# Daily Observations from Sisualik, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Northwest Alaska

## Volume 7: 1996

Cut fish drying at a Cape Krusenstern camp

by
William R. Uhl

Daily Observations from Sisualik, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Northwest Alaska

Volume 1: 1990

Volume 2: 1991

Volume 3: 1992

Volume 4: 1993

Volume 5: 1994

Volume 6: 1995

Volume 7: 1996

Volume 8: 1997

Volume 9: 1998

Volume 10: 1999 & Appendices

Volume 11: 2000

Volume 12: 2001

Volume 13: 2002

Volume 14: 2003 (with 2004 summary)

In 2004, the NPS printed 50 sets of Volumes 1-10 which were distributed to libraries.
Volumes 1-10 have also been distributed in PDF format on CD-Rom.

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**2004**

**ABOUT THE UHLS**

William R. “Bob” *Kalluchuq* Uhl was born January 4, 1927 in Sacramento, California. His first introduction to northwest Alaska was in February of 1948 as a member of the US Military. While stationed in Kotzebue, he met and married Carrie Williams. His marriage to Carrie and a growing disillusionment with the state of affairs in the Lower 48 lead to his decision to establish a life in northwest Alaska.

Carrie Williams *Qisiliaq* Uhl was born on November 30, 1922 in Kotzebue, Alaska, to Whittier *Kalluchuq* and Edna *Napaktuq* Williams. For most of her lifetime she has lived in the country, away from town and any public services, such as running water or electricity (although her family did spend some time in Kotzebue while the children attended school). Her family led a very subsistence-based lifestyle which meant that they depended on hunting, fishing, and gathering to provide food for themselves and their extended family. Carrie’s father was the first Alaska Native pastor at the Friends Church in Kotzebue. In fact, Carrie was named after Carrie Samms, an early Friends Church missionary to the region.

For over five decades, Bob and Carrie have lived in rural camps. Summertimes were spent in a tent (and later in a tiny cabin) on the beach at Sisualik, where they were able to fish and to hunt marine mammals. In the wintertime, they moved inland to a more sheltered cabin where trees provided wood for heat, a stream running under the winter ice provided water, and moose and caribou provided food. These camps were present long before Congress established Cape Krusenstern National Monument through the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

Since its inception, Carrie, Bob and other local residents have been gracious neighbors to the National Park, its visitors and staff. They and others have openly shared stories, wisdom, insights, and food with those interested in learning about their lifestyles and homelands. In fact, Bob and Carrie authored *Tagiumsinaaqmiit: Ocean Beach Dwellers of the Cape Krusenstern Area: Subsistence Patterns* in 1977, a publication which has aided the National Park Service in the planning and management of the monument.

Where historically many families lived year round at Sisualik and Sealing Point, today only the Williams camp (Carrie’s nephews) is occupied in winter. As times have changed, families still maintain summer camps on the Krusenstern beach, but almost all reside in Kotzebue or other villages, taking advantage of educational, employment and other opportunities. Carrie and Bob represent the last family maintaining their historical year round lifestyle within what is now Cape Krusenstern National Monument.

## ABOUT THIS SET OF JOURNALS

Bob and Carrie Uhl have maintained a subsistence lifestyle at Cape Krusenstern for 54 years – beginning well before the establishment of Cape Krusenstern National Monument in 1980. In fact, they are the last full time residents of the Monument.

Bob has kept a daily journal of resource observations of the Cape Krusenstern area and its resources since April of 1990. Bob has generously given permission for the National Park Service to edit and publish his journals for library use in order to better share this invaluable insight into a vanishing lifestyle.

Bob Uhl's diaries provide an invaluable `window` into a vanishing culture. They also provide a daily, ten year record or resource observations made by a keen `naturalist` who has spent 54 years observing and documenting the natural processes of the monument and the subsistence practices of the resident Inupiaq people.

The National Park Service is indeed fortunate to have access to this historic record and is pleased to be able to share it with a broader audience through publication. The information in the journals will be of value to students of natural and cultural history, as well as of general interest.

This set consists of the first 10 years of his journal entries: 1990 through 1999. The National Park Service is in the process of editing entries for the years 2000 through 2004.

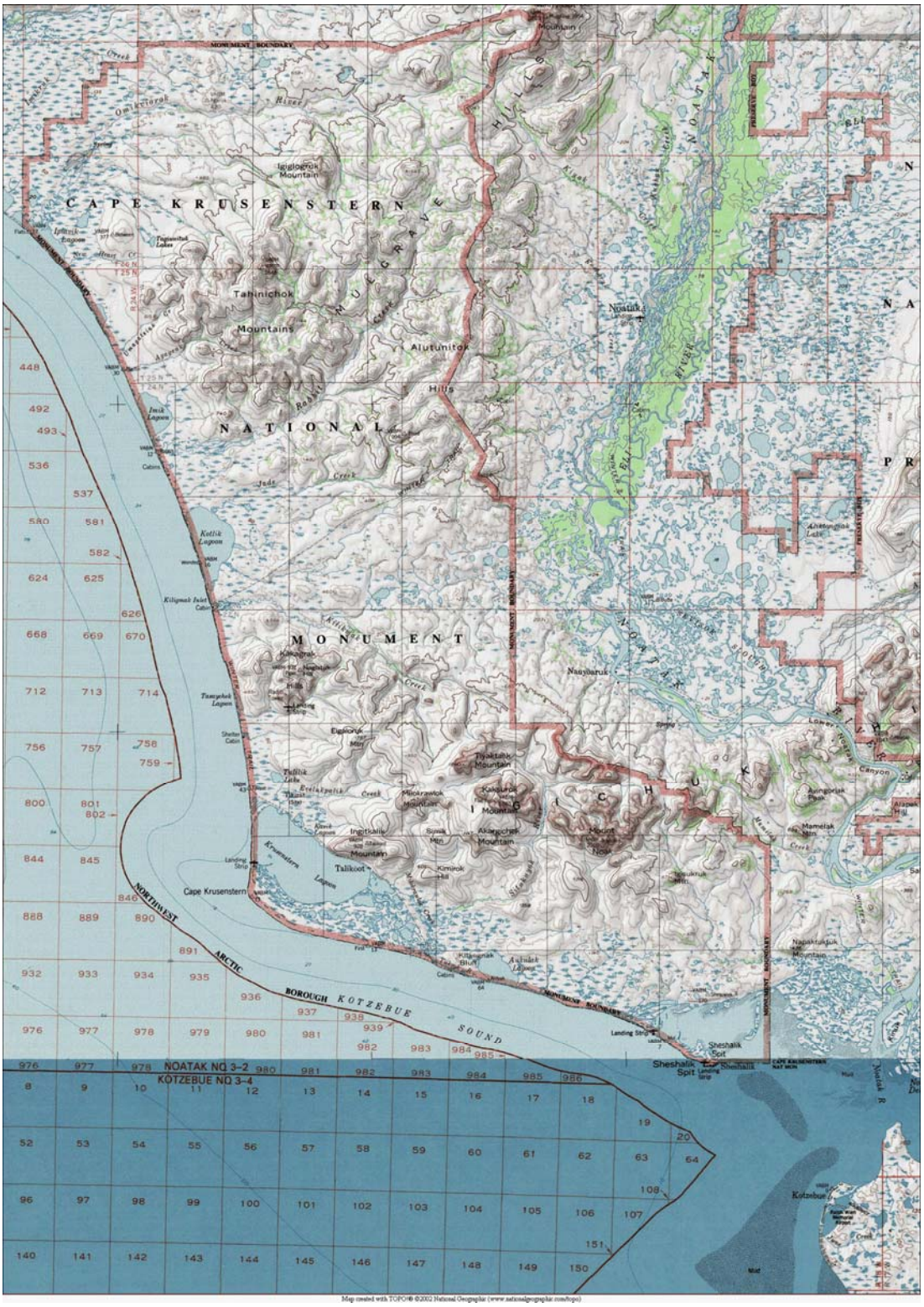
Various factors lead to the Uhls moving into Kotzebue for several months during the winter of 2003-2004. By June, 2004, they had returned to their coastal summer camp. Many people were pleased once again to hear Carrie back on the CB, greeting her friends and neighbors each morning and evening.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN NATIONAL MONUMENT

# RESOURCE REPORTS

**1996**

**WILLIAM R. UHL**


CAPE KRUSENSTERN
NATIONAL
MONUMENT
HUGGRAVE HILLS
NOATAK
Tahinichok Mountains
Alutunitok Hills
Igiglogruk Mountain
Kotlik Lagoon
Kilignak Inlet
Cape Krusenstern
Talikoot
Ingitkalik Mountain
Akiargichek Mountain
Tyaktalik Mountain
Eiglorok Mtn
Nasiaruk
Napaktuguk Mountain
Sheshalik Spit
Sheshalik
Kotzebue
NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH
KOTZEBUE SOUND
NOATAK NQ 3-2
KOTZEBUE NQ 3-4
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# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# JANUARY

## Introduction

I guess one might say that January 1996 was just an ordinary or just an average January, as Januarys go. There were extraordinary happenings but not unexpected ones. The sun came back after all, for those that might have wondered if it would. The first rays made it into our cabin on the 9th, not on the 8th due to a small "puffball" like cloud that blocked it on the 8th. And Pt. Barrow folks and creatures got to see it again on the 23rd. In our area it was above the horizon for 6 hours 1 minute on the 29th. This was a great improvement over the 1 hour 43 minutes of December 20.

The two most outstanding events of the month might have been the return of our little Boreal Owl on the 12th (see Journal entry for 12th and 13th) and the sighting on the 18th of a flock of more than 100 Common Eiders off Sealing Point, a calm day when the high temp was a –24º F and the low was a –34º F! Only the birds know if there was any open water available to them for feeding and warmth. There was none known to the human observers of the ducks.

The coldest day of the month was on the 10th at –38º F. A plus 29º F reading on the 30th gave the other end of the spread of temperatures that January is known for. It did not rain this time, unless one counts a short period of freezing drizzle.

We had six days with winds of 30 k or more, with a whistler from the east to 52 k on the 28th. There was a long pleasant time of calm or light winds in mid month. So we had winds and calm, neither of which is out of the ordinary for January.

We gained very little in snow cover through the month. Through winds and mild temperatures we may actually have lost more than we gained. It is certainly redistributed from December.

For the first time in many years we did not do a CBC. Due to poor trails, weather and finally the flu we just couldn't bring it off within the time limits allowed. January 2nd was the latest possible date. We will hope for a better scene next year. The little Boreal Owl would have been a new species for our count and small groups of overwintering Snow and McKay’s Buntings were present in Sisualik again.

## Wildlife

Conditions of habitat and weather through January '96 are not known to have caused any particular stress on species present within the boundaries of the Monument, with the possible exception of some eiders apparently attempting to overwinter in the vicinity. This statement is based only on the one incident on the 18th, when a flock of 100+ Common Eiders were seen flying around Sealing Point during an extended calm, cold spell. Life- sustaining open water may have been scarce or nonexistent due to calm conditions. In the past this has led to winterkill of these large sea ducks. Events later in the year may provide hints of what becomes of these birds.

Samples of both moose and caribou taken during the month showed not only healthy animals, but also some internal body fat reserves, a good sign for this month.

The scarcity of white spruce cones is certainly a hardship on local Red Squirrels. Cone feeding birds would also have it tough if there are any in the region. We have seen none and generally those species are not caught in mid winter where there are no cones. They are highly nomadic and work the spruce forests where there are cones. Within this group of birds are Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks, White-winged Crossbills and the two Chickadees (Boreal and Black-capped). They are absent from this area this month.

## Caribou

Through January we continued to be in between a large overwintering group of caribou just north of the haul road (Red Dog) and a similar group to the east around Wolf Creek, near Noorvik. The distance between these two groups is more than 50 miles and we are near mid-way. We have had only a few stray animals come through.

A first caribou from the western group taken by a Kotzebue hunter was killed on the 7th. It was reported to be in good condition with some fat. On the 9th, two caribou were spooked at Jones Camp just as a machine was taking off for the woodcutting area.

There was some surprising news on the 15th. A couple of boys from Jones Camp caught seven caribou that were said to be part of a group that has been living inside a large spruce patch. This situation had developed before. A number of caribou find that snow machines won't follow them into the trees. Finding good feed they take up winter living there. When they do venture out into the open spaces usually preferred by caribou and snow machine noise comes to them, they quickly move back into the forest. They become habituated to this and can go for a long span of time without being effectively hunted; they are even by-passed by people seeking caribou. As long

as snow depth within the forest is moderate both for escape and feeding they will continue this pattern. If too much snow builds they will be afraid of not being able to flee and break the pattern and go back to open country. This situation has developed again a few miles north of Jones Camp, which is far from the two major caribou groups east and west. Two young hunters have figured out the system and have taken a few animals from the group about once a week through the month. Each time they return with their catch there is a flurry of activity by other hunters but finding nothing or catching nothing, things quiet down again with success. It is an interesting study of caribou-hunter relationships in the age of mechanization.

On the 17th the same hunter from Kotzebue that got one from the "west" group on the 7th made a round trip to Kivalina, picking up one more caribou near Port Site.

A lone caribou apparently being hazed by a wolf made tracks not far from the house on the trail from which we exit our spruce patch. This was on the 21st. On the 23rd the successful caribou hunters behind Jones Camp made another productive strike.

**Moose**

A lone moose, probably an antlerless young bull, was in the spruce patch on the 2nd.

On the 5th a number of moose, at least four, passed through here during the night, moving down stream. They were feeding along the way and occasionally engaged in sparring bouts, according to their tracks. They were probably all males.

On the 16th a lone moose was seen north of us but not in our spruce patch.

On the 26th a bull moose with antlers was taken north of Anigaaq Ranger Station. It was said to be in good condition with some body fat and good bone marrow.

**Bear**

No January bear tales.

**Sheep**

No news.

## Musk-ox

A single musk-ox was seen in the Rabbit Creek area by the first caribou hunter to make a trip that way on the 7th. No other reports have come in this January of musk ox in the Krusenstern area. A good deal of talk and news has come from the first legal permit hunt on the Seward Peninsula. Most of those holding permits didn't get at the taking of their animal until this month for one reason or another. The time within which they could be taken was coming to an end on the last day of January. Apparently the animal had to be taken on Federal land. Most of the permits were filled in a flurry of activity from mid month to the end. The result of this first hunt of a reintroduced ancient animal is interesting on several levels. Stories and opinions will filter into the grapevine network through the coming year and will probably determine future relationships between local folks and local musk ox. A review of Federal and State positions/perspectives of this first hunt would also be interesting.

## Marine Mammals

Winter seal hunters got out only on the last couple of days this month after an east blizzard. Results were disappointing. Following the lead edge from Sisualik to Sealing Point on the 30th, three hunters reported seeing only one seal which one of the crew missed; there was no second chance. Some other hunters may have gone out on the following day but we did not hear of a sure successful catch. We did hear a rumor that one hunter took 6-7. We could never confirm. No other hunter or marine mammal events came to our ears in January.

## Small Mammals

The first week of January produced a nice extended warm spell that among other things brought on a great settling of our snow cover over broad areas. This in turn brought on the opening of many tunnel doorways easily seen from human height. There was also many snow surface tracks made by the furry little creatures from the tunnels. This "settling of snow" must unsettle the subnivian residents that make a living under there. The need for oxygen, feeding grounds and a trail to visit neighbors must be pretty well disrupted for a time. Shrews, Red-backed Voles, Tundra Voles and some Lemmings seem to be involved, judging by tracks, size of tunnels and habitat. It was a bit surprising to see the numbers of creatures involved, since surface sign has been pretty much lacking earlier in the fall and winter. One wonders at the accuracy of our estimates of microtine populations based on various surface hints we tend to use.

Likewise it is a little hard to judge how the Red Squirrel population is doing with the notable absence of spruce cones. They are around and active during warm spells but

what they are living on is not so apparent. There is some use of the tips of new growth spruce, all right, and of course some dried and stored mushrooms, but beyond that their diet this winter is their own secret.

Tracks of Short-tailed Weasels are a bit more common this month than earlier.

## Furbearers

Aside from a few local Red Foxes, Wolves seemed to be the only furbearers that drew attention to themselves in January.

On the 7th, the hunter from here that got a caribou from Rabbit Creek reported seeing the tracks of a wolf pack containing 12-14 animals in the vicinity of the caribou and musk ox that he saw.

On the 19th travelers from the Hatchery to Kotzebue ran across the feeding place of two wolves and two wolverines on a dead moose carcass far under the snow. This was only 3 or 4 miles north of us. The moose kill site was later rigged with traps and snares. Our Superdog found one of the traps and nearly lost a hind foot to it. He nearly lost more than a foot. For him it was a close call. We have not heard how the trappers made out.

On the 21st a lone, large wolf passed close to the cabin, just outside the tree line, either with or on the trail of a single smallish caribou. It was a time of very hard snow surface and the full story by tracks was not readable.

The numerous wolf track sightings this fall and winter seem to affirm the high and building wolf population in the region claimed by some light aircraft traveling folks.

## Birds

We did not do a CBC this year on the last couple of days it was possible (Jan 1 or 2). Trail conditions and flu canceled our last hopes.

Saw a second chickadee for the winter, on the 6th. This fellow was in willows down on the creek, foraging in some windrowed leaves and stuff on the snow. From its call, only repeated once, I am almost convinced that it was a Siberian Tit, which I have not yet seen. My binocs at this great time of opportunity were back in the house! I have a tape of the three chickadee voices.

Saw a good flock of twenty Snow Buntings in Sisualik on the 8th. No chance to check for McKay's.

The Boreal Owl (first seen late December) was back on the shovel handle on the 12th. See Journal for 12th and 13th for background of this friendly predawn visitor.

See Journal for 15th for comment on town ravens.

Saw three Spruce Grouse at Napaaqtuuraq on the 17th. There are more of these birds around this year.

On the 18th, the second big bird event (the first big bird event was the Boreal Owl) of the month was the sighting of more than 100 eider ducks seen flying over the frozen sea near Sealing Point. See Journal for this event, as it is an interesting happening because of extremes of conditions. Very low temperatures night and day and calm winds with no known open lead in the area means that this large flock of large birds may have had a problem.

A single (the only one all winter) redpoll was seen at dawn on the 19th.

Our little owl may have zipped by the house on the 21st on the trail of the redpoll.

A few small flocks of Willow Ptarmigan were seen through the month but sometimes it was many days between sightings.

## Plants

There is not a real lot new with plants for January '96. The lack of a developed cone crop on the white spruce trees is probably the most important winter plant note, as the rich little seed that are produced in mature cones is a wonderful food source for a number of creatures when they are available. When they are not, like this year, there may be a shortage of alternate food in the relative lack of plant diversity of the far north. This is a recognized regular rhythm and species affected by the pendulum swing from plenty to none have succeeded in dealing with it, which they demonstrate by their continued existence as a species in the habitat. This of course can be a traumatic time for individuals of a species. Several species of birds, Red Squirrels and microtines as well as a number of insects through the year will be impacted by the lack of spruce seed production.

The depressing of willows by various conditions of snow and the heavy icing of above snow surface buds and twigs, likewise has an effect on creatures that use them for food or shelter. There has been a certain degree of these environmentally based restrictions to access by creatures that utilize willows this winter. It is not suspected that the degree of icing or depressing has caused any particular hardship for either moose or ptarmigan. Populations of both ptarmigan and hares are locally depressed

already and moose are not troubled by these conditions unless they are extreme. Snow cover is relatively light, and intense cold spells have been short in January, so moose, so far, have had a good winter.

After some of the very low temperatures in January good cracks developed in snow free ice patches on lakes. With a sharp pick very large chunks can be broken off. We haul this home for our water supply. Even though the unfrozen water in lake under ice is dark tea colored, the surface ice, at least the top two feet of it, is usually crystal clear. While getting ice in this manner in a portion of the lake that had several muskrat "push ups" showing on the surface, I found an odd zone in the ice chunks about 12 inches from the surface. They were in the next 5 or 6 inches. These black dots were some thing like small fish eggs or plant seeds. They were quite small, ¼ the size of a rice grain. As the ice melted and warmed in the house, I noticed many of these in the bottom of our water bucket. Wishing to know what we had inadvertently added to our water supply I gathered some from the bucket bottom, put them on a white paper towel and got out a hand lens - surprise!! They were small sprouted seeds. The sprouting may have occurred in the warmth of the house. We had not noticed this situation in ice from this lake or any other before. In speculation, it seems that these seeds of some aquatic plant may have been disturbed from their fixed place on the lake bottom by muskrat activity. Floating at that stage they could have "zoned" our ice. After freezing and then thawing they apparently were not buoyant anymore but were ready to sprout, given proper temperature rise. This is an interesting mid winter aquatic plant observation and the specific plant species may yet be made clear (ID). It is another example of a plant that gets spread around at thaw and flood time by being transported from here to there by floating and deteriorating late spring ice. This may be one of the inland lake plants that sustain various waterfowl during nesting through fledgling time as the family group is confined to a lake's margin.

## Fish

Not a lot of fish news in January. Those that kept their Shee nets active through the month in NW portions of Kobuk Lake continued to catch fish but on a diminishing scale.

On the 21st our neighbors several miles to the east gave us nearly 100 lbs. of Broad Whitefish, our share of their fall freeze up catch. As mentioned last October in this journal, this species of whitefish in its adult form is rare within the boundaries of Krusenstern. The great catch made by our neighbors this fall is an anomaly that may be a "one year" thing because of floods or other forms of displacement, or it could be a continuing range extension for the species. Only time will tell. The ones we were given had gotten fairly strong before freezing and were choice quaq.

**People**

Fire destroyed the summer camp of these good neighbors the day after their good gift of fish to us. Though their loss was great they were living in their upper winter house two or three miles inland from the summer camp. Their winter clothes, equipment, etc. were not affected. They had been remodeling the place and left a stove fire and chainsaw too close to each other when they went home to winter camp. The fire happened on the evening of the 20th and was reported from town to Jones Camp. No one was there through the time of the fire.

We first got to use trail stakes on the miserable trail to Kotzebue on the 5th, quite a late date for that luxury. Our hope each year is to have that nine-mile stretch marked by Thanksgiving.

We had sunrise in the morning on the 14th. That is a silly sentence to have to write! The sun should always rise in the morning, never in the afternoon! This blatant anthropocentric manipulation of time is unwarranted, in my opinion. Having to live under the constraints of a two hour differential in sun time and clock time is tedious, to say the least.

We had our first two visitors of 1996 on the 16th. Visitors have been scarce this winter. With the Hatchery shut down and caribou absent our visitor load has been very light. Trails and weather has contributed to the lack.

The Sealing Point family is back in the country from Anchorage, which means there will be shelter, warmth and a hot cup at least off and on at that remote site. It is a good thing to know if you are winter traveling the long trail from Kotzebue to Kivalina.

On the 20th a traveler missing three days on a trip from Kivalina to Point Hope was found in good condition by searchers.

On the 23rd the sun came back in sight to the residents of Barrow. On this day our sun time above the horizon was 5 hours and 6 minutes.

On Journal pages for the 24th and 25th is an account of Terry the Superdog's adventure with a leg hold wolf trap. Having been a trapper of furbearers for much of my adult life, this close look into a trapped animal’s eyes was unique. Normally the trapper only sees the animal many hours after it has been caught. The pain and hopelessness has taken the fire out of the eyes by that time.

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# FEBRUARY

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**Plants**

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# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# MARCH

## Introduction

The "Lion" was pretty much missing from March 1996. The "Lamb" prevailed to such a great degree that some very unusual happenings resulted. We have spoken in these pages before of times when there seemed to be an "unbalance" in our yearly weather system patterns. The most obvious clue that something unusual is afoot is that the wind seems to get stuck in one quadrant and threatens to continue on from that direction forever! Strange things happen across the land and sea when this happens, and even what is thought to be the norm for a given season is altered, sometimes greatly.

March '96 demonstrated some of this erratic deviation from norm with resultant effect on creatures that must cope with circumstances if they are to survive.

March is well known for its winds in other regions as well as here. Thus the "Lion and Lamb" old saw. Here, March is often all wind and all west wind. West wind is cold always: more lost travelers, over time, have perished in this month than in any other.

This year March had wind on only three days that were <u>not</u> out of the <u>easterly</u> quadrant. This east wind syndrome, extremely rare for the month of March, gave us unseasonably mild temperatures. It was an offshore wind, strong at times (to 45 K on the 20$^{th}$ and 21$^{st}$), and swept and dug all loose snow up and away, leaving higher levels (such as beach ridge crests on Krusenstern) as dry, dark ground which quickly absorbed the ever-warming sun's rays.

At least two "firsts" for March developed from this. Glaucous Gulls were reported from several locations starting on the 26$^{th}$. No one recalls <u>ever</u> seeing G. Gulls in the Krusenstern area in March. They are known to overwinter in some years in the waters off the Seward Peninsula. On the 29$^{th}$ an Arctic Ground Squirrel was reported out (of hibernation). No one recalls such an early date for that event. Both of these happenings are normally reserved for the last week of April, <u>not</u> the last week of March.

Ivory Gulls and Polar Bears, both seldom seen in inner Kotzebue Sound, were also reported through this period. Then on the 26$^{th}$ we got our first good look at Comet Hyakutake. Someone has suggested that the last time this comet passed this way, Hairy Mammoths were wandering about. Wonder what changes will be apparent the next time it passes through!

A minus 26º F on the 17th and 18th was not very cold, though it was the coldest temperature for the month. Each day the weather person on the radio indicated record lows were forty below or colder range.

The warm spell in the last week of the month, when for nearly a week highs were above freezing, gave us a monthly high of 36º F on the 29th and 31st. Strongest winds were two steady on two consecutive days, the 20th and 21st, at 45 K from the east and southeast. A short rain happened on the 25th.

## Wildlife

March is often the beginning of a tough period for creatures living in arctic or subarctic regions. Fat stored from lush summer growth may be diminished and good winter forage often becomes harder and harder to find as snow, low temperatures and days of wind and drifting snow drain reserves needed to maintain life processes. This year the surprise was the mildness of the month and the lack of sudden temperature changes that can be traumatic (like sudden super cold after wet rain). On the sea, large areas of open water that are normally ice-covered in March may also have beneficial results. Sunlight and temperature may result in increased phytoplankton development that could enrich the marine food web. As this is a birthing time for both Ringed and Bearded Seals, they may benefit in increased production if ice conditions have not become a problem (through crushing and mashing).

Moose and caribou should have had an easy winter, and of course their predators will benefit.

On the other hand March, from the very beginning, had surface traveling conditions nearly perfect for snow machine travel. That, combined with mild weather and long, long sunlight made the harvest of wolves and wolverines more possible than during any prior winter months.

## Caribou

Some animals remained on their chosen winter grounds through the month. Remnants of the Wolf Creek group and the Rabbit Creek animals retained good physical condition as indicated by samples taken through the month. There are some indications that total number in each group began fading away through the month - some to hunters, some to predators, and maybe a trickling of early north movement.

Two small groups of caribou were noted north of us (halfway to Hatchery) on the 8th. On the 17th a few fresh tracks were seen on tableland edge north of Sisualik. Two small

groups were seen on the hills just south of the Hatchery on the 26th. These were the only animals noted in March east of Rabbit Creek and Haul Road and were probably stray groups from either Wolf Creek or Rabbit Creek.

**Moose**

Moose sign was rare here in March, probably more rare than in any recent year. One did walk into an eastern neighbor's camp on the 3rd. No tracks were seen on our annual trip up the lower Noatak to the Lower Canyon for ice fishing on the 7th. There have been tracks on this route most years in the past 20. On the 10tha moose was reported "coming our way" from the west. It never reached our area. No other moose or moose tracks turned up on our watershed in March.

**Bear**

On the 7th, seal hunters out on the ice reported Polar Bear tracks near Sealing Point. During the warm spell of the last week of March and the first week of April a group of 4-5 Polar Bears were reported by aircraft to be a few miles off of Cape Blossom.

Our visitors from Galena on the 30th reported seeing a bear out also in our region during the mild last week of March, though we have had no actual reports.

**Sheep**

No report.

**Musk ox**

Sorry to say that we have heard no reports this month. With caribou hunting going on in the Rabbit Creek and Haul Road areas one would think some musk ox activity would be noted. Haven't hear any reports.

**Marine Mammals**

The warm weather and abundant open water did bring out a fair number of marine mammal hunters in March. Success and amount of harvest may have exceeded any March take in previous recent years. Ringed Seals were the only species taken, so far as we know. Several females with unborn young were taken early in the month; some of the dark-faced smelly males that are not useable for human consumption were killed. These can be used for dog food if hauled home.

On the 6th two ice edge accidents occurred that could have ended in tragedy, but were resolved without injury except maybe to the pride of hunters involved. Ice edge broke off on one hunter as he was getting out of his kayak after hauling in a shot seal. He was having trouble climbing out of the water until he attracted a neighboring hunter's attention and got help to climb out. Another hunter couldn't make it back to ice edge with a lost or broken paddle against wind and strong current. Ropes tied together by helpers got him into safety. These incidents were more serious than they seem in telling. Sea ice hunting can be dangerous, even for the wary!

On the 10th we were given fresh seal meat which was great for a change. On the 12th a sled load of seals headed for Ambler broke down in mid Kobuk Lake. The sled broke. There would be a ready market for them at that village as they are due to host the Friends Mid Year Conference during the week of the 12th and NANA Day on the 18th.

On the 21st, three Russian skiers were picked up from broken ice in the Bering Straits. A number of Polar Bears were reported seen in the area.

Seals were still being taken at Sealing Point on the last day of the month.

Common Ringed Seal harvest through March was high this year. That probably still means less than 100, as there are not many active hunters left. It is unusual for hunting conditions to be so good and so frequent during this month.

## Small Mammals

Since a couple of Short-tailed Weasels took over the storehouse next door our voles and shrews seem to have disappeared. We can keep our valuable meat and fish food stocks from the weasels, so we didn't try to get rid of them. Now they seem more effective than a cat or traps at controlling microtines!

The big news for the month with small mammals if of course the single ground squirrel seen out on March 29th. The last week of April is normally the time squirrels come out at sea level on Krusenstern.

On the 18th Terry (the dog) went with me to the firewood-cutting site. His barking caused me to investigate. I found him under a porcupine in a <u>dead</u> spruce. The next day the porcupine was still in the same dead tree. I don't recall seeing a porcupine up high in a dead tree before. He may have got up there to be away from the dog and may have been so spooked that he stayed overnight up the tree. But then again, a dry tree may be warmer than a green one and the temperatures were a –26º F.

## Furbearers

The last storms of February left a great level snow surface all over the region. After having little opportunity through the rest of the winter because of exceedingly rough surface trail, there was probably intense effort out of towns and villages to take wolves and wolverines. The success rate was bound to be high with such long daylight and such a good snow surface. We hear of some being taken, often multiple animals on same day of hunt. We have no way of knowing total numbers, but conditions were ideal. The only limitations would be gas and oil cost and availability, machine parts, and time limitations of the individual hunter. This March is a classic example of the potential for over harvest of wolves and wolverine in any year that conditions are just right to favor the machine hunter. Post prime furs are an additional reason for possible future harvest limitations.

On the 26th word filtered down the "grapevine" that a distant eastern neighbor had taken a dozen or so marten through the winter. It seems possible that his area of trapping was in the area between Squirrel River, Noatak River and Hotham Inlet on the south. His actual area of trapping is not known but any marten west of the Squirrel is of interest, since no tracks have been noted on Krusenstern this winter. We may learn more on this later on.

## Birds

A few breaks from the "same old birds" day after day this March. A gray phase Horned Owl on the 8th was a good and great surprise. No other had been seen all winter, as there is no local prey to support the big predators. Although the sighting was a surprise (at midday near a large isolated area of fresh W. Ptarmigan tracks), we often do see or hear Horned Owls from mid February to mid March, even in those years when there is no great prey base. These seem to be birds from great distances checking for potential nesting sites with adjacent prey source.

Redpolls in small numbers began to show from the 10th onward.

On the 13th two Boreal Chickadees finally turned up at the fat lump hung all winter for them. These were the first we had noticed on the fat all season.

On the 26th Glaucous Gulls were reported over and on land for the first time in March. The last week of April is the normal time for these birds to turn up. Many were seen for the next 10 days; Ivory Gulls joined them in fair numbers at open lead edge. A phone call from Point Lay indicated that Glaucous Gulls had also reached that northern point through the same period. Speculation on the cause of this month’s early appearance of gulls may be found in Journal entry of the 26th.

On the 29th, a female Three-toed Woodpecker paid a visit to the dead spruce near the house. A first sighting by the house this winter, though birds can usually be found each winter through the larger patches of white spruce up under the mountains.

W. Ptarmigan made a better showing this month than earlier. One quite larger flock (75-100) was seen several times and two young hunters gave us 18 on the 9th, all shot with a .22 rifle.

Terry (the dog) found single Spruce Grouse several times through the month. Our camp group of four Gray Jays completed a boisterous month growing fat on camp scraps.

## Plants

On the 5th of March (see Journal) the most unbelievably beautiful change occurred in our white spruce patch. The bright sun passing through tree branches hung with a multitude of crystal clear ice prisms gave a most incredible show of bright colors against a somber dark green and gray background. A two-hour rain formed the prisms before the sky cleared completely. There was enough detraction of light through the naturally formed ice droplets to scatter brightness and color in all directions as the path of the sun highlighted each spruce tree from behind. The intenseness of this condition for a day and a half after the sky cleared may be a once in a lifetime show. It was really too incredible to describe in words. The sun warmed enough at midday on the third day to release the ice droplets and the show ended. It was so unexpected after a period of dull weather, yea, after a <u>whole</u> winter of dull weather, that the memory of the beauty of our white spruce will linger long. Will it ever happen again? Has it ever happened before?

On the 21st our hand full of Balsam Poplar twigs brought into the house and put in a glass of water a week or so ago had formed big clusters of broad, glossy, yellow-green leaves and roots on the single stems. This is a yearly ritual with us each March as the miracle of leaf growth on bare twigs brought inside renews faith that the world of nature will again burst forth in growth and flowering and replenishing after the ravages of winter. This may be the best use of this interesting northern plant. Beaver, Pine Grosbeaks and Snowshoe Hare may not agree with that statement!

## Fish

On the 7th we made our usual annual trip to visit the stone images at Amaktut and test the thickness of ice in the Noatak River at the Lower Canyon site. We also always put our spoon hooks in the ice holes with hope for a fresh fish and a test of the place as an old, old spring fishing place for the freshwater cod called Burbot in English and Titaliq in Eskimo.

The ice was 36 inches thick. We caught eight Burbot and one hefty Great Northern Pike. A good catch this year since we didn't catch anything last year.

There were other surprises. This site usually produces only subadult non-breeding Burbot. This time we took two yard-long spawned out adults (their eggs are deposited in late fall and early winter). In the stomach of one was a 14" char! We have not before caught a Burbot with char in the stomach.

Good catches of shee were being made near the east shore of Kobuk Lake around the 11$^{th}$. By the 19$^{th}$ there was report of a good catch at Pipe Spit (more than 100 for one fisherman). This is a very early date for shee at that location.

By the 24$^{th}$ reports trickled in of a large catch of char on hooks from Kivalina. This activity is relatively new at that site and seems to be expanding as techniques improve and locations of overwintering fish are found. Some have found their way to Kotzebue markets.

On the 29$^{th}$ two fishermen caught 150 shee in the Rock Island area - a new site of catch this year.

We will not make it to Kobuk Lake for shee fishing till April. We will then, however, and prognosis for a catch is good. It has been a good hooking season for shee and that usually continues till ice out.

## People

Not much change in resident people on Krusenstern this month. The Sealing Point house was occupied most of the time and the three wintering Sisualik camps remained in use.

There was a lot more travel along or across Krusenstern this month. Rather heavy seal hunting activity, caribou hunting in the Rabbit Creek area and coastal trail travel by north village residents was heavy with the mild weather. Preparations for whaling at Kivalina and Point Hope in April would contribute to this traffic as crew members from Kotzebue and other villages make their way north for the Season.

Inland sorties were common for the first time this winter, with mild weather and long days. Caribou, early bears, wolves and wolverine would be target animals; ptarmigan of both species would also be harvested. We have not heard of much success in these efforts except for seals and caribou. More seals were probably taken this month than in any recent March hunt.

We first located the passing comet on the 26th. Our report of that is in Journal entry of 27th. Each night afterwards it was located dropping south of its first position near the star Polaris, in spite of the growing light of the Moon. The "fuzzy star" was impressive enough, but when someone suggested that the last time it passed this way, mammoths and associated creatures were wandering about, it seemed a greater experience. One wonders what will be here the next time it passes!

March 28 was described as "A beautiful April day in March" and <u>that</u> describes the period well!

We had visitors by plane from Galena on the 30th; the night of the 31st we had 8 people in the house. Visitor season has begun!

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# APRIL

## Introduction

After the extended unseasonable warmth of late March and early April that brought unheard of early sightings of Glaucous Gulls and ground squirrels, most everyone thought that we might have an early spring. Others of us, mostly over 60 years of age, tended to adhere to our usual feelings of things being more compensatory. Warm weather in late March, early April will likely mean cold weather at the end portion of April. When early April is cold then the warm sun and mild weather are likely to bring an early thaw that continues into break up conditions and gives an early spring. April 1996 proved out the wisdom of the elders. It was moderately cool to the end with little thawing of abundant snow surface. No other birds followed the lead of the record breaking Glaucous Gull's (except Ivory Gulls and a possible Red-Legged Kittiwake). We, not trusting our own wisdom, moved out of snug winter quarters two weeks too early and had to burn a good deal of our "summer" firewood to keep from freezing in our 14x16 tent.

April was quite remarkable for lack of wind and snow and for the total amount of sun. The coldest temperature was –18º F on the 19$^{th}$. The warmest was 48º F on the 21$^{st}$ and 22$^{nd}$ and believe it or not, the most windy day was on the 2$^{nd}$ with winds at 25 k from the north and northwest. There were only two days in the whole month when clouds hid the sun. Weather-wise one could not hope for a better month than April 1996. It was beautiful and wonderful after some of the very harsh conditions we had through the winter. Again, our elder's feeling of things compensatory. For enduring the harshness of December or maybe February we were given in compensation a near perfect April!

## Wildlife

The moderate but cool weather of April would of course be appreciated by local living creatures, as well as human residents and travelers. The problem though, is the current lack of diversity of creatures again. Numbers of species often sharing this late winter and early spring month with us are just not here this April. Sadly, this year, we must count two major species locally absent. Both moose and caribou were very scarce through most of Krusenstern this April. There were a few caribou on the NW tip of the Monument and moose near the north edge on the Noatak Flats, but very few of both these species made tracks through the land of the Monument proper. These are added to the species that are often present in good numbers but have for several years been at

low ebb. Snowshoe Hare and their multiple predators remain absent (lynx, horned owl, northern goshawk and hawk owl); Willow Ptarmigan, though still scarce, made a better showing this April than last but they still are not enough of a prey base to support predators in the continued absence of hares. Wolverine and Arctic Hare, regular members of the animal community in the past, continue locally absent, probably due to the advent of the snow machine. Other species dependent on white spruce seed production are also absent (White-winged Crossbills, Pine Grosbeak, Boreal Chickadee and Redpoll). It will take a great spring movement of birds to change the character of our April scarcity of creature neighbors, which has resulted in near silence.

## Caribou

On the 2nd and 3rd a mini-symposium was held in Kotzebue to roll around the idea of co-management of the Northwest Arctic Caribou Herd. Federal, state, village and local people gathered to sound out some ideas as to how a somewhat different management system might improve cooperation between agencies. The agencies seem willing, to a point, to involve locals a bit more in management decision-making. The motivation to go the next step has been left with the native corporations. There has been no promise by the establishment to go beyond an advisory input situation. However, several working models of the co-management system have had moderate success and some working form of co-management could develop here. A good deal of information was presented at the meetings.

Though caribou continued to make tracks in the Wolf Creek area (east of us) and the Rabbit Creek area (west of us), none were known to be in between through April. This same distribution pattern has carried through since the first of the year.

## Moose

No moose tracks were seen in our area in April this year. That is a first for many years. Generally tracks and animal sign is at low ebb in April, but this year there have been none. This must reflect the downward trend in moose numbers on the Lower Noatak River. Snow cover has been ample but not excessive and is probably not a factor this year. Several late hunter kills (legal) are known and that could very well be <u>the</u> factor. There seems little justification for maintaining an open moose season for the months of February and March.

## Bear

Brown Bear tracks were in the news several times during the month but no mention was heard of bears being taken on Krusenstern this April. Conditions for bear hunting over

long stretches of time through the month were excellent and some kills could have been made. Successful local hunters have become remarkably quiet about their bear hunting success for several reasons.

Bear tracks were reported on the 2nd and 21st. A bear was seen near the Noatak sno-go trail at Eli River by travelers on the trail on the 26th.

An unheard of report on the 7th indicated that there were 5-6 Polar Bears just offshore of Cape Blossom. This location was the eastern terminus of the big ocean lead made during the huge late winter storm. This was a pilot report and it is very, very unusual to have polar bears that close to Kotzebue. There was an earlier report of polar bear tracks near Sealing Point but we heard no report of people in the Kotzebue Sound region actually seeing polar bears, except from an aircraft.

**Sheep**

No report.

**Musk ox**

No report.

**Marine Mammals**

There was a good deal of effort put into Ringed Seal hunting early in the month when weather was good for it. This was a continuance of the mild weather and abundant open ocean water from weather systems in late March. The number of hunters was probably less than ten but they were probably out to the open lead on several different days. Most caught more than one seal but there were probably few hunters that took more than 10 total through the period of better hunting.

There were probably a few more Common Ringed Seals taken through this 4-month winter hunt period than in recent years, due mainly to close and abundant water and considerably unseasonably mild weather spells. Some sale of meat and blubber was accomplished in villages and in Kotzebue.

There were still unborn pups in a few female seals early in the month but most are born during the month of March.

This is the season that some adult males have a very black "tarry" face and their whole body, meat and blubber, have a very strong kerosene-like smell and taste and are

generally not used for human consumption. One of these was inadvertently killed and then opened with a knife and left on the lead edge. It attracted sixteen Ivory Gulls with some Glaucous Gulls. The Ivory Gulls are probably a local record for numbers and the Glaucous Gulls a record early date of occurrence.

A first Bowhead Whale was taken on the 4th at St. Lawrence Island.

On the 9th the Bering Sea ice edge was reported to be very much farther north for the date than in most years. This reflects our unusual winter weather systems.

A first bowhead for Point Hope came on the 14th. By the 22nd Point Hope had had three bowheads on the ice and two strikes lost.

On the 29th an overwintering seal was seen laying on the ice not far from Lockhart Point. Someone found that the area around where it had been laying was very thin ice, dangerous to travelers, as the sun warmed the surface. The staked trail to Nelson Camp passed right over the area and warnings to travelers had to be given over KOTZ.

## Small Mammals

As the sun warmed the snow surface enough to crust it over in our spruce patch the annual Red Squirrel Carnival got underway. These conditions developed this year on the first couple of days of the month. This April, due to the scarcity of numbers in most other species our near house, Red Squirrels were the most numerous "track makers" in the country. With a newly formed crust on the snow, Gray Jays and Red Squirrels had some fine days of running and foraging around the camp. With mating season and a snow surface crust that will support only jays and squirrels, they become very brave and tame and did a lot of "showing off" of their talents.

On the 25th a long time neighbor friend's boy brought us three snowshoe hares. The first we have had for a long, long time. He and a partner caught them and a few others hunting on the Kobuk Delta. From his description of habitat and hare numbers there, it renews our hopes to soon have hares back in the Krusenstern suitable habitats. They and their host of predators have been too long gone. We have had well demonstrated in the last 20 years how much this species adds to the diversity of life in far north white spruce and willow habitat. Their presence in numbers so enlivens the often bleak, silent and unmoving winter landscape that one experiences a great lonesomeness when they are absent. We look forward with much anticipation to their return. May it be soon!

Voles around the winter camp had virtually disappeared by the time we moved due to the pair of Short-tailed Weasels that became semi- resident.

In Sisualik, around our summer camp, there seems a good number of surviving Tundra

Voles. Their winter work and survival success will come more to light in late May when snowbanks around the camp are gone.

## Furbearers

Little sign of furbearers except foxes in our area. Fox tracks have been few and far between this April, probably still reflecting the lack of caribou and caribou hunting in our area this winter.

Ground Squirrels, sometimes an eagerly sought after furbearer in April and early May, are quite plentiful throughout the coastal and alpine portions of Krusenstern. What fires the motivation to be out after interesting ground dwellers is the need or want of a new, light and very warm parka by either men or women. Men prize a "hair inside" hunting parka for its warmth, lightness and durability. Women prize a matched-skin, “hair outside” parka for its beauty, status-achieving capability and durability. It takes 60 to 80 good skins to make an adult person's parka. The animal is best, both for skin and meat, when taken soon after coming out hibernation. It is also the easiest and most efficient time to take them. Late April and early May is the proper time to take them and they were out on time this year. There was no trapping done this April to our knowledge. There is little need for that kind of parka. A few may have been shot or trapped for food. Their numbers proved to be quite high this spring and anyone who has dreamed of having this kind of parka may have missed a good opportunity.

## Birds

It was noted on the 4$^{th}$ that we had not had a below zero temperature since the 19$^{th}$ of March. That is a long warm spell for this time of year at this geographic location. Weather systems that brought on this extended relative warmth were dominated by easterly winds. That is an "offshore" wind for the west coast of Alaska and it created, along with warmth, a wide band of open water in near coastal marine locations. This in turn brought some bird and animal sightings that are pretty much unprecedented for this region.

Glaucous and Ivory Gulls and possibly Red-legged Kittiwake were seen at ice edge just off Cape Blossom and through numerous land locations around the north shore of Kotzebue Sound.

As many as 16-18 Ivory Gulls were seen together and 20 or 50 Glaucous Gulls were noted in special locations in March and into the first week of April. The Red-legged Kittiwake may be a first for any season in Kotzebue Sound.

The weather cooled to more normal temperatures after the first week of April and bird

sightings dropped off till the last few days of April when G. Gulls, geese and cranes are expected. The only bird recorded in the Journal for this last week is a Glaucous Gull from Sealing Point.

Jonathan didn't make it in April but did do a fly by on the first of May when Glaucous Gulls were reported in numbers from Kotzebue town.

A few Willow Ptarmigan were noted through the month and some displaying birds were noted along the trail late in the month. This was a good improvement over last April here when no displaying birds were seen or heard in April.

First geese were reported into Fairbanks on the 12th.

No dark heads were seen in a good group of Willow Ptarmigan seen along the trail on the 16th.

On the 19th a pile of Ptarmigan feathers along the trail indicated the arrival of either a Gyrfalcon or a Northern Goshawk to the area. The location and nearby trees made either predator a possibility. Some Rock Ptarmigan tracks were noted the same day.

Three reports of goose sightings came in from widely separated locations on the 23rd

On the 26th a small dead bird was delivered to us from Sealing Point. It turned out to be a White-winged Crossbill that perished out of normal habitat. More details can be found in Journal.

April did not produce much excitement on the migratory bird scene this year. We hope for better in May.

## Plants

Not a lot to say about plants in April. There are of course changes developing in many plants, but for the most part they are not much on the surface. Plants are carefully hiding new growth in the center of husks, old leaves and stems, under the snow and on those first places that sun heat melts the snow. Some mosses and lichens are flexing their structures to be ready for growth and/or reproduction.

Late in the month ptarmigan, geese, cranes and caribou will be finding and eating the center-forming blooming stalk of the tussock- making *Eriophorum* sp. If any summer or fall walker who has cursed "niggerheads" in the uneven tundra of the north country would reflect on this early nutritious green food supplied to those creatures when they so dearly need it, he or she might be able to better tolerate the tough walking conditions.

We kept twigs of both Balsam Poplar and Alder (*Alnus crispa*) inside through the month and took joy from watching the leaves and aments form. The alders dropped bright yellow pollen all over whatever happened to be right under the male flower. The leaves and male/female flowers seem to grow and develop by a slow magic. They were after all, only twigs and branches removed from the head, heart and roots of their parents!

Our local Red Squirrels seemed to have finished the "hard season" in good shape despite the lack of white spruce seeds. They do, of course, have access to nutrients from our winter living there. Outlying colonies may not have done so well.

## Fish

Good catches of sheefish were made off and on through March and April. We finally got up and on the lake on the 13th. We got lost in the fog, ran across some exceedingly thin ice, and caught a few fish to make the trip worth it all. One of the fish was a fine big, fat "eating" fish.

We appreciated the visits of a number of fishery biologists through the month. Most were involved in a currently funded sheefish study through tag and recovery, and one is involved in genetic engineering lines relating to the various anti-freeze chemicals some northern fish produce in order to exist. All of it is very interesting, but sometimes on a level of expertise hard for a layman fisherman to follow.

We next ventured up on the lake on the day of the Sheefish Derby. On that day, the 27th, we again caught a few fish but nothing big enough for a prize. Carrie did get a couple of 36 inchers. The contest winners got fish of 47 and 48 inches. A lot of large fish were taken at a place between Kobuk Lake and Selawik Lake called Aklaq. This is quite far up and we didn't get there that day.

Crab pots were set in two different "off Krusenstern" locations this month. Unusual activity for here! The ones set offshore of the Ranger Station were reported (second hand) to have taken several fair sized King Crabs. The other set off Battle Rock, up the NW coast, got only krill for the first couple of days and was then lost when ice smashed in on it. Would hope to talk directly to the pot owner sometime. We have a very high sea floor population of Hermit Crabs and Telemassus Crabs, but their maximum size (the Hermit Crabs) is 4 to 4 ½ inches across the carapace.

## People

By the end of April occupied camps on Krusenstern had increased in over winter residents, but has fallen some short of folks settled here last year for the break up

period. There are four camps west of Sisualik and the Anigaaq Ranger Station. These are the only camps between Sisualik and the Red Dog Port Site complex.

In Sisualik proper there are nine occupied camps as of the last day of April. There will not likely be much change until boating channels open up in late May or June when an upswing in campers will be dramatic, but short-lived.

Woodcutting this April was much diminished from efforts of recent years. Two reasons are the high cost of gasoline and a continuing switch to heating oil, even by camp elders. This is probably good news for our westernmost white spruce copses.

On and around the 6th there were lots of travelers through Krusenstern's coastal trail headed for Kivalina and the large musical and feast celebration of Easter they have made traditional there.

We opened our Sisualik tent camp on the 16th. It was ready to move into by the 19th. Our first overnight there was on the 20th. That is an early date for our move, which is usually accomplished around May 1. We could have waited till then this year too and saved a lot of firewood. It was pleasant to be out in the wide-open spaces again, but the nights got pretty cold in the tent. A last trip to close up the winter house was made on the 24th.

Materials were hauled down to Sealing Point for making a new tower this month. The Harris family did the hauling. It will be good to have a tower in place there again. It has been greatly missed by those that have grown up with historic landmark there. It has a long history of being a navigation help for ice hunters both by boat, dog team, and snow machine.

We did see the Comet Hyakutake on the 5th before moonrise and for the last time on the 10th as its trail across our skies moved south and west into the afterglow of our then late sunset. Do wonder what the comet will find on its next pass this way if it is true that the Hairy Mammoths were active here on its last pass.

On the 9th, 11th and 15th we had a number of biologists visit and spend several hours in discussion of shee and other fish populations. There has accumulated over the years a number of mysteries and questions regarding the dynamics of some local fish species and their relationship to human activity. These visiting folks are involved in the work and new studies are coming up with some interesting information. We enjoyed and benefited from these visits.

On the 7th we again resented the need to move clocks (time) ahead an additional hour to remain in sync with other humans in the region. It put us 3 hours <u>out</u> of sync with sun time, by which all things function in our world, except humans.

On the 28th eight to ten Glaucous Gulls were reported in Kotzebue but April ran out before there was any sign of Jonathan.

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# MAY

## Introduction

We didn't get the warmth that we had hoped for out of May this year, but it did get warm enough to melt most of the snow on the land and give a very weak flush out of the watersheds in the region. The only threat of flood was in the village of Kobuk and that was relatively short-lived.

We can already foretell some of the things that won't or will happen because of the cool early spring season. We will not likely get much "new" driftwood. The berry crop may be affected, and if our growing suspicions are true we may see few *Gentianopsis detonsa*. One wonders about the effect on white spruce seed production since there was so little last year.

Jonathan (the camp watch gull) came back and was a little rusty on his learned routine, but remembered enough to allow us to identify him beyond doubt. We again ate his (or his wife's) first clutch of eggs but they are doing well with their second try.

May was not a good month for Tree Swallows on the arctic coast. They did finally come but may have wished they hadn't before month's end.

Our coldest day was on the 2$^{nd}$ when the temperature dropped to 0º F, maybe for the last time till freeze-up in October. The warmest temperature was a delightful 57º F on the 24$^{th}$.

Wind was rather constant, but at moderate levels. Prevailing westerlies, we believe, is what kept the month cold. The 17$^{th}$ was the windiest day, with W to NW winds at 38 knots

Kotzebue Channel ice went out on the 24$^{th}$ in the morning and there were boats out by afternoon. A first marine mammal hunting boat was out of Kotzebue on the 25$^{th}$ and may have taken a small uguruq and some seals.

A good rain on the 30$^{th}$ gave the already dry tundra the water it needed. The globe-shaped cream-colored flowers of the black bearberry were noted on the 31$^{st}$, along with green but still furled leaves of the tundra mat willows and dwarfed birch. These signs on the last days of May gave renewed hope of warmth, growth and production for the coming summer.

## Wildlife

Since May didn't bring the warmth we hoped for, it is not surprising that some other creatures may have experienced circumstances that made it difficult for them to cope.

We marveled and despaired that Lapland Longspurs, Savannah Sparrows and our Tree Swallows were so late in coming. Swallows may have lost a first clutch of eggs to a prolonged freezing spell.

We later found reason for the lack of our two friendly camp passerines (Longspurs, Savannah Sparrows). The Krusenstern Beach Ridge complex, ten miles west of us, had ground that was snow free nearly two weeks before our area. Early arriving birds found that habitat a place to survive the cold air and to find food. The condition carried on so long that they initiated nest building there and we got left out. We did finally get one pair of each species around the camp.

Our mudflat-salt marsh area suffered a similar '96 fate due to a very high level marine storm surge flood in mid winter that turned to ice, which defied the weak May sun. This kept mudflats, necessary to shorebird migrants, iced over and frozen past the time they were needed. These are localized conditions, though they did prevail in most marshlands directly connected to Kotzebue Sound. Migrating birds must seek alternative habitat and leave us out. Bar-tailed Godwits, Western Sandpipers and Semi-palmated Sandpipers, three major marsh-mudflat species here, were notable by their absence this spring.

There could have been other species more or less affected, especially those dependent on insects for forage. There was no period of intense record-breaking cold, but steady coolness that most species are hardy enough to weather.

## Caribou

On May 3rd there was said to be a heavy movement of caribou north between Selawik and Noorvik. That seems to be the last word of caribou for May and maybe there will be little mention of caribou from this region for the next couple of months, if normal patterns are maintained.

## Moose

After snow melt on the 15th, moose remains were found under a blue tarp with a few trap at the beach at the base of the bluff just east of the Anigaaq Ranger Station. The head, hoof bones and some backbone were there but most of the meat appears to have

been hauled off. It was a female and was quite far away from normal winter moose habitat.

There were no other moose sightings or incidents noted in May, though several incidents of cow moose with new calves were noted in early June, sometimes with bear sightings near the same location. These incidents were near Krusenstern beach camp sites and will be a part of the June report.

## Bear

Very little news of bears through May and that is not surprising. After leaving their dens bears tend to stick to the high country where ground squirrels abound and getting around is easier. First greening of vegetation is also at higher elevations. We did not hear of bear hunting activity through May, though we did hear of an abundance of tracks in the hills behind Sealing Point by a late traveler from Noatak to Sealing Point and back. The scene changed somewhat in early June when the presence of several moose with young calves turned up on Sealing Point flats. June report will update the bear scene.

## Sheep

No report of sheep in this area for May.

## Musk ox

No musk ox report for May.

## Marine Mammals

May and June are marine mammal harvest months so quite naturally there are lots to see at this time. All of the hair seals spend a good deal of their time hauled out on the ice these two months, which makes them that much more visible.

Prior to the 20$^{th}$ there was little or no seal hunting due to poor ice conditions out towards the open leads and snow meltwater on top of the ice. Around the 20$^{th}$ the water had run off the ice surface and as is natural with salt water ice, the surface got dry, snowy and soft, just right for hair seals to lie in the sun and molting hair. There were unusually high numbers on the ice in front of our camp site, sometimes nearly 100, from the 20$^{th}$ till the beach ice moved out in early June. Strangely, but not without explanation, there was very little hunting done at this time. The abundant species was

Common Ringed Seal, with little chance for uguruq. Ice conditions made hunting too tedious and the need for this species by local campers was too weak for any real hunting efforts to be made. June boat hunting seemed much more attractive to meet yearly seal oil requirements.

During this period the nearest open water lead on the ocean was closer than in any other year in the past 50. There was only a mile and a half or two of land fast ice. In some years the nearest open water is 40 to 50 miles from Sisualik.

A first boat of hunter got out into the ocean from Kotzebue on the 25th and probably got a few seals.

June will be an intense month for marine mammal hunting by boat.

## Small Mammals

Sisualik is well supplied with Tundra Voles and Arctic Ground Squirrels this May. Some of the voles are of the white faced or "spectacled" strain noted here in years of high density. Some have been seen over at the Point.

We have more camp ground squirrels than we should. Living is easy for squirrels around our camp. Consequently limiting the numbers is a problem.

Have not seen shrews or weasels in Sisualik this month.

## Furbearers

Little has developed to indicate conditions of furbearer populations this month though muskrats seem to be increasing in the Krusenstern waterway complex. The population has been depressed for many years. Red and white foxes are known to be around but reproductive success will not be known for a while.

Other furbearers maintain only small local populations at isolated points within the Monument.

We do have word of two beavers taken by different hunters on the Noatak River this May. A resident population of beaver on the Noatak has never been substantiated, though an occasional one or two is seen there over a timeframe of several years.

Some claim to have seen signs of overwintering; others suggest the occasional beaver seen there are spring/break-up time wanderers from the Kobuk watershed, which does have a stable population.

**Birds**

Jonathan returned right on time. He did a fly by on the 1st with clarion call. His identity was confirmed the next day when he did his characteristic "swoop" for tidbits. It again took him awhile to remember all of his learned routine and he seems to be concerned mostly with raising a family. I think we ate his first early clutch of eggs on the 23rd but his second try is so far undisturbed.

First Glaucous Gull eggs were harvested on the 20th by westernmost campers. Some nests had two eggs. This is an early date and three eggs are a full clutch for G. Gulls. We found three in one nest behind our place on the 23rd, probably Jonathan's.

Peak of G. gull egg-laying may have occurred in the last week of May rather than the first week of June. Harvest was pretty heavy into the first week of June and a bit beyond.

We had a weak bird migration through our area again this May on two counts. Passerines and early sandpipers found no snow free tundra nor ice free mudflats, while both habitat requirements were available twenty miles west of us. Winter storm surge had put in several feet of mixed overflow marine water and snow, which froze solid over most of the mudflat coastal zone of Kotzebue Sound. This unusual ice pile over mud is very slow to melt in comparison to the usual non-compacted snow accumulation. Migrating birds, as usual, must locate habitat suitable to their needs and we didn't have it.

Nearly all of our Longspurs and Savannah Sparrows nested on the Sealing Point beach ridge complex. They have lots there. We have one of each species around the camp and they seem single parent females.

Our Tree Swallows were very, very late, not making a showing until the 22nd. Things didn't go well for them then either. They initiated nest making right away but on the 26th there was a cruel foggy frozen morning with frozen fog crystals covering every thing above ground level and completely frozen melt water at ground level. The swallows were still not overnighting by the 28th,though they continued packing grass into the box. Our and their hope is, no doubt, for a warm June.

There were two early Red Throated Loons on the 11th; they were a surprise. The noisy Bar-tailed Godwits on the 15th were welcome but lacking habitat they didn't stay long.

First Arctic Terns were noted on the 16th. On the 17th strong west winds developed that gave justification again to the old adage that "birds know the weather.”. The lack of migrants through the first half of May is then explained by the late coming of cold west winds.

Many Snow Geese (200) spent this cold spell on the delta of the small creek to the west of us.

On the 21st large flocks (80) of large whitish redpolls were around camp for sometime. Have noted these Hoary Redpolls in seemingly pure flocks before, spring and fall.

We had a rather steady flow of all three species of jaegers on the 21st and our Swallows finally got here on the 22nd. A very bright colored Horned Grebe was around on the same day; it was a treat to get a good look at this species that is not real plentiful here on the coast.

The three Glaucous Gull eggs in one nest found behind our place on the 23rd may set an early record for our area. One the 24th small birds, passerines and sandpipers made a little better showing and our ground was nearly 100% snow free.

The 26th was an unpleasant morning for migrants. A freezing fog had coated everything with frost and all melt water that wasn't moving was frozen on the surface.

Swallows were still not overnighting on the 28th.

Heard Black-legged Kittiwakes first on the 29th.

There was a lot of loon noise on the 31st as some large ice-free water areas with fish became available.

The show of birds for May 1996 was pretty weak.

Most species that should be seen in the month were, but numbers were poor.

## Plants

The coolness of the month and local snow and ice conditions that affected the birds of course slowed vegetation development. Still, the plants did begin growth and not only that, several species managed to produce first flowers. *Eriophorum* grasses, black bearberry and the Wooly Lousewort produced flowers. The tundra mat willows and dwarf birch had leaves out but still furled up. *Eriophorum* blooms were seen on the 20th. By the 27th green could be seen in many clumps of last year's brown foliage.

On the 28th melt water level was dropping below usual growth level of *G. detonsa*. If seeds didn't get enough warm water to germinate we may not see many examples of this unique and beautiful plant this year.

The greenish, cream-colored, globe-shaped flowers of the black bearberry were plentiful on the 31st. A few *Pedicularis* were showing on this date also.

The remarkable thing about plants this May is their ability to deal with coldness and heat and survive till conditions become more favorable for growth. Our plant community demonstrates remarkable adaptability to varying circumstances this year. Some will benefit (*Primula borealis*), some will suffer (*Elymus mollis*), but all will survive.

## Fish

It was not till the last two days of the month that net fishing could be done by Sisualik people. There were only two remote locations where ice permitted net setting. One was at the tip of the Point and the other was back against the tablelands at the outlet into the lagoon (Kuulitqiin). Whitefish were the only species and they are pretty lean for cooking. Half dried for three days and then cooked they are better. We will have all the fish we want in June and a choice of species.

There were a lot of sheefish caught from the shelf ice near and in front of Kotzebue through May; some big ones, we heard.

A crab pot set earlier but retrieved in May (on the 4th) was reported to have taken three King Crabs. Another set off Battle Rock was checked once and had only krill. Before it was checked again ice piled on it and it was lost.

## People

There were no new campers through the month, only coming and going of family folks from camps occupied in April. Our resident population won't change much till boat trails become free of ice and Noatak and some Kotzebue people will come for marine mammal hunting and fishing.

There were four camps occupied west of Anigaaq Ranger Station and nine through the Sisualik Peninsula.

We made a last town trip on the 6th, though travel into town continued till the 11th, when water on top of the ice got too deep.

By the 13th our local creeks were flooding and Kobuk Village on the Kobuk River was under a flood watch, which didn't last long.

A first air taxi plane landed at Greene's field on the 14th.

Distance travel ceased by the 15th and most camps were having waterfowl soup by the 16th.

The ice moved at Noatak Hatchery on the 16th and by the 21st the ice was still holding 8 miles up from the mouth.

Kotzebue Channel finally opened on the 24th and boats were out the same afternoon. A first boat got out into the ocean from Kotzebue on the 25th.

Arctic Lighterage barge moved from Kotzebue up to the Noatak mouth for protection from ice on the 26th.

There was still no boat trail to Sisualik from anywhere as the month ended. June will give us much freedom as ice gradually recedes or changes back into water.

The strangest thing relating to people this May 1996 was the location in Kotzebue Sound of the near shore open lead, the area in the past and present (with some) where marine mammal and people come together for the annual harvest. What was strange this year was the short distance from Sisualik camps to the ice edge. It was not more than 2 miles. In most years it is 25 to 30 miles and in some years more than 50. Once or twice in this century dog teams would camp one night before reaching the open lead.

The landfast ice, what little there was, was of very poor quality and dangerous to travel on after the first few days of thaw. The results of this, including one more factor, was that none of the residents on Krusenstern this year hunted the open water in May. The one other factor, a human one, was lack of need.

Ringed Seals are the target species (with an occasional uguruq) this month (historically) and now most everyone depends on the June boat hunt for almost exclusively uguruq to supply the annual need for seal oil. It was a strange May in the ocean ice world, a real anomaly to what has gone before, seasonally. Wonder if the marine mammals missed seeing people at ice edge?

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# JUNE

## Introduction

June was good to us this year, it usually is, but it seemed especially good this year.

The return of beluga, the white whale, to Sisualik (the place of white whale, which is the meaning of the Eskimo place name) was the most outstanding event. A good uguruq season just prior to the coming of the whales was also a good surprise since many thought that poor and weak ice conditions might result in a short and unproductive pack ice boat hunt. The weather remained cooler than we might have liked, but it made processing meat and maktak easier and more efficient, as well as keeping down mosquito and blowfly activity. It didn't freeze either, after the various berries came into flower, and though rain was sparse it was well distributed through the month, coming when most needed. All these things, combined with several good fish runs through the month, left very little to complain about and much for which to be thankful. For a good many reasons, we folks that live in Eskimo Land should celebrate Thanksgiving Day in June rather than November.

The presence of walrus in inner Kotzebue Sound was a mixed blessing. Besides the benefits of the hunt - quaq, flippers, meat and ivory - some hunters got to see and interact with animals they have never before seen in the wild. Farther down the line in time, as the ice pack moved north, many headless and whole walrus were strung along the beaches between Nome and Point Hope. The numbers of animals, though exceeding what we have had in the past two years, were similar to what we have had in some recent past years. The problem of course is, from whence comes a headless walrus on a Kotzebue Sound Beach? They can arrive here from as far away as St. Lawrence Island and any point in between, as current and ice regularly moves north through the Straits, the dead animal trapped in the ice pack till it melts on the way north. All dead walruses that come into human hands become headless. Higher water levels or ocean swells often move the carcasses from a first beach-resting place to another, and eventually a final one where beachcombing bears take over. Some Kotzebue hunters feel they may have again received bad, unfair, publicity in this new walrus incident.

June was cool as May, but moderately so with no damaging freezing or frosts. The temperature did drop to 31º F on the 9$^{th}$ and we had frost at 33º F on the 10$^{th}$, but those temperatures were of short duration and did little if any damage to vegetation. Our warmest June day, a record breaker, was the 17$^{th}$ with a temperature of 74º F. We had snow on the 8$^{th}$; there were 8 days in the month with some rain. NW winds at 40 k on 9$^{th}$ and 11$^{th}$ were responsible for the near freezing temperatures around that time and

were the strongest winds for the month.

We have speculated from past years experience that *Gentianopsis detonsa* seeds require warm water to germinate in the dark mud shallow melt water and intense sunlight of mid to late June in some years could be the germination trigger. If that is so we will expect to see very few if any of these exquisite salt marsh wild flowers for June this year due to lack of extended warm spells while shallow melt water still covered the normal level of the seeded zone.

## Wildlife

The coolness of June and its possible benefits to wildlife is a mixed bag. Most warm-blooded creatures benefit from the effect that coolness has on insect activity. Many new born or hatched creatures can suffer great blood loss and torment when unseasonably high temperatures permit full twenty four hours of intense insect activity. That did not happen this June. We worried (I guess the swallows did too) that there would not be enough bugs to meet their nesting activity needs. It was touch and go, I guess. But after some false starts and some miserable days of sitting around waiting for bugs to fly, and many nights of retiring to inland sites that are more suited to Tree Swallow needs, they did mange to produce three eggs that hatched. We worried for a time that the parents would never find enough food to keep them going. This was especially true when we thought for a while that it was a single parent operation. Things did turn out well though, after all, as we found in July when they brought their brand new bits of flesh and fluff, with beady eyes, out from under Jonathan to line up on the handle bars of our sled for inspection. Hardy little far-traveling creatures. It boggles the mind to speculate on how they navigate and otherwise cope with life in a harsh world.

Moose, caribou and musk ox all seem to have done well with calving from numerous observation reports. Ground Squirrels have almost become a plague with abundant increase this year.

A lack of birds of prey for a number of years, the result of low hare and willow ptarmigan populations, has been a part of the dynamics.

## Caribou

As is the usual case, few caribou were seen this month in the zones we frequent. All the activity is on the North Slope and from Red Dog Mine north.

A few caribou/reindeer were seen and a few taken south of Kotzebue on the Baldwin Peninsula through June.

On the 28th there was an unbelievable report of 70-80 caribou around Fish Creek. The report was true enough. The group may have come out to the beach on a hot morning to seek relief from bugs. None were taken as the observer had no gun.

