

Farallon Islands Monthly Report

Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Farallon National Wildlife Refuge

October 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: Russ Bradley, Boo Curry, Garrett Duncan, Sierra Lammers, Dan Maxwell, Zack Mikalonis, Kurt Ongman, Jim Tietz, and Jac Tolchin.

October 2: “**Coast Guard Helicopter**” picked up Jonathan Shore from USFWS

October 7: **“French Kiss”** (skippers Harmon Shragge and Don Bauer) brought out Christa Seidl and departed with Dan Maxwell and Zack Mikalonis. Four crew toured the island.

October 22nd: **“Hokahey”** (skipper Jan Passion) brought out Russ Bradley, Boo Curry, and Jaclyn (Jac) Tolchin and departed with Jim Tietz. Due to tide restrictions there was no tour.

**West End Island Visitors**

October 18: Kurt Ongman and Jim Tietz visited West End Island to conduct pinniped research.

**Weather/Ocean**

The weather in October was dominated by northwest winds, with a few periods of southerly winds and one major storm. There were 0.17 inches of precipitation recorded, most of which fell during one event. Mean midday air temperature was 15.4° C, with a standard deviation of 2.9° C. Mean sea surface temperature was 12.85° C, with a standard deviation of 0.73° C, a high of 14.28° C on the 31st, and a low of 12.0° C on the 6th. Mean SST was approximately 1.11° C lower than the long-term mean for this month, and 1.05° C lower than last October.

**Oiled & Entangled Wildlife**

Ten California sea lions, and one fur seal pup, were noted to have monofilament or unknown substance embedded or tightly wrapped around their neck. A 100% oiled Rhinoceros Auklet was seen in Fisherman’s Bay on the 24th.

**Breeding Birds**

**Storm-Petrels –** Of the 34 ashy storm-petrel nests that were active at the beginning of the month, only 7 had yet to fledge by the end of the month. Song meter units for acoustic monitoring were retrieved on the 28th.

**Brandt’s, Pelagic, and Double-crested Cormorant** – All breeding has been completed and Brandt’s and Pelagic Cormorants were regularly present at roost sites in the morning and evening, but only a few Double-crested Cormorants were seen at the beginning of the month.

**Western Gull** – Very small numbers (~500-2000) have been present on the colony during the day, with some roosting in intertidal areas as well.

**California Gulls –** Approximately 50-200 birds have been seen in regular evening roost sites.

**Common Murre –** Very few murres were seen around the island for most of the month, but numbers increased at the end of the month, with the first colony attendance on the 30th.

**Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet and Tufted Puffin –** Very few Pigeon Guillemots or Rhinoceros Auklets were observed on the water throughout the month, but no puffins were seen.

**Cassin’s Auklet –** The last chick in a followed site fledged on the 21st. Thirteen new ceramic nest boxes were installed at the end of the month.

**Black Oystercatchers** – Some birds are still attending territories, but larger wintering roosting groups are starting to form.

**Pinnipeds**

**California Sea Lion***–* Numbers of California sea lions increased in October but numbers were highly variable. On average there were 3,930 (SD ± 1450) individuals counted during the weekly pinniped census from the lighthouse, with a high count of 5,822 individuals on the 12th. The high count for pups was 509 on the 20th.

**Steller Sea Lions** –On average there were 76 (SD ± 12) individuals counted, with a high count of 93 on the 26th. The high count for pups was 23 on the 6th.

**Northern Elephant Seal –** Numbers of elephant seals increased over the month, with an average total count of 160 (SD ± 20) individuals. The high count was 187 on the 12th.

**Harbor Seal –** Harbor seal numbers were highly variable, reflecting tide and swell heights during the weekly census. On average there were 38 (SD ± 42) individuals counted. The high count was 80 on the 12th, with a low count of 0 on the 20th.

**Northern Fur Seals** – Fur seals counted during surveys remained high during 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 559 (SD ± 23) individuals, with a high of 589 on the 6th. The high count for pups was 204 on the 6th.

One trip to West End Island was made on the 18th. We counted 1,672 total individuals, including 902 pups, from Breaker Cove to Indian Head Beach. We also read 9 tags from San Miguel Island, and tags from 36 pups tagged on West End in September.

**Cetaceans**

**Standard Survey** – Thirteen 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 high winds and seas. Daily incidental observations were also recorded.

