

The Marine Mammal Care Center **2023 IMPACT REPORT**



The Impact of Community

Reflections from Marine Mammal Care Center CEO John Warner

From an unprecedented mass-stranding crisis to marking milestones in patient care, 2023 was quite a year. When I reflect on the impact we made together, I'm struck by the importance of community.

During the domoic acid outbreak that caused hundreds of sea lions to strand on our beaches, it was our compassionate community who stepped up to make second chances possible. And with the strong partnerships we built together, we're now better prepared for the next crisis.

Through our Teaching Hospital and collaborative research projects, we're contributing to the scientific community and training the next generation of marine mammal experts.

Our new exhibits and educational programming are helping us welcome the community to our hospital space and bridge the gap between what's happening with our patients and how to take conservation action in your everyday life.

Throughout this report, you'll see the faces of our staff and volunteers who dedicate their time, expertise and heart to the Center's mission. But I hope you also see your own impact – because none of this life-saving work would be possible without you.

Our Board

Elizabeth Kendrick | *Chair*

Frederick Felman | *Treasurer*

Elizabeth Schindler Johnson | *Secretary*

Donna Dutcher

Dr. Tammy Da Costa Gomez

Lisa Jordan

Elaine Wah



Our Mission

Inspiring ocean conservation through marine animal rescue, rehabilitation, education, and research.

Our Goals

- Advance the field of marine mammal health and care.
- Strengthen the conservation and protection of marine mammals.
- Inspire and equip people to take actions that protect marine mammals and the ocean.



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Over the course of nearly two decades, I've seen the threats to these animals increase, from entanglements in ocean trash to the impacts of warming waters. Your support has enabled the Marine Mammal Care Center to respond to this growing need by providing expert care and a safe space for sick and injured seals and sea lions to recover.

— Dr. Lauren Palmer, Hospital Director

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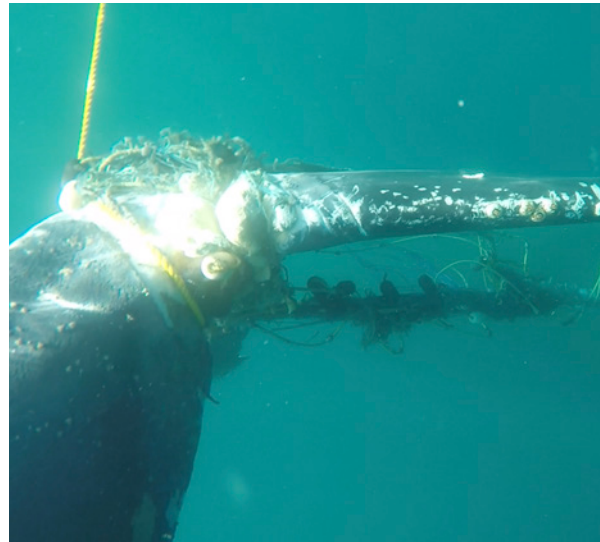


Rescue & Response

After 32 years of focusing primarily on rehabilitation, in 2023 the Marine Mammal Care Center launched a rescue and response program and hired a team of experienced responders. Over the course of the year, the Center received more than 3,000 reports of animals in distress in Los Angeles County.

In addition to performing more than 40 special rescue operations in response to entangled marine mammals, the Center's response experts joined NOAA's Large Whale Entanglement Response Network and attended multiple on-water training events.

During responses, the Center's experts engaged beachgoers in crucial conversations about the importance of marine mammal conservation and the Center's mission.



