



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### SEA OTTER POPULATION CONTINUES TO INCREASE

Sea otters along the Alaskan and Aleutian Islands coast have spread to new areas and thrived to such an extent that their current population may now be as high as 20,000 animals, Daniel H. Janzen, director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, of the Department of the Interior, said today.

In 1950 the estimate was set at 8,000 animals.

A recently completed survey by airplane and boat of the most important sea otter concentrations outside of the western Aleutians (except one in Prince William Sound), revealed a much larger number of otters than was generally thought to exist in these other areas. A total of 4,785 animals was observed in concentration points on Afognak Island, the Barren Islands, Sutwick Island area, Shumagin Islands, Sandman Reefs and Sanak Reefs, and Unimak Island.

In the western Aleutians, Bureau officials believe that the population on Amchitka alone far exceeds this 4,785 figure. In addition there are large numbers of sea otters at Kiska Island, Rat Island, the Delarof Islands, Kanaga Island, and Tanaga Island. Since the animals appeared at Adak Island in 1954 there is another rapidly growing population. One additional concentration exists at Amlia Island that Bureau personnel so far have been unable to evaluate. Adverse flying conditions and the long distances involved make extremely difficult censusing in the western Aleutians.

These interesting marine mammals once were numbered in the tens of thousands in Alaskan and North Pacific waters. In 1804 a single shipment of 15,000 skins valued at more than \$1 million was made from Sitka, Alaska. It was this prime value as fur bearers that led to heavy exploitation in the 1800's and by

the close of that century the animals were virtually exterminated. The Pribilof Islands in Bering Sea, summer home of the colorful Alaska fur seal, supported large numbers until 1802 when the last of the colony was killed off by fur hunters.

Bureau officials are greatly encouraged over the fine increases shown by the sea otters and hope that in the years to come the animals may be restored to something approaching their former abundance. If so, the sea otter--fabulous fur of the old Russian court of Catherine the Great--may again reign as one of Fashion's favorites.

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