

# Northern Fur Seal
## *Callorhinus ursinus*

**Size:** Male northern fur seals can reach maximum lengths of 6 feet 11inches and almost 600 pounds while females are slightly smaller with a maximum length 4 feet 11 inches and 130 pounds.

**Appearance:** Belonging to the family Otariidae, along with all fur seal and sea lion species, northern fur seals have external ear flaps, long front flippers and the ability to rotate their hind flipper to move well on land. The hind flippers of the northern fur seal are the largest of any of animals in the fur seal and sea lion family.

Aptly named for their two dense fur coats, the northern fur seal has an outer layer of long, coarse guard hairs (usually dark brown to black in color) in addition to dense, fine underfur estimated to contain 300,000 hairs per square inches. The northern fur seal has a relatively stocky body in comparison to other fur seal and sea lion species and a short snout which gives them a bear like appearance.

Male northern fur seals are easily distinguishable from females by size and appearance. Males of the species are significantly larger than females and at maturity, become broad through the chest and shoulders and develop a mane of stiff, short hairs.

**Range/Distribution:** Northern fur seals can be found in the cold waters of the Northern Pacific Ocean, the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk.

**Habitat:** Rarely coming on shore, the northern fur seal will spend most of their life in the open ocean. Some animals may spend several years at sea before returning to rookeries. These animals have developed a "jug-handle" position to sleep while they are at sea.

**Prey:** Northern fur seals feed mostly at night using shallow dives to search for food but can dive to over 800 feet searching for a variety of schooling fish and squid.

**Predators:** Killer Whales (Orca)

**Reproduction:** The majority of the northern fur seals breed on select islands off the coast of Alaska. Each spring large male fur seals arrive at breeding areas called "rookeries" to stake their territories. They attract a number of females to their territories and these select males accomplish the majority of the breeding. Females generally have their first pup at five to six years of age and start returning to the breeding islands in June and give birth to a single pup within a few days after arrival on land if they conceived the previous year.

Northern fur seals pass through two phases before they get their adult coat. From birth until first molt in autumn, the young are called "black pups" because their birth coat is black. In late September the birth coat is replaced by "silver" fur (white-tipped guard hairs).

**Conservation Status:** Vulnerable

**Threats:** In the past northern fur seals were hunted in great quantities for their dense coat but through international treaties and legislation this has ceased. A small number of animals are collected by Alaska Natives for subsistence harvesting but this too has declined in the past few years.

Despite the cease on hunting, the northern fur seal population continues to decline. No certain cause for this decline has been identified but these animals are known to be vulnerable to marine pollution (oil spills, plastics, fishing gear, etc.), changes in ecosystem patterns, general nutrition concerns, and the potential impacts of global climate change.

**What's being done?** Legislation and treaties have been enacted to protect these animals and their habitat in an attempt to replenish diminished populations.

Mystic Aquarium is one of four facilities in the nation who are home to northern fur seals. Mystic Aquarium's fur seals serve as important animal ambassadors to educate the public on the issues affecting these animals.