

# The New Year News

Point Reyes National Seashore, California

14 January 2017

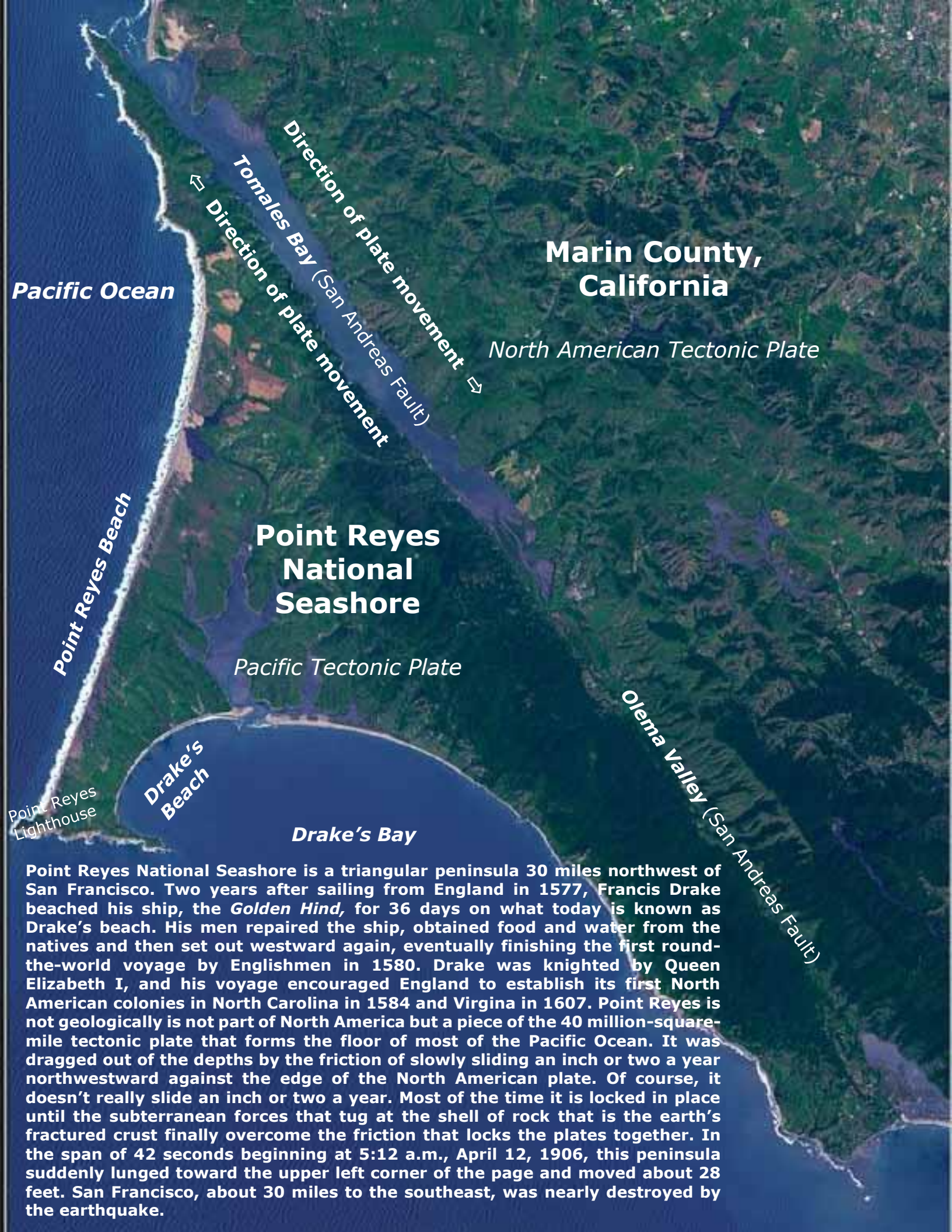
*I've been for a walk  
On a winter's day ...*

*California Dreamin'  
The Mamas and the Papas  
1965*



The lighthouse at Point Reyes (King's Point) in Marin County north of San Francisco. The point was named Punta Reyes by Sebastián Vizcaíno – among other things a Spanish explorer in the Pacific – who saw the point on January 6, 1605, the Twelfth Day of Christmas, Epiphany, which by tradition is the day the three kings, or wise men, from the east arrived at in Bethlehem to see Jesus.





