

## PRESERVING A COASTAL RESOURCE FOR THE FUTURE: THE HARBOR SEALS OF CASA BEACH IN LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

Since the early 1990s, harbor seals have been hauling out at La Jolla's Casa Beach.

Today, this site is a rookery for approximately 200 seals, and has become an integral part of the natural history of San Diego County, enjoyed daily by residents and visitors alike.

However, some have pressured area politicians to destroy this treasure by asserting a fallacy of "shared use." Studies have shown that harbor seals are timid creatures that view human disturbance as a threat. Accordingly, they have been known to abandon a haul-out site due to repeated human disturbances.

A coalition of environmental groups has formed to preserve this natural treasure. This rookery provides a "living laboratory" for adults and children alike. Rarely does such a unique educational experience present itself. At a time when the interaction between children and nature is steadily declining, saving sites like the harbor seal rookery at Casa Beach becomes paramount. Studies have shown a positive link between children's exposure to nature and their academic performance. This habitat should be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations, rather than succumbing to human encroachment.

Our poster presentation will highlight both the beauty of this area and the threats imposed by humans. We will present literature about the importance of the harbor seal habitat both as a treasure of this region's natural history and as an excellent opportunity for young people to bond with nature.