



# West Coast Orange Tag Program

Stranded animals that are responded to, rehabilitated, and released by the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network are given an orange tag on their flippers for post-release monitoring.

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## About the Orange Tag Program

Rehabilitated pinnipeds (seals and sea lions) are marked with a heavy duty orange plastic tag on their flipper, which look similar to a livestock tag. These help our Network partners identify animals after they have been released back to the wild. Photographs and detailed reports of resights help our [West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network](#) and rehabilitation partners track the progress of their patients.

**To report a sighting of an orange tag, contact [orange.tags@noaa.gov](mailto:orange.tags@noaa.gov).**

During the 15 year period of 2006-2021, the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network cared for over 30,000 seals and sea lions at one of the 10+ NOAA permitted marine mammal rehabilitation centers on the West Coast. Of those animals brought into rehab, about 16,000, or 52% have been released back into the wild.

## Important reminder to Share the Shore during Orange Tag sightings:

As much as tag sighting reports are appreciated, you should never closely approach a live animal to get a look at its tag. Getting too close to seals or sea lions can interrupt important survival behaviors such as resting, feeding, nursing, or breeding. Seals and sea lions are also protected by law under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#), which prohibits harassment in order to protect and conserve marine mammal species.

When pinnipeds feel threatened they may react in a dangerous manner, or flee which can lead to trampling or abandoning their young. Always move away at the first signs of disturbance, stress, or agitation. Observe responsibly from afar and follow [Share the Shore](#) principles.

If you believe you see an orange tag on a live seal or sea lion, please use your camera or binoculars to get a closer look. If the animal appears dead from a distance, please call the [West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network](#). Trained professionals can collect the tag information when they respond.

## What are the tags?

Plastic, orange colored tags are placed on the flippers of pinnipeds that have been released from the care of the [West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network](#). These tags have an identification number on one side and the email address, [orange.tags@noaa.gov](mailto:orange.tags@noaa.gov), is found on the other side.

All animals are tagged by trained and authorized members of the [West Coast Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network](#), under the oversight of the [NOAA Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program](#).

## Why do we tag animals?

The mission to respond to, rehabilitate, and release pinnipeds in need of help does not necessarily end at release. Tagging these animals ensures their progress can be monitored as they relearn how to survive on their own in the wild.

Monitoring the health of seals and sea lions can also tell us about the health of the marine ecosystems they live in. These mammals use the nearshore habitat the same way we do. They eat, rest, and use resources as needed. Therefore, the state of their health, such as diet or potential diseases can inform us about conditions in the local environment.

## How do you report a tag?

Orange Tag sightings should be reported to [orange.tags@noaa.gov](mailto:orange.tags@noaa.gov).