**WE RESPONDED TO
MORE THAN 600
ANIMALS, INCLUDING
MARINE MAMMALS
AND SEA BIRDS.**

Trapped in Plastic:

California Sea Lion Merci

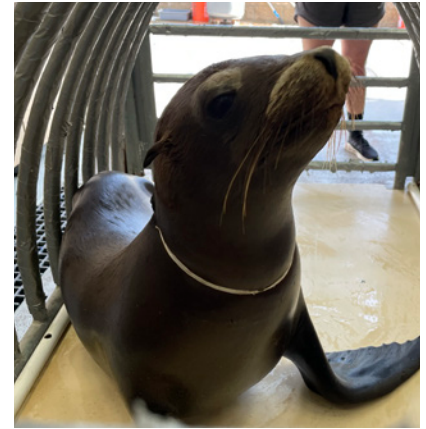
One-year-old California sea lion Merci was found with a plastic packing strap digging into her neck. She was huddled alongside a group of other sea lions on a large red buoy off the coast of Point Fermin, but was easy to spot with the thin, white ring around her neck.

After approaching the buoy slowly in a small inflatable boat, the Marine Mammal Care Center's rescue team was able to catch Merci in a net and transport her to our hospital.

Once Merci arrived, **our veterinary experts were able to remove the plastic packing strap**. It was a full inch smaller than the circumference of her neck and had already started cutting into her skin.

Entanglements like these are especially dangerous for young animals like Merci who are still growing. Without help, the plastic strap would have gotten tighter by the day, eventually becoming life-threatening.

Merçi still has a visible scar around her neck but is otherwise healthy and was able to **return to the wild with a second chance at life**, entanglement-free.





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The most fulfilling aspect of the job is witnessing an animal's entire journey. Working on both the rescue and rehabilitation sides, I've had the privilege of rescuing several animals, aiding in their health progress during rehabilitation, and ultimately releasing them back into the ocean. This job reveals the profound impact that time and care can have on a life, and that's a beautiful thing to be a part of.

— Jules Léon, Marine Mammal Responder

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Animal Care

Over the course of 2023, the Marine Mammal Care Center admitted 329 marine mammals to its hospital facility for care and treatment. These patients ranged in age from pups to adults and included California sea lions, northern elephant seals, Pacific harbor seals and northern fur seals.

In 2023, the Center's animal care experts increased diagnostic testing to help identify patients affected by terrestrial parasites like *Toxoplasma* and *Sarcocystis*. Our veterinary team also gained insights into the treatment of severely ill patients with *Leptospirosis*, a bacterial infection, helping us to better manage animals with this disease.



THE MARINE MAMMAL CARE CENTER HAS TREATED **MORE THAN 10,000 PATIENTS** SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1992.

A Milestone Patient:

California Sea Lion Timmi

When adult California sea lion Timmi arrived at our hospital, she became the 10,000th patient to be treated by the Marine Mammal Care Center.

Timmi was suffering from sarcocystosis, a deadly infection caused by a parasite that can lead to systemic muscle damage if not treated.

While she was being treated for the sarcocystosis, Timmi developed a case of poxvirus, a fairly common infection that causes skin lesions. She then started to develop blistering around her face that resulted in hair loss more severe than anything our experts have ever seen.

Although we can't be sure exactly what caused the blistering, after months of supportive care, Timmi's health improved. Though she still bears some scars and small patches of missing fur, she was able to return to the wild with a second chance at life.



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Being able to save the lives of seals and sea lions has changed my life. Each one of our patients has taught me so much about how special these ocean animals are and how important it is to protect them.

— *Megan Wier, Veterinary Technician*

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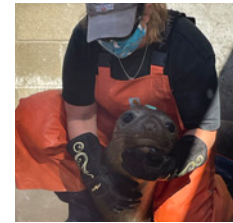


Research

The Marine Mammal Care Center's experts **advanced two independent research projects focused on marine mammal medicine and conservation**, and collaborated with regional stranding partners and ocean scientists on a summary paper focused on the domoic acid event of 2022.

One project focused on raising early-weaned pups (under six months of age) **with the goal of returning them back to their natural environment**.

Another project focused on the use of proportional anatomy to **aid best practices during tube-feeding and intubation** for anesthesia. For young animals like harbor seal and elephant seal pups who are not yet able to eat whole fish, tube-feeding is a vital tool for ensuring they receive the nutrition they need to recover.



