

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WGM-9

Greenland - Hunting II
General Considerations

Akandevøj 7
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Denmark
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Dear Dick,

My last letter to you indicated that the economic situation in Greenland is in a state of flux, with increased emphasis to be placed upon hunting. This emphasis, however, will not be at the expense of the modern fishing industry which is burgeoning along the west coast. Perhaps I gave a misleading impression about this. Modern fishing, even though it involves great risks in Greenland, is the backbone of future plans of economic development there. Past policies about the dim future for hunting in Greenland have, however, been modified so that plans are now being made through the Permanent Greenland Committee (Grønlandsraad) for improvement of conditions in the hunting districts.

Improvements will probably be in the form of higher prices paid to Greenlandic hunters for their raw goods sold to the Royal Greenland Trade Department (KGH), boarding schools to serve the necessarily-dispersed hunting population, freezing houses for better utilization of the catch, and more motorboats so that larger hunting areas can be covered.

I shall attempt in this and the following letters to describe the status of hunting in Greenland and its importance as an economic pursuit compared with the two other main supporting activities--fishing and sheep farming.

Hunting as a way of life in Greenland has a long and troubled history dating from the first migration of nomadic Eskimo from the Canadian arctic archipelago. Fishing and sheep raising, however, started in the present century--fishing as a direct result of the climatic warming. For a hunting people, fishing had always been looked down on as something for women and boys and for old men no longer able to pursue the seals.

After the Greenland Commission of 1948 issued its report in 1950 and the Danish constitutional changes of 1953 were adopted as law, the era of modern Greenland really began. Increasing amounts of money were spent each year on basic construction and expansion of factories, schools, churches, shops, water works, power plants, harbors, roads, and housing. Also, during the past 15 years, a basic change of attitude occurred among the Greenlanders. No longer was a man "only a fisherman"--the deprecativ term "only" was now being switched to the once-mighty hunter.

In the Commission's 1950 report and laws passed on the basis of its findings, the hunting districts of Greenland were deemed rather far from

the main centers of future investment and growth. Fear that a continued decline in seals would erode away the main economic base in the northern districts led to a decision to encourage partial depopulation of Umanak and Upernavik districts.

Danish administrators encouraged people willing to move by offering financial support, housing, and a promise of employment in the growing towns along the southwest coast. Some of the population movements deemed necessary at the time were indeed carried out.* Great problems were encountered, however, in addition to the basic one still plaguing population concentration today—lack of housing.

Since 1950, the natural conditions for sealing have changed so considerably from those on which the 1948 Commission based its report that a new policy has been adopted. This policy is stated in the latest official report on future planning in Greenland, based upon work of the newest Commission looking into Greenland's development (Grønlandsudvalget af 1960, or G-60).

