

SPECIES MANAGEMENT PROFILE

Arctocephalus forsteri New Zealand Fur Seal

Group: Chordata (vertebrates), Mammalia (mammals), Carnivora (Carnivores), Otariidae (Eared seals)

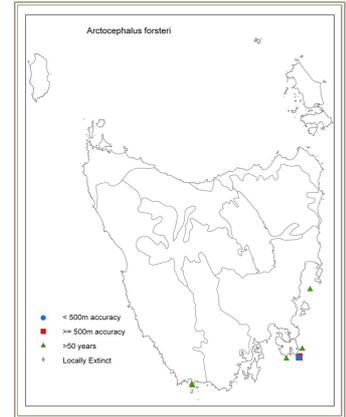
Status: *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*: rare
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999: Not listed

Endemic: Found in Tasmania and elsewhere

Status:



The New Zealand Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) is a large, thick-bodied seal up to 2 m in length and 200 kg in weight. This species was only discovered breeding again in Tasmania in the 1980s after being wiped out by sealing activities in the 1800s. They appear to be recovering well, however numbers remain significantly below pre-harvest levels. In Tasmania, the species breeds annually at established breeding colonies on the southern coast, with pups born November-January and weaned at 4-6 months. The main contemporary threats to New Zealand Fur Seals are interactions with fishing operations (including entanglement), disturbance at breeding colonies and haul-outs, direct persecution and climate change.



Key Points

- **Important:** Is this species in your area? Do you need a permit? Ensure you've covered all the issues by checking the Planning Ahead page.
- **Important:** Different threatened species may have different requirements. For any activity you are considering, read the Activity Advice pages for background information and important advice about managing around the needs of multiple threatened species.

Habitat

- 'Habitat' refers to both known habitat for the species (i.e. in or near habitat where the species has been recorded) and potential habitat (i.e. areas of habitat with appropriate characteristics for the species and within the species potential range which have not yet been adequately surveyed).
- If in doubt about whether a site represents potential habitat for this species, contact the Threatened Species Section for further advice.
- The current breeding range of the New Zealand Fur Seal on mainland Tasmania includes the southern coast from Tasman Island to South West Cape, although individuals may haul out anywhere along the coast including the Bass Strait islands. This species also breeds on the Tasmanian-managed sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island.
- New Zealand Fur Seals are concentrated at breeding colonies during the November to March breeding season, and are more spread out at other haul-out sites during the rest of the year. The largest breeding colonies occur at Flat Witch, Maatsuyker and Tasman Islands.
- The species can occur in large numbers at non-breeding haul-out sites including Taillefer Rocks, Cape Raoul, Cape Pillar, Wendar Island and Niblin Point, with occasional pupping recorded at several of these sites.
- New Zealand Fur Seals commonly haul-out amongst Australian Fur Seals, but breeding colonies are typically separate.
- New Zealand Fur Seal breeding colonies are typically found in structurally complex rocky habitat, where jumbled boulders provide protection to pups and lactating females. In contrast, Australian Fur Seals prefer flatter rocky shelves.
- Interactions with aquaculture industry are frequent in south-east Tasmania.

What to Avoid

- Entanglement with fishing or aquaculture gear
- Vessels approaching close to breeding colonies and haul outs
- Landing at colonies or haul outs.
- Low flying aircraft over breeding colonies, particularly during the breeding season
- Disposal or loss of rubbish, fishing gear or other waste into the ocean
- Sudden loud underwater noise
- Deliberately feeding seals, including offal discharge when fishing while seals are present
- Pollutant run-off into the ocean

Surveying

Key	Survey reliability more info
M	Peak survey period

To ensure you follow the law - check whether your survey requires a permit. Always report any new records to the Natural Values Atlas, or send the information direct to

M	Potential survey period
M	Non-survey period

the Threatened Species Section. Refer to the Activity Advice: Surveying page for background information.

<i>Arctocephalus forsteri</i>	Spring			Summer				Autumn				Winter												
New Zealand Fur Seal	S	S	O	O	N	N	D	D	J	J	F	F	M	M	A	A	M	M	J	J	J	J	A	A

- Breeding colonies and well-used haul-out sites are obvious due to the large amount of seal activity and vocalisation.
- New Zealand Fur Seals are difficult to distinguish from Australian Fur Seals. Look for more pointed muzzle, olive tint to fur, long white whiskers and shrill vocalisation. Both species may haul-out together.
- Males are significantly larger and heavier than females. Pups are black until their first moult.
- New Zealand Fur Seals hauled-out on beaches or away from normal haul-out sites may be injured or sick and are vulnerable to disturbance.
- DPIPWE monitors all known established and emerging breeding colonies at least bi-annually.

Helping the species

- Learn to identify the New Zealand Fur Seal so as to recognise the species if it occurs in your area, particularly in distinguishing from the similar Australian Fur Seal. This can be very difficult and it is recommended that expert assistance with identification is sought if in doubt.
- **Report any observations of sick, injured or entangled seals directly to the Marine Mammal Hotline (0427 942 537). This will help facilitate a rapid response from DPIPWE marine specialists.**
- Consider the needs of the whole habitat. Preserving a threatened species' habitat is the best way to manage both the species and the environment in which it lives.

Recreation

- During recreational boating, avoid disturbance of seals at breeding colonies and haul-out sites by not approaching closer than 50 m.
- Do not attempt to land at breeding colonies or haul-out sites. Disturbed seals may panic and stampede, crushing small animals and pups in the rush to reach the ocean.

Commercial Fishing Activities

- During commercial fishing operations, avoid disturbance of seals at breeding colonies and haul-out sites by not approaching closer than 50 m.
- Do not attempt to land at breeding colonies or haul-out sites. Disturbed seals may panic and stampede, crushing small animals and pups in the rush to reach the ocean.
- To avoid seals becoming entangled in fishing gear - take care to ensure that no fishing gear is lost or discarded into the ocean.
- Collect any abandoned/lost or cut pot lines, rope or fishing gear.

Further information

Check also for listing statement or notesheet pdf above (below the species image).

Cite as: Threatened Species Section (2025). *New Zealand Fur Seal (Arctocephalus forsteri): Species Management Profile for Tasmania's Threatened Species Link*. <https://www.threatenedspecieslink.tas.gov.au/Pages/New-Zealand-Fur-Seal.aspx> Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. Accessed on 16/10/2025.

Contact details: Threatened Species Section, Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, GPO Box 44, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 7001. Phone (1300 368 550).

Permit: A permit is required under the Tasmanian *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995* to 'take' (which includes kill, injure, catch, damage, destroy and collect), keep, trade in or process any specimen or products of a listed species. Additional permits may also be required under other Acts or regulations to take, disturb or interfere with any form of wildlife or its products, (e.g. dens, nests, bones). This may also depend on the tenure of the land and other agreements relating to its management.