

Accepted Manuscript

Overwintering of the parasitic dinoflagellate *Hematodinium perezii* in dredged blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) from Wachapreague Creek, Virginia

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PII: S0022-2011(15)00138-X

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jip.2015.07.013>

Reference: YJIPA 6710

To appear in: *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology*

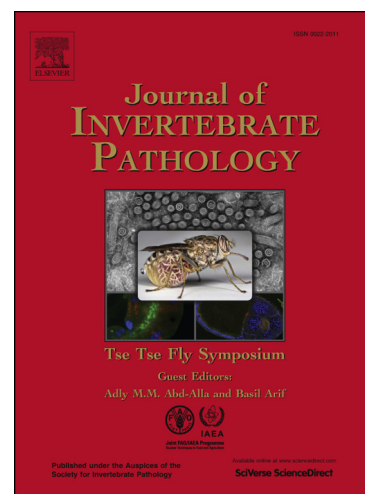
Received Date: 30 April 2015

Revised Date: 20 July 2015

Accepted Date: 27 July 2015

Please cite this article as: Shields, J.D., Sullivan, S.E., Small, H.J., Overwintering of the parasitic dinoflagellate *Hematodinium perezii* in dredged blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) from Wachapreague Creek, Virginia, *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology* (2015), doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jip.2015.07.013>

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**Overwintering of the parasitic dinoflagellate *Hematodinium perezii* in dredged blue crabs
(*Callinectes sapidus*) from Wachapreague Creek, Virginia**

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Running Title: *H. perezii* infections in overwintering blue crabs

Key words: hibernation, life cycle, seasonality, infection, parasite, Crustacea, Decapoda

Abstract: Parasitic dinoflagellates in the genus *Hematodinium* cause disease and mortality in several commercially important marine decapod crustaceans. One species, *H. perezii*, occurs in blue crabs, *Callinectes sapidus*, along the eastern seaboard and Gulf coast of the USA. The parasite infects blue crabs, other decapods, and amphipods in the high salinity waters of coastal bays. Epizootics of the parasite often reach prevalence levels of 75-80% during outbreaks with diseased crabs dying from the infection. Prevalence of the parasite is bimodal, with a minor peak in late spring or summer, and a major peak in fall, and declining rapidly to nearly zero in late November and December. The rapid decline in infections in the late fall brings up the question of

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