



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

March 20, 2026

Meet the Pup-ular Elephant Seals!

Every January Northern Elephant Seals are born. They stay with their mothers for only one month before they are weaned and expected to fend for themselves. The first pups of the season arrive after this weaning period, in March and April. Life for an elephant seal pup is anything but easy. When they come into care, it's often because they are struggling to survive in the wild.

We currently have three Northern Elephant Seal pups in care, all of whom arrived severely underweight, as is common for this time of year. The first pup admitted was a malnourished young male with significant body scarring, likely from being battered against rocks along the shoreline. Another pup, known as "Blue" for the non-toxic identification mark on his head, weighed just 27 kg (59 lbs) at intake—well below the typical birth weight of a healthy Elephant Seal, about 40 kg (88 lbs). In addition to following our usual protocols for marine mammal care, we are now facing a new threat to California's elephant seal populations: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

Earlier this year, HPAI was confirmed in marine mammals in California for the first time, after previously being detected in South America, Europe, and other U.S. states. Cases have begun emerging in crowded seal colonies, raising new concerns about the virus spreading within the state's marine mammal populations. Because of this increased risk, our team is taking extra precautions, including longer quarantine periods and the use of PPE to help keep both the marine mammal team and other patients healthy.

Our team expects to be at capacity with Northern Elephant Seals in the coming weeks. The pups currently in care are showing good progress. Our first elephant seal of the year has perked up and is responding well to treatment, and he just ate his first fish!

While the circumstances that bring them into care are less than ideal, staff and volunteers look forward to caring for these large, doe-eyed seals each year and giving them a second chance.

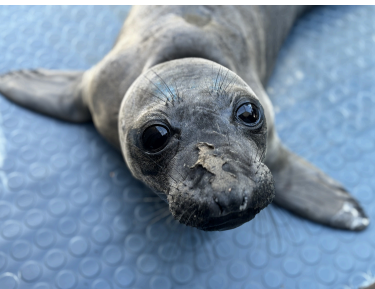
We are incredibly grateful to the members of the public who reported these animals to our team. If you see a stranded marine mammal, please call or text us at 310-924-7256. As always, please never approach, touch, or allow unleashed pets near ailing marine mammals.



Stranded Northern Elephant Seal in Malibu.



Malnourished elephant seal being admitted.



Elephant seal patient, Blue, in care.