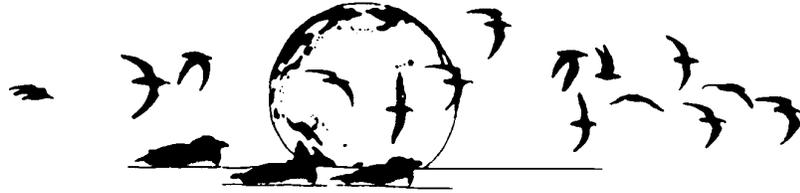


Pacific Seabird Group



DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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2 February 2004

Robert R. Treanor, Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission
Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090
FAX: (916) 653-5040

Re: Petition to List Xantus's Murrelet

Dear Mr. Treanor and Commission Members,

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG) we would like to review the need to list the Xantus's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus hypoleucus*) as threatened in California, as described in our petition to the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) in April 2002. We understand that the Commission will be considering the species listing on 5 February 2004 at a meeting in Long Beach, California. PSG is an international non-profit organization that was founded in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds with a membership drawn from the entire Pacific basin, including Canada, Mexico, Russia, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, government officials who manage seabird refuges and populations, and individuals who are interested in marine conservation.

PSG recognizes that much of the information on population trends and threats to Xantus's Murrelets are not always precise because the species is extremely difficult to study and little funding has been available for research. Xantus's Murrelets spend most of their lives far at sea; nesting in crevices and caves on inaccessible or nearly inaccessible slopes and cliffs of offshore islands; and birds are active at the breeding areas only at night. Despite the difficulty in obtaining data, there is much information that indicates this species' survival is at risk: (1) California, U.S., and world populations are small; (2) the distribution and number of breeding locations are limited, occurring only between the California Channel Islands and central Baja California, Mexico; (3) populations are substantially lower than 50 to 100 years ago; (4) populations are currently undergoing decline; (5) the number of young produced each year is

greatly reduced by predators; and (6) threats are many, some with high potential for catastrophic consequences.

Since submission of the petition, additional information on population status and conservation issues has become available on the murrelet, much of which was covered in a report prepared for the Commission by the Department of Fish and Game. This information supports our initial findings: (1) California's largest breeding colony at Santa Barbara Island continues to decline; (2) despite abundant habitat, the breeding population at Anacapa Island is in a reduced state due to nearly all eggs being destroyed by non-native rats; (3) in 2003 (first year after rat eradication on Anacapa Island), there has not been a significant recovery in the Anacapa Island population (although breeding success has increased); (4) a large colony at the Coronados Islands (just south of San Diego in Mexico) may be adversely affected by construction of a proposed liquid natural gas facility nearby; and (5) marine protected areas and proposed squid fishery management plans in the Channel Islands have reduced but not eliminated impacts to Xantus's Murrelets.

PSG and others have worked to inform state and federal agencies of the murrelet's plight and provided recommendations to reverse downward population trends since the early 1990s. While this led to some additional research on the species, few proactive measures were taken to conserve populations in California. Greater effort is needed to protect, restore, and recover Xantus's Murrelet habitats and populations, which is unlikely without listing. In 1992, PSG began efforts to consider the need for listing. By 2000, PSG had determined that the need for listing was strong. In 2002, PSG submitted petitions to the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the species as threatened. In response to PSG's recommendations and efforts over the last decade, there has been a gradual increase in efforts to protect and restore murrelet populations. Some of these measures will likely have substantial benefits to Xantus's Murrelets, especially the recent rat eradication at Anacapa Island and non-native predator removal at Mexican breeding colonies. Recovery at these islands, however, will likely take many decades and will occur only if population and habitat conditions favor increase. So far, protective measures have not addressed declines and threats at certain other colonies, especially California's largest colony at Santa Barbara Island. Thus, conditions that favor population increase are not assured.

Without the protections afforded by the Endangered Species Act, PSG considers that the Xantus's Murrelet likely will not be provided adequate protection or support for long-term restoration actions to allow population recovery from current depleted levels. PSG reaffirms its request to the California Department of Fish and Game to list the species as threatened in California. State listing is critical to ensure the continued survival of the species.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Harrison
Vice Chair for Conservation