

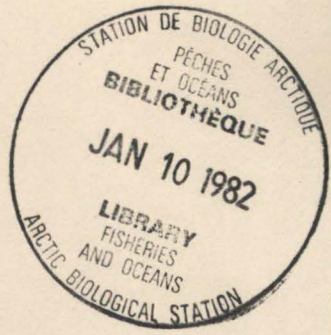


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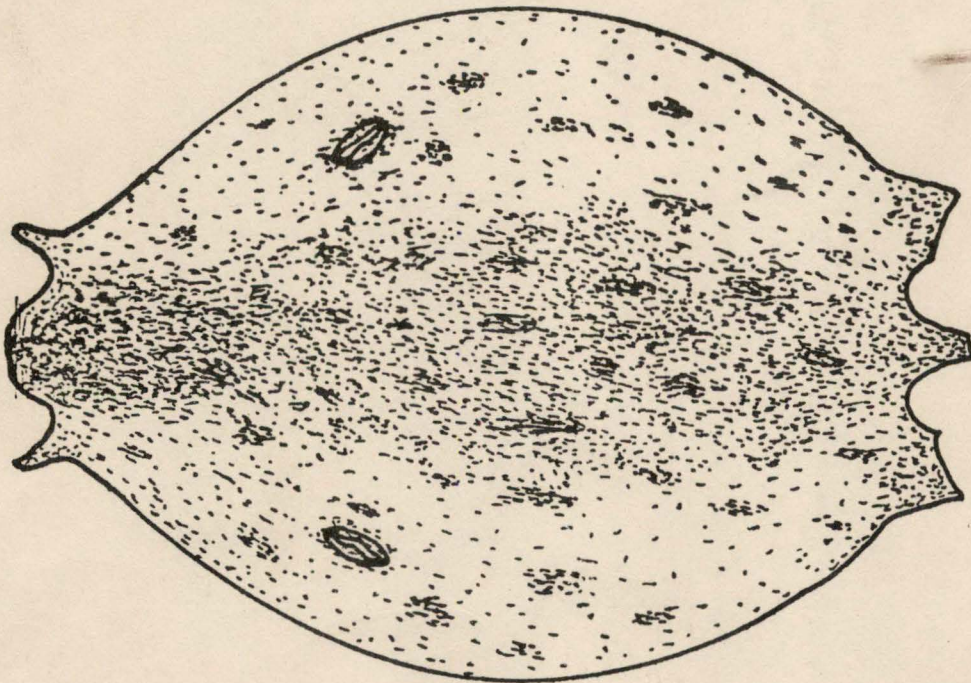


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THE SEALER'S GUIDE





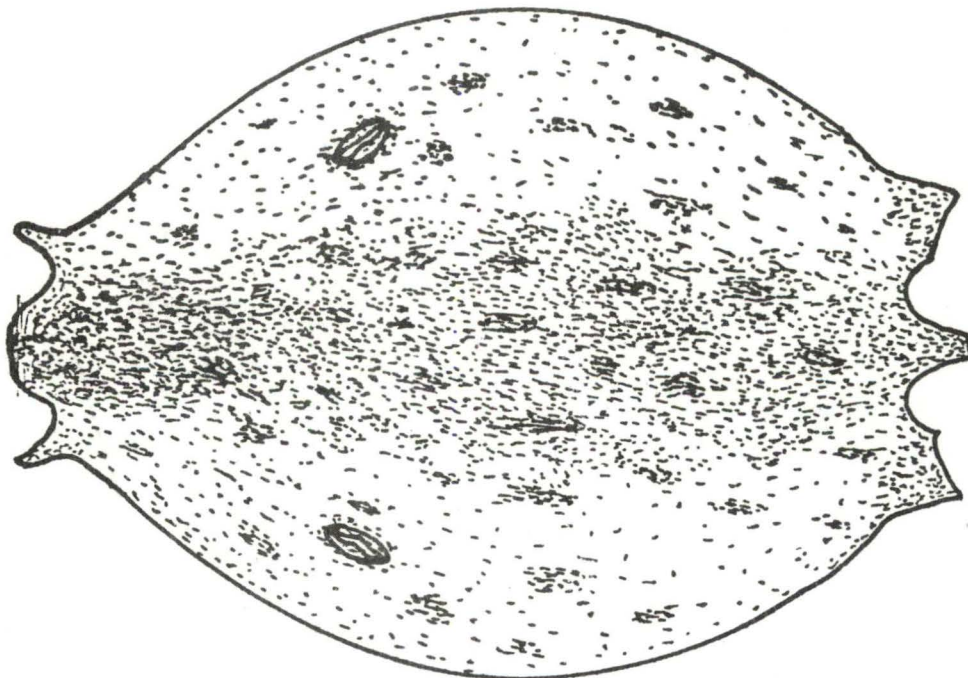
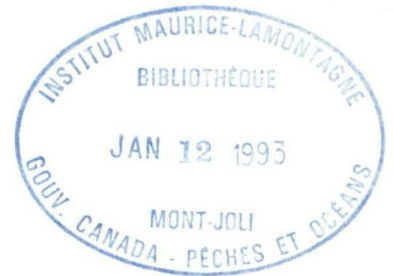
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January 1981

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INTRODUCTION

Seals constitute an important component of the resource-based fisheries of many communities along Canada's east coast. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is responsible for the management of this valuable resource, and protects it and controls its exploitation under the Seal Protection Regulations. Harp seals occurring off the Magdalen Islands and the Quebec North Shore in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are protected under the Regulations which provide for, amongst other things, the establishment of quotas and allocations, the definition of humane killing methods, the issuance of permits to sealers or observers, opening and closing dates within the different sealing areas.