The Center's research on early-weaned pups **advances conservation goals by establishing a scientific basis** for rehabilitation of this young age group.

A Blind Pup:

Harbor Seal Elmer

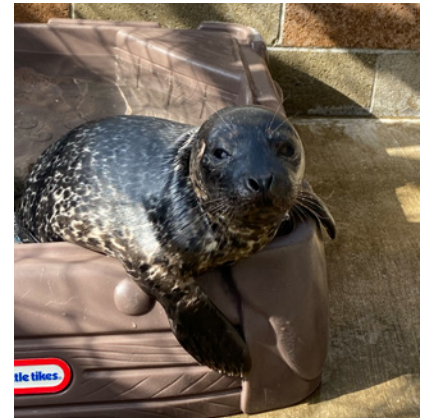
Spotted alone on the beach, harbor seal pup Elmer still had his umbilical cord when he was rescued, so we knew he was only a few days old — **much too young to be without his mother and extremely malnourished.**

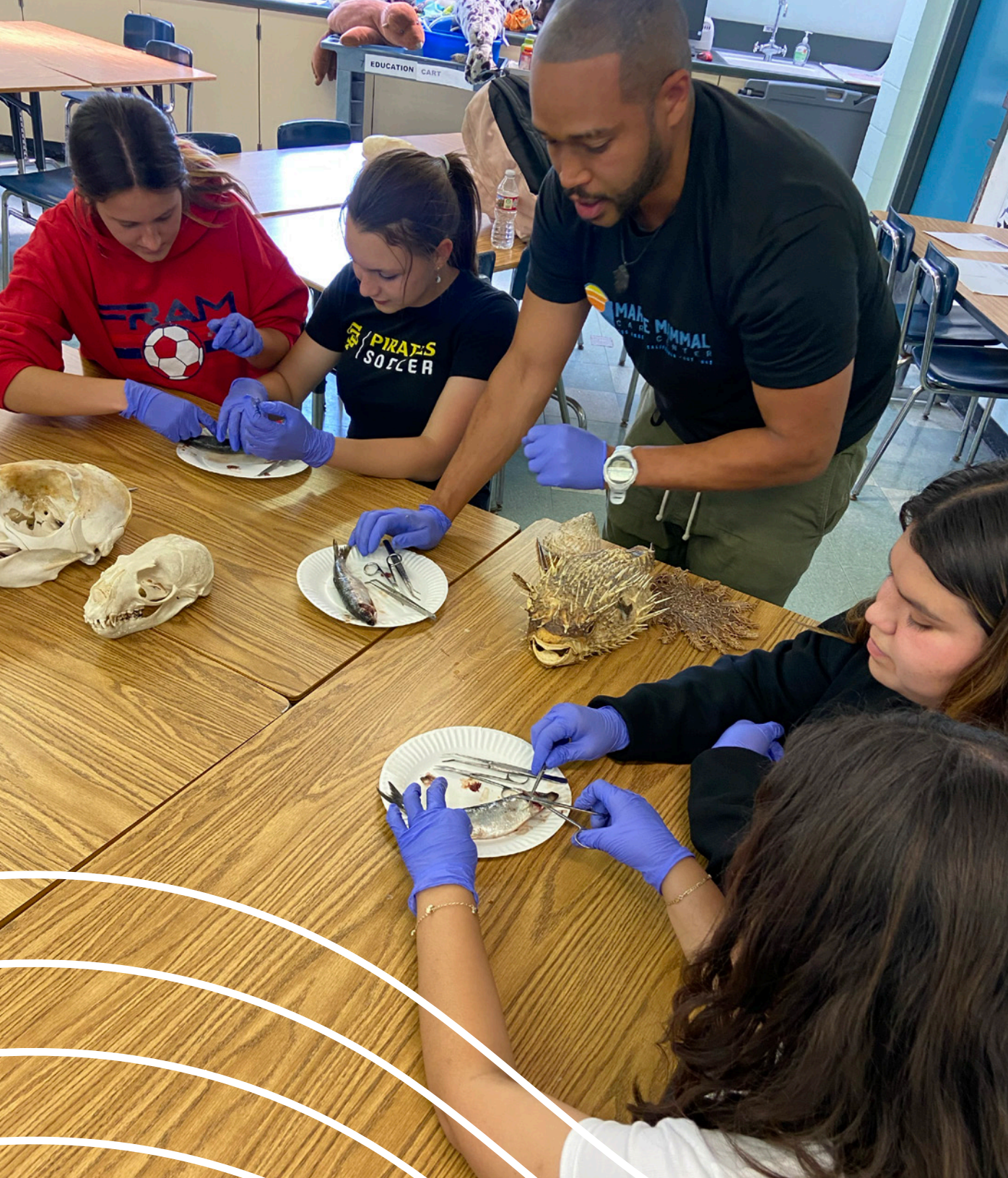
Newborn harbor seals receive all of their nutrition as well as important antibodies from their mother's milk. That's why **orphaned pups like Elmer require specialized care**, like tube-feedings of formula several times a day as well as antibiotics to protect them while their immune systems develop.

