

Don't tamper with the seals

As Oregon slowly begins to re-open in the face of the continuing threat from COVID-19, business owners and beach-goers alike are getting used to staying six feet, or roughly two yards, away from each other.

But some beach dwellers need a little more space than that — 50 yards to be exact — and always have done.

Young seal pups venturing onto Oregon's beaches are at risk from well-meaning people who mistakenly try to rescue them, said Oregon State University marine mammal biologist Jim Rice, who coordinates the statewide Oregon Marine Mammal Stranding Network headquartered in Newport.

"We're in the peak of pupping season right now," he said, "and this past weekend there were several incidents reported of people approaching too closely to seal pups on Oregon beaches.

Rice said people should refrain from

touching or approaching the seal pups, which in most cases are not orphaned or abandoned. Seal pups are frequently left on the beach by their mothers, who are out looking for food. The harbor seal pupping season on the Oregon Coast is generally March through June, with a peak in mid-May.

"Newborn pups typically spend several hours each day waiting for their mothers to reunite with them," Rice said. "Adult female seals spend most of their time in the water, hunting for food, and only come ashore periodically to nurse their pups. But the mothers are wary of people and unlikely to rejoin a pup if there is activity nearby."

Rice said concerned but uninformed beach-goers will sometimes interfere, picking up seal pups and taking them away

from the beaches — and their mothers. A more common threat is hovering by curious onlookers, which can cause stress to the pups and prevents their mothers from returning to them.

"It's tempting for some people to attempt to 'rescue' these seemingly hapless pups," Rice said. "A pup's best chance for survival is to be left alone. A dependent pup that's taken away from its mother will certainly die."

Bystanders should stay at least 50 yards away and keep their dogs leashed, Rice said.

"After suckling for about four weeks, weaned pups are abandoned by their mothers, left to fend for themselves," Rice added. "They will continue to come onto beaches periodically to rest as they grow and learn how to catch their own food."

Even with the best of intentions, Rice said, people can do a great deal of harm. Additionally, people who disturb seal pups, even those who are just trying to help, risk being fined under laws intended to protect marine mammals. The Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibits human interaction with seal pups and other marine mammals on the beach.

Anyone who observes incidents of seal pup harassment or animals in distress should call the Oregon State Police at 1-800-452-7888.

The Oregon Marine Mammal Stranding Network is an organization comprised of state agencies, universities and volunteers, working together to investigate the causes of marine mammal strandings, provide for the welfare of live stranded animals and advance public education about marine mammal strandings.

For more information, go to <http://mmi.oregonstate.edu/ommsn>.



A novel approach to reading club

Toledo Public Library has unveiled its new Summer Reading Program, specially tailored to offer readers of all ages the chance to expand their horizons in an age of social distancing.

For many years, the program has encouraged children, teens and adults alike to read for pleasure over the summer months. Traditionally, this has included tracking reading to earn prizes; and weekly shows from storytellers, puppet shows, educators and a host of other performers. This year, COVID-19 has presented a challenge for this programming, but the library staff has been hard at work devising innovative and creative new ideas for Summer Reading Club 2020.

The all-ages program, themed "Imagine Your Story," offers elements including

The Great Gran Plan Tic-Tac-Toe, The Singing Rock Book Club, podcast reviews, creative writing opportunities and more.

The Great Gran Plan will also be featured in a story trail along Main Street, while The Singing Rock graphic novel stories will be featured in the library windows for additional participation.

To register, go to www.cityoftoledo.org/library. Registration materials will also be available at school meal delivery bus stops, and outside of JC Thriftway on select days. If none of these options work, give the library a call and staff can get you signed up over the phone.

For more information, call 541-336-3132 between 10 am and 2 pm Monday to Friday or email childrens@cityoftoledo.org.

