

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WGM-8
Greenland - Hunting--I
The Hunting Lists

Akandevøj 7
Lille Vaerløse
Denmark
4 February 1966

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Dick,

Despite our stereotyped ideas about the North, the words helicopter, tape recorder, deepfreeze, motorboat, electric guitar, and self-service market are now more applicable than those which immediately come to mind: blizzard, furs, blubber, igloo, kayak, seal, and dog sled. Other than blizzard and winter cold, the latter words belong more to the past than to the present--at least in the Greenland about which I write.

Even in our century, winter cold has moderated somewhat. There are a few indications, however, that the warming was but short-lived and is now giving way to cooler conditions. Hydrographic conditions are still warm enough for cod to be found along Greenland's southwest coast.

This illustrates that keeping up with the times is a difficult business. We often speak of the great lag between scientific advancement and social change, but swiftly changing economic and social conditions are often slow in being assimilated into our fund of knowledge.

Here in Denmark, most people are aware of the radical changes which have taken place in Greenland. Around 1915, a gradual warming in marine conditions resulted in the appearance of cod in Greenland waters. The same conditions accelerated a decline in sea mammals (or at least a shift in their distribution) which had already been noticed before 1900. Sealing and the hunter's life were gradually replaced by a large inshore fishing economy; a barter system, by coins; a necessarily dispersed population, by one now living more and more in towns and larger villages in Greenland. The change from hunting to fishing was really from Stone Age to modern living--all in the course of 50 years. Today in Greenland, modern freezing plants dot the coast, shops and self-service markets are humming with activity, towns have weekly newspapers, Greenland Radio broadcasts the latest news, people are well-dressed, and the Beatles are in style.

For all the modernization that has taken place and despite the great emphasis on fishing as a way of life, one third of Greenland's population lives in areas where hunting is still king and where the mark of a man is his success at sealing.

If fishing has taken over and seems to be the future for modern Greenland, why spend time in a newsletter on hunting in Greenland? Thirty per cent of the population living off hunting should be reason enough. Recent developments, moreover, have convinced me that perhaps we had better take a closer look at hunting in Greenland: its significance today and possibilities for tomorrow.

Highly variable fish catches since 1960 in West Greenland have injected the tiniest suggestion of alarm into Greenlandic affairs. Could this resource which appeared so quickly a generation ago vanish as rapidly, to leave cutters and nets, filletting machines and freezing plants without the raw basis of their existence? The answer to this is a tentative "yes". The obvious next question is: "What can be done if such a change occurs?" One answer would be to follow the fish as other nations are now doing: Russia, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, and the rest. Greenland's fishing fleet, however, is composed of small inshore cutters unable to fish on the banks and offshore areas. Denmark herself has never participated in the large international bank fishery off West Greenland and has no tradition in other than small boat fishing. Recently, however, larger vessels have been considered. Under the new ten-year plan for Greenland, ocean-going fishing vessels will probably be introduced to give the new filletting plants a steady supply of fish in all seasons.

Ironically, even with the great industrialization which has taken place in Greenland with the spotlight on fishing, the only districts showing a profit today are those whose economy is based on hunting and whose way of life has scarcely been affected by the drastic changes wrought by the growth of a fishing industry along the southwest coast. Two exceptions are the towns of Narssaq and Christianshaab. Narssaq has a modern factory with a supply of diverse raw materials keeping it active through most of the year: shrimp, fish, and sheep. Christianshaab is the great shrimp center located in Disko Bay. The factory is modern and efficient; the shrimp, tiny and tasty, with the lure of the North in every jar and can--a sales point on which The Royal Greenland Trade Company (KGH) has capitalized to the hilt. Even with skyrocketing production, possible sales far outstrip the supply.

In the past several years fish-freezing plants have been built in some of the bigger towns along the west coast of Greenland. Because of the heavy seasonability of fish supply, however, these new plants now find heavy going in trying to show a profit. Most of the smaller places south of Disko still operate on the old system of turning the catch of cod into saltfish. Such an operation requires small capitalization, but although Greenland saltfish is a high quality product, world market trends continue to favor a frozen product.

In comparison with the fishing towns farther south, the hunting districts do not require heavy capital investment. The Royal Greenland Trade Company (KGH) requires only a warehouse to store skins sold to it by the Greenlandic hunters. Recently some of the deficit-producing goods such as seal blubber have been deleted from the roster of hunting products bought by KGH from the local population. Moreover, sealskins now fetch high prices in the Danish Fur Auction and fox has not fallen completely out of the picture.

As an introduction to hunting in Greenland and because of the importance which I feel should be placed upon the use of renewable resources in the North today, I will dwell in the remainder of this letter upon a unique source of hunting statistics in Greenland.

