

This document is from the archives of Jim Gehrke. Many folks on the lake this year have once again seen gelatinous masses on their docks at the end of the season

HAVE YOU BEEN SLIMED?

This fall I have had several questions about the large mass of jelly-like stuff that is on the equipment that we are taking out of the lake. I had witnessed this stuff before and called the DNR and remember that I was told that it was not a bad thing. But, because it is so ugly, and because it is so prevalent this year, I thought I would inquire again.

This time I called Michele from the Oneida Co. Land and Water Conservation Office. She called back and gave me the spelling of the stuff. It is Bryozoa. It looks like a large jelly-like deposit on any structure beneath the water surface. It is not fish eggs, not frog eggs, not insect larvae. They are also called “moss animals.” Each clump can grow larger than a human head. They are underwater colonies of tiny animals which filter water for their food. Worldwide there are probably over 3,500 different kinds of Bryozoa. About 50 of them grow in fresh water. They have been recorded as present in the U. S. since the mid 1800’s.

The outside of the colony is a firm jelly surrounding a less visible set of pea sized animals. Each member of the colony has a way of poking a tiny stem out into the water and sucking in water and water nutrients. If there is any action that alerts them to possible harm, they all pull their stem back into the larger mass. This specific Bryozoa (*Pectinatella magnifica*, I think) needs warm water to live. It will die off each fall.

Is it bad? Although a lot of study has not been conducted until lately, no record of skin irritation or similar harm has been recorded. Some freshwater varieties are possibly an indication that the lake is a good quality clear-water lake. Some of the reading that I did said that Bryozoa likes water that is not contaminated. It could even be that the gelatinous masses help to create clear water.

There have been situations where the presence of Bryozoa in freshwater became so dense that steps were taken to alleviate the situation. Golf courses have found it in their irrigation systems and have introduced heavy metals to clear the organisms. Without doing this, the irrigation systems became clogged and useless. Another golf course used hypochlorite and one application seemed to solve their problem.

“Bryozoa generally are considered to be a sign of good water quality and normally aren’t a problem.” Dr. James A. Rice, North Carolina State University

By Jim Gehrke

