

WINTER ECOLOGY OF IMMATURE STELLER SEA LIONS

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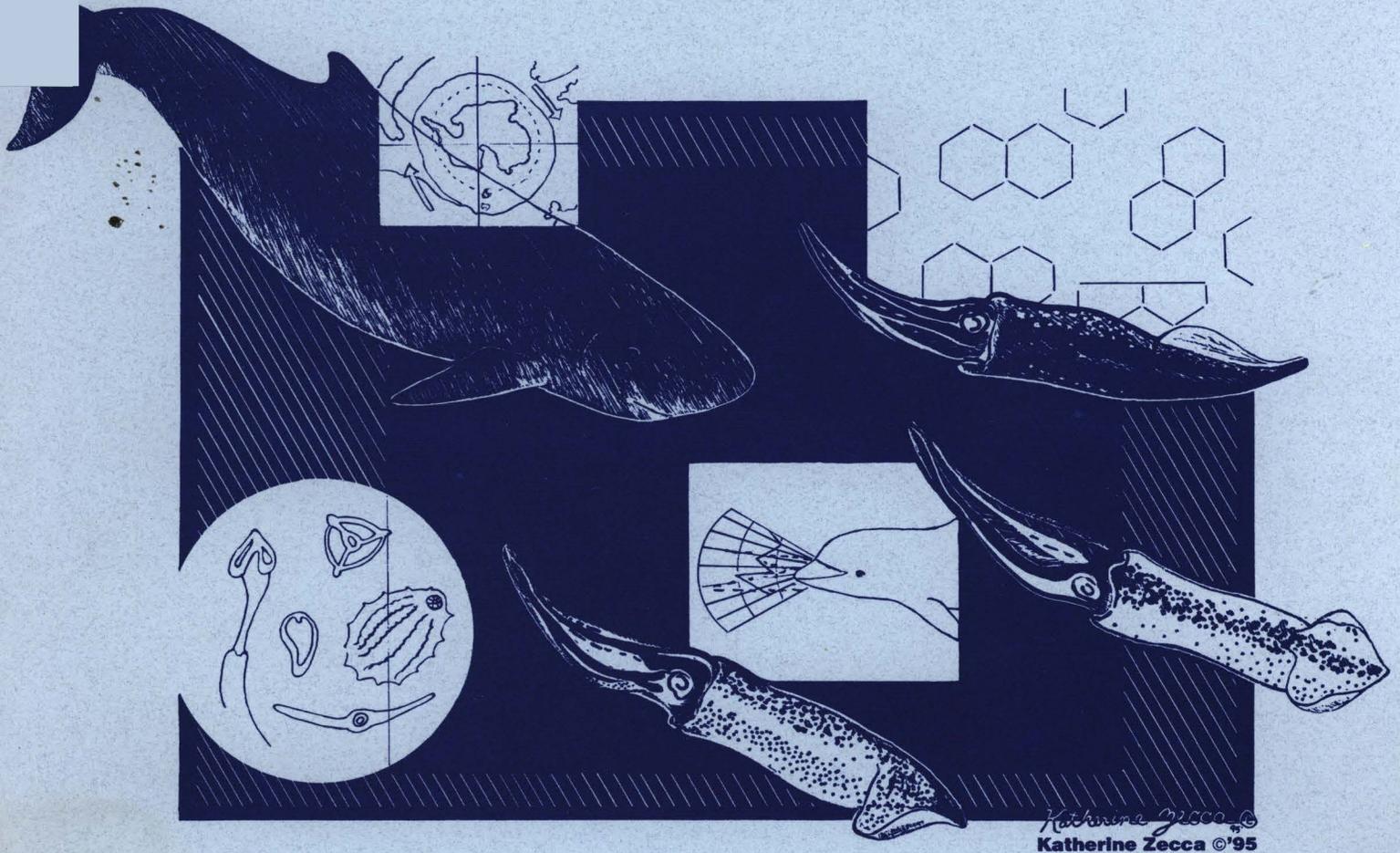
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The world population of Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*) has been declining since the late 1970s. One hypothesis explaining this decline is that young Steller sea lions are nutritionally stressed and are experiencing high mortality during winter. Understanding immature winter ecology during this critical period is essential to resolving the cause of the long term decline.

Data describing haulout patterns and activity budgets were collected on adult and immature (1-3yrs.) sea lions during winter (January to April) 1995 at Cape St. Elias, Alaska. Behaviours measured included: resting, suckling, aggression and others that have been reported to change during periods of naturally occurring or induced nutritional stress. Two sampling procedures were used (1) 30 minute interval instantaneous scan sampling and (2) 15 minute interval focal animal sampling. Activity budgets showed immature animals spend the majority of on-shore time resting (57%), followed by suckling (21%). No diurnal haulout patterns were observed. Haulout behaviour showed a significant correlation ($r = .827$, $p < 0.001$) between numbers of mature females on shore and numbers of immatures present. This suggests a high proportion of immatures are not fully behaviourally or physiologically weaned 3-5 months prior to breeding. Work will continue during winter 1996 to compare activity budgets and haulout behaviours at two sites, one in the area of decline (Cape St. Elias), the other in the area where they are not declining (Timbered Island).

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ABSTRACTS