

Pupping Season Arrives!



Left: Año Nuevo Rookery. Photo: Stan Kaiser Middle: Black Coat elephant seal pups at the Center. Photo: The Marine Mammal Center Right: A harbor seal pup left alone near a beach. Photo: Stan Kaiser

After molting in late spring each year, thousands of northern elephant seals swim far out to sea in the northern Pacific Ocean.

There, they feed in deep open waters for months, diving to 5,000 ft. below the surface and remaining submerged for up to two hours at a time. In December and January, these remarkable animals swim thousands of miles back to the beaches of elephant seal rookeries like Año Nuevo State Reserve, where the females give birth. As shown through satellite tracking studies, these animals follow the same migration pattern every year. Their return to the beaches for “pupping season” is a highly anticipated yearly event for marine mammal enthusiasts, and can mark the advent of a busy period at The Marine Mammal Center when young pups become separated from their mothers.

During the first week of January of this year, just as the elephant seals were beginning their pupping season, California experienced a strong storm that hit the coastal areas hard. The ensuing storm surge that often happens with strong winter storms washed away three young elephant seal

pups from the Año Nuevo rookery. They were rescued from nearby Waddell Creek in Santa Cruz County by the Center and brought to the Sausalito hospital. The “black coat” pups, so called for the black coat that elephant seals are born with, were very young and had no teeth yet, and would be unable to survive on their own. Elephant seals are weaned at around 28 days old, when they also lose their black coats. The three black coat pups rescued by The Marine Mammal Center, nicknamed Thunderbolt, Lightningstrike, and Franie, were tube-fed a formula of salmon oil, milk, and electrolytes to replace the nutrients that they would have received from mother’s milk. Unfortunately, they were too young and weak to survive, and all three died shortly after arriving.

However, another black coat elephant seal was rescued on January 11 from Martin’s Beach in San Mateo County, and was nicknamed Chamomile. It is hoped that during *continued on page 2*

Leave Seals Be! Call 415-289-SEAL instead.

Harbor seals, like elephant seals, give birth to their pups during the spring, and their small size and apparent helplessness sometimes provoke misguided attempts at personal rescues by members of the public. While a pup left on a beach may appear to be in distress, its mother may be nearby, and it is better left alone. A seal pup depends on the rich milk that its mother provides for survival. If people approach it, the mother may avoid returning to her pup. Unfortunately, the Center receives a number of patients every year as a result of illegal pick-ups. Not only can this harm the animal, but it is punishable by law. Call The Marine Mammal Center at (415) 289-SEAL if you come across a seal pup that seems to be abandoned, ill, or injured. The Center will monitor it to see if the mother returns and conduct a rescue if needed.

Harbor Seal Health Project Update

You may recall that The Marine Mammal Center began a study of Pacific harbor seals in the San Francisco Bay last year to research environmental factors that may affect their health. As part of that study, some of the Center’s rehabilitated harbor seal patients were released back to the ocean wearing numbered, orange-colored hat tags to track their survival in the wild. Most recently, a harbor seal named Luka that the Center released in June was seen by biologists on the Farallon Islands, 6 months after leaving the Center.

Please let us know if you spot a seal wearing one of these orange hat tags. In addition, as part of the Center’s *Leave Seals Be* campaign, please report any ill, injured, or dead harbor seal pups to our response line at 415-289-SEAL.



Harbor seal Luka resting on Southeast Farallon Island with some elephant seals. Photo: Sarah Chinn



Left: An oiled bird recovered by the Center and turned over to OWCN for data. Right: The Center's Erin Brodie and Heather Harris (at right) work with OWCN to rescue oiled birds from Rodeo Beach. Photos: The Marine Mammal Center

Catastrophic Oil Spill in San Francisco Bay

On November 7, 2007 an outbound container ship struck the Bay Bridge in San Francisco. Approximately 58,000 gallons of heavy bunker fuel spilled into the bay, the largest oil spill in the San Francisco Bay since 1996. As a member of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN), The Marine Mammal Center assisted where needed. On November 8, the Center helped to collect many living and dead birds at Rodeo Beach in the Marin Headlands, which were turned over to the OWCN for further medical attention and cleaning. In the weeks that followed, the Center responded to numerous reports and inquiries from the public and media. During that period, the Center rescued one live oiled animal, a malnourished northern fur seal with a small amount of oil on its fur. However, the possible role that exposure to the oil played in its condition is still under investigation. While the Center did not need to treat any marine mammals with obvious health effects from the spill, it is unknown what the long term effects will be on the San Francisco Bay ecosystem. The Marine Mammal Center continues to work with other area responders to increase monitoring of Bay Area harbor seals following the spill.

continued from front cover

the next three months, the pup will gain weight and eventually go through "fish school", learning how to catch and eat fish on his own. When he is old enough to survive independently, he will be released back to the ocean. As a male elephant seal, Chamomile may grow to over 4,500 lbs., a huge gain from the 100 lbs. he weighed when he arrived at The Marine Mammal Center!

