

SLIPPERY CHARACTERS

All Antarctic and subantarctic seals are sleek and supple and live up to their nickname of SLIPPERY CHARACTERS. Their torpedo-like bodies are designed for efficient underwater travel.



Weddell seals

Leptonychotes weddellii live in the pack ice and are often seen in tide cracks or sleeping on the ice.



Seals are mammals, which means that they give birth to live pups and suckle their young. Milk is an important part of a young seal's diet although they very quickly learn to hunt krill, squid, fish and other seals for themselves.



Crabeater seals *Lobodon carcinophagus* are filter feeders and have a diet consisting almost exclusively of krill, which they strain through their special shaped teeth. Killer whales and leopard seals are their main predators and a high proportion of young crabeater seals carry open wounds or fresh scars in their skin and blubber from close encounters with these killers. Scientists count the number of crabeater seals in the pack ice from helicopters and from the Australian Antarctic research vessel, *Aurora Australis*.



Antarctic fur seals

Arctocephalus gazella have thick, soft coats. Each square centimetre of their skin has about 40,000 hairs. This dense cover keeps them well insulated against the icy cold waters of the Southern Ocean.



LUCKY TO BE ALIVE!

During the 1800s Antarctic fur seals were hunted to near extinction by sealers wanting their fur for ladies' coats. Records show that British and American sealing ships took as many as 112,000 fur sealskins in just one twelve month period (between 1800 and 1801). Fortunately fur seal populations have slowly recovered since the demise of the sealing industry.

The southern elephant seal *Mirounga leonina* is the largest of the seals, with males weighing over 4 tonnes. It can produce a deafening roar from its trunk-like nose to scare off rivals.



SIZING UP THE SUSPECTS

Leopard Seal

The Leopard seal *Hydrurga leptonyx* is a ferocious and skilful hunter. Although clumsy and ungraceful on land, in the water it is an excellent swimmer and can dive to great depths hunting for fish, squid and even other seals. Krill are an important part of their diet although Adélie penguins are one of their favourite foods! Leopard seals often hide near penguin colonies to catch unsuspecting birds. They grow to about 3 metres long and their soft grey fur has dark spots.

FAT LAYER Leopard seals have a thick layer of fat or blubber up to 10 centimetres thick under their skin that gives the seals their smooth, sleek appearance. It is also excellent insulation against the cold.

LUNG CAPACITY Like all mammals, seals breathe air but they can stay underwater for up to an hour and dive to depths of 600 metres or more in search for food. To avoid getting the 'bends' a seal breathes out before it dives and reduces the amount of air in its lungs to a minimum.

HIND-FLIPPERS The strong muscular hind-flippers are very efficient paddles in the water, making the seals excellent swimmers and divers.

EYES The large eyes of the leopard seal have an almost spherical lens, which helps them see underwater.

TEETH Some of their teeth have prominent cusps that are used for filtering krill, but generally they are sharp and well suited for cutting and tearing flesh.

Slippery Characters MENU
Crumbed krill
Fish basket
Calamari
Penguin puffs
Seal steaks