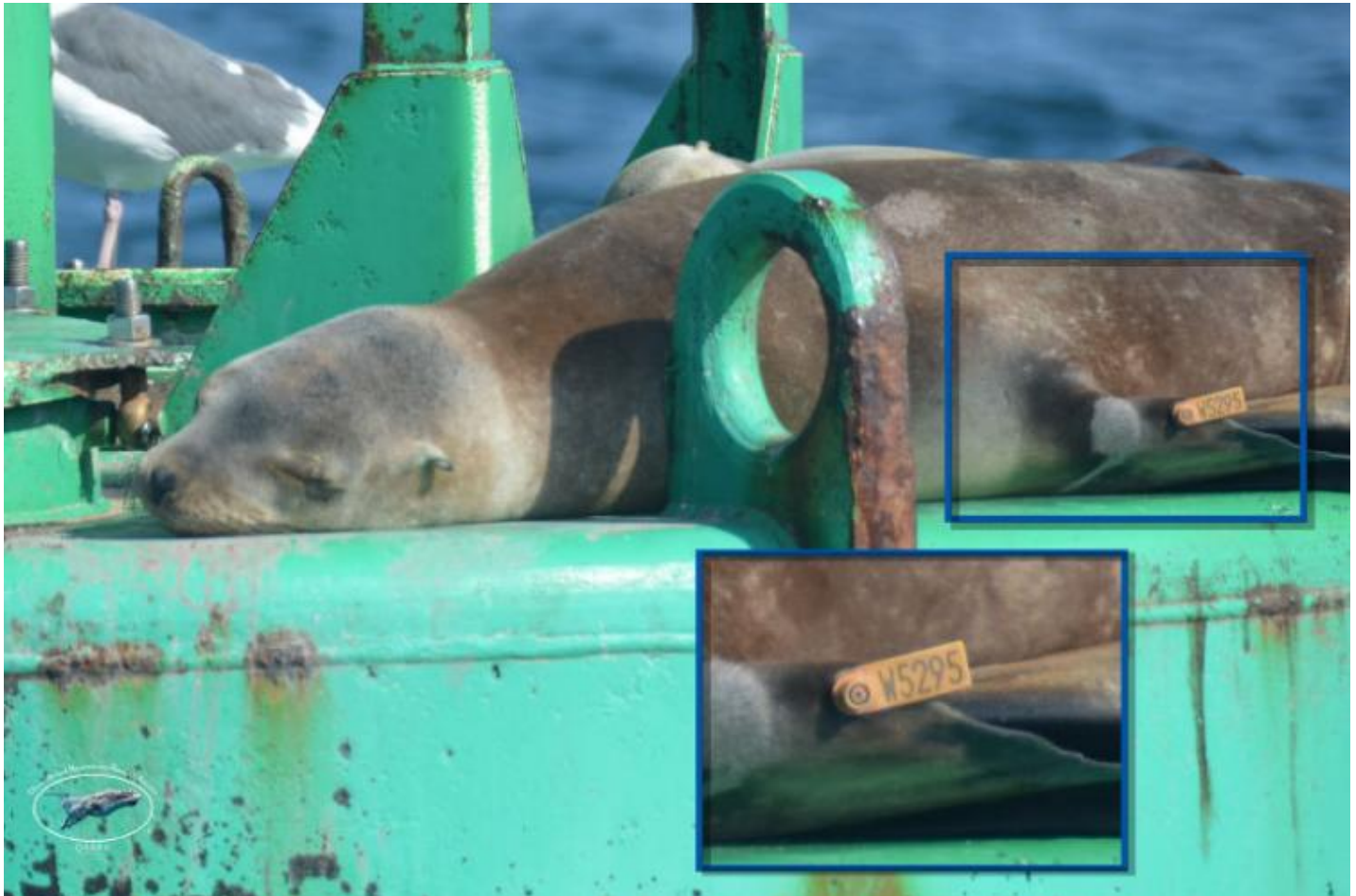
Below is a list of useful information to include when reporting a tag:

- Tag number (located on the outward facing side of the tag)
- Tag location on the animal (front/rear, left/right flipper)
- Sighting date
- Sighting Location (beach, city, county, state)
- Species (see [NOAA Fisheries' Species Directory](#) if unsure)
- A full body photo of the animal and a zoomed in photo of the tag (if safe to do so)
- Any other notes (body condition, behavior, etc.)

Sighting reports are highly appreciated, and the more information provided, the better. However, make sure to prioritize the safety of the animal and yourself when collecting this information.

## What do the tags look like?

California sea lions, Steller sea lions, Guadalupe fur seals and northern fur seals are tagged on the **front flipper**. Tags are usually on the left flipper for males and the right flipper for females.



*Rehabilitated California sea lion, W5295 in Port of Los Angeles. Credit: Ocean Animal Response and Research Alliance*



*Rehabilitated California sea lion, W5304, hauled out on a green buoy with other California sea lions. Credit: Ocean Animal Response and Research Alliance*





