

VSAS Survey report: Oban to Barra, April 13th, 2019

Volunteer Seabirds At Sea (VSAS) surveys were carried out from the bridge of the MV Isle of Lewis on a single scheduled crossing between Oban and Barra on April 13th, 2019. Data were not collected on the return leg due to mechanical issues with the vessel. 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 mostly suitable for surveying, with visibility recorded as either moderate or good. Sea state ranged between two to six and Beaufort wind strengths were recorded between two and five. Swell heights were between one and two metres.

A total of 300 observations were made of 10 species of seabirds (and a further two 'species groups' where identification could not be made to species level) during the dedicated survey effort. One species of marine mammal was recorded. Numbers of observations and total numbers of birds recorded are presented below in Table 1.

Bird species	Number of observations	Total birds observed
Fulmar	85	220
Gannet	39	47
Great black-backed gull	2	3
Guillemot	37	74
Herring gull	1	1
Kittiwake	4	4
Lesser black-backed gull	2	2
Manx Shearwater	89	232
Puffin	16	25
Razorbill	5	10
Marine Mammal species		
Common seal	1	1
Bird species groups		
Auk spp	18	20
Large gull spp	1	1

Table 1. Numbers of observations and totals recorded per species

Species accounts

See figures 1 - 8 for maps of observations.

Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

85 observations of Fulmar, totalling 220 birds, were made, with most observations in the western Minch. Almost all of the birds were recorded in flight, with a large proportion moving in an easterly or southerly direction.

Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*)

89 records of manx shearwater returned a total of 232 birds. These were almost exclusively in the eastern Minch, with the largest concentrations north east and north west of Coll. The majority were recorded in flight, with most birds moving south or south west.

Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)

39 records of gannet comprised 47 birds. Most birds were distributed mid channel or in more western areas. All birds were aged as either adult or I5.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Only four observations, all of single birds, with three of these occurring mid-channel.

Herring gull (*Larus argentatus*)

A single record. One was noted in flight at the west end of the Sound of Mull.

Lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Two birds were noted, both adults. One was near the location that other large gulls at the west end of the Sound of Mull, and one was mid-channel.

Great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*)

Two observations of three individual birds, one mid-channel and one at the west end of the Sound of Mull.

Guillemot (*Uria aalge*)

37 records comprising 74 individuals. Guillemots were mainly distributed To the north east and north west of Coll – broadly mirroring the distribution shown by Manx shearwaters.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*)

Much less numerous than guillemot (5 observations of 10 birds), but with a similar distribution.

Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*)

16 records of 25 birds. Puffins were distributed more evenly across the survey area than other auks, with several records from the western Minch.

Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

A single observation of a single animal, mid-channel.

Distribution maps

Figures 1 - 8 show the distributions of all seabird species recorded during the survey.

