

BALLAN WRASSE

The Deep is working with a Scottish marine laboratory to find out if there is an alternative to the chemicals used to treat sea lice on farmed salmon and cod which threaten their health. Ballan Wrasse hatched and reared from eggs donated by The Deep will co-habit with farmed fish. The juvenile wrasse feed on the lice and will hopefully provide an excellent method of ethical and sustainable pest control.

The Deep has been working closely with researchers at the Ardtoe Marine laboratory on the Ardnamurchan peninsula on the west coast of Scotland. The head of the Ballan Wrasse research project, Dr Jim Treasurer explains, "While wrasse have been used for the control of sea lice in Norway, there are environmental reservations about taking wrasse from the wild. It was crucial that we found a reliable supply of Ballan Wrasse eggs for rearing in our hatcheries. We are delighted that The Deep could solve our problem."

Senior Aquarist, Richard Oades is overseeing the project at The Deep. He explains, "We found that our imitation pipeline in our Northern Seas exhibit was an ideal surface for the wrasse to lay their eggs. This meant we had to rapidly develop a method of carefully removing the eggs. This turned out to be a paint brush and turkey baster! So far Ardtoe have reared over 400 Ballan Wrasse fry which will be monitored to find out how efficient they are at cleaning farmed fish."

Background:

The Deep aquarist team first introduced a population of wrasse into the North Sea tank in 2002. Over the past 3 years, courtship has resulted in spawning. It is the male's responsibility to protect the eggs. 3 to 4 days after they have been laid, some of the eggs are collected and sent to the marine laboratory. They then hatch into fry after 10 days. One year on the juveniles weigh approximately 9g, and are miniature versions of the adults.

Ballan Wrasse are common fish throughout British coastal waters, and found in rocky areas and wrecks. All begin life as females which are maintained in a harem group by a single male. If the male dies or leaves, the largest female of the group develops male reproductive organs and changes sex. This male will make nests and fertilise eggs laid here by receptive female.

Video

Watch video footage of the egg collection in The Deep's Northern Seas Tank

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-B4dXFB6DI>