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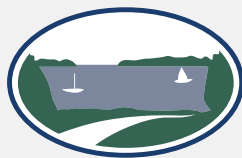
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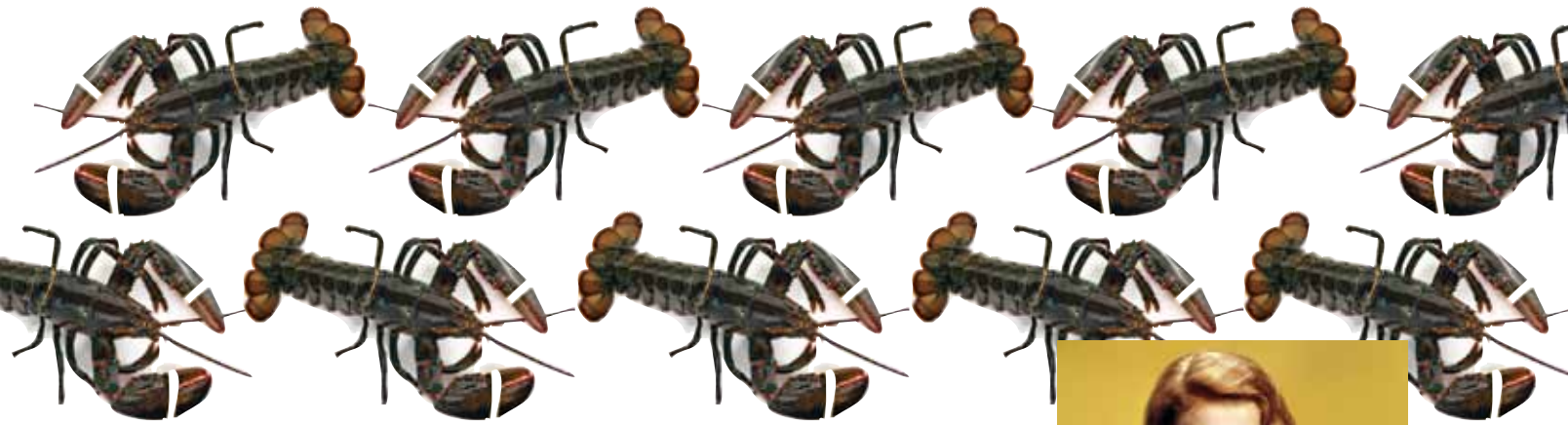


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“Oversexed, Overfed, Over Here”

Sweden bristles at “invasion” of Maine lobsters, asks EU for ban...
But China can't get enough.



FROM STAFF & WIRE REPORTS

“**T**hat, in a nutshell, is what the Swedes think of the American lobster from Maine, New England,” writes the *Guardian*. “It may be much sought after in restaurants, but Sweden does not want the American crustacean to darken EU waters in case it spreads diseases and kills off its smaller cousin. The Swedish environment ministry on Friday asked the EU to list the Maine lobster as an invasive species and ban the import of the live creatures.” Speaking off the record, a Maine lobster industry official quips, “You’d think Sweden would be more worried about other things overrunning it than Maine lobsters.”

Here in Maine, it’s flattering that the country that released Anita Ekberg, Ingrid Bergman, Ann-Margret, Greta Garbo, Lena Olin, Britt Ekland, and Maud Adams into the wild would consider anything from Maine oversexed. But the rest of the comments seem off-target. The refrain from the Maine lobster industry is, Where’s the science?

The *Guardian* quotes the Swedes as say-

ing Maine’s critters “pose several potential risks for native species. Competing for space and resources, they can interbreed with local species and produce hybrid species, which we don’t know will be viable or not,” said Dr Paul Stebbing of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture science.” Specifically, there have been complaints from the Swedish environmental ministry that “more than 30 American lobsters have been found along Sweden’s west coast in recent years, and they can carry dis-



Meet the American lobster’s European cousin, *Homarus gammarus*.



Swedish export: performer Ann-Margret.

eases and parasites that could spread to the European lobster and result in extremely high mortality.” But they haven’t. And how many is “more than 30”?

As for the United Kingdom, according to the *Guardian* “British experts say there have been 24 confirmed reports of the American lobster in UK waters in recent decades. They are not believed to be reproducing, although this is possible. Sightings are believed to be as a result of the deliberate release or escape of specimens from captivity.”

