

Neonatal Harbor Seal ID

Newborn Pup Photography

San Francisco Bay (Amy
Bohorguez) and Sea Ranch
(Anne Chadwick)

Why Identify Neonates?

- Perched lagoon this year is being created for salmonids
- Heavy equipment will go out on the bar to maintain a low wide outflow
- We need to establish when pups are being born to protect the young by delaying the onset of construction



Jamie
Hall

Look For These Neonatal Field Marks (Sarah Allen)

- Umbilicus still attached
 - Umbilicus darkens, drops off after around 3 days
- Wrinkling of the skin
 - Loose folds of skin which later fill out
- Newborns have ‘jerky’ behaviors, not well coordinated

Harbor Seal Neonatal Size ?

A Possible Field Mark

Not a perfect fieldmark since pups can weigh from 15 to 25 pounds (8 to 11 kg) at birth, which may make it hard to absolutely distinguish very young pups from small older ones

Unlike the other, larger California pinnipeds, age and sex classes of harbor seals generally overlap in size, a general difficulty in field work on this species

If Observed, Birth Is The Best Field Observation

*Photos courteous of Anne Chadwick
Pacific harbor seal birthing sequence at Tidepool Beach, The Sea Ranch, Sonoma Co.*



Middle mother about to give birth



Slight bulge at base of flippers

- But birth is not often seen
- Quick
- Note there is a distinctive birth posture, hindflippers out horizontally
- At left, Sea Ranch sequence by Ann Chadwick

Birth Sequence At Sea Ranch



Red bulge protruding



Underside of pup's chin visible

Birth Is Rapid



Pup's shoulders visible



Pup's shoulders visible with placenta

Birth Posture At San Francisco Bay

(Characteristic Bay red seal)



Birth Begins At San Francisco Bay



Fresh Umbilicus At Sea Ranch



Pup completely out



Mom & pup alert to visitors

- Note red color of umbilicus
- Note wrinkles, which are actually folds of skin visible in many but not all infant postures

Wrinkles And Pink Umbilicus At San Francisco Bay



Binocular View Of Wrinkled Pup At Rock Point



Just After Birth Social Bonds Form



Into The Water At San Francisco Bay, No Wrinkles Visible



First Swim Before Nursing



At Sea Ranch, Wrinkled Pup And Nursing



Mom & pup touch noses



Pup begins to suckle

When Seeing Small Harbor Seal Pups Please Note The State Of The Umbilicus, Ski, And Movements On Back of Peripheral Count Form

- Umbilicus
 - Red
 - Dark
 - Absent
 - Unknown
- Wrinkling
 - Present
 - Absent
- Movement
 - Jerky
 - Coordinated



Neonates Were Studied by Janet Stein (1989) At Grays Harbor, Washington

- Neonates described here are equivalent to Age 1 Pups in her classification
 - Age 1 pups were small, slender, had loosely folded skin
 - Land locomotion was “awkward and labored”, with little or no hindflipper use
 - Pups could not support their head above ground

At Jenner, Pups Often Seen At Nurseries



- Nurseries are persistent clusters of moms and pups upriver from the mouth
- Just south of the haystack is characteristic

Thank You For Helping

- There is a nice birth sequence by Robin Lindsey at http://www.robinlindseyphotography.com/gallery/birth_gallery/
- Contact me for other references if you are interested--iceage@sonic.net.