

## **GEHR Watershed Minute #41**

### **Harbor Seals: (244 words)**

Harbor seals are brown, tan, or gray, with distinctive V-shaped nostrils. An adult can attain a length of 6 feet and a weight of 290 lbs. Females can live for 30-35 years but males only live 20-25 years. These large seals frequently choose to congregate in harbors, thus giving them their common name.

Harbor Seals prey primarily on fish such as menhaden, anchovy, sea bass, herring, cod, whiting and flatfish, and occasionally upon shrimp, mollusks and squid. They are able to dive for up to ten minutes, reaching depths of 1500 feet or more, but average dives may be three minutes long at depths of about 60 feet.

When not actively feeding, these seals will haul themselves out of the water and onto preferred resting sites near the coast. In the Great Egg Harbor Bay, these sites can be sandy beaches like Drag Island where land predators can't reach them, or sometimes riskier sites like low docks. Their frequent appearance along the Great Egg indicates a steady supply of fish to eat.

Females mate with the strongest males, and then bear single pups, which they care for alone. Pups are able to swim and dive within hours of birth, and they grow quickly on their mothers' milk. A fatty tissue called "blubber" keeps them warm.

The Harbor Seal population is increasing steadily on the US East Coast. Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act it is illegal to kill any seals or other marine mammals.