

Reports

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## Oyster setting records for Rappahannock River

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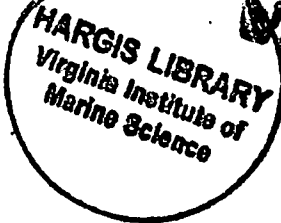
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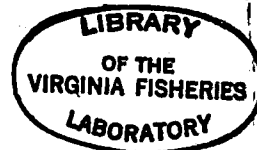
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28 Dec 1948  
J.D. Andrews.

OYSTER SETTLING RECORDS FOR RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

Abstract

1. The Rappahannock River probably never did get a consistent set of oyster spat.
2. In the year 1941 occurred the best set in recent years. No quantitative data.
3. The set for 1942 was practically nil.
4. The set for 1943 was very small or none.
5. The 1944 set was probably the second best in recent years with an average of 176 spat per bushel for the whole river.
6. No set of consequence occurred above Towles Point in 1945, and a very light set occurred below this point.
7. Limited records indicate a year similar to 1945 for 1946.
8. The 1947 set averaged 44 spat per bushel with scarcely any above Towles Point—still a very poor set.
9. The 1948 set was again poor and followed the pattern for 1945, 1946, and 1947. Early spat counts give an average of 30 spat per bushel for the whole river.
10. The setting rate progressively decreases from the lower to the upper oyster bars of the Rappahannock River.

No quantitative data on the annual oyster set in the Rappahannock River prior to 1944 are available. Mr. Herbert Miller of Regent, Va., has been oystering since before the First World War and is now inspector for Middlesex and Essex counties. His father lived and oystered in the same places before him. According to Mr. Miller the Rappahannock never did get a consistent set each year. However, when it did, the set was usually general all over the river. He had not noticed any particular bars which usually get a set when others didn't. The periods of good oystering, as he remembers them, coincide rather closely with economic conditions. He remembers his father telling about the season of 1900 in which he caught 35 bushels of oysters on the first day of the season and 8 bushels on the last day. This sticks in Mr. Miller's memory as the best season ever for oystering. The period 1924-27 was good for oystering, implying a good set about 1923 or 1924. The early and mid-thirties were very poor seasons.

The first Laboratory record on the strike in the Rappahannock River is for 1941. Menzel reports an excellent strike for this year. In 1943, oystermen were saying there were more oysters in the river than there had been for "twenty years." Menzel states many oysters from this set were big enough to market in 1943. The inspectors for the area, Captains Howard Doggett and Ed Blakemore, also recall and talk about the good strike of 1941.

## Oyster setting records for Rappahannock River--Cont'd

The set for 1942 is uncertain, for Menzel states less than one spat per shell set on shells planted at Corrotoman Point in the good-setting Corrotoman River. Apparently the 1942 set in the Rappahannock River proper was a failure.

The year 1943 was also a failure. Again Menzel says less than one spat per ten shells set on shells planted in the spring at Corrotoman Point. Capt Doggett has frequently cited 1942 and 1943 as the good setting years but judging from Menzels records, 1943 must have been confused with 1944, for the records show the latter to be the year with a commercial size set.

The 1944 strike: Menzel and Mackin took 54 samples from 23 bars in the Rappahannock River mostly in June, Aug., and Sept. of 1945. Using the figures for eleven representative bars (distributed evenly from mouth to head of the oyster growing section of the river), I found an average set of 176 spat per bushel for 1944. Generally, the setting rate decreased gradually going up river. Although this set was not heavy, due to the wonderful growth obtained in the Rappahannock River, it resulted in good oystering in 1946, 1947, and to some degree in 1948.

1945 set: Menzel states there was no set of consequence above Towles Point, and on nine rocks below Towles Point, the set averaged 101 spat per bushel. Nine of the eleven well-distributed bars averaged 46 spat per bushel according to my tabulations for the whole river. (No record for upper two stations)

1946 set: No records are available on the 1946 strike, however, it is evident from later examinations that there was practically none in the upper river and very little set in the lower (56 per bushel at Butlers Hole).

1947 set: In 1947 sixteen samples were taken from ten bars and an average set of 44 spat per bushel was found for the river. Most of this occurred on the bars below Towles Point with practically no set above.

1948 set: This set appears to be almost like the previous three years--1945-47--with a small set in the lower river and none above Towles Point. The set for the river averaged 30 spat per bushel.

It appears that a setting gradient exists in the Rappahannock River with the highest setting at the mouth of the river and at the mouth of the Corrotoman River and a gradual decrease in the set up the river. This situation held for one fairly good strike and four years of poor strike.

## References:

1. Annual reports of the Commission of Fisheries and the Fisheries Laboratory.
2. All known unpublished records of the Virginia Fisheries Laboratory.

RECORD OF ANNUAL OYSTER STRIKE IN RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER  
 (Av. No. of spat per bu. on natural culch)  
 Compiled by J. D. Andrews

28 Dec 1948

Observer	Menzel & Mackin	Menzel & Mackin	Andrews	Andrews	-----
Year	<u>1944</u>	<u>1945***</u>	<u>1947</u>	<u>1948</u>	Av. <u>1944-48</u> (four years)
No. of samples per bar	mostly 1, 2, or 3	mostly 1 & 2	mostly 1 or 2		
Period of counts	spring & summer '45	Sept. 1945	mostly Dec. 1947	mostly Dec. 1948	
1. Butlers Hole	519	148	140	---	
2. Broad Creek	427	120	34	80	165
3. Parrotts Rock	101	58	16	68	61
4. Drummond Ground	163	76	166*	144*	137
5. Hog House	120	4	74	8	52
6. Smoky Point	229	12	12	0	65
7. Punchbowl	65	0	0	4	17
8. Piney Island	129	0	10	2	35
9. Morattico Bar	98	0	5	0	25
10. Bowlers Rock	28	-	16	8	17
11. Ross Rock	<u>56</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>31</u>
Total	1933	418	487	334	
Average	176**	46	44	30	74

\* On shells planted springs of 1947 and 1948.

\*\* Average of all 50 samples from all bars was 198.

\*\*\*Nearly all mid-Sept. counts so may have missed late set.