



WINTER

2010

NEWSLETTER

****ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING** JANUARY 8, 2011**

ANNUAL MEETING

The TOGA Annual Membership Meeting will be held ***Saturday, January 8, 2011***, at the **Gloucester County Public Library**, 6920 Main Street, Gloucester, VA 23061 from **2 to 4 pm**. The Library is in the shopping center with the Post Office and Anna's Restaurant. (The VIMS auditorium is closed due to renovations.) As usual, light snacks will be provided. The business portion will include the Treasurer's Report and planned 2011 budget, a recap of 2010 and planned 2011 events, elections for the 2011 Executive Board, and other items of interest. The educational program will consist of two items of interest to oyster gardeners: 1) Carl Hershner (VIMS) will address the current situation regarding the implementation of TMDL's, the EPA, "Bay Pollution Diet", and any potential impacts on Virginia; 2) Jim Wesson (VMRC) will discuss the pro's and con's of diploids (fertile) vs. triploids (sterile) oysters for use by oyster gardeners. Displays of items of interest to Oyster Gardeners are welcome.

PROPOSED 2011 EXECUTIVE BOARD

The current Executive Board has unanimously nominated the following officers for 2011. TOGA members will be afforded the opportunity to make additional nominations prior to the election at the Annual Meeting.

President.....Dave Turney
Vice President.....Brian Wood
Secretary.....Kathy Hoffmann
Treasurer.....Steve Wann
At Large Members.....Lynton Land
Ken Hammond
Rick Griffin
Amry Cox
Past President.....Vic Spain
President Emeritus.....Jackie Partin
VIMS Advisor.....Mike Oesterling

RETIRING BOARD MEMBERS

We would like to thank Bob Buckner, Nick Ferriter, and Chan Chandler (former President) for their outstanding work as Executive Board Members and welcome their continued participation and support. A sad note for us- Mike Oesterling will be retiring from VIMS in March 2011. We will soon be welcoming a new advisor. In many ways, Mike has made TOGA what it is today and we will always be thankful for his dedicated support and the knowledge he has passed on.

2010 FLOAT BUILDING WORKSHOP UPDATE

Our annual Float Workshop went very well this year, and a few of you even commented on how smoothly everything went. There are a few reasons for that: we took more space so we could spread out and not be so crowded, we were able to lock in the necessary purchases earlier so we had a better idea of how many floats we could

build, but most importantly we had a number of new volunteers helping out this time. My big mistake was in not getting all of your names. So for those who did come and help out, we salute you and we thank you profusely for your help. In particular, two ladies just seemed to take over building the Taylor floats, and it ran like a charm! We also had great weather--I worry about Hurricane Whoever coming along some year and washing everything out.

In 2009, we built around 87 floats; this year, we only did 27 or so. I don't know what can cause such a fluctuation. It seems there is no way to predict how many floats we will build prior to getting the registrations in the mail. If anyone out there has some fancy prediction software that could be used to predict the number of floats, I would sure like to have them get in touch with me! Since we didn't have a clue as to how many we would build this year, we purchased extensive materials and now have considerable inventory.

We also asked our membership if they were interested in holding a float workshop in the spring, possibly at a location farther north. We got very few responses, and only two expressed a desire for a workshop in the spring. Since most people prefer to place their young oysters in the water in the fall, maybe we should just stick to the fall Float Workshop.

Someone also commented on how nice it was to see such a diverse group of people all working together on their projects. It was nice and I thank you all, especially our great volunteers!

...Steve Wann, Float Workshop Coordinator

VIRGINIA HALF-SHELL OYSTER TASTING

More than a hundred people came to Gloucester for Toga's Half-Shell Oyster Tasting on Saturday, November 20th. And

that was just the ones who took part in the tasting. An additional large number came along as non-tasting guests! It was a beautiful fall day and there were lots of happy people. Six of about 15 oyster growers who grow oysters around the Middle Peninsula were present, with festive tents and exhibits and lots of oysters. Mike Hutt of Virginia Seafood Products and Dan Kauffman of Virginia Tech were responsible for the program. A very interesting discussion of the difference between taste and flavor helped all of us begin our tasting experience and everyone was amazed to be able to quickly distinguish between the oysters grown in different locations.

Deborah Pratt, a many times National Champion Oyster Shucker, gave demonstrations of how to shuck an oyster, and then she and her sister helped our many volunteers be more efficient shuckers. Kelsick Market provided more food and wine and specialty beers to accompany the oysters. The most frequent comment was "This is GREAT!" and "You have to do this again next year!"

