

News

Arctic Alaska: Scientists seeing fewer sick se polar bears

Jill Burke | Oct 03, 2012



Enlarge This Image

The mysteries behind what made [Alaska seals an](#) and caused [bald spots on polar bears](#) this spring unanswered. For all of its advances, science isn't a quest for knowledge. Hunters in Alaska's Arctic wal animals they harvest are safe to handle and eat. Ar

The collective stewards of Alaska marine life -- hun managers, academics and researchers -- want to k sick.

The illness struck seals in 2011, causing hair loss, organ problems and, in some cases, death. It show numbers across Alaska's Arctic coastline that that t Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) [declared it a Mortality Event](#)" late last year.

"We do not yet know the cause," NOAA spokespers email. The event now includes all four species of ice seals (spotted, beard Pacific walrus. "We hope to find out what it is."

In 2011, some 40 of 100 sick seals were found dead. Others were in varyi death. Similar outbreaks have been documented in Canada and Russia. D year in the Bering Sea, 50 sick seals -- mostly ringed and bearded -- were believe only a few had become ill recently; most were survivors of the illne:

RELATED

[Mysterious outbreak killing Arctic Alaska ringed seals](#)

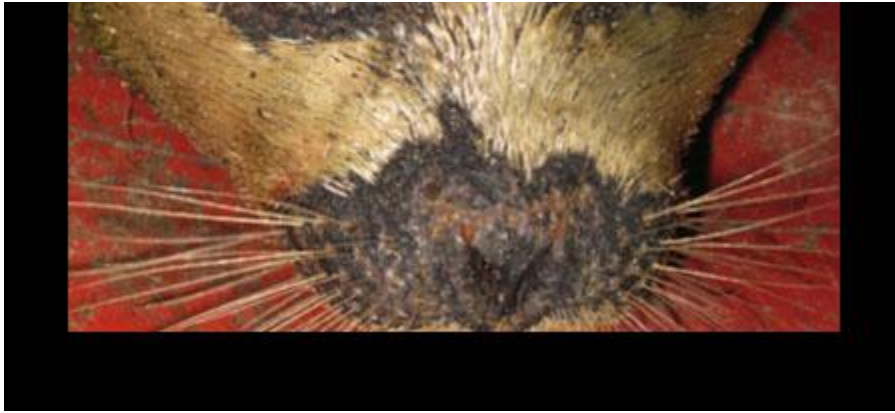
[Illness plaguing seals and walrus brings disease hunters to Alaska](#)

[Months later, Arctic ring seal deaths leave scientists flummoxed](#)



Mysterious outbreak kills

Sign up for Alaska Dispatch News Alerts



Oct 12, 2011

A ringed seal from the Arctic coast near Barrow shows the effects of an unknown disease.

Despite intense research and tests, there's no answer yet. "In many Unusu Speegle noted, "a definitive case is never determined."

For hunters, life goes on

Alaska Native hunters who rely on the animals for food, clothing and to ma find the lack of answers unsettling. Bird flu and other flus have been ruled other known viruses. But knowing what isn't the cause doesn't comfort Al

"Last year was the worst I had seen in my lifetime," said Dan Olanna, an I Shishmaref, an island village located north of the Bering Strait in the Chuk but we rarely saw so many sick before."

Last year, about a dozen of the 30 seals Olanna harvested were sick. Som Olanna and his crew let them go out of fear of coming into contact with the Officials have not found any humans infected, and they have encouraged gathering food. But they also recommend thoroughly cooking meats and th and equipment afterward.

Olanna has been waiting for the island's gusty weather to calm before emb hunts. Fall is an active time for seal hunters, who say the animals' coats a better tasting this time of year. But high winds have kept him indoors much going out is too high to just go, in his words, "motor around for nothing." G gallon, and oil and ammunition have grown increasingly expensive.

While he feels comfortable harvesting healthy seals, a quiet concern nags be affecting the animals, which are used to feed his family and dog team, turned into hats, mittens, gloves, pants and socks by Olanna's wife. An un worrisome.

"It affects our subsistence. It may affect our health. We'd like to find out w sooner the better " he said

Sign up for Alaska
Dispatch News Alerts

Email

Like

68

Tweet

17

1

Print

Single Page



In Wainwright, write-in candidates meet in surprise run-off race



Three dozen new Tasers arrive for Anchorage police officers



Copyright © 2012 Alaska Dispatch. All Rights Reserved.

Sign up for Alaska Dispatch News Alerts