

The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit veterinary hospital, research and educational center. Since 1975, staff and volunteers have rescued more than 12,000 injured, sick, and orphaned marine mammals along 600 miles of northern and central California coastline.

release

The Newsletter of The Marine Mammal Center | Fall/Winter 2007 | Vol. 27 No. 3



Endangered Blue Whales Killed by Ship Strikes at an Alarming Rate

On September 14, 2007, The Marine Mammal Center’s Dr. Frances Gulland, a leading expert in marine mammal medicine, assisted with the examination of a dead blue whale in Ventura County. The whale she encountered, at 78 feet and an estimated 158,000 pounds, was a spectacular specimen of the largest mammal species on the planet. Sadly, this was not Dr. Gulland’s only trip to necropsy a blue whale. Compared with only 5 in the same area for the past 24 years, 3 blue whales have washed up in less than a month in Southern California, raising alarm bells for marine mammal experts.



Left: Dr. Frances Gulland slides off a massive dead blue whale. Right: Dr. Gulland performs a necropsy on top of a blue whale likely struck by a cargo ship. Photos: June Padilla

Once hunted to near extinction, a practice which was banned by the International Whaling Commission in the 1960s, the blue whale population now remains at only 1% of its original numbers and is on the endangered species list. After climbing atop the whale and examining its injuries, Dr. Gulland and a team from the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and the Channel Islands Marine Wildlife Institute determined that the whale had

most likely been struck by a ship, based on a large hemorrhage discovered under the blubber and presence of fractured vertebrae. Another blue whale, also the likely victim of a ship strike, had been found dead in Long Beach on September 8 and was towed back out to sea. In addition, Dr. Gulland was called to assist in the necropsy of yet a third blue whale that was found floating in the Santa Barbara Channel on September 21. That

whale was a 69 foot male, and Dr. Gulland reported that it had massive vertebral, rib, and skull fractures, and a hemorrhage along its left side. It had suffered the same fate as the other two whales: a ship strike.

As there have been only 5 other blue whale strandings in the past 24 years along the same stretch of coast from the Santa Barbara shipping channel through the port of Long Beach, the alarming string of

3 deaths in just over two weeks of this species in that area has scientists searching for answers. “It certainly suggests an unusual mortality event,” said Dr. Gulland. “One theory we are looking at is domoic acid toxicity, which may affect the whales’ brains and disorient them to approaching ships.” While the one whale that was tested did not reveal evidence of domoic acid toxicity, the possibility has *continued on page 2*

Mark Your Calendars

To learn more about these events, go to www.marinemammalcenter.org and click on the Events button.

11/17

Volunteer Orientation
Bay Model, 11 am

1/15

The Marine Mammal
Center’s 33rd Anniversary

1/19

18th Anniversary of the
Arrival of the Sea Lions
at PIER 39

3/1–3/2

Mendocino Whale Festival

12/5

Volunteer Orientation
Education Bldg. 1071, 7 pm

1/26

Volunteer Appreciation Party

2/1–2/3

San Francisco Ocean
Film Festival

3/15–3/16

Fort Bragg Whale Festival

not been dismissed. The deaths of the whales brings to light a growing concern about the hazard that ocean traffic presents to them. As scientists like Dr. Gulland have been observing the bodies of endangered whales washing up on beaches with injuries indicative of ship strikes, it is presumed that many other whales injured or killed by ship strikes never wash ashore to be discovered. Furthermore, despite National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration regulations requiring ships to report whale strikes, most of the stranded whale carcasses that show evidence of strikes have not been reported

by a correlating ship. None of the blue whales recently killed had associated ship-strike reports. Nor did the gray whale in Point Richmond that The Marine Mammal Center performed a necropsy on in June of 2007. While it was difficult to determine whether or not that whale had been struck before or after its death, the young animal had severe lacerations consistent with a propeller strike by watercraft. However, no vessel ever reported striking the animal.

