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**TOURIST VISITORS  
AND THEIR EXPERIENCES  
AT NEW ZEALAND  
SUBANTARCTIC ISLANDS**

by

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## **PREFACE**

This report provides research advice to the Department of Conservation, intended to help improve management of the internationally important subantarctic islands. It is not a statement of Departmental policy, but is part of the ongoing policy development process. Current management of these islands is based primarily upon the Reserves Act 1977, the Conservation Act 1987, and the Wildlife Act 1953. The Department's policies and management programmes for the subantarctic island nature reserves are currently being developed through preparation of a Conservation Management Strategy.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This survey of shipborne tourist visitors to New Zealand's subantarctic island nature reserves was carried out during the 1992/93 and 1993/94 cruise seasons. It reveals that visitors were from more affluent and older sectors of society, were often retired or from professional backgrounds, included a high proportion of women compared with participants in other outdoor recreation activities, and had a high degree of conservation group involvement. Visitor satisfaction was high and favoured features of their visits were experiences of natural environments and wildlife, and the enhanced opportunities for conservation learning. Some distinctions were found between passengers from large and small vessels, suggesting some differences in visitor experiences associated with the contrasting scales of the tour operations. While visitors acknowledged their presence could cause impacts, particularly from trampling of soils and vegetation, no problems were apparent at levels of major concern to island managers. Most visitors supported the restrictions and controls imposed on their visits. A series of recommendations is provided for improving management of tourism at the islands, and for assisting tour operators in planning and conducting island tours.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Tourism growth in the subantarctic islands**

Tourism is continuing to grow and diversify throughout the Antarctic and subantarctic regions, and now brings more people into these areas than does science or any other activity (Enzenbacher 1992a). Interest in the subantarctic islands in particular has grown largely as a consequence of the growth in Antarctic tourism. Visits to subantarctic islands are a useful way of breaking long sea voyages between mainland ports and the Antarctic continent. The islands not only add diversity to Antarctic tours, they also provide special opportunities for people to visit wild, remote places and experience encounters with wildlife of great importance to science and conservation. Thus, several subantarctic island groups in the Southern Ocean are now attracting tourist visits, most notably South Georgia, the Falkland/Malvinas Islands, Macquarie Island and the New Zealand subantarctic islands (Valencia 1995, Dingwall 1995).

Managing tourist visits has now become one of the key issues for conservation of New Zealand's subantarctic islands (Sanson 1994, Sanson and Dingwall 1995). Tourists have been visiting these islands sporadically and in small numbers since 1968, but in recent years the numbers of tourists and frequency of visits have increased dramatically

