

FINAL REPORT

Investigations of Belukha Whales in Coastal Waters
of Western and Northern Alaska.

- I. Distribution, Abundance, and Movements. G. A. Seaman,
K. J. Frost, and L. F. Lowry. 60 p.
- II. Biology and Ecology. J. J. Burns and G. A. Seaman. 129 p.
- III. Food Habits. L. F. Lowry, K. J. Frost, and G. A. Seaman. 24 p.

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I. Distribution, Abundance, and Movements

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SUMMARY

Belukha whales are widely distributed in the marine waters of western and northern Alaska. Seasonal movements are pronounced. During winter belukhas occur principally in the seasonal ice of the Bering Sea, although some may overwinter in the southern Chukchi Sea. Optimal habitat occurs in areas with leads, polynyas, or other areas of predictably open water. The spring migration begins in March and April. Some whales move eastward appearing in coastal waters of Bristol Bay in early April. Others move northward through Bering Strait and through the lead system which extends along the Chukchi Sea coast from Point Hope to Barrow. They then continue north and eastward to Banks Island and Amundsen Gulf where they arrive in May and June. Some of these whales summer in the Mackenzie Delta while others are found offshore in the eastern Beaufort Sea.

Groups of belukhas appear at many locations along the coast of western Alaska shortly after the ice breaks up and moves offshore. Large concentrations are regularly seen near the mouths of the Yukon River, in inner Norton Sound, in Kotzebue Sound, and near Kasegaluk Lagoon. Belukhas have been seen in the Yukon River more than 1200 km upstream from the river mouth.

The abundance of belukhas in coastal waters decreases markedly after August. Large numbers of whales are seen moving westward in the Beaufort and northeastern Chukchi seas in late August and September. During this westward, fall migration the belukhas are associated with the pack ice which is usually 50-100 km north of the Beaufort Sea coast. The path of the migration southward through the Chukchi Sea is poorly known. Whales pass south through Bering Strait during October and November.

Belukhas occur in all proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lease areas. The Saint Matthew-Hall, Saint George, Navarin, and North Aleutian basins include much of the winter habitat. The spring migration passes through the Norton Basin, Hope Basin, Barrow Arch, and Diapir Field lease areas. Major summer concentrations occur in the North Aleutian Basin, Norton Basin, Hope Basin, and Barrow Arch. During the fall migration very large numbers of belukhas pass through the Diapir Field and Barrow Arch.

Although belukhas still occur in all areas where they were known to occur historically, increased human activity in the coastal zone has resulted in some distributional shifts. These are particularly evident in Kotzebue Sound.

The abundance and interrelationships among groups of belukhas are poorly known. Based on available sightings, it appears that belukhas seen in Norton Sound and near the mouths of the Yukon River comprise a single group. Provisionally, the belukhas which summer in the eastern Chukchi Sea are also considered a single group which is seen sequentially at several locations. It is suggested that belukhas in western and northern Alaska comprise four stocks as follows: Bristol Bay - 1,000-1,500 animals; Norton Sound - 1,000-2,000 animals; eastern Chukchi Sea - 2,500-3,000 animals; eastern Beaufort Sea - 11,500 animals. The

minimum total number of animals which pass through the waters adjacent to Alaska is estimated as 13,500-18,000. Considering that belukhas also occur in waters of the USSR, the actual abundance of whales in the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort, and East Siberian seas may be in excess of 25,000.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was funded primarily by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Outer Continental Shelf Environmental Assessment Program. Additional support was provided by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program.

This study of belukha distribution did not have the benefit of funding for systematic surveys. Our results and conclusions therefore result from a compilation of many observations from various sources. We thank all the pilots, hunters, fishermen, biologists, and Alaskan residents who have recorded their observations of belukhas and made them available to us. Major contributions were made by John J. Burns, Francis H. Fay, Don K. Ljungblad, and Robert R. Nelson. John Burns was responsible for most aspects of project management and provided editorial comments on the report. Figures were prepared by Jesse Venable.

WORLD DISTRIBUTION

Belukha whales (Delphinapterus leucas) are widely, though not uniformly distributed throughout most seasonally ice-covered waters of the northern hemisphere (Figure 1). They are circumpolar, occurring off North America, Europe, and Asia (Kleinenberg et al. 1964). Based on a knowledge of seasonal patterns of movement and concentration areas, the presence of major though not complete geographical barriers, and differences in size of adult animals in different areas, it is likely that belukhas occur in a number of somewhat discrete populations and stocks in various parts of their range (Sergeant and Brodie 1969; Gurevich 1980).

In general, belukhas spend the winter in ice-covered offshore waters. They are unable to make and maintain breathing holes in ice more than about 8 cm thick so are found in areas where geographic, oceanographic, or meteorologic factors cause ice motion and the formation of openings (Kleinenberg et al. 1964; Burns et al. 1981). In spring, as soon as the ice begins to break up and move offshore, belukhas move toward the coast, some making extensive migrations in excess of 2,000 km and some moving relatively short distances toward shore. Most belukhas appear to spend most of the summer in coastal waters, especially in shallow bays or estuaries of large rivers, although an unknown proportion of some populations may remain associated with offshore pack ice. In late summer to late autumn they move generally away from the coast, ahead of or with advancing pack ice (Kleinenberg et al. 1964).

In the eastern hemisphere belukhas occur regularly and in substantial numbers in the White, Barents, Kara, Laptev, East Siberian, and Okhotsk seas (Bel'kovich 1960; Kleinenberg et al. 1964; Ognetrov and Potelov 1982). They are sometimes present off the coasts of Norway, Holland, Denmark, and West Germany, and in cold winters have been sighted as far south as Great Britain (Tomilin 1957; Gurevich 1980).

Belukhas regularly occur throughout the north Atlantic and eastern Canadian Arctic north to 82°30'N near Ellesmere Island, western Greenland, and Spitsbergen and south to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. They are occasionally present near the coast of Nova Scotia in the Bay of Fundy, and are rare off Labrador and Newfoundland. They are most abundant in Davis Strait, Baffin Bay, Ungava Bay, Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, Foxe Basin, Lancaster Sound, Prince Regent Inlet, Barrow Strait, Peel Sound, Cumberland Sound, and Jones Sound and have also been observed near Iceland and Jan Mayen (Kleinenberg et al. 1964). The most southern extralimital record along the east coast of North America is from Avalon, New Jersey (38°55'N). Locations of other extralimital sightings from the east coast include Maine, Massachusetts, and Long Island (Reeves and Katona 1980).

In the western arctic belukhas are found in the Beaufort Sea, Amundsen Gulf, and M'Clure Strait, and westward to the East Siberian Sea (Kleinenberg et al. 1964). Western arctic belukhas are apparently separated from those to the east by heavy pack ice which occurs in the western Canadian arctic islands (Sergeant and Brodie 1975). Belukhas are also found in the Chukchi, Okhotsk, and Bering seas, the latter including the Gulf of Anadyr and Bristol Bay. A small apparently

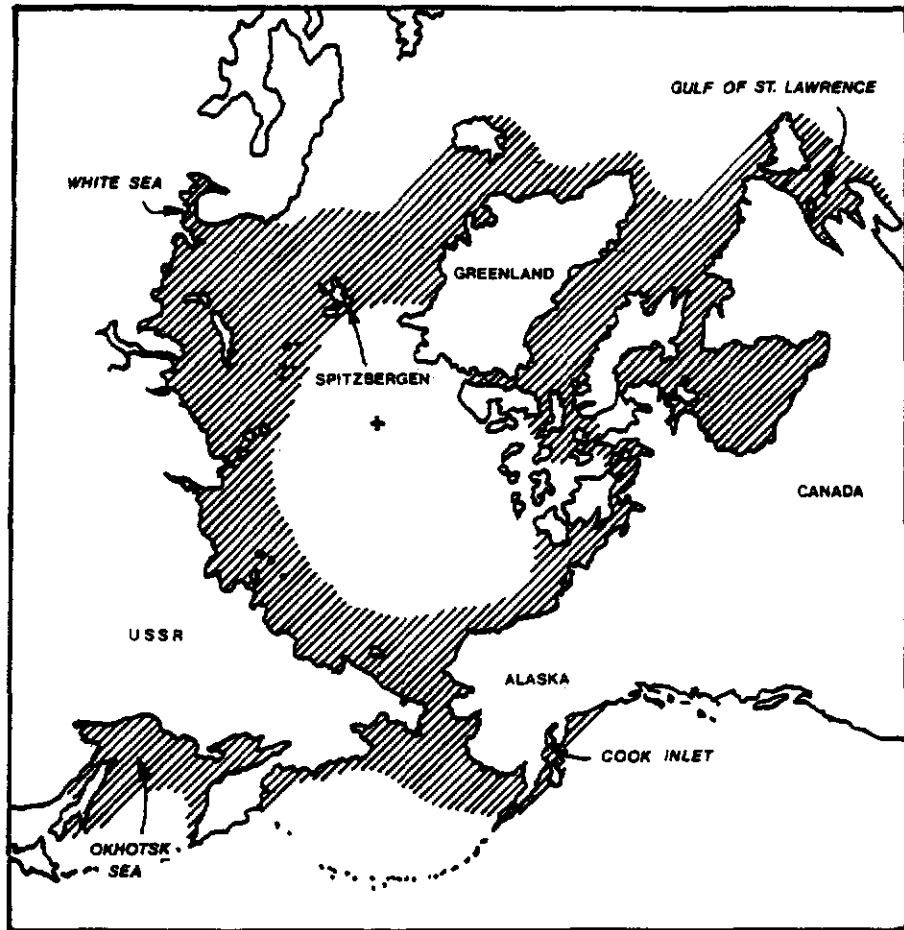


Figure 1. Current world distribution of belukha whales, not including extralimital occurrences.

separate stock occurs in Cook Inlet (Seaman and Burns 1981). In the eastern North Pacific region, extralimital occurrences have been reported from as far south as Tacoma, Washington (47°15'N) (Scheffer and Slipp, 1948).

GENERAL DISTRIBUTION IN ALASKA

Belukhas in Alaska are considered to comprise two populations. One has a center of abundance in Cook Inlet where they are numerous throughout the year (Klinkhart 1966). They are known to range into the northern Gulf of Alaska from at least Kodiak Island to Yakutat Bay (Harrison and Hall 1978). Seasonal movements are poorly known; however, concentrations occur each summer near mouths of rivers flowing into Cook Inlet from the north and east. This project has not dealt with the Cook Inlet population and it will not be considered in the remainder of this report.

The second, much larger group of belukhas ranges seasonally through the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort, and at least parts of the East Siberian seas. During winter these whales occur throughout the ice fringe and front from the Alaska coast to Siberia, as well as in more northerly regions of the Bering and Chukchi sea pack ice where open water regularly occurs (Kleinenberg et al. 1964; Fay 1974; Seaman and Burns 1981). As the ice recedes in spring, a large segment of the population moves north, some of them passing Point Hope and Point Barrow during April to June (Braham and Krogman 1977; Fraker 1979). Those belukhas are thought to mostly migrate eastward through offshore leads in the Beaufort Sea, then south along the west coast of Banks Island to Amundsen Gulf, then west to the Mackenzie River estuary where they appear in late June (Sergeant and Hoek 1974; Fraker et al. 1978; Fraker 1980). Ice conditions allow late migrants to utilize a more direct route to the estuary. Other belukhas migrate less extensively and are seen in coastal waters of the Bering and Chukchi seas shortly after ice breakup in spring. During the summer months belukhas occur in the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas, primarily in coastal waters and the broad margin of pack ice. Major concentrations in western North American waters occur in Mackenzie Bay, Kugmallit Bay, off Kasegaluk Lagoon, in Kotzebue Sound, Norton Sound (including the Yukon River estuary), and Bristol Bay. They have been recorded in major river systems several hundred kilometers from the ocean (Kleinenberg et al. 1964; Gurevich 1980; ADF&G, unpublished). Belukhas leave the coastal zone in late summer to late autumn. Animals in the northern part of their range move southward ahead of and with the advancing ice pack, most of them passing through Bering Strait and into the Bering Sea (Fay 1974; Seaman and Burns 1981).

SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION IN ALASKA

We have compiled available distribution information for belukhas in the Bering and Chukchi seas, the Beaufort Sea, including Mackenzie Bay, and the eastern part of the East Siberian Sea (see also Gurevich 1980 for a review of the seasonal distribution of belukhas in Siberian waters). Data have been compiled by two-month periods beginning in January and are summarized in Figures 3-8. Major locations are shown in Figure 2.

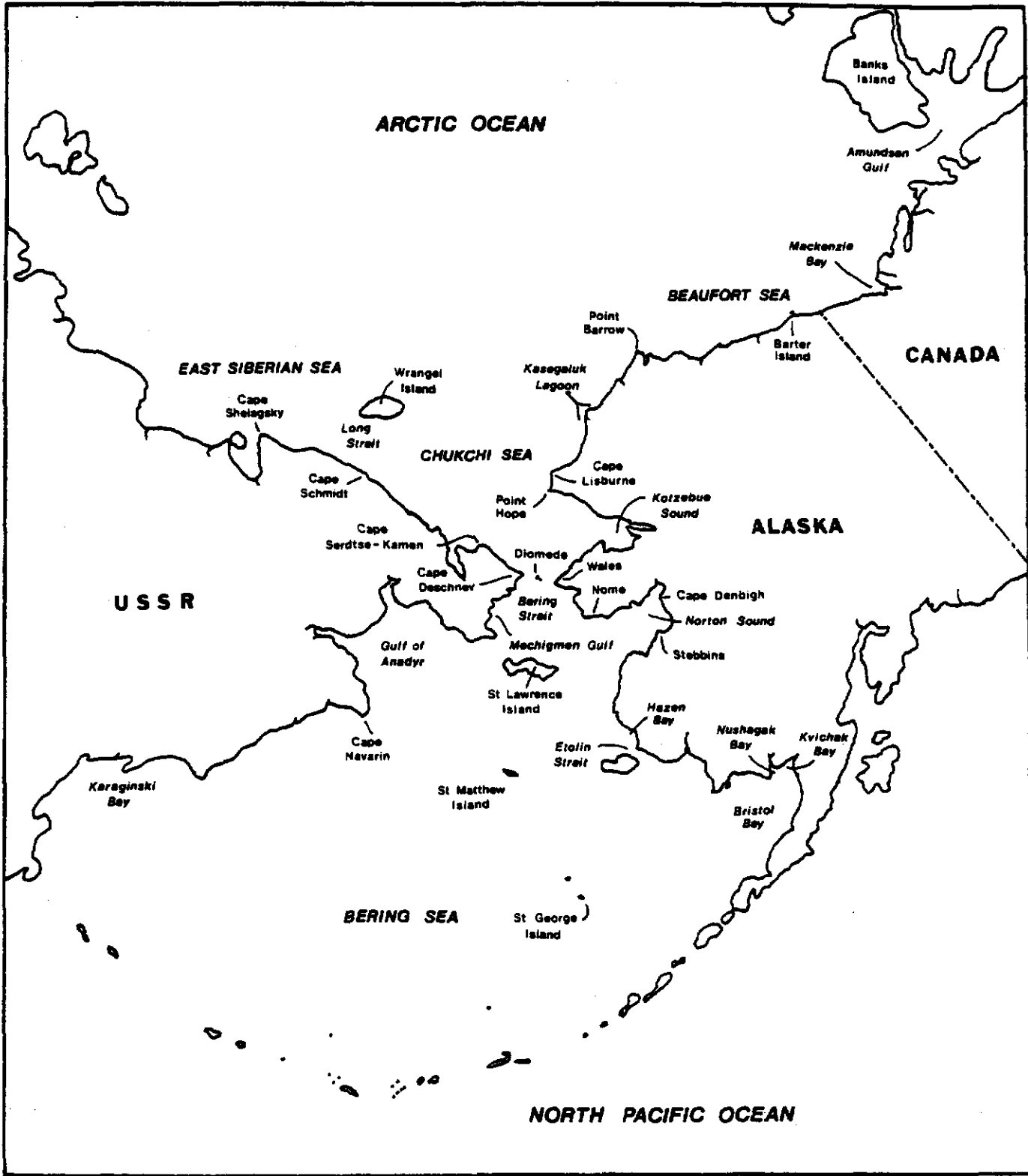


Figure 2. Map of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas showing major locations mentioned in the text.

January-February (Figure 3)

Belukhas overwinter in both the Bering and southern Chukchi seas. Most midwinter sightings have been made from coastal villages south of 69°N latitude. Belukhas probably do not regularly overwinter in the Beaufort or northern Chukchi seas since the ice cover there is heavy, without extensive leads, polynyas, or other areas of predictably open water (Fay 1974). They may occasionally become entrapped by ice, however, and be forced to remain in unsuitable regions (Freeman 1968). Mortality in such instances is probably high (Porsild 1918; Freeman 1968).

During January-February in the southeastern Chukchi Sea, belukhas have been observed from Point Hope to Bering Strait. Sightings have been by residents of Point Hope, Shishmaref, Wales, and Diomedea. Winter distribution in the Chukchi Sea is probably variable depending on annual severity of ice conditions. Along the southwestern Chukchi coast they have been reported during winter from Cape Dezhnev (East Cape) and Serdtse Kamen Cape (Kleinenberg et al. 1964). In the Bering Sea they occur in Mechigmen Gulf and Provideniya Bay on the Siberian coast, south and west of Saint Lawrence Island, and occasionally along the Alaskan coast from Norton Sound to Bristol Bay. In Bristol Bay belukhas are rarely seen by coastal residents during the coldest winter months (Brooks 1954; ADF&G, unpublished). They generally occur in the outer regions of Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea at that time (Lensink 1961).

March-April (Figure 4)

Observations from March and April indicate that belukhas are widely distributed in the Bering and Chukchi seas. They are present along the southern edge of the seasonal sea ice from Bristol Bay westward (Seaman and Burns 1981). Although sightings are widely dispersed throughout ice-covered regions of Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea, the greatest number of sightings has been in western Bering Sea from the ice edge to Bering Strait, including southeast of Saint George Island, south and southwest of Saint Matthew Island, around Saint Lawrence Island, and around the Diomedea Islands and Cape Prince of Wales (Kenyon 1972; Braham et al. 1984; ADF&G, unpublished). On the Siberian side they have been observed from Cape Navarin, Mechigmen Gulf, Serdtse Kamen Cape, and Cape Dezhnev (Kleinenberg et al. 1964; Seaman and Burns 1981).

Belukhas in large numbers are first seen in nearshore waters of Bristol Bay in April as areas become ice-free, frequently congregating at or near the mouths of large rivers to feed and sometimes ascending the rivers until their upstream movements are impeded by ice (Brooks 1956; Frost et al. 1983a; Frost and Lowry, unpublished). They appear north of Bristol Bay along the coast in Etolin Strait and Hazen Bay in April, and are also commonly sighted off the shore ice in Norton Sound near Saint Michael, Shaktoolik, Cape Denbigh, Cape Nome, and the city of Nome.

Sightings in the Chukchi Sea in March and April occur mainly near the coast from Bering Strait to Cape Schmidt on the Siberian side and Point Barrow on the Alaskan side (Seaman and Burns 1981). The first sightings of belukhas off Point Hope are in March with larger numbers observed in April and May (Marquette 1976, 1977, and 1979; Braham and Krogman 1977;

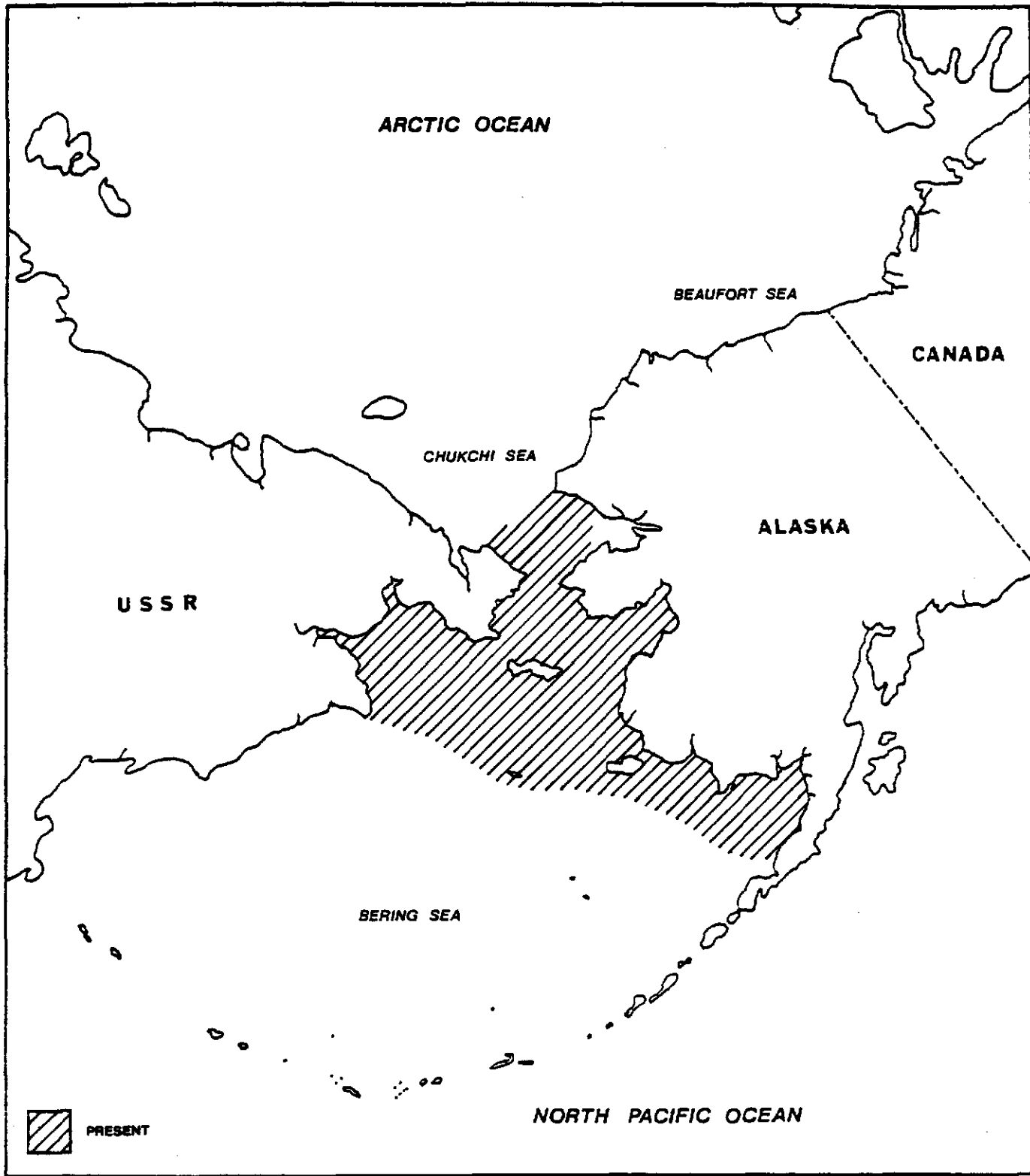


Figure 3. Distribution of belukha whales in January and February.

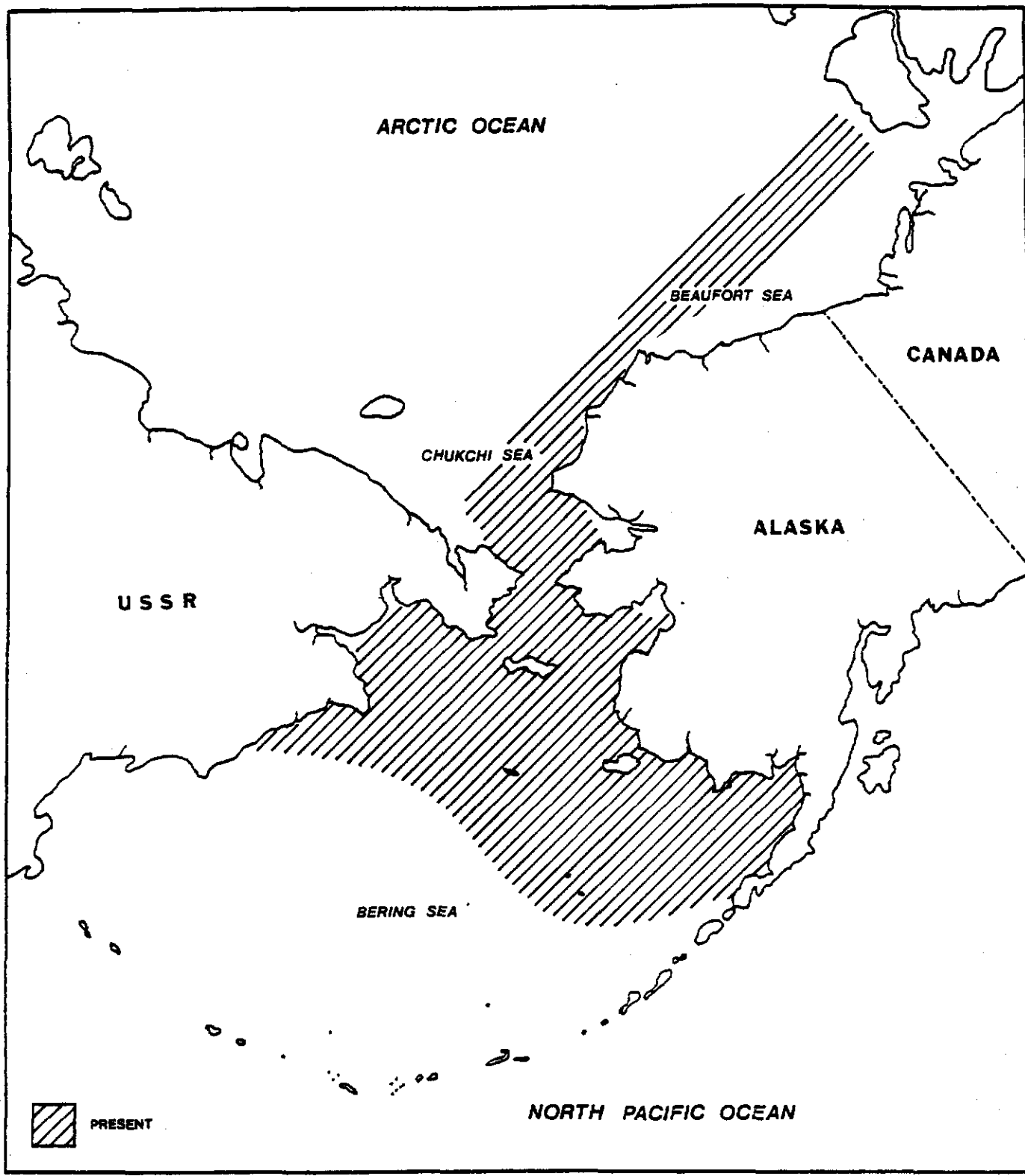


Figure 4. Distribution of belukha whales in March and April.

Frost et al. 1983b). Belukhas first appear off Barrow in early to mid-April but most pass by in May (Braham and Krogman 1977; ADF&G, unpublished).

May-June (Figure 5)

In May and June belukhas are still reported throughout the northern Bering Sea. However, there are fewer offshore sightings and the majority of sightings are relatively near shore. On the Siberian coast sightings occur along the coast from Cape Navarin to Cape Dezhnev (Tomilin 1957; Kleinenberg et al. 1964). In Alaskan waters belukhas occur from southeastern Bristol Bay to Bering Strait and northward past Point Barrow. Most sightings are from Bristol Bay and Norton Sound (Brooks 1954, 1955; Lensink 1961; Klinkhart 1966; Seaman and Burns 1981; Frost et al. 1983a).

By June many belukhas have moved northward into the Chukchi Sea and arrived in the eastern Beaufort Sea where they congregate near Banks Island and Amundsen Gulf before moving into the Mackenzie River estuary. Most sightings in the Chukchi Sea are from the Alaskan side, extending from Kotzebue Sound well into the Beaufort Sea northeast of Barrow (Childs 1969; Seaman and Burns 1981; Braham et al. 1984). Sightings during this period have also been made on the Siberian side near Serdtse Kamen and along the coast as far west as Cape Schmidt (Kleinenberg et al. 1964).

July-August (Figure 6)

July and August are the months during which peak use of coastal waters occurs in most areas. Along the Siberian coast belukhas are apparently rare in Karaginski Bay and common in the Gulf of Anadyr, western Bering Strait, and along the northern coast of the Chukchi Peninsula to the vicinity of Long Strait. There are few sightings during these months from the East Siberian Sea (Tomilin 1957; Kleinenberg et al. 1964). The distribution in Alaska during this period is generally continuous from Bristol Bay to the western Beaufort Sea and into Canadian waters of the eastern Beaufort Sea (Seaman and Burns 1981; Davis and Evans 1982).

The largest number of sightings, and generally the largest groups of belukhas, are seen in inner Bristol Bay, particularly in Nushagak and Kvichak bays (Brooks 1955; Lensink 1961; Frost et al. 1983a); in Norton Sound near the Yukon River estuary, near Stebbins, Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, Koyuk, and Elim; in Kotzebue Sound; between Cape Lisburne and Point Barrow (mainly in and adjacent to Kasegaluk Lagoon); north of Barrow in late August and September (Seaman and Burns 1981; Frost et al. 1983b; ADF&G, unpublished); and in Canadian waters of the eastern Beaufort Sea (Fraker 1977). Groups of whales have also been sighted along the margin of the pack ice from Barrow southwest to Icy Cape and east to Barter Island (Harrison and Hall 1978; Braham et al. 1984; ADF&G, unpublished).

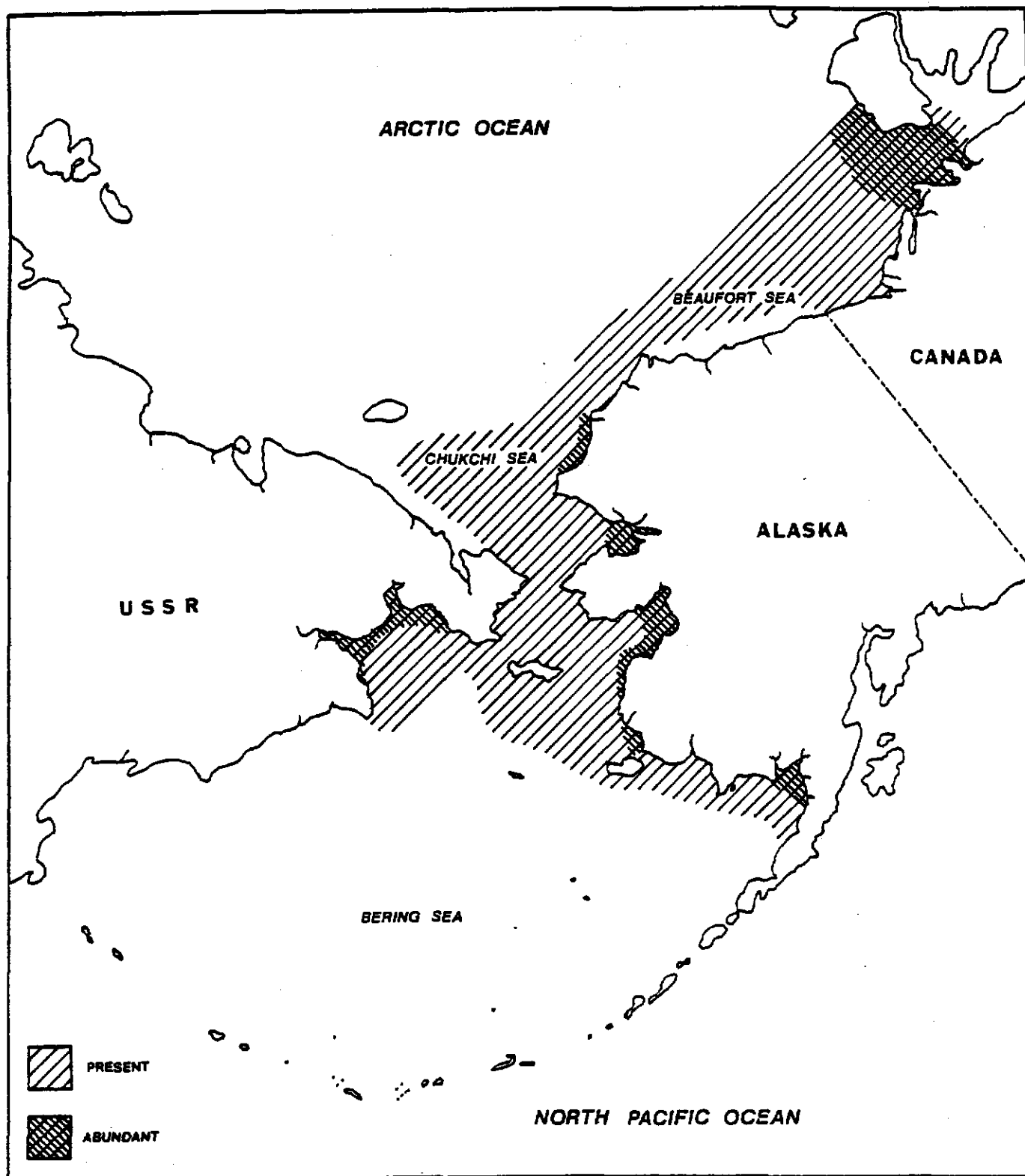


Figure 5. Distribution of belukha whales in May and June.

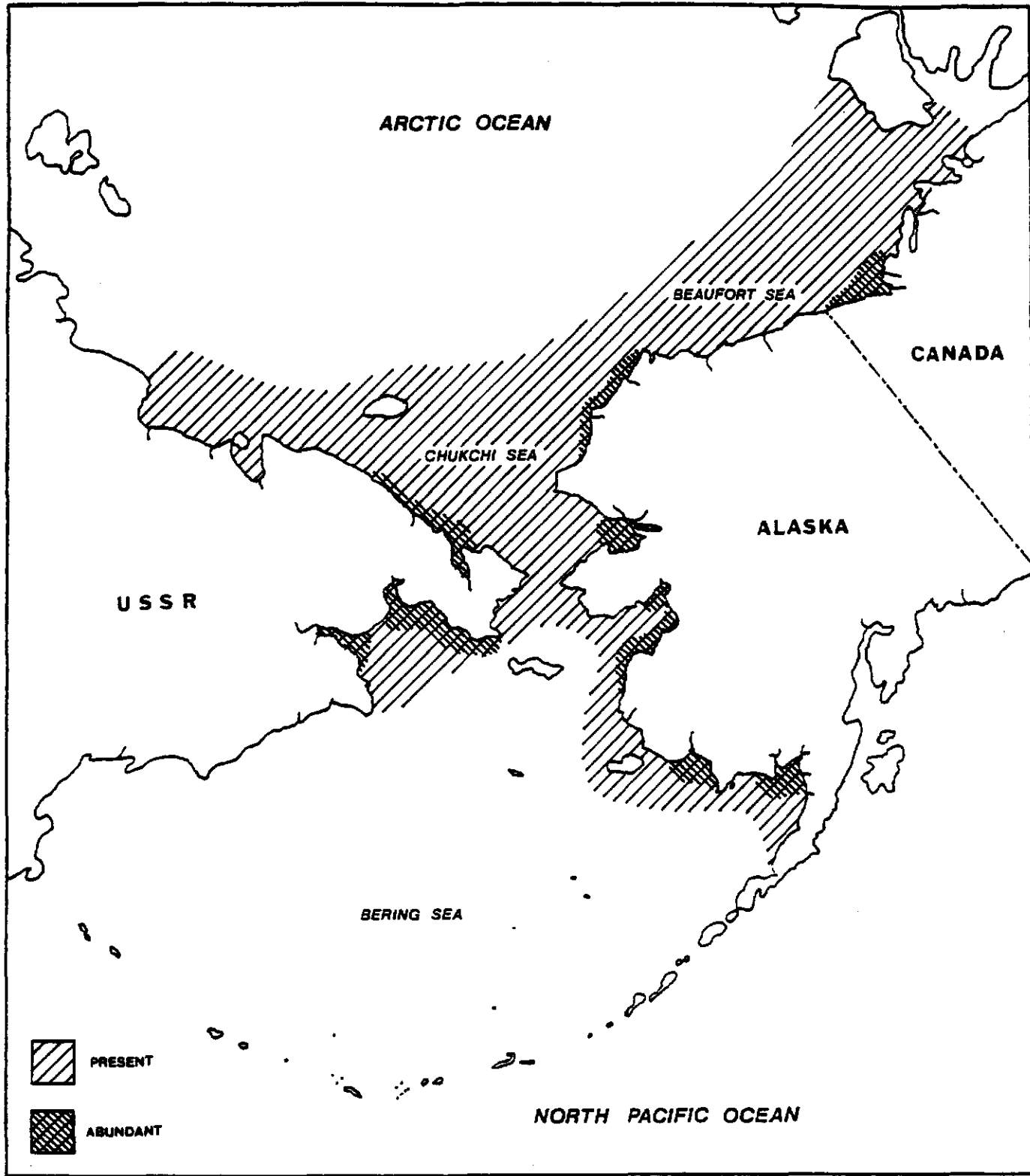


Figure 6. Distribution of belukha whales in July and August.

September-October (Figure 7)

The pattern of whale distribution changes markedly in September and October. Fewer whales are observed in coastal waters, and there is a general increase in offshore sightings. In the far north, animals from Siberia move east and seaward, while those from the eastern Beaufort move westward. Consequently, most sightings in September and October have been from the northern Chukchi Sea between Wrangel Island and northeast of Point Barrow (Seaman and Burns 1981).

Very large aggregations of belukhas have been seen at this time of year; sightings of 500 to more than 1,000 whales were made northeast of Barrow in September 1978 and October 1979 (J. Bitters and L. Zimmerman, personal communication) and of several thousand (perhaps more than 5,000) in the central Chukchi Sea in September 1974 (G. C. Ray and T. Dohl, personal communication).

Some sightings have also been made in the area from south of the pack ice to Bering Strait. Coastal residents of Bering Strait report belukhas moving southward in advance of the ice in October (Kleinenberg et al. 1964; ADF&G, unpublished). Sightings along the Alaskan coast from Cape Prince of Wales to Bristol Bay become increasingly less common as winter approaches.

November-December (Figure 8)

There are few sightings of belukha whales in November and December. Most have been in the Bering Sea with a few in the Chukchi Sea from Point Hope southward (Seaman and Burns 1981). In general, sightings have been by coastal hunters and commercial airline pilots since survey efforts have been minimal during these months. Sightings of belukha whales from villages in Bering Strait indicate a predominantly southward movement (Kleinenberg et al. 1964; F. Fay, personal communication; ADF&G, unpublished). The southward movement characteristically peaks in November and early December with or in advance of the appearance of seasonal pack ice, but continues through midwinter (Kleinenberg et al. 1964).

It appears that belukhas maintain an association with sea ice in winter, and that the timing of their southward migration is closely related to the timing of freezeup and southward advance of the pack ice. Their distribution in March and April suggests that they winter throughout the Bering Sea from the ice front to Bering Strait and the southern Chukchi Sea.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

North Aleutian Basin

For the purpose of this discussion the North Aleutian Basin is defined as the waters of Bristol Bay from Cape Newenham to Unimak Pass (Figure 9).

Our information on belukha whales in Bristol Bay comes from a variety of sources. From 1954 to 1958, J. Brooks conducted extensive studies on

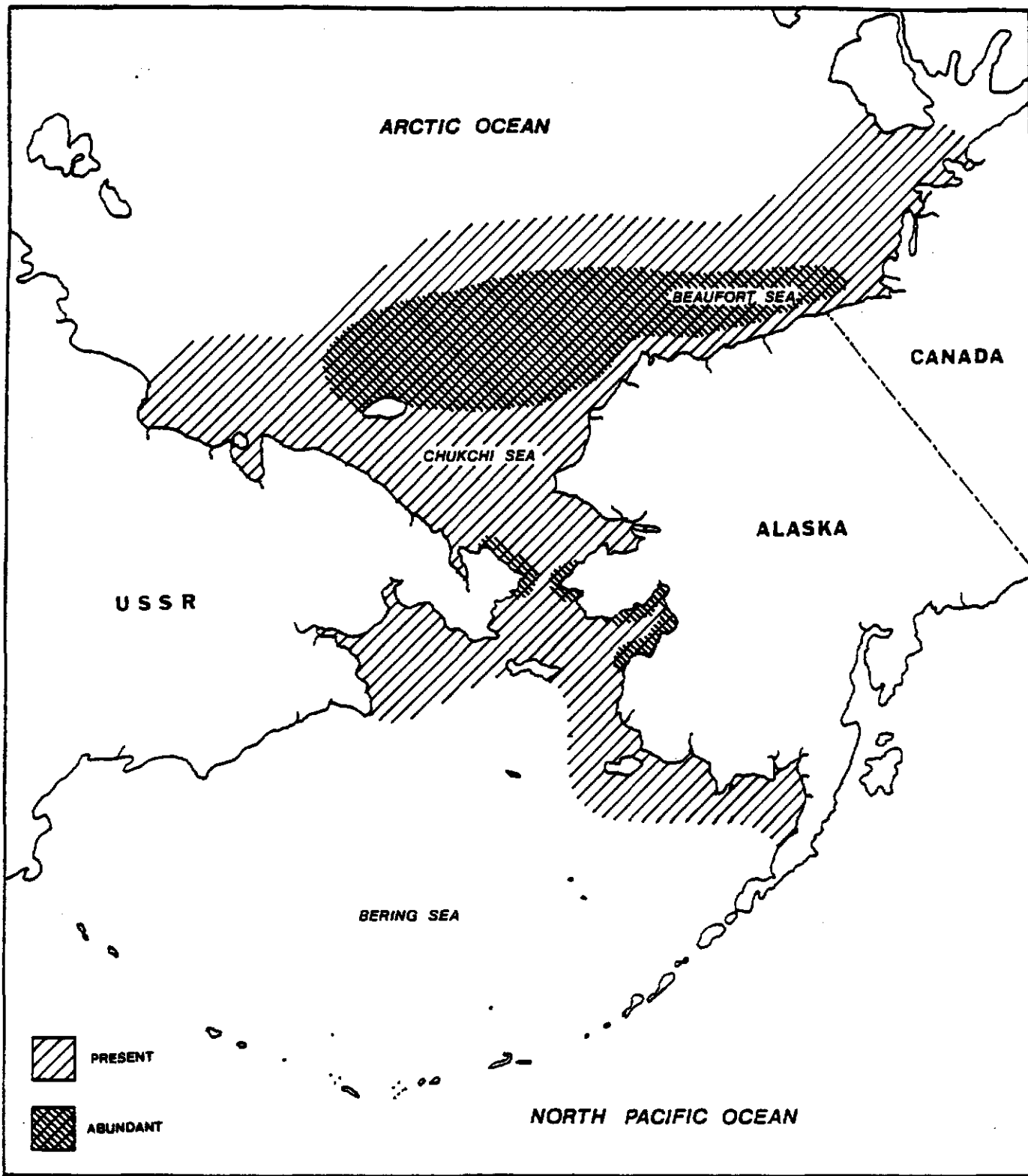


Figure 7. Distribution of belukha whales in September and October.

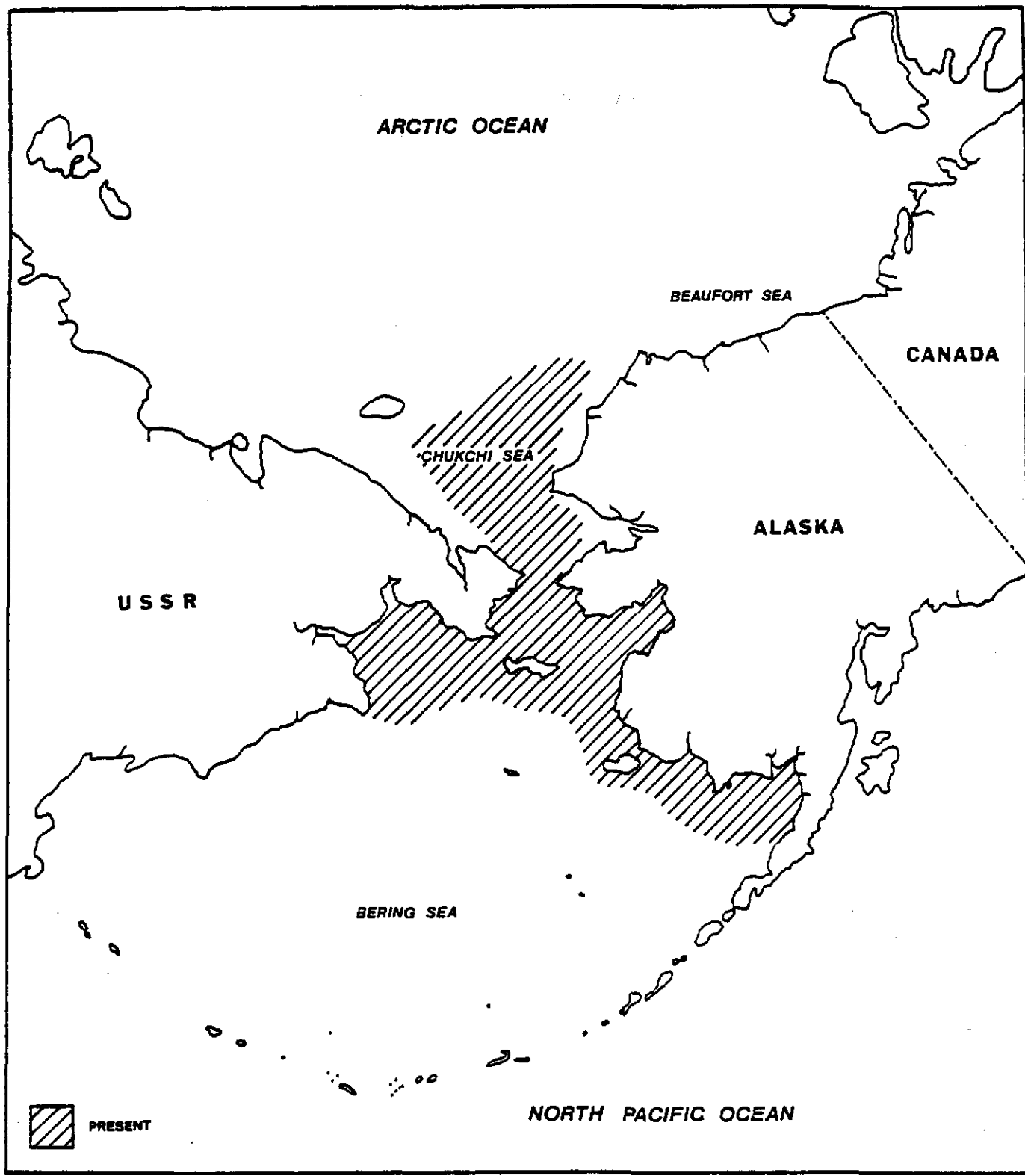


Figure 8. Distribution of belukha whales in November and December.

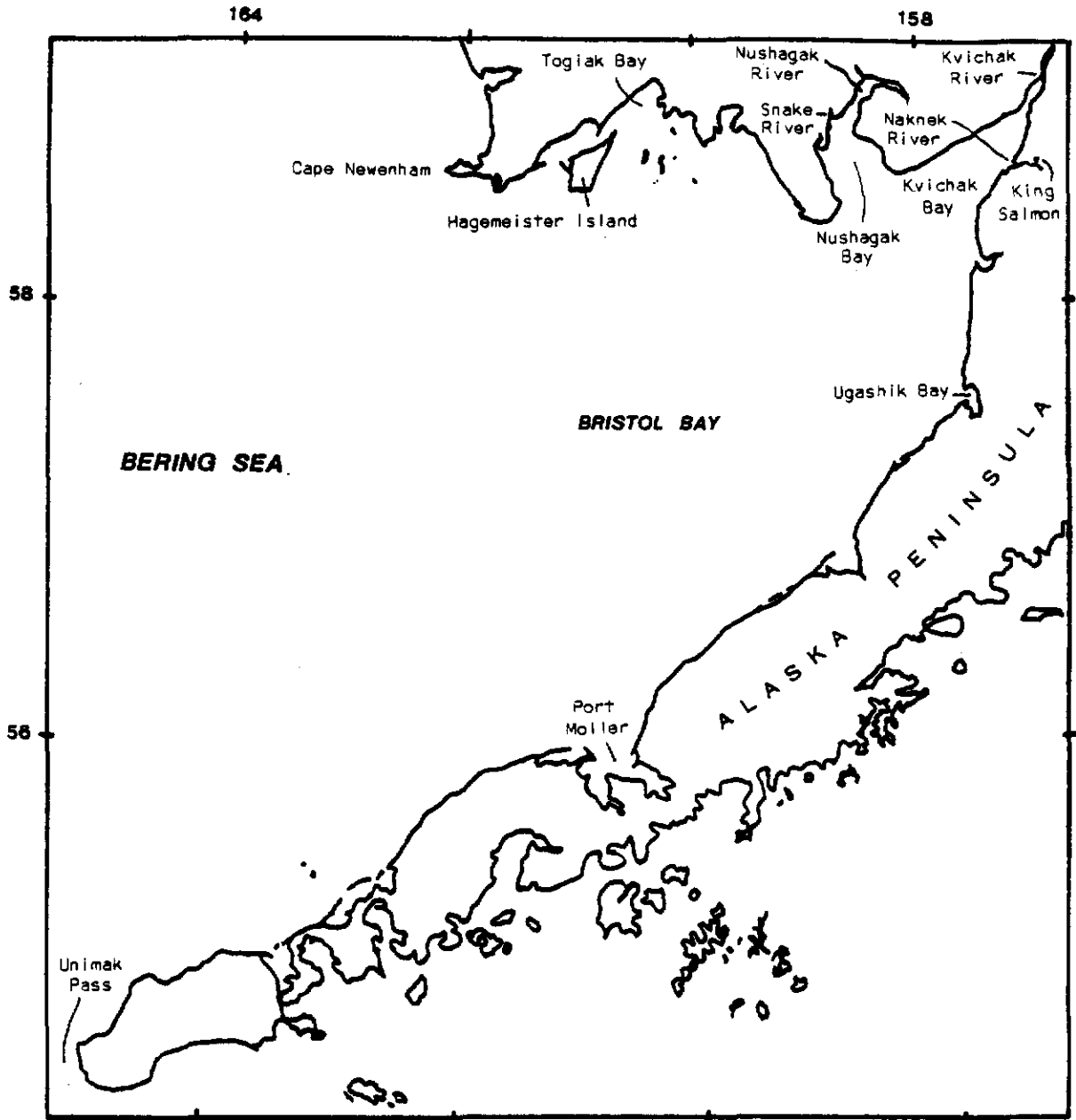


Figure 9. Map of the North Aleutian Basin showing locations mentioned in text.

the distribution, movements, and feeding of belukhas in inner Bristol Bay. Lensink (1961) summarized Brooks' work and added information for areas north of Bristol Bay. More recent studies include the work of Harrison and Hall (1978) primarily in the Bering Sea, and Fried et al. (1979); Lowry, Frost, and Nelson (1982); Frost, Lowry, and Nelson (1983); and Frost et al. (1984) in Nushagak and Kvichak bays. Other information is from the authors' unpublished observations, ADF&G unpublished data, interviews with area residents, and correspondence with biologists working in the area.

Belukhas utilize the Bristol Bay area throughout the year. They are most common and occur in the largest concentrations in nearshore waters during ice-free months (Frost et al. 1983a). Although small groups are occasionally observed near shore in inner Bristol Bay during winter, they are considered uncommon there at that time (Brooks 1954, 1955; Lensink 1961; ADF&G, unpublished).

In general, during winter-early spring belukhas are widely distributed in outer Bristol Bay and the southeastern Bering Sea (Lensink 1961; ADF&G, unpublished) and are believed to occur in close association with seasonal sea ice. They are probably more common during relatively heavy ice years, when the seasonal ice extends south into the Bay, than in years of less extensive ice cover. Leatherwood et al. (1983) sighted belukhas in Bristol Bay on surveys conducted in September, late October-early November, January, and February. Most sightings at this time of year are of groups of one to five whales. A notable exception occurred on 13 April 1976 when over 300 whales were sighted northwest of Port Moller (Braham and Krogman 1977). Examination of satellite imagery indicates that this sighting occurred close to the southern edge of the seasonal pack ice, which extended unusually far to the south at that time (Burns et al. 1981).

In April, as the seasonal ice starts to disintegrate and recede northward, belukha whales begin to move into coastal regions (Brooks 1956; Frost et al. 1983a). Whales are found both offshore and near shore at this time with sightings recorded from Hagemeister Island, Togiak Bay, and eastern Bristol Bay (Kenyon 1972). In April and May, concentrations of up to several hundred animals occur at the river mouths in Kvichak Bay (Brooks 1956; Frost et al. 1983a, 1984). The first concentrations usually occur in mid-April in and at the mouth of the Naknek River where the whales feed on smelt (Osmerus mordax). Belukhas, sometimes in groups of up to several hundred, ascend the Naknek River as soon as the ice goes out, moving at least as far upstream as King Salmon (30 river km from the mouth). When the ice in the Kvichak River breaks up (usually several weeks after breakup in the Naknek) belukhas move to the Kvichak River where, twice daily, groups of whales move upriver on flooding tides and downriver on ebbing tides. The period during which belukhas make daily movements up and down the Kvichak River coincides with the seaward migration of post-spawning smelt and with the peak outmigration of red salmon (Oncorhynchus nerka) smolt. Belukhas remain in Kvichak Bay during the adult salmon runs in June-August, when they are most often found between the western side of the bay and the Kvichak River mouth (Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983, 1984). Belukhas also occur in Nushagak Bay where they are first seen in

mid-April in and near the Snake and Igushik rivers, along the west side of the bay, and off Etolin Point (Brooks 1956; Frost et al. 1983a; Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983, 1984). In May-July, whales are most commonly seen between the mouth of the Snake River and Clarks Point, and in the northern part of the bay near the junction of the Wood, Little Muklung, and Nushagak rivers (Lowry, Frost, and Nelson 1982; Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983, 1984).

Prior to the mid-1960's belukhas moved into several of the major rivers of Bristol Bay from breakup until mid-June (Lensink 1961). Beginning in 1965 tape recorded sounds of killer whales (Orcinus orca) were used to repel belukha whales from the mouth of the Naknek River and later the Kvichak River (Fish and Vania 1971; N. Steen and D. Bill, personal communication). This effort was designed to reduce belukha whale predation on outmigrating red salmon smolt by keeping the whales away from areas with the highest smolt concentrations. The belukha "spookers" were normally in operation from the end of May through the first two weeks of June and effectively displaced belukhas from the Naknek and Kvichak rivers during that period. When the use of spookers was discontinued in late June, belukhas again ascended these rivers but in low numbers. Attempts were made to extend the program to the Nushagak River but tides and other hydrological conditions prevented the establishment of a permanent program. After 1978 the belukha spooker program was discontinued, and belukhas have since resumed use of these river systems during the smolt outmigration (D. Bill and R. Randall, personal communication; Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983, 1984).

Belukhas are abundant in inner Bristol Bay through the remainder of the summer, but become progressively less common in autumn (Brooks 1954; Frost et al. 1983a). They are observed there with some degree of frequency until October when the whales are presumed to move offshore and westward. They have been reported east of Hagemeister Island in September (G. C. Ray, personal communication) and near Ugashik Bay in October (Harrison and Hall 1978). Local fishermen suggest they frequent the outer portions of the Bay. An October sighting near the Pribilof Islands confirms that belukhas do occur offshore over the continental shelf at this time (Harrison and Hall 1978). The degree to which belukhas utilize these offshore waters during summer and autumn is unknown. Sightings and changes in coastal abundance suggest that offshore habitats are not utilized extensively during the summer, but that they may be utilized during autumn. These changes correspond with the sharp decrease in abundance of anadromous fish in coastal waters during autumn.

The spring and summer movements of belukhas in Kvichak Bay are reported to be closely related to tidal movements. Brooks (1954) and Lensink (1961) found that belukhas generally swam up the Kvichak River and over the tidal flats on flooding tides. They usually returned to the bay on ebb tide, although they occasionally remained in the deeper portions of the river through the tidal cycle. Recent observations confirm this movement pattern in the Kvichak River and Kvichak Bay (Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983). In Nushagak Bay, Fried et al. (1979) observed belukhas a considerable distance up the Nushagak River on all phases of the tidal cycle. Other recent observations (Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983 and

unpublished) also indicate that in the lower portions of the Snake River movements of whales are not closely correlated with tides although the direction of tidal flow has a major influence on river currents. The reason for this apparent difference in behavior of belukhas in Kvichak and Nushagak bays is unknown.

It has been suggested that belukhas avoid areas of heavy boat traffic during the commercial salmon fishing season. For example, Lensink (1961) attributed the decreased numbers of belukhas ascending the Kvichak River in mid-June to increased boat traffic in the river. However, since the early 1970's when salmon canneries located up the Kvichak closed down, boat traffic upriver no longer increases markedly during the salmon fishery, yet few belukhas use the upper river after mid-June. Frost, Lowry, and Nelson (1983 and unpublished) concluded that decreased use of the river coincides with the end of the red salmon smolt outmigration. In 1983, belukhas were last seen in large numbers in the Kvichak River on 6 June, by which time 90% of the smolt outmigration had occurred.

Fried et al. (1979) and others have suggested that whales gather near the Snake River to avoid boat activity since that area is closed to commercial fishing. However, Frost, Lowry, and Nelson (1983) observed that the same group of whales moved regularly between the Snake River mouth and the east side of Nushagak Bay near Clarks Point, where there was constant boat activity and where most of the processing fleet was anchored. On several occasions, they observed a large group of belukhas swimming among the boats at Clarks Point. Local biologists also have reported that belukhas are frequently numerous around Clarks Point (K. Taylor, personal communication). Thus, it seems unlikely that the absence of boat activity entirely explains the whales' preference for the Snake River mouth. Topography may be one of the factors affecting the suitability of the area. Although several rivers flow into Nushagak Bay, the most extensive mud flats begin at the mouth of the Snake River and extend south to the mouth of the Igushik River. The red salmon run in the Snake River is smaller than in any of the three other major rivers, but the extensive shallows may make those salmon easier to catch. In Kvichak Bay, belukhas are also frequently seen swimming near fishing boats and nets, and it is probable that the availability of salmon, tidal stage, and bottom topography rather than the presence or absence of vessels, determines distribution of the whales.

Belukha whales calve in Bristol Bay in June and July. Although Fried et al. (1979) did not see neonates during late May and June surveys of the lower Snake River and its mouth, they noted that local residents and fishermen reported calving to occur there. Neonates may have been present during the surveys, but due to their small size, dark coloration, and poor survey conditions they could not be seen (S. Weston, personal communication). In 1982, neonates were observed near the Snake River mouth during early July. In late June-early July of both 1982 and 1983 there was a substantial increase, thought possibly to be a calving concentration, in the number of belukhas using the Snake River mouth area; an estimated 400+ whales were present in mid-July of both years (Lowry, Frost, and Nelson 1982; Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983). In addition, beachcast neonates and floating afterbirth were

observed in the area at that time. Calving also occurs in Kvichak Bay during late June or early July. Lensink (1961) reported seeing the first newborn calves in the lower Kvichak on 14 June. In 1983, females with new calves were observed near the Kvichak River mouth on 7 July (Frost, Lowry, and Nelson 1983). Afterbirths and several dead neonates were found in late June and early to mid-July.

It is difficult to determine the abundance of whales in Bristol Bay; survey conditions are poor due to turbid water, and dark-colored juveniles are particularly difficult to see. Sergeant (1973) in Hudson Bay and Fraker (1980) in the Mackenzie Estuary surveyed belukhas under similar hydrological conditions. Sergeant thought that belukhas spend a third of the time at the surface and the remainder of time underwater and thus multiplied his actual counts by 3 to account for unseen animals. Fraker assumed, since his view of an area was not instantaneous but lasted over 15 seconds, that he would see a higher proportion; he multiplied the number of whales sighted by 2 to obtain the total number present. Frost, Lowry, and Nelson (1983) used surface-time to dive-time information obtained from radio-tagged whales to calculate an average correction factor of 2.75 at a survey speed of 183 km/hr. Comparison of simultaneous aerial and boat counts yielded a similar multiplier of 2.4-2.8.

