

**Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400 kV
OHL Connection
Environmental Impact Assessment
Volume 5 | Technical Appendix**

**Appendix 9.3 | Ornithology Technical
Report - Sections C, D and E**

July 2025





TECHNICAL REPORT ORNITHOLOGY BASELINE

LOCH BUIDHE – BEAULY OVERHEAD LINE

HIGHLAND

28.03.2025 VERSION 1.3 FINAL

PREFACE

This document is a report for ecological services undertaken by the company.

Direct Ecology Limited
Unit 1, Block 2
Duckburn Industrial Estate
Dunblane
FK15 0EW

Tel: +44 (0) 1786 826865
Mob: +44 (0) 7803 587734

info@directecology.co.uk
www.directecology.co.uk

Company Number: SC343106

The Direct Ecology logo is a trademark of Direct Ecology Limited. All other trademarks and registered trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

Copyright © Direct Ecology Limited, 2025. All rights reserved.

REVISION AND SIGN OFF

ISSUE DATE	AUTHORS	CHECKED BY	SIGNED OFF	VERSION	CHANGE REFERENCE
31.10.2024	Cróna McMonagle Matt Finnigan	Sarah Moore Beccy Osborn	Beccy Osborn	1	Draft for comment
26.11.2024	Cróna McMonagle Matt Finnigan	Sarah Moore Beccy Osborn	Beccy Osborn	1.1	Draft for comment
28.01.2025	Cróna McMonagle Matt Finnigan Molly Waters	Sarah Moore Beccy Osborn	Beccy Osborn	1.2	Final
28.03.2025	Cróna McMonagle Matt Finnigan Molly Waters	Sarah Moore Beccy Osborn	Beccy Osborn	1.3	Final with changes in Alignment D and E

CONTENTS

1	PROJECT INFORMATION	5
1.1	TOR.....	5
1.2	SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION.....	5
2	ORNITHOLOGY LEGISLATION & CONSERVATION STATUS.....	6
2.1	LEGISLATION	6
2.2	ORNITHOLOGICAL GUIDANCE	6
3	METHODS.....	7
3.1	SURVEY METHODS	7
3.2	SURVEY LIMITATIONS.....	12
4	RESULTS	14
4.1	SECTION C	14
4.2	SECTION D	31
4.3	SECTION E	47
5	SUMMARY	70
	APPENDIX 1 – FIGURES	74
	APPENDIX 2 – SURVEY DETAILS	162

1 PROJECT INFORMATION

1.1 TOR

Direct Ecology Ltd. was commissioned by ERM to undertake baseline bird surveys on behalf of Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN) which intend to build a new 400 kilovolt (kV) overhead transmission line (OHL) over a distance of approximately 167 km, between new proposed substations at Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beaully. The project being promoted is known as the Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beaully 400 kV OHL Connection and is referred to in this report as the Proposed Development.

This report presents the findings of baseline bird surveys undertaken to inform the design and impact assessment of the southern half of the Proposed Development between Luch Buidhe and Beaully.

1.2 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The southern half of the Proposed Development covers three sections (Sections C, D and E).

Section C originates at Buidhe Substation (Carnaig) heading generally south-west towards the west of Bonar Bridge. The alignment in Section C passes through or in proximity to a number of natural heritage designations such as Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); the River Oykel Special Area of Conservation (SAC); and Kyle of Sutherland Marshes SSSI.

Section D of the Proposed Development originates west of Bonar Bridge, following a southerly direction towards Dingwall before continuing to the west of Strathpeffer. Section D crosses a number of areas of commercial forestry and areas of ancient woodland and passes to the west of the Novar SPA. There are a number of existing OHLs within this section and the terrain varies with large sections comprising very challenging hilly terrain.

Section E originates south of Strathpeffer following a southerly direction to the proposed new Beaully area Substation (Fanellan). The alignment crosses a number of areas of ancient woodland and passes close to the Conon Islands SAC and Lower River Conon SSSI. There are a number of existing OHLs in the area.

The works within the section of the Proposed Development covered in this report will involve:

- Construction of approximately 82 km of a new 400 kV double circuit OHL on steel lattice towers between the proposed new Loch Buidhe (Carnaig) and Beaully (Fanellan) 400 kV substations;
- Construction of temporary and permanent access tracks along the length of the OHL route;
- Rationalisation of existing high voltage and low voltage infrastructure at points of crossing along the new OHL routes, and around new and existing substation sites; and
- Ancillary development including: the formation of 'bellmouths'; temporary and permanent construction access tracks and tower working areas; cable sealing end compounds; construction compounds (where known); 'borrow pits' (where known); vegetation clearance and management; and other temporary measures required during construction.

2 ORNITHOLOGY LEGISLATION & CONSERVATION STATUS

2.1 LEGISLATION

The following legislation relevant to the ornithology baseline has been taken into account:

- Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds ('Birds Directive')¹;
- Directive 92/43/EEC on Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (as amended) ('Habitats Directive')
- The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) (The Habitats Regulations)²;
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)³;
- The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended)⁴;

2.2 ORNITHOLOGICAL GUIDANCE

The following ornithological guidance has been taken into consideration in relation to the surveys undertaken:

- Assessment and mitigation of impacts of power lines and guyed meteorological masts on birds⁵;
- Recommended bird survey methods to inform impact assessment of onshore wind farms⁶;
- Environmental Statements and Annexes of Environmentally Sensitive Bird Information; Guidance for Developers, Consultants and Consultees⁷ ;
- Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) 5: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, and Isle of Man⁸

Other specific guidance documents are referenced in the following sections where relevant.

¹ European Parliament (2009) Directive 2009/147/EC [Online] Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009L0147&from=EN> (Accessed 08/04/21)

² European Parliament (1994) the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 [Online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1994/2716/contents/made> (Accessed 08/04/21)

³ UK Government (1981) The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) [Online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69> (Accessed 08/04/21)

⁴ UK Government (2004) Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 [Online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/6/contents> (Accessed 08/04/21)

⁵ NatureScot (2016) Guidance – Assessment and mitigation of impacts of power lines and guyed meteorological masts on birds

⁶ NatureScot (2016) Guidance – Assessment and mitigation of impacts of power lines and guyed meteorological masts on birds

⁷ NatureScot (2016). Environmental Statements and Annexes of Environmentally Sensitive Bird Information.

⁸ Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D. and 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

3 METHODS

3.1 SURVEY METHODS

3.1.1 VANTAGE POINT (VP)

Flight activity surveys from vantage points (VPs) were undertaken to collect data to quantify the level of flight activity and its distribution in the vicinity of proposed Overhead Line (OHL) infrastructure.

The VP survey methodology is based on guidelines outlined by NatureScot on the assessment of onshore windfarms⁹ and the assessment of impacts of power lines on birds¹⁰.

Viewsheds from VPs covered 180 degrees. During each VP survey the viewshed was scanned using binoculars and a telescope, if required, until a target species was detected in flight. Once detected, the bird was followed until it ceased flying or was lost from view. The time the bird was first detected and duration of the flight, while in sight, was recorded on standardised VP recording forms. The flight line of the bird was plotted on to a 1:25 000 scaled map in the field.

Target species flight height was estimated at the time of detection and at 15 second intervals until the bird(s) was lost from view or moved outside the viewshed. Changes in height bands during flights were marked on the map. Flights were categorised into three height bands (HBs) based on likely potential collision heights with the proposed overhead wires: below collision risk height (0-5 m; HB A); within Collision Risk Height (CHR) (>5 to 70 m; HB B); and above collision risk height (>70 m; HB C).

- **Target Species**

Flight activity target species were informed by a review of qualifying feature species of designated sites within relevant connectivity distances as well as known distributions of other sensitive species as detailed in relevant guidance^{9,10}. They comprised the following groups/species.

- All Schedule 1 raptors;
- All owls;
- All divers;
- All geese;
- All terns;
- All skuas;
- All waders;
- All ducks;
- All grebes;
- Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*); and,
- Black grouse (*Lyrurus tetrix*).

- **Secondary Species**

Flight activity secondary species comprised

- All egrets;
- All gulls;

⁹ NatureScot (2017) Recommended bird survey methods to inform impact assessment of onshore wind farms. Version 2

¹⁰ NatureScot (2016) Guidance – Assessment and mitigation of impacts of power lines and guyed meteorological masts on birds

- Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).
- Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*);
- Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*);
- Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*); and
- Raven (*Corvus corax*).

Passerine flights were not mapped, but movements of large groups of notable birds, i.e., Red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC)¹¹ were recorded.

Secondary species flights were mapped; however, target species were prioritised when a target species flight was being observed.

Survey Timing and Effort

Flight activity survey timing and effort followed the recommendations set out by NatureScot⁹:

- 36 hours of observation was collected from each VP during the breeding season survey (April 2024 -September 2024);
- 36 hours during the winter season (September 2023-March 2024);
- VP watches were of three hours' duration (i.e., 12 x three-hour watches per season);
- VP surveys were stratified across daylight hours to give a representative sample of site use; and
- Over the survey period, a minimum of two watches at dawn (i.e., start 0.5 hours before sunrise - one in autumn and one spring) and a minimum of two dusk watches (i.e., finishing 0.5 after sunset - one in autumn and one in spring) were carried out where the location of the VP and access permissions made it safe to do so (see Section 3.2 Survey Limitations).

Figure 1, Appendix 1 and Table 21, Appendix 2 detail the VP locations and which section (C, D or E) they belong to.

3.1.2 BREEDING BIRDS

Surveys were undertaken to identify the breeding bird communities within the footprint of the preferred route. The recording methodology adhered to best practice survey methodology, Brown & Shepherd (1993)¹², and a scaled-down Common Bird Census¹³ methodology. Two survey visits were carried out between April-July, and in weather conditions suitable for recording (avoiding heavy rain, strong winds, and poor visibility).

The survey route covered all habitats and the survey area for breeding birds extended to 500m either side of the Limit of Deviation (LoD).

Periodic scanning for birds and stops to listen for bird calls and songs was incorporated into the survey. On completion of surveys, field data was interpreted using British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) breeding evidence criteria to assign birds into one of three categories of breeding status: confirmed, probable and possible, applying the following criteria for each category:

Confirmed breeding bird/s

- Distraction display or injury feigning;

¹¹ Stanbury, A.J., Eaton, M.A., Aebischer, N.J., Balmer, D., Brown, A.F., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D.G. & 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. Available online at: https://britishbirds.co.uk/sites/default/files/BB_Dec21-BoCC5-IUCN2.pdf

¹² Brown, A. F. and Shepherd, K. B. (1993) *A method for censusing upland breeding waders*. *Bird Study*, 40, pp. 189-195.

¹³ Marchant, J.H. 1983. *Common Birds Census instructions*. BTO, Tring. 12pp.

- Used nest or eggshells found from this season;
- Recently fledged young or downy young;
- Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest;
- Adults carrying faecal sac or food for young;
- Nest containing eggs; and
- Nest with young seen or heard.

Probable breeding

- Pair in suitable nesting habitat;
- Permanent territory;
- Courtship and display;
- Visiting probable nest site;
- Agitated behaviour; and,
- Nest building or excavating nest-hole.

Possible breeding

- Observed in suitable nesting habitat; and
- Singing male.

Non-breeding

- Bird/s flying over the area; and,
- Summering non-breeding individual birds.

The number and indicative location of likely bird territories was estimated by grouping species registrations from the two survey visits to produce a breeding bird territory map. Breeding skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) and meadow pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) populations were defined by the highest recorded count of singing birds from the two survey visits. Records of singing cuckoo were considered to represent probable breeding.

Birds flying over the site, species suspected to be on migration, or individuals judged to be summering non-breeding birds, were all categorised as non-breeding observations.

3.1.3 BREEDING RAPTORS

Records of breeding and roosting raptor sites were sought from the Highland Raptor Study Group (HRSG) and the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB) during consultation¹⁴. Surveys were targeted at raptor territories obtained through desk study, and any potential nest sites observed during other surveys for example Vantage Point Survey (Section 3.1.1).

Any target breeding sites located within the viewshed of the Vantage Point survey were monitored during that survey. Any target breeding sites located within the 500m buffer of the LoD, that is, the walkover survey for breeding bird survey area, were checked for activity during that survey. Any target breeding sites located beyond the 500m buffer of the LoD were visited specifically to check for any evidence of breeding activity. These checks for active nest sites were made from a distance, following methodology described in Hardey *et al.* (2013)¹⁵. Up to two visits were made to each site

¹⁴ Ref here to Desk Study Chapter

¹⁵ Hardey J., Crick, H., Wernham, C., Riley, H., Etheridge, B. & Thompson, D. (2013). **Raptors: a field guide to survey and monitoring** (3rd Edition). The Stationery Office, Edinburgh.

and, once an active nest site had been identified, no further visits were made in order to minimise disturbance to the birds at this particularly sensitive time.

For golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), the area of search for desk study records extended to 6km from the LoD with respect to breeding territories, and 2km for roost sites. A 2km radius applied for all other breeding raptors with the exception of owl species [not including short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*) and goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) where the radius was reduced to 1km].

3.1.4 BREEDING DIVERS, DUCKS AND GREBES

Records of waterbodies used by breeding diver, and breeding ducks and grebes listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) comprising; garganey (*Anas querquedula*), common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), black-necked grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), Slavonian grebe (*Podiceps auratus*), red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*) and black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), were sought from RSPB during consultation¹⁴. These waterbodies, in addition to waterbodies identified through scoping Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photography as potentially suitable to support these breeding species, were surveyed, following best practice survey methodology¹⁶.

The area of search for desk study records and for suitable waterbodies extended to 1 km from the LoD.

Two survey visits to each waterbody took place during the breeding season (May to July) with at least 14 days separating visits. Surveys were undertaken in calm dry conditions. Water and shoreline of suitable lochans were scanned from a distance to avoid disturbing any incubating birds. Bird behaviour was observed, and any potential breeding signs recorded.

All flights of these waterbird species observed during the waterbody survey visit, and during Vantage Point survey (Section 3.1.1) were recorded, and height bands noted. In consequence any regular commuting flights between breeding waterbodies and feeding sites were able to be identified.

A total of 29 lochs were included in the surveys, details of which are provided in Table 24, Appendix 2. Figure 17 in the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information shows locations of surveyed waterbodies.

3.1.5 BREEDING WOODLAND GROUSE

Records of black grouse and capercaillie lek sites were sought from the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB) during consultation¹⁴. These lek sites, in addition to potential lek sites identified through other surveys such as Vantage Point survey (Section 3.1.1) were surveyed following best practice survey methodology¹⁶.

The area of search for desk study records extended to 1.5 km from the LoD.

Surveys comprised one count of birds between April and May; if birds were not recorded on the survey visit a second survey was carried out. Surveyors scanned the pre-identified sites from strategic locations with a telescope or binoculars, avoiding disturbance to the displaying birds. Surveys took place from 1 hour before dawn until 2 hours after sunrise, in calm dry conditions with good visibility.

There were no pre-identified capercaillie lek locations within the survey area and consequently survey of capercaillie leks was not carried out.

¹⁶ Gilbert, G., Gibbons, D.W. and Evans, J. (1998). Bird Monitoring Methods. RSPB, Bedfordshire.

Survey of black grouse lek sites was undertaken at 19 locations across the route, details of which, along with survey details, are provided in Table 25, Appendix 2.

3.1.6 WINTER FORAGING GEESE SURVEYS

Surveys focused on areas identified by Mitchell (2012) as important feeding areas for qualifying populations of geese associated with the Inner Moray Firth Special Protection Area (SPA) (5.1km from the LoD) and the Cromarty Firth SPA (4.8km from LoD). Survey areas were visited monthly between November 2023 and March 2024.

Methodology involved a pair of surveyors driving along a fixed transect route incorporating the potential foraging areas, stopping regularly to record waterbirds feeding or loafing in agricultural fields and wetland sites, and occasionally making observations by walking into fields to check areas which could not be surveyed from the road. Surveys commenced no earlier than one hour after sunrise and continued no later than sunset.

Time of observation, species, number, and behaviour (foraging, loafing, or roosting) were recorded at the field level. Surveyors avoided double registration of mobile flocks moving between sites. Birds flying overhead were excluded from counts unless they were obviously using the survey area i.e., clearly seen to be taking off from, or landing within, locations within the survey area.

The survey area is shown in Figure 11, Appendix 1 with survey details provided in Table 26, Appendix 2.

3.1.7 WINTERING ROOSTING GEESE SURVEYS

Roost surveys were undertaken at suitable waterbodies (lochs/lochans) within 2 km of the preferred route. Surveys aimed to identify overnight roosting sites used by geese (and swans) and commuting flight paths to and from these sites.

All identified waterbodies listed on Ordnance Survey maps within 2km of the LoD and deemed large enough to support roosting geese were surveyed once per month from November 2023 - February 2024. Surveys followed best practice methods at either dusk or dawn. Dawn observations at each potential roost site started at least 0.5 hours before sunrise and ended 1 hour after sunrise. Dusk observations at each started at least 1.5 hours before sunset and ended 0.5 hours after sunset.

Eleven goose roost (GR) locations were surveyed and are displayed on Figure 12, Appendix 1

- GR01 – Loch nam Bonnach and Loch na Toinnidh;
- GR02 – Loch nan Eun;
- GR03 – Loch Achonachie;
- GR04 – River Conon – Moy Bridge;
- GR06 – Loch Kinellan;
- GR08 – Loch na Crann;
- GR09 – An Dubh Lochan;
- GR11 – Loch Morie;
- GR12 – Loch Bad a'Bhathaich;
- GR13 – Kyle of Sutherland; and
- GR14 – Bonar Bridge.

3.1.8 WINTERING RAPTORS

Surveys for roosting raptors comprised surveys for one species, red kite, and involved two-hour watches from a vantage point position to watch for any birds in the late afternoon coming to roost. Vantage points were selected based on field observations made during vantage point watches. Watches were carried out monthly between December – February and between 1.5 hour before sunset to 0.5 hour after sunset, or when it became too dark to see.

See Table 28, Appendix 2 for survey details. Figure 19 in the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information shows survey positions.

3.2 SURVEY LIMITATIONS

Breeding Raptor and Breeding Bird Walkover

Where possible, all survey areas received the target of two visits. In some locations, however, visits were confined to one survey due to one (or more) of the following limitations:

- Some areas of moorland and forestry could not be accessed due to impassible stands of bracken.
- The second survey visit was abandoned in areas within disturbance distance of breeding Schedule 1 birds where there was a concern that survey activity could cause disturbance to known confirmed or suspected breeding sites.
- In addition, farmland habitats occasionally held cattle or other livestock with survey necessarily taking place at distance from the field boundary.
- Surveys at land to the north-east of 2C-V3-196 and 2C-V3-197 were undertaken outside of the optimum survey period due to access restrictions. Surveys were conducted in August which is outwith the main breeding season.
- Some areas were not visited during the walkover survey for breeding birds, because of access restrictions during the survey period or because of changes to the LoD and location of access tracks subsequent to the survey period, and these are shown on the breeding birds walkover survey figure (Figure 7, Appendix 1). Access restrictions occurred between the following tower locations.
 - The land east of 2C-V3-2
 - Land to the south of 2C-V3-8 and 2C-V3-14
 - Land to the north of 2C-V3-20 and 2C-V3-24
 - Land to the east of 2C-V3-28 and 2C-V3-31
 - Land to the east and west of 2C-V3-38
 - All the land between 2C-V3-39 and 2C-V3-45
 - Land to the west of 2C-V3-46
 - Land to the west of 2C-V3-73
 - Land east of 2C-V3-77
 - Land west of 2C-V3-115 and 2C-V3-38 116
 - Land east of 2C-V3-122 and 2C-V3-123
 - Land south-east of 2C-V3-130
 - Land to the north of 2C-V3-136 and 2C-V3-139
 - Land to the west of 2C-V3-160
 - Land to the east and west of 2C-V3-165 and 2C-V3-169
 - Land to the west of 2C-V3-170
 - Land to the east of 2C-V3-173
 - Land to the north-east of 2C-V3-186 and 2C-V3-187
 - Land to the east of 2C-V3-204 and 2C-V3-205

- Land to the southeast of 2C-V3-207
- Land to the south of 2C-V3-227
- Land to the north-east of 2C-V3-228
- Land to the east of 2C-V3-232

Breeding Diver, Ducks and Grebes

In Section E, Loch a' Ghiubhais, Loch an Fheoir, Loch nan Gobhar, Loch nan Dubh Lochan and Loch nan Eun were surveyed once as these lochs only fell within the survey buffer limit following a shift in the proposed alignment of the project in July 2024. In consequence early breeding attempts may have been missed on Loch a' Ghiubhais and Loch an Fheoir (see Section 4.2.4). Loch nan Dubh Lochan and Loch nan Eun, both of which are also in Section E, were surveyed once in mid-May 2024, with later visits not possible because of access restrictions by the landowner, and it is possible that later breeding attempts on these waterbodies were also missed (see Section 4.2.4).

Breeding Woodland Grouse

In Section E, two lekking locations on Urchany and Farley Forest moorland identified during the RSPB desk study could not be surveyed due to access restrictions (see Section 4.2.5). These lek sites were most recently recorded supporting four birds in 2018 and six birds in 2016 respectively, and it is possible that these lek sites are still active.

Wintering Geese Roost

In Section D, Loch Bad a' Bhathaich (GR12) was frozen on the third (January 2024) visit. During the remaining surveys in November, December 2023 and February 2024, only one record of a waterbird roosting on the waterbody was made, of a single goosander in February, and it is considered that the waterbody does not regularly support significant numbers of roosting waterbirds over winter.

In Section E, An Dubh-Lochan (GR09) was 90% frozen in January within no birds noted on the loch.

In Section E, only two survey visits were undertaken at Loch Achonachie (GR03) in November and December. Access to the survey location was denied by the landowner for the third and fourth survey visits in January and February and these surveys could not be undertaken (see Section 4.2.7) and it is possible that usage by wintering geese was missed during this second half of winter.

4 RESULTS

4.1 SECTION C

4.1.1 FLIGHT ACTIVITY SURVEYS

A summary of target species recorded during flight activity surveys is detailed below and in Table 1. Figures 2a-f, 3a-f, 4a-f, 5a-f, and 6a-f in Appendix 1, also detail the results of these surveys. Osprey and hen harrier flightlines are displayed in the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information in Figures 14a-f and 15a-f. Collision Risk Height (CRH) discussed in this section is within HB B. Full survey results and weather details are provided in Tables 29 & 30, Appendix 2.

Greylag Goose

Twelve greylag goose (*Anser anser*) flights were noted from VP 1, 2, and 4 and were largely noted within the centre of this section along the Kyle of Sunderland. Seven flights consisted of 1-3 birds, with the rest comprising of between 16-60 birds. Flightlines occurred between October 2023 and April 2024 with a maximum of 60 birds recorded. Birds were recorded in HB B and C and spent a total of 3,730 seconds within CRH. Flights were recorded crossing the alignment on seven occasions, five of which were within CRH.

