

Recoveries of Common Seals *Phoca vitulina* L. tagged along the Norwegian coast

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A total of 296 Common Seals have been tagged along the Norwegian coast in the period from 1978 to 1987. Thirty six of the tagged seals have been recovered. Twenty six during their first year of life. The seals were recovered of a mean distance of 58 km away from the tagging locality. The furthest recovery was 340 km away two months after tagging. It is concluded that the Common Seal is not as sedentary as is often believed. This must be taken into consideration when managing Common Seals.

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INTRODUCTION

As a part of surveys of coastal seals along the Norwegian coast Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus* (Fabricius) and Common Seals *Phoca vitulina* L. have been tagged in order to study migration and verify age determination techniques. The recoveries of Grey Seals have been reviewed by Wiig & Øien (1987).

During the period 1978 to 1987 296 Common Seals *Phoca vitulina* L. have been tagged along the Norwegian coast from Hvaler in Østfold county to Troms county. Recoveries of these seals are reviewed here.

METHODS

The Common Seal pups are caught on land or in the water during the first two weeks of life. The pups are tagged with a yellow plastic tag in the web of the hind flipper. All tags applied have been of the Dalton Jumbo Rototag type and have a serial number and «HAVFORSK-NING BERGEN NORW» imprinted.

A total of 296 pups have been tagged during the 10-year period 1978 to 1987 on the coast from Hvaler to Troms. The main tagging areas are shown in Fig. 1 and the number of attached tags are given in Table 1.

A reward is paid by the Institute of Marine Research for every recovery reported.

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RESULTS

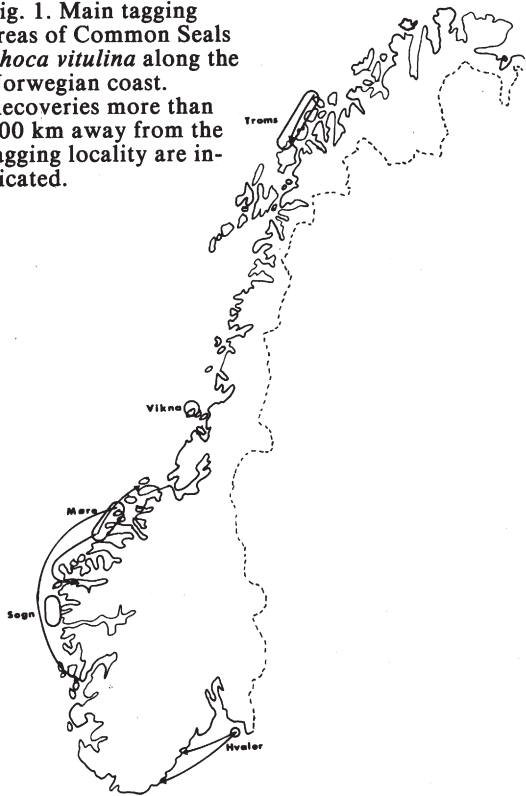
A total of 35 Common Seals (12%) have been recovered. Twenty six of these (72%) were recovered during the first year of life mostly in fishing gears (Table 2). Three seals have been recovered after their second year. These were five and six years of age. The mean distance travelled between tagging and recovery was 58 km. The longest distance travelled was 340 km in two months. Data on those seals recovered more than 100 km from the tagging locality are given in Fig. 1.

The four seals noted as «Found dead» in Table 1 were all found on the shore or in the water without any external injuries. Three of these were tagged at Hvaler and found along the Skagerak coast west of the tagging locality. These may have drifted to the shore by the westerly directed coastal current and cannot be taken as evidence for active migration.

Table 1. Main tagging areas of Common Seal *Phoca vitulina* pups along the Norwegian coast.

Area	Years	Number
Hvaler	1985-1987	74
Sogn	1985-1986	24
Møre	1978-1987	130
Vikna	1981	21
Troms	1987	23
Other areas	1980-1987	44
Total		296

Fig. 1. Main tagging areas of Common Seals *Phoca vitulina* along the Norwegian coast. Recoveries more than 100 km away from the tagging locality are indicated.



DISCUSSION

Common Seals have generally been recorded as sedentary animals. Mark-recapture studies in Great Britain (Bonner & Witthames 1974), as well as in the Wadden Sea (Reijnders *et al.* 1982), have, however, shown that Common Seals are capable of wide dispersal. This is also evident from the present study.

Table 2. Recovery status in relation to age of Common seals *Phoca vitulina* along the Norwegian coast.

	Age						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
No information	2						
Found dead	4						1
Dead in fishing gears	13	3				1	1
Shot	7	3					
Total	26	6				1	2

It is a general pattern among seals that young specimens are notorious dispersers (see Reijnders *et al.* 1982). Most of the Common Seals in the present study were recovered during their first year relatively far away from their place of birth. Wiig & Øien (1987) showed that Grey Seal pups disperse widely from the breeding ground, which also is the situation for the adults. The study of Wiig & Øien (1987) indicated on the other hand, that most of the adult return to breed at the area where they were born. The present study gives no information on this aspect for Norwegian Common Seals. This is also an unsolved problem in other areas (e.g. Boulva & McLaren 1979).

Information from local hunters and fishermen indicates that there is a seasonal migration of Common Seals in several areas along the Norwegian coast. This is a pattern also noted in the Wadden Sea (Reijnders *et al.* 1982) and in Canada (Bigg 1969, Boulva & McLaren 1979).

The relatively few investigations which have been performed on migration in Common Seals indicate that this species is not as sedentary as earlier believed. This is an aspect which must be taken into consideration when management plans are prepared.

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