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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Comment	4
Communique of the 35 th Annual National Conference of FISON	5
National Executive Council and LOC "NIGER 2020"	7
AQUACULTURE	15
Evaluation of growth performance of the predatory <i>Megalops atlanticus</i> reared in different culture systems <i>Okoro, C. B., Anwa-Udondiah, E. P., Ejiogu, I. N. and A. O. Olurole</i>	16
Performance of African catfish (<i>Heterobranchus bidorsalis</i> and <i>Clarias gariepinus</i>) hybrid eggs and hatchlings in clay pot, plastic and glass aquarium <i>K. S. Tukura (Mrs)¹, S.M. Tsadu and A.T. Yisa</i>	20
Standardization of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> fingerlings using age, weight and length estimations <i>Nwangwu, D.C., Yisa, M., Bake, G.G., Orire, A.M., Ogbuebun, K., Mogaji, O., Goni, I.M., Abubakar, G.R., Yahaya, M., Aremu, A., & Mohammed, U.F.</i>	24
Proximate analyses of sex reversed <i>Oreochromis niloticus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) fry treated with different doses of 17 α methyl testosterone <i>K. E. Ogbuebun, V. O. Onyeche, M.I. Goni, and S. A. Olupinyo</i>	28
Comparison of haematological profiles of <i>Oreochromis niloticus</i> cultured in fibre tank and earthen pond. <i>Lawal, B.M., Oke, A.I., Olurole, A.O., Aboluwodi, A.S., Awonuga, A. A.</i>	33
Some morphometric and meristic characteristic of cross between albino <i>Clarias</i> and normal <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> <i>Shettima, A, Yisa T. A Tsado M.S, Orire A.M, Sogbesan O. A and Apollos T. G</i>	38
Effects of using different water sources in the hatchability, growth and survival rate of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> fry <i>Kigbu A.A., Imgbian T.D. and Mohammed, R.</i>	42
Spawning periodicity and fecundity in <i>Coptodon guineensis</i> reared in sheltered systems <i>Oyenyi, O. V. Soboyejo, I. O. and E. P. Anwa-Udondiah</i>	46
Reproductive indices of female <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> fed different inclusion levels of fertility enhancing seed powder <i>Onyia, L. U., Bishara, Y. A., Onyia, E.C. and Duwal, S.D.</i>	49
Growth performance of monosex cultured <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> Juveniles in concrete flow-through and stagnant water tanks. <i>Robert E.A., Yisa A.T. and Tsadu S.M.</i>	53
The Role of Aquaculture in Enhancing Nutrition and Food Security in the World <i>Godwin, S.O. and Akinrotimi O.A</i>	57
FISH DISEASES	60
Gills and intestinal parasites of elephant snout fish <i>Mormyrus rume</i> (Valenciennes, 1847) at Uke River, Karu Local Government Area, Nassarawa State, Nigeria. <i>Banyigyi, A. H., Akpanva, Y. R., Makpo, J. K. and Ameh, S. M.</i>	61
Sensitivity of Bacteria Isolated from Smoked <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> Treated with Scent leaf (<i>Ocimum gratissimum</i>) Juice <i>Adeosun O. Olateju G. B. and Akinyemi, A. A</i>	66

