



Photo by Lyle Hubbard

WORLD WALRUS REPORT

THE WORLD'S POPULATIONS of walrus are showing signs of a comeback, agencies concerned with their management report.

The range of the two forms of walrus—the Atlantic and the Pacific—encircles the polar basin, but there are far more Pacific walrus than Atlantic. The Pacific walrus is distinguished by its longer tusks and larger body.

An annual report summarizing developments concerning marine mammals has been published in the *Federal Register* as required by the Marine Mammals Protection Act of 1972. The report describes the worldwide status of the Atlantic and Pacific walrus.

In the Pacific, where walrus numbers were estimated at 40,000 to 50,000 in the early 1950s, there are now about 140,000 and some biologists believe that the populations may be reaching the maximum that their habitat can support. The entire Pacific walrus population winters in the pack ice of the Bering

Sea and migrates north through the Bering Strait in the spring as the ice breaks up.

In the Atlantic, the latest figures estimate the walrus population to be on the order of 25,000 in two groups—from the Kara Sea to eastern Greenland and from western Greenland to eastern Canada. They, too, migrate north-south with the edge of the ice cap. The average annual Eskimo and native kill of Atlantic walrus is now about 2,700, and the reproductive rate is estimated to be just a little more than that, at around 3,000 to 5,000 a year. Any increase in kills would seriously jeopardize this subspecies. Herds in the Barents, Kara and White seas are close to extinction now.

Since 1956, the U.S.S.R. reportedly has prohibited all hunting of Atlantic and Pacific walrus except that necessary for Eskimo survival. Atlantic walrus hunting is limited by Denmark to Greenland residents using craft under 40 tons and hunting areas and dates

are regulated. Canada restricts hunting to Eskimos and a few white residents.

Beneficial uses of the Pacific walrus in Alaska were terminated by the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, except that Alaska natives are allowed unlimited use, providing they are not wasted.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act provides for return of management to the State of Alaska under regulations approved by the Secretary of the Interior. Alaska applied for return of management in January, 1973 but the federal government has published no formal notice of action on the request.

If jurisdiction over walrus is returned to the State of Alaska, this abundant and formerly closely managed resource may again be available for beneficial uses.

The walrus is a marine mammal known as a pinniped—pinna meaning wing or fin and pedis meaning foot. Their generic name, *Odobenus*, means "tooth-walker." Their long tusks are used for fighting, for climbing on land and ice and for emergencies such as rescuing a pup from an ice crevice. Tusks are not used for eating. At birth a walrus weighs from 85 to 140 pounds and by two years, 750 pounds. Male Pacific walruses have attained weights of 4,000 pounds and females, 2,000 pounds.

Walruses feed mainly on clams but also eat snails, crabs and worms. Occasionally an adult male will eat seal flesh. They have a greater specific gravity than water and must rest on ice or land frequently, although pouches may be inflated to enable them to sleep while floating upright at sea.

Calves are dependent on their mothers for at least 18 months and occasionally for as long as two and a half years. Most females do not begin to breed until six or seven years of age. Mating occurs during February and March. Growth of the fetus, which is delayed, does not begin until about June, and the actual growth period is about 10 months. Most cows do not breed again until the year following the birth of their last calf.

The Atlantic and Pacific walruses' eating habits could pose ecological problems for the mammals if offshore drilling for oil in the Bering Sea or Arctic Ocean is undertaken, or if the extensive clam beds in these areas are subject to dredging.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has established a walrus research program to complement that of the State of Alaska. Other studies are underway and supported by the Sea Grant Program of the University of Alaska.

ANTI SNAG REGULATION PASSED

A SPORT FISHING REGULATION prohibiting the snagging of any fish in fresh water was adopted by the Board of Fish and Game at its fall meeting in Ketchikan.

The antisnagging law, one of 51 sport fishing regulations adopted, is similar to regulations now in effect in Oregon and Washington. Aesthetic objections and danger of overharvest were cited by the Department of Fish and Game as reasons for proposing the regulation.

The new regulation states:

"In fresh water, it is prohibited to intentionally snag or attempt to snag any fish. Fish unintentionally hooked elsewhere than in the mouth must be released immediately. Snagging is hooking a fish elsewhere than in the mouth."

The board also reopened the freshwater drainages of Bristol Bay to red salmon sport fishing and set aside a portion of the Gulkana River near Glennallen for fly fishing only during June and July.

In Southeastern Alaska, the board reduced the daily bag limit on trout, grayling, char and kokanee from 15 to 10 fish with not more than two over 20 inches in length. A uniform bag limit of six salmon (except kings and kokanees) per day was established for all of Southeastern Alaska. These limits apply to both fresh and salt water.

On Kodiak Island, special spring closures for steelhead were liberalized as current studies indicate that steelhead populations on the island are at exceptionally high levels.

Other regulations passed by the board will:

- Restrict freshwater fishing for salmon in several streams near Juneau.
- Redefine the Ketchikan Creek salmon fishing closed area.
- Reduce salmon, trout and char limits in the Yakutat area.
- Add an additional salmon closure in Eyak Lake and tributaries.
- Extend sanctuary and reduce red salmon bag limit on Russian River.
- Reduce bag limit for grayling on Tanana River to five per day.

Alaska

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ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

