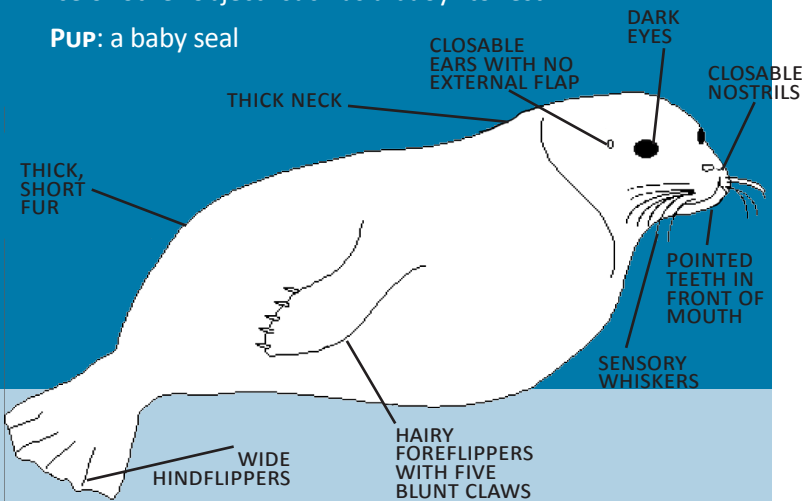


VOCABULARY

CARNIVORE: meat eater with a diet consisting mainly or exclusively of animal tissue

HAUL-OUT: act of an animal coming out of water onto land, ice or other object—such as a buoy—to rest

PUP: a baby seal



PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION Harbor seals are grey or brown with light and dark speckling, especially on their dorsal surface. They have short snouts, similar to dogs. Adults may reach six feet in length and weigh up to 300 pounds. Males are slightly larger than females.

DIET As **carnivores**, their main diet consists of fish but also includes several crustaceans and occasionally squid. They dive 20-450 meters in search of food and can hold their breath for up to 10 minutes, though they typically dive for about three minutes at a time.

LIFE HISTORY They mate in the water. Females give birth to a single **pup** on land in spring or summer. Harbor seals usually **haul-out** in groups to interact socially and avoid predators.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION These seals are generally non-migratory and inhabit both coasts of the United States. In the east, they are found from Canada to the Carolinas. Though unusual, they can be seen as far south as Florida.

LOCAL INFORMATION Most Maryland strandings occur from late winter to early spring and usually on the coastal beaches of Assateague Island. Reports on the Chesapeake Bay are occasionally received. Most seals that strand here are at the extremes of their southern range and are often debilitated and heavily parasitized.

STATUS Federal protection prevents future depletion of the species as a result of human interaction. Humans are a significant threat due to accidental capture, entanglement and boat collision. Other threats include disease and oil spills. In north Atlantic waters, the increasing population currently stands at about 91,000.

HARBOR SEAL

(*Phoca vitulina*)

CLASS: Mammalia

ORDER: Carnivora

FAMILY: Phocidae

GENIUS: *Phoca*

SPECIES: *vitulina*



Harbor seals have dog-like snouts with distinctive V-shaped nostrils.



Pups are able to swim and dive within minutes after birth and nurse for about 24 days.



The most commonly seen seals along the east coast of the United States, harbor seals haul-out when they are not feeding or mating.



Seals haul-out for many reasons, including nursing, pupping and avoiding predators. It is illegal to harass or approach them, in or out of the water.

TO REPORT A STRANDED MARINE MAMMAL OR SEA TURTLE, CALL THE 24-HOUR HOTLINE AT 800-628-9944



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