

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 1, 2013

Año Nuevo State Park
(650) 879-2025

ELEPHANT SEAL GUIDED WALKS AT AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK

Guided walks to see the elephant seals at Año Nuevo State Park will begin this year on December 15, 2013, and continue every day through March 31, 2014.

AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK, home to one of the largest Northern Elephant Seal colonies in the northern hemisphere, is located west of Highway 1, between the cities of Santa Cruz and Half Moon Bay, approximately a 1 ½ hour drive south from San Francisco. Adult seals begin arriving on the beaches by mid-December. Bulls weighing up to 5,000 pounds engage in battles for breeding access to the females. Pregnant females come ashore to have pups beginning in mid-December, with births reaching a peak by late January. Mothers nurse their pups for about a month before weaning them, mating, and departing back to sea. Birthing and mating activity peak by mid-February; and by early March, most adult seals have returned to the sea. In March, hundreds of weaned pups remain behind to rest in the dunes and learn to swim in the tide pools.

During the guided walks, docents lead visitors among the huge marine mammals and explain both the story of the elephant seals and the other natural and cultural history of the area. These popular three-mile walks over rolling sand dunes and sloping terrain last about two and one-half hours and are considered moderately strenuous.

Reservations are recommended for these popular guided walks. **Public Seal Walks** are offered daily for families, individuals, or groups. **School Group Walks** are offered Monday through Friday mornings for grades 1 through 12. Individuals with accessible needs can qualify for special **Equal Access Walks**. People who hope to see the seals during the winter breeding season are urged to get their reservations early.

No public walks will be held on the December 25 (Christmas) or during the Seal Adventure Weekend special event being held on Saturday, January 25 and Sunday, January 26 (read more about this event below).

Guided Walks are conducted rain or shine. Visitors should prepare for an outdoor hiking adventure that may include high winds, heavy rains, and cold temperatures. Recommended clothing includes hooded rain gear, layered clothing, and sturdy walking shoes. For safety reasons, use of umbrellas and baby strollers are not permitted on the walks. Food and beverages are not sold at the Park, but picnic tables are available for use before or after guided walks. It is advisable to bring bottled drinking water on the tour.

Making Reservations

Reservations for Guided Walks can be made through Reserve America by calling 1-800-444-4445 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on weekends from October 1 through February 28—except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily from December 18 through December 31. From March 1 through September 30, reservations can be made 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

Public Walk Reservations

Public Seal Walk reservations will be accepted beginning October 20, 2013, up to 56 days in advance, or as late as one day prior to the reservation date. Public Seal Walk reservations can also be made online at the Año Nuevo link at www.parks.ca.gov, or by calling Reserve America at 1-800-444-4445.

Public Seal Walk tickets cost \$7.00 per person. Children 3 and under are free. The entrance fee to the Park is \$10.00 per car, paid upon arrival. There are no ticket refunds or exchanges for cancellations, no shows, weather, or late arrivals. Refunds are issued only when the Park staff must cancel a walk.

School Group Walk Reservations

Reservations for school groups may be made beginning at 9 a.m. on Saturday October 5, 2013, for any dates during the season. School Group tickets cost \$21.00 each and can only be made by calling Reserve America at 1-800-444-4445. This allows entry for up to 20 students with two adult chaperones. One chaperone is required for every 10 youths 17 years or under. There is no Day Use entrance fee for school groups that arrive with reservations. There is a limit of four School Group Walk tickets per call.

Equal Access Walk Reservations

Individuals with accessible needs may make reservations for special Equal Access Guided Walks. Equal Access walks are available January 1 through March 31, on weekends only. Reservations are required at least two weeks in advance. Tickets cost \$7.00 per person. Reservations may be made by dialing (650) 879-2033 beginning December 2.

Seal Adventure Weekend

On Saturday and Sunday, January 25 and 26, 2014, the Coastside State Parks Association (CSPA) and California State Parks will host Seal Adventure Weekend, a special fundraising

event to support educational and interpretive programs at Año Nuevo State Park and other State Parks along the San Mateo coast.

For one weekend only, visitors will have extraordinary access to linger for an entire morning (8:30-12:00) or afternoon (1:30-5:00) to view the elephant seals at the peak of the breeding season. This is a rare opportunity, one that can be enjoyed by everyone—from families to avid wildlife photographers.

Seal Adventure Weekend tickets will be available for sale online at (www.CoastsideStateParks.org), starting in mid-November. Tickets are \$60 per person; children under 2 admitted free. The number of tickets is limited; only 100 visitors will be allowed to register for each half-day session.

All money from ticket sales will be used to support interpretive and educational programs at Año Nuevo and other State Parks on the San Mateo coast. The cost of the tickets is tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law, as a donation to CSPA, a 501(c)3 nonprofit that supports the State Parks along the San Mateo coast.

The Elephant Seal viewing area will be closed except for official guided walks from December 1 - March 31. Since 1975, similar closures and guided walk programs have allowed a natural development of the elephant seal herd. The mainland herd has increased during that time from only 35 males to more than 5,400 animals, including the birth of more than 1,800 pups.

For more information on the elephant seal, the guided walk program and other features of the Park, dial the Park at (650) 879-2025 or (650) 879-0227 for recorded information. Visit the Park's web site at www.parks.ca.gov and Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Ano.Nuevo.State.Park>