

SYMPOSIUM: Steller Sea Lions

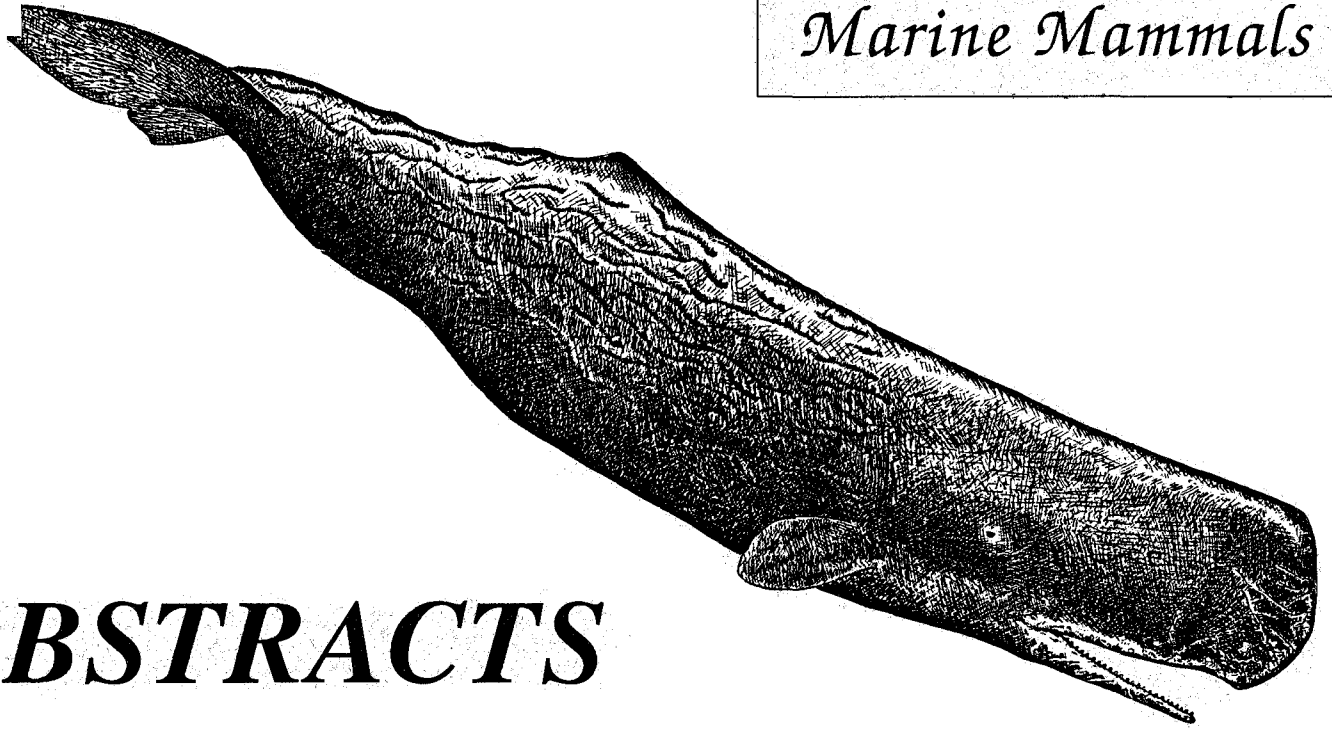
PREY SELECTION IN STELLER SEA LIONS IN THE GULF OF ALASKA.

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Steller sea lion prey were studied in the Gulf of Alaska during the period 1975-79 and again during 1985-86 by collecting animals and determining contents of stomachs. Two hundred and forty one stomachs were examined; one hundred fifty three in 1975-79 and 88 in 1985-86. Contents were removed in the field, weighed and examined. Hard parts were examined in the laboratory and identifications were made to the lowest taxon possible. In both periods sea lions ate a wide variety of fish and cephalopods. Walleye pollock (*Theragra chalcogramma*) was the most important prey item in the diet in both 1975-79 and 1985-86 collection by combined rank index (CRI). Squids (Goniatidae), Pacific herring (*Clupea harengus*), capelin (*Mallotus villosus*), Pacific cod (*Gadus macrocephalus*) and Pacific salmon (*Oncorhynchus* sp.) ranked 2 through 6 respectively in 1975-79 by CRI. Octopus (*Octopus* sp.), flatfishes (Pleuronectidae), Pacific cod, Pacific sand lance (*Ammodytes hexapterus*) and Pacific salmon were ranked 2 through 6 respectively in 1985-86. Some differences in ranking by area were noted. Pollock occurred in 2% of the stomachs examined in the 1960's, 66.7% in the 1970's and 41% in the 1980's. Both the range of sizes and the mean size of pollock consumed by sea lions in 1985-86 was significantly smaller. Mean weight of individual pollock consumed in 1985-86 was 37% smaller. Larger sea lions generally fed on larger pollock.

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ABSTRACTS

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