All licenced sealing vessels of 65 feet and over carry on board at least one Fishery Officer. Moreover, these federal officers, in the province of Quebec, in cooperation with the Quebec Government protection officers of the Direction générale des pêches maritimes (DGPM), carry out surveillance of sealing areas in respect to the enforcement of quotas and regulations.

Large sealing vessels are licensed by the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans while sealers obtain their permits from the nearest Quebec DGPM offices. Sealer's licences are issued to sealing group leaders while other group members receive assistant sealer's licences. Where a Fishery Officer finds a licensee committing an offence under the Regulations, he may suspend the licence of that licensee and oblige him to leave the sealing area.

The following sections are intended to help you make your catches more profitable. We hope the information included in this guide will be of some help and we wish you an excellent sealing season.

I SAFETY ON THE ICE

Going to the ice is a serious business, and experienced sealers know that they must take certain elementary precautions before going to a potentially dangerous environment.

Before taking to the ice, always let your family or your friends know your starting point: a search and rescue team could locate you more rapidly and easily knowing your starting point, your departure time, the number of persons with you, the color of your clothes, etc.

1) SEALER'S EQUIPMENT

- a) A club made of hardwood not less than 24 inches or more than 30 inches in length, which for at least half of its length is not less than two inches in diameter (compulsory).
- b) A knife with a curved blade and a sharpening steel: never use a hunting or a kitchen knife, they will damage the pelt (Each sealer and assistant sealer should have his own knife and sharpening steel).

2) GROUP EQUIPMENT

- a) A small boat and oars to cross water between ice floes and to carry your material and pelts.
- b) A sufficient quantity of drinking water and food for 24 hours (in case of emergency).

3) SAFETY EQUIPMENT

- a) Warm replacement clothes: it is recommended to carry them in waterproof plastic bags. It is strongly recommended to have at least stockings, mitts and also a sweater.
- b) A first-aid kit could be very useful in case of accidents.
- c) Flares could save your life indicating your position to a search and rescue team, if you should be caught on the ice. Other items such as a mirror on sunny days or a flashlight at night could indicate your position to search and rescue aircraft or helicopters.

II ABOUT THE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION REGULATIONS

The Seal Protection Regulations contain a number of sections included in order to ensure the protection and conservation of the resource, and monitoring of its exploitation as it becomes seasonally available. This is one of the reasons why the Regulations stipulate that hunting for seals can only be carried out by individuals holding valid licences.

1) LICENCES

Except for large sealing vessels, the following licences are issued, in the province of Quebec, by the Direction générale des pêches maritimes (DGPM).

Sealing by landmen, or from a vessel less than 65 feet, or with nets, is allowed only in waters along the shore of the part of the province in which the sealer resides, and requires a valid licence.

The licences establish different sealers categories:

- a) Sealer: a person at least 18 years of age, having at least two years of experience as a sealer and acting as a sealing group leader. The sealing group leader is responsible for the actions of the members of his group and can be charged in case of violation of the Regulations by any member of his group.
- b) Assistant sealer: a person at least 15 years of age being member of a group working under the direct supervision of a group leader. The name of the sealing group leader must be entered on the assistant sealer's licence.

- c) Small craft: any vessel of an overall length more than 30 feet must obtain a vessel sealing licence to participate in sealing in the Gulf Area and the Front Area.

- d) Large vessels: vessels more than 65 feet in overall length may obtain a licence from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans provided such a licence has been issued in 1979 (except in the case of special licences issued by the Minister). The application for a vessel sealing licence must be made, at the latest, on the 15th day of February of the year for which the licence is requested.

NOTE: Identification: each sealer or assistant sealer must, at all times, have his licence and wear over or attach to his outer clothing so it is visible at all times the badge issued with the licence. Fishery officers may at all times check if a sealer or an assistant sealer has his licence. Also, every vessel must have on board its licence.

2) QUOTAS

Quotas establishing the number of seals that may be killed are established annually by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on the basis of updated scientific data on seal population assessments.

It is important to note that the total allowable catch is a global quota which is then allocated amongst different components, i.e., landsmen, small craft, large sealing vessels and between the

three large sealing areas, i.e. the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Front off Newfoundland and Northern Canada (including Labrador) exploited by Canada's native people.

It should also be noted that Canada allows for a portion of the TAC to be caught by the natives of Greenland, and also allocates a share to Norwegian sealers, on the basis of international agreements.

