



ANIA Newsletter

A Publication of the Año Nuevo Interpretive Association

Spring 1984

Season Summary

The 1983-84 elephant seal breeding season that is now concluding was not only perfect as far as the weather but also for seal watchers. With more seals than ever before, and only 10 days of wet weather, docents and visitors alike enjoyed exciting, comfortable tours.

Visitors and guides did not often have to contend with wet clothes, muddy feet, freezing hands or chapped lips. What a difference from last season's continuous rain and gale winds.

Besides terrific viewing weather, the seals cooperated by establishing harems in areas where visitors could view them easily.

The overlook at Pole 1 beach provided a view of three separate harems. Since this is a narrow beach, at the base of high cliffs, it is not considered a very choice location by researchers. Last season, all the pups born here were washed away during the storms that occurred simultaneously with high tides. Luckily that did not happen this year and all of the approximately 25 pups born on this beach reached weaner stage.

Visitors were treated to close-up views of non-breeding bulls, and an occasional yearling, at the beach below the Año Nuevo thrust fault. Often these bulls moved on up to the trail, necessitating tour detours. Many shark attack victims were spotted at the thrust fault beach, also. At least five different males were seen here, at different times, with gaping wounds in their flanks, and one badly torn up yearling's body washed up here.

At the lower end of South Beach (closest to the staging area) a small harem of about eight females was established. Because of the skittish nature of these, mostly young, females tour groups were not allowed to view this group.

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UCSC Program Continues Tradition of Excellence

Thirty-four creative, enthusiastic students from the University of California, Santa Cruz participated in the 1983-84 Elephant Seal Tour Program at Año Nuevo. Each student, carrying on the tradition of a joint UCSC-Department of Parks and Recreation program which began in 1975, volunteered 15 days at the Reserve conducting tours, and attended six evening classes.

The evening classes were student/instructor led seminars coordinated by Dr. Karen Davis of UCSC. Each class featured guest lecturers, as well as student presentations, and time was allotted for students to share their tour problems and experiences.

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Community Docents Invaluable Asset

As the winter season draws to a close at Año Nuevo, I am left with many warm memories of the dedicated and friendly people who helped make this such a successful season.

I don't know of many people who would not enjoy walking amongst a group of fascinating, two-ton seals in a beautiful setting of sand dunes and willows. However, it is the docents (both community and UC) who add the special dimension to this unique experience.

It is the docent who imparts the great deal of information that allows the visitor to understand the role and importance of these seals and to tie them in with the surrounding natural and cultural elements.

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