



Canadian Seal Hunt Values Increase

Canada's 2006 seal harvest has generated increased revenues, offsetting higher boat fuel costs and providing fishermen with greater earnings from the production of pelts, fat and meat.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) officials announced that the landed value of seal pelts for the 2006 season, for both Quebec and Newfoundland-Labrador, greatly exceeds that achieved in 2005. For 2006, in Newfoundland and Labrador alone, the landed value of the harp seal hunt is \$26.5 million. This represents the value of purchase orders made by buyers and processors in the province. (The figures are available at http://www.nfl.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/publications/reports_rapports/Land_All_2006.htm)



Preliminary landing values in Quebec are approximately \$2.7 million.

Overall, DFO reported that the landed value of the 2006 Atlantic Canada seal hunt is between \$25 and \$30 million. By comparison, landed values for the seal hunt in 2005 totaled \$17.5 million.

As with previous hunts, the spring sealing season was again a time of claims and counter claims regarding the necessity of the seal hunt for ecological, economic, and socio-cultural purposes. Each year, NGOs opposed to the hunt declare that it is of small fiscal importance, and that sealer-fishermen would be economically better off if they quit taking seals, and participated in a tourist-related endeavor in which they ferried foreign visitors out to see and touch seal pups in their natural environment.

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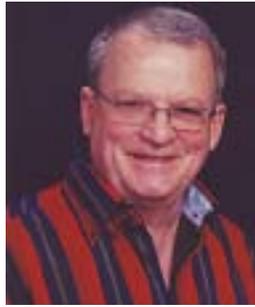
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This year that message was delivered by Paul McCartney and his wife Heather, as they represented the value system of the Humane Society of the United States on the Larry King Live television program (see Sustainable eNews, February/March 2006).

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Alien Invasions - A Matter of Concern for all Ecosystems

Editorial by Eugene Lapointe



We humans have been famous for the intentional and unintentional introduction of exotic forms of life to ecosystems where they never occurred before our arrival. Sometimes these introductions have not had a huge effect on the newly discovered land, but often, the effects have been disastrous. Horses died out on the North American continent right after the retreat of the Wisconsin glacier, around 13,000 years ago. Perhaps they were hunted to extinction by hungry, invading humans, themselves an alien species. Or, perhaps they were rendered locally extinct due to environmental changes that, combined with the effect of the new human predators, caused them to disappear. Regardless, modern Europeans brought them back, along with house cats, dogs, Norway rats, cattle, sheep, goats and Asian carp. Humans took red deer to New Zealand, rabbits to Australia, and then foxes to control them.

What next? An inadvertent and terribly destructive introduction caused by humans has been the brown tree snake, from areas of the south Pacific to Hawaii, where it has devoured many species of birds that have had no chance to escape its hungry advances. The snake has sneaked into the wheel wells of aircraft and into the cargo holds of ships, then released itself into the Hawaiian paradise to eat and reproduce. The US Department of Agriculture has not been successful in eradicating it. The brown tree snake is also poisonous, being a cobra species.

Today, harmful invasions include the introduction of destructive “janitor fish” in the Philippines, as well as an African catfish and the golden apple snail, an aquarium species that escaped and is causing great destruction in rice paddies, where it thrives by eating the crop. In the far north Atlantic, Norwegian fishermen are noting the explosive growth of an invading population of giant red crabs, creatures that devour local crabs and small fish, including the fry of cod. These animals were introduced into Norwegian waters by Russians, who probably had no idea of the degree to which the creatures would be successful. Now they are eating everything in sight, and no one knows how to stem this invasion. Fortunately, there is a growing food market for the creatures in Europe and North America, where the Norwegian origin crabs compete with their north Pacific original stock members at the retail level. In the Philippines, the government is doing its best to eradicate the invasive catfish species that are destroying local fish and other resources.

All countries and their ecosystems are affected one way or another by the human introduction of foreign, alien plant and animal species. The phenomenon will go through one cycle after another in each new habitat, unless people can, through science and dogged persistence, remove them from their new niches. Our sustainable use of natural resources will be forever affected by the degree to which people's “companion animals” and introduced plants will either find a new balance or are eradicated from each newly colonized area in a concerted effort to undo introductions, both intentional and accidental.

