

My two favorite pastimes are connected. I love to travel and explore nature. And when I do travel or visit a yet undiscovered treasure, I have an unquenchable thirst to observe the native or endemic fauna. Unfortunately, I am often defeated, probably as son Zack says, because I am focusing too hard. For example, a few summers ago when we traveled throughout Maine, I just wanted to see one measly moose. After days on the road and hours of scouring the landscape, the only moose I saw was on a bottle of beer. Then, while in Arizona, we visited the two known sites where California Condors are seen: the south rim of the Grand Canyon and the Vermillion Cliffs (where they had apparently become so pesky the Visitor Center staff took to chasing them off the bridge.) On my visit however, not a single condor even flew by. Most recently, during this past winter break my family vacationed in lovely Palm Desert where I was almost assured to see a Big Horned Sheep perched regally atop the Santa Rosa Mountains. When after scanning the horizon repeatedly and no animal presented itself, I changed tactics, resorted to reverse psychology and announced loudly that I simply didn't care if I saw a Big Horn Sheep. Young Zack, keen to my feeble attempt at trickery declared that I was wasting my time. Alas, he was correct. The lesson for me is that the next time a visitor to our park excitedly and hopefully asks me about seeing a dolphin, a bobcat, a gnatcatcher, or even a rattlesnake (actually few who inquire about seeing rattlesnakes actually *want* to see them) I promise not to secretly snicker, nor snidely remark that these wild animals have no known schedule.

The Crystal Cove **bobcats** have become regularly spotted (pun intended) and beloved creatures so it is especially sad to report that in December two of our locals were killed. The first, discovered on PCH directly in front of the elementary school, was on December 8 and based on the size and condition of the carcass was thought to be a healthy juvenile. The second animal was killed later in the month in the wee hours of the morning in nearly the same location. According to Joy Falk of Laguna Beach Animal Control, the deceased bobcat was an adult male, approximately 22 pounds, healthy looking with an exceptionally fine and shiny coat. The animal had a tag in its ear which indicated it was part of an on-going study by USGS studying bobcats in the San Joaquin Hills to determine the spread of notoedric mange disease, a trend linked to rodenticide. Not only has the bobcat population increased in the park, but Officer Falk reported that these felines are "thick" throughout neighboring Laguna Beach, most notably in Bluebird Canyon, Arch Beach Heights, and along the fire road which dips into Aliso and Wood Canyons. Her guess is that just like the equally prevalent coyote, bobcats have adapted to feeding on pet food, which is often left outside. Finally, when I mentioned that my son desperately wants a cat she reminded me that Animal Control receives a dozen+ lost cat calls weekly and we all know that those sweet pets are not lost.

In addition to bobcat sightings reported at a record high, the marine mammal scene in the park these last few months has been thrilling. In addition to the unusual sighting of a pod of Orcas (see 1/20 LA Times,) there are also record numbers of **gray whales** and multiple species of dolphin observed within park boundaries. Further north volunteers involved in a long-term study of the marine mammals that utilize the waters of the Palos Verdes Peninsula have logged a record 433 sightings since December 1, more than they have seen in nearly 30 years. According to Project Director Alisa Schulman-Janiger it's possible that more gray whales are being spotted since they are venturing closer to shore as opposed to on the back side of the Channel Islands. The survey focuses on determining seasonal usage of the nearshore migratory path, and documents changing trends over time. Spotters also detail migratory behaviors observed, including breaching, spyhopping, rolling, courtship, apparent nursing, possible feeding, and interaction with kelp and with other marine mammals. Participants also note possible human impacts on gray whales, including boat interactions, possible harassment incidents, and entanglements. Back in park waters, **Risso's Dolphins** have been delighting staff and visitors alike. When a group of us saw a pod of unknown cetaceans the other day, we thought they might be Orcas based on the tall black dorsal fin. Something was not right though and after further investigation using photos, web sites, books, and a marine mammal expert we decided that our fixation was on a slow moving pod of about 10 Risso Dolphins, who have tall, erect, black dorsal fins, with a back curve. The body of a Risso's Dolphin is extensively scarred, primarily on the back and sides which make the animal appear nearly white, with the exception of the dark dorsal fin and flippers. It is assumed that the scars are a result of interactions with other Risso's or by their squid prey. These 12' dolphins are known as "squid specialists" and so it is thought that their presence is related to the availability of food in the area.

