

Agenda Item	4
Report No	CIA/21/26

The Highland Council

Committee: City of Inverness Area

Date: 18 May 2026

Report Title: City of Inverness Gull Management Plan – Pilot Project

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1 To present the development of the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan, summarising the ongoing survey work, current mitigation activities, partnership contributions, and upcoming actions identified to ensure success of the pilot project.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are invited to:-

- i. **Note and approve** the Inverness City Gull Management Plan;
- ii. **Note and comment** on locations where gull activity is having a significant impact on local communities;
- iii. **Note and comment** on locations where gull behaviour is predominantly associated with food scavenging; and
- iv. **Note and comment** on the potential implementation of gull mitigation measures on Council-owned buildings where significant impacts have been identified

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – NatureScot granted £20k to Highland Council to assist with the development of a gull management plan and establishing best practice. The funding is not intended to be used towards operational mitigation works. The collaborative, effective and evidence-based gull management plan is the beginning of a management plan which will evolve year on year as we get a better understanding of gull behaviour and attractants to the urban environment.

3.2 **Legal** - The Highland Council has no statutory duty to undertake gull management activities in public areas. However, through a coordinated approach involving all relevant Council services, and by implementing proportionate preventative measures, the Council can provide leadership to the public and business community in reducing public health, safety and amenity risks associated with gull activity during the breeding season. This preventative approach seeks to ensure that licence applications become the exception rather than the norm.

Licensable gull management activities, administered by NatureScot, will only be undertaken where an appropriate licence has been granted. Any applicant to NatureScot seeking consent to carry out gull-related licensable activities must demonstrate that a hierarchical approach to management has been followed, including the prior implementation of reasonable deterrent and preventative measures to discourage gull nesting.

- 3.3 **Risk** – Although there is no statutory duty to manage gull populations or behaviour, there is a significant reputational risk arising from public perceptions and expectations of the Council's role in this area. Gull related issues such as noise, fouling, aggression, food scavenging and perceived public safety risks are highly visible and emotive, particularly, during breeding season. As a result, it may be reasonable but incorrect to assume that the Council has both responsibility and the powers to intervene directly.

Overall, the reputational risk lies not in breaching a statutory obligation, but in the misalignment between public expectation and the Council's actual role, powers and limitations, particularly where those limitations are complex, species-specific and poorly understood by the public. Clear, consistent and carefully framed communication is therefore critical to managing this risk and avoiding the perception that the Council is either responsible for, or able to resolve, all gull-related issues.

- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no staff Health, Safety and Wellbeing implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment**
- 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 28 April 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval and are detailed within **Appendix 1**.
- 4.3.2 The Screening Process has concluded that there are only positive impacts. Members are asked to consider the summary within **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3

Type of Impact Assessment	Summary of Impact
Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights	Positive Impact
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	No Impact
Data Protection	No Impact
Island and Mainland Rural Communities	No Difference
Climate Change	No Significant Impact Identified

5 Background

- 5.1 Urban gull activity in Inverness has increasingly given rise to public concern, particularly in relation to noise disturbance, aggressive behaviour, food scavenging, fouling and nesting on buildings. Reports of these impacts are most noticeable during the breeding season and affect residential areas, schools, care settings and the city centre, with implications for public health, safety and amenity. While the full extent of these impacts has not yet been consistently quantified, available evidence highlights clear pressure points requiring a coordinated and proportionate response
- 5.2 In October 2024, NatureScot presented a briefing to The Highland Council, updating elected Members on the Birds of Conservation Concern and on revised national guidance. This guidance clarified that licences for gull management activities can only be issued where there is clear evidence of public health or safety risk, and where alternative non-lethal measures have been demonstrated to be ineffective. The briefing underscored the importance of prevention; behaviour change and evidence-led decision making as the foundation of urban gull management.
- 5.3 In September 2025, Highland Council and NatureScot agreed a joint statement of operational commitment, confirming a shared approach to addressing urban gull impacts. This commitment set out the intention to work in partnership to:-
- develop and implement a practical, evidence-based gull management plan;
 - engage with communities, businesses and other stakeholders to deliver inclusive and effective solutions;
 - promote best practice and conservation sensitive approaches in line with national guidance; and
 - monitor and evaluate a pilot approach to inform future gull management strategies across the Highlands.
- 5.4 A briefing outlining how The Highland Council proposed to progress the development of the gull management plan was presented to elected Members in January 2026. A copy of this report is attached within **Appendix 3**.
- 5.5 Building on this commitment, in March 2026, The Highland Council accepted £20,000 in grant funding from NatureScot to support preparation of a Gull Management Plan covering Inverness and Nairn.

The funding is being used to:-

- strengthen the local evidence base by improving understanding of gull populations and movements;

- supporting a locally focused “*Do Not Feed the Gulls*” awareness campaign; and
- identifying the most effective and proportionate measures to address impacts in the areas most affected.

The Highland Council and NatureScot agreed to the investment of this funding in the appointment of a specialist ecological consultant to undertake the ornithological component of the Plan. This work is focused on gathering robust data on gull populations, nesting distribution and the environmental factors influencing gull foraging and nesting behaviour in and around Inverness city centre and Nairn town centre. The findings will inform targeted interventions, support a hierarchical management approach and reduce reliance on licensable activities, ensuring that future actions are lawful, proportionate and evidence-led.

6 Gull Management Plan – Pilot Project

- 6.1 The City of Inverness Gull Management Plan sets out a coordinated and proportionate approach to managing the impact of urban gull activity across Inverness. The plan focuses on prevention, public awareness, and lawful control measures, working in partnership with stakeholders to reduce risks to public health, safety and the local environment while ensuring compliance with wildlife legislation.
- 6.2 The Inverness Gull Management Plan is attached within **Appendix 2** of this report for Members’ information and consideration.
- 6.3 The City of Inverness Gull Management Plan is intended to be a living document that will evolve over time. As monitoring, engagement and evidence gathering progress, the plan will require to be reviewed and refined on a year-on-year basis by all relevant stakeholders, reflecting an improved understanding of gull behaviour, population dynamics and the factors attracting gulls to the urban environment of the City of Inverness. The first baseline survey was completed during the 2025 breeding season and as is attached as **Appendix 4** for reference. This adaptive approach is considered essential and will ensure that management actions remain proportionate, evidence-based and responsive to changing circumstances.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 27 April 2026

Author: Eleanor Hood, Senior Environmental Health Officer

Background Papers: Inverness Gull Management programme-NatureScot - Licencing [Update](#)
People and Gulls Summit Event - [Summary](#)

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 - Inverness Gull Management Plan
Appendix 3 – Members Briefing Note January 2026
Appendix 4 – Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

About proposal

What does this proposal relate to? Action or delivery plan

Proposal name: City of Inverness Gull Management Plan

High level summary of the proposal: The City of Inverness Gull Management Plan 2026 sets out a coordinated, evidence led approach to managing the impacts of urban gulls while recognising their ecological importance and protected status. Developed jointly by The Highland Council and NatureScot, with input from BID Inverness, the Plan is a pilot initiative intended to support sustainable, lawful gull management in Inverness and to inform wider practice across the Highlands.

Who may be affected by the proposal? Inverness residents, local businesses and visitors to the city.

Start date of proposal: 01/09/2025

End date of proposal: 19/05/2026

Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service? Yes

Which Council services will be impacted by this proposal? Place

Does this relate to an existing proposal? No

Author details

Name: Eleanor Hood

Job title: Senior Environmental Health Officer

Email address: Eleanor.Hood@highland.gov.uk

Service: Place

Responsible officer details

Name: Gregor MacCormick

Job title: Area Environmental Health Manager - South

Email address: Gregor.MacCormick@highland.gov.uk

Sign off date: 2026-04-28

Equalities, poverty, and human rights

Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

Sex: Positive

Age: Positive

Disability: Positive

Religion or belief: No impact

Race: No impact

Sexual orientation: No impact

Gender reassignment: No impact

Pregnancy and maternity: Positive

Marriage and civil partnership: No impact

Protected characteristics impact details: The Gull Management Plan will help educate members of the public and businesses on gull behaviour, and give guidance on measures that can be taken to discourage negative gull impacts on our community

Poverty and socio-economic

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

Prospects and opportunities: No impact

Places: No impact

Financial: No impact

Poverty and socio-economic impact details: The majority of the actions will be educational and advisory.

Human rights

Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal?No human rights will be affected

What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people?Positive

Human rights impact details: The management plan if followed will encourage gulls to forage in their natural environment and therefore reducing the negative impact of gulls in and around residential properties.

Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights? Positive impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Children's rights and wellbeing

What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people? Educating children and young people on how not to reward the gull scavenging behaviour, will give them the information to avoid gull impact.

Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal? No children's rights will be affected

Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected:

Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing? No impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Data protection

Will your proposal involve processing personal data? No

Data protection screening assessment

What change will there be to the way personal data is processed? No personal data will be processed

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Island and mainland rural communities

Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities? No

Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities? No difference

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Climate change

Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO2e)? No

Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? Yes

Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate? No

Provide information regarding your selection above: Liaising with NatureScot and carrying out work in alignment with all relevant legislation

Climate change screening assessment

Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known? Yes

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

City of Inverness Gull Management Plan

Pilot Initiative by The Highland Council and NatureScot

Executive Summary

The City of Inverness Gull Management Plan 2026 sets out a coordinated, evidence-led approach to managing the impacts of urban gulls while recognising their ecological importance and protected status. Developed jointly by The Highland Council and NatureScot, with input from BID-Inverness, the Plan is a pilot initiative intended to support sustainable, lawful gull management in Inverness and to inform wider practice across the Highlands.

Urban gull activity continues to generate public concern, particularly in relation to noise disturbance, aggressive behaviour, food-snatching, fouling, and nesting on buildings. Reports from residential areas, schools, care homes and the city centre highlight impacts on public safety, health and amenity, especially during the breeding season. While impacts cannot yet be fully quantified due to the absence of a centralised reporting system, existing evidence identifies clear hotspots requiring a planned and proportionate response.

The Plan adopts a hierarchical management framework in line with NatureScot guidance, prioritising avoidance and prevention through education, behaviour change, waste management and building maintenance. These measures are supported by habitat and resource management and non-invasive deterrence, with licensable activities identified only as a last resort where non-lethal options have been exhausted and a demonstrable public health or safety risk remains.

Baseline evidence is provided by the 2025 *Inverness Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey*, which identified Herring Gulls and Common Gulls as the predominant urban species, with over 700 apparently occupied nests recorded across the city. Ongoing data collection, improved reporting, hotspot analysis and monitoring of both gull and human behaviours are central to measuring effectiveness and supporting adaptive, cost-effective management.

Clear roles and responsibilities are defined for public bodies, businesses, property owners, contractors and the general public. The Plan emphasises the importance of responsible waste management, informed building and streetscape design, coordinated deterrent use and public cooperation, supported by education and communication initiatives, including the expansion of the “Do Not Feed the Gulls – Let Nature Take Care of Itself” campaign.