But as Elmer got older, it became clear that something wasn't quite right. **Unlike other seals his age, he had no interest in or ability to catch fish** — a key skill he would need to survive on his own.

During an examination, **our veterinary experts determined that he had developed bilateral cataracts, rendering him blind in both eyes.** Knowing that returning to the wild wouldn't be a viable option, our partners at NOAA led a search to find a permanent home for Elmer where he could **continue to receive the specialized care he would need to thrive.**

In his new home at Bahia Resort San Diego, Elmer joined two other visually impaired harbor seals who stranded as pups and together they share a large outdoor pool with many rocks and alcoves.





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Those who become champions for our ocean often find their inspiration in experiences like those provided by the Marine Mammal Care Center. As students immerse themselves in our programs, we are not just teaching, but also sowing the seeds for the next generation of ocean heroes.

— *Dave Bader, Chief Operations
& Education Officer*

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Education

In 2023, the Center developed a new visitor experience focused on learner-centric engagements, interactive exhibits, informational signage and immersive murals. One new feature, an interactive pledge wall with a “share the shore” call to action, averaged 300 pledges per month made by onsite visitors.

More than 2,000 Los Angeles Unified School District students participated in the Center’s STEM-aligned field trip program. And an additional 3,800 students engaged in marine mammal conservation-focused learning during onsite visits.



More than 15,000 people visited the Marine Mammal Care Center and interacted with docents while learning about ocean conservation and marine mammal rehabilitation.





Plagued by a Parasite that Travels from Land to Sea: *California Sea Lion Lisbon*

One-year-old California sea lion Lisbon was found on the beach at Portuguese Bend lethargic, emaciated and covered in abrasions. After two months her wounds had healed and she had gained a healthy amount of weight, but her fight was just beginning.

A blood sample revealed Lisbon was battling a parasite called *Toxoplasma* that can cause fatal brain infections in marine mammals, including threatened and endangered species like sea otters and Hawaiian monk seals. This land-based parasite can also affect pets and humans. The most common sources are domestic cats and wild animals like bobcats and cougars.

When cat droppings containing the parasite are washed out to sea, they can contaminate marine animals that are eventually eaten by sea lions like Lisbon, making them sick — an important reminder that **what we do on land can have an impact on the health of our ocean and marine mammals.**

Lisbon was treated with medication to fight the *Toxoplasma* and was able to return to the wild after about three months in care.



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This hands-on experience taught me a logical approach to medicine and how to run a clinic. It really solidified what I want to do in the future: I've always loved animals, but I think it's even better to be able to help species that have been affected so greatly by human interference.