The abundance of belukhas in Bristol Bay has been estimated by Brooks (1955, 1956) and Frost et al. (1984). Brooks estimated that at least 1,000 belukhas were present in Bristol Bay in 1954, and approximately half that number in 1955 and 1956 (Table 1). In the late 1970's fishermen reported belukhas to be moderately abundant (R. Baxter and M. Nelson, personal communication). Sightings of up to 100-200 whales were regularly made in the Naknek River in April and May (D. Bill and N. Steen, personal communication). In late June 1979, during a flight over the north side of Kvichak Bay, R. Randall (personal communication) counted at least 250 belukhas and estimated that half the animals present were counted. During another flight in summer of 1979, he counted 400 to 500 whales in Kvichak and Nushagak bays combined. Lowry, Frost, and Nelson (1982) estimated that 400-600 whales were in the vicinity of the Snake River mouth in early July 1982. During April to August 1983, Frost et al. (1984) conducted twice-monthly surveys of Kvichak and Nushagak bays and estimated that approximately 1,000 belukhas older than neonates were in the area (Table 2). Based on recent and historical observations, we estimate that approximately 1,000-1,500 belukhas summer in Bristol Bay and the North Aleutian Basin.

Saint Matthew-Hall Basin

The proposed Saint Matthew-Hall OCS lease area, as discussed here, includes the coastal region of western Alaska from the southern Yukon Delta to Cape Newenham and westward to 174°W longitude (Figure 10). Use of the Yukon River estuary by belukha whales is discussed in detail in the section dealing with the Norton Basin.

In winter and early spring belukhas occur throughout the Saint Matthew-Hall lease area except in the immediate nearshore region where they may be excluded by shorefast ice. During occasional episodes of

Table 1. Estimated numbers of belukha whales in inner Bristol Bay in 1954 and 1955 (Brooks 1955). Estimates were based on surface and aerial observations and interviews with fishermen and local residents.

<u>1954</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>
Kvichak Bay	250	250-400	?	600
Nushagak Bay	?	250-400	400	400
Total, both bays, about 1,000				
<u>1955</u>				
Kvichak Bay	100	150-250	?	50-100
Nushagak Bay	?	250	250-500	450
Total, both bays, about 525				

Table 2. Estimated numbers (# counted x correction factor) of belukha whales in Nushagak and Kvichak bays, April-August 1983 (from Frost et al. 1984). Neonates are not included.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Nushagak Bay</u>	<u>Kvichak Bay</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Adjusted Total¹</u>
15 April	218	474	692	747
2/5 May	41	584	625	675
17 May	85	274	359	388
31 May	27	212	239	258
14 June	49	259	308	333
24 June	182	55	237	286
29 June	347	572	919	993
14 July	496	181	677	731
14 Aug	0	309	309	334

¹Total increased by 8% for yearlings which are not seen during aerial surveys (Brodie 1971).

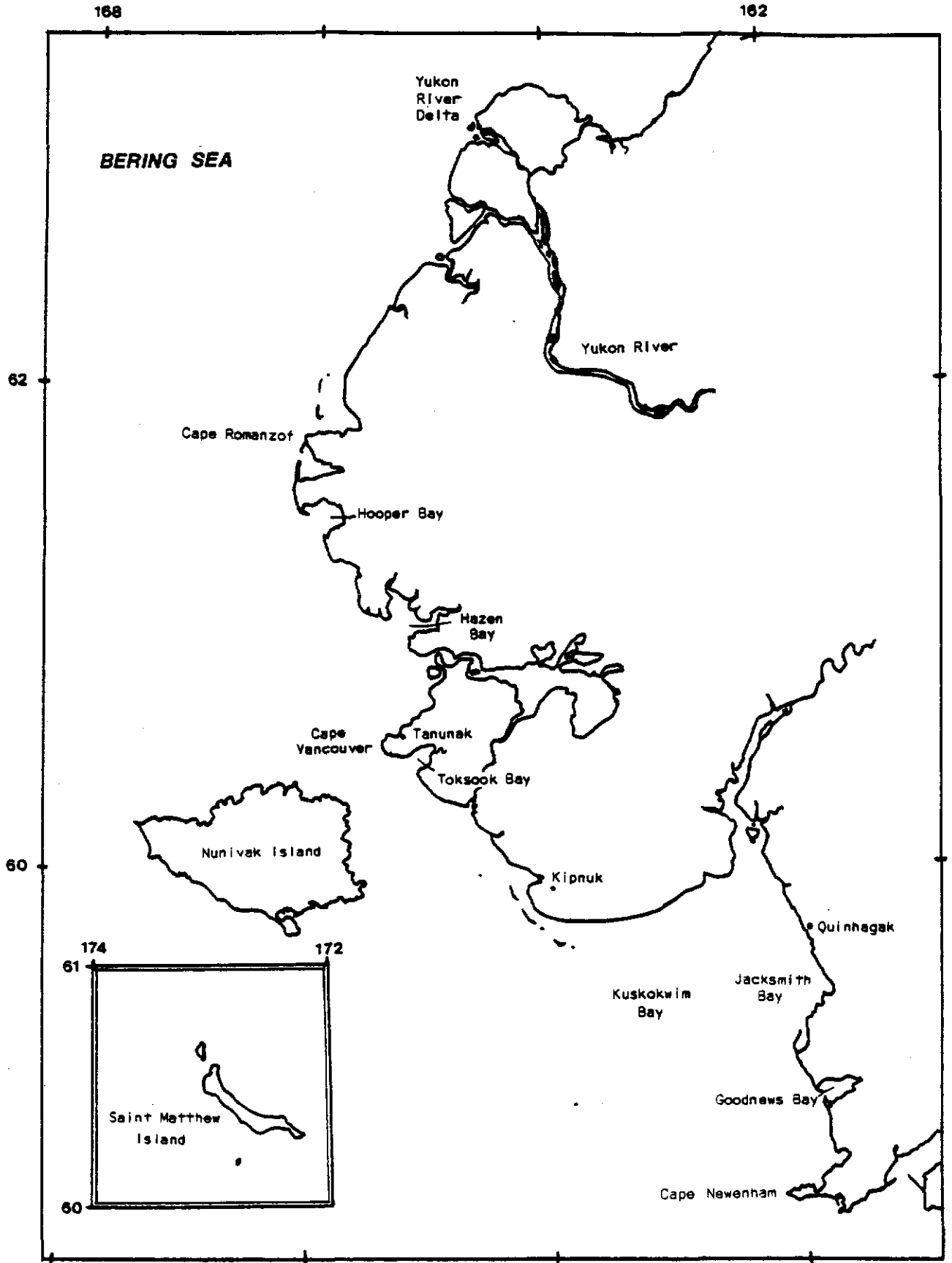


Figure 10. Map of the Saint Matthew-Hall Basin showing locations mentioned in text.

strong easterly winds which may break up the shorefast ice and move it offshore, belukhas have been seen near the mouths of the Yukon River, off Cape Romanzof, near Hooper Bay, and in Kuskokwim Bay (Nelson 1887; Seaman, unpublished). Residents of Hooper Bay report that such sightings occur during most winters (Seaman, unpublished). Nelson (1887) reported that large numbers of belukha whales utilized the coastal regions south of Cape Vancouver during winter. Recent interviews with residents of coastal villages in that area generally confirm Nelson's observations (ADF&G, unpublished).

Most winter and early spring observations of belukhas in the offshore portion of this basin during March and April have been west of 170°W. This is at least partially a result of the distribution of survey efforts. Belukhas are quite abundant in the large polynya and pack ice west and south of Saint Lawrence Island and are commonly sighted along the west and south shores of Saint Lawrence Island (see section on Norton Basin). They have also been frequently sighted in polynyas south and southwest of Saint Matthew Island in March and April (ADF&G, unpublished; Brueggeman, et al. 1984). Leatherwood et al. (1983) made sightings of belukhas south and east of Saint Matthew Island and between Saint Matthew and Saint Lawrence in February and March.

From breakup in May or June until freezeup in October or November belukhas occur throughout coastal waters between the Yukon River estuary and Cape Newenham. Their appearance and abundance is frequently associated with the availability and movements of various anadromous and marine fishes. In recent years their appearance in Kuskokwim Bay is reported by local residents to be irregular and of short duration. Sightings have been reported from Quinhagak, Toksook Bay, and Kipnuk (ADF&G, unpublished). Belukhas were considerably more common in Kuskokwim Bay earlier in the century (R. Baxter, personal communication). The last year belukhas were reportedly seen in large numbers near Quinhagak was around 1955. Belukhas have not been seen for many years in Goodnews Bay where they were previously very common (ADF&G, unpublished). Formerly, belukhas regularly entered the shallow waters of the Bay during the summer and were hunted by local residents.

Belukhas were formerly very abundant in the shallow waters of Jacksmith Bay (R. Baxter, personal communication). A village was located near there which depended to a large extent on an annual summer belukha hunt. It is said that in the early 1920's a large vessel came to Kuskokwim Bay and traded motor boats for king salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha). The next year, about 1925, a very large belukha hunt took place in Jacksmith Bay in which it was reported that "all" the whales were killed. Belukhas failed to return to Jacksmith Bay in subsequent years and the settlement there was abandoned (R. Baxter, personal communication). This may have been a cause and effect situation, but there is also the possibility that, as in other parts of Kuskokwim Bay, there was a general consolidation of many small settlements during this period.

Belukhas frequent the coastal waters between Cape Vancouver and the Yukon River estuary during the spring, summer, and autumn. Observations by residents of Tanunak and local pilots indicate that belukhas are common in the Hazen Bay area where small groups are sighted every year during late

spring and early summer. They are present but less common there in autumn. Belukhas also occur around Nunivak Island during the ice-free months but the degree of use at different times of the year is unclear. Historically, residents of Nunivak Island caught belukhas in nets during the autumn (Curtis 1930).

Belukhas are occasionally observed near and inside of Hooper Bay during the ice-free period, particularly during the late spring and early summer when their presence is closely tied to runs of king and chum (Oncorhynchus keta) salmon (Frost et al. 1983a). The number of whales in the area varies greatly from year to year. Belukhas are also common just north of Hooper Bay near Cape Romanzof where they are often seen in May in association with schools of herring (Clupea harengus) (Frost et al. 1983a). By early summer most whales leave this area and are believed to move to the Yukon River estuary where they are very commonly seen during summer and autumn.

Based on available information about seasonal movements of belukhas in Norton Sound, Bering Strait, and the Saint Lawrence Island region, it appears that a large portion of the whales that seasonally migrate through the Bering Strait to summer in the Arctic Ocean spend the winter in the Saint Matthew-Hall lease area. However, the actual number of belukhas either wintering in the area or passing through it during migration is unknown.

Saint George Basin

The Saint George Basin lease area encompasses a large portion of the southeastern Bering Sea (Figure 11). The northern portion of this area is on the continental shelf. The southern portion is off the shelf, with depths ranging from 200 m to more than 1,500 m. The extent and characteristics of seasonal ice cover are highly variable from year to year (Burns et al. 1981). During the "average" year, ice is usually present in the northern and northeastern portions, generally north of the Pribilofs. During cold winters and "heavy" ice years the ice may extend southward to approximately the continental shelf break, while in light ice years it may be entirely absent from the lease area.

It is difficult to assess the distribution and abundance of belukha whales in the Saint George Basin due to the scarcity of surveys and belukha sightings there. Most sightings have been made in conjunction with aerial and ship surveys directed at other species such as bowhead whales (Balaena mysticetus), walrus (Odobenus rosmarus), and ice-associated seals. Since these surveys are frequently restricted to particular habitats (ice front, shelf edge, etc.) where the target species are more likely to occur, they may not provide a reliable indication of the use of the area by belukhas.

We know of only one sighting of belukha whales in the Saint George Basin during the summer. Leatherwood et al. (1983) reported seeing a single animal southeast of the Pribilof Islands on 8 August 1982. This was the only belukha they sighted in four surveys conducted in the Saint George Basin between late May and September 1982. Harrison and Hall (1978) and Braham et al. (1984) surveyed a large portion of the Saint George Basin

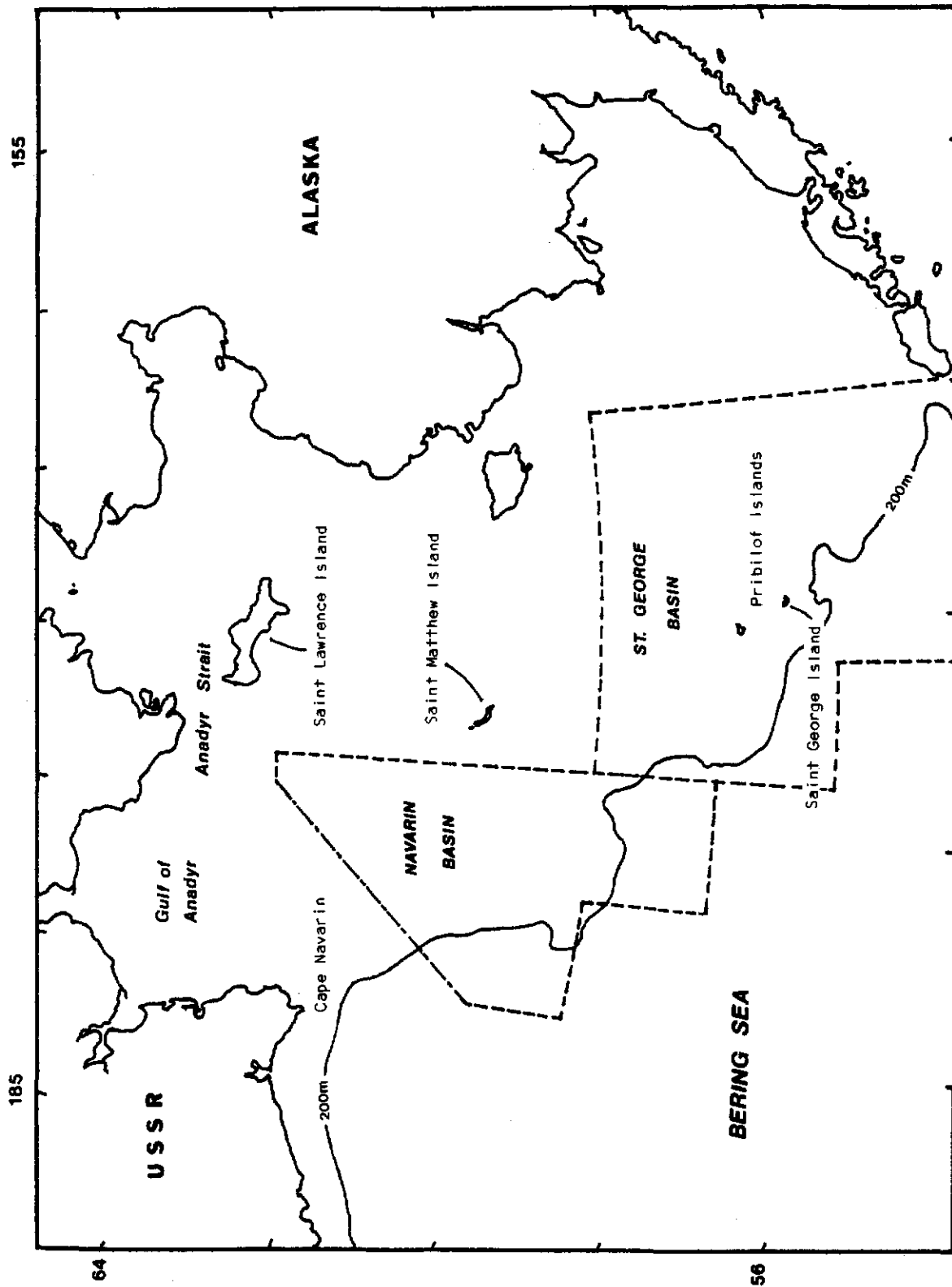


Figure 11. Map of the Saint George and Navarin basins showing locations mentioned in text.

during summer and saw no belukhas. It is possible that they occur in small numbers since they have been seen in the area during the spring and autumn (Harrison and Hall 1978; ADF&G, unpublished). When present, belukhas are probably restricted to the relatively shallow waters overlying the continental shelf and may be somewhat more common in the northeastern portion of the lease area which is closest to the coast.

In late summer and early autumn, belukhas start to leave the Bering Sea coast and by mid to late autumn there is a clear decrease in abundance in some nearshore areas, including in Bristol Bay. This decrease frequently parallels a decrease in the abundance of primary prey species. It is unclear where these whales go at this time, but since there is little evidence of a shift to neighboring coastal areas, it is likely that at least some utilize the more offshore regions of the Bering Sea including the northern portion of the Saint George Basin. Harrison and Hall (1978) observed two belukhas on 11 October 1976, approximately 110 km southeast of Saint George Island. Several species of suitable prey are abundant in this area (Pereyra et al. 1976).

Belukhas probably occur in greatest abundance in the lease area during winter and spring when seasonal ice excludes them from many nearshore regions. They may be most common in Saint George Basin during heavy ice years when they have been observed in March and April near the Pribilof Islands, in western Bristol Bay, and south of Nunivak Island. They are probably less common when seasonal ice in Saint George Basin is minimal or absent. A significant but unknown proportion of the whales that winter in the Saint George Basin lease area probably summer in the coastal waters of the eastern Bering Sea and Bristol Bay.

We cannot presently estimate the number of belukhas utilizing the Saint George Basin. Based on limited sightings, the availability of apparently suitable habitat, and the area's proximity to coastal areas regularly used by belukhas, the Saint George Basin lease area may be important to a large number of whales. We expect that the use of the lease area varies annually with peak use during winter and spring when sea ice is present.

Navarin Basin

The Navarin Basin includes a large portion of the central Bering Sea west of the Saint Matthew-Hall and northwest of the Saint George Basin lease areas (Figure 11). The northern portion is on the continental shelf, while the southern part occurs over very deep water. Navarin Basin is remote; the closest land masses are Saint Matthew Island to the east, Saint Lawrence Island to the northeast, and the coast of the USSR to the west.

It is difficult to assess utilization of the Navarin Basin by belukha whales due to the lack of settlements in the area and the near absence of sightings from any months except March, April, and early May. Aerial sightings of belukhas here have been on an opportunistic basis in conjunction with surveys for other species.

It appears that the portion of the Navarin Basin overlying the continental shelf is an important part of belukha winter range. In the autumn and

early winter large numbers of belukhas are consistently observed moving south into this region through Anadyr Strait (Kleinenberg et al. 1964; F. Fay, personal communication; Seaman, unpublished). In March and April belukhas have frequently been sighted during the course of survey flights over the Navarin Basin (H. Braham, personal communication; ADF&G, unpublished). Brueggeman et al. (1984) observed several hundred belukhas west of Saint Matthew Island in March 1983. Belukhas are also common east and west of the Navarin Basin during the same period. Although there are no sightings available for January and February, distribution then is probably similar to that in March and April although generally more northerly. As winter progresses the whales move southward with the advancing pack ice. Belukhas are thought to be rare or uncommon south of the continental shelf because they are generally shallow water feeders, and the ice with which they are usually associated in winter rarely extends south of the shelf break (Burns et al. 1981).

Belukhas appear to move inshore or northward out of the Navarin Basin in spring. Residents of Gambell see these whales passing through Anadyr Strait in March and April, with the numbers diminishing in May (Seaman, unpublished). Kleinenberg et al. (1964) observed several hundred whales in late May moving northward by Cape Navarin into the Gulf of Anadyr. Some belukhas may remain until June in association with an ice remnant which predictably occurs in the northern Navarin Basin each year (Burns et al. 1981), then move west to coastal areas of the Gulf of Anadyr where they are common until freezeup (Tomilin 1957; Kleinenberg et al. 1964). Belukhas are probably uncommon in the ice-free waters of the Navarin Basin in summer and early autumn when they are abundant in coastal areas, but return in autumn when coastal areas freeze over.

Many of the belukhas which summer in the Chukchi, Beaufort, and East Siberian seas probably occur seasonally in the Navarin Basin. Some may utilize the area for a major portion of those months when ice is present, while others may occur there for only a few days. The abundance of belukhas in Navarin Basin is probably highly variable depending on ice and feeding conditions, but is likely to be greatest during years of extensive ice cover.

Norton Basin

For the purpose of this discussion Norton Basin includes Norton Sound, the southwest coast of the Seward Peninsula, and the Chirikof Basin including Saint Lawrence Island (Figure 12).

Belukha whales are uncommon during the coldest winter months in inner Norton Sound due to the usual presence of an extensive, comparatively unbroken ice cover. Hunters from Elim have reported sightings and occasional entrapment of belukhas in openings in the ice south of that village (Seaman, unpublished), but such sightings are uncommon since leads in the ice are not regularly present in areas accessible to local hunters.

Belukhas utilize the coastal areas of Norton Sound including the Yukon River estuary during the entire ice-free period from breakup in May or June until freezeup in October or November. Belukhas have often been sighted as early as April off the shorefast ice near Shaktoolik and Cape

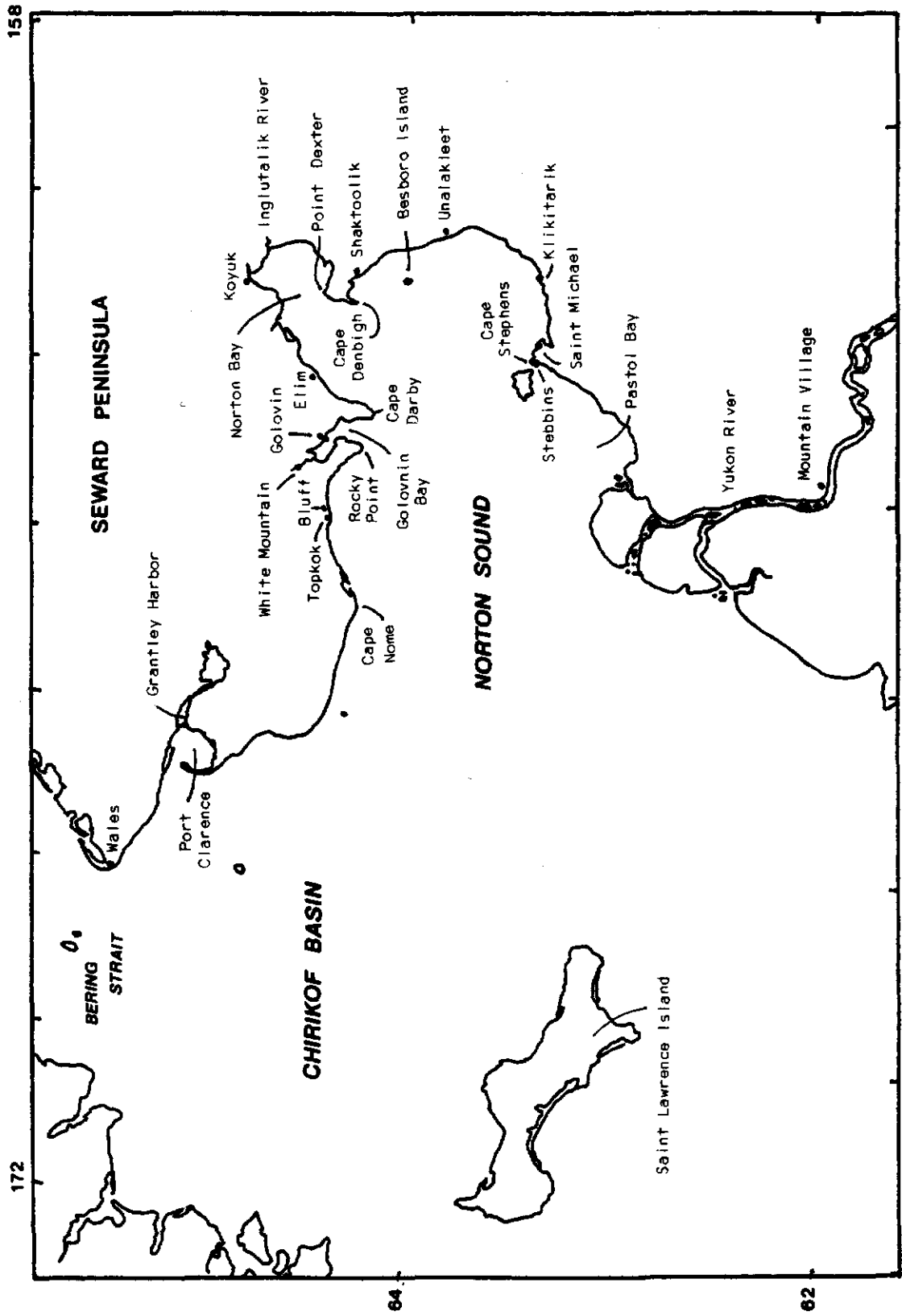


Figure 12. Map of the Norton Basin showing locations mentioned in text.

Denbigh. They are most common near the eastern Norton Sound villages of Stebbins, Saint Michael, Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, Koyuk, and Elim from late May through June and from September until November, although they are present throughout the summer (Frost et al. 1983a). People from Stebbins, Saint Michael, and Elim believe that belukhas seen in spring frequent the mouths and nearshore waters off the Yukon River during the summer. Ray (1964 and 1975) identified the historically important belukha hunting areas in Norton Sound as Pastol Bay, the mouth of the Inglutalik River (Norton Bay), and Golovnin Bay. Nelson (1887) found that belukhas were very common in southern Norton Sound near Saint Michael and near the mouths of the Yukon River. Residents of Golovin and White Mountain confirm that belukhas were historically common in Golovnin Bay and Golovnin Lagoon (ADF&G, unpublished).

Belukhas begin to utilize the coastal areas of Norton Sound at the same time that migratory and anadromous fishes arrive there. During herring spawning, which commences in late May or early June as breakup occurs (Barton 1979), belukhas are regularly seen following schools of herring, particularly near Golovnin Bay, Cape Denbigh, Point Dexter, and near Saint Michael (Nelson 1887; Giddings 1967; L. Barton, personal communication; Frost et al. 1983a). Local pilots have also seen belukhas feeding on herring in mid-June near Besboro Island. In 1981, belukhas were seen chasing and eating herring off Klikitarik in late April and Cape Stephens in mid-May (ADF&G, unpublished). At least 100 were present and feeding on herring in the shallows near Point Dexter in late May 1981. Runs of herring are followed slightly later by capelin (Mallotus villosus) and salmon, which are also important prey of belukhas.

Throughout the summer and autumn belukhas are found near and in the mouths of the Yukon River where they feed on salmon. In 1980, they were common near the southern mouth in late May and June; and in early July over 150 were seen regularly near Big Eddy, just upstream from Emmonak (J. Burns Jr., personal communication). In July 1981 over 100 belukhas were seen feeding just off the northern mouth of the Yukon and another smaller group was sighted to the east in outer Pastol Bay (Ljungblad et al. 1982). King, chum, red, and silver (Oncorhynchus kisutch) salmon enter the Yukon River from late May to early September (Geiger and Andersen 1978). There are numerous historical accounts of belukhas swimming upriver several hundred kilometers above tidal waters, probably following salmon. They have been reported from Nulato and Koyukuk, over 800 kilometers from the river mouth, both historically and as recently as 1981 (Nelson 1887; Collins 1945; Lensink 1961; ADF&G, unpublished). Residents of Tanana remember seeing belukhas near their village in the early 1900's. A group of four or five belukhas was reported several km upriver from Tanana (1,200 km from the river mouth) in June 1982 and at the same general time a single large adult was reported 130 km further upriver above Rampart (F. Andersen, personal communication). In recent years belukhas have been observed occasionally at Mountain Village, 110 km upriver.

In general, belukhas appear to move up the Yukon River less frequently than they did 50-75 years ago. They are still very common, however, around the mouths of the river where they feed in the shallows. Although

the use of those waters may have been altered to some extent by increased fishing and related motorboat activity, the changes are not reported to be great (ADF&G, unpublished).

Near Saint Michael from midsummer to freezeup Nelson (1887) found that belukhas fed extensively on saffron cod (Eleginus gracilis). He observed that feeding occurred mainly at night and in the early morning in the bay near Saint Michael and in the many tidal creeks south to Kuskokwim Bay. In late September and October of 1976 and 1981 groups of 30-60 belukhas were feeding during daytime on schools of saffron cod near Cape Darby and Rocky Point at the entrance of Golovnin Bay (Lowry, Frost, and Burns 1982). About 150 belukhas were seen between Topkok and Bluff in early September 1981 (R. Nelson, personal communication).

Along the coast of the Seward Peninsula from Cape Nome to Wales, belukhas are seen from spring through autumn. They are sometimes seen in the pack ice off Cape Nome and the city of Nome as early as April. They were seen in early May of 1979 by Eskimos hunting walrus between Nome and Sledge Island. Cape Woolley and Cape Nome were once productive hunting sites for belukhas, with whales present throughout the ice-free periods but most common in early summer and again in autumn (Ray 1964; Seaman, unpublished). In November 1977, 150-200 belukhas were seen moving by Cape Nome; in November 1979, approximately 250 were seen there; and in November 1980, 75-100 whales were observed feeding just offshore (R. Nelson, personal communication).

During spring and summer, belukhas appear to move through the area from Cape Nome to Wales, sometimes foraging along the way, but not forming any major local concentrations. Near Cape Nome in spring and early summer they feed on schools of saffron cod and later have been observed following schools of herring (L. Barton, personal communication). The relationship between the belukhas of Norton Sound and those seen along the outer coast between Cape Nome and Wales is unknown, but they may be the same whales moving back and forth, or animals passing through the area. Historically large numbers of belukhas occurred in Port Clarence and Grantley Harbor, but today they are seen only occasionally and in small numbers (Ray 1964 and 1975; Seaman, unpublished). In previous years when belukhas were common in Port Clarence and Grantley Harbor their appearance coincided with that of spawning herring.

Near Wales, belukhas are reportedly most common from mid-March through mid-May when movement is generally northward, and in October and November when most movement is southward (Curtis 1930; Thornton 1931; Van Valen 1941; Ray 1964; Seaman unpublished). Sightings in March and early April are probably of whales migrating to the Beaufort Sea, while later spring sightings may be of whales headed for the Chukchi coast. During summer, belukhas are not common and may be seen moving to either the north or the south.

Near Saint Lawrence Island belukhas are seen commonly in the spring, and occasionally in autumn and winter, particularly when saffron and arctic (Boreogadus saida) cod are abundant (Seaman, unpublished). In April, large groups of belukhas (some of over 100 whales) have been observed moving north by Gambell, Southwest Cape, Southeast Cape, and East Cape. G. C. Ray (personal communication) and Braham et al. (1984) reported many

belukhas in this area in spring, particularly north and northwest of the Island. Belukhas are rarely observed during the summer, usually as single animals or in very small groups of both gray and white individuals (F. Fay, personal communication; Seaman, unpublished).

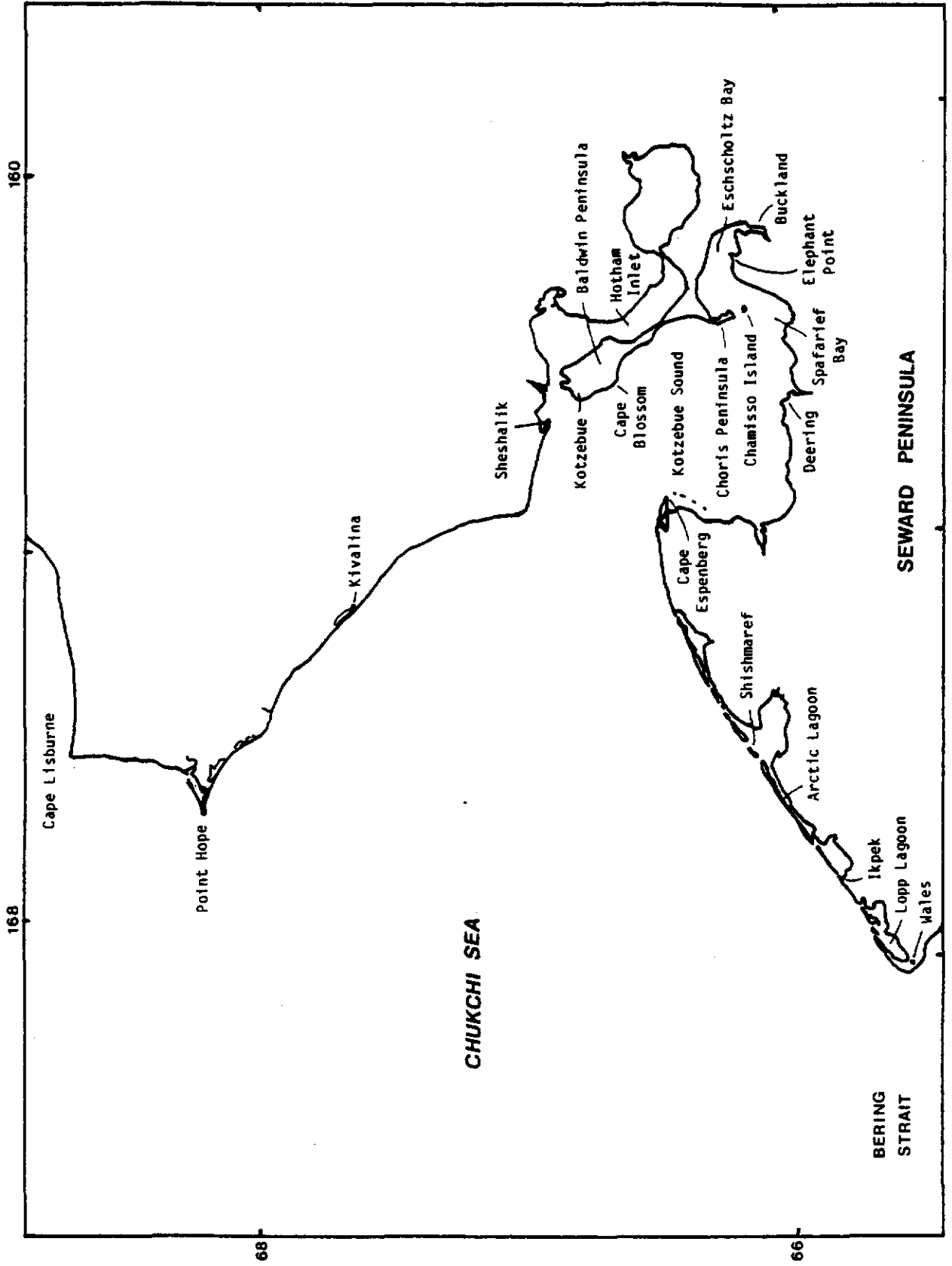
In some years large numbers of belukhas are seen along the north and west shores of Saint Lawrence Island prior to freezeup. Occasional whales are seen in late October but most arrive from the north in November and December. Local residents report that belukhas are seen more often in the autumn at Gambell than at Savoonga; whales seen at Savoonga are usually following the coast of the island toward the west, occasionally remaining in the area for several days. Either before or shortly after the ice appears, belukhas move southward, at least some of them moving into the Gulf of Anadyr (Kleinenberg et al. 1964). F. Fay (personal communication) reported at least a thousand animals north of Saint Lawrence Island in late November and early December 1957. This group followed the north coast past Gambell, headed toward the Gulf of Anadyr. Sightings of equal or greater numbers were made north and west of Saint Lawrence Island in November of 1974 and 1976 (Seaman, unpublished). Smaller groups (15-25) are seen in December-March along the western and southern shores in areas of open water created by strong ocean currents and prevailing northwesterly winds. Groups of up to 250-300 have been reported near Southwest Cape (Seaman, unpublished).

There have been no systematic surveys directed toward determining the abundance of belukhas in Norton Sound or adjacent areas of Norton Basin. The best available information on abundance is based on the observations of local residents and biologists working in the area. In combination, those sources suggest that the number of belukhas utilizing the coastal waters of eastern Bering Sea from Bering Strait south to Kuskokwim Bay during summer at least equals and probably exceeds the number in Bristol Bay. A conservative estimate is 1,000-1,200 whales, possibly as many as 2,000. Although calving occurs in Norton Sound, specific calving areas have not been identified.

Hope Basin

Hope Basin includes the southeastern Chukchi Sea from Bering Strait north to Cape Lisburne (Figure 13). Most of our information on the distribution and movements of belukha whales in the coastal regions of the Hope Basin is based on field studies undertaken by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at Point Hope and in Kotzebue Sound, and on interviews and conversations with long-time residents of coastal villages. Most of this information is reported in Frost et al. (1983b). There is little other published information regarding belukhas in this area.

During winters of years with "light" ice conditions, belukhas are not uncommon in the southern Chukchi Sea. Eskimo hunters from Wales see them in nearshore leads throughout the winter. In the 1950's when seal hunting was still a major winter occupation at Shishmaref, belukhas were occasionally seen by hunters traveling to the shore lead. On 5 March 1976, hunters reported a group of 35 belukhas trapped in the ice about 45 km southwest of Shishmaref (ADF&G, unpublished).



According to older residents of Shishmaref and Wales, belukhas were once common along the northern Seward Peninsula from Ikpek to Cape Espenberg during breakup and throughout the summer (Seaman, unpublished). In the early 1900's, reindeer herders from Shishmaref and Wales saw from a few to several hundred belukhas inside Lopp and Arctic lagoons in late June and July. If left undisturbed, whales would remain in the lagoons for extended periods. Belukhas occasionally entered Shishmaref Lagoon in July during periods of high water, and occurred along the nearby coast until freezeup when they were sometimes caught in nets set in the drifting ice near the village (Seaman, unpublished). At one time some of the people from Kotzebue Sound spent their summers fishing and hunting seals, caribou, and belukhas along the coast from Shishmaref to Cape Prince of Wales (Nelson 1887; Curtis 1930; Hall 1975; ADF&G, unpublished).

Belukhas have been infrequently sighted near Shishmaref in recent years. One group of about 20 was sighted in the ice 7 km west of the village on 4 June 1979 (Frost et al. 1983b). Residents of Shishmaref think there have been fewer whales near their village since the introduction and increased use of outboard-powered boats. Undoubtedly, large numbers of belukhas pass along the north side of the Seward Peninsula in spring on their way to Kotzebue Sound and locations further to the north, but this migration is probably far enough offshore to pass unnoticed by coastal residents.

Belukhas have been reported as common summer residents of Kotzebue Sound for as long as there are published records for the area (Nelson 1887; Curtis 1930; Foote and Cooke 1960; Ray 1964 and 1975; Foote 1965; Foote and Williamson 1966; Saario and Kessel 1966; Hall 1975; Giddings 1967; Seaman and Burns 1981; Frost et al. 1983b). Belukhas arrive in Kotzebue Sound in late May to mid-June, usually during or shortly after breakup when ice is still present but is broken and scattered. They are often first seen in pockets of open water in the northern Sound from Sheshalik to Cape Blossom. In 1978 the first confirmed sighting in Kotzebue Sound was made on 11 June southeast of Chamisso Island by a Kotzebue hunter enroute to Elephant Point. In 1979, a pilot from Kotzebue reported a group of about 30 whales on 1 June south of Cape Blossom. A group of 80-100 was seen at the same location on 6 June, and was observed approaching Sheshalik spit from the southwest shortly thereafter (G. Barr, personal communication). These first sightings in 1978 and 1979 were probably somewhat earlier than usual, since in both years the winters and springs were unusually warm and breakup occurred early. Foote and Cooke (1960) found that the first belukhas usually appeared near Sheshalik in mid- to late June.

Eschschooltz Bay is a large shallow bay in the southeastern corner of Kotzebue Sound about 85 km southeast of Kotzebue. It is presently the most productive belukha hunting site in the Kotzebue Sound area. Belukhas normally appear in Eschschooltz Bay in mid-June, slightly later than in northern Kotzebue Sound. In 1978, hunters from Deering sighted a group of at least 50 on 12 June, 6 km west of Elephant Point, and in 1979 over 200 were seen on 8 June along the northwest shore (N. Lee, personal communication). Belukhas appeared somewhat later in 1982 with the first whales seen on 21 June. When in the area, belukhas normally move into Eschschooltz Bay each day on the flood tide and leave on the ebb tide, but

sometimes remain in the bay through the tidal cycle. They follow a deep channel which extends from Chamisso Island and parallels the north shore toward the Buckland River. On high tide and the first part of ebb tide, the whales commonly disperse along the north and east shores of the bay. On some flood tides they do not deeply penetrate the bay but concentrate in the shallow waters along the northeast shore. This may be due in part to avoidance of boat traffic near Elephant Point and the Buckland River. In June they are usually intercepted by hunters who herd or drive them into shallow waters of the inner bay. In June 1978, 1979, 1981, and 1982 belukhas continued to move in and out of the bay for a week to 10 days, presumably until hunting activity disturbed them to the point they would no longer enter (Seaman and Burns, unpublished). In some years after hunting ceases and all hunters leave, some whales return to Eschscholtz Bay and remain until at least mid-July (Seaman, unpublished).

There appears to be considerable local movement of belukhas in Kotzebue Sound. The whales seen near Sheshalik, Kotzebue, and Cape Blossom are almost certainly part of the same group seen in Eschscholtz Bay. In 1979, during times when belukhas were not seen in Eschscholtz Bay, many whales were seen off Sheshalik, in Kotzebue Sound proper, and in Spafarief Bay just west of Eschscholtz Bay. On several occasions when there was much boat activity near both Sheshalik-Kotzebue and Eschscholtz Bay, belukhas were seen near Cape Blossom and seaward of Sheshalik. The residents of Deering say that belukhas are not seen near their village. Historically as well as in recent years the whales seem to have preferred the northern and eastern parts of the Sound.

The utilization patterns and movements of belukhas in Kotzebue Sound appear to be markedly different today than in the early 1900's (Seaman and Burns 1981; ADF&G, unpublished). Residents of Noatak and Kotzebue have noted that the greatest change occurred shortly after the introduction of outboard-powered boats in the 1920's and early 1930's. Foote and Cooke (1960) stated that before motorboats were used belukhas came very close to shore and often entered the shallows behind Sheshalik spit as well as Hotham Inlet. In the 1940's and 1950's there was a large increase in both the number and size of motorboats near Kotzebue and Sheshalik. Hunting became more difficult as fewer belukhas came into the shallows near these sites. By the 1960's boat traffic in northern Kotzebue Sound was heavy, traditional hunting methods gave way to less organized hunts, and fewer belukhas were seen in these shallow areas. Today belukhas are even less common near Sheshalik than in the 1960's although they are still common offshore. Many people from Kotzebue believe that the noises associated with modernization, such as electrical generation, construction, barge traffic, and low-flying aircraft have compounded the problem.

Noticeable changes in utilization patterns and movements of belukhas have also occurred in Eschscholtz Bay. Traditionally only the people from the small village of Buckland and occasionally Deering hunted belukhas in Eschscholtz Bay. In the early 1900's the village was located on the lower Buckland River, and residents seasonally moved downriver to Eschscholtz Bay for the belukha hunt. The whales, which were present in large but variable numbers every year, were hunted from umiaks and kayaks for one or two weeks in late June or July, or until enough meat was obtained. After the boat hunt was over (usually mid-July) belukhas returned to the bay and

frequently stayed for days at a time moving over the tidal flats on flood tide and to the deep water at ebb tide. The older people remember that very large numbers of whales were present after the hunt in July in the shallows east of Elephant Point and along the north shore. Belukhas frequented these areas until early August, after which time they were more commonly seen in western Eschscholtz Bay, near Chamisso Island and the Choris Peninsula, or in Spafarief Bay.

In the early 1920's a reindeer processing plant was established at Elephant Point. About the same time the Buckland people moved their summer hunting camp from the north side of the bay to this location and by the late 1930's the village of Buckland was situated at Elephant Point year-round. With the increase in noise and activity, belukhas spent more time on the northern side of the bay and came less frequently into the shallows east of Elephant Point. However, boat traffic was generally moderate prior to the 1950's since the village was located very near the hunting area. Boat traffic increased somewhat about 1954 when the village was relocated up the Buckland River to above tidewater and people began moving regularly back and forth. In the late 1960's a few hunters from other areas began to come to Eschscholtz Bay to hunt and by 1975 there were many additional boats, particularly from Kotzebue. Hunters are of the opinion that uncontrolled boat traffic in June and early July, particularly during flooding tides, acts to reduce the number of belukhas entering Eschscholtz Bay and to decrease hunting success (ADF&G, unpublished).

Belukhas are known to both feed and calve in Kotzebue Sound. As in Norton Sound, the whales probably follow local movements of fish, feeding on species which are particularly abundant at certain times (Seaman and Burns 1981; Seaman et al. 1982). In Eschscholtz Bay there are substantial runs of herring, smelt, char (Salvelinus alpinus), and salmon, in addition to large numbers of saffron cod (Barton 1979; Burns, Frost, and Seaman, personal observation).

Calving has been reported in all coastal regions of the Sound; however, it is unknown whether calves are born only in shallow coastal regions or whether calving also occurs offshore. Most observations of calving are from near Sheshalik and from the eastern end of Eschscholtz Bay. Sheshalik may be of lesser importance at present due to avoidance by whales as discussed above.

The actual number of whales using the Kotzebue Sound area during the ice-free months is poorly known. Our estimate of abundance is based on our field studies, interviews with local residents, and occasional observations of local pilots and biologists working in the area. In July 1962, Burns (unpublished) saw 900-1,200 belukhas north of Chamisso Island, moving northward along the Choris and Baldwin peninsulas. On 8 July 1978 a resident of Buckland (N. Lee) saw an estimated 900-1,000 belukhas scattered in the shallows along the northwest shore of Eschscholtz Bay. At least 500 whales were seen from boats in Eschscholtz Bay on the first hunt in June 1978 and, based on hunting success, that is a very conservative estimate of the numbers of belukhas in the area that year. Local hunters reported that belukhas were also very abundant in 1977. In 1979 and 1981 hunters reported low numbers of whales which was reflected

in very low harvests. In 1982 belukhas were very abundant in southeastern Kotzebue Sound and were also common near Sheshalik. Considering all observations we estimate that the peak number of whales in Kotzebue Sound during summer ranges from 500 to perhaps 2,000+ with considerable year-to-year variability which cannot at present be explained. This estimate is based primarily on observations made in southeastern Kotzebue Sound and may poorly reflect whale abundance in other portions of the Sound. Systematic surveys of the area are needed in order to refine these estimates.

Belukhas appear off Kivalina and Point Hope, which are along the migratory route of whales headed to the eastern Beaufort Sea, much earlier than they do in Kotzebue Sound. The northward spring migration past Point Hope has been documented by Foote (1960), Fiscus and Marquette (1975), Marquette (1976, 1977, and 1979), and Braham and Krogman (1977). At Point Hope belukhas are seen moving north through leads in the ice as early as March. The earliest recent sighting was on 21 March 1976 when two groups of approximately 80 and 120 whales were seen moving north through a lead southeast of Point Hope (Seaman, unpublished). In late March 1978 more than 100 were seen moving through the leads near Point Hope and about 1,000 were seen on 19 May 1980 (D. Smullin, personal communication). Belukhas are commonly seen and hunted throughout April and May, although hunting for belukhas takes place primarily when bowhead whales are not available (Marquette 1977; Braham and Krogman 1977). During spring most belukhas are seen swimming north, although in May 1976 several small groups were seen swimming south. Most sightings near Kivalina are in April and May and again in late June and early July (Frost et al. 1983b; Seaman, unpublished).

Hunters from Point Hope frequently see belukhas while hunting seals among the ice floes in late June and early July. During July, August, and early September, many belukhas are occasionally seen along the coast between Kotzebue Sound and Point Hope (Nelson 1887; Foote 1960; Frost et al. 1983b; Seaman, unpublished). Residents of Kivalina commonly see belukhas during the first part of September, usually swimming northwest along the coast toward Point Hope; they are rarely seen after that time. Seal hunters from Point Hope report seeing belukhas moving southward by the village during September and October. Belukhas are uncommon off Point Hope during midwinter, although they are occasionally seen south of there in January and February, following periods of strong northerly winds that form leads and polynyas in the ice.

Barrow Arch

The Barrow Arch area includes the Chukchi Sea coast from Cape Lisburne to Point Barrow (Figure 14). Most of the information presented below is based on our field studies conducted from 1978 to 1981, including interviews with local residents of Barrow, Wainwright, and Point Lay, and aerial surveys of the coast between Barrow and Cape Sabine. Specific sighting information is presented in Frost et al. (1983b). There is little published information on belukhas in this area.

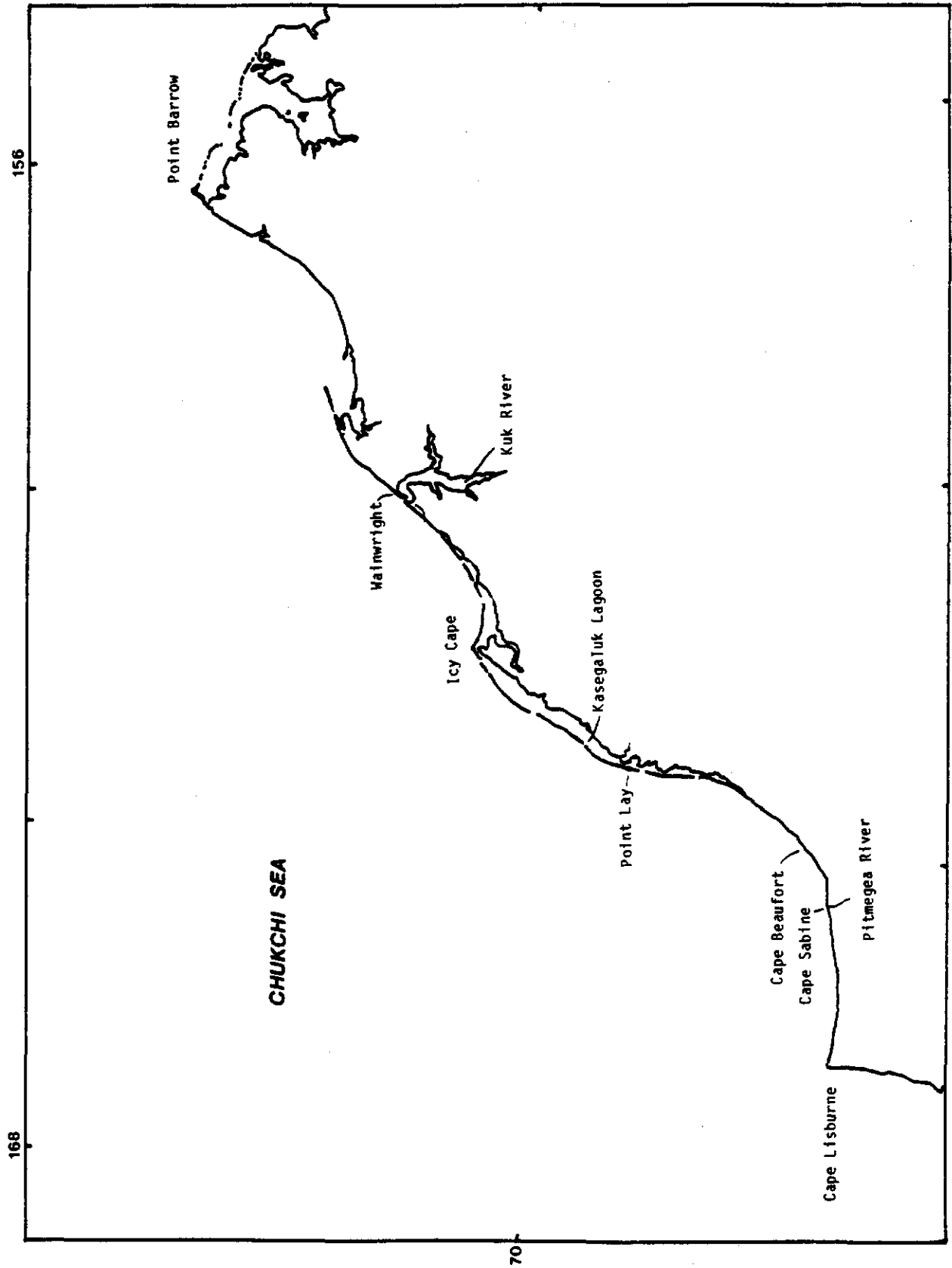


Figure 14. Map of the Barrow Arch region showing locations mentioned in text.

Belukhas are present in two "waves" along the northern Chukchi Sea coast. The first comprises whales migrating northward through leads in the pack ice during March-June and the second consists of whales that move into the coastal zone in June or July after the ice moves offshore. The timing of breakup is variable from year to year, with the ice moving out of the southern regions such as Ledyard Bay earlier than Peard Bay and Point Barrow to the north. On the average, the shore ice leaves Cape Sabine and Cape Beaufort regions in mid-June and Point Barrow about one month later.

Northward migrating belukhas move by Wainwright through leads in the ice as early as March (Nelson 1969; ADF&G, unpublished). However, the peak of the spring migration past Wainwright and Barrow occurs in April and May (Braham and Krogman 1977; Seaman and Burns 1981). Groups of from 10 to several hundred whales have been seen in the flaw zone between Cape Lisburne and Barrow. The spring migration is largely complete by late May with most whales moving into the eastern Beaufort Sea to summer in coastal waters off the Mackenzie River estuary (Fraker 1979).

The coastal area of the northern Chukchi Sea used most intensively by belukhas in June and July is Kasegaluk Lagoon and, particularly, the adjacent marine waters. Belukhas characteristically appear in the southern part of this region near Ledyard Bay in mid- to late June, then move gradually northward following the retreat of seasonal ice. Childs (1969) reported a group of 50 or more belukhas near the Pitmegea River on 24 June 1958. On 3 July 1982 an estimated 2,000-2,500 whales were observed in a loose aggregation moving northward along the coast in the area between Cape Sabine and Cape Beaufort (R. Quimby, personal communication). Calves were observed within the aggregation. Residents of Point Lay regularly see whales near Cape Beaufort prior to their arrival at Kasegaluk Lagoon.

Belukhas first appear near the village of Point Lay in late June or early July. In 1978 the people of Point Lay saw the first "summer" belukhas (as opposed to spring migrants on their way to the Mackenzie River estuary which may be seen in April and May) of the year in Naokok Pass on 2 July. At least 100 whales were moving northward close to the shore. In 1979 the first summer whales, a group of at least 100, were seen at Kukpowruk Pass on 22 June. This is one of the earliest recorded sightings in this area and was probably due to a very early breakup that year.

Although belukhas sometimes use the deeper portions of Kasegaluk Lagoon, they are most often seen in the nearshore waters outside the barrier islands (Figures 15-17). The whales are usually concentrated near major passes, particularly Kukpowruk, Utukok, Icy Cape, and Akoliakatat, and to a lesser extent, Akunik. At a given time, most of the whales in the area usually concentrate at the same pass, either in or just outside of the pass itself, or in the downstream plume of lagoon water. Most have been observed within 1/2-3/4 km from shore, usually with a few small groups or solitary animals (mostly adults) farther offshore in deeper water. On 10 July 1978 a large group of whales observed near Kukpowruk Pass was concentrated in and south of the pass; the nearshore current was moving south that day. Whales seen at Akoliakatat Pass on 13 and 15 July 1979 were in and to the northeast of the pass; the current was moving to the

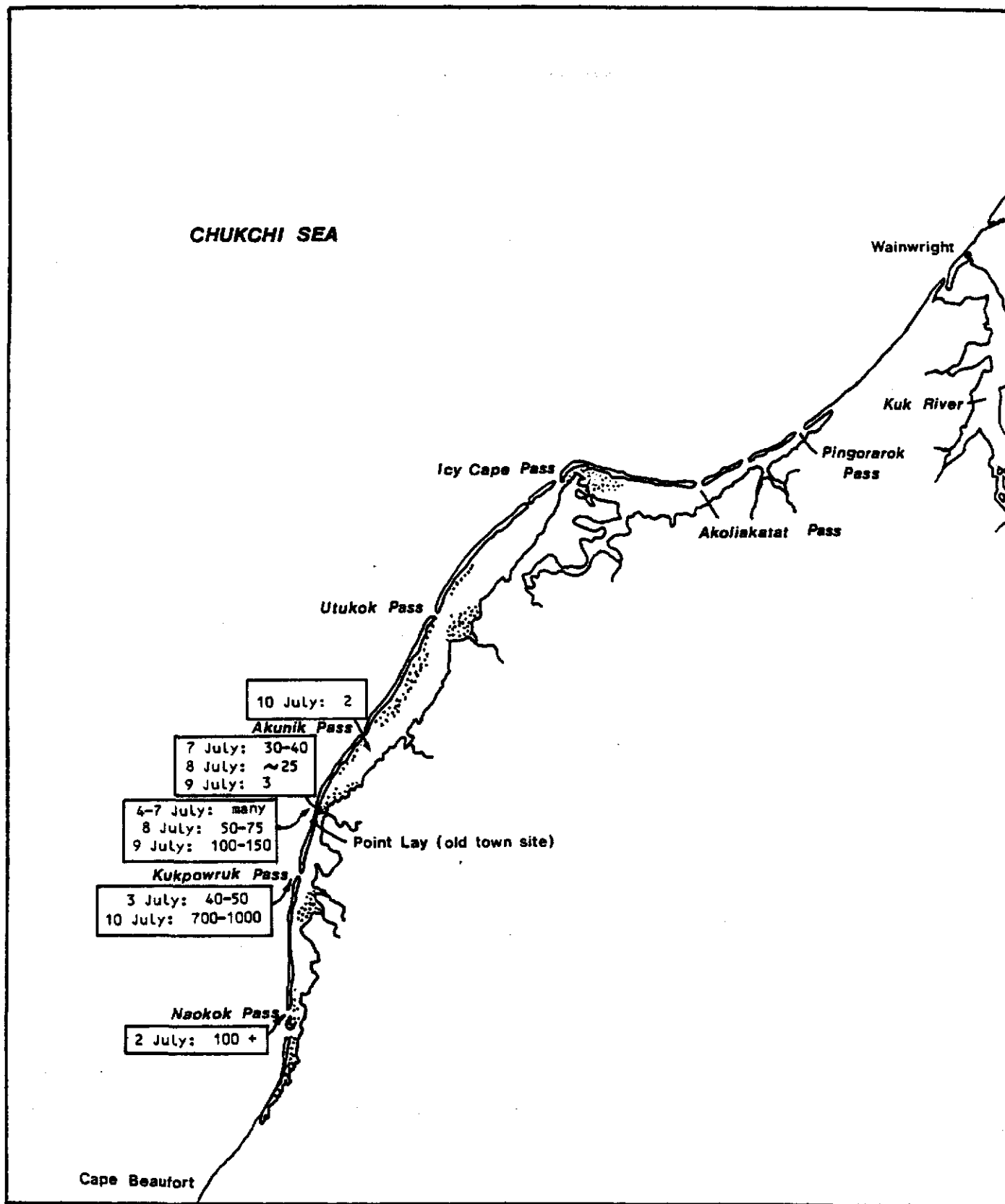


Figure 15. Sightings of belukha whales near Kasegaluk Lagoon, 1978.

