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## Hooker's sea lions in southern New Zealand

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The discovery at Stewart Island of a hauling-out ground regularly used by Hooker's sea lions (*Phocarcctos hookeri*) is described, and recent sightings of sea lions in southern New Zealand are reported. An attempted copulation between a male Hooker's sea lion and a dead female fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) is also described.

### INTRODUCTION

Hooker's sea lion (*Phocarcctos hookeri*) is endemic to the New Zealand region, but there is no precise account of either its geographical range or its numbers. The main breeding grounds are on the Auckland Islands (Gaskin 1972). Sea lions also haul out, and pups are occasionally seen, on Campbell Island and The Snares (Bailey & Sorensen 1962, Crawley & Cameron 1972), and they occasionally visit Macquarie Island (Csordas 1963). Sea lions were numerous in Port Pegasus, Stewart Island, early last century (Shepherd 1940), but this century only stragglers have been recorded on Stewart Island and elsewhere in southern New Zealand (Gaskin 1972).

This paper reports the discovery of a small Hooker's sea lion hauling-out ground (non-breeding area) at Stewart Island, lists recent sightings of male sea lions on Stewart Island and in Otago and Southland, and describes an attempted copulation between a male Hooker's sea lion and a dead female New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*).

All observations reported here were made between November 1971 and December 1974, either during a study of the distribution and abundance of the New Zealand fur seal (Wilson 1974) or during two expeditions to Port Pegasus, during which a search was made for sea lions throughout Port Pegasus and along the coast between Port Pegasus and South West Cape.

### SIGHTINGS OF SEA LIONS

#### SMALL CRAFT RETREAT, PORT PEGASUS

In February 1974 I discovered a sea lion hauling-out ground in Small Craft Retreat, near Port Pegasus, Stewart Island (Fig. 1). This is the only recorded locality on the New Zealand 'mainland' where sea lions regularly haul out. The main haul-out area is on a small, sandy beach just inside the inlet, and is sheltered from winds and seas by nearby Ernest Island. This beach was visited on 3 February 1974

(4 sea lions seen), 6 February 1974 (1), 4 December 1974 (2), and 14 December 1974 (2). The grass and sedges bordering the beach had been flattened by sea lions, tracks extended into the adjacent bush, and sea lion faeces were found throughout this disturbed area.

On 3 February 1974, five other sea lions were seen at the end of the inlet furthest from the sea. Here, the forest extends to the high water line and the sea lions were scattered through about 0.5 ha of it. Although none were seen in this area on other visits, sea lion faeces and trampled vegetation betrayed their presence. Three sea lion skeletons were found elsewhere in Small Craft Retreat, and on 3 December 1974 one sea lion was seen on a sandy beach on Ernest Island.

One of the sea lions seen on 3 February 1974 was an adult male, but all other sightings were of subadult males. They were not as aggressive as sea lions encountered on The Snares and the Auckland Islands. Most entered the water as we went ashore; these usually remained close by, and frequently approached within a few metres of our boat.

Sea lions were numerous in Port Pegasus in 1826 (Shepherd 1940), and his description clearly distinguishes them from fur seals. Virtually the entire coast of Port Pegasus was searched in February and December 1974, but the only sign of sea lions was an area of flattened sedge on a point in Islet Cove.

#### OTHER SIGHTINGS

Sea lions were seen at three other localities around Stewart Island (Fig. 1). I saw a large male at Puwai Bay, Big South Cape Island, on 16 November 1971, and an adult male on Bunkers Islets on 24 January 1973. In August 1973, R. H. Traill (pers. comm.) saw a sea lion on Native Island, in the entrance to Paterson Inlet.

I saw sea lions at Cape Saunders, Otago Peninsula, on 23 February 1972 (2 males) and 3 May 1972 (1 male). Recently sea lions have been seen several

