

Harbor Porpoise by Rebecca Lexa

In recent weeks harbor porpoises have been more evident along the coast and in Willapa Bay. In fact, those who went on the oyster barge trip on the Sunday of Wings Over Willapa in late September were treated to a small pod of porpoises crossing the Bay! It is one of our smallest marine mammals, rarely growing much larger than six feet long. Its coloration is dark gray on its back, with a lighter, silvery gray on the sides. Unlike dolphins it does not have a pronounced beak, and so has a smoother curve from the top of its head to its mouth. If you think you see a harbor porpoise break the surface of the water, look for a small triangular dorsal fin on its back.

While harbor porpoises are often solitary, they do form small groups to hunt fish. They tend to target schooling fish like herring, and usually hunt close to the sea floor. They do not venture far from their home territory and are not generally migratory.

Harbor porpoises generally live ten to fifteen years in the wild, though individuals may reach ages of twenty or more. If you find a stranded or dead porpoise or other marine mammal, please inform the Seaside Aquarium of stranded or dead individuals as soon as possible as they are part of the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network. It is illegal to collect the remains of any marine mammal, so leave them on the beach for gulls and other scavengers.