

## Membership Application

You can help CRESLI in its efforts to study and preserve our delicate coastal ecosystems. Your contribution will support CRESLI's work with marine mammals and sea turtles and further our research.

- **Individuals:** \$25.00 a year
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  - **Sponsor:** \$250.00 a year
- Please see our website ([www.cresli.org](http://www.cresli.org)) for a complete description of the membership levels.

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Mail application to: CRESLI  
Dowling College, Div.  
of Nat. Sciences/Math,  
Kramer Science Cntr  
Oakdale, NY 11769

Make all checks payable to **CRESLI**

All contributions are deductible to the fullest extent of the law. A copy of the last financial report filed with the Department of State may be obtained by writing NYS Dept. of State, Office of Charities Registration, Albany, NY 12231

Dowling College  
Div. of Nat. Sciences & Math  
Kramer Science Center  
Oakdale, NY 11769-1999



# Common Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles of Long Island



**Coastal Research and Education  
Society of Long Island, Inc.**  
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Mission Statement: To promote and foster understanding and stewardship of coastal ecosystems through research and education.

## Whales



### Fin Whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*)

The fin whale, the second largest of the baleen whales and the second largest animal to have ever lived, is the most abundant baleen whale in the Long Island region. Fin whales are present in Long Island waters year round, although there are seasonal distribution differences. During April through August fin whales are usually found in any of five areas located within 30 miles of land. These are areas where intensive feeding activity usually occurs. During September through early December the whales usually move offshore along the continental shelf near the 200 meter contour. In January through March they are found feeding again within 1 mile of the eastern shores of Long Island. During the summer feeding groups often involve aggregations of 20 or more animals. In the winter aggregations are of small groups of 3 to four animals. Calves are observed year round with apparent newborns observed mainly in early July.

### Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

The humpback whale is regularly found in the New York Bight but its abundance fluctuates widely. In some years they are very numerous with aggregations of up to 20 individuals. In other years only a few individuals are present. Humpbacks are one of the baleen whales regularly found in shallow water and have been observed for extended periods of time within Long Island Sound, Block Island Sound, and Gardiner's Bay. In some instances humpbacks have also been observed moving in and out of some inlets along the south shore of Long Island (Shinnecock, Fire Island, and New York Harbor). Humpbacks are found in the greatest numbers around Long Island between the months of June through September. Usually they feed on shoals of small schooling fish such as sand eels or herring.

### Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

The minke whale is one of the smallest of the baleen whales, attaining lengths of approximately 30 feet and weights of 10 tons. They feed on small schooling fish and krill, and are usually found in our waters as single individuals. North Atlantic minkes typically have white bands on their flippers. The minke whale is the third most abundant large whale in the US Atlantic coast.

### Sperm Whales (*Physeter catodon*)

Sperm whales are the largest of the odontocetes and are also the deepest diving and longest diving of the vertebrates (138 minutes and 3000m). Sperm whales feed almost exclusively on squid but will take fish on occasion. Sperm whales are found in the waters of New York in the autumn, winter, and late spring, and occasionally during early summer.

### North Atlantic Right Whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*)

The Northern right whale is critically endangered throughout its range with an estimated 300 individuals. Right whales feed almost exclusively on small crustaceans called copepods, and hence have a very limited food niche. Right whales calve in winter off the coast of Georgia and Florida, and can sometimes be seen in the waters off New York during their migration to and from their typical feeding grounds (the Great South Channel, the Gulf of Maine, the Scotian shelf). Sometimes right whales can be seen in NY's waters in the summer as well.

## Seals



### Grey Seals (*Halichoerus grypus*)

These large seals inhabit remote islands and shoals on both sides of the northern Atlantic. In North America most live along the Canadian Maritime provinces, although smaller numbers are found along the shores of New England. Their distinctive long nose has earned them the name of "horsehead." Males grow to 8 feet and weigh about 800 pounds, while females are smaller, growing to 7 feet and weighing about 400 pounds. Recently weaned grey seal pups often strand on Long Island in late winter and early spring. CRESLI researchers suspect these pups have wandered long distances from their northern birth sites since they are often suffering from exhaustion and are underweight when rescued.

