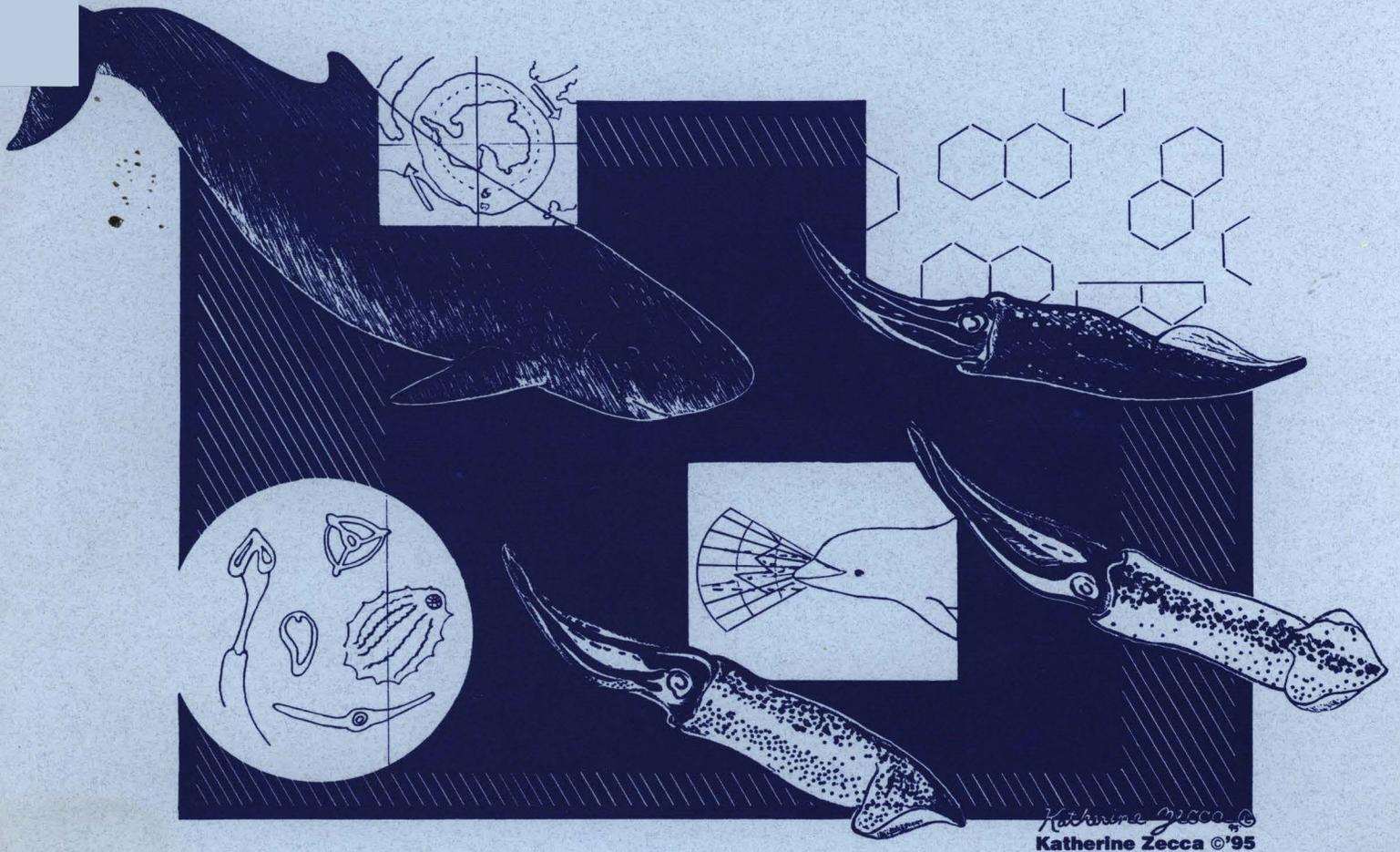


REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR OF STELLER SEA LIONS:
A COMPARISON BETWEEN A STABLE AND A DECLINING POPULATION
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The world population of Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*) has been declining since the late 1970s. In the United States, the Steller sea lion is listed as a *threatened* species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and may be reclassified as *endangered* in parts of their range. One of the leading hypotheses to explain the overall decline is that Steller sea lions are nutritionally stressed. A two-year study was therefore initiated in 1994 to contrast their reproductive behaviour during summer at two sites: Forrester Island in Southeast Alaska where sea lions abundance has been stable or increasing, and the Barren Islands in the Gulf of Alaska where sea lion numbers are declining. The study focuses on behaviours that have been reported to change during periods of naturally occurring or induced nutritional stress, namely: activity budgets and interactions of cows and bulls while ashore, male investment (size of territories, length of bull tenure, number of copulations) and maternal investment (perinatal period, number of suckling juveniles, time spent with pups and foraging at sea). Results from 1994 suggest that maternal attendance patterns and activity budgets differ significantly between the two sites. Females from the decreasing population had a significantly longer perinatal period than did females from the increasing population, and spent more time resting while on shore than did those at the stable site. Females from the declining site also spent significantly more time on the rookery with their pups than did females from the increasing site. Whether such behavioural differences reflect differences in nutritional status, demography or some other factor remains under investigation and can be further expounded upon with additional data collected in 1995 on pup developmental behaviour, male tenure duration and male activity budgets.

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ABSTRACTS