

Friends of the Sea Lion

MARINE MAMMAL CENTER

Winter 2000

A RESCUE - THROUGH THE EYES OF A DOCENT

by Stephanie Looper

Conclusions: Rocks are hard and humans don't bounce well; bruises heal; saltwater facials are refreshing; ice cream is very good and the rescue, rehabilitation and release of any marine mammal is worth all our energy and efforts.

Now I'll tell you how I reached those conclusions.

It's an overcast October Friday afternoon at Friends of the Sea Lion Marine Mammal Center and the telephone rings. A sea lion is in need. In minutes the crew loads all the necessary gear and is on the road. Just one difference this time; I, a Docent, am asked to go along to take pictures of the rescue. Excited? You can bet your steel-toed boots I am. Since the first week I volunteered, almost three years ago, I've had slickers, gloves and boots in the trunk of my car.



At a small Corona Del Mar beach, the truck is backed down a long, narrow, steep road and parked at the sand's edge. We must find the sea lion. Let me tell you, walking in soft sand with bulky boots for an over 50, over weight and out of shape person (not me, of course), is a torturous trek. The search is quiet until I hear Kim, the Animal Care Supervisor, speak. "He's big and he's on the rocks. ("Expletive Deleted"). I'm not overly perceptive but I sense Kim isn't thrilled. The sea lion blends so well with the rocks, even when she points to him, I can't see him until he

takes a deep breath. From a safe distance his health is assessed; labored breathing, mucus running from his nose; thin (50 to 75 lbs. underweight); dehydrated and his weight is estimated at 225 to 250 lbs. He needs treatment; the rescue is a go.

The crew meets back at the truck to collect rescue gear consisting of a large animal crate, boards, nets and towels. As I reach for the camera I hear, "Forget the camera. We're going to need all available hands for this one". Although unsure of my capabilities in this area, I figure all I can give is my best efforts.

Now begins a third bulky boots in soft sand trek, however this time my partner and I are carrying a large animal crate and walking sideways like giant crabs. (If there's a next time, I'm going for the nets.) We stop at the edge of the rocks, our every move is planned and we are cautioned not to risk physical injury to ourselves or to the animal. I was certain that my elevated heartbeat was echoing off the rocks. Quietly we continue on to where the sea lion is resting.

He sees us and becomes agitated. No wonder! He's looking at four weird creatures in yellow slickers carrying boards and nets and they're coming to get him. We hide until he settles down. Time to move on and get in position. I'm assisting as a boarder. My job is to keep him from seeing his escape route to the sea and to help urge him into the crate.



We burst into action. The animal is netted and two rescuers lie prone across the net handle to keep the net flat on the rocks. Meanwhile, the boarders block the sea lion's view of where he most wants to be, the sea. At this point (according to past experience) he's supposed to settle down. This sea lion however, is making it clear he didn't read the book. He's extremely irritated now. All of his defensive instincts and 225+ pounds of strength have kicked in and he's looking for a way out.

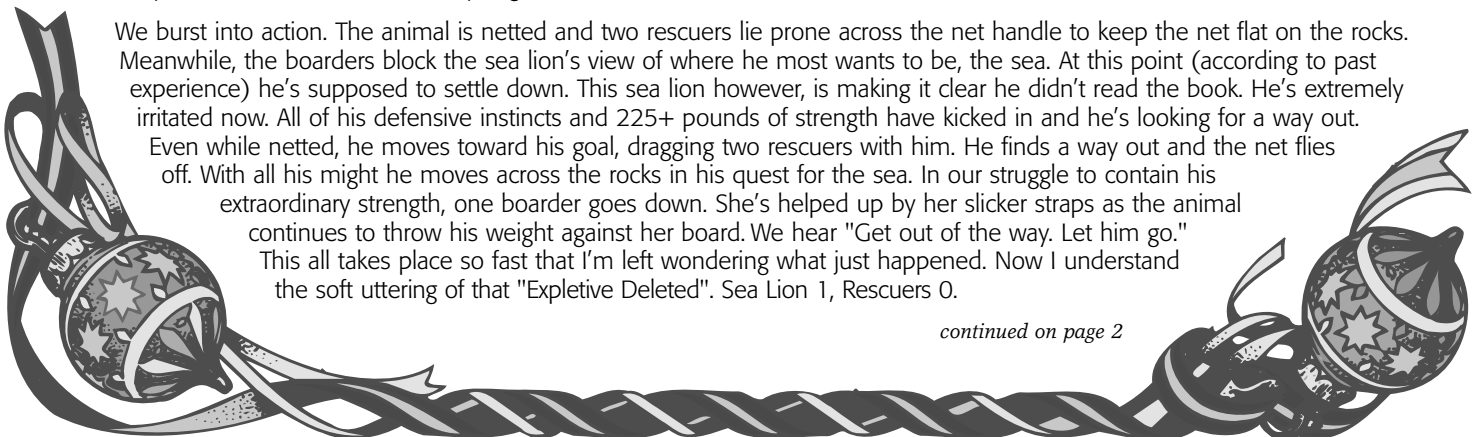
Even while netted, he moves toward his goal, dragging two rescuers with him. He finds a way out and the net flies off. With all his might he moves across the rocks in his quest for the sea. In our struggle to contain his extraordinary strength, one boarder goes down. She's helped up by her slicker straps as the animal continues to throw his weight against her board. We hear "Get out of the way. Let him go."

