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MUSKOX HERD CONTINUES TO GROW

According to the latest survey made by the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska herd of muskoxen on Nunivak Island now numbers 116, Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay announced today.

The survey showed that 19 calves had been born and three adult animals had died, a net gain of 16 over last year.

The herd was established on Nunivak in 1935 and 1936 when 31 animals which had been purchased in Greenland were released upon the island. Because of the low breeding potential of the muskox the natural increase has been relatively slow but because of the protection afforded by the island the mortality rate of the older animals has been held to a minimum.

The muskox, which once roamed the Arctic waste by the thousands, has been reduced to a few scattered herds in northern Canada and Greenland. The muskox had already disappeared from Alaska before the United States purchased that area from Russia in 1867.

The move to re-establish muskoxen in Alaska began in Alaska in 1927. Three years later, in 1930, the Congress appropriated the \$40,000 necessary to obtain 34 wild muskoxen in Greenland. These animals, captured by a Norwegian who understood the habits of the animal, were brought to New York in August 1930 by way of Norway. After the required quarantine in New York they were transported to Seattle by train and thence to Alaska by boat.

The 14,000 mile trek ended November 4 at the College Experimental Farm at the University of Alaska near Fairbanks. There the muskoxen were held under observation until 1935 when four of them were taken to Nunivak Island. The following year the rest of the herd was taken to the island. By that time 11 of the original 34 animals had died and 8 calves had been born.

During the long observational period on the experimental farm it became evident that any idea of domesticating the muskox might better be forgotten because of its unpredictability--gentle one minute and vicious another. Its tendency to break down fences added to the woes of attempting domestication.

Nunivak Island is located some 25 miles off the mainland of Alaska and a little south of the mouth of the Yukon. It is about 40 miles wide and 70 miles long. It is uninhabited except for a few Eskimos. There are no predatory animals there.

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