WHALE WATCHING IN CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

<u>Note</u>: It's always a good idea to call the park before your visit to check on current conditions.

From December through March, visitors have the opportunity to view the return of the gray whale, the state's official marine mammal.

The annual migration of thousands of gray whales (up to 50 long and 45 tons each) begins in Alaskan and moves south along California's coastline to birthing and breeding waters in Baja California. On their journey, the whales move past Point Reyes, the Farallon Islands, through Half Moon Bay and Monterey Bay, and follow the coastline along Southern California before reaching Mexico. The whales travel in small groups and stay close to the shoreline for protection from predators, such as killer whales. Traveling 70 to 80 miles per day, the whales' spouts of vaporized water (at times reaching 12 feet high) can be seen as the whales surface every three to five minutes to breathe. Their 12,000-mile round-trip trek is the longest known distance any mammal migrates on an annual basis. The whales' migration pattern reverses when they lead their new-born calves back to Alaska.

State park whale watching sites include:

HUMBOLDT COUNTY
Humboldt Lagoons State Park (Dry Lagoon), phone: (707) 677-3121
Patrick's Point State Park (Palmer's Point and Wedding Rock) in Trinidad
phone: (707) 677-3570
Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park (Gold Bluffs Beach), phone: (707) 464-6101, extension 5300

MENDOCINO COUNTY
MacKerricher State Park (Laguna Point) on the Mendocino Coast three miles north of Fort Bragg, phone: (707) 964-9112 or (707) 937-5804

MONTEREY COUNTY
Julia Pfeiffer Burns State park (Vista Point, Highway 1), phone (831) 667-2315

ORANGE COUNTY
Crystal Cove State Park (949) 494-3539

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY
Montaña de Oro State Park, phone: (805) 528-0513
San Simeon State Beach, phone: (805) 927-2035

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
El Capitan State Beach (805) 585-1850

SAN LUIS OBISPO OUNTY
Estero Bluffs State Park (805) 772-7434

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California State beaches also offer a number of programs and locations for viewing migrating whales. For details on what programs are offered, contact the state park listed below or call (800) 777-0369 for general information on all state parks or go on line to www.parks.ca.gov

MENDOCINO COUNTY
Manchester State Beach (707) 937-5804
MacKerricher State Park (707) 937-5804
Mendocino Headlands State Park (707) 937-5804

MONTEREY COUNTY
Garrapata State Park (831) 624-4909
Patrick's Point State Park (707) 677-3570
Point Lobos State Reserve (831) 624-4909
Point Sur State Historic Park (831) 625-4419

SAN DIEGO COUNTY
Silver Strand State Beach (619) 435-5184

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Point Sal State Park (805) 733-3713

SONOMA COUNTY
Fort Ross State Historic Park (707) 847-3286
Salt Point State Park (707) 847-3221
Sonoma Coast State Beach (707) 875-3483

CALIFORNIA WHALE FESTIVALS

Dana Point Festival of Whales
http://www.dpfestivalofwhales.com/home.html

Fort Bragg Whale Festival
Mendocino Whale Festival
http://www.mendowhale.com/events.htm

Point Mugu to Point Dume Whale Festival (Leo Carrillo State Park)
http://www.parks.ca.gov/events/event_detail.asp?id=2184

Redwood Coast Whale and Jazz Festival

SUGGESTED READING
There are a number of books available on whale watching, including *West Coast Whale Watching*, published by HarperCollins and written by Richard C. Kreitman and Mary Jane Schramm, a practical guide to watching whales, dolphins, seals and other marine mammals. It contains operator listings, a natural history of marine mammals, and is a useful field guide for species identification.

HEADING FOR SEA
Sightseeing boats offer the best vantage point to view the state marine mammal, and there are many whale-watching operators along the California coast. Various operators offer tours, field seminars, and/or lectures during ocean-bound excursions.