



MARINE MAMMALS OF CALIFORNIA

Multiple ocean environments come together along the California coast, providing a suitable habitat for a wide variety of marine life. This area sports one of the most diverse assemblages of marine mammals in the world. Some species are resident (harbor seal, minke whale, sea otter, and California sea lion), several are transient (gray whale and killer whale), while others use the area as a seasonal destination (humpback whale, elephant seal, and northern fur seal).

Ocean users play important roles in marine mammal conservation. You can make a meaningful contribution in protecting marine mammals by following the information provided in this guide.

PINNIPEDS — SEALS & SEA LIONS

Pinnipeds divide their lives between foraging at sea and coming ashore to rest, mate, give birth, suckle their young, or molt. Pinnipeds are classified into two families. Otariids (sea lions and fur seals) have external ear flaps and can rotate their hind flippers under their pelvis to walk on all fours on land. Phocids (seals) have no external ear flaps and drag their hind limbs, moving like an inch worm on land.

OTARIID PINNIPEDS



Guadalupe Fur Seal Northern Fur Seal California Sea Lion Northern Sea Lion (Steller Sea Lion)

PHOCID PINNIPEDS



Harbor Seal
Scale 1:100
0 0.5m 1m 1.5m 2m 2.5m

Northern Elephant Seal

BALEEN WHALES & LARGER TOOTHED WHALES

Whales and dolphins are in the order Cetacea in two living groups—Mysticeti (baleen whales with paired blowholes) and Odontoceti (toothed whales with one blowhole).

MYSTICETES

scale 1:200
0 1m 2m 3m



Humpback Whale

Minke Whale



Bryde's Whale

Sei Whale



Blue Whale



Fin Whale



Gray Whale

LARGE ODONTOCETES



Cuvier's Beaked Whale

Baird's Beaked Whale



Sperm Whale

SEA OTTER

Otters are members of the weasel family that have adapted to life almost entirely in the water. Sea otters are endangered and occasionally come ashore.



SMALL TOOTHED WHALES, DOLPHINS & PORPOISES

Scale 1:100
0 0.5m 1m 1.5m 2m 2.5m



Risso's Dolphin

Northern Right-whale Dolphin

Killer Whale

Pygmy Killer Whale

False Killer Whale

Melon-headed Whale

Short-finned Pilot Whale

Pacific White-sided Dolphin

Pygmy Beaked Whale

Bottlenose Dolphin

Blainville's Beaked Whale

Rough-toothed Dolphin

Ginkgo-toothed Beaked Whale

Short-beaked Common Dolphin

Hubbs's Beaked Whale

Long-beaked Common Dolphin

Stejneger's Beaked Whale

Pantropical Spotted Dolphin

Hubbs's Beaked Whale

Striped Dolphin

Pygmy Sperm Whale

Dwarf Sperm Whale

Spinner Dolphin

Harbor Porpoise

Dall's Porpoise

Fraser's Dolphin

Ocean Users' Guidelines

- Remain at least 100 yards/meters away from whales and where marine mammals come ashore.
- Remain at least 50 yards/meters away from pinnipeds at sea and other marine animals (dolphins, porpoises, sea otters, and sea turtles). If you see a stranded animal, call 24-hour toll free hotline 877-SOS-WHALE (877-767-9425).
- Do not feed, touch, ride, or swim with marine mammals or sea turtles. Avoid approaching marine mammals or sea turtles when swimming or diving.
- Avoid following behind or directly approaching in front of the animal(s). Attempt to parallel an animal's course, do not travel at speeds faster than the animal(s), and maintain a constant speed.
- Should dolphins or porpoises choose to ride the bow wave of your vessel, reduce speed gradually as necessary, and avoid sudden course changes.
- If approached by a marine mammal or sea turtle, put the engine in neutral and allow the animal to pass. Do not engage propellers until the animal(s) are observed at the surface and are clear of the vessel.
- Marine mammals and sea turtles should not be trapped between vessels or between vessels and the shore.
- Communicate with other vessel operators in the area to minimize disturbance to marine mammals. Wait your turn from a distance and then approach cautiously after other vessels have left.
- When marine wildlife is known to be in an area, post a look out, reduce speed, and be cautious. Marine animals may surface unpredictably at any time or location.

Guidelines Specific to Sea Otters

- Sea otter mothers and pups need more resting time than many other animals in order to stay healthy. Please respect an otter's needs and keep your distance. If you approach a sea otter on a kayak, surfboard, or boat, and the animal dives as a result of your approach, you have caused a disturbance.

Report Marine Mammals in Distress

**24-hour Toll Free Hotline:
877-SOS-WHALE (877-767-9425)**
or Hail the United States Coast Guard on VHF CH-16

Report incidents of marine mammal harassment to NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement at 800-853-1964.

Report injured, entangled, stranded, and ship-struck marine mammals as soon as possible. Reports will be relayed to designated responders. Authorized personnel will guide you as to what to do next. Prompt reporting is the best way to help distressed animals. The following information will aid responders in mounting an appropriate response.

Please provide the following information when calling the hotline:

- Your name and phone number (someone may contact you for more information)
- Date and time of sighting
- Species (if known, otherwise a general description)
- Location (be as specific as possible, include latitude and longitude if available), weather conditions/sea state
- Nature of Distress (entanglement, visible injury, etc.)
- Other details: size, is the animal swimming (speed and direction heading, diving, breathing), description of entanglement, any photos or video taken, etc.)
- Can you stay with the animal and if so, for how long



MONTEREY COUNTY
Fish and Game Commission



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A Waterproof Ocean Users' Guide

