

# ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

## NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Upper—Mount Gareloi, an active volcano on Gareloi Island (west of much larger Tanaga Island).

Lower—Northern sea lions on Sea Lion Rock, Amak Island.

*AKM-DOI-1966 - Aleutian Islands NWR District*

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

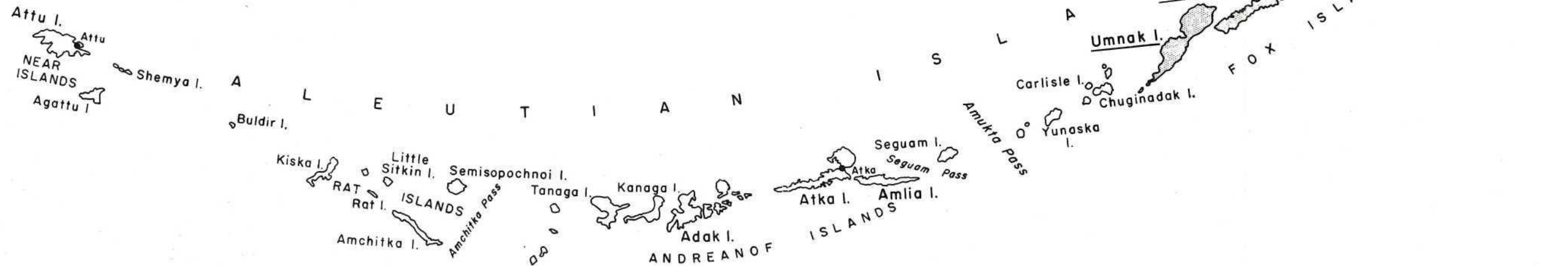
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## ALEUTIAN ISLANDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

ALASKA



(Stippled areas are not part of the refuge)



ALEUTIAN ISLANDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE consists of all but seven of that chain of steppingstone islands reaching out from the Alaska mainland for a thousand miles into the North Pacific toward Kamchatka Peninsula of the Soviet Union. The nearly 70 named islands in the refuge aggregate 2,720,235 acres, making it one of the largest units in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The refuge was established in 1913 by Executive order of President William Howard Taft.

Most of the islands are mountainous, the emergent peaks of a submarine mountain range. Many have active volcanoes towering into the arctic sky; one of these, Shishaldin on Unimak Island, reaches a height of more than 9,000 feet. The larger islands are dotted with lakes and cut by streams. Irregular shorelines have boulder beaches, sand beaches, rocky cliffs, and offshore islets and reefs.

The climate is characterized by fog and clouds; a day with sunshine is almost a rarity. Rain in summer is abundant. The Aleutian Islands are noted for fre-

quent and violent wind squalls that make boating hazardous. Summer temperatures range only into the sixties; in winter the temperature generally hangs near the freezing point but sometimes drops to below 10° F.

Snow is prevalent in winter, although it is apt to be wet and slushy except at higher elevations.

The Aleutians are treeless, supporting a dwarfed flora of willow and alder and alpine heaths and meadows. Some taller shrub growths occur on Unimak and Attu. A stand of beach grass marks shorelines, and offshore waters support great beds of kelp. Copious summer rains keep the islands emerald green at that season; in spring and fall the vegetation is brown and sere.

The Aleutian Islands Refuge is largely an uninhabited wilderness. Once the home of thousands of Aleuts, it now has only two villages, Atka on Atka Island and False Pass on Unimak Island. Disease decimated these people following the arrival of the Russian pioneers, and many of the survivors disappeared or left during American and Japanese military occupation of

the islands in the Second World War. There are a few active military and Coast and Geodetic Survey installations, but they occupy little of the refuge's total space. Cold Bay, an aeronautical navigation center and headquarters of the Alaska Peninsula, is near the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, close to the eastern end of the refuge.

Some of the islands have large areas covered by abandoned military installations—hundreds of quonset huts, miles of roads, old landing strips, warehouses, telephone lines, and piles of trash of every description.

Islands not within the refuge are all in the eastern third of the island chain. They are Akun, Akutan, Sanak, Sedanka, Tigalda, Umnak, Unalaska. Parts of Attu and Adak are under primary jurisdiction of the Department of Defense.

The Aleutian Islands are rich in wildlife. Birds especially are much in evidence at all times. The easternmost islands have a fauna typical of the Alaskan mainland to the east; the western islands have Asiatic features. Olaus Murie described the Aleutians as a

“melting pot for faunal elements from two continents not yet reaching an equilibrium.”

The sea otter, a marine mammal that bears the world's most valued fur, makes its principal home in the waters off islands in the central part of the chain, from Adak to Kiska. Once almost extinct from years of overhunting, strict protection has brought its numbers back to nearly 20,000. Another and much larger sea mammal, the northern sea lion, is common.

Unimak Island, an ecological extension of the Alaska Peninsula, is a closely managed stronghold of the brown bear. The island has over 1,000 caribou, and wolves and wolverines are common. More than 2,000 wild reindeer live on Atka, and caribou have been introduced on Adak. Except for the tundra vole, small mammals like voles, shrews, lemmings, ground squirrels, and weasels are scarcely to be found west of Unimak.

Foxes have an interesting history in the islands. Formerly, the blue phase of the arctic fox was found only on Attu, and the red fox from Umnak east. Prin-



Aleutian Canada geese on the steep slopes of Buldir Island.

cipally during the 1915-25 period and later, blue foxes were introduced on most of the Aleutians, converting them into a commercial fur farming enterprise utilizing wildlife for food. Their pelts now have no value, and complete removal of the introduced foxes is necessary to restore native bird life. This has already been done on Amchitka, with a prompt and striking increase in wildlife of the island.