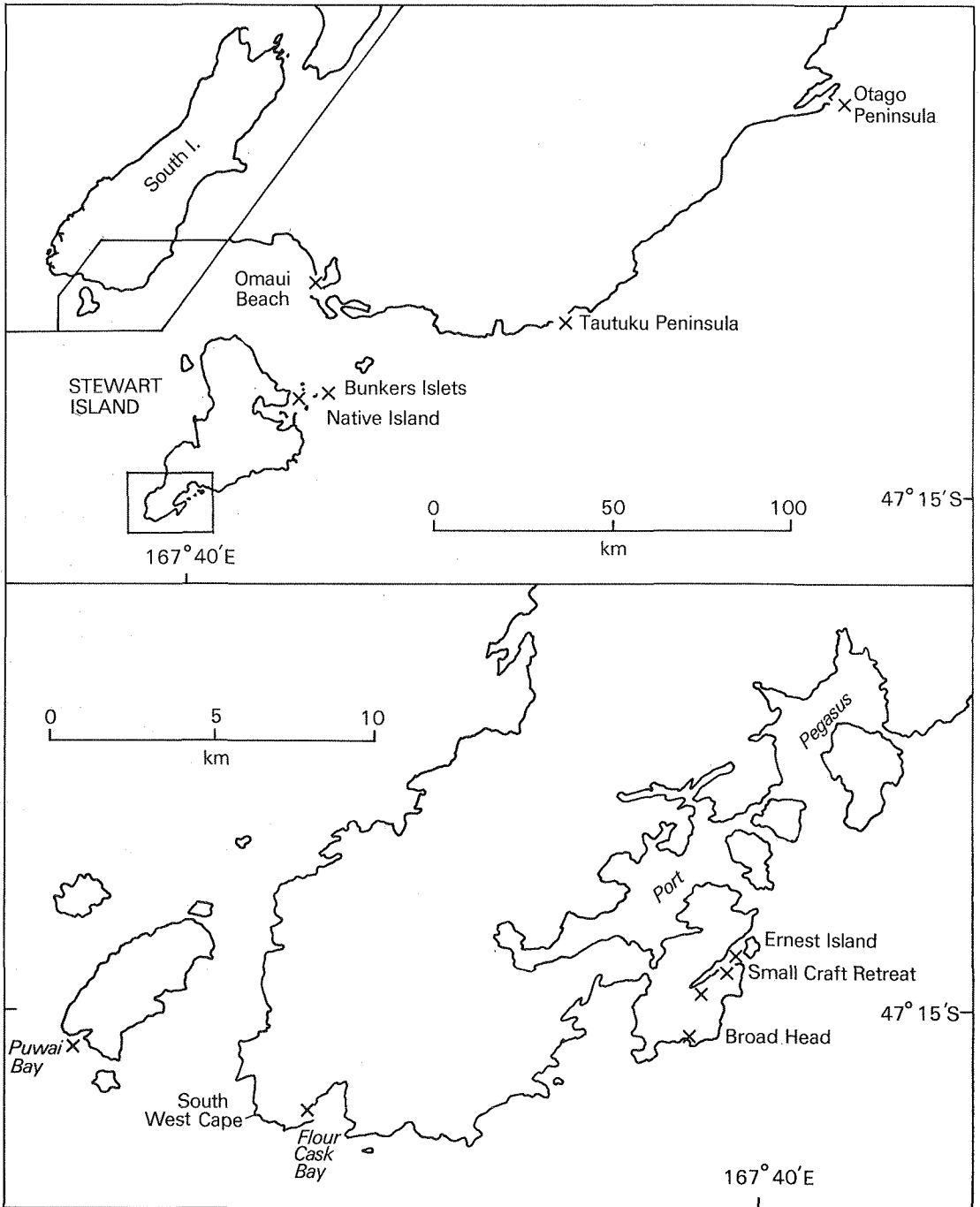


Fig. 1. Locations of sightings of Hooker's sea lions in southern New Zealand, Nov 1971–Dec 1974.

times each year at various places around Otago Peninsula, mostly on sandy beaches (A. Wright, pers. comm.). A small sea lion came ashore at Omaui Beach, Southland (*Southland Times*, 13 Jan 1972, p. 5), and one was seen at Tautuku Peninsula, Otago, in December 1973 (C. H. Hay pers. comm.).

Since this paper was submitted for publication, further sightings of Hooker's sea lions have been made on Stewart Island. Visits were made to the sea lion colony at Small Craft Retreat on 23 and 25 February, and 2 March 1979. Flour Cask Bay, near South West Cape, was visited on 5 March 1979 to investigate reports of sea lions hauling out there.

On the three visits to Small Craft Retreat, 27 sightings of sea lions were made (all males, 8 adults and 19 subadults) but the most individuals seen on any one day was 15. On 23 February 1979 only the beach was visited and four subadults were seen. Fifteen sea lions were seen on 25 February; of these 1 adult and 1 subadult were on the beach, 3 adults and 8 subadults were scattered through about 1 ha of forest at the far end of the inlet, and 1 adult and 1 subadult were hauled out elsewhere on the shores of the inlet. On 2 March, 8 sea lions were seen, 1 adult and 2 subadults on the beach, 2 adults and 2 subadults in the forest and 1 subadult on a low-lying point.

Sea lions were seen on the sandy beach at Ernest Island on most days between 23 February and 6 March 1979. Usually only one animal was seen, but on one day four were present. Except for one yearling male, all sightings were of subadult males. None were ashore for more than a few hours.

Recently, fishermen have seen sea lions on a stony beach in Flour Cask Bay. This beach was visited on 5 March 1979; no sea lions were seen, although sedges bordering the beach had been flattened and sea lion faeces were found. Sea lions have also been sighted on a small beach near Broad Head (M. Schofield pers. comm.).

**ATTEMPTED COPULATION WITH A FUR SEAL**  
An adult male sea lion was observed attempting to copulate with a dead female fur seal on Bunkers Islets on 24 January 1973. When first observed they

were lying in bodily contact. The sea lion sat up momentarily and gently nudged the fur seal several times. A few minutes later he mounted the fur seal and made several pelvic thrusts, at the same time gently nudging her head and neck with his mouth and biting her neck. After about 10 min he became disturbed by my presence, picked up the fur seal by the back of the neck, and entered the water. He swam slowly out to sea holding the fur seal under water.

The fur seal had possibly been killed during an earlier attempt at copulation. This beach had been visited earlier in the day, and though several live female fur seals were present no dead seals were found. The sea lion was not present, but an adult male was seen earlier in the day on another islet 200 m away.

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