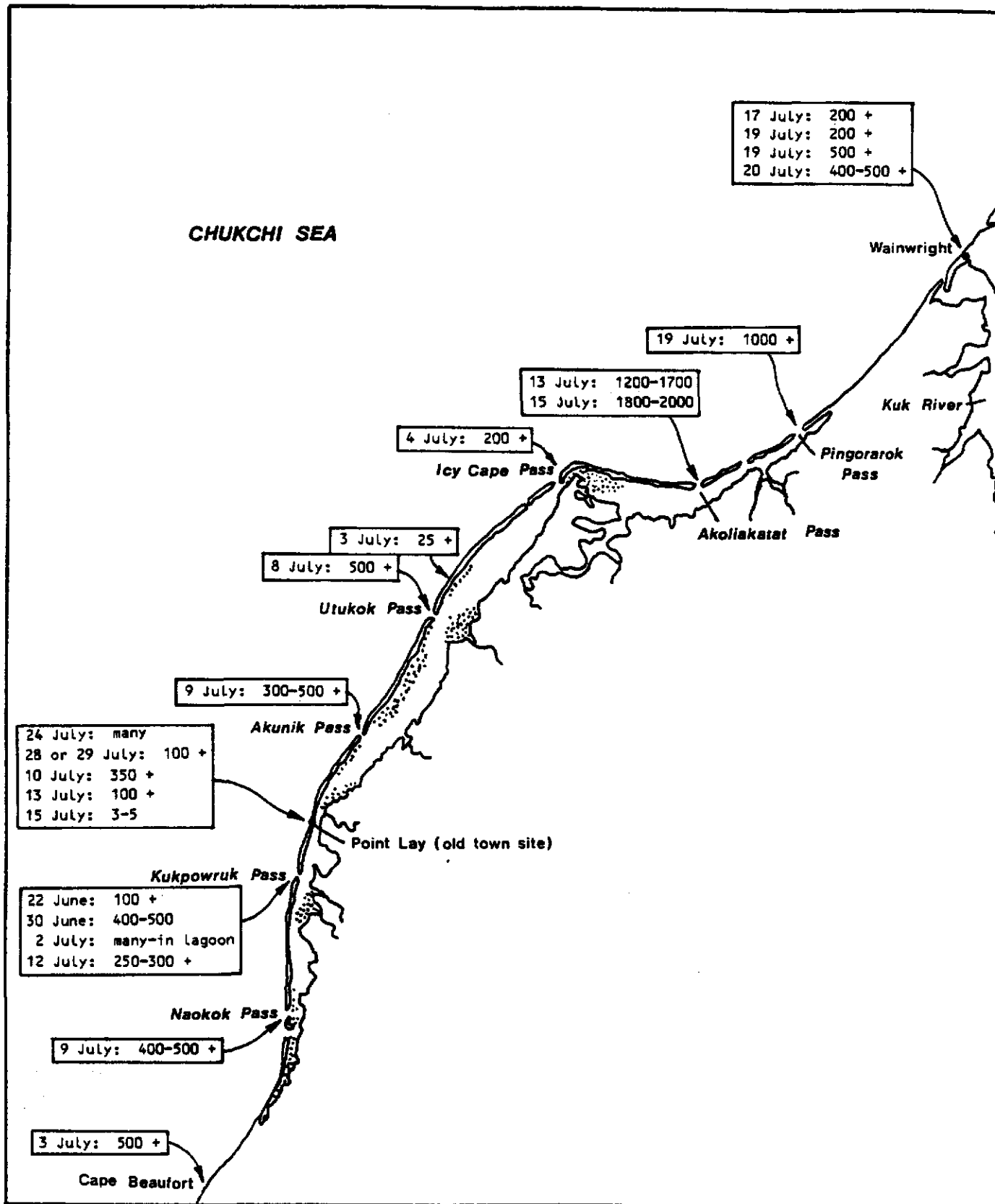


Figure 16. Sightings of belukha whales near Kasegaluk Lagoon, 1979.

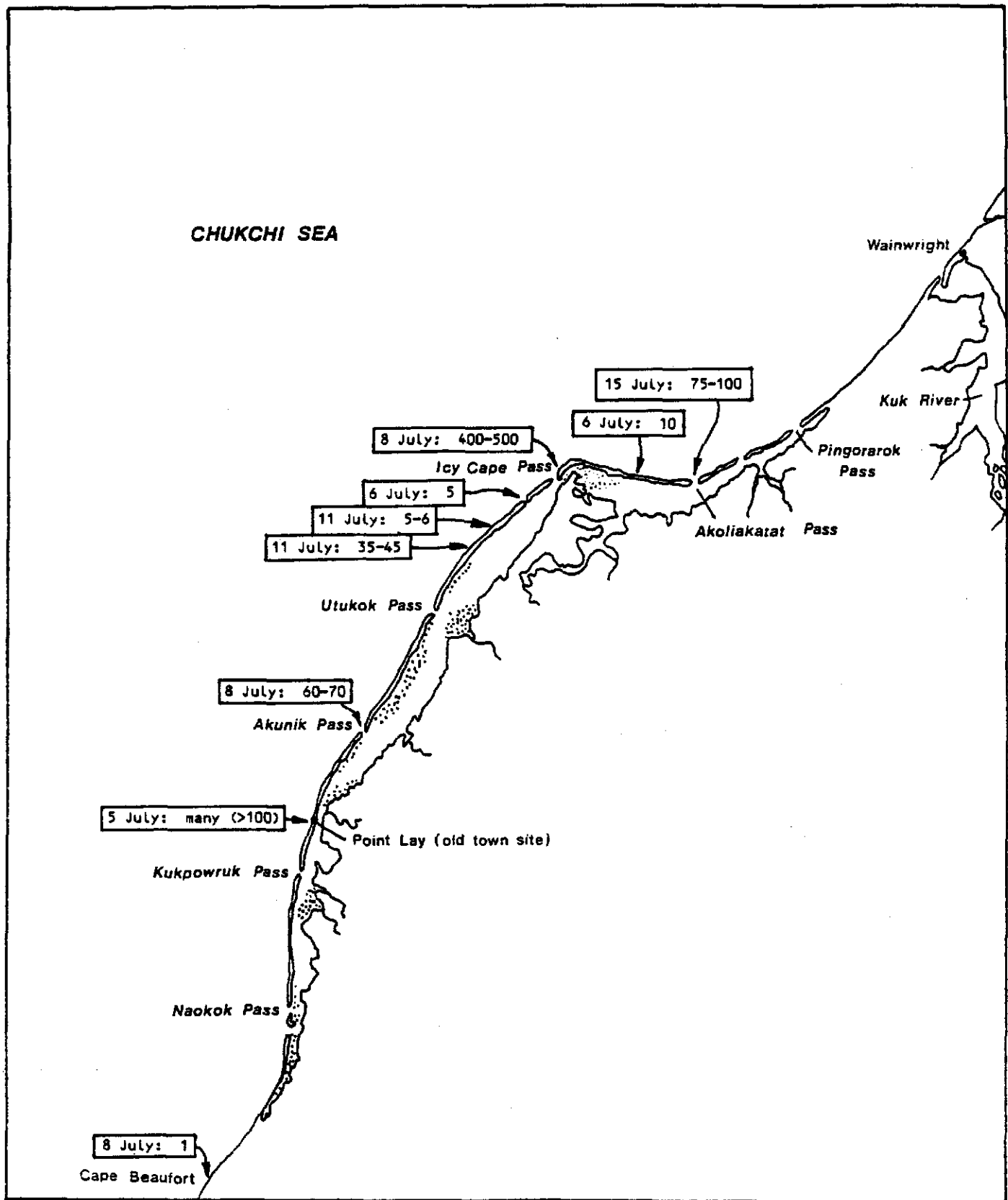


Figure 17. Sightings of belukha whales near Kasegaluk Lagoon, 1981.

northeast. Water temperatures in these lagoon plumes were as much as 2°C warmer than nearby marine waters (Seaman, unpublished).

Belukhas also occur in the deeper channels inside Kasegaluk Lagoon. Point Lay residents report that whales only enter the lagoon when water is moving out a pass. They often enter by one pass and leave by another. In some years, many whales enter the lagoon, while in others very few do so. The reason for this variability is unknown.

Sightings from 1979, the year for which our data are most complete, illustrate some aspects of the movement of belukhas within the area. By late June the shore ice had moved offshore along the southern third of the lagoon; the pack ice remained close to shore near Utukok Pass and Solivik Island. The first belukhas were seen and hunted on 22 June at Kukpowruk Pass, after which they reportedly moved northward and offshore. They were next seen, on 24 June moving southward along the beach near Point Lay and at the same location on 28 June moving northward. A pilot estimated 400-500 whales near Kukpowruk Pass on 30 June. None were seen on 1 July but many were present near shore and inside of the lagoon near Kukpowruk Pass on 2 July. There appeared to be some movement of whales between the coast and the edge of the ice pack a short distance to the north.

On 3 July the coast was surveyed from Naokok Pass to Point Barrow. The pack ice extended south parallel to the coast to approximately midway between Utukok and Icy Cape passes. Several small groups of belukhas were seen along the ice edge north of Utukok Pass. At approximately the same time, over 500 were reported by a hunter about 125 km to the south at Cape Beaufort. No whales were seen between the two points. On 4 July a southwest wind blew the ice to just north of Icy Cape and a pilot saw approximately 200 whales near Icy Cape Pass. On 8 July over 500 whales were seen at Utukok Pass and on 9 July sightings of 300-500 animals were made in the vicinity of both Akunik and Naokok passes.

The last large sighting of belukhas made at Point Lay in 1979 was on 13 July. Over 100 whales were moving northward from Kukpowruk Pass where whales were seen the day before. At Akoliakatat Pass, approximately 1,600-2,400 belukhas were present from 13 to 18 July, at which time they moved farther east and north. Whales were sighted at Pingorarok Pass (1,000+ animals) on 19 July moving northward, and at Wainwright, 40 kilometers to the northeast between 17 and 20 July, with peak numbers late on the 19th (500+) and on the 20th (400). No whales were seen at Akoliakatat Pass on 19 July. Based on the timing of observations, the belukhas seen at Wainwright on the 19th and 20th were the same animals that were observed at Akoliakatat Pass a few days earlier.

According to the residents of Point Lay, belukhas left the Kasegaluk Lagoon region unusually early in 1979. They are usually seen at Point Lay until at least the end of July and sometimes, as in 1978, until the middle of August. In 1981, however, no belukhas were seen on aerial surveys flown after 15 July (Frost et al. 1983b). The whales usually depart to the north, occasionally following the coast where they are seen at Wainwright and, less commonly, at Barrow. The factors affecting the timing of belukha movements are poorly known, but may include ice conditions, water temperature, food availability, human disturbance in the

form of hunting or aircraft overflights, and the presence of killer whales (Orcinus orca) (Bel'kovich 1960; Fish and Vania 1971; Sergeant 1973; ADF&G, unpublished).

Belukhas are known to calve in the Kasegaluk Lagoon area. On aerial surveys in July 1978 and 1979, neonates were observed among the adult and subadult whales. Twice, on 8 and 10 July 1978, belukhas were observed giving birth in the lagoon (Seaman, unpublished).

Our best estimates of the abundance of belukhas along this sector of the coast come from aerial photographic counts of whales at concentration areas. At Kukpowruk Pass on 10 July 1978, 703 whales were counted. At Akoliakatat Pass in 1979, 1,104 were counted on 13 July and 1,601 on 15 July. There are many problems associated with deriving an estimate of the total number of whales in concentration areas from aerial counts (Brodie 1971; Sergeant 1973; Fraker 1977). Some of the animals are underwater at any given time and, depending on turbidity of the water and the depth to which the belukhas dive, they may or may not be visible to an observer. Animals outside the main concentration areas (farther offshore) were more widely dispersed and appeared to remain underwater longer and therefore were not adequately represented in aerial photographs. Neonates and yearlings are also undoubtedly under-represented because their small size and dark color makes them difficult to see. By applying correction factors to account for the above problems in sightability, we estimate the total number of belukhas at Kukpowruk Pass on 10 July 1978 as 1,138, and at Akoliakatat Pass on 13 and 15 July 1979 as 1,575 and 2,282 (Table 3). Based on the above observations and those of local residents, we estimate that 2,000-3,000 belukhas may occur near Kasegaluk Lagoon in most years, although in some years the abundance of whales in the area may be considerably less.

Belukhas appear only occasionally at Wainwright and Barrow during the ice-free periods. Van Valin (1941) described a belukha hunt in "late spring" (presumably July) at Wainwright after the ice had gone out. Belukhas were seen and hunted there on 17 and 18 July 1979. Nelson (1969) noted that during the ice-free season, belukhas were most commonly seen in late July and August, and were usually moving northeast along the coast. Informants from Wainwright confirmed that information, and added that "long ago" belukhas sometimes congregated at the mouth of Wainwright Inlet and moved into the Kuk River during summer. They are occasionally seen near Wainwright in September. They were reported to be numerous off Wainwright on 3 September 1975 and small groups were seen off the coast between Wainwright and Barrow on 11 and 13 September of that same year (Fiscus et al. 1976).

Hunters near Barrow occasionally see belukhas moving along the shore in summer and early autumn. Murdoch (1885) reported that in 1881, 1882, and 1883 large groups of belukhas passed by Barrow as soon as there was open water near the beach and appeared again a week to 10 days later. He saw 100 or more whales pass by Barrow within 200 yards of the shore on 28 September 1881 but noted that September sightings were uncommon. Several older residents of Barrow indicated that belukhas were once commonly seen near the village every summer. Boat traffic and noise

Table 3. Counts from photographs, correction factors and total estimated numbers of belukhas, excluding neonates, seen near Kasegaluk Lagoon on survey flights in 1978 and 1979.

	<u>Kukpowruk Pass</u>	<u>Akoliakatat Pass</u>	
	10 July 1978	13 July 1979	15 July 1979
Photographic count	703	1104	1601
Correction factor for whales underwater and therefore not observed ¹	(140) 20%	(221) 20%	(320) 20%
Correction factor for areas where whales were not included in photos ²	(211) 25%	(133) 10%	(192) 10%
Correction factor for yearlings not observed ³	(84) 8%	(117) 8%	(169) 8%
Total estimated number of belukhas in concentration	1138	1575	2282

¹Brodie (1971) working in clear water in Cumberland Sound estimated that he missed counting 40% of the animals because they were underwater and too deep to see. He did not use aerial photographs. Sergeant (1973) believed that he saw only 33% of the total animals while working in the murky waters of Hudson Bay. Seaman is of the opinion that he was able to count a much greater proportion of the total animals present in and adjacent to Kasegaluk Lagoon through the use of aerial photographs. On the average, whales were observed for 15-20 seconds and appeared on as many as three or four frames.

²Outside of the main concentration areas--the area covered by photographs--there were widely scattered individuals or small groups of whales that could not be included in photos taken on a single pass of the airplane. We assume that the age composition of those whales was similar to the main concentration.

³We used Brodie's (1971) estimate of 8% yearlings. Neonates are not included in the total estimates.

from large generators, vehicles, aircraft, etc., or other unknown factors may have discouraged whales from passing by near shore in recent years.

There is little information on the distribution and numbers of belukhas in the Barrow Arch portion of the northwestern Chukchi Sea. Burns (unpublished) recorded 13 whales in five scattered locations from 74°20'N to 74°41'N and 160°54'W to 167°24'W on 12 September 1974. On aerial survey flights conducted 10 through 20 September 1980, belukhas were sighted at four locations from 72°35'N to 73°00'N and 164°00'W to 169°00'W (Burns, unpublished). Recent detailed observations of autumn distribution in the northern Chukchi and western Beaufort seas are discussed in Burns and Seaman (1985).

Diapir Field

The Diapir Field planning area includes the Alaskan Beaufort Sea and a portion of the northeastern Chukchi Sea east of 162°W longitude (Figure 18). The continental shelf is quite narrow in the Beaufort Sea, generally extending offshore less than 100 km. Nearly continuous ice cover exists through much of the winter with a few offshore leads developing in the spring (Fraker 1979; Burns et al. 1981). Shorefast ice usually persists through June. In most years the pack ice retreats northward in mid to late summer leaving the coastal waters ice-free until freezeup in late September to early November (Burns et al. 1981). In some years the ice never leaves the coastal waters of the Beaufort Sea, while in other years the southern edge may be a hundred kilometers or more north of the coast.

Belukha whales are absent from the Diapir Field during most of the winter, from late November through March. Ice and weather conditions do not produce areas with predictable open water, and favorable wintering conditions for belukhas generally do not occur. Small numbers of whales may become entrapped by ice during the autumn migration, but the incidence of this is probably low. Observations of entrapped belukhas in the eastern Canadian Arctic (Porsild 1918; Freeman 1968) suggest that attempts to overwinter under these conditions frequently result in high mortality.

Belukha whales are common and at times very abundant in the Diapir Field during the spring, summer, and autumn. The majority of belukhas that seasonally occur in the Beaufort Sea are part of a group of at least 11,500 whales that summer in the Canadian Beaufort Sea and overwinter in the Bering and southern Chukchi seas (Braham and Krogman 1977; Fraker 1979; Davis and Evans 1982). The spring migration of belukha whales in the Chukchi Sea past Point Hope commences in mid- to late March (see Hope Basin and Barrow Arch planning area discussions). The earliest recorded sighting of belukha whales passing Point Barrow was on 2 April 1977 when a Barrow hunter, Arnold Brower (personal communication), sighted over 60 animals moving through a narrow lead off the shorefast ice. Four days later several hundred whales were seen. It is possible that belukhas occasionally pass by Barrow as early as late March. Belukhas are known to utilize offshore leads during the spring migration (Braham et al. 1984) and it is likely that some pass Point Barrow unnoticed by local hunters.

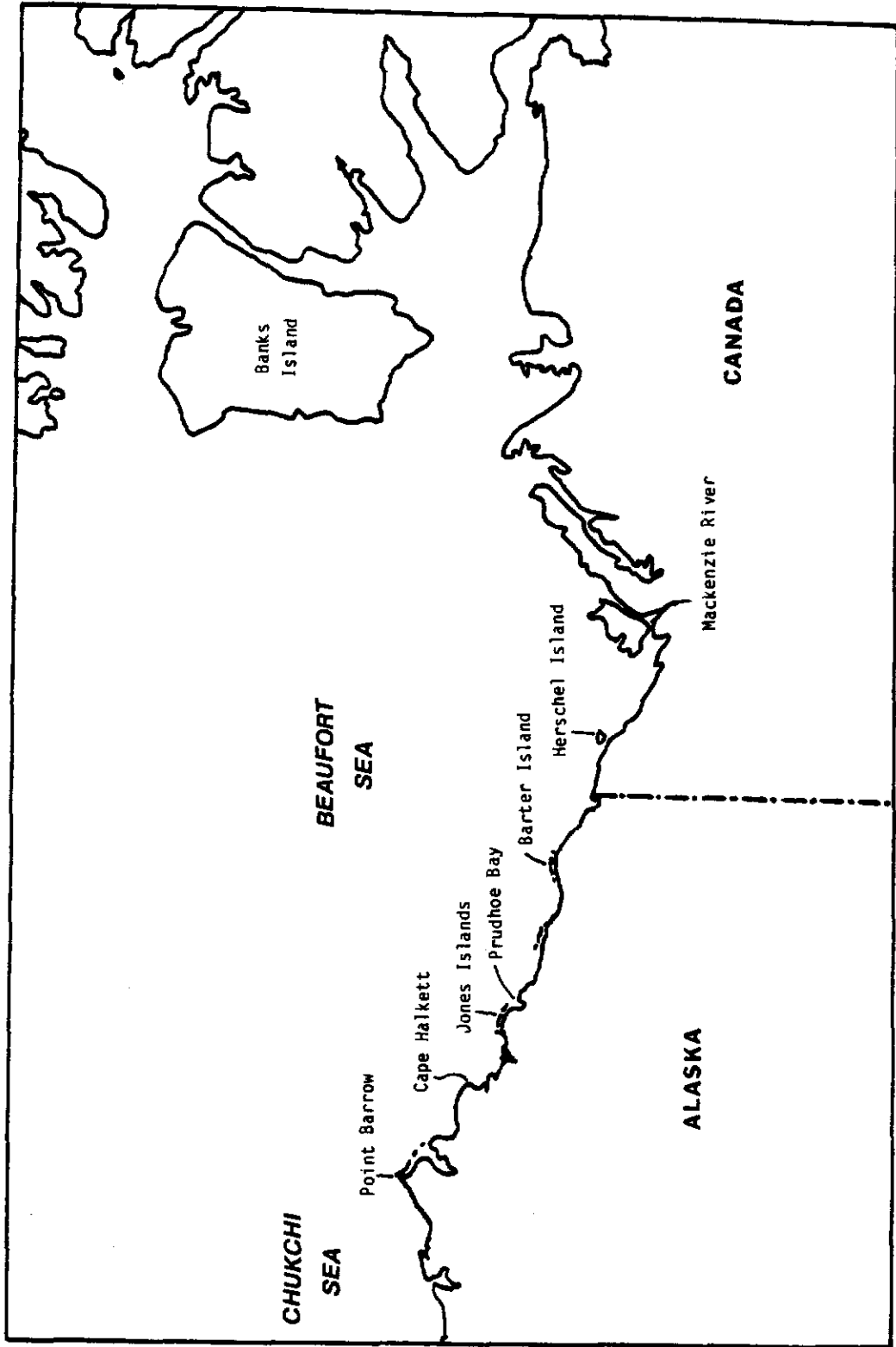


Figure 18. Map of the Diapir Field showing locations mentioned in text.

The peak of the spring migration past Point Barrow occurs from late April to the third week of May and varies in relation to ice conditions (Braham and Krogman 1977; G. Carroll, personal communication). The general north and east migration past Point Barrow continues through at least early July. Braham et al. (1984) observed belukhas north of Barrow up until their last aerial surveys in late June. Harrison and Hall (1978) observed two groups of 9 and 23 belukhas north of Barrow the first week of July and Murdoch (1885) reported whales along the coast at Barrow in the middle of July immediately following breakup.

The proposed migration route of belukha whales from Point Barrow to the eastern Beaufort Sea is described in detail by Fraker (1979). Observations by Ljungblad (1981) confirm that in late May and June migrating whales utilize offshore leads in pack ice which extend northeast from Barrow, into the Beaufort Sea. Many whales appear to congregate in the leads, polynyas, and open water west of Banks Island and in Amundsen Gulf in May and early June. By late June most of these whales have moved to the shallow, warmer waters of the Mackenzie River estuary where concentrations in excess of 2,000 whales are observed in some of the bays (Fraker et al. 1978). However, some belukhas have been seen moving eastward in Alaskan waters as late as 27 June and 15 July (Ljungblad 1981; ADF&G, unpublished).

Belukha whales have never been observed in large numbers during the summer in the coastal waters of the Alaskan Beaufort Sea. This is in marked contrast to the Canadian portion of the Beaufort Sea where up to 7,000 whales have been observed in the Mackenzie River estuary during July and August (Fraker 1980). Long-time residents of the Alaskan mid-Beaufort region, Jim and Harmon Helmericks (personal communication), indicate that belukhas are common off the shorefast ice until it moves away from the coast, usually between late June and mid-July. During the remainder of the summer, belukhas are rarely observed in the ice-free coastal waters of the Alaskan mid-Beaufort Sea.

During summer, belukhas are occasionally observed in the pack ice or ice-free waters near Barter Island. In July, these whales are typically observed moving eastward close to shore in small groups of 5 to 15. During August belukhas occur in groups of similar size, but are observed to move both east and west along the coast. Hunters of Kaktovik on Barter Island killed several belukhas on 19 August 1980.

There have been very few sightings of belukha whales within 120 km of the coast in the waters and pack ice of the Beaufort Sea during July and early August. Harrison and Hall (1978) saw four whales on 18 August 1976, approximately 75 km north of Cape Halkett, and Ljungblad et al. (1982) made three sightings of 26 animals at 96, 220, and 270 km north of Prudhoe Bay on 22 August 1981. Considering the substantial effort that has been devoted to offshore aerial surveys in this region north to about 71° N (e.g., Harrison and Hall 1978; Ljungblad et al. 1980, 1982; Ljungblad 1981), it appears that belukhas are uncommon in the open water areas of the Alaskan Beaufort Sea during July and early August.

Sightings of belukha whales in the eastern Beaufort Sea become increasingly infrequent in late August and September. Whales are seen headed

west past Herschel Island during September; a group of 2,000 was sighted near there on 21 September 1972 (Fraker et al. 1978). It appears that most whales move offshore prior to entering the Alaskan Beaufort Sea since they are rarely reported in nearshore waters. Johnson (1979) reported two sightings of whales swimming westward just offshore of the Jones Islands; a group of 75-100 was seen on 15 September 1977 and approximately 35 were seen on 23 September 1978. Cummings (personal communication) heard vocalizations of belukha whales near Prudhoe Bay in September 1980. No belukha whales were seen during marine mammal research done from a small boat in the nearshore Alaska Beaufort Sea from 20 August to 21 September 1980 and 16 August to 11 September 1981 (Frost and Lowry 1981; Lowry et al. 1981). The majority of belukha whales seem to remain well offshore throughout their westward migration out of the Beaufort Sea. Large numbers of whales have been seen on several occasions in September and early October in the region 35-220 km north of Point Barrow. During September they may be dispersed over a wide area. For example, on 21 September 1977, 100 were seen north of Prudhoe Bay and 2,000 were seen near Herschel Island. On 20 September 1980, Burns and Seaman (1985) observed numerous belukhas in a 140 km long band of pack ice north and east of Barrow.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

While belukha whales are a widespread, abundant, and comparatively well-known species in arctic and subarctic regions, many aspects of their distribution and movements are poorly understood. A basic question of considerable practical significance is how various groups of belukhas, which are mostly observed, studied, and exploited in spring and summer, relate to one another in terms of population identity.

Although some researchers have implied that reproductive isolation occurs among summering groups by referring to them as populations or stocks, such assertions probably do not apply to belukhas in western Alaskan waters. Breeding activity occurs in spring, prior to the arrival at summering areas, at a time when considerable mingling of animals can occur. Unfortunately, virtually no research has been done in areas where belukhas are presumed to breed so that an assessment of population identity must be made based on geographical considerations, as well as the fragmentary results of tagging and morphometric studies. We use the term population to refer to groups of whales that probably have low genetic interchange with other groups due to isolation during the reproductive period. Other groupings or concentrations of whales should be called aggregations, within which there may be herds. In areas where aggregations have been shown to be resident and largely isolated from adjacent groups the term stock may be applicable.

Whales in the North Pacific region are divisible into three populations. Those occurring in the Okhotsk Sea and the Cook Inlet area are resident and geographically isolated from the group that ranges throughout much of the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort, and East Siberian seas. We refer to this latter group as the Bering Sea population. Contrary to the implication of Figure 6 in Gurevich (1980), we know of no evidence to suggest that interchange occurs between the Bering Sea and Cook Inlet populations through Unimak Pass, though it is possible. The separation

between the Eurasian and the Bering Sea populations occurs in the western part of the East Siberian Sea (Gurevich 1980). Heavy pack ice effectively separates the belukhas from the Bering Sea population that summer in the western Canadian arctic from those to the east (Sergeant and Brodie 1975).

Favorable wintering habitat for belukhas (i.e., seasonal pack ice with adequate leads and polynyas) occurs in much of the Bering and southern Chukchi seas and the few available sightings indicate that whales are dispersed throughout this area. Compressive forces resulting in tightly packed ice (see Burns et al. 1981) likely exclude belukhas from some areas north of large islands (i.e., St. Lawrence and St. Matthew) and immediately north of Bering Strait.

With the first loosening of pack ice in March, a large component of the belukha population begins an extensive migration that eventually brings them to the eastern Beaufort Sea-Amundsen Gulf area (Fraker 1979). Since the shorefast ice is still intact during the migration period, these animals are excluded from the coastal zone until late June when they reach the Mackenzie estuary. The remaining animals move to coastal areas of Alaska and the USSR at breakup, which can occur as early as April in southern locations such as Bristol Bay.

During late spring and summer, belukhas occur in most coastal regions of the eastern Bering and Chukchi seas (Frost, et al. 1983a, 1983b). However, they are not seen in all locations at the same time, nor do they necessarily occur in each area every year. In the Bering Sea, whales are resident throughout the summer in inner Bristol Bay and the Norton Sound/Yukon River mouth region but are seen only sporadically in the area from Cape Constantine to Cape Romanzof. Considerable local movements of whales may occur. For example, belukhas that are seen in eastern and northern Norton Sound chasing schools of herring in late May and June are thought to move to the Yukon River estuary in summer to feed on salmon. These may be the same animals seen near Nome and Golovnin Bay in October and November feeding on saffron cod. We estimate that a minimum of 2,000-3,500 belukhas summer in Alaskan waters south of Bering Strait.

Along the Chukchi coast, belukhas are seen in two "waves." The first moves through the shore leads and offshore pack ice, passing Point Hope mainly in late April and May and Point Barrow slightly later (Fraker 1979). The second wave entails groups of animals that appear in coastal areas shortly after breakup from mid-June through July and occasionally into August.

Although direct evidence is lacking, it is likely that the summer whales in the Chukchi Sea are part of a single group which occurs sequentially at various locations along the coast. The timing of occurrence of whales in recent years at several locations is shown in Table 4. These data are based mainly on opportunistic observations and may not in all cases reflect the peak period of abundance at each location. Nonetheless, a clear pattern is evident which shows whales appearing later in the summer at more northerly points, with little overlap between periods of occurrence at adjacent locations. On the average,

this group of whales moves from southeastern Kotzebue Sound to the vicinity of Wainwright, a distance of approximately 625 km during a period of 30 days, much of which may be spent in concentration areas such as Kasegaluk Lagoon. Although the pattern is generally repetitive, considerable year to year variations in abundance and residence time in specific areas have been noted and are discussed in previous sections of this report. We estimate that this group consists of 2,500-3,000 belukhas.

Table 4. Dates of sightings of belukha whales at selected locations on the eastern Chukchi Sea coast (from Frost et al. 1983b and this report).

Year	Kotzebue Sound	Kivalina	Cape Sabine	Point Lay	Wainwright
1978	11 June-9 July	21-24 June		2-10 July	15 July
1979	8-25 June		3 July	22 June-19 July	17-20 July
1980	13-23 June			11 July	20 July
1981	12-19 June		8 July	5-15 July	
1982	7-23 June	29 June	3-6 July	5 July	

The whereabouts of this group of whales after they leave the Kasegaluk Lagoon region and move northward toward Barrow is poorly known. Sightings off Wainwright indicate that they sometimes follow the coastline toward Point Barrow. These whales probably move generally north to the pack ice and remain in the northeastern Chukchi/western Beaufort seas until the autumn migration occurs. During three aerial surveys made in mid-September, the largest numbers of belukhas were encountered in the region generally north of Point Barrow, though herds occurred sporadically along the entire ice margin in the Chukchi Sea and were seen regularly in the western Beaufort Sea (Burns and Seaman 1985).

However, there is also a possibility that belukhas which are in the coastal zone of eastern Chukchi Sea during June to early August may move eastward across the Beaufort Sea and become part of the groups which are in Amundsen Gulf and the Mackenzie Bay region in mid-August. Aerial surveys of the eastern Beaufort Sea and Amundsen Gulf in 1981 detected a major increase in numbers of belukhas between late July and mid-August (Davis and Evans 1982). For the period 5-17 August, the minimum estimated number of whales was 11,500, which was an increase of over 7,000 whales from the previous survey period (18-25 July). During the

mid-August surveys, researchers noted whales moving into their study area from the north. For belukhas to move from Point Barrow to the eastern Beaufort Sea would require a movement of about 640 km over a period of 15-30 days, which is somewhat more rapid than their probable rate of movement along the Chukchi Sea coast. However, this possibility remains speculative since belukhas are occasionally present near Wainwright in early to mid-August and large herds of eastbound whales have not been seen in the Alaskan Beaufort in late July or early August.

As previously indicated, large groups of whales have been observed in September in offshore waters and pack ice of the western Beaufort and eastern Chukchi seas. These groups, which probably include both Chukchi Sea and eastern Beaufort Sea herds, may move westward and join whales which have summered along the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula prior to heading southward through Bering Strait. Large groups of belukhas have been seen near Wrangel Island in early October, headed eastward toward Bering Strait (Kleinenberg et al. 1964).

Based on our review of distributional information, we conclude that belukha whales that summer in the eastern Bering, the Chukchi, and the Beaufort seas probably comprise four summering groups (Table 5). A minimum population estimate of belukhas which pass through waters adjacent to Alaska, derived by summing the low estimate for each group and assuming that Chukchi Sea animals were counted during eastern Beaufort Sea surveys, is 13,500. The maximum estimate is 18,000. It must be noted that both of these estimates are conservative since surveys of the eastern Beaufort Sea did not include the entire area and no corrections were made for submerged animals which were not counted (Davis and Evans 1982). Considering these factors and the unknown number of whales summering in the northern Chukchi Sea as well as in waters of the USSR, the actual abundance of belukhas in the Bering Sea population may be in excess of 25,000.

Table 5. Estimated abundance of stocks of Alaskan belukha whales.

Stock Name	Estimated Abundance
Bristol Bay	1,000-1,500
Norton Sound	1,000-2,000
Eastern Chukchi Sea	2,500-3,000
Eastern Beaufort Sea	11,500

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Investigations of Belukha Whales in Coastal Waters
of Western and Northern Alaska.
II. Biology and Ecology

Principal Investigators

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SUMMARY

Information from 617 belukhas, including fetuses, was obtained during two phases of this study; 1977 to 1979 and 1980 to 1983. The first phase involved harvest monitoring and sampling programs, mainly ancillary to other marine mammal studies, during which data were obtained from 249 belukhas. Preliminary results were reported by Seaman and Burns (1981). The second phase, funded by the NOAA Alaska Office of the Outer Continental Shelf Environmental Assessment Program included monitoring and sampling efforts in which data were acquired from an additional 368 animals, including fetuses. The second phase also included two aerial surveys in 1982, as well as expanded efforts to summarize available information about belukhas.

We consider belukhas in the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort, and eastern East Siberian seas and Amundsen Gulf to be part of a single population that winters mainly in Bering Sea. We refer to it as the Bering Sea population. Based on samples from northwest Alaska, physical maturity of females is obtained between age 8 and 11 and in males between 10 and 14. Mean standard length of females 11 years and older was 355 cm. Mean length of males 14 years and older was 413 cm. Maximum standard lengths were 414 cm for a female and 457 cm for a male. Length at age in belukhas from Bristol Bay, Alaska and northwest Canada was the same as that in belukhas from northwest Alaska. Length and weight of newborn calves averaged 155 cm and 72 kg. Growth of fetuses from waters of Alaska, eastern Canada, and Greenland appeared similar.

The sex ratio was found to be 1:1. Breeding probably begins in midwinter and extends to June with a presumed peak, yet to be verified, during March. Births occur over a prolonged period from April to late July or early August with a peak in mid-June to mid-July. Gestation is a minimum of 14.5 months and more likely 15 to 16 months. First pregnancy occurs between ages 4 to 7 and first births at 5 to 8 years. Females were reproductively active throughout life, though about 50% of those older than 21 years were nongravid when taken. The oldest whales in our samples were two males at least 38 years and a female at least 35 years. Generation time was about 6 years.

Mature females comprise about 33% of the Bering Sea population and the annual rate of calf production is 0.104. Size of this population is unknown. A minimum of 16,000 to 18,000 belukhas occur in waters adjacent to western North America during summer. The entire population, including whales in waters of the Soviet northeast, northwest North America, and the ice front between, will probably be found to number more than 25,000 animals.

Annual landed harvests are on the order of 415 whales, of which 220 are taken in U.S. waters, 135 in northwest Canada, and 60 in Soviet waters. Instances of unusual availability, such as the occurrence of animals entrapped by ice, may substantially increase the take by hunters and predation by polar bears. Hunting loss in all regions combined is estimated to be about 0.44 and the combined total annual kill is estimated to average 735 animals. The combined total annual kill of 585 belukhas taken in waters of Alaska and northwest Canada is 3.3% to 3.7% of the minimum number of whales occurring in those waters.

Belukhas that occur in ice-free coastal waters of eastern Chukchi Sea during summer first aggregate in Kotzebue Sound. After departing Kotzebue Sound, usually in late June, they move generally northward along the coast, temporarily frequenting Kasegaluk Lagoon in late June to mid-July and arrive near Wainwright in late July to early August. Those whales depart coastal waters in August, presumably to the ice front north of Point Barrow, where they mingle with belukhas migrating from the eastern Beaufort Sea region.

Route of the westward late summer and autumn migration of belukhas that summered in the Amundsen Gulf-eastern Beaufort Sea regions is mainly offshore, along and through the ice front.

Other aspects of the biology of belukhas, as reported in the literature, are reviewed and summarized.

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Any small contribution to knowledge about belukhas that this report may make will have resulted largely from involvement of subsistence whalers, particularly those that hunted near Elephant Point, in Eschscholtz Bay. Their interest and cooperation affected all aspects of our field work there, from transportation of equipment, personnel, supplies, and specimens, to securing the whales that became subjects of study. Our experiences in the field, and hopefully our understanding of the small whale hunting culture, were greatly enhanced by the opportunity to live and work among the whalers and their families. We especially acknowledge the assistance of Beulah Ballot, Lawrence Thomas, Willie Thomas, Nathan Hadley, Lester Hadley, Louis Hadley, Raymond Lee, and Tommy Carter, all of Buckland; Elmer Armstrong, Willie Goodwin, Jr., Bob Uhl, and York Wilson of Kotzebue; the people of Point Lay, particularly Amos Agnasagga; and the hunters at Point Hope, particularly Amos Lane, Joe Frankson, and Henry Attunganna.

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INTRODUCTION

General Description

Belukha whales Delphinapterus leucas (Pallas) are one of two genera of cetaceans belonging to the Family Monodontidae. The other is the narwhal, Monodon monoceros Linnaeus, mainly of the north Atlantic-eastern Canadian Arctic regions.

Belukhas are a northern species that occurs in the seasonally ice-covered seas of temperate, subarctic, and arctic regions. According to Tomilin (1957), during the warmer part of the year, belukhas are in coastal waters. The proportion of various populations that frequent offshore waters during warmer months is not known. In the North Pacific region, belukhas are present in the Sea of Japan, the Okhotsk Sea, Cook Inlet (with sightings reported in adjacent waters of Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska), Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas, the eastern part of the East Siberian Sea, Amundsen Gulf, and adjacent waters of the Arctic Ocean. This report is primarily focused on the population or stocks that occur(s) in the Bering, Chukchi, East Siberian, and Beaufort seas and Amundsen Gulf.

Belukhas of this region have been referred to by various North American authors, including us, as the "Western Arctic" or the "Bering-Chukchi population." On reflection, neither name is appropriate. The name Western Arctic population is incorrect because (1) the whales are adapted to and primarily utilize northern boreal and subarctic marine habitats, escaping arctic conditions through migration, and (2) western Arctic has a different geographic reference in different countries. What a North American refers to as western Arctic is, for a Soviet and most other Europeans and Asians, the eastern Arctic. Therefore, we recommend against further reference to a western Arctic population of belukhas (and for the same reasons, bowhead whales, Balaena mysticetus).

The name Bering-Chukchi population is more acceptable though still misleading and inaccurate. Belukhas of the population we studied have a much larger total range that also includes the East Siberian and Beaufort seas, Amundsen Gulf, and adjacent parts of the Arctic Ocean. It is too cumbersome to designate this population by its total range. Therefore, we propose that the region within which the population normally winters, and most likely breeds, be used to designate it. We recommend the name Bering Sea population and will use it in this report.

As adult animals, belukhas appear white or near white with restricted fringes of grey to black on the posterior edges of flukes and occasionally the flippers. This white, adult coloration is attained after a number of years. Calves are blue-grey at birth, becoming progressively lighter colored with age. The white coloration accounts for this whale's common name in several languages: Marsouin blanc, French-French Canadian; white whale, English; and belukha, from Russian belii meaning white. Mainland Alaskan Eskimo common names include dialectal variants of situag (Bering Strait Inupiat), sisuag (north Alaskan Inupiat), and cetuaq (mainland Yupik). On St. Lawrence Island where Siberian Yupik is spoken, these whales are called puugzag.

In western and northern Alaska, coastal people use either the appropriate Eskimo name or the borrowed Russian name. White whale is not a name in common use in this region, reportedly because it is not descriptive or indicative of the color of a significant proportion of the belukhas observed or caught.

A detailed discussion of belukha distribution and seasonal movements in waters adjacent to western and northern Alaska is presented by Seaman et al. (1985). In general, the Bering Sea population winters over a broad area in the drifting ice of Bering Sea. They are found in areas where the ice cover is broken, as for instance in the ice front and in regions of persistent polynyas or ice divergence. Belukhas can surface through relatively thin ice, as in newly refrozen leads and polynyas, but they are definitely limited by ice thickness. Several accounts of entrapment by surrounding heavy ice have been reported and will be discussed later. Numerous sightings of belukhas in thin ice areas indicate that they break the ice cover with their back. Excellent photos of belukhas surfacing through thin ice include those published by McVay (1973).

These whales have no dorsal fin, though a prominent well-developed dorsal ridge is present. They are fusiform in shape, have a comparatively small head with a prominent melon, and anteriorly extended jaws which form a short "beak." The flukes are moderately notched on the midline. Foreflippers are unlike those of other delphinoids, being relatively short, tapered at the proximate and distal ends, and broad across the middle approximately one-third. On older animals, particularly males, they are sometimes curved upward on the distal portion. Also, unlike other cetaceans belukhas have considerable lateral and vertical movement of the head, to the extent that they sometimes appear to be looking almost backward while swimming.

Tomilin (1957) reported that the most common complement of teeth is 34 to 38, with as few as 32 and as many as 40. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) indicate that the first teeth emerge through the gum line at about age one and that there are no deciduous "milk teeth." Our specimens confirm those reports. Teeth are uniformly simple, peg-like structures that have single roots and are deeply, though rather loosely received in the alveoli of both upper and lower jaws. The crowns are often well-worn with great individual variation in extent of wear and orientation of worn surfaces. Tooth wear results in underestimation of ages of older animals, as will be discussed later.

The monodont-type dentition (little differentiation in shape of teeth) appears well suited for grasping prey, though not for masticating it. Food is swallowed whole and includes a wide array of organisms that, in Alaskan waters, ranges in size from small benthic worms and shrimp to red salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) and small chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*). In Bristol Bay, where adult red salmon are commonly consumed, average length and weight of these fish are 61 cm and 3.2 kg (6.6 lb.) (ADF&G file data). Other moderately large species of salmon, including chums (*O. keta*) and cohos (*O. kisutch*), are reported by local residents of the Yukon and Kuskokwim river areas, to be eaten by belukhas. Average weight of adults of these species in the Kuskokwim River is 3.36 kg (7.4 lb.) and 3.45 kg (7.6 lb.) respectively (ADF&G data). About 100 different kinds of prey

items have been reported as belukha food (Kleinenberg et al. 1964) though a relatively few species comprise the bulk of diet at a particular time and place. Results of a detailed study of belukha food habits in the eastern Bering and Chukchi seas are reported by Lowry et al. (1985).

These small whales have been, and remain an important component of the marine mammal resource base available to coastal-dwelling subsistence hunters of northern Alaska. Availability to hunters varies at different locations and is directly related to seasonal movements of the whales. Those whales that move northward through the extensive lead system between Bering Strait and Point Barrow pass close to the settlements of Wales, Kivalina, Point Hope, Wainwright, and Barrow, mainly in late April and May. Point Hope and Kivalina normally account for the largest spring harvest of these migrants.

An unknown proportion of the belukha population moves into coastal waters of mainland Alaska, from Bristol Bay to Point Barrow, as soon as breakup of nearshore and river ice permits. This, of course, occurs progressively later at higher latitudes. As examples, belukhas enter the Naknek River in Bristol Bay in late March-early April, Kuskokwim Bay in late May-early June, coastal waters of Norton Sound normally in early June, Eschscholtz Bay (southeast Kotzebue Sound) in mid- to late June, and Kasegaluk Lagoon (near Point Lay) in late June to early July. Some whales remain, or return to, coastal waters throughout the open water period, though their presence in late summer-autumn is seemingly not yet predictable. Certain coastal locations appear to constitute preferred habitat as belukhas are present each year.

As can be inferred from the comments above, belukhas can be and are harvested at many different locations. However, the most predictably successful hunting sites during the open water seasons are in eastern Norton Sound (from the villages of Elim, Koyuk, Stebbins, St. Michael, and Shaktoolik), Eschscholtz Bay (mainly by hunters from Buckland and Kotzebue), and in Kasegaluk Lagoon (by hunters from Point Lay). Largest annual harvests are normally taken near Point Hope in April-May and in Eschscholtz Bay in June. The majority of specimens available to us are from these two locations.

Background

A list of early literature that includes mention of belukhas would be long and diverse. Explorers of the higher latitudes, as well as northern missionaries, teachers, entrepreneurs, scientists of various disciplines, and the numerous sojourners to shores of the seasonally ice-covered seas often included mention of these whales in their accounts. Certainly, Europeans that became associated, through commerce or scientific curiosity, with native residents of northern coastal regions were made aware of the importance of this small whale, the times of their availability to local hunters, and some of the more easily observed biological characteristics. The latter included coloration, food habits, local movements (especially occurrence in rivers), aboriginal hunting methods, etc. Some of this early literature is cited in the extensive monograph by Kleinenberg et al. (1964) and the summary paper on belukha distribution by Gurevich (1980).

Collectively, Soviet investigators made the first concerted efforts in the North Pacific region, starting in the 1920's, to obtain information about marine mammal resources of the Soviet north and far east. A number of workers began studies in different regions extending from the White and Kara to the Okhotsk and Bering seas. These initial assessments of resources, including belukhas, were in line with a renewed, post-revolutionary interest in developing and exploiting resources in the "frontier" regions. The 1920's and 1930's were, for instance, decades during which great expenditures of money and manpower were devoted to opening up the Soviet northern sea route from Leningrad and Murmansk to Bering Strait and developing a more vigorous economic base. An interesting account of one such effort, which includes frequent mention of the potential importance of marine mammals, is a narrative of the voyage of the Chelyuskin (Anonymous 1935).

Soviet scientists that significantly contributed to a knowledge of belukhas during the 1920's and 1930's included V. A. Arsen'ev, K. K. Chapskii, S. V. Dorofeev, V. G. Heptner, S. K. Klumov, B. A. Zenkovich, and others. Degerbøl and Nielsen (1930) also provided some of the earliest detailed biological information about belukhas from waters of West Greenland.

Major monographs about the species include those by Vladykov (1944), based on studies he conducted in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (eastern Canada), and the comprehensive account by Kleinenberg et al. (1964). The latter is a compendium of virtually all of the available information about belukhas up to that time. Tomilin (1957), in his work on cetaceans of the U.S.S.R. and adjacent countries, also presented an important compilation of available knowledge.

More contemporary studies of belukhas usually have focused less on the economic potential of belukha hunting, though in general, biological material examined has come from commercial or subsistence harvests.

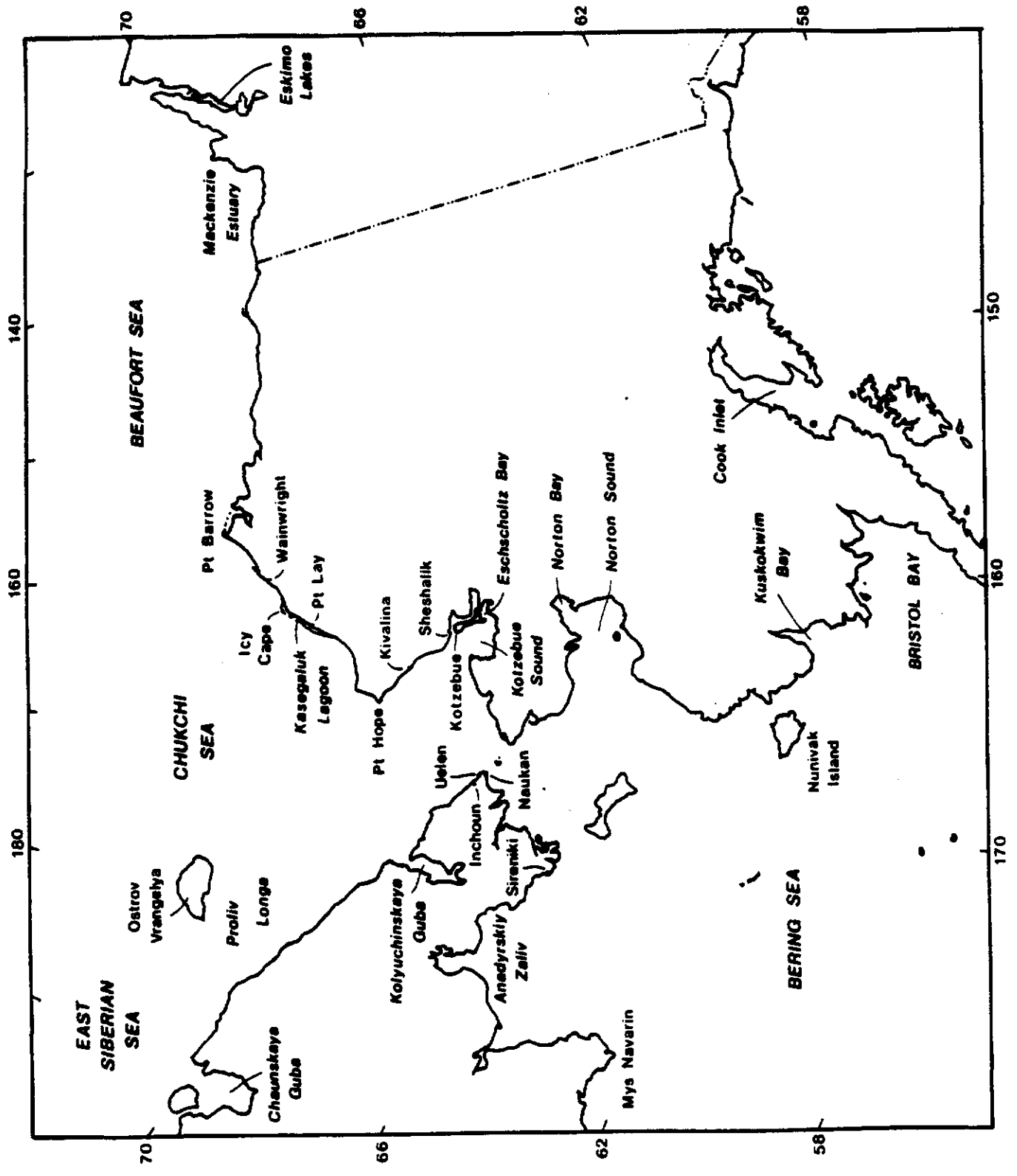
To the extent possible, we have tried to utilize original sources of information about belukhas. However, this was not possible with respect to older works, particularly those in the Russian language that were not available to us. The major secondary sources of earlier writings we utilized included Degerbøl and Nielsen (1930); Vladykov (1944); Tomilin (1957); and Kleinenberg et al. (1964).

Much of the current information about belukhas in western North American waters is contained in "grey literature." Our treatment of that literature may seem overly detailed. However, it includes important data and information that, in our opinion, requires integration and broader exposure to persons interested in these whales.

STUDY AREA

The area in which our studies were conducted includes the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas (Figure 1).

The Bering Sea is a well-defined body of water that is almost completely surrounded by land. Zenkevitch (1963) presents a very useful resume of some major characteristics of this sea, as follows.



...most of the place names referred to in the

The surface approximates 2,304,000 km² and its volume approximates 3,683,000 km³. Greatest depth is in the region of Kamchatka Strait, reaching 4,420 m. Mean depth for the entire sea is 1,598 m. Of great importance, from the standpoint of belukhas, is the fact that the Bering Sea is divided by the 200 m isobath into two approximately equal parts; the southwestern part with depths greater than 3,500 m and the northern and eastern shelf regions of less than 200 m depth. Belukhas mainly occur in the shelf region.

The few soundings available suggest that the continental shelf of the northeastern Bering Sea is a flat plain with gentle slope gradients (Creager and McManus 1966). Minor relief features are present. Major relief features in the Bering Sea are the fjords of the Chukchi Peninsula and the discontinuous trough paralleling the Chukchi Peninsula north of Northwest Cape, St. Lawrence Island (Udintsev et al. 1959).

Of the confined seas, the Bering Sea is exceeded in size only by the Mediterranean Sea. It is connected with the Pacific Ocean by the deep Kamchatka Strait (4,420 m) as well as by numerous, deep passages through the Aleutian Islands.

In the north, Bering Strait connects the Bering and Chukchi seas. This Strait is very shallow (not exceeding 55 m, according to U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, chart number 9400) with a width of 85 km and a cross-section of approximately 2.5 km² (Zenkevitch 1963). Throughout most of the year movement of water is north through Bering Strait. Zenkevitch (1963) indicates that about 20,000 km³ of Bering Sea water passes north through Bering Strait each year. South-setting currents have been recorded (Bloom 1964) and are usually produced by meteorological factors. The magnitude and occurrence of such currents are only poorly known as they occur mainly during the late fall and winter months. South-setting surface currents dominate during November through March and result in a net southward transport of ice during that period.

The Chukchi Sea is somewhat more difficult to delineate as it is not completely surrounded by land. It is frequently considered, especially in the Soviet literature, as an embayment of the Arctic Ocean that is bounded on the south by the Bering Strait, on the west by the Chukchi Peninsula and the eastern shores of Wrangel Island (approximately 176°42'W longitude), on the north by the edge of the continental shelf, and on the east by the shores of Alaska as far as a line extending north from Point Barrow (approximately 156°13'W longitude). All of this area is underlain by the Chukchi Platform.

According to Zenkevitch (1963), the area of the Chukchi Sea is 582,000 km². The continental shelf of the Chukchi Sea is a flat, almost featureless plain having average depths of 45 to 55 m and regional slope gradients ranging from 2 minutes to immeasurably gentle (Creager and McManus 1966). Local maximum gradients range up to 1°55'. Excluding the slope between the land and the sea floor, the major relief features in the Chukchi Sea are Herald Shoal, Hope Sea Valley, and the Cape Prince of Wales Shoal (Udintsev et al. 1959).

The Beaufort Sea is a less discrete body of water than either the Bering or the Chukchi Sea. Generally, it is considered as an integral part of the Arctic Ocean extending from Banks and Prince Patrick islands in northwest Canada to Point Barrow in Alaska. Its southern margin is the shoreline of mainland Canada and Alaska. There is no discrete northern boundary.

Biological and physical features of belukha whale habitat within the three seas are different. The Bering Sea is a northern extension of the North Pacific Ocean. It is a biologically rich and diverse region within which upwelling of nutrient-rich deep water, forced upward by the Aleutian Chain of islands and the continental shelf edge, is a major contributor to the high biological productivity that occurs. Several major rivers, frequented by belukhas, also contribute significantly to the nutrient regime. Climate in the Bering Sea (strongly influenced by the Pacific Ocean) is temperate, grading into subarctic in the northern one-third. Prevailing winds are out the south (mainly southeast) during May through September and from the north (mainly northeast) during November through April. There are great annual differences in climate that result in major annual differences in, for instance, extent and characteristics of the seasonal ice cover. Ice is normally present from late November through June. It includes two major components--ice that forms during winter in the Bering Sea, and ice that is transported south through the Bering Strait. It appears that most ice is of the former component.

On average, the southern extent of ice, at the time of maximum coverage (March-April), coincides with the edge of the continental shelf. However, annual differences in location of the southern ice margin in the central Bering Sea are as much as 450 nautical miles (nm) (from approximately 60 nm south of St. George Island to about 60 nm south of St. Lawrence Island). Shifting and movement of the relatively thin ice cover is significant and produces extensive areas where the ice is fragmented and openings are present. This shifting, together with the extensive leeward coastlines of several large islands as well as the coasts of Alaska and Siberia, produce local conditions that may accommodate a relatively high abundance of belukhas during winter.

The Chukchi Sea is mainly subarctic in its characteristics. Much of the North Pacific influence is lost as water flowing north through the narrow constriction of Bering Strait has become altered in the Bering Sea. Biological productivity of the Chukchi Sea is less than that of the Bering Sea.

Ice conditions are more severe due to average lower winter temperatures, a longer freezing period, incursions of multi-year ice during the fall-spring period, constraints of surrounding land masses that are largely exposed to prevailing winter winds (mainly northeast), and the frequent occurrence of persistent "arctic" high pressure systems. Water depths in all parts of the Chukchi Sea are relatively shallow.

The Beaufort Sea is a transition area between the subarctic and arctic provinces. The northward trend of decreasing biological productivity continues and, in comparison to the Chukchi Sea, productivity is significantly lower.

Multi-year ice is a significant feature of the northern part of this sea and the areal coverage of this ice shows extreme annual variations. Seasonal sea ice develops near shore, its extent depending on the amount of multi-year ice that is present. The coastline of the Beaufort Sea north of Alaska has a northeasterly exposure and it is therefore ice-stressed by the shoreward advance of ice during the seasons of freezing. Prevailing winds are northeast and, at least in the eastern part, there are weak cyclonic surface circulations of air and water (Wilson 1974).

Seasonal and multi-year ice can occur in the Beaufort Sea throughout the year. In most years the nearshore zone is ice-free during August through October but there is great annual variation in the extent of open water. It is mostly ice-covered from late October through mid-July. During the late summer-early fall "open water" period multi-year ice is present at varying distances from shore. Usually it is situated north of the shelf break.

METHODS

Harvest Enumeration

The magnitude of annual harvests of belukhas taken in Alaska from 1977 to 1984 were determined on the basis of many different sources of information. Sampling efforts at major hunting sites provided personnel of ADF&G the opportunity to obtain direct counts of whales harvested during the sampling periods. Public awareness of the belukha investigations was promoted during the course of this and other studies of belukhas, and an extensive network of contacts established. Many of the local contacts reported the seasonal catch of belukhas by hunters in villages where they resided. When a take of whales was reported but the magnitude was unknown, a Department employee stationed close to the hunting site often personally visited that site and determined the take on the basis of direct interview of village residents. At other locations harvests were reported by resident teachers, local pilots, resource managers, or investigators involved with socio-economic studies.

Field personnel of the National Marine Fisheries Service, and later of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, that were involved in investigations of bowhead whales (Balaena mysticetus), provided us with records of belukha catches made during the bowhead whaling seasons, mainly at Point Hope and Barrow.

Harvest data were also obtained during routine visits to villages by ADF&G personnel and by interview of village residents during their visits to communities in which Department offices were located.

Biological Sampling

Most biological sampling was accomplished by an ADF&G employee specifically detailed to known productive hunting sites during periods when successful hunting normally occurs. Usually a single department employee worked at the sampling sites as a means of minimizing both support requirements and intrusions into the closely knit temporary hunting encampments. Productive sites included Eschscholtz Bay, Point Hope, and Point Lay. Eschscholtz Bay was the major sampling area and produced 68% of all whales we examined.

Conditions existing at the time whales were landed determined procedures used for data acquisition and biological sampling, as well as the thoroughness of sampling efforts. Within Eschschoitz Bay whales are mostly taken by driving pods into shallows and then killing as many as possible. Actual timing of each hunting foray is based on the tide conditions; hunting begins shortly after the tide starts to ebb. If whales are seen and a successful drive takes place within reasonable distance of Elephant Point, where whalers and their families camp, the whales are towed to the Point. Butchering begins immediately and continues until all the whales are cut up or, occasionally, until the next ebbing tide when, weather permitting, the hunters again go out. Very often, a large number of whales are landed at one time. As an example, in June 1982, 75 whales were landed after a single drive and the total catch of 121 whales was secured in three drives during a period of approximately 40 h.

As boats returned with whales, each landed animal was numbered and its sex, color, standard length, and other notations recorded. Standard length is the straight line distance between the notch of the fluke and the anterior tip of the lower jaw with the whale lying on its stomach. The collection of specimens including mandibles (occasionally complete skulls), reproductive tracts, and samples of stomach contents was accomplished as the whales were processed. Whales were landed and butchered along a stretch of beach approximately 0.7 km long. Thus, to initially process whales as they are landed at different points along the beach and to subsequently obtain specimens from them when the butchering process had been sufficiently completed, required continuous movement of the sampler up and down the beach. Traditionally, remains are towed to sea by the hunters prior to initiation of another drive, if possible.

The pace of sampling activity after a successful drive is frenetic, becoming exhausting when successful drives occur during successive tidal cycles. As an accommodation to our sampling effort, the hunters at Elephant Point left unsampled whale remains on the beach until we could examine them and obtain specimens. Reproductive tracts of as many females as possible were obtained. Those of males were obtained only in the first years of this project.

