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Press Release

For Immediate Release

BAY AREA SCIENTISTS TO EMBARK ON OCEAN RESEARCH CRUISES

September 10, 2010 – San Francisco. Beginning in mid-September, PRBO Conservation Science, Gulf of the Farallones and the Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries, along with other agency and academic partners, will undertake a series of cruises to continue monitoring ocean conditions in the waters beyond the Golden Gate. They have forged a partnership, the Applied California Current Ecosystem Studies (ACCESS), that supports marine wildlife conservation and healthy marine ecosystems in northern and central California by conducting ocean research on the distribution, abundance and demography of marine wildlife in the context of underlying physical oceanographic processes. The information is used to inform managers, policy-makers and conservation partners about wildlife responses to changes in ocean conditions.

Earlier this summer, ACCESS cruises yielded findings of abundant tiny, shrimp-like krill, which benefits virtually the entire food chain. By conducting surveys for sea birds and marine mammals, considered key indicators of the health of the food web, and by carrying out plankton tows to capture small marine invertebrates, scientists can assess the overall health of the ocean.

Results from these September cruises- conducted during the fall "Oceanic Season" - can be compared to findings from earlier cruises conducted during the summer "Upwelling Season", and document fall conditions before the winter "Storm Season" sets in.

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Research Coordinator Jan Roletto noted, "This year we were very happy to see indications of good productivity. Our sanctuary waters are a destination feeding ground for two endangered species of plankton-feeding whales, the humpbacks and the blues. Whales of both species have been seen in significant numbers this season."

According to PRBO Marine Ecology Director Jaime Jahncke, this has been an extraordinary year for krill-feeding species, including the Cassin's auklet, a small seabird. "These auklets had a very successful breeding season, and 70% are currently engaged in nesting activities with their second clutch of chicks. Fish-eating seabirds such as Common Murres did well this year. Exceptions to this include cormorants and gulls, which are having their third bad year in a row. We hope this cruise will lend us insights into why this is occurring. The monitoring is conducted in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service."

(MORE)

“This collaborative monitoring program is vital for determining year to year changes in ocean conditions, and to better understand where the hotspots are to focus efforts in protecting these special areas” says Dan Howard, Superintendent of Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary off Bodega.

ACCESS cruises collect data on the oceanographic conditions, zooplankton community seabird and marine mammal distribution and abundance within the offshore and nearshore regions of Cordell Bank, Gulf of the Farallones and northern extend of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuaries. See more at the ACCESS webpage at www.accessoceans.org.

About PRBO Conservation Science (www.prbo.org):

PRBO Conservation Science, founded as Point Reyes Bird Observatory in 1965, works to conserve birds, other wildlife and ecosystems through innovative scientific research and outreach. We partner with hundreds of governmental and non-governmental agencies as well as private interests to ensure that every dollar invested in conservation yields the most for biodiversity -- benefiting our environment, our economy and our communities. Visit PRBO on the web at www.prbo.org. Note to reporters: Our organizational name is PRBO Conservation Science, as written with the acronym (not Point Reyes Bird Observatory Conservation Science).

About NOAA's participating National Marine Sanctuaries (www.farallones.noaa.gov, www.cordellbank.noaa.gov)

Designated in 1981, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary spans 1,279-square-miles just north and west of San Francisco Bay, and protects open ocean, nearshore tidal flats, rocky intertidal areas, estuarine wetlands, subtidal reefs, and coastal beaches within its boundaries. In addition, GFNMS has administrative jurisdiction over the northern portion of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, from the San Mateo/ Santa Cruz County line northward to Marin County.

Designated in 1989, Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 529 square miles of ocean northwest of San Francisco, where the combination of ocean conditions and undersea topography supports a highly diverse marine community. The site, which includes an offshore, underwater rocky reef, is a destination feeding ground for many marine mammals and seabirds