The 2026 Action Plan sets out delivery and monitoring priorities. The Plan will be reviewed annually to ensure a balanced, lawful and sustainable framework that reduces conflict, protects public health and amenity, and minimises reliance on licensable control measures while supporting gull conservation and coexistence.

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>Page No</u>
Executive Summary	1
1.0 Introduction	3
• Our Shared Vision	
• Background – Harms & Impacts	
• Impact Assessment	
• Management Hierarchy	
• Objectives	
2.0 Baseline Data Requirements	7
• Population and Distribution	
• Public Health and Safety Locations	
• Impact Hotspots	
• Existing Deterrent Measures	
• Potential Gull Breeding or Roosting Sanctuaries	
3.0 Communication and Education	7
• Population and Distribution	
• Public Health and Safety Locations	
• Impact Hotspots	
• Existing Deterrent Measures	
• Potential Gull Breeding or Roosting Sanctuaries	
4.0 Management Measures	8
5.0 Roles and Responsibilities	9
• The Highland Council	
• NatureScot	
• Business Community	
• Property Owners	
• Gull Management Contractors	
• General Public	
6.0 Action Plan for 2026	12
• Data Collection	
• Operational Works	
7.0 Monitoring and Review	13
8.0 Conclusion	14
References	14
Appendix 1: Species of Gull Prevalent in Inverness	16
Appendix 2: Summary of Findings and Recommendations – Armstrong McCaul Biological Consultants Ltd	17

1.0 Introduction

The Highland Council and NatureScot jointly committed to developing and delivering a pilot gull management plan for the City of Inverness. This initiative represents a proactive and collaborative approach to addressing the challenges posed by urban gulls, while recognising their ecological importance and protected status.

1.1 Our Shared Vision

Our shared vision is to establish Inverness as a leading example of adaptive urban gull management that protects public health and amenity while safeguarding the conservation status of gull species.

This vision recognises the complex relationship between people and gulls in an urban environment and commits to evidence-led, humane and legally compliant interventions, supported by partnership working, public awareness and long-term behavioural change. Through this approach, Inverness will seek to reduce reliance on licensable activities, reduce conflict, promote coexistence, and manage gull activity in a way that is sustainable, responsible and responsive to local needs.

1.3 Background – Harms & Impacts

Inverness has experienced an increase in reports of conflict between gulls and people across a range of urban settings, resulting in adverse impacts on public health, safety and amenity. This includes the following

Care Homes / Nursing Homes:

Reports indicate that elderly residents are experiencing disturbed sleep due to early morning gull calls, particularly during the breeding season.

High Street:

Members of the public report being dive-bombed by gulls and experiencing food-snatching incidents, within these reports children have been targeted.

Schools:

Primary schools have prohibited children from eating outdoors due to aggressive gull behaviour.

High school students report being swooped upon or dive-bombed while walking between nearby food outlets and the school building.

Residential Areas:

Complaints have been received regarding neighbours feeding gulls, attracting large numbers of birds into residential streets and contributing to nuisance behaviour.

Spread of Pathogens:

Whilst there have not been any reported infections attributed to gull presence in Inverness, we are mindful that in highly populated areas of gulls, there may be risk of pathogens that can have negative impacts on the health of people and livestock e.g. *Salmonella* and *E. coli*

1.4 **Impact Assessment**

At present, the overall impact within Inverness cannot be fully quantified, as there is no reliable or centralised reporting system for gull-related incidents. However, available reports indicate the following key issues:

Noise Disturbance:

Early-morning and daytime calling, particularly during the breeding season, causing disruption to residents.

Aggressive Behaviour:

Dive-bombing / swooping associated with nest-defence behaviour or food attractants.

Direct strikes on individuals linked to the same behaviours.

Food-Related Incidents:

Food snatching from members of the public, when food is consumed outdoors.

Environmental Soiling:

Defecation and fouling on buildings, vehicles, public areas, and personal property

Nesting-Related Impacts:

Nesting on roofs, leading to noise, obstruction and difficulties for property owners. Accumulation of nesting materials, which can block gutters, contribute to water damage, and cause general deterioration of building fabric.

Behaviour Beyond Breeding Season:

It is recognised that not all problematic behaviours occur exclusively during the breeding season. Food availability, deliberate feeding by residents, and established behavioural patterns also contribute to year-round nuisance activity.

1.5 **Management Hierarchy**

All gull management activities should follow the established hierarchy of control:

Avoidance and Prevention – Year-Round

Measures that reduce the likelihood of gulls being attracted to an area. *No licence required*. The following measures will be actioned:-

- Public education and awareness campaigns discouraging the feeding of gulls.
- Clear messaging on the link between feeding, aggressive behaviour and nuisance impacts.
- Engagement with residents, businesses and visitors on responsible behaviour in gull-affected areas.
- Signage in known hotspot areas advising against leaving food unattended.
- Community-based initiatives promoting shared responsibility for reducing attractants.
- Early engagement with property owners in known nesting areas prior to breeding season.

- Use of behavioural change approaches to reduce deliberate or inadvertent feeding.
- Integration of gull awareness into wider environmental and waste-reduction campaigns.

Habitat and Resource Management – Year-Round

Actions that minimise access to food, shelter, and nesting opportunities. *No licence required.*

The following measures will be actioned: -

- Advice on the secure storage of domestic and commercial waste.
- During routine litter bin replacement and streetscaping projects, gull-resistant bins to be given consideration and integrated into the design where deemed appropriate.
- Enforcement of appropriate waste containment and presentation by food businesses.
- Continue street cleansing, particularly in areas with high footfall and food consumption.
- Where street cleansing carry out immediate removal of waste spillages and discarded food, a report is logged with Environmental Health for follow up action, when the incident is related to a food business or fly-tipping incident.
- Building maintenance to reduce access to roof spaces, ledges and voids, following assessment.
- Street Café Permits will include a condition for the management of outdoor eating areas to prevent accumulation of food remains, “*all practical measures must be taken to ensure that the street café does not contribute to providing gulls with a food source.*”.
- Public space re-design/upgrades to consider features which minimise opportunities for resting and congregation.
- Liaison with housing providers and landlords on preventative building measures.

Deterrence – Early Breeding Season

Use of non-invasive deterrents to discourage nesting or presence. *No licence required if methods are non-invasive.* The following guidance to be followed by The Highland Council Property Department and shared with other property owners/stakeholders:-

- Deployment of visual deterrents (e.g. kites, flags, reflective devices) prior to and at the start of nesting activity, where appropriate.
- Installation of non-injurious anti-perching systems on ledges, signs and lighting columns.
- Temporary use of audio deterrents where appropriate and proportionate.
- Regular movement or rotation of deterrents to prevent habituation.
- Active roof inspections, where safe access, early in the breeding season to discourage nest establishment.
- Timely intervention before nesting behaviour becomes established.
- Use of deterrents that do not cause harm, distress or injury to gulls or other wildlife.
- Site-specific deterrence plans focused on repeat problem locations.

Monitoring and Review

Ongoing assessment of effectiveness, behaviour changes, and emerging issues. These will include the following:-

- Collection and review of complaints and service requests to identify trends and hotspots.
- Site inspections to assess gull behaviour and effectiveness of measures.
- Breeding season monitoring to compare gull populations and identify successful breeding sites of low impact.
- Recording of interventions and outcomes to inform future action.
- Review of emerging behaviours, including changes in aggression or feeding patterns.
- Annual evaluation of the management plan and refinement of actions as required.
- Reporting to senior management and elected members as appropriate.
- Engagement with partners and stakeholders to share learning and best practice.

Escalation and Specialist Advice

Where issues persist, specialist input may be required. *Licensing may be considered at this stage.*

- Licensing should be regarded as a last resort, applied only when all reasonable non-lethal measures have been exhausted and there is a clear, demonstrable risk to public health or safety.

1.6 Objectives

The objectives of the Inverness Gull Management Plan set out how the Council and its partners will address the challenges associated with urban gull activity in a balanced, lawful and sustainable manner.

The plan will seek to:

- Reduce the negative impacts of gull activity on residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Ensure full compliance with wildlife legislation and support national conservation priorities.
- Promote sustainable, non-lethal management approaches as the primary means of control.
- Enhance public understanding and engagement, encouraging responsible behaviour and community participation.

Collectively, these objectives will guide a proportionate, evidence-led approach to gull management in Inverness, recognising both the needs of the community and the protected status of gull species.

2.0 **Baseline Data Requirements**

To support the development of an effective, evidence-based approach to urban gull management, a clear baseline dataset is required to establish the current scale, distribution and impacts of gull activity across the City of Inverness.

Population and Distribution

Identify the population size and spatial distribution of nesting gulls, broken down by species.

Public Health and Safety Locations

Map locations where gull activity presents heightened risk, including:

- Hospitals
- Airport
- Schools and childcare settings
- Food manufacturing, processing, and preparation premises

Impact Hotspots

Using the new data collection “Report a Gull related Incident”, identify properties and areas experiencing repeated issues:

- Specific areas affected
- Categories of impact (e.g., noise, aggression, fouling, food-snatching)
- Identification of species, as part of follow up action in investigating any site with repeat complaints.

Existing Deterrent Measures

Record current deterrents in place, such as:

- Roof-mounted deterrents (spikes, nets, wires)
- Perching deterrents (e.g., “Daddi long-legs”)
- Food waste hotspots and storage issues
- Operational deterrents (e.g., noise-based systems, falconry programmes)

Potential Gull Breeding or Roosting Sanctuaries

Identify areas where gull presence is acceptable or low-impact, enabling a balanced management approach.

Collectively, this baseline information will inform proportionate and targeted management actions, support future monitoring and review, and enable the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan to be refined over time as understanding of gull behaviour and urban attractants improves.

3.0 **Communication and Education**

Effective communication and education are central to reducing urban gull impacts, by promoting consistent, informed and responsible behaviours among residents, businesses and visitors.

Collaborative Campaigns:

Work in partnership with BID-Inverness and other relevant agencies to deliver ongoing awareness campaigns targeted at schools, the general public, and local businesses. Campaigns should align with national guidance and make use of established educational materials (e.g., NatureScot and RSPB resources), with a focus on:

- Effective waste management practices
- Responsible behaviours that reduce gull attraction
- Promotion of National Guidance: actively promote NatureScot guidance and key principles to support consistent, evidence-based messaging and encourage community adherence to best-practice measures.

Through coordinated communication and education initiatives, aligned with national guidance and delivered in partnership with key stakeholders, the Council aims to support long-term behaviour change that reduces gull attractants and contributes to a more sustainable and evidence-based approach to gull management.

4.0 **Management Measures**

The following management measures set out a coordinated and proportionate framework aimed at reducing the impacts of urban gulls, focusing on prevention, partnership working and practical interventions informed by evidence and best practice.

