

Research Article

Morphometry, Growth, and Condition of Hatchery-Reared Cisco (*Coregonus artedii*) and Bloater (*Coregonus hoyi*)

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Abstract

The re-introduction of native species that have been extirpated or in low abundance in the Great Lakes has been a binational initiative between the United States and Canadian governments. Recently, new management programs have been underway that use current hatchery facilities for the restoration of native forage fishes in Lake Ontario. These species include Bloater (*Coregonus hoyi*), which has been extirpated from Lake Ontario for approximately four decades, and Cisco (*C. artedii*), which exists at a fraction of its former abundance. We assessed morphometrics, length-weight relationships, and condition factors during early life development for eight cohorts of Cisco and Bloater reared from 2012-2019. Weekly samples for Cisco and Bloater were measured from hatch until release (29-45 weeks, 133-1,002 samples annually). Head width, gape, mandible length, and mouth height metrics were all larger for Cisco than Bloater at any given size but increased at similar rates for both species. Average condition factors for Cisco and Bloater were 0.54317 and 0.55892, respectively. This information may also improve field identification of these species, helping managers evaluate the relative success of different release strategies for rehabilitation of populations of these native species.

Keywords

Cisco, Bloater, Length/Weight Regression

1. Introduction

Cisco (*Coregonus artedii*), and Bloater (*C. hoyi*) are two native coregonines that were part of the historic forage base in Lake Ontario [21]. By the mid-1900's Bloater have become extirpated and Cisco have been reduced to extremely low levels due to overfishing, pollution, invasive species, and spawning habitat loss [2, 3, 6, 8, 18, 21]. In response, a binational, multiagency effort between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources, and For-

estry (OMNDMNRF), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to restore native coregonine species into Lake Ontario was initiated. The broad objective is to re-establish the native prey base for the current top predators in Lake Ontario by reintroducing Cisco and Bloater to locations from which they have been extirpated. The culture of Cisco has been accomplished by several conservation hatcheries within the Great Lakes basin, but recent interest in culture of Bloater is limited to one USFWS hatchery, one Canadian hatchery, and the USGS Tunison Laboratory of Aquatic Science. The focus

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on the restoration of native species in the Great Lakes has given rise to new fish culture techniques and management programs designed to reduce pathogen transmission, while producing enough fish to help re-establish or conserve wild populations.

Cohort success in most fish species is often determined during embryo development and first year survival. Identifying factors that directly influence population survival and relate to the success of a restoration program is essential, but basic biological information is rare for these species, including morphometric descriptions and age and growth responses. Early life stage morphometric measurements on coregonine species are rare and results are inconsistent [9, 11, 14, 20, 22]. Weekly growth indices are lacking for both Cisco and Bloater. Our early growth and size measurements in a hatchery setting expand the knowledge base for these species and may help improve current rearing practices, enhancing success of future restoration projects.

The objectives of this study were to evaluate and measure growth metrics of Cisco and Bloater under controlled conditions throughout their first year of growth. From these evaluations, we are developing fish culture standards that would be used as baseline measurements to improve current practices rearing Cisco and Bloater. In addition to traditional growth measurements, we provide baseline morphometric features for both species that should aid in field identification.

2. Materials and Methods

Adult Cisco were captured during December from Chaumont Bay, NY and transferred to outside raceways at the USGS Tunison Lab of Aquatic Science (TLAS) in Cortland, NY. Adults were hand spawned and moved to the hatchery to develop and hatch. Bloater are extirpated from Lake Ontario and were sourced from two places. Adult Bloater are collected from Lake Michigan by the USFWS Jordan River National Fish Hatchery. These fish were spawned, and the eggs were shipped overnight to TLAS. A Bloater brood stock has been established at White Lake Fish Hatchery in Sharbot Lake, Ontario, Canada. Fish were spawned and the eggs were transported to TLAS once they eye-up and are safe to transport prior to hatching.

