



Background (RBCM Press Release)

May 8, 1997

Scientists have first peek at artificial reef newcomers

Royal British Columbia Museum scientists are in a team that has found sea life flourishing in 270 hollow concrete spheres offshore at Sidney, B.C. It's the first time those spheres, each about two feet tall and three feet wide, have been used to create an artificial reef in northern temperate waters.

The reef was laid last fall after residents of Sidney decided they wanted to attract a greater diversity of marine organisms, particularly fish, crab and shrimp, to an increasingly popular public fishing pier on the town's eastern boundary.

Molds for the balls were donated by Reef Ball Development Group Ltd. in the state of Georgia, which has been involved in the creation of 50 artificial reefs in Mexico, the United Arab Emirates, Bahamas, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, New York and Newfoundland. The installation at Sidney is the first in Pacific Northwest waters.

The company made its gift on the condition that the emergence of marine community on the reef be monitored. Volunteers in Sidney manufactured the biologically inert balls from those molds.

The federal Institute of Ocean Sciences, at the invitation of the town of Sidney, came up with the framework for a scientific study that could be conducted by volunteers. The Royal B.C. Museum is training volunteer divers in species identification and monitoring techniques so that long-term records can be established of what's happening around and inside the reef.

Observations

The first observations, made last weekend (May 3, 1997), suggest animals and plants are enjoying the hollow concrete balls. Fish, sea stars, nudibranchs and crabs are among the early settlers. The first forms of plant life--the red algae--have arrived.

The empty balls, which are each a series of micro environments, appear to provide the shade and protection that is attractive to many marine forms. There will be additional shading in the summer and fall when large brown kelps establish themselves.

The studies will continue for another two or three years, depending how long it takes to establish a biological community that appears to be stable.

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