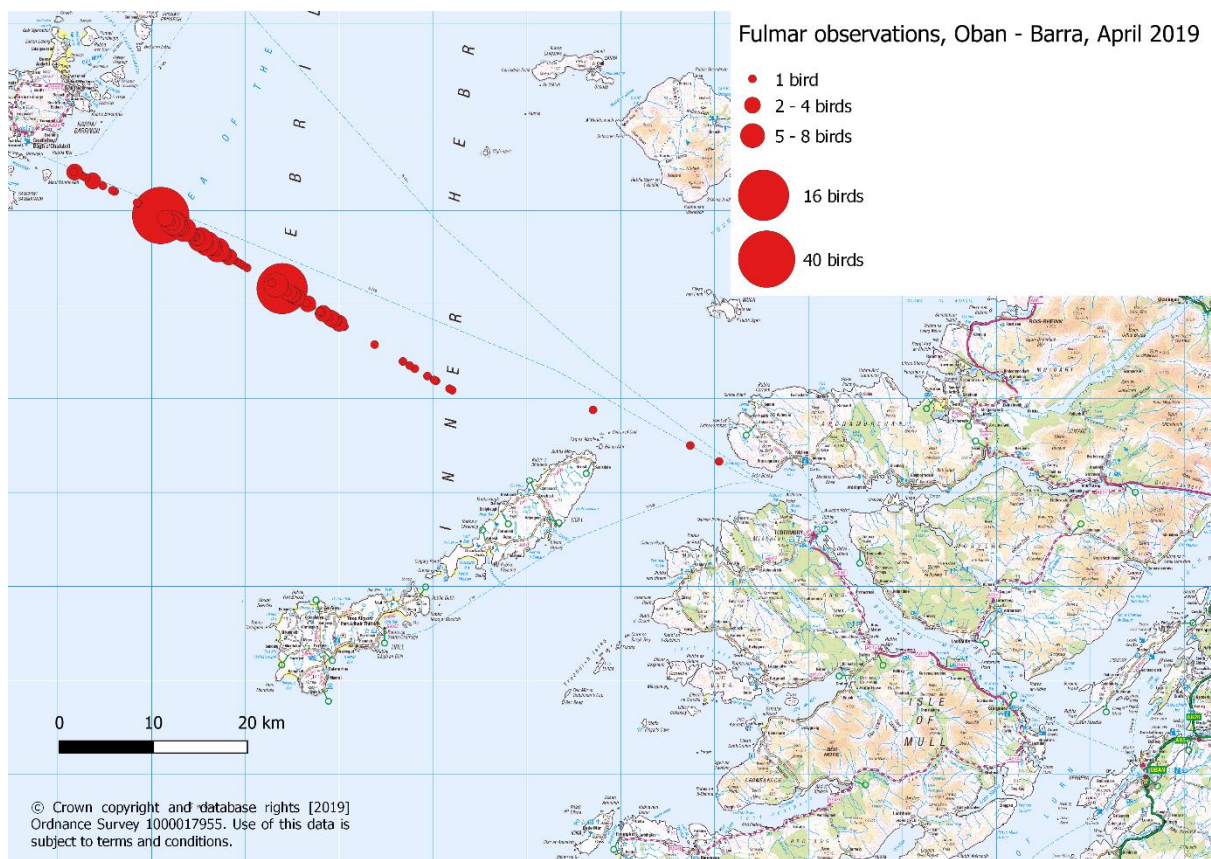


Figure 1. Fulmar observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

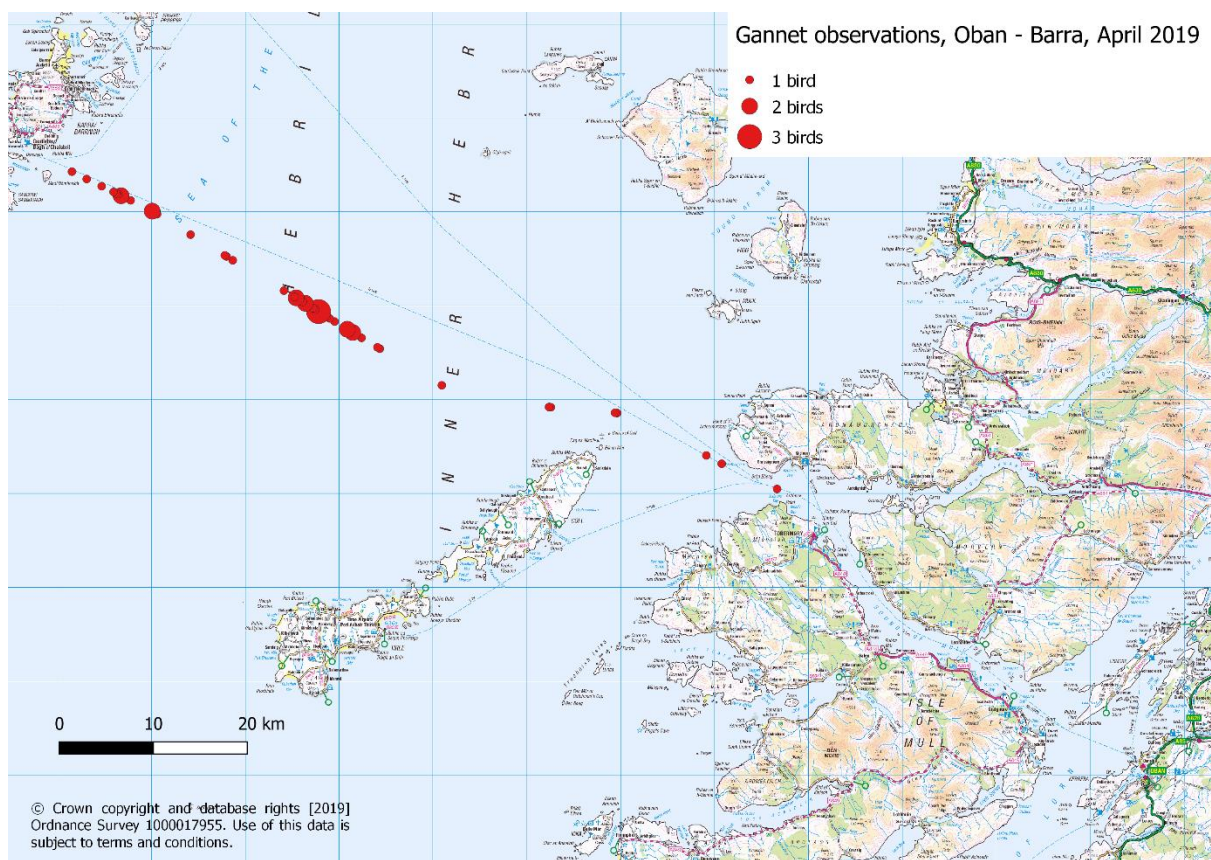


