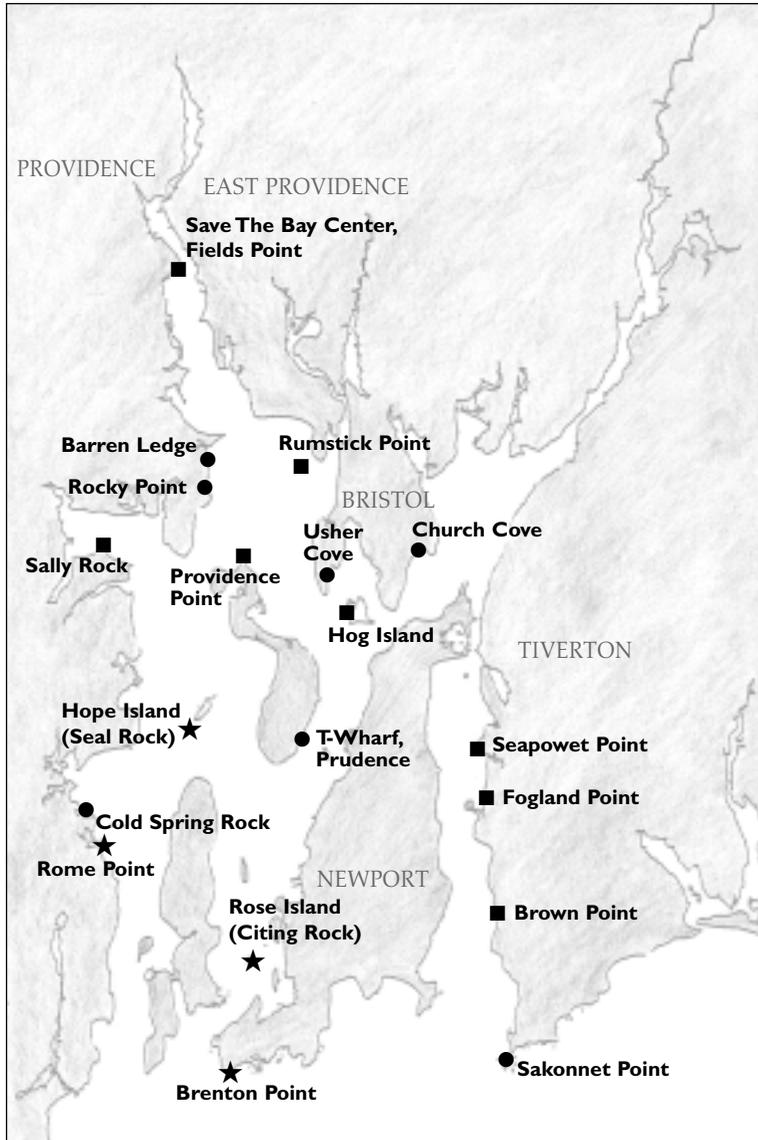


NARRAGANSETT BAY SEAL HAUL OUT SITES

Save The Bay Bay Watchers' Seal Sighting Data



Winter Seal Sightings, Based on Maximum Numbers Observed

- 1-20 Seals
- 21-80 Seals
- ★ Over 80 Seals

SEAL WATCHING TIPS

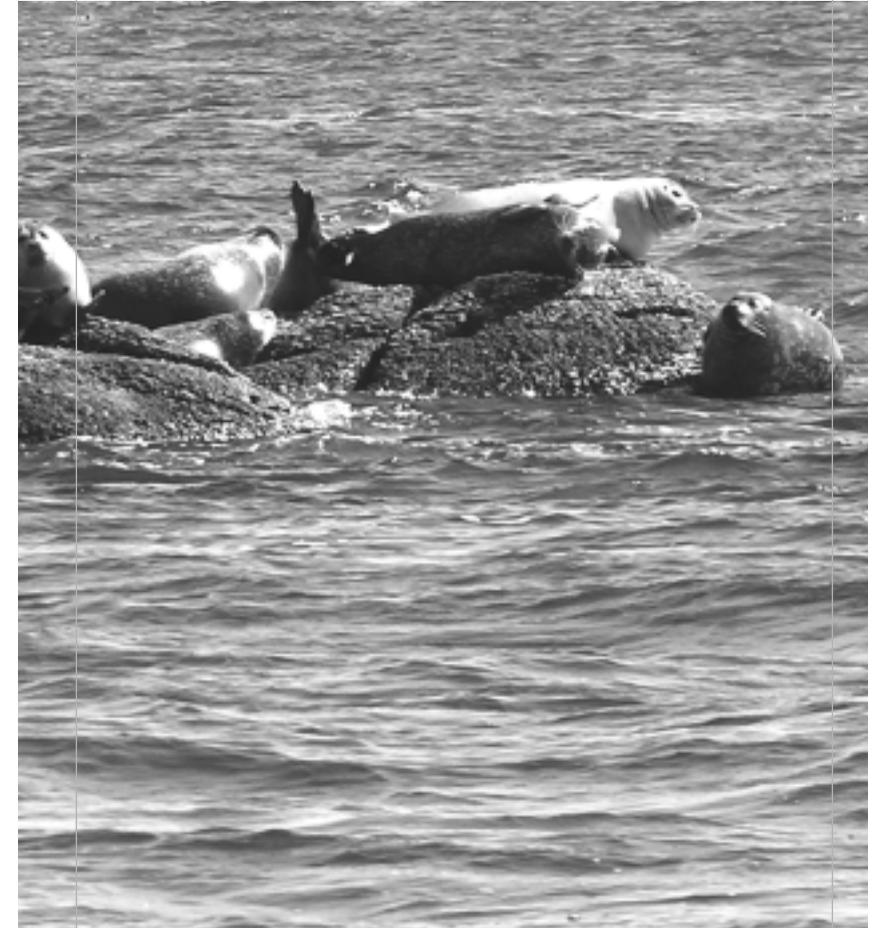
December through mid-April is the best time for seal watching in Narragansett Bay.

- ¥ Check a tide chart for times of low tide. The best time to see seals hauled-out is when low tide falls in the middle of the day.
- ¥ Check the weather forecast. Cloudy or wet weather has little effect on haul-out behavior. However, seals are less likely to haul-out in windy conditions.
- ¥ When observing seals by land or by boat, view from a distance at least 50 yards away with binoculars or a telescope. If you see harassment warning signs such as seals stretching their necks and chests high into the air, starting to move toward or back into the water; looking at you or increasing their vocalization, *back off immediately!* This indicates that the seals are preparing to flee. If the seals do enter the water, leave the area immediately to avoid inflicting additional stress on the animals.
- ¥ Leash and control your dog while walking on the beach or approaching a haul-out site.
- ¥ **Kayaks and canoes are more alarming to seals than motor boats. Do not attempt to approach hauled-out seals. YOU WILL SCARE THEM!**
- ¥ If in a motor boat, pass hauled-out seals from a distance. Avoid sudden changes in course or speed. Maintain a slow speed and a course parallel to the haul-out site. This is far less threatening than a direct approach and allows the animals to see that you are merely passing by.
