

general ecology, including floral and faunal associations, soil groups and general conditions will be made as opportunity offers.

SEALS

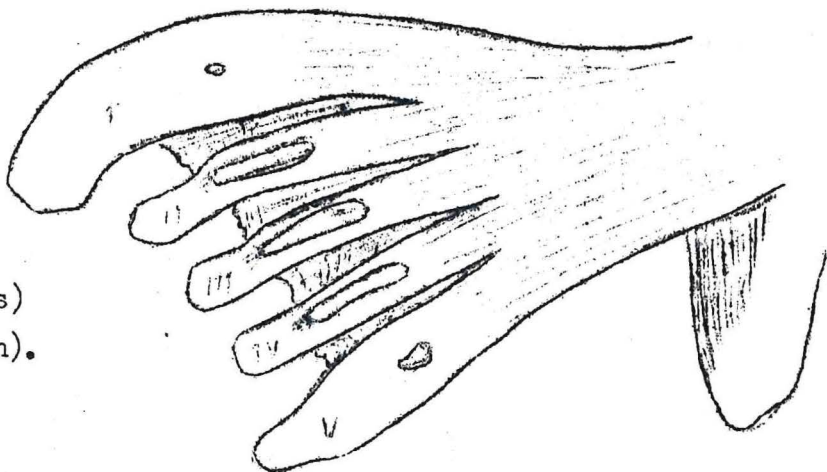
The finding of a baby seal on the rocks near Fish Market Jetty, Fremantle, on December 28 might remind inspectors of the request published in a previous issue of this Bulletin for reports on sightings of seals around our coast. Staff might recall that at the annual conference it was agreed that photographs and diagrams of fur and hair seals would be supplied to all departmental inspectors to assist in the identification of the different species. Photographs have not been obtained but the following information and sketches should be of assistance to inspectors in identifying any seals sighted.

As far as is known, the only seals which are endemic to Western Australian coastal waters are members of the family of eared seals, Otariidae, which includes the hair seals and the fur seals. Untrained observers have long confused fur seals with hair seals due to their similarities in size and colouration.

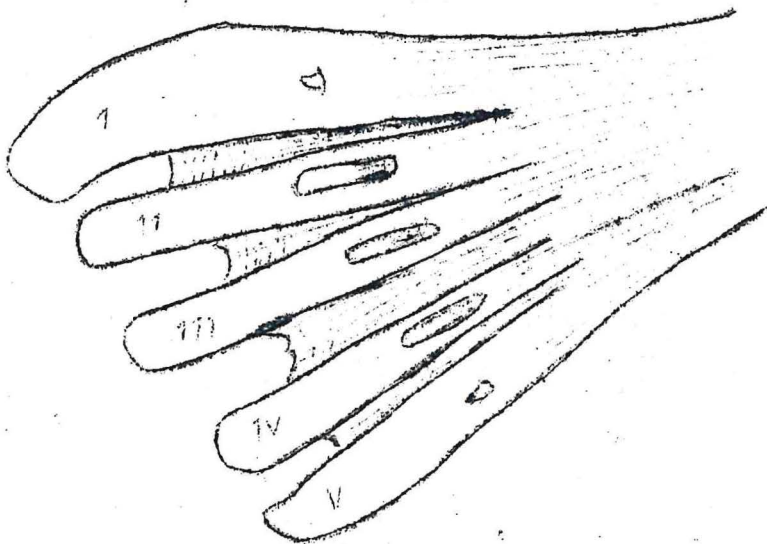
Perhaps the best means of distinguishing between the hair seal and the fur seal, or the 'sea lion' and the 'sea bear', as they are also known, is by the differences in their hind flippers or feet. The first and fifth toes of the hair seal are longer than the second, third and fourth, while the nails reach the free edge of the webbing between toes, as illustrated on page 12. In the fur seal the toes on the hind flippers are all more or less of the same length while the nails are placed very much farther back from the tips of the toes. Both the hair and the fur seal are able to use their hind flippers in moving about on land.

In the family of true seals, Phocidae, two genera occasionally occur in our waters. The true seals can be distinguished from the preceding group by their entire lack of external ears. Additionally, their hind flippers cannot be turned forward and are not used in terrestrial movement. Furthermore, in the water they rise so that just their head protrudes beyond the surface and then they sink backwards. The eared seals, after surfacing, dive forward. The members of the family of true seals which might be encountered in our waters include the Antarctic breeding Weddell's Seal and the Leopard Seal, which ranges over the Southern Ocean generally. The latter may be further distinguished by its elongated body, which gives it a fine appearance, and it is one

Left hind flipper (pes)
of Hair Seal (Sea lion).



Left hind flipper (pes)
of Fur Seal (Sea bear).



(after Wood Jones)

seal whose colouration is of assistance in identification. It has white blotches and black spots over its generally ash-grey body. It is exceedingly agile and ferocious and no attempt to handle it should be made.