

Harbor Porpoise Project

Marine Wildlife

Identification Guide

2016



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Harbor Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*



Harbor porpoises will sometimes make a splash when foraging or socializing.

Basic Facts

Size: 4½-5½ feet long, 100-150 pounds

Coloration: Dark gray to brown on top, pale gray to white on belly. Markings, if any, are inconspicuous.

Features: Small, triangular dorsal fin with slightly longer leading edge. Blunt face without distinct beak.

Diet: Forage fish (e.g. herring, smelt), small squid

Habitat: Mainly found in shallow coastal water, <330 feet deep, throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Local population prefers cool temperatures (52-54°F) and fast tidal currents.



Behavior

General: Quiet and shy. Normally travels in groups of 6 or fewer, or solitary. Remains low in the water when surfacing. Avoids vessel traffic. Spends almost all its time either foraging or searching for a place to forage.

Foraging: Surfaces repeatedly in the same general area. Often accompanied by other animals like seabirds, seals.

Traveling: Surfaces several times in quick succession in a more or less straight line, often followed by a longer dive.

Socializing: Two or more harbor porpoises touching or rubbing their bodies together. May slap tails on the water.

Mother-calf pairs are identified by the presence of a smaller individual swimming behind an adult, surfacing synchronously with her.



Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina*



Basic Facts

Size: 4-6 feet long, up to 310 pounds

Coloration: Gray with dark spots or dark with gray spots.

Features: Rounded body with small flippers. Large, front-facing eyes. Round head with no external ear flaps.

Diet: Fish, mollusks, crustaceans

Habitat: Nearshore; coasts and estuaries in North America, Northern Europe, East Asia.

Behavior: Often seen resting at the surface of the water or hauled out on rocks, beaches, etc. Typically solitary in the water, gregarious on shore.

North American River Otter *Lontra canadensis*



Basic Facts

Size: 2-3½ feet long, 11-31 pounds

Coloration: Dark brown with lighter fur on face and belly.

Features: Long, slender body with powerful tail. Small, round ears.

Diet: Fish, mollusks, crustaceans, echinoderms.

Habitat: Fresh and marine waterways and shorelines in North America.

Behavior: Swims belly-down with head above water. Often seen in groups. Semiaquatic; establishes burrows on land near water.

California Sea Lion *Zalophus californianus*



Basic Facts

Size: males to 8 ½ feet long, 1200 pounds; females to 6 feet long, 250 pounds

Coloration: Blond to brown, males darker than females

Features: Small external ears. Mature males have thick neck and crest of fur on forehead. Dog-like bark.

Diet: Fish, squid, mollusks.

Habitat: Western North America, coasts and seamounts

Behavior: Often swim with nose pointing up, sometimes mouth open. Very gregarious and highly mobile on land.

Steller Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*



Basic Facts

Size: males to 10 ½ feet long, 2200 pounds; females to 8 ½ feet long, 800 pounds

Coloration: Light blond to auburn with brown flippers. Appears light-colored in the water, not black.

Features: Small external ears. Mature males have ruff at neck. Roaring vocalizations.

Diet: Fish, squid.

Habitat: Northern North Pacific coasts, rocky shores

Behavior: Highly vocal and territorial. Colonial breeders. Swim with nose pointing up out of water.

Orca (Killer Whale) *Orcinus orca*



6 Resident Killer Whale

The best-known killer whale. A medium-large (to 7.2 m), black and white form that lives in coastal waters of the North Pacific. Saddle patch often has a large black intrusion ('open' saddle) not found in other killer whales. A fish-specialist – some populations feed almost exclusively on salmon. Females may live to 80-90 years.

tall dorsal fin may be forward-slanted, with wavy trailing edge

males – females

dorsal fin rounded on top with pointed trailing tip

often has very open saddle

7 Bigg's Killer Whale (transient)

A large (perhaps 8 m), black and white form – similar to resident killer whale except it lacks an open saddle. Occurs in coastal and offshore waters of the North Pacific. A mammal-eater, it feeds mostly on harbor seals and minke whales but will also take sea lions, otters, calves of large whales, etc. Named after pioneer killer whale researcher – Michael Bigg.

