

# FUR FARMING IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

(Continued from page nine)

had 1600, but we had a great deal of importations from outside.

Q.—How many have been sent out of the island?

A.—That I have no account of; perhaps a hundred.

Q.—The industry will run on a breeding basis for five or six years?

A.—That was the estimate of those who had looked into it carefully and realized the keen demand there was for breeders.

Q.—These two facts are coincident, that you have a largely increasing price for their furs?

A.—Yes.

Q.—For how many years of the life of the fox does the skin retain its highest value?

A.—During its whole lifetime.

Q.—Suppose a fox bred to be twenty years old would its skin be as good as one five or ten years old?

A.—As good as at one year old, supposing it is in good condition.

Mr. Garnet: What is the breeding life of the fox?

A.—About ten years.

The following report on fur farming, prepared by Professor Cameron and submitted to the Royal Dominion Trade Commission yesterday at which he was a witness:

To Prince Edward Island belongs the credit of domesticating the Silver Black fox, one of the most valuable of fur-bearing animals. The success which attended the efforts of breeders in this line has induced many to take up other branches of fur-farming; and with marked success. Among the latter might be mentioned the farming of mink, marten, skunk, fisher, beaver, muskrat and karakule sheep.

The practical mind of the Prince Edward Islander was quick to grasp the truth that Nature's riches are not inexhaustible. Before arms of precision and skillfully made traps neither beast nor bird can endure. Figures prepared by Alfred Fraser of New York from the London Fur Sales, of C. M. Lamson & Co., show that the supply of raw skins, especially of the valuable fur-bearing animals is rapidly decreasing. For example, during the last twenty years the supply of silver fox pelts has fallen 3 per cent; otter 8 per cent; fisher 95 per cent, and the common mink 20 per cent. On the other hand the demand in commerce for fur-bearing animals is on the increase, the prices of the pelts of the better species having advanced about 100 per cent during the same period.

The following table prepared by Alfred Fraser of New York is based on the London Sales of C. M. Lamson & Co.

Kind of Skin	Percentage Increase in Prices	
	1902-1911 over 1892-1901	1902-1911 over 1882-1891
Fox, Silver	56	300
Cross	100	125
Red	24	245
Blue	100	100
White	100	350
Marten, pine	15	580
Fisher or pekan	430	430
Mink	150	300
Skunk	110	150
Muskkrat	130	200
Lynx	130	200
Otter, land	170	80
sea	65	240

The value of raw furs marketed yearly amounts roughly to \$10,000,000 which when cured, dyed and made into wearing apparel costs in the retail trade \$50,000,000. It would seem therefore that the fur-farmers of Prince Edward Island have not only developed a very lucrative industry but have drawn the attention of the world to the conservation of a great natural resource which was rapidly tending towards extinction. The fact stands in the face that if we are to enjoy the comfort and luxury of fine furs we cannot for any lengthened period depend upon the commercial exploitation of the wilds but must attempt to carry out some creative measures. "We can all live on the interest of Nature" as a great naturalist has said "but our descendants will starve if we attack the capital."

There are now three main centres to the fox industry in Prince Edward Island, namely, Charlottetown, Alberton, and Summerside. Until three or four years ago fox ranching was carried on mainly around Alberton and Tignish, at the extreme western end of the Province. At the present time, with the increased interest and activity in the business, there is a tendency to establish ranches in the more easterly districts.

Within a radius of two miles of Charlottetown one may find today a supply of silver foxes worth at least \$5,000,000. And even farther east around Souris and Murray Harbour foxes and ranches exist in large numbers.

The following excerpt is taken from the Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture issued March, 1914:—"The industry has created great corporate activity in a field where such enterprise had been conspicuously lacking, inasmuch that there were more new industrial and trading companies chartered in the Province in the year 1912 than in forty years before, while in 1913 the new companies exceeded both in their numbers and capitalization all that had been incorporated since the Province was united with Canada, including those of 1912. And during the same two years more capital from outside of the Island was invested in corporate enterprises within its shores than had been brought in during the period of a generation before."

