

# 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 killing, 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 geographers 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 seals thereon 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.

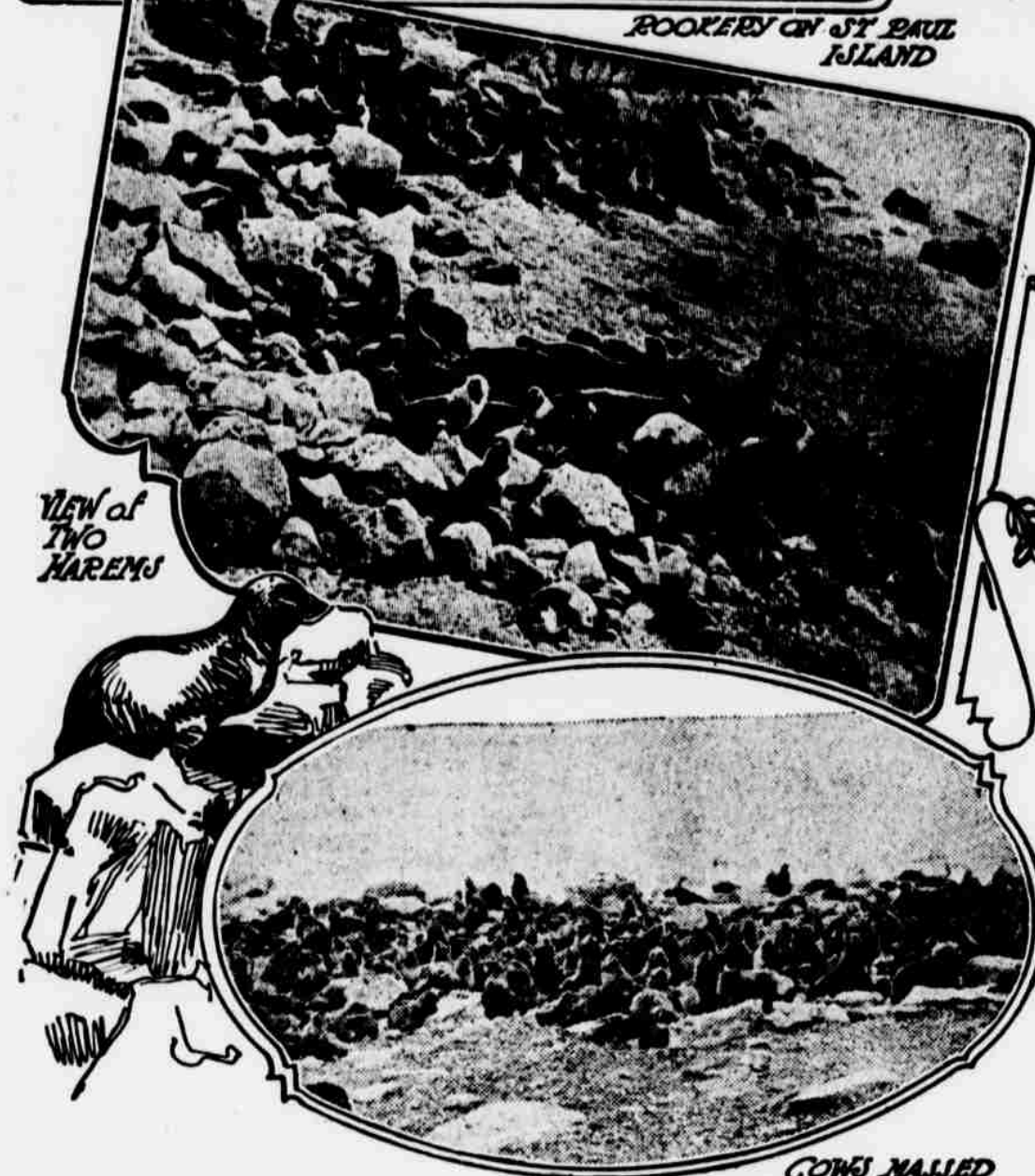
At the close of the season of 1911 the Alaskan seal herd consists of not more than 150,000 individuals of all ages.

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 decimation 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



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 real 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

This ukase involved Russia in a dispute with the United States and Great Britain, resulting in the treaties of 1824 and 1825, which recognized Russia's claim to jurisdiction over the whole of Bering Sea, Okhotsk Sea, and other water inclosed by Russian territory.

From the outset the company placed a rational limit on the number of animals killed each year, and in the light of later experience it is evident that the herd would have been fully able to sustain the annual harvest of skins if these had been taken only from the males. But males and females alike were slaughtered in ignorance or disregard of the polygamous character of the seals, and as early as 1806 it was necessary to suspend operations for two years in order to permit the herd to recuperate.

When killing was resumed, however, it was along the same destructive lines, and the mighty fur-seal host continued to dwindle until by 1834 its numbers were reduced to one-fifteenth or one-twentieth of those present in the first years after the discovery of the islands. The suspension of all killing for a term of years then ensued, and by the time operations were resumed the company officials had come to realize that the females should be protected, and later the sacrifice of old bulls and young pups was stopped.