One of the difficulties in studying the use of renewable resources in the North is getting statistical records covering a span of time. Unless

we have a reliable pool of figures--in this case hunting returns--almost insurmountable problems prevent coming to grips with such considerations as maximum sustained yield, natural biological fluctuations of stocks, and sound recommendations of protective legislation to safeguard animal resources.

Fortunately, in the case of Greenland, hunting statistics do exist. These are in the form of hunting lists which have been kept for over 100 years in West Greenland. Since 1862*, the catch of each hunter in West Greenland has been recorded by an appointed person at every inhabited place.

These hunting returns have been recorded by the list-keepers in 24 one-half month periods throughout the year for each type of animal taken. The original lists are found today in the Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet). Summaries of the lists have been published in printed form since 1873 for South Greenland (the old land division, Kap Farvel through Holsteinsborg District) and since 1903 for North Greenland (Kangatsiaq through Upernavik Districts). I have not been able to locate earlier printed summaries, despite the footnote.

The hunting list summaries for both North and South Greenland (present-day West Greenland) continued to be published in Godthaab up until the outbreak of World War II. During the war, general summaries were published for a few years, but detailed hunting records were possibly kept only sporadically from 1940 until about 1950. Because I have never seen a complete set of these published lists, an accurate account of them is not possible. But the very fact that some form of hunting records have been kept in Greenland for over 100 years gives these lists great potential value and I feel that even an incomplete description of them is important. Part of the lists' value rests in their very uniqueness. No corresponding records are to be found for other areas in the North, with the possible exception of the Soviet Union, about which I have no information.

On page 4 is a copy of the cover and first page from one of the early lists from North Greenland. The title, in Greenlandic and Danish, is "Summary of hunting lists for the districts in North Greenland for the year 1910/11", printed in Godthaab, L. Møller, 1912. The period covered is 1 April 1910 - 31 March 1911. The first page, reproduced here next to the cover page, is the beginning of the list for Godhavn District. It shows under each place the individual hunters' names and what they have taken in seals (Puissit) and Greenland sharks (Eqalugssuit).

On page 5, for comparison with a typical old list, is the latest hunting summary cover page and a representative page--again showing Godhavn District. Recent summaries no longer list each hunter by name with his individual

* According to one source, hunting lists may have been kept as early as 1853. The same source indicates that printed lists have been published since 1862 (North Greenland), although I have not been able to substantiate this. (Sammendrag af Statistiske Oplysninger om Grønland, III, Afsnit 13, 1944. pp. 595-6)

Piniartut

sinerissame avangardlermitut pissainut ag-
dlaŕtaivít katiternere

ukioŕ 1910—11.

Ekalogssuit.	Puissit.	Evkítsume:
118	12	Peter Danielsen (K.)
16	21	Ole
55	6	Paulus Wille
49	1	Jørgen
2	17	Benjamin
36	35	Ole Lindenhavn (niuv.)

Kekertarssuarne

erkánilo piniartut
pissait, uk. 1910—11.

Kaersume:

Ekalogssuit.	Puissit.
50	4
43	«
26	30
77	«
47	«
33	«
72	«
120	«
57	«
35	«
16	8
41	4
22	«
14	4
93	«
83	«
62	«
22	«
14	16
10	«
4	«
21	3
6	1
1	«
108	41

Sammendrag

af Fangelister for

Distrikterne i Nordgrønland

for Aaret 1910—11.

Ekalogssuit.	Puissit.	Evkítsume:
136	«	Dines Kristiansen
9	«	Mathias
14	14	Hans Hansen
20	50	Jeremias
4	3	Josef
18	4	Hendrik Stork (ajøke)
		Igdlunguame:
105	1	Isak Danielsen (K.) (n.1)
22	«	Carl Kristiansen
		Nängissane:
147	21	Jonas Reimer (K.) (kil.1)
		Aumarúttigssane:
102	12	Ludvig Geisler (kil.7)
85	29	Adam

Núngme navitigkat,

L. Møller.

1912.