Microbial Composition of Effluent and Fish Samples from Selected Water Bodies and Farms in Lagos State, Nigeria <i>Oguntade, O.R. and Olajuyigbe, O.O.</i>	70
FISH NUTRITION	
Effects of Replacing Soybean with Beniseed, <i>Sesame indicum</i> Seed Meal on Some Haematological parameters Of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> Juveniles. <i>Inya, F. U., I.B. Okey, S.N. Ochang & J. J. Ekpenyong</i>	74 75
Dietary Effects of Pineapple (<i>Anana comosus</i>) Crush Waste on the Proximate Composition of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> Juveniles <i>Binyotubo, O.I., Binyotubo, T.E., Kwen, K., Anwuri, P.A., Akegbejo, S.Y. and Omoniyi, I.T.</i>	81
Effect of storage on nutritive value of Eco float and vital commercial Fish feed <i>Gusau, I. Mamman, T., Jibrin, H., Hambali, I., Abubabakar, M, A and Muhammad U.</i>	87
Effect of garlic (<i>Allium sativum</i>) as feed additive on the performance and survival of African catfish (<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>) <i>Kolo R.J., Orire, A.M., Jidelola F. B. and Haruna, M.A.</i>	92
Growth performance, hematology and intestinal microflora of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> (Burchell, 1822) fingerlings fed turmeric (<i>Curcuma longa</i>) supplemented diets <i>Joda O. A., Akinde A.O. and Ibadapo-Obe E.O.</i>	97
Nutritional analysis of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> cultured with <i>Spirulina</i> supplemented diets <i>Okwuosa, Obinna B. and Ekeledo, Chukwunyere B.</i>	103
Effect of graded level of <i>Ziziphus mauritania</i> leaf meal on growth performance and reproductive indices of <i>Oreochromis niloticus</i> <i>Suleiman, S. B., Babagana, A., Yusuf, Z. A., Mohammed, Z.B., Aliyu, M.H.</i>	109
Nutritional evaluation of animal by-products meal as partial substitute for fishmeal in the diet of African catfish, <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> (BURCHELL, 1822). <i>Kenge, B. N., Ofojekwu, P.C. and Mohammed, S. A.</i>	115
Growth Performance and Feed Utilization Of African Catfish (<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>) Juveniles Fed Varying Inclusion Levels Of Butterfly Pea (<i>Clitoria ternatea</i>) Seed Meal <i>Adedokun, M.A; Adelodun, O.B., Rafiu, R.A.</i>	120
Assessment of some fatty acids composition of cultured African mud catfish (<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>) in Lagos State <i>Salaudeen, M. M., Ezekiel, M. O., Esan, O. M., Uzoalu, I. A., Egbe, F. C.</i>	124
What Fish Can Do To Immune System:A Case Study Of Corona Virus Relief <i>Garba, A.A</i>	128
Growth performance and haematology parameters of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> juveniles fed <i>Moringa Oleifera</i> leaf meal diet <i>Elizabeth. O. Ibadapo-Obe, Khadijah O. Yustuff, and Abiodun O. Akinde</i>	132
Nutritional Composition of Commercial Fishes from Ikpoba Reservoir and Their Potential Contribution to Recommended Nutrient Intake. <i>Oboh, I. P., Egun, N. K. And Olowo, U. C.</i>	138
Survival rate and performance characteristics of African catfish (<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>) fed varying inclusion levels of cow rumen epithelial tissue <i>Rafiu, R.A, Adelodun, O.B., Ajao, F.S., Nworgu, U.C and Adeolu, S.P.</i>	142
Black soldier fly: A perfect replacement of protein source of feed in Nigeria livestock industry (Review) <i>Abubakar, G.R, Goni, I.M, Musa, A., Idris, H., Nwagwu, D.C, Yisa, M, Ibiyo, L.M.O, Ogbuebunu, K.E.</i>	146
The use of non-conventional feed resources for fish nutrition in Nigeria: A review <i>Agbo, A.N. and Onimisi, H. U.</i>	149

