



SEALS AND SEA LIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Five species of seals and sea lions (pinnipeds) are found in British Columbia (B.C.) waters. Although commercial hunting of all marine mammals is prohibited in the Pacific Region, accidental entanglement in fishing gear or debris, oil spills, conflicts with fisherman, and environmental contaminants all pose a threat to pinnipeds.

Steller Sea Lions were listed as a species of Special Concern in Canada under the Species at Risk Act (SARA) in 2005. People and boats can interfere with an animals' ability to feed, communicate, rest, breed, and care for its young. Be cautious and quiet around pinnipeds, especially when passing haulouts, and avoid approaching closer than 100 meters.

Reporting Marine Mammal Incidents

Rescuing an injured or entangled seal or sea lion can be dangerous - do not attempt to touch or move an animal yourself. Observe from a distance and report any incidents of injured, entangled, distressed, or dead marine mammals and sea turtles. If accidental contact occurs between a marine mammal and your vessel or gear, regulations require you to immediately report it. Proper species identification (see back) is critical for documenting incidents, and tracking and addressing threats to these animals.

Report any incidents involving marine mammals or sea turtles that you observed or were involved in immediately to Fisheries and Oceans Canada's 24/7 Observe, Record, Report Line
1.800.465.4336 or VHF Channel 16

What to Record

YOUR NAME, VESSEL NAME, AND CONTACT INFORMATION

DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

General location with latitude/longitude coordinates if possible

ANIMAL TYPE & SPECIES

Describe size, colour, etc.

ANIMAL ALIVE OR DEAD?

IS IT INJURED AND HOW?

ANIMAL'S BEHAVIOUR

ANIMAL'S DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

VIOLATOR'S IDENTITY & DESCRIPTION

Describe violator's identity, boat or vehicle, licence/registration number, any evidence at the scene

Take Photographs/Video

INJURED ANIMAL AND ANY GEAR

All in one frame including injuries

FEATURES TO IDENTIFY SPECIES

FEATURES TO IDENTIFY INDIVIDUAL ANIMAL

Include ear, leg, and flipper tags, branding numbers, pigmentation and colour patterns on skin or fur, any electronic instruments if present

ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

Identify any violators and their actions, video where possible

CORRECT DATE AND TIME

Make sure camera settings are correct

Sea Lion Comparison

Steller Sea Lions are commonly mistaken for California Sea Lions which pass through B.C. in early winter and late spring. Look for these key differences.



Injured and Abandoned Seals

Reports of abandoned or stranded seal pups are common from June to September during harbour seal pupping season. Seal pups stay with their mothers for 4-6 weeks after birth. Pups whose mothers are away for foraging are often believed abandoned or orphaned resulting in unnecessary intervention.

If you see a seal that you think is in urgent need of care, call the **Vancouver Aquarium's Marine Mammal Rescue Centre at 604.258.SEAL (7325)** and they will instruct you on how best to proceed.



PINNIPED IDENTIFICATION



Steller Sea Lion

Eumetopias jubatus

SIZE Adult males – up to 3 m (10 ft) long / weigh up to 1000 kg (2000 lbs);
adult females – up to 2.2 m (7.2 ft) long / weigh up to 360 kg (800 lbs)

APPEARANCE Light tan to reddish brown colouration, greyish white when wet. Males have a large, robust body, thick neck, and mane; females are more slender. Robust head with short, broad snout, and small external ear flaps. Large hairless flippers can support body for “walking”.

DISTRIBUTION Entire B.C. coast year round. Congregate at rookeries to breed in summer and disperse locally to wintering sites in fall.

BEHAVIOUR Haul out on rocky outcrops and islets. Highly social; at sea may rest in large groups at the surface with bodies touching (rafts), often flippers in the air. Vocalize with grunts and deep roaring/growling.



California Sea Lion

Zalophus californianus

SIZE Adult males – up to 2.5 m (8 ft) long / weigh 200-400 kg (450-900 lbs)

APPEARANCE Dark brown colouration and almost black when wet. Males have a large, robust body, thick neck, and no mane; pronounced forehead (sagittal crest) crowned with a patch of light fur; dog-like head with a long, narrow snout, and small external ear flaps. Large hairless flippers can support body for “walking”.

DISTRIBUTION Only adult and sub-adult males occur in B.C. Present year round, but larger numbers are seen from September-May.

BEHAVIOUR Haul out on rocky outcrops and islets, buoys and jetties. At sea, often seen alone or in small groups; may gather in large “rafts” at the surface; often flippers in the air. Vocalizations sound like repeated honking barks.



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Northern Fur Seal

Callorhinus ursinus

SIZE Adult males – 2 m (6.5 ft) long / weigh up to 250 kg (550 lbs);
adult females – 1.3 m (4 ft) long / weigh up to 50 kg (110 lbs)

APPEARANCE Males have a stocky body with thick neck and dark grey-black colouration; females have a brownish throat with silver-grey undercoat. Small head with pointed muzzle, long whiskers, and pronounced external ear flaps. Extremely long hind flippers.

DISTRIBUTION Mostly females and sub-adults visit B.C. waters during migration (early winter and late spring) or to spend the winter months. Males tend to stay farther north (i.e. Alaska).

BEHAVIOUR Pelagic animals; forage and rest at sea; rest in ‘teapot’ pose by wrapping a single front flipper together with hind flippers; few come closer than 20 km from shore.



Harbour Seal

Phoca vitulina

SIZE Adults up to 1.5 m (4-5 ft) long / weigh up to 100 kg (220 lbs)

APPEARANCE Colouration can vary from black with light spots to nearly white with dark spots. Spindle-shaped body; broad snout (like a canine); no external ear flaps. Short/small flippers that cannot support the body for “walking” on land.

DISTRIBUTION Near shore areas; across entire B.C. coast year round.

BEHAVIOUR Often sleep underwater or hauled out. Move like a caterpillar on land.



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Northern Elephant Seal

Mirounga angustirostris

SIZE Adult males – up to 4 m (13 ft) long / weigh up to 2500 kg (5500 lbs);
adult females – up to 3 m (10 ft) long / weigh up to 600 kg (1300 lbs)

APPEARANCE Uniformly light brown to tan colouration. Robust body that tapers at hips; pointier snout. Adult males have large, elongated fleshy snout that hangs over the lower lip. No external ear flaps. Short/small flippers that cannot support the body for “walking” on land.

DISTRIBUTION Migrate twice a year (spring and fall) between mating and moulting seasons; primarily juveniles seen in B.C. waters.

BEHAVIOUR Sightings are typically lone animals at sea; head above water for ~3 min. Moulting of skin and fur can occur on B.C. beaches; can have the appearance of emaciation during moulting.