3) SEALING METHODS

- a) Landsmen: hunters who reach the seals by foot or in small boats less than 65 feet.
- b) Sealing group: a team of four to ten persons under the supervision of a sealing group leader (sealer's licence). Other group members have an assistant sealer's licence.
- c) Sealing vessel: vessels of 30 feet and over holding a vessel sealing licence. The captain must have on board the permit and a regulatory club or hakapik.

4) KILLING

Killing can be done on water, ice or land by different approved means, so specified in order to protect the species and individual animals, and in order to ensure animals are killed humanely, without inflicting pain or suffering.

Approved implements are as follows:

- a) Club: stick of hardwood not less than 24 inches or more than 30 inches in length and that for at least half of its length is not less than two inches in diameter.
These standards have been established because such a club has an optimum striking force without being too heavy for the sealer.
- b) Hakapik: implement made of iron having a slightly bent spike of not more than 5.5 inches on one side and a blunt projection not more than one half inch on the opposite side. The head must weigh three quarters of a pound and it must be securely attached to a wooden handle not less than 24 inches or more than 60 inches in length and with a diameter of not less than 1.25 inches or more than two inches.
Use of the hakapik is permitted for sealers working off large sealing vessels of more than 65 feet in the Gulf Area and by all sealers in the Front Area.
- c) Rifle: firing only centre-fire cartridges, with a muzzle velocity of at least 1800 feet per second and a muzzle energy of 1100 foot pounds. However, the use of metal-cased hardpoint bullets is prohibited.
- d) Shotgun: of not less than 20 gauge, firing rifle or "Poly-Kor" slug shells. The use of multiple shot shells is prohibited.
- e) Nets: the use of nets to take migrating seals is permitted only in the waters along the shore of the part of the province in which the sealer resides.
- f) Long lines: the use of long lines to take seals is strictly prohibited at all times and in all areas.

5) USE OF THE CLUB AND HAKAPIK

- a) Only the regulatory club and hakapik can be used to strike a live seal.
- b) Seals must be struck only on the forehead.
- c) The regulations specify that, in order to stun a seal, a sealer must strike it three times on the forehead with a club or hakapik, or until the skull is crushed.
- d) The sealer must then check to make sure the animal is unconscious. This is done simply by touching the eye; if it blinks, the seal is still conscious and must immediately be struck on the head to render it irreversibly unconscious.
- e) Seals that have been shot must also be struck on the forehead with a hakapik or a club. Before an attempt is made to skin the seal, the sealer must make sure that the seal has no blinking reflex when one of its eyes is touched and that it is in an irreversible state of unconsciousness or that its skull is crushed.
- f) When the animal is unconscious, the seal must be bled immediately by cutting the major blood vessels to the fore-flippers.

6) SKINNING

- a) A seal must not be skinned until the sealer has checked to see that it is in a state of irreversible unconsciousness. It must be glassy-eyed, have a staring appearance, have no blinking reflex when the eye is touched and its muscles must be relaxed.

- b) The sealing group leader must see to it that the members of his team immediately bleed out the seals they have stunned, and skin them without delay; at no time should there be on the ice more than ten dead seals which have not been skinned.

Strict observance of this procedure is essential to avoid iceburned pelts which are worthless to anyone.

- c) All seal skins must be removed from the ice within 24 hours from the day the seals are killed. Sealing may not be resumed until this condition is met.

However, the Minister may, under unusual circumstances, extend the time for removal of seal skins from the ice.

- d) Hooded seals cannot be taken or killed at any time in the Gulf Area.

NOTE:

Sealers are invited to contact their local fishery officers for more information on the Regulations.

III SKINS AND HANDLING PROCEDURES

The money you will get from sealing depends on the way you select the seal, bleed it, sculp it and handle the pelt.

When your pelts reach the processing plant, a grader examines them one by one. Graders recognize eight seal pelt categories; each has a different value.

Table 1 summarizes the different seal pelt categories and provides the 1979 and 1980 maximum Al pelts value. Table 2 shows the basis of the plant's grading system.

Table 1

PELT CATEGORIES

Categories	Age (Days)	Colour	Lanugo	Pelage	Use			Value All Pelts	
					Long hair fur	Short hair fur	Leather	1979	1980
Cat	0 - 3	Yellow	Fast	None	Dyed			\$ 9.25	10.00
Whitecoat	4 - 10	White	Fast	None	Best (dyed)			\$18.50	20.00
Overgang	11 - 14	White with grey showing under white	Fast	Growing; loose	Inferior (dyed)			\$16.50	18.00
Tanner	13 - 18	Spottchy head, flanks	Loose, Falling	Loose; growing	No	No	Leather only	\$10.50	10.50
Ragged Jacket	17 - 25	Black stripe down back; bare of lanugo	Very loose, falling	Slightly loose, still growing	No	Inferior; nat'l or dyed		\$17.25	18.00
Beater	25 days to 1 yr	No lanugo; silver grey with black spots	Gone	Fast, fully grown		Best nat'l		\$30.00	35.00
Bedlamer	1 - 5 yr	Grey with brown spots; older animals show developing harp		Fast		Good	Poor leather	\$22.00	30.00
								\$ 7.00	7.00
Old Harp	6 yr +	Silver grey with well formed black or brown saddle. Perfect old harp has no isolated spots		Fast		Very good	Poor leather	\$28.00	37.00
								\$ 7.00	7.00

