

VSAS Survey report: Kennacraig - Islay, May 11th 2019

Volunteer Seabirds At Sea (VSAS) surveys were carried out from the forward viewing platform of the Kennacraig to Islay ferry on a scheduled return crossing on May 2019. Data were collected to European Seabirds At Sea (ESAS) standard, by trained volunteers, using the JNCC VSAS app to digitally record data in real time.

Environmental conditions were excellent for surveying, with visibility recorded as excellent throughout. All observations were made in seastate two and Beaufort wind force three. Swell heights were generally below one metre.

A total of 73 observations were made of 10 species of seabirds (and a further four 'species groups' where identification could not be made to species level) during the dedicated survey effort. One species of marine mammals was observed. Numbers of observations and total numbers of birds and mammals recorded are presented below in Table 1.

| Species | Number of observations | Total birds observed |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Common gull | 6 | 7 |
| Common tern | 1 | 2 |
| Fulmar | 1 | 1 |
| Gannet | 24 | 31 |
| Great black-backed gull | 1 | 1 |
| Great northern diver | 3 | 3 |
| Guillemot | 12 | 14 |
| Herring gull | 7 | 8 |
| Kittiwake | 4 | 9 |
| Razorbill | 1 | 1 |
| | | |
| Auk spp | 1 | 1 |
| Guillemot/Razorbill | 7 | 31 |
| Cormorant/shag | 1 | 1 |
| Large gull spp | 2 | 2 |
| Tern spp | 1 | 1 |
| | | |
| Bottlenose dolphin | 1 | 1 |

Table 1. Numbers of observations and totals recorded per species

Species accounts

See figures 1 - 5 for maps of observations

Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

A single fulmar was observed to the north of Gigha. This species was not recorded at all during the April survey of this area.

Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)

The most frequently encountered, and most numerous species on what was a very quiet survey. There were 24 observations comprising 31 birds, with almost all records coming from eastern or mid-channel areas.

Great northern diver (*Gavia immer*)

Three observations totalling three birds, all from the western end of West Loch Tarbert, a favoured area for this species.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Four observations comprising nine individual birds presents a similar return to the April survey. All records were from the more open water areas, mid-channel.

Common gull (*larus canus*)

Six records of 7 individuals of a species that was not recorded at all during the previous month's survey. Almost all records were from the more enclosed areas of West Loch Tarbert and the Sound of Jura.

Great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*)

Just a single individual was observed, mid-channel.

Herring gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Seven observations that comprised eight individuals, the the majority of birds observed in west Loch Tarbert.

Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Two common terns were observed at the west end of West Loch Tarbert. An unidentified tern spp was also observed further up the loch.

Guillemot (*Uria aalge*)

Twelve records of 14 individuals, with all records from the more open water areas mid-channel. 31 birds identified as either guillemot or razorbill were also observed in this area.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*)

Just a single individual noted, mid-channel.

Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)

One animal seen at the south end of the Sound of Jura.

Distribution maps

Figures 1 - 5 show the distributions of all seabird and marine mammal species recorded during the survey.

