

Mexican mabes

Enrique Arizmendi Castillo of Perlas de Guaymas, Apdo. postal #484, Guaymas, Sonora 85400 Mexico, writes

We have adapted pearl oyster culture and cultured pearl production for native pearl oysters *Pinctada mazatlanica* and *Pteria sterna*. We worked with pearl oysters while doing our Master's (Sergio Farell as thesis director and Douglas McLaurin and myself as students) in the ITESM (a private education institute) and upon seeing our advances, they decided to start a commercial-demonstrative farm (ITESM-Perlas de Guaymas) which we operate. At this moment we are har-

vesting our first crop of approximately 4,000 mabes and exactly 16 pearls, all from *Pteria sterna*, pearls of unusual dark colors including purple, blue, gray, gold, black and green with various over-tones in the best pearls. Round pearls are still at the research stage, as you can see from the numbers. This is also the case with *Pinctada mazatlanica*, but projections for this farm include 40,000 for next year and 100,000 mabes for 1998.



Resolving the etymological mystery of *Pinctada*

Dr Henk K. Mienis, National Mollusc Collection, Department of Evolution, Systematics and Ecology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 91904 Jerusalem, Israel, writes:

I have read with interest the remarks by Beatrice Burch concerning the etymology of *Pinctada* (see *Pearl Oyster Information Bulletin*, 8: 10–11). *Pinctada* is indeed neither of Latin nor of Greek origin, but has to be considered a corruption of the French word "Pintade", which again is derived from the Portuguese "Pintada", and which means originally "spotted" or "stained". However, in our case it might have a double meaning.

When Röding introduced the generic name *Pinctada*, he listed several species. The first among them was *Pinctada margaritifera*, with reference to Gmelin and Chemnitz. Gmelin still referred to the pearl oyster as *Mytilus margaritifera*. Chemnitz did not use a Latin name at all, but mentioned it under several common names like "La Pintade: la coquille de naces de perle" (French) or "Die gefleckte Henne" (German). Both "La Pintade" and "Die gefleckte Henne" refer in principal to guinea fowl or pearl hens: common African game-birds. This is not so strange, since the shells of pearl oysters are very close in colouration to the feathers of numerous species of guinea fowl. These birds are characterised by a dark grey or black plumage, heavily spotted with "pearls".

According to the "Petit Robert", a well-known French dictionary, guinea fowl have been called "Pintade" or "Pintarde" since the first part of the 17th Century, both words being derived from the Portuguese "Pintada". Only in 1776 was the name "Pintade", and later on also "Pintadine", (1842), used to indicate pearl oysters.

Röding was probably aware of the double usage of "Pintade" for both guinea fowl and pearl oyster. When he latinised that name, he probably changed it intentionally to *Pinctada*. However, Gray (*Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, 1847: 199) has supported a different opinion: *Pinctada* is a misspelling for "Pintada". Gray even tried, in vain, to replace the former by the latter.

Whether Röding changed "Pintade" into "*Pinctada*" intentionally or by error does not alter the etymology of the word.

Incidentally, the pearly colouration of guinea fowl is well-characterised by such specific names as *Agelastes meleagrides* (white-breasted guinea fowl) and *Numida meleagris* (helmeted guinea fowl).

