

## Farallon Islands Monthly Report

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

November 2019

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#### Island Residents

**Point Blue crew:** Nik Aspey, Olivia Boisen, Joey Negreann, Rya Ruben, Melissa Simon, and Jim Tietz.

#### Island Visitors

November 9<sup>th</sup>: **“Valkyrie”** (skipper Jamis MacNiven) brought out supplies for island and departed with Joey Negreann and Olivia Boisen. Seven people toured the island.

November 23<sup>rd</sup>: **“Starbuck”** (skipper John Wade) brought out supplies for island. Four people toured the island.

#### West End Island Visitors

November 1<sup>st</sup>: Nik Aspey, Olivia Boisen, Rya Ruben, and Jim Tietz conducted pinniped counts and recorded tags that were resighted.

#### Weather & Ocean

The weather on the island this month was variable with predominately northwest winds, but with 21% of the wind coming from the east. The island received 1.4 inches of precipitation, which mostly fell during the storm on the 26-27<sup>th</sup>. Fog occurred on 18% of weather observations. The average midday air temperature was  $13.3 \pm 1.9$  °C, which was 0.89 °C lower than the long-term average for November. The low for the month was 7.5 °C at 6 AM on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and a high of 17.5 °C was recorded at 4 PM on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The average sea surface temperature was  $12.7 \pm 0.5$  °C, with a low of 11.5 °C on the 28<sup>th</sup> and a high of 13.6 °C on the 15<sup>th</sup>. This was 0.53 °C lower than the long-term average for November.

## Oiled & Entangled Wildlife

On 5 Nov, a Common Murre was seen at East Landing with a 15% covering of oil.

Thirteen California Sea Lions and one Northern Fur Seal were observed to be entangled with either monofilament, nylon rope 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. Most 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 5 Ashy sites being monitored, 2 of which were still active with a chick. By the end of the month, both Ashy nests had confirmed fledges.

**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** – Several dozen roosted at typical sites such as North Landing, Sugarloaf, Blowhole Peninsula, and Sea Pigeon Gulch.

**Double-crested Cormorant** – None were seen.

**Western Gull** – Many adults were on territories at dawn, but most dispersed throughout the day. 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.

**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** – Numbers of murrees gathering around the island increased during the first week until the 9<sup>th</sup>, when several thousand began landing on small islet colonies. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, most colonies were full, and this occurred on several days during the latter half of the month when the winds were from the northwest.

**Pigeon Guillemot** – None were seen on the island, with only occasional singles seen near the island through the month.

**Rhinoceros Auklet** – None were seen on the island. One to several were seen around the island most days.

**Tufted Puffin** – None were seen.

**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 3,521 ( $SD \pm 666$ ) individuals counted during the weekly pinniped census from the lighthouse, with a high count of 4,268 individuals on the 28<sup>th</sup>. There was a high count of 308 pups on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Most individuals were hauling out just above the intertidal. Sea Lion Cove, Dead Sea Lion Flat, and Aulon Peninsula were the most important haul-outs.

**Steller Sea Lions** – On average there were 65 ( $SD \pm 9$ ) individuals counted on the standard weekly survey, with a high count of 75 on the 21<sup>st</sup>. There was a high count of 26 pups on the 21<sup>st</sup>. On the 1<sup>st</sup>, 34 individuals were counted on West End Island.

**Northern Elephant Seal** – Numbers counted on the standard weekly survey declined from the previous month. On average there were 193 ( $SD \pm 27$ ) individuals counted, with a high count of 208 on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. On the 1<sup>st</sup>, we counted 37 individuals on the west side of Falcon's Roost, and another 69 on West End Island – many of these would not be detected on the weekly survey.

**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 36 ( $SD \pm 35$ ) individuals counted, with a high count of 75 on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Northern Fur Seals** – Numbers held steady through the month, with an average of 609 ( $SD \pm 59$ ) individuals counted. The high count of 847 occurred on the 7<sup>th</sup>. No pups were counted from the lighthouse this month because they are too difficult to distinguish from yearlings at this distance. However, 97 pups swimming in Breaker Cove were counted on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

On the 1<sup>st</sup>, we did a trip to West End Island, where we counted 1,287 fur seals, of which 470 (age and sex not identified) were in the water off Indian Head Beach. We identified 321 of the individuals on land and 66 in the water (Breaker Cove and off Shell Beach) as pups. We resighted 15 tagged fur seals and were able to read all of them in the field, but we only obtained photos of 10 that had tags legible in the photos – one of these (46F) was an individual we tagged in 2017.

## 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 30 on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Blue Whales were seen on two days at the end of the month, with a high count of 11 on the 29<sup>th</sup>. One Minke Whale was seen on 28<sup>th</sup>. Gray Whales were observed around the island on half the days, with a high count of 8 on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

## Sharks

No predation events or sightings were detected this month. The Monterey Bay Aquarium and Stanford researchers reported that they were not detecting sharks either.

