

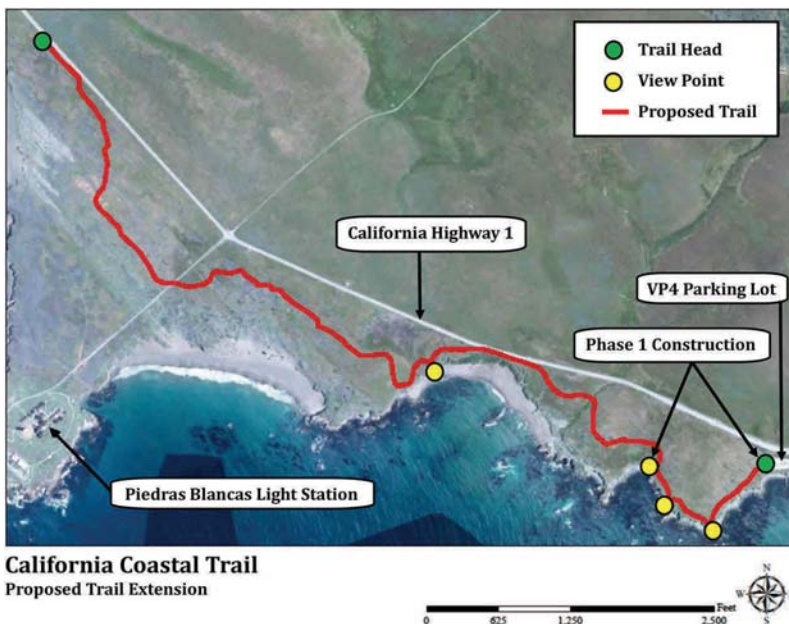


Extension of the California Coastal Trail and New Seal Viewing Areas

Friends of the Elephant Seal (FES) has pledged financial support to extend the California Coastal Trail from VP4 — the parking area at the north end of the north walkway — to the northwest boundary of the Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area — about a half mile northeast of the Piedras Blancas Light Station. Estimated to cost \$185,000, the two-mile trail extension (Figure below) will include four new viewpoints from which visitors may observe seals, sea lions, otters, dolphins and whales on the beach and/or in the ocean. Three of the new viewpoints will be connected by a trail that meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The trail will be constructed in phases as funds are secured. Phase 1 will extend the trail 1/3rd of a mile northwest from VP4 and include the three wheel-chair accessible viewpoints. The estimated \$37,500 required for Phase 1 has already been pledged. Friends of the Elephant Seal's \$5,000 pledge includes a generous gift from the Peter and Mary Russo Family Foundation. Other partners include the US Bureau of Land Management, the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and the San Simeon Tourist Alliance. Phase 1 construction will begin as soon as applicable permits are received.

(Continued on page 3)

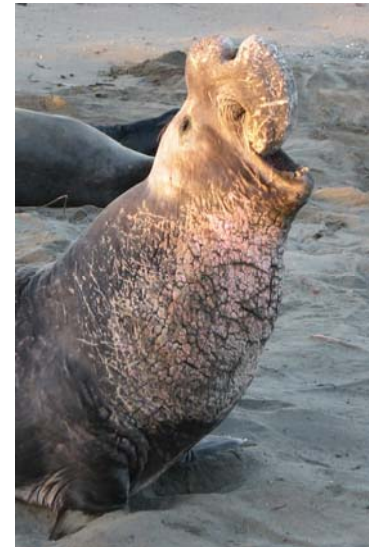


California Coastal Trail
Proposed Trail Extension

Visit our web site at
www.elephantseal.org

I Recognize that Voice! Male Elephant Seal Vocalizations

A recent study at Año Nuevo points up the special nature and importance of vocalization by male elephant seals. Recordings were made of 1100 male-male interactions. The peak loudness recorded was 126 dB — among the very loudest mammal sounds on land. The sound is generated in the throat, larynx and chest. It resonates in the nasal chamber but is not produced there.



Male elephant seals compete for mating opportunities and communication in this situation allows an animal to make the choice to compete or retreat. The vocalizations are acoustical signals that identify the sender's identity and possibly, the degree of threat they pose.

Each male had a unique vocalization, unchanging from year to year or with success or failure in dominance confrontations. In male-on-male confrontations, 83% were resolved by vocalization alone, 20% by appearance alone, 5% involved body contact and less than 2% required an actual fight. The importance of this energy saving resolution of dominance cannot be underestimated.

The study also made it clear that they can recognize the vocalization of individual seals. Sounds from ten males were played on separate occasions. A male that was lower in the hierarchy than the recorded seal responded to the recording by retreating, a male that was higher in the hierarchy charged the speaker. These same recordings were played at Piedras Blancas, eliciting little or no response. Thus the sound by itself is not an indication of rank or size but it can recall the individual that produced it.

Intern Program

FES has just expanded the very successful internship program involving The Marine Mammal Center, Cal Poly - San Luis Obispo, and Friends of the Elephant Seal. The program will support two Cal Poly Biology or Pre-Veterinary Science students as interns in the winter and spring academic quarters and one each in the summer and fall quarters at the Center. In addition they will each have a project of interest to FES. Brinda Barcelona and Craig Brown, winter and spring interns, gave presentations at the April docent dinner. Brinda worked with Brian Hatfield, a marine biologist long associated with FES, collecting re-sight information on northern elephant seal tags and counting dead pups. She presented a summary of a research paper on "Elephant seal physiology during fasting." Craig presented a video of an elephant seal rescue. The video covered the rescue itself, the triage in Morro Bay, and hospitalization and release in Sausalito.