Potentials of sweet potato (<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>) leaf meal as dietary ingredient for <i>Oreochromis niloticus</i> fingerlings <i>Joshua, F.O, Ibiyo, L.M.O, Mogaji, O.Y, Woru, H, Azeez, A, Mohammed, A</i>	154
Evaluation of commercial and locally made feed in the culture of African catfish (<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>) in Nigeria <i>Mogaji, O.Y, Ajani, E.K, Olafur, S.</i>	159
Comparative growth performance and haematological profile of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> (Burchell, 1822) fed dietary inclusions of <i>Zingiber officinale</i> , <i>Allium sativum</i> and <i>Azadirachta indica</i> extracts <i>Agatha A. Nwabueze and Ijeoma Q. Atokpe</i>	164
Substitution of soyabean with <i>Moringa oleifera</i> on the growth performance of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> . <i>Onuoha, P. C. And Okata, J.</i>	168
Effects of dietary lipid on the growth performance and serum biochemistry in carp (<i>Barbonymus schwanenfeldii</i> BLEEKER 1853) fingerling in an aquaponics system. <i>M. A. Sulaiman, L. O. Ibiyo and M. S. Kamarudin</i>	171
Growth performance of maggot meal as a Substitute for Imported Fishmeal in the Culture of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> Juveniles. <i>Ayo-Olahusi, C.I., Oresegun A., Adeleke T.A., Akweeb W.A., Adeyemi, B.Y., Edah, B., Chidume, I; Jibrin, H., Eze, N.C., Olagunju, G.E. and Ayokhai, J.O.</i>	174
Effects of replacement of fish meal with pig blood meal in catfish feeds on their growth, survival and heamotology <i>Agwu, S. C., Oko, A. O., Akinrotimi, O.A., Nwezza, S.N., Onwe, E.U., Jibrin, H., Nwuzor, E. O²., Ogbuzuru-Ebe, S. L. and Chidume, I.</i>	178
FISHERIES ECONOMICS	183
Cultural practices adopted by farmers in Lafia Local Government Area, Nasarawa State for sustainable aquaculture <i>Adebote, E. E. and Adelakin, C. S</i>	184
Production Constraints Effects On Small Scale Aquaculture In Oyo State <i>Morawo B.O., Ajao F.S.</i>	188
Adaptation Of Fish Farmers To Covid-19 Pandemic In Epe Local Government Area Of Lagos State, Nigeria. <i>E. E. Adebote and Adelakin C.S.</i>	192
COVID-19: The Role of Aquaculture in Employment Generation in Nigeria <i>Jim-Saiki, Ojo Lawal; Ogunbadejo, Kehinde Hussain and Giwa, Esemuze Joseph</i>	196
Post Covid-19 economic recovery: importance of aquaculture fish supply to economic recovery plan. <i>Landu, E. J., Sanni, O.A., Olowosegun, T., Ovwie, P.O., Ibrahim, S.O., Bewaji, O. S and Umar, K.J.</i>	200
Economic analysis of fresh fish marketing in Kede-Tifin district of Mokwa local government area, Niger state, Nigeria. <i>Ndanitsa, M. A., Sallawu, H., Mohammed, D. and Ndako, N.</i>	204
Fish Farmers Socio-economic characteristics predicting the challenges faced during COVID-19: A case of Akinyele Local Government, Nigeria <i>Omega. S., Ametepey, E.T.K., and Adebote, E.E</i>	210
Effect Of Income, Socio-Economic Factors On Consumers' Preferences And Quantity Of Fish Consumed By Staff In Different Campuses Of Lagos State. Polytechnic (Laspotech) Nigeria, <i>Sumuvu T.F, Okunsebor, S.A., Zubairu Z.A, Faleti B.E</i>	214
Blue economy as antedote for crude oil market recession, social insecurity and sustainable development in post COVID' 19 pandemic in Nigeria: Extentionist perspective. <i>Olaniran Olakunle Lateef (Ph.D), Buba Saleh Aliyu and Adetunji Adeyemi Olalekan</i>	220

Factors influencing market price of fish in some coastal communities of Rivers State, Nigeria <i>Okenwa, U., Edun O. M. and Akinrotimi O.A.</i>	225
Factors Affecting Adoption of Innovative Fish Farming Technologies in the Niger Delta <i>Opara, J.Y and Ani, N.A.</i>	229
FISHERIES	232
Some aspects of the biology of the silver catfish <i>Chrysichthys nigrodigitatus</i> (Lacepède, 1803) from great Kwa river, Nigeria <i>Edem Thomas Edem, Victor Oscar Eyo, Bridget Effiong Udobong</i>	233
Relationship between fish species abundance and physico-chemical parameters of Tagwai Lake, Minna, Nigeria. <i>Chukwuemeka V. I.; Tsadu S. M.; Kolo, R. J.; Ojutiku, R. O.</i>	237
Length-Weight Relationship and Condition Factor of Fresh Water Turtle (<i>Pelusios castaneus</i>) Dry Season I Study. <i>Sule, S.O., Mohammed, R. And Sotolu, A.O.</i>	244
Stomach content analysis of mangrove oyster crassostrea gasar from Badagry Creek, Lagos Nigeria <i>Kolawole-Daniels Aghogho, Popoola, K.O.K., A.A. Sowunmi</i>	248
Length-weight relationship and condition factor (K) of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> (Burchell, 1822) from Kwaru Lake, Tuarare, Dutsin-ma Local Government Area, Katsina State, Nigeria. <i>Nababa, A.S; Yusuf, Z.A; Dambatta, M. and Sadauki, M.A.</i>	253
Aspect of the biology of <i>Hepsetus odoe</i> in Ebonyi River, Southeast, Nigeria <i>Ude, E.F., Ogbonnaya, H. F., Amadi-Ibiam, C. O. And Nwokpor, E.S.</i>	257
Gonadosomatic index, fecundity and sex ratio of <i>Alestes baremose</i> (JOANISS, 1835) in Zobe reservoir, Dutsinma, Katsina State <i>Muhammad, A. Y.</i>	261
Dietary composition and feeding strategy of the big eye grunt <i>Brachydeuterus auritus</i> (VALENCIENNES, 1832) off The Lagos coast <i>Fola-Matthews, O. O. And Fakayode, O. S.</i>	266
Species Composition, Dominance And Similarity Index of <i>Macrobrachium vollehovenii</i> and <i>Macrobrachium felicinum</i> In Akor River, Ibere Ikwuano, Nigeria <i>Ukagwu, J. I., Anyanwu, D. C., Orgi, M. C., Ohaturonye, S. And Dan-Uchegbu, C.</i>	269
Diet of the Common Cuttlefish, <i>Sepia officinalis</i> (Cephalopoda: Sepiidae) (Linnaeus, 1758), Off Lagos Coast, Nigeria <i>Oluboba, T. F. and Lawal-Are, A. O.</i>	272
Industrial Fishing In Nigeria: A Recent Assessment Of Fish Landings <i>Jim-Saiki L. O., Eke M., Ogunbadejo H. K., Alhaji T. A. and Giwa J. E.</i>	277
Fish Species Composition And Abundance of Kondo River At New Libata, Kebbi State, Nigeria <i>Ibrahim, Baba Usman and Eitokpah, Priscilla</i>	280
Variations of fishing gears used by fishermen in some communities of Lagos East coast. <i>Bolaji, D.A. Akimigbagbe, R.O, Obienu, A.J., Oluwakayode-Oluyi, .O.O., Akande, M.O.</i>	283
Variation of Fishing Gears used By Fishers Folks in Some Coastal Communities of Lagos State <i>Oluwakayode-Oluyi Oluwakemi</i>	287
Fish Weight and Species Diversity of Traditional and Modified Malian Traps in Tagwai Dam of Niger State, Nigeria <i>J. Yusuf, S.L. Lamai, M. M. Abdullahi., A. Ibrahim, S.U. Ibrahim., U.P. Yakubu</i>	291
Stomach content analysis of mangrove oyster <i>Crassostrea gasar</i> from Badagry creek, Lagos Nigeria <i>Kolawole-Daniels Aghogho, Popoola, K.O.K, A.A. Sowunmi</i>	296
An assessment of marine fish resource exploitation in Ogun state, Nigeria. <i>Ogunbadejo H. K., Jim-Saiki L. O. and Alhaji T. A.</i>	301

