

# GRAY SEAL

(WESTERN NORTH ATLANTIC STOCK)

## POPULATION STATUS:

- The gray seal is found on both sides of the North Atlantic, with three major populations: eastern Canada, northwestern Europe and the Baltic Sea.
- The eastern Canada (western North Atlantic) population ranges from New York to Labrador.
- Current population numbers for the western North Atlantic stock are unknown but are estimated at over 250,000 animals.
- Most recent population estimates show increases in abundance in Canada and the United States, although the population in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence appears to be declining.
- Within US waters, gray seals have been seen pupping in increasing numbers on isolated islands off the Maine coast and off of Cape Cod, with Muskeget Island being the largest breeding colony.
- Gray seals are opportunistic feeders. Food sources include fish, crustaceans, squid, octopus, and even sea birds on occasion.



More information can be found at

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals/pinnipeds/grayseal>

## What to do when encountering a seal on a beach or observing a haul out site:

- Stay at least 150 feet away from it to avoid disturbing the seal(s).
- Don't handle it, and keep other people and dogs away.
- Report harassment to **NOAA Marine Mammal & Sea Turtle Hotline 1-866-755-6622**.

## REPORT HARASSMENT:

Gray seals in U.S. waters are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Under the MMPA, seals are federally protected from harassment and capture by the public. If you observe incidents of people or pets tormenting, disturbing or attempting to remove a seal from the beach contact the **NOAA Marine Mammal & Sea Turtle Hotline (1-866-755-6622)** to report a violation.



*Photo credits: Top right: Stephanie Wood, NOAA NEFSC; Middle left: NOAA NMFS; Bottom right: The Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation.*