



LEOPARD SEAL
Hydrurga leptonyx





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Order : *Carnivora* — Family : *Phocidae*



- Size : 2.8-4.5 m
- Weight : 300-600 kg

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE :

Leopard Seals are widely distributed in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic waters of the Southern Hemisphere, south of 78°S.

HABITAT :

Leopard seals live in the sub-Antarctic and Antarctic coastal areas. During the southern winter, the juveniles migrate north (and may sometimes venture to the Crozet and Kerguelen archipelagos) while the adults prefer to stay close to the pack ice.

DIET :

Leopard Seals consume krill, juvenile seals, fish, cephalopods and penguins.

BEHAVIOR :

Leopard Seals are solitary, opportunistic predators and are considered the most ferocious seal in Antarctica. Their hunting tactics include one or a combination of sit-and-wait, stalk, flush, ambush, or chase/courting techniques. Leopard seals whip carcasses violently back and forth until the skin has been peeled back to expose the viscera and body muscle, which they consume. They are awkward on land but swift and graceful in the water. They are powerful enough to jump out of the water up to 2 meters high. They are solitary animals that only gather during the breeding season. They have an imposing and massive head, which often sticks out of the water when they swim near the surface. They make a whole range of low and long frequency sounds such as trills, grunts, growling noises and low frequency moans, which they use underwater and on the ice.

REPRODUCTION :

The age at sexual maturity is about four years for females and 4.5 years for males. At sea and on the ice, Leopard Seals tend to be solitary. There are no breeding sites or colonies. Mating is believed to occur in the water. Gestation period averages 274 days, after a two-month delayed implantation of the fertilized egg. Pups are born on sea ice from early November to late December. They are 1.0 to 1.6 m in length and weigh 30 to 35 kg at birth. Suckling lasts one month, during which the female raises her pup alone. On very rare occasions, males haul out with female-pup pairs but do not offer any assistance.



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THREATS :

The species is categorized as "Least concern" (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, January 2015). It is protected under the Convention for the Protection of Antarctic Seals (1972).