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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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F.W.S. BIOLOGIST TO STUDY FUR-SEALS IN JAPAN

Ford Wilke, a Government wildlife research biologist, will fly to Japan from Washington, D. C. on October 4 to study Japanese scientific records on the migration and food habits of fur-seals and to investigate the fur-seal herd in Japanese waters, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

Mr. Wilke will be attached to the Fisheries Division of the Natural Resources Section, General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, in Tokyo, and will remain in Japan for about two years.

A native of Eau Claire, Wis., Mr. Wilke is 33 years old and a graduate of the University of Minnesota. He conducted fur-seal research on the Pribilof Islands in 1941 and 1942, and was one of the last U. S. officials to leave the Islands after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Until this month, he was employed at the Department of Agriculture's Fur Animal Experiment Station, Saratoga Springs, N. Y. He was a naval officer during World War II.

In October 1941, Japan abrogated the North Pacific Fur-Seal Convention of 1911. The killing of seals while they are in the sea (pelagic sealing) was prohibited by this international agreement, signed by the United States, Japan, Russia, and Great Britain. Uncontrolled pelagic sealing had threatened the North Pacific fur-seal herds with extinction.

Under the terms of the 1911 Convention, Japan had been entitled to 15 percent of the proceeds of the sale of skins taken on the U. S.-owned Pribilof Islands. Payments under this provision amounted to about \$1,500,000. The United States, in return, had received 10 percent of the fur skins taken from the small herd on Japanese-owned Robben Island in the south Okhotsk Sea.

In abrogating the international agreement, Japan declared that a portion of the huge Pribilof herd was proceeding down the Japanese coast and destroying valuable food fishes during its winter migration.

Investigations conducted by the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries at the beginning of the century showed that the Pribilof herd did not mingle with Asiatic fur-seal herds. The Pribilof herd migrated from the eastern portion of the Bering Sea as

far south as California, according to the U. S. investigations, and confined its winter migrations to the American side of the Pacific Ocean.

Studies of stomach contents by U. S. biologists showed that the fur-seals subsisted largely on squid, pollock, seal fish, and other species not used commercially in the United States.

The Department of State recommended that U. S. scientific data on the migration and food habits of the Pribilof fur-seals be brought up to date as a basis for future international negotiations on the protection of fur-seal resources.

At the end of World War II, the Fish and Wildlife Service began a study of the migratory route of the fur-seals from the time they leave the Pribilof Islands in the fall until they return in the spring, to learn definitely whether there are points of concentration during the course of migration and whether any of the animals that frequent the North American coast cross the Pacific to the Asiatic side. Cruises by the Black Douglas, a Service research vessel, have not as yet reported significant findings.

During the 1930's, two Japanese research vessels conducted wide investigations in the Bering Sea. As a result of these and other studies, the Fish and Wildlife Service believes that Japan has accumulated more thorough biological information on the North Pacific fur-seal herds than the United States has.

SCAP's Fisheries Division, in Tokyo, has located and assembled confidential records on the fur-seal investigations in Japanese universities, government research stations, and libraries.

Mr. Wilke will check the authenticity of this scientific data. He will also conduct field investigations in Japanese waters to study the food habits of fur-seals inhabiting Japanese waters. The findings will be used in future international negotiations on the management of the North Pacific fur-seal herds.

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