

Farallon Islands Monthly Report

Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Farallon National Wildlife Refuge

September 2017

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**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 this month included: Ryan Berger, Garrett Duncan, Preston Duncan, Sierra Lammers, Lauren Lescure, Dan Maxwell, Zack Mikalonis, Kurt Ongman, Troels Ortvad, Adam Searcy, Jim Tietz, and Pete Warzybok.

September 3: **“Salty Lady”** (skipper Jared Davis) departed with Troels Ortvad.

September 9: **“Outer Limits”** (skipper Jim Robertson) brought out Dan Maxwell and Garrett Duncan. Point Blue staff Grant Ballard, Russ Bradley, Ellie Cohen, and Jennifer Neidermeyer toured the island with Point Blue volunteers Avery Hellman, Mick Hellman, Sabina Hellman, and Kendall Miller, and then all eight departed.

September 14: **San Francisco Helicopters** brought out Santa Cruz Island Foundation (SCIF) members Karen Blumenshine, Sandy Bredin, Kirk Connally, Marla Daily, and Bill Dewey, who conducted a study of historic resources.

September 16: **San Francisco Helicopters** brought out Point Blue staff Pete Warzybok and Ryan Berger and departed with all five members of SCIF.

September 17: **“Salty Lady”** (skipper Jared Davis) brought out Tony Orr of the National Marine Mammal Laboratory.

September 18: **“Valkyrie”** (skipper Jamis MacNiven) departed with Ryan Berger, Lauren Lescure, Tony Orr, and Pete Warzybok.

September 23: **“Kampai III”** (skipper Andy Jones) brought out Sierra Lammers and Kurt Ongman. Two crew toured the island. The boat departed with Preston Duncan and Adam Searcy.

September 25: “**U.S. Coast Guard helicopter**” brought out Jonathan Shore.

**West End Island Visitors**

September 4: Lauren Lescure and Jim Tietz visited West End Island to conduct pinniped research.

September 17: Ryan Berger, Preston Duncan, Tony Orr, Adam Searcy, Jim Tietz, and Pete Warzybok visited West End Island to conduct pinniped research.

September 29: Zack Mikalonis, Jonathan Shore, and Jim Tietz visited West End Island to conduct pinniped research and examine invasive plants.

**Weather/Ocean**

The weather in September was dominated by northwest winds, with a few days of southerly winds early in the month. Fog was recorded on 10% of weather observations, while haze impaired visibility on another 10% of observations. There were 0.14 inches of precipitation recorded, most of which fell during a thunderstorm on the 11th. Mean midday air temperature was 18.8° C, with a standard deviation of 2.8° C. The highest air temperature recorded during a standard survey was 27.5° C at 1200 on the 2nd, while just two hours prior to this the air temperature reached 32.1° C, the highest temperature ever recorded on the island. The lowest air temperature this month was 13.5° C recorded at 0600 hours on the 24th and 28th. Mean sea surface temperature was 15.47° C, with a standard deviation of 1.08° C, a high of 17.98° C on the 7th, and a low of 14.21° C on the 20th. Mean SST was approximately 1.51° C higher than the long-term mean for this month, and 1.74° C higher than last August.

**Oiled & Entangled Wildlife**

Eleven California sea lions were noted to have monofilament, plastic strapping, or unknown substance embedded or tightly wrapped around their necks. One immature elephant seal had a fishing hook embedded in its lower lip, while another was trapped under a rock at Sea Pigeon Gulch and later died. Oiled Common Murres were noted on the 4th, 7th, 21st, and 24th.

**Breeding Birds**

**Storm-Petrels –** Of the 38 ashy storm-petrel nests that were active at the beginning of the month, two appeared to have fledged by the end of the month. The first chick fledged from a monitored crevice on the 16th. One Leach’s storm-petrel nest was still active at the end of the month.

**Brandt’s Cormorant** – A few unmonitored nests were still active at the beginning of the month, but all had fledged by the end of the month. At the beginning of the month, large numbers of chicks were creching at the shoreline, but most had dispersed to offshore roosts by the end of the month.

