

# GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

## MAMMALS

### Sea Lions

With a population size of about 50,000, the Galapagos Sea Lion (*Zalophus californianus*, subspecies: *wollebacki*) is usually one of the first animals that visitors encounter. They can often be found lazing around the docks where tourist embark on their cruises. On the islands they are found in large colonies lounging on sandy beaches or rocky shorelines. They are playful and very inquisitive and regularly engage in body-surfing in the waves. They are also great snorkeling companions, however, it would be wise to remember they are wild animals and can be unpredictable.

Sea Lions are the largest animals found in Galapagos and full grown males can reach 550 pounds. Besides their larger size, males differ from females in that they have a large “bump” on their foreheads and have extremely thick necks that provide protection. Females are sexually mature at 5 years old, while males mature a little quicker. They will not guard a harem, however, until they are older. They do not live as long as the females that usually reach about 20 years of age. When on land females congregate in harems with a dominant male, while males without harems congregate in bachelor colonies. Fights between bulls are quite common and involve a lot of pushing, neck-biting and dramatic water chases.



Females breed once a year and will have only 1 pup, which they raise for one to three years. While mothers are out foraging, pups will gather in nurseries in the shallow waters, guarded by a single female. Bulls have also been known to help defend nurseries from sharks. At about 5 months old the pups learn to fish for themselves.

## **Fur Seals**

Many people think Galapagos Fur Seals (*Arctocephalus galapagoensis*) are much less abundant in Galapagos than Sea Lions, but they are in fact similar. Fur seals are generally more shy, don't frequent beaches and forage at night and are therefore rarely seen. They prefer more rugged, rockier and shadier shores and spend a lot more time in the water. You are really only likely to see them while cruising, at James Bay on Santiago Island and at Darwin Bay on Genovesa.

Fur seals were hunted to near extinction in the 1800s, nearly to extinction, but they have made an amazing comeback in their population numbers. Population is estimated to number about 40,000 individuals in the archipelago.

Similar to Galapagos Sea Lion, fur seals are distinguished by their smaller size and have a shorter and broader heads. They also have much thicker fur, larger front flippers, slightly bulging eyes, and very prominent ears that stick out from their heads. Males are considerably larger than females, with a thicker neck and are darker in color. Like sea lions they also actively defend harems of females, particularly in the mating season, from August to November. Females can give birth to a pup every year (around October), but generally only successfully raise a pup every two years. Pups suckle for two to three years, and should a second pup be born while the first is still suckling, it has little chance of survival. Pups begin to hunt at a year.

Fur seals eat fish and squid, and they are nocturnal hunters. Scientists have discovered that they tend to hunt less when the moon is full, probably because they are more visible to shark predators, and their prey tends to move into deeper waters.

## Bats

There are two bat species present in Galapagos, but little is actually known about them.

*Lasiurus cinereus*, the Hoary Bat from North America, is light brown with white fur tips, eats insects, and tends to prefer roosting in Mangrove trees or scrub bushes during the day. It is quite widespread and is found on Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal, Isabela, Santiago, and Floreana Islands.

*Lasiurus brachyotis* is found on Santa Cruz and San Cristóbal in the highlands and coastal zones, and it is believed to migrate seasonally between the two zones. This bat forages near the ground while the Hoary Bat forages higher in the trees and air, which explains why they can coexist. *L. brachyotis* is believed to be closely related to the Red Bat of South America.

## Whales & Dolphins

The Cetaceans fall into two major groups – those with teeth, and those with baleen plates (fringed whalebone that enables filter-feeding of plankton and small marine animals). Both groups of cetaceans, and several species from each group, can be found in the Galapagos Islands. Humpback whales are one of the easier baleen whales to identify

because of their angled back, as well as their tendency to breach and splash dramatically back into the sea.



Many species of toothed whales show up in the Galapagos Marine Reserve, including the Sperm Whale, Killer Whale, False Killer Whales, Pilot Whales, as well as several species of dolphins. There

are two dolphin species that are quite common and easy to spot–

the Bottle-nosed Dolphin and the Common White-bellied Dolphin. The Bottle-nosed Dolphins are often found racing alongside boats, while Common Dolphins are more likely to be found in large pods of over 100 individuals.