



## A review on the relationship between the fish length and otolith biometry

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**Abstract**

In teleosts, biometric parameters of certain bony structures are used for the age and/or size determination of the fish. Otolith is perhaps the most widely used of these bony structures. There are numerous studies which have shown that otolith biometry is positively and strongly correlated with fish size. In this paper, some recent studies that investigate the relationship between otolith biometry and fish length are summarized. It is possible to estimate fish size and/or age by knowing this relationship. This information can be useful, especially when it is not possible to sample a certain portion of a fish population. Besides, otoliths found in archaeological excavation sites or in the stomachs of predators can provide information about the fish they belong to. These data are useful to taxonomists, paleobiologists, and researchers studying the nutritional biology of predators.

**Keywords:** Back-calculation, Biometry, Fish size, Otolith, Relationship**Please cite this article as follows:**

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**1. Introduction**

There are many studies on age determination and growth estimation in fish (Şen & Aydın, 2001; Aydın et al., 2004; Eroğlu & Şen, 2009; Acarlı et al., 2014; Altın et al., 2015; Özdemir et al., 2019; Kara et al., 2018, 2020; Reis, 2020; Alagöz Ergüden et al., 2020; Şenbahar et al., 2020; Bal, 2021; Onay, 2021; Onay & Dalgıç, 2021; Aydın & Bodur, 2021; Alagöz Ergüden, 2021). In fish biology studies, it is important to have samples of all sizes, as well as a sufficient number of samples, for accurate estimation of age and growth. However, sometimes it is not possible to catch smaller fish depending on the fishing method applied, and sometimes due to the different habitat preferences of small fish. Also, in order to protect the stock, fishing legislation prohibits the catching of small fish. These conditions make it difficult to obtain information about the growth of fish at younger ages. In scientific studies, the growth of unsampled young fish is estimated by back-calculating using some bony structures (Starostka & Nelson, 1974; Miller & Nelson, 1974;

Nelson, 1974; Tanyolaç, 1979; Duncan, 1980; Bartlett et al., 1984).

It is possible to estimate information such as the length, age, and weight of smaller individuals of the same species by back-calculating using some measurements of large-sized fish caught in bony fish. For this purpose, scales and otoliths are the most used bony structures. It is important to know that which bony structure will give a better result depending on the fish species. Therefore, when using the back-calculation method, the selection of the most suitable bony structure for a fish species is just as important as the precision in the measurements of the age determination and length estimation (Teksar, 2018).

**2. Otolith in Fish**

Otoliths are calcareous structures located in the head of fish and are involved in both hearing and balance functions (Quist & Isermann, 2017). In bony fish, there are three pairs of otoliths (Figure 1) called sagittae, lapilli, and asterisci (Secor et al., 1992). The sizes of otoliths vary within and between the species (Wright et al., 2002).



Generally, the largest otolith in most bony fish species is the sagittae. On the other hand, in Ostariophysean fish (Cypriniformes and Siluriformes members), asterisci and/or lapilli are larger than sagittal otolith (Schulz-Mirbach & Plath, 2012).

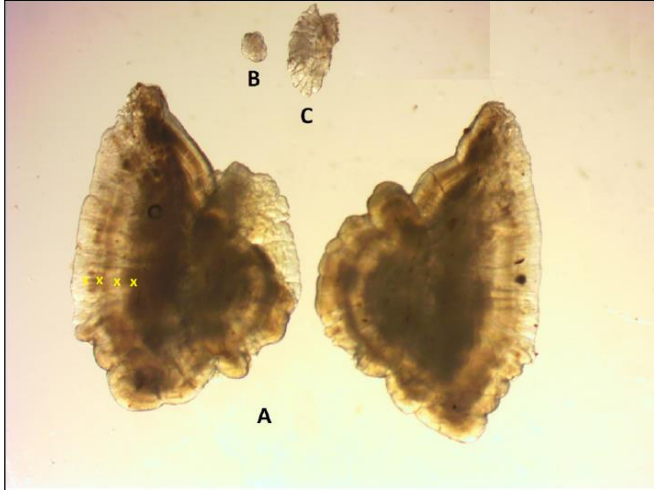


Figure 1. Otolith morphology in *Salvelinus fontinalis* (photographed by Więcaszek et al. 2019). A: Sagittae, B: Lapilli, C: Asterisci.

