

Southern Elephant seals, Falkland Islands - 2012



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Mandatory Credit: Photo by Kjell-Erik Moseid / Rex Features (1788011y)

Awesome Elephant Seals: Fight To Be King of the Harem

When the prize is a harem of females, it is worth throwing your weight around.

These two males Southern elephant seals are pictured locked in a crunching battle for supremacy on the beaches of the Falkland Islands.

The pair went snout to snout in a power struggle over the alpha male role which entitles the winner to a choice of sometimes more than 100 cows on the breeding ground.

The amazing fight was captured by wildlife photographer Kjell-Erik Moseid who says the sound he experienced was almost as impressive as the pictures he shot.

He explains: "The deep rumble you can imagine. It is the sound of a heavy mill going round. Then there is a few seconds of quivering silence. Then they smack into each other and sound carries down to the spinal cord.

"The bigger and deeper the bass, the better. It acts as both a deterrent to competitors and to attract cows. The smaller bulls are often left on the fringes or they patrol back and forth in the sea, constantly on guard about the opportunity to present themselves. They patrol and then to test the king's harem reaction. Most often, a terrifying roar is enough for the newcomer make a quick retreat.

"When it comes to a fight, they face each other, trying to bite through the rival's thick leathery skin. But that's easier said than done to penetrate the thick layer of blubber. The match will be a clean power war, where the two banging each other the best they can. The stronger will land a bite, blood flows and the intruder realises it's over and swims into the sea."

With males over 20 feet (6 metres) long and weighing up to 4 tons (8,800 pounds, 4,000 kgs), Southern elephants are the largest of all seals. Males can weigh eight to ten times as much as

females. They get their name from their trunklike infla... For more information visit http://www.rexfeatures.com/stacklink/IJYGRRRL
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