— *Dr. Emily Rue, Associate Veterinary Fellow and Teaching Hospital Participant*

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Teaching Hospital

The Marine Mammal Care Center serves as a vital training ground providing hands-on practical experience for students who will go on to become future leaders in the field of marine mammal health and medicine.

Teaching Hospital participants in 2023 included eight veterinary students who **gained required and valuable clinical experience** and 11 animal care interns who each spent 300 hours supporting the rehabilitation of admitted patients.

Our animal care experts also recruited and accepted our first full-year Associate Veterinary Fellow who gained valuable clinical marine mammal medical experience.

Hospital Director Dr. Lauren Palmer, DVM, was appointed Clinical Associate Professor of Veterinary Medicine at Western University of Health Sciences for her participation in the education of veterinary medical students.



The Marine Mammal Care Center **accepted 20 Teaching Hospital applicants who commit anywhere from four to eight weeks learning and working** alongside our experienced team of veterinary and animal husbandry professionals.

Teaching Hospital

Success Story:

Dr. Emily Rue

Veterinarian Dr. Emily Rue first arrived at the Marine Mammal Care Center's Teaching Hospital as a veterinary extern gaining experience in marine mammal husbandry and medicine for four weeks before returning to school to finish her veterinary degree.

Dr. Rue's externship was her **first real hands-on experience with marine mammals**, giving her **valuable training in everything from handling skills like restraining and tubing to a better understanding of how to run a clinic** and what's needed in terms of patient management.

Although the externship was only four weeks long, it was **enough to solidify what she wanted to do in the future: focus on wildlife rehabilitation**. And that's exactly what she did after graduating, when she returned as the Center's first full-year Associate Veterinary Fellow, working alongside Hospital Director Dr. Lauren Palmer.

After her year-long fellowship, Dr. Rue will continue on this path as a veterinary intern in small animal medicine in West Los Angeles.





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The Marine Mammal Care Center was the very first volunteer opportunity I had when I moved to Los Angeles. I am currently working on my marine biology degree and am passionate about all things marine conservation related, so I jumped when the opportunity arose to volunteer during the domoic acid crisis last summer. It meant more hands and help going into one incredible cause ... our local marine mammals.

— *Morgan Rae Furno, Volunteer*

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OVER THE COURSE
OF THE YEAR,
285 VOLUNTEERS
CONTRIBUTED A
TOTAL OF 26,550
HOURS OF SERVICE
TOWARD THE
CENTER'S MISSION.

Our Volunteer Community

Volunteers play important roles in all aspects of the Marine Mammal Care Center's life-saving work, from caring for animals to educating visitors to supporting release events.

In 2023, the Center launched Pinniped Patrol, a new program deploying trained volunteers to beaches and harbors throughout Los Angeles County to engage the public and respond to stranded marine mammals until Center staff are able to arrive.



Freed from a Deadly Entanglement:

California Sea Lion Baxter

California sea lion Baxter was spotted by Charles Foster, an avid kayaker who often saw sea lions resting on the Redondo Beach barge during his weekly paddles. But then he noticed something alarming: **one-year-old Baxter was entangled in a gillnet.** Charles called the Marine Mammal Care Center for help.

Although the thin, plastic line was starting to cut into her skin, Baxter was still strong enough to evade multiple rescue attempts over the course of several weeks before she was finally brought to our hospital for treatment.

After carefully removing the fishing line, the Center's veterinary team wrapped Baxter's neck wound in bandages and **gave her the supportive care needed** to aid in recovery. Within a month, Baxter's neck had healed enough for her to return to the wild.

Inspired by Baxter's story, Charles began training to become an animal care volunteer at the Marine Mammal Care Center **so that he could provide hands-on support to the next animal in need.**



“

I am so grateful for the many ways our compassionate community stepped up during the unprecedented domoic acid stranding event we faced in 2023.

