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Herbivore Impacts on the Invasive Marine Alga Grateloupia turuturu

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My project looked at an invasive species of seaweed in Narragansett Bay. All of the existing literature describes the invasion (when it happened, where it spread) but nobody had really looked at what it is doing now that it is here. I conducted a series of feeding trials with snails and crabs to see whether they are eating the seaweed and thereby controlling its population. I set up buckets with just snails, just crabs, and both snails and crabs together in contact with weighed pieces of seaweed. Each bucket was divided into two sides, with seaweed on both and the herbivore on just one side, so I could see whether the waste (feces) the herbivore was producing was helping the seaweed grow on the side without direct contact, where it couldn’t be eaten. I found that the snails were eating the seaweed, the crabs weren’t, and when the crabs and snails were together the snails still ate it, but didn’t eat as much. This is probably because the snails were stressed out by the crabs, and often the crabs would flip over the snails and they couldn’t right themselves to then move over to the seaweed and eat it. In conclusion, snails may be able to control the population of the invasive seaweed, but their ability to do so is lessened when predators are present. Future work could include involving multiple species of seaweed in the same set-up to investigate if the results are the same with other food choices present.