Protocol: Oyster Reef Composition



How to cite this work: Protocol: Oyster Reef Composition. (2020) Tennenbaum Marine Observatories Network, MarineGEO, Smithsonian Institution.



Oyster Reef Composition

**Introduction**

This protocol provides non-destructive standardized data collection on the composition of an oyster reef including both living (oysters, algae, other bivalves, etc.) and non-living substrate (dead shell, rock, sediment, etc.). Oysters are classified as live, gaper (dead or dying with visible tissue), box (dead and gaping with both bivalved shells still attached at the umbo), and cultch (single shell or shell fragments). The protocol is designed to accommodate both large and patch intertidal and subtidal reefs.

**Measured Parameters**

* Percent cover of living and non-living substrate

**Requirements**

Personnel: 2 – 4 people

Estimated Total Time Per Location (*n* = 3 transects per site)

Preparation: 1 person x <1 day

Fieldwork: 2 - 4 people x <1 day per location

Post processing: None

Data processing: 1 person x <1 day

Replication: 5 replicate quadrates per transect, 3 replicate transects per reef, 3 reefs per region

Materials:

Fieldwork:

* 81-point PVC quadrat (Figure 1)

Figure 1. 1x1 m quadrat with 81 intersecting points, 9 holes drilled every 10 cm on each side with string pulled through, PVC can be ¾’’ – 1’’ in diameter A picture containing graphical user interface

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* 30 m transect tape (3)
* Camera
* Oyster reef composition data sheets

**Methods**

Preparation:

1. Review the MarineGEO Oyster Reef Habitat Survey Design for selection of permanent sites.
2. Become familiar with the methodology prior to going out into the field to conduct sampling.
3. Print datasheets on waterproof paper.
4. This protocol assumes that n = 5 replicate quadrats for percent cover are taken per each transect. Three (n = 3) transects are done per each site.
5. For intertidal reefs, sampling is done at a low tide when oystersare exposed. For subtidal reefs, timing of sampling is site dependent.

Fieldwork:

1. Lay out 3 30 m transects across a single reef. The first should go along the area where the highest density of oysters are, and the subsequent 2 should go on the left and the right of the initial transect and at least 1.5 m from it. In many cases, the crest of the reef might not be the area with most live oysters.
2. Ideally 3 transects should be used per reef and sampling from 5 replicate 1x1 m quadrats are done per transect. However, if a single reef is small and there is more than one reef per individual site, several reefs can be used. If this is the case, it is important to note which transects belong to each reef so that the same reef can be sampled in the future. Permanent transects are not necessary for this protocol, however, repeated sampling along the same reef over time is required. For patch reefs and those less than 30 m, lay out a transect to each edge of the reef where oyster density is average to that throughout the transect. If multiple transects fit parallel on a patch reef, they need to be at least 1.5 m from each other. The overall goal is to obtain 15 replicate quadrat samples per site though because oyster reefs are not uniform in size and shape, some sites might have to adapt a more complex design or reduce the amount of sampling. For example, some reefs might only be large enough to fit 2 quadrats along a transect, though if multiple small reefs are within the vicinity, enough replicates can be obtained to get an robust average of oyster composition. In such scenarios, please contact MarineGEO to verify altered methods. See Figure 2 for examples of how to lay out transects on different reefs.

Figure 2. Transects should be 30 m in length for larger reefs. Multiple smaller patch reefs can be used at a site if transects do not reach the desired length.

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3. For a transect reaching 30 m, 5 replicate quadrats are taken along predetermined points. At 5, 12, 15, 20, and 25 meter marks, lay the quadrat to the right of the transect tape with the meter value touching the lower left corner of the quadrat For transects that do not reach the desired 30 m, quadrats can be placed at points determined by the practitioner but should be at least 1 m from each other (e.g. 1 m, 3 m, 5 m, etc.) and this should be noted on the data sheet.

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4. Tally what occurs under each intersecting point (totaling 81 points). Because oysters are the primary target, the tally should quantify the presence and state of oysters. In some cases, seasonal or ephemeral macroalgal blooms can occur on reefs, forming a canopy attached to and covering oysters. In other instances, occasional or rare species (algae, barnacles, etc.) can be found growing on oysters though are not numerically dominant. In either case, all species growing on oysters or forming a canopy get counted separately as secondary species (see data sheet for separate columns of primary vs. secondary species). Major categories include:

* + Live oyster
  + Gaper oyster (gaping dying oyster with visible tissue)
  + Box oyster (gaping dead with both shells still attached, no visible tissue, most common)
  + Cultch (dead with only single shell remaining)
  + Shell hash
  + Sediment
  + Algae (be specific if possible)
  + Rock
  + Any other groups (bivalves, ascidians, sponges, etc.) using lowest taxonomic classification as possible

1. Once finished scoring the quadrat, double count the tallied values to make sure all points were recorded.
2. Repeat for each quadrat along each transect.
3. It is recommended that for intertidal reefs, a photo of the quadrat prior to scoring be taken and labeled for historical records. For subtidal reefs this can be a bit more challenging but is still recommended if conditions are suitable.

**Data Submission**

1. Scan the completed field data sheets and save both paper and electronic versions locally. We do not require you to submit the scanned forms.
2. Enter data into the provided data entry template. Each template is an Excel spreadsheet. Please provide as much protocol and sample metadata as possible, such as the protocol version and contact information. Use the “notes” columns to provide additional information or context if a relevant column doesn’t already exist, rather than renaming or creating columns.
3. Use our online submission portal to upload the Excel Spreadsheet: <https://marinegeo.github.io/data-submission>
4. Contact us if you have any questions: [marinegeo@si.edu](mailto:marinegeo@si.edu)

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