

## VSAS Survey report: Ullapool to Stornoway, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Volunteer Seabirds At Sea (VSAS) surveys were carried out from the bridge of the MV Loch Seaforth on a scheduled return crossing between Ullapool and Stornoway on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Data were collected to European Seabirds At Sea (ESAS) standard, by trained volunteers, using the JNCC VSAS app to digitally record data in real time.

Environmental conditions were excellent for surveying, with visibility recorded as either good or excellent. Sea state was predominantly two to three (with occasional sea states of one and four recorded) and Beaufort wind strengths were recorded as three throughout. Swell heights were between one and two metres.

A total of 229 observations were made of 12 species of seabirds (and a further three 'species groups' where identification could not be made to species level) during the dedicated survey effort. No marine mammals or other megafauna were observed. Numbers of observations and total numbers of birds recorded are presented below in Table 1.

Bird species	Number of observations	Total birds observed
Common gull	1	1
Fulmar	28	34
Gannet	18	22
Great black-backed gull	3	3
Great Skua	2	2
Guillemot	57	98
Herring gull	1	1
Kittiwake	24	31
Manx Shearwater	1	1
Puffin	61	97
Razorbill	15	25
Shag	3	3
Bird species groups		
unidentified auk sp	4	6
Guillemot/Razorbill	9	20
Large gull spp	2	5

Table 1. Numbers of observations and totals recorded per species

### Species accounts

See figures 1 – 9 for maps of observations

#### **Fulmar** (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

28 observations of Fulmar, totalling 34 birds, were made, with all but one observation in the western Minch. All of the birds were recorded in flight, with a large proportion moving in a northerly direction (18 of 28).

**Manx Shearwater** (*Puffinus puffinus*)

A single Manx shearwater was observed mid-channel.

**Gannet** (*Morus bassanus*)

Small numbers of gannets were observed, with 18 records comprising 22 individuals. All but one were recorded in flight and 7 individuals were aged as adults.

**Shag** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)

Three shags, including one immature bird, were recorded. All three were close to shore, with observations from Loch Broom, near Priest Island and outside of Stornoway harbour.

**Great Skua** (*Stercorarius skua*)

Two great skuas were recorded close to shore, with observations from near Priest Island, and outside of Stornoway harbour.

**Kittiwake** (*Rissa tridactyla*)

With 24 observations comprising 31 birds, this was the most numerous gull species encountered during the survey. Birds were encountered in two main aggregations; one mid channel, and one west of Priest Island.

**Common gull** (*Larus canus*)

A single observation of a single bird, in the vicinity of a kittiwake aggregation to the west of Priest Island.

**Herring gull** (*Larus argentatus*)

Another species with just a single record. One was noted in flight in the vicinity of a kittiwake aggregation to the west of Priest Island.

**Great black-backed gull** (*Larus marinus*)

Three observations of three individual birds, all in the western part of the survey with one just outside Stornoway harbour.

**Guillemot** (*Uria aalge*)

The most numerous species recorded, with 57 records comprising 98 individuals. Guillemots were distributed throughout the survey area but with the highest densities showing a clear preference for mid-channel and western areas.

