

Small Isles

Marine Protected Area

A fan mussel in a bed of horse mussels © Paul Kay

The only known aggregation
of fan mussels in the UK

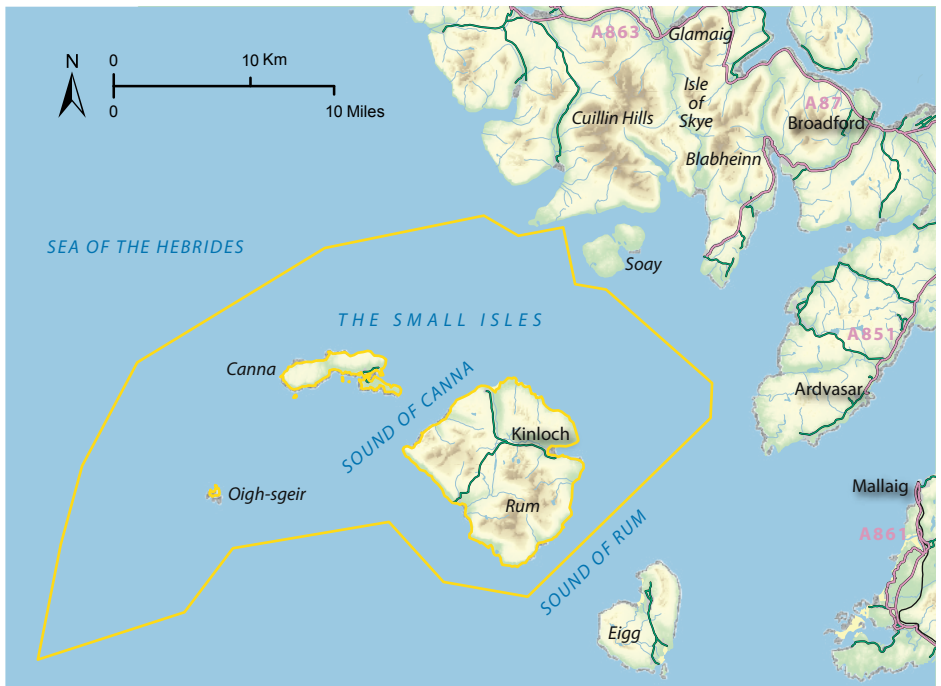
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Marine Protected Area

Home to the only known aggregation of fan mussels in UK waters, Small Isles Marine Protected Area (MPA) encompasses waters around the islands of Canna and Rum off the west coast of Scotland.



The fan mussel is one of the UK's most threatened molluscs. It grows to between 30-48 cm in length and as the name suggests is a narrow fan shape. It lives with the pointed end buried in mixed muddy sands, with only the straight lips of the shell exposed at the sea bed so the animal can filter the water for food. It was believed that only occasional individuals survived around the coast of Scotland until the discovery in 2009 of a large aggregation in the deep, tide-swept waters between Rum and Canna.



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Location: 57° 01.435' N 006° 30.456' W

Area: 803 km²



Northern sea fans with sponges, cup corals and dead man's fingers

Protected Features & Conservation Objectives

Biodiversity: black guillemot; burrowed mud; circalittoral sand and mud communities; fan mussel aggregations; horse mussel beds; northern feather star aggregations on mixed substrata; northern sea fan and sponge communities; shelf deeps; white cluster anemones.

Geodiversity: Quaternary of Scotland.

The aim is to **conserve these features** in order to make a long lasting contribution to the MPA network.

Small Isles MPA overlaps the Rum, and Canna and Sanday Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated in part for their breeding seabirds. The waters of the MPA are used by a large breeding colony of black guillemots (more than 1,200 individuals).

The topography of the sea bed within the MPA is complex. A large U-shaped valley or shelf deep formed by a glacier during the last ice age extends from the Sound of Canna north towards Skye. The near vertical sides of this shelf deep support a diverse fauna including northern sea fans, dead man's fingers, white cluster anemones and sponges. The flat sea bed at the base of the underwater cliffs is covered in mixed muddy sediments with scattered phosphorescent seapens and the burrow entrances of Norway lobsters. As well as the large aggregation of fan mussels, the central section of the Sound of Canna supports the deepest known horse mussel bed in Scotland at depths of between 160-250 m.

Dense fields of the northern feather star occur at a number of locations within the Sound of Canna, to the south-east of Oigh-sgeir and to the north of the channel between the Small Isles and Skye. The northern feather stars extend their spikey striped arms up into the ocean currents creating a brightly coloured bristling carpet on the muddy sea floor.

Further Information

Further information on Nature Conservation MPAs, the wider network and protected areas management is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork

For Nature Conservation MPA site documents and more on the fascinating range of marine life to be found in Scotland's seas, please visit

www.snh.gov.uk/mpas - for territorial waters

www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/scottishmpas - for offshore waters



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 **JNCC**
Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Yarrell's blenny with white cluster anemones



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