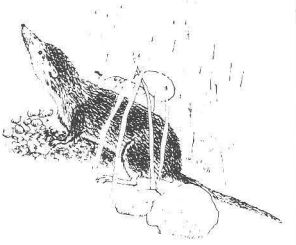
The Other Ingredient



Woodlice are related to lobsters and crabs. To that extent the forests of Ireland and the Department of the Marine have linkage. Forests also display parallel habitat to that of the sea.

What forester has not walked through tall forests and been struck by the thought that in the silence and the half light he could be walking in the depths of the ocean! On stormy days the roar and turbulence in the canopy holds the same frenzy and violence as a storm at sea.

Life lives where light is. In forests great tonnage of insect and arachnid and bird life live out their lives in the canopy layer with no great occasion to visit the lower zones. On death such life may drop through the canopy and tumble down to the forest floor. As in a forest, the photosyntheic layer of the ocean lies as a mesh of soup in the surface layers. Below this 'canopy' all living things depend on the remains of dead creatures — plankton, nexton, bacteria — falling in a continuous rain through the weakening light. They sink past the 800 metre mark and into the dark. They drift down beyond the region of the cephalopods and down further past the blunt snouts of angler fish and some of those that have not simply dissolved their lime shells during the descent slip among the ribs of dead schooners and lie still on the ooze, as ooze, in the never changing darkness.

Whales are like that. It can take up to two days for a dead whale to sink to the abyss. On estimates of mortality it is thought that each 50 square miles of the abyss receives one whale per year. In the same manner it takes less than a minute for a great forest tree to fall. It breaks free of its moorings and pulls its head beneath the canopy and collapses downward to the half gloom of the forest floor below. In both cases, whale and tree, each lie and wait for the inevitable dismemberment. The one, in part, by spiny crabs, the other, in part, by slow fragmentation by woodlice.

There is indeed something to be said for the similarity of seas and forests!