

Farallon Islands Monthly Report

Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge

October 2019

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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.

Island Residents

Point Blue crew: Nik Aspey, Olivia Boisen, John Garrett, Dan Maxwell, Joey Negreann, Kurt Ongman, Rya Ruben, Melissa Simon, Jim Tietz and Pete Warzybok.

Fish and Wildlife Service Staff and Contractors: Mark Ahrens, Dominic Banks, Chris Barr, Mark Briggs, Gerry McChesney, Dane Van Pelt, and Scott Webster.

Island Visitors

October 5th: **“Salty Lady”** (skipper Jared Davis) brought out Joey Negreann.

October 8th: **“Huli Cat”** (skipper Tom Mattusch) brought out Mark Ahrens, Chris Barr, Mark Briggs, Gerry McChesney and Dane Van Pelt.

October 10th: **“Huli Cat”** (skipper Mike Yokomizo) picked up with Mark Ahrens, Chris Barr, Mark Briggs, Gerry McChesney and Dane Van Pelt. **Aris Helicopters** (pilot Jake) brought out Dominic Banks and Scott Webster (Western Slope Livery).

October 12th: “**Starbuck**” (skipper John Wade) brought out Jim Tietz and departed with Dan Maxwell and Pete Warzybok.

October 14th: Dominic Banks and Scott Webster departed via **Aris Helicopters**.

October 26th: “**Stillwater**” (skipper Richard Webber) brought out Nik Aspey and Olivia Boisen and departed with John Garrett and Kurt Ongman. Lynda Schaefer toured the island.

Weather & Ocean

The weather on the island this month was mostly clear with predominately northwest winds, however, a strong component of northeast winds occurred during the final week. The island received 0.1 inches of precipitation, which fell over seven days as drizzle. Fog occurred on only 7% of weather observations. The average midday air temperature was 16.4 ± 3.2 °C, which was 1.0 °C higher than the long-term average for October. The low for the month was 11.0 °C at 7 AM on the 14th, and a high of 29.5 °C was recorded at 4 PM on the 24th. The average sea surface temperature was 13.0 ± 0.3 °C, with a low of 12.1 °C on the 15th and a high of 13.7 °C on the 5th. This was 0.83 °C lower than the long-term average for October.

Oiled & Entangled Wildlife

On 7 Oct, a Rhinoceros Auklet was seen at North Landing with 100% covering of light oil. On 14 Oct, a Western Gull on East Terrace was 80% covered in light oil. On 29 Oct, a Mew Gull in Fisherman’s Bay was 20% covered in oil.

Eleven California Sea Lions, one Northern Fur Seal, and two Western Gulls were observed to be entangled with either monofilament, nylon netting or strapping, or unknown material. Ages of entangled California Sea Lions consisted of immatures, sub-adults, and adults, of both male and female. The entangled Northern Fur Seal was a pup. All entanglements were photo-documented, and photos were sent to Tony Orr at the Marine Mammal Laboratory.

Breeding Birds

Storm-Petrels – At the beginning of the month, there were 39 Ashy sites being monitored, 18 of which were still active with a chick. By the end of the month, 16 Ashy nests had confirmed fledges, while 2 were still active with chicks. In addition, two new sites were found this month by tracking the sounds of begging chicks. One of these chicks has since fledged.

Brandt’s Cormorant – Several hundred adults and immatures were observed at typical roost locations such as Sugarloaf, North Landing, and West End Head.

Pelagic Cormorant – A few dozen roosted at typical sites such as North Landing, Blowhole Peninsula, and Sea Pigeon Gulch.

Double-crested Cormorant – Only a few were seen this month.

Western Gull – Most adults and fledglings used the island's shoreline to roost at typical locations for this time of year such as Mussel Flat, Low Arch, Shell Beach, and Aulon Peninsula. However, an increasing number began returning to territories at the end of the month.

California Gulls – One to two hundred migrants roosted nightly on the island at Mussel Flat and at other locations just above the tideline, with a few hundred more roosting on the water in Mirounga Bay.

Common Murre – None were seen on the island, but numbers around the island increased steadily from a few dozen at the beginning of the month to several hundred by the end of the month.

Pigeon Guillemot – None were seen on the island, with only a few lingering near the island until mid-month.

Rhinoceros Auklet – None were seen on the island, and numbers declined steadily through the month from several per day to just a few per week.

Tufted Puffin – Only a single individual was seen near the island this month on 7 Oct; however, this winter-plumaged bird was observed carrying fish.

