

Making the Fur Seal Abundant

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THE fifteenth of December, 1911, was the time set for the formal adoption of one of the most important international conservation measures that has ever been effected. Pursuant to a convention or treaty concluded at Washington on July 7, 1911, by the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and Japan, the fur seals of the north Pacific Ocean will receive for the first time a form of protection that has been shown to be absolutely necessary, and is guaranteed by these four great powers for a term of 15 years.

The agreement prohibits absolutely pelagic sealing, or the killing of fur seals while in the water, and places the legitimate killing of surplus male seals on land under the direct control of the governments interested.

This convention insures the rescue of the depleted fur-seal herds from commercial extinction; prohibits the citizens or subjects of the contracting powers from engaging in a wasteful, cruel occupation, and removes a long-standing disturbance of international goodwill.

Fur seals inhabit certain parts of both the northern and southern hemispheres, but the most important herds live in the north Pacific, represent three distinct but closely related species, and are known as the Alaskan, Russian and Japanese fur seals, respectively. Although the northern seals roam widely on the high seas, they always resort for breeding purposes to certain definite bits of land, and it is this habit which gives particular nations property rights in them and has created several international complications.

The Japanese seals visit no land except Robben Island and certain islands of the Kurile chain; the Russian seals never go to other shores than those of the Commander Islands, off the coast of Kamchatka; and the Alaskan seals, after distributing themselves over the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean as far south as southern California, make an annual pilgrimage to islands in Bering Sea.

Of all the fur seals, the most numerous and important are those of Alaska, which came to the United States with all the other resources of the territory when Russia ceded her jurisdiction. The Alaskan fur seals have for many years been the subject of protracted national and international discussion, and during the years 1910 and 1911 came in for an unusual amount of attention. In addition to the consideration received during the diplomatic negotiations resulting in the treaty already mentioned, Congress has enacted a new law relating to the seal islands, a new dispensation has come in the administration of the islands, and the government as represented by the Bureau of Fisheries has for the first time engaged in the business of taking and marketing seal skins.

The "new dispensation" includes permanent scientific observation and control of the herd, discretionary authority to suspend all killings, and discretionary power to lease the sealing privileges or to exploit them as a government monopoly.

The only land to which the Alaskan fur seals ever resort is the group of small, rocky islands lying in Bering Sea 215 miles north of Unalaska Island, the nearest land. These bits of bleak land have come to be popularly known as the Seal Islands, from their most conspicuous feature; but among seagoing men they are called the Pribilof Islands, in honor of the Russian navigator who, in 1786, while in the employ of a Kamchatkan trading company, followed the migrating seals and ascertained for the first time where they resorted.

At the time of the discovery of the Pribilofs there were no human inhabitants. As soon as the Russians began to take sea skins they transferred thereto from the Aleutian Islands a number of natives to do the manual labor, and from time to time established small colonies at various convenient points.

The present population numbers about 300 on the two islands. When the seal islands came into our custody the fur seal herd constituted the most valuable aquatic resource that any government ever possessed. Owing to the immense body of animals present and the difficulty of counting with any degree of accuracy, estimates of the size of the herd at that time necessarily differ widely, the extremes being two million and seven million. It is safe to assume that the number was between two and a half and four million, distributed on 20 to 30 rookeries.

At the close of the season of 1911 the Alaskan seal herd consists of not more than 150,000 individuals of all ages. This appalling dwindling of the herd has occasioned much concern and has subjected the government to much unfavorable criticism, because the government has exercised full and continuous control during all the intervening years up to the present date. It will be seen, however, that the criticism is not justified, for the reason that the decline and declination of the herd came through causes operating when the seals were on the high seas and beyond the protecting care of their foster father.

It is furthermore a fact that the government took active steps to secure adequate protection for the seals when away from the Pribilofs, and that its efforts were frustrated chiefly by the results of an unfortunate international arbitration.

Although the seals are easily killed by the methods adopted by man for their destruction on sea and land, they are capable of withstanding great privation and of undergoing extraordinary muscular exertion.

To maintain themselves during winter in the tempestuous north Pacific without resorting to



ROOKERY ON ST. PAUL ISLAND



VIEW OF TWO HAREMS

land is in itself no small accomplishment for air-breathing animals. The females, leaving the islands in November, go further south than any other members of the herd, and in December appear off southern California, where they remain until March. They then begin their long return journey, reaching the islands early in June.

