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INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

GENERAL INFORMATION

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Advancements in Ichthyoplankton Taxonomy in the Northeastern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea: Research Conducted by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center 1965-1999

Morgan S. Busby¹, Ann C. Matarese¹, Deborah M. Blood¹, and Małgorzata Konieczna² ¹Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA ² Sea Fisheries Institute, Plankton Sorting and Identification Center, K. Królewicza 4, 71-550 Szczecin, Poland

Abstract. Collections of ichthyoplankton samples have become increasingly important in studies of fisheries recruitment, aquatic ecosystems, and systematics of fishes. In these studies, it is of primary importance that researchers have knowledge of taxonomic characters necessary to correctly identify species of interest at all stages of development. In this review, we provide a historical account of ichthyoplankton research programs and studies, processing techniques, and advancements in knowledge of ichthyoplankton taxonomy in the Northeast Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea. Most of this research has been conducted by scientists during the past 35 years (1965-1999) at NOAA's Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC). In 1980, the Plankton Sorting and Identification Center in Szczecin, Poland (PSIC), began processing ichthyoplankton samples collected by the AFSC. At that time, it was possible to identify larvae of only 8.3% (52 of 627) of fish species known in the area. The PSIC has since assisted in identifying larvae of an additional 239 species. Presently, larvae of 291of 636 species (45.8%) can be identified from ichthyoplankton samples. Taxonomic studies on gadid larvae in the early 1980s were of particular importance in development of fishery oceanography research on commercially important fish stocks in Alaskan waters. Later studies on scorpaeniform families, particularly the Hexagrammidae and Agonidae, contributed significantly to understanding their systematics. Studies are currently underway on larvae of several families including Scorpaenidae, Cottidae, Hemitripteridae, Liparidae, Stichaeidae, and Pleuronectidae.

Keywords: Ichthyoplankton, taxonomy, history, advancements, N.E. Pacific Ocean, Bering Sea

INTRODUCTION

The collection of ichthyoplankton samples has become increasingly important in studies of fisheries recruitment, aquatic ecosystems, and the systematics of fishes. In all of these studies, it is of primary importance that researchers have knowledge of the necessary diagnostic taxonomic characters to correctly identify the species of interest throughout its life history at all

stages of development (Kendall and Matarese 1994). Ichthyoplankton studies in the Northeast Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea were initiated and conducted during the latter half of the twentieth century to assess abundance and investigate recruitment of large stocks of commercially important gadoid fishes including Pacific hake, Merluccius productus (Waldron 1972; Bailey et al. 1982), and walleye pollock, Theragra chalcogramma (Picquelle and Megrey 1993; Kendall et al. 1996). Studies were also conducted during this period to assess the status of other fishery resources and the influence of the marine environment on the aquatic ecosystem and species composition of the ichthyoplankton community (Kendall and Dunn 1985). Since 1965, most of this research has been conducted by the Recruitment Processes staff at the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center (NWAFC), which became the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) and Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) in 1991. The Plankton Sorting and Identification Center in Szczecin, Poland (PSIC), has had an important role in furthering knowledge on identification of larval and juvenile fishes from the Northeast Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea and in improving the quality of descriptive publications. In this review, we provide a historical account of ichthyoplankton research programs and studies, processing techniques, and advancements in taxonomic knowledge during the past 35 years in the Northeast Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea, most of which have occurred in collaboration with the efforts of PSIC. Important contributions and milestones are discussed, as is currently ongoing research in ichthyoplankton taxonomy.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF ICHTHYOPLANKTON SORTING AND PROCESSING PROTOCOLS

Sample sorting and processing protocols (verification of initial identifications and data processing) evolved as research objectives and technologies changed through time. Ichthyoplankton samples collected for NWAFC Pacific hake studies were sorted and identified at sea from 1965-1970 (Table 1). From 1971-1976, samples collected for the Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction (MARMAP) program were sorted and processed at NWAFC. Staff from the Texas Instruments Corporation sorted ichthyoplankton samples collected for the Outer Continental Shelf Environmental Assessment Program (OCSEAP) from 1977-1979. Staff from NWAFC processed these samples. Beginning in 1980, samples collected during studies conducted by the NWAFC were sent to the National Plankton Sorting Center in Szczecin, Poland, to be sorted and processed. This continued through the inception of the Fisheries Oceanography Coordinated Investigations (FOCI) program in 1984, the Global Ocean Ecosystem Dynamics (GLOBEC) program in 1998, and to the present.

