

# SANTA BARBARA NEWS



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## Opening the door to wonders of nature



News-Press photo by STEVE MALONE

At Anacapa Island, a park ranger introduces visitors to the wonders of nature. Increased numbers of people are expect-

ed to visit the Channel Islands National Park in the future as access to the park expands.

## Islands facing a time of change

By Hillary Hauser  
News-Press Staff Writer

As the 21st century closes in on the Channel Islands, the biggest change will be the acquisition by the National Park Service of Santa Rosa Island and the east end of Santa Cruz Island.

Ownership of Santa Rosa is expected to pass from the Vail and Vickers families, who have owned the island since 1902, to the National Park Service as soon as the end of 1986.

The sale of the Gherini family's Santa Cruz Island property may not be accomplished until 1987 or even later, pending the outcome of the Gherinis' lawsuit against the state Coastal Commission over a zoning issue and the federal government's ability to appropriate the funds for the purchase.

Also, the continuing secret military testing in the islands

Ranger tells of life  
on islands

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*Last in a five-part series of articles about life on the Channel Islands.*

is a controversial issue. Commercial fishermen say the Navy's closure of an area on the west side of Santa Cruz at Valley Anchorage has pushed them out of rich harvest grounds, and they are seeking legal recourse for the loss of their catch.

A complaint has also been filed against the federal government by a group of Santa Barbara fishermen on behalf of two comrades they believe were killed at San Clemente by a wayward military test or unexploded bomb pulled up in fishing nets.

Fishermen are also clashing

with an environmental group that is pushing for the relocation of a small herd of sea otters to San Nicolas Island. The proposed action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Friends of the Sea Otter, they say, will introduce the abalone and sea-urchin-eating otter to all the Channel Islands, and is like "transplanting crows to the cornfields."

Even the future space shuttle launch from Vandenberg has stirred political and environmental concerns around the islands.

Soon after the Vandenberg launch was announced, a meeting was called by federal officials and scientists to focus on potential impact of the sonic boom on island life.

According to Channel Islands Park Superintendent William Ehorn, who attended the meeting, the focus was the

expected effect of a sonic boom on the endangered brown pelican, which has recently begun to breed successfully in the islands after a long decline.

The shuttle is expected to break the sound barrier in the vicinity of San Miguel, Ehorn said.

While the sonic boom from a normal aircraft is three to four pounds per square foot, the sonic boom of a space shuttle craft can reach up to 30 pounds per square foot, he noted.

Ehorn sounded an alarm. "What about the seals and sea lions pupping at San Miguel?" Ehorn asked. "They'd stampede in a noise like that and kill each other. What about the Cassin's auklets, the burrowing birds on Prince Island, and the other sea birds?"

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# Islands are faced with a time of change

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What about the archaeological sites and the caliches? Here we're worried about pelicans — I'm worried about all of San Miguel."

Ehorn took representatives of the Air Force, Hubbs Sea World and UC San Diego to set up monitoring stations on San Miguel. He also sent a ranger to Florida, to listen to the sonic boom of a space shuttle launch there.

"He could hardly hear it," Ehorn said. "This doesn't mean we're backing off. We've got instruments on boats, we've got photos of the caliches, and we're setting up monitoring stations on the islands now. If there is any damage, we'll know."

## Unique among parks

The scientific monitoring of the islands by the Park Service has made the Channel Islands unique among parks in the federal agency's domain.

While the concept of a national park stirs up images of thousands of people trampling over a countryside in the manner of Yosemite or Yellowstone, the legislation establishing the Channel Islands park dictates that scientific preservation of its resources be its top priority.

Under the legislation, the Park Service is to do an inventory of all terrestrial and marine resources in the park boundaries, out to one mile at sea, and report back to Congress every two years until 1990 as to proper management of those resources.

## Long-term monitoring

Since the legislation went into effect in 1980, Ehorn and his team of rangers and scientists have established long-term monitoring of the tidepools and of the islands themselves.

"We're watching tidepools, sea birds, the kelp forest, and we're doing underwater transects (monitoring) out to 60 feet, around all five islands," Ehorn said. "We have teams of researchers looking at indicator animals such as fishes, abalone, algae, sponges, vertebrates and invertebrates. We collect data. We strive to understand why things have happened, so that we can suggest changes."

