



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Alaska is not a land teeming with unlimited quantities of big game, contrary to popular impression, and special efforts are having to be made to protect the territory's wildlife because of the influx of thousands of new residents due to war activities, Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior, said today in an address before the annual meeting of the Audubon Society in New York City,

"Alaska is the last great reservoir of big game in North America under the American flag. There are excellent herds of moose, mountain sheep, caribou, goats, and deer, and great numbers of bears. There are great numbers of moose and mountain sheep only because Alaska provides a vast suitable living space for them. Too many citizens, particularly those with sportsmen's instincts, have the impression that Alaska is a land teeming with such big game. That is not true," Dr. Gabrielson declared.

"Despite the fact that Alaska has an estimated moose population exceeding 20,000 animals, one can search diligently through many thousands of square miles without seeing one moose. The same is true of sheep, goats, and other big game species.

"The great bird colonies also are not widespread, but are restricted to specific areas where the conditions suitable for their existence occur. It is true that there are great numbers of nesting geese and ducks in certain areas of Alaska, but bird life--particularly smallbird life--is much scarcer both as to total number of species and as to numbers of individuals in a given locality than in any comparable area in the States. Only for birds and mammals that feed upon aquatic species, do the available food supplies permit great populations of great concentrations".

The tremendous influx of people into Alaska, both civilian and military, has had a profound effect upon the resident wildlife and upon its future status, Dr. Gabrielson said. Although there has been some wanton killing of game, chiefly by civilian rather than military personnel, the total adverse affect on the wildlife population has not become serious. At the present time, at most posts, the Army and Navy are endeavoring to keep the killing of game under reasonable control.

Of greater influence on the future of Alaskan wildlife has been the construction of landing fields and highways. These alone have made it possible for the increased number of people to get into territories which have previously

(over)

been inaccessible and have made also inevitable the decimation of game supplies in certain localities, Dr. Gabrielson asserted. There is a chance that the present frontier Alaska will gradually become more completely developed, urbanized, and exploited. If that occurs people can no longer depend, as many of the Eskimos and Indians do at the present time, entirely upon the fish, game, and fur for their existence. There are not enough of such supplies to care for any great increase in population over that which Alaska has supported in the past

Some new refuges have been created, to help protect game and the environment which makes it possible, he said, and others may have to be created to prevent destruction of essential wildlife habitats. "We hope to establish such refuges before important species of wildlife are destroyed rather than await that destruction and then go through the long, painful process of restoration that has been necessary in the States."

. A greatly increased staff of wardens to patrol the country will be needed, Dr. Gabrielson said, pointing out that at present only 14 men patrol the vast extent of Alaska. In addition more than the five airplanes now available for the wardens will have to be put into service.

"Today the fisheries are the principal, and fur the third largest, source of revenue in Alaska. Without the salmon fisheries many inhabitants of the coastal towns would have no means of livelihood, and without the fur business most of the small inland towns would vanish. We can look for an increased pressure on these resources with an increased population. Eventually such pressure must lead to the development of other means of livelihood or the eventual destruction of the natural biological resources.

"In order to place the management of the wildlife resources on a permanent basis of self-perpetuation it will be necessary to change the concepts of the people of Alaska and of most of the people who are going to Alaska, regarding the extent to which wildlife may be utilized. Only by successfully changing the popular viewpoint may we maintain Alaska as the source of the most valuable salmon fishery in the world, as the home of the greatest bird colonies in the country, and as the last reservoir of the great game herds to be found under the American flag."