

Annex F - Ornithology Consultation

September 2022



**North Argyll 275 kV Upgrade: An Suidhe,
Crarae, Craig Murrail and Crossaig
Substations**

**Approach to Ornithology Survey:
Consultation**

September 2021



Our ref: 0607366

17/09/2021

Submitted by e-mail:

Dear Sir / Madam,

North Argyll 275 kV Upgrade: An Suidhe, Crarae, Craig Murrail and Crossaig Substations

Approach to Ornithology Survey - Consultation

1. BACKGROUND

Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission (SHE Transmission) is preparing to submit applications for planning permission under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act (TCPA) 1997 (as amended) to construct and operate four 275 kilovolt (kV) substations in Argyll. The substations are located at An Suidhe, Craig Murrail, Crarae and Crossaig North. Substations at An Suidhe, Crarae and Crossaig North also require short sections of overhead line realignment to connect to the transmission network. Consent for overhead line works will be requested under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Environmental Resources Management (ERM) Limited is providing specialist environmental support. The effects on biodiversity for each substation will be reported in an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) as part of an individual Environmental Appraisal (EA) or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report to support consent of each Project.

A range of surveys have been undertaken to inform the EIA for SHE Transmission's Inveraray to Crossaig Overhead Line Reinforcement Project, which will connect to each of the four substation locations. Some of these surveys cover one or more of the proposed substation locations. Surveys have also been undertaken for the existing Crossaig substation which cover the location of the proposed new Crossaig North substation.

This letter summarises the surveys that have been undertaken relevant to the substation locations, and the proposed approach to defining the ornithology baseline for the EcIA using existing data. We seek agreement that the approach proposed is acceptable to NatureScot.

1.1 Site Location

Figures 1.1 to 1.4 show the four substation locations.

2. THE PROJECTS

Each of the four individual projects entails the construction of a new 275 kV electricity substation. The key components of these developments are:

- Air-insulated switchgear (AIS), potentially located within a building, together with site services and control equipment. The height of the substation building will depend on the selected AIS substation design, up to a maximum height of 25 m. A single supergrid transformer will be located outdoors within a bunded area. Depending on the final arrangement, there may also be some unhoused electrical switchgear and plant located within the platform area. The site would be surrounded by a 2.4 m high security fence of palisade construction with CCTV surveillance. Substations are not generally illuminated, other than sensor-activated security lighting for night-time access. Floodlights would be installed but only used in the event of a fault during the hours of darkness;
- Formation of new access tracks; and
- Temporary site compounds and construction laydown areas.

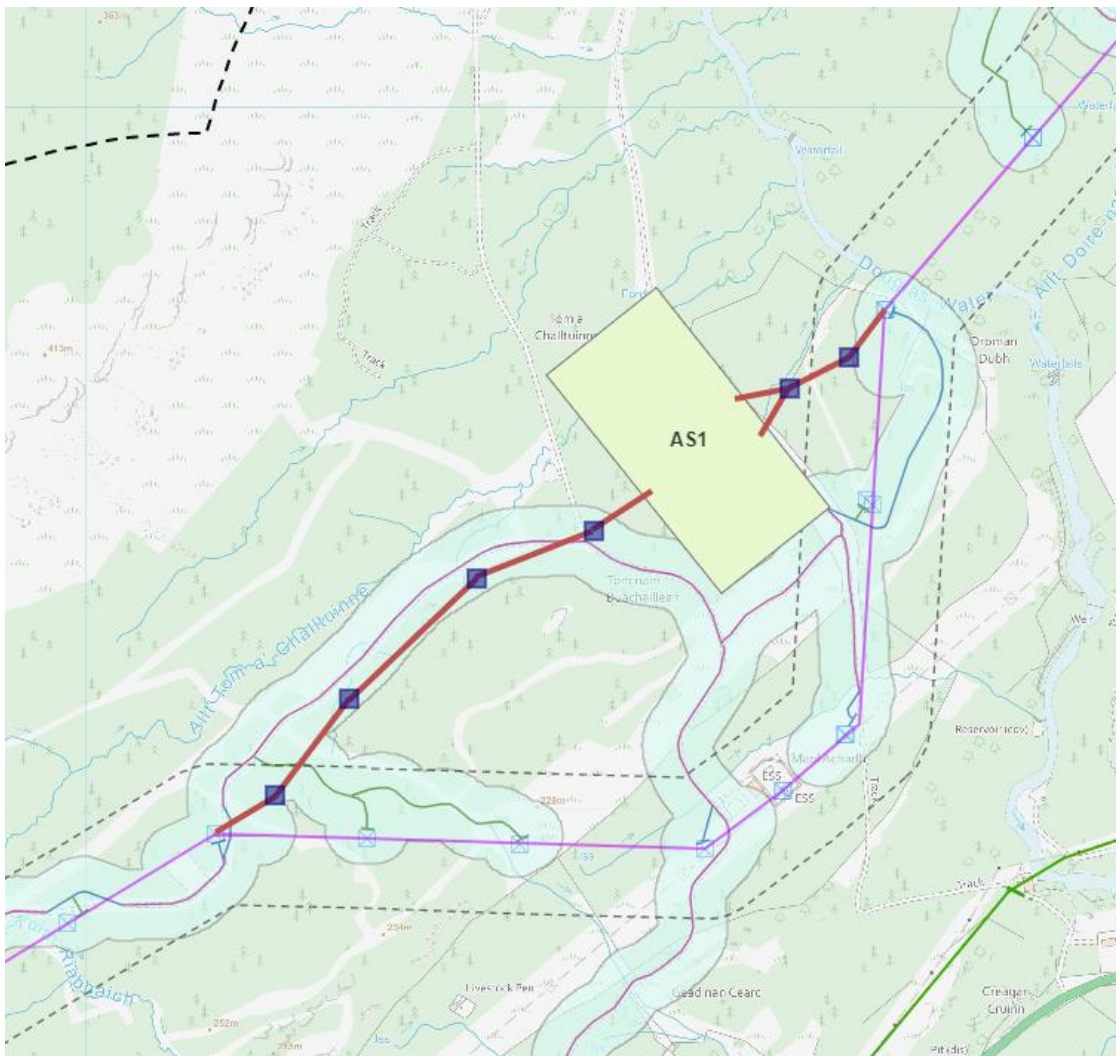
In addition, three of the projects (An Suidhe, Crarae and Crossaig North) require the construction of short sections of new overhead line (OHL) and the dismantling of old redundant sections of line as follows.

