Forecast Hauls of Mackerel

Ichthyology

By LEWIS RADCLIFFE
U. S. Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries

At this season of the year, the mackerel seiners at Gloucester and other fishing ports are busily engaged in outfitting their boats for the southern fishery and the lover of fresh mackerel is looking forward to the day when the freshly caught fish will appear on his menu. The fisherman is at sea as to whether mackerel will be abundant again this year, and later the cold storage man will be at a loss to know whether he should buy for freezing at current prices, or defer such action, hoping for an abundant supply at lower prices later on in order that we may have our mackerel the year round. Naturally, mature information on the probable abundance of fish will benefit the trade in making their plans for the season, subtracting uncertainties and contributing to the stability of industry and therefore to keeping down the price of the fish to you and me.

The supply of such pelagic or surface swimming fishes as mackerel and herring is largely dependent upon unusually favorable conditions in certain years which augment the stocks in the sea and provide good fishing as long as such rich year classes remain abundant. Additions to the supply in intervening years are too small to maintain a large fishery.

From 1860 to 1885 an annual catch of more than 70 millions of pounds of mackerel on our North Atlantic coast was not uncommon and occasionally as much as 100 million pounds were taken. Then a sharp decline set in and for forty years annual catches of from 5 to 25 million pounds have been the rule.

As a result of a fairly large brood in 1921 and an even better one in 1923, mackerel reappeared in abundance in the catches beginning with 1925. In that year the catch was 34 million pounds and in 1926 47 million pounds, declining to 42 million pounds in 1927, and 31 million pounds in 1928. Thus we are able to observe the rise and fall of the catch from two rich year classes. Evidently unless another rich year class appears, the catch will continue downward to the 40-year level between 1885 and 1925.

Fortunately the 1927 year class appears to have been good, but just how rich it is too early to estimate. In 1928 it contributed over 1,600,000 pounds of "tinker" size mackerel and this year's catch will reveal more definitely how abundant the 1927 brood is. This year the 1927 brood will be two years old, weighing about one pound, whereas the 1923 fish will weigh two pounds or more.

O. E. Sette of the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries has been studying the mackerel fishery, analyzing each year's catch and assembling a fund of information which will be helpful in forecasting the abundance of mackerel. A year ago he predicted a falling off in the 1928 catch of not less than 12½ per cent., and now predicts a further decline of 30 to 50 per cent. in the catch of the older fish of 1923 brood. As the relative abundance of the 1927 year class cannot yet be estimated, it is unsafe to predict the total catch for 1929. If it is as rich as the 1923 year class, we may have another record catch in 1929, made up largely of two sizes or age groups, one measuring 14 to 15 inches in length, and the other 16 inches or more.

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Automobile trucks that burn charcoal gas instead of gasoline have been introduced into Chile, and are pronounced very economical.

A new device attached to a front door lock switches off the hall light inside the house when you lock the door, and lights the light when you unlock the door.

Automobile drivers in Peru must pass a complete psychological and physical examination, and must repeat the test every six months, in order to prove that their original qualifications are maintained.

The only states not included in the birth-registration area are New Mexico, South Dakota, and Texas.

Florida spent more on public schools in 1926 in proportion to her annual income than any other state.

Civil airports will be the forts of the nation in future emergencies, a government aeronautics official predicts.

A fossil tusk seven feet long, belonging to a prehistoric mammoth, has been found in Alaska and presented to the Field Museum.