

ing the seals are still diminishing in numbers, and the seal catch on land and sea grows less from year to year. The percentage of decrease in the number of seals born on the islands becomes more noticeable as time passes, the operations of the sealing fleet producing a more marked effect on the reduced herd; in 1897 there was found a decrease of 11 per cent. over the preceding year, and during the present season a decrease of 22 per cent. since 1897. The decrease is best shown in the annual counts of seals born on all rookeries small enough to admit of counts being made. These rookeries were, with one exception, on St. Paul Island. A year ago it was not considered feasible to extend the census of pups to any additional rookeries on account of their size. This year it was found that all the rookeries on St. George Island had shrunk to such a degree that actual counts could be substituted for the various estimates hitherto employed. These counts, in connection with those made regularly on St. Paul Island, will be very useful hereafter. Since 1896 the land catch has been: 1896, 28,964; 1897, 20,890; 1898, 18,032. The pelagic catch has decreased as follows: 1894, 61,838; 1895, 56,291; 1896, 43,917; 1897, 24,322. The pelagic catch for 1898 has not yet been made known; but whether less than in 1897 or not, there is no uncertainty about the diminution of the herd.

On account of temporary difficulties, the fences built for retaining males on land were not as strong as they should have been, and many seals escaped. There will be little difficulty in making them perfect next season. Fencing is practicable, and serves the double purpose of preventing the laborious re-driving of non-killables, and keeping them at home during the presence of the sealing fleet in Bering Sea.

Some of the females branded, for the purpose of lessening the value of their skins,

spicuous about the islands in midsummer.

Certain smooth rookery grounds have been covered with boulders to afford young pups shelter during the battles of the bulls, and attempts will probably be made to repair the injurious worm-infested areas.

A rational scheme of seal ranching is being developed that will practically do away with the moderate natural mortality, and facilitate such handling of the animals as is necessary. Of course, no care of the seals on the breeding grounds will save them, should pelagic sealing continue. The nucleus remaining is sufficiently strong to restore the herd in a few years.

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#### *THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.*

IN proportion to the population and total number of educational institutions, British Columbia has an unusual number of natural history museums. These are exceptionally well administered, considering their isolation from other scientific institutions.

The Provincial Museum at Victoria is by far the most important one in the Province. It is located in the east wing of the Parliament Building, thus having the facilities of the Parliamentary Library. The staff consists of the curator, Mr. John Fannin, a taxidermist and two floor attendants. The Museum was originated some years ago by the government, at the suggestion of Mr. Fannin, whose private collection formed the nucleus of the Museum, after having been the stimulus for its foundation.

As Mr. Fannin's special interest lies in the fauna of the Province, to the knowledge of which he has made important contributions, the trend of the Museum is in this direction, although the other departments of natural history are by no means neglected.

Special attention is now being given to

the building of groups of birds and mammals represented in their natural environments. The interest of the people in this work may be gauged from the fact that Mr. Fannin was sent to the great museums of England and the eastern United States to investigate the methods of preparing such groups.

The policy of the Museum is to be mainly provincial and, while specimens from all parts of the world are used for comparison, the endeavor is thoroughly to represent the natural history of the Province, so that visitors from foreign countries may see at a glance the natural treasures of the region. The collection contains good representation of the birds and mammals of the Province. At present efforts are being made to improve the mountings and secure better specimens of the species.

Fish are represented by gelatine casts and alcoholic specimens. The value of the collection will soon be in proportion to the importance of the fisheries of their coast. There are some specimens illustrating osteology. A considerable collection of crustaceans and shells is also on exhibition, as well as a beautiful series of butterflies and other insects.

This rich mining region is naturally productive of fine mineral specimens, which are represented in the Museum, together with the paleontological collections. Although the Province is excessively rich in anthropological material, its representation in the Museum has been somewhat curtailed from lack of funds. However, there is a fair collection of casts of faces of men; stone, bone and antler implements from shell heaps and mounds; several totem poles, carvings and other ethnological material from the Indian villages of the coast. The implements of hunting and the chase are classed together, as are also the specimens connected with fishing, houses and property, travel, religion, etc.

The Museum is fairly well arranged, and

the labeling will put to shame many of the great museums of the East, although, as with all such institutions, constant improvements are being made.

The city of Vancouver, with a population of some twenty thousand, seems too young to show much interest in the museum as a natural adjunct to education, although the Art and Scientific Society is endeavoring to form a museum in its rooms.

New Westminster, with a population of eight thousand, has made a splendid beginning towards a museum properly connected with other educational affairs. The upper story of the City Library has been set aside for museum purposes.\* Cases have been built from plans furnished by the Smithsonian Institution, and space has been allotted for the various divisions of natural history. There has already been secured and installed a considerable collection of birds and small mammals. Many of these were donated by the Provincial Museum. Several cases have been filled with minerals and other geological specimens. A very few ethnological specimens have been secured; there is more material of an archaeological nature. Some of the stone and bone implements represent rare forms.

The spirit of museum administration exhibited at these institutions is one to be commended. There seems to be no thought in mind to conflict with the plan that the collections are intended for study. Every facility is given to visitors to examine, illustrate or publish papers on any of the material within the museums. It is also understood that full labels are desired. In fact, the spirit shown in these museums is one in close cooperation with research and education.

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\* The Library and Natural History Museum of New Westminster were totally destroyed by the fire which consumed that city on September 11, 1898.