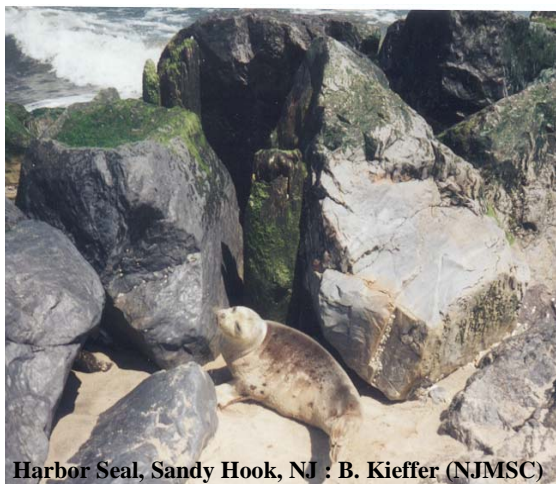


# New Jersey Sea Grant Extension Program



**Bulletin No. 14**

## NJ's Visiting Seals



Harbor Seal, Sandy Hook, NJ : B. Kieffer (NJMSC)

During most of the year, northeastern seals inhabit the near-shore waters of Canada and New England. However, during the winter months, some species migrate as far south as New Jersey and beyond. This migration of seals may be influenced by factors such as: seasonal food abundance, weather patterns, population growth and human disturbances.

**Harbor seals** (*Phoca vitulina*) are the most common winter visitors in NJ. Other species of seals visiting here include the **gray** (*Halichoerus grypus*), **harp** (*Phoca groenlandica*) and **hooded** (*Cystophora cristata*) seals. In the winter, NJ must feel like the Caribbean to them!

### If You Encounter a Seal in the Wild

- **Keep your distance**, and observe from afar (at least **100 ft. (30 m)** by law!) This includes **your pet too!**
- **Remain quiet** and still when observing— noise and startling movements disrupt the way that seals feed, rest, breed and socialize.
- **Refrain from throwing objects** to the seal, including food— wild seals are not trained like aquarium seals and should not be harassed.
- Remember, **seals are WILD** animals and **they can BITE** with their very usable “canine” teeth!

### Strandings

A stranded seal is a seal that is harmed by disease, accident, orphanage or disorientation and has stranded itself on land or in shallow water.

#### **Authorized Stranding Center in NJ:**

Marine Mammal Stranding Center

PO Box 773

Brigantine, NJ 08203-0773

(609) 266-0538

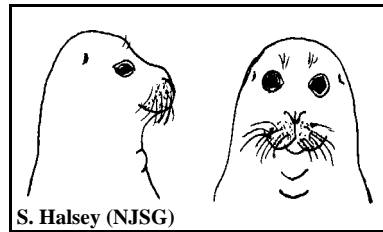
For More Information: [www.mmsc.org](http://www.mmsc.org)

### If You Find a Stranded Seal

- In NJ, **call the Marine Mammal Stranding Center** or local police— they are trained in helping these animals.
- When calling, be sure to provide the location of the seal (s), type or **description** (see inside) and its behavior at time of observation.
- **Keep people and pets away** from the seal, it is under a lot of stress.
- Leave the seal where it has stranded— **do not chase** it or move it back into the water.

# Identification Guide to NJ

## Harbor Seal



### Harbor Seal

**Average Size:** 5 ft (1.5m) and 150-250 lbs (68-113 kg)

**Coloration:** Gray or brown coat with spots/blotches

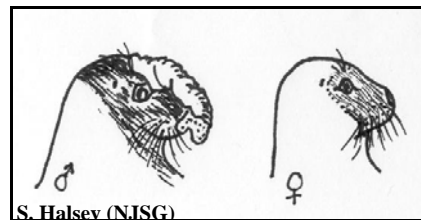
**Head Size and Shape:** Small with a “dog-like” muzzle

**Nostril Shape:** V or ♥

**Scientific name:** *Phoca vitulina*, meaning “sea dog”

**Keep Back  
It's the  
AND THE**

## Hooded Seal



### Hooded Seal

**Average size:** 7-8.5 ft (2-2.6 m) and 400-800 lbs (181–363 kg)

**Coloration:** Light gray/silver coat with dark blotches

**Head Size and Shape:** Broad, males have a black inflatable “hood” which hangs over the mouth

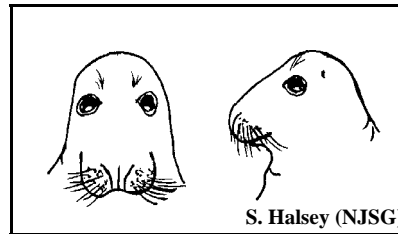
**Nostril Shape:** Males can inflate a **red** balloon-like sac from their nostrils

