

Farallon Islands Monthly Report

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

November 2020

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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.

Southeast Farallon Island Visitors

Point Blue crew: Steve Dougill, My-Lan Le, Evan Lipton, Mike Mahoney, and Jim Tietz.

November 3rd: **Helicopter** brought out Scott Webster and Dominic Banks.

November 6th: **Helicopter** took Scott Webster and Dominic Banks back to the mainland.

November 10th: **“Freda B”** (skipper Paul Dines) brought out supplies and FWS employees Gerry McChesney and Alyssa Clevensline.

November 19th: **“Outer Limits”** (skipper Jim Robertson) brought out Bonny Doon Environmental crew: David Gill, Michael Guilbert, and Dean Pochard; and Tad Greulich of Reconcraft. Gerry McChesney and Alyssa Clevensline returned to the mainland in the afternoon with the Bonny Doon crew and Tad Greulich.

November 30th: **“John A.B. Dillard Jr.”** (Skipper Kixon Meyer) brought out Garrett Duncan, Mackenzie Cahill, Sabrina Dahl, Rhett Finley and Alyssa Clevensline and departed with Jim Tietz, Steve Dougill, Evan Lipton, and Mike Mahoney.

COVID-19: In response to ongoing concerns over impacts of this global pandemic, certain precautionary measures were taken this month to minimize the risk of COVID-19 infecting

island personnel: The use of PPE was required by newly arriving interns prior to and during the landing; the frequency of regular supply runs was reduced from twice a month to once a month; no off-island breaks were granted to crew members; and no visitors were permitted to tour the island. Only essential personnel are currently permitted on the island until further notice.

Weather/Ocean

Monthly weather is summarized in Figure 1. Light to moderate NW winds dominated this month. The island received 0.63 inches of rain this month, which fell almost entirely on the 17th and 18th. Fog was noted on 15% of weather observations. The range of midday air temperatures fell within the long-term normal range for this month, with an average of 13.5 ± 1.26 °C. This was 0.77 °C lower than the long-term average for the month. Sea surface temperature (SST) readings from the island were slightly lower than the long-term normal range for this month, with an average of 12.31 ± 0.64 °C. This was 0.96 °C below the long-term average for the month.

