

Phoca fasciata (Zimmerman, 1783)

PHOC Phoca 7

SLR

FAO Names: **En** - Ribbon seal; **Fr** - Phoque à rubans; **Sp** - Foca fajada.



Fig. 538 *Phoca fasciata*

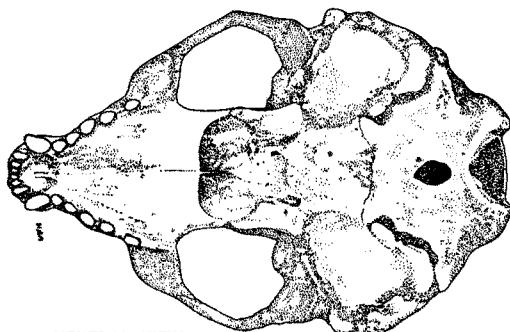
Distinctive Characteristics: Ribbon seals are more slender than other Bering Sea ice seals. The head is small, relatively wide, flat, and somewhat cat-like. The forehead is small in profile. The close-set eyes appear large, and the muzzle is short, blunt, and tapers slightly. The nostrils are also small and terminal, forming a V-pattern that converges at the bottom. The vibrissae are light-coloured, beaded, and fairly prominent. There are long, thin, hooked claws on all digits of the foreflippers. The ends of the foreflippers are weakly pointed to somewhat squared off, with only slightly different digit lengths.

Ribbon seals have an exceptionally striking colour pattern. Newborns have a shaggy, woolly, whitish lanugo that is shed at about 5 weeks. Youngsters are fairly plain-looking, without a hint of the bold pattern of adults. Subadults are blue-black above, including the crown and tops of the foreflippers, fading to silver-grey on the flanks and undersides. The face is pale and the end of the muzzle, lower jaw, and chin are dark. In adults of both sexes, pale bands of variable width encircle each foreflipper and shoulder, the neck, and the lower back, flank, and abdomen. The bands vary greatly in width (on some animals they are so wide that they merge). Band colour ranges from a shade just paler than the surrounding dark pelage to off-white. The freshly moulted base colour in adult males is reddish brown to black. Adult females are much paler, tan to light brown, rendering the bands less distinct.

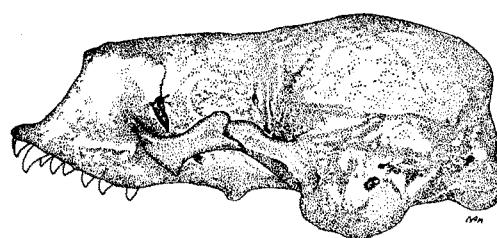
The dental formula is I 3/2, C 1/1, PC 5/5.



DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



LATERAL VIEW

Fig. 539 Skull

Can be confused with: Four other phocids: ringed (p. 262), harbour (p. 258), Larga (p. 260), and bearded (p. 274) seals share the range of the ribbon seal. Look for details of pelage markings and coloration, particularly the presence of markings (other than 4 obvious wide pale bands) such as spots, blotches, or large numbers of rings. Also, note overall size, relative size of the head and muzzle, and girth-to-length ratio.

Size: Adult ribbon seals reach a maximum length of about 1.8 m and weights of 90 to 148 kg. Pups are approximately 86 cm long and 10.5 kg at birth.

Geographical Distribution: Ribbon seal distribution closely matches that of Larga seals. The former are widespread in the seas adjacent to the western and central North Pacific Ocean. They occur in the Sea of Okhotsk and Sea of Japan, and from the Bering Sea northward to the western Beaufort and eastern Chukchi seas. Ribbon seals inhabit the southern edge of the pack ice from winter to early summer. Most are thought to be pelagic in the Bering Sea during the summer.