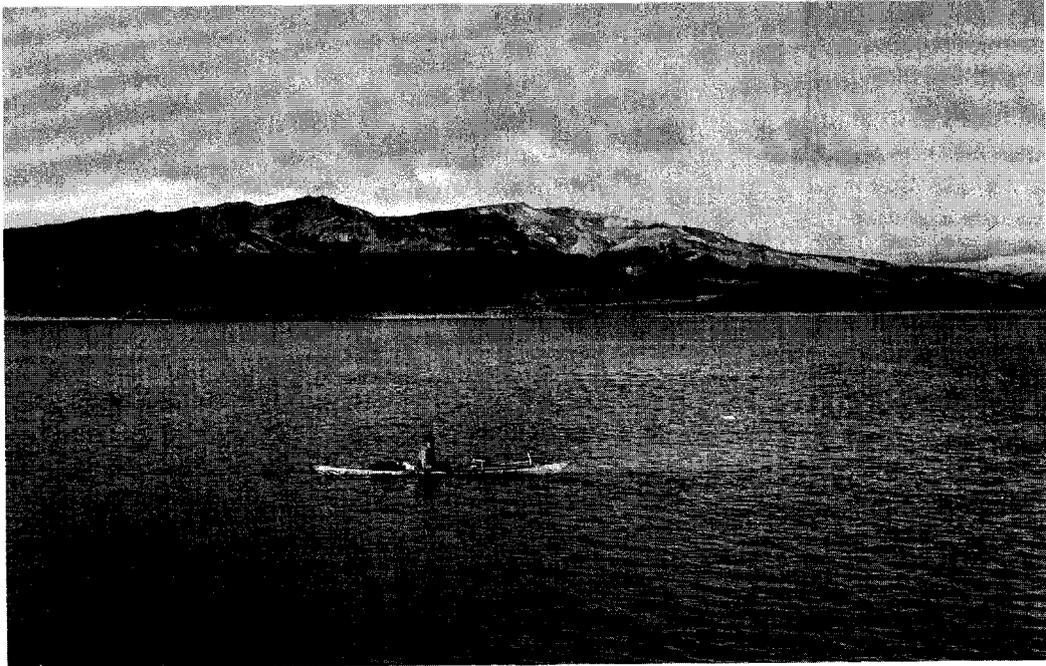
The 1960 Commission was disbanded after publication of its report. The task of implementing its recommendations was given to a new body, Grønlandsraad, the Permanent Greenland Committee. This committee is composed of both Danish and Greenlandic representatives and, although it has no power in its own right, its recommendations will probably be accepted by the Greenland Council (Landsraad) and passed into law by the Danish Parliament. Among its members are Danish and Greenlandic MPs, other high government officials, the Governor of Greenland, and career civil servants specializing in Greenland. Grønlandsraad's chairman is H. H. Koch, who was head of the 1948 Commission.

The present policy of the Permanent Greenland Committee regarding the hunting districts will probably be based on what the 1960 Greenland Commission said in its report. The Permanent Greenland Committee has discussed the hunting districts in its meetings. Their recommendations, which will be presented to Parliament, will first be reviewed for approval by the Greenland Council, presently in session in Godthaab.

In the next several paragraphs, I shall summarize what the Greenland Commission of 1960 thought the situation to be in the hunting districts.

Since natural conditions in the hunting districts (Umanak, Upernavik, Thule, Angmagssalik, and Scoresbysund) differ greatly from those in the remaining parts of inhabited Greenland, special policies must be adopted to guide development in the hunting areas. The decline of seal hunting, which seemed to be a definite trend around 1950, has now reversed itself. Total sale of sealskins to KGH from the five hunting districts increased

* This story, along with a description of the continuing trend toward population concentration in Greenland, belongs in another newsletter series.



A kayak hunter from Skansen, Godhavn district (Disko Bay)

by 80% from 19,000 in 1950 to 35,000 in 1960. Gross income from the sale of raw products in the hunting districts to KGH rose by 4-5 times from 1950 to 1960. But when one calculates population and cost of living increases during the period, the real income increase per inhabitant has been about 100%. These increases have been due not only to sale of raw hunting products, but also to fish landings which were started during the period in Angmagssalik (cod) and Umanak (Greenland or blue halibut). Because of steadily increasing profit from production realized by KGH in the hunting districts (573,000 kr.* in 1961 and 1,230,000 kr. in 1962), prices for various hunting products were increased by 10% on 1 April 1964. Profit-sharing premiums were also initiated on seal and fox pelts as well as sale of feathers and down to KGH. According to these regulations, 50% of the profit in export sales made on these products would be paid out by KGH to the Greenlandic hunters in proportion to what they had sold to KGH up to a maximum of 25% of landed value. Also, in Greenland in 1964, a baby bonus was initiated which totaled up to 10% of the cash income in the hunting areas.

Even though KGH had production profits in the hunting districts, loss through their supply service and retailing in shops was 2.5 million kr. in 1961 and 1.9 million kr. in 1962. This loss, an annual one, is caused partially by the deliberate policy of keeping the retail prices on necessary goods as low as possible and uniform all over Greenland

* 1 Danish kr. = 14¢ or 1 US\$ = 6.9 kr.

regardless of location. Since this loss is kept separate on the balance sheet and is, in fact, paid for by special Danish state subsidy, the hunting districts can show a nice profit on paper despite their remote locations and numerous small settlements.

