



# Friends of the Sea Lion

## MARINE MAMMAL CENTER

Spring 2001

### **BELIEVE IT OR NOT...** *by Michele Hunter & Régan Rostain*

Who would have thought when Kirsten Sellwood, Animal Care Supervisor and Laura Cowen, Animal Care Volunteer left the Center on January 30th to rescue a reported beached sea lion at Doheny Beach that they would come back with such an unusual animal. Upon examination, we noted the sea lion pup was underweight, infested with lice and "boy did he look a little different". We all knew he wasn't a typical California sea lion pup, but what kind of sea lion pup was he? After careful examination we were fairly sure he was a Steller sea lion, *Eumetopias jubatus*...an endangered species!

Now all we needed was verification. We e-mailed pictures and a detailed description to Dr. Francis Gulland at the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, CA, where we knew Steller sea lion pups had been rescued and rehabilitated. Dr. Gulland confirmed that it looked like a Steller sea lion pup.

Stellers are typically found from Central California to Northern Honshu in Japan, and to the Bering Strait. About 70 % of the Steller sea lion population resides in Alaska, and there are only about 500 animals in California. Wow, was this animal out of his range. This is the first Steller FSLMMC has treated in our 30 years. In honor of this precious surprise, we decided to name him "Ripley" after "Ripley's, believe it or not"!



**Ripley staying warm under heat lamps** - *photo taken by Regan Rostain*

The first course in this animal's treatment was to give him an injection of Ivermectin (a deworming medication) that kills off the lice. Since he also suffered from a respiratory infection, he was treated with antibiotics. We were all quite relieved when his blood work results came back within normal range. The next step was to get him to eat. We were told it would be difficult to get a Steller to eat dead fish, so we decided to first stimulate his hunting instincts with a few large goldfish. We are happy to say the technique paid off. Seven volunteers and staff eagerly looked on, all with smiles, and a few in tears, as he began to eat smelt and pieces of herring. His future was in doubt before this event.

Here's where the story gets a little weird (if it wasn't already). On one Sunday morning, two weeks after our Steller sea lion pup arrived, he "BARKED." No big deal, right? Sea lions bark. Well, according to the literature Steller sea lions don't bark!! So now, yet again, we are thinking, "Hmmm, what kind of sea lion pup is he?" Next, we sent pictures to Dr. Mike Castellini, a renowned Steller sea lion biologist. Dr. Castellini also agrees that our Ripley looks like a Steller sea lion pup. No surprise there. But he also agrees with the literature, "Steller sea lions don't bark!" WOW. Could we have a Steller/California sea lion hybrid? We are looking into that very question right now. We have contacted a geneticist who will analyze our Ripley's DNA and compare it with samples from both Steller and California sea lions to make this determination. If Ripley is not a hybrid, he probably learned to bark from his pen mate Ziggy Stardust. Ziggy, a typical California sea lion, loves to bark. A lot!

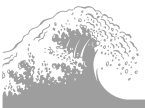
Regardless if Ripley is a Steller sea lion or a Steller/California sea lion hybrid, his future is looking bright. We welcome you to come by the Center to visit Ripley and see how well he is doing. You will notice that Ripley appears different from a California sea lion pup in that: his muzzle and chest are broader; the hair around the head is denser and longer; ears are longer; some hair around the head region is black at the base and white at the tip; front and back

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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.





## THE MYSTERY OF SWAMP THING

by Kimberly Zagres

Like a Hollywood movie, the saga of "Swamp Thing" started with his surprising discovery. Something big was in the river channel that drains to the ocean in Irvine. Friends of the Sea Lion Marine Mammal Center was dispatched to investigate and found a large (over 7 feet in length), male sea lion, covered in ooze, sitting on a mud bar in the channel. Immediately (and affectionately) called "Swamp Thing", he smelled like his Hollywood counterpart and was just as aggressive.

**Mystery #1:** How did he manage to work his way from the ocean this far inland?

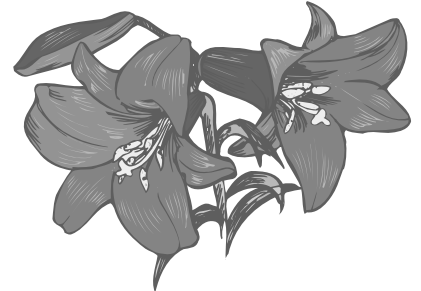
**Mystery #2:** What was ailing this animal that was clearly more than 300 pounds overweight?

