

# Fur seals

## ?! What the...?!

While very skilled navigators underwater, Fur seals can sometimes get disorientated on land, and can turn up in some very strange places. Such places can include drains, inland waterways, streets and even private backyards.

## Stat attack

After being hunted to the brink of extinction, Fur seals were finally granted full protection in 1894. Although Fur seal numbers have recovered to at least 50,000, it is estimated that this is still only 15% of the total population as it was before the arrival of humans.

## Hey guess what?

Fur seals sometimes look like they are crying. In actual fact, seals do not have tear ducts – their weepy eyes are caused by normal moisture secretions, which keep their eyes wet.

## Linnaeus says...

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Mammalia  
Order: Carnivora  
Family: Otariidae  
Genus: *Arctocephalus*  
Species: *A. forsteri*

Whether basking on a sun-baked rock, frolicking in a rock pool or swimming and diving in the open sea, Fur seals (kekeno) are a familiar sight along Otago's rocky coastlines.

All but wiped out by European sealers in the 1790s, the total population has now recovered to at least 50,000 and the Fur seal is by far the most common seal species living in New Zealand waters today. It has successfully re-established breeding colonies and haul-out (rest) sites around the South Island and bottom of the North Island. Recent studies have shown that numbers are increasing.

Fur seals can be easily identified by their pointy noses, long whiskers and thick, dark brown fur. They are members of the otariid family of seals, which means they possess external earflaps, which means they possess external earflaps and can use all four flippers to move about on land. They prey on fish, squid, octopus and crustacea such as krill, and often make dives of up to 200m in depth and one to two minutes duration.

A typically small species, reaching a maximum weight of 200kg, Fur seals are generally afraid of people and easily disturbed. Territorial males may become aggressive when provoked during the breeding season (late October-mid January). Fur seals are gregarious creatures, and like to 'socialise' at breeding colonies or haul-out sites. They prefer rocky beaches, with plenty of crevices and tidal rock pools, in which to keep cool. Although common right around the Otago coast, some of the best places to spot Fur seals are on the Otago Peninsula.



Female Fur seal and pup



A male Fur seal opens wide

