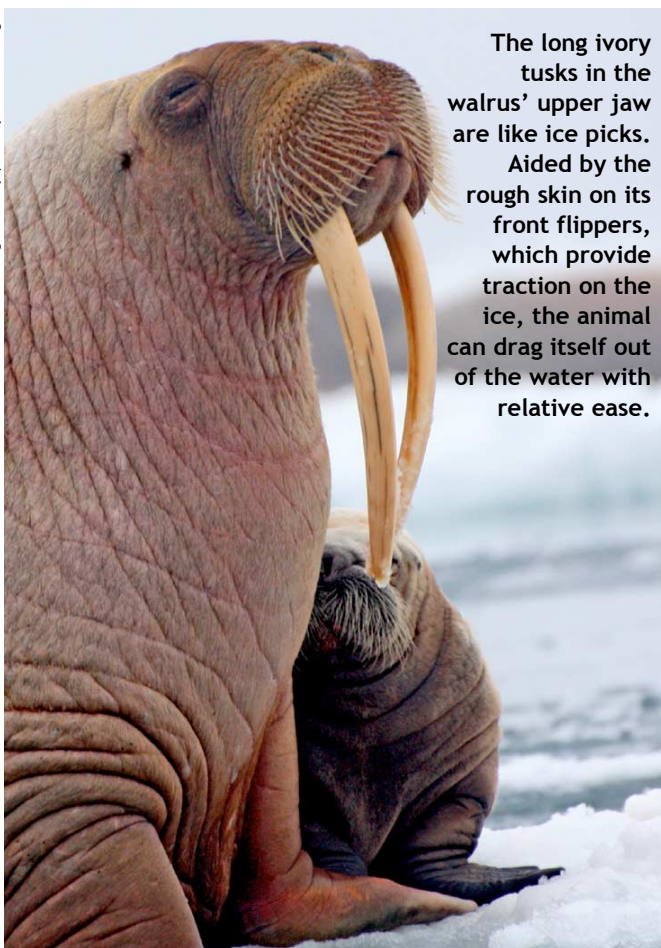


The Walrus

Scientific Name: *Odobenus rosmarus*

Irish Name: Rosualt

U.S. Geological Survey/photo by Sarah Sonsthagen



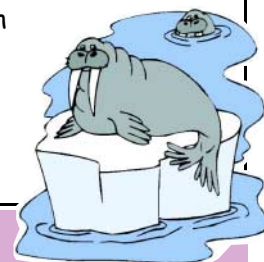
The long ivory tusks in the walrus' upper jaw are like ice picks. Aided by the rough skin on its front flippers, which provide traction on the ice, the animal can drag itself out of the water with relative ease.

The walrus is a relative of seals and sea lions. Collectively they are known as pinnipeds (a word which means fin or flipper-footed). The most striking feature of both the male and the female walrus are their tusks. These are really overgrown canine teeth. On the male they can grow very long - up to 1m in length. The walrus also has a huge and powerful body and needs to eat a lot every day. It does not use the tusks to feed. Instead it uses its mouth and tongue to suck up sea snails, worms, shellfish and krill from the seabed. With poor vision, it must rely on the sensitivity of its whiskers and snout to find the food while it blows a stream of water at the ground to stir up the prey.

The walrus can be clumsy on land but in the water it becomes streamline and agile, propelling itself with its hind flippers and using the front flippers to help it steer. It has a very thick skin, almost like an armour, covered in short, coarse hair. Underneath is a thick layer of blubber to protect it from the cold. It can dive up to 100m in depth and is capable of staying under water for up to 25 minutes.

Relatives

There are two very closely related walruses. One is the Pacific walrus, which is found in the North Pacific and Arctic Ocean. The other is the Atlantic walrus, which is found in the North Atlantic, from eastern Canada to Greenland to the Arctic Ocean. A male is a **bull**, the female a **cow** and their young is a **calf**.



Keeping in with the crowd

Walruses are very social animals, hanging out in large groups. However males and females usually live separately, but come together on land to mate. Bulls court females with booming noises, which can often be heard up to 16 km away (10 miles). During the mating season, males fight with other males for territory. The tusks creates lots of scars on the skin but these are not usually fatal.



FACT FILE:

Colour: Grey or cinnamon-brown. Turns red when sunbathing. The heat enlarges the arteries causing blood to rush to the skin & absorb heat.

Length: 3 - 3.6m. Males are larger than females.

Weight: 1.2 - 2 tonnes. Males are much heavier than females.

Diet: Sea snails, shellfish, worms, krill & slow-moving fish.

Habitat: In North Pacific, North Atlantic & Arctic waters, on ice floes & on the shoreline.

Lifespan: Approximately 40 years. Has few young. Usually born around April to June.