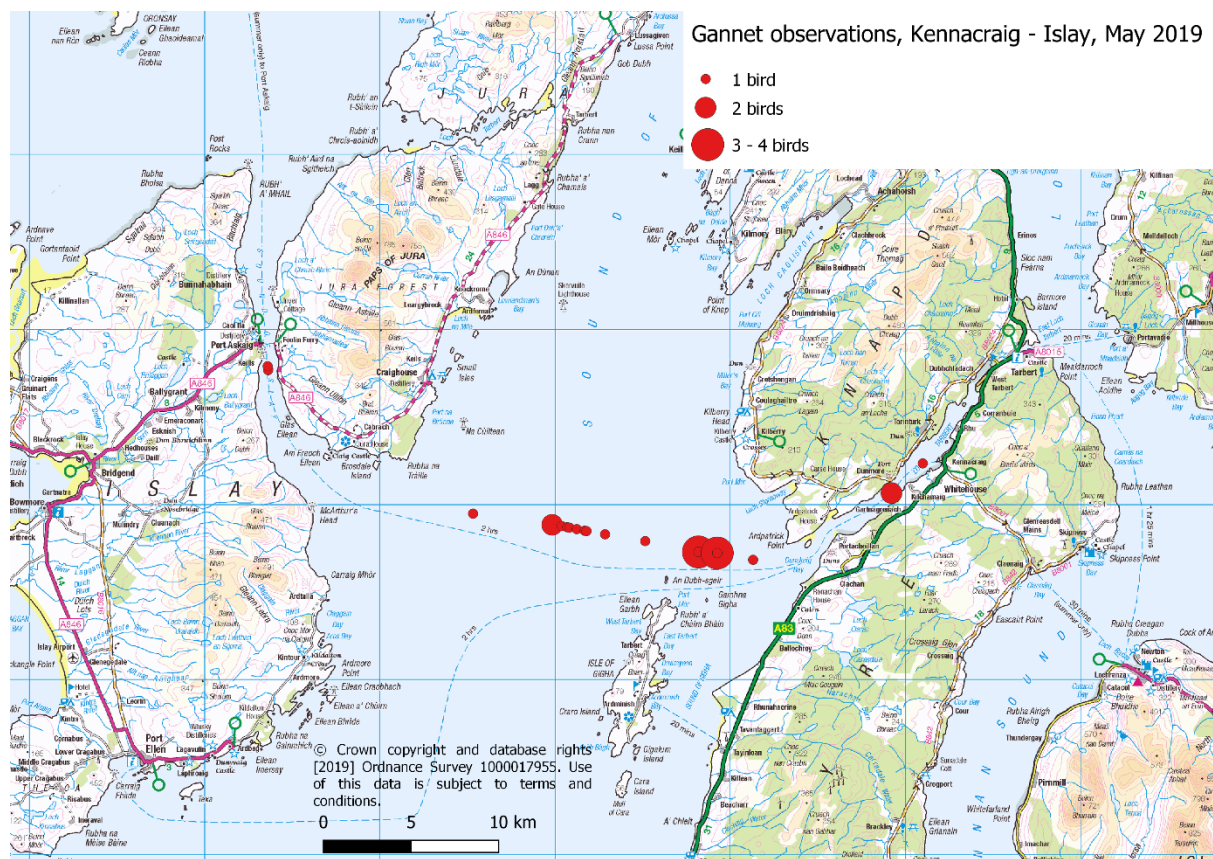


Figure 1. Gannet observations during Kennacraig - Islay survey, May 11th, 2019

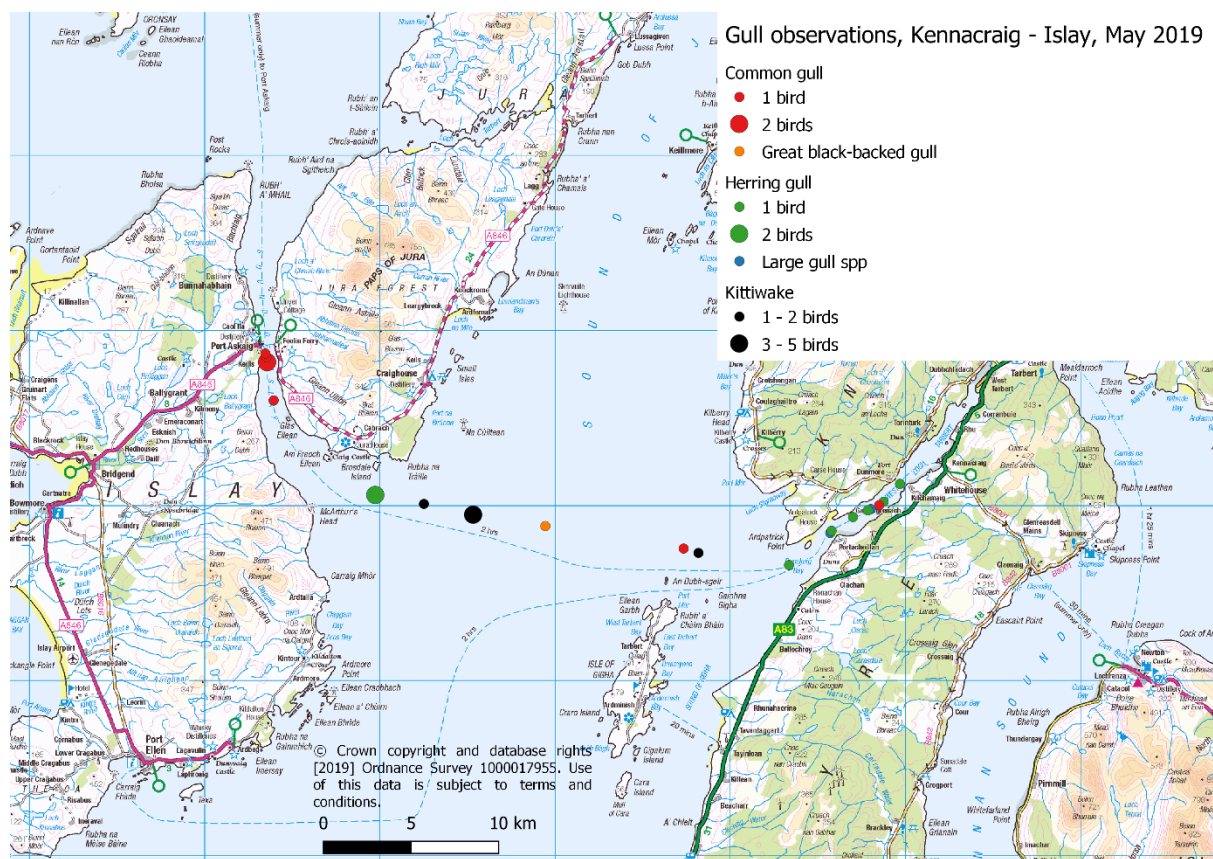


Figure 2. Gull observations during Kennacraig - Islay survey, May 11th, 2019