Under authority of the Act passed by the Legislature in April last entitled "An Act to Impose a Tax Upon Foxes Held in Captivity in this Province" which imposed a tax of 1 per cent on the value of the increase in value of the income tax of 14 per cent formerly paid, an official enumeration was made in August last, with a valuation of the young foxes for the purpose of taxation.

This valuation was made under sworn statements from every fox ranch as to the number, character and legal ownership of its animals, only the young foxes born and reared during the year being liable to taxation. The total number of fox ranches was found to be 277 and of foxes of all grades 3,190, which are tabulated below as Silver, Crosses, Reds and Unclassed, respectively. The number of old and young foxes, the number of vixens and males and the number of breeding and non-breeding vixens were found to be as subjoined:

Description	Silvers	Crosses	Reds	Unclassed	Totals
Vixen, Breeding	215	84	118	1	418
Vixens, non-Breeding	343	65	105	6	519
Total Vixens	558	149	223	7	837
Males (Old)	441	144	194	59	838
Total Old Foxes	899	294	417	126	1736
1913 Young	708	271	414	6	1399
Total, all Foxes	1607	565	831	132	3135

	Average Value	Total Value	Taxes at 1 p. c.
Silvers	\$4,893	\$3,439,449	\$34,394
Crosses	992	249,989	2,500
Reds	66	27,125	271
Unclassed	100	690	6
Aggregates		\$3,717,163	\$37,172

It is to be observed that the official valuation for purposes of taxation was much under the actual selling prices, which advanced after the enumeration was made. It is also to be noted that the value of foxes of one year old and upwards and especially of proved breeders, is considerably greater than young ones in their first year. Bearing these facts in mind, together with the fact that the prices have been almost continually advancing and have never receded, the following tabulated estimate of the value of foxes in captivity in the Province with the ranches and equipment at the close of 1913 may be considered a moderate one: "The enumeration was made in August 1913.

899 Old Silvers at \$10,000 each	\$8,990,000
703 Young Silvers at \$7,000 each	4,921,000
294 Old Crosses at \$800 each	235,200
271 Young Crosses at \$1,000 each	271,000
417 Old Reds at \$75 each	31,275
414 Young Reds at \$66 each	27,126
50 Blue Foxes at \$400 each	20,000
130 Unclassed Foxes at \$1,000 each	130,000
277 Ranches at Ranch Prop. at \$750	207,750

This makes a total estimated value, (31st Dec. 1913) of \$15,186,150. At the date of writing (June 23rd, 1914) the old foxes in captivity together with the young of the present breeding season could not be purchased for Twenty-five Millions of Dollars. The above estimated valuation of the fox industry in the Province is equal to more than three times and value of all the livestock including cattle, horses, sheep, swine and poultry which total according to the Canadian census of 1911 is given at \$7,500,000.

### EARLY HISTORY.

Some thirty years ago Benjamin Daywood succeeded, after some years, in rearing a litter of two young "Silvers" from a pair captured in the wild. The pelts of these two were sold for \$75.00 and \$125.00, respectively. Owing to the cramped quarters and the unsuitable surroundings the parent foxes died and the enterprise was abandoned.

The real pioneers of the industry as we have it today were Charles Dalton and Robert Oulton. Mr. Dalton, now Hon. Chas. Dalton in the Government of Prince Edward Island, began experimenting with red foxes in 1887. He experimented secretly keeping his foxes in a small shed at Nail Pond. About the same time Mr. Oulton was pursuing similar experiments on Savage Island with a pair of silver foxes which were obtained from a trapper on Anticosti Island. In 1894 Messrs Dalton and Oulton joined interests and together they worked unmolested and successfully with their animals on the isolated area of Savage Island in Alberton Harbor. The ranch was built in a slope of spruce and hardwood and there, for the first time, wire netting was used in the construction of the pens.

