

## Report from Kagalaska

Why is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) killing caribou on Kagalaska Island? Here's a bit of history to help explain it. Barren-ground caribou calves from the Nelchina herd were captured, held in captivity, and released on Adak in 1958 and 1959 to provide recreational hunting opportunities for military personnel stationed on the island. Adak is 500 miles outside the native range of caribou, but the introduction was successful and the herd quickly became established on the island. Surveys conducted opportunistically with military and U.S. Coast Guard aircraft estimated the population at approximately 300-400 animals throughout much of the 1980s, when there were about 5,000 people living on the island. When the military base closed in 1997, hunting declined sharply, and the caribou population exploded: we counted about 2,700 animals in 2005 and 2012.



Caribou on Adak  
photo by Mark Ricca

In recent years caribou have been swimming across the narrow strait separating Adak from Kagalaska Island. Kagalaska is part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, and the Refuge's establishing purpose is to maintain natural diversity. Kagalaska is also designated as wilderness, which means managers have a responsibility to maintain natural qualities. Since Kagalaska's caribou are coming from Adak, where caribou were introduced by humans, the establishment of a new population on Kagalaska is not part of a natural biological process, and the resultant damage to native plant communities and an ecosystem that evolved without large grazing animals harms the island's natural diversity and wilderness character. To prevent caribou from establishing a resident breeding population on Kagalaska Island, the USFWS developed a caribou control plan consisting of re-occurring walk-in efforts. In addition to eliminating caribou found on Kagalaska, the project will provide information about how many and how often caribou swim to the island, which will help refine subsequent control efforts. Caribou control on Kagalaska should also lower the risk of caribou dispersing to other Refuge islands east of Kagalaska.

City Manager Layton Lockett accepts delivery of caribou meat from *Tiglux* Captain Billy Pepper  
photo by Debra Sharrah



Wait a minute--isn't Adak part of the Refuge as well? Yes, much of Adak is comprised of Refuge land, most of which is also designated as wilderness. But, because Adak has extensive private ownership, a community, and a long history of caribou hunting, management of caribou on Adak is done through a process involving the state, the Refuge, the Aleut Corporation and the City of Adak. Currently the herd is managed primarily by Alaska Department of Fish and Game sport hunt regulations and federal subsistence regulations.

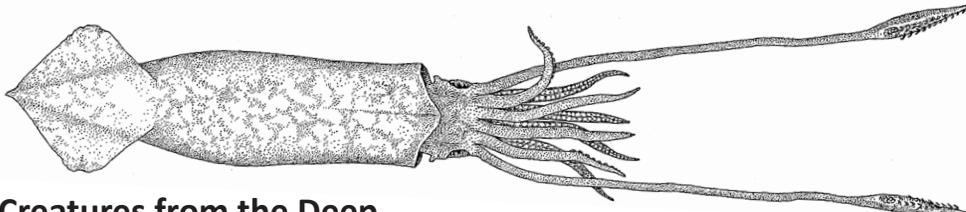
The first control effort on Kagalaska occurred 25-27 May, during a brief intermission in the R/V *Tiglux*'s deployment of seabird monitoring and research camps to islands west of Adak. Within an hour of arriving at the island on the evening of the 25th, crews working off *Tiglux* shot three bulls on the east side of Kagalaska, and six more bulls were killed the following day. Salvage crews field dressed and hauled meat back to the ship. No additional animals were encountered. Midday on the 27th *Tiglux* delivered 1,208 lbs of meat to Adak, where the City coordinated distribution to residents (left).

## Colorful and Camouflaged

Once again, Adak's students did a fantastic job creating artwork and poems for the Alaska Migratory Bird Calendar Contest. The theme for 2016's calendar was "Colorful and Camouflaged", inspiring some very creative use of mixed media. Adakian kids won every single slot in the K-2 and 3-5th grade divisions of the local competition, and two kids won for both their poster AND their poem--congratulations, Jaslene and Tarrence! Other winners were Karina, David, Kalie, Juliana, and Sharon for posters, and Zyrus, Adrien, Logan, Sienna and Augie for literature. The Refuge Manager chose Karina's poem as his favorite; it will be printed in the 2016 calendar. Local winners went on to compete at the state level, but the competition must have been extremely stiff this year, because only one of the 14 entries from Adak was selected to appear in the calendar. Congratulations, Juliana, on your lovely poster!

