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# Commentationes Biologicae

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Results of bottom fauna sampling in certain localities in the Tvärminne area (inner Baltic), with special reference to the so-called *Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory

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## Commentationes Biologicae

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## Abstract

SEGERSTRÅLE, SVEN G: Results of bottom fauna sampling in certain localities in the Tvärminne area (inner Baltic), with special reference to the so-called *Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory. *Commentat. Biol.* 66, 12 pp., 1973. — The paper presents and comments on the results of quantitative sampling of the bottom fauna performed in five localities (depth range 3–35 m) in the neighbourhood of the Zoological Station at Tvärminne (southwest coast of Finland), in the years 1960–1963. This work was a continuation of earlier long-term studies on the interannual fluctuations in the abundance and composition of the populations of the bivalve *Macoma baltica* in the area. The results are found to accord with the theory that an inverse correlation exists between the recruitment of *Macoma* and the abundance of *Pontoporeia* (mainly the species *P. affinis*). It has been suggested that this amphipod ingests the newly-settled spat of *Macoma* together with the bottom substrate.

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## Introduction

Studies on the quantitative occurrence of benthic animals have been in progress since 1926 in the area adjacent to the Zoological Station at Tvärminne, situated on the southwest coast of Finland, near the entrance to the Gulf of Finland. A salient feature revealed by repeated sampling at a number of selected stations was the marked interannual fluctuation in the abundance of all the main members of the bottom fauna, including *Macoma baltica*, *Pontoporeia affinis*, *Corophium volutator*, and the larvae of chironomids (cf. 1–4; surveys in 5, 9).

Special attention has been paid to the changes in the *Macoma* populations, since certain unexpected anomalies in the composition of the stock of this bivalve were observed at the very start of the sampling work in the Tvärminne waters (corresponding results had already been obtained in 1922–1923 in another area off the south coast of Finland, viz. Pellinge; cf. 4).

Repeated quantitative sampling carried out in some Tvärminne localities (depth range 3–35 m) for 11–17 years within the period 1926–1959 gave the following results. Below c. 20 m, the populations of *Macoma* usually show total absence, or at least strikingly poor representation, of several year classes, the phenomenon becoming increasingly pronounced with depth. In contrast, populations of the bivalve in shallow

water invariably exhibit a more or less normal composition. At the deepest repeatedly visited station in the study area (35 m), the failure of recruitment proved to comprise periods of up to c. 25 years. In consequence, the abundance of *Macoma* at greater depths is subject to especially marked fluctuations and is, on the whole, low as compared with that in shallow water. Examination of *Macoma* material from other parts of the Baltic, together with data available in the literature, indicates that periodical failure of recruitment is a more or less characteristic feature of the populations of the bivalve living in deeper parts of the Baltic basin (6).

Studies carried out at Tvärminne in order to find an explanation of the feature led to the conclusion that physical factors (nature of substrate, salinity, temperature, oxygen supply) are not involved. On the other hand, certain facts suggest that the gaps in the *Macoma* populations are caused by periods of high abundance of *Pontoporeia* and the author has put forward the idea that this amphipod eats newly-settled spat of *Macoma* when ingesting the bottom substrate, which constitutes its food (6).

In order to check the assumption that there exists an inverse correlation between the success of *Macoma* spatfall in a given year and the abundance of *Pontoporeia* in the same year, special sampling was performed in the years 1960—1963 at five selected stations in the Tvärminne area. The results gave support to the »*Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory». Part of them were published in 1965 (7).

The present paper is intended to present the full results relating to *Macoma* and *Pontoporeia* of the sampling carried out in 1960—1963. Apart from their contribution to our knowledge of the annual fluctuations of benthic animals in the Tvärminne waters, a further reason for publishing these results is the inclusion from 1964 onwards of the five sampling stations in the annual programme of bottom fauna studies of the Institute of Marine Research of Finland. Thus by now material from no less than 13 successive years is available for the elucidation of the fluctuations in numbers of the benthic animals inhabiting the localities in question (although not treated in the present paper, other components of the fauna than *Macoma* and *Pontoporeia* were also included in the collecting work in 1960—1963).