**Moose**

There were more moose sightings from coastal camps this June than in the past few years. Most of them were cows with very small calves. Since bears were also often seen in the vicinity it again seems that cow moose often seek out human camps just before or after giving birth as a shelter from bear presence.

There was a female with very small twin calves at Salluq on June 4. On the 5th two bears were seen chasing a moose with a single larger calf from the same camp.

Later in the month and on the 28th two adult moose were around western camp sites and others were seen on the Sealing Point flats.

Moose seen like this, out of normal habitat in June and July, is usually an indication that there will be more moose this early fall in the regular moose habitat of the Monument (the inland zones). The last two summers there were few moose seen by coastal campers.

**Bear**

There seems little doubt that moose birthing on the coast this June was the attractant for the unusual (for this month) number of bear sightings.

A small bear in a camp with numerous kids was killed. On the same day, the 5th, two bears were seen chasing a moose at another camp 6-7 miles away.

On the 19th a first bear was seen near a Sisualik camp. It returned on the 21st for a dead seal that he had found there. It has made tracks a few other times but has not yet got into trouble.

It is unusual to have this much bear activity at coastal camps during this month. Numerous marine mammal carcasses - uguruq, walrus, beluga, porpoise and seals - began to wash up on shore toward month's end and will act as attractants for the rest of the summer.

Bear tracks on the beach at more or less regular intervals, makes life much more exciting on Cape Krusenstern beaches!

## Sheep

No local report, but rumor has it that things are looking better in the region with fair lambing and good winter survival of last year's lamb production (yearlings).

## Musk ox

Although a few musk ox sightings were reported in May near the Battle Rock area and in the hills behind Sealing Point, a group of 16 or so began to be seen on the rocky bluff ridge behind Sealing Point early in July. We do not have in our notes any sightings for June. This is the time when higher elevation and farther inland willow leaf growth is far ahead of anything on the coast. Presumably this tender juicy new growth is attractive enough to keep musk ox inland, out of sight of coastal dwellers.

## Marine Mammals

June in these recent times has become the month for marine mammal harvest. It is the month that gives power boat access to the ice pack, which is loose enough to travel around in and contains concentrated groups of most Kotzebue Sound marine mammals. The concentrations of animals occur because of diminishing ice on the sea and the mammals generally moving north as the pack ice retreats to permanent ice zone in the northern Chukchi and Beaufort Seas.

The big events of the 1996 season were the return and relatively long presence of beluga whales to Kotzebue Sound and the nearly unprecedented presence of many walrus deep into Kotzebue Sound, in the Deering and Chamisso Island area. Added to these good events was an abundance of uguruq in the ice and enough good boating weather to harvest about as many of these locally choice animals as any hunter wanted. It was a very good month for the people of Kotzebue Sound.

Boats were already able to get out into the ice pack from Kotzebue in the first few days of the month. They were able to catch a few uguruq. Sisualik beach ice didn't open until the 5$^{th}$; on the 7$^{th}$ three uguruq were brought into Salluq, the first to be landed on Krusenstern beaches.

On the 9$^{th}$ a neighbor saw the first beluga in rough water. Also on the 9$^{th}$, with pack ice out of sight from Sisualik, a first beluga was taken at the mouth of Kotzebue Channel, maybe in a net. On the same day we saw our first beluga from our tent front, moving west. There were 10 to 15 adult animals coming well out of the water with each breath. This is characteristic when the animals are tame, not spooked and have not been hunted. They looked good! Small groups of beluga were seen each day around this time for 3 or 4 days; Noatak hunters moved down and into the Point on the 10$^{th}$.

Also on the 10th, Salluq hunters saw a gray whale as they brought in five uguruq in one load.

Spotted Seal in numbers were reported on the 12th as uguruq hunting continued; fat char from Kivalina turned up on the same day.

On the 13th our crew brought us three uguruq. Two beluga were taken in a net at the mouth of Kotzebue Channel on this day as well. Uguruq hunting is intense and productive, with 4 or 5 to some boats. The women of the camps are very busy with butchering, working the mammals for the products desired. There is a lot of work.

On the 14th a beluga tangled in a neighbor's whitefish net and took it away. Several beluga taken by chase (2) and some by net (3) on this date. Though some uguruq hunting continues, most hunters have turned their interest towards beluga. Then on the 15th walrus were reported in sight from Deering. There were some boats already halfway there when a CB alert came over the air.

Three beluga were taken from nets on the 16th. All were all sub adults. We know of seven beluga taken so far on this side. On the 17th two walrus were taken near Rabbit Creek by a Kivalina boat. On this same day 20 or more beluga were feeding and swimming around Sisualik. There was no catch made on this day but a lot of beluga nets were set on the 18th, when the ice pack was back in sight from Sisualik. On the 19th a first dead walrus landed on Krusenstern beaches on this side of Sealing Pt. The head with tusks was still on the animal.

On the 20th three more beluga were taken in nets at the mouth of Kotzebue Channel. Five dead walrus were found in ice near shore; three still had heads.

On the 21st several beluga were taken with nets and by chase. One large white one was taken by friends, who gave us a large share.

A boat out of Salluq this date (21st) ran into 20-30 walrus on ice not far from shore. This maybe a first ever happening. They killed one and towed one dead animal with tusks home.

Around and on the 22nd boats out of Kotzebue took a number of walrus. A single Ribbon Seal was also reported taken.

There again was no ice in sight from either Sisualik or Sealing Point on the 23rd. On the 24th there was a large group of beluga at the mouth of Kotzebue Channel but were turned back by an early incoming barge. On this same day a large black and white whale off Salluq was seen and thought to be an orca.

On the 26th beluga were in the ground swells. On the 28th the Point Lay beluga drive was to take place. On the 29th we helped butcher three beluga, two from a neighbor's net and one that was shot from the beach.

As we said in the beginning, June '96 was a good harvest month for Kotzebue Sound hunters. It was good for us non-active hunters too. Carrie and I took part only in the butchering and gained three plastic buckets of dried uguruq meat and oil, three buckets of maktak and many buckets of winter seal oil. Taikuu!

The number of beluga taken, though difficult to tally this year, was probably around 50 with maybe a half to ¾ taken by net. That's a total for the whole Sound. Walrus taken with boats out of Kotzebue or Sisualik was less than ten. The Deering-Elephant Point walrus take is unknown.

## Small Mammals

Both voles and ground squirrels show signs of taking over the world here when their new youngsters get out on their own. The squirrel population was already very high with adults. The depressed population of birds of prey, due to long lasting hare and ptarmigan shortage, has a good deal to do with erupting squirrel and vole populations.

A few of the odd white-faced tundra voles have been noted over at the Point.

We have not yet seen any of the other small mammals around. Neither shrews nor weasels have made themselves known, if there are some around. Porcupines have not yet turned up on summer beaches.

## Furbearers

We had a report from a person staying at a camp on the lower Noatak River that he took a beaver that was passing his camp this June. There was a second report from farther up the river of second beaver taken. These reports are interesting because there have been sporadic reports of beaver taken on the Noatak over the past 10-15 years. Noatak does not have a resident beaver population. So far as is known, the Kobuk River is the last watershed on the western continent to have a resident beaver population.

There was some sign in June that muskrat populations had picked up a bit locally from a long lasting low.

There is some sign of young red foxes at known den sites.

**Birds**

We began our 24 hours of sun above the horizon on June 2. Two of our most abundant camp passerines were very scarce here at Sisualik this month. Both Lapland Longspurs and Savannah Sparrows, though present, were observed in very low numbers. We did finally end up with one pair of each nesting around camp. We do think we isolated a major reason for the scarcity. Fifteen to twenty miles west of us, on the Krusenstern Beach Ridge complex, the land became snow free early in May. Our area pretty much retained its near total snow coverage for nearly two weeks longer due to a cool May and much retained winter snow. The camps down on the beach ridges reported abundance and early arrival of both species. These species seem to get to our region when they follow the Alaskan coast, making landfall at Cape Krusenstern and moving east or west to their final destination.

Finding early snow free habitat and food available, and with cool weather and worse conditions east over a long time window, they just initiated nest building there. A few late migrating adults sparsely filled in our portion of coastal habitat.

Our Tree Swallow box residents had a tough first week of June. Cold temperatures made insects inactive and incubating conditions probably difficult. We found later (in mid July) that they had successfully produced three young. We didn't think they would make it.

Black-legged Kittiwake were back on the ocean on the 4$^{th}$.

Our ocean front ice moved out on the 5$^{th}$. Kittiwake and loon noise then filled our heretofore nearly silent waterfront. Coastal break up is really underway, as indicated by these now-constant bird sounds.

There was a first Yellow Wagtail on the 7$^{th}$.

There was snow on the morning of the 8$^{th}$ when our flock of four to five hundred non-breeding Tundra Swans moved from *Potamogeton* feeding beds at sea level, to sprouting, growing grass forage on freshwater tableland. Salt marsh is very slow in greening due to a thick ice covering of overflow water.

On the 9$^{th}$ there was a group of two to three hundred pintails sheltering in a narrow lagoon arm near our tent. These are male and failed-nest females moving north in search of secluded good feeding areas for wing feather molt towards the last of this month. There was also a large flock (30) of cranes in our backyard today.

On the 10$^{th}$ there were more than a thousand Black-legged Kittiwakes scattered along a few miles of beach feeding actively on krill. They may be some of the north nesting cliff birds (Cape Thompson?)

On the 11th we were given a large bucket of late eggs by a friend that had made a late egging trip west. Common Eider and Glaucous Gull were species type and though some had large embryos, many were still quite good. One female eider taken from the nesting site was very fat.

The 16th had a calm early morning after a windy night and there were a lot of loud bird sounds - kittiwake, crane, and loon - very loud and very beautiful.

A first Aleutian Tern voice heard today the 17th. This species is the very latest migrant and egg layer. It regularly nests on Krusenstern in sometimes quite large colonies (200) with little fidelity to location. The chosen nest site is sometimes so close to sea level that the area can be flooded by storm surge before egg hatching if a large early season storm develops.

Swallows were noted feeding young on the 25th. Our large tundra swan flock still around but *Potamogeton* beds at extremely low water conditions from strong north winds. This note is from the 28th.

A late north flight of 20 Brant was noted on the 28th; other camps reported sighting other small flocks. This seems late to travel to northern molting grounds.

Two Aleutian Tern eggs taken by kids were quite fresh on the 28th. No sign of growing embryo.

On the 30th the large flock of swans was still here feeding, now on tender growth of salt marsh.

**Plants**

A cool May and a cool beginning to June prompted me to suggest that *Gentianopsis detonsa* plants would be few. This was based on speculation that seeds across the salt marsh are abundant and multi-year but require special conditions to germinate. A warm water bath could be one of the requirements. This is based on many years of observation of plant occurrence. Shallow snow melt water over dark mud, with a hot late May or early June sun in some years provides these conditions at the salt marsh level where the beautiful little flowers occur. Those conditions were weak this year at the time the melt water level was right. We will see in late July what this year produces.

First "real" flowers were noted on the 6th: *Pedicularis lanata* and black bearberry (*Arctostaphylos*). The "brown ground" was greening after a shower on the 7th. Chives and *Ligusticum* (one of our two wild celeries) were plants showing the most first green.

Snow on the 8th did not injure any new growth but slowed its development. Earlier greening on higher ground and fresh water locations prompted our swan flock to move

up on the tablelands for first tender greening grasses on the 8th.

On the salt flats the *Puccinellia/Carex* show no sign of greening yet on June 9.

The first pink tint was noted on *Primula borealis* buds on the 11th (this is our first salt marsh "bloomer").

The first mosquito and numerous bumblebees were noted on the 14th. These early hardy pollinators are probably of more value than is commonly understood.

*Primula borealis* blooming well by the 14th; developing into a spectacular year for this species by the 18th.

By the 17th green had overcome the brown on our daily landscape.

On the 17th a strange plant in a small pot that we had in the tent all spring bloomed! This was unexpected. I had seen last spring (a year ago) a sprouting plant at the upper edge of the salt marsh on the level where *G. detonsa* usually grow. I didn't right away know what was different, but something attracted my attention so I had the idea of putting it in the little pot that I had kept over several summers trying to get a growth of *G. detonsa* plants (never did). Last summer the sprouting plant laid out a doily of leaves that looked like *Primula borealis*, but with much longer petioles. No stalk appeared, the leaves dried, and the pot was put outside for the winter. Brought it in this spring as snowbank melted away and growth began quite rapidly, with both leaves and a flower stalk. This is obviously a biennial. It seems to key out in Hulten's as *Primula incana* a plant that is not within Hulten's range for here. I did however, find it recorded on a FWS plant list for this region from a few years ago.

On the 18th, Alpine Azalea, Alaska Poppy, Rock Jasmine, Salmonberry and *Potentilla villosa* were noted in flower on our back beach range zone.

By the 20th the mudflat *Puccinellia* and *Carex* were showing new tender but short growth.

From this date (the 20th) the next week to 10 days is critical for salmonberry production. Male plants have to accomplish pollination to produce a berry crop for us this year. There are lots of flowers.

On the 21st the ground scent was delicious! The floral display of *Primula borealis* on the 22nd in some salt burn areas of the marsh was particularly spectacular.

*Primula borealis* and salmonberry flowers at peak blossom on the 25th,and on the 26th the ground again had that "low bush" jungle characteristic where every inch of Arctic lowland ground is aggressively "used" by some species of vascular plant or bryophyte.

On the 26th, *Elymus mollis*, beach grass seed heads finally began to show. This usually happens at the same time that Chum Salmon begin their run. The salmon were 10 days earlier this year for the first time in at least 50 years.

First *Pedicularis sudetica* on the 26th. Salt marsh grasses sweet and tender yet on this date. Fine goose feed but no local geese. Salmonberry flowers rapidly dropping petals.

On the 29th new flowers noted were beach pea, dandelion and yellow paint brush.

Bluebells came out strong on the 30th; about half of salmonberry flowers have dropped their white petals.

June '96 was good for slow development of vegetation. The coolness slowed processes but lack of long frost or freezing weather that destroys rather than slows growth never happened. Fruiting will be a little later, that's all.

**Fish**

We ate our first netted whitefish on the 3rd - two fish from a net shoved down a crack in the shore ice. Things were different on the 5th when our beach ice finally moved and we shoved the net out full length: lots of fine whitefish that we scaled for cutting the next day. Our empty fish racks took on new character as pole after pole of fresh cut whitefish were hung to dry. Lots of work but the reward is long lasting.

On the 6th two of the female whitefish we were working had large egg sacks with eggs ready to deposit, three months out of season! It was reminiscent of our out of season mature egg-carrying Shee of last December.

Another heavy pure whitefish catch on the 7th finished loading our racks.

On the 10th a few lean Noatak trout got in a short set of the net. Wakes were seen in calm water on the 13th, and sure enough, when the net went in there was lots of action as fat Kivalina char arrived in Sisualik. These are the choice table fish for June.

An early surprise chum salmon was taken on the 17th at Sealing Point. This is a very early date for this species. We got two in our short salmon net on the 19th and from that date on small catches of salmon were common at all beach camp sites within Krusenstern boundaries.

Two fat char were taken by visitors with rod and reel on the 18th. It was unusual since char aren’t often taken with rod around our camp sites.

On the 29th we got a 12 lb. King Salmon in our 6" mesh net. It was very good.

June was good fishing. Our whitefish were pure. No other species when they were running which saves time. When there are flounders, saffron cod and sheefish mixed it is extra work. We got all we wanted to cut in a couple of days.

The Kivalina char came at a good time and were fat. While they are running a short net set will give more than you want.

The salmon run began two weeks early and in numbers. When in need for cooking or making a few half dried fish, a single set of the net for a short time will meet your need.

**People**

Our increase in people numbers from May residents came on the 10th, when campers from Noatak arrived by boat. A few campers from Kotzebue also set up old camps at the Point. This was probably a 10 family increase this year. A few more than the last couple of years. A first mosquito on the 14th was probably glad to see the increase in human population.

By the 15th most of the camps had uguruq. Many had what they considered enough, so they concentrated on beluga since there were some around this year. Much of that time and energy went into fixing and setting nets for beluga, as that has come to be the most sure way to have maktak, a very choice food for Sisualik and Noatak people. Sitting for hours or day in a boat anchored just outside of shallow water where beluga come in from deep water (often at night) is another time consuming beluga hunting method.

Word came by CB on the 15th that many walrus were in sight from Deering. Hunters then had an additional choice for their time. When weather was good those with beluga net set could go look for walrus. This was a very rare scenario for Kotzebue Sound hunters. Beluga have been scarce for many years and walrus seldom go into inner Kotzebue Sound.

On the 20th a boat out of Salluq came upon a walrus on the ice and took at least one. By the 23rd there was no longer ice in sight from either Sisualik or Sealing Point. And on the 25th there was only one very small snowbank remnant left in sight from Sisualik.

The time of ice and snow was over but beluga take and the finding of floating walrus continued into July.

People had a good June harvest this year from waters adjacent to Krusenstern National Monument. There are signs of animals wounded and lost that die and later wash up on beaches to feed bears, foxes, wolves, ravens and gulls. It is an unavoidable part of the

marine mammal hunt scene. The magnitude of lost animals varies from year to year for a variety of reasons.

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# JULY

## Introduction

From July 1996 we got our long awaited warmth, flowers, fish enough and a relatively light exposure to mosquitoes. The most notable event of the month for me was the locating of a sizeable colony of *Gentianopsis detonsa* on the 22nd after a fearfully long time of being unable to find a single plant before the bright purple-blue corollas gave their location away. It was a poor year for this unique plant, as predicted - tens as compared to the thousands of the past two seasons. But I did get to see enough to satisfy me till next year while adding another clue to understanding this curious, fragile and beautiful flower.

Many headless walrus carcasses on the beaches of Kotzebue Sound this month again brought notoriety to the region via the media route. And as usual, a good many half truths and misunderstandings of a complex situation has led to hard feelings between users, managers, the local public and the distant public. The unprecedented presence of large numbers of live walrus within inner Kotzebue Sound during the last half of June is a factor that plays a major role in this scenario.

We had an unbelievable high of 86º F on the 8th. A low of 40º F on the 27th gave us the good feeling of not having a killing frost during this critical berry-forming month. Seven days of rain, drizzle or showers on scattered days through the month gave moisture enough locally to keep vegetable processes going but just barely. Some near inland areas did become too dry for blueberries. Our coastal zone benefits from local fogs and night dew during these years of early season dryness.

We had a number of days of high winds and at least two storm surges of marine waters that reached medium flood stage on the salt marsh and brought waves up to sod line on the beach, but not yet into the beach grasses.

Beluga whales were still part of the scene in July and dead floating walrus, some with heads and some without, became a major issue in July. Of course once dead walrus float it is only a matter of time till all are headless.

Beachcombing bears made the scene early on and with a lot of beached marine mammals it will again be a summer and fall of occasional human/bear conflict. The over-abundance of food for the bears usually results in milder confrontations. The

local bears soon become knowledgeable about ATV traffic, camp sites and avoid them. As nights get longer the bears become pretty much nocturnal.

A first time coming of a tour ship to the beaches (old and new) of Krusenstern scheduled for around the 24th was cancelled as they were running behind schedule. As it turned out weather would have prevented the off loading of tourists in zodiacs due to several days of rough water.

## Wildlife

The relative coolness and dryness of the month tends to inhibit insect life, especially bloodsuckers or egg depositors, which probably made this July more tolerable for the larger animals. Though there were some long spells without rain, ground moisture from late snowbanks and underground springs tend to sustain good tender vegetation where animals that seek out their better food can find it.

Successful reproduction by most species seems the good picture of July '96. Young squirrels and voles were all over the land. Passerines and sandpipers, though few nested here, soon filled the land from adjacent plots where they did nest, soon after they could fly. This spreading over the land after reproductive effort is probably motivated by food search in most species. Fat reserves are required for long distant migration and for overwintering by those non-migratory creatures.

There may have been some losses suffered by some species due to flooding of the salt marsh two times. Late nesting terns, Arctic and especially Aleutians, often have their nests at such a low level that storm surge floods can be deadly, depending on time and state of growth of chicks or eggs.

Voles and shrews and some squirrels have to swim during flood and become vulnerable to predators. Glaucous Gulls (like Jonathan) do well for food when the salt marsh floods.

Most creatures and people seem to have done well in this region throughout July '96

## Caribou

On the 3rd we heard that a few caribou had been taken by camp people on the N and NW shore of Kobuk Lake as they came down to water edge from hills to the north.

Several caribou-reindeer were reported taken on the west-facing beach of the Baldwin Peninsula during warm days when these animals come out onto beaches for relief from the combination of heat and bugs.

Resident campers took one or two yearling animals on Krusenstern Flats, but these were stray single animals far from any real group. The quality of their meat usually reflects their isolation. Caribou are gregarious creatures and don't do well as loners. The one exception is large mature herd bulls that often purposely spend the months of July and August alone or with a single male companion putting on fat for fall activities.

**Moose**

There were a fair number of moose sightings this July by beach dwellers, more than in the past couple of summers. These incidents began in June at calving or shortly after and bear harassment may be a factor. The various sightings may be of the same animals that have taken up summer residence in the local areas.

Most of the sightings involve two younger bulls together, one lone large bull, one female with two calves, and one female with one calf.

**Bear**

There was a lot of bear activity on Krusenstern this month and that will probably continue into October. This is continuance of a trend that developed some 20 years ago. At that time bear tracks were quite rare on Krusenstern beaches but were regular or common within the coastal mountains.

On the 8$^{th}$ a small bear ate from a beached marine mammal in between west side Sisualik camps. On the 14$^{th}$ a bear was seen "bathing in the ocean" from the most westerly Sisualik camp. On the 21$^{st}$ a larger bear was in an inland neighbor's camp by their washing machine during the darkest hours. It was shot at and thought to be wounded. On the 22$^{nd}$ bear tracks were noticed in our backyard. It was a rather small bear and had eaten from a well-rotted beluga carcass. On the 24$^{th}$ a bear was shot at, in a western camp, again in the darkest hours. On the 26$^{th}$ several bears were seen from the most westerly camp at Sealing Point. There was a sow with two cubs of the year and four others of mixed sizes. The attractant was a walrus carcass a couple of miles from the Sealing Point house.

The combination of abundant beached marine mammals and an apparent increase in local Krusenstern bear population means a lively time along the beaches through the next 2 ½ months. Bear and people trying to live on the same land. One can hope that circumstances will allow both species the freedom they need. In the past, longer nights have meant far less sightings but increased nocturnal activity.

## Sheep

No sheep happenings in this low land zone distant from normal habitat.

## Musk ox

On the 6th a group of 8 musk ox with 3 calves was seen near the Battle Rock area.

On the 14th 6-8 musk ox were seen from Sealing Point back on the high ridge that leads down from the backcountry to the rock cliff on the lagoon edge. Several sightings through the month on this distant ridge indicates that at least a small group again spent the summer in this near beach zone. Some pilot reports indicate a larger group of musk ox has spent considerable time a bit farther inland than can be seen from the beach.

## Marine Mammals

Although ocean ice was gone and summer ground swells were building on the 2nd, belugas continued to be around into July and a few continued to be caught in nets. Many beluga nets were still set through the first week and a half of July.

A number of belugas passed Sealing Point on the first, headed north (to Pt Lay). On the 3rd two large white belugas were taken from nets by people over at the Point. A next-door neighbor took a 2-year-old beluga from his net on the 4th and at least one other was taken on the 5th. There was an aircraft report of a beluga struggling in a net west of us on the 8th. A dead harbor porpoise drifted to beach on the 9th. No bullet holes. A small group of beluga was reported in the Cape Blossom area, not traveling, but kind of staying in place. From the journal this is the last beluga sighting.

People traveling from Kivalina to Kotzebue killed a walrus on the beach at Battle Rock. This was reported to be a sickly animal long wounded. This was on the 14th.

There was a probable gray whale taken by hunters from the Buckland-Elephant Pt area on the 3rd.

A drifted in two-year-old beluga without bullet hole was also noted on the 14th. On the 16th a large white spoiled beluga was found. This one had been killed by rifle and not recovered. A beluga was seen and wounded from the beach at Salluq on the 18th and two dead harbor porpoise drifted in on the 19th. Beluga net kills. Another beluga was wounded at Salluq on the 21st. On the 23rd another walrus with tusks was found. New drift-ins after a blow on the 26th were four common seals, one uguruq, one beluga and a harbor porpoise. A live sub-adult beluga was seen at Salluq on the 28th.

Some beluga nets left in the water for long periods of time without checking and without removing probably account for the several dead harbor porpoise and probably some beluga that die and drop off with storm waves. Some guidelines and rules for irresponsible beluga netters would seem to be in order after this year of high use of this means of taking marine mammals.

## Small Mammals

Tundra Vole numbers remain pretty high as do Arctic Ground Squirrels. One vole brought to us by neighbors had the faint "white spectacles" that sometimes occurs with our *Microtus oeconomus*. When the population is high it is not difficult to find one with white marks around the head and face.

There are shrews around but do not seem too abundant. Both weasel species are rare in Sisualik this summer.

There were two reports in July of porcupines walking the beaches. They do each summer in small numbers.

## Furbearers

On the 12th I found a strange cache of dead half squirrels placed side by side close together. Some blood on the outside of fur indicated they had been killed and placed there without any covering or burying. This was a mystery. There was no sign of human involvement and since the cache was on vegetated soil no tracks were recorded. A few days later an enlarged squirrel hole nearby indicated a den was involved. Though what lived in the den was never definitely decided it was more than likely made by white fox, maybe even with a pup or two.

Except for very high population of Arctic Ground Squirrels and a moderate high of Tundra Voles there was little indication in July of the presence of other furbearers. High populations of the two prey species will eventually lead to an increase in some local furbearers.

## Birds

Well, July is the month we first get a look at production of new birds for the year.

Our closest to home view is from the Tree Swallow box. In spite of having to contend with Jonathan, the Glaucous Gull sitting on their roof all summer, our tree swallows brought forth three duplicates of themselves on the 20th. They were around

outside, lined up in a row on 4-wheeler handlebars and sled rail for feeding for a couple of days and then they were gone.

A second year Slaty-backed Gull from Siberia joined our camp gull flock on the 10th and got quite tame and used to favoritism in feeding. He came pretty ragged looking and faded. After 3 weeks he looked much more robust, but was still not accepted by the gull flock. I suppose the favored feeding made the relationship worse. He was still here on the last day of the month but disappeared soon after. We like to think he returned to Siberia a wiser bird but we have nothing to confirm that.

By the 31st passerines were filling the air by movements from other more productive places. We had only a small locally nesting population of redpolls, Savannah Sparrows, and Lapland Longspurs.

On the 2nd our flocked non-breeding swans had moved off somewhere, pintails and wigeon were into molt, and there was a flock of 100+ male Scaup in the back lagoon.

Our last tableland snowbank was gone on the 2nd. New growth of late grasses and sedges for waterfowl/goose food begins in deep ravines from this date, providing tender growth through July and into most of August.

First flying new passerines out on the 9th. Maybe a few early returning Northern Pintail (from molt) by the 13th.

By the 18th Mew Gull parents were getting real aggressive as young begin to fly.

Had an interesting experience with a Short-eared Owl family on a sourdock trip to inland lake on the 19th. The young were newly flying and the parents tried all sorts of ploys to distract attention from the scattered young.

We named our camp Mew Gull "Pipsqueak" (for obvious reasons) on the 24th. She has probably been as faithful as Jonathan for a couple of years but is not much noticed until her three offspring are brought or follow her down to ocean beach from inland. This happened on the 26th this year. Arctic Tern young were brought out to ocean beach on the 29th. Soon, in August, these two species will fade from the scene. Mew Gulls, as family, a week sooner than Arctic Terns.

On the 29th a flock-family of white-fronts was found at a sourdock lake. They could not quite fly but would fly within the week.

By the 30th some birds of prey were gathering on beachfront after north winds, when traveling young shorebirds and passerines filled the same habitat. Noted were Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Parasitic Jaeger and Merlin.

Our backyard Glaucous Gull was still sitting on its nest on the 9th of July and no flying young of this species was brought down to the beach until well into August.

**Plants**

July is plant month like August is berry month. There always seems so much to take note of in the plant world through this month. It is mind-boggling to consider what we, as imperfect individuals, don't notice each July. I, for instance, apparently walked past the beautiful, delicate and unique *Gentianopsis detonsa* for thirty-five July's without noticing the plant.

This year it was predicted in these notes in May and June that this would be a poor year for this plant. It was. After two back-to-back years of 1,000 to 10,000 plants on the Spit, it would have been difficult to find 100 this year. The prediction was based on the speculative need of a period of warm days in late May or early June where snow melt water over dark mud reaches high temperatures, to bring on germination of abundantly distributed microscopic multi year seed.

After searching diligently through plots where plants have been found in prior years through the first half of July, without success, I was surprised, as usual, to find a small colony of plants where I had been looking all the time, after the deep purple-blue buds began to show through the green. This was on the 22nd. Other scattered plants were found in the next few days. See journal page for 27th. Their season of flower barely covered two weeks. Had no report from any other area this summer.

The first flowering salmonberry plants were forming berries by the 4th. *Pedicularis sudetica* was having a good year by this date after several poor ones. This salt marsh "peppermint pinwheel" is one of the showier salt marsh flowers, but with a short time span of floral display.

First Iris flowers were noted on back beaches on the 8th. Also the first Arctic Daisies and Jacob's Ladder flowers were noted on this date.

First of the Gentian genus were see on the 11th (*G. prostrata* and *G. propinqua*). Also the first flowering of *Saussurea nuda* and *Senecio pseudo-Arnica* were seen on this date; *Elymus* grain head started pollen shed on this date also.

Iris bloom peaked on the 13th and the first open flower bud of Grass-of-Parnassus was noted on this day.

On the 16th much of our near beach vegetation leaves in particular were burned by salt spray from a strong on shore wind while great breakers were hitting the shore. Apparently even salt tolerant species can't stand this mist that may become "super saturated" through some process. *Artemisia*, fireweed, beach peas, and even *Elymus*

leaf blades are killed. The plants survive if enough unburned leaves remain. Usually only the side facing the ocean is affected.

Also on the 16th the colony of white-petaled *Epilobium latifolium* at Sisualik Point airstrip was in bloom. Our two home backyard plants are taking the year off. Plants grow but no blossoms. This happens in some years. Next year there may be many flowers on both plants. Makes one wonder how old these plants can come to be.

By the 18th salmonberries were forming well and timely rain gives further hope for a good crop.

The 19th was sourdock pick day at an inland site. Plants and crop were good, but leaves smaller than last year, which means less quantity after the day's picking.

On the 20th first tall fireweed blossomed, two day later than *E. latifolium*.

Cranberries still blooming on the 21st.

Dwarf flowering *Lomatogonium rotatum* seen on the 23rd with blooming *G. detonsa*.

Grasses/sedges at edge of salt marsh still tender for waterfowl on the 24th.

Ate 4 or 5 ripe salmonberries on the 26th.

*G. detonsa* flowering peak already past on the 28th.

A second inland lake sourdock trip on the 29th found dominant inland flowering plants to be monkshood and marsh five-finger. This *Potentilla* had attracted hundreds of small bumblebees to their dark chocolate flowers.

By the 31st salmonberry picking was reported good at Selawik and beginning on the Noatak Delta. Too small a percentage of berries were ripe for picking in our near coast zone. Another week or ten days and we will be at it too.

## Fish

ADF&G put out the Commercial Chum Fishery buoy at Anigaaq on the 5th. Chum salmon turned up two weeks early (in June) and have been around in pretty good numbers since. We took a "water" mark chum on the 6th. This is a fish that has taken on freshwater breeding coloration, much different than the usual silver color of fresh run fish at this date. The first open fishing time for chums was on the 8th, 2 to 6 PM. Opening price was $1.00 a fish but that soon dropped and stayed at $.60 a fish. With only one buyer, the fishery was virtually run (fishing time at least) by the buyer and amount processors could handle, which wasn't much. It was a very poor year for the

commercial fisherman, again, like last year, with an abundance of fish, but price and number of fish both strictly limited by circumstances.

Several long lean emaciated shee were taken in our short push pole salmon net in July, moving back into brackish water from the ocean (where they probably wished they had stayed). This happens each July, now at least, to a few adult shee. They go out to sea with the fresh spring run off flush. Things go well for a while, but soon freshwater is gone, as is prey they are used to, and they apparently can't tolerate straight saltwater for very long. We see a few trying to make their way back to estuary systems. Some must perish because what we see are big headed fish with almost no flesh on body bones and very weak.

There was a good catch of "pinks" or "humpies" in the Salluq area on the 7th. They didn't seem to reach Sisualik, at least not as a group. There was one or two a day for a while in our table net.
We took a tagged char on the 8th and reported it to AFD&G.

The outlet at Anigaaq closed tight on the 16th, a very early date, and we assume there is a real lot of fish trapped that we will be glad to work on in September.

Our day catch for our short (7 fathom) salmon net on the 18th was one chum, one humpy, 16 white plastic bags and a blouse.

Salmon were quite thick in the Sound on the 22nd with jumpers all over. A very heavy commercial catch was made at "the island" on the 25th.

On the 29th whitefish netting at Anigaaq was good, as expected, by some that set nets for fish to cut and dry.

We took three snaky shee in one short table net haul on the 30th (see Journal for details). We also took a rather rare flat fish for this area on the same day (*Limanda aspera*).

## People

July began with the ocean monster loosed for the season. Large ground swells on the first announced that fact. That same evening two visitors to the region left Sisualik Point on the backs of the growing swells in a two-person sea kayak into an increasing wind. We local folks winced to see them go by far offshore, away from the breakers, which was correct, but our fears were when they would soon have to go ashore through the building surf. Two days later we found out that they did make it ashore six miles or so down the beach at the mud bluff just east of the Anigaaq outlet. We have not heard more of their trip up the coast from somewhere South of

Nome to Barrow. We wish them well. I'm sure they had a rough first night out of Sisualik.

We enjoyed our first sunset on the 9th after a little more than a month of 24-hour sun. At the same time we were reminded that Christmas was not far off with one or two hours of sun daily.

The human population of Sisualik-Krusenstern increased a good deal through July but not by new camps or camp sites. Each established camp simply swelled up with the influx of children, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters or the various in-laws. Extended families tend to come forth to camp sites in July, much like the flowers and vegetation, to rejoice in the warm sun. Generally speaking we welcome the influx as it spreads the mosquitoes a little thinner and brings some folks to the door that one hasn't seen for years.

On the 22nd we got word that a cruise ship would anchor off the beach ridge complex and send several Zodiac raft loads of folks to the beach to walk a ways inland to the Old Whaling Archeological site. This would be a first expedition of this sort since the Monument was established and a number of local folks were a bit anxious, waiting to see how the adventure would go. Local NPS folks were of course a part of the anxious local resident group.

On the 24th we got word that the event was cancelled due to the cruise being behind schedule. The weather also came down hard on the proposed date with extremely rough seas so the event was kind of double cancelled. It was probably just as well that it was cancelled for those high waves brought in several more headless walrus, almost to where the landing was planned, and a bear walking into a camp at night near the site was fired on. Not killed, but frightened off.

From a people perspective July '96 was a pretty good July. It was not too hot, there were not too many mosquitoes, most of the time there were lots of fish, flowers and butterflies and a good deal of found ivory. There were no bad floods, fires or tragic accidents on Krusenstern, though we did have a burial because of a tragic automobile accident in Kotzebue. A young lady, the granddaughter of a large Sisualik clan family, was killed in Kotzebue and buried in Sisualik.

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# AUGUST

## Introduction

August 1996 was good to us and for us. Some of the good things that the land produced and we worked on, we will savor through the coming 6 to 8 months. It must always be taken into consideration that one has only so much time every day, especially during the harvest months, when there is usually more of a variety of things one could work at than there is time available. One must set priorities and that can be difficult. The decision-making, that is. It is then that your value system gets its annual exercise.

Perhaps of most value to us this August was the salmonberry crop. In terms of number of berries produced on prime berry ground (Salluq) there has probably never been more. On the other hand, the size of individual berries was the most talked about subject amongst berry pickers. Although there were plots with big or medium-sized berries, very small ones covered most areas. They were thick enough to make the ground the characteristic orange-red from a distance, raising hopes of a great bonanza. Close at hand it seemed to take forever to fill the in hand dipper to dump into the main picking pot. We did luck out in finding several plots of medium to large size berries that geese or other people had not yet located.

Remember that this year was made the dearer because of a complete failure of the crop last year. We will eat salmonberries this winter and often.

There was some rain on 10 different days and winds got up to 35 k on three days. The direction was S to NW on the 2$^{nd}$, N on the 25$^{th}$, and NE to SE on the 28$^{th}$. A warm temperature of 68º F on the 19$^{th}$ and a cool 28º F on the 26$^{th}$ were temperature extremes. It was not a wet August nor was it a hot August. Neither was it a particularly windy August. We had light frost on three mornings and a bit of ice in the basket on the 26$^{th}$. These frosts did not spoil our blackberry crop but it did soften some berries so that berry pickers were easily identified by purple hands, knees and some backsides.

## Wildlife

August is the month when success or failure of the breeding season can be best read. Most birds and mammals that have produced young have now led them to a large enough size that they are not hidden in the grasses or willows anymore but accompany their parents on parade for all the world to see. Locally, caribou, moose and sheep seem to have had a good season. Of the birds, Tundra Swan and Northern Pintail seem to

have had good year and Whimbrel calls were again a common late-August sound.

Whimbrels have been very scarce locally for several years. There was no indication through August that Willow Ptarmigan had made any particular gains. This is a favorite local bird whose numbers have also been way down for several years.

## Caribou

It wasn't till the 18th that we got word that caribou in numbers were in the Kiana-Ambler zone; on the 23rd word came that there were caribou at Sugar on the Noatak. This site is not far above the village of Noatak. By the 30th caribou were being taken in numbers by boat hunters on the Kobuk, at Kiana-Ambler and above Noorvik. On the Noatak they were available as far down river as the Lower Canyon, less than 20 miles from Kotzebue town. This is early and wide distribution of the NW Arctic herd, probably reflecting its continued high population. It has been good for all the people of the region and most households have caribou meat by one means or another. This early presence while most animals are fat is very fortunate and there is still a month before bulls come into rut.

## Moose

Though the moose season opened on the first we have not heard of any moose kills.

There were two moose in sight on the beach ridge complex for most of the month. They were most often seen from Sealing Point but were never hunted. They eventually moved back into the hills after fattening. They were both males, one smaller than the other.

It is not unusual for moose <u>not</u> to be hunted on Krusenstern in August. Most August moose are taken by boat hunters and none of the Krusenstern streams are large enough for boat access into the hills. In some years one or two may be taken on the flats or on the lower portion of Tuqsruq Creek. To our knowledge none were taken this August.

## Bear

The beaching of numerous walrus carcasses in July and a few in August made Krusenstern beaches a regular bear walk way. The highest concentration was between Salluq and Sealing Pt.

Remarkably, there were few sightings by people through August as nights became longer and bear visits to walrus carcasses became nocturnal. Also, people density and

activity became so intense through August on the salmonberry picking grounds that the bears seemed to have been intimidated.

The people invasion began by boat, ATV and aircraft on the 5th when only ¼ of the berries were ripe. People and berry ripeness peaked between the 8th and 15th with people from Kiana, Noorvik, Pt. Hope, Koyuk and Kotzebue on the grounds in the Salluq area.

On the 8th we got the sad word that a friend and world famous bear photographer Michio Hoshino had been killed by a bear in Siberia while in his sleeping bag! He had spent time with us twice in past years and we were quite fond of him. His passing on and the means of that passing was a shock to us. We had looked forward to his next visit and possible meeting with his new wife and child.

On the 13th there were bear, moose and musk ox in sight at the same time from Sealing Point, an unusual occurrence.

By the 16th a lot of "new" bear tracks were reported just east of Sealing Point as several "new" walrus carcasses rolled in and people traffic began to drop off.

A first whitefish net set at Anigaaq on the 20th was first checked by a large bear.

On the 25th word came that a camper-rafter had been killed on the upper Noatak by a sow bear with a young cub. We checked with a number of elders from the region and could find <u>no</u> history of a local person <u>ever</u> being killed by a bear. Some mauling, yes, but no fatality recalled. That was a surprise.

On the 27th a large bear checked <u>our</u> whitefish net at Anigaaq, doing some damage to the net in process of eating fish. The next day some one else's net was checked. By the 29th overnight netting was put on hold due to nightly bear activity.

The scene is set for bear trouble in September. One family is setting up a camp site at the netting and fishing location. Bears, following their usual pattern, will continue to eat from the oily and strong smelling walrus and then seek fresh fish if available, especially as nights get longer.

## Sheep

No reports of sheep from our location.

## Musk ox

Musk ox were seen on the Krusenstern beach ridge complex through August but only one or two animals. No larger groups were reported on the flats but some may have been seen on the back hills.

## Marine Mammals

A few additional walrus rolled up in August during times of high wave action. One or two with tusks, others headless. These new roll ups are more tasty to bears and feeding activity by them increased just east of the tower site at Sealing Point.

A lone beluga was seen several times by different people in that same vicinity. It was reportedly hit by shots from the beach three different times but no dead animal ever turned up. It is unusual for beluga to be seen at this location in August. This may have been a wounded animal from earlier in the year or a very old animal that could no longer keep up with its group.

August is the "low point month" in the annual marine mammal activity year in Kotzebue Sound.

## Small Mammals

Ground squirrels, shrews and tundra voles were noted to be in good numbers on all of Krusenstern lands. Some locations in the salmonberry picking grounds have extremely high vole population, as evidenced by ground workings in their search for roots. There was little sign of either Least or Short-tailed Weasel this month.

## Furbearers

There are signs of both Red and White Fox young of the year over much of the Krusenstern area and no indication of other furbearers, which is not unusual in August.

## Birds

Our second year Slaty-backed Gull, which was getting quite tame, did not make a showing after August 2. We assume he has returned to his probable birthplace in Siberia. He was an interesting bird through July and missed during August.

By the 5$^{th}$ molting geese and flying young with new flight feathers were noted in large

lagoons near Battle Rock. Within the week they were starting to filter into the Krusenstern salmonberry picking zones of the Beach Ridge area.

By the 7th there were lots of young passerines moving around (mostly longspurs). Arctic Terns with young as well as Pipsqueak with her family of three were still around (the Mew Gull).

First calling of geese noted in Sisualik on the 8th.

A Merlin was seen at Akulaaq on the 9th where moving shorebirds and passerines were concentrated.

On the 14th lots of waterfowl were gathering on Sisualik salt marshes, including many young Northern Pintails. An unusual male in mating plumage was noted, and a flock of 15 Whimbrel were welcomed in from the north.

On the 15th the first Tundra Swans back from molt were noted. The salt marsh has really come back to life.

By the 16th terns and Mew Gulls were scarce. These are the first locally plentiful birds to move south after Tree Swallows.

By the 20th, Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns were gone; the Merlin was seen again at Akulaaq on the 21st.

A first Sanderling was seen on the 24th and Whimbrel noise was common on the air through the week. This was good as this species has been locally scarce for several years.

A return of summer warmth during the last few days of August brought out insects we hadn't seen for a while. A first major exodus of cranes occurred on the 31st; passerines by this time were very scarce.

## Plants

The plentiful harvest-production of salmonberries was the big plant news of August '96. See Journal entry of 6th for a picture of local value of salmonberry producing ground.

In the Salluq area, berry formation for female plants was probably as high as it ever gets. Size of individual berries was something else. There were many, many very small berries. More than will ever be eaten by all creatures that feed on them. There were some plots of fine big ripe berries, but they had to be searched out.

A fourth of the crop in that area was ready to pick by the 5th. The 12th was a berry-picking day to remember for us. A day of all ripe large size berries in a plot untouched by other berry pickers. Nearly all berries were ripe by this date and our last salmonberry pick day was on the 20th. That was because we had enough. There were still many berries to be picked if anyone wanted them. The best picking places were of course depleted and many tons of berries were harvested.

Our first blackberry pick day was on the 26th with berries already softened by early frost. The crop was a bit better than last year and good for us as we found several plots with good big sweet berries.

Both cranberries and blueberries were a bit a failure. There were some, and by much legwork some could be had, but we had such a good supply of salmon- and blackberries we did not make the effort on those two species.

Some interesting plant notes other than berries had to do with our camp's white petaled *Epilobium latifolium*. Neither formed blossoms this year even though the colony on Sisualik Point air strip bloomed profusely. This has happened before and makes one wonder how long these plants live.

*Gentianopsis detonsa* had a poor year but there were some. One flower was noted on August 3, no doubt the last of the year.

There was a magnificent bloom of the latest gentian, *Lomatogonium rotatum*, as the sun warmed after a shower on the 3rd of August.

Some sedges at lower level of marshes remained tender (for goose feed) throughout the month.

On the 24th our distant tableland copse was blushing yellow against the still green willow leaves around it. By the next day the copse looked like lemon yellow flame. Fall time is here!

A new and deadly plant was found within the beach ridge complex lake system behind Salluq on the 19th. Although *Cicuta mackenzieana* is known from the Noatak Delta, it was not known to occur on Krusenstern. This was a large robust plant on the mud bank edge of a large lake containing a pair of T. Swans with one cygnet. The plant had been partially eaten by swan or geese. The seeds from the seed head were gone and some leaf stalks.

By the 18th the salt marsh behind Sisualik was quite yellow but lower level sedge and (*Puccinellia*) were still green and somewhat tender for goose feed.

## Fish

Of some concern this year was the number of incoming, overwintering char. We took very few in our table net and never had a net in the water when anything like a real run happened. The first char of this fall run, recognized by ovary-gonad condition, may show as early as August 10 and usually run very strong 15th to 25th. We either didn't have a net in, especially while we were picking salmonberries, or the run was early or the run was extremely weak. There were not many taken with salmon during the last commercial fishing period, though there were some. (A single tote of char in a salmon catch of 280 by a commercial net set near our camp.) Since cooked livers from this fall run make one of our favorite treats when mixed with blackberries, everyone wondered (in Sisualik) where were the trout? Late reports from Kivalina seem to indicate a weak incoming run there also. Surveys earlier indicated a good many "egg layers" in both Noatak and Kivalina. These surveys are done each year by ADF&G.

There has been some concern for years that changing use patterns for this species may at some point cause serious depletion.

The chum salmon run through August was strong and long and sadly there was a very limited market. Escapement was great and river conditions may have been pretty good: no floods but maybe periods of very low water.

Numbers of sub adult shee were trapped inside the Anigaaq system by its early closure. Many of these were taken in whitefish nets late in the month when that operation got underway. The shee were in good fat condition. Such numbers of shee in that system is rare, though in past years there has always been a few.

Netting of whitefish to cut for drying began in earnest during the last week of the month. A large, net-tending large bear slowed this activity some as people hesitated to leave nets in overnight. As expected, the early July closure of the outlet added up to lots and lots of fish for everyone who wanted some through August and on into September.

## People

As mentioned above Krusenstern salmonberry picking areas had many people from many different places for two weeks in mid month. ATV and boat traffic was heavy and moderate air taxi use brought in some local and more distant folks. The great number of bear tracks on the beaches discouraged camping away from already established camps. This put a good deal of pressure on resident camps and probably made stays by outsiders much shorter than would be expected. Though people were plenty and all got berries, there were still berries to pick when the last visitors left. This paragraph refers to the Salluq area.

Sisualik went through a similar invasion for blackberries during the last 10 days of the month. Waterfowl and bear tend to move off of the heavy "people use" areas temporarily. Some waterfowl harvest (to feed berry pickers) took place, but for the most part "freezer loading" held off till September.

Trash wise we were impressed by the lack of it in all areas we touched on at Salluq and Sisualik. Folks can do better when reminded, or when they are made aware of a problem they might not have thought was a problem. We are much encouraged by visitor care for the land this season.

The death of two people by bear attack this August, though widely separated by location, was cause for sadness on several planes. It reinforces the old feelings that it may be impossible for active people and active bears to share common ground.

There was a near tragic house fire on the west Noatak Delta on the 28th, at the old Jerry Coppock cabin. The single person sleeping in the house barely escaped. As it was a kind of wet time for the land around the cabin the fire didn't spread far. The loss of the cabin is tough on the owners, but the situation could have been much worse.

We had our first "hovercraft" (air cushion vehicle) pass a few hundred yards off the Sisualik beach on August 14th. It is a monster! We hope there are no more! The noise and the sight seem more than most creatures (including humans) can tolerate.

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# SEPTEMBER

## Introduction

September 1996, like August, was a rich one for us: many natural "goodies" to gather off the land, a lot of sunshine and absolutely no threat of flood or wave damage. In fact the weather systems of this September leaned much the other way, to north quadrant winds, which generally give us dry air and low water levels. It also gives us early frost and snow, which leads to early freeze up and a quick return of snow machine traveling conditions.

Our annual wish for caribou in September while bulls are fat and sweet came to be this year. Our other greatest concern, whitefish at Anigaaq as air temperatures come down, also came to be. The harvest of both these high value local foods this September was limited only by the amount of work a local resident wished to take on. Everyone that lives here got all they wanted of both delicacies and quit working them. It is very seldom that circumstances come together so that this condition can develop amongst the subsistence folks of the Cape Krusenstern area.

A September dominated by north winds as this one was, can be expected to cause some anomalies. A list of them might run like this: early foliage coloring and leaf dropping by deciduous plants and shrubs; salt marsh coloring and early maturing of seeds, bulbs, corms and roots that are important to staging waterfowl; early movement of caribou and moose, with a 10 day early onset of rut; early ice formation that is of benefit to surface traveling people; entrapment of some species of small fish that are in the process of moving through shallow waters in their annual change from summer to winter range; and the sad circumstances of cutting short the maturing and fattening time for large slow growing birds like Tundra Swans and loons. Cool dry north winds are a real benefit to meat/fish curing and preserving and they can, in this country, cause conditions terribly frustrating to boat travel. Certain freight trips can't be made and soon, before there can be any rising of water, ice formation begins and further prevents any reasonable use of boats. This year a quick and early cooling started in September and finished early in October, resulting in a rather short interval of non-travel time. Ice surface travel became relatively safe by the brave and knowledgeable in mid October.

As stated before, the most noteworthy characteristics of September 1996 was north wind, cool air and low water. The coldest and only day in September in the teens was 19º F on the 27$^{th}$. The warmest day was a toasty 68º F on the 4$^{th}$. Six days in the month

developed winds of 30 knots or better, and the direction was always NW, N or NE. Forty knot winds from the north on both the 8th and 25th were times of most extreme conditions. There was snow or rain or mixture of the two on 7 different days in the month. The snow that developed after an all night rain on the 20th kept the ground more or less white into October. We had a good and fruitful September on Cape Krusenstern National Monument.

## Wildlife

The dry cool north wind syndrome of the month is kind of a mixed bag for wildlife. For waterfowl and shorebirds, the long periods of exposed extensive mudflats and the probable accelerated maturing of aquatic plant starch storage would seem quite beneficial. So much area was so long exposed, including rich relatively untouched zones of benthic fauna, that shorebirds must have gained migration fat in record time. For all waterfowl, exposed *Potamogeton* beds in normally deeper water areas came to be within easy reach for feeding birds. Many of these areas would have been relatively untouched in prior years and might be especially rich as a food source.

On the other hand, some species of fish that need to navigate certain areas through the month to get to other areas might find it easy to become trapped, where they might fall easy prey to predators.

Insects would find the cooler temperatures of the end of the month very inhibiting to their activities. The 68º F temp of the 1st week of the month brought out a probable final day of jubilee for many insects. There were many observed, even hornets, mosquitoes and large blowflies and spiders.

Larger animals probably found hormone prompting that led them to experience sexual urges ten days early.

There was no observed great catastrophe from these different circumstances, except maybe unusually heavy gull predation in unusual areas, which highlights another aspect of life: loss to one species is usually gain to some other. The things that happen to creatures in this kind of an unusual September could be very complex and are certainly not easily read. Two September harvest species that we usually always have in abundance are char and Saffron Cod. They were both extremely scarce this year. On some days when a net was set in the ocean for saffron cod it would come up with several hundred pounds of jellyfish. Normally two or three jellyfish are as many as are ever taken in our fall saffron cod fishing.

## Caribou

Every fall since 1950 we have waited impatiently for caribou to come by our area on their fall movement south. Some years they do. Some years they don't. Early on, they would not come before October 14, an arbitrary date that in most years means that large herd bulls are well into smelly rut condition and not fit for human food. Our hope is always that they will not only come, but will come in late September while the bulls are fat and sweet.

Last year they didn't come at all. This year they came right on cue. On September 21st two bunches of several hundred turned up a few miles inland from Salluq; later in the afternoon a long continuous single-file line appeared behind Sisualik at the edge of the tablelands moving steadily from west towards thee. The percentage of bulls was high and all that were taken in the week following were sweet and fat to some degree. Our hopes, and then some, for caribou during September were fulfilled.

On Sunday the 22nd a small group of caribou walked right to the door of our neighbor's house. They passed within shooting range of our camp. The Christian community of Krusenstern people normally doesn't hunt or fish on Sunday unless there is special need. These caribou were not fired on.

On Monday, everyone, needles to say, was caribou hunting and everyone had opportunity through the week to take as many as they wished. The limiting factor for most was freezer space and willingness to chance that the cool weather would continue, so that outdoor stored meat would not sour and turn bad as it has on these dates in the past. We took three bulls and others took a few more. Those with large dog lots took more, for if meat spoiled for human use, their animals would benefit.

The caribou for the most part were in good physical condition. Some bulls had only moderate fat and others were well loaded with fat. We heard no reports of sickly animals.

Some neck swelling had begun on two bulls we took on the 25th. This is an early date for that early rut change. The animals, meat and fat gave no indication of rut smell but it won't be long. Biologist suggested that the onset of rut can be 10 days or so early during early fall cooling.

Caribou in lesser numbers were still around as the month ended.

## Moose

There were no moose sightings or reports on Krusenstern for September. This is not too

unusual if the Noatak River population is shrinking.

## Bear

A bear was seen NW of Sealing Point on the first. On the 4th a late traveling ATV found a bear in the trail on the beach at Anigaaq. They driver fired a pistol in the air and the bear took off. On the 5th a bear took a sack of fish from by the owner's tent camp at Anigaaq while he was absent for the night. The next night the owner was there when the bear came back for more fish. The bear was shot in the dark taking fish hanging on the rack. It was found dead several hundred yards away after daylight. It was probably a 3 or 4-year-old male in good condition.

Several nets had been "bear hauled" prior to this incident. No bear tracks were seen at fishing sites after this date.

## Sheep

No sheep reports on Krusenstern.

## Musk ox

A coast beach traveler saw musk ox, bear, porpoise, whale and geese west of Sealing Pt on the first. (Number not mentioned but two had been reported several times in August in the Battle Rock area.) This was apparently the only sighting in September.

## Marine Mammals

The whale (large unknown species) and porpoise mentioned above were seen west of Sealing Point. Sightings of the small Harbor Porpoise were made through the month, most often between Anigaaq and Port Site.

From mid month through the end Spotted Seals were regularly seen by boats passing from Sisualik to Kotzebue and back in the deep main channel mouth that runs past the front of Kotzebue. After the salmon and char run, Spotted Seal tend to concentrate at the seaward mouth of that channel, feeding on incoming saffron cod and herring.

A few Spotted Seals and young uguruq may have been taken before month’s end by Kotzebue people or other travelers. There has not been much participation in the late September boat seal hunt this year, especially out of Sisualik.

## Small Mammals

Since people have put away much caribou meat and fish (dried and frozen) this September, the abundance of weasels (both species), voles (several species), and shrews (at least two species) is of much concern. There have been years when a gutted caribou carcass could lay on the ground all winter and be untouched.

Other years, sure protection of "goodies" consists of sealing them in a metal drum or a heavy plastic box. This September and probably through the rest of the winter, the best protection possible is going to be needed, as all of the meat/fish-eating creatures are abundant. Several weasels were killed in Sisualik while their hair was still brown. A newly filled sack of whitefish left on the ground overnight can be drilled into by shrews, Tundra Voles, and Red-backed Voles. One must be constantly on guard to prevent long time infection, because even hard frozen material can be nibbled away and/or soiled by the creatures.

All these species are in good numbers this September. How the numbers hold up through the winter is another question, since they all eat one another given opportunity.

Ground Squirrels were still locally abundant as they came closer to hibernation in October.

## Furbearers

Red and probably some young white fox are making abundant tracks on Krusenstern beaches. They surely will increase as these species are attracted and held by large piled up food sources. The zone around Anigaaq (Ranger Station) outlet has much fox feed from fish handling and caribou slaughter and butchering. This concentration of food at this particular time may bring some surprises as young of both species (but especially white fox) may run short of food around den sites. They are now big enough to become nomadic if need arises and of course they can't get out on ocean ice yet, so beach following (from the north) is the direction or trail they are forced into (they can of course go north or south). Some years many choose the southern route and we develop, for a time, a large population of white fox that may be from summer dens far removed from birth den sites.

No other furbearer sign was obvious in September, but wolves and wolverine can be expected in the wake of the caribou movement. Mink and otter sign will be found as freeze becomes more complete in October.

## Birds

There were a lot of birds on Krusenstern in September, maybe even more than during spring migration. Waterfowl and shorebirds dominate as most passerines have moved through from mid to late August.

By the third, Mew Gull and Arctic Tern calls (common through the summer) were not heard on the air, but Whimbrel, Sandhill Crane, Canada Geese and Red-throated Loon were still loud and strong. Whimbrel have been scarce for several years, but have improved their numbers.

Willow Ptarmigan were first seen on the beach on the 7th with hopes that they would rapidly increase as they often do this month. They didn't. They have remained scarce. Heavy southern movement of cranes and geese were noted on this same date. On the 9th a Merlin was seen at Akulaaq again.

On the 11th most G. Gulls in the country (and there are lots) were back in the lagoon and mudflat areas where the extremely long low water condition had trapped many small fish in basins and potholes within the mudflats. Fish species can only be speculated on, but the young or sub adults of many whitefish species spread over the mudflats throughout the summer for food. In September they return to the deeper water of major river estuaries for overwintering. Nine-spine Sticklebacks are also in these waters at this time. Feeding was so good for gulls that even Jonathan gave into temptation and moved into the trapped fish zones for more than a week.

At this time, even though ice was forming quite rapidly, there were lots of Canada Geese, Wigeon and Tundra Swan in both the Sisualik lagoon area and in the marsh flats behind Salluq.

On the 13th, after a cold freezing quiet night, the only sound on the morning air was that of feeding geese and the gurgle of swans on the exposed and very black mud behind Sisualik. It was a real subdued sound, but it seemed like a "crowd" of voices on the still air.

On the 14th water started coming up and waterfowl spread out again, with more feeding area available and warmer incoming saltwater spilling lightly over frozen mud.

Several Sanderlings were seen on the 16th.I was surprised to see three Long-billed Dowitchers on the 19th, especially when it started to snow the next day after an all night rain. The ground turned white right in front of a watching flock of a thousand Canada Geese. There was quite a contrast on the landscape: the black water and white land or mud. Just before the snow I saw 20-30 passerines, and an hour later two flocks totaling 30 birds of the Long-billed Dowitcher kind. Three to four inches of snow covered everything but water by evening.

Surprisingly with 6" of new wet snow on the ground the next morning, there were still lots of waterfowl and even some Dunlin and L.B. Dowitchers on the mud at water line.

On the 23rd a notebook entry indicates that there were thousands of Canada Geese, thousands of Tundra Swans and thousands of caribou on the Salluq flats towards the Anigaaq outlet, where there were thousands of whitefish throwing themselves out on the gravel. There were also a thousand mixed pintail and wigeon foraging around what the tundra swans dredged up and lost. That few mile section of Krusenstern was quite rich on the 23rd of September 1996!

Found a dead emaciated G. Gull bird of the year and a dead Red-necked Grebe on the 23rd and 24th, and a live but weak Black Guillemot chick that may not have flown yet. Have not before had a live guillemot in hand. His chances of survival seem slim.

On the 25th many Snow Buntings were moving through. Still many geese and swans hanging on, but freshwater is freezing and closing up very swiftly.

By the 26th, geese were able to get at the blackberries again after a warm sunny day.

Temperatures were in the teens on the 27th, but some geese and swans were on the Sisualik salt marsh.

Then it rained on the 28th and Jonathan was back.

On the 29th, a day of fog, rain and snow, only three small flocks of geese and one small flock of swans were seen. The salt marsh is getting silent again.

On the 30th, with air clear and cooled, we saw 10 swans with a small retinue of wigeon. The swans were two families.

On this day Terry caught his last ground squirrel for 1996. A year he will long remember for its abundant squirrels. See Journal entry of 30th to see why there is a mention of Terry and his squirrel hunting here.

There were a lot of birds on Krusenstern during September '96 and though they may have wished for another two weeks of non-freezing they apparently did well down to the very last day. October will find a pretty silent beach ridge complex that for three months has echoed incessantly loud and clear with swan, crane, goose and Loon calls!

**Plants**

One usually doesn't focus much on plants after their floral displays are gone and their leaves have colored, faded and fallen off. Many – most - are at rest for the winter by the

end of September, ready to be snow covered for some protection. Others demonstrate pure faith by staking all hope for continued species existence on a flimsy but abundant seed production.

There are a few flowers that bloom into September in the region, especially when it is a wet September (which this wasn't), and in years past I have noted most of them. They are, across the board, species that bloom much earlier and have lingering, maybe stubborn individuals that hold off or are held off by circumstances of place, to a late blooming date. Strangely, some plant species have no lingering individuals. They bloom within a certain time window, all of them, and that is it for the year.

It seems that all of our bird and animal life are dependant on the work that plants do during their active season. One's mind is boggled by imagining the mass of *Potamogeton* corms and stems consumed each fall by waterfowl on their staging-fattening grounds along with how many tons of berries and sedges.

The caribou have added pounds and pounds of stored energy on their backs from plant production; moose work hard and efficiently on many plants to energize their reproductive effort and their life processes within that huge bulk through a cold, cold winter.

So it goes: the plants use the sun and the various creatures use the plants. A really remarkable state of affairs, when you focus on it.

**Fish**

There are a number of interesting happenings in the fish line this September.

The summer chum salmon run was good and we continued to get a few fresh run fish into September.

The trout-char run usually peaks in late August but often there are many in Sisualik waters to at least mid-September. They were not there this September and no one has a hint of why.

Saffron Cod usually begin a good show in the Sisualik ocean net early in September and continue till slush runs heavy at the end of the month. They were not there this September either. No reasonable cause is known.

The early July closure of the outlet at Anigaaq was supposed to have trapped a lot of whitefish for us to work on in September. It did and we did work hard and we do have more whitefish than we need, both dried and frozen.

Some started to net whitefish in late August for cutting and drying. We set a net on the 7th of September and got two full sacks overnight, which we cut for drying. On the 14th we sewed up the first sack of whitefish caught overnight. We did another on the 16th and then on the 18th we had a full day of handling fish both from net and "ditch trap." See Journal entry of the 18th for description of operation of "ditch trap."

We and most others had both enough whitefish and caribou before the month ended.

Two species dominated the catch: Alaska or Humpback Whitefish (the larger) and Least Ciscoe (the most favored when they have roe). There were also some Bering Ciscoe and sub adult sheefish.

The catch of whitefish at this season is a kind of staple of the culture. Most households have one meal a day (lunch or supper) featuring seal or whale oil products with dried and/or frozen fish or meat. The frozen fish can be whitefish from a sack put up at Anigaaq in September or trout put up in Noatak or Kivalina in late September or fresh sheefish netted NE of Kotzebue mid October-November. The whitefish taken on Krusenstern in September are a favorite winter food through out the region.

Our total catch of whitefish for freezing filled six sewed sacks. Each burlap sack is a 100 lb. gunnysack filled to the brim with soft thawed whitefish and sewed shut at the top. These finished sacks weigh up to 150 lbs. It takes awhile for one family to eat through one. They are often shared around to family, friends and often some are brought to Thanksgiving and Christmas Feast. Early in September several hundreds of the tasty fish are scaled, cut and hung on poles to dry, a food that everybody seems to like. This was a good whitefish year for us and for all of those that worked at Anigaaq outlet.

We had our fill of white clams on two days, the 22nd and 26th.

## People

There were 2 active camps on Krusenstern this September. Some of the 12 were much more active than others in fishing, waterfowl and caribou hunting, berry picking, and firewood gathering. Some have large dog lots that require more stockpiling of resources.

Early in the month there were often folks visiting from Kotzebue for black- or cranberry picking and duck and goose hunting. These were local Kotzebue residents often friends or people with family attachments to some of the 12 established camps. Again this month there were no "non-resident" visitors to the area.

There was a daily high temperature record set on the 4th, then frost on the 7th and ice on

the 10th. The Commercial Fishery boundary marker was picked up on the 7th. On the 11th, some small lakes had ice clear across them and there was a spectacular display of Northern Lights, the first that we have seen for the fall.

A telephone-CB contact with Kivalina on the 13th indicated that caribou were unwilling to cross the Red Dog haul road from the Kivalina side to our side.

By the 14th some large lakes were iced clear across and a large flock of Canada Geese were grazing blackberries across our backyard.

On the 15th, caribou were overrunning the village of Noatak. A group of six bulls went right by the windows of the church during Sunday services.

With all the low water and north wind we weren't able to make our fall supply trip to Kotzebue until the 16th. It did go smoothly though and we were then ready for freeze up. On the Journal entry of the 16th there is a statement dealing with our riches and privileges, for just living here. Place is important.

On the 17th, Cedric, the Sisualik camp ground squirrel who was supposed to be sound asleep was seen running away with one of Carrie's dirty socks from the pile by the washing machine. Carrie tried to catch him or get him to drop it but he didn't and disappeared into his den with the prize. We can't imagine what he will use it for.

The 18th is described in the Journal as a "full day of fish." The first use of the traditional "ditch trap" way of fishing at Anigaaq is described. Check out the details. This is a truly ancient way of fishing, with no nets or hooks.

On the 25th there was a whole flotilla of tugs and barges anchored off Anigaaq to shelter from the north wind and low water. They moved off after a day or two.

The 29th was such a miserable day of mixed rain, fog and snow that it caused a remembrance of "bad years" on Krusenstern, in contrast to the wonderful life and harvest we have had this September '96. See Journal for the run down.

The last day of the month cleared and cooled with sun, a very fine day with ten Tundra Swans still around on a small pond of open water in an otherwise frozen lake. The group was made up of two families, four adults with six cygnets.

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# OCTOBER

## Introduction

Freeze up and moving month (from summer to winter quarters), and that is not for us humans alone. Certain waterfowl, caribou, moose and bears as well as smaller creatures often do a good deal of relocating this month to be in a better position, as warm blooded creatures, to cope with the coming six months of low temperatures and diminished light.

October can be a very pleasant month or it can be one of the nastiest periods of time with which warm-blooded creatures ever have to cope because of the danger that wet and cold conditions pose. Warm-blooded creatures, including man, can handle dry cold to extremes, but wetness and cold are quite a different story. October is often a playtime for temperature and moisture fluctuations.

Our move was early and easy in a relative sense. We moved on the 16$^{th}$, possibly the earliest date of that event. Snow depth on the tablelands was level. The tops of only the largest of tussocks were showing through. The snow was icy and compacted, so it made unusually fast and smooth trail. We also had the help of a second snow machine and sled, driven by a nephew.

Weather for the month followed the lead of September to give us a fairly early freeze up. Made a first crossing to winter camp on the 14$^{th}$ and a Sisualik-Kotzebue crossing was made by others on the 15$^{th}$.

The coldest temperature of the month was –14º F on the 18$^{th}$ and 25$^{th}$. The warmest days were the 3$^{rd}$ and 4$^{th}$, with a high temperature of 40º F.

Winds early in the month were moderate, for which we were thankful, as we were still living in our large tent on the north shore of Kotzebue Sound. After we moved inland to the warm insulated cabin, there were winds from the SE to 40 knots on the 27$^{th}$ and 50 K on the 28$^{th}$. There were flood warnings with that storm and we rejoiced much for being up in the foothills through that time period. The floodwaters did get high and waves got big but all of Sisualik was protected by offshore crushed ice and slush, a lot of it. There was extensive overflow that delayed travel to Kotzebue for several days but the ice where the trail must go remained intact and travel resumed as soon as water levels dropped. We made a first town trip on the 22$^{nd}$. The trail was unusually fine - flat

with no slippery glare ice - and though the ice was thin there were no obvious overly thin places.

We had snow on seven days with rain for a few hours on the 28th. Our ground snow cover by the end of the month was probably greater than most years, but less than years of record snowfall.

Probably the most unusual event of the month was the death of a bear on the afternoon of the 12th. A few details can be found on the Journal entry of the 13th, but the full story remains to be told.

We last saw Jonathan Livingston Seagull on the 16th, the day we moved out of the tent. He was not seen on any of our trips down for hauling things up here. He looked robust and in fine health with full speckled winter head coloration. We expect to see him again next May 1st or 2nd. We wish him a good and safe winter.