# Marin County, California

North American Tectonic Plate

## Point Reyes National Seashore

Pacific Tectonic Plate

Point Reyes National Seashore is a triangular peninsula 30 miles northwest of San Francisco. Two years after sailing from England in 1577, Francis Drake beached his ship, the *Golden Hind*, for 36 days on what today is known as Drake's beach. His men repaired the ship, obtained food and water from the natives and then set out westward again, eventually finishing the first round-the-world voyage by Englishmen in 1580. Drake was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I, and his voyage encouraged England to establish its first North American colonies in North Carolina in 1584 and Virginia in 1607. Point Reyes is not geologically is not part of North America but a piece of the 40 million-square-mile tectonic plate that forms the floor of most of the Pacific Ocean. It was dragged out of the depths by the friction of slowly sliding an inch or two a year northwestward against the edge of the North American plate. Of course, it doesn't really slide an inch or two a year. Most of the time it is locked in place until the subterranean forces that tug at the shell of rock that is the earth's fractured crust finally overcome the friction that locks the plates together. In the span of 42 seconds beginning at 5:12 a.m., April 12, 1906, this peninsula suddenly lunged toward the upper left corner of the page and moved about 28 feet. San Francisco, about 30 miles to the southeast, was nearly destroyed by the earthquake.



*I've been for a walk*

*On a winter's day ...*

Normally I try to do a newsletter for New Year's featuring photography from the California coast. Lighthouses are a favorite sub-theme.

But as you may have heard, the drought has ended in Northern California due to the thud of tons of giant snowflakes landing in the Sierra Nevada – the usual location for my holiday newsletter – after Christmas.

Here at sea level in San Jose, the drought ended with a splash.

The rain would have made for a couple of weekends of difficult photography had I ventured out.

Saturday's trip to Point Reyes National Seashore, the locale for this newsletter, was shot on the first good weather opportunity weekend since I was in the Sierra a week before Christmas.

I also made a 90-second video on this trip that you can see at <https://youtu.be/uAtFx1sSfjA>.

My plan is to spend tomorrow, the Martin Luther King Day holiday, back in the Sierra, now one of the whitest places in the country, to show you what the end of our drought looks like. It will give you some "after" views to match the almost snowless "before" photos in last month's holiday newsletter.

Happy New Year.

