MORTALITY RATES OF HATCHERY-REARED AND WILD JUVENILE QUEEN CONCH IN NATURAL HABITATS

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Hatchery-reared and wild juvenile queen conch, *Strombus gigas*, may exhibit different mortality rates due to predators in nature. We tested this hypothesis with a field experiment whereby hatchery-reared and wild juveniles ranging in total shell length from 60 - 85 mm were tethered during late summer and early fall, 1988 in seagrass beds with and without natural conch populations. Mortality rates were monitored at weekly intervals, and appeared higher than those of larger juveniles greater than 85 mm total shell length. We discuss the results of this field experiment, its implications for queen conch stock enhancement, and future research directions.