

## An approach to unraveling the coexistence of snappers (Lutjanidae) using otolith morphology

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**Summary:** The sagittae otolith morphology of marine fishes has been used in many ecomorphological studies to explain certain ecological adaptations of species to habitat. Our study compares the sagittal otolith shapes of ten species of snappers (Family Lutjanidae) inhabiting the Persian Gulf. We used a morphometric analysis of the otolith measurements (length, height, perimeter, area and weight) and of the ratio between the area of the sulcus acusticus and the area of the otolith (S:O). The otolith contour was also analysed using wavelets as a mathematical descriptor. Morphological variations in the otoliths were associated with the morphology and external colouration of snappers as well as ecological traits. An analysis of the interspecific S:O ratio suggested that the highest ratios occurred in snappers inhabiting shallower waters. A categorical multivariate analysis, including morphological, ecological and otolith size factors, showed that the species adapted to dim light conditions had a greater otolith perimeter. An analysis of variance of the otolith contour revealed zones with a higher interspecific variability, although only the antero-dorsal zone showed differing patterns. Although the otolith patterns appear to have a phylogenetic component, they might also be related to diel activity rhythms or to the light conditions in the habitat. The results of the study showed that variation in otolith morphology can be used to explain the coexistence of sympatric species.

**Keywords:** otolith; morphology; biodiversity; functional ecology; snappers; Lutjanidae.

### Una aproximaci n a la compresi n de la coexistencia de pargos (Lutjanidae) a partir de la morfolog a del otolito

**Resumen:** La morfolog a del otolito sagitta de peces marinos se ha empleado en estudios de ecomorfolog a al objeto de explicar las adaptaciones ecol gicas de las especies al h bitat. Nuestro estudio compara la forma del otolito de diez especies de pargos (familia Lutjanidae) del Golfo P rsico. El an lisis morfol gico se realiz  a partir de medidas del otolito (longitud, anchura, per metro,  rea y peso) y la proporci n entre el  rea del sulcus acusticus y del otolito (S:O). Tambi n se analizaron los contornos de los otolitos mediante descriptores matem ticos denominados wavelets. Las variaciones morfol gicas en los otolitos se asociaron a la morfolog a y la coloraci n externa de los pargos, as  como a diversos caracteres ecol gicos. Las especies con valores m s elevados en la proporci n S:O habitan en aguas someras. El an lisis multivariante categor ico de factores, ecol gicos y morfol gicos del otolito (forma y tama o), puso de manifiesto que las especies adaptadas a condiciones tenues de luz presentan el per metro del otolito m s grande. El an lisis de varianza del contorno del otolito revel  la presencia de zonas con gran variabilidad inter-espec fica, si bien solo la parte antero-dorsal permiti  distinguir patrones claros de variaci n. Aunque dichos patrones parecen tener un componente filogen tico, tambi n estar an relacionados con el ritmo de actividad diaria o las condiciones de luminosidad en las que viven las especies. Los resultados del este estudio demuestran que la variaci n morfol gica del otolito puede ser usada para explicar la coexistencia de especies simp tricas.

**Palabras clave:** otolito; morfolog a; biodiversidad; ecolog a funcional; pargos; Lutjanidae.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sensory ecology acts as the interface between processes occurring within organisms and those occurring between organisms and their environment (Weissburg 2005). Fishes have a variety of sensory receptors that enable them to glean information from their surroundings (Atema et al. 1988). Among these receptors, the inner ear is associated with balance and sound detection (Popper and Fay 1993, Popper and Lu 2000). Usually, fishes are classified as hearing generalists if they can detect sound frequencies no greater than 1 to 1.5 kHz; they are classified as hearing specialists if they can detect sound frequencies greater than 1.5 kHz (Popper et al. 2003). Morphologically, the inner ear of teleostean fishes is essentially formed by three semi-circular canals and otolithic organs (sacculus, utriculus and lagena), within which are located the otoliths (sagitta, lapillus and asteriscus, respectively) (Assis 2003, 2005, Cermeño et al. 2006). The otoliths are acellular concretions of calcium carbonate and other inorganic salts developing over a protein matrix (Carlström 1963, Blacker 1969, Degens et al. 1969) and in close association with the sensorial macula (Platt and Popper 1981, Lychakov and Rebane 2000, Schulz-Mirbach et al. 2011). The otoliths, especially the *sagittae*, play an important role in inner ear functions (Platt and Popper 1981, Popper and Fay 1993, Popper and Lu 2000). Previous studies have indicated that the size of the *sagittae* is an adaptive factor associated with sensitivity to sound (Myrberg 1980, Montgomery and Pankhurst 1997, Paxton 2000, Cruz and Lombarte 2004). Fishes with large otoliths produce sounds and show highly developed intraspecific acoustic communication (Luczkovich et al. 1999, Holt 2002). These characteristics enable them to live in coastal and deep environments where visual and light communications are less important (Deng et al. 2011, 2013). Moreover, it has been reported that females can use the auditory sense to detect and locate vocalizing males during the breeding season and can change their hearing sensitivity depending on their reproductive status (e.g. Winn 1967, Sisneros and Bass 2003).

