

## Education, not domestication

Factual information is needed to refute the assertions in Kent Trego's most recent anti-seal letter regarding the La Jolla harbor seal rookery ("Making a buck off the seals," *Village News*, July 20, page 8).

Wild harbor seals utilized the immediate vicinity of Casa/Children's Pool Beach as preferred habitat when the first mapmakers were laying out the town of La Jolla. Old maps of 1887 and 1894, as well as the current USGS map, show "Seal Rock" as the rock-complex now underneath the seawall. By 1922, hunting of harbor seals along the West Coast had reduced the population to "several hundred animals for the entire California coast," according to one scientist of the time, and thus La Jollans were not seeing many, if any, seals in 1931, when the seawall was constructed near a very small beach which existed then under the now-present lifeguard tower.

With the inception of the Federal Marine Mammal Protection

Act in 1972, California's population of harbor seals began to return to natural levels, and harbor seals began to reoccupy ancestral rookeries; however, many California mainland sites were no longer available to this human-shy species, having been occupied in the interim by people. Thus, harbor seal rookeries in southern California became concentrated on our offshore islands.

Fortunately for the ecology of nearshore La Jolla and the pleasure of thousands of recreational seal watchers, La Jolla's harbor seals became bold enough, probably out of necessity, to reestablish their rookery at the ancestral site. Here they now give birth on the sand, nurse their young, molt and haul out to rest and reoxygenate without disturbance (except from the anti-seal activists), as these seals no doubt did prior to the massive hunting that almost caused their permanent disappearance from the California coast.

Because harbor seals are naturally quite shy of people, a citizens volunteer educational program to protect the La Jolla rookery seals from humans who would chase them off the beach by approaching too closely (in violation of city and federal law) has been operating since the beginning of 2005. To raise money for the program, a table selling T-shirts and other seal-related items often operates above the rookery. Mr. Trego's inferences regarding domestication and "a trained seal show for commercial purposes" show his lack of understanding of harbor seals, their natural behavior and habitat, the educational program volunteers, and the general public's desire that the seals remain undisturbed.

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