

## SCMU/GUMU Technical Committee Annual Report

### **2023 REPORT OF THE PSG SCRIPPS'S MURRELET AND GUADALUPE MURRELET (AND CRAVERI MURRELET) TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

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#### **Introduction**

In 2012, the American Ornithologists' Union split Xantus's Murrelet into Scripps's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus scrippsi*) and Guadalupe Murrelet (*S. hypoleucus*), based on genetic separation. In September 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declined to list these species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, although they remain protected as state-threatened species under the California Endangered Species Act and they are listed as endangered in Mexico. The mandate of the Scripps's Murrelet and Guadalupe Murrelet Technical Committee (SMGMTC; formerly the Xantus's Murrelet Technical Committee) of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG) is to “monitor the federal listing petition, state status, research, and conservation issues; provide information to interested parties; and coordinate research and conservation in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada.” During the non-breeding season, the Scripps's Murrelet occurs at sea off the Pacific coasts of western Baja California, California, Oregon, Washington, and southern British Columbia; it breeds on at least 12 islands off southern California and northwestern Baja California. The Guadalupe Murrelet occurs at sea in the same areas as Scripps's Murrelet during the non-breeding season; but it breeds mainly at Guadalupe Island, with smaller numbers at the San Benito Islands and perhaps a few other islands as far north as Santa Barbara Island. The Craveri's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus craveri*) breeds on many islands in the Gulf of California and at least 4 islands off the coast of Baja California from Asunción to San Martín. Post breeding it ranges into waters off Southern California and occasionally further north. Its conservation status is threatened/vulnerable (IUCN 2019) and is impacted by many of the same stressors and concerns as Scripps's and Guadalupe murrelets, hence its inclusion in development of a conservation plan for these species.

Below, we summarize SMGMTC activities in 2023:

#### **Meetings**

The SMGMTC met at the February 2023 PSG Annual Meeting (agenda included). Committee members provided updates on ongoing monitoring, research, restoration, and conservation activities, and discussed the status of the management and restoration plan.

#### **Murrelet Management and Restoration Plan**

In 2015, the SMGMTC updated part of the Murrelet Management and Restoration Plan that will help guide government and private efforts to protect and restore Scripps's and Guadalupe murrelets at

breeding islands in southern California and northwestern Baja California. The draft plan was completed in 2011. In 2021, SJV funded the joint proposal submitted by the National Park Service, the California Institute for Environmental Studies and the Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas, A.C. Progress made on the revised draft was presented at the 2023 Committee Meeting and a draft of the plan will be presented and shared at the 2024 meeting.

### **Listing Status**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declined to list Scripps's Murrelet and Guadalupe Murrelet under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in a decision issued on 21 September 2016. Certain members of the committee assisted the Service in 2014-2016 with needed information. The Service's finding stated that "we find that the stressors impacting the species have either been eliminated or reduced to the point where they are not of sufficient imminence, intensity, or magnitude, either singularly or cumulatively, to indicate that the Guadalupe [and Scripps's] murrelet is currently in danger of extinction (an endangered species), or likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future (a threatened species) throughout all or a significant portion of its range."

The State of California officially listed the Xantus's Murrelet as Threatened in December 2004. However, there is still no recovery plan or implementation schedule. Guadalupe Murrelet is listed as Endangered in Mexico; the species is not listed in Canada. None of these designations have been changed since Xantus's Murrelet was officially split into Scripps's Murrelet and Guadalupe Murrelet.

### **Nest Monitoring and Surveys (2023)**

*Santa Barbara Island:* Nest monitoring of Scripps's Murrelets to measure hatching success, timing of breeding, and changes in population size was continued by the California Institute of Environmental Studies (CIES) and Channel Islands National Park (CINP: Mazurkiewicz), with funding from the CINP. Scripps's Murrelets nested in restoration plots in both artificial and natural nest sites, and active nest sites have been increasing in some of these locations since 2014. A Guadalupe murrelet was observed nesting on SBI in 2023.

*Anacapa Island:* Monitoring at Anacapa in 2022 occurred over the course of the nesting season with year two of funding from NPS through a Focused Condition Assessment study. This project was conducted with a graduate student at the University of Washington (Amelia DuVall) and CIES to implement this two year project (2021-22). It includes monitoring of known nesting caves and other locations. We are also looking at predation pressures by common raven and other species. Monitoring includes camera arrays and acoustic monitoring in addition to the nest checks. No monitoring was conducted in 2023 at Anacapa.

*San Clemente Island:* In 2023, the California Institute of Environmental Studies (CIES; Parker and Whitworth), Institute for Wildlife Studies, and US Navy (USN) conducted nest searches and monitoring, spotlight surveys, and at-sea captures in their 12th consecutive year of population monitoring at the island. Work also included installing artificial nest modules (n=15) for nesting murrelets. One GUMU nest found in 2022 successfully hatched.

*Guadalupe:* Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas, A.C. (GECI) continued monitoring activities for Guadalupe Murrelet, including nest censuses/estimation, evaluation of reproductive performance and banding with funding from NFWF, Packard Foundation, and other sources. Field activities were conducted as usual.

### **Restoration**

*Anacapa Islands:* Active plant restoration efforts by CINP and CIES is currently underway on East Anacapa Island for a sixth year in 2023 with funding from the state of California and National Park Service (NRPP) . Black rats (*Rattus rattus*) were eradicated at Anacapa in 2002 and the murrelet population doubled in size by 2014 (CIES: Whitworth & Carter). Murrelets do not currently nest on the top of East Anacapa (where plant restoration is occurring) but occur in close proximity in cliff area near restoration sites. Nesting has been documented in sea caves, steep slopes and cliffs since 1994. This work is funded by MSRP for the past several years.

*Guadalupe:* In 2023, GECI continued restoration activities through implementing social attraction techniques for murrelets using artificial burrows and acoustic playbacks with funding from NFWF, Packard Foundation, and other sources. Restoration actions were carried out as usual.

### **Conservation Issues**

*Introduced Mammals:* GECI continues with the feral cat eradication on Guadalupe Island and enforcing biosecurity measures to prevent re-introduction of non-native species on nesting islands in Baja California with funding from NFWF, Packard Foundation, and others, and with support from federal government and local fishing communities.

CINP and the USN are discussing biosecurity efforts that could be taken to prevent movements of introduced Black Rats from San Miguel Island (SMI) to Prince Island. A proposal was submitted to NFWF in 2017 that funded a feasibility study for rat eradication at SMI.

At San Clemente Island, CIES and IWS have been using motion-sensor cameras to detect predator activity (feral cats, island fox, and rats) in murrelet breeding areas. IWS are actively removing feral cats, with funding from the USN.

### **PSG Scripps's, Guadalupe and Craveri's Murrelet Technical Committee Meeting**

Date: Tuesday, 14 February 2023

Time: 2 pm- 5 pm (Pacific Time)

Committee Co-Coordinators and Meeting Organizers:

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### **AGENDA**

- 2:00-2:15 Welcome and introductions
- 2:15-3:00 Share research, monitoring, and conservation updates
- 3:00-4:30 Discuss current status and next steps for the SCMU/GUMU/CRMU Murrelets Conservation Management Plan.
- 4:30-4:50 Wrap up and next steps