- Establish working committee, all parties to be represented and plan to be reviewed and adapt as appropriate
- Prompt removal of nesting materials pre-nesting season, carry out on annual basis and/or as frequently as determined by property owners own assessment.
- Installation, maintenance and review of site appropriate roof deterrents to prevent nesting and roosting/perching.
- Provision of approved gull-proof waste receptacles where we have evidence of gull scavenging from bins.
- Engagement with food businesses, educate and raise awareness of best practices.
- Consideration of street net lighting/bunting to hinder severity of dive bombing. These mitigation measures to be considered as part of wider streetscape projects.
- Investigate establishment of alternative gull nesting sanctuaries or areas where gull presence can be tolerated.
- Consideration and trial of “*Pull : Push*” techniques to reduce urban gulls in city.

Taken together, these measures support a balanced and adaptive approach to urban gull management, recognising the need for ongoing review, collaboration with stakeholders and the integration of mitigation actions within wider property management and streetscape initiatives.

5 Roles and Responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities are essential to the effective delivery of the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan, ensuring a coordinated, lawful and proportionate approach that reflects the shared responsibilities of public bodies, businesses, property owners, contractors and the wider community in tackling the issue. All stakeholders will be encouraged and supported to follow the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan through education, guidance and partnership working.

5.1 The Highland Council

Strategic Leadership and Legal Awareness:

Although there is no statutory duty to control gulls, The Highland Council recognises the legal protections and conservation status of gull species. The Council will lead by example through the development and implementation of a Gull Management Plan that addresses community concerns, reduces conflict, and acknowledges existing financial constraints.

Identification of Public Health and Safety Areas:

Work with BID-Inverness, local businesses, and community groups to identify areas where gull activity presents heightened public health or safety risks.

Consideration in Building Design and Planning:

Ensure new Council developments incorporate design features that minimise gull nesting opportunities.

Building Standards should consider gull-resistant design principles when assessing planning applications for new buildings or significant renovations.

Provision of Gull-Proof Waste Receptacles:

Assess hotspot areas and, where appropriate, install Council-approved gull-proof bins at Council-managed facilities to reduce waste-related attractants.

Appropriate Deterrents for Historic and Listed Buildings:

Follow expert guidance to ensure that any deterrents installed on historic or listed buildings are both effective and suitable for sensitive structures.

Specialist Advice and Trial Methods:

Give due consideration to guidance provided by gull experts, including the potential trial of Pull:Push methods aimed at shifting gull presence away from high-impact urban areas.

Collaboration and Public Education:

Continue collaborative work with BID-Inverness on education and communication campaigns. Actively promote NatureScot guidance and best-practice principles to the wider community.

5.2 **NatureScot**

Identification of Potential Breeding Sanctuaries:

Investigate and provide expert advice on the identification of suitable gull breeding or roosting sanctuaries in low-impact areas.

Specialist Advice and Guidance:

Offer guidance on:

- Relevant impact categories
- Appropriate deterrent and mitigation measures
- Licensing tests and conditions where licensing may be considered.

Promotion of Best Practice:

Promote the national guidance and management hierarchy, ensuring consistent messaging and evidence-based management approaches.

National Coordination:

Lead and coordinate relevant national campaigns, including the Five Actions framework arising from the Gull Summit.

5.3 **Business Community**

Businesses will be encouraged and supported to engage with and follow the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan through targeted communication, guidance and awareness-raising. This will include promotion of best practice, lawful deterrent measures and responsible waste management, in line with NatureScot guidance and relevant statutory obligations. Measures will include:

Installation and Maintenance of Deterrents:

Install, maintain, and routinely review appropriate and effective gull deterrents on business premises. Businesses have a responsibility to seek advice from NatureScot and/or competent bird-control contractors to ensure methods are lawful, effective, and suitable for the site.

Responsible Waste Management:

Dispose of waste in a manner that does not attract gulls, including securing waste containers, managing outdoor eating areas, and preventing access to food waste. Businesses must adhere to their Duty of Care under Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA).

Compliance with National Guidance:

Follow NatureScot guidance, including recommended deterrent practices, non-lethal management principles, and responsible behaviours to reduce conflict with gulls.

5.4 **Property Owners**

Property owners will be encouraged and supported to follow the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan through access to clear guidance, advice and coordinated working. The Council and partners will promote best-practice approaches to deterrence, building maintenance and waste management, helping property owners to take effective and lawful action. Measures will include:

Installation and Maintenance of Deterrents:

Install, maintain, and routinely review appropriate and effective gull deterrents on buildings. Property owners have a responsibility to seek advice from NatureScot and/or competent bird-control contractors to ensure that all measures are lawful, effective, and suitable for the structure.

Designing Out Nesting Opportunities:

Where regular nesting sites are identified, take action to design out nesting opportunities through repair, maintenance, or upgrades to building features.

Coordinated Action:

Work collaboratively with neighbouring property owners to implement a coordinated approach, helping to prevent displacement of gulls from one property to another.

Appropriate Waste Management:

Use secure and appropriate waste receptacles to minimise food attractants and discourage gull activity around properties.

Responsible Bird Feeding:

If feeding birds, follow RSPB guidance on responsible bird feeding—aimed at supporting small garden birds—while ensuring that feeding practices do not encourage larger birds such as gulls. Deterrents should be in place where necessary.

5.6 Gull Management Contractors

Gull management contractors operating within the City of Inverness will be encouraged to familiarise themselves with and work in accordance with the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan. Measures will include:

Apply Best Practice:

Follow recognised best-practice approaches set out in NatureScot guidance, ensuring all actions align with legal and conservation requirements.

Awareness of Local Management Plans:

Familiarise yourself with the Local Council's Gull Management Plan and related policies to ensure consistency and coordination across the community.

Support for Property Owners:

Provide advice to property owners on deterrent methods and coordinated approaches to help avoid the displacement of gulls onto neighbouring properties.

5.7 General Public

Members of the public will be encouraged to understand and support the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan through education and awareness initiatives. This includes promoting responsible behaviours, such as not feeding gulls and managing waste appropriately, to reduce conflict while recognising the protected status of gull species. Measures will include:

Awareness and Understanding:

Take time to understand the issues associated with urban gulls, including why certain behaviours, such as food-snatching, noise, or nesting on buildings occur and how human activity can unintentionally exacerbate these problems.

Avoid Feeding Gulls:

Support the message behind the “*Do Not Feed the Gulls – Let Nature Take Care of Itself*” campaign. Feeding gulls encourages aggressive behaviour, increases dependency on human-provided food, and can lead to larger concentrations of birds in residential and commercial areas.

Responsible Waste Disposal:

Ensure personal waste is securely bagged and placed in appropriate bins. Do not leave food waste beside bins or in open containers where gulls can access it.

Respect Deterrents and Nest Management Measures:

Avoid tampering with any deterrents, signs, or equipment installed by property owners or the Council. These measures are in place to reduce conflict and protect both people and wildlife.

Report Problem Areas:

Inform the Council or relevant local representatives about recurring gull hotspots, damaged bins, or areas where waste is frequently disturbed. Reporting helps build local data and improve targeted management.

Support Conservation Principles:

Recognise that gulls are protected species, and management must balance community concerns with legal and ecological responsibilities. Community understanding helps ensure non-lethal and sustainable approaches are accepted and effective.

6.0 Action Plan – 2026

This Action Plan for 2026 sets out the practical steps required to progress the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan, building on improved evidence, partnership working and public engagement. The actions focus on strengthening data collection and reporting, informing targeted and proportionate interventions, and delivering coordinated operational measures to reduce the negative impacts of urban gull activity during the breeding season and beyond.

6.1 Data Collection**Breeding Season Survey (2026):**

Conduct a comprehensive gull population and nesting survey in Inverness and Nairn during the 2026 breeding season to establish robust baseline data. Please refer to Appendix 2.

Improved Reporting System:

An online reporting system has been launched by The Highland Council for members of the public, businesses, and partners to record gull-related incidents, enabling more accurate monitoring of impacts.

Hotspot Behaviour Analysis:

Investigate both gull behaviour and human behaviours at identified hotspots to understand drivers of conflict and opportunities for targeted interventions.

Impact Categorisation by Postcode:

Categorise reported impacts by postcode area, identifying patterns, severity, and locations requiring prioritised action.

Identification of Suitable Deterrents:

Assess and map appropriate, affordable, and non-lethal deterrents for specific postcodes or property types, ensuring recommendations are evidence-based. Any street scaping projects are to consider incorporating mitigation measures to reduce the negative impact of gulls.

Evaluation of Existing Measures:

Review the effectiveness of current non-lethal control measures, identifying what is working, what requires adjustment, and where innovation is needed.

6.2

Operational Works**Public Campaign Launch:**

Implement the “*Do Not Feed the Gulls*” campaign in coordination with the national communication strategy, ensuring consistent messaging across platforms and partners.

Review and Deployment of Multiple Deterrents:

Review existing deterrents and install multi-model, non-lethal control measures in priority areas under the control of The Council, where data indicates persistent or severe impacts.

City Centre Patrols:

Carry out regular patrols of the city centre to:

- Identify new or emerging problem areas
- Provide on-the-spot guidance to businesses and the public
- Reinforce education and awareness messages
- Monitor waste management issues contributing to gull attraction

Collectively, these actions will strengthen the Council’s understanding of gull behaviour and urban attractants, support more targeted and effective mitigation, and reinforce consistent messaging across partners and communities. Delivery of the 2026 Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed to ensure actions remain evidence-based, lawful and proportionate, with learning used to inform future revisions of the Gull Management Plan and subsequent annual action plans.

7.0 **Monitoring and Review**

Ongoing monitoring and regular review are essential to ensure that the City of Inverness Gull Management Plan remains effective, proportionate and evidence-based. A structured review process will enable the Council and partners to assess emerging trends, evaluate the success of mitigation measures, and ensure continued compliance with legal and conservation requirements.

Annual Review Process

Conduct an annual assessment of:

- Gull population data, with a focus on Inverness City and Nairn, to monitor changes in numbers, distribution, and breeding patterns.
- Mapping and evaluation of existing deterrents, reviewing their condition, effectiveness, and any gaps that require additional measures.
- Licence applications and compliance, ensuring that any licensed activities meet legal requirements and align with conservation priorities.

The findings from the annual monitoring and review process will inform future revisions of the Gull Management Plan and subsequent action plans. This adaptive approach will support continuous improvement, strengthen accountability, and ensure that gull management actions respond to changes in population dynamics, behaviour, and urban pressures over time.

8.0 **Conclusion**

The City of Inverness Gull Management Plan 2026 provides a clear and proportionate framework for managing the impacts of urban gulls while recognising their protected status and ecological value. By focusing on prevention, evidence-led decision making and shared responsibility, the Plan seeks to reduce conflict, improve public amenity and minimise the need for licensable control measures.

