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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**INFORMATION SERVICE**

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ANNOUNCE 1948 FUR-SEAL TAKE

A total of 70,142 fur-seal skins were taken in the Government-administered sealing operations on Alaska's Pribilof Islands during the 1948 season, Milton C. James, acting director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today. Operations began in late June and closed on July 27.

This year's take was 8,695 skins more than obtained in the 1947 operations. Under the provisions of the Alaska Fur-Seal Law of 1944, 20 percent of the skins become the property of the Canadian Government. After they are dressed and dyed, the U. S. skins are sold at auction to commercial fur dealers, the net proceeds going to the Treasury of the United States.

The fur-seal herd numbered 3,837,131 animals in this year's Fish and Wildlife Service census. This is an increase of 6 percent over the 1947 figures. The census is a computation of all animals, based upon observations of the number of "harem," or breeding, bulls, the number of "idle" and "surplus" bulls, the number of animals killed in sealing operations, and mortality factors determined from branding activities.

Because the number of animals available for killing each year has not increased at the same rate as the total herd; this year, the Fish and Wildlife Service is checking the figures obtained by the standard census-taking with aerial photography.

A plane flying at an altitude of 1,000-ft. photographed every rookery (breeding place) area on the Islands at the time of greatest concentration of animals on shore. The Service is now preparing the photographs in a mosaic which will be enlarged for a verification of the census computations.

Eighty percent of the world's fur-seals breed on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. To prevent extinction of this valuable herd by commercial killing, the U. S. Government assumed direct control of the sealing operations in 1910.

Since that date, the herd has increased from 132,279 animals to its present vast size. Nevertheless, through Government conservation and management, a million and a-half skins have been taken from the herd during this period.

From oceanic wintering grounds extending as far south as southern California, the entire fur-seal herd assembles each spring on the treeless, volcanic Pribilof Islands. They remain here for several months, during which the young seals, or pups, are born.

Killings on the Islands are confined to three-year-old male animals, all of whom are surplus bachelors. The fur-seals are polygamous and the numbers of each sex equal, making it possible to kill the surplus bachelor animals without decreasing the number of young that may be born.

The young males, which yield the most valuable pelts, herd by themselves, making it possible to drive and kill them without disturbing the breeding animals. By limiting the killing period, the Service makes a suitable reserve of three-year-old males for breeding stock.

Killing of seals while they are in the sea is prohibited by international agreement between the United States and Canada.

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