Pink-footed Goose

Six pink-footed goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) flights were noted from VP 1 and 2, spread across the eastern half of this section from the Kyle of Sutherland to Clais na Sinneig. Flights consisted of single flights of between 20 - 810 birds and two flights of 30 birds. Birds were likely to be on migration with records occurring in September, February, and April. Two of the flights occurred within HB B including the maximum count of 810 birds, with a total of 99,900 seconds spent within CRH. Birds were noted crossing the alignment on four occasions, none of which were within the CRH.

Mute Swan

Two records of mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) were made during surveys, both from VP 4; one consisting of two birds swimming and the other of a flight within HB B where two birds were noted in flight for 60 seconds. Birds were recorded in December 2023 and January 2024. The birds were recorded crossing the alignment over the Kyle of Sutherland.

Whooper Swan

Five whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) flights were noted in October and December 2023 and in February 2024 comprising three flights of five birds, one flight of three birds, and one flight of seven birds. Birds were largely recorded from VP 4, along the Kyle of Sutherland with one flight noted from VP 1. Flights were noted within all height bands with a group of five birds noted in HB B for 30 seconds. Birds were noted in flight across the alignment on one occasion within HB C.

Wigeon

One wigeon (*Anas penelope*) flight was recorded in March 2024 from VP 4 and consisted of four birds within HB A. Birds were noted along the Kyle of Sutherland but did not cross the alignment.

Teal

Five flights of teal (*Anas crecca*) were recorded within HB A and B, as well as on the ground around Loch Leisgein. Flights were recorded in October 2023, March 2024, May 2024 and June 2024. Only one flight was noted within HB B for ten seconds and consisted of 30 individuals, giving a total of

300 seconds at CRH for the species. All observations were from VP 2 and teal were observed crossing the alignment on one occasion within the CRH.

Goldeneye

One goldeneye (*Bucephalus clangula*) flight was noted in January 2024 along the Kyle of Sutherland. The record consisted of a single bird flying at HB A and was not noted within the alignment.

Red-breasted Merganser

One red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*) flight was noted in May 2024 along the Kyle of Sutherland. One bird was noted in HB A and did not cross the alignment.

Tufted Duck

One record of tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*) was made and consisted of two birds on the ground in May 2024 from VP 2 at Loch Leisgein.

Black Grouse

Three black grouse flights were recorded from VP1, 2 and 5a. Two birds were recorded in HB A in December 2023 from VP2 north of Loch Leisgein, one bird was noted in HB A in June 2024 from VP 1, south of Cnoc Garbh-airigh, and two birds were recorded within HB B in February 2024 from VP5a, beside Cnoc na Lapaich. Black grouse were recorded within HB B for a total of 75 seconds. Birds were not recorded crossing the alignment.

Lapwing

One lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) flightline was noted in January 2024 from VP 4 and consisted of two birds flying with HB B for 30 seconds. It was noted crossing the alignment where it intersects with the Kyle of Sutherland.

Golden Plover

One golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) flight was noted in May 2024 from VP 1 on Cnoc Garbh-airigh. The flightline consisted of a pair of birds flying with HB B for 25 seconds. They were not observed crossing the alignment.

Snipe

Three snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) flights were noted from VP 2, south of Loch Leisgein, and from VP4, along the Kyle of Sutherland, in October 2023 and June 2024. Birds were noted in HB A and B, as well as from the ground and consisted of 1-2 birds. Snipe were noted in HB B for a total of 228 seconds. No birds were observed crossing the alignment.

Osprey

Eleven osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) flights were noted during surveys, all but one within HB B giving a total of 1,231 seconds within this height band. Ten of the flights were of a single bird, one flight was of three birds consisting of an adult and two juvenile birds from the same nest. Birds were noted largely from VP 4, along the Kyle of Sutherland, and were recorded between June and August 2024. Birds were noted crossing the alignment on 13 occasions, 12 of which were within CRH. Observations were largely of birds flying to and from a nesting location with food drops, adults carrying food, and hunting noted.

Goshawk

Two goshawk flights were recorded from VP 2 and 5a and were both noted within conifer plantation, one within Carbisdale Wood and the west of Loch Leisgein. One bird was noted from VP 2 within

HB A and B in October 2023 and one bird was noted from VP 5a in June 2024 within HB B. Goshawk was noted in HB B for a total of 165 seconds and crossed over the alignment on three occasions.

Hen Harrier

Twenty-three hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) flights were noted with the majority recorded during the 2024 breeding season. Flights largely consisted of single (male or female) birds, though flights of two birds were made on three occasions. Seventeen of the flights were noted within HB B, with a total of 1,188 seconds spent within this height band. Hen harrier was most commonly recorded from VP2, around Loch Leisgein though they were also noted around Cnoc Garbh-airigh and Cnoc na Lapaich from VP 1, 5A and 5B. They were noted crossing the alignment on 15 occasions, nine of which were within CRH.

White-tailed Eagle

One white-tailed eagle flight was noted from VP 4 in April 2024, of a single bird flying within HB B for 600 seconds. The bird was observed crossing the alignment twice along the Kyle of Sutherland.

Red Kite

Forty red kite (*Milvus milvus*) flights were noted throughout the year which comprised of 38 flights of one bird and two flights of three birds. Birds were noted in all height bands and spent a total of 4,729 seconds within HB B. Birds were scattered across the entire section with the highest concentration around the Kyle of Sutherland and were noted crossing the alignment on 26 times, 19 of which were at CRH.

Merlin

Two merlin (*Falco columbarius*) flightlines were noted in May and July 2024 between Loch Leisgein and Cnoc Garbh-airigh. Birds were noted from VP 1 and 2 and one flight within CRH was noted crossing the alignment on one occasion. Flight lines occurred within HB A and B and merlin were noted for 10 seconds with HB B.

Table 1: Summary of VP results within Section C

Species	No. of flights	Peak count recorded on an individual flight	Collated time recorded within HB B (Seconds)	No. of occasions that flights crossed the alignment	No. of birds which crossed the alignment	No. of occasions that flights crossed the alignment within HB B	No. of birds which crossed the alignment within HB B
Greylag goose	12	60	3,730	7	29	5	26
Pink-footed goose	6	810	99,900	4	150	0	0
Mute swan	1	2	120	1	2	0	0
Whooper swan	5	7	150	1	3	0	0
Wigeon	1	4	NA	0	0	0	0
Teal	5	30	300	1	30	1	30
Goldeneye	1	1	NA	0	0	0	0

Species	No. of flights	Peak count recorded on an individual flight	Collated time recorded within HB B (Seconds)	No. of occasions that flights crossed the alignment	No. of birds which crossed the alignment	No. of occasions that flights crossed the alignment within HB B	No. of birds which crossed the alignment within HB B
Red-breasted merganser	1	1	NA	0	0	0	0
Tufted duck	1	2	NA	0	0	0	0
Black grouse	3	2	75	0	0	0	0
Lapwing	1	2	30	1	2	1	2
Golden plover	1	2	50	0	0	0	0
Snipe	3	1	228	0	0	0	0
Osprey	11	3	1,844	13	21	12	20
Goshawk	2	1	165	3	3	3	3
Hen harrier	23	2	1,188	15	16	9	9
Red kite	40	3	4,249	26	28	19	19
White-tailed eagle	1	1	600	2	2	2	2
Merlin	2	1	10	1	1	1	1

4.1.2 BREEDING BIRD SURVEYS

Table 2 describes the breeding bird species recorded during the walkover survey for breeding birds within Section C. Figures 8a-g, Appendix 1 display the results of these surveys and survey details are in Table 22, Appendix 2.

Table 2: Breeding bird results Section C

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Teal	T.	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded at Loch Leisgein, a waterbody surrounded by moorland to the east of Invershin. The loch provides suitable breeding habitat for this species which prefers oligotrophic pools in upland Scotland.	BoCC Amber
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	MA	1	✓	✓	One probable territory recorded at Loch Leisgein, a small loch located in moorland east of Invershin, and two possible territories at the waterbody connected to Culrain Burn in the coniferous forestry of Carbisdale Wood.	BoCC Amber
Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	PH	X	✓	✓	Heard and seen during the first and second survey.	Introduced
Cuckoo <i>Cuculus canorus</i>	CK	2	✓	✓	Two cuckoos recorded calling across Section C, in coniferous plantation and moorland. Cuckoo is a difficult species to census because of its unusual breeding biology and retiring nature, but its presence during survey, and the presence of its favoured host species dunnock in the forestry and meadow pipit in the moorland suggests that this area of the survey does contribute towards supporting the local breeding population of cuckoo.	BoCC SBL Red,

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Woodpigeon <i>Columba palumbus</i>	WP	1	✓	✓	One probable and twelve possible territories were recorded in this section. These were located in the woodland either side of the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Amber
Little grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	LG	0	✓	✓	Two possible territories were recorded in this section, on two small lochs.	BoCC Green
Lapwing	L.	1	✓	✓	One probable territory was recorded near Loch Leisgein, on the moorland east of Invershin. A pair of birds was observed behaving territorially including alarm calling on both survey visits.	BoCC Red, SBL
Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>	CU	0	✓	✓	One possible territory was located in the north of this section close to Claisnafaie.	BoCC Red, SBL
Snipe	SN	0	✓	✓	Two possible territories were recorded in this section, both of which were located in the northeast part of Section C. This area provides the most suitable habitat for snipe with open habitats present. Much of the rest of this section consists of woodland habitat which provides unsuitable habitat.	BoCC Amber
Common gull <i>Larus canus</i>	CM	4	✓	✓	A small colony of common gull near Loch Leisgein, on moorland to the east of Invershin. The colony comprises three probable territories, on the small moorland hill to the north of the loch and on the lochshore, with the confirmed territory on an island on the loch where it should be safer from mammalian predators.	BoCC Red
Grey heron	H.	1	✓	✓	One confirmed territory in the woodland next to the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Green
Great spotted woodpecker	GS	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded in Carbisdale Wood.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
<i>Dendrocopus major</i>						
Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>	JD	0	✓	✓	One possible territory was recorded in the woodland by Invershin.	BoCC Green
Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	J.	0	✓	✓	Two possible territories were recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Carrion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i>	C.	0	✓	✓	Two possible territories were recorded in the woodland near the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Green
Hooded crow <i>Corvus cornix</i>	HC	0		✓	One possible territory was recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Raven	RN	0		✓	Three possible territories were recorded across the woodland in this section.	BoCC Green
Coal tit <i>Periparus ater</i>	CT	4	✓	✓	Three confirmed, one probable and 123 possible territories were recorded in this section. The coniferous woodland plantation makes for good breeding habitat.	BoCC Green
Blue tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	BT	0	✓	✓	Four possible territories were recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Great tit <i>Parus major</i>	GT	3	✓	✓	Three probable and four possible territories were found in this section.	BoCC Green
Skylark*	S.	18	✓	✓	Eighteen probable territories were recorded, all located within the moorland to the east of Invershin. Skylark is a common and	BoCC Red, SBL

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
					widespread species in Scotland in suitable open habitat, and the moorland here provides suitable breeding habitat for this species.	
Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	SL	0	✓	✓	Seen foraging regularly over the survey area but no breeding evidence was recorded.	BoCC Green
House martin <i>Delichon urbicum</i>	HM	0		✓	No breeding territories were recorded. One record of a bird in flight through the coniferous plantation was made during the second survey visit in July and is considered to represent a foraging bird. House martin usually inhabits towns and villages and is scarce as a breeding bird in forests.	BoCC Red
Long-tailed tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	LT	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded within the woodland in this section.	BoCC Green
Willow warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	WW	6	✓	✓	Six probable and 45 possible territories exist in this section. The woodland and scrub habitats provide good breeding habitat.	BoCC Amber
Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	CC	4	✓	✓	Four probable and thirteen possible territories were recorded, these were mostly in the woodland near the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Green
Sedge Warbler <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	SW	0		✓	One possible territory was recorded next to the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Amber
Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	BC	0	✓	✓	Blackcap were found in the woodland in this section, with five possible territories recorded.	BoCC Green
Garden warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i>	GW	0		✓	One possible territory recorded by the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>	GC	3	✓	✓	Three probable and 42 possible territories were recorded, the coniferous plantation woodland provides suitable breeding habitat for this species.	BoCC Green
Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	WR	9	✓	✓	A common and widespread breeder within the survey area. Nine probable and sixty-two possible territories were recorded.	BoCC Amber
Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>	TC	0	✓	✓	Four possible territories were recorded in this section within the wooded areas.	BoCC Green
Song thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	ST	0	✓	✓	Twelve possible territories were recorded, all within the coniferous plantation. The rides and glades provide the woodland edge habitat favoured by this breeding species.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Mistle thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	M.	1	✓	✓	One probable and two possible territories recorded in the rides and glades of the coniferous plantation. The forest edge habitat provides suitable breeding habitat for this species.	BoCC Red
Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	B.	3	✓	✓	There were three probable and five possible territories recorded in this section, these territories were located in the wooded areas.	BoCC Green
Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	R.	5	✓	✓	Five probable and eighty-two possible territories were recorded in this section. These were found across the woodland in this area.	BoCC Green
Whinchat <i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	WC	1		✓	One probable and one possible territory were recorded, both in open habitat adjoining coniferous plantation where the grassland and scrub provide suitable nesting and perching for singing and hunting.	BoCC Red

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Stonechat <i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	SC	5	✓	✓	One confirmed, four probable and four possible territories were found in this section.	BoCC Green
House sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	HS	0		✓	No breeding territories were recorded.	BoCC Red, SBL
Dunnock <i>Prunella modularis</i>	D.	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded within the coniferous plantation in this section. Dunnock requires a shrub understorey which is not usual in mature forestry blocks. The species is common in younger conifer plantations and the population of this species in Section C can be expected to fluctuate based on the stage of forestry rotation.	BoCC Amber
Meadow pipit*	MP	15	✓	✓	Fifteen probable territories were recorded in this section. Good breeding habitat is found in the dry and wet heath habitat.	BoCC Amber
Tree pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	TP	1	✓	✓	One probable and ten possible territories were recorded in the rides and forest edges of the coniferous plantation which dominates the habitats of Section C. The low field layer and scattered trees required by this species for breeding are provided by these woodland edge habitats.	BoCC Red, SBL
Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	CH	2	✓	✓	Two probable and 115 possible territories were recorded in this section's woodland and scrub.	BoCC Green
Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	BF	0	✓	✓	Seven possible territories were recorded in this Section. All records were made within the coniferous plantation which dominates Section C and provides suitable foraging for bullfinch, though not ideal nesting habitat – bullfinch usually nest in thick shrubs up to 2.5 m from the ground.	BoCC Amber, SBL

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Greenfinch <i>Chloris chloris</i>	GR	0		✓	One possible territory was recorded, in the coniferous plantation. Greenfinch favours lowland habitats, and the forestry does not provide optimum breeding habitat.	BoCC Red
Linnet <i>Linaria cannabina</i>	LI	0	✓		A single male observed singing on Garvary Moor in May. This area of scrubby moorland provides suitable breeding habitat for this species.	BoCC Red, SBL
Lesser redpoll <i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	LR	0	✓	✓	Sixteen possible territories were recorded across the coniferous plantation. The forestry recently planted on moorland to the east of Invershin particularly provides suitable breeding habitat for this species which prefers woodlands and forests prior to canopy closure.	BoCC Red, SBL
Crossbill <i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	CR	3	✓	✓	One family, two probable territories characterised by males singing in a similar location over both survey visits, and 26 possible territories, were recorded across the coniferous plantation in this Section. The majority of the records were of birds calling, or of birds in flight, singly or in groups of up to ten individuals. The forestry provides suitable breeding habitat for this species, and it is likely to support more breeding birds but because crossbill is an early nesting species some birds may have finished nesting before the survey commenced in April.	BoCC Green, Sch 1, SBL
Siskin <i>Carduelis spinus</i>	SK	0	✓	✓	In total 151 possible territories were recorded in this section; these territories were almost all located within the coniferous plantation.	BoCC Green, SBL
Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	GO	1		✓	One probable territory and three possible were recorded in the woodland south of the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Reed bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	RB	1	✓	✓	One probable territory was recorded in the scrubby moorland habitat of Garvary Moor, and three possible territories in scrubby farmland adjacent to the Kyle of Sutherland. Reed bunting is typically a breeding bird of lowland damp grassland and wetlands, only found in Section C in the valley of the Kyle of Sutherland.	BoCC Amber, SBL
<p>Key: BoCC: Birds of Conservation Concern (Stansbury <i>et al.</i>, 2021¹⁷ & Stansbury <i>et al.</i>, 2024¹⁸)</p> <p>Sch 1: Birds listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)</p> <p>SBL: Scottish Biodiversity List</p> <p>*Maximum counts of singing/calling birds</p> <p>X: Pheasant territories not calculated</p>						

¹⁷ Stanbury, A.J., Eaton, M.A., Aebischer, N.J., Balmer, D., Brown, A.F., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D.G. & 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. Available online at: https://britishbirds.co.uk/sites/default/files/BB_Dec21-BoCC5-IUCN2.pdf

¹⁸ Stanbury, A.J., Burns, F., Aebischer, N., Baker, H., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Dunn, T., Lindley, P., Murphy, M., Noble, D., Owens, R. and Quinn, L. (2024) The status of the UK's breeding seabirds: an addendum to 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, 117 471-487. Available online at: <https://www.britishbirds.co.uk/seabird-bocc5a>

4.1.3 BREEDING RAPTORS

A summary of survey results for each species is provided below and in Table 3. Survey information for breeding raptor surveys is detailed in Table 22, Appendix 2. The Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information provides more in-depth information on nest locations as well as figures displaying locations.

Osprey

The most suitable habitat within Section C is located where the sections intersect with the Kyle of Sutherland as there are both hunting and nesting opportunities present. An active nest was noted within the survey area, along with a nearby inactive nest which was thought to be an old nest of the current breeding pair.

Sparrowhawk

Two sightings of sparrowhawk were made within this section in July and August 2024 which consisted of a male and a female bird in flight, within 500m of each other. It is considered that this represents a probable territory located close to the Kyle of Sutherland at approximately NH 57045 95797 (Figure Reference DEL59). Other suitable nesting habitat is present throughout the survey area particularly in the south and centre within woodland habitat.

Goshawk

Goshawk was rarely recorded during the walkover surveys though the survey area is considered to provide suitable breeding habitat. One individual was noted calling in the north of Carbisdale Wood close to the Kyle of Sutherland in August. A successful breeding attempt was recorded within these woods.

Hen Harrier

Large areas of the south and centre of Section C are heavily forested which would deter breeding hen harriers within these areas. The north-eastern third of this section provides the most suitable breeding habitat with open heathland habitat present. The eastern most tip of the alignment overlaps with Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moor Special Protection Area (SPA) which is designated for breeding hen harrier. Aggressive encounters between hen harrier and red kite were noted close to Srón Ach a'Bhacaidh, along with several sightings of a pair in the area during the breeding season. During survey on the 10th of July 2024 a male persistently alarm-called from perches in the area and a female was flushed from the ground. Indications were that a nest was likely in the area, but it was not located.

Red Kite

Red kite was noted twice during walkover surveys in July. Observations consisted of single birds in flight over forestry habitat. No evidence of breeding was noted; however, suitable nesting habitat is present particularly in mixed woodland habitat situated along the Kyle of Sutherland.

White-tailed eagle

One immature white-tailed eagle was recorded in flight over the survey area in May 2024. No evidence of breeding was noted during the surveys.

Buzzard

Buzzard was commonly recorded in the woodland habitat within this section, which provides suitable breeding habitat for this species. Observations were made of single birds both in flight and calling

over the survey area. Two possible territories were noted within the woodlands to the east of Invershin and were thought to be centred around NH 58294 96407 and NH 59772 96936 (Figure References DEL54 & 55). No confirmed nest sites were noted during the surveys.

Kestrel

The open heathland and interspersed grassland with Section C provides hunting opportunities for kestrel which was infrequently recorded across this section. No nesting sites were found; however, large swathes of this section are dense forestry, which makes nest finding difficult for smaller raptor species. Kestrel may be using old nests present within this forestry for breeding. A female carrying food was noted in Viewfield Wood at NH 55821 93538 (Figure Reference DEL49). While no nest location was identified, it is assumed that kestrel is breeding around this area. A male was also recorded hunting nearby the same date.

One possible territory was identified with forestry habitat close to the north-eastern survey buffer at NH 64553 96608 (Figure Reference DEL56). A male bird was noted hunting nearby to this location in July.

Table 3: Summary of breeding raptor results

Species	Nest Sites	Confirmed Territory	Probable Territory	Possible Territory
Osprey	1	-	-	-
Sparrowhawk	-	-	1	-
Goshawk	1	-	-	-
Hen harrier	-	-	1	-
Buzzard	-	-	-	2
Kestrel	-	1	-	1

4.1.4 BREEDING DIVERS, DUCKS AND GREBES

Tables 23 and 24, Appendix 2 provides survey details and detailed results for these surveys. Survey results are also displayed on Figure 17 within the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information.

Red-throated diver

Two waterbodies were surveyed for red-throated diver. Suitable habitat for breeding red-throated divers was noted on these waterbodies, Culrain Burn Loch and Loch Leisgein, however, no divers were noted during the survey visits. No flights of red-throated diver were noted within Section C.

Ducks and Grebes

No survey for Schedule 1 ducks or grebes were undertaken within this section as no desk records indicating their presence within this section were returned and no evidence of these species were noted during other surveys.

4.1.5 BREEDING WOODLAND GROUSE

A summary of the survey results is outlined below. Table 25, Appendix 2 displays the details and results of these surveys. The Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information provides more in-depth information on lek locations as well as figures displaying locations.

Capercaillie

No evidence of capercaillie was noted in Section C.

Black grouse

Seven lekking black grouse were recorded on moorland to the east of Invershin on the 19th of April 2024. The lek was noted in grazing fields close to a ruined croft. Additionally, a pair of birds was recorded during BBS survey just south of the lek site on the 8th of May 2024.

On the same moorland as lek DEL03, but approximately 2.4 km to the south a single male bird was recorded lekking on the 19th of April 2024.

Further to the west on the same moorland one male black grouse was flushed on two occasions in April. No lekking behaviour was observed and this location is not considered a lek site.

4.1.6 WINTERING GEESE FORAGING

No surveys were undertaken for foraging wintering geese in Section C.

4.1.7 WINTERING GEESE ROOSTS

A summary of the survey results is outlined below and in Tables 4 & 5 for the individual lochs. Table 31, Appendix 2 shows the survey details and Figures 13a-k, Appendix 1 displays the results of these surveys. These figures display swan and geese flightlines along with all records of wild fowl noted on waterbodies.

- **GR13 – Kyle of Sutherland**

A flock of 74 pink-footed geese was noted feeding in a field north of the survey location in November 2023 and remained in this position till the end of the survey.

A flock of 49 greylag geese was noted in November taking off from a field and flying south-east in HB B. Two groups of greylag geese were noted in flight in HB C in December 2023 and consisted of 17 and 28 individuals. These two groups landed in fields close to Culrain shortly after sunrise to forage. A small group of 11 greylag geese were noted feeding beside the survey location for the duration of the January survey. Three small groups of greylag geese were noted in flight over the loch in February with 2-14 birds noted.