Figure 2. Gannet observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

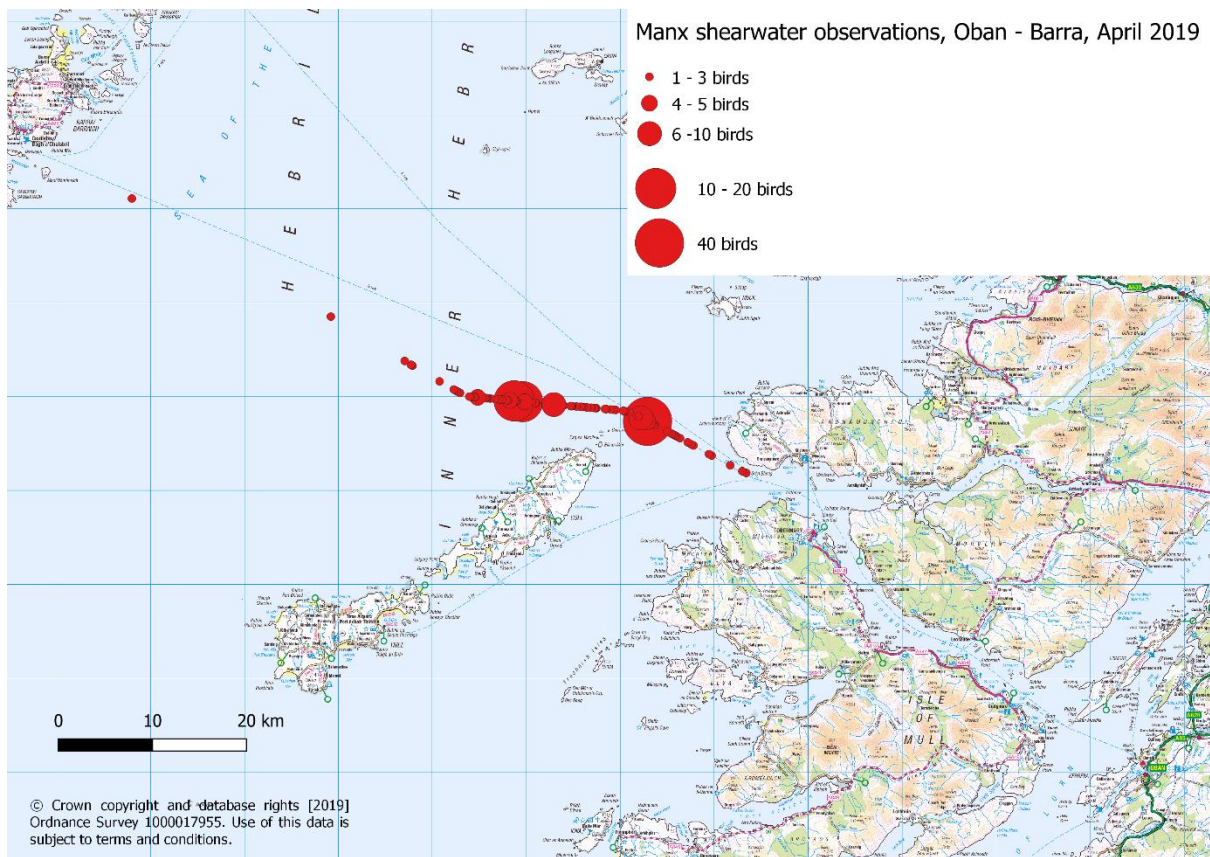


Figure 3. Manx shearwater observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

