
Pacific Seabird Group



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

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Mollie Beattie, Director
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
634 Arlington Square
Washington DC 20240

Boyd Gibbons, Director
California Department of Fish & Game
P.O. Box 2090
Sacramento, California 94244-2090

Re: Advance Notice of Petition to List Xantus' Murrelet as Endangered

Dear Director Beattie and Director Gibbons:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we wish to advise you that we plan to petition the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) within the next few months to list Xantus' Murrelet (Synthliboramphus hypoleucus) as an endangered species pursuant to § 4(b)(3) of the Endangered Species Act^{1/} and 50 C.F.R. § 424.14 (1992). FWS currently classifies this species as a category 2 endangered species.^{2/} PSG may also petition the California Department of Fish & Game to list this species as endangered under the laws and regulations of the State of California. The purpose of this letter is to invite you and interested organizations to participate in our efforts to document and assess the status of and threats to this species.

^{1/} 16 U.S.C. § 1533(b)(3) (1988).

^{2/} 56 Fed. Reg. 58804-12 (November 21, 1991).

PSG is an international organization that was founded in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. PSG draws its members from the entire Pacific Basin, including Mexico, Canada, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, French Polynesia and Russia. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, state and federal officials who manage seabirds and the marine environment, and individuals with interests in marine conservation.

In recent years, PSG has become increasingly concerned regarding the status and vulnerability of the Xantus' Murrelet. In 1991, the FWS resurveyed many breeding colonies in the Channel Islands, California. In the draft final report (Carter et al., 1992), FWS estimated a total of 1,780 breeding birds in California, 95% of which nest on Santa Barbara Island. PSG hopes to facilitate the investigation of the status of nesting locales on other California Channel Islands during 1994. In addition, other data collected by the University of California and National Park Service in the 1970s and 1980s has indicated poor reproductive success for many years and significant mortality by avian and mammalian predators. Close proximity to offshore oil platforms, nearby tanker traffic, and substantial military activity in the region, places the Xantus' Murrelet in a tenuous position for long-term viability. PSG hopes to facilitate additional investigations of the status of nesting colonies on other California Channel Islands and in Baja California in the future. With a better understanding of its current status, PSG hopes to work with various agencies to develop appropriate actions to protect and study this little-known rare alcid species. PSG and the International Council for Bird Preservation have already asked Congress to appropriate funds to remove alien predators from Isla Clarión and North Coronado Island, Mexico, to allow Xantus' Murrelets to resume normal breeding there.

PSG formed a committee of interested and knowledgeable biologists and resource managers in 1992 to assess available information on this species and to evaluate existing and potential threats. The committee met on several occasions to discuss this issue during 1992-1994. The result of their deliberations was the conclusion that available data warrants concern as to whether the species may be in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future. The committee recommended to the Executive Council of PSG to petition the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to elevate Xantus' Murrelet from its current category 2 status to either Threatened or Endangered, as appropriate.

On 28 January 1994 PSG's Executive Council approved a motion to proceed with the petition, and directed the Xantus' Murrelet Technical Committee to prepare the necessary documentation. As part of this process we are notifying agencies and organizations with jurisdictions, activities, or interests within the Southern

California Bight of our intent, and soliciting their input and participation in the process.

To this end the Xantus' Murrelet Technical Committee of PSG is convening a meeting from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 18, 1994 to consider any additional information and answer questions regarding the status of this species. The meeting will be held at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, 439 Calle San Pablo, Camarillo, California 93012. The Foundation telephone numbers are (805) 388-9944 Voice, (805) 388-8663 Fax.

If a representative from your organization would like to attend this meeting or contribute information, please contact William T. Everett, Coordinator, Xantus' Murrelet Technical Committee, at the Western Foundation.

Because we agree with Department of the Interior Secretary Babbitt that the best means of avoiding "train wrecks" that have characterized the implementation of the Endangered Species Act is to have better information, we have initiated this cooperative effort at this early stage. We hope this process will ultimately result in a secure future for this rare seabird species and unique public resource, and we look forward to meeting you or your representative at the 18 May meeting at the Western Foundation.

Sincerely,

John Piatt CSM

John Piatt
Craig S. Harrison

cc: The Nature Conservancy
National Park Service, Channel Islands National Park
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,
Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary
United States Coast Guard
National Marine Fisheries Service
Minerals Management Service
Santa Catalina Island Conservancy
United States Navy, Point Mugu Naval Weapons Station
United States Navy, Naval Air Station North Island
Point Reyes Bird Observatory
National Biological Survey
International Council for Bird Preservation - U.S. Section