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We begin the volume with a special chapter on sea mammals and conservation, in the context of marine conservation and climate change because these are topics of great growing concern. Another special concern and somewhat controversially involves the classification of the order Cetacea. We follow the traditional arrangement exemplified in the Third Edition of *Mammal Species of the World* (MSW), published in 2005. Nevertheless, we have made several improvements and updates. The views of the authors, all of whom are leading authorities, have been incorporated into this volume. We have added descriptions of new species and ongoing systematic revisions, which continue to add to our knowledge of the phylogenetic relationships of the families covered by this volume. The Systematics section in each family account reviews the ongoing taxonomic work and recent research using new molecular techniques, which have revolutionized our ability to analyze evolutionary relationships.

Recently, there is strong molecular evidence for close evolutionary relationship between cetaceans and the family Hippopotamidae in the traditional order Artiodactyla. This has led to vigorous well-exposed arguments for combining the two groups into a single order, Cetartiodactyla. We think that most of our readers will find it easier to use the volume as it is arranged, but with the caveat that an extensively modified classification of higher categories of mammals may soon be accepted. For the latest version of this ongoing study to properly outline the phylogenetic relationships of all sea mammals, we recommend visiting the website of The Society for Marine Mammalogy (<http://www.marine-mammal-science.org/>).

Pinnipeds are found in coastal waters worldwide. The eared seals of the family Otariidae are seen far south and sea lions. They live in all oceans except the North Atlantic and are better adapted to locomotion on land than the flipper relatives because they can tuck their hindflippers under their bodies. Like phocids, they have an amphibious lifestyle, breeding on land but spending most of their time in the water. Highly specialized carnivores, they feed on fish, crustaceans, and cephalopods, and have adapted to a wide variety of coastal marine habitats.

The walrus is perhaps the most specialized, with only a single living species, the walrus, which inhabits the arctic and subarctic waters of the Northern Hemisphere. Walrus are huge, with bodies almost as large in circumference as in length and with small heads perched on top. Both sexes have elongated canine teeth forming distal tusks. When swimming, their hindflippers propel them as they search along the bottom for food. Ashore, walrus can walk on all four limbs, using their tusks to help move their heavy bodies. Like phocids, walrus lack external ear flaps. Unlike male otariids and phocids, adult male walrus are almost entirely naked, with only watered hair over the body. Nevertheless, the skin is very thick to protect them when fishing.

The last of the pinniped families, the earless seals of the family Phocidae, are more common in temperate and polar waters than in tropical seas. True seals, as they are also known, are more adapted to ocean life than their relatives the eared seals and sea lions. They can swim long distances, dive deeply for long periods of time, and are generally much more at home in the water than on land.