HISTORY OF IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Larvae of Pacific hake was the only taxon identified in ichthyoplankton samples at NWAFC in 1965 and 1966 (Table 1). In 1967, all larvae were identified to the lowest possible taxon. Egg identification began in 1971. The NWAFC began its association with PSIC in 1980, at which time science staff in Poland identified larvae to the lowest possible taxon. Scientists at NWAFC

Year	Sorting and Processing	Scientific Programs & Studies		Identification	
1965 1966				Pacific hake larvae	
1967	At Sea	NWAFC Pacific hak			
1968					
1969				All larvae	
1970					
1971					
1972					
1973	NWAFC	MARMAP Program OCSEAP Program			
1974					
1975				All larvae and eggs	
1976					
1977					
1978	Texas Instruments Corp.				
1979			•		
1980				All larvae	
1981			USSR/US Studies		
1982		NWAFC Studies			
1983					
1984					
1985					
1986					
1987		FOCI			
1988	Plankton Sorting and	FOCI		All larvae; walleye	
1989 1990	Identification Center,			pollock egg identification	
	Szczecin, Poland	NWAFC ->	AFSC	and staging	
1991 1992		NWAFC \rightarrow	AFSC		
1992					
1993					
1994 1995					
1995		Bering Sea FOCI			
1990					
1997					
1998 1999			GLOBEC	All larvae and eggs	

Table 1. Historical account and time line of ichthyoplankton sorting and processing protocols and scientific programs for the NWAFC and AFSC 1965 to 1999.

identified all eggs and verified identifications of larvae. Eggs of walleye pollock were identified and separated into 21 developmental stages at PSIC beginning in 1981, followed by identification of all other fish eggs in 1998. Identifications of juvenile fishes were added to their responsibilities in 1991. With most of the sample processing being conducted in Poland, AFSC scientists have been able to devote more time to verification and addressing taxonomic problems.

ADVANCEMENTS IN TAXONOMIC KNOWLEDGE

Prior to publication of the Laboratory Guide to Early Life History Stages of Northeast Pacific Fishes (Matarese *et al.* 1989), information on identification of Northeast Pacific fish larvae was a combination of a few published reports and considerably more unpublished descriptions and illustrations. Information on larval identification was given to scientists at PSIC in the form of training sessions in Seattle, copies of published papers, and draft manuscripts. Descriptive sections of the manuscripts were greatly refined after the PSIC scientists were consulted. Even so, the number of species of fish eggs and larvae that could be identified was relatively low. Only 1.6 percent of fish eggs (10 species in 4 families) and 8.3 percent of larvae (52 species in 19 families) could be identified in plankton samples (Kendall and Dunn 1985) (Table 2). These calculations were based on a total of 627 species in 94 families known to occur in the area (Matarese *et al.* 1989).

The number of identifiable taxa rose sharply to 7.0 percent of fish eggs and 41.9 percent of larvae upon publication of the laboratory guide (Kendall and Matarese 1994). Since publication of the laboratory guide, two new scorpaenids (Orr and Baker 1997), one cottid (Yabe 1991), one agonid (B. Sheiko, Department of Ichthyology, Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia, unpubl. data), three liparids (Busby and Chernova, submitted; Orr and Busby, unpubl. data, Orr and Busby, submitted), one zoarcid (Anderson 1994), one acropomatid (Busby and Orr, 1999), and one pleuronectid (Orr and Matarese 2000) have been reported in the area (Table 3). Two cyclopterids have been synonymized (Kido and Shinohara 1996) (Table 3), bringing the current total number of species to 636 in 98 families. In addition to reports of new species occurring in the area, several new descriptions of early life history stages (all larvae) have been published, mostly on fishes in the order Scorpaeniformes (Table 4). These include six scorpaenids (genus Sebastes) (Moreno 1993; Sakuma and Laidig 1995; Laidig et al. 1996; Laidig and Sakuma 1998), one psychrolutid (Ambrose 1996a), 12 agonids (Busby and Ambrose 1993; Ambrose 1996b; Busby 1998), seven liparids (Marliave and Peden 1989; Ambrose 1996c), one pholid (Watson 1996), and one pentacerotid (Mundy and Moser 1997). With these new larval descriptions, it is now possible to identify 45.8 percent of the larvae in the area (291 of 636 species) (Table 2).