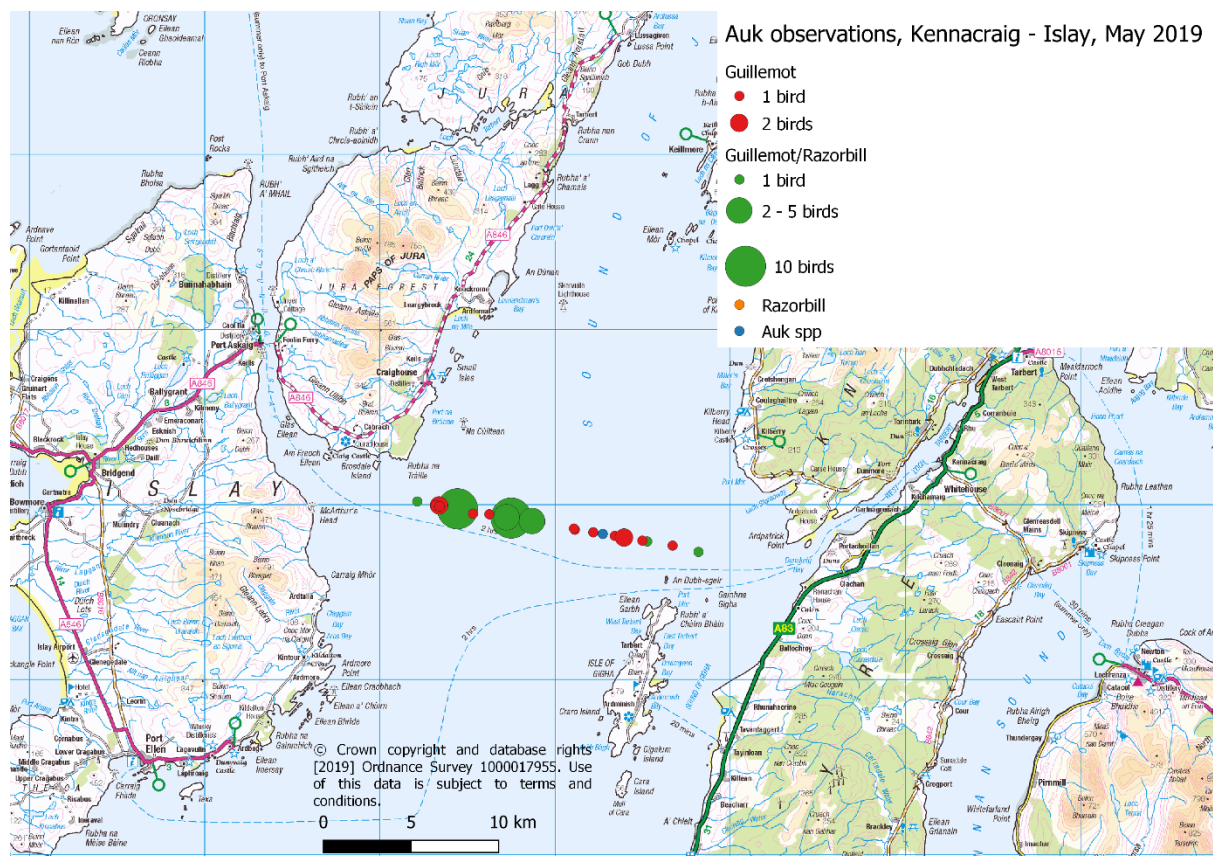


Figure 3. Auk observations during Kennacraig - Islay survey, May 11thth, 2019

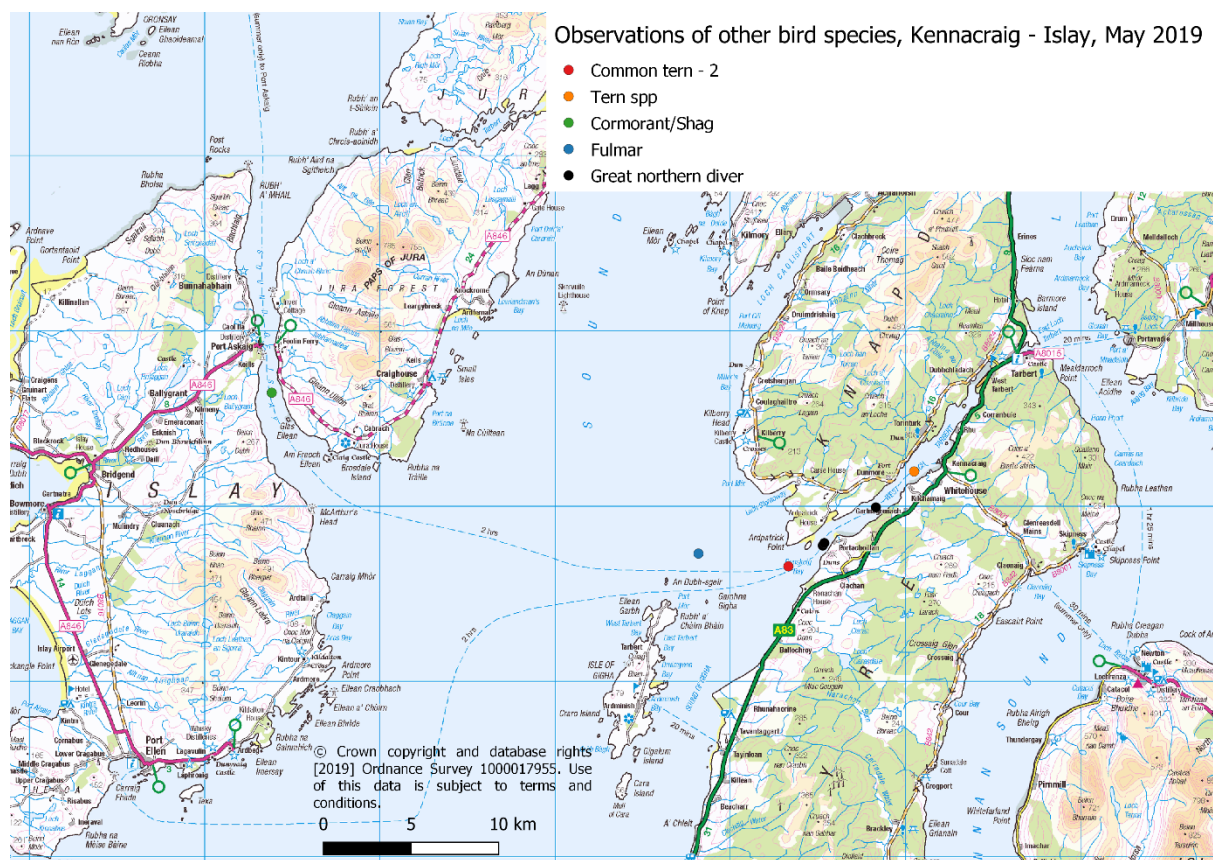


Figure 4. Observations of other bird species during Kennacraig - Islay survey, May 11thth, 2019



Figure 5. Bottlenose dolphin observations during Kennacraig - Islay survey, May 11thth, 2019

Acknowledgements

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