Teleost fish have 6 otoliths, three on each side. However, the sagittae formed in the sacculus of the inner ear is used to determine the age (Ekingen, 1983). Of the other two pairs, only the asterisci in the lagena is used for age determination in some mesopelagic fish, whereas the lapilli in the utriculus, the 3rd pair, is not used at all. The biggest reason for this is that the last two types of otoliths are generally very small in all bony fish (Avşar, 2005).

Since the otolith morphology is species-specific (Campana & Casselman, 1993), otolith measurements are particularly significant for the studies in the identification of the fish species and populations (Bani et al., 2013; Bostancı et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2017; Avigliano et al., 2018; Bostancı & Yedier, 2018; Özpiçak et al., 2018; Deepa et al., 2019; Song et al., 2019), trophic ecology (Yazıcıoğlu et al., 2016, 2018), taxonomy (Campana, 2004; Tuset et al., 2008; Yılmaz et al., 2015), and paleontology (Campana et al., 1995; Schulz-Mirbach & Reichenbacher, 2006).

### 3. Relationship between Otoliths and Fish Size

The bony structures of fish and fish size growth are related to each other. Although it varies according to the bony structure, taking various structural dimension measurements such as width, length, weight, and associating them with fish length and determining the growth rate according to this relationship are among the studies that have been carried out recently (Samsun & Samsun, 2006).

Many studies have focused on the detailed examination of marine and freshwater fish otoliths and introducing otolith morphology by preparing otolith atlases. Anatomy of fish

species, identification of new fish species, taxonomic revisions of fish taxa, determination of phylogenetic relationships, ecomorphology studies, determination of relationships between fish growth and otolith growth, determination of similarities between the growth of fossil fish and fish living today are some of them (Bostancı et al., 2012).

From this point of view, estimation of fish size from otolith biometry and accordingly stock management studies are very important. Studies on the relationship between fish size and otolith biometry are quite abundant in the fields of population dynamics and stock management (Table 1).

Some studies pointed out that there is a positive and strong linear relationship between the size of some bony structures and fish length. These bony structures are otoliths, scales, anal and dorsal fin rays, cleitra, opercula, dentary and pharyngeal bones (Copp & Kovac, 2003; Aydın et al., 2004; Britton & Shepherd, 2005; Bobori et al., 2006; Tarkan et al., 2007; Bostancı et al., 2007). Computed biometric parameters in some research have shown that some bony structures are more suitable than others. Moreover, otolith and other bony structure biometry of the same fish species in different habitats may differ depending on the location and the water quality. For example, it has been shown that the otolith characteristics of *Carassius gibelio* vary between specimens collected from two different lakes (Bostancı, 2005). Furthermore, Balon (1981) stated that the skeleton formation during larval development is also species-specific and is strongly influenced by environmental factors (i.e., dissolved oxygen and temperature). Hence, these factors should also be taken into account in the otolith measurement studies to determine the biometric parameters with high precision (Munk & Smikrud, 2002).

### 4. Conclusion

Knowing the relationship between otolith biometry and fish length is useful for two reasons: (i) it is possible to estimate fish size from the length of otoliths found in archaeological sites and predator stomachs, (ii) if the age was determined using otoliths, it is possible to verify the age by checking the fish length when a value out of the expected is found (Echeverria, 1987). In addition, it has been reported that otolith weight can be used to determine the age of fish in some species (Pawson, 1990; Cardinale et al., 2000). Data on the biometry of the species are thought to be useful for fish taxonomists, researchers investigating the nutritional biology of fish predators, and paleobiologists dealing with the otoliths of fossil fish.