Kalátldlit-nunane

piniartut pissáinut titartaivít katiternere

1. apríl 1962 - 31. marts 1963

tunissagssiat handelimit tunissat

áma

niorkutigssanik atortugssanigdlo

handelimit pisiat 1962

1962/63	kommunit	arferit Hvaler										puissit Stæler						
		riká-gug-dli		kilalugkat		nár-nat		nísat		avdlat		aorfti		naist	kar-gíssat	ugssuit	álárssuit	agdlag-túldlo
		Væge-hvaler	Nar-hvaler	Nar-hvaler	Keener-kasor-lit	Keener-kasor-lit	Keener-kasor-lit	Keener-kasor-lit	Grinde	Marruv	Andre	Hval-rozer	Ring-sæler	Ring-sæler	Serag-sæler	Romme-sæler	Stæt og bláidlar	Stæt og bláidlar
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11								
Transition page																		
GODHAVN																		
	H	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	33
Skansén																		
	By	-	1	27	5	-	-	-	-	-	4	223	1	24	269			
Godhavn																		
	H	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	278	-	-	-	-	-	23
Disko fjord																		
	H	5	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	26	17	-	3	168			
Kronprinsens Eiland																		
	1962/63	5	1	42	5	1	-	30	524	1	27	493						
tamamiuvalurik																		
(sót tamaisa)	1961/62	10	28	75	-	11	-	25	2.305	3	35	899						
(total)	1960/61	31	1	37	-	7	-	12	1.476	6	71	625						

UMANAK																		
Niakornat	H	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	183	-	2	44			
K'aersut	H	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	158	-	2	72			
Úmanak	By	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	114	-	1	26			
Semiarssuit	B	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	36	-	-	31			
karfidlurik (i alt)												150	-	1	57			
Úmánatsiak	B	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	185	-	-	44			
Ikerasak	H	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	231	-	-	42			
karfidlurik (i alt)					4	-	-	-	-	-	-	416	-	-	86			
Sfút	H	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	270	-	3	45				
Uvkusigssat	H	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	249	-	-	24			
Igdlorssuit	H	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.323	-	8	202			
Núggðtsiak	H	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	627	-	-	180			
tamamiuvalurik	1962/63	-	1	7	4	1	-	1	3.376	-	16	710						
(sót tamaisa)	1961/62	-	5	6	-	-	-	2	6.530	-	22	1.354						
(total)	1960/61	-	296	6	-	1	-	4	6.053	-	7	2.339						

SAMMENDRAG AF GRØNLANDS FANGSTLISTER 1/4 1962 - 31/3 1963
 DEN KONGELIGE GRØNLANDSKE HANDELS KØB AF PRODUKTER OG
 DEN KONGELIGE GRØNLANDSKE HANDELS SALG AF VARER OG MATERIALER 1962

HUNTING STATISTICS BASED ON THE GREENLANDERS' LISTS OF GAME
 CAUGHT IN GREENLAND IN THE PERIOD 1/4 1962 TO 31/3 1963
 PURCHASE OF PRODUCTS BY THE ROYAL GREENLAND TRADE DEPARTMENT AND
 SALE OF GOODS AND MATERIALS FROM THE ROYAL GREENLAND TRADE DEPARTMENT IN 1962

result; a yearly total is given for each inhabited place. On the other hand, instead of merely using the categories "seal" and "shark", many more divisions have been made in the catch by type of animal, in addition also to listing other valuable information.

As I indicated earlier, there is some doubt about the date the hunting lists were started. More definite, however, is the fact that the man initiating the hunting statistics was Governor of South Greenland (Inspektør) Dr. phil. H. J. Rink. Hinrich Rink, who eventually became Director for KGH, was a scientist who took a keen interest in the development of Greenland and the well-being of the Greenlanders. Rink, possibly influenced by the father of written Greenlandic, Samuel Kleinschmidt, organized the local council system in West Greenland. The local councils (forstanderskaber) were set up to administer social aid and make it more realistic. To do this, it was necessary to have more accurate information about hunting conditions in each district. Although Rink saw the need for an accurate recording of the hunt for the purposes of the local councils, I have an idea that, as a scientist, he foresaw as well the ultimate scientific value of such information.

From the beginning, the published hunting list summaries for South Greenland included small whales (Matagdlit), seals (Puissit), and fox (Teriangniat). From 1901/02, small whales were no longer listed. Starting in 1916/17 a more detailed breakdown was published, making the list summaries more interesting scientifically. This listing, which continued to at least 1936/37, was beluga (hvidfisk), porpoise (marsvin), large seals (klapmyds), small seals (blaaside and fjordsael), white fox, blue fox, polar bear, reindeer, and shark. From 1940, seals were listed by species and several small whales were added.

For North Greenland the published summaries starting in 1903/04 list seal and shark until 1911/12 when a breakdown similar to that of 1916/17 in South Greenland was started. Polar bear were, however, not added until 1914/15 in North Greenland. In 1939, seals were listed by species and later several types of small whale were added, as in South Greenland.

One of the interesting and valuable features of the old hunting list series was the use of each hunter's name. Individual naming yields much information, including, for example, degree of hunting skill and year of hunter's death. Names are no longer used in the published summaries, although it is possible that the original lists still maintain this system.

