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Aquaculture Seed Collection: Methods, Sites and Modern Approaches

S. Balavinayaga[1], S. Mahalakshmi[2]*

[1]UG Student, Dr. M.G.R Fisheries College and Research Institute, Ponneri-601 204, Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalitha Fisheries University, Tamil Nadu, India.

[2]PG Scholar, Department of Aquatic Environment Management, Dr. M.G.R Fisheries College and Research Institute, Ponneri-601 204, Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalitha Fisheries University, Tamil Nadu, India.

ABSTRACT

Aquaculture is a rapidly growing sector that plays a crucial role in food production and economic development. The success of aquaculture largely depends on the availability of quality seed, which may be obtained from natural sources or hatcheries. This article focuses on the importance of site selection and collection methods in ensuring efficient seed procurement. Proper site selection is based on environmental, biological, and hydrological factors such as water current, depth, salinity, and the presence of breeding and feeding grounds. Pre-monsoon surveys and analysis of river characteristics further help in identifying suitable seed collection sites.Various methods are employed for the collection of prawn seed, including shooting nets, cast nets, drag nets, stick nets, leaf brush method, and pit collection, each selected based on habitat and seed availability. Similarly, molluscan seed collection involves the use of collectors such as shells, ropes, tiles, and other substrates for spat settlement. The collection from natural sources requires careful consideration of environmental conditions, appropriate gear selection, and proper handling and acclimatization techniques to ensure high survival rates.In addition, modern tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), particularly ShellGIS, have enhanced site selection by integrating hydrodynamic and environmental data for better planning and management. Overall, the combined application of traditional knowledge and modern technology improves seed collection efficiency, supports sustainable aquaculture practices, and enhances productivity.

Keywords: *Aquaculture , Seed collection ,Site selection , Prawn and molluscan seed ,GIS (ShellGIS) ,Sustainable aquaculture.*

Introduction

Aquaculture has emerged as one of the fastest-growing food production sectors in the world, playing a vital role in ensuring food security, employment generation, and economic development. The success of any aquaculture operation largely depends on the availability of healthy and high-quality seed. In aquaculture, the term seed refers to the early life stages of aquatic organisms such as fish, prawns, and shellfish, which are used for stocking in culture systems. These seeds may be obtained either from natural water bodies or produced artificially in hatcheries. In India, despite the advancement of hatchery technologies, natural seed collection continues to play a significant role, especially in the culture of certain finfish and shellfish species. Natural sources such as rivers, estuaries, backwaters, and coastal areas serve as important reservoirs of seed. However, the availability and quality of seed from these sources are highly influenced by environmental conditions and seasonal factors.

Proper site selection is a critical step in seed collection, as it determines the abundance, accessibility, and quality of the seed. Site selection is not a random process; rather, it is based on a scientific understanding of various factors such as water current, depth, temperature, salinity, turbidity, and the presence of breeding and feeding grounds. In addition, knowledge of biological aspects like species distribution, spawning seasons, and migration patterns is essential for identifying suitable collection sites. Equally important are the methods employed for seed collection. Different species require different collection techniques depending on their habitat, behavior, and life stages. The choice of appropriate gear and method ensures maximum collection efficiency while minimizing damage and mortality of the seed. Improper methods may lead to high stress, injury, or loss of valuable seed resources. Furthermore, seasonal variations such as monsoon patterns, tidal cycles, and lunar phases significantly influence seed availability. Therefore, successful seed collection requires careful planning and

timing in accordance with these natural cycles.In conclusion, both site selection and collection methods are interdependent and form the foundation of successful aquaculture practices. A thorough understanding of these aspects not only improves seed quality and survival rates but also enhances overall productivity and sustainability in aquaculture operations.

Site Selection for Seed Collection

1. Importance of Site Selection

Site selection is one of the most critical steps in the process of seed collection in aquaculture. Choosing a suitable location ensures the success and efficiency of the entire operation. A well-selected site provides abundant availability of seed, making collection easier and more economical. It also reduces mortality during handling and collection, thereby improving survival rates. Moreover, seeds collected from ideal locations are generally healthy, active, and of better quality, which ultimately enhances culture performance. Another important aspect is the site history. Areas that have been productive in the past are often reliable for future seed collection as well. Such locations usually possess favourable environmental conditions and consistent breeding activity, making them dependable sources of quality seed.