As Dr. Gulland and a team of other scientists sift through the data they have collected from the blue whale carcasses, the question remains about how ship strikes can be prevented. A 1996 Marine Mammal Commission review reported that

the number of serious and lethal injuries to whales increases sharply at vessel speeds over 13 knots. "Regardless of the possible theories about why the whales are unable to get out of the way of approaching ships," says Dr. Gulland, "one way to minimize mortalities in whales with regard to ship strikes may be for ships to slow down." To that end, on September 25 the Center for Biological Diversity filed an emergency petition with the federal government to reduce the speed limit to 10 knots in the Santa Barbara Channel for large ships. It is hoped that the implementation of the speed limit will halt the recent trend, and that the endangered blue whale will be safe to feed off the California coast in the future.



Dr. Gulland measures the towering tail of a blue whale in Ventura County. Photo: Chuck Kirman / Ventura County Star. www.venturacounty.com

Ship Strike Lawsuit

In 2001, an endangered pregnant humpback whale was found floating in Glacier Bay National Park, Alaska with massive skull fractures. The Marine Mammal Center's Dr. Frances Gulland assisted in a post-mortem exam on the whale, and was later called to testify when evidence revealed that the injury was likely caused by a collision with a cruise ship. While most ships that neglect to report hitting whales likely are unaware of the occurrence, the Glacier Bay incident indicated negligence on the part of the cruise ship.

Witnesses testified that passengers and crew had spotted two humpback whales, yet the captain had not diverted the ship's course or slowed down as mandated by law. Passengers reported feeling the ship strike something, and the ship's naturalist wrote to colleagues that the ship had possibly struck a whale; however, the incident was not recorded in their log or reported to authorities as required. As a result of the court case which included Dr. Gulland's testimony, the cruise line paid \$750,000 to settle charges.

Blue Whale Strandings 1983-2007

Santa Barbara to Long Beach

Date	Location	Size
9/01/86	Los Angeles Harbor	74 ft.
8/03/87	Long Beach Harbor	46 ft.
8/17/92	Santa Barbara	31 ft.
8/04/02	Los Angeles Harbor	70 ft.
8/21/04	Port of Los Angeles	52 ft.
9/08/07	Long Beach Harbor	72 ft.
9/11/07	Santa Barbara	79 ft.
9/19/07	Santa Barbara	69 ft.

Big Sur to Point Reyes

Date	Location	Size
7/23/86	Big Sur	69 ft.
9/03/88	San Francisco	72 ft.
9/02/89	Point Reyes	75 ft.
9/12/92	Point Reyes	55 ft.
10/04/93	Monterey	n/a
7/22/02	Mill Valley	77 ft.
10/01/04	Monterey	59 ft.

* Data source: California Marine Mammal Stranding Network, NOAA.

Capital Campaign Update

The Marine Mammal Center has received a special \$1 million challenge grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in support of the capital campaign! In order to receive this \$1 million grant, the remaining funds needed to complete the project and lock in the current construction contract must be raised by January 15, 2008.

"It is an honor to have our capital campaign bolstered by the generosity and support of the Packard Foundation, one of the largest foundations in both the Bay Area and the nation," said Martha Whetstone, Executive Director of The Marine Mammal Center. "The Packard Foundation made a previous grant of \$1 million to our capital campaign in 2005, and we are both humbled and extremely excited about its new commitment to us."

The focus of the Packard challenge is on securing major gifts of \$100,000 and higher that can help the Center meet its goal. Since receiving news of the Packard challenge, the Center also received a grant of \$1.3 million from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund to help meet the challenge! This brings the Goldman Fund's total commitment to the capital campaign to \$1.5 million.

If you would like to help the Center meet the challenge from the Packard Foundation, please call the Development Office at 415-289-7335 to arrange a private hard-hat tour of the construction site.

Wildlife Disease Conference



A northern fur seal recovers at The Marine Mammal Center after stranding. Photo: The Marine Mammal Center

The 56th annual meeting of the Wildlife Disease Association (WDA) was held August 12-17, 2007 in Estes Park, Colorado. The Marine Mammal Center's Staff Veterinarian, Dr. Felicia Nutter, made an oral presentation entitled "Update on Northern Fur Seal Strandings Along the Central California Coast Since 1975", and Research Fellow Tracey Goldstein presented "The Role of the Biotxin Domoic Acid in Reproductive Failure in California Sea Lions on San Miguel Island".

