

## Docent Journal Entries, 1997-1998

Friends of the Elephant Seal docents write notes in journals at the end of their shifts. Below is a sampling from the first-year journals.



**11/28/1997** Arrived at 10am. People were waiting for us at the gate. It's a beautiful day. I've been here about 15 minutes and have already spoken to about 16 people. 11:30 am—a herd of people walked out onto the beach and towards the seals. They ignored all of us up here but then someone yelled and they came back up. Lots of people are so happy we're here and are very receptive to the knowledge I've shared.

**12/29/97** What a great day! Where were all the volunteers? The bluffs were constantly filled with people. A seal on the bluff had been chased there by a big male. We made a small rock barrier and left a sign that explained the seal was not sick, but resting. Visitors were sure she was sick and were trying to comfort her by getting close and extending their hands. She had quite a set of teeth, which she bared several times. Once we had the barrier up and people kept back from her, she relaxed and went back to her nap.

**1/30/98** Where do I start? Could write a book about what I saw today. Pups drowning, seals slammed against the rip rap. Giant logs rolling thru the colony. Injured seal lion crawled up the beach. Pups and moms screamed and wandered all afternoon looking for each other. Saw several unbelievable reunions and adoptions. Which is a good thing because it was tough to watch at high tide. North end lost about 4 ft. of sand, which will make them even more vulnerable. Lots of dead pups at south end. One weaner is lost between highway and large dunes to the south. Looks like all the sub-adult males had to take refuge on the grass at Arroyo Laguna. Looks like they like it there. More big surf on tap next week.

**2/8/98** El Nino has dealt a painfully sad blow to our seal colony. Seeing the beaches which once were filled with the excitement of births and the tender moments of moms and pups empty and strewn with debris was heart-wrenching. The few remaining adults and many pups struggled against the onslaught of water and ocean garbage as the seas pounded the shores with storm waves and high tides. People's reactions were as numerous and individual as the efforts of the pups and their families to stay secure through the chaos. You could sense the unspoken emotions of sadness, fear, and anxiety as all of us watched, helplessly, the plight of our own special seal colony's struggle with nature. The only ones who seemed unconcerned with all of it was the huge old bull. It is said that life is a balance between the good things and the difficult things and that we must accept both equally. We experienced the joy, excitement, and surprises of the birthing season. Now we must endure the sadness of the stormy season

and know that this, too, shall pass. It's all a part of the circle of life, and through it all we have each other to laugh to cry to share our experience. Isn't it wonderful?!

**2/28/98** Stopped at Arroya Laguna on my way to Vista Point because there was a ton of people on the field. A highway patrol was there with his horn and he left when I arrived. Stayed ½ hr and got everyone to leave. Everyone was polite and said they would go north to the proper Vista Point. I spent the rest of the afternoon at Vista Point. Several visitors came from LA after reading *LA Times* article and agreed with me that the photo made them think they could go out and play with the cute little seals.

**3/6/98** School field trip from San Joaquin Valley —185 kids. Docents (12 of us) ready for 1pm arrival—they arrived at 1:45p. Many of them had never seen the ocean – which made this trip so special even if there was not a lot of E-seal action on the beach. Unbeknownst to us docents, the teachers had told the kids the afternoon would be spent on the beach collecting shells, etc. and watching seals. So we had a large group of about 12-yr olds wanting a little more beach interaction than the sleeping weaners provided. They stayed about an hour. I directed them to the cove since they were going to stay in the area until 5p. Bottom line, the teachers were happy & so were the kids!! Did I mention we also had 2 surprise buses? About 11:30 a bus from Alternative School in Arroyo Grande—17 boys (about 15-17 years). It worked out great to answer questions and see their faces while discovering the world of e-seals. Then, a little after 1pm, all of us waiting docents saw a bus coming! Yeah!—until Carol said—“It's a Santa Barbara bus.” Well, we had 40 unexpected curious kids from Santa Maria. Good day—we all left laughing.

**3/20/98** Group of 35 children and 15 adults from Santa Maria waiting for us to open gate. They were a great group, well informed, but still asked lots of question. A couple (not with the group) allowed their unattended little boy about 5 years old to get to close to the edge of the bluff, and he went over the edge and fell to beach about 20 feet. Rugged little guy cried, but didn't seem hurt. He was very lucky as it was the rocky part of the bluff where he went down.

**5/9/98** Sunny, with fierce cold windy. Most all at north end were appreciative and awed. Stopped 3 kids who were rampaging through the dunes and explained a few things to a family clapping and yelling at the seals from the bank “to get good pictures.”

**7/27/98** No seals at VP3 so we came up to VP4—no one else here as docents. Parking lot full but visitors have climbed fences onto Hearst property. Very windy. Left at 2pm. Fence cut at north end.