A single mute swan was noted on the water in November 2023. A group of three mute swans were recorded on the ground in December 2023, along with a group of four in February 2024 noted on the loch. One flightline of three mute swans was recorded in January 2024, with birds taking off from the water and flying north-west before survey end.

A group of 20 mallard, 18 tufted duck, and three little grebes one cormorant were noted in November 2023. Four flightlines of mallard were recorded in December 2023 of between 2-12 birds, along with four goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) flightlines (1-3 birds), one heron and one cormorant flightline. Mallard and cormorant were also recorded in February 2024 with four flightlines of 1-6 mallard noted and a single flightline of an individual cormorant noted. None of the flights crossed the alignment and occurred to the south.

Table 4: Summary of GR13

Survey type and date	Dusk (30/11/2023)			Dawn (19/12/2023)			Dusk (21/01/2024)			Dawn (23/02/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count using Roost
Greylag goose		49	49	45		0		0	11	14		0	11
Pink-footed goose			74										74
Mute swan		0	1			3		3	0			4	4
Mallard		0	20		4	4				5		5	20
Tufted duck		0	18										18
Goldeneye						3							3
Little grebe		0	3										3
Curlew												3	3
Cormorant		0	1		1	1					3	3	3
Heron					1	1							0
No. of roosting species	6			5			1			4			6

• GR14 – Bonar Bridge

In November 2023, 28 mallard, 14 goldeneye, five mute swan, and three cormorants were noted on the water and remained until the end of survey. A group of 49 greylag geese landed at Invercharron Farm beside the water just before sunset and remain in the same position until survey end. One flightline of two greylag geese was also recorded within HB B over the loch.

One greylag goose flightline was noted flying southwards in December 2023 and consisted of four birds flying over the loch.

Three mute swans were noted taking off from the water in January before the end of the dusk survey.

In February 2024 nine wigeon, one shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), one great northern diver (*Gavia immer*) two mute swans, four mallards, one little grebe, one heron, one goldeneye, and one cormorant were recorded on the water at the start of the dawn survey. Flightlines of one greylag goose was noted within HB B and one flightline of two mute swans within HB A, neither of which interacted with the loch.

Table 5: Summary of GR14

Survey type and date	Dusk (30/11/2023)			Dawn (19/12/2023)			Dusk (21/01/2024)			Dawn (23/02/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count using Roost
Greylag goose	49		49										49
Mute swan		0	5					3	0			2	5
Shelduck												1	1
Wigeon												9	9
Mallard		0	28									4	28
Goldeneye		0	14									5	14
Little grebe												1	1
Curlew												2	2
Cormorant		0	3									1	3
Great northern diver												1	1
Heron										1		0	0
No. of roosting species	5			0			0			9			8

4.1.8 WINTERING RAPTORS

No surveys were undertaken for wintering raptors in Section C as no desk records indicating their presence within this section were returned and no evidence of roosting raptors was noted during other ongoing surveys.

4.2 SECTION D

4.2.1 FLIGHT ACTIVITY SURVEYS

A summary of target species recorded during flight activity surveys is detailed below and in Table 6. Figures 2a-f, 3a-f, 4a-f, 5a-f, and 6a-f in Appendix 1, also detail the results of these surveys. Osprey and hen harrier flightlines are displayed in the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information in Figures 14a-f and 15a-f. Collision Risk Height (CRH) discussed in this section is within HB B. Full survey results and weather details are provided in Tables 29 & 30, Appendix 2.

Greylag Goose

Twelve greylag goose flights were recorded scattered through the section, with the highest concentration in the very north. Birds were recorded in October and November 2023, and between January and June 2024 excluding February. Records consisted of six flights of 1-9 birds and six flights of 10-50 birds. Geese were noted within HB B for 6,640 seconds and were noted crossing the alignment on four occasions, two of which were within CRH.

Pink-footed Goose

Thirty-one pink-footed goose flights were recorded, with all except one flight occurring within HB C. Flights consisted of 11 flights between 1-50, 11 flights between 51-100, nine flights of 101-250 birds and one flight of 650 birds. A total of 5,100 seconds was spent within HB B. Records were largely made during the autumn and spring periods and with the highest concentration at the north of this section. Birds were recorded in September and November 2023, and in February - April 2024. Birds were noted crossing the alignment on 25 occasions, one of which was at CRH. One pink-footed goose flight noted here also forms part of the goose roost survey effort (See Section 4.2.7).

Goldeneye

One flight of one pair of goldeneye was noted in HB C in February 2024 from VP16 close to Cnoc Ceislein.

Goosander

One goosander flight was noted in February 2024 from VP13 along the Avern River. A pair of birds were noted in flight in HB B for 10 seconds and were not noted crossing the alignment.

Black Grouse

Six black grouse flights and one ground registration were recorded and consisted of two flights of one bird, two flights of two birds, two flights of three birds and one ground registration of five birds. Birds were noted in September and October 2023 and in January, April and September 2024. Birds were most commonly noted from VP21 close to Cnoc na Bainnse with single flightlines noted from VP10, 11 and 9 across moorland habitat towards the northern end of this section. Black grouse were recorded throughout the year and were noted crossing the alignment on five occasions, three of which were within CRH. They were recorded within HB B for 181 seconds.

Golden Plover

One golden plover flight was noted in July 2024 and consisted of one female bird in HB B for 20 seconds. The bird was recorded from VP 11 within moorland habitat and was not noted crossing the alignment.

Red-throated Diver

Two red-throated diver flights were recorded in July and August 2024 from VP 7 & 10, consisting of single birds. Birds were noted by Abhainn A'Choire Bhuig and close to Creag Ceapaich. Both flights were in HB B for a total of 35 seconds, and they were noted crossing the alignment.

Osprey

One osprey flight was recorded in June 2024 from VP20 along the Abhainn Sgitheach and consisted of a single bird flying with HB B for 32 seconds. Osprey were not recorded crossing the alignment.

Golden Eagle

Eleven golden eagle flights were recorded across all height bands and were scattered across the section with the highest concentration close to Carn na h-Uigeig. Most records were of single birds though two individuals were noted on two occasions. They were most commonly recorded over the autumn and winter period, noted between September and November 2023, but were also noted in February, August and September 2024. They were observed crossing the alignment on two occasions, one of which was within CRH. Golden eagle was noted within HB B for 1,175 seconds.

Goshawk

Thirteen goshawk flights were noted with flights consisting of individual birds and occurring across all height bands. Goshawk were observed in HB B for 1,120 seconds and were noted crossing the on the alignment on four occasions, all of which are within CRH. Observations were commonly made in the centre of this section within conifer plantations from VP 12 and 13 and were made across the year.

Hen Harrier

Twenty-six hen harrier flights were recorded across all height bands. They were recorded throughout most of the year, though were rarely recorded in winter. All records were of single birds though both male and females were recorded. They were most commonly recorded towards the centre of the site between VP 15, 16 and 17 around, Cnoc a Loin, and were noted crossing the alignment on six occasions, two of which are within CRH. They were recorded for 2,617 seconds within HB B.

Red Kite

Red kite was the most common bird recorded during surveys with 238 flights noted. Flights consisted of 201 flights of one bird, 28 flights of two birds, six flights of three birds, one flight of four birds, one flight of five birds and one flight of seven birds. They were noted throughout the entire section with birds recorded across all height bands. Red kites were recorded within HB B for 25,762 seconds and they crossed the alignment on 73 occasions, 53 of which were within CRH.

White-tailed Eagle

One white-tailed eagle flights were noted in October 2023 from VP15 over Coire Dubh. Records consisted of an individual bird flying within all height bands and did not cross the alignment. Flight time within HB B lasted for a combined total of 100 seconds.

Merlin

Three merlin flights were noted, two within HB B and one within HB A with flights consisting of individual birds. Merlin was noted in October and November 2023 as well as in June 2024 and recorded for a total of 240 seconds within HB B. Birds were noted from VPs 8 & 10 close to Creag na Ceapaich and Coire Bhenneit, and from VP 20 along the Abhainn Sgitheach.

Peregrine Falcon

Two peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) flights, consisting of individual birds, were noted in August 2024 from VP 13 close to Loch Morie and VP 22. Birds were recorded within HB B for 43 seconds and were noted crossing the alignment on two occasions, one within CRH.

Table 6: Summary of VP results with Section D

Species	No. of flightlines	Peak count recorded on an individual flightline	Collated time recorded within HB B (Seconds)	No. of occasions that flights cross the alignment	No. of birds which crossed the alignment	No. of occasions that flights cross the alignment withing HB B	No. of birds which crossed the alignment within HB B
Greylag goose	12	50	6,640	4	173	2	93
Pink-footed goose	31	650	5,100	25	2,011	1	85
Goosander	1	2	20	0	0	0	0
Goldeneye	1	2	NA	0	0	0	0
Black grouse	7	5	181	5	16	3	6
Red-throated diver	2	1	35	2	2	2	2
Golden plover	1	1	20	0	0	0	0
Osprey	1	1	32	0	0	0	0
Golden eagle	1	2	1,175	2	2	1	1
Goshawk	13	1	1,120	4	4	4	4
Hen harrier	26	1	2,617	6	6	2	2
Red kite	238	7	25,762	73	78	53	53
White-tailed eagle	1	1	100	0	0	0	0
Merlin	3	1	240	0	0	0	0
Peregrine falcon	2	1	43	2	2	1	1

4.2.2 BREEDING BIRD SURVEYS

Table 7 describes the breeding bird species recorded during the walkover survey for breeding birds within Section D. Figures 9a-s, Appendix 1 display the results of this surveys and survey details are in Table 22, Appendix 2.

Table 7: Breeding bird results within Section D

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Greylag goose	GJ	0	✓		Recorded on the first survey but no breeding territories were recorded. The waterbodies within the survey area provide suitable breeding habitat for greylag goose.	BoCC Amber
Teal	T.	2	✓	✓	One confirmed, one probable and three possible territories were found in upland waterbodies and river margins across the survey area.	BoCC Amber
Mallard	MA	1	✓	✓	One probable and ten possible territories were recorded across Section D, from lochs within forestry to small pools within farmland.	BoCC Amber
Red Grouse <i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	RG	2		✓	Two probable and nine possible territories in this section.	BoCC Green, SBL
Pheasant	PH	X	✓	✓	Found across the section.	Introduced
Swift <i>Apus apus</i>	SI	0		✓	No breeding territories were recorded, though noted foraging over survey area during the 2 nd visit.	BoCC Red
Cuckoo	CK	1	✓	✓	Cuckoos were recorded calling on site during the first and second survey visit, and it is considered there is one probable and 10 possible territories. This section provides good breeding opportunities with favoured host species meadow pipit and dunnoek present.	BoCC Red, SBL
Feral pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	FP	1	✓	✓	One probable and nine possible territory were recorded in this section. These territories were in buildings at Novar Estate.	BoCC Green
Woodpigeon	WP	6	✓	✓	Six probable and 24 possible territories were recorded in the woodland habitat throughout the survey area. The deciduous	BoCC Amber

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
					woodland and coniferous plantation habitats provide suitable nesting sites for this species when they are adjacent to arable and pastoral feeding habitats.	
Collard Dove	CD	1	✓	✓	One probable and one possible territory were recorded in the farmland in the very north of this section.	BoCC Green
Little grebe	LG	0			One possible territory was noted within the southern half of the section.	BoCC Green
Golden plover	GP	2	✓	✓	Four possible and two probable territories were recorded in the north half of this section, in the upland areas. Territories extended up to Allt Strath nan Seasgach in the north and south to Allt na Cruaiche.	BoCC Green, Annex I, SBL
Curlew	CU	0	✓	✓	Two possible territories were noted close to Boathmore within moorland habitat.	BoCC Red, SBL
Snipe	SN	5	✓	✓	Five probable and twelve possible territories were recorded in Section D, spread across areas of wet grassland and bog. These are the favoured breeding habitats for this species, nesting in the thick vegetation and probing for invertebrates in the damp substrates.	BoCC Amber
Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	GK	0	✓		Two possible territories were recorded within the survey area around Gledfield Estate. Birds were recording calling within the survey area on the first visit with the moorland providing suitable nesting habitat.	BoCC Amber, Sch 1
Common gull	CM	0	✓	✓	Common gulls were recorded in flight on the 1 st and 2 nd survey visits; however, no breeding behaviour was observed.	BoCC Red
Grey heron	H.	0	✓		No breeding territories were recorded in this section, although they were recorded during the first survey.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Great spotted woodpecker	GS	4	✓	✓	Fourteen possible and four probable territories were recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Jackdaw	JD	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded in this section, these were in woodland on Novar Estate.	BoCC Green
Jay	J.	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded in the woodland in this section.	BoCC Green
Carrion Crow	C.	0	✓	✓	Six possible territories were recorded in this section, spread across the woodland in this area.	BoCC Green
Hooded crow	HC	0	✓		Two possible territories were recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Raven	RN	1		✓	One probable and one possible territory was recorded in this section. The probable territory was in the woodland near Strath Sgitheach.	BoCC Green
Coal tit	CT	36	✓	✓	Seven confirmed, 29 probable and 106 possible territories in this section.	BoCC Green
Blue tit	BT	0	✓	✓	Ten possible territories were recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Great tit	GT	5	✓	✓	One confirmed, four probable and 22 possible territories noted in this section.	BoCC Green
Skylark*	S.	117	✓	✓	A total of 117 probable territories were found in this section. The records are concentrated in the moorland habitat, which provides suitable breeding habitat for this species.	BoCC Red, SBL
Swallow	SL	0	✓	✓	Seen foraging regularly over areas of this section and three possible territories were recorded in the north of this section around farm buildings.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
House Martin	HM	2		✓	Two probable and 22 possible territories were recorded all of which were associated with buildings including Culeave Croft, Glaick, and Fannyfield.	BoCC Red
Long-tailed tit	LT	0	✓		Two possible territories in this section, within woodland habitat.	BoCC Green
Willow warbler	WW	57	✓	✓	Fifty-seven probable and 253 possible territories of willow warbler recorded within the survey area; concentrated in the lowland and woodland habitats, but also on the moorland where there are a few trees or bushes.	BoCC Amber
Chiffchaff	CC	12	✓	✓	Twelve probable and 54 possible territories were noted in this section.	BoCC Green
Sedge Warbler	SW	0	✓		One possible territory recorded during surveys, near a relatively wide and scrubby clearing with a watercourse in Morangie Forest. This location provide suitable habitat for sedge warbler which primarily breeds in lowland marshes and waterways but also utilises scrub, damp rough grassland and young conifers.	BoCC Amber
Grasshopper warbler <i>Locustella naevia</i>	GH	1	✓		One probable territory was found southeast of Loch Morie on Novar Estate with a male recorded singing close to the same location on two survey visits.	BoCC Red
Blackcap	BC	1	✓	✓	Blackcap territories were found in the woodland in this section, with one probable and six possible determined.	BoCC Green
Whitethroat <i>Curruca communis</i>	WH	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded for whitethroat, three in Torrachilty Wood and adjacent moorland and one in Morangie Forest. These records probably represent feeding birds because this species prefers to nest in lowland scrubby habitats and woodland edge and avoids canopy closure.	BoCC Amber

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Goldcrest	GC	19	✓	✓	Two confirmed, 17 probable and 93 possible territories were recorded in this section. The conifer plantation woodland in much of this section, is suitable breeding habitat for this species.	BoCC Green
Wren	WR	26	✓	✓	Twenty-six probable and 229 possible territories of wren throughout the survey area and making use of all the habitats, with greatest density in the deciduous woodland and coniferous plantation habitats.	BoCC Amber
Treecreeper	TC	1	✓	✓	Ten possible and one probable territory were recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Song thrush	ST	1	✓	✓	One probable and 18 possible territories were recorded in this section, within the woodland habitats. Song thrush will nest in the edge of woodlands and where there is adjacent open ground for foraging.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Mistle thrush	M.	5	✓	✓	One confirmed, four probable and eight possible territories within the woodland habitats of Section D. The forest edge habitat provides suitable breeding habitat for this species.	BoCC Red
Blackbird	B.	2	✓	✓	Two probable and nine possible territories were found in this section. Largely within the woodland in the bottom half of this area.	BoCC Green
Spotted Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	SF	1	✓	✓	One confirmed and four possible territories were recorded within the survey area. The confirmed territory was found in the southern edge of Iveroykel Forest in the north of Section D and one of the possible territories in riparian woodland in adjacent farmland. Two of the remaining records were made in Morangie Forest and the final record in Clare Plantation. Breeding sites within the coniferous plantation habitats may be in wind-blown gaps, otherwise this species' preferred breeding areas are deciduous woodland with open clearings, and farmland with trees and scrub.	BoCC Red

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Robin	R.	22	✓	✓	Twenty-two probable and 123 possible territories in this section.	BoCC Green
Whinchat	WC	2	✓	✓	Two probable and one possible territories were found for whinchat, spaced across the site in Acharn Wood near Boath, and on the moorland above Strath Rusdale and the moorland above Strathcarron. Whinchat is typically a species of open habitats and nests in habitats such as grassland, bracken, heather or gorse, and it is likely that the birds seen in the woodlands were foraging.	BoCC Red
Stonechat	SC	13	✓	✓	Three confirmed, ten probable and 34 possible territories in this section.	BoCC Green
Wheatear	W.	2	✓	✓	Two probable and six possible territories were noted across the moorland habitat in the survey area. Wheatear will utilise holes in the ground, stone dykes, scree slopes or boulder crevices to breed within this habitat.	BoCC Amber
Dipper <i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	DI	0	✓	✓	Two possible territories were recorded in this section, one just downstream of Loch Morie and one on Allt Coire Behenneit. Other rivers and burns within this section could also provide breeding habitat.	BoCC Amber
Dunnock	D.	3	✓	✓	One confirmed, two probable, and 25 possible territories were recorded in this section. Territories are largely associated with the woodland habitat within this section with birds likely to be nesting in scrubby areas within these woodlands.	BoCC Amber
Grey wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	GL	1	✓	✓	Five possible and one probable territory were recorded in this section, all along or near waterbodies, rivers or streams located within woodland habitat.	BoCC Amber
Pied wagtail	PW	0	✓	✓	Four possible territories in this section.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
<i>Motacilla alba</i>						
Meadow pipit*	MP	178	✓	✓	There was a total of 178 probable territories present in this section, across the open habitats of Section D.	BoCC Amber
Tree pipit	TP	2	✓	✓	Two probable and 28 possible territories were recorded for tree pipit. All the records were made in woodland habitats, or scrubby moorland habitats. This species breeds in open habitats characterised by a low field layer and avoids closed canopy or woodland with well-developed shrub layers: any records made in these habitats likely represent foraging birds.	BoCC Red, SBL
Chaffinch	CH	41	✓	✓	Forty-one probable and 262 possible territories were found in this section. This section forms good habitat for chaffinch with woodland and scrub habitat present.	BoCC Green
Bullfinch	BF	2	✓	✓	Two probable and 16 possible territories were recorded in this section. Territories are grouped within woodland, which is present intermittently along this section, with birds likely nesting within scrubby areas of woodland.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Greenfinch	GR	0	✓		One possible territory was recorded in this section and was located along the River Sgitheach within woodland habitat. This species is associated with garden and woodland habitat.	BoCC Red
Linnet	LI	0		✓	Three possible territories were recorded in this section. Territories were associated with farmland and scrub habitat and noted at Glaick and close to Clare Plantation.	BoCC Red, SBL
Lesser redpoll	LR	7	✓	✓	Seven probable and 46 possible territories were recorded in this section. Territories were located within woodland habitat scattered throughout the south and central part of this section.	BoCC Red, SBL

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Crossbill	CR	8	✓	✓	Found spread across the woodland in this section, eight probable and 29 possible territories were recorded.	BoCC Green, Sch 1, SBL
Siskin	SK	53	✓	✓	Fifty-three probable and 143 possible territories noted in this section. Most of these were in or around the woodland.	BoCC Green, SBL
Goldfinch	GO	3	✓	✓	Nine possible and three probable territories were recorded in this section, most of these were in the southern half of this section.	BoCC Green
Reed bunting	RB	1	✓	✓	One probable and eight possible territories were recorded across Section D, in clearings in the coniferous plantation or in the moorland habitats.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Key: Annex I: Annex I of the EU Birds Directive 2009/147/EC: species requiring designation of SPAs BoCC: Birds of Conservation Concern (Stansbury <i>et al.</i> , 2021 & Stansbury <i>et al.</i> , 2024) Sch 1: Birds listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) SBL: Scottish Biodiversity List *Maximum counts of singing/calling birds X: Pheasant territories not calculated						

4.2.3 BREEDING RAPTORS

A summary of survey results for each species is provided below and in Table 8. Survey information for breeding raptor surveys is detailed in Table 22, Appendix 2. The Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information provides more in-depth information on nest locations as well as figures displaying locations.

Golden eagle

One golden eagle nest was located on the southern edge of Loch Morie within an area of crags with tree cover. One adult was recorded on the nest on the 3rd of the May 2024. A subsequent visit was undertaken on the 4th of June 2024; however, the nest location was obscured due to increased foliage on the trees. The adult was observed on the crags close to the nest site in late June, and further sightings of adult birds were noted in flight later in the season.

Sparrowhawk

Male and female birds were noted within the survey area in April, May and August. One possible territory was also noted centred around NH 51961 62704 (Figure Reference DEL 73).

Goshawk

No sightings or nests of goshawk were recorded during the surveys though a breast feather was noted within forest close to the Moss of Bogandurie at NH 53745 64428.

Hen Harrier

Hen harriers were recorded between the Moss of Bogandurie and Acharn Wood. No nest sites were found though it is considered that there were two territories within this approximate area. One probable territory was noted to the east of Cnoc Gille Mo Bhrianaig. A pair of adult birds were recorded at this location in June and displayed agitated behaviour. On May 2nd an adult female was seen carrying a stick and landing in an area of tall heather. Soon after she continued flying without the stick. It was assumed that there may be a nest at the location. A possible territory was also noted with a male and female bird noted close to this location in July.

Red Kite

Red kites were commonly recorded in the southern half of this section, with sightings largely consisting of 1-2 birds in flight. One red kite nest was located in August 2024. No fledglings were recorded but signs of use were noted below the nests with prey remains and feathers noted and adults were commonly recorded nearby during the walkover survey. One probable territory was also noted one south of Moss of Bogandurie

Buzzard

Buzzard were recorded frequently during the survey with 1-2 birds noted throughout the survey area. Birds were mainly noted in flight and calling, though hunting, perching and breeding behaviour was also noted on occasion.

One nest was located during the surveys at NH 56894 78436 (DEL43). This nest was found late in the season though was considered to have been occupied during the breeding season.

A confirmed breeding territory was noted in the north of the section along the boundary with Section C in West Strathcarron Wood. A family was noted close to NH 55201 91456 (Figure Reference DEL62), along with a nest that had been used this year. Three further probable, and three possible territories, were noted within woodland habitat in this section (Figure Reference DEL 63 – DEL68).

