

Marine Mammals Around Kushiro

The seas around Kushiro support many marine mammals, most notably whales, seals, and Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*). Common seals (*Phoca vitulina*), also known as harbor seals, live in eastern Hokkaido year-round and breed in rocky coastal areas, where they are sheltered from the weather and predators. Spotted seals (*Phoca largha*) breed on ice floes and arrive in Hokkaido in summer on drift ice from the Sea of Okhotsk.

Steller sea lions migrate from the Sea of Okhotsk to Hokkaido in winter. They live in subarctic waters, breeding and resting on beaches and rocky reefs, and feed on a wide range of fish including Alaska pollock, mackerel, herring, and Pacific cod. At one time, Steller sea lions were endangered, due in part to illegal hunting and loss of habitat, but their numbers have increased in recent years.