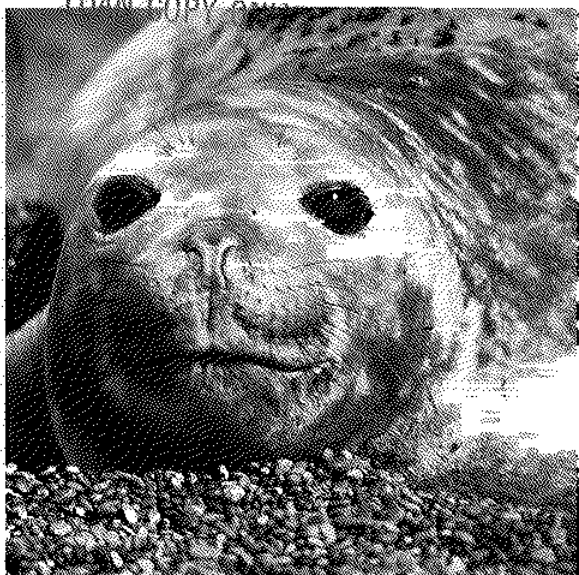




Protecting Marine Mammals



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Sea Grant Depository

Look

from a distance ...
but don't touch, feed
or harm in the wild

Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1335 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910



Sue Keller, Alaska Sea Grant

Who doesn't get a thrill from watching a dolphin jump through the waves on a summer day? Or a sea lion sun itself on a windswept rock? Or experience a feeling of serenity in watching the migration of majestic whales along the coast?

Who hasn't wanted, at least once, to get even closer to these marine mammals — to join in their antics, to become part of their habitats, to respond to their apparent calls for human contact?

Why not? What possible harm can we do by hand-feeding dolphins, sea lions or seals? Or by piloting our boats close enough so we can reach out and touch a passing marine mammal? What harm is there in swimming with playful dolphins or porpoise and teaching them to be friendly with humans?

Unfortunately, we can kill them.

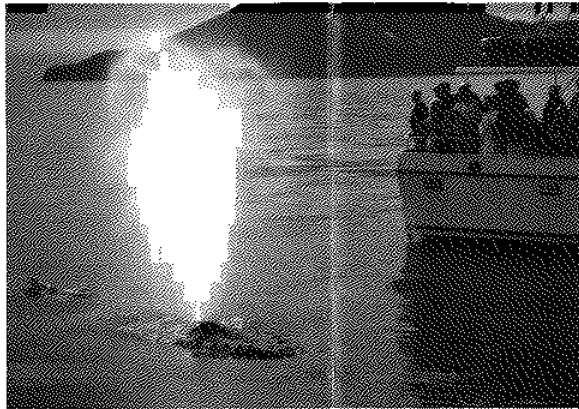
Not intentionally, not even today. But our well-meaning actions on a summer's day are putting more and more marine mammals at risk.

These animals are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act ... and some by the Endangered Species Act. The National Marine Fisheries Service, which is responsible for managing and

protecting whales, dolphins, porpoise, seals and sea lions, has regulations prohibiting feeding marine mammals in the wild and others that specify how close people can get to the animals. We've learned, albeit slowly, that these activities may significantly change the marine mammals' behavior by disrupting their normal feeding and reproductive patterns.

Consider the facts ...

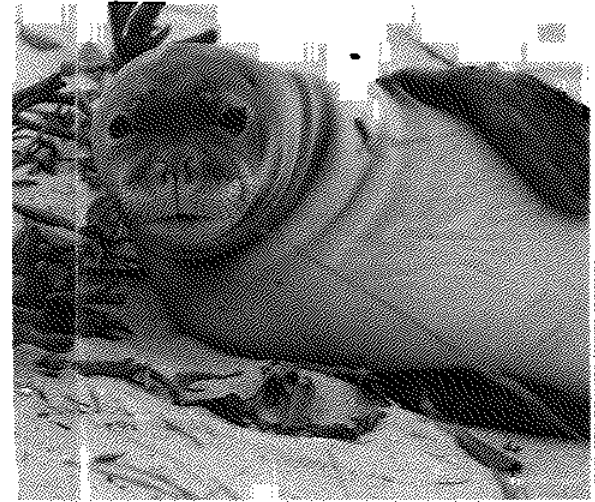
- ❖ Feeding marine mammals can affect their ability to cope and live in their natural habitat.
- ❖ It reduces the animal's natural wariness of humans and increased interactions with people can lead to injury or death to the marine mammals.
- ❖ Feeding marine mammals encourages them to approach boats and increases their chances of colliding with boats. They become more apt to tangle with fishing gear or boat propellers.
- ❖ Regular feeding programs may cause migratory animals to remain in areas after their natural primary prey species have left and the animals could be subjected to food shortages and inhospitable conditions.
- ❖ Marine mammals who are accustomed to being fed when boats are around and people are in the water may become aggressive in their efforts to get food and could injure swimmers.



Kurt Byers, Alaska Sea Grant

Did you know ...