**Razorbill** (*Alca torda*)

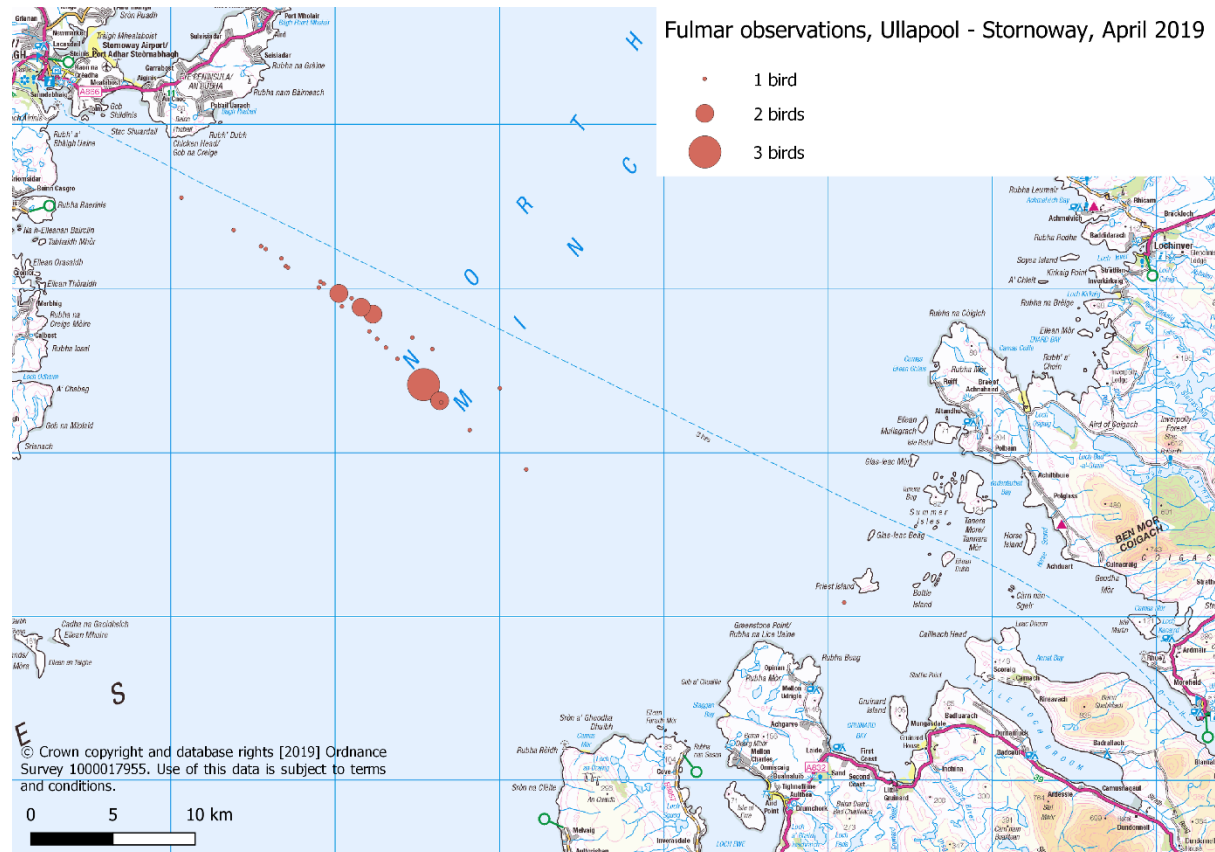
Much less numerous than guillemot (15 observations of 25 birds), but with a similar distribution, with larger aggregations showing a clear preference for mid-channel and western areas.

