

VSAS Survey report: Kennacraig - Islay, September 14th 2019

Volunteer Seabirds At Sea (VSAS) surveys were carried out from the forward viewing platform of the Kennacraig to Islay ferry on scheduled return crossings on 14th September 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 suitable for surveying, with visibility recorded as good to excellent throughout. Beaufort wind force was recorded between three and five, and seastate ranged between two and four, with swell heights were generally below one metre.

A total of 94 observations were made of eight species of seabirds (and four 'species groups' where identification could not be made to species level) during the dedicated survey effort. One species of marine mammal 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 |
|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Eider | 2 | 2 |
| Gannet | 43 | 62 |
| Guillemot | 2 | 2 |
| Kittiwake | 10 | 31 |
| Manx Shearwater | 14 | 29 |
| Razorbill | 2 | 11 |
| Red-throated diver | 1 | 1 |
| Shag | 9 | 9 |
| | | |
| GU/RA | 6 | 8 |
| Large gull spp | 1 | 1 |
| small gull spp | 1 | 1 |
| gull spp | 3 | 9 |
| | | |
| Seal spp | 2 | 2 |

Table 1. Numbers of observations and totals recorded per species

Species accounts

See figures 1 - 5 for maps of observations

Eider (*Somateria molissima*)

Two birds were seen at the mouth of West Loch Tarbert. Both were males.

Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)

The most numerous species recorded, with 43 observations comprising 62 individuals. Many were seen mid-channel, and there were also high densities at the south end of the Sound of Jura.

Manx shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*)

14 groups were observed, totalling 29 individuals. All were recorded from areas of more open water mid channel.

Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)

Nine individuals were observed, with records coming from the mouth of West Loch Tarbert, and the south end of the Sound of Jura

Red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*)

A single bird was observed at the mouth of West Loch Tarbert.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

The most numerous gull observed, with 31 birds noted from 10 records. Most observations were made in waters south of Jura.

Guillemot (*Uria aalge*)

Surprisingly, just two individuals were noted. Both observations came from waters south of Jura.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*)

Just two records – one of a single bird and one of a group of ten. The group of ten was recorded mid channel, and the single bird was in the area preferred by other auks and kittiwakes, south of Jura