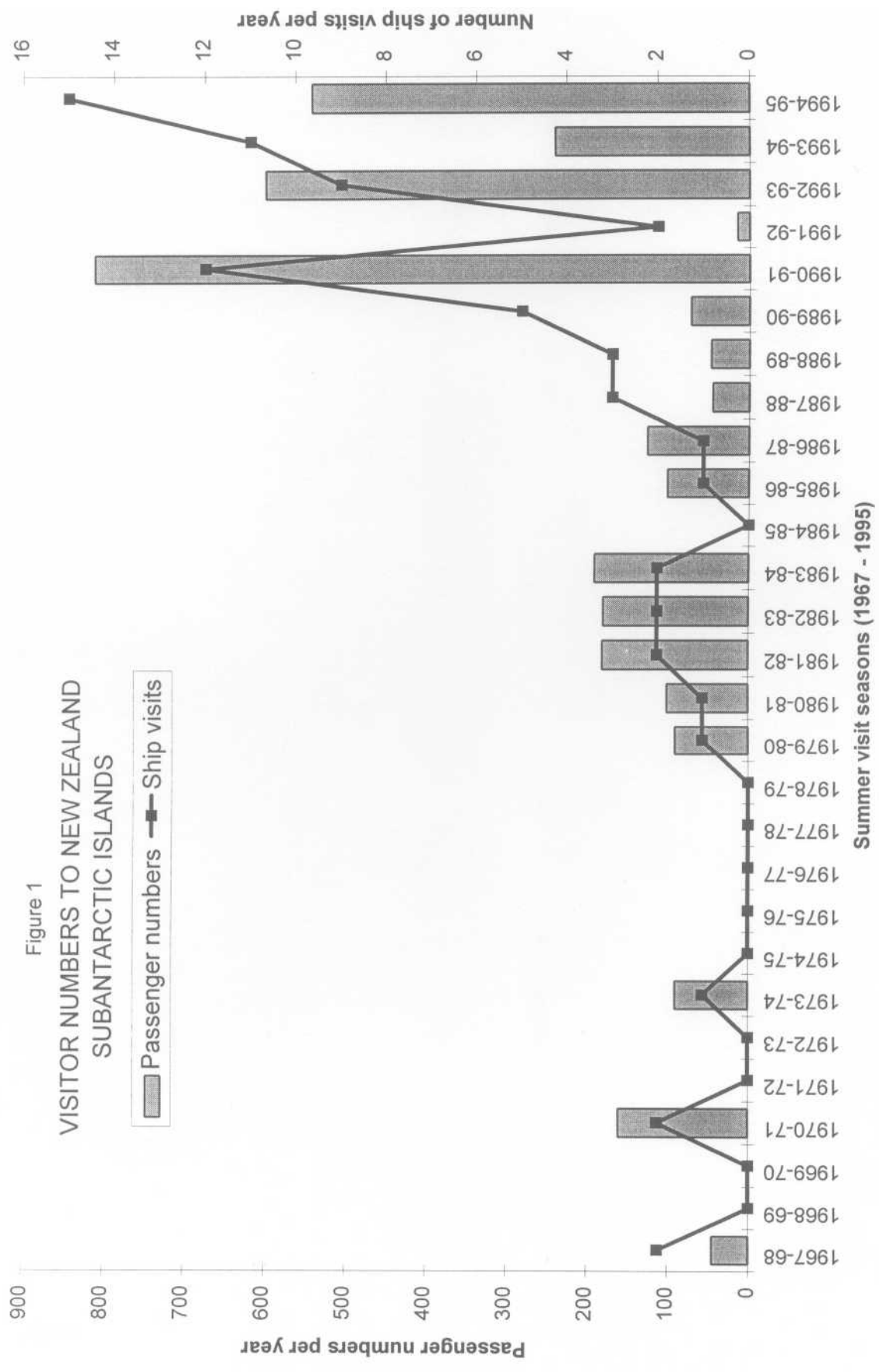


Figure 1 Visitor numbers to New Zealand subantarctic islands.

(Figures 1 and 2). In the seven-year period 1987/8 to 1993/4 a total of 1,831 people visited the islands aboard 45 ship voyages. The growing trend is further revealed by the fact that in the 1994/5 summer there were 15 voyages to the islands carrying a total of 542 passengers.

Accompanying the steady growth in numbers of tourists and of visits to the islands in recent times has been a greater diversification of tourist activities. Traditionally, tourists visited aboard medium-sized cruise ships, carrying 100-150 passengers, but recent times have witnessed the advent of smaller tour boats, with fewer than 50 passengers, and private yachts (Figure 3). In 1994/5, for example, there were three visits by cruise ships, seven by smaller boats and five by private vessels.

Whereas the larger cruises are generally limited to sight-seeing activities from the water, with brief landings ashore in small inflatable craft, passengers on the smaller tour boats are more likely to be pursuing nature tourism (so-called ecotourism) activities. They therefore tend to make more frequent landings, spend more time ashore and visit the more remote areas in search of rare species of animals and plants, seabird and marine mammal breeding colonies, and other special wildlife sites. Such differences may present different potentials for impacts levels and patterns.

There is also a growing demand for ship-based helicopter sight-seeing, scuba diving and other specialist activities such as filming and research. A further trend is a demand to allow visits by large ocean-going cruise liners carrying up to 400 passengers (such visits are prohibited by current policies applying at New Zealand subantarctic islands).



**Figure 2** Tourists from the 100+ passenger cruise liner "World Discoverer" landing by inflatable rubber craft on Enderby Island (Auckland Islands Group). Managing increasing numbers of tourist visits is now a key issue for subantarctic island protection.



Most tourist voyages to the islands have been a component of Antarctic tours conducted by foreign tour operators and based from overseas ports. Recently, however, tours have been organised and operated from mainland New Zealand, and have been specifically targeted at the subantarctic islands.

## **1.2 Tourism impacts on subantarctic islands**

While tourist visits to date have been essentially benign in their environmental impact, there is mounting concern that further increases in the volume and diversity of tourist activities could lead to greater demands for the provision of onshore facilities, and to an increased threat of environmental damage and disturbance to wildlife (Figure 4).

Such concerns are not limited to the subantarctic islands, but are also common throughout the Antarctic realm (Enzenbacher 1992b, Stonehouse 1994). In response to these concerns, the Antarctic Treaty parties in 1994 agreed on a comprehensive series of guidelines for visitors to the Antarctic and for those organising and conducting tourist activities, within the context of implementing the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (Anon 1994).