**Puffin** (*Fratercula arctica*)

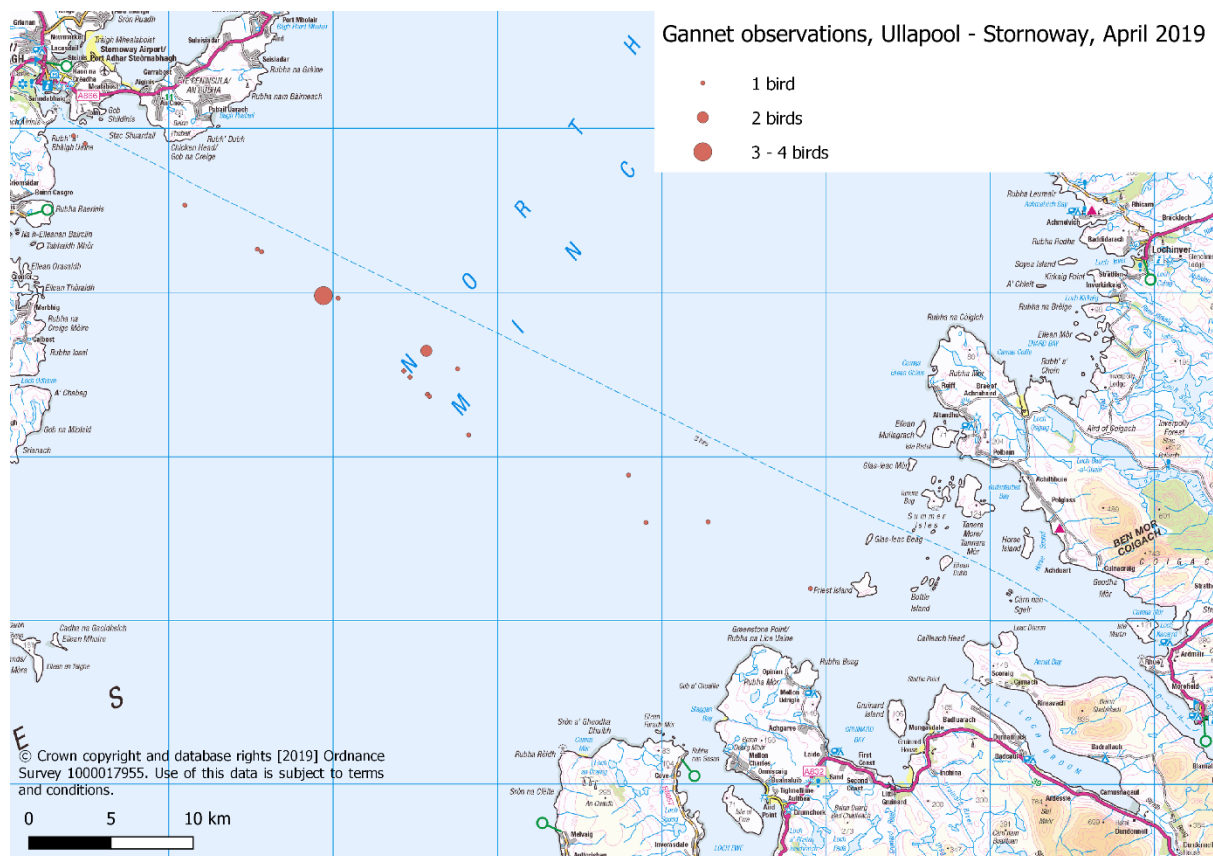
The most frequently encountered species, with 61 records of 97 birds. Interestingly, unlike other auks, puffins showed a clear preference for the eastern part of the survey area.

