



OCEAN ANIMAL EMERGENCY

1 x 60 HD



International

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In *Ocean Animal Emergency*, NOVA follows a dedicated group of veterinarians and volunteers, who work to rescue, rehabilitate and release ailing harbor seals, California sea lions and elephant seals. Some patients are malnourished pups, separated from their mothers; others bear deep scars, a permanent reminder of entanglement with plastics tossed carelessly into the ocean; and many develop deadly diseases triggered by pollution.

Renowned veterinarians Frances Gulland and Felicia Nutter direct medical treatment at the Marine Mammal Center, the foremost research hospital, specializing in marine mammal veterinary care, in the world. Since patients at the Center can't describe their symptoms, the physicians make diagnoses and clinical treatment decisions using a combination of traditional hands-on care, careful observation, and the newest technology to rehabilitate them; with the end goal of releasing them back into the wild.

Dan Costa, a biologist from the University of California, Santa Cruz studies healthy elephant seals in the wild to learn about their biology, their behaviors and the fragile state of their environment. He tracks their daily activity with satellite tags, which are glued to the tops of the elephant seal heads. Costa explains that these "electronic yarmulkes" transmit important data via email, including information on the depth of dives and distance traveled. The satellite tracking reveals that elephant seals are active most of the year—traveling distances through the Pacific Ocean that are equivalent to approximately two times the width of the United States.

NOVA is there as the Marine Mammal Center team tries to help California sea lions suffering from a mysterious disease. In 1998, Drs. Gulland and Nutter and their colleagues began to observe a dramatic increase in the number of desperately ill California sea lions stranding along the coastline. Hundreds of animals presented a myriad of symptoms including seizures, convulsions, and extreme physical exhaustion. Dr. Gulland identified the culprit as demoic acid poisoning, which causes severe brain damage and eventually death. Right now, there is no cure for demoic acid poisoning. Until there is, the Marine Mammal Center will continue to humanely treat the affected animals.

The experts interviewed in the film believe that the many maladies plaguing marine mammals reflect the declining health of our oceans and the profound effect that humans have on the environment. Hamilton describes the more than 1,000 animals treated each year at the Marine Mammal center as, "canaries in the coal mine": early warning signs of an environmental disaster.

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NOVA

CREDITS

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