



# species factsheet

## | species introduction |

**Common name:** Southern fur seals

Scientific name: *Arctocephalus sp*

Eight of the nine fur seals species are found in the southern hemisphere. Contrary to 'true seals', southern fur seals have external earflaps and they can turn their hind flippers forwards. They therefore have extra mobility on land using their hind flippers together with their strong front flippers. Another difference is the use of their front flippers for swimming



whereas 'true seals' use their hind flippers. Fur seals are the smallest seal species and are closely related to sea lions. Fur seals do not have a fat layer like other seals and rely on their coat of dense underfur intermixed with guard hairs to stay warm. An adult male is significantly larger than an adult female and can weigh over 200kg, sometimes even more than 5 times the weight of a female. Whereas female fur seals can live up to the age of 23 the males, due to

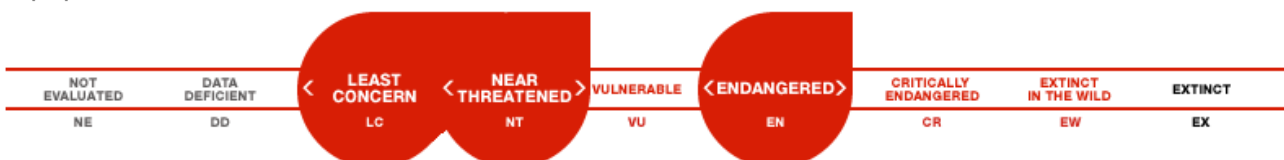
their more competitive and demanding lifestyle, usually only reach the age of 15. Fur seals usually dive for an average of three to four minutes at 30-40 meters deep. Fur seals have sharp eye sight and keen hearing. Fur seals, although they breathe air, are most at home in the water and may stay at sea for weeks. Female fur seals are called cows and male fur seals are called bulls.

## | status in the wild |

The different species of the *Arctocephalus* are more or less threatened. *Arctocephalus australis* (South American Fur Seal), *Arctocephalus forsteri* (New Zealand Fur Seal), *Arctocephalus gazelle* (Antarctic Fur Seal), *Arctocephalus pusillus* (Afro-Australian Fur Seal) and *Arctocephalus tropicalis* (Sub Antarctic Fur Seal) are of Least Concern (LC) with an increasing population trend.

*Arctocephalus philippii* (Juan Fernández Fur Seal) and *Arctocephalus townsendi* (Guadalupe Fur Seal) are Near Threatened (NT) with an increasing population trend.

*Arctocephalus galapagoensis* (Galápagos Fur Seal) is Endangered (EN) with a decreasing population trend.



## | species reproduction |

Southern fur seals are known to be polygynous, which means that males mate with and control more than one female; this is called a harem. Between October and December males will compete for certain areas along the shore to establish their territories. Females typically arrive two weeks after the males. The largest territories and the most females will go to the most dominant males. On average, the breeding male fur seal has more females than any other polygynous mammal. A male fur seal will reach sexual maturity at the age of seven and the female fur seal reaches sexual maturity at the age of three.

Females will give birth to a pup conceived during the mating season of the previous year. Mating occurs typically 6 to 12 days after the birth of the pup. The total gestation period will take from 8 to 12 months, including 3 to 4 months for delayed implantation to ensure that the pup will be born at the right time of year when returning to the breeding grounds. A pup will be nursed for a period of 7 months to 3 years. A new born pup will weigh between 3.5 and 5.5kg and measures 60 to 65cm in length. Pups are born black and will eventually become dark brown or grey.

## | species habitat |

Southern fur seals live in the waters of the Southern Hemisphere. The South American fur seal is found along the coasts of Peru to southern Brazil, the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.

The New Zealand fur seal is found on South Island, New Zealand, the Bounty Islands and along the coast of south-western Australia.

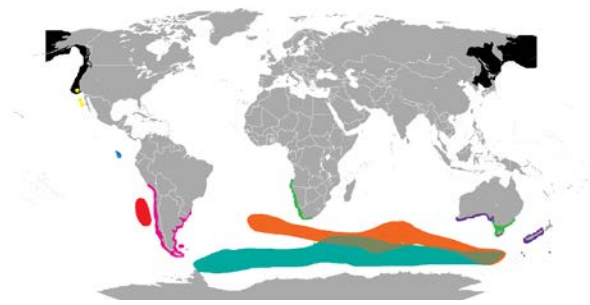
The Galapagos fur seal is, of course, found on the Galapagos Islands.

