

Name: _____

When Is an Elephant Not an Elephant?

By Mikki Sadil



Everyone knows that elephants have trunks. But did you know there is a kind of seal that also has a trunk? This is the elephant seal, which gets its name from the extra large proboscis, or nose, on the male that resembles an elephant's trunk. The females don't have a trunk.

Elephant seals are the largest pinnipeds, or fin-footed animals, in the ocean. There are two types of elephant seals: the southern elephant seal, which stays in the frigid waters of Antarctica, and the northern elephant seal, which swims in the warmer waters of the Pacific from Canada down to Mexico.

The male elephant seal (called a bull) can be 14 to 16 feet long, and weigh between 3,000 and 5,000 pounds. That's longer and heavier than an average-sized automobile! The female (called a cow) is slightly shorter and lighter. She can be 9 to 12 feet long and weigh between 900 and 1,800 pounds.

These seals are extraordinary swimmers and divers. They spend up to ten months a year living in the ocean without ever touching land. They can dive down to 5,000 feet and stay underwater for up to two hours, and when they come up for air, they only remain near the surface for three or four minutes before they dive again. The females feed primarily on squid and octopuses in the deepest parts of the ocean. Males hunt along the



shallow Continental Shelf and look for small sharks, stingrays, and other bottom-feeding fish.

Every year, elephant seals gather together on beaches and rocks near the shore. These large groups of elephant seals are called rookeries.

While on land, the seals go through a process called molting, in which they shed their skin and hair. This can take as long as two months, and during this time they just lounge around on the beach. They don't even go back into the water for food! Can you imagine lying around and not eating for two whole months?

The elephant seal may get his name from the elephant, but he is an amazing creature all on his own.

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1. Where would you be most likely to see a northern elephant seal?
 - a. on an island near Antarctica
 - b. in the ocean off the coast of Florida
 - c. on a beach in California
 - d. on a rocky shoreline in Europe

2. What do elephant seal cows eat?

3. What do elephant seal bulls eat?

4. If you were to see a rookery of elephant seals from a distance, how could you tell which ones were males and which were females?

5. Which fact about elephant seals is true?

- a. They spend most of their lives on beaches.
- b. They all have a large proboscis, like an elephant.
- c. They usually weigh more than 5,000 pounds.
- d. They spend most of their lives underwater.

6. About how much would five adult male elephant seals weigh?

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____

s b o p i r o c s

hint: long nose, like a trunk

2. _____

e p n i d s n p i

hint: animals with finned feet

3. _____

i e M o x c

hint: country located south of the United States

4. _____

i p a m i r y r l

hint: mainly; mostly

5. _____

p u o s c t o s e

hint: sea animals with eight arms

6. _____

s i e k o o r e r

hint: large colonies of animals

7. _____

a l o w l s h

hint: antonym for deep

ANSWER KEY

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1. Where would you be most likely to see a northern elephant seal?
 - a. on an island near Antarctica
 - b. in the ocean off the coast of Florida
 - c. on a beach in California**
 - d. on a rocky shoreline in Europe

2. What do elephant seal cows eat?

Seal cows eat squid and octopuses.

3. What do elephant seal bulls eat?

Seal bulls eat small sharks, stingrays, and bottom-feeding fish.

4. If you were to see a rookery of elephant seals from a distance, how could you tell which ones were males and which were females?

Males are larger and would have a trunk (proboscis), while females are smaller and would not have a trunk.

5. Which fact about elephant seals is true?

- a. They spend most of their lives on beaches.
- b. They all have a large proboscis, like an elephant.
- c. They usually weigh more than 5,000 pounds.
- d. They spend most of their lives underwater.**

6. About how much would five adult male elephant seals weigh?

Accept any answer between 15,000 and 25,000 pounds.

ANSWER KEY

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.



1. **proboscis**

s b o p i r o c s

hint: long nose, like a trunk

2. **pinnipeds**

e p n i d s n p i

hint: animals with finned feet

3. **Mexico**

i e M o x c

hint: country located south of the United States

4. **primarily**

i p a m i r y r l

hint: mainly; mostly

5. **octopuses**

p u o s c t o s e

hint: sea animals with eight arms

6. **rookeries**

s i e k o o r e r

hint: large colonies of animals

7. **shallow**

a l o w l s h

hint: antonym for deep