

Summary of Steller Sea Lion Sightings

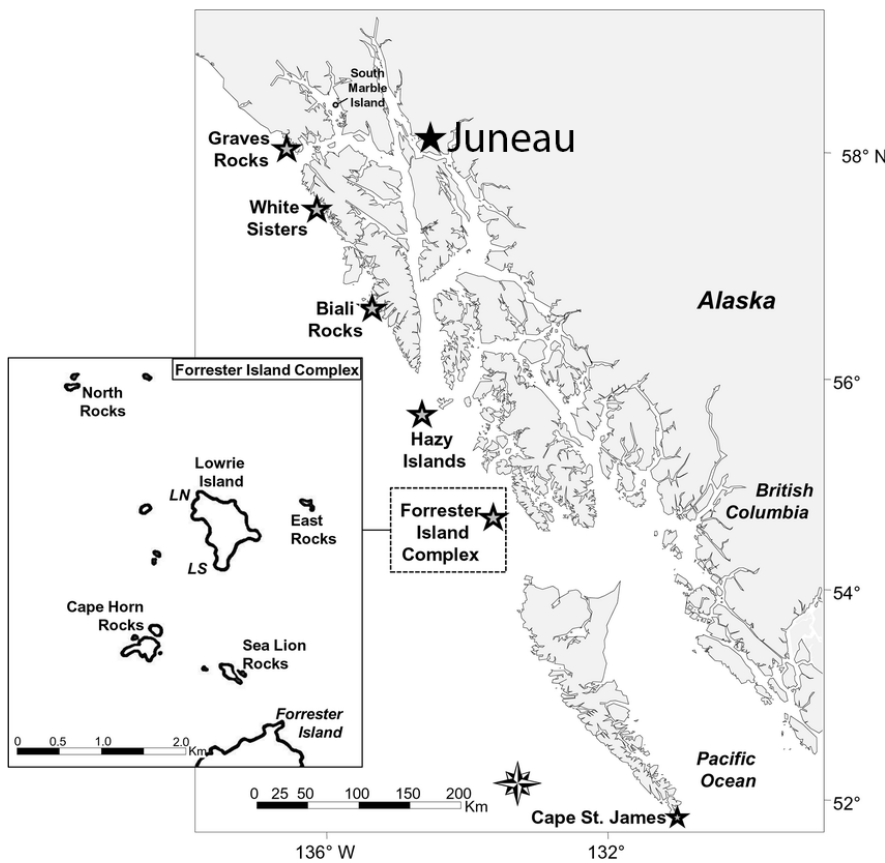
Our Steller Sea Lion survey is opportunistic in that we record sightings only as we encounter them and normally do not go “after” them.

Since we began this survey in 2018, we find that nearly all our Steller sea lions are juveniles, many well under five years of age. Determining age is difficult, and we’ve learned to judge by comparing what we know about the branded individuals who have a known age.

Virtually all the larger Steller sea lions we encounter are sub-adult males. We determine this by the development of the mane. We are confident we’ve never seen a full adult sea lion in our waters.

2025 was busy as we had whale watching from April 14 through October 7 with 162 days on the water and 1,016 Discover Alaska’s Whales science tours. We encountered Steller sea lion on 60% of the tours.

Steller Sea Lion Locations



This map shows the breeding locations in Southeast Alaska for Steller sea lion. Most of the branded sea lions we have seen have a “V” with the number which indicates they were born at Graves Rocks, the northernmost of the five major pupping grounds in SEAK. This is likely due to its proximity to Juneau waters.

Hastings, Kelly & Jemison, Lauri & Pendleton, Grey & Raum-Suryan, Kimberly & Pitcher, Kenneth. (2017). *Natal and breeding philopatry of female Steller sea lions in southeastern Alaska*. PLOS ONE. 12. e0176840. 10.1371/journal.pone.0176840.

