U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Federal Aid In Wildlife Restoration

# ALASKA

## JOB COMPLETION REPORTS

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Volume 12 No. 2a

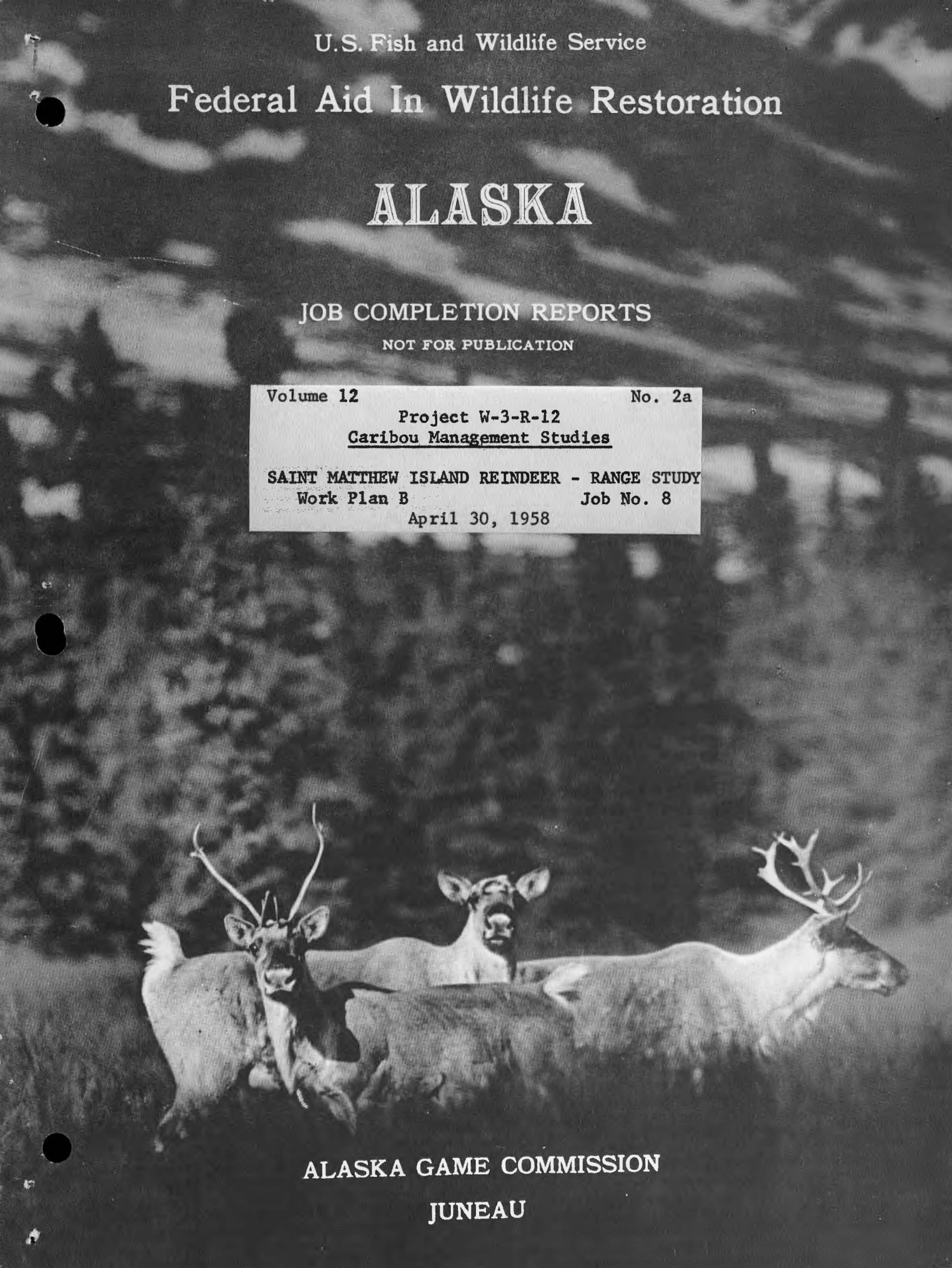
Project W-3-R-12

Caribou Management Studies

SAINT MATTHEW ISLAND REINDEER - RANGE STUDY

Work Plan B Job No. 8

April 30, 1958



ALASKA GAME COMMISSION

JUNEAU

Volume 12 Number 2a

JOB COMPLETION REPORTS

Project W-3-R-12 Alaska April 30, 1958

Wildlife Investigations

Work Plan B Job No. 8

Caribou Management Studies

# SAINT MATTHEW ISLAND REINDEER-RANGE STUDIES

David R. Klein, Wildlife Management Biologist
James L. Whisenhant, Biological Aid

Robert F. Scott
Supervisor, Game Restoration

Clarence J. Rhode
Executive Officer
Alaska Game Commission

Not for Publication

(Reports are preliminary in nature and conclusions are subject to change with further investigation.)

Job No. 8

Caribou Management Studies - Saint Matthew Island Reindeer-Range Study

PERIOD COVERED: July 1 - August 15, 1957

ABSTRACT

A field study of reindeer-range relationships on St. Matthew Island in the Bering Sea was made during the summer of 1957. Population counts showed that the reindeer herd had increased at an average annual rate of 34 percent since the original stocking of 29 animals in 1944. The present reindeer herd numbers approximately 1350 animals. The fawn ratio of 26 percent of the total adults represents a continuing increase but at a somewhat reduced rate from previous years. The physical condition of reindeer sampled was excellent.

Summer forage conditions appeared adequate for the existing herd. The winter range, a dry tundra of lichens, willows and sedges, showed serious over-utilization. Lichens have been almost completely eliminated on much of the winter range, while willows and sedges have increased their surface coverage and now support more of the winter utilization. Vegetation was studied and recorded through the use of line transects and meter square quadrats. Permanent range enclosures were constructed to serve as ungrazed control plots.

Other biological data were collected.

OBJECTIVES

The occurrence of an unharvested and rapidly increasing reindeer herd on St. Matthew Island offered the opportunity to initiate studies of reindeer-range relationships to take advantage of this unique situation. It was felt that the knowledge of the population dynamics and range ecology of this isolated reindeer herd, with a known history and free of human interference, would be of considerable value in understanding the ecology of the caribou herds of the mainland of Alaska. The outlined objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To evaluate sex and age composition and obtain an accurate estimate of total numbers of the St. Matthew Island reindeer herd.
2. To sample physical condition of the animals present in terms of weights, measurements and parasite incidence.
3. To evaluate quantitative and qualitative condition of the existing range and the vegetative complex of the island.
4. To establish permanent transects, enclosures and unprotected control quadrats to reflect future trends in range condition.

5. To collect information of other animal populations present and any additional information of biological significance as time and logistics permit.

TECHNIQUES USED

Field work was done during the period July 15 - August 9, 1957 by David R. Klein and Field assistant James Whisenhant. Transportation of personnel and equipment, both to and from St. Matthew Island, was accomplished by the Coast Guard cutter "Wachusett". A brief stop at Hall Island was made on August 9, after departure from St. Matthew Island.

Reindeer Population Counts: The total count of the entire reindeer herd was obtained at a time when the main body of the herd was located on the narrow part of the island south of Big Lake (See Fig. 1). Four consecutive days were spent in making this count and complete coverage of the island was obtained from southeast to northwest. Composition counts were made whenever the opportunity for close observations of reindeer existed. Binoculars and a 20-30 power spotting scope were used to aid in the differentiation of sex and age groups. The age and sex of reindeer dying from natural causes was determined from skeletons found throughout the island.

Physical Condition of the Reindeer: During the course of the study twelve reindeer were shot from representative sex and age groups within the population. These animals were examined to determine their physical characteristics and well being. Body and antler measurements and weights were obtained and examinations were made for parasites and other pathologic conditions.

Vegetative Composition and Condition of the Range: A survey of the vegetative complex of the island was made through the use of point-intercept transects, meter-square study quadrats and extensive plant collections. On the line transects and quadrats, vegetation was recorded by ground cover, frequency of species occurence, vigor, utilization by reindeer and total aspect. A representative collection of plants was made from the entire reindeer range. One hundred and fifty-eight specimens were collected, representing one hundred and twenty species. Appearance of the vegetation and general aspect of the range was recorded photographically. Most of the plants collected were identified by Dr. Herbert C. Hanson, with cooperation from Fr. M. Duman on the sedges and rushes, W.C. Steere on the mosses and J.R. Swallen on one species of Poa. Dr. Hanson also supplied invaluable assistance in the interpretation of plant relationships in the ecology of the reindeer range. Mrs. Hildur Krog identified the lichens. Lists of plants collected appear in the Appendix.

Twelve point-intercept transects, one hundred feet long and with recording points at one foot intervals, were established in varying stands of vegetation throughout the island. These transects were laid out with a steel tape and marked at both ends with rock cairns. A photographic record was obtained for each transect in color and black and white. Locations of the transects were recorded in the field notes and on aerial photos. The information recorded from the transects is summarized in the

Appendix. An accompanying map shows the locations of the transects (Fig. 27).

Three groups of one-meter-square vegetative study plots were established on sections of the reindeer winter range. Each group consists of four meter-square plots laid out in close association as shown in Figure 28. Two of the plots in each group were protected from reindeer grazing and trampling by five feet of cattle fencing, topped with two strands of barbed wire (Fig. 15). The two remaining plots were unprotected and available to use by reindeer. The ground cover in each of the plots was recorded by species, area covered and height and charted on graph paper at the scale of 1:5. The plots were photographed in color and black and white and a soil well was dug near each group from which samples and a description of the soil profile was obtained. The vegetative analyses of the quadrats and the soil characteristics are listed in the Appendix. The locations of the quadrats are marked on the map in Figure 27.

Other Biological Data: During the study there was opportunity to collect information relative to other animal populations on, or adjacent to the island. Lists of mammals, birds and fishes seen, or known to occur, on St. Matthew Island are included in the Appendix with estimates of numbers present. A brief summary of suggestions to aid in future temporary or permanent habitation of the island is included in the Appendix.

## FINDINGS

Island Topography and Weather: St. Matthew Island(N 60° 30' by W 172° 30') is located in the Bering Sea Wildlife Refuge approximately 200 miles south of St. Lawrence Island and 170 miles west of Nunivak Island. It is about 32 miles long by 3½ wide and comprises 128 square miles. The topography of the island is characterized by a series of north-south ridges, with intervening low valleys. The ridges are about a thousand feet high, are in most cases eroded to smooth contours and are of volcanic origin. The precipitous basalt cliffs, formed by the cutting action of the sea on the mountains, indicate that the basic relief of the island was formed by an extensive complex of lava flows. The irregular character of the island is broken in two places on the southern portion where extensive dry flats, only a few feet above sea level, extend across the island (Figs. 13 & 14). Earth disturbances adjacent to the cliffs, mentioned by Hanna (1920), are apparently the result of land slippage where concentrations of a mineral, similar to bentonite, occur in the soil and decomposing volcanic rock. This mineral has a marked affinity for water with which it forms a greasy gumbo-like texture, very conducive to mass slippage of the earth.

There are several fresh and brackish water lakes on the island, many of which have been formed by gravel bars built by wave action. Storm tides bring salt water into some of the lakes. Residual snow banks, ground water and precipitation feed the numerous small streams which drain the valleys and empty into the lakes.