Table 2

SEAL PELT GRADING

Skin quality Color	1	2	3	SPOILED
	Perfect skin, no scratches. Even symmetrical cut. Face, tail, scutters present, maximum length.	Slightly imperfect. Noticeable shortage due to lack of head, tail or rear flippers.	Scratched fur. Skin is incomplete or asymmetrical. Flipper holes too large or uneven. Skin or leather is nicked.	
A Fully natural. No stains discolouration or birth marks.	100% \$20.00 \$35.00	75% \$15.00 \$26.25	50% \$10.00 \$17.50	
B Very slightly off, either slight yellow or birth marks.	70% \$14.00 \$24.50	52.5% \$10.50 \$18.37	35% \$ 7.00 \$12.25	
C Extensive yellowing or staining or birth mark.	36.7% \$ 7.34 \$12.84	27.5% \$5.50 \$ 9.62	18% \$3.60 \$ 6.30	
SPOILED				W = 0.0% <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">\$1.00</div>

Legend:

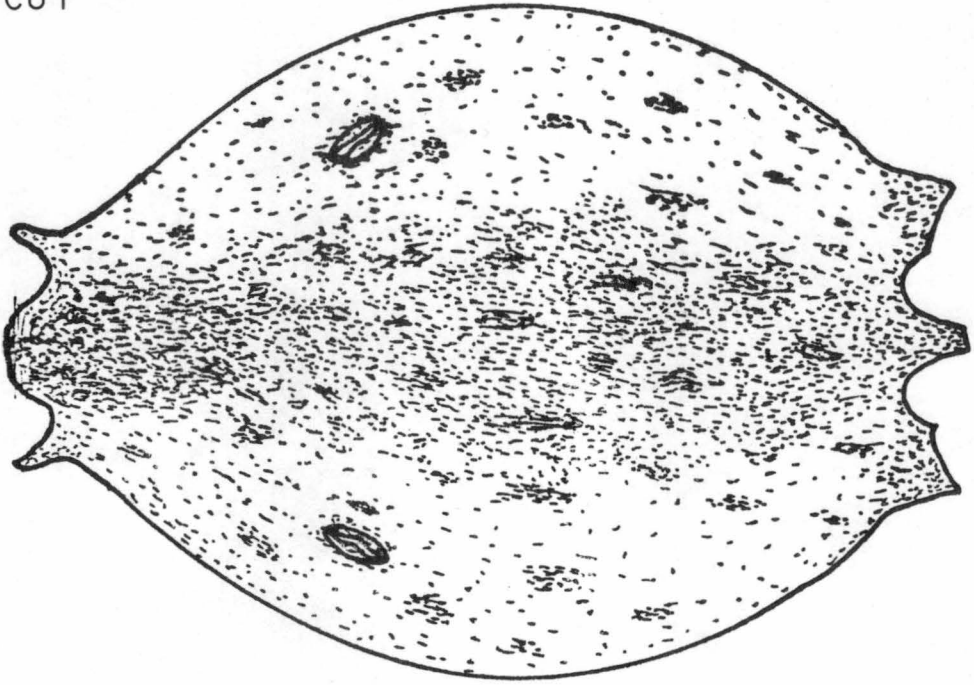
% Relative value

\$Whitecoat

\$Beater

Moulting bedlamers & old
harps = \$7.00 (grade 1).

PROPER CUT



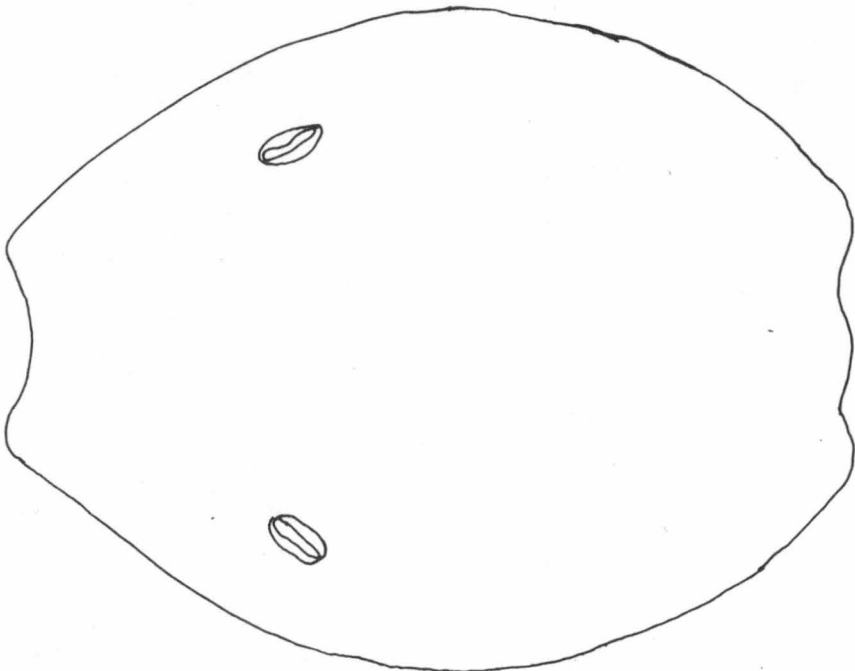
FAULTS :

