

Alien species crowding out local mussels

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Kochi: Wondering why the mussels (Kallumakkaya) you always liked has been tasting different? It may not be the local green mussels (*Perna viridis*) which are native to the Indian waters. Instead, it could be the wild mussels that have invaded the Kerala coasts almost erasing the green and brown mussels popular here.

The invasive species, *Mytella strigata* (previously known as *M. charruana*) is native to South America and has established itself in many coastal and estuarine areas in Kerala, including Vembanad, Ashtamudi, Kayamkulam and Padanna backwaters.

RISKS AND IMPACTS

- Green mussel farming is very popular in northern districts
- Often, farmers may mistake the seeds of *M.strigata* (wild) for that of *P.viridis* (local-the green mussels)
- The species is edible (though not as tasty as green mussel) and can be consumed



or can be used as feed ingredients

- All out efforts should be made to prevent, control and

eliminate *M.strigata* from establishing in state waters

- *M.strigata* should not be used for farming, as it will promote further spreading. If found attached to cages/nets or any other materials, they should be removed and kept out of the water body to ensure its eradication

Experts say it has been noted in the Kerala waters since 2018 but now it has become invasive and is replacing almost the entire native mussels.

“We believe this species has entered new areas mainly thro-

ugh ballast waters or attach to hulls of ships and established themselves in the major ports, initially,” said P Laxmilatha, principal scientist and head, molluscan division.

Mytella strigata can tolera-

te a wide range of salinities and are generally found as thick beds, attached to partly submerged/submerged substrata, including rocks, piers, wooden poles and cage nets and grows up to 8cm in length.

It is edible, though not as tasty as green mussel. An invasive species is an organism that is not indigenous, or native, to a particular area. Ability to grow fast and spread quickly makes them dangerous for the native species. “In the spat stage (when oysters attach themselves to a hard surface), it can be confused with the spat of the green mussel.

Shell of the invader is dark brown to black in colour, whereas that of green mussel is emerald green. Besides, variations in shape and colour patterns are also common. The shell of *M.strigata* (brown) has a bluish to purplish-black nacreous interior while in *Pviridis* (Green) it is shining white with a pale, bluish-green tinge.