



**WEDDELL SEAL**  
*Leptonychotes weddellii*





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Order : *Carnivora* — Family : *Phocidae*

## GEOGRAPHIC RANGE :

Weddell Seals are restricted to the Antarctic continent.

## HABITAT :

Weddell Seals are coastal animals. They alternate between hunting in the water and resting on the pack ice or on land.

## DIET :

Their diet primarily consists of bottom-dwelling icefishes. They also eat crustaceans, cephalopods and krill.

## BEHAVIOR :

Weddell Seals are prodigious divers: they can reach over 750 m depths and have the capability of undertaking 70 minute dives. However, they primarily feed at depths of 50–500 m, diving for 15-20 minutes. They are not sociable animals but they tend to congregate in loose groups near access holes to the water. Weddell Seals that remain in fast ice areas abrade and grind the ice with their lower incisors to maintain access to and from the water. They hunt under the ice using their very good eyesight and ability to swim at very high speeds. During the darkness of the Antarctic winter, they rely on the sense of touch of their vibrissae or whiskers, which are not just hairs, but sensory organs that allow them to detect the wake of fish.

## REPRODUCTION :

It is a polygamous species and the ratio is on average 10 females to one male. Females become mature at 3 to 6 years of age and males at 7 to 8 years. Weddell Seal pups are born on the ice from October through mid-November. Females generally give birth to a single pup, but can often have two. Pups are born earlier at lower latitudes than at higher latitudes. Newborns are about 1.2 m long and average 25 kg. Adult females nurse their pups for a prolonged period (6 to 7 weeks). Adult females lose 150 kg after birth and during lactation, while pups gain 100 kg. Females enter oestrus right after weaning their pup, and mating occurs underwater (early December). Active gestation starts 40 days later (diapause) and lasts 9 months.

- Size : 2.5-3.2 m
- Weight : 400-600 kg



## THREATS :

The species is categorized as "Least concern" (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, December 2014). Weddell Seals served as an important source of food for men and dogs throughout the early periods of Antarctic exploration, but this marginal hunting did not put the species at risk.