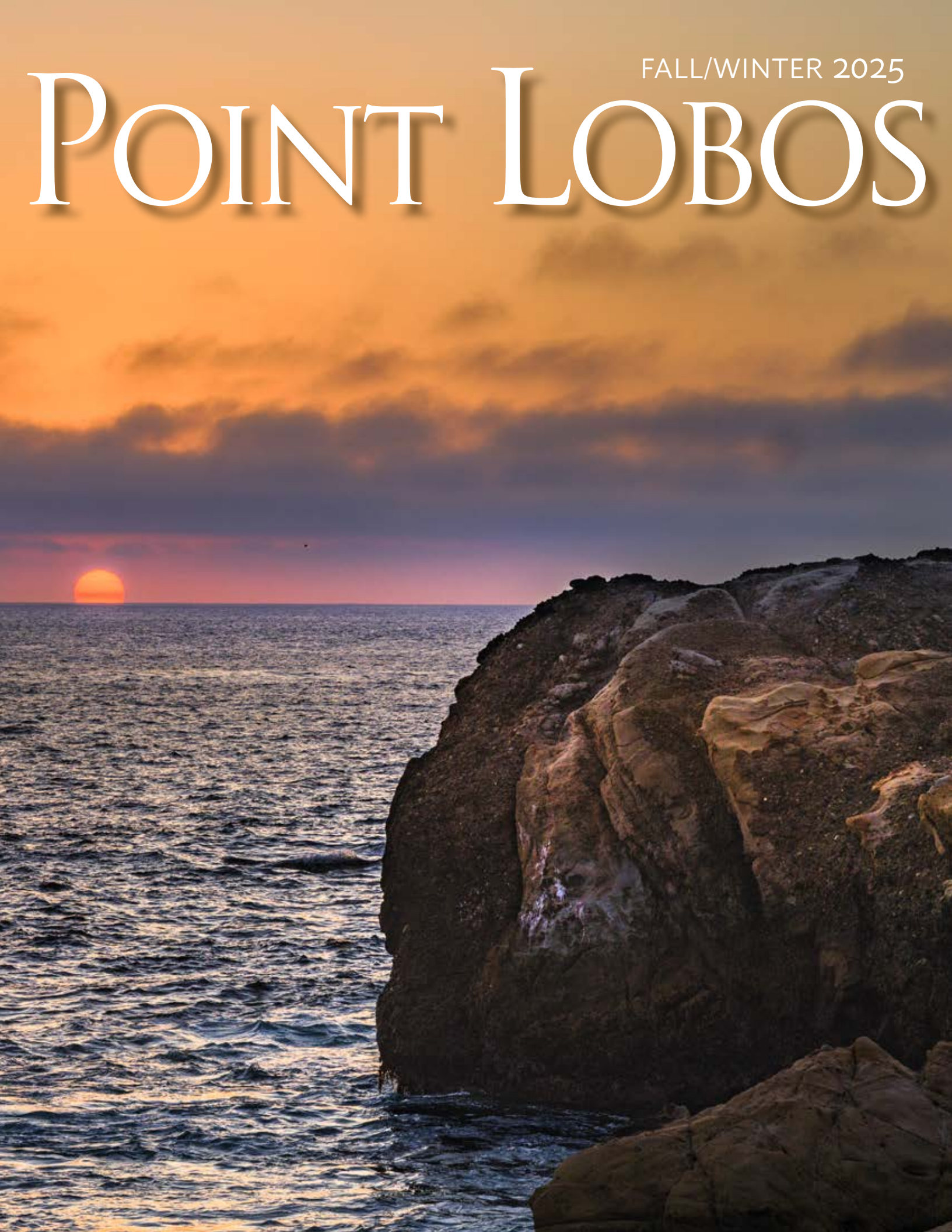


FALL/WINTER 2025

# POINT LOBOS





Our mission is to protect and nurture Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, to educate and inspire visitors to preserve its unique natural and cultural resources, and to strengthen the network of Carmel Area State Parks. [pointlobos.org](http://pointlobos.org)



Pencil and watercolor artwork by Christina Reynolds.

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Photographs taken by Point  
Lobos Docents in the course  
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in this magazine courtesy of  
California State Parks.



Steffanie Gamecho, the PLF Executive Director, made a career change from private-sector corporate strategy and marketing to nonprofit strategy and business consulting three years ago. A lifelong nature enthusiast, volunteer and conservationist, Steffanie has spent time in Thailand, Costa Rica, Mexico and the U.S. working on volunteer conservation projects. She has three adult children — Pete, Elena and Morgan.

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# Looking ahead with gratitude

by Steffanie Gamecho

Each season at Point Lobos carries its own rhythm, a reminder that nature has the ability to set the pace for our lives. In spring, harbor seals arrive on the beaches to pup, drawing visitors eager to witness the wonder of new life along the shore. Summer fills the Reserve with families and travelers, learning side by side under the guidance of dedicated California State Parks docents. Autumn slows the tempo, offering quiet moments for reflection as golden light softens the landscape. And winter, with its calm and clarity, encourages us to look back at the year with gratitude and forward with hope for what lies ahead.

At the Point Lobos Foundation, gratitude is at the heart of everything we do. We exist because of you — our donors, members, and volunteers — who care deeply about protecting this extraordinary place. Your support allows us to nurture and grow the docent community, whose generosity of time and knowledge enriches every visit. It is because of you that local schoolchildren — many experiencing the ocean for the first time — step onto these trails, breathe the salt air, and begin building their own lifelong connection to nature. These are moments that spark curiosity, ignite imagination, and plant the seeds of stewardship that will last well beyond a single visit.

Your gifts also sustain the essential work of caring for these lands and waters. Together, we maintain and restore trails and sensitive habitats, ensuring that Point

Lobos and Carmel River State Beach remain healthy and resilient for wildlife and people alike. From the thriving kelp forests just offshore to the quiet meadows inland, your generosity helps protect the intricate web of life that makes these places so extraordinary.

We are also delighted to share that the Foundation has once again been accepted into Monterey County Gives! (MC Gives!), our most significant fundraising campaign of the year. Year-end contributions through MC Gives! amplify our ability to meet urgent needs, launch new initiatives, and plan boldly for the future. We are deeply grateful to every donor who joins us in this season of giving, knowing that each gift, no matter the size, has a lasting impact.

This season also brings change and opportunity. Dan Shaw, a trusted partner to PLF for many years, has been promoted to District Superintendent for California State Parks' Monterey District. Dan plays a vital role in the partnership between State Parks and the Foundation, and we look forward to working even more closely with him as we take on the ambitious work that lies ahead. Please join us in congratulating Dan.