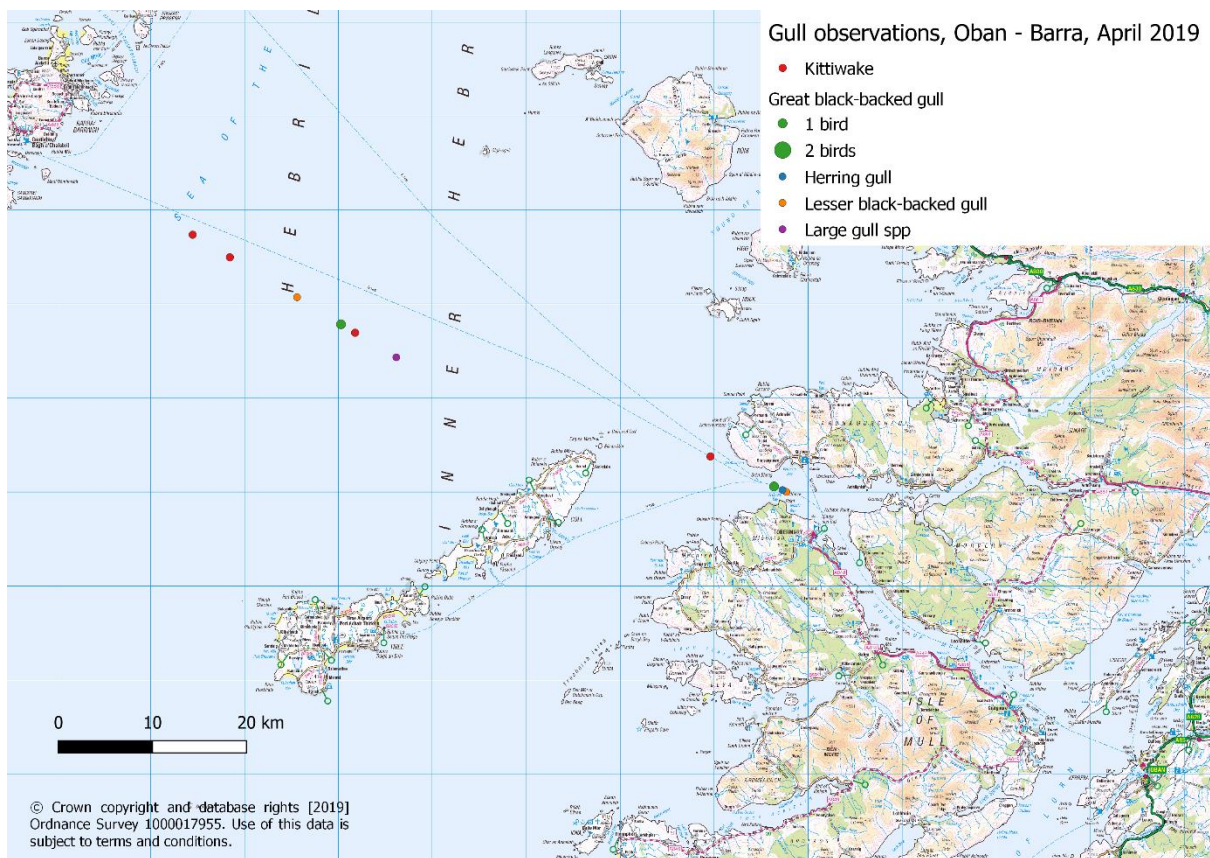


Figure 4. All gull observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

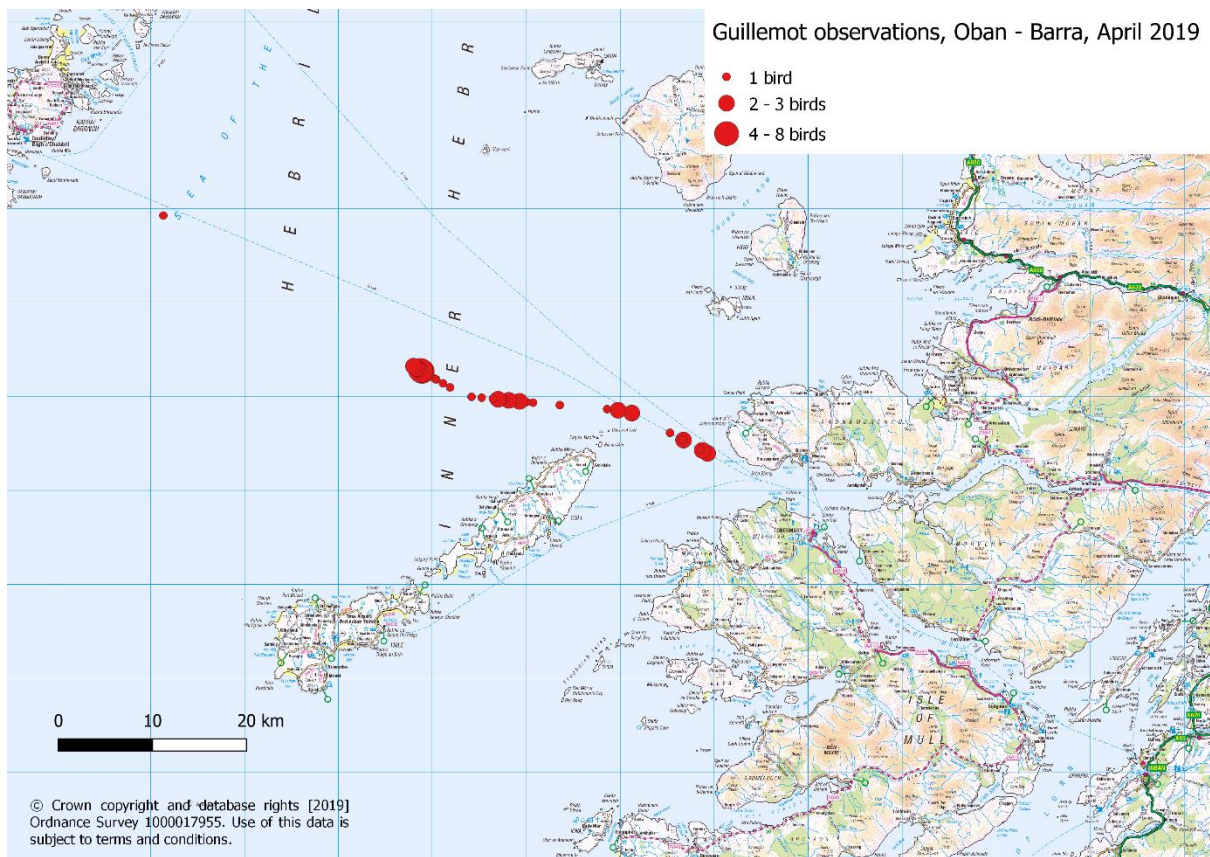