Maneuvering his "slight" bulk (he still weighed 300 pounds in his emaciated condition) back to our Center was no easy feat, nor was his nursing care. Pumping liters of hydrating fluids into his body daily, and treating his severe infection (imagine a very large child with a VERY runny nose) was no job for the squeamish.

Swamp Thing wasn't an easy patient. Yet, he did seem to want the fish we offered. Unfortunately, something was wrong. He couldn't retain any solid food. Blood work indicated his body's fight against a massive infection, but it could not explain the difficulty he experienced swallowing fish. No obstructions could be seen in his mouth (you just can't ask an animal that large to stick out his tongue and say "ahh"). Dr. Evans, our veterinarian needed to see what was happening deeper in Swamp Thing's throat. A preliminary attempt to restrain his emaciated but still impressive (and strong!) bulk convinced Dr. Evans and Animal Care Director, Michele Hunter, that, for the safety of the animal and the staff, Swamp

Thing needed some sedation. The sedation allowed Dr. Evans to safely reach down past those imposing canine teeth, into the esophagus (the "food tube"). Up to his shoulder in Swamp Thing's throat, Dr. Evans found the answer to at least one of Swamp Thing's mysteries. One large bone and a collection of smaller bones were tightly lodged in the esophagus, effectively keeping any solid food from passing into the stomach. One mystery solved, but another surfaces. The bones were not from a fish; what had Swamp Thing eaten? Once the obstruction had been cleared, we were hopeful. But during his recovery from the sedation, Swamp Thing had respiratory difficulties. Sadly, despite attempts at resuscitation, Swamp Thing quietly slipped into a coma and passed away.

When an animal dies at FSL, a necropsy (an autopsy for animals) is performed to find the cause of death and to gain valuable knowledge about these animals. Swamp Thing's necropsy, like his discovery, was full of surprises. The tissue in his throat around the bone obstruction was dying. In addition, Swamp Thing's lungs were severely damaged by his respiratory infection; his body had no muscle or layer of fat (as would be seen on a healthy animal); he had a large abscess in one kidney; and he had more objects, including a large knot of fishing line with hooks, a plastic wrapper and a cigarette butt in his stomach. Swamp Thing's extreme condition tempered our grief when we realized he was no longer in pain. Swamp Thing was with us only for a brief period of time, but this large, smelly sea lion touched our hearts.



## YOU MIGHT BE AN FSL VOLUNTEER IF...

by Laura Cowen

- You plan your vacation around pupping season.
- The pictures of releases outnumber the pictures of your children.
- You know what happens when you try to thaw a frozen fish in the microwave.
- A Sunday dinner is interrupted by a call to pick up "a little sea lion pup right around the corner" and you find out not only is it around the rocky, high cliff, but it also weighs more than you do.
- Somebody mentions grabbing a smoothie and visions of a blender and a chopped fish come to mind.
- You try to "accessorize" all your outfits around yellow.

## 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
- ◆ Increase public awareness of the marine environment through education and research



# PINNIPED PUP PAGE

Hi Kids,  
Welcome to our third Pinniped Pup Page, the "Triple P". This page is just for kids. We have included an article on Simba and Alcatraz, two sea lion pups we rescued; an article on endangered species; a fun game; and Pup's Picks. Pup's Picks are stories or drawings done by you, the reader, that have been chosen to be featured in the Triple P. Hope you enjoy your page.

Sincerely,  
Beaté and Régan



"Pup", our Triple P Mascot, hopes the Easter Bunny brings you lots of yummy goodies!

## PUP'S PICKS

Andrew Gunnin age 6, and Whitney Gunnin age 10, both attended the release of our elephant seal "Eddie".

Andrew and Whitney had a great time at the release.

In honor of the occasion, Andrew drew a wonderful picture of Eddie swimming away in the ocean and Whitney wrote a lovely article about the release.

Thank you Andrew and Whitney for contributing to this newsletter. We are happy you could attend the release.

Would you like your artwork or story featured in the next issue of the Triple P? Mail your marine-themed drawing or article to Beaté and Régan at Friends of the Sea Lion, 20612 Laguna Canyon Road, Laguna Beach, CA 92651. Drawings need to be no larger than 5" X 7". Please include your date of birth and tell us a little bit about yourself. Children must be 12 or under.



