

Angel's

Be
Alive!Angel Gomez,
Director of
Member
Services

The Grunion Run

Hello everyone!

Can't sleep at night and need something to do? I've got something for you – a grunion run.

You will have a few days in August to go out to Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro, right next to the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, a Rec and Parks facility, and see these little fish come up on shore and spawn. I was lucky enough to go in July and actually see the grunion come on shore and do their thing. I have to say it is exciting, and the look on the kid's faces is priceless. If you have children and want to take them out late one night during the week (including Friday), this is a real treat.

I took my family and one of my son's friends to enjoy this nocturnal event. I would say it's about 30 miles from downtown Los Angeles, and very economical, too. You can park right at the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, and the parking is about \$1 per hour (maximum charge is \$9). We arrived at 10:17 p.m. and left by 12:38 a.m. The total cost was \$3. We brought a small cooler and filled it with sandwiches and chips and a couple of juice bottles. The boys had a blast, and my son's friend, Adrian, really enjoyed going, too. It was his first time, and he loved every moment. (And he will love having his picture in the paper!) **(1)**

Although we didn't make it in time, the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium also offers a lecture and information session before each grunion run. The aquarium opens at 8 p.m. on those dates (see below), and the charge for the program is \$5. But you don't have to participate in that to attend the grunion run.

What Are Grunion?

There are a few things you must know before you go. First, do you know what grunion are?

They are fish, members of the New World silver-sides family, *Atheriniopsidae*, along with the jacksmelt and topsmelt. They normally occur from Point Conception, a few nautical miles west of Santa Barbara, to Point Abreojos, Baja California. Occasionally, they are found farther north to Monterey Bay and south to San Juanico Bay, Baja California.

To hunt the little fish on your own – to grab them with your bare hands and place in a bucket – you must do the following:

- Get a fishing license. You must purchase a license at a sporting goods store. Many fish and tackle shops and some Walmarts and Kmart's also sell a fishing license in California. Lots of parents want to take their kids to do the grunion run. **(4)**

- Find out about your local beach curfews along the California coast. While technically you may be on the beach to fish after curfew, most places with curfews will not offer parking, so that eliminates many beaches where grunions spawn (lay eggs).

- Be sure the location you visit actually has grunion runs. There is a grunion program offered to the public at Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro on several



nights of the season. Call (310) 548-7562 for details. (Information courtesy the California Dept. of Fish and Game.)

Grunion Spawning Activities

(5) California grunion spawn at night on the beach, from two to six nights after the full and new moon, beginning a little after high tide and continuing for several hours. As a wave breaks on the beach, the grunion swim as far up the slope as possible. The female arches her body, keeping her head up, and excavates the semi-fluid sand with her tail. As her tail sinks, the female twists her body and digs, tail first, until she is buried up to her pectoral fins. After the female is in the nest, up to eight males attempt to mate with her by curving around the female and releasing their milt as she deposits her eggs about four inches below the surface. After spawning, the males immediately retreat toward the ocean. The milt flows down the female's body until it reaches the eggs and fertilizes them. The female twists free and returns to the sea with the next wave. The whole event can happen in 30 seconds, but some fish remain on the beach for several minutes. (The Gulf grunion spawns during the daytime, and has smaller eggs.)

Spawning may continue from March through August, with possibly an occasional extension into February and September. However, peak spawning is from late March through early June. Once mature, an individual may spawn during successive spawning periods at about 15-day intervals. Most females spawn about six times during the season. Counts of

maturing ova to be laid at one spawning ranged from about 1,600 to about 3,600, with the larger females producing more eggs. A female might lay as many as 18,000 eggs over an entire season. The milt from the male might contain as many as one million sperm. Males may participate in several spawnings per run.

The eggs incubate a few inches deep in the sand above the level of subsequent waves. They are not immersed in seawater, but are kept moist by the residual water in the sand. While incubating, they are subject to predation by shore birds and sand-dwelling invertebrates. Under normal conditions, they do not have an opportunity to hatch until the next tide series high enough to reach them, in 10 or more days. Grunion eggs can extend incubation and delay hatching if tides do not reach them, for an additional four weeks after this initial hatching time. Most of the eggs will hatch in 10 days if provided with the seawater and agitation of the rising surf. The mechanical action of the waves is the environmental trigger for hatching, and the rapidity of hatch, in less than one minute, indicates that it is probably not an enzymatic function of softening the chorion, as in some other fishes.

The hatching of grunion eggs can be watched by collecting a cluster of eggs after a grunion run and keeping them in a loosely covered container of damp sand in a cool spot for 10 to 15 days. Then, add one teaspoon of sand and eggs to one cup of sea water and shake gently; the eggs will hatch before your eyes in a few minutes.

at Cabrillo Beach | in San Pedro



(1) Family friend Adrian and my son, Angel, grabbed a few grunion. Look at the fun they are having. Priceless!



(2) My son Angel pretends to eat a grunion. Don't worry, no grunion were hurt during our visit.



(3) My other son Aden got his hands on another one.



(4) Adrian, Angel, and Aden each caught a grunion. They were so happy.



(5) Lots of people try their best to catch grunion.

Upcoming Dates

Here are the upcoming dates and approximate times for grunion runs at the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium in August:

Aug. 5:	9:30 p.m. - 11:30 p.m.
Aug. 6:	10:05 p.m. - 12:05 a.m.
Aug. 7:	11:35 p.m. - 12:35 a.m.
Aug. 8:	11:05 p.m. - 10:05 a.m.
Aug. 20:	9:55 p.m. - 11:55 p.m.
Aug. 21:	10:40 p.m. - 12:40 a.m.
Aug. 22:	11:25 p.m. - 1:25 a.m.

The times offered are merely guidelines, offering a two-hour span in which spawning runs may occur at Cabrillo Beach in Los Angeles County. Subtract five minutes for San Diego, and add 25 minutes to find the time for Santa Barbara. The best runs normally occur on the second and third nights of the four-night period. The second hour is usually better. **(3)** Grunion can be captured by hand only during open season, and you aren't allowed to dig holes to trap them. While you can take all you want, don't be wasteful.

Take only what you will eat. **(2)**

Lastly, I always need to be reminded to bring chairs, blankets, warm clothes and extra shoes. Your shoes will get very wet; once you see the grunion, you will forget about the water and try your best to catch these little guys.

I hope you can make the trip. If not to San Pedro, there are other beaches north and south of there that will also have grunion run schedules, too.

Oh, one more thing: Don't forget the flashlight!

**Until next time,
be safe and Be Alive!
— Angel**

Directions and Parking

• The Cabrillo Marine Aquarium is on the shore at Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro, between Point Fermin and the Port of Los Angeles.

3720 Stephen M. White Dr.
San Pedro, CA 90731
(310) 548-7562

Directions:

- Take the Harbor Freeway (110) south
- Exit at Harbor Boulevard in San Pedro.
- Turn right onto Harbor Boulevard.
- Turn right onto 22nd Street.
- Turn left onto Pacific Avenue.
- Turn left onto Stephen White Drive.
- Proceed to Cabrillo Beach parking lot.

Cabrillo Beach Parking

- \$1 per hour (\$9 max) for cars, \$2 per hour (\$15 max) for boats and oversized vehicles.
- Parking is free with a member parking pass.