2. Pre-Monsoon Survey

A pre-monsoon survey is conducted to assess the suitability of a site before the onset of the monsoon season, which is the peak period for seed availability. This survey involves a detailed study of the riverbed topography and surrounding terrain. Understanding the physical features of dry riverbeds and banks helps in predicting how water will flow during floods.The survey also helps in analyzing water current patterns and identifying potential operational zones where seed collection can be effectively carried out. By studying these factors in advance, it becomes easier to predict areas where seeds are likely to accumulate during the monsoon, thus improving collection efficiency.

3. River Characteristics

The physical characteristics of a river play a major role in determining the availability and distribution of seed.

a. Current Pattern

Water current is a key factor influencing seed movement and aggregation. A moderate current is considered ideal, as it helps in transporting and concentrating seeds in certain areas. Strong currents, on the other hand, may wash away seeds and make collection difficult, while very weak currents may not bring sufficient quantities of seed to the collection sites.

b. River Bends

River bends create distinct zones due to variations in water flow. One side of the bend forms an erosion zone, which is steep and experiences fast-moving water, leading to soil erosion. The opposite side forms a shadow zone, where water movement is slow and sediment deposition occurs. Both these zones are generally not suitable for seed collection due to either excessive turbulence or insufficient flow.

c. Ideal Collection Spot

The most suitable locations for seed collection are slightly sloping banks where water current naturally directs seeds towards the edges. At certain points, centrifugal force created by the flow of water pushes seeds to the sides, leading to their accumulation. These spots are ideal for placing nets and collecting large quantities of spawn efficiently.

4. Biological Factors

Biological aspects are equally important in site selection. The presence of breeding and feeding grounds indicates a higher probability of seed availability. Areas with a rich diversity of fish fauna, including both resident and migratory species, are considered highly productive.Special attention should be given to the abundance of economically important species, as this determines the commercial value of the collected seed. Understanding spawning seasons and migration patterns further helps in selecting the right location and timing for collection.

5. Connectivity

Connectivity of the main river with other water bodies significantly influences seed availability. Tributaries, canals, and rivulets act as important pathways for fish movement, especially during breeding seasons. These interconnected water systems serve as breeding and nursery grounds, resulting in higher concentrations of seed. Therefore, areas where such connections exist are often rich in seed resources and are highly suitable for collection activities.

Methods of Prawn Seed Collection

Prawn seed collection is an important activity in aquaculture, especially in coastal regions where natural resources are abundant. The collection is commonly carried out in estuaries, creeks, backwaters, and coastal waters where prawn larvae and juveniles are naturally available. The choice of method depends on factors such as water depth, tidal movement, and seed availability. Efficient collection methods help in obtaining healthy seed with minimal damage and mortality.

1. **Shooting Net**: The shooting net is one of the most commonly used methods for prawn seed collection. It is a funnel-shaped net made of fine monofilament material with a mesh size of about 1 mm, which is suitable for trapping small larvae and juveniles.This net is mainly used in tidal waters such as estuaries and creeks. It is operated during both high tide and low tide, when water movement carries the prawn seed along with it. The net is fixed in position, allowing water to pass through while trapping the seed. Each operation usually lasts for about 60–90 minutes, ensuring effective collection.

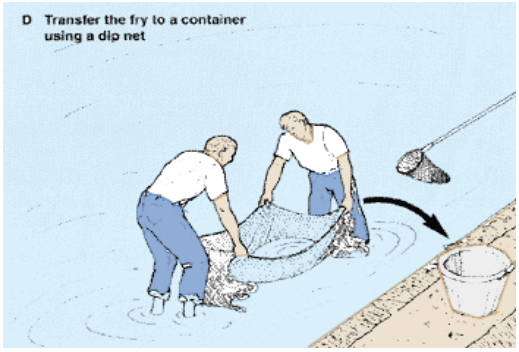

Figure 1. *Transfer of fish fry to a container using a dip net, demonstrating careful handling and collection techniques to minimize stress and injury during aquaculture operations.*

2. **Cast Net**: The cast net is a circular net, usually about 2.5 meters in diameter, with a mesh size of around 10 mm. It is a traditional and widely used fishing gear operated manually by throwing it over the water surface.When the net is cast, it spreads out and sinks, trapping prawn seed within it. It is particularly useful in shallow waters and areas where seed density is moderate. This method is simple, cost-effective, and suitable for small-scale collection.