An Suidhe

An Suidhe substation requires:

- Approximately six new towers to make the connection into and out of the proposed substation;
- Potential for short term temporary overhead line diversions during construction;
- Temporary works areas (where possible, the main site compound will be shared with the substation); and
- Dismantling of redundant towers, approximately six.

Figure 2.5 An Suidhe Indicative OHL Realignment

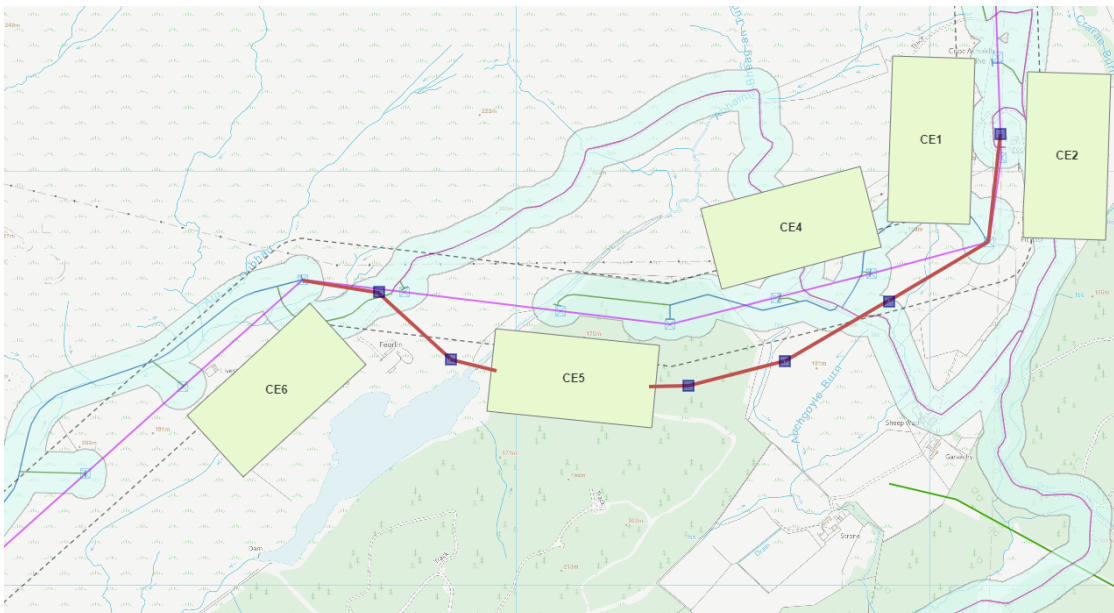


Crarae

Crarae substation requires:

- Approximately six new towers to make the connection into and out of the proposed substation;
- Potential for short term temporary overhead line diversions during construction;
- Temporary works areas (where possible, the main site compound will be shared with the substation); and
- Dismantling of approximately five redundant towers.