Cassin's Auklet – Several birds returned to the island on dark nights to vocalize and excavate nest sites – overall numbers seemed low. Few birds were observed on the water near the island.

Pinnipeds

California Sea Lion – On average there were 4,088 (SD \pm 522) individuals counted during the weekly pinniped census from the lighthouse, with a high count of 4,561 individuals on the 24th. There was a high count of 270 pups on the 17th. Most individuals were hauling out just above the intertidal, but a few hundred were hauling out by the domes most days.

Steller Sea Lions – On average there were 66 (SD \pm 15) individuals counted, with a high count of 81 on the 17th. There was a high count of 22 pups on the 17th.

Northern Elephant Seal – Numbers fluctuated between two hundred and three hundred individuals. On average there were 239 (SD \pm 38) individuals counted, with a high count of 290 on the 24th.

Harbor Seal – Harbor seal numbers were generally low, but fluctuated due to the variety of tide and swell conditions during the weekly census. On average there were 25 (SD \pm 23) individuals counted, with a high count of 55 on the 31st.

Northern Fur Seals – Numbers held steady through the month, with an average of 819 (SD \pm 79) individuals counted. The high count of 871 occurred on the 24th. Pup numbers counted from the lighthouse decreased through the month from a high of 168 on the 11th to only 2 on the 31st; however, 110 pups swimming in Breaker Cove were counted on the 31st as well. Pups on Indian Head Beach became increasingly difficult to count from the lighthouse as they molted out of their natal pelage and approached the size of yearlings.

Cetaceans

Standard Survey – 18 one-hour standard whale watches were conducted from the Lighthouse using the Spotter App when conditions allowed. Numbers from standard watches were combined with incidental observations and five-minute scans once per hour from the lighthouse during shark watch to create daily estimated totals. Humpback Whales were seen on most days, with a high count of 84 on the 13th. One to four Blue Whales were seen on six days during the first two weeks. One to three Gray Whales were observed circling the island, mostly during the final week of the month. A pod of 30 Risso's Dolphins were seen on the 16th and a pod of 200 Common Dolphins were seen on the 6th.

Sharks

Twelve predation events on pinnipeds were detected this month. Most attacks observed occurred off the eastern half of the island.

Salamanders

One survey was conducted on the 15th, but no individuals were detected under the coverboards.

Owls

Roost surveys were conducted daily, and target netting was conducted on calm nights. Only eight owls were believed to have arrived this month, and only two were captured. One of the owls that arrived this month was first banded on the Farallones in 2018. In addition, two unbanded owls occupied roost sites this month that also were used by unbanded owls last year—we have been unable to catch them thus far. An intern devised a burrow trap that uses an audio lure to attract them into the artificial burrow, but so far, we have not had any success with it.

Crickets

Surveys were conducted from 28 Oct to 2 Nov at Rabbit Cave, Cricket Cave, Spooky Cave, and pocket caves at Corm Blind, the "Gap", and at North Landing.

Bats

No bats were seen this month despite daily searches of the trees.

Mice

House mouse numbers remained high throughout the month and were frequently observed outside during the day. Mice invaded both houses and were particularly bad in the Coast Guard House.

Inverts and Intertidal

Eight species of butterflies were seen, which consisted of an unknown species of Sulphur, a California Tortoiseshell, several Painted Ladies, a couple West Coast Ladies, a Red Admiral, a few Monarchs, a few Common Buckeyes, and a couple Western Pygmy Blues. Five species of dragonflies and one damselfly were recorded: Green Darner, Blue-eyed Darner, Black Saddlebags, Variegated Meadowhawk, Red Rock Skimmer, and Familiar Bluet.

Oceanic Events

Nothing to report.

Plants

Invasive plant treatments in September were very effective as few live non-native plants were present in treated areas.

Violations

Five boats were observed this month fishing within the Marine Reserve, and we contacted the California Department of Fish and Wildlife about it.

Maintenance

Island biologists Tietz and Warzybok conducted routine weekly maintenance checks on the PV system and generators. Monthly changes of water filters, water testing, and crane greasing were conducted. In addition, we repaired a leak in the water pipe in front of the PRBO House. Several access points were plugged in the Coast Guard House, but mice continued to enter the house. Scott Webster replaced the upper guide rope and lower mast sheave at East Landing, conducted the annual crane inspection and certification, performed basic crane servicing, and performed tests on the crane electrical system to help determine the source of occasional hoist circuit breaker trips. FWS and Mark Briggs of Safety Management Resources conducted a marine safety evaluation of landing operations. Mark Ahrens of FWS conducted a facility condition assessment.