Another unfortunate result of modern occupation of the islands has been the introduction of Norway rats on many islands, probably chiefly during World War II. These voracious rodents have a serious effect on nesting birds. The possibility of eliminating them seems remote.

The most obvious feature of Aleutian wildlife is the large quantities of colonial sea birds. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, congregate in vast nesting rookeries—fulmars, two species of petrels, three species of cormorants, black-legged kittiwakes, glaucous-winged gulls, guillemots, murrelets and murrelets, six species of auklets, and two species of puffins. Three species of loons are easily found—common, arctic, and red-throated.

Great numbers of waterfowl winter in and among the islands, mostly oldsquaws, king eiders, and harlequin ducks. Of all the emperor geese in the world, about half winter on the refuge. During the summer, common teal (a Eurasian bird), mallards, pintails, greater scaups, mergansers, and common eiders nest on the islands. Formerly the Aleutian Canada goose lived on all the islands from Amlia west; now it is found only on tiny Buldir Island, which escaped fox introductions. It is now one of the world's rarest

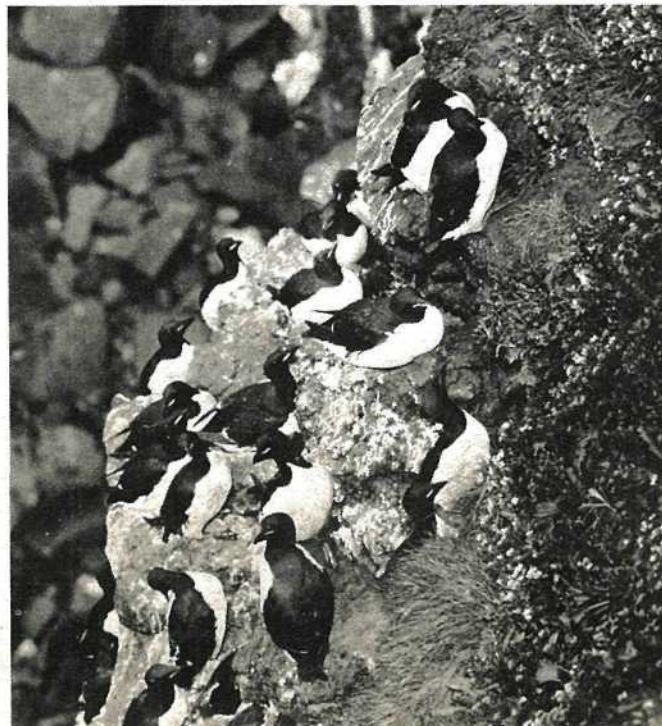
birds, but habitat restoration is progressing toward ultimate restocking of its former breeding range.

The bald eagle is resident in substantial numbers. The peregrine falcon is common, and some gyrfalcons are to be found. Some shorebirds nest in very large numbers, primarily black oystercatchers, rock sandpipers, and northern phalaropes. The rock ptarmigan is found throughout the refuge, and there are willow ptarmigans on Unimak. Among the small land birds, winter wrens, gray-crowned rosy finches, Savannah, fox and song sparrows, Lapland longspurs, and snow buntings are abundant. A number of Asiatic birds have been found, including the whooper swan, falcated teal, Steller's sea eagle, wood sandpiper, black-tailed godwit, slaty-backed gull, black-headed gull, oriental cuckoo, eyebrowed thrush, arctic warbler, Siberian rubythroat, gray-spotted flycatcher, white, gray, and yellow wagtails, brambling, and rustic bunting.

Streams issuing from the islands are used by large numbers of spawning salmon, and make a significant contribution to the numbers of these valuable food fish.

Owing to their isolation and the lack of commercial travel service, the Aleutian Islands are difficult to visit. There is scheduled air service to Cold Bay, Unalaska, Umnak, Adak, Shemya, and Attu. Hotel and restaurant accommodations are found only at Cold Bay.

Thick-billed murrelets are among the sea birds that nest abundantly on the Aleutian Islands.



Sea otter mother and pup.

Military clearance is necessary to visit defense installations. Information concerning the refuge not available in this leaflet may be obtained from the Refuge Manager, Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Cold Bay, Alaska 99571.

IZEMBEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE RANGE lies just to the east of the Aleutian Island Refuge, along the north shore of the western tip of the Alaska Peninsula, and is administered from the same Cold Bay headquarters as the Aleutian Islands Refuge. It was established in 1960 and comprises 415,000 acres, a valuable waterfowl feeding area with vast eelgrass beds and bordering upland tundra. The tidal lagoons of this refuge support the continent's entire black brant population for 2 to 3 months each year, providing a unique migration feeding area essential to the survival of this species.

BOGOSLOF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, established in 1909, is also administered from the Cold Bay headquarters. It consists of two rocky islands totaling 390 acres lying about 30 miles north of Umnak Island. It has a northern sea lion herd of about 800 animals and contains important sea-bird rookeries.

All photographs by Karl W. Kenyon, BSFW.



*In its assigned function as the Nation's principal natural resource agency, the Department of the Interior bears a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that renewable resources are managed to produce optimum yields, and that all resources contribute their full measure to the progress, prosperity, and security of America, now and in the future.*