Figure 5. Guillemot observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

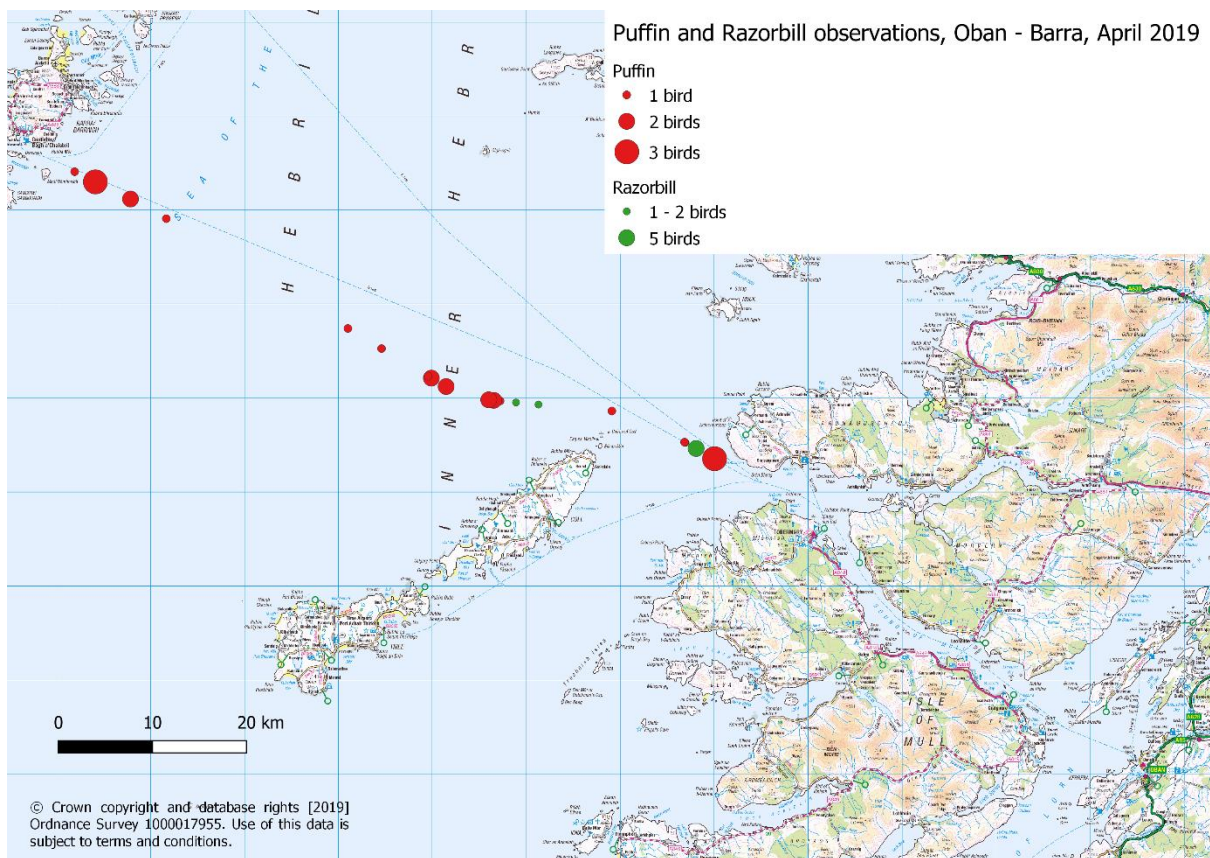


Figure 6. Puffin and Razorbill observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

