



KINSHIP CIRCLE

FOR ANIMALS...
ADVOCACY ▴ EDUCATION ▸ DISASTER AID
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by Brenda Shoss

A white face with black moon eyes presses against her frantic mother. The pup hesitates before lifting her head to meet the blow of a club. Two more hits smash the fragile skull. The hunter forces a hook into the baby's head to haul her across the ice floes to a boat.

A nearby sealer overshoots, fracturing another pup's ribs. Warm red strands bisect the ice as the man kicks the shrieking seal on to his back. A terrified mother watches the sealer skin her pup from groin to throat.

These brutal portraits will emerge nearly 1 million times over a three-year span. Fisherman off the shores of Newfoundland and Labrador will use clubs to kill white-coat pups and high-powered rifles to gun down adults. With an annual 350,000 kills, Canada conducts the world's largest commercial massacre of marine wildlife.

Young seals are clubbed to avoid bullet-riddled pelts. Although the slaughter of unweaned pups is forbidden, an estimated 95% of fatalities in 2003 were 12 days to 12 months old. In April of 2004, The New York Times reported, "With one or two blows to the head, they crush the skulls, sometimes leaving the young animals in convulsions."



CANADIAN SEAL HUNT BLOODPRINTS ON ICE



PHOTO COLLAGE, poster-size original created by Kinship Circle.
CREDITS: Sea Shepherd Conservation Society; IFAW, yellow jacket sealer clubbing; IFAW, rolling over seal; Reio Hara & IFAW, harp whitecoat babies. www.harpseals.org/toolbox/xtolbox1.html#kill

Men bludgeoning fuzzy-wuzzies? In Canada the harp seal is no cute critter. He is the official scapegoat for a depressed fishing industry.

In 1983, Canada's commercial seal hunt collapsed amid global protest. But by the early 90s, cod were scarce. Canadian fisheries and politicians blamed the seals.

Meanwhile, foreign and domestic fishing fleets looted Newfoundland's Grand Banks fishery. Oversize drag trawlers, with goliath nets that gobbled their way down to the sea floor, wasted minerals and vegetation as they dragged up cod by the ton.

In 1992, when the draggers surfaced empty, politicians scrambled to save local fisheries with subsidies. They also pledged to eradicate the "cod-killing" seal. Yet Brian Tobin, onetime Minister of Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), refused to criminalize the seal because his own staff had no conclusive studies to verify a link between harp seals and diminishing cod.

Set to leave the DFO to become Newfoundland's Premier in 1995, Tobin suddenly faced a seal-hating constituency. In a campaign flip-flop, he proclaimed: "There is only one major player still fishing the cod. His name is harp and his second name is seal." Tobin's final gift as DFO minister was the launch of a bigger and bolder seal hunt.

Since then, offshore draggers continue to scourge the coasts beyond the government's 200-mile boundary. Canadian firms



still buy imported cod while fishing-repressed Newfoundlanders subsist on federal handouts. Rather than deal with overfishing, authorities kill seals.

"I would like to see the six million seals, or whatever number is out there, killed and sold, or destroyed or burned," John Efford, Newfoundland's Minister of Fisheries, declared in 1998. "Kill them [seals] and they [cod] will come back."

"Only problem with Efford's wisdom is that scientific observation does not back up his political scapegoating of the seal," argues Captain Paul Watson, an author and co-founder of Greenpeace who formed the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in 1977. Watson calls Efford's rhetoric a "tirelessly repeated lie. We have politicians solving the problem of wildlife destruction by, well, destroying more wildlife."

Watson — a native Canadian who once planted himself on an ice floe to barricade a baby seal from an advancing seal boat — backs his argument with expert opinion. "Certainly, no Department of Fisheries scientist thinks the seal had anything to do with the fishery's collapse," Dr. Jeffrey Hutchings, a fishery biologist and former DFO consultant, has confided.

In fact, marine mammalogist Dr. David Lavigne attributes cod recovery to an abundant seal population. Lavigne claims cod make up just 3% of the harp seal diet. Seals primarily consume fish that prey on cod. Thus, fewer seals mean more predatory fishes, ultimately weakening the cod stock.

In 1999, seal hunt historian Farley Mowat told Watson a reported 300,000 seals didn't account for the 900,000 actually killed. For every seal landed, more wounded seals drown beneath the ice. Sealers who overstep quota are not penalized. Due to limited supervision on the ice, Marine Mammal Regulations (MMR) under the Canadian Fisheries Act are rarely enforced.

During a single March-April hunt, witnesses documented over 660 MMR violations. Data from 2001 showed 40% of seal pups were skinned alive. "We filmed seals being skinned alive right in front of us," one observer told the BBC (4/7/04).

The seal meat market is nearly nonexistent. Some Newfoundlanders consume the flipper, but most of the carcass becomes animal feed or rots on the ice. A limited demand for seal fur in Norway, Denmark, Russia, and Eastern Europe results in a multitude of unsold pelts each year. Seal penises are peddled as impotence cures in Asia and Canadian officials plug seal oil as an Omega 3 supplement.