As we close this year and welcome the next, I want to thank you for making Point Lobos part of your story. Together, we are not only protecting a Reserve — we are safeguarding a legacy of natural beauty, inspiration, and connection that future generations will treasure.



*Reg Henry, a Point Lobos Docent, is editor of the Point Lobos Magazine. In a newspaper career of more than 35 years, he worked at the Courier-Mail in Brisbane, Australia, The Times of London, the Pittsburgh (Pa.) Post-Gazette, and The Herald in Monterey, where he was the editor from 1988 through 1993.*

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# Seals of our approval

An edition featuring some cute residents

by Reg Henry

Every April at Point Lobos, harbor seals give birth on the more secluded of the Reserve's beaches. When I am on docent duty at that happy time, I tell visitors: "I think it's because the seals get the group maternity rate on their insurance."

This may not be strictly accurate but my view is that humorous-looking animals need a humorous explanation. Actually, the so-called birthing month is not a strictly accurate term either. It usually begins with a few pups appearing in late March but stragglers sometimes appear in early May.

We have brought the seals to you this edition and perhaps you will be prompted to come and visit in April, a great time to be at the Reserve. Not only can visitors see the miracle of birth on the beaches but also they can find spring flowers coming to life on the land.

In our lead story, Kim Akeman, an expert on seals around the Monterey Peninsula, writes about what makes them so special and some of the challenges they face in today's world.

Ms. Akeman suggests that seals may be the cutest animals along the California coast, a bold claim that the sea otter lobby might dispute. But I can see it. If I had big goo-goo eyes, I might be cute too.

Whatever their cuteness factor, they are certainly marvelous and it's hard not to smile when you see them. They are pulsating sausages on the beach and twirling torpedoes in the water. The sea lions are funny too, but they are big loud goofs, while harbor seals are comedic in their own quiet way.

One strange thing is that while females are busy giving birth on the beach, a male sometimes appears offshore slapping the water to attract attention to himself as a handsome dude anxious for love. This would be the equivalent in our species of a man arriving at the labor ward with candy and flowers looking for a date. Crazy!

During the birthing month, the docents mount a Pup Watch to educate visitors and make sure they keep their voices low so as not to disturb the seal moms and their pups – yes, the byword for maternity wards everywhere is shush!

Trisha Bennett Mayer, the Pup Watch leader for the past few years, has written a sidebar report on what has been happening at Point Lobos lately. Unfortunately, the past season was not universally happy. The life expectancy of pups is always problematic but this year, especially at China Cove, nighttime predators — believed to be coyotes — took a terrible toll on the pups.

And they also serve who but stand and paint and sketch. Point Lobos is a wonderful place to do nature journaling, and the subjects are not just seals but the Reserve's great cornucopia of creation.

Elsewhere in this issue, Kathleen Ryan, a docent who leads a nature journaling group at Point Lobos and recently conducted an outdoor art event for PLF members, explains what is involved in this pastime (full disclosure: I am a member of her group and in so doing illustrate her point that you don't have to be a great artist to take part).

To top off the pinnipeds and the paint, Chuck Bancroft, the former Ranger who is our resident columnist, will tell you about a bird that is smarter than you thought.



*Kim Akeman is a retired registered veterinary technician who has worked with animals most of her life. She's worked in wildlife rescue, a zoological park and veterinary clinics, and for 11 years was a volunteer in the Sea Otter Research and Conservation program at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. She joined Bay Net, the shoreline docent group for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, 14 years ago and has since gained a wealth of knowledge about harbor seals.*

*She monitors seals daily and provides data to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Stanford University and the city of Pacific Grove. She received a Sanctuary Sea Star award along with her husband, Thom Akeman, for public education in 2021 from the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.*

*Kim tracks the seals through photo identification and has assigned names to more than 300 harbor seals over the years.*

*Her email address is oceanfoxx@yahoo.com*

# Safe harbor not guaranteed

Seals find life harder in a more challenging world

by Kim Akeman

Harbor seals may be the cutest animals along the Pacific coastline. At Point Lobos and elsewhere, the torpedo-shaped animals (*Phoca vitulina*) are frequently mistaken for the bigger and noisier sea lions. They often take the blame for barking all night and keeping people awake in their hotels. But they take that criticism with a grain of saltwater because, in fact, they do not bark.

They differ from sea lions in other ways: they undulate versus walk on all fours, have spotted coats, no external ear flaps and are solitary animals, to name a few. These shy marine mammals are generally nocturnal and tend to spend their nights alone in the ocean, hunting for whatever fish and squid they can find to eat.

In daytime they are hauled out on rocks and some beaches doing their best to rest. They are site specific, meaning that if you see a seal on a rock and return the next day to see a seal on that same rock, it is an 85 percent chance that it will be the same seal. This is called site fidelity.

While many people think harbor seals are just lazy animals sleeping the day away, it is quite the opposite. They are resting at their haul-out sites to perform multiple processes needed for survival during their rest: thermoregulation, digestion, replenishing oxygen supplies to their lungs and muscles for their nighttime dives, restoring energy supplies for evading predators (white sharks and orca) and, for the mature females, growing a pup. These processes are necessary for survival in the harsh ocean environment.



A rock serves as a bed for a tired harbor seal. Photo by Chuck Bancroft.

But this required rest is harder for seals to obtain as urban settings get more congested. Harbor seals are extremely sensitive to both visual and auditory disturbances and our world gets closer and noisier to them every day. These disturbances cause seals to flush (flee from their resting site), interrupting those important processes and ridding the seals of vital energy requirements. Repeated disturbances affect the health of seals and during the pupping season can cause mother seals to abandon their pups, which cannot survive without them.

Females start giving birth around the age of 5 years old. They generally give birth once a year, at about the same time and place. Once the pup is born the moms will nurse them for three to six weeks on average. The nursing time all depends on how much food the mom was able to find and convert into milk for her pup. Seal milk is about 54 percent fat. The more milk the pup consumes, building up a fat reserve, the better chance it has to survive.

Moms take their pups out for swimming lessons to strengthen their muscles and show them the layout of the area but not how to hunt for food. That comes with instinct and a natural learning curve, which is why they need to have as much weight as possible, living off that fat reserve until they learn to find food on their own.



*Getting to know you. Photo by John Drum.*



*Someone is hungry. Photo by John Drum.*



*Rider aboard. Photo by Sara Courtneidge.*

While the harbor seal pups can swim at birth and are often in the water within minutes of being born, they are not strong swimmers at first and need time to develop their abilities. A mom will carry her pup on her back if it tires out. When mom weans the pup she leaves to find a mate and start next year's pup.