Distribution maps

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

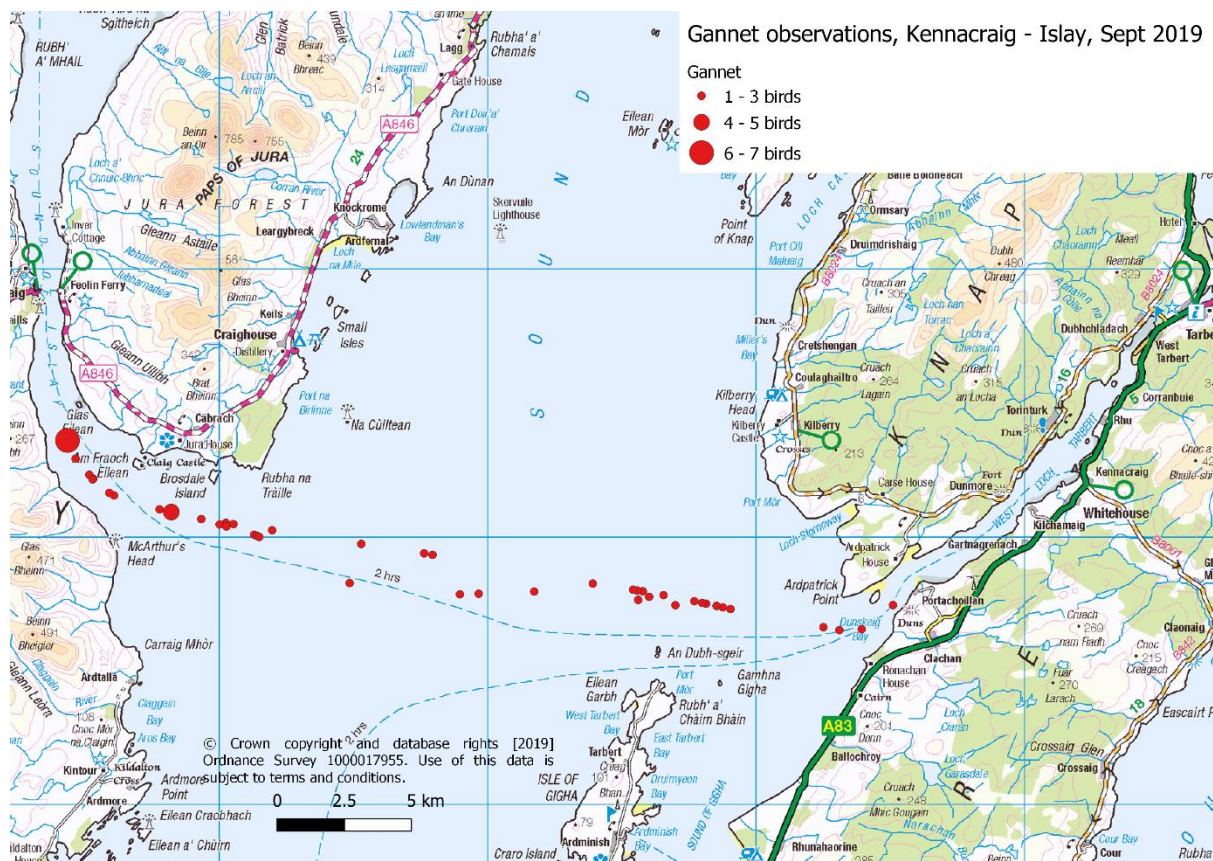


Figure 1. Observations of gannet, Kennacraig - Islay , September 14th, 2019.

