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FAST FACTS

NAME: Steller sea lion (northern sea lion)

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Eumetopias jubatus*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 566 kg (males), 263 kg (females)

AVERAGE LENGTH: 282 cm (males), 228 cm (females)

AVERAGE LIFESPAN: Approximately 18 to 30 years

DID YOU KNOW?

Groups of sea lions have many names depending on where they are: on land they are a colony, in water they are called a raft, during breeding seasons they're referred to as a rookery and when several females are in one male's territory, they're called a harem.

PHYSIOLOGY

Steller sea lions get their name from the mane of coarse long hair around the face. These sea lions are able to rotate their hind flippers forward, which allow them to support their entire weight when walking on all flippers. Steller sea lions have external ear flaps, known as pinnae which they shut when swimming so water doesn't get in their ears. They are able to dive to a depth of 350 metres and stay underwater for five minutes.

The sea lions' coat color changes as they grow. Newborn pups have a thick, brown coat at birth. When they're six months old they grow a lighter coat. By age two to three years, they grow a yellowish-tan adult coat.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Steller sea lions prefer to swim and hunt in colder waters. Once a year, beginning in May, they congregate on land for the mating season. Males usually arrive first to establish their territories. Only the strongest males are able to claim enough territory to form a harem of three to 20 females. Once the females arrive, the males herd them into their territories. Often, males will fight over females by throwing their bodies against each other and biting.

Young pups are fed by their mother for at least the first three months and sometimes up to a year. At one month, they are able to swim and by the time they're three months old, they are able to catch their own food. They feed on squid and octopus as well as herring, mackerel and salmon.

One of the greatest threats to the Steller sea lion population is human activity, including oil spills and increased competition with the commercial fishing industry.

RANGE

Steller sea lion can be found on the North Pacific coasts of Russia, Japan, Canada and part of the United States. In Canada, they are found along the rocky coast of British Columbia.