

St. Matthew Alaska Deer Population Crash

[Population Dynamics: An Introduction for Alaskan Reindeer Herders](#)

Andrew John Karter

University of California, Davis

Robert A. Dieterich

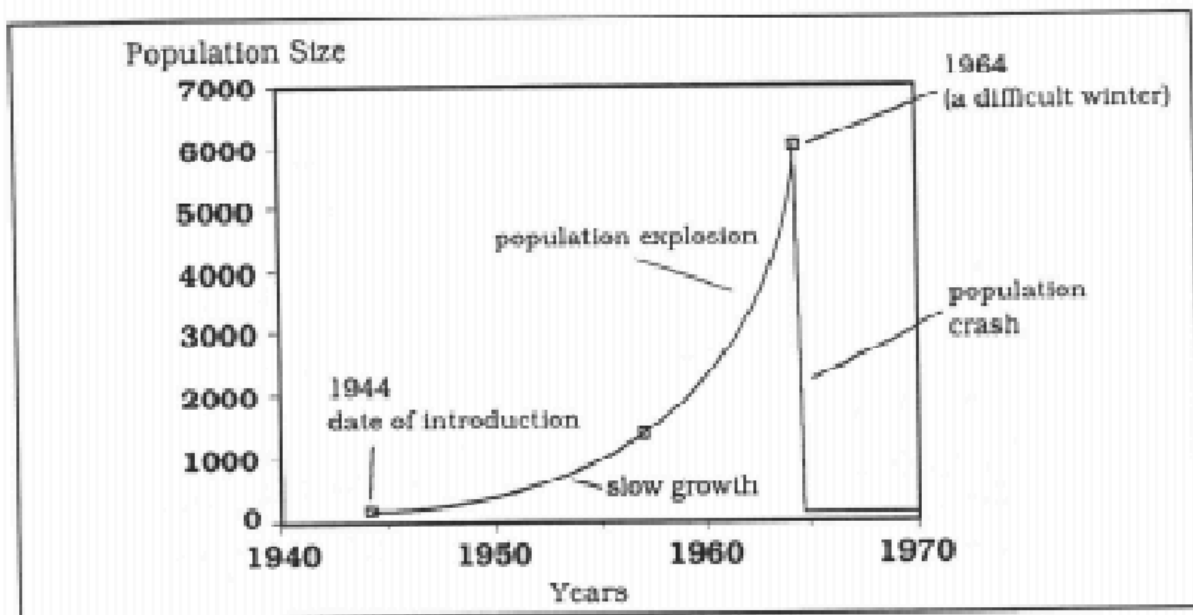
Professor of Veterinary Science, Emeritus

Institute of Arctic Biology,

University of Alaska Fairbanks

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St. Matthew Island Reindeer Population Dynamics



St. Matthew Island's reindeer herd provides a good example of a population explosion and crash. When 29 reindeer were introduced to St. Matthew in 1944, the island was covered with a thick mat of lichens. With the abundance of high quality forage, the herd increased dramatically, and by the summer of 1963 there were 6000 unmanaged reindeer on the island. There were however, less than 50 reindeer alive that next spring. St. Matthew's reindeer population increased dramatically because there was little hunting or predation, good fawn production and an abundance of high quality forage.

As the St. Matthew reindeer population grew, increasing amounts of forage were required. Soon most of the lichens (high quality winter forage) were used up, and sedges and grasses (medium quality winter forage) took their place in the ground cover. At the time of the crash, deep snows limited availability of the remaining forage.