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NURSERY GROUND FOR EARLY JUVENILES OF TIGER PRAWN IN KOVALAM BACKWATER NEAR MADRAS*

The Kovalam backwater (Lat. 12°46' N; Long. 80°18' E) is usually flooded during the northeast monsoon from October–December. Consequently, the sand bar at the mouth of the backwater is cut open to release the accumulated water into the sea and thus avoiding inundation of paddy fields lying adjacent to the backwater. The bar mouth remains open till April – May, during which time, recruitment of larvae and early juveniles of prawns, fishes and crabs takes place continuously, supporting a lucrative fishery in the back-

waters during the post and pre-monsoon months, especially for penaeid prawns. For the purpose of utilising the early juveniles of fast growing species of penaeid prawns for field culture, experimental drag net (10 m long; 12 mm mesh size) operations were carried out in the backwater during December 1984. This has brought to light the occurrence of early juveniles of tiger prawn *P. monodon* off Vadanemmel village.

The total length of juvenile tiger prawn caught ranged between 28 and 91 mm. They were found to be more abundant over the sea grass bed. A maximum

* Reported by M. Kathirvel and V. Selvaraj, Madras Research Centre of CMFRI, Madras.

of 717 juveniles per 100 m² were caught in the drag net operated in the backwaters near Vadanemmel.

The present observations have indicated the rich colonisation of early juveniles of *P. monodon* over the sea grass beds. This congregation could be attributed to the clinging habits of the species in its earlier part of the life. This habit of taking shelter among the grasses may help them to escape from predators. A perusal of literature on the habitat of the species has shown that *P. monodon*, also known as the grass shrimp,

takes refuge among the weedy areas in estuaries during its postlarval and early juvenile stages. Taking advantages of the clinging habit of fry of tiger prawn, successful fry collections have been achieved by suspending bunches of twigs and grass from a horizontal rope in the estuaries and bays in Philippines. The abundantly found fry of *P. monodon*, associated with sea grass vegetation in Kovalam backwater can be exploited for meeting the great demand for tiger prawn seeds for farming.