Mandibles and skulls were cleaned and air-dried in the field. Soft parts, including stomach contents, were preserved in 10% formalin. Testes and epididymides from which micro-slides were to be made were sliced for better preservation. Ovaries were usually left attached to the uteri, the latter having been cut off 5-10 cm posterior of the cervix, tied, and the lumen injected with 10% formalin to ensure fixation of the uterus and preservation of a small fetus, if present. Uteri were not obtained from those whales that had a near-term fetus. Most near-term fetuses were measured in the field. A few were brought to the laboratory.

Lactation was noted at the time whales were landed (either based on the presence of exuding milk or by palpating the teats) or, if not externally obvious, during subsequent inspection of mammary tissue left as part of carcass remains.

Payment of 10-20 dollars (the latter after 1979) was made to each hunter that secured a whale from which we obtained specimens and supporting data.

A similar sampling procedure was utilized at other locations by ADF&G personnel. Non-departmental cooperators, mainly engaged in bowhead whale studies at Point Hope, provided what data and specimens they could secure. Those specimens were frozen and shipped to our laboratory in Fairbanks.

Laboratory Procedures

Male Reproductive Organs

Laboratory procedures varied somewhat over the course of this study. The volume of one intact testicle, with and without the epididymis attached, was determined by water displacement for a small sample. Tissue samples from testicles and epididymides which had been sliced and fixed were sent to a commercial laboratory for preparation of histological slides. Standard histological preparations were made using Hematoxylin-Eosin stain. These slides were examined to determine the state of spermatogenesis in testes and the presence or absence of sperm in tubules of the epididymides.

Female Reproductive Organs

For females, ovaries were separated from uteri. Examination of these two organs was done separately and the subsequent findings regarding appropriate aspects of reproductive status were compared. Length of a "nongravid" uterine horn was measured from the level of the medial, externally recognizable junction of the horns to the anterior end, over the curvature of the preserved horn. General assessment of surficial rugosity and whether or not the whale was parous or nulliparous was noted. Each uterine horn was then opened. Notations were made of general internal appearance, presence of mucus, debris, blood, a cervical plug, and presence or absence of a small fetus. Anomalies were also noted.

Thus, based on examination of uteri, females were categorized with respect to relative age (juvenile, sexually mature and relatively young, or sexually mature and relatively old) and reproductive status (nongravid, gravid, or postpartum).

Ovaries were trimmed of connective tissue, and weighed to the nearest 0.1 g. A two-dimensional diagram of paired ovaries was made on a 5" x 7" index card along with depictions of obvious surficial features. The paired ovaries were then serially sectioned (parallel to the longest axis) by hand. Sections were, on average, about 2 mm thick. Ovarian structures, including follicles larger than 5 mm, corpora lutea, corpora albicantia, calcified bodies, and other noteworthy internal features were drawn based on the serial sections. Several sections of those ovaries that contained multiple structures were drawn. The position of each section was noted on the diagram of the intact ovary from which it was taken. Other notations were included on the diagram cards, including correlations of results of ovarian and uterine examinations.

Age Determinations

Age determinations were based on the number of dentinal layers counted on longitudinal sections of teeth (Laws 1953; Sergeant 1959; Klevezal' and Kleinenberg 1967; Brodie 1971).

Examination of our first collected specimens showed great variation in size and wear of mandibular teeth from an individual and among individuals. Teeth were removed from the mandibles in several different ways depending on the difficulty encountered. Some were rotated in the alveolar socket and pulled using dental pliers, or they were pried out with the aid of a dental elevator. In some instances, the mandibles were boiled or macerated in water until the teeth became loose and could be easily removed with pliers or forceps. The method employed depended on several factors, including size and curvature of the teeth, extent of eruption, or whether the mandibles were stored in water to prevent desiccation and checking of teeth.

Epoxy glue was used to attach the two or three largest mandibular teeth to small wooden blocks which could be clamped on the turntable of a precision lapidary saw. Orientation of glued teeth was important in order to obtain longitudinal sections from the midline portion. Sections from the central portion of one or two teeth were cut to a thickness of 0.001" to 0.012" using a diamond-impregnated blade. Dentinal layers were counted using a microfiche reader or a binocular microscope. In both cases transmitted light was used. When dentinal layers were not sufficiently distinguishable in the tooth sections initially cut, additional teeth were sectioned for examination.

When the neonatal line was evident, the number of dentinal layers was considered to represent the total complement deposited. When absent, an unknown and variable number of layers had been worn away and counts represented some minimum number. In odontacete whales the neonatal line is a distinctive dentinal layer laid down shortly after birth. It separates prenatal from postnatal dentine (Nishiwaki and Yagi 1953; Sergeant 1959). We based the age (or minimum age) of whales on the assumption that two dentinal layers are deposited each year, in accordance with the findings of Brodie (1971).

Aerial Observations

Seasonal distribution and relative abundance of belukhas in the study area are subjects addressed by Seaman et al. (1985). We report here only an interpretation of late June-August movements of belukhas within or from Kotzebue Sound to Point Barrow, and characteristics of the westward, autumn migration of whales in the northeastern Chukchi and Beaufort Seas.

Most available records of belukha sightings during summer in coastal waters between Kotzebue Sound and Point Barrow have been compiled and summarized by Frost et al. 1983. Those, together with additional sightings, were reviewed to determine possible patterns of movement in that region and the relationship between groups of whales summering in the eastern Chukchi and those in the eastern Beaufort seas.

Additionally, on June 29, 1982, when belukhas were no longer available to hunters, an extensive aerial reconnaissance of nearshore Kotzebue Sound was made. This reconnaissance was after the period of successful hunting in southeastern Kotzebue Sound (Eschschooltz Bay and near Chamisso Island) that occurred from 22 to 26 June and after the period of successful netting in northeastern Kotzebue Sound which occurred between 17 and 26 June.

Flights were made in a float-equipped Piper Super Cub flown at an altitude of 3,000 ft and an average speed of 90 mph. Time of the flights was such that they occurred during the period 2 h before to 3 h after high tide at Kotzebue. State of the tide was considered a principal factor as the whales usually are in the bays and closest to shore at about high tide. Flight path was maintained by visual reference to the coastline and was $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 mi seaward on flights outbound from Kotzebue and about $\frac{1}{2}$ mi seaward on those inbound to Kotzebue. A deviation from this pattern was made to search Eschscholtz Bay and its entrances.

An intensive search of the southern margin of drift ice in the Beaufort Sea was made during 17-21 September 1982. Previous aerial surveys for Pacific walrus (Odobenus rosmarus divergens) during this period in the northern Chukchi and western Beaufort seas had suggested that during September belukhas likely were strongly associated with the ice fringe and that the route of the autumn migration may be mainly determined by location of the drift ice margin. Location of the summer-autumn ice margin in relation to the Beaufort Sea coastline is annually quite variable but usually at some considerable distance. Experience during previous years indicated that weather for flying was normally poor along the coast and over open water but was marginal to good over the pack ice. To deal with these conditions a fully instrumented aircraft capable of sustained flight in severe icing conditions was required.

A Conquest (Cessna 441) was selected for our search effort. This aircraft was capable of takeoffs and landings in bad weather, could climb to 30,000 ft through severe icing conditions, and had a high altitude cruising speed of up to 290 knots. Once the pack-ice margin was located visually or by on-board radar, descent to desired search altitude was made and the cruising speed reduced to 120-140 knots. Although suitable for a general search for belukhas, the aircraft was less than ideal for making a reliable census because the main observers, located in the passenger cabin, had only limited forward visibility and no capability of taking photographs while the aircraft was in level flight. We made counts and photographed the larger pods and aggregations of whales by closely circling them.

A 500-ft altitude and cruise speed of 120-140 knots were used during search efforts. Occasionally, descents to 200 ft were necessitated by low clouds. A transect width of $\frac{1}{2}$ nm, $\frac{1}{2}$ nm on either side of the aircraft, was used for counting whales and maintained with the aid of inclinometers. Three observers were utilized: one in the co-pilot's seat and two in the passenger cabin. The pilot and forward observer counted whales within that portion of the transects close to the airplane that were not visible to observers in the passenger cabin. The forward observer also recorded all sightings as well as time, position, other navigational information, ice conditions, and weather. Data were recorded mainly for each 1-min time interval though occasionally the record interval was as long as 3 min.

Survey flights were made on 17, 19, 20, and 21 September. Those on the first three days were along, or north of and parallel to, the ice margin between 141° W and 160° W. On 21 September transects deeply penetrated the pack ice along alternate N-S and S-N lines. Length of transects flown on the 21st was determined by the distance between the open water/ice margin interface and the point at which a solid ice cover was encountered. Total

allotted time for all flights, including ferry time from Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay and Prudhoe Bay to Anchorage was 25 h.

Two concurrent studies in the Beaufort Sea north of Alaska were of particular relevance to our autumn survey effort. Ljungblad et al. (1983) were engaged in extensive aerial reconnaissance over a very broad area of open water, for bowhead whales. S. Johnson (personal communication) repeatedly flew a grid of pre-selected transects from shore, seaward to a distance of 20 nm, in the area between the Alaska/Canadian border and 143°45'W. These surveys were for purposes of recording all marine mammal and bird sightings. Both Ljungblad and Johnson provided us with information about belukha sightings.

Data Management

Data acquired in this study were put into two basic formats (files) suitable for analysis utilizing a "mini" computer (Digital Equipment Corp., VT/78, with associated printer and plotter). The first file was of whale sightings and associated information such as number of animals, time, date, geographic coordinates, ice conditions, begin and end points of survey transects, and pertinent comments about sightings and/or transects.

The second file was of biological data about sampled whales including specimen number, date and location of capture, sex, color, length, weight (mostly of fetuses of neonates), age, and reproductive status.

A variety of programs, prepared by Mr. Jesse Venable, were utilized for data analysis. These included tabulation of harvest data, determination of various biological parameters, tests of statistical significance between or among samples, construction of a life table and age-specific mortality estimates, plots of whale sightings and of transects flown during aerial surveys, and general mapping of the study area.

RESULTS

Biological Sampling

In total, 491 belukhas older than newborn calves, 68 fetuses in the first trimester of development, and 58 term fetuses and newborn calves were sampled in 1977 to 1983 (Table 1). Most were landed by subsistence hunters and were mainly taken in Eschscholtz Bay during June of various years. The Eschscholtz Bay samples amounted to 68% of the whales older than calves and 62% of the fetuses and newborns. Fifteen of the whales, including an abortus and nine neonates, were found beachcast in the Bristol Bay region by L. Lowry and/or K. Frost (personal communication; Frost et al. 1983).

Subsistence hunting during June-July is during part of the prolonged birth period. At most locations where hunting occurs in these months, belukhas are driven into shallow water where they are relatively easy to follow and kill. Knowledge and observation of hunting techniques employed during whale drives suggest that the younger, smaller whales are under-represented, to an unknown extent, in our samples. Larger whales are preferred because of the higher yield. Their size, lighter color, and more obvious wake make them easier to pursue and hit with rifle fire.

Table 1. Field collection efforts and a summary of belukha whales examined, or from which specimens were obtained and included in this study, 1977 to 1983.

Field location	Dates	No. of belukhas				No. of fetuses or newborn calves accounted for			Field collector
		males	females	undeter- mined	total	recently implanted	near-term or newborn	total	
Point Hope	Apr-May 77	19	20	0	39	5	9	14	G. Seaman/ ADF&G
Elim	Jun 77	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	G. Seaman/ ADF&G
Point Hope	Apr 78	11	5	0	16	1	2	3	G. Seaman/ ADF&G
Eschschooltz Bay	Jun 78	38	38	2	78	15	7	22	G. Seaman/ ADF&G
Point Lay	Jul 78	5	4	0	9	0	1	1	G. Seaman/ ADF&G
Wainwright	Jul 78	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	R. Tremaine/ ADF&G
Eschschooltz Bay	Jun 79	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	G. Seaman/ ADF&G
Point Hope	May 79	5	1	0	6	0	1	1	P. Field/ NMFS
Wainwright	Jul 79	28	12	1	41	4	5	9	R. Tremaine & G. Seaman/ ADF&G
Barrow	May 79	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	Unknown collector/ NMFS
Eschschooltz Bay	Jun 80	51	40	2	93	16	5	21	J. Burns & K. Frost/ ADF&G
Point Hope	May 80	4	4	1	9	1	1	2	D. Smullin/ NMFS
Eschschooltz Bay	Jun 81	5	34	0	39	8	6	14	J. Burns/ ADF&G
Nushagak Bay	Jul 82	3	0	0	3	0	2	2	L. Lowry & K. Frost/ ADF&G
Eschschooltz Bay	Jun 82	53	68	0	121	11	9	20	J. Burns/ ADF&G
Point Hope	Apr-May 83	3	5	0	8	2	1	3	R. Clarke/ North Slope Borough
Bristol Bay	May-Jul 83	0	2	0	2	0	8	8	L. Lowry & K. Frost/ ADF&G
Point Lay ^a	Jul 83	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	R. Nelson/ ADF&G
Totals		239	246	6	491	68	58	126	

^a Only fetuses from this collection are included in results of this report.

Sex Ratio

Of 533 specimens including 47 term fetuses or newborn calves, 265 (49.7%) were females. Although the sex ratio of the entire sample was 1:1, there were great deviations in some subsamples. At Point Hope, 16 whales sampled in April 1978 included 11 males (69%). At Wainwright, in July 1979, 28 (70%) of 40 whales taken were males. In Eschscholtz Bay during June 1981, the entire annual catch, which amounted to 39 belukhas, was taken in a single drive. Thirty-four (87%) of those whales were females.

Differences in sex ratios of these subsamples suggest some degree of segregation among different pods and groups of belukhas, and beg the general questions of sampling biases and the sampling effort required to deal with such biases.

Growth

Age-Body Length Relationship

Age-body length data were obtained from 126 belukhas, not including fetuses. This sample was of 58 males and 68 females. Two other data sets from whales that were taken in, or are known to pass through waters adjacent to Alaska were available for comparison. The first was from 18 belukhas taken in Bristol Bay (Lensink 1961) and the second from 45 animals taken in the Mackenzie estuary (eastern Beaufort Sea) and sampled by Sergeant (1973).

Growth curves for male and female belukhas, based on data obtained during our study, are shown in Figure 2. In Figure 3 the data reported by Lensink (1961) and Sergeant (1973) are plotted in relation to the growth curves for males and females from northwest Alaska.

Age-length relationships of the Bristol Bay and Mackenzie estuary samples appear to be essentially the same as those from whales taken in northwest Alaska. It is noteworthy that the sample from Bristol Bay included a large proportion of belukhas less than 12 years old, based on the assumption of two dentinal layers per year of life.

Maximum standard lengths of belukhas in our sample were of a 30-year-old male 457 cm and a 31-year-old female 414 cm. In comparison, maximum lengths in the smaller samples from Mackenzie estuary were of an approximately 445-cm, 20-year-old male and a 387-cm, 20-year-old female. Maximal lengths in the Bristol Bay samples were 417 cm for a 16-year-old male and 356 cm for a 5-year-old female.

Figure 4 shows growth of belukhas, based on animals from northwest Alaska, ages 0 to 4 years. The increase in SL during the first year of life was found to be 46.3 cm or 26.8%, based on comparison of means of six neonates and four 1-year-olds. This compares to a length increase of 56.4 cm (35.3%) between the same age cohorts, as found by Brodie (1971) for belukhas in Cumberland Sound. Values for annual growth increments are presented in Table 2.

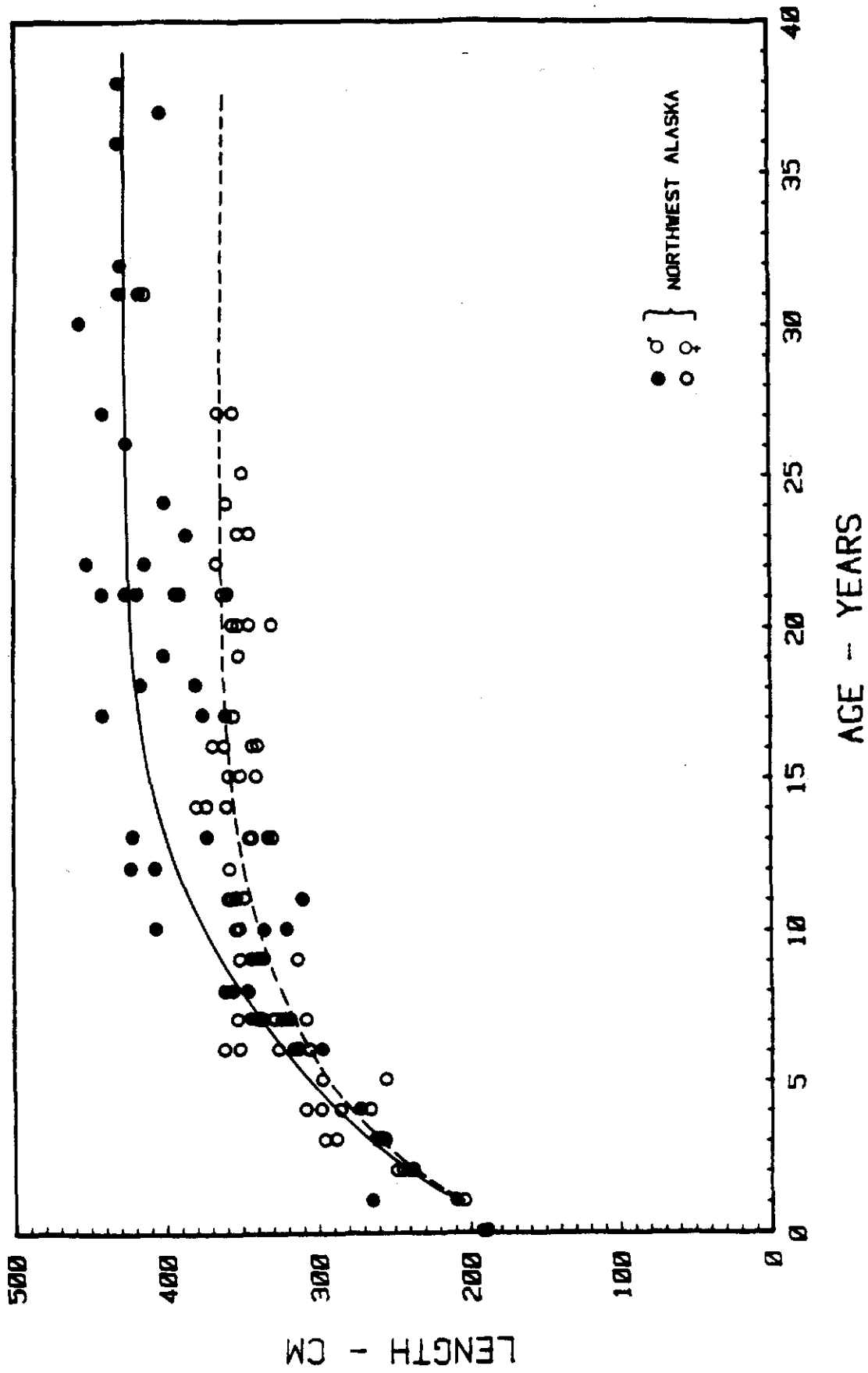


Figure 2. Age-length relationships of 126 belukhas sampled in northwest Alaska, 1977 to 1982. Growth curves were fitted by eye.

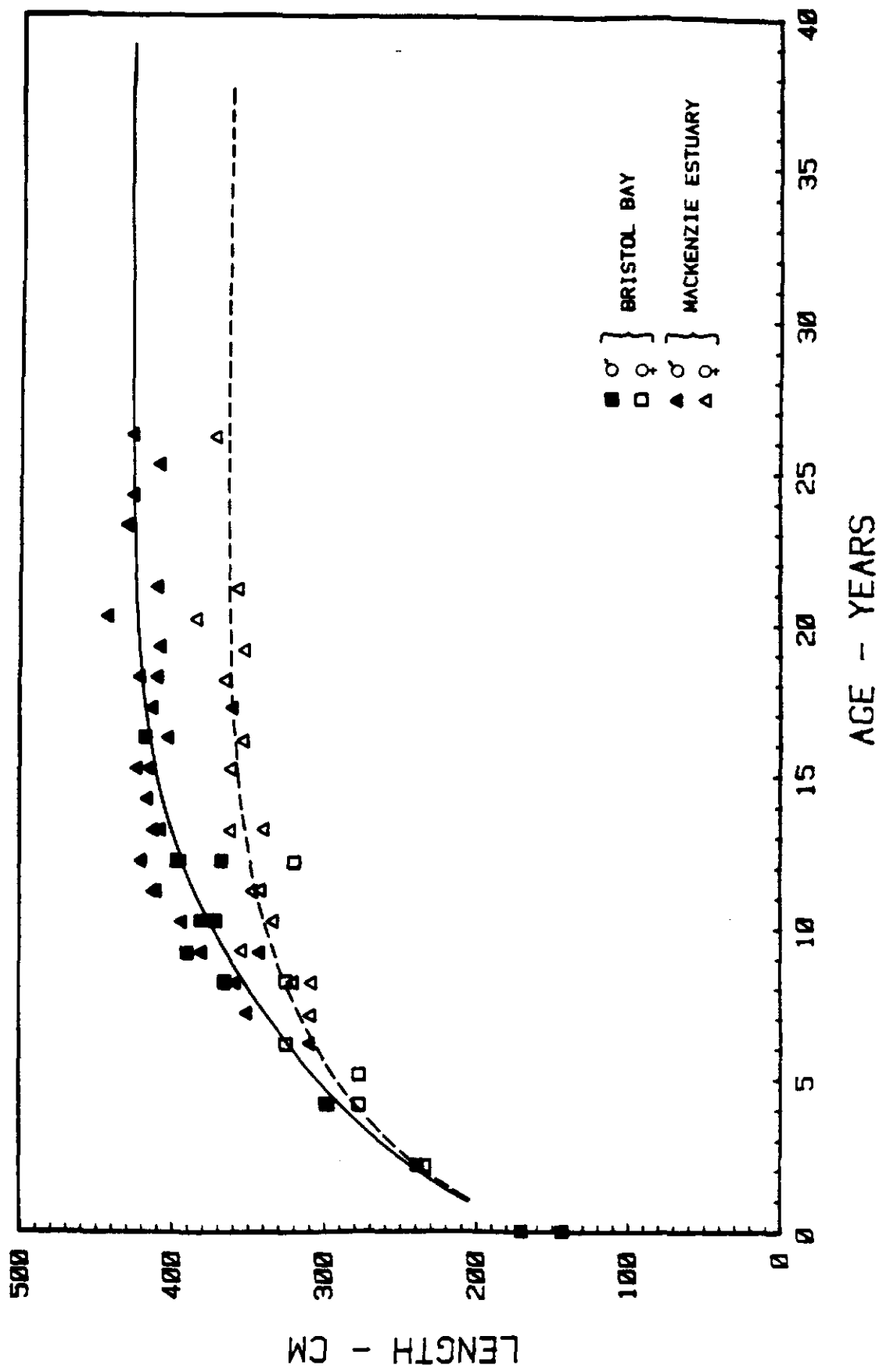


Figure 3. Age-length relationships of 18 belukhas from Bristol Bay, Alaska and 45 from Mackenzie

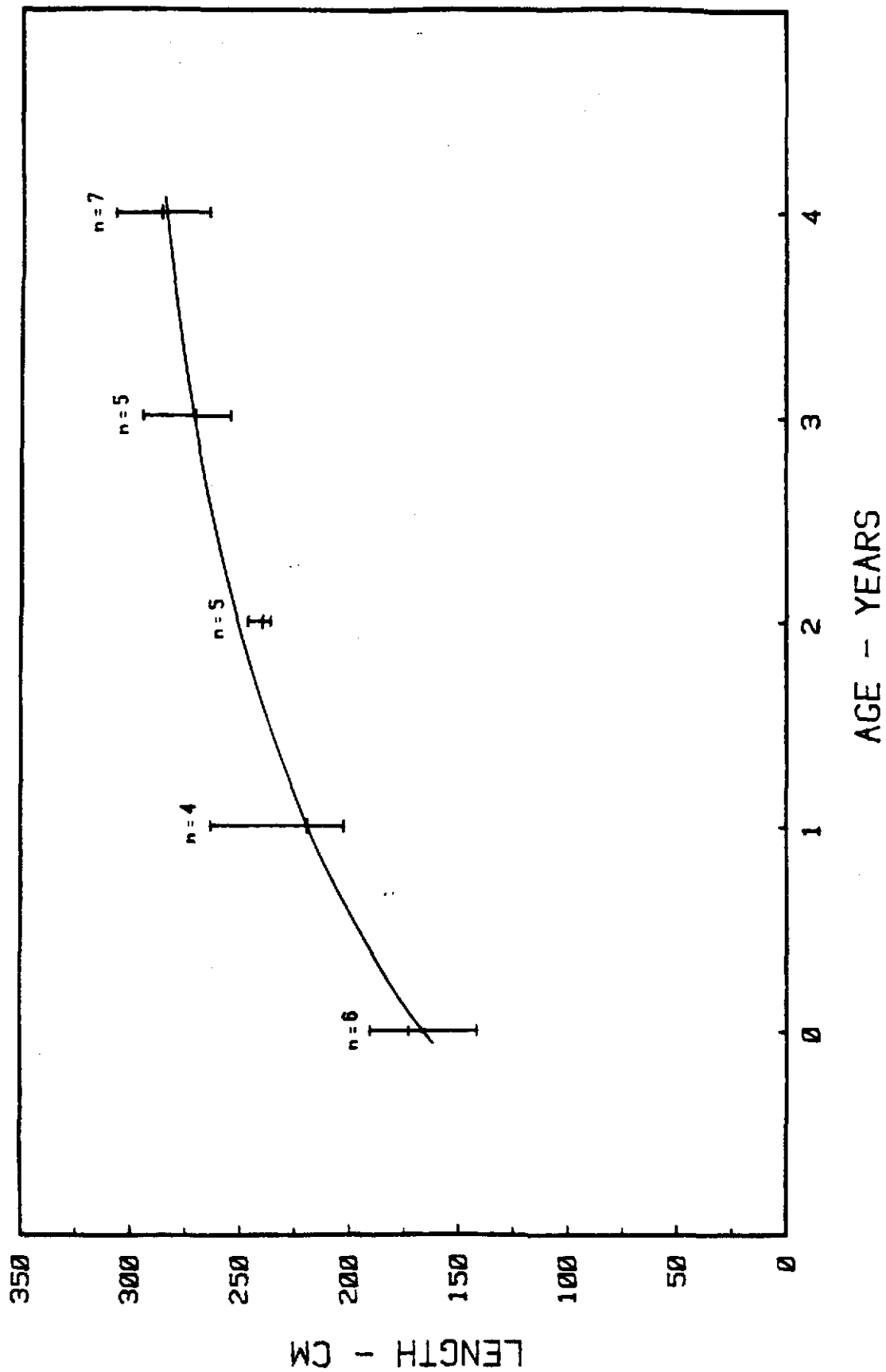


Figure 4. Age-length relationships of belukhas, ages 0 to 4 years, from northwest Alaska.

Table 2. Parameters of age/length relationships for belukhas ages 0 to 4 years, from northwest Alaska; males and females combined.

Parameter	Age (yr)				
	0	1	2	3	4
Sample size	6	4	5	5	7
Mean length (cm)	173.1	219.4	239.8	270.7	286.1
Minimum length	142.2	202.6	236.2	254.6	264.2
Maximum length	190.5	263.5	246.4	294.6	307.3
Increase from preceding year (cm)	-	53.3	20.4	30.9	15.4
Percent increase from preceding year	-	32	9	13	6

Our sample is inadequate to determine the increase in length during the first few months of life, though it is suggested by two calves of the year killed by hunting (as compared to beachcast) in Bristol Bay (Lensink 1961). These included a newborn, 142 cm long, taken in mid-June and an approximately 3-month-old calf, 168 cm long, taken in mid-September. The difference in length was 26 cm or 18.3%. Though such an increase in length in the first three months of life is highly probable, many more specimens would have to be measured and their age determined to adequately estimate growth during early life.

The matter of growth during the first several months of life is important, given the techniques of aerial observation and/or photogrammetry that have been utilized by some investigators to determine the proportion of calves of the year in various aggregations of belukhas. In our opinion, such methods are reasonably accurate during June-July when neonates are small and exhibit little overlap in length when compared with 1-year-old animals. However, aerial observation and photogrammetry may be much less useful by late August to October, when some calves of the year are probably as large as some yearlings.

If aerial observation and/or photogrammetry procedures are to be used as a means of determining birth rate or the proportion of calves present at times other than close to the peak birth period, much more data about growth during the first two years of life will be required.

Fetal Growth

Sample size for embryos and fetuses from waters of northern Alaska was 99 and includes 5 from Bristol Bay collected by J. W. Brooks (unpublished), and 94 obtained during this study. Specimens were collected from April to July and include 59 embryos and small fetuses and 40 near-term and term fetuses. We have no data about fetal growth during the eight-month period, August to March.

Three length measurements were recorded as appropriate for condition of an embryo or fetus. Five embryos were straight and rod-like in appearance. Greatest length of these was used. Forty fetuses were large, near-term or term, and were measurable in a manner similar to larger belukhas. On these, standard length (SL) was measured. On the remaining 54 small fetuses, nose to tail length (NTL), SL, or both were taken, depending on whether the fetus was tightly curled or relatively straight. NTL is a measurement from the anterior end of the jaw to the tip of the developing fluke along the dorsal curvature of the body. A fluke notch is not present on small fetuses in May to July. Of the 54 small fetuses, only NTL was obtainable on 41, and both NTL and SL on 13. NTL is an exaggeration of SL and when used, resulted in a discontinuity when making comparisons with embryos or with larger fetuses. A regression equation was developed, based on the 13 fetuses for which both NTL and SL were recorded. The resulting equation showed that $SL = 0.737 (NTL) - 4.57$, with $r = 0.941$. The derived SL of small fetuses was used to plot progressive increase of fetal length over time (Figure 5).

Mean length of 26 near-term fetuses collected in June was 155.5 cm (range = 127.3 to 180.3) and is our best indicator of length at birth. The

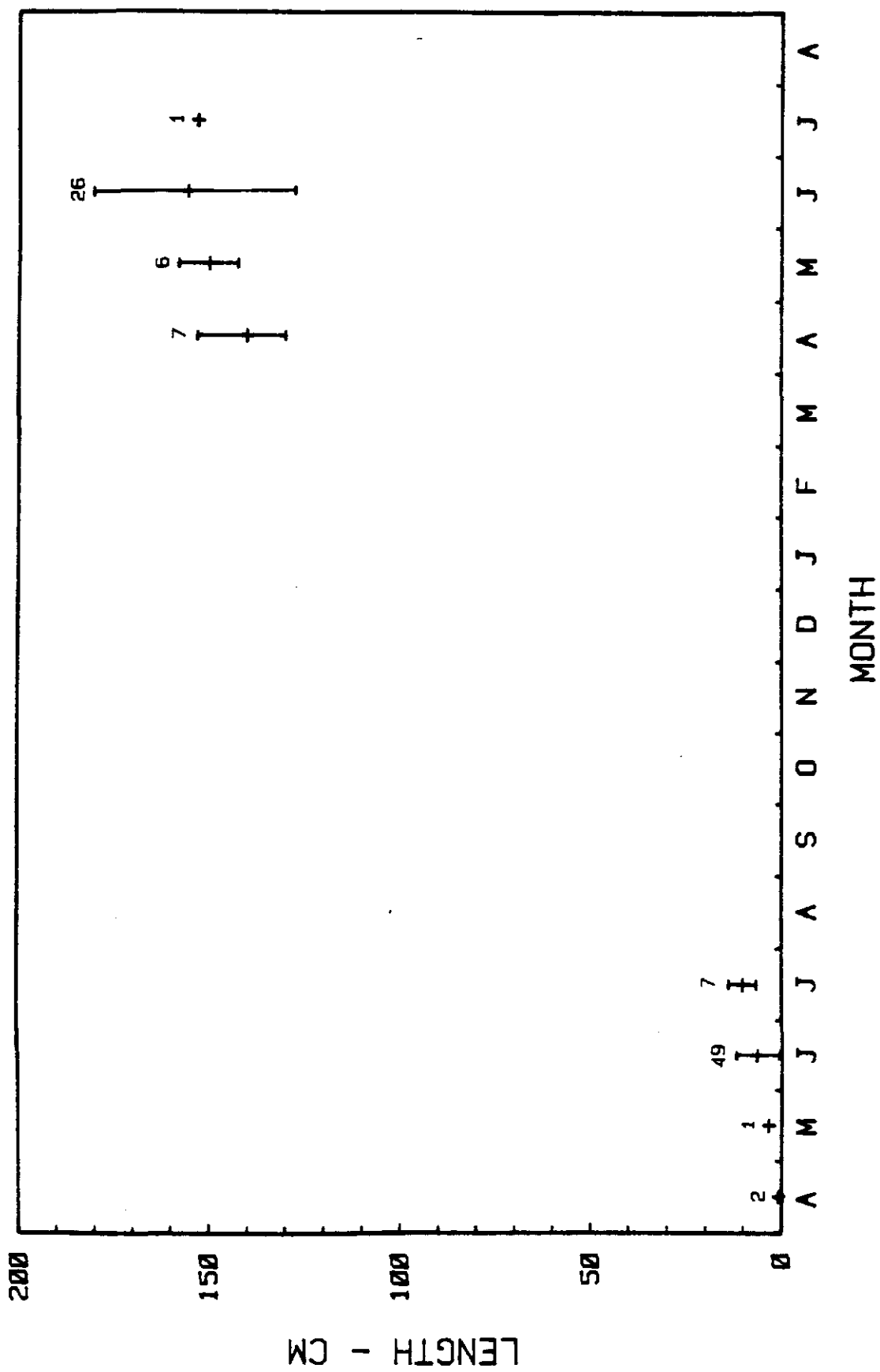


Figure 5. Progressive increase in length of prenatal belukhas from Bristol Bay (N = 5) and northwest

increase in weight over time is shown in Figure 6. Average weight of six near-term fetuses taken in mid- to late June was 71.8 kg.

The data from belukhas taken in Alaskan waters show that during late pregnancy from April to June, the increase in fetal length is comparatively small, whereas increase in weight is considerable. Compared to near-term fetuses taken in June, those obtained in April were only 10% shorter, but 45% lighter.

Length of Neonates

Standard length of four newborn calves from northwest Alaska taken in June averaged 164.9 cm with a range of 137 to 175 cm. Nine neonates obtained in Bristol Bay during July included one taken by hunting (J. W. Brooks unpublished) and eight found beachcast. That taken by hunting was 175.3 cm long. Those found beachcast averaged 143.0 cm, with a range of 137 to 152 cm.

Beachcast neonates from Bristol Bay were appreciably smaller than term fetuses from that area. Five term fetuses from Bristol Bay, obtained by Brooks (unpublished), had an average SL of 154.9 cm (range = 134.6 to 170.2); a length approximating the mean of 155.5 cm for other term fetuses from waters of northern Alaska.

Excluding the beachcast neonates from Bristol Bay, average length of four newborn calves obtained in June-July was 174.0 cm.

Reproduction

Interpretation of Female Reproductive Tracts

Extensive examination of female reproductive tracts from ice-associated pinnipeds of Bering Sea indicated the validity of recognizing nulliparous, primiparous, and most multiparous females on the basis of size and external condition of uterine horns (Burns 1981a, b; Burns and Frost 1983). Exceptions were multiparous females in which successive pregnancies occurred only in the same horn. These could not be discerned from primiparous animals. Differences among the three categories of females were that uterine horns of nulliparous animals were narrow, smooth in external appearance, and relatively thin-walled. When a pregnancy went to late term or birth, the uterine horn became greatly thickened, rugose, and internally a placental scar was often evident. Correlations of reproductive status based on gross examination of uterine horns and on ovarian analysis were very useful in identifying animals that had ovulated but not given birth, those that were primiparous, and those that had two or more pregnancies alternately involving both horns.

In belukha whales, nulliparous females were easily distinguished from parous animals based on gross external examination of uteri. This, in combination with ovarian features, permitted recognition of young animals that had ovulated but had not supported a fetus. However, primiparous and multiparous animals were indistinguishable. Even when a belukha had supported only one fetus to late term or birth, both uterine horns appeared similar.

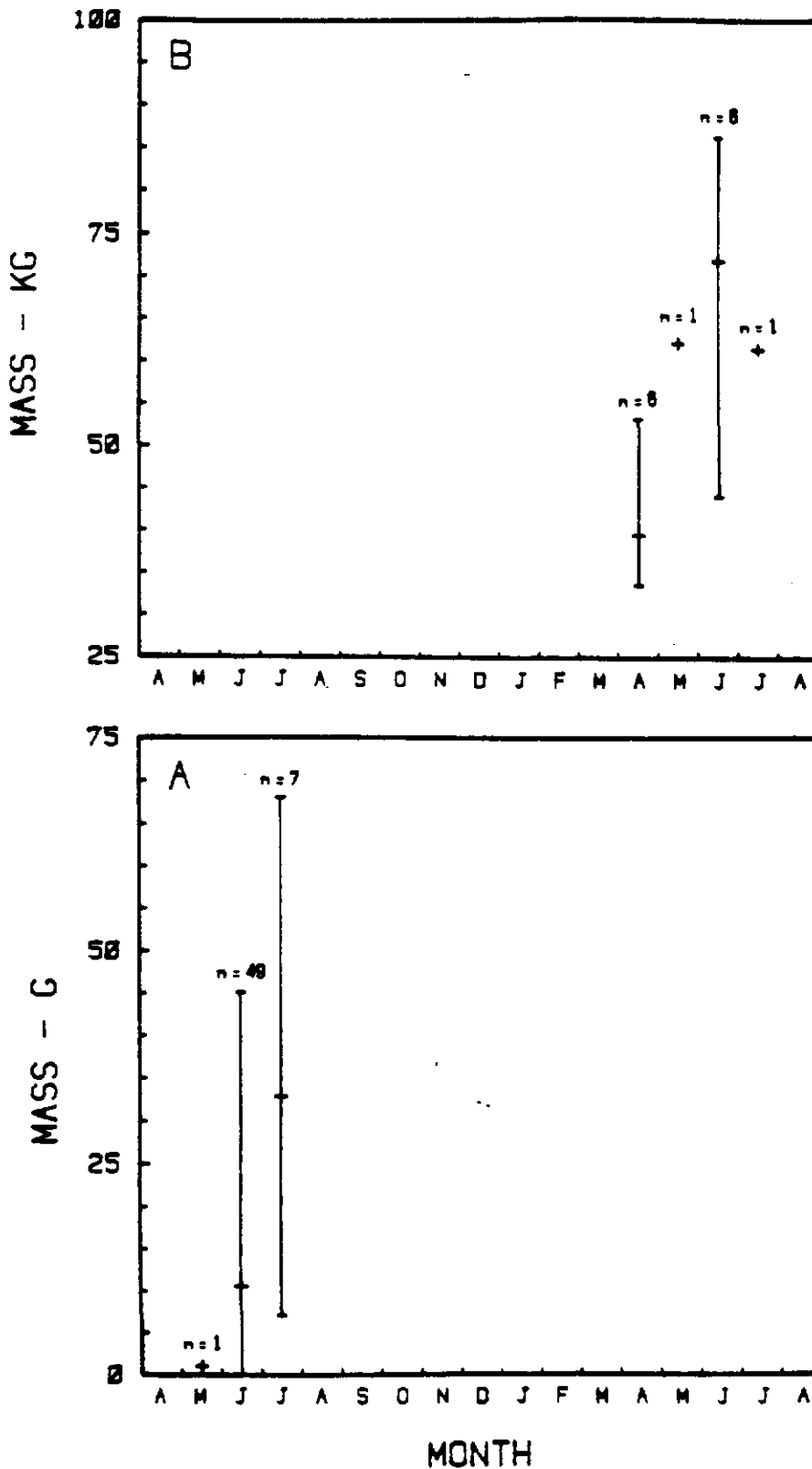


Figure 6. Progressive increase in weight of prenatal belukhas from northwest Alaska; A is of fetuses in the first trimester of development with weight in g, and B is in the third trimester with weight in kg.

We attribute this to involvement of both uterine horns in a pregnancy. Field examination of belukhas with term fetuses, taken in Eschschoitz Bay in 1981 and 1982, showed that in seven of 11 instances the fetus extended into both uterine horns. The head and torso were in the horn where the placenta was and extensive, fluid-filled fetal membranes with the enclosed caudal portion of the fetus extended into the other uterine horn.

In the four instances where a term fetus was within a single horn, the caudal portion was tightly recurved and laid along the ventral surface of the abdomen as described by Doan and Douglas (1953). In one instance, the head was toward the cervix. Caudal presentation was probable in the other three instances. Caudal presentation appeared probable in all instances where the caudal part of a fetus extended into the nongravid uterine horn. In the four instances in which a near-term fetus was completely within one uterine horn, part of the fluid-filled membranes intruded into the other horn.

Perhaps of greater significance was the finding that in seven of 11 early pregnancies noted in our 1982 sample from Eschschoitz Bay, fetal membranes extended into the nongravid uterine horn. Field collections of examined uteri were from 22 to 24 June and the fetuses were small. None exceeded 160 mm in length. Gross appearance of the epithelial tissue in both horns of newly pregnant females appeared similar. No comparisons based on histologic preparations were made.

The apparent frequent involvement of both uterine horns in a single pregnancy is probably facilitated by the broad connection between the horns, the relatively large cavity of the uterus, a single cervical canal, and presence of a mucus plug in the cervical canal during pregnancy. These anatomical features were consistent with findings reported by Kleinenberg et al. (1964), though in our samples there was considerable variation in characteristics of the cervical plug. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) indicated that these mucus plugs were, "thick, rubbery, and semitransparent," and that they were only present in pregnant females, occurring at all stages of pregnancy.

In our samples the mucus plugs varied from gelatinous and amber-colored to rubbery and nontransparent whitish in color. It is not known if the duration of specimen storage in 10% formalin affected appearance of this mucus substance. We found mucus plugs in all pregnant females examined for it and also in a few nongravid adults.

The presence of accessory corpora in the ovaries of belukhas have been noted by several investigators. Brodie (1971) discussed problems of interpretation of ovarian examination resulting from the presence of accessory corpora lutea in pregnant belukhas. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) concluded that such accessory corpora indicated postpartum breeding, an occurrence disproved by Brodie (loc. cit.). Multiple corpora lutea from a single pregnancy result in multiple corpora albicantia. Normal interpretation of these structures, as would be done for instance in the walrus or phocid seals, to obtain an indication of the approximate number of ovulations or, less precisely, the number of young born to a female, is not applicable to belukhas. Our earliest samples, obtained in 1977, included females supporting a single fetus (we encountered no multiple

pregnancies) but exhibiting more than one corpus luteum. The work of Brodie (1971), combined with our earliest findings, encouraged us to disregard numbers of corpora albicantia as being indicative of the actual number of ovulations or pregnancies. Instead it prompted an effort to obtain a sufficiently large sample of females during the appropriate time of the reproductive cycle to base estimates of productivity on the presence of active corpora lutea in combination with the presence of a fetus. The number and frequency of corpora lutea in our samples of females containing such structures are presented in Table 3.

Our sample of females with at least one corpus luteum was 110. Of those, 87 (79%) had a single corpus luteum, 17 (15.5%) had two luteinized bodies, 5 (4.5%) had three, and 1 (1%) contained five well-developed luteinized bodies.

Subdivisions of this total sample were as follows:

47 females with a near-term fetus or newborn calf
 34 (72.3%) with one corpus luteum
 11 (23.4%) with two luteinized bodies
 2 (4.3%) with three luteinized bodies

63 females with a small fetus
 53 (84.1%) with one corpus luteum
 6 (9.5%) with two luteinized bodies
 3 (4.8%) with three luteinized bodies
 1 (1.6%) with five luteinized bodies

Brodie (1971) reported that five of 39 (12.8%) term or postpartum females had accessory corpora lutea. In our sample as a whole, 110 pregnancies were associated with 141 corpora lutea, or 1.3 corpora lutea per pregnancy. The 1980 sample of 21 females obtained in Eschscholtz Bay is 19% of the females included in Table 3, though it includes 39% of the females with multiple corpora lutea. We have no explanation for the large annual variation in multiple corpora lutea evident in our samples.

There was a suggestion that more accessory corpora lutea were associated with later stages of pregnancy, though the differences in sample means ($t = 0.5462$, $df = 107$, $P > 0.5$) and distributions ($\chi^2 = 4.57$, $df = 3$, $0.5 > P > 0.1$) were not statistically significant. Mean number of corpora lutea in 47 females with a term fetus or newborn calf was 1.32, compared to 1.25 in 63 females supporting a small fetus.

Age at Sexual Maturity in Females

In this discussion, age at sexual maturity is the age at which a female conceives for the first time. Pregnancy may or may not result from the first ovulation. Our sample of known-age females ovulating for the first time includes 24 animals. In only two (8%) of these, ovulations did not result in a pregnancy. This was deduced by the presence of a corpus albicans in an ovary of those females, the uterine horns of which were clearly those of a nulliparous animal.

Table 3. Number of corpora lutea found in ovaries of pregnant and postparturient belugas from northwest Alaska. Samples are separated into whales supporting a small fetus and those with a near-term fetus or newborn calf.

Sample collection	N	With near-term fetus or newborn calf			N	With a small fetus		
		1	2	3		1	2	3
PHD-77	9	8	1	0	5	4	1	0
PHD-78	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	0
PHD-78	7	6	1	0	15	15	0	0
PLD-78	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
PHD-79	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
WD-79	5	3	1	1	4	3	1	0
PHD-80	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
EPD-80	5	4	1	0	16	8	4	3
EPD-81	6	4	2	0	8	8	0	0
EPD-82	10	5	4	1	11	11	0	0
PHD-83	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Totals	47	34	11	2	63	53	6	1

Determination of reproductive status for sexually immature females is straightforward. However, determination of the age of first pregnancy in the 22 females that had been pregnant only once is slightly confounded by the following considerations:

1. The duration of pregnancy is greater than a year.
2. Those pregnant only once were represented by females of three different conditions commensurate with a basically triennial breeding cycle; recently pregnant (with a small fetus), with a near-term fetus or neonate, or nongravid but having borne a calf prior to the year of capture.
3. Females were taken during the calving period or, stated differently, about the time of their own birthdays.

Thus, a female of age 6, pregnant for the first time and supporting a small fetus, was bred at age 5+ or during its sixth year of life. A female of age 6, pregnant for the first time and supporting a term fetus was bred at age 4+ or during its fifth year of life. The analysis becomes somewhat less accurate for nonpregnant, primiparous females with presumed 1-year-old calves. Such females bred for the first time some 26 to 27 (or more) months prior to capture. Our sample includes 10 such known-age primiparous, nongravid females, eight of which were taken near Elephant Point in 1982 again suggesting an interesting sampling bias operative at the particular location and at that time (in this instance, a high proportion of young females of the same reproductive status).

Correlation of age at sexual maturity (= initiation of first pregnancy) for 22 females, based on the considerations stated above showed that 12 females (54%) conceived at age 4+ (fifth year of life), 9 (41%) at age 5+ and 1 (5%) at age 6+.

Table 4 presents a slightly different approach to the question of age at sexual maturity and pregnancy rate for our entire sample of 207 known-age females. Again, it is important to note that we obtained most of the samples at the approximate time of their birth dates. Thus, 4-year-old females were not pregnant when taken during June, though some of them would have become so prior to their fifth birthday. These data show that all animals up to the age of 4 years (N = 28) were sexually immature, 33% of 5-year-olds were sexually mature, as were 94% of 6-year-olds. All animals beyond age 8 were sexually mature.

Pregnancy Rates

Our sample of 207 known-age females included 36 (17%) sexually immature animals. This proportion of immatures is lower than actually occurs in the population as a whole, for reasons which have already been discussed.

Of the entire sample of sexually mature females for which age was determined (N = 171), 35% were nongravid when taken, 35% were newly pregnant, and the remainder were with term fetuses or had recently given

Table 4. Reproductive status of 207 known-age female belukhas from northwest Alaska.

Age	No.	Number			
		Immature	Nongravid	Recent preg.	Near-term
0	1	1	0	0	0
1	4	4	0	0	0
2	6	6	0	0	0
3	6	6	0	0	0
4	11	11	0	0	0
5	9	6	0	3	0
6	16	1	6	4	5
7	11	1	4	4	2
8	7	0	1	2	4
9	7	0	1	4	2
10	5	0	0	3	2
11	9	0	3	3	3
12	4	0	2	1	1
13	8	0	5	0	3
14	8	0	2	5	1
15	9	0	2	4	3
16	8	0	1	3	4
17	8	0	2	3	3
18	6	0	2	3	1
19	5	0	1	2	2
20	8	0	1	4	3
21	5	0	3	0	2
22	9	0	1	5	3
23	10	0	5	2	3
24	5	0	4	1	0
25	3	0	1	0	2
26	5	0	3	0	2
27	5	0	4	1	0
28	1	0	0	1	0
29	3	0	2	1	0
30	1	0	1	0	0
31	1	0	0	1	0
32	1	0	1	0	0
33	1	0	1	0	0
34	0	0	0	0	0
35	1	0	0	0	1

birth (Table 4). These findings further support conclusions of a basically triennial breeding cycle as shown by Brodie (1971) and Seaman and Burns (1981).

Age-specific fecundity was examined in a general way (Table 5). Again, sampling bias and the triennial breeding cycle precluded meaningful comparisons among individual age classes of relatively small sample size. The trend for grouped age classes is evident. Nongravid females comprised 25% of those ages 8 to 20 years and increased to about 50% in animals older than age 20. Thus, the incidence of pregnancy is reduced in older age animals. The analysis by 3-year age groups shows a similar trend though it is confounded by attainment of sexual maturity over several years in young age groups and by the probability of encountering high proportions of females of specific reproductive condition in pods that are hunted in Eschscholtz Bay. As an example, 89% of all females in age group 8 to 10 in our samples were pregnant.

Age-specific birth rates, based on those females with term fetuses or neonates as shown in Table 4, by groups of age classes were: ages 0-5, 0.0; ages 6-10, 0.326; ages 11-22, 0.333; ages 23-25, 0.278; ages 26-28, 0.182; and ages 29-38, 0.125. Based on the age frequency of sexually mature females in our sample, as shown in Table 4, birth rate for the population was found to be 0.306. We consider this to be a slight under-estimation because of the inability to recognize those females that may have borne calves during the earliest part of the prolonged birth period in which they had been collected. Age-specific pregnancy rates, based only on inclusion of those females with a small fetus were: ages 0-5, 0.055; ages 6-10, 0.414; ages 11-22, 0.363; ages 23-28, 0.267; and ages 29-38, 0.190. Values for age cohorts 6 to 22 indicate that some females become pregnant more frequently than once in three years.

Birth Period

According to residents of coastal northwest Alaska, the time during which most belukha calves are born is from shortly after the middle of June to about mid-July. Our samples indicate an extended birth period beginning at least as early as mid-April and extending through July and possibly later. The peak period, however, is probably mid-June to mid- or late July. Determination of the latter part of the peak may be complicated if selective use of warmer coastal waters by whales about to, or having recently given birth, actually occurs. If, as suggested by Sergeant (1973) and Sergeant and Brodie (1975), such habitat selection does occur, samples would be biased toward females supporting a term fetus or newborn, even after the actual peak period of births.

Our aggregate sample of 195 sexually mature females included 171 for which age was determined and an additional 24 of unknown age. Of the 195, 54 were in the latter stages of pregnancy or were recently postparturient; 14 having been taken in the nearshore lead system of eastern Chukchi Sea during April-May and the remainder by driving them in embayments during June-July.

Postpartum females were determined based on an observed cow/calf pair or on the basis of meeting two or more of the following criteria: (1) presence

Table 5. Age-related fecundity in sexually mature female belukhas from northwest Alaska. Data are presented for, (A) groups comprised of 3-year classes and (B) for larger groups.

A			B		
Age groups (years)	N	Nongravid (%)	Age groups (years)	N	Nongravid (%)
5-7	28	36	8-20*	92	25
8-10	19	11			
11-13	21	48			
14-16	25	20			
17-19	19	26			
20-22	22	23	21-30	47	51
23-25	18	56			
26-28	11	64			
29-31	5	60	31-37	<u>4</u>	50
32-34	2	100			
35-37	<u>1</u>	0	TOTAL:	143	
TOTAL:	171				

* This cohort begins with whales in the age group at which all females were sexually mature.

of one or more corpora lutea/corpora albicantia in the early stages of degeneration; (2) distended uterine horns containing blood or debris; and (3) lactating with evidence of abundant milk production (colostrum in several instances). The inherent bias in this procedure is that females which may have given birth in April-May would not have shown indications of recent parturition by mid-June-July. They would be classified as supporting a calf because they were lactating, but not necessarily having been pregnant in the year taken. This tends to overestimate the number of nongravid females and underestimate those classified as having near-term fetus/newborn calves. Doan and Douglas (1953) reported that placental scars are not evident in belukhas. We found none, even in females known or judged to be recently postparturient. This may be explained by structure of the placenta, variously referred to as being of the epithelial (Kleinenberg et al. 1964) or indeciduate type (Doan and Douglas, loc. cit.).

Eight females taken between 25 and 29 April supported a near-term fetus, and one taken on 29 April was postpartum. Four females taken in May had a near-term fetus and none were postpartum. Samples obtained in June include 32 females taken in Eschscholtz Bay between 13 and 24 June, of which 19 supported a near-term fetus and 13 were postparturient. Between 1 and 18 July, eight females were obtained near Point Lay and Wainwright, of which three were recently postparturient and five bore a term fetus.

In Bristol Bay, 68 belukhas were collected between 26 May and 18 August 1954 (ADF&G 1969). These included 4 taken in May, 12 in June, 31 in July, and 24 in August. Three term fetuses were found in the June sample; the last one being on the 23rd. Three calves of the year were taken, the first one on 8 July. In 1961, also in Bristol Bay, Lensink (1961) found a newborn on 14 June and two term fetuses, one each on 11 and 17 June. Lowry et al. (1982) reported finding two beachcast neonates in that region, the first on 7 and the second on 10 July, 1982. Both had been dead for several days. Frost et al. (1983) indicated that in Bristol Bay births occur principally in June and July. During repetitive aerial searches for beach cast whales in 1983, the first belukha was found on 11 May 1983 and the first newborn on 4 July. Five dead newborns were found on 15 July. Additionally, four different masses of drifting afterbirth, identified as being from belukhas, were found and reported by local fishermen on 9 July 1983 (Frost et al., loc. cit.).

In Kasegaluk Lagoon, near Point Lay, a birth was recorded on 7 July 1978. In this instance an unaccompanied whale was observed for several hours after which a calf suddenly appeared beside it (Seaman, field notes).

Our findings indicate that in waters adjacent to Alaska, the birth period of belukhas is rather long, extending from April through July and possibly longer. However, most births occur between mid-June and late July.

Breeding Period

Brodie (1971) utilized a straight line method applied to fetal lengths and determined the gestation period to be 14.5 months. For the population of whales he studied near Baffin Island, the known birth period was late July-early August and he concluded that the peak breeding period was therefore in mid-May.

Application of the same procedure used by Brodie (1971) to our data from the Bering-Chukchi population of belukhas would indicate a peak of breeding in April. This is based on a 14.5 month gestation period and a peak of births during a month-long period from mid-June to mid-July.

However, our limited collection of biological samples suggests that breeding may occur earlier and that diapause (delayed implantation) cannot, as yet, be ruled out for belukhas. Our series of 20 early-caught, sexually mature females other than those with a near-term fetus or neonate (these are ruled out as breeders in the year of capture) includes 9 taken in April and 11 in May, as shown below:

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. specimens</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>No. specimens</u>
April 25	2	May 7	1
26	1	10	1
27	2	17	4
29	4	19	3
		23	1
		24	1

Of the nine females from April, ovaries of four had a large, completely formed corpus luteum, the smallest of which was 39 mm in diameter. One of the females, taken on 27 April, had a 2.8-mm, rod-like, segmented embryo. No embryos were recovered from the other three, though they were, in all probability, pregnant. Another four females were apparently nonbreeders during the year of capture. They showed no indication of recent or impending ovulation. As is usual for most adult females, the ovaries of these nongravid females contained follicles, in one instance as large as 8 x 5 mm, but mostly less than 2 mm. None of these follicles protruded from the surface of the ovary. One female taken on 29 April 1977, contained a fully mature, ripe follicle, the greatest diameter of which was about 42 mm. The follicle mostly protruded above the surface of the ovary. This female was considered to be nearing ovulation. Thus, of the five females taken in late April that showed signs of breeding activity, four had ovulated enough in advance of collection that the corpora lutea were fully formed. One was approaching ovulation, indicating that some breeding was still occurring.

Of the 11 appropriate females obtained in May, five had ovulated earlier in the year as evidenced by a fully formed corpus luteum, the smallest of which was 41 x 30 mm. An embryo, 8.4 mm, was recovered from the female taken on 7 May. Recent or imminent ovulation was evidenced in one animal taken on 10 May. It had a large (>30 mm), though collapsed, follicular cavity which protruded above the ovary surface. This follicle may have been naturally ruptured, or burst when the whale was butchered on the ice. The remaining five females were apparently nonbreeders in the year of capture. None of the 112 females taken in June that were potentially capable of breeding during the year of capture showed signs of recent or impending ovulation. Fifty of them were already pregnant and supporting small fetuses and 62 were nongravid. In the July sample of 10 appropriate females, 2 were nongravid and 8 were pregnant. One of the eight had a large, 45-mm, incompletely formed corpus luteum, suggesting ovulation sometime in late June-early July. It was taken on 18 July.

This series of specimens indicates that some breeding occurs in late June-early July but most occurs prior to late April. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) noted the difficulty of finding very small embryos under field conditions. They indicated that some authors had recorded well-developed corpora lutea in belukhas, but were unable to find an embryo. That was the case in our series of newly pregnant females taken in April-May. The two embryos recovered were in uteri from two of three reproductive tracts obtained in 1980 and later, all of which were carefully examined under laboratory conditions. The third of these taken on 19 May, had a fully formed corpus luteum, the largest dimensions of which were 50 x 41 mm. Neither an implantation site nor an embryo was found. We cannot say with certainty that samples obtained prior to 1980 contained a small embryo or not. They did not have obvious implant sites; features which are apparent even with the smallest discernable embryos.

Small to moderate size follicles were found in ovaries of some females, regardless of either the month in which they were taken or their general reproductive condition. As an example, of 68 females taken in June 1982 in Eschscholtz Bay, 24% had one or more obvious follicles. The largest follicle in two recently postpartum females was 12 x 9 mm. In three females with a small fetus the largest follicle was 7 x 6 mm (\bar{x} = 6 x 5.7 mm). Five females with follicles were subadults, being nulliparous and not pregnant. The largest follicle in these was 10 x 8 mm (\bar{x} = 6.6 x 5.2 mm). In six nonpregnant, parous females, average size of follicles was 11 x 6.3 mm, and the largest was 17 x 12 mm. This large follicle was the only one in the June 1982 sample that might have matured later in the summer. Though it was situated near the surface of the ovary, it did not protrude.

Histological sections of testes and epididymides from 39 males were examined microscopically. This sample included 8 whales taken in late April, 2 in mid-May, 6 in late May, 18 in mid-June, and 5 in early July. Five whales were found to be adolescent. In the 34 sexually mature males, two (5.9%), both taken in mid-June, were judged to have been in breeding condition. In the testes of both, all phases of the maturation of germ cells, from spermatogonia to spermatozoa, were evident. Also, spermatozoa were moderately abundant in tubules of the epididymides of both whales.

In contrast, the other 32 adult males, including the 14 animals obtained in April and May, were in the early to mid part of the retrogression phase of the annual cycle of spermatogenesis. Within epididymides, spermatozoa were mostly absent (22 animals) or present only in trace amounts (10 animals). Contents of tubules mainly consisted of cellular debris. Seminiferous tubules of the testes showed various stages of degeneration of germ cells, presence of giant cells, and extensive debris. Presence of multi-nucleated spermatid giant cells is indicative of the retrogression phase.