Table 1. Total length and otolith biometry parameters of some fish species reported in recent studies

Fish species	N	Total length (cm)		Otolith length (mm)		Otolith weight (g)		Otolith width (mm)		Reference
		Range	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	
<i>Terapon jarbua</i>	132	12.5-32.5		4.2-10.7		0.010-0.157		2.43-5.95		Chanthran et al. (2021)
<i>Otolithoides pama</i>	184	5.1-32.7	18.4±4.9	2.0-13.9	8.3±0.2	0.009-0.756	0.243±0.133	1.60-10.20	6.67±1.75	Bhakta et al. (2020)
<i>Solea solea</i>	110	20.8-28.5	24.4±1.7	3.5-5.4	4.2±0.4	0.012-0.035	0.019±0.005	2.87-4.29	3.41±0.30	Başusta et al. (2020)
<i>Solea solea</i>	25	10.2-38.0		2.3-6.0		0.004-0.041		1.96-4.74		
<i>Lepidorhombus boscii</i>	17	17.8-29.4		4.5-7.1		0.017-0.036		3.10-4.44		
<i>Gaidropsarus biscayensis</i>	50	8.7-14.5		2.3-3.4		0.001-0.026		0.89-1.20		
<i>Lophius budegassa</i>	15	11.9-37.4		2.5-8.6		0.001-0.047		1.10-4.78		Daban et al. (2020)
<i>Uranoscopus scaber</i>	13	9.2-20.6		3.3-9.3		0.007-0.117		1.90-5.06		
<i>Arnoglossus kessleri</i>	164	6.8-11.6		1.6-3.5		0.001-0.010		1.15-2.26		
<i>Lesueurigobius friesii</i>	213	4.9-9.3		2.4-4.2		0.005-0.027		1.93-3.43		
<i>Capoeta angorae</i>	178	7.5-37.8	18.1±4.1	1.4-4.2	2.6±0.4	0.001-0.009	0.002±0.001	1.25-3.57	2.18±0.33	
<i>Capoeta antalyensis</i>	112	7.1-34.0	12.6±3.5	1.3-3.9	2.0±0.7	0.000-0.004	0.001±0.001	0.99-3.57	1.66±0.64	
<i>Capoeta caelestis</i>	159	4.4-28.3	14.8±6.3	0.9-3.6	1.8±0.9	0.000-0.006	0.003±0.001	0.80-2.79	1.53±0.68	
<i>Capoeta erhani</i>	135	15.0-47.0	23.2±5.7	2.3-4.6	3.6±0.5	0.001-0.009	0.002±0.001	1.90-3.59	2.76±0.34	Emre (2019)
<i>Capoeta pestai</i>	154	6.2-26.8	15.1±4.4	1.3-3.9	2.6±0.7	0.000-0.010	0.002±0.002	1.07-2.99	2.09±0.48	
<i>Pseudophoxinus antalyae</i>	344	2.8-16.8	7.7±3.2	0.6-2.8	1.9±0.5	0.000-0.005	0.002±0.001	0.49-2.30	1.56±0.40	
<i>Pseudophoxinus fahrettini</i>	151	5.3-19.6	12.2±2.5	0.9-3.1	2.0±0.4	0.000-0.006	0.002±0.001	0.78-2.95	1.98±0.37	
<i>Pellona harroweri</i>	9	13.8-14.6		1.3-4.5		0.007-0.010		0.79-2.71		
<i>Notarius grandicassis</i>	10	17.5-46.5		1.1-2.3		0.124-1.264		0.88-1.93		
<i>Trichiurus lepturus</i>	10	47.7-72.1		3.7-5.4		0.004-0.010		1.56-2.04		
<i>Haemulon plumierii</i>	14	17.5-20.9		1.0-1.7		0.062-0.172		0.80-1.25		
<i>Haemulon steindachneri</i>	13	19.3-22.1		1.4-2.0		0.104-0.122		0.95-1.20		
<i>Bairdiella ronchus</i>	8	23.4-37.6		1.5-2.5		0.012-2.620		0.95-2.10		
<i>Ctenosciaena gracilicirrhus</i>	26	8.9-16.4		4.5-7.4		0.024-0.109		3.80-5.82		
<i>Cynoscion jamaicensis</i>	20	16.3-23.0		8.8-12.2		0.061-0.220		4.46-6.13		Oliveira et al. (2019)
<i>Cynoscion microlepidotus</i>	13	17.0-38.5		1.4-2.6		0.075-0.309		0.74-1.40		
