

CHAPTER XV.—FURS

CONSPECTUS

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NOTE.—*The interpretation of the symbols used in the tables throughout the Year Book will be found facing p. 1 of this volume.*

Section 1.—The Fur Industry

Subsection 1.—Fur Trapping

The fur industry was at one time the most vigorous and remunerative industry in Canada and it still contributes many millions of dollars annually to the national income. Until the end of the 19th century practically all Canadian furs were wild-caught and, although fur-farming has developed rapidly during the present century, trapping continues to provide nearly 60 p.c. of the income from raw furs produced in Canada.

Wild fur-bearers are still taken in moderate numbers, even in settled areas of this country, but the populations of such animals have, in general, been so reduced by the advance of settlement that the principal trapping areas now lie in the Northwest Territories and the northern parts of the provinces. Many wild animals, including some important fur-bearers, are subject to marked fluctuations in numbers from year to year, and these fluctuations are often greatest and most nearly regular in northern regions. The number of pelts of certain wild species taken annually is notably affected by these fluctuations.

Another and perhaps more important factor governing the 'take' of wild-animal furs is the fluctuation in demand and in price consequent on changes in fashion. Thus, the vogue of recent years for short-haired furs, resulting from the desire of women to present as slender a silhouette as possible while wearing a fur coat, has caused a decrease in demand for fox and other long-haired pelts and a corresponding decrease in the number of such pelts taken by trappers. In areas, such as parts of the Northwest Territories, where these furs were formerly a staple source of income, this change in style has resulted in serious hardship. It is obvious that the problems thus created cannot be solved by wildlife-management practices.

Conservation and management of fur-bearers are, however, receiving increasing attention from federal and provincial authorities. Scientific studies of many species are being made to determine the principal factors controlling their numbers, the optimum annual harvest that should be taken, and the best methods of increasing that harvest. Among the controlling factors being studied are food, shelter, weather, diseases, parasites and predators.

In certain fur-producing districts, provincial and territorial authorities have instituted a registration system in accordance with which trap-lines or trapping areas are assigned to individuals on a constant basis. This system puts the responsibility on the registered trapper for the conservation of fur-bearers in his own area and has, in general, proved highly successful.

Forest fires frequently wipe out for some time wild-fur production over large areas. Provincial forest services combat this menace by well-organized fire-fighting systems, including the use of aircraft and parachute-dropped fire-fighters and