



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

March 17, 2023



Young elephant seal on the beach

The First Elephant Seal Pup of the Season

Here at CWC we are used to all kinds of sounds emanating from various enclosures, but one particularly vociferous species that staff and volunteers look forward to working with each year are Northern Elephant Seal pups. Each winter Elephant seals breed and give birth primarily on offshore islands and remote coastal areas along the Pacific coast, from Baja California to central California. Some of the most popular breeding sites for these seals are along the California coast near San Simeon, Piedras Bancas, and Año Nuevo State Park.

At birth elephant seal pups weigh 60 to 80 pounds and can be three to four feet long. They are born with a black "pup coat" of fur and will molt into a silvery grey coat when they are four to six weeks old. The mothers will nurse their pups for one month, during which time the pups gain weight rapidly, tripling in size. After the nursing period, the pups are abruptly weaned and left to fend for themselves. They spend several more weeks at the rookeries, learning to swim and dive in tide pools and shallow waters. Eventually, they venture out to the open ocean, where they will spend 80% of the year, only coming on shore to molt and breed.



Patient in her enclosure

Northern Elephant Seal pups face a number of challenges in the wild, including predation by sharks and orcas, as well as environmental threats like pollution and climate change. Sometimes young pups have a hard time finding enough food and will haul out on the beaches of Malibu, emaciated and lethargic. When this happens, we always advise that members of the public keep their distance and contact California Wildlife Center for

assistance. It is never advisable to try to scare or push the seal back into the water.

Unfortunately, off leash dogs walking along the beach will sometimes come across an elephant seal pup in distress, and chase after the animal. This was the case for the first rescued elephant seal of the 2023 stranding season who was spotted by a member of the public on the morning of March 10th. Our Marine Mammal Rescue Team quickly responded to the call, but when the team arrived on site the animal was gone. In their place was the telltale trail in the sand of the seal using their front flippers to pull themselves back into the water, surrounded by paw prints. Los Angeles County code 17.12.290 states that neither dogs nor cats are allowed on public beaches and that all dogs must be on a leash on private beaches. These regulations are put in place to help keep wildlife, pets, and people safe.



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Luckily, later in the day, our Marine Mammal Rescue Team received another call about the young elephant seal in distress, only two miles from the original location. Staff and volunteers once again rushed to the location, and this time the seal was able to be safely contained and brought back to CWC for care. The young patient, who is only about ten weeks old, will remain at CWC for about three months, or until she is able to swallow fish under water and is healthy enough to survive on her own in the wild.

If you find a seal in need of help on a beach in Malibu, contact our Marine Mammal Rescue Team at 310-924-7256. Never attempt to get close to the animal, since doing so may force the distressed seal back into the water.

You can do even more to help wildlife by donating at cawildlife.org!