

The Harp Seals of April

In 2012, the Canadian government authorized 400,000 of the Harp seals to be slaughtered for the purpose of harvesting their pelts and their meat. The hunt commenced April 12, 2012. The methods used to slaughter the Harp seal is often gruesome and quite controversial, with the majority of slaughtered seals being of three months of age or younger (though older than 12 days as required by regulation) given the appeal of their white furry pelts. The Humane Society has operated a boycott of Canadian seafood for some time for this reason.

Seals share the same order with Dogs, in the order Carnivora. They also share the same sub-order in Caniformia, or Canoidea (meaning “dog-like”). At this juncture, they do split off into a separate superfamily, with dogs belonging to Canidae and seals belonging to Arctoidea. There are many studies that have documented the intelligence of seals, and these creatures are known to exhibit remarkable capabilities. In one such study, exhibited on PBS, the series, NOVA scienceNOW* highlights not only how seals are able to associate numerical numbers and alphabetical letters with sounds, but to extrapolate from that the ability to use reason and logic to take it one step further.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/smart-marine-mammals.html>

*Note: Funding for NOVA scienceNOW is provided by the National Science Foundation, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and PBS viewers.