

Submission
No 39

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP ROSEHILL RACECOURSE

Organisation: Cumberland Bird Observers Club

Date Received: 16 July 2024

My name is Martin Mansfield. I am the Conservation Officer of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club (CBOC), which has over 400 members. I am writing on behalf of the Club and this submission has been endorsed by the Club's Committee.

The main focus of our submission is in relation to Term of Reference (e) Potential impacts on parkland in Western Sydney. We are not making any judgement about whether Rosehill Racecourse should be sold and replaced with a housing development.

We are writing to express our strong opposition to the reported idea that, if Rosehill Racecourse is sold, it should be moved to Sydney Olympic Park and in particular to the Brickpit. It is unclear how serious a suggestion this is but we believe it needs to be nibbed in the bud now and that no further consideration should be given to it.

Sydney Olympic Park and the neighbouring Bicentennial Park are home to, and are visited by, an enormous number of birds of a wide variety of species, a number of which are classified as threatened species. Creating a racecourse there would have a significant, in some cases a devastating, impact on these birds. This is CBOC's primary concern about the proposal.

Moving the racecourse to Sydney Olympic Park would involve the loss of an enormous amount of parkland which Western Sydney cannot afford to lose especially as its population grows, including with the possible development of 25,000 homes on the Rosehill Racecourse site. It has been suggested that somehow a racecourse could be constructed at the Brickpit without any significant impact on the Brickpit and its surrounding area. This is patently absurd and fanciful. A racecourse requires not just the track itself but an enormous area of infrastructure. The construction of a racecourse and its associated infrastructure would require the destruction of large amounts of vegetation which is essential habitat for birds (and other animals). Moreover the large attendances at the racecourse would inevitably drive birds away.

Sydney Olympic Park supports three Endangered Ecological Communities and has a rich and abundant bird diversity with high ecological, aesthetic and educational values. Birddata, the BirdLife Australia bird observation register, reports that in the 20 years to 2023, 237 species of birds were recorded in Sydney Olympic Park. In 2023 alone, 141 species were recorded.

Cumberland Bird Observers Club has undertaken the Spring Bird Census at Sydney Olympic Park for the past 20 years. In that period, we have recorded 195 bird species. In 2023 alone, there were 111 species. The census involves volunteers counting the number of birds and species seen in a 20-minute period one day a week for eight weeks. In 2023 a total of 19,109 birds were seen, an average of 2,389 birds per week. In addition, CBOC holds regular birdwatching outings in Sydney Olympic Park where a large number and variety of birds are seen.

At the Brickpit specifically, Birddata records 166 species of birds in the 20 years to 2024, and 138 species in the period 2014 to 2024.

In Bicentennial Park which is a very short distance from the Brickpit, Birddata records 174 bird species.

At least 11 species of migratory shorebirds have been observed in Sydney Olympic Park and/or Bicentennial Park. These birds are listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and are therefore matters of national environmental significance requiring special protection. Of these 11 species, seven are also listed under the EPBC Act as threatened species. An additional at least three species that are listed under the Act as threatened have also been seen. At the Brickpit specifically, at least three species listed under the Act – Bar-tailed Godwit, Latham's Snipe and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper – have been recorded. In February 2024, 60 Bar-tailed Godwits, which are classified as Endangered, were observed.

If a racetrack were to be built at Sydney Olympic Park, it would be another instance of public land being handed over to private interests. In addition, it seems clear that Sydney does not need four racecourses. The existing courses at Canterbury and Warwick Farm which are severely under-utilised could be upgraded and used for racing more frequently instead of building a new racetrack at Sydney Olympic Park. We understand that this is the view of leading figures in the Australian Turf Club which made the original proposal to close Rosehill Racecourse.