



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Weddell Seal (*Leptonychotes weddellii*)

Description

Weddell seals are 'true seals' which are characterized by lack of an external ear flap and short forelimbs (unlike sea lions). They have a large robust body with a small flat head. Recently molted adults are bluish black with white blotches scattered over the chest and belly. Gradually the coat fades to brown through winter and early summer. Pups are born with a long, woolly, brown to gray coat.

Habitat and Distribution

Weddell seals have a circumpolar distribution around Antarctica. They typically breed close to shore along cracks in the fast ice.

Sounds

Weddell seals are extremely vocal, especially underwater, and produce low-frequency buzzes, and higher-frequency whistles and chirps. Males produce calls during the breeding season to defend aquatic territories and to attract females.

Feeding

Weddell seals forage primarily on fish, cephalopods, crustaceans, and krill.

Threats

Weddell seals do not currently face any known threats. Potential threats include loss of sea ice due to global climate change and increased tourism in the region.

Fun Fact

Weddell seals make pulsed vocalizations during the breeding season that are so intense that they can be felt through the thick fast ice!



Joachim Ploetz



Joachim Ploetz

Family: Phocidae
Population: 500,000 – 1 million
Status: Least Concern
Length: 9.5 – 11 feet
Weight: 880 – 990 lbs