

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
INFORMATION SERVICE

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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RESEARCH VESSEL STUDIES  
MIGRATING FUR-SEALS IN PACIFIC

The Fish and Wildlife Service's 360-ton research vessel, Black Douglas, is now cruising in the north Pacific Ocean, trying to follow the fur-seal herds as they migrate southward from their Pribilof Island breeding grounds.

The Service disclosed today that the vessel departed from Seattle, Wash., on November 2, and will return to port about December 24. Sailing westward to Umnak Island in the Aleutian chain, the Black Douglas will eventually go south as far as Lower California, in its attempts to locate the specific migration routes and wintering grounds of the Alaska fur-seal herds (almost four million animals, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service's 1948 count).

Biologists Victor B. Scheffer and Karl W. Kenyon, who are aboard the vessel, want to locate the course of the fur-seals' migration, and discover whether there are any points of seal concentration after they leave their breeding grounds. The biologists will also study the food habits of the fur-seals, and will investigate predation on seal pups by other marine mammals.

Rough water and perpetual fog are making the investigation a "hazardous undertaking," the Service said. The study is further complicated by the fur-seals' migratory habits. They migrate gradually from their breeding grounds in small numbers; there is no mass movement. In addition, the animals remain beneath the surface of the water for lengthy periods, and are exceptionally rapid swimmers.

To help them sight the fur-seal herds, the biologists and their aides station themselves in the vessel's "crow's nest" on regular "watches." To obtain stomach specimens for food habit studies, a dory equipped with a harpoon-gun will be lowered into the ocean to kill several seals.

The Black Douglas was built in 1930 in Bath, Maine as a private yacht. In 1941, the Fish and Wildlife Service purchased the vessel and converted it into a "floating biological laboratory" for fur-seal investigations. During World War II, it served as a Navy patrol vessel. Equipped with 900-h.p. Diesel engines, the Black Douglas is 118 ft. long, has a 32 ft. beam, and carries a crew of 14.

At the completion of the current cruise, the vessel will be used by the Fish and Wildlife Service's Branch of Fishery Biology for pilchard research off the California coast.

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