This all takes place so fast that I'm left wondering what just happened. Now I understand the soft uttering of that "Expletive Deleted". Sea Lion 1, Rescuers 0.

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Friends of the Sea Lion is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, which does not receive government funding and is solely supported by donations from private individuals and organizations. If you would like to donate to Friends of the Sea Lion, please send your donation to:

**Friends of the Sea Lion
Marine Mammal Center
20612 Laguna Canyon Road
Laguna Beach, CA 92651
Or, call us at
(949) 494-3050.**





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A RESCUE - THROUGH THE EYES OF A DOCENT

His labored breathing might be caused by a respiratory infection so he doesn't go far offshore. We're on our feet now, waiting to see if he'll come ashore again. He does, farther away to a rocky alcove in the cliffs. Now I'm thinking, "Why can't this big boy pick that lovely stretch of soft sand beach right over there?"

We try again. The netting is successful. This time he settles down. While one rescuer manages the net handle, three others board trying to nudge him toward the crate. He senses our intent and becomes a moving mass of muscled energy. The net becomes entangled on a rock and begins to lift. A rescuer dives to put her full body weight on the frame of the net. Realizing she's too close to his gaping mouth, she tries to scoot backwards. He can bite her even though he's netted. In a lightening flash, and for a number of seconds that seem like forever, he has her by a boot heel. He lets go and as the rescuer moves away the net lifts enough for him to get his nose out. Now he's halfway out and on the move, but the net is caught on him. Two boarders, with heroic effort, slow him down and the two rescuers (being dragged along the rocks behind this magnificent creature) remove the net. We are told again to let him go. One boarder succeeds in getting out of his way. Another is shoved into a rocky ledge. We watch as the animal swims away.

The consensus is he will probably beach himself again. We wish out loud that next time he picks that lovely stretch of soft sand beach right over there. The tide is rising and there isn't enough daylight left to try again. Yes, we would have tried again. I can sense the defeat we all feel and it's a sad moment, until a wave rolls up and gives me that refreshing saltwater facial. We all laugh and feel much better about the score, Sea Lion 2, Rescuers 0.

With bruised bodies and battered egos, we gather our gear and make our fourth trip with bulky boots in soft sand returning to the truck. On our way back to FSL we stop at Baskin Robbins. Our gallant efforts deserve a reward and our energy level needs the boost of an ice cream cone. There is work still to be done. The truck and gear need cleaning and Buttercup, our elephant seal pup patient, needs her last feeding. As the nets are pulled from the truck several rocks are discovered. These I claim as souvenirs of my first rescue adventure.

The next day, another crew rescues the same sea lion off that lovely stretch of soft sand beach and is given the name Thor.

Maybe some of our knees aren't what they used to be; maybe some of us work long hours at a full-time job; maybe some of us have colds and aren't feeling up to par; and, maybe this one is over 50, overweight and out of shape. But make no mistake, **if there's an animal in need, all our staff and volunteers would be there to give another 200%**. If asked, would I go again? You bet your steel-toed boots I would.

Since his rescue, Thor has been cured of all infection and gained 50 lbs. He was released back to the wild November 3rd. Score tied, both sides win.



Friends of the Sea Lion Marine Mammal Center rescues, rehabilitates and releases animals like Thor year-round. Please come to visit our Center and our wonderful patients. Maybe I'll be the one who greets you and I'll introduce you to some extraordinary people.

