



Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

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Photo: Wade Tregaskis

WILDLIFE VIEWING

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is a world-renowned travel destination for abundant wildlife viewing. Many ocean users, including commercial and private boaters, sport fisherman, kayakers, stand-up paddlers, windsurfers, and scuba divers visit each year to experience the incredible diversity of marine life seen year-round.

There are numerous opportunities to view wildlife from a safe distance while reducing our impacts. Wildlife viewers should not disturb, harass, or cause animals to change their natural behavior.



Photo: Wade Tregaskis

Ocean users, including kayakers, should encounter sanctuary wildlife from a safe distance.

Many of the most popular viewed marine animals, including whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions, are protected by federal law under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. Some species, including sea otters and sea turtles, are also protected by the Endangered Species Act.

The recommended guidelines presented here do not replace federal or state law. Before visiting, know the regulations for viewing marine protected species in their habitats. See NOAA regulations: 50 CFR Sections 216.11, 216.19, and 15 CFR 922.184.



MONTEREY BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Designated in 1992, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is one of the largest federal marine protected areas in the National Marine Sanctuary System, encompassing 6,094 square miles of ocean and 276 miles of shore-line length.

The sanctuary contains diverse ecosystems, including deep underwater canyons, rugged rocky shores, extensive kelp forests, wave-swept sandy beaches, and tranquil estuaries. Known as the "Serengeti of the Sea," the sanctuary harbors an incredible variety of marine life, including at least 36 species of marine mammals, 525 species of fishes, 180 species of seabirds and shorebirds, and an abundance of invertebrates and algae.

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FOLLOW GUIDELINES

Keep your distance and remain at least **100 yards** (300 feet) from whales and at least **50 yards** (150 feet) from dolphins, porpoises, seals, sea lions, and sea turtles.

Avoid flying drones, or unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), near animals. The noise and close proximity of drones can harass the animals and cause stress.

All vessel operators should:

- Stay alert and look ahead for signs of whales that can surface suddenly ahead of your path.
- Put your vessel in neutral if a nearby whale is feeding or resting as whales are sensitive to engine noise.
- Operate at no-wake speed or match the speed of the slowest whale.
- Be wary of breaching and flipper-slapping whales that might injure passengers or your vessel.
- Minimize sudden, unnecessary maneuvers and avoid excessive or sudden changes in your speed or direction near whales.
- Never drive through groups of whales.
- Communicate with other vessel operators nearby to minimize whale disturbance.
- Limit your observing time to 30 minutes or less.
- Be aware that cumulative impacts may occur. Your vessel may not be the only one to have recently approached the same whales.
- Slowly steer your vessel away when leaving, as there may be other unseen whales nearby.

Acceptable Boat Maneuvers



Slowly approach parallel at least 100 yards away.



All vessels remain on one side of a whale only.

Unacceptable Boat Maneuvers



Never approach a whale head-on.



Never follow from behind or "leap frog" ahead.



Never approach or follow parallel along both sides.



Never surround a whale with multiple vessels.



Never entrap a whale along the shore.



Never place your vessel between a mother and calf.



TAKE CAUTION

Watch for Signs of Whale Disturbance

Cautiously leave the area if you observe:

- **Evasive behavior** – swimming erratically, swimming rapidly away, or prolonged dives.
- **Defensive behavior** – female shielding calf.
- **Vocalizations** – trumpeting through their blowhole.

Avoid Whale Collisions and Entanglements

Ship strikes: Collisions between whales and vessels can occur, often with serious risks to boaters as well as to whales. Take precautions to avoid collisions and follow the guidelines.

Whale entanglements: Whales can become entangled in the lines and buoys of fishing gear. Entanglement may cause physical trauma, infections, and may lead to ship strikes since the whale is less mobile.

To help an entangled whale:



Call – the Entanglement Reporting Hotline: 1 877-SOS-WHAL or 1-877-767-9425 or hail the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF radio Ch.16.



Monitor – from at least a 100 yard distance, note the time of sighting, direction of whale travel, and location coordinates. Document the entanglement with photos if possible.



Stay in your boat – never get into the water, touch, or attempt to free a whale. Removing lines or buoys diminishes the chances of freeing the whale of all entangled gear. Wait for trained, authorized personnel to respond.



TAKE ACTION

Report Incidents and Violations

Report marine mammal harassments
NOAA Enforcement Hotline: 1-800-853-1964

Report entangled whales
Entanglement Reporting Hotline:
1-877-SOS-WHAL or 1-877-767-9425
U.S. Coast Guard: VHF Ch.16

Report derelict fishing gear
Derelict Gear Hotline: 1-855-542-3935

Report dead, injured, or stranded marine mammals or sea turtles
NOAA Fisheries West Coast Stranding Hotline:
1-866-767-6114

Responses to marine mammals in distress are coordinated and authorized by NOAA Fisheries. Do not feed, or attempt to feed, any marine mammals. It's harmful and illegal.

Use the Ocean Alert app



Support ocean conservation with Ocean Alert, a mobile data collection app. Report sightings of marine animals, including sea turtles, sharks, and whales in real time to alert others nearby to slow down or avoid a protected species. Download for free in app stores.



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