



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Bearded Seal (*Erignathus barbatus*)

Description

Bearded seals are 'true seals' which are characterized by lack of an external ear flap and short forelimbs (unlike sea lions). They are named for the dense "beard" of whiskers covering the upper lips and cheeks. They have a long large body with a relatively small head and short flippers. Coloration is gray or dark brown with dark spots and light rings. Pups shed their white lanugo coat in utero, and are born with long, wavy bluish to brown hair.

Habitat and Distribution

Bearded seals are solitary and have a circumpolar distribution in the Northern Hemisphere. They are generally found in shallow water floating on sea ice.

Sounds

Male bearded seals are extremely vocal underwater and have regional vocal dialects. Vocalizations include minute-long courtship songs, trills, ascents, sweeps, and moans.

Feeding

Bearded seals forage on crabs, shrimp, mollusks, cod, flatfish, sculpins, and octopus that live on or near the shallow sea floor.

Threats

Bearded seals are hunted for subsistence throughout the Arctic, and commercially in Russia. They are occasionally killed as bycatch in fishing gear. They are also potentially threatened by loss of sea ice habitat.

Fun Fact

Bearded seals are extremely vocal and the songs of males can be heard for up to 19,312 meters (12 miles away)!



Hans Wolkers



Hans Wolkers

Family:	Phocidae
Population:	> 500,000
Status:	Least Concern
Length:	7— 8 feet
Weight:	570 — 800 lbs