

Farallon Islands Monthly Report

Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge

September 2018

James Tietz

jtietz@pointblue.org

**Point Blue Conservation Science –**Point Blue advances conservation of birds, other wildlife and ecosystems through science, partnerships and outreach. Our highest priority is to reduce the impacts of habitat loss, climate change, and other environmental threats while promoting nature-based solutions for wildlife and people, on land and at sea. Visit Point Blue on the web [www.pointblue.org](http://www.pointblue.org).

**Island Visitors**

**Point Blue crew**: Sophie Bennett, Preston Duncan, Rae Engert, John Garrett, Sarah Hecocks, Dan Maxwell, Kurt Ongman, Katherine Snell, Amanda Spears, Jim Tietz, and Pete Warzybok.

September 1: **“French Kiss”** (skipper Harmon Shragge) conducted a resupply. Three crew toured the island and departed with Sophie Bennett and Katherine Snell.

September 19: **“Valkyrie”** (skipper Jamis MacNiven) brought out Sophie Guarasci (The Marine Mammal Center, Sausalito, CA), Tony Orr (Marine Mammal Lab, Seattle, WA), and Pete Warzybok (Point Blue). Four crew toured the island and departed.

September 22: **“Salty Lady”** (skipper Geoff Knight) brought out Charles Whitefield and his assistant, Jose Leyva. The **“Cordelia”** (skipper Alan Weaver) crew of three people toured the island and departed with Garrett, Guarasci, Orr, and Warzybok. **“U.S. Coast Guard”** helicopter landed on Helo Pad to drop off generator.

September 29: **“Hokahey”** (skipper Jan Passion) conducted a resupply. Four of the crew toured the island.

**West End Island Visitors**

September 14: Jim Tietz and Amanda Spears conducted fur seal resights

September 20: Tony Orr (Marine Mammal Lab) and Sophie Guarasci (Marine Mammal Center) visited the island with John Garrett, Sarah Hecocks, Dan Maxwell, Jim Tietz, and Pete Warzybok to tag fur seal pups.

September 21: Tony Orr (Marine Mammal Lab) and Sophie Guarasci (Marine Mammal Center) visited the island with Rae Engert, Kurt Ongman, Jim Tietz, and Pete Warzybok to tag fur seal pups.

**Weather/Ocean**

The wind this month was blowing west to northwest for 72% of the weather observations, with a few days of southerly winds at the beginning and end of the month. Skies averaged 63% overcast and fog was recorded on 20% of weather observations. No precipitation was recorded. Mean midday air temperature was 15.4° C, with a standard deviation of 1.25° C. The highest air temperature was 18.5° C recorded on the 30th, the lowest was 11.5° C recorded at 0600 hours on the 24th. Mean sea surface temperature was 13.41° C, with a standard deviation of 0.93° C, a high of 16.27° C on the 30th, and a low of 12.34° C on the 20th. Mean SST was approximately 0.78° C lower than the long-term mean for this month, and 2.06° C lower than last September.

**Oiled & Entangled Wildlife**

On the 22nd, one Cassin’s Auklet near East Landing was 25% covered with brown oil that was concentrated on the breast and flanks.

Eight adult and immature California sea lions were seen with monofilament line or nylon rope embedded in their neck, face, or chest.

**Breeding Birds**

**Storm-Petrels** – At the beginning of the month, 41 sites had active Ashy nests and 1 had an active Leach’s nest. One new Ashy nest site was added on the 23rd by tracking the begging calls of the chick. The Leach’s nest fledged on the 1st. By the end of the month, 5 Ashy nests had confirmed fledges and 26 were still being monitored. The chicks from the remaining nests disappeared prior to fledging.

**Brandt’s Cormorant** – Large numbers of mostly feathered to fully feathered chicks were observed at the end of the month creching along the shoreline below their respective breeding colonies. Independent fledglings and adults roosted daily on islets and West End. On the 9th, 53 regurgitated pellets were collected from the Cross-Channel Colony and 52 from the Corm Blind Hill Colony for diet analysis.

**Pelagic Cormorant** – The final monitored nest fledged on the 29th. Adults and fledglings were observed roosting daily on cliffs around the island.

**Double-crested Cormorant** – Several chicks continued being fed in the Maintop colony during the first half of the month, but all had dispersed by the end of the month.

**Western Gull** – Several late chicks continued to be fed by parents through mid-month, but all chicks fledged or were abandoned by the end of the month. Most adults were no longer attending breeding territories and were concentrated in roosting flocks on the Marine Terrace, Shell Beach, and Aulon Peninsula.

