

# California Sea Lion

**Scientific Name:** *Zalophus californianus*

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Carnivora

**Family:** Otariidae



Sea lions differ from other eared seals in that the sea lion lacks the dense underfur which makes a seal coat so salable and attractive to furriers. Their flippers have no fur. They can grow to 6 to 7½ feet long and weigh 200 to 300 pounds for females, and up to 650 pounds for males. In contrast to true seals, the sea lion can sleep on its back in the water. They propel themselves at speeds of up to 15 to 25 mph by making simultaneous sweeps of their large front flippers, the hind flippers playing little part in propulsion. They can dive to 450 feet or more. The hind flippers are used for grooming. Because their hind limbs can be rotated to aid locomotion, they are able to move relatively easily on land. The male is a polygamous animal, very protective of his harem, which may contain up to 80 females. Sea lions are gregarious animals, and

it is usual to see congregations of hundreds on islands along the California coast. They are very noisy and excitable.

---

## Range

W. coast of N. America & Mexico, Galapagos Islands

## Habitat

Water, beaches, rocky shores

## Gestation

9 months

## Litter

1-2

## Behavior

In contrast to true seals, the sea lion can sleep on its back in the water. His visual acuity in air is limited. They propel themselves at speeds of up to 15 to 25 mph by making simultaneous sweeps of their large front flippers, the hind flippers playing little part in propulsion. They can dive to 450 feet or more. The hind flippers are used for grooming. Because their hind limbs can be rotated to aid locomotion, they are able to move relatively easily on land. The male is a polygamous animal, very protective of his harem, which may contain up to 80 females. Sea lions are gregarious animals, and it is usual to see congregations of hundreds on islands along the California coast. They are very noisy and excitable.

## Reproduction

Males protect their harem from other males, and may go months without eating while doing this. Young sea lions are precocial. They are mobile within 30 minutes of birth. Females reach sexual maturity at 5 years, and nurse their young for 6 months, much longer than seals. Females mate about 10 days after bearing young in the spring, but the resulting embryo stops growth at the blastocyst stage for some months while the female is nursing. After the pup is weaned, the blastocyst attaches to the uterus wall, a placenta develops, and a normal pregnancy begins.

## Wild Diet

Squid, octopus, small fish