

Pacific Seabird Group



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

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Tim Setnicka
Superintendent, Channel Islands National Park
1801 Spinnaker Drive
Ventura, CA 93001

Re: Rat Eradication on Anacapa Island

Dear Setnicka:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we are very disappointed the Park Service has delayed the aerial drop of brodifacoum at Anacapa Island. While we appreciate the need for all permits to be in order, there is an apparent lack of appreciation for large losses to migratory birds that rats cause. This condition will continue to exist if the rat eradication program is not allowed to go forward.

PSG is a non-profit scientific organization dedicated to the study and conservation of seabirds and their marine environment. PSG is an international organization that was founded in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. PSG takes a broad international perspective in recognition that the oceans are tied together by the wandering of seabirds and the flow of ocean currents. Accordingly, our membership is drawn from the entire Pacific basin, including Canada, Russia, Japan, China, Mexico, 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.

Our ranks include experts on invasive predator eradication and seabird biology in the Channel Islands, Xantus' Murrelet in particular. PSG is concerned about the welfare of this species and would make the following points about the effects that rodent eradication would have on seabird conservation.

(1) Xantus' Murrelets are a rare, occurring on 4-5 islands in the U.S. and 4-6 islands in Mexico. Evidence suggests the population on Santa Barbara Island, largest in the U.S., has declined significantly. Population trends elsewhere are not as well known, but significant declines are suspected, many of which are due to introduced predators.

(2) Due to the apparent population declines and threats to this rare seabird, PSG has prepared a petition to list the species under state and federal endangered species acts. The petition is currently under revision by the Xantus' Murrelet Technical Committee of the PSG.

(3) The Anacapa Island group apparently hosts a small population of Xantus' Murrelets, but population trends there are unknown. There appears to be a considerable amount of unused nesting habitat, but it is unknown how many murrelets the island group could support.

(4) Evidence indicates that introduced black rats and native deer mice eat murrelet eggs on Anacapa, thereby limiting productivity. The effects of this predation on the Anacapa murrelet population is unknown. However, the effects of mouse predation on murrelet eggs have been well documented on Santa Barbara Island, and effects at the population level quantified. In summary, mice take ~30-50% of the eggs produced each year; this chronic reduction in productivity has been a significant factor in the Santa Barbara Island population decline. It is the opinion of PSG, that black rats, as larger predators than mice, take more eggs, and possibly chicks, on the Anacapa Islands. It is likely that this rate of predation has consequences at the population level there. Therefore elimination of the predation should have positive population-level effects.

(5) The use of aerially delivered rodenticides to eradicate introduced mammalian predators on seabird islands has been tested and is a well-established technique worldwide. Management of exotic predators is a primary seabird conservation and restoration action. PSG believes that eradication of black rats from the Anacapa Islands will promote the population growth of Xantus' Murrelets and other seabird species. PSG endorses the use of the rodenticide brodifacoum to eradicate black rats from Anacapa Island.

(6) The Anacapa Island rat eradication project should not be delayed. For a variety of well documented biological reasons, application of the rodenticide during November is most appropriate. Delaying the project will likely result in a less efficient eradication program (according to the rat eradication team). Additional collateral damage to other seabird species (e.g., gulls) may occur as these species are more numerous on the habitat later in the winter.

(7) PSG is not concerned with the anticipated minimal level of anticipated collateral damage to Western Gulls posed by application of the rodenticide during November. Worldwide, Western Gulls are increasing; there will be no significant population-level effects of the collateral mortality to this species.

(8) PSG has no comment regarding collateral damage to songbirds or other organisms. PSG's expertise and concerns are with marine birds. PSG strongly supports the eradication of black rats from the Anacapa Islands to promote the conservation of seabirds, and believes that this project will be successful.

(9) For reasons outlined above, PSG urges the National Park Service and other agencies to conduct this project immediately. Delay of the project will likely result in additional mortality to Xantus' Murrelets and other seabirds.

We hope this nationally important conservation project can go forward as planned without delay. We are sure the seabirds as well as the NPS will benefit from this project. If we can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Harrison
Vice Chair for Conservation