

You will be asked about THE PREDATORS



The Orca (Killer Whale)
(Orcinus orca)

The Orca has a striking color pattern made up of well defined areas of shiny black and white. Males can grow as large as 32 feet long and weigh 8 to 10 tons. Females can reach 23 feet in length and weigh up to 4 tons. The mouth of the orca is large and well adapted for hunting. It has 46 to 50 conical-shaped teeth.

Orcas are found in all oceans of the world, though they are more abundant in cooler waters. They seem to travel according to availability of food and move freely from hemisphere to hemisphere. Orcas in our region are more typically located from Monterey Bay north.

Elephant seals encounter orcas on their migrations rather than in the slightly warmer waters that surround Piedras Blancas. The diet of some pods of orcas includes up to 12% elephant seal.



The Great White Shark
(Carcharodon carcharias)

The Great White is one of the largest species of shark. Maximum known length is at least 20 feet and maximum known weight is 4,140 pounds.

The white shark lives mainly in the upper part of the water column near the shore. The shark commonly patrols coastal waters inhabited by pinnipeds where there is deep water close to shore. The shallow waters surrounding Piedras Blancas may deter predation in the vicinity of the rookery.

White sharks are intelligent with one of the largest brains for their body size of any animal. They use their sense of smell and an ability to sense the electrical fields of other animals to detect their prey. With elephant seals they seem to favor a forceful strike from below, near the rear flippers. The shark then waits until the seal's loss of blood and mobility allow it to finish the attack in relative safety.