

Water Quality



CRABS

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Institute of Marine Science in Gloucester Point, part of the College of William & Mary.

The point of releasing the crabs isn't to have more crabs for watermen to catch, as some oyster restoration is designed. That's called "put and take."

Rather, the blue crabs are put in the bay in hopes that they'll grow to adult size and produce more generations of crabs — a process called "stock enhancement."

"Our released crabs contribute to the next generation," Dr. Zohar said.

Field surveys show the hatchery's crabs survival is similar to wild crabs — about 15 percent on average, with fluctuations from 7 to 30 percent.

The crabs that survive grow quickly, and reach maturity and market size in about three months.

"In one summer, our released crabs are joining the spawning stock," Dr. Zohar said.

At SERC, researchers led by director Dr. Anson Hines are trying to figure out the best spots for releasing crabs.

"We're trying to be strategic in this effort to have the maximum effect of increasing the dwindling stock," Dr. Hines said.

The hope is that one day, the hatchery will be able to produce far greater numbers of baby crabs. And it will be vital to put those crabs in the right places.

"To make a meaningful increase of 10 percent, we'd have to produce and

release on the order of 10 million crabs or maybe more," Dr. Hines said.

In 2006, 120,000 hatchery crabs were released in the bay, double the number from 2005. And so far in 2007, scientists have already reached the 2006 mark.

Producing millions is possible — scientists in Asia have done it with other crab species, Dr. Hines said.

The focus on boosting the crab population is due to their overall drop in the bay. Though the population is stable, it's below where it should be.

And the number of juvenile crabs in the bay is a concern as well. Maryland and Virginia regulators reported this spring that the number of juveniles they found during winter surveys dropped significantly.

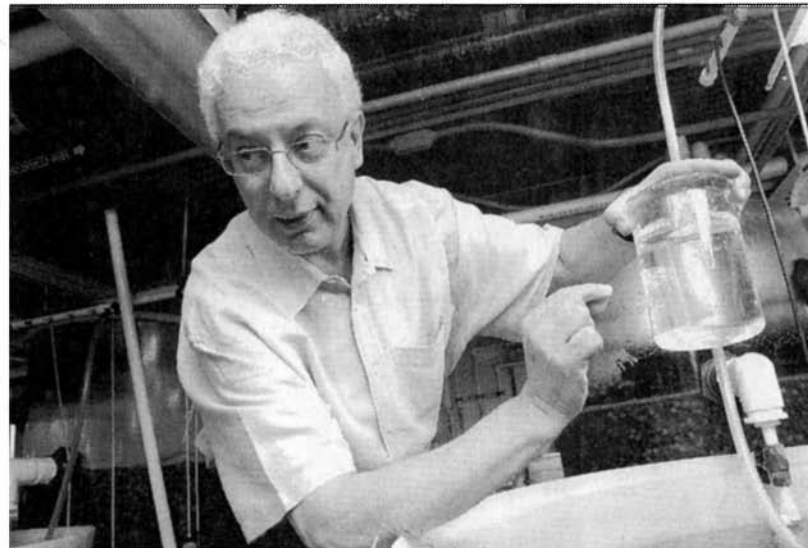
The work on hatching and releasing blue crabs will continue. Earlier this year, UMBI, the state and the watermen's group signed an agreement pledging to work together for the next 10 years. The state-owned Southern Maryland hatchery will be expanded under the deal.

The project has spawned scores of academic papers and recognition within the marine biology community. The overall body of knowledge on blue crabs has expanded.

"The research is making exciting progress," Dr. Hines said.

The work is vital, Dr. Zohar said, for bringing back what he calls "the last big fishery in the Chesapeake."

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Photos by Joshua McKerrow — The Capital

Dr. Yonathan Zohar holds up a beaker containing tiny larval-stage blue crabs. The hatchery he directs at the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute in Baltimore is responsible for producing hundreds of thousands of blue crabs that are released into the Chesapeake Bay.



Adult blue crabs at the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute's hatchery in Baltimore are kept apart to cut down on one of the main complications of working with crustaceans — they tend to eat each other.



About Our Bay

Our Bay is produced by Capital Gazette Communications to raise awareness about the Chesapeake Bay and environmental issues. **Our Bay** also features several items provided by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. They include “Ask a Scientist,” “Creature Feature,” “Did You Know?” and the “Tip of the Week.”

Send us your bay stories

Just as we all share responsibility for the health of the Chesapeake Bay, we also all enjoy its beauty and bounty.

Do you have a favorite spot to relax and enjoy the view? Do you have time-honored bay traditions you are passing on to your children? Do you have a memory of the bay that comes to mind again and again?

We want to hear your stories about our bay. Share them with us in 200 words or less — an essay or a letter that tells your bay story.

We’ll publish some of those stories in a new feature called “**My Bay**” that will appear on these pages and in *The Capital*.

Send your thoughts to ourbay@capitalgazette.com or Our Bay Editor, 2000 Capital Drive, Annapolis, MD, 21401. Be sure to include your name and a daytime phone number.