Now that the Marine Life Protected Act has officially been enacted, new brochures have been designed to help quell the confusion. In Orange County alone there are 7 **State Marine Conservation Areas** some with the same allowed take regulations and others that have different regulations. At Crystal Cove, for example, fin fishing by hook and line as well as spearfishing is allowed, whereas in Laguna Beach, no take of any fish is permitted. To view the brochure see our website at [www.crystalcovestatepark.com](http://www.crystalcovestatepark.com) and for detailed information and complete regulations see [www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa). Orange County Coast Keeper is spearheading a county-wide MPA Watch program in which volunteers will conduct passive human use surveys, several times each month by walking the beach and recording data on how people are using the Marine Protected Areas; tidepooling, kayaking, shorefishing, surfing, stand up paddling, walking, and other forms of on-shore and off-shore recreation. I just completed a survey and walked our entire stretch of coastline. Mostly I saw walkers, but did see 6 free divers, 3 lobster boats, and a group of researchers doing intertidal transects at Rocky Bight. I also saw one gray whale, a seal hauled out at Split Rock, and hundreds of birds. Not a bad way to spend a few hours.

For those who choose to partake in the volunteer survey project, a stop at Cottage #46 to view the the experimental exhibition—*Weird Rocks* is in order. This new exhibit focuses on the unique geology of Crystal Cove, and highlights the concretions that are found in the Park. After visiting the exhibit, Park visitors are encouraged to explore the beach geology on their own. Visitors can check out geology scavenger hunt cards from the Park Interpretive Store and go on their own *Weird Rock* adventure. When they find the items on the scavenger hunt cards, they can return to the Park Store to receive a special geology prize. The exhibit was created in collaboration with UCI and Saddleback College. Jennifer Long and Janice Hansen from UCI's Department of Education wrote the text for the exhibit, and Professor Mert Hill from Saddleback College served as the scientific advisor. CCA will use this exhibit to gather information about how to effectively convey scientific information to the public in an informal setting and will be used to help with the development of a permanent geology exhibit in the Park.

A number of years ago we dabbled with **Park Yourself Machines** at the different kiosks. They had a relatively short shelf life, but as California State Parks seeks ways to increase revenue, the new and more technologically advanced Park Yourself Machines are returning to Crystal Cove. So, coming on-line in the very new future, machines will be located at the kiosks at Pelican Point, Reef Point, Los Trancos, Moro Day-use, and at the El Moro Visitor Center. Park users will be able to purchase their \$15 day-use passes using either cash or credit cards and can do so when the park opens at 6am until the park closes at sunset (except at the Los Trancos lot which remains open until 10pm to accommodate the Beachcomber Café patrons.) I agree with all those who groan about the hefty fee, but after having recently spent \$29 for a two hour movie (one adult + 2 kids tickets + \$8 for a butter saturated popcorn) I must admit that for a carload full of people, clean restrooms, a gorgeous coastline, pristine wilderness area, and copious amounts of entertainment (and the chance to see burrowing pocket gophers, hunting Northern Harriers, and migrating Gray Whales, just to name a few) the \$15 fee is worth every penny.

After 14 years (this month is my anniversary, I started working at Crystal Cove in February, 1998) my long desired dream of having a separate classroom may actually come true. With grant funds dedicated to this project, permitting for the classroom, which will be a double wide modular near the existing Los Trancos Sector Office, has begun. I am not going to write another word, for fear that I will jinx myself, but the mere notion that I may finally have a "classroom of my own," one that is decorated with the myriad interpretive and educational props that have been collected for so many years, and will be a quasi-Nature Center for park visitors, students, and volunteers alike, makes me tingly. And in the words of celebrated author Jack Canfield: *"Remember that your thoughts are the primary cause of everything. So when you think a sustained thought it is immediately sent out into the Universe. That thought magnetically attaches itself to the like frequency, and then within seconds sends the reading of that frequency back to you through your feelings."* I guess it took 14 years for these thoughts to reach the Universe and become a reality, but I am not complaining ☺