

# A SEA LION ON THE PACIFIC COAST OF PANAMA

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DURING the night of August 14, 1967, while on a hunting trip, Mr. David Ruiz and five other hunters discovered a live specimen of a sea lion on La Barqueta beach, District of Alanje, Pacific coast of Chiriquí Province in extreme western Panamá. The mammal was captured alive but not without effort, since it put up a good struggle during which one of the hunters was bitten and required hospitalization. The animal was taken to the town of Alanje where it survived for 24 hours. It was found to weigh 200 pounds after it died. The specimen was skinned and the meat was used for food. Unfortunately the bones, including the skull were thrown into the swift-flowing waters of the nearby Rio Chico and were therefore lost. One of us (Tovar) traveled to Alanje and was able to obtain the salted skin on loan.

From the incomplete skin (tail and extremities missing) it was evident that the animal was a sea lion (Family Otariidae) but a more precise identification could not be made. The skin had a well defined ear, measuring 23 mm; a coat of coarse, stiff hairs without underfur; no neck mane; and coloration as follows:

Head, neck, and shoulder area brownish, with a golden tint, paler at the sides; dorsum and flanks dark brown; belly region pale tawny. Length of skin without tail 117 cm.

The specimen may have been only an escape from captivity. *Zalophus* is transported regularly to various parts of the world and occasionally escapes. There are reports for example from the Gulf of México and the Atlantic coast of the United States (C. O. Handley, Pr., *in litt.*) On the other hand, the specimen may represent an unusual natural occurrence of *Otaria*, which is known on the west coast of South America southward from Perú, or of *Zalophus*, which is found on the Galapagos Islands and at other localities far to the north. The latter possibility prompts this note since no seal has ever been reported in Panamanian waters.

For his kind information regarding the finding of the specimen here recorded and permission to study the skin, we wish to thank Mr. David Ruiz. We are deeply indebted to Dr. Charles O. Handley, Jr. for reading the manuscript and making very helpful suggestions.

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