

# Mating Systems of Pinnipeds

**Directions:** Answer the questions below about mating systems based on the information given about each type of breeding pinniped.

Pinnipeds (seals) are a diverse group of fin-footed marine mammals. Pinnipeds forage at sea, come ashore (land or ice) to reproduce, have short, intense lactation period, and produce young that are born well developed.

## **Land-breeding pinnipeds**

- This species gives birth on islands or isolated beaches. These land masses are permanent, fixed locations.
- Females are clumped into large groups. Most are receptive to mating around the same time.
- Males remain on land the entire breeding season ( $\leq 2-3$  mo) without feeding.

## **Pack ice (floating ice) breeding pinnipeds**

- Pack ice habitats are vast so females are not clumped spatially, but individuals live in small to moderate-sized groups. The location of ice floes and females varies.
- Pack ice breaks up in the spring so there is only a short time period when conditions are good for giving birth and raising offspring.

## **Fast ice (attached to land) breeding pinnipeds**

- This species lives on expansive areas of ice and the individuals are widely dispersed.
- These pinnipeds choose to mate near cracks in the ice or breathing holes and males can guard one breathing hole at a time (water breeding). While this species is typically dispersed they will form small groups around breathing holes.

### **1. Which of these is most likely to be polygynous? Why?**

**2. Which is least likely to be polygynous? Why?**

**3. Which is most likely to be highly sexually dimorphic? Why?**

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