

Notes on New Zealand mammals 2. New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) pups at Turakirae Head, North Island

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On 20 April 2004 I observed a single seal pup at the Turakirae Head seal colony (41°26.4'S, 174°55.3'E). It remained in close proximity to an adult female seal. The relationship between the two is not known, although when I approached the pup, the female became agitated and displayed an aggressive posture.

Subsequently, on a return visit to the site (15 June 2004) four seal pups were observed. All the pups stayed close together, with several adult female and juvenile seals in the immediate vicinity. The pups were observed in or near to rock pools, and several were engaged in "practice" swimming, a behaviour commonly observed at fur seal rookeries.

Keywords New Zealand fur seal; rookery; *Arctocephalus forster*

Turakirae Head has some habitat characteristics similar to those of the nearby established North Island rookeries at Cape Palliser and Honeycomb lighthouse, including complex rocky structures that provide shelter from heat, storms and strong wave action, and rock pool areas that provide "nursery grounds" for pups. Turakirae Head is also close to the abundant and reliable food resources of the Cook Strait Canyon. It might be expected that, as seal populations continue to recover, Turakirae Head might sometime soon make the transition from a temporary winter haul-out, of mainly adult males, to an immature colony occupied by males, immature animals (of both sexes) and non-breeding females, and eventually into a rookery. The presence of young pups early in the calendar year is usually taken as a reason to classify a colony as a rookery. Therefore, seal activity at Turakirae Head has been monitored on and off since the 1970s, and these sightings were made in the course of that programme.

There is no evidence that the pups reported here were born at the site. The four pups seen in June, and even (though less likely) the one seen in April, could all have weaned early and dispersed to Turakirae Head from elsewhere. On the other hand, these initial observations at least suggest that the colony at Turakirae Head warrants further monitoring, especially over the next breeding season.

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