

PRBO Conservation Science
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Press Release for November 9, 2007

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Oiled Birds at the Farallon Islands

Oil from the SF Bay Cosco Busan oil spill is affecting seabirds at the Farallon Islands, as noted by biologists from PRBO Conservation Science (formerly Point Reyes Bird Observatory). As of November 9, over 30 oiled birds of a half dozen species have been detected on the island. This is of concern as the Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge hosts 300,000 birds, 5 species of seals and sea lions, and other marine life inhabiting the waters around the islands. Since the SF Bay spill, PRBO biologists, in coordination with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, are on heightened alert, surveying the island and the surrounding waters multiple times each day.

Oiled species currently include Common Murres, Rhinoceros Auklets, Western Grebes, Brown Pelicans, and Western Gulls. Most of the oiled birds have been identified as Common Murres. This time of year it is common for biologists to observe 6-8,000 birds grouped together in rafts around the islands. Oil carried by winds or on currents reaching the islands from SF Bay has the potential to negatively impact a great number of birds. Biologists on Southeast Farallon Island are concerned about tarballs reaching the island and more oiled birds in next 3-4 days.

The Farallon Islands are home to over 300,000 birds of 12 species, making this the largest seabird breeding colony in the continental U.S. Five species of seal and sea lion also rely on the Farallon Islands for breeding and resting. The waters surrounding the island are rich with food, important for the birds, seals and sea lions, and whales. This is a significant natural resource for California, as well as the entire Pacific.

Effects of oil spills are far reaching, both geographically and ecologically. If significant numbers of birds are oiled it could have devastating effects on the total population size of some species, as recovery rates from rehabilitation are low. PRBO's involvement in oil spill response is to document all dead and alive birds brought into the Oiled Wildlife Care facility in Cordelia, CA, as part of the California's Incident Command structure. Identifying and documenting the oiled animals (live and dead) are critical components of spill response, providing the scientific evidence used to legally assess the impact of the spill on wildlife.

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PRBO Conservation Science is a non profit studying birds and ecosystems to advance conservation from Alaska to Antarctica, on land and at sea. Founded in 1965 as Point Reyes Bird Observatory, PRBO's 120+ staff and seasonal biologists 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.

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