Successful delivery of the Plan will depend on continued partnership working between The Highland Council, NatureScot, BID Inverness, businesses, property owners and the wider community. Behaviour change, improved waste management and informed building design will be central to achieving sustainable outcomes.

As a pilot initiative, the Plan will be reviewed annually and refined in response to new evidence, monitoring outcomes and emerging challenges. This adaptive approach will ensure that gull management in Inverness remains lawful, effective and proportionate, while supporting coexistence between people and wildlife in the urban environment.

9.0 **References**

- NatureScot Gull Management Guidance
- Inverness Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Appendices

Appendix 1: Species of Gull Prevalent in Inverness

Appendix 2: Summary of findings and recommendations following initial assessment by Roy Armstrong

Appendix 1: Species of Gull Prevalent in Inverness

Inverness Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Report Reference: [319414-THC - Inverness Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey - V1.0.pdf](#)

The 2025 census recorded the following across the full survey area:

- **Total active nests:** 743
- **Active territories:** 914
- **Total number of individual birds observed:** 1,513

Table 3: Total Number of Gulls per Census Unit within Main Survey Area

Species	AON	AOT	IND
Common gull	112	164	206
Herring gull	615	762	1271
Lesser black-backed gull	8	11	17
Great black-backed gull	8	13	17
Black-headed gull	-	-	2
Total	743	914	1513

AON – Apparently Occupied Nest

AOT – Apparently Occupied Territory

IND – Individual Adults

Appendix 2

Summary of findings and recommendations following initial assessment by Roy Armstrong

Armstrong McCaul Biological Consultants Ltd.

The initial assessment has identified several priority actions to improve understanding of gull presence, behaviour, and ecological drivers across Inverness. The following recommendations are made:

- **Undertake further targeted surveys** at *The Maltings* and the *Biffa facility*, as these locations present high-energy food sources likely influencing gull activity and distribution.
- **Analyse existing survey data** and prepare high resolution mapping of Active Occupied Nests (AONs) and Active Occupied Territories (AOTs) to support spatial understanding and management planning. Surveys will follow standard Seabird Monitoring Handbook methods and do not require licenses.
- **Identify any ground-nesting colonies** within the wider city area to inform forthcoming dietary studies and assess potential ecological or public health implications.
- **Gull management interventions:** No licensable activities are planned for the proposed 2026 works. Focus will be on establishing monitoring and implementing a non- licensable Push-Pull strategy designed to reduce gull nesting in Inverness by limiting access to high-energy food sources and enhancing alternative nesting sites.

Push-Pull methods will be observational, based on proven techniques used elsewhere, and do not require NatureScot licensing.

Members Briefing

City Leaders Business Meeting - 26th January 2026

UPDATE ON THE PILOT PROJECT TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A CITY OF INVERNESS GULL MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This briefing provides an update on the joint Highland Council–NatureScot pilot project to develop a coordinated and evidence-based Gull Management Plan for the City of Inverness. The project aims to address ongoing public health, safety, and amenity issues associated with urban gulls while recognising their ecological significance and protected status.

NatureScot has awarded £10,000 to support development of the plan, which builds on the longstanding operational work delivered by Inverness BID. A hierarchical approach to gull management is required, prioritising prevention (education, waste management, removal of high energy food sources), followed by licensed nest and egg removal where justified, with lethal control permitted only as a last resort for public safety reasons.

A baseline survey undertaken in 2025 across 7 km² of Inverness identified Herring Gulls and Common Gulls as the predominant species. This data will help inform targeted, species appropriate mitigation measures. Further workshops with Highland Council Services, NatureScot, and Inverness BID will refine data gathering and guide the next phase of work.

Key actions under development include improved public reporting tools, expanded education campaigns, enhanced waste management guidance for businesses, and enforcement where persistent waste issues attract gull activity. Longer term measures such as gull proof infrastructure and updated building design requirements are also being explored.

The plan will establish a sustainable, annually reviewed framework for coordinated urban gull management. Completion of the pilot Gull Management Plan is scheduled for 31 March 2026 with a view to be presented at City of Inverness Area Committee on the 18th May 2026.

2.0 Purpose of Briefing

- 2.1 To update Members on the joint Highland Council–NatureScot project to develop and implement a pilot Gull Management Plan for the City of Inverness. The initiative represents a proactive, collaborative approach to managing the challenges associated with urban gulls while respecting their protected status.

This note summarises recent survey results, current mitigation activities, partnership contributions, and forthcoming actions to progress the pilot project.

3.0 Background

3.1 A joint statement of operational commitment was agreed by Highland Council and NatureScot in September 2025 to work in partnership to:

- Develop and implement a practical, evidence-based gull management plan.
- Engage with communities, businesses, and stakeholders to ensure inclusive and effective solutions.
- Promote best practice and conservation-sensitive approaches in line with national guidance.
- Monitor and evaluate the pilot to inform future strategies across the Highlands.

3.2 NatureScot has made funding (£10k) available to Highland Council for the development an area wide gull management approach, which aims to:

- Improve understanding of local gull populations and their movements
- Identify practical measures suitable for different contexts
- Identify high-impact areas and how best to address these impacts
- Provide the basis for a locally coordinated, area-based licensing approach

The funding is being awarded strictly for the production of the management plan and cannot be used for operational work.

3.3 This pilot project is intended to build on the existing gull management programme led by Inverness BID and funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund and Inverness BID. It will serve as a model for future management plans across other communities in the Highlands.

3.4 NatureScot has advised that a hierarchical management approach is required: i) prevention as the primary strategy; ii) licensed nest and egg removal where prevention is insufficient; and iii) lethal control only as a last resort where all other measures fail and a public safety risk is evidenced

3.5 The pilot gull management plan is being developed by Highland Council (input from Environmental Health; Property; Environment Team), NatureScot and Inverness BID.

3.6 BID Inverness remains central to operational gull management within the city. Their work includes deterrent measures, education campaigns, coordination of licensed activities, and support to businesses. Their work is not financially sustainable without continued external support.

4.0 Mitigation Measures Under Development

4.1 In developing the Gull Management Plan, the Council is currently working on:

- Reviewing recommendations from the Inverness Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey.

- Incorporating lessons from Inverness BID's operations since 2012.
- Considering approaches trialled by other local authorities.
- Working with ecological consultants for further assessment.
- Exploring funding options for gull-proof litter bins.

The Gull Management Plan will integrate all feasible, sustainable measures and will be refined annually. It is not a short-term solution but a framework that will be refined annually as our knowledge grows regarding effective measures to mitigate negative gull/human interactions.

5.0 Current Position & Next Steps

- 5.1 A baseline gull census and distribution survey was completed during the 2025 breeding season across 7 km² of Inverness City Centre. Herring Gulls and Common Gulls were confirmed as the most prevalent species. The information obtained will be used to focus on the traits and behaviours of these species, when considering deterrents and management techniques.

This survey will form a key evidence base for the gull management plan.

Annual repetition of the survey is proposed to identify trends in gull populations.

- 5.2 Further meetings between Highland Council, NatureScot, and BID Inverness will take place in February with a focus on improving data gathering to help inform the management plan.

- 5.3 We aim to deliver the following as part of the management plan:

- Mapping key evidence layer (breeding/incidents/prevention techniques etc) to ensure action is targeted in the right locations.
- Additional gull proof bins.
- Review the effectiveness of current deterrents and liaise with NatureScot on potential alternative and site-specific deterrent options.
- Improved reporting system so we can obtain data on the negative impacts experienced by members of the public.
- Repeat the summer breeding population within Inverness and as of 2026 extend the survey to include Nairn.
- An increase in existing “*Do not Feed the Gull, let nature look after itself*” campaign.
- Attend schools to educate children at a primary school age.
- Further educate those who continue to feed the gulls and attracting them to residential and pedestrian areas.
- Educating and providing advice to businesses on their role to minimise exposed food waste and to inform their customers of the potential of gull activity if eating foods outside their premises.
- Streamline application procedures for licensable activities.

- 5.4 Many future measures will require additional investment. Behaviour change will be gradual, and it is important that expectations must be managed.

5.5 The aim is to prepare and complete this pilot gull management plan for Inverness by **31st March 2026**. The finalised plan will be presented at the City of Inverness Area Committee on 18th May.

Briefing Prepared by:

Eleanor Hood, Senior Environmental Health Officer, Communities & Place,
Environmental Health, 38 Harbour Rd, Inverness

Tel: 0790 1281629 Email: Eleanor.hood@highland.gov.uk

Inverness Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Prepared by: Arthian Ltd
For: The Highland Council
Site: Inverness

Date: 24/06/2025
Document Ref: 319414
Issue-1.0



Quality Assurance

Issue Record

Revision	Description	Date	Author	Reviewer	Approver
0.1	Draft submitted for internal review	20/06/2025	SCr	NM	NM
1.0	Final for submission to Client	09/07/2025	SCr	NM	NM

Staff Detail

Initials	Position
SCr	Associate Manager for Ecology and Biodiversity (Scotland)
NM	Director of Ecology and Biodiversity

Contents

1. Introduction	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Purpose of this Report.....	5
2. Methodology	6
2.1 Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey	6
2.2 Limitations	8
3. Results	9
3.1 Gull Distribution	9
3.2 Gull Census.....	10
3.3 Vulnerable Receptors	10
4. Mitigation Measures	12
4.1 Physical Prevention	12
4.2 Removal of Old Nests and Material.....	12
4.3 Removal of Foraging Resource	12
4.4 Human Disturbance	12

Tables

Table 1: Timing of Breeding for Gulls	6
Table 2: Details of Survey Visit Conditions.	8
Table 3: Total Number of Gulls per Census Unit within Main Survey Area	10
Table 5: Total Number of Gulls per Census Unit within 50m of Vulnerable Receptors	11

Plates

Plate 1: Survey Area	7
----------------------------	---

Appedices.

Appendix A- Gull Distribution Maps	15
--	----

References

References:.....	16
------------------	----

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent decades the urban gull population in the UK has seen a dramatic increase. The urban gull population of Inverness breed within proximity to residents, tourists and local businesses. There have been numerous reports of “nuisance” birds which have interacted negatively with the public. This has created the perception of an urban gull problem which has garnered the attention of governing bodies.

All five of the breeding gull species present in Inverness are now listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) amber and red lists, alongside their conservation status, the birds, their active nests and eggs all have legal protection under The Wildlife and Countryside act 1981.

NatureScot and The Highland Council are considering the development of a Gull Management Plan for the City of Inverness. The plan will aim provide a new approach which takes into consideration both conservation and control of gulls.

Arthian Ltd. (Arthian) has been requested by The Highland Council (THC) to undertake an Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey of 7km² of the Inverness City Centre and its immediate surrounds together with 23 additional receptors, identified as having vulnerable users. The survey outcome will inform the development of the Inverness Gull Management Plan.

