

VSAS Survey Report: October 2021

Summary

After a year-long hiatus, Volunteer Seabirds at Sea (VSAS) survey teams returned to the west coast of Scotland this month. Surveys were carried out from the decks of the Kennacraig to Islay and the Ardrossan to Brodick crossings. Data were collected to European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) standards, by trained volunteers, using the JNCC VSAS app to digitally capture data in real time.

Environmental conditions were challenging for both surveys, and those experienced on the Arran survey were unsuitable for collecting high quality data, so observations from that survey are not shown here. The first leg of the Kennacraig to Islay route was used as a refresher so only the return survey is shown below, however it's worth noting that a white-tailed eagle was spotted towards the mouth of West Loch Tarbert during the refresher survey.

Routes

Kennacraig to Islay, 9th October 2021

A total of 99 observations were made of 12 seabird species (and three 'species groups' where identification could not be made to species level) during dedicated survey effort. No marine mammals were observed. Numbers of observations and total numbers of birds recorded are presented below (Table 1).

| Species | Number of observations | Total birds observed |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Black guillemot | 1 | 1 |
| Guillemot | 12 | 32 |
| Razorbill | 1 | 1 |
| Guillemot/razorbill | 4 | 8 |
| Gannet | 11 | 28 |
| Shag | 5 | 5 |
| Kittiwake | 31 | 52 |
| Common gull | 15 | 17 |
| Common gull/kittiwake | 1 | 1 |
| Great black-backed gull | 1 | 1 |
| Herring gull | 14 | 19 |
| Large gull sp. | 1 | 1 |
| Eider | 1 | 5 |
| Great northern diver | 1 | 1 |
| Red-breasted merganser | 1 | 1 |

Table 1. Numbers of observations and totals recorded per species

Distribution maps

Figures 1 to 5 show the distributions of all seabird species recorded during the survey.

