



Sterilization, sex inversion and identification of sex in fish reared in fish farms

Roland Billard

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Roland Billard. Sterilization, sex inversion and identification of sex in fish reared in fish farms. Rivista Italiana di Piscicoltura e Ittiopatologia, 1983, 18 (2), pp.45-54. hal-01601106

HAL Id: hal-01601106

<https://hal.science/hal-01601106>

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Piscicoltura e Ittiopatologia

Pubblicazione ufficiale della
ASSOCIAZIONE PISCICOLTORI ITALIANI (A.P.I.)

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Autorizz. Trib. Treviso n. 256 del 18-10-1966

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Proprietà Letteraria Riservata

Printed in Italy - Tipografia EMILIO BONO
Via S. Paolo 12 - 10138 TORINO, Italia

Dir. Respons.: Cav. BORTOLO SALVADOR
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STERILIZATION, SEX INVERSION AND IDENTIFICATION OF SEX IN FISH REARED IN FISH FARMS

INTRODUCTION

It is advantageous for the fish farmer to commercialize his fish before they reach sexual maturity or after they have been sterilized; the growth rate is better and the feed conversion ratio is lower (SIMPSON, 1976). Furthermore, the quality of the product does not depreciate in immature or sterile animals as it does in mature fish. This way also avoids post-reproductive mortality which can be considerable and allow salt water culture without the mortalities associated with sexual maturity. If the fish are eviscerated, there is no yield loss due to the presence of gonads. In the case of Tilapia, sterilization or the induction of monosex individuals resolves one of the main problems in the rearing of this species, that is, early reproduction before commercial size is reached, causing numerical overpopulation and marked dwarfism. The use of sterile individuals also permits the experimenter to introduce foreign species into the natural environment without risk of population explosion.

For purposes of sea ranching, it is interesting to augment the number of females in species such as salmonids which are not as highly fertile. Several strategies may be used but not all are operational in fish farming. Some reviews have dealt with this subject (CHEVASSUS et al., 1979 a, b; BILLARD, 1981; DONALDSON and HUNTER, 1982).

Monosexual lines.

Hybridization. The most classic example of hybridization is that of Tilapia; different hybridizations have given progeny having sex ratios higher than 50% and, in some cases, entirely male or female progeny have been obtained (WOHLFARTH and HULATA, 1981). The male lines are preferred in practice in Tilapia because male growth is better than female growth. In fish farming in Israel and in southeast Asia, *Sarotherodon (Oreochromis) niloticus* females are often crossed with *S. (O.) aureus* males.

Hormonal treatments.

The sex of fish may be reversed by administering sex steroids, if the fish are treated before sexual differentiation. The steroids are given to salmonids such as *Salmo* in the diet beginning at the first feed intake. If 3 mg of methytestosterone (MT) per kg of feed are given for 70 days, the progeny are male and, if 20 mg of estradiol are given for 30 days, the progeny are female (SIMPSON, 1976; JOHNSTONE et al., 1978). In *Oncorhynchus* which differentiates sexually earlier than *Salmo*, the treatment begins before the first feed intake and is given as a bath during vitelline resorption (DONALDSON and HUNTER, 1982). Steroids administered to the brown carp reverse the sex (NAGY et al., 1981). Sex may also be reversed in Tilapia; the abundant literature on this subject has been reviewed by GUERRERO (1979, 1981). In Israel, male lines of Tilapia are actually produced on a commercial-hatchery scale (ROTBARD, personal communication).

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Although limited, this direct approach commercializing fish given a steroid treatment, leaves residues in the product. The commercialization of such a product is illegal in some countries and the consumers may refuse to eat it. It has thus been necessary to find methods of commercialization which do not depend directly on hormonal treatment. In the rainbow trout where the females are homogamous, BYE and LINCOLN (1981) have developed a system for producing female lines by reversing the male sex (all fish treated with MT) and then identifying the genetic females by the absence of the vas deferens. X sperm, collected after autopsy, is inseminated into normalova to obtain uniquely female progeny (fig. 1); a large number of fish must be treated and killed but an XX female line can be established from which XX males are obtained by the same masculinizing hormone treatment (fig. 1).

DONALDSON and HUNTER (1982) identified the genotype of *Oncorhynchus* progeny, after masculinizing treatment, by more precise criteria than absence of a vas deferens in XX males, and then carried out progeny testing. Afterwards, he only kept XX male sperm which was stored and deep-frozen. Another approach proposed by CHEVASSUS et al. (1975 a) consists in directly obtaining XX gynogenetic diploid embryos (fig. 2).

