

Steller sea lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) breeding patterns on Dolgaya Rock (Kuril Islands, Russia), 2003-2005.

Alexey V. Altukhov¹ and Vladimir Burkanov^{2,3}

¹ Lomonosov's Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia

² National Marine Mammal Laboratory, AFSC, NMFS, NOAA, Seattle, USA

³ Kamchatka Branch of the Pacific Institute of Geography, FEB, RAS, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Russia

Dolgaya Rock is part of the Lovushki Islands situated in the central Kuril Islands in the Russian Far East. Steller sea lions have bred there for over 100 years. Field observations were conducted in late May - July over 3 years (2003-2005). Animals were observed from a blind on a high (15 m) slope using binoculars at a distance of 30-150 m. Counts were conducted daily. Continuous monitoring of marked and individually recognizable sea lions was performed to record their breeding behavioral status. Digital cameras were used to document their presence and to provide precise identification of marked animals.

Steller sea lion abundance steadily increased during June for all three years due to the arrival of mature females. In late June, non-pup abundance reached 750-830 individuals of which about half were breeding females. Parturition occurred from late May through June. The most active pupping was observed between 1 – 25 June. Females mated with males on average 11 ± 4 days ($n = 58$) after pupping. Breeding activity sharply decreased in late June - early July. The maximum alive pup count was 423, 405 and 448 in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively. Post-natal pup mortality was approximately 5%. A total of 105 mature females were identified during the first year. Forty-five (43%) of them were repeatedly seen all 3 years, of which 41% gave birth every year, 33% birthed 2 years, 14% had one pup only, and 12% never gave birth at all. Twelve percent of females nursed their offspring more than 1 year and 2% more than 2 years. A total of 102 females were recorded mating with males of which 69 (68%) returned to the rookery the next season and 53 (77%) gave birth to a pup. Observation results show the Steller sea lion population at Dolgaya Rock is growing.