

SCRATCHPAD

Seals on the sand

By **LISSA BREWER**
COAST WEEKEND EDITOR



During the spring and summer months, a new generation of harbor seal pups try their flippers in the coastal inlets and estuaries of Oregon and Washington, often seen near Nehalem and Tillamook bays. The marine mammals, born in seal rookeries or in waters familiar to previous generations, spend a great deal of their early lives on land.

Capable of swimming but unable to tread water for long, the young seals rely on mom for a fresh catch. Fish, mollusks and crustaceans are plenty in Northwest waters

and keep seals growing. The pups' time on land also helps to regulate their body temperature; they'll return as adults to rest on shorelines and rocks.

In the meantime, though, these pups face many threats, from predators on land to unsuspecting encounters with humans. There is a familiar scenario that goes something like this: a beachgoer finds a young seal, resting alone on a secluded beach. The visitor concludes that the adorable pup, its beaded eyes and whiskers scanning its surroundings, must have been abandoned.

But marine experts – and federal law, per the Marine Mammal Protection Act – advise keeping a safe distance. Touching or disturbing the seals is illegal, and if humans get too close, mothers will sometimes not



Jacob Spinks

return to feed their young.

Instead, concerned seal enthusiasts can give a call to the Marine Mammal Stranding Network. This will alert local wildlife officials to the seal, who will respond and

observe the pup. In many cases, responders will post signs, helping the flippered friend to avoid being disturbed and grow closer to a life at sea.

our coast weekend

ON THE COVER

Karen Brownlee's ceramic work and studio will be highlighted on this year's Peninsula Arts Association summer studio tours.



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