Diploid gynogenesis.

Monosex female lines, such as *Poecilia formosa* and *Carassius gibellio*, are found in nature. Gynogenesis has been induced experimentally in several fish species. To activate the egg, the researcher can use either a specific spermatozoon, inactivated by UV, X or γ -rays, but still motile, or a foreign spermatozoon whose head size corresponds with the micropyl diameter. Heat shock (CHOURROUT, 1980) or cold shock (LINCOLN et al., 1974; LEMOINE et al., 1980), causing the female pronucleus to fuse with the second polar body, reestablishes ploidy in salmonids.

Diploid gynogenesis has also been obtained in sturgeon, flatfish and cyprinids (see CHEVASSUS et al., 1979 a). This technique cannot be applied directly due to a high rate of inbreeding but may be combined with sex reversal (fig. 2).

Sterilization or blocking of gametogenesis.

Surgical castration. This type of castration is relatively simple in salmonids and more difficult in cyprinids, but its practical use is limited.

Irradiation. TASHIRO (1972) showed that doses of 600 RADS given to rainbow trout eggs at the eyed-stage cause about 80% sterility. Similar results were obtained in the brown trout (BILLARD and REINAUD, unpublished see EGAMI and IJIRI, 1979 for review).

Hormonal treatments.

When these treatments are applied to juveniles

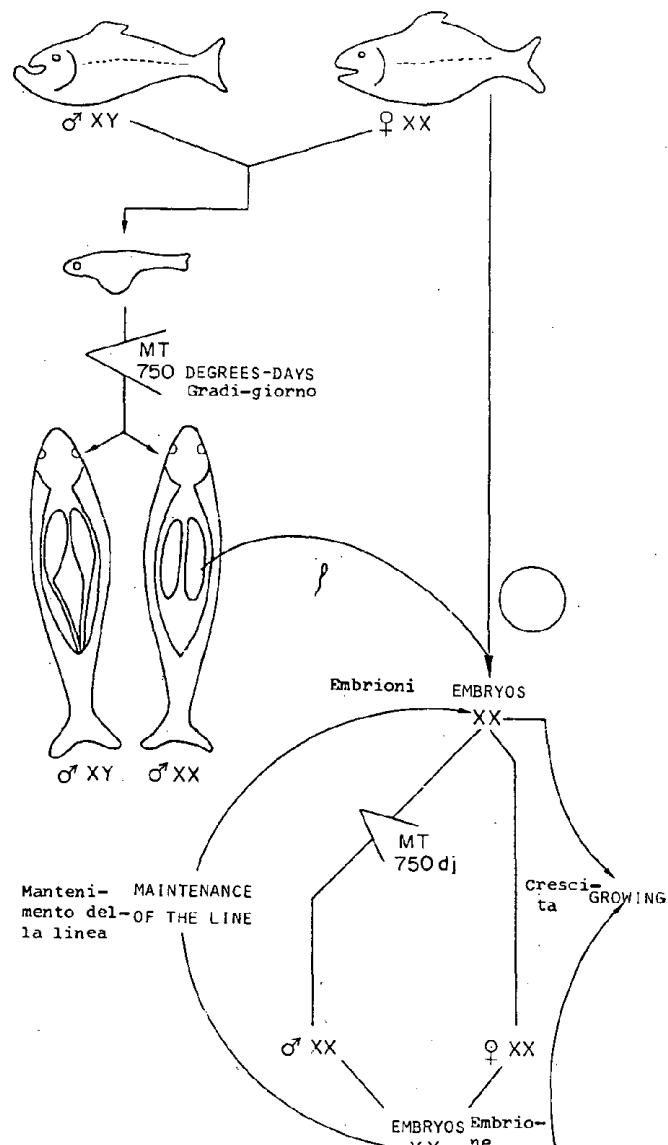


Fig. 1. - In this technique normal rainbow trout fry were treated from the first feeding and for 750 degrees-days with methyl testosterone (MT) incorporated into the food (3 mg of MT/kg of feed). The females were reversed into XX males, and in some there was no sperm duct allowing identification of the XX and XY males. It was therefore easy to obtain XX embryos leading to a monosex line. Once this first step was accomplished, some XX fry could be reversed into males by the same treatment.