Fishing and natural mortalities as factors depleting the silver catfish, <i>Chrysichthys nigrodigitatus</i> resource of the Cross River, Nigeria. <i>Daniel Ama-Abasi and Edak Aniedi Uyoh.</i>	304
Stomach Content and Feeding Habit of West African Fiddler Crab <i>Uca tangeri</i> From a Tropical Mangrove Lagoon, Lagos, Nigeria. <i>Adejumobi, K.O. Oluwakayode, O.O. Olubola, T.O. and Kasim, O.I.</i>	308
Food and feeding habit and condition factor of tiger shrimp, <i>Penaeus monodon</i> (Fabricius), in the Lagos Lagoon, Nigeria. <i>Aderonke Omolara Lawal-Are, Oluboba, T.F. Oluwajoba, E.O. Oluwakayode-Oluyi O.O. Adejumobi, K.O, Kassim O.I. and Jerome, F.C</i>	313
Assessment of Sea Turtle Bycatch in Artisanal Gillnet Fisheries off The Niger Delta <i>Justina .A. Obieniu and Adegbile O.M.</i>	317
Nutritional composition of commercial fishes from Ikpoba reservoir and their potential contribution to recommended nutrient intake. <i>Oboh, I.P., Egun, N. K. And Olowo, U.C.</i>	321
Catch effects of monofilament and multifilament gillnet of different mesh size in Shabu stream <i>Mohammed, R., Kigbu, A.A. and Usman, M.</i>	325
The Effects of Imported Fishes on Nigeria Fishing Industry <i>Alhaji T.A, Jim-Saiki L.O., Ogunbadejo H.K and Mohammed R.</i>	330
POST HARVEST	333
<i>Dermestes maculatus</i> degeer, 1774 (Coleoptera: Dermestidae): A threat to fish preservation (review) <i>Nasir U. A., Suleiman, M. and Abdulkarim, B.</i>	334
Preference and Perception of Fish Processors on the Influence of Wood Types on the Quality of Smoke-dried Fish in Katsina State <i>Dauda, A.B., Oladapo O.O., and Garuba A.M.</i>	338
Development and evaluation of cookies supplemented with fish protein concentrate. <i>Omojowo F.S; Ihuah J.A.; Ayuba A.B; Isah M.A. and Unogwu, A.</i>	343
Effect of some spices' combination on the proximate composition of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> processed under hot-flame from charcoal (Chorkor oven) <i>Umar, K.A., Yusuf, J.K. and Abdullateef, M.M.</i>	347
Organoleptic characteristics and eating quality acceptability of traditionally smoke-dried freshwater fishes in Toru-orua, Bayelsa State <i>Tina Enize and John F. Alfred-Ockiya</i>	352
TOXICOLOGY AND WATER QUALITY	355
Assessment of Nutrient Load in Wastewater and Sediment-Pore Water from Catfish Ponds in Monai Cluster Fish Farm, Southern Basin of Kainji Lake <i>Mu'azu, M.M., Atiribom, R.Y. and Mbagwu, I.G</i>	356
Stoichiometric Nutrient Limitation and Microalgal Flora of A Former Sewage Disposal Site, at Iddo, Lagos Lagoon, Nigeria. <i>Elegbeleye, O. W., Yusuf, W.A., Offiah, V.C., Okonkwo, C.E.</i>	360
Behavioural Responses and Mortality of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> Juveniles Exposed to Acute Concentrations of Paraquat <i>Okey, I. B., E.O. Ayotunde, B. U. Patrick & E. E. Ewelu</i>	363
Macro Benthic Invertebrates Assemblage in different Anthropogenic Activity Zones in Badagry Creek, South Western Nigeria. <i>Bosede Omolara Ayo-Dada and Gbolagade Akeem Lameed</i>	368
Effects of Covid-19 lockdown on plankton communities in the Lagos Lagoon <i>Okonkwo, Cleopatra Ebere, Yusuf, Waheed Abiodun, Igwegbe, Adeline Nkechi, Nicholas, Eteobong</i>	371