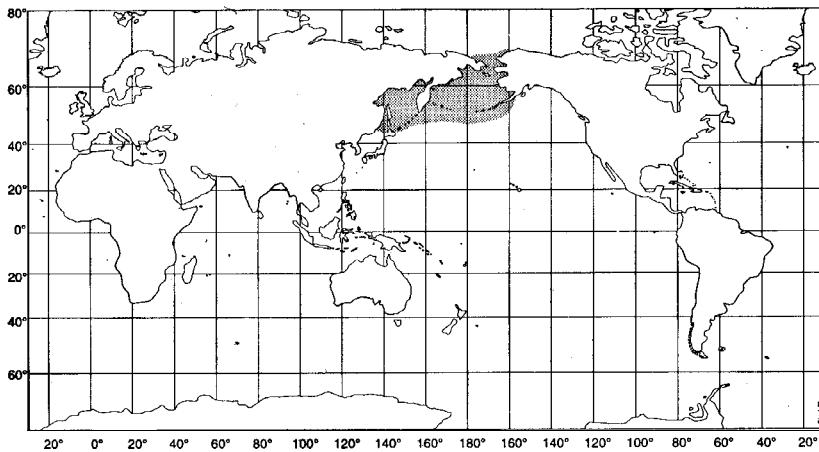


Fig. 540

Biology and Behaviour: Ribbon seals are solitary for much of their lives. Pups are born on ice floes from early April to early May. Males are generally nowhere to be seen during the nursing period. Ribbon seals are able to move rapidly on ice, using slashing side-to-side motions. They also extend their necks to peer at sources of disturbance, but are fairly approachable by boat. They are rarely encountered, because of the remote and inhospitable nature of their polar habitat.

Little is known of the diet of ribbon seals, except that types of prey vary by area, and probably season. Several species of fishes and crustaceans are consumed.

Exploitation: Only very small numbers of ribbon seals have ever been taken in commercial or subsistence harvests, the latter carried out by native peoples since prehistoric times.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.

Halichoerus grypus (Fabricius, 1791)

PHOC Hali 1

SEG

FAO Names: En - Grey seal; Fr - Phoque gris; Sp - Foca de gris.

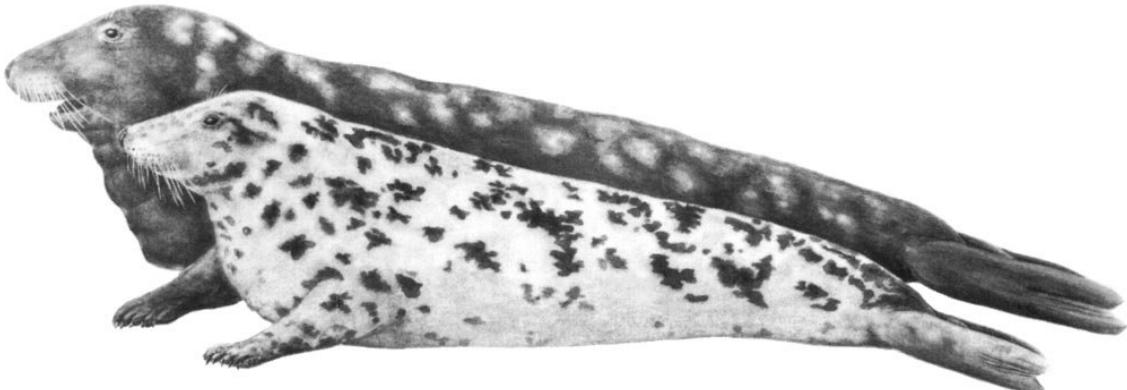
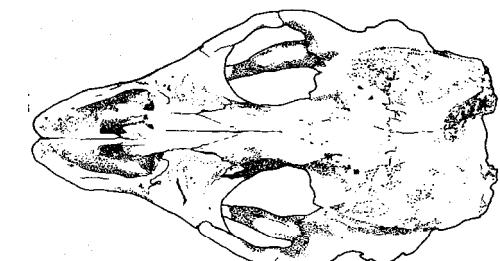