These findings show that although a small proportion of males may remain in breeding condition through June and perhaps later, most are in nonbreeding condition by late April-May.

Evidence from reproductive organs of females and males indicate that the breeding season is long but that most breeding occurs during an unknown period prior to mid-April. We suggest that additional study will establish

the peak period between late February and early April, when most belukhas are in the Bering Sea or beginning the spring migration.

Color Change

The color of term fetuses and very recently newborn calves seems quite variable. They appear to have a light greyish or silvery sheen that masks much darker pigmentation. Short-term exposure apparently changes or removes this surface coloration and the young calves become a dark brownish-grey or blueish-grey. Belukhas gradually become lighter as they mature and all (or most) are white, with a narrow blackish fringe on the posterior margins of the flukes as adults. Some adults, especially males, also have a narrow dark fringe along the posterior margins of the flippers. Sergeant and Brodie (1969) indicate that the white coloration is obtained when the animals become sexually mature, "but rather later in females than in males."

We classified belukhas into four general categories of color: dark brownish- to blueish-grey, grey, light grey, and white. Since categorization of such a color gradient is subjective, some differences in assigned coloration may have occurred both between the two principal investigators and among different years for the same investigator. The senior author classified 172 of 209 (82%) whales for which color as well as either age, standard length, or both were also determined. The greatest probability for discrepancy may be in classification of light grey- and white-colored animals.

Lengths and ages of males and females of the four color phases are presented in Table 6. For males, dark grey animals were mostly those in their first and second years of life, grey animals were mostly ages 2 through 7, light grey were mostly 6 to 9 years, and white-colored males were 9 years and older. The light grey phase was evident in some males and females by age 5. The mean age of light grey females indicated in Table 6 is misleading. Although the modal age of light grey females was 6 years, this color phase was evident in animals as old as 21, thus skewing the mean to an age significantly higher than either the mode or the median of 7 years. Apparently, in some females the light grey color phase persists well into adulthood while others become white as young as age 6.

Indicated mean ages of white-colored males and females are parameters of little value because of the great range in age of whales in this color cohort.

Reproductive status of females indicated that most reach sexual maturity before they become white. A comparison of coloration and reproductive history showed that none of the dark grey females were sexually mature. Of 29 grey females, three (10%) were sexually mature, having been pregnant once. They were judged to have bred at age 4+ (fifth year of life).

Sexual maturity in females was mainly obtained during the light grey color phase. Of 21 females in this category, 19 (90%) were sexually mature, including 7 (37%) that had been pregnant only once. The older, light grey animals were multiparous.

Table 6. Age (yrs) and standard length (cm) of belukhas from northwest Alaska, classified by color phase.

Sex	Parameter	Color phase							
		Dark grey		Grey		Light grey		White	
		Length	Age	Length	Age	Length	Age	Length	Age
Male	N	4	5	8	19	10	17	24	39
	Mean	217.6	1	299.4	5	333.2	7.5	408.3	22.9
	Range	188.0-256.5	0-3	236.2-335.3	2-9	297.0-355.6	5-11	345.4-452.1	9-38
Female	N	5	6	13	23	11	21	35	65
	Mean	214.8	1.2	274.3	3.9	329.7	8.8	350.8	19.3
	Range	190.5-241.3	0-2	238.8-307.3	2-6	304.8-361.3	5-21	312.4-373.4	6-33

Of 71 white-colored females, all were sexually mature and 31 (44%) were pregnant only once; one becoming so at age 4+ years, one at 5+ years, and two at 6+ years. Although they were white when collected, they were probably grey or light grey when they became pregnant.

Of 225 whales in our sample, for which color was recorded, 70% were light grey (whitish) or white.

Age Structure and Mortality Rates

Several sources of bias additional to those inherent in field sampling affect our analysis of population structure. Age determinations were based on counts of dentinal layers and the conclusion by Brodie (1971, 1982) that these layers are deposited at the rate of two per year. Our age determinations for small-sized whales also support Brodie's conclusion. There is great individual and sex-related variation in length and diameter of teeth. On average, those of males are considerably larger, in both dimensions, than those of females. We do not know if there is a general sex-related difference in rate of tooth wear, nor if the growth-to-wear relationships vary at different times of a whale's life. Accurate counts of the total number of dentinal layers actually deposited were possible only when the neonatal line was present. Loss of that important reference line was quite variable. It was worn away in 1 out of 21 (4%) whales 8 years old and all of 15 whales that were determined to be 17 years old (34 to 35 dentinal layers). However, it occasionally persisted in a very few individuals up to the age of 23+ years. For our purposes we used the minimal ages, as determined by the number of remaining dentinal layers, as if they were actual ages. Thus, the true age frequency distribution of older whales in our samples is biased toward younger cohorts and the maximum life span is underestimated.

The derived estimates of birth rate for the population as a whole and age-specific birth rates are also considered to be slightly lower than actual. Birth rates are based on those females that supported a term fetus or had recently given birth. The great majority of whales were sampled in June and July, at which time indications of a birth that may have occurred several weeks to months earlier were no longer obvious. Such whales would have been classified as nongravid. Actual birth rate for our sample was probably closer to 32% for females 6 years and older rather than the derived rate of 30.6%. However, we have used the 30.6% figure.

Age composition of 412 sampled whales from northwest Alaska is shown in Figure 7. Under-representation of age classes 0 to 5 is obvious. This is presumed to result from bias due to three factors: (1) a generally older-age composition of those whales comprising the early spring migrants (those taken in the lead systems near Point Hope in April-May); (2) a general hunter preference for larger whales; and (3) the greater ease with which larger, lighter-colored whales can be pursued in shallows. Age composition of our sample indicates that full recruitment into the catch occurs at about age 6. Various aspects of this sort of recruitment into the harvest are discussed, in detail, by Ricker (1958). The age frequency of sampled animals 6 years and older was "smoothed" using the probit regression (Caughley 1977) in order to generate the probable age structure of that

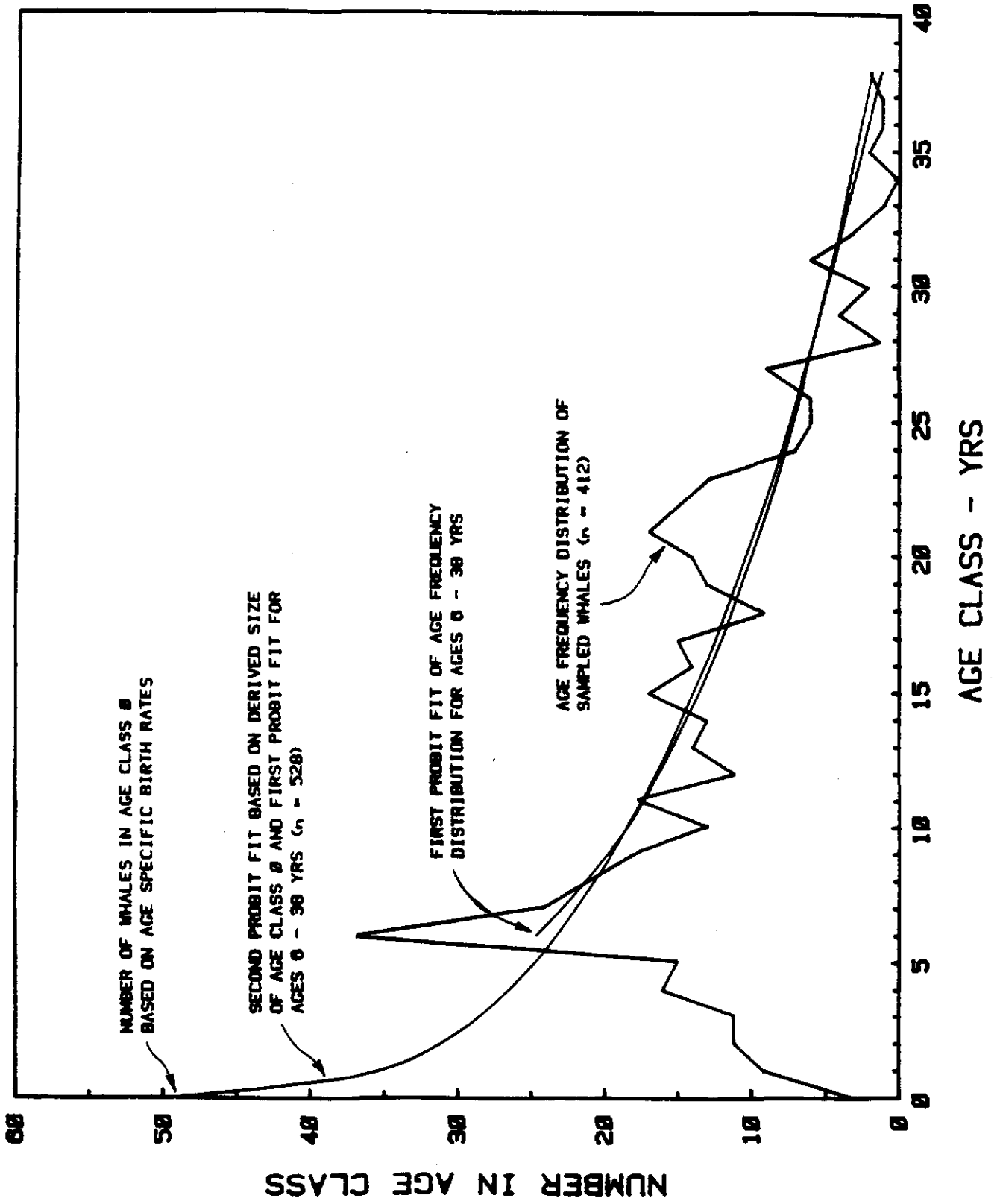


Figure 7. Age-frequency distribution of 412 belugas sampled in northwest Alaska and the probable

portion of the population. Then, based on our findings of a 1:1 sex ratio, age-specific birth rates as previously indicated and the fitted age frequency distribution of whales 6 years and older, the number of calves produced by a "population" of our sample size and composition was derived. The 332 belukhas, 6 years and older represented by the probit fit produced 50 calves. Using 50 as the size of age cohort 0, and the values that produced the probit fit for belukhas 6 years and older, another probable age frequency curve was generated. Our assessment is that the derived distribution curve for ages 0 to 38 appears to be a reasonable approximation of population structure.

This statistical exercise indicates that in the derived "population" of 528 belukhas, calves (age 0) represent 9.5%, ages 0 to 5 are 35% to 36%, and those 6 and older are 64% to 65%.

A life table for belukhas in our study area, based on the fitted age distribution is presented in Table 7. Procedures used for deriving that table generally follow those employed by Caughley (1966, 1977) and Smith (1973). Parameters included are age (x), smoothed age frequency distribution ($N = 528$), number per age class when the population size is 1,000, survivorship (l_x), deaths per age class (d_x), age-specific mortality rates (q_x), and mean life expectancy per age class (e_x). Mean annual mortality rate was found to be 0.0936.

Age-specific mortality (q_x) for a model population of 1,000 belukhas is shown in Figure 8. It suggests that the mortality rate for males, starting about age 4, becomes increasingly greater than for females.

Mortality

We have no data about mortality of belukhas caused by diseases or parasites. Three causes of mortality commonly mentioned in Eskimo lore are entrapment in ice and predation by polar bears and killer whales. Surprisingly, in many years of working with marine mammal hunters of northwestern Alaska, instances of either entrapment or predation by bears were reported from relatively few locations. Entrapment of belukhas by unfavorable ice conditions can certainly facilitate predation by bears and the two phenomena are often linked.

Entrapment

Belukhas normally winter in regions of active drift ice where they have easy access to air. The vast majority of the Bering Sea population apparently winters over a broad area in Bering Sea. Winter distribution is inadequately known. In other parts of the north there are aggregations, groups, and populations that winter in restricted and localized polynya areas in several parts of the Soviet Union (Kleinenberg et al. 1964), in Foxe Basin and James Bay in eastern Canada (Jonkel 1969, Sergeant 1973, Stirling et al. 1981), and in Bering Strait.

Throughout their range, belukhas occasionally become entrapped by extensive ice. Accounts of ice entrapments suggest to us that they most commonly result from two causes--failure of belukhas to migrate prior to or during

Table 7. Life table for belukha whales based on samples obtained in northwest Alaska from 1977 to 1982.

Age class (x)	Number per age class	Number per age class (pop. = 1000)	Survivors per 1000 (l_x)	Deaths per 1000 (d_x)	Age specific mort. rate (q_x)	Mean life expectancy (e_x)
0	50	94	1000	294	294	10.18
1	35	66	706	76	107	13.21
2	31	59	630	53	84	13.73
3	29	54	577	42	73	13.95
4	26	50	535	36	66	14.01
5	25	47	500	31	62	13.97
6	23	44	469	28	59	13.86
7	22	41	441	25	57	13.70
8	21	39	416	23	56	13.50
9	19	37	393	21	55	13.26
10	18	35	371	20	54	13.00
11	17	33	351	19	54	12.72
12	16	31	332	18	54	12.42
13	16	29	314	17	54	12.09
14	15	28	297	16	54	11.76
15	14	26	281	15	55	11.40
16	13	25	266	15	56	11.04
17	12	24	251	14	57	10.66
18	12	22	237	14	58	10.28
19	11	21	223	13	60	9.88
20	10	20	210	13	61	9.47
21	10	18	197	12	63	9.06
22	9	17	184	12	65	8.64
23	9	16	172	12	68	8.21
24	8	15	161	11	71	7.77
25	7	14	149	11	74	7.32
26	7	13	138	11	78	6.87
27	6	12	127	11	83	6.41
28	6	11	117	10	88	5.95
29	5	10	106	10	94	5.47
30	5	9	96	10	102	4.99
31	4	8	87	10	111	4.50
32	4	7	77	9	122	4.01
33	3	6	68	9	137	3.50
34	3	5	58	9	155	2.97
35	2	5	49	9	180	2.43
36	2	4	40	9	216	1.85
37	2	3	32	9	271	1.22
38	1	2	23	23	1000	0.50

Mean mortality rate = 0.09362

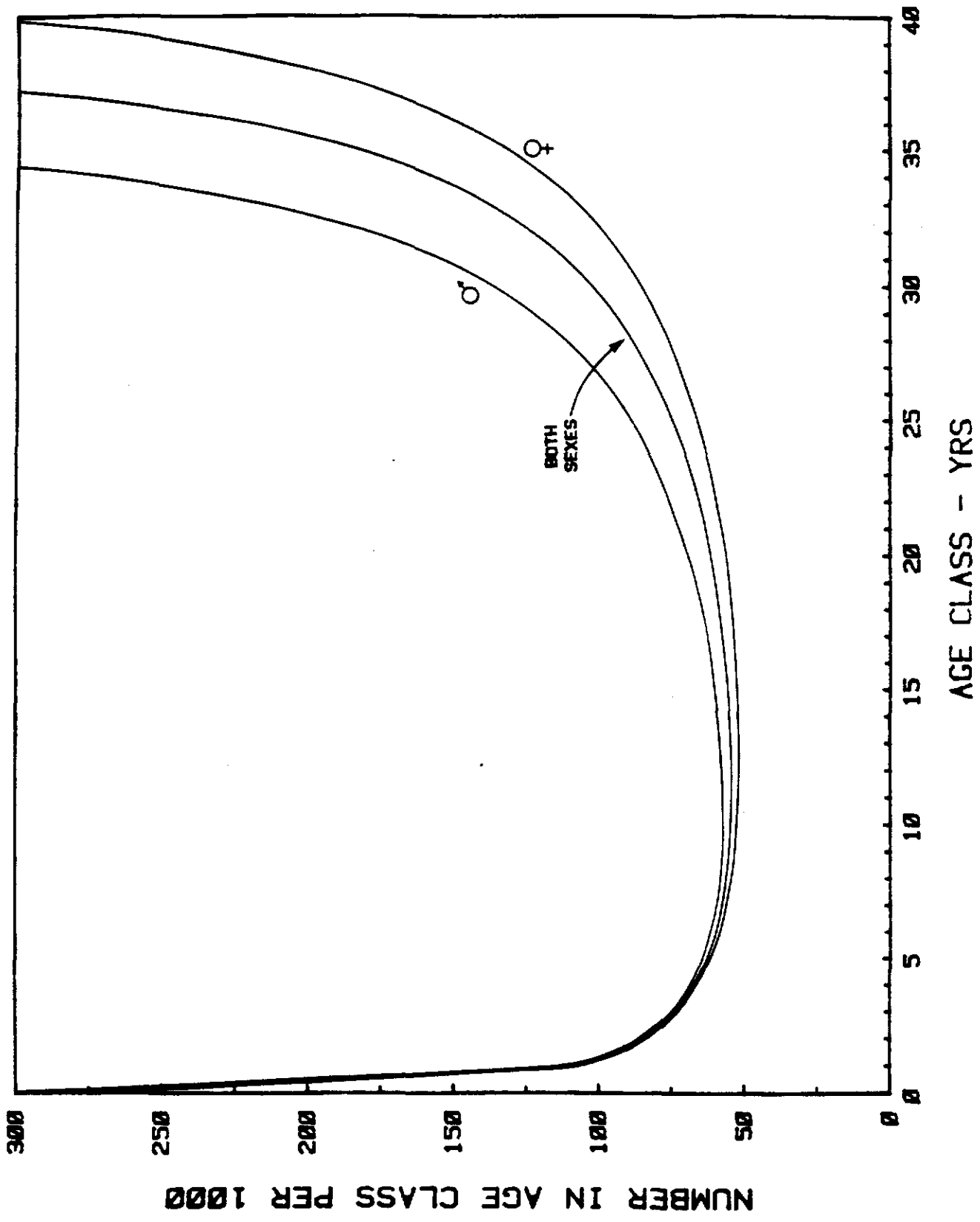


Figure 8. Age-specific mortality (q_x) for a model "population" of 1,000 belukias, based on samples from northwest Alaska obtained in 1977 to 1982.

autumn freezeup, or deep penetration of the pack ice during spring migration with subsequent cold weather and extensive freezing of openings.

Porsild (1918) described entrapments of animals and introduced the anglicized Greenland Inuit term savssats into the biological literature. The term savssag (or its dialectal variants), in its most general sense, means an animal whose way is blocked. In Greenland Inuit, savssag usually means a single whale or seal locked in a hole in the ice and savssat refers to more than one whale or seal in similar circumstances. The term is less commonly used in reference to sea birds or fishes whose way is blocked by such man-made devices as a weir (Schultz-Lorentzen 1927). In Alaska there are exact equivalents used by coastal Inuit from Bering Strait to Point Hope: saprag (sing.) and saprat (pl.; Bob Uhl, personal communication). We will use the more familiar Greenland word in reference to trapped belukhas.

In April 1984, two instances of entrapment were known to have occurred adjacent to Alaska (Lowry et al., in press). The first was near Fairway Rock, in Bering Strait, at approximately 65°38'N, 168°34'W. An unknown number of whales (savssat) became entrapped around the middle of the month. The opening and numerous dead whales were found by a pilot flying from Nome to Little Diomed Island and the site was subsequently seen, on occasion, for almost a month. Photographs acquired by Mr. Robert Nelson (Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Nome) that were taken on 24 April by Mr. John Fray (pilot, Seward Peninsula Flying Service) showed that a minimum of 40 and perhaps as many as 55 whales had been killed over a period of several days and dragged onto the ice by polar bears. By 6 May the dead whales had drifted to a location approximately two miles north of Little Diomed Island. On that date an estimated 31 polar bears were scavenging belukha remains that were spread over several acres of ice around the opening. Open water was then only several hundred meters away (Sister Joseph Alice, Fraternity of the Little Sisters of Jesus, Diomed Island, Alaska, personal communication, 8 August 1984). The second entrapment occurred in mid-April in southeast Chukchi Sea at approximately 67°49'N, 165°15'W. Numerous belukhas were seen at two small, closely adjacent holes in extensive refrozen leads. No other openings in the ice were visible. Several polar bears and several dead belukhas were seen (David Furber, pilot, Shellabarger Flying Service, Kotzebue, Alaska, personal communication 16 May and 4 September 1984).

Predation

The preceding comments about polar bear predation on savssat add to the existing record of such mortalities as reported by several writers, including Freeman (1973). Polar bears also take belukhas under different conditions. On 27 April 1984, near Cape Lisburne, Alaska, Lloyd F. Lowry, (biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fairbanks, field notes; Lowry et al., in press) examined a kill site at which a polar bear took a young belukha in a narrow though continuous lead system. The first northward migrating belukhas moving through that general area were seen on 25 April. Thousands of whales were seen generally moving northward through the Cape Lisburne area, from 25 April to 13 May, when field study by Alaska Department of Fish and Game personnel was terminated. Dr. F. H. Fay (University of Alaska Fairbanks, personal communication) noted a report by

a pilot, of a belukha caught and partially eaten by a polar bear in the southern Chukchi Sea on 27 March 1967. Mitchell and Reeves (1981) show an instance of predation by polar bear(s) in the eastern Beaufort Sea.

Killer whales have been reported as major predators on belukhas. Sleptsov (1952) described a predatory encounter involving those whales that was also recounted in Kleinenberg, et al. (1964). The latter authors also commented on predation by killer whales published by Kukenthal (1889) and Degerbøl and Nielsen (1930) indicating that belukhas are vulnerable when panicked. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) stated that killer whales do not occur in the Arctic Ocean of Siberia and North America. We are aware of three sightings of killer whales associated with the ice margin in waters north of Alaska. On 10 July 1967, at least five killer whales, in a single pod, closely approached a marine mammal hunting party operating in pack ice near Wainwright (70°39'N). The hunters indicated that game was very "nervous" for several hours after these whales had passed and that the occurrence of these whales was not especially unusual. The two other sightings were in September in western Beaufort Sea; 7 on 17 September 1974 near the ice margin where bowhead whales were present (Burns, field notes), and one large male in the ice front at 72°28.5'N, 153°06.7'W, on 17 September 1982. The latter sighting was made during our survey of belukhas and the killer whale was in loose ice (2/10) where belukhas were also abundant. Other killer whales may have been present, submerged in the openings, or under the ice.

Dr. F. H. Fay (personal communication) noted a report by an Eskimo hunter of St. Lawrence Island who found a dead adult belukha on 7 November 1967 which was killed by a killer whale(s). Fay (1982) concluded that killer whales were probably significant predators of walrus in the Bering and Chukchi seas. Predation on belukhas is also a logical occurrence in those seas when the two are present in the same area.

Accounts of harassment or predation by killer whales on belukhas, that have been observed or related to us, have occurred in the Kotzebue Sound area and near Point Lay. Most happened during June-July. During June 1979, belukha hunting success was unusually poor in Eschscholtz Bay and only three were taken. Failure of belukhas to enter the bay from Kotzebue Sound was attributed by local hunters to persistent presence of killer whales near the mouth of the bay (Seaman, field notes). Other interactions between killer whales and belukhas that have been recounted to us were as follows.

Mr. York Wilson, a hunter from Kotzebue, informed us of an incident that occurred during early July, sometime in the middle 1950's. A pod of belukhas was chased into shallow water near Sheshalik (northeastern Kotzebue Sound), by a pod of killer whales. The belukhas remained stationary for quite some time while the killer whales cruised back and forth in deeper water. After a time several of the smaller killer whales dashed toward the belukhas, apparently frightening a gray colored one away from the pod. This small belukha was seized by a large male killer and carried away from shore. A brief struggle occurred, the killer whale dove, and considerable blood and oil floated to the surface. The large killer whale swam seaward carrying the limp body of the belukha, with the posterior portion in its mouth. It was not observed to feed on the belukha before disappearing from view.

Two separate accounts were relayed to the senior author by Mr. Willie Goodwin, Jr., also an active belukha hunter from Kotzebue. Several years ago, while camped near Sheshalik in early July, Mr. Goodwin's mother watched a pod of killer whales chase a lone belukha toward shore. In its apparent attempt to escape, the belukha beached itself. Partial and complete strandings, with animals becoming free on the subsequent rising tide, were reported by Smith (1985). The second incident occurred in mid-June 1984, also near Sheshalik. A pod of four to six killer whales chased a much larger pod of belukhas under shorefast ice that was extensive at the time. Reportedly, the killer whales cruised about in the area near where the belukhas went under the ice and did not permit them to come out. These belukhas could have utilized the enlarged access holes of ringed seals to breathe. Basking ringed seals were common in the area at that time. Geptner (1930, cited in Tomilin 1957) indicated that belukhas can utilize seal holes for breathing.

Farther north, in the vicinity of Point Lay, there are three recent records of killer whales in the vicinity of belukhas. On 15 July 1979 the junior author saw at least two killer whales attack and kill a grey, subadult belukha. The event occurred close to the seaward shore of a barrier island and happened within 30 m of the observer. The sea was rough. The first sighting was of a "spyhopping" killer whale. The second was of the belukha, also spyhopping, between the shore and the killer whale. A second killer whale and a young (possibly calf) grey whale (Eshrichtus robustus) then briefly appeared. The next whale seen was the belukha. When it dove it was attacked by one of the killer whales and a bout of violent thrashing occurred, followed by 10 to 15 seconds of relative quiet. Then, the killer whale surfaced with the young belukha in its mouth. None of the whales were seen after that. It was not known if the killer whales were initially pursuing the grey whale or the belukha, nor the eventual fate of the grey whale. On 5 July 1981 a pod of killer whales was seen chasing a pod of belukhas. Outcome of that chase was not known (account by Point Lay hunters to G. Seaman, field notes). On 11 July 1981 a single killer whale was swimming about 50 m offshore (Seaman field notes).

Sergeant and Brodie (1969) indicated that in Cumberland Sound (eastern Baffin Island, Canada) killer whales have been reported to prey on belukhas. Steltner et al. (1984) report an eyewitness account of how killer whales preyed on narwhals in the eastern Canadian Arctic.

We are not aware of any accounts from the Bering or Chukchi Sea region that suggest predation on belukhas by walruses or sharks, as mentioned by Chapskii (1941) and Sleptsov (1952). Predation on marine mammals by sharks is not unusual (Brodie and Beck 1983). Pacific sleeper sharks, Somniosus pacificus, may be probable predators of belukhas in Alaskan waters. These sharks occur in Bering Sea (Wilimovsky 1958; Bright 1959; Hart 1973), and are known to prey on pinnipeds (Bright 1959). Their Atlantic counterpart, the Greenland shark (S. microcephalus) has been known to attack narwhals and belukhas caught in nets (Beck and Mansfield 1969).

Hunting

Seaman and Burns (1981) summarized the recent information about belukha hunting and netting in western Alaska and the harvests of these whales

throughout Alaska from the late 1950's through 1979. Information from the late 1950's came from Lensink (1961) who estimated annual average harvests of 400 to 500 whales throughout all of western and northern Alaska; including a known directed take of 165 in Bristol Bay during the five-year period 1954-1958. In the Bristol Bay region the last significant, directed harvest of belukhas was in 1965, when seven whales were known to have been killed (ADF&G 1969). Though belukhas remain abundant in the bay hunting effort was drastically curtailed after 1959 for three reasons: cessation of lethal methods of controlling predation by belukhas on juvenile and adult salmon, greater participation of local residents in the intensifying salmon fishery, and a decrease in the demand and use of belukha whale meat and muktuk in that region. Several factors, mostly related to "modernization" including the virtual demise of working sled dog teams, contributed to that decrease in demand. Use of non-lethal methods of controlling presence of belukhas in major salmon spawning rivers, as reported by Fish and Vania (1971), eliminated that portion of the annual kill actually or subliminally encouraged by a desire to harass these whales and/or reduce their numbers in rivers flowing into Bristol Bay.

In Bristol Bay, the take of belukhas by directed hunting has remained comparatively low since 1961. Four were reported killed by hunting in summer 1983 (Frost et al. 1983). Most belukhas now taken in that region are accidentally entangled in salmon gillnets, with a kill on the order of perhaps 15 to 30 per year depending of characteristics of the salmon fishing season. In 1983, an incidental catch of 23 belukhas was reported (Frost et al. 1983).

Approximate average annual harvests of belukhas from the Bering Sea population, made in Alaska during different time intervals were as follows:

late 1950's	\bar{x} 450/yr - Lensink 1961
mid-1960's	\bar{x} 225/yr - Burns, unpublished
1968-1973	\bar{x} 183/yr - Seaman and Burns 1981
1977-1979	\bar{x} 187/yr - Seaman and Burns 1981
1980-1984	\bar{x} 237/yr - this study

Harvests recorded for specific locations in the years 1977-1979 are reported in Seaman and Burns (1981, p. 571, Table 1). A similar presentation for the years 1980-1984 is included in Tables 8 to 12. In 1984 it was not possible to survey all of the coastal communities. Therefore, only part of the 1984 harvest is known. Based on that known harvest, take in 1984 was estimated to have been about 170 belukhas. This relatively low estimated take was mainly due to a total failure of the important annual hunt in Eschschooltz Bay and the lack of hunting effort near Point Lay, even though whales were present in early July.

It is noteworthy that near Kivalina in 1983 and 1984, harvests of belukhas have been significantly higher than the recent, long-term average take. In spring of 1983 and 1984, residents of Kivalina engaged the assistance of a local pilot to fly over the ice and locate leads through which bowhead whales and belukhas were passing. The hunters then established their ice camps near the most promising leads (R. Quimby, ADF&G, Kotzebue, personal communication; Burch 1984). Use of a small airplane to locate suitable openings in the extensive ice cover is a means of ensuring that open water

Table 8. Statewide (Alaska) belukha harvest, 1980, from records compiled by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.¹

Village or area	Number known	Number estimated	Source of information
Bristol Bay	8	15-20	Mainly incidental to fishing - K. Taylor - ADF&G and area fisherman
Yukon-Kuskokwim deltas	9	15	J. Burns, Jr. - Fisheries Biologist in region; summer of 1980
St. Michael	unknown	10 ²	estimated
Stebbins	unknown	10 ²	estimated
Shaktolik	unknown	5 ²	estimated
Koyuk	unknown	15 ²	estimated
Elim	unknown	5 ²	estimated
Nome	0	0	J. Burns - ADF&G, correspondence w/ residents of Nome
Diomede Island	2	2	J. Burns - ADF&G, information from A. Iyahuk and P. Omiak, residents of Little Diomede
S.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Eschscholtz Bay	101	101	J. Burns and K. Frost - ADF&G, field monitoring and hunter interviews
N.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Sheshalik	13	13	J. Burns - ADF&G, personal interviews and Elmer Armstrong, resident of Kotzebue
Kivalina	3	3-5	J. Burns - ADF&G, interview of several residents of Kivalina
Point Hope	23	23-25	D. Smullin - biologist at Point Hope during bowhead whaling season
Point Lay	15	15-18	J. Burns - ADF&G, correspondence with residents of Point Lay
Wainwright	0	0	J. Burns - ADF&G, personal interviews with residents of Wainwright
Barrow	0	0	J. Burns - ADF&G, O. Ahkinga and W. Kaleak - residents of Barrow
Kaktovik	<u>11</u>	<u>11</u>	B. Bartels - USFWS, Kaktovik resident W. Marquette - NMFS
Totals	185	243-255	

¹ An additional five to seven belukhas were taken in the separate "Cook Inlet" population, most incidental to commercial salmon fishing. K. Schneider - ADF&G, pers. commun.; J. Burns - ADF&G, interview of resident of Tyonek.

² No unusual harvests of belukhas were reported by local travelers, residents of these villages, or hunters interviewed. Therefore, the average of known annual harvests for the location are used.

Table 9. Statewide (Alaska) belukha harvest, 1981, from records compiled by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.¹

Village or area	Number known	Number estimated	Source of information
Bristol Bay	unknown	10-20	K. Taylor - ADF&G, area fisherman
Yukon-Kuskokwim deltas	17	25-28	J. Hanson, Alakanuk, general comments of various village residents and travelers, includes three known taken in salmon nets ²
St. Michael	11	11	G. Seaman - ADF&G, personal interview
Stebbins	10	10-20	R. Nelson - ADF&G, personal interview
Shaktooklik	7	7-15	R. Nelson - ADF&G, personal interview, L. Schwarz - ADF&G, aerial survey and estimate
Koyuk	21	21-25	R. Nelson - ADF&G, personal interview
Elim	3	3	R. Nelson - ADF&G, personal interview
Nome	1	1	R. Nelson - ADF&G, personal interview
Eschscholtz Bay	39	39	J. Burns - ADF&G, field monitoring
Northern Kotzebue Sound	4	4	J. Burns - ADF&G, personal interview and monitoring
Kivalina	3	10-15	E. Burch - anthropologist, G. Moore - ADF&G, and Kotzebue residents ³
Point Hope	0	4-7	unverified pilot report
Point Lay	29	29-38	G. Seaman, field interview, and T. Smith - both ADF&G, R. Dronenberg - North Slope Borough
Point Barrow	5	5	O. Ahkinga - Barrow resident, R. Dronenberg - North Slope Borough
Kaktovik	0	0	B. Bartles - USFWS, Kaktovik resident
Totals	150	179-231	

¹ An additional three to six belukhas were taken in the separate "Cook Inlet" population, most incidental to commercial salmon fishing (K. Schneider - ADF&G, pers. commun.).

² 1981 has consistently been reported as a year when all marine mammals, including belukhas, were noticeably scarce near the Yukon River mouths during the open-water season.

³ The 1981 harvest in Kivalina was estimated on the basis of an average catch of 10-15 whales as reported by informed village representatives.

Table 10. Statewide (Alaska) belukha harvest, 1982, from records compiled by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.¹

Village or area	Number known	Number estimated	Comments and sources of information
Bristol Bay	9	15-20	Mainly incidental to fishing. S. Behnke, K. Taylor, and L. Lowry - ADF&G
Kuskokwim Bay	4	4-10	R. Baxter - ADF&G, J. Hanson - resident of Alukanuk
Hooper Bay	5	5-7	R. Baxter - ADF&G
Yukon River Delta	20	20-30	J. Hanson - resident of Alukanuk
St. Michael	4	4-10	R. Nelson - ADF&G
Stebbins	6	6	F. Pete - resident of Stebbins, R. Nelson - ADF&G
Shaktoolik	16	16	C. Katchatag - resident of Shaktoolik, R. Nelson - ADF&G
Koyuk	13	15-20	K. Dewey - resident of Koyuk, R. Nelson - ADF&G
Elim	14	15-20	C. Sacceous - resident of Elim, R. Nelson - ADF&G
Diomede Island	1	1	P. Oniak - resident of Diomede, R. Nelson - ADF&G
S.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Eschscholtz Bay	129	129	Harvest recorded directly by J. Burns - ADF&G, take at Choris Peninsula reported by W. Goodwin, Jr. - resident of Kotzebue
N.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Sheshalik	25	25	Mostly taken in whale nets. B. Uhl and W. Goodwin, Jr. - residents of Kotzebue area, J. Burns - ADF&G
Kivalina	4	4-5	B. Adams and R. Adams - residents of Kivalina, G. Moore - ADF&G
Point Hope	17	17	R. Clark - Ak Eskimo Whaling Comm. field observer, J. Jacobson - resident of Kotzebue
Point Lay	28	28-33	G. Hittson and A. Agnassagga - residents of Point Lay
Wainwright	0	0	Many seen. None taken. B. Patkotak - resident of Wainwright
Barrow	3	3-5	T. Albert - North Slope Borough
Kaktovik	0	0	B. Bartels - USFWS, Kaktovik resident
Totals	298	307-354	

¹ An additional 3 to 6 belukhas were estimated to have been taken from the separate "Cook Inlet" population. Of these, one was reported taken by residents of Tyonek (D. Foster - ADF&G) and others incidental to commercial salmon fishing (K. Schneider - ADF&G).

Table 11. Statewide (Alaska) belukha harvest, 1983, from records compiled by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.¹

Village or area	Number known	Number estimated	Source of information
Bristol Bay	22	25-30	L. Lowry, K. Frost, and K. Taylor - ADF&G. Mostly incidental to fishing
Yukon-Kuskokwim deltas	6	15	J. Burns, Jr. - ADF&G Fisheries Biologist in region; summer of 1983
St. Michael	4	4	R. Nelson - ADF&G, interview of village residents
Stebbins	7	7	R. Nelson, same
Unalakleet	2	2	R. Nelson, same
Shaktooklik	7	7	R. Nelson, same
Koyuk	11	11	R. Nelson, same
Elim	10	10	R. Nelson, same
Golovin	2	2	D. Punguk - resident of Golovin
Nome	0	0	J. Burns - ADF&G, interview of Nome residents
Diomede Island	0	0	P. Omiak - resident of Little Diomede
S.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Eschscholtz Bay	48	48	N. Hadley - belukha hunter from Buckland, W. Goodwin - resident of Kotzebue, pers. commun. with J. Burns
N.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Sheshalik	19	19-24	J. Burns - ADF&G, personal interviews, B. Uhl - belukha netter and W. Goodwin - Kotzebue
Kivalina	24	24	E. Burch, Jr. - anthropologist working at Kivalina and R. Quimby - ADF&G, Kotzebue
Point Hope	30	31	K. Frost - ADF&G, from several informants R. Clarke - biologist, NMFS, bowhead whale project
Point Lay	18	18	R. Nelson - ADF&G, field monitoring of harvest
Wainwright	0	0	J. Burns - ADF&G, personal interviews with residents of Wainwright
Barrow	0	3	W. Kaleak - resident of Barrow
Kaktovik	0	0	B. Bartels - USFWS, Kaktovik resident
Totals	210	226-236	

¹ An additional three to six belukhas were taken in the separate "Cook Inlet" population, most incidental to commercial salmon fishing (K. Schneider - ADF&G, pers. commun.).

Table 12. Known and estimated harvests of belukha whales taken near selected locations in western and northern Alaska during 1984, from records compiled by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.¹

Village or area	Number known	Number estimated	Source of information
Bristol Bay	6	6-15	K. Taylor - ADF&G, Dillingham
Yukon-Kuskokwim deltas	5	20	S. Patten - ADF&G, Bethel, J. Hanson - resident of Alukanuk
Koyuk	38	38	R. Nelson - ADF&G, Nome, K. Dewey - resident of Koyuk
S.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Ecschscholtz Bay	0	0	J. Burns - ADF&G, Fairbanks, N. Hadley - resident of Buckland
N.E. Kotzebue Sound incl. Sheshalik	31	31	J. Burns - ADF&G, Fairbanks, W. Goodwin - resident of Kotzebue
Kivalina	27	27	E. Burch, Jr. - anthropologist working at Kivalina
Point Lay	0	0	J. George - North Slope Borough

¹ On the basis of known and estimated harvests at hunting sites indicated above, the total 1984 harvest of belukhas in western and northern Alaska was estimated to have been about 170.

is found and if openings are numerous, that camps can be established near those that have been frequented by whales. The spring harvests of belukha whales by hunters from Kivalina in 1983 and 1984 were 24 and 27 respectively (R. Quimby, personal communication; Burch, personal communication; 1984). It is anticipated that if aircraft continue to be engaged by hunters from Kivalina for the purpose of choosing the most favorable locations for their whaling activities, catches of belukhas will continue at levels above the long-term annual average.

We did not make a systematic study of the helminth fauna in harvested belukhas. In the course of disarticulating mandibles and cleaning skulls, the senior author examined ear sinuses of 31 whales. Nematodes, identified by Dr. Murray Dailey (California State College, Long Beach, CA) as Otophocaenurus oserskoi, (Skrjabin 1942) were present in all. In their summary of marine mammal parasites, Dailey and Brownell (1972) listed 15 helminths in belukhas, including the nematode indicated above. Those helminths included five species of trematodes representing three genera, one cestode, seven species representing five genera of nematodes, and two species of a single genus of acanthocephalans.

Movements

Summer Movements in Eastern Chukchi Sea

Annual sea ice conditions strongly influence movements of marine mammals (Burns 1970, Fay 1974, Burns et al. 1980, 1981, Braham et al. 1984), including belukhas, throughout their range and especially in the eastern Chukchi Sea during spring and summer. During spring, belukhas often migrate in association with bowheads and may precede the bowheads by one to two weeks (Braham 1984). At Little Diomedede Island, which is centrally located in Bering Strait, northward-migrating belukhas are occasionally taken as early as the first part of March. Usually, however, they are not seen by seal hunters there until late March. They generally arrive in association with bowheads near Point Hope in early to mid-April (Johnson et al. 1966) but have been seen as early as mid-March (Seaman et al. 1985). Foote (1960a) reported the first sighting of a bowhead from near shore on 10 April 1960 and the first belukhas on 11 April. Belukhas continued passing Point Hope, close to shore, until late July 1960 (Foote 1960b). Bowheads, and presumably belukhas, have been reported to arrive in the vicinity of Point Hope as early as 19 March (Foote 1960a).

Unusually heavy, close-packed ice conditions have been known to delay whale migrations. In 1980, an extraordinary blockage of Bering Strait by closely packed ice (Johnson et al. 1981, Ljungblad 1981) is reported to have delayed the spring migration of bowheads by approximately one month (Johnson et al. 1981). Presumably belukhas were similarly affected.

The northward migration of belukhas through the flaw zone in eastern Chukchi Sea is quite prolonged. Based on aerial surveys in the region between Wainwright and Barrow in 1976, Braham and Krogman (1977) reported sighting belukhas from 29 April to 19 June. Their surveys were terminated on 20 June. Of note was the finding (Braham and Krogman 1977, P. 20) that, "As many belukhas were seen during the last part of the season as during the first part." An average of 43.3 belukhas were seen per survey day in

May (12 survey days) and 42.0 in June (six survey days). There is no reason to believe that an end to the migration abruptly coincided with termination of the above-mentioned surveys.

Northward spring migration of belukhas off the northwest coast of Alaska is generally along the same route traversed by bowheads, with two variations. Belukhas are more broadly dispersed during spring migration (Braham et al. 1984), and some of the later migrants enter coastal waters as soon as nearshore ice conditions permit. When they begin to enter the bays, rivers, and estuaries, the directed path of their travels becomes more variable and they spend days or weeks in the same general area.

In March to May or June many belukhas passing northward from Bering Strait to Point Hope move to the west of Kotzebue Sound, beyond the margin of the extensive, unbroken ice cover. It has long been known that some of these early migrants approach land in the region between Kivalina and Point Hope, where a persistent polynyna is present. Kivalina is a settlement from which belukhas are often successfully taken by hunting in leads during April-May. So long as Kotzebue Sound remains icebound, the belukhas apparently continue northward. As ice in the Sound deteriorates, the newly arriving belukhas penetrate it. Annual variation in numbers of belukhas utilizing coastal estuaries is considerable (Anderson 1937; Lensink 1961; Sergeant and Hoek 1974; this study). Our studies in Kotzebue Sound support the Eskimo contention that, within the Sound proper, belukhas first occur in the northern part and work their way eastward and southward as seasonal disintegration of ice proceeds. This is graphically shown in Figure 9. They usually arrive in southeastern Kotzebue Sound and Eschscholtz Bay during the second 10 days of June, while other belukhas are still moving up the retreating flaw zone farther north.

The subsequent pattern of movement of those belukhas that enter Kotzebue Sound is suggested by sequential sightings in June to August in and near estuaries along the Chukchi Sea coast (Table 13). On average, after most whales depart Kotzebue Sound, they arrive in the vicinity of Point Lay in late June to early July and near Wainwright in mid- to late July or early August.

Nelson (1969), stated that belukhas may pass within sight of the coast near the village of Wainwright at any time during the summer, and that this may occur whether or not ice is present. Our information may help clarify Nelson's statement a bit more. During summers of severe ice conditions, Icy Cape is the geographic point along the northwest coast, north of which sea ice may persist relatively close to shore. Farther north, there is a higher probability of such an event happening. At Wainwright during years when ice moves far offshore, belukhas are apparently not seen after late July to early August. In years when the ice does not recede far from shore, these whales may appear sporadically in coastal waters throughout August and early September. The greater frequency of sightings in late summer during heavy ice years is thought to involve whales moving back and forth between the pack ice and coastal waters. Summer 1975 was unusual in that the pack ice extended south of Wainwright and was seldom far from land. In late August of that year, Ray and Wartzok (1980) reported sighting both belukhas and bowheads relatively close to shore in the region

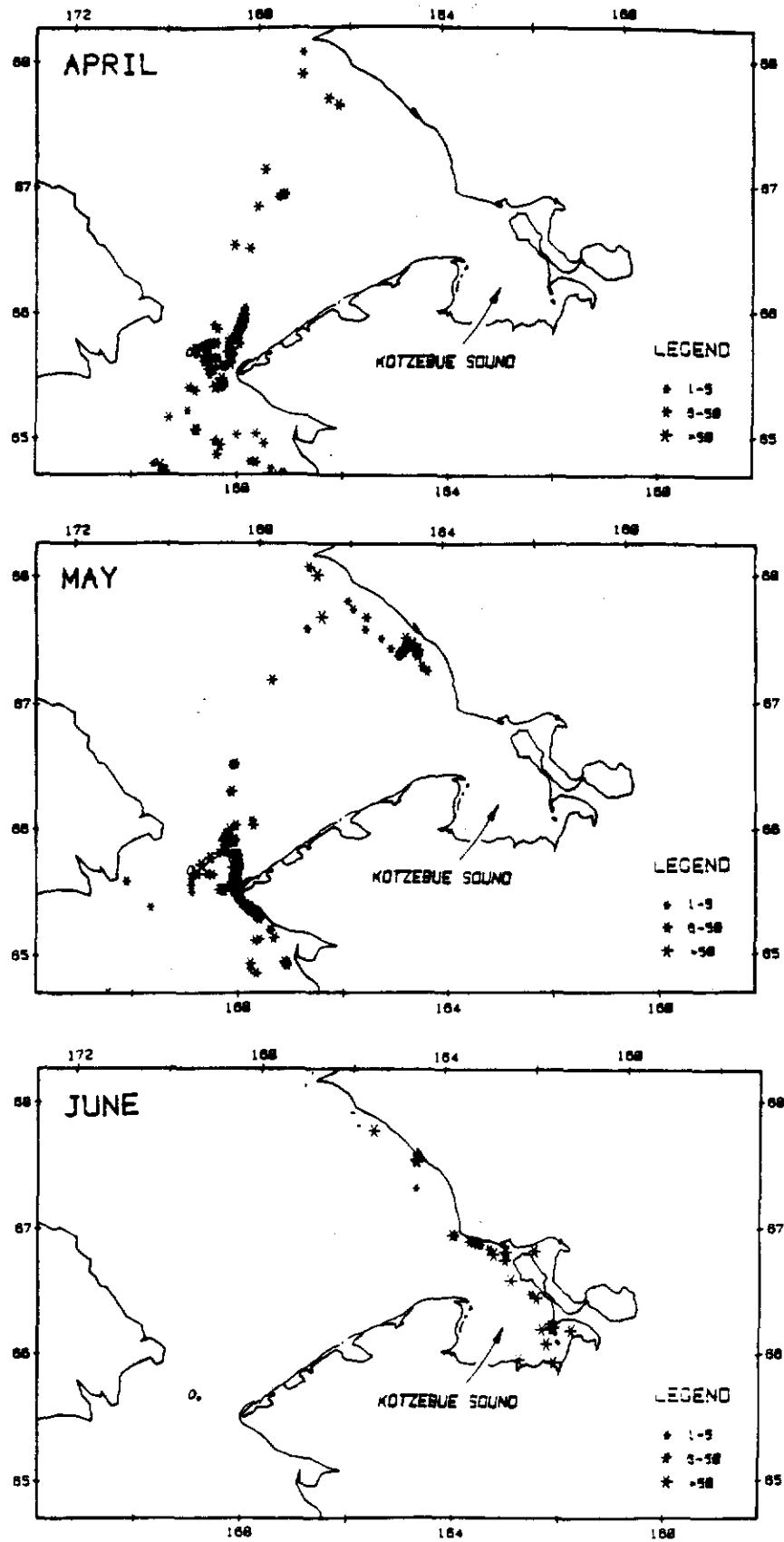


Figure 9. Occurrence of belukhas in or near the Kotzebue Sound region in April to June.

Table 13. Dates when belukhas were known to be present during breakup and ice-free months near selected locations in the eastern Chukchi Sea region.

Year	Locations				
	Kotzebue Sound	Kivalina	Cape Sabine	Point Lay	Wainwright
1958	--	--	24 Jun ¹	--	--
1960	--	1st week Jul ²	--	--	--
1962	mid- to late Jun	--	--	--	--
1966	--	--	--	--	Early Aug ³
1976	--	--	--	--	21-28 Jul
1978	11 Jun-9 Jul	21-24 Jun	--	2-10 Jul	15 Jul
1979	8-25 Jun	--	3 Jul	22 Jun-19 Jul	17-20 Jul
1980	13-23 Jun ⁴	--	--	11 Jun	20 Jul
1981	12-19 Jun	--	8 Jul	5-15 Jul	--
1982	7-23 Jun	29 Jun	3-6 Jul	5 Jul	--
1984	--	--	4 Jul ⁵	4 Jul ⁶	--

¹ Childs (1969).

² Saario and Kessel (1966).

³ Nelson (1969).

⁴ K. Frost, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, Fairbanks, Field Notes.

⁵ J. Coady, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, Nome, Personal Communication.

⁶ Arthur Manning, Fairbanks, Alaska, Personal Communication.

between Icy Cape and Point Franklin. Our studies indicate that belukhas move northward after leaving Kasegaluk Lagoon and presumably, in 1975, they moved to the ice fringe near Wainwright.

The general picture of belukha migrations that emerges from this information is that from March to early June movements of these whales are comparatively rapid and directed; northward toward Point Barrow and thence mostly eastward across the Beaufort Sea. From about mid-June to early August the sustained, directional movement slows, with large numbers of whales entering warmer coastal waters from Kotzebue Sound to Mackenzie Bay and others remaining close to the retreating ice fringe between these points and also probably westward in the northern Chukchi Sea. By early to mid-August most belukhas move away from the coast toward the pack ice.

Those that entered coastal waters, starting in Kotzebue Sound in about mid-June, move slowly northward, some temporarily stopping at other embayments and estuaries enroute and, in August, mostly move off to the ice of the eastern Chukchi and western Beaufort seas.

A generally similar migration pattern is hypothesized as occurring along the coast of Chukotka (see Discussion). By early September, belukhas north of Bering Strait are mostly associated with the late summer ice fringe and front over a very broad area extending from Wrangel Island to Amundsen Gulf. Observations in September suggest a late August distribution that includes large numbers of whales north of Chukotka (Klumov 1936, in Kleinenberg et al. 1964) and from the northeastern Chukchi Sea to Amundsen Gulf. By late August the belukhas slowly begin a return migration that eventually brings most of them back into Bering Sea.

Autumn Migration in Beaufort Sea

Aerial surveys of the ice "front" in extreme northeastern Chukchi Sea and the Beaufort Sea were conducted from 17 to 21 September 1982. The eastern and western limits of this survey area were approximately 141°W and 161°W, respectively. Tracklines were determined during the survey flights and were predicated on location of the ice margin.

This survey was specifically intended to test the hypothesis that in autumn, the westward migration of belukhas across the Beaufort Sea is in close proximity to location of the pack ice margin and front zones. That hypothesis was based mainly on the paucity of reported sightings from shore and in ice-free waters of the Beaufort Sea during autumn, speculations of investigators that had studied summer distribution of belukhas in eastern Beaufort Sea and Amundsen Gulf, and the limited record of sightings for August to October obtained mainly in conjunction with surveys of other marine mammals, including bowhead whales and Pacific walrus. The background for formulation of this hypothesis evolved from results of several studies discussed as follows.

Sergeant and Hoek (1974) stated that belukhas depart the eastern Beaufort Sea during September, moving in open water. This conclusion appears to have been based largely on a sighting of 2,000 whales near Demarcation Point on 21 September 1972. These authors did not indicate how far from the pack ice those whales were. Fraker (1977) stated that knowledge of the

westward autumn migration from the Mackenzie estuary was a major data gap. He suggested that some belukhas depart the estuary to the north to exploit food resources that may occur along the pack ice margin. Fraker et al. (1978) also indicated that little was known about fall migration in the Beaufort Sea. They suggested that it takes place in late August-September, that movement is toward the west, and that it was not known if migration occurred along the coast or offshore though it was "possibly along the pack ice." Those remarks appear to involve a reassessment of the conclusions previously expressed by Sergeant and Hoek (1974). Harrison and Hall (1978) reported results of 6,000 km of aerial survey tracklines flown in the western Beaufort Sea during July 1975 and August 1976. The majority of those survey lines appear to have been over ice-free waters. Only two sightings of belukhas were made in each month in the Beaufort Sea. These four sightings were of 36 belukhas, all of which were within the ice front. Johnson (1979) reported two sightings of belukhas made from islands of the Jones Islands group in southcentral Beaufort Sea. The first was a pod of 75-100, swimming westward within 300 m of the seaward side of Pingok Island on 15 September 1977, and the second was of 35, swimming westward, within 150 m of the seaward side of Thetis Island, on 23 September 1978. The first sighting was of belukhas in ice-free waters 10 to 20 km south of the pack ice. The second sighting was of whales moving along the edge of a small field of scattered ice some 16 to 20 km south of the main pack. Johnson (loc. cit.) concluded, based on these sightings and previously published records by Fraker et al. (1978), that the autumn migration occurs during the last half of September and is near the coast well south of the pack ice margin. Fraker (1980) again stated that the autumn migration had not been studied, and reiterated the sightings reported in Fraker et al. (1978) and Johnson (1979).

A series of aerial surveys, mainly for walruses and bowhead whales, began to strongly point to the ice front as the habitat through which the autumn migration of belukhas mainly occurred. In September 1974 and 1975, the senior author participated in surveys of Pacific walruses in the northern Chukchi and extreme western Beaufort Sea. Survey lines were over open water and from the ice margin northward until close-packed ice (9/10 to 10/10 cover) was encountered. A few sightings of small groups of belukhas were made, all within the ice front. Distribution of sightings during those September surveys indicated that some belukhas were present in the northern Chukchi as well as in the Beaufort Sea.

An extensive walrus survey in which the senior author also participated was undertaken during 10 to 20 September 1980 (Johnson et al. 1982). Tracklines, location of the pack ice margin, and general position of belukha sightings are shown in Figure 10. The indicated sightings are only of those whales within about 1/8 nm of the survey aircraft. Three important points about the autumn distribution of belukhas emerged from the 1980 walrus survey. These were: 1) belukhas occur well within the ice margin during mid-September, 2) they extended at least as far west as the northcentral Chukchi Sea, and 3) an area of very high abundance occurred north and east of Point Barrow. The last point is not particularly evident from Figure 10. However, on 11 September 1980, during the survey flights north and east of Barrow, several thousand belukhas were present, almost all beyond the pre-selected survey transects. Twenty-three sightings of a total of 124 belukhas occurred on the transects.

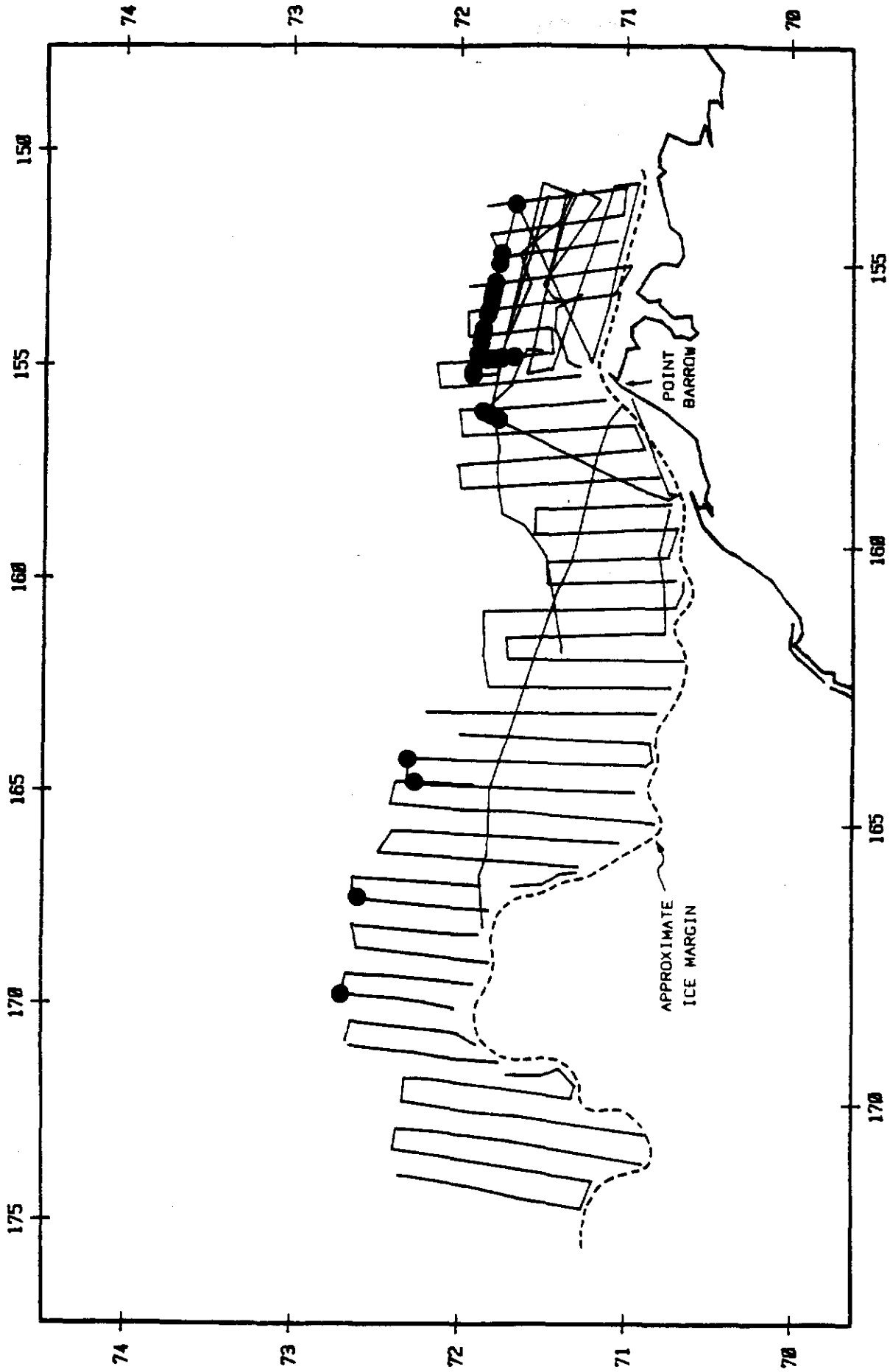


Figure 10. Tracklines flown during a walrus survey, 10 to 20 September 1980, showing locations of the pack ice margin and sightings of belukha whales (after Johnson et al. 1982).

Ray and Wartzok (1980) and Ray et al. (1984) reported sightings of belukhas also made during extensive flights with large aircraft for the purposes of determining the utility and capabilities of remote sensing techniques for study of marine mammals. In September 1974, they sighted belukhas in association with the ice front zone across the western Beaufort Sea and the Chukchi Sea west to approximately 177°W longitude (Ray and Wartzok 1980, Figure 2b). They also found a huge aggregation of belukhas of unknown total size that exceeded several thousand animals. This aggregation was seen on 18 September 1975 about 30 nm south of the pack ice margin in northeast Chukchi Sea. Their sightings led them to suggest the possibility, as had Fraker et al. (1978), that belukhas that summer in the eastern Beaufort Sea-Mackenzie Delta regions may first move north to the ice front, westward across the Beaufort Sea within the front, and then southward from somewhere in the east-central Chukchi. As an alternative possibility, they suggested that belukhas of the front may be a separate subpopulation (from those that supposedly occur near shore?) that may utilize the productivity of that habitat (Ray and Wartzok 1980).

