

Amelia's Journal

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS, CALIFORNIA



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THE CHANNEL ISLANDS:

The Channel Islands are a group of islands off the coast of California. They're often referred to as the "Galapagos of the U.S." because they are so unique. We stayed in Ventura, California and took a ferry to get to the different islands every day for a week! While every island was unique and different, my favorite part of each day was just being on the boat!

Every morning, we'd pass a group of loud barking sea lions. Sometimes, hundreds of common dolphins would pass us as they raced to some unknown destination. My marine biologist mom pointed out everything we saw as we glided through the water. On 2 different days, we got to see a humpback whale breach, and one day we saw a blue whale—the largest living mammal on the planet! We tracked them through their "foot prints". You see, the whales leave 'foot prints' on the water's surface. When a whale is moving under water, sometimes the energy from the movement of its tail creates a slick spot on the surface of the water called a 'whale footprint'.



This humpback whale is breaching

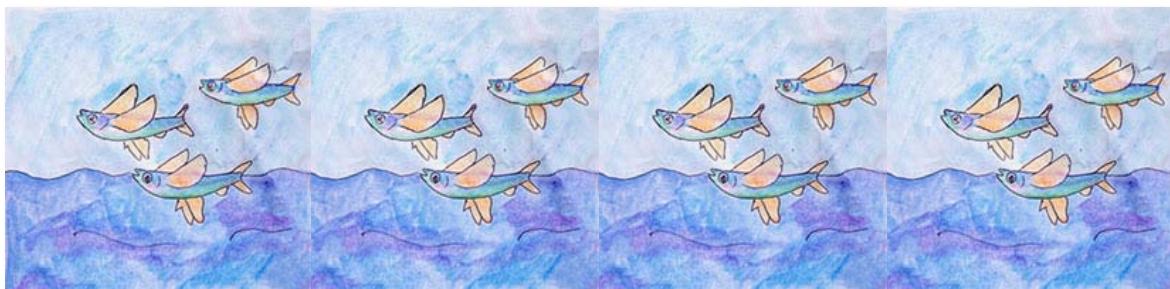


This blue whale was bigger than our boat!



This is what a whale foot print looks like

The coolest thing I saw happened one afternoon as we were headed back to the mainland. I looked over and saw all of these little fish "flying" out of the water!! My mom explained that these were "flying gunards"; they have long, wing-like fins that allows them to glide for periods of time in the air. They "fly" above the water's surface when predators are after them and they are trying to avoid being eaten. I think that's a pretty amazing defense mechanism for a fish!!



ON THE ISLANDS

Each island is unique and worth visiting. There's some great hiking and a lot of interesting wildlife. We interviewed a biologist who works with the island fox, an animal that lives on 6 of the 8 Channel Islands, but is found nowhere else on earth. These animals were on the brink of extinction until a special program was put in place that has helped them recover their population. They are becoming a true endangered species success story!



Photo by Tim Coonan, NPS

My favorite island:

ANACAPA ISLAND: This place is filled with thousands of seabirds, including the largest breeding colony of endangered California brown pelicans and western seagulls. There's a very cool old lighthouse, and the blooming ice plants on the ground made this place look like a picture postcard!



California Brown Pelican



Yellow Ice Plants

Hiking here is pretty terrific, but the neatest part of this place is underwater. There are kelp forests around the island, and to help visitors learn about what's there, Park Rangers do underwater presentations with an underwater video camera! It was a fun way to learn about the ocean without getting wet—but, I sure wish I had brought a swimsuit!



BACK ON THE MAINLAND:

When we were back in Ventura, we spent a day filming around the coastal tide pools. What a great way to spend a day -- I love tide pools!

TIDE POOLS



Tide pools are rocky pools that are filled with ocean water when the tide is low. They're like mini worlds where land and ocean intertwine for long periods of time. When you start exploring a tide pool, you never know what you'll find!!!

I found tons of little brown hermit crabs, green anemones, and sea stars.

Can you see the sea stars?

These are anemones—their tentacles close up when they're out of water to protect themselves.



Tide pools are great for learning about ocean life on a smaller scale and without actually having to get into the ocean (although I always seem to get pretty wet while I'm exploring them!)

When we returned home, I found a great app that helps to identify what you see in California tide pools: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/california-tidepools/id497631839?mt=8> I'll definitely bring this along on my next trip to the beach!!

'Til next time,

Amelia

