

...PRESENTS:

BEN HIGGINS

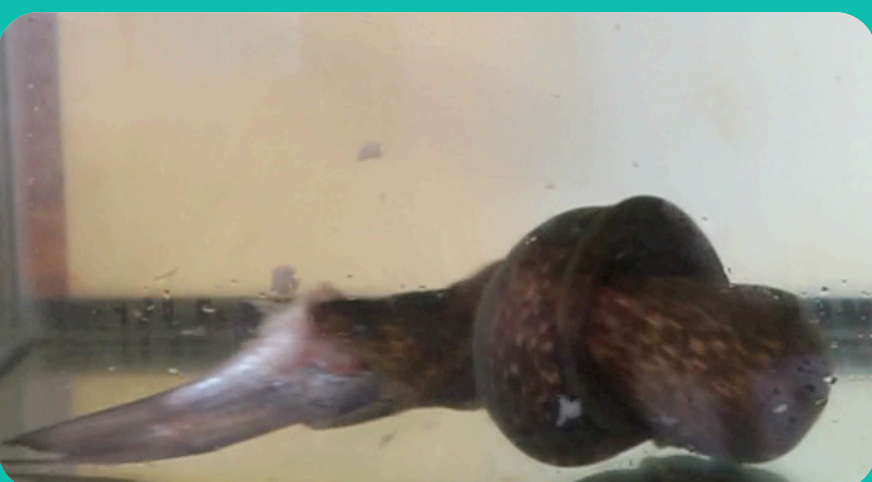
WHS SCIENTIST IN RESIDENCE, 2014-2015



One of the best parts about my research is that it lets me work both in the lab, and out in the field. Here I am with "Scout," one of our three California morays we keep in the lab to help us learn more about these cryptic and elusive fish.

Some stuff about me:

- Age: 31
- Where I grew up: Los Angeles, California
- High School: Crossroads High School
- Favorite subjects in high school: Biology
- College (undergraduate): Pitzer College, Pomona California
- Some of my favorite things: Camping, SCUBA diving, video games
- Something weird about me: I worked as a roadie in the summers for music artists such as Simon & Garfunkel, Eminem, Jay-Z, and others to put myself through my Masters program at the California State University, Fullerton.
- What I think or do when I get frustrated: When I get frustrated I like to take a walk and bring my binoculars to look for birds. I find the search for them calms me to the point where I can come back to the situation and figure it out.



The knot! Because of their flexible and elongate bodies, eels are able to tie themselves into a knot to help them tear off portions of large prey items.



My wife, Rachel and daughter, Kai after picking some olallieberries. As you can see, Kai couldn't quite make it home before she decided to start eating a few a lot!



What's for dinner? Amazingly, we still don't have a good idea of what morays eat! See that bulge in their body? That was dinner! We extract recently consumed meals by a method called manual palpation, which leaves the eel unharmed, but probably a bit hungry.

What I study

Southern Californian kelp forests are some of the most well studied ecosystems in the ocean. Kelp forests provide us with scientific and economic resources, such as beach erosion protection, and both commercial and recreational fisheries. I work with one of the native residents of the Southern Californian kelp forests, the California moray eel. Because the morays live in cracks and crevices, they have been overlooked in standard fish counts and remain poorly understood. Even basic biological information, such as what they eat, how often they need to eat it, how much (if at all) they move, how many there are in a given space, or even how old they can get! My research is focused on these questions.

This will be my first year as a SCWIBLES fellow, and I could not be more thrilled to be working with all of you. Science in itself can be a lot of fun, but the more people that work together to understand something, the more fun it becomes, and the better the work! If you see me around, please feel free to ask me what it's like being a scientist. I'd also be happy to tell you the story of my eel bite!



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