The ranch was built and equipped by Mr. Oulton, Mr. Dalton supplying two pairs of black foxes, one of which had been secured at Morell, P. E. Island, and the other from Lewis Spence of Beauséjour. The pair were never experimented with western black foxes. They kept the strain pure and to prevent too much breeding, secured from trappers from time to time native eastern foxes of good quality. Only the best were retained from year to year for breeding purposes. The best dens or nests were hollow logs brought to the ranch, but in time it was learned that this occasioned the breeding mother was unnecessary and the modern kennel was eventually substituted.

The problem of selecting the most suitable food for the animals had to be studied and solved. In this connection it might be said that one of the most important of the early discoveries was that whole wheat bread furnished a wholesome and complete food.

In the late 90's three other men, James Tuplin, James Gordon and Silas Boyser became interested in the possibilities of domesticating foxes and cultivating their fur. They attained a modicum of success rearing several litters of silver foxes.

In 1897 Mr. Dalton built a ranch of his own at Tignish but still kept an interest in the ranch on Savage Island. At Tignish he developed into the chief fur-merchant of the Island buying and selling skins and conducting the general fur business for the entire district.

### PELT VALUE.

The pelts obtained from the ranch-bred foxes gradually improved in quality owing to careful selection, follows:

Year	No. of Skins	Total Value	Average Value
1905	11	\$ 597.33	\$ 54.30
1906	3	973.33	324.44
1907	28	2282.80	81.53
1908	27	3674.20	136.05
1909	10	10852.67	1085.27
1910	1	1995.33	1995.33
1911	85	\$8819.66	\$103.76

It may be noticed that since 1910 the skins of the highest P. E. Island quality have been marketed in London or elsewhere. Only a few skins from foxes that died from accident or disease or such as had grown too

old to breed were marketed. The reason for this is obvious. The profits from fox-breeding has proved to be so exceptionally large that many were induced to enter the business and the demand for breeding foxes absorbed all that were produced.

The reports from the London sales have shown a continually ascending scale of prices. Although some furs decrease in price there never has been a "slump" in the market quotation on silver fox.

Reports published by C. M. Lamson & Co., London, England, June, 1913—"FOX SILVER, Advanced 25 per cent. The offering which was unusually good for the time of year, met with excellent competition and realized considerably higher prices."

October, 1913—"FOX SILVER, Advanced 40 per cent. Sold very well; the finest dark show little change in value, but all the paler and inferior skins, especially those resembling Fox Cross, realized high prices."

January, 1914—"FOX SILVER, Advanced 50 per cent. Were in excellent request and sold rather higher than last sale, all kinds participating in the improved demand."

A London fur broker who visited Prince Edward Island in the Autumn of 1913, and inspected the foxes in some ranches in the vicinity of Charlottetown gave it as his opinion that the pelts he saw were of an average worth \$1500 each.

In this connection the following extract from a lecture delivered by Mr. J. B. Romhough, a well known American Scientist before the members of the Academy of Science, Baltimore, Md., on April 20th, 1914 is significant:—"While I was in Europe last summer I visited the Zoological gardens in London, also those in Antwerp and Brussels and in Paris, France, and not one of these places had a specimen of a Silver Fox. They said when I inquired about them, 'they were too rare and expensive to be found in a zoo.' Seeing some fox skins in a large retail fur store on Rue De La Paix, Paris, I went in and inquired about them. They were shown to me and I saw three, and four thousand dollars respectively. Upon my return to New York I saw in 'Revilleon Freres' window, on 4th St., some skins. I went in and they showed them to me and asked \$500 for the lighter color skin and \$2000 for the real dark skin. They were of the same quality as I priced in Paris, and I might say in neither case were the pelts to be compared with those I have seen on Prince Edward Island."

