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Shellfish disease in the United Kingdom, 1970-71

by

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This report is made primarily to indicate the continuing interest in shellfish disease in the UK. Although little advance has been made on work with gill disease in oysters, newly imported commercial stocks continue to show a further reduction in disease levels. As in previous years (Alderman 1969, 1970), regular samples have been taken from imports into the River Blackwater in Essex. The cycle of gill disease was again recorded in 1971 and found to be identical with that of 1969 and 1970, with low levels of active disease immediately after import in April (8 per cent) rising to a peak in May (22 per cent) and falling rapidly thereafter. Infection levels were lower than those found in 1970, which were again lower than in the peak year of 1969, and, as far as is known, no grower has suffered a loss of any significance this year. Samples examined in early August of this year showed only healed lesions in healthy oysters.

It is hoped that this trend will continue, but it is thought to be important that additional legislation should be provided to prevent the movement of any diseased oysters into areas in the UK at present free from this disease.

Apart from gill disease, there have been no signs of any other pathological symptoms in Crassostrea angulata, and there is no indication in this country of any mortalities such as have been reported in France by the fisheries press recently.

A minor loss of young Crassostrea gigas in trays in Cornwall, and abnormal shell conditions in a few specimens of Ostrea edulis from Newtown in the Isle of Wight, are being examined to determine if disease is involved. Neither is of any great importance and stocks of both oysters are in generally good condition. The O. edulis imported from Morlaix this year, which were examined for the presence of the pathogen

discovered in the Abers of Brittany, were also in good condition and lacked the typical parasite cells described by Comps (1970).

Finally, a new disease has been identified in Cancer pagurus caught in the Portland (Dorset) area this summer. A proportion (no accurate figures available) of the crabs were found, on landing, to be dribbling a green liquid. When such specimens were opened, it was found that the hepato-pancreas was disintegrating to produce the green liquor. Examination of the liquor in fresh preparations and in smears showed the presence of large numbers of spores of a protozoan parasite, probably a Microsporidian, which is the likely cause of the disease. Further examination of this material is in progress and we would be grateful for notification if the disease is detected elsewhere.

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