Barn owl

Two barn owl (*Tyto alba*) nesting sites were recorded within this section. First, a barn owl box was recorded to the east of Loch Morie at Boathvic farm. An adult was noted in a barn owl box within a farm building in June.

A second barn owl nest was recorded within a derelict agricultural building to the east of Meall an Tuirc. A pair of barn owl were recorded in June within the building with numerous pellets and droppings recorded.

Tawny Owl

One record of a tawny owl in flight was made in the centre of Torrachility Wood in June. Suitable breeding habitat is present within woodland, and it is likely that tawny owl is breeding within the survey area.

Kestrel

Few records of kestrel were made within this section with all sightings in the southern half of the section between Moss of Bogandurie and Torrachility Wood. An old kestrel pellet was noted in the northern half to the west of Meall Doir a Chuilinn. No nests were found within this section.

Peregrine Falcon

Desk study information indicated that there was a nesting pair close to Loch Glas No nest was visible during a field visit in August, however, though a perch covered in droppings was noted on the cliff indicating probable peregrine presence.

Table 8: Summary of breeding raptor results

Species	Nest Sites	Confirmed Territory	Probable Territory	Possible Territory
Golden eagle	1	-	-	-
Sparrowhawk	-	-	-	1
Hen harrier	-	-	1	1
Red kite	1	-	1	-
Buzzard	2	-	3	3
Barn owl	2	-	-	-
Kestrel	-	-	-	-
Peregrine falcon	-	-	-	-

4.2.4 BREEDING DIVERS, DUCKS AND GREBES

Tables 23 and 24, Appendix 2 provides survey details and results for these surveys. Survey results are detailed on Figure 17 within the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information.

Red-throated diver

A displaying pair of red throated divers was noted on the 1st of May 2024. Of the thirteen lochs surveyed within Section D, one was considered unsuitable to support breeding divers: River Avon loch east (NH 56061 75238), because of its small size (0.07 ha) and likelihood of disturbance from farming, fishing and recent, adjacent forestry works.

Ducks and Grebes

No survey for any other Schedule 1 ducks or grebes were undertaken within this section as no desk records indicating their presence within this section were returned and no evidence of these species were noted during other ongoing surveys.

4.2.5 BREEDING WOODLAND GROUSE

A summary of the survey results is outlined below. The Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information provides more in-depth information on lek locations as well as figures displaying locations.

Capercaillie

No evidence of capercaillie was identified in Section D.

Black grouse

Four leks were recorded within an area of approximately 70 ha on moorland on Novar Estate.

Two lekking males were recorded on the 3rd of May 2024). Individual black grouse were observed close to the lek site during BBS surveys on the 1st of May.

A further record of two lekking males was made on the 20th of March 2024, approximately 650 m to the south west of lek site the previous lek site, although there were no birds present on a further visit to the site on the 4th of April 2024.

Two lekking males were noted on the 20th of March 2024. No black grouse were noted on a further visit on the 4th of April 2024, whilst on the 3rd of May six males were observed displaying spread out over the hill slope in this area. Three male black grouse and one female were recorded between 500 m to 1.2 km north of the lek location on the 2nd of May during BBS surveys.

Black grouse were heard lekking on the 20th of March 2024 No black grouse were noted on a return visit here on the 4th of April 2024.

Two lekking black grouse were recorded) on the moorland of Gledfield Estate on the 10th of April 2024. A single displaying black grouse was recorded on a further visit on the 10th of April 2024.

Approximately 500 m to the north west of the previous lek reference , two lekking males were recorded at) on the 27th of March 2024, though no birds were recorded here on a further visit on the 10th of April 2024. It is considered possible that the two males recorded here are the same two individuals recorded at DEL04 in April.

Five lekking black grouse were recorded in a clearing in Torrachility Wood) on the 12th of April 2024; on a further visit on the 18th of April 2024 two lekking black grouse were noted and several others heard nearby. Four lekking black grouse were also noted from nearby VP21 on multiple occasions at this lek site over the lekking period.

Six lekking males and six females were recorded on the 23rd of April 2024 at NH 51450 62850 (Figure reference RSPB04). Two smaller satellite leks were also noted on the same survey with two lekking males recorded approximately 700 m north and one lekking male noted approximately 1.1 km north. During BBS surveys one female in flight was recorded on the 12th of June 2024 and one male was recorded on the 31st of July 2024. These records were located between 600 to 800 m north of the main lek site.

One lekking male was noted on a survey visit on the 17th of April 2024 in moorland just north of Morangie Forest (Figure reference RSPB07). No birds had been recorded here on a previous visit on 22nd March 2024.

At least two males were heard lekking from Swordale grouse moor on the 23rd of April 2024. The observation was made from an adjacent land parcel with no view of the lek, therefore only an approximate location and number of birds was noted.

4.2.6 WINTERING GEESE FORAGING

No wintering geese foraging surveys were undertaken within Section D.

4.2.7 WINTERING GEESE ROOSTS

A summary of the survey results is outlined below and in Tables 9 & 10 for the individual lochs. Table 27, Appendix 2 shows the survey details and Figures 13a-k, Appendix 1 displays the results of these surveys. These figures display swan and geese flightlines along with all records of wild fowl noted on waterbodies.

- **GR11 – Loch Morie**

No geese or swans were recorded during surveys of this loch. Individual cormorant flightlines were noted in December and January, one from one side of the loch to another and the other of a bird leaving before sunset. Mallard were noted roosting on the loch on two occasions in January and consisted of 12 and 30 birds.

Table 9: Summary of GR11

Survey type and date	Dusk (19/12/2023)			Dawn (12/01/2024)			Dusk (29/01/2024)			Dusk (06/02/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count
Mallard						30			12				30
Cormorant			1					1	0				1
No. of roosting species	1			1			1			0			1

- **GR12 – Loch Bad a’ Bhathaich**

No geese or swans were recorded during surveys of this loch. One male goosander was noted feeding on the loch in February.

Table 10: Summary of GR12

Survey type and date	Dusk (30/11/2023)			Dusk (19/12/2023)			Dawn (12/01/2024)			Dusk (27/02/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count
Goosander												1	1

No. of roosting species	0	0	0	1	1
--------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

4.2.8 WINTERING RAPTORS

No surveys were undertaken for wintering raptors in Section D as no desk records indicating their presence within this section were returned and no evidence of roosting raptors was noted during other ongoing survey.

4.3 SECTION E

4.3.1 FLIGHT ACTIVITY SURVEYS

A summary of target species recorded during flight activity surveys is detailed below and in Table 11. Figures 2a-f, 3a-f, 4a-f, 5a-f, and 6a-f in Appendix 1, also detail the results of these surveys. Osprey and hen harrier flightlines are displayed in the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information in Figures 14a-f and 15a-f. Collision Risk Height (CRH) discussed in this section is within HB B. Full survey results and weather details are provided in Tables 29 & 30, Appendix 2.

Greylag Goose

Twenty-eight greylag goose flights were recorded across all height bands. They were most commonly noted in the north of this section from VP 24 and 25 along the River Conon. Sightings consisted of eleven flights of fewer than 10 birds, eight flights of between 10-50 birds, and five flights of between 51-160 birds. Greylag geese were noted in HB B for 55,553 seconds and were noted crossing the alignment on 18 occasions, seven of which were within CRH. Five of these flightlines were noted during the goose roost survey effort (See Section 4.3.7).

Pink-footed Goose

Thirty-three flights of pink-footed goose were recorded over the winter period mainly in November 2023. Twenty-two flights consisted of between 1-100 birds, ten flights consisted of 101-500 birds, and one flight consisted of 2,000 birds. Pink-footed geese were most commonly recorded in the north of this section along the River Conon. Birds were noted in HB B for 298,030 seconds and were recorded crossing the alignment on seven occasions, one of which was with CRH. Nine of these flightlines were noted during the goose roost survey effort (See Section 4.3.7).

Mute Swan

Three mute swan flights were noted; two from VP97 and 98 in June 2024 which consisted of a pair of birds beside Breakachy Farm, and one flight noted in August 2024 from VP23 close to Loch Kinellan which consisted of a male bird in flight. Birds were noted with HB A and were not noted crossing the alignment.

Whooper Swan

Twelve whooper swan flightlines were noted between October 2023 and June 2024. Flights comprised of four flights of two birds, four flights of 4-8 birds, and four flights of 12-40 birds. Whooper swan were recorded in HB B and C and spent 13,152 seconds within HB B. Flights were largely concentrated in the north of this section along the River Conon and were noted crossing the alignment on six occasions, three of which were within CRH. Four these flightlines were noted during the goose roost survey effort (See Section 4.3.7).

Teal

One ground observation of teal was made in May 2024 from VP29 where a female and a juvenile were noted swimming across Loch na Toinnidh.

Goosander

One goosander was noted in HB B for 150 seconds. The record was noted from VP28 along the River Orrin in October 2023 with the bird noted crossing the alignment.

Goldeneye

Two goldeneye flights were recorded from VP 29 in December 2023, with birds flying from Loch nam Bonnach to the connecting Loch na Toinnidh. One to two birds were noted, both within HB A and also outwith the alignment.

Black grouse

Four black grouse flights were recorded from VPs 29, 90B and 97, within moorland habitat close to Cnoc Udais, Cul Beag and Breakachy Hill. Birds were noted in September and November 2023 and in January and February 2024. Flights consisted of two flights of one bird, one flight of three birds, and one flight of six birds. Two flights were recorded within HB B for a total of 70 seconds. Birds were not noted within the alignment.

Curlew

One curlew flight was recorded from VP90B, close to Auchederson, in June 2024 and consisted of a single bird flying within HB B and C. The bird was recorded for a total of 30 seconds within HB B and was noted crossing the alignment at HB C.

Snipe

One snipe flightline was noted from VP90B in June 2024 and consisted of a displaying adult close to Auchederson. It was noted within HB B for 21 seconds and was outwith of the alignment.

Red-throated Diver

One red-throated diver flight was recorded in May 2024 from VP29 and consisted of a bird flying off Loch na Toinnidh. It was noted within HB B for 20 seconds and crossed the alignment within HB C. Ground observations of red-throated divers were also made from VP29 and 97 with birds observed Loch na Toinnidh and Loch nam Bonnach.

Osprey

Twenty-nine osprey flights were recorded with HB B and C. Observations were mainly of single birds though one flight consisted of a pair noted from VP32A in April 2024. Osprey were recorded within HB B for a total of 1,713 seconds. Osprey were recorded most commonly in the south, beside the River Beauly, though infrequent flights were also noted elsewhere including along Loch nam Bonnach and Loch na Toinnidh, the River Orrin and the Black Water. Osprey were noted crossing the alignment on 14 occasions, twelve of which were within CRH. Behaviours noted flights to and from nest sites, food drops, and hunting,

Golden Eagle

Seventeen golden eagle flights were recorded, mostly commonly from VP 26, in the northern half of the section close to Cul Mor. Golden eagles were noted throughout the survey season and flights consisted of ten flights of one bird and seven flights of two birds. Flights were recorded in all height bands and birds spent 2,804 seconds within HB B. Four flights were recorded crossing the alignment, two of which were within CRH.

Goshawk

Two goshawk flightlines were noted; one near Ruttle Wood from VP32A in June 2024 and the other over Torrachility Forest from VP23. Both consisted of a female flying within HB B with a total of 82 seconds within this heightband. The female over Torrachility Forest was observed displaying. The flights did not cross the alignment.

Hen Harrier

Four hen harrier flights, consisting of individual birds were recorded, with both male and female birds noted. Sightings were made from VP 29, 32A and 97 close to Loch nam Bonnach and Loch na

Toinnidh, Ruttle Wood and Breakachy Hill, with birds noted within HB A and B. A total of 149 seconds were recorded within HB B with birds noted within alignment on two occasions within CRH.

Red Kite

Red kite was the most commonly recorded species during the surveys with 606 flights recorded, spread across the entire section. Birds were recorded across all height bands and spent 182,571 seconds within HB B. Red kite were noted throughout the year with 481 flights consisting of individual birds, 78 flights of two birds, 17 flights of three birds, 15 flights of four birds, 11 flights of 5-9 birds and four flights of 11-18 birds. Red kites were noted crossing the alignment on 206 occasions, 132 were at CRH.

White-tailed Eagle

Four white-tailed eagle flights were recorded from VP 22, 24, 29 and 30, close to Loch nam Bonnach and Loch na Toinnidh, along the Black Water and over the Torrachility Forest, in September and October 2023, and February 2024. Flights consisted of single birds and the total time spent at CRH comprised 370 seconds. White-tailed eagle was not observed crossing the alignment.

Merlin

Seven merlin flights were recorded during the survey with all flights consisting of single birds. Birds were noted in September 2023, January 2024 and between May and September 2024. Both male and female birds were noted and flights were observed across all height bands with 165 seconds spent in HB B. Birds were noted from VP29 and 30, mainly around Cnoc an Teine, and were observed crossing the alignment on two occasions within CRH.

Peregrine falcon

Seven peregrine falcon flights were recorded from VP 24 and 22, near Torrachility, and VP 32A, Ruttle Wood. Birds were noted crossing the alignment on one occasion within HB B. Flightlines consisted of single bird within all height bands with peregrine noted within HB B for 157 seconds. Flights were noted in February, May, June, July, and September 2024.

Table 11: Summary of VP results within Section E

Species	No. of flightlines	Peak count recorded on an individual flightline	Collated time recorded within HB B (Seconds)	No. of occasions that flights cross the alignment	No. of birds which crossed the alignment	No. of occasions that flights cross the alignment within HB B	No. of birds which crossed the alignment within HB B
Greylag goose	28	160	55,553	18	268	7	166
Pink-footed goose	33	~2,000	298,030	7	196	1	22
Mute swan	3	2	NA	0	0	0	0
Whooper swan	12	40	13,152	6	105	3	23
Teal	NA	2	NA	0	0	0	0
Goosander	1	1	150	1	1	1	1

Species	No. of flightlines	Peak count recorded on an individual flightline	Collated time recorded within HB B (Seconds)	No. of occasions that flights cross the alignment	No. of birds which crossed the alignment	No. of occasions that flights cross the alignment within HB B	No. of birds which crossed the alignment within HB B
Goldeneye	2	2	NA	0	7	0	0
Black grouse	4	6	70	0	0	0	0
Curlew	1	1	30	1	1	0	0
Snipe	1	1	21	0	0	0	0
Red-throated diver	1	1	20	2	3	0	0
Osprey	29	2	1,713	14	14	12	12
Golden eagle	17	2	2,804	6	8	3	5
Goshawk	2	1	82	0	0	0	0
Hen harrier	4	1	149	2	2	2	2
White-tailed eagle	4	1	370	0	0	0	0
Red kite	606	18	182,571	253	389	166	243
Merlin	7	1	165	2	2	2	2
Peregrine falcon	7	1	157	1	1	1	1

4.3.2 BREEDING BIRD RESULTS

Table 12 describes the breeding bird species recorded during the walkover survey for breeding birds within Section E. Figures 10a-o, Appendix 1 display the results of this surveys and survey details are in Table 22, Appendix 2.

Table 12: BBS Results in Section E

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Mallard	MA	4	✓	✓	Four probable and four possible territories were recorded in this section, on several of the small waterbodies and rivers.	BoCC Amber
Goosander	GD	0		✓	Observed on the River Conon outwith but no evidence of breeding was noted.	BoCC Green
Red Grouse	RG	0	✓	✓	One possible territory was recorded in the south of this section.	BoCC Green, SBL
Pheasant	PH	X	✓	✓	Found regularly on both survey visits.	Introduced
Swift	SI	0		✓	No breeding territories were found but swift were observed on the second survey visit and likely use the survey area for foraging.	BoCC Red
Cuckoo	CK	2	✓	✓	Cuckoos were recorded calling on site during the first and second survey visit, and it is considered there are two probable and six possible territories present within the survey area. The moorland habitat roughly in the centre of site provides good habitat for its main host species – meadow pipit.	BoCC Red, SBL
Feral Pigeon	FP	0	✓	✓	Noted in flight over the survey area, no territories were recorded.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Woodpigeon	WP	3	✓	✓	Three probable and 58 possible territories were noted in this section, primarily along the woodland habitats.	BoCC Amber
Little grebe	LG	2	✓		Two probable territories were noted in the southern end in Ruttle Wood and the other in Torrachillity forest. One possible territory also noted.	BoCC Green
Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	OC	0		✓	One possible territory was noted along the River Orrin within fields beside Stronachroe.	BoCC Amber
Golden Plover	GP	2	✓	✓	One probable territory was noted north of Loch nan Lochan Dubh and another probable territory was recorded close to Cnoc Beinn na Lice. Both territories are located within suitable moorland habitat.	BoCC Green, Annex I, SBL
Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	RP	1	✓	✓	One probable territory found on a wind farm north of Loch nam Bonnach where it was suspected that a ringed plover was nesting at the base of a wind turbine though this was not confirmed.	BoCC Red
Curlew	CU	1	✓	✓	Recorded within open habitat present in the southern half of the survey area close to Creag an t-Suidheachain. One probable territory is present with a pair of birds noted on both visits displaying agitated behaviour.	BoCC Red
Woodcock <i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	WK	0	✓		One possible territory was recorded in the south of this section where it was noted calling close to woodland near to Breakachy Hill.	BoCC Red
Snipe	SN	1	✓	✓	One probable and nine possible territories were recorded in southern half of the section. The territories were noted between Cnco Udais in the north and around Breakachy Hill in the south.	BoCC Amber

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	CS	1		✓	One probable territory was recorded on River Conon close to Loch Achonachie and one possible territory was recorded near Loch nam Bonnach.	BoCC Amber
Greenshank	GK	0	✓		One possible territory recorded in this section, on the west of the Loch nam Bonnach where an adult was noted calling. This loch and surrounding habitat provided suitable breeding habitat for greenshank though it was only noted on one survey visit.	BoCC Amber, Sch 1
Black-headed gull <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	BH	0		✓	Recorded on the second survey in flight along the River Conon but no breeding territories were recorded.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Common gull	CM	1	✓	✓	Common gulls were recorded in flight on both survey visits, one confirmed and one possible territory were recorded near Loch nam Bonnach.	BoCC Red
Great black-backed gull <i>Larus marinus</i>	GB	0	✓		Observed on the first survey on Loch nam Bonnach but no breeding territories were noted.	BoCC Red
Lesser black-backed gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	LB	0		✓	Recorded in flight along the River Beaully and the Black Water during the second survey, no breeding territories noted.	BoCC Amber
Grey heron	H.	0	✓	✓	No territories were found during the surveys, though they were noted in flight along the River Conon.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Great spotted woodpecker	GS	3	✓	✓	Three probable and eight possible territories were found in this section.	BoCC Green
Jackdaw	JD	0	✓	✓	One possible territory was found in the woodland near Altgowrie.	BoCC Green
Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	RO	0	✓	✓	No territories were recorded in this section, though birds were noted in foraging and in flight in the north.	BoCC Amber
Jay	J.	1		✓	One probable territory in Bridgepark wood was found and another three possible territories also recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Carrion Crow	C.	4	✓	✓	Four probable and two possible territories were recorded in this section and several other birds were spotted foraging throughout the section.	BoCC Green
Hooded crow	HC	1	✓	✓	One probable territory was found in the southern half of this section.	BoCC Green
Raven	RN	1	✓	✓	One probable and one possible territory were recorded in this section, both in the southern half.	BoCC Green
Coal tit	CT	12	✓	✓	One confirmed, 20 probable and 137 possible territories in this section, these were located in the north and south of the section, near the more wooded areas and plantation forests.	BoCC Green
Blue tit	BT	11	✓	✓	One confirmed, ten probable and 19 possible territories. These were found in the wooded areas, near the north and south this section.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Great tit	GT	6	✓	✓	Six probable and 30 possible territories found within the woodland areas in this section.	BoCC Green
Skylark*	S.	38	✓	✓	Thirty-eight probable territories were recorded. The majority of territories were noted within moorland habitat in the centre of this section.	BoCC Red, SBL
Swallow	SL	1	✓	✓	One probable and one possible territory recorded. Swallows were also noted foraging over the survey area.	BoCC Green
House martin	HM	0	✓	✓	No territories were recorded during the surveys, though birds were noted foraging over the survey area. As this species is associated largely with private dwellings they may be under recorded due to access.	BoCC Red
Long-tailed tit	LT	1	✓	✓	One probable and eight possible territories were found in this section, within the woodland areas.	BoCC Green
Willow warbler	WW	13	✓	✓	192 possible and 12 probable territories were recorded in this section. Most of these were around the woodland habitats which provides good breeding habitat.	BoCC Amber
Chiffchaff	CC	11	✓	✓	Eleven probable and 145 possible territories were noted in this section. These territories were concentrated in the north and south of the section, in the areas of woodland.	BoCC Green
Grasshopper warbler	GH	0		✓	One possible territory found in the northern half of the survey area along a small stream within an opening in Muirton Woods.	BoCC Red
Blackcap	BC	2	✓	✓	Two probable and 21 possible territories found in this section.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Whitethroat	WH	0	✓	✓	Four possible territories were recorded in this section and were noted within Ruttle Wood, close to Breakachy Hill and near Cornhill Wood.	BoCC Amber
Goldcrest	GC	10	✓	✓	Ten probable and 104 possible territories were recorded.	BoCC Green
Wren	WR	9	✓	✓	Eight probable and 155 possible territories in this section, making it the most common breeder in this section. Suitable breeding habitat is located across the entire section.	BoCC Amber
Treecreeper	TC	1	✓	✓	Nine possible and one probable territory were recorded in this section.	BoCC Green
Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	SG	0	✓	✓	Recorded on both the first and second surveys but no breeding territories were determined.	BoCC Red
Song thrush	ST	2	✓	✓	Two probable and fourteen possible territories were recorded. The woodland and scrub provide good nesting habitat with territories mainly located towards the north and south of this section.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Mistle thrush	M.	3	✓	✓	Seven possible, two probable, and one confirmed territories were recorded in this section, spread throughout the wooded areas in this section.	BoCC Red
Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	RE	0	✓		A small flock were recorded on the first survey, although they were not considered to breed on within the survey area.	BoCC Amber
Blackbird	B.	3	✓	✓	Three probable territories and 39 possible territories were found in the woodland and plantation forest in this segment, in the north and the south.	BoCC Green