### FOX BREEDING AS AN INDUSTRY

Three successive years of large profits have demonstrated that silver fox breeding is by far the most lucrative live stock industry in the world today, and the confidence in its future by those engaged in it was never before so strong and firm as it is now. That confidence rests upon the following well-established facts:

That the native silver fox of Prince Edward Island produces the most valuable and profitable commodity and has broken all previous records on the London fur-market.

That the strain has been improved by careful breeding so as to ensure the reproduction of high pelt values from generation to generation.

That the conditions of soil and climate here are unequalled elsewhere for the production of the silver fox at its best.

That 85 per cent. of all the silver foxes in captivity are in the ranches in Prince Edward Island.

### PRESENT DEMAND.

The silver black foxes of Prince Edward Island are at present being bred and marketed purely for breeding purposes. Those interested in the fur industry and stock-breeders generally have been quick to realize the great importance and immense possibilities of the new industry. Fox ranching as an industry has spread over Eastern Canada and the northern states of America, and the demand for pedigreed Prince Edward Island foxes has been greater than the supply. This led to the introduction of Newfoundland and western foxes as breeders, but the progeny of these do not bear the peculiar characteristics which have attracted the attention of and commanded the high price from London buyers.

### FUR VALUES.

Silver black fox skins on account of their rarity and intrinsic character have shared with the sable the place of honour at London fur sales. According to "Fur Farming in Canada" the handbook prepared by Mr. J. Walter Jones at the instance of the Commissioner of Conservation of Canada, the average price of all silver fox skins sold in London including the wild stock and ranch stock was as follows:

Year	Average Price
1905	\$146.53
1906	156.92
1907	157.11
1908	168.91
1909	244.12
1910	414.37
1911	290.01

"This drop was due to the absence of Island skins in any quantity. The value as shown by the return of sales for P. E. Island silver fox skins for the same period was as follows:

Year	No. of Skins	Total Value	Average Value
1905	11	\$ 597.33	\$ 54.30
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ing of foxes is the sanitation of the ranch. According to Dr. Higgins, V. S., B. S., pathologist of the Dominion Department of Agriculture, the pens should contain an area of 3,000 square feet, only one pair occupying each pen. The runs for exercise are usually from 50 to 60 feet in length.

The feeding utensils should be sterilized before each meal, the foxes being fed twice a day. The foxes are usually fed on raw meat, fish, milk and whole-wheat bread. The dieting when properly understood is simple and inexpensive, but at the same time it is one of the most important considerations in fox rearing as up to the present, intestinal troubles have been almost entirely the sole cause of loss.

### PRESENT PRICES AND PROFITS.

As has been already stated foxes are at present being marketed for breeding purposes and in consequence of the immense demand prices have shown a steady increase. In 1910 the cost of a pair of first-class pedigreed breeders from a recognized strain was \$4,000, in 1911 the price rose to \$6,000, in 1912 to \$10,000, and in 1913 to \$15,000. The current price for proved breeders of Class A, P. E. Island stock ranges from \$20,000 to \$25,000, according to fur quality and productiveness. Options on young foxes for Autumn delivery cost from \$13,000 to \$15,000 according to purity of pedigree.

In this connection the following quotation may be given from an article by Mr. W. C. Anderson who discussed the future of foxes from an economic point of view:—"I hear that options are now being taken on 1914 pups for \$13,000 per pair. Do ranchers realize what it means, to sell pups at this figure? It means, as shown in table C, that the purchaser is getting an investment that will increase in value nearly three times, and then pay 23 per cent. annually on this increased value. If 1914 pups are to be sold at all, they should not be sold at a penny less than \$22,000 per pair. At this price, even, the buyer would make a good investment. If this price is not forthcoming, then SELL NO INCREASE, it will pay to retain them in the ranch. In the same way, 1915 pups should not be sold for less than \$17,000 per pair.

This inquiry has shown that even at this apparently high capitalization of \$15,000 per pair, the industry is on a sound and profitable basis if conducted in the way indicated. Stock issued in 1913 should increase in value nearly five times during the next four years, and then pay an average of 23 per cent. interest annually on this increased valuation for the next ten years. Thereafter with good management on a large scale, the business should pay about 15 per cent. annually.