Construction Update

The Marine Mammal Center's staff is watching with excitement as its future workplace becomes more realized with each passing day. The animal care and education buildings now have completed roofs. Both buildings' floors have been completed, and interior wall framing is 95% completed. Windows, plumbing, and electrical conduit installation has begun, and the buildings are nearing the "dry-in" stage. Stairs, a sidewalk, and additional landscaping have really helped the facility to take shape.

For the Center's future patients, construction of the first block of 8 animal pools has begun, with another 10 to come. Installation of the underground piping for the pools is underway. Check the website for more details and photos!

Packard Challenge Grant Update – We Did it!

Last October The Marine Mammal Center received a special challenge grant of \$1 million from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in support of its capital campaign.

We are proud to announce that we have completed the challenge grant and by doing so, have completed the capital campaign! In order to receive this \$1 million grant, the Center had four months to raise \$6.5 million. Thanks to the generosity of so many, we met that amazing goal.

The Center would like to especially thank its Chairman, Merrill Magowan, for his personal generosity and his tireless fundraising efforts.

The Center also wishes to thank every donor of every amount that supported the Packard challenge—we made it thanks to you! Your contributions will be formally recognized in a later edition of Release and in the 2008 annual report.



The Center's new education building, January 2008. Photo: The Marine Mammal Center

Seal Volunteers Needed!

Our busiest season is in full swing and we have many seal pups in need of TLC. Join a fun and committed group of individuals who make a difference in the lives of marine mammals every day.

In addition to animal care, there are many other opportunities to get involved, including the rescue and release of animals, youth education, administration, retail and more.

Learn more about these opportunities on our website or contact the Center's volunteer coordinator, Kathleen Hannah, at hannahk@tmcc.org.

A listing of volunteer orientations is on page 3 of this newsletter.

Fun Events at the Center!

Be sure to join us Saturday, March 8 for the 25th Annual Run for the Seals, a fun, self-timed 4-mile run and walk to benefit The Marine Mammal Center. Runners, walkers, baby joggers, and dogs on leash are welcome to participate in the event at Rodeo Beach in the Marin Headlands. More information at www.runfortheseals.org.

Baseball fans can support the Center at the 6th Annual Marine Mammal Day at AT&T Park May 31. Join Lou Seal and Franny the Fur Seal as you cheer the Giants on, and a portion of the proceeds will go directly to The Marine Mammal Center! Visit our website for more details.

New Logo

You'll notice on the cover of this newsletter that we started the new year with a new look! Our new logo beautifully represents how our shared ocean environment is essential to the health of all life, a philosophy we whole-heartedly support at The Marine Mammal Center. Marine mammals are indicator species of ocean health, as represented by the unified image of the animal and its natural marine environment. The ocean drop also represents our responsibility in the relationship between humans and the ocean's inhabitants.

We thank Anthem Worldwide for the development and creation of our new logo. During the coming year, you will begin to see more of our iconic identity and we hope you will help us proudly spread our message.

Sincerely,

Merrill Magowan
*Chair, Board of Directors
The Marine Mammal Center*

Mark Your Calendars

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

3/1–3/2 & 3/15–3/16

Mendocino Whale Festival.
www.pointcabrillo.org

3/5, 4/9, 5/8, 6/3

New Volunteer Orientation
at Building 1071 in Marin
Headlands. 7:00–8:30 p.m.

3/8

Run for the Seals, Marin Headlands. www.runfortheseals.org

3/10–3/16

Marine Mammal Center Week
at Aquarium of the Bay.
www.aquariumofthebay.com

3/22, 4/19, 5/17

New Volunteer Orientation
at the Sausalito Bay Model
11:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

3/29, 4/19

Headlands Institute Summer
Camp Open House in the
Marin Headlands, 1-4 p.m.
www.yni.org

4/19

Marine Science Institute Earth
Day Environmental Fair, 8a.m.-
4 p.m. www.sfbaymsi.org

4/20

EarthFest environmental fair
with Aquarium of the Bay
at Pier 39, San Francisco.

5/4, 6/14, 7/12, 8/22

Seaflow whale-watching and
underwater noise education
trip to Gulf of Farallones NMS.
www.vesselwatchproject.org or
415-229-9366.

5/31

Marine Mammal Day with
the Giants at AT&T Park,
San Francisco.

6/6

San Francisco ZooFest for Kids
from 5:30-8 p.m. in San Francisco.