Increased well-being in the hunting districts has occurred despite Danish concentration on developing the modern installations of a booming fishery along the southwest coast. It has also occurred despite a stoppage in purchases of seal blubber and shark liver by KGH in the summer of 1963. Seal blubber had always been an important source of income for the population. In 1961 it equaled over one third of the income from sealskins and about twice the income from the sale of fox skins. At the same time it was a financially disastrous item for KGH to handle and try to sell. Loss through sales of seal and other oils in recent years was much greater than total income realized by the Greenlanders from the sale of blubber to KGH. KGH's clear-sighted policy of cutting their losses in seal oil processing by stopping seal blubber purchases did not hurt the income situation in Greenland as many had feared. On the contrary, the situation improved vastly in 1963 and 1964 as outlined above.

To compensate for losses of income when seal blubber was no longer bought by KGH, purchase prices for sealskins were raised. In 1962 and 1963, moreover, the export value of sealskins from Greenland averaged over 5 million kr. as world market prices boomed. This export is KGH's most profitable area of activity in Greenland. The hunting districts, therefore, are producing well for the export trade. For this reason and because the difficulties in encouraging population movements to major towns were more complex than anticipated, an attempt will be made through higher prices to the hunters to improve the general situation in the hunting areas. It is also felt that the hunter should be getting more benefit from the current high price levels for his products.

The above then, in relatively few words, is the official Danish government thinking concerning the hunting districts as expressed in the G-60 report. It indicates that a basic change of policy toward the hunting districts has occurred and that some of this policy has already been initiated.

Another interesting facet of development in some of the hunting districts, which has appeared recently, is the possibility for limited fish landings. This situation has given an even rosier picture to future plans than anticipated a few years ago. Because of changing ice conditions, however, these fishing possibilities cannot have the year-round character necessary for extensive modern development. Fish landings now being made in the hunting districts add nicely to the income possibilities there, but hunting will probably continue to color the development of the two districts concerned.

Keeping in mind that fishing and fish processing are the major supporting activities in Greenland today and with the above as background, let us take a look at the nature of hunting in Greenland today.

In the days before a modern fishery, the Greenlanders relied almost exclusively on the seal as a source of food, heat, light, clothing, tents, kayak covering, and miscellaneous but important sources of sinew, dog-sledge harnesses, lines, and waterproof kayak parkas. Although seals were the main backbone of existence, they were also supplemented in various seasons by important amounts of eggs, birds, fish, berries, polar bear, and reindeer.

Success at hunting precluded a concentrated settlement pattern; a dispersed population could better utilize the stocks of seal without danger of overhunting, decline in seal numbers, and eventual starvation of the hunting families.