Ljungblad et al. (1980) reported the results of a very intensive survey effort undertaken during autumn 1979. They reported results of 44 separate flights in the central Beaufort Sea region during September and October of that year. Until the onset of freezeup, most segments of the survey flights were over open water, south of the ice margin that prevailed. Belukhas were seen on only two occasions--on 1 October well into the pack north of Point Barrow and on 19 October in the advancing ice front north of Harrison Bay. The paucity of reported sightings during these extensive surveys over open water indicated that any subsequent searches for belukhas, by us, should be concentrated farther offshore and within the ice front. In autumn 1980, Ljungblad (1981) again conducted extensive surveys for bowhead whales in the Beaufort Sea during September and October. The primary study area during 4 September to 24 October was the near-shore central Beaufort between 146°W and 154°W. Some flights extended to Mackenzie Bay in the east and to Point Barrow in the west. He reported that in autumn 1980 pack ice remained close to the coast, some 8 nm north of the barrier islands that are generally east of the Colville River delta. Additionally, freezeup was underway early, the process being quite apparent by 16 September. No belukhas were reported seen during the 20 separate flights made in September 1980. One sighting of two belukhas was reported during 14 survey flights in October. The sighting was on 6 October and the whales were swimming west (Ljungblad 1981).

Aerial surveys, primarily for bowhead whales, were also undertaken during August-September 1980 in the eastern Beaufort Sea by Renaud and Davis (1981). These investigators flew extensive, largely replicate transects, mostly north of the Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula, over open water during three periods; 6-7 August, 21-24 August, and 3-4 September 1980. No belukhas were sighted during the September survey. During each of the two surveys in August, 82 belukhas were sighted. The whales were broadly distributed in ice-free waters. Based on the relatively low number of belukhas seen, Renaud and Davis (1981, p. 49) stated simply that, "These results also do not provide much information regarding the whereabouts of the Mackenzie estuary population of white whales in August and September."

The final set of survey data considered in the design of our 1982 search for migrating belukhas were results of surveys undertaken in September-October 1981 by Ljungblad et al. (1982). These investigators flew 134 hours, mainly between 140°W and 154°W and predominately south of the pack ice. The total survey effort included 21 flights in September and 11 in October. No belukhas were sighted on any of these flights, again indicating that if they were migrating westward during this period, they most likely had to be farther north, in or near the ice front.

Our surveys were conducted from 17 to 21 September 1982. Total time on survey transects was 13 hours 29 minutes. An additional eight hours were devoted to transit to and from the survey area and circling over aggregations of whales. We concentrated almost entirely on the ice front zone extending from open water 3 nm south of the margin, northward until the ice cover became complete. Transects paralleled the margin in the survey area east of 148°22'W. West of that longitude some tracks were parallel and others perpendicular to the general ice margin. The only survey effort over water farther than 3 nm south of the ice margin was during transit to or from the primary survey area. In total, 1,768.5 nm of linear tracklines were surveyed on five separate flights as shown in Figure 11. A transect width of $\frac{1}{4}$ nm on either side of the aircraft was further divided into inner and outer $\frac{1}{8}$ nm strips. Boundaries of the transects were maintained by use of inclinometers. Sighting conditions were marginal on flight 1 and poor on the four subsequent flights. On 17 September the wind was less than 5 knots, permitting extensive formation of slush ice in openings between ice floes. On the 19th to 21st, winds in excess of 25 knots prevailed producing waves with whitecaps in ice-free waters and in openings north of the ice margin. Additionally, small ice floes and ice rafts were being blown away from the larger masses. The combination of waves, whitecaps, and abundant small floes in openings of water between the larger ice rafts made it difficult to sight and enumerate belukhas. Also, many of the whales we saw were starting to dive beneath or were emerging from under the ice. In spite of these difficulties, our surveys were very useful for determining the distribution of belukhas. The combination of poor sighting conditions and an unknown correction factor for whales below the surface and for whales under the ice did not permit any quantitative assessment of the total number that may have been present.

Belukhas were present in the ice front zone from the easternmost to westernmost points surveyed. Within the transects, 103 sightings of 224 belukhas were recorded. Sixty-three percent of the whales counted were within the first $\frac{1}{8}$ nm of the transect, indicating a rapid decrease in sightability with distance from the aircraft. From the onset of this survey it was evident to us that the sighting of even a single whale within the transect usually meant that more were present. We temporarily deviated from a transect on 15 occasions to widely circle an area in search of additional whales. During these 15 instances of circling, 731 belukhas additional to those within transects were counted. Mean group size along transects was 2.2 whales (103 sightings of 224 belukhas). Mean size of the few aggregations over which we circled was 48.7 whales (15 aggregations of 731 belukhas). This great difference shows that if the objective of a survey in the front is to obtain a population estimate, a very intensive effort for animals that are mostly underwater, swimming beneath ice, widely distributed, and probably highly clumped would be required.

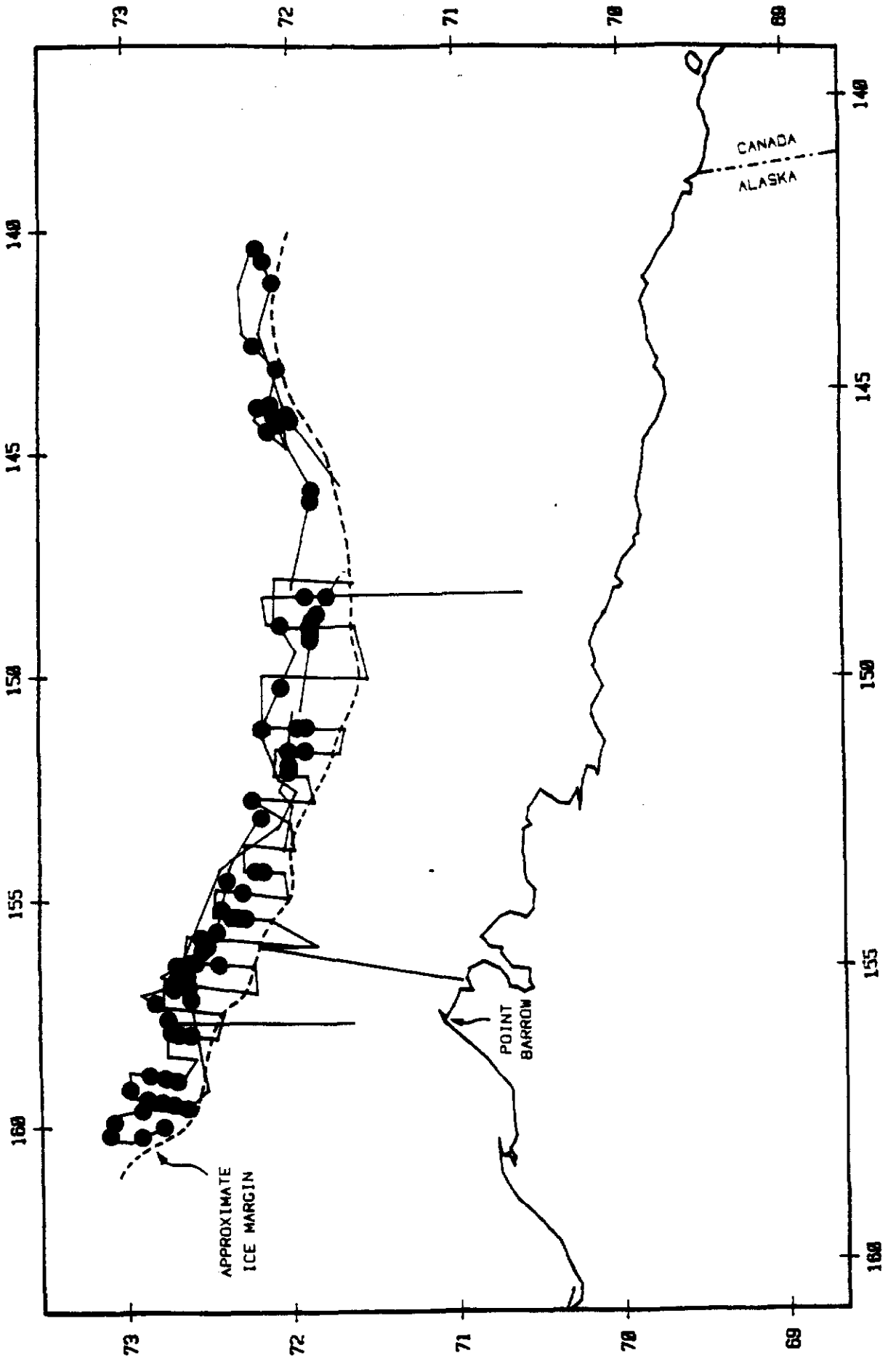


Figure 11. Location of aerial survey tracklines and sightings of belukhas within survey transects during 17 to 21 September 1982.

As was the case for belukhas sighted during the 1980 surveys of walrus (Johnson et al. 1982) and 1981 surveys of bowhead whales (Ljungblad et al. 1982), belukhas were most abundant to the north and northeast of Point Barrow (see Figures 10 and 11). Directional movement of the whales we saw within transects was basically to the west (98 of 103 sightings). Two sightings were of four whales swimming east, and three sightings were of six whales swimming south. The latter were on transects in the Chukchi Sea, northwest of Point Barrow. We did not record direction of movement of pods that were beyond the transects.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Sex Ratios

Our findings show a sex ratio of whales in Alaskan waters to be 1:1 based on a sample size of 533. However, there was great annual variation (cf. annual samples from the same locations, as presented in Table 1, or samples indicated in Table 14. Tomilin (1957) also concluded that the sex ratio was approximately even, based on results of work by Vinogradov (1949, cited in Tomilin 1957) and Klumov and Dorofeev (1936). Though no sample sizes were indicated, Tomilin reported an extreme degree of selection in a sample in which 78.7% of the belukhas taken in the Gulf of Sakhalinskii (Okhotsk Sea) in 1930 were males. Kleinenberg et al. (1964), also citing Vinogradov (1949) as their source, say only that the sex ratio in belukha populations is 1:1.

Causes for the observed differences in sex ratio, even within the same geographic sampling area, are assumed to result from the factors stated by Tomilin (op. cit.); specifically, that it results from the differences in composition of pods that are captured. Tarasevich (1958) stated that sexual segregation of belukhas is common. Sergeant (in press) commented on differences in summer distribution of females with young calves and adult males in the St. Lawrence estuary.

According to Eskimos of Little Diomedede Island, Alaska, the first groups of whales to pass north during the earliest phases of the annual spring migration are large adult males, based on the sex of those they occasionally kill and the size of those they see. We have not sampled these early migrants. Brodie (1971) indicated a selective bias toward females and neonates in the net capture of belukhas in shallow water. Sergeant and Brodie (1975) indicate that the long-term catches of whales near Churchill have been on the order of 500 per year, with a strong bias for males, that comprise about 66% of the harvests. Ognetov (1981) found that males were 75% of whales in a sample of 105 animals taken in the Barents Sea in 1973-74. Fraker (1978) similarly indicates a selective bias toward males, which are about 80% of the annual catches made in the Mackenzie estuary.

In Eschscholtz Bay, during the whale drives, the selective bias is toward larger whales that are more often light-colored and leave a larger wake in shallow water. Both characteristics, color and size, more readily focus attention of hunters in pursuit. Thus, hunting bias takes at least two forms: a disproportionate number of older, larger whales from those available, and non-random composition of pods. Notwithstanding, the kinds

Table 14. Sex ratios of belukhas sampled in various studies.

General location	Source of data	Sample size	No. males	No. females	Sex ratio
Bristol Bay Alaska	Brooks 1954 (unpubl.)	66	20	46	
	Lensink 1961	25	15	10	
	Lowry et al. 1982	5	4	1	
	Frost et al. 1983	20	13	7	<u>0.81:1</u>
Northwest Alaska	This study	533	268	265	<u>1.01:1</u>
Mackenzie Estuary, NW Canada	Fraker 1980	129	100	29	
	Hunt 1976	16	8	8	<u>2.92:1</u>
Hudson Bay, NE Canada	Doan and Douglas 1953 3 annual samples				
	1949	180	93	87	
	1950	293	176	117	
	1951	581	383	198	
	Sergeant 1973	590	279	311	
Finley 1982	60	30	30	<u>1.31:1</u>	
Greenland	Degerbøl and Nielsen 1930	190	104	86	<u>1.21:1</u>
White, Barents, and Kara seas	Medvedev 1970	99	66	33	
	Ognetev 1981	<u>385</u>	<u>221</u>	<u>164</u>	<u>1.46:1</u>
		3,172	1,780	1,392	$\bar{x} = 1.28:1$

of different sampling biases associated with different times, locations, and methods of capture, the sex ratio of various belukha populations is apparently 1:1.

Growth

Age-Body Length Relationships

Increase in length of belukhas during the first few years of life is not well known. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) reported their findings about progressive increase in length of "sucklings" from Tugurskiy Gulf in southwestern Okhotsk Sea in the period from late June to late July. They reported a length increase of 62 cm (27%) between sucklings examined in late June when they averaged 230 cm (N = 6) and those measured on 26 July that had an average length of 262 cm (N = 5). We judged those data as not useful for indicating growth of calves. Measurements included in their analysis (Table 54, p. 255) strongly suggest that the broad category of "sucklings" probably included neonates as well as 1- and perhaps 2-year-olds. The numbers of each age cohort cannot be determined on the basis of data they presented. Brodie (1971) also commented on problems of accurately determining growth rate of calves based on the reported findings of Kleinenberg et al. (1964).

Of concern in this discussion are the probable relationships of belukhas that occur in three different geographical regions during summer; Bristol Bay (southwest Alaska), northwest Alaska and the Mackenzie estuary of eastern Beaufort Sea. Belukhas that summer in these three areas winter in Bering Sea, though it is not known if or to what extent they may intermingle.

Sergeant and Brodie (1969) examined geographical differences in body size of belukhas from 12 different regions of their range. They concluded that the smallest belukhas come from western Hudson Bay, the White Sea, and Alaska. In both males and females, those from Alaska were ranked fourth and those from Mackenzie Bay, eighth, in order of increasing length in a ranking from 1 (smallest) to 12 (Sergeant and Brodie 1969, Figure 8, p. 2567). Sergeant and Brodie's sources of data about whales from Alaska were those animals obtained in Bristol Bay by Brooks (1954b) and Lensink (1961). As previously indicated, samples of whales taken in Bristol Bay appear to be strongly biased toward younger-age cohorts (smaller-sized individuals) than those taken in other parts of Alaska. Based on an examination of Lensink's data, the modal and mean ages of 21 whales from Bristol Bay, were 5 and 6.2 years respectively. In our sample of 412 animals from northwest Alaska the mode and mean were 12 and 13.6 years respectively.

Comparison of the lengths of white-colored males and females from northwest Alaska (this study) and Mackenzie estuary (Sergeant and Brodie 1969) showed that males from both areas were of similar length whereas, females from Alaska were smaller ($t = -2.5689$, d.f. = 65; $0.01 < P < 0.02$; Table 15). This comparison was based on length frequency of harvested "adult" whales and several significant sources of potential bias contributing to samples of different size composition in females are probably operative. These include different conditions in which hunting occurs, hunter selectivity

Table 15. Standard lengths (cm) of adult, white-colored belukhas from northwest Alaska and the Mackenzie estuary of northwest Canada.

Statistical parameter	<u>Northwest Alaska</u>		<u>Mackenzie estuary¹</u>	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Sample size	23	35	85	32
Mean	402.9	350.7	412.9	359.5
S.D.	33.9	12.3	21.9	15.3
Minimum length	327.8	312.4	377.1	346.5
Maximum length	452.1	373.4	460.0	386.5

¹ Data were interpolated from Sergeant (1969) as follows: samples sizes of white-colored whales were derived from Figure 4, p. 2564 based on the assumption that males longer than 350 cm and females longer than 330 cm are white; means, ranges, and standard deviations are from Figure 8, p. 2567.

and non-random composition of whale pods. Our samples are almost entirely of whales pursued cooperatively by a large number of boats, driving large pods within enclosed embayments well inshore. The cooperative driving is terminated when the whales are in water shallow enough to be easily followed or can no longer be driven. At that point of a drive, the actual killing begins. In Mackenzie Bay belukhas are hunted in a less confined body of water and each boat (hunting crew) acts as an independent unit usually in pursuit of a single whale (Hunt 1979). According to Fraker (1980), hunters in the Mackenzie estuary select large individuals and avoid taking females with calves. Such selection is evident in the sex composition and length frequencies of harvested whales in that region, reported by Sergeant and Brodie (1969), in which 75% of the examined whales (N = 126) were males and there were no females less than about 310 cm.

We further approached the question of size differences among belukhas from Bristol Bay, northwest Alaska and eastern Beaufort Sea by comparing length at age rather than lengths of white-colored animals, using the growth curves derived from the sample from northwest Alaska. This non-statistical approach indicated that length at age for males and females from all three areas was similar (Figure 12). As an additional comparison, we used a chi-square test to determine if there was a statistical difference in length at age in females 10 years or older in samples from Mackenzie estuary (N = 12) interpolated from Sergeant (1973, Figure 10, p. 1077) and northwest Alaska (N = 27). No statistically significant difference was evident ($\chi^2 = 6.295$, d.f. = 5). Based on those data we conclude that length at age for these aggregations of summering whales is probably the same.

Brodie (1982) compared length at age of a captive male belukha from Alaska, maintained at the Vancouver Public Aquarium (Vancouver, B.C., Canada), with his findings from whales sampled near eastern Baffin Island, Canada. The captive whale was measured six times between 1.2 and 14 years of age. Growth of the captive whale closely approximated that of free-ranging animals examined by Brodie (op. cit., p. 446, Figure 1).

We queried Dr. Newman, Director of the Vancouver Public Aquarium (personal communication, December 27, 1984) about the origin of the whale and verified that it was captured in Bristol Bay. We then compared its growth with that of the male segment of our sample from northwest Alaska (Figure 13). Growth rate of the captive male from Bristol Bay was slightly faster than the average of our sample, though within the range of lengths for appropriate year classes. Its greatest length of 427 cm was 10 cm less than that of the largest male from northwest Alaska.

Fetal Growth

Our data about fetal growth of whales from waters adjacent to Alaska included specimens representing only the early and late stages of gestation. To this we added data from 131 fetuses examined by Degerbøl and Nielsen (1930) from waters of Greenland, 103 from eastern Hudson Bay summarized by Sergeant (1973), 17 from the St. Lawrence estuary reported by Vladykov (1944) and 9 from waters adjacent to Baffin Island, reported by Brodie (1971). The resulting composite growth curve is shown in Figure 14. It appears that fetal growth in belukhas from Greenland and eastern

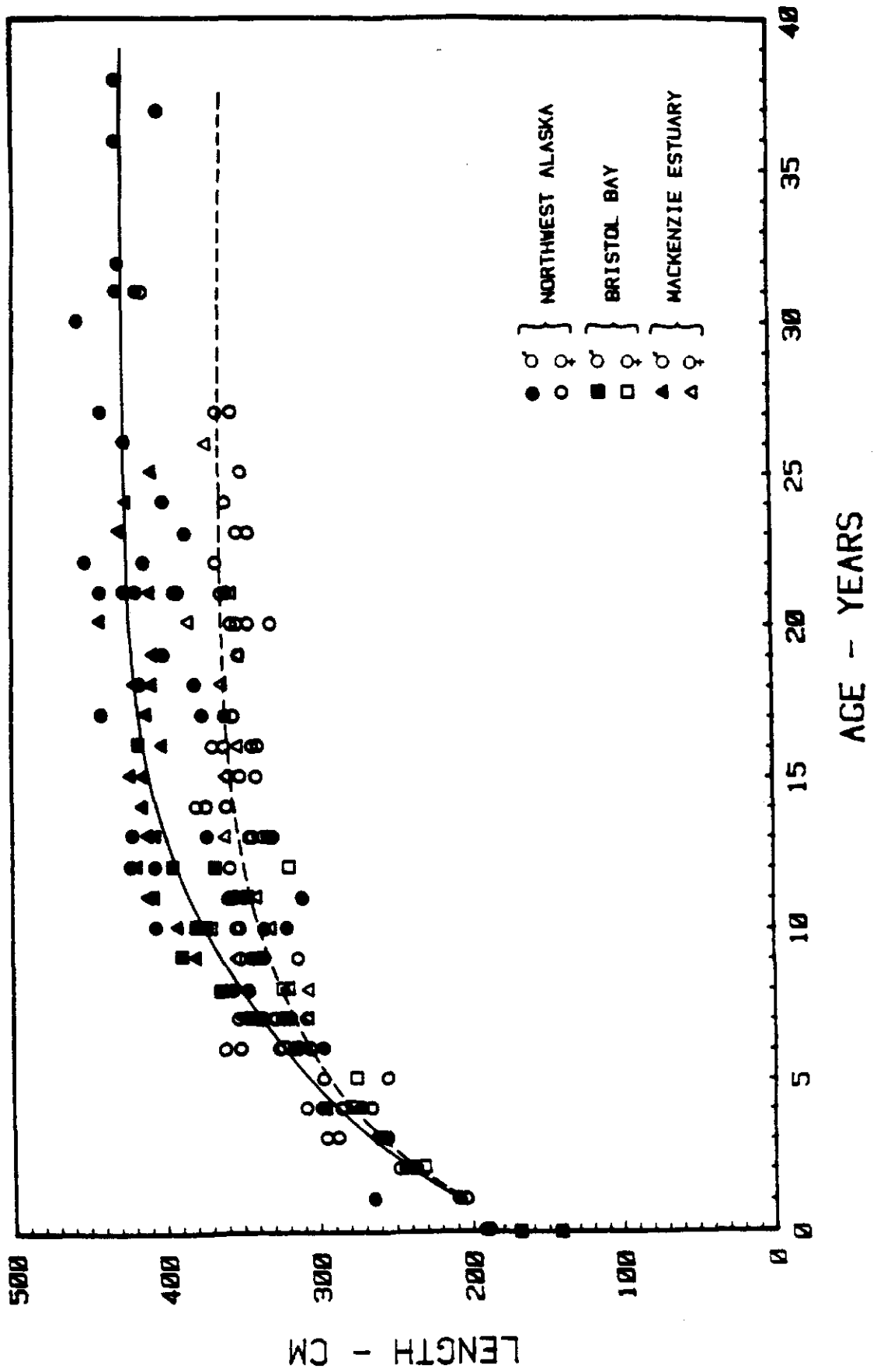


Figure 12. A composite illustration of length at age for belukhas from the three areas indicated and the growth curves for whales from northwest Alaska.

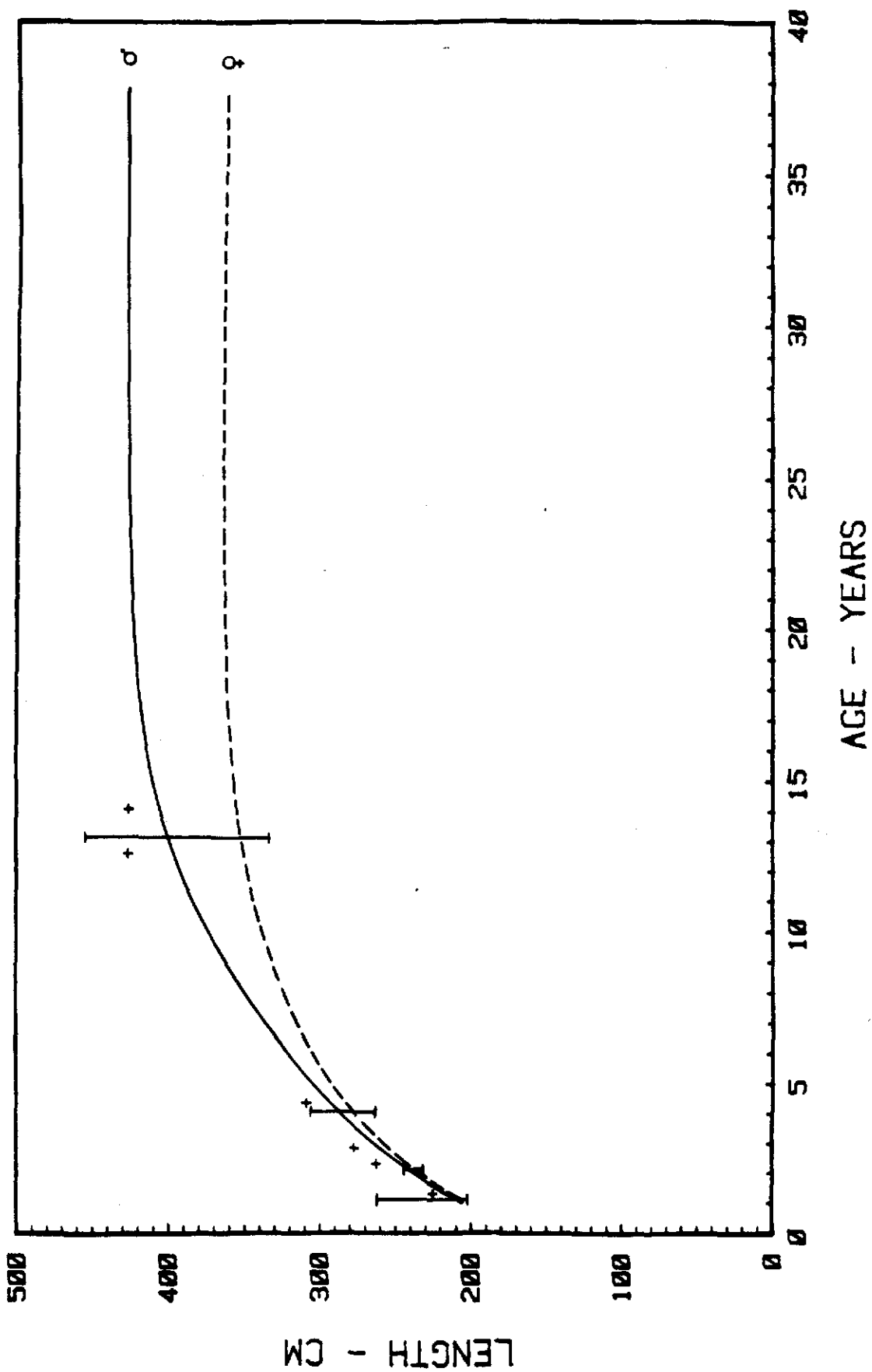


Figure 13. Length at age of a captive male belukha from Bristol Bay, Alaska, maintained at the Vancouver Public Aquarium (+) compared to the range for males and the growth curves for both sexes from northwest Alaska.

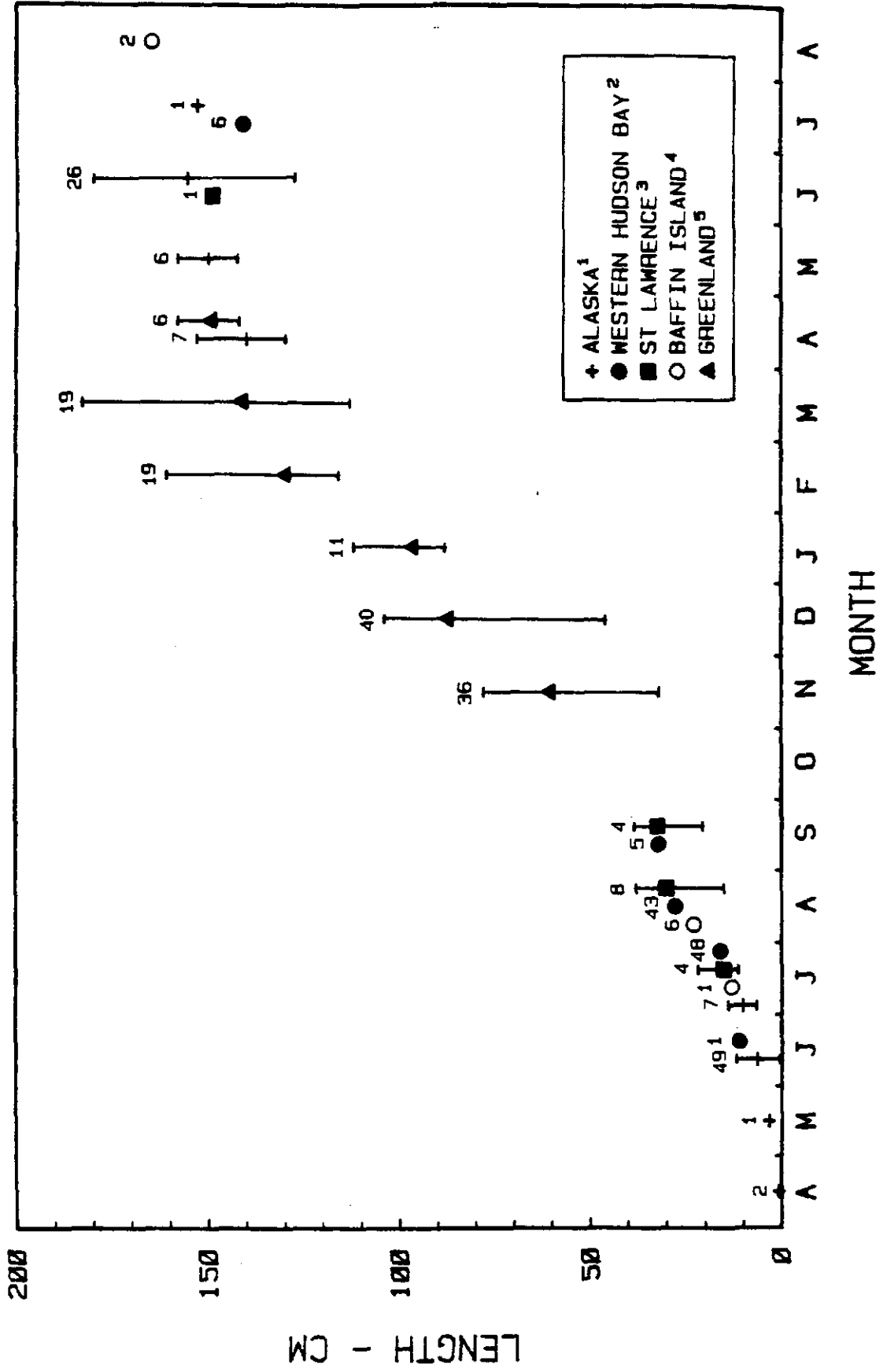


Figure 14. Increase in length of belukha fetuses. Sample size is indicated above symbols. Sources of data are: (1) this study; (2) Sergeant 1973; (3) Vladykov 1944; (4) Brodie 1971; and (5) Pegerbyl and Nielsen 1930.

Canadian waters is generally similar to that for whales from Alaskan waters. In most locations, the peak period of births occurs in mid-June to mid-July. However, in Cumberland Sound on eastern Baffin Island, it is in mid-July to mid-August (Brodie 1971). A similarly later peak birth period may also occur in waters adjacent western Greenland, contrary to comments by Degerbøl and Nielsen (1930) that most young in that region are probably born in March to May. Their conjecture was based on encountering the first neonates in mid-March and on the observation that fetal length did not increase after April. However, review of their work indicates that no whales were sampled after mid-April. Our findings verify that some early births do occur and that although there is little increase in fetal length after April, there is a considerable increase in weight.

Figure 14 does not include fetuses examined by Soviet scientists. Most of the Soviet data was summarized in graphic form by Kleinenberg, et al. (1964, p. 260, Figure 99). That graphic presentation also included data of Degerbøl and Nielsen (1930) and Vladykov (1944). The combined data plotted by Kleinenberg et al. (loc. cit.) were not separable by source or geographic location. Nonetheless, their summary showed that growth of fetuses in whale populations adjacent to the U.S.S.R. approximated that of whales from western Greenland and the St. Lawrence estuary, and those values were similar to North American groups illustrated by us. Collett (1911, in Degerbøl and Nielsen 1930) indicated lengths of six small fetuses as follows: one of 14 cm taken on 6 May 1903 near Vardø on the Norwegian coast of the Barents Sea, three taken near Spitzbergen on 14 August 1869 having lengths of 26.0, 27.5, and 29.0 cm, and two taken at an unidentified location in the Svalbard region on 15 August 1881 that were 23.5 and 28.0 cm. Those lengths are in line with the growth rate shown in Figure 14, though we have no way of determining how those fetuses were actually measured (SL or NTL).

Different authors determined probable size at birth in different ways. Our data indicate the average length (N = 26) and weight (N = 6) of term fetuses from Alaskan waters to be 155 cm and 71.8 kg. These values for other populations or groups of belukhas were: Baffin Island (Brodie 1971), 165 cm, 79 kg, N = 2; west Greenland (Degerbøl and Nielsen 1930, average of three fetuses taken on 12 April, 1926) 153 cm; west Hudson Bay (summarized by Sergeant 1973), about 150 cm. Various authors estimated size at birth to approximate an average of the length of the largest fetus and smallest neonate. Using this procedure, size at birth in the Barents Sea (Khuzin 1961, in Kleinenberg et al. 1964) was 158.5 cm; in the Kara Sea (Zaikov 1934, in Kleinenberg et al. 1964, Kleinenberg and Yablokov 1960) 148.5 cm and 149 cm. For the Okhotsk Sea, Sleptsov (1952) reported the smallest neonate and Kleinenberg et al. (1964) reported the largest fetus. Derived mean of these was 152.5 cm. Thus, size of term fetuses from Alaskan waters, 155 cm, is similar to that of other groups or populations of belukhas.

Weight-Gain of Calves

We were not able to weigh belukhas other than fetuses, thus we have no data about the rate of weight-gain. Lensink (1961) reported the weight of a newborn taken in mid-June to have been 45 kg and that of a 3-month-old calf to have been 106 kg. The difference of approximately 61 kg is an increase

of 136% in the first three months of life for the two animals from Bristol Bay. Brodie (1971) reported the weight increase from birth to 1 year old for belukhas from Baffin Island based on 17 of the former and three of the latter. Average weight of the neonates was 78.3 kg and that of the yearlings was 187.8 kg; indicating a 140% gain during the first year of life. The average weight of neonates reported by Brodie (1971) was close to that of the six near-term fetuses from late June, obtained in northwest Alaska (\bar{x} = 71.8 kg).

Birth Period

Determinations of the birth period for belukhas are based on two general types of information. The first and most useful is that derived by examination of whales including fetuses and verified newborns, observation of actual births, and rigorously acquired data about short-term changes in the proportion of calves. The second and more confusing type of information includes general comments mostly about such things as finding "large" fetuses (measurements unspecified) or the general sightings of dark-colored calves reported but not verified as newborn.

Sergeant (1973, p. 1080) commented appropriately about the difficulty of determining a peak period of births for belukhas when he stated, "It is strange that the peak could not be narrowed down more closely, since the size frequency of small fetuses . . . shows a very narrow season of matings, with no evidence of variation from year to year over three consecutive seasons"

Early studies in Alaskan waters indicated, as does our data, that calving occurs mainly in June-July. Nelson (1887) stated that calving occurs in mid-June in the vicinity of St. Michael (southern Norton Sound) and Lensink (1961) indicates a peak of calving in Bristol Bay during mid-June.

Though our data indicate a prolonged birth period extending from April through July and perhaps later, the incidence of births prior to about mid-June is comparatively low. Most seem to occur between mid-June and the second decade of July throughout waters adjacent to Alaska. In northern Alaska, most births that occur prior to about 15 June occur in cold, ice-covered waters. During the open water period (progressively later farther north) any selective utilization of warm, nearshore or estuarine waters by cows about to give birth, or cows accompanied by new calves, would tend to bias samples in such a manner that an apparent peak in the birth period would be suggested even after it actually occurred.

The peak birth period suggested by our data is generally supported by findings elsewhere. As determined by studies conducted in Alaskan waters, some females were still supporting a term fetus as late as mid-July, when our sampling efforts terminated. The first verified postparturient cow was taken on 21 April.

More subjective data, mainly from aerial surveys, suggest a slightly more confused picture. Braham et al. (1984) summarized the results of several years of study in which they were involved from 1975-1978. They reported that young of the year (short-yearlings?) and neonates were seen during the course of aerial surveys in April and May in each of four years. The

sighting of neonates in these months is probably based on known births as early as April and the likelihood of being able, at least on occasion, to differentiate between newborns and short-yearlings. These authors (Braham et al. 1984, p. 29) also state that, "Small young of the year calves were observed by the senior author 100 km north of Barrow on 28 September 1979. Calving may therefore occur into late summer or early autumn." Although late summer-early autumn calving is certainly possible, the sighting reported above is inconclusive unless the observers could distinguish with certainty between neonates and calves of 2½ to 4 months age. It is certain that a large proportion of belukhas in the Beaufort Sea during September are returning from Amundsen Gulf and Mackenzie Bay where they calve earlier.

It is general knowledge among Eskimos that in more northern waters the appearance of large numbers of calves coincides with arrival of belukhas in bays and lagoons. Various investigators have also stated this to be the case (Sergeant 1973; Sergeant and Brodie 1975; Finley 1976, 1982; Fraker 1977, 1978). In Alaska, exceptions to this generalization are in Bristol Bay and Cook Inlet, where belukhas usually begin frequenting estuaries as early as late March in some years, though neonates have not been seen until June.

Belukhas that summer in eastern Beaufort Sea and Amundsen Gulf are considered by us to be of the same stock as those we sampled in northwest Alaska, and they usually arrive in the Mackenzie estuary in the last week of June (Fraker 1977, 1978). Based on extensive aerial surveys in that region in 1981, Davis and Evans (1982) reported that neonates comprised 13% of 615 belukhas sighted between 18 and 25 July and 12% of 875 whales sighted in the period 5 to 17 August. If neonates were correctly identified from an aircraft, this suggests little calving after late July in that region.

In most other northern areas births also occur mainly in June-July as reported for the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Vladykov 1944) and the White and Kara seas (Bel'kovich 1960). Zaikov (1934, in Tomilin 1957) recorded a catch of 247 whales taken in the Gulf of Ob (White Sea) between 15 July and 3 August 1932. Only one full-term fetus was found, though the catch also included 62 sucklings of which 20 still retained remnants of the umbilical cord. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) concluded that in most Soviet waters the birth period ends between the second half of June and early August. Medvedev (1970) writing about belukhas in southeastern Kara Sea made a general (and confusing) statement that the mating and birth periods end in August-September.

Findings of investigations carried out in the Okhotsk Sea by Arsen'ev (1939) and Nikol'skii (1936) were summarized by Kleinenberg et al. (1964). It was reported that in that region, unlike the situation farther north, belukhas calve in early spring.

In Hudson Bay, Canada, Doan and Douglas (1953) reported the last date of finding a term fetus was in the week ending 14 July. They further stated that the presence of a large fetus is rare in late summer. Brodie (1971) indicates the birth period as occurring in late July to mid-August in Cumberland Sound, near Baffin Island.

Breeding Period

As with several other aspects of reproduction, comments gleaned from the literature about the season of rut or breeding are inconsistent among accounts. Early literature on this subject includes accounts of belukhas in pursuit of each other, or otherwise involved in behaviors interpreted as being or associated with mating. Zhitkov (1904, cited in Kleinenberg et al. 1964) reportedly observed mating in late June-early July in the White Sea. Provorov (1957, in Kleinenberg et al., loc. cit.) reportedly also observed mating of these whales in the White Sea, on two occasions in mid-July. One of these observations, as recounted, strongly indicates that mating was occurring. That incident was on 10 July 1933.

Vladykov (1944) concluded that the period of mating in the St. Lawrence Estuary extended from early April to early June, with a marked peak at the beginning of May. This was determined on the basis of fetal growth and a presumed gestation period of about a year. In applying similar methodology to data from Greenland (apparently that of Degerbøl and Nielsen, 1930), Vladykov concluded that the period of mating there extended from February to August, with a pronounced peak also around early May. Doan and Douglas (1953) worked with samples of belukhas from the Churchill region of western Hudson Bay. Based on measurements of fetuses and following procedures established by Vladykov (1944), they determined that most conceptions occurred in May though some occurred from March to September.

Tomilin (1957), in his summary of available information, correctly stated that the breeding season is long, though he was in error that its onset is in August. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) recounted much of the reported information and incorporated some additional data. They based their determination of the breeding season on several considerations, though mainly on analysis of fetal growth curves also during an assumed gestation period of 12 months. They concluded that in all seas the mating period seems to be late April to early May, with isolated matings from late February to late August--over a period of six months. Brodie (1971) determined the gestation period to be 14.5 months as compared to all previous findings that it was about a year. This, in combination with a supposed peak birth period for belukhas in Cumberland Sound of late July-early August, placed the peak of breeding for that stock in mid-May.

Sergeant (1973) reported results of his work in western Hudson Bay. He concluded that gestation was most probably around 14 months. Mean date of birth, based on fetal length and length of calves at birth, was not established with certainty and could have been either in the first week of August or closer to mid-July. Thus, he concluded that conception could have been in mid-April or earlier for that stock or population of whales.

Based on the fetal growth curve of belukhas taken in Alaskan waters, the assumption that delayed implantation does not occur, a main birth period of mid-June to mid-July, and the currently assumed gestation period of 14.5 months, as found by Brodie (1971), breeding in belukhas of the Bering population would occur mainly in April. However, this does not in fact, appear to be the case, based on examination of ovaries or of testes.

Examination of ovaries indicated that although some breeding may occur in late April to perhaps mid-June, the peak of breeding is probably appreciably earlier than that. Four of five females taken in late April and judged to have been in breeding condition during the year of capture, had already bred. These four had fully formed corpora lutea and the other was about to ovulate. The time required for complete formation of a corpus luteum in belukhas is unknown. Nonetheless, these specimens indicate that although the peak breeding period cannot be determined, it occurs earlier than mid- to late April.

Examination of histological sections of testes and epididymides indicated, as did ovarian analysis, that the peak breeding period occurs at some unknown time prior to late April. Of 14 adult males taken in late April to late May, all were in the retrogression phase of the annual cycle of spermatogenesis. Retrogressive changes are probably not abrupt and it is assumed that retrogression was initiated significantly earlier than the dates on which those males were collected. Thus, although the peak breeding period cannot be established on the basis of specimens available to us, we suggest that it most likely occurs mainly between late February and early April.

Evidence from females and males suggests that some breeding could occur as late as June. That there is a definite peak is shown by the narrow range of fetal size at age in our sample.

At this time, we cannot rule out the possibility of delayed implantation in belukhas, with attachment occurring mainly in mid- to late April.

Vital Parameters

The sources of data about vital parameters for belukhas of the population we sampled in northwest Alaska are mainly derived from Table 4, which presents information on reproductive status of females and the life table (Table 7). Our presentation is made in the form of a list. There is considerable confusion among different authors with respect to definitions of vital parameters as they are presented in the literature and therefore, when the terms may be ambiguous, we have attempted to explain what we mean and/or provide the values from which an estimate was derived.

Reproductive Parameters

Sex ratio; 1:1.

Breeding season; late February to June with a presumed peak in March.

Birth period; March through July or August with a peak in mid-June to mid-July.

Gestation period; 14.5 mos. at minimum (Brodie 1971); more likely 15 to 16 mos.

First pregnancy; ages 4 to 7.

First birth; age 5 to 8.

Maximum age at last birth; about 35 years (maximum age is not known due to loss of dentinal layers in teeth of old animals).

Generation time; about 6 years.

Duration of dependent nursing period; 6 to 12 mos.

Pregnancy rates;

- A. Proportion of sexually mature females age 5 years and older with either a newly implanted fetus, a term fetus, or a newly born calf, $112/179 = 0.626$.
- B. Proportion of sexually mature females age 5 years and older with a newly implanted fetus, $60/179 = 0.335$.
- C. Proportion of sexually mature females age 6 years and older with a term fetus or a newly born calf, $52/170 = 0.306$. In view of bias inherent with interpretation of ovarian analysis, prolonged birth period, and pregnancies at a rate greater than once in three years for younger sexually mature females, a more reasonable estimate is on the order of 0.32 to 0.34. Note in Table 4 that 6 of 16 females, age 6 years, had given birth in a prior year.

Female reproductive life span; this is an ambiguous term. Our samples show that females are reproductively active throughout their adult life though there is a marked decline in pregnancy rates in old-age animals. Potential reproductive life span in our sample is on the order of 31 years, or during the span from age 4 to 35 years. Maximum potential reproductive life span is not known because of loss of dentinal layers in old animals.

Population Parameters

Maximum longevity; due to loss of dentinal layers in teeth, maximum longevity is not known. The oldest animals in our samples included two males 38+ years and a single female, 35+ years.

Proportion of mature females in population; best estimate is 32% to 33%. From the probit age structure, $322/528$ (61%) of the whales were age 6 years or older and $357/528$ (68%) were 5 years or older. The sex ratio is 1:1. Attainment of sexual maturity occurs when a female becomes pregnant. First pregnancy occurs between ages 4 and 7 years, mainly at ages 5 (33% to 38% of females were pregnant) and 6 (by which age 94% of the females were sexually mature).

Annual rate of calf production; best estimate is 0.104. This estimate is from the "smoothed" age structure derived through probit, and the resulting life table. The model population of 1,000 whales included 94 calves; $94/906 = 0.104$.

Crude birth rate; the same as the rate for females supporting a term fetus or neonate. Best estimate is about 0.33. The range, as indicated by our data is 0.31 (from probit age structure and age-specific reproductive rates) to 0.34 based on interpretation of ovarian features.

Survival (q_x); 0.094, derived from probit age structure and resulting life table.

There are several sources of comparative data about other stocks or populations of belukhas dealing with one or more of the parameters listed above. We have not included a summary of those data because of the possible ambiguities with respect to definitions and differences in procedures used by other investigators. Primary sources of data that readers can compare with our findings include: Bel'kovich (1960), Brodie (1971), Sergeant (1973, in press), Heyland (1974), Finley (1976), Ognetev

(1981), Seaman and Burns (1981), Brodie et al. (1981), Finley et al. (1982), and Ray et al. (1984). Summary papers of interest are those by Braham (1982, 1984).

Our data indicate that gross annual production of calves per 1,000 belukhas of the composition sampled in northwest Alaska is about 106 (1,000 whales x 0.33 adult females x 0.32 crude birth rate).

Color Change

The change in coloration of belukhas from dark to white, as a function of increasing age and size, has long been known. Nelson's (1887) conclusion about the timing of these color changes was amazingly insightful, considering that he had no quantitative means of accurately determining age of individuals. He wrote (Nelson, op. cit., p. 290), "As already noted these animals are very dark-colored when young. They become lighter each year until the fourth or fifth season, when they are a pale milky bluish, and about the sixth or seventh year they are a uniform, clear milky white."

Various investigators have utilized slightly different categories for describing color phases of belukhas. Kleinenberg, et al. (1964, p. 32, Table 8) indicate the classification schemes used by 13 different researchers of which five used three color categories, six used four, one used five, and one used six. Hay and McClung (1976) refer to 11 color categories though they did not indicate any proportions or numbers within each. We used four categories that were closest to the system utilized by Arsen'ev (1936, in Kleinenberg, et al., loc. cit.). In fact, in the six studies reported in Kleinenberg et al. (loc. cit.) that utilized four color categories, the color phases were easily relatable to ours. Brodie (1982) reported that a captive male belukha from Bristol Bay, Alaska, maintained in the Vancouver Public Aquarium, obtained its white coloration at about age 6. He compared that to males from eastern Baffin Island that were found to become "noticeably" white at about 7 years. In our sample, males became "whitish" as young as age 5 and white as young as age 9. Considering the ambiguities of different characterizations of color phase, the captive whale, those we sampled, and those sampled by Brodie, indicate that the whitish and white phases are probably obtained at about the same age in whales from Alaska and eastern Baffin Island.

Sergeant (1973) compared the age at which whales from eastern Baffin Island, western Hudson Bay, and eastern Beaufort Sea become white. He found (p. 1072), ". . . that the white color is attained at a fairly constant age in different populations . . ." He reported the minimum ages of white-colored animals taken in the vicinity of Churchill and Whale Cove, both in western Hudson Bay and in the Mackenzie Delta (animals from the latter area seasonally pass through waters adjacent to Alaska). Assuming two dentinal layers per year of age, minimum ages of white males and females from Churchill were 7 and 8 years respectively; 10 and 8 years respectively for Whale Cove; and 8 and 7 years respectively for whales from Mackenzie estuary. In the Mackenzie estuary, Sergeant (op. cit.) also reported grey-colored females as old as 15 years. Kleinenberg et al. (1964), similar to all other studies, found that each color phase includes a size range of animals that overlaps markedly, though the sizes of most animals in each color group do not.

White-colored belukhas are sexually mature adults. We found that at least in females, a high proportion of light grey animals (90%, N = 21) are also sexually mature. The proportion of adult belukhas in different populations have been indicated by various writers, on the basis of the proportion of white-colored whales. In our sample of 225 collected whales for which color was recorded, 53% were white and 17% were light grey. Of the light grey females, 19 of 21 (90%) were sexually mature.

The proportion of white and/or whitish-colored whales in samples reported by different investigators is presented in Table 16. Direct comparisons of color composition in samples, based on examination of whales landed and those classified during aerial surveys, may not be entirely appropriate. Landed whales can be more precisely categorized; whereas, there may be a tendency to combine (or an inability to differentiate) light grey and white-colored whales seen during aerial surveys. Our sample of examined belukhas (53% white and 17% grey) would probably be equivalent to 70% white and "whitish", as categorized during an aerial survey. Based on the probable age structure of belukhas sampled in northwest Alaska, the proportion of white and whitish-colored whales would be on the order of 65%.

Movements

Summer Movements in Eastern Chukchi Sea

Until recently, the perspective of summer belukha migrations in eastern Chukchi Sea was that gleaned from compilation of sightings made from shore or the edge of shorefast ice. Those general observations suggested two separate "waves" of migrants (cf. Foote and Williamson 1966, p. 1082); those passing northward through ice-covered waters mainly in March-May and those occurring in ice-free coastal waters and passing northward in a more leisurely manner in June-August.

Available evidence indicates that many or most of the early migrants near Alaska travel eastward after rounding Point Barrow (Braham and Krogman 1977; Fraker 1979; Seaman and Burns 1981; Ljungblad 1981). Perhaps most of these early migrants reach the eastern Beaufort Sea and Amundsen Gulf. Some enter ice-free coastal waters in mid-June through July and begin moving away from the coast in August, returning westward across the Beaufort Sea during August to October (Fraker 1979; Seaman and Burns 1981; Davis and Evans 1982).

Belukhas in the eastern Chukchi Sea also begin to enter ice-free coastal waters during June, first in the region of the northern Seward Peninsula and Kotzebue Sound. The northward movement of these whales is much less directed and more leisurely in that once they begin frequenting rivers, bays, and lagoons they remain in or near these habitats for days and perhaps weeks (as do many of the belukhas that reach eastern Beaufort Sea). Nonetheless, general direction of their movements is northward. In late July-August they leave the coastal zone, also as belukhas in eastern Beaufort Sea do, and by late August-September whales that summered in coastal waters of the eastern Chukchi and the eastern Beaufort seas are mostly associated with the ice front. It is possible, though not probable, that belukhas reaching the vicinity of Point Barrow, from the south, in

Table 16. Proportions of white and "whitish"-colored belukhas in different geographic regions as reported by various authors.

Region	Source	Proportion (%) white-colored animals	Sample size	Sampling method
Kara Sea	Medvedev 1970	61	99	Observation of passing whales from ice
Gulf of St. Lawrence	Vladykov 1944	61	219	Whales examined
White Sea	Provorov 1958	72	32	Whales examined
White and Kara seas	Ognetev 1981	70	385	Whales examined
White Sea	Klumov 1939	54 (white) 73 (white and light)	204	Whales examined
Western Hudson Bay	Doan and Douglas 1953	66	902	Whales examined
Northwest Alaska	Braham et al. 1984	62	507	Observation of passing whales from ice
Northwest Alaska	Braham et al. 1984	93	unknown	Aerial surveys
Northwest Alaska	Braham 1984	71	627	Aerial surveys
Northwest Alaska	This study	70	225	Whales examined

late July-early August move rapidly eastward through Beaufort Sea to the Mackenzie estuary. This probability is considered low in view of the somewhat synchronus departure of most belukhas from northern coastal waters at this time. We suggest that belukhas present in coastal waters of eastern Chukchi Sea during summer eventually reach the ice front generally north and northeast of Point Barrow where they mingle with whales migrating from eastern Beaufort Sea, as schematically shown in Figure 15. Radiotagging efforts in waters of northwest Alaska (a feasible undertaking) are required to verify the hypothesized movements. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) indicate that in Soviet waters, some belukhas are associated with the ice front in summer.

Autumn Migration in the Beaufort Sea

We have already reviewed the survey efforts and other studies that influenced our search for migrating belukhas in Beaufort Sea, west of the Canadian border. Several additional survey efforts are of significance in interpreting our results.

Davis and Evans (1982), reported results of extensive surveys undertaken in the Canadian Beaufort during July-September 1981. Results of these surveys were unavailable at the time of our effort in September 1982. Their survey design included five regions extending eastward from the Alaska-Canada border to and including eastern Amundsen Gulf. Systematic surveys were accomplished during four time periods; 18-25 July, 5-17 August, 19-29 August, and 7-14 September. Several important findings were made. They found that a rather large proportion of belukhas in the Canadian Beaufort did not enter the Mackenzie estuary as was previously thought. The number of belukhas in the Canadian Beaufort was very conservatively estimated to include at least 11,500 animals. Belukhas moved into deeper waters by the first of August and the westward autumn migration was offshore.

Harwood and Ford (1983) conducted more limited surveys during August-September 1982 in part of the region covered by Davis and Evans in 1981. In the 1982 surveys, those authors found that the westward movement of belukhas from the southeastern Canadian Beaufort had probably occurred prior to late August and certainly prior to surveys they conducted from 5-13 September 1982.

Dr. Steven Johnson (LGL Alaska, Ltd., Anchorage, Alaska, personal communication, 16 January 1982) conducted repetitive surveys of transects shown in Figure 16, on 1, 4, and 8 August and on 15, 18, and 22 September 1982. Their transects were 1,600 m wide and extended 20 nm from the near shore starting points. No belukhas were seen on any of those surveys.

Ljungblad et al. (1983) continued a program of very extensive aerial surveys for bowhead whales in the American part of the Beaufort Sea in August-October 1982. Their surveys did not extend appreciably north of 72°N and were mostly south of 71°N. Ice generally persisted in the survey area until mid-August, and then rapidly receded northward. In early August belukhas (numbers unspecified) were widely distributed in association with ice, mainly between 71°N and 72°N latitude (Ljungblad et al., loc. cit., p. 103). Of significance in relation to our surveys was that during extensive flights in September, they saw no belukhas. Belukhas were again sighted in

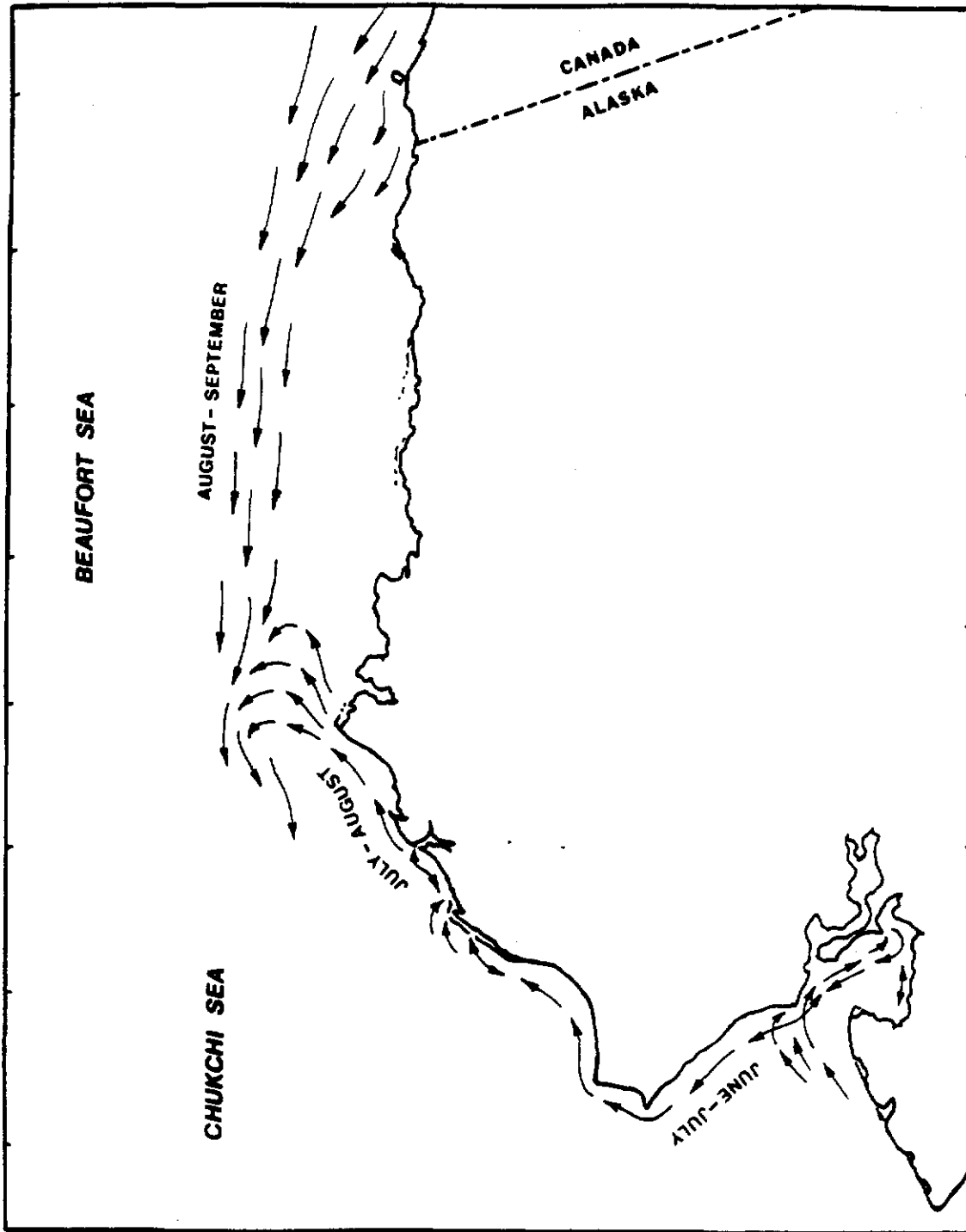


Figure 15. Schematic illustration of hypothesized movements of belugas that occur in coastal waters of the Chukchi and Beaufort seas during summer.

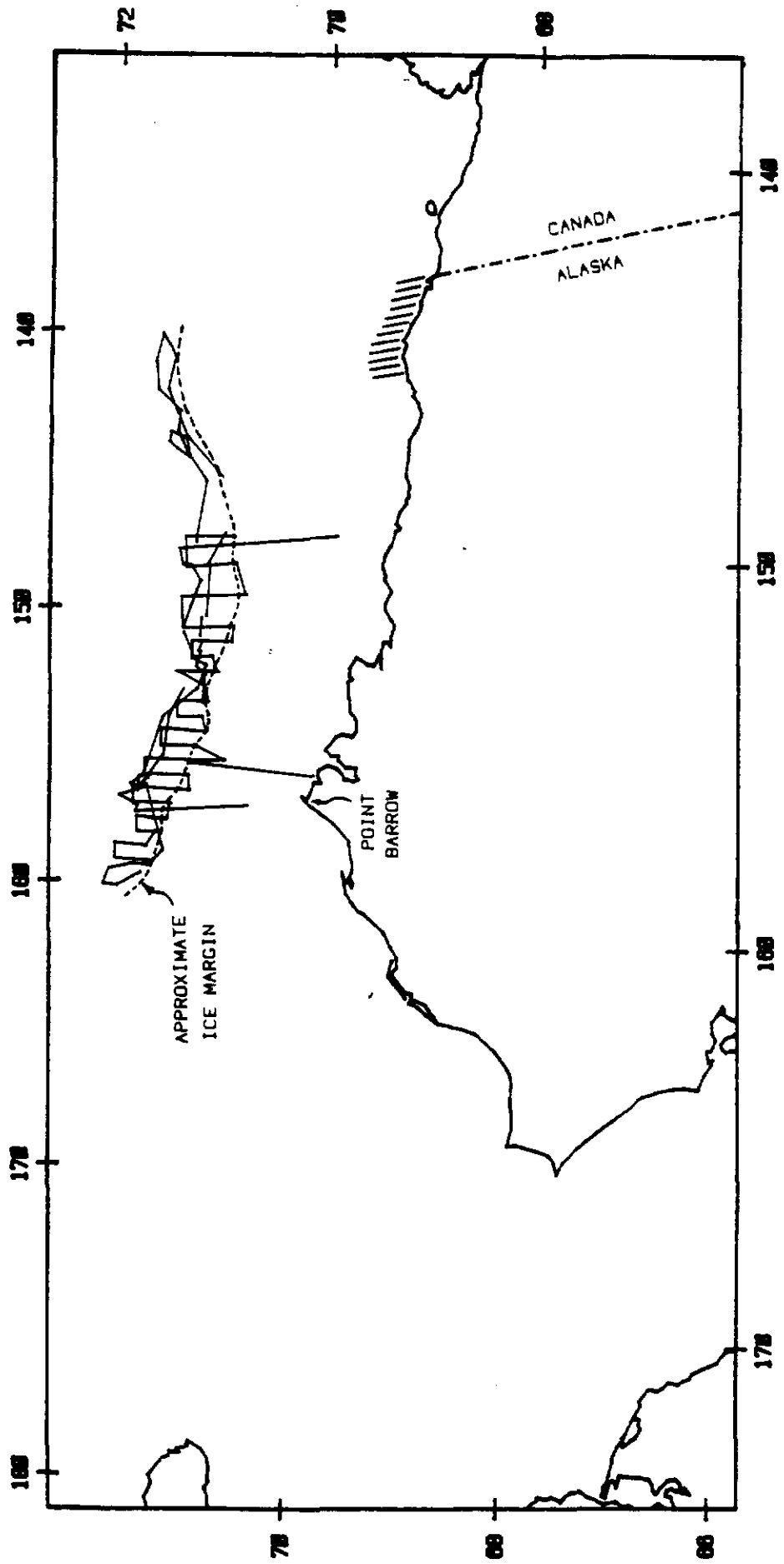


Figure 16. Aerial transect lines flown in September 1982 during this study and by S. Johnson (personal communication).

