

Alcatraz Island Seabird Interpretation, 2008



Final Report to the
Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA)
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC)

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INTRODUCTION

In 1993, GGNRA completed a management plan for Alcatraz Island, which included provisions for maintaining breeding populations of colonial waterbirds. This plan emphasized protection of the island's natural resources, while maintaining opportunities for visitor access, special events, and other island uses. To address protecting natural resources while maintaining visitor and event services, PRBO, with support from GGNPC, has been conducting education and outreach programs since 2006. Our objectives in 2008 were to reduce human-caused disturbance to nesting seabirds on Alcatraz by promoting safe-use actions to the public and specific user groups, as well as to improve public interest in and understanding of seabirds as a critical natural resource on Alcatraz as a way of reducing conflict between cultural and natural resource management. This report is a summary of our education and outreach efforts for 2008.

PUBLIC OUTREACH PROGRAMS 2008

The following outreach programs and activities were delivered:

International Migratory Bird Day Celebration, June 7, 2008

This was our third on-island celebration and public awareness day of Alcatraz seabirds. This celebration has two goals: 1) raise awareness of island visitors to the nesting seabirds while they enjoy and explore the prison, and 2) demonstrate to island staff that island visitors are interested in learning about Alcatraz seabirds. Activities include public viewing stations at three locations on the island, informational booths, games, and slide show in the electric shop, and an interpretive bird walk. In 2008, 600 people visited the electric shop and each of the viewing stations received 200 visitors.

Detail of IMBD Celebration Activities

Public Viewing Stations: Volunteer docents were stationed at each of the key breeding colony sites easily viewed by island visitors. At these areas visitors viewed seabirds through spotting scopes and binoculars provided by PRBO and NPS and learned about the natural history of the birds.

Electric Shop: The electric shop was opened to visitors and operated as a seabird education center where visitors sipped shade-grown coffee, ate shade-grown chocolate, walked through a photo gallery of the wildlife of Alcatraz, and received materials about seabirds, including the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch card. Other activities included a station where visitors could check out binoculars, look through field guides, and participate in a scavenger hunt. Visitors were also able to learn and see for themselves first hand through microscopes how scientists study the diet of the birds of Alcatraz. Booths were staffed by representatives of the Bay Area Sea Kayakers, International Bird Rescue Research Center, and the Oiled Wildlife Care Network.

Alcatraz Seabird Docent Program

This is the 2nd year of the Seabird Docent Program on Alcatraz. The goal of this program is to raise awareness of island visitors to nesting seabirds as they view and explore the prison and reduce visitor entry into closed areas. The docent program involves a two part training and a commitment to operate the stations at least 10 times during the seabird nesting season. In 2008 the docents spent a total of 278 hours on the island between 30 April and 6 August (an increase of nearly 150% from 2007) and reached over 3,000 visitors.

Detail of Docent Activities

On 21 April, we began training several volunteers, both returning and new, to become seabird docents on Alcatraz to help educate the public about seabirds found on the island and to potentially help reduce human-caused disturbances to their nesting areas. We added information and updated the Alcatraz Seabird Docent Binder that was used in 2007. The binder contains 27 pages of information helpful to docents in interpreting the natural history of seabirds, as well as some general information about Alcatraz. To deliver the resource binder and training outline, we held 1 classroom training sessions where we familiarized the docents with the National Park Service, PRBO, and the history of the island with a focus on the wildlife that inhabits it. We also held 1 field training session where we took the docents to the island and gave them an orientation on what a typical day for them would entail. A total of 14 docents were trained of which 8 were able to come frequently throughout the season.

The Alcatraz Seabird Docent Program was a huge success both for getting the word out about the importance of Alcatraz seabirds, as well as to connect a group of people with the island and the birds inhabiting it.

On-island Tours and Presentations

The goal of our on-island tours and presentations is to train island staff in the natural history and ecology of Alcatraz's seabirds, enabling them to answer questions from island visitors and become connected to the natural resources of the island. Sara Acosta delivered 4 presentations to on-island staff and other invited guests on various days between 10 April and 20 November on breeding ecology and sensitivity of nesting seabirds. Attendance was good and feedback of its informative impact was positive.

Targeted Outreach to Key User Groups and the Public

This program's goal is to reduce off-island human-caused disturbance to nesting seabirds. Activities include identifying and conducting outreach to boaters and air tour operators, creating outreach materials and websites, delivering presentations, and participating in a central coast working group to reduce seabird disturbance (the Seabird Protection Network)

To inform our targeted outreach efforts, we summarized disturbance data by user group (Table 1). From this, we developed a list of Bay Area marine and air operation groups to target. We then developed a presentation discussing the natural history of seabirds on Alcatraz, effects of disturbance, and ways to prevent disturbance by humans on foot, in boats, and in aircraft. Formal and informal presentations, meetings, media outreach, and delivery of disturbance reduction information are summarized in the table below.

Summary of Alcatraz Presentations and Outreach in 2008.

