

Shoreline Education for Awareness, Inc. (SEA)

Founded 1990. SEA is Friends of the Southern Oregon Coastal National Wildlife Refuges. Docents provide information through interpretation at Simpson Reef, other wildlife viewing locations, brochures, campfire "talks," and intertidal guided walks for schools and the public from Memorial Day to Labor Day. During other months, these services are provided by appointment when docents are available. ■



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Friends of Shore Acres, Inc. (FoSA)

Founded in 1986, this private non-profit tax-exempt cooperative provides educational and interpretive services for Shore Acres State Park and other parks in the Sunset Bay State Park Management Unit. ■



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Simpson Reef & Shell Island * Cape Arago



Marine mammals and seabirds loafing on the rocks adjacent to Shell Island. Photo by: Dave Ledig/USFWS.

Wildlife viewing at its best

* **Simpson Reef and Shell Island are within Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge.**

The offshore rocks, islands and reefs provide breeding and resting areas for seabirds and marine mammals.

PLEASE REMEMBER: To help protect sensitive wildlife, all coastal rocks surrounded by water at mean high tide are closed to the public. ■

Northern Elephant Seal

These seals can be seen at Cape Arago all months of the year with peak numbers occurring in the spring.



Photo by Frank Balthus

Sometimes mistaken for logs, they lie on the beach in front of Shell Island, often right up against the base of the island.

Most are young (1-4 yrs.) and were born at Ano Nuevo, between San Francisco and Monterey, California. They haul out at Cape Arago to rest and molt where they lose not only their fur, but the upper layers of their skin. During this 3 week process, they do not eat or drink.

The Northern Elephant Seal is the largest of the seal family and the deepest diving mammal, having been recorded to depths of over 4,000 feet. They spend much of their lives at sea where they feed on hake, sharks, rays, ratfish, and deep water squid. ■

Male – up to 2 1/2 tons, 15'+ in length
Female – up to 1200 lbs., 10' in length
Pup – approx. 75 lbs. at birth with black coat
Born in January and February

Osprey

The Osprey has a chocolate-brown back and upper wings and a mostly white breast. It also has a diagnostic dark line that starts at its eye and sweeps back. Ospreys are the continent's only raptors that eat almost exclusively live fish.



Photo by Frank Balthus

They dive feet first for fish and if successful are often harassed by bald eagles looking to steal an easy meal. Ospreys return to the Oregon coast each spring to breed, often using the same nest. The mated pair usually lay three eggs in a nest made of sticks. In October, after their chicks have fledged, Ospreys migrate south to Mexico for the non-breeding season. ■

Harbor Seal

Harbor seals are year round residents. You'll see them on the outer reef and on Shell Island and the rocks behind the island. They are light to dark gray with contrasting spots.



Photo by Dave Ledig

Harbor seals give birth in this area in the spring. During this period, the pregnant females and the pups use different areas to rest. For this reason, the path to the north cove of Cape Arago is closed to the public from March 1 through June 30.

Harbor seal pups can swim at birth. They nurse for about three weeks, then are weaned and no longer cared for by their mother. They eat a large variety of fish caught in the local area. ■

Male/female – approx. 250-400 lbs.
Length – about 5'
Pup – approx. 25-35 lbs. at birth
Born in April and May

Pelagic Cormorant

These black seabirds have white patches on their thighs that can be seen during the breeding season.

They build their nests on the ledges of Shell Island. Look for 2 or 3 chicks in the nest in July. The chicks feed by putting their heads into the adult's throat to retrieve fish. They make their nests out of seaweed and hold it together with their guano. ■

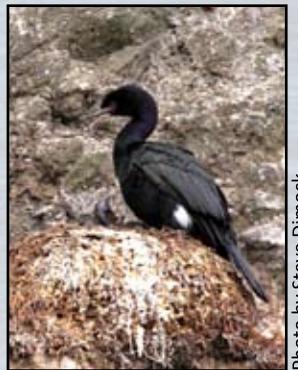


Photo by Steve Dimock

Gray Whale



When you look out beyond Simpson Reef, you may see a whale blow.

Almost all the large whales that come close to shore in Oregon are gray whales. About forty-five feet long as adults, these whales breed and give birth in the lagoons of Baja, California in the winter.

From March to June they swim close to Cape Arago as they travel to Alaskan waters for their summer feeding season. A few of the younger whales will stay around the Oregon coast for the summer and often can be seen feeding out beyond Simpson Reef.

From December to February you can again see whales swimming past the Cape as they head for the Baja breeding lagoons.

When gray whales feed on the abundant bottom-dwelling crustaceans known as “amphipods”, they use their long fringe-like baleen, which hangs from the roof of their mouths, to scoop up sediment from the bottom of the ocean and strain out the burrowing animals.

If you look with binoculars, you will see that the gray whale has a very blotchy skin. Barnacles, about two inches in diameter, grow in patches on the whale’s skin giving the whale a mottled appearance. ■

Mature length – about 45’
Weight – approx. 45 tons
Calf length – about 15’
Average weight – 1 ton

California Sea Lion

As their name implies, these animals spend much of their time in California where they breed in the summer months. At the end of the breeding season, male California sea lions leave the breeding grounds and migrate north, arriving at Cape Arago in early August. Many of them continue north as far as British Columbia. The females and their pups remain in California. Large numbers of males (1,500-2,000) haul out at Cape Arago during the late summer and fall. Smaller numbers are present in the winter and then increase as they migrate back south in the spring.



Photo by Frank Balthus

When dry, California sea lions are chocolate brown and many of the older males have a noticeable sun-bleached bump on their head. This bony crest on the skull grows larger as the sea lion ages. Often, they are seen on Shell Island and on the same rocks as the Steller sea lion. During their peak numbers in the fall, they lie out on any rock they can find. **These are the animals that make the barking sound.** The other seals and sea lions make few sounds during the non-breeding season. ■

Male – approx. 500-750 lbs., about 8 ft.
Female – approx. 200-400 lbs., about 6 ft.
Pup – approx. 35 lbs. at birth in June

Steller Sea Lion



Photo by Dave Ledig

Also known as the Northern Sea Lion, this is the largest of the sea lions. They breed in Oregon during the summer, but not at Cape Arago.

They use this area as a haul-out site during the non-breeding season. Often they can be seen on the northern rocks of Simpson Reef, on the large pointed rock to the north of Shell Island, and on the beach at Shell Island. When dry, they are light sandy brown in color. Like all sea lions, adult males are 3 to 4 times larger than females. ■

Male – 1 ton+ and 10’ in length
Female – approx. 600 lbs. and 7’ in length
Pup – approx. 40 lbs. and silver black at birth
Born in June and July

Black Oystercatcher

These birds are year round residents. The brilliant red bill of this black shorebird is not just for decoration.



Photo by Susan Dimock

It’s an important tool used to open mussels found in the intertidal area.

As the oystercatchers fly over Shell Island, listen for their shrill call. ■