Table 2. Advancements in taxonomic knowledge of early life history stages of northeastern Pacific fishes 1985 to 1999.

Source	Number of species	Number of larvae described ¹	% Known
Kendall and Dunn, 1985	627	52	8.3
Matarese et al., 1989	627	263 ²	41.9
Present study	636	291	45.8

¹Includes only species level identifications.

²As calculated by Kendall and Matarese (1994).

Taxon	Investigator(s)
Scorpaenidae Adelosebastes latens	Orr and Baker, 1997
Sebastes glaucus	»
Cottidae	
Bolinia euryptera	Yabe, 1991
Agonidae	
Podothecus veternus	Sheiko, unpubl. data
Liparidae Liparis marmoratus Allocareproctus jordani genus nov. sp. nov.	Busby and Chernova, submitted Orr and Busby, submitted "
Cyclopteridae Aptocyclus ventricosus Pelagocyclus vitiazi ¹	Kido and Shinohara, 1996 "
Zoarcidae Lycodes soldatovi	Anderson, 1994
Acropomatidae Howella sherborni	Busby and Orr 1999
Pleuronectidae Lepidopsetta polyxystra	Orr and Matareses, 2000

Table 3. Species synonymized, described, or reported in the northeastern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea since publication of Matarese *et al.* (1989)

¹According to Kido and Shinohara (1996), *P. vitazi* Lindberg and Legeza 1955, is a junior synonym of *A. ventricosus* (Pallas 1769).

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Several authors published work during this period that was of particular significance in terms of taxonomic advancement, usefulness in recruitment process studies, or both (Table 5). The first of these contributions was the paper by Matarese *et al.* (1981) that described the larval development of the gadids *Microgadus proximus*, *Theragra chalcogramma*, and *Gadus macrocephalus*. The ability to identify and distinguish these taxa, particularly *T. chalcogramma*, was paramount in the development and initial research of the FOCI program. Publication of the paper by Dunn and Vinter (1984) on the development of *Eleginus gracilis* with comments on the identification of other Northeast Pacific gadids was another significant milestone. In addition to the description of larval *E. gracilis*, the authors also presented the first partial series of *Boreogadus saida* and presented the diagnostic characters needed to distinguish the larvae of all five species of gadid fishes known from Alaskan waters. Kendall and Vinter (1984) described the early life history stages of all five genera and seven of the nine species of hexagrammid fishes in the northeastern Pacific Ocean. This was the first published study

Table 4. Descriptions of early life history tages of Northeast Pacific fishes published after Matarese *et al.* (1989).

Taxon	Author(s)	
Scorpaenidae		
Sebastes atrovirens	Moreno, 1993	
S. carnatus	22	
S. mystinus	22	
S. rastrelliger	33	
S. goodei	Sakuma and Laidig, 1995	
S. saxicola	Laidig et al., 1996	
S. rastrelliger ¹	Laidig and Sakuma, 1998	
Psychrolutidae		
Psychrolutes phrictus	Ambrose, 1996a	
Agonidae		
Odontopyxis trispinosa	Busby and Ambrose, 1993	
Xeneretmus latifrons	"	
X. leiops	Ambrose, 1996b	
Agonopsis vulsa	Busby, 1998	
Anoplagonus inermis	22	
Bathyagonus alascanus	"	
B. infraspinatus	22	
B. nigripinnis	>>	
B. pentacanthus	"	
Leptagonus frenatus	>>	
Pallasina barbata	"	
Podothecus acipenserinus	"	
Liparidae		
Liparis fucensis	Marliave and Peden, 1989	
L. callyodon	>>	
Careproctus melanurus	Ambrose, 1996c	
Liparis mucosus	,,	
L. pulchellus	22	
Paraliparis cephalus	>>	
Rhinoliparis attenuatus	,,	
Pholidae		
Apodichthys fucorum	Watson, 1996	
Pentacerotidae		
Pseudopentaceros wheeleri	Mundy and Moser, 1997	