The organizing committee very much appreciates the help of VIMS people, Mike Oesterling and Vicki Clark, and many volunteer oyster shuckers, as well as Leanne DuBois from the Virginia Department of Agriculture Water Harvest, and Mike Hutt and Dan Kauffman. TOGA volunteers were, as usual, present and busy and helpful. Many thanks to you all. View photos from the oyster tasting event on the TOGA website...*Jackie Partin, MOG*

FELLOW MOGS: WE NEED YOUR HELP OR, THOUGHTS FROM A NEW MOG

When I completed the 2009 Master Oyster Gardener (MOG) class, I was anxious about how I would fulfill my commitment of 50 hours to TOGA. What opportunities were available within my constraints of time and knowledge, and did I really know enough to contribute in a quality way? I found the

answers when I attended my first board meeting: there are many ways to help achieve our goals, and the quality and depth of my efforts would improve by working with the relatively small group of passionate TOGA veterans that does so much for this organization. Granted, I have put a lot more miles on my truck than I expected, but the experiences have been equally more fun and rewarding than I ever anticipated. I'm hoping more MOGs would like to share some time and energy with TOGA, but are not sure how. I would like to describe some of the ways you can help, and to encourage you to give it a try.

This has been a busy and productive year. We will have participated in nearly 30 festivals, fairs, and various environmental events. Our resources were stretched, and we were not able to accept a couple of invitations. With all these activities spread out over the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, and The Peninsula, getting people and equipment to the right place at the right time was a challenge. Did I mention that we established a new position this year, the Outreach Coordinator? That would be me, Dave Turney. If you look on the last page of this newsletter and on the website at our Outreach Schedule, you can see the diversity of organizations with which we work. There are many fascinating people and good causes out there, and TOGA shares substantive community involvement with many of them.

We need your help. If I may borrow from a recent background paper by Jackie Partin, written to advertise TOGA's sponsoring of the November 20th Virginia Half-Shell Oyster Tasting event... "We hold workshops in which we show people how to build Taylor floats and other containers that are appropriate for their site. We help schools plan and carry out oyster gardening projects, and we staff exhibits at dozens of annual events, to encourage new gardeners. We visit new gardeners' growing sites at their invitation, to help them solve problems." In the Outreach Coordination area, we try to make sure that, for each

event, both TOGA and the sponsor have the required information to set up - when, where and what is needed; we maintain an inventory on publications, tables, posters, banners, aquariums, aerators, heaters, extension cords, oysters and associated marine critters, tents, etc. Some members are staying abreast of standards and research efforts from various governmental organizations. We participate in oyster growth and longevity studies. We keep an eye out for good speakers and substantive topics for TOGA-sponsored events. Grant request writing and web maintenance are other actions. Like any endeavor, you break it into bite size parts, tap into the various talents and interests of the team, and press on. All of these things are discussed at board meetings, which we have roughly every two months. I know some members may not be able to attend weekday meetings, so perhaps we can find additional ways to communicate where we need help.

My goal in writing this article is to urge TOGA members, and especially MOGs, to participate in fulfilling our growing agenda. Your thoughts and comments are welcome. I can be reached at 804-462-3131, or via email at dn.turney@yahoo.com. Phone numbers and email addresses of other board members can be found on our website...Dave Turney, Outreach Coordinator

TOGA'S OYSTER GROWTH AND LONGEVITY STUDY

We have had 35 people volunteer for TOGA's Oyster Growth and Longevity Study with 20 receiving their oysters and supplies in August 2010. The Remaining 15 volunteers will have received their supplies and oysters in November.

These volunteers have and will receive three different disease resistant strains of oysters to be grown in numerous and varying rivers, bays and tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay (in cages TOGA provides) for tracking the growth and longevity of their specimens.

These strains include Triploid (sterile oyster), Debys (Delaware Bay High Salinity X- breed) and LA's (Louisiana Low Salinity X-breed). These oysters have been especially developed for commercial oyster growers and gardeners like us. The big question has always been, "What grows best in my area of the Tidewater?" With this study, we hope to determine just that.

October results are in from the August volunteers. These study oysters were put in an upweller (see photo below) a few weeks for rapid growth prior to dispatching, with sizes varying from 5/8" to 3/4" in length.



The results of these oysters have varied in the early returns, but exciting results have been that some of these batches of study oysters are averaging 2 1/2" in length already! Also with less than 1 percent in natural (other than predator kills) die off.

