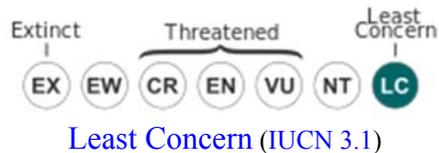


From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Harbor (common) seal

Conservation status



The **harbor** (or **harbour**) seal (*Phoca vitulina*), also known as the **common seal**, is a true seal found along temperate and Arctic marine coastlines of the Northern Hemisphere. The most widely distributed species of pinniped (walrus, eared seals, and true seals), they are found in coastal waters of the northern Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the Baltic and North Seas.

Harbor seals are brown, tan, or gray, with distinctive V-shaped nostrils. An adult can attain a length of 1.85 meters (6.1 ft) and a mass of 132 kilograms (290 lb). [Blubber](#) under the seal's skin helps to maintain body temperature. Females outlive males (30–35 years versus 20–25 years). Harbor seals stick to familiar resting spots or haulout sites, generally rocky areas (although ice, sand and mud may also be used) where they are protected from adverse weather conditions and predation, near a foraging area. Males may fight over mates underwater and on land. Females bear a single pup after a nine month gestation, which they care for alone. Pups can weigh up to 16 kg (35 lb) and are able to swim and dive within hours of birth. They develop quickly on their mothers' fat-rich milk and are weaned after four to six weeks.

Habitat and diet

Harbor seals prefer to frequent familiar resting sites. They may spend several days at sea and travel up to 50 kilometers in search of feeding grounds, and will also swim some distance upstream into freshwater in large rivers. Resting sites may be both rugged, rocky coasts, such as those of the Hebrides or the shorelines of New England, or sandy beaches. Harbor seals frequently congregate in harbors, sandy intertidal zones, and estuaries in pursuit of prey fish such as menhaden, anchovy, sea bass, herring, mackerel, cod, whiting and flatfish, and occasionally shrimp, crabs, mollusks and squid.

Pacific Coast and California

The California population of subspecies *richardsi* amounted to approximately 25,000 individuals as of 1984. Pacific harbor seals or Californian harbor seals are found along the entire Pacific coast shoreline of the state. They prefer to remain relatively close to shore in subtidal and intertidal zones, and have not been seen beyond the Channel Islands as a pelagic form; moreover, they will often venture into bays and estuaries and even swim up coastal rivers. They feed in shallow littoral waters on herring, flounder, hake, anchovy, codfish and sculpin.