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THE BEHRING SEA QUESTION

IN order to understand the Behring Sea question, some knowledge of the natural history of the fur seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*) is requisite. The more important facts as bearing on the question may be briefly stated; and those desiring to further study the question are referred to Mr. Henry W. Elliott's book, *Our Arctic Province*, published by C. Scribner's Sons, New York, to which I am indebted for much information.

The breeding ground of the fur seal is on the Pribylov Islands, St. Paul and St. George, in the Behring Sea.¹ They are about 180 miles from the nearest land, and were discovered by Pribylov, who commanded the sloop called 'St. George' engaged in the fur business, in 1786: they were then uninhabited, but natives were brought from Oonalashka and Atkha, and the population in 1880 consisted of 298 souls on St. Paul and ninety-two on St. George. St. Paul contains thirty-three and St. George twenty-seven square miles.

The islands have been rented from the United States Government by the Alaska Commercial Company, under certain regulations, including the education and care of the natives, all of whom are employed by the Company.

The breeding season lasts from May until August, some young seals and females remaining until November; but during the rest of the year the islands are deserted by the seals, whose whereabouts is not then distinctly known; it is probably far to the South, in the North Pacific Ocean.

A few old males begin to arrive at the islands early in May, but the mass early in June; they are then excessively fat, and weigh about 500 lbs.; the females arrive about the middle of June, though a few are earlier; they are much smaller than the males and weigh 80 to 90 lbs. Each bull selects a bit of land on arrival on which he collects several females as soon as they land, and defends against all other bulls, the fights between the bulls for the possession of the females being very severe. Each bull will collect from six to perhaps in some cases, as many as forty to fifty in his harem, those who by their early arrival have secured the best bits of ground, near the water, getting the most. The females give birth to a single pup within about twenty-

¹ See chart on page 608.

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