Within two days of their arrival on the rookeries the cows give birth to their pups. Not until ten or twelve days have elapsed do they return to the water or take any food. Then, after washing and playing near the islands, they make their first long trip to the feeding grounds, coming back to the rookeries after three or four days. Thereafter throughout the season the cows make regular feeding trips at intervals of five to ten days.

The seals subsist chiefly on squid, but also on herring, smelt, salmon, pollock, and other kinds of fish, which are caught and eaten in the water. They have prodigious appetites and gorge themselves whenever the opportunity comes.

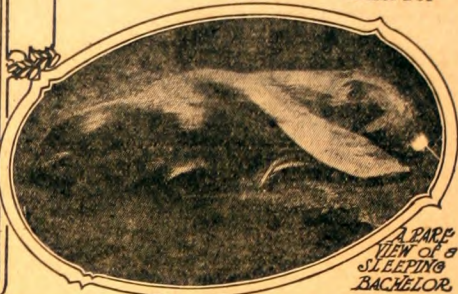
On the approach of cold weather, the cows and pups leave the islands together. Up to that time the pups have subsisted solely on milk, and they then have to learn to catch their own food, consisting of fish and squid. Inasmuch as the natural mortality among the pups in their first year is fully 50 per cent, it is evident that they experience many vicissitudes in the tempestuous seas to which they commit themselves. The males follow shortly after, but some remain about the islands throughout the winter in mild seasons, and the natives always depend on seals for food in December and January.

Fur seals and hair seals have always been regarded as legitimate objects of exploitation, and all governments having ren or assumed property rights in herds of seals have sanctioned their killing, under restriction, for fur, leather, oil, food, etc.

Beginning in 1786 and continuing until the sale of Alaska, Russians were almost continuously engaged in killing fur seals on the Pribilof Islands. In the earlier years there was a promiscuous scramble among rival companies, so that to maintain order and properly regulate the taking of seals the government was forced in 1799 to give the privilege to a single company, created by imperial decree and having among its shareholders members of the imperial family and the nobility. This association, known as the Russian-American company, enjoyed a monopoly of this business as long as Russia had control of Alaska. An ukase issued by Alexander I in 1821 for the regulation of the company had as one of its features the prohibition of foreign vessels within 100 miles of the Russian coasts and



A MOTHER SEAL AND HER NEW-BORN PUP



A BARE VIEW OF A SLEEPING BACHELOR

criminate, was confined to bachelors, and had no effect on the permanence of the herd.

Although the indiscriminate killing of seals in the sea had been going on from very early times, this business was not extensive, was conducted by natives using spears in their canoes, and had no appreciable effect on the herd.

Special inquiry made by the government showed that in different years from 70 to over 90 per cent of the seals killed at sea, either on the northwest coast or in Bering Sea, were females. What pelagic hunting then meant to the seal herd when so large a fleet was engaged, and what it has meant recently when the fleet was larger in proportion to the number of seals, may be appreciated when it is stated (1) that for every seal killed and secured by the hunters not less than two seals were killed and lost because they sank before the hunters could lay hold of them, while many that were wounded and escaped died later; (2) that for every adult female killed on the way to the islands in spring an unborn pup was sacrificed; (3) that for every female killed after the herd had reached the islands a pup on shore was left to die a lingering death by starvation, and a pup to be born the next season was likewise sacrificed.

The government was not slow to realize the damage done to the seal herd by pelagic sealing, and was led to assume jurisdiction over the entire American side of Bering Sea and to regard as poachers any persons found hunting seals therein. The seizure of vessels flying the United States and British flags followed, and there arose a controversy with Great Britain, which culminated in the reference of the case to an international tribunal of arbitration that met in Paris in 1893. The award of the arbitration court was against the United States on both of the main contentions, namely, the Bering Sea is a closed sea, and that the property right in the seal herd warranted the government in protecting the seals while on the high seas.

Since the award of the Paris tribunal the case of the fur-seal herd has gone from bad to worse. The United States government early showed its good faith by prohibiting its citizens from engaging in the lucrative industry of pelagic sealing; but the subjects of all other countries were permitted to do so, and it was the injection of a new factor, Japan, that contributed more than any other cause to the declination of our seal herd.

The fur-seal problem with which the United States government now has to deal presents several phases. The most important duty the responsible officials have to perform is to conserve and increase the seal herd. This involves continuous care, study, and observation; the determination of the actual condition and needs of the herd, and the application of the results of scientific and economic investigation to the welfare of the seals.