PELT IS TOO SHORT

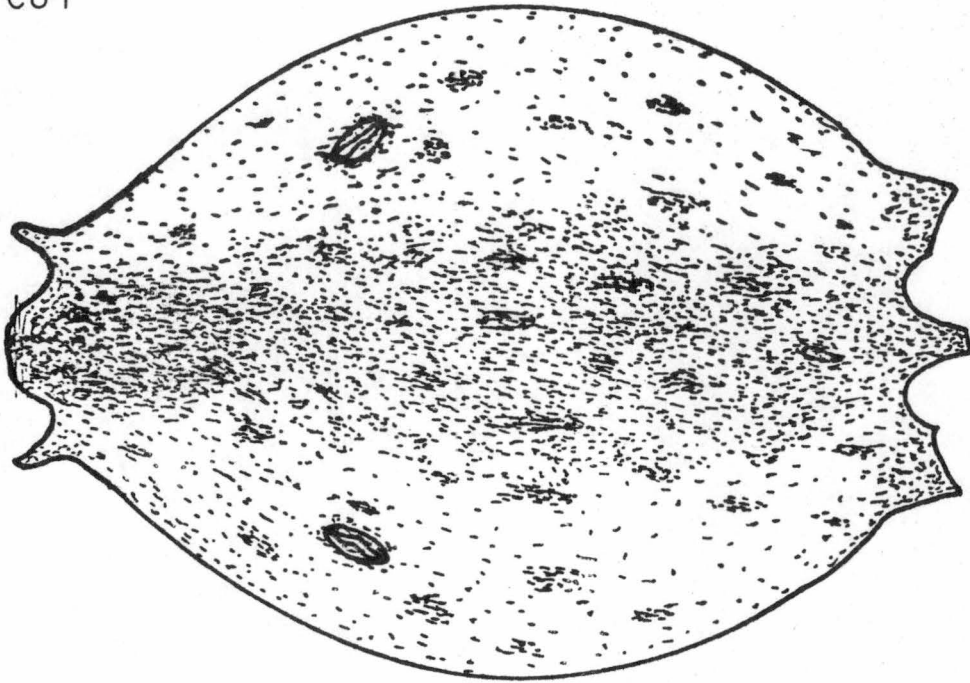
HEAD HAS BEEN CUT OFF

TAIL IS MISSING

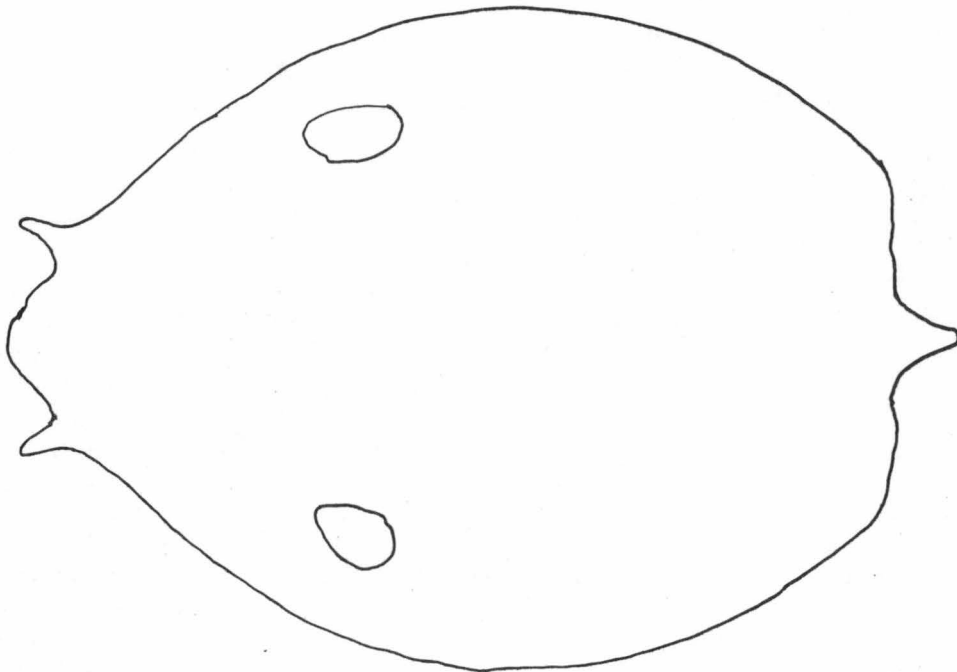
SCUTTERS HAVE BEEN CUT TOO SHORT



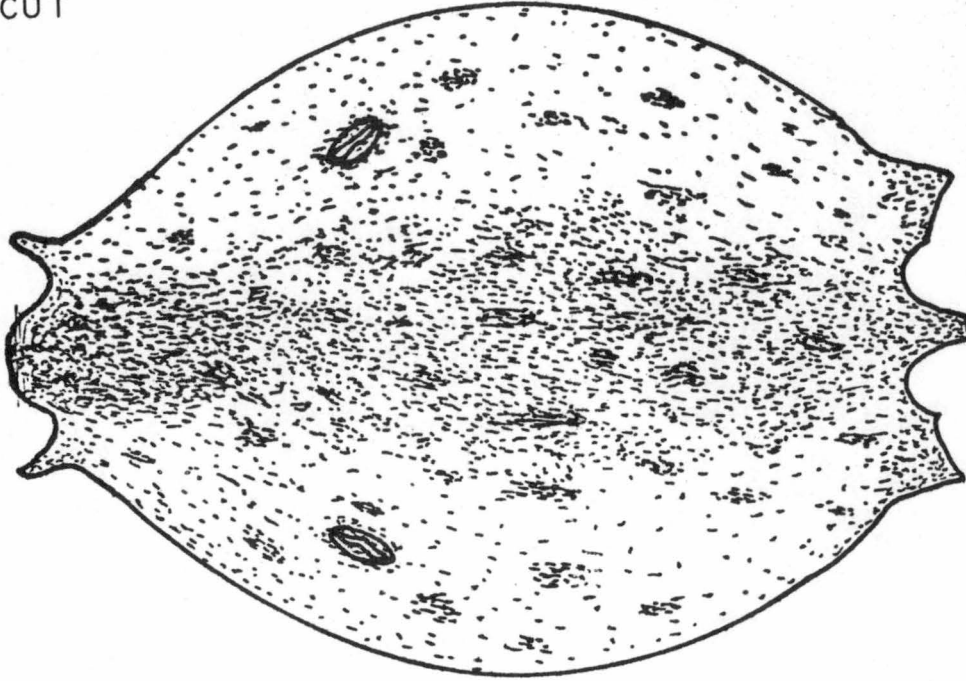
PROPER CUT



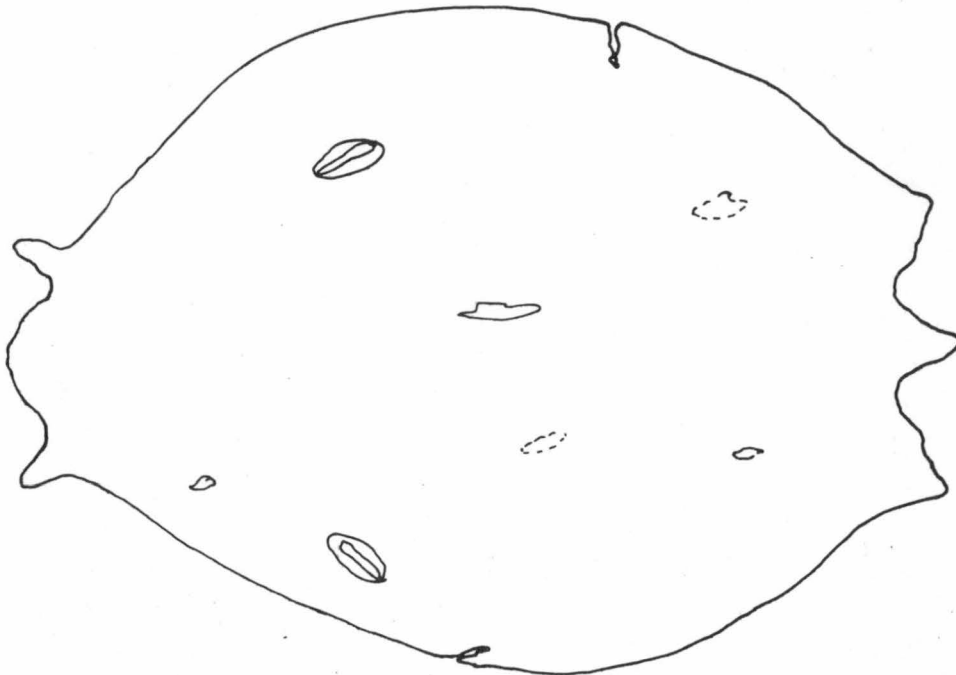
FAULTS:
FLIPPER HOLES ARE UNEQUAL IN SIZE AND TOO LARGE
SCUTTERS ARE TOO SHORT



PROPER CUT



FAULTS:
SPLITTING IS OFF-CENTRE
SLOPPY CUT
NICKS AND CUTS ON THE FAT SIDE



How to get the best grade

A-1, B-2, C-3; it may seem a little complicated when we are not used to the grading system. However, this grading system determines how much money you get for your pelts. So, if you want to get the best prices, read the following tips to avoid downgrading your pelts:

- 1) Select animals with the most valuable fur.
- 2) Bleed them immediately after killing to avoid iceburned pelts which are worthless.
- 3) To bleed the animal, start at the chin and go half-way between the flippers and cut the blood vessels on either side of the rib cage leading down to the flippers. Then, flip the animal over on its belly and let it bleed out.
- 4) Then, flip the seal over on its back, straddle it if you like, and make one clean cut with a good sharp knife. Use only a knife with a curved blade; kitchen or hunting knives inevitably damage the pelt.
- 5) Make a clean cut, starting at the chin to half-way between the flippers, then down through the navel to the tail.
- 6) Cut down both scutters.