In questa tecnica avannotti normali di trota iridea sono stati trattati dalla prima alimentazione e per 750 gradi-giorno con metiltestosterone (MT) incorporato nel mangime (3 mg di MT/kg di mangime). Le femmine sono state tramutate in maschi XX, ed in alcuni vi era dotto spermatico che permetteva la identificazione dei maschi XX e XY. È stato quindi facile ottenere embrioni XX che portavano a linea monosesso. Una volta che questo primo passo è stato compiuto, alcuni avannotti XX hanno potuto essere tramutati in maschi con lo stesso trattamento.

at higher doses and for longer periods, the gonads are sterilized. HABIN et al. (1981) thus sterilized rainbow trout by giving 30 mg of MT for 100 days; turbot were sterilized after 70-day treatment at 15°C with MT (25 mg/kg of feed) (BYE and JONES, 1981).

The possibilities of blocking gonadal development in adult fish are limited; they include irradiation or the use of drugs such as steroids (50 µg of MT/kg of feed throughout gametogenesis) (BILLARD et al., 1981), cyproterone acetate or metallibure. However, none of these techniques are easy to apply or they are subject to ethical or legal considerations because they implicate the use of drugs.

Immunisation.

LAIRD et al. (1978, 1980) studied the possibilities of destroying fish gonads by autoimmunization using injections of the ground gonad, but this technique is not yet available to fish farmers.

Triploidy.

THORGAARD and GALL (1979) showed that triploid rainbow trout have only filiform ovaries and partially developed testes. Triploidy has been experimentally obtained in flatfish (LINCOLN, 1981) and, although some developmental gonadal abnormalities have been observed in male hybrids, the gonadosomal index was not changed and the testosterone content was high enough to induce secondary sex characters. Therefore, in the present state of knowledge, triploidy does not seem to be an advantageous technique in rearing flatfish, contrary to what PURDOM's (1972) first results indicated. The induction of experimental triploidy on a large scale in salmonids is recent (REFSTIE, 1981; CHOURROUT, 1980 and unpublished), but the results by LINCOLN and SCOTT (1982) indicates that females are sterile. However, LINCOLN and HARDIMAN (pers. comm.) found that growth was slower in triploid than the diploid controls.

Interspecific hybridization.

Hybridization in fish may not lead to sterility. CHEVASSUS (1979) reviewed this question in salmonids and showed that the number of hybridizations leading to sterility was relatively limited. Also, few of the many hybridizations in Tilapia appear to produce sterile progeny (AL DAHAM, 1970; WOHLFARTH and HULATA, 1981). This method should be explored further but will not have a wide application in fish farming in the near future.

Identification of sex.

It is often an advantage to know the sex of the fish to be reared, but their secondary sex characters, whether permanent or temporary, are hardly developed. The sex can only be determined, after sexual maturity is reached, by such signs as a prominent

genital papilla, verrucous scales, the gill covers, the first rays of the pectoral fins or simply by the gametes released. The sex can sometimes be identified directly by dimorphic pelvic fins (tench) or dimorphic anal fins (trout: GRUCHY and VLADIKOV, 1968; Tilapia: CHERVINSKI, 1965) or by morphometric analysis (trout: LE BAIL, 1981). Fish can also be sexed by assay of the sex steroids (II ketotestosterone) which are only found in large amounts in adult males and for which there are routine testing techniques (WRIGHT, 1976; SANGALANG and FREEMAN, 1977; SANGALANG et al., 1978; FOSTIER et al., 1982). The steroid levels in juveniles are not easily detectable but they can be stimulated by injecting the gonadotropic hor-

