SHORT NOTE

OTOLITH AND BODY SIZE RELATIONSHIPS IN BIGEYE GRENAIDER (Macrourus holotrachs) IN CCAMLR SUBAREA 48.3

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Abstract

A large sample of otoliths from bigeye grenadier (Macrourus holotrachs) caught as by-catch in the Patagonian toothfish (Dissostichus eleginoides) fishery in Subarea 48.3 was measured and weighed, and the usefulness of otoliths as predictors of fish size was determined. Otolith mass provides good estimates of fish length, whereas otolith length and width measurements provide less accurate estimates of fish length. Seasonal variations in fish mass with reproductive condition need to be considered if predictions of fish mass from otolith mass are undertaken. Otolith size/fish size models should be derived for each fish population under investigation. The length of fish chosen in such studies should be representative of the size range consumed by predators.

Résumé

Un échantillon important d’otolithes de grenadiers gros-yeux (Macrourus holotrachs) prélevé dans la capture accessoire de la pêcherie de légine australe (Dissostichus eleginoides) de la sous-zone 48.3 a été mesuré et pesé pour déterminer si les otolithes pouvaient être considérés comme des indicateurs de la taille des poissons. Le poids des otolithes donne une bonne estimation de la longueur des poissons, alors que la longueur et la largeur des otolithes n’en donnent pas d’estimations aussi précises. Les variations saisonnières du poids des poissons en fonction de la condition de reproduction doivent être prises en compte si l’on entreprend de déterminer le poids des poissons à partir de celui des otolithes. Il conviendrait de dériver des modèles de taille des otolithes/taille des poissons pour chaque population de poissons à l’étude. La longueur des poissons retenus dans de telles études devrait être représentative de l’intervalle des tailles consommé par les prédateurs.

Резюме

Было измерено и взвешено большое количество отолитов южноatlантического
макруруса (Macrourus holotrachs), выловленного как прилов при промысле
патагонского клыкача (Dissostichus eleginoides) в Подрайоне 48.3, и оценена
полезность отолитов в качестве предикторов размера рыбы. Масса отолита
позволяет хорошо оценить длину рыбы, в то время, как длина и ширина отолита
daют менее точную оценку длины рыбы. Если масса отолита используется для
оценки массы рыбы, то необходимо учитывать также сезонную изменчивость
массы рыбы в зависимости от репродуктивного состояния. Модели размера
отолит/размера рыбы должны составляться для каждой изучаемой популяций
рыб. Длина рыбы, выбиаемой для таких исследований, должна отражать диапазон
размеров рыбы, потребляемой хищниками.
INTRODUCTION

Fish of the family Macrouridae (rattails and grenadiers) are regularly taken as by-catch in the longline fisheries for toothfish (*Dissostichus* spp.) in the Southern Ocean. In certain areas, such as the Ross Sea and around the Kerguelen Islands, macrourids may comprise as much as 17–23% of the total catch by weight in these fisheries (van Wijk et al., 2000). In other fisheries, such as the Patagonian toothfish (*Dissostichus eleginoides*) fishery at South Georgia and Shag Rocks (Subarea 48.3), reported macrourid by-catch is less, between 1–2% of the total catch weight. However, even in these regions, the total catch of macrourids may amount to between 10 and 25 tonnes each year (CCAMLR, 2000).

There are currently very few data available on the population abundance of macrourids or of their interactions in the Southern Ocean ecosystem. In the waters around South Georgia and Macquarie Island macrourids of the genus *Macrourus* occur in the diet of *D. eleginoides* (Garcia de la Rosa et al., 1997; Goldsworthy et al., 2001), and discarded by-catch fish are known to be taken by black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses (Xavier et al., 2002). It is likely that within the Southern Ocean ecosystem, as elsewhere, macrourids are important predators of benthic and mid-water fish and invertebrates (Merrett and Haedrich, 1997).