In the future, as more data starts to accumulate, we will post this information on our website and upcoming newsletters for all to share. Thanks to our volunteers! ...*Brian Wood, MOG, TOGA Project Coordinator*

DAY BASKETS

OK, so when you have a bunch of friends coming over, you naturally haul one of your floats out of the water and harvest what, ten dozen oysters or so? But suppose you and your significant other just want a dozen each; do you still haul the float out? It can be a pain. My suggestion is to take a tip from sailors of old, and create a "day basket".

This comes from the old-fashioned "day tank" used on sailboats: in the days before watermakers the sailors knew drinking water

was limited in quantity, so they would fill a small tank each morning with the amount of water they would consume that day; when that tank went empty, there was none left for the rest of the day. The "day basket" for me started out as a "day bucket": I would harvest a few dozen for my guests, and pull out an additional two or three dozen: these "leftover" oysters were put into a five-gallon plastic bucket into which I had cut holes and attached a line, which I tied to my pier, and put the bucket, with oysters inside, into the water. The next time I wanted oysters, I just pulled on the line and up came the bucket and oysters. Simple, cheap, and effective. But the bucket got slimy, and crabs and toadfish tended to share the bucket with the oysters. I needed a better solution.

It was at one of the Float Workshops that someone asked to take the cut-out corners of wire. I didn't think to ask what they wanted them for, but eventually I realized that these squares of wire 12" by 12" could be put together with cable ties to create a "day basket" into which oysters could be held until hunger struck. With a top and open sides, the drawbacks of the "day bucket" were eliminated. My first attempt was successful, but it had the retrieval line going through two opposite corners of the top edge, causing the cage to distort slightly. And the distortion made it impossible for any top to fit securely.

My latest attempt is to lead the line from the center of the bottom of the day basket, up through the center of the basket. Yes, it can still tilt to one side if there are more oysters on one side than the other, but this is easily remedied by shaking the cage to even out the oyster load. Fouling is mostly eliminated, crabs and fish generally are excluded, and an added advantage is that I'm not pulling out a bucket filled with water.



Yes, it sinks. You could attach small PVC floats like a Taylor float has, but that's too much work for me. I put a large knot in the line and run the line and knot between boards on my pier: by placing the knot in the right location on the line, the day basket can be suspended above the bottom, and even be suspended high enough to be out of the water for a while on each tidal cycle; I'm experimenting to see if this cuts down on slime and barnacles on the oysters.

So, each time I harvest some of my oysters, I just put a few dozen into a day basket and hang the basket from my pier. I find it a great solution, but it's not perfect, and if anyone has any improvements to suggest, I would like to hear from you. ... *Steve Wann, MOG*

COWNOSE RAYS, NOT ALL BAD FOR OYSTERS

By spring 2003, a thriving oyster population had developed on three dimensional shell cultch reefs in the intertidal zone of Bennett Creek off Bay Point in Poquoson two years after being deployed. In June, massive schools of Cownose Rays descended on the reefs eating the oysters. Damage to the oyster population/reefs by these shellfish sharks was disappointing. Technical publications and newspaper accounts I have read about rays hampering oyster restoration programs in the bay are consistent with my experience here; too many rays are bad.

The excellent presentation by VIMS scientist Bob Fisher describing his Cownose Ray research at the 2010 TOGA Mid-Year Education Event last June has changed my

thinking about the rays from negative to positive. One of the key points he made was the rays could not eat oysters with maximum whole body thickness more than 32mm because their mouth could not open any wider. This was demonstrated showing tank test videos of rays eating oysters including oysters in clumps except the largest ones. This realization motivated me to gather surviving large natural oysters recently dislodged from my reefs by the rays but not eaten to measure their maximum whole body thickness. Measurements of maximum thickness were consistent with VIMS research results.

Of interest to me was that Mother Nature by limiting the whole body thickness a ray can eat protected the best large female spawning stock having survived disease and predators, and that provide the best shell essential for the natural population to be self sustained in my garden. Moreover, the shell/fragments from smaller oysters they eat left on/nearby the reefs by the rays during the summer provide clean structure when it is most effective for oyster larvae to set on year after year. The primary pulse of clean shell from ray feeding is in June when hungry rays arrive in this area and oyster larvae are ready to set here based on my experience deploying shell bags to recruit seed. See Article "Expanding the sustained oyster population in my garden", TOGA Fall 2009 newsletter on the website.