JUNIOR PHILANTHROPIST'S

During an after-school Sea Lion Club meeting, Regan Rostain, FSL's Interim Education Director, told the children about the Henry family's fundraising event (see "Seal Carnival" article). At the next Sea Lion Club meeting, two of the after-school children gave Regan the following letter:

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SEA LION,

STEPHANIE HENSON AND I, KAITLIN CARNEY, SOLD AIR HEADS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS AT THE SCHOOL ARROYO VISTA. ON THE LAST DAY WE ALSO SOLD TROLII CANDY HAMBURGERS. THE AIRHEADS WERE 25¢ AND THE HAMBURGERS WERE 3 FOR 25¢. WE MADE \$90.00 SELLING. MY GRANDPA WHO LIVES IN RUNNING SPRINGS ALSO DONATED \$20.00 FOR SAVING THE SEALS. ALTOGETHER WE MADE \$110.00. WE HAD FUN DOING IT AND WOULD LIKE TO DO IT AGAIN IF WE CAN. WE HOPE WE MADE ENOUGH TO SAVE AT LEAST ONE SEAL. WE ALSO HOPE THAT YOU ENJOY THE MONEY AND IT WILL HELP YOU BUY SOME SUPPLIES. ENJOY THE MONEY.

FROM,

KAITLIN CARNEY AND STEPHANIE HENSON

We applaud the efforts of these young philanthropists and encourage other children interested to give us a call if you have any questions about fundraising or other fundraising ideas.

WINE TASTING BENEFIT

On December 3, a group of FSL members, board members and new friends got together for an early evening of wine tasting and hors d'oeuvres to benefit Friends of the Sea Lion. The well-attended event, hosted by Mistral restaurant in Corona del Mar, raised awareness and interest in the center.





THE DECLINE OF A SPECIES

The Steller sea lion, *Eumetopias jubatus*, the largest species of sea lion, was once considered to be the most abundant sea lion in North America. Sadly, this species is no longer abundant. The animal's greatest numbers occur from the Gulf of Alaska to the western Aleutian Islands. This population of Steller sea lions is referred to as the western stock. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the entire population was estimated to be around 300,000 sea lions (which is likely a conservative estimate). As of 1989, the population had dropped to 116,000 sea lions. The current population is estimated to be approximately 35,000. On November 26 1990, Steller sea lions were listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act due to the population's dramatic drop in numbers. In 1997, the western stock was listed as endangered.

Several hypotheses have been advanced for the cause of this decline. But, the most widely accepted hypothesis suggests that humans have detrimentally changed the sea lions' environment. Many researchers contend that the population decline is related to the increase in the amount of commercial fishing in the Gulf of Alaska. Stellers eat a variety of prey items, such as, Pacific herring, Pacific cod, capelin, salmon, and squid. However, Walleye pollock, *Theragra chalcogramma*, constitutes a large percentage of the Steller sea lion's diet. As might be expected, the decrease in the Steller sea lion's population is strongly correlated with the increase in the Walleye pollock fishing industry in the 1970's.

This conflict, raises the question "whose fish is it"? Some people claim the fish belong to humans, while environmentalists and animal activists claim the fish belong to marine inhabitants. With proper management of our fisheries, this resource could belong to both.

But the truth is, our fisheries have not been properly managed. In the 1970's the North Pacific commercial fishing industry caught an estimated 440 million pounds of pollock per year. Most catches of pollock become frozen fish sticks and fish sandwiches at fast food restaurants. By 1998, the pollock catch increased to 2 billion pounds per year.

Clearly, we have learned nothing from the collapse of the New England fisheries, closed down in 1994 due to over-fishing. We must take stronger measures to regulate fish catches. We need stronger fisheries legislation and strict implementation of such legislation. It is essential to conduct further studies on the impact of intense commercial fishing on fish populations of both commercial and non-commercial value, on populations of endangered species, and on food web structure.

The over-exploitation of our North Pacific fisheries not only threatens the Steller sea lions, but the entire marine ecosystem. Other marine mammals including Pacific harbor seals, Ringed seals, Northern fur seals, and several species of sea birds also rely on pollock. Furthermore, Killer whales, now deprived of one of their "favorite foods", sea lions, have begun to prey on sea otters, a phenomenon virtually unheard of in the past. Killer whales must eat several sea otters to approximate the catch of a single Steller sea lion. As a result, the sea otter population in Alaska is declining at an alarming rate.

But, all is not lost. On July 21, Seattle's U.S. District Judge, Thomas Zilly, issued an injunction prohibiting groundfish trawling within 20 nautical miles of Steller sea lion rookeries and breeding areas. The Judge ruled that the National Marine Fisheries Service violated the Endangered Species Act, by failing to protect critical sea lion habitat. Many researchers and environmentalists believe this decision is a step in the right direction. Without proper enforcement, the Endangered Species Act is only a piece of paper. Without proper management of our North Pacific fisheries, we risk losing the primary fishery upon which the world relies; we risk permanent damage to our marine ecosystem; we risk losing a lot more than the Steller sea lion.