### Material and methods

The five sampling stations mentioned above are as follows: No. I (3 m), No. XXVI (20 m), No. XLIV (35 m), and two of the »Spar Buoy Stations», viz. Spar Buoy West F (20 m) and Spar Buoy East B (20 m); for their locations, see 4, Figs. 14 and 16. Collecting was carried out with the Ek-

man-Birge quantitative bottom sampler (area covered 250 cm<sup>2</sup>). On each occasion 20 samples, equalling 0.5 m<sup>2</sup>, were taken (only exception: 10 samples at St. I, 1961). The bottom material was washed through a sieve of 0.5 mm mesh size. Experience has shown that the minimum length of *Macoma* retained by this mesh size is c. 1 mm. Alcohol was used as preserving fluid.

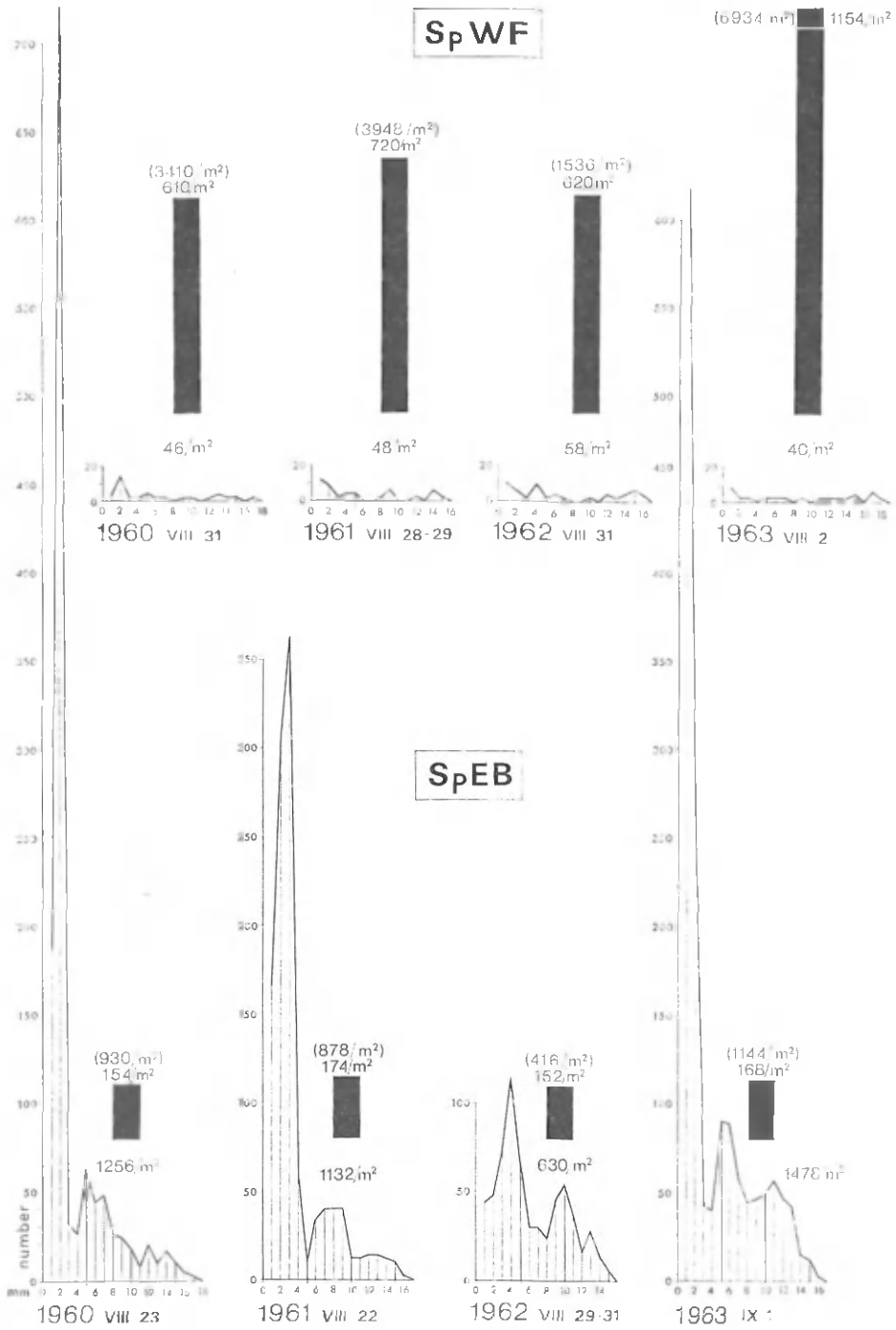
### Results and comments

The results of the sampling at the five localities in 1960—1963 are illustrated in Figs. 1—3, which show the density of the *Macoma* and *Pontoporeia* at each sampling time and the distribution by length classes of *Macoma*. As regards *Pontoporeia*, the total number is given in brackets and the number of specimens with a minimum length of 6 mm without brackets (black bars). Attention should primarily be paid to the latter value, as smaller *Pontoporeia* can hardly be assumed to ingest the spat of *Macoma*, which has a length of 0.25—0.30 mm. The size limit drawn is, of course, arbitrary, as details of the feeding of *Pontoporeia* are not known.

