

Amelia's Journal - California Migration



Central California

Today we drove to Central California. My parents want to film some of the animal migration stories that are happening right now. You see, some animals travel every year to another location when the seasons change. The journey that they make is called a "migration". When the seasons change back again, the animals return to their original home.



All kinds of animals migrate. Some insects, birds, whales, fish, and even reindeer (also called "caribou") migrate! I wondered how the animals know when it's time to begin traveling. At first I thought that it must be connected to the change in weather as the seasons change - like it will get colder or there will be less food. Then I thought about times when summer lasts into fall, or winter comes earlier than expected. Then I learned that no matter what the weather is doing, there's something that changes regularly that is much better to count on, and that's the length of a day! As the earth makes its rotation around the sun, the days get shorter when winter's coming, and they get longer as we head into summer. That stays the same no matter what the weather is doing!

The length of time between sunrise and sunset is called "daylength". Almost every living thing is affected by daylength - plants, animals, and you and me! As daylength changes over the seasons, animals that migrate become restless, as if something's telling them, "it's time to get going!"



Morro Rock

Morro Bay

When we arrived at Morro Bay, the first thing I noticed was Morro Rock, a large extinct volcano peak that looks like a large cap rising out of the ocean. Morro Bay is a small ocean-side town filled with neat little shops and lots of seafood restaurants. I think I'm going to like this place!

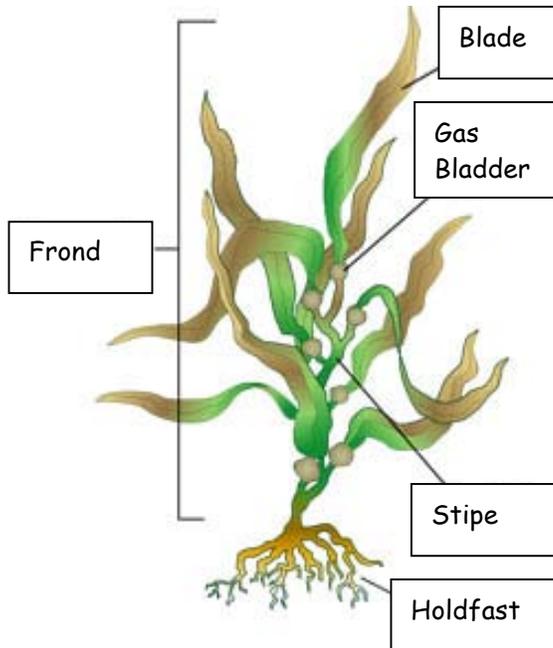
Morro Bay has a mild climate, which attracts birds that migrate. We took a boat into the bay so that we could get a better view of some of the birds that have made their way here for the winter. Morro Bay provides a home for more than 150 species, or kinds, of birds, and almost 70 species use it as a stop on their annual migration journey. We saw Brant Geese that flew here all the way from Alaska, and grebes that are visiting for the winter from British Columbia, in Canada. Thousands of shorebirds stood along the water's edge for the buffet of food found in the shallow water.

In the afternoon, we switched to a boat that had windows in the lower deck so we could see some of the wildlife beneath the water. We saw fish and small acorn barnacles. There was eelgrass, which is an important food source for many of the migrating birds, and lots and lots of kelp.....



Grebe visiting from Canada

AMAZING KELP



Kelp is a marine seaweed that can grow almost a foot a day and reach 200 feet high! If you swam to the bottom of the ocean, you'd find that kelp have no roots, stems, leaves or flowers like other plants. So, although they're commonly referred to as plants, they are actually a type of algae.

Kelp provides an important habitat for many animals to live and hide from predators. Kelp is also a source of food for snails, sea urchins, crabs, fish, and people. Yes! People!

Have you ever eaten ice cream? Well, then you've eaten kelp! **Agar**, **carrageenan**, and **algin** are substances that come from different types of seaweed. Aside from ice cream, you can find these substances in chocolate milk, salad dressing, apple pie and toothpaste!

The next morning we took a walk and found some sea otters wrapping up in a blanket of kelp preparing for a nap. The kelp will keep them from drifting too far away while they sleep. Just another use for this incredible seaweed!

Stop hogging the kelp!



Big Sur, California

Today we headed to Andrew Molera State Park in Big Sur to see work being conducted by scientists with the Ventana Wildlife Society. First, we watched staff and interns record data on resident and migratory songbirds.



I'm on my annual vacation - but scientists keep calling it a migration!



Then we hiked with a wildlife biologist to a butterfly grove. This is one of the places along the California Coast where Monarch butterflies west of the Rocky Mountains migrate for the winter. In many species of animals, the same individuals travel the same routes year after year. What makes these Monarchs so unique is that they've never been here before. It takes an average of five generations to complete one migration!



