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Fundamental Forage Fish

Edina Johnston

Forage fish are the smaller species of fish such as herring, surf smelt, sand lance and anchovy which sustains larger predators higher up the ocean foodchain. Tuna, bass, cod, flounder, salmon, swordfish, whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, sea lions and even sea birds rely on these under-appreciated species.

Forage fish spawn in the upper areas of the beach which are often impacted by human activities. Unless there is a lucrative monetary component (such as the herring roe fishery), these forage fish are largely ignored by the Department of Fisheries & Oceans. As such, little is known about their numbers, spawning habits, and so on.

The Denman Island Forage Fish Group has recently been awarded a \$900 donation from the great folks at the Pacific Salmon Foundation which will enable us to purchase our own equipment and continue our research.

Luckily, marine biologists such as Ramona DeGraaf are raising awareness and she travels the coast, training

volunteers to take samples following a strict criteria for - gathering, which are submitted for analysis and becomes part of a crucial database. The forage fish group of the Denman Island Marine Stewardship Committee has been stalking the 'wee fishies' since last spring and have finally had positive results at several beaches.

Monitoring will continue to document the health of the stocks and perhaps provide enlightenment as to their future. Awareness of how we can lessen the 'human footprint' and protect forage fish habitat is also a key component in survival of a healthy marine environment. Driving on beaches, removal of seaweed, building of sea walls and boat ramps, beach modification by the shellfish industry (moving rocks, removing driftwood logs), all have negative impacts on forage fish habitat. Want to know more? Visit: <http://foragefishmatter.blogspot.com>, or contact: edijohston@gmail.com, 250-335-2689. ☞

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