



# FRIENDS OF THE ELEPHANT SEAL

## E-SEAL NEWS

WINTER  
2008



### NEW BEGINNINGS

In early December the stage is being set at Piedras Blancas for Mother Nature's elephant seal spectacle of birthing, mating and fighting. The subadult males that have been acting like big guys, sparring in mock battles, will get a rude awakening when the really big guys begin to arrive from their Alaska migration, ready to take over the beaches for the dramatic winter season. When the big guys settle in, the hierarchy on the beach changes often. A huge two ton male, with his long, dangling nose, will collapse on the beach and appear to sleep. He surely must feel heavy as he hits the gravity of the beach after being buoyant in the sea for months while traveling to the Aleutian Islands and back. But as another male rides in on the surf, he postures, puffs up his big nose and bellows. He'd rather not fight to stake his claim to a piece of beach. He has a long fast ahead of him, not eating for nearly four months, and he needs to conserve energy for serious confrontations during the mating season.

An adult male elephant seal looks almost like a prehistoric creature with his rough, crusty neck and the long nose—called a proboscis—that gives elephant seals their name. After awkwardly galumphing across the sand, the males may collapse like deflated blimps. But they can turn up their speed when defending their territory. Size matters, and each male wants to convince the others that he's the biggest and strongest. When they fight, the calloused neck becomes a protective shield, and their booming threat sound is difficult to describe, although someone described it as sounding like a Harley revving up in a gym. If that

*(Continued on page 3)*

For Up-to-date information, visit our web site at [www.elephantseal.org](http://www.elephantseal.org)

### THE SEA AROUND US

The ocean along the Piedras Blancas rookery is included in two protection programs: the federal government's Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the State of California Marine Protected Areas.

**The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary** is the largest of the five marine sanctuaries on the west coast. It extends from Cambria on the south to Marin County on the north. The shape of the sanctuary is designed to encompass the most valuable features such as the Monterey Bay canyon and it extends as far out as 80 nautical miles from the coast.

Restrictions within the sanctuary include those against developing and producing oil, gas or mineral resources; discharging most materials within or near the boundary of the sanctuary; moving or causing damage to historical resources; drilling or dredging; taking any marine mammal, sea turtle or sea bird; as well as restrictions on motorized craft and airplanes.

**The Central California Marine Protected Areas** (MPAs) were recently established. They are all within three nautical miles of the coast and provide protection to marine life.

The MPA locations are selected to foster both species diversity and redundancy. Their size is selected to provide safety for resident species which live most of their adult life within a region of a few miles. The offspring of these species, however, drift significant distances on the currents before they reach maturity. The spacing of the areas is designed to encourage repopulation of any area from its neighbors should some disaster cause the population in that area to become seriously depleted.

Most of the offspring end up outside of the protected areas, however, and help replenish the supply of fish available to commercial and recreational fishers. The resident fish grow larger, greatly amplifying the number of offspring: a 7.5 pound rockfish produces ten times as many offspring as a 1.8 pound rockfish.

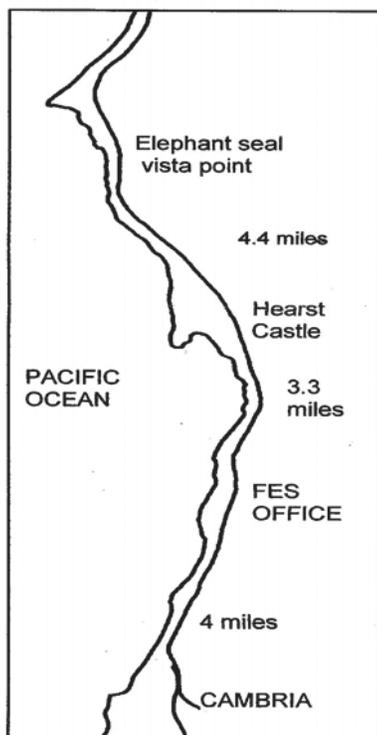
The Piedras Blancas Marine Protected Area extends from one mile south to 3-1/4 miles north of the light station and three nautical miles out to sea. It includes two regions: the portion close to shore is a "no take" zone while the outer portion allows fishing only for albacore and salmon, fish that travel through the zone but are not residents.

### Tips for Safe Viewing

- View from a safe and respectful distance.
- NEVER get between a seal and the water.
- Dogs and seals don't mix. Keep dogs away from the seals
- Please stay off sand dunes which are fragile areas for plants and animals.

Elephant seals are protected by law. It is illegal to harass any marine mammal. If you witness harassment, call 1-800-853-1964.

### Map to Elephant Seal Viewing Piedras Blancas



**Friends of the Elephant Seal**  
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**Visit our office, gift shop,  
and displays at the  
Cavalier Plaza, Highway 1  
San Simeon**

## WHAT'S NEW AT FRIENDS

**Welcome new docents:** Ten new volunteer docent guides completed their training this fall and received their blue jackets. Their names and photograph are shown on the opposite page.