Hatched fry were grown in circular hatchery tanks (190 L) and then moved to outside concrete raceways (500 L) while receiving 1.8-3 liters of well water per minute. The mean temperature, pH, and total hardness of this water were 9.8°C, 6.82, and 230 mg/L as calcium carbonate, respectively, and remains constant. Daily fish husbandry duties including care and maintenance are detailed in the TLAS Coregonid Culture Manual [23] and were followed for the duration of the study. Fish were fed a variety of pelletized commercial feeds using automatic feeders to maximize growth at appropriate feeding rates according to nutritional requirements [23].

We measured growth and development of Cisco for the first 33-45 weeks of life, and that of Bloater for the first 29-39

weeks, January (hatch) through October (release), in consecutive year classes from 2012 to 2019. Five individuals of each species per each year class were randomly weighed (to the nearest 0.1 mg wet weight after blotting off excess water) and measured for total length (nearest 0.1 mm) weekly, using a digital microscope camera (Scope Photo 3.0, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, P. R. China) equipped with image measuring software (Image J). All fish evaluated were euthanized following standard American Fisheries Society IACUC procedures [1] with Tricaine S (MS-222, Syndel USA) and immediately measured fresh to eliminate change in size by preservation. Length-weight relationships were estimated using the general allometric equations,

$W = aTL^b$ or $W = aTL + b$, where 'W' is the wet weight of the fish in mg, 'TL' is the total length of the fish in mm, and 'a' and 'b' are fitted regression parameters. For the 2012-year class, additional growth metrics (yolk sac depth, head width taken posterior to the eye, mouth width or gape, lower jaw mandible length, and mouth height) were measured (to the nearest 0.1 mm) to identify additional characteristics that may differ between species (Figure 1 [8, 12, 13]). Condition factor of fish from the 2012, 2016, and 2017 year classes was calculated using the formula: $K = W(100/TL^3)$, where 'K' is the fish condition factor, and W and TL are defined as above [16, 17]. All metrics were plotted against total length to generate growth curves for each species. Differences in growth, condition factor, and additional metric measurements within and between species at a given length or age were tested using Analysis of Variance comparisons (ANOVA; Statistix 10.0, Analytical Software, Tallahassee, Florida). We considered $P \leq 0.05$ to be significant.

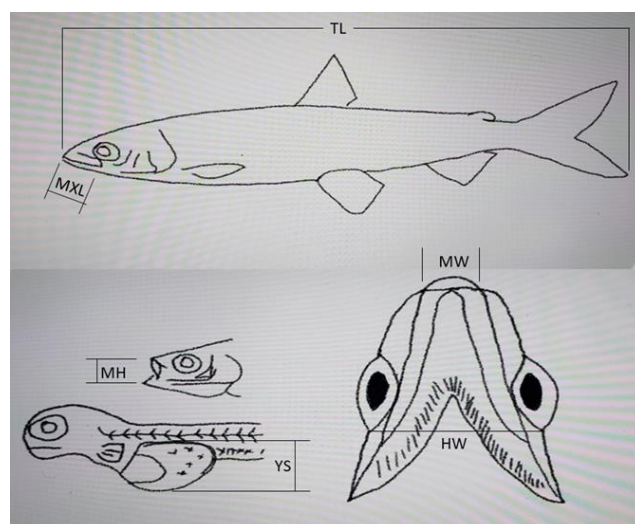


Figure 1. Morphometric measurements recorded weekly to determine unique characteristics between Cisco and Bloater during the first year of growth. Morphometrics are defined as Total Length (TL), Yolk Sac Depth (YS), Head Width (HW), Mouth Width or Gape (MW), Lower Jaw Mandible (MXL), and Mouth Height (MH).