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Robin	R.	19	✓	✓	Seventeen probable, two confirmed and 116 possible. These were largely scattered along the woodland and coniferous forest in this section.	BoCC Green
Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	RT	1	✓		One probable territory was recorded in the south of this section in woodland habitat close to Ardoch.	BoCC Amber
Whinchat	WC	0	✓		Two possible territory was recorded in this section to the west of Breakachy Hill.	BoCC Red
Stonechat	SC	10	✓	✓	Three confirmed, seven probable and 13 territories were recorded in this section. The heathland habitat make it a good area for breeding stonechat.	BoCC Green
Wheatear	W.	0	✓		One possible territory was recorded in this section with the wind farm at Cnoc Udais.	BoCC Amber
Tree sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>	TS	0	✓	✓	One possible territory was noted on farmland near Muirton Mains.	BoCC Red
House sparrow	HS	1	✓	✓	Three possible territories and one probable territory were found in the northern end of this section close to Kinnahaird and Muirton Mains. As this species is associated largely with private dwellings they may be under recorded due to access.	BoCC Red, SBL
Dunnock	D.	5	✓	✓	Five probable and 17 possible territories were found in this section, distributed in woodland areas which are mainly located towards the north and the south of the section.	BoCC Amber

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Grey wagtail	GL	0	✓	✓	One possible territory was recorded in the south of the survey area, near River Beaully.	BoCC Amber
Pied wagtail	PW	0	✓	✓	Three possible territories were recorded in this section. Crevices within rocky boulders, drystone walls, and the cliffs provide ideal nesting habitat for pied wagtail.	BoCC Green
Meadow pipit*	MP	34	✓	✓	Thirty-four probable territories were recorded in this section, mainly within the southern half of this section, largely within moorland habitat.	BoCC Amber
Tree pipit	TP	2	✓	✓	Two confirmed and 15 possible territories. Woodland edges next to the heath provides good breeding habitat. Territories were scattered throughout the section.	BoCC Red, SBL
Chaffinch	CH	22	✓	✓	Twenty-two probable and 147 possible territories were recorded. These territories were predominantly situated in the north and south of the section, in the areas of woodland and scrub.	BoCC Green
Bullfinch	BF	2	✓	✓	Ten possible and two probable territories found during the surveys largely located in woodland in the north and the south of the survey area.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Twite <i>Linaria flavirostris</i>	TW	0		✓	One possible territory was noted close to Auchederson which provides suitable farmland habitat for breeding.	BoCC Red
Linnet	LI	0		✓	Four possible territories were found in this section which were located in the farmland and scrub areas. Territories were noted near to Auchederson and Conton Mains.	BoCC Red, SBL

Species	BTO Code	No. confirmed/ probable territories within survey area	Recorded on survey:		Notes	Conservation Status (BoCC) / Legislation
			1st	2nd		
Lesser redpoll	LR	2	✓	✓	Two probable territories and 16 possible territories in this section were found mainly in woodland in the north and south of this section.	BoCC Red, SBL
Crossbill	CR	1	✓	✓	One probable and thirteen possible territories recorded, largely woodland to the north and the south of the section including Ruttle Wood and Muirton Wood.	BoCC Green, Sch 1, SBL
Siskin	SK	39	✓	✓	Thirty-nine probable territories and 137 possible territories were found, the plantation forests and woodlands in this area form suitable breeding habitat.	BoCC Green, SBL
Goldfinch	GO	1	✓	✓	One probable territory and 15 possible found in this section.	BoCC Green
Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Y.	2		✓	Two probable and 42 possible territories were recorded in this section, with good areas of farmland and scrub for breeding habitat present.	BoCC Red; SBL
Reed bunting	RB	2	✓	✓	Two probable and four possible territory in this section, there are areas of good habitat for reed bunting with wet habitat and pockets of scrub and grassland suitable for nesting.	BoCC Amber, SBL
Key: Annex I: Annex I of the EU Birds Directive 2009/147/EC: species requiring designation of SPAs BoCC: Birds of Conservation Concern (Stansbury <i>et al.</i> , 2021 & Stansbury <i>et al.</i> , 2024) Sch 1: Birds listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) SBL: Scottish Biodiversity List *Maximum counts of singing/calling birds X: Pheasant territories not calculated						

4.3.3 BREEDING RAPTORS

A summary of survey results for each species is provided below and in Table 13. Survey information for breeding raptor surveys is detailed in Table 22, Appendix 2. The Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information provides more in-depth information on nest locations as well as figures displaying locations.

Osprey

Osprey were observed in flight and calling consistently throughout the survey season towards the southern end of this section along the edge of the River Beaully, close to Loch nan Eun and around Loch Achonachie. Osprey likely favour these areas due to the close proximity of suitable waterbodies for foraging. Two nests were recorded in this section.

One nest was situated along the River Beaully with adults recorded at the location throughout the season. At least one chick was recorded calling for food in mid-August 2024.

An adult was noted on a nest also along the River Beaully. Breeding was confirmed in July 2024 with one chick noted in the nest.

Golden eagle

An adult golden eagle was observed in flight close to Loch nam Bonnach in mid-May 2024. No other observations were made during the walkover surveys.

Sparrowhawk

Three sightings of sparrowhawk were made during the surveys with both male and female birds noted in flight. A nest was also located beside the Falls of Orrin along the River Orrin at NH 46887 51856 (Figure Reference DEL51). Breeding was successful at this nest with three fledglings recorded. One nest was recorded at NH 44539 59327 (Figure Reference: DEL33) close to the Black Water. This nest was found late in the season though there was evidence of occupancy with feathers and splashes noted. A possible territory was noted towards the south of the section in Ruttle Wood centred around NH 46974 42921 (Figure Reference DEL61).

Goshawk

A goshawk nest was located within Aigas Community Forest at with large amounts of active signs noted underneath the nest site including prey remains, feathers, and pellets in July. Alarm calling adults and two juveniles were noted on subsequent visits. No other records of goshawk were made during the walkover surveys. The woodland habitat, present in dense blocks at the north and south of this section, as well as intermittently in the centre, provides suitable breeding habitat.

Red Kite

Red kites were widespread and frequently recorded in this section, as it provided good foraging and nesting potential. Records mainly consisted of single birds in flight, though 2-3 birds were recorded on occasion. Birds were recorded circling, hunting, perching, calling, and displaying breeding behaviours.

Four nest sites were recorded within the survey area along with two probable territories;

- At least one fledged chick was noted beside a nest in the south of Ruttle Wood A chick close to fledging was seen in this nest during survey on 21st June 2024. Both adults were close by alarm-calling;

- A large built-up nest was recorded in Ruttle Wood at with an adult noted in low flight beside it; and,
- Two red kite nests were recorded in August 2024 in the northern half of the section. No fledglings were recorded but signs of use were noted below the nests with prey remains and feathers noted.

Lastly, two probable territories were noted; one within Bridgepark Wood and the other to the east of Torrachility Wood.

Buzzard

Buzzard was recorded as being widespread across the survey area with 1-2 birds frequently noted. Birds were largely recorded in flight, though were also observed perching, hunting, calling, and displaying breeding behaviour. One nest was located at NH 44467 59237 (Figure Reference DEL34), though was found late in the season in August. It was considered that this nest was active during the 2024 breeding season. Two probable breeding territories were noted, one centred around NH 48079 52929, and the other around NH 47407 42801 (Figure Reference DEL57 & 58). The mix of woodland, farmland, and upland open habitats provides good foraging and nesting habitat. However, no nest sites were found during walkover survey.

Barn owl

A barn owl nest with unhatched, old eggs was noted within a shed at Breakachy Farm. This breeding attempt was thought to have failed with the barn owl no longer in attendance, and no recent active signs. Another barn owl box is present within other buildings within the same farmstead, though no active signs were noted underneath the box and no breeding signs noted. A barn owl was recorded roosting nearby to the nesting location within farm buildings at Breakachy Farm, NH 46044 44490. One barn owl was observed roosting within the building in June 2024.

An unconfirmed nesting and roosting site were recorded to the east of Loch Achonachie within a building. A large accumulation of pellets, droppings, and nest material were recorded within the building.

A confirmed nesting and roosting site was noted within an abandoned cottage close to Auchmore Wood. A nest box was noted in the rafters along with two dead chicks on the floor of the building in October 2023 (Figure Reference DEL53). The chicks were considered to have been close to fledgling and born earlier this year. An adult barn owl was also present in the building and was using it as a roost site.

Two barn owls were recorded in flight just north of Muirton Mains in June 2024 during walkover surveys.

Long-eared owl

A long-eared owl (*Asio otus*) feather was found in the south of the site within Ruttle Wood. No other signs or sightings were noted during the surveys. Long-eared owl is likely to be under recorded due to their nocturnal behaviour and suitable breeding habitat is present within the survey area.

Tawny Owl

One tawny owl (*Strix aluco*) roost was found south of the River Conon in a woodland strip around NH 46957 53242 (Figure Reference DEL52). A bird was heard calling close to this location in June 2024 during walkover surveys. Given the good quality woodland habitat particularly in north and south of this section, it would be expected that tawny owl breed in the vicinity and that this species was under recorded as it is a nocturnal species.

Kestrel

Breeding behaviour was noted 1.5km north of Breakachy Farm around NH 46430 45973 (Figure Reference DEL48) with mobbing behaviour recorded on two occasions. A female was recorded attacking a buzzard in May 2024, and a male was noted mobbing a raven in the same month. This indicates that a probable breeding pair were present around this location, however no exact nest location was identified. Another possible territory is located towards the south of the section in Torrachility Wood (Figure Reference DEL70) with a female noted in this location in May and a bird recorded calling close by in June 2024.

Merlin

Merlin was recorded breeding within heathland habitat to the east of Buachaille Bréige. A female was recorded mobbing a red kite at this location in May 2024 indicating breeding close by. No other records of merlin were made during the walkover surveys.

Peregrine Falcon

One nest site was located on crags along the River Beauly during breeding bird surveys. The nest was an old raven's nest though it is thought that kayakers along the river caused disturbance, and no evidence of breeding was recorded in 2024. Sightings of peregrine were confined within Torrachility Wood, with one confirmed nest and one possible nest identified. Alarming adults and two juvenile birds recorded from the confirmed nesting location in June 2024.

Table 13: Summary of breeding raptor results

Species	Nest Sites	Confirmed Territory	Probable Territory	Possible Territory
Osprey	2	-	-	-
Sparrowhawk	2	-	-	1
Goshawk	1	-	-	-
Barn owl	3	-	-	-
Red kite	4	-	2	-
Buzzard	1	2	-	-
Kestrel	-	-	1	1
Merlin	-	-	1	-
Peregrine falcon	2	-	-	1

4.3.4 BREEDING DIVERS, DUCKS AND GREBES

Tables 23 and 24, Appendix 2 provides survey details and results for these surveys. Survey results are also displayed on Figure 17 within the Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information.

Red-throated diver

Two breeding red-throated diver territories were recorded on two of the sixteen lochs surveyed within Section E.

Four of the waterbodies surveyed had been colonised with vegetation and had no open water and were therefore not suitable for breeding divers (four unnamed lochans close to Beinn an Rubha Riabhaich centred on NH 43986 52294, NH 43714 52867, NH 43537 53175, NH 43786 52210). High levels of recreational use observed at Loch Achonachie meant it was considered

unsuitable to support breeding divers, given the species' susceptibility to disturbance. In addition, Loch Kinellan (NH 47070 57570) and Kinellan Lodge Lochan (NH 47520 57331) were both considered to be located in too urban an environment for divers.

Other lochs visited within Section E were considered suitable for breeding red-throated diver, though no divers were noted on them during surveys (Loch a' Ghiubhais, Loch an Fheoir, Loch nan Dubh Lochan and Loch nan Eun). All four of these waterbodies were surveyed once only (see Survey Limitations Section 3.2). Loch a' Ghiubhais and Loch an Fheoir were surveyed at the beginning of July 2024 and, since they are located close to Loch nan Gobhar upon which it is considered that breeding had already progressed to juvenile stage by the same date, it is possible that earlier breeding attempts were missed on these two lochs, although a shoreline walk did not indicate any evidence of earlier breeding attempts, it is possible that the remains of scrapes were not obvious to surveyors. Both Loch nan Dubh Lochan and Loch nan Eun were surveyed once in mid-May 2024, and it is possible that later breeding attempts were missed.

Ducks and Grebes

Two pairs of Slavonian grebes were recorded on lochs within Section E throughout the breeding season. Observations consisted of adults hunting and loafing on the lochs and no evidence of a nesting attempt was recorded.

4.3.5 BREEDING WOODLAND GROUSE

A summary of the survey results is outlined below. Table 25, Appendix 2 display survey details. The Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information provides more in-depth information on lek locations as well as figures displaying locations.

Capercaillie

One capercaillie caecal dropping was identified in June 2024 on a forestry track in Torrachilty Forest. No other signs or leks were recorded during the surveys.

Black grouse

Six lekking black grouse were recorded on the northern reach of Urchany and Farley Forest moorland on the 30th of April 2024. Four females were also noted beside the lek during this survey.

On the same tract of moorland as RSPB06 but 5.6 km to the south, six lekking males were recorded on the 10th of April 2024 with two females noted nearby.

One male bird was noted in a small clearing in woodland to the south of Urchany and Farley Forest moorland, 600 m from lek site RSPB11 reported above, on 10th of April 2024, though no lekking activity was observed. Similarly, one male bird was observed though no lekking behaviour recorded, on 10th April 2024, on open moorland approximately 1 km from lek site RSPB11 mentioned above (Figure reference RSPB12). These records are not considered to represent active lek sites, though the most recent desk study records from 2016 noted six lekking birds at this location

One further lek site (Figure reference RSPB10) on Urchany and Farley Forest moorland, approximately 300 m to the south of lek site RSPB11 and identified through RSPB desk study, was only surveyed once due to access restrictions (see Section 3.2 Survey Limitations). No birds were noted though this lek site was most recently recorded supporting four birds in 2018.

4.3.6 WINTERING GEESE FORAGING

Figure 11, Appendix 1 displays survey results and survey details are provided in Table 26, Appendix 2. A summary of the results is given below and in Table 14.

Pink-footed Geese

Pink-footed geese were only recorded during the second survey visit in November 2023.

During the November 2023 surveys large groups of pink-footed geese were noted feeding within fields. This included 1,250 geese in fields around Wester Moy, a sub-group of 555 moved west later in the day closer to Heights of Kinnahaird. A small group of seven birds was noted just south of Wester Moy.

Greylag Geese

Greylag geese were recorded on five of survey visits with December 2023 the only month they were not noted.

In October a group of 14 birds were recorded foraging within stubble fields between Marybank and the River Conon.

Forty-seven greylag geese were recorded within stubble fields close to Heights of Kinnahaird in November 2023. A group of 17 birds were noted just south of Wester Moy also within stubble fields.

A group of 66 greylag geese were recorded north of Coul of Fairburn in January 2024, foraging within pasture grassland.

A small group of four greylag geese were recorded south of the close to the Black Water in February 2024.

In March 2024 separate groups of 70, 80, and 200 greylag geese were recorded simultaneously in a group of fields north of Muirton Mains.

Whooper Swan

Whooper swans were recorded on three of the six survey visits, in October, November, and December 2023.

In October 2023 a group of 137 whooper swan were recorded foraging in fields between Marybank and the River Conon, this included 31 juvenile birds.

In November 2023 a group of seven whooper swans were recorded on two occasions between Wester Moy and Marybank foraging within stubble fields. These were considered to be the same group.

In December 2023 13 whooper swans, including six juveniles, were recorded in stubble fields just north of Coul of Fairburn.

Other Species

Mute swan were recorded on two survey visits with a peak count of five foraging within arable fields north of Marybank. One glaucous gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) was recorded in flight in December 2023. A number of incidental species were noted, all of which were recorded on Loch Kinellan. Species recorded include wigeon (peak count 42), goldeneye (7), tufted duck (20), mallard (15), teal (4), coot (*Fulica atra*) (8), mute swan (2), little grebe (2), and herring gull (*Larus argentatus*) (2).

Table 14: Summary of Goose Foraging Survey

Species	Peak count per survey visit					
	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24
Pink-footed goose		1,250				

Species	Peak count per survey visit					
	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24
Greylag goose	14	47		66	4	350
Canada goose		1				
Mute swan					5	4
Whooper swan	137	7	13			

4.3.7 WINTERING GEESE ROOSTS

A summary of the survey results is outlined below and in Tables 15-20 for the individual lochs. Table 27, Appendix 2 shows the survey details and Figures 13a-k, Appendix 1 displays the results of these surveys. These figures display swan and geese flightlines along with all records of wild fowl noted on waterbodies.

- GR01 – Loch nam Bonnach and Loch na Toinnidh**

No geese or swans were noted on these lochs during surveys.

A pair of mallard and goldeneye were noted on Loch nam Bonnach at the start of the December 2023 dawn survey. Two goldeneye flights were also recorded on the same date and consisted of a male and a pair of birds in the south of the site, with birds flying from one loch to the other. Flights were noted within HB A.

In February 2024 four goldeneye, five mallard, and four teal were noted on the loch at the start of the dawn survey. A pair of goosander arrived shortly after sunrise on the same date.

Table 15: GR01 summary

Survey type and date	Dawn (20/12/2023)			Dusk (08/01/2024)			Dawn (02/02/2024)			Dawn (21/02/2024)			Peak Count using Roost
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	
Mallard			2									5	5
Teal												4	4
Goldeneye			2									4	4
Goosander										2			2
No. of roosting species	2			0			0			4			4

- GR02 – Loch nan Eun**

No waterfowl were noted from this location.

- **GR03 – Loch Achonachie**

Whooper swans were noted on both survey visits. A group of 11 birds, with at least two juveniles, were noted arriving on the loch after sunset during the November 2023 survey visit. Birds were noted in HB A and landed on the southeast of the loch. This represented the peak count of roosting whooper swan on the loch.

Two cormorants were noted in flight on the November 2023 within HB A and B. Birds were observed taking off and landing on the loch. A group of three whooper swans were recorded taking off from the loch just after sunrise in December 2023.

Only two survey visits were undertaken, in November and December 2023. Access to the survey location was denied in January and February 2024 and these surveys could not be undertaken (see Section 3.2 Survey Limitations). No geese were recorded during surveys.

Table 16: GR03 summary

Survey type and date	Dusk (27/11/2023)			Dawn (01/12/2023)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count using Roost
Whooper swan	11	0	11		3	3	11
Cormorants	2	0	2				2
No. of roosting species	2			1			

- **GR04 – River Conon – Moy Bridge**

Large movements of pink-footed goose were noted during the dusk survey on the 15th of November 2023 with groups landing in fields to the northwest of the survey location. All the birds, (c.2,000 individuals) left shortly after sunset and flew south. A group of 61 whooper swan were noted in flight within HB B during this survey though none landed or took off.

Movements of greylag geese were recorded during surveys on the 14th of December 2023, with a group of 70 birds landing within fields behind the survey location 82 minutes after sunrise.

Small groups of greylag goose (two groups of four birds) were noted in flight on the 26th of January 2024, with one group landing close to the River Conon after sunrise.

A group of four greylag geese and 26 pink-footed geese were noted in the fields beside the River Conon during the dusk survey on the 5th of February 2024 and remained in those fields until survey end.

No swans were noted from this location.

Table 17: GR04 summary

Survey type and date	Dusk (15/11/2023)			Dawn (14/12/2023)			Dawn (26/01/2024)			Dusk (05/02/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count using Roost
Greylag goose				70		0	4	0	0			4	4
Pink-footed goose	c. 2,000*	c. 2,000*	0									26	26
No. of roosting species	0			0			0			2			2

• GR06 – Loch Kinellan

A flock of 100 pink-footed geese was noted in HB C in November along with one flight of 12 whooper swans in HB B. The group of pink-footed geese landed close to Elsieck Farm and remained for the rest of the dusk survey. Other waterfowl noted on the loch in November included; 2 mute swan, 18 wigeon, 8 mallard, 13 tufted duck, 2 goldeneye, and 8 coot.

In December two mute swan and 3 tufted ducks were noted on the loch. One flightline of eight whooper swans within HB C was noted, along with one cormorant flightline which flew onto the loch.

Table 18: Summary of GR06

Survey type and date	Dusk (14/11/2023)			Dawn (12/12/2023)			Dawn (26/01/2024)			Dusk (05/02/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count using Roost
Pink-footed goose			100										0
Mute Swan		0	2			2							2
Wigeon		0	18										19
Mallard		0	8										8
Tufted Duck		0	13			3							13
Goldeneye		0	2										2
Coot			8										8
Cormorant				1		0							0
No. of roosting species	6			2			0			0			6

Survey type and date	Dusk (14/11/2023)	Dawn (12/12/2023)	Dawn (26/01/2024)	Dusk (05/02/2024)	

- **GR08 – Loch na Crann**

No geese or swans were recorded during surveys of this loch. One heron was noted on the ground next to the loch in December. One goldeneye flight was noted above the loch in February.

Table 19: Summary of GR08

Survey type and date	Dusk (27/11/2023)			Dawn (12/12/2023)			Dawn (23/01/2024)			Dusk (05/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count using Roost
Goldeneye											1	1	1
Heron						1							1
No. of roosting species	0			1			0			0			1

- **GR09 – An Dubh Lochan**

A group of eight whooper swans, consisting of five adults and three juveniles, were noted roosting on the loch in December. No geese were noted during surveys. One male mallard was recorded on the loch in February.

Table 20: Summary of GR09

Survey type and date	Dusk (27/11/2023)			Dawn (12/12/2023)			Dawn (23/01/2024)			Dusk (19/02/2024)			
Species	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Arrive	Leave	Present	Peak Count using Roost
Whooper swan					8	8							8
Mallard												1	1
No. of roosting species	0			1			0			1			1

4.3.8 WINTERING RAPTORS

Table 28, Appendix 2 provides the survey details for these surveys. The Annex of Environmentally Sensitive Information provides more in-depth information on nest locations as well as figures displaying locations.

Red Kite

Observations made during a nearby VP survey (2.5km away) identified a red kite roost in the area around Muirton Mains with approximately 60 birds counted entering the roost. Subsequent wintering roost surveys recorded red kites using woodland around both Fairburn House and Muirton Mains as a roost site. On the first visit on the 4th of December 2023 approximately 20 red kites were recorded entering the roosting site near Fairburn House. Fourteen red kites were recorded entering a roost on the 29th of January 2024 west of Muirton Mains. Thirty red kites were recorded entering the roost during the 3rd visit on the 26th of February 2024 close to Fairburn House.

5 SUMMARY

A summary of the results of the bird surveys, undertaken between September 2023 and September 2024, is provided below for each section.

5.1.1 SECTION C

ANNEX I / SCHEDULE 1 SPECIES

A total of 12 species listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive or Schedule 1 of the WCA were recorded in this section of the route.

Breeding was recorded in two of the Annex I / Schedule 1 species. Red kite had the highest number of nest sites and territories along the route. Goshawk had one confirmed nest site along the route. There was one possible osprey nest site though it was not in use during the breeding season. Details on locations are provided in the Confidential Annex where appropriate.

There were a number of Annex I and/or Schedule 1 species which occurred in suitable habitat but where no nest were located but breeding behavior was noted. For some of these species, such as hen harrier, it can be difficult to locate nests and as such, it is considered there could have been breeding territories present.

No breeding divers or Schedule 1 ducks or grebes were recorded within this section.

OTHER SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

A further 13 species which are categorized as red on BOCC 5 were recorded either during VPs or during walkover surveys.

Seven lekking black grouse were recorded across two locations on moorland to the east of Invershin.