Stations Spar Buoy West F (*SpWF*), Spar Buoy East B (*SpEB*), and No. XXVI (Figs. 1 and 3). All three stations are situated at the same depth, 20 m, but the bottom at St. SpEB clearly differs from that at the other two, where the substrate is more or less homogenous mud. At St. SpEB clay, sand, and gravel are also found — a consequence of the locality being comparatively strongly exposed to swell from the open sea.

As is shown by a glance at the diagrams, there is also a clear difference between the stations in the relationship between the densities of *Macoma* and *Pontoporeia*. At St. SpEB, with its bottom rich in mineral components, *Macoma* was very abundant in all four years and *Pontoporeia* was relatively scarce, whereas at the two other stations the opposite was the case. This contrast is in accordance with the *Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory discussed in the Introduction. Apart from this general feature, in one special case the diagrams allow direct comparison of the success of *Macoma* recruitment with the abundance of *Pontoporeia* in the year of spatfall concerned. In 1963, the stock of *Macoma* at St. SpEB exhibited a very marked peak of bivalves about 1 mm in length. Age analysis has shown that these young *Macoma* settled in 1960 and, especially, in 1961. In these two years the numbers of *Pontoporeia* (with a minimum length of 6 mm) caught at St. SpEB, expressed as percentages of those caught in the two other localities, were as follows:

	SpWF	XXVI
1960	25 %	16 %
1961	24 %	20 %



The relative scarcity of *Pontoporeia* at St. SpEB in the two years with markedly successful *Macoma* recruitment is thus very pronounced.

However, it is difficult to regard the conspicuous peak of young *Macoma* at St. SpEB in 1963 as being due exclusively to a decrease in predation by *Pontoporeia* on the spat in 1960–1961, since the scarcity of young *Macoma* at the two other stations was much more marked in 1963 than might be expected from the differences in *Pontoporeia* abundance. Concentration by water movements seems most likely to be an additional factor contributing to the high numbers of young *Macoma* at SpEB in 1963. In fact, the abundant occurrence of mineral components on the bottom and the location of station on a slope exposed to heavy wave action suggest that, under special hydrodynamic circumstances, settling or newly-settled *Macoma* accumulate in the locality. Such «hydrographic concentration» of very young bivalves has earlier been assumed for a number of other localities in the Tvärminne area, as well as for areas outside the Baltic basin (cf. 4, p. 35).

The following additional comments may be made in respect of the diagrams referring to St. SpEB: (a) they offer an opportunity to observe the gradual decline of a clear-cut peak in a population of *Macoma*, viz. that of 2-mm bivalves in 1960; (b) they contribute to our knowledge of the rate of growth of *Macoma* in the Tvärminne region, the bivalves of the above-mentioned peak having reached 4 mm by 1962 (this growth rate agrees with earlier results obtained for *Macoma* populations living at 20 m; cf. 6, Fig. 22).

*Stations I and XLIV* (Fig. 2). These two localities are among those sampled in several earlier years (cf. 4).

The following results of the collecting work performed during the period 1960–1963 may be mentioned:

Station I. (a) In conformity with earlier observations, the locality, situated at only 3 m depth, was found to harbour a *Macoma* stock of normal composition, i.e. without gaps pointing to years or periods of recruitment failure. Bivalves 1 mm in length were admittedly absent from the samples in 1960, but as, in the following year, there are abundant specimens of this size class, which, on age analysis, settled in 1960, the absence of spat from the material from this year is obviously due to its having been too small, at the time of sampling (21–23 July), to be re-

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*Fig. 1.* Numbers per m<sup>2</sup> of *Macoma* and distribution of the bivalve by length classes at the Tvärminne sampling stations Spar Buoy West F (depth 20 m) and Spar Buoy East B (same depth) according to quantitative sampling in 1960–1963, and abundance of *Pontoporeia* in the same samples. Figures in brackets: total abundance of *Pontoporeia*; without brackets (referring to black bars): specimens of the amphipod with a minimum length of 6 mm.