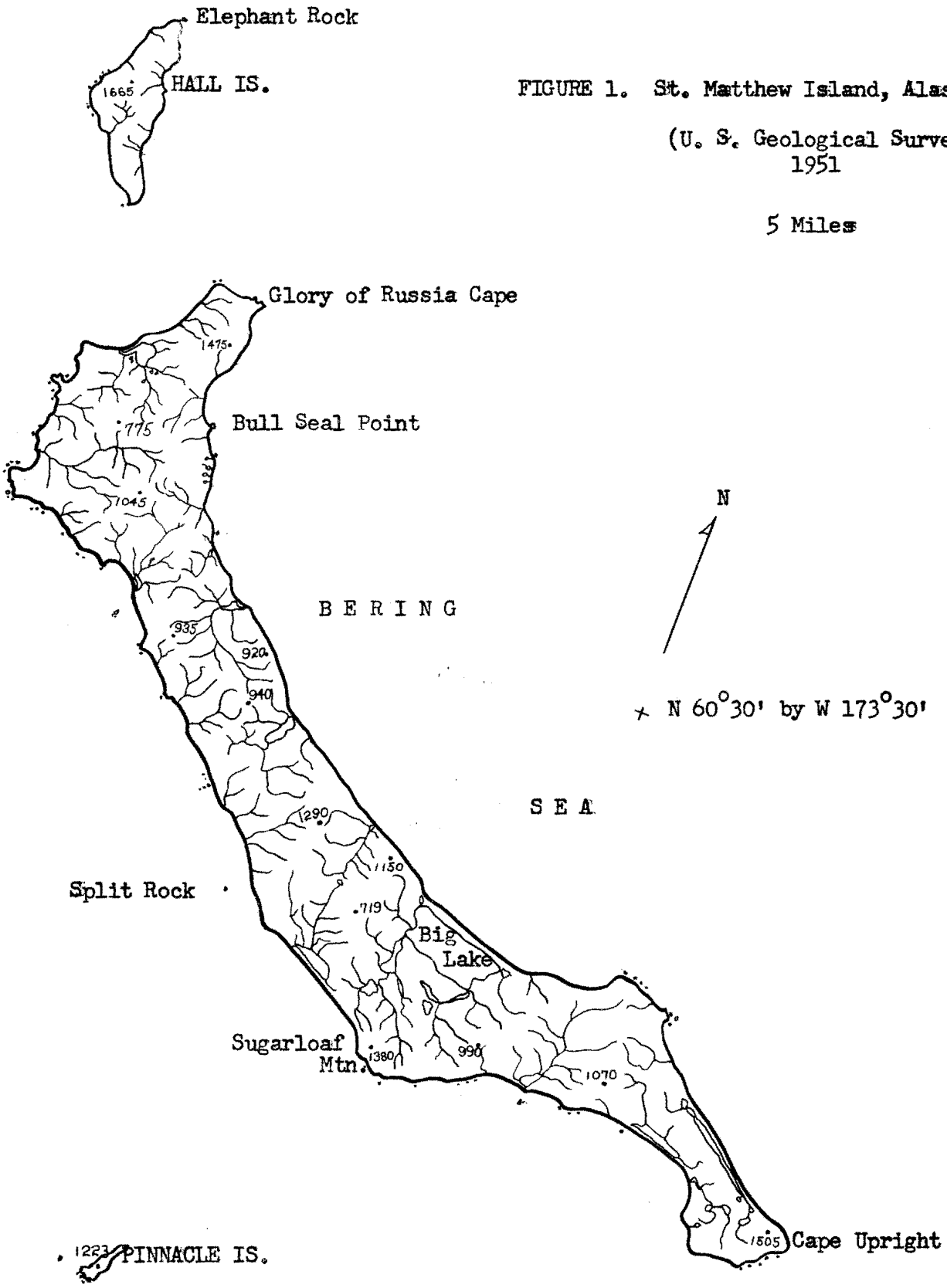



FIGURE 1. St. Matthew Island, Alaska

(U. S. Geological Survey)
1951

5 Miles

The climate of St. Matthew Island is characterized by extreme wind velocities, a moderate temperature for such a high latitude, considerable summer fog and an annual precipitation of 15 inches. A weather summary kept by the U.S. Army from September 1943 through August 1944 on St. Matthew Island, is presented in the Appendix.

The Reindeer Herd: The existing reindeer herd on St. Matthew Island is the result of the release of 24 female and 5 male reindeer on August 20, 1944, by the U.S. Coast Guard (Beals, 1944). The animals, which were all two-year-olds, were obtained from the Nunivak Island herd near Nash Harbor and were transported by the Coast Guard Cutter "Clover". The objective of the release was to establish a small herd as an emergency food supply during World War II. A Coast Guard loran station and an Army weather station were maintained on the island during the war years, but both were abandoned before the herd was of harvestable size. Shooting of the newly established animals by the military personnel was not permitted. The island has been uninhabited since then and no harvest of reindeer has taken place.

Reindeer Population Counts: During July 15-August 9, 1957 a total of 1226 reindeer were counted, with no known duplication existing. While making the counts at the north end of the island some animals were missed due to impaired visibility by fog. Large bulls, which were scattered throughout this area at the time, probably constituted the greater portion of the animals missed. This is also indicated by the disproportionate sex ratio among the older animals in the raw counts. By comparison of the composition counts with the assumed herd composition, it seems likely that approximately ten percent of the herd was not counted (See Tables 1 & 2). Adding the ten percent missed to the total animals counted, gives a rounded population figure of 1350. This represents an average yearly rate of increase of 34 percent since their release in 1944. Actually, it is probable that the rate of increase was higher than this during the first few years, due to the large proportion of producing females in the initial stock and the absence of non-producing young stock. Among reindeer, yearling cows breed and have fawns when they are two years old, while caribou are a year later in this respect. Also, female reindeer on good range frequently are bred in their first year and have their first fawns when they are one year old (Chase, 1957). As sex and age ratios adjusted to more natural conditions, the rate of increase quite likely stabilized at a lower figure. The assumed population growth of the herd in the thirteen years since the original stocking is depicted graphically by the growth curves in Figure 2. Rausch's minimum estimate of 400-500 reindeer in 1954 and Rhode's estimate of 700-800 in 1955, add credence to the assumption of the herds rate of growth. Scandinavian figures quoted by Hadwen and Palmer (1922) show average herd increase for managed reindeer herds to be about 25 percent. The growth of the reindeer industry in Alaska in the twenty years period from 1902 to 1921 shows an annual net increase of 27 percent, or an annual gross increase of 33.3 percent, if total harvested animals are considered (Hadwen and Palmer, 1922). The reindeer herd on St. Paul Island, also in the Bering Sea, showed an average annual rate of increase of 19 percent during its build-up period, however, when examined on a yearly basis, this rate fluctuated widely from negative values in two years to as much as 42 percent four years before the peak was reached (Scheffer, 1951).

Herd Composition Counts: Herd composition counts of several segments of the herd were obtained. Segregation of fawns from adults was possible for 910 animals. Yearling segregation, which was more difficult and required closer observation, was obtained for 218 reindeer. Three hundred large bulls were tallied out of the total count of 1226. During the period of the study the cows and young stock, which composed the main body of the herd, remained in the area northwest of the Cape Upright flats and southeast of peak 940 (Fig. 1), while the large bulls were scattered over the northwest and southeast extremities of the island. A summarization of the composition counts is shown in Table 1 and the assumed herd composition is shown in Table 2.

The fawn ratio of 26 percent of the total adults, while indicative of a continuing population increase, is nevertheless, below the indicated level of previous years. This may mean that the herd has already exceeded the point of inflection on the sigmoid growth curve (Fig. 2), and has entered the decelerating phase of population growth. The 34 percent fawn ratio in the smaller sample counted (218), is probably biased. This count is the sum of many segregation counts of small bands which are predominantly cows accompanied by fawns and some yearlings. Barren cows and the majority of the yearlings usually remained in the larger groups (100 plus).

Natural Mortality: The skeletons or other remains of 31 reindeer were found during the course of the study. Whenever possible, these were sexed by examination of the antlers and pelvis and aged by teeth appearance. No remains of reindeer were found northwest of peak 940, which reflects the concentration of winter activity on the southeast portion of the island. This sample of natural mortality is presented in Table 3. It is apparent, upon examination of this data, that the greater portion of animals represented fall in the older age groups and reindeer over eight years of age make up the largest group. This is partially explained by the less apparent nature of the remains of very young animals and the ease with which they are scattered by foxes. Bearing this in mind, a stratification of this type is logical under a very low mortality rate, which is expected in view of the rate of increase. At first appearance this sample appears exceptionally small in view of the total population present. However, the herd is only 13 years old and eight years ago there were less than 200 animals. The low ratio of females to males represented in the sample is quite likely due to the less apparent nature of female remains. The large bleached antlers of bulls were frequently all that could be seen of a skeleton above the surrounding vegetation, while the smaller antlers of cows were not as readily seen and are more subject to destruction by foxes, mice and shattering by frost action. The large number of antlered bulls represented in the sample indicates that these animals die in the early winter, probably shortly after the rut and prior to the shedding of antlers.

The legs and feet of newborn fawns were found at two different arctic fox dens, however, there was no evidence to indicate the cause of death. Foxes were very effective in locating carcasses of reindeer which had been killed for examination and evidence of their presence at old kills was very common.

TABLE 1 REINDEER COMPOSITION COUNTS, ST. MATTHEW ISLAND

July 15 - August 9, 1957

| Object of count | Total Animals | Fawns No. | Fawns % of Total | Bulls 2 yrs. No. | Bulls 2 yrs. % of Total | Cows | Yearlings No. | Yearlings % of Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fawn segregation | 910 | 267 | 29 | none | | not segregated | | |
| Yearling segregation | 218 | 75 | 34 | none | | 99 | 45 | 21 |
| Total count | 1226 | | | 300 | 24 | | | |

TABLE 2 ASSUMED HERD COMPOSITION, ST. MATTHEW ISLAND - 1957

(from sample counts, Table 1)

| Total herd | Fawns No. | Fawns % of Adults | Fawns % of Herd | Yearlings No. | Yearlings % of Adults | Yearlings % of Herd | Cows over yearling age | Bulls over yearling age |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1350 | 280 | 26 | 21 | 190 | 22 | 14 | 470 | 410 |