## Wildlife

The early and rather complete freezing of fresh water by the first of the month cut our waterfowl presence time short by nearly two weeks. This may have caused some trouble for small late Tundra Swans, late-hatched Red-breasted Mergansers and any loon that couldn't make it to saltwater.

Though we saw some small looking cygnets with parents on the last open water holes, we found only one that apparently died of unknown causes and was scavenged by a tough group of five ravens.

The last caribou moving through had some trouble making crossings of thin glare ice in the lowlands. We saw several bunches using good sense and moving back into the foothills for the rest of their southern trek.

A real pile up of young, less than white, white fox developed at Anigaaq around the fishing and caribou-butchering site. Have not seen such a concentration of this species for 15 years or so.

Our catch of Snowy Owl this October was nil. Though we attached traps to poles we set them only one night after seeing two owls along the beach. There was no catch that night and the presence of many tame foxes and lack of owl sightings caused us not to set the traps again. Foxes quickly take trapped owls, usually the same night they are caught.

## Caribou

There were still some rather large groups of caribou around as we got into October. An interesting observation of caribou problem-solving occurred on the 1st and 2nd. See Journal

There were four bull caribou at Sealing Point on the third but the folks there couldn't get in shooting range. They wanted them bad enough, for the main caribou movement by-passed them through the coastal foothills while we were getting ours at Anigaaq where they came right to the beach. They did get some on the 6th - one, a fine fat female.

We saw a group of 10-12 caribou heading back towards Noatak River on the 7th. These seem to be the last few caribou sightings from the large movement through here in late September on the 7th. On the 9th (see Journal) a crippled caribou fawn on the main beach travel route was dealt with.

On the 11th a small group of caribou passed right through Sisualik camp backyard and on east without being disturbed.

On the 13th four bull caribou came through the back yard again and a nephew shot two when they reached his backyard. One was very fat with only faint rut smell. The other was a little strong and less fat. This is not unusual for this date.

Reports from north Kobuk Lake indicate a few around through the month.

The three bulls we took in late September have given us good food through the month. We will be glad for fresher meat in November and December, given opportunity.

On the 30th we got word that thousands of caribou had gone down into the heart of the Seward Peninsula for the first time in this century, right into the range of many reindeer.

## Moose

There were some old moose tracks around the cabin when I first got there on the 14th. That night a bull came right into and through the cabin clearing, looked through the open door in to the messy storage cabin, and then rubbed his antlers on a tall dog stake in the "front yard." When I came up the trail the next morning from Sisualik to move into the cabin, there were two wolf tracks in my sno-go trail of yesterday headed into the cabin and a bit farther along the tracks of the bull moose coming out. The animals were apparently there near the same time. One wolf took up the trail of the leaving

moose back up the creek. Didn't have time with moving chores to check out further interaction. The incident did give a great feeling of moving not only into good winter shelter but also into a bit of wildness yet on this date.

## Bear

After a summer of lots of beach bear activity related mostly to dead walrus on the beach, some problems developed when "people fishing" began in September at the Anigaaq outlet site. Nets are set and left overnight and then checked each day by owners with ATV's from both beach directions. One camp was set up at the site and a few dogs moved to the location. Some nets began to be checked during the night by bears. That is a mess because the net is often ripped and torn or drugged around. There is not only the catch loss but gear damage. This culminated in one 3-4 year old bear being shot in the middle of the night at the Anigaaq camp site while the bear was eating half dried fish on a cache by the tent. Around the same time, caribou turned up in numbers and the fishing outlet became a major butchering area as it is the point on the beach that provides hunters best access before freeze up to caribou traveling a bit inland. Most of the camp hunters from Sisualik and Sealing Point side concentrated their harvest point there. After the one small bear was killed there were no more bear tracks around the fishing area or on caribou heads and guts left by hunters. By this time caribou were to be found all through the coastal mountain areas and human harvest, heavy, had taken place at various points from the Noatak Delta west and east.

There were no more bear tracks on the beach or at netting sites. Many nets were set and much whitefish harvested by both net and ditch trap.

It was a surprise then when on the 11$^{th}$, in the early morning dark hours, the "bear with the big feet" known by most beach traveling residents, turned up in the midst of a Salluq camper’s dogs. The beach had been bear track free for nearly one month. Now there was fresh snow and most fresh water ice could be walked on or traveled on. The bear was wounded and later killed. It had eaten from a couple of old walrus carcasses before getting into the dog yard. No one doubts that it was the "big footed bear" that had checked net and avoided close contact with camps for several years. What brought him to the beach at this late date can only be speculated on, though one can imagine that he thought one more belly full of rich sour walrus meat and oil would be just the thing to hibernate on. It is an unfortunate loss of an interesting creature that seemed to be getting the knack of co-existing with humans.

## Sheep

No word of sheep sightings on Krusenstern in October.

## Musk ox

Though some ATV travelers west of Sealing Point often see one or two musk ox in the Killikmaiq/Rabbit Creek area they don't often mention it unless it is the only living creature they see over that way. On the other hand, especially in October, a walrus swimming or hauled out and caribou sightings are always right away on grapevine news. We don't seem to have any musk ox reports for this October.

## Marine Mammals

A female walrus hauled out on the beach 6 or 7 miles NW of Sealing Point with her calf was taken on the 8th by a Sealing Point traveler. The meat and quaq was good and many people shared in the "different" food.

On the 9th a seal hunting boat from Kotzebue got into Sisualik with one young uguruq and one seal. Due to heavy slush, even the next day, he couldn't get back into Kotzebue. He ended up leaving the boat in Sisualik and flying home.

Kotzebue boat hunters took a few Spotted Seals, Common Ringed Seals and yearling uguruq in early October but there were no boats hunting out of Sisualik this fall.

On the 12th we had young uguruq meat from one taken by family at Sealing Pt. That was to be our only taste of uguruq for this October. They shot two from the beach but one was not recovered.

Fall time seal hunting by boat and from shore continues to fade as an activity that in the near past absorbed a lot of time, equipment and expense. The benefits of the hunt were much more valuable just a few short years ago, and individuals had the time available to put into the activity. It is another of those truly cultural seasonal activities that required both hunter involvement and home based processing crew to make it worthwhile. If any part of the activity falls by the wayside, the whole work soon fades away. We are well into the fading in Sisualik and Kotzebue is trending that way.

## Small Mammals

We have lots of small mammals this October. Ground squirrels went into hibernation with high numbers and some were still seen out through the first week of October.

Tundra Voles and shrews are plentiful around Sisualik especially around our stored

sacked fish. There are Least and Short-tailed weasels, both there and here at winter camp, where red-backed voles and shrews are more abundant. Having the weasels and voles both abundant works to our advantage if our cards are played right. The challenge of course is to protect our stored foodstuffs.

Red squirrels are plentiful up here in the spruces and they face a winter of challenge again with a small spruce cone crop. The weasels up here keep those sociable little creatures on their toes or up in their tree nests rather than in their warmer ground dens. This dual home situation of red squirrels thoroughly frustrates my squirrel hunting dog Terry.

## Furbearers

White Foxes made a great and rather surprise showing early in October. It has been many years since we have seen so many, so early. This happens when white fox dens north of us have pretty good production and the food source that sustained the broods to near adulthood dwindles. They are forced to wander early on to seek food, before ocean ice forms in November and December. Normally they do leave land and seek a living on ocean ice when that becomes possible. They did pile up at Anigaaq this October. They are quite tame and are not very white yet, not priming up till December. Four or five could often be seen from one spot on the beach and tracks in fresh snow indicate numbers into the hundreds.

Wolf tracks have been unusually abundant around our area of orbit since caribou came through in late September. There were new tracks of multiple animals every day after we made a trail inland to the cabin at mid month. A small pack apparently settled for a while not far west of us, in the mountains.

No wolverine tracks were seen this month but the movements of northern caribou through here was so extensive that some could be expected later on.

There were a couple of different size mink tracks on our creek when we moved up and one land otter.

Both red and white fox have been close around the cabin since our move up at mid month.

## Birds

October 1996 was not much for the birds. The north country is pretty unforgiving in its treatment of birds. If you are a bird and circumstances have not allowed you to be ready to migrate, for whatever reason, October is the month when it all comes down on you.

All surface freshwater freezes and snow cover limits much access to possible useable food from the ground.

On the first there were still many Tundra Swans behind Sisualik. These are flocks made up of family groups, often with young that of course can fly but may yet be short of stored energy (fat) or sufficient muscle development to take on the long migration flights. Every day they can keep open water with feed beneath is gain to these large hardy birds that just barely have time from ice out to freeze up to hatch eggs, herd young to good feeding and flight, and then be ready to guide them on their first move to wintering areas. At low marine water stage there is moving fresh and brackish water over *Potamogeton* beds behind Sisualik, which permits access for feeding waterfowl.

There were also many traveling, south-moving Snow Buntings on the date. This movement of our last migrating passerines began in late September and will continue into mid October.

On the 3rd there was one family (5) of swans and several wigeon, mallard and pintail in a small open water hole at Akulaaq.

By the 14th the Glaucous Gull flock at Anigaaq outlet had grown to over 1,000 due to available fish there and none elsewhere. A solitary young of the year Yellow-billed Loon was seen in the ocean on this day also. It is expected that a few of these giant seabirds will be seen near Krusenstern beaches this month. Some may not yet be able to fly and are usually seen swimming north to south.

By the 5th passing Snow Bunting flocks had grown to 100+ birds per flock.

Jonathan was back by the 6th from an unusually long absence. We speculate that there was a bonanza of small fish trapped for an extended period in the basin between Kotzebue and Sisualik due to extremely low marine waters.

By the 8th Snow Bunting flocks in the *Elymus* (beach grass) were numbering into the 200+. Also on this date it was noted in the journal that no further sightings of swan or wigeon were expected.

On a trip west to Sealing Point on the 11th we found the intact wings and a few bones of a recently scavenged cormorant. The lack of a white patch on the wings and the glossy green-purple black feathers indicate the possibility of a lost Brandt's Cormorant out of normal range. We normally have only the Pelagic Cormorant off the beaches of Krusenstern.

We also saw a first Snowy Owl on the 11th and set pole traps for one night without making a catch. We did not reset traps due to owl scarcity and White Fox abundance.

Last saw Jonathan with another adult gull and one gray bird on the 15th.

Saw a Spruce Grouse on the 18th, a new bird for the month with the two Gray Jays at winter cabin site.

A few Willow Ptarmigan were seen through the month and we ate a few, once as a gift from a friend and neighbor. Their abundance is still much depressed in an area where they were historically a staple fall time (October) food.

For the first time in many years we did not take any Snowy Owls in October. There are three reasons. We did attach traps to the usual poles on Carrie's allotment land behind the tent, but we had the traps set only one night after we saw a couple of owls. There was no catch that night and young white foxes had already visited each pole. We did not reset the traps. We moved early (on the 16th). Owls seemed scarce. Tame white fox would likely take any owl caught, even the first night.

## Plants

Our move on the 16th put us in a white spruce patch again for the winter. Many small creatures, both birds and mammals, use the seed-nuts from spruce cones for food, when available. We like to see a good cone year since it means the company of several species of birds in sometimes relatively large numbers. It also means an easy and productive winter for red squirrels and voles. We won't have the cones again this winter and though there may be a few it appears that there will be less than last year, which was also poor.

Dropping back to the first of the month for a moment, those waterfowl that in some years hang on until mid month (not this year) are exclusively dependent on one plant for piling on last minute migration fat. That plant is *Potamogeton* (*filiformis* and *vaginatus*), a brackish water aquatic that forms beds in back water lagoons and mudflats throughout the salt marshes of Cape Krusenstern. That use makes this species and the well being of it very important to the region. It is very heavily used throughout the ice-free season. The insects associated with the plant and its beds do much to sustain local and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds and several local species; its importance to the ecosystems of Kotzebue Sound can hardly be overstated.

## Fish

The numbers of Alaska Whitefish (humpback) and Least Cisco trapped in the Krusenstern Waterway this year by a July closure of the outlet to the sea was so great

that those people fishing it had all they wanted and more by the first week of October. This includes use as dog feed, dried fish, sacked frozen fish, and of course cooked table use. Though multitudes of fish were still available to those that wanted to work them, fishing effort dropped off to nothing by October 10th.

Our best Saffron Cod catch was two buckets on the 7th. We got a few Saffron Cod early in the month but this species has been scarce this fall at netting time and still scarce later in the month, when jigging through thin ice in Kotzebue or Noatak River sloughs is usually extremely productive. Extremely low marine waters through September and into October is thought by some to be the reason of scarcity.

We did not fish herring this October, having too many other things to do.

We heard by CB on the 10th that the first sheefish were being eaten on north Kobuk Lake from nets set under ice.

On the 23rd a Sisualik neighbor who put shee nets up in Kobuk Lake left us two large shee to pick up in Sisualik. They will taste fine again.

By the 25th the report came down that the shee netters were getting lots of fish.

The thin ice period of October through December is the time shee netting is most productive. They have apparently had good catches again this October.

Kotzebue smelt and tomcod fishers (jigging) have had a poor October, with only a few of both species.

## People

October is moving month for people. We moved inland on the 16th. Sealing Point and Salluq families moved out on the 20th. A few others vacated camps and by month's end the only occupied camps were in Sisualik proper and numbered eight. Several of these may close down in November.

The last boat from Kotzebue was on the 9th. The captain couldn't get the boat back to Kotzebue due to heavy slush and rough water. He flew home. We first had slush ice on Sisualik beach on the 10th.

Made first trip to winter cabin on the 14th.

We had a first sno-go from Kotzebue on the 15th. This is only 3 days off the historical all time early date of October 12th.

By the 17th town travel time from Sisualik Point (9 miles of thin ice) was only 20 minutes for those that did it. Fine trail, no glare ice and smooth.

Cut down an old friend on the 21st (see Journal).

On the 24th an intoxicated visitor to a Sisualik camp who attempted to walk back to Kotzebue was found dead a mile or two short of town.

On the 25th we got our first warning of a winter storm watch. Blizzard and coastal flood watch came on the 26th and 27th. We were glad to be up in the foothills.

Two searches for lost travelers were on going at this time. Both turned up okay, one in Noatak, one in Noorvik.

A doctor on a trip from Barrow to Wainwright has not been found.

Sisualik came out all right in the big storm. A lot of broken ice and slush acted as a mile long breakwater. We did hear that some Point Hope people were evacuated to the higher ground of the community center.

Overflow was extensive but trail ice between Sisualik and Kotzebue was not broken up this time.

On the 31st a couple of sno-go's made the crossing again, without sleds.

October kind of went out with a bang. Have an idea that we may be in for more wind, snow and overflow in November - we had too much good weather in September and October!

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# NOVEMBER

## Introduction

November was hard this year of '96. That is, there was little softness, sympathy or compassion in it. Strong winds, much snow, floods and maybe worst of all, a short period of icing through some zones that may be the most extreme in at least 50 years. To highlight this dismal assessment, we had a heavy southern movement of a North Slope segment of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, called the Teshekpuk Lake Herd, for the first time since radio-collaring technique came on line. This herd has wandered around the North Slope each year but has not before joined the deep southern movement that most of the rest of the WACH undertakes each fall. This change in pattern is of much interest to biologists and laymen alike, both of which have been anxiously awaiting some sign of drop in the herd's extended high population.

We saw far less moose in our local area of coverage than in any November since the early '70s. The reasons for this situation are complex and not easily read, but some understanding is possible. It may not be as serious as it might seem at first glance. More on this later.

On the positive side, the two heavy waves of caribou that passed through here this fall have left everyone with a good supply of meat, so limited numbers of other species (ptarmigan, hare and moose) is not the catastrophe it would be had caribou migrations passed out of reach from Krusenstern.

A low of a minus 30º F on the 30$^{th}$ was (appropriately) the coldest temperature of the month. Above freezing temperatures of 33º F on the 2$^{nd}$ and 17$^{th}$ were the warmest of the month. Winds of 35 k, 52 k, 45 k and 40 k from the E and SE on the 8$^{th}$, 9$^{th}$, 14th and 15$^{th}$ explain why our snow distribution was so unusual by the end of November. We had some snow on ten days of the month and the potentially damaging icing conditions came on the 15$^{th}$. We had minus temperatures on only 10 days in November, which means it was probably relatively warm when compared to historic records for the month. Winds of 80 knots at Wales on the 15$^{th}$ were the strongest we remember hearing about.

## Wildlife

As mentioned above in the introduction some concern has developed this November for some species. What does the late movement of nearly all caribou off of the North Slope mean after many years of a sizeable remnant remaining there year round? And along with that, is there any special significance to an earlier heave movement from the first wave of southern migrants far out on to the Seward Peninsula, where they have not before ventured in this Century? (There was, in the distant past, a resident year around population there).

There is known to be a diminishing trend in the Noatak moose population. How does this relate to the extreme lack of moose this November in habitat on our NE corner of Krusenstern?

How about the heavy icing that occurred in our area on the 15$^{th}$? This may or may not be critical in some areas with some species of living creatures - only time will tell. There is no known immediate problem but it is difficult to get a reading on these kinds of events during the short days of November and December. A further complication on this issue is that weather prevented the scheduled fall ADF&G moose count on the Noatak and Kobuk range this November.

Another concern is the obviously high numbers of wolves on Krusenstern this November. We have not seen that much wolf sign before in our time here, but it is not unexpected with the multi-year high of caribou numbers and their different migration pattern this year. This concern has two parts. One is the impact of high wolf populations on species that can ill afford high predation (sheep, moose, and musk ox). The other concern is for the wolves themselves, i.e., displacement (due to altered migration and wintering locations of their prey base) and concentration near human population centers where mechanized wolf catching has become pretty efficient.

We still have no hint of snowshoe hare return to our area. We are closing in on a nearly 20-year absence, and that seems far too long.

## Caribou

The first hint of a second wave of caribou from the north came on the 2$^{nd}$ and for the following 10 days, larger and smaller groups passed daily through tidelands of Sisualik, hitting the north tip of the Baldwin Peninsula both east and west of Kotzebue. None of the animals moved through tablelands or foothills unless chased there. They stayed on the ice and mudflats of tidelands zones. That is unusual. Most

often the migrants pass through here on either the tablelands zone or the foothills.

Some folks noted and commented on subtle differences in the appearance and behavior of these animals. They were darker and duller appearing, with less white showing in a group of animals; they generally had shorter legs when compared with animals of the first wave in September. It was also mentioned by many that the animals were quite tame and allowed close approach of snow machines, much unlike the usual response of the earlier, more sophisticated animals.

It was on the 7th that we got word that these indeed were "different" animals - radio-collared animals of the Teshekpuk Lake Herd. Most of them were reported already south of Point Hope and some down into the Baldwin Peninsula, south of Kotzebue. This herd has not come south, wandering much on the North Slope, but never followed the pattern of most of the WACH.

What this means at this point is anybody's guess. We hope they find a good wintering range and return to wherever they will when the time comes. Because of the radio collars we will know a little more about the WACH by this time next year. It is a wonderful opportunity for biologists and others that share an interest in this remarkable species that has been so long a major part of northern animal life.

On the 11th we first noted antler-less bulls.

Reports were mixed on meat quality (fat). Some reported fair fat reserves; other reports indicated nil stored energy. We killed two females, both with fawns, on the 11th. Their condition was borderline. Marrow was firm and oily, but mesentery and kidney fat was just barely visible.

The only animals in a healthy herd that would be expected to carry back fat at this date would be females without fawns. Lucky hunters reported some in that condition.

By the 20th there was little sign of continued caribou movement south, but some large and healthy groups were on Krusenstern in the Sealing Point area and it seems likely they were also present on the boundaries of the Monument.

The extreme icing conditions of the 15th may make feeding more difficult for caribou in some zones, but not impossible. Other zones may be free of the problem. See Journal entry of the 15th.

On the 29th there was still talk of "good" caribou in the Sealing Point area.

## Moose

Since the mid '60s (when moose were just becoming common in the area), November is the month when we have sought out a large female moose without a calf for our winter moose meat, whether we have had a good year for caribou or not. We did not have refrigeration in those days and that kind of a moose was the only kind to have much fat at that season. We often looked over as many as 100 animals before making a choice and finding opportunity to collect the moose of choice. Usually at this time, at the tail end of rut, moose are on high ground, away from glare ice and often in large groups (20 or 30). Much of our location is that kind of habitat adjacent to the lower Noatak River. In late November and December (varying from year to year apparently depending on snowfall) most moose move down to the main stems of the larger rivers.

This year, though effort was limited, we know of only three moose within our normal moose hunting area. A bull with a single antler was seen near the cabin on the wet icy day of the 15$^{th}$. He stayed in our spruce patch and creek for nearly a week.

On the 22$^{nd}$ a cow with calf entered the same area but was moved out on the 24$^{th}$ by two wolves.

These were the only moose known to be in the area, either by sight or tracks.

On the 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ I checked out areas where moose had concentrated in past years and found no tracks and no moose. A comment in the notes for those two days may give a hint. My comment was that the landscape from "lookout" points looked more like a March scene than a November one. Extreme easterly winds had put most all of an abundant snow cover into tree patches, creeks, and draw/ravine areas where moose in past years spent feeding hours. The timberline zones where they normally spent much time were put in bad shape (for November) by huge and deep snow banks with several "crusts" down through the depths. These conditions would make it very difficult for moose to function in this habitat this year.

Another factor was the amount of wolf activity in the area, more than we have seen before at this location.

On the 27th late visitor-travelers left us a moose nose given them by a hunting team dropped off by air taxi South of Noatak village not far from the Hatchery Site.

Moose are said to be plentiful bordering the river between the Hatchery and Noatak village.

## Bear

We did hear an interesting rumor in mid November that several bears (three?) were still making tracks in the snow and were headed for Noatak village from the Nunnaqsraq (the big bend) area just south of the village. They apparently didn't reach their target destination for we never heard more of them. There seems little doubt that there were bear tracks; that area just west of the river is a well-known denning zone. There have been other mentions of bears out in the Hatchery area very late this season. We may hear more facts as the winter wears on. Many and late salmon in the river combined with extreme low late fall water levels may account for some late bear activity.

## Sheep

We have no sheep reports. If the heavy freezing rain on the 15$^{th}$ occurred on sheep range east and north of us, then there would be little chance for sheep survival. The hope is that on sheep winter range the ground temperatures were much higher or upper air temperatures much lower so that snow instead of rain fell. By the time of this writing we have heard that extensive icing from this mid November storm has been catastrophic for reindeer and their herders in far eastern Siberia (right across the water from us). Extensive starvation has prompted an attempt at mass evacuation out of the iced area.

## Musk ox

We have not had any word of musk ox this November.

## Marine Mammals

Common Ringed Seals were noted in the waters off Krusenstern beaches on the few days of "good" weather through the month. An ice shelf was in place through the month on the east side of a line drawn from Sisualik Point to Cape Blossom on the Baldwin Peninsula. On the west side of this line pack ice moves in and out and around at the whim of wind and current. No stationary ice shelf had formed yet through the month on the gravel shore edge through Krusenstern, from mid Sisualik west along the Monument shore through Port Site. This is more or less normal, as shorefast ice doesn't usually form till December. The seals mentioned are usually seen in ice-free waters from shore. They can and used to be taken often with rifle and kayak.

On the 4th two were shot by a Sisualik neighbor. One sunk (unusual but can happen this month for various reasons); the other floated and was retrieved.

On the 12th we had news that Gray Whales had arrived in Baja, California a full month earlier than usual. One wonders why and since some of them come from here and North Slope waters, one also wonders if there could be any environmental connection between this unusual event and the southern exodus of the Teshekpuk Lake caribou group.

**Small Mammals**

Our Sanningaruq area has a high population of both Red-backed Voles and shrews. We have had to take special precautions to protect our stored food that the creatures also like. Both are adept at finding their way to favored foods (meats-fish-cereals etc.).

The abundance of Red-backed Voles may be responsible for a few Marten tracks again in the area. As for shrews, there seemed too many in our storage shed when a fresh caribou heart accidentally got left unprotected overnight and was nearly gone in the morning. By placing an empty 3 lb. coffee can with a half-inch of seal oil in the bottom (an old Eskimo shrew trap) we reduced the numbers rather quickly. I didn't yet make an actual count but after three days the bottom was covered with dead shrews – possibly a dozen.

Red Squirrels seem fairly abundant but they face another tough winter with white spruce cones. The fall was quite dry, good for their stored mushrooms and stuff and they early on were working the newest buds on the tips of spruce branches.

There are signs of porcupines around in the usual places.

**Furbearers**

There were numbers of white and Red Fox in the area through November. A little trapping and some snow machine catching provided a little fur for some, but there is no indication of much effort put into fox catching.

There was however a good deal of effort put into wolf and wolverine capture, primarily by tracking with snow machine. It is hard to know the total catch from any given area but it is known that some individuals took as many as 5 wolves and 4 wolverine from within a 50-60 mile range of Kotzebue, a few probably from Krusenstern proper. We have seen more wolf tracks around our small area of orbit

this November than at any other time in our history here. Most of the successful hunters said both wolf and wolverine pelts were not prime and would not hunt any more until December and later. This is a reflection of our sometimes long warm and windy spells through the month and lack of extended cold spells. We had minus temps on only 10 days in November.

On the 23rd I received two good surprises. I ran across both wolverine and marten tracks, both of which I haven't seen in our area for some time. The wolverine probably won't last long but the appearance of marten again may indicate that a western expansion of range may indeed have occurred when the first in recorded history came through the NE corner of Krusenstern a few years ago. The extension of breeding pairs would be from Kiana on the Kobuk to the east bank of Noatak River. It is not yet clear that there is an established population on Krusenstern. Only "slop over" or drift animals through early winter.

Two minks and a single land otter have made tracks on "our creek" in November.

Both Least and Short-tailed Weasels have been common this November.

There are many more muskrat "push-ups" this November on the large lake our trail to Kotzebue crosses.

**Birds**

On the very first of the month I was glad to be startled again by the "thunder wings" of a handsome Spruce Grouse as it flew from its bed in the snow to the top of a small spruce. There are fair numbers around this fall. It is a species that thrives during multiple years of low bird predators. Many years without hares has brought our avian predators to a very small population. Northern Goshawks, Horned Owl, Hawk Owl and Gyrfalcon are all winter scarce in this area. The "Fool Hen" doesn't last long when those expert bird-catching species are abundant. Their numbers are currently winter low because both hare and ptarmigan populations have been at an extreme low for many years.

Small winter birds that we have in numbers during those years when the white spruce seeds are abundant are not here again, lacking a food source. No cones again for a second year. (This group would be Pine Grosbeaks, White-winged Crossbills, Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees and Redpolls).

Our three camp Gray Jays spend a good bit of their time keeping another pair away from here. They are only moderately successful so we often have five around most of the day.

Heard a loud crowing willow ptarmigan early in the morning on the 3rd and it sounded wonderful. Their numbers are up some this year and we expect to see more, as days get longer and willows more covered by snow.

Have not see other bird species this month except ravens, who have been running in some pretty tough-acting gangs all fall because caribou and their predators have been abundant. These groups have seemed very aggressive.

Would expect to see Snow Buntings, McKay's Buntings, eiders and Oldsquaws down next to the ocean, but have spent little time there.

Have not seen Snowy Owls or Gyrfalcons through November, a disappointment.

Also have not seen or heard woodpeckers of any kind, also a disappointment because within the silent winter spruce forest, this hard working bird livens things up.

Neighbors with dog yards have had chickadees and redpolls but we have not seen any.

**Plants**

As noted above our local white spruce cone crop failed again bringing hard times to Red Squirrels, Red-backed Voles and the winter seed eating birds.

The extreme icing on the 15th sealed some plants in ice for a while. Grass seed stalks and other tall ground plants that stood out above snow surface remain ice coated.

There is a report out that reindeer in eastern Siberia have suffered heavy starvation because of the ice sheet laid down, probably in the same storm we had. The report we have heard sounds pretty catastrophic.

Having no cones to work on, Red Squirrels do a lot of work on this season's new growth of white spruce tips. A lot of the material falls to the snow surface so I'm not sure exactly what part of the twig they are ingesting - maybe the bud nuclei for next year's reproduction.

**Fish**

Shee net fishing went well in NW Kobuk Lake in the usual fall locations. Some great catches were made as high water rushed in after much low water. We received a

share off and on as fisherman friends dropped some "eating fish" by after checking their nets.

On the 21st, coming home from town, we stopped by the tomcod and smelt fishers out on the bar by the staked trail. They were doing pretty good and they took up a collection of smelts and gave them to us for our supper. They were a treat and very good fried. They also gave us some saffron cod. The fishing for both those species has been very slow this fall. It was poorest early on and did begin picking up after mid November. Usually it is best soon after ice forms but not this year, probably because of excess low, low water in early freeze up period.

There was much shee and whitefish quaq at the Thanksgiving Feast.

## People

Trail stakes from Kotzebue to Sisualik were finished on the 12th, much to the pleasure of all the travelers that will cross that 9 miles of ice between now and next mid May.

After the strong winds and rain of mid month (80 knot winds at Wales, rain in Kotzebue on the 15th), people of Sisualik will have to use an axe with their shovel in order to move snow. The snow banks are big and hard and it won't change till the sun warms it next May.

There was an oil spill (diesel) discovered on the 21st at Wales. The clean up was said to be good, the cause maybe extremes of weather and erosion.

We had another unfortunate death of a Sisualik person on the 23rd in a sno-go and booze accident close to Kotzebue. They were riding double at high speed when they hit an edge of ice. The driver was killed; the passenger survived, but will spend sometime healing.

Our trail into town got quite good and fast toward the end of the month, 1 hour travel time, and we were able to make both Thanksgiving and Carrie's birthday (two days later) by traveling home after feast. No overnighting.

There were 8 occupied camps in Sisualik through November and none west of there. We are the only occupied <u>inland</u> camp within the Monument. Our neighbors four miles to the east (on the Noatak Delta) are outside the boundary.

Around the 22nd there was much sno-go travel through and around the monument. The main attraction was wolf tracks and the discovery that some of the Teshekpuk

Lake caribou in the Sealing Point area were quite fat. A few wolves were taken and reports indicated that both wolf and wolverine had less than prime fur.

Some White and Red Fox were also taken. The reds prime, the whites not.

# MONTHLY RESOURCE REPORT

# DECEMBER

## Introduction

The most notable thing about December 1996 might be a December without a gale!

One does not expect a winter month in the Arctic to be without wind. We did have wind, but 30 knots on the 19th and 20th were the only near gale winds that we saw this December. Only six days of some degree of snowfall also seems quite moderate. We did lose our sun down to 1 hour 43 minutes but were well on the way to getting it back by the 31st. Everyone was grateful for the moderate weather through Christmas and New Year's.

A minus 34º F on the very first day of the month with a high, that day, of only a minus 25º F seemed to give hint of a rough month, but it didn't turn out that way. That was our coldest day of the month and 20º F on the 21st was our warmest. That really gives the true picture of our moderate December of 1996.

Noteworthy also was the return of marten to the NE timbered sections of Krusenstern National Monument. We documented their first appearance, a range extension, several years ago with the hope that they would become a part of our regular animal community. That didn't seem to happen. Now there seems reason to speculate that the range extension did happen (roughly from Kiana to the east bank of Noatak River) and we are seeing this year some of the graceful and beautiful furred animals in the white spruce patches west of the Noatak River.

It has seemed a great privilege to me to have several northern species move into the area I have been active in for the past 50 years. These species include the return of caribou in this century, and possibly the first appearance and building of a large moose population, apparently establishing itself where it was not known before.

## Wildlife

The short daylight hours and often lack of distant visibility always makes December a bit lonesome out on the land because one usually doesn't travel far and the land can seem pretty absent of other creatures, even when they are relatively plentiful. This December is really lacking in diversity and in large numbers of any species. A list of species that one might expect to see, and have been seen in other December goes like

this: Snowshoe Hare, Lynx, Moose, Wolf, Red Fox, Wolverine, White Fox, Mink, Land Otter, Polar Bear, Musk ox, Red Squirrel, and the two weasels. In avifauna one might see Goshawk, Gyrfalcon, Golden Eagle, Snowy Owl, Boreal Owl, Horned Owl, Hawk Owl, Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Common Raven, Redpoll, White-winged Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Spruce Grouse, Boreal Chickadee, Willow Ptarmigan, Rock Ptarmigan, Black-capped Chickadee, Eider and Black Guillemot. This December we have seen only those underlined which gives an idea of how sparse our community of creatures is this time around.

## Caribou

There were a few remnants of the Teshekpuk caribou migration around the first 10 days of the month. These were mostly one's or two's, the lost, disoriented or stray, wounded animals that always follow a major herd movement.

There was a good large group in the Sealing Point area (including at least one radio-collared animal) that apparently had decided to overwinter there. The last hunters (and there were more hunters than one would expect after the extended and abundant movement nearly through Kotzebue a couple of weeks previous) reported caribou with good quality meat (fat) from the group in the Sealing Point area.

After the 10th we did not see hoofed animal tracks in our area anymore, either caribou or moose.

With caribou this was expected. As migration lines drop off only overwintering groups will remain and they tend to orbit around good feeding areas they have found. It will not be clear where there are groups of over wintering caribou in our area until the longer days of late January and February permit people to travel around more and reports will trickle in. The Sealing Point group and some on the Baldwin Peninsula south of Kotzebue are the only groups we have heard of through December

## Moose

The only news of moose we have for December is a nose given us on the 4th by some travelers passing through. They had got it from an Air Taxi moose hunting pair that had killed a small bull near the Noatak Flats.

Moose have not been so scarce in our local area in December for many, many years. The real reason is not clear. The hope is that the scarcity is due to local circumstances since we are on the edge of moose habitat, but it could very well reflect a sharp decline in moose numbers in those areas like ours, that have only

recently been colonized (after 1940).

**Bear**

No bear stories. All on shore are sound asleep.

**Sheep**

No sheep report. We hope the winter sheep range locally missed the local heavy icing that we had in November.

**Musk ox**

No reported sightings.

**Marine Mammals**

December is the first real sea ice-building month and as expected, land fast shelf ice did develop through Sisualik and west before the month ended - actually by the 14th.

Though there was some opportunity we did not hear of any seals being taken through the month. The few resident people in Sisualik are generally no longer participating winter seal hunters and traditional knowledge warns against offshore hunting until January. This remains a pretty strong taboo for safety reasons. Sea ice and lead conditions, small mammals, and furbearers become more predictable by January.

**Small Mammals**

Red-backed Voles and Arctic Shrews continue to be plentiful. During the first week of the month (a cold, the coldest time) many vole tracks were noted on the surface throughout the country. This was towards the end of the spell and came after a long period of practically no surface sign.

In our storehouse floor, our shrew and vole population goes quickly up and down. Shrews pretty much disappear after a few days of activity by Least and Short-tailed Weasels.

Red Squirrels are a bit hard to keep tabs on at this season as they can become very

inactive through lengthy cold spells and give the impression that they are having a tough time. There does seem much less sign than through November, but this will have to be proved out in some February mild spells. They are into a second year cone crop failure that may test their ability to sustain a population in the face of a missing major winter food source.

## Furbearers

The catch of wolf, wolverine and marten, south and west of the Squirrel River in our region during November and December 1996 exceeds the harvest of any prior year in this century, particularly if one excludes aircraft involvement in past years.

Several things coming together have made this possible.

Two large waves of caribou movement through the area, separated by a month of no local movement, no doubt brought some "followers" along with them. The relatively large number of human harvesters of caribou in our area left much food available in the form of butcher scraps and wounded or lost animals. This sets a scenario for a build up and sustaining of a high number of caribou predators near to an area of many hunters. Early and abundant snowfall with lots of wind further set the stage for early and long distance snow machine surface travel that is near perfect. Add to this a small but hyperactive group of relatively young but knowledgeable snow machine hunters and you have the picture. Short daylight hours and storms have been deterrents, but the harvest has not been far from home. What long-term effect this will have on these two species is unknown. Wolverine in particular may have a slow rebound capability.

The range extension of marten reported here a few years ago has apparently resulted in local reproduction that has made catches of marten possible by ambitious local trappers in the westernmost white spruce timbered zones along the Lower Noatak River and west. Numbers are a bit hard to come by yet, but several have reported catches of 5 or 6 to 10 or more. This adds up to more marten taken in this zone than at anytime in this century. Kiana used to be considered the most westerly edge of marten range.

A few land otter and mink tracks were seen through the month in our home area. No trapping effort was made for them here.

On the coast some red fox and white fox were trapped and sno-go caught but numbers have not been large and effort pretty small.

Wolverine tracks at my firewood cut site prompted me (with Carrie's urging) to

make a set there. Wolverine tracks did not return after the 4th but the set did take two male marten.

The hunters that complained of non-prime wolves and wolverine hides at the end of November went back to catching in December and reported better skins from the 10th on.

**Birds**

On the 16th we decided that we would not have an Audubon sponsored CBC this year since we had not received necessary forms. On the 18th we found the forms in the P.O. and went ahead with plans for a count in spite of knowing there are few overwintering birds due to lack of prey for winter birds of prey, and a second year failure of the white spruce cone crop, which causes scarcity of winter seed eaters.

With good help from Kotzebue and a one-day postponement, we had a beautiful count during a beautiful but short day on December 31st.

Five participants found 89 birds within our 15-mile circle, made up of five species on count day and one additional CW (count week) species. We found 11 Common Raven, 9 Gray Jay, 56 Willow Ptarmigan, 8 Spruce Grouse, 5 Boreal Chickadees, and a Northern Hawk Owl in camp a few days before and the day after the count, which qualified it as a count week bird.

This is a total of 90 individuals and six species, which seems pretty good in an area where winter birds are really scarce this year.

Our 8 Spruce Grouse broke our local count record where one or two has before prevailed. The numbers of this species is quite high locally as the absence for several years of winter birds of prey has allowed its numbers to peak. They are hard to see and the population is much higher than indicated by this one spruce patch count on count day.

We had 2 hours and 19 minutes of sun on count day with mild but rapidly cooling temperatures and clear sky.

Willow Ptarmigan have continued to show a bit better population than the past few years.

The Northern Hawk Owl first turned up atop a camp spruce tree on the 22nd. It is the first we have seen in several years.

We were not able to find overwintering Snow Buntings, which often have McKay's mixed in. Open water was too far offshore in Sisualik this year to be within count circle, therefore eliminating possibility of Eiders or Black Guillemots.

Except for CBC day, bird appearances were pretty limited this December due to a number of understandable reasons.

We appreciate those who could come from Kotzebue to make the Sanningaruq CBC day a success for 1996.

## Plants

From around the 11th on, for a week, small twigs and pieces of green white spruce branches began to appear on trails in abundance as Christmas tree seekers out from town sought to bring at least a small remembrance of the natural world into the urban household. It was noticed that some continued the practice we initiated many years ago when requested by out of town family to bring them a "tree." The process is to select a tree with many braces and cut it off as high as one can reach with a little hand saw. The top then goes for the household Christmas Tree, to be discarded soon after New Year's Day; the bottom usually goes out to healthy growth, often producing a multi-stemmed shrub-like tree that offers good shelter to small birds, Red Squirrels and even nesting sites for those birds that like the protection a bramble-like hideaway for nests or food caches. When there are enough healthy branches on the lower portion, continued growth seems always to continue. We have some examples 10-20 years after the pruning.

The green twigs and branches on the otherwise clean winter trails that is an indication of Christmas tree cutting is the result of frozen trees loaded on a sled bumping along towards home. Where possible, this can be somewhat improved by taking a small tree indoors to thaw for a few hours, then folding pliable branches against the stem, placing in a couple of plastic bags and wrapping with light rope or string before loading on the sled for the long trip home. Trees cut in cold weather, thrown on the sled, roped down and hauled suffer many, many missing twigs. They do still look like small like trees, however, and can be patched up before being decorated. Who has seen a white spruce tree that looks better decorated with lights and tinsel than one with a heavy load of seed- laden tan cones? Natural spruce trees of this later kind are non-existent locally this year and last.

Abundant Spruce Grouse and Red Squirrels continue to take a toll on new growth twig portions of spruce branches. These probably contain the potential for next year's flowers and cones.

**Fish**

December fishing is pretty much confined to sheefish netting in Kobuk Lake. Catches there continued through December and seemed pretty good. We benefited again this month through friends that have active nets up in that area and we were given fresh fish several times through the month and are quite grateful to these local fishers and friends from Sitka that sent us a "care" package of seafood from that area. We were never in need of fresh fish this month of relatively light fishing activity in our local area of orbit.

**People**

By the 14th there were only four occupied camps in Sisualik; our inland winter cabin home makes a total of five winter resident camps this winter of 1996.

The sun started to rise in the afternoon on or around December 1st. Its rays no longer came into our house windows on the 4th. We had 1 hour 43 minutes of sun on the 20th and gained one minute the next day. That is always a neat milestone each December in our life. By CBC day on the 31st we had 2 hours 19 minutes of sun. We will expect the sun back in the house windows by the 9th of January and sunrise back in the morning on the 15th.

An unusual day on the 11th when our outside world changed to one of hoarfrost (see Journal).

New Stove Day on the 13th (see Journal).

A live, large male marten was taken inside a hanger at Kotzebue Airport on the 13th. There was report of 5 marten taken by a young trapper on the Lower Noatak River.

We developed both sno-go and generator problems in mid month that gave a few more gray hours! (See Journal entry of 16th.)

Also on the 16th, a dog musher was hit and badly injured by a drunk snow machine operator way out on a camp trail. Kind of a first accident of that kind here. The musher is recovering.

On the 19th I talked to my brother in California on the phone. Haven't done that for 50 years! I left there in 1947.

Our charge light was lit from 11:45 till 3:45 on our solar panel (that charges phone

battery) on the 20th, the shortest day.

Met some disoriented travelers on the 27th while coming down from the mountains on my firewood trail. It was a first trip out for them and they were 20 miles from town with ground drift developing. They were traveling directly away from safety. Did get them turned around and on the right trail back to town. Hope they survive the winter. They seem at risk. We checked by telephone later and found that they had made it home.

# CAPE KRUSENTSTERN JOURNAL

## JANUARY

**January 1**

High 22º F
Low 18º F
Cloudy, light snow
E-SE wind to 25

A fine warm New Year's Day - not too bright due to cloud cover but we did gain another 7 minutes of sun today. Within only a week now its rays will be back in through the windows of the cabin.

Can't shake the flu and its symptom to really enjoy this mid winter mildness.

We must make a trip to town for gas tomorrow if the weather is suitable.

No owl again this morning; maybe he won't become a part of our spruce patch community.

The mild temperatures are really settling the snow. More and more black spots are showing where the slate had been completely white for the past two or three weeks.

Went a ways down the town trail today with Terry to check it out. The trail is still showing well which should make the town trip easier. No large animals have been walking around lately and no small ones either it seems, except the Red Squirrels, Red-backed Voles and shrews inside our spruce patch world.

My! Only 4 years to the year 2000. Won't that be something to remember to write on letters and checks!

**January 2**

High 26º F
Low 14º F
Cloudy
E-SE wind to 40

Town trip canceled due to high winds. Some overflow reported on Kotzebue bar. There were some travelers today, making good use of the new stakes.

Took a snowshoe walk with Terry this afternoon and he found a moose resting in our spruce patch. He had to go up to it (50 feet) but when it turned back to look at him, he came back to me. This is his usual response to moose, and the usual moose response to him. As long as the moose runs away the dog will follow. As soon as the moose finds the dog close it stops and faces the dog. This can be very intimidating to the dog (or wolf) and is no doubt designed to be. The moose appeared to be a young antlerless bull.

Temperatures have grown warm enough to weld surface snow particles together so this afternoon, even though Kotzebue had winds to 40 knots, they also had visibility out to 35 miles. Rather unusual and will change immediately if there is any new snow.

For the first time in many years we will not submit a Sanningaruq, AK Christmas Bird Count. Too much weather, flu and a backlog of undone chores - probably a sure sign of aging.

Our little owl did not show again this morning. I do wish we could know more about him. There are a couple of very small Eurasian owls that conceivably could turn up in this area. There is little doubt that this is a Boreal Owl (yellowish beak, light eye disks) but we have not had a good binoc look in good light.

**January 3**

High 26º F
Low 24º F
Cloudy, snow
E-SE wind to 35

Blizzard conditions when new snow falls. There has been less than an inch. The old snow has pretty much fused together and drift has not been bad up this way, though it has been continual again in Sisualik and Kotzebue.

We are about to run out of gas for the generator though we do have a gas lantern with fuel for a while. Our town visit is getting more imperative!

This was a day of house chores. Finished skinning and cutting the current section of the moose we had in the house thawing. We now have only one hind leg and the two front legs with shoulder to thaw and work up. This moose has been a tremendous amount of work over what we usually expect. Of course, it has been very worth it as some of our friends and family who have shared will agree. It is super good quality moose meat.

We have a report that indicates no travelers at all today on the Sisualik-Kotzebue trail so condition of the trail is not known.

Our camp crew of three to four Gray Jays worked only half a day today.

We are gaining daylight at a rate of 5 to 7 minutes daily now, but it doesn't show much on a dull day like today.

**January 4**

High 26º F
Low 22º F
Fog, cloudy, snow
E wind to 15
NW wind to 10

Another birthday. They sure seem to come around fast. It will take once more to make 70 and the goal after that will be to usher in the New Year 2000. And to get used to writing it on checks or letter heads.

Didn't make it to town again today. The two or three inches of new snow with wind last night obscured our close to camp trails and the two creek crossings required re-breaking. In the process of doing that, found out that Kotzebue was fogged in and more snow was falling. Since tidewater overflow conditions were unknown to us it seemed reasonable to postpone again.

Took a short snowshoe walk through the spruce patch today, the first for a long time. There were several fresh W. Ptarmigan tracks, day old moose tracks and many Red Squirrel tracks. This warm weather has them out running around again and probably seeking out something to fill in for the spruce cones they are lacking this winter.

Very soft trail today, both for snowshoes and sno-go. The extended warm temperatures have warmed the snow clear to the ground and as you walk around, the surrounding snow settles with a thump every few steps. There were many vole (air vent) holes. This compacting of snow no doubt gives them some trouble with crushed runways and a need for oxygen.

**January 5**

High 24º F
Low 14º F
Clear, few clouds
N-NE wind to 35

Finally did the town trip but it wasn't easy. We do have gas now, for a while.

The beautiful blue sky, big moon (before sunup) and the bright sun (almost 3 hours of it) made up for the heavy ground drift, hidden old trail surface and the bad bumps. And it was so good to have a plainly staked trail to follow. No more traveling by

dead reckoning on that mean 9 miles between Sisualik Pt. and Kotzebue. They are nice sturdy willow stakes too! Easy for tired old eyes to see.

There was a bit of overflow on the bar in front of town but it was simple to go around it. It was not so simple to go around the different kind of overflow on our second creek crossing on our way home. It was dry this morning but upstream overflow moved down across the trail while we were in town. It was not deep so we just went through it. "All's well that ends well."

This morning before daylight, as we started off on our town trip, we were surprised and a little awed by a pile of very fresh moose tracks right in the trail in our back yard. Our hope was that there was not a bull or two standing right in the trail to be dazzled by the bright headlamp. There wasn't! This is the largest group of moose that have passed through our Spruce Patch this winter. There were at least four and probably a couple of more. At the second creek crossing (that overflowed) they had quite a sparring time, with tracks all over the glare ice. That indicates at least a couple of large bulls still carrying antlers.

**January 6**

High 15º F
Low 0º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 30

Our temperatures are finally sinking to more seasonal depths. It has been great to have such mild temps through the Holidays and short daylight time. Our sun is really coming back now. Today we passed the 3-hour mark headed for 4 at the rate of an 8-minute gain a day.

Wind on south facing slopes strong again today with heavy drift of granular sand-like snow. Tussocks and old trails showing again as the strong steady winds reshuffle the snow surface.

Saw a chickadee today down in the creek willows. This is only the second seen since our move up here in mid-October.

Had to rework our generator shed today as the roof fell in last night. It is made of living trees as upright supports and the swaying of the trees from the North winds brought on the collapse. It was not unexpected.

Terry had a good run re-breaking our various trails and finding the overflow that gave us trouble yesterday on the second creek crossing already frozen.

Did not see any new moose tracks. Those of yesterday were apparently made by a

wandering group passing through.

A couple of neighboring hunters are making a trip west to see if the could find some of the fat caribou that continue to make news from down there.

**January 7**

High 0º F
Low –10º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 25

A week into January and our temperatures still holding at a reasonable level. They are on the way down and along with increasing sunlight we have our mid-winter cold spell to look forward to. The intense cold monster will be stalking about again in January, February or early March. With such moderate weather for so long it will be tough to get used to extreme cold again. I'm not sure at what age your body can no longer adapt but I feel I am approaching it.

Saw a small flock of ptarmigan twice today near around the cabin. They look so big when they fly. It is difficult to see them before they fly. They and the Red Squirrels are the only daily track makers now when there are no moose around.

No sign of our little owl. Wish there was a way to bring him back and have him here for a while. How such a small delicate little bird of prey can survive in our hostile winter world is certainly unclear. The problem of getting a hold of something to eat each day seems an insurmountable problem. It was maybe accomplished in conjunction with the need of subnivian microtines to open winter tunnel "doorways" to assure sufficient oxygen for their "under snow" world.

Survival of creatures under extremes of environment is a never-ending mystery that can be everlastingly fascinating. Life, after all is said and done, does go on - usually.

A local hunter found and took a single caribou from Rabbit Creek yesterday. He also saw a single musk ox. This is a first take of caribou on west Krusenstern.

**January 8**

High –4º F
Low –14º F
Clear, few clouds
W-NW-W wind to 25

This is the magic day in years past when we have caught the sun’s rays first returning to inside our cabin through its little high windows.

We did not catch it today. A small round very pink-purple wind cloud blocked the

ray at the critical time. But we know now that any clear day from now till next late November there will be live sunrays in our cabin. The sun is really on its way back - in earnest!

Strong northerly winds continue drifting and sculpturing what's left of our ground cover.

Went to Sisualik today for yet more stuff (caribou leg skins, uguruq skin, red dye, etc.). Kind of a cold lonesome place down there this time of year, but it was enlivened today by a large flock (20) of Snow Buntings. Some were very white indicating the possibility of a mixed flock of McKay's Buntings and Snow Buntings, as often occurs here in mid-winter. I did not get to examine them with binocs.

Terry the dog went down with me with much enthusiasm but after waiting around for me to get work done in the drifting snow he was more than ready to go home to his warm bed in our spruce tree patch.

There were fresh W. Ptarmigan and Red Squirrel tracks, none other.

**January 9**

High –12º F
Low –31º F
Clear
N wind to 20

Town trip for propane and gas. Carrie stayed home for a change. Cold and trail roughness are not easy to take together. One or the other but not both! She got to record the first day of 1996 that sunrays were seen entering Sanningaruq house through our small windows.

Our "shortcut" trail to town is not really that. It is straight to town but the three mile section to the east of Sisualik Point, which has been rough, is still very "wash board" rough. The trail through summer camp at Sisualik is much, much smoother; though much longer distance-wise, it is the better route.

Two caribou were seen by neighbor's wife just as he took off to get a load of wood. He probably didn't see them but we haven't heard the full story yet. Caribou in numbers are reported again both 30 miles to the east and 30 miles to the west.

Cold weather is back and both machines and people will need to adjust again. Had to change plugs to get going this morning and had to use the wolf tail face cover during some of the trip.

Our "abundant" snow cover has shrunk with all this strong north wind, dry air and

sunshine. Hah!

**January 10**

High –16º F
Low –38º F
Clear, calm

Cold weather! Bright!

Intended to get a load of firewood today but was intimidated by the thermometer. Getting the sno-go going is always a hassle at these lows. Weatherman has promised some warming tomorrow and our wood will stretch that far.

The three Gray Jays worked around camp all day but other than distant aircraft engine noise there was little indication of life about today. The temperature hung between –34º F and –38º F all day.

Had a big bowl of Sisualik blackberries, half frozen with a little sugar after sheefish and moose for supper. There is nothing better as an antidote to near –40º F temperatures outdoors. A snug cabin, warm fire and a well-filled stomach - so goes a mid January day, 30 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

**January 11**

High –26º F
Low –37º F
Clear, few PM clouds
N-NW wind to 15

Another bright but cold day. Did get the sno-go started this afternoon and got a small load of dry firewood and then a better load of ice. It is great weather for cutting ice. Lakes have now developed some good cracks in the much-thickened ice and chipping along both sides of the crack gives some fine big chunks (5 to 20 lbs).

No sign of larger animals in the country though no real effort toward looking around has happened yet. The surface has become very good for cross-country traveling; more traveling will take place as the weather moderates some.

No sign of open water off Sisualik from the hills today. It is really ice making time on the ocean and those few birds that may be in that work now are needing to use every trick they know to survive these cold calm spells. Black Guillemot and Common Eider may be the only candidates.

Our camp Gray Jays are working short days, even shorter than they were earlier. This is probably due to sufficient stored away grub from many days of storing and packing.

The weather may mild up for the weekend. Hope so - amount of snowfall will be interesting as our snow cover has gotten pretty thin.

Moon only in the morning now.

**January 12**

High –10º F
Low –27º F
Clear, a few clouds
Light winds

The milder temperatures and bright sun today were great. Besides that our friendly little owl was back on the shovel handle. So good to have him back in the pre-dawn hours, but his continued sporadic appearance poses more questions than answers and I am not particularly in need of more questions without answers. I have enough already. He certainly is a friendly little fellow. Doesn't mind having the flashlight shining in his eyes for minutes at a time. He flew straight at my knee this morning but didn't make contact.

Made a first trip to Sisualik for alder bark and the washing machine. Trail not too bad down that way. It is probably better to go to town that way rather than on our shortcut trail.

Very bright sun came up while I was there and gave everything a golden tint.

Saw one sno-go traveler and no other sign of life down that way. There seems no life north of us either.

The length of daylight hours will soon bring some new hints as to where additional resources might be found. Our abundant supply of fat moose meat seems more valuable every day we don't see sign of caribou.

Cloudy with a few snowflakes this evening, with temperatures continuing to rise. Hope they stay up again for a while.

**January 13**

High –2º F
Low –12º F
Cloudy, few flakes
Light winds

Cloud cover all day took away the brightness that we were getting used to. The sun did make a big purple-pink ball just as it came up and then got cut off by cloud cover.

No owl this morning but additional whitewash on shovel handle indicates that he might have been there part of the night.

There seems little doubt that he is a young (1 or 2 years old) Boreal Owl, but the ID is from combination of flashlight and binoc view, which does leave some questions. ID based primarily on small size, light colored bill, yellow eyes, light breast and belly with long even streaks of brown. The eye disks are prominent but the dark-black outline of them is not as distinct as one would hope, nor is the spotted forehead very clear under flashlight. There seems a large light spot on the nape and large light spots or blotches on the back. There are a couple of small Siberian owls, which is the reason for this scrutiny. Would sure like to see the little fellow by daylight and am looking forward to vocalization a little later on.

It seems a miracle that this little fellow can mange to keep himself fed and warm in this harsh environment.

This spell of milder weather is giving us a chance to get caught up a bit on firewood and ice and now with the washing machine on hand we may be able to get a washing or two done before caribou hunting or sheefish hooking comes on line. It will be good to get out somewhere in the longer days of February.

**January 14**

High –3º F
Low –4º F
Cloudy, snowflakes
Light winds

A very quiet somber day. Rather heavy cloud cover. No sun, no wind.

We finished up some of our long lasting projects and hope to make a trip into town tomorrow. We will probably go through Sisualik to miss that rough trail on the lagoon.

The owl was not here again this morning and the Gray Jays put in a light day. Red Squirrels are finding good traveling on snow surface now and are making use of it to gather scraps from Terry's leftovers.

A very loud raven dropped by today, no doubt wishing he could have some scraps too!

The sun will rise in the morning tomorrow for the first time this year. The sun should never be made to rise in the afternoon! The two hour variance from sun time that we labor under should be returned to the natural status of things.

**January 15**

High –5º F
Low –10º F
Fog, cloudy, clearing
Light winds

Town trip. A real variety in the sky today. The midway line between Sisualik and Kotzebue had fog and snow showers to the north with temperatures milder by 10 degrees. To the south, over Kotzebue, it was clear blue sky, sunshine and moonlight with temperatures reaching for –20º F. The north side, our side, remained foggy, cloudy, and 10º F warmer all day. It was neat to pass into and out of the two different worlds twice today.

Town ravens demonstrated their urban know-how again today, a couple of times. I suppose it shouldn't be a surprise that this adaptable "wilderness" bird quickly learns what it must do to make a living in an urban setting.

A number of creatures, besides man, manage to make this transition and again it really shouldn't surprise us since adaptability is a major attribute of any successful species.

A flurry of caribou excitement the last couple of days. Seven were taken by a couple of local hunters just north of Jones Camp.

One of the Jones boys brought home a sled load of caribou from the hills behind Ivik a couple of days ago. All these occurrences are just east of us, at 5 to 30 miles distance. The meat is reported to be "pretty good."

**January 16**

High –8º F
Low –22º F
Clear, some clouds
NE wind to 15

Cooling again. Two visitors today, our first for '96.

There are a number of folks looking around the hills for caribou. Not many have been found.

Terry the dog and I broke a trail more than halfway down to Jones Camp. We want to visit down there this week. The snow is icy and breaks clean down to the tussocks. A twice run over makes a good trail.

The three Gray Jays seem the only things alive around our camp today besides us

humans.

Our visitor reported a small flock of Willow Ptarmigan as he came into the camp.

It is great to have the sun coming up in the morning again (even if it is only a few minutes before noon yet).

No sign of the owl again yet.

It seems like we are winding down in activity, especially if the cooling trend is going to continue. It is about time, we have a lot of desk work to get done before outdoor things eat up much of our time again.

A lone moose was seen to the north of us today.

The person that went to Rabbit Creek last for caribou (and got one) saw tracks of 12-14 wolves.

**January 17**

High –12º F
Low –26º F
Clear, some clouds
Light winds

A cold day but the fiery golden pink show put on by the new sun and cloud clusters certainly gave the appearance of warmth if not the fact.

Got a load of firewood from Napaaqtuuraq and the air there (because of the altitude) was noticeably warmer than at lower levels.

Saw fresh W. Ptarmigan tracks and Terry put up three Spruce Hens. They annoy him no end. He is more used to Willow and Rock Ptarmigan that fly straight away and can be chased by sight. Spruce Hens fly from the ground with a great explosion just to the tree above, out of Terry's reach, of course.

Some of our Sealing Point family are back in the country and three of them have gone down to the Sealing Point house. That was yesterday and today. They may have continued on down to Rabbit Creek to try to get some fresh meat. A neighbor from Sisualik joined them this morning and we are anxious to hear how their trip turns out.

The Rabbit Creek, Killikmaiq area may turn out to be a good hunting ground for February and March. Caribou on the land and marine mammals at ocean leads, which are usually close there, will be sought after as the days grow longer.

The trail down that was is reported to be especially good. A snow machine from Kotzebue went down that way yesterday, caught one caribou around Port Site, went on to Kivalina, had lunch there and then returned to Kotzebue. A long day for mid-January travel.

**January 18**

High –24º F
Low –34º F
Clear
Light winds

A cold bright day with some interesting news from Sealing Pt.

Two groups of people quite well separated (several miles) saw a flock of 100 or more Common Eider flying from the northwest (Port Site) towards Sealing Point and possibly on towards the Anigaaq Ranger Station. With the temperatures that we have and calm wind these birds may have trouble finding open water. This is not as rare as it might seem. In fact it might be a fairly regular happening. We have long known that in some years Common Eiders do manage to successfully survive overwintering in this zone. We also know that in some years there is heavy mortality, especially when there are long spells of calm cold weather this month or next. There are at least three places around the cape there where strong currents cause ice movement and thus new open water. These large hardy waterfowl work the area from early winter on, and if food and water can continually be found, they overwinter well. When conditions get too tight they must pay the price for not moving further south while they could. Large schools of Arctic Cod (*Boreogadus saida*), a favorite rich food source, may be the cause of these birds remaining so far north. They also utilize local clam beds.

The travelers that saw these birds on Krusenstern were on their way down to Port Site, Rabbit Creek and caribou. Just when they got to some actual animals west of Port Site one machine quit and they had to haul it all the way back to Sealing Pt.

**January 19**

High –28º F
Low –34º F
Clear, calm

Our high temperatures seem to be reaching down toward the lows. We are looking for a break in this current cold spell. The brightness is great and increasing by 8 minutes a day. If our temperatures would get back above that –20º F mark even for part of the day it would be fine. Most of the State is under a cold high pressure system.

News from north of us today. A couple of hunters up that way dropped by to tell us of fresh tracks of two wolves and maybe two wolverines around a dead animal - probably a moose.

We were just ready to take off to visit our closest neighbor at Jones Camp. After doing the visit and returning home I took Terry the dog out for a run while the machine was warm. There were fresh large wolf tracks just across our creek. The sun was already down so there was nothing to be done today. May check around a bit tomorrow and see what is going on.

There are more hunters each day heading for the Port Site caribou grounds and there have been wolves and wolverines reported around those caribou. The disturbance of machines may have caused some of the predators to come this way.

Saw a small bird just at dawn this morning. He looked good for a change and was probably a very lonesome Redpoll. Wonder how single small birds survive these long cold nights.

**January 20**

High –22º F
Low –32º F
Clear, calm

Well, we are about to enter the last week of January, a milestone time in this part of the world. When length of daylight time is considered this is known as the week, if you haven't noticed already, that daylight hours have increased and in this week you can almost notice the difference from day to day as the increase is from 8 to 10 minutes a day. Farther north, the folks at Barrow will see the sun above the horizon for the first time in a couple of months on the 23rd.

In those years when we had a good rabbit population this would be the week in which it has gotten bright enough and snow has accumulated enough to make snowshoe hare hunting most profitable. Where are those rabbits?

This week is also remembered as the very earliest that we made a good catch of sheefish with hooks on Kobuk Lake.

In a general sense, the outdoor world begins to open up again after being closed down by darkness and rough weather and probably reaches a peak in early July.

Today was bright but we continue in the midst of a cold spell with thermometer remaining between -20 and –30º F through the whole day. Most creatures spend the time doing what ever is necessary for them to stay warm. We followed their lead and stayed home and warm.

A person missing for three days between Kivalina and Pt. Hope was found today in good shape except for injuries sustained in a cliff fall.

**January 21**

High –17º F
Low –30º F
Clear, light winds

Our air today seemed warmer than our temperatures indicate. The low is from shortly after midnight, as during the night a breezy air movement of some kind brought temperatures up to the –20º F point where it hung all through daylight hours.

Snow machine started relatively easy today so I ran Terry down to tidelands and back. Trail is quite hard and good running for a sprint dog.

Snow surface has gotten very hard in places and though there has been a wolf and a caribou at the cross roads where our trail goes out into the tussock country. I'm not sure what become of them. The wolf may have been on the trail of the lone caribou.

We received a gift box of Broad Whitefish and some caribou meat on our visit to Jones Camp Friday. These are a very good whitefish that are more an inland fish than our more coastal common Humpback or Alaska Whitefish. For some reason there were an unusual lot of them in the sloughs around Jones' last October. We are glad for their generosity. They are a fine frozen fish when a bit smelly.

After sundown yesterday evening Jones' summer camp burned to the ground. They had been down there re-building the house and may have left their chain saw too near the woodstove, which they thought was burning out. A disappointing loss for them but most of their winter clothes and things are up at their winter cabin where they are living.

A fast straight flying bird zipped by the house just at dusk this evening. May have been our little owl.

**January 22**

High –14º F
Low –26º F
Clear, clouds building
Light winds

Town trip through Jones' trail over and Sisualik on the way home. Both pretty bumpy in places. Sisualik is probably the better crossing.

Quite a lot of fine sunshine today but not much else to see. Town folks and town

ravens seem equally busy, eking out a living. Heard some interesting vocalizing by both.

The moon seems especially rapid in coming back this month. It is here in New Moon phase. It was first noted yesterday and the sliver is already thick and high this early evening.

Musk ox harvest on federal lands south of Kotzebue on the Seward Peninsula has gotten underway in earnest this week. The current open permit hunt was to close down on the last day of this month. It will be interesting to see how this idea goes in this region. Musk ox have not been legal game here this century. We wonder how people will like the meat.

Temperatures started to drop again quickly this evening.

A real lot of frosted country around right now with few active creatures on it. Frost hangs from everything above the surface: grasses, willows, trees, wires and poles. Quite a frost build-up from lack of wind in combination with fog and frost formation from moist air.

**January 23**

High –8º F
Low –27º F
Cloudy, fog, snow
Light winds

Sun back in Barrow. 5 hours 6 minutes here.

Got a load of ice today in preparation for clothes washing this week.

Fog and a little light snow most of the day made for a dull day until the sun broke through in the late afternoon.

Our mornings are still late due to two-hour sun/clock time differential, but afternoons are long, reaching till 6 pm already.

Fox killed in Kotzebue last week was rabid.

There was an interesting radio report of international botanist group work this past season. A number of new species seem to have been recorded. Hope to hear more of their work report.

The same young hunter that got caribou not far off last week did the same thing again yesterday. No one else seems to be able to find any. The report is that they run

into the trees when sno-go noise is made. When snow is not too deep in the trees some whole groups of caribou learn this adaptation to mechanized harassment.

There was a white Supercub with solid red wings doing some low flying west of here yesterday. No hint of the reason for the low flight but did appear to be looking for something.

**January 24**

High –12º F
Low –25º F
Clear
Light winds

Town trip today for gas and "goodie package" from Sitka.

Used the "short cut" trail again. The three-mile stretch out on the ice from tablelands to the staked trail must still be taken at a very slow speed. The staked trail is getting smoother. The trip went well and the round trip was completed by 3:30 p.m.

Decided to take Terry for a run before the engine got cold. Went N toward the old Hatchery trail. Turned around on top of Miluraaq ridge. Looked around a bit and then started home the way we came up. Down the first hill I stopped and waited for Terry to catch up. Waited and waited, no Terry. Went further down and stopped again, no Terry. Was of a mind to go home and eat lunch since we hadn't yet. Terry does know his way home and sometimes he has business of his own. I did feel uneasy though so I turned back and went up the hill to the top of the hill I stopped to look for tracks. A movement out of the corner of my eye caught my attention. As I focused, I saw it was a large white dog with blood on him, droopy ears and a very sad demeanor. Terry was in a number 3 coil spring trap, leg hold trap, with a wolf snare to one side. He let me release him. There was some blood on foot and body. I was afraid some toes might be frozen even in that short time. I warmed it in my bare hands for some time. He was able to make it home on his own though sometimes on three legs. More on this tomorrow.

**January 25**

High –6º F
Low –26º F
Cloudy, hazy, fog
NE wind to 15

There finally seems to be some weather on the way. We've had a remarkably long spell of calm cold weather for this area and this time of year. Temperatures started a slow rise this afternoon and one's exposed skin could relax.

Took the "wolf trap dog" up to the site of our moose kill to see if wolverine or

wolves had finally located the guts. They haven't. There are not even fox tracks around the site. Most remarkable to have a favorite food of large northern predators ignored for that long period in mid winter.

Terry's hind foot is pretty well recovered today after being in the wolf trap for 20 minutes. A truly remarkable recovery considering temperatures were between –20º F and –30º F. Several times on the way home I warmed the foot in my bare hands.

Finding him (in time) and releasing him made me reflect again on my many years as a user of leg hold traps for furbearers. The trap truly is probably the most terrible instrument invented by man for use against fellow creatures. It was not invented as an instrument of torture, of course, but as an expedient means of taking furs that have been worth large sums of money and that fueled a large world industry for a long period of time. The extreme look of despair and helplessness in Terry's eyes and demeanor after only 20 minutes gave me a momentary vision of the hundreds of animals my setting of traps had affected, over the years, standing in the path of creature freedom. There are of course many "other sides" to the story but none of them are quite so intense as looking into a trapped animal' eyes.

**January 26**

High 5º F
Low –7º F
Clear, few clouds
E wind to 25

Drifting snow on the surface again. It has been a while since we have had enough wind to move snow. The calm and clear sky was good, all right, but the build up of frost on everything in the open air and the cold temperatures that go along with clear sky in January were getting tiresome. The next few days may be much different.

There is reported to be a rather large group of caribou just north of the Haul Road. This is the group that Kivalina, Noatak and a few hunters from Kotzebue have taken animals from that have been reported fat for some time.

There is some concern that the Haul Road may be a barrier that could keep animals from moving to greener pastures and under certain conditions, bring about a winter die off similar to what happened last year. This seems unlikely to me under the present scenario. Snow cover in the area is very light. It is possible that traffic on the haul road has caused this situation to build. Just how the situation will develop will depend on weather and snowfall and amount of good forage available where the animals have settled. With longer days and no caribou closer to the three villages, these animals may be hit pretty hard by local hunters.

A bull moose was taken just north of the Anigaaq Ranger Station this week by a

neighbor. It was reported in good condition with oil bone marrow. It was still carrying its antlers. It seems late for that.

**January 27**

High 10º F
Low 6º F
Cloudy
E wind to 40

Finally did a washing today. Almost had generator problem trying to get the washer motor to turn over.

