

A Seal of Approval – 5

Seals eat **mainly fish**, and some may also consume large quantities of **squid**, other mollusks, and crustaceans. Most fish, not keen on getting eaten alive, **do their best to escape** predators such as seals. Some **squid**, whose eyes are almost as complex as those of humans, are **swift swimmers** and also do their best to **avoid** being eaten.

- Seals are **agile swimmers**, but other qualities are required to ensure catching a fish that wants to get away. One of these is their **superior eyesight** in the murky depths. Even then, the viewing range is far less than in the air. For help in detection of prey, seals have well-developed **tactile senses**. Many mammals have on their face, **long stiff hairs** called *vibrissae*, such as the cat's whiskers which it uses to gauge spaces, find its way in the dark and sense predators or prey.

But seal's whiskers have **ten times** the number of **nerve fibres** of land mammals. This gives seals the ability to not only **detect vibrations** in the water, but to **identify the source** and its **location**. In essence, the whiskers are part of a **sensory system** that enables the animal to "see", without having to consciously interpret what each hair feels.

- Some **analogy** might be seen in the operation of the BrainPort©, by which a **blind person**, on whom is mounted a **mini-video camera** which is connected to small **disk** held on the top of the **tongue**. The camera output feeds a grid of **400 points on the tongue** to provide a 400 pixel black and white **image**. Each pixel point on the tongue receives a small **electric shock** when black is detected by the camera - a **big tingle** for a dark pixel and a **little tingle** for a lighter pixel. The **combination** of tingles which are felt through the cluster of **nerve** endings in the **tongue** are transmitted to and interpreted in the person's brain as a **visual sensation**.

In the case of the **seal**, it detects the **vibrations** generated in the water when a **fish** swims by. Seals have been observed **swimming along** in the way a dog **follows** a scent trail. They have been able to discriminate the **species** and the **size** of the fish responsible for the trail, and decide to pursue one for dinner, only if it's the **suitable kind**.

- The effectiveness of the seal's whiskery **sensory system** can be appreciated in the case of **blind ringed seals** living in Lake Saimaa, Finland. They have been observed successfully **hunting** on their own, apparently relying on their **face hairs** to gain sensory information and catch prey.

The **walrus** has the most *vibrissae*, up to 700 individual hairs, which sounds like a lot of **input** to the sensory system. It eats shrimp, crabs, sea cucumbers, etc., but its **favourite are clams**. In order to harvest them, it **grazes** along the **sea bottom**, sending jets of water and waving its flippers to **uncover** the bivalve prey. In the meanwhile the water has become **muddy** with all the disturbance, and the walrus' eyes are **little help** in seeing what it is doing. Enter the **moustache** of highly sensitive **detection hairs** to identify the sought-after shellfish.

- On finding a clam, the walrus **slurps the meat out** in one deft motion by gripping the shell firmly in its lips and withdrawing its **piston-like tongue** quickly into its mouth, which has a **uniquely vaulted palate** just made for the job.

All these **remarkable** creatures, while left unmolested **by mankind**, have existed and thrived over millennia. They have **managed admirably**, with no human help, to survive through every challenge, however extreme - all because they were made by a **wise Designer** - **Job 38:39-39:30**.