<i>Macrodon ancylodon</i>	31	18.2-30.9		9.4-13.4		0.062-0.198		4.31-7.09		
<i>Menticirrhus americanus</i>	16	12.0-17.0		0.9-1.2		0.047-0.108		0.75-0.92		
<i>Micropogonias furnieri</i>	14	17.8-33.9		1.5-2.5		0.052-0.753		0.60-1.87		
<i>Paralonchurus brasiliensis</i>	10	15.6-22.0		1.4-1.9		0.059-0.091		0.67-0.93		
<i>Stellifer naso</i>	15	9.4-11.2		3.9-4.3		0.012-0.013		2.43-2.96		
<i>Polydactylus virginicus</i>	11	17.0-25.3		4.2-5.7		0.005-0.013		2.26-2.87		
<i>Puntius sophore</i>	41	66.0-109.0	83.9±1.6	0.5-1.1	0.7±0.1			0.61-0.98	0.91±0.02	Rani et al. (2019)*
<i>Perca fluviatilis</i>	195	4.6-24.0	8.9±4.2	1.4-6.0	2.7±1.0	0.001-0.031	0.005±0.005	0.81-3.23	1.42±0.51	Şimşek et al. (2019)
<i>Pomatomus saltatrix</i>	398	43.6-67.0	51.8±5.3	9.7-15.3	12.6±0.9	0.030-0.110	0.050±0.010	3.65-5.45	4.29±0.31	Souza et al. (2019)
	346	12.3-37.0	19.1±0.9	3.8-12.6	6.7±0.6			1.59-4.34	2.60±0.24	Bal et al. (2018)
<i>Anguilla Anguilla</i>	60	11.2-79.5	42.9±14.0	1.2-4.8	2.7±0.7	0.001-0.016	0.005±0.003	0.88-2.58	1.79±0.38	Kanjuh et al. (2018)
	115	11.8-38.1	25.4±6.4	1.5-3.7	2.9±0.5	0.001-0.014	0.008±0.003	1.05-2.59	1.96±0.35	Düşükcan (2018)
<i>Capoeta trutta</i>	106	23.7-43.4	30.6±3.0	2.0-3.9	3.1±0.3	0.004-0.013	0.007±0.002	1.75-3.07	2.27±0.27	Doğan and Şen (2017)
<i>Centropomus parallelus</i>	50	8.6-55.2	23.7±10.7	3.9-22.3	10.4±4.1			2.10-11.00	5.80±2.00	
<i>Centropomus undecimalis</i>	50	9.8-104.0	40.0±20.6	4.5-29.9	13.8±5.8			2.40-14.10	7.00±2.70	
<i>Lutjanus analis</i>	50	8.8-52.0	18.55±7.4	4.2-16.7	7.7±2.3			2.60-10.00	4.80±1.40	
<i>Lutjanus jocu</i>	50	17.8-53.0	25.36±5.4	6.6-14.2	8.4±1.2			3.70-7.80	4.90±0.60	Assis et al. (2018)
<i>Lutjanus synagris</i>	50	7.1-44.6	19.7±10.2	4.0-19.7	9.3±4.2			2.30-10.90	5.50±2.30	
<i>Chaetodipterus faber</i>	50	12.2-37.4	22.8±5.0	3.6-8.7	6.2±1.0			2.20-4.70	3.30±0.50	
<i>Mugil curema</i>	50	16.9-41.5	29.3±4.3	5.7-10.6	8.0±0.9			2.80-4.80	3.70±0.40	
<i>Foetorepus calauropomus</i>	55	10.2-28.0		2.6-5.1		0.001-0.007		1.20-2.18		
<i>Trachurus declivis</i>	108	12.1-29.2		3.9-7.9		0.006-0.029		2.07-4.17		
<i>Parequula melbournensis</i>	145	11.0-19.4		5.1-7.8		0.013-0.049		4.06-6.17		
<i>Neosebastes scorpaenoides</i>	51	24.2-37.8		7.9-12.7		0.032-0.144		3.22-6.71		
<i>Platycephalus aurimaculatus</i>	60	18.4-52.6		6.5-15.6		0.012-0.160		2.35-5.49		Park et al. (2018)
<i>Platycephalus bassensis</i>	62	25.0-45.9		8.7-15.4		0.028-0.173		2.86-4.95		
<i>Platycephalus conatus</i>	67	21.5-47.6		9.4-18.9		0.046-0.282		3.41-6.58		
<i>Lepidotrigla mulhalli</i>	182	10.6-21.8		2.6-5.6		0.002-0.030		2.04-4.29		
<i>Lepidotrigla vanessa</i>	254	11.9-32.3		2.3-5.8		0.002-0.037		1.93-4.61		

\*Studies with an asterisk presented the average values as mean±standard error.

