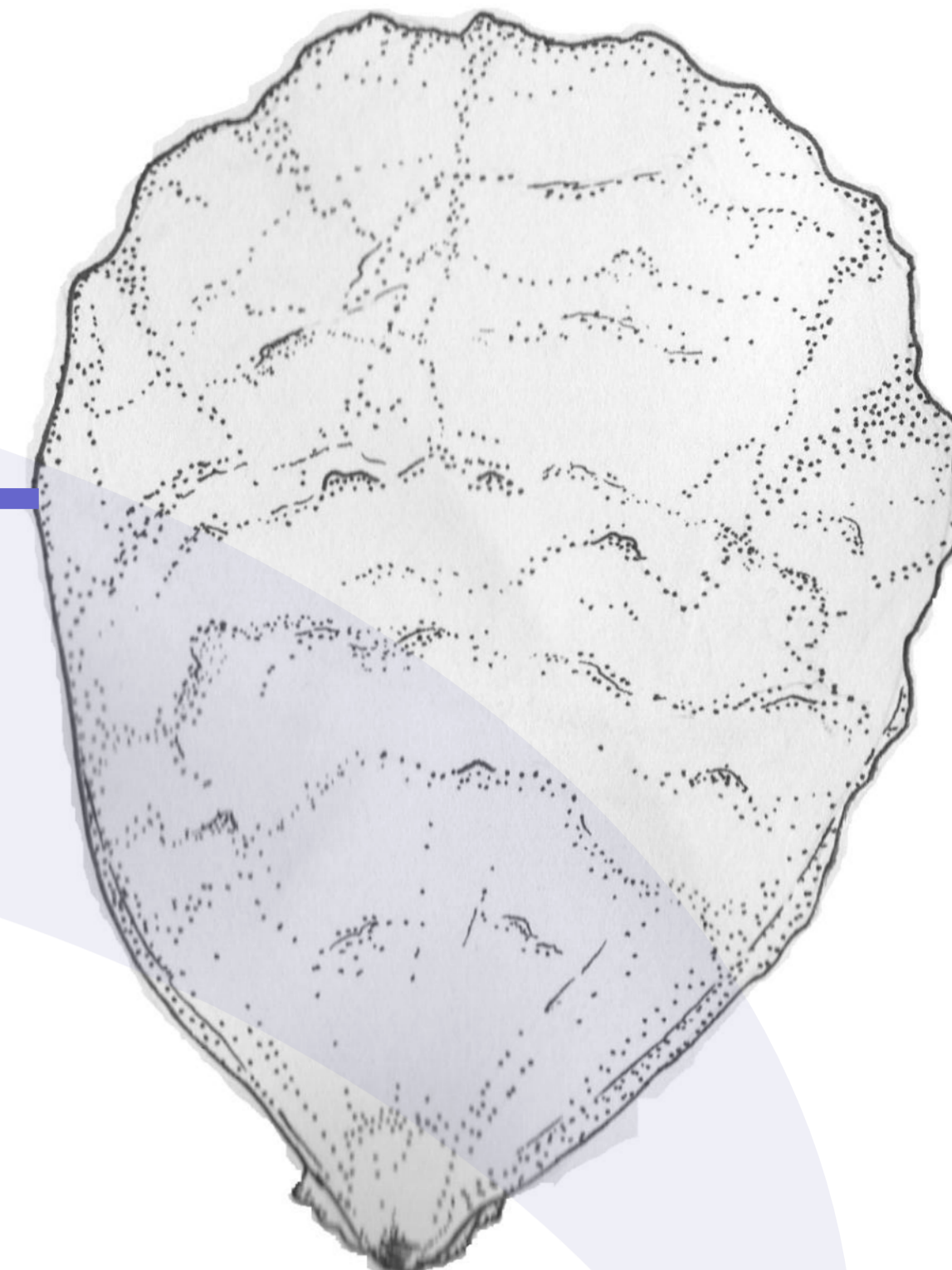


Oyster Reef

The eastern oyster is a member of the mollusk family. They are often called shellfish due to their two hard shells that grow around their soft bodies. Oyster shells grow from the edges outwards, like a tree and can grow quite large if left undisturbed. Most will grow in an oval shape with one shell growing flat while the other grows into a cup shape. The shells can also grow around things that surround the oyster to form different shapes. Their two shells, or valves, can close very tightly and stay shut for a long time. This helps protect the oyster from predators such as crabs.

*Oysters are filter feeders*- They feed by drawing water in through a siphon and filtering out food and other particles through a set of “gills”. When there are many filter feeders growing together they can clear the water of a lot of particles. Helping to clean up the water around them.

