Hunting Qawa̱x (Sea Lion) in Unalaska and Atka

Overview

In Unanga̱x culture, sea mammals are highly important and respected animals. Historically, nearly every part of the animal was eaten or purposefully used. In this film, brothers Moses and Larry Dirks, in Unalaska, and Danny Snigaroff, in Atka, share their knowledge and experience hunting qawa̱x (A), or sea lion, in the Aleutian Islands.

Some of the Essential Tools to Bring

Safety Tips:

Always prepare for emergencies when you go out hunting on the water. Here are some examples of important safety items to bring:

- Life jackets
- Extra fuel
- Extra clothes and rain gear
- Axe
- Oars (in case motor breaks down)
- Bucket (if needed to remove water from boat)

UNANGAM TUNUU:

Qawa̱x (A) – Sea lion
Qawas (A) – Sea lions
Qayu̱x (A) – Retrieving hook
Saygi̱x (A) – Rifle
Ukina̱x (A) – Knife

E = Qawalangin, or Eastern dialect
A = Nii̱gux̱, or Western or Atkan dialect

By: Shara Kay
**TIPS FOR HUNTING QAWAX**

**WHO:**
- Always hunt with two or more people. Don’t go hunting alone.
- Make sure someone in your group is familiar with the area.
- Make sure someone in your group is an experienced boat captain/driver.

**WHEN:**
- You can hunt during the summer and fall in Atka and Unalaska.
- Wait for favorable conditions. For example, don’t go out when the wind is blowing past 25 to 35 miles per hour because the waves will be too big.

**WHERE:**
- In the summer, qawax can be found hanging out near fish streams.
- Listen to resident hunters for tips and information on where to find local haulouts.

**HOW TO HERD:**
- Once you spot the qawas, herd/drive them to where you want to shoot.
- It is best to herd the qawas towards shallow water and to avoid the kelp beds, so you don’t have to continuously clean kelp out of your motor.
- Herd the qawas away from areas with boulders. It can be very hard to retrieve the qawas from areas with boulders.

**WHEN TO SHOOT:**
Wait until the qawax comes to the surface of the water and inhales to ensure its lungs will be full of air. This helps to keep the qawax floating on the surface of the water for a while, making it easier to retrieve.
- Aim for the head so you do not spoil the meat.
- When waters get rough, hunt from a nearby rock.

**HOW TO RETRIEVE AND HAUL:**
- Use a qayux (A) (retrieving hook) to pull the qawax up to the boat. A retrieving hook has a wooden body with a j-hook and a lead sinker on it.
- Thread a rope through the nose/front teeth and pull the head to the stern, or back of boat.
- Tow the qawax by starting off slow, gradually gaining in speed. Tow to wherever you are going to butcher it.

**UNANGAX WAY:**
Live with and respect the land, sea and all of nature.
Tanañningi łqayusalix anqajaîinchin ñqnałtxichin (E)
Tanañ, alañuñ ama slum imugan huzuun anaqîm anqâxingis sahnganatada (A)

By: Shara Kay & Chrissy Roes

Qaqamiigux

In pursuit of the food and culture, Alaska's indigenous peoples

APIA