



Flippers & Fins

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- View current patients during daylight hours at the NMMC
- Gift shop has new winter hours Thursday through Saturday
- Volunteers needed in the gift shop and hospital
- Make a "Meals for Seals" contribution

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Blue Whale Washes Ashore in Ft. Bragg

This past October a whale of an opportunity washed ashore for two of our own NMMC volunteers. On October 20th 2009 a blue whale washed ashore in Fort Bragg of Mendocino County. An apparent victim of a ship collision, the female blue washed into a cove where Amber Anderson and Anna Ulch were able to collect Level A data for NOAA with the help of Humboldt State University Mammalogist Thor Holmes.

Level A data mainly consists of taking the measurements of the animal, sexing, and also taking a blubber sample. After driving several hours, our two volunteers and Thor Holmes arrived just in time to get all the measurements done and collect a blubber sample before they ran out of light to work in. Taking the measurements of a blue whale is not an easy feat, espe-

cially when you have to worry about the waves also coming in. Many of the measurements required Amber and Thor to physically be on the whale, which turns out is also pretty slippery. Some of the more amazing measurements that were recorded were the whale's pectoral fins that were over 11ft long and her overall body length of 72ft.

Although it was very unfortunate that this animal died, it resulted

in an amazing experience. Many things were learned from the stranding of this particular blue whale. One of the more interesting items we learned was that she seemed to have been a mother at some point in her life. This is great news because it was once thought that blue whales were hunted so heavily that the few whales that did survive would have a hard time finding mates if at all.

In the days following the initial data collection efforts were put forth to preserve the blue whale so that the skeleton of the whale could later be rearticulated and displayed. Volunteers from Humboldt State University, College of the Redwoods and Sonoma State University worked for six days to move the carcass of the whale.



NMMC Volunteer Amber Anderson taking measurements on the carcass.

Oiled Wildlife Care Network

The Northcoast Marine Mammal Center is a member of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN), which was established in 1994 as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The OWCN is a statewide collective of trained wildlife care providers with a mission **to provide the best achievable capture and care of oil-affected wildlife by partnering with management agencies, universities, industry, and rehabilitation groups.**

Janet Dickey, NMMC Board Member and Hospital Volunteer, has been leading efforts here at the Center trying to organize volunteers interested in becoming part of our oiled wildlife response team. She recently attended the OWCN's Second Annual Rehabilitation Conference, *Oilapalooza*, which was held October 24-25th in San Diego.

In the event of an oil spill along our remote northern California

coastline, the NMMC would work together with Humboldt State University to mobilize a rescue effort and stabilize animals affected. During such an event, only trained volunteers would be authorized to work in the affected area and handle animals. Training consists of a series of webinars, which are available to NMMC and begin in January.

For more information on becoming a trained response volunteer, email us at rescue@northcoastmmc.org.

Volunteer Spotlight



Carol McNickols, Scott Johnson, and Elly Nance (left to right)

Have you ever looked at the volunteer schedule and noticed that the eight o'clock Sunday morning slot is always covered by the "Nurses"? Who are these people?

Since 2005, nurses from Sutter Coast Hospital and their family members have volunteered to feed and clean at the Center. The team varies from 3 to 10 members, and the core members are Elly Nance, Carol McNickols, and Scott Johnson. Elly and Carol typically volunteer in the morning after working a twelve hour graveyard shift at the hospital. Scott is a certified registered nurse anesthetist, one of three at the hospital.

Elly Nance is an Emergency Room nurse from Iowa and has worked at the Northcoast Marine Mammal Center since 2004. Elly has three children, and her daughter Lois has visited the NMMC on many occasions. Lois finds the Center absolutely awesome. There are no oceans or marine mammals in Iowa, so both Elly and Lois find this an opportunity of a lifetime. Elly says, "these animals restore my soul and let me know how truly blessed I am to have this wonderful opportunity to care for them."

Carol is an Intensive Care Unit nurse who has been at the Center since 2006. She is originally from Nevada and became interested in the Center in 2003 when she found us online. She was a traveling nurse at the time and specifically requested to be assigned to Crescent city so she could volunteer. Carol loves photography and enjoys taking many pictures, especially of the releases.

Scott received his undergraduate degree in Biology, specializing in Microbiology. He went on to get his graduate degree in anesthesia and worked at a series of hospitals in Illinois and Wisconsin. He grew up in the city of Chicago, but out-

side of visiting the Shedd Aquarium, he only saw fish at the fish counter of the local supermarket. He became a certified diver and is currently a divemaster. He has three sons, two of whom are currently in college. Scott's brother, who is a docent at the Año Nuevo State Reserve and volunteers at The Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, is the one that got him interested in marine mammals. Scott says, "I was able to dive with California sea lions once, and it is really an amazing experience."

