

**Unusual concentration of sea lions near Heceta Head on the Central Oregon Coast**  
**12-10-09**



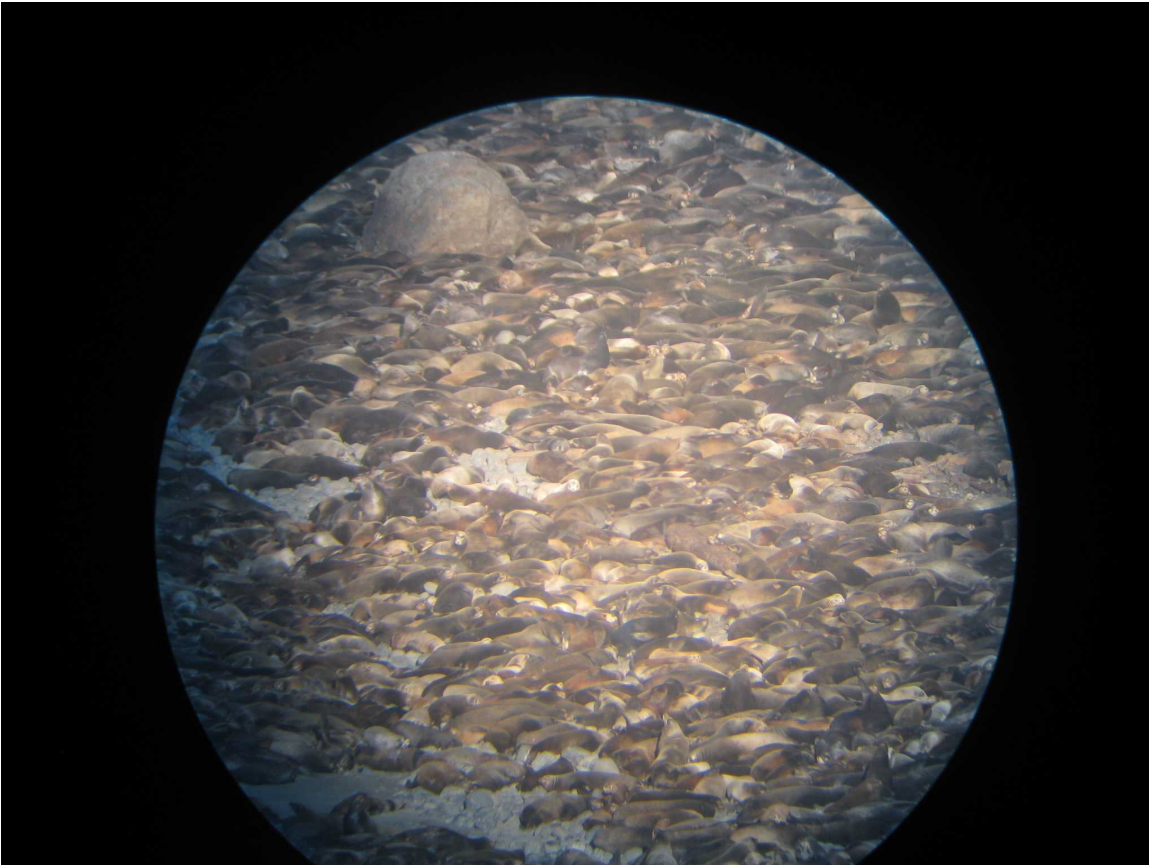
**I have found nobody yet who seems to recall or know of such a concentration of sea lions like this on the Oregon Coast, including folks at the Hatfield Marine Science Center. I estimate that there were over 5,000 sea lions on the beach and in the near-shore area between Heceta Head and Sea Lion Caves today. Some marine mammal scientists from HMSC have also seen them over the last couple of weeks, but in varying numbers (some as high as what I estimated today). The vast majority are California sea lions, and many appeared to be females (which is highly unusual in Oregon) but may have been juvenile males. Resident Steller sea lions, which are larger and lighter colored on average, were crowded up out of the picture to the right, though some were mixed in with the California sea lions.**



**Zoom photo with little “point & shoot” camera. I estimate over 250 animals in the photo of a small fraction of the total mass.**



**Zoomed in on two near-shore “rafts” of over a hundred sea lions in each.**



**Photo taken with “point & shoot” camera through my spotting scope showing a small fraction of the total mass----and there are hundreds of sea lions in this photo.**

**There does not appear to be much of an increase in sea lion abundance elsewhere on the Oregon Coast at this time. There are large potential impacts on fish stocks, including winter steelhead returning to near shore and estuary areas, the food base for resident Steller sea lions, and other ecological parameters. If they stay through the winter (they will likely all go south to their breeding grounds in spring and summer), and if they find spots like Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River and Oregon City Falls on the Willamette, they will be an enormous problem for spring Chinook salmon and sturgeon, as well. This level of crowding can also lead to spread of sea lion diseases and die-offs on Oregon beaches.**

**Killer whales and large sharks have not zeroed in on this concentration of sea lions yet, though two killer whales were seen off Depoe Bay last weekend. It’s not known if they were the marine mammal eating killer whales or the salmon eating type.**