**California Gulls** – A few adults were observed daily in afternoon roosting flocks. Individuals from colonies elsewhere have been observed daily in roosting flocks on the island and in the surrounding waters.

**Common Murre** – Very few murres were seen around the island this month. Most were observed flying by during sea watch.

**Pigeon Guillemot** – The final chicks fledged from followed sites by the 9th. Many fledglings were observed in the water around the island.

**Rhinoceros Auklet** – A few were being seen in the water around the island on a daily basis.

**Tufted Puffin** – Large numbers were observed around the island during the first half of the month, but very few were seen subsequently.

**Cassin’s Auklet** –The final chick from the Known-age study fledged on the 22nd. At the end of the month, adults began returning to the island at night to vocalize.

**Black Oystercatchers** – Most pairs were seen foraging along the intertidal, and several were seen tending to recently fledged juveniles.

**Pinnipeds**

**California Sea Lion***–* On average there were 4,422 (SD ± 1657) individuals counted during the weekly pinniped census from the lighthouse, with a high count of 6,311 individuals on the 6th. The high count for pups was 505.

**Steller Sea Lions** –On average there were 62 (SD ± 19) individuals counted, a high count of 73 on the 13th. The high count for pups was 14.

**Northern Elephant Seal –** Numbers of elephant seals gradually increased this month, with an average total count of 72 (SD ± 24) individuals counted. The

**Harbor Seal –** Harbor seal numbers were relatively low, reflecting high tide conditions during the weekly census. On average there were 34 (SD ± 32) individuals counted.

**Northern Fur Seals** – Fur seal numbers remained high during the month. The mean count was 950 (SD ± 231) individuals, with a high of 1092 on the 13th. The high count for pups was 285. On the 14th, a trip to West End counted 1,752 individuals, 611 of which were pups. We read 25 tags on this trip and saw 5 other tags that we were unable to read. All of the tagged animals seen on this trip were from San Miguel Island. On the 20th and 21st, Tony Orr (Marine Mammal Lab), Sophie Guarasci (Marine Mammal Center), and Point Blue personnel tagged 100 pups with blue All-flex tags. Typically, fur seals do not return to their natal colony until their 3rd or 4th year. They also resighted tagged individuals opportunistically and collected 25 scat samples for dietary analysis.

**Cetaceans**

**Standard Survey** – Eight one-hour standard whale watches were conducted this month from the Lighthouse using the Apple iPad and Spotter App. Poor visibility caused by a low cloud ceiling precluded standardized cetacean surveys on most days. Daily high counts from standard watches and incidental observations are summarized below.

A few gray whales (1-3) were seen daily at the end of the month. Humpback whales were seen on two-thirds the days this month, with a high count of 59 on the 27th and 28th. A blue whale was seen on the 17th. Large groups of Risso’s dolphins were seen on the 21st (200) and the 27th (100).

**Sharks**

Standardized shark surveys started on the 2nd. On the 3rd, a shark was seen breaching off West End. On the 19th, a shark was observed scavenging upon a decomposing California sea lion. Three attacks were observed during the last week of the month.

**Salamanders**

No salamander surveys were conducted this month. On the 25th, one was uncovered during the demolition of the Road to Nowhere and relocated at the PRBO House.

**Owls**

Standardized surveys started on the 16th. The first Burrowing Owl of the season was discovered on the 22nd. We determined that 7 individuals had arrived by the end of the month, and three of these owls were captured in mist nets using playback and banded.

**Crickets**

No cricket surveys were conducted this month.

**Bats**

A hoary bat first discovered on 30 Aug continued roosting in the same spot in the PRBO Tree for 2.5 weeks until it departed on the 17th. Another was found in the Coast Guard Tree on the 4th and remained until the 6th. On the 27th, a hoary bat was observed flying over Tower Point.

**Mice**

Two mouse trapping sessions were conducted this month. The first from the 13th to the 16th had 86% overall trapping success. The second from the 25th to the 28th had 85% overall trapping success.

**Inverts and Intertidal**

Several species of migratory insects were seen during the month. Dragonflies were the most abundant, and the following species were identified: Black Saddlebags (*Tramea lacerata*), Variegated Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum corruptum*), Blue-eyed Darner (*Rhionaeschna multicolor*), and Green Darner (*Anax junius*). Only two butterflies were seen: a Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) and a Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*). A few hundred Pacific Sea Nettle (*Chrysaora fuscescens*) were seen on the east side of the island throughout the month.

**Plants**

On the 14th, a trip to West End Island noted a lot of New Zealand spinach on the southwest side of Main Top and above Pastel Cove.