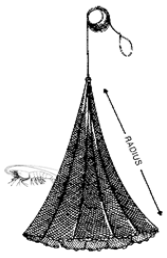

Figure 2. *Dip net used for collecting fish fry, showing its conical shape and radius, designed for efficient and gentle capture of delicate larvae in aquaculture practices.*

3. Drag Net / Scoop Net

Drag nets or scoop nets are used in shallow water bodies such as ponds, lagoons, and coastal edges. In this method, the net is dragged manually along the bottom or scooped through the water to collect prawn seed.This method is effective in areas where seeds are concentrated near the bottom or along the edges. It allows for the collection of a considerable quantity of seed in a short period..

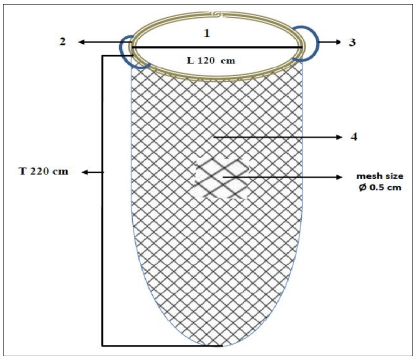

Figure 3. *Design and dimensions of a dip net used in aquaculture, showing the circular frame (120 cm diameter), net length (220 cm), and mesh size (0.5 cm), suitable for efficient collection and handling of fish fry.*

4. Stick Net

The stick net is a stationary or fixed type of net that is installed in narrow water channels or creeks. It is supported by wooden sticks or poles and remains in place for extended periods.This method works passively, as the moving water current carries prawn seed into the net, where they get trapped. It is particularly useful in tidal regions where water flow is regular and predictable. Since it requires less manual effort, it is efficient for continuous collection.

Figure 4. *Handheld dip net used for scooping and transferring fish, illustrating its simple design and suitability for gentle handling of small fish in aquaculture operations*.

5. Leaf Brush Method

In this traditional method, bundles of leaves or plant materials are placed in water bodies. Prawn larvae and juveniles are naturally attracted to these structures and attach themselves to the leaves.After a certain period, the leaf bundles are removed, and the attached seed is collected

manually. This method is simple, eco-friendly, and effective in areas with calm water condition

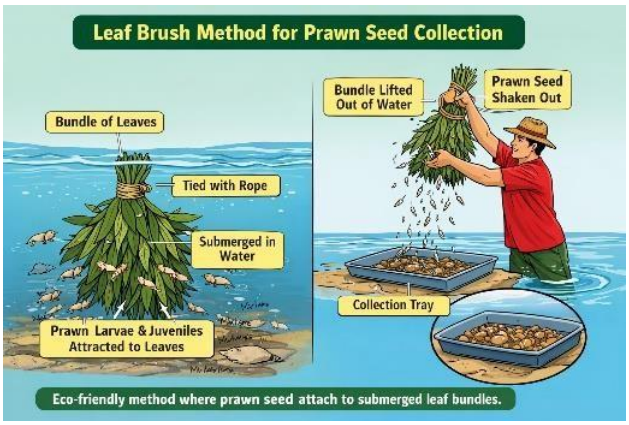

Figure 5. *Leaf brush method for prawn seed collection, showing bundles of leaves submerged in water to attract larvae and juveniles, which are later shaken off and collected in trays as an eco-friendly harvesting technique.*

6. Pit Collection

Pit collection is practiced in intertidal zones, where small pits are dug in the substrate. During high tide, water carrying prawn seed enters these pits.As the tide recedes, the water remains trapped in the pits along with the seed. The accumulated seed is then collected manually. This method utilizes natural tidal movements and requires minimal equipment.

