

## A GUIDE TO MALIBU BEACH WILDLIFE





From its rocky shores to its deep blue waters, Malibu’s natural landscape is much of what makes it such an idyllic destination. But it’s not only a haven for visitors and (human) residents — thanks to its unique geographic features, it’s also a peaceful sanctuary for the area’s beach wildlife.

“It’s still got a lagoon — 95 percent of the coastal lagoons in Southern California are gone, so there aren’t many choices if you’re a creature that needs that kind of habitat,” explains Rosi Dagit, senior conservation biologist at the [Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains](#). “It [also] has a creek, and much of the upper watershed is protected open space in public state parks or national parks. So even though there’s quite a big population of people, there’s also still room for other creatures that live there.”

Luckily for visitors, these creatures aren’t all tucked away in secret hideaways or inaccessible nooks. Wildlife spotting is a popular pastime in Malibu, and there’s no shortage of incredible species to observe.

To help protect these animals and their habitats, there are a few guidelines to keep in mind. Don’t leave any trash on the beach (and try to pick up any you come across), says Dagit. If you see an animal in distress, alert a lifeguard on the beach (or call the [Malibu Wildlife Center](#)). Don’t collect or touch any marine life, and of course, keep a safe distance and respect any barriers or signage you see to give wildlife their space.

Even so, visitors can still enjoy incredible views of Malibu’s vast beach wildlife with a few strategic tips. Bring along a pair of binoculars for up-close looks, wear sturdy shoes for hiking and rock-hopping, and make your way to these three places for prime wildlife spotting near Malibu Beach Inn. While marine mammals, birds, and other sea life can be seen all along the Malibu coastline, you’re almost sure to see something amazing at these destinations.

## GO BIRDING AT MALIBU LAGOON



*Photo: stevevogh* via *Wikimedia Commons* / CC BY

Birdwatching, or “birding” as it’s known to ornithology aficionados, is familiar hobby at Malibu Lagoon. And it’s no wonder: Located just half a mile from Malibu Beach Inn, it’s a bird lover’s paradise. You’ll encounter many types of birds here, including great blue herons, ospreys, double crested cormorants, Heermann’s gulls, brown pelicans, snowy egrets, least terns, and many more.

Those binoculars can significantly enhance a seabird spotting, especially during the nesting season of snowy plovers, one of the most common birds at Malibu Lagoon. “Having a pair of binoculars [means] you can see those tiny little fluffball chicklets — they are the cutest things you’ve ever seen,” says Dagit. Snowy plovers nest right on the beach, so it’s important to respect the post “fences” that mark the boundaries of their area, because nests are easily disturbed. However, snowy plovers break the rules themselves sometimes to hang out with the surfers on the main part of the beach, laughs Dagit.

## MARVEL AT THE TIDEPOLS AT LEO CARILLO STATE PARK



*Photo: Yes for State Parks via Flickr / CC BY*

Teeming with vibrant sea life, the tidepools at Leo Carillo State Park are sights to behold.

Peer into one and you'll likely see a colorful array of sea anemones, sea urchins, starfish, mussels, crabs, barnacles, snails, and much more.

The look-but-don't-touch rule applies here: "There is limited signage, so [it's important for] people not to pick up the anemones, and not to pick up the sea stars and put them in a bucket and bring them back with the beach," says Dagit. Just gazing into these miniature ecosystems is mesmerizing enough, after all. And while you're at Leo Carillo State Park, be sure to explore the beach's many sea caves and rock arches, too.

To determine the ideal time to visit, check the tides in the paper or [online](#) — the best viewing opportunities are when the tide is low (which varies depending on the day). Also, keep in mind that the parking lot at Leo Carillo is currently closed, so park along the Pacific Coast Highway (it's about a 20-minute drive from Malibu Beach Inn).

## WATCH FOR WHALES, DOLPHINS, SEA

# LIONS AND HARBOR SEALS AT POINT DUME



*Photo: NOAA via Flickr / CC BY*

Plenty of marine mammals can be spotted from the shore in Malibu. “Pacific harbor seals can be often observed thermoregulating on rocks or with their heads up in the kelp beds just off the beach,” says Maddalena Bearzi, Ph.D., president of the [Ocean Conservation Society](#). Sea lions can be seen (and their barks heard) along the coastline, too.

There are also several species of dolphins to keep an eye out for. “One the most common species of dolphins observed not too far from shore is the bottlenose dolphin,” says Bearzi. “These coastal waters, in fact, serve as a regular transit corridor and feeding ground for these animals moving from Northern Baja California, Mexico, to Northern California and Oregon.” Pacific white-sided dolphins and long-beaked and short-beaked common dolphins frequent these waters as well, she adds.

For a higher vantage point, hike up to the overlook at Point Dume. In addition to these other marine mammals, it’s an excellent place for whale watching. “Gray whales can be seen near

shore during their northbound migration, while minke whales, blue whales and fin whales are at times present more offshore in these waters,” says Bearzi. November through April provides your best chance at [viewing gray whales](#), while newborn whale calves can be seen migrating from February through the end of spring.

To get there, park at the Westward Beach lot, and hike up the trail to Point Dume from there. “Just scrambling on that rocky point at Point Dume is pretty cool in and of itself,” says Dagit, “and hiking up to the top with binoculars is just fantastic, because then you actually get a great view [of whales and other marine mammals].” If you’d like, you can take the trail down the other side and head down the staircase onto Dume Beach at low tide for another viewing place.

To cap off or kick off a day of wildlife spotting, she suggests stopping in at one of the many restaurants on Westward Beach for brunch or a sunset happy hour while you’re in the area. It’s the perfect way to celebrate one of those picture-perfect, nature-filled days that Malibu is famous for.

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