6/16–8/22

Coastal Camp at Headlands
Institute, www.coastalcamp.org



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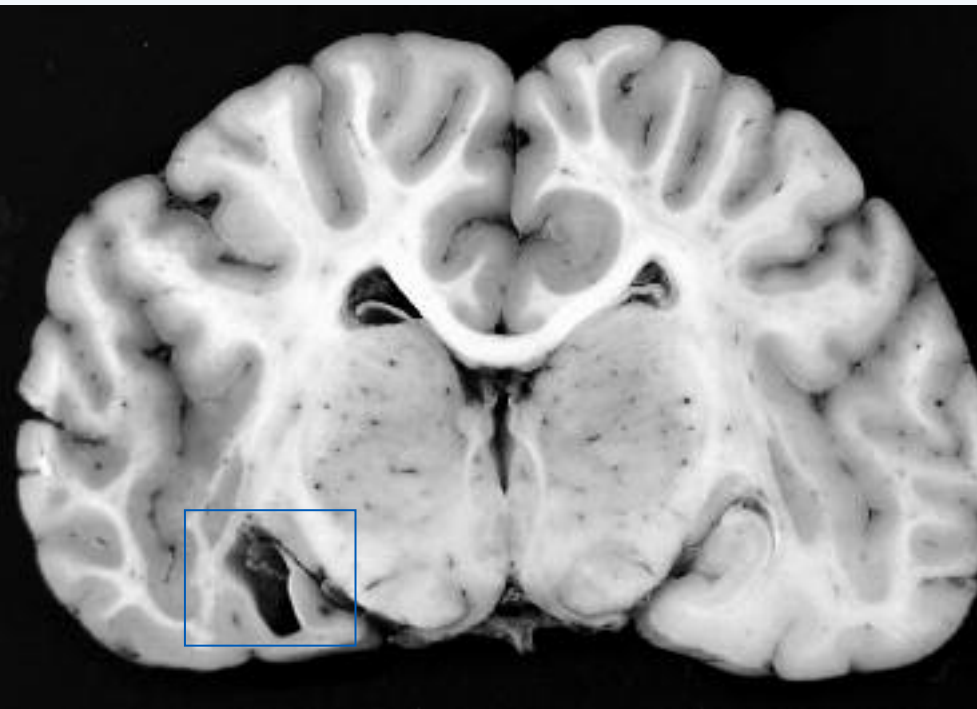
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A post-mortem cross sample of the brain of “Apple”, a California sea lion with domoic acid toxicity, shows brain damage evidenced by atrophy of the hippocampus (shown at lower left).

Photo: Tanja Zabka, The Marine Mammal Center

A new paper co-authored by the Center’s Dr. Frances Gulland and research fellow Tracey Goldstein has been published by The Royal Society.

The paper reports findings from studies in California sea lions on domoic acid toxicity, caused by harmful algal blooms.

In 1998, The Marine Mammal Center diagnosed the first case of domoic acid toxicity in marine mammals on the west coast, and has conducted extensive studies of the condition since then. In 2005, the Center’s researchers showed that the toxin can cross the placenta in pregnant females, potentially affecting unborn fetuses. The new paper’s study reports links to epilepsy and identifies chronic neurological consequences of domoic acid toxicosis.

As the toxin is ingested through fish who have fed on the algal blooms, and humans likewise eat fish, the implications of the study are far reaching.

Article Abstract:

Harmful algal blooms are increasing worldwide, including those of *Pseudo-nitzschia* spp. producing domoic acid off the California coast. This neurotoxin was first shown to cause mortality of marine mammals in 1998.

A decade of monitoring California sea lion (*Zalophus californianus*) health since then has indicated that changes in the symptomatology

and epidemiology of domoic acid toxicosis in this species are associated with the increase in toxigenic blooms. Two separate clinical syndromes now exist: acute domoic acid toxicosis as has been previously documented, and a second novel neurological syndrome characterized by epilepsy described here associated with chronic consequences of previous sub-lethal exposure to the toxin. This study indicates that domoic acid causes chronic damage to California sea lions and that these health effects are increasing.

Domoic Acid Toxicity: A Case Study

In July of last year, a California sea lion washed up on a beach in Santa Cruz County. She was unresponsive and lethargic, so The Marine Mammal Center was called to rescue her, and “Duner” was brought to the Center’s hospital.



Top: The MRI machine at IAMS Pet Imaging Center, where Duner’s brain is scanned. **Bottom:** Duner is sedated prior to her MRI. Photos: Stan Kaiser

She was suffering from recurrent seizures and vomiting. Based on her behavior, veterinarians immediately suspected that Duner had domoic acid poisoning, a condition caused by the presence of toxic algae in the ocean’s food chain, and a disorder the Center is seeing with increasing regularity.

