The Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge
30 miles west of San Francisco, California

A Biologically and Economically Rich Ecosystem

Why Such a Rich Ecosystem?

Cold Water Upwelling in the California Current System: Northwesterly spring winds cause cold water to upwell and to flow from the north, chilling the currents from British Columbia to Baja California. The resulting abundance of nutrients and krill provide food for marine fish, birds, and mammals.

On the Edge of the Continental Shelf: The Farallon Islands sit at the shelf’s edge, where the ocean floor plunges from 300 feet to more than two miles deep. This change in ocean floor topography creates conditions perfect for upwelling and a rich food web.

A Diverse Food Web is the result of these unique ocean conditions. Fish, plankton, krill, squid, and jelly fish make up the diverse and plentiful food resources of this region, one of the most abundant in the world.

An Economic Resource

Ecotourism: Between 3,500 and 4,000 people experience the birds, whales, seals, and sharks of the Farallon Islands through boat tours to the Farallones. Boat tours take passengers close enough to see the animals without approaching too close to cause disturbance.

Fisheries: Both recreational and commercial fishers depend upon the healthy marine food web at the Farallon Islands.

A Wildlife Resource

A Haven For Seabirds: 300,000 birds of 12 species make this the largest seabird breeding colony in the continental U.S.—and home to 30% of California’s breeding seabirds.

Important For Rare Species: Half the world’s population of the Ashy Storm-petrel (species of special concern) breed on the islands, which are also used by Steller sea lions and Northern fur seals.

Refuge for Seals and Sea Lions: Five species rely on the Farallon Islands as a breeding and haul out site: Northern elephant seals, California sea lions, Northern fur seals, Pacific harbor seals, and Steller sea lions.

Essential Feeding Area for Ocean Predators: Seabirds, marine mammals, turtles, and great white sharks gather here in large numbers to feed in the rich food web surrounding the Farallones.
Research and Conservation on the Farallones
98 Years of Protection • 40 Years of Science

Conservation Partnerships at the Farallon Islands

The Farallon National Wildlife Refuge (FNWR) was established in 1909 by President Theodore Roosevelt. As part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s refuge system, the refuge is closed to public access.

The Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS) protects an area of 948 square nautical miles off the northern and central California coast. Special regulations apply, visit: http://farallones.noaa.gov/manage/regulations.html.

Marine Protected Area (MPA): The Farallon Islands are a California State Marine Conservation Area established in 1991. For more information: www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/mpa.asp.

Research on the Farallon Islands

PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) has been conducting year-round wildlife research, monitoring, and stewardship on Southeast Farallon Island continuously, since 1968, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

PRBO’s research focuses on understanding Farallon wildlife population dynamics, documenting species recovery, understanding the complexity of the marine food web, and quantifying the impacts of climate change for seabirds, marine mammals, and the entire marine food web.

Applied Science: Our scientific findings are applied to improve wildlife conservation and fisheries management and to reduce disturbance to Farallon wildlife and the marine ecosystem.

Research partners include sailors and fishers—the volunteer skippers of the Farallon Patrol who provide transportation to PRBO’s island field station year-round, and the commercial fishers who assist in our studies of seabird diets, revealing the health of the marine ecosystem.

To learn more about results of PRBO’s studies of Farallon wildlife and the surrounding marine ecosystem, visit www.prbo.org/sefimap.

PRBO Conservation Science has been conducting research and stewarding the island’s abundant and unique natural resources every day and night since 1968.

Learn more! Visit www.prbo.org/sefimap or call 707-781-2555 ext. 307.