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**The effect of incubation temperature on early malformation,
regionalisation and meristic characters of the vertebral column in
farmed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*).**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
in
Science**

At Massey University, Manawatū, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2018

ABSTRACT

Skeletal deformities are a recurrent problem in farmed Chinook salmon which limit production and have animal welfare impacts. Skeletal deformities of a variety of types are recognised especially when the external phenotype of the animal is affected. These types are well described in juvenile and adult stages of the production cycle. Which skeletal malformations affect early life stages in salmonids is less well known. Temperature is commonly manipulated in fish farming husbandry. High rearing temperatures are related to higher growth rates and in Atlantic salmon, elevated temperature has been inferred as a potential risk factor for skeletal deformities. In this thesis, malformations of the vertebral column in post-hatch to first feed life stages (500-900 degree-days) were studied in farmed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) in New Zealand. Fish were reared at a constant 4°C, 8°C and 12°C, from fertilisation to juvenile stages. The effects of rearing fish at these temperatures on malformations of the vertebral column were studied in specimens whole-mount stained for cartilage and mineralised bone, and in histological sections. The external phenotype of post-hatch stages could be linked to internal skeletal malformations such as notochord malformations, chordacentra fusions and malformations of the associated elements. In all temperature groups, externally normal specimens could have internal malformations, predominantly fused chordacentra. Conversely, externally malformed fish usually displayed internal malformations. Specimens raised at 8°C had fewest malformations, followed by specimens of the 12°C group. Specimens raised at 4°C had the highest number of malformations. This study indicates that 8°C is the best incubation temperature of those tested. In addition, the effects of rearing temperature on morphological variation of skeletal elements such as vertebrae, vestigial ribs and vestigial elements in the caudal fin were studied. Six vertebral column regions were identified. The defining characters of each of these regions remained independent of the rearing temperature. Still, the postcranial, transitional and ural regions showed temperature sensitive meristic variation of the vertebrae, vestigial ribs, arches, epurals and uroneurals. Meristic variation can foreshadow skeletal malformations that emerge late in life and thus be significant for the early diagnosis of vertebral deformities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was still in the full swing of writing the Ph.D. thesis when I first drafted this section. However, I am nearing the end and one question has been tumbling through my mind many times in the last six months: “Is it truly hard to do a Ph.D. project, and if yes, why is it so hard?” I can only answer this question from my own perspective and experience(s) and thus different people may have different answers or may ask the question differently.

From a scientific viewpoint my answer to the question is fairly straightforward and simple: “No, scientifically I find a Ph.D. project not hard to do.” I feel that when one is passionate about science, passionate about working in the lab, and is curious about the results of the experiments, a Ph.D. project is not so hard to do. One question that follows is: “Was the project not scientifically challenging?” The answer to this latter question is a firm: “No, it was challenging.” Not the difficult experimental methods or statistical analyses, but the scope, range and depth of the subject were challenging. Skeletal tissues have deep roots in evolution, are observable over hundreds of millions of years and have hundreds of books describing their anatomy in currently living animals. In addition, hundreds of outside and innate factors influence the skeleton. The width and depth of this subject take gargantuan proportions. The diversity in anatomy of skeletal tissues of currently living teleost fish alone is mindboggling. Moreover, one can happily spend an entire life studying the skeleton of a single fish species, for example the salmon. With passion, drive and curiosity the daily challenges while doing science are overcome. “Than why do PhD students suffer so much during their project?”

Many a time I heard from fellow Ph.D. students, friends and people close to me say that they are frustrated, stressed, burned-out, having health issues and being outright unhappy. “Are these ‘things’ also part of doing science?” Again, for me personally the answer is straightforward and simple: “No, the suffering is not a part of doing science.” The negative emotions and also positive emotion one experiences during a Ph.D. project is part of being human. This brings me to the ‘Why it is so hard to do a Ph.D. project’. For me, science is the absolute sustenance of my rationale. I eat, drink and breathe science. But, above all I am still a human being, full of emotions and believes. However, being a human is sometimes hard. That is why doing a PhD project is so hard. For me, the project was a constant search for a balance. Distancing myself from feeling and believing during scientific activities, while feeling and believing during life experiences outside science. Searching for a balance, something we all struggle with is likely part of the real valuable lessons I have learned during this Ph.D. project. As humans, we have help. The amazing people who helped and supported me as scientist and human brings me to the true purpose of this section: ‘Saying thank you’.

I have to start by thanking Freddy, Christian, Goedele, Jurgen and many other fantastic teachers of the high school I attended (Scheppers-Wetteren, Belgium). These people taught with so much care and passion it affirmed my choice of studying biology and increased my interest in science.

