

DECEMBER 15 – 31, 2020 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

SEALS



1. **Harbor Seal**, *Phoca vitulina*,
© providence raptors.com

For 39 years my wife and I lived on the coast of Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts. I travelled to Cape Cod every year taking students to Monomoy Island and the coast.



2. **Gray Seal**, *Halichoerus grypus*,
© www.joanlarson.com

During that time the Gray Seal population was in recovery. They were close to extinction in the 1960's. We observed few if any from 1964 to the 1990's. Viewing the third photograph will give one an idea of the recovery of the Gray Seals today.



3. View of **Gray Seals** on Cape Cod beach,
www.capecodtimes.com

Gray Seals feed on fish, Harbor Seals, Harbor Porpoises, Lobsters and Octopus. Other than with other seals it is obvious that seals in general and the Gray Seal in particular compete. They are dependent on the fish species they feed on, along with other food items they find. Although humans may feel they compete with us for food, in actuality that may not be necessarily true.

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4. Gray and Harbor Seals hauled out on the beach at Jeremy Point in Wellfleet, MA, in 2007. Photo credit: NOAA Fisheries

GREAT WHITE SHARK



5. Great White Shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*
© www.bostonmagazine.com

The Great White Shark, *Carcharodon Carcharias*, has been in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans long before man, and in time long before seals were its prey. Therefore, it is certainly not unusual for Great Whites to patrol the waters around Cape Cod.



6. A Great White Shark, just missing a seal as the seal jumps out of the water, © psmag.com

Predators go where there is food. The reason Great Whites have not often been seen around Cape Cod in the past was due to the lack of food. The seal population, both Harbor and Gray seal population were down. Gray Seals were almost gone from New England waters. When laws were enacted to protect them, their population slowly

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started to recover. It took many years, but now we are seeing a resurgence of seals. Consequently, Great Whites who will patrol areas just to check to see if food is available, now know that the seals are back. Therefore, it is worth their time and energy to hunt the waters off of Cape Cod, and especially off the beaches where the seals congregate.

Human beings are not a food item for Great White Sharks even though the movie 'Jaws' caused major fear and concern when people go to the beach. That does not mean Great Whites or any shark for that matter, won't take a chance to check you out when they are patrolling for food. Humans need to use common sense when they go swimming in an area where there are or have been seals. The only rule that affects sharks is hunger. Then they will attack, check the food item out, bite and eat.

If we believe in sharing this planet with its wildlife, we need to be smart, prepared and cautious in the right places. Maybe Cape Cod should have allotted ocean swimming areas that are protected from any shark species. It might be confining, but it would surely show that humans are willing to share their space with species that not only belong but who have owned this space for millions of years.

From the internet:

"Seals and Sharks: A Few Things they have in Common

- Both seals and sharks have inhabited waters around Cape Cod and the Islands for centuries, long before humans.
- Both have been increasing in numbers since the passage of federal regulations after populations were severely depleted by hunting and fishing.
- Seals and sharks each play a role in maintaining a healthy oceanic ecosystem.
- Population numbers for both seals and sharks in Cape waters are unknown due to their seasonal migrations and foraging behaviors.
- Both have diverse diets and eat what is readily available. Seals and sharks each consume different prey based upon their age, size and location."

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Coywolves, howling
Red Fox, by compost area
Meadow Voles

Weather Tidbits

Month of DECEMBER 01-31, 2020

[*All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).*](#)

PRECIPITATION

Average December Precipitation for Middlebury, VT = 2.36 inches.

Months Precipitation = 42.2 mm or 1.7 inches. A 0.7 mm deficit.

Overcast Days: 24

Overcast Days: We had 24 days, three weeks and three days of overcast skies. 13 days the first two weeks and 11 days the second two weeks. This is a week short of a month with overcast skies