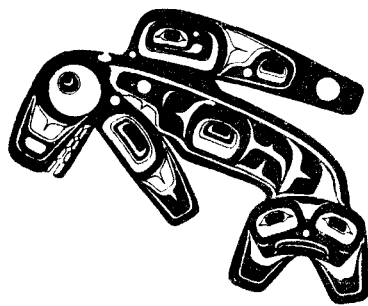


FEEDING OF BEARDED SEALS IN THE BERING AND CHUKCHI SEAS AND IMPLICATIONS WITH RESPECT TO CARRYING CAPACITY. Lloyd F. LOWRY\*, Kathryn J. Frost and John J. Burns, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

Current and historical information about food habits of bearded seals, Erignathus barbatus, are evaluated. Feeding varies with age of seals, location and time of year. Shrimps, crabs and clams are the most important prey. Young seals eat mostly shrimps. Recently, clams were important in the diet only in Norton Sound and near Wainwright, and only during late spring and summer. In the Bering Strait seals taken in spring 1958 and 1967 consumed large quantities of clams but this item was only a minor fraction of foods in 1974-78. Walruses, Odobenus rosmarus, have increased steadily since 1960. Whereas the Bering Strait was mainly a route through which walruses migrated in spring and fall, this region is now also an area in which large numbers (up to 60,000) spend the summer and fall. The walruses feed mainly on clams. Increased foraging activity of walruses may well have reduced availability of this food item for bearded seals. The walrus population appears to be exhibiting indications of stress which are probably reflections of numbers at or in excess of carrying capacity. Indices of population condition in bearded seals have remained stable, perhaps due to their more euryphagous habits.

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