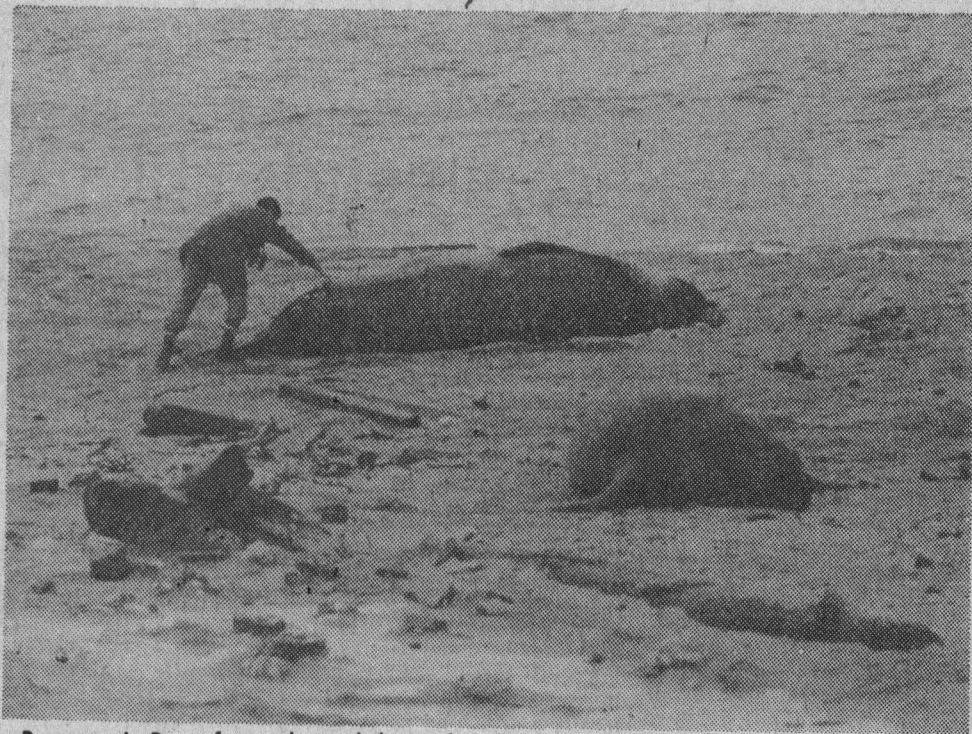


Ano Nuevo



Burney LeBoeuf marks adult male elephant seal with peroxide mixture.



Some people think seals are sick when it's the summer molting season.

# Increase Of Elephant Seals May Be 'Menace'

By WALLACE WOOD  
Sentinel Staff Writer

## Sentinel

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How do you say, "Move over!" to a ton of elephant seal sitting on your favorite beach spot?

You generally don't, admits UCSC biology professor Burney Le Boeuf. "Close up, elephant seals are pretty unpredictable."

More of these sometimes-touchy beasts will be showing up on local beaches during the coming years, Le Boeuf says.

And elephant seal etiquette may be pretty important for the beach-goer.

Already quite a tourist attraction at Ano Nuevo (New Year's) Point and Island, the number of elephant seals is

growing so fast they soon will be looking for new places to live, according to LeBoeuf.

From a nearly-extinct species in the 1880s, the seals have made a "fantastic" comeback with the aid of scientific interest and legal protection from humans.

After decades of slaughter by blubber-hunters for their fine oil, the total number of seals was probably less than 100 before 1900, LeBoeuf estimates.

Today, there are probably 80,000. And more than 1,000 of those come to the rocky Ano Nuevo site at the Santa Cruz County Line to breed, raise their pups, fight each other for territory, and just generally do what elephant seals do.

As a state protected area, the point and island is carefully managed by scientists and state parks officials. Tours are guided to keep humans and seals out of each other's reach.

"But they are reproducing so fast, they're running out of room. Soon, I'm sure they'll be showing up on other beaches down the coast," LeBoeuf said.

With tongue in cheek, he called it "The Elephant Seal Menace," and he will give a public affairs lecture talk on them Thursday at a luncheon at the Holiday Inn.

The public needs to know how to act around the animals should they show up, and LeBoeuf is understandably worried over the question of limiting their numbers when there are enough around to cause problems.

"What if an elephant seal bites a child at Cowell's Beach?" he asked. "We want to start thinking ahead before something like that happens."

### Downtown Unit Meets Monday

The Downtown Neighbors Association Monday will discuss the Laurel Community Center, including plans for park development and the traffic pattern, during a regular meeting at 8 p.m. at the YWCA, 303 Walnut Ave.

Third (Seaside) District Supervisor Gary Patton, who represents the area, will discuss matters of concern to area residents.

For more information, call Gil Nordquist, 426-4479.

Humorous encounters already have taken place. One was the appearance of a seal at the 18th hole on Cypress Point—right in the middle of the famed Bing Crosby Golf Tournament. Cameramen abandoned their filming of the golf pros and show business celebrities to take pictures of the puzzled mariner.

There also have been some other instances of beachgoers or homeowners calling police or parks officials to shoot elephant seals on the beach "because they thought they were dying."

Usually not, said LeBoeuf. The males like to sleep on the beach during the summer molting season, and their scruffy appearance with huge chunks of hair peeling off is quite normal. After molting, the seals usually are on their way.

During wintertime, it's the more serious business of breeding and pup-raising. When an area is staked out then, it can be dangerous for humans to approach the rookery.

The population explosion among elephant seals doesn't pose any great problem yet. The animals don't feed on the fish or seafood usually sought by humans. They like squid, small sharks and deep-diving fish.

"About the biggest problem will be competition for beach space," LeBoeuf said.

He wants to generate interest in the problem, though, before

an unhappy incident calls attention to it. "I wouldn't want decisions made in Washington, D.C. like they have been with other marine mammals."

Limiting elephant seal population growth will be a tricky matter. Given public opinion and new laws protecting endangered species, any killing of the animals will be sure to raise an angered outcry.

"I'm sure one of the first attempts will be to move them from an area where they are not wanted," LeBoeuf predicted. But, given their size, not much success is predicted.

"They can be driven off beach areas, but it takes some doing," he added.

Persons interested in attending the luncheon and talk by LeBoeuf are asked to call the UCSC Alumni Office, 429-2530. Cost is \$5.

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Burney LeBoeuf