Only about 50 percent of the pups will survive to their first birthday in normal times. These are not normal times.

Climate change is having a dramatic impact on our shoreline and the animals that depend on it. Harbor seals and other near-shore animals that do not regularly migrate are particularly affected. The climate change warming the Earth is depleting the food source in colder water ecosystems like those along our coast. The warmer water forces the cold-water fish to go farther offshore and deeper to find colder water for their survival. Animals that cannot swim so far and so deep, such as harbor seals and some species of shorebirds, cannot go to those deep areas to get the bigger food supply. They must depend on the diminishing food supply along the shoreline. We know that a substantial percentage of harbor seals in this area have simply perished from diminishing food supplies in the past decade or so.

For example, a shoreline docent group that has been monitoring the harbor seals along the Monterey Peninsula (Monterey, Pacific Grove and Pebble Beach) saw the highest number of harbor seals in more than a century in 2014. That's also the year a serious ocean warming event that National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration called "the blob" started impacting the food supply.

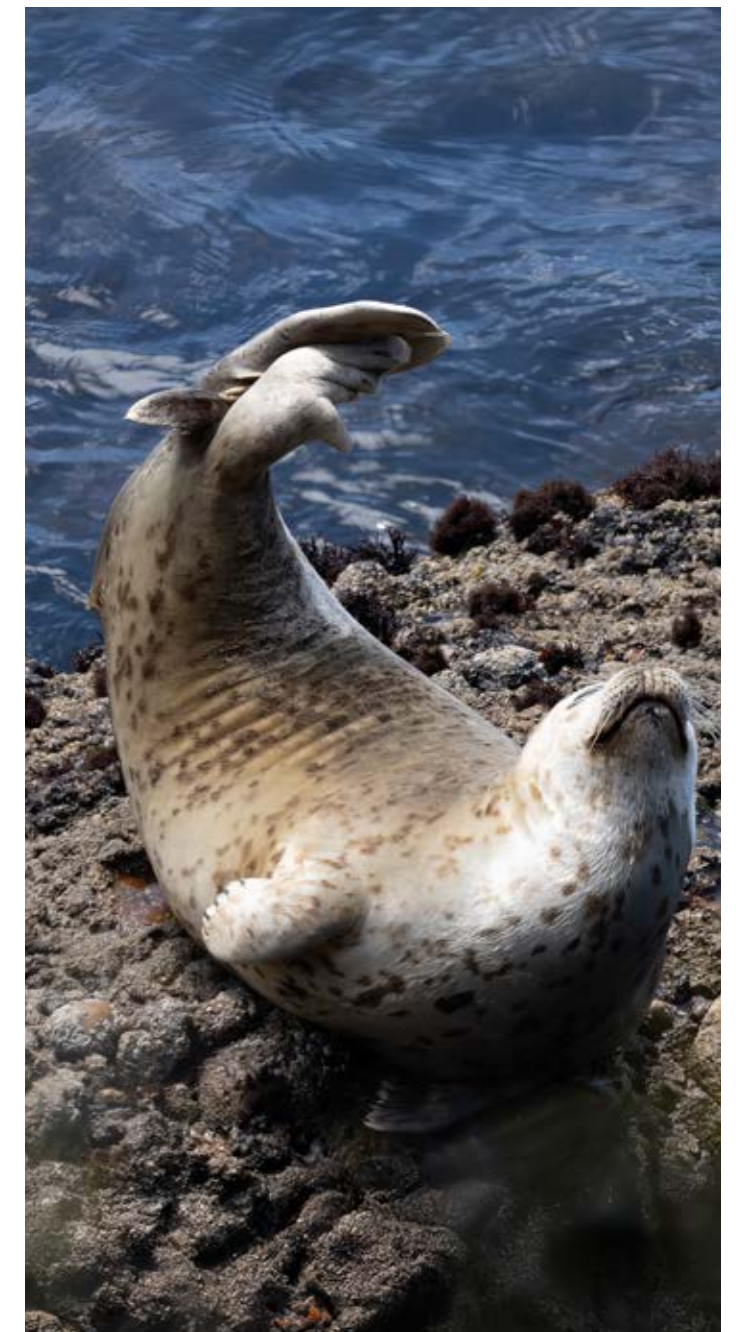
The effect of that warming trend became evident in 2015 when several thin moms gave birth to pups but had no milk to nurse them. That year we lost 34 percent of the newborns and many mom seals due to starvation. The next year was even worse. The loss of just the pups alone was nearly 80 percent. The numbers began to stabilize in 2018 but the total colony along the Monterey Peninsula went from a high of 750 to a count today under 300.

Seal groups along the California coast began voicing concerns at the drop in population. NOAA had conducted the last statewide aerial count in 2012 but had not done one since. Listening to the current counts from the seal monitoring groups, NOAA conducted a fly over count in June of 2024. Those photos are still being analyzed.

While we cannot do anything immediately to protect seals from the effects of climate change, we can do something to minimize the damage to them from an increasing number of man-made disturbances. These can be just as deadly as the effects of climate change and responsible for the more recent drop in numbers. As docents we are the first line of defense for these animals and can educate onlookers with these tips for viewing responsibly.

- Keep your distance – if a seal looks at you, you are either too close or too loud.
- No drones.
- Keep pets on a leash.
- When on the water stay away from coves and rocks where wildlife resides.
- Use a camera with a super zoom lens and silence the shutter.

With all our help, these adorable animals will be able to continue living along our coastline where we can all enjoy them.



*Seal calisthenics. Photo by Susan Lambert.*



# Point Lobos harbor seals today

## While they look healthy, predators harm the pups

by Trisha Bennett Mayer

How are our harbor seals faring? Pupping season is well behind us and many of the seals have left the Reserve now to forage elsewhere. But a walk along the Bird Island or North Shore trails, or a visit to Moss Cove, is bound to reveal some plump, relaxed, healthy seals.

Fortunately, our harbor seals are not impacted by the dreadful leptospirosis outbreak that is currently hammering the sea lion population, nor do they appear to suffer the effects of domoic acid like their pinniped cousins do. Our harbor seals look well, and appear to be thriving.

And yet, like everywhere else along the California coast, our harbor seal numbers are dwindling. Over the past five years, the number of pups born and reaching “weanhood” at Point Lobos has dropped

from 55 to 45, then to 32, then 27, and this year to a disappointing 18.