Elly, Carol, and Scott all come from land-locked states, and feel blessed to live in such an awesome natural setting. For them, Crescent City is really unique and combines small-town living, a great job, and a tremendous natural location. "That's why it's worth getting up, or not quite going to bed on a Sunday morning."

Harbor Seal Shot in Crescent City

On November 28th at 11:30 a.m., rescue staff from the Northcoast Marine Mammal Center responded to a report of a harbor seal that had been shot on the floating dock in Crescent City. Upon arriving at the scene, what we found was horrifying. A single harbor seal juvenile was actively bleed-

ing from a wound in its chest, and blood from the animal stained seals resting nearby.

Several volunteers worked with the California Department of Fish and Game wardens on a rescue attempt, but were unsuccessful. The animal likely succumbed to its injury.

The National Marine Fisheries

Service (NMFS) is offering a \$2,500 reward in connection with this crime. Anyone with information should contact the NOAA Hotline at 1-800-853-



Director's Message

The Northcoast Marine Mammal Center had a crazy year in 2009! In addition to staff changes, we rescued a record 115 animals this year! While the bulk of the patients admitted during the year were emaciated yearling California Sea Lions during the summer months, we also admitted less common species such as a Steller Sea Lion, Guadalupe Fur Seal, and Northern Fur Seal.

Each patient has their own story.....some are here for a short time, some are here for several months, some have traumatic inju-

ries, and some were just too weak to make it in the wild. I can say that I am always rooting for the underdog, and the strength that I have seen in some of our patients has amazed me.

During 2009, our success rate for releasing patients back into the wild was 40%. As we look into the next year, we can hope to increase our success. Having a crew of trained, intuitive volunteers for animal care is what makes our success possible. It is my hope in the coming year to increase training and work to develop more comprehensive protocols for use in the hospital.



Hugging a sea lion (statue) while visiting The Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito.

I look forward to the coming year and sharing our stories with our friends and members.

Monica Hiner

Our New Necropsy Suite



Thomas Willard working on finishing the necropsy room.

The Northcoast Marine Mammal Center is excited to have a fully functional necropsy suite. Completion of the necropsy suite has been ongoing for over a year as funds became available.

Six months ago, all that stood was a framed room with a necropsy table in it. While the water was hooked up, the drain and electricity were not installed. During this past summer I was approached by a local contractor, Thomas Willard, who inquired whether we ever needed volunteer work on facility maintenance. Much to my surprise, he seemed willing and excited at the prospect of helping facilitate the completion of the necropsy room.

Funds to complete the project were provided by the Del Norte Sunrise Rotary and Southwest Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Thomas Willard, the Del Norte Sunrise Rotary, and Southwest Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network for making this project possible. Dr. Wood is looking forward to

spending time in the new necropsy suite collecting valuable scientific data for years to come.



Dr. Wood performing a necropsy on a California Sea Lion.



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The Northcoast Marine Mammal Center is a 501(c)(3) Non-profit Organization dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned, sick, or injured marine mammals.

To report an injured or stranded marine mammal, please call our Stranding Hotline at (707) 951-4722.

Meet Our Current Rehabilitation Patients

As you may remember from our last newsletter, we rescued a Steller Sea Lion pup (Stella) last June that had been separated from her mother. Stella is doing great and has doubled in size since her admission to the NMMC! She now weighs 80 lbs and her development is on track. We hope to release her in May when the Steller Sea Lion rookery returns to Point St. George Reef.

On a smaller note, the latest admission to the NMMC was a 10 pound Northern Fur Seal pup that was affectionately named Skittles by rescue staff. She was rescued in Trinidad on November 6th. Her rehabilitation is going well. She is eating fish and has gained 3 pounds over the last month. Ultimately, she will most likely be transferred to The Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito for release.



Skittles enjoying the sunshine in one of the outside pens.

Other patients currently at the NMMC are Lady, a Northern Elephant Seal juvenile that was admitted with unusual growths on her side. Dr. Wood performed a biopsy of the tissue and we are awaiting results from the laboratory.

Two California Sea Lions, Raine and Bear, are also currently residing at the NMMC. Bear is a juvenile male and was admitted in November with seizure activity and malnourished. His seizures have not returned, and we anticipate he will be released after gaining a little more weight.

Raine, a yearling California Sea Lion, was originally admitted to the NMMC in July. At that time, he was underweight, lethargic, and had been harassed by people and their dogs on the beach. He was successfully rehabilitated and released in September, however, restranded six weeks later. Upon that time, he had lost 20 lbs and had a large abscess on his neck. We anticipate Raine will make a full recovery and be released soon.