

Species at Risk

in Nuu-chah-nulth Ha-houlthee

Basking Shark and Steller Sea Lions



Uu-a-thluk is partnering with the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk (AFSAR) to let communities know what species at risk live in Nuu-chah-nulth ha-houlthee. Knowing where they live and how to protect them is the first step towards stopping their decline and helping them to recover. To read other articles in this series or to read our species at risk guidebooks, please visit www.uuathluk.ca/communications.

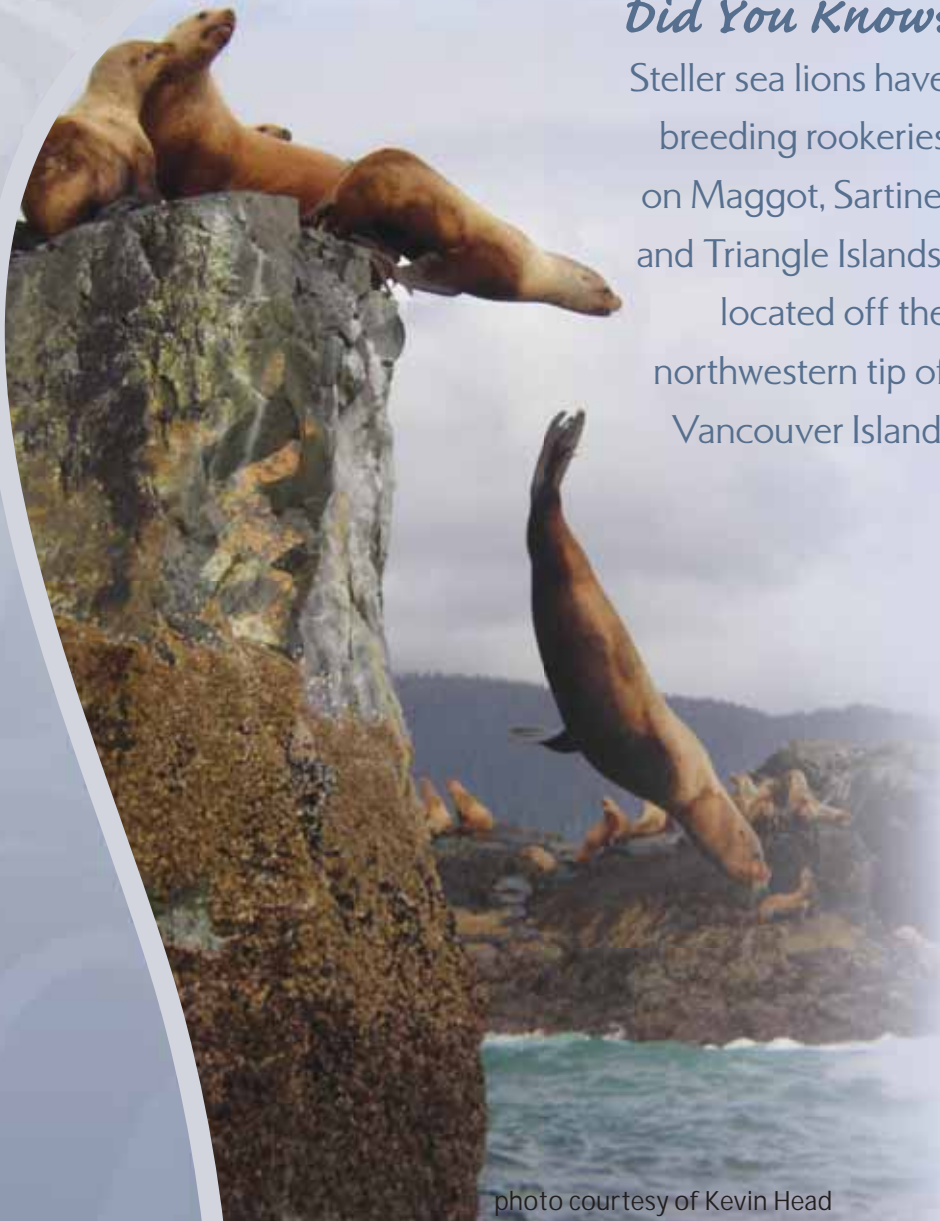


photo courtesy of Kevin Head

Did You Know?

Steller sea lions have breeding rookeries on Maggot, Sartine, and Triangle Islands, located off the northwestern tip of Vancouver Island.

Steller Sea Lions (tukuuk)

Steller sea lions, one of the largest sea lions in the world, can weigh up to 800 kilograms and measure over three meters in length – about the same size as a Volkswagen Beetle.

Ranging from southern California, north to the Bering Strait, and south along the Asian coast to Japan, Steller sea lions generally stay close to shore during the summer months, but move to over 200 kilometers off the continental shelf in the winter. They regularly haul out in large social groups on flat rocky shorelines, contributing to eco-tourism in coastal communities. Steller sea lions are indicators of healthy ecosystems, given their widespread distribution, long lifespan, and fortunate position near the top of the marine food chain.

Strong marine predators, Steller sea lions feed on a broad range of seafood including herring, hake, sand lance, salmon, dogfish, eulachon, sardines, rockfish, flounder, skate, squid, and octopus. Competition with these species concerns most fishermen.

Steller sea lions are categorized as special concern under Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA). First protected from harvest or culls in 1970 under the Fisheries Act, their populations have increased 3.2 percent annually in British Columbia since that time. The current population in British Columbia is estimated at about 20,000 animals.



photo © Chris Gotschalk

Basking Shark (nutku?)

Sometimes mistaken for a Great White, the Basking shark is the biggest fish in Western Canada and the second largest in the world, often growing as long as a school bus. Its huge mouth distinguishes it from the Great White. Measuring up to 40 ft long, it has five distinguishing gill slits around its head, and a huge mouth for eating fish, shrimp and krill. It is a gentle filter feeder, and gets its name from its habit of lying quietly on the surface of the water, often with its large dorsal fin exposed.

The Basking shark lives in mild parts of the world's oceans, most notably

throughout the Pacific from the Gulf of Alaska to Baja California. Basking sharks characteristically migrate with the changing seasons, reaching maturity around 16 years of age. Female Basking sharks are pregnant for up to 3.5 years!

Due to heavy fishing in the 1940s and a government sanctioned cull in B.C. from 1945 to 1970, Basking sharks were nearly wiped out. The past two generations of Basking shark populations in Nuu-chah-nulth territory have seen a 90 per cent decline. They are classified as an endangered species under Canada's SARA. It is estimated that the Basking shark population will take approximately 200 years to return.

Today, Basking sharks are susceptible to entanglement in fishing gear and collision with boats. There were rare sightings near Flores Island and Sydney Inlet in Clayoquot Sound during the 1990s; only six Basking sharks have been seen and recorded since 1996 in the WCVI.

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