Gray whales were seen on 3 days, with a maximum of 4 on the 3rd. Humpback whales were seen almost daily, with a maximum of 65 on the 21st. Blue whales were seen on one-third of the days this month, with a maximum of 5 seen on the 14th. One Dall’s porpoise was seen on the 25th, and pods of 40-50 Risso’s dolphins were seen on the 6th and the 14th.

**Sharks**

All-day surveys from the lighthouse continued from the lighthouse, weather permitting. Only two confirmed predation events were noted around the island this month near East Landing. Late in the month, shark researchers on the boat “Norcal 1” saw sharks approaching decoys on most days they visited the island.

**Salamanders**

Standard salamander surveys were initiated this month and were conducted on the 4th, 15th, and 28th. An all-island cover board census was conducted on the 28th and 29th. No salamanders were found under cover boards this dry month, but salamanders were seen incidentally on a few nights, when they came out of their burrows.

**Owls**

Burrowing owl migration increased in October, with 13 new arrivals and a daily high count of 17 individuals seen on the 14th. One of the owls previously banded here in 2015 returned to the island, and was seen in 2016 as well. Thirteen owls were banded this month.

**Crickets**

Quarterly cricket surveys were conducted Oct 27th to November 1st at all sites. Consistent high numbers were counted with many juveniles present at survey locations.

**Mice**

Two mouse surveys were conducted this month beginning on the 14th and 31st. Trap success was 90% for both surveys, with high rates of cannibalism on trapped mice noted.

**Inverts and Intertidal**

# On the 5th eleven Ochre Sea Stars (*Pisaster ochraceus*) were seen in Jewel Cave, a recovery compared to recent years of absence likely due to sea star wasting disease.

**Plants**

Plant activity was minimal with dry conditions.

**Violations**

In October we recorded 2 fishing violations within the SE Farallon State Marine Reserve, both were reported to CDFW. On the 2nd an Air National Guard Helicopter flew over West End at 600 ft, moving 100 California Sea Lions. Their office was contacted by USFWS and information on the ceiling restrictions was passed along to their pilots.

**Maintenance**

Island biologists Tietz and Bradley 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. Jim reorganized old file cabinets. The doorway of the main house was mouse-proofed. Generators were exercised and the lower unit oil and gaskets on the North Landing engine were changed, after it appears water had leaked in. The Lighthouse communications cabinet was mouse-proofed and debris was removed from the catchment pad in advance of water collection.

**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): 3.8 hours

Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon): 3.7 hours

Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke): 3.8 hours

Kohler 15ROY61 (PV): 2.1 hours

Webasto: Not working

Power Used: Start of month = 62,980; end of month = 63,602 for total of 622 kwh

**Fuel Reserves**

Fuel used in October: 20.4 gallons

Drums: 6.25 X 55g = 340 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: ~98,300 gallons (7’3”)

Gravity Tank: empty

Settling Tank: empty

Water use at house meter was 2,389 gallons.

**Sightseeing Boats**

During October, five sightseeing boats visited the Farallones. The **Kitty Kat** was seen five times with an average of 35 POB. The **Salty Lady** was seen eight times with an average of 35 POB. The **Silver Fox** was seen once with 20 POB. The **Akula** was seen shark diving seven times with an average of 8 POB. The **Derek M. Bayliss** was seen shark diving two times with an average of 12 POB.

**Non-breeding birds**

Pacific Loon, Common Loon, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Black-footed Albatross, Pink-footed Shearwater, Buller’s Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Northern Gannet, Brown Booby, Blue-footed Booby, Brown Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Greater White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose, Aleutian Cackling Goose, Cackling Goose, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, Surf Scoter, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Wandering Tattler, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, Red-necked Phalarope, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Heermann’s Gull, Mew Gull, California Gull, Herring Gull, Thayer’s Gull, Glaucous-winged x Herring Gull, Glaucous-winged x Western Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, Band-tailed Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl, Anna’s Hummingbird, Rufous/Allen’s Hummingbird, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Red-shafted Flicker, Black Phoebe, Say’s Phoebe, Tropical Kingbird, Hutton’s Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Tree Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Rock Wren, Pacific Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Swainson’s Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Varied Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Sage Thrasher, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Audubon’s Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend’s Warbler, Western Palm Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Western Tanager, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Oregon Junco, Slate-colored Junco, Lapland Longspur, Red-winged Blackbird, Brewer’s Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, Purple Finch, Cassin’s Finch, House Finch, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, and American Goldfinch