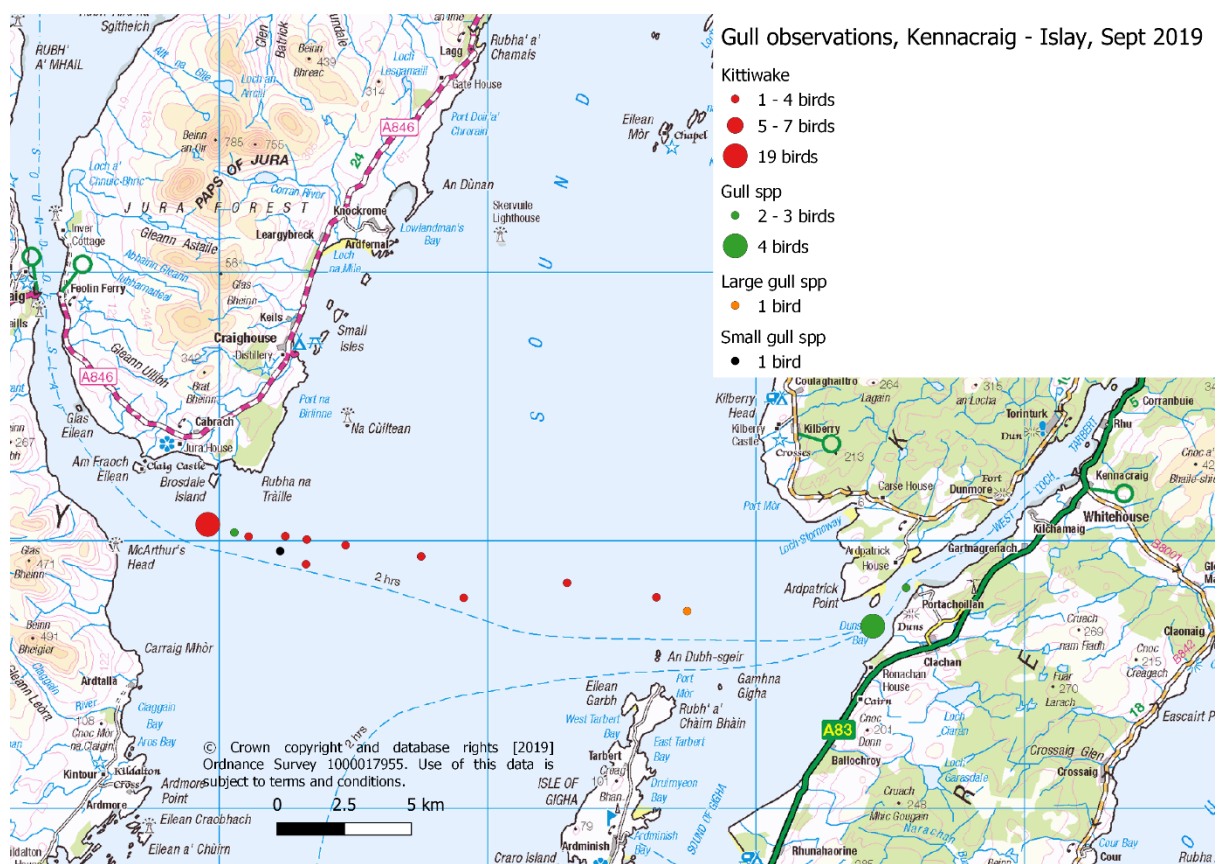


Figure 2. Observations of gulls, Kennacraig - Islay, September 14th, 2019.

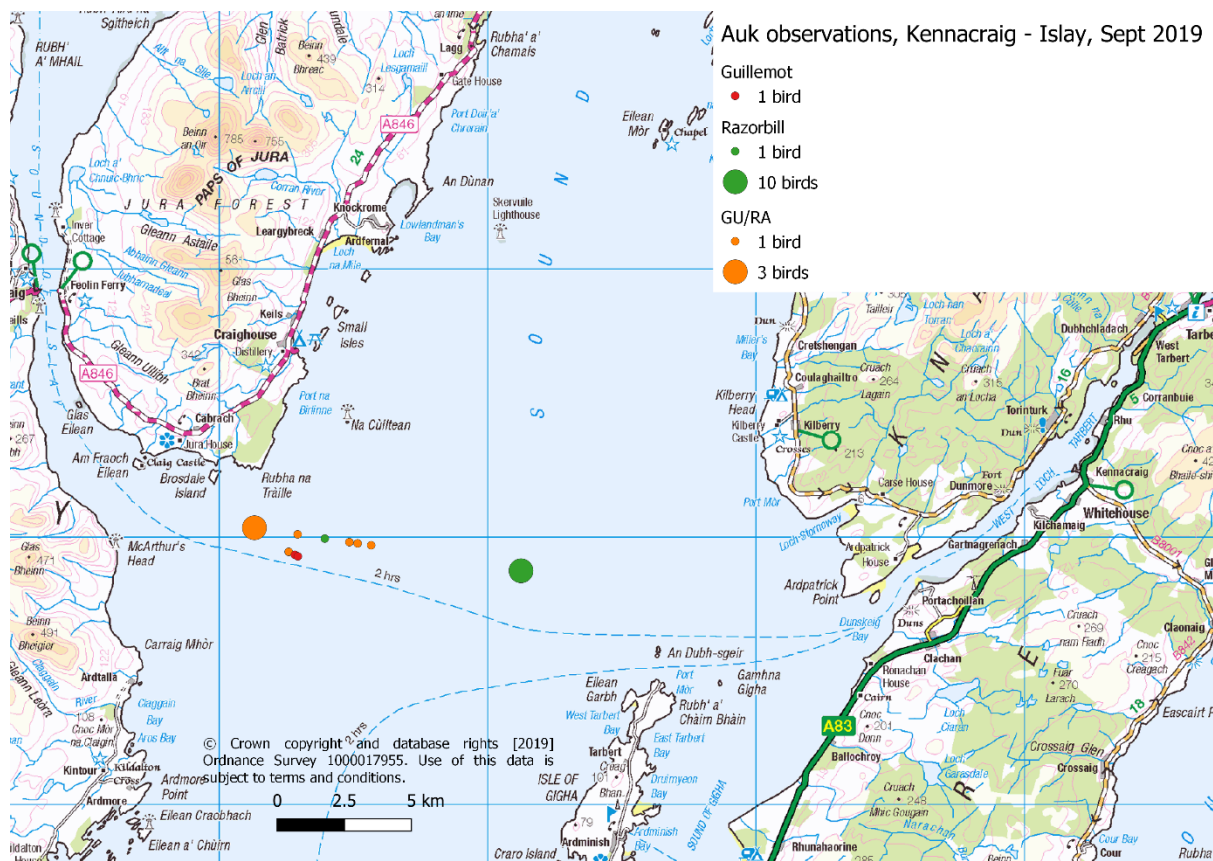


Figure 3. Observations of auks, Kennacraig – Islay, September 14th, 2019.