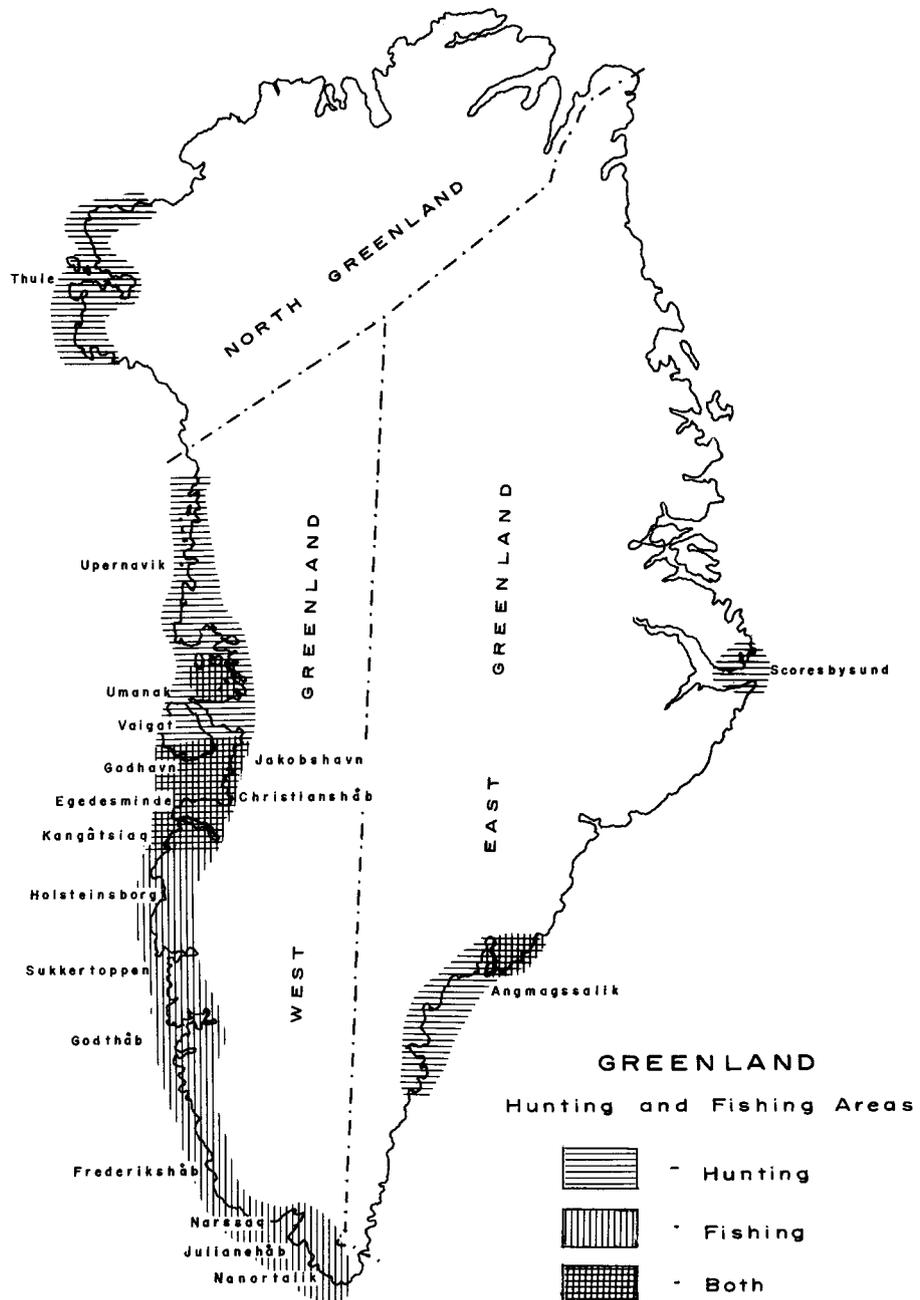
Seals varied in number throughout the years, however, as did ice conditions and weather, so that, at times, starvation did, in fact, reduce the number of Greenlanders when food stocks ran low. Greenland today remains on the outer margin of habitable areas of the world, but the natural population controls have been removed by Mother Denmark, resulting in a population growth rate among the highest in the world. What in the past would have been starvation and widely fluctuating natural conditions have been evened out by a fluctuating state deficit in Greenland.