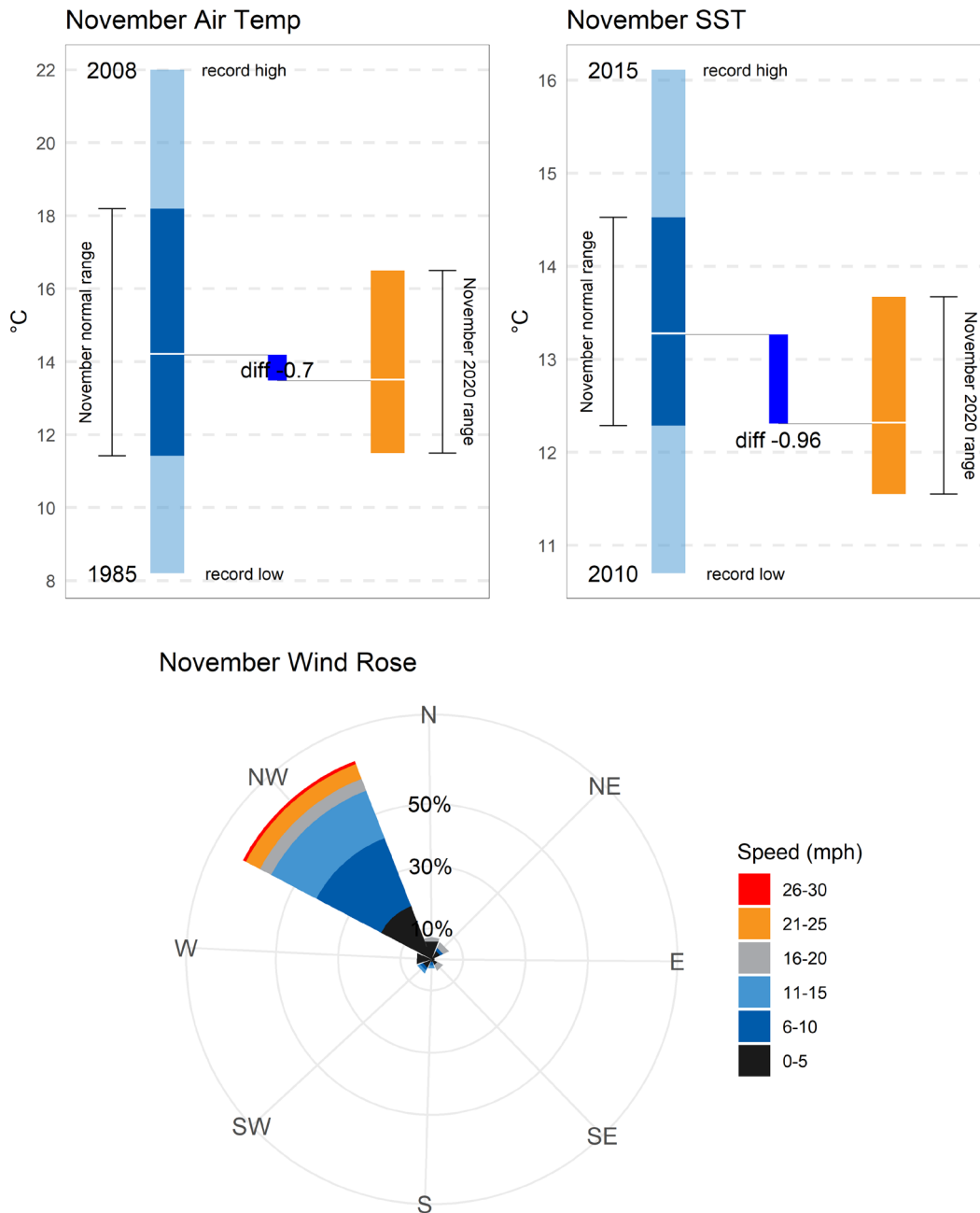


Figure 1. Noon air and sea surface temperature data summary. Light blue depicts the long-term (1971 – 2019) range of observations with years given for record highs and lows; dark blue shows the long-term range of averages for November. Orange depicts the range of current (2020) observations. Differences between the long-term and current means are shown in red if above normal, and blue if below normal. Daily wind speed (color scale) and direction binned into sectors for morning, noon, and afternoon observations for this month. Larger bars indicate more wind from that direction.

Oiled & Entangled Wildlife

Fifteen *Zalophus* were seen with monofilament, packing strap, or unknown material embedded tightly around their necks, but it's possible that these were all recorded in previous months. One Western Gull (immature) was entangled with fishing lure and line in its foot.

No oiled wildlife were observed this month.

Breeding Birds

Storm-petrels – At the beginning of the month, two Ashy sites were active with chicks and still being followed from the previous month. Both of these nests fledged by the 10th.

Brandt's Cormorant – A few thousand birds were observed daily either roosting on offshore islets or feeding on the ocean.

Pelagic Cormorant – Approximately a hundred birds were observed daily roosting on cliffs.

Double-crested Cormorant – None were seen this month.

Western Gull – A few thousand birds were observed daily either roosting on the island or feeding on the ocean. In the early morning, a few thousand birds returned to their territories. Numbers increased dramatically on the 27th and 28th when we estimated that there were 8000 individuals on territory.

California Gulls – Numbers of migrants declined this month.

Common Murre – On the morning of the 6th, all colonies were fully occupied. Typically, colonies in early November are only partially occupied, so it was surprising to see the colonies suddenly full.

Pigeon Guillemot – One to three birds were seen offshore on seven days this month.

Rhinoceros Auklet – One to two birds were seen offshore on six days this month.

Tufted Puffin – None were seen this month.

Cassin's Auklet – On most days, only a few birds were seen offshore on a daily basis around the island, but during the final week, no birds were seen offshore. On five days during the 2nd and 3rd weeks, large numbers of birds landed on the island at night to dig out nest sites and vocalize.

Black Oystercatchers – Individuals this month were usually seen either paired up along the shoreline or in the large roosting flock at Low Arch.

Pinnipeds

California Sea Lion – On average there were 7,602 (std \pm 2347) individuals counted during the weekly pinniped census from the lighthouse, with a high count of 10,364 individuals on the 6th. The high count for pups was 311 on the 6th. A few shark bitten individuals were seen this month. By the end of the month, very few individuals were using the Marine Terrace. Large numbers, though, were present on the north side of the island from Sea Lion Cove to Aulon Peninsula.