Each hunter was grouped under the name of his home village on the lists, thus giving valuable clues to inhabited places. From 1916/17 for both South and North Greenland, these places were arranged on the lists in geographical order from south to north, another valuable source of information when trying to map inhabited places in Greenland.

For all their uniqueness, there are some gaps in the published summaries*. For South Greenland, summaries are lacking for all but three years from

* In 1948, one publication (Beretninger vedrørende Grønlands Styrelse) began printing general hunting summaries going back to 1934/35. These, however, included only district totals, so that the interesting local hunt results could no longer be followed.

1926/27 until 1940/41. In North Greenland, for a period of six years from 1926/27, no hunters' names are given. I have yet to discover what happened in Greenland in 1926/27. Although publishing stopped after 1939/40 for South Greenland (until a new hunting summary series resumed in 1958), summaries continued to be published for North Greenland up until 1944/45. No hunters' or village names, however, were published after 1938/39 for North Greenland.

After an apparent halt in publication from the early forties, a new series of the summaries appeared first in 1958 following suggestions from the Greenlandic Parliament (Landsraad) during their meetings in 1956 and 1957. During a discussion of sealskin prices in the 1956 Landsraad, one of the members regretted that more information on the seal hunt was not available. The question of resuming publication of the hunting list summaries was at that time also being discussed in the Ministry for Greenland. In the 1957 Landsraad meeting, a Ministry suggestion of the form these lists should take was accepted by the members.

The first of the new hunting list series to appear was for 1956/57, published in 1958. Each year since then, lists have been printed. The last one (see page 5) was for 1962/63. In addition, an attempt is being made to publish summaries back to 1939/40 so that the record may be complete. So far, summaries for the years 1954/55 and 1955/56 have been printed. Whether the gap can be filled is doubtful, but general totals can probably be published.

The accuracy and reliability of the hunting lists, especially the older series, is impossible to determine statistically. Several factors point toward high reliability, however. Printing and publishing the lists with wide distribution in Greenland has probably tended to keep the list-keepers on their toes. Each hunter had a chance to see his result in print and could thereby make sure that his result tallied with what was attributed to him. Ph. Rosendahl, former Governor of North Greenland and one of the few scholars making extensive use of the hunting lists, has attempted to determine the accuracy of the lists. In the case of one animal, arctic fox, the entire hunt is sold to KGH. A comparison may therefore be made between the hunting lists and KGH's purchase records. Such a comparison yielded (for 1954/55) 83% and 95% accuracy for South and North Greenland respectively. A similar study for the years from 1927 to 1940 showed 90% and 93% accuracy. Rosendahl believes that the accuracy of statistics for the larger and more important animals such as seals, reindeer, and polar bear is even higher.

Unfortunately, lists have been kept for only a short time in present-day North Greenland (Thule District) and East Greenland. Even though they are included in the latest listings, results from the North and East Greenland hunting districts are today not very reliable. Many places fail to report at all in some years; estimates are then made based on adjoining years' records, but these cannot be statistically reliable. The same unreliability exists for the larger towns along the west coast, but these are not particularly important for hunting at any rate.

For the latest published year (1962/63), hunting lists were missing for 28 per cent of Greenland's inhabited places representing 6 per cent of the total population. One must remember, however, that many of the places not filing returns are sheep farming settlements with little or only incidental importance in hunting. For the year 1961/62, lists were lacking from 21 per cent of the inhabited places, representing 3 per cent of the population.

The Ministry for Greenland hopefully will continue to support and encourage interest in keeping the hunting lists. The guiding hand in such matters, Philip Rosendahl, retired several years ago. At present in the Ministry, two men (Fuld, Svend Jensen and Handelsfuld, E. Wassmann) are working full time in preparing the lists for publication. Five thousand copies of the yearly lists are printed, most of which are distributed in Greenland as an inclusion to the newspaper Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten.

The hunting list summaries now include a variety of information making them required reading for Greenland specialists. Since 1958/59, the summaries were expanded to include what the population of each district earns through sale of products (fish, sheep, and hunting) to KGH. Purchases by Greenlanders at KGH stores are also listed. For ready comparison between various districts in Greenland, all hunting results are now translated into equivalent weight of meat and edible portions.

The lists are basically in Greenlandic for Greenlanders, but have Danish subtitles and an English translation page. Because they now include sheep farming and fishing results, the lists enable Greenlanders to keep up with developments on their island, as well as to compare their district with neighboring ones.

Recently, I took Joan to a sale of Greenland furs at the new Danish Fur Auction. This sale represents the end result of the hunting economy in Greenland; the auction drew enthusiastic fur buyers from all over the world. The story of this auction and a bit more detail of hunting in Greenland as learned from a perusal of the unique hunting lists will have to wait for following letters.

Sincerely,

Bill Mattox

W. G. Mattox