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Leopard seals at The Snares islands, New Zealand*

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On 23 November 1976 we found a 270-cm-long leopard seal, *Hydrurga leptonyx* (de Blainville), resting on rocks 4 m from a 20×30-m pool in Seal Cove, on the east side of Main Island, The Snares.

Regurgitated remains of a Snares crested penguin, *Eudyptes robustus* Oliver, beside the seal included feathers, skin, and the upper portion of a female's bill. The seal defaecated while we photographed it; the faeces contained tapeworms, *Diphyllobothrium quadratum* (Linstow), and remains of a female crested penguin.

Two Hooker's sea lions, *Phocarctos hookeri* (Gray), approached the seal when it entered the pool, but retreated when it turned sharply towards them. After remaining undisturbed for several minutes, the seal was again approached by a sea lion. The two slowly circled each other about 3 m apart under water; the leopard seal, with its head turned towards the sea lion, opened its mouth and made grunting sounds. The sea lion moved away, then reapproached by swimming towards the hind flippers of the seal. By swimming in tight circles with sudden



Fig. 1. Leopard seal and Hooker's sea lions. Seal Cove pool, The Snares, Nov. 1976.

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bursts of speed the seal avoided the sea lion. This chase continued briefly, with occasional more vigorous pursuit around the pool. At one point the seal turned very sharply, mouth open, to attack the sea lion's flank. No contact between the animals was observed, but the sea lion retreated.

The leopard seal slowly swam towards the rock barrier between the pool and the sea, and hauled out close to three male sea lions. No physical encounter occurred, but the seal periodically made a gaping display (Fig. 1) accompanied by rumbling growls.

Later, after entering the sea, the leopard seal passed within 3 m of a basking New Zealand fur seal, *Arctocephalus forsteri* (Lesson), which immediately dived deeply. This reaction is normally seen when Hooker's sea lions closely approach fur seals

in the water.

Two different leopard seals, both 220–250 cm long, were seen during the 1971–1973 University of Canterbury Snares Islands Castaway Expedition. One was at North Arm Beach at the mouth of Penguin Creek in June 1972, the other in Station Cove in August 1972. A 200-cm leopard seal was observed resting on supralittoral rocks in Boat Harbour on 12–13 January 1977.

This appears to be the first published record of leopard seals at The Snares.

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