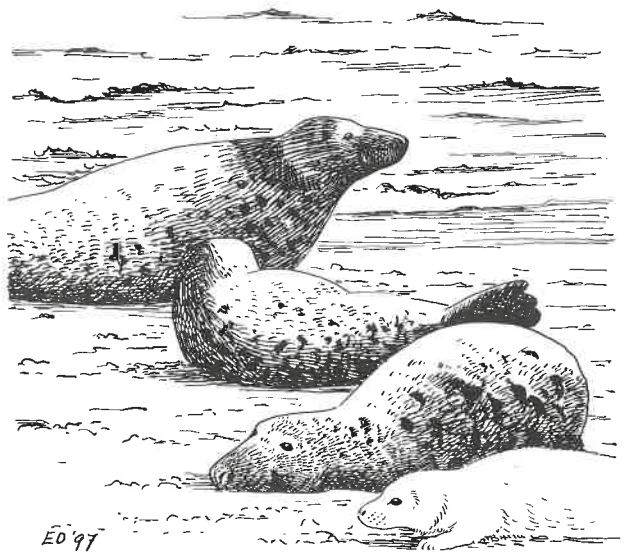


Halichoerus grypus (FABRICIUS, 1791)



E. Hazebroek

Grey seal

AL	-	LT	Ilgasnukis ruonis
BG	Дългомуцунаст тюлен	LU	-
CZ	Tuleň kuželozúý	LV	Pelēkais ronis
DE	Kegelrobbe	MK	Сива фока
DK	Grásæl	MT	-
EE	Hallhüljes	NL	Grijze zeehond
ES	Foca gris	NO	Havert
FI	Halli	PL	Foka szara
FO	Láturkópur	PT	Foca-cinzenta
FR	Phoque gris	RO	-
GR	-	RU	Длинномрды́й тюлень
HR	Čunjasti tuljan	SE	Grásäl
HU	Kúpos fóka	SI	Stožčastoglavi tjuenj
IR	Rón glas; Rón mór	SK	Tuleň sivý
IS	Útselur	TR	Grifok
IT	Foca grigia	YU	-

Distribution

World: Grey seals range over the North Atlantic coast. Roughly three stocks can be identified; one in the West Atlantic, one in the Baltic and one in the East Atlantic. The West Atlantic stock ranges from Cape Chidley in the north of Labrador, through Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and the Gulf of St Lawrence to Nantucket.

Europe: the northern border of the East Atlantic stock extends from Iceland to the White Sea. They are found around the British Isles and along the Atlantic and North Sea coasts, down to Brittany in France. The majority (about 80%) breed around the British Isles, especially off the north-west coast of Scotland. Initially grey seals were not considered native of the Wadden Sea. However, recent archeological findings show that this species prevailed in the area until the late Middle Ages. Since the 1950s it has been recolonizing the area, breeding at two locations in Germany and The Netherlands. The range of the Baltic stock includes the Gulfs of Bothnia, Finland and Riga and south to the Gulf of Danzig, extending as far as the border between Poland and Germany, and on the Swedish coast as far as Malmö.

Geographic variation

None known.

Habitat

Breeding sites can be exposed rocky coasts or shelves, shingle or sandy beaches, on grass sites or in caves. In the Baltic and in the Gulf of St Lawrence, grey seals also

breed on ice. Intertidal flats in estuaries are used for hauling out, but are not well suited for breeding as newborn pups are initially poor swimmers.

Grey seals generally exhibit opportunistic foraging behaviour. Foraging areas will depend on available prey species, and are therefore highly variable. The ranges of seals were observed to be up to 100 km. Though the maximum recorded dive depth was more than 100 m, most dives seem to reach close to the bottom, suggesting benthic foraging.

Population status

Estimates of population size in the different areas are not comparable as techniques differ.

East Atlantic stock: Over its complete range this stock is either stable or growing. The total size of the British population was estimated to be 111000 in 1997. In its northern range the population is estimated to be over 20000. In the eastern North Sea there are only a few hundred animals.

