

News Release

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The Marine Mammal Center Helps Abandoned Seal Pups Along the Coast Through its "Leave Seals Be" Campaign

(SAUSALITO, Calif.) – The arrival of the pupping season's first harbor seal patient, nicknamed Theros, is a reminder to <u>Leave Seals Be</u> so they have a second chance at life. <u>Leave Seals Be</u> is **The Marine**Mammal Center's public education campaign to remind people along the California coast not to pick up or disturb harbor or elephant seal pups they spot on the beach. Instead, the Center encourages the public to keep their distance when they see what might be a sick or abandoned seal pup, and to call its 24-hour response line at (415) 289-7325 or 289-SEAL. The Center can then monitor the pup to see if the mother returns and if needed, dispatch a trained team to rescue the animal should no mother return.

"We've already begun rescuing and helping elephant seals and harbor seals that have been found by members of the public, abandoned on beaches along the coast," said Shelbi Stoudt, stranding manager at The Marine Mammal Center. "We depend upon the public to be our eyes and ears so that we can rescue these animals because in many cases they do become separated from their mothers as a result of human interference or worse, get entangled in ocean trash. Without our help, these animals very likely would not have a chance at survival."

Why Leave Seals Be?

The first two months of a harbor seal's life are the most critical and set the stage for his ability to survive. Mother will nurse the pup for approximately 28 days providing him with the nutrient-rich milk he'll need in order to gain enough weight and strength to survive the following month when he begins to learn to forage on his own and mom is no longer around. It's during this two month period that he runs into many obstacles such as human interference, predators, entanglements in ocean trash, and even stormy weather. Sometimes members of the public mistakenly remove what appears to them to be an abandoned pup, because they believe they are helping the animal.

The best way a beachgoer can help a sick, injured or an abandoned seal pup is to call the Center's response hotline to alert trained rescue volunteers. Once on site, they can assess the situation to see if the pup needs to be rescued. In many cases, the pup may be put under observation on the beach for 24-48 hours to see if the mother will return. This observation period is critical as the mother may be nearby waiting for a chance to reunite with her pup. The Center never removes a pup from its mother during the critical nursing period unless it's apparent the mother is no longer available and the animal is weak and ill.

In addition, it is illegal and punishable by law for unauthorized people to pick up, handle or disturb any marine mammal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Only trained, authorized responders, like volunteers and staff at the Center, are allowed to do so.

Theros is the first harbor seal pup rescued by The Marine Mammal Center in 2012. Theros still had his silky white lanugo coat or 'birth coat' as well as his umbilical cord when volunteers rescued him from a beach in San Luis Obispo County on February 20. With no mother in site, for days, the little pinniped was transported to the Center and is currently receiving medical care by a team of veterinarians and volunteers. The hope is to get him healthy and strong enough to be returned to the ocean. Watch Theros play with a "fish-sicle" in her pool!

No matter where you are, a good rule of thumb to helping a sick or injured harbor or elephant seal pup is:

- * Stay at least 50 feet away from it. The pup's mother may be nearby.
- * Do not handle it and keep other people and dogs away.
- * Call The Marine Mammal Center's 24-hour response hotline at (415) 289-7325 or 289-SEAL.
- * In Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, call locally at (831) 633-6298.
- * In San Luis Obispo County, call locally at (805) 771-8300.

To learn more about the *Leave Seals Be* campaign and how you can help marine mammal pups like Theros, visit **www.MarineMammalCenter.org**.

About The Marine Mammal Center:

The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit veterinary hospital, research and educational center dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of ill and injured marine mammals - primarily elephant seals, harbor seals and California sea lions - and to the study of their health. Since 1975, the Center has been headquartered in the Marin Headlands, within the Golden Gate National Parks and has rescued and treated more than 17,000 marine mammals. The Center's newly rebuilt headquarters in Sausalito gives visitors the unique opportunity to learn about marine mammals through viewing areas and educational exhibits. The hospital is open to the public daily 10 A.M.-5 P.M. except for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. For more information and to sign up for the Center's eNewsletter, go to: www.MarineMammalCenter.org

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