



Marine Mammal Laboratory

Marine Mammal Education Web



Leopard Seals

- Kingdom:** Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Phocidae
Genus: *Hydrurga*
Species: *leptonyx*

What is [taxonomy](#)?

Leopard seals are found around the pack ice edges of the Antarctic continent. The head of the leopard seal is shaped more like a reptile than a seal. Larger prey such as small seals and penguins are hunted by first hiding under the ice waiting for the penguin or small seal to enter the water. Leopard seals are solitary and few pups have ever been observed. In some areas leopard seals migrate north with the formation of new ice and return south for the breeding season.

Interesting Facts:

- Leopard seals have a huge mouth!
- The leopard seal swims so fast it can "jump" out of the water to get prey (like penguins) on the edge of the ice!
- The leopard seals has spotted fur and a long slender body, that is why it is named the leopard seal!
- Leopard seal pups feed on krill!
- Leopard seals have been measured at 12 feet in length!
- Leopard seals have large front flippers that they use like sea lions, to move and steer through the water!

What I should know about leopard seals!

- [Where do leopard seals live?](#)
- [How many leopard seals are there?](#)
- [How can I identify a leopard seal?](#)
- [What do leopard seals eat?](#)
- [How do leopard seals have their young?](#)
- [How long do leopard seals live? How do they die?](#)

- [Where can I find more information about leopard seals?](#)

Where do leopard seals live?

Leopard seals inhabit the pack ice and fast ice edges around Antarctica, particularly around the Antarctic peninsula. Their distribution overlaps that of a primary prey species, crabeater seals. Leopard seals do not make long dives, 15 minutes is the longest recorded, because of this they do not move very far from open water. Because they hunt from concealment they do not need to dive for long periods to feed. Females are larger than the males. The female leopard seal can weigh as much as 1000 pounds, the male 800. We do not know a lot about their habits because, the leopard seal is a loner and it is rare to see mothers and pups.

How many leopard seals are there?

Although it was once thought that there may be over 200,000 leopard seals. There is currently no reliable estimate of the abundance of crabeater seals. An international group of scientists is currently collaborating to decide a good population estimate.

How can I identify a leopard seal?

Leopard seal females will weigh up to 1,000 pounds and the males 800 pounds. The leopard seal has been known to reach 12 feet in length, but are commonly 10 feet long. The nostrils are on top of the snout, along with a huge mouth and no noticeable forehead make the leopard seal appear reptilian rather than mammalian.

What do leopard seals eat?

Leopard seals eat penguins, sea birds, small seals, *cephalopods* fish, and krill.

How do leopard seals have their young?

Female leopard seals have their young between November and December on the ice. The pup will weigh up to seventy pounds and will double in size within three months. Not much else is known about the young leopard seals, because very few have ever been seen.

How long do leopard seals live? How do they die?

Leopard seals have been known to live for twenty six years.

The killer whale is the only known predator.

Where can I find more information about leopard seals?

Web Sites

- [Marine Mammal Laboratory Library](#)
- [Seal Conservation Society](#)
- [University of Michigan - Animal Diversity Web](#)

<https://www.afsc.noaa.gov/nmml/education/pinnipeds/leopard.php>