We are living under a blizzard threat tonight. Wind has been strong all day with ground drift but no new light snow to blow yet. Weather Bureau forecasts a kind of "double whammy" - two weather fronts one behind the other.

Got a load of firewood to be a bit ahead. Found little sign of life except abundant Red Squirrels down at the woodcut spruce patch.

Both the sun and moon are quite high in the sky now. Sunlight is in the prisms, those beautiful rainbows, and moonlight through the window and onto the floor. The land of darkness is displaying a good deal of light now. Our sun up time exceeds 5 ½ hours now.

Warmed temperatures help to make the days chores a little easier to keep up with.

Terry seems completely recovered from wolf trap experience. Wonder if he learned anything. He has not gotten a single porcupine quill since his first initial encounter. I'd like to believe that he is a smart dog though it really doesn't matter. What does is that he is "my dog." Enjoy the blizzard. We haven't seen fresh snow and strong winds for a long time.

**January 28**

High 17º F
Low 10º F
Cloudy, snow
Blizzard
E wind to 52

Very windy, warm but not a lot of new snow yet. We may get that as winds drop off after midnight.

Snowshoed a bit around our spruce patch today to stretch the legs of both Terry and I.

There was not much to see. We were lucky to see trees and willows, since drifting snow out in the open made visibility zero.

Red Squirrel and Gray Jay were the only creatures we noted out and about.

We had a rather "gourmet" dinner today: Chukar Partridge and dumplings, the first we have ever had. The birds were a gift from a friend that had been hunting south (far south) this fall.

Blizzard conditions are forecast to continue till after midnight.

We will have a new open lead on the ocean and if the weather winds down right there will be opportunity for a day or several of winter common seal hunting.

One cannot help but wonder if all or some of the 100+ Common Eider seen out on the ice at Sealing Point during our last cold spell have survived to enjoy the 17º F temperatures and abundant open water.

**January 29**

High 28º F
Low 16º F
Cloudy
S wind to 15

Fine temperatures for January! The open lead on the ocean is two miles south of our summer camp. The SE edge runs toward the mouth of Kotzebue Channel; the westward edge meanders toward Sealing Point two to three miles off shore. It is good for winter seal hunting if winds are down. We have not heard of any attempt yet.

There were travelers to and from Sisualik today and they reported some overflow patches that they were able to detour around. The water may be dropping already. If so, we need to make another town trip soon.

The blizzard left much dark ground. It is good for caribou. They will not have to dig for lichens in this area. The tops of ridges are greatly grooved. Very poor trail snowbanks close to willows or along west facing ridges are very good traveling now. The small amount of fresh snow that fell in the blizzard yesterday was mostly carried into creek beds, willow patches, or timber stands. Very little is left to show in cross-country travel.

We had hoped the storm would bring the Red Dog road caribou this way. No sign of them yet today.

6 hours 1 minute of sun today. We are beginning to have daylight hours of decent length. There is fair traveling light from 10 AM to 6 PM.

No large game tracks around our area.

**January 30**

High 29º F
Low 15º F
Clear, clouding PM
S to 15

Town trip, late start, poor trail, but still a round trip before sundown, testimony to lengthening daylight hours. There was some large overflow patches but were easily detoured. The grooved hard snow, a result of the 50 K east wind of a few days ago, is another story. There is no way around them and they are rough.

Overflow was moderate after this last storm due to only moderate rise in marine water level.

Three Sisualik seal hunters went out to the lead and followed it west as far as Sealing Point today. They saw few seals and fired only one shot, which missed. With both current and wind in against the edge ice there was little "clear" open water for hunting. These were the first serious hunters out this season. A disappointment to many relatives and friends of the hunter who envisioned fried fresh seal liver or the hot dark meat with fresh cooked blubber. Mmmm. That is cold winter food at its best.

The remarkably warm bright January day was wonderful. The bumps in the trail did not allow the luxury of sitting back and enjoying it.

**January 31**

High 25º F
Low 0º F
Cloudy, some sun
W-NW wind to 15

Cooling down again before we got too warm which is probably best for this month.

Traveled around a bit today with the sno-go and dog and am sorry to report that the snow surface in all directions is real rough and mostly real hard. It is a test of both person and machine to cover even the routinely used trails.

The bright sun early in the day was beautiful, turning a bit somber as gray clouds with some light snow covered our sky.

The ocean lead seen from the top of Napaaqtuuraq was closed with some piling of ice. Looks like the winter seal catch out of Kotzebue-Sisualik will again be small.

None of the travelers along the open lead yesterday saw any birds: no Eiders or Guillemots. As yet one can only wonder about the whereabouts of the 100+ flock seen a couple of weeks ago while there seemed to be no open water.

As January fades we can be thankful for relatively mild temperatures for this month and at the same time look forward to a probable extended cold spell with the Intense Cold Monster in charge, since we haven't really had one yet this winter. However we can also look forward to the returning sun to help out in warming at least the daytime temperatures.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

# FEBRUARY

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## MARCH

**March 1**

High 8º F
Low –21º F
Clear AM
Clouding PM
NE wind to 18

Bright and clear and cool with a fine new level traveling surface. This last storm left us the gift of a smoooooth trail. It is wonderful. It is even cushioned with several inches of top soft snow. And there is another side: it is ideal for snow machine hunting. Wolf, wolverine or fox would have little chance of escape if their fresh tracks are cut. The months of March and April are the two months each year when long daylight and heavy snow cover with a level surface make these three "open land" species quite vulnerable. A February closure in years when these species are scarce can be one effective tool for management.

There were fresh Willow Ptarmigan tracks, fresh Short-tailed Weasel tracks and fox tracks on the trails traveled today. I ran down the trail to town as far as tidelands and picked up lake ice for water on the return trip. After lunch, a firewood haul trip to Napaaqtuuraq was taken on and accomplished, but not easily. The dry wood area down there caught a real lot of drift in this last storm. This is tree and branch breaking drift and is no doubt a mortality factor on white spruce in small or large isolated patches. It is a very fine powder-like drifted snow that sticks to branches, often heaviest on the lee side of the tree and can grow to great weight during long storms. The unbalanced weight can bend the tree over so that additional drift puts weight on top and can break the tree or deform it. Thick stands of saplings (like those at Napaaqtuuraq) are often hit pretty hard.

**March 2**

High 26º F
Low 8º F
Sun and clouds
E-SE wind to 30

A bright warm windy day with ground drift out in the open but very pleasant with a warm sun that felt pretty good. To be able to speak of feeling the sun’s warmth again is always a great omen at this time of year in this region. It also means that sunglasses will be a necessity again for short and long periods of outdoor travel.

The mild temperatures and wide near shore open lead on the ocean in wind velocity. There is very little shore fast ice to hunt from in Kotzebue Sound and usually that means few seals but there can be exceptions.

A neighbor's son caught a gray wolf yesterday hunting out of Buckland and it is likely many wolves and wolverine will be taken in the next couple of weeks as trail surface has come to favor the hunter for the first time this winter season. Areas near villages will probably be pretty heavily worked for these two species.

A large group of Willow Ptarmigan passed by on our creek in between the times I passed through there without seeing any. We would like to eat ptarmigan again for a change but I can't seem to run on to them while I have a shotgun in hand.

No local moose tracks and no hint of caribou in nearby locations.

There has been too much weather lately to get into the Kobuk Lake shee fishing scene.

**March 3**

High 30º F
Low 24º F
Cloudy, snow
E-SE wind to 25

Another dull, warm, "whiteout" day. With all the hours of sun we have now (10+ hours) it would be good to see it once in a while. We cannot complain about the temperature. The warmth is fine, but the quickness with which dry falling or drifting snow turns wet is a problem.

Neighbors have moose around this morning and may decide to take it. One of their hunters is out looking for caribou but he may have to go farther than they will be able on this day.

Our regular Gray Jay group has grown from three to four. Our camp site may be known within the local Gray Jay community as the only place in the region where various foods are available everyday. By this time of the winter Gray Jays not attached to a camp are probably on pretty short rations.

Our spruce patch border "snow piles" are of magnificent size by now. These are huge drifts of "building like" size that develop on the "heavy drift" side of a spruce patch. The very strong easterly winds with snow fall that we have had much of since the first of the year have produced near record size snow piles. These will be slow melting this spring and will prolong spring runoff in small local drainages.

**March 4**

High 32º F
Low 10º F
Fog, clearing PM
Light winds

Town trip. Very heavy fog all the way. We had to circle several times to locate "top of hill" after second creek crossing. Was able to see old trail marks in the snow from there down to tideland edge and three markers. From there, followed the bank east to Jones' staked trail. All this with three to four hundred yards visibility. Could see Arctic Lighterage when we arrived in town from only an eighth of a mile out. The home trail, by contrast, was perfect. Crystal clear and smooth trail in all directions.

As predicted, hunting conditions by snow machine are at annual peak best and several caribou were reported taken on the eastern half of Krusenstern - four just east of Sealing Point and one north of us. Their condition was not especially good, maybe poor by standard of main herd groups, but that is the norm for isolated small groups or singles at this mid season time.

First winter seal hunt success reported today, a catch of three by a Kotzebue-based hunter. Several others were out, probably with moderate success. Three to five is a good catch for this season.

Squirrels, raven and weasel had a ball around camp while we were in town. Nothing of value damaged, just scraps that have accumulated over the winter.

**March 5**

High 23º F
Low 12º F
Clear, light winds

The couple of hours of rain we had last week has given us, in the bright sun of yesterday PM and all day today, the most bejeweled white spruce patch that we have ever seen. As the Sun takes its daily journey across our eastern horizon it highlights, by turn, each individual spruce tree. The sun's bright rays passing through the tree branches, which are clothed with a combination of white opaque snow and crystal clear ice, effected a jeweled prism unspeakably beautiful. A very rare combination of light and brightness and color that more than compensates for the dark and stormy period we have just come out of.

The weather and trails have been good for hunters. We have heard of a moose taken, caribou of good quality taken within 20 miles of here, and sheefish hooking on Kobuk Lake. Weather and temperatures are ideal and people are quick to take advantage of it, as both have been such a hindrance this past month.

We will soon want to take on some travel and projects postponed for this time of

good weather.

**March 6**

High 26º F
Low 2º F
Clear
E wind to 18

Another beautiful spring day. We know that it is not really spring but it seems like it this week. The recent change from former status quo - the warm sunlight, winds and level un-bumpy trails - is quite remarkable. Makes one feel that the world is in pretty good shape after all. We recognize that it might be deceptive though. March is the month that west wind can change everything (except the length of sunlight hours). It can even bring our temps down in the forty below range again. We hope that is not necessary. We have had enough of that kind of cold and enough wind.

Seal hunt drama took place yesterday out on the lead edge off Kotzebue and Sisualik. A lone hunter somehow ended up in the water, probably with some problem of balance while launching or landing to ice edge after using his kayak to retrieve a shot seal. We have not heard the full story but he was able to attract the attention of another hunter (who is hard of hearing) that was able to help get the hunter up out of the water. In a second incident, another hunter was towing his dead seal up to the edge of the ice against a strong outgoing current when his paddle broke. Fortunately he was with another person that was able to get some ropes together to throw out to him. Either of the incidents could have led to death of the participants. We are thankful that they survived this episode. A number of seals were brought home.

**March 7**

High 20º F
Low 6º F
Clear, clouding PM
NE-E wind to 18

A good morning of visiting and a good afternoon of fishing in the presence of the Stone Indian Bowman and Eskimo woman with baby on her back at the lower Noatak River Canyon.

We made our annual trip to this long known traditional Burbot fishing place. Last year we didn't even get one fish. Today, together we caught 8 Burbot and one Northern Pike.

Two of the Burbot were large (over 30 inches) spawned-out adults and the stomach of the larger contained a 1- inch Arctic Char: a first finding of char in Burbot stomach. Another stomach contained a large whitefish so the Burbot are not only there this year (absent last year) but they seem well fed. We had lots of boiled liver this evening.

The only major animal sign seen this trip was a single fresh wolf track crossing the river east to west. There were no rabbit, moose, caribou or ptarmigan tracks. That 8 to 10 miles seems quite free of game of any kind.

The first hole we tried to make in the ice proved to be one we couldn't finish with either auger or old fashioned ice chisel (tuuq) because of ice thickness. Turned out that it was a place of much overflow; at other locations nearby ice is a little more than three feet. Measured thickness at one hole.

Polar Bear tracks have been reported near Sealing Point by seal hunters.

**March 8**

High 20º F
Low 0º F
Clear, some clouds
N wind to 15

Another of those beautiful days. We were a little worn from our activities yesterday and didn't do much.

On coming into the spruce patch after running the dog, was surprised to see a large dark gray bird fly from mid way up in a tree. The broad wings and big head made it to be a Great Horned Owl.

It has kind of been an expected thing, even in those years when snowshoe hares are absent, that we often have a show of sometimes vocal Great Horned owls. This is the beginning of their mating season and there are some surprisingly long "prospect" flights into areas that have not had this species all winter. There were a lot of Willow Ptarmigan tracks within the border of trees where the owl was perched.

Seal hunters, a few, have been out each day of this mild weather. There has been no report of great catches but a few per hunter.

A fisherman stopped by our fishing holes today and reported that he got more than 10 mixed very small and some medium sized fish (Burbot). He reported two small groups of caribou tracks in the river where there were none yesterday.

Vole and shrew numbers around camp have gotten quite scarce since the weasel or weasels have moved in.

Time is passing swiftly now with long daylight, fine weather and good trail. Will need to get at our spring-summer firewood cut and haul since we only have a month and half here in the trees.

**March 9**

High 14º F
Low 6º F
Clear, clouding PM
N-NW wind to 20

Finally made a new firewood haul trail today. Turned out to be fairly easy as the deep snow in the place chosen was pretty well packed. A couple of times over it with snowshoes and then the sno-go without sled worked out pretty good. Was even able to take out a couple of half loads. After it firms up tonight, full loads will be possible. There is not a lot of dry timber in that spot but they are fine long trees killed by porcupine and spruce bark beetle.

A couple of young fellows came by today and asked Carrie if she wanted ptarmigan, if they got some. She said an emphatic yes and explained that we hadn't eaten <u>any</u> ptarmigan yet this winter. I was up cutting wood when they came by but was home when they came back. The surprise was that they had caught 18 Willow Ptarmigan, with one .22 rifle! The second surprise was that they gave them <u>all</u> to us. We tried to tell them to spread them around to some other folks but to no avail. We are thankful for such an unexpected windfall. Most of the birds came from our own creek and spruce patch. They said they ran into a flock of more than 100. They are probably the reason the Horned Owl was present yesterday and he is probably still around. A large group of prey in an otherwise barren country is a great attractant for birds of prey.

Met a couple of other hunters on the wood trail. They had seen a couple of caribou not far up the trail.

**March 10**

High 8º F
Low –5º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 18

A quiet, sun-warmed early spring Sunday in our white spruce sheltered cabin. We had visiting neighbors from Sisualik and enjoyed the company.

We have been seeing a few small birds around camp at inopportune times this week. By the time we get to binocs they have moved on. They are probably Redpolls; the other option would be Boreal Chickadees. Neither are out of place. Often there are none all winter, until early March. It is almost like the March appearance of Snow Buntings on the tidelands or city dumps.

If some large flocks of W. Ptarmigan continue to make a living locally we may see more birds of prey shortly. Northern Goshawk, Gyrfalcon, Horned Owl, Snowy Owl, and since it is near mid March, Golden Eagle and Rough-legged Hawk are remote possibilities.

The thoughts reminds that we only have a month and half here in the cabin till it is back to the tent at ocean edge. Just think of those wide-open spaces and all those birds of May!

Meanwhile we must get a pile of firewood into Sisualik as well as a number of sled loads of possessions we have hauled up here over the winter.

Our visitors today brought a good chunk of fresh seal meat with blubber that we will enjoy since it has been awhile since we have had some.

Tonight we will have boiled ptarmigan with seal oil and a good deal of the broth. It has also been a while since we have had those tasty birds, Eskimo style!

A moose reportedly coming our way from the west, observed by our visitors on their way home.

**March 11**

High 6º F
Low –20º F
Clear, some clouds
NE-E wind to 15

Town trip for business by the straight trail! This is the "straight as the raven flies" trail into town directly from our place here that we haven't used for more than a month. No corners, no detours and took us only an hour both ways. It is not quite as smooth as I thought it might be but it is now a fast trail. (Routes we have used this past month have taken from two to two and half hours each way.)

It is the first time we have been on the Sisualik staked trail since the great "ice upheaval." The two short sections that piled high are pretty impressive. They are on the north side of Kotzebue Bar. It appears they were formed by a wedge-shaped mass of floating ice being jammed against ice fastened down on both sides. The strong winds from the SW would put strong current surge, wind and high water level forces all pushing in the same direction. Tremendous pressures! Remember all of this is in inland basin waters where normally ice surface doesn't change after it freezes in mid October till break up.

Shee hooking near the east shore of Kobuk Lake is producing catches pretty regularly now.

A Kotzebue seal hunter hauling a load of fresh caught seals to Ambler for the huge gathering of people for Mid Year conference and NANA Day broke his sled in the middle of Kobuk Lake. He will have to re-adjust. If he makes it eventually he will be fortunate, as there will be many inland people there with a yearning for various seal

parts.

**March 12**

High 12º F
Low –10º F
Clear, few clouds
Light winds

A fine cool day with sun warming at midday.

Cut and hauled a load of wood today and a load of ice this PM. There seems never quite enough day to get done all that you might like to do. Thought I would get another load of wood after the ice, but ran out of steam.

Things kind of on hold till Carrie decides when she may head for Ambler and NANA Day. Friends Midyear Conference begins in Ambler tomorrow and will end Sunday. A lot of the people of the region will be in Ambler this week and for NANA Day on Monday.

Firewood cutting and hauling. It is certain that there are hunters and fishers out and we will get word of their particular excitements in the next few days.

More seals seem to have been taken than we have word of. There are some for sale at various locations. We are also cooking seal tonight for a good time of feasting on a food we haven't had for awhile.

**March 13**

High 10º F
Low –19º F
Clear, few clouds
Light winds

Another fine day. A cool night but an early warming sun.

Most of the day spent inside on paperwork and getting Carrie ready for Ambler trip tomorrow.

A high point of the day was when Carrie noticed a small bird (smaller than gray jay) near the fat hanging on a tree trunk. Finally, a Boreal Chickadee has found the moose fat hung there for him back in early December. We've had a long wait!

For many years we had a group of chickadees spend the whole winter around the cabin, coming every day to a rough feeder or hanging fat. Some became remarkably tame. One learned to come in through the window for food on a shelf. Another would regularly land on one hand to be fed from the other. A Black-capped Chickadee learned to come to call one year. For the last two years we have not had

chickadees around camp. The dead tree in front of the door that held the fat and whose branches offered escape and shelter from more aggressive Gray Jays blew down in a storm. We don't know if that is a reason or not. We see chickadees out away from camp occasionally but a camp group hasn't formed these last two years.

Large flock of Willow Ptarmigan making tracks out in the flats on the tablelands where there have been no tracks all winter. It is good to see them and their voices will soon fill the air if they hang around. It is unclear yet whether there are many flocks or only one large flock moving around rapidly.

**March 14**

High 8º F
Low –22º F
Clear, some clouds
N wind to 20, late PM

An early town trip. Made it in less than 1 hour for the first time this year. Trail has gotten very good straight in. Carrie's flight to Ambler was off at 11:00 AM.

Some trouble getting snow machine restarted after getting home for lunch. Ran Terry up to the woodcut location but forgot my snowshoes so came home empty. Terry treed another porcupine without incident.

No large animal tracks anywhere on our travels today. The moose reported to becoming our way a couple of days ago apparently didn't.

Ravens seem scarce in town.

Willow Ptarmigan tracks all over the tablelands. We saw a few this morning.

There are a few Red Fox tracks. The snow surface indicates very few creatures in our part of the region.

A Sisualik hunter did get four caribou from the Wolf Creek group.

**March 15**

High 0º F
Low –18º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 25

A beautiful sunny day over here till late afternoon and evening when winds picked up. We had a much better day than Kotzebue, which had ice fog, snowdrift and very low chill factor all day. Even Sisualik drifted most of the day.

A bad sno-go break down at midday and a long afternoon walk home took some of

the joy out of the good weather. It was good walking and the wind behind was a help for keeping cool and pushing a bit towards home.

The break down came after climbing out of the creek with a good load of wood: the chain or a bearing or both. The engine running well, but the track will not go around.

The 5-6 miles home was not bad. I haven't spent much time on snowshoes this winter and kind of miss those little joys of distance snowshoe travel. Used to spend a good deal of the winter strapped to a pair of snowshoes. They are a marvelous invention that allows a person good and rapid passage over the notoriously rough and uneven terrain of Arctic tussock tundra. One can wish, in vain, for such easy passage in the summer when snow is gone and the sun and mosquitoes are both out.

Little other news from this side. No travelers today - most everyone is up in Ambler enjoying each other's company.

**March 16**

High 3º F
Low –14º F
Clear
W-NW wind to 18

Transportation problem solved for a while. Town family brought a working rig over and took my broken down machine into the shop.

Another weekend with travelers off in a lot of different directions. Kobuk Lake fishing, Kiana sno-go race and the sunny hills of Rabbit Creek or Wolf Creek for caribou.

This is the weekend that our sun above the horizon reaches the magic 12-hour mark. Twelve hours of sun, twelve hours without! It was only 2 ½ months ago that we were down to less than two hours of sun above the horizon. Our next goal will be a full 24 hours of Sun, which will happen on the 2nd of June.

The sharp west wind air of yesterday and today is characteristic of this month. The sun and its warmth seem to have little effect on west wind air. Once the wind gets back to coming off the land, the sun almost immediately seems to spread its warmth through the air.

We wonder what will be the date that the sounds of the Arctic air, the near silence of this winter, will be broken by some cry of spring.

**March 17**

High –4º F
Low –26º F
Clear, high haze
NE wind to 15

A quiet bright but cool Sunday. Ran Terry up the trail toward the Pass. The higher mountain elevations have much warmer day temperatures than lower flat floor locations. Quite pleasant on the hillsides facing the sun when winds are light.

Fresh local caribou track reports from Sisualik neighbor that came up to get wood today. Sounds interesting. Having large groups of caribou, 30 miles on both sides of us all winter, one would expect a movement of a number of animals through here sometime. We shall see!

Some late afternoon visitors changed the whole atmosphere of the day. Good and long and productive conversation. Another time when the old adage applies: "It's never over till it's over." Great show by the visitors very invigorating! Everyone seems to have some good hope for the up coming Co-management Mini Symposium at the end of the month. Will probably have to attend and check it out.

**March 18**

High 8º F
Low –26º F
Clear
NE wind to 15

NANA Day in Ambler. Firewood cut day here. The very bright sunny days continue. Nighttime cold is pretty sharp but the sun begins to warm the air at our elevation quite early. By mid afternoon one can believe spring is really on the way.

Terry and I went up to the woodcut site with our borrowed Polaris and cut wood for 4 or 5 hours. Terry didn't find the porcupine that has been in a dead tree the last two times we were up there. Don't remember seeing a porcupine staying two days in a dry, dead tree before. Possibly it was a traumatic reaction to being surprised at rest by the "white terror to porcupines," Terry the Superdog.

The travel road seems pretty much the same except for lots of Willow Ptarmigan tracks. We saw a good bunch of the birds right in our creek crossing.

Ravens seem to have a new lilt in their flight and their voice. They too have felt the hint of spring.

It will be good to see a different species of bird. It truly has been a poor winter bird year for our section. Change in that status could come soon.

No word yet on broken snow machine in town. Hope it can be fixed.

**March 19**

High 12º F
Low –15º F
High clouds, thin
NE-E wind to 38

Town trip with the borrowed sno-go to pick up the Ambler traveler. With a high wind watch on for this evening wasn't real sure we would make home in time but we did. Wind and drift was pretty heavy and we lost the morning track several miles out on the Sound. We did manage to hit the bank edge of the tablelands, but a mile east of our trail climb out. Not much lost time but always a bit fretful when you can't see where you are or the surface in front of you.

Lots of tales from Ambler tonight. They had quite a gathering of old friends and others up there. People from far and wide. Most will have gone home by tomorrow. Ambler will be pretty quiet.

We have a couple of days of bad winds forecast again. Hope they are not worse than forecast.

Interesting news on two fronts from town. A heavy shee catch at Pipe Spit by at least one fisherman. Fish not large but plentiful. It is a month early for Pipe Spit but good news for us as it is close.

The other news is of multitude wolf catches (and at least three wolverines) from both Noatak and Kobuk watersheds. It is as we predicted. Long day with near perfect snow surface and very little chance earlier in the season because of such poor hunting conditions will augur for a heavy late harvest of these two animals.

**March 20**

High 20º F
Low 10º F
Clear, few clouds
E-SE wind 45

Lots of wind today but no fresh snow and no drifting inside of our spruce patch, for which we are thankful. Sisualik and Kotzebue residents have not been so fortunate. Heavy drift and harder and harder snow. Gusts have been into the 50's at Kotzebue. It is kind of unusual to have such strong winds without snow for so long.

The strong offshore wind means wide leads and lots of open water along the NW coast of Alaska.

The timing of this situation may have an effect on spring whale movement - both bowhead and beluga. We shall see if there is.

Some large snow "pillows" are building in the drift sections and our level trail may look different - it does already with tussocks showing again and some snow sculpted piles with abrupt drop offs on the side facing SW.

Our local ravens are having a great time on the strong wind updrafts.

Have seen a few small birds around camp the last few days and haven't been able to catch them with binocs. They may be redpolls if not chickadees. Redpolls do increase in most years about this time.

Hunting and cross-country travel kind of on hold till winds drop off. Traveling and hunting is possible since distance visibility is pretty good but it is risky. When clouds quickly move in and fresh new snow has begun, the hunter-traveler has a whiteout storm almost immediately, which is storm difficult to handle.

**March 21**

High 24º F
Low 16º F
Cloudy, snow
E-SE wind to 45

Strong winds again most of the day and clouds with some fresh snow but not a lot. Things began to improve early evening as clouds began breaking up and winds began to wind down. Tomorrow may be a better day. Heavy drift all day today made outside work or travel better left to another day.

Our camp crew of Gray Jays worked hard all day as warming temperatures made all those hard frozen food scraps soft enough to chip off a load to haul away and cache somewhere else. Two ravens did some visiting with a variety of vocalizations and an eye out for a chance to hijack a loaded Gray Jay. Ravens have a sharp eye and a good brain. They often are able to locate a Gray Jay food cache site.

Our in-house Balsam Poplar twigs have developed some fine big glossy light green leaves. The new growth green makes a fine indoor bouquet much more pleasing to the eye and mind than a cluster of artificial flowers!

We received word tonight that our sno-go is repaired. That is good news and sooner than expected.

We may now get on with our summer firewood cut and haul or go shee fishing.

We will begin searching the sky for the new comet as soon as cloud cover permits.

A rescue report of three Russian skiers in the Bering Straits. They have been located but not yet picked up. There are said to be many Polar Bears in the near vicinity. High winds and lack of fuel caused helicopters to leave the area before pick up.

**March 22**

High 28º F
Low 20º F
Cloudy, some sun
Snow late
SE wind to 25

Town trip to retrieve repaired snow machine. After storm trail very good and level old trail showing down on the ice. Bumps have developed again up here in the tablelands and tussocks are showing more prominently. Town trail is still fast - slightly under an hour for us.

Quite a lot of open water again not far off shore of Sisualik and Sealing Pt. There is some shelf (land fast) ice again though to hunt from and travel on for those that wish to brave it for reward of a fat seal.

Windy, drifting on the ground this morning but quite mild warm air. Very spring-like. No overflow from this last blow, probably because it was not the cyclonic kind of storm that usually brings such conditions. Winds didn't shift clear around the compass. They just blew with gale force for two full days from E and SE. We are developing some mighty huge east wind formed snowbanks in the country.

Several people have reported seeing redpolls in town and in the country where there were none through the winter. In a phone conversation on St. Patrick's Day with a friend in Tok, AK (Interior), learned that redpolls at their feeder had increased many fold from what were regular winter feeders. We have noticed over many years that there is an increase in redpoll sightings in March each year. Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Hawk and Snow Buntings have been recognized as first early migrants in March. Redpolls may also qualify for this early migrant honor.

**March 23**

High 29º F
Low 20º F
Cloudy, snow
SE wind to 18

A warm day with the snow from showers melting on dark objects when the sun breaks through the cloud cover.

The sun is probably stimulating growth on hillside exposed tussocks areas. There are many of these spots partially bare of snow after our last spell of 40 knot east winds.

We are seeing new birds! We have two Boreal Chickadees coming regularly to moose fat hung under tree branches. As usual, the camp Gray Jays think they own the place and won't tolerate the chickadees when they are around. The chickadees know how to handle the situation though. Our gray jay flock contains four now. For most of the winter three were regularly present, though a fourth was sometimes around.

Didn't go anywhere today except a short circle around camp to run the dog and go over the trails. Whiteout conditions prevailed. There were no fresh ptarmigan tracks but there were fresh fox tracks again inside the tree patch and close to the cabin.

We have another high wind warning out for tomorrow afternoon. More east wind to 40 and more snow. No end till May I guess.

A small short-tailed weasel and the red squirrels are back in the storehouse. Voles are not. Probably tough for voles to make a living.

Hope the clouds clear tonight so we can locate the comet.

**March 24**

High 28º F
Low 18º F
Cloudy, snow
E-SE wind to 30

Wind picking up through the afternoon and gale expected during the night. The long stretch of wind and mild temperatures has given a spring-like slickness to areas where people have been active.

Very wide ocean leads with winds and mild weather may negatively affect whaling activities next month.

A short ride with the dog this morning in the drifting snow showed that lower levels of trail are still level and visible, but ridge tops and side hills are getting gouged out with bumps, holes, and much bare ground showing.

One hunter got out on ocean ice yesterday but reported too much wind and too large water. He did see seals but conditions too severe to get any.

Second day of women’s dog races cancelled today due to weather.

Little hunting or fishing success reported lately probably due to unstable weather.

An unusually high catch of char by hook and line has been reported from Kivalina in

the last 10 days. Techniques of winter fishing at Kivalina have been rather slow (compared to Noatak) to develop. The fishermen on the coast seem to be catching up. Some sacks of char have been advertised for sale this week for as much as $150.

Our two new common Boreal Chickadees are spending more time at the hanging moose fat. One has an unusual white line where wing rests against body feathers.

**March 25**

High 35º F
Low 29º F
Cloudy, snow, rain
SE-S wind to 30

A rather strange dull damp and warm day for March. Winds were quite strong early in the day and the trees very springy and lively in their wind dance because of the above freezing temperatures.

It was not a great day for traveling but some did occur, including the matriarch for the William's clan going from Sealing Point to town. Rain gear would be a reasonable travel garb. The new snow with rain mix is very sticky, clinging to anything that it touches (gloves, clothes, sno-go track). With this extended mild spell late in March we may see a cool April. If not we will have an early spring. Everything dripping this afternoon: trees, willows, roof and especially any dark colored object above snow surface.

One positive affect the period of rain might have is to fasten new snow down so that the next wind will not sweep it into piles that will spoil our fine trail system.

Our camp bird group now is 4 gray jays, 2 common raven and the two boreal chickadees. They were all busy early in the day as food scraps were thawed but all faded away early as the air got quite wet.

Very extensive open water leads along the West coast of Alaska will surely affect marine mammal and sea bird movement this early spring.

Apparently the all day south winds have not brought on much marine overflow water, yet. No storm surge.

**March 26**

High 34º F
Low 14º F
Cloudy, snow, sun
SW wind to 38

Town trip and with a remarkable day of weather change. Everything in one day! Warm sunshine and bright, no clouds as we took off at 11:00 AM. Clouds covered

the sky before we traveled ¼ of the way, then bright sun, melting roofs in Kotzebue. Leaving Kotzebue in sun but ground drift from SW. Only tops of our tallest coastal mountains and our morning trail showing. Conditions worsened soon after we got home, with heavy snowfall and 40 knot winds that made an honest warm blizzard for 3 hours. Finally, broken clouds, sun out, and light winds just as the sun went down.

We got an excited phone call from our neighbor 5 miles east soon after we got home. She had seen a "white sea gull" with ravens where her boys had cut up some meat for dog food, blood on the snow.

We, in our group of people, have not before had a gull sighting this early. According to the literature, there have been overwintering Glaucous Gulls in waters off the Seward Peninsula. With such long and strong offshore winds and with so much open marine water, a land straying gull shouldn't be a surprise. But it is to us and of course to our neighbor, as we have not heard before of a March land-sighting of a Glaucous Gull! Our neighbor says that we will have an early spring.

Two small groups of caribou seen today on the trail down through our place from the Hatchery.

There also was an interesting report of a dozen marten taken this winter, south and west of the Squirrel River drainage. We have not seen or heard of sign of this graceful creature west of the Noatak River.

**March 27**

High 34º F
Low 6º F
Clear, fog patches
Light westerlies

A very beautiful bright and warm day. Rather too sticky to work wood or anything outdoors that needs to be laid down and picked up again. Some snow balling of snow on snow machine tracks too.

The talk of the region is the early appearance of gulls (Glaucous, presumably) at various points since yesterday. One at Jones Camp, several in Kotzebue and many by the family at Sealing Pt. An afternoon phone call from Point Lay for another reason did reveal that gulls had also been seen there. March gull sightings, so far as our experience goes, are pretty much unknown for this region.

The large amount of ice-free ocean water on the whole western coast of Alaska is probably the primary cause of the month early movement. Food in that water could also be a factor. Unusual sea conditions related to temperatures could bring some species (Capelin, Sand lance or Arctic Cod).

Usually the first Glaucous Gulls turn up during the last week of April.

A clearing sky late yesterday evening got us out of the house between 10 and 11 to look for Hyakutake Comet. It was not hard to find. It and the North Star were the only two prominent points of light off the "pointer stars" of the big dipper lip. The star was a bright point of light, the comet a kind of "cotton ball" fuzzy light looking larger than the star and with a faint broad tail. The brightness of the moon is detracting from it, making fainter the tail of the comet, which looks something like a miniature Milky Way.

Have not in my lifetime seen a comet so plainly. Quite an unusual treat.

**March 28**

High 34º F
Low 10º F
Clear
NE wind to 15

Another beautiful April day, in March! Hard to believe our weather and season variations this year.

There are still Glaucous Gulls around Sealing Pt. No new reports from other places.

Hauled down a couple of loads of wood today before a visitor friend came by. We had a good lunch and a long afternoon of conversation.

The warm midday Sun is so good to feel on bare skin. No gloves, no facemask, even in short shirtsleeves for a time. After so long a period of protecting skin from low chill factor temperatures while outdoors it is such a good relaxing feeling to be out in the air in temperatures your body can easily tolerate.

Our everyday camp creatures now total eleven: four gray jays, two ravens, two boreal chickadees, two red squirrels and a short-tailed weasel. They don't get along well together but they are able to work and eat around each other with a fairly high degree of toleration. The two of us people and our Superdog aren't given any particular homage, though one can kind of sense a certain recognition that the regular daily treats that are here for them are here because of us. Can that be called "community?"

Just found out tonight that we may have a family visiting (overnighting) this weekend from Galena by aircraft. Have to make an airfield tomorrow!

**March 29**

High 36º F
Low 10º F
Clear and clouds
NE wind to 18

We had an early bird this morning. A Three-toed Woodpecker was whacking away on the large dead white spruce. Haven't had one around the house before this winter. A very good and loud noise in an otherwise pretty silent forest.

Weather remains mild - quite warm in the midday sun and sticky surface.

Packed a landing strip down today with the snow machine. It is a two-way strip ready for north/south or east/west directions. The south-north portion is best: longer, better-packed and less undulations. Our visitors shouldn't have any trouble getting on the ground. Hope the weather continues to be good.

Red Squirrels and Gray Jay very active these days with much chasing and display interactions.

Another surprise today, a single Ground Squirrel seen out today at Sealing Pt. We do not recall ever hearing of Ground Squirrels and Glaucous Gulls in the month of March! They are both April happenings, and normally in the second half of April. We habitually allow for a two week or 10 day difference between early and late springs but we thought that was the upper limits. We wonder what is next for this spring of 1996.

A good catch of 150 Shee reported yesterday from "Rock Island" (Ivik).

**March 30**

High 35º F
Low 22º F
Cloudy
NW wind to 15

Visitors successfully used the landing field. We have certainly enjoyed their coming and there were many a varied conversations. Semi whiteout conditions developed before they got in and the tree branches were good marking the outlines of the runway.

We did locate the comet some distance more south of Polaris. The moonshine has increased so the comet was less prominent again.

Our little cabin, quite adequate for us, seems full tonight with two more adults and their two young lively children.

**March 31**

High 36º F
Low 16º F
Clear
NW-N wind to 18

The ptarmigan group was around late this evening with lots of "crowing" and fussing sounds, good after the silence of last spring.

Some late visitors tonight. Our four visitors from Galena were joined by two mutual old friends. With the two of us that makes 8 people in our little 16x20 house. There was a lot of different conversation.

Well, April is just a bit ahead. Glaucous Gulls and Ground Squirrels have already made a showing, in March. Now there is a hint that our weather is heading into a cooling trend that will hold break up for another month. We will need that month to get our Sisualik wood haul, and many loads of personal "junk" back down to summer camp.

Not much new around our spruce patch except a lot of Red Squirrel activity.

Sealing Point finally caught a few seals. They reported getting one large female with a large unborn seal inside. They are lucky. Common Ringed Seals are very fat at this time and young seals will be born, probably all of them this month. The unborn seals have very beautiful long silvery white hair and make beautiful trim for fur clothing of several kinds.

Some good Shee catches were made a few days ago but reported catch pretty low for this Sunday from reports we have had.

The comet in sight again, continuing to slip south of Polaris.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## APRIL

**April 1**

High 30º F
Low 17º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 20

We have reached April when that magical change of seasons begins. Jonathan back hopefully and possibly some early arriving cranes and geese. Winter is really going to be over! Hurray!

Guests got on their way this morning and left it pretty quiet today. We've had a fairly strong north wind all day with some surface drift out in the open. We did have a very bright sun all day and it was warm out of the wind.

Red Squirrel and Gray Jay continue spring carnival-like hyperactivity. The surface of the snow has become a real parade ground for both species. The sun for several days at midday has gotten warm enough to crust it enough to support these forest habitat light weights and they are just reveling in the freedom of it. "Look ma, no snowshoes!"

We believe that it is likely that there are also bears out but we have not yet heard of a report to substantiate that. Snow cover and traveling conditions are ideal so it is likely that bear hunt success will be great this month.

**April 2**

High 18º F
Low 12º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 25

Early town trip with rather heavy ground drift. We got in a little after 8:00 AM and made it to meeting for caribou co-management on time at 8:30 AM. The Museum, where meetings were held, was quite cool and dark with no windows. You kind of lose contact with the outside world and wonder what is changing out there.

There was a good turnout from a wide range of people. The general "sense of the meeting" was good. Since initiative for action will be left with Maniilaq Association we will have to see what develops. To work together towards maintaining the health and existence of this great resource important to so many people is a great idea; it is a work worthy of sacrifices of time and expense from individuals within the region of the range of this animal as well as those from the rest of the State.

With the relatively good weather, sheefishing activity on Kobuk Lake continues to occupy many people. There is also, this week, a crew from ADF&G taking samples and monitoring this phase of shee harvest. It seems to indicate a little more intense work to gain better knowledge of shee dynamics as well as the folks that harvest them. Current understanding of those dynamics are quite incomplete.

**April 3**

High 16º F
Low 5º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 18

Second day of the mini-symposium.

Though the session was shortened some and hurried along for the sake of distant travelers and aircraft time deadlines, more information for future developments seemed more in evidence than during the first day. Again, time will tell what fruits this good coming together might produce.

Saw a town raven busily gathering a great wad of caribou hair from an old outdoor skin for a purpose that only he/she might know.

Evening winds have dropped and night temperatures are likely to drop below 0º F again. It has been sometime since that has happened.

We had not planned to overnight in town but we did and will look forward to getting home and catching up on happenings there. Terry the Superdog will go without fellowship and supper and inside things may freeze a bit.

**April 4**

High 16º F
Low –14º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 20

Believe it or not, we have not had below zero temperatures since the 19th of March! That is quite a long "warm spell" and the Glaucous Gulls and Ground Squirrels reported a month early can at least in part, be said to be there as result of the temperatures.

It was learned during our staying in Kotzebue that seal hunting was quite productive for several hunters out of Kotzebue last week. Multiple catches (mostly less than ten for any individual hunter) were made and a few females with unborn pups were taken. Most Ringed Seals have given birth in March and only rarely are females still carrying young into April.

Several seal hunters reported both Ivory Gulls and Glaucous Gulls in the wide shore leads off Kotzebue and Sisualik. All unusual but not really surprising given the nature of the two species.

On the few days that the winds were right for hunting, the abundant open water was made good use of by a few Kotzebue hunters.

Our upland trails have gotten kind of lumpy again due to three days of ground drift from the north.

It is reported that a first bowhead was taken on St. Lawrence Island (Gambell) on the first.

**April 5**

High 16º F
Low –14º F
Clear, clouding PM
N-NW wind to 15

Temperatures remarkably similar to yesterday. Late clouding and promise of snow may change the scene for tomorrow.

Wood cut and haul today. Sore muscles tonight. After about three days of it the body used to accommodate to it. We hardly get that intense.

Haven't seen the two Boreal Chickadees for several days.

Snow Buntings have been mentioned around town and the gull sightings around the country seem to have ceased with the coming of sub zero temperatures.

Saw the camp Short-tailed Weasel this morning. He looks very healthy and fat and brave. He is quite tall when he stands on his hind legs.

Our good clear weather seems to have come to a close. Snow and some wind have been promised by the weatherman. With west winds, the cooling trend may continue into early May. This is the local community feeling towards the time spring may come: cold early April means that spring may come early. A warm spell in early April means cold end of April, usually run by west wind and cold Siberian air mass. Our late March's extended warm spell may be the trigger for a cool April.

Lots of dog races, sno-go races and other people festivities this weekend.

Saw the comet well last night before the big old moon came up. Not much better than the first time we saw it, but is now in our SW sky.

**April 6**

High 25º F
Low 6º F
Cloudy AM, clearing
Light winds

Hauled a first load of wood to Sisualik, got a load of lake ice and then brought a load of dry logs down from the cutting site. A day of pretty good exercise.

There was a big time in some villages today. Dog team races, snow machine races and though the morning was dull the sun came out warm and bright in the afternoon and just being outdoors was pretty pleasant.

Talked to a person who had recently hunted caribou at Rabbit Creek. His sled still had considerable blood. He said it was a good trip but lots of caribou and lots of rocks. He said the meat was worth it. Also talked to fellows that were up in the Wolf Creek area. There were several hunters and they had taken only one.

There have been many travelers up the coast to Kivalina yesterday and today. Very good singing and lots of it has been a great drawing card for Kivalina in the past few years at Easter time. A new (less than 10 years) tradition has sprung up. Kivalina invites anyone who wishes to come and there have been many from other villages to make the pilgrimage. The weather this year seems fine for the long trip.

Our Red Squirrels seem to be the most plentiful living warm-blooded creature in our small world. There is very little sign of other creatures within many miles of here. The only change now will probably be the influx of migrant birds in May.

**April 7**

High 20º F
Low 8º F
Cloudy, snow
E-SW-NE wind to 18

There have been some unique and remarkable reports from Kotzebue Sound through the past 10 days. Here is a bit of a summary. There are numerous Glaucous Gull sightings around town, in camps, and out in the wide-open water lead off Cape Blossom and Sisualik and Sealing Pt. The earliest of these were in March, a time when no one locally seems to remember seeing G. Gulls before. Various single sightings of Ivory Gulls were reported; a group of 15 to 20 was seen around an opened seal carcass at the edge of open water. At least one sighting of Ivory Gull was reported in Kotzebue. A group of 5 or 6 Polar Bears was reported not far off Cape Blossom near Kotzebue this week. A kittiwake was also reported with the gulls at open water edge. Most of these ocean related creatures, present where they seldom are at this season, can be assumed to be where they are due to wide open sea water all along the west coast of Alaska. One wonders what or how this will affect northern migration of marine

mammals (bowhead, beluga, walrus).

Two inches of new snow today and promise of a bit more will change our travel surface some, hopefully for the better.

The first week of April, Easter and change to daylight savings time has passed, which means our move to the coast will be our primary concern for the next few weeks, hopefully not too early nor too late.

**April 8**

High 12º F
Low –16º F
Clear
NE-E wind to 18

Cold last night! Our suggestion last week that April might cool down and spoil the hope of some for an early spring seems to be on target. One wonders how the creatures other than humans are coping now.

Our great flock of W. Ptarmigan has not been around for a week. There were no new tracks in the snow either toward Sisualik or toward our wood cut site on the upper part of the creek we are on. Some dark heads should be showing on adult males wherever they are. In years with light snow cover, that can happen as early as the last week of March.

Chill factor temperatures were down in the –40º F range this forenoon.

Movement of our clocks ahead another hour yesterday puts us again to the state of a full three hours out of sync with the sun. There was still too much "daylight" in the western sky at 12:00 PM last night to see the Comet. It should have looked good at 3 AM, which is true midnight under this dumb time system.

There was enough snow yesterday to alter our trail surface and to make a ground storm if the wind gets strong enough. We are not through with drifting snow yet this year, I am sorry to say. Our trick will again be enjoying our spruce patch down to the last minute when snow gets warm enough to stick together and can't drift.

**April 9**

High 24º F
Low –8º F
Clear
Some high thin clouds
NE-E wind to 20

Town trip. Good trail though drifted over. One hour each way. Came home early to be ready for house full of visiting biologists.

They came and we had a great time of unlimited conversation, mostly about fish. They left us a couple of good fresh caught fish – sheefish - that we will get cooked up tomorrow.

Not much new in town except for a bit more bustle and hustle and roof drip at midday advertising the approach of break-up. Everyone seems a bit more enlivened by the thought and looking forward to the reality of it.

Bering Sea southern ice edge reported to be unusually far north for this date. It seems we may yet have an early spring. The results of our unusual March weather may generate some other strange events as break-up draws near.

**April 10**

High 35º F
Low 12º F
Clear
NE wind to 18

A fine, fine April day. A very warm sun in front of the cabin though it was still drifting a bit down in Sisualik as I found out hauling a load of Summer firewood there. The country still white down there. No gulls and no squirrels. We find ourselves wondering if Jonathan, our "camp watch gull," checked for us down there during the last warm spell when numerous very early Glaucous Gulls were seen.

The only hint of spring today is the warm sun. No reports of new birds or animal movements that might be related to the new coming season.

A small flock (12) of W. Ptarmigan did finally track up our new snow surface at the creek crossing.

We did see the comet again last night at about 12:00 PM. It has gone farther toward our western horizon where the sun now keeps a light bright spot through the night. The comet isn't any plainer to see than it was before the light of the moon began to wipe the stars out.

After having an exciting time last night with a house full of working biologists it is very quiet tonight and only the haunting thoughts of points made in good conversation linger on.

There are a lot of races on for the coming weekend, starting tomorrow. The Kobuk 440 takes off at noon tomorrow.

**April 11**

High 37º F
Low 6º F
Clear
NE wind to 15

A very clear sky and a very warm sun today. One would expect to see squirrels out in Sisualik but I didn't. Made three trips that way today with firewood and some other stuff. First time all winter that it was not drifting there while I was there.

There were a few W. Ptarmigan tracks on the trail and only two fox tracks over the 6-7 mile stretch. We have a very good haul trail this year. Hope it stays that way till we complete our move.

It seems early to seek to complete our move. Usually we hold to the first few days of May. This year is so unusual we think we do need to be near ready with an eye to weather system that might develop rain.

Visitors again tonight. We've had them often lately. A whole winters worth in 10 days! The good weather, good trails and warm long lasting sun helps them along this way. Good show! Lots of interesting conversations.

Sheefish news pretty slow though some are being taken. Some of our visitors have been a part of the crew that are taking samples and harvest information on Kobuk Lake each day. Finally some more work is being done toward understanding shee life dynamics. There has been a real lack of understandings of the ways of this fish.

**April 12**

High 34º F
Low 5º F
Clear
N wind to 18

Another of those beautiful days sometimes found in April. Not too cold, not too hot, very bright and dry with light winds throughout.

Took a couple of loads to Sisualik and then got another load of wood from up creek.

The sun has just warmed the snow surface by midday (3:00 PM), but there is not enough warmth to soften the underneath before evening temperatures drop below freezing again. These are ideal conditions for many things - fishing, traveling, hunting. It is a great time of year for hauling things with a great level trail that remains firm all day.

We may hit Kobuk Lake tomorrow to try our hand at sheefishing. We haven't heard of strong catches this week but fish in small numbers have been taken each day.

Moose and caribou are certainly absent from our area this month. Have not seen a track of either in our short travels for wood, ice and town.

Red Squirrels, weasel, Willow Ptarmigan and an occasional Spruce Grouse and Red Fox are our only track makers now.

The first geese of the season were reported into Creamer's Field in Fairbanks today.

**April 13**

High 34º F
Low 2º F
Clear, ground fog
NE wind to 15

Finally a trip to Kobuk Lake. It was a fine cool, clear morning here when we started off about 8 AM. We got to Pipe Spit in an hour or so and then got stuck in the fog before we could locate yesterday's fishing holes. A young fellow with better eyes than us stopped and gave us help in the fog to find the lost hooking spot.

We got a few fish right away. The first to grab my hook was a fine big fat female that was just able to come through the hole. It was a fine fish of about 20 lbs. We got 8-10 smaller fish and made it back home around 5:00 PM when the auger refused to work.

Our second vase of Balsam Poplar has leafed out again already. They sure add a nice spring promise to the inside of the house.

There were quite a few people on the lake. Probably 30 and all probably got a few fish.

We were near (½ mile) from where the women's snow machine race trail passed through. The Kobuk 440 dog race will use the same route late this evening on their way into Kotzebue town after a long, long run. Our local distant friend Louie Nelson has a good chance to win since he got into Noorvik, the last village, before a Kotzebue finish. We wish him well; he has worked hard.

**April 14**

High 31º F
Low 6º F
Clear, high clouds
N-NE wind to 20

That spring migratory bird milestone has come again. There was a time 20 years ago when a nephew living in Noatak had Sandhill Crane in the pot for his birthday on this date. It remains our most early migrating fowl harvest.

We were very tired last night from our Kobuk Lake adventure. After a good feed from

the biggest fish and a good night's rest we are feeling "chipper" again.

Point Hope took a first (for them) Bowhead Whale today - apparently a cleaner, earlier though probably not less yearned for catch than last year's.

Took Terry up to the wood cut site for his run today and found it warm inside the trees but windy with some ground drift in the open. Wood cut this year, so far, seems less than in most recent years. There is time yet but a number of local camp elders have switched to oil for camp home heat.

Our four Gray Jays worked double hard today to clean up and re-store. Bread, oil and fat waste keeps them pretty busy and out of other trouble.

Unsure what to do with the coming week. More fishing? More wood? More summer camp preparation and continued hauling of things out of here to make our last minute move easier? We are coming into the last two weeks of April, which is traditionally spring moving time.

Our one-day trip yesterday sure made us richer. The single large shee was a fish of size and quality not likely to be surpassed. Fresh caribou meat given to us while there will keep us eating the best of the land for this month.

**April 15**

High 35º F
Low 6º F
Clear
Light winds

Well, here it is mid month already and we have a wonderful warm sun by the doorstep but the country round about still is white and snow is firm. It seems our spring thaw is not going to be too early. Last year we moved out on the 24th.

Today was beautiful. Took a load down to Sisualik in the morning and enjoyed a visiting Prof. of Biol. from Nevada in the afternoon. Genetic engineering is a bit over my head but I learned a lot in a few hours concerning some unexpected possible benefits from several of our local fish species concerning their ability to function in very low temperatures. Herring and Rainbow Smelt are currently of particular interest because of their ability to produce anti-freeze and glycol.

No spring bird reports locally yet and no additional reports of Ground Squirrels or bears out.

Most of the action this week is up on the Shee fishing grounds after a whole series of different races over the weekend.

**April 16**

High 24º F
Low 9º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 20

Opened the summer camp today. Made two trips down to Sisualik. On the second Carrie went with me and we shoveled out the door, cleaned the snow off the roof, set the stovepipe on the stove and built a nice warm fire. There was a lot of "rain drip" as the accumulated frost on the inside of the canvas thawed but once gone things will be nice and dry. We usually fire up two or three times before moving things into the tent. It wintered well this time with very little snow inside and no damage to the frame from snow weight. Our winter winds were so strong and frequent there was little chance for roof weight build up.

The landscape very white down there yet with no thawed ground showing yet. No squirrels out yet either and no sign that Jonathan (the camp watch gull) has been there yet. We will expect him the last week of this month though. It will be a terrible disappointment if he doesn't show. We've put an awful lot of food and time in on that bird. We will know him again by his remembered response to some of our actions. He has become a multi-year friend with some great tales to tell, if only we could speak his language.

There was a good flock of W. Ptarmigan in the spruce patch when we came in this afternoon. With the N wind blowing they seem to have sought the shelter and warm sun that this spruce patch offers. We did not see dark heads or a scattering of birds (display sign) so we may have a hint that spring is far off yet.

**April 17**

High 34º F
Low 10º F
Cloudy, snow, fog
Light winds

A town trip and a mean one on the way home: complete "whiteout". We were able to do it by Sisualik staked trail. Trying to see the old tracks where the trail was firm was extremely eye tiring. Off the trail was soft with out big load. It was not cold, there was no drifting snow and the machine functioned well. Probably shouldn't complain but in mid April you expect bright weather and well-defined firm trails like we've had for the past two weeks. Seems like even thinking of a town trip is enough to bring a weather change toward the negative.

A Yute Air plane crash happened while we were shopping at Hansen's. Pilot and freight only. He survived the crash and was med-evaced to Anchorage. Crash happened just after take off, altitude 500', a sudden turn dive into the ground. Freight was for Kiana. Stuff scattered three or four hundred yards along the ice of crash path.

A small plane pilot reported seeing two bears out a few miles of our place yesterday. They were well up in the mountains where they usually are at this time.

No new bird reports yet.

Streets of town getting a bit wet; everything white out in the country yet.

Wonder where Jonathan is at this point in time.

**April 18**

High 24º F
Low –4º F
Clear, fog patches
Light winds

Everything bright white again today. The snow of yesterday and last night that fell without wind added up to about 2 inches. The bright sun today on the new whiteness made the world so different than yesterday when the total "whiteout" made traveling so miserable.

Got a load of firewood and then Carrie and I went down to the tent in Sisualik and had a fire in the stove for a couple of hours.

The only fresh tracks on the snow today were foxes and our camp Short-tailed Weasel. Some Red Squirrels of course have made tracks around their trees and of course bears that are out will have made tracks today. It was an ideal day for bear hunters and no doubt there have been some out.

Cool weather has filled in again to prevent any "too early" spring thaw from developing. The wonder now is whether it will be a late spring, or simply a "normal" spring, whatever that is.

We will be eating trout flour soup tonight courtesy of some generous Noatak fishers.

We have been eating well this April with lots of variety. March and April this year are certainly not starvation months for us.

**April 19**

High 28º F
Low –18º F
Clear, few clouds
Light winds

A cold temperature for this April day. The sun warmed quite early though and the great lack of wind for several days has been fine, especially with considerable top light snow

that will drift if it doesn't warm more at midday before we have wind.

The tent in Sisualik is all shoveled out and we had fire in the stove yesterday and today to dry it out some. We are ready to make the move now whenever it seems good.

Lots of new ptarmigan tracks today in both directions and of both species (Willow and Rock). Have not seen much sign of Rock Ptarmigan in our lower elevations of travel this winter. Today their "short step" tracks up to each dwarf birch twig sticking out of the snow was pretty descriptive of the species. The smaller bird seems to seek out the smaller leaf bud of the *Betula* shrub, *Betula glandulosa*, rather than the larger buds on the various *Salix* sp. that willow ptarmigan thrives on. Perhaps the name should be Birch Ptarmigan rather than the Rock Ptarmigan to be consistent.

Several more overnight fox tracks on both our north and south trails. Maybe increased wandering by as yet unmated pairs.

A single pile of W. Ptarmigan feathers along the trail today. A Gyrfalcon or a Northern Goshawk fed in Sanningaruq today or possibly even the stray Horned Owl seen some time ago in our tree patch.

**April 20**

High 42º F
Low 18º F
Clouds AM, clear PM
Light winds

It is good to feel 40º F temps again. It was a fine windless warm day and we moved a good deal of our "junk" down here to Sisualik. We plan to spend the night in the tent on the edge of Kotzebue Sound - wide open spaces again! It is a little early but we hope we'll be lucky and not have another storm this month. Today was certainly beautiful and several people report seeing Ground Squirrels out, but there weren't any out here today. Maybe tomorrow. Weather forecast is for continued mild weather.

No bird reports yet.

There are many Tundra Voles overwintering in our "generator shed" where we had a sack of whitefish.

Fishing seems kind of slow on Kobuk Lake. The only "hot spots" seems to be the various slough outlets where a mixture of sub adult shee, burbot and northern pike are the catch, sometimes a sled load.

Number of occupied Sisualik camps has increased quickly this week and more will surely follow as snow softens and water rises in Kotzebue streets.

**April 21**

High 48º F
Low 22º F
Clear, few clouds
NE wind to 15

It felt warmer than the temps indicate today. With the sun beating down on the yet all white world without wind, the warmth seemed intense.

We seemed to have moved right on time though it seems early. The surface snow really softened this time today and will not likely drift much when it blows next.

Lots of visitors today. Kind of one after the other. We did get two sled loads out of Sanningaruq this morning and have at least one more to finish up the season.

Lots of Ground Squirrels out on the coast today. Bear tracks in the mountains all reported by visitors, but no bird report. Wouldn't be surprised to see Jonathan or some of his relatives tomorrow. Geese and cranes may make a pre-May showing this year if the trend continues.

The streets of town will be pretty watery this week and we will need to get gas and heavy staples (flour, sugar, evaporated milk, etc.) out while the trail remains firm.

This is the usual talk of "thaw time" on Kotzebue Sound and it can be as early as now or, as is more often the case, into early May. At any rate it is wonderful when it happens. One looks forward to the feel of warm air on the skin, the sound of bird wings and song in the air and the remembered sound of waves on the water. Another long winter has passed and the world is about to start growing again. Let it begin!

**April 22**

High 48º F
Low 26º F
Clear
Gusty N-NE wind 18

Fine frozen trail this morning so got the last of the heavy stuff out of the trees. The snow softened in the afternoon hours again.

One of our "in camp" ground squirrels first came out this afternoon and I saw an earlier one near the trail back on the lagoon edge on the way down from Sanningaruq.

The older folks of the Sealing Point family went down to their Sealing Point house today. They have health problems, and have been having them for several years. Hopefully they will have a good spring in camp. They long for it.

Point Hope has three whales now, catching the third one today. They are doing well this

year though they have lost two. They still have several strikes.

Thought that we would hear more Willow Ptarmigan this spring but so far that has not yet happened. There have been some big flocks but no indication of breaking up for display activity yet.

We still must get heavy stuff out of town tomorrow. Two drums of gas will be the most heavy. We then have one last trip to make up to winter camp to close up and bring down the last of things we will need for summer.

Still no spring bird reported, at least not in a manner that we could hear of it. Surely some inland points should have seen cranes or geese by now.

**April 23**

High 40º F
Low 8º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 10

Two trips to town for fuel and staples. Fine trail straight in, 45-minute trip. We haven't enjoyed such trails at this pre-breakup hauling season for a long time.

There were three goose reports in today from widely separate points.

A single Glaucous Gull was reported from Sealing Pt.

Much traveling and moving of heavy things around the country today while the trail surface is still firm. This clear weather with cold nights and warm days is great and will allow travel for some time.

Town streets got wet quickly today after being hard frozen early in the day.

More squirrels out today. We are finding it hard to wait for Jonathan, our camp watch gull. Will he be back? It's a tough world out there and winter does take a hard toll on living creatures.

**April 24**

High 34º F
Low 0º F
Clear
Light westerlies

Another beautiful bright sunny day but a little cooler, reflecting the sea breeze. Winds were off of the ice instead of off the ground.

Still no new bird reports. Jonathan where are you? We are into the last week of April!

We cleaned up the winter place today and got everything out that is coming out. We didn't nail up the bear proofing so at least one more trip is required. Also should our good weather turn to bad we can still easily overnight up there. It is still early enough to develop some mean storms if conditions should develop. They have in the past.

We did see a flock of 10 or so Willow Ptarmigan today and they seemed pretty white yet and of course flocked yet, which seems a bit contrary to the feel of things round about.

There is a good deal of ground showing now on inland trails, prime walking places with some feed available for crane, geese and of course displaying W. Ptarmigan. Also a number of tundra hump heath plants will be getting a head start over those pieces of tundra that will be snow covered for a long while yet.

It was a good day for people living along the beach to be out on the sea ice looking for marine mammals with the wind change pattern. There would be both Ringed Seals and Uguruq laying on the ice in the sun in this fine weather.

**April 25**

High 26º F
Low –3º F
Clear
Light winds

Another town run for fuel. Good firm trails. Our spring move and supply runs have been very easy this year with good trails and lots of time. The cold mornings before the fire gets going are uncomfortable but that may change as warmer weather sets in.

Two camp squirrels were out today for an hour. Don't think they made it at all yesterday.

No new bird news today. Temperatures and snow cover holding constant and so are the birds. Some are probably not far off.

A few campers for the spring break up time are hauling stuff to camps. Numbers look to be similar to last year.

The big sheefish derby is on for Saturday and Carrie, having won once will want to try again. The longest fish takes $500, the most combined weight takes $300. Fishing and traveling time from 9 AM to 6 PM, a short fishing day.

There are lots of early and late afternoon sno-go travelers these days. Just an evening of fresh air and traveling around joy riding.

A neighbor friend dropped by with three Snowshoe Hares taken on the Kobuk Delta. These were the first we have had to eat for a long time. He reported enough tracks and rabbits on that delta to make hunting worthwhile. That is close enough to Krusenstern to raise hopes for a return of this remarkable and prolific little animal. It was good to have pot roast rabbit again and of course when they do come back there will be several other now absent winter species also returning to our Spruce Patches.

**April 26**

High 29º F
Low –6º F
Clear, high clouds
NW wind to 15

A very cold morning in the tent. Made maybe a last trip up to the house and put up the bear deterrents.

There was more ground showing but no living things to see, not even ptarmigan (there were gray jays, ravens and red squirrels at the house).

There were travelers through Sisualik today. Some campers continue to haul stuff though most have by this time "caught up" due to firm and level trails.

A sad wilderness tragedy came to light today. A few days ago the kids at Sealing Point camp found a dead small bird on a patch of gravel on their ocean beach. Today they remembered to send it this way for ID. It turned out to be a female or sub adult White-winged Crossbill. It no doubt lost contact with its normal forest habitat in a storm. The sun warmed beach gravel may have provided warmth for a bit. The strange thing is we have not seen crossbills in our spruces at all this winter since the cone crop was practically nil. How far this bird came to die on Krusenstern beaches we will never know.

Tomorrow is the great shee contest. If things hold together for us we will give it a try.

A bear was seen on the Noatak trail by travelers to Kotzebue. It was near the confluence of the Eli River with the Noatak.

**April 27**

High 32º F
Low 14º F
Clear, high clouds
S wind to 10

Covered a lot of ice today. Completely circled Kobuk Lake. Almost more traveling than fishing. We did finally get a few fish but nothing in the contest winning class. Carrie did get a couple that exceeded 36" and will be good eating. The contest winner was a long fish of 48".

There were a few caribou tracks on the lake and a single large moose followed the beach nearly the full length of the NW shore.

Heard a few W. Ptarmigan display calling on the Baldwin Peninsula. They sounded great.

A couple of Ravens must have given Terry the dog a bad time while we were gone. He got his chain wrapped around his pole and then they stole much of his leftover food. Must have made him mad all right.

All the Shee Derby winning fish seem to have come from a site down the Baldwin Peninsula on the Kobuk Delta called Aklaq. The total take must have been considerable as first and second weight prizes exceeded 300 lbs. each. There were many people on that portion of the lake.

Bear tracks reported near Fish Creek camp.

**April 28**

High 36º F
Low 4º F
Clear
Some fog and mist
W-NW wind to 15

A cool Sunday in Sisualik but several squirrels were out for a couple of hours.

No bird reports but Glaucous Gulls more or less regular down at Sealing Point lagoon gravel island.

Lots of visitors - we had a good pot of sheefish chowder. Lots of good conversation and ice cream.

A crab pot put in the ocean this week has not produced much so far but krill and some arthropods. It is several miles offshore in the Battle Rock area.

Our spring thaw is indeed going to be late and those anticipating an early spring during the mild spell at the end of March when both gulls and ground squirrels were fooled, are, by this time, disappointed.

We now anxiously await warmth and birds. Jonathan Livingston Seagull is of course foremost in our thoughts.

A late gull report. Someone who went to town today saw 8-10 Glaucous Gull during her stay there.

**April 29**

High 28º F
Low 6º F
Some clouds, fog, sun
W-NW wind to 15

No early spring! April is going out quite cool with little midday thawing. We will hope that May does warm things up some.

Did see several displaying Willow Ptarmigan today on the trail up to Sanningaruq. Went up to check the place and to get few green alders for firewood and red dye making. Terry had a good run and the trails inland remain firm and neat.

An overwintering seal found at Lockhardt Point and some very dangerous thin ice with 15' of water beneath. This is a dangerous situation. With lots of sno-go's traveling around it is a bad danger.

Snow around the alder lower stems and roots, very hard snow, made the alder cutting difficult and only a small load was gained.

Our black plastic bucket for early season water is working in spite of cold temperatures.

Squirrels continue to be out for a few hours each day and a few more turn up each day.

Nights and mornings are still pretty cool in the tent. We moved two weeks too early and are eating up our "summer" woodpile pretty rapidly.

**April 30**

High 35º F
Low –2º F
Clear, fog
W-NW wind to 18

Well, so much for April. The end has been quite cool and any hopes for an "early" spring are gone too. April birds here on Kotzebue Sound have been scarce with only a few scattered G. Gull and geese.

Since we have been hitting our woodpile pretty hard I have spent some time the last couple of days cutting and hauling some alders to burn. They seem to burn slower and hotter in our little stove. Just the improvement we need with the cold temperatures. Green alders (*Alnus crispa*) burn much like coal and indeed if one has metal forge work to do they can be used for that, whereas white spruce doesn't get hot enough for working iron.

A kind of dismal misty fog this morning freezing on things even silenced the few W.

Ptarmigan we have around.

The squirrels were out in spite of the wind and cold and there were three at once standing on our pile of logs behind the dome.

We do want to go Shee fishing again but can't get a hint where there might be some.

A bad thin ice spot ¼ mile out from Lockhardt Point right on the staked trail was noted as a warning to travelers by radio last night and this morning. Kind of a "first time" for that area. It is a very dangerous spot as a day or two of sun will thaw it enough to drop somebody's snow machine into 15 feet of water.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## MAY

**May 1**

High 26º F
Low 7º F
W-NW wind to 15

Things are looking up! It is May and Jonathan (the bird) may have done a fly by. A lone Glaucous Gull flew over camp and let out a short loud incoming gull call. He was high and didn't deviate from his westerly course.

Many Glaucous Gulls were reported in Kotzebue town today.

Got another load of alders today and found it quite warm on the hillside at Napaaqtuuraq. Wind was still steady from the west in Sisualik and it was much cooler than up in the foothills. The wind died in late afternoon, air cleared of vapor and fog and the sun got quite warm from 6 to 8 PM. Warmer than we have been for some time.

Trails are still super good around the country, except for the thin spot ¼-mile out from Lockhardt Point.

Some crab traps out west of Sealing Pt. Haven't heard results of catch.

Still no other bird reports, though word of geese and cranes are expected at anytime. There seems to be a milding trend and at this date that will surely mean birds.

We had three ground squirrels sitting in a line on our firewood log pile today.

**May 2**

High 25º F
Low 0º F
Clear, frosty fog AM
NE wind to 18

Lots of Glaucous Gulls today, both in Kotzebue and Sisualik. Made a fast trip to town for more gas, milk and sugar. It is so easy to haul those heavy things right now while the surface is hard frozen. It is some benefit for enduring the cold nights and especially early morning before the fire is going. (Our low temperatures this week are a little lower than is comfortable in a large 14x16 tent.)

There was one web-footed track this morning around the fish scraps and amongst the raven tracks. We missed seeing the bird probably late yesterday afternoon. It was a very

cautious bird walking a couple of hundred yards to the scraps. If it is Jonathan he has learned through the winter to be cautious around people. It is probably not Jonathan. We must wait more for a sure clue that Jonathan has returned. My, he will be big and bright this year if he has made it through the winter.

Town trail and streets remain pretty hard frozen but more and more dust is developing instead of mud because of continuing freezing temperatures. That may be about to change as the weatherman is speaking of snow and 30º F temperatures for tomorrow.

We had planned to go shee hooking today but a touch of flu has made me hold off for a bit. Also we are finding it hard to hear news of a new area fishing strike.