Maintenance Needs

- The red blinking light on the East Landing circuit breaker box no longer works.
- The PV and Buffy generators are supposed to automatically start to give themselves monthly exercise. This is not happening, requiring they be manually started for exercise. (Exercise not needed during the winter months.)

- The cistern and other elements of the water catchment system are showing their age and are need of major repairs or replacement. The cistern continues to lose water at a rate ~250 gallons per month.
- The Settling Tank also appears to have a leak in it when water is above 5.1 feet.
- The Settling Tank measuring stick came undone and fell into the tank.
- Many sections of the wooden railing on Lighthouse Hill need repair.
- Several inches of water accumulate in the pipe shop after a good rain. A new threshold is needed to seal the door. Also, there could be a crack in the foundation.
- There are several broken sections of pipe around the island which have received temporary repairs with compression sleeves. **Island-wide, the water pipes are in dire shape and need to be replaced.**
- The kitchen drain is not draining well despite multiple attempts to clear it. Due to the age of the plumbing and the ongoing difficulty servicing pipes under the house, it may be necessary to abandon the current plumbing and install new pipes outside the house to connect the sinks and showers to the gray water system.
- The PRBO house kitchen counters especially around the sink continue to deteriorate. Replacement sometime in the next year is recommended.
- Slow but steady leak in the PRBO fire hose spigot.
- The HADS weather station is no longer transmitting data to the web. Attempts to reset the unit have failed, and will require expert guidance to fix.

Solar/Electric

PV System

Distilled water used:	0 gallons
Distilled water reserves:	28 gallons

Generator run times

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy):	2.7 hours	(1801.4 on meter)
Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon):	10.1 hours	(631.5 on meter)
Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke):	20.1 hours	(390.5 on meter)
Kohler 15ROY61 (Peevey):	2.4 hours	(3886.8 on meter)
Webasto:	0 hours	

Power use

Facilities power use: Start = 80,380; End = 80,973; for total of 593 kWh

Fuel Reserves

Diesel used:	27.0 gallons
Diesel drums: 12.5 @55gal:	688 gallons
Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy) Tank:	Full
Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon) Tank:	Full
Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke) Tank:	Full
Kohler 15ROY61 (Peevey) Tank:	Full
Webasto Tank:	Full
Surplus gasoline for boat motors:	2 gallons

Safeboat tank:	Full
Zodiac tank:	Full

Water Reserves

Water used this month:	Start = 273,307; End = 275,624; for a total of 2,317 gallons
Cistern:	7'0" or ~93,320 gallons
Gravity Tank:	empty
Settling Tank:	empty

Sightseeing Boats

The following boats were recorded viewing the island and wildlife: the Salty Lady was seen 11 times with an average of 32 POB; the New Ray Ann was seen 2 times with an average of 23 POB; and the Huck Finn was seen once with 24 POB. The following boats were present at the Island to look for sharks: the Akula was seen 5 times with an average of 8 POB; the Derek M. Bayliss was seen 4 times with an average of 10 POB, and the Silver Fox was seen 3 times with an average of 24 POB.

Non-breeding birds

Pacific Loon, Common Loon, Eared Grebe, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed Shearwater, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Buller's Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Brown Booby, **Red-footed Booby**, Northern Gannet, Brown Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, **Black-crowned Night-Heron**, Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Cackling Goose, Brant, Northern Pintail, **Ring-necked Duck**, Surf Scoter, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Black-bellied Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Wandering Tattler, Spotted Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, Western Sandpiper, **Rock Sandpiper**, Dunlin, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Snipe, Red-necked Phalarope, South Polar Skua, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Bonaparte's Gull, **Black-tailed Gull (first island record!)**, Heermann's Gull, Mew Gull, Ring-billed Gull, California Gull, Herring Gull, Iceland (Thayer's) Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, Glaucous Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Elegant Tern, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, **Common Poorwill**, Vaux's Swift, Anna's Hummingbird, Northern Flicker, Least Flycatcher, Western Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, **Tropical Kingbird**, Warbling Vireo, Violet-green Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Rock Wren, Pacific Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Solitaire, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Varied Thrush, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, **Prairie Warbler**, Palm Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler, Western Tanager, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Lapland Longspur, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Bullock's Oriole, Purple Finch, House Finch, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, American Goldfinch