**Pelagic Cormorant –** By the end of the month, six more nests had fledged, while two continued with fully feathered chicks. Many adults and recent fledglings were roosting on cliffs at the end of the month.

**Double-crested Cormorant** – Adults were observed flying from Maintop to the east early in the morning and returning later in the day to feed chicks still on the nesting colony. One active nest was noted in early September on the northeast side of Maintop. Independent chicks were occasionally seen foraging in coves and bays around the island.

**Western Gull** – The few late nests that persisted during the first half of the month fledged or failed by the end of the month. Most gulls were being seen in roosts on the Marine Terrace and roosts elsewhere.

**California Gulls –** A few adults were observed daily in afternoon roosting flocks. Juveniles 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.

**Pigeon Guillemot –** The last monitored nest fledged on the 14th. Adults and chicks were seen sitting on the water all month, but numbers had greatly decreased by the end of the month.

**Cassin’s Auklet –** Nine chicks fledged from followed nests, while five other nests were still active at the end of the month. Very few were noted on the water around the island at the end of the month, but good numbers returned at night during dark nights to vocalize.

**Rhinoceros Auklet –** Only a few were noted on the water around the island or flying by this month.

**Tufted Puffin –** Puffins were observed carrying fish to nests at the beginning of the month. Puffin congregations were noted on land during the mornings, and groups were observed flying around promontories. Many pairs and small groups were observed on the water around the island in the afternoons. Adam Searcy meticulously counted 200 puffins on the water on the 5th.

**Black Oystercatchers** – Most pairs were seen foraging along the intertidal, and several were seen tending to recently fledged juveniles. The last monitored oystercatcher chicks fledged on the 17th.

**Pinnipeds**

**California Sea Lion***–* Numbers of California sea lions noticeably decreased compared to the previous month. On average there were 3,042 (SD ± 171) individuals counted during the weekly pinniped census from the lighthouse, with a high count of 3,334 individuals on the 21st. The high count for pups was 379 on the 21st.

**Steller Sea Lions** –On average there were 90 (SD ± 22) individuals counted, with a high count of 146 on the 17th. The high count for pups was 19 on the 10th.

**Northern Elephant Seal –** Numbers of elephant seals increased over the month, with an average total count of 63 (SD ± 37) individuals. The high count was 120 on the 28th.

**Harbor Seal –** Harbor seal numbers were highly variable, reflecting tide and swell heights during the weekly census. On average there were 48 (SD ± 42) individuals counted. The high count was 96 on the 28th, with a low count of 4 on the 7th.

**Northern Fur Seals** – Fur seals counted during surveys increased throughout the month, with numbers on land varying mostly due to temperatures, wind speed, and cloud cover. During warm days with little cloud cover, up to 500 fur seals were estimated to be in the water just offshore of Indian Head Beach. The mean count from the lighthouse was 492 (SD ± 123) individuals, with a high of 695 on the 28th. The high count for pups also occurred on the 28th with 274 individuals.

Three trips were made to West End Island. On the 4th, we counted 1638 total individuals, including 898 pups, from Weather Service Peninsula to Indian Head Beach. We also read 11 tags from San Miguel Island. On the 17th, five personnel from Point Blue went over to West End with Tony Orr of the National Marine Mammal Laboratory and tagged 64 pups. Prior to the survey, we counted only 299 pups at Indian Head Beach, which was 434 fewer pups from the previous trip. It was a sunny day and many of the pups were in the water when we started, but we caught several when they returned later in the afternoon. On the 29th, we counted 1539 total individuals, including 691 pups. We also read 46 tags, of which, 29 were on pups.

**Cetaceans**

**Standard Survey** – Nine one-hour whale watches were conducted this month from the Lighthouse using the Apple iPad and Spotter App. Our survey frequency was hampered by thick fog and poor visibility due to smoke and haze caused by wildfires. Daily incidental observations were also recorded.

Gray whales were seen on 7 days, with a maximum of 2 on the 15th. Humpback whales were seen daily, with a maximum of 117 on the 22nd. Blue whales were seen on half the days this month, with a maximum of 7 seen on the 22nd. A pod of 50 Pacific white-sided dolphins was seen on the 26th.