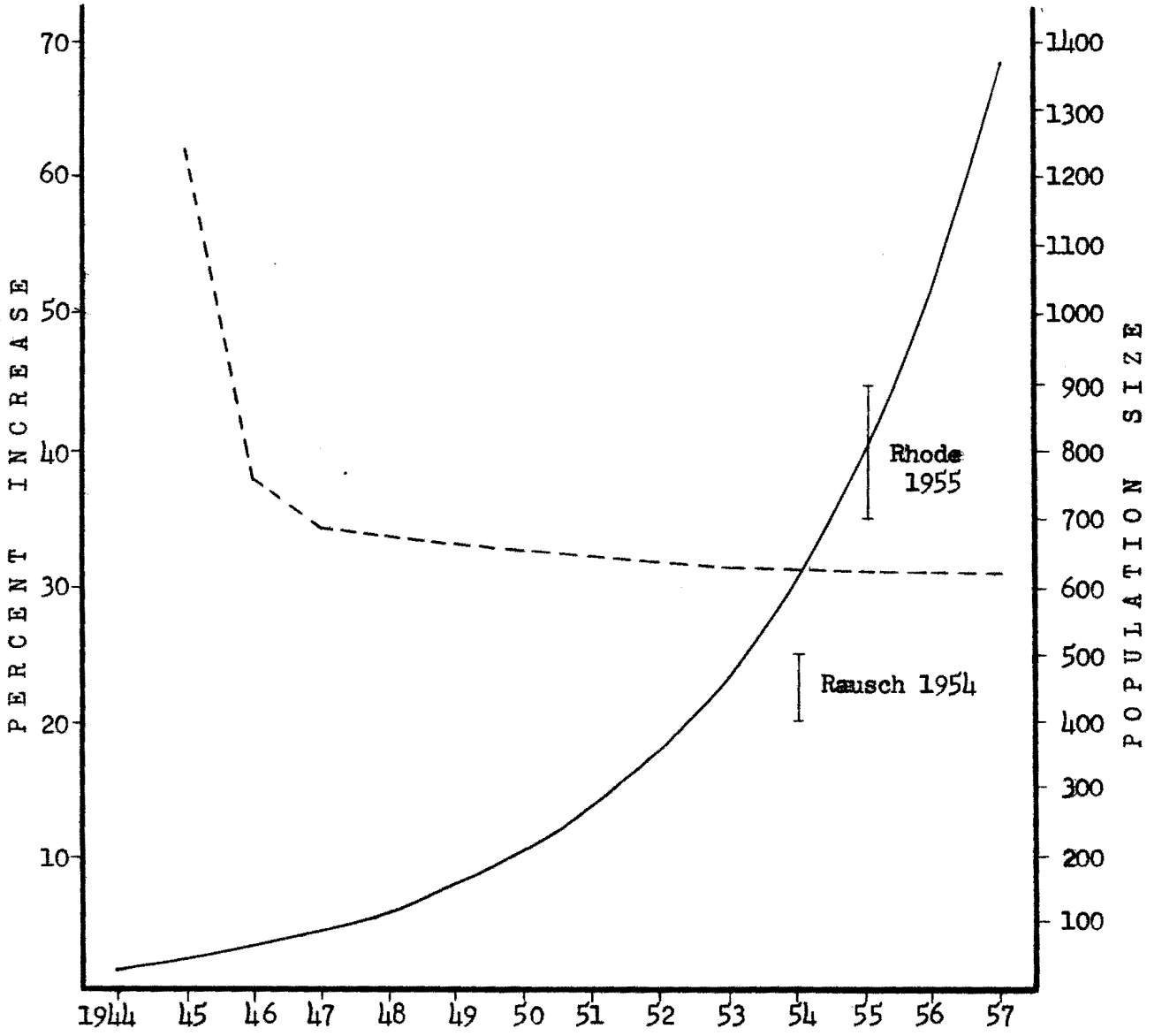



FIGURE 2. Assumed population growth of the St. Matthew Island reindeer herd, 1944 - 1957. The broken line curve shows the instantaneous percentage rate of population growth of the reindeer since their introduction in 1944. The cumulative population growth is shown by the solid line curve for this same period.

Six reindeer are known to have died after their antlers had become entangled in copper wire at the abandoned Coast Guard station (Fig. 3). One reindeer was observed to be lame due to a piece of wire wound around its leg at the knee joint. A shed antler, with about ten pounds of wire entangled on it, was found four miles from the Coast Guard station.

Physical Condition and Characteristics of the Reindeer: Twelve reindeer were collected as an index to the health and physical characteristics of the herd. All animals collected were in excellent physical condition. Fat deposition was particularly noticable in the large bulls but actively growing yearlings and lactating cows were also in good flesh with mesenteric, subcutaneous and intermuscular fat present. Subcutaneous fat was pink in all of the specimens, indicating that fat anabolism was taking place. The two large bulls collected had fat layers on their rumps three to four inches thick. Hadwen and Palmer (1922) list October as the period when reindeer have attained their maximum fat reserves. Weights and measurements, taken from the animals collected, are shown in Table 4. The weights of all of the reindeer collected are greater than the average weight range listed for reindeer from other Alaska herds.

Also conspicuous among these animals was the very large and uniform antler growth on all sex and age groups. "Trophy size" antlers were common among the large bulls. The measurements from the three large bulls compare favorably with caribou antler measurements and these were by no means the largest animals present. Figures 5 through 10 show the range of antler development on some of the reindeer specimens collected.

No warbles, nose bots or other external parasites were found in the specimens collected. Although the 12 animals collected is admittedly a small sample, this indicated absence of warbles and nose bots corresponds with conditions on St. Lawrence Island where the reindeer herd was free of these parasites for several years after its establishment (Hadwen and Palmer, 1922). The original stock was moved to St. Matthew Island in August when it is most likely all the bot fly and warble grubs had left the reindeer and egg laying had not started. Mr. Fred Chase, Nunivak Island reindeer manager, has suggested that climatic conditions, rather than isolation, may be the important factor on St. Matthew Island in keeping the animals free of insect parasites.

All reindeer specimens examined were free of parasites of the lungs and liver and complete examination of the digestive tract of four reindeer failed to reveal parasites. Again, the extremes in weather conditions on St. Matthew Island may be detrimental to the completion of the exoteric stage of the life cycles of some internal parasites. Of course, there are many parasites which are not eliminated by climatic extremes and these are quite likely present in the herd but might not be found in healthy animals. The significance of the lack of internal parasites in these reindeer is apparently not due to their isolation but more likely is a reflection of the excellent welfare of the herd at this time.

The general well being of these reindeer, which is reflected in their large body size and antler development, abundant fat reserves and indicated absence of parasites, are obviously reflections of aspects of their environment. In this respect, the quality of the summer forage is perhaps most

TABLE 3. NATURAL MORTALITY AMONG THE ST. MATTHEW IS. REINDEER HERD

(From skeletons & remains found July 15 - Aug. 9, 1957)

| Age (yrs) | Sex | | Undetermined | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | | No. | Percent |
| 0-1 | | | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| 1-2 | | | 3 | 3 | 10 |
| 4-5 | | | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 5-6 | 1 | 4 | | 5 | 17 |
| 6-7 | 2 | 1 | | 3 | 10 |
| 7-8 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 17 |
| 8+ | 10 | 1 | | 11 | 37 |
| Adult? | | 1 | | 1 | 3 |
| | 16 | 8 | 7 | 31 | |

Table 4

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ST. MATTHEW ISLAND REINDEER, 1957

| Date Collected | Age | Sex | Total Weight | Hind Foot | Chest Girth | Total Length | Length of Longest Beam of Antlers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8/3 | fawn | F | 97 | 15.75 | 36.50 | 50.75 | 10.75 |
| 8/7 | fawn | F | 107 | 16.00 | 38.50 | 53.25 | 12.00 |
| 8/8 | 1 | F | 186 | 17.00 | 43.50 | 59.50 | 23.00 |
| 8/8 | 1 | F | 211 | 18.25 | 45.00 | 61.00 | 21.25 |
| 8/1 | 1 | M | 235 | 18.00 | 46.75 | 62.50 | 30.50 |
| 8/4 | 1 | M | 219 | 18.75 | 46.00 | 61.75 | 26.75 |
| 8/3 | 3 | F* | 245 | 18.50 | 48.50 | 70.75 | 18.50 |
| 7/17 | 4 | F | --- | 19.00 | 44.75 | 68.25 | ---- |
| 8/7 | 4 | F* | 247 | 17.25 | 45.50 | 69.00 | 26.00 |
| 7/17 | 7 | F* | --- | 18.25 | 47.00 | 66.50 | ---- |
| 7/20 | 8+ | M | --- | 21.25 | 55.00 | 82.00 | 41.00 |
| 8/4 | 8+ | M | 404 | 19.25 | 62.50 | 77.25 | 49.50 |

* lactating

instrumental, as the physiological requirements for growth and development are the highest during the summer season.

Complex of Vegetation Present: Vegetation is of the arctic tundra type and is of a more xeric nature than that of the Pribilof Islands. Precipitation at St. Paul Island in the Pribilof group is greater than on St. Matthew Island and averages 24 inches annually. All plants are low growing and only the annual growth of a few forbs and grasses exceeds one foot in height. Willows, the only shrubs present, are decumbent forms. The major plant communities can be broken down into several groups, which are described here briefly.

1.) DRY FLATS: Extensive flats, with well-developed and well-drained rocky soils, are located northwest of Cape Upright and southwest of Big Lake. These flats support a dry tundra vegetation consisting mainly of lichens, willows and sedges. Soil wells disclosed no permafrost and its absence over the greater portion of the island is further indicated by the good soil drainage. Frost boils of 10-30 inches in diameter do occur. The dry flats have supported a greater intensity of winter utilization by reindeer than any other vegetative type. Consequently, lichens have been drastically reduced. The analyses of the vegetation at Station 1 and 2 and Transects 2 and 11, which appear in the Appendix, are typical of the dry flats (See Figs. 15, 16, 17, & 18). Plants occuring on the dry flats are listed below in their order of abundance:

Lichens: Cladonia alpestris, Sphaerophorus globsus, Cetraria cucullata and Thamnolia vermicularis are the most common forms, while other forms of Cladonia, Lobaria linita, Dactylina arctica, Cetraria islandica, Cetraria islandica and Nephroma expallidum are also present.

Salix crassijulis x ovalifolia grows on raised hummocks a foot to several feet in diameter. Forms of S. arbutifolia replace S. crassijulis x ovalifolia with increased moisture or where temporary flooding occurs.

Carex nesophila is very common throughout the flats.

Mosses were apparently instrumental in building the hummocks upon which the willows grow and are mostly Polytrichum alpinum.

Other plants present, but scattered are:

Artemisia arctica var. beringensis
A. trifurcata
Luzula arcuata
L. nivalis
Trisetum spicatum
Polygonum viviparum
Cardamine umbellata
Empetrum nigrum

2.) DRY, LOW RIDGE TOPS AND BENCHES: Vegetation on level elevated areas where soil formation and "drainage" are good is quite similar to that found on the low, dry flats. Density and frequency of occurrence of willow (Salix crassijulis x ovalifolia) decreases with altitude and is usually replaced by Dryas octopetalla. Other more xeric plant forms are common on such sites. The lichen complex is similar to the dry flats but not as dense. Carex nesophila decreases in density. Moss is present but depauperate. The mineral soil is exposed more frequently. Vegetative composition of this community is analysed in the Appendix under Station 3 and Transects 6, 7, 9 and 12 (See Figs. 19 & 20). In addition to the Dryas, willows, sedges and lichens, other plants occuring on these sites are:

Artemisia arctica var. beringensis
A. trifurcata
A. senjavinensis
Festuca brachphylla
Ligusticum macounii
Pedicularis sudetica
Androsace chamaejasme
Loiseleuria procumbens
Vaccinium vitis-idea
Polygonum viviparum
Campanula uniflora
Empetrum nigrum
Potentilla vahliana
Oxytropis nigrescens
Lycopodium alpinum
Senecio atropurpureus

3.) MOIST, WELL-DRAINED MEADOWS: On these sites sedges are predominant but ground cover is complete and a wide variety of arctic alpine forbs exists. Carex nesophila is the predominant sedge. Willow is primarily Salix rotundifolia, which forms dense mats particularly when associated with snowflushes, and S. reticulata, which is usually scattered but more apparent because of its larger leaves. Lichens are very scattered on such sites. Frequently, residual snow banks furnish abundant moisture throughout the summer on these meadows. Transects 1 and 10 were laid out in these plant communities and their summaries are presented in the Appendix. Figure 14 shows the typical association of these types. Additional plants occurring on the wet, well-drained meadows are:

Calamagrostis deschampsioides
Alopecurus alpinus
Arctagrostis latifolia
Poa arctica
Artemisia arctica var. beringensis
Aconitum delphinifolium
Valeriana capitata
Sedum roseum
Gentiana glauca

Pedicularis capitata
Lagotis glauca
Lycopodium selago
Carex bipartita
Saxifraga hieracifolia
S. punctata
Luzula wohlenbergii

4.) WET, POORLY-DRAINED MEADOWS: Bog meadows are common in some sections of the flats, in broad valleys and low mountain passes where level ground is poorly drained. Sedges predominate in such sites. Eriophorum augustifolium and E. russeolum var. albidum are very common but do not form true hummocks characteristic of the sub-arctic muskegs. Carex stans and C. bipartita occur as codominants on these sites and are grazed heavily by reindeer in the summer. The intervening areas between the sedges are occupied by Sphagnum sp., other mosses, a few lichens (Cladonia alpestris, Thamnolia vermicularis and others)and such higher plant forms as Petasites frigidus, Rubus arcticus, Potentilla palustris and Salix arbutifolia. The vegetative summaries from Transects 4 and 5 are typical of the bog meadow type (Fig. 21). Evidence of the presence in the past of permafrost on the island is indicated in some of the low bog meadows where "pingo" mounds have been pushed up by frost action (Fig. 22).