Since Steller sea lion require a flat spot to rest, we find them more often there than at sea. We pass Faust Rock buoy on many of our excursions, so it is well surveyed. Poundstone Rock and Horse Shoals buoys are a bit out of our normal range, so they are sampled irregularly.

Benjamin and Little Islands are also out of our normal range and guides often ask captains to visit them when we know sea lions are there.



Faust Rock buoy..... 58.41846 -134.92701
Green and red bell buoy to mark an underwater rock



Poundstone Rock buoy 58.52887 - 134.92927
Green and red bell buoy to mark an underwater rock



Horse Shoal buoy 58.25712 -134.70588
Green white light buoy marking the shoals

Benjamin Island..... 58.54598 -134.92347

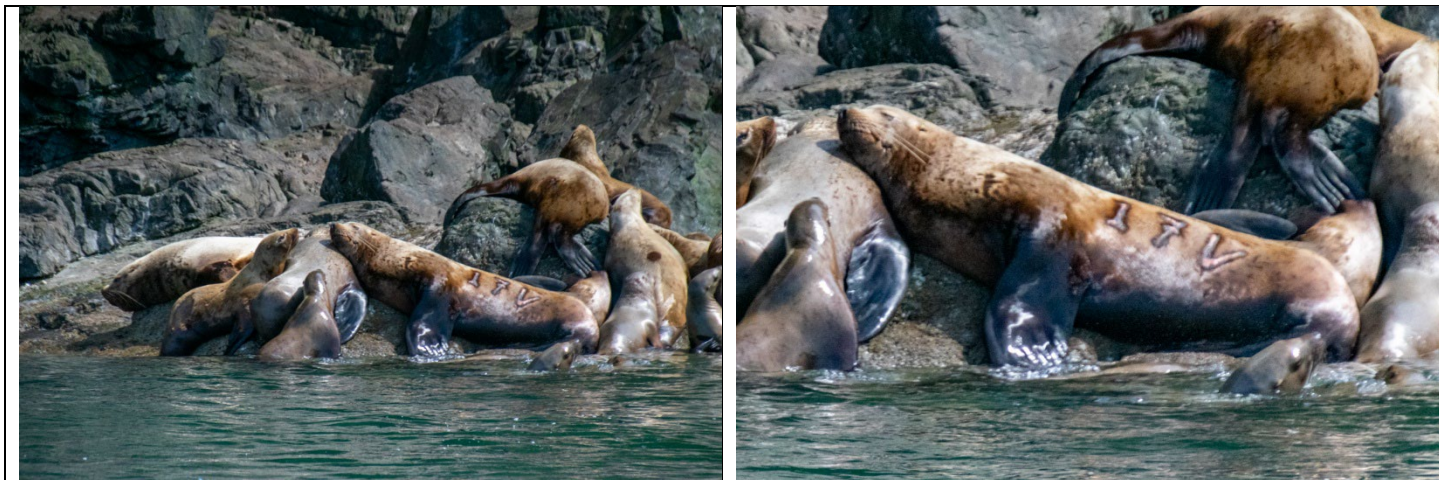
Little Island 58.54008 -135.04703

Entanglements

During this period, we encountered NO Steller Sea Lions with any form of entanglement, and the last entanglement we found was in 2023!

Branded Sea Lions

We encountered only one branded sea lion on June 10, 2025. Since the Alaska Department of Fish and Game ceased branding Steller sea lion in 2019, the number of branded animals spotted has declined dramatically.