Steller Sea Lion – On average there were 84 (std \pm 23) individuals counted, with the high count of 113 on the 20th. The high count for pups was 18 on the 6th.

Northern Elephant Seal – Numbers increased this month, with an average count of 220 (std \pm 42) individuals. A high count of 251 individuals occurred on the 20th. All were immatures or sub-adult males.

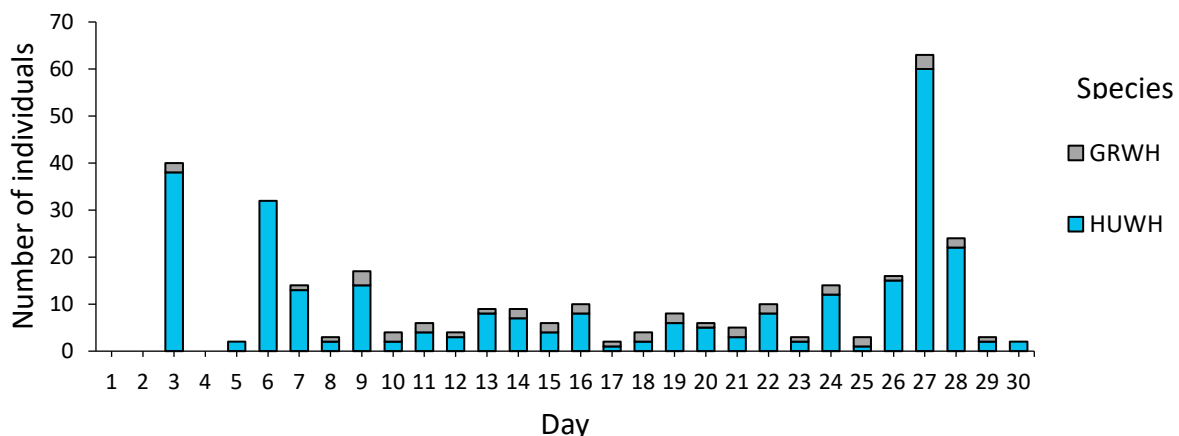
Harbor Seal – On average there were 27 (std \pm 23) individuals counted, with a high count of 51 on the 12th.

Northern Fur Seal – Numbers declined for the colony on West End this month as more individuals head to sea for the winter. On average there were 501 (std \pm 156) individuals counted, with the high count of 600 observed on the 12th. Pups were not identified from the lighthouse because they become too difficult to distinguish from immatures.

Cetaceans

Standard Survey – 14 one-hour standard whale watches were conducted this month from the Lighthouse using the Spotter App. Fog and/or wind hampered our ability to conduct these surveys. One to three gray whales were observed close to the island all month. Large numbers of humpback whales were seen in higher numbers sporadically and a high count of 60 was seen late in the month.

November 2020 Cetacean Sightings



Sharks

We spotted 24 shark predation events this month around the island. Most of these feeding events were located on the east side of the island from Fisherman's Bay to Saddle Rock. Researchers from the Monterey Bay Aquarium came to the island on a few days and encountered several sharks during their work. Official shark surveys concluded on the 27th.

Salamanders

Salamander surveys were conducted on the 1st and the 15th, but no salamanders were seen on either survey.

Owls

We recorded two arrivals this month, with a high count of 6 birds on the 8th. We were unable to capture any birds.

Crickets

No cricket surveys were conducted this month.

Bats

No bats were detected this month.

Mice

Mice were easily seen this month running around outside during the day and night. Mice continued to access the interior of the Coast Guard house by chewing through the foam barriers.

Inverts

Two species of dragonflies were seen this month: green darner (*Anax junius*) on the 16th, and variegated meadowhawk (*Sympetrum corruptum*) on the 16th.

Plants

USFWS personnel, Gerry McChesney and Alyssa Clevestine, treated New Zealand spinach (*Tetragonia tetragonoides*) and goosefoot (*Chenopodium murale*) in K Plot, lower Corm Blind Hill, Shubrick Point, North Landing area, above Shubrick Cove, and West Terrace.

Violations

People on thirteen boats were documented fishing in violation of the State Marine Reserve. None of these boats were observed to disturb wildlife on the island. Most of these violations were called into California Fish and Wildlife.

