

New Zealand's seals: what's the difference?

New Zealand sea lions

- Males: 350–500 kg; brown/black.
- Females: 100–160 kg; cream/silver.
- Blunt nose, short whiskers.
- Found on sandy beaches and surrounds.



Male (left) and female (right) sea lions
Photo: Rod Morris

New Zealand fur seals

- Males: 90–150 kg; dark brown.
- Females: 30–50 kg; dark brown.
- Pointy nose, long whiskers.
- Found on rocky coastlines.



Sub-adult male sea lion
Photo: Karen Baird



Fur seal adult and pup
Photo: Rod Morris

How can you help NZ sea lions?

Sea lions are charismatic animals and people are encouraged to stop and take the time to enjoy them. However, they are wild animals and can be unpredictable. By following the simple guidelines below, you can enjoy your sea lion encounter without compromising your safety or that of the animals:

1. Always stay at least 10 m from seals and sea lions. Allow them more space if they are active, and be prepared to move away calmly.
2. Do not disturb seals and sea lions. Don't make loud noises or throw objects in their vicinity.
3. Keep dogs and children under control around seals and sea lions.
4. Never attempt to handle seals or sea lions as they can be aggressive and often carry diseases.
5. Do not drive vehicles any closer than 50 m from seals or sea lions.
6. Do not feed seals or sea lions.
7. If you are concerned about the safety of a seal, please contact the Department of Conservation immediately on 0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468).

Your effort to learn and share what you know about New Zealand sea lions will help facilitate their recovery.

Further information can be found on the DOC website www.doc.govt.nz

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Cover: Sea lion pup. Photo: Louise Chilvers

Published by and copies available from:
Aquatic and Threats Unit
Department of Conservation
PO Box 10-420, Wellington, New Zealand
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New Zealand Government

New Zealand sea lions

Living together on the mainland



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

New Zealand sea lions

- Found only in New Zealand.
- One of the rarest seals in the world, with total population $\leq 10\,000$; their numbers appear to be declining.
- Breeding mostly restricted to NZ sub-Antarctic, although a slow return to mainland NZ is now occurring.



Photo: Louise Chilvers

Threats

- Drowning in trawl fisheries.
- Disease.
- Human disturbance.



Photo: Louise Chilvers

Sea lion ecology

- Sea lions eat a wide variety of prey species, few of which are important for commercial or recreational fishing.
- Sea lions can travel up to 175 km from the coast to feed, and dive up to 600 m in depth.
- Sea lions come ashore to rest and breed. Some of them, especially mothers and young pups, may travel well inland.
- Females give birth to a single pup every 1 or 2 years. Pups are born in December or January each year.
- For the first year of their lives pups are dependent on their mothers for milk and protection. While mothers are at sea feeding, pups are alone. This is natural, but they are particularly vulnerable to disturbance during these periods, so please keep your distance.



Pup in rata forest
Photo: Louise Chilvers

Sea lion behaviour

- Sea lions are generally quite confident around people. Their responses to people vary; they may completely ignore you if they are resting, or during more active periods they may chase people and dogs that approach too closely.
- Sea lions are often perceived to be quite playful in the water. This 'play' can sometimes become boisterous, and people diving or swimming in the vicinity of sea lions should be observant and be prepared to move away.
- Sea lions are often seen with flies buzzing around their eyes and covered in sand. Sea lions flick sand onto themselves to keep cool, and the flies are attracted to the moisture (which looks like tears) around their eyes.
- It is normal for sea lions to cough, sneeze and vomit. Seals and sea lions vomit to get rid of undigested food, such as fish bone fragments.

Return to mainland NZ

- Archaeological evidence indicates that sea lions were once present all around the NZ coastline.
- Hunting by Polynesian settlers and European sealers led to their near extinction, following which they were absent from the NZ mainland for 200 years.
- NZ sea lions have been protected since 1893, but only started to breed again on mainland NZ in the 1990s.
- A small number of NZ sea lions now breed on the Otago coast. From 1994 to 2009, 40 pups were born.
- Currently, NZ sea lions can be found on the south and southeast coasts of the South Island and at Stewart Island.

