

POLAR BEAR CONSERVATION RESEARCH

Fish and Wildlife and Air Force Cooperate

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HQ AAC, ELMENDORF AFB Alaska—For the second consecutive year, the 711th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron at Cape Lisburne, hosted a research expedition conducted by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

As a part of a five-year international study on the polar bear, a research team headed by Dr. James Brooks, representing the United States in this study, came to Cape Lisburne to survey the polar bear population in and around Chukchi Sea.

Possible Extinction

International concern for the Polar Bear has arisen in recent years, as the question has grown regarding its possible extinction. In 1965, five countries, including the United States, Russia, Canada, Denmark, and Norway, gathered at an international Polar Bear Conference, and identified areas of information that would be required to determine the current and future status of the polar bear, and its chances for survival.

As a result of this and other more recent meetings, conservationists world-wide are working together to find out such things as the life history of the polar bear, its migratory characteristics, the abundance of the species, and the number of bears harvested annually by each country.

Use Modified Helicopter

"And to learn about the polar bear, you have to go where he is," to quote Dr. Brooks. For this reason the expedition came to Cape Lisburne.

Utilizing a small airplane especially designed for landing on ice, and a specially modified helicopter, the team flies out over the frozen sea, methodically criss-crossing a designated area, until a polar bear is spotted.

Snow on the ice aids greatly in detecting the animals, as the helicopter hovers just a few feet off the ice, and can closely follow the bear's tracks.

Subduing a Bear

A capture-gun, firing an anesthetic-filled syringe dart, is used in subduing the bears. The anesthetic takes about fifteen minutes to become fully effective, and during this time the two aircraft

fly around the bear keeping it away from the leads, or open breaks in the ice.

Since the drug has tranquilizing properties, the bear eventually becomes very docile, and offers no resistance. It quickly recovers, with no after-effects. It should be noted that no bears have been lost due to the use of this drug.

While the bear is in a drugged state, the researchers work quickly. Using varied methods, the bear is tagged as a means of future identification. Collars and ear tags are used, and a special dye is painted on the bears to aid in visual identification.

This year for the first time experimental radio collars are being tested, to determine the practicality of employing radio telemetry to locate tagged bears. The small radio transmitter on the bears' collars produce an intermittent signal that can be detected at a maximum range of thirty miles.

The bears are weighed, using cargo net and the helicopter. A non-functional tooth is extracted for future study to determine the bear's age.

Cape Lisburne Assistance

In support of the expedition Cape Lisburne has made available full use of its runway and radar facilities. Daily weather information and navigational assistance is provided.

Research team members have full use of government quarters and dining facilities. Technical and material assistance has aided such operations as field testing the radio collars, and improvement of aircraft refueling.

Dr. Brooks emphasized that the expedition "could not have been possible without the cooperation of the Air Force in making available its station facilities."

He conveyed his appreciation to the Alaskan Air Command, and in particular to Cape Lisburne Commander Maj. Harley P. Evans and all station personnel who assisted in the operation.

This five-year study may result in agreements establishing international regulation and control of polar bear conservation. In event, much more information will be known about the polar bear than is currently available.

Cape Lisburne personnel look forward to next year, when the most interesting and worthwhile activity will again take place at their doorstep.



HALF-HIDDEN, and splendidly camouflaged, a bear (arrow) prowls behind an ice ridge. (USAF photo)



BETRAYED ONLY BY his black snout and eyes, a bear seems as interested in our photographer as

the photographer is in the bear. (USAF Photo)



THIS HALF-TON BEAR is not dead. He's not even asleep. He is just resting quietly from the

effects of a tranquilizer. (USAF Photo)