Domoic acid poisoning is caused by harmful algal blooms and has affected thousands of marine mammals. The subject is a focus of many marine mammal researchers, including the Center’s Director of Veterinary Science, Dr. Frances Gulland, who has studied and co-authored numerous reports on the condition, including one recently published by the Royal Society (see *Science Update* above). Researchers hypothesize that rising temperatures in the ocean, as well as agricultural and urban runoff into the ocean, may be contributing factors in the increased growth of the toxic algae. While there are no conclusive results yet, various studies are currently being conducted, including several which are sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Like other sea lions with domoic acid poisoning that are studied at the Center, when Duner continued to have seizures, the decision was made to take her to Redwood City’s IAMS Pet Imaging Center for an MRI scan of her brain to confirm the domoic acid diagnosis and investigate the severity of the damage. The scan revealed that domoic acid had irreparably injured Duner’s brain. The hippocampus (an area of the brain) was atrophied, and Duner would likely continue to have seizures for the rest of her life. The difficult decision was therefore made to euthanize Duner to spare her from suffering.

The Marine Mammal Center is in a unique position to study and learn about the patients that it treats. Duner’s case, along with the many other domoic acid toxicity cases at the Center, serves to provide researchers with information about this alarming condition, as well as highlight the influence that the marine environment has on all mammals that rely on the ocean as a food source. Hopefully, people can use the valuable information that is gained from these patients to affect future change.

2007 Highlights



Humpback calf "Dawn" and windsurfers in Rio Vista. Photo: Sarah Wilkin, NOAA Fisheries



Hawaiian Monk Seal twins in their beach pen. Photo Bob Braun, NOAA Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center NOAA Permit 9321489



Dr. Frances Gulland slides off a dead blue whale after examining it. Photo: June Padilla

Major Scientific Discoveries

→ The Center analyzed blubber samples from female sea lions and their pups, and learned that the PCBs crossed the placenta, thus exposing fetuses during critical months of their development. This study helps set the parameters for developing risk assessment models for marine mammals.

→ In 2007, the Center's researchers published a paper in the Proceedings of the Royal Society identifying epilepsy in sea lions as a result of previous exposure to domoic acid, a toxic algae. This is important, as similar effects could occur in people if they ate seafood containing these levels of the toxin.

→ Sexual transmission may be an important factor in the spread of herpes virus associated with cancer in adult sea lions.

Humpback Whales Delta and Dawn

A mother and calf pair swam 75 miles up the Sacramento River, captivating the world. Weeks later, assisted by a coalition of state and federal agencies and led by The Marine Mammal Center, the whales swam back to the sea. Antibiotics were administered to the whales—a first for this species in the wild.

The littlest elephant seal that could

The Center came to the rescue of a young black coat elephant seal in Santa Cruz. Tamar survived against the odds after her mother adopted another young seal, and nursed them both. Separated from her mother, Tamar then swam an estimated 70 miles from the Farallon Islands to Santa Cruz, where the Center rescued her. She was successfully treated and released five months later.

Hawaiian Monk Seals Back to the Wild

As part of a joint conservation effort, The Marine Mammal Center embarked on a captive care project at Midway Atoll to provide nutritional supplementation to female juvenile monk seals in hopes of improving their chances of survival in the wild to reproduce. The project was a success, and in 2007, six seals, including rare twins, were released back to the ocean.

Capital campaign in full swing

In 2007, the Center moved full speed ahead on fundraising for the capital campaign to rebuild its facilities. The public grand opening of the new Marine Mammal Center is expected in spring 2009. You can read more about our progress and achievements on page 2 of this newsletter.

Earth's Largest Leviathans Wash up

Four blue whales washed up dead along Santa Barbara coast as a direct result of ship strikes. The Center was called upon to necropsy three of the whales. The endangered whales' deaths fueled major concerns about cargo shipping industry practices and prompted a petition to be filed with the federal government by the Center for Biological Diversity requiring ships to lower speed limit to 10 knots.

2007 Number of animals admitted

Species	Number	Percent
California sea lions	459	64%
Northern elephant seals	106	15%
Pacific harbor seals	77	11%
Steller sea lions	2	0%
Northern fur seals	20	3%
Guadalupe fur seals	1	0%
Cetaceans—various species	29	4%
Southern sea otters	22	3%
Total	716	100%

* percentages are approximate due to rounding procedures.

Special Thanks

The Marine Mammal Center is grateful to the following generous donors that contributed gifts of \$500 and higher to its annual operating fund. This list recognizes gifts received between September 1, 2007 and December 31, 2007.

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