ARTWORK BY ANDREW GUNNIN

## ENDANGERED SPECIES

What is an endangered species?

Endangered species are animals and plants that are in danger of becoming extinct. Threatened species are animals and plants that are likely to become endangered in the future. In the past 200 years, over 500 species became extinct in the United States. Why?

Well, with our growing human population comes the need to build, build, build. Most of the animals that are extinct or in danger of extinction, lost their homes (in other words, "Habitat Loss" is a very bad thing).

Congress recognized that our plants and animals needed some help. So in 1973 they passed the Endangered Species Act. Now, it is a national priority to save endangered species. In the 28 years since the passing of the Endangered Species Act, only 7 out of 909 endangered or threatened species have become extinct. Although that is 7 too many, we are on the right track. Protecting endangered species does work!

So how can you help? Lots of ways! You can adopt an endangered species or write an article for your school newspaper to tell others about endangered species. Also, when you and your parents are driving along highways where wildlife may be present, SLOW DOWN and keep a sharp lookout. Collisions with cars and trucks are a major problem in certain areas for endangered species such as North American river otters, American black bears, Florida panthers, Desert tortoises, Gray wolves, Red-cockaded woodpeckers, Brown pelicans, and many more (not to mention a problem for people, too!). For example, around 65 percent of Florida panther and American black bear deaths are related to highway accidents. For more ideas, you and your parents can go to your local library or visit the web.



## SIMBA AND ALCATRAZ FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED

Meet Simba and Alcatraz, two California sea lion pups that have become best buddies. We rescued Simba and Alcatraz in early December. When they first came in, both animals were underweight and dehydrated (their bodies had lost a lot of water). Sea lion pups should weigh about 65-70 lbs., but Simba was only 25 lbs. and Alcatraz was 35 lbs. No fear though, fattening up sea lions is our specialty. But this isn't a story about fattening up sea lions; this is a story about friendship. What makes the story of Simba and Alcatraz so special, is that from the moment they were put together in a pen, they were inseparable. And when I say inseparable, I mean inseparable. Simba and Alcatraz are always side-by-side. Whether



Simba with her favorite pillow - Alcatraz

they are playing in the pool, eating lunch, or sleeping, these two animals are never more than a foot apart. Why? Well, it seems that Alcatraz is very protective of Simba. As you know, we are a hospital and sometimes we need to hold animals to give them a shot (with medicine to make them feel better) or to feed them (when they won't eat on their own). Alcatraz really doesn't like it when Simba is being held by a person. Alcatraz will bark at anyone that stands between him and Simba (he even barks at other sea lion pups that separate them). Once he even crawled on the back of an animal care volunteer that was holding Simba!! Obviously, since Alcatraz is a sea lion, we can't explain to him that we are trying to help save Simba. And save Simba we did. Both Simba and Alcatraz are all better and ready to go home. Don't worry kids, we are releasing these two best buddies TOGETHER. I have a good feeling that even after they go back to the wild, Simba and Alcatraz are going to be inseparable.



## EDDIE GOES HOME By Whitney Gunnin

Eddie was an elephant seal who had been rescued by the "Friends of the Sea Lions." They help sea animals who have been hurt, have respiratory problems, don't eat or have been stranded. After nursing animals back to health, they are released. My family got to see Eddie being released. At first, he did not want to go. Everybody gave him a lot of encouragement. Then he looked back at the people on the beach and swam away. We stayed and watched him play in the water. Thank you "Friends of the Sea Lions" for helping Eddie.

## PUP'S UNSCRAMBLE GAME

These questions are all about the marine mammals Friends of the Sea Lion (FSL) rehabilitates. Their answers will help decode the answer to the Bonus Question.

Seals, sea lions, and walrus all belong to what special group of animals?

1

What kind of noise does a sea lion make?

4 5

What type of seal at FSL has spots?

9 7

Not only is FSL a hospital for seals and sea lions, but what other animal does the center take care of?

8 6

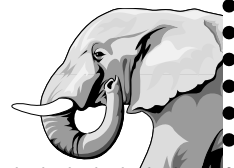
What are the three R's of FSL? (Hint: two of the R's are Rehabilitate and Release)

2 3



Bonus Question!!!! Adult male elephant seals get their name from their trunk-like nose resembling an elephant. What is the name given to the adult male elephant seal nose?