**Good news and bad news:** The FES annual dinner dance fundraiser, Sunset at San Simeon, will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2009 at the Hearst Ranch Warehouse. Diana Teetzel is coordinating the event. She has a great crew to help make this year another success. The evening includes wine, beer and hors d'oeuvres, dinner, a silent auction and raffle and dancing to live music by the Mighty Croon Dogs. For reservations, call the office, 924-1628. Tickets are \$75. The bad news is that the FES grant from the California Coastal Conservancy has been suspended because of the state's budget crisis. This news makes our annual fundraiser more important than ever.

**New Board Members:** Docents Megg McNamee and Jim Brownell are now members of the FES Board of Directors. Megg is the new treasurer, and Jim is active in the Outreach program and the Training Committee.

**Office Staff:** The office is now staffed regularly five days a week. Judy Burley works Tuesday and Wednesday, Diana Teetzel works Thursday and Saturday, and Joan Crowder works Friday. The other days are sometimes staffed by volunteers.

**Goodbye Grossmans:** The docent dinner in November was an occasion to say farewell to Ann and Bernie Grossman. Ann has been a friend of the elephant seal since the organization's beginning and has been invaluable as director of the fundraising activities and as president of the board, as well as being active in school and bus tours. She also organized the Adopt-a-poll program, which brought in some funds. Bernie was always supportive and volunteered to help with parties and fundraising activities. They will certainly be missed.

**Onward Michele:** Michele Roest recently resigned from her post as education and outreach specialist for the northern area of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, where she was a good friend, advisor and ally of FES. She will stay in the area and we wish her well in her new pursuits.

**Protected territory:** The Davidson Seamount will be included in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary in February, 2009. The area around it, approximately 775 sq. statute miles, will be known as the Davidson Seamount Management Zone.

**Light station tours:** As of January 2009, there will be a charge for tours of the Piedras Blancas light station. For tours on Tuesdays and Thursdays, meet at the former Piedras Blancas Motel, one and a half miles north of the light station at 9:45 a.m. Price for adults is \$10. Reservations are required for the other tour that leaves from Hearst Castle on the third Saturday of each month. The price is \$15 for adults. Children under 16 are admitted free to both tours. Call 927-6811 for the Saturday reservations.

### New Beginnings (Continued)

hollow holler doesn't scare off an opponent, they may choose to fight, banging their necks together and biting into each other's tough chest shield, drawing blood. The males come in weighing as much as 5,000 pounds and when they leave over three months later, they have lost as much as 40 percent of their weight.

By the time the pregnant females begin coming in in December, each alpha male has staked a claim to part of the beach, ready to assemble a harem of 30 to 40 females. Pups begin being born about December 15th to 20th, usually three to five days after the mother arrives. The actual birth usually takes less than half an hour.

Visitors who are fortunate enough to view a birth will see the black pup emerge, with the gulls standing by to clean up the afterbirth. The number of pups born each year is gradually increasing, with more than 4,000 born last winter. After nursing the pup for about a month, the female is ready to mate again and leave. During that time, the pup, which weighs about 60 pounds at birth, may have quadrupled its weight, and for every pound it gains, the mother will have lost two pounds. A healthy pup may weigh as much as 300 pounds or more by the time its mother leaves, and it has to live off that fat for a couple of months while it becomes seaworthy. Weaning is abrupt, as the mothers mate again and head out to sea, leaving their babies on the beach.

As the pups are weaned, the harem master expects to mate with each of "his" females, and the mating season is when visitors often see the males fighting.

While the males provide action on the beach, the mothers and pups are also dealing with each other and with the winter tides and high surf. Storm surges toss the pups about and often separate them from their mothers. As the number of births has gone up in recent years, the mortality rate of pups on the beach has also increased. So viewers see new life as pups are born, but may see death as well, as they observe nature up close and personal.

### NEW DOCENTS—FALL 2008



**Back Row:** Courtney Aloji, Carolyn Burry, Bette Bardeen, Keith Hayes, James Siler

**Front Row:** Nancy Miller, Christel Chesney, Warren Helmstedter, Charmaine Coimbra, Polly Tatton

### DOCENT SPOTLIGHT: MEGG MCNAMEE



Megg McNamee brings her talents to FES in many ways. She has joined the Board of Directors as treasurer, she works on the bluff, and she is a skilled photographer and graphic artist. Thanks, Megg.



### From the Gift Shop

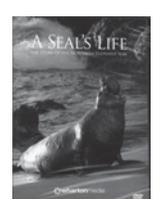
The following items are available for purchase from our Gift Shop. Prices include tax. Call 805-924-1628 for shipping and handling costs.



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Price: \$9.00



**DVD**  
Price: \$24.50



**DVD**  
Price \$20.00