## Salamanders

Three surveys were conducted this month. None were found on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, which was prior to the first rains. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, we detected four adults and ten juveniles. The ten juveniles were all under one coverboard with two adults.

## Owls

Roost surveys were conducted daily, and target netting was conducted on calm nights. Only two owls were believed to have arrived this month, and zero were captured. The two owls we banded in Oct of this year were not relocated in Nov. The following list details the owls we observed in Nov.

- An unbanded owl in a roost on the southeast side of Corm Blind Hill (CB01) was present most days in its roost.
- One of the two owls (P30/S) that overwintered in RCC311 last winter may have returned to this roost site. This owl was last resighted (and band confirmed) on 25 Oct 2019 in Owl Chute. However, on 21 Nov, an owl with a field-readable band on the left and silver on the right evicted an unbanded owl from RCC311 that had been present at that site from 2 Oct to 18 Nov. The bands of the owl seen on the 21<sup>st</sup> were only observed with a trail-cam at night. Based on four days of trail-cam footage, this owl only leaves its roost after sunset and returns to its roost before sunrise. Only one pellet has been found at this roost since 21 Nov.
- On 24 Nov, an unbanded owl, which, based on photos, appears to be the same as the owl evicted from RCC311, was found at PRBO 325. Although we are not seeing this owl regularly due to inclement weather, we have found a number of pellets at its roost entrance.
- On 28 Nov, an unbanded owl was first detected in a roost behind the Coast Guard house (CG01). Based on photos, this owl appears to be different from other owls.

## 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 detected this month.

## Mice

House mouse numbers remained high throughout the month and were frequently observed outside during the day. Mice have been particularly bad in the Coast Guard House, where holes adjacent to the upstairs bathroom mirror and in the ceiling of the rear entryway need to be repaired.

## Inverts and Intertidal

Three species of butterflies were seen, which consisted of a couple Painted Ladies, a West Coast Lady, and a Monarch.

## 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

A large Coast Guard plane flew over the island at noon at ~500', and a boat (CF 3558 RL) passed between Saddle Rock and the main island – neither incident disturbed wildlife. Nine boats were observed this month fishing within the State Marine Reserve and one of the nine boats dropped a crab pot, which it removed before departing. We reported most fishing violations to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

## Maintenance

Island biologists Tietz 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. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, Point Blue crew shoveled debris off the catchment pad, and on the 26<sup>th</sup>, we scrubbed the remaining silt during the first rain of the fall season.

## Maintenance Needs

- The red blinking light on the East Landing circuit breaker box no longer works.

- Two holes inside the Coast Guard house (one in the ceiling of the rear entryway, and one adjacent to the mirror in the upstairs bathroom) need to be fixed to prevent mice from entering the house.
- North Landing slewing chain broke a linkage and needs to be fixed.
- 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.
- Monterey cypress trees need to be pruned. The tree closest to the southeast side of the Coast Guard house rubs against the house during east winds. The other Coast Guard tree that fell in 2018 needs to be cut back.

## Solar/Electric

### PV System

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

### Generator run times

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy):	0 hours	(1801.4 on meter)
Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon):	1.6 hours	(633.1 on meter)
Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke):	9.9 hours	(400.4 on meter)
Kohler 15ROY61 (Peevey):	0.2 hours	(3933.1 on meter)
Webasto:	8 hours	

### Power use

Facilities power use: Start = 80,973; End = 81,555; for total of 582 kWh

### Fuel Reserves

Diesel used:	7.6 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 = 275,624; End = 277,149; for a total of 1,525 gallons	
Cistern:	6'10" or ~90,000 gallons
Gravity Tank:	empty
Settling Tank:	~3 feet

## Sightseeing Boats

Only one boat was observed viewing the island and wildlife – the Salty Lady was seen 7 times with an average of 30 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 2 times with an average of 22 POB.

## Non-breeding birds

Pacific Loon, Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed Shearwater, Buller's Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Brown Booby, **Red-footed Booby**, Northern Gannet, Brown Pelican, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Cackling Goose, Brant, Northern Pintail, Surf Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Killdeer, Wandering Tattler, Spotted Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, **Rock Sandpiper**, Pomarine Jaeger, Bonaparte's Gull, **Black-tailed Gull**, Heermann's Gull, Mew Gull, California Gull, Herring Gull, Iceland (Thayer's) Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, Glaucous Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Band-tailed Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, **Common Poorwill**, Anna's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Hutton's Vireo, Horned Lark, Barn Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Rock Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, **Red-flanked Bluetail**, Townsend's Solitaire, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Varied Thrush, European Starling, **Red-throated Pipit**, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, **Black-throated Green Warbler**, Townsend's Warbler, Palm Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned

Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Blackbird, Purple Finch, House Finch, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, American Goldfinch