**Scientific name:** *Cystophora cristata*, meaning “bladder crested seal”

**For seal sightings,  
call the NJ  
Mammal Society  
Center  
at 609/261-1111  
local 1111**

# State's Visiting Seal Species

## Gray Seal



### Gray Seal

**Average size:** 6.5-8 ft (2-2.4m) and 600-900 lbs (272-408 kg)

**Coloration:** Male- dark gray or brown coat with light spots  
Female-lighter coat with dark spots

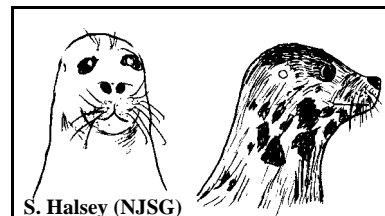
**Head Size and Shape:** Large with a long “horse-like” muzzle

**Nostril Shape:** || or W

**Scientific name:** *Halichoerus grypus*, meaning “hook-nosed pig of the sea”

Up to 100 ft-  
Deep Law!  
They BITE!

## Harp Seal



### Harp Seal

**Average Size:** 5.5 ft (1.7 m) and 200-400 lbs (91-181 kg)

**Coloration:** White coat with a large black “harp-shaped” marking on back

**Head Size and Shape:** Black head with a pointy nose

**Nostril Shape:** Round ●●

**Scientific name:** *Phoca groenlandica*, meaning “Greenland seal”

Strandings  
NJ Marine  
Stranding  
Center  
6-0538 or  
Police

## SEALS ARE PROTECTED BY LAW!

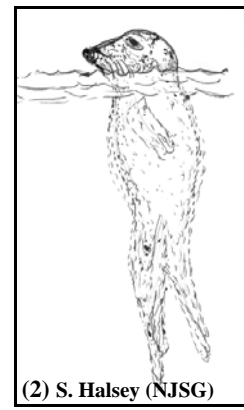
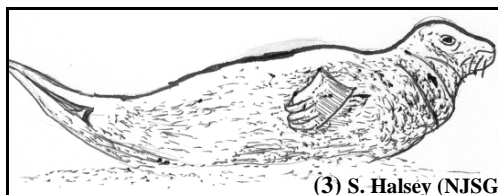
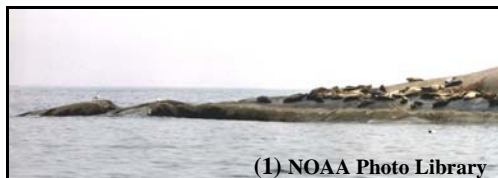
The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 states that the “taking” of any marine mammal and the importation of a marine mammal or a marine mammal product is strictly prohibited. **“Taking” is defined as HARASSING, HUNTING, CAPTURING, KILLING OR ANY ATTEMPT to harass, hunt, capture or kill a marine mammal.** VIOLATORS CAN BE FINED UP TO \$20,000 FOR EACH VIOLATION AND IMPRISONED FOR UP TO ONE YEAR.

### Some Common Seal Behaviors

**Hauling Out**– seal resting on land (1)

**Bottling**– seal’s head is above the water while the rest of the body is held vertically under the water (2)

**Banana Position**- (harbor seals) lying on land with head and hind limbs raised above the ground, resembling a banana shape (3)



### Seal Facts

**What Do Seals Eat ?** **Fish**- herring, flounder, cod, hake, capelin and mackerel, **Crustaceans**- shrimp, krill and crab, and **Cephalopods**- octopus and squid

**Who Eats the Seals?** Sharks, Polar Bears, Walruses, Killer Whales and Native Alaskans

**How Do They Move?** **On Land**- Seals wriggle forward on their stomachs with their hind limbs extended behind them. Seals CANNOT walk on all four limbs like sea lions can.

**In Water**- Seals swim by moving their hind flippers in a back and forth motion. They use their front limbs like rudders for steering.

### Acknowledgements

Written by Jenny McCormick, NJSJG Program Associate/  
Fisheries Agent and Dr. Susan Halsey, NJSJGEP Director

### Photo Credits:

**International Fund for Animal Welfare:** F. Bruemmer  
www.ifaw.org

**Mystic Aquarium:** www.mysticaquarium.org

**NOAA Photo Library:** www.noaa.gov

**Sylvia Stevens** (Wildlife Photographer)

**NJMSC & NJSJG:** Barbara Kieffer and Jenny McCormick

### References

Hannah, Janice. 1998. *Seals of Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern United States*. International Marine Mammal Association, Ontario, Canada. www.imma.org

Katona, Steven, et al. 1993. *A Field Guide to Whales, Porpoises, and Seals from Cape Cod to Newfoundland*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London.

Riedman, Marianne. 1990. *The Pinnipeds: Seals, Sea Lions, and Walruses*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.

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