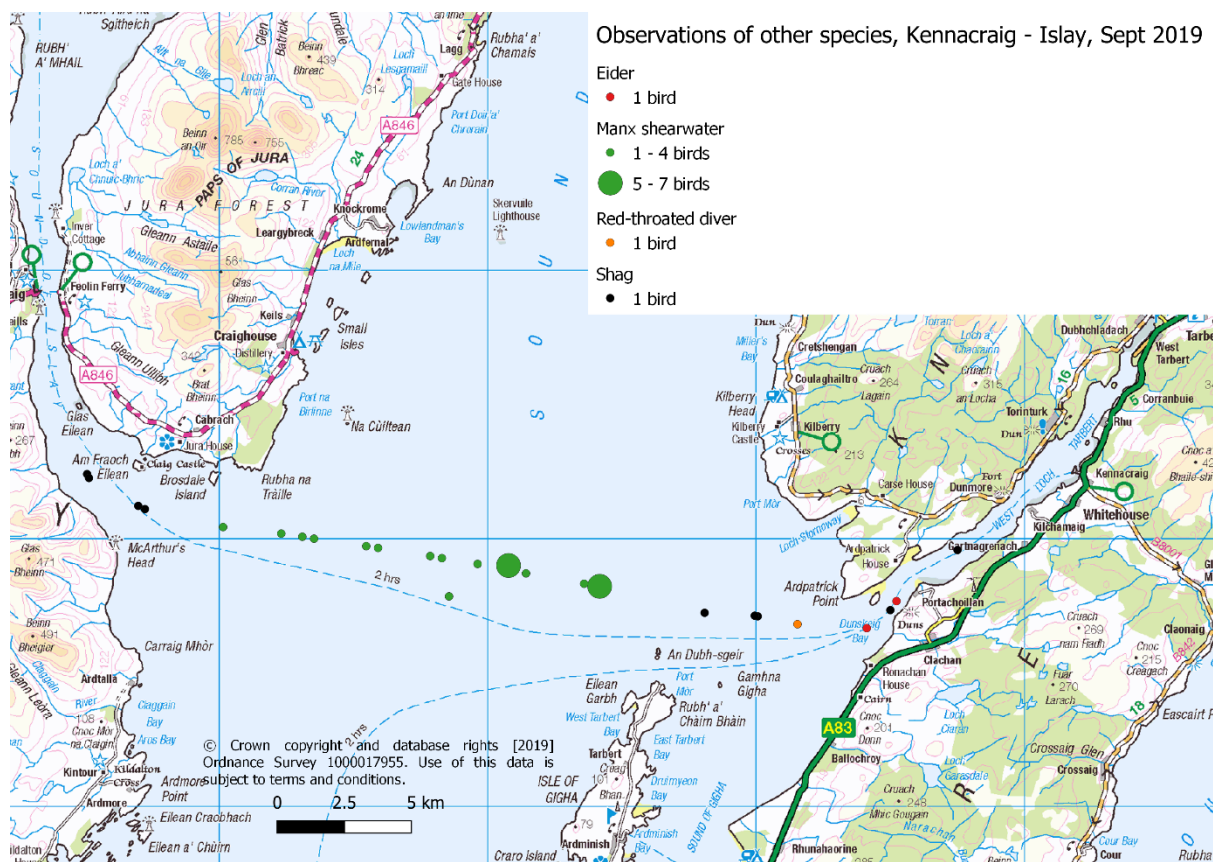


Figure 4. Observations of other seabirds, Kennacraig - Islay , September 14th, 2019.



Figure 5. Observations of unidentified seal spp, Kennacraig - Islay , September 14th, 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.