Throngs Help Clean Rodeo Beach



The lagoon at Rodeo Beach is cleaned. Photo: Elizabeth Sherrell

A record number of community volunteers of all ages cleaned the beach, lagoon, parking lot, and building areas at Rodeo Beach for California's Coastal Cleanup Day. In all, 157 volunteers picked up a whopping 267 lbs. of garbage, including a tire, a rusted car part, and of course, thousands of cigarette butts and plastic pieces and wrappers. One volunteer even found a lucky \$20 bill! A hearty "thank you" to all who participated in helping to clean up the marine environment.

Support The Marine Mammal Center the eScrip Way!

Every time you shop at participating eScrip merchants the Center will receive a portion of the sales! It's easy to register—just go to escrip.com, designate The Marine Mammal Center as the charity of your choice, and register your grocery club and your debit/credit cards. The eScrip website is secure, so you can enter your information with complete confidence. By registering with eScrip, retailers will contribute 2% to 6% of your purchases to the Center.

Just hear those Sleigh Bells Ringing and Sea Lions Singing



This holiday season, you can give the gift that keeps on giving by shopping at The Marine Mammal Center gift stores and online. Check out these favorites:

1. A Seal's Life DVD. This is the incredible story of the twice-a-year migration of elephant seals along the west coast of North America. The elephant seals swim thousands of miles and remain at sea for months. This DVD was produced in association with the National Geographic Mission Program.

2. Dolphin Necklace. This beautiful and unique Seaglass necklace features a sterling silver dolphin charm resting on a seaglass shard which dangles from a delicate 16" snake chain. The glass is in shades of greens or blues. Made in U.S.A.

3. Guide to Marine Mammals of the World. The National Audubon Society's guide to 120 species of marine mammals features over 500 pages of expert information including 320 illustrations by Pieter Folkens and 418 photographs. (Soft cover, 9" X 6.5") A great gift for anyone interested in marine mammals.

4. Sea Otter Holiday Cards. Boxed cards printed on 100% recycled acid-free paper. Inside greeting: May you have a Happy Holiday and a Joyous New Year

5. Decade Short Sleeved T-shirt. On black or gray, 100% pre-shrunk cotton, the decade design (created for our 10 year anniversary) remains one of our most popular t-shirts. In adult and youth sizes this unique design is popular with all ages and is sure to catch attention.

6. The Marine Mammal Center 2008 Calendar. This beautiful 8.5 X 11 inch glossy is jam-packed with beautiful, high-quality photographic images of marine mammals! Inset pictures and text show volunteers and staff at The Marine Mammal Center working with these amazing animals!

7. Adopt-A-Seal®. Give the gift of life! Each Adopt-a-Seal® represents thousands of other patients that need The Marine Mammal Center's help. It's a unique and thoughtful gift that will delight animal lovers young and old. For a minimum tax-deductible donation of \$30, your designated recipient will receive:

- a photo of their adoptee
- a personalized certificate of adoption
- an animal biography
- the most recent issue of our newsletter, *Release*
- the satisfaction of helping a sick or injured marine mammal!

You can also find many other marine related items including clothing, jewelry, books, posters, figurines, plush animals, and much, much more.

If you don't see exactly what you want, please call our gift shop at 415-289-7373 to find out what additional items are available. To ensure delivery by the holidays, please place your order by December 14th.

Locations: If you live in the San Francisco Bay area, drop by our gift shop at PIER 39 in San Francisco or our Visitor Center and Gift Shop at 1049 Fort Cronkhite in the Marin Headlands. Shop online at www.marinemammalcenter.org

Special Thanks

The Center is grateful to the following generous donors that contributed gifts of \$500 and higher to the Center's annual operating fund. This list recognizes gifts received between May 1, 2007 and August 31, 2007.

\$25,000 and higher

Mary Bachman and William Downing
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Human Interaction With Marine Mammals

If you come across marine mammals that seem injured or ill, you should always call us immediately on our 24-hour rescue and response hotline, 415-289-SEAL (7325).