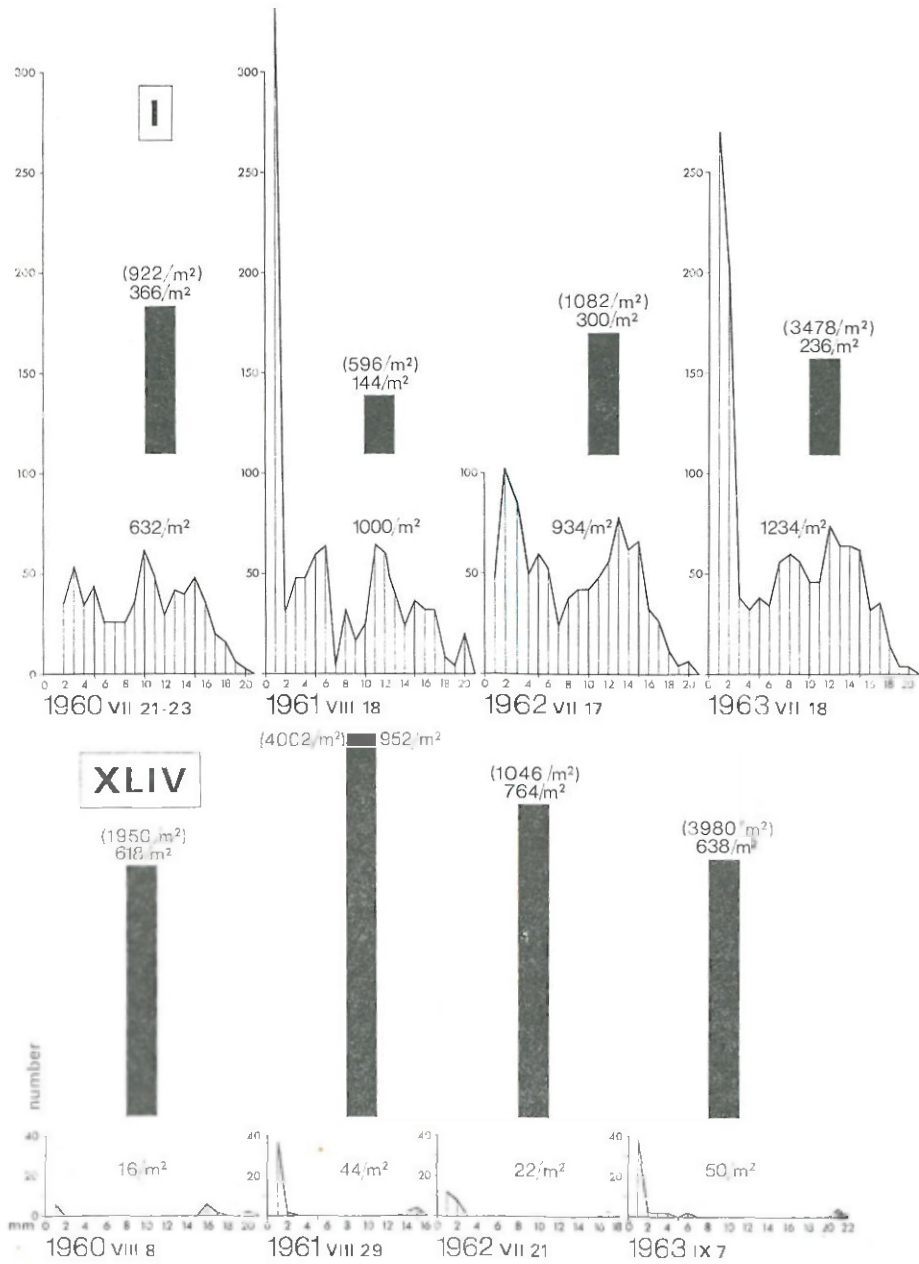


Fig. 2. *Macoma* and *Pontoporeia* diagrams for the Tvärminne stations I (3 m) and XLIV (35 m). Cf. Fig. 1.

tained by the sieve. (b) In addition to the peak in 1961, another may be observed in the diagram for 1963. In this case, too, the peak proved to be due to abundant spatfall in the preceding year. (c) The diagrams show that in the two years of successful *Macoma* recruitment (1960 and 1962) *Pontoporeia*, the supposed predator of minute *Macoma*, was moderately abundant (density of specimens with a minimum length of 6 mm 366 and 300/m<sup>2</sup>, respectively).