Mercury Accumulation in the Edible Bivalve <i>Crassostrea gasar</i> (Adanson, 1757) Collected from the Western Creeks of the Lagos Lagoon, Nigeria <i>Lawal-Are, A.O, Moruf, R.O, Mbanefo, I.S. And Sodimu, T.J</i>	378
Seawater flux and its Consequences on Ayetoro coastal community of Ondo State, Nigeria. <i>Olakunle, G.W., R.O.D. Shelle and S.O. Popoola.</i>	382
Assessment and Management of impact factors on Marine mammals during geophysical survey in Nigeria coastal waters. <i>Olakunle, G.W., O.M. Adegbile and A.W. Yusuf.</i>	387
Selected Trace Metal Levels in Herring (<i>Clupea harengus</i> , Linnaeus 1758) and Atlantic mackerel (<i>Scomber scombrus</i> , Linnaeus 1758) from major Storage facilities in Maiduguri, Northeast, Nigeria <i>Olanrewaju, A.N., Kareem, O.K., Agbelege, O.O. and Ogunkoya, F.T.</i>	390
Effect of ammonia (NH ₃) toxicity in freshwater on the growth and haematology parametrs of <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> fingerlings <i>Kenneth-Ugochukwu, I.B., Okafor, E.</i>	393
Relationship between heavy metals uptake in crab organs and sediment of Lagos Lagoon <i>Jerome F. C.</i>	398
Toxicity of Lime Fruit Juice to an African Leech (<i>Hemiclepsis quadrata</i>) and Its Haematophagous Potential. <i>Ajibade Akinniyi Oyetunji, Adeosun Olubunmi, Obisesan Omodolapo Morohunranti, Adebukola Folake Bankole, and Rashidat Rafiu</i>	403
Nano-Clay Based Filter For Treatment of Fish Pond Wastewater <i>F. H. Kolawole, R. O. Ojutiku and A. S. Abdulkareem</i>	407
Acute Toxicity of Water Accommodated Fractions (WAFs) of Three Nigerian Crude Oils to Black Jaw Tilapia, <i>Sarotherodon melanotheron</i> <i>Omogoriola Hannah Omoloye</i>	410
Assessment of Heavy Metals in E-waste Leachates: A Case Study of E-waste Dumpsites in Lagos and Osun States, Southwest Nigeria <i>Igbo, J.K. and Nwoko, Chidinma, J.</i>	415
Bioaccumulation of some heavy metals in selected fish species in Shiroro Lake, Niger state, Nigeria. <i>Yusufu, F.O, Kolo, R.J, Ojutiku, R.O and Ibrahim, S.U</i>	419
Toxicity effects of sub-lethal concentrations of cadmium (Cd ²⁺) on haematological parameters of fingerlings and juveniles of freshwater fish, <i>Clarias gariepinus</i> (Burchell, 1822) <i>Jacob, L.T., Auta, J., Kogi, E. and Habila, J.D.</i>	424
Seasonal variations in the occurrence and distribution of pharmaceuticals in the Odo-Iya Alaro river, Lagos state Southwest Nigeria <i>Olatayo M. Ogunbamwo</i>	430
Distribution and composition of aquatic insects in relation to the physicochemical parameters of Awba reservoir, Ibadan <i>Kolawole-Daniels Aghogho, Popoola K.O.K, Nicholas Eteobong</i>	437
Evaluation of the transfer of heavy metals from pig manure to maggot, house fly larvae (<i>Musca domestica</i>) <i>Yusuf, A., Onimisi, M.M., Olorundare. T.L.</i>	440
Assessment of Bioaccumulation Rate of Heavy Metals in Drill Cuttings by Mangrove Periwinkle (<i>Pachymelania aurita</i>) of the Lagos Lagoon. <i>Igwegbe, A.N.</i>	443
Impact of some hydrological factors on biodiversity of fish in Agaie/Lapai dam reservoir of Niger State, Nigeria <i>Yakubu, U.P., Ibrahim, S.U., Yusuf, J., Yusuf, M.K.</i>	448