## Distribution maps

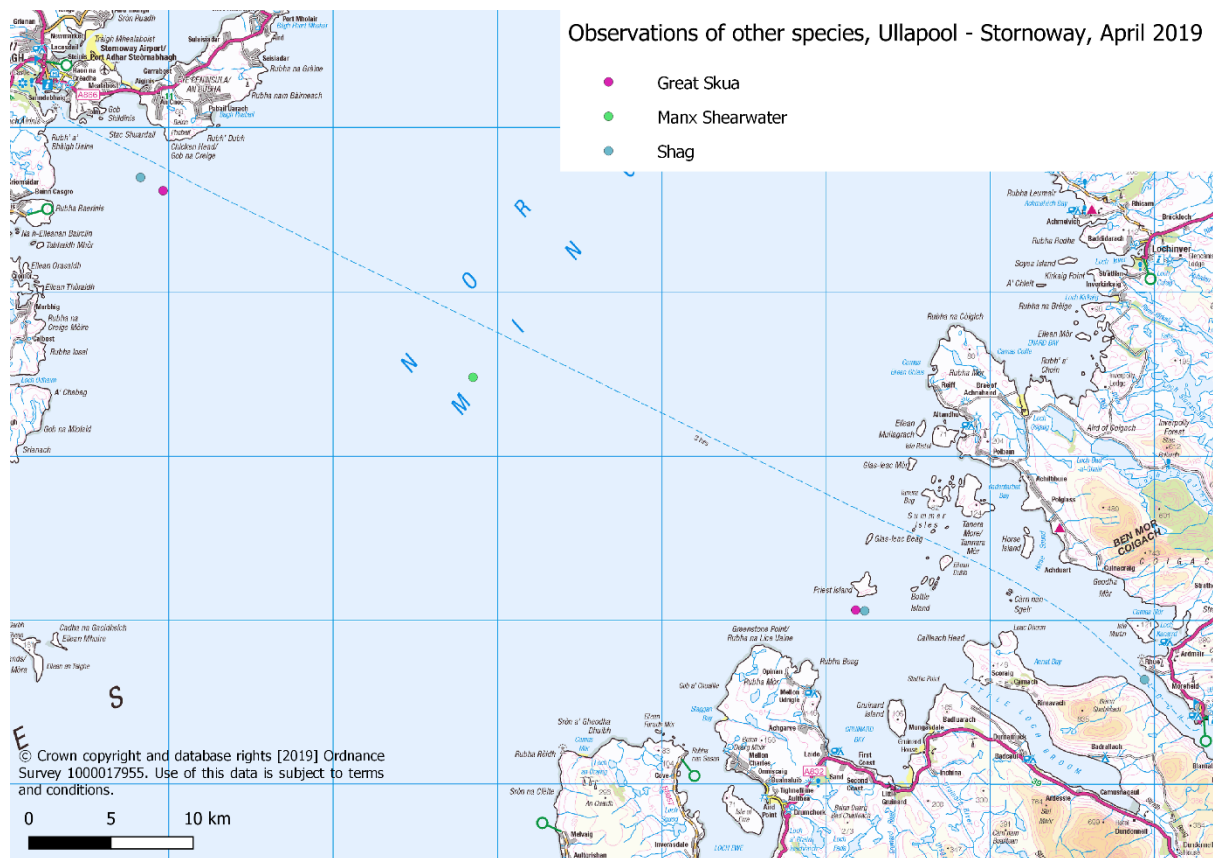
Figures 1 to 9 show the distributions of all seabird species recorded during the survey.