A huge thank you goes to Prof. Dr. Ann Huysseune. You have been the supervisor of my Bachelor and Master theses and a supervisor of the Ph.D. project. What I find personally so impressive is that you inspire without aiming to inspire. You do what you are passionate about and you do it in your own way. That in itself is inspirational. Your passion for teeth and the interaction between epithelium and mesenchyme has ‘bitten’ me as well (so to speak). Working with zebrafish and *Polypterus* in the EvoDevo lab has increased my respect for fish tremendously. Thank you for your eternal patience during reading and correcting manuscripts. I enjoyed, and learned so much from your insight into texts and language. You always seem to know where I want to end-up with a paragraph. I admire the sharpness and clarity of your writing. I will never forget that for every scientific question we have, there is likely a fish that could help answer the question. Together with Eckhard you have given me the opportunity to have a unique life experience.

A tremendous thank you to Prof. Dr. Eckhard Witten. I will never forget the day you and Ann asked me if I was willing to go to New Zealand to do a Ph.D., on the 14th of February 2013. Your in-depth knowledge of the salmon skeleton is, it seems, never ending. Impressively, you always know what a target public wants and can create a very clear structure and message directed towards them. You also have inspirational ideas that cause some amok among the well-established ideas. Although your ideas seem outrageous at first, they become less so after some closer inspection and more reading. Those alternative insights and ideas inspire me to think further and try to stretch personal observations and knowledge in the literature into a new perspective. I also have to thank you for reading and making suggestions that stimulated me to improve my own writing. I thank you and Ann for taking so much of the initial contract and paper work of the PhD project away from me, so that I could focus on the science. Finally, I have to thank you for giving me the opportunity to present at my first international conference, at IAFSB (Interdisciplinary Approach in Fish Skeletal Biology) in Tavira (Portugal) where I was able to meet my New Zealand supervisors.

I want to thank all the members of the EvoDevo lab in Ghent.

Thank you Mieke, for helping with cutting hundreds of sections for my Master thesis work and later helping with staining sections for my Ph.D. project. We could always ask you where ‘stuff’ was in the lab and where chemicals were stored. Thank you for your positive spirit and hands on approach.

Bart, you have helped me re-appreciate ‘dinokoeken’. As Sam wrote before me, you are indeed a scientific writing marvel and that motivated me to try and write better myself.

Jeroen, you have taught me to appreciate ‘durum’. Yes, good food is important during all that thinking work. Thanks for providing so much fun in the lab environment. There is no way to explain how the combination with Sam worked so well. We were belly shaking with laughs within 60 seconds when you two were together in the lab.

Big thanks to Sam. Scientific and life mentor. Unbelievable as it may seem, I chose the subject of my Master thesis from a list of 164 subjects. I knew I wanted to do a thesis in the EvoDevo lab of Ann, but still, what are the chances. Together with Jeroen you always managed to lift the spirits. You taught me to name and classify samples, pictures and files with care. Your eye for good graphics was inspirational and I have to thank you for teaching me the workings of Photoshop, Illustrator and Amira. Yes, I know and truly understand your search for perfect symmetry when making manuscript figures. Thank you for your continued support during my PhD work.

Thank you to Iris, you were in the lab during the transition period between Master and PhD. It was a rather long period and mentally and emotionally it was not always easy for me. But you were always there to talk to. Thank you for the many supportive conversations, which made me see many new perspectives on life and how life unfolds itself.

I want to say thank you to Daria and Veronika, who came in the lab during the last year I was in New Zealand. Thanks for the fun and supportive environment you have provided. You helped me recover mentally and emotionally from a nasty case of IBD.

Finally, I want to thank Miranda, Hilde, Inge and Marjolein who continued their support during my Ph.D. These people are essential during the Bachelor and Master in Biology but work behind the scenes. Now I can finally officially thank them for always being there and providing support to the students.

Down under I need to thank Nicole Ruff and Ben Wybourne from Skretting Australia. Nicole and Ben were some of the initial drivers of the project and asked Eckhard to find a student. Indirectly they have given me the chance to do an international PhD project. I also have to thank Mark Preece of New Zealand King Salmon Co Ltd Thank you for your support during the experiment at Tentburn hatchery (**experiments were approved by Animal Ethics Comity of Massey University: AEC protocol 14/32**). You always have been very supportive of the project and helped us with communications to and from the aquaculture company.

A big thank you to Prof. Dr. Peter Davie, who I met first on the IAFSB conference in Portugal. What I mainly remember is Matthew making English analogies, which included all kinds of animals, until you brought a polite but stern stop to that. Thank you for your strict, but just and always very strong advice. Your work organisation and discipline were always present as a steady guidance. You were

always there to pick-up the ‘fish train’, when things were not going as smooth, and ‘smolt’ on. Your advice on figures and texts was always compact, clear and strong. Few words, big actions. Yet, when words were used they were allowed to be floral, delicate and intricate. It is such a sensitive balance, but I will always try and find that balance.