### Harbor Seals (*Phoca vitulina*)

Named common seal throughout Europe, this seal frequently observed around Long Island lives along the shores of eastern Canada, New England and in the winter, as far south as the Carolinas in a variety of habitats. Harbor seals can be viewed in small groups hauled out basking on sand bars, rocks or remote beaches, sometimes popping their heads up in the waters nearby. Male harbor seals generally grow to 5 - 5 ½ feet in length, weighing 200 - 250 pounds, while the smaller females reach approximately 4 ½ to 5 feet, weighing 150 - 200 pounds. Pups, weighing 12 -20 pounds and measuring about 2 ½ feet, are born in the spring. Unlike many other seal pups, harbor seals are able to swim from birth. Harbor seals, like most other seal species, migrate southward every winter, returning to New England and Canada in the summer. On Long Island a large influx of these seals arrive in November and remain through mid- May, although some are known to stay throughout the year.

### Harp Seals (*Phoca groenlandica*)

The harp seal is named for the dark harp shaped pattern on its back. These seals resemble the harbor seal but are slightly larger, growing to 6 feet and weighing up to 400 pounds. The harp seal's scientific name means "ice loving seal of Greenland" which is fitting for these inhabitants of the polar pack ice. Their migration roughly follows the edge of the pack ice which retreats northward in the summer and moves south in winter. Pups are born with a white coat which gives it ideal camouflage as it spends long periods of time waiting on the ice for the mother to return from feeding.

### Hooded Seal (*Cystophora cristata*)

Hooded seals are a less numerous seal than the harp, but inhabit the same regions of the world. These seals feed on fish, squid, shrimp and mussels. They are large and very distinct in appearance. The males which reach up to 9 feet and weigh 900 pounds, have a very unusual nasal sac which can inflate to twice the size of a football for courtship display or if angered. Females are somewhat smaller, about 7 feet long and weighing about 670 pounds. Several pups come ashore on Long Island every year, often exhausted, and sick. Two of these hooded seals have been outfitted with satellite transmitters which have enabled researchers to trace their movements and behavior.

## Sea Turtles



### Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*)

The most abundant of all the marine turtles, these handsome creatures reach 4- 5 feet in length and weigh up to 400 - 500 pounds. Loggerheads are reddish brown on the back and orange - yellow underneath. They often acquire barnacles and seaweed growing on their shells. Juvenile loggerheads regularly inhabit Long Island Sound and the eastern bays where they feed mainly on crustaceans and shellfish. Some adults can be found along the ocean shore and in New York Harbor. As with all sea turtles, loggerheads are long lived with life expectancy range up to 60 - 75 years or more.

### Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

These large turtles can reach up to 500 - 600 pounds and approximately 4 - 6 feet in length. A brownish or greenish color, their carapace is blotched with green, brown and yellow flecks. Their name comes from the greenish color of their fat called calipee. Green turtles are a threatened species in the US with the exception of Florida where they are endangered. On Long Island, juvenile green turtles can be found entrapped in fishing gear during the summer and a small number suffer cold stunning each year. They utilize Long Island's warm shallow bays and Long Island Sound to feed on crabs, crustaceans and submerged aquatic vegetation such as eel grass.

### Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*)

The Kemp's ridley is the most seriously endangered sea turtle and among the most highly endangered species of the world. Although these unique turtles hatch in Mexico, and primarily inhabit southern waters, many juveniles travel up the warm current of the Gulf Stream to Long Island's waters each summer. Kemp's ridleys are a drab, dark olive green color on top, and light greenish underneath. Their large head has a prominent "beak" used to grab and break up crabs, shellfish and other hard shelled prey. By far the smallest sea turtle, ridleys reach 2 - 3 feet in length and up to 100 pounds as adults. As only juveniles come into our waters, they are often referred to as "dinner plate size," measuring about one foot in diameter and weighing 8 - 12 pounds.

### Leatherback Sea Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

The giants of marine turtles, leatherback sea turtles are oceanic reptiles that can reach 6 to 8 feet in length and weigh 1,200 to 1,500 pounds. These dark green or black skinned turtles are often speckled with white or pink blotches. Their name comes from their leathery covered carapace, which is actually comprised of many thin, interlocking bone-like plates which make up the carapace. These turtles are listed as a federally protected endangered species. Leatherbacks are commonly seen in Long Island's offshore waters during the late summer. They often bask or rest at the surface, which may explain why a number of them wash ashore mortally wounded by ship propellers. These unusual reptiles also fall victim to ingestion of plastics floating on the surface which resembles the jellyfish they catch for food.