



Pacific Marine Mammal Bulletin #1

Please Keep Your Distance... MOULTING ELEPHANT SEALS

An intimidating sight

A moulting Elephant Seal can be an intimidating sight. Weighing up to 2,300 kg and as long as 5 metres, when this animal moults it may appear to be very sick and may develop "elephant seal skin disease". However, moulting is a natural process and should not be interfered with.



Visits our shores

Elephant seals are regular visitors to the B.C. coast, especially in the spring and summer months. Most elephant seals seen off B.C. shores are adult males or juveniles, whereas females tend to remain further offshore. They can be spotted off Vancouver Island's West Coast, in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and off the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Stuck on land

If you spot a sickly looking elephant seal on land, it is probably moulting. All elephant seals spend one month a year on land to moult; they undergo what is called a "catastrophic moult" in which they shed all of their fur along with the underlying layer of skin. For just over a month, the seal is confined to land and spends most of its time dozing and lazily flipping sand onto itself to stay cool. It doesn't eat and may lose up to 25% of its body weight.

If you see a moulting elephant seal...

Please keep your distance. It may look slow and harmless, but is capable of moving very quickly and could be dangerous if it feels threatened.

To report a marine mammal disturbance or harassment:

Fisheries and Oceans Canada's
Observe, Record, Report (ORR) line

1-800-465-4336

To report a seal that you believe is injured or abandoned:

Vancouver Aquarium's Marine
Mammal Rescue (MMR)

604-258-SEAL (7325)

Island Wildlife Natural Care Centre:
250-357-0777

For more information, call:

Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Pacific Region

General Inquiries:
604-666-0384

www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca