

Cystophora cristata* (Erxleben, 1777)*PHOC Cysto 1****SEZ**

FAO Names: En - Hooded seal; Fr - Phoque à crête; Sp - Foca capuchina.

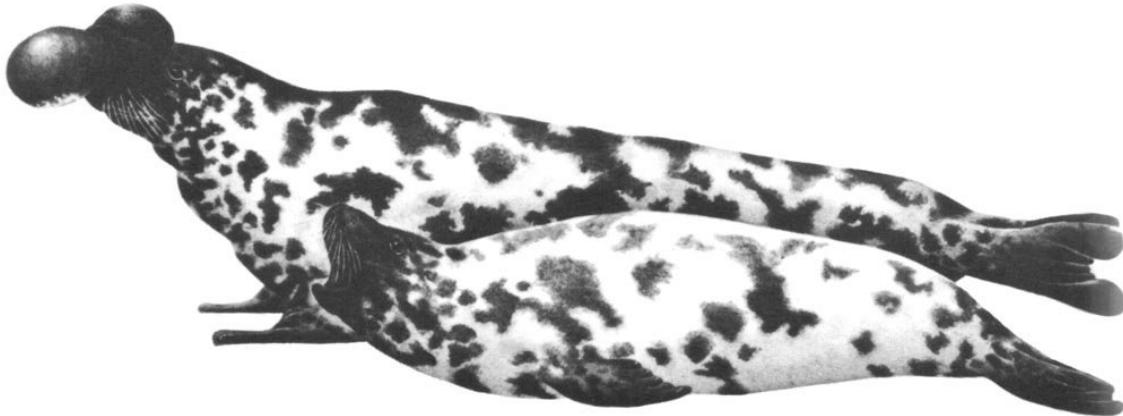


Fig. 547 *Cystophora cristata*

Distinctive Characteristics: Hooded seals are sexually dimorphic. Both sexes are robust, with large, wide, and relatively short heads. The muzzle is very wide and fleshy; it overhangs the mouth and droops slightly in adult females and subadults. In adult males, however, there is an inflatable nasal cavity in the form of a black bladder. When flaccid, it hangs down in front of the mouth; when inflated, it forms a taut, crescent shaped hood that almost doubles the size of the head and substantially elevates the profile. Male hooded seals also can close the right nostril, extruding a membrane from the left nostril as a brownish to bright red balloon-like structure. The flippers are relatively short, and are slightly pointed and angular with a longer first digit. The vibrissae are beaded, relatively short, and inconspicuous; they are dark in pups and light in adults.

Adults are silvery grey, with scattered, irregularly sized, dark blotches. These blotches coalesce on the head and muzzle. The foreflippers are generally dark. Pups are called "bluebacks," born in a handsome coat of dark blue-grey above and creamy white below. The dark colour continues onto the hindflippers and also extends downward to include the foreflippers. The pale colour rises high on the flanks and neck, and encompasses the lower jaw. Bluebacks retain their coat until the following summer. The face and muzzle are very dark, almost black, to behind the eyes.

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

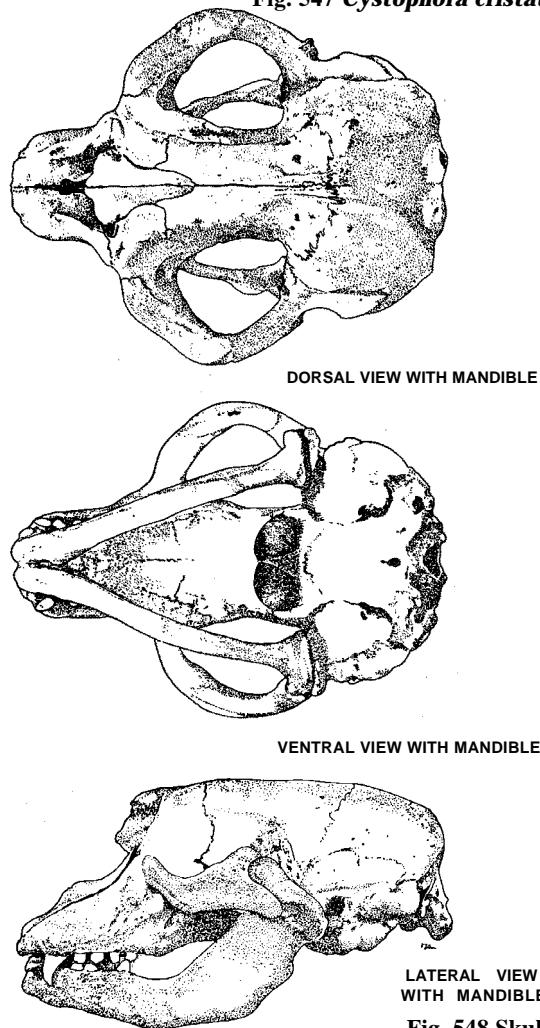


Fig. 548 Skull

Can be confused with: Hooded seals share their range with 5 other phocids. Harp (p. 268), harbour (p. 258) ringed (p. 262), bearded (p. 274), and grey (p. 272) seals can be distinguished by pelage colour, and head shape and size. Hooded seals are most likely to be confused on ice with bearded seals, and additionally in the water, with harp seals. Harp seals are small and uniquely marked. Bearded seals are larger with a small head and "bearded" look.

Size: Adult males reach lengths of 2.6 m and weights of 300 to 400 kg; females average about 2 m in length and weigh 145 to 300 kg. Pups are born at 87 to 115 cm and weigh 20 to 30 kg.

Geographical Distribution: Hooded seals are found in the Atlantic region of the Arctic Ocean, and in high latitudes of the North Atlantic. They breed on pack ice and are associated with it for most of their lives, shifting their distribution with its seasonal fluctuations. There are 4 major whelping areas. Hooded seals wander widely, and have been found as far south as Florida and Portugal. Astoundingly, 1 female recently made her way to San Diego, California, on the opposite side of the continent from the species' normal range.

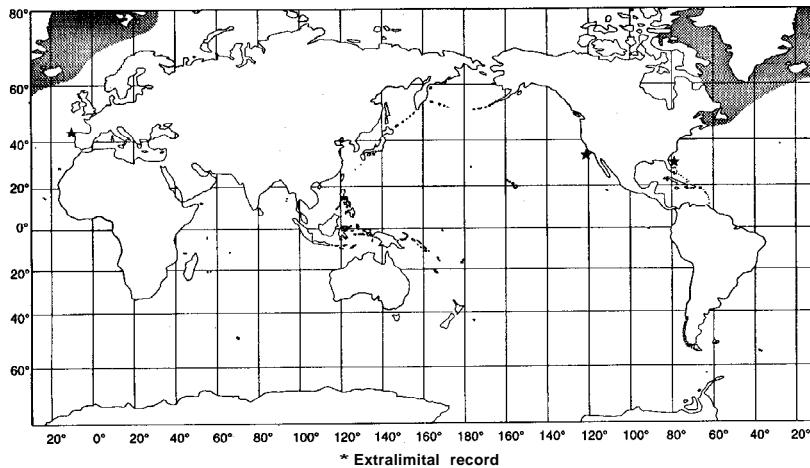


Fig. 549

Biology and Behaviour: Hooded seals pup away from floe edges, on pack ice in March and early April. Females are usually widely separated and aggressively defend their pups. Remarkably, pups are weaned in an average of only 4 days, the shortest time for any mammal. Males are territorial and patrol the ice edge; they often haul out near females, forming trios. Bulls actively fight among themselves, and can inflict bloody wounds; they routinely display by inflating their nasal bladders and extruding their nasal septum to ward off competing males. They also vocalize at the same time by shaking the balloon violently, producing a loud "pinging" noise. Mating usually takes place in the water.

Hooded seals typically fast during breeding and moulting, but actively feed during much of the rest of the year. Their diet is poorly known, but appears to consist primarily of squids and fishes. It includes both coastal and benthic species, suggesting a coastal distribution for at least part of the year.

Exploitation: Like most other Arctic pinnipeds, hooded seals have been hunted by people since prehistoric times. There has also been a long history of commercial sealing for this species, for oil and, particularly for the luxurious coats of the bluebacks. Hooded seals are still hunted in Greenland for meat for humans and dogs, and for pelts. Also, an unknown number are killed every year by incidental entanglement in fishing nets.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.

Monachus monachus (Hermann, 1779)

PHOC Mona 1

SMM

FAO Names: **En** - Mediterranean monk seal; **Fr** - Phoque moine de la Méditerranée; **Sp** - Foca monje del Mediterráneo.

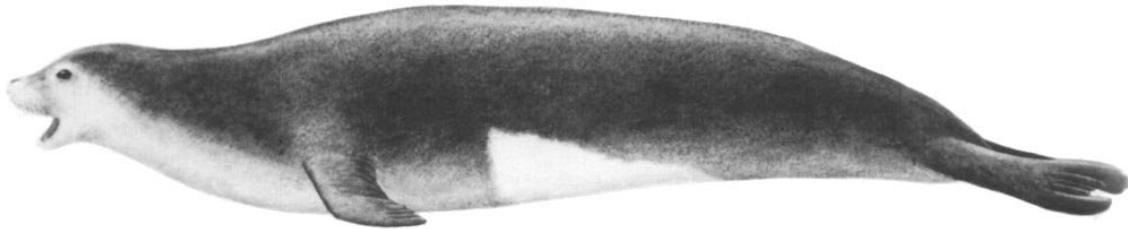


Fig. 550 *Monachus monachus*

Distinctive Characteristics: Adult mediterranean monk seals are robust, with short flippers, a long fusiform body, and a proportionately small head. The head is wide and somewhat flat, with the eyes spaced fairly widely. The muzzle is particularly wide, but compressed from top to bottom. The mystacial pads are large, fleshy, and extend beyond the nostrils. The nostrils are situated at the top of the muzzle unlike any other North Atlantic phocid species. The vibrissae are smooth and unbeaded. Females have 4 retractable teats.

Coloration is variable throughout all the now-isolated subpopulations. Most animals are dark brown above and paler below, the colours separated by either a gradual blending or a sharp demarcation. Others are black overall, or very pale silvery white with variable darker blotching. Some animals have a large white belly patch; others have white blotching elsewhere on the body. Pups are born in a woolly blackish coat, sometimes with white spots and irregular blotches, and often with a yellowish white patch below. The moult of pups to a coat of silver-grey above and lighter below occurs at 4 to 6 weeks. Little is known about the seasonality of the moult.

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

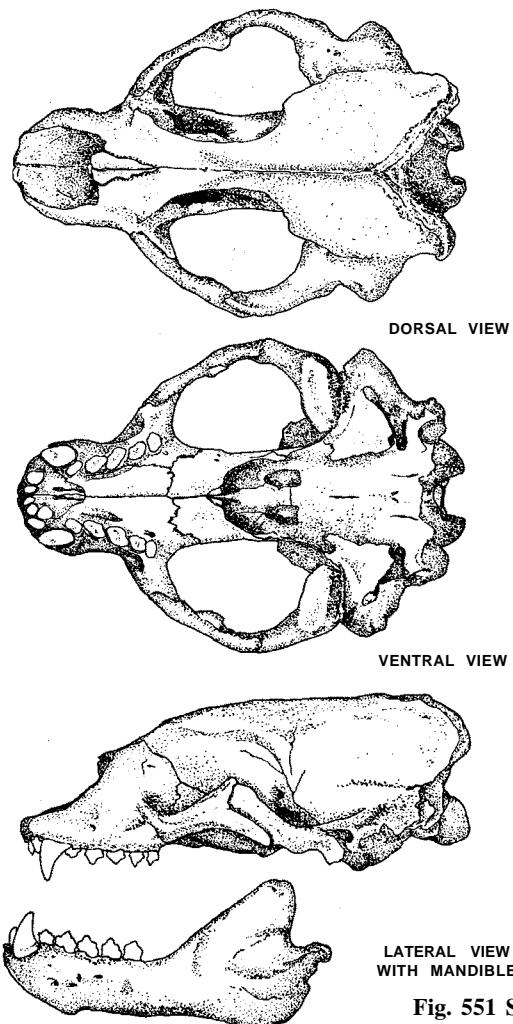


Fig. 551 Skull

Can be confused with: Mediterranean monk seals do not regularly share their range with any other pinniped. The nearest regularly occurring species are harbour (p. 258) and grey (p. 272) seals, and hooded seals (p. 276), all of which occur farther north in the Atlantic. However, Mediterranean monk seals can be readily distinguished from all of these species by their lack of spots, characteristics of the head and muzzle, smooth vibrissae, and 4 mammary teats.

Size: Adults are up to 2.8 m in length, and weigh 250 to 400 kg. Newborns are 80 to 120 cm and 15 to 26 kg.

Geographical Distribution: Mediterranean monk seals are found in the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black seas, and along northwestern Africa to about 34°N. Their presence on islands far offshore demonstrates at least occasional offshore ventures. On land, they choose rocky coastlines, with a preference for sea caves and grottos that are generally inaccessible from land (and sometimes have only submarine entrances). In West Africa, they come ashore on open beaches.

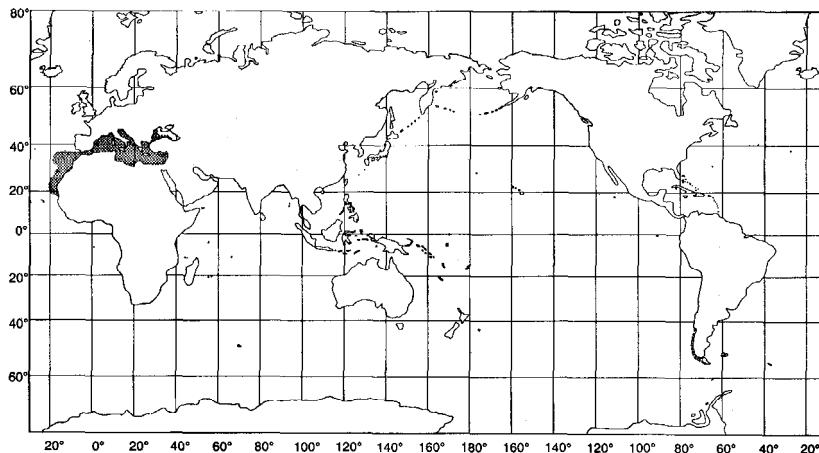


Fig. 552

Biology and Behaviour: This seal is considered nonmigratory, spending most of its time within a very limited home range. Breeding occurs much of the year, but mostly from August through October.

Mediterranean monk seals are among the least social of pinnipeds when ashore; they are presumed to be most socially active in the water, where the only copulation ever observed was recorded. Little information is available on diving, but most dives are thought to be shallow, less than 70 m, and short, less than 10 minutes.

The diet consists of octopus, at least 1 type of ray, and a variety of fishes. Large fish that cannot be swallowed whole are brought to the surface and shaken apart.

Exploitation: Mediterranean monk seals are highly endangered and their chances for long-term survival are considered poor. They are widely scattered in small groups with little exchange of individuals. These seals have no doubt been taken for food and skins ever since the region has been inhabited by people. There is no record of a systematic commercial hunt, but persistent hunting, and recent poaching in this heavily populated region has likely led to this seal's precarious position. Overfishing, pollution, and development of much of this region are suspected to be significant contributors to the decline as well. It is feared that if Mediterranean monk seals were exposed to a disease like that which decimated populations of harbour and grey seals in northern Europe, it could spell the end of this species.

IUCN Status: Endangered.

Monachus tropicalis (Gray, 1850)

PHOC Mona 2

SKC

FAO Names: **En** - West Indian monk seal; **Fr** - Phoque moine des Caraïbes; **Sp** - Foca monja del Caribe.

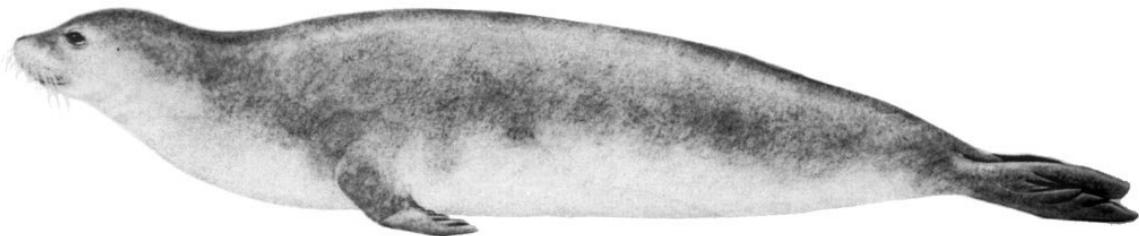
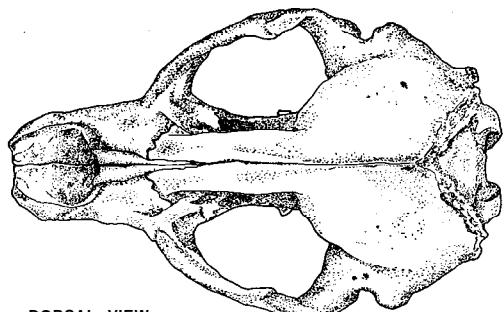


Fig. 553 *Monachus tropicalis*

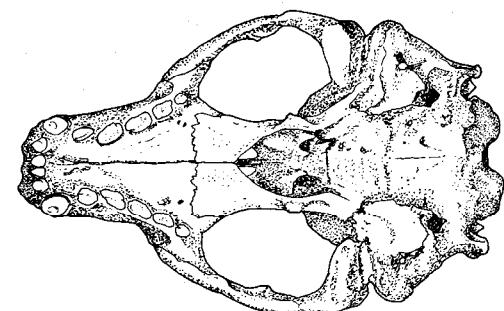
Distinctive Characteristics: The West Indian or Caribbean, monk seal is now considered extinct; none have been seen since the early 1950's. It is described here in hopes that some individuals still survive, and can be identified so that they can be adequately protected. Very little is known of the biology or appearance of this seal, but it is believed to have been similar to the Hawaiian (p. 282) and Mediterranean (p. 278) monk seals.