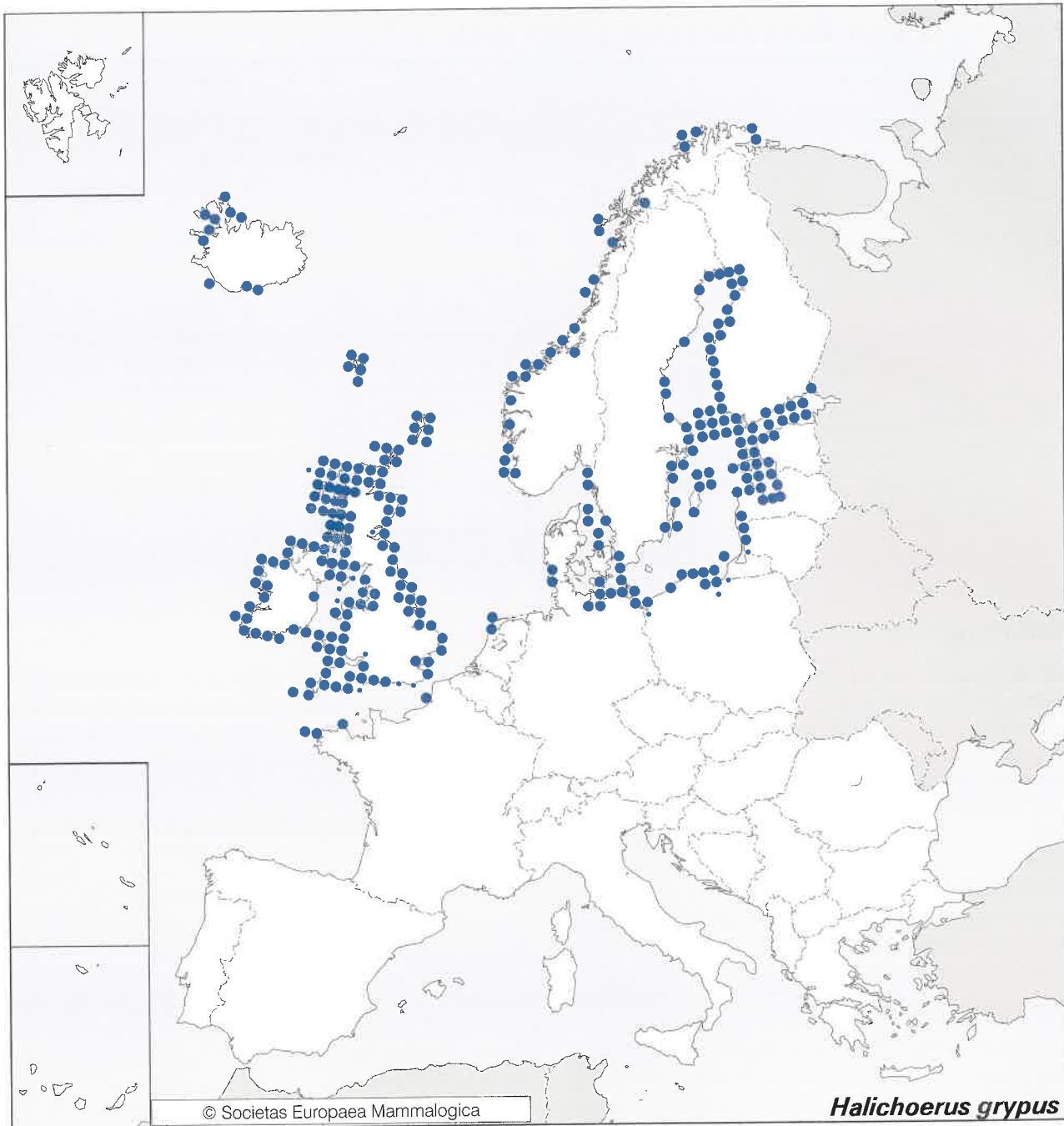
West Atlantic stock: In 1987 80000-110000 animals.

Baltic stock: Until recently, numbers were dropping. Current numbers are estimated at 5000 animals, indicating a recovery; this could, however, also be due to a change in behaviour of the animals.

International legal & conservation status

Bern Convention, Appendix III.

Bonn Convention, Appendix II (only Baltic Sea population).



EU Habitats & Species Directive, Annex II, Annex V.
IUCN Red List, Endangered (only Baltic Sea population).

Other information

Some of the grey seal's prey species are commercially exploited. This has led to controversial public debates about the perceived need for culling programmes to control seal numbers. Lack of suitable databases currently hinders ecological research which might well resolve existing controversies. Concern that the grey seal acts as a vector for the codworm *Pseudoterranova decipiens* has sometimes led to killing. In the Baltic, 15–

20% of pups may drown each year in fishing nets, and fertility rates are low as a result of pollution. In highly populated areas disturbance of breeding sites can result in high pup mortality.

Literature

- Anderson (1992)
- Reijnders *et al.* (1993)
- Reijnders *et al.* (1997)
- S. M. J. M. Basseur, E. H. Ries & P. J. H. Reijnders