

SPOTTED SEAL AND BELUKHA WHALE USE OF A COASTAL LAGOON SYSTEM IN NORTHWESTERN ALASKA

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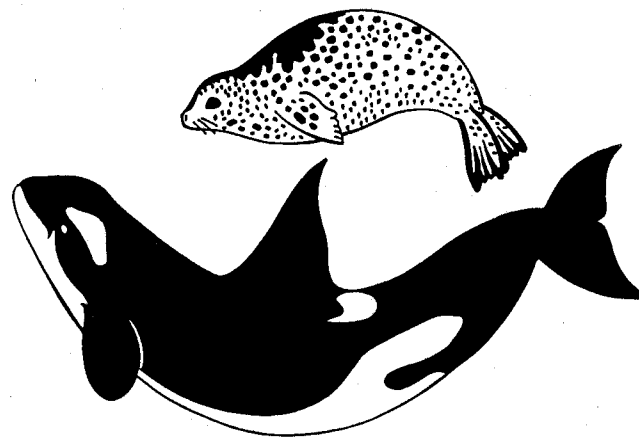
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Both spotted seals (*Phoca largha*) and belukha whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*) are found associated with sea ice for much of the year. During summer months they frequent ice-free coastal waters of the Bering and Chukchi seas.

A series of low-lying barrier islands extending along 170 km of the Chukchi Sea coast forms Kasegaluk Lagoon. Aerial surveys were conducted in this region in 1989-91 to document the distribution and numbers of marine mammals using the area. A group of about 1,000 belukhas appears on about July 1 at the south end of the study area. Over the next 2 weeks they disperse along the coast, often aggregating in and near lagoon passes. They usually leave the area by July 20. Spotted seals begin hauling out on certain spits and sandbars inside lagoon passes in mid-July. Numbers hauled out at particular locations are very variable, but peak at about 1,800. They remain in the area until at least mid-October. Data from satellite PTTs attached to 4 spotted seals in summer 1991 indicate that there is significant movement between passes and to offshore areas. These data will help us to better define use of different parts of the lagoon and how long seals remain in the lagoon before they migrate south for the winter.

The unique habitat provided by Kasegaluk Lagoon may be impacted by development of oil, gas, and coal resources.



Ann Spurgeon

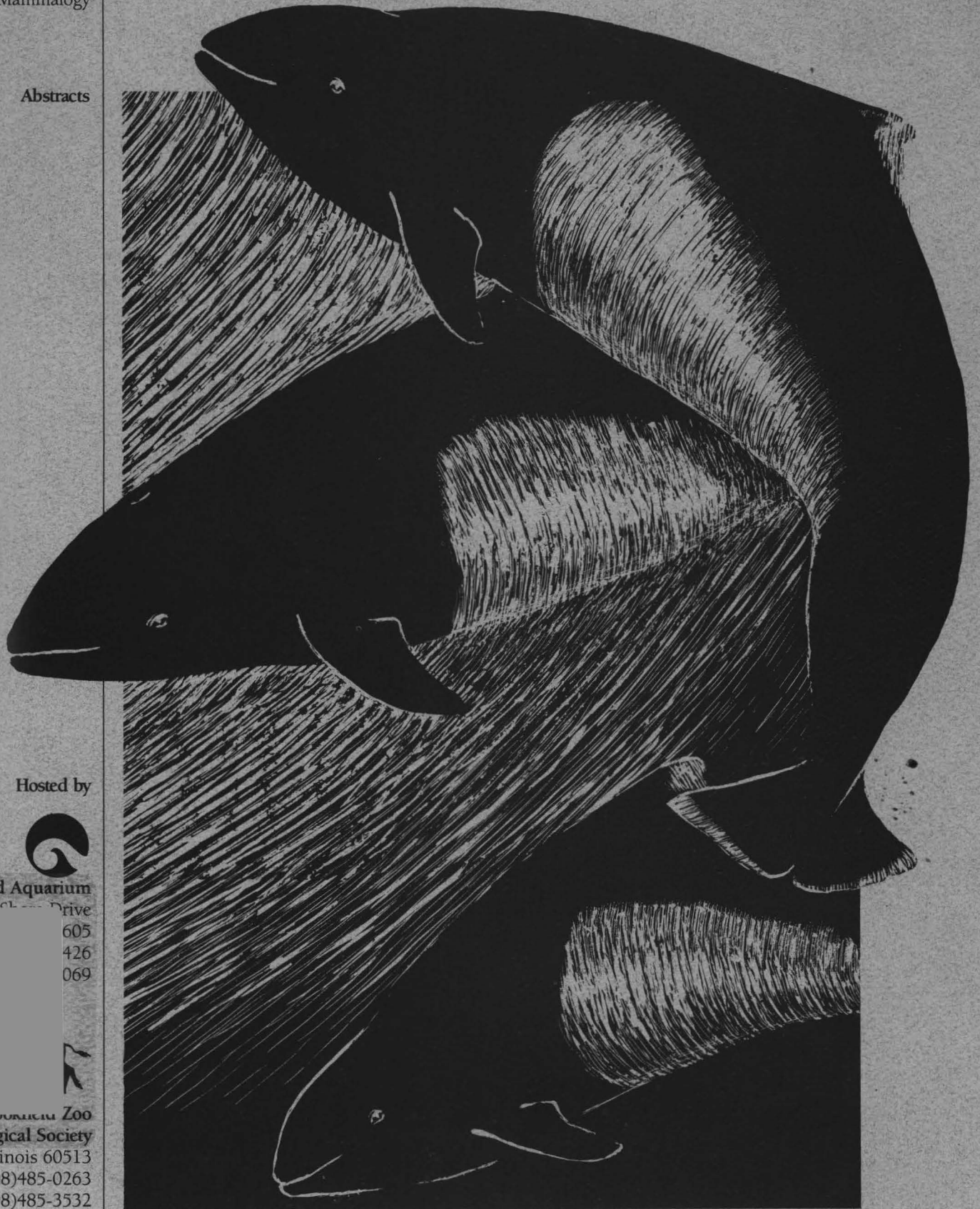


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