



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

January 13, 2023



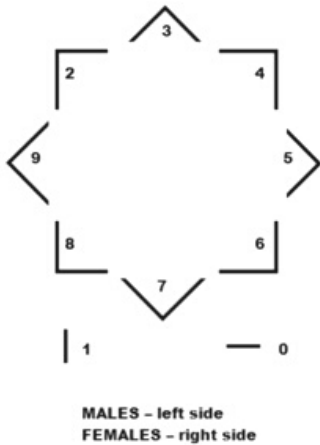
First two sea lion pups of the season

The First Sea Lion Pups of the Season

On the morning of December 25th our Marine Mammal Response Team received a call about a sea lion pup in need of help on Westward Beach in Malibu. The young animal had come out of the water and wedged herself in-between large rocks on the beach. At first glance CWC staff was able to tell that the sea lion was fearful, dehydrated, and severely underweight, and so the pup was rescued and brought back to CWC for care.

Once at CWC staff immediately got to work assessing and stabilizing the young patient. At about six months old she weighed a mere 22 pounds, which was well below her target weight of 45 pounds. She also had the clear markings of being part of a California Sea Lion population study. Each year National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) biologists brand and tag 1% of the sea lion pups born on San Miguel Island. Resighting data is collected from these animals throughout their lives in order to create models to estimate the survival rate of sea lions.

Before coming to CWC this particular pup had four numbers branded on her left side and had yellow tags applied to both of her front flippers. Here at CWC we use a temporary method for marking each patient while they are in care, and then prior to release the patients are outfitted with an orange flipper tag for future re-sighting data and history.



Farrell number chart



Female sea lion #157

On intake we shave markings (known as Farrell numbers) into the animal's fur. Males are marked on the left side and females are marked on the right. Farrell numbers have specific characters to designate the numbers zero through nine. Characters are combined to create numbers ten and above. For example, if a female patient is number 95, the symbols < > would be shaved onto her right side. The shaved markings naturally fade when the animal goes through their annual molt and does not leave any permanent marks on their fur, as opposed to brands which are intentionally meant to be a large and permanent visual identifier.

Since the first sea lion pup already had an obvious identifier, we did not shave the Farrell numbers onto her right side. Each patient needs to be clearly marked so that staff and volunteers are able to quickly identify individuals in order to administer medications and fluids, monitor progress,



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and assess appetite. Occasionally we will use grease markers to paint a color on patients' heads, but the markers wear off quickly when animals go in and out of the water and so the Farrell numbers are the preferred method of identification while in care.

The first sea lion pup from Christmas day soon had company. On December 30th our Marine Mammal Response Team rescued an emaciated female pup from La Piedra Beach in Malibu, and a few days later we picked up another female pup from Broad Beach. Sea lions are naturally social, and so it is critical that they are raised with others of their kind. These three quickly became comfortable with each other and were soon observed curled up together on large heating pads.

We estimate that these sea lions will be at CWC for about 12 weeks, or until they are healthy and strong enough to be returned to the wild. If you find a sea lion on the beaches of Malibu in need of help, keep your distance and contact CWC at 310-458-9453. You can do even more to help wildlife by donating at cawildlife.org!