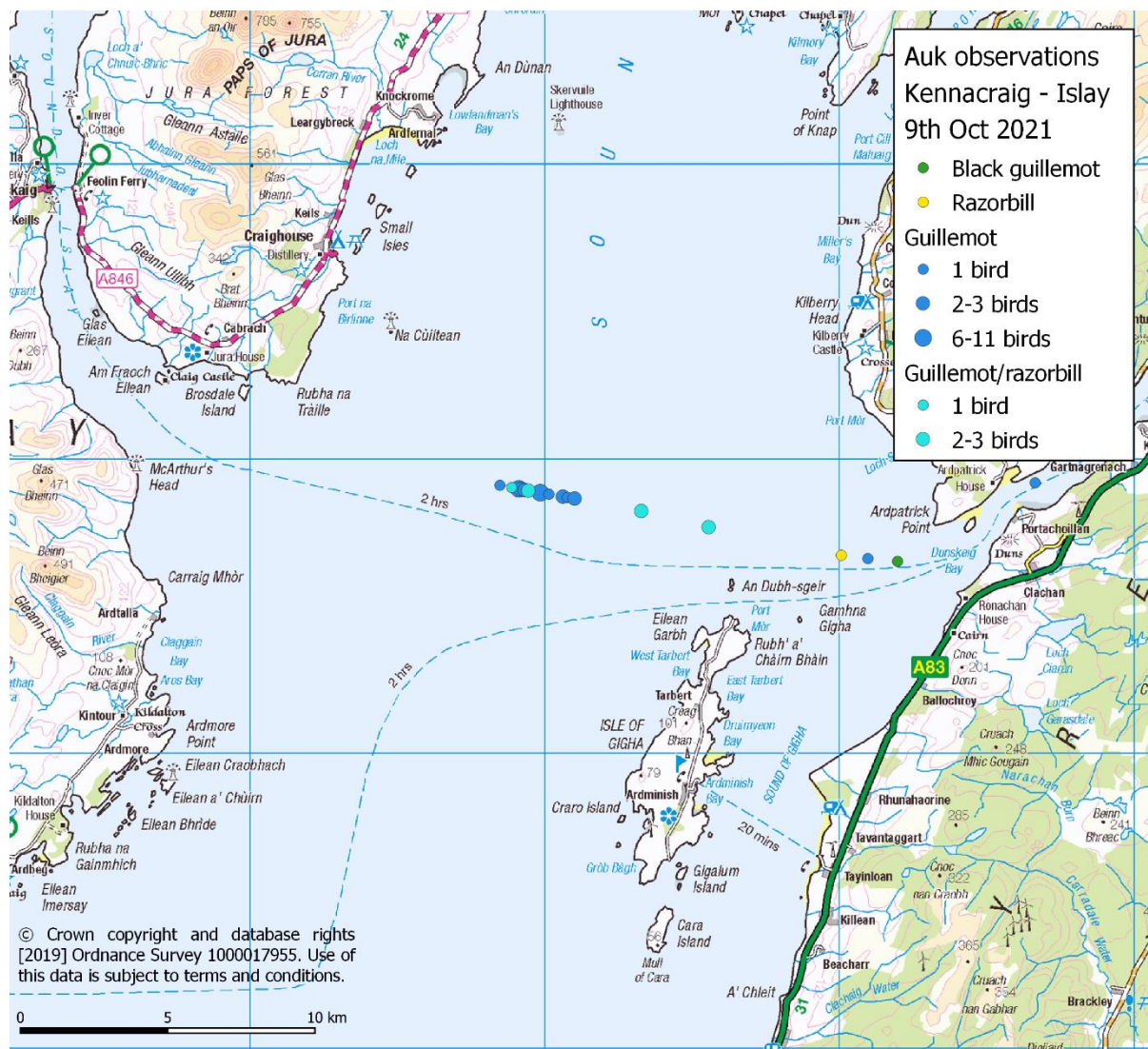


Fig 1. Auk observations recorded during the Kennacraig-Islay survey, 9th October 2021

