

Bear "claws" in contract

Hospital workers in Churchill in northern Manitoba faced with a unique occupational hazard, a threat to life and limb by wandering polar bears, now have a provision in their contract affectionately called the "Polar Bear Claws".

Each year in the autumn, hundreds of polar bears migrate through Churchill on their way towards the soon-to-be frozen expanse of Hudson Bay and across into the Arctic.

Though no one has been killed or seriously injured in the last five years by a polar bear, the huge mammals prowl the town, breaking into homes and sometimes terrorizing the residents.

And with 217 bears sighted last year ambling through the city, the hospital workers decided to guard against a surprise encounter with the bears by obtaining employer-financed transportation home after their night shifts.

The car rides home at night may set the skittish workers' minds at ease, but car windows really cannot withstand the probing of a curious, adventure-seeking, full-grown polar bear, say Parks Canada officials.

Peanut farming a first

An industry that could bring in \$50 million a year has just been introduced into Ontario.

Jim Picard, a farmer from Windham Centre, Ontario, is the first Canadian to grow peanuts and open a shelling plant.

"This year there are seven farmers who are cultivating 80 hectares of peanuts and we hope to shell 200,000 pounds of them," Mr. Picard said.

Some of the shelled, roasted, toasted peanuts will be sold from a small shop adjacent to the plant itself. However, Mr. Picard will also fill the orders received from a number of customers for whom he will have to produce large-scale crops in the coming years.

A Montreal firm, Skippy Peanut Butter, strongly supports this new industry and "will take everything we can produce," Mr. Picard said.

The shells can be used for compressed building materials, fireplace logs, household cleansers and even in fodder for cattle, said Mr. Picard. "Everything we grow can be used for something," he said.

Alberta coal mine planned

The Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board has approved a \$400-million coal mine near Hinton in northwest Alberta. The mine was proposed by Union Oil Company of Canada Limited, Calgary, and Rescon Coal Holdings Limited of Edmonton.

The bituminous coal from the northwestern region of the province would be used for thermal power generation and sold to Pacific Rim and European markets.

Union Oil has a 90 percent interest and Rescon 10 per cent in the joint venture. A preliminary decision has been made to commit the initial \$155-million investment to begin construction in 1981 with late 1983 as the date for start of production.

When in full operation, the open pit mine would have an annual yield of 4.3 million metric tons of raw coal, of which three million tons would be saleable.

Approximately 226 million tons of coal deposits in the adjacent Obed and Marsh blocks will have sufficient recoverable coal to ensure 37 years of output in the Obed block alone.

Peregrine falcons make comeback

After a close brush with extinction, the peregrine falcon is once again off and flying.

Ten years ago there were only about 20 breeding pairs of the elegant anatum species of the peregrine falcon throughout Canada and only one pair known to be mating in Alberta.

But this summer more than 100 young anatum peregrines were turned loose across the country as flying proof of the success of a special captive breeding program for the endangered bird.

The 1980 release will roughly double the number of wild peregrines breeding in Canada.

"In 1970 the anatum peregrines were virtually gone in North America," said Richard Fyfe, the Canadian Wildlife Service supervisor of the federal-provincial breeding project at Canadian Forces Base Wainwright in eastern Alberta.

"A general decline had been noted in the bird across North America. They were on the endangered list and there was a risk of extinction."

The peregrine is best known for its role in the medieval sport of falconry, incredible hunting skills, sight and ability to dive at more than 380 kilometres (240 miles) an hour.

It survived the smog of the Industrial Revolution. But DDT was its worst enemy, and the falcon slowly disappeared from the skies in all but the most isolated nesting areas as the poison worked its way through the food chain. The use of DDT was banned in Canada in 1970.

To save the bird, the Canadian Wildlife Service collected 12 young members of the rare species in 1970 and started a captive breeding program in a remote corner extensively along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico where peregrines winter.

Defying the predictions of many conservationists who said the birds could not be bred in captivity, two peregrines were hatched in 1974.

It was a world first, and the Canadian government issued a special stamp to commemorate the success.

With the use of a technique called "fostering", the young are usually returned to the wild by placing them in existing peregrine nests. "The attempt to bring back the peregrine is an attempt by man to correct the man-made problem of DDT pollution," Mr. Fyfe said.



Mr. Picard fills containers with Valence peanuts from his first experimental crop.