

# BAYLANDS

## Harbor Seals

Harbor Seals, also called Common or Spotted Seals, are found in the San Francisco Bay and are sometimes seen in the waters near the Palo Alto Baylands. Highly adaptable animals, they live in many and varied environments. They prefer bays and sheltered coves, but are also seen on rocky beaches and sometimes in rivers. Harbor Seals are widely distributed throughout the world, ranging from along the entire Pacific coast to the coasts of Europe and Asia.

Harbor Seals have a great variety of coat colors, from pale silver to dark mottled brown and black. Most have whitish spots with gray centers all over their bodies. Their head shape varies from one population to the next but is generally round with a short muzzle. Their faces bristle with stiff whiskers known as vibrissa and their eyes are large, round and teary. As all other true seals, the Harbor Seal's ear openings are just small holes in the skull.

Harbor Seals are a small seal species. Adult males weigh from 200 to 300 pounds and are 5 to 6 feet in length. Adult females are usually much smaller, in the 100 to 150 pound range.

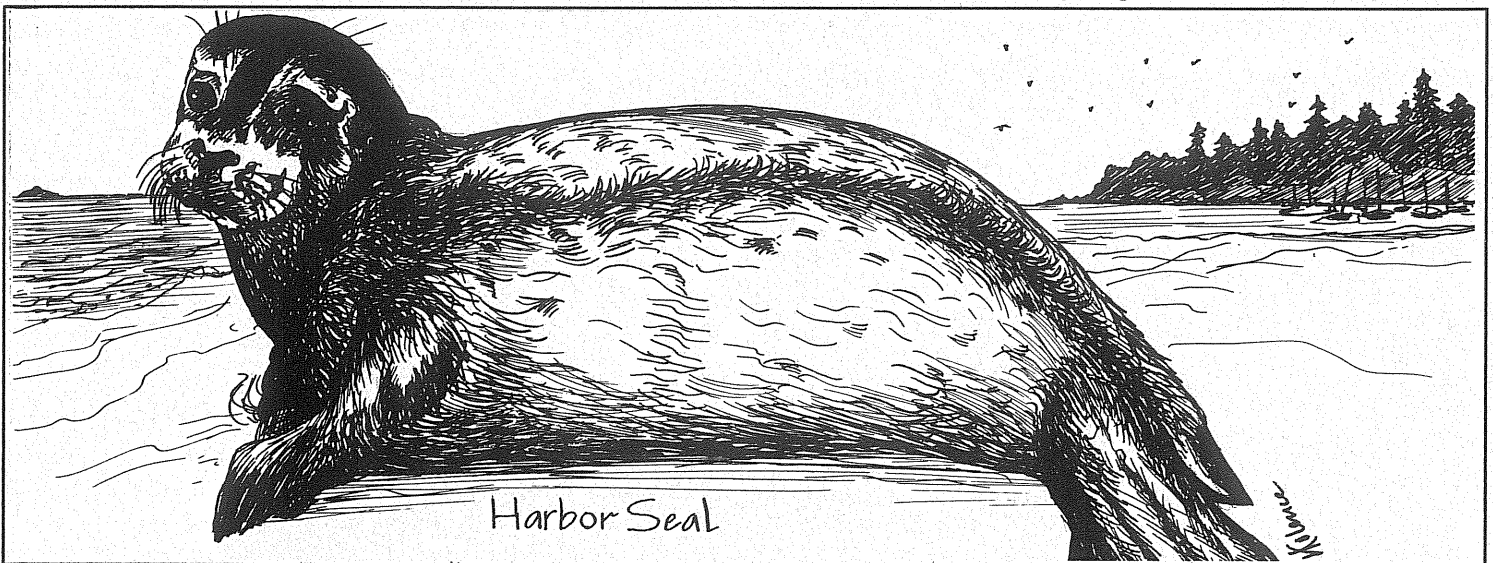
## Nature Notes

Harbor Seals are *pinnipeds*, which means that they have fins or wing-like structures for feet. This greatly hinders their mobility on land, where they move with a slow undulating motion which makes them resemble huge caterpillars. But in the water they are graceful swimmers and highly capable fish hunters. In fact, these seals are not liked by the commercial fishermen because they compete so effectively for the available fish supply. Fish, mollusks, and crustaceans are their main diet.

In the water Harbor Seals are not particularly social animals, but on land, and especially when the females have their pups, they form small groups for protection.

When they are born, baby seals weigh around 25 pounds and grow extremely fast. They learn to swim and catch fish very quickly. When they are seen riding on the mother's back, they are undoubtedly learning how to stay under water for longer and longer periods of time. When they are mature, Harbor Seals can stay under water for up to 45 minutes.

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Harbor Seal