



Ashy Storm-Petrel near the Farallon Islands. Over 60% of this species breeds on the Farallones and populations there have declined severely since the early 1970s, when Burrowing Owls began to overwinter there. Photo: Compliments of the Author. Photo of the South Farallon Islands (Southeast Farallon Island with Maintop Island in the foreground) in Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge. Bird photo: Annie Schmidt. Islands Photo: by Jan Roletto — Public Domain — National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Response to Opposition to Eradicate Invasive Mice from the Farallon Islands

The proposed mouse-eradication project is grounded
in the absolute best and most-current science available
and has nothing to do with the current administration

Dec 25, 2019

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By Peter Pyle

We feel we must again respond to the opposition to a proposal by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to eradicate non-native and invasive House Mice from the Farallon Islands (<https://www.sonomacountygazette.com/sonoma-county-news/part-2-threat-to-our-coast-updating-the-local-coastal-plan>) (<https://www.sonomacountygazette.com/sonoma-county-news/part-2-threat-to-our-coast-updating-the-local-coastal-plan>). There are several things that are factually incorrect, misleading, or sensationalized about the author's piece, but to link the effort to President Trump and "fake science" is, well, incorrect and misleading itself.



Location of the Farallon Islands. Modified by TShilo12 from Image:bWpdm5 usgs photo golden gate.jpg to show position of Farallon Islands. CC BY-SA 3.0

One of us helped to found the biological research station on the Farallones, and both of us worked there as biologists during the 1970s into the 2000s, documenting migration patterns and breeding efforts of the birds there, along with all that might negatively affect their populations. One of us is engaged in an alien mammal-eradication project on Maui, which looks to be saving the last colony of the endangered Newell's Shearwater on that island. Thus, feel well grounded, scientifically, in this issue. Our Farallon studies on owl/mouse/storm-petrel interactions were initiated in the mid-1990s, have been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and have continued to be undertaken in consideration of mouse removal by dedicated FWS biologists over a course of more than 20 years (and four presidential administrations). *The proposed mouse-eradication project is grounded in the absolute best and most-current science available and has nothing to do with the current administration.*

A lot has been written about this proposal, both pro and con. We invite those interested in being informed to read the FWS's Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the project [here](#)

https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/South_Farallon_Island_%20Invasive_House_Mouse_Eradication_Project_Final%20EIS.pdf (https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/South_Farallon_Island_%20Invasive_House_Mouse_Eradication_Project_Final%20EIS.pdf),

along with several follow-up papers by scientists and others on the validity of this eradication effort, e.g.,

http://www.marineornithology.org/PDF/44_1/44_1_121-126.pdf (http://www.marineornithology.org/PDF/44_1/44_1_121-126.pdf)

and

<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ecs2.2878> (<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ecs2.2878>),

as well as opinions by us in favor of the proposal,

<https://www.ptreyeslight.com/article/tradeoff-clear-farallon-islands> (<https://www.ptreyeslight.com/article/tradeoff-clear-farallon-islands>)

and

<https://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/2228418-181/close-to-home-eradication-of?sba=AAS> (<https://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/2228418-181/close-to-home-eradication-of?sba=AAS>)

We are also happy to share our letters to the California Coast Commission (CCC) by request at the email address below.

A misconception by the proposal's opponents is that Farallon biologists are happy to be using a small quantity of rodenticide to remove the mice, as if a simple-minded black-and-white issue. Rather, we support the effort based on careful scientific assessment of all costs and benefits, the sort of comprehensive and open-minded consideration that seems to be lacking among the proposal's opponents. With recent substantial technological advances in eradication protocols, scientists predict that the meticulously planned Farallon attempt will have a very high chance of success (85% according to one estimate we've heard). With carefully-planned mitigation efforts, the costs may be as little as a few gulls or less, and the benefits a reversal of the decline of the Ashy Storm-Petrel, in perpetuity, along with many other benefits that come with a return to a naturally balanced native ecosystem. We don't gamble, but we liken the odds of success to placing a bet of \$100 with an 85% of winning \$1,000,000. Who wouldn't take this chance? Another way to look at it: If your friend has advanced cancer, you recommend chemotherapy, despite its drawbacks, in the hopes of a cancer-free future. Who wouldn't recommend this to a friend?



With carefully-planned mitigation efforts, the costs may be as little as a few gulls or less, and one of the benefits a reversal of the decline of the Ashy Storm-Petrel.

At the previous CCC meeting, contrary to Charter's statement, the FWS had well-established documentation in support of all questions. The FWS pulled the proposal at the CCC's direction due to one or more CCC members' not having read the EIS and being influenced by well-organized opposition from many who have never set foot on the Farallones. Please help those biologists and scientists who have worked on the island by expressing support for this mouse-removal effort to the CCC. We have no web site in which to click and send an unmindful letter. We are instead basing our opinions and letters on our long histories working on and caring for the Farallones, and on well implemented research, "true science" if you will.

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Caption to photo: Ashy Storm-Petrel near the Farallon Islands. Over 60% of this species breeds on the Farallones and populations there have declined severely since the early 1970s, when Burrowing Owls began to overwinter there.

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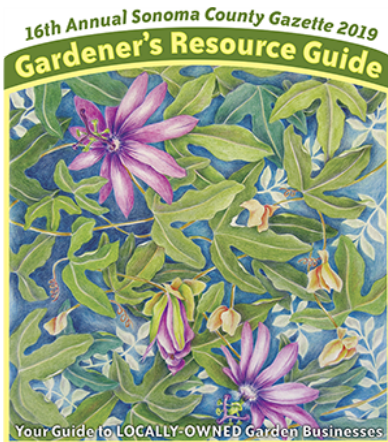
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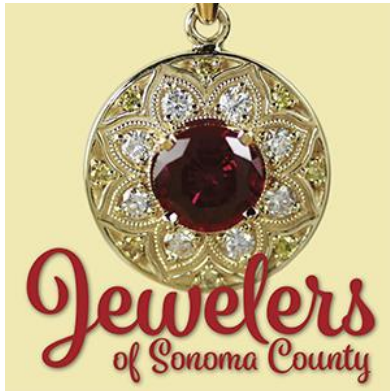
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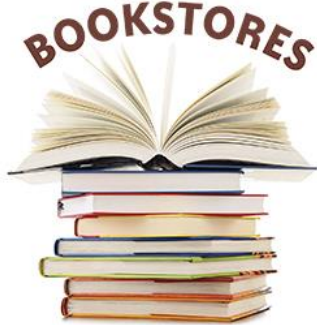
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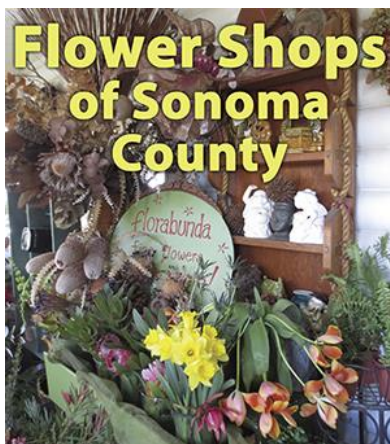
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