3. Results and Discussion

We measured the growth and development of Cisco ($n=4,243$, 530 ± 130 /year class) for the first 45 weeks of life, and that for Bloater ($n=3,627$, 453 ± 23 /year class) for the first 39 weeks of life, for the 2012-2019 year-classes. Growth regressions at age (in days) for Cisco were $L=5.3318 \cdot \text{Age}^{0.8095}$, $W=0.004 \cdot \text{Age}^{2.7147}$, and for Bloater were $L=1.6762 \cdot \text{Age}^{0.7288}$, $W=0.000005 \cdot \text{Age}^{2.5243}$, respectively for predicted lengths and weights (Figure 2). From hatch, mean larval yolk sac depth decreased daily by 28% for Cisco and 33.3% for Bloater. Average maximum sizes ($\text{mm} \pm \text{SE}$, $\text{g} \pm \text{SE}$) attained were 103 ± 0.89 mm and 9.32 ± 0.19 g for Cisco and 92.1 ± 0.67 mm and 6.2 ± 0.13 g for Bloater (Table 1). Between weeks, mean total length tended to be larger for Bloater than Cisco (0.36 ± 0.16 mm v 0.29 ± 0.2 mm), but was not

significantly different ($p = 0.7$, $t = 0.29$, $df = 31$), while mean weight was nearly identical (Cisco: 0.02 ± 0.01 g and Bloater: 0.02 ± 0.04 g) ($p = 0.9$, $t = 0.04$, $df = 31$). Allometric regressions for Cisco and Bloater were $W=7 \times 10^{-7} \text{TL}^{3.4832}$ and $W=1 \times 10^{-6} \text{TL}^{3.3706}$, respectively (Figure 3, Table 2). Weekly mean condition factor value was significantly greater for Bloater ($0.09 \times 10^5 - 1.14 \times 10^5$) than Cisco ($0.06 \times 10^5 - 2.3 \times 10^5$) ($p < 0.01$, $t = -15.8$, $df = 199$). Weight increased with fish total length according to equations $W = 0.0036 \text{TL} + 0.2866$ for Cisco and $W = 0.0035 \text{TL} + 0.3454$, for Bloater (Figure 4). Additional meristic measurements were all significantly larger for Cisco (Gape, $p < 0.01$, $t = -3.72$, $df = 27$; Head Width, $p < 0.01$, $t = -5.03$, $df = 27$; Mandible Length, $p < 0.01$, $t = -4.75$, $df = 27$; Mouth Height, $p < 0.01$, $t = -2.55$, $df = 27$) than Bloater at a given fish length (Table 3, Figure 5).