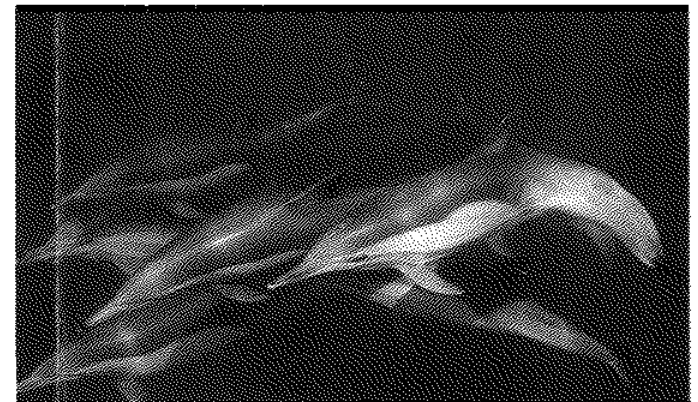
- ❖ After dolphin feeding became popular along the Gulf and southern Atlantic coasts, scientists found more stranded dolphins with wounds and scars from boat propellers. More dolphins also began approaching boats and begging for handouts.
- ❖ People have been seen trying to feed marine mammals such things as beer, junk food or non-edible foreign objects.
- ❖ Marine mammals have been hit by boat propellers, snagged by fish hooks and chased down



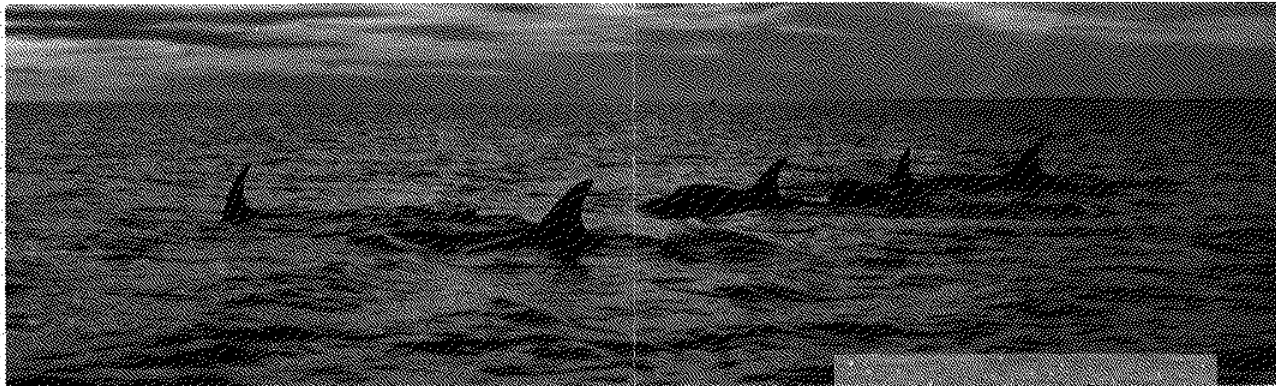
A. K. H. Kam, Hawaii Sea Grant

by high-powered motor boats. Pups or calves too young to feed themselves die when they are separated from their mothers.

- ❖ Gunshot wounds are a common cause of death in seals and sea lions on the West Coast and off Florida's east coast, and dolphins have been shot in the Gulf of Mexico.
- ❖ In the first year of a program to assess marine mammal interactions with commercial fishing operations, 89 dolphins and porpoise were entangled in coastal gillnets and trawl fisheries.
- ❖ In Hawaii an increase in vessel traffic may have displaced humpback whales from their traditional nursery areas where they are most protected from predators



Bernd Würsig, Texas A&M University-Galveston



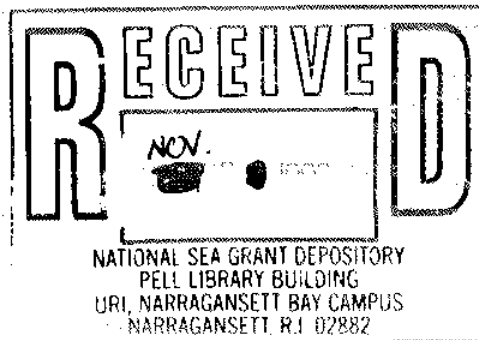
Bernd Würsig, Texas A&M University-Galveston

What you can do ...

- ❖ Do not feed marine mammals when you are boating or walking along a pier.
- ❖ Maintain a minimum distance of 50 to 100 yards from all animals, whether in the water or on shore, to prevent disturbance or harassment.
- ❖ Learn more about marine mammals by visiting a library, nature center or museum, and teach others what you know.
- ❖ Find out who handles live marine mammal strandings in your area in case you see one. If no separate organization exists, contact the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or your state wildlife agency.
- ❖ A seal or sea lion pup found alone on shore is generally not abandoned, but has only temporarily been left behind while the mother forages. Leave it alone. Any attempt to move the animal can result in injury or ultimate abandonment by the mother.
- ❖ Keep your distance ... respect their beauty, enjoy watching them, but don't feed them, harm them, or swim with them. You can return another day — make sure they can too.



Thomas Hennegan



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