1.2 Purpose of this Report

This report has been produced to document the methods, results and conclusions from the Inverness Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey. The report will also provide a summary of mitigation measures which can be adopted to deter nesting gulls on each of the buildings associated with vulnerable receptors, where appropriate.

2. Methodology

2.1 Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

The approach to the gull census and distribution surveys followed an amended version of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee’s (JNCC) Seabird Monitoring Programme - Urban Gull Survey methodology. The methods consisted of ground-based counts of gull species within the survey area; common gull (*Larus canus*), lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*), great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*) and black-headed gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*).

The surveys were undertaken between the 12th - 23rd of May 2025. This captures the period of peak incubation when at least one individual of a breeding pair of adult gulls will be tending to a nest site, protecting or incubating eggs. See **Table 1** below for breeding times for each gull species. A single visit at this time of year, along each street within the survey area is considered sufficient to identify all gulls utilising the survey area for breeding.

Table 1: Timing of Breeding for Gulls

Species	Laying Date	Incubation Period (days)	Fledging Period (days)
Common gull	From May	22-28	~35
Herring gull	From Late April	26-32	35-40
Lesser black-backed gull	From mid-May	24-27	30-40
Great black-backed gull	From May	27-28	49-56
Black-headed gull	From May	23-28	~35

Where buildings were high and the streets narrow, obscuring rooftops, a single vantage point survey from Inverness Castle was undertaken to supplement the ground-based count. Care was taken to not duplicate records when supplementing ground-based counts with vantage points. To minimise duplication the same surveyor undertook the ground-based count immediately after the vantage point survey.

Each bird that was observed during the survey was recorded on mobile Global Information Software (GIS), specifically QGIS, and bird behaviour was placed into one of four categories.

- Nesting – Adult bird actively incubating a clutch of eggs or brooding young chicks.
- Loafing – Adult bird utilising rooftops or ground level for resting or guarding a nearby nest site.
- Bathing – Adult bird utilising waterbodies for preening and bathing.
- Foraging – Adult bird searching for or utilising a food resource.

Birds were recorded where interactions with ground-level or rooftops were apparent. Birds observed flying over at height were not counted, as these individuals may not be breeding within the survey area.

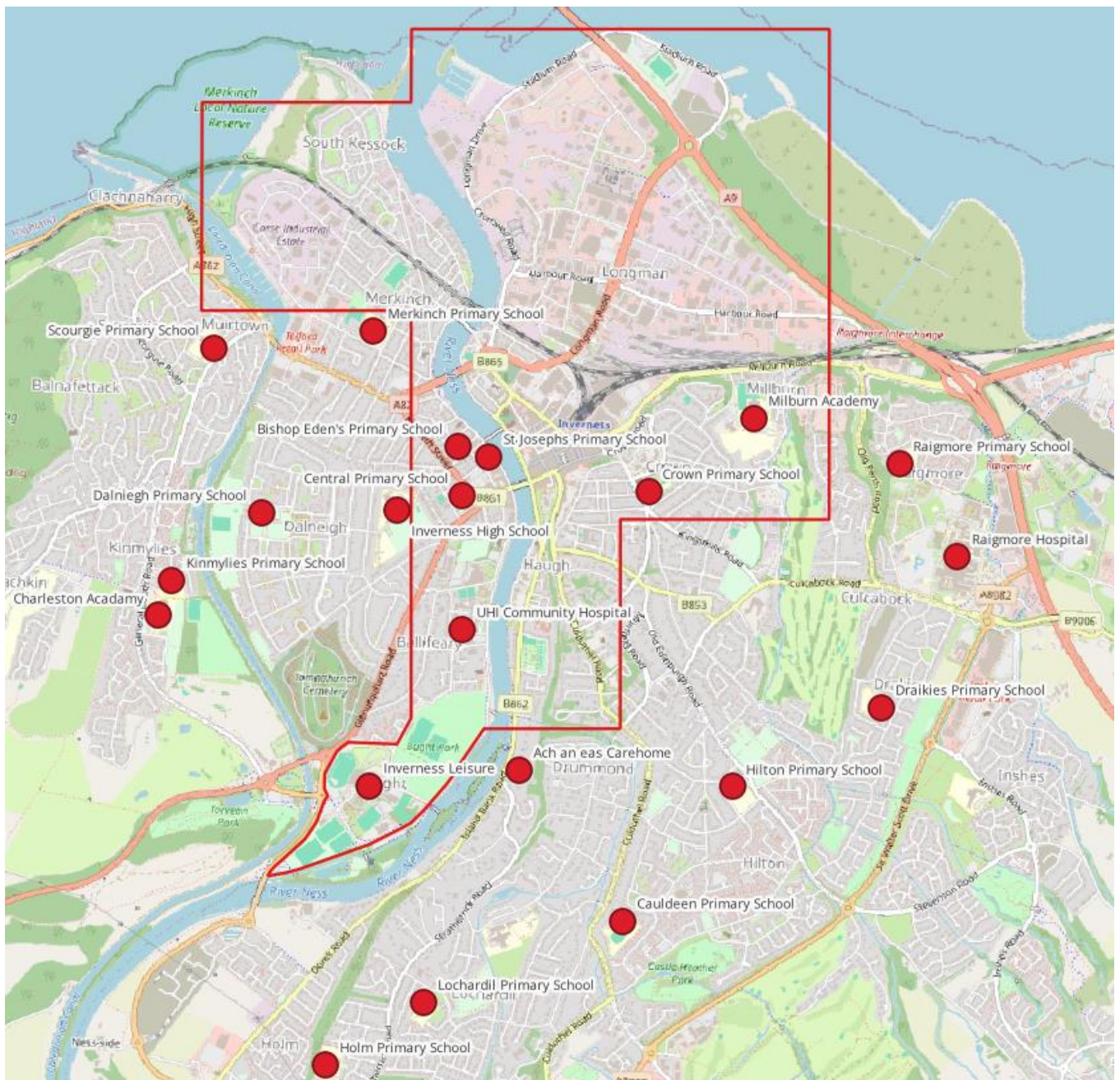
This categorisation of behaviour allows for the analysis and reporting of three different census units (i.e. objective values based on three different means of measurement) as a breeding population estimate.

- Apparently occupied nest (AON) – a well-constructed nest or scrape nest, either containing eggs or young, or an apparently incubating adult.
- Apparently occupied territory (AOT) - estimated by the spacing of birds or pairs on different rooftops and observations of apparent territorial behaviour, when actual nests cannot be discerned. All AONs were considered AOTs and accounted for during analysis.
- Individual adults (IND) - total number of birds in full adult plumage.

The Survey Area and additional vulnerable receptors are shown in **Plate 1** below.

The additional receptors have been identified by The Highland Council where “nuisance” behaviour from breeding gulls could be considered a health and safety risk to vulnerable users.

Plate 1: Main Survey Area (Red boundary) and Vulnerable Receptors (Red circles)



Where possible visits were undertaken in dry weather conditions with good visibility and light winds no more than Beaufort Force 4, detailed in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Details of Survey Visit Conditions.

Date	Weather Conditions			
	Cloud (Oktas)	Wind (Beaufort)	Precipitation	Temp (°C)
12/05/2025	0	2	None	13
13/05/2025	0	1	None	12
14/05/2025	0	3	None	14
15/05/2025	0	2	None	14
20/05/2025	0	1-2	None	20
21/05/2025	0	3	None	16
22/05/2025	0	3	None	13
23/05/2025	0	2	None	14

2.2 Limitations

Although the survey aims to count all gulls in full adult plumage, it must be considered that some birds will move in and out of obscured areas during observation. It therefore cannot be guaranteed that records of individuals have not been duplicated, nor that every bird can be counted. However, the methods used are robust and the most appropriate for the purpose of the study, and where necessary the surveyors used best judgement, based on a wealth of bird survey experience, to determine whether to record an individual whilst in motion.

Privately-owned land was avoided and all ground-based surveys were undertaken from publicly accessible streets, pathways, parks and gardens. As such, concealed nest sites may not have been recorded. However, privately-owned land was mostly in distinct, small parcels with visibility from adjacent areas, and therefore all areas could be adequately viewed with binoculars to identify apparently occupied territories as a minimum.

3. Results

3.1 Gull Distribution and Conservation Status

The distribution of each gull species is described in Sections 3.1.1 - 3.1.5 below. To accurately depict the distribution only data from the main survey area of 7km² is presented here.

3.1.1 Common Gull

Common gulls are currently on the BoCC Red List with 49k pairs estimated to be breeding in the UK.

There were 206 occurrences of common gull recorded throughout the survey area. The majority of which were located in the north of the city within the industrial estates of Carse and Longman. With more localised colonies around UHI Community Hospital and Inverness Leisure Centre. See **Figure 1** and **2** for distribution of common gulls within the survey area.

The nests identified were largely within guttering, flat roofs or concealed ground locations.

3.1.2 Herring Gull

Herring gulls are currently on the BoCC Red List with 130k pairs estimated to be breeding in the UK.

There were 1271 occurrences of herring gull observed within the Survey Area. The densest populated areas were the industrial estates to the north of the city, the city centre itself and along the riverside. Bught in the south of the survey area and the Crown and Milburn areas to the east were the least densely occupied. See **Figure 3** and **4** for herring gull distribution within the survey area.

The nests identified were mostly on flat or gently sloping roofs, roof ledges, chimney stacks and in one colony, at ground level.

3.1.3 Lesser Black-backed Gull

Lesser black-backed gulls are currently on the BoCC Amber List with an estimated 110k pairs breeding throughout the UK.

Only 17 occurrences of lesser black-backed gull were reported within the Survey Area. These were primarily located within Carse Industrial estate with a few outlying individuals in Longman Industrial Estate and one individual in the City Centre. See **Figure 5** for lesser black-backed gull distribution.

The nests identified were mostly on gently sloping roofs and within herring gull colonies.

3.1.4 Great Black-backed Gull

Great black-backed gulls are currently on the BoCC Red List with an estimated 15k pairs breeding throughout the UK.

Great black-backed gulls were identified 17 times within the Survey Area. These were located within the Carse and Longman Industrial Estates in the north of, and within the City Centre. For great black-backed gull distribution see **Figure 6**.

The nests identified were on mostly flat or gently sloping roofs and within common gull or herring gull colonies.

3.1.5 Black-headed Gull



Black-headed gulls are currently on the BoCC Amber List with an estimated 140k pairs breeding throughout the UK.

A total of two individual adult black-headed gull were recorded within the Survey Area: a single bird at the Muirtown Basin and single bird within the Carse Industrial Estate. See **Figure 7** for distribution of black-headed gull within the main survey area.

