

Sea Lion — Wiinaq

WIINAT CARLIANGUT. – THE SEA LIONS ARE HAVING BABIES.



Photo: A sea lion swimming in Kizhuyak Bay.

The Gulf of Alaska is home to the Steller sea lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*), the largest pinniped in the North Pacific. Bulls average 1,150 pounds, cows 580 pounds, and both are nearly ten feet long. Sea lions are opportunistic feeders that range from intertidal areas to the edge of the continental shelf. Fish are their primary food, although they also eat squid and an occasional harbor seal. Like seals, sea lions haul out on land to rest, breed, and pup.

Alutiiq people hunted sea lions both on land and in the water. Some animals were taken from kayaks with harpoons, but it was easier to capture them at rookeries. With clubs and spears, hunters would sneak up on resting sea lions, particularly during the summer pupping season.

In addition to food, sea lions provide an array of raw materials. Sea lion bone was fashioned into tools, the intestine was used for clothing and containers, and whiskers decorated hunting hats. The most important resource, however, was the animal's skin. Sea lions are one of the only sources of large hides in the Kodiak Archipelago. Kayaks and larger open-skin boats were covered with sea lion skins, particularly those of cows. Sea lion skins were also used to cover the smoke hole of a sod house and to wrap the dead for burial.