Good luck to the survivors!■

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Sealers themselves know they need the cash that the hunt generates to pay bills, particularly since there is little opportunity to earn income during winter months. Seal fishery is one of a number of harvests of a seasonal nature that fills a gap for local people, and seal products markets are now growing. Far from being an endeavor of little or no profit, seal fishery is traditionally regarded as absolutely necessary to continued survival on “The Rock”, as Newfoundland is often called.

Anti-use NGOs argue that the economic value of animal harvests is so low that they are not really worth the effort, and that the activities should be replaced with other, more politically correct, pursuits. The new Canadian figures will be used to demonstrate that these claims are off base. Sealers say the fishery is necessary and worthwhile from both economic and environmental perspectives, and continues to be a valued tradition for the cultures of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec. ■

Catch Reduction Planned for Shrimpers

United Nations Environment Program officials have announced that a new design for shrimp trawl nets is highly effective in decreasing by-catch.

Because of a built-in escape device, fewer small species of fish, fewer immature large species, fewer turtles and other unwanted creatures are retained and killed in the new net design. After four years of testing, it has been found to efficiently dump out unwanted species or allow them to escape intentionally, something that shrimp do not have the ability to do. This means that there can be a less adverse impact on each ecosystem where shrimpers work.



In addition, because the intended catch is more efficient, it reduces vessel fuel consumption and man hours per ton of catch.

The by-catch reduction project is part of a much larger effort on the part of UNEP and the Global Environment Facility, which has poured millions of dollars into this resource sustainability enhancing effort. It is recognized as an important step in conserving biodiversity, reducing waste, and increasing efficiency around the world in fisheries everywhere. It is hoped that the project concepts will be adapted to other fisheries and that sufficient education will be made available to fishermen in many different circumstances, so that reduction of by-catch can continue.

“Reducing by-catch is a high priority for my organization,” said Ichiro Nomura, Assistant Director-General of the FAO Fisheries Department. “If less young fish and non-target species are inadvertently caught, they can be left to mature to the benefit of fishermen and their livelihoods and for the millions of developing country people who rely almost exclusively on fish as a vital source of healthy and nutritious protein.”

The development of similar by-catch exclusion devices and techniques is expected to continue with the financial support of the Global Environment Facility.

Eugene Lapointe, President of IWMC World Conservation Trust, said: “Practical improvements in the task of providing food for the world's people are always welcome news. We applaud this effort and all those who have contributed to it.” ■

Debate Sparked Over Dolphin Intelligence

Two opposing views about the intelligence of dolphins have been presented in recent weeks. An international consortium of scientists and zoo and aquarium professionals opposed to dolphin drive fisheries held a press conference in Washington, DC on 19 July calling for an end to the practice, while Dr. Paul Manger of the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa argued just weeks later that the animals are no smarter than rats or goldfish.

Citing scientific literature on the mental, emotional and social characteristics of dolphins, and drawing comparisons with the intelligence of primates, the American scientists called the drive hunts “an astonishingly cruel violation of any reasonable welfare standards”. The press conference was organized with the help of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

While the panelists argued that drive fisheries, undertaken in Japan, is inhumane, they were unwilling to suggest any alternative killing method. Japanese people have consumed dolphin meat for thousands of years and drive fisheries is a cultural practice with a long history in some small fishing towns. Japanese fishermen regard drive fisheries as an efficient method for catching dolphins and officials say that it is more humane than alternatives.



Dr. Manger, a neuro-ethologist at the university's school of anatomical sciences, published his seven-year research in March and was scheduled to present his findings as Sustainable eNews went to press. Contradicting the Americans, Dr. Manger says that dolphins' intelligence cannot be judged by the size of their brains because brains are organized in different ways.

He said that dolphins take years to train at aquariums and that their behavior is based on rewards, a conditioning system that is associated with low levels of intelligence. And he questioned why dolphins do not try to escape from their confines by jumping over pool dividers whereas goldfish will try to jump of a bowl if no lid is placed on top.

Meanwhile the American scientists launched an internet petition that they hoped would attract one million signatures. ■

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Sustainable News Briefs

Antagonist flees to refuge in Australia

Paul Watson, the notorious campaigner and alleged eco-terrorist, has once again slipped out of the custody of law enforcement. His ship the Farley Mowat had been detained since early spring at port in South Africa after authorities determined that his navigation officers and papers were not appropriate for the type of vessel. Watson claims the ship is a yacht and a personal recreational vessel but the South African authorities deemed it to be a commercial vessel because of its activities in interfering with whale research in the Antarctic, through which the Sea Shepherd Conservation

Society attracts donations from supporters around the world. These donations constitute commercial gain and would not be made if the ship was not being used in that manner. Accordingly, different paperwork and appropriately certified marine officers were required.

