The HSUS Petitions U.S. Government to Protect Fur Seals

Our battle to end U.S. seal clubbing continues

It's early summer in the Pribilof Islands, off the coast of Alaska. North Pacific fur seals are gathering, as they have every June through November, to deliver their pups and, later, to mate. Older males gather females into their harems and bask on the rocks by the sea. Younger males, called bachelors, cluster in groups, awaiting the day they will have harems of their own.

For 24,000 to 28,000 of these young males, the summer will be a short one. Because of a brutal, unnecessary, and destructive hunt, these animals will end their lives as bloody, skinless carcasses in the grey-green tundra grass.

Why? Government-salaried workers shaking tin can noisemakers will herd the clumsy young males into a large group. Shouting and shaking their tin cans, the workers drive eight to ten seals at a time into a circle of club-wielding men. Surrounded, the young seals raise their heads, defenseless, and the clubs sink with a sickening thud into one skull after another. Most of the animals lie stunned or dead; some lumber away, escapees from the outdoor slaughterhouse. Later, the seals are bled to death and skinned, and the troup of killers moves on to another group of young seals, already raising their heads about to receive the blows.

Since the 1960s, The Humane Society of the United States has vigorously protested this brutal clubbing of the North Pacific fur seals. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, HSUS investigator Frank McMahon repeatedly documented this slaughter and worked with government officials and others to stop it. In 1980, HSUS chief investigator Frantz Dantzler returned to continue the work. Unhappily, these constant efforts, though successful in calling this brutal activity to the attention of the American public, failed to achieve our goal of bringing the Pribilof "harvest" to an end.

Now, we have undertaken a different strategy: on Thursday, January 5, 1984, we petitioned the U.S. government to protect these seals under the "threatened" category of the Endangered Species Act. This action should force government officials to end the (continued on next page)
drastic decline of the North Pacific fur seal and restore the population. Then, we trust, the seals will be protected from what has become their annual summer slaughter. This hunt is allegedly "carefully monitored," "skillfully conducted," and "managed" so that the overall population is not diminished from year to year. However, the "managed" population has shrunk from nearly 3 million in the 1930s to 1.4 million today. The seals simply aren't reproducing rapidly enough to replenish their numbers.

"The current rate of decline is eight to ten percent per year...[and] there are no indications that the decline has abated; indeed, recent data suggest that the rate of decline may be accelerating," wrote HSUS Vice President of Wildlife and Environment Dr. John W. Grandy in our petition to Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldridge.

"The situation grows progressively worse," Dr. Grandy continued, "with a decline of eight to ten percent a year, simple mathematics suggests that it may take 40 years to reverse what has happened before the species is endangered."

Although the North Pacific fur seal is not as well known as the Canadian harp seal, it has a 200-year-old relationship with human beings that involves violent slaughter on both land and the high seas, delicate, multi-national treaties, and a government subserviently sustains a cruel fur market at taxpayers' expense. There are Aleut Indians (whose ancestors were sent as slaves to the Pribilof Islands by Russia to kill the seals) who have relied on U.S. government salaries during the summer seal slaughter and on public assistance throughout the rest of the year as they wait for summer to roll around again. This ridiculous situation is cruel to the seals, devastating to the seal population, and unproductive for the Aleuts, who need year-round work.

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The HSUS is pressuring the U.S. government on many fronts to stop the seal slaughter. We have supported the HSUS conceived and had enacted by Congress) by holding a briefing on Capitol Hill for U.S. senators and their aides to educate them about the need to end the U.S. slaughter and ask them to ratify only a protection treaty. On the same day we are asking our members to gather outside their own senators' district offices to ask for their support in ending the hunt.

We have to stop killing these seals now!

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Why Is the Fur Seal Population Declining?

The North Pacific fur seal is at the mercy of political, environmental, and biological elements—all of which are currently dragging its population to a frighteningly low level.

Throughout most of this century, the United States has been obliged to participate in the Interim Convention on the Conservation of North Pacific Fur Seals in order to control the hunting of these animals on the Pribilof Islands. If this treaty had not been in effect, there might well have been uncontrolled slaughter of seals, especially at sea. Many of the seals which were killed on the high seas before the Convention was enacted were pregnant females, thus wiping out entire generations. By the 1950s, the seal population had revived under the protection of the treaty, at which point the government again permitted hunters to kill females. Predictably, the population quickly shrunk. By 1968, this practice was again stopped under the assumption that the population would recover again. But it did not. Indeed, it is now clear that the population has continued its decline.

Another factor posing a very serious threat to the seal population is entanglement. Because of the Pacific Ocean's currents, the Bering Sea, the seals' playground, acts as a collecting basin for the flotsam from the tens of thousands of fishing boats in the North Pacific. Since the cold water preserves the material over long periods of time, the trash builds up, creating a deadly "garbage dump" in the sea. Seals, sea birds, fish, and other creatures of the North Pacific get caught and drown, or, worse yet, suffer a slow, painful strangulation when the strong fibers of nets and packing straps wrap around their necks. An incredible 70,000 seals die needlessly every year because of this litter!

Wildlife biologists are hopeful that if this generation of seals can be maintained, the species stands a strong chance of building up its numbers again. We have to stop killing these seals now!

What The HSUS Is Doing

Since 1984 is an especially important year for the North Pacific fur seals, the HSUS is launching a major program to protect the seals every way we can. The HSUS...

- Has prepared substantial documentation on the drastic decline of the fur seals and petitioned the Department of Commerce to place the North Pacific fur seals on the "threatened" list under the Endangered Species Act. This will force the government to make every effort to restore and protect the seals.

