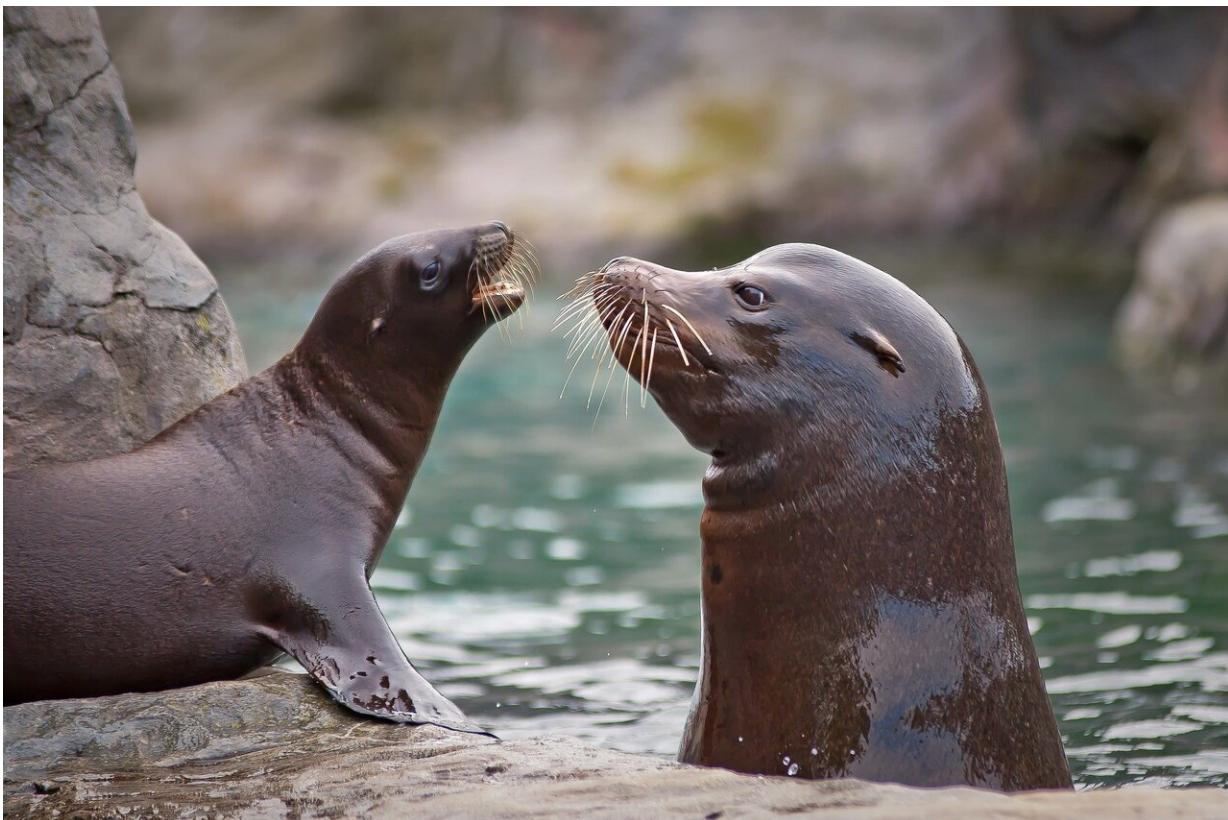


Two barking sea lions charge through crowd during breeding season at San Diego's La Jolla Cove

July 27 2023, by Summer Lin, Los Angeles Times



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Two male sea lions were recorded on video this week charging at each other and running through a group of beachgoers at San Diego's La Jolla

Cove, a scene that animal experts say reflects the typical behavior of male sea lions during breeding season.

Most sea lions in California are born on the Channel Islands off the coast, but since La Jolla Cove has in the past decade become a major location where sea lions mate, have pups and rest, such scenes have taken place in closer proximity to humans, according to animal experts.

In a video posted Monday on Instagram, sea lions can be heard barking at the people on the beach and seen scooting on the sand. Another sea [lion](#) comes charging out of the water toward the shore, forcing everyone to run away.

A person can be heard in the video telling visitors to give the animals some room.

"Everybody, let's please give the large male [sea lion](#) plenty of room," the person said in the video. "They have bit people and they are protected animals."

Sea lions have bitten people in recent weeks along the California coast, although experts say the behavior can be attributed to being sickened by the ongoing bloom of toxic algae.

High concentrations of domoic acid—a neurotoxin produced by the marine algae Pseudo-nitzschia—have sickened sea lions and dolphins when they consume fish that have ingested the algae, experts say.

The sea lions in the video, however, aren't behaving aggressively due to toxic algae, because male sea lions don't usually eat that much fish during [mating season](#), spending most of their time fighting over territory and trying to mate, according to Dr. Alissa Deming of the Pacific Marine Mammal Center in Laguna Beach, California. The sea lions that

have suffered from seizures and bitten beachgoers in the process also tend to be female.

The sea lions in the [video](#) were trying to establish who was the [dominant male](#) on the beach in order to attract females during the peak of breeding season, which typically goes from June until August, Deming said.

"The people were essentially [innocent bystanders](#) while they were trying to establish who's king of the beach," she said. "One animal is kind of running away, looking back and trying to get away from the male. The other male is chasing him. They were just running through the group of people."

Male sea lions tend to "aggressively" defend their territories during mating season, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Males also "bark like dogs" to communicate with other males, but while on breeding islands are "skittish" of humans and "will run into the water if they see or smell people," according to the NOAA.

Sea lions are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which prohibits the hunting, harassment, capturing and killing of these animals.

The public should respect the sea lions and keep their distance, especially during mating season, Deming said.

She recommends that beachgoers avoid getting close to the animals and instead take pictures from afar, where the [sea lions](#) will look more natural and people can view the moms interacting with the pups.

"You can essentially see a 'National Geographic' episode right in front of you," she added.

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