

Fur Seal Survey

New Zealand fur seals used to be widespread around the New Zealand coast in pre-human times, but by the early 19th century they were almost extinct on the mainland. Since then they have been gradually increasing in numbers, and over the past 30 years or so they have started to recolonise Auckland and Northland. Initially there were just young individuals and males around the coast, but more recently there has been evidence that they are breeding around the northern North Island.

I am doing a preliminary survey of fur seals as part of my studies at Otago University. At the moment we really don't know enough about the numbers of fur seals, and where they are congregating. We need this information for a number of reasons:

- Fur seals are a protected species under the Marine Mammals Act, 1978, but we need to know more about where they are to determine how best to protect them.
- Fur seals can get caught in fishing nets, and they can also damage fishing gear and remove fish from nets. Knowing where fur seals are helps to manage the conflict between fisheries and fur seals.
- Sometimes DOC approves permitted facilities (e.g. Auckland Zoo) to attempt to rehabilitate sick or injured marine mammals. To ensure the success of a rerelease it is vital to have an appropriate place to release to.

If you have seen fur seals in the Hauraki Gulf or in Northland, please let me know the locations, dates and times as accurately as possible. If you have time, I'd be happy to phone you to discuss the sightings. Any photos of fur seals would be extremely valuable, especially if you can tell me where and when they were taken.

Remember if you do see fur seals it is a legal requirement to stay at least 20 m away from them. Even if you are more than 20 m away, but you notice the fur seal's behaviour changes (for example if it goes from lying down to sitting up and looking at you) then you are probably too close and should retreat.

Have a great summer on the water and stay safe!

Thank you very much,

Diana Galbraith

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