Jonathan is back! One gull became very excited and vocal when I approach the swallow box. He will swoop when I toss a tidbit but as usual it will take awhile for him to re-habituate. It's him all right!!

**May 3**

High 35º F
Low 18º F
Cloudy, snow, rain
NE-E wind to 20

A change of weather and a loss of our bright, bright sun that has been bright for so many days.

The air is no longer quiet as it has been all winter. One does not have to stand quietly outdoors for long before the clear call of Glaucous Gulls. The only other air call so far heard here, though, is the winter familiar raven squawk.

A CB call from family in Noatak reports a first goose there.

A mixture of snow and rain this evening and more forecast for tomorrow will probably bring us cranes, swans and geese.

The reflection of open water on the clouds in the Sound shows it to be quite close to Cape Blossom and probably not too far from Sisualik. That is unusual. Often at this date the entire Sound is shore fast ice shelf with the open water lead running a near straight line from Cape Krusenstern (Sealing Point) to Cape Espenberg.

There is a report of a heavy movement of caribou between Selawik and Noorvik. May be the main northward movement of the western segment of the WACH - maybe mostly females with bulls following.

There are a real lot of squirrels and gulls around our camp today. Probably 6 squirrels and 8 gulls. That many squirrels cannot live peacefully that close together. War may

soon prevail.

Our tent roof is getting wet this evening for the first time since our move. The doorstep also. Perhaps our indoor water will not freeze for these two nights in a row.

**May 4**

High 37º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy, fog, light rain
NE to SE wind 25

A first spring rain, mixed with a little snow, a night without freezing temperatures. We are on our way down the break up trail. Several reports of geese seen today come from Kotzebue, where, of course all the mud is. There is very little mud away from human activity yet. Wind swept spots around large lakes will soon have the required heat absorbing dark color on snow that will make early spring goose habitat.

One surprise is that we have had no crane reports yet. There is abundant beach ridge habitat ready for them on the Sealing Point flats, but no birds yet.

Our glaucous gull flock of 6 to 10 is more or less constant. Jonathan has not tried his swallow box landing pad yet though I feel certain he or his mate is part of the flock.

My brother-in-law left us a couple of Ringed Seals for our seal oil, in part, for the coming year. We bury them in the snow to be worked after the snow has melted from the grass-covered ground. Next year's seal oil is quite important. It is a good gift, from Sealing Point.

The constant gull noise on the air as the wind drops to nothing is such a treat. Again, the contrast from the silence of winter is moving.

There is a report that a crab pot set off Anigaaq took three rather large crabs not long ago. Species and distance from shore not known yet.

**May 5**

High 38º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy, rain, fog
E-SE wind to 18

Another night of non-freezing and light rain. The firm snow surface is rapidly giving way to become slush and air. First on trails over the ground, later on trails over saltwater ice. We are glad we got our heavy hauling done while it was firm, level and easy. Moving heavy loads will be increasingly difficult and will soon be impossible.

We do have another trip into town to make tomorrow to straighten out Carrie's blood

pressure pills mix up and to get a few last minute things. It may be our last snow machine trip to town. The next will be by plane or boat.

Goose sightings reported around the country but cranes have not been sighted, which seems a little strange. Usually they and gulls arrive before geese.

Our friends and neighbors up at Jones Camp report hearing the winnowing call of a Common Snipe today. That before cranes is also unusual, but the two-day and continuing rain and is ideal Common Snipe weather.

Our group of camp gulls has grown and is quite noisy now. Jonathan is still a bit shy and has only landed on the swallow box roof once. His presence is divided between camp and a chosen nest site out back a half mile or so away. These birds seem to have an amazing fidelity to nest sights even when they are yet under snow and/or ice.

Heard that Wainwright got a Bowhead lately.

Short-eared Owl, cranes and "snipes" at Sealing Point this evening; also a lone jaeger!

**May 6**

High 39º F
Low 36º F
Cloudy, light rain
NE to SE wind 15

A town trip, hopefully a last one till boat time.

Water on top of the ice in Kotzebue Channel (from Front Street to the bar, ½ mile) is deepening rapidly due not only to natural run off from dirty snow piles around town but also from the many pumps running in town by folks whose basements or yards may be flooding. Each year there seems to be more pumps and more water at the early stage of snow melt. Cleaning the streets free of snow through the winter traps more snow, to melt at this time of year.

News of the first spring fowl in family pots came through today. Hopefully we will have a taste soon. (Not of their pot but from our own!)

No new bird reports today. The lack of small passerines is being interpreted by everybody to mean more freezing weather to come (by a strong west wind) So far our known migratory birds list consists of Glaucous Gulls, Canada and Greater White-fronted geese, Sandhill Crane, Tundra Swan, jaeger, Short-eared Owl and Common Snipe.

Jonathan perched on the swallow box roof today when we came home from town. It is interesting how it takes considerable time for him to get back to the habituated routine

that he had when he left last October. Makes one wonder again how and where he spent his winter.

It is confirmed that a few King Crabs were taken in April from pots set offshore from near the Anigaaq Ranger Station.

**May 7**

High 46º F
Low 31º F
Cloudy, rain to snow
SW-W wind to 15

Changeable weather today finally ending with freezing temperatures before 12 midnight.

Went up to the inland lake late this afternoon but did not see many birds and not much water or mud. The only new bird was a Mew Gull. Did see Tundra Swans, Sandhill Crane and White-fronted Geese.

The snow started to freeze before I started home, the first time for several days. That will make traveling people happy.

Many travelers both ways out of town yet today but water on the top of ice is a problem. Tonight's freeze will make a difference.

**May 8**

High 38º F
Low 30º F
Cloudy, sun AM
E-SE wind to 18

Anniversary Day, our 48th.

The warm wind is back again and things softened up rapidly this afternoon after firming from freezing early last night.

Tried in vain to get a first bird for the pot today. Birds still pretty scarce behind our area. There are no small birds at all, though there are robins and such on the Noatak River.

That zone below the village is a haven for early migrating birds because the temperatures are usually moderate there as compared to the coastal section.

Travel continues to and from town though it is pretty wet. People are rushing to get necessary traveling and hauling done before the ice breaks up.

New birds are hard to come by. Only the ones we have already seen once are around

today.

It is good to hear the Willow Ptarmigan display call around the backcountry. There are not lots but on windless air they are pretty much there. Between those birds and the first cranes, the tableland is seldom quiet - much improved over last year.

A few last minute campers are getting settled in. We'll give a tally soon, counting all those that will be on Krusenstern for the break-up period.

**May 9**

High 40º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy, rain, clearing
NE to SE wind 18

A pretty wet night and day with things improving after 5 PM.

There were a few birds moving this evening as the weather improved. Cranes, geese and swans, the big hardy birds, still no small ones. It won't be long till swallow time now. In the past, we have had them before this date.

Jonathan has remembered most of his conditioned responses though I haven't tried hand feeding from the swallow box pad yet. But like last year he has established early claim to the swallow box roof for a landing/watching pad and the swallows will be forced to tolerate him or not use the box.

Bird hunting has been largely unproductive so far this spring due to weather and nature of the thaw (rather a lot of bare ground and rather retarded flooding.)

Travel on the ice from here to Kotzebue continues with the water on the ice in the channel in front of town drying up some.

Some of our family due to move in with us for a while today. It may be a bit crowded till snow melts a little more and frees the land for running kids and wandering adults.

Not much sign of running water from our place yet but some small creeks may have run out already.

Ocean hunting is on hold and has been most of the week due to offshore winds.

**May 10**

High 40º F
Low 36º F
Cloudy, fog, drizzle
Light winds

The new folks in camp spent the day shoveling snow and gravel to get a tent sent up. We were a bit crowded last night, which provided motivation for today's work.

The large bird scene continues to improve but slowly. A few more cranes, swans and geese each day but still no small birds in Sisualik.

Local bird hunting has been real slow. There was a good flock of Northern Pintail numbering 25-30. These were the first pintail we have seen.

Tomorrow is NAMC Day (North American Migration Count Day).

We may have some participation from this region for the first time this year. This will be the 5th year of this exercise to give a "snapshot" of bird migration across the continent. It will be early in migration for us with not too many species or numbers tallied but the information will add to the full scope of the spring migration in progress. We have a person in the heart of the Noatak Flats, south of the village, an interesting place at this season as it offers inland shelter for coastal migrants when winds and/or temperatures turn too severe.

Squirrels and gulls continue to be the most constant "other" creatures in our small world. This may soon change if the sun ever comes out and warms up the outdoor world.

**May 11**

High 48º F
Low 36º F
Cloudy
Light winds

A nice windless day and less damp but no sun again.

A few "new birds" got in, including two Red-throated Loons, a Whimbrel and Semi-palmated Sandpiper.

The trail to Kotzebue is in worse shape a traveler last night reported, with deep water on ice in the Kotzebue Channel. At least one traveler made it across this way today.

There are only a few bird hunters over this way so far which is a bit surprising as birds have increased in the last couple of days. Trail conditions are one reason; good hunting in other directions, maybe with less hazardous trails, would be another.

An older neighbor had to have a med-evac today. He lives alone and was fortunate to have a visitor at the time of a quickly developing problem. A plane did come quickly and he made it to the hospital. We haven't yet heard his condition.

Break-up is developing rather slowly due to only moderate warm temperatures. It has not frozen for a while so we could still have some fairly high run off waters.

Swallows have been reported in town but none here yet. A few small "peeps" - Western or Semi-palmated Sandpipers - are showing up.

**May 12**

High 46º F
Low 36º F
Clear!
W-NW wind to 18

Our world finally cleared. There is a lot of sun - nice and dry but a cool afternoon west wind.

Two Tundra Swans have spent the whole day in the backyard, in a small puddle of water on a large shallow but frozen lake.

Our fine camp family visitors are all off down the west coast to Sealing Point, visiting some of our old camping sites. A bit of bird hunting is on their agenda. Quiet here for a while.

Bird migration is kind of bypassing us again because of relatively heavy snow and winter overflow ice formed over mud in the salt marsh zone. With much more thawed ground and water and dry grasses in other nearby places, the birds funnel through or rest in those places of more suitable habitat. There are still no small birds locally. Savannah Sparrows and Longspurs and our Tree Swallows have yet to show.

Ground Squirrels continue to do battle for mates. There are 6 or more around our three or four-acre campsite. The various pea vines in the area will get pretty well eaten up this summer.

Not much sign of Tundra Voles yet, but un-melted snow still hides the true picture of what is under there.

It is great to have gull noise in the front and swan talk in the back at the same time again.

Snow Geese seen at Sealing Point today.

**May 13**

High 52º F
Low 32º F
Clear
N wind to 25, gusty

Long periods of little wind today then a half hour or so of strong wind off the land. Rather warm.

The unusual ocean lead system became more obvious today as gusty direct offshore winds swept away all but land fast ice. So little ice and so much open water in Kotzebue Sound have many boating time ice hunters worried that uguruq hunting season will be short and maybe not very productive.

Generally, birds are still scarce locally. More seem to be making landfall in the Sealing Point area and then making their way east or west from there depending on destination. Kobuk-Noatak watershed species move east, Brooks Range species move west.

Relatively few bird hunters on this shore of Kotzebue Sound this year. There has been pretty light harvest to date. White-fronted Geese and Northern Pintail are taken most often, with Canada Geese and Widgeon secondary major harvested species. Snow Geese are a highly valued bird when available. The first of the year were seen yesterday.

Small passerines are still absent from the tundra; everyone is a bit concerned. Their late coming is usually seen as a sign of yet to come cold weather (west wind). Birds are known to have a better knowledge of coming weather than human weather station observers in the eyes of most resident peoples.

Our swallows have not returned yet.

Water is running down the hills and bigger creeks. Kobuk village flood watch on.

This is the first day no surface crossing to or from Kotzebue has occurred. One tried to but turned back.

**May 14**

High 50º F
Low 34º F
Clear
Light AM winds
West wind 15, PM

A fine day - lots of insects out, but still few birds. Crane and Tundra Swan noise dominated the still morning air.

A first plane landed on Greene's Field today after pallets were dragged over the landing strip by a snow machine. A granddaughter needed to be at her son's graduation. They made it although the field was a bit short.

Flood warning for Kobuk village was cancelled today as the ice jam gave way. Locally, runoff waters continue but at a pretty slow pace.

The water started flowing out of the Anigaaq system (by the Ranger Station). Akulaaq is still filling up.

Open water on the ocean is visible from ground level. Very unusual. Maybe for the first time in 50 years at this date.

Noatak River running ice, large floes, at the village site.

Hatchery ice solid yet but water rising rapidly.

A pair of swans and few pintails feeding steadily on Mitkutailaq Lake. Wonder what?

A first uguruq lying on the ice near Sealing Point. The ice quite thin around where it was lying. No attempt made to take it. Hunting conditions for marine mammals are pretty poor.

Swallows not here yet.

**May 15**

High 52º F
Low 32º F
Clear
NW-N wind to 20

A sometimes windy day with a warm sun if you can hide from the wind.

The real "noisemaker" of the salt marsh turned up today. Even above the noise of wind and flopping tent the insistent repeated cry of the Bar-tailed Godwit came clear on the air.

Several Lapland Longspurs have been reported in Sisualik since yesterday, though we have not seen any.

Distance travel has just about come to an end around here though several boys did make it home from the far side of Sealing Point last night. Small creeks and slough outlets, combined with unusually thin ocean ice, inhibit coastal travel this year at an unusually early date.

Bird numbers continue a slow build. I suspect we may have a sudden flood of most all species. It has been a "hesitant May" - indecisive between cold and warm. Probably tends to hold birds over at good feeding, resting sites farther south. The last half of May could be rich in migratory birds.

Moose remains were reported yesterday in an unusual location: on the coast near the Anigaaq Ranger Station. They were covered with a blue tarp and there were un-retrieved traps on the site. This was a second hand report. I may have opportunity to check out the site.

**May 16**

High 46º F
Low 38º F
Clear, clouding
N wind to 20

Another gusty windy day with a warm sun, out of the wind.

Insects are having a great time the last few days. Temperatures warm enough and no birds to bother them. The larger overwintering blowfly adults and very many small "fruit" flies are the major insects.

Four Arctic Terns were seen today. These are the first of this species. Small sandpipers were reported to be plentiful around some early "ice mud" in the back lagoon system.

Our ground on the flats is about 50% snow free. The tablelands are much more snow-free, with only snow banks for the most part. Water outflow is relatively slow locally and at present we are not sure whether the high point is yet to come or has already past. The high level of frozen winter overflow ice makes the amount of melt water in the lagoon hard to read.

Most local folks are enjoying a pot of waterfowl soup each evening at this mid May time. This true for about two-week period in the last half of May and then becomes only an occasional happening as we move into June.

Noatak River ice moved at the Hatchery at midday and warning was given in Kotzebue for open, moving holes near Arctic Lighterage dock in town.

Ice was still holding at Sam Henry's but water was very high.

**May 17**

High 40º F
Low 28º F
Clear and cloudy
W-NW wind to 38

Well! We have come to a very good reason for the delay in the coming of passerines and small shorebirds. Our swallows apparently know what they are doing.

Yesterday evening winds began to pick up from a westerly (from over ice rather than from off the land) direction after being pretty much northerly all day. Fog patches appeared and capped the coastal mountains and a fog bank began to grow far out over the ice and ocean toward Siberia. All of these are the well-known signs of a bad west wind, which in turn means a sudden deep drop in temperatures from our rather balmy spring time pattern. Today we have it. Strong gusty winds, cold air and no real indication of duration. The freezing temperatures and possibility of snow or freezing rain could be more than some migrant birds could stand, especially small ones. Some birds go inland or gather in places of thawed ground and moving water that can be refuge for a time. For insect eating birds that don't have a lot of fat reserve, things could be tough. We expect now, as this cold front fades away, that our bird migration will flow more freely and may be intense because of the "hold off." It is hard to conceive just how birds seem to have pre-knowledge of pending dangerous weather conditions, but circumstantial evidence surrounding weather seems to confirm their powers every once in awhile. "The birds know the weather than we do" - a statement pretty much accepted by local people.

**May 18**

High 36º F
Low 26º F
Cloudy
NW to SW wind 20

A "Silent Spring" morning - a bit distressing, a bit depressing. The cause? Not insecticides or other man-made pollution but a 26º F low at mid break-up time. Most nonmoving freshwater is frozen up. Soft warm food-filled organic mud is temporarily frozen hard as concrete again. It becomes apparent how much a few degrees of temperature can influence life of different forms. Some especially well-sheltered habitat may have extreme high concentrations of bird life as those birds that have already come seek places to stay alive until normal temperatures resume.

Early afternoon we began to have snow showers with fine big snowflakes. Then the sun broke through, the wind stopped, and it was nice and warm till mid evening when the steady west breeze made us know that it would freeze again tonight.

A late report by a couple of folks that came to their camp by plane in between snow showers indicated that a lot of snow geese were around the back shore of Akulaaq

Lagoon.

A flock of 10-12 redpolls settled on the camp grounds this evening. A first occurrence of that size of a flock this spring. They were all large white-breasted birds with tiny beaks. The splash of red on the head and breast of some was quite brilliant. Have seen pure flocks of these large whitish redpolls before, both spring and fall. Don't know their origin.

**May 19**

High 34º F
Low 22º F
Clear, some clouds
W-SW wind to 35

Where has spring and break-up gone? We gained both snow and ice last night. We lost the additional snow today but a good deal of the new ice lasted through the day.

There is going to be some effects on birds and maybe newborn animals from this mid to late May cold spell. Birds of all kinds (except Jonathan) are pretty much absent from our low cold coastal zone. Hopefully those that have been brave enough to come have found sheltered microhabitats inland that will sustain them for a while.

Reproductive effort may be at risk with some waterfowl as fat reserves may be used up waiting out migration movements.

Our lagoon and ocean ice is getting all white again as surface water seeps through and the ice cover floats high and dry.

The curious absence of birds locally seems strange for the date. If we could trust our memory we would suggest that the absence seems most extreme for this date.

The ocean is undergoing some ice change - mashing and jamming, which may have considerable effect on marine mammal hunting later this season. Right now things are at a standstill due to high winds.

We did have travelers from Salluq yesterday.

No word yet on Kotzebue Channel ice, except that it is not travelable.

**May 20**

High 36º F
Low 20º F
Clear, haze PM
W-NW wind to 30

Another day of strong cold west winds.

Made a 4-wheeler trip west and had a long day with little material benefit.

Most of break-up water is frozen up because of past three cold days and nights. Only running water channels remain open. Waterfowl are very scarce here. Ducks in particular are hard to find. They must be inland where conditions may be a bit milder.

There was a flock of 200 Snow Geese on the delta of the small creek to our west. Carrie saw another flock passing through our back salt marsh.

Numbers of birds seen today were few but number of species is impressive: Snow Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Canada Geese, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Oldsquaw, Snow Bunting, Wheatear, Hoary Redpoll, Lapland Longspur, Red-throated Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, Black Turnstone, Western Sandpiper, Glaucous and Mew Gulls, and Sandhill Crane.

The first Glaucous Gull eggs were harvested today! That news from our west side family and neighbors. It seems early, but then again we are not far from the last week of May, which is the usual harvest time. A few nests had two eggs already.

Some large areas of ocean ice have dried up and have numbers of Common Ringed Seals hauled out. A large number are two or three miles west of us. The open water edge is only a mile and half from shore, off our nearest westerly point from here.

The yellow bloom spikes of *Eriophorum* sp. dot the snow free tussock tablelands in spite of the recent temps.

**May 21**

High 40º F
Low 20º F
Clear, haze
Light variable winds

The cold numbing west winds have stopped! The sun took over right away this morning, melting snow surface and the edge of snow against dark things.

A flock (80) of the large white small-billed redpolls took over the camp for an hour early this morning.

A rather steady movement of jaegers passed through east to west yesterday. It seemed to be a mix of species, with maybe more Parasitic than the Long-tailed or Pomarine Jaegers, though those species were also represented.

Break-up waters have really been retarded. The Noatak is still iced over from the mouth to 8 miles up or so. Town channel is still holding and travel west from here to Sealing

Point is still possible. Most of the ocean ice has floated and the surface is pretty much snow white again, providing a good a haul out for seals to snooze in warmer temperatures to help in molting their old hair.

The distance to open marine water (lead edge) from Sisualik is probably less than in any year of the past 50 years.

No one has ventured out yet to try the hunting except from Sealing Point.

Birds have not shown much increase in numbers or activity yet today but the resumed mildness should bring some kind of a resumption of migration. It has been difficult time for those that are here through this resumed freezing time.

**May 22**

High 56º F
Low 29º F
Clear, some haze
E-SE wind to 15

Finally, a real spring break-up day and best of all, the Tree Swallows have finally returned. Maybe the two adults of last year and two of their offspring. They are already moving grass into the box.

Spent the day back in the salt marsh and saw most of the birds expected by this time, including a rather exotic looking Horned Grebe. Passerines are still scarce and Tundra Swans seem to outnumber all other local waterfowl. There is a flock of non-breeding (mostly) 1 to 2 year olds of about 300. Quite a show and lots of noise as usual.

Kotzebue Channel still holding but the ice is dark with some open holes. It won't last long. Noatak River still iced up past Sam Henry's. May be ice free from Amaktut to the village and above.

The swallows make themselves at home right away, just as if they have been here all the time. They must have quite a story to tell. Wish I could understand swallow language - wonder where they have been the last 20 days.

First Brant were reported from the Point last night. I heard some today but did not see them. Did see one flock of Snow Geese, about 14, flying high.

We are still lacking Lapland Longspurs and Savannah Sparrows around camp.

A Short-eared Owl did a first fly by and Bar-tailed Godwits are still conspicuous by their absence.

**May 23**

High 56º F
Low 36º F
Cloudy with sun
Light winds

A fine warm day with muted sun.

In a rather unusual situation, I was able to walk all the way across the lagoon to the mud spits where Glaucous Gulls are slowly putting eggs in their nests. One nest had 3, a full clutch; others had only one or two. Egg laying has taken place with some gulls nearly a week early but intense egg laying still seems to go by the calendar. The last week of May and the first week of June is the usual window of heavy nest activity and egg production. I took home 9 and it was good to have fresh eggs. The eggs are twice the size of a large chicken egg and there is little noticeable difference in appearance and taste. The early eggs are the best, before the embryos begin to develop. They are still edible by some, even after a recognizable small gull has formed within the shell. One can eat up to three eggs at a time. Taking on four at once is usually a little more than your system will tolerate, as they are quite rich. Locally, the Glaucous Gull egg is by far the most eagerly sought "wild egg" with considerable time and expenditure being put into the harvest. In spite of this, our Glaucous Gull population seems to continue growing.

The lagoon is clogged with February storm overflow ice. Snowmelt outflow was not enough and too slow to make much of a dent in melting it. Normally one would have to use a small boat or kayak to make the trip I did today. This condition will influence many of the living things of the salt marsh.

This past week or 10 days may have been the critical time for *Gentianopsis detonsa* seeds to germinate in the sun-heated shallow water at certain levels in the marsh. It has been too cold through the period, and now as it warms, the water level may have dropped below where the seeds are deposited and the effect will be a very small crop of *G. detonsa* for '96. We have had two "bumper crops" in a row ('94, '95). We may see few of the delicate flowers this July if this speculation is correct. We shall see.

**May 24**

High 57º F
Low 36º F
Clear, few clouds
NW wind to 18, PM

A beautiful warm morning with a cool but pleasant afternoon breeze.

The small birds have finally made a showing. Savannah Sparrows, Lapland Longspurs and even a White-crowned Sparrow scratched around the front door today. There were also some large flocks of redpolls, so our swallows have lots of company. Their first

day or two their only company were Glaucous and Mew Gulls; they were on roof of their house sometimes.

Kotzebue Channel opened this morning and the first boats were out this afternoon. They can now travel by boat to Noatak village and through the Little Noatak Slough area, but not much of anywhere else. People can also go out into the ocean into the near shore lead.

Our early-formed group of flocked non-breeding Tundra Swans continues to grow. They are starting to follow the greening of the salt marsh. The flock may reach 500 again and may also be right in our backyard for a while - lots of noise when they are close.

Our snow free ground is nearly 100% down here on the flats. There are some large snow banks around buildings yet, especially those that were occupied for a while during the winter.

Bumblebees were common yesterday, seeming to come onshore from the open ocean. This is a sign, remember, of uguruq presence in Kotzebue Sound.

The large nesting area of G. Gulls on the Noatak delta will be hit hard by egg hunters this long weekend. The birds are just into intense egg laying. Lots of people in the Kotzebue Sound area like gull eggs.

**May 25**

High 43º F
Low 34º F
Clear
NW wind to 20

A clear but cool day since our west wind is back again. We had a surprise rain shower late last night that turned to ice and frost by this morning.

There are a lot of Tundra Swans and passerines on the Spit and salt marsh now and some large patches of "ice mud" showing in the lagoon that probably are hosting some sandpipers. Both passerines and sandpipers have been few up until the last couple of days. Godwits, Western and Semi-palmated Sandpipers - three species that are most numerous here in late May - have thus far been scarce.

A first boat is known to be out in the ocean from Kotzebue today. This is a surprise since we also learned this morning one cannot get in or out of the mouth of the Noatak River because of ice blockage. Usually there is enough outward current surge that when Kotzebue Channel goes the whole river from Kotzebue to Noatak clears of ice quickly. That hasn't happened this time because of sluggish current and low water in the Noatak watershed.

There is some hint by CB that the boat that is out may have found dangerous circumstances. It is quite windy here and the open water is quite large, so there can be rough water.

**May 26**

High 40º F
Low 29º F
Fog, rain, clearing PM
Light winds

A cruel foggy frozen morning in May for Sisualik, Alaska. Cruel because of the cooling effect on those living that need all the warmth they can get at this stage of their annual living cycle. Insects, plants, birds and mammals require certain high temperatures to continue their reproductive development at this critical time. This morning, the frozen whiteness of Sisualik brought on by a night of freezing fog stuck to everything doesn't show any hint of warmth, except that huge yellow orb low in the morning sky, shining through the fog. Come on sun! Come on, do your duty!

Well as the day wore on the sun did get busy. Frost turned to a pretty heavy but brief cold rain then cleared by 6:00 PM to 40º F and sun. The swallows, after waiting most of the cold wet morning, had given up and gone back inland to wherever they go when they are not here at their box site.

We did get word that the one boat we know that was out yesterday got one uguruq, the first of the season for here, and several common seals. The marine mammal hunting season by boat is underway.

We also heard that the Arctic Lighterage Barge has moved up towards Noatak. It is unclear whether it is loaded and headed for the village or just sheltering from ice at the mouth.

**May 27**

High 48º F
Low 32º F
Clear, clouding PM
Light E and S wind

A nice warm "break up" day. The warmth is great and green is beginning to show in the midst of last year's dried foliage on the ground and in the salt marsh.

Saw a Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern and Northern Harrier today.

Picked up 4 Glaucous Gull eggs today from our backyard. There were three in one nest and eggs may be showing signs of developing embryo inside. That makes seven from back here. One of the clutches is surely Jonathan's, though we don't know which one.

We have a strange ice situation this year, right now. The ocean is free of ice on a boat trail from Kotzebue to the Point, just west of us. We still have several miles of land fast ice in front of Sisualik proper. At the same time, in the lagoon, there is no boat trail from the westernmost Noatak River slough channel. A four-wheeler crossed our back lagoon today where there is usually a boat trail by this stage of break-up. Neighbors were trying to get from Kotzebue to some family grave sites behind us for a Memorial Day visit. They couldn't make it through our lagoon after coming through the Noatak Delta, which is all open now, and had hoped to get around the edge of the lagoon as usual. No chance. The reason is the high, old, frozen overflow ice from the strong storm surge marine waters of last winter and lack of heavy spring flood waters.

Word is that Noatak River is now high with wood coming out. Good news for us beachcombers.

Had two Lesser Golden Plovers in the backyard today.

A dozen Ringed Seals laying on the ice in front of us today.

**May 28**

High 51º F
Low 30º F
Sun AM
Clouding, rain PM
E-SE-S wind to 18

A cool night, warm morning and a wet afternoon. The rain may be timely for the needs of the ground with its variety of plant life ready to burst forth with this year's growth and production. The snow melted so fast and then cold and dry air has continued so long that this first warm rain may be just what the earth needs.

Insects were out in numbers again when the temperatures got between 40-50º F.

The swallows have been here off and on for a while each day but seldom over-nighting with the freezing temperatures. They have packed a few grasses into the box but without much enthusiasm.

Lots of Tundra Voles and Arctic Ground Squirrels around the camp buildings and junk piles since most of the snow has melted. We have just a few snow piles left and can drive the four-wheeler straight through camp now.

Most of the *Elymus* beach grasses are cut and "mulched" by T. Voles' winter activity. Short-eared Owls and Northern Harrier have been hunting nearby through the week.

Not much change in ice conditions. No boat path yet to Sisualik proper from either

front or back routes and still no place to put out a net for fresh fish. The hope at this point is that higher water in the Noatak River will speed ice melt in the salt marsh zones and create currents that will break off our shorefast ice on the ocean.

The melt water level in the marsh is now pretty much below the usual level of *G. detonsa* growth, thus no hot water bath for seed germination.

**May 29**

High 50º F
Low 36º F
Cloudy, rain
Some clearing PM
SE-S wind to 18

Rain most of the day till early evening when wind dropped and sun warmed and dried the air a bit. The ground got the good soaking that it needed and probably enough in the back watersheds to keep the rivers running at high levels for a while.

Marine waters are high from the southerly winds and the hope is that our shore ice will move out so net fishing and boat access becomes possible. We might even see Beluga Whales. It is time.

Our bird scene hasn't improved much except for a continued high presence of redpoll. Many seem paired and may nest locally. The seed of *Artemisia* sp. seem especially attractive to these busy little passerines. Longspurs remain scarce in our camp area. That is unusual and unexplainable at this point in time.

Have not heard of any marine mammal hunt effort the last couple of days. Weather and ice pack condition are not very inviting.

Green growth of some scattered individual plants can be seen, perennials and bi-annuals for the most part. When the sun warms after this rain green should be an easier color to see.

Tundra Voles around camp are especially active as the last of their snow banks fade away.

The first Black-legged Kittiwake voices from the ocean this evening.

**May 30**

High 46º F
Low 35º F
Cloudy, rain showers
E-SE-S wind to 15

We seem to be in a period of wetness that may be more beneficial to us and other

creatures down the growing-season road. The earth is getting a good post-snowmelt soaking.

Netting for whitefish produced a fair catch in two local sites, the first net catch here this breakup period. The only person home at Sisualik Pt. found a small channel to stick a net out right at the tip of the point. He got fish but didn't indicate how much. The guess is not a real lot as the possible netting site may be small and confined by ice.

The other site is directly north of us at the narrow outlet into the lagoon from our largest creek system. The one fishing there got a tub full in a short time last evening.

Most of these whitefish are going into dog feed. Usually these first whitefish are pretty "winter lean" and a poor cooked fish for human consumption, especially those taken in the lagoon.

Our ocean ice hasn't changed. I put a net into the beach crack this morning that runs parallel to the beach in shallow water. No catch which was no surprise. The net needs to be set at right angle to the beach, not parallel to it but there are no cracks located yet of that nature.

We do have many ringed seals lying on the ice in front of Sisualik. A report from Sealing Point today indicates a great lack of ice toward Port Site. There was no ice on the ocean at all.

**May 31**

High 50º F
Low 35º F
Cloudy
E-SE wind to 15

Seems like we have been chilly the whole month of May! Today was a pleasant chilly but we will look forward to more warmth in June.

In spite of the coolness, green leaves on prostrate willows and dwarf birch are out but not yet unfurled and the pale cream yellow globes of the black bearberry are full out in the midst of last year's brown leaves (*Arctostaphylos alpina*).

The tips of green against brown are easy to find on almost any plot of ground. Soon green will obscure all the brown. That is the sign of June!

Saw a lot of silvery scaly fish in a small outlet creek today - probably "in going" Least Cisco. Quantities of whitefish are now being taken at the two sites mentioned yesterday (Sisualik tip and the inner lagoon channel.) Ice prevents net setting at any other place in Sisualik yet.

A few Brant are using our back lagoon ice-rafted mud for feeding now. No real migratory flight has yet been noted, either into the area or out, just random small flocks.

Gull egg taking is still in full swing, though peak of laying may have come or passed. Difficulty of getting around due to odd ice conditions means that the number of people participating has not yet peaked. It probably will this weekend.

A lot of loon noise in the air today for the first time. This reflects the increasing open fish-laden water available. Both Red-throated and Pacific Loons are present; Yellow-billed and Arctic Loons could be present as well.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## JUNE

**June 1**

High 46º F
Low 36º F
Cloudy
S-SW wind to 18

Well! June is not much of an improvement over May, at least on this first day. With steady winds off the ice and the sun hidden in clouds it was another cool day. The swallows sat around with hunched backs all morning and disappeared for the afternoon.

These steady "on shore" winds are having an effect on the pack ice in the Sound. An aircraft passenger from Sealing Point today reported lots and lots of pack ice south of that point, where there has been only open water for much of this late spring. This is a good situation for marine mammal boat hunters that have had little opportunity to be out yet. There may be boats out today with some uguruq catch success.

We have numbers of Common Ringed Seals lying on the shore-fast ice in front of us. It is interesting that no hunting of these seals is taking place even though there are camps with dogs to feed and oil needs to meet. The reasons are readable though a bit complex. It is, though, a definite sign of change from even 10 years ago that probably indicates an attitude change.

The extended coolness of this early growing season will have various effects on plant growth and production. New growth has been retarded and that has so far prevented frost damage. A late start doesn't do damage like a killing frost after half growth.

The continued coolness should provide a good trial for thoughts on *Gentianopsis detonsa* germination. There may be few plants.

**June 2**

High 50º F
Low 35º F
Cloudy
NW wind to 20

This is the magical date after which our sun doesn't set again till mid July. This is the annual period of time we try to remember in December. As the NW winds picked up again this afternoon our temperatures didn't seem much different than those of December!

Early this morning while there was complete stillness of air, there was a sound of some sort from straight out in the ocean. Couldn't be sure whether it was wave action, ice movement or possibly a boat in the offshore ice. Later around noon we did pick up a boat that was traveling from Kotzebue to Sealing Point for uguruq hunting. He reported being in large open water without ice. We think he will find abundant ice down towards Sealing Point. Very little boating/hunting has taken place this week. Maybe there will be lots next week.

We seem to have a local scarcity of Lapland Longspurs for this date. It seems to extend through the Monument coastal zone. No known cause but there seems to have been fewer each year over the past few years.

Some of the channels over at the Point are finally cutting a trail through the old overflow ice to connect with Noatak Delta out flow. There may soon be boat access to Sisualik.

Some large ice blocks are said to be running out Kotzebue Channel from Kobuk. This is the first of it and it will interrupt travel into Kotzebue for some time now.

A lot of Ringed Seals on Sisualik ice today - 100?

**June 3**

High 46º F
Low 33º F
Clear, few clouds
W-NW wind to 18

A warming AM with swallows showing a lot of ambition. The "cold wind" developed again in the PM and swallows again retreated to milder air, wherever that is. It still seems that a Tree Swallow would have a better reproductive time in tree habitat rather than the ocean edge of Kotzebue Sound. It is difficult to understand swallow reasoning. It quite possibly could have something to do with availability of specific insect prey available on the salt marsh (to feed young) that are not available at higher elevations.

A few uguruq are being taken by boat hunters out of Kotzebue. Kobuk ice was running

out the channel today till the wind picked up. Wind holds the ice back and allows hunters from the ocean ice pack to get back up into town with their catch. The same wind keeps us and the swallows cold, not to mention the mosquitoes, which we have forgotten about.

Some understanding has come to light in reference to Lapland Longspur scarcity here. We learned today from family at Sealing Point that there are lots on the Beach Ridge complex there. They came early when the ground was snow free there and no ground was available here (snow covered). That condition was so prolonged because of coolness that they stayed there for nest building and egg laying. This is a fine example again of how different conditions can be at critical times, even only 20 miles apart.

Ate our first fresh whitefish from beach crack today. Caught only two, one fat, one not.

**June 4**

High 44º F
Low 36º F
Clear, hazy
W-NW wind to 18

Cool morning and mid day but a fine windless warm evening and guess what? A brilliant male Lapland Longspur keeping close track of his dull mate right on our doorstep! They were around all evening and may set up housekeeping here. We are glad to have them and our activities will generate a good feeding area for them and their young. We have lots of worms and their eggs from our meat and fish drying. A large portion of their diet at nesting time is blowfly eggs, larvae and adults.

Lagoon water level very low, just like fall time. The ice has melted and moved around a lot the last few days but low level of marine water still prevents netting and boating around.

A few boats continue to get out into the ice pack and bring in an uguruq or two. No big catches and kind of tough hunting because of too much ice. That will change of course and maybe soon. Break-up is still ahead of normal schedule in spite of cool daily temperatures.

Tundra vole population quite high on the Spit; some of the white- faced strain have been seen.

Took home one fresh g. gull egg from our backyard today. It may be Jonathan or his mate's second try.

Some Semi-palmated Sandpipers have nests, now as well as N. Pintails and Wigeon.

Moose have been seen near the beach several times and at different places this past

week. At least one female had very small twin calves last week.

Black-legged Kittiwakes back again.

**June 5**

High 48º F
Low 37º F
Clear, some clouds
E-S wind to 10

Big day today. Our shorefast ice moved for the first time, opening the beach from 2 feet wide to more than 200 yards all through Sisualik.

At 8:00 AM the ice in front and beach crack looked the same as when we went to bed last night. By 9:30 when I went out the door of the tent it was 50 yards wide. There was no wind and it reminded me of the time when we were on the outside of a similar rapidly widening open channel, far out from Sealing Pt. It is not good to be on the wrong side of a rapidly opening lead in the ocean.

This morning we were on the right side. We pushed the whitefish net out right away with the pole and though a few fish got caught, enough for lunch, the catch for the time involved was disappointing. We ate the cooked fish and as the water cleared of moving ice we ran the net full out as the channel was wide enough now. Went to do other chores and in an hour pulled the net in again. Lots, real lots, of fine big whitefish, unmixed with another species - there were more than 100. Almost too much but Carrie promises to help me cut them tomorrow and they are the best of dried fish, after the tedious work of preparing them is done. We are much richer this evening. Jonathan too.

They had a big day west of us too. A small bear walked into one camp and had to be killed. Several miles away, within sight of a camp, two bears were chasing a cow moose with a small calf. Bear adventures are getting underway early this year.

A May traveler from Noatak to the coast reported an unusual lot of bear tracks inland of Sealing Pt. It is difficult to make rational sense of bear populations and activity on and around Krusenstern. There seems so many contradictions to oral historic accounts.

A first trip to Kotzebue from Sisualik by boat was completed today. Many new faces can be expected soon in Sisualik. The rather nice isolation period of break-up time is about over.

**June 6**

High 51º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy
Light onshore winds

A pretty nice day in Sisualik with water front loon and kittiwake noise. There is a good deal more open water and a neighbor made it into town through the ice cakes.

We got our good whitefish catch of yesterday cut and hung and will have some good half dried whitefish in three or four days.

Ran Terry the dog back into the beach ridge area and found the first "real" flower. Numerous stalks of *Pedicularis lanatum* brighten the tundra; often the light pink is next to a round circular patch of the cream-yellow bearberry globes.

Water has risen some in the lagoon and gulls are into some spawning herring but not a lot. If the marine water really comes in with forecast SW winds, herring will be flooding into the lagoons and salt marsh in numbers with near ripe eggs.

Our whitefish catch yesterday was quite remarkable for pure species content, 100 or so whitefish with absolutely no other species. Unusual. Also within that group of fish we found two females with fully developed, near ready to deposit eggs. This is even more unusual than the large sheefish in the same condition last December. This species normally spawns in October. We don't remember encountering ovaries of this species in that condition at this date before. It causes us to wonder if there can be some habitat or environmental cause for the unusual "out of season" reproductive development.

**June 7**

High 48º F
Low 38º F
Cloudy, rain
SW to NW wind 15

A wet and cool day today with a much larger ice-free water area off Sisualik. These last few days are the time when "intense-ness" of life (for humans at least) switches from the back freshwater and brackish zones to the front open ocean water. Before the shore ice move, the ocean beach seems a pretty sterile zone, on the surface at least. When it becomes water it becomes a main route of travel for boats, whales, seals, birds and fish.

Three uguruq were brought in last evening at Salluq camp, the first landings on Krusenstern beaches we know of this spring.

Got a double load of Alaska Whitefish in a 30-minute soak of the net this morning. Pure whitefish again: another three or four poles of cut fish. Our racks are looking the most filled in Sisualik right now. We hear they are starting to get some out-moving char

and shee over at the Point. We are fortunate to get such a pure catch of target species.

There is a report, a true one, of two beavers taken on the Noatak late last month and early in this. That is unusual but confirms a possible range extension for beaver into the Noatak. The establishment of a permanent population may not happen, but you never know.

The ground is really "greening on the brown" today after the soaking but cool rain. We will soon have a green world again, with mosquitoes!

Chives and *Ligusticum* greens are farthest along in development right now; red fireweed shoots are out.

A first Yellow Wagtail noted today.

**June 8**

High 41º F
Low 35º F
Snow, rain, clearing
Light variable winds
NW wind to 35, PM

We awoke to falling snow this morning and though it didn't make the ground white it did accumulate a half-inch on our remaining strip of beach sea ice. It is interesting that Kotzebue Weather Station gives a record high for June 8 as 8lº F!

In the light of the historic records it is certainly not surprising that the greening of our local salt marsh is much delayed this year. The coolness of May, the heavy burden of winter high water overflow ice on all Kotzebue Sound tidewater marshes, and the low outflow of warm freshwater drainages have all helped delay sprouting and greening of the *Puccinellia Carex* zone, the first zone of vegetation on the mudflat and salt marsh areas of Kotzebue Sound.

Tundra Swans moved from tidal flat *Potamogeton* feeding to greening freshwater marsh on tablelands adjacent to tidelands, but at a bit higher elevation where sprouting grasses are a stage ahead of those at mudflats. *Arctophilia fulva*, *Calamagrostis arcticus* and *Eriophorum* would be among the higher-level sprouters. Locally flocked non-breeder Tundra Swans are good indicators of tender new growth on various different plots that in sequence come into new seasonal growth.

A very wet day till evening, when strong NW winds dried the air with the help of some sun.

We cut and hung our whitefish catch of yesterday: 4 more poles and are glad they are all drying now.

The first driftwood turned up today - just a few pieces. The rain will really green up the land if it ever warms up.

**June 9**

High 42º F
Low 31º F
Clear, few clouds
NW wind to 40

A very windy cool night for this date. The swallow was in her box making a brave attempt at incubating I guess. Water buckets had an eighth to quarter inch of ice this morning though there was no frost due to winds and dryness. Our hanging fish are doing well now.

One beluga was reported seen in the rough ocean yesterday evening by our next-door neighbor.

Pack ice has gotten surprisingly large for this date but still not halfway to the grass line.

No driftwood here from this wind. Several Sisualik boats went into town planning to make a round trip but couldn't make it back when the strong winds picked up. Apparently there were no hunters out in the pack ice because of a long rainy day prior to wind pick up.

Much ice from Kobuk Lake came down into Kotzebue Channel and blocked it for boat travel last night but it had cleared by this mid afternoon.

Beach has cleared of snow for travel with 4-wheeler.

Shee taken at Sisualik Point stuffed with 3-4 inch saffron cod.

A very large group of two to three hundred Northern Pintails sheltering by the next camp west that is unoccupied. First we have seen of large molt-bound groups.

Large flock (30) of cranes in the backyard today.

*Puccinellia-Carex* mudflat not showing any green yet.

Ice pack out of sight from Sisualik today.

Many, many small groups of Mew Gulls and Kittiwakes west today.

Report of a first beluga taken at mouth of Kotzebue Channel in the last couple of days.

About 10:00 PM we saw 10 to 15 large beluga moving from east to west, 100 to 500 yards offshore from our tent door. They look great, This place rejoices to see again the creatures it was named for.

**June 10**

High 48º F
Low 33º F
Fog, clouds, clearing
W-NW wind to 15

Frost on boards this morning but not as cold as yesterday morning.

Both swallows around and as the sun warmed today at least one began active hunting.

Fog burned off after 2 PM and with light onshore winds, the day seemed better than the last several.

Made a beach trip to Akulaaq today and found it still full of water with the outlet still dammed. With all the whitefish passing that is not good. It would only take a few shovel-fulls to start it emptying, but decided to let nature take its course. If it doesn't open it will have no fish next September. If it does there will be no ATV trail to the outlet at Anigaaq through the summer. Hard decision. Whichever human choice is made, it would not please all.

Many, many Black-legged Kittiwakes feeding on krill in the water along the gravel edge for two or three miles of beach. The numbers probably top 1,000. There were much smaller numbers of Mew and Glaucous gulls. One may speculate that these birds are en route to Cape Thompson or other cliff nesting sites, though date seems late for there. Maybe farther north and west.

Noatak village people on their way down today; some will have camp set up by tonight.

Willows, Lousewort, and Coltsfoot flowering in some locations.

Five uguruq landed by one boat at Salluq today. A baleen whale (gray?) was seen by these hunters.

A short net set took only 6 very slim whitefish this morning. Will try large mesh soon as char are expected. Two very snaky char in the bigger mesh this evening with a bucket full of very large whitefish.

**June 11**

High 46º F
Low 36º F
Cloudy, light rain
NW wind to 40

Bad west winds all day again. Very little ice in sight, though it is still right on the beach at Sealing Pt. Strong constant winds from this direction tends to push the pack ice quite far offshore from Sealing Point east to Sisualik.

We were given a bucket of eggs today, from friends that were down on the Krusenstern Flats, and one Common Eider that was nice and fat. The eggs were mostly Glaucous Gull eggs, with a few Common Eider eggs mixed in. Some of the eggs had pretty well developed embryos.

A small group of belugas has been seen each day for the last three days. Rough water has prevented hunting and has prevented the setting of nets offshore. It is good to see them again but it is likely that when the weather moderates, abundant nets and traveling boats will mean that we will not see them much, at least in a relaxed state.

Our ground vegetation is in a classic arctic hold. The new green growth of many plants is there but lying close, close to the ground and in many cases still sheltered by the dried foliage of last year. The whole panorama though gives the impression that all plants are just waiting for the proper moment to "spring forth."

Saw one *Primula borealis* today with buds just ready to unfurl, the pink-blue showing through the yet-closed sepals.

The heavy run of kittiwakes seems to have passed. There are some around but the steady NW movement of the past couple of days has ceased.

**June 12**

High 46º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy but clearing
NW to S wind 15

The weather has finally given us a break. The sun has warmed, the ocean has calmed and early boats out of Kotzebue have already headed back in with loads of up to four uguruq.

There is reported to be not only lots of uguruq, but lots of spotted seals. This is an indication that pack ice is rather thinly distributed in Kotzebue Sound. The uguruq boat hunting season may be good but short.

Word of excessive walrus harvest - heads only - may be good for Krusenstern bears and

us.

Our Salluq neighbors dropped off thirty pounds of fresh uguruq meat today on their way to town for gas. We've cooked up most of it, anticipating our boat hunting crew in this evening after work, for their first trip out into the ocean ice this year.

A flock of 16-18 cranes have been stalking around our backyard for the last three days.

There are numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Mew Gulls feeding in the water on the shoreline since the sea has calmed. There are also many loons about. Mostly Red-throated Loons.

There are also numerous small groups of Red Phalaropes on the tide lines after the sea has calmed.

We did not put a net out today to see what fish we have after the blow - too many other chores. Maybe tomorrow.

Lagoon remains at exceedingly low level for this season. Boats out of Kotzebue are mostly coming out the main channel.

An odd concentration of seals in an unusual place. There is a large block of ice in the shallow water basin on the boat trail between Sisualik and Kotzebue. The seals are on it. They seldom go into shallow water at this season.

**June 13**

High 66º F
Low 34º F
Clear
S to W wind 15

A busy, busy day today. Fine, fine weather too.

The water was a flat calm this morning; something was making rather strong ripples, a definite wake in the water. Decided to see what it was so pushed the trout net out and wow! That's right, the fat Kivalina trout, the cooking fish of choice until salmon come, are here and in numbers. Didn't set the net again since our hunting boys were out overnight and may bring in work enough for us.

That happened. They got in about 6 PM with two very large uguruq and one small but fat one. We indeed have work enough and then some.

There was also beluga news today. Two were taken by net and a number were reported at the mouth of Kotzebue Channel where boat hunters were waiting. We have not yet heard the results of the episode.

Many uguruq have been taken in these last two days since the blow, some boats with four or five. There are reported to be lots and most laying on small flimsy ice floes. The concentration seems to be between Krusenstern and the Baldwin Peninsula with few and "wild" (timid) animals between Sealing Point and Kivalina. Presence of walrus is suspected in that area. It is firmly and locally believed that walrus frighten and alert both species of hair seals.

There are lots of working women tonight as the warmer weather promises fly and other insect activity and there is a lot of good meat on one large uguruq.

**June 14**

High 70º F
Low 42º F
Clear
Light S and SW wind

A fine warm day with at least one mosquito and lots of bumblebees. There was a lot of beluga activity too.

Beluga were around several times today. The first group got chased between 5 and 6 AM. They were around again before noon and around three this afternoon one wrapped a neighbor's whitefish net around itself and ran away with it! That is a first for Sisualik. Others have bumped or gotten killed while tangled in whitefish nets but none that we know of have run away with the whole net.

We know that at least two beluga were taken and maybe more. Several more nets have been set. The two taken were taken by chase.

Fat Kivalina char are still running well but we didn't set net today, having enough work with the uguruq from yesterday to get butchered and hung. We did that and now the three skins await blubber removal. That may happen this evening and/or tomorrow.

Uguruq hunting continues but not so intensely. Most hunters that really want some have some and their workers need to catch up. Since belugas are showing a bit more than the last few years attention has shifted more to that delicacy.

Our warm temperatures are releasing our vegetation and insects from their deep freeze stupor. Can probably find *Primula borealis* in the near salt marsh - mosquitoes!

**June 15**

High 58º F
Low 47º F
Cloudy, rain AM
Clearing PM
S-SE wind to 18

Pretty good half a day with lots of people in camp. The rain kept us from finishing our uguruq work but we got half done - the rest for will wait another day. Temperatures warmed enough for flies and mosquitoes to be active. Yes mosquitoes - but only one so far.

Some beluga action again. At least one taken and probably killed, but not recovered.

There was also a CB report that there were walrus in sight from the village of Deering. A very unusual report.

Fat char continue to be taken over a broad area.

Some uguruq hunters are still hunting, but most have enough. Some report that local ice is of poor quality and deteriorating.

Some very large flocks (200-300) of Northern Pintail are and have been in our area salt marsh. These are males and failed female breeders that are pre-molt flocks. It less than 10 days to molt time.

The rain last night and today will be a boon to late developing vegetation and floral development.

There are a lot of boats out this weekend for numerous reasons: marine mammals, rod fishing, net fishing and just outdoor living. It has gotten warm enough.

**June 16**

High 62º F
Low 43º F
Cloudy, clearing
S-SW light winds

A surprisingly fine quiet warm morning. Wind picked up suddenly late last night from the west and everybody ran for shelter. The wind quit after a couple of hours and wake up time this morning was very quiet, except for kittiwake, loon and crane noise on the air.

A successful beluga hunt yesterday evening turned tragic when one of crew in the boat towing the dead animal in collapsed and couldn't be revived. Quite a long time passed

before help could get to them. It seems to be not an accident but a heart attack or something and person probably died.

Three beluga, at least, taken in nets today. Dark olive to light tan, all sub-adults. The Kotzebue-Sisualik beluga catch this June is surprising in light of recent previous years. We have not had an ice or hunting report from Elephant Point. The number of nets out in the Kotzebue-Sisualik zone is not known but there will be more, and there are already many. This scenario is not a good one. It equates this way: the more beluga known to be in the zone the more net are put out.

We had a heavier load of visitors the last two days than we have had for a long time. Most were family and many over-nighted. Use pressure was heavy on our single ATV.

At day's end we totaled a take of seven belugas. This is not a firm figure but a likely one. Most were net taken but not all.

Finally got out on the marsh a bit today and found, as expected for several days, that *Primula borealis* are just beginning to bloom.

Mosquitoes are really beginning.

**June 17**

High 74º F
Low 52º F
Clear, few clouds
NE to E wind 18

Warm today! A new day record high for Kotzebue Weather Station.

Aleutian Tern voice first heard yesterday and today here in Sisualik.

A first Chum salmon, first for the whole Sound as far as we know, was taken this morning at Sealing Point. It is an early date but follows the more southern salmon watershed trends.

Two walrus were taken by a Kivalina boat in the Rabbit Creek area today.

We worked all day splitting up the meat of the three uguruq into long thin strips that will dry enough in three or four days to be put down in oil for winter.

There was a large group of beluga (20 or more) feeding and milling around for several hours this morning in mid Sisualik. They were very close to the beach sometimes and were shot at twice by a neighbor. Both shots were misses. It was a bit too choppy for boat hunters. If the winds calm tonight there is a chance for boat hunters to get beluga and at the same time cause some to get into nets that they might have otherwise

avoided.

Though many belugas were seen today both in Sisualik and around the mouth of Kotzebue Channel we did not yet hear of any catch, either by chase or net.

We did not see icebergs in the ocean from Sisualik for the first time today. And the 70º F temperatures made one feel that summer is indeed here.

Potted tent plant bloomed: it is a biennial *Primula*!

Our world is green today. The green has overcome the brown.

**June 18**

High 62º F
Low 54º F
Cloudy, some sun
SE wind to 20

Took Terry (the dog) back to the beach ridge zone today; haven't been there for a few days and change have developed. Alpine Azaleas, Alaska poppies, rock jasmine, salmonberry plants, *Potentilla villosa* and *Primula borealis* are all blooming profusely. A bit of rain and heat makes for quick change at this season. It is good to see those familiar flower faces again.

The surprise blooming indoor *Primula* looks much different than the now profusely blooming *Primula borealis*. Will try to record those differences.

A couple of fat char were taken today by visitors casting from our beach.

Lots of beluga net were set or reset on Sisualik beachfront late last night. There was a small group of belugas just offshore before the nets were set. So many nets in front of us now that we probably won't see any more belugas from our camp site. There was a lot of shooting last night from the Kotzebue Channel area over a long period of time while it was calm. We have heard of only one additional beluga taken but there may have been more.

Ice was back in sight this morning from the SE, Sadie Creek/Baldwin Peninsula side. It is coming to our side rapidly by southerly winds and current.

Found a couple of pieces of driftwood today and a large, dead from last fall, spotted seal that Terry tried to drag out of the water.

Two more chum salmon taken at Sisualik Point and one again at Sealing Point.

A late report adds several more chums from Sisualik so the run is on.

Aleutian Terns again.

**June 19**

High 66º F
Low 52º F
Cloudy, light showers
SE to NW wind to 20

Another busy day in camp. People coming and going and our beluga share ready to cook up.

Set 4 1/2 " net for 20 minutes and got char, whitefish and sheefish. Took it out and put in 6" salmon mesh for 35 minutes. Was surprised to find two large male chum salmon and one fat male char larger than the salmon. These are the first salmon we have taken this year but catches of two to four have been made in Sisualik since the very first at Sealing Point. This is the first time we have pushed out our short salmon net.

Ice rather close to Sisualik and right on the beach again at Sealing Point. Beluga continue to keep people excited. After many years of few beluga, these last ten days have been just like old times. Many beluga seen nearly every day and many taken in nets and by chase. Total harvest numbers will be hard to come by. Most but not all net catches have been of subadult animals. Sharing between camps has been good, though some aggressive hunting and boat maneuvering has brought some protests.

A first dead walrus has washed in just east of Sealing Pt. It did have a head but does not seem to be a kill from this spring, though some of the quaq will be cooked.

A first bear of the season was seen in the western portion of Sisualik, nosing around someone's boat.

The showers today have brought on more green and flowering. It is really the first warm rain we have had. The other rain spells have been cold.

**June 20**

High 60º F
Low 48º F
Cloudy, some sun
NW wind to 15

No beluga action last night on this side but some hunting and at least three taken on the Kotzebue Channel side. Action continued through today there and this afternoon a CB report indicated that one very, very small boat was hauling three beluga into town. He was having trouble because of towing uneven weight. His catch was from his net.

Salmon catch continues pretty good - maybe multiple poles at Salluq.

Made a four-wheeler trip out onto tide flats this afternoon to check quality of tide flats graze potential for geese. The *Puccinellia* has turned emerald green and is already being grazed by waterfowl. These neat emerald plots are nearly all fresh green growth that is tender and nutritious. The *Carex* the next zone up is growing too but is still covered with previous year's brown growth. The whole picture of time and growth of these mudflat and strand species is complex and is important to waterfowl needs. The higher levels of "grass" (*Carex* sp./graminoids) sprout and supply graze for birds early. The lowest plant, the *Puccinellia*, is the latest to come alive because of the cooler temperature of the substrate.

Our backyard salmonberry flowers are just opening. We are into that critical time for salmonberry production again. For this week we need ideal pollinating conditions.

Five dead walrus that we know of have been found today just off Krusenstern Beaches, Three with heads and tusks.

All of our "camp family" left today.

**June 21**

High 64º F
Low 54º F
Clear
SE-S wind to 15

Beluga and walrus are again the big items of conversation, speculation, dreams and work today.

Several net-taken beluga again and a close look at interacting groups of passing and feeding belugas at tent waterfront.

A CB report alerted hunters to the presence of walrus near Chamisso Island. The boat contacted was already nearly halfway there. Already-dead walrus, most headless, are reported again today on or near Krusenstern Beaches. There is a greater percentage of walrus with heads on so far than in past few years.

The small bear reported near westernmost camp was back again to claim a small drifted in seal last night. It buried what was left and put a little blue float, apparently as a marker for the site. (All kinds of strange stories around here!)

Mosquitoes quite bad today and a first butterfly noted.

The green of summer continues to creep higher, soon to obscure the brown of last year’s growth.

The scent of the ground on the breeze is delicious! The rock jasmine flowering has come on quite suddenly and broadly, all over.

Another historic traditional happening has been altered this year. Salmon have been in the water a week and the *Elymus* seed heads have not appeared yet. Normally they appear at the same time.

A late report of a large beluga taken off Sisualik by friends that were here this afternoon and live walrus take off the Ranger Station site.

**June 22**

High 65º F
Low 43º F
Cloudy, rain late
SW to NW wind 30

A day of wind, high water and large swells spoiled the hopes and plans of marine mammal hunters. The nets (beluga nets) remained in the water of course and could make a catch, but the net-tenders wouldn't be able to retrieve or kill the animal. That will have to wait till winds calm.

A friend over at the Point had good fortune last evening. He found several belugas in shallow waters on his way home from a beluga chase. He was able to get one fine white animal, which he shared with us. The number of beluga around and the number of beluga taken by Kotzebue and Sisualik hunters for this '96 Season is quite remarkable and will be much discussed and long remembered.

The presence of large numbers of walrus on a line from Chamisso Island to Kivalina this week is even more remarkable. It is now being suggested by some to be the reason the beluga in the Sound are staying so close and so long in shallow water.

Lots of new flowers out today: forget-me-nots, bluebells and a super extraordinary bloom of *Primula borealis*. Don't recall such a display of this beautiful little deep pink, salt-loving early-flowering marsh plant.

This rain will help the salmonberry flowers along but the strong cold wind today won't help with pollination.

Several walrus have been taken by local hunters this week, as well as at least one Ribbon Seal.

**June 23**

High 54º F
Low 40º F
Cloudy, clearing
NW wind to 20

A cool dry day for this date – there is absolutely no ice in sight this morning from Sisualik. The report from Sealing Point is similar. The return of the NW wind syndrome through strong current and wind push of ice may usher in our "ice free" season. Some hopeful walrus and beluga hunters may be disappointed, but most everyone has oil and meat enough to welcome in the next season of fishing, berry picking and mosquitoes and butterflies and flowers.

The near onshore winds of yesterday brought a lot of dead sea mammals to shore. These are animals lost or un-retrievable when first killed or wounded, a bi-product of marine mammal harvest. Ringed seal, spotted seal, uguruq and walrus were species noted. Oil of some is useable for humans. The meat and skins are for dogs or bears only. There is an unusually high number but it is an annual occurrence as marine ice fades away.

The wind is dying as the day ends and the hunters are waiting, eager to get out and see if there are still walrus and/or belugas still in the area.

We had a first summer meeting for Sunday School here today. We enjoyed the fellowship and food.

**June 24**

High 56º F
Low 42º F
Cloudy, rain, fog
NE wind to 18

Finally a good day to burn our year's accumulation of cardboard and plastics. The pile, including dry grasses, was quite large and more than halfway down our long beach. The steady offshore wind and promise of coming rain worked out just right. The pile was dry, burned hot and our summer fish camp site is a lot cleaner looking.

No ice in sight again this morning so it may be gone for good now.

There were reports of a large group of beluga headed into Kotzebue Channel last night when a barge came along, causing them to return to deep water. Haven't heard of others yet today.

Our two plants of white-petaled fireweed (*Epilobium latifolium*) are slow to grow and are pretty anemic looking.

Put 6" mesh net out this morning and got lots of healthy looking flounders and one male chum salmon for supper.

We collected quite a lot of rainwater today. It helped out our stored supply a lot.

No beluga sightings today, that we heard of anyway. The marine waters came up quite high this evening. Some beluga should come in with it.

Visited the *Puccinellia* mud flats again today and found several "grass" species still tender and good as forage for geese.

A large whale was seen by Salluq people this morning. They said black and white and that it made quite a spout and splash. Maybe an orca but no one mentioned a dorsal fin, so we don't know for sure.

**June 25**

High 59º F
Low 49º F
Cloudy, fog, showers
Light winds
NW wind to 15

A great, great day for the pollination of our salmonberry crop. It is right on peak flowering time with a few flower petals already dropping. The light winds, misty showers, warmth and insect activity today should give us a crop. Last year was a near failure.

No ice again and ground swells (small ones) all day are good indications that summer is really here and the marine mammal hunting scene is closing down. Storing away and cleaning up are the leftover chores.

We cooked up our beluga maktak share today (after three days of hanging/air-drying). It will cool overnight, dry out a bit tomorrow, and then into plastic buckets to be covered with oil and stored away.

Had the short "pole push" salmon net out today but the only catch was flounders.

There are still many beluga nets out. Some beluga were seen at the mouth of Kotzebue Channel last night but no catch reported.

The outlet of Akulaaq has remained closed and now the report is that the Anigaaq outlet is getting shallow. The sooner it closes now the better, for whitefish will be moving out from now on till it closes.

Intense growth and development is the name of the game for vegetation. You can

almost see leaf-blossom development going on while you watch.

*Primula borealis* and salmonberry blossoms are at peak. Both are having a good year. The *Primula*, a salt burn specialist, is really spectacular.

Swallows show sign of feeding young. That's kind of a surprise in lieu of the tough times they have had. Only one snowbank left in sight on tablelands.

A moose and a bear at Sealing Point.

**June 26**

High 55º F
Low 48º F
Cloudy, light rain
N wind to 20

A cool day of kind of steady but light rain. Our ground is becoming a low verdant jungle again. Lots of life there.

Ground swells continue, due to no more ice on the ocean and very strong north winds on the outer capes.

Finally located *Elymus* seed heads today on back beaches. This in most every year is sign of chum salmon in the Sound. It seems to have failed this year as a first salmon turned up on the June 17, ten days ago.

Some beautiful new *Pedicularis sudetica*, the peppermint swirls of the salt marsh, were noted blooming today. The bright yellow of *Potentilla Egedii* is also beginning to dot the salt marsh.

The salt marsh grasses remain sweet and tender from a goose's perspective, but some or most are down in molt or are getting close to it. The last week of June is beginning molt time for male and failed breeders of the Northern Pintail species.

We still have one tableland snowbank.

A number of beluga were seen in the swells today, passing Sisualik and headed for Kotzebue.

Some small groups of Western and Semi-palmated Sandpipers are appearing on the mudflats. Maybe failed or non-breeders already to head south again.

"Pole push" net fishing not much when ground swells are active. We didn't set a net today. We may do that when swells retreat some. We need fresh fish again.

Salmonberry flowers are rapidly dropping white petals; this week is indeed critical for a crop.

**June 27**

High 60º F
Low 40º F
Clear
N to NW wind 35

Strong dry winds and very low marine waters.

There is, today, a strange erosion by the large ocean swells. The wave action at extreme low water level has cut down through gravel and sand to what is apparently Pleistocene mud-sod. It has not done that here in front of our camp in our lifetime.

A neighbor ran over a baby seal with 4-wheeler on the beach this morning and gave it to Carrie to make a bag. These Ringed Seals were born in late March or early April and often get "lost" by the time the ice leaves the area. Those that don't get lost go north with the pack ice. They have beautiful silvery short hair and make fine little utility bags. They are the ideal material for making seal skin pants, formerly a necessity for every ice hunter or arctic traveler. One whole seal skin for each leg. The only seam is through the crotch.

No word of belugas this day though many nets are still out.

We finished up our meat and oil work today and have them put in the cool storage. A lot of good oily food. Dried uguruq meat in oil, dried fish in oil, and beluga maktak in oil. They will be more attractive as the weather begins to cool and frost and ice claim the world again.

The strong wind today and the relative coolness through the period may detract from our salmonberry harvest potential.

There is a story about someone seeing 70 or 80 caribou around Fish Creek on Kobuk Lake.

**June 28**

High 55º F
Low 36º F
Clear
NW wind to 35

Another cool windy day but finally calming after 8 PM.

Beluga nets have not been checked for seven days because of rough water. Have not heard of belugas being seen for a couple of days and the report is that Point Lay will do

their beluga drive early tomorrow. After the kill, K. Frost of ADF&G will attempt to place satellite radio transmitter on one or some whales. They were to do a couple here in Kotzebue Sound but equipment (net) was late coming. Hope they are successful. We need to know more about beluga movement patterns while there is still a presence of this interesting creature.

Our flock of 400 or so Tundra Swans are still in our back mudflat area. Today they were working a *Potamogeton* bed a half-mile north of our tent. The lagoon is almost empty of water from long continuous NW winds.

Two adult moose were at Salluq camp this morning.

A late flight of 20 Brant were headed NW on the ocean beach today, maybe for molt areas on the Beaufort Sea.

This long windy cool spell seems not to have harmed the berry crop at Salluq. A good report from there today by friends picking sourdock.

There are only three occupied camps down there now but there will be many more in late July if the salmonberry crop comes in.

Neighbors found tern eggs, possibly Aleutian, the very latest of egg layers locally.

**June 29**

High 55º F
Low 40º F
Clear, some clouds
S to NW wind 18

A busy day and then weekend family late in the day. It has been a long day.

We helped in the butchering of three beluga today. Two net caught 2-3 year olds and one 4-year-old shot from the beach. Our share will make another 5-gallon bucket of maktak!

Our nearest neighbor had one of the best catches that we have heard of in his beluga net today. There were two beluga, one young uguruq, one spotted seal and one large new-haired male common seal. This catch was probably the results of the strong wind, big waves, and muddy water of yesterday.

A large percentage of the belugas taken on this side of the Sound have been sub-adults, especially those taken with nets.

There was at least one more taken near the same time and there could be more that we haven't heard of yet.

Our large flock of Tundra Swans still in the backyard foraging both on aquatics and the still tender *Carex* marsh grasses. They are a boisterous and noisy bunch. Wherever they choose to molt will be pretty heavily impacted.

New flowers today: dandelions, yellow paintbrush, beach peas.

Our *Elymus* beach grasses are having poor and slow growth this year. Only a few grain heads are showing yet on the ocean strand.

Had a 12 lb. king salmon in our short 6" mesh this morning. There were two nice char this afternoon.

**June 30**

High 58º F
Low 40º F
Some clouds
S to NW wind 15

Swans remain in our remote backyard grazing both the remaining tender greens above water level and the new growth of aquatics (*Potamogeton*). The change that has occurred in the mud flats and salt marsh in the last two weeks is one of "new season growth." That is, the food waterfowl seek out has changed from overwinter seed, corms, and roots, to tender new growth that is day by day growing less tender and juicy as it moves toward maturity: flowering, seed-forming and drying. Various species of vegetation and different levels or plots of salt marsh come into these changes at different times.

A small group of Aleutian Terns began egg laying on the end of a neighbor's landing field this week. Several of the eggs taken were quite fresh, embryos undeveloped. This is the latest of all local species to initiate egg laying. Also they show little fidelity to place from year to year.

At least one more net caught beluga and word of some passing through last night. This one another 2-3 year old. Many of the netted beluga were of this gray-tan age/color.

Point Lay beluga drive postponed till tomorrow due to high winds. Five hundred beluga reported in the area.

Chum salmon and flounders in a 20-minute net set.

