



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ANNOUNCE SPRING AUCTION OF GOVERNMENT-OWNED SEALSKINS

Nearly 30,000 Government-owned Alaska fur-seal skins will be offered for sale at the annual spring auction in St. Louis, Mo., on April 19, the Fish and Wildlife Service has announced.

These sealskins will include 17,500 matara brown finish, 10,000 safari brown, and 2,000 black. Also up for auction will be 497 blue fox pelts from the Pribilof Islands.

In addition to the U. S. Government fur-seal skins, the Government of the Union of South Africa will offer 4,000 Cape of Good Hope fur-seal skins finished "Transveld."

The furs to be sold on April 19 will be available for inspection by prospective buyers on and after Wednesday, April 14, at the show rooms of the Fouke Fur Company in St. Louis, Government agents in the processing and selling of the furs.

At the October 1947 auction, the large matara sealskins were in particular demand because of the new fashion trend to longer coats and sold for as much as \$123 per skin, the highest price paid in 27 years. Lively bidding at that auction brought an average price of \$57.92 for the entire offering of sealskins, an increase of 19.5 percent over the April 1947 average of \$48.73 per skin.

The value of the Alaska fur-seal herd today, which numbers more than 3,600,000 animals, is estimated at more than \$100,000,000. Since 1910, when the Government assumed direct control of the fur seals, 1,428,769 seal skins have been taken, worth approximately \$40,000,000. Translated into terms of fur-seal coats, which require from six to eight skins apiece, this total has produced around 200,000 coats. The Alaska fur seal's great value lies in its soft underfur.

The Pribilof Islands--a treeless group of volcanic origin, located in the heart of Bering Sea, some 250 miles off the mainland of Alaska--are the only spots where the Alaska fur seals ever seek the shore. St. Paul Island, about 14 miles in length, St. George Island, 12 miles long, and Sea Lion Rock, a small islet adjacent to St. Paul, are the breeding grounds of the herd. From wintering grounds extending as far south as southern California, the entire herd assembles each spring on these islands. Here they remain for several months during which the young seals, or pups, are born.

Fur-sealing operations take place chiefly in June and July when the family groups, or harems, occupy the rookeries upon which generally only breeding seals and pups are found. Near these rookeries are the so-called hauling grounds where the unattached bulls and immature males, or bachelors, congregate.

It is from these hauling grounds, that the seals selected for killing, principally 3-year-olds, are driven inland a short distance. Rainy or cloudy weather is preferred for the seal killing which is done under the immediate direction of the Fish and Wildlife Service by the native Aleuts who reside in the villages on St. Paul and St. George Islands.

After the killing the skins are removed and given a thorough curing in salt for at least 10 days. They are then rolled singly with a generous supply of salt on the flesh side, which is turned inward. Boric acid also is used as a germicide in preserving the skins. From 50 to 100 of the skins are packed to the barrel.

The Government has a contract with the Fouke Fur Company of St. Louis for dressing, dyeing and selling the skins at public auction. There are more than 100 distinct manipulations or treatments involved in the processing of fur-seal skins, each requiring great skill and care. This work is completed in about 60 days and results in the creation of a fine fur that is both exceedingly durable and of great beauty.

For many years all sealskins were dyed black, but in recent years shades of brown have been developed. Two shades are now used; safari brown, a deep chocolate tone, and matara brown, which has a bluish background.

After being dressed and dyed, the skins are sold at a public auction held twice a year in St. Louis and the net proceeds are turned over to the Treasury of the United States.

When the Federal Government assumed active management of the fur seals in 1910 and began all sealing operations on its own account, the herd numbered only about 130,000. As the result of a scientific program of conservation and utilization, the herd today is more than 25 times as large as it was in 1910.

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