

A LEOPARD SEAL FROM HOUT BAY, SOUTH AFRICA

PETER B. BEST

Division of Sea Fisheries, Cape Town

On 14 October 1969 a leopard seal *Hydrurga leptonyx* came ashore alive at Hout Bay, Cape Province (34°03'S, 18°21'E), and was captured in a net for the local zoo. This animal died in captivity on 23 October, when it was found to be a female measuring 89½ inches (2,28 m) in head-body length (Fig. 1). The skin and skeleton are now lodged in the South African Museum (catalogue no. 35796). There had been only one previous record from South Africa, a female 8 feet (2,44 m) long that came ashore alive 14 miles north-east of East London in September 1946 (Courtenay-Latimer 1961).

Leopard seals live in the pack ice around the antarctic continent during summer and autumn, but during winter regularly visit sub-antarctic islands. According to Gwynn (1953), leopard seals arrive at Macquarie Island (54½°S) in May and depart in December, numbers being highest in August. At Heard Island (53°S) the species is present all the year round but is most abundant from July to September. At Kerguelen Island (49°S) the peak density is also from July to September (Paulian 1952), but leopard seals are only seen from May to November. There are a number of limital records from farther north, including Tristan da Cunha, the Cape Horn region of South America, New Zealand, Lord Howe Island, Australia, Amsterdam Island and South Africa (Scheffer 1958). The most northerly record yet is from Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, at 20°45'S (Berry 1961). Nine of the eleven limital records for which I have dates fell in the months August (2), September (3) and October (4), the exceptions being in June and December (Berry 1961, Courtenay-Latimer 1961, Csordas 1963, Ingham 1960, Marlow 1967, Paulian 1957, Serventy 1950 and Wakefield 1962). These records therefore probably represent an extension of the normal winter migration of the species.

The right upper canine of the Hout Bay female was sectioned longitudinally and found to contain a single post-natal dentinal layer 0,9 mm thick, with traces of a translucent layer on its inner border. This seal therefore must have been just over one year old, which is compatible with the pupping season proposed for this species in September and October (Csordas 1963). According to Laws (1957, Fig. 3), female leopard seals are on average 81 inches in total length at one year and 97 inches at two years: his data for first and second year females, however, was mainly collected in July (three out of four animals). The total length of the upper canine (71 mm) agrees closely with Laws' (1957, Fig. 6) plot for one year females.

In captivity this seal proved to have interesting feeding habits. It caught and ate a juvenile black-backed gull *Larus dominicanus* that settled on the pool, leaving behind as evidence most of the feathers and the neatly fleshed skeleton. Whole, skinned chickens presented to the seal, however, were swallowed whole. Dead stockfish *Merluccius capensis* below about 30 cm in total length were also swallowed whole, but larger specimens were fleshed by repeated shaking until only the neatly cleaned head and vertebral column were left. The seal was finally induced to feed on the leg of an ox tied underwater. Large pieces of raw flesh



FIGURE 1

Leopard seal from Hout Bay. Dorsal view of (a) head and (b) back, and ventro-lateral view of (c) anterior, (d) middle, and (e) posterior portions of body.

were torn from this and swallowed at the surface. Up to 35 lb. (15.9 kg) of food was taken in a single day.

The seal was found to be heavily parasitised at a post mortem examination (made in the author's absence). Scattered throughout the lungs were many ill-defined pale areas about 5 mm in diameter: on histological examination these proved to be small nematodes *Parafilaroides* sp. (apparently different to *P. hydrurgae*) packed in the smaller bronchi and air spaces. There was a complete lack of an inflammatory response from the lung parenchyma to these parasites. Numerous nematodes *Contraecum* sp. (close to *C. osculatum*) were also found in the stomach, and the intestine was packed with the cestodes *Diphyllobothrium wilsoni*.

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