

# PRESENTS CALIFORNIA SEA LION

## *Zalophus californianus*

This charismatic and gregarious species is a marine mammal belonging to the Otariidae family. They stay close to coastal environments, especially rocky or areas where they can pull themselves out of the water and rest away from predators. In Mexico, this is considered a priority species.

### TAXONOMY

**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Class:** Mammalia  
**Order:** Carnivora  
**Super familia:** Pinnipedia  
**Family:** Otariidae  
**Genus:** *Zalophus*  
**Species:** *Z. californianus*



**Conservation Status:**  
• Nom 059 – Pr (special protection)  
• IUCN – LC (least concern)



**Distribution:** Pacific coastline from Canada to Baja California in México.



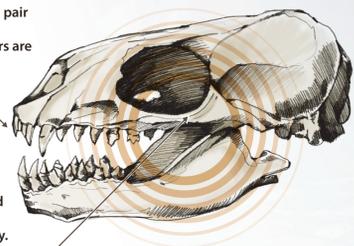
**Diet:** It is an opportunistic species, feeding on fish and mollusks like squid and octopus.



**Reproduction:** They usually mate between May and June; females give birth to one calf after a 12-month gestation period.

34 teeth, including a pair of large canines. The premolars and molars are uniform in size.

Males can make loud barking sounds to defend their territory.



### ANATOMY

Their body is hydrodynamic with a long and narrow snout. Sexual dimorphism occurs, which means physical differences between females and males are present and become evident especially when they reach maturity.



Females and juveniles have light to dark brown fur



Males usually have dark brown to black fur

Eyes are large and adapted to detect colors in the blue light spectrum, allowing the species to become well adapted for coastal marine habitats.

Visible ears. Their hearing is well developed.

**1.8 - 2 meters**  
estimated maximum length in size

**80 - 120 kilograms**  
weight reached by females

**2.4 - 2.7 meters**  
estimated maximum length in size

**300-380 kilograms**  
weight reached by males

**20 years** on average in the wild is the average life span.

**30 years** on average in captivity is the average life span.

The spine is flexible, allowing them to change direction swiftly while swimming at high speeds.

They have 38 whiskers on each side that can reach 20 cm in length. These whiskers allow them to detect prey and other signals when foraging for food.

The animal is propelled forward with every stroke made with the front flippers.

Their back flippers are used to maneuver and change direction.

**Porpoising:** When swimming at high speeds, they leap out of the water for short distances.

They have a thick layer of blubber under the skin that helps them keep warm and provides buoyancy.

Sea lions are skilled swimmers and can reach speeds of up to **40 km/hr** although average speeds vary between 10-17 km/hr.

Both females and males can stay underwater for up to **20 minutes** however average dives last between 2 and 10 minutes.

They can reach depths of up to **274 meters** but most dives average 50 meters in depth.

**3-5 nails** on their back flippers.

On land, the back flippers rotate forward under the body to to move on land.

Sea lions have adapted to human presence and can frequently be seen as environmental education ambassadors.

Some rookeries in the Gulf of California are tourism attractions, allowing divers and snorkelers to observe these individuals up close.

### DISTRIBUTION

California sea lions live on the Eastern coast of the northern Pacific Ocean. The species' range spans from Alaska to Chiapas in Mexico. Although they spend most of their time in the water, during the reproduction season (May-August) they gather in specific sites known as rookeries. The most important rookeries are located on the Channel Islands in California, USA, and in the Gulf of California, Mexico.



**1:10**  
Proportion of males to females during reproduction season.

**16 rookeries** monitored

**15 years** monitored

The *Zalophus* genus includes three species



1. *Zalophus japonicus* in Japan (extinct)



2. *Zalophus wollebaeki* in the Galapagos Islands



3. *Zalophus californianus*



### ROOKERY MONITORING

Males are territorial and fight other males over females in their territory. In collaboration with scientists, for the past 15 years CONANP has implemented a monitoring program in some of the rookeries in the Gulf of California and the Pacific.

### CONSERVATION TIMELINE



**1872:** Sea Lion hunting becomes a commercial activity.



**1930:** Although hunting is declared illegal, the practice continues until 1982.



**1978:** The islands in the Gulf of California are declared a reserve and refuge for migratory birds and wildlife.



**1994:** The species is included in the NOM-059-ECOL-1994, which lists the species and subspecies of wild flora and fauna under special protection.



**2000:** The 1978 decree is modified to Flora and Fauna Protection Area Gulf of California Islands.



**2011:** CONANP creates the Biological Monitoring Program for Natural Protected Areas (PROMOBI) through which important rookery monitoring is done.



**2014:** The species is included in the list of conservation priority species and populations.



**2016:** Federal government incorporates PROMOBI into the community surveillance and management program (PROMANP).

First time period in which a decrease in the sea lion population is recorded.

1970-1990: Population recovery period.

1990's: Second population collapse.

2000-2010: Period of stability in the sea lion population.

2010-2016: After a small recovery, the third collapse in the population is recorded.

### THREATS



**Fishing gear**  
They can become entangled in nets, or ropes associated with active or phantom fishing gear.



**Environmental variations**  
They affect the abundance and availability of their prey; juveniles are particularly affected.

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