

The Living Fossil (Horseshoe crab)

Kamaruzzaman Yunus

Akbar John

Ahmed Jalal Khan Chowdhury

Zaleha Kassim



IIUM PRESS

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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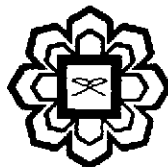
Editors,

Kamaruzzaman Yunus

Akbar John

Ahmed Jalal Khan Chowdhury

Zaleha Kassim



IIUM Press

Published by:
IIUM Press
International Islamic University Malaysia

First Edition, 2011
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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Kamaruzzaman Yunus
The Living Fossil (Horseshoe crab)
Kamaruzzaman Yunus
Include index
Bibliography: p.
ISBN

ISBN: 978-967-418-042-3

Member of Majlis Penerbitan Ilmiah Malaysia – MAPIM
(Malaysian Scholarly Publishing Council)

Printed by :
IIUM PRINTING SDN.BHD.
No. 1, Jalan Industri Batu Caves 1/3
Taman Perindustrian Batu Caves
Batu Caves Centre Point
68100 Batu Caves
Selangor Darul Ehsan

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CHAPTER - 3

Site selection and nesting behaviour of horseshoe crabs with special reference to *Limulus polyphemus*

¹Penn, D., ¹Brockmann, H.J., ²Akbar John, B., ²Jalal, K.C.A.

¹Department of Zoology University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611

²Institute of Oceanography and Maritime studies (INOCEM), Kulliyah of Science, International Islamic University Malaysia, Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, Bandar Indera Mahkota, 25200, Kuantan Pahang, Malaysia

Abstract

horseshoe crabs lay their eggs on beaches in the intertidal zone. The elevation of the beach on which they nest differs among populations. Horseshoe crabs synchronize their nesting with the tides that reach the aerobic sediments on the beach, resulting in nesting patterns that differ with differences in tidal regimes and beach morphology. Previous studies have recorded that there are two factors that potentially affect egg survival at different beach elevations: erosion and rate of development. Rate of development increased with oxygen concentration, redox potential, and temperature, and all three of these factors changed with beach elevation. Horseshoe crabs nest just above the mean high tide line where the development of their eggs is maximized. Beach sediments lower on the beach contain inadequate interstitial oxygen concentrations, whereas sediments higher on the beach are too dry for egg development. Although beach geochemistry and local tidal rhythms provide a partial explanation for the geographic variation in nest-site preferences and nesting synchrony among horseshoe crabs, they do not explain all of the variation in nesting behavior. It was postulated that nesting behaviour of horseshoe crabs are primarily influenced by lunar cycle.

Key words: horseshoe crabs, nesting grounds, microhabitat, nesting behaviour, redox potential.