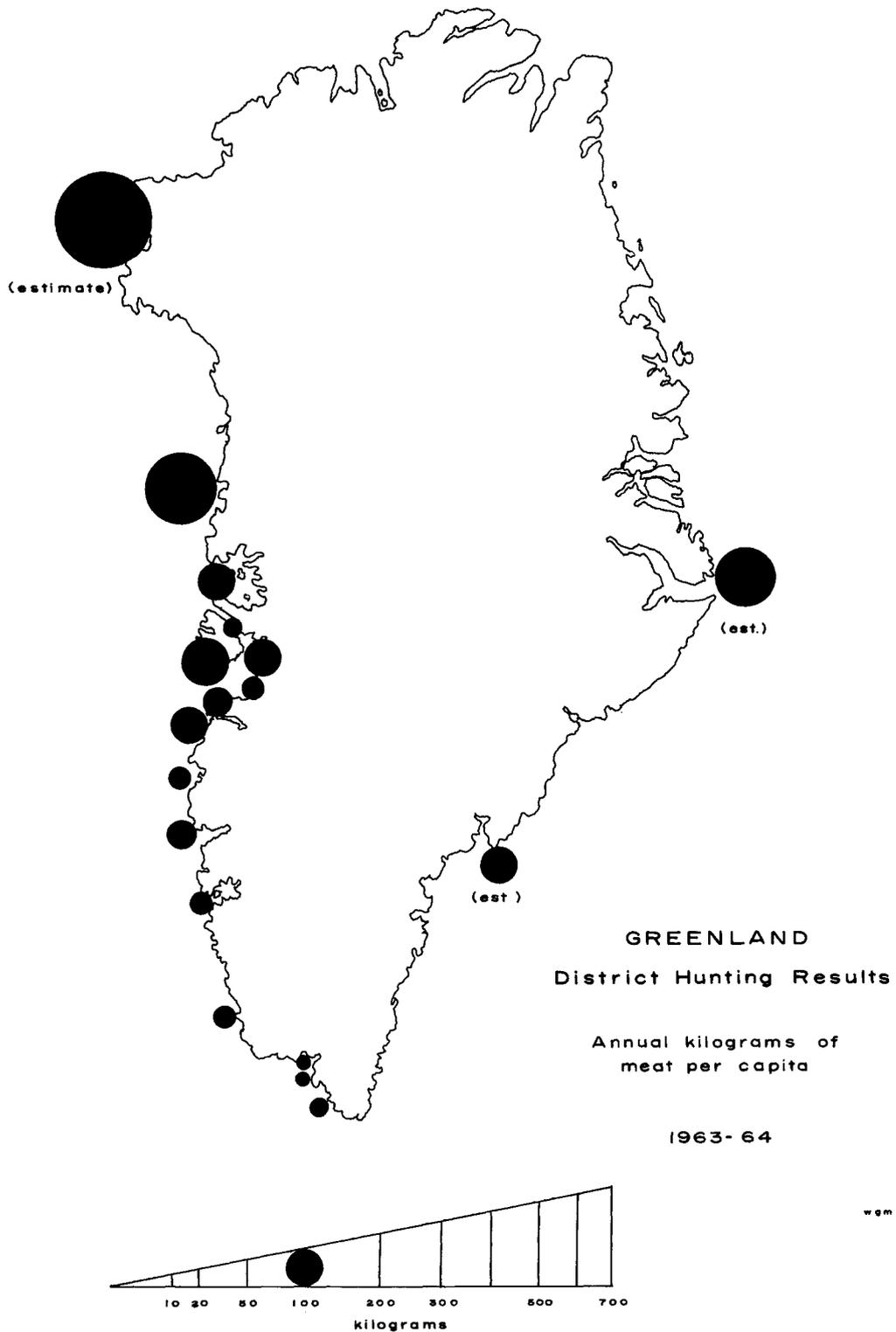
Hunting in Greenland has never been able to support a large and growing population and will always be a pursuit of secondary importance. The prime hunting requisite of a dispersed population negates most of the modernization now being planned and executed in other parts of Greenland. New schools, shops, warehouses, wharves, and power plants can be afforded only in the main population centers. And, of prime importance, if education and training for life in the modern world are to be carried out effectively in Greenland, the teaching resources available must be directed where they can do the most good for the most people. A scattered hunting population precludes this. Despite the advantages, further concentration in the hunting districts is out of the question. Already the towns of Umanak and Upernavik, Thule (Qanaq) and Scoresbysund* are larger than they can afford to be.

The map on page 6 shows in a general way the distribution of hunting and fishing in Greenland. Although hunting is carried out all over populated Greenland, it is the main economic activity in the areas shown. Fishing is the overwhelming economic pursuit from Kap Farvel to Nordre Strømfjord on the west coast, supplemented by sheep farming in the extreme southwest. Both fishing and hunting are important in Disko Bay and nearby areas, plus Angmagssalik on the east coast. Within Umanak, designated as a hunting area, is found a significant fishery for Greenland halibut.