Bluebells came out strong but foliage not robust. About half the salmonberry flowers have dropped their petals. It is a little early to assess possible crop this year - maybe by next week.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## JULY

**July 1**

High 70º F
Low 48º F
Clear
S-SW-W wind to 15

July begins as a typical July should: hot sunshine, some bugs and a shiny sea with huge Hawaii 5'0 swells developing white tops as they approach the beach. These kinds of swells signal the end of spring and the beginning of summer in Sisualik.

In spite of the huge swells, which are diminishing, a sea kayak with two paddlers is passing a ¼-mile off shore. We have no idea who they are or where they are going. They will have a time landing on the beach if the swells continue, till they tire of paddling.

Belugas were seen last night at Sealing Point moving toward Point Lay, where they had their first hunt today we heard. Hunters from here (relatives) are reported to have gotten four. They have a different system there, we understand. The catch from this first drive, after they are cut up, will be piled and divided among all the houses of the village. If hunters then want more they can hunt again.

Marine waters are high today but began to drop towards afternoon.

Young squirrels are out. Terry caught one while on leash with ATV. They are not quite half the size of adults and not real bright.

We are hoping that Anigaaq channel will close anytime now as few of the whitefish have gone out yet.

The thunder of the swells breaking on Sisualik beaches today is a somber reminder that the wave monster is alive again.

**July 2**

High 56º F
Low 46º F
Cloudy, rain
SE to SW wind 20

A rainy day with a little more wind than forecasted, but things improving in the evening.

Everybody inside most of the day. The biggest excitement was the two kayakers who passed last evening between seven and eight o'clock, far off shore in a sea with quite large swells that could only get worse the farther they went. Us locals worry about how they would manage a landing to the beach with such heavy surf. There is as yet no report of them having been seen by campers west of the Ranger Station.

Marine waters have been quite high and there are lots of beluga nets out yet. It is still a bit rough for net checking but maybe later this evening some boats will get at it.

There have been no reported sightings of beluga today.

Our big flock of non-breeding Tundra Swans has moved off. There was a large flock (100) of male Greater Scaup with them all day yesterday. These scaup will be last of the ducks to molt wing feathers in late July or early August. Pintail, wigeon and geese are into wing molt now, some at least.

Our last snowbank on the high bank of the tableland was gone this morning. We can only see snowbanks in the higher mountains from here now, though there are some deep "ravines" to the west of us that run north to south that trap great quantities of snow. They will still have snowbanks, and new vegetation growth will be late to begin, supplying geese with tender forage through and after molt. These areas may even attract inland hatchlings as soon as they can fly well if a new telemetry study proves out.

**July 3**

High 62º F
Low 48º F
Clear
NW wind to 20, PM

Two large moose at Sealing Pint today. They have been around Salluq off and on for some time.

At least two large white belugas were brought in from nets today. The first Point Lay drive was quite successful too with enough to share with the whole village. The Pt. Lay drive was on Monday and Tuesday. A lot of beluga action this year. There are many puzzling questions.

Chum Salmon are making a pretty good show. A neighbor set a net around noon and left for town. The wind came up and the weak anchor dragged in. It was fairly full of salmon, lying on the beach. There is to be a fishermen's meeting on Saturday and probably a first commercial opening on Monday, July 8.

Rumor has it that Buckland people (at Elephant Point) killed a baleen whale yesterday. It is said to be a Bowhead, which seems unlikely. It is the time/season when many Gray Whales are often in outer Kotzebue Sound.

Caribou are in the news again. A few have been taken on the north shore of Kobuk Lake.

There are many beluga nets in the water yet.

There are more flowers each day and a lot of ¼ to ½-size ground squirrels running around. Terry can't believe squirrels can be so dumb.

A cool windy evening, without mosquitoes again. Mosquitoes are not having a good summer.

There are few people in camps tonight. Most are in Kotzebue for the 4th of July celebration.

**July 4**

High 72º F
Low 45º F
Clear, few clouds
W-NW wind to 15

A beautiful day for the 4th of July.

Our neighbor took a two-year-old beluga from his net so we helped him cut it up and gained a share. This will make nearly three large white plastic buckets full of finished, cooked, oil-covered beluga maktak that we have gained through generosity of our friends, family and neighbor. This is a record amount since we quit hunting belugas ourselves.

Put the 9-fathom (length) 6" mesh salmon net out late this morning and found 6 large bright silver chum salmon in it when beached this afternoon. A nice catch from a short net put out with a pole. We will have a favorite summer dish for supper: boiled salmon heads.

Practically all the beluga nets that were set last month are still set. The Commercial Chum Salmon season may open this coming Monday, so some instructions are probably coming from Fish and Game.

We have young half (some ¼) size ground squirrels running around, lots of them. It seems more than we have seen before. Since they have only been active above ground since May 1st they must have a pretty short gestation period. Their high population level has been hard on our various local pea vine varieties. The oxytropes and beach peas are both a favorite food source. Our *Oxytropis Maydelliana* is now very scarce as they eat leaves, roots and seeds. *Lathyrus maritima* fares better because the plants are much more numerous.

Some of our salmonberry plants are forming berries after blossoms. A good reason to hope for a better crop than last year.

**July 5**

High 58º F
Low 50º F
Clear, some clouds
W-NW wind to 18

At least one net-taken beluga again today.

Fish and Game came by today for a good visit. They were on the way to put in boundary line for the commercial fishing area. The season's first period will open Monday.

*Pedicularis sudetica* is having a great blossom year. The flowers have had a couple of bad years from freezing and/or drying. This year they are abundant and full, robust-flowered, the peppermint pinwheel of arctic salt marsh.

Thunder and lightning got a little closer this evening than it has so far summer.

Mosquitoes may have a good evening as our wind is dropping and the air is pretty moist.

We didn't set a net today. The catch yesterday will carry us for a while.

We have a Siberian visitor in our camp gull flock today: a second year Slaty-backed Gull. Hope he stays for a while. The Glaucous Gulls are intimidated. There is probably no connection, but a Siberian group of dancers got into town for the Trade Fair today also.

Mini-ground squirrels continue to run about, not knowing much of the cruel, cruel world. It is remarkable that a few manage to grow to adulthood.

Our floral display is approaching climax this week - probably a week later than usual but both floral development and foliage growth is happening almost while you watch. With 24-hour sun, moisture and warmth, day-to-day change in vegetation is exciting!

A moose went through Sisualik this early morning. It is the first we have had though they have been fairly regular at Salluq camp.

**July 6**

High 70º F
Low 49º F
Clear, few clouds
Light winds

A beautiful warm day - almost too hot, but not quite.

Had the 6" mesh net out for several hours and it had 4 chum salmon. One of them was deeply water-marked (colored), locally called "Noatak salmon" for the color change soon acquired upon entering fresh water.

There was a very long, very lean sheefish in the net with salmon. This is the time of return to freshwater of those shee that went out into the Sound with the spring flush out and now have been in salt water too long and have become anemic.

Nearly dead calm all day today with a light breeze from off the water. A real fine summer day.

No hint today of anymore beluga in Kotzebue Sound. We shall see.

A report today of 8 musk ox and three calves in the vicinity of "Battle Rock."

Tried the whitefish net today after the salmon catch and got nothing but flounders. Our water has gotten clearer than it has been before this spring.

It is that time of the flowering year again when one is overwhelmed by the sheer number and diversity of flowers. Early on one looks for a single flower here or there to confirm that the earth really is going to bloom again. By now one despairs because you can't possibly see them all, individually, only as masses and something seems to be lost - the tender beauty of the individual is blotted out by the mass.

There was even a butterfly or two today.

"Slaty-back" getting tamer and more attracted to the camp.

**July 7**

High 74º F
Low 52º F
Clear
NE to NW wind 15

Pretty warm, almost too much at midday.

Our vegetation is making up for lost time now, including berry crop, but everything will need a little water soon. A timely rain (maybe in the form of thundershowers) may give us a good berry season. It is now time to consider getting out to an inland lake to see what amount of sourdock we can muster this year. The best growth of leaves on the plant *Rumex arcticus* (our sourdock, qauġaq) occurs when there is much early season warm weather. We haven't had that this year so our expectations are not very high.

It is also time to seek out a few flightless waterfowl. It has been awhile since we have had fresh meat, and though we have heard of a few lucky people that have seen and taken caribou, we have not seen a piece of meat for the soup pot. We do have enough fish and marine mammal products to eat well, but the soup pot has been inactive for a while. Pintail, wigeon and geese are likely to be flightless, in molt right now.

The first open period in the Kotzebue Sound commercial chum salmon fishery is to happen tomorrow. Prices promise to be quite low with one buyer not being able to handle much volume. Periods will be short. Tomorrow nets will be in from 2 to 6 PM.

A good catch of pink salmon (humpbacks) was made at Salluq the first part of this week. They were moving west, which seems strange.

Butterflies today. We have not seen many yet this summer.

**July 8**

High 86º F
Low 50º F
Clear, thunderheads
W-NW wind to 20

Another warm day, but most of it with a brisk wind. Maybe our worst night and early morning of mosquitoes so far.

Quite a catch this morning in the 3" whitefish net: four whitefish, a char, four humpback salmon, three large chum salmon and numerous flounders in a 2-hour soak.

The char was carrying and ADF&G tag. It was a female with half- developed eggs, a stray that is not part of a big char movement - there are few char in Sisualik waters right now. The number was 5524 on a white tag.

First Iris bloom today on the back lagoon beach. Also saw daisies and Jacob's ladder.

Two moose at Salluq and later at Sealing Pt. Two others behind Salluq. One with two calves the other with one.

Fresh bear tracks again quite near Sisualik camps. Nearly all the dead drifted-in sea mammals are on the east beach with only one on the west side where the bear is eating. When he finishes or tires of that one we may hear more of his travels.

A plane reported a beluga struggling in a net west of us late last night. We haven't yet heard if the net owner has found out or has checked the net. There are apparently beluga around yet.

First commercial chum fish period today 2:00 to 6:00 PM. Haven't heard price or catch.

Slaty-back was back again today after a days absence.

**July 9**

High 67º F
Low 55º F
Clear
NW wind to 15

Not so warm as yesterday, just about right.

Another commercial fishing period today, 12 noon till 6 PM.

Insects pretty much have the world again for a while. This includes the ground, the water, the grasses and the air. Our Arctic world has become a mini-jungle again with living creatures over every inch of it.

Baby ducks and just flying passerines are out and we will have our first sunset since June 1st tonight.

The high temperatures and dry air are making some of our ground too dry for the kind of vegetation on it. If we don't get rain again soon our berry crop will be affected.

The Glaucous Gull sitting on eggs north of us is still sitting. This is the site that last year near this time flooded out and we never learned the fate of the chick or egg. It may even be Jonathan or his mate.

Lots of butterflies today, yellow and black, orange and blue. We had thought we might not see any this year due to the cool, cool spring weather.

The plague of ground squirrels continuing with many half size ones.

A few species of plants are making a poor showing this year, *Oxytropis Maydelliana* and *Saussurea* sp. in particular, and not a single *Gentianopsis detonsa* plant has been found yet. May have to wait till what plants there are get developed enough to see.

Report of two beluga in a net west of us, one floating with an oil slick. Sounds like a spoiled animal in a neglected net.

Also a Harbor Porpoise dead in a beluga net today.

**July 10**

High 68º F
Low 55º F
Clear, thunderheads
E-SE wind to 20

Two bull moose in the backyard this morning, one lying down, the other eating some salt marsh greens. They were in the area where our big flock of swans often gathers to feed. The moose soon moved on right into the middle of Sisualik camps, down onto the ocean beach and then laid down for a half hour nap! All of Sisualik came to know they were there, and quite remarkably, they were allowed to finish their nap and move back across the salt marsh and into the hills where they belong. Must have been a day of wonders to those two young fellows, a part of the world they seldom see. Feel pretty good about friends and neighbors permitting these creatures to visit without incident.

Carrie off to town this evening for summer Friends Church conference.

Finally washed out our freezer today and have pretty well caught up with camp duties and chores. Will be free to go to inland lake for sourdock when a suitable day comes along.

An 8-hour commercial fishing period today. One dollar a fish is the current selling price.

Lots of beluga nets out yet. A recent report of a small group south of Kotzebue not moving much from one location.

Saw a doubled up family of recent hatchlings yesterday. Two female Oldsquaws with combined family of 16-18 chicks.

Slaty-back around all day. He is responding to special feeding.

The two moose went through Jonathan's nest site and the bird has not returned to incubation site, which probably means eggs have hatched.

**July 11**

High 70º F
Low 60º F
Cloudy
Light winds

Finally found a blooming gentian: *G. prostrata*. Have spent a couple days checking old places of *G. detonsa* occurrence without locating a single plant. *G. prostrata* is normally the first to bloom. Have seen a few plants of *G. propinqua* but none yet of *G. tenella* or *G. detonsa*. Plants of Grass-of-Parnassus with buds (no blooms) are showing and our two white-petaled *Epilobium latifolium* plants look weak (not robust) and have no buds. This perennial sure varies from year to year in robustness of growth. Backyard Iris blooming today and a few *Senecio lugens* are showing yellow. Also some blue *Saussurea*. The higher well-drained areas are showing dryness and heat stress.

A few more showers or real rain is probably critical for our berry crop. There are only a few salmonberry flowers left and cranberries, the latest berry flowers, are at peak.

*Elymus* beach grass grain heads started dropping pollen yesterday.

Beluga sightings seem ended. A number of Harbor Porpoises have been reported in the Salluq-Sealing Point area. One would like to see all the beluga nets out of the water but many remain. When commercial chum periods are on it puts an awful lot of netting in the zone and creatures other than those targeted by the nets are sometimes caught and drowned.

Several sea beach sunflowers (*Senecio pseudo-Arnica*) were seen in full flower today on lagoon beach. This plant and the Iris are very rapid in growth from beginning greening to open flower. Late to start but quick to flower.

**July 12**

High 68º F
Low 60º F
Clear, shower clouds
SE to S gusts to 18

Spent several hours today look for sign of *Gentianopsis detonsa*. No sign! Covered much of our backyard marshland, especially where they were abundant last year and the year before. They are probably not blooming yet but the plants should be of a size that is recognizable. Did locate some plants of *G. prostrata* and *G. propinqua* but none of either *G. detonsa* or *Lomatogonium rotatum* (Star Gentian). The plants are the latest to grow and blossom in the region so some may turn up yet. It may be recalled that back in May and June we suggested that due to cool temperatures at time of germination that it may be difficult to find *G. detonsa* this year. We shall see. This plant is difficult to detect until its beautiful purple-blue flowers light the salt

marsh. So long we have waited to see, again, this unique and mysterious wild flower. The yearning becomes an ache by this time and the more so since there is not a hint that there will be even one.

Gulls are giving camp a tough time. Light fishing effort and disappearing winter-killed food right at the time hatched chicks require lots of feed has caused gulls to be pretty aggressive. Slaty-back is here and Jonathan and Pipsqueak the camp Mew Gull; all are having trouble getting their share of camp spoils.

Saw a large flock of 100+ of male Scaup on the lagoon today. They won't become flightless till nearly August.

There are some N. Pintails on the mudflats - maybe early returns from molt.

Found a strange cache of three young ground squirrels today, piled together, not covered. Blood on some indicates violent death but no hint of what caught and piled them.

**July 13**

High 66º F
Low 55º F
Clear, thunderheads
NW wind to 15, PM

Very fine weather for living today. Moderate bugs, moderate temperatures and moderate winds. Most everybody and all things are pretty happy. Lots of sun.

Another bull moose was down to visit Sisualik this morning and seems to have made it back inland. The number of instances of moose visits to the coast this year during our "warm time" are up over recent past summers. Couldn't guess the reason. It does augur well for a higher local population come fall.

Some whitefish and young sheefish in the ocean probably moving from Anigaaq back toward the rivers. Anigaaq outlet is said to be quite narrow. We are into the window of time again that we hope for an early closure of the outlet down there to trap as many fish as possible for our later use.

Cranes and moose in the backyard this shiny quiet morning but the salt marsh is pretty quiet, with only female ducks with broods to be seen. Mud flats are pretty empty except for a few N. Pintails that are probably back early from molt. Sandpipers still pretty much on lake margins trying to grow up.

There are still beluga nets in the water and a report of one boat chasing a few west of us yesterday afternoon.

Lots of many different kinds of butterflies today - probably peak butterfly time.

Tried again with a two-hour walk to locate *G. detonsa* - no sign. There are a few *G. prostrata* and *G. propinqua*. This will be a sad summer without the sighting of this fine flower. Iris are nearly at peak; first open Grass-of-Parnassus today.

**July 14**

High 76º F
Low 42º F
Clear, clouding
S-SW to 15

News of a walrus taken yesterday near Battle Rock by two boats traveling from Kotzebue to Kivalina.

There was also a report yesterday of 6-8 musk ox on top of the ridge that leads down to the cliff face on Sealing Point lagoon.

A dead two-year-old beluga drifted into shore on our beachfront today. The upper side (as it had been floating) was free of maktak by sun action and gull activity. The bottom half was yet maktak covered. There were no visible wounds. The assumption is that it drowned in one of the multitude of beluga nets left in the water, still unattended for many days. It is expected that there will be more. Some regulation or oversight of net setters seems imperative.

Another butterfly and Flag Lily (Iris) day. Both are spectacular this fine warm day.

Found rather abundant *G. propinqua* plants (no flowers yet), but still no *G. tenella* or *G. detonsa*.

It surely is a good year for *Primula borealis* (now much past peak) and *Iris setosa* (peaking right now).

The pile of three half-grown squirrels may be solved. Found an oversize squirrel hole near the cached squirrels. What lives in the hole is not yet clear. Most likely a white fox with pups. Other less likely possibilities are a stray mink, or marten out of habitat, or a young inexperienced red fox with a small pup or two. This caching of prey without burying seems unusual. Bones of a freshly eaten turnstone (probably) was on the shore near the site, which hints at a bird of prey (merlin?).

Bear on beach by westernmost camp taking a bath in the ocean.

**July 15**

High 63º F
Low 52º F
Cloudy
SW-W wind to 35

A sudden pick up of wind, waves and water early this morning, enough to route me out of bed at 4:00 AM to get equipment and boat off the beach up into the grasses. Huge swells - water level came up rapidly almost to grass root edge of the ocean beach. Both wave height and water level started back down as the wind dropped off some in the afternoon. No harm done except a very large deteriorating walrus carcass was left on our ocean waterfront. It will take awhile to get it cut into several pieces so the water can move it away.

We think - though it's not proved yet - that the wave action has closed the outlet at Anigaaq. We hope so!

Swallows must have had a scary night. Thought the young ones had gotten out last night when there was a lot of commotion around the box and they didn't seem to be out this morning. They were around this afternoon. Gulls and squirrels are pretty insistent in bumming food today.

Carrie having trouble getting home. Can't find a plane. She did make it later on by boat.

We did get rid of the walrus, unless it comes back. It was a very strenuous job. Cut it in three pieces and moved them down into the breakers. They keep rolling back up but by repetition, the pieces were moved at least a half-mile away. We now have an odd set up: no dead sea mammals from Sealing Point to Sisualik proper to the tip of the Point. All beachcombing bears will need to go by all the waterfront houses to find seal and walrus carcasses.

**July 16**

High 63º F
Low 48º F
Cloudy
Light rain AM
Clearing PM
Light winds

A very fine summer day after a fair wetting of the ground overnight. Enough to save our berry crop if it is not too long till the next one.

Some green growth near the edge of the beach suffered salt burn from the mist formed by big swells.

Vegetation in general looks fresh and rejuvenated after the rain and warm afternoon sun

Anigaaq outlet is really closed, hopefully for good. One family from Sisualik is already hauling things down to their camp at Katyauraq to wait for berry ripening.

This July closing will mean good fall fishing. There are a lot of whitefish in that system right now.

A large dead spoiled beluga found floating yesterday. It was white and had been well shot but lost.

The buyer of chum salmon is having trouble moving out the quantity of chums available thus fish time pretty reduced. Another tough go for fishermen.

The floral show on the inland route to Sisualik Point is near peak. *Epilobium latifolium* patches are the main attraction. The 20-30 plants near the west end of the airstrip with white petals are doing fine.

Still no located *G. detonsa*; iris remain at peak and abundant.

Marine water very low again.

Bugs not bad even though the weather is good for them.

**July 17**

High 64º F
Low 46º F
Cloudy, drizzle
SE to NW wind to 18

Our ground got a good wetting today and the air began soon after noon.

A short commercial fishing period today (2 to 6 PM) today due to shortage of shipping totes! Our commercial fishery has sure "gone to the dogs." The buyer determines price, fishing time, and who can sell fish. The buyer is king and the depressed world market makes it a bad time for fisher folks.

Anigaaq is well closed with numerous travelers going back and forth by 4-wheeler. One family already moved down to the salmonberry picking grounds from Sisualik. Normally the berries ripen there around August 1st to 10.

Several beluga nets remain out mostly with no check by owners. Bad scene.

Biting bugs seem few today in spite of damp not too cold air.

Have yet to locate a single *G. detonsa*. This may be a year to document the low of this Sisualik species.

Fresh bear tracks in two places since waves swept the beach clean between here and Sealing Point.

Five nice whitefish in small mesh this morning. Replaced it with salmon size mesh. Will note catch later.

Biggest need now is sourdock harvest before first berries ripen.

Young swallows not out yet. Slaty-back still here and looking a little more robust.

The salmon net caught only one spent humpy, no chums. That's unexpected!

**July 18**

High 64º F
Low 56º F
Cloudy, drizzle
Fog AM, clear PM
Light variable winds

A dull dreary wet AM changing to a brilliant bright warm and verdant PM. The warmth, moisture and sunlight gave our world a kind of "greenhouse" atmosphere. Bugs and plants rejoiced mightily. Worms - larvae of various flies - found it a great time to spread themselves around. Our newly flying longspurs and savanna sparrows found that to be a great opportunity.

Our salmonberries are showing red on the tip of the formed berry, wrapped tightly in the sepals yet. Those plants out in the open and on higher ground seemed to have dried out too much to nurture a fruit during the long warm spell without rain. There is still a good chance for a good crop in moist zones. Cranberries are still blooming and blueberries locally are quite small yet. Blackberries are looking fine but are not black yet.

Local Mew Gulls parents are getting very aggressive as young approach flying stage.

A few walrus still floating around and news of the headless walrus making local, state and international media.

People spending time in the field for sourdock now as first berries are still 10 days off.

Lots of butterflies, squirrels and mosquitoes. These are real warm weather fellows, wasps and dragonflies.

One beluga wounded from the beach at Salluq last night.

Shiny water but some swells this evening.

The 6" mesh net out all day. The catch: one chum, one humpy, 16 plastic bags and a blouse. The pristine waters of Kotzebue Sound?

**July 19**

High 76º F
Low 50º F
Clear, clouding late
W-NW wind to 18

Trip to inland sourdock grounds. A good strenuous day with good rewards. Returned with 30-40 lbs. of sourdock leaves. Picking was a little slower than last year. Still no grass in that particular place, which is good as grass hinders picking.

As always, a trip inland at this season is a thrill on a number of lines, not the least of which is the number of flowering plants never seen around salt marsh and ocean beach. Shooting stars, violets, valerian and the beautiful pink nagoonberry flower very widespread under willows but seldom producing berries. Another thing that may amaze the inland hiker in July is the very aggressive competition of plants for every square inch of available soil. This seems kind of unique to our Arctic-subarctic land. If you ever manage to walk through a small plot of land with nothing growing on it, it is sure not to stay that way long.

Was privileged to witness the reaction of parental Short-eared Owls to a stranger in their midst. The young can apparently fly but not far or for long. Forgot my binocs this morning so missed the best of the show. Most surprising, the adults produced a whole repertoire of monster noises, no doubt designed to scare off anything. One would not expect those kinds of noises from a small owl. I nearly stepped on one youngster hidden in the tall grasses.

The remains of two harbor porpoise were newly drifted on to the beach just west of here.

**July 20**

High 56º F
Low 48º F
Cloudy AM
Clearing PM
W-NW wind to 18

Sourdock cook today, resulting in one full plastic bucket of finished product (water, sourdock leaves and uguruq blubber boiled together to consistency of medium thick oatmeal).

A cool, clear and dry day. No chance to put net in as the ocean has been rough.

A few tall fireweed blooming around camp. A local *Epilobium latifolium* bloomed two days ago.

Saw a few plants of *Lomatogonium rotatum*. Still no *G. detonsa* located.

Bones and muscles a bit worn from yesterday's walk and pack. It does make the sourdock taste better.

There is a fog bank out over the ocean this evening. We hope it doesn't mean that the westerly winds will continue until it finally frosts. That would be catastrophe. We do not need any frost till September.

Headless walrus are much in the news this week after two years with very few drifted in headless animals. This year the count is way up. Where they were killed is speculative.

Three new Tree Swallows out of the box today, one smaller and less sure of himself than the others. The three arranged themselves on the "carry box" of the four-wheeler while waiting for mother to bring feed. Such small bits of fluff and beady eyes to face the trials of a big cruel world. They seemed to have survived their first trial, the hungry gulls. One could interpret the line up on the 4-wheeler basket as a "thank you" and a goodbye till next May.

**July 21**

High 56º F
Low 50º F
Cloudy, fog, drizzle
SW-NW wind 18

A wet day. Again good for the berry crop. Looks like we will have some salmonberries and some blackberries. There is not much for encouragement in the blueberry line and cranberries are still blooming.

The salt marsh and "gully-late snowbank" area still have abundant tender grasses of the *Puccinellia* and *Carex* complex. Our local geese are not back from molt yet. Wonder about Galena white-fronts?

Still have not located a single plant of the species *Gentianopsis detonsa*. It was expected that this would be a poor year for that species but to go a whole year again without a glimpse of its delicate frame and deep color? It will be interesting to know where specimens occur during this year of low occurrence. It's known range on Kotzebue Sound is from the Noatak Delta-Sisualik area down through Kotzebue on the west facing shore to the Kiwalik Spit on the Baldwin Peninsula.

Found the three new swallows sitting in a line in the rain, on the sled handle bars back of the dome away from the gulls, waiting for their parents to bring them something to eat.

Some rumor at Salluq of a wounded or sunk beluga. The story is unclear at this point.

Commercial salmon fishery meeting tomorrow. Some adjustments to be made. The situation doesn't look hopeful for the fishermen.

A large bear by an inland neighbor's camp last night. They may have wounded it.

Two beluga seen very close to the beach west of us today by a traveler. He wounded one.

**July 22**

High 64º F
Low 52º F
Cloudy, warm
Light winds AM
SE-S wind 30, PM

Lots of things happening today here.

Bear tracks in the backyard, the first to come that close this year. The attractant was a beluga carcass drifted into the salt marsh lagoon area on the last high water. There is a good chance that this is the same bear that wandered into a neighbor's camp after it was here. This incident was mentioned yesterday.

Received news today that a cruise ship will anchor offshore of Sealing Point Thursday morning and ferry tourists into shore, who will then walk inland to the site of the "old whaling" beach ridge. We had thought something like this would happen soon after the area was made a National Park. Now we will be curious to see how the first trial of this kind of tourism works out. Weather and ocean conditions will need to be pretty good. We shall see.

Perhaps the biggest thrill today was seeing again the delicate fragile beauty of the unique plant *Gentianopsis detonsa*. Several small groups of two to four plants became noticeable just to the side of the four-wheeler trail in the salt marsh, which I have checked through every day or two this summer. There is a magic atmosphere about the way these plants appear as the deep purple blue corollas form. One corolla was even open. These few plants are not robust like they were last year, but their eye-catching fragile beauty is all there and just in time to make my year. The thought of having to skip a year of seeing this plant is somehow king of terrifying.

Salmon were thick in the ocean this morning, right on the edge of shore water. The 7-fathom push pole net took 8 in 15 minutes and that is all we could use right now.

**July 23**

High 60º F
Low 60º F
Clear, some clouds
SE to S wind 40

Lots of wind, lots of water, lots of waves and I am glad to say lots of *Gentianopsis detonsa*! Found a colony of small flowering plants. Where? you ask. Well right on (actually just a few feet off) the main ATV trail, used almost everyday. The colony contains maybe 30 plants, all nearly with their corollas open. May take a picture of them tomorrow. They are so difficult to see before the deep blue purple corolla petals are out. When they are out they can be seen from nearly 100 yards away.

Also some dwarf *Lomatogonium* flowers were seen for the first time today. That means that all of our plants that are going to bloom this year, have. They will linger of course and some species have not yet peaked but there will be no other species to come into flower this season.

Our ocean waves are almost up to the grass edge this evening. The lagoon has passed the highest level reached so far this summer. The islands are still showing through.

Gulls are beginning to sit on the ground at various sites. Perhaps some blueberry or salmonberries are beginning to look good.

Today's commercial fishing period was pretty much a blowout. There will be another tomorrow. Price is down to 60 cents a fish.

Another walrus with tusk found by a western camp today.

Today large waves and high water are not seen as a threat to the western outlets. It is thought that it will only build up the gravel barrier.

Unusual daily temperatures today: both the high and low were a nice 60º F.

**July 24**

High 62º F
Low 56º F
Cloudy, showers
Sun once in a while
SE-S wind to 25

A windy day but not at the extremes of yesterday. The ocean remained too rough for boat traffic, but town travel was possible and a number of boats made the trip. A

commercial fishing period opened at 12 noon running till 6 PM. Price is 60 cents a fish and they are getting a lot of fish.

Took a picture of the large *G. detonsa* colony today. Corolla were open when the sun broke through. The heads were nodding so in the wind the detail is not real clear. The flowers are recognizable though.

Another bear was shot at again last night from western camps.

The cruise shop adventure cancelled due to time constraints. Maybe next time.

Much of our salt marsh area remains under water today at low-level flood stage; continuing southerly winds will hold it that way.

Slaty-back still here and Jonathan and Pipsqueak (the mew gull).

Anigaaq and Akulaaq remain closed and are being strengthened by the large swells we've been having and will continue to have for a few days.

We do need a spell of good weather to make a town trip for gas and stuff before the salmonberry stampede begins.

The marsh *Puccinellia* and *Carex* grasses seem still glossy and tender for goose feed. We have not seen any flying geese yet.

Berries are doing fine with the every day showers.

**July 25**

High 60º F
Low 54º F
Cloudy, rain, storm
SE-S wind to 45

A real summer storm with several hours of heavy rain and waves up to the grasses but not over the bank yet at this writing. The wind has shifted a bit to the west and dropped some so we think the worst may be over, but we have been fooled before. On this type of storm our highest and most damaging waves come when winds shift to SW and W without diminishing. Our flood water in the back continues to rise on E to SE gales then begins to drop as winds move towards the west. Flood waters back there rose to a point above anything so far this summer. Some mice, squirrels and young non-flying birds will be flooded out and become a meal for our hungry gull flock. Many small fish will be trapped in grasses and also make the gulls happy.

One crew of our local commercial fishermen made a great catch up at the "Island." They found it difficult to get their nets out in time because of too many fish. They were rumored to have delivered over 1,000.

This was the day the tour ship was to anchor off Krusenstern and send landing parties ashore. They cancelled yesterday being behind schedule. They must be experiencing some rough weather even for their ship.

Our ground really got a soaking today. That should add much to the size of our berries. It is timely.

Hope we aren't flooded out tonight and that tomorrow is better weather than today.

**July 26**

High 56º F
Low 44º F
Cloudy
NW wind to 18

A cool day after the storm. The high water seems reluctant to run out. It pretty well flooded all the marshland yesterday and it will be a while before levels are back to normal back there.

There is a commercial fishing period today. One fisherman reported getting some trout. We don't know how many. It is early for trout by two weeks.

Saw Pipsqueak's youngsters today. They are flying. Once they come down to the ocean beach they will be ready to leave this area.

Numerous bear sightings west of Sealing Point yesterday: a sow with two small cubs and apparently another group of four. These were all beachcombing bears and were either on or walking towards beached walrus.

Fishing for whitefish is good at Anigaaq, though only one camper is working it yet. They will be making dried fish.

Tried to put our net in the ocean this morning but it wouldn't stay out due to swells and current.

Ate four or five ripe aqpik today - the first. They were from the "grave on the hill" site. Salmonberries are getting ripe! And they are good!

Made an ATV beach trip to Anigaaq early this morning. Saw four drifted in seals, one uguruq, one medium sized beluga and a harbor porpoise. Lots of fresh meat for our beachcombing bears. There are no walrus carcasses.

It is good to not have to worry about big waves or high water tonight.

**July 27**

High 50º F
Low 40º F
Few clouds, clearing
NW wind to 18

A beautiful bright afternoon, evening with a cool wind but dry air and the marine water level finally dropping back to normal.

Took a walk in the sun through the backyard salt marsh and found a number of interesting things. Best of all were the unexpected and scattered *Gentianopsis detonsa* in some of the outer marsh areas that I haven't been to for some time. There are not many plants but they are at peak bloom and the deep purple blue corollas stand out boldly in an otherwise flower-scarce marsh. Most of the corollas were in open mode because of the bright warm sun and a few had begun the fade that signals seeding. The few scattered plants and several small colonies number less than 100 where there were thousands the past two summers. It was a Gentian day. All local species accounted for. Besides *G. prostrata* and *G. propinqua* I finally found two colonies of the small but pretty *G. tenella*. *Lomatogonium rotatum* blossoms are common but not yet at peak. Iris have mostly become seedpods. Barely found four or five flowers for table vase.

Managed to set the pole salmon net this morning and got four fresh salmon in the hour it held off shore in the residue ground swells. We are rather tired of a steady fish diet but they are of top quality.

People are reported picking berries today, first of the summer, salmonberries. There may be a lot picked between now and the 1st of September.

Slaty-back still here, getting tamer, swallows long gone. We wish the best to the three new insect eaters - may they never be too hungry.

**July 28**

High 64º F
Low 42º F
Clear, clouding PM
N-NE wind to 15

A very fine day - seems like summer again.

We are poised on the brink of the berry picking month and kind of leaving the flower month behind. I'm so very glad we got to see a smattering of gentians again. It is strange how this group of flowers has come to mean so much to me personally. I'm not sure what would be the effect of not seeing a single *Gentianopsis detonsa* one whole summer.

Lots of whitefish at the newly closed outlet at Anigaaq. Some are netting already and making dried fish and cooking some for dog feed. Its early closure should mean a continuous lot of fish.

The ocean and lagoon during high water this week was fairly loaded with salmon. The water has pretty much dropped out of the lagoon today and the calm ocean has had jumpers all day. The next commercial opening is tomorrow at 12 noon.

The peak blossom time for local *G. detonsa* seem already past. In checking the nearest colony today I found many already fading as their pods develop. There still seems so many unanswered questions about this plant and the answers are slow in coming.

A large barge or ship is anchored off shore of Salluq today. Maybe an ore carrier from Red Dog sheltering from N-NW winds.

A beluga (a lone subadult) was seen at Salluq today.

Birds in the salt marsh are pretty scarce. A few sandpipers were on the mud today. Saw one family of pintail young that can't fly yet. No geese, no swans, no pintails and no wigeon yet. The pintail, widgeon and first geese should be getting back now from molt.

**July 29**

High 65º F
Low 46º F
Clear, few clouds
N wind to 20

A trip to another inland lake today. It is the same lake that produced nearly all our sourdock for 5 years, then failed last year. I found today that it hasn't recovered much this year. It did come through in one way though. We have been on a fish diet for some time and meat or fowl at this point in time would be great. There were a few flightless ducks and a family of white-fronts that were nearly ready to fly on the inland lake.

Some large groups of Arctic Tern have taken their young down to the shore of the sea. They seem lucky so far this year as I haven't seen a Parasitic Jaeger around for a long time. A pair of jaegers working together often catch new-flying terns in spite of adults and colony protection.

Had a few ripe salmonberries on the trail in; only a small percentage of the berries are ripe yet even on the tablelands, which ripen first. Also had a handful of blueberries. The rest are yet green or white and they don't seem too plentiful.

Monkshood and Marsh Five-finger (*Potentilla palustris*) dominate inland floral display right now with some tall fireweed blossoms. Hundreds of small bumblebees are working the *Potentilla*. Their chocolate colored flowers must be sweet.

Whitefish netting is good at Anigaaq and salmon are still in the ocean side.

Lots of passerines and sandpipers flocking on the sunny ocean beach today for the first time.

Mosquitoes were alive and well today. The inland walk was all right, into the north wind. Coming out with the wind behind was something else.

**July 30**

High 63º F
Low 44º F
Clear
N wind to 30

A fine dry day with gusty north winds and low marine waters. Fine weather for drying fish and the fish are down the beach a few miles. Lots of whitefish at Anigaaq. At least two families are working at that now.

Aborted town trip again today. We need to go in for gassing up and other odds and ends of company business. We may make it tomorrow. August is going to be the berry month this year.

Put the net out late yesterday afternoon. It caught three large snaky shee moving from the west to where they will be back where they belong in brackish water with kind of food they need. They were extremely emaciated. This happens each year about this time. It seems to be shee that have gone out with spring flush of fresh water and have spent too long in water that is too salty and lacks the kind of food they need. One had reddish lesions over the body.

With passerines flocking to the beach (and sandpipers) several birds of prey have turned up in the last couple of days. Northern Harrier, several Short-eared Owl, and several Parasitic Jaegers. These species have not been seen much till now since migration.

Had the net out this afternoon till the wind change made large swells. It had one husky watermarked chum salmon and one large "smooth flounder" of the species *Limanda aspera*, rather rare here on the beach. "Pipsqueak" the Mew Gull had her three newly flying youngsters down on the ocean beach today.

**July 31**

High 58º F
Low 46º F
Cloudy, light rain
SE wind to 30

The long planned town trip finally happened and went smoothly in spite of rather high winds. The water level was good and the nearly straight line into town from the lagoon went quickly though bumpily on the way in against the waves.

No commercial fishing again - looks like a pretty hopeless season for those involved.

Saw a number of old friends. Kotzebue seemed a bit subdued. No Post Office or bank visit and few people in stores at least during early afternoon. The large number of recent deaths and funerals has touched many large clans.

Arctic Tern flocks on the ocean beach continue and Black Turnstones are also down on littoral habitat.

Berry picking good at Selawik and beginning on the Noatak Delta.

Passerines are beginning to fill the air again as the production of this year get their wings on.

Weather promises to be wet and windy for a couple more days. No major storms though.

Several camps have put up numbers of cut whitefish. The weather will please them.

Sisualik grave digging tomorrow.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## AUGUST

**August 1**

High 55º F
Low 48º F
Clouds, some rain
SE to SW wind 10

Loud waves this afternoon – they're only about halfway up the beach, but on shore winds amplify the sound.

Not much activity in Sisualik today. Everyone kind of resting up for the difficult burial here tomorrow of a young lady from a large local clan family.

Had the pole salmon net out awhile and got one fresh run female chum salmon and one very long snaky sheefish.

We found gull droppings staining our tent blue when we got home from town yesterday. This is sometimes the way we find out the blueberries, at least some of them, are ripe.

The wetting of our berry ground everyday augurs for a real good berry crop, barring frosts.

The squirrel plague continues and everyone comments on the great numbers. Some vegetation shows it too.

Moose season opens today and some boat hunters will be on the rivers. Moose that have been seen rather regularly out in the wide open spaces tend to retire to heavily vegetated areas in August as the weather cools and insects are not so bothersome.

The folks home at Sealing Point house today report numbers of several kinds of shellfish pushed up by their large swells today. Gulls are said to be doing real well.

**August 2**

High 53º F
Low 42º F
Cloudy, fog, rain
S to NW wind 35

A day characterized by change. Very heavy rain through the night with fairly light south winds. The rain quit for a while around 8 or 9 AM and wind swung towards the SW and picked up a little, but the ocean was good enough to push out the pole salmon net which I did. Just before noon the wind picked up and waves were large enough to begin to drag the net to the beach so I had to pull it in. Was surprised to find ten large chum salmon in it, some quite colored and several bright silver fresh run chums.

Waves and wind built up to almost sod level through the afternoon with marine waters at medium flood stage. Things began to get better slowly after 6 PM.

The burial that was supposed to happen here today may not take place till tomorrow.

Jonathan was real glad to see the salmon catch and he can hardly wait till I get around to cutting them. Pickings for the camp gull flock have been kind of short for a couple of weeks since we haven't handled much fish.

We will hope this west wind will not bring up a killing frost. A hard frost at this point in time would be catastrophic for the berry crop.

Slaty-back seems to be gone from here. Almost a week has passed since we last saw him. He went back to Siberia or was perhaps the victim of someone overprotective of his fish catch. Another possibility is the closed Anigaaq outlet and its abundant gull feed.

**August 3**

High 53º F
Low 40º F
Clear, cloudy
NW-SW-S wind to 18

Much, much better than yesterday with less wind, less wet, with even some warm sun before another huge black mass of cloud came in from the SW and wet everything down again.

The interlude of warm sun sparked a magnificent bloom of *Lomatogonium rotatum*, the Star Gentian. This is our latest major species to make a floral splash, that is, the last species of the season to come to peak flowering.

The burial of the young Sisualik lady killed in a Kotzebue auto accident happened this afternoon. A second funeral in Kotzebue while another family friend's funeral on going

in Buckland. No connection between the deaths except their status as friends and/or family.

August, the berry month, is getting underway, but weather and so many deaths so close together are slowing harvest plans.

Too much high level marine water is slowing the return of birds to the salt marsh. Ducks and sandpipers glory in mudflats. When there are none, the birds are restricted to lake margins and are thereby somewhat secluded.

The up and down floodwaters give our local gull flock better feeding opportunities than they would have otherwise.

A walrus with large tusks found today this side of Sealing Point.

At least one of the *G. detonsa* in the larger colony was open and bright looking today when the sun broke through. Others faded.

**August 4**

High 58º F
Low 50º F
Cloudy, showers
SW wind to 18

Sunday again. How time flies! The berry month is underway and we haven't picked even a small bowl yet. Some of the more inland sites nearby have been picked on this last week - timely picking is a neat trick. All berries don't get soft and pickable at the same time. If you hit the patches too soon you can only pick ¼ or ½ of them. If you hit the patch too late you find only stems minus the berry - your neighbor has the berries.

Took a short walk a while ago and found that our two *E. latifolium* plants with white petals definitely aren't blooming this year. They must be many years old and do skip flowering once in awhile.

The other negative observation around the place is that the vapor mist from the rather constant onshore big waves we've had this month contains such a concentration of salt that it has killed much foliage near the beach. It has really hit our tall fireweed, near peak flowering, hard. Leaves look the same as they do after a heavy frost.

Another walrus with partial tusks found 3 or 4 miles down the beach this morning.

A good flock of N. Pintail in our close duck lake today, for the first time this fall.

Took a picture of open corollas of *G. detonsa* colony near camp. There are a surprising number of dwarf plants in this plot.

**August 5**

High 60º F
Low 40º F
Clear, few clouds
NW wind to 20

Finally a trip to visit Sealing Point relatives. Lots of dead walrus, lots of bear tracks and the beginning of a lot of people on the Sealing Point flats berry-picking area. Salmonberries are plentiful and enough of them are ripe that people are moving in by boat, aircraft and ATV.

We also saw one adult beluga near shore on the way down.

Many of the berries are hard yet and it is frustrating to not pick those nice large berries that aren't quite ripe yet. The stampede of people is on though.

The report of large numbers of whitefish down that way are true and the dam on the channel outlet is now quite high and safe. We should have good fishing this September.

There is a report of lots of adult geese flying between Sealing Point and Port Site. These birds have finished their flight feather molt and are back in the air. We have not seen any yet on this side.

Cranberry crop will be late, but they are coming along well in places.

We may try to get our boat down that way, ocean water permitting. It will be good for us to have a boat down that way for a while.

We did pick our first berries of the season today, a rather large bowlful from Akulaaq.

Sealing Point still has a good many flowers.

**August 6**

High 60º F
Low 38º F
Clear, few clouds
NW wind to 25

A first full day of berry picking resulting in 6 quart bags for the freezer. That's a great improvement over last year when there were very few salmonberries.

The berry ground (between Anigaaq and Sealing Point, the Krusenstern beach ridge complex) looks very good and very rich. It is interesting that this area has been set aside, famous for its rich archaeological value. To locally living people the richness is of a more practical nature. It is a great berry producing area. In a good year tons and

tons of berries of the four most important species is produced, more than all creatures that eat them can finish up. One reason this is such a high production berry ground is the nature of the vegetation found there. Everything, including willows, grows very low to the ground. Often the salmonberry plant, with a berry on top, is the tallest vegetation around. This is when salmonberries have a good year one can see the great orange-red coloration of the ripe berries from a distance. Sometimes the colored patch is more than an acre in size. There is much less competition for space on this soil. Moss and the berries and a few health plants and short willows.

The salt marsh is yellowing. Fall is on the way. Saw our first flock of flying geese today; many waterfowl returning to staging areas to fatten for September migration.

The higher-level marsh grasses are no longer green and tender. Some plots of *Puccinellia* and *Carex* are still good.

**August 7**

High 54º F
Low 40º F
Cloudy
SE wind to 20

A rather frustrating day but mostly because we weren't able to do what we had planned. Not too unusual for us. We had hoped to get the little boat down to Anigaaq to use it for berry picking. Just as we were putting the boat down we got a call from Sealing Point that strong winds and big waves were building down there. We decided not to launch the boat. We finally gave up the idea after lunch and went behind camp here where there had been a patch of berries earlier, waiting for ripening. They were gone and we only founda few others. Not much production this day! Another storm coming tonight and tomorrow too.

Another beluga shot and wounded near the beach at Sealing Point. Four times a beluga following close in to the beach has been shot at and touched but not killed or retrieved. The occurrence of beluga in this area is unusual at this season. The picture building here may be of a wounded, impaired animal that is staying alive in a limited living zone and being shot at when it is seen by a hunter.

A first fat fall trout today and 10 salmon. The trout had had a close call with a seal but the wound had nearly healed.

Lots of young passerines, terns and "Pipsqueak’s" family of three still around.

Many salmon-, blue- and blackberries not yet ripe. Likewise for cranberries, of which there will be lot.

**August 8**

High 54º F

Low 50º F
Cloudy, rain, fog
SE to NW wind 20

Wet and cool today with changing winds. Lots of salmonberry pickers out in the fog and rain, west of here in the Sealing Point area. No berry pickers can go from here today because of the large swells reaching the mud bank near the outlet at Anigaaq.

There are berry pickers from Kiana, Noorvik, Point Hope, Koyuk, and Kotzebue on the Salluq berry grounds. Access is by boat, ATV, and aircraft. There may be as many as 30 individuals on the ground and many more are expected during the coming week.

Bears and geese have not had much peace this week and will have less next. After that things will be more normal.

The berry grounds are real extensive down that way so everyone will get some. There is great competition among the women to be the first to get to the thickest and largest berry patches, as those are the plots that produce the most berries in the shortest time. People are counting their daily quantity picked in numbers and fractions of 5 gallon plastic buckets, so we are having a good salmonberry year.

Sad word comes today that Michio Hoshino, friend and wildlife photographer was killed by a bear, probably in Siberia. Sad word indeed about a good friend and "new daddy."

First calling of geese heard in Sisualik indicates beginning of staging/fattening after molt.

**August 9**

High 60º F
Low 44º F
Clear
N wind to 30

A full day of salmonberry picking and the weather was perfect for it. We picked up 35-40 lbs. of very good fresh fruit. We were surprised to find that many of the berries are still unripe, hard, especially the larger berries in sheltered places (grasses, willows, etc.). It is frustrating to pick salmonberries when only half of the berries are ripe! It is difficult to leave the nice big ones behind after picking the small ripe ones.

The beluga with nine lives seen again in the Sealing Point area today. None shot at it this time as the ones who saw it didn't have a rifle.

Saw a Merlin on the beach at Akulaaq today. Young shorebirds are gathering on beaches to shelter from our strong N wind; a lot of passerines too. Fair game for a

young Merlin.

Lots of berry pickers on the beach ridge complex of Krusenstern Monument. A rather unprecedented use of ATV through off beach zones. Lots of berries harvested each day now - by people, geese, cranes, gulls, large shorebirds, whimbrels, godwits and bears - till most of the berries are gone.

Interesting news from Espenberg-Seward Peninsula area: deep inland lakes have real Arctic Char, not Dolly Varden.

Geese are showing up in numbers on Krusenstern Flats.

Saw a first flock (12) of Whimbrel today.

**August 10**

High 58º F
Low 34º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 30

Into the 30's again! Found a little light frost in low sheltered places, a skim of ice on a low hidden pot of shallow water. The frost is not of long duration and should not have much effect on ripening berries unless to hurry their ripening along.

Finally got the Smoker (boat) down into the Krusenstern waterway complex and picked nearly a 5-gallon bucket of salmonberries.

The geese really filtering into the berry grounds down there. New flying young and wing molt adults returning to staging and feeding sites. Both Canada Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese as well.

Saw a number of flying young of Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns. Our Mew Gull Pipsqueak and family of three not around camp on our return from berry picking. Both Arctic Terns and Mew Gulls do not hang around here for long after their young can fly.

Saw lots and lots of salmonberries today - a lot are small and many still not ripe. We are doing well on salmonberries this year.

Lots of half grown cranberries down that way and here. We will not be short of cranberries this year.

New bear tracks are scarce. So many people and machines have obviously intimidated some of the bears, for a while.

Had a heavy catch of fish in overnight set of 7 fathom 6" net, a red salmon, 2 Noatak

salmon, a trout, and the rest chums.

**August 11**

High 64º F
Low 36º F
Fog, cloudy, clearing
S-SW wind to 10

Lots of folks passing through today. There was a wedding over at mid Sisualik, some friends got in with a float plane from Galena and had a good visit, some town family over for a short visit and a far west neighbor over to overnight next door. Quite a day of conversation and sharing.

Another walrus with tusks found today near Sealing Point.

Though the salmonberry picking grounds are near vacated today we expect a crowd back again next week and then a quick drop back to pre-berry pick resident population.

We will be in the thick of it too this week.

**August 12**

High 60º F
Low 36º F
Fog, cloud bank, clear
S to E wind 15

A berry-picking day to remember forever for the two of us. We got started traveling at 9 AM, got on berry ground by 10:30 and spent two hours looking for a better place to pick. After a number of stops and picking from small patches we made a good move across the slough to a high ground location. It was just red, covered with all ripe berries of large size growing very close together. It was, in fact, a place of all salmonberry picker's dreams and hopes. We picked till 8 PM and found it hard to leave then. We had about 60 lbs of berries. The morning had been dark and damp, foggy. About the time we found the good berries the sun broke through bright and warm with no wind. Insects were a bit bothersome but not bad. The characteristics of the famous Krusenstern Salmonberry Preserve were all loud and clear: many Glaucous Gull parents, anxious over young that are about to fly, many worried crane parents for the same reason and of course, the many, many Red-throated Loon calls. Hundreds of geese were trading back and forth between berry feeding grounds and tender greens of mudflat area. The whole scene was about complete and perfect and without human crowd, though there were three or four other berry pickers in the far distance.

It was a day to cherish and remember for a long time.

**August 13**

High 56º F
Low 52º F
Cloudy, rain
SE-S wind to 25

A very large trout (char) this morning in fall run mode. Very fat and wide male with just a thin trace of the gonad organ. It was 32" long with an 8 ½" girth (to pelvic from feral ridge).

Moose, bear and musk ox all in sight from westernmost Krusenstern beach camps early this morning.

Ducks are beginning to fill in the Sisualik salt marsh zones. High water on the marine side will keep them in the upper lakes for a while. Geese and crane numbers on the Krusenstern Beach Ridge complex are reaching numbers that are quite remarkable after the relatively small pre-molt and molt numbers. These birds, those lately back from molt with newly flying birds of the year, fill the air with noise when winds are light. They also do a lot of flying, testing new pinions and building chest muscles on young birds. Mid August is a time of annual influx of waterfowl to the coast for feeding and staging.

The very green tender grasses around small and large tundra ponds are very attractive to geese right now. They seem to walk right through large patches of soft ripe salmonberries (knocking some berries off but not eating them) to get to the succulent sedges.

**August 14**

High 56º F
Low 52º F
Rain!
S-SW wind to 18

Rather a solid day of rain, steady with only variation in the amount - light, medium and heavy. A good day for indoor work.

We were fortunate to have a first fall pot of duck soup - very good. A couple of Northern Pintail formed the base of this pot. One male bird had not molted its spring body feathers. The flight feathers did seem new. It is odd to see spring mating plumage at this early fall date.

There is a nice flock of 15 Whimbrel using the backyard today. We have seen but few of this species for the past few years. It is great to have them around again as their voices add to the building fall serenade.

No berry pickers out yesterday and today. If the rain shuts down there will be enough

tomorrow and we will head out too - to the salmonberry picking area that we didn't finish two days ago.

Didn't set the net today. Waves made it difficult and we are not in need of fresh fish.

Many young and recently flying Pintails around Sisualik now. Some are looking pretty robust already.

Two musk ox and two moose on Sealing Point flats.

One Sisualik whitefish netter who had overnight net at Anigaaq reports too much fish!

What was apparently a "hovercraft" went by today, going towards Port Site. First we have ever seen. It is a monster!!

**August 15**

High 61º F
Low 50º F
Fog, drizzle, cloudy
N wind to 15

Two flying Tundra Swans in the backyard. We saw two flying adult swans with one non-flying youngster on a lake at Salluq two days ago. These are the first noted flying swans after molt period.

Lots of ducks in high-water feeding lakes, mostly N. Pintail. Sisualik will have many more ducks this fall than last because water level inside the Krusenstern Waterway is high for duck feeding and can only get higher. The Noatak Delta, with its up and down tidewater level, becomes much more attractive and a more efficient area to feed for putting on migration fat.

Three large chums in the table net today. Where are the trout? It is time for them to be running pretty strong.

A musk ox unsettled a lone lady at one of the western camps last night. Nearest neighbor had to walk over and chase it away. She thought it was a bear; he (the neighbor) probably wouldn't have answered the distress plea if he had known it was a musk ox. It is a zone of bear travel from hills to beached walrus carcasses. We still have a substantial group of beachcombing bears. An inland neighbor has opted not to overnight in their lower fish camp site in the tent, but to return to their hillside house to sleep. Their many dogs at the fish camp bark lots every night and they suspect bears.

**August 16**

High 59º F
Low 50º F
Cloudy AM
Clear PM
NW wind to 25

A dull morning changing to a brilliant afternoon with wind.

Another full day of salmonberry picking via 4-wheeler, boat and legs. It was a good day, maybe 50 lbs. worth.

Geese have increased again down that way. There are lots. One large flock of ducks (200) and two families of N. Pintails were seen, but few ducks will stage in that area due to flooding. They will move into Sisualik and the Noatak Delta tidewater lands.

Salmonberries are nearly all ripe now, some of them leaning over to touch the ground. We have done well this year with salmonberries. We will also get enough cranberries - there are lots and they are already big. Blueberries and blackberries are still question marks.

Lots of bear tracks from last night: one small one in west Sisualik, one very large one at Akulaaq, and a sow with two cubs in the Salluq area. There are walrus carcasses in each of these places but mostly they remain whole and have not yet had the skin torn to expose meat and blubber. The gulls would like that to happen too. These huge piles of meat and blubber are still packaged tightly with that nearly impenetrable and very thick skin.

Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns are difficult to see now as most have left their nesting locale and are headed towards wintering ground.

**August 17**

High 55º F
Low 44º F
Some clouds
Fog, but sunny
NW wind to 20

We can't seem to lose that NW wind. Our black- and cranberry crop may be in jeopardy as NW winds often bring on a hard frost or freeze if they last long enough.

A day off from berry picking today. Carrie made a quick trip to town for things we needed and I entertained visitors who arrived by float plane. The flying folks are on an interesting White-front Goose tracking project. They are making some surprising discoveries about seasonal movements within the region.

Lots of ducks in Sisualik. Pintails feeding on the ground again in some areas. It is kind of a mystery what they are finding there since the blackberries wouldn't seem to be ripe enough yet. Maybe gravel for gizzards? Seeds from some grasses?

Whimbrel numbers continue to grow, which is great news.

Short-eared Owls are seen hunting in daylight every day now; a few may be local residents as it seems early for migrants of the species.

Both Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns and of course Tree Swallows are gone.

Had the 6" mesh net out today expecting char but there were none. Only salmon (red and chums) and some large Flounders. Have we missed the char run or is it late? It normally is on by August 15.

**August 18**

High 56º F
Low 45º F
Fog, clearing
Light winds

Real heavy fog hung on till mid afternoon. It was very slow to dissipate even under a bright sun. Once the fog was gone it was an especially fine warm sunny afternoon and evening.

First caribou news from Kiana and Ambler. Most of the hunters from those villages on firefighting crews that are currently down south.

Salmonberry picking is still the major activity on the land here. A bucket a day is good enough, for a couple of pickers with a 5 gallon bucket.

Ducks, geese and whimbrels gathering for fall fattening.

Blueberries, blackberries and cranberries ripening swiftly.

Much of the vegetation has yellowed on higher ground, but much goose feed remains tender and green at salt marsh level.

Insects are still with us as the warm sun heats the moist air. Mosquitoes take a third place position with gnats and midges being more numerous.

School is scheduled to begin again this coming week and less family berry picking gangs will be in the field because of it.

We are somewhat concerned about the fall trout run. We have had nets out only

sporadically and have caught several fall-run trout (with non-developed ovaries) mixed with a few carrying half or more developed egg skeins. No real heavy movement sign has occurred yet, while we have had nets out. The calendar date indicates that we should be seeing many trout.

**August 19**

High 68º F
Low 48º F
Clear
NE-E wind to 25

Another full day of salmonberry picking. A fine windy dry day, sometimes too windy.

Like some days in the past, we didn't locate good berries until late in the day. This means, of course, that we must go back tomorrow. We were going to fish and dry whitefish for a change of pace.

Salmonberries are something like popcorn: the more there are the more you want. We do feel privileged to have such a windfall of such good fruit.

We were going to set our whitefish net at Anigaaq today but changed our mind since we can't handle both fish preparation and berry picking at the same time.

A real lot of passerines moving through where we were picking berries today. They seem to be mostly Lapland Longspurs.

More fledgling N. Pintails today along the slough edge to berry picking grounds.

Took samples of goose dropping and their forage plants for FWS today.

Also discovered a new plant for this area (Krusenstern waterway). Have not keyed it out yet.

Set net (6") in the ocean this evening with hope for trout.

**August 20**

High 66º F
Low 48º F
Clear
Light NE to NW wind

Another salmonberry day but guess that the end is near for work on that species. We set the whitefish net at Anigaaq and saw fish hit the net while we were there, so it looks like we trade berry juice for fish scales for a while.

A large bear worked one net down there last night after having a good deal of walrus

meat. A neighbor is camped there with a dog with fish hanging. His nights may be a little restless for a while. I hope our net is not the second night bear target. This is not a good situation. Human fishing will be growing more intense and the bears eating more walrus every night will want fresh fish for a little diversity. Bears will fish at night and people will want to work the fish trap at night too.

There was a great show of fish this afternoon right at the outlet, trying to find a way out of their entrapment. The fall fishing prospects look great. The bears will complicate the scene.

Lots of waterfowl in the country. There seem to be good numbers of N. Pintail young out. Have not seen an adult Mew Gull or an Arctic Tern for several days.

The mystery plant found yesterday seems to be *Cicuta mackenzieana* a plant very poisonous to humans. This plant had been eaten in part – stems, leaves and seed heads - probably by Tundra Swans. Are they immune? Or is that why the swan family that lives there has only one cygnet now?

**August 21**

High 57º F
Low 46º F
Clear
NE wind to 30

A fine windy day for drying fish; our overnight net and Anigaaq provided us with two poles of whitefish now hanging in the wind.
Our catch was somewhat less than expected but enough to make it worthwhile.

Saw a Solitary Sandpiper today, twice, going and coming, at the base of the mud bluffs near the Anigaaq outlet. We seldom see this bird locally.

Fall continues to come down on us. A tent was set up last night in our back blackberry ground as that berry gets ripe enough to pick. They are big enough but still a bit bitter.

Also saw the Merlin again at Akulaaq. It must live there. It is a good place for this swift little hunter to find migrating sandpipers.

We ate flounders again for lunch today. They are large and numerous on the ocean side, and about ¼ of them are fat (thick) enough to be good eating. Whitefish stomachs, eggs and livers made a good supper with a few pieces of barbecued chicken.

Never picked a berry today for change. Seems strange, after getting into it all day for several in a row. We'll probably alternate between an ear tuned to news of caribou movements.

Should be some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers turning up soon. This regular visitor from Siberia is always neat to see and regularly turns up in small numbers the last week of August and first week of September.

**August 22**

High 56º F
Low 33º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 15
SW wind to 10

A very fine day today with some wind and low water but by evening the water was returning quickly.

Flounders again for lunch. One salmon and one trout with 100 flounders; ¼ of the flounders good for cooking.

A last commercial opening tomorrow.

We had light frost last night.

Our plans for the day was to seine some whitefish at Anigaaq for more dried fish but that didn't work. There weren't any fish playing at the outlet. Instead we set the larger mesh net for overnight, in spite of fresh bear tracks.

A few pickers are beginning to work the blackberries. They are of good size but still a bit bitter.

Interest in salmonberries has dwindled and maybe almost died. There are still lots of berries and one could gather many more even though they are small and some are turning white. These "turning color" berries are not as pretty as when first turned orange, but they are actually sweeter and more concentrated after the fashion of other "dead ripe" berries.

The trout run is still a matter of concern.

Caribou have been reported for a week now between Kiana and Ambler, but no news from the Noatak. Probably no one has gone up river yet.

**August 23**

High 56º F
Low 38º F
Clear
S-Se wind to 18

Checked the net at Anigaaq first thing this morning and found fresh bear tracks 400

yards from our west neighbors' camp. It was the large beachcombing fellow's tracks. He is the one that knows his way around camps without getting into trouble.

There were not many whitefish in the net but a lot of smooth skinned flounders. There were also five sheefish, which is unusual for that water system. They were fat and in good condition.

The ocean 6" mesh net had only one salmon and many flounders of the sandpaper-like skin. The two main flounder species seem to do well in our waters (their water?). Mosquitoes on land, flounders in the water. Very successful species!

They have extended the fishing time for the last period of the year until noon tomorrow.

We have had several days of low marine waters but now it is coming back and the mud flats are not so dry. Several boating berry pickers had been stranded.

Caribou reported on the Noatak today at Sugar, which is not far above Noatak village. Fresh meat has a high priority right now. There will probably be a number of boats through Noatak this weekend.

Trout are still scarce. This last commercial opening may give a better reading on percentage of trout to chum salmon in catch.

Very light frost again last night.

**August 24**

High 55º F
Low 49º F
Cloudy, drizzle, rain
S-SW wind to 30

Large waves developed quickly late last night. My net and push pole required rescue this morning, before coffee, and dressing in the wind and rain. Made it just in time. The waves had reached them but hadn't yet moved them. A long commercial net set close to us didn't fare so well. They had taken 280 fish before twelve and couldn't check the net again because of darkness. At daylight the net was probably full but huge waves prevented any boating all day. The outer anchors dragged and 3 football field lengths of net were almost on the beach, with some rolling. A sad ending for that crew for this fishing season. They had one tote of trout out of the 280 chums delivered. Not a high percentage of trout for this date.

Saw a first fall Sanderling today. The cottonwood copse in sight on the tableland hill is blushing yellow against the still green willows they share the knoll with. The Sanderling and the yellowing leaves mean September is near.

The rain today will increase the size and sweetness of our blackberry crop, our next target species. Our sweet large Sisualik blackberries are our hands-down favorite. We can use large quantities even with our windfall of salmonberries.

The caribou are really here. A boat left Kotzebue yesterday evening on hearing the report and was back at the Hatchery before noon today, asking about wind conditions in order to get back into town with their caribou meat.

**August 25**

High 56º F
Low 48º F
Cloudy, drizzle AM
Clear PM
N wind to 35

Very strong winds and clear sky this late afternoon. Frost to some degree seems inescapable. We hope it is light for at this point, as a heavy frost could destroy our rapidly maturing black- and cranberry crop. If winds continue through the night, it will frost.

The commercial salmon net caught out in the storm (three shackles, three hundred yards) wasted a lot of fish (chum salmon and char). This "necessary waste" in a commercial fishery is deplorable but an inescapable happening with the way the chum set net system functions. It is ironic that this monstrous waste is accepted as tolerable by the establishment while individual "waste" of a few caribou or walrus is seen as a heinous crime.

A camper killed by a sow bear with a small cub on the upper Noatak River this weekend is the first we have heard of in 50 years of our time and maybe well back into the generation before that. Some elders recall maulings, but no human deaths by brown bears.

It is good to see Whimbrel regularly again this fall. For two years they have been rare locally.

Our Cottonwood copse looks like lemon yellow flame in the clear sun this afternoon; the higher elevations show the red of shrub birch and bearberry. Fall colors are here on all levels and a heavy snow advisory is on for the north side of the North Slope.

**August 26**

High 48º F
Low 28º F
Clear
NW-N wind to 20

Ice this morning, but very little frost due to all night wind with dry air.

We did pick blackberries today and we do have black-blue hands but it is not as bad as it looks. One blackberry in 50 breaks and colors the hand, but does not hinder blackberry picking or eating. They will firm up given a chance.

Went to Anigaaq first thing this morning to check for fish and set one whitefish net. There were fresh small bear tracks right down the fine trail made yesterday as swells receded. There was an ATV about 10 minutes ahead of us but he didn't see the bear either.

Several flocks of cranes coming in off the ocean, maybe from Espenberg or even Siberia. Also more Whimbrels and some shorebirds. A flock of 300 wigeon and some geese at Akulaaq. Also a young Gyrfalcon was sitting on a stump, waiting.

Another "tame" eagle was seen on the beach west of us yesterday. We kept an eye out for it this morning but didn't see it. Birds of the year separated from parents may turn up here sometimes. There are enough young squirrels to practice hunting skills on. Hope we see him if he is still around.

Some kind of animal seen on the mountains inland of Sealing Point house this afternoon. They are as yet unidentified. Hope they are caribou.

**August 27**

High 48º F
Low 29º F
Clear
Light winds ,AM
E wind to 15, PM

Fine weather today but that is about all that went well. I got an early start to check the overnight net at Anigaaq but the large bear was there first. He made some small holes in the net and got most of the fish except the flounders. This is a problem! It was the bear with the biggest feet, which means that he knows how to handle nets - he just hasn't quite learned how to re-set the net.

Frost was heavier this morning than yesterday but the temperature didn't get quite so low. Berries are somewhat softer but may firm up some if it doesn't freeze again for awhile.

Lots of flounders both in the sea and inside Anigaaq. About 10% of the starry flounders from the sea are fat enough for cooking and eating. We have some for lunch everyday now.

There will be a good deal of hunting on the coming Labor Day weekend. Caribou and moose are available on both the Noatak and Kobuk now and waterfowl are plentiful on

both deltas and other marshlands. Most emphasis will be on caribou, as usual.

Two salmon overnight in the 6" mesh and two trout in the 4 ½" mesh this afternoon was the day's day catch from the ocean.

Marine water level stayed very low till late afternoon when it began to rise as our wind began to increase from the east.

**August 28**

High 54º F
Low 42º F
Clear, clouding PM
NE to SE wind to 35

Strong winds but dry and a good profitable day. We are a bucket of blackberries richer. This was our first full day on blackberries. After the two nights of freeze there are some soft berries and our hands and bodies are dyed purple but the berries are pickable and will firm up again quickly if it rains a bit.

Marine waters have continued low which is an indication that winds will not swing to SW and W but will diminish in the E-NE-N quadrant. No flood this time. This is characteristic of lows that pass from Siberia to the Alaskan Interior, south of us.

A cabin fire this afternoon NE of us on the Noatak Delta was over before we heard of it. It was the Jerry Coppock house on the westernmost Noatak Delta slough. The site is only a few hundred yards from where the creek our winter house is located on joins the Noatak mouth slough. One young man was sleeping there and just barely made it out of the house. He was not hurt and a few people from Sisualik and Jones Camp kept the fire from spreading to the country. It was a close call but no one hurt.

We have a "house" guest for a few days picking berries with us.

The bear checked another net last night. Not mine! It wasn't out again. Now we have the problem of how to get a hold of some fish. Both the fish and the bear are active at night.

**August 29**

High 56º F
Low 45º F
Cloudy, light showers
SE wind to 30

Another windy day and a few showers. Too much wind to put net.

Did get a new garbage pit dug and a cartful of poor quality firewood. The dry was good for berry picking and a number of camps did work in the blackberry grounds most of

the day.

Whitefish netting at Anigaaq is at a stand still. No one quite knows what to do about the net-checking bear.

Waterfowl have increased steadily here on their staging grounds – a few more Pintails.

Last flowers are showing around. Only a few from each species, as if a kind of afterthought.

Caribou news seems kind of quiet but it seems that a few boats have gotten into town with loads of meat.

Kind of a time of bear-human confrontations statewide. Local calls to ADF&G have been numerous. We are not alone with our bear problems.

With today's showers our blackberries should be firming up and even growing a little larger.