**Sharks**

Surveys from the lighthouse were initiated on the 1st of the month. Four confirmed predation events were noted around the island this month, with 2 off East Landing, one off Indian Head, and one in outer Maintop Bay.

**Salamanders**

No salamander surveys were conducted this month.

**Owls**

The first burrowing owl of the fall season was observed on the 10th, with three more arriving later in the month. Island-wide surveys for owls were initiated on the 17th. The burrowing owl intern, Sierra Lammers, arrived on the 23rd. The first owl was captured on the 25th, but we were incapable of catching other owls due to windy weather.

**Crickets**

No cricket surveys were conducted this month.

**Mice**

Two mouse surveys were conducted this month beginning on the 7th and 23rd. Trap success was 89% for the first survey and 90% for the second.

**Inverts and Intertidal**

# Throughout the month, good numbers (4-26) of egg yolk jelly (*Phacellophora camtschatica*) were seen near the island. Up to 5 Ochre Sea Stars (*Pisaster ochraceus*) were seen in tide pools on the east side of the island.

**Plants**

# On the 4th, it was noted that New Zealand spinach plants (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*) on Maintop had flourished on the south facing slopes and were cascading vine-like down its rocky faces. On the 27th, Jonathan Shore pulled five malva near the PRBO house. During a trip to West End Island on the 29th, Shore and Tietz noted that half of the spinach on Maintop was dying (probably from lack of moisture), while the other half was seeding. Above Pastel Cave, Shore pulled *Chenopodium* and 21 large spinach plants and tossed them in the ocean.

**Violations**

At least 17 violations occurred at the Farallon Islands this month.

* 1 Sep, three men were observed fishing within the State Marine Reserve (SMR) aboard a Mako 243 (CF 1497 KX)
* 2 Sep, an Aquasport (CF 4868 NK) was fishing off Sugarloaf.
* 2 Sep, The Kite Sherpa (CF 9134 SG) was fishing off Shubrick.
* 2 Sep, a Shamrock-style boat (CF unknown) was fishing off Maintop Bay.
* 2 Sep, a Striper-style boat fishing off Saddle Rock and was visited by the Marlin.
* 3 Sep, a Glacier Bay catamaran with 5 people onboard was fishing 1 km off West End Point.
* 3 Sep, the Deborah Lee (CF 1216 PM) was fishing ¼ mile off the Aulon Islets.
* 4 Sep, a Glacier Bay catamaran named the Out of Cay (CF 7926 SR) was fishing in the SMR off West End.
* 12 Sep, three men were fishing from a white boat (CF 7518 VL) near Saddle Rock.
* 21 Sep, a propeller plane (N722BM) flew over the island twice at an elevation of 450’.
* 24 Sep, a Pro Line (CF 6974 PZ) was fishing off West End reef.
* 24 Sep, two men were fishing from a Zodiac with a canopy off West End.
* 24 Sep, crew members on the Hog Heaven were cleaning fish and throwing remains into ocean within 100 feet of Shubrick.
* 26 Sep, two boats (ID unknown) were observed fishing within the SMR off Shubrick.
* 27 Sep, a Grady White (CF 9785 KZ) was fishing off Shubrick
* 27 Sep, a 15’ powerboat (CF 8831 SM) went between Saddle Rock and Southeast Farallon.

**Maintenance**

Island biologist Tietz conducted routine maintenance checks on the PV system and generators weekly. Monthly changes of water filters, crane greasing, and outboard motor operation were also conducted. Garrett spackled the ceiling in the PRBO walk-thru room. Garrett modified the communications cabinet so the door can shut with the new equipment. Adam and Dan cleaned and mouse-proofed the closet in the PRBO living room. Garrett removed the torn weather stripping from the door in the laundry room and raised the threshold to keep the mice and rain out. Jonathan and Garrett removed temporary power cable up to lighthouse and old network cable between the houses. Jonathan patched mouse holes under sink in Coast Guard house. Jonathan and Garrett dry fit the Murre Project zodiac at North Landing in case it needs to be used. Jonathan and Jim performed annual maintenance on Yamaha 25hp at North Landing, engine oil and filter change, lower gear case oil change, greased, cleaned fuel filter, and changed the top spark plug (bottom one could not be reached.)

