

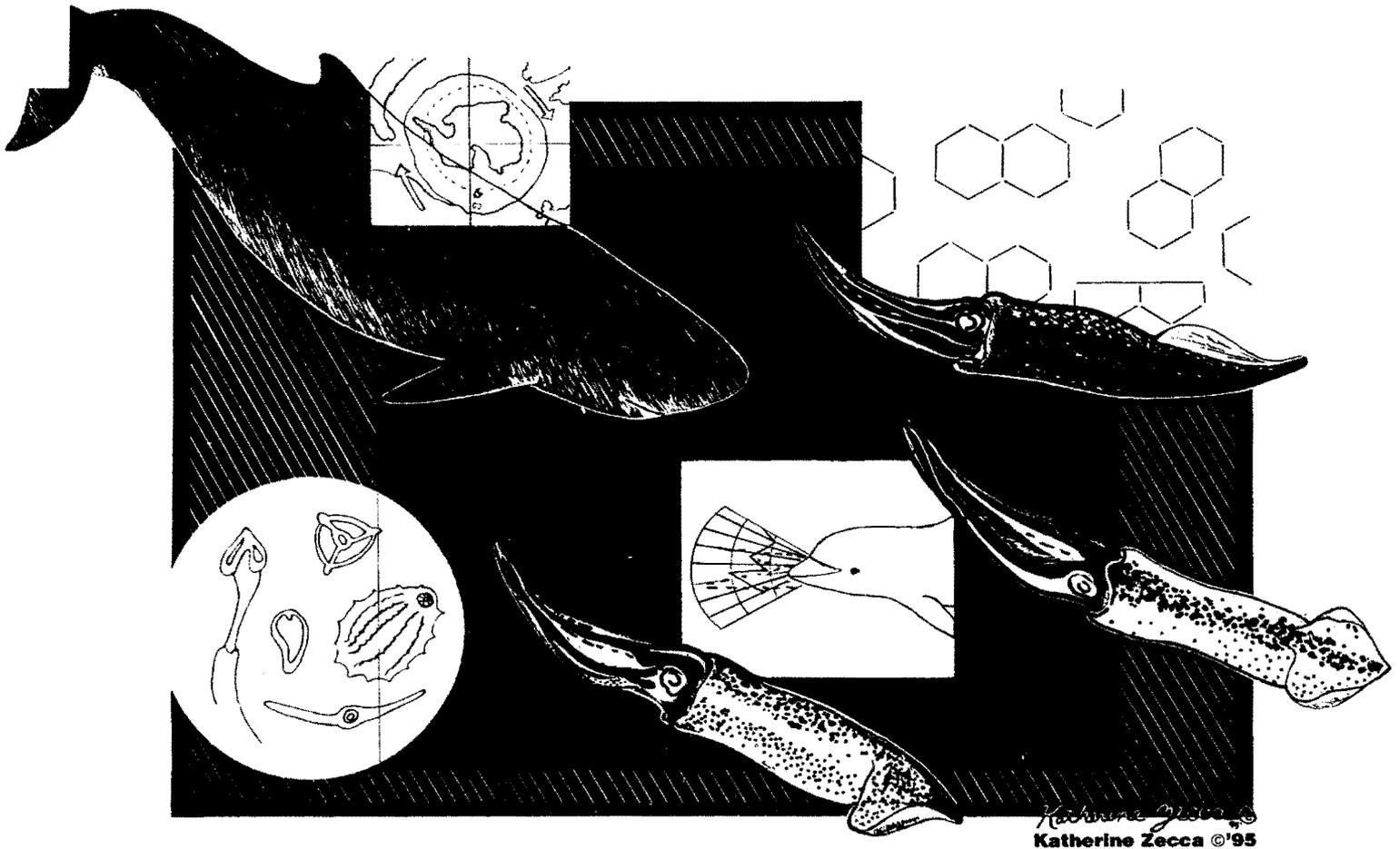
SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION OF STELLER SEA LIONS IN ALASKA

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Information on the seasonal distribution of Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*) are necessary to 1) analyze causes of their Alaskan population declines and 2) implement protective measures to restore the population. However, most available distribution data have been obtained during the breeding season (June-July). Consequently, the NMFS and ADF&G conducted aerial surveys during March-April 1993, and November-December 1994 which in combination with June-July 1992 and 1994 surveys provide the first Alaska-wide description of Steller sea lion seasonal distribution. Less than half as many animals were observed in the December-April period as during June-July, however, numbers on haul-outs (rather than rookery sites) were greater in winter than in summer. Populations on summer rookery sites were high until October-November, after which there was a rapid decline in numbers on the sites. During December-April, many rookery sites were empty, while many haul out sites were occupied that were empty in summer. A smaller proportion of animals were observed in the central Gulf of Alaska and eastern Aleutians in December-April than in June-July, while a greater proportion was observed in Southeast Alaska (the area with the most stable population). The redistribution of animals from or to specific sites and regions appear to be the result of animals migrating from one site or region to another on a seasonal basis, and different regional haul out patterns. Both would be the result of local differences in prey availability, or climatic/oceanographic conditions. These distributional data may be used by the NMFS and ADF&G to define sea lion protection areas which better match seasonal distribution patterns.

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ABSTRACTS