

Exceptional seabird breeding success

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Point Blue, in collaboration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, has monitored the reproductive performance of seabirds on the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge continuously since 1968. During 2013, highly productive ocean conditions allowed seabirds to achieve exceptionally high breeding success. Strong northwest winds during spring resulted in productive upwelling and favorable ocean conditions which in turn resulted in plentiful prey resources for breeding seabirds.

Cassin's auklets continued to exhibit very high productivity this season with greater than one chick fledged per breeding pair (on average) for the fourth consecutive year. This productivity was driven by a continuing abundance of euphausiids (krill) throughout 2013 and a high rate of successful double brooding.

Common murres, pigeon guillemots and rhinoceros auklets also exhibited productivity well above the long-term mean. Juvenile rockfish (particularly shortbelly rockfish) remained the most prevalent prey item observed in chick diet for these species, while anchovies were once again absent. Other common prey observed included squid, smelt, sculpins, saury and octopus.

Western gulls achieved above average productivity in 2013 after 4 years of exceptionally low breeding success. California gulls successfully fledged chicks for the first time.

Brandt's and pelagic cormorants also rebounded this season, with productivity well above the long-term means for these species. Brandt's cormorants raised more than 2 chicks per pair

after suffering near complete breeding failure each of the last five years. (Figure pg. 2)

Main Points

Highly productive ocean conditions led to high breeding success for all seabirds during 2013.

Cassin's auklets fledged more than 1 chick per pair (on average) for an unprecedented 4th straight year.

Common murre, pigeon guillemots and rhinoceros auklets benefited from abundant prey resources.

Both cormorant species experienced their highest productivity in many years.

Western and California Gulls rebounded from several years of little to no breeding success.

Warzybok, P., R. Berger and R. Bradley. 2013. Status of Seabirds on Southeast Farallon Island during the 2013 Breeding Season. Unpublished report to the USFWS. Point Blue Contribution Number 1960.

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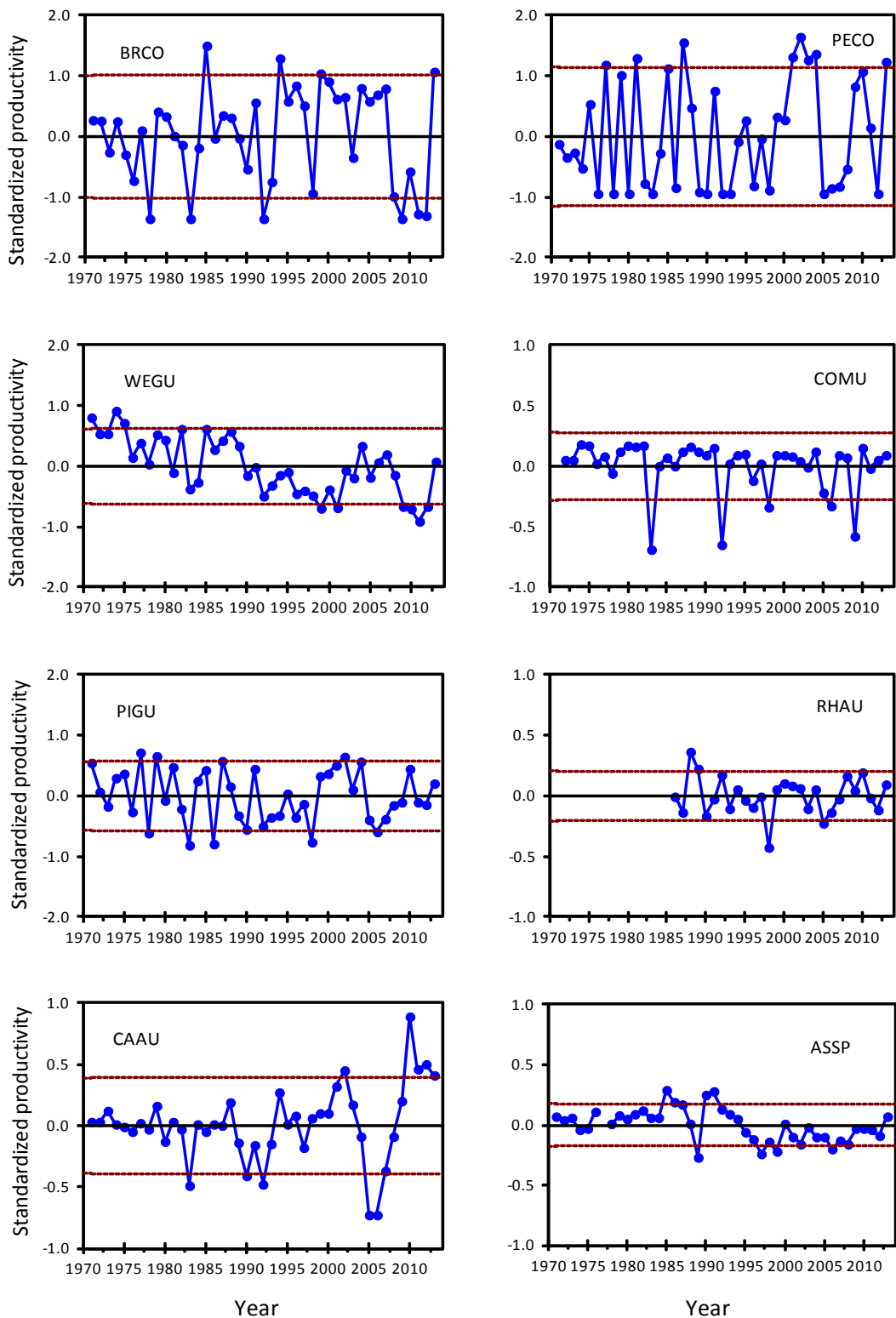


Fig. 1 Standardized productivity anomalies (annual productivity - long term mean) for 8 species of seabirds on SEFI, 1971-2013. The dashed lines represent the 80% confidence interval for the long term mean.

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