

# Helping to Heal:

## The Marine Mammal Center



Sea lion smoothie, anyone? You might be surprised at the contents of this milkshake. Workers feed smoothies to seal and sea lion patients at the Marine Mammal Center hospital. Puree of fish, vitamins, and whipping cream are in this high-fat formula. Marine mammals love it.

But what are seals and sea lions doing in the hospital, anyway? At Marine Mammal Center in California, nearly 600 pinniped (seal and sea lion) and cetacean (whale and dolphin) patients are treated each year. Some are injured by shark attacks, boats, fishing nets, and even gunshots. Others are ill from viruses or the effects of pollution.



Veterinarians, biologists, and trained volunteers care for these animals. When they get a clean bill of health, they are set loose to their ocean home.

Not all the animals at the center are sick. Some have been rescued from areas where their lives are threatened by human

At the Marine Mammal Center, volunteers feed and care for the animals (left). Above, rescuers help Humphrey, a humpback whale, off of a reef flat where he was stranded. Below, a California sea lion is brought into the center.



**pinniped (PIN-iped):** the order of marine mammals that includes seals, walruses, and sea lions, whose habitat is the ocean but who can move on land using their flippers. Pinniped comes from Latin, meaning "fin-footed."

**cetacean (sis-TAY-shun):** the group of marine mammals that includes the whale, dolphin, and porpoise. These creatures cannot move on land. Sometimes they get washed ashore during high tide and strand (get stuck out of water).



These rescued elephant seals are going back to their ocean home.

activity. Some are orphaned babies. These young animals gain weight on the center's smoothie formula until they can eat their natural diet of fish. One newborn harbor-seal orphan named Kristi weighed only 10 pounds when she was rescued.

After three months of fattening up at the center, Kristi weighed 50 pounds and had met another orphan named Vivi. The two pals were set free at a marine reserve, where their chances for survival are excellent.

The elephant seal called General has a red tag on her hind flipper. This means that she comes from San Nicholas Island, hundreds of miles to the south. Will General find her way home? Tags help biologists track and study the migration, health, and social habits of rare and endangered species.

As we heal marine mammals, we are also learning ways to keep a healthy balance among all the creatures who depend on our complex ocean world.



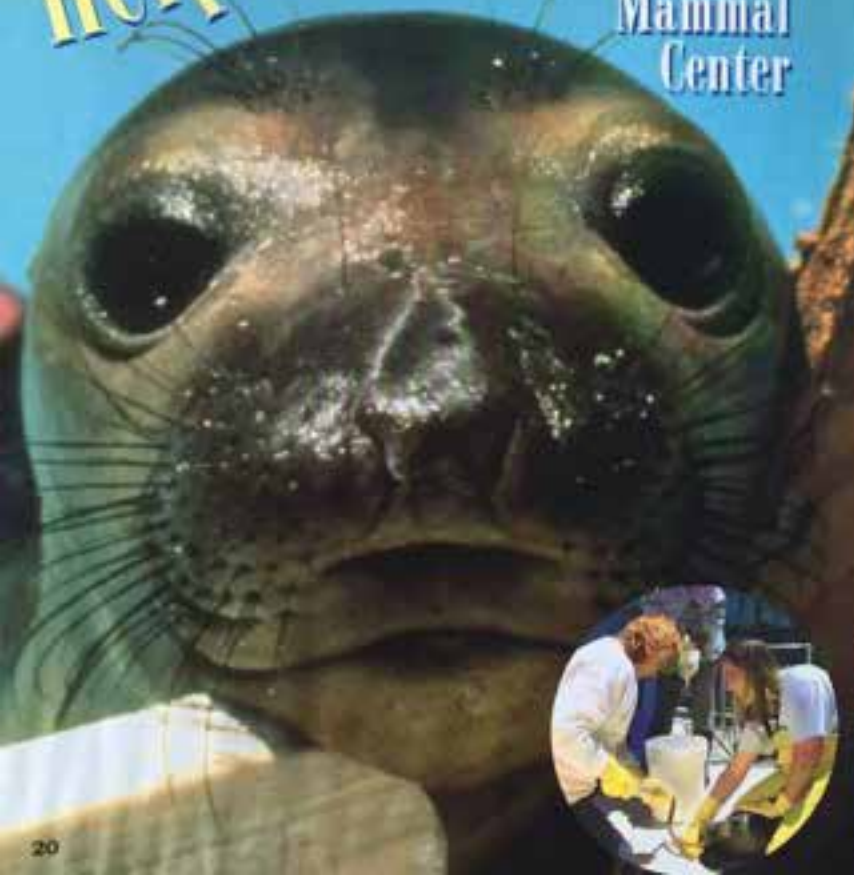
### What to do if you discover a sick or injured wild animal:

1. Do NOT approach the animal. Wild animals are untamed creatures and might bite or hurt you.
2. Ask an adult to phone your local Wildlife Resources office for advice.
3. If you find a sick or injured marine mammal, and you're on the California coastline, phone 415-289-SEAL (7325).

**Note** that marine-mammal mothers often leave their young on the beach while they are fishing out at sea. Their instinct guides them back to their pup even in a colony of hundreds of young. If you see a lonely seal or sea-lion pup, don't assume that it is an orphan. If you disturb the pup, the mother may sense danger and never return.

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