

## Preface

The California Islands include the Channel Islands off the coast of southern California, the Pacific Baja California islands, and islands within the Gulf of California. Although most of these islands are situated close to the mainland, they are visited and understood by relatively few of the many people who observe them casually on a daily basis. The seventh California Islands Symposium, held February 5–8, 2008 in Oxnard, California, provided an opportunity for researchers and educators to disseminate their knowledge of the California islands and their surrounding waters. With Santa Cruz Island clearly visible offshore, over 300 participants gathered at the Embassy Suites hotel to attend 154 talks and 28 posters, including a special session on the first five years of monitoring marine protected areas in the Channel Islands. The organizers and participants, ranging from archaeologists and ecologists to geologists and historians, reflected the diversity of stakeholders sharing an interest in these unique islands.

Like most islands, the California Islands are hotspots of biodiversity and extinction. In his keynote address, Dr. Ernesto Enkerlin-Hoeflich stated that although they make up less than 1% of the land area of California and the Baja California peninsula, the Channel and Pacific Baja California islands contain nearly 10% of the region's endemic species and subspecies and have experienced 15% of the region's extinctions, resulting largely from the introduction of invasive plants, large grazers, and non-native predators during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the last symposium in 2003, heroic efforts have continued in removing these introduced species from the islands, notably the eradication of goats from Guadalupe Island, pigs from Santa Cruz Island, and black rats from San Ignacio Farallón and San Pedro Mártir islands. Thus, a highlight of this meeting was the large number of presentations detailing how the islands' ecosystems have responded to these species' removals. An encouraging number of projects documented success, including the reintroduction of island foxes to San Miguel and Santa Rosa islands, new recruitment of Guadalupe cypress on Guadalupe Island, and increases in native shrub cover on Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara islands. Other studies pondered why species like the island scrub oak on Santa Catalina Island have not responded as expected to the removal of feral goats and pigs. The presentations also brought forward new and exciting information on prehistoric settlement patterns and indigenous strategies for utilizing island resources, as well as the culture and exploits of the islands' more recent occupants.

These proceedings are a collection of peer-reviewed papers based on a sample of presentations from the symposium. They cover a variety of subjects, ranging from the formation and natural history of the islands to the relationships that prehistoric islanders developed with their environment, and from the history of the ranches that were so influential in shaping the islands' recent history and landscape to current efforts to restore island ecosystems to their natural state. The papers in these proceedings represent ongoing research on the California Islands, which strives to illuminate understanding of an enigmatic landscape rich in history and biodiversity.