

2009 Interpreter's View #2

A collection of interpretive ideas created on a weekly basis by the Año Nuevo docent trainee class of 2009

Topic: Elephant seals Presenter: Frank Balthis

Touch me and I'll scream!!! Female elephant seals will produce a loud protest call when approached by a lower rank male. This is to get the attention of the alpha male, who will drive off the interloper. The female's instinctual protest ensures that only the strongest male will mate with her, thus ensuring that her offspring will be alpha material.

T-T-T-T- Timing is the secret As a potential alpha bull, you may want to avoid being an early bird, who hops and battles from place to place, long before females even arrive. If you waste your stored energy early in the season, a well rested, late arriving male might just steal your dominant role. In this case "the early bird doesn't always get the harem."

She lost how much weight??? Unbelievable!!! In one month's time, a nursing female will lose about 40% of her body weight. So if she came in at 1600 pounds, she will leave at 1000. That works out to losing about one pound per hour. Now that is weight loss success....and here's how to do it....eat as much as you want for several months...then swim 2000 miles....then don't eat anything for a month (while nursing a child). It's easy.

Parenting classes work!!! especially when you take them at "The School of Life University" at Año Nuevo. Researchers have found that more experienced, older, "better educated" females have an advantage over younger, inexperienced moms. They choose and fight to keep the best and safest birthing areas, ensuring their pups success in life.

E-Seal Roulette... All the elephant seals never show up on the same shore at the same time. That alternate arrival strategy ensured the survival of this species back in 1900 when they were nearly hunted to extinction. Who likes crowds anyway?

Do you remember that guy who broke your nose???? Of course you would. And so do elephant seals. Tests prove it. A loudspeaker was placed next to an elephant seal bull and then recordings of several local males doing their "challenge" vocalizations were played. Sometimes the bull just laid there and paid no attention to the sound, sometimes the bull ran away from the speaker, and sometimes the bull actually attacked the speaker.

Men eat bottom fish, women prefer squid... It seems elephant seals have different tastes. That sounds natural...at least for us humans...consider this, a man and a woman go out to eat in a San Francisco seaside restaurant. They most likely will order different entrees, won't they? So would an elephant seal.

Seal Skits ... Why not use your whole body when you interpret elephant seals? Act out a beta bull sneaking through the harem, head up, head down inch by inch. Then an alpha bull rising up and giving that marauding bull the evil eye. Then the bluff charge. Fun.

What do elephant seals and astronauts have in common? They both spend time in a weightless environment. The result is a loss in bone density and strength for both astronauts and aquanauts. (Yes, astronauts really experience this skeletal setback) The answer to the problem: come back to earth and feel the gravity. That's just another reason why an elephant seal's semiannual haulout onto land (and into gravity) is so crucial.

Seals on steroids The alpha bull's size and his aggressiveness may be compared to an athlete using the same testosterone-related anabolic steroids to increase his performance and dominance on the playing field...or beach.