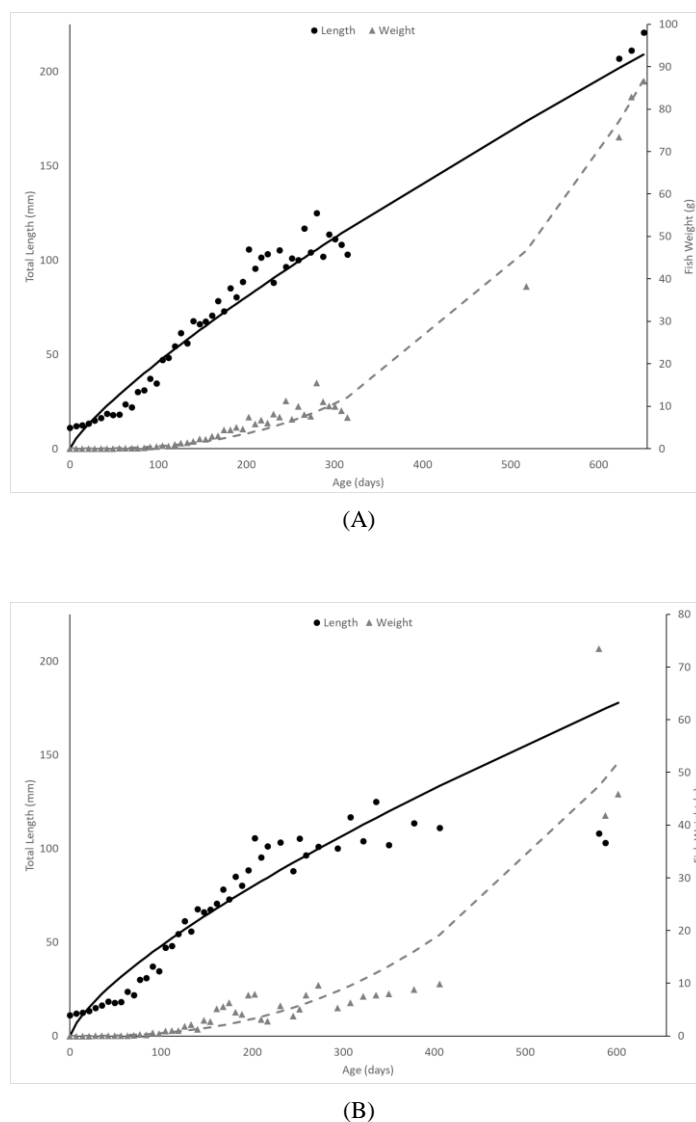
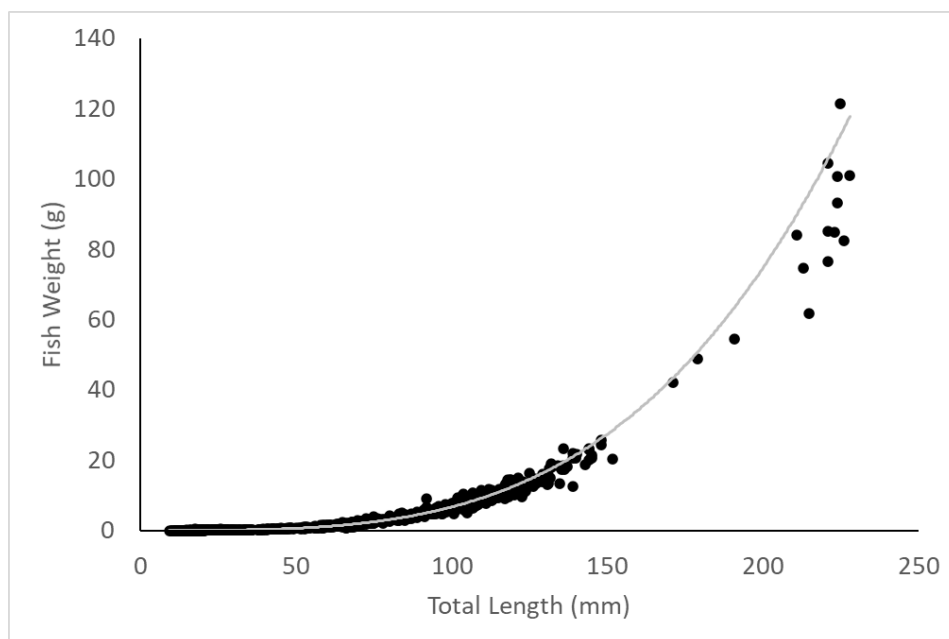


