



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SCIENTISTS TAG 20,000 SEAL PUPS

Scientists of the Department of the Interior, aboard the motorship Black Douglas cruising in the north Pacific have "tagged" nearly 20,000 seal pups in their investigation of the migration routes and food habits of the Alaskan fur seal herd, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. The pups were marked with metal tags attached to their flippers.

Recoveries of the tagged seals at sea during the coming months or years will yield specific information on the migration habits of the seals. In 1950, when this year's pups will be ready for killing, a statistical study of the recoveries of marked 3-year-olds on the killing grounds will make possible a check on the accuracy of seal censuses taken by other methods.

The investigation was started in 1941 on recommendation of the Department of State, after Japan notified the U. S. Government that on October 23, 1941 it would abrogate the Fur Seal Treaty of 1911 which prohibited the killing, capturing or pursuing the animals at sea. The Japanese government claimed that the fur seal herd, at least in part, was damaging its fishing industry. Early investigations did not agree with this contention and the State Department recommended that the Fish and Wildlife Service bring up-to-date its scientific data on seals to determine the validity of Japan's claims. Great Britain, Russia, Japan and the United States were signatories to the 1911 treaty.

The Black Douglas, a schooner yacht, was purchased in 1941 by the Service and was refitted at Savannah, Ga., but before it reached Seattle, war was declared and the expedition was suspended. The vessel was requisitioned by the Navy and during the war was in the patrol service. It left Seattle to resume the investigation last spring.

Dr. Victor B. Scheffer, in charge of the biologists on the Black Douglas, now plans to chart the passage of the seals from their breeding grounds on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea to ascertain what they eat and to analyze the hazards the herd encounters during the nine months they spend at sea.

On the first trip of the Black Douglas, from May to August, the scientists observed the seals traveling northward along the coast of British Columbia and Alaska, but only when they neared the Pribilofs were any large groups of seals seen.

During the killing season from June 10 to July 31, a total of 61,447 fur-seal skins were taken. Included were nearly 10,000 from the 4-year-old class, taken experimentally this year to determine whether they are significantly more valuable to the fur trade. Ordinarily only 3-year-old bachelor seals are killed. Not until these 4-year-olds have been processed and sold will the results of this experiment be known.

Since 1910 when the Government assumed direct control of the fur seals 1,367,322 sealskins have been cropped for market, worth approximately \$40,000,000.

In mid-November the vessel will leave St. Paul Island to travel westward in the wake of the migrating seals, as far as the International Date Line, to observe particularly how far they venture into the waters of the western Pacific. Toward the end of November the expedition will turn southeast and observe the seals on their southbound journey.

When sealing operations on the Pribilof Islands were concluded on July 31, construction work was resumed following the arrival of the annual shipment of supplies in August from Seattle aboard a Navy supply vessel. The walls and roof of the new recreational hall on St. Paul Island, which will cost \$30,000, have now been completed. New homes for two native families and one Service employee have been started, and the extension to the by-products plant will soon be finished. Materials have been received for the addition to the school building but work on this structure must await the end of the school term. On St. George Island the foundation and walls of a new blubbering house for the processing of sealskins have been completed.

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