3.2 Gull Census

Table 3 illustrates the number of birds per census unit within the main survey area. The most common species breeding within the survey area was herring gull with 615 active nests identified, 762 territories recorded, and 1271 individuals observed in total. Following herring gull, common gull was the second most common species present with 112 confirmed active nests, 164 territories and 206 individuals recorded within the Survey Area. Lesser black-back gull and great black-backed gull were equally common, with a total 8 active nests observed for each species, 11 and 13 territories identified respectively, and 17 individuals of each species recorded. Black-headed gull was the least common with only two individuals recorded, both were not showing signs of nesting or holding territory.

The total number of active nests recorded throughout the survey area was 743, active territories were 914 and total number of individual birds observed was 1513.

Table 3: Total Number of Gulls per Census Unit within Main Survey Area

Species	AON	AOT	IND
Common gull	112	164	206
Herring gull	615	762	1271
Lesser black-backed gull	8	11	17
Great black-backed gull	8	13	17
Black-headed gull	-	-	2
Total	743	914	1513

Using the total number of pairs estimated to be within the UK and the number of AOTs identified within the 7km² main survey area a percentage of the UK population of each species is calculated in **Table 4** below. Due to lack of breeding evidence, black-headed gulls are not considered within this calculation.

Table 4: Percentage of UK Breeding Gull Population within Main Survey Area by Species

Species	AOT	Estimated UK Pairs	Percentage of UK population (%)
Common gull	164	49,000	0.33
Herring gull	762	130,000	0.58
Lesser black-backed gull	11	110,000	0.01
Great black-backed gull	13	15,000	0.08

3.3 Vulnerable Receptors

Table 5 below depicts the number of birds per census unit, recorded within 50m of the additional receptors associated with vulnerable users.



Inverness Leisure Centre had the most birds occupying the survey area a total of 34 birds on apparently occupied territories, followed by Raigmore Hospital where 20 birds were on apparently occupied territories. Whilst no adult breeding birds were recorded at Ach an Eas Care Home.

Locations such as Inverness Gaelic Primary School, Inverness Royal Academy and Lochardil Primary School had a larger number of individuals recorded than active territories. This is due to a larger number of foraging gulls recorded during school lunchtimes which have likely travels from further afield. Whereas the larger UHI Community hospital number of individuals is due to the proximity of an area of the River Ness used for loafing and bathing.

Table 5: Total Number of Gulls per Census Unit within 50m of Vulnerable Receptors

Vulnerable Receptor	Census Unit		
	AON	AOT	IND
Inverness Leisure	34	34	34
Ach an Eas Care Home	-	-	-
UHI Community Hospital	7	13	47
Crown Primary School	1	1	3
St Joseph's Primary School	2	2	2
Central Primary School	-	2	2
Bishop Eden's Primary School	2	4	4
Milburn Academy	1	3	4
Raigmore Hospital	3	20	21
Raigmore Primary School	-	1	1
Draikies Primary School	1	3	3
Hilton Primary School	-	4	4
Cauldeen Primary School	-	3	3
Inverness Gaelic Primary School	-	4	55
Inverness Royal Academy	-	5	59
Charleston Academy	1	3	7
Lochardil Primary School	1	1	26
Holm Primary School	-	4	4
Inverness High School	2	5	5
Dalniegh Primary School	4	11	11
Merkinch Primary School	5	9	9
Scourgie Primary School	1	3	3
Kinmylies Primary School	4	7	8

4. Conclusion and Mitigation Measures

It is recognised that Inverness City has a significant population of breeding gulls, mainly common and herring gulls which as it potentially grows may become increasingly important to seabird conservation. It is important that control measures are put in place where the nuisance behaviour of breeding gulls has the potential cause a health and safety concern for vulnerable users.

Due to the conservation status and legal protection of gulls, issuing licences for lethal control is currently considered a last resort and would only be considered under specific mitigating circumstances such as:

- An adult or chick has been found in a location where it poses a risk to public health or safety and cannot be removed without significantly harming the bird.
- A nest containing newly hatched chicks is at severe and likely risk of starting a fire, however in this case a licence for relocation within close vicinity of the nest site would be preferable to lethal control.

Therefore, it is preferable to undertake other options of mitigation. The following methods of nesting deterrence could be implemented individually or in combination at each of the vulnerable receptors identified by the council.

4.1 Physical Prevention

Physically excluding birds from nesting sites is likely to be the most effective solution. This may include netting over flat roof areas and anti-nesting spikes in key areas such as chimney pots or guttering/roof valleys. Netting should be of 75mm mesh and would need to be appropriately maintained to ensure that it remains effective and does not cause birds to become entrapped or entangled.

It must be noted that this method comes with a risk of causing mortality to target and non-target species. Ideally this would be used in areas where there is a lower visibility from public areas and access is easily available for routine maintenance

Installation should occur outside the breeding bird season (September to March) and should be installed by an experience pest control company.

4.2 Removal of Old Nests and Material

As some birds use nest sites in subsequent years or use material from old nests, it is prudent to make sure that prior to the next breeding season that all old nest material is cleared and removed from roofs and ledges. This could achieve a moderate impact on the attractiveness of a potential nest site for gulls.

4.3 Removal of Foraging Resource

Removal of foraging resources such as litter and food waste is also recommended. As gulls forage communally and as local to nesting sites as possible, if there is less food resource in the area then it is less likely that gulls will take up residence on buildings. This could be in the form of anti-littering campaigns and daily litter clean up.

4.4 Disturbance

Where gulls have nested previously and old nest material has been identified and subsequently cleared, a continuous human presence at the start of the breeding gull season (March-April) will deter gulls from nesting in potentially vulnerable areas. This method is effective but can be labour intensive and requires multiple daily



walkovers of potential nesting sites. This can be supplemented by use of a dog handler or falconer to increase its effectiveness further.

4.5 Scaring Devices

Installation of scaring devices can be effective in conjunction with the above. The most effective would be a mixture of audio and visual deterrents such as gull distress calls and bird of prey “decoys”. As gulls can become desensitised it would be important that these are changed throughout the year to maintain their effectiveness. Scaring devices and decoys should be installed by an experience pest control company to be most effective.



Appendices

Appendix A- Gull Distribution Maps

Figure Number	Species Distribution
Figure 1	Common gull (north)
Figure 2	Common gull (south)
Figure 3	Herring gull (north)
Figure 4	Herring gull (south)
Figure 5	Lesser-black backed gull
Figure 6	Great black-backed gull
Figure 7	Black-headed gull

266000

267000

268000



Figure 1 - Common Gull Distribution (north)

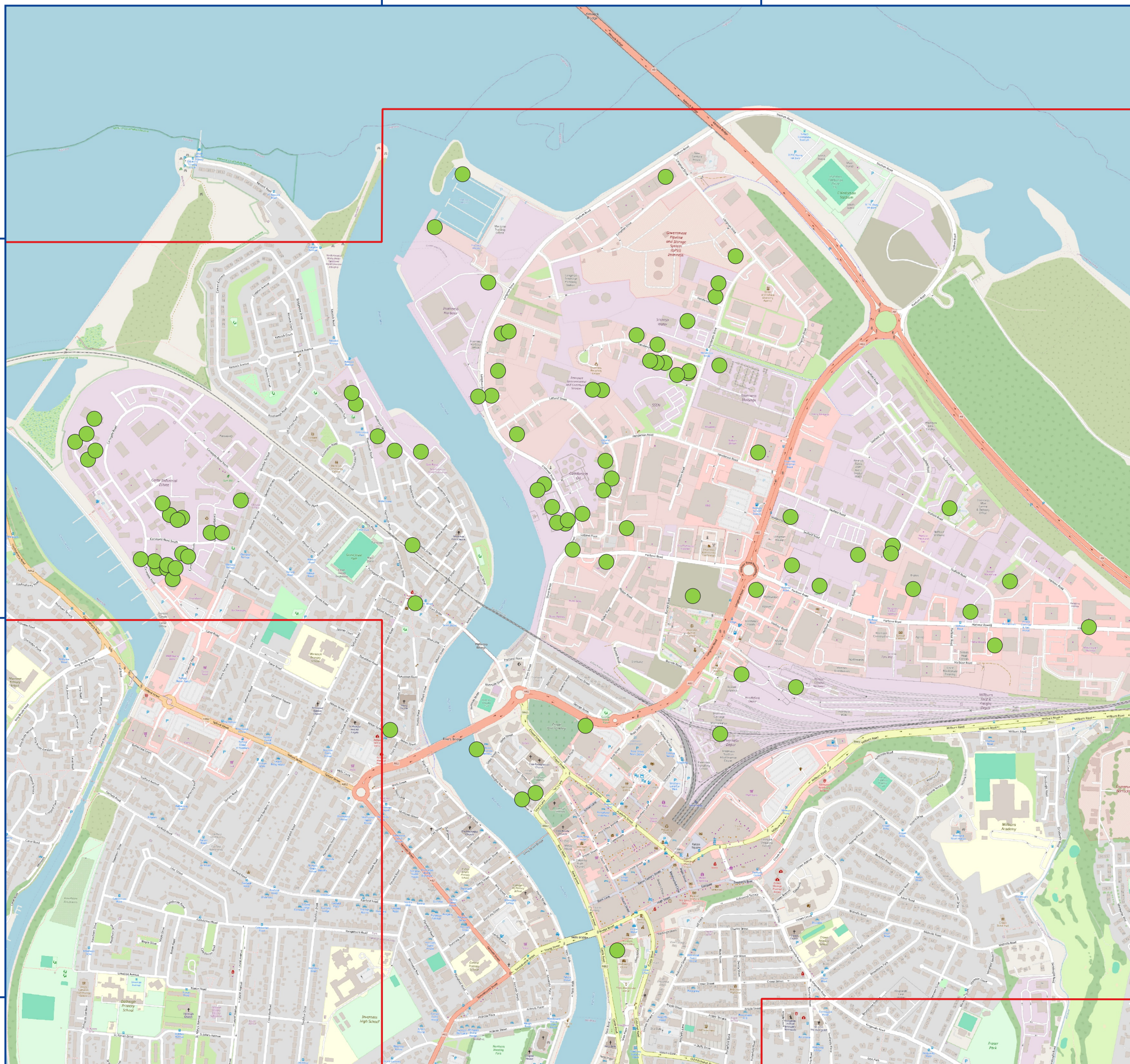
The Highland Council Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

- Key:**
- Survey Area
 - Common gull

847000

846000

845000



Project Number: 319414	Scale at A3:
Drawn By: SCr	1:10,000
Reviewed By: NM	Version: Final
Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700	Issue Date: 26/06/2025

