

inches cut of the water, whether to catch gnats or for mere sport I am unable to say. I remarked to one of the men dipping them that he was taking a good fare, and he replied that what I now saw was not a "flea bite" to what was taken last year, when a man and his son dipped 70,000 from that very place in a single day, he being "high liner" for 1883. This method of taking alewives with eels was entirely new to me, and thinking possibly it might also be so to you I venture to address you in relation to it.

KNOX HOTEL, THOMASTON, ME., *May 10, 1884.*

137.—ON THE CULTIVATION OF SOFT-SHELL CRABS.

By CHARLES C. LESLIE.

In our harbor and along our coast are found millions of the common blue sea-crab, and I have for the past two years been considering why it is that, with the number that are to be found here, we cannot get a supply of soft-shell crabs. The same crabs are found along the coast of Maryland and other States adjacent, and yet I have hunted and failed to find many. At one time I found three and at another time four. But in no instance have I found a half dozen, even after hunting a whole day.

I would be greatly obliged to you if you would kindly tell me if there is any artificial way by which I could secure a supply.

CHARLESTON, S. C., *April 24, 1884.*

REPLY BY PROFESSOR BAIRD.

If you have the same blue crab (which I presume to be the case) as the one furnishing the "soft-shells" of the Chesapeake Bay, there is no reason why you should not find them in this condition, which is merely their state after the old shell has been thrown off and the new one is being formed.

You might try the experiment of penning up the crabs in a shoal pond, fed by the tide, into which small fish and other marine refuse can be brought by the tide through a grating.

By taking flat stones, bundles of brush, or other substances of a similar character, and laying them over the bottom, you furnish a refuge under which the crabs can crawl. By lifting up these branches from time to time you can find the crabs under them.

This process has, I believe, been actually made the subject of a patent, but the inventor is dead; and the patent, probably, has long since run out.

Of course the defenceless crabs are readily devoured by their stronger relations, and it is therefore advisable to keep them where they can be properly protected from such destruction.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *April 26, 1884.*