

DISCOVER Amazing Wildlife



Whether you walk, bike, boat, or drive, you can't miss some of the best scenery and wildlife viewing on Earth! Like Africa's Serengeti Plain, the sanctuary offers spectacular wildlife watching with its wealth and diversity of animals, many of which can be seen easily from shore.

SANCTUARY HABITATS

- Sandy beach
- Rocky intertidal
- Sloughs and estuaries
- Kelp forests
- Sandy or muddy sea floor
- Deep sea and open ocean

MAGNIFICENT MARINE MAMMALS

With more than 30 species, you can find marine mammals here in abundance every day. Look just offshore for shy harbor seals, noisy sea lions or curious sea otters. In winter, watch for the heart-shaped blows of gray whales as they travel close to shore. Three major groups of marine mammals can be seen in the sanctuary: seals and sea lions; whales, dolphins and porpoises; and sea otters.

SEALS AND SEA LIONS

Seals and sea lions can be hard to tell apart. They both have thick layers of fur and fat to keep warm, and tapering bodies and strong flippers for fast swimming. They spend most of their time at sea, but come ashore to rest or give birth. True seals or "earless" seals, like the harbor seal, lack visible earflaps. On land, they wriggle awkwardly on their bellies. Eared seals, including fur seals and sea lions, have external ear flaps and much larger flippers they use to "walk" on land.



Northern Elephant Seal ●●

One of the largest true seals, elephant seals live on beaches and offshore islands when breeding (December to March) or molting (summer), otherwise feeding far offshore. Diving more than a mile deep, they feed on sharks, fishes and squid. Adult males with their large elephant-like noses and long canine teeth engage in bloody battles to establish territories and harems of females. Once hunted nearly to extinction, they've staged a remarkable comeback, with a population today of over 150,000. The best places to see them are at Año Nuevo State Reserve and Point Piedras Blancas.



Harbor Seal ●●

Quiet and shy, plump harbor seals can be seen year-round, resting lazily on rocks just offshore. These small sausage-shaped seals have spotted silver-gray to black coats. Often curious, harbor seals will watch

people walking along the shore or follow divers or swimmers in the water. Fast predators, they hunt for a variety of fishes and crabs. Females give birth to one pup each spring.



California Sea Lion ●

Social, playful and loud, California sea lions pack together on rocks, jetties and under wharves. Their piercing bark can be heard from quite a distance. In the water they rest on the surface in "rafts" of many animals, with heads and flippers poking above the water. They can also be seen body surfing and "porpoising," or leaping high out of the water. Males are dark brown, and can weigh up to 1,000 pounds, while females are considerably lighter and smaller. They feed offshore for squid, herring, anchovies, salmon, hake, and rockfish.



Southern Sea Otter ●●

SEA OTTERS

(Threatened)
The smallest marine mammal in North America, sea otters are actually related

to weasels, skunks and river otters, and like them, have stubby front paws. Usually found in or near kelp forests, they rarely come ashore. They rest by wrapping themselves in kelp to keep from drifting away. Sea otters eat abalone, urchins, snails, octopus, crabs and other shellfish, often placing a rock on their chest to pound open hard-shelled prey. Lacking blubber, they burn calories quickly and may eat up to 25 percent of their body weight each day. They depend on their thick, water-resistant fur to stay warm. Fur traders seeking their lush pelts hunted the otters to near-extinction in the 1700s and 1800s. The population has grown very slowly over the years, and is still threatened by oil spills, pollution and other human disturbances.

WHALES, DOLPHINS AND PORPOISES

Whales, dolphins and porpoises are divided into two groups: toothed and baleen. Baleen whales, such as blue, gray and humpback whales, have hundreds of comb-like plates with stiff bristles growing from the upper jaw to strain small food from huge mouthfuls of water. Toothed whales, including dolphins, porpoises, sperm whales and orcas, use sharp, pointed teeth to catch fish and other large prey.



Gray Whale ●

The most commonly seen baleen whale in the sanctuary, California gray whales migrate 12,000 miles each year from feeding grounds in the Bering Sea to calving lagoons in Baja California and back. Grays travel close to shore in small groups, passing south along the sanctuary's coast from late November to mid-February and north again from February to mid-May.



Humpback Whale ●

Both humpback and blue whales visit sanctuary waters in the summer and fall, attracted here by their prey—great swarms of krill. Humpbacks, like this one, also dive for schools of squid, anchovies or sardines.



Killer Whale ●

Killer whales, or Orcas are seen year-round in the sanctuary, but most frequently in the spring, corresponding to the migration of mother gray whales and calves. Killer whales patrol the canyon edges searching for grays—feeding upon their calves.



Common Dolphin ●

Common dolphins are very social, traveling in pods of up to 2,000 animals. These active dolphins are often seen riding the bow wave of boats, leaping high into the air, or even somersaulting. Other types of dolphins and porpoises found in the sanctuary include Dall's porpoise, pacific white-sided dolphins, Risso's dolphins and bottlenose dolphins.

