



The Marine
Mammal Center

News Release

Contact:
Jim Oswald – (415) 289-7341
oswaldj@tmmc.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LEAVE SEALS BE AND CALL THE MARINE MAMMAL CENTER

Rescue season for harbor seals begins as first newborn patient is admitted to the Center

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – February 25, 2009) - 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.

“We admitted more than 100 harbor seals last year for a variety of reasons, including those that were separated from their mothers as a result of humans picking them up and removing them from their natural habitat,” said Shelbi Stoudt, stranding manager at The Marine Mammal Center. “The best thing you can do to help a harbor seal pup or any other marine mammal that looks to be ill or in a bad location is to call us on our response hotline. Our trained volunteers will monitor an abandoned seal pup from a safe distance and perform a rescue only when necessary.”

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.

On February 18, The Marine Mammal Center rescued its first harbor seal patient of the season. The days-old male pup, with its umbilicus still attached, was rescued at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in San Mateo County after park rangers kept him on watch in hopes of spotting his mother.

-MORE-

With no mother in site, the pup was lying on the beach, vulnerable to birds that were pecking at it. The pup was rescued and vets and volunteers at the Center are caring for Pavi, as he was named, tube-feeding him daily.

If you come across a harbor seal pup or any marine mammal that appears to be in distress between Sonoma and Mendocino County down to northern Santa Barbara county coastlines, please call The Marine Mammal Center's 24-hour response hotline at **(415) 289-SEAL (7325)**. 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 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-SEAL**.

To learn more about the **Leave Seals Be** campaign and how you can help marine mammal pups like Pavi, 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 14,000 marine mammals. In late June 2009, the public will be able to visit the Center's newly rebuilt headquarters in Sausalito, which includes animal rehabilitation viewing areas and educational exhibits. For more information, visit www.marinemammalcenter.org.

###