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Mammals of the Arctic Slope of Alaska.

by

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In the summers of 1951 and 1952 when we sampled the mammalian fauna of northern Alaska, we verified the existence there of 41 species (one with two subspecies in the area), belonging to 32 genera of 19 families of seven orders. Twenty-nine of the species are land mammals and 12 are marine mammals (six seals and six cetaceans, that is to say, whales and their allies).

On the Arctic Slope of Alaska--meaning from the crest of the Brooks Range of mountains northward to the Arctic Ocean--there are only a few kinds of mammals, and the numbers of each kind fluctuate widely over periods of three to nine years. The same can be said of the fauna of any part of the Arctic region in comparison with the fauna of the Tropical region.

The actual number of land mammals, say, in an area 25 miles square, is fewer than 17 immediately south of Point Barrow, Alaska, as contrasted with about 55 at Lawrence, Kansas, in the Temperate region, and more than 140 in the Tropical region, immediately adjacent to Panama City, Panama.

Why are there so few kinds in the Arctic region? Continuous cold for a long part of each year so shortens the growing season that there are few kinds of foods readily available and but few places to live and so only a few species can exist. Bats, for example, subsist mostly on insects; but at Point Barrow insects are readily obtainable in only two of the twelve