AMERICAN INVASION

How did Maine’s lobsters get there, howev-

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er small their number? It's a long swim from Damariscotta. The *Guardian* quotes Sweden's environmental ministry's theories: "We have reason to believe that lobsters are put in coastal waters perhaps for later consumption. Some of the American lobsters found by fishermen in the sea outside the west coast of Sweden were still wearing rubber bands round their claws with the exporting company name on the rubber band." New England lobster groups take this most seriously. "The Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association is jittery at any European ban as the export of lobsters to the EU is worth \$134m (£93m) annually."

Ready Seafood Co., Lobster Trap Seafood, and East Coast Seafood, along with several other wholesalers from Maine, went to Brussels to ensure there is no European Union-wide ban. In all, according to the *Press Herald*, "75 people met for 90 minutes to talk about how to avoid the all-out ban that Sweden asked the European Union to adopt."

"It's flattering that the country that released Anita Ekberg, Ingrid Bergman, Ann-Margret, Greta Garbo, Lena Olin, Britt Ekland, and Maud Adams into the wild would consider anything from Maine oversexed."

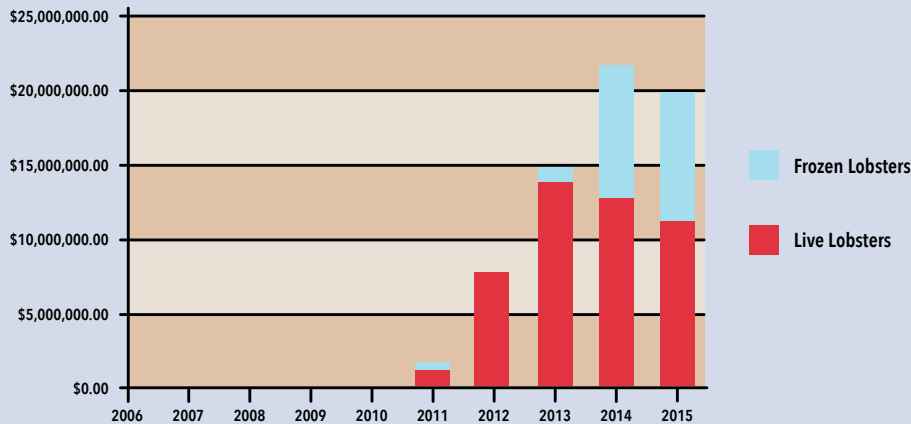
HUGE DEMAND FROM CHINA

"I started working with Maine Coast in January of 2016," says Annie Tselikis of The Maine Coast Company in York, an international wholesaler of lobsters. So deep are these connections, Tselikis is headed for China in the coming months. The company has been aware of the country's love for the lobster's seductive, "auspicious" shade of scarlet, "for as long as we've been marketing that resource [in China]."

Asked about the infamous 30 Maine lobsters slithering at the bottom of Sweden's claim, and whether these doughty examples of *Homarus Americanus* escaped from holding tanks after shipment from the US, Tselikis says, "No. The way that lobsters are

Not for all the Lobsters in China...

Maine Lobster Exports to China



Now, people worldwide aren't just eating Maine lobsters. They're debating them, too. From London to Beijing to Washington, DC, lobsters are a hot topic as an indicator of emerging global trends.

This summer, the *Washington Post* has taken its readers to Little Cranberry Island to dramatize the monumental demand that the Chinese have for Maine Lobsters. "Little Cranberry, an island of 70 inhabitants, and China, a nation of 1.4 billion people, increasingly find themselves connected by the shifting currents of the world economy," writes the *Post's* Ylan Q. Mui, who came to Vacationland to file this story.

"The rise of China's middle class has coincided with a boom in Maine's lobster population, resulting in a voracious new

Year	Live Lobsters	Frozen Lobsters	Total
1998	-	\$14,000.00	\$14,000.00
1999	\$10,616.00	-	\$10,616.00
2000	-	-	-
2001	\$2,983.00	-	\$2,983.00
2002	-	-	-
2003	-	-	-
2004	-	-	-
2005	-	-	-
2006	-	-	-
2007	-	-	-
2008	\$4,573.00	-	\$4,573.00
2009	\$3,775.00	-	\$3,775.00
2010	\$89,560.00	\$21,580.00	\$111,140.00
2011	\$806,165.00	\$661,267.00	\$1,467,432.00
2012	\$7,879,572.00	\$47,402.00	\$7,926,974.00
2013	\$14,486,507.00	\$640,402.00	\$15,126,909.00
2014	\$12,978,127.00	\$8,471,727.00	\$21,449,854.00
2015	\$11,479,709.00	\$8,403,168.00	\$19,882,877.00

stored in various parts of this industry, if you are receiving product in Europe, you are not storing that product in the water. You're storing it in a tank on the mainland."

