

WHAT ARE THE MAIN THREATS TO THE SAIMAA RINGED SEAL?



FISHING GEAR

Certain types of fishing gear can be lethal for the Saimaa ringed seal if they become caught up in them. Nets are especially dangerous for seals. Traditional hook and line fishing, lure fishing, and fishing traps that have a narrow opening are safe for seals.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Winters have become milder with higher temperatures and less snow than before. This has made it more difficult for seals to breed. Volunteers have helped seals to breed by making man-made snow drifts and artificial nests.



NOISE AND DISTURBANCE CAUSED BY HUMANS

Saimaa seals are shy animals. They must be allowed to nest and rest on rocks in peace. Unnecessary noise and movement in the Saimaa seal areas must be avoided, especially with motor vehicles. Seals may be observed from a distance with binoculars.



SMALL AMOUNT OF SEALS

The Saimaa ringed seal population is still very small, and divided into small sub-populations living in various parts of Lake Saimaa. Surprising factors and chance, for example, contagious diseases, can threaten the Saimaa ringed seal population.

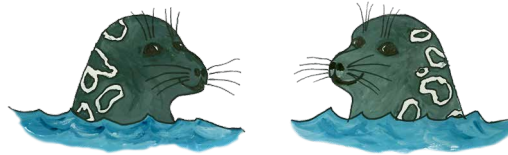


THE SAIMAA RINGED SEAL – ONE OF THE WORLD'S RAREST SEALS



The Saimaa ringed seal is only found at Lake Saimaa. The seals are divided into smaller sub-populations in various parts of the lake and live in the same area from one year to another.

The Saimaa ringed seal spends most of its life underwater. They can remain submerged for around 20 minutes before having to come to the surface to breathe. Seal pups often also sleep underwater in short bursts.



DID YOU KNOW?

A relative of the Saimaa ringed seal, **the Ladoga ringed seal**, lives in Lake Ladoga in Russia. They are slightly smaller than the Saimaa ringed seal. Whilst their population is significantly larger than that of the Saimaa ringed seal, the Ladoga ringed seal is vulnerable.

Another relative, **the Baltic ringed seal**, lives in the Baltic Sea - as the name suggests. It is the world's smallest seal species. The Baltic ringed seal is near-threatened.