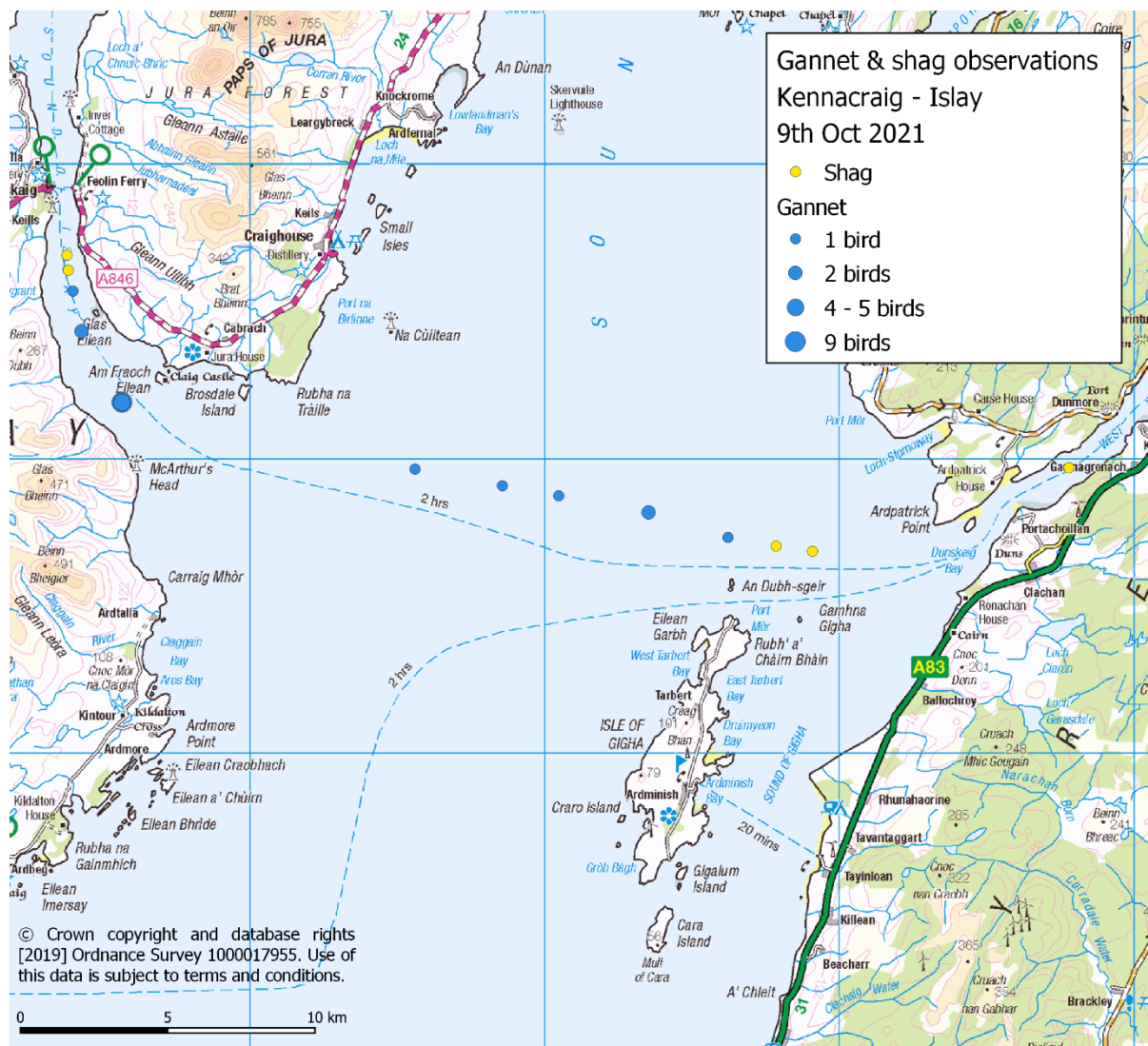


Fig 2. Gannet & shag observations recorded during the Kennacraig-Islay survey, 9th October 2021

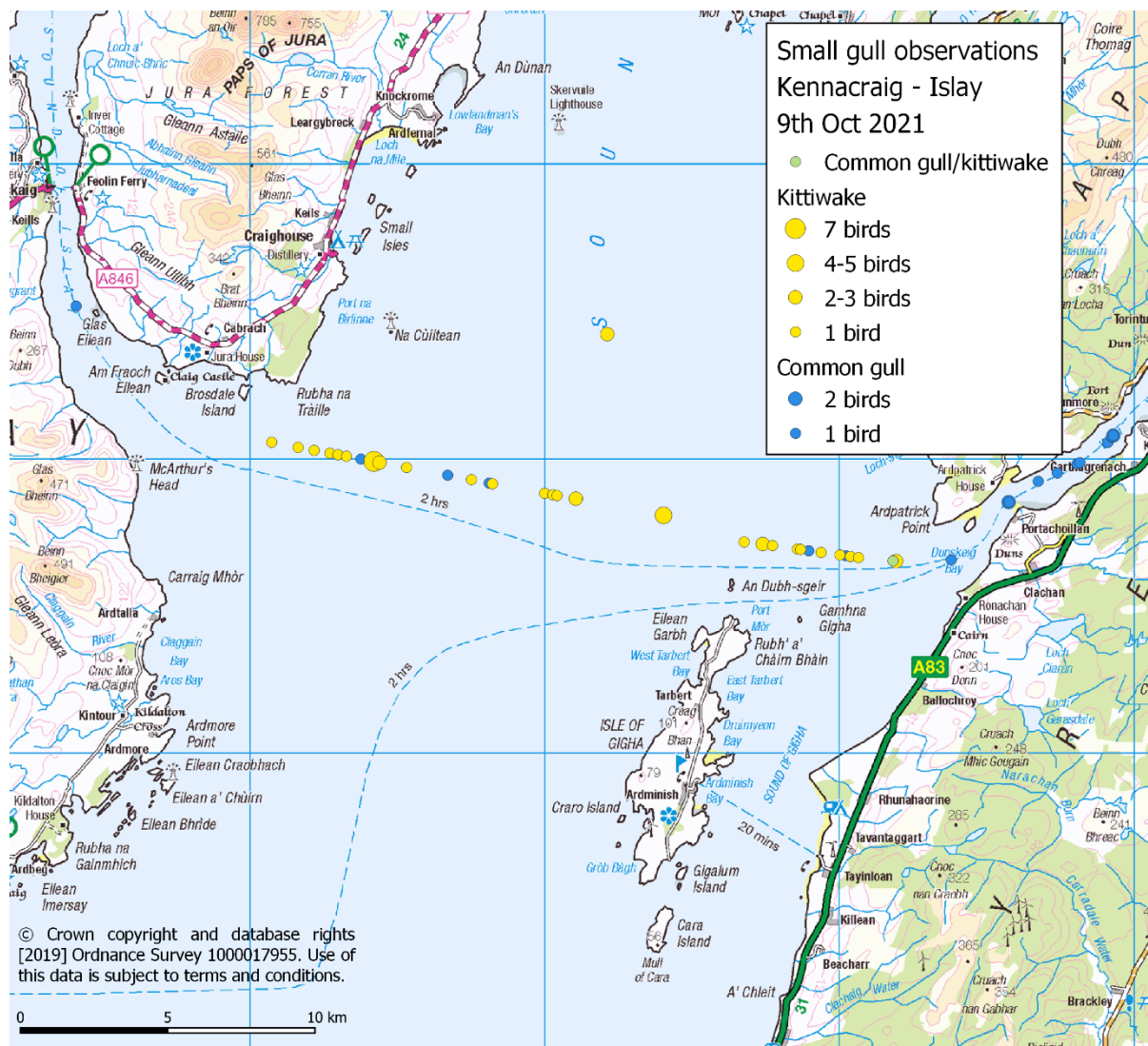


Fig 3. Small gull observations recorded during the Kennacraig-Islay survey, 9th October 2021

