



SHELLFISH AND AQUACULTURE SERIES

Gone, but not forgotten...shellfish you remember

Thankfully the title of this newsletter is “not entirely correct.” Some shellfish are less abundant in the Great Salt Pond now than they were decades ago, but they are not gone—and they certainly occupy a disproportionately large part of our childhood memories.

STEAMERS

Perhaps the best known example of a “gone but not forgotten” shellfish is the soft-shelled clam (*Mya arenaria*), a.k.a. steamer, longneck or piss clam. Served steamed with melted butter, or as fried whole-bellies, these clams are still a staple of local cuisine even though they are usually imported from more northerly New England states.

Anecdotally, the soft-shell population in the Great Salt Pond is less than 10% of what it was about thirty years ago. Why is that? There are likely several contributing factors, including predation by invasive species like green crabs. Because of their relative lack of abundance, harvesting the soft-shell clam is prohibited on Block Island.

SURF CLAMS

The Atlantic surf clam (*Spisula solidissima*), a.k.a. sea clam or skimmer, is the largest of the local clam species, and you have probably seen their triangular shaped shell used as a dish or an ashtray. While not as well-known as steamers or quahogs, if you have eaten the fried clam strips that Howard Johnson’s made popular then you have enjoyed the foot of the surf clam. They also make great striped bait!

RAZOR CLAMS

The Atlantic jackknife clam (*Ensis leei*), commonly called a razor clam, is the decathlete of the clam world. With their powerful foot they are a challenge to catch, as their digging speed can be faster than the diggers’, and they have been known to propel themselves out of buckets after capture. Your hard work in catching a razor clam will be rewarded by eating a delicacy!



Top to Bottom: Surf clam, Razor clam, Softshell (steamer) clam (courtesy Chris Littlefield)



Surf clam



Quahog (l) and Steamer (r)

OUR MISSION: To protect and enhance the environmental quality of the Great Salt Pond, including its shorelines and wetlands, and to promote appropriate and productive uses of the Pond’s resources by residents, visitors and local businesses.

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Please consider becoming a member of The Committee for the Great Salt Pond. For information and details, visit our website at cgspblockisland.org.