Oysters tend to grow in clusters on top of one another. Growing like this over long periods of time can develop reefs. Much like tropical coral reefs, these reefs can be very productive and offer a lot to the environment. They provide all sorts of fish, crabs, worms, and even birds, with places to hide and food to eat. Oyster reefs also help protect the shorelines from erosion by reducing wave and current energy.



Adult Oyster

## The Eastern Oyster:

# Building *Them and You* a Better Future

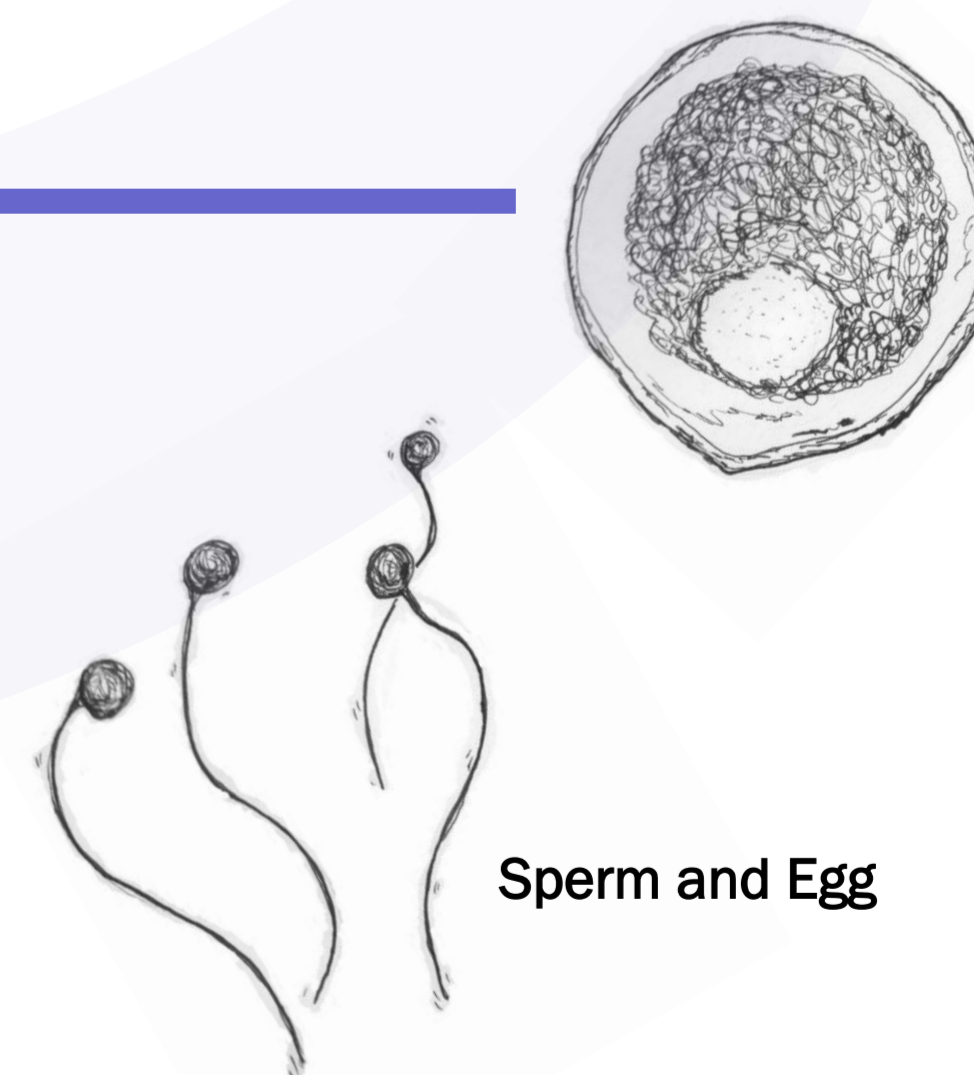
Oysters are free spawning. They reproduce by releasing sperm and eggs into the water around them. With luck the eggs will become fertilized forming an oyster larvae that will float around in the water for up to 3 weeks. This is a risky venture so females produce up to a 100 million eggs in a single year to better their chances.

During the 3 weeks after fertilization the free-floating larvae are feeding on tiny plankton that are found in the water. There are many predators that the larvae must evade, such as jellyfish, small fish and even other filter feeders. They develop a “foot” that is used to maneuver around. They also use their foot to seek out a suitable home to “set” on, where they will stay for the rest of their life. This is usually on to another oyster shell. This preference builds the reefs into such large features.

There has been a large reduction in oyster populations in recent years and a lot of effort has been placed on restoring this important part of the coastal environment.



Oyster Larvae



Sperm and Egg

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For More Information or to get involved with restoration work:

[http://www.chesapeakebay.net/american\\_oyster.htm](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/american_oyster.htm)

<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/fisheries/recreational/articles/oysterrestoration.html>

<http://www.vims.edu/mollusc/monrestoration/restoyreef2.htm>