

Chapter 40

The first aerial survey of Cape Fur Seal numbers at Baia dos Tigres, southern Angola

M.A. Mejer

Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Marine and Coastal Management, Private Bag X2, Rogge Bay 8012, South Africa

The first aerial census of Cape Fur Seal numbers in Angola was conducted on 19 December 2006. The camera team of F. Gombo, M.A. Mëyer and P.G.H. Kotze took off from Namibe at 11h24 in a Partenavia aircraft, the Kuswag VIII, piloted by D. Jordaan and E. Aandrag. On arrival at Baia dos Tigres, filming commenced in a westerly direction from the north-east corner of the island (16°30'S, 11°42'E). The camera used was a canon eos 5D (color digital photographs).

Several groups of seals were present on island, including at the north-east corner (1 group), the north-west corner (1 group), the west flank (11 small groups), and between the south-west and south-east corners (1 long, continuous group). Additionally, small groups of seals were observed on the inside (east side) of the peninsula to the south of the island. At 13h03, the aircraft returned to Namibia. After refuelling, the aircraft took off at 14h02 and flew to Namibia. En route to the Kunene River, the Angolan coast was scanned for the presence of seals, but none were seen.

In total 4 378 pups were counted on the aerial photographs, confirming the status of Baia dos Tigres as a seal breeding location. A further 17 062 subadult and adult seals were counted. The latter represents an underestimate of numbers of these age classes in the region, since an unknown number of them would have been at sea. The pup count is also an underestimate of the number of pups born since an unknown number would have succumbed to mortality before the count, and some pups may have been concealed in the photographs and therefore not counted. However, the census is comparable with the censuses conducted in Namibia and South Africa. The results of the census confirm the status of Baia dos Tigres as a seal breeding location. The recent establishment of this breeding colony and others in the north of Namibia (e.g. at Cape Frio and Palgrave Point) are evidence that there has been a recent northward shift in the distribution of the Cape Fur Seal population in the northern Benguela.