

Dye marking of elephant seals

The first thing you will see on the beaches of Sea Lion Island are the elephant seals. The second one is that they carry black names and codes on their body. These marks are used for a long term scientific research project to study the ecology, behavior and genetics of the elephant seals.



Marking is an essential tool for any wildlife study, because it permits the sure recognition of the individuals studied. The marks pose no threat to the animal welfare, because the same hair dye used by coiffeurs is used and marks are put without any kind of constrain of the animal. The marks disappear during the molt of the fur. Dye marks permit to reduce the impact of the research on the seals, because individuals can be safely recognized from the distance without any further disturbance.

Sea Lion Island visitors sometimes complain about the dye marks. We understand that sometimes they are not very nice to see. It should be kept in mind that seals are wild animals and it's not always easy to put a nice mark with 30 knots of wind. To reduce the

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impact of marks, in particular for photographers and filming crews, we would like to give some hints and suggestions:

- we mark elephant seals during the breeding season only (September to November). During the rest of the year, most of the animals will not carry marks
- we leave one of the three seal breeding areas mark free (just go north from to the lodge, see map, red area), although we have no control over seal movements
- for the current season only (2004) no females will be marked on the whole northern beaches (see map, yellow area)
- pups and weanlings carry no dye marks at all, so they are perfect subjects for great pictures !
- elephant seals are nicer from the front, where they don't carry any dye mark: so the best shots will be mark free.

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