A female California sea lion on a beach. Photo: The Marine Mammal Center

The Marine Mammal Center has seen many patients over the years who have suffered at the hands of human aggression. There have been numerous gunshot victims, such as Chippy, an adult California sea lion who was discovered in Los Banos with a bullet lodged in his skull. There was also the case of Arrow, a five month old California sea lion in Morro Bay that had been pierced with a 16-inch crossbow. Both Chippy and Arrow were successfully rehabilitated at The Marine Mammal Center and released back to the wild. Their injuries were evidence of blatant violations of the 1972 U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, a law which prohibits people from harming or disturbing marine

mammals. Because of the act, the crime against Arrow was successfully prosecuted. The guilty parties were identified, fined \$4,000, and ordered to pay \$2,200 in restitution to the Center.

The cases of Chippy and Arrow represent malicious attacks on animals, and are very clear breaches of The Marine Mammal Protection Act. However, there are many other cases of humans unknowingly breaking this law in their misguided attempts to help marine mammals. For example, in July 2007, a jet skier herded a grey whale out of the Santa Cruz harbor after the cetacean swam close to shore. While the person's actions were well intentioned, because he was not an authorized stranding network member and the animal was not in visible distress, his behavior actually violated The Marine Mammal Protection Act. If he had been prosecuted, he could have been fined up to \$20,000 and/or received jail time. In the case of a man who "rescued" a harbor seal pup near Eureka, California, and took the animal to a casino to show to friends, The Marine Mammal Protection Act was successfully used to prosecute and convict him. The pup was kept overnight at the man's home and died soon after it was turned over to authorities the next day.

In addition, The Marine Mammal Center has rescued several animals which were being fed

human food by the public. One such animal was a California sea lion, "Colin", who was being fed bread by people in the Berkeley Marina. Unfortunately, Colin had to be euthanized after being rescued by the Center. A harbor seal rescued from the Reno area was being kept by people and fed whipping cream and clams. Marine mammal digestive systems are not designed to digest human food. At The Marine Mammal Center, their diets are carefully planned by veterinarians to provide them with the appropriate food to deliver the nutrients they need to survive. Members of the public who attempt to feed marine mammals out of good intentions are actually breaking the law.

The Marine Mammal Center's Stranding Manager, Shelbi Stoudt, cautions people from interfering when they see stranded marine mammals. "People should never attempt to rescue stranded animals. Marine mammals are wild animals and can transfer diseases to humans and domestic pets," she says. "Well meaning people can actually do more harm than good if they are not specifically trained to handle marine mammals." If you come across marine mammals that seem injured or ill, you should always call us immediately on our 24-hour rescue and response hotline, 415.289.SEAL (7325).

Why Do We Rescue Sea Lions?

Release is a publication of The Marine Mammal Center.

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A California sea lion in Monterey Bay with a neck wound from an entanglement. Photo: D Florio

You may be aware of the current debate about sea lions feeding on dwindling salmon runs in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. With a once threatened California sea lion population now recovered to substantial levels, and threatened Chinook salmon being a favorite food of sea

lions, the three states are petitioning the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to enact an amendment to the Marine Mammal Protection Act that would allow certain sea lions feeding on the salmon to be euthanized by authorities. The proposal has spurred a heated debate between those in favor of the measure, and those opposed to killing the sea lions.

As NMFS decides the steps it will take to address the issue, some people wonder why facilities like The Marine Mammal Center continue to rescue California sea lions. The Marine Mammal Center rescues an average of 300 California sea lions a year. The rescue of these animals has very little numerical impact on the sea lion population. Rather, what the Center provides is a humane response to sick and injured animals that would

otherwise endure prolonged suffering and exposure to dogs and people as they ailed on beaches. The Center also studies the diseases and conditions of the patients it treats, including cancer and toxic algae poisoning. This research provides a great deal of information about ocean health potential human conditions.

Regardless of NMFS' decision regarding the California sea lion debate, individuals should be aware that it is always illegal to harm or interfere with any marine mammal, as specified in The Marine Mammal Protection Act. Only organizations authorized by the National Marine Fisheries Service are permitted to approach or handle marine mammals. If you see people harassing sea lions or spot an injured or ill marine mammal, call The Marine Mammal Center at 415-289-SEAL (7325).

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The
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