**August 30**

High 59º F
Low 48º F
Some clouds, clearing
NE-E wind to 20

Seems like summer again today. We spent the afternoon (6 hours of it) on the blackberry grounds where we made a new find of rich production. Berries large and many, but some are a bit soft from the two nights of frost. Clothes and hands show a lot of deep purple but they are highly pickable. If they were all firm one could pick more in a given time. We filled a 5 gallon plastic bucket.

Saw several insects today that we haven't seen for awhile: mosquitoes, gnats and several hornets!

Lots of waterfowl around; two swans in our near-tent duck lake and three out in the Tern Lake area.

Our berry scene is going well but fishing is something else. Had the 4 ½" mesh out all day but the catch was mostly flounders, with one spawning char and one spawning chum. That doesn't leave much hint except that char may have already passed. If so that means a very light run of char here this early Fall.

Waiting for the telephone crew used up our morning today but we do have a new phone now and are getting the number we dial consistently rather than haphazardly.

Whimbrel and crane sound still in the air. It won't be much longer. Both species usually move on in the first week of September if not sooner.

Caribou hope runs high for the Labor Day weekend. Kiana and Noorvik have lots, Noatak some and the nearest here are at the Lower Noatak Canyon area.

**August 31**

High 60º F
Low 47º F
Clear
Light winds

Well, good to have 60º F temperatures again except that the gnats and small pale fall mosquitoes thought so too. There were lots and we were all day out in the blackberry patch we discovered yesterday. We filled a full 5-gallon bucket. The frost-softened berries have firmed up a bit and are tasting pretty good.

Two salmon overnight and four this afternoon make late salmon fishing pretty good, but where are those trout?

Cranes, geese and swans moving through today. Not a lot but a first real movement of crane. Very few passerines around.

Most people out for Labor Day have headed for caribou or moose hunting. We have only one weekend camper for berry picking and waterfowl hunting.

Lots of gulls in our camp flock today.

Also a bit more shooting this evening than we have heard for a while. The hunters are a few hours early.

No recent caribou news though a few were reported taken today along the Lower Noatak Canyon.

Marine water level hanging around normal. It is a little higher at night and ebbing early afternoon.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## SEPTEMBER

**September 1**

High 58º F
Low 40º F
Cloudy, some sun
Light winds

September started out with a most beautiful sunrise. Along with the fall colors on marsh, tablelands and hills, the sunrise shone bright and brilliant through a narrow portion of clear sky between horizon and cloud cover. The effect was very much like a focused floodlight on a very elegant, very colored stage. A remarkable beginning for our month of color.

Lots of boats out on the river systems but few over our way. There are some weekenders though – town-living members of camp families for the most part.

Next door neighbor killed a weasel with his shotgun this morning. It was still in the brown summer mode.

Our newest member of camp community, the wayward Black Turnstone, seems a bit lonely amid the giant Burgmeister gulls standing on our beach. He, in a way, has taken the place of "Pipsqueak" the mew gull who already moved south. She and the turnstone thrive on the "crumbs from the table" of the larger gulls.

Though many caribou are reported at inland points (Noatak-Noorvik-Kiana) an ATV traveler yesterday traveled our beach nearly to Port Site and reported seeing musk-ox, bears, porpoise, whale and lots of geese but no caribou or sign of their recent presence. Sounds something like last year. We do hope they make it into our quadrant bounded by Noatak River on two sides and the Red Dog road.

**September 2**

High 58º F
Low 47º F
Clouds, fog, smoke
Clearing
SE wind to 15

A nice bright warm late afternoon. The morning was kind of damp and dull with large and small ground fog patches. The ground grasses and berries were too wet this morning for blackberry picking but after lunch things had dried up well and we went up to the plot where we have been picking and filled a bucket (5 gallon) by 6 PM. The berries have gotten more firm and easier picking.

Though we have had very little wind the last two days and sometimes lots of shiny water, we have had continual ocean swells of fair size. The marine water was also quite high last night but dropped this afternoon.

We finally did get a net out into the swells this evening. We have heard today that char got into Kivalina rivers just last week.

Caribou are getting closer to Kotzebue by way of the north shore of Kobuk Lake. Word has come that there were caribou at Ivik and Fish Creek today. Boatloads of meat have been coming into Kotzebue pretty steadily this week.

Saw a Peregrine Falcon over our backyard salt marsh today.

Several goose hunters have been active the last two or three days on the Krusenstern Flats. There are a lot of geese there - geese and bears and berries.

**September 3**

High 61º F
Low 46º F
Clear, few clouds
Light winds

Such a beautiful summer day today and all that goes with it: salmon, mosquitoes, blowflies and spiders. Perhaps we're going to get some of the summer we didn't have in July and August. It was very nice and warm this mid afternoon.

There were two red salmon, a large trout and five chum salmon this morning in the overnight 6" mesh net.

Crane and whimbrel calls ring out in the still air of the salt marsh. Those sounds will be the next to fade. Arctic Tern and Mew Gulls, common summer sounds, are long gone.

There is reported to be a concentration of people and caribou in the Wolf Creek area on the North Kobuk Delta. There are still caribou sporadically above Noatak Village, mouth of the Aggie, Frank Knapps', Ivik, and Fish Creek. There is still no report at all from the coastal section (from Kivalina to Sisualik) of caribou - only bears and musk ox.

Insects had the best day today that they have had in some time. Flies were laying eggs on fish again and gnats and mosquitoes were biting warm-blooded creatures again.

**September 4**

High 68º F
Low 47º F
Clear
NE-E wind to 18

A record breaking daily high in Kotzebue. Very warm and nice and dry in Sisualik.

We had a day off from the berry grounds today and got caught up on a few odds and ends of chores.

Caribou are still the big news and most people with boats and free time are up that way (N and NW Kobuk Lake, Noorvik, Kiana, Noatak).

Our town family got three today not far from their home at Fish Creek.

Pretty warm temperatures for working fresh meat and fish. They do have to be worked right away too.

There are few people in Sisualik today. Some caribou boat hunting, some town travelers and a few working west fishery or goose hunting. Ocean has been medium high and calm all day.

A late traveling 4-wheeler last night (11:30) found a bear in the trail at Anigaaq. It stood up and gave the young couple a thrill. He fired his pistol once and the bear dropped to all fours and took off for the hills.

Hope this lake Eskimo-Indian Summer spell continues for a while. It is quite pleasant. It hinders some pre-freeze chores but those temperatures will be along soon enough.

The sun will set in the water tonight. Up till this date the setting has been over land.

**September 5**

High 65º F
Low 52º F
Clear
NE-E to 35

Lots of wind this morning. No town trip.

Overnight net was on the beach with the gulls cleaning out several old salmon and a few flounders.

We picked blackberries for several hours in the warm, windy, dry air. It was a great outdoor day, away from the flapping tent. Our tent flaps a lot when dry with winds of 20 K or better. It tightens up when wet. There was certainly no wetness today.

Caribou reportedly getting closer. One seen behind westernmost Sisualik camp. An unconfirmed report has numbers already on our side of Noatak River near Jones Camp. A late telephone report has a large group (herd) of caribou on the east bank of the Noatak about to cross to our side. Hope they make it. This time of year it has been difficult for caribou to reach our section from the east because of near constant traffic on the river, which prevents a long uninterrupted swim.

A bear took a sack of fish from right in front of the single tent camp at Anigaaq last night. There are several dogs chained there but no people overnight. The owner is going to be there tonight. We wish them both – the bear and the person - good luck.

**September 6**

High 64º F
Low 46º F
Clear
NE-E wind to 18

A beautiful warm day again with a windy morning but becoming glassy calm in the evening.

We decided against the town trip due to low water and our need to haul gas and some other heavy stuff. As it turned out we would have had a fine trip. The wind dropped and the water level rose. You can't know that beforehand though.

Helped a friend bury a bear today. A three to four year old male walked right into his camp among his dogs looking for fish on the ground. At the time of the shooting it was eating dried whitefish from his rack. He fired one shot. The bear ran off and wasn't found till morning. It was about two hundred yards from where it was hit.

We set a couple of whitefish nets at Anigaaq and had 20 or so after a couple hours.

Decided to take a chance and leave one net out overnight again.

"Cedric" the Sisualik sisrik is in trouble. "Cedric" is one of the Uhl camp ground squirrels and a large weasel, still in sleek summer colors, was checking out all the "holes" in camp this evening.

Saw caribou today west of us - a group of four with a larger animal behind. They were moving into the wind, which means toward Sisualik from inland. Tried to get in front of them but didn't see them again after moving toward where they were going.

**September 7**

High 67º F
Low 37º F
Clear, calm AM
N wind to 25, PM

As the sun came up this morning we found lots of fish in the net we left overnight at Anigaaq. There was no bear. The fish filled two "tied top" burlap sacks and it took us the full day to scale and cut them. That is lot of fish for one rather short whitefish net (3" mesh).

The ocean net didn't do as well. No trout, two chum salmon and a number of fair sized flounders.

There was frost again this morning and we haven't tried the blackberries to see if they have gotten soft again.

Cranes and geese moving south in numbers yesterday and today.

Nothing new on the caribou scene today except that we have gift meat from successful family boat that got back from hunting last night. Still no good report of numbers of caribou west of the Noatak River.

A nice flock of Willow Ptarmigan flew from the gravel on the beach at Ikpikaagruq. These are the first I have seen for ages.

Fish and Game removed their boundary buoy today from Anigaaq. They had a fine day on the ocean to do it.

A good show of northern lights last night. The first display we have noticed this fall.

**September 8**

High 48º F
Low 34º F
Clear

N wind to 40

My! A week of September gone already. This is ice month - "new ice" month - and we had some this morning in our rainwater collecting tub, which strong winds (35-40) of early morning blew away from its place of collection.

Cranes and geese continue moving through and marine waters at extreme low due strong north wind.

Very bright sun today but a strongly flapping tent all day with the high winds. Migrating-staging waterfowl have really extensive mudflats to utilize, and they are doing so.

No new caribou news today. If they move into the wind we will miss out again at this early date when bulls are good and fat. We do have caribou meat from friends and family.

Found a shrew in the seal oil pot today.

The strong winds will keep many weekenders from their jobs tomorrow if they don't diminish early this evening.

The whitefish we worked on all day yesterday are already half dry with the constant strong dry wind. Only trouble is that I can't turn them over till the winds drop or they will blow away.

The unusually low marine waters make it possible to walk out over the mud in areas that are usually underwater. It is a time to recover lost anchors or other heavy items that have been lost overboard in the last year or so.

**September 9**

High 50º F
Low 33º F
Clear, squall clouds
N-NW wind to 30

A day of cool winds after our spell of unseasonable warmth. Frost this morning but only lightly.

Caribou news is that they are still on the east side of Noatak River. They are numerous at various points from Noorvik through N shore of Kobuk Lake, to the east bank of Noatak River, from the mouth up to the mouth of the Aggie River.

We traveled the beach west to Anigaaq to put an anchor and hauling line in the slough

to use for setting our whitefish net as air temperatures get cooler and ice begins to form. We may start sacking fish as early as next week if the cooling trend continues. The eggs in the fish are beginning to loosen and the sooner they are taken the better they are. However, they will get too strong (rotten) to eat if air temperatures stay warm for too long. September 15-16 in some years begins the freezing period. In some years it's not till October. Last year we lost a good many sacked whitefish and trout due to a prolonged warm spell.

There was no fresh bear sign on the beach today. The presence of caribou not far off may be a factor as well as the absence of the buried one.

There are lots of Canada Geese in the air enjoying the sweet blackberries. There are still cranes but they are thinning out. Young swans are just beginning to show in staging areas. Passerines are rare and shorebirds becoming so.

The small falcon (probably a Merlin) was seen at Akulaaq again.

**September 10**

High 44º F
Low 28º F
Clear, some clouds
N wind to 25

Ice and frost this morning. The edges of some lakes had ice and slush that remained past noon.

Several neighbors picked blackberries all day - cold hands with purple juice stains.

A group of five caribou were seen by Krusenstern people today and another neighbor saw a cow and calf.

Lots of waterfowl behind Sisualik trying to put on fat while they can. It is early for this kind of cold.

Saw a few cranes today and 200 Tundra Swans.

Marine waters remain at very low ebb. A boat or two did make it to town and one is stranded on the bar in front of town.

Was able to set the 6" mesh net this evening.

The ocean swells are down some this evening. We postponed our town trip again because of low water on one side and swells in the outer ocean side.

There is a remarkable lack of new bear tracks on the beach. Availability of Noatak River salmon and the spoils of human caribou hunting may have attracted their interest away from our ripe walrus meat.

Some waterfowl hunting continues each day but participants are few. Canada Geese and Wigeon outnumber all other species.

**September 11**

High 46º F
Low 27º F
Clear, few clouds
N wind to 30

There were almost not enough hours in this day.

With the continued north wind water is extremely low in the lagoon and the mud flat systems are really exposed. Gulls are doing well with trapped fish and other things exposed by the general low level of marine waters.

Our town trip didn't get off the ground. The morning was good for travel on the ocean but stronger winds in the afternoon would have made the return impossible tonight.

Lots and lots of Canada Geese and Wigeon in the country.

Ice extended clear across some small lakes this morning and all of the ice didn't melt during today's warm portion.

The caribou cow and calf were seen again, but no other local reports on caribou today.

Fishing very poor overnight with 6" mesh net. Five or six flounder and one 8" tomcod was all there was. No trout, salmon or anything in that side. There were lots of jellyfish. This is a reflection of the continuous N and NW winds, which make colder water and increased salinity that seem to suit jellyfish.

Spectacular northern lights! Quite a show! Around 12 midnight, they were in a wide split belt of dancing lights from SE to NW, horizon to horizon.

**September 12**

High 42º F
Low 28º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 30

Our early freeze continues and marine water levels continue to drop. The lagoon almost to rock bottom; it is to mud bottom.

There is a lot of waterfowl eating richly on the exposed *Potamogeton*. Canada Geese and Wigeon dominate and there was a huge raft of Greater Scaup on the deepest part of the lagoon. There are good numbers of Green-winged Teal and Tundra Swans. Both passerines and shorebirds seem absent from our salt marsh.

The cow and calf caribou seen early this week were seen again today. Our friends and neighbors are not about to kill these two. They are kind of like bait for large numbers of caribou to the east and north of us.

A new report today puts many caribou on our side of Noatak River near the Lower Canyon. That is less than 20 miles from here.

A second report (pilot report) puts many caribou toward Kivalina on our west side. We may see fat bull caribou yet. It should be another two weeks yet before bulls begin to get strong.

Some larger lakes have ice still halfway across at sundown this evening. Some wet gravel on the edge of the lagoon over soft mud was frozen deep enough to support a man's weight.

**September 13**

High 44º F
Low 25º F
Clear
N wind to 20

A very nice quiet morning: no flapping tent, no breaking swells, only the continual soft noise of undisturbed geese and an occasional gurgle from Tundra Swans.

Our town family boat got under way about 10:30 to pick us up for a much needed town trip. They called a half hour later reporting that they had to turn back due to high waves at Kotzebue Channel mouth. We cancelled the town trip till next week and went west to Anigaaq to set our net. We did that, and visited one of the families down there that is fishing.

We picked up a load of driftwood, glassed around the country for caribou (without seeing any), and came home and put out the tomcod net for the first time this fall. We got a dozen good looking cod and nearly a ton of jellyfish, all colors.

Lots of geese and other waterfowl on the warm black mud of the lagoon bottom.

The water is finally starting to come up, first on our front beach then in the lagoon. Ducks and geese will have much unfrozen water soon again.

We hear that the caribou on the Kivalina side won't cross the haul road to come our way. That was a report from a person in Kivalina today.

Ground Squirrels are by far the most often encountered living creatures on Krusenstern right now.

**September 14**

High 40º F
Low 24º F
Clear
Variable light winds

We've finally come to the end of our hard, harsh N wind. Marine water has slowly come back and remaining waterfowl have spread out accordingly. Swans, Canada Geese and Wigeon are the most numerous, but there are a number of other species in lesser numbers.

Saw one Sanderling on the beach today. Haven't seen other shorebirds or passerines for some time, though there are sure to be Dunlins somewhere in the mud, as well as Long-billed Dowitchers.

Nothing new on the caribou scene. We seem to be the only group of people in the NANA Region that do not have caribou within easy walking distance at this crucial time, two weeks before bulls go into rut.

We lucked out on our net set for whitefish last night at Anigaaq. We filled and sewed up a hundred-pound burlap sack, fish weight of more than 100 lbs. This will be our first sack made for quaq (frozen seasoned smelly fish) for winter consumption. It is always a bit of a gamble as just when to begin this "open air" fish preservation. If done too early they get too rotten for human use, too late, they lack flavor. Dry cool weather, even not freezing is good for them. Too much late rain spoils them.

Some large lakes were iced clear across this morning and the lagoon iced halfway across. The lagoon is now nearly ice-free again this evening with different wind direction and rising warm saltwater.

Some berry pickers still active and we ate our first Saffron Cod for lunch today, including the cooked livers with blackberries.

**September 15**

High 42º F
Low 20º F
Clear
Light winds

Another beautiful fall day with a group of 12-18 Canada Geese grazing back and forth through Carrie's backyard black berry patch. It's another example of how quickly some wild creatures can become habituated to places and circumstances when nothing frightening happens to them for a while. Normally Canada Geese at this season fly in alarm when humans or vehicles show within a half-mile on the horizon.

Our early freezing continues with small lakes iced over all day. Larger lakes and lagoon are ¼ to ½ ice covered in the morning, but most of it is gone b late afternoon.

Caribou overrunning Noatak Village today! CB report from family up there reported caribou bulls running past the church building during services this Sunday.

Closer to home, a group of 9 were seen by a young hunter halfway between here and Anigaaq (Akulaaq pole grave site). He may have tried to get some. We haven't heard his story or of his success yet. In addition, family at Sealing Point traveled to Battle Rock for a load of wood and a look around and saw another small group of female caribou (8-10) traveling NW.

Fishing at Anigaaq, waterfowl hunting, and looking for caribou are all needful and anticipated for the coming week, but our first and highest priority is fall supplies, including gas, a trip to town. Hope we make it easily. Early freezing can cause transportation problems.

**September 16**

High 40º F
Low 20º F
Cloudy, snow showers
NE wind to 15

Finally the long awaited town trip for fall supplies and gas happened, and successfully!

A clogged fuel filter ¼ way to town on the ocean side gave some anxious moments but was cleared quickly by our mechanical crew. Our trip home with two drums of gas and a ton of groceries was on calmer seas and unloading on the ocean beach was relatively easy. It was a day of needless tension. Fall trips out of Sisualik are often like that when everything goes smoothly. Usually you have good reason to be tense till the trip is completed. We feel so rich again with adequate fuel and store bought luxuries. It is an illusion. Our real richness is our place here and the privilege to make a living, maybe not off of it, but with it.

Saw a number of seals while our engine was shut down, the first we have seen this fall.

A few caribou seen from Sealing Point.

Fish a plenty at Anigaaq and snow showers gives one hope of good quality quaq (sacked and aged whitefish) for the winter.

Saw several Sanderlings today, the first shorebirds seen for a while.

Water level dropped more again this afternoon. Complaints of low water are coming from all over the country as folks hurry to get supplies in before freeze up.

**September 17**

High 48º F
Low 23º F
Cloudy, some sun
N-NW wind to 20

Heavy frost this morning, everything white. Temperatures moderated through the day and by evening was pretty mild. Most of the ice formed to date may be soon gone.

Lots of waterfowl in the country but not much else on the salt marsh and extensive mudflats. Usually there are lots of Dunlin at this date, but not here this year.

A large bull caribou was seen behind Sealing Pt. No one went after it. We saw a cow and calf on the way home but also did not go after them.

A couple of folks did some seining at Anigaaq today. We got there just as they pulled a lot of whitefish onto the gravel.

We had already set our net and had a cartful of firewood so didn't take part in the different fishing method, which is very effective when many fish are down at the outlet.

Cedric, the Sisualik camp squirrel, ran off with one of Carrie's dirty socks that was out by the washing machine. We don't know why! Or what he intends to do with it! She tried to catch him but didn't.

**September 18**

High 42º F
High 32º F
Cloudy
W-NW wind to 25

A cool and windy day, full of fish! Yes! Anigaaq gave reason to its place name today.

The whitefish really came down and did their best to get out to the ocean over the dam. None made it but thousands died trying. Their flesh will feed many human stomachs this winter. The old fashioned "ditch trap" did the trick. A ditch in the beach gravel provokes an outward current that fish can sense back in the slough. They follow it out toward the ocean, but the water gradually sinks through the coarse gravel as the water level in the ocean is much lower right now then in the slough. The unfortunate fish following the current to a trickle flops on its side and can't recover stability and is pushed farther down the now dry ditch on the slippery gravel by the next fish behind. This morning the ditch was so full of dead and dying fish that the one who started the "dig" had to holler "free for ALL." There were many more fish than he could handle. I picked out a full sack of ciscoe, many of them ripe with delicious roe. Ciscoe have been scarce till now, this year. This was a real "bonanza," but on top of it I still had to check out the net we set yesterday. It had another full sewn-up sack and another half - lots of whitefish. Sewed sack weighs over 200 lbs., enough for our whole winter, if we alone ate from them. This was an "all day" fish day. Now all that is needed is for them to freeze solid after they age a bit for flavor.

**September 19**

High 42º F
Low 28º F
Snow, cloudy, rain
N-NW wind to 18
S-SW wind to 15

Changeable weather today. Ground was white with ½”of snow this morning. This evening we have rather heavy rain.

Spent the day among the waterfowl in the back salt marsh. Marine water has come back, all the ice and snow has melted, and freeze-up will have to start all over again.

There are an unusually high number of Canada Geese and Widgeon around yet.

Saw three Long-billed Dowitcher today. That’s unusual since all shorebirds have been scarce for 10 days.

No new caribou or bear news today. Our wind may bring both species closer.

The sound of waves breaking on the shore is loud again after not hearing them for a while. Hope this interlude of waves and rain is short. It tends to interrupt our fall harvesting activities, which have become intense.

It is, however, still September and this kind of weather is not unusual for the date.

**September 20**

High 40º F
Low 32º F
Cloudy, snow
N-NE wind to 20

Well, Well!! An unusual September day. It started to snow late this morning after raining a good deal through the night.

We dedicated this day to the remarkable species, *Branta canadensis tavernii,* particularly those thousands that were still on Krusenstern National Monument this morning at sunrise. These hardy birds have been enjoying the bountiful crop of blackberries and the warm sun to snooze in at midday for most of the past month. Now, in a few short hours this afternoon, that berry crop is under 3 or 4 inches of new heavy snow and water has become their only locally available habitat. The weatherman says to expect sharply dropping temperatures tonight with strong winds from the NW. Good by geese and Godspeed to better pastures. We shot one today but that does not mean that we don't have tremendous respect for this marvelous long-distance traveler.

Today's sudden snowfall caught numerous people "off base" also. Traveling school teacher is spending the night at Sealing Point, one Kotzebue boat traveler stuck in Sisualik, and one Sisualik boat is stuck in Kotzebue.

Before the snow I saw a flock of 20-30 passerines feeding on seeds and two flocks of Long-billed Dowitchers totaling 30 birds. Their world is certainly different tonight than it was this morning. Hope they can handle it.

**September 21**

High 37º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy, snow, rain
N-NE wind to 18

Close to 6" of wet snow on the ground this morning. The ground is not frozen and the sun and rain showers this afternoon has reduced it by more than half. It is still a lot of snow for this date.

As often happens, the weather has provoked a movement of caribou that has come closer to us. Two bunches, one of several hundred caribou, were seen this afternoon behind Salluq moving towards Sisualik. Later travelers reported a long line behind Akulaaq Lagoon and some that had reached the pole gravesite a few miles west of the westernmost Sisualik camp site.

One young fellow may have shot some but all the other hunters are holding till the caribou get more used to the new location. The leading animals seem to be mostly

females.

With the couple of days of bad weather, fishing efforts have dwindled. Fish and caribou will now compete for an individual's time. Some days will not be long enough to do all that you would like to do. Caribou bulls are only two weeks from rut. That will mean caribou hunting will be high priority, at least till a couple of good bulls are in hand. As temperatures seem to be cooling again, additional sacked whitefish are also in order.

We still have a high density of Canada Geese and Wigeon. The geese are hanging on, hoping enough snow will melt for them to get at the blackberries again. A few shorebirds also – Long-billed Dowitchers and Dunlin.

**September 22**

High 37º F
Low 30º F
Clear, few clouds
N-NE wind to 20

A rather nice early fall day in Sisualik and in some ways kind of unique. This afternoon Carrie was looking around with binocs at geese, swans and ducks. Our water is all ice-free again but the ground has 3-4 inches of crusted snow. She said in an excited voice, "There are some caribou a little ways over there!" Well, it is Sunday and usually the Christian community does not hunt or fish on Sunday unless there is special need. The seven caribou were on the lagoon beach, about ½-mile away, and heading out into the muddy lagoon in a straight line towards our neighbors or us. They kept coming and walked right up to the front door of our neighbor's house. They lay down two hundred yards from his door. He and his wife were watching. The caribou rested there for a ½-hour then walked our way and passed 150 yards north of us through our backyard, letting geese and swans fly. They lay down again about 300 yards away, 2 cows with calves and three young males. An hour later a snow machine came by on the trail and the adults in the group knew that sound in their memory and took off like the machine was right behind them. It wasn't. He never left the trail.

It is an unusual day when several caribou can visit three camps in Sisualik and not get shot. These are the very first to be seen from Sisualik this fall.

We had a big pot of white clams last night from the large, spaced, swells on the ocean yesterday.

Caribou are here in numbers. Around 4 or 5 PM we noticed a long line of caribou just into the edge of the tablelands north of us. This is their traditional trail during a major migration. Usually they don't hit this till rut is full on. This is the earliest date known. They are moving steadily, mostly in a single line from west to east. Some local boys that killed some west of us yesterday and today report good fat large bulls.

Simultaneously we have this evening a report from Sealing Point that first groups have turned up there. This seems a major migration from north to south on the regional scene, from W to E on our local beach line. Looks like we will be busy tomorrow!

**September 23**

High 34º F
Low 22º F
Cloudy
N-NE wind to 18

Yes! It was a busy day today. The bounty of this portion of arctic land is truly remarkable this year, nearly unbelievable. Boom or bust in the Arctic - that is a characteristic. We have the "boom" today. Thousands of caribou, thousands of Canada Geese, thousands of Tundra Swans and thousands of pintails and wigeon. Add to that fine egg-laden whitefish that just pour out of the slough to the dry sand and into your gunnysack. We had all this today at Anigaaq and Sisualik. Canada Geese concentration in the unfrozen portion of the lagoon is unprecedented. Numbers of caribou at this pre-rut time is also unprecedented. We still have 3 to 4 inches of hard crusted snow over most all of the land, but only a little ice persists on lakes.

Some folks are taking six or eight caribou now hoping that our weather will stay cool enough to preserve them. By calendar it is still September and warmth and rain (two meat spoilers) can still come.

We took only one good bull today and may take another two or three given opportunity in the next few days. We don't have much freezer room after our good berry harvest and hate to risk spoilage.

We had good opportunity to take as many bulls today as one could want. These caribou are moving east from north and west and are a second wave after those that passed Sisualik yesterday.

Found a dead Red-necked Grebe on the ocean beach today, an unusual find.

Carrie made a full-sewed sack of fine whitefish with roe while I skinned and hauled our bull.

The caribou did have a good deal of back fat. Fine meat.

**September 24**

High 36º F
Low 24º F
Clear, few clouds
N-NE wind to 15

Another fine September day but frustrations developed.

When caribou come before freeze-up there are only a few places where they can be accessed for hauling. This morning we were a bit late getting started and by the time we caught up, caribou were already alerted by hunters ahead of us and had moved on. We went to the fish "ditch trap" and two early-bird young men were working the place that Carrie had to herself yesterday. No fish and no caribou for us today though we saw many of both.

Found one dead, emaciated Glaucous Gull juvenile today, and one live Black Guillemot juvenile. Have not seen young birds of this species before. It had hauled out of water and was warm in the Sun when we came along. It may also be starving. Couldn't guess where as a hatchling it had come from. Both birds lacking parents may have had feeding problems. Likewise the young Red-necked Grebe found dead yesterday.

Some fall marine mammals are beginning to show around (uguruq, spotted seal).

Finally put a net in the ocean again, and got six saffron cod in several hours. Not much, but what we had hoped for. We have had only a few cod so far this fall.

Some bull caribou are showing "neck swell" more than two weeks early.

Jonathan has not been around for two days. Wonder if older age has anything to do with moving south earlier?

**September 25**

High 33º F
Low 26º F
Cloudy, some sun
N wind 35-40

Very strong winds all day dropping off toward evening. This amounts to a strong north wind on top of an already in place north wind system. It is very unusual and has provoked two conditions that are out of the norm: unseasonable cold and super low water.

We have a whole flotilla of barges and tugs near the beach at Akulaaq and Anigaaq. They have been there since yesterday. Haven't heard the full story yet. Seems to have been a fuel barge with a leak.

Lots of caribou passing again today. We took two large bulls from Anigaaq hill today and another sack and half of fish from the "ditch trap". A real rich but windy day at that location. We have three fat bull caribou now so will not get more for a while. The bull's necks are beginning to swell and most antlers are polished for fighting but bulls are still grouped together for traveling and no "smelly" ones have been reported yet. Fatness of the three we have taken is not excessive but probably adequate for energy drain about to begin. Some still have tags of velvet hanging from their antlers.

Small and large flocks of Snow Buntings have been moving through the past few days.

Many swans and geese are hanging on but seem to be thinning out as freezing temperatures continue. The extreme low waters have provided them with good food source (*Potamogeton*) and wind has kept feeding holes on the mudflats from icing over.

A real lot of swans with young were at Salluq yesterday.

**September 26**

High 36º F
Low 26º F
Clear
Light winds

A very beautiful day with a warm afternoon sun topped off with a rising moon partially shadowed but quickly clearing as it got higher above the horizon.

Caught up (somewhat) with camp chores and got the meat from yesterday’s two bulls cleaned up for storage.

Geese finally got to some of the snow-covered berries this afternoon. They've waited long and almost have to scratch the ground snow away (like chickens). There are not many water holes left unfrozen but there are still many geese, swans, and wigeon and Green-winged Teal.

Whitefish and caribou harvest is still on going at Anigaaq by those that don't yet have enough.

The tugs and barges sheltering off Akulaaq and Anigaaq have moved off today.

Net in the ocean for several hours took only two saffron cod.

Some squirrels were out again for a while today but I didn't see Cedric; Jonathan has not come back. Kind of miss that old bird, hope he is all right. He may be back yet. There is report of lots of gull activity in the basin on the Kotzebue - Sisualik boat trail.

With such low water some kinds of small fish may be easy prey.

We had our fill of big white clams again this evening, gift of the extreme low water that began to rise a bit this evening.

**September 27**

High 32º F
Low 19º F
Clear, clouding
Snow showers
N-NE wind to 15

Out temperatures into the teens again. It has been awhile. It is good for our meat and fish, though the weatherman has mentioned rain several days down the line.

We spent the day putting things up and down for winter storage. Our meat and fish needed to be off the ground due to shrew and vole presence. We also have short-tailed weasel and least weasels around, which will cut down on vole and maybe shrew numbers. The least weasel seen today was just that: very lost, small and still in brown summer pelage.

Set net in the ocean for saffron cod today but only got a load of jellyfish and one large spawned-out male chum.

There were still swans and geese around this morning in spite of the cold night. Hardy creatures, all right, but some swan young-of-the-year may not have had enough time to put on any fat reserve for migration. Some seem pretty small.

Neighbor has had a small passerine around his house for a few days. He is to alert us if it shows again and he will try to get us a better description. He says he has never seen that kind before.

Marine waters remain quite low but with diminished winds boats have been traveling to Kotzebue again through the outer channel.

Caribou are spread over a wide area yet, all through Krusenstern Monument.

**September 28**

High 36º F
Low 28º F
Cloudy, snow, rain
SE-S wind to 20

Well, we were suspicious of such an early freeze and expected a warm probably rainy

spell. We have it and the hope now is that it won't last too long or be too violent. (Fall floods are no fun.) The forecast sounds fine, if it develops as indicated. Winds to W or NW by Sunday evening will cool us off again. Our fish and meat storage depend on it.

Not so hectic yesterday and today. Caribou have moved, fish are not so anxious to get out of their impoundment. The cloudy and wet weather makes the cheery camp stove easy to worship.

We think Jonathan is back unless an imposter has learned a few of Jonathan's tricks. He seems a bit wilder and less talkative than Jonathan usually is.

Marine water has finally come back to a reasonable level. This floods the prime gull feeding zone in the basin between Sisualik Point and Kotzebue. A bonanza of trapped fish there may have been temptation enough to hold Jonathan away from home for a few days.

Waterfowl now have abundant water again in the salt marsh so foraging may be easier. We didn’t see any waterfowl for the first time, but expected that they would be in the back marsh area - we weren't up there today.

**September 29**

High 38º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy, fog
Rain, snow
NE to S wind 18

Weather-wise it was a real dismal day to be outdoors. There is hardly a worse weather condition in our annual diverse change than the mixed rain and snow conditions of late fall with some snow already on the ground. Wet cold seems to be hard on all warm-blooded creatures.

We finished the harvest month of September with a good deal of good food to use and try to protect from spoilage. Salmonberries, blackberries, sourdock, seal oil products, dried whitefish, frozen whitefish, frozen waterfowl and frozen caribou meat. About the only thing we don't have that we usually have are saffron cod and herring. We may still have opportunity for these two species and some fall seals as well as ptarmigan, snowy owl and of course a winter moose. We truly have a wonderful high-producing land, when things come together as they should. At a time like this we dare not think of the hard years when things don't develop as they might.

Three flocks of Canada Geese and a small flock of swans were seen today in our back marsh. It is getting silent again back there. Water rose somewhat but is still low. Steady rain this PM has melted snow over some blackberries. Those geese that toughed it out

are now paid off with frost-sweetened berries.

Terry didn't find any squirrels out today. He does still have hope.

**September 30**

High 41º F
Low 34º F
Clearing
N wind to 25

The sky cleared and the air dried and except for a little more wind than we need, it was a fine day with which to end September. Our air-stored sacked fish and meat are doing fine since the rain and mild weather didn't last too long.

Got a cart load of fir wood today from Akulaaq, saw 10 swans (two families) and a dozen wigeon in some open holes, but no more geese.

It was a great day for Terry. On his daily run he surprised a squirrel sitting in the sun by his hole and dragged him out. The gravel has thawed enough to make that possible and that probably winds up the squirrel hunt year for Terry. It has been the best of his life. Terry had some trouble as a young dog finding a purpose in life. Arctic Ground Squirrels solved that problem for him as he figured out a way to catch them. He doesn't catch every one he starts digging on, but he is successful on a remarkably high percentage of those for which he digs. It is an interesting story as to just how he found the secret of squirrels that only bears and a few dogs figure out (and perhaps wolves?).

No fish for the last few days due to weather but caribou are still in the Anigaaq area though none are being seen at the moment in Sisualik. A few were taken home again today.

There are very large ground swells this evening due to strong N winds at sea. Water is rapidly dropping again because of the same winds.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## OCTOBER

**October 1**

High 36º F
Low 24º F
Clear
N wind to 15

A fine day today with a super highway on the beach as water level and swells both fell away and gave us a wide, wide beach.

We made use of the trail shortly after sun up this morning to see what we could see or do west of us. What we saw was a lot of bull caribou (on an unapproachable island) and a lot of whitefish just waiting to rush out of the slough onto the gravel.

We did get another sewed sack of fish and more and probably would have taken one more bull if we could get to them. This bunch of maybe 1,000 animals has a high density of bulls and apparently late rutting individuals, as many have strips of velvet still clinging to their unpolished antlers and as yet show no aggressive behavior toward each other. We watched one large bull testing the ice on the slough they must cross to continue their east-south trek. He turned back after making it halfway on the glare ice. He probably figures one more night of freezing is needed.

Lots of swans back of Sisualik tonight on the west Noatak Delta. They are mostly gone from the few open water holes to our west. Some young birds may not be ready for migration stress.

Did not hear or see geese today but there are still lots of Snow Buntings traveling.

Only three saffron cod in the ocean net this afternoon.

**October 2**

High 30º F
Low 25º F
Cloudy, sun
N-NE wind to 15

A good day: another sack of fish, an hour of caribou watching that gave some insights on herd problem-solving and two round trips to Anigaaq.

The caribou were part of the group that has been in the same spot (on salmonberry picking grounds) for several days. They were on ground that has deep partially frozen slough on every side. Hoofed animals have a traction and stability problem on glare ice. It can be extreme if an animal breaks through the ice and must climb back up on the ice to get ashore. This group of caribou wanted to move on. One cow got on the ice and started timidly across. Halfway (the deepest part) the ice broke, plunging her into cold water deep enough that she had to swim. She tried to go forward by breaking the ice ahead of her but that didn't work, as the ice got thicker toward the far edge. She turned back in a bit of panic and tried to climb out on the trail where she went in. That didn't work either but she used a different technique: she circled the open hole and slammed as fast she could into the ice, breaking it a bit closer to shallow water. She repeated this many times till shallows were reached and she could climb out on shore, quite worn out. I left observation post at this point. Herd had bunched up, seeing all this but taking no action. Returning to observation place in two hours the herd was gone and the binocs showed the halfway crossing had been extended all the way across. On our way home we saw the small herd heading due north through the hills toward Noatak. No more glare ice and thin ice for that group for a while. Presumably another animal in the group, maybe a bull but more likely another cow took the half broken trail and finished the swim and ice-breaking crossing. It is also likely that several animals got into the water at the same time, which didn't allow for any turning back. The herd triumphed over this problem in a demonstration of how the herd benefits from individuals in it, who in turn benefit greatly by being herd members. This is the classic picture of caribou survival technique that has made them a successful species for a long, long time.

**October 3**

High 40º F
Low 27º F
Clear, some clouds
Light winds

Today was one of those days that we never see too many of: mostly clear, calm, a warm sun and a very, very quiet "outdoors" in Sisualik.

Saw five swans (two parents, three cygnets) in an open water hole in the far back salt marsh. There were also 15 ducks of mixed species (Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail).

Seal hunters are out (boats) and having some success. Today was ideal for fall seal hunting by boat. There are no floating ice pans yet though for the seals to climb on.

Four large bull caribou passed Sealing Point this afternoon. The speculation is that these are not stray animals but the beginning of another movement from the N-W through our coastal zone.

Had the Saffron Cod net out most of the day and there were 10 fine robust fish by early

evening. An improvement over the last few times we've had the net out.

Lots of white gulls yet. These older birds usually thin out.

Several sacks of whitefish collected by fishermen at Anigaaq again today. We did not go down for a change.

Everyone here is pretty much hoping for freezing temperatures and no rain to make good the large amount of whitefish and caribou we have on hand.

**October 4**

High 40º F
Low 26º F
Cloudy, fog, drizzle
Light winds

A pretty dismal day weather-wise: warm and wet with poor visibility. Still, one can enjoy the calm ocean and the quiet air, for the dynamics of those two at this season seldom allow the tranquility that we have today.

We made a round trip to Sealing Point and had a short visit with Carrie's brother and family. On the return trip we picked up a load of firewood, saw two bull caribou and then hauled a neighbor's load of fish from Anigaaq for him because he had a break down.

The erosion and generally erratic beach condition between Sealing Point and Salluq is extreme! The warm temperatures and drizzle have made the sand and gravel very soft and the ATV trail in that area is not good.

We saw in the ocean a young-of- the-year Yellow-billed Loon, several lone Oldsquaws and a large flock (50) of young Common Eiders.

There are still flocks of Snow Buntings following the beach. The flock of G. Gulls at Anigaaq had grown rapidly to probably 1,000. We have also seen raven groups numbering 20 there in the wake of the caribou harvest. Much of the killing and butchering took place just a bit inland from the fishing place at the outlet of Anigaaq.

We saw two White Fox today at close range at different locations. They are not white yet and are very tame. The first we've seen in this month for a long time.

**October 5**

High 38º F
Low 34º F
Cloudy, fog, drizzle
SW-W wind to 10

Twenty-four hours of non-freezing temperatures. We hope our frozen stuff (fish and meat) stored outdoors will weather this mild spell in good shape. There has not been too much rain, which will help.

One of the Arctic Foxes must have followed us home. When I went out the tent after lunch this afternoon I caught a glimpse of something that looked like a gull, running east with some large dark thing in its mouth. Checked with binocs and saw the fox looking back to see if it was being followed. This means we have another creature that will be after any outdoor stored edibles. We are gaining quite a list of creatures that will cause us some extra work to protect our hoard. Short-tailed Weasel, Least Weasel, Tundra Vole, Red-backed Vole, Shrew, Red Fox and now White Fox. Gulls will sure get at things if food thaws and is not protected.

Squirrels were out around camp again today; there were 20 ducks, (Wigeons?) and four Tundra Swans on the edge of our lagoon as marine waters finally came up a foot or so.

Some large flocks (to 100+) of Snow Buntings foraging in the *Elymus* grasses.

Have not seen a Snowy Owl yet.

Some Saffron Cod in the ocean net today in between the jellyfish.

Eight bull caribou spent the night near Sealing Point and were still on the flats today. None taken yet.

**October 6**

High 38º F
Low 22º F
Clear
N wind to 30

Freeze-up again today. Wind switched to N, sky cleared and refreezing began early last night. By noon today our marine water, which had come up quite a bit yesterday, dropped again and will probably continue low till this North wind runs its course. Hopefully it will freeze deeper before the next mild spell brings snow to travel on.

Had ptarmigan for Sunday dinner today. The first in a long time and brought to us by a good neighbor. W. Ptarmigan populations here are still much depressed. We hope they are coming back. These birds were nearly all white with only a few brown feathers remaining in their white coloring.

Few people in Sisualik this weekend. We are beginning to think how nice it will be to get into the cabin and trees again. Enough of this wide-open coast zone!

Jonathan seems to be back, may have been back for a week or so. But his former ID characteristics have been subdued for some reason. This interrupted presence hasn't happened before, at least for such a long period. Neither have we had such a long period of low water in the lagoon system that seems to have trapped large numbers of some kind of small fish.

Caribou showing around Sealing Pt again. No one quite sure yet where they came from or are going. A female without calf taken and was reported very fat. Some bulls may now be strong, but no sure report.

**October 7**

High 25º F
Low 16º F
Clear
N wind to 10

A fine day, but a couple of incidents gave it a melancholy trend that we had difficulty overcoming.

We traveled west this morning with ATV to see how the fishing was going at Anigaaq and to see what was new that way on the caribou scene.

There were a few fish coming out and some had come out overnight. They were being taken care of so we went on down to check the boat (a mile west of the Ranger Station). It was ¼ full of frozen rainfall from last week. Looks like it might winter there, to be ready for next year's salmonberry crop.

We did see a good bunch of 10-12 caribou on the distant flats making their way back up into the hills.

We saw three white foxes from the first lookout stop this morning. These were quite white in the strong sunlight, very unlike the dirty gray ones we saw down there a couple of days ago.

As we turned back home we soon ran across a fawn caribou that seemed crippled somehow. We had heard from neighbor that it had swum out to sea when he came by. We tried to avoid causing that again by going far around it. Later on some one determined that it had a real physical defect so he killed it to prevent further misery. The calf may have been one of a pair that had lost their mothers and were traveling together a week ago when they met an ATV coming towards them on a narrow sandy strand with ocean on one side and ice covered lagoon on the other. They chose the iced lagoon and fell through about 500 yards out. They couldn't climb out with hooves on glare ice. The ATV driver hadn't meant to cause the problem. He was just traveling the

trail to the fishing site. He watched for a while and then left. Later one of the animals was seen dead at the broken ice edge but the other had managed some how to get out. Though this was more than a week ago the calf that escaped may have stayed up in the tundra near the site. The attempted panicked escape to the ocean today may have been the "last straw."

After returning home I took Terry (the dog) for his run back on the beach of our lagoon. Noticed from a distance a group of six ravens busy at some mischief on a gravel strand near an open water hole. Turns out that they were eating a lately dead Tundra Swan, a cygnet. A few days ago I had seen a lone cygnet trying to join a family group (two cygnets with parents) at that open water area. The lone youngster seemed rejected by the other swans. At least, he kept to himself as the birds moved around the hole feeding.

Each year at freeze up time there are incidents of this kind that we must witness. It is a hard and harsh world out there and sometimes very unforgiving.

Two full buckets of large Saffron Cod in the ocean net this evening, our best catch yet.

**October 8**

High 24º F
Low 14º F
Clear
NW-N-NE wind to 15

Walrus today. A hunter from Sealing Point ran across a female walrus hauled out on the beach near the old shelter cabin at Aitilik. We will make a trip down that way tomorrow for our share.

Very large flocks (100-200) of Snow buntings feeding around in the *Elymus*.

A young uguruq was shot and lost for want of retrieval "throwing hooks" at Sealing Point yesterday.

Some fish still coming out at Anigaaq.

No more bears, no more swans, no more wigeons.

Kotzebue boat seal hunters are probably doing well. Weather has been good for them at this ice making time.

There were a few squirrels out today again and our camp gull flock is beginning to lose white birds to southern movement. Jonathan is still here. Nearly all adult gulls leave here around this time, leaving only gray birds of the year.

Freeze up is really here. Fresh water lakes and crossings will be mostly crossable by morning, with caution.

We see white fox everyday now. The last time we saw numbers in early fall was more than 10 years ago. This phenomena happens when dens of white fox that produced young run out of local feed and animals move along the beaches to where there is food until young ice forms in the ocean that they can get out on to travel.

**October 9**

High 24º F
Low 10º F
Cloudy, snow
NE to E wind 18

We had planned to go to Sealing Point today to get some walrus quaq and meat. Marine high water and swells turned us back from the beach mud bank at Anigaaq. The tops of the swells were slapping the base of the bluff. We turned back and got a couple of loads of firewood. Got caught in a very heavy snowfall on the last load. The east wind put the falling snow right in both eyes and some of it was icy. Very, very hard to see the beach trail.

A neighbor's friend came this way by boat last night. He had been hunting seal and had one uguruq and a seal in the boat. He couldn't get back to Kotzebue so he opted to overnight in Sisualik. This morning he tried again but was stopped by rough water. He decided to put the boat up here and fly back to town.

Saw a fair sized flock of Willow Ptarmigan on the trail west today. That is only the second time I have seen ptarmigan this fall.

There were no more signs of swans or other waterfowl today, though there are still many white adult Glaucous Gulls.

There are many white fox tracks in the overnight snow and many vole tracks. It seems to have the makings of a great winter white fox population. In years past this was a great promise, when foxes were about the only source of dollars in the region.

**October 10**

High 28º F
Low 20º F
Cloudy, snow
NE wind to 25

The air pretty well saturated with very small grain snow all day today. We again postponed our trip to Sealing Point for some walrus. Maybe we'll make it tomorrow.

Our first "slush" of the fall came out in front of us late yesterday afternoon. During the night the wind changed to south with some large swells and piled most of the slush into a beach breakwater wall the full length of Sisualik. They have a bit of celebration at some coastal villages on sighting this first sign of building the ocean ice world.

Some friends on north Kobuk Lake were eating their first sheefish catch of the fall from under ice nets.

This date is the earliest in history that anyone has crossed to Sisualik from Kotzebue on the new ice surface. This was a crazy young fellow that made the crossing several years ago. Early dates for dog team and sno-go are 12th, 14th.

I haven't yet made a crossing to our winter house trail. Was up there to check the crossing today but unfrozen water on the edge kept me from testing the ice, as I had short boots on. The ice, by its light color, looked pretty thick.

Finally saw a small flock of ptarmigan today down on our back salt marsh beach ridge. They used to come down by the hundreds to feed on blackberries just barely under the snow at this point in time.

**October 11**

High 22º F
Low 8º F
Clear
Snow squalls PM
Light winds

Made the trip to Sealing Point with the 4-wheeler. Overnight snow was minimal. The sun came out around noon and the trip was very pleasant. Some swells were hitting the whole beach near the tip of the Cape but we could detour over the beach ridge trail.

Found the wings and bones of a freshly eaten cormorant. White foxes are what ate it. Only the two wings were intact and from the green sheen it seemed an adult bird, but there was no sign of any white patches. Based on that it could have been a lost Brandt's Cormorant. Normally the Pelagic Cormorant is the only cormorant that we see here.

The big bear is back! Fresh tracks in the new snow of last night. It visited the camps of the only remaining residents of Salluq. He has a number of dogs staked out and bear got in the middle of them. None were hurt. This was about 5:00 AM. Very dark! He fired a shotgun and the bear ran off as he got a 30/30 but he chose not to shoot. Later he tracked the bear with sno-go to a patch of willows, with no tracks out, but still couldn't see the bear. He will have a restless night tonight (the person, that is).

Lots and lots of white fox at the Anigaaq fishing place. We saw maybe 10 today. Very

poor fur at this date.

Saw Snowy Owl today so set the pole traps. A small group of caribou came right through camp after we got home. It was a short day.

**October 12**

High 28º F
Low 9º F
Cloudy, snow squalls
NE to SW wind 30

A real day of weather began last night. We have 5 inches of new snow that has come from huge masses of very black clouds that come out of the SW sound and engulf the whole eastern half of the Monument.

A young uguruq was shot in front of the camp we visited yesterday, just after we left. The swells were too large to launch the kayak and it was getting dark. Their hope was that the swells would eventually push the animal into the beach. Someone checked the beach after a couple of hours and there was the prized bundle of blubber and meat. Our share was just delivered here in Sisualik this afternoon. It will make a great supper, our first meal of uguruq of the fall season.

We must change from ATV to snow machine to make our move to Sanningaruq winter camp. We have enough snow and it will be good to get into a house from the tent. We have not yet made an ice crossing but it should be good enough for medium loads.

Jonathan still here expecting a thawed lunch and supper. His freckled winter head is a sight to see and he is his usual robust winter self. We feel more confident that he can take care of himself over winter than we have felt in other years. He has stayed squatted on his swallow box all day, apparently keeping his legs warm.

**October 13**

High 18º F
Low 3º F
Clear, some clouds
NE wind to 15, AM
Light winds, PM

A bear died yesterday afternoon. It is a sad story but pretty typical of human-bear conflict in the northern Bush. It was the big bear, the one that knew how to haul nets and detour around camps so as not to alert them. It was a boar and about as large as male bears get in this region. Why did it come back to beachcombing after being absent from ocean beaches for nearly a month? Who knows? There was surely enough food in the mountains (since the caribou have come with heads, gut piles and lost wounded animals). It did eat from two walrus carcasses on the beach before getting into a

person's camp and dog lot. It apparently didn't go back to a den site, but entered a willow patch on the side of a hill, apparently to spend the day before again going on a raiding tour of Krusenstern beach camp sites.

Four bull caribou were walking straight to our tent this afternoon before an unaware sno-go driver came along and turned them off. It is strange that the bulls were traveling together at this time. October 14 is the date after which bulls are usually not shot because of onset of rut, which makes the bull meat have a strong taste.

Fired up the sno-go today for the first time and will probably try to get up to the winter house tomorrow. The lagoon is too wet, with lots of fresh snow mixed with salt water. There is a bit of ice under that.

**October 14**

High 18º F
Low 2º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 18

Made it to Sanningaruq (winter camp) today! The bears were kind again and left the house intact. Some creature, probably a red squirrel, has been in the house and shredded some paper but appears not to have stayed long; have not yet found any further damage. It seems nice in the shelter of the spruces again and the friendly Gray Jays can hardly wait for our move back to there. That will happen any day now. The trail is unusually good because of snow cover, not so rough and bumpy as all but the big tussocks are covered.

There are old moose tracks around the cabin and fresh fox tracks. No sign of snowshoe hares.

There doesn't appear to have been much bear activity around the house this summer.

Had a first sno-go break down on the way home. The front shock on the undercarriage snapped and jammed the track. That was at a point only halfway home. Thought I would have to walk it but after working on it a bit was able to remove broken portion so track could run free. Made it home without problems, but slow.

Some small groups of caribou are passing at the lower edge of the tablelands, west to east.

A nephew killed two bulls right from the camp site where he is staying. One is exceptionally fat with only a hint of rut smell. The other is good meat and sweet yet. He is probably lucky. Many bulls are probably strong by now.

**October 15**

High 10º F
Low –2º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 15

Two firsts today: our first temperature dip below zero for the fall and not too surprisingly, our first sno-go traveler from Kotzebue. It is always quite startling how few days it takes from beginning of freeze till some hardy soul braves the 10-12 miles of thin ice to reach Sisualik. The folks on this side depend on someone on that side to make the first crossing, as the deep channel right in front of town is the greatest hazard. The day after the first crossing will see others go, because gas, some foods, tobacco and snow machine part are usually needed by most families after two or three weeks of waiting for ice formation so regular winter travel can begin.

Jonathan, his wife, and one bird-of-the-year are still hanging close. We have plans to move to winter quarters tomorrow and that will leave the gulls to their own efforts. They are robust and have a good start towards having a good winter wherever they spend it. Come April we will be looking forward to their cries and presence again.

A third first today for us are wolf tracks. Several made fresh tracks on the lagoon and two followed the trail right into the house, where a bull moose was investigating the house and tracks that I made yesterday.

**October 16**

High 10º F
Low 0º F
Clear, clouding
N-NE wind to 15

Moved today! Lock, stock and barrel. How good to be within some good insulation again! Front and back of the body the same toasty warmth, with only a little bit of fire too.

The sno-go trail to Kotzebue has gotten quite good and some Sisualik people have made round trips today.

The new scene on our travels today is wolf tracks. There were a couple yesterday; today it appears that we have a pack in the area. A sno-go trail one or two days old provides a firm traveling path for wolves in a wide untracked area. There is crusted snow below the three or four inches of fluffy snow, which makes for particularly difficult traveling for wolves. These conditions gave us a great trail for moving. Only the tops of the largest tussocks are showing. After a time or two over the same trail it becomes firm and level. It may be the best trail we ever moved on.

The house and things left here are all in good shape.

So far no hare tracks, but Red the house squirrel is still here and a family of Gray Jays. Haven't yet assessed the cone crop but Red has been peeling some close to the house.

Walking the country requires snowshoes already.

Looking forward to seeing the new moon and hearing wolves howl. It has been awhile since we have heard that awesome sound.

**October 17**

High 18º F
Low –2º F
Clear, few clouds
NE wind to 15

Spent half a day getting things a little more in shape and then a trip to Sisualik for more things. Brought up two sacks of whitefish that the weasel let me have from the pile. We face a winter at war with weasel, vole and shrew, not to mention Gray Jay. We recognize that they have a share, but generally speaking they are not interested in shares - they want it all!

No Jonathan today. One adult gull did a fly-by while I was there but he didn't look right or left, but only scanned the shoreline directly under him.

There seems to be more fresh wolf tracks again today. Wonder how long these wolves will hang in the area. Their skins are not yet prime.

There are some aggressive flocks of up to twenty ravens working the country.

Travelers to town are cutting down the distance and time to get there. Travel time is only 20 minutes now for some.

Our area is remarkably free of tracked snow. All the caribou tracks are on the edge of the tidelands. There are none up here in the tablelands and foothills; moose sign is scarce. Wolves and foxes (red and white) are for the moment the principle track makers.

So far Gray Jays and Common Ravens are the only birds, though our distant east neighbors report lots of chickadees around their camp, where they stay year around.

**October 18**

High 10º F
Low –14º F
Clear
Light winds

A cold night for the date, even up here in the highland spruce patch. This was our second night up here so temperature-wise one must remember that there is often an 8 or 10º F difference between here and the sea level site of our Sisualik camp.

Saw a real different bird today and one that fits the site exactly. It was old "thunder wings" himself, a Spruce Grouse (Spruce Hen)

Terry (the dog) had an interesting afternoon exploring last year's bone burying sites. He had freedom from the chain for three hours. He apparently didn't find any porcupines (on the ground) or moose, as he always barks at them.

Caribou are still near Sealing Point and on the NE shore of Kobuk Lake. Wonder if we will have overwintering of caribou?

An "old timer" put a net in at Anigaaq today under fairly thick ice. He must want fish from that site pretty bad for the work involved. He is probably after Bering Cisco, a rather rare and very fat whitefish that usually survive the winter in certain deep coastal lagoons. We will try to get word of his catch. That is two late nets being tended in that system.

We are having trouble seeing the new moon this month. We can hardly wait. With all this snow on the ground the October moon will be pretty bright on clear nights.

It is finally <u>there</u> and already a pretty good slice of the whole. Strange that we couldn't see it the last couple of nights – may be clouds on the horizon.

**October 19**

High 18º F
Low –6º F
Clear, few clouds
Light winds

A trip to Sisualik today to haul a few more things and to do a few things necessary to our two annual moves. It is a move of only six miles or so but the only way for it to be more worrisome or more work would be if it were 200 miles.

It's remarkable how in so few miles, our environment can be so different. Cooler nights, warmer days, willow and cottonwood shelter from wind and drifting snow and several different species of birds, mammals and fishes. It is good to be in our winter home

again.

The bull moose that came by and apparently knocked on the house door and peeked in the storage shed the night after the first trip up here has not come back. Two wolves came by the same night and I haven't yet had time to follow tracks around to see what, if any, interaction took place. I expect the generator and insulated cabin walls are keeping us from hearing the eerie howling of wolves each night, as we seem to have a family operating in our area. There are new tracks each day on the snow go trail. There have been no new caribou tracks.

The creek water has frozen up at quite a high level and there are fine big mink tracks there from not long ago.

Another Gray Jay has joined the original two but spends most of his time looking over his shoulder for an expected attack of one or both of the originals. Gray Jays exhibit little tolerance even for their own kind.

The Sisualik weasel (white now) resented our hauling fish sacks.

**October 20**

High 18º F
Low 2º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 10

A very quiet Sunday here, removed from the main stem of sno-go traffic.

Very few creatures in the country and fewer people.

A single Gray Jay is making a great effort to join the camp two but is undergoing a high degree of harassment. He was forced to bump the window once today, but didn't hit it directly enough to knock him out.

Took a short walk with Terry today and found that distances between here and there are getting longer. Used to spend a lot of time on snowshoes. Kind of miss the slow but thorough travel mode, but leg muscles seem to have had enough.

The cone crop looks even poorer than last year. Red Squirrels seem to be feeding on buds of spruce already. Their summer storage piles should be in good shape (mushrooms, bones and other goodies) since we did not have an extended rainy Season.

All of the Sealing Point is moving out, as are Salluq families. There will be only the Sisualik few left this week, a total of six occupied camps. There still a few "off and on-ers" (overnight or weekend campers at formerly occupied camps).

We have had quite a long spell of moderate but cool weather conditions. Hope this continues till we get our first town trip done.

One Sisualik person set a shee net in Kobuk Lake today.

**October 21**

High 22º F
Low 4º F
Cloudy, snow
N-NE wind to 15

A cloudy day for a change with an inch of snow and a bit warmer temperatures.

Cut down a very old friend today. The largest white spruce out of our north window died several years ago. During a switch of direction in storm winds last winter, it occurred to me that if the bottom was rotted, the tree would come down on the house with at least the ¼ length of the top. This would likely break windows, mash the telephone antennae and possibly do damage to one corner of the house. Made the decision during that storm that it should come down before another winter. We miss its bulk and protection from wind gusts and our camp birds will sorely miss its thick protective branches. I'm sure it will live in the memory of many creatures over its hundreds of years of existence. A very old friend indeed!

We need to make a trip to town tomorrow, weather permitting. It will be our first for the fall and that is always stressful. It's a little more so this time since we don't have a trustworthy machine. We'll see how it goes.

**October 22**

High 22º F
Low 10º F
Clouds, clearing
N-NE wind to 15

Made the town trip today and it was easy! Very good trail, flat and reasonably straight, and all snow-covered ice. One of the hazards of early fall travel is slippery glare ice, especially when there is wind. There is no glare ice on the Kotzebue trail this fall.

Saw a number of friends and talked too much as usual.

Tomcod (Saffron Cod) and smelt fishers not doing well. Maybe the fishery will pick up later as the run by Sisualik was late too. Strange how some species that seem plentiful every year can in some years also be scarce. Char, tomcod and Willow Ptarmigan are current examples. Over a hundred year time span these species would be plentiful every year probably more often than any other species, but this year they are all three scarce.

Wolves are not scarce. On our way home two or three miles from the cabin a single large wolf got on our trail from the west, the track we made this morning, and was following it right to the house. It may have heard our approach and took off to another location. We have not seen such wolf sign at this location ever. Hope they are around for a while.

We still need propane and gas so will probably try to break our lower short cut trail tomorrow.

**October 23**

High 18º F
Low –4º F
Clear
N wind to 20

A day to recover from yesterday. It is so very bright out on the tundra with some drifting snow on slopes.

Broke the "shortcut trail" down to tidewater today. The creek bank climb out is a little steep and the second creek crossing has a lot of overflow. It is frozen at this time and we (the dog Terry and I) didn't have any trouble crossing.

As usual this trail (the lower portion) still has some bumps (worse than Sisualik trail) but is not bad for this season.

Lots of Willow Ptarmigan on this new trail, down in the "chain of lakes" area crossing. Didn't see any birds though. There were old wolf tracks and a few not so old caribou, fox and weasel tracks. The ice on the large lake seemed thick enough (I crossed it). Terry found several fresh fox tracks and chased at least one of them.

There was only one other sno-go track in the area and it was made several days ago.

A neighbor, who has put shee nets out, left two of his catch down at our tent site but didn't get word to us till today. We appreciate the fresh fish and will pick them up tomorrow.

Carrie fighting the annual battle of the flies which determines who will get the cabin for the winter. She is winning but the flies are really coming out of the cracks and crannies. By weekend she will about have the upper hand.

**October 24**

High 13º F
Low –10º F
Clear

N-NW wind to 20

A trip to Sisualik for things and for the sight of waves, open water, a duck and lots of sun. It was cold in Sisualik. Fairly strong winds from the NW kept our house area a little warmer than the open ocean beach.

We traveled over the first small "snow bumps" of the year as the wind last night drifted loose snow into small ridges across the old.

The one duck we saw in the ocean was an Oldsquaw. It is normal that some lone lost birds of this species try to survive in the ice-free portions of the sea. Most of the loners perish from starvation and ever lowering temperature.

Very little sign of people in Sisualik though we saw two sno-go travelers, one looking for ptarmigan and wolves, the other hauling things from their summer camp farther west.

Daylight hours are getting short! There soon won't be enough to get the daily chores done without artificial light.

There were new wolf tracks again and maybe one caribou.

Our neighbor, who has put a shee net in Kobuk Lake, left us two nice large fish at our Sisualik camp. We brought them home tonight and will have fresh fried fish for supper.

An intoxicated person trying to walk from Sisualik to Kotzebue was found dead this afternoon on the ice crossing.

**October 25**

High 5º F
Low –14º F
Cloudy, snowflakes
NE to E wind 18

A cold night for the date. There are some record cold temperatures around the northern and western portions of the state. The weather forecast tonight has a genuine winter storm watch beginning Sunday afternoon-evening. That may cure our lack of snow for trails near camp.

Except for our three camp Gray Jays and some rowdy groups of ravens there is not a lot of sign of life around our spruce patch. There were two busy Spruce Grouse last evening at dusk in the tree over the garbage heap. There are a lot of tracks of the very smallest of mammals around our tree patch. Shrew populations must be very high and their need to move around to find sufficient food is the reason for so much surface sign.

This means trouble for stored food goodies. The little creatures are good climbers and can enter containers through the smallest holes or cracks. They are meat and fish eaters, often following fat portions that their small teeth can handle when the harder textured parts are frozen solid.

The sheefish netters of Kobuk Lake are catching lots of fish. These fishers are from camps that are close to the NW portion of Kobuk Lake and from Kotzebue or Sisualik. The fishing area is from Ivik down through little Noatak to Pipe Spit and Lockhardt Point.

This period of relatively thin ice through December is the most effective time for this fishery.

**October 26**

High 7º F
Low 4º F
Cloudy, snow
NE-E wind to 25

Tonight we have the weather report that we have been dreading since late August, that is, while we were in Sisualik summer camp on the edge of the sea. The first is for winds 50 to 60 knots with monthly high tides at the same time. There is also a flood watch for south- facing beaches in Norton and Kotzebue Sound and through the Bering Straits. Intense storms after ice formation can be a hazard to your health in Sisualik and very stressful. We are glad to be up here in the foothills and tree patch where our only worries are deep snow and falling trees.

We will have contact with several camps in Sisualik to monitor the storm.

Our snow and wind began this afternoon. The high wind and water is forecast for Sunday evening through Monday.

Did chores around the house and snowshoed the trails. We will have much better trails in the tree patch after the storm and we hope the ice in the Sound that makes our trail to town stays put. It has broken up before and can prevent travel for a long time. We shall see.

This will be our first major storm of the winter and maybe the largest for a year or so.

**October 27**

High 16º F
Low 6º F
Cloudy, snow
SE to SW wind 40

We are under a blizzard and flood watch tonight and tomorrow. We are so glad that we are up here in the foothills where we can snugly take on a blizzard and don't have to worry about an ordinary flood. We do have considerable "things" close to the edge down there. The forecast is for waters 5 to 10 feet above normal high water. There should be large areas of slush offshore that may protect Sisualik beaches from severe erosion and large swell damage.

The 4-5 inches of fresh snow that fell last night has solved our close to camp trail problems. Our next chore after the storm will be breaking down the new snow into trails. Then there will be the effect that floodwaters will have on ice and overflow conditions.

It has been a necessarily quiet Sunday up here but a good time to catch up on some inside chores and undone paperwork.

The only outdoor creatures to see today were our three Gray Jays; two ravens appeared that would like also to eat scraps around camp.

Terry the squirrel hunter is spending his first storm day in the house. He thinks that's pretty great and probably can't wait till the next storm.

October seems to be going out with bang. It has been a relatively "quiet" month till this weekend.

**October 28**

High 37º F
Low 14º F
Cloudy, rain, snow
SE-S-SW wind to 50

The high temperature today tied the record high for the day. Winds at more than 50 knots from SE late last night and early today. This afternoon winds here dropped abruptly as they switched to south and then SW. Trees and roofs started dripping as light rain began to fall. The rain didn't last long but the dripping continued into evening.

Two searches are on for travelers lost in the weekend blizzard. The Noorvik-Kotzebue one was successful this afternoon. Ross Jones, on his way to Noatak from his family's camp near ours up here, is the focus of the second search and he has not yet been located.

We had nearly 6 inches of new snow overnight while the wind gusts were more than 50 K so we did have a genuine blizzard last night. Most all of that snow was left in our spruce patch and other low or sheltered places. With today's warm temperatures the new snow was exceedingly sticky for snowshoes or sno-go track, but it does pack down

well for trail making.

The people in Sisualik say they have real big waves down there this afternoon and for the first time, we understand that Point Hope people have been evacuated to a community center due to size of waves there this evening.

**October 29**

High 38º F
Low 28º F
Cloudy, clear
SW wind to 18

High wind and flood warnings cancelled and we even warmed in the sun a bit.

There is still a search going on for neighbor's son. The young fellow from Noorvik was found this morning.

We finally got the sno-go fired up and ran over our sno-go trails and got some ice for drinking water. Our packed trail is still good after the 50 K winds but much of the ground on either side is exposed again. Ptarmigan will find berries and caribou will not need to "paw" snow to find lichens.

The trail and ground is good up here in the tablelands, except our lower creek trail can't be used because of overflow. Tideland areas are full of overflow today. We don't know when we will be able to get through the water to Sisualik or Kotzebue.

Our two wolves are still around. There were fresh tracks in the sno-go trail from last night. One has a very large track. Don't know what is holding them here since we have not seen caribou or moose tracks for a long time.

The world outside of our tree patch looks altogether different after the blizzard - lots of ground and dark things showing. It will be very difficult to see animals or lost people.

The lost son of our neighbor walked in to Noatak this afternoon. The two-night, three-day ordeal may cause him to be a bit more cautious. We're so very glad he made it home safely.

**October 30**

High 28º F
Low 22º F
Cloudy, light snow
Light S to W winds

Overflow waters have begun to drop but there have not been any travelers yet out of Kotzebue toward Sisualik. That means it is still pretty wet.

The two local lost travelers are home. It is reported that one searcher has a broken arm and a couple of searcher's snow machines were stuck in overflow water.

Farther north, a doctor traveling from Barrow to Wainwright is lost. This afternoon, the whereabouts of the search crew from Point Lay is unknown.

Glassing around our local area from our lookout points today gives the impression that our country right now is pretty poor. It is "hungry country." There is no sign of moose, caribou, ptarmigan or hare. Hope this situation improves. It does make our stored foods more precious.

The appearance of many thousands of caribou on the Seward Peninsula proper, for the first time in more than 100 years, may explain in part the lack of animals here.

Many travelers, including us, are impatient, waiting for trail into and out of Kotzebue. As always, gasoline, propane and store supplies run low during long periods of bad weather or poor trail.

**October 31**

High 26º F
Low 10º F
Cloudy, some sun
Light W to SW wind

A fine bright morning. Cloud cover increased during PM. Nice mild weather to be out. Had we more gas and our own sno-go, it would have been good to scout around the country to see if there are some moose within our reach. The female season opens again tomorrow and we, of course, would like to have one again. We have seen only one recent moose track since we have moved up from Sisualik, and that was a bull followed by a wolf. Just from what little we know with the bit of area we have traveled so far, things don't look too promising for a choice female moose for us this fall. One never knows, though, before checking out known preferred local habitat.

