

# National Shellfisheries Association Quarterly Newsletter



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## President's Message

I hope you have had a productive and enjoyable fall. Here in Maine, we had a beautiful and mild autumn and our shellfish have had a longer than average growing season. With the shortening days comes the realization that all those seasonal projects need to be completed before the snow flies. This is also the time of year when Abstracts get written, so I hope you will consider submitting an Abstract to the 106<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the NSA, which will be held March 29 – April 2 in Jacksonville, Florida. Abstracts need to be submitted online at the NSA web site ([www.shellfish.org](http://www.shellfish.org)) and are due no later than January 1, 2014. This is also the date that applications for student awards are due as well as “early-bird” registrations for the meeting. And of course, NSA memberships need to be renewed by then as well. Since none of us want to be writing an Abstract on New Year's Eve, I suggest we get those Abstracts and applications written, memberships and registrations confirmed and that flight to Jacksonville and hotel room booked before the holiday rush descends upon us. Not only will doing so help you have a stress-free New Year's Eve but you'll also save money by taking advantage of those “early-bird” rates.



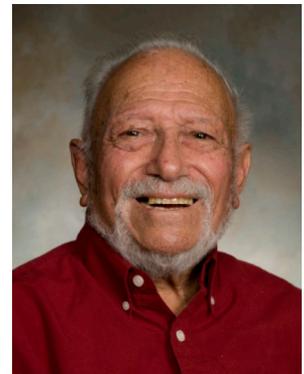
With this issue of the *QNL*, we sadly report another loss to our shellfish community with the passing of Sammy Ray. Sammy was a pioneering shellfish biologist and remarkable educator and mentor to students of all ages. Catching up with Sammy at NSA meetings was always a joy. He will be sorely missed.

It continues to be a privilege and honor to serve this 105 year old organization and I am fortunate to get to work with such talented and dedicated colleagues.

**Chris Davis**  
President

## The Passing of an Icon Sammy Ray

Sammy Ray, renowned oyster biologist, dedicated marine educator, and a founder of Texas A&M University at Galveston, died on October 14, 2013 at the age of 94. Sammy's first professional interest was ornithology. As an undergraduate student he worked under the direction of ornithologist George Lowery at Louisiana State University (LSU), where he received his B.S. degree in 1942. There, he refined his skills as a taxidermist and made numerous contributions to the LSU Museum. In June 1942, he enlisted in the Navy as a pharmacist's mate. He saw intense action in the Pacific theater where he collected birds knocked to the ground by artillery fire from both friend and foe. The specimens were shipped to the Smithsonian Museum, and are a part of its permanent collection of Pacific birds.



At the conclusion of the war he intended to attend medical school. An offer of a fellowship funded by Gulf Oil and the opportunity to attend Rice University and work with the parasitologist Asa Chandler diverted him from medical school to oyster biology. After World War II, exploration, drilling, and production of oil in the estuaries of Louisiana intensi-

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- *Shellfish R & D*
- *The Epic Saga of Ming*

## Sammy Ray... *continued from page 1.*

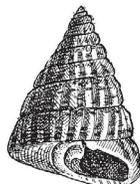
fied greatly. Coincident with this heightened activity was high levels of oyster mortality, resulting in a lawsuit filed by oystermen against oil companies. Numerous oil companies combined efforts to fund a comprehensive study of the cause of the excessive mortalities of Louisiana oysters. The legacy of the effort was the discovery that the high mortalities were due not to oil industry activities, but to a previously undescribed parasite. John Mackin, Malcolm Owen and Albert Collier described the parasite in a 1950 article in the journal *Science*, and named it *Dermocystidium marinum*. Ray soon thereafter developed a technique to easily identify and quantify it. The technique is referred to as Ray's Fluid Thioglycollate Method, and is still widely used. In the latter part of his life, Sammy founded the web site Oyster Sentinel ([www.oystersentinel.org](http://www.oystersentinel.org)) to disseminate information on distribution and abundance of the parasite, now called *Perkinsus marinus*. He was an advocate for the importance of maintaining adequate freshwater inflow to estuaries to control oyster disease, maintain oyster populations, and support other estuarine species.

Sammy mentored generations of students -- graduate, undergraduate, high school, and elementary. He witnessed the retirement of some of his former graduate students before his own, while introducing elementary students to marine science. He joined Texas A&M University in 1957 and later founded the first resident graduate and undergraduate teaching program at Galveston. One of his proudest accomplishments, however, was the founding in 1986 of Sea Camp which fosters in young students an interest in science. Over the years more than 1,600 students from 27 states and 6 countries have attended. His diminutive size and trademark blue overalls earned him the nickname "Papa Smurf" from his Sea Camp students. He embraced this moniker and used it to better connect to his young students.

From its humble beginnings as a marine station without classes or resident students, Ray was instrumental in the emergence of Texas A&M University at Galveston. During his career he served as Director of the Galveston Marine Laboratory, Head of the Department of Marine Sciences, Dean of Moody College, and Interim President of TAMUG. He is rightly called a founder of TAMUG, if not the father of the institution.

For his many friends and colleagues in the National Shellfisheries Association, he will be remembered not only for his extraordinary life and significant scientific contributions, but for his indomitable spirit and vibrant personality.

**Tom Soniat**  
University of New Orleans



## The Epic Saga of *Ming*

Researchers at Bangor University reported that an ocean quahog dredged off the coast of Iceland is the world's oldest living non-colonial animal, determined to be the ripe old age of 507 years (as recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records). *Ming* the clam - so called because it settled and metamorphosed during the Chinese Ming dynasty. The clam was found during an expedition by the Bangor University team who calculated its age by counting bands measured on the sectioned surface of the outer shell margin.

The researchers, led by Chris Richardson, were interested in studying ocean quahogs (*Arctica islandica*), for a couple of reasons. Firstly, these clams are known for their longevity, and could provide clues about the science of ageing. What intrigued the Bangor group was how these animals manage to escape senescence. This may be associated with some genetically influenced difference in cell turnover rates that we normally associate with much shorter-lived animals. Accordingly, the University has received funding from the UK charity *Help The Aged* to help support its research.

Beside the animal's remarkable age, it may offer clues on climate change. The oxygen isotopes in the mollusc's shell can determine what the ocean temperature was throughout its life.



"There are a number of methods to chart past climate on land, but for the marine environment we only have some very limited data. The *A. islandica* can help fill this gap in our knowledge and provide us with a very accurate picture of past climate," Rob Witbaard, of the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, said. "This is important to our understanding of how much changes in the oceans affect the climate on land. And the really amazing thing is that the pattern in the ocean quahog's growth rings actually recurs in tree rings."

*Addendum: Recent news stories in late November reported that Ming was sacrificed while researchers were taking measurements on the clam.*