



SAFE VIEWING STATEMENT

State Parks and NOAA Remind the Public to View Elephant Seals from a Safe Distance During Upcoming Mating Season

The California Department of Parks and Recreation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are urging the public to view northern elephant seals from a safe distance, especially during the upcoming mating season of December and January.

Once thought to be extinct, these elephant seals have made a dramatic recovery over the last century bounding back from less than a 100 to an estimated 210,000 – 239,000 animals. The rookery of elephant seals at Piedras Blancas has recently become one of the largest on the west coast of the United States with an estimated population of 23,320.

But as their numbers increase, so has the potential for humans to interact intentionally or unintentionally with these animals. And despite their sometimes docile and clumsy appearance, elephant seals can be extremely quick and sometimes vicious if humans, or their pets, get too close.

In addition, all marine mammals, like elephant seals, are protected under federal law and anyone harassing these animals by getting too close may be subject to prosecution under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. To report a violation, please call the NOAA *Enforcement Hotline* at 1-800-853-1964.

To assist the public in safely viewing these animals, the following viewing guidelines are provided:

- Watch quietly from a safe distance of at least 100 feet –wild animals are unpredictable.
- Use binoculars and spotting scopes.
- If a seal becomes alert or nervous and begins to move away, you are too close.
- Dogs and seals don't mix. Dogs should be on a leash no longer than 6 ft. and 100 ft. away from any seal.
- Observe beach closures and restrictions.
- The best place to view seals from a close, yet safe distance is at the Elephant Seal board walks or vista points 3 and 4, which are 4.5 miles or 7.2 km north of Hearst Castle / Old San Simeon on Highway 1.

December 9, 2014, Statement issued by:

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For more information on northern elephant seals please contact the numbers above or visit these websites at:

California Department of Parks and Recreation: http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=26424

Friends of the Elephant Seal: <http://www.elephantseal.org/Rookery/viewing.html>

NOAA: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals/pinnipeds/northernelephantseal.htm>

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Public Service Announcement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oZFH6AsDS8