

## **Farallon Mitigation Trial – Research Update: Dec. 13, 2012**

The Farallon Islands Trial Team has completed its third week of research activities hazing Western gulls from the South Farallon Islands. Western gulls have been identified as a potential species at risk if a proposed operation to remove invasive house mice from the islands proceeds. House mice are having a negative impact on the island's seabirds and native wildlife and threaten the island's endangered Ashy storm petrel population. Trial progress has been enormously successful with the team keeping the South Farallon Islands almost free of gulls over the trial period.



To provide an indication of the trials success, the average number of Western gulls detected on the islands during the period of the hazing operation has been less than 28/day. At the same time last year there were up to 12,716/day. Proving that gull numbers on the island can be reduced to such low numbers provides confidence that potential risk to gulls from a mouse removal operation can be successfully mitigated. The few gulls that returned to the islands were generally chased away after 15-30 minutes.

The team has gained a useful working knowledge of the techniques that are effective for dispersing gulls while at the same time minimizing the disturbance of pinnipeds and other wildlife on the Refuge. A combination of lasers, effigies, pyrotechnics, biosonics (playback of amplified gull distress or raptor calls) and helicopter hazing has been very effective at creating and maintain a gull-free area on the islands. An innovative and very effective new gull hazing technique has also been developed, utilizing a Long-Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) deployed from the helicopter over any remaining roosting gulls.

To simulate conditions expected during a mouse removal operation using a bait containing a rodenticide, placebo (non-toxic) rodent bait pellets were broadcast across areas of the island. Monitoring during the trial has yet to detect gulls in or near any of the areas of bait spread, providing confidence that gulls can be isolated from bait during an operation. During the past two weeks the

majority of placebo rodent bait pellets have molded, decomposed, degraded or have been hidden by vegetative growth. Over 96% of the pellets applied were nearly invisible to observers after one week and it is presumed that this bait would be unavailable to gulls.

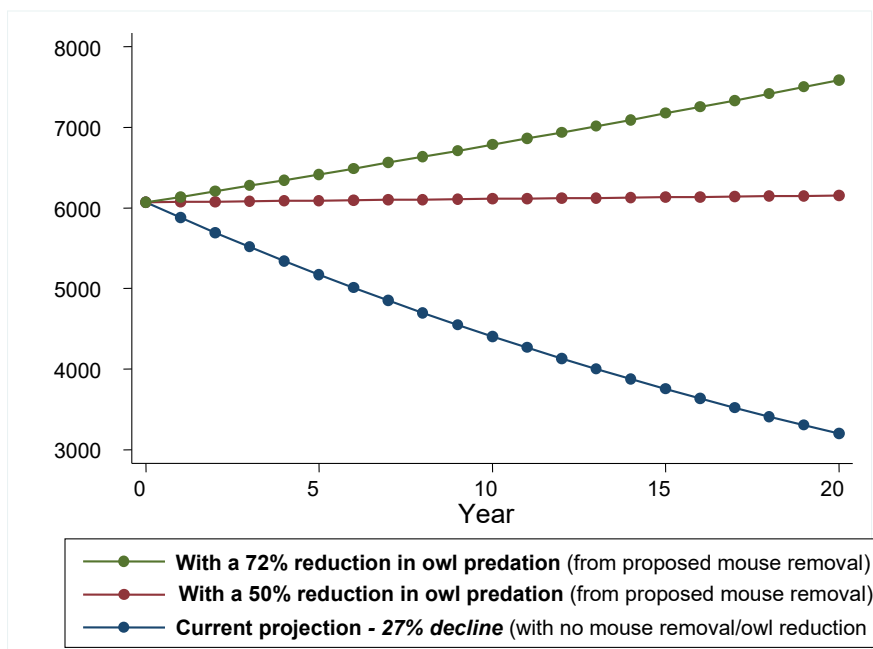
The multi-agency avian research team conducting the field trial is comprised of biologists from Island Conservation, USFWS, PRBO Conservation Science, as well as Oiled Wildlife Care Network, USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services and CDFG-OSPR. The team is now preparing for departure from the island, but PRBO Conservation Science staff remaining on the island will continue conducting daily gull counts after the trial team's departure to document how quickly Western gulls return to the island after the cessation of hazing activities. The Western gull breeding season usually begins in March-April.

Data collected to date will be useful for designing operational and mitigation plans for any proposed invasive mouse removal on the Farallones, and may also aid the design of preventative hazing systems to keep birds away from oil spills or other hazard areas along coastal areas.

The removal of invasive mice from the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge is proposed to help reverse the declining population trend of the IUCN endangered Ashy-storm petrel by reducing the negative impacts of the invasive rodent on this tiny and vulnerable seabird.



**Ashy Storm Petrel Breeding Population Size** (PRBO)



*The Farallon Restoration Project has been made possible by funding and assistance from settlement funds from the Luckenbach Oil Spill Trustee Council, California Coastal Conservancy, David and Lucille Packard Foundation, Campbell Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Coastal California Restoration Settlement Funds Grant #8001.04.034554; California Department of Fish and Game's Oil Spill Response Trust Fund through the Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) at the Wildlife Health Center, School of Veterinary Medicine, UC- Davis.*

**- Dan Grout, Farallon Project Manager**

For more information visit <http://www.restorethefarallones.org/>



A special thanks from the team goes out to *BirdGard*, who generously loaned several avian hazing devices to the research project. The team is also enormously appreciative to all of the cooperating agencies and individuals who have volunteered their time, funds or equipment to support this trial, and to development of the proposed mouse removal and island restoration project.