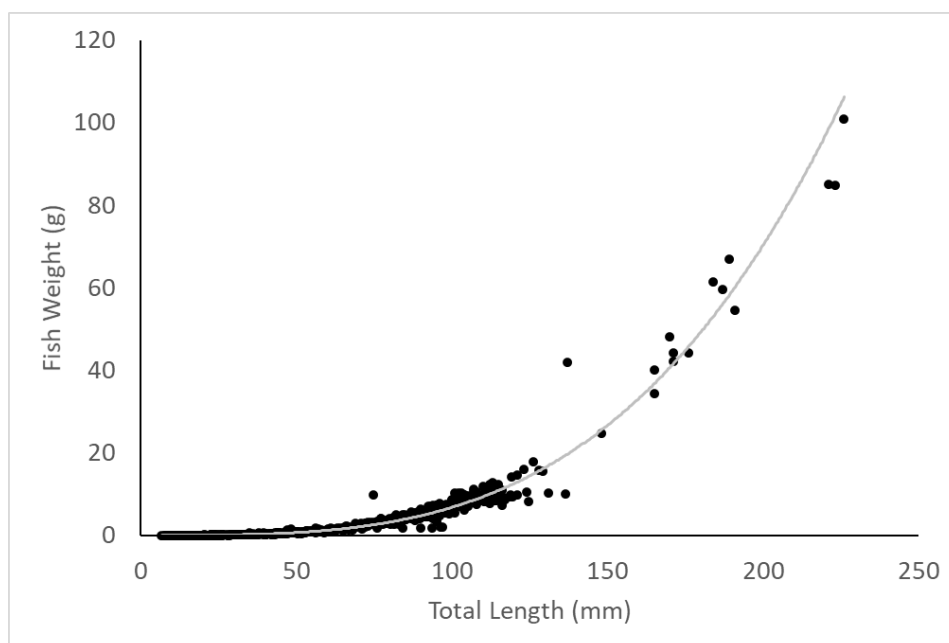
Figure 2. Average weekly length and weight regressions for (A) Cisco and (B) Bloater among the 8-year classes evaluated during their first year of growth.

Table 1. Largest attainable size ranges for Cisco and Bloater cultured at Tunison Lab of Aquatic Science from 2012-2019.

Species	Attainable Age (Weeks)	Total Length (mm)				Total Weight (g)			
		Average \pm SE	Max	Min	Count	Average \pm SE	Max	Min	Count
Cisco	33-45	103 \pm 0.89	164.0	65.0	675	9.32 \pm 0.19	25.6	3.0	621
Bloater	29-39	92.1 \pm 0.67	136.5	47.0	759	6.2 \pm 0.13	17.9	7.9	517



(A)



(B)

Figure 3. Overall length-weight regression for (A) Cisco and (B) Bloater among the 8-year classes evaluated during their first year of growth.

Table 2. Length-weight regression for (A) Cisco and (B) Bloater for the 8-year classes evaluated during their first year of growth.

Year	Cisco	Bloater
2012	$W = 4E-07TL^{3.5956}$	$W = 9E-07TL^{3.459}$
2013	$W = 2E-06TL^{3.2258}$	$W = 1E-06TL^{3.3947}$
2014	$W = 4E-07TL^{3.5964}$	$W = 1E-06TL^{3.3599}$
2015	$W = 6E-06TL^{3.0137}$	$W = 1E-27TL^{13.831}$
2016	$W = 2E-06TL^{3.2765}$	$W = 2E-06TL^{3.2135}$
2017	$W = 2E-06TL^{3.2486}$	$W = 2E-06TL^{3.3069}$
2018	$W = 2E-06TL^{3.253}$	$W = 3E-06TL^{3.1694}$
2019	$W = 5E-07TL^{3.5872}$	$W = 1E-06TL^{3.3416}$
OVERALL	$W = 7E-07TL^{3.4832}$	$W = 1E-06TL^{3.3706}$