**Figure 1. Fulmar observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019**



**Figure 2. Gannet observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019**



**Figure 3. Great skua, Manx shearwater and shag observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

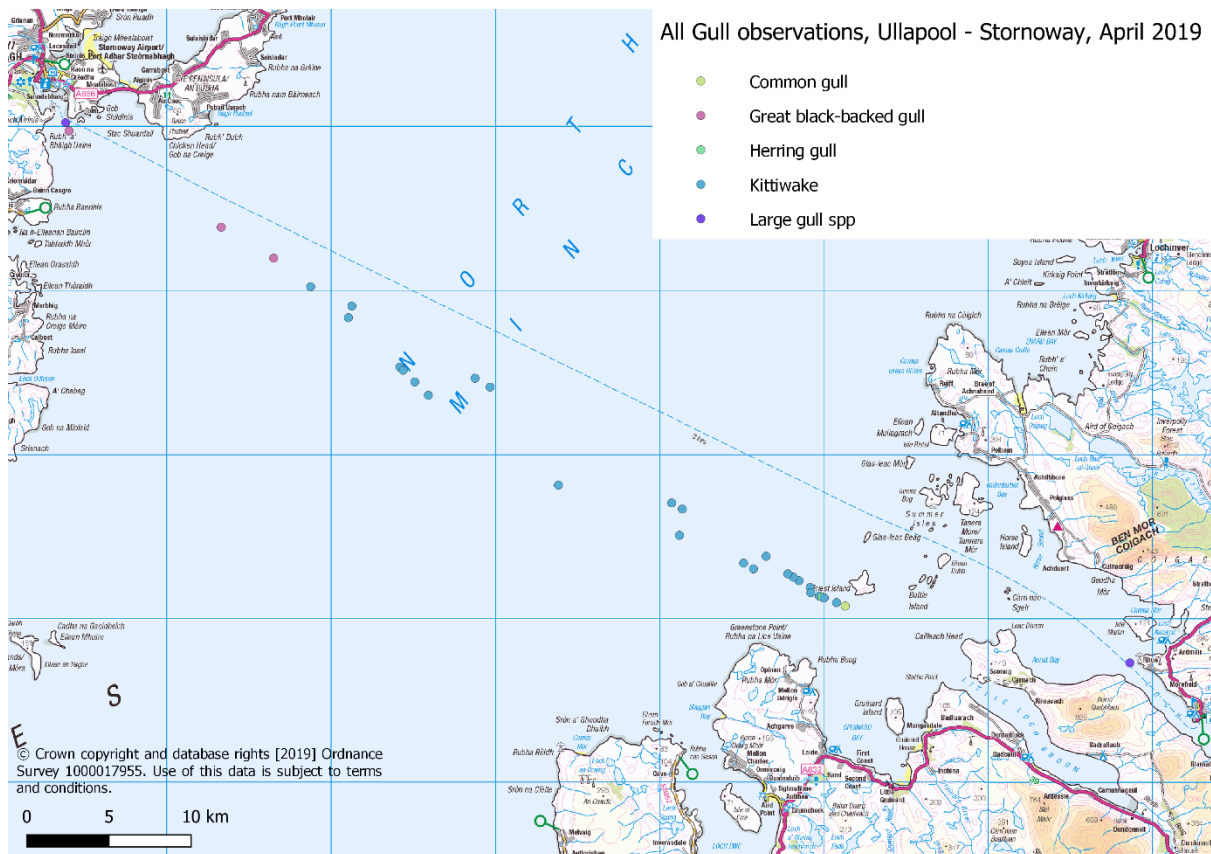


Figure 4. All gull observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

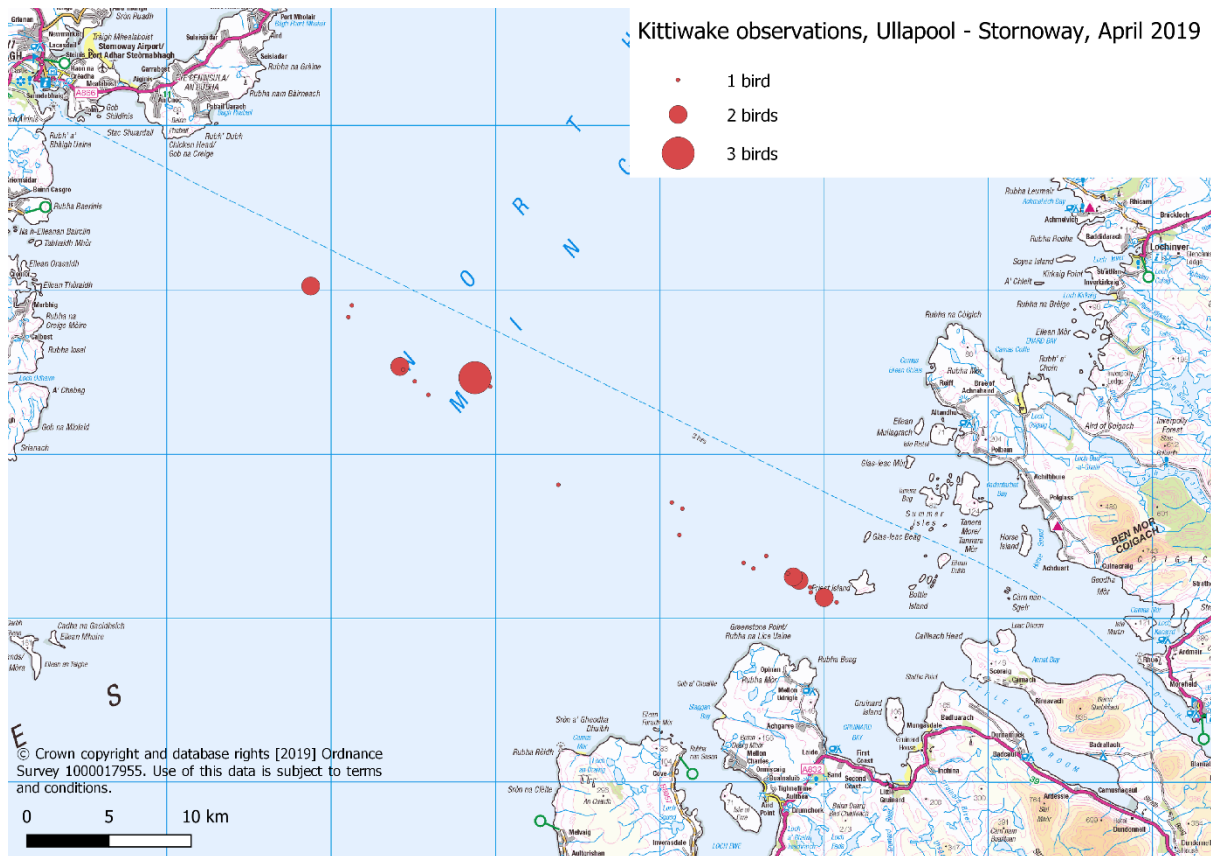


Figure 5. Kittiwake observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019