To thank Dr. Matthew Perrott I may need to invent some new English words. You are and have been a stellar supervisor. You have keen and curious eyes that want to see and know everything. Your eye for detail is truly impressive. I also thank you for taking up most of the institutional hassles away from me. The everlasting positivity you radiate was what I fell back on many times. That brings me to your true power as a supervisor. You are a great scientist but to me an even greater human. You taught me how to travel with less stress, both in and outside of New Zealand. You taught me the basics of car maintenance. You helped me to put setbacks in perspective and helped me become more independent when juggling with paperwork and moves within a larger organisation. You have really brought out the best human in me during this PhD project. Of course there was some help from Magda, Megan and Xander. I am enormously grateful for all your generosity and the very warm welcome you have given me in your family. I have to thank Magda for providing me with an essential phone number.

I just heard I had to leave the place I was living at that time and I did not have all my wits about me. A very awkward phone call (number provided by Magda) brought me to Jack McKenzie. Still, we met and I rented a room. You have given me a home in New Zealand and I would never want to trade it for anything else. Thank you for the stimulating conversations about almost any subject. Thank you for teaching me so much about sports, and to help me appreciate rugby, cricket, cycling and many other sports on a different level. In the same breath I want to say thank you to Kyoko Murakami. You have taught me so much more about the Japanese culture, about its beautiful language and about life. Thank you for introducing me to Hash House Harriers, the most quirky and weird bunch of people I know, but absolute top fun. Shumba, my furry cat friend, I will miss you tremendously.

Dylan and Helen, you guys have become great friends. You both are the real deal, Kiwi as. Funny enough you are the only real kiwi friends, of my age, I have. Thank you for the invitations to your house for a top feed of venison and crayfish. I will never get bored of that combination. Thank you for the board games and both beating me and letting me win shamelessly. It was always great fun.

Thank you to all the HHH guys, my other old as and Kiwi as friends. Thank you for the amazing runs, amazing feeds (such as ‘hash mash’ - we never had a bad one) and fantastic insights into what it means to be Kiwi and what it means to live in New Zealand.

Thanks to the histopathology people for all the fun birthday parties we had in the research group. My Te Reo has not improved much but at least I have learned to sing happy birthday in Māori. Thank you Cristina for introducing me to the marvellous world of Pokémon Go. Thank you to Becks, Natalia and

Juliana to provide some fun in my office. Thank you Ingeborg, for visiting me to have good chats. Especially in the last months you were there for me to talk to about stress and emotions that were hitting me hard during that period.

Aline, I have only met you months before the end of my project. Still, thank you for being there and introducing me to Brazilian culture. I could talk openly and honestly with you when I needed it. Thank you for all your support and advice. You have become one of my most amazing friends! Thank you Chiara for your sharp, witty and full of glamour support. Grazie.

I have to finish with some very special people back in Europe.

I want to start with thanking my friends in Belgium, especially Nils, Jolien, Michiel, Mo and all the guys of the 'Bende van Hijfte'. I also want to thank my family who was always interested and supportive, especially Frederik and Jan, for legendary meals, music and Ping-Pong matches. Also thanks to the guys of the 'Stormvogels', our friendly futsal team. I also want to thank the family of Sofie, her parents and grandparents, for being interested, supporting and welcoming.

A very special thank you to Jan Daem. Jan taught me the beginnings of biodiversity by telling about the animal kingdoms and its species at high school. I also learned to be meticulous and careful in everything I do in the lab environment. Jan has become a very close mentor. He guided me as a young student in a classroom environment and was one of my strongest supporters during my studies. Jan was always there for mental and emotional guidance. We had many substantial conversations over the years that have stimulated me to keep developing myself as a scientist and human being.

Thanks a thousand to my parents and my brother. The past four years have been hard on all of us. It seemed that when the challenges I faced became more difficult, yours did too. But some of those challenges are past us now. Things have changed and not for the worst. You were able to visit me in New Zealand and my brother has successfully obtained his physiotherapy degree. You did a stellar job Gerben, it must be said. Thank you mom and dad for allowing me to study at the University, believing in me and supporting me throughout this almost twelve-year venture. Up to the next adventure.

