

# SEA-LION, CALIFORNIA

## RANGE:

California coast and offshore islands, latitude 20 – 40 degrees (Canadian border to Mexico). The Japanese sea lion may actually be the same species.

## HABITAT:

Coastline.

## SIZE:

Males: 8' long, 600-800 lbs.; females: 6' long, 200 lbs.

## LIFE EXPECTANCY:

Averages 15-20 years in captivity; one lived to age 30.

## REPRODUCTION:

- Breeding season: late May or June. Large herds of males attempt to establish individual territories on shore. (Prime locations are "beachfront").
- Some scientists claim the bulls fast for up to 2 months while guarding their territories and the very loose harem structure which results when females come ashore to choose a place to bear their single pups.
- An old bull may collect 3-20 females.
- Younger bulls, even the sexually mature, form bachelor herds until about age 8
- Mating takes place within a few days of delivery, so gestation is 12 months.
- The fertilized egg does not immediately develop past a few cell divisions (delayed implantation).
- The mother cares for her pup for up to 9-12 months and teaches it to swim.
- They nurse up to 9 months. They locate each other by voice patterns.

## DIET:

**Wild:** fish, squid, octopus.

**Zoo:** Capelin, herring and mackerel. The first one thrown to each has a vitamin hidden inside; we call this a "pill-fish" (not a fish species!).

## BEHAVIOR:

- Sea lions swim very gracefully with their front flippers.
- They are quick and agile on land, being able to rotate hind flippers forward for propulsion.
- Highly intelligent, sea lions pups play almost continuously like puppies. They throw things to retrieve and "invent" formation swimming and sliding games. Grooming, as in all aquatic mammals, is a very important activity.

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LOUISVILLE



photo by Rick Lombardo

Order:	<b>Carnivora</b>
Suborder:	<b>Pinnipedia</b>
Family:	<b>Otariidae</b>
Genus:	<b>Zalophus</b>
Species:	<b>californianus</b>

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### POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Sea lions and fur seals are easy to tell from "true seals" by their possession of external ears.
- Also, their hind flippers are less modified for swimming, allowing these animals much more agility on land.
- The sea lion's hind flippers can rotate forward enabling it to "run" and even jump. (It is the "seal" used in circuses and aquariums to entertain by its ball-balancing ability, ladder-climbing, etc.).
- There are 5 species of sea lion, characterized by short, coarse hair with no distinct undercoat.
- It is thereby saved from a destiny as a "fun fur".
- The California sea lion is the only sea lion with no mane, but it does make a roaring sound.
- Sea lions can swim 4 meters per second under water.
- The Navy has trained sea lions to help in recovery, down to 500', of rockets gone awry.
- Any oil spill is dangerous to young pups because it mats their fur destroying its insulating quality before the pups have enough blubber to compensate.
- Thus, there is concern about the proposal to open the Channel Islands to drilling.
- The Santa Barbara oil spill in 1969 was 3 months prior to pupping season, so there was no significant pup mortality.
- The pups did, however, have to increase metabolism by 50% to keep warm.
- Oil is most toxic in the first 24 hours after a spill.
- The most frequent cause of death is parasites, followed by man, killer whales, and sharks.

### STATUS:

Small, but stable and protected population of 90,000. Some places are locally overpopulated, and there are complaints from fishermen whose gill nets may be raided.