

Importance of parasitism as a mortality factor in the common cockle *Cerastoderma edule* in the northern Wadden Sea

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The common cockle *Cerastoderma edule* is one of the dominating macrobenthic species in the Wadden Sea. It has been the object of numerous studies and is well known to show large fluctuations in abundance. Various predator exclusion experiments in the field suggested predation to be the major structuring force in cockle populations on tidal flats. However, one potentially important factor has been neglected in most of these studies: parasitism. In recent years, ecologists have become increasingly aware of the potential ecological importance of parasites and a still growing body of literature has emerged on various effects of parasites on host individuals, populations and communities.

This poster presentation reports on an ongoing study on the relative importance of parasitism as a mortality factor in the common cockle *Cerastoderma edule* in the northern Wadden Sea. Preliminary results will be presented on the species composition of parasites in local cockles and on the spatial scale of parasite prevalence by using data from a field mapping in 2002 of cockle populations in two adjacent tidal basins. In addition, future aspects of research on the temporal scale of infections, experiments on potential pathogeneity of certain parasites and experiments on the relative importance of parasites in cockles will be presented.