My last words of thanks are for a very special person. Sofie, I will never forget the message I sent on the morning of the 14th of February 2013. Yes, in the evening of the same day I was asked if I was willing to do my Ph.D. in New Zealand. Still, together we built for almost four years on a relationship we had to physically stretch over half the planet. You are the most amazing intelligent, kind and beautiful person and in the last four years you have given me many of the most beautiful moments I ever experienced. Also, during the times I was suffering from stress or health issues, you were there to support me. I think we could truly understand each other because we were both in a similar situation, I

had my Ph.D. project in NZ and you had yours in the USA. Alas, several months ago things seemed to have changed for you. Inadvertently, things changed for me too. Painful and sad as it may be, I want to thank you tremendously for your support and for being there over the last four years.

Adelbert

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Table 30: Mutations affecting the normal chordocyte and chordoblast vesicular transport functions in zebrafish and medaka

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

6m	six months (at sea)
°C	degrees centigrade
°d	degreedays
τ_s	Gorodilov's tau S
>	larger than
%	percent
±	plus or minus
<	smaller than
Σ	summation
antS	anterior spine
AB	Alcian blue
AC	alternating current
ALP	alkaline phosphatase
AB-PAS	Alcian blue-periodic acid Shiff
AR	Alizarin red
ARF	ADP-ribosylation factor
Atf	cyclic AMP-dependent transcription factor
Bbf	multifactor complex containing B element binding factor
BD	basidorsal
BMP	bone morphogenetic protein
BN	bent neck
BNA	base of neural arch
BTM	bent tail medium
BTS	bent tail severe
BV	basiventral
cm	centimetre
C	compression
C	compression and/or reduced intervertebral spaces
Cb	chordoblast(s)
CB	cancellous bone
CC	central canal
CHC	chordacentrum
Cltc	clathrin coated
CM	curly medium
Col	collagen

COP	coatomer protein
Creb	cyclic AMP response element-binding protein
CS	curly severe
CTM	critical thermal methodology
d	days
dd	degreedays
df	degrees of freedom
dpf	days post fertilisation
DEPC	diethyl pyrocarbonate
DIC	differential interference contrast microscopy
E	epural(s)
ECM	extracellular matrix
EEM	external elastic membrane
EMT	epithelial-mesenchymal transition
ER	endoplasmic reticulum
F	fertilisation
F	fusion
FF	first feed
Fig.	figure
FL	fork length
FW	freshwater
g	gram
glm	general linear model
h	hour(s)
H	hatching
HA	haemal arch
H ₂ O ₂	hydrogen peroxide
Hox	homeobox
HS	haemal spine
HSP	heath shock protein
Hy	hypural(s)
ILT	incipient lethal temperature
IV	intervertebral space
K	kyphosis
KOH	potassium hydroxide
kV	kilovolt
l	left

logistf	Firth logistic regression
L	litre
L	lordosis
LKS	lordosis, kyphosis, scoliosis
LLT	lower lethal temperature
LRO	lysosome related organelles
μm	micrometre
m^3	cubic metre
mA	milliamps
min	minute
mm	millimetre
mM	millimolar
ml	millilitre
MET	mesenchymal-epithelial transition
Mfh	mesenchyme fork head
MMP	matrix metalloproteinase
nm	nanometre
nsh	notochord sheath
N	normal
NA	neural arch
NCH	notochord
NS	neural spine
NT	neural tube
NTC	notochord
NZKS	New Zealand King Salmon
opc	opisthural cartilage
<i>O.</i>	<i>Oncorhynchus</i>
OPT	optimum temperature
pap	parapophyses
ppm	parts per million
pERK	phosphorylated extracellular signal-regulated kinase
pS6	phosphorylated S6
Pax	paired box
PBS	phosphate-buffered saline
PH	parhypural
PH	post-hatch
PHy	parhypural

PFA	paraformaldehyde
PIT	passive integrated transponder
PLP	paraformaldehyde-lysine-periodate
Pre-zyg	pre-zygapophysis
Pst-zyg	post-zygapophysis
PU	preural
r	right
R	region
R	rib
RAS	recirculating aquaculture system
sec	seconds
smolt	freshwater pre-smoltification stage
spp	species
Sox	sex-determining region Y-related high mobility group box
S	scoliosis
SC	scar tissue
SD	standard deviation
SHH	sonic hedgehog
SIG	salmon improvement group
SMM	spinal malformation medium
SMS	spinal malformation severe
ST	stegural
SW	seawater
SW-6	six months in seawater
SW-12	12 months in seawater
T	time
TEM	transmission electron microscopy
TL	total length
TM	tail malformation
TNL	TNL International Ltd
Total	total deformities
U	ural
ULT	upper lethal temperature
UN	uroneural
UPR	unfolded protein response
UV	ultraviolet
vbi	vertebrae imperfecta

V	vertebra(e)
VE	vertebral endplate
VNA/S	vestigial neural arch/spine
VS	vertical shift of the entire vertebral centrum
WT	wild type