The 2025 pupping season, of course, was extraordinary. Out of a total of 30 live births, subsequent pup counts only revealed 18 weanlings. Many, if not all, of the 12 missing pups were killed within hours of birth by predators (identified as coyotes) on the birthing beaches and rapidly stripped down to their skeletons. Others managed to reach the water, but subsequently died of their wounds. Still others died of their wounds on land.

A recent NOAA harbor seal meeting revealed that, while rookeries such as Point Reyes always suffer losses due to coyote predation, none had experienced the dramatic rise in predation as that seen at Point Lobos in 2025. Of course, some pup

predation does occur every year at the Reserve, but this year the predators were so efficient that the harbor seals abandoned China Cove beach partway through the pupping season, preferring instead to take refuge on rocks and islets in the cove.

Thus far, the dramatic rise in coyote predation at Point Lobos this year remains unexplained. For the 2026 season, motion cameras will be installed at the Whalers, China and Moss Cove rookeries and may provide some answers.

Meanwhile, the Reserve’s overall harbor seal population has also shrunk. When was the last time anyone saw China Cove beach as crowded with seals as the accompanying photo (taken in January 2016) shows?

Kim Akeman’s meticulous research has shown beyond doubt that excessive noise and disturbances cause miscarriages and premature births in harbor seals, that marine heatwaves like “the blob” force harbor seal prey to seek cold water at greater depths, thereby resulting in emaciated seals, and that habitat loss due to urban development and erosion encroaches on harbor seal haul-outs and rookeries. And although the harbor seals seen at Point Lobos are (mostly) protected from excessive noise and disturbances, they are subjected to the same stresses as

those listed above when foraging or hauled out elsewhere along the California coast.

So let’s all do our part to be good “seal stewards” by explaining to Point Lobos visitors the importance of being quiet around harbor seals, and giving these delightful creatures the best chance possible to rest, nurse, flourish and thrive.



Underwater view of a seal. Photo by Jerry Loomis.

A Point Lobos Docent since 2016, Trisha Bennett Mayer was the Harbor Seal Pup Watch Advocate for five years, with 2025 being her last pupping season in this position.

Much of her life was spent overseas, but in the early 1980s she pursued graduate studies at the then Monterey Institute of International Studies, falling in love with the Monterey Peninsula and vowing to return some day. Over the next 30 years, her daughters were born in Switzerland, and she worked as a translator in Geneva and Hong Kong. After her husband passed away, she retired from the International Committee of the Red Cross and returned to this area in 2015 and settled in Carmel Valley.

These days she spends time walking her dog, attempting watercolor painting, enjoying her docent friends and spending many happy hours volunteering at Point Lobos.

Trisha Bennett Mayer — trisha.bennett.mayer@gmail.com



Mom and baby heads-up. Photo by Yvonne Wright.



China Cove as it appeared in 2016. Photo by Trisha Bennett Mayer.



*Kathleen Ryan, a second generation native Californian, has lived on the Monterey Peninsula for 10 years. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Foods and Nutrition from Cal Poly, Pomona, and has a current California Clear Multiple Subject Teaching Credential. She taught third and fourth grades for many years and, now retired, enjoys hiking, biking and scuba diving. Her passion is in getting others involved in travel sketching and nature journaling. She has been a Point Lobos Docent since 2017 and is the leader of the Point Lobos Nature Journaling Group.*

*Her email address is [kmr95321@gmail.com](mailto:kmr95321@gmail.com)*

# The personal art of journaling

## Documenting nature brings multiple rewards

by Kathleen Ryan

Journal? Check. Pencil? Check. Small watercolor palette and waterbrush? Check. I review my materials list as I enter through the welcoming gates of Point Lobos State Natural Reserve. On this gloriously foggy day I set my sights on Weston Beach to meet up with a nature sketching group that I lead for Point Lobos Docents and a few others. My nature journaling kit also includes a paper towel, a permanent ink marker and a white crayon. My keen sense of curiosity is warming up.

I'm now sitting all bundled up on one of the larger rocks at Weston Beach, and my mind begins to relax. I look out to see the waves crashing on the shoreline rocks, and beyond, a whale exhales at the surface and the accompanying spout shoots into the air. The cool mist on my face and the briny smell of drying kelp pieces on the shoreline awaken and invigorate me. Tasting the salty air is like a favorite snack and the cacophony of sounds from waves crashing, Black Oystercatchers wheeing and keeing, sea lions barking, and other sketchers chatting remind me that I am here to refresh and renew my spirit.

It seems that the American Psychological Association and I agree. Spending time in nature has both physical and mental benefits. Of course, walking and hiking is a given



The art produced in the recent PLF-sponsored journaling class. All photos by Don Blohowiak.



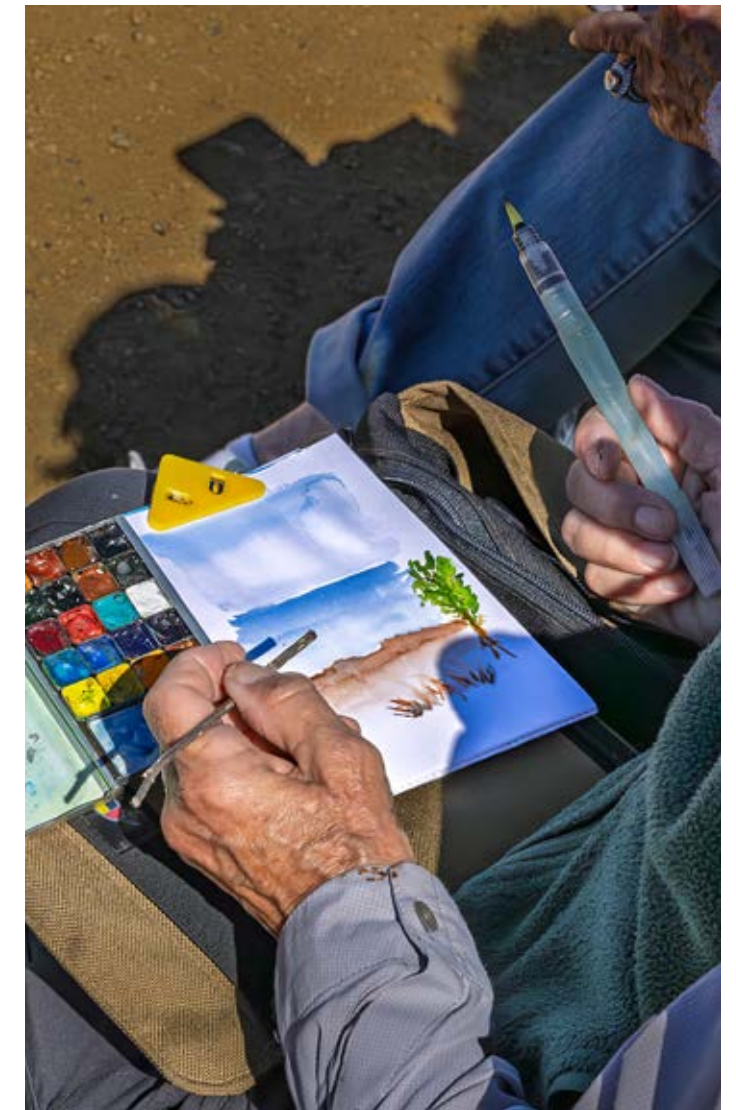
Nature journaling leader Kathleen Ryan instructs the class.

exercise benefit, but other benefits include a boost to the immune system, enhanced cognitive function, improvement of heart health, better sleep, a reduction in psychological stress and an improvement in mood. And with nature journaling there is the added bonus of a physical record documenting an experience with nature's grandeur.

