

## Cape Fur Seals preying on seabirds

The Cape Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus* was described as a predator of the Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus* by Cooper (1974) who observed such behaviour at Dassen Island and reviewed similar observations by other authors.

On 21 January 1977 I observed a bull seal killing two penguins at House Bay on Possession Island (27 01S, 15 12E). The headman informed me that he occasionally saw large seals taking penguins.

During a parliamentary enquiry into the running of the Government Guano Islands and the sealing industry in 1906 and 1907 (Cape of Good Hope 1907), the chairman (Mr J. Searle, M.L.A.) asked several witnesses if they knew of seals destroying seabirds. The skipper of the Guano Islands vessel "Seabird" and the headmen from Sinclair, Possession, Halifax and Ichaboe Islands all knew of seals killing penguins. Two of the headmen (from Sinclair and Ichaboe) specified that it occurred at Possession Island (where there was no seal colony) rather than at their island.

The headman from Possession had also seen "seals taking malgas (*Sula capensis*) but very rarely" (p.231). A witness who netted seals near Robbesteen (E. Wearin) claimed to have "seen seals seizing duikers (*Phalacrocorax* sp.)" (p.160).

It is interesting to note that most of the observations of seals taking penguins occurred at islands with the larger penguin colonies (namely Dyer (in Rand 1959), Dassen, Possession and Halifax) rather than at seal colonies. This can be attributed, in part, to the presence of observers on the bird islands, whereas the seal islands have no permanent human residents.

### References

- Cape of Good Hope, Department of Agriculture. 1907. Guano Islands Commission's Report. In Annexures to the votes and proceedings of the House of Assembly, Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, No. 114 of 1907, HA 634, 272 pp.
- Cooper, J. 1974. The predators of the Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*. Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl. 94: 21-24.
- Rand, R.W. 1959. The Cape Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*). Distribution, abundance and feedings habits off the south western coast of the Cape Province. Investl Rep. Div. Fish S. Afr. 34: 1-75.

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