Station XLIV. The diagrams in Fig. 2 prompt the following remarks: (a) In contrast to that at St. I, the *Macoma* stock at St. XLIV has proved to be characterized by recruitment failure during long periods. The markedly low number of large bivalves caught during the four years now under discussion is due to just such an exceptionally prolonged period (cf. 4, p. 26). (b) The occurrence of minute bivalves in the years of the study period indicates some recruitment at St. XLIV (the group of *Macoma* 3–6 mm in length found in the samples of 1963 is seemingly referable to spatfall in 1959; cf. 4, Fig. 9). As far as the period 1951–1958 is concerned, when the sampling in the locality showed total absence of *Macoma* recruitment, newly-settled bivalves, even if present, no doubt escaped through the sieve then used (mesh size 1 mm). (c) As far as the *Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory is concerned, comparison between the recruitment of *Macoma* and the abundance of the amphipod in the year of spatfall is possible in one case only, owing to the slow growth of the bivalve in the locality now under discussion (cf. 4, Fig. 22). Age analysis showed that the individuals constituting the moderate peak of 1 mm *Macoma* in 1963 (38/m<sup>2</sup>) had settled in 1959–1960, mainly in the latter year. In 1960 (data from 1959 not available) the recorded density of *Pontoporeia* (with a minimum length of 6 mm) was comparatively high, 618/m<sup>2</sup>, a result that supports the *Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory.

### Concluding remarks

As was mentioned in the Introduction, the aims of the present paper are both to contribute to our knowledge of the long-term fluctuations of benthic animals in the Tvärminne area and to present additional data pertaining to the *Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory. As far as the former aim is concerned, general interest attaches to the results obtained in the case of *Macoma*, owing to the large material available. At St. XXVI, in particular, where sampling with quantitative gear was started in 1926, the changes in the population of *Macoma* have proved striking and offer an instructive example of the fluctuation in numbers and stock composition of this bivalve within the Baltic area. In Fig. 4 the whole series of sampling re-

