

# central CALIFORNIA



Sandwiched between the major population centers of San Francisco and Los Angeles, the ecologically diverse and rich Central Coast of California supports thousands of species of marine life. This beautiful area contains large kelp forests, zooplankton, and krill forming a solid foundation for a food web that supports sea mammals including humpback whales and elephant seals; millions of seabirds; endangered sea turtles; slow growing fragile deep sea corals; and fish species such as salmon, halibut, and crab that are important for commercial, recreation, and subsistence harvest. In order to ensure a sustainable existence for ourselves

and this exquisite marine environment, we need to act now to pull a protective blanket over special areas of the coast.



**Let the Governor and your Legislators know** that you care about the exquisite marine habitat of the Central Coast of California, and want these important ecological areas protected.

<http://www.govmail.ca.gov>  
 Senator.lastname@sen.ca.gov  
 Assemblymember.lastname@assembly.ca.gov



*Cold water coral. Photo courtesy Geoff Shester*

## OCEANA

PACIFIC REGION OFFICES

**Juneau**  
 175 South Franklin Street, Suite 418  
 Juneau, AK 99801 • (907) 586-4050

**Monterey**  
 99 Pacific Street, Suite 575-C  
 Monterey, CA 93940 • (831) 643-9266

**Portland**  
 4189 S.E. Division Street  
 Portland, OR 97202 • (503) 235-0278

**World Headquarters**  
 2501 M Street NW, Suite 300  
 Washington, DC 20037 • (202) 833-3900

Oceana.org • 1-877-7-OCEANA

**51** important ecological areas of the central California coast





## AÑO NUEVO

Kelp, rocky reefs, currents, and an underwater canyon make the Año Nuevo area a lush productive ocean environment. The offshore islands are graced by a large elephant seal rookery and seabird colonies, and the entire region contains some of the most diverse and abundant bird and fish populations in the state.

## MONTEREY BAY/CARMEL BAY

The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary rich marine environment is home to more than two dozen species of marine mammals, including the massive blue whale and playful sea otters; nearly 100 species of seabirds such as brown pelicans and common murre; 345 species of fish; 4 species of threatened or endangered sea turtles; as well as hundreds of species of large marine algae such as kelp. It is also home to submarine canyons with amazing vibrant corals, sponges, anemones, and other living seafloor habitat. The Monterey Crescent contains many science and conservation organizations including Oceana, the world famous Monterey Bay Aquarium, and more than twenty research facilities which make it a predominant area of marine research in the United States.

## POINT SUR

The nearshore rocks and mainland cliffs of Point Sur are home to a myriad of seabirds including common murre, Brandt's cormorant, pelagic cormorant, pigeon guillemot, Cassin's auklet, western gull and the rare ashy storm-petrel. These birds can be seen diving for anchovies, sardines, and squid. It is a key upwelling center with an extensive offshore rocky reef system.

## PARTINGTON

Home to the Big Creek State Marine Reserve and the Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Marine Conservation Area, this area contains a unique and complex array of large and small submarine canyons that are extremely important habitat for more than twenty species of rockfish.



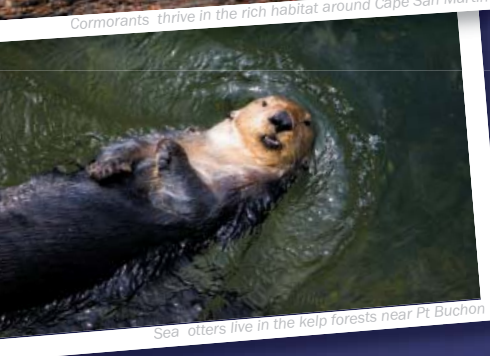
Elephant seal, Año Nuevo



Cold water coral habitat, Monterey Bay. Geoff Shester



Cormorants thrive in the rich habitat around Cape San Martin



Sea otters live in the kelp forests near Pt Buchon

## CAPE SAN MARTIN

Northern elephant seals, California sea lions, harbor seals, and sea otters cavort in the waters off Cape San Martin, while Brandt's cormorants and western gulls dive in the surf. This productive area contains the beginning of Mill Creek submarine canyon, as well as an unusual nearshore shelf break providing a nutrient rich upwelling zone which supports the bountiful variety of sea life.