Figure 2.6 Crarae Indicative OHL Realignment

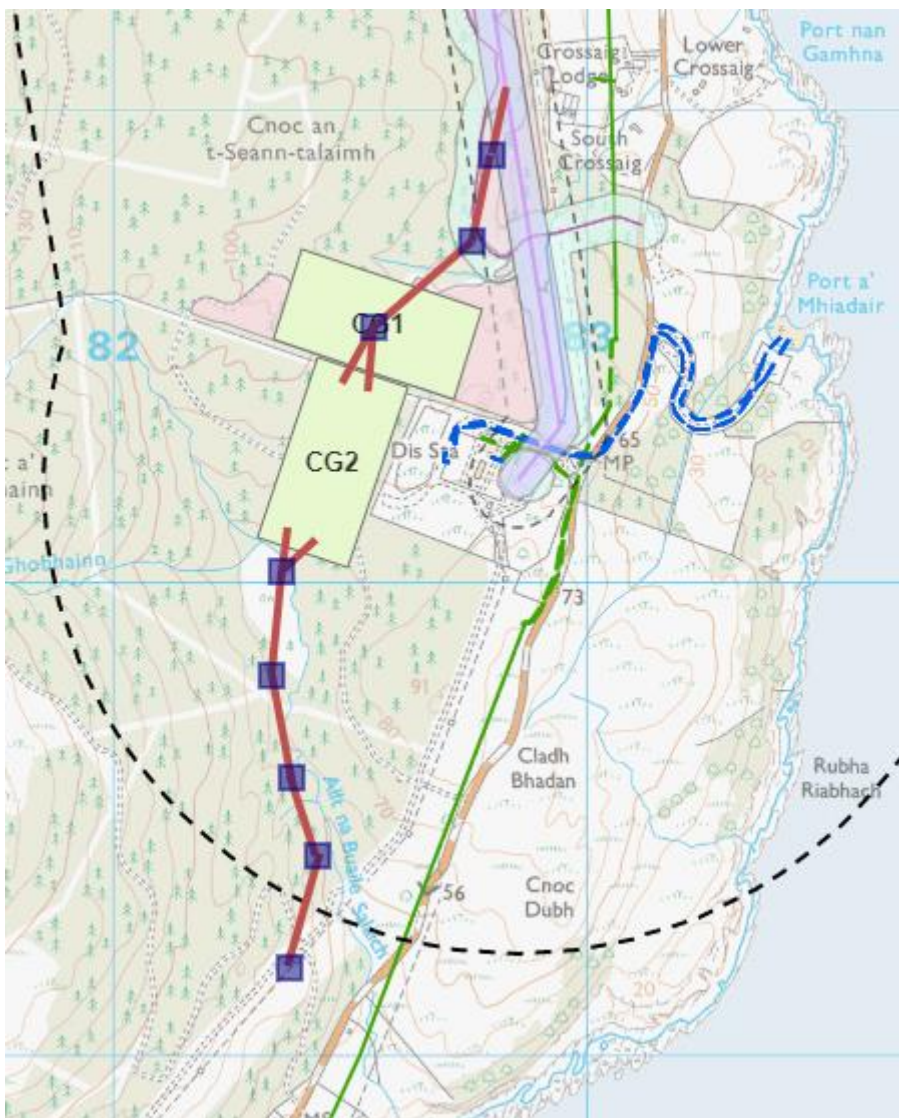


Crossaig North

Crossaig North substation requires:

- Approximately eight new towers to make the connection into and out of the proposed substation;
- Potential for short term temporary overhead line diversions during construction;
- Temporary works areas (where possible, the main site compound will be shared with the substation); and
- Dismantling of redundant towers, approximately eight.

Figure 2.7 Crossaig North Indicative OHL Realignment



2.1.1 Desk Based Information Review and Existing Survey Data

An initial review of desk based information identified the high level information on habitats and designated sites provided in Table 2.1.

Site specific bird survey data is held by SHE Transmission for some of the proposed locations. Table 2.2 summarises the surveys that cover each of the substation locations, as well as a high level summary of the Survey findings.