5.) ROCK RUBBLE FIELDS AND HIGH RIDGE TOPS: Vegetation on high, rock rubble fields and ridge tops of frost-sorted scree is mainly restricted to crustose lichens. Frost action is very apparent in these locations, forming stone polygons and stripes, and on the ridge tops, sorting the scree into a "pavement" of rocks of uniform size (Fig 14.) Soil formation is very limited, occuring in pockets where fine material has been brought to the surface by frost boils. Where protection from the wind is afforded, these soil pockets support lush growths of lichens, including Cladonia alpestris, Sphaerophorus globosus and others. Carex nesophila is interspersed with the lichens. Unfortunately, the total area occupied by the "pockets" of vegetation is small.

6.) STABILIZED BEACH RIDGES: Immediately behind the gravel beaches are located bands of almost pure stands of Elymus mollis on the old, raised beaches. Stabilization of the sand and gravel of these old beaches is taking place, however, "washouts" from recent storms are evident. Scattered through the stands of Elymus are Angelica lucida, Lathyrus maritimus, Cochlearia officinalis, Senecio pseudo-arnica and Calamagrostis deschampsioides.

Several other vegetative types, or plant communities, are present on St. Matthew Island but they are of less importance as reindeer range and occupy restricted areas.

Immediately inland from the Elymus beach ridges, between Big Lake and the sea, is a flat expanse about 300 yards wide by four miles long which is grown almost exclusively to Empetrum nigrum (Fig. 23). It is a dry,

well-drained flat, with a very thin soil layer overlying coarse irregular-shaped gravel. Widely scattered in this matrix of Empetrum, which is quite depauperate, are plants of Salix arbutifolia, Oxytropis nigrescens, Artemisia arctica var. beringensis and Deschampsia caespitosa. A few other examples of this community are found under similar conditions throughout the island but they are quite limited in size.

Adjacent to several of the large lakes are flood plains which are inundated annually or every few years. Water levels in the lakes can be raised through storm tides, which flood over the beach dykes, excessive spring runoff and raising of the beach dykes through wave action. These flood plains, with rich alluvial soils, support lush growth of grasses and some forbs and willows. Deschampsia caespitosa is the dominant grass often forming pure stands. Forms of Salix arbutifolia occur commonly on these sites as well as Rumex fenestratus. The vegetation recorded in Transect 8 in the Appendix, is typical of these lake flood plains.

Other vegetative types occupying limited areas include: lake shores with rushes, Potentilla palustris and Ranunculus hyperboreus predominant; lakes and ponds where Hippuris vulgaris, Equisetum palustre and Potamogeton sp. are present; and cliff faces where Cochlearia officinalis, Arenaria peploides, Claytonia acutifolia and a few grasses grow luxuriantly in the crevices in the rock, fertilized by droppings from the sea birds.

The Reindeer Range - Summer Use: Evaluations of range condition and the effect of ungulate utilization are difficult tasks on any range. On the tundra biome, where perennial growth does not exceed a few inches, variations in range conditions are not obvious. Lacking accurate knowledge of the appearance of the range in previous years, a certain amount of speculation is involved in estimating changes that have taken place. Until several years accumulation of systematic vegetative measurements are available, rather general observations of indicator plants and apparent vegetative changes resulting from reindeer activity, must be relied upon.

Summer forage, for reindeer on St. Matthew Island, shows no apparent deterioration through over-utilization by the present reindeer herd. During the field studies, reindeer were observed to use the well-drained sedge meadows and bog meadows almost exclusively for summer grazing (Types 3 & 4). In these types, sedges are dominant, or very common, and are eaten extensively by the reindeer. On the drier, better-drained meadows, Carex nesophila is the most abundant sedge and receives the brunt of summer use, while the wetter, boggy sites support a wider variety of sedges but C. stans is usually the dominant form and receives the heaviest use. Other sedges, leaves stripped from willows, grasses and forbs are also important components of the summer diet of reindeer. Frequently, the flowering or fruiting parts, were all that were eaten from some plants, such as Rumex fenestratus and Arnica lessingii. All vegetative types receive some summer use by reindeer, however, only the types with a high proportion of sedges are utilized consistently.

The quality of the low-growing plants of the arctic tundra, which make up the summer forage, are apparently highly nutritious, as reflected in the excellent physical condition of the reindeer. The high nutritional value of some types of arctic vegetation, which is associated with the long

daily solar radiation, has been known for some time (Curtis & Clark, 1950). On St. Matthew Island the variations in exposure, resulting from irregularities in terrain, account for a wide range in plant development and maturity. Also, the cool moist summers delay maturity and curing of vegetation. Consequently, vegetation during its most highly nutritious period, the early stages of growth, is available for an extended period throughout the summer.

The effects of current use of sedges, grasses and forbs was readily apparent on the range, however, previous year's utilization was not evident on such plant forms. Summer grazing is apparently seldom permanently destructive to this type of summer forage and indications are that limited grazing of annual growth of sedges, grasses and some herbs is actually beneficial in stimulating forage production. Harmful effects of the reindeer on the summer range are limited to trampling of vegetation and compacting of loose, moist soil where movements of large numbers of animals are constricted in narrow valleys and by other terrain features. Throughout the spring and summer, when the vegetation is growing, plants are able to withstand considerable trampling and recover rapidly. In addition, the high humidity, which accompanies the persistent spring and summer fogs, keeps the lichens moist and resilient and less subject to crumbling than in a drier atmosphere or during the winter.

At the time of the study, summer reindeer range on St. Matthew Island showed no significant permanent damage as a result of reindeer activity. Evidence, from other reindeer ranges in Alaska, indicates that summer range seldom suffers from over-utilization, while winter range conditions appear to be the most important population controlling factors. However, the importance of summer range, in the ecology of reindeer, may be greater on an island where opportunity for movement is restricted. In addition, the favorable condition of the summer range, under the present stocking of about 1350 reindeer, is not necessarily indicative of the carrying capacity of the area, in view of the short time this number has been present on the range. By referring to the growth curve in Figure 2, it is apparent that in 1955 there were only about 800 reindeer, while two years earlier less than 500 were present on the island. Unfortunately, the indicators of range deterioration on summer range are much less apparent than on winter range, yet the importance of high quality summer forage for growth and development of all grazing animals is of unquestionable value.

The Reindeer Range - Winter Use: Winter reindeer range on St. Matthew Island is necessarily restricted to windswept areas which are blown free, or nearly free, of snow by the prevailing northeast winds of winter. Stream valleys, depressions and the lee side of hills, accumulate drifted snow which greatly restricts availability of vegetation in these areas. By nature of their exposure and lack of significant snow cover, the windswept areas support xeric plant communities, which reflect their harsh microclimatic environment. A lichen-willow-sedge complex predominates on the winter range. The analyses of the vegetative complex of sections of the winter range are included in the Appendix under Stations 1, 2 and 3 and Transects 2, 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12.

Up to the present, the greatest concentration of winter use by reindeer, has been on the two areas of large dry flats and adjacent low ridges on the southeast end of the island (Figs. 13 & 15). Late winter aerial observations, made by Regional Director Clarence Rhode, in 1955, revealed large numbers of reindeer using these areas. As one travels northwestward, up the length of the island, evidence of winter utilization, such as winter droppings, shed antlers and lichen deterioration, becomes less common and finally disappears completely at the extreme end. The northwest end of the island, north of peak 940 in Figure 1, has no extensive flats and is interrupted by many small valleys and intervening ridges. There are also extensive areas of "rock pavement" where soil development has not taken place. These veritable deserts on much of the northwest end of the island apparently result from the absence of surface water, due to the excellent drainage afforded by the decomposing bedrock. The entire northwest end apparently receives only limited summer use by a small number of large bulls.

Vegetation on the heavily utilized wintering areas adjacent to Big Lake and Cape Upright readily shows the effect of reindeer use. Lichen growth has been seriously depleted through the combination of winter grazing, trampling and shattering and actual removal of the dry, shattered pieces of lichen by the persistently strong winds. With wind velocities often averaging in excess of 20 knots during winter months, the potential for plant desiccation and erosion is great (See Weather Summary). Lichen growth, which formerly occupied the slight depressions between the raised hummocks of prostrate willows, has been almost completely removed. Lichen growth on these over-grazed areas apparently was quite similar in the past to ungrazed areas at the northwest end of the island and on reindeer-free Hall Island where the lichen mat is 3-4 inches deep (Figs. 18 & 25). Now the lichen mat on the winter range seldom exceeds an inch in depth and is composed of badly shattered lichens unattached to the ground. Unfortunately, the preferred lichen species, such as Cladonia alpestris, are the most vulnerable to shattering through trampling, while the more resilient forms which resist shattering, such as Thamnolia vermicularis, are less palatable to reindeer and make up a smaller percentage of the original stands.

The willows on the winter range have fared somewhat better than the lichens and in fact, have increased their area of ground coverage as competition with the lichens has decreased. In similar lichen-willow-sedge stands at the northwest end of the island, which have not been utilized by reindeer, the willows and sedges have been suppressed by the engulfing growth of lichens. While the removal of lichens on the winter range has stimulated growth of willows and sedges, more recently reindeer have been forced to rely heavily on the willows with the result that evidence of this heavy use is also apparent on these prostrate shrubs. Exposed stems and some "die back" occur on willows throughout the dry flats and low ridge tops at the south end of the island as a result of reindeer browsing, pawing and trampling. Widely scattered willows growing in the Empetrum nigrum flats, between Big Lake and the sea, have suffered the greatest damage from pawing.

Sedges on the winter range have apparently increased as a result of the reindeer activity on the lichens much the same as the willows have. However, while the willows have increased their ground coverage wholly through expanded growth of existing plants, the sedges appear to have extended their coverage through both rhizome sprouting and reseeding. Also, the sedges which are mostly Carex nesophila, have not been important constituents of the reindeer's winter diet while lichens were abundant, although they are utilized extensively during the summer. Evidence from other reindeer ranges indicate that when lichens are depleted, grasses and sedges are grazed extensively during the winter (Palmer, 1929).