## PIEDRAS BLANCAS

Large kelp beds off Piedras Blancas hide juvenile rockfish and cabezon while providing a home for a large population of sea otters. Piedras Blancas Island is a nesting site for pigeon guillemots, western gulls, thousands of Brandt's cormorants, and the rare rhinoceros auklet. Northern elephant seals blanket the beach with a rookery at Point Piedras Blancas.

## CAMBRIA

The rich upwelling waters off Cambria support extensive kelp beds that are important habitat for juvenile and adult fish.

## ATASCADERO TO MORRO BEACH

The meeting of creeks, wetlands, salt marshes, mudflats, eelgrass, sand dunes and open water attracts a variety of seabirds, marine life, and fish including English sole, California halibut, sculpin, sanddabs, leopard sharks, and steelhead trout.

## PT BUCHON TO SAN LUIS

Rocks in the region harbor a large complex of nesting seabirds including Brandt's cormorant, pelagic cormorant, western gull, and pigeon guillemot. Nearshore kelp beds support a large sea otter population, and the seafloor is blanketed with colorful corals and other filter feeders. Protections in place for the security of the Diablo Power Plant also serve to protect the rich marine life of this area.

## OCEANO TO POINT SAL

California sea lions and thousands of seabirds including sooty shearwaters, pigeon guillemots, and rhinoceros auklets congregate to feed on schools of forage species in the rich waters off Oceano. Beneath the surface, rocky reef habitat supports many different fish species including various rockfishes. Rocky reefs, while more common farther north (like Monterey) are few and far between in this area of the Central Coast.

## PURISIMA POINT

Least terns and pigeon guillemots nest in this region which supports kelp beds and rocky reefs with distinct and varied marine creatures including abalone and rockfish.

## PT ARGUELLO TO PT CONCEPTION

Point Arguello to Point Conception is a region of rich biological diversity caused by the meeting of the cold California Current and warmer waters of Santa Barbara Channel. Northern elephant seals, pigeon guillemots, rhinoceros auklets, and sooty shearwaters make this productive area their home. Nearshore and shelf rocky reefs are home to invertebrates such as red and black abalone; and fish such as lingcod, and black, blue, brown, copper, olive and vermillion rockfish. Some existing marine protections are in place as a result of security around Vandenberg Military Base.



A rockfish near Monterey. Geoff Shester



# 51 important ecological areas of the central California coast



## Año Nuevo

- 1) AÑO NUEVO NORTH Rocky reefs, diverse fish and birds
- 2) AÑO NUEVO WEST Buffer to elephant seal rookery
- 3) PT AÑO NUEVO Major elephant seal rookery
- 4) AÑO NUEVO SOUTH Seabird colony, coastal marshes

## Monterey Bay

- 5) NATURAL BRIDGES Rocky reefs, high fish diversity
- 6) SANTA CRUZ Rocky reefs, kelp beds
- 7) SOQUEL POINT Rocky reefs, fish nursery
- 8) WATSONVILLE REEF Rocky reefs, freshwater mixing
- 9) MONTEREY CANYON Largest submarine canyon in West
- 10) MONTEREY CANYON HEAD Shark habitat, diverse fish
- 11) MONTEREY BAY SHELF Soft seafloor bottom habitat
- 12) SOQUEL CANYON Rockfish hotspot, corals
- 13) PORTUGUESE REEF Rockfish habitat, seabirds
- 14) PACIFIC GROVE Kelp, sea otters, extensive rocky reef
- 15) RICKETTS Kelp bed, sea otters, #1 Dive site for West
- 16) PEBBLE BEACH Rocky reefs, kelp forests, sea otters
- 17) NORTH CARMEL BAY Pinnacles, corals and sponges
- 18) SOUTH CARMEL BAY-POINT LOBOS Corals, kelp beds
- 19) CARMEL CANYON Corals and sponges, pinnacles
- 20) ELKHORN SLOUGH Fish and shark nursery, clams