TURTLE TALES

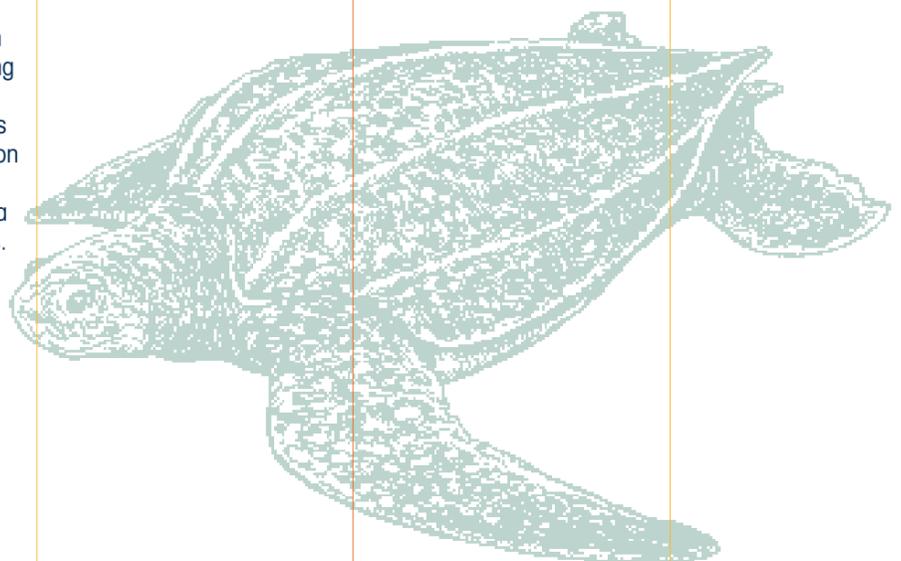
Although other species of sea turtles may be sighted occasionally in sanctuary waters, the leatherback, the largest turtle in the world, is the most regular visitor here. Leatherbacks arrive here in the summer and fall to feast on jellies.



Leatherback turtle ●

(Endangered)
Seeing a leatherback turtle is a rare treat since they spend most of their time underwater. The deepest diving animals known, with the largest geographic range of any reptile, leatherbacks are found in all the world's oceans. A great mystery is

where leatherbacks spend their time in the open sea. Accidental entanglement in fishing nets, over-harvesting of eggs and adults, and disturbance at nesting sites has reduced their population in the Pacific Ocean by 95 percent, making them a highly endangered species.





BOUNTIFUL BIRDS

They come in all shapes and sizes, and stand alone in marshes or fly in flocks of thousands out at sea. The sanctuary is situated along the Pacific Flyway, the path taken by birds during their migration between southern wintering grounds and northern breeding sites. About 130 different marine birds are found in the sanctuary. Based on their habitat and food, marine birds are usually divided into two groups: shorebirds and waders, and seabirds. Shorebirds and waders, such as sandpipers, plovers, avocets, herons and egrets, forage along wetlands

and beaches of the sanctuary. Some seabirds, like albatrosses, storm-petrels, and shearwaters, remain far out at sea where they feed and rest, coming ashore only to breed. Coastal seabirds stay closer to shore and include the brown pelican, loons, cormorants, scoters, grebes and gulls.



Snowy plover ●

(Threatened)

These diminutive shorebirds winter and nest along sandy beaches and tidal flats. They hunt for small invertebrates found in beached seaweed and other wrack. Plover nests are just a mere depression in the sand, and the parents incubate the eggs around the clock for 28 days. Once the chicks hatch, the male cares for them. Because beaches are popular recreational sites, plovers and

their nests are vulnerable to human disturbance. Habitat loss and predation by introduced species, such as the red fox, have also contributed to a serious decline in the snowy plover population.



Great blue heron ● ●

Over four feet (1.2 meters) tall with a wingspan of up to seven feet (2.1 meters), these herons have long legs, a large blue-gray body, and a long, elegant neck. Although graceful when walking or flying, they flap their wings awkwardly in takeoffs and landings. Herons are noisy in their nests, but wade silently through wetlands, standing

frozen before lunging for fish, crabs and other prey. They are seen often at Elkhorn Slough.



Pelagic Cormorant ●

Like most diving birds, cormorants are skilled at fishing, but unlike them, their feathers have no natural water-proofing oils. A cormorant's feathers soak up water, helping it dive deep, but it must spend a lot of time perched on rocks, spreading its wings to dry them. Three kinds of cormorants inhabit the sanctuary. The smallest species, the pelagic cormorant, can dive to 180 feet (55 meters) to catch small fishes.



Brown pelican ● ●

(Endangered)
Easily recognizable by their large pouch, pelicans are often seen flying in flocks above the ocean searching for schooling fish like sardines or anchovies. With their keen eyesight, they can spot fish from heights of 20 to 60 feet and will abruptly dive for them. After a successful dive, a pelican drains the water from its pouch and swallows the fish headfirst. Their dramatic population decline in the 1960s was traced to the pesticide DDT, which caused their eggshells to become thin and fragile. When DDT was banned in 1972, the population began to rebound, but still remains endangered along the Pacific Coast.



