



FAST FACTS

Name: Walrus

Species name: *Odobenus rosmarus*

Average weight: 1,400 kilograms (males)
900 kilograms (females)

Life expectancy: up to 40 years (in the wild)

PHYSIOLOGY

The species name, *Odobenus rosmarus*, is Latin for "tooth walking sea-horse." While there is only one walrus species, there are two subspecies: *O. rosmarus rosmarus* is the Atlantic walrus, found in eastern Canada and the high Arctic, and *O. rosmarus divergens*, the Pacific walrus, which occasionally wanders into the western Canadian Arctic from Alaska.

Resembling a large seal, the walrus has dark brown skin that is covered with a thin layer of tiny brown hairs, covering a generous layer of fat to help it withstand the cold. They are known for their long tusks, which can reach a length of 40 centimeters. The tusks, which grow continuously, help to create breathing holes in the ice and the walrus uses them to pull themselves out of the water. The walrus has whiskers on either side of its face that act as a food detector, locating clams and shellfish on the ocean floor.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Walruses spend most of their time on land. Because of their size, they appear to move slowly and sluggishly. However, unlike seals, walruses can move on all fours, allowing them to run as fast as humans in short spurts. Also, they are quite graceful in water.

They live in shallow water, but search for food in deeper areas. A walrus can dive up to 90 metres and can stay under for up to 30 minutes.

Walruses are very sensitive to approaching planes and boats, sometimes causes the walrus herd to stampede back into the water.

RANGE

The world walrus population is estimated at 300,000 individuals, of which only 20,000 are thought to be the Atlantic subspecies. At 5,000 individuals, the largest walrus herd in Canada occurs in Foxe Basin, where numerous polynyas (areas of open water surrounded by pack ice) create a desirable habitat.

During the winter months, the walrus lives on ice floes and in the summer, they spend their time on rocky beaches.