

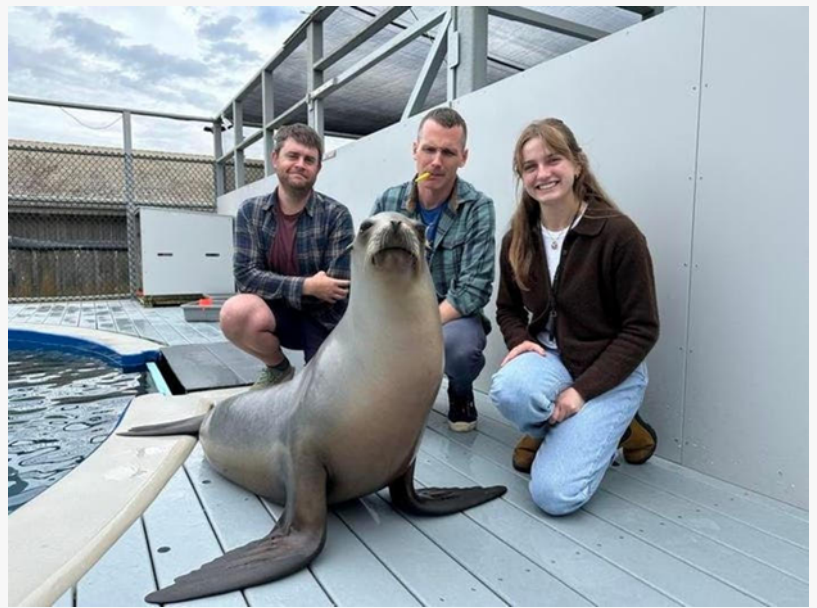
Sea Lion Ronan Makes Scientific Waves in Breakthrough Beat-Keeping Study

SARASOTA, FL, UNITED STATES, July 14, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Sarasota's New College of Florida continues to shape the future of marine mammal science with the release of a groundbreaking study led by comparative neuroscientist Dr. Peter Cook and Master's student Carson Hood. Published in *Scientific Reports*—the fifth most-cited journal in the world—the peer-reviewed article demonstrates that a trained California sea lion named Ronan can match—and even outperform—humans in keeping a musical beat.

The study, titled “Sensorimotor synchronization to rhythm in an experienced sea lion rivals that of humans,” was co-authored by Cook, Hood, Andrew Rouse of UC Santa Cruz, and Colleen Reichmuth who runs the UCSC pinniped lab where Ronan lives. It highlights Ronan's extraordinary precision in rhythm synchronization, with timing variability as small as five to ten milliseconds—roughly the duration of a tenth of an eyeblink.

“She is incredibly precise,” said Dr. Cook, who leads the Comparative Cognition Lab at New College. “Ronan continues to challenge what we know about how non-human animals perceive rhythm and pattern. She's hitting the rhythmic bullseye again and again—and doing so as consistently as, or better than, humans.”

The implications of the research extend far beyond entertainment. The study contributes to the emerging field of biomusicality, which explores how species perceive music-like qualities such as rhythm and beat. This work raises critical questions about the evolution of cognition, the universality of rhythm recognition, and the shared brain mechanisms that underlie musicality,



Study co-authors Andrew Rouse (UC Santa Cruz), Dr. Peter Cook (New College of Florida), and graduate student Carson Hood with California sea lion Ronan. Photo credit: Colleen Reichmuth. NMFS 23554

cognition, and consciousness across species.

For Carson Hood, a student in the inaugural class of New College's Master's in Marine Mammal Science, this marks the program's first published student paper.

"As a graduate student here, I get to explore the questions I care most about—alongside professors who are approachable, experienced, and deeply dedicated to this field," said Hood. "What makes this study so meaningful is that by learning how animals like Ronan process rhythm, we begin to uncover the deeper patterns that connect species—and ultimately, how our brains make sense of the world."

New College's interdisciplinary Marine Mammal Science MS program is the only one of its kind in the U.S. With Sarasota Bay at its doorstep, and faculty like Dr. Cook leading the way, the college is fast becoming one of the top destinations for students interested in marine mammal science.

"This is exactly what New College is built for," said Dr. Cook. "Curious students. Big questions. Deep research and science."

The study has already attracted national and international media attention, including coverage from The New York Times, Popular Science, BBC, and the San Francisco Chronicle.

About New College of Florida

Founded in 1960, New College of Florida is a top-ranked public liberal arts college and serves as Florida's Honors College. Recognized for its academic excellence, rigorous inquiry, and commitment to free expression, New College offers more than 50 undergraduate majors, graduate programs in Applied Data Science and Marine Mammal Science, and a growing NAIA athletics program.

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