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Glenn L. Hoffman

*US Fish and Wildlife Service*

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Polypodium Sp. (Coeleenterata) Found in North American Sturgeon

On 27 May 1970, Mason Shouder, Michigan Fisheries Biologist, discovered some abnormal eggs in a ripe sturgeon, Acipenser fulvescens. The fish were taken from the Black River near Cheboygan, Michigan, which is barricaded from Lake Huron by a dam built in the 1920’s. Normal ripe eggs were black spheres; the abnormal ones were enlarged and grayish (Fig. 1). About 20% of the eggs were affected and attached to the wall of the uterus in saclike structures. The ovary was also abnormal, being flaccid. In May 1973, a single infected egg was found in vodka-pre-served eggs from a ripe sturgeon from the same locality; only one of 1,391 eggs (0.07%) was found infected.

The abnormal eggs contain the mature stolon stage of Polypodium sp. (Fig. 2). The stolon is a white elongate structure, 1.3 mm in diameter, and has many fingerlike tentacles 0.87 to 1.2 mm long by 0.17 to 0.087 mm diameter. No intact stolons were available for length measurement.

Polypodium hydriforme Ussov, 1885 (Figs. 3–5) has been reported from Acipenser spp. from some of the major rivers of the USSR.

Figures 1, 2. A coelenterate parasite of sturgeon eggs from Michigan. 1. Enlarged gray eggs on the right contain mature stolons of Polypodium sp. Normal black eggs are on the left. 2. Eggs infected with Polypodium sp. Egg at lower left is still intact; egg at upper right has been torn to release fragments of the parasite.

This is the first North American record of Polypodium sp. If more material becomes available, species determination will be attempted. With the current price of caviar $100/lb this may be a very important fish parasite. We would appreciate receiving additional material.

G. L. Hoffman, Eastern Fish Disease Laboratory, Kearneysville, West Virginia 25430; E. V. Raikova, Inst. Cytol., Acad. Sci., Leningrad, USSR; and W. G. Yoder, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Grayling Research Station, Grayling, Michigan 49738