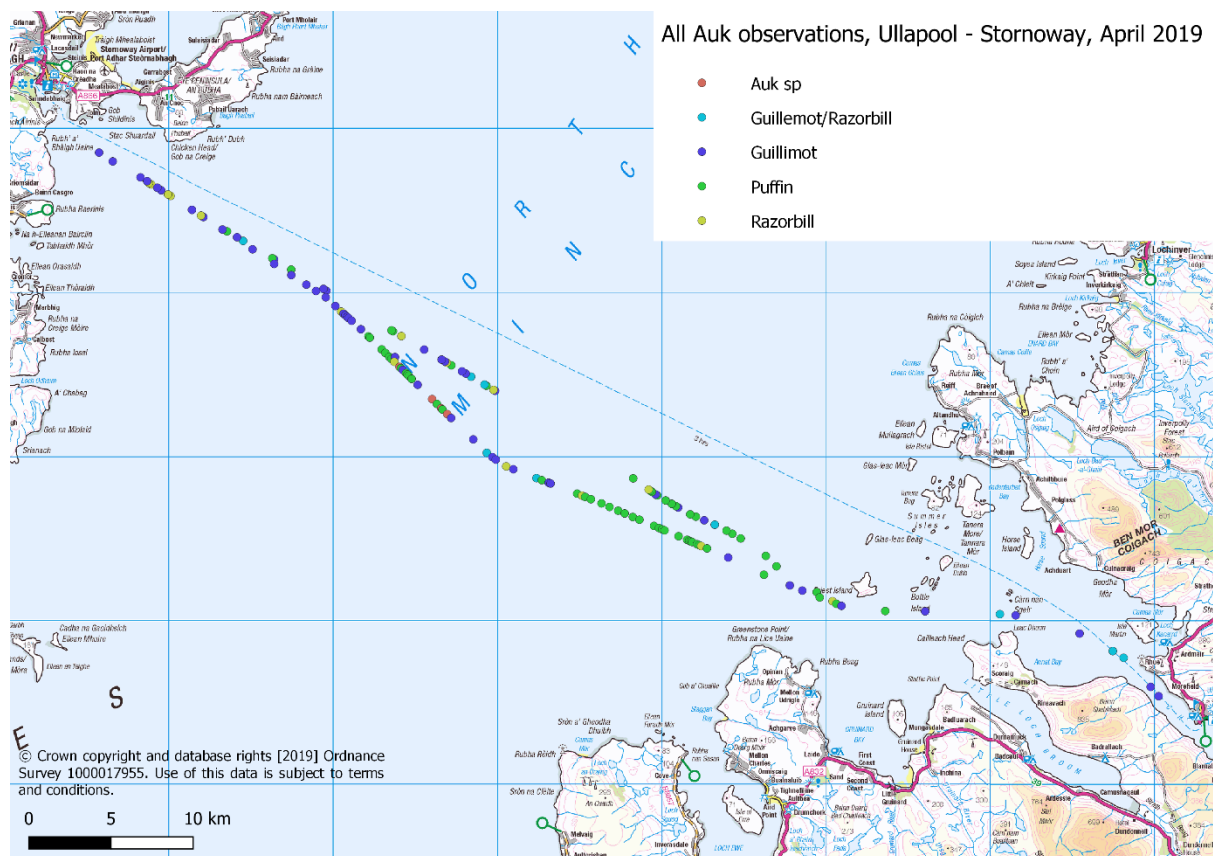


Figure 6. All auk observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

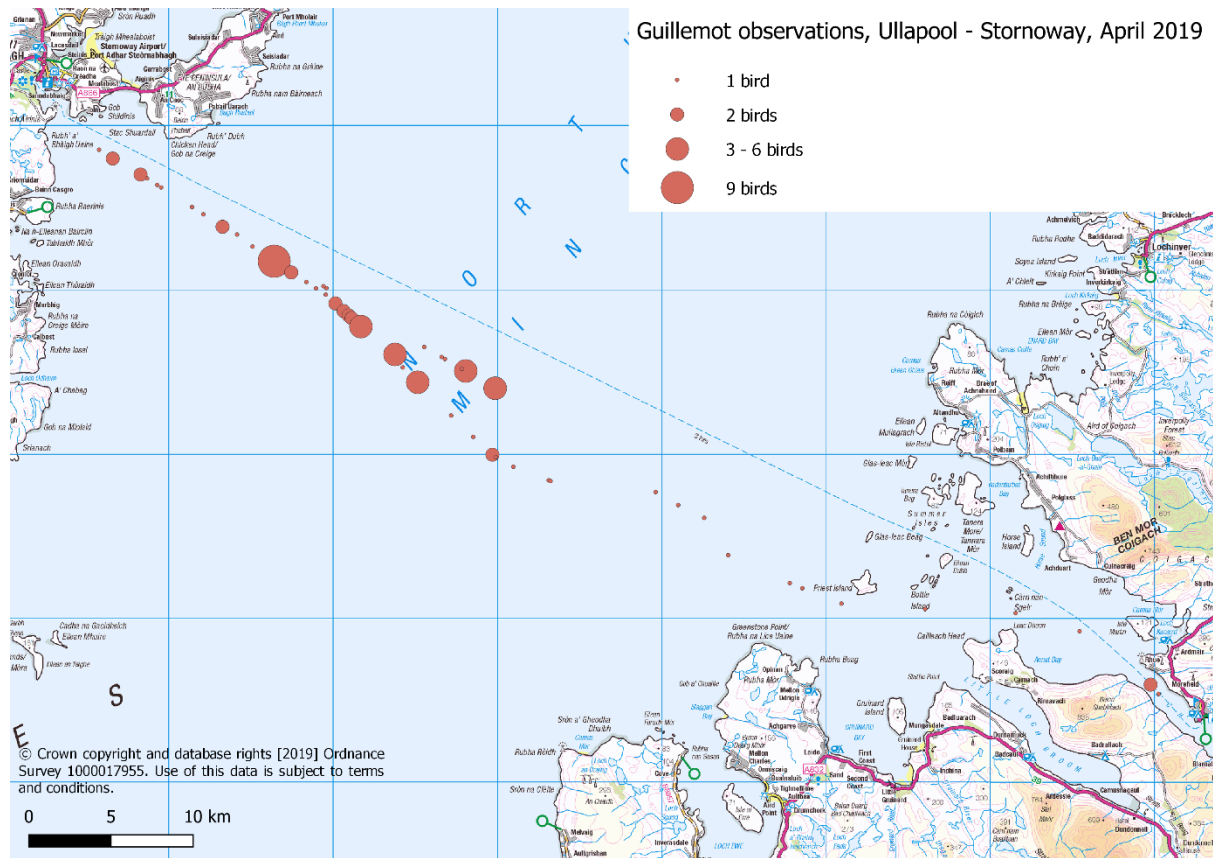


Figure 7. Guillemot observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

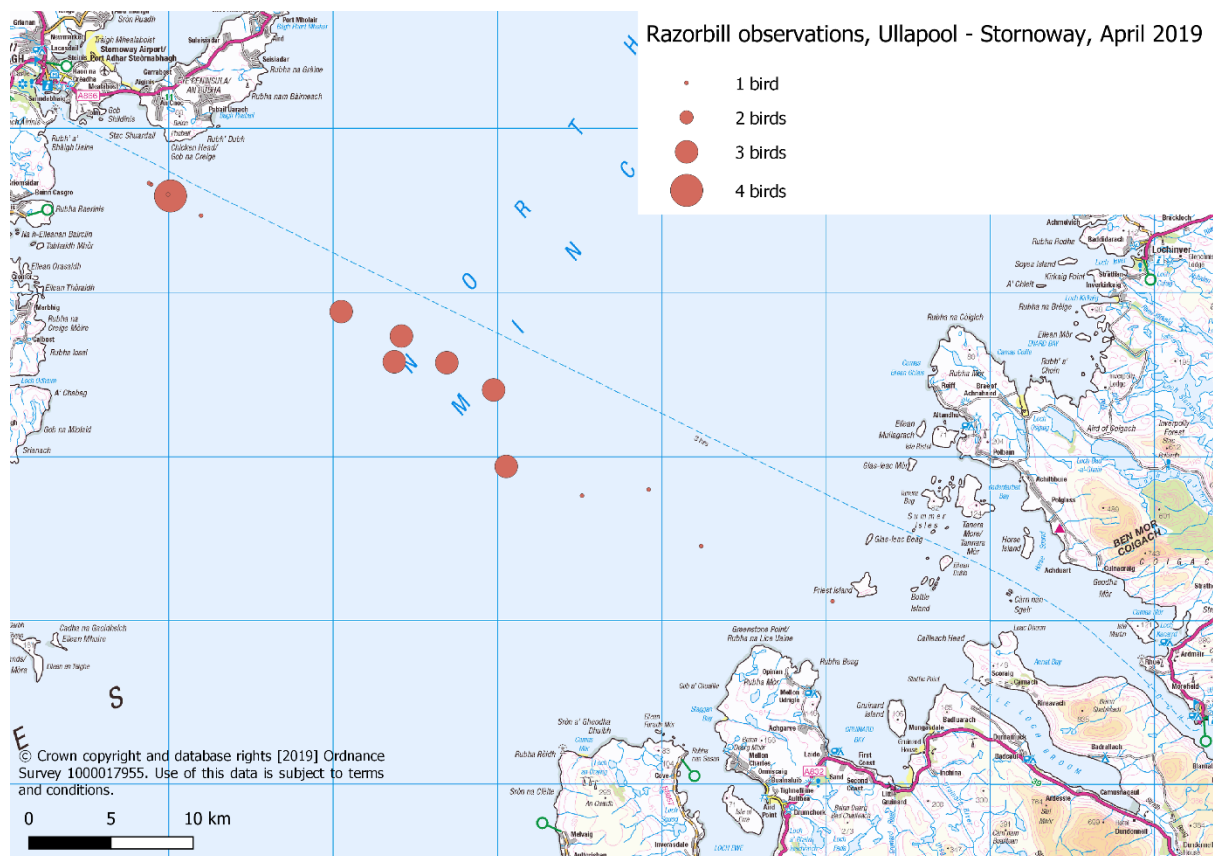