Maintenance

Island biologist Tietz conducted routine weekly maintenance checks on the PV system and generators. Monthly changes of water filters and crane greasing were conducted. No crane trainings were conducted this month due to several actual landings and rough ocean conditions at the landings. Webster and Dominic Banks completed annual inspections of East and North Landing cranes. Alyssa and Jim replaced two boards on the EL boat cradle. Jim, Gerry, and Alyssa removed drain plug from lower hull and determined that there was no water inside in an attempt to determine if water had intruded. Jim, Alyssa, and Steve replaced carbon brushes on portable blue diesel generator and were able to start it and confirm that it is generating power at 110 volts. Point Blue crew replaced 24 CFL bulbs with LED bulbs in the PRBO house. Steve put in new Velcro to weatherize nest boxes in the Habitat Sculpture. Bonny Doon Environmental completed semi-annual maintenance on septic system. Gerry collected water for water quality tests. Wheelbarrow wheel replaced. Point Blue crew shoveled debris off the catchment pad in preparation of winter rains.

Maintenance Needs

- The Peevey and Buffy generators have been decommissioned and the island is in need of a new PV backup generator.
- The cistern and other elements of the water catchment system are showing their age and are in need of major repairs or replacement. The cistern continues to lose water at a rate ~250 gallons per month.
- The Settling Tank has a leak in it when water is above 5.1 feet.
- The PRBO house kitchen counters especially around the sink continue to deteriorate. Replacement sometime in the next year is recommended.
- 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.
- The gutters and flashing on both houses are degrading and will need to be improved or replaced.
- Aluminum railings at East Landing and the lighthouse need repair.
- Powerhouse roof-access ladder mounts are badly corroded and need to be replaced.
- There is now a small leak in the closet next to the downstairs bathroom in the PRBO house. It only leaks when it rains, which may mean there is a failure in the roof above.
- The load cell battery and antenna at the EL crane were replaced, but now the load cell needs to be recalibrated.
- The Honda portable gas generator has a mysterious leak behind the air filter and is currently unusable.

Solar/Electric

PV System

Distilled water used:

0 gallons

Distilled water reserves: 46 gallons

Generator run times

Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy):	0 hours	(1830.5 on meter)
Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon):	0 hours	(668.1 on meter)
Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke):	16.7 hours	(540.6 on meter)
Kohler 15ROY61 (Peevey):	0 hours	(3954.2 on meter)
Webasto:	5 hours	

Power use

Facilities power use: Start = 87,984; End =88,565; for total of 581 kWh

Fuel Reserves

Diesel used:	14.8 gallons
Diesel drums: 9.5 @55gal:	523 gallons
Kohler 15ROZ (Buffy) Tank:	Full
Kohler 30REOZJC (Speedwagon) Tank:	Full
Kohler 40REOZK (Zeke) Tank:	Full
Kohler 15ROY61 (Peevey) Tank:	½
Webasto Tank:	Full
Gasoline for portable generator/boats:	29 gallons
6 gallon boat tank:	Full
3 gallon boat tank:	Full

Water Reserves

Water used this month: Start = 302,780; End =305,197; for a total of 2,417 gallons	
Cistern:	6' 0" or ~75,000 gallons
Gravity Tank:	empty
Settling Tank:	empty

Sightseeing Boats

The **Salty Lady** was the only boat recorded viewing the island and wildlife and was seen 2 days with an average of 19 POB. The **Derek M. Bayliss** was present at the Island looking for sharks 3 days with an average of 7 POB.

Non-breeding birds

Red-throated Loon, Pacific Loon, Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Eared Grebe, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed Shearwater, Buller's Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Black-vented Shearwater, Brown Booby, Northern Gannet, Brown Pelican, Cackling Goose, Black Brant, Surf Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Pacific Golden-Plover, Killdeer, Wandering Tattler, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, Least Sandpiper, Rock Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Red Phalarope, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Heermann's Gull, Mew Gull, Ring-billed Gull, California Gull, Herring Gull, Thayer's Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, Glaucous Gull, Sabine's Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl, Short-eared Owl, Anna's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**, Horned Lark, Barn Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Rock Wren, Bewick's Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned

Kinglet, Mountain Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Varied Thrush, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Audubon's Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Palm Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, Spotted Towhee, Clay-colored Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Oregon Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Purple Finch, Cassin's Finch, House Finch, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, and American Goldfinch.