October during conditions of rapidly advancing and forming ice. A combined total of 485 belukhas were counted in August and October including 250 on 17 October, in the same general area northeast of Point Barrow where they consistently have been observed in September and October. Table 17, compiled from charts of survey transects flown by Ljungblad et al. (loc. cit.), indicates dates when they saw belukhas.

The most compelling evidence for a westward autumn migration route that is mainly offshore and largely determined by location of the prevailing ice front zone is shown in Figure 17. This figure depicts four things: general position of the ice margin during 17 to 21 September 1982; transect lines flown during this study (mostly near and north of the ice margin); transect lines flown by Ljungblad et al. in September 1982; and the locations of all sightings of belukhas during those two survey efforts.

Figure 18 depicts locations of all sightings of belukhas north of Alaska, based on sources available to us, for which we could determine geographic coordinates. Sources of data for this figure are presented in Table 18. It shows that during August belukhas are widely distributed throughout those areas of the western Beaufort that have been surveyed and occasionally along the Chukchi Sea coast as far as the vicinity of Wainwright. Ice conditions during August are highly variable, though in most years the pack has not yet melted and receded to the minimal annual coverage (Weeks and Weller 1984). Belukhas are present in the American part of Beaufort Sea during August, at the same time that maximum numbers were counted in the Canadian Beaufort. In our opinion, some of the whales that round Point Barrow do not make the long traverse to eastern Beaufort Sea. There appears to be a progressive movement away from shore in August. Current data are inadequate to describe this movement or to determine numbers of belukhas in western Beaufort Sea during August. The lack of reported sightings in August, west of Point Barrow, is probably an artifact resulting from almost no survey effort in the ice front during that month.

From Figure 18 it is evident that the westward migration is in full swing in September, that a concentration area exists north and northeast of Point Barrow, and that belukhas also occur in the northern Chukchi. The somewhat linear distributions of whale sightings indicate a strong association with the ice front (a linear feature), at least in the Beaufort Sea. Location of the margin and front zone in different years probably accounts for the seemingly great latitudinal distribution of sightings. Latitudinal distribution of sightings in September of different years was rather great and we have not made any correlations of whale distribution and bathymetry. The huge aggregation of belukhas found northwest of Point Barrow on 18 September 1974 by Ray and Wartzok (1980), swimming generally west-southwest, some 30 nm from pack ice, was assumed to have been a migrating assemblage.

In October, most sightings of belukhas were in the western Beaufort. Location of sightings indicates that a linear distribution related to location of the ice front still persists. Frequency and location of sightings suggest that peak migration out of the Beaufort occurs prior to October. However, it should be noted that combined survey efforts in this month have been much less than during September. Sightings in October 1975 by Ray and Wartzok (1980, Figure 26, p. 72) were mostly in central Chukchi

Table 17. Survey dates on which belukhas were sighted in the American sector of the Beaufort Sea in August-September 1982 (from Ljungblad et al. 1983).

August		September		October	
Survey date	Belukhas seen	Survey date	Belukhas seen	Survey date	Belukhas seen
1	no	1	no	2	yes
2	no	2	no	3	no
5	no	4	no	4	no
6	yes	7	no	5	yes
7	yes	8	no	6	no
8	yes	11	no	7	no
11	no	14	no	9	no
12	yes	15	no	10	no
14	yes	16	no	11	no
15	yes	18	no	12	yes
16	yes	21	no	13	no
17	yes	23	no	14	no
18	yes	24	no	15	no
20	no	25	no	16	yes
21	no	27	no	17	yes
22	no	28	no		
23	yes	29	no		
24	yes	30	no		
25	no				
28	no				

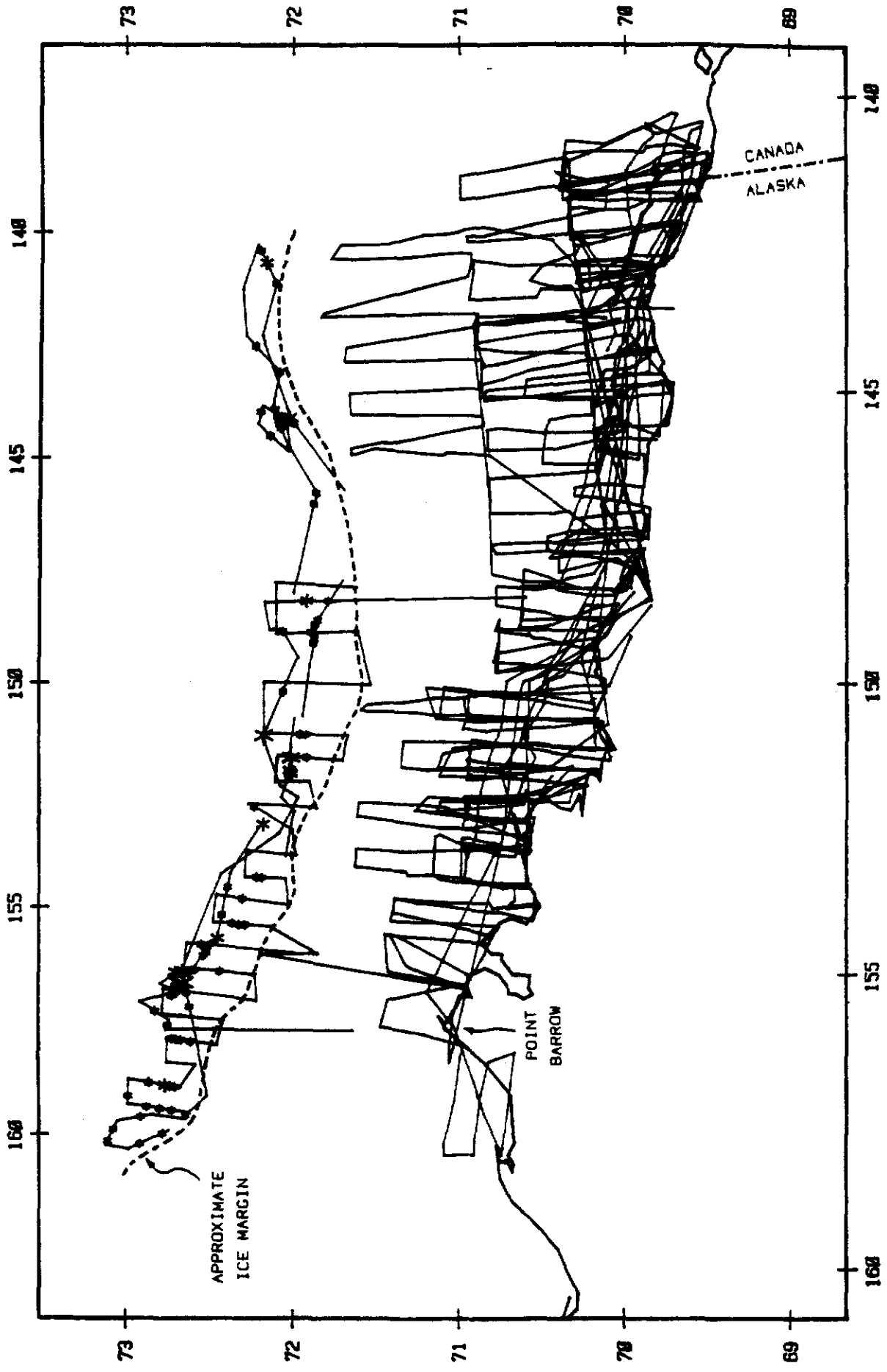


Figure 17. Survey transects flown in September 1982 during this study and by Ljungblad et al. (1983). Location of the ice margin and all belukhas sighted on transects are shown.

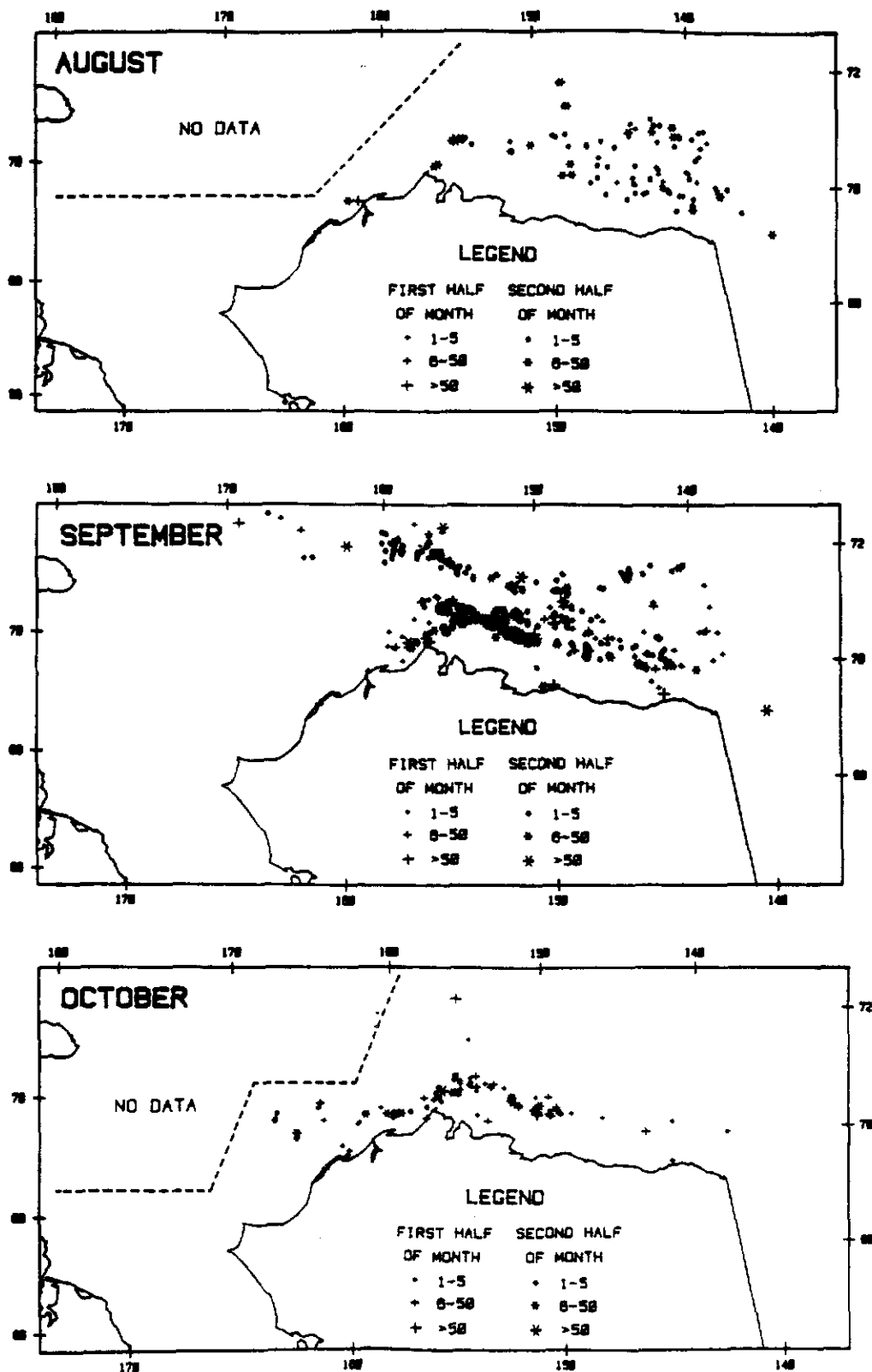


Figure 18. Composite of belukha sightings near northern Alaska in August to October, for which coordinates could be determined. Sources of data are in Table 13.

Table 18. Sources of data on belukha sightings shown in Figure 17. Only those data appropriate to month and region and for which geographic coordinates were provided or could be reasonably determined, were utilized.

Source of data	Time of sightings		
	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.
Bitters, J., pers. comm., 1978	X		
Braham and Krogman 1977		X	
Burns, J., field notes, Sept. 1974		X	
Dohl, T., pers. comm., 1979		X	
Fiscus, C., pers. comm., 1974		X	
Fiscus et al. 1976		X	
Fraker et al. 1978		X	
Frost, field notes, 1978	X		
Harrison and Hall 1978	X		
Johnson 1979		X	
Johnson et al. 1981		X	
Johnson et al. 1982		X	
Ljungblad et al. 1980		X	X
Ljungblad 1981	X		
Ljungblad et al. 1982	X		X
Ljungblad et al. 1983	X	X	X
Murdock 1885		X	
Naval Arctic Res. Lab., files, 1978 and 1980	X		X
Nelson 1968	X		
Ray, C. G., pers. comm. in Braham and Krogman 1977		X	
Ray et al. 1984	X	X	
Univ. Rhode Island Lab. ¹ for Study of Info. Sci.	X		

¹ Provided a computerized listing of belukha sightings recorded during various projects supported by the Alaska Outer Continental Shelf Environmental Assessment Program and subsequently submitted to the National Oceanic Data Center.

Sea, near and south of 70°N latitude; considerably south of sightings in September. These data are not included in this report as the geographical coordinates were not available to us.

For waters of northern Alaska and northwest Canada, available data indicate a weak association of belukhas with pack ice in July (numbers in coastal areas are greatest), becoming stronger in August when they depart coastal waters, and being very strong by September.

Migration in Soviet Waters

The limited information available about whale migrations and movements in waters of the Soviet far east indicates a "mirror image" pattern to that in Alaskan and western Canadian waters, at least during the first half of this century. Some belukhas remain in coastal waters of Bering Sea throughout the year, though most migrate north through Bering Strait during spring-early summer. Substantial numbers move northwest after passing Mys Dezhneva, summer in the western Chukchi and eastern East Siberian seas, and return to Bering Sea in autumn-early winter. Such a hypothesis is based on the following records.

Kleinenberg et al. (1964) report sightings of belukhas in May from the vicinity of Mys Navarin, the Gulf of Anadyr, and the region from Bukhta Provideniya to Ostrova Arakamchechen and around Chukhotka to Mys Serdtse-Kamen.

Large herds of belukhas occur in the Gulf of Anadyr during the second half of June, migrating along its western and northern shores, some entering Zaliv Kresta and large numbers entering Anadyrskiy Liman where they remain throughout the summer (Vinogradov 1949, in Kleinenberg et al. 1964; Tomilin 1957). The maximum number of belukhas in the Gulf of Anadyr occurs in July (Kleinenberg et al. 1964).

Nikulin (1947, in Kleinenberg et al. 1964) indicated that belukhas appear in the western Chukchi Sea in early summer, though Sverdrup (1930, in Kleinenberg et al. 1964) indicated that they occur in large numbers near Serdtse-Kamen, during April-May and are hunted at that time by the Chukchis. Klumov (1939) indicated that belukhas occur in large numbers near Wrangel Island, in summer. According to Arsen'ev (1939), along the north coast of the Chukchi Peninsula, large numbers of belukhas occur only as far west as Mys Shmidta. However, Tomilin (1957) includes the eastern part of the East Siberian Sea within the range of these whales. Gurevich (1980) states that, "They are common among the ice floes in the Long Strait near Vrangal Island and off the Chukchi coast from Cape Dezhnev westwards as far as Chaunskaya Guba." The latter location indicates a considerable penetration of the East Siberian Sea.

Kleinenberg et al. (1964) state that belukhas pass the settlement of Uelen, near Mys Dezhneva during spring and autumn; a situation similar to that on the Alaskan side of Bering Strait. Fedoseev (personal communication in Kleinenberg et al. 1964) reported seeing two large groups of belukhas. The first, seen on 4 October 1960, north of Wrangel Island, was a huge aggregation that extended over a distance of 15 km. The second group was seen on 17 October 1960, 80 miles from Wrangel Island. It was estimated to include 300-350 whales, swimming in the direction of Bering Strait.

Belikov et al. (1984) reported on opportunistic sightings of marine mammals made during repetitive ice reconnaissance flights from June to September in 1971 to 1979. Relatively few sightings of belukhas were reported. However, they did show that belukhas extended well into the East Siberian Sea as early as June. The majority of their sightings were in the general vicinity of Wrangel Island.

These various reports further support the comments of Kleinenberg et al. (1964) that in the western Chukchi Sea, during summer, belukhas occur, "not only near the coast but also north of Wrangel Island."

Natural Mortality

In his extensive review of information about belukhas, Tomilin (1957) summarized a number of instances of ice entrapment in widely scattered parts of their amphiboreal range. Several of those were noteworthy for the size of aggregations entrapped, as indicated by numbers removed by hunters. An instance in Kolyuchinskaya Guba, a bay on the coast of northwest Chukchi Sea, involved the capture of several hundred belukhas by local inhabitants. Tomilin (loc. cit.) also noted repetitive instances of entrapment in the same general location and predation by polar bears on trapped belukhas. He suggested that occasional entrapment is evidence for extensive penetration of "dense" (closely packed) ice by belukhas. Citing Geptner (1930), Tomilin (loc. cit.) indicated that in unbroken ice belukhas utilize seal holes for breathing and, where ice was forming, they used their backs to make and maintain openings.

Kleinenberg et al. (1964) included many of the information sources used by Tomilin (1957) and indicated that instances of ice entrapment have repeatedly been recorded. These authors used the Greenland Inuit term, savssat, apparently in reference to regular occurrences in waters adjacent to Greenland where a specialized hunt of entrapped belukhas sometimes occurs. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) noted that belukhas can survive entrapment without access to food for one-two months. Mitchell and Reeves (1981) list known records of ice entrapment of narwhals and belukhas in the eastern Arctic, extending as far back as 1750. Freeman (1968) presents a detailed account of an entrapment that occurred in Jones Sound, Northwest Territories, Canada.

Including the two instances of entrapment that occurred near Alaska in April 1984 (Lowry et al., in press), there are five confirmed records and numerous other reports involving belukhas of the Bering population. The five confirmed records are the entrapment of several hundred whales, apparently in autumn, that occurred in Kolyuchinskaya Guba (Tomilin 1957); one of 20+ whales in Eskimo Lakes, Mackenzie Bay in autumn-winter, 1966-67 (Hill 1967, 1968); one of an unknown number from which about 35 were taken by hunters near the northwest coast of the Seward Peninsula, in early March 1976 (Seaman et al. 1985); an unknown number trapped in ice of the central Chukchi Sea in late March (Jack W. Lentfer, formerly a polar bear specialist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, personal communication, 29 August 1984); and 2,000 to 3,000 entrapped in Proliv Senyavina (northwestern Bering Sea) in late December 1984.

Entrapment in elongated bays and large lakes during the period of autumn freezeup apparently results when extensive, rapidly forming ice blocks exit of the whales, as was reported for the Eskimo Lakes and Proliv Senyavina events. Hill's account of such an event was interesting in several respects. In August 1966, an estimated 50 belukhas were in the fourth or innermost of the Eskimo Lakes that bound the east shore of the Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula, some 150 miles inland from the Beaufort Sea. A similar number were seen on 20 September. Ice began forming in early October and only three open areas remained in the fourth Eskimo Lake on 1 November. Twenty belukhas were still present on 20 November, apparently utilizing one remaining hole. By 21 January 1967, only one whale remained. The natural hole at which the remaining whale was seen was frozen over when visited on 26 January. No hunting took place at this entrapment. It was presumed that these trapped whales starved. The maximum observed time of dives was 7 min and 25 sec, though a recording crew using hydroacoustic equipment noted that on 21 January, the single remaining whale was away from the hole for about 40 min. During their entrapment whales broke the overhanging ice around the hole with their backs, as has been reported previously by several authors. Records of ice entrapment in the eastern arctic are presented by Mitchell and Reeves (1981).

In April 1984 entrapment during the northward spring migration near Alaska occurred when early migrating whales that deeply penetrated the northern pack were caught by unusually low temperatures and severe freezing conditions. This followed almost a month of warm temperatures. Table 19 shows the average daily temperatures recorded at Nome and Cape Lisburne during March and April 1984. It can be seen that, in comparison to temperatures in March, those recorded in April were unusually cold. Though they are not precise indicators of temperatures that existed in Bering Strait-southern Chukchi Sea region, conditions recorded at Nome reflect the monthly trends and suggest the cause of entrapment in Bering Strait and near Kivalina.

With respect to predation by polar bears and killer whales, records available to us mainly add to the already existing body of information. Some additional insights about the combined impacts of entrapment and predation by bears are suggested by the incidences in April 1984.

Polar bears were exceptionally abundant in northern Bering Sea and eastern Chukchi Sea during winter-spring 1983-84. The largest recorded harvest ever made by coastal-based hunters in those areas were made during that period (292 polar bears; D. Taylor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, AK, undated memorandum). Thus, any belukhas in the region, whether entrapped or free-ranging, were exposed to a potentially higher than normal probability of predation. Many bears did locate the savssat at entrapments found in April 1984. Additionally, during the course of field work in the Cape Lisburne area during April-May 1984, it was observed that polar bears routinely investigated areas where belukhas had rested under thin ice in newly refrozen leads. Such resting areas are obvious from the air as the whales leave elongate impressions in the thin ice that resemble closely scattered grains of rice. These distinctive impressions have variously been referred to as conical elevations (Kane 1926, in Mitchell and Reeves 1981, p. 675), cupolas (Davis and Finley 1979 Ms), or domes (McVay 1973).

Table 19. Average daily temperatures ($^{\circ}\text{F}$) at Nome and Cape Lisburne, Alaska, during March-April 1984. Average temperatures are means of the daily highs and lows.

Nome				Cape Lisburne			
March	Temp.	April	Temp.	March	Temp.	April	Temp.
1	8	1	31	1	-27	1	2
2	0	2	24	2	-27	2	8
3	8	3	18	3	-28	3	4
4	-2	4	24	4	-25	4	-8
5	12	5	22	5	-20	5	-17
6	35	6	12	6	-13	6	-17
7	37	7	-4	7	-9	7	-18
8	26	8	-9	8	-6	8	-21
9	37	9	-4	9	-1	9	-19
10	37	10	-2	10	9	10	-17
11	31	11	-1	11	7	11	-13
12	25	12	0	12	16	12	-16
13	35	13	4	13	4	13	-8
14	26	14	5	14	6	14	8
15	15	15	7	15	-3	15	-2
16	13	16	2	16	-9	16	-13
17	32	17	-1	17	-10	17	-11
18	18	18	8	18	-12	18	-7
19	6	19	7	19	-15	19	-8
20	2	20	8	20	-17	20	-9
21	6	21	14	21	-15	21	-9
22	12	22	18	22	-21	22	-9
23	10	23	13	23	-15	23	-9
24	11	24	15	24	-16	24	-8
25	13	25	23	25	-17	25	-9
26	11	26	25	26	-22	26	6
27	11	27	32	27	-17	27	13
28	14	28	24	28	-15	28	6
29	27	29	26	29	-13	29	3
30	22	30	20	30	-10	30	2
31	25			31	-8		

Conditions that prevailed in spring 1984 were atypical. Savssat and predation on them by polar bears in the Bering and eastern Chukchi seas are probably uncommon in most years, as indicated by observations of other biologists that worked in the region over a number of years.

Mr. Jack W. Lentfer (personal communication, 29 August 1984) was engaged in polar bear tagging operations during spring, from 1967 to 1976, in the eastern Chukchi Sea region. This work involved many hundreds of hours of flying to track and capture bears. During his studies he found no instances of bear predation on belukhas and only one entrapment; in which a small number of savssat were present. Mr. James W. Brooks (formerly polar bear specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, personal communications, August 29 and September 6, 1984) was involved in a similar tagging effort during spring seasons, 1968-1972. His field work was all in the eastern Chukchi Sea, off Cape Lisburne. During those five seasons he recorded no instances of entrapment nor of successful predation on belukhas by bears. Mr. Steven Amstrup (currently polar bear specialist for the USFWS) has been tagging and tracking polar bears during spring, from 1981 to 1984. During three of those years he worked in the eastern Chukchi Sea and also reported no instances of belukha entrapment or predation on whales by bears.

Though these polar bear specialists normally started their field work at a time prior to arrival of belukhas in the Chukchi Sea, their field efforts normally included part of the period when migrating whales were present.

The situation in Bering and eastern Chukchi seas is in marked contrast to reports from experienced polar bear hunting guides that operated in western Chukchi Sea until 1972. Sport hunting for polar bears with the aid of small aircraft was common practice from about 1950-1971. General comments of interest were reported by various professional guides over a period of years.

These guides pursued large, trophy class polar bears primarily in the western Chukchi for three stated reasons: (1) bears near the Alaska coast, though numerous, tended to be smaller and included a larger proportion of subadults and sows with cubs; (2) pack ice was more fractured and mobile in the eastern part, with a broad active flaw zone (also see Burns 1970); and (3) on average, tracking and landing conditions for aircraft were more favorable in the western Chukchi because of thicker, more extensive ice. The polar bear guides, operating from villages along the eastern Chukchi coast began hunting in the east, though generally, while flying westward. Thus, they were very familiar with conditions in different parts of the Chukchi Sea.

Mr. Robert Curtis (pilot and polar bear guide, personal communication to Dr. F. H. Fay, 27 March 1967) reported finding a belukha in southwestern Chukchi Sea that had been killed and eaten by a polar bear. Mr. Nelson Walker (pilot, big game guide, 30+ year resident of Kotzebue, personal communications during numerous conversations with the senior author) summarized his observations of belukha entrapment and polar bear predation over the period 1952-1971. He recounted no instances of belukha entrapment in the central Chukchi region east of 168°W, and two instances of bear predation. In the western Chukchi the situation was much different. He

recounted finding, on average, one or two instances of entrapment involving small numbers of savssat a year, with polar bears present at many of them. The most dead belukhas he reported (presumably killed by polar bears) was seven. Occasionally walruses, mostly single individuals, were also entrapped and successfully preyed upon by bears, according to Mr. Walker.

A recent instance of mass entrapment in Soviet coastal waters of northern Bering Sea received worldwide news media attention. It was reported that in late December 1984 several thousand trapped whales (up to 3,000) were found in Proliv Senyavina (Senyavin Strait) that separates Arakamchechen Island from the Chukchi Peninsula. According to newspaper accounts (i.e., Anchorage Daily News, Saturday, 23 February 1985; The New York Times, Tuesday, March 12, 1985) the Soviet icebreaker Moskva, overcoming great difficulties, made a channel through heavy ice, reaching the whales in late February 1985. The belukhas were reportedly reluctant to follow the ship to safety and were eventually coaxed by the sounds of classical music. Some savssat reportedly perished due to crowding in the small open holes.

These newspaper accounts are at some variance with what probably actually happened. According to S. P. Duniushkin, Marine Mammal Inspector, Okhotskrybvod, Magadan, U.S.S.R. (personal communications with the senior author in March and April 1985), several thousand belukhas were indeed trapped during late December, in Proliv Senyavina. Repeated attempts of the icebreaker to reach the whales were unsuccessful and some animals began to perish. In view of the grave situation and deteriorating condition of the trapped whales, some 300 to 400 animals were killed for local use by hunters from the nearby Native settlement of Yandrakinot. Eventual fate of the large number of entrapped whales is unknown at the time of this writing. Based on available information about time and location of the event, those whales would have had to survive entrapment until about late May, before ice conditions would have moderated enough to permit their escape.

It is evident that entrapment of belukhas of the Bering population occurs with some frequency. Entrapment in autumn-early winter, as a single factor, probably poses a greater threat of death to belukhas because of intensifying ice conditions and starvation of imprisoned animals over protracted periods of time. Entrapment during late winter-spring, during northward migration, would tend to be of shorter duration and whales would eventually be released by shifting ice before they starved. In either case, entrapment increases the likelihood of predation by polar bears and occasionally by man. Entrapment probably occurs with greater frequency in western rather than eastern Chukchi Sea due to penetration of more severe ice conditions by belukhas. The numbers of savssat involved in spring entrapments are, on average, probably small.

In our opinion, events affecting belukhas that occurred in Bering Strait and eastern Chukchi Sea during spring 1984 were unusual for two reasons; the uncommon abundance of polar bears and the unusually warm temperatures and extent of open water in March, followed by severe cold and extensive re-freezing of leads in April.

Predation by killer whales on belukhas is also of significance in the Bering and Chukchi seas. The extent of such predation is, as yet, not

known, though it is probably common in some parts of the belukha's annual range. During the months of minimal ice extent, relatively few of the entire Bering Sea population of belukhas remain in the Bering Sea where killer whales are relatively abundant. Most belukhas are in the northern Chukchi, East Siberian, and Beaufort seas. The number of killer whales in the northern Chukchi is relatively low, based on the infrequency of sightings. There are no reported sightings from the central and eastern Beaufort, and their occurrence in the East Siberian Sea is unknown. Effective use of underwater broadcasting of killer whale sounds to keep belukhas out of major salmon streams in Bristol Bay, Alaska (e.g., Fish and Vania 1971) attests to the strong reaction of belukhas to the acoustical perception of killer whale presence.

Contaminant Levels

Addison and Brodie (1973) reported the occurrence of DDT residues found in samples from 14 adult belukhas taken from the Mackenzie Delta. Whales that summer in that region pass through waters adjacent to Alaska and are hunted by Alaskans. Those authors found that DDT and its metabolites were present at levels of 0.01 and 0.02 parts per million (ppm), fresh weight in muscle and liver tissue, respectively, and 2 to 4 ppm fresh weight in blubber. These levels were considered by those authors to be lower than in marine mammals from other regions such as the North Atlantic.

Addison and Brodie (1973) based their comments about sources of these contaminants on the premise that belukhas occurring in Mackenzie Delta do not migrate beyond the Beaufort and Chukchi seas. They concluded that residues of DDT and its metabolites were thus of local origin, obtained through the food web. However, based on the seasonal migrations of these belukhas it is equally probable that exposure occurs during winter when the belukhas are in Bering Sea, a region dominated by inflow of North Pacific water.

Sergeant and Brodie (1975) stated that belukha fisheries in the eastern part of the Northwest Territories (Canada) that produced meat and muktuk for human consumption failed because of the discovery of mercury in meat. Mercury in belukha meat exceeded the 0.5 ppm wet weight level that was allowable for human consumption. Heavy metal burdens in belukhas of the Bering population are known only from four females taken in Mackenzie Estuary, the results of which were reported by Hunt (1979). In those four whales mercury in liver tissue ranged from 7.41 to 22.64 ppm ($\bar{x} = 13.3$). Mean levels in meat and muktuk were 0.91 and 0.14 ppm respectively. Zinc also occurred at high levels, the mean of measurements being 24.1 ppm in liver, 23.8 in meat, and 21.6 in muktuk. Cadmium, copper, lead, and chromium were also reported as present.

Contemporary Harvests and Total Kills

Belukhas of the Bering population historically have been, and continue to be, hunted in coastal waters of three broad regions: far eastern Siberia and Chukotka; western and northern Alaska and the eastern Beaufort Sea and Amundsen Gulf of Canada. In all three regions the historical aboriginal harvests appear to have been substantially larger than most annual harvests made at the present time (Tomilin 1957; Fraker et al. 1978; Seaman and

Burns 1981). The majority of belukhas taken in earlier times were hunted during open-water seasons by large numbers of men, usually employing kayaks (or similar small craft), harpoons, and spears in highly organized "drives" during which many belukhas were driven into shallows and killed (Pallas 1788, cited in Tomilin 1957; Nelson 1887; Kowta 1963; Meteyer 1966, quoted in Fraker et al. 1978; Foote and Williamson 1966; Ray 1966; Vanstone 1967; McGhee 1974; Fraker et al. 1978; Hunt 1979; Seaman and Burns 1981). During our work in villages of western and northern Alaska, we were frequently told of traditional sites where people formerly gathered to collectively hunt and process the catches.

Review of written records available to us, as well as discussions with Alaskan Natives and other informed individuals indicates that the complex process of "modernization," has strongly affected belukha hunting. V. A. Arsen'ev, a well-known authority on marine mammals of the Soviet far east, worked in that region during the 1920's and 1930's. He recounted to the senior author, via personal discussions in 1967, that reduced hunting effort and landings in Chukhotka were, in part, due to consolidation of many of the smaller coastal settlements, increasing involvement of potential hunters in activities other than subsistence hunting (especially during summer months) and abandonment of the traditional hunting methods that involved large numbers of hunters. To a great extent, these changes have also occurred in Alaska (Seaman and Burns 1981; Seaman et al. 1985) and probably in northwest Canada. There is a general concensus that the contemporary magnitude of belukha kills, including increased losses associated with the use of rifles as opposed to harpoons and nets, is usually less than in former times for the Bering population of these whales (Arsen'ev, personal communication; Fraker et al. 1978; Seaman and Burns 1981).

Annual harvests of belukhas may fluctuate greatly. The "regular" seasonal harvests are affected by annual differences in abundance and availability of whales, especially in coastal waters during summer. Also, the periodic occurrence of savssat that accord opportunity for unusually large harvests to be secured, further contribute to great annual variations in harvest levels.

Accurate information on magnitude of contemporary kill levels, especially the component that includes numbers of belukhas wounded or killed and lost, is difficult to obtain and interpret. It is our intention to summarize what we consider to be the most reliable information and, from this, to derive an estimate of mortality due to hunting.

Soviet Harvests

Successful hunting for belukhas of the population under discussion, in what are now Soviet waters, formerly occurred over a broad expanse from Kamchatka to Chaunskaya Guba in the western part of the East Siberian Sea (Tomilin 1957). According to Tomilin (1957) and Arsen'ev (personal communications) in recent times they have mainly been taken in the region of the northern Gulf of Anadyr.

Reported magnitude of landings varied by source. Tomilin (1957) indicates only that they are taken sporadically. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) reported

that about 500 are taken in the Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi seas combined. It was not possible for us to determine what proportion of that reported level of take may have been from the whale population under discussion. These same authors also indicated a take of 100-300 belukhas in the Bering Sea.

Krupnik (1979, 1980) reported on characteristics of marine mammal harvests, including belukhas, made during the 1920's and 1930's by Asiatic Eskimos. Asiatic Eskimos live along the southern (Anadyr) and eastern (Bering Strait) shores of the Chukchi Peninsula. He indicated that during those years, Siberian Eskimos were 28% of the population of Chukotka; they took an average of 25 to 30 belukhas a year in the mid-1930's; that catch was 50% to 70% of all whales taken by Native inhabitants of the Chukchi Peninsula and that hunting losses were high, on the order of 100% to 150% of the landed catch (50% to 60% of the whales struck were lost). Rozanov (1931) reported that formerly, belukhas were taken by shooting only near the settlement of Naukan. Nine belukhas were taken there in 1929 and 42 in 1930.

V. N. Gol'tsev, formerly a fisheries inspector in the Chukotka region during the 1960's (Soviet Ministry of Fisheries, Okhotskrybvod), informed the senior author that few people now normally hunt belukhas and the level of take is low; probably less than 40 whales per year on average, and mainly along the north coast of the Gulf of Anadyr (Gol'tsev, personal communication, August 1973). Yablokov (1979) indicated that former catches near the Chukchi Peninsula (Bering and Chukchi seas) sometimes reached 100 to 200 animals; that current catches are less than 100 in the Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi seas combined; and on the order of 20 to 50 in Bering Sea. Ivashin and Mineev (1981) reported the recent known harvests of belukhas in different parts of the U.S.S.R. In the Chukchi Sea, six were taken during the two-year period 1973-74. Reported harvests in the Bering Sea ranged from 15 to 32 in 1973-1980 with an annual average of 26 during 1976-1980. Harvests in 1981 to 1983, as reported by Mineev (1984), were 22, 12, and 18 respectively. Of these, only two were taken in the Chukchi Sea in 1983.

Most recently, A. Somov, Inspector for the Soviet Ministry of Fisheries, stationed in Magadan, informed the senior author that an annual landed catch of about 25 to 30 belukhas is made by workers from the settlement of Sireniki, at the southeastern corner of the Chukchi Peninsula in April and May (Somov, A. G., personal discussion with J.B., December 17, 1985) apparently utilizing the very important, persistent, polynya system referred to as Sirenikovskaya Polynya by Bogoslovskaya and Votrogov (1981). Somov further indicated that although belukhas are occasionally hunted at other locations in the Bering and Chukchi seas, the average number taken per year is very low.

On the basis of all the information presented above, we conclude that a reasonable estimate of contemporary Soviet harvests from the Bering Sea population of belukhas is normally on the order of 60 whales per year. The large kill of savssat in Proliv Senyavina in 1985 will greatly increase reported harvest of 1985.

Western Canadian Harvests

Harvests of belukhas from the Bering population, made by Canadians, occur primarily in what is broadly referred to as the Mackenzie estuary of the eastern Beaufort Sea. In addition to kills in that estuary, an estimated 10 whales may be killed (not necessarily landed) in other parts of the western Canadian Arctic (Fraker 1980).

There are several sources of data about landings (retrieved harvest) in the Mackenzie estuary over several years. Those data we have used are presented in Table 20. The average annual landing in the Mackenzie estuary during the 11-year period from 1971 to 1981 was 129 belukhas. If it is assumed that six of the 10 belukhas killed per year, on average, in other parts of the western Canadian Arctic are landed, the average level of recent landings is about 135 belukhas per year.

Alaskan Harvests

The landed kill of belukhas in western and northern Alaska, for various years, is presented in Table 21. The most pertinent and reliable data are those for the years 1977 to 1984. During that eight-year period the annual average landed harvest was estimated to have been 220 animals.

The combined estimated annual landed harvest of belukhas from the Bering population, made in Soviet, Canadian, and American waters is 415.

Total Kills

It is extremely difficult to estimate the total annual kill of belukhas based on the landed catch. Losses depend on a great number of variables including the environmental circumstances under which whales are taken, methods of capture, location of hunting activity, attitudes and capabilities of the hunters, and behavior of whales. Loss rates range from zero when whales are taken with nets to very high when they are shot in narrow leads during their northward spring migration or in deep open waters during summer. Some authors have indicated the causes of hunting loss and/or suggestions for reducing it (Hunt 1976, 1977, 1979; Fraker 1980).

Though it may not be precise, a reasonable estimate of total kills, including whales landed and those struck and lost by rifle fire, is necessary in order to estimate the probable impact of harvesting on the population of whales as a whole. As was true for determinations of the landed harvest, the various sources of information are subject to different interpretations.

Estimates of the proportion of belukhas killed but not retrieved in the western Canadian Arctic vary considerably. Hunt (1976, 1979) estimated that 40% of the whales killed were not landed. Fraker (1980) estimated that loss at 33%, while Finley et al. (1983) indirectly indicated that it was about 57%, or an estimated 300 whales killed per year with average annual landings of 130.

We have chosen to use the estimate of 40%. On that basis, the average landing of 135 whales indicates a total kill of 225 in waters of northwestern Canada.

Table 20. Reported landings of belukha whales in the Mackenzie estuary, eastern Beaufort Sea.

Year	Number landed	Source of information	Year	Number landed	Source of information
1960	145	1	1971	82	2
1961	145	1	1972	120	2
1962	96	1	1973	177	2
1963	94	1	1974	122	3
1964	45	2	1975	142	3
1965	70	2	1976	154	3
1966	96	2	1977	140	3
1967	40	1	1978	121	3
1968	14	1	1979	120	4
1969	-	-	1980	90	4
1970	105+	2	1981	149	4

¹ Sergeant and Brodie 1975. Data presented by these authors are for the western Canadian Arctic. Lacking clarification, we have assigned them specifically to the Mackenzie estuary.

² Fraker et al. 1978.

³ Fraker 1980.

⁴ Fraker and Fraker 1982.

Table 21. Reported or estimated landings of belukhas in western and northern Alaska (Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas) from 1963 to 1984.¹

Year	Number landed	Source of information	Year	Number landed	Source of information
1963	225	2	1974	-	-
1964	225	2	1975	-	-
1965	225	2	1976	-	-
1966	225	2	1977	247	4
1967	225	2	1978	177	4
1968	150	3	1979	138	4
1969	170	3	1980	249	4
1970	200	3	1981	205	4
1971	250	3	1982	331	4
1972	180	3	1983	231	4
1973	150	3	1984	170	4

¹ When a range in the probable landed kill was indicated in the original data source, the mean of that range has been used in this table.

² Burns, J. J., Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, unpublished.

³ Seaman and Burns 1981.

⁴ Data obtained during this study.

In eastern Canada, Orr and Richard (1985) reported on some aspects of the belukha hunts in Cumberland Sound in 1982 to 1984. Hunting was mainly unorganized in that boats mostly operated independently. Hunting efficiency, as reported by these authors may have relevance to similarly conducted hunts in other regions. Orr and Richard (ibid.) made one statement that was difficult for us to interpret. They said (p. 3) that, "All the dead whales observed by DFP personnel, were buoyant and it is therefore unlikely that any were lost due to sinking." Their reference apparently was to a hunt on 21 July 1982 when 19 belukhas were landed. However, it was interspersed with more general comments about hunting methods. In our experience, whales that sink before being harpooned or speared, would not be seen unless they were subsequently grappled, or floated to the surface, usually a day or more after death. An assumption that no whales are lost due to sinking is questionable. Though Orr and Richard (op. cit.) reported the number of belukhas landed during each hunt they monitored, ancillary information about whales sunk, or that escaped after being wounded, was only mentioned in relation to five hunting forays made in August 1984. During those hunts (16, 18, 21, 23, and 25 August) an estimated 36 to 38 whales were struck by rifle fire. Of those struck, 11 were landed, 1 was known to have been killed and sunk, and 24 to 26 were wounded and escaped. Using values of 37 whales struck and 25 wounded but having escaped, 29.7% of the struck whales were landed, 2.7% were known to have been killed and sunk, and 67.6% were hit but escaped. Fate of belukhas in the latter category was, of course, unknown.

In Alaska, belukhas are mainly taken either in spring, as they migrate northward through the ice, or during the months of open water when they are mostly herded into shallows and killed. We have no additional information that alters our previous conclusions (Seaman and Burns 1981) of loss rates associated with these two types of hunting. The loss rate for hunts conducted at the land-fast ice edge is estimated at about 60% of the animals struck. That, associated with whale drives, is estimated at 20%. The average annual landed harvest of 220 in 1977 to 1984 is considered to have been comprised of 30% taken at the land-fast ice edge and 70% taken in shallow water. Thus, the average annual kill in western and northern Alaska is estimated to approximate about 360 belukhas per year. That estimate is high for years when landings include a significant number of whales caught in nets. In order not to underestimate losses, we have included such whales as being part of the catch taken by driving.

It appears that the Soviet harvest is mainly taken in April-May. We assume that conditions are similar to those in Alaska for hunts at the land-fast ice edge, where losses are estimated to be 60% of the whales killed. If so, an annual average harvest of 60 belukhas represents a kill of 150.

Based on the comments above, we conclude that the estimated total kill of belukhas from the Bering population, made in waters of the U.S.S.R., Canada, and the U.S.A. is on the order of 735 per year.

It has been obvious to all observers of belukha hunts conducted at the edge of land-fast ice that a considerable reduction of losses can be achieved; particularly by improving hunting methods of the less traditional, inexperienced, younger-aged hunters.

Size of the Bering Population

At present, there are no quantitatively verified estimates of total size of this population of belukhas. Burns (1984) indicated that, at a minimum, it probably included 25,000 to 30,000 animals. That minimum estimate was based primarily on numbers of whales that occur in coastal waters of western North America during months of open water and on information about distribution in other parts of the Bering-Chukchi region during those months.

During summer, in Soviet coastal waters of Bering Sea, belukhas have been reported to occur from south of Karaginskii Island to Mechigmen Gulf in western Bering Strait. The center of summer abundance in Soviet waters of Bering Sea appears to be in the region of the northern Gulf of Anadyr from Kresta Bay to Providenia Bay where they apparently stay or periodically occur throughout the summer (Kleinenberg et al. 1964).

As far as the Chukchi and East Siberian seas, several informants from Little Diomed Island (U.S.A.) informed the senior author that in former years when they traveled by skin boats to the settlements of Naukan and Uelen, near the northeast tip of the Chukchi Peninsula (up to 1946), belukhas were seen migrating northward and were occasionally taken in late July-early August. One of the apparent hunting sites was near the estuary between Uelen and Inchoun. According to Arsen'ev (1937, in Tomilin 1957) belukhas are reported to occur in coastal waters of the northern Chukchi Peninsula to a point as far west as Chaunskaya Guba in the East Siberian Sea. They have also been reported at Cape Schmidt in the East Siberian Sea (Arsen'ev 1939, in Kleinenberg et al. 1964). They are apparently numerous in the vicinity of Kolyuchinskaya Guba and Ostrov Vrangelya (Wrangel Island) (Kleinenberg et al. 1964).

Soviet investigators were the first to report that in summer these whales occur offshore as well as nearshore. Kleinenberg et al. (1964, p. 288) stated, "Observations from the air showed that the belukha is also found in summer at the edge of finely broken 4/10-5/10 ice and in polynyas, cracks, and leads in heavier pack ice of 9/10-10/10." The occurrence of belukhas in offshore waters during summer was also found to be the case in western North America (Davis and Evans 1982; this study).

Yablokov (1979) stated that there are no good census data from Soviet waters on which to base estimates of the size of various groups or populations. His approximate estimates of numbers include 1,000 to 2,000 in the East Siberian-Chukchi seas and 2,000 to 3,000 in Bering Sea. It is noteworthy that the 1985 entrapment in Proliv Senyavina, involved up to 3,000 belukhas.

In coastal waters of Alaska and northwest Canada, summer distribution of belukhas extends from Bristol Bay to Amundsen Gulf. The best available estimates of belukha abundance are for these waters and are as follows (see also Seaman et al. 1985).

In Bristol Bay, numbers of belukhas during summer have apparently remained about the same over many years. The estimates are of 1,000-1,500 animals (Brooks 1954b, 1955; Lensink 1961; Frost et al. 1984). At other locations

in Alaska the estimates are 1,000-2,000 in the Yukon River Delta to Norton Sound (Seaman et al. 1985; this study) and 2,500-3,000 along the Chukchi Sea coast from Kotzebue Sound to Point Barrow (Seaman et al. 1985; this study). The estimate of 1,000-2,000 for the Yukon River Delta-Norton Sound region is conservative. In mid-June 1956, more than 2,000 belukhas were present in and near the middle mouth of the Yukon River (R. A. Hinman, Alaska Dept. Fish and Game, Juneau, personal communication, 23 Feb. 1985). No assessments have been made in the region between Bristol Bay and the Yukon River Delta, though belukhas are there during summer. Thus, the number of belukhas in coastal waters of western Alaska during summer is minimally estimated at 4,500-6,500 animals.

Several aerial surveys have been undertaken in the eastern Beaufort Sea and Amundsen Gulf. Sergeant and Hoek (1974), based on preliminary surveys, estimated that there were 4,000 belukhas present in the Mackenzie Delta region. Subsequent estimates in the Mackenzie estuary were based on more extensive surveys, the results of which were published mainly by Fraker (1977, 1980) and Fraker and Fraker (1982). The more recent of these works placed the number of belukhas in the Mackenzie estuary at about 7,000, not including neonates. Davis and Evans (1982) considerably expanded the survey area beyond the Mackenzie estuary and found that the minimum number of whales in the eastern Beaufort and Amundsen Gulf was 11,500. Their methods of arriving at the estimate were very conservative. Without doubt, future efforts in the eastern Beaufort Sea-Amundsen Gulf region will result in significantly higher numbers of belukhas being accounted for.

Considering these various estimates, the minimum number of belukhas in coastal waters of Alaska, together with those in the eastern Beaufort-Amundsen Gulf region, during summer is on the order of 16,000 to 18,000.

Burns' (1984) estimate of a minimum population on the order of 25,000 to 30,000 belukhas for the Bering Sea population as a whole is based on the assumptions of 3,000-4,000 belukhas occurring in offshore waters of the western Beaufort, northern Chukchi, and East Siberian seas; 6,000-8,000 in Soviet coastal waters, including those around Wrangel Island; and 16,000-18,000, as indicated above, for Alaska and Canada. It is highly probable that the Bering-Chukchi population of these whales is larger than 30,000, though at this point such a statement is pure speculation.

The number of whales that summer in waters of North America extending from Bristol Bay to Amundsen Gulf, and from which Alaskan and Canadian hunters kill an annual average of 585, is a minimum of 16,000 to 18,000. Thus, 585 whales are removed by hunting (including whales landed as well as those struck and lost) from groups of whales that produce, in aggregate, a minimum of 1,680 to 1,890 calves per year. Size of the Bering population, as a whole, is significantly larger than 16,000 to 18,000 animals.

Population Discreteness

The implicit assumption throughout this report is that belukhas in the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort, and eastern part of the East Siberian seas and Amundsen Gulf are a single genetic population. This population winters in the ice-covered regions of the Bering Sea and, severity of winter ice conditions permitting, into the southern Chukchi Sea. During summer and

early autumn, the seasonal range is greatly expanded, as indicated in several previous sections. The wide summer distribution includes nearshore waters, more distant waters in the Beaufort and western Chukchi seas, as well as the ice fringe and "front" north to (and perhaps into) the consolidated pack.

On an annual basis, there is great variability in numbers of whales and the duration of their occurrence in coastal areas, as indicated by our work in Norton Sound, Kotzebue Sound, and Kasegaluk Lagoon. This was also found to be the case in Bristol Bay (Brooks 1955), the Mackenzie estuary (Slaney 1975, Fraker 1980), and the Kara Sea (Tomilin 1957).

Recently, several authors have urged the recognition of separate summer aggregations of belukhas as constituting different stocks (Fraker 1980; Finley et al. 1982; Braham 1984). However, Yablokov (1979, p. 18) indicated that, "Very possibly, animals from Anadyr Bay (Bering Sea) belong (or are more closely connected) to the northern population." Such a view would be in agreement with reports of northward-migrating belukhas near Naukan and Uelen in July-August, seen in former times by Eskimos from Little Diomedede Island. The most significant aspect of stock discreteness is whether or not the summer aggregations of whales that occur in coastal waters comprise different, reproductively isolated groups (populations). For the Bering population, that question will not be definitively answered until the annual movements and interactions among the different aggregations are known.

From our perspective, all of the available information supports the view that belukhas of the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort, and eastern part of the East Siberian seas are of a single, interbreeding population.

Biological parameters we have examined show similarity in the whales from Bristol Bay to the Mackenzie Delta. It is clear that these whales winter in the Bering Sea. The majority of them pass through the narrow confines of Bering Strait during both the spring and autumn migrations. Extensive intermingling is suggested by the occasional sightings of huge aggregations such as those reported by Fedoseev (in Kleinenberg 1964) and Ray et al. (1984) and our observations in the region generally north of Point Barrow. Breeding probably occurs earlier in spring than was formerly thought, at a time when these belukhas are in Bering Sea or just beginning the spring migration. There are no natural barriers to prevent intermingling during the breeding period or at other times of the year.

Belukhas are known to also form huge aggregations. Dorofeev and Klumov (1935a) reported the largest of which we are aware; no less than 10,000 animals in the Gulf of Sakhalin (Okhotsk Sea) during mid-June.

Our review of what is known about the seasonal movements, distribution, and biology of belukhas throughout their range suggests to us that different populations, in the traditional sense, are not necessarily represented by geographically separated summer aggregations. Different populations of belukhas are those for which the array of seasonal habitats, particularly those occupied in late winter-early spring, are separate. There can be both large and small, discrete populations. That appears to be the situation in Alaska with respect to the small (300-500 animals) Cook Inlet population and the much larger Bering population.

Physiography of the Bering-Chukchi region, as habitat for belukha whales and some other ice-associated marine mammals of the northern hemisphere, is unique. The region is very large. Extensive heavy ice conditions that preclude overwintering, mostly prevail north of the confines of Bering Strait. Favorable ice conditions occur, to varying degrees, south of the Strait. Species that winter in the seasonally ice-covered regions of Bering Sea have access to extensive summer ranges within the Bering Sea as well as the broader areas including the Chukchi, Beaufort, and part of the East Siberian seas. Species that exhibit seasonal movement patterns somewhat similar to those of belukhas in this region include spotted (*Phoca largha*), ribbon (*Phoca fasciata*), and bearded (*Erignathus barbatus*) seals, bowhead whales, and Pacific walruses. Pacific walruses exhibit a high degree of segregation during summer, with disjunct aggregations occurring at several locations along the Soviet and American coasts. Additionally, nearly all females and young summer in the Chukchi Sea and nearly all adult males in the Bering Sea (Fay et al. 1984).

Behavior

Because of the focus of our study, relatively little information about behavior of belukhas was obtained; thus, this section is mainly a discussion of information in reports and published literature.

Duration and Depth of Dives

As indicated by Ridgway et al. (1984), belukhas are not generally considered to be deep-diving animals, perhaps because of their abundance in relatively shallow coastal waters. Dhindsa et al. (1974) measured the respiratory characteristics of blood from belukhas maintained in captivity. They found a high blood oxygen capacity (25.8 vol.%) though they did not comment on the diving capabilities of belukhas. Ridgway et al. (op. cit.) measured blood characteristics of two active belukhas maintained in excellent physical condition. Blood oxygen capacities ($Hb \times 1.34$) were similar to, but slightly higher than reported by Dhindsa et al. (op. cit.); being 28.0 and 27.2 vol.% for a juvenile male and an adult female, respectively. Mean hematocrits were 52.6% and 52.2% for the male and female.

Additionally, Ridgway et al. (1984) provided the most rigorous information about depth of dives, using the two animals for which blood characteristics were determined. The whales were trained to dive in the open ocean. During their experiments, the belukhas remained submerged as long as 15 min 50 s and the adult female dove as deep as 647 m.

Frost et al. (1985) monitored two radio-tagged belukhas in comparatively shallow areas of Bristol Bay, Alaska. A subadult male remained submerged for a maximum of 5 min 56 s and mean duration of its dives was 2.09 min. An adult female dove for a maximum of 2 min 8 s. Percent of time at the surface was found to be 3.8 and 34.7 for the male and female respectively.

Dorofeev and Klumov (1935a) reported that belukhas normally dive for 1 to 1.5 min and up to 3 min when alarmed. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) indicated that these whales can remain under water for 15 to 20 min. Hill (1967; 1968) reported maximum dive time of an entrapped belukha to have been 7 min

25 s though he also indicated that the last surviving whale at an entrapment was absent for up to 40 min. Hay and McClung (1976) reported the duration of dives (presumably all in shallow water) to average only 52 s.

Swimming Speed

Swimming speed of belukhas was reported by Dorofeev and Klumov (1935a) to be 3 to 5 knots (5.6 to 9.3 km/h) when undisturbed and up to 7 knots (13 km/h) when disturbed. Ray et al. (1984) reported that whales with young swam at the rate of 2.3 km/h and traveling groups (without young?) moved at 7 km/h. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) indicated that belukhas swim at 5-6 km/h with a maximum speed of 20 km/h. Ridgway et al. (1984) determined swimming speeds during commanded dives for an immature male and an adult female belukha. The male descended at an average rate of 8.2 km/h and ascended at 8.1 km/h; speeds for the female were 7.2 and 8.2 km/h respectively. Frost et al. (1985) reported a movement of 30 km in 6 h for a juvenile, radio-tagged male, an average of 5 km/h. They also reported regular daily movements by belukhas of 100 to 150 km.

Feeding

Feeding activity of belukhas while they are in estuaries and river mouths has been a point of considerable discussion. Sergeant (1973) suggested that the main advantage of the use of estuarine habitats during summer derives from the thermal advantages of warmer waters to neonates. He indicated that belukhas feed very little while in estuaries. In Alaskan waters, the occurrence of belukhas in rivers and estuaries is usually strongly associated with seasonal concentrations of fish, and the whales prey extensively on them. Bristol Bay is the best-studied location (Brooks 1954a-1957; Lensink 1961; Frost et al. 1983; Lowry et al. 1985). In that region, belukhas enter the estuaries and rivers as early as March and remain through July. They feed intensively on seaward-migrating smelt (Osmerus mordax) in March to May, on seaward-migrating sockeye salmon smolt in May-June, and on returning adult salmon, mainly sockeye, during June-July.

In the Yukon River and Norton Sound, belukhas arrive as soon as ice conditions permit, usually in late May or early June. Here, according to local residents, they also feed extensively on smelt, on the huge spawning concentrations of herring (Clupea harengus pallasii), and different species of salmon. Lowry et al. (1985) found that near Norton Bay, in June, belukhas had been feeding on herring, saffron cod (Eleginus gracilis), and various sculpins.

Aspects of belukha food habits, particularly in the Kotzebue Sound area, are discussed in great detail by Lowry et al. (1985). Of interest here is that the intensity of recent feeding by whales taken in Eschscholtz Bay during June was highly variable among years. Based on our sampling at that location, they were regularly feeding. In most years feeding apparently occurred in Kotzebue Sound, some hours prior to the whales' entering the confines of Eschscholtz Bay. Volumes of food remains in stomachs were relatively small and well digested. However, June 1982 was the exception in that belukhas were observed to be actively feeding within Eschscholtz

Bay and the volume of fresh food remains in stomachs, from which we collected subsamples, was consistently much greater than during previous years. Thus, it appears that the whales actively feed while in coastal waters of Kotzebue Sound and that whether or not they feed while in Eschscholtz Bay is a function of prey abundance (as it probably is at other nearshore locations).

The age at which young belukhas begin to feed independently, is not well known. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) reported the different opinions of various investigators and stated, ". . . we agree with the majority of authors that the lactation period lasts about half a year." The timing of our collections was such that we have no samples of first year animals between the birth period (when neonates are nursing) and about 1 year. A 12-month-old whale taken in Eschscholtz Bay had been feeding on saffron cod and remains of 26 such fishes were in its stomach (Lowry, personal communication).

Occurrence in Estuaries and Rivers

Nearshore movements in the lower (tidally influenced) reaches of rivers and confined estuaries are usually closely correlated with the ebb and flow of tides (see discussion of hunting in Eschscholtz Bay). Belukhas normally move into the confined estuaries and river mouths on incoming tides and return seaward during the ebb (Arsen'ev 1939; Vladykov 1944; Brooks 1954a; Lensink 1961; Kleinenberg et al. 1964; Frost et al. 1983; and numerous others).

