

Life as an Oyster and how They are Always Affecting the Environment

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Life Cycle

You may have heard of oysters and you may have even eaten them before, but do you know how oysters grow and how they help the aquatic animals in our waters? An oysters life cycle begins when an egg is fertilized by a sperm. The female casts millions of eggs into the water that are so small that they can not be seen with the naked eye. Eggs can be released in a lot of places, but most of the reproductive cycle occurs in oyster reefs. Usually the female releases the eggs where there is a large collection of food (algae) for the newly born oysters (spat). The release of eggs takes place from June to November, with the highest spawn rate from June to July. Spat grow about one inch a year and by the third year they reach sexual maturity.

The Oysters Job

My family has been growing oysters for 15 years, but I never knew a lot about them, until last year when I went on a field trip to Gwynn's Islands Oyster Hatchery. During my field trip I learned that oysters help clean up to 50 gallons of water a day! In the olden days there were so many oysters that they could filter the entire Chesapeake Bay in 5 days! The filtered water is healthy for seagrass and other marine life. Filtering is not the only thing that oysters do. They can attach themselves to each other and make big reefs to protect and make a good breeding place for fish, crabs and other marine life. Sadly because they are filtering water they are in danger of the pollution that is dropped in the water by humans causing the number of oysters to go down. Fortunately, places like the Gwynn's Island Oyster Hatchery, Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA), Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), and other organizations are working to increase the oysters in the Chesapeake Bay.

What I Think

I think that oysters are really cool creatures and we should continue to protect them. They are so important to the ocean's ecosystems. They may taste good but it is important to replace them as we eat them. We should all try and do our part to reduce polluting our waters. My family and I have already taken a step to repopulate the oyster beds by growing them along our shoreline. What can you do to help?

Fun Facts About Oysters

1. Did you know that oysters take the flavor of the water that they grow up in so that is why some oysters taste different than others.
2. Oysters can have pearls in them but it is very rare to find one.
3. Oysters have a lot of iron, calcium, and protein.
4. Most oysters look for love in the springtime.
5. Oysters can take a lot of the energy out of big waves and at most they can take 93 percent of the power!
6. Oil is very fatal to all stages of an oyster life.
7. Oysters can change their genders multiple times in their lifetime!
8. The largest oyster found weighed 1.3 kg
9. Oysters are one of the few species that humans eat when they are dead or alive.
10. Humans have been consuming oysters for over 4000 years.
11. Oysters have no central nervous system.
12. Oysters can live to be 20 years old.

Sources

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