AN INVADER IN THE WADDEN SEA – *ENSIS AMERICANUS*

Figure 1 – Picture of an American razor clam (*Ensis americanus) in the mudflat at List*

Introduction

The American razor clam *Ensis americanus* is one of many invasive species in the Wadden Sea. This clam is not native to the German mud flat ecosystem. They were unintentionally introduced in the late 1970's as blind passengers in the ballast tanks of large cargo ships. Originating from the North American Atlantic Coast, they are now found in large numbers on the Coast of the Wadden Sea.

Characteristics

The American razor clam has a very long, narrow housing, and whose upper and lower shell runs nearly parallel. The average length of the clam in the North Sea is about 17cm. In North American waters they can grow up to 25cm. The ratio of the shell length to shell height is about 5 to 7. The top and the bottom edges are rounded. The upper shell is reddish to grey and the lower shell is brownish in color. The razor clam is a filter feeder. It sits vertically in the sediment at a depth of about 5 - 20cm. It has openings on both ends of its shell in order to filter the water and absorb nutrients. The age of the clam can be determined by counting the number of ridges on the shell. These ridges occur during the growth phase every summer when the clam extends its shell. The life span generally ranges from 5-7 years. The only predator known to feed on the razor clam is the Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus.*

Infobox
The Oystercatcher is a native bird in the Wadden Sea, feeding on molluscs. Easily identifiable by its long red beak.

Management Issues

Despite the abundancy of the non-native razor clam, no harmful effects on the local ecosystems can be recognized so far. However, care should be taken when walking in the mud flats as the sharp edges of the clam easily penetrate the skin and can cause severe cuts. The clam population is under constant monitoring in order to control its future impact on the local environment.

Figure 2 - Overall distribution of *Ensis americanus* in the Wadden Sea

Rashed Sheriff, Samuel Jantz, Fabian Delong, Jan Wildefeld