The analysis of otoliths retrieved from diet samples of higher predators can be used to provide information on the type, size, mass and energetic content of their fish prey (Reid, 1995; Bowen, 2000). However, useful information can only be obtained from the otoliths if the relationship between otolith size and fish size is established (Everson et al., 1999). Existing information on otolith size/fish size relationships for Southern Ocean macrourids has been obtained from only a small sample of *Macrourus holotrachys* otoliths (*n* = 15) from fish caught around Heard and Macquarie Islands (Williams and McEldowney, 1990). Here we present the results obtained from a large sample of otoliths of *M. holotrachys* taken as by-catch in the commercial longline fishery for toothfish around South Georgia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In total 230 macrourids were obtained from CCAMLR observers on board commercial toothfish longline vessels fishing within Subarea 48.3 between June and August 2001. Specimens were frozen and then thawed prior to examination at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) laboratory at King Edward Point, South Georgia. Fish were identified using the methods of Iwamoto (1990), Miller (1993) and Fischer and Hureau (1985). Fish were identified using a number of characteristics including the extent of squamation on the underside of the head, lunate areas behind the snout, and the number of pelvic fin rays as described by Trunov and Konstantinov (1986). The majority of these (227) were identified as belonging to one species, *Macrourus holotrachys*. The following data were collected for each fish: total length *L* (cm), anal length *L* (cm) and total mass *W* (kg). Anal length is the measure of macrourid length routinely taken because damage to the long fragile tail can lead to inaccuracies in total length estimation. Left and right sagittal otoliths were removed and examined under a light microscope. If they appeared to be undamaged, the otolith length *L* (mm) and otolith width *W* (mm) were measured to the nearest 0.001 mm using electronic calipers according to the methods of Williams and McEldowney (1990). The total otolith mass, *W* (g), was measured to the nearest 0.01 g using a standard analytical balance.
The relationships between otolith length $L_o$ (mm), otolith width $Wd_o$ (mm) and otolith mass $W_o$ (g) and fish total length $L_t$ (cm), anal length $L_a$ (cm) and total mass $W_t$ were investigated. Fish and otolith weights were log-transformed to linearise data for the calculation of 95% confidence limits of regressions and associated predictions. Data were subsequently back-transformed to natural units. The relationships between fish total length $L_t$ (cm), anal length $L_a$ (cm) and total mass $W_t$ were also investigated.

RESULTS

The majority of $M$. holotrachys examined were female (219 of 227) and ranged in size from 47 to 80 cm $L_t$. A paired t-test comparison of the dimensions of the left and right otoliths revealed no significant differences in otolith length ($T = 0.76$, $p = 0.45$, $n = 213$), otolith width ($T = 0.34$, $p = 0.74$, $n = 219$) or otolith mass ($T = 0.24$, $p = 0.81$, $n = 212$), enabling measurements of either otolith to be used in subsequent analyses. Regressions of otolith length against fish length (total and anal) and fish mass indicate simple relationships between variables with otolith length increasing with increasing body size. The data are reasonably well fitted with simple linear regressions. Similar results are obtained from scatter plots of otolith width against fish length and mass. The results of these regression analyses are given in Table 1. Significant relationships exist between otolith linear measurements and fish size, however $r^2$ values are low and there is much scatter in the data. The predictive capabilities of all of the models are similar.

Scatter plots of otolith weight against fish length and weight are shown with fitted curves in Figure 1. Significant relationships exist between fish size and otolith mass ($W_o$ (g)), $p < 0.001$ in all cases. The regression equations describing the relationships are:

- total length $L_t$ (cm) = 92.09 ($W_o$)$^{0.295}$ ($r^2 = 0.61$)
- anal length $L_a$ (cm) = 38.093 ($W_o$)$^{0.367}$ ($r^2 = 0.60$)
- total weight $W_t$ (kg) = 5.68 ($W_o$)$^{1.017}$ ($r^2 = 0.62$).

Higher $r^2$ values compared to those obtained when using otolith linear dimensions as variables suggest that otolith mass can provide a more useful predictor of fish size than otolith length or width measurements. The predictive capability of the fitted models is compared in Table 2. Confidence Intervals (CI) for predictions based on otolith mass range from $\pm 4$ cm for the smallest fish analysed (17 cm anal length) rising to $\pm 5$ cm for the largest. CIs for predictions based on otolith length range from $\pm 4$ cm for the smallest fish to $\pm 6$ cm for the largest. The confidence intervals of predictions of fish size based on otolith length are greater and hence less useful than those obtained from the fish length/otolith mass model.

