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Maritime Aquarium Offers Winter Seal-Spotting, Birding Cruises

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You can cruise out onto Long Island Sound with the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk this winter in the hope of seeing some of the seals and birds that spend the colder months just off shore.

— *an announcement from* [the Maritime Aquarium](#)

The Maritime Aquarium's 2020 season of Seal-Spotting & Birding Cruises offers outings on many Saturdays and Sundays now through April 12.

Dates and departure times vary by low tide. The next cruises are on Saturday, Jan. 18 at 11 a.m. and on Sunday, Jan. 19 at noon. For the full schedule, go to [the aquarium website](#) (and see the list at the bottom of this article).

These invigorating 2½-hour cruises seek out some of the harbor seals and gray seals that annually migrate

down into Long Island Sound from their summer breeding and pupping areas off Cape Cod and the Gulf of Maine. (Harbor seals are the same species featured in the Maritime Aquarium.)

“Having so many seals come into the Sound is the positive result of the federal protections on seals, which have enabled their populations to increase, as well as of the broad work to improve the health of the Sound, making it an enticing winter habitat for the seals,” said Dave Sigworth, the aquarium’s associate director of communications.

During the aquarium cruises, seals often can be seen near the Norwalk islands resting on rocks and shoals exposed at low tide. Aquarium educators will point out these federally protected marine mammals and talk about their natural histories.

“Many people are surprised that seals visit the Sound, because the seals are only here during winter when boaters aren’t out there,” Sigworth said. “It’s a thrill to see them, and a motivating reminder that the Sound is a thriving natural resource worthy of our protection.”

The cruises also give birders unique “on-the-water” access to see and photograph visiting winter waterfowl, such as buffleheads, mergansers, Brant geese and long-tailed ducks.

“Seal-Spotting and Birding Cruises” take place aboard The Maritime Aquarium’s R/V Spirit of the Sound, the country’s first research vessel with quiet hybrid-electric propulsion.

R/V Spirit of the Sound has a climate-controlled cabin but, because the best viewing is outside on the deck, participants should dress for the weather. Binoculars will be provided, along with hot chocolate and coffee.

Also during each cruise, participants can help aquarium educators with plankton samplings. Data collected during the cruises is added to the Long Island Sound Biodiversity Project, which is an ongoing census of the Sound’s animal species.

This online database, sponsored by the aquarium, makes data on the physical and biological contents of Long Island Sound available to students, educators and researchers.

The Maritime Aquarium’s cruises offer memorable family fun but please note that all passengers must be at least 42 inches tall.

If You're Going ...

- Tickets for a “Seal-Spotting & Birding Cruise” are \$31.50, or \$26.50 for aquarium members.

- Capacity is limited so advance reservations are strongly recommended. Walk-up tickets will be sold, space permitting. Reserve your spot by calling (203) 852-0700, ext. 2206, or by going online to [the aquarium website](#).

Cruise Dates and Times

—Saturday, Jan. 18 at 11 a.m.

—Sunday, Jan. 19 at noon

—Saturday, Feb. 1 at 9:30 a.m.

—Sunday, Feb. 2 at 10:30 a.m.

—Saturday, Feb. 15 at 9:30 a.m.

—Sunday, Feb. 16 at 10:30 a.m.

—Saturday, Feb. 29 at 8 a.m.

—Sunday, March 1 at 9 a.m.

—Saturday, March 14 at 9 a.m.

—Sunday, March 15 at 10 a.m.

—Saturday, March 28 at 8 a.m.

—Sunday, March 29 at 8 a.m.

—Saturday, April 4 at 2 p.m.

—Saturday, April 11 at 8 a.m.

—Sunday, April 12 at 9 a.m.