European lobsters are *Homarus gammarus*. They are blue in the water. They're slightly smaller than Maine lobsters.

"It is all of our opinion that these [30 Maine] lobsters have been liberated [at var-

ious times] by private citizens who think they're doing something right. You can see evidence of this on the internet. A couple of weeks ago there was someone from Scotland who posted a YouTube about releasing a lobster back into the wild." Except it wasn't the "wild" the Maine lobsters were used to. "The Scottish posting was taken off Youtube" amid a derisive chorus of "You're

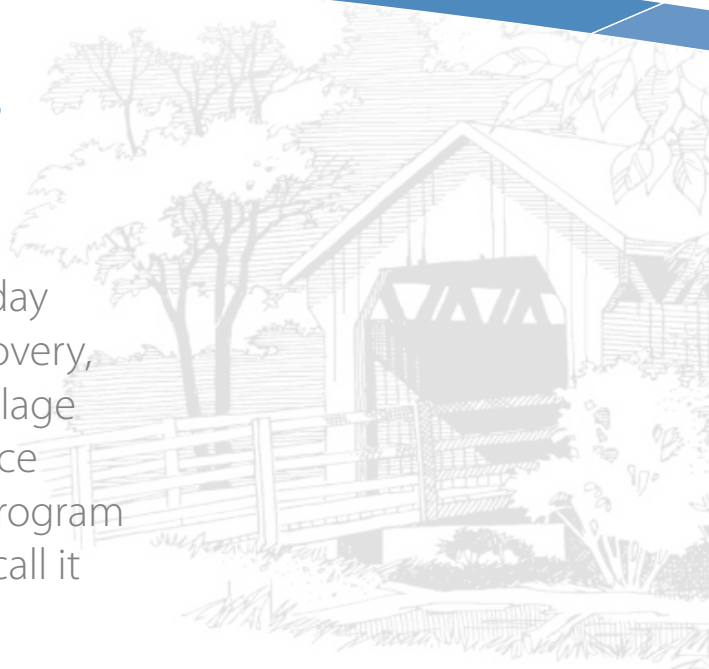
an idiot." "Why are you returning it to the ocean," and on and on. "The thing is," Tselikis says, "you're releasing it in waters that are not native to it."

After all, how helpful is it to release a lobster into the wild with bands around its claws? Here, enjoy your freedom! Naturally, this speaks to individual, sadly misinformed "rescues" of Maine



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INSIDE STORY

Shanghai, hub for Maine international trade.

market for the crustaceans' succulent, sweet meat. Exports of lobsters to China, nonexistent a decade ago, totaled \$20 million last year. The bright red color of a lobster's cooked shell is considered auspicious, making it a staple during Chinese festivals and weddings."

Maybe that's why Sweden is so red in the face.

So sanguine is Maine about its skyrocketing world lobster demand, "the state has established a full-time development office in Shanghai and led a second trade mission to the city last year."

Information for these graphs was generated for Portland Magazine at press time by the Maine International Trade Center.

lobsters. It may be more a matter of sympathy than science. Apparently, Sweden has yet to prove a new malignant horde has successfully bred in European waters. The Maine lobster industry is working hard to make this case and others to the European Commission. Does Jeff Bennett of the Maine International Trade Center subscribe to the Mary Tyler Moore buy-and-release theory?

"Somehow they got out there, and they certainly didn't get there on their own. There are numerous stories," but it all comes down to this: "I think they were released either intentionally or were mishandled, one or the other."

As we go to press, lips are tight, because there's a lot of maneuvering behind the curtain. "We're trying to do a lot of things behind the scenes that we don't want to disclose to the press yet. There will be more news in July." If that news goes Sweden's way, it will be boiling hot. ■

Update: A group of U.S. government scientists labels Sweden's proposal to classify *Homarus Americanus* as an invasive species as "so thin it doesn't merit a political debate, much less a full-scale European Union import ban," according to the *Portland Press Herald*.

DITA BECNEY

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