







Hooded seal *Cystophora cristata*



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Adult hooded seal © Garry Stenson

Hooded seals are the largest **true seal** species in the North Atlantic. Like a lot of animals, they show **sexual dimorphism**. Males can grow up to 2.5 metres and weigh 300 kg, while smaller females grow up to 2.2 metres and weigh around 160 kilograms. Adults have characteristic silvery-grey coat with irregular spots all over their bodies and dark coloured flippers and faces. **Pups** are born with their distinctive blue-grey coats on their backs and lighter bellies. Because of this colouration, they got their nickname “blueback”.

Adult length 2.5 metres
Adult weight 300 kg
Maximum age 25-30 years
Eats pelagic fish, squid
Group size up to several hundreds during moulting and breeding seasons

Predators polar bears, killer whales, Greenland shark
IUCN status vulnerable (2024)
NEA abundance not enough data
Hunted in
 1,112 seals/year
 10 seals/year
mean 2019-2023

Main threats:









Climate change



Pollution

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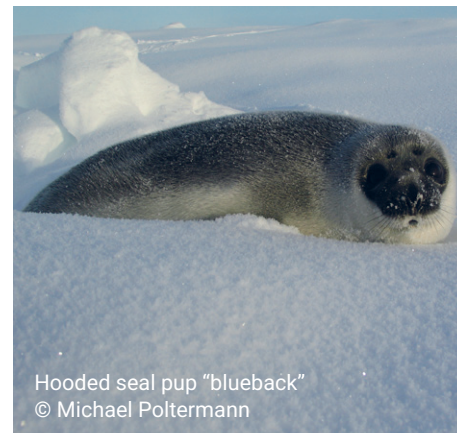


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The most recognisable feature of hooded seal is the hood they got their names after. The hood is actually a nasal sac males have that can be inflated to form a bi-lobed hood over the top and front of the head. In addition to that, male hooded seals also have elastic nasal **septum** that can also be inflated and looks like pinkish, red balloon. Inflated “hood” and nasal **septum** play a role in mating. While a female nurses her **pup**, males compete for the right to mate by repeatedly inflating their hood and **septum**. The competition can also involve males fighting each other which can end with injuries.



Adult male hooded seals with inflated bi-lobed hood and nasal septum © WILDLIFE GmbH / Alamy



Hooded seal pup “blueback” © Michael Poltermann

Hooded seals are the **species** with the shortest nursing period of all mammals! Females give birth to one **pup** a year. After only 3–5 days, the mother leaves the **pup**, which remains on the ice for a few more days until it begins to swim and forage for itself. At birth, **pups** are around 1 metre in length and 24 kilograms in weight. In the first few days, the **pups** can double in weight thanks to the richest milk of any mammals, containing over 60% of fat!



Research: How will the changes in **sea ice** due to climate change impact **migratory patterns** of hooded seals?