SUPPLEMENTARY	454
The influence of gender on participation in coastal artisanal fish marketing in Badagry, Lagos State. <i>Nwezza, S. N. Agwu, S. C. Uro, V. O. Olajide, O. T. Uzoalu, I. A. Amoo, I. F.</i>	455
Haematological and Biochemical responses of <i>Chrysichthys nigrodigitatus</i> as Biomarker of Environmental Pollution in Ologe Lagoon. <i>Bassey Okon Bassey</i>	458
Removal of heavy metals from water using bamboo (<i>Bambusa vulgaris</i>) biochar as low-cost adsorbent <i>Nwamba, E. E. and Adu-Poku, S.</i>	462
Fish Value of Gurara Reservoir, Kaduna State, Nigeria <i>Ago, N. D., Abiodun, J. A. and Nwabeze, G. O.</i>	466
An exploration of the aquaculture possibility of <i>Chrysichthys nigrodigitatus</i> <i>Daniel Ama-Abasi & Sandra Uwalaka</i>	470
Heavy metal concentration in surface water, sediment and crab tissues from the Lagos Lagoon. <i>Fola-Matthews, O. O. and Jerome, F. C.</i>	473
Proximate Composition and Acceptability of Imported and Locally Produced Crackers <i>Salaudeen, M. M., Ezekiel, M. O., Egbe, C. F. and Musa, M.</i>	477
Sex ratio and length weight relationship of West African Fiddler crab <i>Uca tangeri</i> from tropical Mangrove Lagoon, Lagos, Nigeria. <i>Kassim O. I., Adejumbi K. O., Oluwakayode-Ohuyi O. O., Oluboba T. F. and Abass Oyinlola.</i>	480
Studies on the fertilization, hatchability, and survival rate of <i>Clarias garinpinus</i> larvae produced using ovalin and ovatide <i>Okoro, C. B.</i>	483
Pathogenic and zoonotic potential of bacterial flora of commercial fish ponds in Ibarapa Central Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria <i>Obisesan, O. M., Oladosu, G. A., Abegunde, P. T., Ajibade, A. O., Adah, A. D., Oladejo, A. O.</i>	488
Review on Fish Farming for Bioprocess Products Utilization <i>Garba, A. A., Adaka, G. S., Iluokhauno, M. E and Olele, N. F.</i>	492
An Assessment of Physico-Chemical Parameters of Six Selected Locations in Lagos Lagoon, South-Western Nigeria. <i>Nwoko, Chidinma J.* and Igbo, J. K.^b</i>	495
LIST OF AUTHORS	499

AQUACULTURE

3

Standardization of *Clarias gariepinus* fingerlings using age, weight and length estimations

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Abstract

A study was conducted to estimate the range of weight / length as well as age at which a *Clarias gariepinus* fish can be said to be a standard fingerling. Artificial breeding was conducted using male and female brooders weighing 2.7Kg and 2.3Kg respectively. Offspring were managed through eight weeks in both indoor (glass aquarium) and outdoor (concrete tanks) facilities. Data on weight and length were obtained and recorded weekly. Physico-chemical properties of the water were also monitored and recorded. The study revealed that the age at which a *Clarias gariepinus* fish can be said to be a standard fingerling is after six weeks while the range of weight and length recorded were from 4.00 - 6.5g and 6.50 - 10.00cm respectively. The study recommends that hatchery operators raise *Clarias gariepinus* for a minimum of six weeks before selling to fish farmers – to reduce mortalities recorded at the fish farms and its multiplier effects on existing and intending fish farmers