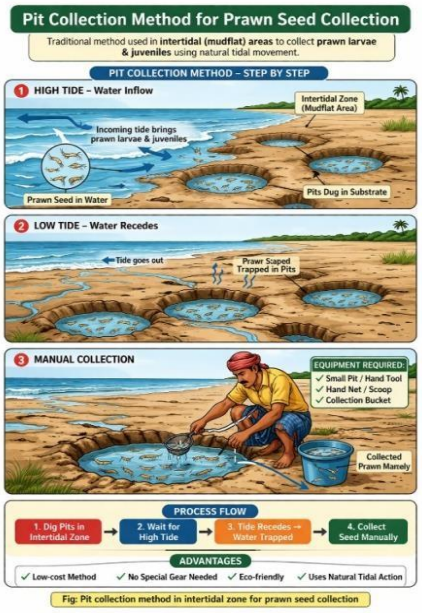

Figure 6. *Pit Collection Method for Prawn Seed Collection*

Timing of Collection

The timing of prawn seed collection is a crucial factor for maximizing yield. Collection is generally carried out during specific lunar phases, particularly around the full moon and new moon periods. During these phases, tidal fluctuations are stronger, which enhances the movement and concentration of prawn seed. The most effective collection period is from the 12^{th} day of the lunar cycle to the 4^{th} day after the peak phase. Proper timing ensures higher availability of seed and improves collection efficiency.

Collection Methods of Molluscan Seeds

1. Pearl Oyster Seed Collection

- ➢ Collectors are used to attract larvae (spat)

Materials used:

- Oyster shells
- Ropes
- Bamboo
- Coconut shells

Figure 7. *Pearl Oyster Seed Collection*

Modern methods include:

- Nylon ropes
- Fish cages (hapa)
- ➢ In some countries, collectors are suspended in water from rafts

2. Edible Oyster Seed Collection

- ➢ Use of cultch (substrate for larval attachment)

Types of cultch:

- Tiles
- Shells
- Wooden sticks
- ➢ Best time: 7–10 days after peak spawning
- ➢ Example: Lime-coated tiles used in Pulicat Lake

3. Mussel Seed Collection

- Collected from natural beds
- Also by placing collectors in farms

Figure 8. *Mussel Seed Collection*

Spat settlement occurs on:

- Rocks
- Groynes
- Suspended tiles

4. Clam Seed Collection

- Collected by sieving sediment
- Done about one month after spawning
- Also found in prawn culture ponds

Collection from Natural Sources

Collection of seed from natural sources plays a significant role in aquaculture, particularly in regions where hatchery production is limited or where wild seed is preferred for its adaptability and robustness. Natural water bodies such as rivers, estuaries, backwaters, lagoons, and coastal areas serve as rich sources of seed for shrimp, prawns, and molluscs. However, successful collection depends on a clear understanding of environmental conditions, seasonal variations, and appropriate techniques.

Shrimp and Prawn Seed

The collection of shrimp and prawn seed from natural environments requires careful planning and consideration of several important factors. These factors directly influence the quantity, quality, and survival of the collected seed.

1. Availability of Breeding and Feeding Grounds.
Areas that serve as breeding and nursery grounds are the most suitable for seed collection. Estuaries, mangrove regions, and coastal backwaters are highly productive zones where larvae and juveniles are abundantly available. The presence of sufficient food organisms further supports the growth and survival of seed in these areas.

2. Suitable Environmental Conditions
Environmental parameters play a crucial role in determining seed availability and distribution:

- Water Depth: Shallow waters are generally preferred as they allow easy operation of nets and higher chances of seed concentration.
- Current Velocity: Moderate current helps in transporting and concentrating seed, whereas strong currents may carry them away.
- Turbidity: Slightly turbid water is often ideal, as it provides protection to larvae from predators and indicates nutrient-rich conditions.Maintaining these favorable conditions ensures effective and efficient seed collection.