These whales are known to ascend major rivers to a considerable distance upstream. Numerous occurrences were summarized by Kleinenberg et al. (1964). Yablokov (1979) stated that, at present, small schools of belukhas enter all large Siberian rivers. In the Yukon River of Alaska they were reported as far upstream as Nulato, 729 km by river from the sea (Nelson and True 1887). In mid-June 1982, five belukhas were reported near Tanana, 1,119 km from the mouth of the Yukon (B. Lentsch, personal communication) and a few days later a single whale was seen 18 miles above Rampart, at a location 1,257 km from the sea (P. Wakefield, personal communication). Other past occurrences of these whales in fresh water are indicated by Alaska place names including two different Beluga lakes, Beluga River, and Beluga Slough (Orth 1971).

Disturbance by Noise

Tolerance of non-lethal disturbance by cetaceans has proven very difficult to evaluate if only because of the difficulties of conducting controlled experiments on free-ranging whales. As Reeves et al. (1984) point out, under normal field conditions there are many problems involved in relating behavioral responses to acoustical stimuli.

There are most certainly great differences in potential for harmful effects between short-term, minor modification of behaviors such as group formation, position, swimming speed, dive time, or breathing rates, as compared to displacement from advantageous habitats, disruption of migration and movement routes, significant interruption of feeding opportunities, or other important vital functions.

As has been implied in this report as well as in all studies based on sampling of belukhas at traditional, nearshore hunting locations, the most intensive kind of repetitive disturbance is hunting. In spite of it, belukhas mostly continue to return to favored bays, estuaries, and rivers throughout their range. However, there have been changes in activity patterns, duration of use of favored areas, and tolerance to human-caused sounds.

Several recent reports deal with responses of belukhas to noise. Fraker (1977) observed that belukhas move away from approaching tug and barge traffic. In one instance, he found that a large group of belukhas being observed responded by rapidly swimming away from such vessels at a distance of 2.4 km. Scattering of these whales was still evident 3 h after the incident, but by 30 h they had resumed a normal distribution near their original location. As Mansfield (1983) pointed out, reaction of whales in the incident reported by Fraker (ibid.) was initiated at a distance far less than the estimated maximum perception range of sounds from the tugboat. Fraker (op. cit.) also found that belukhas reacted more to moving as opposed to stationary sound sources and that frequent tug and barge traffic impeded the movement of belukhas in that they did not move along their normal travel route until vessel activity temporarily ceased.

With respect to stationary sources of noise, McCarty (1981) reported that in Cook Inlet, Alaska belukhas, including females and calves, passed as close as 10 m to active oil production platforms. Further, belukhas seemed not to be affected by constant noise but showed a temporary avoidance reaction to sudden changes of noise levels.

Stewart et al. (1982, 1983) reported on results of their studies in the Bristol Bay region. They found that responses of belukhas to noise were strongly affected by both the activity of whales and the habitat in which noise occurred. Their work was in the Snake River and Nushagak Bay. The strongest reactions of belukhas were to sounds of outboard motors and, regardless of behavior before outboard motor noises began, whales immediately swam downriver. Similar flight responses were elicited by outboard noise in the bay though not to noises emanating from larger inboard-powered fishing and processing vessels. These authors also found that belukhas responded more to sudden noise disturbance than to constant noise. Feeding and traveling activity of whales was not greatly affected by play-back sounds of oil drilling activities and whales passed close to hydrophones while such sounds were being broadcast. Thomas and Kastelein (1983) found that captive belukhas quickly acclimated to sounds of oil drilling activities played at typical sound levels.

Tolerance to disturbance by human activities seems highly variable and it is difficult to make any generalizations, except that in Alaska, displacement of belukhas seems to occur to a greater degree in regions where the variety of man-caused intrusions includes active hunting. This suggests a degree of habituation, or lack thereof, associated with experience. Significant hunting only occurs in western and northern Alaska.

In Cook Inlet, belukhas seasonally occur close to the busy seaport of Anchorage and in the mouths of larger rivers where small boat traffic is heavy.

In the Bristol Bay region the whales likewise frequent rivers where fishing vessel traffic is especially heavy and parts of the bay where actual fishing effort is intense. Entanglement in salmon gillnets occurs and has already been discussed.

The situation north of Bristol Bay is apparently far more complex. Belukhas are hunted by coastal residents whenever the whales are available. In the Kuskokwim Bay region local residents consider the whales to be easily frightened by outboard-powered small boats, low-flying aircraft, and other loud noises. They indicate that whales still frequent Kuskokwim Bay but are far less tractable (in the sense that they can be herded) than during the days prior to the advent of high-powered outboard motors. That same opinion is shared by whalers of the Yukon Delta, Norton Sound, and Kotzebue Sound (Seaman and Burns 1981).

The experiences of whalers that hunt in and near Eschscholtz Bay have led them to conclude that disturbance of belukhas by small boat traffic and low-flying aircraft often keeps the whales from entering the bay. As a result, an agreement among the hunters and with local aircraft operators, in effect when whales are known to be present, restricts such traffic to times that coincide with low tide. The whalers are very aware that belukhas normally enter Eschscholtz Bay a few hours after the tide begins to rise. Sergeant and Brodie (1975) referred to excessive hunting or boat traffic near an Eskimo settlement in eastern Canada as a possible cause for a shift in whale distribution.

Eskimo lore also indicates differences in tolerance levels of belukhas in the pack ice. Whales passing through narrow leads or other small openings in the ice are said to be easily frightened by hunters. Those whales in large openings or wide leads reportedly often move at a more leisurely speed and frequently stop, mill about, or remain at the surface for longer periods of time. It would seem that the more confined openings increase both the risk of whales to predation by polar bears and the "alertness" of older, experienced whales in conditions that place them at high risk.

In western Alaska there is a generally held belief that the modernization of coastal communities, with all of the associated noises (generators, heavy equipment, airplanes, snow machines, outboard motors, etc.) and odors, is presently causing belukha whales and other marine mammals to pass communities at a greater distance from shore and to partially abandon traditionally favored sites now in close proximity to settlements. Sheshalik (= Sesualik and other dialectal variants of Inupiat), adjacent to the large community of Kotzebue is a location where belukhas, though still present, no longer remain in large numbers for long periods of time during summer. This geographic place name means a location where belukhas (sisuaq) congregate. Effects of such displacement are unknown. It seems probable that such avoidance responses are beneficial to the whales in that they are less exposed to hunting. As more information about belukhas has accumulated, it seems likely that such vital functions as successful birth and nurture of calves can occur beyond the coastal zone. Displacement from estuarine waters where whales are intensively hunted may not have an overall, adverse effect on the whale population if suitable habitat in other areas remains available.

Conversely, from a homocentric perspective, such displacement has a negative impact on subsistence users of belukhas and on opportunities for people to observe and study these whales.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH NEEDS

Some conclusions we have drawn from this study are based either on limited data, or extensions of available information to geographic areas for which adequate data are not available. There are many information needs about belukhas in general and about the Bering Sea population in particular. Those we find to be most pressing are as follows.

1. At present, there is no information about the reproductive biology of belukhas during late winter-early spring. Therefore, duration and peak of the breeding period is not adequately known. Appropriate biological samples may be difficult to obtain because most belukhas are taken in late spring-early summer. However, it may be possible for investigators that work in waters adjacent to Greenland to sample entrapped whales that are taken by hunters during February to April.
2. The summer distribution of belukhas within and along the ice front zone of the Chukchi, Beaufort, and eastern East Siberian seas should be determined. A substantial portion of the Bering Sea population may occur in that habitat at the same time that whales occur in coastal waters in greatest numbers.
3. The number of belukhas that occur in Soviet coastal waters of the Bering, Chukchi, and East Siberian seas during summer, is unknown and should be studied. In a preliminary way, this could be accomplished through carefully designed aerial survey efforts.
4. The extent of segregation and perhaps habitat partitioning by belukhas, based on age, sex, and reproductive status is not known. These can be studied by sampling whales at different times during the prolonged spring migration or at entrapments that may occur in the same region at different times during winter and spring.
5. Relationships among different summer aggregations of belukhas in waters of northwestern North America and northeastern Asia are not known, though we suggest that they are all part of a single Bering Sea population. The extent of interchange during summer and of intermingling while whales are in Bering Sea during winter-early spring, can be studied with the aid of radiotelemetry techniques. Application of radio tags should be done as soon as possible.
6. Monitoring of annual harvests, at least on an intermittent basis, should be undertaken to determine magnitude and variation as well as extent of hunting loss, composition of harvested animals, and the biological parameters (particularly those relating to productivity) that can be determined by sampling harvested whales.
7. No systematic effort has yet been made to determine the regional distribution and abundance of belukhas in Bering Sea, during winter. It is probable that areas of high whale abundance do occur, perhaps

regularly. The need for information about stock identity and about whale distribution in relation to proposed offshore petroleum development, warrant initiation of efforts to determine winter-early spring distribution and relative abundance.

8. In the Chukchi Sea, incidences of ice entrapment during spring migration appear to be closely correlated with weather during March to mid-May. Assessment of entrapment as a source of direct mortality, and as a factor contributing to increased predation by polar bears should be attempted on an opportunistic basis.
9. Food habits of belukhas in waters beyond the coastal zone are not known and should be studied. It is recognized that such an undertaking would require an ability to respond to opportunistic situations involving belukhas killed by polar bears or at occasional entrapments.
10. Size of the Bering Sea population of belukhas is not known. It is recognized that several preliminary studies must be undertaken before a broad-based aerial census will be feasible. Such preliminary undertakings are indicated as items 2, 3, and 5 (above).
11. Annual variability and magnitude of the incidental catch of belukhas associated with the Bristol Bay salmon fishery should be determined. Preliminary studies indicate that such mortality may be substantial in some years.

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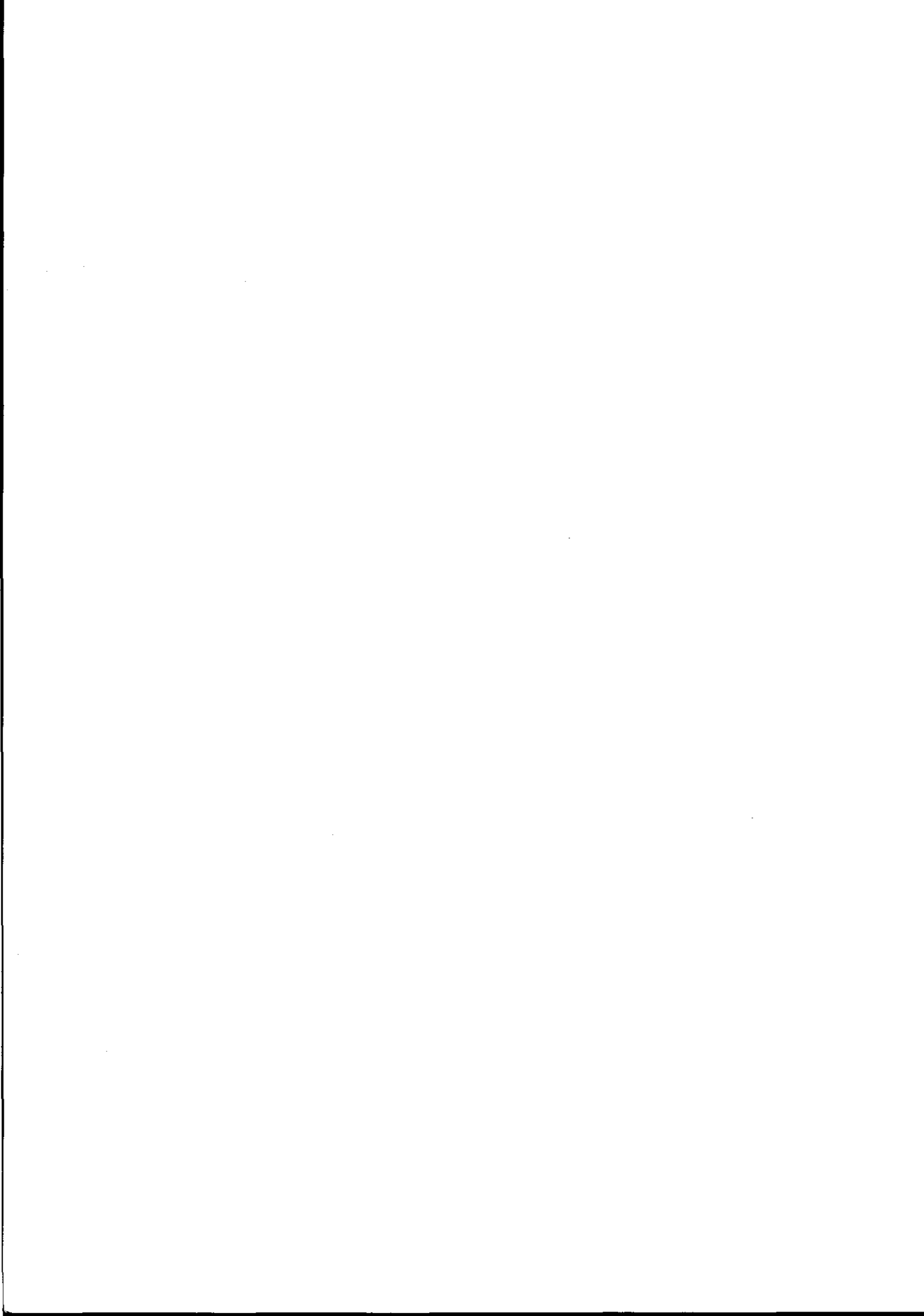
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of Western and Northern Alaska.

III. Food Habits

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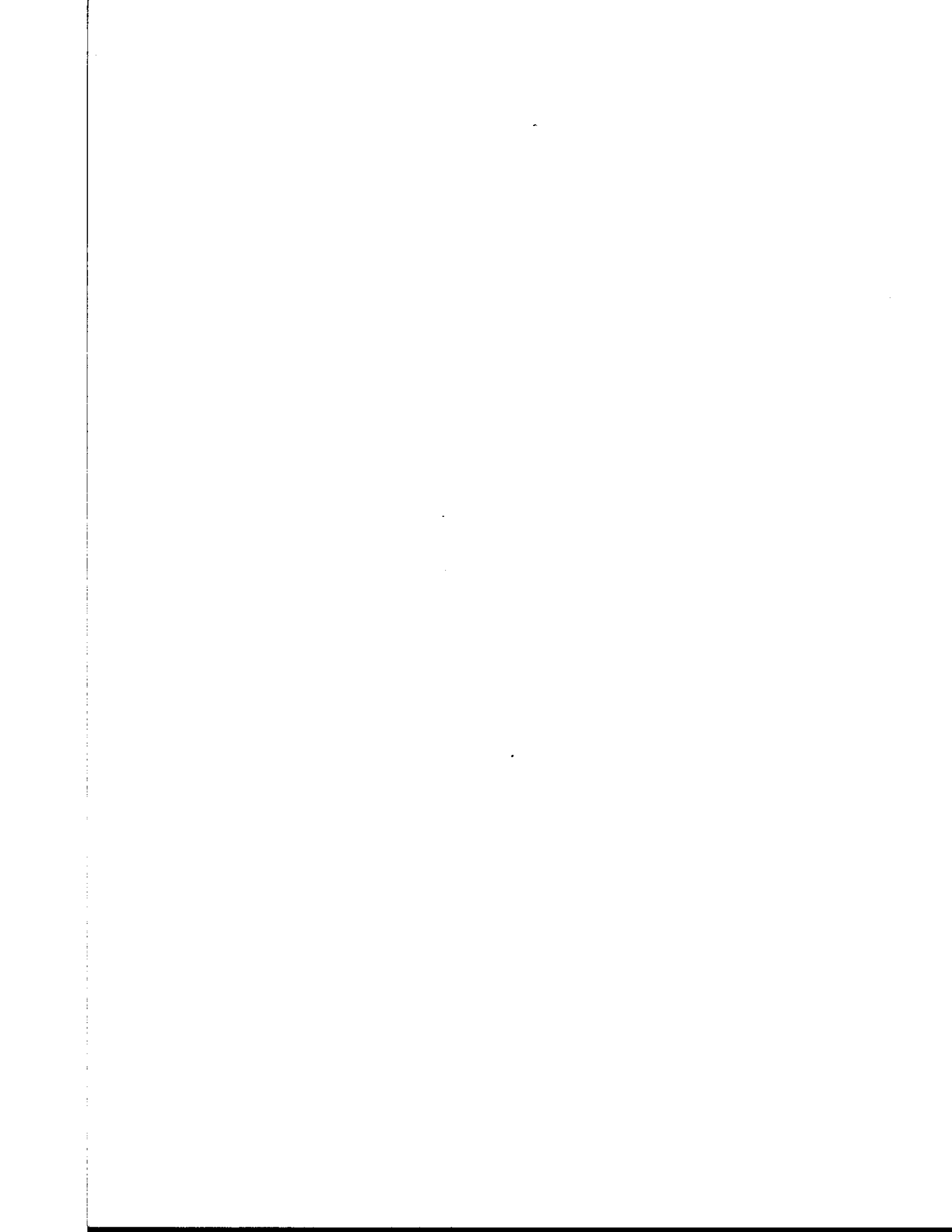
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SUMMARY

The stomachs of 242 belukha whales from the Bering and Chukchi seas were examined. Of those, 141 contained food remains. Foods eaten during the spring migration in the Chukchi Sea included arctic cod, shrimps, and octopus. In coastal areas of the northern Bering and Chukchi seas summer foods were saffron cod, sculpins, herring, smelt, capelin, char, shrimps, squid, and octopus. Primary foods in Bristol Bay were salmon and smelt. No samples are available from autumn or winter. During those seasons it is probable that pollock are the main prey in the southeastern and southcentral Bering Sea, while saffron cod and arctic cod are major foods in more northern areas.

In Eschscholtz Bay young belukhas ate smaller saffron cod than did older animals, and males ate proportionately more sculpins than did females.

Belukha whales are large animals and where they are abundant they will consume substantial quantities of fishes. In the Kvichak River in 1983, belukha predation accounted for 5% of the red salmon smolt outmigration, 1% of the commercial catch of red salmon, and 9% of the commercial catch of other salmon species. Prey eaten by belukhas are similar to those eaten by several other marine mammals species, and harvested by commercial fisheries. Competition for food with other marine mammals and fisheries may influence population size and productivity of belukhas.

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INTRODUCTION

The belukha whale (Delphinapterus leucas) is a major component of the marine mammal fauna of Alaskan waters. It is the only ice-associated small cetacean commonly found in Alaska and as such occupies areas in which the mammal fauna is dominated by pinnipeds. Although the foods utilized by belukha whales in some parts of their range have been described in detail (e.g., Vladykov 1946; Kleinenberg et al. 1964), the only significant recent information on foods utilized in Alaskan waters is from studies in inner Bristol Bay (summarized in Lensink 1961). As part of a comprehensive investigation of the trophic relationships of marine mammals in the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas, we have obtained and examined samples of the stomach contents of belukha whales taken by Eskimo subsistence hunters. In addition, we have obtained some specimens from animals killed in fishing nets or dead from natural causes.

An understanding of the trophic relationships of this species is important for at least two reasons. First, major developments such as oil and gas exploration will soon occur in coastal and offshore waters of Alaska. Such development is presently underway in the Mackenzie River delta in Canada, an important part of the belukha whale's range. If potential effects of such development are to be fully assessed, an understanding of the food web of which belukhas are a part must be achieved. Second, management of marine mammals based on ecosystem concepts is mandated by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Carrying capacity, defined as the maximum number of animals of a given species which the environment can support, is one such concept. Since major food resources are always shared by more than one consumer, carrying capacity in terms of food is not a single species parameter, but rather is related to the characteristics of all species which share the resource base. In order to understand the complex and dynamic nature of carrying capacity, the types of foods utilized by major consumers must be documented.

The results of our analysis of belukha whale stomach contents have been reported in part elsewhere (Lowry et al. 1981a, b; Seaman et al. 1982). In this report we present the results of all specimens examined from the initiation of this study in 1977 through the summer of 1982.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Most belukha stomachs were obtained from whales taken in Eskimo subsistence harvests at various sites in the northern Bering and Chukchi seas from 1977 through 1981. One stomach was obtained from an animal that was accidentally caught in a fishing net and two were from animals found dead on or near shore. Sex was determined for each animal sampled by examination of the genital slit. Age determinations were based on counts of dentinal growth layers in thin longitudinal sections of mandibular teeth (Burns and Seaman 1985).

Stomachs were collected whole or slit longitudinally and the contents removed. In some instances when stomachs contained small amounts of a single type of prey, the contents were examined and quantified in the

field. In all other stomachs the contents were preserved in a 10% formalin solution for later analysis. Stomachs of animals taken in Eschscholtz Bay in 1982 were very full, and we collected only subsamples that ranged in volume from 10 to about 900 ml.

In the laboratory, stomach contents were gently washed on a 1.0-mm mesh sieve. Components of the stomach contents were identified using appropriate keys and reference specimens and sorted to the lowest possible taxonomic level. The water displacement volume of each invertebrate taxon and of all fish material combined was determined. The number of fishes of each taxon consumed was estimated based on identification and counts of characteristic hard parts, particularly otoliths. For major prey species, a sample of otoliths that did not appear degraded was measured from each stomach (maximum length to 0.1 mm). The lower crest length of octopus beaks was measured (Clarke 1962) to the nearest 0.1 mm. These measurements were used to estimate lengths and weights of fishes and weights of octopus consumed using relationships determined from intact fishes and octopus collected in the Bering and Chukchi seas (Table 1).

We present our findings in three ways: (1) the percent of the total volume of stomach contents which was composed of a particular type of item (percent volume) was used for invertebrate taxa and all fish material in aggregate; (2) the percent of the total number of identified fishes represented by each taxon (percent number) for fish taxa; (3) the percent of all stomachs in a sample which contained each particular item (percent frequency) for all items.

RESULTS

Stomachs from a total of 242 whales were examined, of which 141 contained food remains. Three were from whales found dead in northeastern Bristol Bay, three were from whales taken at Elim in Norton Sound, and the remainder were from four locations along the Chukchi Sea coast (Figure 1). Samples were collected during the months of April-July.

A minimum of 18 species of invertebrates and 13 species of fishes were identified from the stomach contents (Table 2). The greatest variety of prey (minimum of 19 species) was found at Eschscholtz Bay, the area from which the largest number of stomachs was collected.

The volume of contents in stomachs we examined ranged from a few milliliters to over 5 liters. The great majority of stomachs contained less than 500 ml of food, usually consisting of bones and otoliths from fishes, beaks from cephalopods, carapaces from crustaceans, and inorganic material, particularly pebbles and sand.

The stomach of the belukha caught in a salmon net in Kvichak Bay in May 1980 contained remains of 70 rainbow smelt (490 ml), 2 flatfish (77 ml), and 10 shrimp (13 ml). On 29 June 1982 we found a subadult male belukha floating in the Snake River (Nushagak Bay) approximately 3 km upstream from the river mouth. The animal was freshly dead and was spewing remains of red salmon. In the stomach were remains of four

Table 1. Regression equations used to estimate sizes of prey consumed by belukha whales (from Frost and Lowry 1981a and unpublished).

Prey Item	Otolith length range (mm)	Regression Equation
<u>Eleginus gracilis</u> (saffron cod)	< 8.5 > 8.5 --	fish length (cm) = 1.740 (otolith length (mm)) - 0.090 fish length = 2.323 (otolith length) - 4.839 fish weight (gms) = 0.0050 (fish length (cm)) ³ .095
Family Cottidae (sculpins)	all --	fish length = 4.009 (otolith length) - 4.364 fish weight = 0.0088 (fish length) ³ .038
<u>Oncorhynchus</u> ¹ <u>nerka</u> (red salmon)	all --	fish length = 8.635 (otolith length) + 17.723 fish weight = 0.00046 (fish length) ³ .776
<u>Octopus</u> sp.	--	octopus weight (gms) = 0.0281 (lower crest length (mm)) ³ .389

¹equations are preliminary based on measurements from 8 fishes

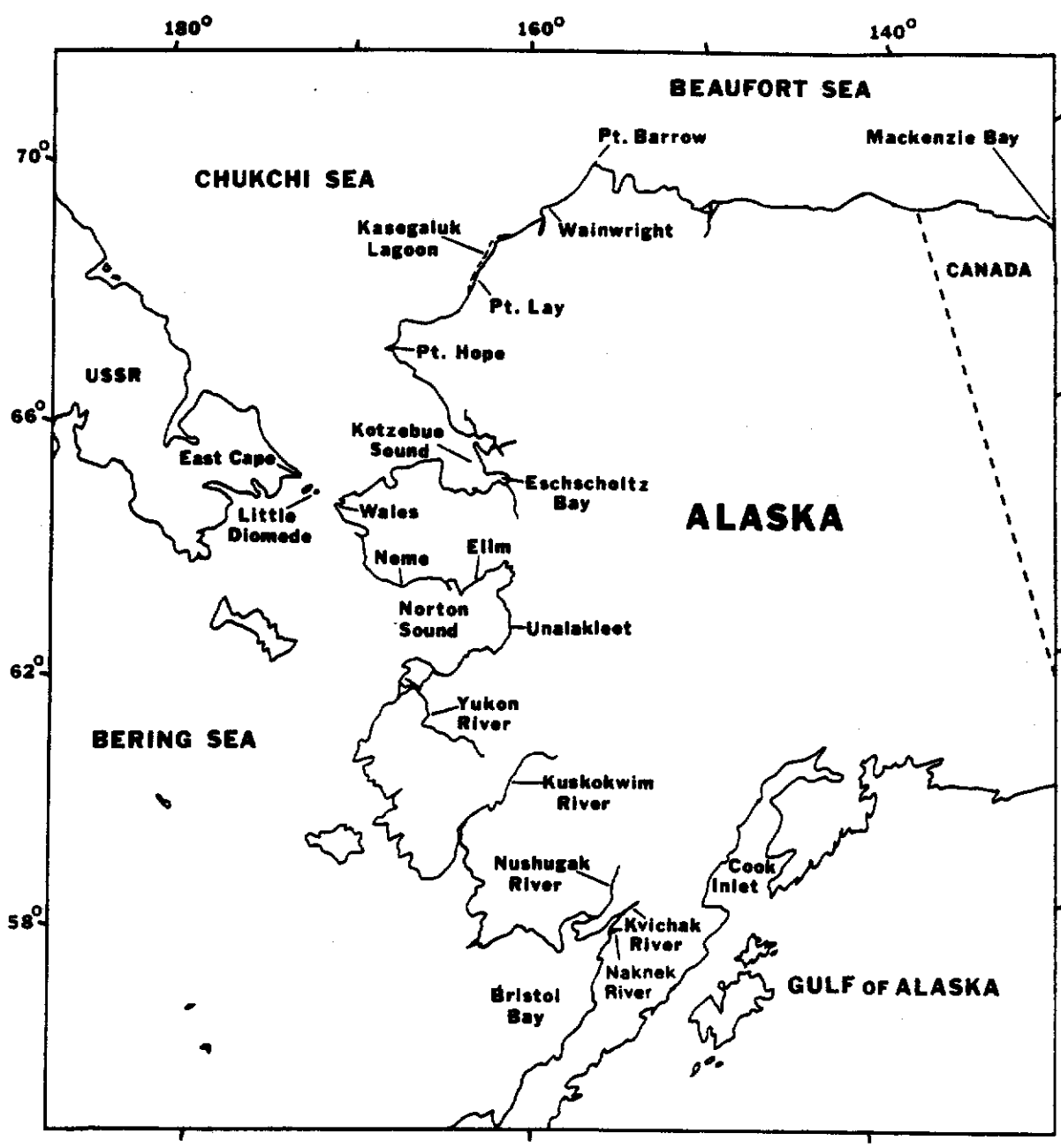


Figure 1. Map of Alaska showing major locations referred to in the text.

Table 2. Prey species identified from stomachs of belukha whales taken at 5 locations in western Alaska. Sample sizes indicated include only stomachs containing food remains.

TAXON	northeastern	Elim	Eschschooltz	Point Hope	Wainwright	Barrow
	Bristol Bay May-July n=3	June n=3	Bay June n=113	April-May n=18	July n=3	May n=1
CEPHALOPODS						
Family Gonatidae (squid)				X	X	
<u>Octopus</u> sp.			X	X	X	
SNAILS						
<u>Margarites</u> sp.				X		
<u>Polinices</u> sp.			X		X	
CLAMS (unidentified)			X			
MYSIDS						
<u>Mysis</u> sp.			X			
<u>Neomysis</u> sp.			X			
AMPHIPODS						
<u>Gammarus</u> sp.			X			
SHRIMPS						
<u>Argis</u> sp.				X		
<u>Crangon</u> sp.				X		
<u>Crangon septemspinosa</u>	X		X			
<u>Eualus</u> sp.				X		
HERMIT CRABS						
<u>Pagurus trigonochierus</u>				X		
ISOPODS						
<u>Saduria entomon</u>			X		X	
<u>Saduria sabini</u>			X			
ECHIUROID WORMS						
<u>Echiurus echiurus</u>				X		
POLYCHAETE WORMS (unidentified)			X			
TUNICATES (unidentified)			X			
FISHES						
<u>Boreogadus saida</u> (arctic cod)			X	X		X
<u>Catostomus catostomus</u> (sucker)			X			
<u>Clupea harengus</u> (Pacific herring)		X				X
<u>Coregonus</u> sp. (whitefish)			X			
<u>Eleginus gracilis</u> (saffron cod)		X	X		X	
Family Cottidae (sculpins)	X	X	X			
<u>Lycodes</u> sp. (eelpout)			X			
<u>Hypomesus olidus</u> (pond smelt)	X					
<u>Osmerus mordax</u> (rainbow smelt)	X		X		X	
Family Pleuronectidae (flatfish)	X					
<u>Pungitius pungitius</u> (stickleback)						X
<u>Oncorhynchus nerka</u> (sockeye salmon)	X					
<u>Salvelinus malma</u> (arctic char)			X			
PEBBLES		X	X	X		

salmon; based on sizes of otoliths, two of the fishes were 54.9 and 73.8 cm long and weighed approximately 1,715 and 5,240 g. On 1 July 1982 we located another subadult male belukha which had obviously been dead for several days. The carcass was above the high tide line about 10 km upstream from the mouth of the Snake River. In its stomach were a few fragments of a shrimp and otoliths from 68 rainbow smelt, 2 pond smelt, 7 sculpins, and 1 flatfish.

The stomach contents of three belukhas taken at Elim on 12 June 1977 were similar to one another and consisted of a combined total of 887 ml of partially digested fish and 381 ml of pebbles, mostly 2 cm or less in diameter. Fishes eaten by the three whales included at least 3,900 saffron cod, 55 sculpins, and 5 herring. Saffron cod eaten averaged 16.5 cm long (range 6.5-29.1 cm) and 40.0 g in weight (range 1.6-168.4 g); sculpins averaged 35.6 cm (range 22.9-51.0 cm) and 524.6 g (range 119.6-1,362.2 g).

We examined the stomach contents of 65 belukhas taken in Eschscholtz Bay in June 1978 (Table 3). Stomachs from three animals were empty; the remainder contained bones and otoliths of fishes, primarily saffron cod and sculpins, and small amounts of shrimp, isopods, snails, polychaetes, and octopus. Saffron cod eaten averaged 12.4 cm long (range 5.0-30.2 cm) and 17.7 g (range 0.7-188.9 g); sculpins averaged 22.5 cm (range 10.5-28.9 cm) and 131.7 g (range 11.2-242.5 g). In 1979 we examined the stomach contents of three whales taken between 16 and 23 June. Two were taken in Eschscholtz Bay and contained numerous saffron cod otoliths and traces of shrimp and snails. The third, taken near the village of Buckland (about 38 km up the Buckland River from Eschscholtz Bay), contained 5,810 ml of partially digested fish, most of which was the remains of 11 arctic char up to 50 cm long. Otoliths and bones representing 7 whitefish, 5 suckers, 50 sculpins, 22 smelt, and 1 arctic cod were also present. In June 1980 we examined the stomachs of 53 belukhas, 28 of which contained food remains. Food items identified were generally similar to previous years (Table 3). In comparison with 1978, whales taken in 1980 ate invertebrates, sculpins, and rocks less frequently and had eaten more rainbow smelt. In 1981 the stomachs of 11 whales taken on 15 June were examined. All of those stomachs were empty. In 1982, subsamples of stomach contents were collected from a sample of 20 whales. The animals had been actively feeding prior to being hunted and were observed feeding in the Bay again on the day after the hunt (Burns, field notes). Based on frequency of occurrence in the subsamples (Table 3) foods eaten were very similar to those found in previous years.

At Point Hope we examined the stomachs of 35 whales taken 22-27 May 1977 and 15 whales taken 25-26 April 1978. In 1977 30 stomachs were empty, and in 1978 six stomachs were empty. Stomachs of the whales taken in April 1978 contained mostly crangonid shrimp (Table 4). One stomach contained otoliths from 43 arctic cod. A total of 34 octopus beaks was found with a maximum of 15 in a single stomach. The animals examined in May 1977 contained almost exclusively octopus beaks and small pebbles. A total of 823 beaks was found with a maximum of 625 in a single stomach. Thirteen additional whales taken at Point Hope in 1979 and 1980 were examined. Stomachs of two of six taken on 6 and 8 May 1979 contained food in the stomach; one containing otoliths from three arctic

Table 3. Stomach contents of belukha whales collected in Eschscholtz Bay.

Prey Item	13-18 June 1978, n=62			16-24 June 1980, n=28			22-23 June 1982 n=20		
	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency
Shrimp	4	--	76	3	--	50			90
Isopod	6	--	34	1	--	14			35
Octopus	<1	--	52	<1	--	14			5
Other Invertebrate	<1	--	41	<1	--	29			40
TOTAL INVERTEBRATE	11	--	90	5	--	82			95
Rocks and Pebbles	1	--	66	<1	--	4			5
TOTAL FISHES	87	--	94	95	--	96			100
Saffron Cod	--	88	94	--	90	86			100
Sculpins	--	11	42	--	2	25			10
Rainbow Smelt	--	<1	29	--	7	39			55
Pacific Herring	--	<1	3	--	1	7			5
Eelpout	--	<1	2	--	--	--			--
Mean Volume of Contents (ml)			47.2		81.1	410.7 ¹			
Total Number Identified Fishes			4,346		434	1,250			

¹mean volume of subsamples

Table 4. Stomach contents of belukha whales collected at Point Hope.

Prey Item	22-27 May 1977, n=5			25-26 April 1978, n=9		
	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency
Shrimp	<1	--	20	99	--	67
Squid	0	--	0	<1	--	11
Octopus	75	--	100	<1	--	78
Other Invertebrate	<1	--	60	<1	--	11
TOTAL INVERTEBRATE	75	--	100	100	--	100
Rocks and Pebbles	25	--	40	<1	--	22
TOTAL FISHES	0	--	0	<1	--	11
Arctic Cod	--	0	0	--	100	11
Mean Volume of Contents (ml)	53.3			48.4		
Total Number Identified Fishes	0			43		

cod; the other, one octopus beak, one saffron cod otolith, and two small unidentifiable fishes. Two of seven taken on 19 May 1980 contained traces of food; one had only beaks of two octopus, the other had beaks from seven octopus and fragments of a shrimp, the operculum from a snail, and a small pebble.

Three of 20 belukhas we examined at Wainwright contained food. One taken 22 July 1976 contained beaks from three octopus and four gonatid squids (probably *Gonatopsis borealis*). Two whales taken on 18 July 1979 contained 12 partially digested rainbow smelt, otoliths from two saffron cod, and trace amounts of snails and isopods.

The stomach of a belukha taken 17 May 1979 at Barrow contained one intact nine-spined stickleback (3.2 cm long), two intact herring (6-7 cm long), and otoliths from two arctic cod.

The large sample of belukha stomachs collected from Eschscholtz Bay in 1978 was examined for age- and sex-related differences in foods. The components of the stomach contents of young and older whales were very similar (Table 5). The range in size of saffron cod eaten was also similar (Figure 2). However, only 8.6% (9/104) of the saffron cod eaten by young animals were over 15 cm in length while 27.0% (115/426) of the saffron cod eaten by older animals were longer than 15 cm. This difference is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 10.749$, $P < 0.01$).

The composition of the stomach contents of male and female belukhas was slightly different (Table 6). Shrimp accounted for a greater proportion of the contents and occurred more frequently in females than in males; the opposite was true for isopods. The most obvious difference occurred in the consumption of sculpins which were eaten by 4 of 28 females and 21 of 29 males, a highly significant difference ($\chi^2 = 8.012$, $P < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

Biases in Stomach Content Analysis

Over 100 kinds of organisms have been identified in the diet of belukha whales (Kleinenberg et al. 1964). We found several general types of prey in the belukha stomachs we examined, including benthic invertebrates (crustaceans, worms, molluscs, and tunicates), nektonic invertebrates (squids), pelagic and semidemersal fishes (arctic cod, saffron cod, herring, whitefish, smelt, char), and demersal fishes (sculpins, suckers, and eelpout). With the exception of octopus, many of the benthic invertebrates found in the belukha stomachs may have been released from the stomachs of fishes consumed and digested by the whales. Both saffron cod and sculpins commonly feed on benthic invertebrates (Andriyashev 1954). We examined the stomachs of 79 saffron cod caught in Kotzebue Sound in March 1978 and found that they had eaten mostly polychaetes, shrimps, amphipods, and mysids. Forty sculpins (*Myoxocephalus* spp.) caught in the northern Bering Sea and Norton Sound in October 1976 had eaten shrimps, amphipods, crabs, and fishes (Frost, unpublished). In belukhas taken in Eschscholtz Bay, snails, clams, amphipods, mysids, tunicates, and polychaetes were found only in stomachs which also contained fishes. Of 27 stomachs containing isopods

Table 5. Stomach contents of belukha whales collected in Eschscholtz Bay, June 1978, separated by age categories.

Prey Item	less than 6 years old, n=9			6 or more years old, n=47		
	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency
Shrimp	15	--	78	5	--	77
Isopod	7	--	22	7	--	38
Octopus	3	--	56	<1	--	47
Other Invertebrate	<1	--	44	<1	--	30
TOTAL INVERTEBRATE	25	--	100	12	--	89
Rocks and Pebbles	2	--	67	1	--	68
TOTAL FISHES	72	--	100	86	--	94
Saffron Cod	--	92	100	--	89	94
Sculpins	--	7	44	--	10	40
Rainbow Smelt	--	<1	33	--	<1	32
Pacific Herring	--	0	0	--	<1	4
Eelpout	--	0	0	--	<1	2
Mean Volume of Contents (ml)		9.9			44.3	
Total Number Identified Fishes		571			3,562	

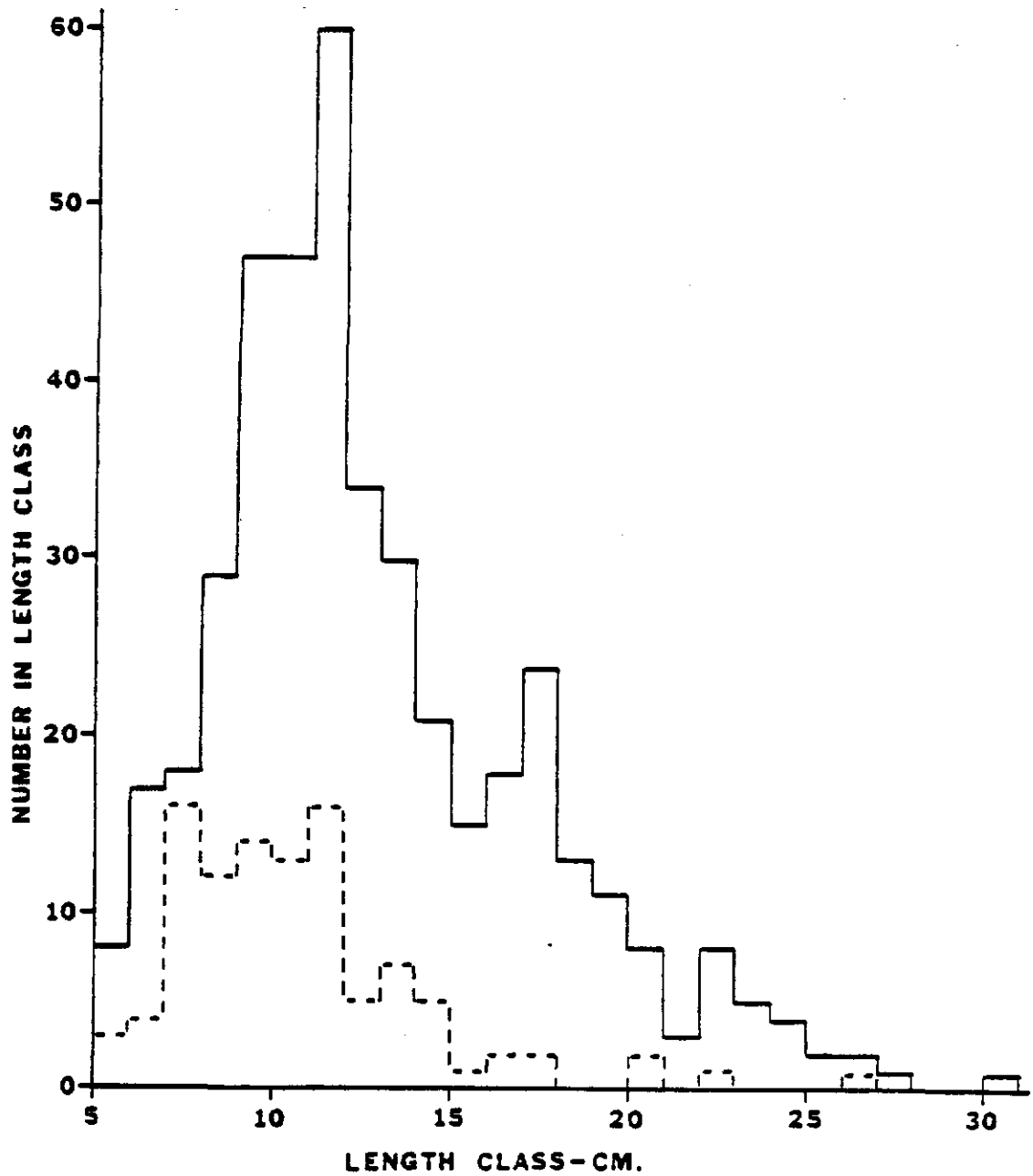


Figure 2. Length distribution of saffron cod eaten by belukha whales based on measurements of otoliths in stomachs. Dotted lines represent fishes eaten by whales five years old and younger; solid lines represent fishes eaten by older whales.

Table 6. Stomach contents of belukha whales collected in Eschscholtz Bay, June 1978, separated by sex.

Prey Item	Females, n=28			Males, n=29		
	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency	Percent Volume	Percent Number	Percent Frequency
Shrimp	11	--	82	2	--	72
Isopod	2	--	25	8	--	48
Octopus	<1	--	64	<1	--	34
Other Invertebrate	<1	--	21	<1	--	38
TOTAL INVERTEBRATE	14	--	93	10	--	86
Rocks and Pebbles	<1	--	64	1	--	69
TOTAL FISHES	85	--	89	88	--	97
Saffron Cod	--	98	89	--	82	97
Sculpins	--	<1	14	--	17	72
Rainbow Smelt	--	2	39	--	<1	24
Eelpout	--	<1	4	--	0	0
Mean Volume of Contents (ml)			24.8			73.0
Total Number Identified Fishes			1,648			2,588

20 also contained sculpins. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) found a similar situation in the White Sea where certain benthic invertebrates were present only in belukha stomachs which contained flatfish. At Point Hope three of the whales examined in 1978 contained over 100 ml of shrimp and no fresh fish remains. We conclude that although many of the invertebrates we found were secondary prey, octopus, shrimps, and sometimes isopods are directly consumed by belukhas. Hay and McClung (1976) found a young belukha in Cumberland Sound with a stomach full of amphipods and seaweed.

Since most of the stomachs we examined contained little or no freshly ingested food, our measures of volume of food items in the stomachs are probably biased in several ways and may be of little value in determining the actual importance of the various prey. For fishes, we were able to determine the number of each species (or taxon) consumed during recent meals based on characteristic hard parts. This measure may be biased if parts of different fish species persist in the stomach for different lengths of time. However, we know of no data to indicate that such is the case, therefore we consider that our counts of fish parts reflect recent consumption. Miller (1978) noted that fur seals (Callorhinus ursinus) accumulate and later regurgitate squid beaks and Pitcher (1980) presents data which suggest that the same may occur in harbor seals (Phoca vitulina richardsi). Octopus flesh was not found in any of the belukhas we examined suggesting that they had been eaten some time before the whales were killed.

We found no evidence to suggest that stomach contents were regurgitated by belukhas during the course of their being pursued and killed. One pod of more than 200 whales was slowly driven for over two hours in Eschscholtz Bay. When a suitable location was reached, 45 of them were killed, of which 43 contained food in the same state of digestion. One belukha in the Buckland River was chased for several hours and when killed contained the largest volume of contents we encountered. However, our data from Eschscholtz Bay in 1981 suggest a limit on the persistence of food remains in the stomach. The whales were driven for about 3.2 hours before being killed and all 11 examined had empty stomachs. This indicates that either they had not fed prior to entering the Bay or all food remains were cleared from the stomachs during the drive.

Feeding During Spring Migration

Arctic cod, the most abundant semidemersal fish in northern ice-covered waters (Blacker 1968), was the fish species we found eaten in greatest numbers by belukhas taken in the spring. However, the presence of otoliths from 48 arctic cod in 19 belukha stomachs containing food indicates that arctic cod were not abundantly available or the whales chose not to feed intensively on them.

Shrimps were eaten in small but perhaps significant quantities by whales taken at Point Hope in April. Johnson et al. (1966) examined stomachs from two belukhas taken in May 1961 at Point Hope which contained arctic cod and shrimp of at least three species. We found shrimp in only trace amounts in two of nine belukhas taken at Point Hope in May. Shrimps,

particularly the family Crangonidae, are widely distributed and quite abundant in arctic waters (Squires 1969; Lowry and Frost, unpublished).

Octopus beaks were more prevalent in belukha stomachs from Point Hope than elsewhere, occurring in 15 of the 18 stomachs examined. Although the beaks may persist in the stomachs for some time, the prevalence of beaks in the whales strongly indicates an abundance of octopus in the vicinity of Point Hope, although perhaps some distance to the south. The maximum number of beaks in a single whale was 625. Based on measurements of lower crest length, the mean weight of the octopus consumed by that belukha was 205 g; therefore, approximately 128 kg of octopus was consumed, enough to supply the food intake requirements of a belukha weighing 700 kg for four days. We conclude that octopus are a potentially significant food of belukhas during the spring migration.

The percentage of empty stomachs during the spring migration was high. Overall, at Point Hope 45 of 63 stomachs we examined were empty. At the same time of year nearly all stomachs of belukhas taken at Wainwright and Barrow are usually empty (R. Tremaine, personal communication). At Point Hope a much higher proportion of stomachs was empty in 1977 than in 1978. The difference is not significant ($\chi^2 = 2.016$ $P > 0.10$) but nonetheless suggests a difference in conditions which affect feeding. In 1977 most of the whales were taken during periods with unobstructed leads south of Point Hope which allowed belukhas to move steadily northward. Stomach contents of those whales were dominated by octopus beaks which may represent prey eaten several days earlier. In 1978 all the belukhas were taken in 12 hours immediately following the formation of a nearshore lead which had previously been kept closed by southerly winds. Numerous belukhas were seen in openings in the ice southeast of Point Hope. Whales taken immediately following the opening of the lead contained small amounts of recently eaten prey, largely crangonid shrimp. It appears that belukhas sometimes feed during their spring migration when their northward movement is prevented by ice.

Summer Feeding in Coastal Areas

Fishes were the dominant item in the stomachs of belukhas taken in coastal waters during summer. In the northern Bering and southern Chukchi seas, saffron cod were by far the most commonly eaten species, occurring in 104 of 113 belukhas taken at Eschscholtz Bay and in all three belukhas taken at Elim. Sculpins were eaten less commonly, occurring in 37 of the whales from Eschscholtz Bay and in two of the whales from Elim. The total quantity of sculpins and saffron cod represented by otoliths in belukha stomachs from Elim in 1977 and Eschscholtz Bay in 1978 was calculated (Table 7). The estimated amount consumed was about 28 times larger at Elim due to the greater number of otoliths in the stomachs and the larger individual size of fishes consumed. The differences in numbers of otoliths found in belukhas from the two areas may be the result of differences in location of feeding, time when killed, and feeding conditions. The hunters from Elim said the belukhas were actively feeding when first sighted, as further indicated by the presence of several intact fish in the stomachs. The belukhas were moving westward away from Norton Bay. In most instances, belukhas taken in Eschscholtz Bay had probably eaten in Kotzebue Sound

Table 7. Estimated quantities of fishes consumed by an average belukha whale taken near Elim (June 1977) and in Eschscholtz Bay (June 1978).

Location	Saffron Cod			Sculpins			Total
	Mean Number Consumed	Mean Weight (g)	Estimated Amount Consumed (kg)	Mean Number Consumed	Mean Weight (g)	Estimated Amount Consumed (kg)	Estimated Amount Consumed (kg)
Elim	1,300	40.0	52.0	18	524.6	9.4	61.4
Eschscholtz Bay	63	17.7	1.1	8	131.7	1.1	2.2

before entering the bay, though in 1982 they were feeding in the bay as indicated by the larger than usual quantities of food in their stomachs. In June belukhas enter Eschscholtz Bay on the rising tide and are normally intercepted and hunted within about one to two hours after entering. It is also noteworthy that because of their much larger size, sculpins are more important in the diet than is indicated by the relative numbers consumed (Table 7).

All our samples from Kotzebue Sound were obtained in June from Eschscholtz Bay. Curtis (1930) found that saffron cod was the most common item in belukhas taken in northern Kotzebue Sound near Sheshalik mostly in late June. Hunters from Kotzebue who have hunted many years near Sheshalik informed us that saffron cod were common in belukha stomachs and that shrimp and salmon were occasionally found. Belukha hunting at that locale usually ended before salmon arrived. Belukhas sometimes return to Eschscholtz Bay after the June-early July hunt and are occasionally seen in large numbers (Seaman, unpublished). They may feed on salmon in late July and August. Hunters in Eschscholtz Bay report that saffron cod, sculpins, and herring are common items in belukha stomachs. Herring normally appear in mid-June to July, generally after the hunts from which we obtained samples in 1978-82. Smelt appear in Eschscholtz Bay and the Buckland River in greatest numbers in May and early June.

The feeding of belukha whales inhabiting Bristol Bay in spring and summer was studied by Brooks (1954-1956) and summarized by Klinkhart (1966). Brooks (1954) and Lensink (1961) found a close relationship between prey abundance and belukha distribution and movements. Belukhas are present in Kvichak and Nushagak bays in large numbers in May through August. They are attracted to these rivers in early May by large concentrations of outmigrating smelt. As soon as ice cover on the rivers breaks up, belukhas frequently move upstream on flooding tides, apparently in pursuit of smelt. At the end of May whales shift from eating smelt to sockeye salmon fingerlings, which continue to be the predominant food items until about mid-June. In mid-June adult salmon become the primary prey. The frequency of occurrence of different species of salmon is directly correlated to their abundance; sockeye salmon predominating in stomachs in the first three weeks of July and other salmon species in late July and August (Brooks 1955). In addition to salmon and smelt, flounder, sole, sculpin, blenny, lamprey, two types of shrimp, and mussels were also reported in the stomachs examined. The three belukha stomachs we examined generally agree with the pattern described by Brooks.

Nelson (1887) reported on feeding of belukhas along the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Near Saint Michael (southern Norton Sound), the first belukhas seen in spring arrived 5-10 June, coinciding with the arrival of spawning herring which they followed into bays and inlets. These observations are in agreement with those of Giddings (1967) who frequently saw belukhas near Cape Denbigh (northeastern Norton Sound) following schools of herring in June. Also, the people of Stebbins, Unalakleet, and Shaktoolik reported that they frequently see belukhas following schools of herring into Norton Bay. While surveying herring schools, Barton (personal communication) saw numerous belukhas

associated with herring concentrations on 30 May 1978 near Golovnin Bay (northern Norton Sound), and somewhat later near Nome.

Nelson (1887) found that belukhas fed heavily on saffron cod in the mouths of many tidal creeks between Saint Michael and the Kuskokwim River. He found the mouths of these tidal creeks to abound in saffron cod between midsummer and freezeup. Whales actively fed on saffron cod throughout this period, ascending rivers after darkness and returning by daylight. We observed numerous belukhas in association with schools of saffron cod near Golovnin Bay in late September 1981. Informants from several villages in Norton Sound have reported salmon in belukha stomachs in July and early August. Fishermen from Elim who annually fish near the northern Yukon Delta frequently see belukhas near the mouths of this river while salmon are present. One fisherman reported taking belukhas with recently ingested chum salmon (Oncorhynchus keta) in their stomachs. It appears that salmon are important to belukhas when available, but that saffron cod are probably of greater importance because they are available and abundant over a longer period of time.

Large numbers of belukhas utilize the coastal and lagoon waters adjacent to Kasegaluk Lagoon (northern Chukchi Sea) from late June to August. No stomachs have been examined from whales in this region but observations of fish abundance, belukha behavior and movements, and past examination of stomach contents by hunters suggests some species which may be important food items. Fish frequently caught by subsistence fishermen in this area in June, July, and August include sculpins, arctic char, smelt, saffron cod, whitefish, and capelin (Mallotus villosus). In addition, salmon are caught in July and August. Certain regions of Kasegaluk Lagoon such as Utukok and Akoliakatat Passes are known for better fishing. Large concentrations of spotted seals (Phoca largha) are found in July and August in those areas.

The hunters of Point Lay believe that belukhas come to the Kasegaluk Lagoon area to feed. According to hunters, the stomachs from whales arriving in the area in late June or early July frequently contain shrimp, octopus or squid, and small fish. The first belukhas discovered and killed in the lagoon have usually eaten fish; at least sculpins, smelt, and char. The hunters reported that contents were highly digested and difficult to identify. Stomachs of whales taken from large localized concentrations in the passes of the lagoon were usually empty or contained digested fish remains.

On 10 July 1979 one of us (G. Seaman) observed several hundred belukhas for a period of six hours. The whales followed the coast within 50 m of shore, near Point Lay. They characteristically surfaced two to four times, then dove and remained submerged for 30 to 180 seconds. Occasionally a whale would remain near the observation site for five minutes making several dives and then continuing northward. On 9 and 10 July large schools of capelin were observed near the beach and occasionally washed up on shore. It appeared that belukhas were following and feeding on capelin. The residents of Point Lay said capelin occur off Kasegaluk Lagoon in very large numbers for a short period in mid-July of most years. Capelin are probably very important to belukhas during periods when they are present in the area, but they

do not occur every year. A similar condition of occasional importance of capelin to belukhas was observed by Vladykov (1946) in the Saint Lawrence estuary, Doan and Douglas (1953) in Hudson Bay, and Kleinenberg et al. (1964) in Soviet waters.

After belukhas leave Kasegaluk Lagoon they often move northward along the coast and pass Wainwright. Our samples indicate that rainbow smelt may be a major food near there. Capelin also spawn on the beaches near Wainwright. We have received specimens collected on the beach in front of the village on 16 July 1978 (Lowry and Frost, unpublished).

Sex- and Age-related Differences in Foods

Our collections from Eschsoltz Bay give strong evidence of a difference in the selection of food by belukhas of different ages and sexes. Sexual dimorphism occurs in belukhas with females substantially smaller than males of the same age (Sergeant and Brodie 1969). Although the components of the food found in younger and older whales of both sexes were similar, older belukhas had eaten significantly larger saffron cod and males had eaten significantly more sculpins which were of a much larger size than saffron cod. This suggests that the smaller whales prefer smaller fish and the larger belukhas select for larger fish. Vladykov (1946) found the same to be true in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence where young belukhas and females ate small fish and shrimp, and adult males, in addition to the smaller prey, had eaten large cods (*Gadus* spp.) which were rarely eaten by small belukhas and females. Kleinenberg et al. (1964) showed a similar preference for prey by belukhas of different size and sex classes in waters of the Soviet Union.

Autumn and Winter Foods

Although no stomach samples are available from belukha whales in autumn and winter, their probable foods can be inferred from distribution and abundance of potential prey. Pollock (*Theragra chalcogramma*) is the most abundant species of finfish in the vicinity of the ice front (Pereyra et al. 1976) and is probably a major belukha food in this area. Based on the stomach contents of ringed seals (*Phoca hispida*), arctic and saffron cods are by far the most abundant forage fishes in the northern Bering Sea in autumn and winter (Lowry et al. 1980). Arctic cod are the most important single item in the winter diet of belukhas over much of their range, and thus the winter movements of belukhas are closely tied to the distribution of arctic cod (Lønø and Øynes 1961; Kleinenberg et al 1964; Tarasevich 1974). Saffron cod may also be an important autumn and winter food of belukhas in some portions of the Bering Sea. Residents of Gambell note that belukhas are frequently seen along the western and southern shores of Saint Lawrence Island where prevailing northeasterly winds keep the coast free of ice throughout most of the winter. The presence of belukhas in this area in winter is closely linked to abundance of saffron cod along the shores.

In addition to pollock and arctic cod, many other species of demersal, semidemersal, and pelagic fishes occur in the Bering Sea in autumn and winter and are certainly eaten at times by belukhas. Spawning smelt are

abundant in some coastal areas in autumn. Shrimps and octopus may be eaten in quantities in some areas. However, based on observations of belukha foods in other areas and seasons, and the winter distribution and abundance of potential prey, we speculate that in the Bering Sea the bulk of their autumn and winter diet is composed of arctic and saffron cods in northern areas and pollock in southeastern and southcentral regions.

Trophic Interactions

Belukha whales are large and may be locally very abundant. Their foraging activities might therefore be expected to affect stocks of fishes on which they feed. Brooks (1955) estimated the number of adult salmon consumed by belukhas in Kvichak Bay as approximately 196,000 in 1954 and 99,000 in 1955. He also estimated that about three million red salmon smolt were eaten each season. This predation was considered significant in light of the depleted red salmon stocks. Frost et al. (1984) estimated that in 1983, belukhas in the Kvichak River consumed about six million red salmon smolt and 283,000 adult salmon (182,000 red salmon and 101,000 other species). This consumption amounted to about 5% of the average annual smolt outmigration, 1% of the commercial catch of adult red salmon, and 9% of the commercial catch of other salmon species.

The species of prey consumed by belukha whales are also major foods of other species of cetaceans and pinnipeds in the Bering and Chukchi seas (Johnson et al. 1966; Frost and Lowry 1981b; Lowry and Frost 1981). Gadid fishes (arctic and saffron cods and pollock), herring, capelin, and smelt are of particular importance in the diet of at least six species of pinnipeds and four species of cetaceans. Sculpins, shrimps, and octopus are of secondary importance in the diet of both seals and belukhas. Saffron cod and sculpins eaten by belukhas are generally larger than those eaten by seals (Lowry and Frost, unpublished), while arctic cod, capelin, smelt, and herring consumed by belukhas and seals are probably of similar size classes. Potential competition for food may be particularly great between belukhas and spotted seals since the distribution and food habits of these species overlap broadly throughout much of the year (Lowry and Frost 1981 and unpublished). The number of fish-eating pinnipeds in the Bering and Chukchi seas is difficult to estimate at present, but certainly exceeds two million. Given the broad dietary overlap with pinnipeds and the relatively much smaller population of belukha whales, limitation of the belukha population through competition for food appears to be a possibility. If so, the carrying capacity of the Bering-Chukchi system for belukha whales (as expressed by population size and productivity) may be influenced by foraging activities and population sizes of other species of marine mammals. In addition, commercial fisheries, particularly for herring and salmon in coastal areas of the Bering and Chukchi seas and for groundfish in the southeastern and central Bering Sea, remove great quantities of some marine mammal forage fishes (e.g., Pruter 1976; Lowry et al. 1979). The combined effects of predation and commercial fishing on fish stocks and the possible resultant effects on marine mammal populations remain unclear at present. However, a significant potential exists for interactions between belukha whales and commercial fisheries (Lowry et al. 1984).

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