266000

267000

268000

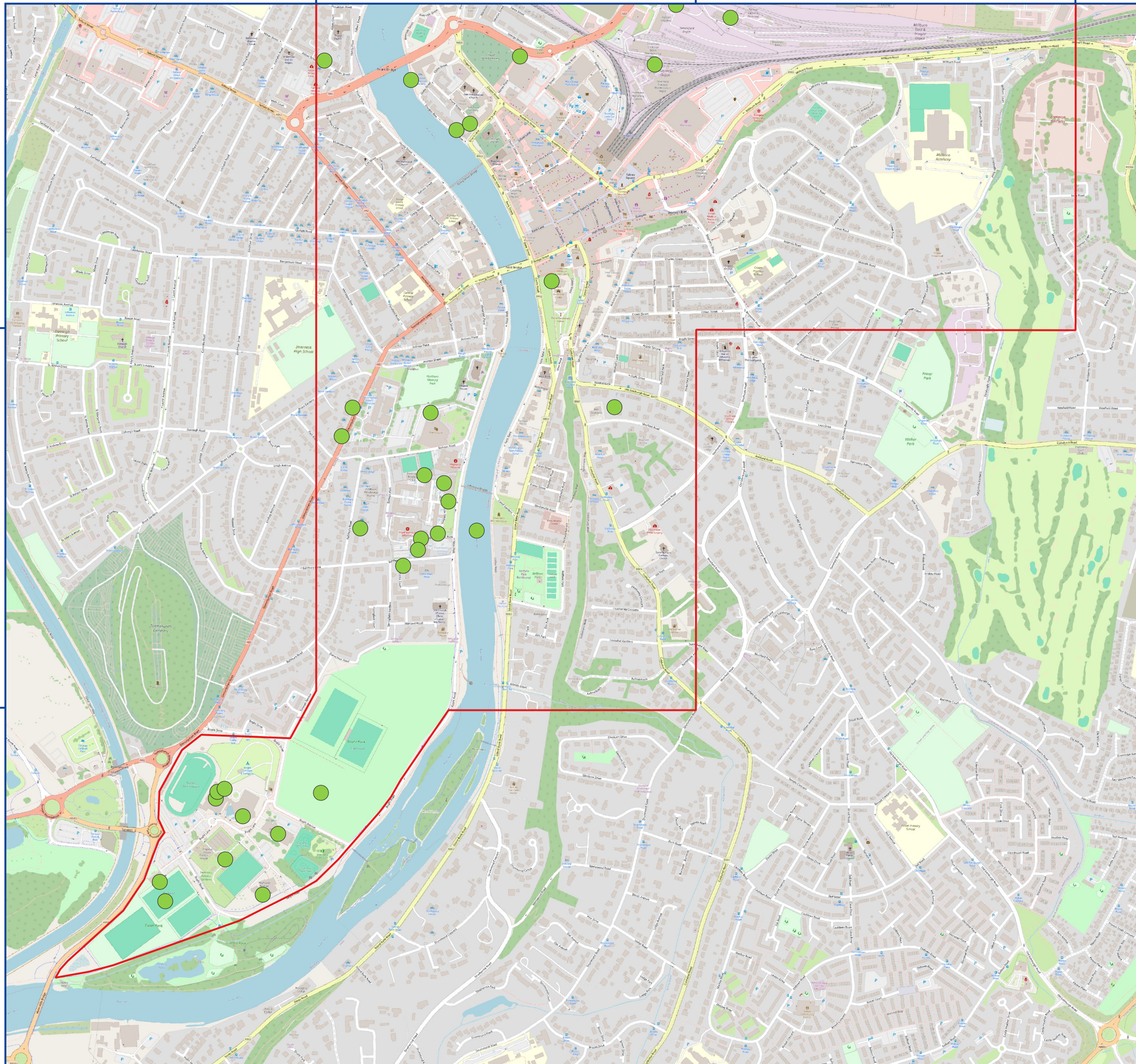


Figure 2 - Herring Gull Distribution (South)

The Highland Council Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Key:

-  Survey Area
-  Common gull



0 250 500 m



Project Number: 319414

Scale at A3:

Drawn By: SCr

1:10,000

Reviewed By: NM

Version: Final

Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700

Issue Date: 26/06/2025

266000

267000

268000

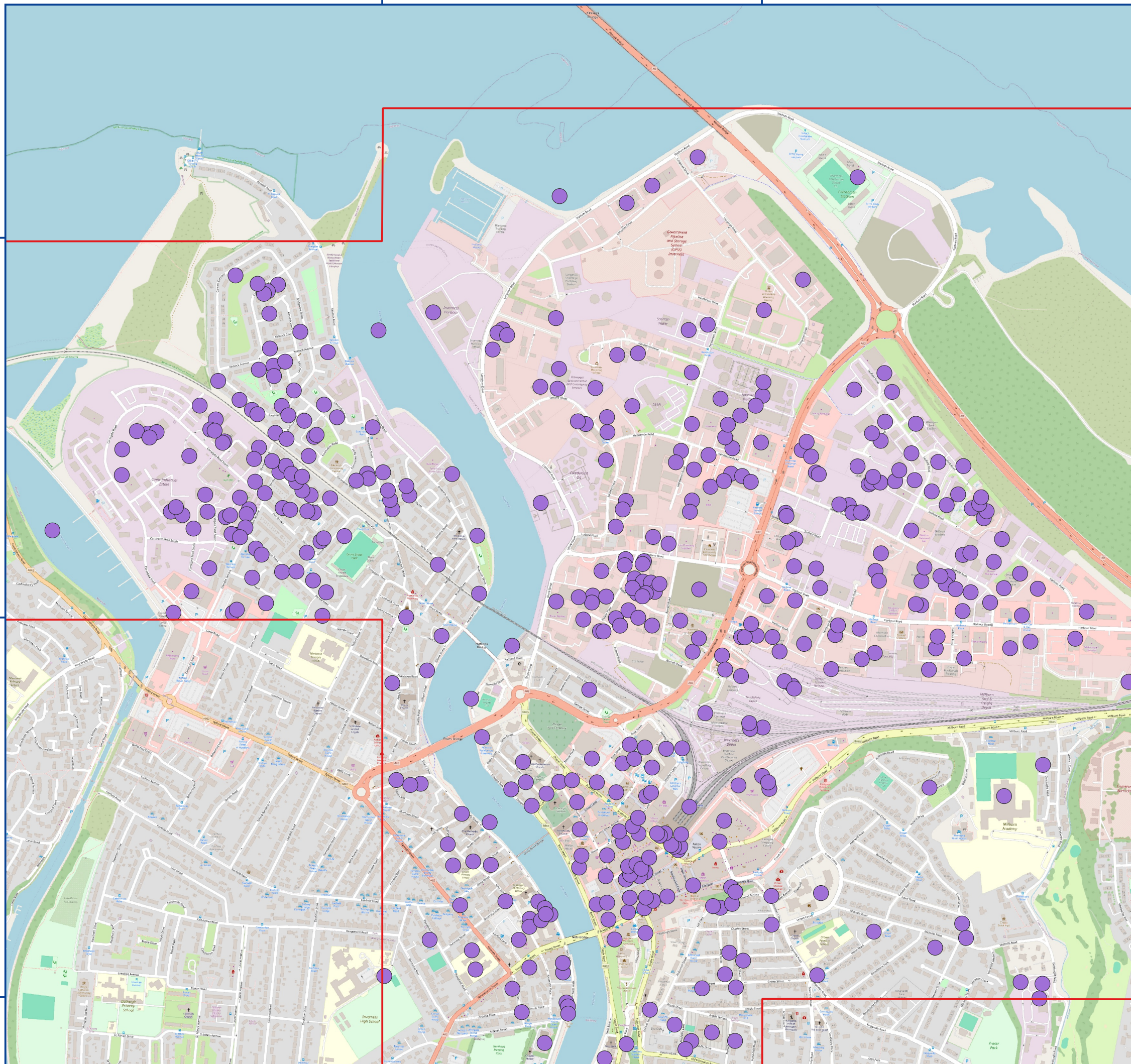
Figure 3 - Herring Gull Distribution (north)

The Highland Council Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Key:

 Survey Area

 Herring Gull



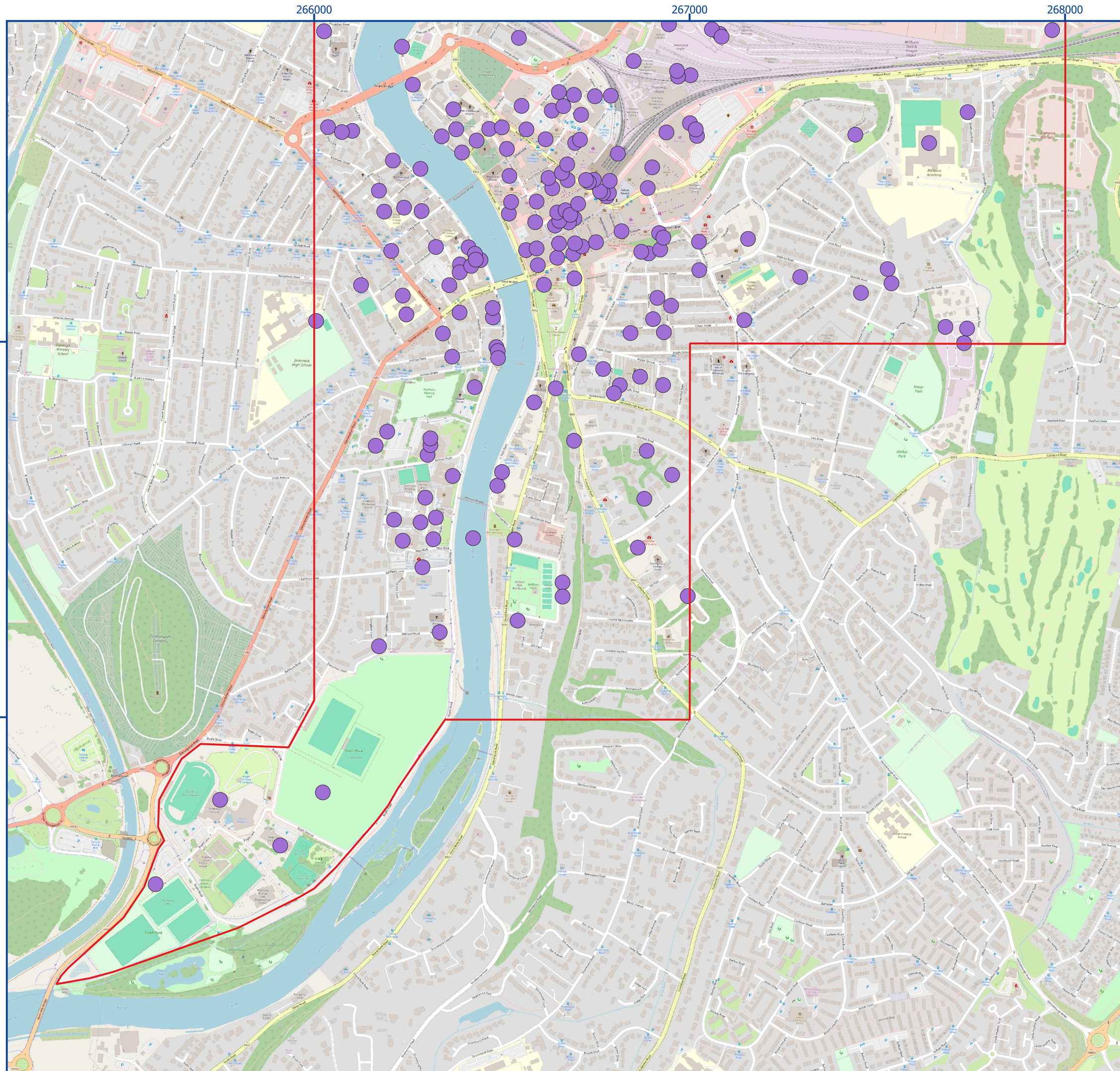
Project Number: 319414	Scale at A3:
Drawn By: SCR	1:10,000
Reviewed By: NM	Version: Final
Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700	Issue Date: 26/06/2025