A scarcely less important duty, and one that is in no respect antagonistic to the first, is to provide a revenue and to utilize a highly useful resource at the time when that resource possesses the greatest market value. This involves the judicious killing of the male seals when they are two or three years old and the disposal of their pelts to the best advantage. A third duty is to ascertain what are the real needs of the helpless native inhabitants of the seal islands, and to give them the air that is best suited for their mental, moral and physical nature.

Recent criticism of the government's policy of taking the skins of seals in view of the depleted condition of the herd is based on deficient knowledge. The fur seal being a highly polygamous animal, and males and females being born in equal numbers, it follows that under the conditions that have prevailed and still continue the number of males produced is far in excess of the requirements of nature for the perpetuation of the species.

The preservation and increase of the seal herd is entirely compatible with judicious sacrifice of a limited number of young male seals each year, and this is quite as true when the herd is depleted as when the rookeries are crowded to their full capacity. When the presence of a sufficient reserve is determined by responsible officers of the government, the utilization of the surplus males for their pelts and incidentally for native food is justified and demanded by common sense, and fulfills the utmost demands of both the spirit and the letter of genuine conservation.

If not a single male seal were to be killed on the islands or at sea during the next five years, not a single additional seal would be produced as a result of that course. If not a single male seal were to be killed on the islands or at sea during the next 20 years, not a single seal would be added to the herd that will not be added if the present policy of restricted killing of surplus males is continued.

DRAMATIC SCENE AT A WEDDING ALTAR

Wronged Girl With Detective Stops Marriage of Former Lover of Friend.

FROM CHURCH TO CELL

Reply to the Rector's Request to Speak Now or Forever Hold Their Peace Lifts the Lid of Startling Developments.

Philadelphia.—A dramatic incident occurred the other afternoon in St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal church, Fifteenth and Porter streets, when pretty Eleanor Rogan, 21 years old, of No. 3959 Wallace street, put to an unexpected end the wedding of James R. Sencenick, a marine stationed at the Philadelphia navy yard, and Ruth Myers, 20 years old, of No. 2440 South Rosewood street. The rector, Rev. Edwin F. Carson, had just asked the formal question whether any one objected to the union, when Miss Rogan stepped up the aisle and declared that the ceremony should not be continued.

Sencenick, it is said, is a friend of both young women, who were formerly chums. For some time he paid attention to Miss Rogan, and there was an understanding that they should be married. His love, however, turned to the young woman's friend, Miss Myers, and the two became engaged. Later he procured a license, giving his name as James R. Hale.

Miss Rogan learned of all that was going on, and went to the Detective Bureau and later procured a warrant for the young marine's arrest. Accompanied by Detective Haley she went to the navy yard and told the commandant her story. He told her Sencenick was away on leave of absence, but he would be arrested and turned over to the police when he returned on Monday.

Miss Rogan then visited her mother, who lives in the neighborhood of 15th



Miss Rogan Stepped Up the Aisle.

and Porter streets, and during her visit learned that the marine had been seen in the neighborhood during the day. She summoned Detective Haley and a further investigation resulted in the discovery that the marine and Miss Myers were to be married in the afternoon.

It was about 4 o'clock when the rector pronounced the words saying that if anyone had any reason why the marriage should not take place, to speak now or forever hold his peace. He had hardly uttered the words when Miss Rogan walked up the aisle, with the detective behind her, and told the rector that the wedding must not be consummated.

Mr. Carson took the marriage party, Miss Rogan and the detective to the vestry room, where the young woman told her story. He then handed back the marriage license to the marine, telling him that he could not continue the ceremony. When this was done the detective told the marine that he was under arrest and took him to the central police station.

On the way from the church Sergeant of Marines Laselle tried to arrest Sencenick on complaint of the government, but withdrew his request when the detective informed him that he was outside of Federal jurisdiction.

Deaf From Melon Seeds. Williamsport, Pa.—Treating thirteen-year-old Carolina Garrison for deafness, Dr. G. D. Nutt found two watermelon seeds in the girl's right ear and one in the left. They had evidently been there since she was a child, and likely stuffed there by herself, unnoticed by her parents. Her hearing now is normal.

Talks in Monkey Language. Pittsburgh, Pa.—Dominic Lapiano, assistant keeper at the Highland zoo, claims that he is able to converse with "John," a three-year-old chimpanzee, in monkey language.