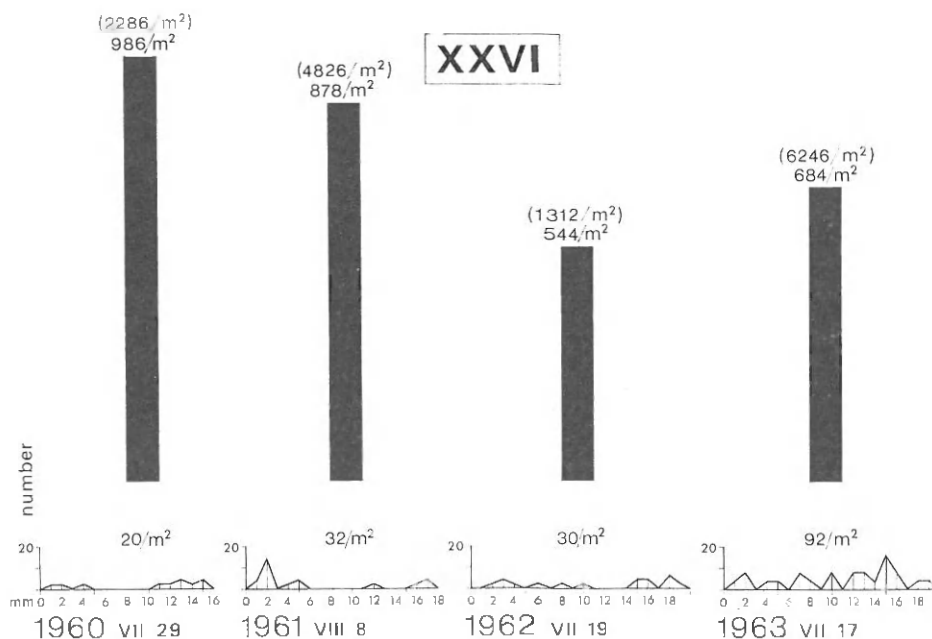
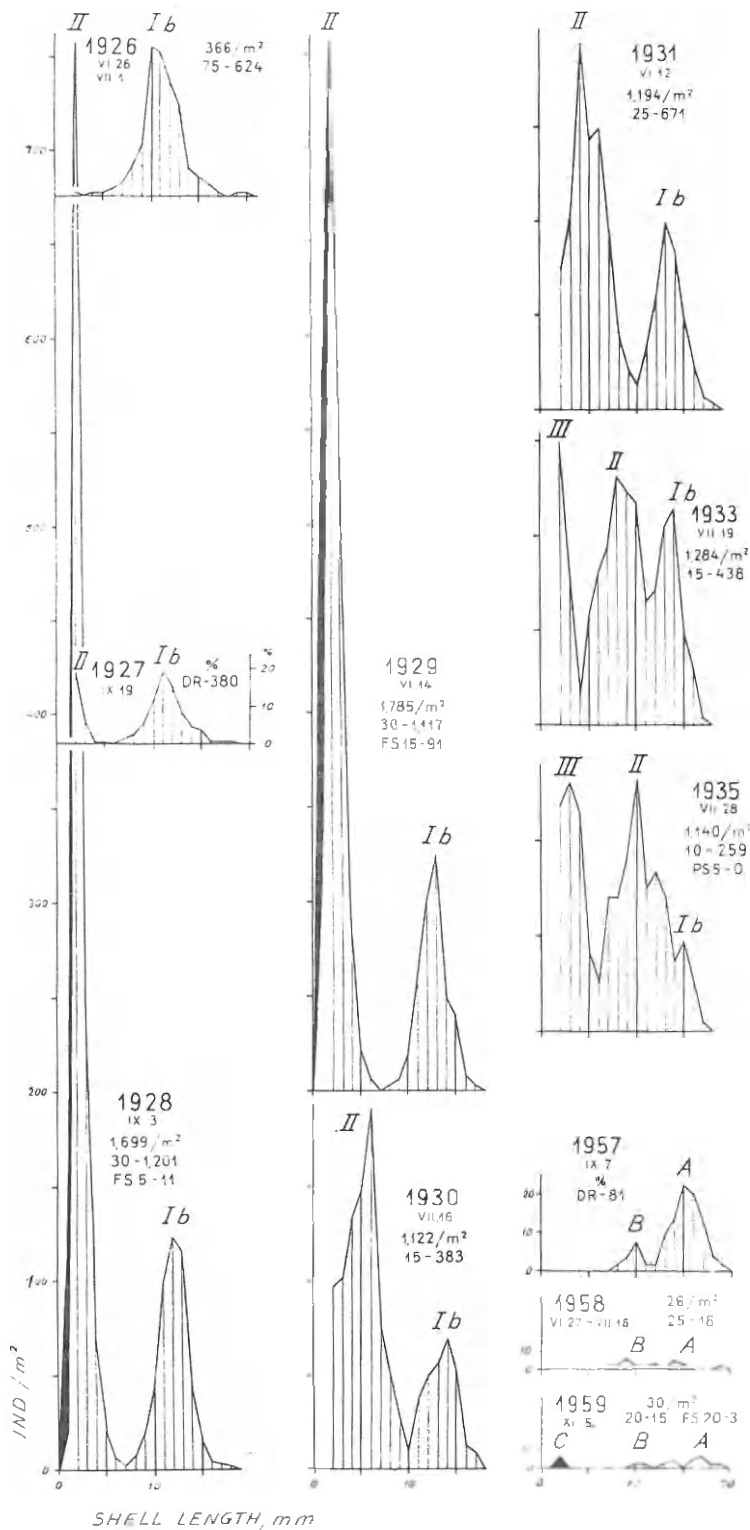


Fig. 3. *Macoma* and *Pontoporeia* diagrams for the Tvärminne station XXVI (20 m). (Cf. Fig. 1).

sults obtained prior to 1960 is reproduced from an earlier paper (4, Fig. 8). The total period of observations comprises 15 years between 1926 and 1963. As will be seen, the maximum and minimum densities of *Macoma* are 1785 and 20/m<sup>2</sup> (in 1929 and 1960, respectively; in both cases the same sieving technique was used).

As far as the *Macoma-Pontoporeia* theory is concerned, evidence supporting it is, as we have found, provided by some of the results obtained in 1960—1963, which allowed direct comparison between the recruitment of *Macoma* and the abundance of its supposed predator in the year of settlement of *Macoma*. The other data obtained at the five sampling stations also accord with the general view that localities with a low abundance of *Macoma* harbour a relatively dense population of *Pontoporeia*.

Fig. 4. Distribution by length classes and density of *Macoma* at the Tvärminne station XXVI in the 11 years of sampling prior to 1960 (1926—1959; in 1927 only dredge, »DR», used). Figures below those indicating number/m<sup>2</sup> give number of samples (Ekman-Birge) and number of bivalves caught. Black parts of diagrams: bivalves caught with sieve with meshes of 0.5 mm (»FS»), in other cases a 1.0 mm sieve was used. After Segerstråle 1960 a.



SHELL LENGTH, mm

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