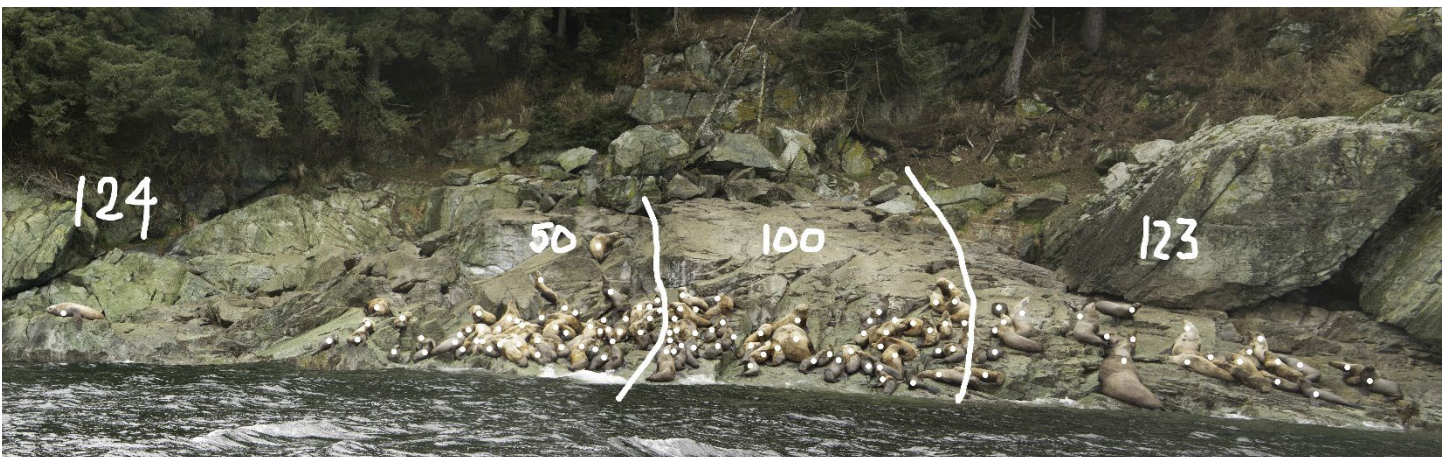
17V is a male that was born on June 15, 2016, at Graves Rock. This sea lion will have his ninth birthday in just five days!

Steller Sea Lion Haulouts

Steller sea lions take advantage of the flat perching places on the west shore of Sentinel Island's cliffs from late winter through early June. This location is near the limit of how far we can travel with the time constraints of our tours, but it is a fun place to visit and count the number of individuals. In early summer they abandon Benjamin and for the open waters of Juneau. In early August they begin congregating on Little Island where they take advantage of the rocky beaches to keep them out of the water.

Ideally, guides take a series of overlapping photographs that can be merged into a panorama in PhotoShop. It is a tedious task to use the eraser tool to mark every sea lion with a dot to count. Since they are packed tight where they may lay over and under others, the count should be considered an approximation.

Benjamin Island



Theresa Miller's tour visited Benjamin Island on April 25, 2025, and found 124 Steller sea lions. The sub-adult males are easy to pick out in mass of juveniles just by their size.

Benjamin Island



On a whim, Scott Ranger headed to Benjamin on July 20, 2025, and was surprised to find 43 Steller sea lion on the haulout. Usually there are none here in mid-summer. The sea lions are congregated into a small area which makes getting all of them in a single photograph easy.