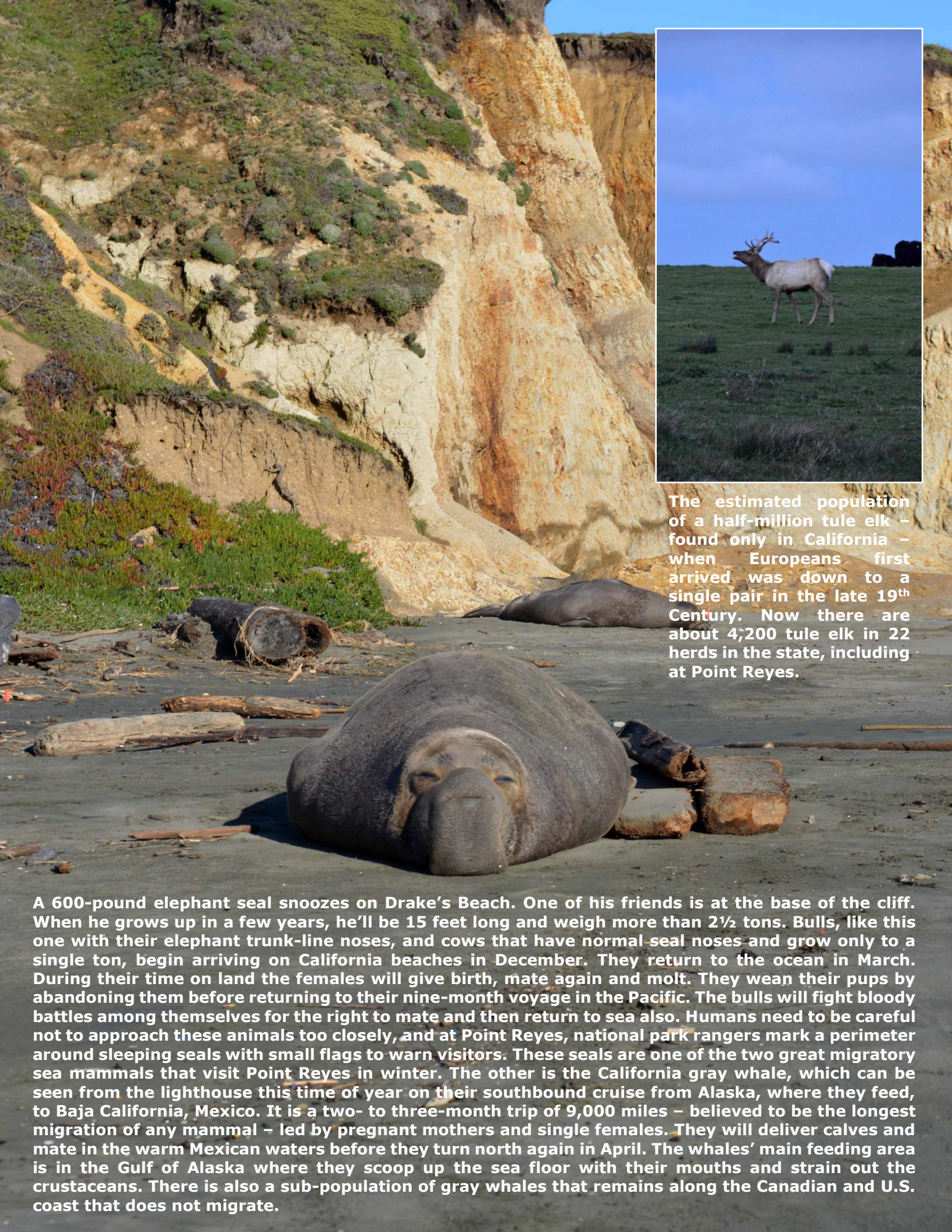
**Point Reyes Beach, which is 600 feet below, stretches northward from the point itself.**





**The lighthouse at Point Reyes is one of the few that is built lower than the highest available point of land. As one of the foggiest places in the United States in summer, the lighthouse was constructed halfway down a 600-foot cliff so that the light would be below the usual fog level.**





The estimated population of a half-million tule elk – found only in California – when Europeans first arrived was down to a single pair in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Now there are about 4,200 tule elk in 22 herds in the state, including at Point Reyes.

A 600-pound elephant seal snoozes on Drake's Beach. One of his friends is at the base of the cliff. When he grows up in a few years, he'll be 15 feet long and weigh more than 2½ tons. Bulls, like this one with their elephant trunk-line noses, and cows that have normal seal noses and grow only to a single ton, begin arriving on California beaches in December. They return to the ocean in March. During their time on land the females will give birth, mate again and molt. They wean their pups by abandoning them before returning to their nine-month voyage in the Pacific. The bulls will fight bloody battles among themselves for the right to mate and then return to sea also. Humans need to be careful not to approach these animals too closely, and at Point Reyes, national park rangers mark a perimeter around sleeping seals with small flags to warn visitors. These seals are one of the two great migratory sea mammals that visit Point Reyes in winter. The other is the California gray whale, which can be seen from the lighthouse this time of year on their southbound cruise from Alaska, where they feed, to Baja California, Mexico. It is a two- to three-month trip of 9,000 miles – believed to be the longest migration of any mammal – led by pregnant mothers and single females. They will deliver calves and mate in the warm Mexican waters before they turn north again in April. The whales' main feeding area is in the Gulf of Alaska where they scoop up the sea floor with their mouths and strain out the crustaceans. There is also a sub-population of gray whales that remains along the Canadian and U.S. coast that does not migrate.



*Happy New Year*



A couple walks on Drake's Beach and another atop the cliff as the sun begins to set at Point Reyes.