Table 1. (Continued)

Fish species	N	Total length (cm)		Otolith length (mm)		Otolith weight (g)		Otolith width (mm)		Reference
		Range	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	
<i>Belone belone</i>	51	11.8-32.5	22.5±4.4	1.0-3.0	2.2±0.5			0.53-1.67	1.24±0.27	
<i>Trachinotus ovatus</i>	62	3.0-15.2	4.7±1.9	0.5-2.5	1.1±0.4			0.46-1.30	0.74±0.22	
<i>Spicara smaris</i>	1520	1.0-13.7	3.1±1.8	0.6-5.4	1.7±1.0			0.37-3.53	1.07±0.56	
<i>Sprattus sprattus</i>	42	4.3-7.4	6.5±0.7	0.8-1.5	1.2±0.1			0.53-0.87	0.69±0.06	
<i>Pomatoschistus marmoratus</i>	1150	1.2-13.5	3.4±1.0	0.7-2.1	1.3±0.4			0.63-1.78	1.13±0.28	
<i>Symphodus ocellatus</i>	1189	1.4-17.3	5.6±1.8	0.7-3.4	1.4±0.4			0.41-2.00	0.91±0.24	
<i>Chelon labrosus</i>	306	1.9-19.1	7.0±4.0	0.7-4.7	1.9±0.9			0.50-2.49	1.21±0.47	Altin and Ayyildiz (2017)
<i>Mullus surmuletus</i>	976	4.0-14.8	5.8±1.1	1.0-2.9	1.5±0.3			0.57-2.22	1.13±0.24	
<i>Chromis chromis</i>	153	1.9-12.5	7.3±2.2	1.1-5.8	3.2±1.1			0.64-3.21	1.91±0.55	
<i>Scorpaena porcus</i>	82	3.0-31.3	12.2±5.1	1.7-8.1	5.2±1.4			0.99-3.36	2.26±0.57	
<i>Trachinus draco</i>	106	2.4-29.3	10.0±5.6	1.3-7.8	3.7±1.5			0.20-5.16	1.88±0.89	
<i>Lithognathus mormyrus</i>	2638	1.4-16.5	3.4±1.1	1.3-4.3	2.2±0.4			0.98-2.41	1.38±0.21	
<i>Serranus scriba</i>	638	1.5-21.4	9.6±3.3	0.5-6.9	3.5±1.2			0.08-2.83	1.58±0.50	
<i>Serranus scriba</i>	763	6.8-24.1	13.7±3.6	2.7-8.4	4.9±1.6	0.002-0.031	0.009±0.006	1.30-3.20	2.12±0.40	Bilge and Filiz (2018)
<i>Bathylupea hoskynii</i>	15	12.7-16.7				0.024-0.043		5.24-7.01		
<i>Chlorophthalmus nigromarginatus</i>	28	17.2-22.0				0.009-0.025		5.59-7.74		
<i>Neoscopelus microchir</i>	20	15.5-22.0				0.024-0.054		6.12-8.33		
<i>Ostracoberyx dorygenis</i>	17	9.1-11.8				0.008-0.033		3.89-5.43		
<i>Synagrops japonicus</i>	16	9.1-10.2				0.007-0.013		4.36-5.17		Aneesh Kumar et al. (2017)
<i>Cubiceps baxteri</i>	27	12.7-20.0				0.008-0.018		5.56-7.21		
<i>Neopinnula orientalis</i>	38	16.4-27.6				0.004-0.110		5.27-7.65		
<i>Polymixia fusca</i>	43	8.4-22.4				0.017-0.177		5.3-10.63		
<i>Bembrops caudimacula</i>	20	15.5-24				0.012-0.040		4.59-6.39		
<i>Atherina boyeri</i>	174	5.9-9.5		2.1-3.7	2.8±0.02	0.001-0.004	0.003±0.001	0.99-2.10	1.79±0.01	Bostancı et al. (2017)*