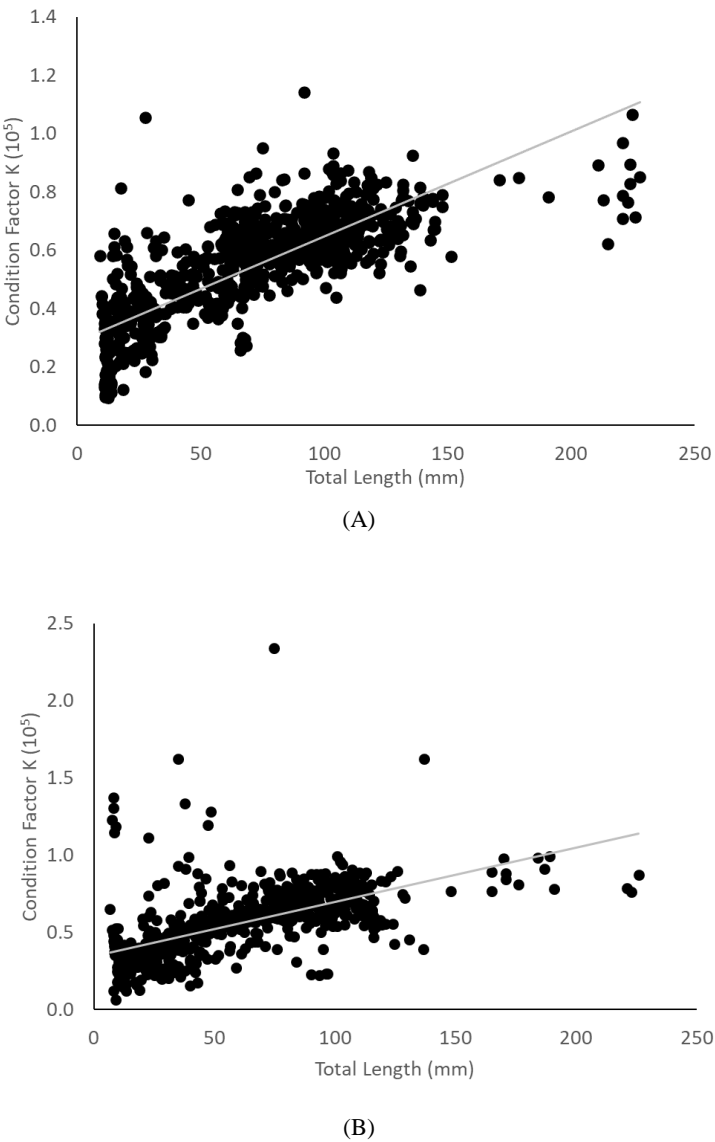
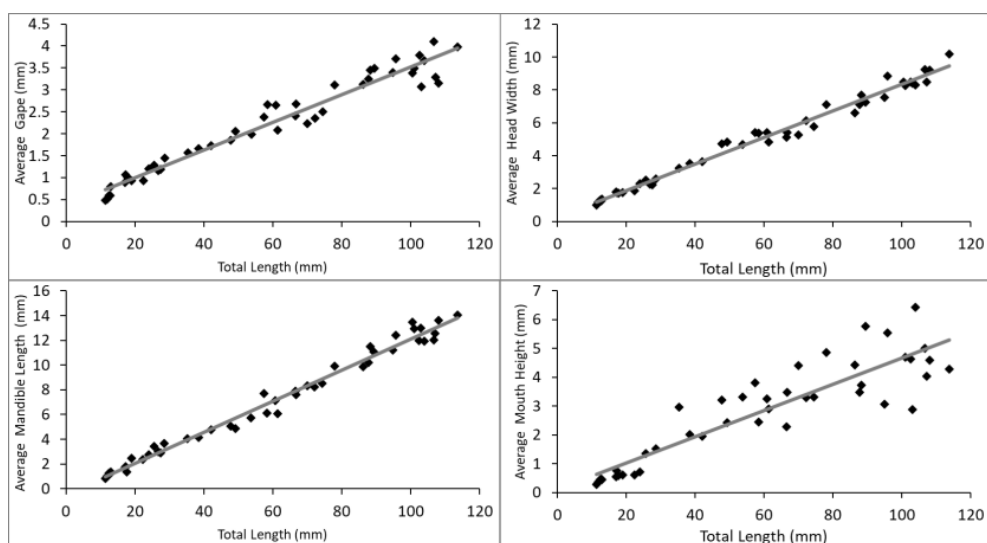


