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# Scientist Profile: Sarah Codde, Marine Ecologist

[Golden Gate National Recreation Area \(https://www.nps.gov/goga/\)](https://www.nps.gov/goga/), [Point Reyes National Seashore \(https://www.nps.gov/pore/\)](https://www.nps.gov/pore/)



Sarah Codde, Marine Ecologist specializing in marine mammals at Point Reyes National Seashore.

*NPS / Maritte O'Gallagher*

## On Finding Her Focus...

"I was always interested in the ocean, and the mystery of it. But it wasn't really until college that I figured out I wanted to focus on marine mammals. It fascinated me that seals and sea lions have this dual life, where they spend half their time in the ocean and half their time on land. I loved learning more about how they really do that. I started with the National Park Service in 2008 as a harbor seal monitoring intern at Point Reyes, and eventually worked my way up to a permanent position. I was always focused on elephant seals and harbor seals."

## On Working with Elephant Seals...

"While we're looking for tagged animals during tag-resight surveys, we sit in one place for a couple of hours and just observe. It gives us a lot of time to be close to the animals and see their individual behaviors. We really learn more about the species that way, and it's pretty fun to see little details that you wouldn't see if you were just passing through. Watching the behavior of male seals is probably the most interesting. One of my favorite moments is when a young male approaches to challenge an alpha, and all the alpha has to do is open up one eye-- he doesn't even move-- and the approaching male usually gets scared and leaves. If he doesn't leave, then we get to see two males actually battle. That can be really awe-inspiring, to see these 6,000-pound animals battling each other. Even in this job, how often are you gonna see that?"



Codde tags a weaned pup during a tag-resight survey, marking it with a uniquely numbered pink tag that will enable researchers to identify this individual in the future and know where and when it was initially tagged. They can then use this information to estimate population size and track changes over time.

NMFS Permit #17152

NPS / Maritte O'Gallagher

## On Her Role as a Scientist...

"In our surveys, we are tracking population growth and how the seals are using beaches in Point Reyes. We also share that information with researchers at other colonies, so they know when seals that they've tagged show up here at Point Reyes and vice versa. That way, the larger scientific community gets an idea of how these populations are changing and moving over time."

"A main thing I focus on as a scientist is to provide data and recommendations to park management to help the park best protect the elephant seals. It's difficult to balance wanting the public to enjoy coming to a place like Point Reyes and see wild animals in nature, but also trying to protect those wild animals from human disturbance. It falls on me to make those recommendations, and that can be a challenge."

"Being a scientist has helped me become more boring at parties, because all I want to talk about is elephant seals. Still, people usually like hearing about the males battling, blood spurting out from a fight, females fighting, and the pups going from 70 pounds to 300 pounds in a month. People react to those sorts of things. It makes it easier to pass on the passion and excitement of what I do."

*Interview and Profile by Maritte O'Gallagher, March 2018.*

## Further Reading

[Elephant Seal Monitoring \(https://www.nps.gov/articles/elephant-seal-monitoring.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/articles/elephant-seal-monitoring.htm)

[Elephant Seal Monitoring FAQ \(https://www.nps.gov/articles/elephant-seal-monitoring-faq.htm?utm\\_source=article&utm\\_medium=website&utm\\_campaign=experience\\_more\)](https://www.nps.gov/articles/elephant-seal-monitoring-faq.htm?utm_source=article&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=experience_more)

[Where and When to See Elephant Seals at Point Reyes \(https://www.nps.gov/articles/where-when-elephant-seals-point-reyes.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/articles/where-when-elephant-seals-point-reyes.htm)

[Harbor Seal Monitoring \(https://www.nps.gov/articles/harbor-seal-monitoring.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/articles/harbor-seal-monitoring.htm)

[San Francisco Bay Area Inventory & Monitoring Network \(https://www.nps.gov/im/sfan/pinnipeds.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/im/sfan/pinnipeds.htm)

[Pacific Coast Science & Learning Center \(https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seals.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seals.htm)



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