Another type of fishing traditional in most hunting areas is for Greenland shark, a sluggish relative of southern sharks. The Greenland

* Districts in Greenland (called kommuner) are named after their main town and administrative center, except for Vaigat District, where the coal-mining town of Qutligssat is the main center.





Statistical source: "Sammendrag af Grønlands Fangstlister, 1963-64"

shark's importance declined recently after shark skin and liver were no longer bought by KGH. Shark meat, cooked or air dried to reduce toxicity, is still a main source of rations for Greenland sledge dogs.

The importance of hunting as a food source has always been paramount in Greenland, unlike other areas where, for example, seals are hunted for their pelts only. The seal in Greenland is no longer the essential source of light, clothing, and tent and kayak covering as in the past. European clothing has largely replaced sealskin, except for boots and festive costumes; canvas now is used for covering kayaks, coal for heat, and electricity or coal oil for light. The seal remains only as a vital food supply and as a source of cash through sale of skins to KGH.

Other animals hunted for food and fur are the polar bear and reindeer. Small whales and walrus are hunted for their food value; fox are trapped for their pelts only.

The map on page 7 shows the total result of the hunt in 1963-64 in kilograms of meat (and edible innards) per capita, as reported in the latest hunting list summary. The result for Scoresbysund is an estimate, since no hunting returns were received for 1963-64. Angmagssalik's total is partially an estimate, Thule's largely so. The wide range of meat available to the population is to be expected. The map points up the high per capita natural income in the form of food in the hunting districts. The per capita amount of meat gained through hunting in 1963-64 for Greenland as a whole was 83 kilograms, about the same as in the past ten years.

Thule's large meat per capita result is based mainly on estimated hunting returns; most of the narwhals taken in Greenland are hunted in Thule district, as well as one third of the bearded seals, one sixth of the ringed seals, one third of the fox, and one half of the polar bear. In absolute figures, which are hidden by the per capita map, Upernavik hunts two times more meat than any other district. The 629 tons which it totaled in 1963-64 were followed by Thule's estimated 316 tons.

Seals are by far the most important animal hunted in Greenland because both their meat and pelts are valuable. Other animals, however, also play an important role as sources of food. The table on page 9 lists each type of animal hunted in Greenland (other than birds), calculated average weight of meat and edible innards, number hunted in 1963-64, total weight of edible meat, and per cent of grand total meat represented by each type of animal.

Although small whales are an important source of food, the figures in the table are misleading because they are well over the 10-year average during the period 1954-55 to 1963-64. The catch of little piked whales in 1963-64 was about four times greater than the 10-year mean and therefore accounted for more than its normal share as a source of meat. Narwhal (the Arctic's unicorn) and white whale are taken mainly in the northern part of the west coast, porpoise in the south. The catch of walrus was the lowest in the 10-year period, but since one half of the catch is

Edible Meat Result from the Hunt in Greenland 1963-64

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Calc. wt. kg.</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Total wt.</u>	<u>%</u>
little piked whale	2,000	165	330,000	11.9
narwhal	250	325	81,050	2.9
white whale (beluga)	225	229	51,525	1.0
common porpoise	25	914	22,850	0.8
(Total whales)			(485,425)	(17.6)
walrus	300	103	30,900	1.1
ringed seal	22	63,431	1,395,482	50.67
harbor seal	45	127	5,715	0.2
bearded seal	110	1,033	113,630	4.1
harp seal	35	10,238	358,330	13.0
hooded seal	100	1,201	120,100	4.3
(Total seals)			(1,993,257)	(72.4)
reindeer	60	3,891	233,460	8.5
polar bear	120	88	10,560	0.4
TOTAL			2,753,602	100.0

attributed to Thule district, whose total catch was based on an estimate, walrus totals are uncertain. Walrus and narwhal are both sources of bone and ivory which are used in carving figurines and other decorative pieces.

