

THE FUR SEAL OF THE PRIBILOFF ISLANDS

(Continued from page 1)

pounds or so and range in years from one to four. They are the only ones allowed to be killed for food and furs. The fur in color is of a grayish black and is very soft and velvety.

After the seals have gathered on the rookeries the bulls select from twelve to thirty cows, or as many as they can guard. These males are very jealous and fierce animals. If another bull should try to interfere with his family group a furious fight occurs; blood squirts and flesh flies about and they fight until almost dead, unless one or the other escapes.

If a cow should leave a herd the bull immediately pursues her, catches and bites her on the back, lifts her in the air and flings her back into his herd. The only possible escape for the cow is to get to the water while he is asleep; but he generally has them so badly frightened and subdued that they dare not attempt to escape.

The seals breed twice during the season, early in June and about the last of August, and have one pup each time. At this time the fierce bulls are very busy in supplying food for their families, traveling far out to sea, bringing home seaweed, jelly fish, and other kinds of fish. The young take to water when they are about a month and a-half old. Their mothers are very patient while teaching them to swim. The young stay together in groups of five or six hundred and remain near the shore for about two months; then they take care of themselves.

The manner and habits of the fur seal are very peculiar. During a heavy rain, they desert the rookeries; but when the sun shines and the earth is warm, they climb on the rookeries and lie on the rocks sunning themselves as a dog would when it is resting. The seals not only sun themselves, but bleat most of the time like a flock of sheep, only more musically. All day and night, when it is calm and clear, the seals make a noise somewhat like an approaching railroad train and they can be heard for miles away. If they are disturbed during the night they let out a horrible scream.

They have many ways of amusing themselves. They propel themselves on the surface of the water, roll like a boat, flop around and make the spray fly. They also race with the breakers and ride the waves. Often one sees them racing among themselves. They are tame while in the water and will follow a rowboat and come within a couple of yards of it. The seals also seem to be affectionate and have the kissing art to perfection.

The bachelors have their own amusements, such as rolling, racing on land, mock fights, and playing what

seems like "tag" and "follow the leader." This may seem a little exaggerated, but to believe it one has only to observe them in circuses and notice how playful and eager they are to perform.

Each year in June these seals are branded somewhat like a herd of cattle. This is done to find out the number returning, whether they are new animals, and how many come back the following year. The bachelor seals are found in groups, because the bulls try to keep them off the rookeries. When they are in a group they are not easily separated. This habit of keeping together is of great aid to the sealers, for the seals are easily separated into droves and driven into the seal field. On the day of the drive, about two o'clock in the morning, the natives get between the herd and the water and suddenly make all the noise possible with tin cans, pans, etc. This awakens the seals and, in attempting to escape the noise, they rush inland. The sealers then drive them slowly to the seal fields where they are branded by clipping the hair off the back of their head.

After branding, the killing season takes place, which lasts about two months. On two of the islands, they are now allowed to kill only 13,000 seals a season; but before the United States Government controlled the islands, 20,000 to 30,000 or more seals were allowed to be killed each year. The sealers who do the killing are experts in this line of work. They are divided into three classes. The first-class men, who are most expert, select the seals to be killed and club them on the head just enough to stun them. Immediately after this is done, the second-class men stab the seal in the breast, and the third-class men immediately remove the skins from the animals. After the skins are removed they are counted, weighed, and salted. The skins are salted in order to keep them from spoiling. After the first of August they are tied in bundles and placed ready for shipment. Before being shipped they are counted again and placed under the seal of the United States Revenue Officer, and shipped to San Francisco. From there they are shipped to London, where they are plucked and dyed. They are valued at about \$100 a skin.

The seals start to leave the islands in November, the bulls being the last to depart. Their winter home is not known, but it is thought they go to some warmer climate, even as far South as California.

The flesh of these seals is so good that many people from the United States who have tasted seal flesh say it is even better than beef. Seal meat is becoming popular, for it was served in one of the first-class hotels in San Francisco and the guests who partook of it said it was a very delicious dish.

In a couple of years the United States Government is going to start a meat packing industry. Canneries are to be built on these islands and the sealing trade will be revived. The season will be open to the public in 1918.