Keywords: *Clarias gariepinus*, Catfish, Fingerling, Standardization

Introduction

Fingerlings are baby fish of between 1 – 2 months old for most fish species and usually “finger” length in size. They are the “seeds” for stocking of fish ponds, reservoirs and depleted open water bodies. They form the bedrock of fish farming industry (Madu, 2016). The demand for fingerlings in Nigeria was estimated at over 4.3 billion annually and less than 56 million was being produced (F.D.F., 2007). The availability of reliable source of fingerlings, especially of *Clarias gariepinus* and its hybrids is one of the criteria for a successful fish farming enterprise (Madu, 2004, 2014). Because fingerlings can be ready for sale from 6 - 8 weeks after breeding, this aspect of the fish farming value chain is regarded as the “fastest revenue yielding” and thus should be “standardized” to avoid the continuous exploitation of quacks and its multiplier effects.

The African Catfish is a species of catfish of the family Clariidae and its scientific name is *Clarias gariepinus* which was named by Burchell in 1822. The physical changes in terms of weight and length or age of fish from the point of hatching to adult fish can be sub-divided into the following stages - Larvae / Hatchlings, Fry, Post-fry, Fingerlings, Juveniles and Adult fish. According to Olaosebikan (2011) and Madu (2016), these stages are described as follows:

Larvae / Hatchlings – newly hatched eggs, from day 1 – 3 usually with yolk sac.

Fry – are fish seeds aged 4 – 28 days. They do not have yolk sac and accept artificial food – live feeds.

Post-fry – are fishes of 4 – 5 weeks old, the intermediate between fry and fingerlings. They are ready to accept artificial feed. They are not stable thus this stage is considered critical.

Fingerlings – are fishes of 6 – 8 weeks old. They accept artificial feed and are more stable at this age. They are considered the “seeds” for stocking.

Juveniles – are fishes of 8 – 10 weeks old, very stable and accept most artificial feeds.

Adult fish – these are fishes of over 12 weeks old

Generally fingerling production which can also be referred to as fish breeding, induced breeding, seed multiplication, fish seed propagation or fish hatchery management, involves a series of breeding and feeding practices which can be grouped under the following three major sequential operations (FAO 1997; Madu, 1989; Wedemeyer, 2001)

This refers to the procurement, care and maintenance of the parent stock (brooders). The broodstock can be best sourced from either the wild / natural waters or established fish farms. The sexes of the broodstock should be identified and stocked separately. For the brooders to be healthy, they must be fed well. Catfish requirement is 35 – 40%. The water quality parameters must be checked daily.

Induced Spawning and Hatching of Eggs

Fish are usually stimulated to release their eggs under controlled and conditions manipulated by hatchery operators. The major method which is commonly used is the artificial hormone induced spawning / stripping and artificial fertilization method. This method allows the hatchery operator to control almost all aspects of the breeding process.

Nursery Management of Hatchlings up to Fingerling Stage

This is the most delicate aspect of fingerling production because the percentage survival of the hatchlings could be zero if not properly handled. The newly hatched fish (hatchlings or larvae) are very delicate and must be handled with ultimate care. Some of the important factors that must be considered during nursery management include – Adequate stocking density, adequate food and feeding schedule, good water quality management, sampling and sorting to remove jumpers and measures to control of predators.

Materials and methods

Experimental Site: The study was conducted at the Hatchery Complex of the National Institute for Freshwater Fisheries Research (NIFFR) and Federal College for Freshwater Fisheries Technology both in New Bussa, Niger State, Nigeria.

Collection and Management of Broodstocks: Male and female brooders weighing 2.70kg and 2.30kg respectively were sourced from Awuru river in Niger state. Both fishes were properly checked to make sure they were gravid and allowed to acclimatize in holding tanks for one week before using them for breeding. During this period, the brood fishes were fed very well twice daily with 40% crude protein feed. This is to ensure production of many offspring during breeding.

Inducement, Collection of Eggs and Milt: The female fish was induced by injection of ovaprim® hormone at a dosage of 0.5ml/Kg of fish body weight. This was done using 2mm needle at an angle of around 35 degrees below the line of the fish towards the anterior part. This method is intramuscular. The fish was then allowed for the latency period (9 – 12 hours). After the period of latency the female fish stripped for collection of eggs by gently pressing the stomach with the thumb from the pectoral fin towards the genital opening and green-brownish eggs were being collected in a bowl as they easily ooze out until the eggs stop coming out. The only way to collect the milt (sperm) was to kill the fish, thus the fish sacrificed and the two testes carefully removed and dried with filter paper. The cream-white part of the testes lobes containing ripe semen were put into saline water.

