



Spring break in the estuary



Above: Elk get ready for a swim in the Necanicum estuary.
Top left: This elk with one antler has an eye on the camera.

Photos by Jeff Ter Har

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word nerd

By RYAN HUME

Sea lion [sē lī•ən]

noun

1. Any marine mammals of the furred family Otariidae defined by their long front flippers, external ear flaps and the ability to walk on all fours. The Steller is the largest of 13 living species. Partial to island living, sea lions give birth on land and are infamous in the lower Columbia basin for having a taste for smelt and salmon

Origin:

Sea: Developed from the Old English *sæ* as a cognate with the Old Frisian to arrive at *see*, then *sea*, before 1200.

Lion: The form *lēo*, as taken directly from the Latin, forms the root of all Germanic variations; as *lēon*, later *lyon* as borrowed from the

Old French, it is first recorded around 1175.

Sea lion: Prior to taking into account eared seals around 1690, the term appeared in fables and heraldry as a mythical beast with a fish's tail and a lion's head around the 1660s. First known use was in 1601 and referred to a kind of lobster or crab. It is thought the name arrived to various species of the eared seal due to their loud, throaty bark, though in some species the males do have a lionlike mane.

"The number of sea-lion at Tillamook rock is immense, and they would not stir a peg. One of the mariners from the Corwin took off his shoe and hit an old fellow over the head to make him scamper, but the monster (as large as an ox), only winked at his assailant."

—*The Daily Astorian*, June 28, 1879, p. 2

"An aerial survey of marine mammals in the lower Columbia River found spring Chinook salmon will have to make it past more than 6,000 hungry harbor seals, 1,500 California sea lions and 100 Steller sea lions."

—Associated Press, "Study finds 7,500 marine mammals in lower Columbia River," *The Daily Astorian*, Feb. 28, 2015

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