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LEATHERY TURTLE (REPTILIA: CHELONIA) IN FOVEAUX STRAIT (NOTE)

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ABSTRACT

Further records of the leathery turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea* (Linnaeus), augment earlier records and perhaps indicate that this species may be a regular visitor.

INTRODUCTION

McCann (1966b) lists records of turtles and sea-snakes in New Zealand waters. He records nine North Island localities at which leathery turtles were either photographed or collected and suggests that it is possible that this turtle is more frequently in the New Zealand area than has been recorded. In an earlier paper (McCann 1966a), he lists the leathery turtle as an occasional straggler into New Zealand waters, most frequently seen in northern waters, but also recorded as far south as Otago and Foveaux Strait. He does not include these or any other records of leathery turtles from the South Island in his larger, second paper (1966b).

The Otago record probably refers to a leathery turtle at present in the Otago Museum. This turtle was foul-hooked by an angler at the mouth of the Waitaki River on 10 January 1959, measured 6 ft (1.85 m) long, and weighed 800 lb (375 kg) (J. T. Darby, pers. comm.).

McCann's (1966a) Foveaux Strait record possibly refers to a record of an unidentified turtle seen in Foveaux Strait and noted at a meeting of the Wellington Philosophical Society in 1885 (Hector 1886).

FURTHER RECORDS

The present note lists further recent records of the leathery turtle in southern New Zealand waters.

On 20 February 1970, the crew of the Bluff oyster-boat *Bargara* (skipper K. Roderique) saw a turtle off Saddle Point in Foveaux Strait. The crew volunteered the information that the turtle had several longitudinal ridges but no plates on its dorsal surface, that its overall colour was grey, and that it was about 7 ft long. This information led to its firm identification as a leathery turtle.

The sighting of a turtle in Foveaux Strait in the 1969–70 summer would usually be linked with the exceptionally warm summer. However, the crew of the vessel maintained that they saw a similar turtle at the same position in early 1969.

A large leathery turtle was also sighted by Mr G. L. Brian and Mr R. Langford off Cape Palliser on 12 December 1969. They observed the turtle for some time, and their description of the leathery, grey skin and longitudinal ridges on the back confirmed its identity.

On p. 30 of the *New Zealand Weekly News No. 5502* of 12 May 1969 is a photograph of a leathery turtle washed ashore at Gillespie's Beach, South Westland. This turtle was 6 ft 3 in. (1.9 m) long.

These observations and McCann's (1966a and b) data indicate that the leathery turtle may be a regular visitor to New Zealand waters. It is certainly the most frequently recorded New Zealand turtle.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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