Field Trip Report  
October 6, 2013  
Gulf of the Farallones Sanctuary Pelagic Trip  
Trip Leader: David Wimpfheimer

It isn’t often one can be 35 miles offshore the Golden Gate on glassy seas wearing a t-shirt, but that is what we enjoyed on our annual trip to the Farallon Islands and offshore waters. We travelled aboard the comfortable Outer Limits with Captain Jim Robertson as our skipper and David Wimpfheimer as our guide. The birds were plentiful and we spotted Parasitic Jaeger, Pelagic Cormorants, grebes, Black Turnstones and Oystercatchers, among others, before passing Point Bonita Lighthouse. As we moved past the point we picked up Brandt’s Cormorant and the first of many Common Murre. As we arrived at the South Bar, the water depth decreased to only 44 feet and we began to see rafts of birds and in the distance, a Humpback Whale. We enjoyed moderately good view of this animal as it spouted several times and showed its fluke before diving. Captain Robertson said the birds were attracted to the fish that pile up against the bar. We had excellent views of Surf Scoters and Pink-footed and Buller’s Shearwaters.

As the Farallones came into view, David told us of the history of the islands and of the 30,000 Northern Fur Seals killed and the 14 million murre eggs collected before the islands were protected. Sharp-eyed Logan Kahle spotted the Blue-footed Booby on the islet called Sugarloaf. It was sitting with a group of Brown Pelicans. A Peregrine Falcon was also spotted. We enjoyed seeing, hearing and smelling the Northern Fur Seals, California and Steller Sea Lions on the rocks. As we passed by the huge rock arch on the south end of the islands, David explained how important the iconic landmark was to early travelers, artists and photographers. Once out past the islands we encountered Sabine’s Gulls, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros Auklet, and Northern Fulmar. Shearwaters flew in close to the boat. Although we saw three species during the day, there were only a few Sootys, usually the most common by far. We had amazing views of Black-footed Albatrosses flying and sitting on the water. Many birds were attracted to
the dead fish discarded by Black Cod longliners fishing in the area. A **South Polar Skua** flew in to challenge gulls to the feast. Probably the most unlikely sighting was a small flock of **Vaux’s Swifts** passing overhead, 35 miles out to sea.

We saw only one whale on our trip, but had great views of many Harbor Porpoise. Its not always easy finding cetaceans in our vast ocean, but the birds and incredible weather more than made up for that. We enjoyed the return trip back to Sausalito where the bay was busy with kayakers and bikini-clad, stand-up paddle boarders enjoying the fine weather.

By Vicky Van Meter