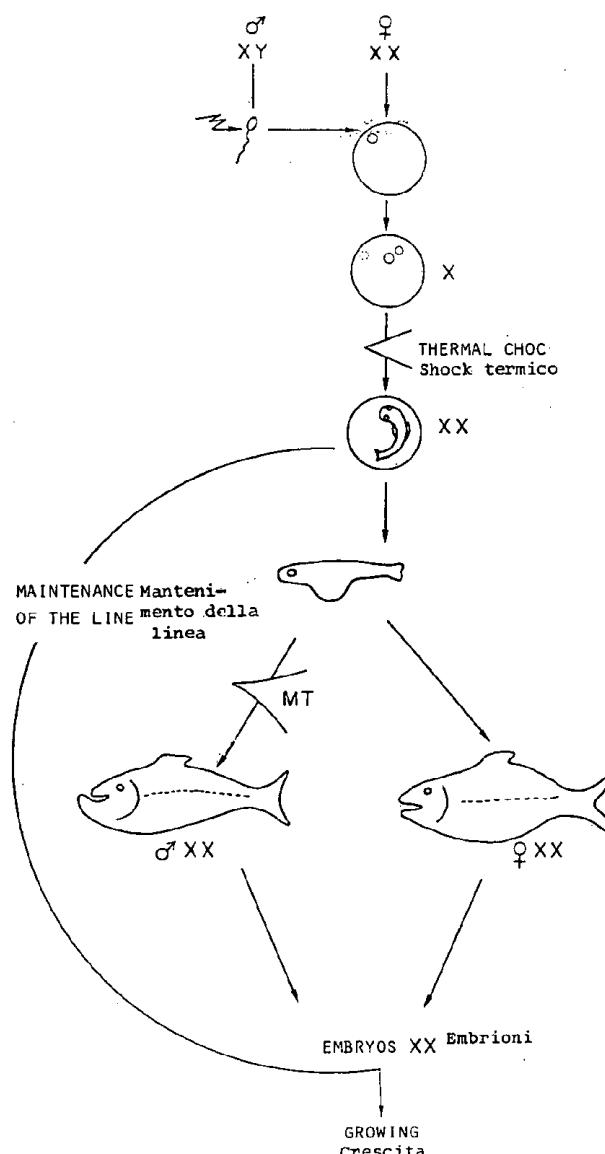


Fig. 2. - In this technique some of the XX embryos first obtained by gynogenesis were reversed into XX males by MT treatment, as in fig. 1.

In questa tecnica alcuni embrioni XX ottenuti dapprima con ginogenesi sono tramutati in maschi XX mediante trattamento con MT, come nella fig. 1.

mone, II-ketotestosterone (N. G. and IDLER, 1980) or estradiol and vitellogenin (IDLER and CAMPBELL, 1980). Females beginning vitellogenesis can also be detected by measuring the vitellogenin. IDLER et al. (1981) and LE BAIL and BRETON (1981) proposed a field method using immunoagglutination for determining the circulating vitellogenin. The use of blood markers such as transferrins and of sex proteins has been proposed by AVTALION (1981) for Tilapia.

The HY antigen, found in the heterogametic sex of many vertebrates, has been identified in fish but since the results are not consistent (it is present in

both sexes in trout: MULLER and WOLF, 1979, or only in homogametic females: SHALEV et al., 1978), it cannot be used yet for sexing fish.

Conclusions.

Table 1 gives a summary of the present possibilities for sex control in fish. Several techniques have already been commercialized (carp and Tilapia) and others, tested on a pilot scale, will soon be available to fish farmers. Some are still in the experimental stage.

THE CONTROL OF SEX IN FISH

Objective	Approach.	Technique	Achievement level		
			Research	Pilot	Fish-farm
Sterilisation	Genetique	Triploidy Hybridization	+ Trout +	Plaice	
	Irradiation	600 rads eyed stage	+ Carp	Trout	
	Hormonal treatment	Sex steroids in diet (*) before sex differenciation ≥ 100 days - ≥ 30 MG	+ Trout turbot		
Monosex lines	Hormonal treatment	Sex reversal (70 days - 3 MG) Hybridization	+ Trout Carp	Trout Carp	Tilapia
	Genetique	Diploid gynogenesis + Sex reversal	Carp Trout	Carp Trout	Carp
	Morphometry Blood assays	Sexual sec. charact. 11 KT (specific for male) vitellogenine immunopagg.	+ + +		Tilapia

(*) Consumer acceptability.

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R. BILLARD (*)

STERILIZZAZIONE, INVERSIONE DEL SESSO ED IDENTIFICAZIONE DEL SESSO IN PESCI DI ALLEVAMENTO

INTRODUZIONE

È vantaggioso per il piscicoltore mettere in commercio i propri pesci prima che essi raggiungano la maturità sessuale o dopo che essi siano stati sterilizzati; il tasso di accrescimento è migliore e quello di conversione più basso (SIMPSON, 1976). Inoltre, la qualità del prodotto non si deprezza nei pesci immaturi o sterili come invece capita nei pesci maturi. Ciò evita anche le mortalità post-riproduzione, le quali possono essere considerevoli e permette la maricoltura senza le mortalità associate alla maturità sessuale. Se i pesci sono eviscerati, non si hanno perdite dovute alla presenza delle gonadi. Nel caso delle tilapie, la sterilizzazione o l'induzione di individui monosesso risolvono uno dei problemi principali nell'allevamento di queste specie, vale a dire una riproduzione precoce prima che il peso commerciale sia raggiunto, col causare un'iperpopolazione numerica e marcato nanismo. L'uso di individui sterili permette anche allo sperimentatore di introdurre specie esotiche in un ambiente naturale senza rischio di esplosioni di popolazioni ittiche.