- ¥ Never handle or try to rescue seals. Remember not every seal on the beach is stranded or sick. It is not unusual for seals to be alone and on land. Some come ashore and can rest for more than twelve hours.
- ¥ Do not attempt to feed seals. Feeding encourages seals to approach boats, increasing the likelihood for propeller injuries. Seals also bite and can carry infectious diseases. Feeding seals is against the law!
- ¥ If you find a seal or other type of marine mammal or sea turtle that appears to be dead, stranded or entangled, please contact Mystic Aquarium at 860-572-5955. Be prepared with the following information: your name and phone number, the exact location of the animal, a description of the animal and the condition of the animal.

For more information about Narragansett Bay's seal population, or to learn more about Save The Bay's SEAL WATCHING CRUISES, please visit our Web site at www.savebay.org.

NARRAGANSETT BAY'S

Wintering Seals



SAVE THE BAY®
NARRAGANSETT BAY

100 Save The Bay Dr., Providence, RI 02905
www.savebay.org

THE WHY, WHERE AND WHEN . . .

Surprising to many Rhode Islanders, harbor seals are common inhabitants of Narragansett Bay from October through April. Each fall, harbor seals migrate south from Maine and the Atlantic Provinces of Canada to winter in the warmer waters and protected harbors of Narragansett Bay. Harbor seals can be seen from shore resting on rocks or haul-out sites that are exposed at low tide. The seal population in Narragansett Bay reaches its peak from late February through the month of March.

HOW MANY SEALS WINTER IN NARRAGANSETT BAY?