Lapwing, a red listed wader species, was recorded along the route with one probable territory recorded near Loch Leisgein east of Invershin. One possible curlew territory was also noted in the north of this route.

There were also a number of red listed passerines found breeding in suitable habitat along the route. Skylark (18 probable territories), mistle thrush (one probable and two possible territories), whinchat (one probable and one possible territory), tree pipit (one probable and ten possible), greenfinch (one possible territory), and lesser redpoll (16 possible territories). This section was dominated by coniferous plantation. Additionally, cuckoo was recorded calling on site with one probable and 11 possible territories in areas that provide good breeding opportunities with favored host species.

WINTERING GEESE AND SWANS

Roosting graylag and pink-footed geese, and mute swan were recorded on the Kyle of Sunderland. Roosting graylag geese and mute swan were also recorded at Bonar Bridge. A number of other waterfowl were also recorded roosting at these locations.

No wintering raptor roost survey or goose foraging survey was undertaken within this section.

5.1.2 SECTION D

ANNEX I / SCHEDULE 1 SPECIES

A total of 13 species listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive or Schedule 1 of the WCA were recorded in this section of the route.

Nest locations were recorded in four of the Annex I / Schedule 1 species. There was one confirmed golden eagle nesting site. There were also two barn owl nesting sites as well as one probable peregrine falcon nest. One red kite nest was also located in this section. Details on locations are provided in the Confidential Annex where appropriate.

There were a number of Annex I and/or Schedule 1 species which occurred in suitable habitat but where no nesting locations were identified. For some of these species, it can be difficult to locate nests and as such, it is considered there could have been breeding territories present. There were one possible and one probable hen harrier territories, one east of Cnoc Gille Mo Bhrianaig, and the second close by. There was one probable red kite territories noted south of Moss of Bogandurie. Two possible greenshank territories were recorded around Gledfield Estate. Finally, there was one displaying pair of red-throated diver recorded and three lochs in this section were considered suitable for breeding, and a further five lochs had suitable habitat though were at risk of disturbance.

Some species had potential to breed, but no evidence of breeding was observed and there was no indication that birds observed were territory holding – either too few sightings, or a bird out of season or possibly ranging far from its territory. Species which fell into this group were goshawk and peregrine falcon. One goshawk breast feather was found within forest close to the Moss of Bogandurie and a peregrine falcon perch with dropping was noted close to Loch Glas. Both of these were found in suitable habitats, but no evidence of breeding was observed.

No wintering raptor roost surveys were undertaken in this section.

OTHER SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

A further 15 species which are categorized as red on BOCC 5 were recorded either during VPs or during walkover surveys.

There were numerous black grouse lek sites recorded in this section and lekking behaviour was observed during the breeding season during walkover surveys. Sites included moorland on Novar Estate, Gledfield Estate, Morangie Forest, Swordale grouse moor, and Torrachilty Woods.

There were also a number of red listed passerines found breeding in suitable habitat along the route. Skylark (117 probable territories), house martin (two probable and 22 possible), mistle thrush (one confirmed, four probable, and eight possible territories), whinchat (two probable and one possible territory), tree pipit (two probable and 28 possible), greenfinch (one possible territory), lesser redpoll (seven probable and 46 possible territories), grasshopper warbler (one possible territory), spotted flycatcher (one confirmed and four possible territories), linnet (three possible territories). Additionally, Cuckoo were recorded calling in this section with one probable and ten possible territories in areas that provide good breeding opportunities with favored host species.

WINTERING GEESE AND SWANS

No wintering geese foraging surveys were carried out.

No roosting geese or swans were recorded on lochs surveyed within this section. Though a number of other waterfowl species were also noted roosting on lochs surveyed.

5.1.3 SECTION E

ANNEX I / SCHEDULE 1 SPECIES

A total of 15 species listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive or Schedule 1 of the WCA were recorded in this section of the route.

Nest locations were recorded in six of the Annex I / Schedule 1 species, osprey, goshawk, red kite, barn owl, peregrine falcon, and merlin. Osprey were confirmed breeding in this section, two nests

were recorded in this section with adults observed in flight and calling throughout the survey season along the edge of the River Beaully. A goshawk nest was located within Aigas Community Forest with breeding confirmed with two juveniles seen on the nest. Four red kite nest sites were recorded, with two probable territories noted within Bridgepark Wood and Torrachility Wood. There were four barn owl nest sites found including a couple of failed breeding attempts as well as one site with active signs. One confirmed peregrine falcon nest was located within Torrachility Wood and one abandoned nest site was located along the River Beaully. Lastly, merlin was recorded breeding within heathland habitat to the east of Buachaille Bréige. Details on locations are provided in the Confidential Annex where appropriate.

Hen harrier was recorded during flight activity surveys though no evidence of breeding was noted.

Two breeding red-throated diver territories were recorded on two of the fourteen lochs surveyed within this section. Six of the surveyed lochs were considered suitable for breeding divers. Additionally, a pair of Slavonian grebes were recorded on lochs within this section throughout the breeding season, but no evidence of a nesting attempt was recorded. One greenshank territory was noted on Loch nam Bonnach.

Some species had potential to breed, but no evidence of breeding was observed and there was no indication that birds observed were territory holding – either too few sightings, or a bird out of season or possibly ranging far from its territory. Golden eagle and capercaillie fell into this group with one golden eagle observation but no signs of breeding, and a capercaillie caecal dropping was recorded on a forestry track in Torrachilty Forest.

Red kite were recorded roosting in the area around Muirton Mains with between 14-60 birds noted during surveys.

OTHER SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

A further 22 species which are categorized as red on BOCC 5 were recorded either during VPs or during walkover surveys.

There were numerous black grouse lek sites recorded in this section and lekking behaviour was observed during the breeding season during walkover surveys. Sites included moorland and woodland to the south of Urchany and Farley Forest moorland.

There were also a number of red listed passerines found breeding in suitable habitat along the route. Skylark (38 probable territories) the majority of which were in moorland; mistle thrush (two probable, seven possible, one confirmed territories); whinchat (two possible) west of Breakachy Hill; tree pipit (two confirmed and 15 possible); grasshopper warbler (one possible territory), tree sparrow (one possible territory) farmland near Muirton Mains, house sparrow (three possible territories and one probable); twite were also recorded possibly breeding close to Auchederson (one possible territory); linnet (four possible territories) mainly in farmland and scrub areas; lesser redpoll (two probable and 16 possible territories); yellowhammer (two probable and 42 possible territories). Additionally, cuckoo were recorded calling in this section with two probable and six possible territories in areas that provide good breeding opportunities with favoured host species.

Ringed plover found on a wind farm north of Loch nam Bonnach where it was suspected that a ringed plover was nesting at the base of a wind turbine though this was not confirmed. One probable curlew territory was recorded within open habitat present in the southern half of the survey area close to Creag an t-Suidheachain. One possible woodcock territory was also noted close to Breakachy Hill.

WINTERING GEESE AND SWANS

Foraging pink-footed geese, graylag geese, and whooper swan were recorded during surveys around Marybank.

Roosting whooper swan were recorded at Loch Achonachie and An Dubh Lochan. Pink-footed geese and mute swan were recorded roosting at Loch Kinellan, graylag geese and pink-footed geese were noted roosting at River Conon - Moy Bridge.

