



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE



NOAA / SBNMS



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Family: Phocidae  
Population: 350,000–500,000  
Status: Least Concern  
Length: 5 – 6 feet  
Weight: 290 – 370 lbs

## 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!