The Antarctic fur seal is found on seasonally ice-free islands, south of the convergence in the Southern Ocean and on the continental edge of Antarctica.

The South African fur seal is found on the coasts of Namibia, western and southern South Africa and on the southwest coast of Australia.

The Guadalupe fur seal is found on Isla de Guadalupe, the coast of Baja California and western Mexico.

The Sub Antarctic fur seal is found on the islands north of the convergence/Southern Ocean.



## | species food |

The fur seal is mainly a nocturnal hunter. It is a carnivore and feeds on fish, molluscs, aquatic crustaceans (shrimps and lobsters) and occasionally squid. Several species also eat birds, especially penguins.

The Antarctic fur seal is particularly successful at finding high concentrations of food and will feed on krill. The Southern fur seal around South Georgia mainly feed on krill, while at Heard and Macquarie Island they mainly feed on fish and squid. Whereas the female forages close to the islands while caring for the young, the males forage further away. The South American fur seal has a diet that varies with the location. Southern fur seals living close to the shores

of Brazil hunt for shrimp, while those living in Peru and Uruguay feed on anchovies. The southern fur seal living in Chile hunts for krill (especially lobster krill).

### **| threats |**

The major threat for the southern fur seals has always been humans hunting them for their fur. Many of the southern fur seal populations were wiped out due to hunting. Nowadays threats are entanglement in marine debris such as polypropylene packaging bands, fishing nets and nylon cord. The southern fur seals are also hunted by South American sea lions, Orcas and Sharks. It is known that leopard seals take a third of the new born pups at sites such as the South Shetland Islands. The level of natural predation on southern fur seals may even be high enough to cause a population decline at this site.

Climate change and over fishing are also considered a threat. The possible effect of climate change on southern fur seals is unknown, but it has been suggested that populations may decline due to the warming up of the Earth. Annually 1% of the total population is noted to be caught in anthropogenic (human generated) debris. Most of the entangled southern fur seals are juveniles and sub adults. 30% of the individuals affected are injured and expected to die as result of their entanglement.

### **| conservation |**

All southern fur seals, except the Guadalupe fur seal (CITES Appendix I) are listed as CITES Appendix II. In the USA the fur seals are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Fish and Game Code of the state of California. In Mexico its habitat is also protected. Below 60° south, the population of the southern fur seal is protected by the Antarctic Treaty and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals. North of the Antarctic Treaty area the populations of southern fur seals are protected by the nations which govern the islands where they breed.

The Afro-Australian and the New Zealand fur seals are protected by the governments of Australia and New Zealand. The Galápagos fur seal is, by the establishment of the Galapagos National Park, protected by a 40 nautical mile perimeter no fishing zone and regulated tourism.

The sub-Antarctic fur seals are protected due to the fact that all of their breeding islands are managed as protected areas or parks by the governments who claim these territories.

The Juan Fernandez fur seal has total protection in Chile (1978).

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

- <http://www.air-and-space.com/200101%20Antarctica/Seals.htm>
- <http://www.iucnredlist.org/search>
- [http://www.eoearth.org/article/Southern\\_fur\\_seals](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Southern_fur_seals)
- <http://marinebio.org/species.asp?id=265>
- <http://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/wildlife/animals/seals-and-sea-lions/antarctic-fur-seals>
- <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/fur-seal/>

- [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Arctocephalus\\_australis/](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Arctocephalus_australis/)
- [http://www.theanimalfiles.com/mammals/seals\\_sea\\_lions/antarctic\\_fur\\_seal.html](http://www.theanimalfiles.com/mammals/seals_sea_lions/antarctic_fur_seal.html)
- [http://www.ehow.com/facts\\_5494105\\_habitat-antarctic-fur-seals.html](http://www.ehow.com/facts_5494105_habitat-antarctic-fur-seals.html)
- 2012. "Marine Bio" (On-line). South American Fur Seals, *Arctocephalus australis*. <http://marinebio.org/species.asp?id=312>.
- National Geographic Society. 2012. "National Geographic" (On-line). Fur Seals. <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/fur-seal/>.
- Campanga, C. 2008. "*Arctocephalus australis*" (On-line). IUCN Red List. Accessed <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/2055/0>.

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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)