1 5 8 4 9 7 3 6 2





## MICHELE HUNTER TAKES ON NEW ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND ANIMAL CARE

by Dana Friedman

Friends of the Sea Lion Director of Animal Care, Ms. Michele Hunter has left a 13-year career with Taco Bell Corporation for a new job as full-time FSLMMC Director of both Operations and Animal Care. Trading in her heels and hose for boots and slickers was an easy decision for Michele, who has worked at FSL part-time since 1989 and over the years has held positions ranging from Animal Care Supervisor to Director of Animal Care, including helping to run the Center as Interim Director of Operations.

As Director of Operations and Animal Care, Michele is working a full-time schedule on site at the facility, overseeing a staff of five employees and more than 65 volunteers. Her new duties include overseeing all educational programs, fundraising activities, facility maintenance, budgeting and more, in addition to overseeing the rehabilitation

of FSLMMC's pinniped patients.

"She is an extremely effective, dedicated and motivated manager," states Dr. Richard Evans, FSLMMC Medical Director, who has worked closely Ms. Hunter since 1995.



Michele Hunter

Kim Zagres, FSL Animal Care Supervisor says, "For as many years as she's been working with these animals, Michele's genuine compassion never ceases to amaze me. She knows the status of every critical patient's condition down to the smallest detail, and she's like Mom to her staff and volunteers."

FSLMMC's Board of Directors is thrilled to bring a person of Ms. Hunter's caliber to the Center's staff, according to Board Member Bonnie Shier. "Michele brings a level of experience to our Center that is unequaled. We're happy to have her!"



### WISH LIST

**We are in need of a truck for rescues (manual transmission)**



- Antibacterial hand soap
- Liquid Bleach
- Karo Syrup
- Dawn dishwashing liquid
- Comet
- Paper towels
- Toilet paper
- Large trash bags
- KY Jelly
- Blenders
- Blankets (no large quilts, towels or sheets)
- Chlorine for our pools
- Copier paper
- Photo-quality printing paper
- Construction Paper
- Printer cartridges (color & black & white) for: Epson Stylus 900N and Deskjet 870 Cse



**Moss getting warm in carrier -**

*photo taken by Regan Rostain*



**Grammy -** *photo taken by Regan Rostain*

## BELIEVE IT OR NOT...

*continued from page 1*

flippers are thicker and shorter and there are spaces (~6-8 mm) between the molars on the upper and lower jaw (of course this last characteristic you won't get to witness first hand, you'll have to take our word on it).

In our Winter 2000 newsletter we did a feature article on the Steller sea lions and their decline. Having an endangered species (or half endangered species) at our center has made us all feel very excited, and a bit nervous, but mostly privileged and honored that we are able to help "in a small part" the conservation of these remarkable animals. Once Ripley receives a clean bill of health from our veterinarian Dr. Evans, we will have to make the decision where to release him. Even if it turns out that Ripley is a hybrid, his best chance of having a "normal" life will be with Steller sea lions. Since the closest Steller sea lion rookery is Año Nuevo island off the coast of Santa Cruz, CA, it looks like some of the FSLMMC crew will be making a little trip up north.





## 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.

### PLANNED GIVING

- I am interested in putting *Friends of the Sea Lion* in my will.
- I am interested in receiving information about planned giving.

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) \_\_\_\_\_



## CORPORATE CORNER

### Fluor Corporation

Thanks to the Flour Corporation for repainting and deck-stripping our stairs.

### GRANTS

The Pacific Life Foundation has once again generously awarded Friends of the Sea Lion with a grant for our Marine Mammal Research Initiative project.

Thank you to the Wells Fargo Foundation for supporting our education efforts with a grant to deliver our marine education programs in low-income schools.



### SPECIAL RECOGNITION

A heartfelt thank-you to a very special volunteer – **Chuck Miller**. Chuck is a handyman extraordinaire! He's installed heat lamps in our pens and nursery to keep our critical and thin animals warm, even during the night. He transformed a storage closet into our new lab, along with the help of our veterinarian, Dr. Richard Evans. These projects are to name just a few. His enthusiasm and craftsmanship are greatly appreciated!

We'd also like to thank **Steve DePalma** for helping out with the lab and his other contributions to FSL.

We would also like to recognize **Dave Tales** from *Kwikcopy* for producing our new membership cards for free!

After completing a year of service as our director, **Darah Himmelhoch** has returned to Pittsburgh to be with her family. We wish her the best of luck!

**Friends of the Sea Lion  
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