

Bidarki Story (Part 2a)

In the villages of Nanwalek and Port Graham, Alaska, katy chitons are known as “bidarkis.” The majority of people who live in the villages are Alaska Native of the Sugpiaq group. The chitons have been an important subsistence food in the area for more than 100 years. The name bidarki reflects the history of the area—it is the Russian word for “boat.” Russians settled in the area in the 1780s and stayed throughout the 1800s. When the bidarki is trying to protect itself from a predator, it curls up into the shape of the boat to protect its soft and tasty foot.



The people who live in these villages noticed that there were fewer bidarkis in the places they went to harvest them, and that they were generally smaller than in the past. This had been occurring over the last 10-15 years.

They wanted to know:

- Why are there fewer and smaller bidarkis to harvest?
- How fast do bidarkis grow?
- How long do they live?
- Is pollution affecting the bidarkis?

What can people do to manage their harvest of bidarkis so they can sustain this traditional use into the future?

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