To try to answer this question, Save The Bay organizes annual seal counts. Save The Bay volunteers have been recording the number of seals at various haul-out sites since 1994. The largest number of seals observed at one time was on the rocks off Rome Point in North Kingstown a total of 178 seals. The highest number of seals observed during a Bay-wide seal count was February 27, 1999, when volunteers counted 268 seals at 13 haul-out sites throughout Narragansett Bay. Unofficially, Save The Bay staff counted over 350 seals at just three sites in March of 2002! The number of seals in Narragansett Bay has increased over the last few decades due to the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the ending of a Rhode Island bounty on seals in the early 1960s.

OTHER SEALS IN NARRAGANSETT BAY

In recent years there have been more sightings of harp, hooded and gray seals in Narragansett Bay and along the southern Rhode Island shore. These seals are more likely to be seen hauled out on the shoreline even in busy areas. These seals may not show a fear of humans but they SHOULD NOT be approached! Seals can bite and may be harmed by the stress of the encounter. They are also protected by law.

Season Sponsor:



Harbor Seal

Description: harbor seals have small heads and large eyes. From a profile view, they have a short muzzle and a concave forehead, much like a dog's head.

Size: males: 5 to 6 feet, 250 lbs; females: 4.5 to 5.5 feet, 175 lbs.

Coat: color ranges from tan to dark gray with fine dark spotting on the back. As seals dry, their coat may appear lighter.

Pupping: occurs from May to June along the coasts of Maine and New Hampshire. Pups nurse for 4 to 6 weeks.

Behavior: haul-out on rocks off shore; commonly seen resting in a banana shape. Can remain underwater for up to 28 minutes and reach speeds up to 15 knots.

Diet: a variety of fish, such as herring and smelt, squid and crustaceans. Seals get fresh water through their prey.



Gray Seal

Description: very large seal; long and broad snout resembles a horse. Juveniles can be confused with harbor seals.

Size: males: up to 8 feet, 800 lbs; females: up to 7 feet, 400 lbs.

Coat: brown, gray or black with spots and blotches on neck and sides. Males are darker than females.

Behavior: live in colonies on sandy island beaches. Rarely seen in Narragansett Bay, occasionally on the South Shore.



Harp Seal

Description: dog-like muzzle, similar to harbor seal. Head and chest darker than body.

Size: 5-6 feet, 250-400 lbs.

Coat: adults have distinct dark harp or horseshoe marking on back.

Behavior: brilliant white pups born on pack ice in the Canadian sub-arctic some adults and juveniles may wander south of their range into New England during winter. Occasionally seen on beaches and shoreline in and around Narragansett Bay.



Hooded Seal

Description: larger, more prominent muzzle than harbor seal. Adult males have nasal appendage called the hood which is inflated during courtship or disturbance.

Size: up to 9 feet. Males to 900 lbs; females smaller.

Coat: juveniles called blue-backs due to the steel-blue color of the top half of their back, no spots. Adults have black irregular patches on body with black muzzle and face.

Behavior: born on pack ice in the Canadian sub-arctic juveniles may wander south of their range into New England after weaning; nurse for 4 days (shortest nursing period of any mammal). Very rarely seen in Rhode Island waters.



HOW DO HUMANS AFFECT SEALS?

Even though seals seem curious about everything, including us, they are actually very sensitive to human disturbance. While agile in water, seals are clumsy on land. The smallest disruption can cause them to abruptly leave their haul-out sites and flee into the safety of the water. This quick transition from a restful state to one of panic may severely stress seals.

Seals haul out to rest and conserve energy. Any time seals are disturbed, even unintentionally, there is a negative impact on them. An isolated incident may in fact be one of several disturbances throughout the day. In fact, if seals leave their haul-out site due to any type of human disturbance, it is considered a breach of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. The act prohibits touching, feeding, harassing or otherwise disturbing seals or other marine mammals.

KAYAKER/BOATER IMPACT ON SEALS

The most common disturbance of seals in Narragansett Bay is from recreational boaters, **especially those exploring the Bay by kayak or canoe.** Ironically, these seemingly unobtrusive boats are extremely disruptive and will cause seals to panic at distances up to one-half mile away. Hauled-out seals may view the low silhouettes of kayaks and canoes as the stalking behavior of predators.

Seal illustrations by Gail Sirpenski.