A comparison of the results of the current study with published data for $M$. holotrachys is shown in Figure 2. There are substantial differences in the slope and intercepts of the regression equations, which in turn give rise to differences in the fish size predictions for each model (Table 3).

Scatter plots of fish total length against fish anal length and fish total length against total mass are shown in Figure 3. A linear regression best describes the relationship between fish total length and anal length whilst fish weight is approximately the cube of total length.

DISCUSSION

The study was undertaken to evaluate whether data obtained from studies on predators can be used to obtain information on their macrourid prey. The aim of such studies, which examine otoliths from sources such as bird and fish stomachs, is to estimate the biomass of the fish consumed. The results from this study indicate that otolith size (i.e. length or width) or mass, can be used to predict the size of the fish from which it was taken. However, otolith weight is a far better predictor of fish size than either otolith length or width. When otolith mass is used as a predictor, the regression explained over 60% of the variation of the data, an improvement on the 30% obtained when using otolith size. A similar result was obtained in mackerel icefish ($Champsocephalus gunnari$) by Everson et al. (1999).

Despite their widespread use, problems may exist when otolith dimensions are employed to reconstruct the size structure of the fish prey items found in the diets of marine predators. One difficulty is that otoliths may erode during digestion and that the degree of erosion is species-specific (Bowen, 2000). Degradation due to digestion may result in biases when otoliths are used to identify diet composition in higher predators. ‘Compensation Factors’ derived from in-vitro feeding experiments are often applied in dietary studies to compensate for otolith erosion, enabling fish length and mass to be calculated (Reid, 1995). North et al. (1983) suggested that $C$. gunnari otoliths from seal faeces lost 10–20% of their length during digestion, whereas those from
Table 1: Results of the linear regression analysis \( y = bx + A \) of fish body size \( (L_t, L_a, \text{ and } W_t) \) against otolith length and otolith width.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Otolith Length ( (L_t) )</th>
<th>Otolith Width ( (W_{ot}) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( A )</td>
<td>( B )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length ( (L_t, \text{ cm}) )</td>
<td>27.81</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal length ( (L_a, \text{ cm}) )</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>1.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weight ( (W_t, \text{ kg}) )</td>
<td>-1.55</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Comparison of fish anal length \( (L_a, \text{ cm}) \) predicted from (a) otolith mass and (b) otolith length. Upper and lower 95% confidence limits (CL) are given along with the confidence interval \( (CI) \) \( (\text{CL}^{\text{upper}} - \text{CL}^{\text{lower}}) \).

(a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Otolith Mass (g)</th>
<th>Predicted Value (cm)</th>
<th>Lower CL (cm)</th>
<th>Upper CL (cm)</th>
<th>CI (cm)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>8.1</td>
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<td>27.2</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>37.3</td>
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</table>

(b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Otolith Length (mm)</th>
<th>Predicted Value (cm)</th>
<th>Lower CL (cm)</th>
<th>Upper CL (cm)</th>
<th>CI (cm)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.0</td>
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<td>14.1</td>
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<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
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<td>14.0</td>
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<td>24.2</td>
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</table>

Table 3: Comparison of fish total length predicted from otolith length, from the equations of this paper and Williams and McEldowney (1990).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Otolith Length (mm)</th>
<th>Estimated Fish Length (cm) This paper</th>
<th>Williams and McEldowney (1990)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>12</td>
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nototheniids had lost 15–25%. There is currently little information available on the digestion rates of macrourid otoliths in predator stomachs. However, the large size and robust structure of *M. holotrachys* otoliths compared to the otoliths of other Southern Ocean fish species suggest that they are much less likely to be eroded during digestion. The potential biases associated with partially eroded otoliths must be borne in mind when reconstructing the fish component of the diet of predators.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER STUDIES

The discrepancies observed between the otolith length/fish size relationships described in the current study and that produced by Williams and McEldowney (1990) are likely to have a number of causes. Williams and McEldowney’s (1990) data were obtained from a small sample (*n*= 15) of smaller fishes (16.3–54.1 cm SL) from Heard and Macquarie Islands compared to the large sample (*n*= 227) of larger specimens (47–80 cm SL) measured in this study. We would advocate the use of predictions of fish body size from otoliths that have been derived from the fish populations on which the predators have been feeding. Samples cover the widest possible size range to encompass fish of a size representative of those consumed by the predators.