APPENDIX 1 – FIGURES

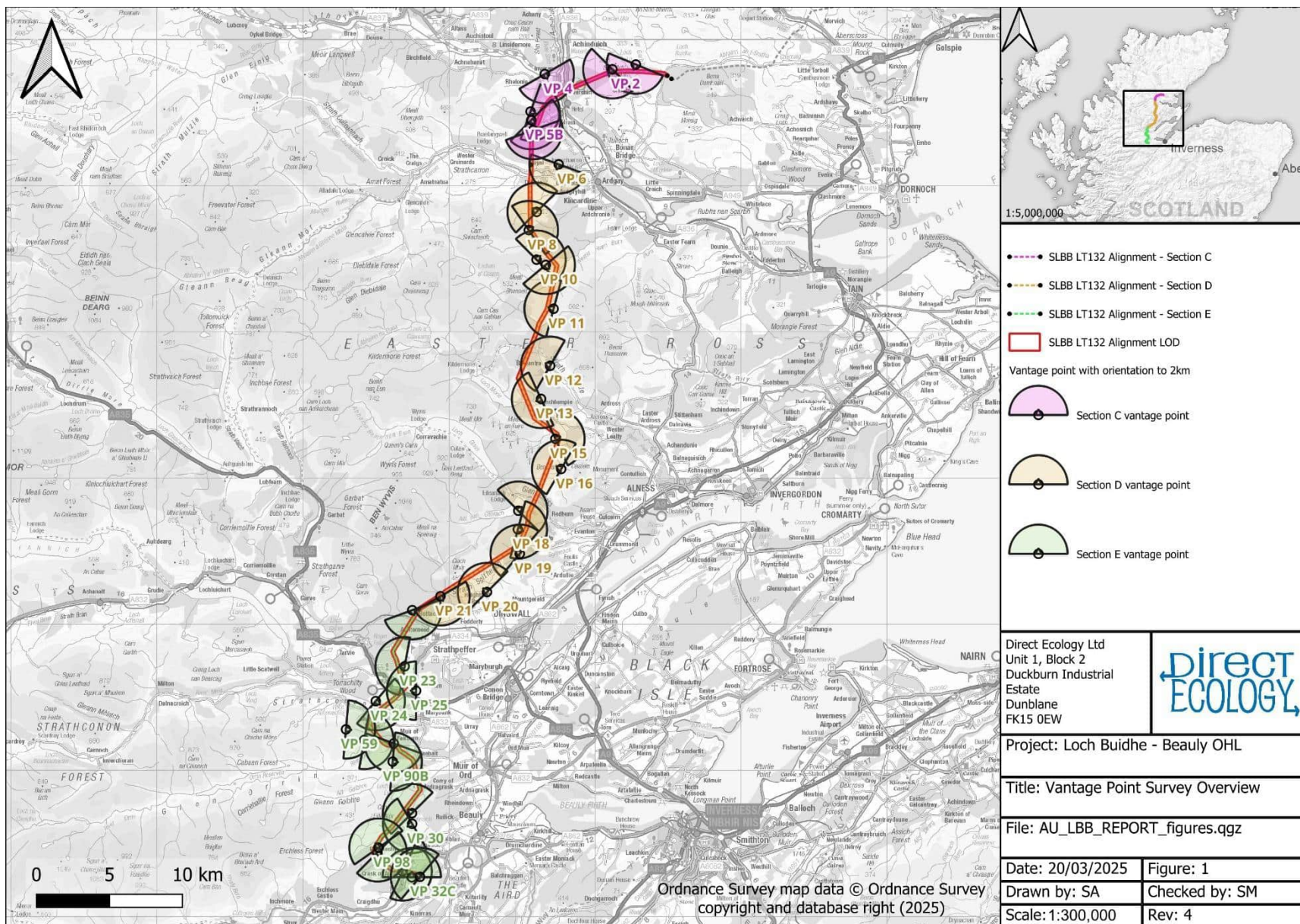


Figure 1: Vantage Point Survey Overview

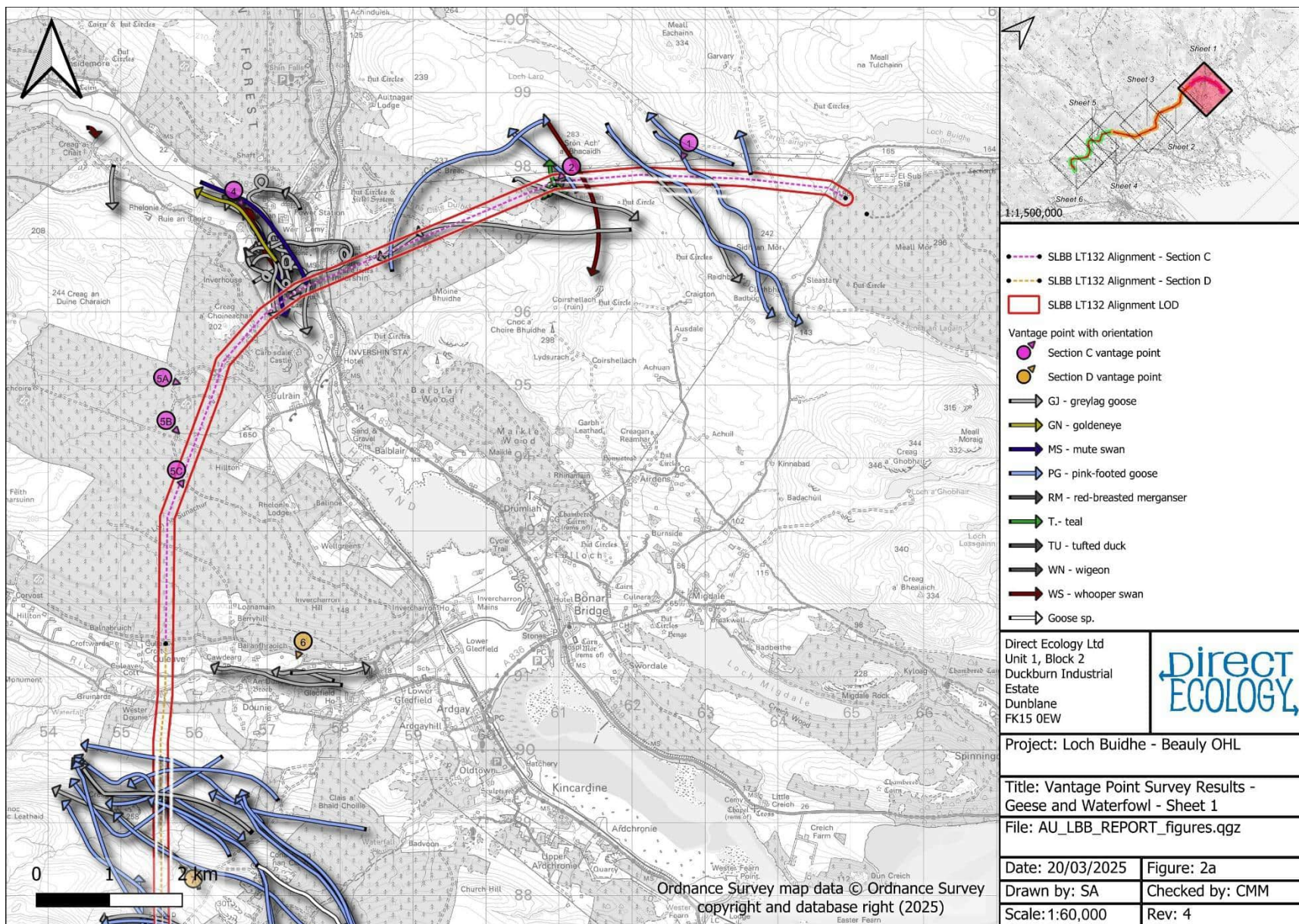


Figure 2a: Vantage Point Survey Results – Geese and waterfowl – Sheet 1

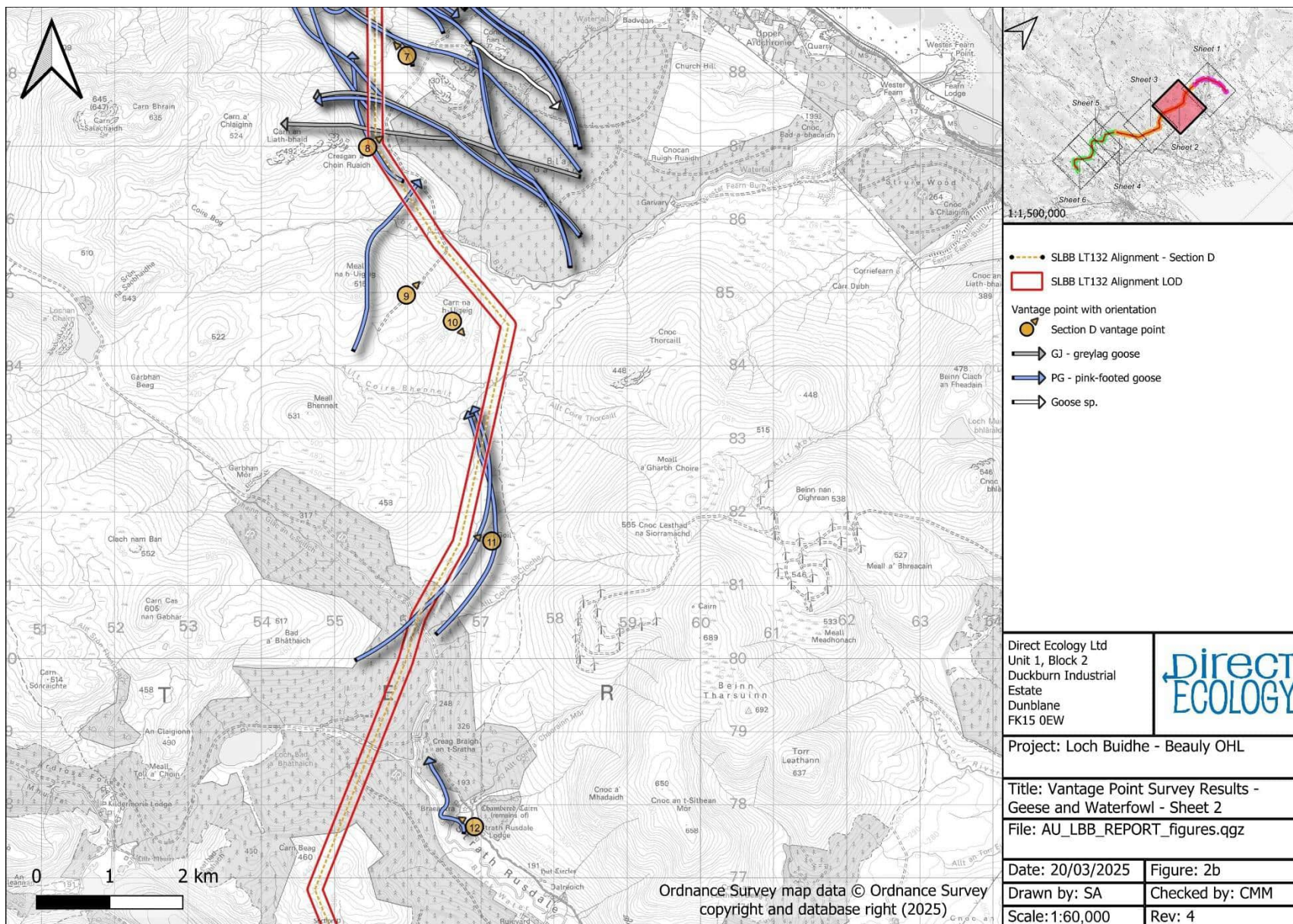


Figure 2b: Vantage Point Survey Results - Geese and Waterfowl – Sheet 2

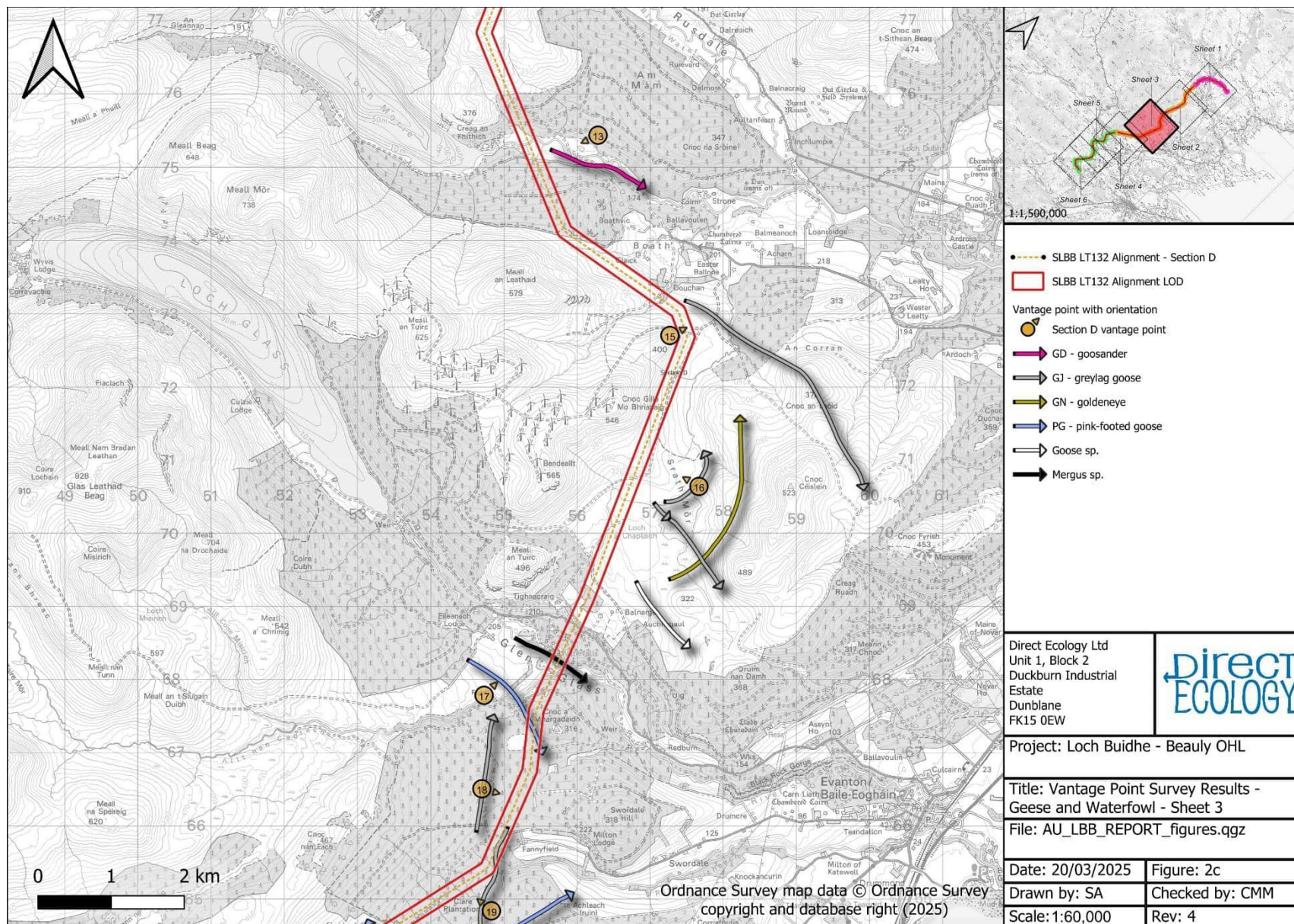


Figure 2c: Vantage Point Survey Results - Geese and Waterfowl – Sheet 3

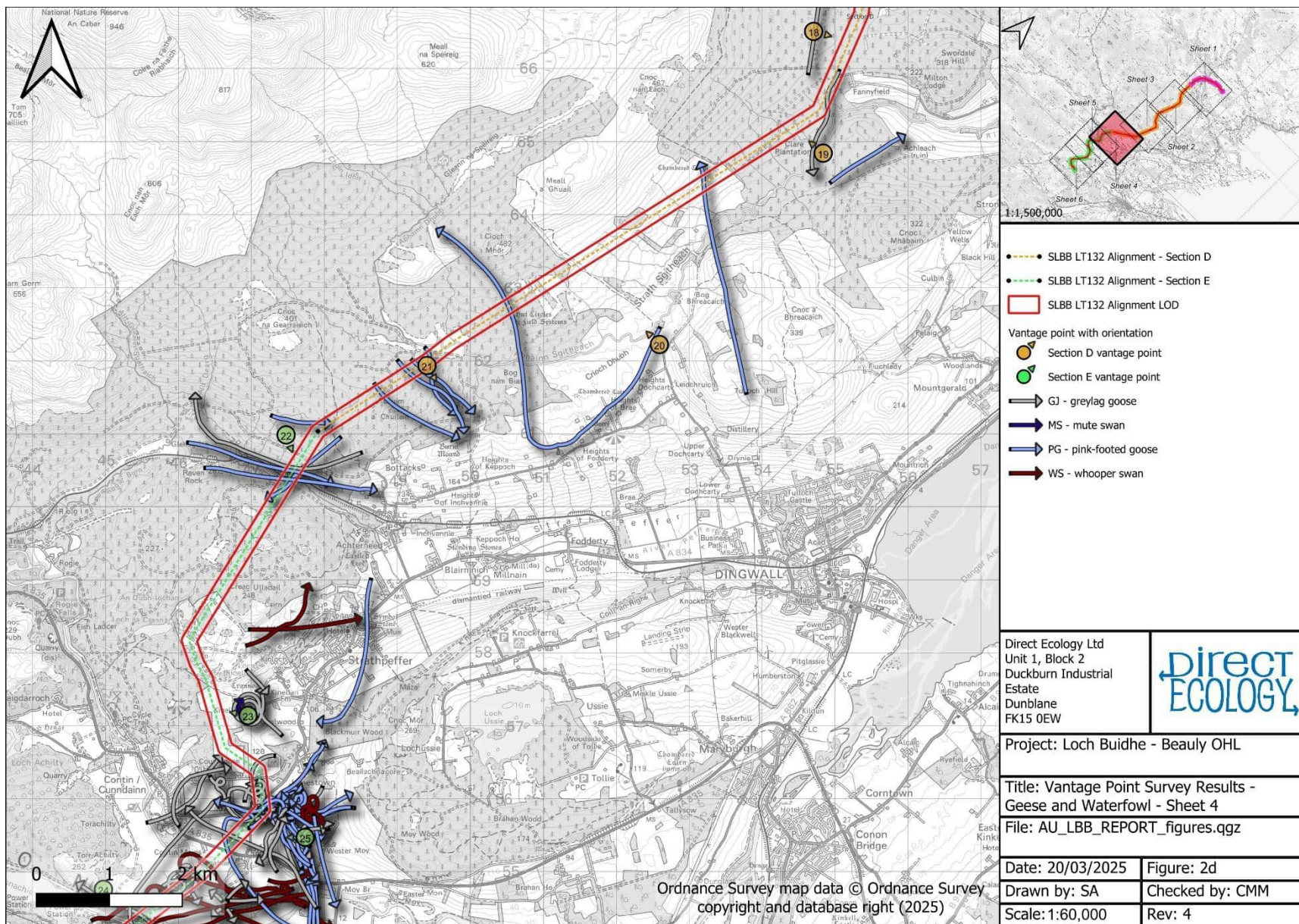


Figure 2d: Vantage Point Survey Results - Geese and Waterfowl – Sheet 4

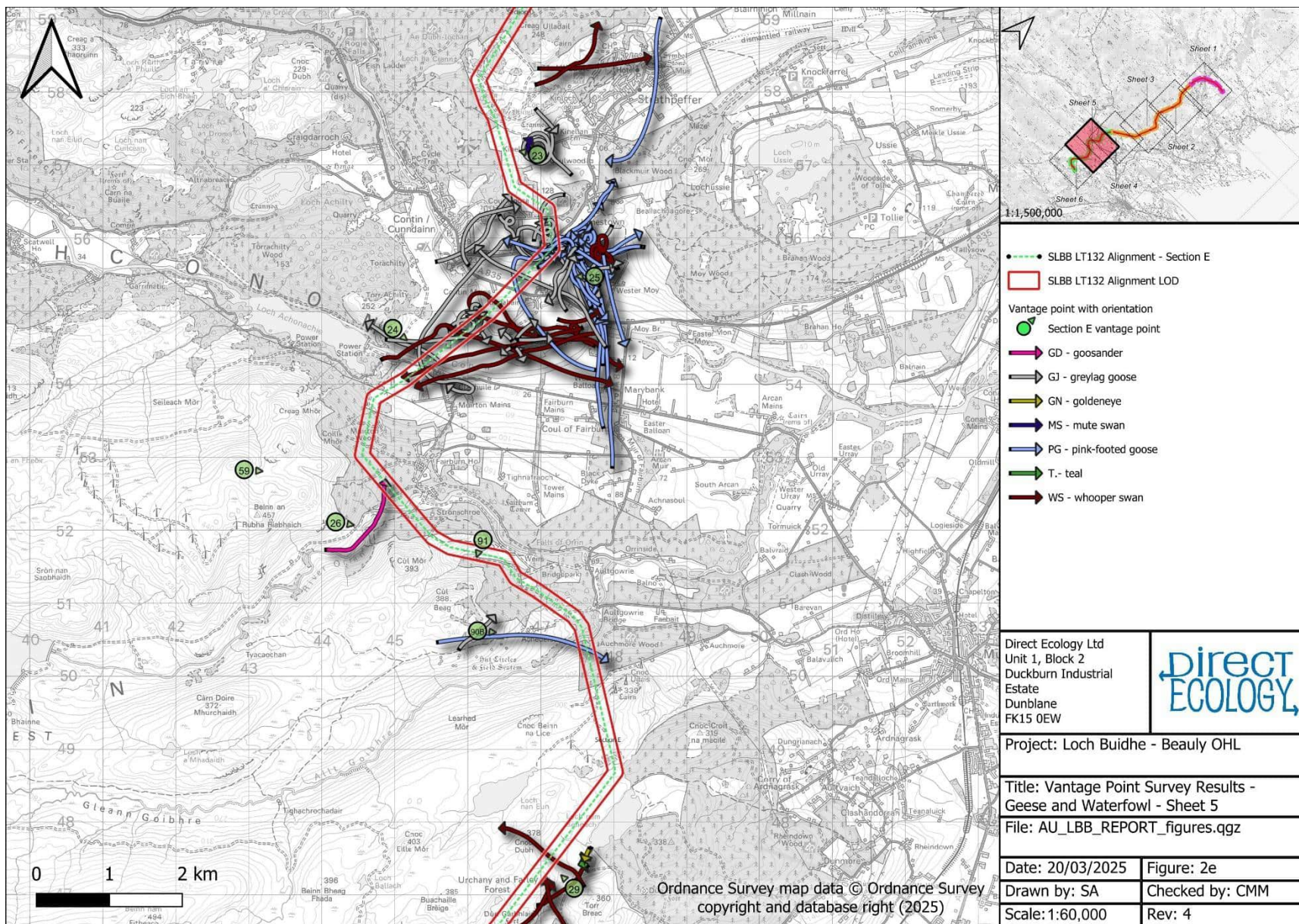


Figure 2e: Vantage Point Survey Results - Geese and Waterfowl – Sheet 5

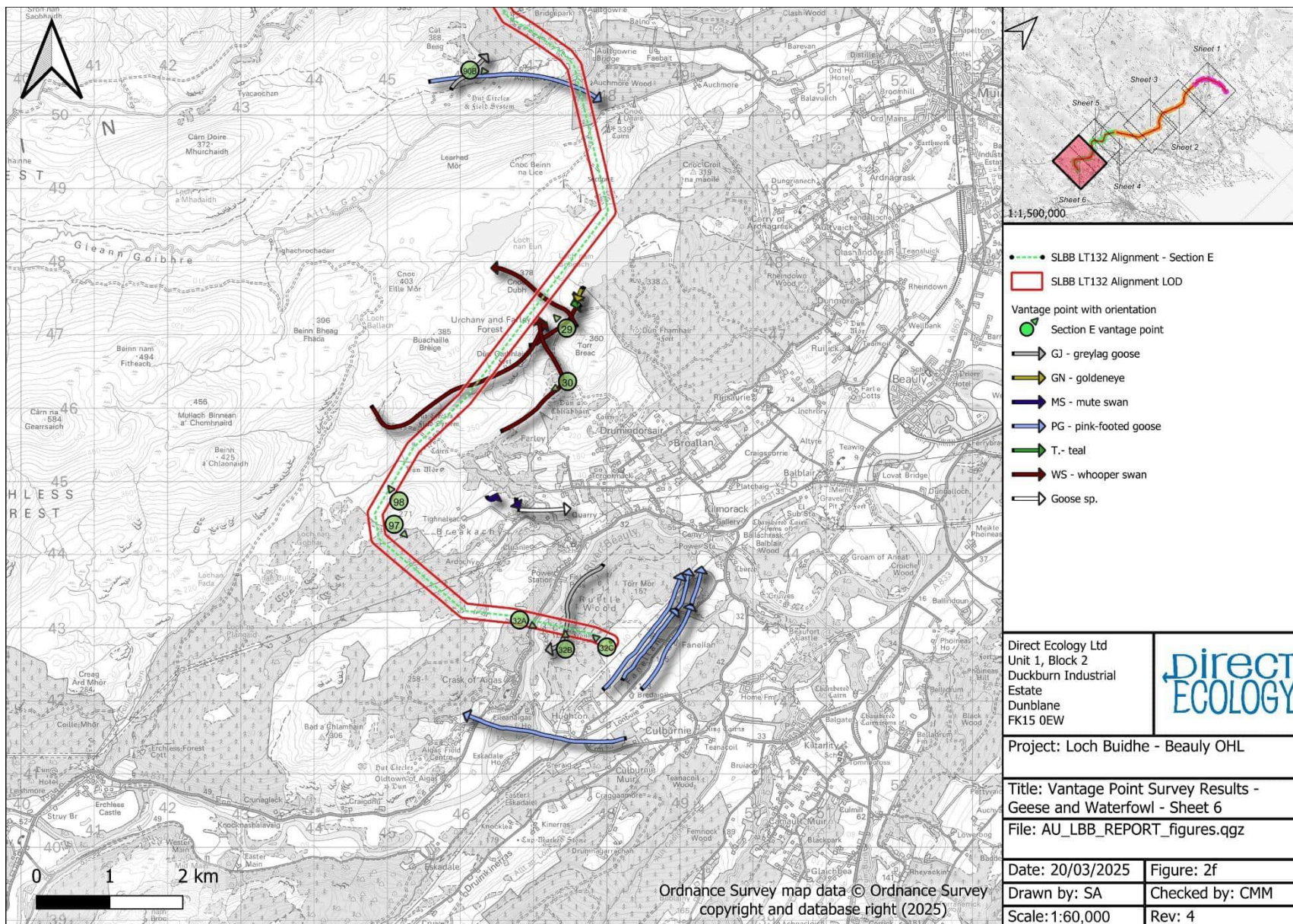


Figure 2f: Vantage Point Survey Results - Geese and Waterfowl – Sheet 6

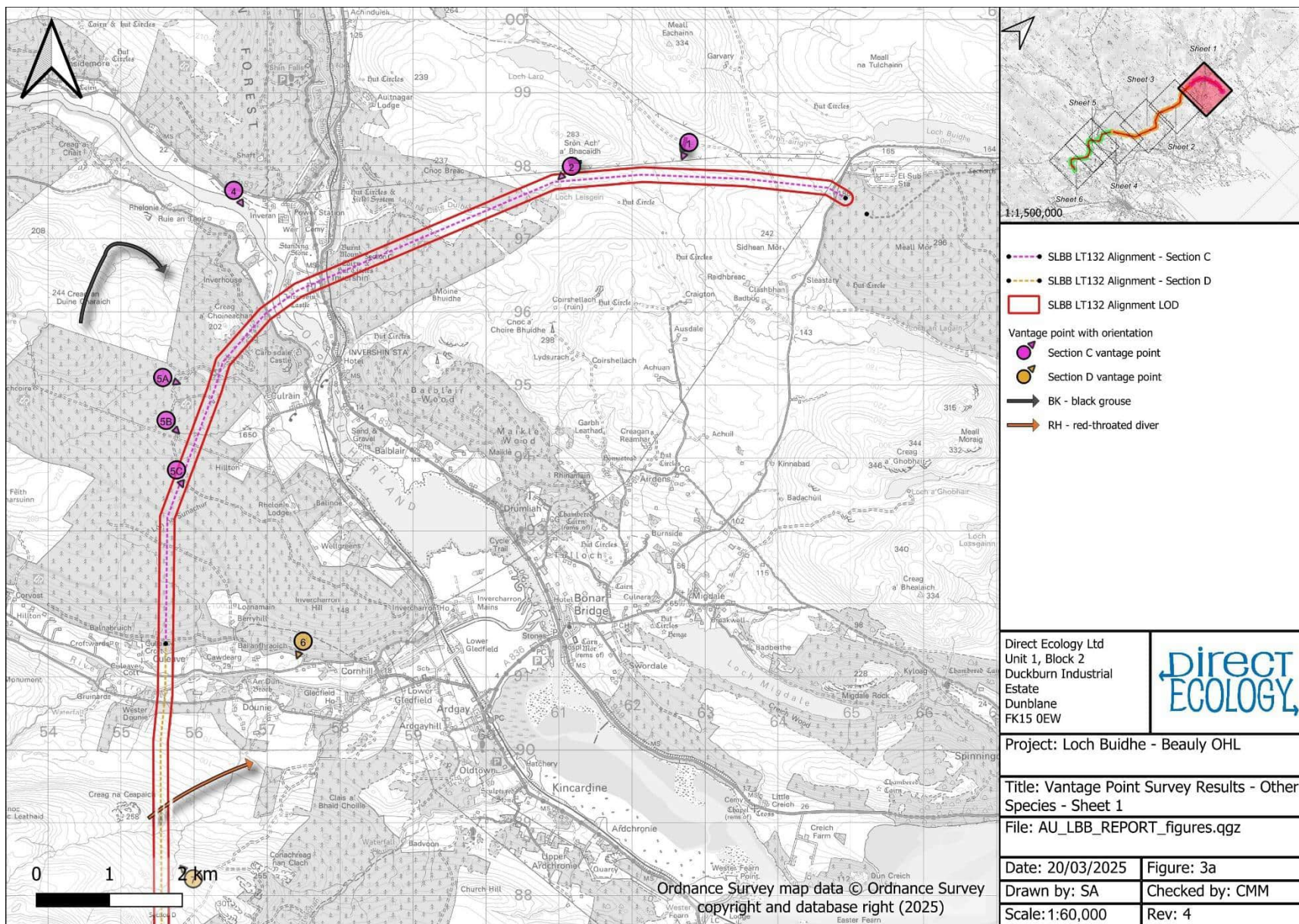


Figure 3a: Vantage Point Survey Results – Other Species – Sheet 1