- Will observe March 1 as the 1984 National Day of the Seal (a day which the HSUS conceived and had enacted by Congress) by holding a briefing on Capitol Hill for U.S. senators and their aides to educate them about the need to end the U.S. slaughter and ask them to ratify only a protection treaty. On the same day, we are asking our members to gather outside their own senators' district offices to ask for their support in ending the hunt.

- Will continue to urge the Reagan Administration to negotiate and vote for a treaty that protects these seals rather than permitting their slaughter.

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Although North Pacific fur seals have been hunted since the 1700s, the United States did not assume any responsibility for hunts until 1987, when it acquired Alaska and the Pribilof Islands from Russia and leased the islands to the United States. Then, we trust, the seals will be protected from what has become their annual summer slaughter. This hunt is allegedly "carefully monitored," "skillfully conducted," and "managed" so that the overall population is not diminished from year to year. However, the "managed" population has shrunk from nearly 3 million in the 1930s to 1.4 million today. The seals simply aren't reproducing rapidly enough to replenish their numbers.

The HSUS is pressuring the U.S. government on many fronts to stop the seal slaughter. We have supported the recent establishment of a $20 million trust fund earmarked for new industries on the Pribilofs not dependent on the seal hunt.

Unfortuately, the support of this fur seal enterprise doesn't end after the sealers get their paychecks. The U.S. government然后 ships the pelts exclusively to the Foske Fur Company, which has a secret process to make the rough seal skin into soft, expensive fur coats. There is virtually no market in the United States for these fur seal garments. Even though Fashion Fur is able to sell some overseas, it is still forced to stockpile unused skins yearly.

Although North Pacific fur seals have been hunted since the 1700s, the United States did not assume any responsibility for hunts until 1987, when it acquired Alaska and the Pribilof Islands from Russia and leased the rights to kill seals on the new territory. The seal killing continued virtually every year because of this litter!

Wildlife biologists are hopeful that if this generation of seals can be maintained, the species stands a strong chance of building up its numbers again. We have to stop killing these seals now!

HOW THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY RESPOND

Don't be surprised if the U.S. government tries to tell you that the annual slaughter of up to 28,000 male seals "helps" the population. According to the government's rationale, bachelor males with their massive, lumbering bodies threaten the survival of the new pups. Some pups are indeed killed by the male seals that waddle over them. But this has nothing to do with the population decline. The government's own data show that, on the few islands where North Pacific fur seals can gather and not be commercially clubbed, the seal populations are healthier.

How can we be expected to believe that seals, which have survived and adapted over millions of years, are now dependent on people destroying tens of thousands of them each year to ensure their survival? That logic just won't wash!
out the years, these four countries are still bound by terms which govern the killing of North Pacific fur seals. Now called the Interim Convention on the Conservation of North Pacific Fur Seals, this current treaty requires the United States to conduct the seal slaughter on the Pribilof Islands. The United States keeps seventy percent of the seal pelts and gives Canada and Japan each fifteen percent of the total. Russia, according to its treaty obligations, manages a similar but much smaller hunt in its territory and divides the pelts in the same way—keeping the seventy percent for itself.

The current treaty still serves the fur seal industry, but it does contain provisions designed to keep the seal population abundant. Even so, the population has now shrunk drastically below the levels required by the treaty, but it is probable that the 1984 seal hunt will still continue, at taxpayers' expense!

This is the last year that the hunt will be held under the terms of the current treaty. In April, even before the summer 1984 hunt, negotiations will begin for a new treaty to go into effect when the current treaty expires in October 1984. Whether or not Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldridge decides to place the North Pacific fur seal on the "threatened" list, 1984 presents a unique opportunity to move toward total protection for the North Pacific fur seal once and for all. The HSUS has already urged the North Pacific Fur Seal Commission to negotiate a new treaty based on conservation rather than exploitation. We don't want a mere extension of the present treaty because it would only legitimize the current killing of tens of thousands of seals yearly when the population is already rapidly declining.

The year 1984 can indeed be the year of the North Pacific fur seal. With your help we can convince the U.S. government that a federal policy to hunt the fur seal is a federal policy to wipe out an entire species. To end the seal hunt this year will be a big step to ensure that the shriveling population has a chance to swell again some day.

What You Can Do

• You can help protect the North Pacific fur seals by urging your senators to work to achieve a new treaty that stops the annual slaughter on land as well as at sea. Plan a friendly National Day of the Seal (March 1) demonstration at your senators' local offices. Use the enclosed petition to gather signatures. Before you give the completed petitions to your senators, be sure to copy them so The HSUS can present them to senators' Capitol Hill offices as well. For more Seal Day ideas, please write to The HSUS for the free Seal Day action packet.

• When planning your Seal Day events, be sure to order from The HSUS additional copies of this Close-Up Report ($6.00 per 100 copies), our special fur seal pamphlet ($2.75 per 100 copies), and extra copies of the enclosed petition (available for free).

• Also write to Sen. Charles H. Percy, chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, in support of a new protective treaty.

• You can reach your senators and Sen. Percy at the following address:

  The Honorable (Senator's name)
  The U.S. Senate
  Washington, DC 20510

• Be sure to also support the HSUS request that the North Pacific fur seal be placed on the "threatened" list under the Endangered Species Act. Address your letters on this issue to:

  The Honorable Malcolm Baldridge
  Secretary of Commerce
  Department of Commerce
  Room 5854
  14th & Constitution Avenues
  Washington, DC 20230

• Finally, help The HSUS in our work to end the brutal commercial exploitation of the North Pacific fur seal and other wildlife. Your tax-deductible contribution enables us to work for the protection of animals, both wild and domestic. With a contribution of $25.00 or more, you will receive a blue-and-white "Club Sandwiches—Not Seals" T-shirt. Please use the enclosed coupon to specify size.