Otolith mass can be used to provide predictions of fish length or fish mass. However, we would not recommend estimating fish mass directly from otolith mass measurements as this is likely to vary with spawning condition. Only otoliths from females were examined in the current study and further investigations on males are required. Previous studies on *C. gunnari* otoliths have, however, found there to be no difference between the size of otoliths in males and females.

Strong relationships between otolith size and fish size have been observed for many species of macrourids found in other parts of the world, including studies on Mediterranean species (Masusi et al., 1995) and those found in South African waters (Smale et al., 1995). Otolith morphology is highly species-specific, therefore direct comparisons with these results were not undertaken. It is clear, however, that when undertaking such studies measurements should be standardised.

CONCLUSIONS

(i) Otolith size can be used to predict fish size in *M. holotrachys*.

(ii) Otolith mass provides a better predictor of fish length than otolith size.

(iii) Seasonal variations in fish mass with condition need to be considered if predictions of fish weight from otolith mass are undertaken.

(iv) Otolith size/fish size models should be derived for each fish population under investigation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES


Otolith and body size relationships in bigeye grenadier, Subarea 48.3

Figure 1: Scatter plots of total length $L_t$ (cm), anal length $L_a$ (cm) and total weight $W_t$ (kg) against otolith mass ($W_o$ (g)). The equations of the fitted lines are given in the text.
Figure 2: Scatter plot of total length $L_t$ (cm) against otolith length $L_o$ (mm). The solid line is the linear regression line for the data. The dashed line represents the linear relationship between fish length and otolith length obtained by Williams and McEldowney (1990) for *Macrourus holotrichys* otoliths from Heard and Macquarie Islands.
Figure 3: Scatter plots of fish total length $L_t$ (cm) against anal length $L_a$ (cm) (top) and fish total weight $W_t$ (kg) against fish total length $L_t$ (cm) (bottom). The equations of the fitted lines are $L_t = 1.8834 L_a + 18.501 \quad (r^2 = 0.7536, \text{ Top})$ and $W_t = 8 \times 10^{-6} L_t^{2.93} \quad (r^2 = 0.8221, \text{ bottom})$. 
Tableau 1: Résultats de l’analyse de régression linéaire ($y = bx + A$) de la taille corporelle du poisson ($L$, $L_a$ et $W$) par rapport à la longueur et à la largeur de l’otolithe.

Tableau 2: Comparaison de la longueur anale du poisson ($L_a$ cm) présumée à partir (a) du poids de l’otolithe et (b) de la longueur de l’otolithe. Les limites supérieure et inférieure de l’intervalle de confiance à 95% (CL) sont données avec l’intervalle de confiance (CI (CL(upper) - CL(lower))).


Liste des figures

Figure 1: Diagramme de dispersion de la longueur totale ($L_t$ cm), la longueur anale ($L_a$ cm) et le poids total ($W_t$ kg) par rapport au poids de l’otolithe ($W_o$ kg). Les équations des courbes ajustées figurent dans le texte.

Figure 2: Diagramme de dispersion de la longueur totale ($L_t$ cm) par rapport à la longueur de l’otolithe ($L_o$ mm). Le trait plein représente la ligne de régression linéaire des données. Les tirets représentent la relation linéaire entre la longueur du poisson et celle de l’otolithe obtenue par Williams et McEldowney (1990) pour les otolithes de Macrourus holotrichys des îles Heard et Macquarie.