SEAL CARNIVAL

A Fun Time Was Had By All

We would like to introduce you to a very special family, the Henry's. Lauren (age 8) and Amy (age 11) have both attended our summer Camp program "**Camp Pinniped**". Both Lauren and Amy have a great love of marine mammals and really wanted to do something to make a difference. So Lauren and Amy together with their parents Dillon and Evan, put on a "Seal Carnival" to raise money for our Center. This was quite a spectacular event. The Henry's designed and built fun games, such as, "shark attack", "feed a seal", "sea lion tic-tac-toe", and "rubber ducky water races". Several of Lauren and Amy's friends eagerly helped out with the event by running booths. The education department from FSLMMC was also there to teach the carnival goers some fun facts about marine mammals. Since Lauren and Amy did such a great job advertising for the event, by handing out flyers to their neighbors and school mates, over 60 people attended. The Henry's raised \$450.00, which will buy a lot of fish for our patients. We would like to give a very special thanks to the Henry family for their hard work and contribution. The initiative shown by Lauren and Amy at such a young age provides hope for the future of our marine environment.



MISSION STATEMENT

Friends of the Sea Lion Marine Mammal Center's mission is to:

- ◆ Rescue, medically treat and rehabilitate seals, sea lions, dolphins and whales that are stranded due to injury or illness;
- ◆ Release healthy animals back to their natural habitat; and
- ◆ Increase public awareness of the marine environment through education and research.





Friends of the Sea Lion Marine Mammal Center 2001 MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

Friends of the Sea Lion's annual membership program offers you the satisfaction of knowing that you have helped rehabilitate sick and injured seals, sea lions, dolphins and whales. Member support also helps educate the community about marine mammals and their environment.

Membership benefits include:

- Newsletter by mail
- 20% discount off gift shop items, excluding Holiday cards
- 10% off Holiday cards
- 10% discount off of educational programs, excluding school/group presentations
- Behind the Scenes Tour of our rehabilitation facility in Laguna Beach on designated "Member Days"
- \$5 off Captain Dave's Dolphin Safari in Dana Point
- Our quarterly newsletter
- Personal recognition of your generosity in the annual review section of our newsletter (if you prefer not to be recognized, please contact us by mail or phone)

Membership lasts for one year and requires a \$25 minimum donation. Thank you for supporting Friends of the Sea Lion! If you have any questions or comments about our membership program, please don't hesitate to call us at (949) 494-3050.

I'm pleased to join as a member of the **ELEPHANT SEAL CLUB** with a \$25 - \$49 donation.

I'm pleased to join as a member of the **HARBOR SEAL CLUB** with a \$50 - \$99 donation.

I'm pleased to join as a member of the **SEA LION CLUB** with a \$100 - \$249 donation.

I feel very generous and am interested in becoming a member of the **PACIFIC PINNIPED CLUB** with a \$250+ donation.

Donor Name _____

Street Address _____

City State Zip

Email Address _____

Amount _____ **Check #** _____

Credit Card #(MC/VISA):# _____ **Exp. Date** _____

I am interested in becoming a MARINE MAMMAL MERCHANT, with an in-kind donation.

Merchandise (silent auction item/wish list item) _____



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CORPORATE CORNER

Chase H & Q Grant

On Saturday October 28, Chase H&Q, in Newport Beach, provided us with plants and a wonderful group of 25 volunteers to landscape our property. In addition, The Chase Manhattan Foundation gave the Friends of the Sea Lion a \$1,000 grant to carry out various other renovations. A big thank you to Kristen Blazer and Lisa Frei for their efforts in coordinating the volunteer event and to their foundation for its financial support. Thank you also to Kevin Naughton, owner of Laguna Gardens Nursery, and to Gus and Jennifer DeFalco from the Floor Guys for providing products to us at cost for renovation projects.

Nikken

On Saturday October 21, in preparation for FSL's busy winter season, a group of 9 volunteers from Nikken, Inc. in Irvine gave Friends of the Sea Lion a big helping hand by carrying out the messy job of cleaning our pool filters. This is the fourth time Nikken has delivered this service to FSL, which has provided at least \$2,500 savings to the Center. A big thanks to Nikken's Joanne Kaplan for organizing these volunteer projects.

GRANTS

The **Elimina Sewall Foundation** has once again generously awarded Friends of the Sea Lion with a \$7,500 grant for general operational support. We are extremely grateful to this foundation for their continued support.

Thanks to **The Donald Slavik Family Foundation's** generous \$22,650 grant last year, we now have new educational displays, computer equipment and various other equipment for our Dolphin Program.

BEQUESTS

We thank the Lewin family for their generous \$18,000 bequest.

Please call FSL if you might be interested in putting us in your will, or for information on planned giving.