Fig. 541 *Halichoerus grypus*

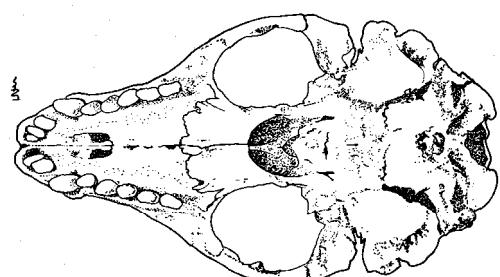
Distinctive Characteristics: Grey seals are robust and sexually dimorphic; males grow noticeably larger, with a proportionately larger and broader head. The distinctive muzzle is particularly long, and wide at the end, with a fleshy mystacial area that somewhat obscures the lower jaw. In adult males, the top of the muzzle is convex. In adult females and subadults, it is flat, very slightly convex (as in adult males), or slightly concave; the latter having only a barely noticeable forehead. The shape of the head has led to the locally used common name "horsehead." The nostrils are widely separated and almost parallel to each other, forming almost a W-pattern as opposed to the V-shaped pattern of seals of the genus *Phoca*. The eyes are small in proportion to the size of the head and somewhat widely separated. The foreflippers are short, on adult males, and are wide and relatively thick. Typically, adult males are somewhat thicker through the neck than females.

Pelage colour and pattern are individually variable. Most grey seals are shades of grey, slightly darker above than below. There are usually numerous irregular blotches and spots on the back and sometimes a few below. Many males darken with age. Subadults are paler, with few, if any, blotches; some are light tan just prior to moult. Others are orange to reddish on the neck, underside, and flippers. Newborns have a silky, creamy white lanugo, occasionally with a greyish tinge. In 2 to 4 weeks, this coat is replaced by one like that of the female, but with more subtle markings.

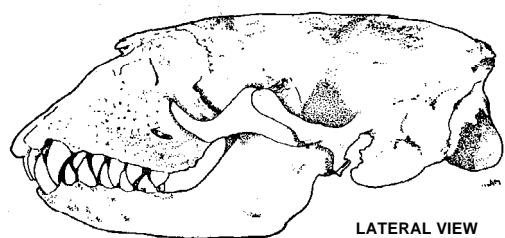
The dental formula of adults is I 3/2, C1/1, PC 5-6/5.



DORSAL VIEW
WITH MANDIBLE



VENTRAL VIEW



LATERAL VIEW
WITH MANDIBLE

Fig. 542 Skull

Can be confused with: Five phocids share the grey seal's range. The grey seal is larger, with a relatively larger head and longer muzzle, and a decidedly different set of pelage markings than harbour (p. 258), harp (p. 268), and ringed (p. 262) seals. The characteristics of the head, muzzle, and nose, and overall colour and markings will help separate grey seals from the comparably sized bearded (p. 274) and hooded (p. 276) seals.

Size: Adult males are up to 2.3 m long and weigh 170 to 310 kg, females to 2 m and 105 to 186 kg. Pups are 90 to 105 cm and 11 to 20 kg at birth.

Geographical Distribution: Grey seals have a cold temperate to subarctic distribution in the North Atlantic. There are 3 somewhat isolated stocks: a western Atlantic stock centred in northeastern North America; an eastern Atlantic stock split between Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Ireland; and a Baltic Sea stock. Grey seals are generally coastal; they haul-out on isolated beaches and rocky ledges of islands. In some localities, they move well inland to pup and breed.