While cutting, make all your cuts with smooth, even strokes. While cutting between the blubber layer and the meat, keep in mind that any nick or cut to the skin will drop the pelt's value. Aim for a pelt with as much blubber and as little muscle as you can. Any muscle that is left will be a source of blood which can discolour the fur. The more meat you leave on the pelt, the less money you get.

Never wipe off the blade of your knife on the fur - this is a frequent cause of deterioration and downgrading at the grader's table.

- 7) The front and rear flippers and face should be trimmed to leave as much fur as possible on the pelt.
- 8) The flipper holes should be small and equal in size.
- 9) Leave the tail on; otherwise, your pelt will be downgraded.
- 10) Cool off your pelts blubber-side up so the fur is protected from the sun.
However, don't let them dry.
- 11) Wash your pelts as soon as possible: the fur's worst enemy is blood because the iron it contains makes the pelts turn yellow.
- 12) As soon as the pelts have been thoroughly washed and cooled off, it is recommended to use the anti-yellow solution.

IV STORAGE

When you store your pelts:

- 1) Before storing them, apply the anti-yellow solution if you haven't already done so. First, remove the excess water, then work in your anti-yellow solution with a brush. Get it right down to the roots.
- 2) Keep them away from rusty nails, iron surfaces, fuel and engine heat as this will result in permanent stains or spoiling.
- 3) Always pile them fat to fat and fur to fur because the meat left on the fat is a source of blood which will discolour the fur.
- 4) Keep your pelts in a shed to keep out of the sun and rain. Remove the snow and ice from the pelts and pile them fat to fat and fur to fur on a platform so that that melt water is not a problem. Melt water will make your skins turn sour.
- 5) Then cover the pile of skins with plastic or a tarpaulin.
- 6) If the weather is getting warmer, put some snow on top of the tarpaulin to keep the pile of skins cool.

V LONG TERM STORAGE

If you can't deliver your skins because the plants are closed:

- 1) Use a broad, flat blade and work the fat off carefully. Be very careful, any nicks will reduce the pelt's value.
- 2) Put the pelts in a plastic or wood container and store them in a cool dark place.
- 3) Pile the skins with salt on all sides; then pour in 100% brine.
- 4) Squish the pelts down to remove any air pockets which would result in spoiling.
- 5) Put a non-metallic weight on top such as a stone.
- 6) Put a lid on top to prevent evaporation.

SO, REMEMBER

- 1) SELECT AN ANIMAL WITH THE MOST VALUABLE FUR.
- 2) KILL HUMANELY AND EFFICIENTLY.
- 3) BLEED IMMEDIATELY AND SCULP CAREFULLY AND QUICKLY AFTER KILLING.
- 4) WASH OFF ALL TRACES OF BLOOD AND FAT.
- 5) COOL OFF THE PELTS BEFORE PILING THEM.
- 6) USE THE ANTI-YELLOW SOLUTION.
- 7) KEEP YOUR PELTS COOL, OUT OF THE SUN, AWAY FROM SOURCES OF RUST AND KEEP THEM FROM TURNING SOUR.

ALL THESE TIPS WILL GIVE YOU BETTER RETURNS.

VI GENERAL INFORMATION

Every year, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Quebec Region, organizes a seal hunt coordination center in the Magdalen Islands.

In 1981, this center will again be located at the Bourque Motel. Many federal officers will be there as in past years, working in collaboration with the provincial fisheries protection officers.

1) The Conservation and Protection Branch

The Conservation and Protection Branch regularly uses aircraft and helicopters principally to locate the herds, to assess their abundance, evaluate and follow the progress of whelping and pup growth. These data are used to determine the precise opening date of the hunt and contribute to the protection of the species by ensuring that gravid females are not interfered with before giving birth.

Aircraft and helicopters are also used throughout the hunt to monitor sealing activities, to make sure that regulations are observed and that no one's life is in danger. In fact, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans often participates, in collaboration with the Canadian Coast Guard, in search and rescue operations.

The Conservation and Protection Branch also places a Fishery Officer on board every large vessel which operates in the Gulf.

He keeps an eye on all sealing operations, and checks the catch. When activities reach their peak, the Branch puts additional officers on board, if necessary.

Given the specific responsibilities of the Conservation and Protection Branch, helicopters allocated to that Branch can only be used to transport persons authorized by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In any case, the most recent information brought back by the Fishery Officers patrol is immediately recorded by the Information Service for transmission by code-a-phone.

2) The Information Service

Since 1979, the Communications Division, Quebec Region, has organized an Information Service in the Bourque Motel at the Magdalen Islands to answer media queries on sealing activities.

For the benefit of the Magdalen Islands population, the Information Service also records messages on code-a-phones concerning position of the herds, their abundance, and progress of sealing operations.

