



Steller Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

Size: Steller sea lions are the largest of the Otariidae family (the group that includes sea lions and fur seals). Males can reach sizes of 11 feet in length and 2,500 pounds while females are smaller at 9.5 feet in length and 700 pounds.

Status: ICUN – Near Threatened; ESA Endangered - Western Distinct Population Segment

Appearance: Steller sea lions are well known for their noticeably large head and broad chest. Coloration of adults ranges from light brown to blond with a slightly darker bottom half, while pups are born dark brown or black. Their large powerful front flippers are sparingly covered with fur. Steller sea lions exhibit sexual dimorphism, in which adult males are noticeably larger than females and further distinguished by a thick mane of coarse hair.

Range/Distribution: They range from southern California, northward along the coast of North America, across the Aleutian Islands, and southward to Japan.

Habitat: Steller sea lions forage near shore and pelagic waters but are capable of deeper dives to approximately 1300ft. Rocky areas and land habitat are used as haul-out sites for periods of rest, molting, and as rookeries for mating and pupping during the breeding season. At sea, they are seen alone or in small groups, but may gather in large "rafts" at the surface near rookeries and haul outs. They are capable of powerful vocalizations that are accompanied by a vertical head bobbing motion by males.

Prey: Steller sea lions' prey on a variety of fishes (capelin, cod, herring, mackerel, pollock, rockfish, salmon, sand lance, etc.), mollusks- including clams, snails, squid, and octopus.

Predators: As one of the largest pinniped species, the main predator of Steller sea lions are orcas.

Mating Behaviors: Steller sea lions are colonial breeders. Adult males, also known as bulls, establish and defend territories on rookeries to mate with females. Bulls become sexually mature between 3 and 8 years of age, but typically are not large enough to hold territory successfully until 9 or 10 years old. Mature males may go without eating for 1-2 months while they are aggressively defending their territory. Females typically reproduce for the first time at 4 to 6 years of age, usually giving birth to a single pup each year. At birth, pups are about 3.3 feet (1 m) in length and weigh 35-50 pounds (16-22.5 kg).

Threats: Most Steller sea lion populations declined markedly in the 1980s and 1990s, even though the animals are protected. Scientists are unsure what factor or combination of factors was responsible for the decline. However, current threats include; boat/ ship strikes, contaminants and pollutants, habitat degradation, illegal hunting and shooting, offshore oil and gas exploration, and interactions (direct and indirect) with fisheries. One-fifth of one percent of Steller sea lions sighted during surveys in southeastern Alaska are entangled by marine debris including packing straps and fishing gear, but the extent of mortality due to this is unknown.

Fun Facts:

- Steller sea lions' impressive low-frequency vocalizations sound more like a roar when compared to California sea lions, which sound more like a bark.
- Steller sea lions are named for the German surgeon and naturalist George Wilhelm Steller. In 1742, he observed and described these large pinnipeds.
- Steller sea lions are the fourth largest pinniped in the world, behind the northern elephant seal, southern elephant seal, and walrus.