My sketchbook journal has changed in the years I have been nature journaling. I began with the idea that I needed to create fine art. I've discovered that I am not a fine art creator. My art is wonky and comes from my desire to observe and take notes. I have improved greatly over the years, but it has involved many "pencil miles" — a term that John Muir Laws, a well-known and influential nature journalist, has coined. He also says, "When you celebrate the world through the pages of your journal, every stroke of your brush or pencil can be a song of gratitude for the opportunity to be alive." It doesn't involve a degree in art, or perfection, just a desire to take note of the world around you.

Journaling can be a solitary experience, but you will find there is a group of like-minded individuals who gather together and journal about their time with nature. Going off onto the Cypress Grove Trail or the North Shore Trail alone allows you to experience grandness all on your own, but, if you enjoy social activity that can be yours as well. While in a group, I may be surrounded by others who are observing alongside me.

In the end, though, this is a personal journey. My reflections put down in word, color, and symbols all represent that small window of opportunity I have gifted myself. While we do sit together, our observations are completely different. Our journaling is as varied and unique as we are.



Meeting nature with brush and paint.



Arlo McMillen tries his hand at journaling.

In early September I was involved with a nature journaling event sponsored by the Point Lobos Foundation. During the event, docents with experience in nature journaling met up with PLF members who were curious about the practice. We met at Piney Woods and after hot drinks and snacks and a quick introduction to the materials we would be using, docents and participants set off to document nature together.

Small groups were scattered along the South Shore Trail and the trails throughout the woods. Techniques were demonstrated and ideas for recording findings through the use of basic art materials and prompts were discussed and implemented. At the end of the morning we met together and reviewed our work. I thought the results well reflected the beautiful morning, and the sights and sounds that we were there to record. Will the PLF do this again? From the comments I heard, the answer would be a resounding yes! There just needs to be enough interest from the PLF members.



Docent Trisha Bennett Mayer joins PLF members at recent outing.

When I nature journal I am entering the realm of nature and my duty is to observe and to collect information in the form of notes, questions, quick sketches, and patches of color. Some might say that a camera can give me similar results. I am convinced that in allowing nature to unfold its drama and interactions around me, together with the investment of the time I take to put it on paper, a lasting memory with physical evidence will be my reward — one of billowing waves of fog, pelicans gliding in formation, low-flying water-skimming cormorants, sea palms holding on for dear life, urchins being pounded by the mighty Pacific, crabs giving the side-eye as they side walk trying to escape.

You do not need to be an artist to be a nature journalist. You do not need to be a perfect writer to be a nature journalist. You need to be curious and observant and willing to let nature teach you something. Remember, you can join the Point Lobos Nature Journaling Group, or come out with a friend or on your own. I have done all three. And I have the journals, and memories, to prove it. If I were you, I'd give it a go.



Pages from Kathleen Ryan's nature journal.





Chuck Bancroft spent 31 years of his 35-year career as a State Park Ranger at Point Lobos and, in retirement, has led programs and nature walks for the Point Lobos Foundation.

His email address is [sparkystarkweather@gmail.com](mailto:sparkystarkweather@gmail.com).

# Something to crow about

## Here's to a really smart bird that is often misunderstood.

by *Chuck Bancroft*

Many cultures associate crows with death, bad omens and ghost stories. A group of crows is called a murder or a mob which doesn't help their reputation. But crows are one of the most intelligent and social animals in the world.

Crows are exceptionally intelligent when compared with 7-year-old children and even chimpanzees and other primates. They are capable of creating and using simple tools to use in gathering food like insects in crevices and holes. They have recognized faces of researchers over time.

The American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) is an all-black bird found across North America. Crows are very social. They are the common birds of fields, open woodlands and forests. Crows are scavengers that thrive around people, and you will often find them wherever people gather or at the dumps looking to find free food. Indeed, they are often found in the picnic areas at Point Lobos doing just that.

Crows are large birds, typically 17 to 21 inches long, with a glossy, entirely black plumage and a stout, dark bill. Young crows may have a brownish tinge to their feathers and a pale iris, which turns dark as they mature.

In flight, crows and ravens look very similar. To tell them apart watch their flight pattern and look at the shape of the tail feathers. The Common Raven glides or soars much more often than the American Crow. The tail feathers are tapered or diamond-shaped. The American Crow has square or rounded tail feathers. In flight they flap steadily. The wings are broader and shorter than a Common Raven's.

The diet of crows consists of a wide variety of seeds, fruits, insects and small animals. They communicate with a familiar "caw-caw" call and can be distinguished from similar species by their unique vocalizations. Crows have many different sounds or calls. When a predator or threat is near they can alert their companions with their raucous sounds.

Crows live in cooperative family groups. A bonded pair will build the nest in evergreen or deciduous trees, using twigs and lining them with softer materials. The female will lay three to eight eggs. Incubation lasts for approximately 18 days. The young birds typically remain in the nest for about four weeks before fledging. Once they leave the nest, crows create groups with members of their own age. Young birds may stay with their parents for several years, helping to raise younger siblings. During winter months they gather

in large roosts looking for warmth, shelter and protection from predators. They will often chase down predators to keep them away from their territory.

On many occasions I've seen groups of crows at the Carmel River mouth. The tops of trees are good roosting locales. I've seen large flights heading toward and then hanging out in the eucalyptus trees at Mission Ranch during happy hour.

Crows should be respected and admired for their complex social life and ability to adapt to many different habitats — especially their adaptation to humans in their habitats.



As in many family groups, fights happen.



An intelligent bird pauses to ponder.



Tops of trees make a good roost for a "murder of crows." All photos by Chuck Bancroft.



