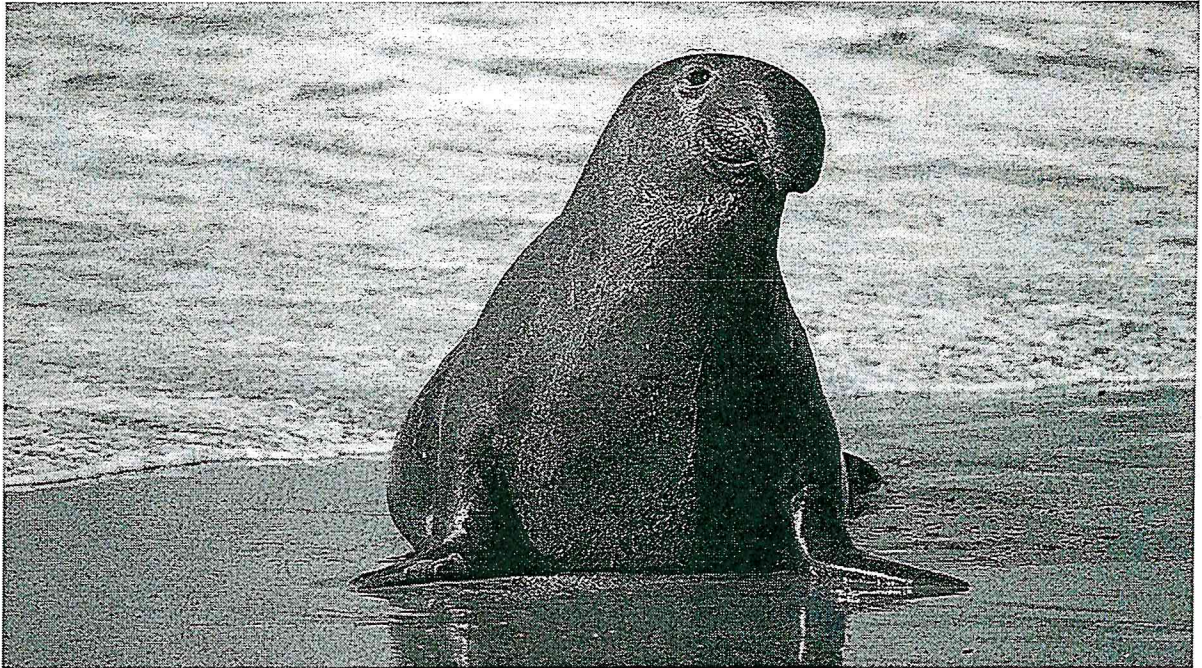


New study: Elephant seals recognize voice rhythm and pitch to avoid bullies

By PBS NewsHour, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.26.17

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A male elephant seal at the Ano Nuevo State Reserve on January 13, 2010 in San Mateo County, California. New research suggests that male elephant seals recognize their rivals by rhythmic patterns in their call. Photo by: Barry Bland/Barcroft Media/Getty Images.

We can recognize our friends just from the sound of their voice. The rhythm and pitch of their speech tell us who they are.

Rhythm is a repeated pattern of movement or sound. When someone talks about "feeling the rhythm," in music or dance, they are talking about these patterns. When we speak, we arrange every sound into patterns without always knowing it. Sounds that are loud might be followed by sounds that are softer.

The rhythm in our speech is part of how we recognize the voices of people we know. Humans are not the only animals who can do this. Male elephant seals can recognize the calls of other seals. A new study shows that seals are able to recognize rhythm. This is how they know who is who.