On the dry flats where utilization by reindeer has been most intense and the lichen flora has been virtually eliminated, some wind erosion of the fine organic surface duff has taken place. The mineral soil is not as susceptible to wind erosion due to its high moisture content from frost thawing in summer and its frozen nature in winter. The surface character of the flats, with the raised hummocks of willow and intervening depressions occupied by the lichens and sedges, also tends to preclude wind erosion. Frost boils are common throughout the flats and can be mistaken for erosion due to reindeer activity, particularly so when the imprints of several hooves remain in the firm mud of the boils. The windswept, vegetated ridge tops, which are segments of winter range, are more readily eroded by wind action when the vegetative cover is disrupted. On these sites both the plant cover and the layer of organic duff are much thinner than on the lower flats and the effect of feeding and trampling by reindeer is more pronounced. Evidence of moderate to severe wind erosion of both the organic surface layer and the finer mineral soil were encountered on the more exposed ridges where wind velocities are greatest. Figure 20 shows the effects of wind erosion in exposing the roots of Dryas and in the establishment of a pebble layer as the finer mineral soil has been blown away.

Invasion of deteriorated lichen-willow-sedge range by other less desirable species has not occured to a significant extent. On a few of the more xeric low ridges and slopes, the impression is gained that Dryas and Empetrum have increased their area of surface coverage as the destruction of the lichen growth exposes more mineral soil. However, the growth of dense mats of Dryas and Empetrum are restricted in area and occur only on the dry and exposed ridge tops and old gravel flats adjacent to the beach.

Extensive reindeer trails, such as are characteristic of long-used caribou range, are not found on the island. Single trails have developed through narrow passes, in V-shaped canyons, and where lake shores crowd adjacent hillsides. Apparently, the movements of reindeer on the island are dispersed and not usually en masse so that the parallel trails of migration found on caribou ranges have not developed here.

Conclusions: It is obvious, from the herd counts and the projected population growth curve (Fig. 2), that the reindeer on St. Matthew Island have rapidly increased in 13 years to occupy an apparently very favorable virgin range. At their present rate of increase, saturation of the range is imminent. Fawn counts indicate that over-population is beginning to have its effect on productivity. Present density on the island is 10.5 reindeer per square mile, however, the north half of the island is not

used extensively as winter range and topography and edaphic conditions limit its value for future use. Also, tallus slopes and rock rubble fields on mountain sides and ridges, reduce the total usable range. Consequently, reindeer use is concentrated on a much smaller total area. Palmer (1929) lists 10-16 deer per square mile as the maximum allowable for safe range use. If only utilizable range is considered, reindeer density on St. Matthew Island is already in excess of Palmer's figure. On St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs, reindeer reached a density of 49 animals per square mile just prior to the "crash die off" (Scheffer, 1951).

Deterioration of the lichen range has been in progress for at least the past 3-4 years. Willows also show the effects of over-utilization. Comparison of the most heavily used wintering areas with similar areas at the northwest end of St. Matthew Island and on adjacent Hall Island show marked contrasts. Lush, undamaged lichen growth 3-4 inches thick is still common (but scattered) on the northwest end of St. Matthew Island and on reindeer-free Hall Island. On the large dry flats, which comprise the most extensive wintering areas, lichens are no longer the important component of the available winter feed that they have been in the past. While early quantitative reports of the vegetation of St. Matthew Island are lacking, general observations by early explorers and naturalists indicate that a lush lichen flora was a distinct characteristic of the vegetative complex of the island prior to the release of the reindeer (Hanna, 1920 and Beals, 1944).

The immediate effect of a reindeer population in excess of the available range on the vegetation of St. Matthew Island will be quite noticable in altering successional stages. Indications of such changes taking place are already apparent. However, it is doubtful that the survival of any plant species is in jeopardy. Many local refugia exist due to the variations in terrain and associated winter snow accumulation in which plants are completely protected from destructive activity. Scheffer (1951) found on the Pribilof Islands that after the reindeer die off had occured and the range was depleted, isolated areas of lichens and other plants remained in areas seldom visited by the reindeer.

It is felt that bird life on the island will not be seriously affected by the increasing reindeer herd. The reindeer are in no conflict with the thousands of cliff nesting sea birds, or the snowbuntings, repolls and rosy finches, which nest in the higher, rocky terrain of the island. Undoubtedly, the sandpipers and few ducks that nest in the lower, boggy areas will suffer occasional nest mortality from trampling by reindeer, however, this should not be excessive in view of the wide dispersal of the reindeer in the summer nesting season and their restricted use of certain areas of the island.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

At the present time, harvest of the reindeer on St. Matthew Island for food purposes is economically impractical. The inaccessibility of the island, the absence of an available human population as a labor source and the lack of a demand for the meat contribute to this situation.

Complete removal of the herd to alleviate future problems of over-population and range deterioration, while desirable, would involve seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Extreme logistical problems and the persistent summer fogs would render "clean up" of the last few animals a long and difficult task.

In view of the fact that management of this reindeer herd is impractical and there are no other range priorities planned for this island in the near future, it is recommended that the St. Matthew Island reindeer herd be used as an experiment in population dynamics and range ecology. Merely by following a laissez-faire policy with the herd, much valuable information of reindeer-range relationships will become available as the population builds to its peak and the expected crash decline follows.

It is desirable that annual, or at least periodic, counts of the population be made to enable plotting of the trend in growth and pinpointing the peak of the cycle. The population decline may be rapid after the peak is reached. The reindeer herd on St. Paul Island showed a loss of 37 percent in one year after the population high. Counts could possibly be accomplished through cooperation with the Navy or Air Force. Vertical photographic coverage of the reindeer when they are concentrated on the wintering areas would enable relatively accurate counts. The Navy makes periodic weather reconnaissance flights over this area and would have the best opportunity to choose favorable weather for photographic purposes. Perhaps a Fish and Wildlife Service representative could go along on one of the flights and assist in the photographing.

Following the peak of the reindeer population cycle on St. Matthew Island, the vegetative study plots and transects should be re-examined to evaluate the changes in the range which have taken place. Until this occurs, periodic checks of the range would be desirable.

# APPENDIX

## St. Matthew Island - Reindeer

Contents:


Weather Summary.

Location of Transects and Quadrats (Fig. 27).

Summarization of Line Transect Data.

Layout of Range Study Quadrats (Fig. 28).

Summarization of Data from Station No. 1.

Summarization of Data from Station No. 2.

Summarization of Data from Station No. 3.

Soil Analyses from Stations 2 and 3.

Lichen Species Composition.

Plants Collected.

Birds, Mammals and Fishes Observed.

Facilities for Future Projects.

Literature Cited.

ST. MATTHEW ISLAND CLIMATOLOGICAL DATA

September 1943 - August 1944
(Recorded by U.S. Army)

| | Temperature | | | Precipitation | | Wind | | | Fog |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Month | Max. | Min. | Ave. | Total Precip. | Total Snow On Ground | Prevailing Direction | Ave. Speed | Extreme Speed | Hours of |
| Sept. 43 | 45.6 | 37.2 | 41.4 | 2.08 | 0 | NNE | 14.6 | 40+ | 110 |
| Oct. 43 | 39.2 | 32.4 | 35.8 | 1.81 | 0.2 | NNE | 13.7 | 48+ | 63 |
| Nov. 43 | 32.7 | 26.5 | 29.7 | 1.40 | 2.8 | NNE | 17.0 | 42+ | 15 |
| Dec. 43 | 20.5 | 12.1 | 16.1 | 0.82 | 11.0 | N | 17.9 | 60+ | 5 |
| Jan. 44 | 12.4 | 0.7 | 6.6 | 0.84 | 16.7 | NE | 26.1 | 80+ | 148 |
| Feb. 44 | 21.1 | 10.1 | 15.4 | 1.46 | 16.4 | NNE | 23.9 | 60+ | 143 |
| Mar. 44 | 15.4 | 7.0 | 11.0 | 0.32 | 13.0 | NNE | 20.3 | 65+ | 141 |
| Apr. 44 | 24.5 | 11.9 | 18.4 | 0.52 | 10.2 | NNE | 19.6 | 45 | 108 |
| May 44 | 35.4 | 27.5 | 31.5 | 0.82 | 3.5 | NNE | 12.4 | 36 | 267 |
| June 44 | 41.3 | 33.0 | 37.2 | 0.89 | 0.3 | NNE | 10.7 | 37 | 376 |
| July 44 | 47.8 | 39.4 | 43.7 | 1.47 | 0 | NNE | 9.7 | 35 | 468 |
| Aug. 44 | 49.0 | 42.9 | 45.9 | 2.89 | 0 | W | 10.2 | 32 | 401 |
| Total | | | | 15.32 | | | | | |

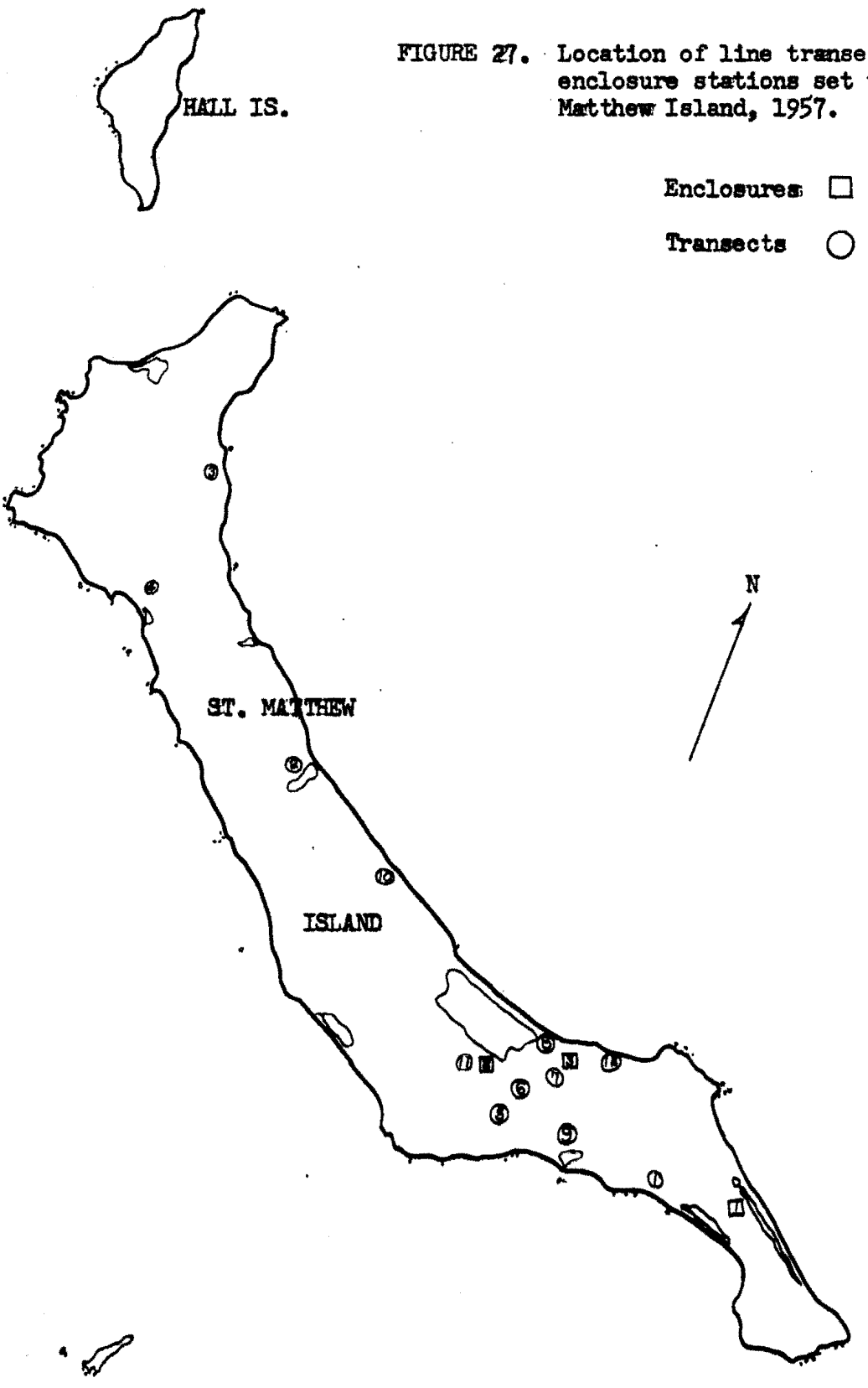



FIGURE 27. Location of line transects and range enclosure stations set up on St. Matthew Island, 1957.

