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Channel Islands National Park News Release

October 22, 2018

For Immediate Release

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Research on an Ancient Sea Cow Discovered on the Channel Islands

Ventura, CA — During a lecture on Thursday, November 8, 2018, Dr. Jonathan Hoffman with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (SBNMH) will discuss the research plans for a significant sea cow fossil discovered on Santa Rosa Island in 2017.

The sea cow fossil is one of the oldest of its kind found on the west coast of North America, with an estimated age of 20-25 million years old. It is the first sea cow fossil discovered on the Channel Islands and it may represent a new species.

Hoffman will provide an understanding of how the sea cow specimen was deposited on Santa Rosa Island, its discovery, and the efforts to protect the specimen from scouring winds and winter rains, as well as the requisite need for excavation to prevent its loss due to erosion.

The many challenges encountered during the excavation process will be highlighted, along with the scientific studies planned by various researchers and institutions and what they hope to learn about the environment in which sea cows lived.

Hoffman received his Ph.D. in Geology from the University of Wyoming. His dissertation focused on using fossilized mammal teeth as tools to recreate ancient landscapes. Hoffman is currently the Dibblee Collection Manager of Earth Science and is responsible for the SBNMH's geology and paleontology collections. He is responsible for curating the material that the SBNMH acquires from Channel Islands National Park and sharing it with the public.

The talk will be held on Thursday, November 8, 2018. The From Shore to Sea lecture series is sponsored by Channel Islands National Park to further the understanding of current research on the Channel Islands and surrounding marine waters. The 2018 lecture series will take place at 7:00 pm on the second Thursday of each month, February through April and September through November, at the Channel Islands National Park Robert J. Lagomarsino Visitor Center, 1901 Spinnaker Drive, in Ventura Harbor. The programs are free and open to the public.

Channel Islands National Park was set aside, in part, for protection of its amazing paleontological resources, which are important for their educational and scientific research value. This work was specially authorized under a scientific research and collecting permit. It is illegal to disturb or collect fossils or any other objects without a permit. Members of the public can help us protect these resources by leaving them in place and notifying a park ranger.

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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

About Sea Cows

Sea cows, or sirenians (which includes modern manatees and dugongs), are torpedo-shaped aquatic mammals that live in shallow waters and grow to be massive in size, up to 13 feet in length. In some parts of the world, their fossil records date back to 50 million years ago.

At one time, there were over a dozen different genera of sirenians, a name derived from the mermaids of Greek mythology. The cause of their decline is unclear, but may be linked to changes in food availability and environmental and oceanographic conditions.

Their modern relatives include three manatee species in the western hemisphere and the dugong, found in the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean and the east coast of Africa. The dugong is the closest living relative to the sea cow from Santa Rosa Island. The last remaining dugong on the west coast of North America, the Stellar's sea cow, was hunted to extinction in the 1760s.

This lecture can also be viewed live online, at: [Shore to Sea lecture series](https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/live-programs.htm)
<https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/live-programs.htm>

Lectures are recorded and posted at: <http://www.nps.gov/chis/learn/photosmultimedia/from-shore-to-sea-lecture-videos.htm>

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