

**From:** [Peter Pyle](#)  
**To:** [Jim Tietz](#)  
**Cc:** [Gerry\\_McChesney@fws.gov](mailto:Gerry_McChesney@fws.gov); [brad.keitt@islandconservation.org](mailto:brad.keitt@islandconservation.org)  
**Subject:** Re: Origin of SEFI house mice  
**Date:** 06/24/2011 10:28 AM

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Hi Jim -

It hasn't been confirmed that I know of but at least twice I collected some mice for folks at MVZ to run the genetics. If they ran the test I never heard about it.

In the late 1980s or early 1990s sometime I started wondering why the SEFI mice had white bellies but House Mice in mainland California had dark bellies. Karen Cebra from CAS was on the island and we collected a couple and sent them to a Peromyscus expert in Michigan who proclaimed that they were juveniles of that genus but that, as juvs, he couldn't figure out the species. Meanwhile I'd also found an old reference (1840) to the sealers making traps for the mice out of a water-filled barrel on SEFI, in which they would capture 100's per night. These two things led to a bit of a goose chase, in which I checked the grooving on the teeth and tried to figure out of what genus they actually were, thinking maybe they were an undescribed species. I concluded that the presence of the rabbits from 1855-1973 and their eating all of the greenery may have suppressed the mouse population somehow to invisibility year-round, as is the case now in spring.

I eliminated Peromyscus based on the tail and teeth (the "expert" later sheepishly retracted his ID) and also eliminated harvest mice (Reithrodontomys) and was left concluding that they were House Mice that had evolved white bellies for some reason. I became interested in why this might be and in checking the collection of Mus at CAS for variation noted that most (maybe about 100) collected in California and North America did indeed have dark bellies (there was an odd one here and there with whitish bellies). At the end of the line were five individuals with white bellies that looked the most like the SEFI mice. The labels indicated were of subspecies jenkinsi collected in Siberia (I think this subspecies name is no longer valid and it is called something else now). But it all seemed to make sense (or at least a good story) that they got there originally with the Russian sealers in the 1810-1830s.

For a while I didn't talk about this too much. I was worried that someone might proclaim the mice a "historic" feature of SEFI, as the NPS has done (or at least has tried to do) with the cows on Point Reyes. I worried that someone would use this as a reason not to want to eradicate them.

By the way, I have also been looking for a report that I recall writing in the late 1990s or early 2000s summarizing the mouse/owl/storm-petrel situation. I have some notes but cannot find a hard or electronic copy of the report. It may have been for the "Farallon Mouse Planning Meeting" held by Joelle Buffa/FWS on March 16th, 2000.

My notes document that from 1976 to 2000 there were 12 dead burrowing owls found between January 28th and May 23rd. There were also an additional 16 or 17 owls recorded into spring, after the migratory period, that disappeared and it looks like I may have presumed these had also died. Also that there were 273 fall arrivals of BUOW during this period and 91 individuals had wintered. I think most of this got

summarized into the poster that Kyra did for a mammal-eradication symposium, and I'm not sure if there is a copy of this around any more either. It seems this info may be needed to document that many owls also die out there in spring. Perhaps if the report or poster cannot be found someone can go through the zip sheets and journals to recreate these data.

Hope this helps and I'm happy to do anything I can to see an eradication effort take place.

Peter

At 06:37 PM 6/23/2011, Jim Tietz wrote:

Hi Peter,

Do you know if the house mice on SEFI originated from Siberia? There is some debate now about where they came from. If they are from Siberia, where did this info come from?

Thanks,  
Jim

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