¹Augments description of Moreno (1993) to cover all developmental stages.

containing larval descriptions of an entire family of fishes in the region. Publication of the *Laboratory Guide to Early Life History Stages of Northeast Pacific Fishes* (Matarese *et al.* 1989) was the most significant work on larval fish taxonomy in the region during this time period. In this guide, comparative descriptions of 232 species, including 200 previously

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Author(s)	Family	No. of larval taxa described	Significance
Matarese et al., 1981	Gadidae	3	1 st N.E. Pacific gadid larvae
Dunn and Vinter, 1984	Gadidae	2	Completes family Gadidae, all taxa compared
Kendall and Vinter, 1984	Hexagrammidae	All 5 genera, 7 spp.	Diagnosis of entire family
Matarese et al., 1989	All N.E. Pacific	232	200 new illustrations, entire region covered
Busby, 1998	Agonidae	22	9 new descriptions, 13 updated

Table 5. Special contributions to advancements in taxonomic knowledge of early life history stages of northeastern Pacific fishes 1981 to 1998.

unpublished illustrations, were presented. Since publication of the laboratory guide, only one major study on larval taxonomy has been completed: Busby (1998) presented the diagnostic taxonomic characters and illustrations of 22 of 25 species of larval and early juvenile agonids occurring in the area. This included new larval descriptions of nine species and augmented or updated descriptions of the remaining 13 taxa.

CURRENT STUDIES

Despite all of the recent advancements in our ability to identify early life history stages of northeastern Pacific fishes, gaps exist in our knowledge of one perciform and three scorpaeniform families (Table 6). At present, we are only able to identify 64 percent of larval scorpaenids, 61 percent of cottids, 17 percent of liparids, and 58 percent of stichaeids (Table 6). Research is currently being conducted by staff at the AFSC on all of these families and others including the genera *Sebastes* (family Scorpaenidae), *Triglops* (family Cottidae), *Hemitripterus* (family Hemitripteridae), *Liparis* and *Paraliparis* (family Liparidae), *Bryozoichthys* (family Stichaeidae), and *Lepidopsetta* (family Pleuronectidae; Orr and Matarese 2000) (Table 7).

Contributions of scientists at PSIC have been very important in taxonomic studies of northeastern Pacific fishes. A recent example of this concerns investigations of *Lepidopsetta* larvae. After AFSC scientists identified a new variety of flatfish larva, similar to what had been identified as *L. bilineata* but not linked to any known adult in the area, PSIC scientists were promptly able to accurately identify this larva in plankton samples. This eventually led to the identification and description of the adults of a new species of flatfish. Collaboration between staff of the Plankton Sorting and Identification Center and AFSC, along with continuing efforts of ZSIOP scientists to separate and identify larvae of the poorly known families, will lead to further advancements in taxonomy and fisheries oceanography in the next century.

Family	Number of species ¹	Number of larvae described ¹	% Known
Scorpaenidae	45	29 ²	64
Cottidae	110	67	61
Liparidae	78	13	17
Stichaeidae	27	16	59

Table 6. Gaps in knowledge of early life history stages in four major families of northeastern Pacific fishes

¹ Includes all new species described or reported from the area since Matarese *et al.* (1989) and presently unpublished larval data from AFSC.

² Includes only taxa with stages other than preflexion and juveniles known.

Table 7. Current AFSC ichthyoplankton taxonomy research

Taxon	Description	Investigator(s)
Scorpaenidae		
Sebastes spp.	Systematic revision with larval and juvenile characters	Kendall and Orr
Cottidae		
Triglops spp.	Identification and development of five species of <i>Triglops</i> larvae	Blood and Matarese
Hemitripterus bolini	Development of eggs and larvae with information on spawning and life history	Busby et al.
Liparidae		
Liparis spp.	Taxonomic study	Busby
Paraliparis spp.		
Stichaeidae		
Bryozoichthys spp.	Identification and development of <i>B. lysimus</i> and <i>B. marjorius</i>	Blood and Matarese
Pleuronectidae	-	
Lepidopsetta polyxystra	Revision of genus with description of a new species	Orr and Matarese

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