SUMMARIZATION OF DATA OBTAINED FROM 12 POINT INTERCEPT TRANSECTS
ST. MATTHEW IS., 1957

(Intercept points every foot on a one hundred foot line)

SPECIES (or ground cover) INTERCEPTIONS PER 100 CONTACT POINTS

| | Transect Number | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Lichens - Total | | 37 | 37 | 41 | | 9 | 20 | | 50 | | 41 | 3 |
| Cladonia alpestris | | 24 | 31 | 32 | | 3 | 16 | | 42 | | 33 | 2 |
| Thamnolia vermicularis | | 5 | 5 | 9 | | 3 | | | 6 | | 2 | |
| Sphaerophorus globosus | | 8 | | | | 3 | 4 | | 2 | | 6 | |
| Dactylina arctica | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Lobaria linita | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Carex nesophila | 20 | 11 | 7 | | | 18 | 20 | | 17 | 6 | 38 | 16 |
| C. stans | | | | 17 | 62 | | | | | | | |
| Eriophorum augustifolium and E. russeolum | | | | 2 | 4 | | | | | | | |
| Luzula arcuata | | | | | | 3 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Deschampsia caespitosa | | | | | | | | 58 | | | | |
| Arctagrostis latifolia | | | | | | | | 1 | | 13 | | |
| Poa arctica | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Salix reticulata | 38 | | | | | | 3 | | 1 | | | 4 |
| S. rotundifolia | 18 | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| S. crassijulis x ovalifolia | | 4 | 3 | | | 14 | 4 | | 12 | 3 | 7 | |
| S. arbutifolia | | | | 19 | 1 | | | | | 11 | | |
| S. arbutifolia x ovalifolia | | | | | | | | 22 | | | | |
| S. ovalifolia | | | | | | | | | | | | 12 |
| Empetrum nigrum | | 17 | 44 | | | | 26 | | | | | 41 |
| Vaccinium vitis-idea | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Cornus canadensis | | | | | | | | | | 3 | | |
| Artemisia trifurcata | | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | |
| A. arctica var. beringensis | 11 | | | | | | | | | 24 | | 2 |
| A. tilesii | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| A. senjavinensis | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Arnica lessingii | 6 | | | | | | | | | 2 | | |
| Petasites frigidus | | | | 5 | 5 | | | | | | | |
| Dryas octopetala | | | | | | | 10 | | | | | 4 |
| Rubus arcticus | | | | 1 | 2 | | | | | 6 | | |
| Potentilla palustris | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Saxifraga punctata | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| S. hieracifolia | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Sedum roseum | 2 | 1 | | | | | | | 3 | 13 | | |
| Arenaria arctica | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | | 3 | 3 |
| Loiseleuria procumbens | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Ligusticum macounii | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Rumex fenestratus | | | | | | | | 12 | | | | |
| Polygonum viviparum | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Polemonium acutiflorum | | | | 1 | 2 | | | | | 4 | | |
| Angelica lucida | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Equisetum arvense | | | 5 | | | | | | 3 | | | |
| Sphagnum sp. | | | | 7 | 12 | | | | | | | |
| Moss- mostly Polytrichum alpinum | 4 | 27 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 39 | | | 7 | 5 | 10 | 4 |
| Exposed soil | | | | | | | 3 | 7 | | 7 | | 5 |
| Gravel & pebble surface | | | | | | 15 | | | | | | |
| Rocks of varying sizes | | | | | | | 12 | | 5 | | | |

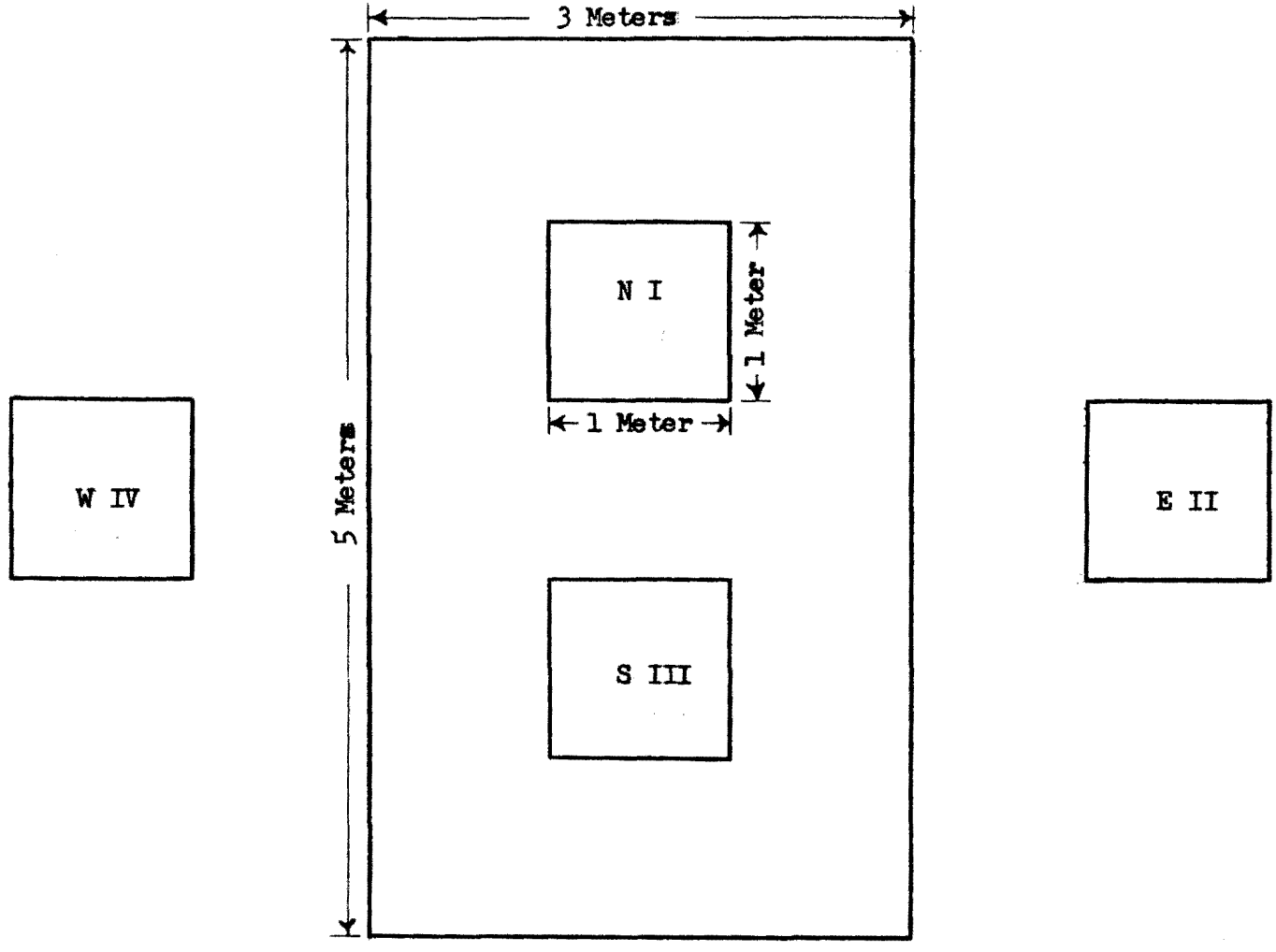



FIGURE 28. Layout of the meter-square range study plots showing plots N I and S III within the fenced enclosure and the unprotected plots E II and W IV outside of the enclosure.

## VEGETATIVE COMPOSITION AND GROUND COVER WITHIN THE METER SQUARE STUDY PLOTS AT STATION NO. 1

Station #1, July 21, 1957, St. Matthew Island.
Located approximately ¼ mile south of small lake at northwest corner of flats northwest of Cape Upright. Cape Upright approximately 5 miles to the southeast. Elevation 15 feet, site level. Dry lichen-willow-sedge tundra. Lichens badly shattered and mixed with some detached dead moss. Lichen layer averages ½ inch deep and is composed predominately of Sphaerophorus globosus, Cetraria cuculata, Thamnolia vermincularis and scattered and finely broken pieces of Cladonia alpestris. Some frost boils present. Heavily utilized by reindeer in the winter. Willows and other plants in vigorous condition.

The north and south plots, I and III, are protected from reindeer grazing by fencing. The east and west plots, II and IV, are unprotected. The fence enclosure is 9 by 15 feet. The site photograph of the enclosure was taken 50 feet east of the enclosure from a permanent photo-recording stake.

| | | PERCENT OF TOTAL AREA | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grid Key | GROUND COVER | Plot N I (enclosed) | Plot E II (unprotected) | Plot S III (enclosed) | Plot W IV (unprotected) |
| 12 | Shattered lichens with a few unattached dry mosses | 68.5 | 77.6 | 79.6 | 76.7 |
| 3 | Salix crassijulis x ovalifolia | 13.7 | 6.6 | 9.7 | 10.6 |
| 2 | Carex nesophila | 4.0 | 10.6 | 8.0 | 7.2 |
| 1 | Luzula arcuata | .7 | 2.4 | 1.2 | 1.1 |
| 10 | L. nivalis | | | | .4 |
| 6 | Trisetum spicatum | <.1 | | | 1.0 |
| 3 | Arenaria arctica | 2.8 | 1.7 | .8 | 1.3 |
| 11 | Artemisia trifurcata | | | | .1 |
| 8 | Pedicularis sudetica | .1 | .1 | | .1 |
| 7 | Vaccinium vitus-idea | .3 | | .2 | |
| 9 | Moss (Polytrichum alpinum) | .4 | 1.0 | .4 | 1.6 |
| 4 | Gravel (frost boils) | 9.4 | | | |

## VEGETATIVE COMPOSITION AND GROUND COVER WITHIN THE METER SQUARE STUDY PLOTS AT STATION NO. 2

Station #2, August 2, 1957, St. Matthew Island.
Located approximately ¼ mile southwest of the south corner of Big Lake. Elevation 15 feet, site level. Dry lichen-willow-sedge tundra. Lichens badly shattered and mixed with some detached dead moss. Composition of this lichen-moss layer varies from 80% lichen - 20% moss to 55% lichen - 45% moss and from ½ to 1½ inch thick. Its predominant lichen species are Cetraria cuculata, Sphaerophorus globosus, Thamnolia vermicularis and Cladonia alpestris. This area is heavily utilized by reindeer in the winter but condition of lichens is slightly better than at station #1.

