

November 25, 2008

Del Monte Forest Property Owners
3101 Lake Forest Road
P.O. Box 523
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Dear Friends,

As residents of the Del Monte Forest, we are indeed fortunate to be able to enjoy the presence of marine mammals. California sea lions, Northern elephant seals and Pacific harbor seals all share our beautiful environment. What a wonderful scene....but all is not well.

If you were able to attend our semi-annual meeting on November 16, you had the opportunity to hear from Dr. Jeffrey Boehm and Dr. Frances Gulland from The Marine Mammal Center. I wanted to let you know that the Center will be featured in an episode of NOVA that will air tonight, November 25 at 8PM on PBS stations across the country.

As Dr. Boehm and Dr. Gulland informed us, our oceans are in trouble and the marine mammals are part of the early warning system that is letting us know that we need to take action. The producers of NOVA, a well respected PBS television series, are calling attention to the problem with a program entitled Ocean Animal Emergency. Here's an excerpt from the NOVA website (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ocean911/>) that describes the message that our marine mammals are sending us.

Part emergency room, part rehab facility, and part research lab, the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, California means the difference between life and death for sick and injured ocean animals. NOVA takes you inside this very special ER to witness the efforts of a renowned team of wildlife veterinarians as they fight to save their animal patients as well as to uncover the cause of a mysterious neurological illness plaguing marine mammals like California sea lions and harbor seal pups.

Not only are these animal patients endearing, they are also sending us an urgent message about the health of our oceans. Veterinarians Frances Gulland and Felicia Nutter direct medical treatment at the center. In the late 1990s, Gulland first suspected a link between wrenching neurological symptoms afflicting marine mammals and domoic acid, a neurotoxin produced by algal blooms. Now, Gulland and Nutter work with a team of passionate volunteers to rescue sick and dying animals languishing on beaches. All too many of the animals are victims of the deadly domoic acid poisoning; others are malnourished pups separated from their mothers; and some bear deep scars that are the result of being entangled in plastic trash floating in our oceans.

Veterinarians at the center treat animals using a combination of traditional hands-on care and cutting-edge technology. The goal is to rehabilitate each animal and release it back into the wild.

According to Paula Apsell, NOVA's senior executive producer, the program is much more than the story of these compassionate caretakers. "This documentary focuses on our

changing environment as well as the innovative techniques pioneered at the Marine Mammal Center that are saving aquatic animals around the world."

NOVA travels to Oahu with Dr. Gulland as she applies practices developed at the center to save an endangered Hawaiian monk seal, a species on the brink of extinction. Says producer Hamilton, "With an estimated 1,200 Hawaiian monk seals remaining in the world, the survival of every individual is vital."

Dan Costa, a biologist from the University of California, Santa Cruz, is among the researchers featured in the film. He studies healthy elephant seals in the wild using satellite tags, which are glued to the elephant seals' heads like "electronic yarmulkes," as Costa puts it. Costa's satellite tracking has revealed an extraordinary migration that was previously hidden underwater: Some animals have been shown to make a roundtrip beyond the international dateline, a distance nearly twice the width of the United States. They do it alone every year, and most return to the exact same beach. Dr. Nutter marvels at the elephant seals' annual migration route, "It's like the Serengeti of the sea, but nobody sees it."

The experts interviewed in the film believe that many of the maladies plaguing marine mammals reflect the declining health of our oceans and the profound effect that humans have on the environment. Hamilton describes the nearly 1,000 animals treated each year at the Marine Mammal Center as "canaries in a coal mine." He adds, "We wanted to show the links between human behavior, the deteriorating health of marine mammals, and the destruction of their habitat."

“Ocean Animal Emergency” airs on PBS and PBS-HD tonight, November 25 at 8PM and should be available on-line the following day. We urge you to take the time to watch this interesting and vitally important program.

Every Del Monte Forest resident can play a part in addressing the plight of our oceans and our marine mammals. As we walk along our trails and beaches we can pick up trash (plastic debris, ropes, fishing line, etc). Even the smallest pieces of plastic can be ingested by marine life and injure their digestive system. Sea turtles can make the fatal mistake of ingesting a floating plastic bag, thinking it is a jelly fish. Seals, sea lions and whales can become entangled in fishing lines, ropes and nets. Chemicals washed into the ocean from rivers and storm drains can impact the health of all ocean residents.

The Marine Mammal Center web site (<http://www.marinemammalcenter.org>) contains a wealth of information about how you can help, including how to report injured or stranded marine mammals (415-289-SEAL) and how you can provide financial help to this organization that is primarily supported by contributions from private sources.

Please contact me if you have any questions. Thanks.

Richard Cassam
DMFPO Director