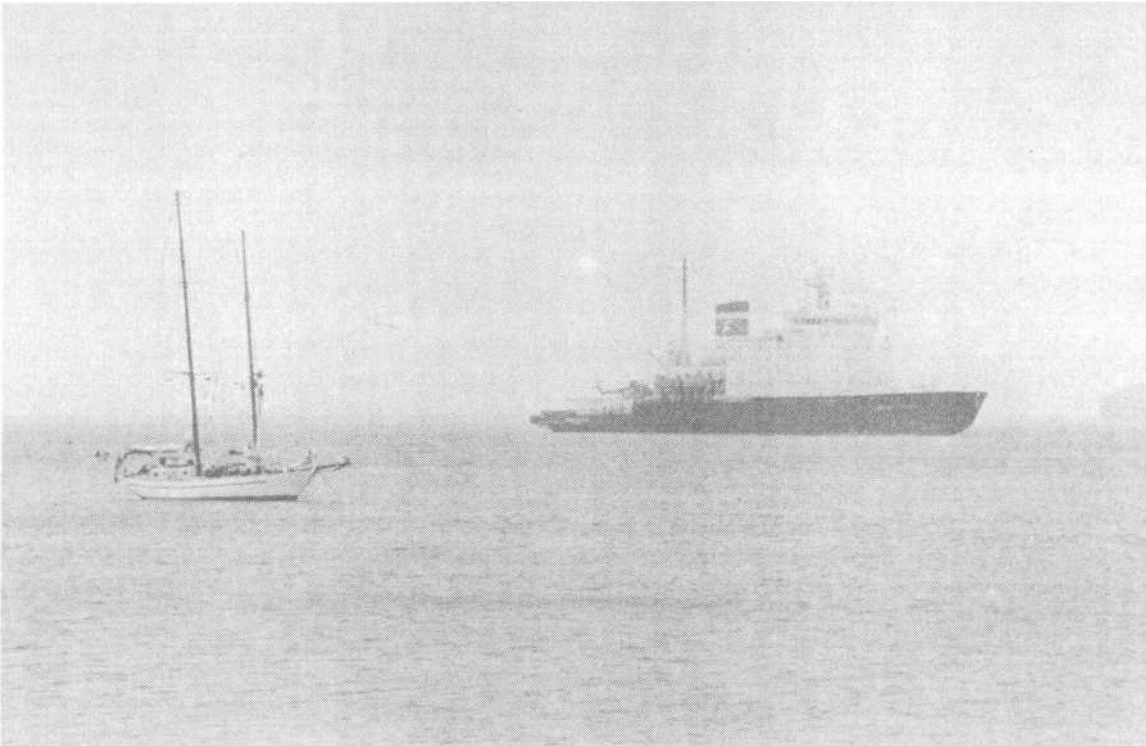
The international scientific and conservation communities have also given extensive consideration to measures for minimising tourism impacts in the Antarctic (Lewis Smith *et al.* 1994) and on subantarctic islands (Dingwall 1995). In the case of the subantarctic islands, tourism is acknowledged as a legitimate activity, but conditional upon the observance of legal regulations, and with management oversight necessary to maintain the conservation values of the islands. Included among recommended management measures is the need for socio-cultural and environmental research, to gain a better understanding of tourists, their activities and their impacts. Some preliminary work has begun in monitoring physical impacts of shipborne tourists in the Antarctic Peninsula region (Stonehouse 1992). The investigation reported here involves social and impact perception research in the context of management of New Zealand's subantarctic island nature reserves.

## **1.3 Management of tourism at New Zealand subantarctic islands**

The five New Zealand subantarctic island groups are nature reserves, under the Reserves Act 1977, for which the principal objective of management is strict protection of their natural state. Tourism, while regarded as a legitimate use of some islands, is permissible only under certain conditions and controls intended to uphold the paramount objective of nature conservation (Figure 5).

The island reserves are each managed according to the provisions of legally binding management plans (soon to be replaced by a single Conservation Management Strategy), which are the basis of rules governing tourist visits, and include:

- restrictions on access, landings and entry points;
- a maximum limit of 600 visitors allowed at any one site in one season;



**Figure 3** "Kapitan Khlebnikov" (chartered Russian Icebreaker) and a private yacht at Port Ross (Auckland Islands Group) on a typically misty day. Tourist access to the islands is by sea, and on an increasingly wide variety of vessels.



**Figure 4** "Invasion" by tourists at sites such as Enderby Island (Auckland Island Group) raises concerns about the cumulative impacts of people on the island environments.