From generous donors and volunteers to city and county leadership to members of the public who called our hotline, none of that life-saving work would have been possible. And with the strong partnerships we built together, we're now prepared to tackle the next crisis.

— John Warner, CEO

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An Unprecedented Domoic Acid Outbreak

In the summer of 2023, hundreds of California sea lions were sickened by a harmful algal bloom, which produced a toxin called domoic acid that affects the brain, heart and liver.

For more than seven weeks, these animals washed up on the beaches of Los Angeles weak, lethargic and suffering from violent seizures—sometimes a dozen a day.

At the height of the crisis, the Center, in partnership with LA County, created a first-of-its-kind resting zone on Venice Beach for sea lions suffering from the toxin.

Over the course of the outbreak, the Center was able to recruit significant volunteer support, including 300 Pinniped Patrol volunteers who contributed 4,000 hours of service helping keep the public safe and informed during the crisis. More than 40 animal care professionals from around the country also contributed their time.



DURING THE DOMOIC ACID OUTBREAK, THE CENTER ADMITTED **MORE THAN 120 ADULT CALIFORNIA SEA LIONS** OVER THE COURSE OF SEVEN WEEKS.



A Crisis on Our Coastline:

California Sea Lion AngeLA

AngeLA is an adult female California sea lion who first stranded on Redondo Beach. Although the visible scarring around her neck from a previous entanglement is jarring, it was not the cause of her distress that day.

Instead, our team observed that AngeLA was lethargic and having seizures, signs that she was suffering from the effects of the record-breaking toxic algal bloom occurring off the coast. AngeLA needed to be rescued, but the toxin had already affected so many sea lions in the area that our hospital was full and could not take any new patients.

Thankfully, our Los Angeles Unified School District neighbors **worked with us to expand our hospital capacity during this crisis by building a triage space** in the Center's parking lot where we could provide patients with the medications, meals and space they needed to recover.

Four days after she initially stranded, AngeLA was one of the first patients to be rescued and cared for in that space. And six weeks later, **she was able to be released back to her ocean home.**



Financials

The Marine Mammal Care Center is honored to be a trusted organization.

Guidestar Platinum Seal of Transparency

This recognition shows a nonprofit's commitment to transparency, allowing potential donors and funders to make educated decisions. The Platinum Seal is the highest possible rating on Guidestar.

Great Nonprofits Top-Rated Nonprofit

These ratings come from donors, volunteers and others who have experienced the nonprofit's impact firsthand.

Charity Navigator Four Star Charity

This recognition comes from third-party accreditation that validates our organization's operational excellence. Four Star Charity is the highest possible rating on Charity Navigator.

1% for the Planet

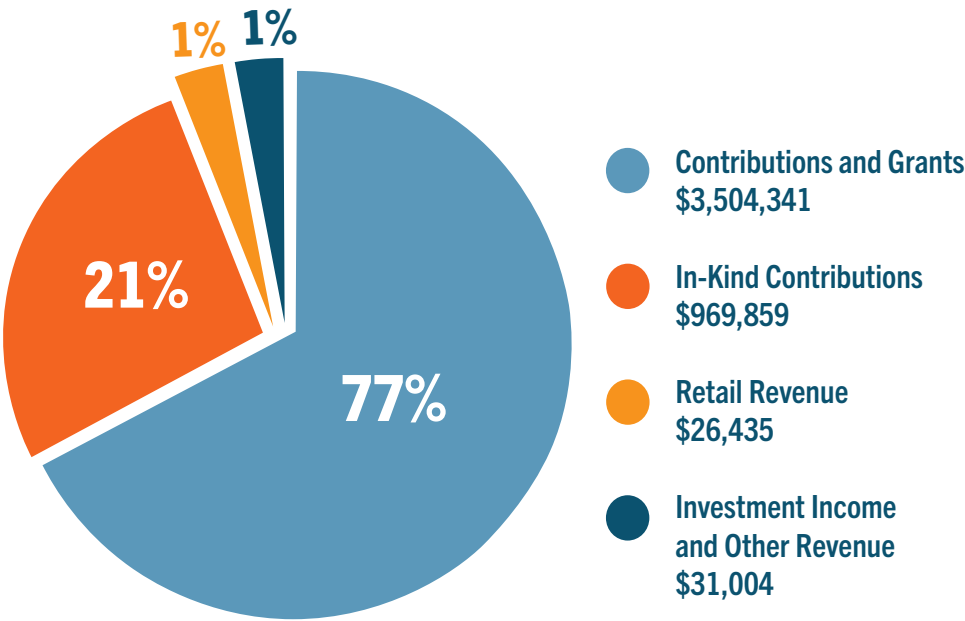
The Marine Mammal Care Center is a vetted Environmental Partner in a global network with thousands of businesses and environmental organizations working together to support people and the planet.



