

## **‘Demonic’ sea lions that attacked people off California coast were sickened by toxic substance: scientists**

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They were flippin’ poisoned!

The horde of “demonic” sea lions that attacked people off the California coast in recent weeks lashed out because they were sickened by mind-warping toxic algae, scientists have discovered.

The normally adorable ocean critters — who [mauled a surfer](#) and [bit a swimmer](#) — were reduced to a zombie-like state due to a neurological flare-up that caused confusion, seizures and panic, marine experts said.

“These animals are reacting to the fact that they are sick,” John Warner, CEO Marine Mammal Care Center in Los Angeles, told [BBC News](#).

“They’re disoriented, and most likely, most of them are having seizures, and so their senses are not all fully functional as they normally would and they’re acting out of fear.”



*Hundreds of sea lions were sickened by toxic algae, causing some of them to lash out. Getty Images*

The center tested hundreds of [sea lions](#) and found they suffered from the so-called “domoic acid toxicosis” from gobbling down fish exposed to the toxic bloom near the southern California shoreline.

At least 195 sea lions with the illness have been admitted to the center since late March, said Warner, who said they can recover with anti-seizure medications and sedation.

But the brain-bending condition often makes sea lions flip out with rage — like in the case of Rj LaMendola, who was dragged from his surfboard by a sea lion on March 21.

“It looked possessed,” LaMendola, 40, wrote later in [Facebook post](#). “This creature looked like nothing I’d ever seen—its expression was feral, almost demonic, devoid of the curiosity or playfulness.”



*Surfer Rj Lamendola was mauled by a sea lion that looked “demonic.”facebook/rjlamendola*



*1Phoebe Beltran, 15, was bitten by a sea lion while training to become a life gaurd. KNBC*

He escaped from the blubber-bellied beast with a bloody gash on his left butt cheek and was rushed to a hospital.

“It felt like I was being hunted,” he said. “Today, I endured the most harrowing and traumatic experience of my 20 years of surfing.”

Nine days later, Phoebe Beltran, 15, was doing swim test in Long Beach to become a lifeguard when a sea lion repeatedly sunk its teeth into her right arm.

“I was just so scared, so shocked, but I still felt the immense pain on my arms, like, over and over again,” the teen [told ABC 7](#).

She was hospitalized but didn’t require advanced treatment after

the unprovoked attack.

Others have reported bizarre behavior and aggressive sea lions as experts said attacks by the animals are “on the rise.”

The toxic algae bloom sprouted earlier than normal this year and has spread for roughly 370 miles along Southern California coastline.

Exposed sea lions often become lethargic or in a comatose state then turn aggressive as they recover from the poisoning, Warner said.

“Their behavior changes from what we’re used to, to something more unpredictable,” Warner said.

“If they’re still aggressive or not foraging properly, it tells us their brains aren’t functioning the way they should,” he said.



*Jules Leon, a marine mammal responder with the Marine Mammal Care Center in San Pedro, uses a net to rescue a California sea lion suffering from domoic acid poisoning. ALLISON DINNER/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock*

Source: <https://nypost.com/2025/04/10/us-news/demonic-sea-lions-that-attacked-people-off-california-coast-were-sickened-by-toxic-substance/>

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