The ecological monitoring in the islands, Ehorn said, is

"something that hasn't been done in any other park."

"Our foremost aim is protection, not screwing up the quality of the islands," Ehorn said. "We're not developing them in any way. People who've never been there don't know what they're missing. It's hard to put into words. You go there for inspiration, education. You have a different experience out there."

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Further rough waters in the future of the islands, however, come in the form of the federal budget cuts affecting the National Park Service.

## Financial hand

Lending a financial hand to the Park Service, a group based in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties has combined to help provide special programs — including interpretive and resource management programs, publications, and trips to the islands for underprivileged children.

The Friends of the Channel Islands National Park has an energetic backbone in Jane Baxter, a professional fund-raiser who is trying to drum up support for island projects.

The Friends money has gone toward black rat eradication and research equipment such as the "Cassins condominiums" on Prince Island, the satellite rock of San Miguel. The "condominiums" are small observation boxes placed by scientists over the nests of the Cassins auklets, a burrowing sea bird, that enable the scientists to accurately assess the health of the population.

## 'Floating classroom'

Ms. Baxter said the 200-member Friends group is also supporting a "floating classroom" program in which needy children can go to the

islands.

"People on the street ask, what about those islands — can you go out there?" said Ms. Baxter. "There are a lot of misconceptions about the national park. People need to know how it's being managed and take advantage of it."

With slightly less emphasis on public visitation, the Nature Conservancy forges into the future with its preservation plans for the main part of Santa Cruz Island.

Dr. Carey Stanton continues at the helm of the Santa Cruz Island Co., which runs the island's day-to-day cattle ranching operation, the permit system for yachtsmen, and the leases for the Navy and University of California stations on the island.

The conservation organization, meanwhile, has eradicated most of the feral sheep from the Stanton part of Santa Cruz, in a restoration move expected to help the native plants re-establish themselves.

Until the Conservancy takes over the entire 54,381 acres in the year 2008, the organization will continue to use the island for education, scientific research and fund raising, according to Bob Hansen, who heads the local chapter of the Conservancy.

One research project underway on Santa Cruz is a geological survey that will result in a

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—Jane Baxter

soils map of the island for other researchers to use. The Conservancy has also funded vegetation and hydrological maps, as well as aerial infrared maps of the island.

## Supplemental work

Hansen said the Conservancy "tries to supplement what the National Park Service is doing," by supplying information for animal and plant inventories. The Conservancy

does not involve itself with the intertidal or marine life of the island.

However, the underwater life around the islands is handled by the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

Designated in September 1980, the National Marine Sanctuary includes the waters within six nautical miles around the five northern Channel Islands — or 1,252 square nautical miles. It is the largest marine sanctuary in the country, and contains one of the world's largest and most diverse populations of marine mammals and sea birds.

## Discharges prohibited

Carol Pillsbury, sanctuary manager, said the purpose of the sanctuary designation is to protect the marine ecosystem around the five northern Channel Islands. Within the sanctuary boundaries, new oil leasing and ocean discharges are prohibited. Also disallowed is the operation of tankers and barges within one nautical mile of the islands or the flying of aircraft below 1,000 feet.

Ms. Pillsbury is quick to point out that the regulations don't affect the "average visitor" to the islands — commercial fishermen included.

The sanctuary has "survived tremendous legal pressure" from the Western Oil and Gas Association, she said. In a series of court maneuvers, WOGA lost its bid to open sanctuary waters to drilling.

"When you look at the whole picture — the park and sanctuary — it's a nice package," Ms. Pillsbury said. "The intent is to keep the islands as they are."

## Documentary possible

In May, Jean-Michel Cousteau took a flight over the Channel Islands, to consider the possibility of a Cousteau documentary on the islands. In describing these rocky outposts, Nature Conservancy spokesman Bob Hansen, put it this way:

"They are in exceptionally good condition, because of their separation from the mainland. I don't think the general public realizes how valuable they are to science. We really have a Galapagos-like archipelago off California — and a rare insight as to what isolation does to evolution!"