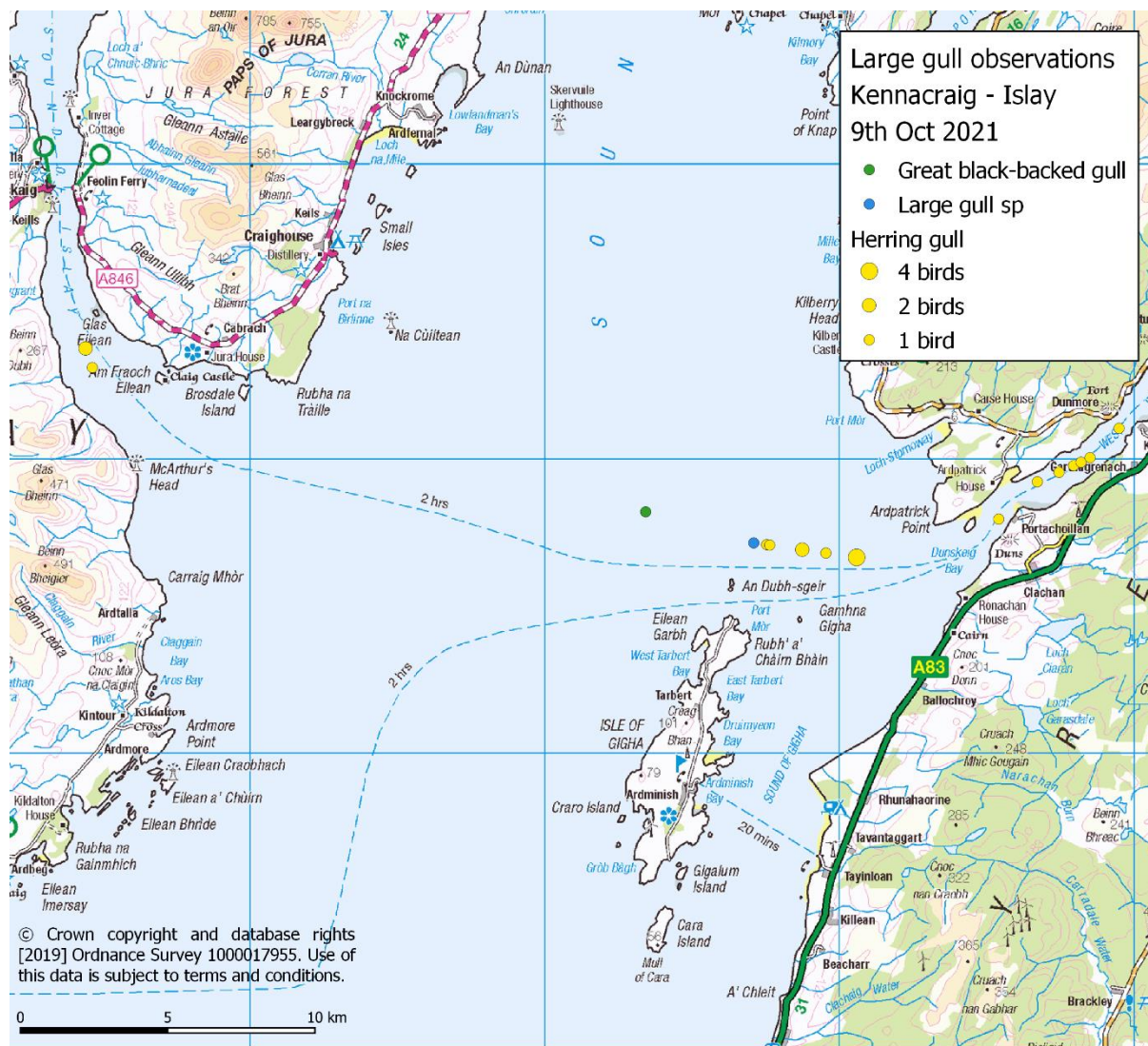


Fig 4. Large gull observations recorded during the Kennacraig-Islay survey, 9th October 2021

