



national science week 2011

Ben Arthur, Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies *Winter hide outs – the Antarctic Fur Seal*

Seals are big, cuddly and cute. It's almost impossible not to like them. But unfortunately for us, we usually only get to see them when they come to land, or close to it. The truth is though; that a lot of species of seals spend most of their time swimming around the ocean, a long way from land. So, have you ever wondered where they go and what they do during all that time they spend at sea?



Nature and animals have always fascinated me. As a kid I would spend most of my weekends outside, just looking for fun things to do. I always knew I wanted to work with nature. So after finishing college I enrolled in a Bachelor of Science at the University of Tasmania. I studied Botany, Environmental Science, Chemistry and my major, Zoology. I then completed Honours in Zoology, for which I researched beach-nesting shorebirds.



After graduating in 2009, I began working as a research assistant at the Marine Predator Unit at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. The work involved the use of satellite tags to track the movements of Southern Elephant Seals while they are at sea. During the summer of 2009/10, I was lucky enough to spend 6 months on Macquarie Island in the middle of the Southern Ocean researching Elephant Seals. Whilst on the island, our small research crew caught female seals, which we weighed, measured and then attached satellite trackers to before they went to sea for the winter. The satellite tags constantly send information to satellites in the sky which we can download every day, letting us spy on our seals to find out exactly where in the Southern Ocean they are, and what they've been up to!

Since returning to the real world, I have continued to work with seals, and am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Tasmania researching the winter habitat use of Antarctic Fur Seals from various Sub-Antarctic islands, to help us better understand the effects of climate change on marine predators. As a biologist I've been given great opportunities to visit some of the most incredible places, and work closely with some of the world's coolest animals. It's also great to know that the work I am doing has a conservation application, and will hopefully be used to manage and protect not only the seals, but also the entire Southern Ocean ecosystem.

Find out more about Southern Elephant Seal tracking by visiting <http://imos.org.au/ssos.html>
www.youngtassiescientists.com