At one time the Danish government operated a whale-catching vessel in West Greenland. Whales were hunted all along the coast, towed into the nearest settlement, and the Greenlanders were offered a free source of meat in exchange for flensing services. The blubber from flensing was rendered down and sold by KGH. A whaling station on land was operated at Tovqussaq in Sukkertoppen district until 1958.

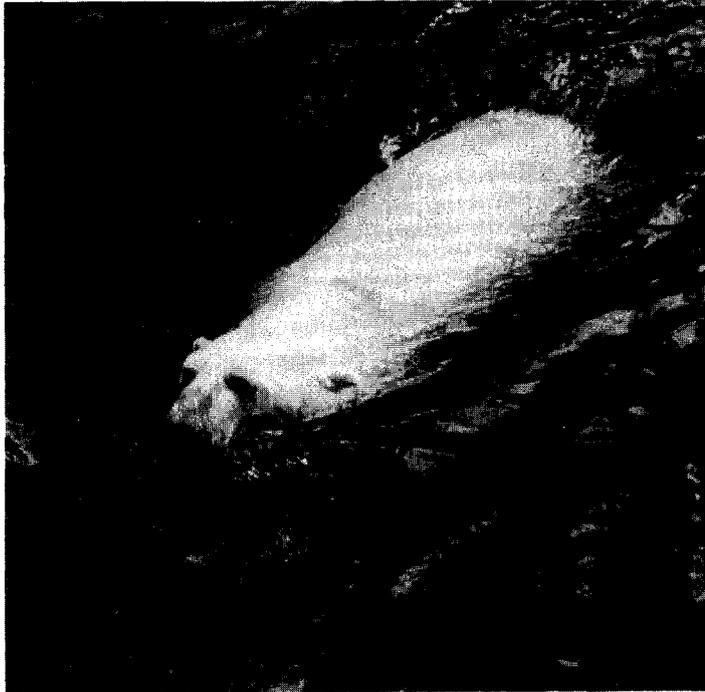
In order to tap the small whale source, some of the new fishing cutters now purchased by Greenlanders are supplied with whale cannon and harpoon. Small whales are, therefore, a fine potential food source and will be utilized to an increasing degree in the future. Freezing plants and storage facilities, plus the ability of the new coastal vessel "Kununguaq" to carry frozen cargo, will mean maximum utilization of this source, fresh meat for the Greenlanders, and a growing source of income for part of the population.

Seals, however, remain the chief source of meat and the main object of the hunt. The ringed seal is the old food standby of the Arctic, and it has certainly been the increase in numbers taken of this species which has bolstered the position of hunting in Greenland. The total caught in 1963-64 was far above the 10-year average and fully twice the number taken in 1954-55. Of the two main migratory seals, harp and hooded, found in Greenland, the harp (or Greenland) seal is the more important. The harp is taken also along the coast of Labrador and on the well-known spring seal hunt in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on the "Front" off the coast of Newfoundland before migrating to West Greenland. The vast numbers of harp seal taken during the Canadian hunt has undoubtedly influenced its frequency along the coast of Greenland. The harp seal total in Greenland in 1963-64 was under the 10-year mean and one half the number taken in 1954-55. The hooded seal (or bladdernose) is also found off eastern Canada, but mainly off East Greenland and Jan Mayen on its moulting grounds. There has been no noticeable decline in the numbers of hooded seal taken in Greenland in the past ten years.

Reindeer, relative of the North American caribou, are taken by the Greenlanders in late summer and autumn on oft-times rigorous journeys toward the inland ice. The reindeer hunt formerly occupied a large part of the population for two or three summer months and even today the urge to participate in the chase is a strong one. Because the reindeer hunting season falls right in the best fishing period, many Greenlandic fishermen are away from the boats for a while each summer. The number of reindeer hunted each year has been increasing steadily for the past ten years. In 1963-64, 3,900 were killed, almost three times the 1954-55 hunt. Despite this increase, it is puny in comparison with the results of a century ago. Hinrich Rink estimated that, at its culmination between 1845 and 1850, about 25,000 deer were killed annually in Greenland. By the 1870's the annual kill had dwindled to about 1,000. Present hunting laws prohibit the wasteful slaughter which probably was the cause of such a sharp decline. Domesticated reindeer from Scandinavia are now being raised in inner Godthaabfjord and are not, of course, shot by the Greenlandic hunter.