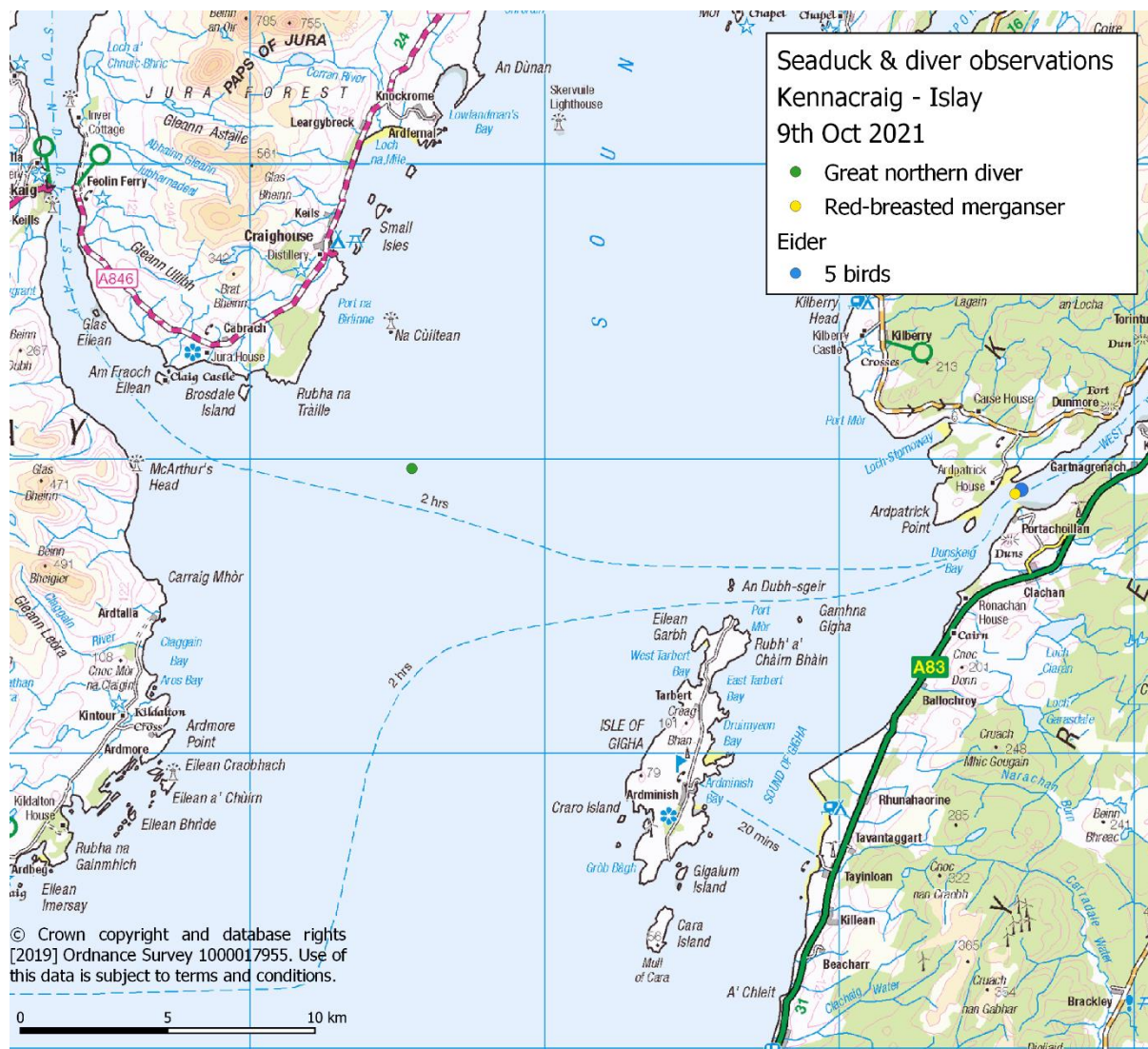


Fig 5. Seaduck & diver observations recorded during the Kennacraig-Islay survey, 9th October 2021

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the volunteers who gave up their time to take part in this month's surveys – we hope this report serves as a useful reminder of your time on board! We would also like to thank the Captain and crew of the ferries for welcoming the survey teams on board, and Klare Chamberlain and Ruth Rice at CalMac who helped with access and other arrangements.