Financials for FY2023

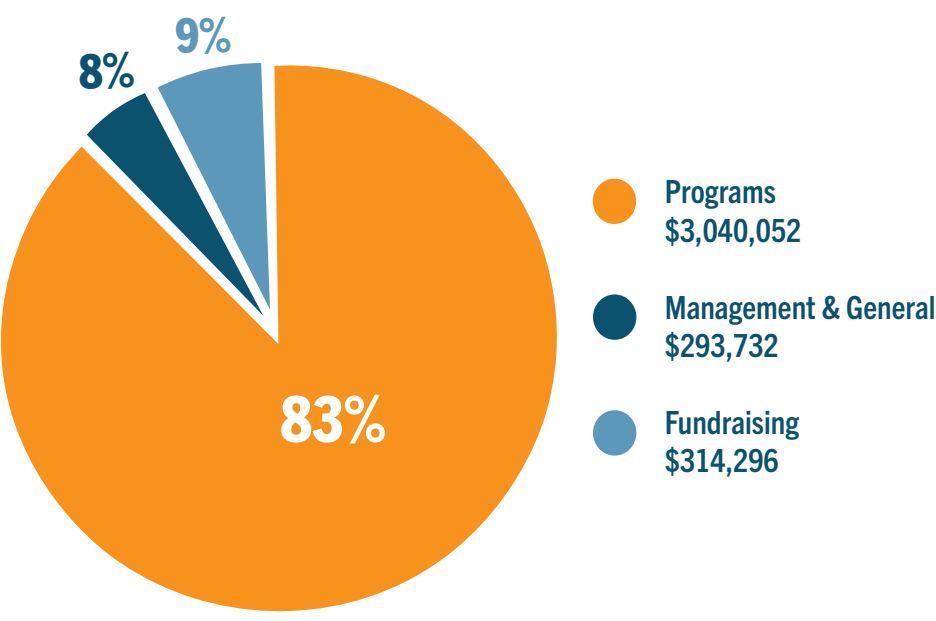
The Marine Mammal Care Center’s life-saving work is made possible through the support of generous people like you.

Support & Revenue



Total Support and Revenue: \$4,531,639

Expenses



Total Expenses: \$3,648,080

Change in Net Assets: \$883,559
Transfer to Reserves: \$883,559
Net Impact: \$0

Audited financials for 2023 are available at MarineMammalCare.org/financials

Take Action and Make an Impact

Your everyday actions can have an impact on the health of our ocean and marine mammals. From what you do with your waste to making your voice heard and voting, **your choices matter.**



Use your voice and vote with the environment in mind. Discuss the importance of conservation with friends, neighbors and local leadership, and research candidates' stances on the topic before heading to the polls.



Eat more plants by going meatless at least one day a week. A hamburger patty made of ground beef has a carbon footprint that's eight to 10 times higher than one made with chicken and around 20 times higher than a vegetarian version.



Reduce, reuse, THEN recycle. Reducing what you buy and making sure you reuse what you already have goes a long way in helping our environment. Recycling is an important last step.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead

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