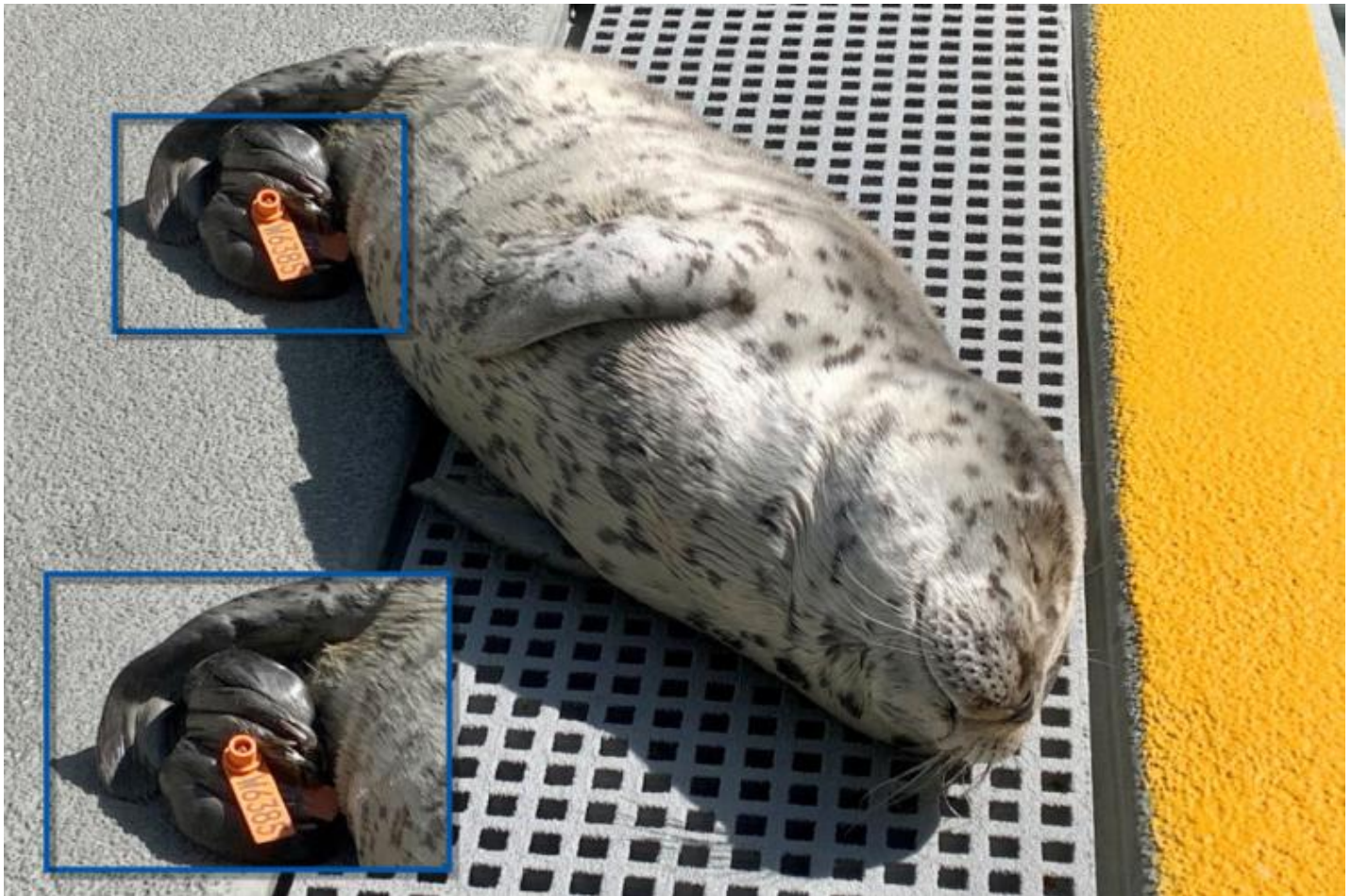
*Rehabilitated Guadalupe fur seal, W0369, photographed during release. Credit: Bill Hunnewell, The Marine Mammal Center under NOAA Permit #18786-04*

Harbor seals and northern elephant seals are tagged on the **rear flipper**. Tags are usually on the left flipper for males and the right flipper for females.



*Rehabilitated Pacific harbor seal, W5282, photographed in LA County. Credit: Ocean Animal Response and Research Alliance*





*Pacific harbor seal pup, W6385, in rehabilitation care. Credit: Giancarlo Rulli, The Marine Mammal Center*

Additional tag colors and types are used by researchers and scientists throughout the region.

## Contact Us

For more information on the Orange Tag Program, contact:

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## More Information

- > [West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network](#)
- > [Marine Mammals on the West Coast](#)

*Last updated by*  
[West Coast Regional Office](#)  
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