Male

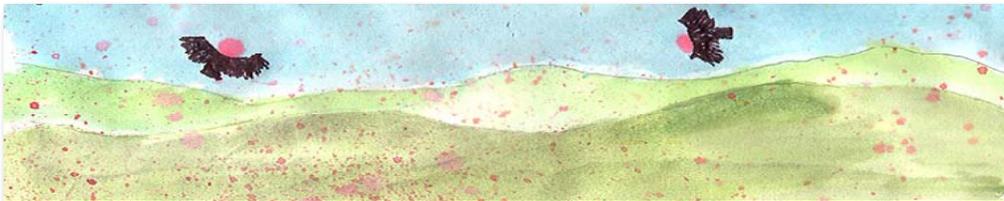
Want to know
how to tell
males from
females?



Female

The males have two black spots on their wings and thinner black lines (called webbing). I also learned that butterflies can taste with their feet. Their taste sensors are located in their feet, so they can taste their food by standing on it!

California Condors don't migrate, but the Ventana Wildlife Society has been working on reintroducing this endangered species to the Big Sur area. These birds can have a wingspan of 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet. We watched 2 condors soar overhead as they surveyed the land and sea for possible food. Even from a distance I could see they were huge!



The next day we hiked to a waterfall in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The waterfall flows into the Big Sur River, which is connected to the Pacific Ocean. This is home to Rainbow Trout. When these fish become adults, they migrate to the saltwater ocean and only return to the freshwater streams of the river to produce and deposit eggs. Before they leave for the ocean, they're known as Rainbow Trout. When they return, they're called Steelhead Trout. This is because the Rainbow Trout's diet changes when they're in the ocean, which causes them to appear more silvery gray.



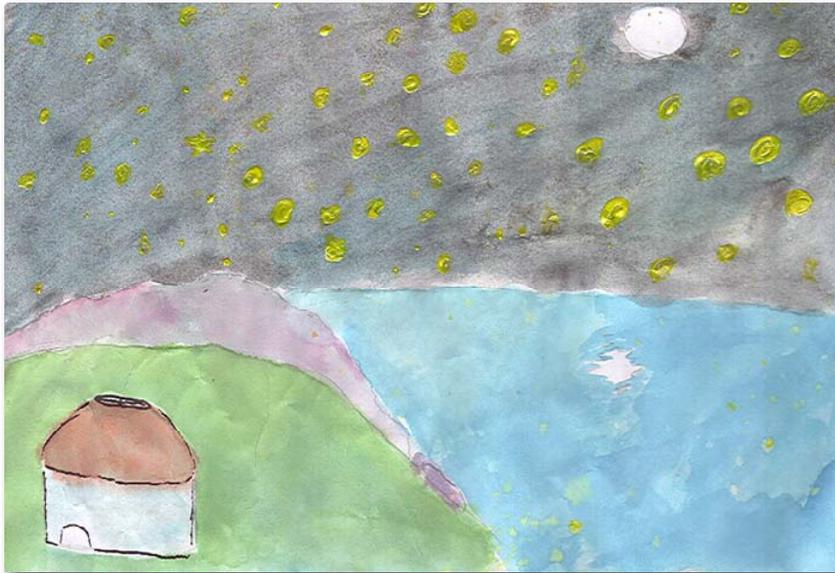
Rainbow Trout

So, let me get this straight—first, I'm a Rainbow Trout, then I'm a Steelhead Trout? This is so confusing, I'm having an identity crisis!



Steelhead Trout

Before continuing our journey, we spent the night at Treebones Resort in Big Sur (<http://www.treebonesresort.com/>). I have to mention this because, we didn't sleep in a hotel, we slept in a YURT. A yurt is a giant round tent that is almost like a cabin. They were originally used by people in central Asia. The top of our yurt had a sky dome, so we could sleep under the stars while inside! This place was totally amazing!



Piedro Blancas, California

Northern Elephant Seals migrate thousands of miles twice a year and come to land areas like the beaches of Piedro Blancas to breed, give birth, molt and rest. Areas like these are called "rookeries".

Elephant seals get their name from their large size and the giant noses on the males. During the 1800's they were killed for their blubber, which was turned into oil. By the early 1900's, they were almost extinct! The governments of Mexico and the United States gave protection to these animals and today they're thriving. They're such neat animals, I'm glad they're still around and doing fine!

Hey, Phill! Haven't seen you since the last migration cycle. What's new?



Pismo Beach

Today we filmed at Pismo Beach, which is home to one of the largest types of clams found along the California Coast. There used to be hundreds of clams all over the beach. Today there aren't as many, so there are special laws and regulations to help their numbers increase.



My dad prepared a seafood soup using clams, noodles and lots of garlic. It was delicious! He made sure to use only sustainable seafood in the dish. "Sustainable" means that something can be maintained. In other words, it means using seafood that doesn't have a negative impact on the environment.

I think that it's important to protect our oceans, and by choosing sustainable seafood, we can all help keep the environment healthy! Want to find out more? Check out the Seafood Watch Program at <http://www.montereybayaquarium.org> They have a great Seafood Watch Pocket Guide that you can download.

Heading back home, I thought a lot about migration. When animals migrate, they travel past oceans, through plains and over mountains. I hope to see many of the same places they do as I travel with my parents on *Wonders of the West*.

'Til next time,

Amelia

