

Behavioral Ethograms of Pinnipeds in Human Care

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Detailed ethograms inform researchers and caretakers about potential modifications to species' behavior in human care. In many instances, ethograms serve as an important tool for understanding the baseline behavior of the target species. Consequently, the behavioral baseline allows us to compare changes to behavior as they relate to interactions with conspecifics or their environment. This study is an example of such a collaboration between the animal care team at the Long Island Aquarium and researchers at the Center for the Study of Pinniped Ecology & Cognition. In this study, we utilized web cams mounted within the perimeter of the habitats and conducted observations to generate behavioral ethograms of pinnipeds (harbor seals and California sea lions). The utilization of web cams for data collection will be discussed as well as preliminary data in reference to 1) a baseline activity budget, 2) usage of space within exhibits by animals, and 3) relationships between activity/exhibit usage with and without people present. This work, and the dissemination of its data, will serve to inform captive management objectives as well as highlight positive interactions for animals that are housed in appropriate human care environments.

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