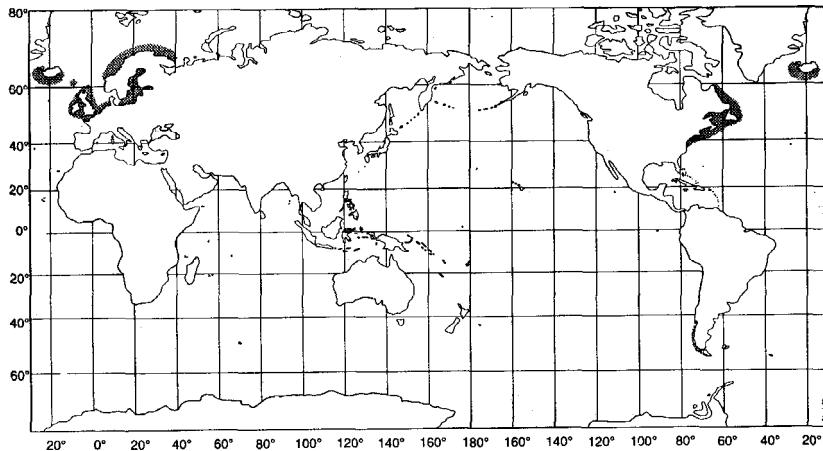


Fig. 543

Biology and Behaviour: Grey seals are polygynous. Males actively compete for females, but actually fight little, relying instead on threat gestures and vocalizations. They do not defend territories or herd females. Pupping and breeding occur between late September and early March. Seals in the British Isles breed earliest, followed by those in Norway and Iceland, and finally those off Canada and in the Baltic Sea.

Grey seals disperse widely from their rookeries during the non-breeding season, but reassemble to moult. When ashore, they are generally gregarious, hauling out near each other, as well as with harbour seals. In the water they are usually solitary, or in small dispersed groups. They regularly maintain a vertical "bottle" position, treading water with only the head exposed.

Grey seals feed in inshore benthic habitats, on a wide variety of fishes and invertebrates. They also feed on schooling fish in the water column, and occasionally take seabirds.

Exploitation: Grey seals have been the target of subsistence hunting, followed by commercial hunting and, finally, government-sponsored culls to control their numbers as pests to fisheries.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.

***Erignathus barbatus* (Erxleben, 1777)**

PHOC Eri 1

SEB

FAO Names: En - Bearded seal; Fr - Phoque barbu; Sp - Foca barbuda.

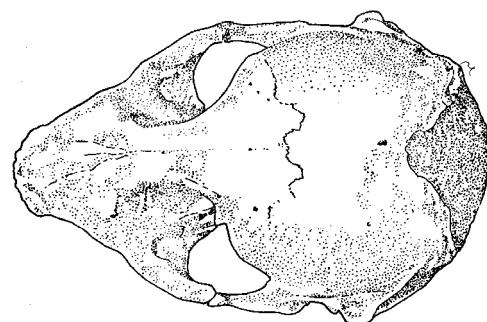


Fig. 544 *Erignathus barbatus*

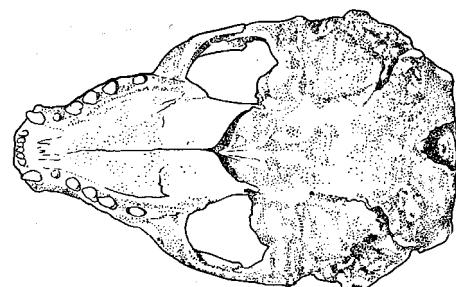
Distinctive Characteristics: Bearded seals are large, but look even longer because of their small head and relatively short foreflippers. The head is rounded and somewhat narrow, and the eyes are relatively small and close-set. The muzzle is wide and fleshy, with widely spaced nostrils. The abundant vibrissae are pale, not beaded as in other Arctic phocids, and are long and densely packed. When wet they are straight, but when dry they curl inwards at the tips. The whiskers are sufficiently conspicuous to have given rise to the common name, "bearded" seal. The foreflippers are short, relatively broad, and strong, with robust claws. Unlike any other phocid, the bearded seal's foreflippers end in digits of about the same length, though the middle digits may be slightly longer on some individuals. This creates a square, or slightly rounded, end to the flippers. Unlike all other Arctic phocids, bearded seals have 4 retractable teats, instead of 2.

Adults are slightly darker above than below. Body coloration varies considerably from light or dark grey to brown: the face and flippers are often rust-coloured. Pups have a long, dark, wavy coat, with up to 4 transverse bands of lighter colour from the back to the crown of the head. The muzzle and the area around the eyes are pale. Sometimes a dark line, originating at the crown, extends between the eyes.