**Maintenance Needs**

* Repair liner in the Gravity tank
* Wing-nut bolt needs to be drilled out of the threading and replaced on the NL derrick winch handle as it broke during a landing
* The dumper jet battery appears to be losing its charge quickly despite regular recharges. The reason for the rapid discharging is not known. The batteries are fairly new so the issue may be with the charger not bringing them up to full capacity.
* Cistern is losing water at a rate ~250 gallons per month and needs to be inspected. There appears to be a much more sizable leak when the cistern is above 8’6”.
* Settling Tank appears to have a leak in it when water is above 5.1 feet.
* Some of the wooden railing on Lighthouse Hill needs repair.
* Webasto heater is not functioning and is currently off island for repair.
* Clean water line going to upstairs in PRBO house needs to be cleared to increase water pressure.
* Drain line from PRBO kitchen sink needs to be replaced.
* Front door and frame to PRBO house are rotting at bottom corner and need to be repaired or replaced. The weather stripping for all doors needs to be replaced to keep out weather, flies, and mice.
* New screens are needed on the PRBO house to keep out flies on “warm” days.
* Refurbishment of North Landing platform
* Replace window blinds in PRBO bathrooms and kitchen.
* 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.
* Washing machine door lock is beginning to fail. It requires a bit of finesse to close and sometimes will get stuck in lock mode.
* The crane hoist motor needs to be replaced.

**Solar/Electric**

**PV System**

**Generator run times**

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy): 3.4 hours

Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon): 3.4 hours

Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke): 13.2 hours

Kohler 15ROY61 (PV): 1.9 hours

Webasto: Not working

Power Used: Start of month = 62,370; end of month = 62,980 for total of 610 kwh

**Fuel Reserves**

Fuel used in July: 20.4 gallons

Drums: 6.5 X 55g = 357 gallons

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy) Tank: Full

Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon) Tank: Full

Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke) Tank: Full

Kohler 15ROY61 (PV) Tank: Full

Webasto Tank: 1/4

**Water Reserves**

Cistern: ~100,000 gallons (7’4”)

Gravity Tank: empty

Settling Tank: empty

Water use at house water meter was 2,197 gallons.

**Sightseeing Boats**

During September, five sightseeing boats visited the Farallones. The **Kitty Kat** was seen eight times with an average of 34 POB. The **Salty Lady** was seen eight times with an average of 37 POB. The **Outer Limits** was seen once with 40 POB. The **New** **Captain Pete** was seen once with 25 POB. The **Silver Fox** was seen three times with an average of 24 POB. The **Akula** was seen shark diving seven times with an average of 8 POB.

**Non-breeding birds**

Pacific Loon, Common Loon, Yellow-billed Loon, Northern Fulmar, Kermadec Petrel (1st North American record), Pink-footed Shearwater, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Buller’s Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Northern Gannet, Brown Booby, Blue-footed Booby, Brown Pelican, Green Heron, Great Blue Heron, Greater White-fronted Goose, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Surf Scoter, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Wandering Tattler, Spotted Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, Sanderling, Pectoral Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Heermann’s Gull, California Gull, Herring Gull, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Band-tailed Pigeon, White-winged Dove, Mourning Dove, Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl, Common Nighthawk, Black Swift, Vaux’s Swift, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Anna’s Hummingbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Willow Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Western Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, Say’s Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Cassin’s Vireo, Hutton’s Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Purple Martin, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Marsh Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Townsend’s Solitaire, Swainson’s Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Varied Thrush, Northern Mockingbird, 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, Blackpoll Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Mourning Warbler, Wilson’s Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Western Tanager, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Brewer’s Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Oregon Junco, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Black-headed Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brewer’s Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird, Hooded Oriole, Bullock’s Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, House Finch, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, American Goldfinch