

CHAPTER XIV.—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

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 57 p.c. of the income from raw furs produced in Canada.

Wild fur-bearers are still taken, 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 style change has resulted in serious hardship. It is obvious that the problems thus created cannot be solved by wildlife-management practices.

The most important aspects of management of the fur-trapping industry are: constant practical scientific research, maintenance of suitable habitat and its improvement where possible, sound and balanced regulation of the harvest of fur-bearers, provision of competent and adequate field staffs, and free education of trappers with respect to the principles of wildlife management. By these means many areas depleted of fur-bearers have once again become productive. Such means will become increasingly important in maintaining Canada's position as a major producer of raw furs.