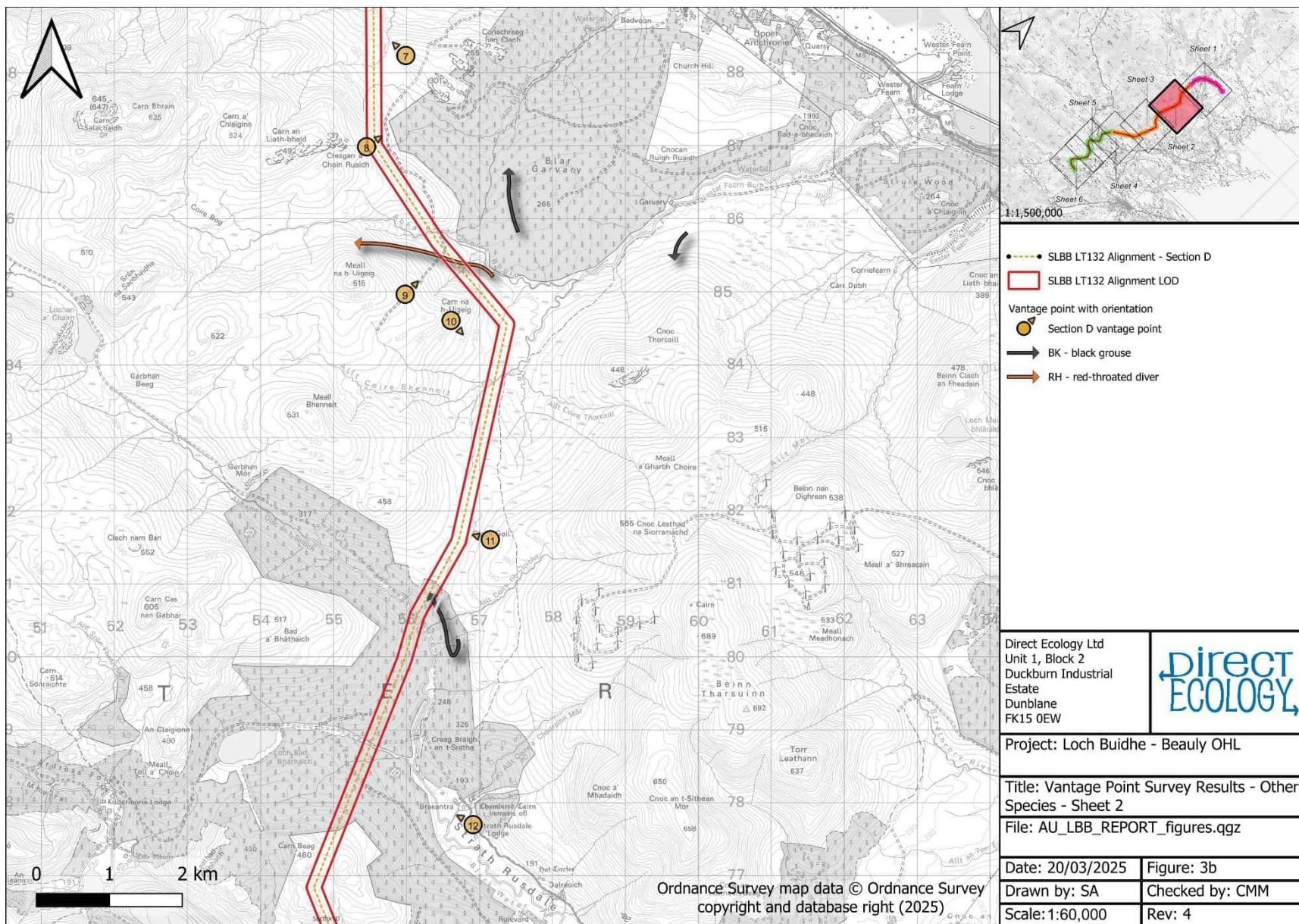


Figure 3b: Vantage Point Survey Results - Other Species – Sheet 2

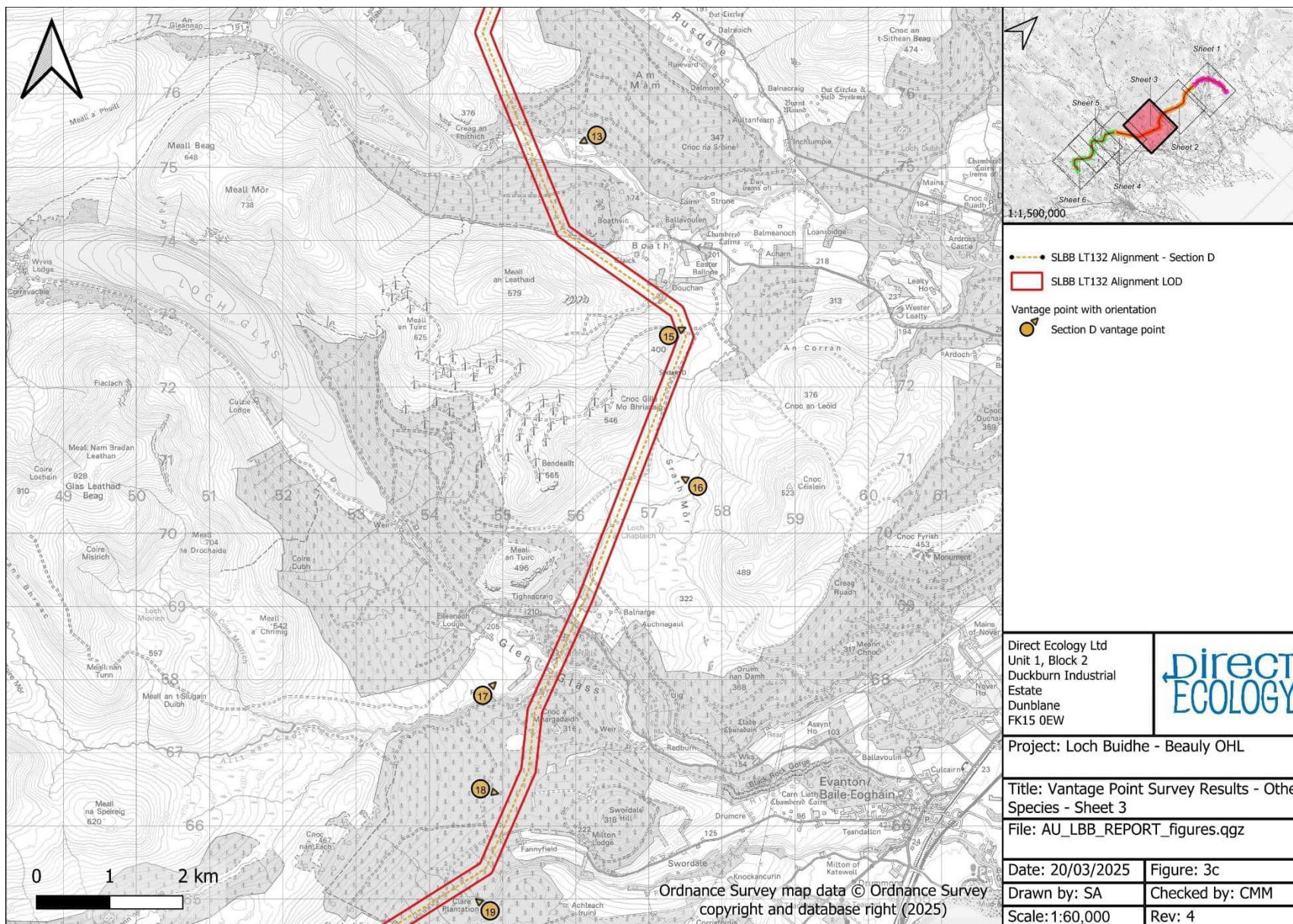


Figure 3c: Vantage Point Survey Results - Other Species – Sheet 3

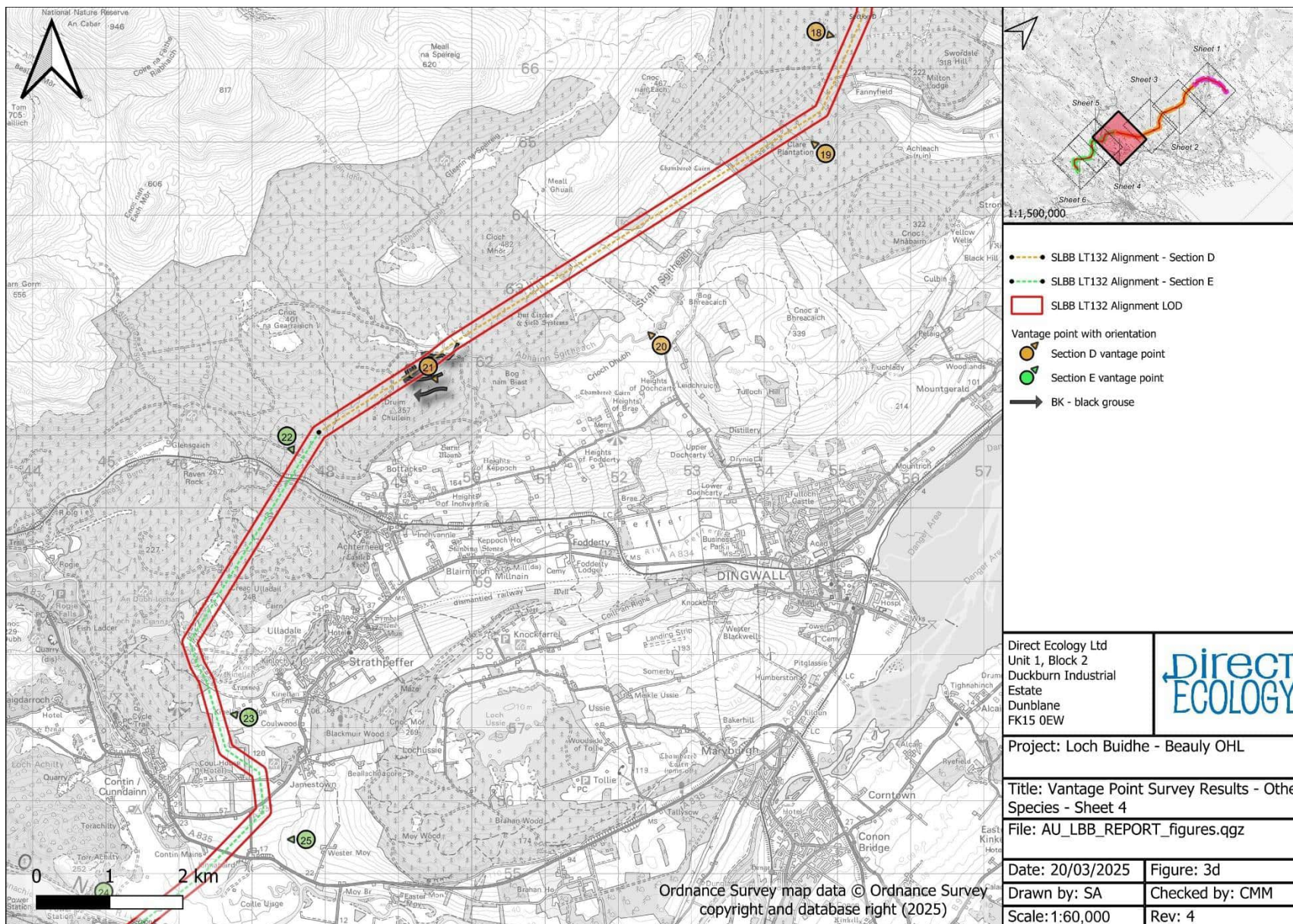


Figure 3d: Vantage Point Survey Results - Other Species – Sheet 4

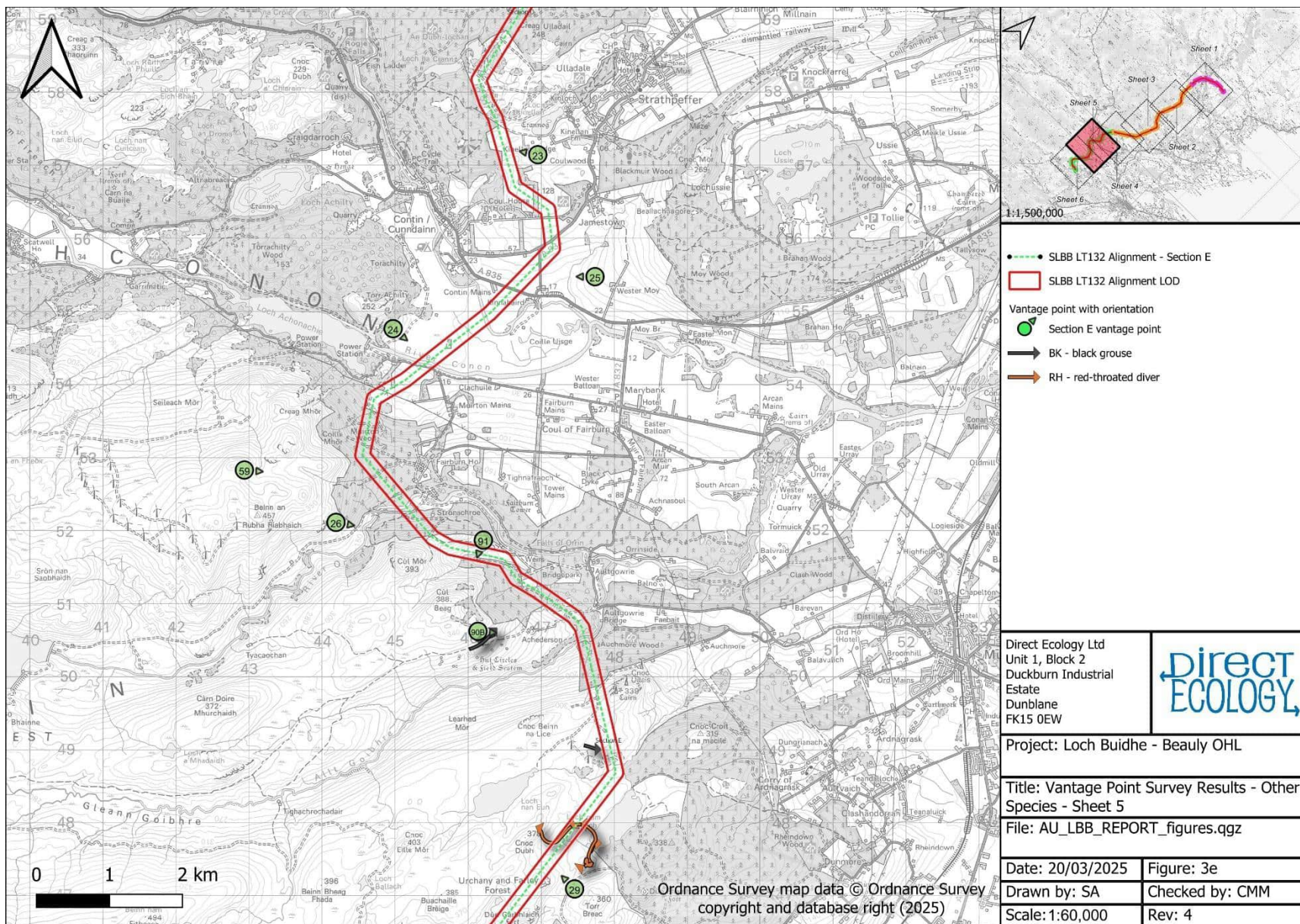


Figure 3e: Vantage Point Survey Results - Other Species – Sheet 5

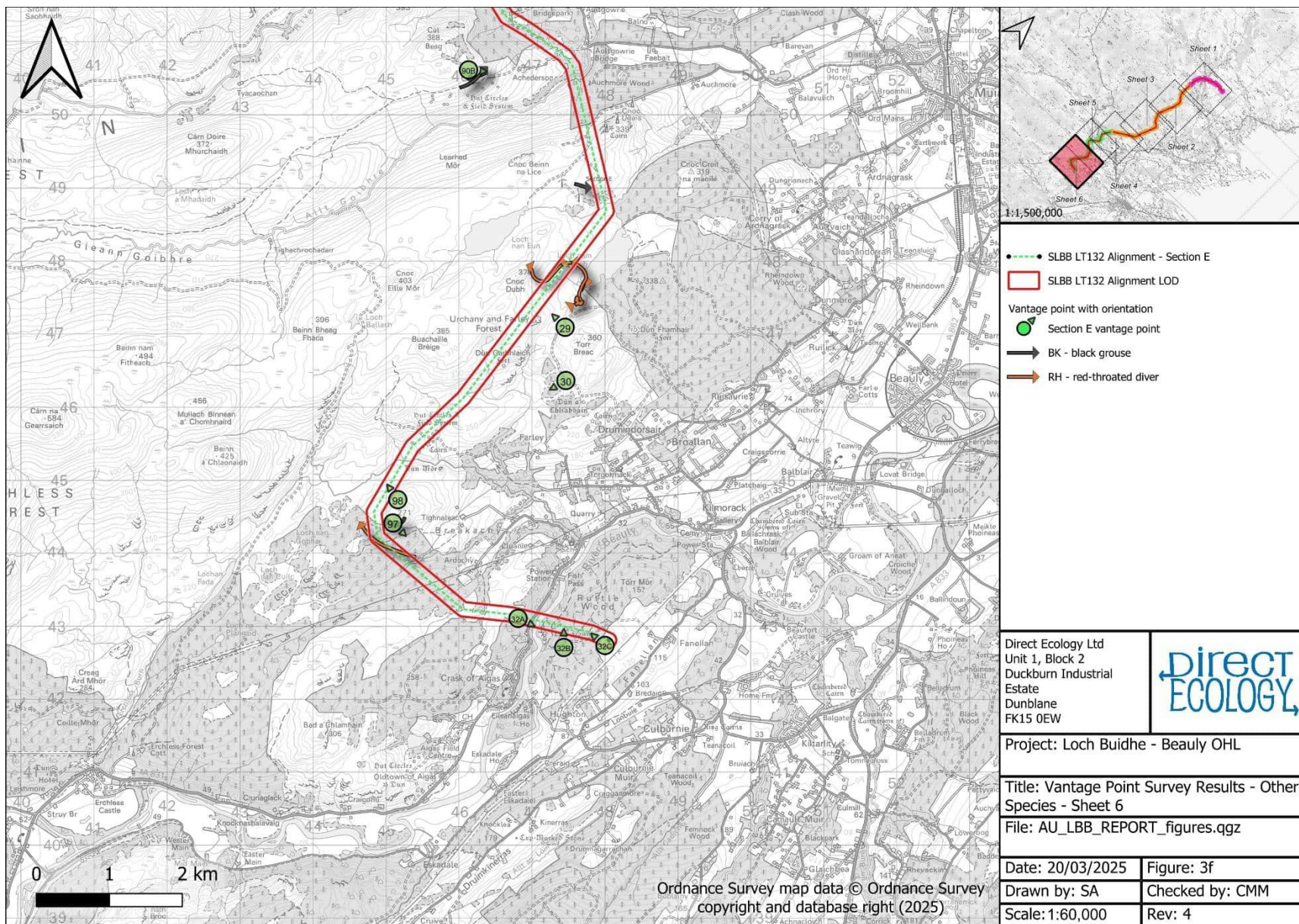


Figure 3f: Vantage Point Survey Results - Other Species – Sheet 6

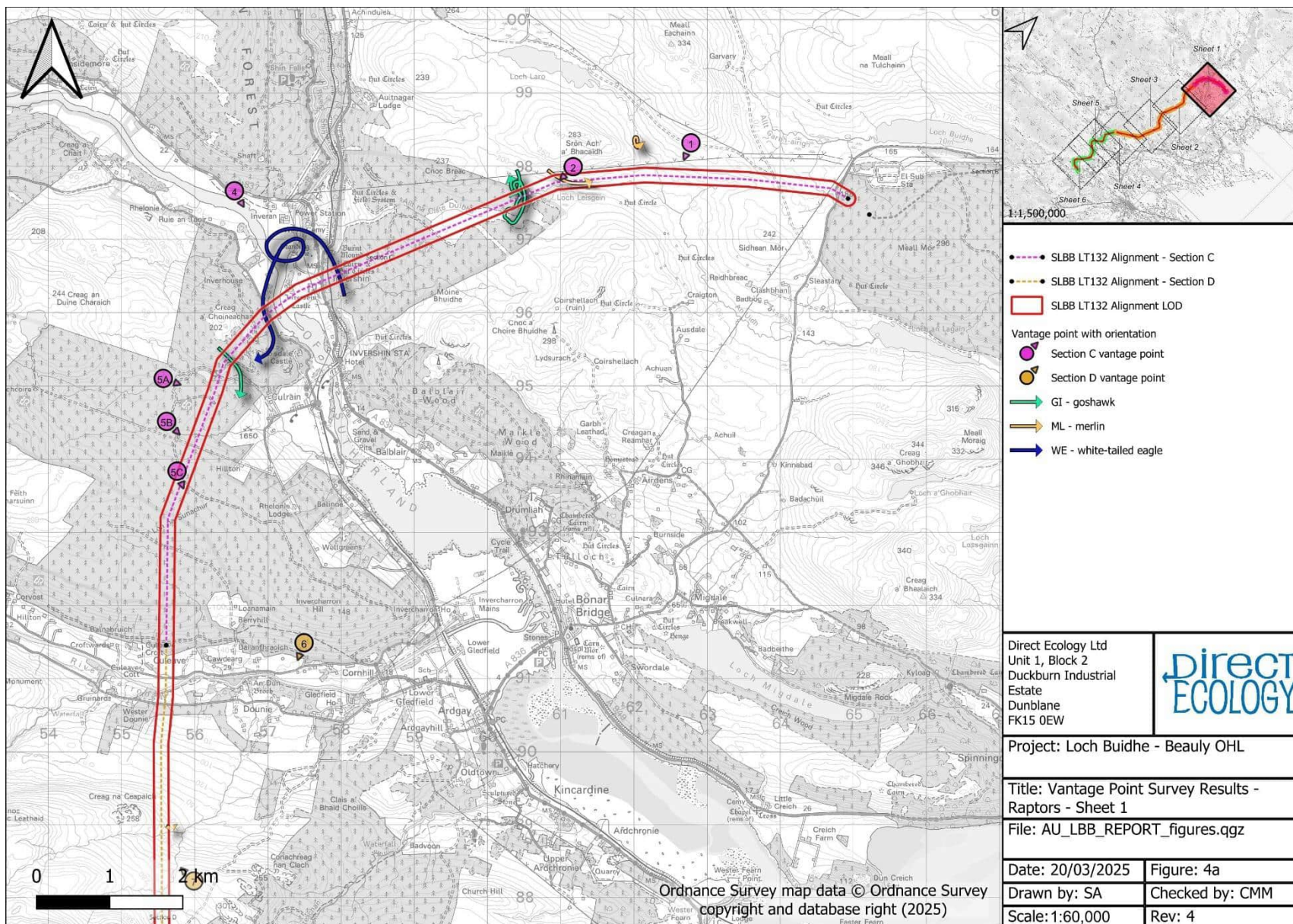


Figure 4a: Vantage Point Survey Results – Raptors – Sheet 1

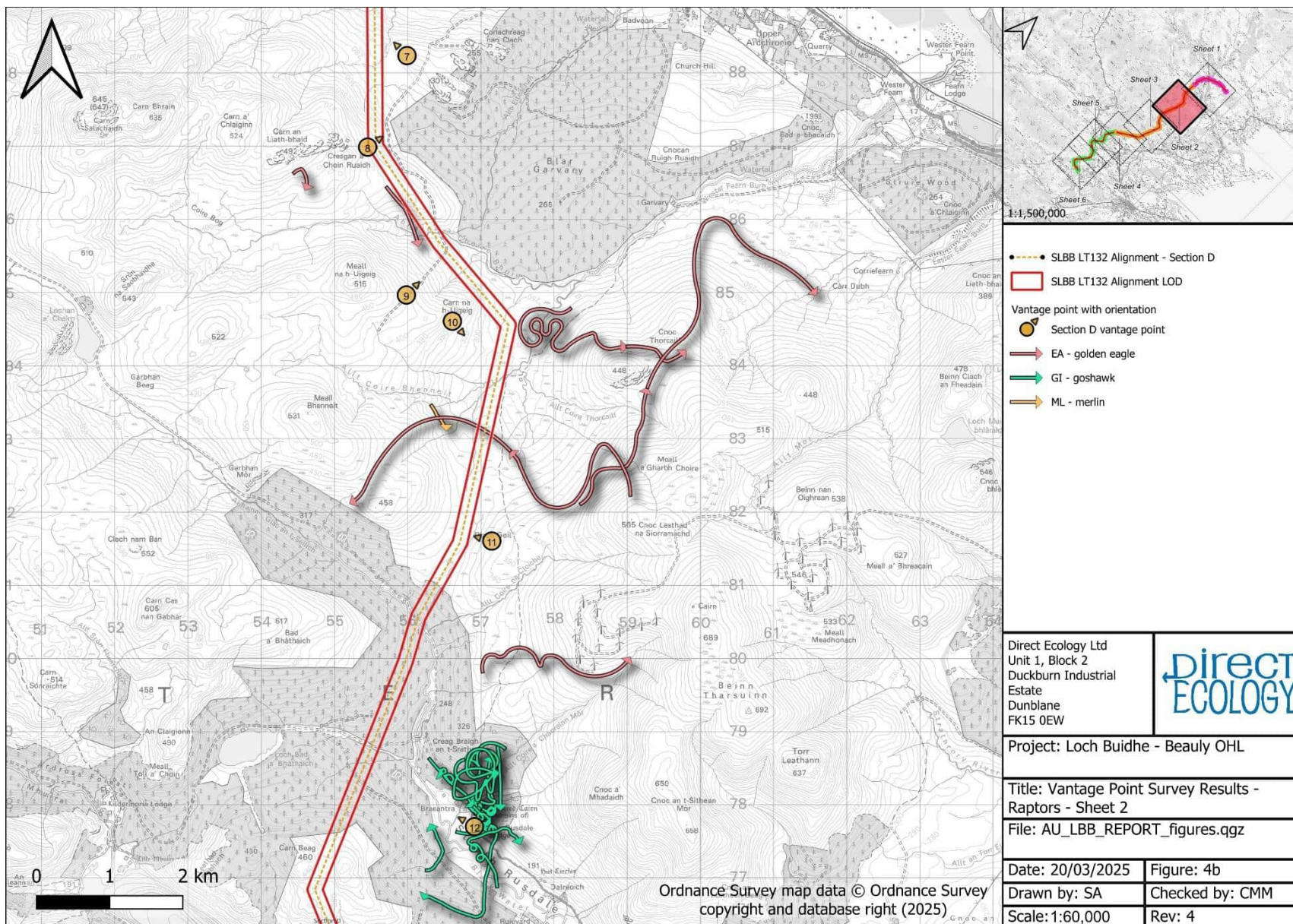


Figure 4b: Vantage Point Survey Results – Raptors – Sheet 2

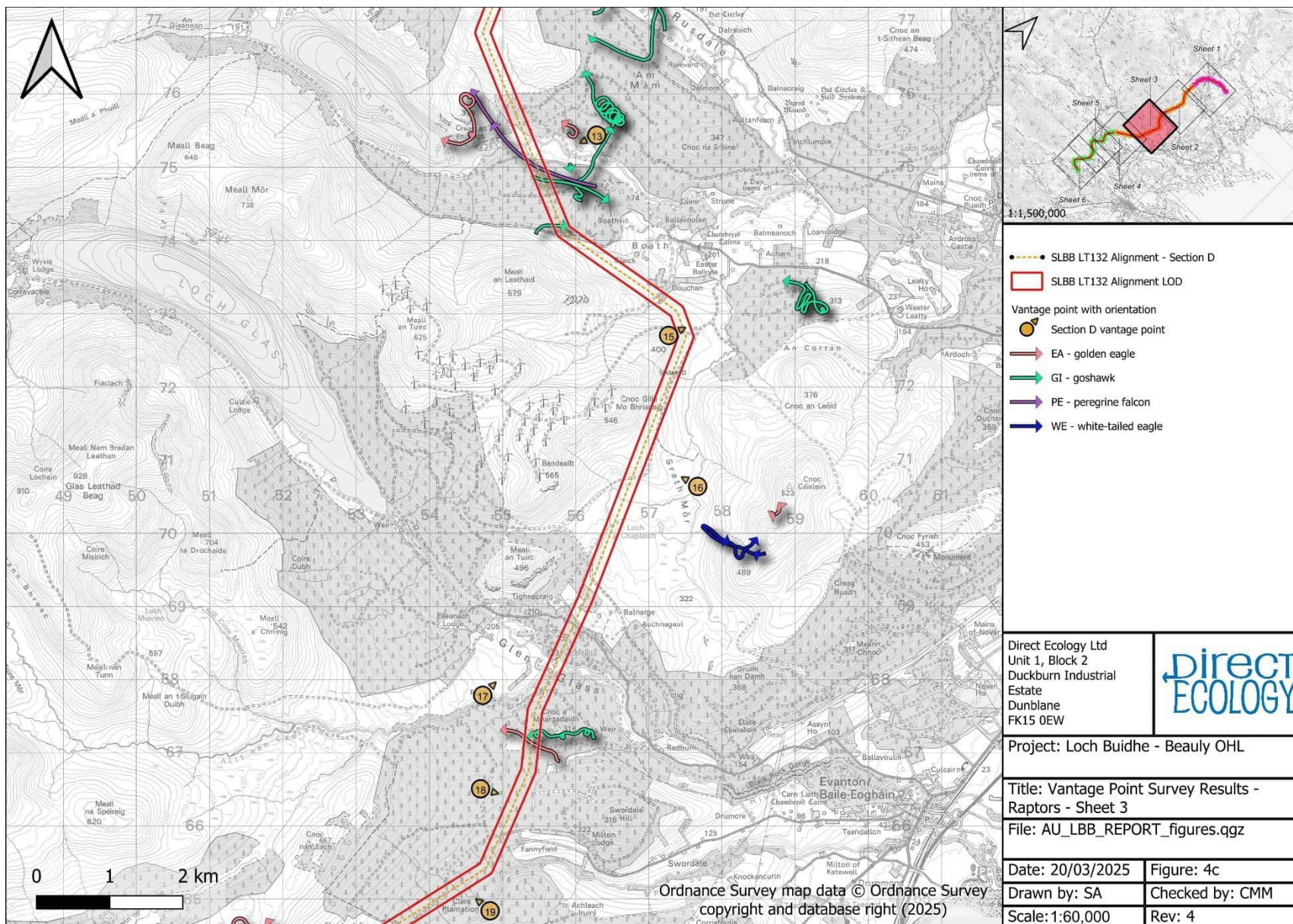


Figure 4c: Vantage Point Survey Results – Raptors – Sheet 3