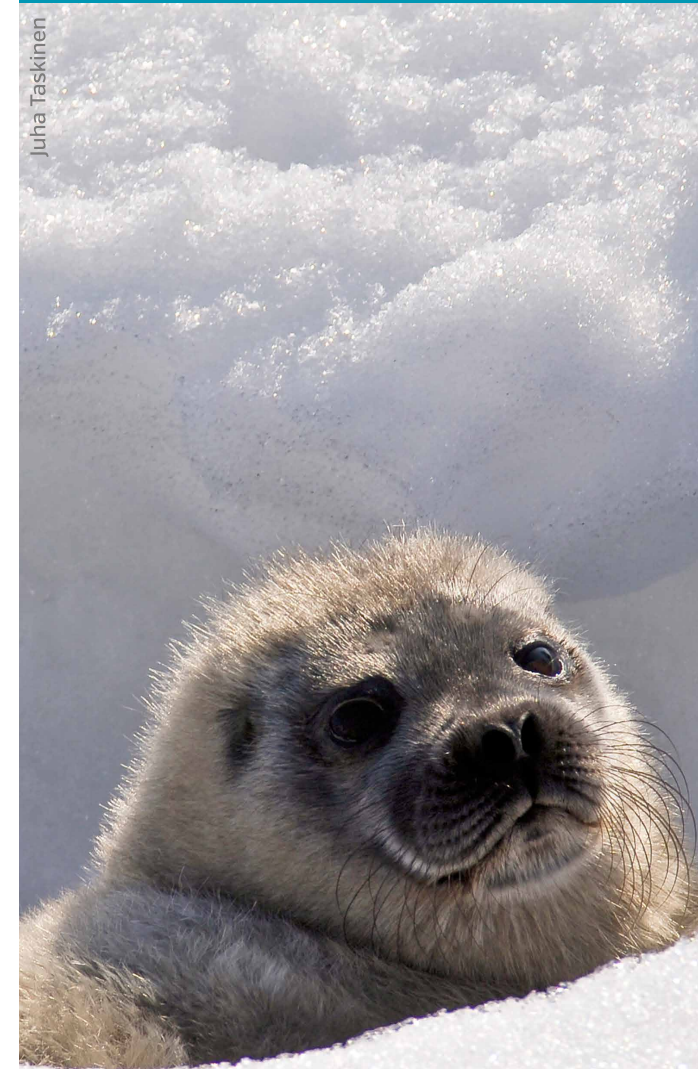


The material has been updated and published in the Our Saimaa Seal LIFE project (LIFE19 NAT/FI/000832), which is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Illustrations: Kaarina Tiainen. Texts: Jannika Paananen, Sanna Leppänen. Layout and seal identification illustration: Hanne Kosonen. The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation, 2023.

The endangered SAIMAA RINGED SEAL

Juha Taskinen



WHAT DOES THE SAIMAA RINGED SEAL LOOK LIKE?

EARS
has excellent hearing and no earlobes

LARGE BROWN EYES
sees extremely well underwater and not so well above the surface

THICK WHISKERS
serve as sense organs and enable the seal to detect the movement of fish in the water

SMALL AND SHARP TEETH
for grabbing fish, which are swallowed whole without chewing

FRONT FLIPPERS AND THEIR NAILS
help the seal dig a nest and holes in the ice

RINGED PATTERN OF THE FUR
is as unique as human fingerprints

STRONG BACK FLIPPERS
enable great swimming speed

CHUBBY FIGURE
the thick subcutaneous fat layer serves as insulation similar to a winter coat

SHORT TAIL



SAIMAA RINGED SEAL (*Pusa hispida saimensis*) IN FIGURES

- Population roughly **430-440** individuals (in 2022)
- Some **120** fertile females (in 2021)
- Lifespan roughly **20** years
- The average length of a mature individual **130-145** cm
- The average weight of a mature individual **50-90** kg
- A new-born seal pup weighs **4-5** kg
- An adult seal eats roughly **1,000** kg of fish a year

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE YEAR OF THE SAIMAA RINGED SEAL LIKE?

When the autumn comes, seals start eating large amounts of fish in order to thicken their subcutaneous fat layer. They especially like small fish, such as vendace, smelt, perch, roach, and ruffe.

In winter, seals are rarely seen. They spend most of their time in the water underneath the ice cover. They make holes in the ice for breathing and dig snow caves in snow drifts close to the shore for resting.

Mother seals dig a nest on top of the ice in a snow drift by the rocky shore. There is a hole in the ice at the bottom of the nest for diving into the water.

Mother seals give birth to a seal pup inside the snow nest during February-March. They nurse their pup in the safety of the snow nest. The fluffy light grey fur of the pups protect them against the cold.

The pups grow and gain strength quickly, thanks to the fatty milk produced by their moms. Little by little they learn to swim and fish independently.

In late spring, adult seals start moulting. During that period, they can be seen ashore on rocks and rocky shores where they dry their old fur and scratch it off.