<i>Pterois volitans</i>	472	9.8-35.8	22.8±6.6	1.9-7.4	4.5±1.0	0.001-0.110	0.007±0.005			Aguilar-Perera and Quijano-Puerto (2016)
<i>Micromesistius poutassou</i>	88	6.5-39.0		3.2-19.0						
<i>Phycis blennoides</i>	76	4.5-54.0		2.9-18.2						
<i>Mullus barbatus</i>	149	6.5-21.5		1.8-4.0						Viva et al. (2015)
<i>Trisopterus minutus</i>	68	5.5-25.0		3.5-12.0						
<i>Trachurus mediterraneus</i>	163	5.0-42.0		1.8-11.4						
<i>Trachurus trachurus</i>	170	6.0-41.5		2.2-13.4						
<i>Trachurus trachurus</i>	509	11.5-21.7	16.8±0.1	1.4-6.9	4.2±0.1	0.010-0.021	0.016±0.001	2.00-3.48	3.04±0.01	Ergüden and Alagöz Ergüden (2013)*
<i>Cynoglossus lighti</i>	256	4.5-31.2	14.5±4.0	0.9-6.0	2.1±0.5			0.74-5.37	1.61±0.35	Zan et al. (2015)
<i>Barbus grypus</i>	90	37.7-69.9	59.2±5.4	2.6-3.8	3.2±0.2	0.005-0.013	0.009±0.001	1.66-2.56	2.16±0.18	Düşükcan et al. (2015)
<i>Argentina sphyraena</i>	401	7.0-18.1	12.3±1.8	2.6-5.4	4.0±0.5	0.003-0.006	0.007±0.003	1.70-3.70	2.70±0.33	Bilge and Gülşahin (2014)
<i>Glossanodon leioglossus</i>	225	6.1-13.0	9.6±1.1	2.3-4.6	3.5±0.3	0.003-0.009	0.004±0.001	1.60-3.10	2.36±0.24	
<i>Argyrops spinifer</i>	54	15.1-64.2	33.8±13.4	5.8-18.2	10.7±2.8	0.050-0.510	0.170±0.100			Ghanbarzadeh et al. (2014)
<i>Alburnus heckeli</i>	110	8.8-11.0		1.5-2.9		0.001-0.002		1.02-2.43		Basusta et al. (2013a)
<i>Salmo trutta macrostigma</i>	153	18.2-38.2	23.8±0.3	2.1-3.8	2.7±0.02	0.000-0.001		1.17-2.12		Başusta et al. (2013b)*
<i>Lepidotrigla dieuzeidei</i>	443	7.2-14.7	10.8±0.1	3.4-7.4	5.1±0.04	0.001-0.013	0.004±0.001	2.45-5.30	3.58±0.029	Başusta et al. (2013c)
<i>Macrondon ancylodon</i>	22	19.5-40.0	30.3	9.9-16.6	13.3	0.060-0.360	0.170	3.81-7.66	5.82	Cardoso et al. (2012)
<i>Macrondon atricauda</i>	22	18.2-41.0	30.1	9.1-14.7	12.2	0.040-0.190	0.110	3.94-7.15	5.63	
<i>Mastacembelus mastacembelus</i>	187	23.7-80.6	53.4±15.1	1.4-3.8	2.4±0.4	0.001-0.004	0.002±0.001	0.80-1.71	1.28±0.20	Eroğlu and Şen (2009)
<i>Chondrostoma regium</i>	506	20.1-33.3	26.6±2.6	2.2-3.6	2.9±0.3					Aydın et al. (2004)
<i>Capoeta capoeta umbla</i>	251	19.4-46.0	28.2±5.3	1.7-4.6	2.3±0.5					Sen et al. (2001)

\*Studies with an asterisk presented the average values as mean±standard error.

**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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