We were lucky to have Aleutian Islands Unit Biologist Jeff Williams here again to present the awards. Jeff also presented awards to Zyrus and Finn, whose calendar contest posters were selected to represent our region in the Art in the Capitol exhibit, on display in Juneau while the legislature was in session. He also presented tokens of appreciation to the teachers and aides for their dedication and participation. Thanks to all who came and cheered the kids on (special thanks to Debra for the nice photos), and well done, kids!





## Creatures from the Deep

Last month turned up three interesting creatures on Adak's beaches. One was a robust clubhook squid (*Onykia robusta*, above and right), which is the largest squid occurring in our area--the mantle alone can reach six and a half feet. These guys wash ashore on Adak every year or so, and have often mistakenly been called giant squid. Indeed, they can be gigantic (their mantles are about the same length as a giant squid's, though their tentacles and arms are proportionally much shorter), but they are in a different family than the infamous *Architeuthis*. Little is known of the life history of these squid, but they are generally found at depths greater than 1,600 feet, where they feed on fish and squid. Like other squid, they have eight arms with suckers and two long feeding tentacles, the ends (or clubs) of which are specialized in various ways. As their name suggests, clubhook squid have two rows of distinctive hooks on the tentacular clubs. Another distinguishing feature of a robust clubhook squid is its textured pinkish-purple mantle skin, striated with longitudinal ridges, and its very large fins.



Robust clubhook squid  
photo by Travis Watts



Smooth Lumpsucker  
AFSC/NOAA

Another creature to wash ashore was a funny little round fish called a smooth lumpsucker (*Aptocyclus ventricosus*, left). The ones we find on Adak are generally about the size of a large softball, scaleless, drab and spherical. Their pelvic fins have evolved to form a strong sucking disk on their undersurface, which holds the fish firmly to the bottom of the sea. They are, literally, lumps with suckers.

Also washed up in May were several longnose lancetfish (*Alepisaurus ferox*, right). These strange, wicked-looking fish beach themselves regularly in the Aleutians, sometimes still alive but generally either dead or about to be. Up to six and a half feet long, they have huge mouths armed with several large fang-like teeth and lots of smaller teeth, and a long and very high sail-like dorsal fin (about twice as high as the fish is deep) that may not be obvious in a dead fish. When they aren't dying, they dwell in the deep sea, down to 6,000 feet. There they devour fish and squid, even other lancetfish, swallowing their prey whole--one lancetfish we found had a stomach full of hundreds of small intact squid.



Longnose lancetfish

photo by Steve Ebbert



photo by Travis Watts



This summer's Wednesday Walkabouts are off to a great start! We had four outings in May, and in spite of the weather being mostly windy and wet, all the kids had a great time. One week we traipsed around Heart Lake, learning about rat behavior, stream crossing and bog safety, comparative dentition of ungulates and rodents, and local geography, even a bit about navigation. We also replanted chocolate lily bulbs that had been dug up by rats and did a lot of exploring, poking into little holes and gullies, rolling down grassy hills, and splashing in the lake. Another week we roamed up and down the dunes and beaches by Candlestick Bridge, watching seals, discussing survival adaptations of nearshore creatures and looking for treasures. The kids have been full of questions, voracious for answers, and excited to be discovering things for themselves. We are all looking forward to many more fun Wednesdays of exploration this summer!



## Fair Winds and Following Seas

On the last day of May, we lost one of our most dedicated and sedulous volunteers when Rachel moved to California. For more than a decade Rachel has stepped in whenever we needed extra help, not only in Adak town, but also in field camp, where she worked tirelessly and cheerfully as part of the Rat Camp team. She's been an enthusiastic source of encouragement and support, and made every job more fun.

Thank you, Rachel, for all your hard work over the years! Have safe travels, enjoy your new home, and know that you are sorely missed.