Little Island



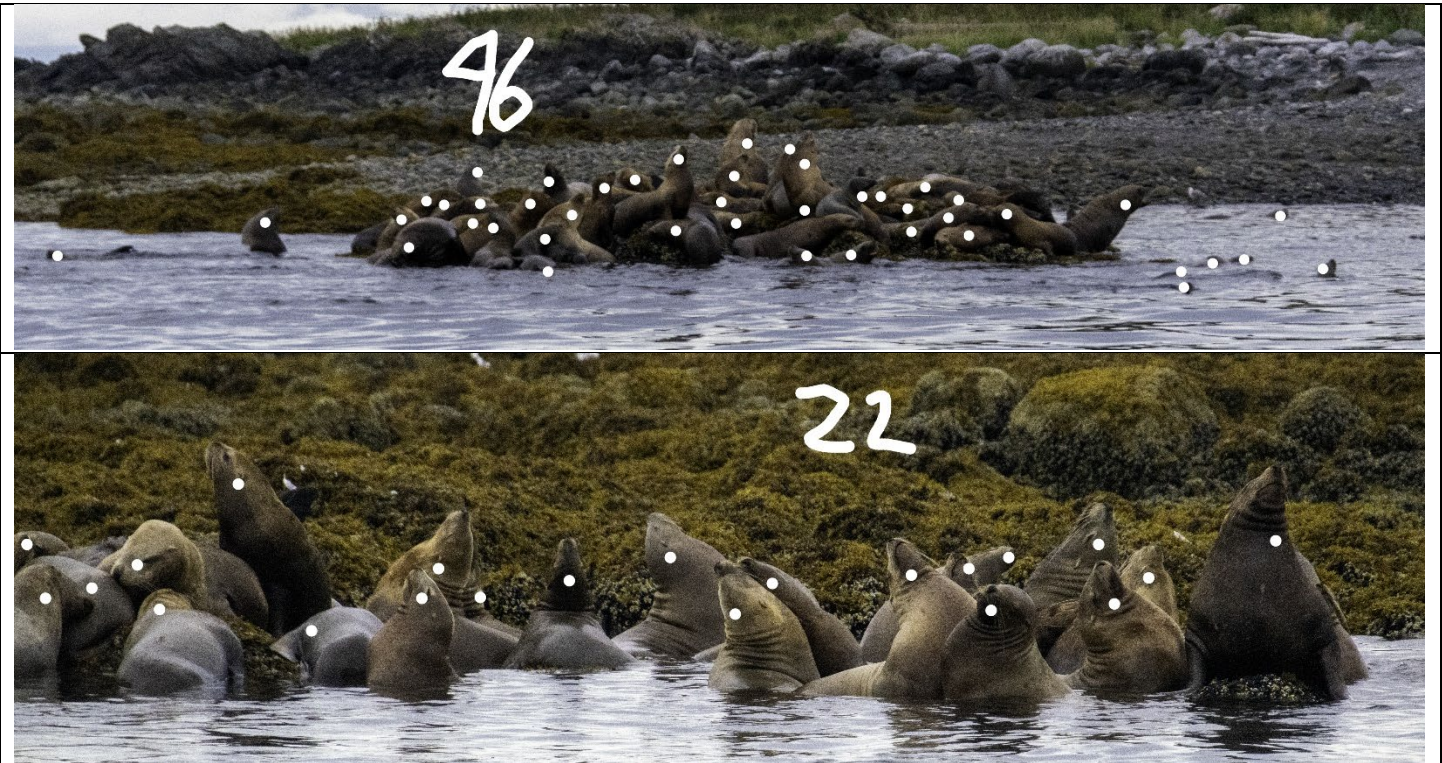
On August 25, 2025 about 9:30 am, Chris Chocian's found this assortment of 84 Steller sea lion at Little Island. Since the photographs do not overlap, a panorama cannot be created covering all the animals. This count is from the photos taken and is surely lower than the actual numbers there.

Little Island



That same afternoon at about 4:00 pm, G.G. Belsito visited Little Island and took a series of photos illustrating the age group with the sub-adults representing a sizeable minority of the group. The photos are not overlapping so a panorama is not possible.

Little Island



August 31, 2025, about 10:00 an, Ray Flynn's group found these 68 sea lions. Panorama showing all isn't possible with the photos, so this is a severe undercount.

Little Island



September 3, 2025, Sarah Reunitz's tour enjoyed watching these two sub-adult males (top photo) arguing with each other. The second photo shows two sub-adults with very different pelages. The lack of a "mane" and very smooth skin on the left animal may indicate that it is a female. The developing mane and neck full of wrinkles is a mark of the right animal being a male.



Sarah got a partial panorama of the eastern half of the group showing 111 animals. There are more to the left of this image so this is a severe under count.

Little Island



On September 24, 2025, Scott Ranger headed with Captain Mitch Stauffer to Little Island. While viewing, Scott estimated to the group there were about 300. The panorama finds this a pretty good guess!

L. Scott Ranger
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