

---

Walrus are wary of two predators: polar bears and humans. Polar bears occasionally prey on young walrus and injured adults. Walrus should be especially afraid of humans. In the past Inuit relied on every part of the walrus to fill some need in their lives. They used walrus meat and blubber for food and oil. They used the tough brown hide to make shelters, rope, and harnesses for their dogs. Today the most prized part is the ivory from walrus tusks; Inuit use it to carve tools and make ornaments.

For a long time, traders from around the world, including the United States, hunted walrus commercially. However, The Congressional Walrus Act of 1941 banned all U.S. commercial hunting. This means that only the Inuit can legally hunt walrus for their daily needs.

The walrus's scientific name, *Morongo*, means "toothwalker" because walrus use their ivory tusks to pull themselves out of the water onto the ice. There are about 250,000 walrus in the world. Female walrus, called cows, can weigh up to 1,500 pounds; male walrus, called bulls, can weigh up to 3,000 pounds. Walrus are generally brown. However, they turn a pale-white color if they spend too much time in cold water, and pink if they lie in the sun for too long.

Walrus are mammals. That means that they can't breathe through gills like fish can. Instead,

like humans, they have to hold their breath underwater. In fact, a walrus can hold its breath for up to ten minutes!

Walrus inhabit the coastal areas of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland, regions of the Arctic where the air temperature ranges from about -50 to +50 degrees F. How do walrus stay warm in these temperatures? Walrus have a thick layer of insulating fat called blubber; this layer can be up to 6 inches thick! In addition to their blubber, walrus keep each other warm by staying in close physical contact. By sleeping in a heap or swimming close together in the water, walrus share their body heat to stay warm and toasty.

Adult walrus typically eat about 5% of their total body weight per day. That means a 2,000-pound walrus eats an average of 100 pounds of food every day! Their diet consists mostly of clams, marine worms, and fish. In fact, adult walrus can eat as many as 6,000 clams in one feeding! They can dive to depths of 200 feet in search of food. Walrus have lots of whiskers called

They use these to feel for clams and other food on the ocean floor. Sometimes they try to uncover clams by filling their mouths with water and squirting it out like a powerful fire-hose at the sea floor.

Walrus like to travel in herds or small family groups. It is rare to find a walrus alone. Much like birds that travel in flocks, walrus migrate in herds each year. In fact, some migrate more than 1,863 miles each year.

Walrus travel primarily by swimming. They spend about two-thirds of their lives in the water. By using their hind flippers like a propeller, they can swim at an average speed of 4.3 miles per hour (mph) and as fast as 21.7 mph. Like all good swimmers, walrus know that they need to rest. The herd climbs out of the water onto a haul-out area that the Inuit call an *qajaq*. Here, they pile up and rest in the warm sun.

That a baby walrus weighs 100 pounds?

The word "walrus" originated with the Danish word *val* meaning "sea horse" or sea cow?

That walrus accidentally swallow pebbles and small stones while feasting on clams?

That walrus don't chew their food? What terrible table manners!

That a young walrus may ride on his or her mother's back?

That walrus produce *growls*, grunts, barks, soft whistles, rasps, and *o*

Walrus use their tusks to pull themselves out of the water and to display social dominance—who is the strongest, oldest, and toughest walrus of the herd. Females' tusks can grow to a length of about 30 inches, and males' tusks can grow to a length of 40 inches. That's more than three feet! Tusks grow for about 15 years to reach these great lengths, but sometimes tusks are broken or chipped in quarrels between walrus.