eye patch usually slants slightly downwards towards the rear

generally pointed dorsal fin

closed saddle, often extends past midline of dorsal fin

8 Offshore Killer Whale

A smaller form (to 6.7 m) rarely observed because it occurs mainly over outer continental shelf of eastern North Pacific. Group size usually large (100-200); ranges widely: some groups travel between Alaska and southern California. Apparently feeds extensively on sharks and teeth are often worn to gum line due to rough skin of sharks.

faint saddle

dorsal fin rounded at tip

often have nicks in dorsal fin

Selection from poster, "Killer Whales: Ecotypes and Forms" (NOAA)

Basic Facts

Size: Males to 32 feet long, 22,000 pounds; females to 28 feet long, 16,500 pounds.

Coloration: Iconic black and white coloration; white to gray saddle patch behind dorsal fin.

Features: Males with tall, triangular dorsal fin; females with shorter, hooked fin.

Diet: Salmon, marine mammals, and sharks, depending on ecotype; see graphic above.

Habitat: Worldwide, depending on ecotype; see graphic above for North Pacific ecotypes.

Behavior: Tight-knit, matrilinear pods. Fast and acrobatic swimmers.

Less Common Mammals (Rarely seen from shore)



Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*)



Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)



Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)



Gray Whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*)



Dall's Porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*)



**Pacific White-Sided Dolphin
(*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*)**

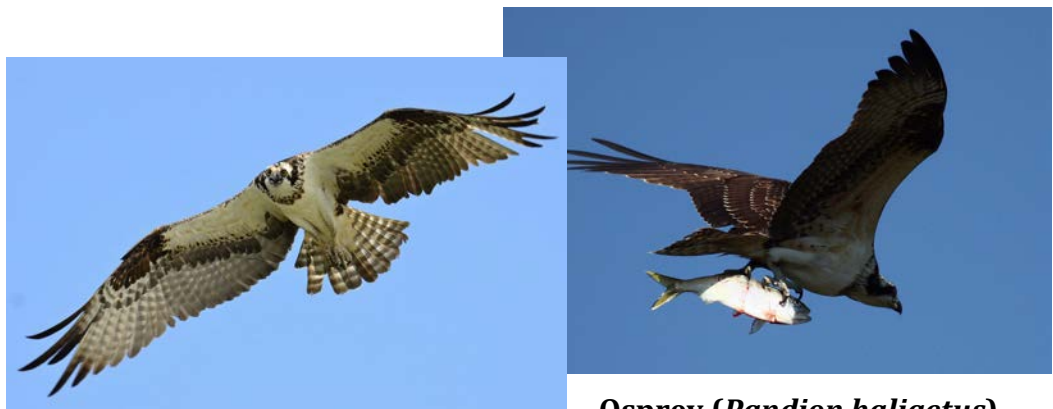
Birds - Raptors



Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

L, to R: adult plumage; immature plumage; adult plumage in flight

Large, soaring birds. Bald eagles and ospreys are the only notably marine-adapted raptor species in the Salish Sea region. Both catch fish by diving toward the water.



Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Birds – Duck-Like

Diverse group of birds that often feed by swimming at the water's surface and diving. Includes cormorants.



Rhinoceros Auklet
(*Cerorhinca monocerata*)



Tufted Puffin (*Fratercula cirrhata*)



Common Murre
(*Uria aalge*)



Marbled Murrelet
(*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)



Pigeon Guillemot
(*Cepphus columba*)



Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax* spp.)



Harlequin Duck
(*Histrionicus histrionicus*)



Scoter (*Melanitta* spp.)

Birds – Gull-Like



Glaucous-Winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*)



Caspian tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*)



Heermann's Gull (*Larus heermanni*)



Mew Gull (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*)



Ring-Billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)



California Gull (*Larus californicus*)



Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*)



Brown pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

The most common seabirds in the Salish Sea. Aside from gulls, this category also includes terns, shearwaters, and pelicans.

Birds – Shorebirds



Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*)



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)



Long-Billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)



Surfbird (*Aphriza virgata*)



Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Shorebirds include all species that wade at the water's edge or run along beaches/shores. Not all the common species are shown here.