The arctic fox is trapped for its pelt in all districts of Greenland, but mainly in the southwest and in the Thule district. The arctic fox in Greenland is a dimorphic form occurring in two color phases--the so-called blue and the white. These are taken in a 2:1 ratio respectively, except in some years when whites are almost as numerous as the blue. Fox farming has been tried in Greenland; most of the pelts reaching the fur auction are, however, wild-caught. Fox skin prices are now benefiting from a fashion fad for long-haired fur. What Greenland needs is a few more Barbra Streisands.

The polar bear, mighty king of the Arctic, is hunted in Thule district and along the east coast (and by an ICWA white hunter with camera in the Copenhagen zoo). They are an insignificant source of meat, but their pelts bring high prices in the fur auction. The average number of polar bear shot during the 10-year period was 80, but decreasing numbers of



Polar bear

of those taken find their way to the auction. Most are now bought by local Danes or are used by the hunters themselves. The sparsely settled coast of East Greenland provides a de facto reserve for the polar bear. The small number of bears taken each year also insures against threat of extinction which is felt in other parts of the North.

Of the seven land mammals found in Greenland, only two are of any direct importance and included in the hunting list summary: reindeer and polar fox. The other five animals have negligible importance: hare is not hunted to any great extent, and musk ox, weasel, polar wolf and lemming are found only on the northeast coast as far south as Scoresbysund. A few musk ox were, however, recently introduced into the inland area near Søndre Strømfjord and are totally protected.

One great lack in the hunting lists is the failure to record numbers of birds taken each year. Many thousands of sea birds are killed annually for food. The chief among them is Brünnich's guillemot, which is the most common bird in Greenland. In addition, extensive numbers of sea gulls, ducks, and other water birds are shot. The hunter in the photograph on page 3 was out after sea gulls. Although not my cup of tea, there are those in Greenland who find sea gull soup a particularly delectable dish. Ptarmigan, the arctic grouse, are not favored by the Greenlanders, but considerable numbers are hunted by the Danish inhabitants of Greenland.

My consideration of hunting in Greenland in this letter has been from the commercial and food gathering standpoints. Trophy hunting by sportsmen in Greenland may have some limited future as the tourist trade opens up. I personally feel that most hunting by sportsmen in the Arctic is rather unsportsmanlike. A good case in point is the herding and shooting of polar bear from small planes off the northwest coast of Alaska. Also, I would not find it exceptionally sporting to shoot down a musk ox casually standing about in its defensive formation; the same goes for a polar bear swimming desperately with its cubs to avoid a pursuing fishing cutter. Fortunately, this type of hunting is prohibited in Greenland.

I have trapped the white Greenland falcon to train for hunting, but this trapping is now unlawful in Greenland. Instead there is open season on falcons during the autumn migration and throughout the winter months, but it is uncertain how many of these prized birds are shot for food in Greenland. The income-producing potential of allowing limited live-trapping by foreign falconers is undoubtedly one thousand times greater than the pittance of edible flesh each shot falcon contributes to the larder.

European hunters and trappers, namely Danes and Norwegians, were once active in East Greenland in commercial hunting ventures. These unprofitable operations, abandoned by both countries, would make a fascinating story complete with sovereignty claims, World War II encounters, and the usual hairy tales of life in the frozen North.

My next letter on hunting in Greenland will delve a bit more deeply into the seal hunt and its trends, as well as the present position of hunting as a source of income in relation to fishing and sheep raising.

Sincerely,



W. G. Mattox

Received in New York April 13, 1966.