

Farallon Islands Monthly Report

Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Farallon National Wildlife Refuge

November 2017

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**Island Visitors**

Point Blue crew this month included: Russ Bradley, Boo Curry, Garrett Duncan, Sierra Lammers, Kurt Ongman, Christa Seidl, Jim Tietz, and Jac Tolchin.

November 4: “**Steadfast**” (skipper Kixon Meyer) brought out Jim Tietz. SCRIPPS Institute of Oceanography personnel Melissa Carter and James Kumo toured the island. Russ Bradley and Sierra Lammers departed.

November 14: **“USCG helicopter”** delivered Ed Van Til to the island.

November 17: **“USCG helicopter”** picked up Ed Van Til and took him to the mainland.

November 18th: **“Bonkers”** (skipper Keith Sedwick) brought out Sierra Lammers and departed with Garrett Duncan, Kurt Ongman, and Christa Seidl.

**West End Island Visitors**

November 2nd: Russ Bradley, Christa Seidl, and Garrett Duncan visited West End Island to conduct pinniped research.

November 25th: Boo Curry, Sierra Lammers, Jim Tietz, and Jac Tolchin visited West End Island to conduct pinniped research.

**Weather/Ocean**

The weather in November was mostly dominated by northwest winds, but punctuated by several days of east winds during offshore wind events and south winds preceding storms. There were 1.88 inches of precipitation recorded, which mostly fell during three moderate storms. Mean midday air temperature was 15.4° C, with a standard deviation of 1.2° C. Mean sea surface temperature was 14.69° C, with a standard deviation of 0.40° C, a high of 15.50° C on the 1st, and a low of 13.83° C on the 30th. Mean SST was approximately 1.43° C higher than the long-term mean for this month, and 0.14° C higher than last November.

**Oiled & Entangled Wildlife**

Nineteen California sea lions, two Steller sea lions, one northern elephant seal, and four fur seals were noted to have monofilament, plastic strapping, or an unknown substance embedded or tightly wrapped around their neck. A Western Gull on the 4th and a Common Murre on the 11th had small amounts (~10%) of oil on their bodies.

**Breeding Birds**

**Storm-Petrels –** Of the 7 ashy storm-petrel nests that were active at the beginning of the month, only 2 had yet to fledge by the end of the month.

**Brandt’s, Pelagic, and Double-crested Cormorant** – All breeding has been completed and Brandt’s and Pelagic Cormorants were regularly present at roost sites throughout the day. Only two Double-crested Cormorants were seen during 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. Numbers increased during the month as more individuals began staking out territories at dawn.

**California Gulls –** Fewer than 100 birds have been seen in regular evening roost sites.

**Common Murre –** Murre numbers increased dramatically this month as regular dawn colony attendance increased in preparation for next year’s breeding season.

**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 –** Very few were seen sitting on the water around the island this month, and most stayed away at night. On several mornings, large numbers were observed flying north.

**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 November but numbers were highly variable. On average there were 3,200 (SD ± 824) individuals counted during the weekly pinniped census from the lighthouse, with a high count of 4,262 individuals on the 17th. The high count for pups was 193 on the 8th.

**Steller Sea Lions** –On average there were 97 (SD ± 13) individuals counted, with a high count of 107 on the 8th and 30th. The high count for pups was 37 on the 30th.

**Northern Elephant Seal –** Numbers of elephant seals increased over the month, with an average total count of 244 (SD ± 68) individuals. The high count was 342 on the 30th.

**Harbor Seal –** Harbor seal numbers were highly variable, reflecting tide and swell heights during the weekly census. On average there were 61 (SD ± 37) individuals counted. The high count was 119 on the 1st, with a low count of 23 on the 23rd.

**Northern Fur Seals** – Fur seals counted from the lighthouse declined slightly during the month as colony members return to sea to find food. The mean count from the lighthouse was 433 (SD ± 95) individuals, with a high of 544 on the 17th. The high count for pups was 127 on the 1st. Identifying pups from the lighthouse became increasingly difficult as they molted out of their natal pelage.

Two trips were made to West End Island, one on the 2nd and one on the 25th, to count fur seals from Breaker Cove to Indian Head Beach and resight tags. On the 2nd, we counted 1,596 total individuals, including 967 pups, and we read 6 tags from San Miguel Island, and 25 tags from pups tagged on West End in September. On the 25th, we counted 1,272 total individuals, including 619 pups, and we read 9 tags from San Miguel Island, one tag from a rehabilitated individual, and 28 tags from pups tagged on West End Island.

**Cetaceans**

**Standard Survey** – Twenty-one one-hour whale watches were conducted this month from the Lighthouse using the Apple iPad and Spotter App.