Crows are plentiful at the mouth of the Carmel River near Point Lobos.



A crow fights an aerial battle with a larger Red-tailed Hawk.



# MOONLIGHT WALK 2025

## Appreciation for Foundation Members

As summer came to a close, members experienced the Reserve in a way few ever do—under the glowing light of the moon. The Moonlight Walk offered exclusive after-hours access to Point Lobos, where the sunset melted into starlight and the calls of sea lions echoed across the coast. Guests enjoyed picnics, sweet treats at the PLF Dessert Bar, and the rare serenity of walking the trails after dusk. It was a magical evening of shared appreciation for this place we all love.



Photos by Manny Espinoza, Keira Silver, and Fred Brown.

CELEBRATING OUR MEMBERS:

# A year of connection, creativity, and appreciation

This year, we've had the joy of connecting with our members through unique experiences that celebrate the beauty, history, and spirit of Point Lobos and its surrounding treasures. Each gathering has been a heartfelt expression of our gratitude for your continued support — moments that remind us how special this community truly is.



Members of the Point Lobos Foundation gathered on a sunny Saturday morning in September for a peaceful and reflective morning of Nature Journaling within Point Lobos State Natural Reserve. Guided by gentle instruction and the sounds of the sea, participants took time to slow down, observe, and translate their connection to nature onto the page. It was a moment to breathe deeply, notice the details of the wild landscape, and rekindle the sense of wonder that draws us all to Point Lobos.



Point Lobos Foundation Members at the Peregrine Falcon and Gray Whale membership level were treated to an unforgettable afternoon of history, art, and camaraderie at the historic Hudson House overlooking Carmel Bay. Guests mingled over light refreshments before embarking on a private tour that revealed the home's fascinating

past. The day culminated in an inspiring plein air painting demonstration, as artists captured the serene coastal vistas that have long inspired creativity at Point Lobos. Surrounded by art, history, and breathtaking views, members experienced the perfect blend of culture and connection.





# Notes from the Docent Log

Compiled by Emily Hull-Parsons

Emily Hull-Parsons, originally from Illinois, arrived on the Monterey Peninsula over 40 years ago. During those years she ran an active consulting practice in the areas of management and philanthropy. Now retired, she has found time to enjoy serving as a Point Lobos Docent and has become an avid landscape artist, as well as a very enthusiastic grandparent.

On Monday, I was talking to a young boy and his mom about the harbor seals. The mom was trying to convince the boy to carry on walking on the Bird Island Trail, but he was not interested in doing so. Suddenly, he called out behind me. "What's that?" Turning, I saw the tail of a beautiful reptile as it scurried back behind the rock. The boy was fascinated, so patient and still. And he was rewarded in a few minutes with a full view of a Western skink. "I want to stay here for three days!" he said to his mom. Point Lobos has something special to capture everyone!

**Michele Hardoin, 05/21/2025**



Western skink on Bird Island Trail. Photo by Michele Hardoin.

While walking the South Shore Trail, I was able to photograph two different species of solitary bees that we have at the Reserve (solitary bees are bees that raise their young alone, without the help of other bees within a colony). They were foraging on the seaside daisy and the lizard's tail flowers.

**Carol Hoffman, 05/28/2024**



Busy bees at the Reserve: Cellophane bee (left) and small carpenter bee. Photo by Carol Hoffman

For years, I have heard leaders of School Walks regale the kids with the familiar and perhaps slightly crude aphorism, "Leaves of three, leave it be. If it's shiny, watch your hiney." Today I realized that, at Point Lobos, that colorful phrase actually was an urgent notice to be taken quite literally. To wit, one of three benches near the entrance to the Sea Lion Point Trail has poison oak growing past the exposed ankles and knees region straight up into the "Please be seated" zone.

**Don Blohowiak, 08/31/2025**

A special treat for the Earth Day School Walk kids was interacting with State Parks Interpreters Ashley Wemp and Erika Delemarre as they emerged from the depths of Whalers Cove in their wetsuits. The kids from Fremont Elementary were fascinated with the equipment and the explanation of what the divers were finding and doing underwater. A very magical and lucky timed encounter for all of us. And as a bonus, along with us was School Walk Guide trainee Patty Martin-Claspell, who is a diver herself and one of the big tank fish feeders at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

**Fred Brown, 04/22/2025**

Scientists have been able to confirm the bacterium *vibrio pectenicida* (a bacterium similar to what causes cholera in humans) is to blame for sea star wasting.

**Jennifer Alexander, 08/04/2025**



Otter mom and her newborn pup just seconds after its birth. Photos by Sara Courtneidge.

As I was walking to my car this afternoon, I noticed an otter in the water. Not unusual of course, except there were divers in the water and the otters usually seem to stay away from them. She was quite far off from the shore, so I grabbed my long lens and started taking shots. At first she was rolling in the water, adopting some strange postures such as holding her forelimbs above her head as she turned, and also sometimes raising up her tail and hind legs. I kept on watching and shooting, and realized that I was now seeing a very small pup being vigorously groomed on the otter's belly.

**Sara Courtneidge, 06/24/2025**



Photo by Susan Lambert.

First, I saw breaching whales off Sea Lion Point, then walking along the trail, I saw a guy on the wrong side of the barrier sitting over the edge on a rock on the side of a cliff. Yikes! Next, there was a lovely photo shoot on Hidden Beach with a super fancy dress theme. Then I saw a kayaker, and stand-up paddler who eventually ended up in China Cove (watched over by Park Aides until they left) and, on the other side, a whale fully right next to Bird Island. To finish the day, I saw a bobcat right off the trail gobbling up pocket gophers right and left. Not a boring day!

**Susan Lambert, 7/24/2025**



A pair of visitors spotted a Rhinoceros Auklet today, hanging out near a gathering of Pigeon Guillemots. The visitors were keen birders from Wisconsin who brought their own binoculars and a telescope, and were tickled to spot this bird so close to shore. They were somewhere along the Cypress Grove Trail when they spotted it. I have never seen a Rhinoceros Auklet myself, but they were happy to share their photo with me.

**Jennifer Alexander, 07/24/2025**



Rhinoceros Auklet. Photo from visitors.