First and foremost with us right now is getting to town to pick up a new sno-go, gasoline and propane.

Sno-go's without sleds made the crossing to Kotzebue this early afternoon, the first from Kotzebue. Later there were several from this side going to Kotzebue for the funeral of the fellow who froze and died trying to walk from Sisualik to Kotzebue last weekend.

Was able to use our lower trail that crosses the creek twice this morning - the overflow had dried up. The trail after the big blow is not bad.

Finally saw one caribou today while making trail. It seems a sickly or wounded female animal, which wolves will soon make use of.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## NOVEMBER

**November 1**

High 27º F
Low 20º F
Cloudy, snow
SE wind to 15

No town trip today. Visibility limited, no stakes, and the weatherman promises worse weather before better.

Our camp Thunder Bird (Spruce Hen) startled me again on the way down to the creek this morning. He (she?) lived up to one of its more common local names (fool hen). After the wing noise like thunder it sat on the top of a small sapling twenty feet away, craning its neck this way and that. The fool hen certainly acts the part wholeheartedly. The fortunate Horned Owl, Hawk Owl or Northern Goshawk that finds one probably has an easy feast. It is small wonder that their numbers seem always and anywhere quite small. We feel privileged to have a few around again for a while. They seem to have quite a wide geographical range, even into Siberia, where we understand that there is no white or black spruce. They do carry their name of Spruce Grouse with them though.

We are having snow all day today and probably all night, when the wind is to switch to W and pick up, which will mean ground storm. The weather has been pretty mean this last 10 days. It seems worse because travel surface and visibility were so good after ice became thick enough for distance travel.

We are fortunate to have on hand most of the things we need for everyday living. We would like to pick up our new sno-go, gas for it, and propane for cook stove whenever trail conditions permit.

**November 2**

High 33º F
Low 20º F
Broken clouds
SW to W wind 18

A nice day up here in the hills with off and on sun and a little light ground drift. Another 4" of snow from yesterday has whitened the world again. It has painted over the tussocks and other dark spots that the strong east winds had exposed. There is a fine tracking snow, and cross-country travel surface is good.

Tidelands are not doing so well: overflow, fresh snow and mild weather have left a mess down there. A neighbor tried to cross from Sisualik to Kotzebue and on up to check his shee nets. He turned back to Sisualik, reporting the trail to be too wet. He said it would probably be all right without a sled. This fresh snow on salt water ice always causes a mess - the fresh snow draws water up through the thin ice. Glad we didn't try to go. We do need to get to town, but now the weatherman is reporting some more blow and snow for Monday.

Neighbor killed the caribou I saw yesterday. Reported it was sickly, with water around heart and lungs.

Much sign of voles and shrews as the snow piles deeper.

Had Terry the dog loose this morning and he found a small flock of Willow Ptarmigan, the first we've seen since our move.

There are also both Least Weasel and Short-tailed Weasel tracks on the new overnight snow.

**November 3**

High 24º F
Low 1º F
Mostly clear
Freezing fog AM
SW to NE wind 15

Another fine day in the foothills, but we again have a high wind and blizzard warning hanging over us for tonight and tomorrow, which makes it unlikely that we will make our needful town trip.

A CB report this morning indicated quite a lot of caribou had gotten into Sisualik beginning yesterday evening; many were there this morning. He didn't know which way they had come from, but they may be moving east towards Kotzebue and the Noatak mouth. I climbed to a lookout point this morning and evening and didn't see

anything. We are too short of gasoline to use the snow machine. Gas and a new machine are two major reasons for our much delayed town trip.

White foxes may have reached our place. There were fox tracks all around the camp this morning and deep holes dug in the snow for old bones or meat scraps.

Heard crowing W. Ptarmigan again this morning. It is a good early morning sound, promising abundance on the land.

Both weasels making tracks around. They may be the greatest track makers on the snow surface right now.

It is already 10:00 in the evening and our winds are still light and the sky clear. Hope this one misses us somehow.

**November 4**

High 22º F
Low 14º F
Cloudy, light snow
NE-E wind to 18

Our side of the Sound was much better today than Kotzebue, where east winds to 40 K kept snow drifting most the day. Because of steady light snow our visibility was poor most of the day. We think, with the present forecast, that we might make our town try tomorrow.

The caribou that were in west Sisualik night before last apparently crossed the Sound to Kotzebue and Lockhardt Point, probably most of them last night. This is kind of an odd happening. We don't have a hint as to numbers. The one reporter that we heard from simply said there were lots. If we ever get on our way to town we may see their tracks. We would have been glad for them to come this way, as our valley is quite empty of living creatures.

Our three camp Gray Jays were joined by two more this afternoon, and war has continued all evening.

There were a few seals (Common Ringed Seals) down in Sisualik after the big high water. Our neighbor said there might have been lots early in the day. The one he shot sunk! Unusual this time of year. He missed the other one.

We have not traveled with the sno-go for about a week now, saving our store of gas for the house light generator. We will need to catch up on those things that need doing with the rig. Ice, wood and moose hunt. The cow season opened on November 1st.

**November 5**

High 22º F
Low 14º F
Cloudy
NW-N wind to 20

We finally made the town trip and back. It wasn't easy, but everything held together well. Several thousand caribou in sight on the Sisualik side made it a more interesting trip.

We had three hurdles: a lot of trail to break, a narrow break in the ice on our first creek crossing, and some thin ice crossing from tablelands into Sisualik. Then when we got to Sisualik Point, ready for the 9 mile Sound crossing, we found that I could not see the track/trail of an earlier traveler due to white out. We just had to go for it, with head in the air, and hope to miss all the thin ice spots. Bull caribou travel that way and generally do all right.

We made it with only a few wet places showing on our trail.

Since we took such a long time getting to Kotzebue and didn't leave the house till 11:00 AM, we had a short visit for business in Kotzebue. We did get a 100 lb. bottle of propane, 15 gallons of gas, and of course the new Arctic Cat sno-go. The sno-go did make it home and do you know what? Prism mounted to the side of the headlights give a halo of rainbows on either side of your trail as you bound over the snow! Didn't know of this neat potential till it got dark on our way home. We chose an Arctic Cat for a change because of relative mileage for this model - we might have done it for the rainbows!

Will give more details on caribou tomorrow.

**November 6**

High 14º F
Low 3º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 25

The light surface snow has been drifting since yesterday and has left us with badly grooved and sculpted snow piles where our smooth tableland trail used to be. Tough riding again up here in the tablelands. Conditions are much better down on the tidelands.

We heard that staking of the Sisualik trail has begun (yea!). The traveling public gains greatly when those 9 miles of open ice have a marked trail. Necessary travel even in poor weather is possible. Lives are saved.

We went down to Sisualik today through bumps and drifting snow to get some more things and Carrie's box shelter for traveling.

We saw another sno-go moving several hundred caribou across our trail. We would take a couple for fresh meat if we had a good chance to choose. They were pretty well spooked already so we didn't shoot. One must try for a cow unaccompanied by a calf to have the best of meat at this date.

Many thousands of caribou have passed through Sisualik at tidewater level in the past four days. This second wave of the Western Arctic Herd has had little harassment this side of Kotzebue. Few hunters and few travelers. They have not loitered much. There is little feeding and resting, giving the impression of "being on trek." Don't know from how far they have come, though some have suggested from as far as Barrow.

**November 7**

High 10º F
Low –10º F
Clear, some clouds
N-NW wind to 10

Big news today! The caribou that have been moving through since the third and are still in the process of doing so are more than likely the Teshekpuk Lake herd! A call from ADF&G today reports only one out of 10 radio collars are left on the North Slope. The rest are now south of Point Hope with some already on the Baldwin Peninsula. This group of caribou has not joined the general southward migration of the balance of the WACH (since collars were in place). They have wandered here and there on the Slope, but have not come south till this year. This change of pattern opens wide the doors of speculation. The herd (WACH) has been at such high numbers for so many years that down seems to be the only way the numbers can go, and everyone wonders when and how steep that impending crash will be. Some oral history seems to indicate the crash can be real abrupt.

Those that have seen these caribou close up (including us) have indicated a subtle difference in appearance (shorter legs, darker colored over all). Word from those that have taken some so far have reported rather poor condition – not fat. That further confirms a "forced march" situation. The only animal likely to be carrying back fat would be a cow without calf. Most other individuals are normally low on stored energy at this point in time.

Fresh wolf tracks again this morning; fresh W. Ptarmigan tracks again too.

**November 8**

High 4º F
Low –15º F
Cloudy
E-SE wind to 35

Another blizzard building today, gradually, from the cold morning to near –50º F chill factors this afternoon. Temperatures began to rise as winds increased.

Had hoped to shoot a caribou or two today but that didn't happen. Saw a few but didn't manage to get into rifle range. Ground drift on the lagoon and lower areas complicated the attempt and overcast sky made seeing trail surface difficult.

We do have two reports of meat quality of three animals taken today. One was described as "good meat," one as "edible," and one of very poor quality described as being very lean with "dark" meat.

This report is not worth much as we don't know age, sex etc. of the animals. It does indicate though, in combination with a few other reports we've had, that these long-distance moving animals may be low on fat reserve.

Lots of ravens following the deep cut trails of these rapidly moving animals. As always, there are also the "tagalong" individuals: the sickly, the hurt, and the lost fawns that can't keep up, but know they must keep trying. Very pathetic, very poignant. One would like to turn away, avert the eyes, yet the facts can't be removed. The eyes of four-footed predators are fastened on those unable to keep up and will soon act as angels of mercy, bringing to an end the terrible hurt of inadequacy.

**November 9**

High 16º F
Low 4º F
Blizzard
E-SE wind to 52

Genuine stay-at-home blizzard today. The weather bureau was right on. There was little fresh snow through the night and morning but it began to snow in earnest this afternoon, so once again we will have a new face on the landscape.

Ravens and Gray Jay worked at eating today. I suspect that some creatures that have good stored energy took the day off. A time to rest. Predators may have a good opportunity if they can find prey.

The movement of Teshekpuk caribou through Sisualik to the Baldwin Peninsula continued strongly yesterday, making landings off the ice on both sides of Kotzebue (at Lockhardt Point and at the old army base site).

We have no hint yet whether most have passed by now or whether there are more to come. We have no hint if they continued their trek today or took the opportunity to feed and/or rest up a bit. They seem to travel more by scent than sight and of course could continue in spite of the blizzard.

**November 10**

High 21º F
Low 15º F
Cloudy, snow
E-SE wind to 35

Blizzard conditions through much of the day but winds and snow ceasing toward sundown.

Lot of new snow and strong winds last night and this morning. Lots of trail work to do inside the trees. Went over them with snowshoes but didn't get the sno-go fired up. Temperatures quite mild this evening.

Terry turned up a Spruce Hen during our trail fixing today and chased it around as long as he could see it.

Our friends and neighbors in Sisualik came across Friday night to their house in Sisualik. Their house is on the main migration trail of the Teshekpuk Lake caribou migration. The storm was beginning and a group of caribou had bedded down right next to their cabin. He shot three and reported them as good meat. That report from this hunter is a reliable one. He knows which animals to choose and he well knows what qualities make good meat.

They returned to town today and reported caribou still traveling south on the Sisualik-Kotzebue trail.

Hopefully there will be no overflow from this latest blizzard as the wind returns to north without swinging to south and west. We will appreciate that, as we need to get some fair loads of stuff out of Kotzebue, like gasoline and possibly a new generator.

**November 11**

High 28º F
Low 20º F
Cloudy
W-NW wind to 15

Finally got dug out from the blizzard and got trails in shape again. Made a trip to Sisualik to see how things were there and to check on caribou. The trail we had before the blizzard is still good. There was no show of overflow on it. There had

been only two small groups of caribou through Sisualik since the drifting stopped last night. I saw only one tired bull that had shed both antlers already. Also noted several shed antlers where large groups had rested on the flats.

We still hadn't taken any caribou from this current big movement from the North Slope and certainly didn't see any chance today. Then, just before climbing the last hill to home in a land with no caribou tracks, new or old, I saw a small group of females and fawns running down the hill towards the sno-go (with headlight covered by cardboard); I stopped the engine and waited. They were passing at quite a long range to the side. When they got as close as they were going to get and stopped I picked a female that seemed farthest from the calves. The bullet landed and mortally wounded the animal. Was sorry to see a calf drop out of the group and stay with his mother. I followed the group a bit farther and when they stopped I fired again at a large looking female. She dropped immediately and no fawn stayed behind. She had one though, as we found when skinning. Both animals and the small female calf that I shot that wouldn't leave her dead mother were healthy, but with poor quality meat with no internal fat. Stomachs were less than half full. We have fresh meat but of poor quality. A cow without calf is the only chance for fat meat at this season and I wasn't able to make that first choice. With snow machine and a small group of animals there is not a lot of chance to shoot one's first choice. These animals may be in for a hard winter. They are well haired - very thick coats - and are lively animals. Hope they can build up some fat reserves somewhere.

A weasel causing trouble in fish and storehouse around camp. Terry chasing it but can't catch it. Don't know what will happen if he does. It will act differently than a squirrel!!

**November 12**

High 22º F
Low –2º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 18

Town trip for gasoline. It was a very good trip with lots of sun and fine "close together" trail stakes (all the way for the return trail). They finished the last quarter mile into town while we were there. It is so fine to have that 9-mile stretch of flat ice marked with willows.

There were some big snow banks around after the last blow, both in Sisualik and Kotzebue.

There were very few fresh caribou tracks this morning but there was a large group, in a single file line, right on the edge of the tide flats. Though numbers have slowed the last two days there are reports from Point Hope and Kivalina.

Met a fellow heading for the big mountain behind our place this morning. He said he was chasing wolves yesterday and got his sled stuck and had to leave it. He didn't say if he had gotten any wolves.

A strange report on the radio today that Gray Whales had arrived in Baja, a full month early! Does that reflect some of our odd weather? We did host them up here through the summer.

The weather bureau reports tonight that we have more wind coming. Forty and 50 K winds seem quite common this late fall. Don't know when we'll catch up on chores and start looking for a fat moose.

**November 13**

High 20º F
Low –5º F
Clear
E-SE wind to 25 (PM)

A bright and beautiful morning and early afternoon with wind and some clouds developing in late afternoon. We are under a high wind warning again for tonight and tomorrow. Some very strong E winds again. The trail north of here is already grooved and lumped and difficult for cross-country travel.

I did get a load of dry wood up there today and made it home in one piece. It is good to have firewood and gas on hand again.

Was surprised to see a nice group of 20 caribou a couple of miles NW of our cabin this morning. Haven't seen any north of us till these. They were quite tame, watching the sno-go pass without taking flight.

Moose are scarce! There was only one track at the head of our creek, made during the end of the last storm.

There is an abundance of Red Squirrels up that way (with no spruce cones), but not much else: no caribou, no snowshoe hares and no foxes. The snow is very icy with some very hard-sculpted zones that make travel difficult for both driver and machine. The higher mountains look pretty lifeless, probably rather heavily iced.

Our Sisualik neighbor shot three caribou from his camp before breakfast this morning. We are waiting to hear how much fat they carry. Some of the last animals from the North Slope may or may not show more fat.

**November 14**

High 26º F
Low 19º F
Cloudy, some clear sky
E-SE wind to 45

A windy warm day with snow free air. There is some ground drift in open areas but the old snow is reluctant to move because of the warm temperatures. The threat of several days of 40 to 50 knot winds has most folks sticking close to home. November seems to be giving us the winds we thought we had escaped from in the previous months of '96.

Our landscape has taken on a very rough look and when you get out into it with your snow machine, you find that "rough" is a very good word to use for the condition. It is the result of rather heavy snow accumulation and too many days of continuous 40 K winds. It consists of areas gouged to the ground, exposing tussocks, rocks and willow clumps, with nearby snowbanks hard sculpted as ice. The smooth level trail zones are on salt lagoon ice and on west-facing snowbanks of north-south ridges.

Groups of caribou feeding and resting are very hard to see.

Since we have fresh meat and a good deal of blood on the ground where we butchered the caribou our Gray Jay group has doubled. There were six around today with a lot of infighting.

A number of wolves were taken by travelers chancing on fresh tracks this last week.

**November 15**

High 30º F
Low 24º F
Cloudy, freezing rain
E-SE wind to 40

An unusual and maybe bad situation with our weather today. Very early this morning we had a first wave of rather heavy rainfall in a short time. The temperatures at ground level were still well below freezing. This caused a heavy ice film to form over everything exposed. This happened several times through the day without temperatures ever rising above 32º F. If temps fall before thawing, this ice coating will mean trouble for Willow Ptarmigan and possibly reindeer and caribou.

This may be the worst period of freezing rain that we have ever seen. Much of the tundra where caribou seek lichens has become snow free because of long periods of strong winds (80 K from the east at Wales this morning). Ice coating on those zones will limit the area caribou can forage over. Luckily there will be much variation over the range. Soft snow between ice crust and lichens does permit access.

Willow Ptarmigan depend much on the buds and tender new growth tips of various willow species. If these develop too much ice encrustation the birds can't manage their normal foraging techniques.

Creatures near Sanningaruq have increased. A short walk to our lookout point revealed seven caribou feeding and moving east just across the creek, where a large bull moose with one antler was eating willows.

**November 16**

High 31º F
Low 29º F
Cloudy, snow
E-SE wind to 25

Another day of semi-hibernation. The combination of bad trail in all directions, ground drift, and rather constant snow in the air makes for a good time to stay home and get done some of the things we would like to do there. We do need to cut and haul wood and seek out a winter moose, but there may be a better day for that.

The one antlered bull moose ½ mile up the creek hasn't come down yet.

Did fire up the sno-go today and ran over our two entrance trails to the spruce patch. Saw a good flock of 20 willow ptarmigan feeding out on the tundra while doing that. Hopefully they are taking advantage of a chance to get a few berries and are not being forced to forage there because willows are too iced over.

We got word today of two prisoners escaping from Kotzebue Jail. They are 22 year-old men. It seems kind of a first and not a very wise move on the boys' part, as they are from large clan families in the region and are not likely to be able to hide for very long.

A short-tailed weasel has moved into the storage shed next door. He will thin down the vole population and hopefully some shrews; then we will have to decide how long we can tolerate his activities in our foodstuff. Terry (the dog) likes to chase the weasel but on catching up he hesitates to grab the animal like he does with squirrels.

Caribou (though few now) are still passing daily down on the tide flats.

**November 17**

High 33º F
Low 26º F
Cloudy, snow
Clearing before sundown
SE wind to 18

Finally a clearing sky about 3:00 this afternoon and we had a large beautiful white world again. The near half moon began its climb in the sky soon after the sun slipped below the horizon. The sunup hours are getting quite short.

Took Terry out for a run and saw a few scattered stray caribou. No real groups.

There were wolf tracks in the sno-go trail again, maybe a day old.

Kotzebue broke their record daily high today for the date and we had a few hours above freezing, but the clearing sky pushed the mercury down again. It was a pleasant day, even during the snowy part.

We do have some bad icing from yesterday: willows, grasses and spruce branches, or anything else above surface, are more or less coated with ice. There are at least two layers of crust on ground cover snow. The condition is severe enough that it might cause some trouble with various creatures. We will have to wait and see what happens as weather cools. Ptarmigan, red squirrels, spruce grouse and caribou could be at risk.

The one-horned bull moose that was up creek two days ago hasn't come down through our cabin section yet. He may have gone back up or cross- country, or has settled in to Sanningaruq for an extended stay. There is good feed here and some wolf protection.

**November 18**

High 26º F
Low 16º F
Some sun, some clouds
Light winds

A trip to Sisualik today to see what we could salvage of things we didn't do before the big winds and rain. Very hard snow down there due to rain on already hard snow drift. One must use an axe before shoveling.

We didn't get into the tent or the cool storage oil. We did get the crippled sno-go shoveled out and the stuff from the dome that we needed.

W didn't see any caribou or fresh tracks on the way down, but on the way back we saw two bunches totaling 50 animals. They were heading inland, due north, which seems unusual for this caribou movement. There are a lot of antlerless bulls in the groups we have seen this week. We may have some overwintering bull groups yet.

Saw a flock of Willow Ptarmigan moving through willows on the ground but nothing

to indicate that they couldn't handle their willows. The icing the other day was bad and remains so. The ground is in bad traveling shape for caribou but feeding may not be much affected. The various levels of crust all have soft snow under them, which mean that caribou may have to work harder to get lichens - but they can get them. When ice is directly against the soil the deer can't handle it.

The open water in the ocean at tent site looked real good and Carrie saw a seal not far out.

**November 19**

High 27º F
Low 20º F
Clear
E wind to 25

Took a trip north finally to look for moose. Went to Miluraq, which overlooks moose mountain. It was a very disappointing trip. No moose and no moose tracks for the first time in more than 20 years.

The icing over the country is also the worst remembered in 40 years. Around the rocky knolls and local coastal mountains it is especially bad with the wind today. Climbing with snowshoes or even walking with mukluks is nearly impossible and a risk to life and limb.

The snow cover after the series of storms is a surprise. From the lookout points the landscape looks like March, not November, and that is very likely why there are no moose or moose tracks in the high country where they usually are in the immediate post-rut period.

I was lucky to see the one antlered bull a few days ago, who may still be in our creek. He is legal game, but we are not considering taking a bull at this point in time. We may learn a little more about moose distribution in the next few weeks. There may be isolated animals in areas away from main river drainage, but snow conditions came down so rapidly that most of the moose in the Noatak drainage are probably along the main river and north of the Igichuk Hills.

Some willows seem to have shaken off their ice coating in wind and sun. Willow Ptarmigan will be happy. There was a good flock on our creek crossing.

**November 20**

High 18º F
Low 5º F
Clear, few clouds
E wind to 20

A fine bright day again but our time of sun above the horizon is getting short.

Checked the two westernmost spruce patches for moose tracks today. There were none, which makes this the poorest moose count for this local area in November for more than 20 years. Regular habitat (where they have been in this month in the past) is full of snowdrift. The Noatak Flats zone may be the only hope for a late moose hunter.

The snow surface in the tree patch is pretty sterile of tracks. No moose, no hare. There are only weasel, fox and a few red squirrels to mark the snow.

There are still caribou west of us in the Sealing Point area. A passing hunter reported that they took a few good ones yesterday. They looked for them today but didn't find them.

The country everywhere is really iced up.

We may make another trip to town tomorrow for gas. Using the generator all day and night until midnight gobbles the gas. We do appreciate the fire in house light though, in these shortening daylight hours.

Killed two Short-tailed Weasels today in the storehouse. They were messing up some stored goods.

**November 21**

High 24º F
Low 6º F
Clouds, sun
E-SE wind to 25

Made a town gas trip and it was an easy one. We used the "short cut trail" for the first time this fall and our travel time was just a bit more than an hour. Quite a difference in time from our prior trips this fall.

Smelt and tomcod hookers were doing pretty well in town today. We stopped by those close to the trail on the way home and they collectively gave us enough smelt for supper and a few tomcod for our quaq.

A diesel spill at Wales. Apparently not too serious but an ugly reminder that Kotzebue Sound has so far been lucky. We hope that continues, but increased traffic of vehicles shipping ore, etc. probably means we will need more than luck.

Caribou hunters out again! The latest news is that some pretty good (fat) animals

were found toward Sealing Point. There seems to have been an interruption in traveling caribou this week, which may mean that they are still to the north and west of us and will overwinter in good feeding spots.

There were new moose tracks on our creek when we came home today. It must be the one-antlered bull; he may have chosen our tree patch as a place to abide for a while.

We are losing daylight fast and we really don't have much to lose. We are already down to a little more than 4 hours.

**November 22**

High 22º F
Low 2º F
Sun, clouds
NE wind to 10

A fine November day. Took a trip to Sisualik to empty the underground storage of oil. We have decided to take all of our seal oil out so we won't need to shovel it out again. This will be the first time we will have tried this system. Since we don't use wooden barrels any more (only plastic buckets now), they can be moved easily.

Saw four paŋniq at tableland edge today. They moved east, following the pattern of the last two weeks.

A moose cow with small calf entered Sanningaruq tree patch today. We had almost given up hope of moose in our area. They do seem to be moving around some now.

Willow Ptarmigan continue to make tracks, so looks like they will manage in spite of icing.

Raids on our stored foods have dropped off since we removed two weasels the other day.

Lots of new sno-go's out of Kotzebue today. Trails are so flat and all overflow is now dry, so anyone with a rig is wanting to try it out on some distance runs.

Some caribou hunting continues west of us towards Sealing Point.

**November 23**

High 12º F
Low –6º F
Clouds, some sun
Light winds

An interesting day today with a bit of excitement. Went to get a few logs of firewood north of us where I had gotten some a week ago. I had left three caribou gut piles at that location. Was surprised and pleased to see that a small wolverine had visited those guts. It has been several years since I have seen wolverine tracks that close in. I took Terry with me for his daily run. He disappeared a half mile out of camp and I had no hint of which direction or why. I waited for him several times on the way up the creek. It is extremely unusual for him to stray for long. Our countryside is iced and hard, so that tracks hardly show out in windswept areas. It is even hard to see hoof tracks.

I had to give up on Terry, go get the firewood and hope he would find his way home. I got to the wood cut site and had worked for 30 minutes making trail. I was just ready to start the chainsaw when the clump-clump of something running through the trees on the heavy crusted snow startled me. It sounded like a very large animal. Then I saw this specter of a tall white animal flashing by against a dark background of spruce. My first reaction was to glance at my rifle some distance away on the seat of the sno-go. My first thought was, "My, that’s a large and tall white fox" Right behind that thought was the realization that here was my long lost dog, who in some remarkable way (known only to him) had found me across several miles of icy unmarked trail. This may happened before. That is, his ability to locate seems to go beyond the limits of what seems possible for normally functioning eyes, nose and ears. This will count for another remarkable find by this, no doubt, remarkable dog.

On returning home with the wood I tied the dog and donned snowshoes to check out what had become of the cow and calf moose that entered our tree patch yesterday, since their tracks had not turned up on the creek here by the cabin.

The first thing I found was two wolf tracks entering the trees from the west on a direct scent line (when NE breeze was blowing) of where the cow and calf were browsing. The moose and wolf trails continued up the creek as darkness over took me. The wolves obviously had targeted the moose and the icy crusted snow may be difficult for the calf to handle. I will seek to follow the tracks farther tomorrow. They were headed in a general direction that would put them through or near where Terry first disappeared this morning. Don't know yet if there is any connection.

The last bit of excitement was the finding the tracks of a large marten within the boundary of the spruce patch called Sanningaruq. They are back!!

**November 24**

High 12º F
Low 8º F
Cloudy, light snow
Light winds

Pretty white out today. With cloud cover and low angle of sun the best way to see the snow surface on which you are traveling is by the light of your snow machine, before sunup or sundown. One can know that we are only a week off from December, even without a calendar.

I'm glad to report that the cow and calf moose lucked out this time. The wolves turned off of the tracks when the two climbed a steep knoll just before leaving Sanningaruq. There was a small group of fresh caribou tracks heading east (the way all have gone) and the moose turned NW across open tundra with shallow snow. The wolves chose to follow the caribou tracks. This scenario was read from the tracks that I checked out today. It is a bit hard to figure the wolves reasoning and exact time that the participants were on the scene. It would seem the moose calf would be the easier target, but perhaps not with only two wolves and the cow moose in the way.

Lots of Willow Ptarmigan tracks up our creek. This area may have been only lightly iced.

Ice cutting for camp water is very simple this year, and very different than the last couple of years. There is much glare ice on our lakes after our extreme winds. There is little brown or dirty overflow ice on the surface. This makes deep cracks in an abundance of crystal clear ice. With a pick one can load the sled in no time and the colder the temperature, the easier the chore.

**November 25**

High 8º F
Low 2º F
Cloudy, light snow
Light winds

A bad snow machine accident Saturday night. Two young men from Sisualik families on one machine hit an ice ridge or pile at high speed. One died on the way to the hospital, the other has a broken shoulder and vertebrae injury. There was alcohol involved and it was another "accident" that never should have happened, but it is probably inevitable that it would. We went down to Sisualik today to be with the gravediggers.

Pretty much whiteout conditions during daylight hours again today. We have only a few minutes more than 4 hours of sun now.

There are fresh wolf tracks around again and we did see a group of four caribou moving inland on our way home. There seems to be more scattered small groups and single caribou wandering around rather aimlessly, very unlike the quick sure one-direction movement of all animals 10 days ago. A high percentage of animals seen lately are antlerless bulls.

We have accumulated nearly an inch of snow today, so fresh tracks will be easily discerned again. Most loose snow had been blown away this past week, leaving only a hard icy surface that makes tracks hard to see.

There will likely be a heavy catch of wolves if tracking conditions improve while they are near Kotzebue, where there is lots of smooth ice surface for chasing.

We are glad that trail stakes are in place before Thanksgiving this time. It has helped the gravediggers today and will make a difference at burial time on Wednesday.

**November 26**

High 10º F
Low 2º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 18

A huge full moon as it comes up this evening! With the perfectly clear sky and snow-covered ground we will have about the peak, the acme, of what is possible for the term "a night of moonlight." Our sunup hours for tomorrow have dropped to 4 hours, which of course enhances the value of 18 hours of moonlight.

Went up to the wood cut site, with Terry. He pulled nearly the same trick again, but I may have found the secret of his delay. There is a porcupine with which he may have a feud, not far off the trail as we leave the tip of Sanningaruq tree patch when traveling the up-creek trail. This may require a 15-minute barking session from him before he gets on his way to catch up with the snow machine.

The small wolverine had made tracks at the site again, so I was under considerable pressure to make a trap set. The value of a new wolverine ruff to the ladies of the land cannot be overestimated and Carrie follows the same pattern.

There were a few small groups of caribou tracks headed north from the coast into the mountains.

Have not seen fresh wolf tracks yet in the new snow of yesterday.

As we wind down into Thanksgiving and Carrie's birthday (separated by only one day this year) weekend, we hope for reasonable traveling weather to make our nights

away from home as few as possible. Both the dog and the contents of the house weather a single night pretty well but more than that during cold weather is burdensome.

**November 27**

High 3º F
Low –4º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 18

The cooling weather trend takes some getting used to again. Clothes and other winter gear come under closer scrutiny as temperatures drop below 0º F.

We got everything ready for Thanksgiving tomorrow hoping to travel and enjoy Thanksgiving with family on the same day. Carrie made cranberry-blackberry akutuq, I prepared a half sack of Anigaaq fish quaq, and I cut up caribou meat for the soup pot. We will hope we make it to the church feast with everything ready at the set 4:30 PM time.

Had another interesting adventure with Terry on his run today. We went the 3-4 miles down to near tidewater, turned around, and came towards home. Around some fresh caribou cratering only a mile from home he took off toward the west and quit following the sno-go and trail. I went on home as his side sorties are usually short. It was nearly two hours later that he returned home carrying of all things, the throat patch skin and hair of a freshly killed caribou. There was much frozen blood on the outer long hairs but the biggest surprise of all was that the inside of the hair-skin was still warm to the touch, not just unfrozen but with animal body heat! Now this evidence looks bad. Terry himself however was spotless white, clean, no sign of blood. I have observed Terry chasing and catching up with various animals (he is very fast) and except for ground squirrels, muskrats and once in his life, a porcupine, he invariably stops when the animal (moose, caribou, fox, bear) stops and turns around toward him. He barks several times from a safe distance, but he is quite timid and turns toward home. I can't picture him being brave enough to grab an animal as large as a caribou.

There are several wolves close around our area and our best theory is that he found a fresh wolf kill (that maybe the snow machine presence had spooked the wolves from) and that he took home a souvenir. Another possibility is a hunter kill from today that skinned his catch and Terry packed a piece of that home.

Sadly there is no tracking snow. With the two days of north wind even the inch that lately fell has been whisked away and only icy snow remains, which barely shows a hoofed animal’s passage. Tracking or backtracking a wolf or a dog is impossible.

There may be some ways to check this out further but they will have to wait till Thanksgiving and birthday are out of the way.

I so love to see Terry run free, but not for him to become a "sport killer."

Late travelers-visitors left us with a moose nose given them hunters dropped by air taxi south of Noatak village. It was said to be a young bull with antlers still in place.

**November 28**

High –2º F
Low –12º F
Clouding, clearing
Light winds

THANKSGIVING. A new twist for us. We went into town, leaving at 9:00 AM. We had one feast with family at 2:00 PM, then delivered a pot of soup (caribou) and ½ sack of whitefish to the church and joined them in another feast at 4:30 PM, and finally returned home by moonlight by 9:00 PM. Thanksgiving 1996 was a full day for us.

Since most of our traveling was by sno-go headlight we got to see new animal tracks that are missed in the near "whiteout" of daylight hours.

There were a lot of new tracks: wolf, moose and many caribou tracks. The activity was upon the tablelands this time, not down on the tideland zone.

The single moose track was apparently the "one-horned bull" finally moving out of Sanningaruq.

Wolf tracks seemed to be here and there in many spots.

The town trail is fine, especially on the ice of the Sound. It is quite flat. The ground is more lumpy and icy but not bad. Our travel time was a little over 1 hour.

**November 29**

High –6º F
Low –20º F
Cloudy, light snow, fog
Light winds

A rather dull, "whiteout" day. Got a load of ice and let Terry come along in case he was willing to lead me to wherever he got the piece of warm caribou skin. He wasn't. Ice cutting was quick and easy due to glare ice, cracks and cold weather.

After lunch I went up to check the wolverine trap set, but he had not returned to that

location yet.

Did see several sno-go's and two small groups of caribou. The larger group (18) was feeding the smaller ran parallel to me on the snow machine trail. They were within shooting range, but didn't get a chance to make a good choice (cow without a calf) so didn't shoot.

There are numerous tracks of small groups of caribou crossing our creek north of us, from west to east. There are rumors of some good fat caribou from those that remain west of us yet.

The two weasels seem to have done in most of the voles in our food storage cabin next door. They do not apparently count shrews as food. There were four on a small piece of caribou heart when I went in to get some other things. We are going to lose some choice food to those smallest of mammals. It is hard to monitor everything and they are so talented at jumping, tight-wire walking and doing just about anything to reach food.

Tomorrow will be Carrie's 74th birthday and we will be trying to go to Kotzebue to be with her son's family. Hope weather and trails hold as well as the Thanksgiving trip. We shall see.

**November 30**

High –6º F
Low –30º F
Clear
Light winds

Carrie's 74th birthday. We made it into town and back to share the day with family and friends and look at that low temperature! We got home about 10 PM and that's where the temp was.

This was an interesting home trip because it was so dark. It is much like traveling in a tunnel. Pick up the stakes in front of town, turn off at tree branch marker left this morning and then up into the tablelands and finally into our patch of trees. One's visibility is limited to what trail is lighted by the snow machine headlamp, just down the tunnel of trail for 18 miles, with no right or left or distant vision. The moon doesn't rise now till 11:30 PM.

Quite a few fresh tracks on the town trail - caribou, wolf and fox.

We had a good birthday celebration with good friends and helpful family.

# CAPE KRUSENSTERN JOURNAL

## DECEMBER

**December 1**

High –25º F
Low –34º F
Clear, clouds PM
Light winds

An early appearance of the "intense cold monster" - a timely test of one's clothes, machines, housing and mental state to cope with short daylight and extreme temperatures.

I think we have probably seen our last sunrays through our cabin windows till January 8-9. Our sun-up time is near 3 hours now.

Christmas is the next big event on the social side, and our shortest day of the year will happen just before the social event. Each minute of gain in sun time will be greatly welcomed. We continue to lose sun time, of course, with surprisingly large loss amounts still - 7 minutes again today.

There are still numbers of caribou reported in the Sealing Point area and some with very good meat. They are also reported to be numerous on the Baldwin Peninsula, not far from Kotzebue, but with no mention of quality.

Some taking of fur animals has been reported, but wolf and wolverine have been rather poor in quality due to relatively mild temperatures through November. White fox will be coming into its prime in this month.

Some marten are again appearing west of Kiana and Kobuk. Have seen only the one track here so far, but haven't been around much.

Willow Ptarmigan are more common than last year.

Killed a Short-tailed Weasel again this morning in our sacked fish. It does not appear that shrews are on the food list of Short-tailed Weasels. Our storage shed has a high shrew population right now, though voles are scarce after three weasels were in residence for a while.

**December 2**

High –6º F
Low –30º F
Cloudy, light snow
N-NE wind to 10

Town trip and a pretty easy one. Today's low came not long after midnight. There was a gradual warming trend through the day with increasing cloud cover. As usual, with temperatures of minus 30 for a while, any warming is quite pleasant. Our trip in was at –20º F, our trip home this late afternoon was in the –10º F range. Neither seemed cold with the good traveling gear we have.

Someone was seeing a group of caribou from the Post Office when we dropped in there.

We had news of a neighbor's fur catch last night: five wolves, a couple of wolverines and a few red fox. Wolves and wolverine were said to be not fully prime. This reflects the mild temperatures we had in November. The boys said that they won't hunt for these animals anymore until they prime up some. Maybe January. It is disappointing to take animals of these more highly valued species and find them is less than prime condition.

Our food scraps have attracted a number of foxes around the house clearing. Our snow is more tracked up than anyplace I've seen in outlying areas. There are both red and white fox tracks and we never see them.

The above fur animals reported taken were probably *not* taken within the boundaries of Krusenstern, though some of them could have been.

With cloud cover and town traveling, our daylight hours seemed really short today.

The new snow will give opportunity for tracking again, if it continues.

Three hours, 8 minutes of sun today.

**December 3**

High 0º F
Low –18º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 18

We had about as bright a day as can be had at this location in December. We had clear sky and a pre-dawn waning half moon from 1 am till noon, and then a risen sun for 3 hours. Yes, we are in that deplorable state again where, because of our two-hour discrepancy between sun time and designated clock setting, the sun does not clear the horizon till after noon. This is *not* natural and should never have been allowed to come to be! Hope that is a clear statement of my feelings.

The light dusting of snow we got yesterday was also a disappointment, as the gusty winds in exposed locations rolled it up and away again, destroying for the most part, its fresh track-retaining capability.

Didn't do much today but run Terry around and catch up on camp chores: splitting wood and bringing fresh ice in.

There are a few fresh caribou tracks around and some feeding effort on their icy land. Though the top of snow is icy they seem to do well enough in some places. They are working for their food though.

Neighbors may have gotten a couple of more wolves at the Noatak mouth.

**December 4**

High –4º F
Low –22º F
Clear
N-NW wind to 20

The sun was full out today for its full three hours. The rays no longer enter our south-facing windows. They won't be back till January 8-9.

Got a load of firewood today and found that the wolverine had been back to the trap tree but did not attempt a climb. The trap is a tree set, hoping to exclude fox, weasel or dog. It is also designed to hang the trapped animal in the air, which eliminates chew off and brings a relatively quick death to the trapped animal. He does have to climb a tree though, and that can take time. He is coming to the bait site, however, and that is a first major hurdle for the trapper.

Saw three caribou and some other fresh tracks around on the way up. Did not really look around since Terry went with me and I needed to keep him in sight. It seems that we are going to have some caribou around through the winter. We are probably

past the window of time in which long distance travel is under taken by our herd. Antlerless bulls will likely form small groups and be around good local feeding sites. Some cows and calves, either strays or those that didn't make it through with the main herd, may join these groups to make the groups a little larger.

Have not seen either fresh moose or wolf tracks lately. Local people have taken a number of wolves in the last 10 days. And we are cooking a moose nose today provided by some hunters dropped by air taxi on the lower Noatak Flats.

**December 5**

High –5º F
Low –10º F
Clear, few clouds
N-NW wind to 18

Town trip today: trail and weather were good but the main reasons for the trip, a mechanic check out of the new Arctic Cat and a 15% discount for elders at a Christmas sale, both backfired.

After the check out, when we were loaded to go home, the sno-go quit running just as we got down on the ice from Front Street. Two mechanics came down, took the machine back up to the shop and twenty minutes later brought it back running. Just as I was hooking up our hitch, the machine quit again and wouldn't re-start. One of the boys let us go home with his racing machine (dragging our sled), while they took my new Arctic Cat to the shop again to figure out the problem. The result of the exercise so far is a charge of $62.00 to make my new snow machine, *not* run! Perhaps tomorrow things will look better.

The AC 15% discount sale was just that. For us elders who get a 10% discount *everyday*, we were not especially celebrating the 5% discount sale, which is what it should have been called. The advertising would lead you to believe a total discount would be 25% (10% daily plus 15% special day). That would have been great. We didn't buy much. We do appreciate our discount but the advertising of this Christmas favor seems over done.

Neighbor's boys caught two wolverines today. A total of four now for them.

We have had to deal harshly with the high population of shrews in our storehouse. Will give details soon. An old remedy proves very effective.

**December 6**

High –4º F
Low –30º F
Clear, light clouds
Light winds

A kind of light day today recovering from a traumatic yesterday. One generator gave out, but that was not unexpected. It had been showing signs of doing so and is the reason we sought a new one yesterday. The new one is a different brand than we have had before and I hesitate to put it to use while it is so cold. Our temperatures have continued to drop all day as a weekend storm watch was cancelled.

There are some remarkable catches of wolves and wolverines being made by young hunters on snow machines, considering the shortness of daylight (less than 3 hours now) and unusual snow conditions. It is hard to assess the region-wide effectiveness of this means of hunting on these species. What is to be done (if anything) when predator species build in numbers in response to continuing high ungulate populations? The question becomes more imperative as some moose and caribou areas begin to evidence diminishing trends.

Ravens, Gray Jays, Spruce Grouse and Willow Ptarmigan seem to be our only winter birds this December.

Vole tracks on surface snow have suddenly picked up this week as the cooling trend develops. Don't have a hint of why, unless it has to do with constructing new tunnel mazes in untouched zones. These small creatures are dependant on the snow layer a few inches above ground surface for winter survival. Food, warmth and air sustain them there. There may be several feet of snow atop that ground-level crystallized snow zone, and these animals don't often resort to travel on the upper snow surface in mid-winter.

**December 7**

High –11º F
Low –32º F
Clear, few clouds
NW-NE wind to 18

Kotzebue reporting chill factor temperatures to –70º F this morning. Actual temperatures warmed rapidly as winds picked up. We did not have the strong winds here which caused the dangerously low chill temperatures in Kotzebue.

We did have cold air early on and that made the starting of a snow machine a little hard. It did go and I ran Terry and got a little ice for home water supply. The minus 30º F air isn't much fun to play out in. Exposed "old skin" is easily frosted. It is not bad when one has good clothes, trustworthy machines and everything (including mechanical things) goes well. It is not a time to have accidents or breakdowns.

We have heard rumor from the Noorvik area of another sno-go accident resulting in the death of one person and serious injury of another.

Did not see sign of "other creatures" today except ravens and gray jays.

Some further catch of wolves and wolverine reported by neighbors.

These minus 30º F degree temperatures in early December will tend to inhibit creature activity, which will fluctuate back as temperatures warm again.

Some new snow may come and will be welcome, though no major storm is in sight.

This Pearl Harbor Day again brings back many distant memories. Carrie's memories of a December "blackout" in Kotzebue are interesting.

**December 8**

High 13º F
Low –16º F
Cloudy, snow
N-NE wind to 18

Good to have warmth (above 0º F) and soft fluffy snow again (1½ inches). Much softer snow machine riding and a great tracking snow. A whole new sheet of white surface to make record of anything moving across it. We are fortunate in the north to have this easy record of living things around us. Imagine in contrast the abundant jungle life at the equator, with so little record left by moving creatures!

A quiet Sunday again and most potential visitors trapped by marginal traveling conditions in Kotzebue. They had much more wind than us today, with drifting and falling snow making for poor visibility and only 3 hours (or less) of sun behind the clouds.

It will be interesting to see how long it takes for local creatures to again show their presence on a new sheet. We will have a good reading in a couple of days of what sort of a group of creatures might share the winter with us locally.

Did see Red-backed Voles in the stored food shed today. They have been scarce since the three Short-tailed Weasels stayed for a while in there.

**December 9**

High 18º F
Low 7º F
Cloudy
Light winds

A fine mild day but not easy to see the snow surface.

Two inches of new snow without wind have made a great tracking surface. Two stray caribou, a couple of foxes, and voles were the only trackers noted.

Repaired sno-go returned today and we did use it for an hour without any problems. Hope that that situation continues, for a couple of years. Warranty will cover most or all costs.

Another episode in the Terry-caribou saga. I turned him loose to follow me, but he turned off again not far from camp and didn't show up at the 5- mile wood cut site. When I came back down I turned off where he did and followed his tracks to where he had found a lone caribou's feeding spot. He turned from there and started back to follow the sno-go trail but veered abruptly north again, and then east, obviously in sight chase of the lone caribou. He and the caribou went right past our spruce patch and down to where the caribou crossed the creek. When Terry got on the firm overflow ice in the creek, he left the caribou trail and stayed on the ice of the creek. I stopped the sno-go to go down and see where the two had gone on the creek. I found out and turned back to the sno-go and there was Terry the dog in person! I was quite surprised to see him! From the tracks, it appears he ran with caribou quite close and side-by-side but never making a grab for the caribou. This confirms past observations, but to be truthful, I expected to see a slaughtered caribou this time and the end of Terry's running free.

**December 10**

High 18º F
Low –8º F
Mostly clear
Light winds

Round trip to town this day with the mended new sno-go - in fact with both mended sno-go's. Both did well. No problems and one took home a drum of gasoline. It was a fine mild day with dry clear air. The trail was good. It was pretty much in the same condition as before and the 2" of new snow that had rolled a bit in places was just enough to make the drop from bumps a little softer.

We met three white-calicoed hunters heading towards Sealing Point with karmun type sleds. The mild and unimpaired vision makes for a good day of hunting and these early starters will have it. A three-hour day is not long, but it can be productive.

The day would have been good even for seal hunting and there may have been a hunter or two out, though it is by old elder taboo a month too early to play on ocean ice.

Kotzebue is looking more like Christmas! Lots of lights and decorations are going up by the hour.

If it were not for ravens it would seem, seeing the world from Kotzebue, that wild birds no longer existed in the world. We are quite thankful for those great black birds!!

**December 11**

High 4º F
Low –16º F
Fog, cloudy, light snow
Light W-SW winds

Talk about a "dull" day! This was it. Only a little over 2 hours of sun (that we didn't see), cloud cover, and very dense freezing fog in most areas all day. It does have its beauty. The frozen fog (hoarfrost) coating all the branches of spruce, the various willows, grasses, and anything above the surface of the ground gives one the impression of being in an entirely different world than the one we were in yesterday, when the air was so clear and dry that white mountains with tree patches could be seen clearly 40 miles away. Today's world is quite small, but intense.

Holiday activities have pretty much taken over the time of those in town; camp people are kept busy by their daily chores of wood gathering, fire keeping, supplying water for home, and various odds and ends that keep life support systems going through the month of short days.

There is little time each day for hunting, fishing or whatever, but these activities do continue depending on need, availability of resources and individual choices.

The Christmas Tree Season is on. When I went down our trail to get lake ice today there were many twigs and pieces of branches from those who traveled from town yesterday to take home a tree for their house, for a couple of weeks. Branches, tips and twigs break off easily when even mildly frozen.

**December 12**

High 8º F
Low –1º F
Cloudy, fog, snow
NW wind to 18

Another "obscured" day. Visibility very limited and only a half-inch or so of snow. We do enjoy the mild temperatures: any day in December or January that the temperature is above 0º F is fine.

Hauled a good load of dry firewood today and was surprised to find fresh marten tracks at the wolverine trap site. Marten are in the news again this fall. Several have been reported taken at various points on the western edge of the white spruce timber

zone. This fur animal has extended its range west in the past decade. We are glad to have this graceful and beautiful creature as a part of our animal community, even though they are yet quite rare. Red Squirrel and Red-backed Vole show pretty strong populations through this extended range zone and may provide sufficient prey base at least for a while.

Our winter bird scene promises to be very poor again. Any bird other than raven, Willow Ptarmigan and Gray Jay will make the day for a local bird-watcher. There are several species that we will probably see a few times through the winter, but it will make the day when one makes an appearance.

A lone large Land Otter passed through our lower trail area two days ago on that first fresh snow. These animals, safe enough when they are on a large or medium sized river or creek system, are at risk when traveling between watersheds. Bears, wolves and people take a toll.

**December 13**

High 6º F
Low –16º F
Cloudy
NW wind to 10

Stove day! A stove is pretty important for reasonable survival in this north country. Early on I learned to make one from 55-gallon oil drums, tutored by my abundant in-laws. The oven would bake sourdough biscuits every night, as well as good and delicate cakes for special occasions. It takes a lot of pounding and time to construct one with primitive tools. No one, including us, makes his own stove anymore. Several weeks ago I was given a huge used “air tight” one and I finally got brave enough in mind and body to see about getting it set up. Our flue system was the big sticker. The new one is to replace an old light-metal air tight that we have had for several years. It can’t be replaced with a new one of the same kind because they are not made anymore. It took most of the day, but we revamped the flue system and made it work. It is pretty big and pretty hot, but it seems we have pretty good control and may not burn down our little cabin.

Took a quick run up to the trap site late in the afternoon. Something or things have eaten quite a lot of the bait without springing the trap. It wasn’t a wolverine but there are weasel, fox and marten tracks, as well as red squirrel and raven tracks. I fixed it up a bit.

Another neighbor’s son came home with a new snow machine yesterday and caught a wolverine today. That neighbor’s family has at least five wolverine and five wolves by now.

Did not see any large animal tracks today.

One town boy reports five marten from east side of Noatak River; one was caught in an air taxi hanger in Kotzebue.

**December 14**

High 0º F
Low –19º F
Clear
Light winds

Saw the sun above the horizon for a while today when I was in Sisualik shoveling out the freezer.

We checked the charge light on the battery pack today to note time of daily charge. We came up with 5 hours of charge, from 11:15 am to 4:15 pm. That is pretty good as our hours of sun are only 2 hours. This battery pack runs our telephone.

No tracks but fox and weasel on the Sisualik trail today.

Open water fog noted far offshore from Sisualik. It seemed to be around the mouth of Kotzebue Channel and is probably just opening. There may be several miles of shelf ice now off the eastern beaches of Krusenstern.

Little sign of active people down that way today. There are only 4 active camps down there now, and some of those may not be home.

We are only a week away from the shortest day of the year. My, it will be fine to gain a few minutes each day instead of lose!

The Gray Jay is not a particularly well-loved bird in the north, but ours seem pretty dear this year since they alone of all species provide us with birds to see and watch everyday!

A couple of Christmas Tree seekers dropped by to warm up today. Don't know how many branches their tree will have when they get back the 18 bumpy miles to town. At near –20º F spruce branches are pretty brittle. They do still smell like trees though.

**December 15**

High 4º F
Low –20º F
Clear early
Cloudy and snow late
E wind to 18, late

One hour, 56 minutes of sun today, but we didn't see it. It was a short day but the moon is there and growing.

Today I found a male marten in the trap set for wolverine. It was alive and made me wish I hadn't set the trap. Remember? I said I thought I would not set a leg hold trap again for a fur animal. Outside pressure and opportunity made me drop that agreement with myself. There is some justification though. I have stated before in these pages that though I have been a trapper for many years, I was not familiar with marten, not having lived within their range. A few years ago *they* extended their range to include my range and I quite quickly became acquainted with this most graceful of northern furbearers. Those events are recorded in these pages. I have also stated before that one can hardly "know" - truly know - a species until you have sought one out in its home range, watched it, and eventually kill one to skin, dress out and know by first hand the body, fur, hair, bone structure, etc. Today with marten I have completed that aspect of the "whole" knowing of a new species. This most graceful fur animal has a fur, a tail, ears, a voice and a spirit that may raise it above all others as a species of note.

Several wolf catches were made in the good brightness of yesterday. Some were taken on Krusenstern, three at least. The wolverine that first made tracks around where I set the trap may already be another's skin, since no tracks have yet returned and each day this week we hear of neighbors or friends taking another wolverine.

No hoofed animal tracks seen today.

**December 16**

High 6º F
Low –17º F
Clear
E wind to 18

Another town trip, to get something done about the new generator, which doesn't work in our system. We are down to one ancient generator with no stand-by, only 5 days from the longest night of the year! We have had a lot of mechanical problems this December. Makes us know how flimsy our mechanical lifestyle-maintaining technology is. It also makes you appreciate more those same wonders of human technology when the broken things are back and running again. Electric lights, oh, the brightness! In the month of December, the miracle of brightness in the dark, how wonderful! How habit forming!

No animal tracks on the 18-mile Kotzebue trail except a few fox. There seem to be no hoofed animals in our section of the country just now.

Trail is good: one-hour travel time and smooth at tidewater.

A friend and neighbor from a big family badly injured last night on the trail with his dog team. A drunk snow machine driver apparently hit him from behind. His sled was demolished, some dogs were injured and at least one killed. The driver was med-evaced to Anchorage and reported out of coma this afternoon. The report at this point is that he will survive. It is an unusual accident for this country of many accidents.

Seems there will be no Christmas Bird Count from Sanningaruq this year again. Last year I cancelled; this year they have not sent the necessary forms.

**December 17**

High 2º F
Low 0º F
Clear
N wind to 25

Ground drift most of the day over here under the mountains. Kotzebue has had light winds all day.

The moon and sun were up together this afternoon for a short time, fairly close to each other on the horizon. It was a rather strange scene. The sun did not really get above the horizon, just kind of scooted along it. We are down to 1 hour, 50 minutes of sun and in a week we will be on our way up again. We are only losing two or three minutes a day now.

Saw a few Willow Ptarmigan on the creek today when I ran the dog.

Also some fairly new wolf tracks on the edge of the trees moving toward the house. They were covered from the last snowfall, so don't know how close he came to the cabin. One of Terry's buddies maybe.

Our camp Gray Jays are looking fat and round.

Someone cut the tip off of a rather large white spruce in our trail by the second creek crossing last night. The pressure to have a "real" Christmas tree is pretty strong and each year there are quite a few hauled in. Often they are cut from pioneering groups or as single trees from fringes or isolated trees, rather than from within thick tree branches.

We have been promised cold and strong N winds tonight with very low chill factors. Weather Bureau hasn't been doing too well lately. We shall see.

**December 18**

High 4º F
Low –26º F'
Clear, few clouds
NW wind to 15

Yet another town trip! We are spending a lot of time, energy and gas doing that during this early winter time. There is some reasonable justification. We are plagued with several different mechanical problems (sno-go and generator) and some medical needs.

We met a friend on the trail who was just coming in from the Sealing Point area. He reports a lot of caribou right on the Sealing Point flats; that is especially good news because it means we will have overwintering caribou not far away. We hope their feed situation is good and that they stay in good physical shape.

Finally got the CBC papers today, so perhaps there will be a Sanningaruq Bird Count for '96 after all. We will see if people and weather will cooperate. The last possible day is January 5, so we have a little more leeway on that end this year.

The only birds seen today were our camp Gray Jays and a few ravens here and there.

No hoofed animal tracks again today. Seems rather lonesome after the constant parade through November and early December.

Had a good and quick trip in and back, even a bit less than 1 hour each way, but cold coming home.

One hour, 45 minutes of sun up today.

**December 19**

High 2º F
Low –17º F
Cloudy, snow, blizzard
E-SE wind to 30

Unexpected (and unforecasted) blizzard conditions by late afternoon.

Haven't had a good snow for awhile. The surface will look different again. Hope it doesn't complicate our travel plans for Christmas. We even heard rain mentioned in the forecast tonight, but hope that is for more southern points.

Not much journal material today. Our few acre white spruce patch gets to be a pretty small world when blizzard conditions prevail. The Gray Jays, Red-backed Voles and shrews are the only other creatures around our world today.

Our newly purchased generator is not working out and our light for reading, writing and sewing is dependent on one very old generator that has been in service for too many years. Do hope it holds out till Christmas festivities are completed.

The mild temperatures are appreciated for the shortest days. We will be gaining a minute or two by the 25th, maybe even 5 minutes.

Talked to my brother in California and his wife tonight. Haven't done that for 50 years! My last trip out that way was in 1946.

**December 20**

High 14º F
Low 4º F
Cloudy, snow, blizzard
SE wind to 30

Kotzebue had more wind than here today and we may have had more snow than they. At any rate, both places had blizzard conditions most of the day. We have four to five inches of new snow to mash down and snow is still coming down. Snow machine hunters will have tracking snow again; everything that moves about will be leaving its mark.

The charging light on our solar panel batteries remain lighted from 11:45 am till 3:45 pm. Our sun above horizon time of 1 hour, 43 minutes is the low point for the year so we will be gaining a minute tomorrow or the next day. It will be great to have the sun back and gaining time. We did not see it at all today because of heavy cloud

cover; if we had seen it, it would not really be *above* the horizon but just sliding along it for 1 hour, 43 minutes.

Carrie still doing some last minute Christmas sewing and we will spend the next couple of days getting ready to spend a day or two in town for Christmas.

My other brother and his wife called this morning. Apparently voices don't change much over the years.

According to our afternoon weatherman we will gain one minute of sun tomorrow. If that is correct, our 1 hour and 43 minute day today will be the shortest sun time of the year.

A day like today, with both high and low above 0º F is rare and prized at this time of year, even if it took a blizzard to do it.

**December 21**

High 20º F
Low 0º F
Fog, snow, light clouds
Light winds

Started off for a load of firewood this morning at daylight with a nice clear sky and mild air. The 4-5 inches of new snow from yesterday made nice soft riding, but did not see a track of any kind out in the open, though there were weasel tracks inside the trees. After cutting several dry trees and loading them in the sled I found that fog had closed in. It was a very thick fog and I was glad to have fresh tracks in the snow to follow home.

Took Terry and went down the tideland trail for a load of ice. He could follow the old trail and I followed his tracks. He makes a good guide dog but with some limitations.

There were no fresh tracks down that way either and after we had lunch two young hunters dropped by to warm up and say hello. They had been looking for wolf tracks but had not found any tracks and the fog did them in too.

Terry stayed out unchained last night, terrorizing a Least Weasel that was trying to find an easy meal from his scraps. Both he and the weasel were pretty well worn by daylight this morning and both spent most of the day sleeping.

There is a report of some overflow down in the tidelands but only mildly. Not enough to bother Christmas travelers.

Well, we are on our way back to sun. We gained one minute today: 1 hour, 44 minutes today from 1 hour, 43 minutes yesterday. This should be New Year's Day!??

**December 22**

High 10º F
Low –10º F
Clear, fog patches
Light winds

Hooray!! Yea, yea!! Finally a new bird for the winter and timely, as the growing sun got real pink and bright over here today with an advance of two minutes of sunlight.

Carrie, looking out the door at the rosy pinkness of the sky, ducked back in the house to grab the binocs saying, "That don't look like a camp robber" (Gray Jay). It wasn't. It was the first Northern Hawk Owl we've seen for several years sitting, as they often do, in the tiptop of the tallest spruce on the horizon. Also as usual, our camp Gray Jays were flying at it, mobbing it. That is typical Gray Jay attitude towards the Hawk Owl. "He won't get you if you are looking at him, just don't turn your back!" Prey size birds are pretty scarce for Hawk Owls in a year like this, when the spruce cone scarcity doesn't allow the seed-eaters to overwinter. This looked like a young bird with a good deal of brownish feathers.

Overflow at our lower creek crossing is a mess and caught some travelers either last night or this morning. We will have to go up the hill and out the back way if we go to town tomorrow.

It certainly was a beautiful December day. Very unlike the darkness the month is noted for in the Arctic. Pink pre-dawn sky, reddish sun up time, pink again at sundown, and then the white light of a huge near-full moon. No time for darkness to set in till the moon goes down early tomorrow morning. Pretty neat for the week of "shortest days".

**December 23**

High 4º F
Low –10º F
Clear
NE wind to 15

Town trip through the back hill climb in order to miss the overflow area of the second creek crossing. There was also a bit of frozen overflow down on the Sound, but the only problem was the new "snow bumps" created by the last storm. Our 1-hour travel time has become 1 hour 30 minute because of the lumps. It is still not bad though.

Town stores are still quite full of shoppers many from the villages. This has been true for the last couple of weeks. It reflects the relatively large sums of money circulating through the region - quite a change from a few years back.

We will be going to town to overnight this time, for Christmas Eve and Day with family. The house will freeze up and the dog will be alone for one night or two for the first time this winter. It will take awhile to get back in shape after the festivities. Our hope is that the weather will continue to be reasonable. We will hope to do a Christmas Bird Count before the 5th.

The sun seemed quite bright again today and our round trip was all in daylight, the return even in sunlight. Its rays will be back in the cabin in two weeks now.

A Least Weasel or two have taken up residency in the storage shack now. He will trim the Red-backed Voles back a bit and hopefully not get into "our goodies."

Received a care package from Sitka today. Their "subsistence food" tastes pretty good to us again.

**December 24**

High 18º F
Low –10º F
Clear
N-NE wind to 10

Town for Christmas! Beautiful December morning!!

The trip in went well, with a few more bumps, so that our travel time is now 1 ½ hours instead of 1 hour.

Christmas Eve at the Friends Church was quite full of humanity, lots of people in one building and very warm. It was however, a good place to be on Christmas Eve with the smiling faces of many children and adults, all to one degree or another recognizing the greatest Gift of all by their presence.

Don't recall being quite so warm before. Had to take an hour off for fresh air and a light nap. That is probably part of the price of growing older. The program started at 6:00 pm and closed down around 11:00 pm, with many taking active parts.

There is probably not such a thing in the world today as pure nature or pure humanity, but on this day, coming from camp to the civic gathering for the celebration of Christmas, we two people experienced remarkable extremes.

There was a nice flock of more than 50 Willow Ptarmigan in the early morning light

at the second creek crossing.

**December 25** High 4º F
Low –18º F

Feast today. Again lots of people, lots of food and pretty much in old-fashioned tradition: fresh frozen fat shee with seal oil, and several servings of caribou-reindeer soup, topped with wild berry akutuq.

The crowd of partakers was thin at Thanksgiving, giving feelings of a dying tradition in this form. The Christmas Feast however exhibited so much enthusiasm both by providers and receivers that there seems no chance that the good feast traditions will disappear.

With the feast over by 7:00 pm and a clear rather mild sky with a huge full moon just rising higher in the sky, we decided to return to our Christmas card cabin in the spruce and our very lonesome dog. In an hour and a half we were back in a rather (now) unbelievable land of tranquility, where the loudest night sound possible is the distant howling of a wolf.

As always we enjoyed the brief contrasts and sharing with family and we are extremely grateful that everything went smoothly.

**December 26** High 4º F
Low –8º F
Clear, some clouds
NE wind to 15

Recovery day today: from large crowds, high heat and night travel. Old bones and muscles don't bounce back so quickly. We will become a 70-year-old couple next week, when I join Carrie at that rather remarkable birthday number for such young folks.

Another fine December day by any standards. We heard that we gained five minutes of sun yesterday, but are only up by three today. That's not a complaint, just a statement of fact. It is all gain that will lead to a more reasonable day and night length by the end of January.

Haven't seen the Hawk Owl again. Hope he can turn up on CBC day.

Have a good report of snowshoe hare tracks less than 20 miles east of us today. They are getting closer. Never expected to see the day when marten tracks are more common in NE Krusenstern white spruce stands than snowshoe hares!

We still have one or two least weasels in and around the storehouse, and nightly visits from a fox or two.

There was a single otter track in the creek when we came home from town.

There have been no large animal tracks within our orbit for some time. Wolves, caribou and moose are somewhere else.

**December 27**

High 14º F
Low 4º F
Clear
NE wind to 18

Got a load of wood today, and another marten! It is a very beautiful creature and came from the same "wolverine" trap as the other. I have only the one trap set. It is at the site where I cut firewood. A second animal is a surprise and indicates more of a range expansion or straying from "normal range" than a single animal would. One wonders from where these marten have come and why. There is no indication that families have been raised locally in the past year.

No other tracks except fox and weasel were noted today. (Willow ptarmigan and least weasel tracks are common daily.)

Our CBC is set for the 30th with about 8 participants. Hope the clear and mild weather continues. Kotzebue had east winds up to 35 today with ground drift. We had only about half that.

We met a couple of travelers today that had gotten turned around and were traveling away from town when they wanted to be traveling toward town. They are new to Kotzebue and winter sno-go traveling. They certainly seemed at risk to life and limb from Arctic environmental conditions, "babes in the woods." I hope they survive the winter. It will take better judgment than they displayed today.

**December 28**

High 10º F
Low –12º F
Clear, few clouds
NE wind to 15

Another fine December day, a little colder in the dark evening before the moon rises. The moon has been so big and bright the last four nights and the moonlit air so mild, one can almost believe that the moon is giving us warmth as well as light.

A friend came by this late afternoon and we had a great good talk.

Got a load of ice and ran the dog at the same time. A great day to cut ice. A nice deep crack in the ice of the small lake allowed the pick to break off very large chunks of crystal clear ice.

Lot of Willow Ptarmigan tracks at our creek crossing. Hope some of the Bird Count group will see some. We don't have a lot of hope for many birds on Monday's CBC day, but we do have Snow Buntings reported in Sisualik, chickadees at Jones Camp and Spruce Grouse around. We shall see.

Weasel tracks seem to be increasing again next door in the storehouse. There seems more than usual weasel sign in the country this month, fueled no doubt by the abundance of both Red-backed Voles and Tundra Voles.

**December 29**

High 0º F
Low –16º F
Slowly clouding
Light winds

Another fine relatively mild December day with our sun back over two hours already. Its rays will be back in our cabin in a little more than a week now and by the end of January we will have a reasonable time of daylight, which our solar panel will thrive on.

Quiet day here and after many clear days it looks like our CBC day (tomorrow) may be cloudy and snowy. We may have to cancel due to poor visibility, though winds are to continue light. Getting out of and into Kotzebue is major concern.

The first dog race of the winter, the Baker 120, finished up last night with Ed Iten winning without much trouble. The race was from Kotzebue to Noatak and back, and the winner made it in less than 12 hours. In days past, most families traveling by dog team made the run from Noatak to Kotzebue in two days, stopping at the Shelter Cabin at the mouth of the Aggie. As days got longer and loads lighter, making the run to Kotzebue in one day was the hallmark – the badge - of a *good* dog team. A round- trip in 10 hours? Wow! Times have changed much, even for dog teams.

**December 30**

High 12º F
Low 0º F
Cloudy
NE-E wind to 20

The 60% chance of snow didn't happen. We got the 40% chance that it wouldn't, but it was enough to delay the CBC till tomorrow in hopes that the sky and air will clear. There were whiteout conditions today that made the cancel reasonable, especially if tomorrow is better.

Went up to the wood cut site today to haul in wood cut previously. Didn't see anything but a couple of ravens and sno-go lights here and there across the country. During this holiday period when many people have time off work, there is a good deal of traveling out in the country, partly due to mild temperatures and partly due to numerous prior wolf and wolverine catches not far from Kotzebue.

As we head into the New Year looking to more sun and longer daylight, our hope is that creatures of some kind will turn up to mark up the sterile-looking snow within most of our white spruce timbered areas. One can get a strong sense of loneliness while snowshoeing through miles of trees and seeing little sign of other living creatures. What makes it worse is recalling the times of abundance when nearly all the surface snow was tracked up by something after several days of no new snowfall.

We are seeing frequent Willow Ptarmigan tracks along our creek, though we seldom see the birds. More sun and longer days will help on that.

**December 31**

High 7º F
Low –14º F
Clear, few clouds
Light winds

Big day today, and a long one. The sky was about half clear, with moon shining through at 7:00 am. At 8:00 we were informed by phone that the CBC crew would be on their way from town at 9:30 for the annual CBC at Sanningaruq. (We missed last year due to circumstances.)

It turned out to be a perfect day for our purposes. The decision to hold yesterday for today turned out perfectly. Our rather small crew of 4 adults and two kids arrived at 10:30 and after visiting over warm stove and hot drink I joined the group to look for birds within our 15-mile diameter circle. For a year with few overwintering birds and a small crew we did surprisingly well. We found 6 species and 89 individuals. The Northern Hawk Owl we had about camp a few days ago didn't show but was right in camp on New Year's Day, so he will become a CCW (count week) bird.

It was a bright nearly windless day with rapidly dropping temperatures, and the chance to hear or see birds was perfect. Sadly woodpeckers and seed-eaters are just not around and winter birds of prey are wintering at sites far away that better supply their food needs.

We did break our count record for Spruce Grouse while everything else is at low ebb this year. This handsome and hardy northern bird is doing well, probably due to lack of winter birds of prey. The eight we were able to find don't give a true picture of abundance, as they are very difficult to find and see in their spruce thicket habitat. We had a good day, good group and good count.

The crew headed back to town about 5:00 pm and we followed about a half hour later, hoping to take part in the New Year's Eve watch night service at the Friends Church. We did that - a very good time with friends and family and a great way to bring in a New Year. We decided against overnighting and made it home here just as the lazy moon was coming up about 3:00 am. It was a full day for a young couple in their 70's!