

Sea Lion

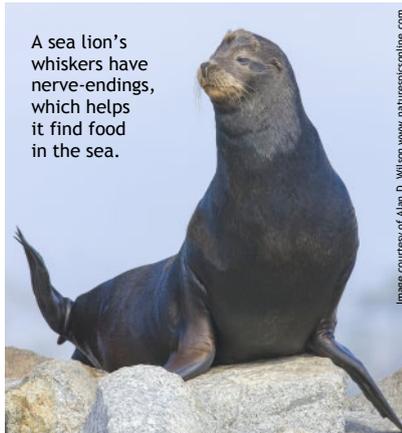
Scientific Name (Family Name): Otariidae

Irish Name: Mór-rón

Sea lions are marine mammals and have long, streamline bodies, covered in an oily fur coat. Underneath they have a layer of thick blubber to keep them warm in icy waters, though this blubber is less thick where sea lions live in warmer climates. Their powerful front and hind flippers help them move about on land and make them powerful swimmers in the sea. In proportion to their body, their head is small and they have large eyes, whiskers and external ears, with visible flaps.

Along with seals, fur seals and walruses, sea lions belong to a group known as Pinnipedia (meaning wing-footed). All these pinnipeds are related to each other. However, sea lions are most closely related to fur seals and together they are known as Eared seals—both have visible flaps over their ear holes. The seals in Irish waters, belong to a group of seals known Earless seals or ‘true seals’. These seals have ear holes, but no flaps. Though sea lions look very similar to ‘true seals’, they are different and these differences are listed on the right.

There are six species of sea lion: California, Stellar’s, South American or Patagonian, Galapagos, New Zealand and Australian. There was a seventh, the Japanese Sea Lion, but sadly they became extinct by the end of the 20th century. Sea lions can be found in the Northern Pacific between Asia and North America and off South America, Antarctica, southwestern Africa and southern Australia. There are no sea lions in Ireland.



A sea lion's whiskers have nerve-endings, which helps it find food in the sea.

Image courtesy of Alan D. Wilson www.naturesonline.com

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEA LIONS & SEALS



Image courtesy of Alan D. Wilson www.naturesonline.com



Image courtesy of Robbie Murphy

SEA LION

- Sea lions have external ear flaps.
- Sea lions have hind flippers that they can rotate toward the front of their bodies.
- Sea lions have long front flippers, which have very short claws.
- Sea lions use their hind legs to ‘walk’ on land.
- Sea lions gather together in large groups.
- Sea lions are very loud.
- Sea lions can bring their long front flippers together and appear to clap.

SEAL

- Seals have NO external ear flaps.
- Seals have hind flippers that extend behind their body and they cannot rotate them.
- Seals have short front flipper, which have long claws.
- Seals move around on their bellies, with caterpillar-like movements.
- Seals often spend time on their own.
- Seals make soft grunts.
- Seals can't bring their front flippers together.

FACT FILE

Height: Can reach 3.3 m, depending on the species.

Weight: Up to 1,120 kg, depending on the species.

Colour: Brown to dark grey.

Food: Sea lions are meat eaters and love fish, squid, and octopus.

Habitat: Sea lions move from the oceans back to land, in order to breed.

What's in a Name?



A colony of South American sea lions on a beach in Patagonia, South America.

Image courtesy of Reinhard Jahn, Mammeln (CC BY-SA 2.0 DE; Wikimedia User: Nansomite)

The Sea Lion gets its name from the lion-like mane surrounding the neck of the males. Of the six species of sea lion, the California Sea Lion is the only species not to have this mane.



A male sea lion is known as a **bull**; a female is known as a **cow** and the young is a **pup**. A large group of sea lions that gathers on land is called a **colony** or a **pod**.