3. Efficient Gear Selection
The selection of suitable fishing gear is essential for maximizing collection efficiency. Different gears such as shooting nets, cast nets, drag nets, and scoop nets are used depending on the habitat and seed size. The mesh size of the net should be appropriate to capture the seed without causing damage.

4. Proper Handling and Acclimatization
After collection, proper handling of seed is very important to reduce stress and mortality. The collected seed should be carefully sorted to remove unwanted species and debris. It should then be conditioned and acclimatized gradually to the environmental conditions of the culture system, especially in terms of salinity and temperature. Proper transportation methods should also be followed to ensure seed survival.

Molluscan Seed

The collection of molluscan seed (such as oysters, mussels, and clams) from natural sources also requires careful attention to specific factors.

a. Selection of Suitable Season

Molluscan seed collection is highly dependent on the spawning season of the species. The timing of spatfall (settlement of larvae) must be accurately identified to ensure maximum collection. Collecting during the peak season increases the chances of obtaining large quantities of healthy seed.

b. Use of Appropriate Collectors

Various types of collectors are used to attract and collect molluscan larvae. These include:

- Brushwood and mangrove branches
- Ropes and synthetic fibers
- Tiles and plastic plates
- Shells arranged with spacers

These collectors provide a suitable surface for larvae to attach and grow. The type of collector used depends on the species and environmental conditions.

c. Careful Handling and Transport

Molluscan seed must be handled with care to avoid damage to their delicate structures. After collection, the seed should be kept moist and transported under suitable conditions to prevent desiccation and stress. Proper storage and transportation techniques help in maintaining high survival rates.

Use of GIS in Site Selection (ShellGIS)

Modern aquaculture practices increasingly rely on advanced technologies for improving efficiency and sustainability. One such important tool is the Geographic Information System (GIS), which is widely used for planning and management in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. In aquaculture, GIS plays a crucial role in identifying suitable sites for farming by integrating and analyzing various environmental and spatial data.

ShellGIS

ShellGIS is a specialized GIS-based tool developed specifically for shellfish aquaculture. It is designed to assist in the selection of suitable sites for shellfish farming, particularly for species such as oysters, mussels, and clams.

ShellGIS helps in:

- Mapping potential aquaculture sites
- Analyzing environmental suitability
- Supporting decision-making for farm establishment
- By combining different types of data into a single platform, ShellGIS enables farmers and researchers to make informed and scientific decisions regarding site selection.

Data Required

For effective functioning of ShellGIS, different types of data are required. These data are broadly classified into hydrodynamic and environmental parameters.

1. Hydrodynamic Data

Hydrodynamic data describe the physical movement and characteristics of water bodies:

Water Depth (Bathymetry):

Information about the depth of water is essential to determine whether the site is suitable for the growth and survival of shellfish. Different species require specific depth ranges.

Tidal Patterns:

Tidal fluctuations influence water exchange, nutrient supply, and waste removal. Understanding tidal cycles helps in selecting sites with optimal water circulation.

2. Environmental Data

Environmental factors are critical for the growth and productivity of shellfish:

Temperature:

Water temperature affects metabolism, growth rate, and reproduction of shellfish.

Salinity:

Different shellfish species have specific salinity requirements, and stable salinity conditions are essential for their survival.

Food Availability:

The presence of plankton and other natural food sources determines the productivity of the site.

Advantages of ShellGIS

The use of ShellGIS offers several advantages in aquaculture:

Accurate Site Selection:

By analyzing multiple parameters simultaneously, ShellGIS helps in identifying the most suitable and productive sites for shellfish farming.

Better Farm Management:

It provides valuable information for planning farm layout, monitoring environmental conditions, and managing resources effectively.

Increased Production Efficiency:

Selecting the right site leads to better growth, higher survival rates, and increased yield, ultimately improving overall production.

Time and Cost Saving:

Reduces the need for extensive field surveys and minimizes trial-and-error approaches

Conclusion

The integration of GIS technology, particularly ShellGIS, has significantly improved the scientific approach to site selection in aquaculture. By utilizing accurate environmental and hydrodynamic data, it ensures optimal site selection,

enhances productivity, and promotes sustainable aquaculture development.

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