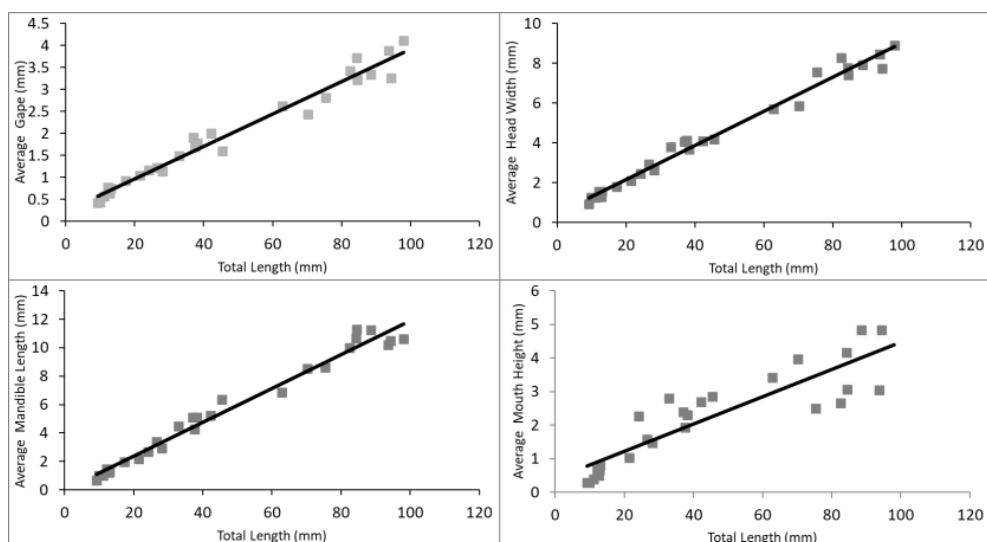
Figure 4. Condition Factor ($K, 10^5$) for (A) Cisco and (B) Bloater related to the total length of the fish.

Table 3. Length-weight regression for regression equations for (A) Cisco and (B) Bloater meristic measurements) for the 8-year classes evaluated during their first year of growth.

	Cisco	Bloater
Gape	$W = 0.0314TL + 0.3737$	$W = 0.0369TL + 0.2254$
Head Width	$W = 0.0807TL + 0.2772$	$W = 0.0858TL + 0.427$
Mandible Length	$W = 0.1257TL + (-0.4652)$	$W = 0.1194TL + (-0.0276)$
Mouth Height	$W = 0.0455TL + 0.1153$	$W = 0.0407TL + 0.4063$



(A)



(B)

Figure 5. Morphometric measurements for (A) Cisco and (B) Bloater related to the total length of the fish.

Relationships between fish length and other physiological measurements have been used as standard measures of successful operation in hatcheries for many decades [15] and are

convenient indicators of fish health [22]. While length-weight relationships have been published for numerous species from water bodies around the world [4, 10], only one other report

directly compares Cisco and Bloater growth metrics, and their results showed similar length-weight responses for both species [19].

Both species studied here exhibited similar growth characteristics (length, weight and condition) under standard hatchery conditions. Although Bloater hatched later, growth characteristics were similar at the same age as Cisco. High coefficients of determination (R^2) for all comparisons suggest that length is a reliable measure of growth in both species, but not for condition factor, which had the lowest coefficients and may have multiple determining factors. Carlander [4] observed low correlations for freshwater fishes between fish size and condition factors even within a species across multiple year classes. However, an increasing condition factor is indicative of an increase in feeding intensity and positive growth in weight [4], as we observed in this study.

Additional meristic measurements increased for both species and were indicative of differential growth of body components. Overall, Cisco grew larger than Bloater, resulting in the need for larger body parts to consume larger food sources [5, 21]. The smaller Bloater mouth and head size observed here suit them well for their more selective planktivorous nature.

4. Conclusion

Growth of both Cisco and Bloater under standard culture conditions resulted in similar length-weight responses. Morphometric changes demonstrate the differential growth of various body components of these two species in their earliest life stages. Our findings provide fisheries managers with baselines for monitoring growth metrics in culture settings and for valuable comparisons with field observations.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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