Coloration is said to have been brown above, blending to yellowish white below. No information exists on potential differences between the sexes. Like Hawaiian monk seals, West Indian monk seals were said to occasionally have green algae growing on the pelage. Pup were born in a soft woolly coat that persisted for an unknown period of time.

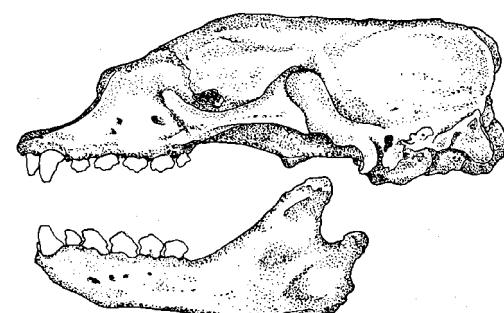
The dental formula is I 2/2, C 1/1, PC 5/5.



DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



LATERAL VIEW WITH MANDIBLE

Fig. 554 Skull

Can be confused with: Feral California sea lions (p. 230) have been reported from the Gulf of Mexico. Hooded (p. 276) harbour (p. 258), and less frequently, harp (p. 268) seals are known to stray occasionally as far south as the central and east coast of Florida, near the edges of the West Indian monk seal's former range. Monk seals can easily be distinguished from all of the above.

Size: Adult West Indian monk seals reached at least 2.4 m in length (females may have been slightly larger than males). Hawaiian monk seals of comparable length to the largest reported for West Indian monk seals weigh 170 to 270 kg. Newborns were probably about 1 m and 16 to 18 kg.

Geographical Distribution: This monk seal once inhabited the entire Caribbean Sea, ranging northwest to the Bay of Campeche in the Gulf of Mexico. In prehistoric times, it may have reached north to the Bahamas and even South Carolina. There were extralimital records from the southeastern United States.

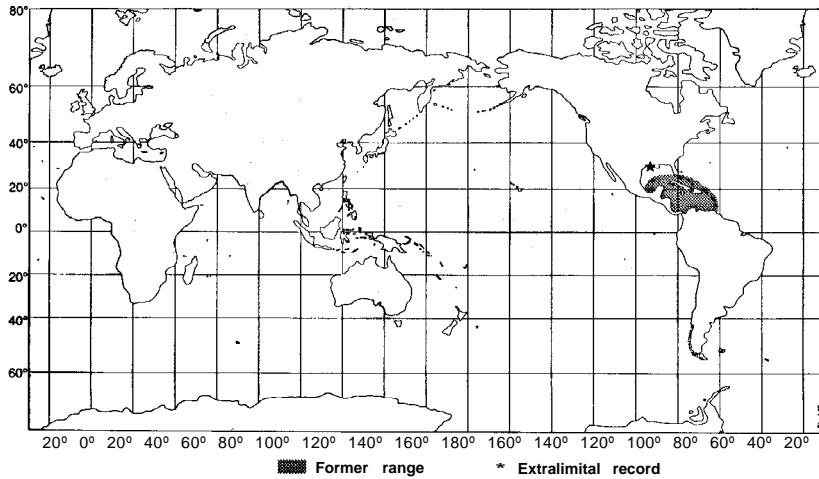


Fig. 555

Biology and Behaviour: Evidence from some animals collected in the 19th Century suggested that pups were born in December. Little else is known of this seal's biology, except that they were said to "bark in a hoarse, gurgling, death-rattle tone."

Exploitation: This monk seal is now thought to be extinct, in large part because of exploitation by humans. It is the only pinniped species to become extinct in modern times. This seal was likely to have been taken opportunistically by native peoples of the region, although this is not documented. Early explorers took monk seals for meat and fat to produce oil. Soon a thriving seal fishery developed throughout the region and the population was quickly depleted. The last report of a sighting was from Seranilla Bank, between Jamaica and Honduras, in 1952. There have been several surveys since that time and no evidence of the West Indian monk seal has been found.

IUCN Status: Extinct.