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NEW ZEALAND FUR SEALS AT THREE KINGS ISLANDS (NOTE)

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ABSTRACT

Since 1967, New Zealand fur seals (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) have been seen in winter on Three Kings Islands (34°10'S, 172°08'E) in increasing numbers, up to 80 in 1969. Approximately 130 were also seen on Motupia Island (34°37'S, 172°48'E) in 1969.

INTRODUCTION

Turbott (1952) and King (1964) restrict the distribution of the New Zealand fur seal, *Arctocephalus forsteri*, to portions of the South Island coast, Chatham Islands, and the Subantarctic Islands south of New Zealand. However, colonies of wintering seals are also known to occur at Cape Terawhiti, Sinclair Head, Turakirae Head, Cape Palliser, and the Sugar Loaf Islands at New Plymouth. Two seals have been seen on Gannet Island near Kawhia Harbour (Young 1971).

OCCURRENCES

In October 1968, Mr R. J. Jose, the Harbourmaster at Whangaroa Harbour, who was fishing commercially around the Three Kings Islands (34° 10' S, 172° 08' E), reported the existence of a seal colony there.

On 14 October 1968, m.v. *Taranui* circled Great Island, but no seals were sighted. About midday, Mr Jose took the writer in his launch to the westernmost of the Princes Islands, where 20 seals were counted. These consisted of two bulls, one young seal about 1 m long, and the rest cows or young bulls.

The seals were on the SE side of the island, hauled out on a large area of moderately sloping rock. Although a landing was not possible because of a heavy swell, the weather was fine and the launch was able to approach the island closely, enabling the whole of the island to be inspected and an accurate count to be made.

Reports from local fishermen indicate that the seals were first seen at the Three Kings Islands in December 1967. In 1968 there were up to 30, and in 1969 there were 70-80 seals. The seals arrived in June or July and usually departed in October. A large colony exists on Motupia Island off Ninety Mile Beach, 130 seals being counted there in the winter of 1969 (Mr R. J. Jose, pers. comm.).

These continued sightings indicate that the once depleted New Zealand fur seal may be substantially extending its range northward from that recorded by Turbott (1952).

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