



Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

99 Pacific Street, Building 455
Monterey, CA 93940

Web: montereybay.noaa.gov

Email: montereybay@noaa.gov

Telephone: (831) 647-4201

Photo: Melissa Anne Thomas

SEAL, SEA LION, OR SEA OTTER?



Photo: Bill Bouton



Photo: Mike Baird

Harbor Seals – have short front flippers, dark or white spots on their fur, and lack external ear flaps. Males and females up to six feet in length.



Photo: Steve Lonhart



Photo: Phil Adams

Elephant Seals – have short front flippers, tan or dark brown fur, and lack external ear flaps. Males up to 13 feet in length, and females up to 10 feet.



Photo: Mike Baird



Photo: Megan Gong

Sea Lions – have long front flippers, tan or dark brown fur, and have external ear flaps. Males up to eight feet in length, and females up to six feet.



Photo: Steve Lonhart



Photo: Steve Lonhart

Sea Otters – have front paws, tan and dark brown dense fur, and usually seen floating on their backs. Males and females up to four feet in length.



**MONTEREY BAY
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY**

Designated in 1992, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is one of the largest federal marine protected areas in the National Marine Sanctuary System for its biological richness and cultural significance. The sanctuary encompasses 6,094 square statute miles (4,601 square nautical miles) of ocean and a shoreline length of 276 miles.

The sanctuary contains diverse marine ecosystems, including deep underwater canyons, a seamount, rugged rocky shores, extensive kelp forests, wave-swept sandy beaches, and tranquil estuaries. Known as the “Serengeti of the Sea,” the sanctuary harbors an incredible variety of marine life, including at least 36 species of marine mammals, 525 species of fishes, 180 species of seabirds and shorebirds, and an abundance of invertebrates and algae.

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VIEWING GUIDELINES

All marine mammals are protected. It is against federal and state law to disturb them or cause a change in their natural behavior. Enjoy watching in a responsible way:



Keep your distance. Causing otters to dive or seals to flee into the water from shore may threaten their pups and interrupt their feeding, resting, breeding, or nursing.



Hands off. Attempting to, or touching wildlife, can injure the animal, put you at risk, and may be illegal for most protected species. Never touch or pick up wildlife.



Never chase or harass wildlife. Never surround, trap or separate animals, approach them head on, or approach them directly from behind.



Do not feed wildlife. Attempting to attract or feeding wildlife may harm animals by causing injury, sickness, death, and habituation to people.



Report sick wildlife. Animals that appear abandoned may not be, as seals often rest on beaches or leave pups alone while feeding at sea. Report any suspected sick or injured wildlife to local authorities.



Keep pets on leash. Dogs can chase, harm, and disturb wildlife, or may cause mothers and pups to get separated. Wildlife can injure or spread disease to pets.



Know drone laws. All unmanned aircraft systems are prohibited in airspace below 1,000 feet in four restricted zones in the sanctuary without a permit, and from any

airspace that causes wildlife disturbance. Recreational and commercial drone operators must comply with all Federal Aviation Administration regulations as well as local laws and ordinances on airspace restrictions.

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PACIFIC HARBOR SEAL

(Phoca vitulina richardii)

Quiet and shy, harbor seals can be seen year-round, occupying shallow ocean waters, estuaries, or bays. They gather in groups along sheltered shoreline areas, on beaches, rocks, and spits, where they breed, molt, and rest. These small, plump seals have spotted silver-gray to black coats, and each individual has a unique pattern of dark spots or scattered white rings. Often curious, harbor seals will watch people walking along the shoreline or follow kayakers or divers in the water. Being fast swimmers, they can hunt fishes, octopuses, and squid. In the spring from March to May, females gather on protected beaches to give birth to one pup each year. Mothers often leave their pup alone on the beach while feeding offshore, returning later to nurse. On average, females can live for 35 years and males for 25 years.



Photo: Marge Brigadier

NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL

(Mirounga angustirostris)

Spending most of the year feeding out at sea, elephant seals come to sheltered beaches and islands to breed, pup, molt, or rest. Diving to a depth of more than 5,000 feet, they feed on sharks, fishes, and squid. Beginning in December, male elephant seals come to shore to battle each other for territory and access to females. Once the females arrive, they give birth to a pup and nurse for about 28 days, then mate with one or more of the dominant males before returning to sea. For the next two months, weaned pups remain on beaches learning to swim and dive on their own. Once hunted to near extinction in the late 1800s, today elephant seals are protected and have made a remarkable population comeback. They can be seen on beaches at Año Nuevo State Park and Piedras Blancas.



Photo: Denise Koczek

SOUTHERN SEA OTTER

(Enhydra lutris nereis)

Usually found in shallow bays, estuaries, or near kelp forests, sea otters feed on crabs, urchins, clams, and octopuses, often using small rocks to crack open the shells of prey. Lacking blubber, they burn calories quickly and eat up to 25 percent of their body weight a day. To stay warm and keep their thick fur waterproof, they spend hours a day grooming. Otters rest by wrapping in kelp to keep from drifting away, and can form groups of a dozen or more, called rafts. Single pups are born year-round, peaking between January and March, and stay with their mothers for six months or more. Southern sea otters, hunted for their lush pelts in the 1700s and 1800s, were once thought to be extinct until a group of about 50 individuals were discovered off Big Sur in 1938. The California population has grown slowly over the years to an estimated 3,000 animals.



Photo: Mike Baird

CALIFORNIA SEA LION

(Zalophus californianus)

Playful with a loud bark, sea lions are found on rocks, jetties, docks, or under wharves. Very social animals, large groups rest closely packed together on land or float together in rafts at sea. Sea lions are agile swimmers, and can be seen leaping out of the water. They hunt offshore for fishes and squid. California sea lions breed mainly on offshore islands from Santa Barbara to Mexico, and most pups are born in June or July. Mothers nurse their pup for at least six months to more than a year. By five years of age, males develop a bony bump on top of their skull called a sagittal crest. California sea lions are susceptible to entanglement in fishing gear and debris, malnutrition, and disease from harmful algal blooms that can cause the animals to have life-threatening seizures.



Photo: Cat Harper



Image courtesy of the Art and Design Department at California Polytechnic State University

REPORT ANIMAL DISTURBANCES

NOAA Enforcement Hotline: (800) 853-1964
CalTIP Hotline: (888) 334-CalTIP (888-334-2258)

REPORT SICK OR INJURED ANIMALS

The Marine Mammal Center
San Francisco Bay Area: (415) 289-7325
Monterey or Santa Cruz Counties: (831) 633-6298
San Luis Obispo County: (805) 771-8300

HELP PROTECT WILDLIFE

Are you passionate about helping prevent wildlife disturbance? Become a volunteer for Bay Net or Team OCEAN! Bay Net volunteers serve as shoreline naturalists to educate the public about the sanctuary, local wildlife seen from shore, and promote respectful wildlife viewing. Team OCEAN volunteers are on-the-water naturalists who educate other kayakers about the sanctuary and help prevent wildlife disturbances along the coast. For more information, visit:

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Photo: Amity Wood