



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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The size of the fur seal herd on the Pribilof Islands has been so increased through careful conservation measures under direct Government management that it is now larger than it has been in 75 years, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes announced today.

The annual census of the seals, completed in August showed that the herd consisted of 2,945,663 animals. The capital value of this famous herd is estimated at well over \$100,000,000, Secretary Ickes declared.

The fur seal herd numbered possibly 4,000,000 animals at the time the United States purchased Alaska, a purchase which included the Pribilof Islands, from Russia in 1867. In the following two years various independent and uncontrolled groups killed approximately 329,000 seals.

For a period of 40 years, from 1870 to 1910, the right to take fur seal skins on the Islands was leased by the U. S. Government to private corporations. Under the first 20-year lease the annual take was frequently in excess of 100,000 skins, a total of 1,977,377 skins during the life of the lease. Under the second twenty year lease the total take was 342,651 skins.

The extreme exploitation of the herd during the period of leases to private companies, plus extensive pelagic killing of the seals by our own and other nationals, finally reduced the size of the herd to only 123,138 -- the lowest point in history -- by 1911.

In 1911 the Government itself took over the management of the herd and in that same year a convention was concluded among the United States, Great Britain, Japan, and Russia, which effectively barred pelagic sealing north of the 30th parallel of north latitude except for limited operations by primitive methods carried on by Indians and other aborigines. At present the herd is protected under a provisional agreement between the United States and Canada under which Canada receives 20 per cent of the skins taken on the Islands.

This year only 47,652 skins were taken from the Islands due to the fact that a sufficient supply of skins was already available in the United States from operations in previous years. At present it is possible to process only about 45,000 skins a year because of the lack of skilled workers.

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The Islands are now managed by the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service. The sealing operations have, despite careful conservation, resulted in more than \$10,000,000 being turned into the U. S. Treasury.

With the herd still growing rapidly, it is probable that after the war the number of skins which can be made available for sale will substantially increase. The skins are dyed by a secret process and can be had in the familiar black and two rich brown shades. Improvement in processing methods have made the skins much more pliable in recent years and therefore more suitable for smart tailoring.

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