Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

**Description**

Harbor seals are ‘true seals’ which are characterized by lack of an external ear flap and short forelimbs (unlike sea lions). They are medium-size with a short spindle-shaped body and dog-like snout. Coloration varies considerably with latitude, ranging from light tan to black with spots or rings. Premature pups are born with a lanugo coat although it is usually shed in utero.

**Habitat and Distribution**

Harbor seals are widely distributed along the coasts of the North Pacific and the North Atlantic. Five subspecies are recognized based on geographic distribution.

**Sounds**

Harbor seal pups make a plaintive contact call throughout the period of maternal dependence. Adult males are especially vocal during the breeding season producing vocal displays underwater, and there is evidence of regional vocal dialects. Harbor seals also make aggressive growls when threatened.

**Feeding**

Harbor seals are opportunistic and eat fish, octopus, and squid.

**Threats**

Harbor seals are accidentally caught in fishing gear such as gillnets, trawls, purse seines, and weirs. They are also threatened by ship strikes, oil spills, contaminants, power plant entrapment, and illegal shooting. While hauled out on land to rest, harbor seals are frequently disturbed by humans.

**Fun Fact**

Harbor seal pups can swim at birth and by the time they are 2-3 days old, they can already dive for up to two minutes!