Craig has continued as the summer intern and is working on a count of sub-adult and adult males during the molting season. Craig will be doing these counts weekly using binoculars and a Cal Poly Questar telescope. This will allow him to conduct the survey from the boardwalk and public areas, minimizing any chance of disturbing the seals and putting visitors at ease concerning these activities. If successful, we will be able to have more such activities that allow us to learn more about the seals in our rookery as opposed to depending solely on observations in other rookeries. Craig and Brinda will both be applying to veterinary school this fall as a result of their intern experience.



What's New

The information hand-out at the rookery has been transformed. It is now four pages and includes information covering all seasons, both in the rookery and at sea. The larger format also permits the inclusion of a section on the history of the rookery and statistical data about the seals. Since many of our members have not been to the rookery since this change, a copy is enclosed.

The shark detector's first season. Members received a special mailing last winter about our newly sited white shark detector. From mid-October through February only two sharks triggered the detector and each of them stayed in the area of the buoy only a few minutes. That is a dramatically lower hit rate than that experienced near the rookeries at Año Nuevo, the Farallon Islands or Pt. Reyes.

Multilingual Interpretive System. Installed at each end of the bluff is a system to provide commentary on the seals in multiple languages. They can be read with smart phones or tablet computers, both of which are frequently seen. To forestall roaming charges, we are providing a WiFi connection brought to the rookery by docents. The commentary is available both as text and as audio.

To see, and hear, what our visitors do, go to www.elephantseal.org/language.html.

As they become available, we will be increasing the number of languages available. Volunteer translators and recorders welcome.





简体中文
Dansk
English
Français
日本語

繁體中文
Deutsch
Español
Italiano
Português



WiFi
10AM to 4PM

www.elephantseal.org/language.html

2014 Pup Count. This was another growth year for the pup count, at least 5300 were born during the 2014 season. The survival rate on the beach was relatively low, however, with approximately 15% lost. Late February experienced record high swells accompanied by high tides and the waves probably account for loss at more than double the usual rate.

Extension of the California Coastal Trail and New Seal Viewing Areas (Continued from page 1)

Funding the entire two mile extension will require a coalition of federal, state, corporate and individual donors. The Board of Directors of the Friends of the Elephant Seal has authorized \$12,500 to be used as matching funds to encourage donations for Phase 2 construction. A crucial part of FES's mission is conservation and education; the rookery trail system is designed to keep elephant seals and humans safely apart while providing additional viewing areas.

The need for a trail system with coastal viewing access has evolved since November 1990, when elephant seals began hauling out in a small cove in the lee of the Piedras Blancas Light Station. In early 1992, the birth of the first pup initiated one of the fastest growing elephant seal rookeries ever recorded.

As the seal population grew, so did problems of seal-human interactions. The seals became a major fascination for those traveling Highway 1. Thousands stopped, parked illegally and precariously, then breached perimeter fencing and made their way over private property to view the seals. From 1994 to 1997, there was a steady increase in reports of seal harassment and dangerous behavior by people who were curious but unaware of hazards and regulations.

The geological and biological importance of the Piedras Blancas area reaches back millennia and the archeological and historical record reaches back centuries. Protection and management of the national treasures in the area are very recent. A 1997 trade of property between the State and the Hearst Corporation enabled construction of a legal parking lot with safe public viewing areas. At the same time, Friends of the Elephant Seal was created as a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 corporation to protect the seals from harassment and to teach rookery visitors about the seals and marine environments vital for their survival. FES guides in the rookery steadily reduced seal harassment.

In 2003, FES Executive Director Susan McDonald obtained a grant for a boardwalk on the bluff trail south of the VP3 parking lot. (Figure opposite page) FES President Bill Johnson provided the leadership and coordination of the permitting, planning and construction.

The boardwalk and trail that connects VP3 to VP4 were added on the north in 2010 under the current FES president, Brandt Kehoe.

The existing trails and boardwalks at the main elephant seal viewing area (VP3) were constructed by the California Conservation Corps with funding from California Coastal Resources Agency, 2000 Parks Bond Act, California State Coastal Conservancy, Land and Water Conservation Fund, U.S. Department of the Interior, California Department of Parks and Recreation and Trex Company, Inc. Coordination and support were provided by California State Parks, Caltrans, San Luis Obispo County, The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and The Hearst Corporation.

In 2006, the entire six miles of rookery beaches were made part of Hearst San Simeon State Park with the signing of an agreement between The State of California and The Hearst Corporation. FES guides continue to provide interpretive services at VP3 as State Parks Volunteers.

In 2008, the Piedras Blancas Light Station was designated as an Outstanding Natural Area within the Bureau of Land Management's Natural Landscape Conservation System. In 2011, 232 acres of State Park land was incorporated into the Outstanding Natural Area. In 2013 the Outstanding Natural Area was expanded again to a total of 476 acres, including the entire six miles of elephant seal rookery beaches.

The Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area is co-managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the State of California. The Outstanding Natural Area contains important Native American archeological sites and natural resources. Friends of the Elephant Seal is working to raise funds for the coastal trail project, which will allow access while protecting resources.

The Piedras Blancas Northern Elephant Seal Rookery is the only elephant seal rookery in the world easily accessible to the public 365 days a year without charge. Donations to the construction of the trail extension can be mailed to Friends of the Elephant Seal, Post Office Box 490, Cambria, California 93428. Donations are tax-deductible as permitted by law. For more information, call (805) 924-1628.