



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SMOTHERED OYSTERS

"Smothered oysters" is not always a recipe for shellfish preparation.

Smothered immature oysters, or spats--destroyed by predator mollusks--are a different story, according to oyster investigators of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior. Deprived of oxygen and food, oyster spat never lives to reach the family table.

The oyster larva, in its free-swimming stage, is a favorite food of many aquatic forms, including other oysters. Even after the spat is securely anchored to some object and the oyster begins to build a limestone shell about itself, it is attacked by a host of enemies.

Best known of these enemies are the starfish and oyster drill, both of which do incalculable damage to the growing oyster. Only recently, however, Service scientists stationed at the Service's Milford, Connecticut, laboratory have discovered the fact that several other species of our common mollusks, besides the drills, are also inflicting extremely heavy losses among young oysters.

Observations carried on during the last four summers by Dr. Victor L. Loosanoff and James B. Engle showed definitely that two genera of mollusks, namely, Anomia, and Crepidula, are responsible for the destruction of oyster spat in

several areas of Long Island Sound where, at the beginning of each season, very good sets of oysters were recorded.

As a general rule, the setting of oysters and that of the predator mollusks occurs at approximately the same time. However, since the rate of growth of the oysters is much slower than that of Anomia or Crepidula, the latter soon outgrow the oysters. While growing, the shells of Anomia spread over the oyster spat attached nearby which, when covered in this manner, soon suffocate and die.

"Our examination of shells collected from the lots where sets of Anomia and oysters occurred", according to Dr. Loosanoff, "revealed that in almost every instance there were several smothered young oysters under each Anomia shell. In one instance, for example, there were 22 dead oyster spat found under a single Anomia only five-eighths of an inch in diameter. Although having but one shell, Crepidula destroys the oyster spat in the same manner."

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