Figure 3: Diagramme de dispersion de la longueur totale du poisson ($L_t$ cm) par rapport à la longueur anale ($L_a$ cm) en haut et du poids total du poisson ($W_t$ kg) par rapport à sa longueur totale ($L_t$ cm) en bas. Les équations des courbes ajustées sont $L_o = 1,8834 L_a + 18,501$ ($r_2 = 0,7536$, en haut) et $W_o = 8 \times 10^{-6} L_o^{2.93}$ ($r_2 = 0,8221$, en bas).

Список таблиц

Таблица 1: Результаты анализа по методу линейной регрессии ($y = bx + A$) размера тела рыбы ($L$, $L_a$ и $W$) по сравнению с длиной и шириной отолита.

Таблица 2: Сравнение длины рыбы до анального отверстия ($L_a$ см), полученной по (a) массе и (b) длине отолита. Приводятся верхняя и нижняя границы 95%-ного доверительного интервала (CL) и доверительный интервал (CI (CL(upper) - CL(lower))).

Таблица 3: Сравнение общей длины рыбы, рассчитанной по длине отолита, используя уравнения из данной статьи и работы Уилльямса и Макэлдауни (Williams and McEldowney, 1990).

Список рисунков

Рисунок 1: Графики рассеяния значений общей длины ($L_t$ см), длины до анального отверстия ($L_a$ см) и общего веса ($W_t$ кг) относительно массы отолита ($W_o$ г). Уравнения описывающих кривых приводятся в тексте.

Рисунок 2: График рассеяния значений общей длины ($L_t$ см) относительно длины отолита ($L_o$ мм). Сплошная линия – график линейной регрессии по этим данным. Пунктиром показана линейная зависимость между длиной рыбы и длиной отолита, полученная Уилльямсом и Макэлдауни (Williams and McEldowney, 1990) для отолитов Macrourus holotrichys из района о-вов Херд и Маккуори.

Рисунок 3: Графики рассеяния значений общей длины рыбы ($L_a$ см) относительно длины до анального отверстия ($L_o$ см) (вверху) и общего веса рыбы ($W_t$ кг) относительно общей длины рыбы ($L_a$ см) (внизу). Уравнения описывающих кривых: $L_o = 1.8834 L_a + 18.501$ ($r_2 = 0.7536$, вверху) и $W_o = 8 \times 10^{-6} L_o^{2.93}$ ($r_2 = 0.8221$, внизу).

Lista de las tablas

Tabla 1: Resultados del análisis de regresión lineal ($y = bx + A$) de la talla del pez ($L$, $L_a$ y $W$) en función del largo y ancho del otolito.
Tabla 2: Comparación de la longitud preanal ($L_a$ cm) derivada de (a) el peso del otolito y (b) el largo del otolito. Se muestra el límite superior e inferior del intervalo de confianza del 95% (CI) junto con el intervalo de confianza (CI) ($CL_{superior}$, $CL_{inferior}$).

Tabla 3: Comparación de la longitud total del pez derivada del largo del otolito a partir de las ecuaciones presentadas en este trabajo y en Williams y McEldowney (1990).

Lista de las figuras

Figura 1: Diagramas de dispersión de la longitud total $L_t$ (cm), longitud preanal $L_a$ (cm) y peso total $W_t$ (kg) en función de la masa del otolito ($W_o$ g)). Las ecuaciones de las líneas ajustadas figuran en el texto.

Figura 2: Diagrama de dispersión de la longitud total $L_t$ (cm) en función del largo del otolito $L_o$ (mm). La línea continua representa la regresión lineal de los datos. La línea discontinua representa la relación lineal entre la talla del pez y el largo del otolito derivada de Williams y McEldowney (1990) para los otolitos de *Macrourus holotrichys* de las islas Heard y Macquarie.

Figura 3: Diagramas de dispersión de la longitud total de los peces $L_t$ (cm) en función de la longitud preanal $L_a$ (cm) (superior) y el peso total del pez $W_t$ (kg) en función de la longitud total del pez $L_t$ (cm) (inferior). Las ecuaciones de las líneas ajustadas son $L_t = 1,8834 L_a + 18,501 (r^2 = 0,7536, superior)$ y $W_t = 8 \times 10^{-6} L_t^{2.95} (r^2 = 0,8221, inferior)$. 