



Science Organization Celebrates 50 Years of Research on the Farallon Islands

Petaluma, CA, April 3—Exactly fifty years ago today, Point Blue Conservation Science officially began its research program on the Farallon Islands, 26 miles west of San Francisco.

Unbeknownst to those pioneering scientists who landed at the Southeast Farallon Island on April 3, 1968, their efforts marked the beginning of one of the longest continuous research and stewardship efforts in the world. Since then, Point Blue scientists have been on the island—which hosts seals, sea lions and the largest seabird breeding colony in continental United States—24 hours a day, 365 days a year, working in close partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

“I feel incredibly lucky to have been able to spend so much time out on the ‘Galapagos of California,’” said Pete Warzybok, Farallon Program Biologist at Point Blue, who has spent over 2000 days and nights on the island. “The Farallon Island Field Station serves as Point Blue’s laboratory on the Pacific and it’s really a one of kind setting that provides a unique opportunity to monitor environmental changes to birds and ocean life.”

Birds are excellent indicators of environmental change. Over the past fifty years, Point Blue has amassed invaluable long-term data sets that are crucial for understanding—and addressing—threats to our climate, our ocean, seabirds, sea lions, seals, whales, white sharks, and the ocean food web. The long-term data sets collected by Point Blue on the Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge help to inform management and conservation actions on the island. Importantly, they also indicate the effects of climate change to the marine ecosystem.

“Our Farallon Islands program is a great representation of the work we do at Point Blue to conserve nature for wildlife and people,” CEO Ellie Cohen said. “By combining cutting edge scientific research with strong, collaborative partnerships we’re able to advance our climate-smart conservation goals. And the scientific value of our long-term data sets in teasing out both human-caused and natural change over time shows how vitally important it is that programs like this continue to be supported.”

“The decades-long partnership between Point Blue and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) is a great example of two organizations working together for a single purpose: studying and protecting the incredible wildlife and natural habitats of the Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge,” said Anne Morkill, USFWS Manager of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Over the years, Point Blue’s scientific research has led to significant ocean conservation outcomes including:

The establishment of what was then known as the Point Reyes Farallon Islands National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) designated by President Jimmy Carter in January 16, 1981. NOAA changed the name to Gulf of the Farallones NMS in 1997, and to Greater Farallones NMS in 2016 after expanding north to Point Arena in Mendocino County.

An end to gill-net fishing in Central California waters with the 1987 ban in the Gulf of the Farallones and northern Monterey Bay to protect seabirds from bycatch;

The 1993 state law to prevent the hunting of White Sharks off California’s coasts; and

The establishment of Marine Protected Area regulations around the Farallones in 2010, as part of the California Marine Life Protection Act.

Throughout Point Blue's time conducting research on the island, the scientists' stewardship and continuous presence led to the return of Northern Fur Seals, which, after an island-wide slaughter in 1834, abandoned the island completely until the 1970s, when they began a slow return. Thanks in part to Point Blue's stewardship, the population has steadily increased, and now numbers approximately 2,200 animals including over 1,100 pups born in 2016.

Our scientists have also borne witness to noteworthy wildlife trends, including the unprecedented appearance of a Northern Gannet in 2012, which traveled across the Arctic to be on the Farallones—never possible before climate change's impacts made the Northwest Passage open year round.

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Point Blue's 160 scientists advance 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.

For more information, including high-resolution images ([samples here](#), more available), please contact Zach Warnow: 415-786-5285.