The Marine Mammal Center®

The Marine Mammal Center advances global ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education.
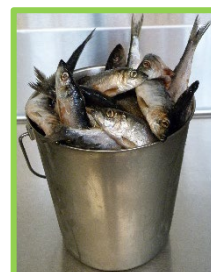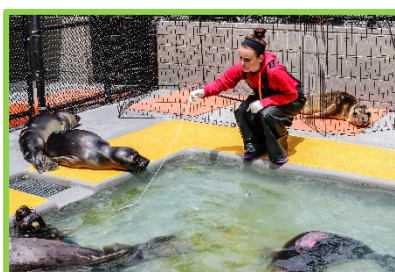
Seal Sustenance

Helping marine mammals stay wild is best for them and for people. That's why at The Marine Mammal Center, we do everything we can to minimize our contact with animals in our care and we spread the word to leave seals be in the wild to keep us all safe.

Sometimes, when we care for patients at the Center though, we do have to come in contact with them for things like exams, treatments and mostly, helping them eat for the many seals and sea lions that we rescue as pups who have only ever eaten mother's milk.

They start out with a fish milkshake tube fed to them until they can regain some strength and start learning how to track and eat whole fish in a process we call fish school. Eventually, we free feed animals before they can be released back to the wild able to catch live fish on their own. Watch this video to see what it all looks like.

As you can see, the most contact between care takers and animals happens during fish school. ***Can you spot the ways that we try to keep seals wild in the videos?***

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We want your ideas for how we can reduce contact with animals even more to help them stay wild and be released back to their ocean homes successfully. Here's one example in action that helps monk seal patients at our hospital in Kona, Hawai'i practice their natural foraging skills without any contact with people. Flipping the flaps on the box open to get the fish is a lot like how monk seals look under rocks and corals for food in the wild.

Will you create automated feeding systems? Design more barriers or equipment? Help spread the word to leave seals be in the wild? There's an ocean of possibilities and we're excited to see your innovative ideas and prototypes!

Answers could vary, some potential answers are: boards between people and animals, only talking around animals for safety reasons, fish on a string, working efficiently to limit time near animals, animals grouped together to encourage normal social behaviors, crates for transport, net to get animals out of pool