

Commonly found Marine Mammals of Puget Sound

Pinnipeds - Seals and Sea Lions



Pacific Harbor Seal
Phoca vitulina

Adults mottled tan or blue-gray with dark spots
Male: 6' / 300 lbs; Female: 5' / 200 pounds
Earless (internal ears, with obvious hole)
Short fur-covered flippers, nails at end
Drags rear flippers behind body
Vocalization: "maah" (pups only)

Harbor seals are the most abundant marine mammal in Puget Sound. Curious, but shy, they prefer quiet, unpopulated areas. Seals often haul out on protected beaches and rocks to digest food, rest in the sun, give birth, or nurse young. At any sign of danger they slip into the water where they swim with grace. On land however, seals flop along as they do not have rotating hind flippers for walking like sea lions.

California Sea Lion
Zalophus californianus

Dark brown to black
Male: 8' / 800 lbs; Female: 6' / 250 lbs.

Extended, rolled flap ears
Long leathery flippers, nails mid-flipper
Walks on all four flippers; Doglike bark

Mainly male California sea lions are seen from fall to spring in the Puget Sound region. California sea lions have a doglike snout, and at about five years males develop a "sagittal crest" or bump on their foreheads. Groups of sea lions often rest on the water "rafting", with their flippers extended above the surface.



Steller Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

Light to golden brown
Male: 10-12' / 2200 lbs;
Female: 7' / 600 lbs.
Extended, rolled flap ears
Long leathery flippers,
nails mid-flipper

Walks on all four flippers; Deep lion-like roar

Found mostly in northern waters in our region, listed under the Endangered Species Act.



Northern Elephant Seal

Mirounga angustirostris

Brownish-gray

Male: 20' / 8,000 lbs

Female: 10' / 2,000 lbs.

Internal ears (slight hole)

Short fur-covered flippers, nails at end

Drags rear flippers behind body

Vocalization: Guttural growl or belch

Elephant seals are increasing in number in this region, and are the only pinniped here that molts annually, sloughing off the outer layer of skin and fur.



Seal Pups

If you see a seal pup alone on the beach

DO NOT DISTURB - it's the law!



Human encroachment can stress the pup and scare the mother away.

For your safety and the health of the pup, leave the pup alone. Do not touch!

Seal "pupping" occurs in June and July along the Strait of Juan de Fuca and San Juan Islands, and July through September in southern Puget Sound and Hood Canal. Most pups are born at haul-out sites or rookeries, but a female may give birth anywhere there is easy access to the waters edge.

Nursing pups remain with their mothers for 4 to 6 weeks and then weaned to forage and survive on their own. A nursing pup may triple its birth weight by the time it is weaned and uses its stored fat reserves as it learns to feed on its own.

Up to 50% of pups will not survive their first year. Contributing factors to pup mortality are: premature birth; predation by wild predators or domestic dogs; infection; disease; dehydration; or starvation.

Cetaceans

Odontocetes (toothed)

Orca (or Killer Whale)

Orcinus orca

Black body with white chin, belly, and eyepatch

Average 23 - 26' / 4 - 8 tons

Tall dorsal fin, up to 6' on adult males; gray saddle patch on back behind dorsal. Travel in pods of 3 - 40; *Resident* type eats salmon; *Transients* eat marine mammals. Southern Resident orcas are endangered.



Harbor Porpoise
Phocoena phocoena

Dark gray or black with lighter sides and belly

Average 5- 6' / 120 lbs.

Small triangular dorsal fin, small blow, travels alone or in small groups of 2 - 10. Does not bow-ride.

Dall's Porpoise

Phocoenoides dalli

Black body / white belly and sides

White on dorsal fin trailing edge

Average 6 - 7' / 300 lbs.

Stocky body, small flippers and flukes, triangular dorsal fin. Fast swimmer, creates a "rooster tail" spray and likes to bow-ride. Travels alone or in groups of 2 - 20 or more.



Mysticetes (baleen)



Gray Whale
Eschrichtius robustus

Gray with white mottling / barnacles

No dorsal fin, has "knuckles" or knobs on back

Average 46' / 33 tons

Heart-shaped blow, small resident population feeds in Puget Sound each spring, stragglers year-round

Minke Whale

Balaenoptera acutorostrata

Black / dark gray, light undersides, white patch on flippers.

Small, sleek body, pointed head

Average 26-28' / 6-8 tons

Short curved dorsal fin, travels alone or in small groups.