Date	Audience	# People
April 17, 2008	PRBO Lecture Series	20
June 16, 2008	PRBO Lecture Series	15
May/June 2008	SEA Alcatraz Program Students, on-island tour	4 classrooms
April 2008	BASK website update +	
April 2008	Posted a Wildlife Advisory at online boat launch sites *	
April 2008	Alcatraz Protection Flyer distribution	19 clubs, rental shops, marine user groups contacted; 7 responded

May 2008	Alcatraz Nature in the City newsletter article †	
June 30, 2008	ABC Channel 7 News Feature: Alcatraz Wildlife Affected by Oil Spill ‡	
June/July 2008	National Wildlife Federation Magazine released article ±	

+Updated Bay Area Sea Kayakers (BASK) website information

<http://www.bask.org/ENVIRO/frame.html>

*<http://gotoes.org/put-ins/>

†<http://natureinthecity.org/NTCnews5-26.html>

‡<http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/video?id=6237828>

±After an interview with National Wildlife Federation magazine in August 2008, a short article was published highlighting unexpected places where people can get great views of wildlife, including Alcatraz Island (<http://www.nwf.org/NationalWildlife/article.cfm?issueID=122&articleID=1597>).

Outreach Materials Created (summary)

- Docent binder
- Wildlife Protection Flyer
- Alcatraz Seabird Ecology and Conservation Presentations
- PRBO Seabird Aware Brochure (revised, reprinted and distributed in 2008)
- Student outreach posters – posters created through PRBO's SEA Alcatraz program. The best posters have been chosen as effective outreach tools for 2009.

Outreach Recommendations

- Continue participation in central California Seabird Protection Network (SPN) to ensure that minimum approach distances are set to benefit Alcatraz seabirds.
- Continue to work with NPS staff to develop interpretive signs and deliver tours around the island to help protect breeding seabirds as well as educate visitors about wildlife on this unique island.
- Continue the on-island docent program for seabird colonies during the nesting season
- Incorporate Alcatraz as a key outreach site for existing marine outreach programs (GFNMS Webs Under Waves and SPN for example) since other seabird colony sites are largely inaccessible to humans.
- Deliver presentations and outreach materials to marine and air users during and just prior to the nesting season with an emphasis on the early part of the season as colonies are most vulnerable during this time.
- Continue outreach to on-island staff regarding Alcatraz seabirds, using the seabird training packet, presentations, and bird tours delivered by PRBO on island biologists and/or docents.
- Conduct another International Migratory Bird Day celebration to reach the general public (June).
- Incorporate monthly/quarterly participation of PRBO outreach/biologist personnel into Bird Management Team Meetings
- Investigate recruiting environmental education graduate student (SFSU) to further outreach programs.

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Table 1. Summary table showing frequency (and percentage) of types of disturbances to Brandt's Cormorants on Alcatraz Island, 1997-2008.

Type of Disturbance	Number of disturbances observed												
	1997 (206 hrs)	1998 (227 hrs)	1999 (313 hrs)	2000 (216 hrs)	2001 (251 hrs)	2002 ¹ (96 hrs)	2003 ² (224 hrs)	2004 ² (340 hrs)	2005 (334 hrs)	2006 (363 hrs)	2007 (308 hrs)	2008 (186 hrs)	
External:	Marine traffic	38 (51%)	28 (30%)	98 (49%)	97 (48%)	79 (38%)	22 (33%)	92 (62%)	17 (40%)	17 (50%)	8 (30%)	35 (55%)	24 (62%)
	Air traffic	20 (27%)	18 (19%)	59 (29%)	61 (30%)	102 (49%)	23 (34%)	47 (32%)	14 (33%)	13 (38%)	7 (26%)	7 (11%)	4 (10%)
	Other	2 (3%)	4 (4%)	10 (5%)	24 (12%)	9 (4%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	4 (9%)	1 (3%)	1 (4%)	3 (5%)	0 (0%)
Island-Based:	Human interference	5 (7%)	5 (5%)	3 (1%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	13 (19%)	3 (2%)	5 (12%)	1 (3%)	9 (33%)	6 (9%)	7 (18%)
	Interspecies event	3 (4%)	23 (24%)	26 (13%)	12 (6%)	10 (5%)	7 (10%)	4 (3%)	1 (2%)	2 (6%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)
	Other	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Unknown Cause:	6 (8%)	15 (16%)	5 (2%)	8 (4%)	5 (2%)	2 (3%)	2 (1%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (9%)	1 (3%)	
Total:	74	94	201	203	207	67	149	43	34	27	64	39	
Frequency of disturbances³	0.36	0.42	0.65	0.84	0.82	0.70	0.67	0.13	0.10	0.07	0.21	0.21	

¹ The total hours observed was reduced in 2002 due to observer inconsistency.² In 2003-2008, includes extra disturbance monitoring on the North End of the island.³ This frequency represents the minimum number of disturbances per hour. Observers could not see the whole island at once, therefore the actual disturbance rate is likely to be higher.