These messages are updated as soon as new information is available.

However, it is obvious that patrols are subject to weather conditions and to other circumstances which may prevent the Fishery Officers from observing the ice and bringing back new

information. Moreover, the main duty of the Fishery Officers being the control of sealing activities and the maintenance of order on the ice floes, the spotting function is necessarily subordinate.

In any case, experienced sealers know that winds and currents can rapidly change ice conditions and the location of the herds, so that recorded information soon becomes outdated.

3) The Research Branch

Resource management has for years depended on research carried out by Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientists who have studied seals to determine stock abundance and distribution, fertility rates and reproductive levels, and migratory characteristics, to mention only a few of the research projects undertaken in the past.

These studies, carried out at the Magdalen Islands by scientists of the Arctic Biological Station in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, and recently, of the Fisheries Research Branch of Fisheries and Oceans in Quebec City, or elsewhere, frequently include tagging of harp and other seals. Tagging is one of the most important techniques in the evaluation of stock abundance and also provides useful data on growth rates and migrations. Similar studies are carried out elsewhere in the Gulf, on the Front and in the Arctic. It is important that sealers be aware of these activities, because their participation is essential to the success of the studies, firstly, in leaving newly tagged whitecoats, and secondly, in returning without delay, tags recovered from any other seal. Rapid return of recovered tags ensures rapid payment of the reward.

In 1981, a research project will attempt to determine the causes, and means of prevention of ice-burned pelts. Ice-burn, which we know occurs when seals are not bled out immediately after stunning, renders seal pelts worthless, and is a serious problem at the Magdalen Islands, particularly in the landsmen's catch.

4) Other Research Activities

a) COSS - Committee on Seals and Sealing -

Created in 1971 by the Federal Government, the COSS is an independant committee made up of scientists, veterinarians, representatives of the industry and executive members of Canadian and international humane societies.

COSS studies the economic, sociological, ecological and humanitarian aspects of the seal hunt and recommends to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans any measures it judges necessary, including changes in regulations.

Members of the Committee regularly come to the Magdalen Islands and to other sealing areas to monitor various aspects of the hunt, as well as to carry out specific studies related to the mandate of the Committee.

Members of the Committee are:

Professor Keith Ronald, Dean of the College of Biological Sciences, University of Guelph, who is Chairman;

Tom Hughes, Executive Vice-President, Ontario Humane Society, Toronto;

Trevor Scott, Executive Director, International Society for the Protection of Animals, London, England;

Dr. Harry C. Rowsell, Executive Director, Canadian Council on Animal Care, and Professor, Department of Pathology, University of Ottawa;

Kjell Henriksen, fishing industry executive and former Canadian NAFO Commissioner;

Professor H. D. Fisher, Department of Zoology, University of British Columbia.

b) Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
Humane Practices Committee

At the request of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, following a recommendation to this effect by COSS, this committee has observed the hunt at the Magdalen Islands and on the Front since 1979. Their specific mandate was to evaluate the humane aspects of the seal hunt, in particular, the methods used for killing seals.

Members of the Committee have observed the use of the regulation club and hakapik and find these effective and humane when properly used. The Committee has recommended that the sealer education program of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans be intensified and expanded and that emphasis be put on the humane aspects of killing methods.

Finally, the Committee observed preliminary tests carried out with an experimental gun designed by a member of COSS and recommends that research on the use of this firearm be continued to fully evaluate its effectiveness, under all conditions on the ice. It is anticipated that these tests will be carried out this year.

Members of the Committee are:

Dr. R. W. Stonehouse, Chairman of the Committee, Private Small Animal Practitioner, Toronto, Ontario;

Dr. J. P. Quine, Large and Small Animal Practitioner, Calgary, Alberta;

Dr. R. G. Thomson, Planning Co-ordinator, Proposed Atlantic Regional Veterinary Project, Charlottetown, P.E.I.;

Dr. J. S. Ashman, Supervisor, Animal Care Program, Veterinary Services Branch, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Toronto, Ontario;

Dr. R. G. Urquhart, Director, Regulatory and Communicable Diseases Section, Veterinary Services Branch, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Toronto, Ontario.

c) University of Guelph (Ontario)

For some years, a team of scientists from the University of Guelph, Ontario, has come to the Magdalen Islands to carry out research supported by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The Guelph team hopes again this year to establish a permanent base on the ice, as it did in 1979. Its studies will cover, amongst others: the effects of pup removal on the female; the effect of marking the pup on the behaviour of its mother; bitch-pup behaviour during nursing; energy transfer from bitch to pup; the relationship between condition of the gravid female and the size and growth rate of the pup; the evolution of the pup's energetic reserves during the post-weaning fast.

RESULTS

Each of the above groups produces a report outlining the results of its studies and, if warranted, formulates recommendations to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. This provides a factual, scientific basis for the adjustment and improvement of sealing practices and upgrading of the exploitation of the resource while protecting it to the greatest extent possible from the humane point of view.

Prepared by: Communications Division
Quebec Region
Fisheries and Oceans