

Otaria flavescens South American sea lion

Order: *Carnivora*

Family: *Otariidae*

South American sea lions inhabit shoreline rocky areas, cliffs, tidepools, and sandy beaches.

The southern coasts of South America – Peru, Chile, Southern portions of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and the Falkland Islands are their main native home ranges.



Diet

South American sea lions eat a large variety of benthic and pelagic species of fish and marine invertebrates. Their diet of fish is also where they get all their water requirements.

O. flavescens have incredibly sensitive vibrissae that they use to help them detect prey in cloudy or darker waters where they may not be able to see well.



Conservation and Management

Bycatch - Near the southwestern coast of South America, incidental bycatch by industrial trawl vessels was recorded at about 1.2 sea lions caught per fishing operation. Of those caught, almost 15% that were brought aboard the trawl vessels had already been fatally injured or killed.

Commercial Fishing - Most fishermen along the South American coasts advocate for harvests of this species, and some necropsies have found poison and fishing equipment in the stomachs of dead sea lions. Several government-issued cullings have taken place in Uruguay since the early 2000s, which has resulted in pup harvesting of numbers close to 50,000 pups.

A Natatorial Semi-Aquatic Species

O. flavescens only frequents the water to hunt, spending most of their time on land. They are specialized for their marine habitat with a fusiform body shape, large flippers to propel themselves through the water, and blubber to help temperature regulation in colder water. Their flippers lack blubber for thermoregulation uses on warm beaches.

They can slow their heart rate to four to six bpm to conserve oxygen and hold their breath for longer dives while hunting. They can hold their breath for up to 5 minutes at a time.



Behavior

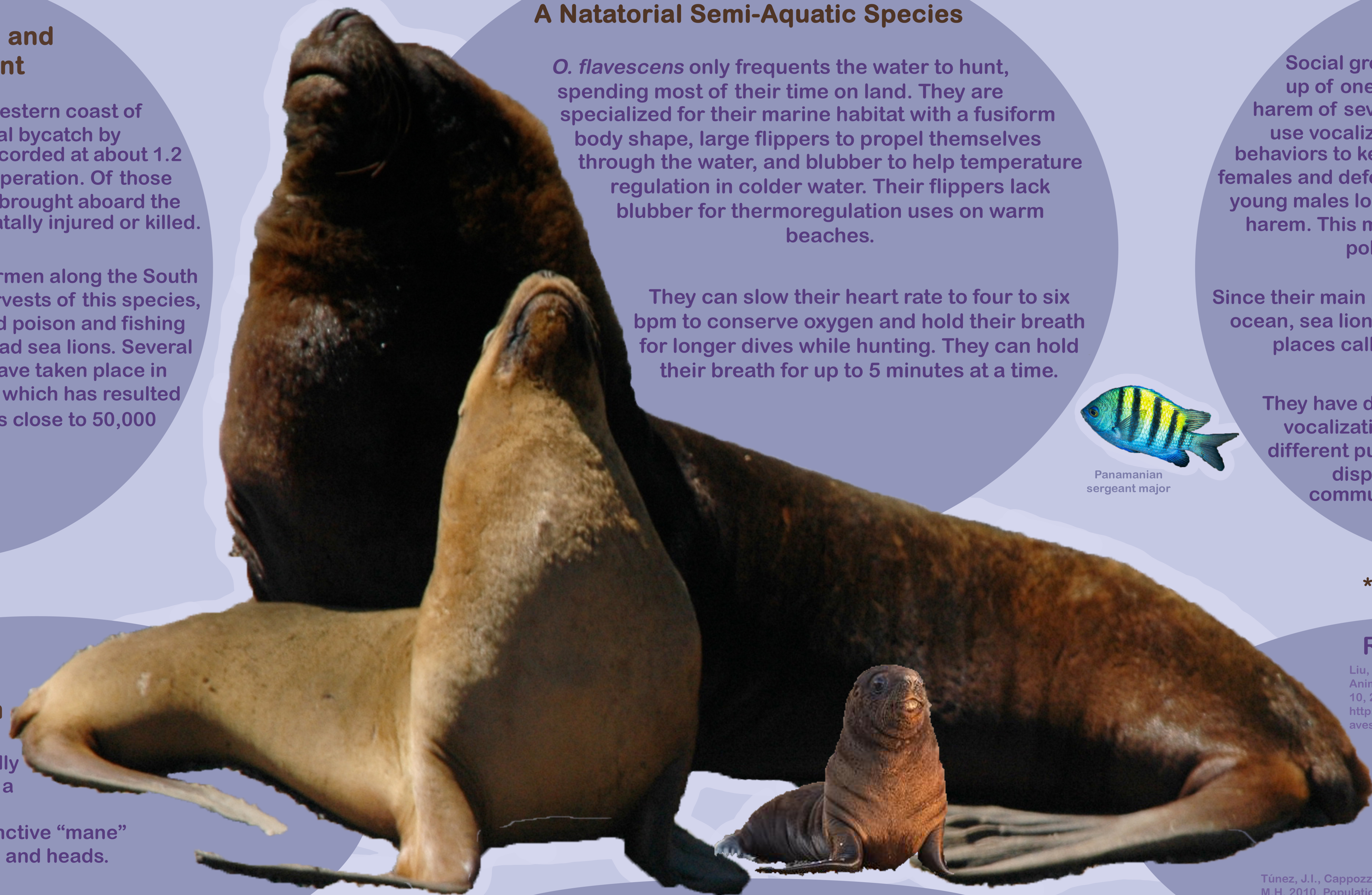
Social groups are typically made up of one dominant male and his harem of several females. The males use vocalizations and aggressive behaviors to keep the four to fifteen females and defend them against other young males looking to take over the harem. This means the species is polygynous.

Since their main predators live in the ocean, sea lions breed on land in places called rookeries.

They have distinguished barks and vocalizations that are used for different purposes such as attack displays, fights, and communication between pup and mother.

Sexual Dimorphism

Males and females are sexually dimorphic, with males being a much larger size than females and having a distinctive “mane” of fur around their necks and heads.



male, female, and pup

Sagan for scale

References

- Liu, S. 2000. "Otaria flavescens" (On-line), Animal Diversity Web. Accessed September 10, 2021 at https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Otaria_flavescens/
- Cárdenas-Alayza, S., Crespo, E. & Oliveira, L. 2016. *Otaria byronia*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T41665A61948292.