

Pacific Isle Cats Eliminated

By Harry Whitten
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Jarvis island, a speck in the Pacific ocean 1,300 miles south of Honolulu, may be cat-less now. Or it may have one cat left.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service isn't sure, but it hopes there are no cats left. Staff members of the service made trips there recently to try to eliminate all the cats because they were eating the birds and had eliminated certain small species of birds.

Jarvis, as well as its neighbors, Baker and Howland islands, are units of the Pacific Islands National Wildlife Refuges. All the cats were eliminated from Baker in 1964 and shortly thereafter some species of seabird, previously absent, were breeding on Baker.

A few cats remain on Howland, although an attempt was made in 1979 to eliminate them.

David Woodside, of the Fish and Wildlife Service, tells about trips this year to Jarvis to get rid of the feral cats, descendants of domestic cats that have gone wild.

HE AND Mark Rauzon, a gradu-

ate student at the University of Hawaii, were on Jarvis for four weeks in June and July. During the first two weeks they just looked and studied the birds and cats and during the last two weeks they tried to eliminate the cats. They killed 110 cats that they could count; possibly they got a few others.

Woodside returned to Jarvis last month, accompanied this time by Steve Fairaizl, assistant refuge manager on Tern island, French Frigate Shoals, and Uti-maawa, a Gilbertese who is the conservation officer on Christmas island. The trip to Jarvis was made aboard the schooner Machias from Christmas island.

During the six days there, the party saw three cats and killed two, a female and a male. They got a shot at a third cat but don't know if they hit it.

There is a good chance the cat problem on Jarvis has been solved unless the third cat survived and is a pregnant female. Woodside hopes to return to Jarvis in April to look at the situation.

THE CATS are descended from pets brought to the tiny islands

by colonists and which remained after the colonists left. Cats on Howland were exterminated in 1964 by members of the Smithsonian Institution Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program but reappeared in 1966 after a visit by the U.S. military.

Robert J. Shallenberger, supervisory wildlife biologist here with the Fish and Wildlife Service, said Howland may be the focus of the next effort to eliminate cats.

He explained that cats are introduced predators, that they created recent problems on the islands, and that each cat will kill several hundred seabirds a year.

He admitted that it is not a satisfying part of a refuge manager's job to eliminate one species in favor of another but



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said that in an island situation, native species should be favored over exotic species.

He said a striking increase in the number and diversity of birds occurred on Baker after the cats were eliminated.

JARVIS IS a 1,100-acre island just south of the equator that is uninhabited by human beings. Vegetation consists of grasses, prostrate vines and low-growing shrubs. The island is believed to have been discovered Aug. 21, 1821, by a Capt. Brown of the English ship Eliza Francis.

Representatives of the American Guano Co. claimed it in 1857 under the Guano Act of 1856 and later in 1857 Cmdr. Charles H. Davis surveyed the island and formally claimed it for the United States. Guano was dug

from 1858 to 1879.

Great Britain annexed the island on June 3, 1889, and a London and Melbourne guano company leased the island in 1906 but did not do much guano mining.

In order to assert American claim to Jarvis, Howland and Baker, all of which also were claimed by Britain, the United States colonized them in the years from 1935 to 1941. Hawaiian youths from the Kamehameha Schools were the colonists and two colonists — Joseph Keliianai and Richard Waley — were killed by Japanese air attacks on Howland Dec. 18, 1941.

The three islands were annexed to the United States by President Franklin D. Roosevelt shortly before the outbreak of World War II.