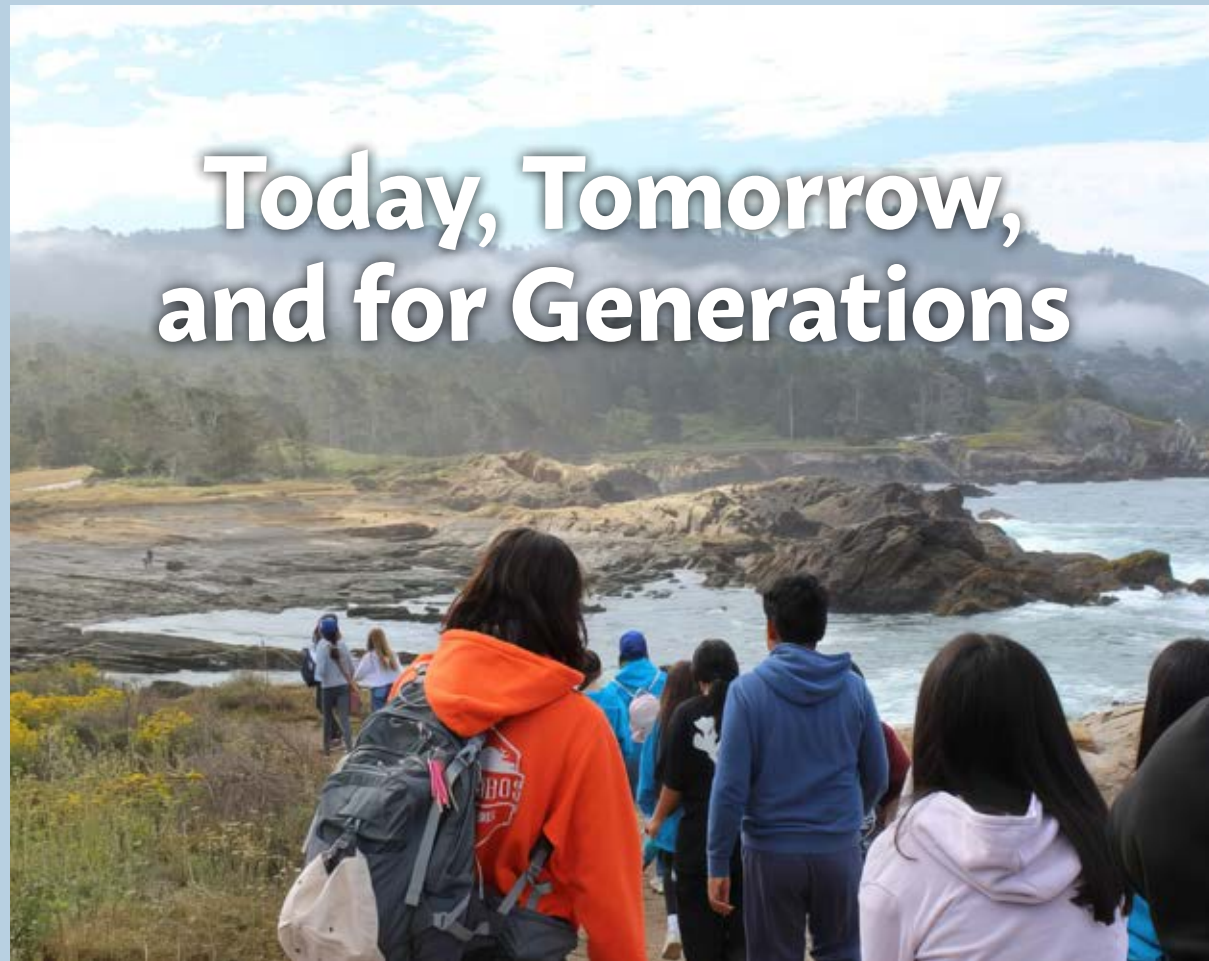
While out today helping visitors I started monitoring and keeping track of how many people were holding their cell phones, looking at it while walking or having it up to their ear in conversation! Drumroll please....Just one out of every 17 people I observed was sans phone! As I have said many times to help people see what the Reserve offers, tuck the cell phone away except when encountering a "photo opportunity."

**Paul Reys, 09/01/2025**

While on Gate Greet this morning, a visitor caught my eye. She was a 4th grade teacher who hates litter, so she brought in a long claw and garbage bag to collect litter along her walk in the Reserve. What a gem!

**Michele Hardoin, 09/07/2025**

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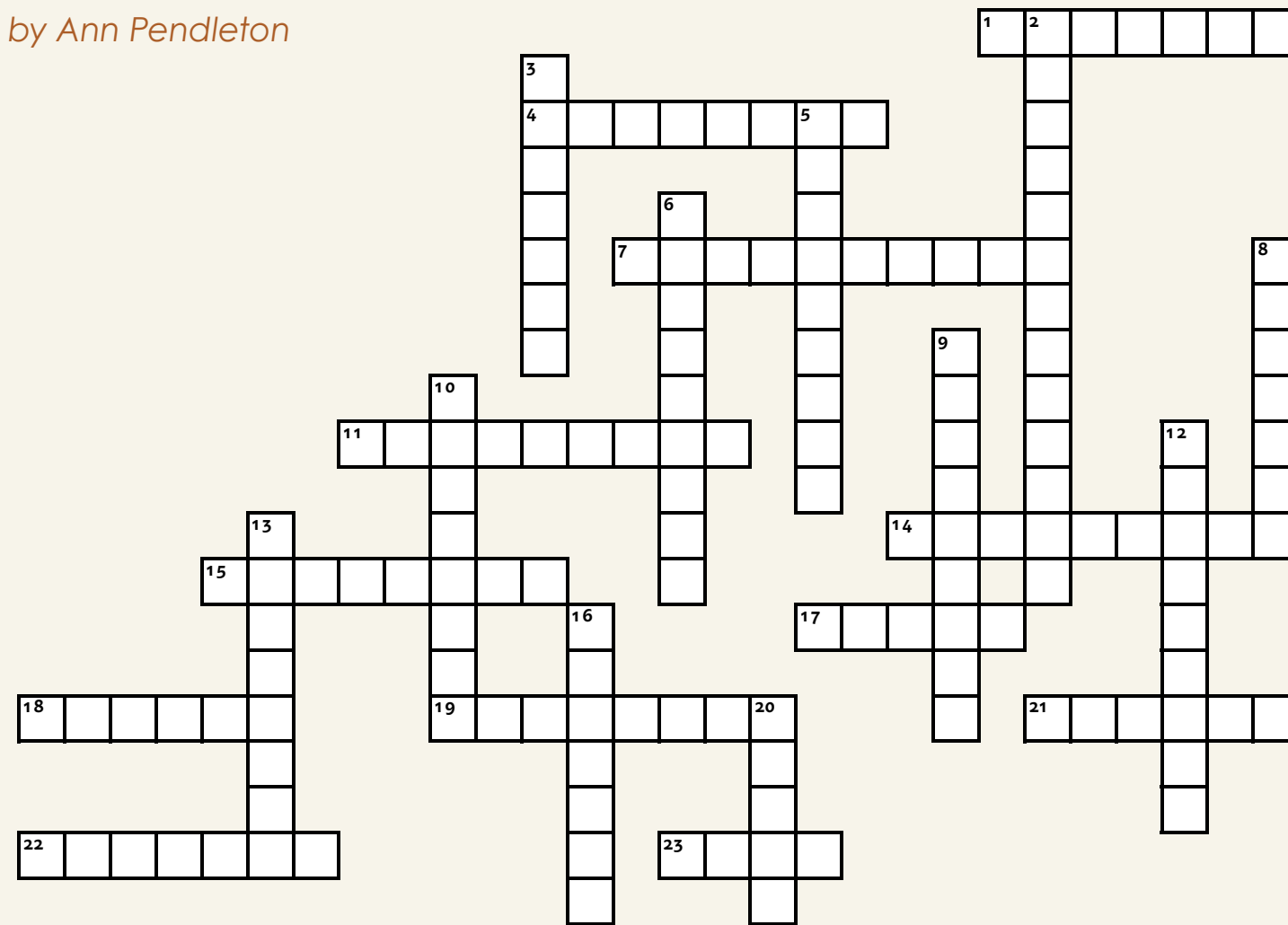
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# Puzzle: Harbor Seals