### OTHER FUR BEARERS

As a subsidiary industry to fox ranching, ranchers have come to realize the importance of similarly rearing other fur-bearing animals. There are about 100 minkeries throughout Canada, 25 per cent of which are located on Prince Edward Island, the remainder being principally in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. The current price of a pair of ranch-bred mink is \$250. Several skunkeries and mixed breeding ranches have been established in the Province and considerable progress has been made in rearing these animals in captivity.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOX.

The fox is naturally disposed to be nervous towards all unfamiliar sights, noises or odours. Through some cases the keeper succeeds in winning the confidence of his foxes particular care is taken to keep them undisturbed during the mating and breeding periods. Especially after parturition the vixen must be kept undisturbed, strange sights often causing her to get into the pen, when she carries her young around the pen seeking a hiding place. The exposure is liable to cause the death of the young puppies. Many ranchers even remove the male fox to a separate pen as a precautionary measure. Fifty-one days is the average gestation period. The pups are obtained as a rule on the middle of March to the first week in May, the litters containing from one to six pups. In some rare cases litters of seven and even eight have been known. When the young ones are about four weeks old the mother fox for the first time carries them from the nest to the open air. The mother usually weans her young when they are three months old. Foxes are monogamous. The pairs are mated in September and from this on it is customary to close the ranch and keep them in seclusion.

### MODERN METHODS OF RANCHING

The present method of ranching is the outcome of many experiments, and the application of scientific knowledge to the development of the industry. It is essential that a ranch be suitably located under conditions as near as possible to those of the native haunts. For this purpose ranches are usually located in woods, preferably a mixed growth of soft and hard-wood sufficiently open overhead to allow the sun to penetrate. A high and strong guard-fence is run around the whole enclosure seven to eight feet high, with an "overhang" wire four feet wide, supported on brackets attached at right angles to the top of the fence. Within this enclosure spacious pens are wired off, the wire being carried into the ground to the subsoil, a distance of three or four feet to prevent the foxes burrowing to freedom, and within each pen is a specially built kennel, which consists of an inner and an outer apartment entered from the outside by a 7 1/2 in. by 10 in. board chute sloping to the ground. The inner kennel or nest in which the young foxes are born is about 18 inches square. Insulating packing is placed around the nest to ensure an even temperature. The nest thus retains the body warmth of the fox in winter, and does not suffer from the excessive summer heat.

The pens are usually built side by side in rows, with an alley leading down the centre for watering and feeding purposes. To secure continued immunity from epidemics the ranches are now being constructed with a dead air space of from five feet to ten feet below the pens.

### BREEDING AND CARING

The first essential in care and feeding

fortunate indeed that Prince Edward Island has boldly entered this field of industrial activity while the enterprise is yet new and while the rewards are so great and the prospects so bright as they are at the present time."

### ASSOCIATION OF FOX BREEDERS

With the object of preserving the old Island type of animal, which some claim to be a sub-species of the Silver Fox, the Fox Ranchers of the Province formed a Breeders' Association, Sept. 24, 1913 to carry out a system of registration and classification.

The following classification for Silver Foxes was adopted:—  
Class A.—Any silver fox shall be eligible for registration in Class A whose parents are silver in color and bred in captivity in Prince Edward Island, and never produced any but silver foxes.

Class B.—Any silver fox shall be eligible for registration in Class B whose parents are silver in color and bred in captivity, not necessarily in P. E. Island.

Class C.—Any silver fox, free from red or rust, no matter what its parentage, provided it is bred in Prince Edward Island, shall be eligible for registration in Class C.

Class D.—Any silver fox, free from red or rust, no matter what its parentage or place of birth, shall be eligible for registration in Class D.

It may be noticed that the underlying idea in this classification is the superiority of the old "Island" silver black foxes.

The Association has not been incorporated and is entirely voluntary, but the classification is generally recognized.

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