

Alaska Science Forum

Alaska's European Rabbits

By NEIL DAVIS

The European rabbits on Middleton Island in the Gulf of Alaska and on Umnak, Rabbit and Hog Islands in the Aleutians have an involved history which began about two million years ago. Then, they inhabited Africa, Asia and North America, later entering South America during the ice age era a few tens of thousands of years ago.

Phoenician traders found the forefathers of the Middleton and Aleutian rabbits in Spain about three thousand years ago. The rabbits became an item of trade and soon were domesticated all over Europe. There, different breeds were evolved. Released in England by the Normans to grow wild, the domesticated rabbits soon took over and were a dominant pest for a thousand years. Introduced into Australia, the European rabbits soon were devastating pasture land there, too.

Once released, the European rabbit multiplies and does well in places where there is open grassland and not too many controlling predators such as fox, coyote or wolf. Grassy islands seem to be especially suitable. Consequently, European rabbits have done well on the comparatively dry San Juan Islands of the Puget Sound area and on Middleton Island and several other islands in Alaska.

Harvestable populations of European rabbits have evolved from unknown numbers introduced on Umnak Island in 1930 and on Rabbit Island in 1940. Three female and one male rabbit placed on Middleton Island in 1954 multiplied like rabbits until their descendants numbered between 3,600 and 7,000 in 1961.

There also have been successful transplants of snowshoe hares onto Kodiak Island and several Aleutian islands, but introductions of hares and rabbits to the wet, forested islands of Southeast Alaska have been unsuccessful.

**Sponsored by the Geophysical Institute,
University of Alaska**



When you're in Anchorage, Alaska... there's no place like Hilton.

The Anchorage Westward Hilton, with 502 Beautiful rooms, is situated in the heart of downtown Anchorage. Complete convention and banquet facilities.

The Top of the World Restaurant — Finest in dining and atmosphere!

The Trattoria — authentic Italian cuisine in a truly Italian setting!

The Signature Room — best entertainment in town!

Convenient 24 hour Coffee Shop

For your reservations, call your local Hilton
Reservation Service or call us direct at
(907) 272-7411

It is our pleasure to serve you.



Third at 'E' St., P.O. Box 520, Anchorage, Ak. 99510