

# THE AMERICAN BIOLOGY TEACHER



## About Our Cover

This scene – Cape or brown fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*) and Cape cormorants (*Phalacrocorax capensis*), framed against the Atlantic Ocean – was photographed in Namib-Naukluft National Park near Walvis Bay in Namibia, where these animals are found in abundance. In the name of both animals, “Cape” refers to the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of Africa. This is somewhat misleading in the case of these seals because when found “down under” they are known as Australian fur seals, a subspecies. The Cape cormorants (or Cape shag) are endemic to the southern part of Africa; as such, they are found nowhere else.

Locally, Cape cormorants often associate in very large groups but are considered endangered because of rapid population decline in the past thirty years. These birds are a glossy black, with a distinctive red-orange patch at the base of their beaks. They hunt in flocks and take fish such as anchovies and pilchards directly from open water. Common predators include black-backed jacks, which may often be found patrolling the beach, and their nests may be raided by gulls, pelicans, and even their relative the great cormorant.

The star of this scene is the brown fur seal, the largest member of the fur seal group (males weigh ~250 kg, females ~120 kg). The African or Cape variety lives near the southern tip of the continent, extending up the western coast and east into Namibia; a huge colony at Cape Cross numbers >1500 individuals. They eat fish and squid, as well as crabs and other crustaceans. They are highly social animals and use complex vocalizations to find their pups even when separated for days while the adults are feeding at sea.

This digital image was recorded with a Nikon D850 camera using a 28–300 mm zoom lens with image stabilization. The photographer is William F. McComas, editor of *The American Biology Teacher* and Parks Family Professor of Science Education and Director of the Project to Advance Science Education at the University of Arkansas (mccomas@uark.edu).

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