

AGE, GROWTH, AND REPRODUCTION OF BELUGA WHALES FROM THE EASTERN CHUKCHI SEA, ALASKA

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Measurements and biological samples were collected from 445 beluga whales taken in the subsistence drive hunt by Alaska Natives at Point Lay, Alaska from 1987 to 1998. The belugas in this harvest are from the eastern Chukchi Sea. Asymptotic lengths of white males (~440 cm) were longer than white females (~363 cm) but lengths of the younger gray-white males and females and gray males and females did not differ. Small and young belugas were underrepresented in both length and age compositions of the harvest. More males were taken in the harvest than females. Overall pregnancy rate was 0.56, which included females pregnant with small and term fetuses and post-parturient. Pregnancy rate for only females with small fetuses was 0.41. A pregnancy rate of 0.41 indicates a calving interval of between 2 to 3 years. Reproductive rates of females decline with age indicated by a lowered pregnancy rate (after 13 years) and decreasing corpora count (after 20 years of age).

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ABSTRACTS

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