



The Marine
Mammal Center

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This Pupping Season, Remember to “Leave Seals Be”

The best response to an abandoned seal pup is to call The Marine Mammal Center

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – February 28, 2008) - As seals give birth on beaches this season, The Marine Mammal Center is reminding people along the California coast to help give harbor seal pups a chance at life by not picking them up or disturbing them. The **Leave Seals Be** public education campaign encourages people to keep their distance when they see a sick or abandoned seal pup, and to take action by calling the Center’s 24-hour response hotline at **(415) 289-SEAL (7325)**. The Center will monitor the pup to see if the mother returns and conduct a rescue if needed.

Generally, when a harbor seal pup is alone on the shore, its mother is nearby. Unfortunately, well-intentioned beachgoers may think the seal pup is in trouble and immediately pick it up or put it back into the water, or worse, remove it from the area. A seal pup depends on the rich milk that its mother provides for survival. If people are too close, the mother may avoid returning to it. Members of the public should be aware that it is illegal and punishable by law to pick up, handle or disturb a seal pup under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

“Human interaction is a definite hazard to a young seal pup’s survival,” said Shelbi Stoudt, Stranding Manager at The Marine Mammal Center. “Unfortunately, a large number of harbor seal pups that we rescue each season have been unnecessarily separated from their mothers because of illegal pickups or other types of harassment. We hope to decrease that number by getting the word out to the public that they should leave seal pups alone and call our response hotline instead. Our trained volunteers will monitor an abandoned seal pup from a safe distance and perform a rescue only when necessary.”

In addition to reporting harbor seals that may need to be rescued, researchers also ask that the public report any dead seals, or seals with triangular hat tags on their heads. In 2007, The Marine

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Mammal Center outfitted some of its rehabilitated harbor seal patients with orange, numbered hat tags in order to easily spot them in the wild. The reporting of these animals will help the Center with its research into the study of the health of San Francisco Bay harbor seals and the affects contaminants have on this distinct population compared to seals in other locations.

If you come across a harbor seal pup or any marine mammal that appears to be in distress in the Bay Area, Point Reyes National Seashore, Bolinas, Moss Beach, Richmond, Sausalito, and Pescadero areas, please call The Marine Mammal Center's 24-hour response hotline at **(415) 289-SEAL**. Once a seal pup is reported to the Center, trained volunteers and staff can be dispatched to monitor the animal. If needed, they will safely rescue the animal and transport it to the hospital for medical attention.

What to do if you come across a sick or abandoned seal on a beach:

- * Stay at least 50 feet away from it. Pup mothers may be just around the corner.
- * Do not handle it and keep other people and dogs away.
- * Call The Marine Mammal Center's 24-hour response hotline at **(415) 289-SEAL**.

About The Marine Mammal Center:

Headquartered in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Sausalito, California, 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. Patients that become healthy again are released back to the ocean. Since 1975, the Center has rescued and treated thousands of marine mammals and has accumulated a body of knowledge about marine mammal and ocean health from its patients. By educating the public about marine mammals, the Center hopes to foster ocean stewardship and conservation. The Marine Mammal Center is supported almost entirely by private funds. For more information, visit www.marinemammalcenter.org

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