

Alcatraz Bird Census

Dear Editor,

The article entitled “Alcatraz bird census ... or the ABC program” in the spring 2000 issue of *Park Science* [20(1):6] contains several inaccuracies. Ranger Brett Woods did found the Alcatraz Bird Census (ABC) in the early 1990s. However, after his brief stint on the island ended, I took over ABC program management. The program hardly “languished” as the article stated. Instead, it ran successfully until I left the island in 1997.

I worked on Alcatraz from 1991 to 1997. Among my myriad duties, I served as Natural Resources Coordinator for the island. I recruited, trained, and supervised the volunteers that conducted the ABC until I left for Everglades National Park in 1997. During my tenure as “Birdman of Alcatraz,” the ABC did quite well. There was no apparent need for changing the census procedures or database management. I was therefore disturbed to note that the article suggested that the ABC stagnated or stopped after Woods’ departure.

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Golden Gate NRA regrets the article’s tone. However, the decision to standardize methods for recording bird frequency and occurrence data on Alcatraz along with regular reporting has improved the value of the information. For example, the area search protocol¹, now used on Alcatraz and at other areas in the park, distinguishes birds on land from those on water, information that was useful to park management in a recent environmental impact statement. The technique has other benefits, including its widespread usage. Database management evolved to reflect the needs of the protocol, and the software was changed to meet the NPS standard.

¹Ralph, C. J., G. R. Geupel, P. Pyle, T. E. Martin, and D. F. DeSante. 1993. Handbook of field methods for monitoring land-birds. USDA Forest Service, Publication PSW-GTR-144, Albany, CA.