Figure 8. Razorbill observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

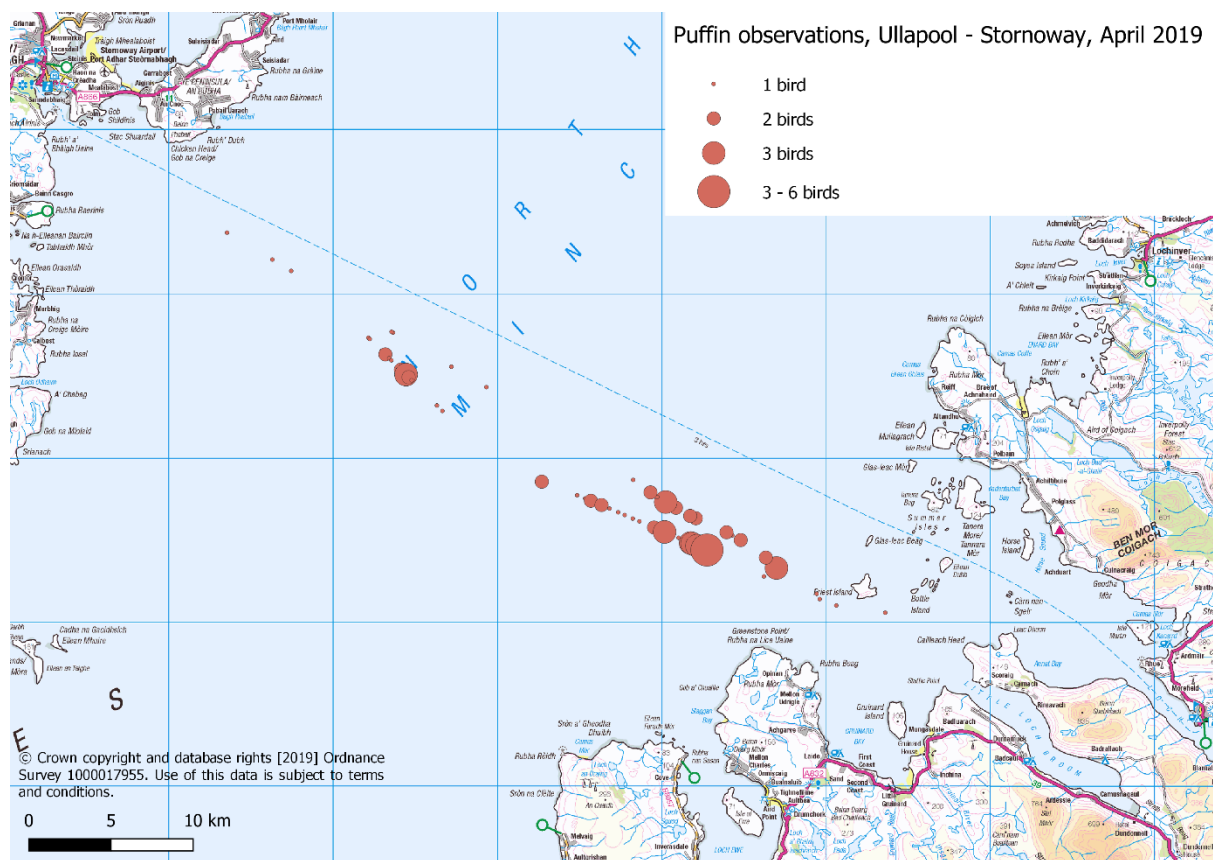


Figure 9. Puffin observations during Ullapool – Stornoway survey, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the volunteers who gave up their time to take part in this survey – we hope this report serves as a useful reminder of your time on board! We would also like to thank the Captain and crew of the MV Loch Seaforth for welcoming the survey team on board, and Klare Chamberlain and Ruth Rice at CalMac who helped with access and other arrangements. Finally, thanks to Simon Pinder for coordinating volunteer effort.