Figure 4 - Herring Gull Distribution (South)

The Highland Council Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Key:

- Survey Area
- Herring gull



Project Number: 319414	Scale at A3:
Drawn By: SCR	1:10,000
Reviewed By: NM	Version: Final
Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700	Issue Date: 26/06/2025

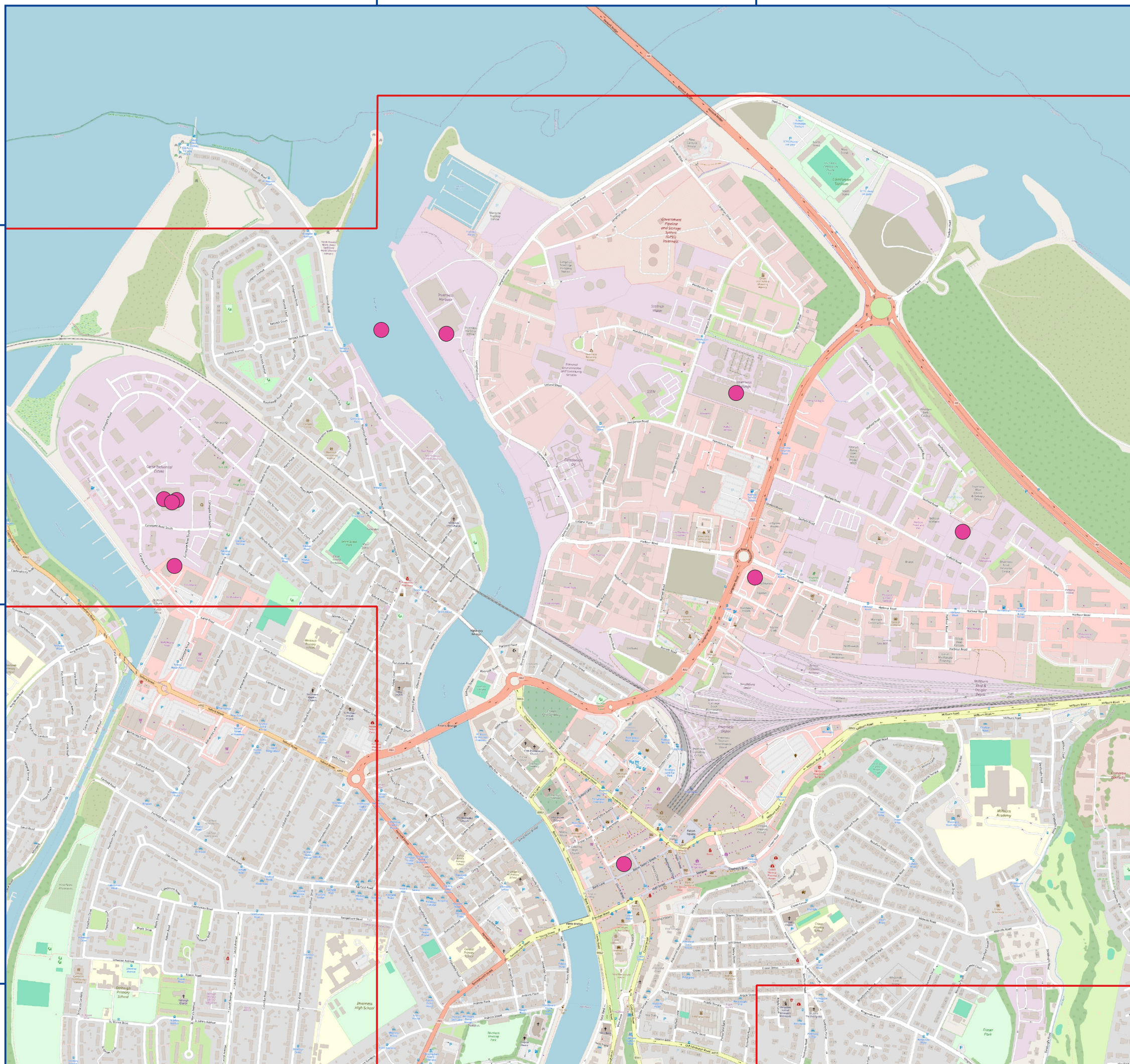
Figure 5 - Lesser Black-backed Gull Distribution

The Highland Council Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Key:

- Survey Area
- Survey Area Gulls
- Lesser black-backed gull

847000
846000
845000



Project Number: 319414	Scale at A3:
Drawn By: SCR	1:10,000
Reviewed By: NM	Version: Final
Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700	Issue Date: 18/07/2025

266000

267000

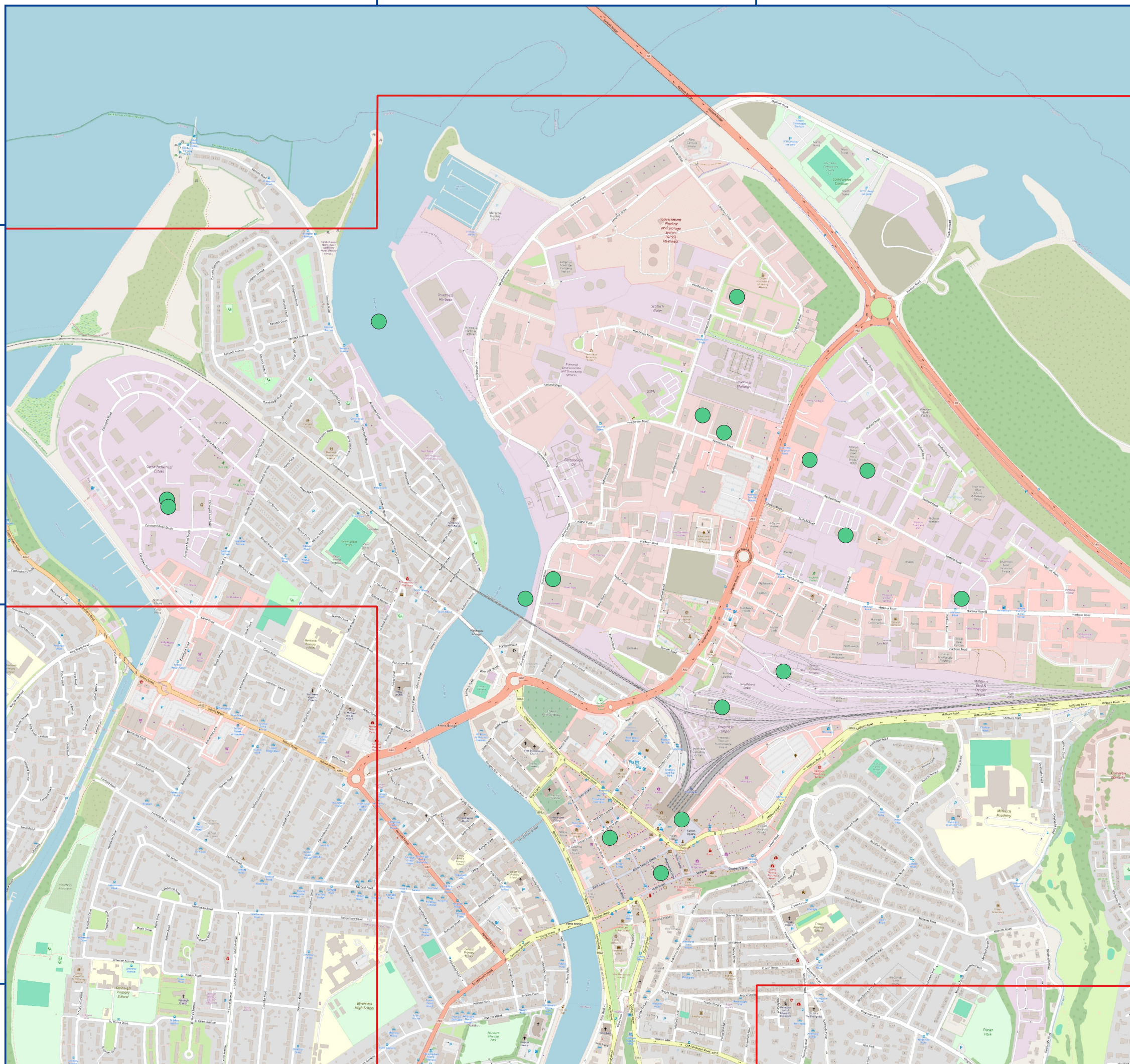
268000

Figure 6 - Great Black-backed Gull Distribution

The Highland Council Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Key:

- Survey Area
- Great black-backed gull



Project Number: 319414	Scale at A3:
Drawn By: SCR	1:10,000
Reviewed By: NM	Version: Final
Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700	Issue Date: 26/06/2025

265000

266000

847000

846000



Figure 7 - Black-headed Gull Distribution

The Highland Council | Urban Gull Census and Distribution Survey

Key:
 Survey Area
● Black-headed gull



Project Number: 319414	Scale at A3:
Drawn By: SCR	1:5,000
Reviewed By: NM	Version: Final
Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700	Issue Date: 26/06/2025

References:

- Harrison, C. 1975. Nests, eggs and nestlings of British and European Birds. Collins, London.
- JNCC. 2020, Urban Gull Survey Methods.
- Nature.Scot (2025) <https://www.nature.scot/doc/guidance-gull-management> (accessed 24/06/2025)
- Ross, K., Burton, N., Balmer, D., Humphreys, E., Austin, G., Goddard, B., Schindler-Dite, H. & Rehfish, M. 2016. Urban Breeding Gull Surveys: A Review of Methods and Options for Survey Design.
- Snow, D.W. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. The birds of the western Palearctic, Concise edition. Oxford University Press.
- Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D. & Win I. 2021. The Status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain. *British Birds* 114: 723-747.
- Woodward, I., Aebischer, N., Burnell, D., Eaton, M., Frost, T., Hall, C., Stroud, D.A. & Noble, D. (2020). Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. *British Birds* 113: 69–104.