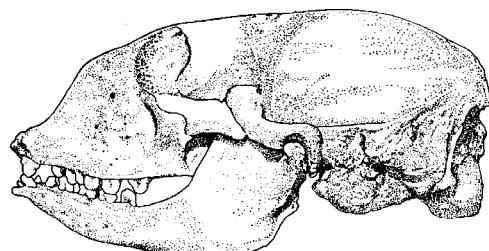
The dental formula is I 3/2, C 1/1, PC 5/5.



DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



LATERAL VIEW
WITH MANDIBLE

Fig. 545 Skull

Can be confused with: Bearded seals share their range with 7 other phocids: harbour, Larga, ringed, ribbon, harp, hooded, and grey seals. Of these, most are smaller, spotted (or otherwise uniquely coloured), or generally distributed further south. In the North Atlantic, the bearded seal is most likely to be mistaken for the hooded seal (p. 276) on shore, and additionally the harp seal (p. 268) in the water. These latter species have distinctively marked colour patterns, not likely to be confused with the more-or-less uniform pattern of bearded seals.

Size: Adults range up to 2.5 m in length. Adult females are slightly longer than males. In the Bering Sea, males reach 262 kg and females 361 kg. Pups are, on average, about 1.31 m and 33.6 kg at birth.

Geographical Distribution: Bearded seals have a circumpolar distribution in the Arctic, generally south of 80°N. They are subarctic in some areas, such as the lower Bering Sea, Sea of Okhotsk, and western North Atlantic where they reach the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. They usually restrict themselves to sea ice and stay in relatively shallow areas of continuously moving ice, where open leads and polynyas regularly form. In some areas, they are known to haul out on shore, ascend streams, or live a pelagic existence away from ice and land for long periods of time.

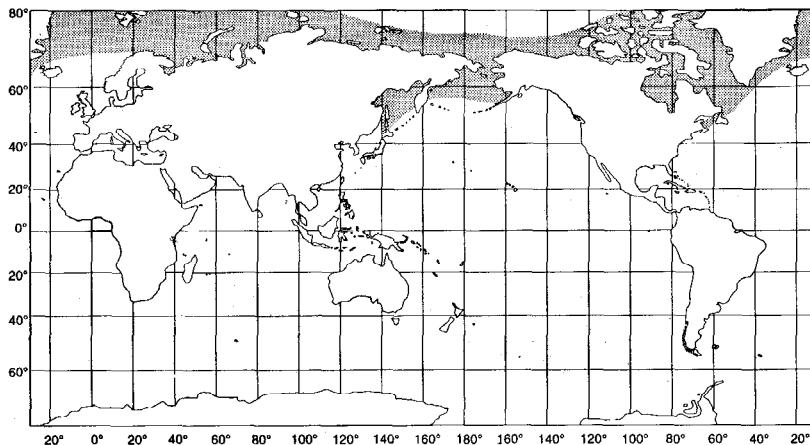


Fig. 546

Biology and Behaviour: Pups are born in the open on pack ice, from mid-March to early May. After the breeding season, many seals migrate northward with the retreating ice, returning southward again as the ice advances in autumn and winter.

Bearded seals are solitary. Seals rarely haul out on the same ice floe with other seals, and even then, maintain healthy distances from neighbors. At times, however, currents cause ice pile-ups in small areas, forcing aggregation of seals. Bearded seals are exceptionally wary and always haul out with their head very close to the water at an ice edge or breathing hole.

In the water, bearded seals are often found "bottling" vertically, asleep. When startled, they swim with strong strokes of the foreflippers. Foreflippers are probably also important in social interactions.

Bearded seals feed on many species of small invertebrates that live on, and in, the bottom. It is likely that they supplement their diet with fishes, as well.

Exploitation: Bearded seals have been, and continue to be, hunted by humans. Subsistence hunting goes back to prehistoric times, and they are still a mainstay of many local villages in the far north. They are a source of food, but also provide valuable hides for clothing and covering boats. Small-scale commercial harvesting is engaged in by the Russians to this day.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.