

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

Seal Watch

Pacific Harbor Seals & Pupping Season



Photos by Kevin O'Connor

Goat Rock, Sonoma Coast, CA

March through August



www.stewardscr.org

707.869.9177 • stewards@stewardscr.org

P.O. Box 2, Duncans Mills, CA 95430

Pacific Harbor Seal Facts

Scientific Name: *Phoca vitulina richardii*

Type of Seal: These pinnipeds are true seals with ear holes, no external ear flaps, small flippers, and they move on land by flopping along on their bellies.

Range and Habitat: The Jenner haulout is the largest in Sonoma County. In the northeast Pacific, they range from Alaska to Baja California, Mexico. They favor near-shore coastal waters and are often seen on rocky islands, sandy beaches, mudflats, bays, and estuaries.

Identification: Spotted coats in a variety of shades from white or silver-gray to black or dark brown

Birth Weight: 20 to 24 pounds (9-11 kg) at birth

Adult Length & Weight: Reach five to six feet (1.7-1.9 m) in length and weigh up to 300 pounds (140 kg). Males are slightly larger than females.

Life Span: Females live 30-35 years, males 20-25 years

Diet: Prey fish at this site include flatfish, octopus, hake, and hagfish. Salmon are not a significant prey species. They forage mostly at night and rest on land by day.

Moult: Harbor seals moult annually during the summer.

Pupping: Adult females (3+ years) usually mate and give birth every year. Pregnancy lasts 9 months and pupping takes place from March to May. A pup can swim at birth and will sometimes ride on its mother's back when tired. Pups make a bleating noise that sounds like "maaaa." They double their weight in the first month; their mother's milk is 40 percent fat. After about four weeks, the pups are weaned.

Harbor seals are particularly vulnerable during pupping season and protected by the **Marine Mammal Protection Act, which requires staying at least 50 yards away from them.** If frightened by onlookers or dogs, nursing mothers may abandon their shore-bound young. Staying away from these stranded pups is the best way to ensure their mothers' return.

Report seals who appear to be abandoned or injured to the Marine Mammal Center (415) 289- 7325 (seal)