

Elk selfies are not advised



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEAL MAINE

Wildlife photographer Neal Maine said he spotted a woman and her dog get too close to an elk cow, which then charged. People are advised to stay well clear of cows and calves, especially during calving season from late May through early June.

Warning: Keep clear of elk cows, calves

By Edward Stratton
EO Media Group

Wildlife experts are advising people to steer clear of elk and their calves after reports of dangerous encounters, including a Gearhart woman on a hike who claimed a large elk charged at her “full throttle.”

Elk are protecting their territory and calves during calving season, so the animals are wary of perceived threats.

Neal Maine, a wildlife photographer, said he witnessed an encounter Sunday near Del Rey Beach while shooting a cow and her calf with a telephoto lens.

Maine said he saw a woman, with her dog in tow, get up close to a mother and calf to take a photo with her cellphone.

“This woman had come up over the dunes,” he said. “She got about 10 feet away. Then the elk just kind of had it, and it took off after her.”

Wildlife biologist Dave Nuzum with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said the reaction to humans varies from cow to cow.

“What seems to set them off around people is if there’s a dog,” he said.

Elk do not usually see humans as predators, Nuzum explained, but dogs can resemble coyotes. He recommends leaving dogs behind

or on leashes in any area with lots of elk or calves, along with keeping a long distance from elk.

No warning

Hayley Rogers of Gearhart conveyed in a Facebook post Monday her displeasure at a lack of warning signs about elk near public beaches.

Rogers wrote she was hiking the Birdy Beach Trail near the mouth of the Necanicum River Monday when she saw a large elk about 200 yards away. Having lived in the area for 14 years, Rogers added, she knew not to get close.

“As I went over the hill I heard the loud galloping of hooves along with crunching grass,” Rogers wrote. “I turned to see a 1,000 (pound) elk (a very large female I believe) coming at me full throttle.”

Rather than run, she chose to stand her ground: “So I stood my ground and found myself yelling, ‘Bad elk, No!’ at the top of my lungs.”

Rogers wrote she ended up calling 911 as the elk slowed and got closer and she feared she had nowhere to hide. The police, she wrote, told her she should not have been in the elk’s habitat in the first place.

“Fortunately by now I had found some type of marker in the ground which was metal

and about 4 feet long with a flag on the end of it,” she wrote. “The elk was now 20 (feet) or so away and I was swinging this marker violently at the elk. This was the first time the elk actually stopped.”

“I was done being scared and more angry at the police department for telling me I shouldn’t be on a trail that had been publicized by the community paper, which I’ve ran on for years.”

Gearhart City Administrator Chad Sweet said this is the first instance he has heard of someone being charged by an elk in his 18 years living in the area.

While there are no plans to put up signs at public beach approaches pointing out calving season, Sweet said the Fish and Wildlife Department is working on informative signs on interactions between people and animals. He added Gearhart is looking at cutting down some trees near the beach dunes to lower fire risk and prevent habitation by elk or transients.

Gearhart Police Chief Jeff Bowman said he focuses on the human half of the equation, shooing people away when they stop on the side of U.S. Highway 101 and try to get close to the elk for cellphone photos.

“This Gearhart herd, they don’t run off because you’re out there mowing your

lawn,” Bowman said, adding if people pretend not to notice nearby elk, the animals usually go about their way.

Bowman, Sweet and Maine all lamented the trend of people trying to get closer to elk for photos.

“I guess when someone gets stomped, there will be more heightened awareness,” Bowman said.

Calving season

According to the U.S. Forest Service, migrating elk herds with pregnant cows halt temporarily in late May to early June for calving season. Cows will leave the herd hours to days before giving birth. Calves are secluded up to three weeks with their mothers in a calving area, which can be grasslands, shrublands and forests.

“There’s a patch of forest in the Del Rey Beach area where we’ve seen calves being born in the last three years,” Maine said.

Nuzum said there is very little of South County that is not elk habitat, estimating more than 5,000 animals in the Saddle Mountain wildlife management unit.

Elk calves curl up and lay in grass or other covered areas as part of their survival strategy, he said, and if someone were to come across one by accident, he advised it is best to get out of the area.

White-sided dolphin washes ashore on Ocean Park beach

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

OCEAN PARK, Wash. — A 7-foot-long, 250-pound male Pacific white-sided dolphin washed ashore in Ocean Park Tuesday afternoon, May 27.

The dolphin had died before washing ashore. Seaside Aquarium staff recovered the animal and it was sent to Portland State University for marine mammal experts to perform a necropsy May 28 to see if they could determine the cause of death. The aquarium received the results May 31, and the necropsy revealed the animal had “some sort of heart complication, most likely due to old age,” according to aquarium staffer Tiffany Boothe.

The necropsy confirmed what external observations had suggested, which is that the dolphin likely was an old male who died of natural causes, Seaside Aquarium General Manager Keith Chandler said. The dolphins teeth were “really worn,” which is a sign of age, he said.

The results reflect good news, Boothe said, because they show “this was a healthy animal” with “no signs of disease or human interaction. Just old.”

Pacific white-sided dolphins are known for their exuberant behavior, leaping

out of the water, belly-flopping, somersaulting and riding the bow waves of boats. They can live for a little more than 40 years. Although they are an offshore species, the dolphins will sometimes venture closer to shore. They are endemic to the northern Pacific Ocean, ranging from the Aleutians down the west coast to the tip of Baja California.

The aquarium works with the Oregon Marine Mammal Stranding Network to recover animals that have washed ashore, both alive and dead. They do not see many white-sided dolphins on the shore — on average about three per every two years — because they stay farther out in the ocean, as compared to other marine mammals, such as harbour porpoises, Chandler said. They can be seen swimming more often, but if something happens to them, he said, they usually don’t make it all the way to shore, instead sinking toward the ocean floor.

“These aren’t that common,” he added.

One of the aquarium’s main goals in responding to incidents is to educate the public.

“When we’re out there working on these animals, people often will stop and ask questions, so it’s good to inform them,” Chandler said.



TIFFANY BOOTHE — SEASIDE AQUARIUM

A Pacific white-sided dolphin washed ashore in Ocean Park, Wash., Tuesday, May 27.

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