This same violation has been charged previously in Canadian ports, where authorities detained the boat and crew until proper navigational requirements were met. Watson claimed that his boat and crew were exempt from the restrictions that South African marine authorities had imposed, and as soon as security was relaxed, on the 16 June, the Farley Mowat was spirited out of

the harbor and out to sea. There was no apparent pursuit by the South African Marine Safety Association.

Watson plans to resume his career of destructive adventurism by heading to the Southern Ocean where he will again present a physical threat to ships legally engaged in research whaling. He has now docked in Australia, where he is not expected to be inconvenienced by any marine safety regulations. Australian officials condemn the Japanese research and some tacitly support Watson's efforts to disrupt it through harassment and even threat of physical damage to ships at sea. ■

Wolf Management Plan Voided



The state of Wisconsin has been barred from killing even marauding wolves following a lawsuit brought by animal rights groups under the Endangered Species Act.

There are an estimated 500 gray wolves in Wisconsin, where they have been growing steadily since the Endangered Species Act of 1972 gave them complete protection from hunters and trappers.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service gave Wisconsin permission to kill up to 43 of the animals after the state argued that the permit was necessary "to maintain social tolerance for the wolves". Wisconsin is a major dairy state, and cattle out in pasture are in danger of being consumed if wolf packs find them at night.

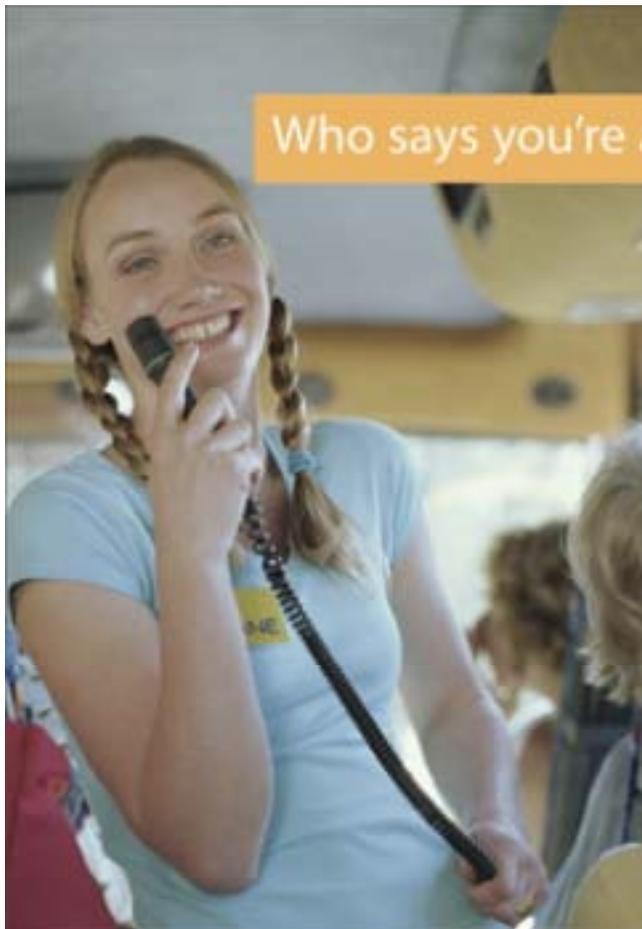
A number of animal rights organizations, including the Humane Society of the United States, brought the lawsuit against the Fish & Wildlife Service and the State of Wisconsin, in the US federal court. Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly ruled that the depredation permit violated the Endangered Species Act, because wolf recovery would not be supported by killing them for any reason. In her decision, she wrote: "Simply put, the recovery of the gray wolf is not supported by killing 43 gray wolves." The ruling is not being appealed at the present time. ■

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Watercraft rider lands big fish the hard way

A 4-foot sturgeon jumped out of the Suwannee River on Sunday and knocked a man unconscious. Blake Nicholas Fessenden, 23, of Wildwood was going about 30 mph on a personal watercraft, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reported. His girlfriend, riding a different watercraft, stopped and held his head above water after the fish hit him. Passengers on another vessel pulled Fessenden from the river. He was taken to Shands at the University of Florida. (St. Petersburg Times, Tuesday August 8, 2006)



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