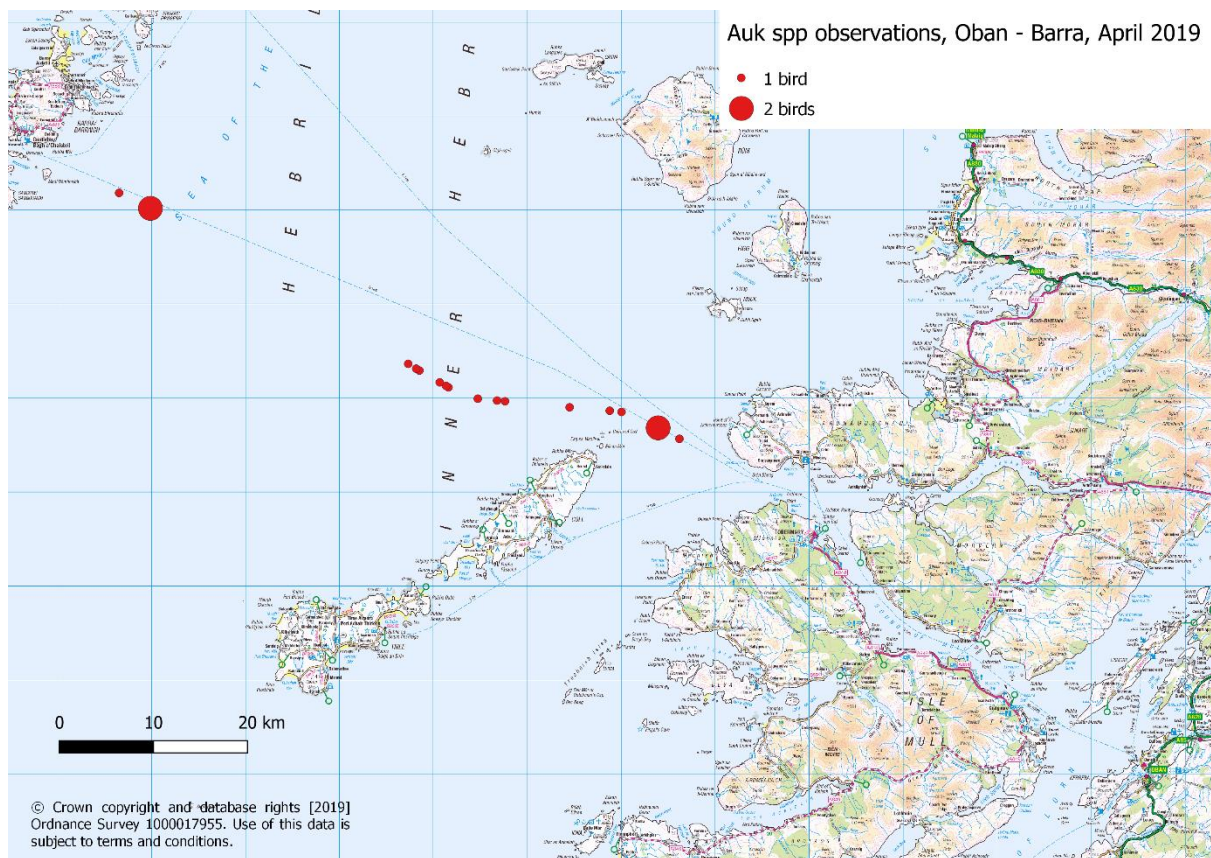


Figure 7. Auk spp observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

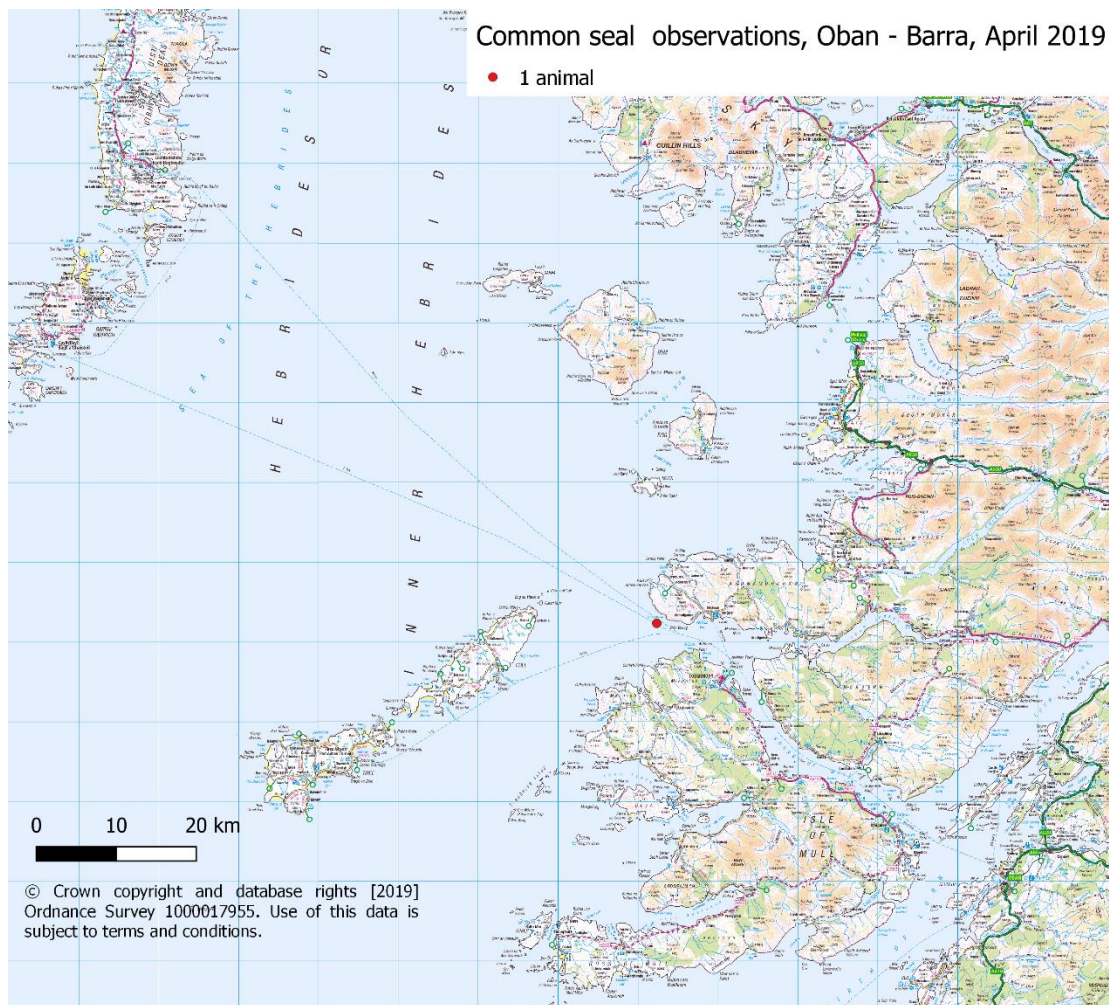


Figure 8. Common seal observations during Oban - Barra survey, April 13th, 2019

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 Isle of Lewis 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.