

Fall Observations of Westward Migrating White Whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*) Along the Central Alaskan Beaufort Sea Coast.

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Little is known of the westward fall migration of white whales out of the Beaufort Sea. Fraker *et al.* (1978:41) mention only two records of presumed fall-migrating white whales in this area: (1) approximately 2000 westward-moving white whales near Herschel Island, Yukon Territory, on 21 September 1972; and (2) approximately 100 white whales near the edge of the pack-ice east of Point Barrow, Alaska, also on 21 September 1972. It is unknown whether fall migration takes place along the coast or offshore or both in the pack-ice.

In mid- to late September 1977 and 1978, during the course of aerial surveys along the Alaskan Beaufort Sea coast, white whales were observed migrating westward at coastal locations seaward of Jones Islands, Alaska.

On 15 September 1977, at approximately 13:30 Alaska Daylight Time, approximately 75-100 white whales were observed swimming westward 50-300 m seaward of the western end of Pingok Island (70°34'N; 149°35'W), Alaska; some young-of-the-year were present in this group. Approximately 200 glaucous gulls were associated with the whales. On this date, the southern edge of the Beaufort Sea pack-ice was estimated to be >10 km seaward of Pingok Island.

On 23 September 1978, at approximately 13:00 ADT, an estimated 35 white whales were observed swimming westward along the edge of a field of small ice pans and brash ice approximately 150 m NE of Thetis Island (70°33.5'N; 150°10'W), Alaska. Six adult-sized whales (very white in colour) were each accompanied by a young-of-the-year; the remainder of the whales appeared to be of adult size, but they were smokey-grey in colour. Approximately 30 glaucous gulls were circling nearby and were apparently associated with the whales. On this date the southern edge of the Beaufort Sea pack-ice was estimated to be > 16 km north of Thetis Island.

Despite near-daily field work in Simpson Lagoon from breakup to late September of 1977 and 1978, no whales were ever observed in the shallow water between the barrier islands and the coast.

Thus it appears that at least a portion of the westward fall migration by white whales out of the southeastern Beaufort Sea occurs during mid- to late September near the coast, well south of the southern edge of the pack-ice, but seaward of the barrier islands.

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