

MARINE MAMMALS



North American River Otter: *Lontra Canadensis*

Found throughout Canada and many parts of the United States, this otter is a common sighting along our coast. Their fur is usually dark brown in colour, which can lighten around their face. Otters have short little legs and are generally between 3 and 4 feet long including the tail. It spends most of its time in or near the water. With webbed feet and an extremely muscular tail, these animals are tremendous swimmers. Otters are very

efficient predators; feeding on just about anything they can get their paws on. About 80% of their diet is made up of aquatic organisms.

Fun Fact:

- The North American river otter is one of 13 species of otter worldwide
- Despite their name, they will swim in both fresh and salt water



Mink *Mustela vison*

This sleek-bodied animal has chocolate brown to black fur with white spotting on the chin and throat. Their tail is long and bushy. Average weight is 1-4 pounds, the size of a small housecat, with the male being heavier than the female. They prey chiefly on muskrats, mice, rabbits, chipmunks, fish, snakes, frogs and birds. They den near water in

abandoned burrows and move often.

Fun Facts:

- Unfortunately the pelts of these small animals are highly valued and most of the animals used commercially are raised on ranches.

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Harbour Seals *Phoca vitulina*:

These intelligent marine mammals range from 4 – 6 ft. and 120 – 500 pounds. Their coats are grey to black in colour and they are usually speckled with spots. Schooling fish is their main diet; however, they are known to feed on squid, crustaceans, and mollusks as well. Transient Orcas, Coyotes, and Eagles all prey on the harbour seal.

Fun Facts:

- Can distinguish between different whale dialect.
- A harbour seal is capable of maximum dive depths approaching 300 metres and for durations of nearly 25 minutes in adults.
- Harbour seals can detect prey using nerves in their whiskers to sense pressure changes in the water
- Harbour seals can sleep underwater



California Sea Lion: *Zalophus californianus*

The California Sea Lion is usually smaller and darker than the Stellar Sea Lion. The males range in size between 2-2.5m and 440 – 860 lb and are dark brown, with a pronounced forehead. The hair on the males forehead lightens as it gets older. The females are smaller, ranging from 1.5 – 2m and 120-220 lbs, and light brown in colour. They can be found on the Pacific Coast from Southern British Columbia to Baja California.

Fun Fact:

- These animals can dive up to 140m in depth and stay submerged for 20 minutes.
- The bull is very vocal continually giving a honking bark while defending his territories.

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Stellar Sea Lions: *Eumetopias jubatus*
Males, also called bulls, are light tan colour on top and darker underneath. They have dark brown flippers and a massive neck and forequarters. Males range in size from 2.7 – 3.2m in length and up to 2,200 lbs! The females, also known as cows, are a uniform brown in colour and one third the size of a male. The cows are typically 1.9 – 2.2 m in length and 600-800 lb. These animals can be found from Alaska to California.

Fun Facts:

- During the breeding season, bachelor bulls and non-breeding females herd separately from breeding colonies
- The breeding bull often fights fiercely to defend his territory and his harem of 10 to 30 cows.
- Adult sea lions have a deep, bellowing roar



Dall's Porpoise *Phocoenidae dalli*
This creature is often mistaken for a baby killer whale, because of the similar black and white coloring. Closely related to the dolphin, these creatures are very playful. You will see them alongside boats playing in the wake. However, Dall's Porpoises do not come fully out of the water, instead have a "rooster tail" of water coming off their back. Like dolphins, porpoises are carnivores,

eating mostly fish and/or squid. Whistle-like sounds help these animals keep in contact and communicate with each other as they travel and feed. They also use echolocation to find their food or to scan their surroundings.

Fun Facts:

- The word porpoise comes from two Latin words – when translated into English mean "pig-nosed"
- In B.C. waters, dolphins produce sounds that we can hear, whereas porpoises communicate at frequencies beyond the range of human hearing.

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Orcas (Killer Whale) *Orcinus orca*:

These playful mammals have a distinct black and white appearance. The killer whales are identified by their large back dorsal fin, which can have different nicks or marks on it. Typically, males average lifespan is 30 years, while females average age is 50. There are three genetically different populations that live in British Columbia: residents, transients and offshores. Each of these populations has major differences in behaviour and

social organization. While the transient killer whales feed mainly on other sea mammals, resident killer whales feed almost entirely on fish. Very little is known about the offshore killer whales, but it is thought that they are similar to the residents.

Fun Facts:

- Killer whales are actually a large dolphin!
- There are approximately 300 northern and southern residents in Washington/B.C. waters and about 219 West Coast transients. About 200+ offshores have also been identified.