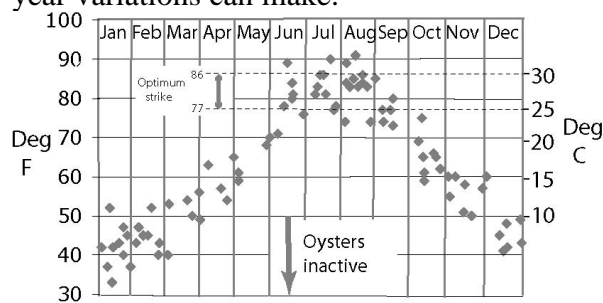
The partnership between TOGA and VIMS has provided many educational opportunities for gardeners to learn more about oysters and marine life that inhabit the bay with this keystone animal. I encourage gardeners to use these opportunities to learn more for a better understanding. (The complete article with pictures, graph, and description with details is available at the TOGA website)...*Julian Cox, MOG*



***Visit the TOGA website for
additional information & photos:
www.oystergardener.org***

WATER TEMPERATURES IN SPENCER CREEK

Water temperatures have been taken sporadically for over a decade about 2 feet below the surface off a pier in Spencers Creek, in the Little Wicomico River. Measured temperatures were plotted versus time and several temperatures of interest to oyster growers added. The plot below emphasizes what a big difference year-to-year variations can make.



As examples, water temperatures rose above 50 degrees Fahrenheit (10 degrees Centigrade), the temperature at which oysters start to grow, in mid January one year, whereas another year stayed cold until early April. A water temperature of 77 degrees Fahrenheit (25 degrees Centigrade), sufficient to trigger spawning, was reached in early June some years, whereas in other years sufficiently warm temperatures were reached much later, or not at all...*Lynton Land, MOG*

NOTE TO VENDORS

Please update your information for our website (www.oystergardener.org) Oyster Gardening Resources Page. We will be updating the format and content. Please check the page and let us know if it is OK or provide us with updated information on contacts, products, business hours, etc. Contact Vic Spain (vicspain@rocketmail.com, 804 642-6764).

TOGA 2011 OUTREACH SCHEDULE

We have tentatively identified the events listed below for the coming year, and this list will likely grow. We will update the web as the dates and times are confirmed.

This year our resources were stretched, and we were not able to accept some of the invitations. I encourage fellow members to help set up and staff our upcoming events. These are great opportunities to contribute your time and effort to the worthy causes of TOGA while meeting many fascinating people and having a lot of fun.

We need an Outreach Coordinator for 2011. Please call me at 804-462-3131 if you would like to consider this position, or help out. I will remain in the position until a new person is found and up-to-speed. I will continue to help as needed, as will many of those who have helped throughout the year...*David Turney, Outreach Coordinator*

No.	Event	Date	Location	Coordinator
1	Menokin Nature Series	4/6	Menokin	Lynton Land
2	Poquoson Earth Day	tbd	Poquosons	Julian Cox
3	Middle Peninsula Oyster Fair *	5/	ChristChurch	Vic Spain
4	Northern Neck Oyster Fair*	5/	Kilmarnock	Lynton Land
5	Earth/Arbor Day	5/	Fort Monroe	Grady Wesson/Vic
6	Montessori	5		

7	Eco-Expo	6/	Beaverdam Pk	Jim Renner
8	MOG course	6/	Gloucester	Sam Joplin
9	Rivafest	6/	Tappahannock	Brian Wood
10	Gywnns Island Festival	tbd	Mathews	Jim Renner
11	Mathews Market Days	9/	Mathews	Rolf Zierow
12	Hampton Bay Days	9/	Hampton	Julian Cox
13	Oyster Gardening Workshop	9/	Reedville	Brian Wood
14	TOGA Float Workshop	9/	Gloucester	Steve Wann
15	NN Land Conservancy (BBB)	9/	tbd	Nick Ferriter
16	Mathews Maritime Heritage Day	9/	Horn H. Marina	Rolf Zierow
17	National Estuaries Day	9/	Williamsburg	tbd
18	West Point Crab Carnival	10/	West Point	Bob Buckner
19	Fun Fest	10/	White Stone	Nick Ferriter
20	Urbanna Oyster Festival	11/	Urbanna	Jim Renner
21	Garden Club of Virginia	11/	William & Mary	Curt Bluefeld
22	Chesapeake Bay Days	tbd	Mathews 6 th gr	Rolf Zierow
23	Oyster Tasting	tbd	Gloucester	Jackie Partin
24	TOGA Annual Meeting	tbd	tbd	Dave Turney



Our newsletter was paid for by funds generated from
the sale of Chesapeake Bay license plates.