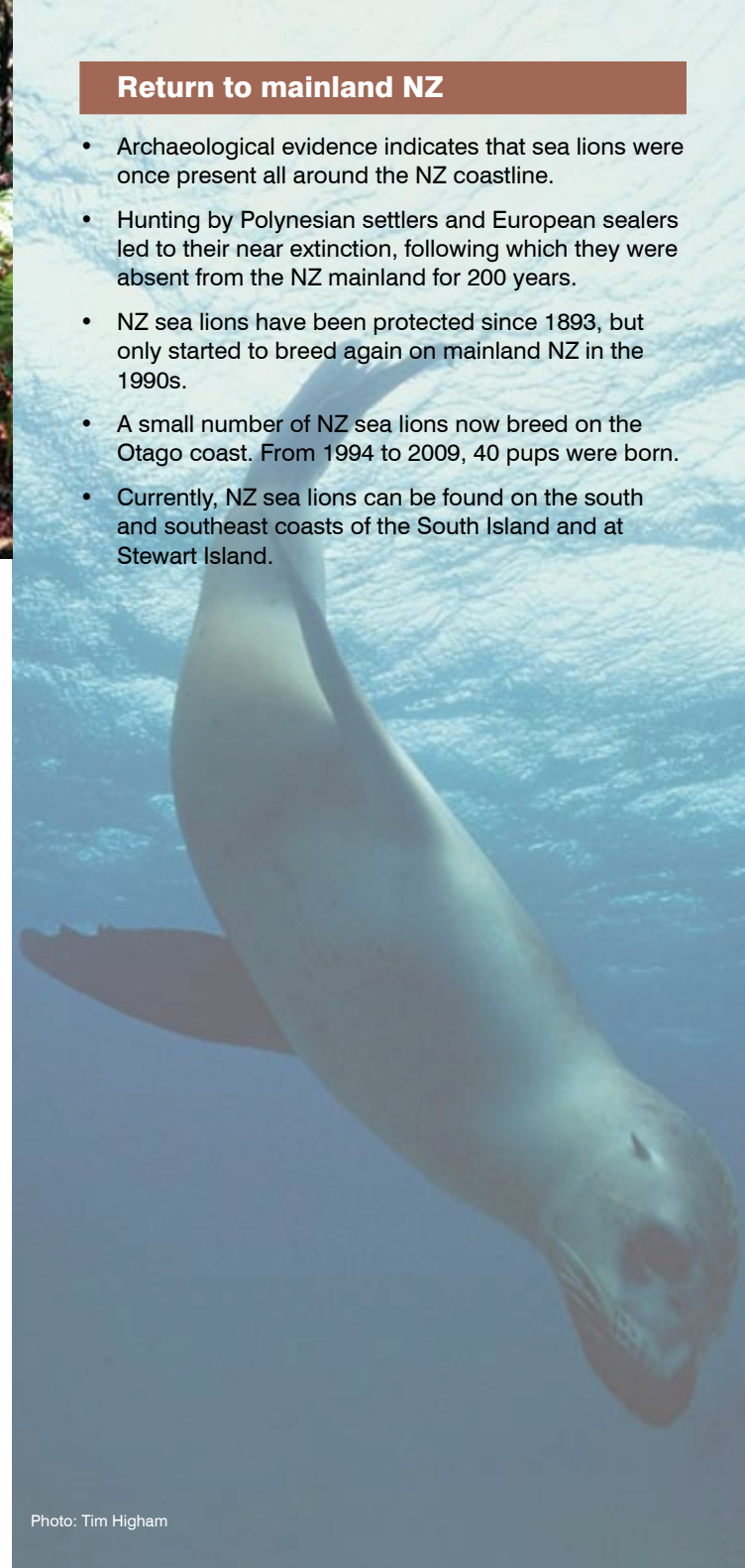


Photo: Tim Higham