

Spreading south: *Schizoporella japonica*

At risk: Oysters can be smothered by the invasive species, which encrusts their shells

# OYSTER SNATCHERS!

## Delicacy under threat from a tide of tiny invaders

By **Julia Horton**

AN oyster revival across the UK is under threat from an invasive species expected to spread south through Scottish waters, scientists have warned.

Tiny orange-red sea creatures called *Schizoporella japonica* have been found at more than a quarter of Scottish ports, compared to fewer than one in ten harbours in England and Wales.

While most invasive species move from south to north, these were probably among the first to go in the opposite direction, researchers said.

Study authors say the invaders, native to Japan, 'hitchhike' by encrusting ship hulls like barnacles.

They can be spread further on the floating parts of marine energy schemes during transportation from harbours to open seas for construction.

Their growing presence poses a deadly risk to oysters and mussels as the colourful colonies can grow on their shells and smother them.

Plastic waste – the subject of The Daily Mail's Turn The Tide On Plastic campaign – is also bringing a range of other invaders to our shores, as they cling to floating rubbish dumped thousands of miles away, experts say.

Record numbers of tropical sea creatures are being swept across the Atlantic by the Gulf Stream.

Edinburgh University marine

scientist Jennifer Loxto warned that *Schizoporella japonica* could be a 'bellwether of future invasions'.

These could be triggered by melting Arctic sea ice caused by global warming opening up new routes for other alien species.

The lead author of a paper published in the *Biological Invasions* journal, she wrote: 'As our climate warms and sea ice continues to reduce year on year, the opening of new Arctic trade routes may affect the distribution of invasive species, especially for cold-tolerant species like *S. japonica*.'

The Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route could allow cold-tolerant hull-fouling species [that can colonise ship hulls] to move to Europe from North America to the west and from Russia and east Asian ports to the east.

'Once in Europe, species with wide temperature tolerance ranges, like we have seen with *S. japonica*, may establish reproducing populations.'

Developing tidal and wave energy

schemes provided an 'ideal' habitat and opportunity for the alien species to take hold and spread further, she said.

The mussel and oyster industry was 'particularly threatened' economically and environmentally by the sea creatures, she warned.

The concerns were echoed by the scientist leading a scheme returning native European oysters to the now-protected waters of the Dornoch Firth. Bill Sanderson, associate professor of marine biodiversity at Edinburgh's Heriot-Watt University, said: 'The movement of invasive non-native species in general is a big risk.'

Amid fears of the threat from plastic waste, wildlife expert Steve Trehwella found 20 invasive species on an 18-mile stretch of beach in Dorset, including Goose Barnacles from Portugal attached to an old shoe, a Columbus crab that had travelled from Bermuda in a plastic pipe and an Atlantic pearl oyster and scorched mussel, both from the Caribbean.

Mr Trehwella said: 'This sort of thing has always happened but previously they would only be able to find their way across on driftwood or coconut. Now we are putting 600million tons of plastic into the oceans every year.'

He added: 'Many of these species have the potential and ability to settle in our waters.'



Washed up: Goose barnacles from Portugal on an old shoe

## Inquiry plea over repeat sex offenders

MINISTERS have been urged to investigate after it emerged dozens of people have reoffended after being taken off the sex offenders' register.

Over the past four years, 29 people who came off the register have offended again, and the rate is much higher in Scotland than the rest of the UK.

Scottish Tory justice spokesman Liam Kerr said: 'If there's any suggestion sex offenders considered "no longer a risk" are going on to commit further appalling crimes, then the system must be investigated.'

'A responsible government will surely step in at the earliest possible opportunity to find out how and why this is happening.'

'Failure to do so will reinforce the view that the SNP are a soft touch when it comes to justice.'

The figures were revealed by the Scottish Sun on Sunday.

Detective Superintendent Gail Johnston, head of the National Offender Management Unit, said: 'Since 2015, less than 1 per cent of those removed following a review have committed further sexual offences.'

A Scottish Government spokesman said: 'Rules governing registered sex offenders are more stringent than ever. Every effort is made to minimise risks posed by registered sex offenders.'

## Boost for £1m Scots homes

THE number of homes worth more than £1million sold in Scotland rose sharply during the first half of last year.

Estate agents sold 73 residential properties for a million pounds or more during the first six months of 2018 – 20 more than the same period the previous year.

The figures, published by Lloyds Bank Private Banking, showed Scotland bucked a UK-wide downturn in the number of premium properties sold.

The sale of million pound-plus homes in London continued to decline, down 8 per cent from 3,940 homes in the first half of 2017 to 3,628 in the first half of 2018.

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