



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

**WEST
COAST
REGION**

To report a dead, injured
or stranded marine
mammal
Call: 1-866-767-6114

For law enforcement,
harassments, and other
violations
Call: 1-800-853-1964

Entangled marine
mammals
**Call: 1-877-SOS-WHAlE
or 1-877-767-9425, or
Hail the U.S. Coast Guard
on VHF Ch. 16**

To report derelict gear
Call: 1-855-542-3935



**with
Elephant
Seals**

Frequently asked questions

There is an elephant seal hauled out. What should I do?

Keep your distance. The West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network encourages you to “Share the Shore” with elephant seals. Elephant seals haul out on beaches on a daily basis to rest and regulate their body temperature. Please stay back 100 yards if possible, keep your dogs on a leash, and if the animal is injured call our hotline at **1-866-767-6114**. The best thing you can do is to leave the animal alone. You can also find contact information for your local stranding network coordinator at: http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected_species/marine_mammals/stranding_maps_and_contacts.html

Can I feed, touch, or pick up an elephant seal or an elephant seal pup?

NO. Elephant seals (and all marine mammals) are protected by law under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Federal marine mammal regulations prohibit harassing or capturing elephant seals onshore to reduce human disturbance of important life processes. Feeding elephant seals in the wild is also prohibited and is considered harassment. What is harassment? It is when we disturb, injure, or interfere with its ability to hunt, feed, communicate, socialize, rest, breed, or care for its young. If you feed, touch, harass, pour water on or pick up a seal you may be investigated by NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement for violating the marine mammal regulations.

I can closely approach an elephant seal or elephant seal pup. Is it sick?

NO. Many elephant seal pups are too young to have developed protective wariness (escape response) and



may not flee when approached while resting and warming up. Some pups are not sensitive to human presence. Adult elephant seals are more wary and may escape to the water, if approached. Some elephant seals may not flee at all, but may feel threatened and may be defensive. Please Share the Shore and give the animal space.

Photo: Chris Yates, NOAA

Is the elephant seal population healthy?

Yes, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act elephant seal populations have recovered to healthy numbers. The elephant seal population is estimated to be at about 150,000 animals.

The elephant seal is injured. What should I do?

Elephant seals are wild animals and occasional minor injuries can be expected. If you think the animal is seriously injured call our hotline at **1-866-767-6114** or use our GIS maps to find the stranding coordinator in your area; <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/marine-mammal-protection/west-coast-marine-mammal-stranding-network>. Sometimes what you may think is an injury, may be normal. Male elephant seals typically fight each other near the shoreline to establish their territory. During these vicious and often times, bloody battles, males may appear injured, but they do not usually inflict lasting or serious damage on each other. Young animals can also be observed play fighting too.

What is molting? Does it hurt the animal?

Each year, starting in mid-March, elephant seals undergo a catastrophic molt hauling themselves out onto many of the same beaches that just a few short weeks prior were used for birthing and mating. The fur sheds in patches with the epidermal skin attached revealing a new dark gray fur underneath ready for immediate use. Over time, this gray coat will gradually change to a shade of brown. The big males are usually darker while the adult females often sport a tan color. During these 25-odd days ashore, the elephant seals seem to be somewhat vulnerable to warmer air temperatures and will often move down to the water's edge or even enter the water to cool off, but the act of shedding their fur does not hurt them. Hauling out speeds up the molting process for elephant seals. Do not attempt to pour water on the animal or feed it, it does have the ability to return to the water and forage for food, as necessary.



Photo: Mark Lowry, NOAA

I am concerned the elephant seal pup is abandoned.

Pups are born in early winter from December to January. A minimum undisturbed observation period of 24 to 48 hours is recommended to determine whether the pup is being attended by a female. Signs of an attendant female would include; sightings of seal(s) in the water nearby; tracks near the pup; movement of the pup up or down the beach, or in and out of the water. Elephant seal pups may haulout in the same place for several days or weeks at a time; this does not mean they are abandoned. An attendant female may be nursing her pup at night if there is human disturbance around the pup during the day. Pups are generally weaned for about 6 weeks, then they molt.

What is the rehabilitation policy for elephant seals?

There are NMFS authorized rehabilitation facilities that are available to provide clinical care to a limited number of sick or injured marine mammals. The decision to place an animal in a rehabilitation facility is made on a case-by-case basis by authorized Federal, state, or local officials, or by local Stranding Agreement holders who have been authorized by NMFS to conduct live animal first response and triage. Our overall goal is to provide an



Photo: Jim Milbury, NOAA

appropriate response to ensure that animals have the best chance to survive on their own in the wild, which may mean leaving the animal in the wild. The elephant seal population is healthy, and in cases of natural mortality, there is no need to intervene on an individual animal's behalf to preserve the population's status. In fact, intervention to capture an individual elephant seal is often avoided to minimize potential impacts and disturbance of other animals at the site, especially nursing females and their pups. In some cases, animals with serious injuries are considered candidates to be taken in for treatment. Rehabilitation can only be done by trained experts at an authorized facility; these facilities cannot accept illegally captured marine mammals delivered to them for treatment by unauthorized individuals. Rehabilitation of elephant seals is difficult and many will not survive; rehabilitation does not guarantee the long-term survival of the animal post-release.

How can I learn more about elephant seals?

For more information about elephant seals, please visit our website at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/northern-elephant-seal>