Fertilization, Incubation and Hatching: The testes from the male fish was cut using blades in the saline water and then mixed with the eggs for one minute using a clean feather to allow fertilization. Distilled water was then added and again stirred for another one minute to complete the fertilization. Thereafter, the water and excess milt were decanted. The fertilized eggs were spread in a single layer on the kakabans placed in the breeding tank to avoid suffocation. The incubation water was supplied from the borehole and allowed to stay overnight and properly aerated using electric aerator to provide enough oxygen. After 24 hours the healthy developing eggs (greenish in color) started hatching, the kakaban was removed and some of the eggs which did not hatch (white in color) were siphoned away.

Indoor Management of Larvae and Fry

The larvae (hatchlings) were not fed until they were seen to have absorbed their York sacks after three days. The fry were then fed three times daily with zooplanktons trawled from the hatchery complex combined with commercial Artemia® from the fourth day until two weeks. During this period, jumpers were sorted out, removed and replaced weekly to avoid cannibalism and malnutrition of other fishes. The water quality was monitored to ensure its kept within acceptable aquaculture range and the oxygen demand was supplied using constant aeration. The tanks were siphoned daily and water replaced to the required level. After two weeks the fishes were transferred to prepared outdoor tanks at a stocking density of 200 fish / m². The tanks were covered with 2mm mesh net to evade predators.

Outdoor Management of Post-Fry and Fingerlings: The post-fry fishes were fed three times daily with commercial fish feed (Coppens®) of 0.8 – 1.2mm. With progressive growth, the feed size was increased to 1.5mm and later 2mm size of feed was used for the last week.

Data Collection: The data (weight and length) collection was done weekly using sensitized weighing scale and meter rule. The data collection is only for the majority uniform sized fishes since the few jumpers and minors were removed from the experimental tanks and replaced from the pool.

Results and Discussion

Water Quality Parameters: The results of the mean water quality parameters as were recorded for the experimental duration of eight weeks are presented in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Mean water quality parameters of experimental tanks (8 weeks)

Parameters	Mean	Range	Ideal Ranges
PH	7.16	7.0 – 7.6	6.50 – 9.00
Water Temperature (°C)	28.20	28.00 – 30.90	25.00 – 33.00
Dissolved Oxygen (mg/L)	8.96	6.20 – 9.10	5.00 – 9.00
Conductivity (µS/cm)	160	90 – 320	150 – 500

Data are expressed as Means of daily readings for eight weeks

From the results in the above table, the water quality parameters were all within the optimum range for the culture of the experimental fish (*Clarias gariepinus*) fingerlings.

Weight – Length Estimation

Results of weight and length as recorded for the experimental duration of eight weeks are presented on table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Weight and Length range of experimental fishes for eight weeks

Duration [Week(s)]	Weight Range (Grams)	Length Range (Cm)
1	0.50 – 0.60	Approx. 1.00
2	1.10 – 1.20	1.70 – 2.00
3	1.65 – 1.80	3.80 – 4.00
4	2.20 – 2.50	5.00 – 5.30
5	2.60 – 3.00	5.50 – 5.70
6	3.50 – 4.00	6.00 – 6.50
7	4.20 – 4.50	6.50 – 7.00
8	5.00 – 6.50	8.00 – 10.00

Performance of Fish during Study

Visual observation during feeding and sampling times revealed that the fishes became more active after 3 days as they were seen swimming up vigorously in search of food. It was also noticed that the few mortality of the fishes recorded started at this time and this can be attributed to the inability of the few fishes to adapt to the supplementary feeding after yolk sac absorption. It was noticed that from the 6th week, the fishes were very much active and very stable and this could be an indication that they have gone out from the “lag-phase” of growth. (Madu, 2008)

Conclusion

From the estimation study, it can be concluded that *Clarias gariepinus* fingerlings are fishes not less than six weeks old and ranging from 4.00 – 6.50g weight and 6.50 – 10.00cm length.

Recommendation

Study should be repeated using different stocking densities and different (bigger) culture medium to evaluate changes in water parameters and growth rate; since most farmers are likely to breed with higher density and bigger culture medium with thousands of fry. It is also recommended that outreach and awareness campaign be initiated and intensified by major stakeholders; especially for hatchery operators, fingerlings/fish seed mongers, fish farmers / intending farmers on the ideal size of fish to be procured and the dangers or consequences of procuring fishes below or within lag-phase of growth.

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