by Ann Pendleton



## ACROSS

- 1 A way for all of us to help harbor seals is to keep the \_\_\_\_\_ of harbor seals by people as quiet as possible.
- 4 Harbor seals are extremely sensitive to both visual and \_\_\_\_\_ disturbances.
- 7 There is a docent group on the Monterey Peninsula who monitors the \_\_\_\_\_ of the harbor seals.
- 11 Two ocean \_\_\_\_\_ of the harbor seals are white sharks and orcas.
- 14 The population of harbor seals has been \_\_\_\_\_ since at least 2015.
- 15 Harbor seals often return to the same rock which is called site \_\_\_\_\_.
- 17 Harbor seals hunt at night for fish and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 18 The spotted pattern of a harbor seal is \_\_\_\_\_ to each individual.
- 19 \_\_\_\_\_ are sometimes useful midwives for birthing harbor seal mothers. (2wds)
- 21 One land predator of the harbor seal is the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 22 The large brown algae called kelp, creates the \_\_\_\_\_ forest in Point Lobos.
- 23 Only about \_\_\_\_\_ of the harbor seal pups survive their first year.

## DOWN

- 2 Harbor seal pups learn to hunt \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 The warming of the ocean temperature has caused fish to take to colder waters \_\_\_\_\_ offshore.
- 5 Resting time for a harbor seal is important as they need to \_\_\_\_\_ oxygen for their next nighttime dive.
- 6 Harbor seals are generally \_\_\_\_\_ hunters and sleep during the day.
- 8 The \_\_\_\_\_ of the earth is depleting food sources in colder eco systems.
- 9 Climate Change is having an impact on our \_\_\_\_\_ and the animals that depend on it.
- 10 The barking sound off the coastline is from \_\_\_\_\_ not harbor seals. (2wds)
- 12 A plant in the sumac family found in abundance in Point Lobos is \_\_\_\_\_. (2wds)
- 13 Female harbor seals nurse their pups up to \_\_\_\_\_. (2wds)
- 16 Harbor seals do not \_\_\_\_\_ so are adversely affected by warming waters.
- 20 Mother and pup harbor seals identify one another by \_\_\_\_\_.

Answers at [pointlobos.org/magazine/crossword-solution](http://pointlobos.org/magazine/crossword-solution)

# Acknowledgments

Memorials, tributes and grants April 16, 2025 - October 15, 2025

## IN HONOR OF

The PLF Staff  
*Annis and Nick Kukulan*  
Peter Serchuk  
*Brenda Cunningham*  
Chuck Bancroft  
*Charles Schmuck*  
Carol Rossi  
*Janet Leask*  
Michele Hardoin  
*Jeffrey Reynolds*  
Bruce P Dyer  
*Karen Dyer*  
Peggy Grier's 90th Birthday  
*Mary Conway*  
Lindsay Nevis  
*Patrick Nevis*  
Silvestri children & the family's memories  
*Sandra Silvestri*  
Margaret Allen Hudson  
*Thomas Hudson*  
Karen Balch Wagner  
*Yunghi Choi*

## IN MEMORY OF

Bernardo Inong Gomez, my Dad,  
for without him I would not be the person  
I am today.  
*Bernard Gomez*  
James Eddy Hatch & Alan Merle Hatch  
*Lauren Kerr*  
Richard M. Jacobs  
*Linda Jacobs*  
Steve Hatch  
*Michael Maurutto*  
Sister Patty Carothers  
*Mike Haworth*  
Niall Cranston Higbee  
*Tempe, Erin, and Scarlett Wennerholm*  
Peter Serchuk  
*Elizabeth Krchak*  
*Fred Serchuk*  
*Steve Serchuk*  
*Trust Company Family Offices*  
Maureen Mason  
*Kathy Goldstein*  
Kevin Simpson  
*Mary Gagliardi*  
Lynn Ludlow  
*Maureen Morris*  
Fern Williams who was  
dedicated to preserving wildlife.  
*Rosalie Pinkert*  
Linda Colehower, who shared  
her love of Point Lobos  
*Beth, Maya, and Jada Colehower*

## GRANTS & RESTRICTED GIFTS

Chapman Foundation  
*For Experience Point Lobos for Monterey  
Peninsula students*  
Harden Foundation  
*For Experience Point Lobos for Salinas/  
Salinas Valley students*  
Monterey Peninsula Foundation  
*For the Longterm Conservation and  
Stewardship Program*  
Nancy Eccles and Homer M Hayward  
Family Foundation  
*For trails, school outreach, and  
stewardship*  
Pebble Beach Company Foundation  
*For Experience Point Lobos*  
Yellow Brick Road  
*For youth programs*  
Upjohn California Fund  
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and stewardship*  
Community Foundation  
for Monterey County  
*Climate Change Mitigation  
and Education*

## SISTER ANNA VOSS FUND

**In memory of**  
Carl and Carol Voss  
*Carl Voss, Jr.*

**In honor of**  
Deborah Shoub Ju  
*Shirley Keenan*  
Daniel Tellep and family  
*Susan Tellep*

**Carmel River State Beach**

**In memory of**  
Mike "Tubby" Turbow  
*Jacquelyn Gottlieb*

Photo by Keira Silver.



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