

Press Release

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A Fur Seal Recovery Story – PRBO documents biggest year yet for Northern Fur Seals on the Farallon Islands

Last week, PRBO biologists completed their first Fall survey of the West End of Southeast Farallon Island and found that Northern Fur Seals have increased at least 40% from last year's numbers. This is significant because the Fur Seal colony on the island is believed to have once exceeded 100,000 individuals, but was completely extirpated from the Farallones due to fur hunting in the early 1800's.

In 1996, the first fur seal pup in over a hundred years was born on the Farallones. Since then the population has experienced exponential population growth as a result of continued protection. As of last week, 476 Fur Seals were documented on the island. Of those, PRBO scientists believe at least 180 were pups born on the island. This is a remarkable increase from just one pup born in 1996 to 180 pups this year, just 15 years later.

This amazing recovery story shows the value of protecting the US Fish and Wildlife Service Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, not only from hunting but from public visitation. Marine wildlife require islands free from terrestrial predators and invasive species, for breeding and resting, and are sensitive to changes in food, climate, disturbance, and hunting. The return of the Fur Seal to this wildlife haven demonstrates the success of the US Fish and Wildlife Refuge System in recognizing and protecting this key place for marine wildlife.

PRBO Conservation Science has been tracking the health and status of Farallon wildlife since 1965, in cooperation with USFWS.

“As a biologist committed to studying, understanding, and helping to protect wildlife, documenting and witnessing the return of a species is inspiring. It's why I chose the field of conservation biology.” said Jim Tietz – PRBO Farallon Island Biologist

Every day and night since 1968, PRBO biologists have lived on the Farallones, never more than a handful at a time, tracking every wildlife, weather, and ocean phenomenon that occurs. The science conducted on the island answers questions about how climate change is affecting the survival of our marine life – seabirds, seals, sea lions, and whales – all indicating the health of our ocean and the impact of our activities on the mainland. This constant monitoring and detailed observational recording is the cornerstone of field biology, and produces patterns and results that can help provide guidance for conserving the Farallones and the ocean surrounding them in this time of rapid environmental change. The return of the Northern Fur Seal is a success story for the Refuge, and a new phenomenon for our scientists to track. Many new questions arise about the impact of the return of the Fur Seal to the island, especially to its

nesting seabirds. PRBO will continue to observe the seal's return and share our results with other biologists around the world.

About PRBO Conservation Science (www.prbo.org):

Founded as Point Reyes Bird Observatory in 1965, PRBO works to conserve birds, other wildlife and ecosystems through innovative scientific research and outreach. PRBO's 140 staff and seasonal scientists advance conservation from Alaska to Antarctica. We partner with hundreds of governmental and non-governmental agencies as well as private interests to ensure that every dollar invested in conservation yields the most for biodiversity -- benefiting our environment, our economy and our communities. PRBO's budget for fiscal year 2011-12 is \$8.5 million. Visit PRBO on the web at www.prbo.org.

Note to reporters: Our organizational name is PRBO Conservation Science, as written with the acronym (not Point Reyes Bird Observatory Conservation Science).