Nell'operazione « sea ranching », è interessante aumentare il numero di femmine in specie come i salmonidi che non siano molto fertili. Molte strategie possono essere impiegate ma non tutte sono fattibili in piscicoltura. Alcune rassegne hanno trattato questo argomento (CHEVASSUS & C., 1979 a, b; BILLARD, 1981; DONALDSON & HUNTER, 1982).

Linee monosessuali.

Ibridazione. Il più classico esempio di ibridazione è quello delle tilapie; ibridazioni differenti hanno dato progenie con tasso sessuale superiore al 50% e, in alcuni casi, sono stati ottenuti tutti maschi o tutte femmine (WOLFART & HULATA, 1981). Le linee dei maschi sono preferite in pratica poiché la crescita del maschio è migliore che nella femmina. In piscicoltura, in Israele e nell'Asia sudoccidentale, femmine di *Sarotherodon* (*Oreochromis niloticus*) sono sovente incrociate con maschi di *S. (O.) aureus*.

Trattamenti ormonali.

Il sesso dei pesci può essere cambiato somministi-

strando steroidi del sesso, se i pesci sono trattati prima della differenziazione sessuale. Gli steroidi sono dati a salmonidi come *Salmo* nel mangime a cominciare dalla prima assunzione di mangime. Se si somministrano 3 mg di metiltestosterone (MT) per kg di mangime per 70 giorni, la progenie sarà maschile e, se si danno 20 mg di estradiolo per 30 giorni, la progenie sarà femminile (SIMPSON, 1976; JOHNSTONE & C., 1978). Negli *Oncorhynchus*, che si differenziano sessualmente prima che i *Salmo*, il trattamento inizia prima della prima assunzione di cibo e ciò è fatto come bagno durante il riassorbimento del sacco vitellino (DONALDSON & HUNTER, 1982). Gli steroidi dati alla carpa bruna fanno cambiare sesso (NAGY & C., 1981). Il sesso può anche essere cambiato nelle tilapie; l'abbondante letteratura in proposito è stata passata in rassegna da GUERRERO (1979, 1981). In Israele, le linee maschili di tilapie sono attualmente prodotte su scala commerciale di piscicoltura (ROTBARD, informazione personale).

Sebbene limitato, questo metodo di mettere in commercio pesci che hanno ricevuto un trattamento con steroidi, lascia residui nel prodotto. La messa in commercio di tale prodotto è illegale in alcuni paesi ed il consumatore può rifiutarsi di mangiarlo. È stato pertanto necessario trovare metodi di commercializzazione che non dipendessero direttamente da trattamenti ormonali. Nelle trote iridee dove le femmine sono omogame, BYE & LINCOLN (1981) hanno sviluppato un sistema per produrre linee femminili col far cambiare sesso ai maschi (tutti i pesci trattati con MT) e poi identificando le femmine genetiche con l'assenza del vaso deferente. Lo sperma X, raccolto dopo autopsia, è mescolato con uova normali onde ottenere solamente progenie femminile (Fig. 1); gran numero di pesci dev'essere trattato ed ucciso ma una femmina XX può essere stabilita da cui maschi XX sono ottenuti con lo stesso trattamento ormonale mascolinizzante (Fig. 1).

DONALDSON & HUNTER (1982) hanno identificato il genotipo della progenie di *Oncorhynchus* dopo il trattamento mascolinizzante, con criteri più precisi che l'assenza del vaso deferens nei maschi XX e poi hanno realizzato test di progenie. Quindi, il solo sperma maschile XX è stato conservato e congelato. Un altro metodo proposto da CHEVASSUS & C. (1975 a) consiste nell'ottenere direttamente embrioni diploidi ginogenetici XX (Fig. 2).

Ginogenesi diploide.

Le linee monosessuali femminili, come *Poecilia formosa* e *Garassius gibelio*, sono ritrovabili in natura. La ginogenesi è stata indotta sperimentalmente in diverse specie ittiche. Per attivare l'uovo, il ricercatore può usare sia uno spermatozoo specifico, inattivato con UV, X o gamma-raggi, ma sempre mobile, oppure uno spermatozoo la cui dimensione del capo corrisponde al diametro del micropilo. Lo shock al calore (CHOURROUT, 1980) o quello al freddo (LIN-