One gray whale was seen on the 28th. Humpback whales were seen almost daily, with a maximum of 50 on the 6th. Blue whales were seen on 13 days this month, with a maximum of 8 seen on the 12th. Two minke whales were seen on the 2nd. Two fin whales were seen on the 11th, and 3 were seen on the 28th.

**Sharks**

All-day surveys continued from the lighthouse, weather permitting. Five shark attacks were seen from either the lighthouse or incidentally by islanders when shark watch was not happening. On the 18th, we heard from boat-based shark researchers there were four attacks, but we were busy with a landing and missed all of them.

**Salamanders**

A standard salamander survey was conducted on the 15th and found six salamanders under cover boards.

**Owls**

Burrowing owl surveys were conducted daily during November, with a high count of 8 on the 1st, 2nd, and 12th. Netting for owls was conducted on relatively calm nights and resulted in the capture of 8 owls, 6 of which were new, while the other 2 were recaptures of birds initially banded earlier in the season (Sep-Oct). In addition, 3 other owls initially banded earlier in the season were resighted in Nov, and a few unbanded owls were seen regularly at the same roost sites.

**Crickets**

The first-ever cricket survey was conducted in Great Murre Cave on the 4th, resulting in 287 crickets being seen. This number is similar to many other caves on the island, but an order of magnitude less than the number typically counted in nearby Cricket Cave.

**Mice**

Three mouse surveys were conducted this month beginning on the 1st, 12th, and 27th. Trap success was 89% for the first two surveys, with high rates of cannibalism on trapped mice noted. Capture success was only 44% for the final survey, indicating a major decline in mouse abundance.

**Inverts and Intertidal**

# During our cricket survey on the 4th in Great Murre Cave, we also found 3 brittle stars, 2 gunnels, several sculpin species, 1 cabezon, and many crabs.

**Plants**

Plant began sprouting all over the island after the first decent rainfall of the season during mid-month.

**Violations**

In November we recorded 9 fishing violations within the SE Farallon State Marine Reserve, most were reported to CDFW. On the 4th, a two-masted schooner called the Salty Dog (Sooke, BC) sailed between Saddle Rock and the main island, which moved 200 sea lions and flushed another 30. On the 13th, a twin propeller plane (N28FC) flew over the island at an elevation of 500’ – no wildlife were disturbed. On the 18th, the Happy Days motored onto a blood slick where a recent shark attack had occurred. On the 29th, a crab boat called the Imperial (04208) from Eureka, CA, was anchored offshore with its flood lights fully illuminating the east side of the island. An unknown crab boat did the same on the 30th.

**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. Garrett replaced the kitchen sink faucet. Ed Van Til and Garrett installed new on-demand hot water heater in CG house. Ed and Garrett mouse-proofed the CG house. The catchment pad was scrubbed on the 16th during the first significant rainfall, so we can now collect water. Garrett fixed the upstairs sink in the PRBO house by breaking the valve free. Ed installed Webasto pump, but it was not tested.

**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.
* 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.

**Solar/Electric**

**PV System**

**Generator run times**

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy): 11.8 hours

Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon): 3.5 hours

Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke): 3.7 hours

Kohler 15ROY61 (PV): 6.0 hours

Webasto: Not working

Power Used: Start of month = 63,602; end of month = 64,258 for total of 656 kwh

**Fuel Reserves**

Fuel used in November: 28.8 gallons

Drums: 6 X 55g = 330 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: ~94,980 gallons (7’1”)

Gravity Tank: empty

Settling Tank: empty

Water use at house meter was 2,638 gallons.

**Sightseeing Boats**

During November, six sightseeing boats visited the Farallones. The **Salty Lady** was seen four times with an average of 35 POB. The **Silver Fox** was seen twice with an average of 23 POB. The **Happy Days** was 6 times with an average of 24 POB. The **Akula** was seen shark diving ten times with an average of 8 POB. The **Derek M. Bayliss** was seen shark diving two times with an average of 17 POB.

**Non-breeding birds**

Pacific Loon, Eared Grebe, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed Shearwater, Buller’s Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Black-vented Shearwater, **Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (first California record)**, Northern Gannet, Brown Booby, Blue-footed Booby, Brown Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Aleutian Cackling Goose, Brant, Surf Scoter, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Wandering Tattler, Whimbrel, Black Turnstone, Wilson’s Snipe, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Bonaparte’s Gull, 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, Glaucous Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Mourning Dove, Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl, Anna’s Hummingbird, Red-shafted Flicker, Black Phoebe, Hutton’s Vireo, Brown Creeper, Rock Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Varied Thrush, American Robin, European Starling, American Pipit, Yellow Warbler, Audubon’s Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend’s Warbler, Western Palm Warbler, Summer Tanager, Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Oregon Junco, Slate-colored Junco, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, Western Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, and American Goldfinch