**Violations**

In September, we recorded five fishing violations within the SE Farallon State Marine Reserve, with most reported to CDFW. The Special Closure around the island was not violated and no wildlife on the island were disturbed.

**Maintenance**

Island biologists Tietz and Warzybok conducted routine maintenance checks on the PV system and generators weekly. Monthly changes of water filters and outboard motor operation were also conducted as well as monthly crane greasing. Training for crane operations were conducted for interns. Reducers and water lines connected to nitrate cylinder were replaced. The battery on the REO generator was replaced. A clamp was used to stop a water leak between the pump house and the pipe shop.

**Maintenance Needs**

* Repair liner in the Gravity tank
* Cistern has been losing water at a rate ~250 gallons per month. There appears to be a much more sizable leak when the cistern is above 8’6”. A recent inspection of the cistern indicated serious structural decay that will need to be repaired in the future.
* Settling Tank appears to have a leak in it when water is above 5.1 feet.
* Many of the wooden railing on Lighthouse Hill needs repair.
* Corrosion of the cart path rail system appears to be accelerating and will need to be addressed soon, perhaps repaired with the old galvanized pipe when the water lines are replaced. The cart is falling of the tracks in several places now.
* Several separations have been seen on the East Landing derrick slewing rope, possibly from jogging the slew. Perhaps tightening the slewing rope will mitigate this issue slightly until replacement.
* Several inches of water accumulate in the pipe shop after a good rain. A new threshold is needed to seal the door.
* Several grease points on the crane are having difficulty taking grease.
* Broken section of pipe near Twitville needs to be properly repaired.
* Broken section of pipe below gravity tank needs to be repaired.

**Solar/Electric**

**PV System**

Distilled water reserves: 20 gallons

**Generator run times**

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy): 1.3 hours

Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon): 11.1 hours

Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke): 12.9 hours

Kohler 15ROY61 (Peevey): 0 hours

Webasto: 0 hours

Power Used this month: Start = 71,108; End = 71,861; for total of 753 kwh

**Fuel Reserves**

Diesel fuel used in August: 16.3 gallons

Drums: 2.3 x 55g = 126 gallons

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy) Tank: Full

Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon) Tank: Full

Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke) Tank: Full

Kohler 15ROY61 (PV) Tank: Full

Webasto Tank: 2/3 Full

Surplus gasoline for boat motors: 0.6 gallons

Safeboat tank: Full

Zodiac tank: Full

**Water Reserves**

Cistern: ~ 67,500 gallons (5’6”)

Gravity Tank: empty

Settling Tank: empty

Water use at house meter was 2,028 gallons

**Sightseeing Boats**

The **Kitty Kat** was seen 8 times with an average of 33 people; **Salty Lady** was seen 7 times with an average of 34 people; **Huck Finn** was seen twice with an average of 16 people; **Outer Limits** was seen once with 25 people; **Sea Wolf** was seen once with 20 people. White shark tour boats included: **Silver Fox** seen 3 times with an average of 26 people; **Akula** seen 8 times with an average of 8 people; **Derek M Baylis** seen once with 6 people.

**Non-breeding birds**

Pacific Loon, Common Loon, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed Shearwater, Buller’s Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, **Northern Gannet, Brown Booby, Red-footed Booby,** Brown Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Greater White-fronted Goose, Northern Pintail, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Virginia Rail, Sora, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Wandering Tattler, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Black Turnstone, Ruddy Turnstone, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Wilson’s Snipe, Red-necked Phalarope, Red Phalarope, Parasitic Jaeger, Pomarine Jaeger, Heermann’s Gull, California Gull, Elegant Tern, **Arctic Tern**, **Scripps’s Murrelet**, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl, **Short-eared Owl**, Vaux’s Swift, Anna’s Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Western Wood-Pewee, Willow Flycatcher, **Least Flycatcher**, Dusky Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, Say’s Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Cassin’s Vireo, Hutton’s Vireo, Warbling Vireo, **Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-green Vireo,** Purple Martin, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Rock Wren, House Wren, Marsh Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Swainson’s Thrush, Townsend’s Solitaire, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Tennessee Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Audubon’s Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend’s Warbler, Hermit Warbler, **Blackburnian Warbler**, Prairie Warbler, Palm Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, **Northern Waterthrush**, Connecticut Warbler, Mourning Warbler, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Wilson’s Warbler, **Canada Warbler**, Western Tanager, Green-tailed Towhee, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Brewer’s Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole, Hooded Oriole, Bullock’s Oriole, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, and American Goldfinch