## Point Sur

- 21) CASTLE ROCK COMPLEX Common murre colony
- 22) HURRICANE PT OFFSHORE Nutrient rich upwelling
- 23) POINT SUR TO PFEIFFER Kelp forest, rocky reefs
- 24) POINT SUR SOUTH Deepwater canyon, rocky seafloor

## Partington

- 25) J. PFEIFFER INSHORE Rocky canyonhead, kelp forest
- 26) J. PFEIFFER OFFSHORE Canyons, seabird colonies
- 27) PARTINGTON CANYON Seabird colonies
- 28) BIG CREEK Rocky reefs, canyon, corals & sponges
- 29) GAMBOA POINT Kelp forests, canyonheads
- 30) LOPEZ POINT Kelp forests, high fish diversity

## Cape San Martin

- 31) GORDA Nutrient rich upwelling zone
- 32) PLASKETT Major nesting seabird colonies

## Piedras Blancas

- 33) RAGGED POINT Kelp beds, seabird colonies
- 34) PT. PIEDRAS BLANCAS Elephant seals
- 35) P.B. OFFSHORE Habitat for threatened fish

## Cambria

- 36) CAMBRIA NORTH California sea lion haulouts
- 37) SOUTH CAM Nutrient rich upwelling zone, kelp

## Atascadero to Morro Beach

- 38) MORRO BAY ESTUARY Eelgrass, fish nursery
- 39) ATASCADERO BEACH Snowy Plover nesting site
- 40) MORRO BEACH Snowy Plover nesting site

## Point Buchon to San Luis Obispo

- 41) POINT BUCHON Sea otters, rocky reefs
- 42) DIABLO Seabird colonies, hydrocorals

## Oceano to Point Sal

- 43) OCEANO Seabird foraging area
- 44) POINT SAL Rhinoceros auklets, high fish diversity

## Purisima Point

- 45) NORTH Seabird colony, kelp beds, rockfish
- 46) SOUTH Seabird colony, kelp beds, estuary
- 47) OFFSHORE Habitat transition zone

## Point Arguello to Point Conception

- 48) POINT ARGUELLO Major seabird area, sea otters
- 49) OFFSHORE Nutrient rich upwelling zone
- 50) ESPADA BLUFF Nutrient rich upwelling zone
- 51) POINT CONCEPTION Sea otters, elephant seals

The Central Coast of California is home to one of the richest marine ecosystems on the planet. From enormous blue whales to the tiny krill they feed on, a spectacular array of marine life inhabits our Pacific shore. Elephant seals and California sea lions gracefully ply the surf and clumsily haul out on rocks or shore, sea otters cavort in the kelp beds, dolphins and whales do great acrobatic leaps above the sea, and colonies of seabirds take refuge along the rocky cliffs and islets. Beneath the surface, deep underwater canyons blanketed with corals, sponges, and other living seafloor animals provide homes for rockfish, crabs, lingcod, basket stars, shrimp, octopuses, and numerous other animals.

While some small areas are already protected, through the Marine Life Protection Act the State of California will establish new protected areas all along the coast. Levels of protection can vary from no-take marine reserves to marine conservation areas where some activities are limited. As part of this process, Oceana scientists evaluated fish, seabird, marine mammal, habitat, and geologic data for the Central Coast of California and identified 51 Important Ecological Areas.

As the population on our planet continues to grow, it is crucial we take the time now to protect some special places. We are more likely to protect places we know and love. We invite you to join us for a journey down the Central Coast of California past 51 wondrous places. Together we can protect and preserve them for this and future generations to know and enjoy.

Elephant seals at Año Nuevo

Elephant seals at Año Nuevo

Kelp forest near Monterey. Photo by Geoff Shester

Kelp forest near Monterey. Photo by Geoff Shester

Cold water coral. Geoff Shester

A common murre seabird colony can be found near Point Sur. NOAA

Seagrass near Monterey. Geoff Shester

Cambria is home to many California sea lions

Brown pelican in breeding plumage.