



# species factsheet

## | species introduction |

**Common name: Leopard Seal**

Scientific name: *Hydrurga leptonyx*

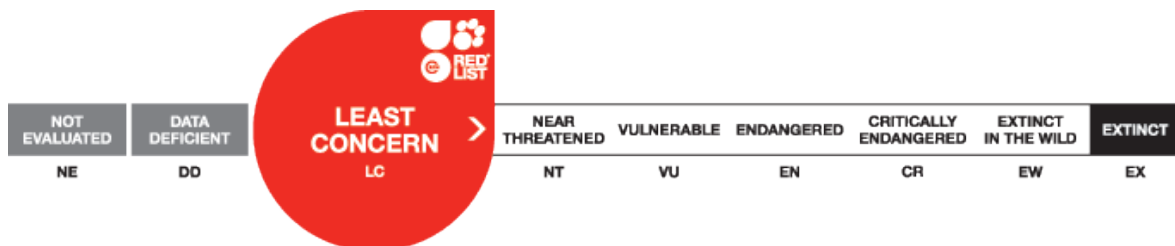
Leopard seals are solitary animals with a streamlined body, long broad fore flippers and a large and reptile-like head. Their fur is silvery-grey to black with variable dark spots and a pale underside. They are the only seal species where the female is larger than the male. Adult males are 2.8 to 3.3 metres long and weigh up to 300kg. Adult females are 2.9 to 3.8 metres and weigh up to 500kg. They have well developed canines to seize penguins and other seals, as well as specialised teeth that filter krill from the water.

Leopard seals are widely distributed in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic waters of the Southern Hemisphere, occurring from the coast of the Antarctic continent north throughout the pack ice and around most sub-Antarctic islands.



## | status in the wild |

Leopard seals are categorised as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List due to their widespread occurrence and large population size.



There are currently no major threats to leopard seals. However, increasing disturbance from tourism, the commercial harvest of krill and the unknown impacts of climate change may affect this species in the future.

Conservation of the leopard seal is important as they are a top order predator and therefore any impacts on this species will also be seen further down the food chain.

### **| species reproduction |**

After a gestation period of around 9 months, leopard seal pups are born from early November to late December, and also sometimes in October and January. Unlike some other seal species which have long periods of maternal care, the single pup is weaned after approximately 4 weeks.

### **| species habitat |**

The main habitat of the leopard seal is the Antarctic pack ice, its associated ice bergs and smaller ice floes. Vagrant seals are often seen as far north as South Africa, South America, Australia and New Zealand.

### **| species food |**

Leopard seals have a varied diet that includes other seals, penguins, seabirds, fish, squid and krill. Krill makes up about 50% of their diet, particularly in winter when other food is scarce. They typically hunt in the water and will position themselves adjacent to penguin rookeries to lie in wait for penguins coming and going.

### **| threats |**

Leopard seals are not currently experiencing any major threats and due to the inaccessibility of the Antarctic habitat they have not been hunted commercially. There is however, concern over their long-term future as they do face increasing disturbance from tourism with the potential for spread of disease. The increasing commercial harvest of krill could pose a problem for leopard seals due to their high dependency on this food source. Climate change could also pose a threat. Global warming would reduce the ice habitat available for pupping and resting. It could also reduce the amount of krill available since krill live and breed under the ice, and also affect the availability of other prey species such as penguins.

### **| conservation |**

Leopard seals are protected by the Antarctic Treaty and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals.

They are part of the Antarctic Pack Ice Seals (APIS) program which aims to improve understanding of the ecological role of pack-ice seals by looking at population structures, dietary preferences, movements and diving behaviours. These studies help in understanding the ecosystem and therefore in managing human activities such as the commercial harvest of krill and fish.

### **| find out more |**

<http://www.arkive.org/leopard-seal/hydrurga-leptonyx/>

<http://www.iucnredlist.org>

<http://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/wildlife/animals/seals-and-sea-lions/leopard-seals>

<http://taronga.org.au/LeopardSeal>

<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/?base=5368>

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For more information go to [www.poletopolecampaign.org](http://www.poletopolecampaign.org) or email [info@poletopolecampaign.org](mailto:info@poletopolecampaign.org)