Sooty shearwater ●

Seen flying offshore in flocks of hundreds of thousands near rich feeding grounds, or resting on the water in tight flocks, sooty shearwaters are the most abundant seabird in the sanctuary from May through September. This wide ranging seabird nests on sub-Antarctic islands off New Zealand, Tasmania, and Chile before migrating north to spend the winter in warmer Northern Hemisphere seas. Sooties are attracted here by an abundance of prey, including sardines, rockfishes, squid, and krill.

FABULOUS FISHES

Unless you go diving or are a lucky fisherman, you might not see them, but more than 150 kinds of bony fishes and 33 types of cartilaginous fishes (sharks, skates and rays with skeletons made of cartilage instead of bone) live in the sanctuary. Some are residents, like halibut, rockfish and leopard sharks. Others, like tuna, travel the sea. Each fish is specially adapted to its habitat: Kelp greenlings hide in kelp forests, rockfish and lingcod take refuge in rocky reefs, sanddabs and sole camouflage on sandy bottoms, and big, strong swimmers like albacore, swordfish and white sharks find plenty of room in the open ocean.



Rockfish ●

Rockfish live in kelp forests, rocky reefs and in deep submarine canyons. More than 70 species are fished along the Pacific Coast and marketed as "rockcod" or "red snapper." Most rockfish grow slowly and have a very long life span. Some species may live more than 100 years. Because they grow slowly and live so long, rockfish mature late and don't breed until they're seven to 20 years old, making them vulnerable to overfishing.



Sanddabs ●

Practically invisible when still, these small bottom-dwellers camouflage perfectly with the sandy or muddy seafloor. With their flat bodies and both eyes on the same side of their head, sanddabs are designed to hide on the bottom, watching for approaching predators or prey.



Salmon ●

Salmon are anadromous—born in freshwater, but living their adult lives at sea, returning to their birth streams and rivers to spawn. The sanctuary is home to three species—chinook, steelhead, and coho. Unlike steelhead and coho, chinook salmon don't spawn in tributaries running into the sanctuary, but they're the most economically important salmon for sport and commercial fishing. They use the sanctuary's rich ocean habitat extensively during

their one to four years at sea. With historic runs at an all time low, some subspecies, like the Sacramento River winter-run are endangered or threatened. Steelhead and coho salmon are also threatened, mainly due to loss or damage of their freshwater habitats.



White Shark ●

The largest predatory fish on Earth, white sharks are surrounded by myths and legends, playing an important role in many cultures. Little is known

about where they breed, how long they live, or where they travel. Scientists believe they spend a lot of time cruising offshore waters, alone or in pairs, but their solitary habits and remote wanderings make them difficult to study. Although their population is low worldwide, adult white sharks are relatively abundant off central California, attracted here by large colonies of seals and sea lions upon which they feed. Despite a fierce reputation, white sharks rarely attack people.

TIDEPOOL TREASURES

The rocky shores and tidepools of the sanctuary are a great place to watch ocean life without even getting wet! At low tide you might see tidepool sculpins darting away, sea stars clinging to rocks or hermit crabs scurrying about. Bright green surfgrasses and colorful forms of red and brown seaweeds carpet the rocks. Sanctuary tidepools are one of few places in the world where so many kinds of organisms live in such a small area—creating a treasure chest of life waiting to be explored.



Black turban snail ● ● ●

Several hundred black turban snails can be seen grouped together in crevices and shaded areas, or in shallow pools. Sea otters, rock crabs, ochre sea stars eat these common snails, while hermit crabs use their empty shells for a protective house.



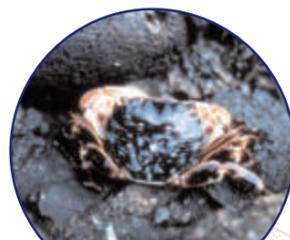
Aggregating anemone ● ●

These beautiful flowerlike animals use stinging cells on their tentacles to paralyze small prey. Because aggregating anemones can rapidly clone themselves—literally split in half—they're very abundant. If exposed to air, anemones contract in size and retract their tentacles. Sticky bumps on their bodies collect sand and bits of shells, which provide camouflage and prevent them from drying out.



Ochre sea star ●

You'll find colorful ochre stars in an array of hues—yellow, orange, dark brown or deep purple. These voracious predators use hundreds of tiny suction-cup feet under each arm to pry open mussels, barnacles and other prey. After opening the shells, they slide their stomach inside, digesting the animal. Ochre stars can cling tightly and motionless on a rock for weeks on end.



Lined shore crab ● ● ●

Lined shore crabs abound in tidepools and will scramble sideways for shelter if you approach, or press themselves into crevices to hide. They spend a lot of time out of water, primarily eating algae, which they scrape off rocks with their claws. Shore crabs are a favorite food of sea gulls. If a gull grabs a crab's leg, the crab can shed the leg and dash away. In time, it will grow a new one.