The north and south plots, I and III, are protected from reindeer grazing by fencing. The east and west plots, II and IV, are unprotected. The fence enclosure is 9 by 15 feet. The site photograph of the enclosure was taken 50 feet east of the enclosure from a permanent photo-recording stake.

| | | PERCENT OF TOTAL AREA | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grid Key | Ground Cover | Plot N I (enclosed) | Plot E II (unprotected) | Plot S III (enclosed) | Plot W IV (unprotected) |
| 15 | Shattered lichens with some detached dry mosses | 88.0 | 73.9 | 58.6 | 72.3 |
| 5 | Salix crassijulis x ovalifolia | 4.1 | 3.2 | 27.1 | 2.0 |
| 2 | Carex nesophila | 6.5 | 15.5 | 13.0 | 24.7 |
| 1 | Luzula arcuata | .4 | 5.7 | .6 | .1 |
| 6 | Trisetum spicatum | .5 | <.1 | .1 | .3 |
| 3 | Arenaria arctica | | .1 | | |
| 8 | Pedicularis sudetica | .1 | .1 | | |
| 13 | Artemisia arctica var. beringensis | .2 | | | |
| 10 | A. trifurcata | .1 | .2 | | .4 |
| 12 | Cardamine umbellata | .1 | .1 | | |
| 14 | Polygonum viviparum | | | .1 | |
| 11 | Lycopodium selago | .1 | .1 | | |
| 9 | Moss (Polytrichum alpinum) | <.1 | .2 | | .3 |
| 4 | Gravel (frost boils) | .4 | 1.2 | 1.1 | |

VEGETATIVE COMPOSITION AND GROUND COVER
WITHIN THE METER SQUARE STUDY PLOTS AT STATION NO. 3

Station #3, August 5, 1957, St. Matthew Island.
Located approximately 1 mile east of east corner of Big Lake on first ridge top. Elevation 200 feet, site level. Dry lichen-willow-Dryas-sedge tundra. Much exposed soil and pebble layer from wind erosion. Lichen layer very thin, less than ½ inch and badly shattered. Some detached dry mosses also mixed with lichens. Lichens mostly Cetraria cuculata, Thamnolia vermicularis and some Cladonia alpestris. This is a windswept area which has received heavy winter utilization by reindeer. Wind erosion has been active.

The north and south plots, I and III, are protected from reindeer grazing by fencing. The east and west plots, II and IV, are unprotected. The fence enclosure is 9 by 15 feet. The site photograph of the enclosure was taken 50 feet west of the enclosure from a permanent photo-recording stake.

| | | PERCENT OF TOTAL AREA | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grid Key | Ground Cover | Plot N I (enclosed) | Plot E II (unprotected) | Plot S III (enclosed) | Plot W IV (unprotected) |
| 23 | Shattered & depauperate lichens and unattached dry mosses | 40.3 | 40.0 | 26.1 | 6.8 |
| 5 | Salix crassijulis x ovalifolia | 13.1 | 11.6 | 3.0 | 1.6 |
| 21 | Dryas octopetala | | 1.4 | 11.1 | 23.3 |
| 2 | Carex nesophila | 11.1 | 10.0 | 6.7 | 7.1 |
| 1 | Luzula arcuata | 1.0 | 1.2 | .4 | .2 |
| 6 | Festuca brachyphylla | 1.3 | 1.3 | .6 | 1.0 |
| 3 | Arenaria arctica | .6 | .1 | | |
| 8 | Pedicularis sudetica | 4.5 | | .2 | .3 |
| 14 | Polygonum viviparum | 1.2 | 1.7 | 1.1 | .2 |
| 15 | Oxytropis nigrescens | .9 | 1.1 | .3 | .2 |
| 16 | Androsace chamaejasme | .7 | 4.4 | 1.0 | 1.6 |
| 18 | Ligusticum macounii | .6 | 1.2 | 1.5 | .2 |
| 19 | Artemisia senjavinensis | | .4 | | |
| 24 | Potentilla vahliana | | | | .1 |
| 20 | Campanula uniflora | .9 | .7 | | .1 |
| 9 | Moss (mostly Polytrichum alpinum) | 1.2 | .5 | .7 | 1.1 |
| 4 | Gravel (pepple layer) | 15.0 | 11.6 | 26.3 | 38.5 |
| 17 | Organic soil | 11.7 | 12.7 | 20.7 | 17.6 |

SOIL SAMPLE ANALYSES FROM STATIONS
2 AND 3, ST. MATTHEW ISLAND

(pH determinations made by the Agricultural
Experimental Station, Palmer, Alaska)

STATION NO. 2

Surface vegetation similar to that within quadrats. Surface duff, dead plant parts, 3/4 to 1 inch deep. Root penetration to 16 inches. No effervesence on all samples with 20% hydrochloric acid. All colors from moist soil. August 2, 1957.

Soil beneath surface duff to 11½ inches:

Texture- loam; crumbles readily into soft aggregates 1/8 - ½ inch in diameter, moderately large number of small stones up to 1 by ½ inch, usually with rounded edges.

Color- dark brown to brown, 4/2 on 7.5 YR.

pH- 5.0

11½ to 17 3/4 inches (6¼in.):

Texture- loam; fairly sticky with rounded stones up to 1 by ½ inch, somewhat less numerous than in horizon above, crumbles readily to particles 1/8 by ¼ inch, crumbles more crisply than in horizon above.

Color- yellowish brown, 5/4 on 10 YR.

pH- 5.2

Below 17 3/4 inches - subsoil:

Texture- loam; somewhat sticky, feels like dough, in small aggregates 1/16 inch in diameter, soft, very numerous stones up to 1½ by 1/8 to ¼ inches occasionally larger, rounded, more numerous stones than loam.

Color- yellowish brown, 5/4 on 10YR.

pH- 5.2

SOIL SAMPLES (continued)

## STATION NO. 3

Surface vegetation similar to that within quadrats. Surface duff 0 to ½ inch deep. Root penetration to 15 inches. No effervesence on all samples with 20% hydrochloric acid. All colors from moist soil. August 5, 1957.

Soil beneath surface duff to 3 inches:

Texture- loam; many gravel particles and small stones, unusually sharp angles, up to ½ - 3/4 inch in diameter, very rich in organic matter.

Color- dark reddish brown, 3/3 on 5 YR.

pH- 5.7

3 to 9 inches (6 in.):

Texture- loam; somewhat sticky, with very many sharp, hard granular particles which break when subjected to considerable pressure, up to ¼ inch in diameter, these are lava particles, the material tends to form into compact masses, occasional irregularly shaped stones to 2 inches in diameter.

Color- dark reddish brown, 3/4 on 5 YR.

pH- 6.0

Below 9 inches - subsoil:

Texture- sand and gravel with very little silt, scattered small stones, rounded edges up to ½ inch in diameter, occasional larger irregularly shaped stones.

Color- dark brown, 4/3 on 10 YR.

pH- 6.7

LICHENS FROM A SAMPLE TYPICAL OF THE DRY FLATS AND LOW RIDGE TOPS OF THE REINDEER WINTER RANGE

(Near station #2, August 2, 1957, St. Matthew Is.)

| Order of Abundance | Species |
|---|---|
| 1 | Cetraria cucullata (most abundant on heavily grazed areas) |
| 2 | Cladonia alpestris (best growth on ungrazed or lightly grazed areas) |
| 3 | Sphaerophorus globosus |
| 4 | Thamnolia vermicularis |
| common | Cetraria islandica |
| tr. | Lobaria linita (thallus form) |
| tr. | Dactylina arctica |
| tr. | Retraria islandica (thallus form) |
| tr. | Nephroma expallidum |
| tr. | Cladonia sp. |

ST. MATTHEW ISLAND PLANTS COLLECTED DURING JULY 15 - AUGUST 9, 1957

| Specimen Number | |
|---|---|
| 83 | Polytrichum alpinum Hedw. |
| 73 | Equisetum palustre L. |
| 124 | Equisetum arvense L. |
| 65 | Lycopodium alpinum L. |
| 96 | Lycopodium selago L. |
| 68 | Eriphorum angustifolium L. |
| 62 | Eriophorum russeolum var. albidum Nyl. |
| 115 | Carex nesophila Holm. |
| 90 | Carex membranacea Hook. |
| 125 | Carex bipartita Bellardi |
| 1 | Carex stans Drej. |
| 99 | Luzula nivalis (Laest.) Beurl. |
| 126 | Luzula multiflora (Retz.) Lej. |
| 58 | Luzula arcuata Wahl. |
| 22 | Luzula wohlenbergii Rupr. |
| 64 | Juncus castaneus Smith |
| 102 | Juncus biglumis L. |
| 118 | Hierochloe alpina (SW.) Roem. & Schult. |
| 119 | Festuca brachyphylla Schult. |
| 13 | Elymus mollis Trin. |
| 54 | Calamagrostis deschampsioides Trin. |
| 85 | Alopecurus alpinus J.E. Sm. |
| 17 | Arctagrostis latifolia (R. Br.) Griseb. |
| 60 | Trisetum spicatum (L.) Richt. |
| 94 | Deschampsia caespitosa (L.) Beauv. var. glauca (Hartm.) Sam. |
| 14 | Poa arctica R. Br. |
| 5 | Angelica lucida L. |
| 117 | Ligusticum macounii Coult. & Rose |
| 74 | Hippuris vulgaris L. |
| 49 | Valeriana capitata Pall. |
| 113 | Gentiana glauca Pall. |
| 122 | Gentiana algida Pall. |
| 6 | Pedicularis sudetica Willd. |
| 45 | Pedicularis capitata Adams. |
| 106 | Lagotis glauca Gaertn. |
| 30 | Androsace chamaejasme Host. |
| 42 | Primula tschuktschorum Kjellm. |
| 2 | Rumex fenestratus Greene |
| 92 | Loiseleuria procumbens (L.) Desv. |
| 123 | Polygonum bistorta L. ssp. plumosum (Small) Hult. |
| 11 | Polygonum viviparum L. |
| 39 | Oxyria digyna (L.) Hill. |
| 41 | Papaver radicatum Rottb. alaskanum (Hult.) J.P. Anderson |
| 80 | Pyrola minor L. |
| 82 | Vaccinium vitis-idea L. |
| 9 | Empetrum nigrum L. |
| 110 | Campanula uniflora L. |

ST. MATTHEW ISLAND PLANTS (continued)

4 Sedum roseum (L.) Scop.
27 Cornus canadensis L.
19 Claytonia sarmentosa C.A. Mey.
78 Epilobium latifolium L.
72 Epilobium anagallidifolium Lam.
51 Polemonium acutiflorum Willd.
131 Claytonia acutifolia Pall.
31 Arenaria arctica Stev.
134 Arenaria peploides L. ssp. latifolia (Fenzl) Maguire.
100 Lychnis macrosperma (Pors.) J.P. Anderson
46 Cerastium beeringianum Cham. & Schl.
47 Cerastium fischerianum Ser.
29 Dryas octopetala L.
87 Geum rossii (R. Br.) Ser.
40 Potentilla pacifica Havell.
79 Potentilla palustris (L.) Scop.
37 Potentilla vahliana Lehm.
81 Rubus arcticus L.
116 Oxytropis nigrescens (Pall.) Fisch.
43 Astragalus umbellatus Bunge.
52 Lathyrus maritimus (L.) Bigel.
108 Draba lactea Adams.
109 Draba stenoloba Ledeb.
32 Cardamine umbellata Greene.
8 Cardamine pratensis L.
130 Cochlearia officinalis L. arctica (Schlecht.) Hult.
50 Aconitum delphinifolium DC. paradoxum
103 Anemone narcissiflora L. sibirica (L.) Hult.
107 Anemone richardsonii Hook.
71 Ranunculus hyperboreus Rottb.
98 Ranunculus cymbalaria Pursh.
33 Parnassia kotzebui C. & S.
76 Chrysosplenium tetrandrum Th. Fries.
34 Saxifraga bracteata D. Don
95 Saxifraga foliolosa R. Br.
89 Saxifraga hieracifolia Waldst. & Kit.
53 Saxifraga hirculis L.
88 Saxifraga punctata L. ssp. nelsoniana (D. Don) Hult.
91 Saxifraga serpyllifolia Pursh.
38 Saxifraga unalaskensis Sternb.
114 Saxifraga bronchialis L. ssp. funstonii (Small) Hult.
121 Saxifraga oppositifolia L.
28 Taraxacum sibiricum Dahlst.
67 Petasites frigidus (L.) Fries.
93 Saussurea angustifolia DC.
56 Artemisia trifurcata Steph. var. heterophylla (Besa.) Kudo.
26 Artemisia arctica Less var. beringensis Hult.
97 Artemisia tilesii Ledeb.
86 Artemisia senjavinensis Bess.
23 Arnica lessingii (T. & G.) Greene
44 Senecio atropurpureus tomentosus (Kjellm.) Hult.