The result was a remarkable recuperation and increase in the herd that afford a valid basis for the belief that speedy recovery of the decimated herds of Alaska, Russia, and Japan may follow the elimination of the factor responsible for their present condition, namely, the indiscriminate killing of males and females at sea. When Russia ceded her jurisdiction over Alaska, the Pribilof fur-seal herd had attained a degree of prosperity closely approaching its condition at the time of its discovery, and we thus came into possession of a resource but little impaired and had a knowledge of its significant history to guide us in its treatment.

It is a cause for congratulation that no country has dealt with its seal life in a more intelligent, humane, and zealous manner than the United States, and it was a cruel fate that for so many years rendered our efforts futile. The only occasion when there was any laxity in our administration of the seal islands was during the first years of our possession, when the government was still unorganized anywhere in the territory and various private companies landed parties on the Pribilofs and took seal skins without any government supervision or restriction. It was in that year that the largest killing in the history of the islands was made; the number of skins obtained was probably not less than 300,000, and may have reached 375,000; but this take was not indis-

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 decimation 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 natures.

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.

## WORTH TALKING ABOUT

OLD TIMER REMEMBERS WHEN IT REALLY WAS COLD.

"Truthful James" Rivals Baron Munchausen in Recalling a Winter That Makes Even Oldest Inhabitant Take Back Seat.

"Did you ever hear," began the stem-winding story teller, as the unwound five yards of wrappings from his neck, "about the winter I lived in the country? It was what a fellow might be excused for calling some winter. That is to say, it was cold.

"We began to notice unusual symptoms along in November. To begin with, the creeks all froze solid—clear to bottom, you understand—and instead of water flowing along in the creek beds there was ice moving at about the same speed. They have something up in the Arctic regions very much like what we saw then—they call them glaciers up there, I believe. But there was this difference—up north the glaciers all move down to the sea and break off and float away, leaving plenty of room for other ice to follow. Our ice streams didn't do that at all.

"The creeks where I was was all emptied into the river and, of course, the river was as full as the creeks. So there was nothing left for the creek ice to do but bump up when it reaches the river and double back on itself. Then when it got back to headquarters it had to double up again and go down to the river. All the creeks kept up this process until they were piled on top of themselves four or five times, or even more than that. We had to tunnel through them to get from one township to another. And we had to keep making new tunnels, too, as the old tunnels moved up above our reach.

"But, bad as this condition seemed, the worst was yet to come. The first cold snap lasted until along in January; then we had the usual January thaw—which in the country generally means something. But this particular thaw hadn't got good and started when a big freeze came down on us one night and froze the ground so quick and so hard that it popped the rabbits and woodchucks up out of their holes the way a little boy pops a pea out of its pod.

"Every single one of those poor little animals just stayed up there in the air—frozen stiff, some of them six or eight feet above the ground. There were so many of them that a fellow couldn't go out without bumping his head. It was much like walking along under a dense forest, only the animals were closer to our heads than the limbs of the trees would have been. The only way we could get a glimpse of the sun was to take an ice ax and climb up the side of one of the creeks. I never expect to see the like again."

"Well," exclaimed the wild eyed victim, "I don't believe you will. And I suppose that when you wanted dinner all you had to do was to go out and build a fire anywhere and the dinner would thaw out of the air and fall down into the pot and be cooked. Eh?"

"Not on your life!" asserted the stem winding story teller. "If you knew what you were talking about you wouldn't make any breaks like that. It was so cold that whenever anybody tried to start a fire the air melted and put the fire out. Every time!"

"It was well along in March before a square meal could be had anywhere. I would have starved to death a dozen times only for one thing—and a mighty fortunate thing it was. I kept a Jersey cow—just one, but, of course, she was the pick of the herd—in a fireless cooker that I had.

"But since then I never have been able to say that I like ice cream. And I don't suppose I ever will either."—Chicago News.

### Fairies in Ireland.

That belief in "fairies" still persists in many parts of Ireland was shown at the last meeting of the Athlone district council, when it was stated, says a report in the Times, that a laborer named Kilduff had given up possession of an acre of land, which had been allotted to him under the laborers acts, and upon which the council proposed to build a cottage for him, because he was "afraid of the fairies." The plot is at a place called Lacken, and Kilduff's objection to it was that there is on it an old fort or rath which would have to be removed. On no account would he interfere with "the fairies' home."

A former district councillor named Gilleran now applied for the plot, upon which he said he would build a cottage.

Mr. Malone said that, at the local government inquiry, Kilduff stated that the house in which he now lived was so windy that it would give rheumatism to a wild duck.

The council decided to give the plot to Gilleran.

### Ruthless Financier.

"They don't run this street car system for nearly the money there is in it," said Mr. Growcher.

"Do you think you could show us a way to carry more passengers?" inquired the director.

"No. But after you charge a person a small fare to get in you lose sight of the possibilities. By crowding in a few disorderly people and keeping the windows closed you could make it worth a dollar and a half of any man's money to get out."