

I'D BEEN paddling the incredibly rich and diverse waters of Monterey Bay for several years, sharing information, helping people and picking up floating trash, so when I saw a notice in the paper in spring, 2001, it caught my attention.

With the rapid growth in popularity of kayaking in the area, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary was starting a pilot program and looking for people to staff it. They wanted kayakers who had some background or interest in environmental protection. The plan was to patrol the most popular stretches of water and serve as liaisons between the sanctuary and the visiting public. It seemed the perfect summer job. I applied and was accepted.

When three of us showed up for the first of several weeks of training, Team OCEAN was born. One day a week for eight weeks we learned all about the sanctuary, its history and more importantly, its flora and fauna and how to protect them.

We learned the ecological relationship between the kelp beds and the rich life off the Monterey coast and the incredible variety of sea birds, invertebrates and fish found along our shores. But most of all we focused on the threatened and endangered marine mammals that live in the area.

One of the sanctuary's concerns was that since our seals, sea lions and otters (especially the otters) were cute, the tourists were loving them to death, chasing them about in attempts to get up-close photos.

By the time the season started, the one woman in our group had to drop out, leaving Jeffery and me to patrol Elkhorn Slough and Monterey's Cannery Row four days a week. Jeffery drove down from San Francisco each day, so was clearly in it for more than the small pay.

We had different styles. He seemed to consider himself more a park ranger, while I saw myself as a docent, a twist on the "good cop, bad cop" game.

Six hours a day, four days a week was an exhausting schedule for two, but the joy of being out on the water, with the fog, wind and sun along with the wonderful sights and sounds we encountered daily, made it worthwhile. At the fall debriefing we offered our suggestions for the future. I suggested a volunteer program to augment the paid staff.

After a summer off I returned as a volunteer



Ron Eby has been leading Team OCEAN since 2006.

in 2003. Team OCEAN was thriving, with four paid staff and two dozen volunteers. It has continued to grow since then, and there are now six staff members.

The first new staff member in 2002 was Lori Beraha, now starting her sixth year. She also works on a whale watching boat in addition to other jobs. She is a world traveler and sailor who has crewed on boats to places I can't even find on a map.

Lori decided to join Team OCEAN during a career workshop that involved brainstorming the perfect job.

"I imagined a ranger-like position, combing and monitoring the beaches and helping injured wildlife. When I saw the job ad I couldn't believe it. Kayaking was even better."

Before Lori signed on, we'd experimented with paddling Santa Cruz that first season. It didn't seem worth the manpower, so we established the current pattern of patrols along Monterey's Cannery Row and Elkhorn Slough, a five-mile-long estuary at the center of Monterey Bay. These are the most accessible and popular of Monterey Bay's many great paddling spots.

Both locations are rich in wildlife. Cannery Row has massive kelp beds that are home for snails, octopi, anemones, schools of small fish and the sea urchins that are a favored food for endangered otters. The Monterey Harbor jetty is usually a mass of California sea lions, and each rock along the shore hosts a napping harbor seal. The air and rocks are filled with

Sea lions near the Monterey Harbor jetty.

