

Letter to the Editor

A Hooded Seal (*Cystophora cristata*) Sighting Along St. Mary's Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada

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On January 23, 2018, our group, the Oceanographic Environmental Research Society (OERS- Comeauville, Nova Scotia), received a call from the Department of Fisheries & Oceans (DFO, Environment Canada - Meteghan Region) to assist with and evaluate the condition of a stranded seal. The seal was approximately 100 m from the shore line of a beach located along St Mary's Bay, Nova Scotia (44.2174° N, 66.1430° W) and, as shown in figure 1, was nestled amongst cast off ship parts and debris of a busy shipyard (A. F. Theriault & Son Ltd.- Meteghan River, Nova Scotia). Concerned with its welfare, the employees had called DFO to prevent the seal from getting injured and see if it required medical care.

Upon arriving at the site, Dr Nesime Askin (OERS Biologist in Residence) & Michael Belanger (OERS Director of Operations) met with a DFO Officer from the Meteghan Region who led them to the seal. This seal was confirmed to be a juvenile male hooded seal (*Cystophora cristata*) which appeared to be well nourished and in a very healthy condition (2). It had the very distinctive pelage (black/blue dorsal and creamy white ventral surfaces) of a non mature hooded seal. It seemed that the young seal had tried to get higher up upon the beach to get away from a violent storm the night before and decided to stay protected amongst the debris of the shipyard. The seal was resting very comfortably and did not appear to be agitated by the nearby movement of the various equipment (tractor, trucks). After 3 hours, the seal tried to move further up into the debris so it was decided to slowly guide the animal back onto the beach closer to the water's edge using herding boards. Once there, the seal willingly returned to the water and swam off.

Although not rare to find hooded seals in the area of St Mary's Bay, Nova Scotia, they are not typically found there in large numbers and this sighting confirms the fact that juveniles do travel significant distances

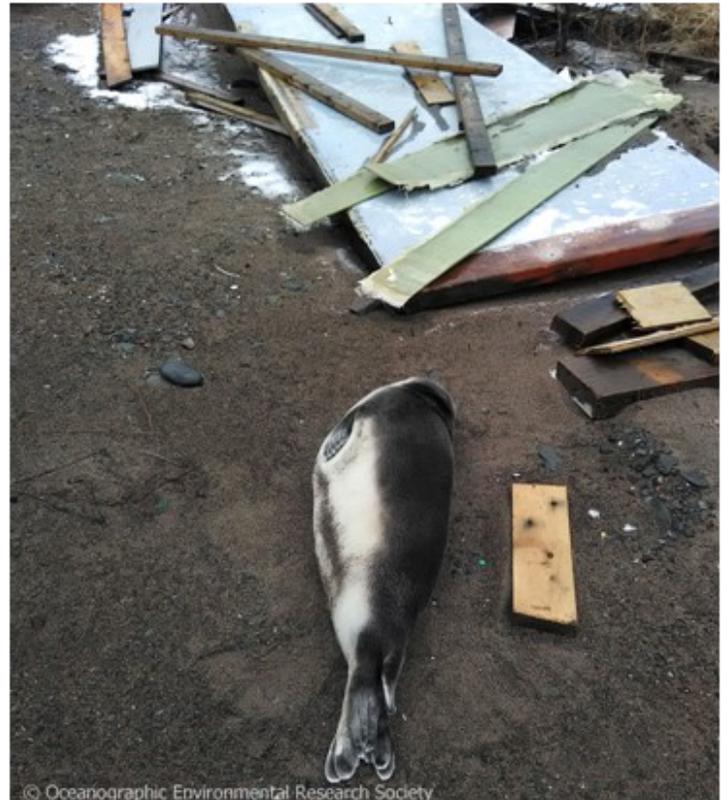


Figure 1: Image showing the colouration of the juvenile hooded seal when it was spotted on shipyard property on January 23, 2018. Pelage is dark dorsal and creamy white ventral typical of juvenile hooded seals. Note that the seal was lying amongst nearby debris on the ground. Photograph reproduced with permission (OERS).

from typical sites where they are normally found (eastern Newfoundland/Greenland coasts) (2). Co-incidentally, a few days later on January 27, 2018, a younger emaciated hooded seal was struck by a car along a highway on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia and after rescue was cared for at Hope For Wildlife Centre until its release (1). This sighting adds further evidence to the wide range of global travel the juveniles of this species undertake.

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