Table 2.1 Findings of Initial Desk Based Review and Existing SHE Transmission Bird Survey Data

An Suidhe	<p>The majority of the Proposed Development is within commercial coniferous plantation of low ecological and conservation value. There is an area of semi-natural broadleaved woodland, which is of higher ecological importance than the surrounding conifer habitat. There are no Ground Water Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTEs) or Annex 1 habitats present. Glen Etive and Glen Fyne SPA is over 10 km to the north east. There are no sites within 5 km designated for habitat. Breeding bird surveys undertaken in 2015-2016 recorded breeding wren, stonechat, wheatear and willow warbler in the vicinity of the proposed substation. No Schedule 1 bird species were recorded at the proposed location.</p>
Craig Murrail	<p>The majority of the Proposed Development is commercial coniferous plantation of low ecological and conservation value. An area of mature conifer woodland is present with potential for red squirrel species. Moine Mhor SAC, SSSI and LNCS is 4 km to the east. Taynish and Knapdale Woods SAC and SSSI is 7 km to the east. Knapdale Loch SPA & SSSI is 7 km to the south east. Lochgilphead LNCS is 3.5 km to the south. Loch Leathan LNCS is 6.9 km north. Breeding bird surveys undertaken in 2015-2016 recorded breeding willow warbler, chaffinch, siskin, coal tit and meadow pipit from the vicinity of the proposed substation location. No Schedule 1 bird species were recorded at the proposed location.</p>
Crarae	<p>The Proposed Development is within commercial coniferous plantation of low ecological and conservation value though there is potential for red squirrel dreys. There is an area of marshy grassland within the site which has potential for Ground Water Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTEs) and further assessment will be undertaken to confirm this. Knapdale Loch SPA is over 17 km to the west. There are no sites within 5 km designated for habitat. Breeding bird surveys undertaken in 2015-2016 recorded chaffinch, cuckoo, willow warbler, whinchat, grasshopper warbler and song thrush in the vicinity of the proposed substation. Black grouse leks were recorded in 2016 from moorland to the north, east and west of the proposed substation location. Flights of black grouse were also recorded over moorland to north of site. No Schedule 1 bird species were recorded at the proposed location.</p>
Crossaig	<p>The majority of the Proposed Development is commercial coniferous plantation of low ecological conservation value. There is an area of mature conifer woodland, which has the potential to support red squirrel. The Proposed Development does not sit within any internationally, nationally, or locally designated sites. A number of international designated sites lie within 10 km of the Proposed Development, including Sound of Gigha SPA (9.5 km west), Kintyre Goose Lochs SPA (7.8 km west), Kintyre Goose Roosts SPA (5.2 km west). A number of nationally designated sites lie within 10 km of the Proposed Development, including Arran Northern Mountains (7.2 km), Claonaig Wood SSSI (5.7 km north). A number of Local Nature Conservation Sites lie within 5 km of the Proposed Development including Crossaig Glen LNCS (1.5 km north), Cour LNCS (2km south), Loch an Eilein Group (4 km north west).</p>

Surveys of the area around the existing Crossaig undertaken in 2012 recorded goldcrest, siskin, robin, wren, coal tit, great spotted woodpecker, tawny owl, barn owl and sparrowhawk.

Table 2.2 Summary Of Bird Surveys Undertaken to Date by SHE Transmission that cover Proposed Substation Locations

Substation	Vantage Point Survey coverage	Date	Breeding Bird Survey	Date	Black Grouse Survey	Date	Diver Surveys	Date	Targeted Eagle / Raptor Survey	Date
An Suidhe (substation and 6 new towers)	Yes Inveraray-Crossaig (I-C) Baseline Survey VP 3	Feb 2017 - Jan 2018	Yes – I-C Baseline Survey	2015-2016	No – location screened out	N/A	No – no breeding lochans in the vicinity	N/A	Yes	Feb 2017 - Jan 2018
Craig Murrail (substation only)	No	N/A	Yes – I-C Baseline Survey	2015-2016	No – location screened out	N/A	No - no breeding lochans in the vicinity	N/A	No	N/A
Crarae (substation and 6 new towers)	Yes I-C Baseline Survey VP 5	Feb 2017 - May 2017	Yes – I-C Baseline Survey	2015-2016	Yes	2015 - 2016	No – no breeding lochans in the vicinity	2015	Yes	Feb 2017 - May 2017
Crossaig North (substation and 8 new towers)	Yes – I-C Monitoring Survey VP 12 Sheirdrim to Crossaig grid connection VP surveys	March – May 2021 Proposed for September 2021 – ongoing.	Yes – existing Crossaig substation surveys	2012	No – location screened out	N/A	No - no breeding lochans in the vicinity	N/A	Yes – area to north covered by raptor survey	N/A

3. PROPOSED APPROACH TO BASELINE DATA COLLECTION TO INFORM ORNITHOLOGY ECIA

Based on the survey work undertaken to date, the proposed approach to baseline data collection for each site is set out below. The proposed approaches are based on the implementation of SHE Transmissions Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Birds Species Protection Plan (SPP) prior to and during construction (see Section 4).