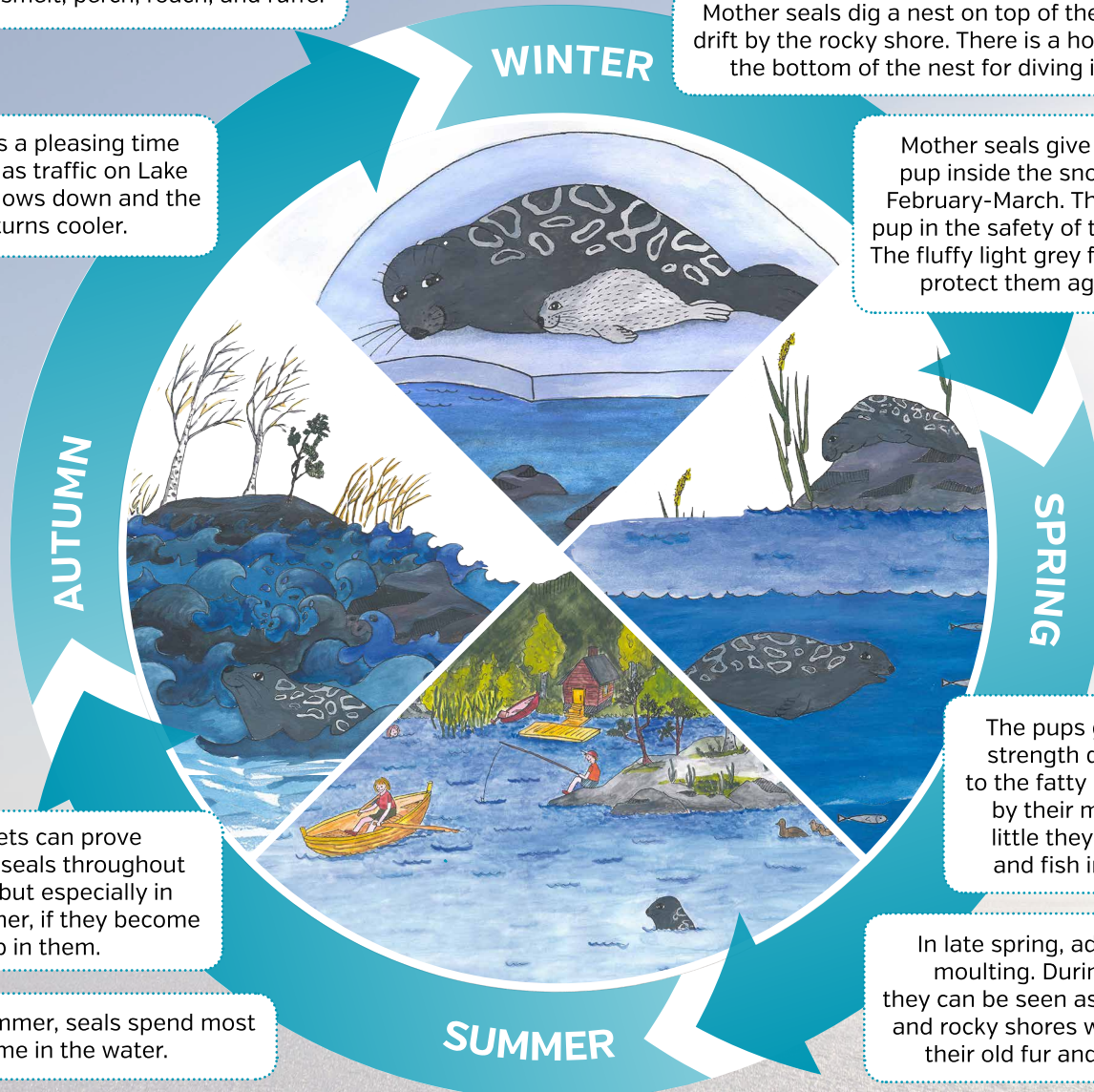
During moulting, adult seals also start fasting, so they do not eat much during that time.

Autumn is a pleasing time for seals, as traffic on Lake Saimaa slows down and the weather turns cooler.

Fishing nets can prove lethal for seals throughout the year, but especially in the summer, if they become caught up in them.

In the summer, seals spend most of their time in the water.

When the summer comes, seal pups start their independent life and must cope on their own.



WINTER

AUTUMN

SPRING

SUMMER

The Saimaa Ringed Seal

I'm a friend of snow and cold weather



JUHA TASKINEN



The material has been updated and published in the Our Saimaa Seal LIFE project (LIFE19 NAT/FI/000832), which is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.