

To start my notes on the seal-fishery, let me say that at the beginning of the hunt in the search of those "pearls of great price" that open boats were used, in the old records there appears a letter sent to Governor Gambler by J. Bland of Bonavista, which is as follows:

Bonavista, Sept. 26, 1802.

Sir.—Your Excellency has been pleased to request of me some information respecting our seal fishery, and as far as my own experience and general observation can lead I shall endeavour to comply with that request. This adventurous and perilous pursuit is prosecuted in two different ways. During the winter months by nets and from March to June in ice skiffs and decked boats or schooners. The fishery by nets extends from Conception Bay to the Labrador, and in the northern ports there is a more certainty of success. About fifty pounds weight of strong twine will be required to make a net, the half-worn small hawsers, which the boats have used in the summer fishery do for foot-ropes, new ratline is necessary for head ropes and each net is required to be about forty fathoms in length, and nearly three in depth. I am anxious this minute that your Excellency may form some idea of the expense attending this adventure, as well as of the mode in which it is conducted. Four or five men constitute a crew to tend about twenty nets, but in brisk sealing this number of nets will require a double crew, in separate boats. The seals bolt into the nets while ranging at the bottom in quest of food, which makes it necessary to keep the nets to the ground, where they are made to stand on their legs, as the phrase is, by means of cork fastened at equal distance along the head ropes

The net is extended at the bottom by a mooring and a killick fixed at each end, and it is frequently placed in fifty fathoms of water, for we observe that the large seals are caught in the deepest water. To each end of the headrope is fixed a line, with the pole standing erect in the water to guide the sealers to the net, and when the poles are torn away by ice or other accidents they are directed by landmarks, and find their nets with creepers. The seals in their efforts to free themselves, cable the nets at the bottom and none but experienced sealers can disengage them without cutting the net. This description Sir, may not be interesting, but it will carry to Your Excellency a correct idea of this laborious business, and show that none but men active and inured to hardships can be qualified to engage in it. On the Labrador coast the sealfishery begins in November, and ends about Christmas, when the nets are taken up. With us it begins about Christmas and continues through the winter, the ice in this quarter being seldom stationary for any considerable length of time. Should strong east and northeast winds prevail through the months of December and January, the seals towards the end of the latter month never fail to appear in large companies, always going before the wind and ice, until they find themselves imbayed. The seals upon this coast are of many species, they are classed and distinguished by names only to be found in the Newfoundland nomenclature, and only understood by the Newfoundland naturalists. Tars, Dohters and Gunswolls and many others brew upon the rocks, in the summer season, and may be called natives, but these make but little part of our fishery. Our dependence rests wholly upon Harps and Bedlamers, which are driven by winds