

And Propagates Slowly—

Russia Says Polar Bear Population Is Small

By

ALEXANDER KISHCHINSKY

Novosti Press Agency

The polar bear, the most well-known of the Arctic's land animals, is at the same time little known. It is the most powerful among land beasts of prey; The lion and tiger are lightweights in comparison to the average female bear which weighs 683 pounds.

Studies have shown that the

population of polar bears is small. Though it is very difficult to make a count in the ice-bound polar reaches of these constantly roaming animals, their number is held to be between 12 and 20 thousand. Apart from this, the polar bear propagates slowly.

The female begins to bear young at the age of four, and usually brings forth cubs once in three years. Fifteen to twenty per

cent of the cubs usually die in the first year of their lives. In addition to this, some fifteen hundred animals or more annually are hunted down. Though seemingly not a large figure, it has brought the polar bear to the brink of extinction.

This and other data that scientists have at their disposal points to the problem of the

(Continued on Page 6)

Arctic Polar Bear...

(Continued from Page 1)

protection of the polar bear. Polar bear hunting is completely forbidden in the USSR.

Wrangel Island, the main area of polar bear propagation near the Arctic Pacific, has been declared a state game preservation, and the main sites on the island where dens are most densely situated, are particularly guarded areas: No humans are allowed in the vicinity during the period when the bear families come out of their dens.

True, special licenses may be obtained in order to catch 12 to 15 bear cubs from Wrangel Island annually for zoos. But, in order to catch the cubs, a mother bear may never be shot.

Bear hunting from planes is prohibited in Alaska. Polar bear hunting has been completely forbidden in Norway for the period 1973 to 1977. Large national parks have been founded in Canada, Greenland, and on

Spitsbergen, where bear inhabited localities are under protection.

The governments of the USSR, the U.S., Canada, Norway, and Denmark concluded an international agreement on the protection of the polar bear declaring a polar bear hunting ban throughout the Arctic area over a set period.

The question of the polar bears' future is a serious one. Oil is now being extracted, international airlines and waterways are crossing over, and settlements and cities are going up where bears were once masters in that very Arctic which is being crossed.

Whereas several years ago, no clear and definite answers could be given to the question, the answer today is quite positive. At any rate, measures taken so far on an interstate scale have halted the decrease of the polar bear population.—