An Suidhe

VP survey data, including specific raptors watches, is available for 12 months from February 2017 – January 2018. Breeding bird survey data is available from 2015-2016, and low numbers of common woodland/upland species were recorded. No black grouse were recorded, and there are no breeding diver lochans within 1 km of the site. As a result, it is proposed to use existing data from previous surveys to inform the assessment, and no further surveys are proposed.

Craig Murrail

No new OHL is required, and so VP surveys are not considered necessary to inform the ornithology EcIA. Breeding bird survey data is available from 2015-2016, and low numbers of common woodland/upland species were recorded. Breeding bird survey data is available from 2015-2016, and low numbers of common woodland/upland species were recorded. No black grouse were recorded, and there are no breeding diver lochans within 1 km of the site. As a result, it is proposed to use existing data from previous surveys to inform the assessment, and no further surveys are proposed.

Crarae

VP survey data, including specific raptors watches, is available for 4 months from February 2017 – May 2017. Breeding bird survey data is available from 2015-2016, and low numbers of common woodland/upland species were recorded. A number of black grouse leks were recorded on moorland around the substation during surveys in 2016. There are no breeding diver lochans within 1 km of the site. Assuming NatureScot are content that the black grouse survey data from 2016 is still valid, no further surveys are proposed, and existing data from previous surveys will be used to inform the assessment.

Crossaig North

VP survey data is available for including specific raptors watches, is available for three months from March 2021 to May 2021 from monitoring surveys during the construction of the Inveraray-Crossaig OHL. In addition, SHE Transmission started collecting VP data for the Sheirdrim – Crossaig grid connection project in September 2021 which also covers the proposed substation location. These surveys are proposed to continue until August 2022. In addition, VP surveys covering a known golden eagle nest site approximately 1.5 km north of the substation location in Crossaig Glen have been undertaken between February 2017 and January 2018 and again between March – May 2021.

Breeding bird survey data is available for the existing substation site adjacent to the proposed substation location from 2012, and low numbers of common woodland/upland species were recorded. Breeding barn owl, tawny owl and barn owl were all recorded in woods adjacent to the existing substation. No black grouse were recorded, and there are no breeding diver lochans within 1 km of the site.

Although the breeding bird data is relatively old, the habitats that will be affected are common and widespread in the area. Assuming NatureScot are content that the existing data are sufficient to characterise the area, no further surveys are proposed.

Table 3.1 Summary of Existing Data Available to Inform Assessment

Substation	VP Surveys		Breeding Bird Surveys		Black Grouse Surveys		Breeding Diver Surveys		Targeted Raptor Surveys	
	Likely to be required to inform assessment	Existing Survey Data Available	Likely to be required to inform assessment	Existing Survey Data Available	Likely to be required to inform assessment	Existing Survey Data Available	Likely to be required to inform assessment	Existing Survey Data Available	Likely to be required to inform assessment	Existing Survey Data Available
An Suidhe	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓
Craig Murrail	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x
Crarae	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓
Crossaig	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓

4. MITIGATION

The construction works will be undertaken over an approximate 24 month period, with an anticipated start date in August 2023. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be produced and the implementation of the mitigation measures will be supervised by an Ecology Clerk of Works (ECoW), who will be present on site during construction. Pre-construction check surveys will also be undertaken for birds for any works undertaken during the breeding bird survey, or where existing survey data indicates that Schedule 1 bird species which could be sensitive to disturbance may be present on site outside the breeding bird season (e.g. hen-harrier at winter roosts).

In addition, SHE Transmission has a well-established set of Species Protection Plan documents including a Bird SPP (Annex A). All of the SPP documents have been 'pre-agreed' with NatureScot and have been previously and are currently being used for during other SHE Transmission projects. As with the CEMP above, an ECoW will attend site on a regular basis throughout the construction period to confirm that the measures of the SPPs are implemented as required.

5. CONSULTATION REQUEST

We would be grateful for the opinion of NatureScot in relation to any requirement for additional bird surveys for the four substation projects. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss the projects and the proposed approach with you should this help.

Yours sincerely



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Consents and Environment Manager

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ANNEX A BIRD SPECIES PROTECTION PLAN