"Imagine trying to market baby seals as some sort of health food product?" Watson asks. "Omega 3 and essential fatty acids can be [derived] from flax and hemp seed oil without ingesting PCB's and arsenic found in seal oil."

The European Union banned seal hides in the 1980s. In the U.S., seal goods are illegal and many legislators support a Congressional resolution to end the hunt.

Some animal protection groups advocate Canadian boycotts. Brigitte Bardot, Martin Sheen, Pierce Brosnan, William Shatner, Richard Dean Anderson, Paris Hilton, and other celebrities publicly denounce the carnage. Polls show most Canadians oppose the tax-subsidized hunt as well.

Nonetheless, the face-off between statesman and seal now flaunts the highest kill quotas in over 50 years. At this rate, the hunt seems unsustainable.

Officials aren't worried. Most DFO ministers hail from Newfoundland, where seals are charged with wiping out the cod fisheries. Moreover, political parties vying to govern Newfoundland won't risk votes by condemning the hunt. Newfoundland's Green Party even endorses seal extermination.

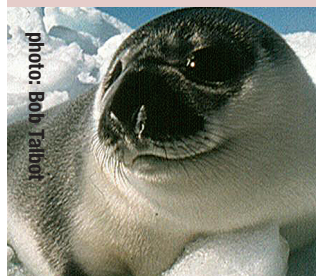
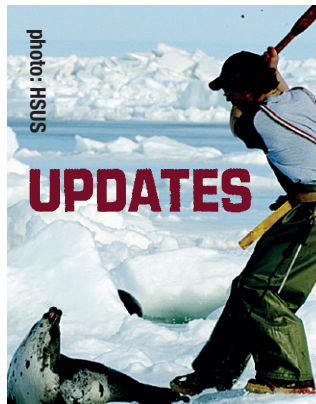
Government apathy only drives Watson to end the bureaucratic battle over seals. "*Sea Shepherd has been fighting the seal slaughter since the Seventies,*" he says. "*We will continue to oppose it until we shut it down. We will never abandon the seals.*"

2011: 300,000 Harp + 60,000 Grey Seals (highest quota since 1971)

2009 Kill Quota: 338,200 Seals (55,000 more than in 2008)

2008 Kill Quota: 275,000 Seals (99.8% under 3 months old)

2007 Kill Quota: 270,000 Seals (98% are 2 weeks - 3 months)



4/13/11: Despite a 2011 harp seal kill quota of 300,000, few sealers arrive in northeastern Newfoundland to kill them — due to a shrinking seal pelt market, poor prices and the EU ban. Just 4 boats trek to Gulf of St. Lawrence icebeds before they melt, resulting in a kill of 1,200 grey seals (1% of a 60,000 quota there). National polls (2007, 2008) show a vast majority of Canadians back the EU's right to ban seal goods.

10/28/10: Canadian sealers fail to dilute a EU ban on seal goods when European Judge Marc Jaeger rejects a thinly disguised government attempt to save Canada's commercial hunt.

8/20/10: European Union seal-goods ban activates with exemption for native Canadian Inuit Tribes and 15 commercial sealers who want a moratorium until Europe's top court rules definitively.

5/5/09: European Parliament votes 550-49 to ban seal items from import/export across the European Union's 27 nations. Canadian sealers lose their biggest customer: EUROPE!

3/18/09: Russia bans White Sea hunt of harp seals under 1 year of age, surpassing Canada in government response to public opinion on seal hunts.

3/09: Canadian Senator Mac Harb proposes an amendment to the Fisheries Act to ban seal slaughter in Canadian waters, with immunity for aboriginal peoples. A first-ever.

2/13/09: Authorities okay a 2009 grey seal kill, but processors tell hunters they'll refuse skins of baby greys, so sealers stay home.

Jan. 2008: Fur Institute of Canada's Bruce Williams tells Canadian Press sealing trade is in "crisis" due to expected seal import bans across Europe. With markets closing, seal product prices plunge, dropping by 50%.

2007/2008: European Commission evaluates a EU Member States ban on seal products. A European Food & Safety Authority (EFSA) report shows critical flaws in Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations. In one example, EFSA advises seals not be moved, gaffed or hauled until confirmed dead or unconscious. But hunters routinely hook seals without verifying unconsciousness or death.

7/30/07: U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passes resolution condemning the seal hunt. U.S. Senators introduce similar resolution, S. Res. 118, calling for end of seal hunt.

1/25/07: Belgian Parliament votes unanimously to implement a national ban on the import of all seal products, making Belgium the first nation in the European Union to do so.

2006 & 2007: 98% of seals killed range from 2 weeks to 3 months in age. During annual ambush on whelping grounds, pups are gunned down, bludgeoned, kicked, thrashed with hakapiks. Some rot on the ice floes.

Nations that ban trade in seal products: United States, Belgium, Netherlands, Mexico, Slovenia, Croatia

Nations whose parliaments resolve to ban trade in seal products: Panama, Germany, Austria

Nations that intend to ban seal goods trade: France, Italy

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• www.harpseals.org • www.seashepherd.org/seals