



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

January 3, 2025

Holiday Pup

On December 25th, California Wildlife Center's Marine Mammal Rescue Team picked up an emaciated California Sea Lion pup from El Matador Beach in Malibu. At rescue, she weighed 28 pounds. Pups at six months should weigh around 40 pounds.

During the intake exam, our team found that this six-month-old pup was malnourished—her ribs were visible, she was dehydrated, and she could not apply weight to her left front flipper. Upon examination our team found multiple flipper abscesses of unknown origin. These abscesses can be from a viral infection or simply micro cuts on the flipper. The pup is responding well to antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medication. She has also started eating fish and her attitude is improving daily.



First California Sea Lion patient of the season.



Patient eats cut fish in a pool.

All new sea lion pup patients are placed on a liquid diet and slowly transition to whole fish once they are stable. Initially the tube-fed formula contains electrolytes and vitamin supplements. As the patient's hydration improves, protein rich supplements and fish are added to the blended feeds. This progression minimizes overtaxing the body when in a starvation state.

California Sea Lions (in the wild) are born in June and remain with their mothers for an average of nine months. During this time, pups learn important life skills including where and how to best forage. The young sea lions continue to nurse until these skills are strong enough to ensure their survival on their own. When pups are weaned or separated from their mothers too soon, they may have trouble finding enough fish to support their growing body and can fail to thrive on their own.

California Sea Lions have robust rookeries on the north Channel Islands and feed in the shallow waters off the island and nearshore along the California coast. Due to their proximity to people, they are at high risk for human-related injuries such as entanglement in derelict fishing nets or lines (along with other trash in the ocean), gunshot wounds, and harassment by people and unleashed dogs on the beach.

If you find a stranded marine mammal, please stay back, keep your pets on leash and observe the animal from a distance of at least 50 feet (ideally 150 feet). Do not feed or pour water on the animal. Marine mammals often haul out onto the sand when they are cold or tired. Forcing them back into the ocean can be life threatening as they may be too exhausted to swim and prevents our rescue team from being able to provide life-saving care. Contact your local Marine Mammal Stranding Network. In Malibu, call CWC at (310) 458-9453, option 1 or text (310)924-7256. Please be prepared to provide a zoomed in photo, why you are concerned, and a location pin or address so that the rescue team can find the distressed sea lion.



Patient just prior to rescue by our Marine Mammal Rescue Team.