ST. MATTHEW ISLAND PLANTS (continued)

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Senecio pseudo-arnica Less. |
| 35 | Antennaria monocephala DC. |
| 20 | Salix crassijulis x ovalifolia Flod. |
| 21 | Salix reticulata L. |
| 129 | Salix ovalifolia Trautv. |
| 24 | Salix rotundifolia Trautv. |
| 63 | Salix arbutifolia Pall. |
| 133 | Salix arbutifolia x ovalifolia Hult. |

LICHENS (Identified by H. Krog)

1. Cladonia alpestris (L.) Rabh.
2. Sphaerophorus globosus (Huds.) Vain
3. Thamnolia vermicularis (Sw.) Ach.
4. Cetraria cucullata (Bull.) Ach.
5. Cetraria islandica (L.) Ach.
6. Lobaria linita (Ach.) Rabh.
7. Nephroma expallidum Nyl.
8. Dactylina arctica
9. Retraria islandica (L.) Ach.
10. Cladonia coccifera var. pleurota (Flk.) Schaer
11. Alectonia nigricaus (Ach.) Nyl.

BIRDS, MAMMALS AND FISHES
OBSERVED AT ST. MATTHEW IS.
1957

BIRDS

| Date First Observed | Species | Total Number Seen 7/15 - 8/9 |
|---|---|---|
| 7/15 | McKay's snowbunting | 115 (nesting) |
| 7/15 | Rosy finch | 27 (nesting?) |
| 7/15 | Kittiwake | 1200 (nesting) |
| 7/16 | Bairds cormorant | 375 (nesting) |
| 7/16 | Glaucous gull | 70 |
| 7/16 | Tufted puffin | 450 (nesting) |
| 7/16 | California murre | 1300 (nesting) |
| 7/16 | Pacific eider | 220 (nesting) |
| 7/16 | Ruddy turnstone | 90 |
| 7/16 | Pigeon guillemot | 400 (nesting) |
| 7/16 | Northern phalarope | 35 |
| 7/16 | Red-backed sandpiper | 350 (nesting) |
| 7/16 | Alaska longspur | 45 (nesting) |
| 7/17 | Little brown crane | 14 |
| 7/17 | Whistler swan | 2 |
| 7/17 | Pintail duck | 15 (nesting) |
| 7/17 | Aleutian sandpiper | 110 (nesting) |
| 7/18 | Old squaw duck | 40 (nesting) |
| 7/18 | Redpoll | 15 (nesting) |
| 7/18 | Horned puffin | 550 (nesting) |
| 7/21 | Red-throated loon | 12 (nesting?) |
| 7/26 | Parasitic jaeger | 2 |
| 7/26 | Paroquet auklet | 350 (nesting) |
| 7/29 | Wandering tattler | 5 |
| 7/26 | Pacific fulmar | 100 (nesting) |
| 7/15 | Black-footed albatross | 2 (offshore) |
| 7/29 | Least sandpiper | 5 |
| 8/9 | Harlequin duck | 20 |

Frank Beals, FWS refuge manager, observed the following additional species while on the island during June 24 - August 15, 1944 (Beals, 1944):

| | |
|---|---|
| Red-breasted merganser | common |
| Long-tailed jaeger | abundant |
| Snowy owl | abundant |
| Least auklet | rare |
| Northern loon | rare |
| Golden plover | rare |
| Pelagic cormorant | common |

The many jaegers and owls seen in 1944 were apparently attracted by the high population of voles that was present on the island at the time.

## MAMMALS

Meadow vole - Microtus abbreviatus:

Evidence of previous abundance of the meadow vole, in the form of abandoned runways, was common throughout the island. The 1957 population was very low; over a hundred trap nights of effort failed to secure a specimen. A few fresh runways were seen at the north end of St. Matthew Island and on Hall Island. Reports by other observers indicate that the vole population is subject to extreme fluctuations. Hanna commented on the low numbers of voles in 1916 and Beals and Rausch reported population highs in 1944 and 1954.

Arctic fox - Alopex lagopus:

Foxes were abundant on the island in 1957. Rausch reported them to be uncommon in 1955 while Beals, in 1944, listed them as common but not abundant. Hanna's 1916 observations mentioned fox, or evidence of them, present at every landing they made. Two skulls and one skin collected during 1957 have been deposited in the University of Alaska collection.

Polar bear - Thalarctos maritimus:

No recent evidence of polar bears was found. The old, well-worn polar bear trails mentioned by early observers were still plainly visible on the tundra adjacent to the beaches. A few weather-eroded skulls were found throughout the island. Elliot (1880) landed on St. Matthew and Hall Island in 1874 and reported polar bears very common, estimating 250-300 present on the two islands. Hide hunting was common at this time and 16 bears were killed there as late as 1890 (Beals, 1944). Elliot refers to a party of five Russians and seven Aleuts who passed the winter of 1810-11 on St. Matthew Island. Four of the Russians died of scurvy. Their object was polar bear hide hunting. During the visit of the Harriman Expedition in 1899 there was no evidence of polar bears being present on the island (Merriam, 1901).

Harbor seal - Phoca vitulina:

Approximately 200 harbor seals were seen at various points around the island. The largest concentration was on an offshore rock five miles east of Sugarloaf Mountain. One harbor seal skull was collected and is in the University of Alaska collection.

Sea lion - Eumetopias jubata:

Three sea lion carcasses were found on the beaches at the north end of St. Matthew Island and a group of about 350 sea lions was seen at a rookery two miles south of Elephant Rock on Hall Island.

Walrus - Odobenus rosmarus:

Four walrus carcasses were found on the beaches of the north end of St. Matthew Island. Three of these were large bulls, while the fourth was a young male. All of the carcasses appeared to have been washed up by spring storms. During an aerial flight over the island in May 1955, several walrus were observed hauled out on the ice on the northeast side (Rhode, 1956). Walrus have been known to haul out on the northwest cape of Hall Island in past years (Hanna, 1920).

OTHER MAMMALS:

Whale remains were common on the beaches. Hanna (1920) identified remains of the bowhead, Balaena mysticetus, humpback, Megaptera novae-angliae, sulphur-bottom, Sibbaldus musculus Bairds, Berardius bairdi and the killer whale, Grampus rectipinna. Gray whales, Eschrichtius glaucus were seen feeding off the northeast shore of St. Matthew Island in 1957.

A beach worn skull of a fur seal, Callorhinus ursinus, was found at the north end of St. Matthew Island. There has been no record of fur seals using these islands in past years.

No evidence of sea otters, Enhydra lutris, was found on St. Matthew Island. Kelp beds, common to the sea otter islands of the Aleutians, were absent from this area.

## FISHES

Dolly varden trout, Salvelinus malma, were abundant in most of the larger drainage systems of the island, which emptied into lakes. Gravel beaches, through which the lakes drained to the sea, prevent movement of the fish to the sea, except during storms. Sticklebacks, Gasterosteus sp., were found in the brackish lagoons and pools. There is some evidence of the presence of the black fish, Dallia pectoralis, in the lakes of St. Matthew Island (Wilimovsky, 1957).

## FACILITIES AND FEATURES OF ST. MATTHEW IS. OF SIGNIFICANCE IN PLANNING LAND-BASED PROJECTS.

Planning for future biological studies, or for harvest and utilization of the reindeer of St. Matthew Island, will be simplified if information of transportation problems and existing living facilities are known.

No harbors exist at St. Matthew Island. Beach landings by boat are best made on the northeast shore during the summer months as the prevailing winds at this time are from the southwest. Airplane landings with a Grumman goose, or larger plane, could safely be made in the sea on the lee side of the island, about half of the time during mid-summer. The loose, rounded gravel of the beaches, however, would not permit taxiing a heavy plane onto the beach. None of the beaches are suitable for landings with conventional wheeled aircraft. There is a strip of old beach gravel adjacent to Big Lake, which is stabilized by vegetation and appeared solid enough to support a goose in a wheel landing. Frost conditions would effect this surface. Landings in Big Lake and two or three of the other large lakes appear to be the most practical method of landing, or basing, an airplane at the island. These lakes are relatively shallow but with few exceptions are deep enough for safe landings. Taxiing out of the lakes could also be accomplished.

Travel over the surface of the island is most practical on foot, however, a jeep might be useful if solid routes of travel were picked out and established in advance. There are boggy areas which would be impassable. This was graphically illustrated by the presence of two, large Coast Guard Caterpillar tractors in the center of the island, which obviously became bogged down and were abandoned.

Six Quonset huts remained standing at the Coast Guard station and one at the Army weather station. All of these buildings were in poor condition but could be repaired for storage or living with a minimum of effort. Several antenna poles at the Coast Guard station could be used in setting up radio communications. Unfortunately, all of these structures are on the exposed side of the island. There is one driftwood cabin on the northeast shore near Big Lake which would be suitable summer shelter for three or four men.

Fresh water is readily available from any of the streams and most of the lakes. Driftwood, for fuel or limited structural use, is abundant on the northeast shore of the island and in isolated spots on other beaches.

## LITERATURE CITED


Beals, F. 1944. Field diary June 23-August 20. Unpublished, in Fish and Wildlife Service files.

Chase, F.H. 1957. In correspondence. September 11.

Curtis, O.F. and D.G. Clark. 1950. An introduction to plant physiology. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc. 752 pp.

DeLeonardis, S. 1957. In correspondence. October 29.

Elliot, H.W. 1880. Report on the seal islands of Alaska. Publication of the Smithsonian Institution, March 31, 1880.

Hadwen, S., and L.J. Palmer. 1922. Reindeer in Alaska. U.S. Dept. Agr. Bul. 1089. 74 pp.

Hanna, G.D. 1920. Mammals of the St. Matthew Islands, Bering Sea. Jour. of Mammology. 1 (3): 118-122.

Hanson, H.C. 1952. Importance and development of the reindeer industry in Alaska. Jour. of Range Mgt. 5 (4): 243-251.

Merriam, C.H. 1901. Harriman Alaska Expedition. (Wash. Academy of Sciences), New York. Vol. 1-14.

Palmer, L.J. 1926. Progress of reindeer investigations in Alaska. U.S. Dept. Agr. Bul. 1423. 37pp.

_____. 1929. Improved reindeer handling. U.S. Dept. Agr. Cir. 82. 18pp.

Rausch, R. 1954. Unpublished report of trip to St. Matthew Is., Aug. and Sept., 1954.

Rhode, C.J. 1955. Correspondence to the Director, Fish and Wildlife Service. May 20. 3pp.

Scheffer, V.B. 1951. The rise and fall of a reindeer herd. Sci. Monthly. 73:356-362.

U.S. Weather Bureau. 1944. St. Matthew Island weather data - October 1942 to August 1944.

Wilimovsky, N. 1957. Personal communication. June 17.


Prepared by: David R. Klein, Wildlife Mgt. Biologist

Approved by: Robert F. Scott, Supervisor, Game Restoration

Date: March 31, 1958