Many fishes vary morphologically among habitats. The variations depend on hydrostatic conditions, visibility, intraspecific competition, buoyancy and predation (Robinson and Wilson 1994, Jonsson and Jonsson 2001). Ecomorphology tries to understand how the ecology and evolutionary processes of an organism are related to its morphology (Luczkovich et al. 1995, Wainwright and Bellwood 2002). Most ecomorphological studies are focused on feeding mechanisms (Wainwright et al. 2001, Collar and Wainwright 2009) and locomotion patterns (Robinson and Wilson 1994, Pakkasmaa and Piironen 2000) because these factors may play a role in shaping the patterns of abundance and habitat distribution in fishes (Mittelbach 1984, Wainwright 1996). However, this scientific discipline has also been applied in otolithology because certain characteristics of otoliths (e.g. sulcus area, depth of the sulcus, sulcus area:otolith area ratio or shape) vary according to environmental, ontogenetic, phylogenetic

and ecological factors (e.g. Nolf 1985, Lombarte 1992, Lombarte and Leonart 1993, Paxton 2000, Gauldie and Crampton 2002, Volpedo and Echeverria 2003, Lombarte and Cruz 2007, Tuset et al. 2010, Reichenbacher et al. 2007, Lombarte et al. 2010, Teimori et al. 2012). However, it is not known how otolith shape variability affects hearing ability (Popper and Lu 2000, Popper et al. 2005).

The snappers (Lutjanidae) are a group of circum-tropical fishes comprising 23 genera and 123 species (Froese and Pauly 2011). Twelve species of snappers have been identified along the Iranian coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea (Assadi and Dehgani 1997, Valinassab et al. 2010). Ecologically, snappers play an important role in near-shore systems, including mangroves, seagrass beds and freshwater streams, and in open-water habitats, inside or around reefs (Aiken 1993, Appeldoorn and Meyers 1993, Cervigón 1993, Baisre 2000, Claro et al. 2001). These habitats play different roles in development and life history by serving as daytime refuges, feeding nurseries and/or nesting areas for many species, including snappers. They also offer pre-recruits and juveniles abundant food resources, less competition with adults and less predation (Druzhinin 1970, Thayer and Chester 1989, Nagelkerken et al. 2001, Cocheret et al. 2003). Recently, Sadighzadeh et al. (2012) demonstrated that otolith shape descriptors and morphometrics are useful for discriminating among *Lutjanus* species in the Persian Gulf. In this study, a novel methodology for analysing otoliths based on outline sections is developed.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sampling

Juvenile (close to the size of first maturity, according to the literature) and adult fishes were collected with bottom traps from January 2010 to December 2011 in the Persian Gulf commercial fishery (Fig. 1). A total of ten species of snappers *Lutjanus* spp. were collected and measured (total length, TL in cm). The sagittal otoliths were removed, washed, dried and stored in labeled plastic vials. Otoliths from the left side of the fish were oriented with the inner side (sulcus acusticus) up and digitized using a microscope attached to an image analyser. Large otoliths were directly digitized using a digital camera (Canon 450D with 24-105 mm lens). All images included an embedded millimeter scale (Fig. 2).

### Otolith morphometry

The area (OA in mm<sup>2</sup>), height (OH in mm), length (OL in mm), perimeter (OP in mm) and sulcus acusticus area (related to sensory macula area) (SA in mm<sup>2</sup>) were measured using Image-Pro Plus version 4.1.0 software (Media Cybernetics, Inc.). The otolith weight (OW in mg) was also obtained and included in the analysis (Table 1). Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Levene tests were used to check normality of the data distributions and variance homogeneity, respectively. The

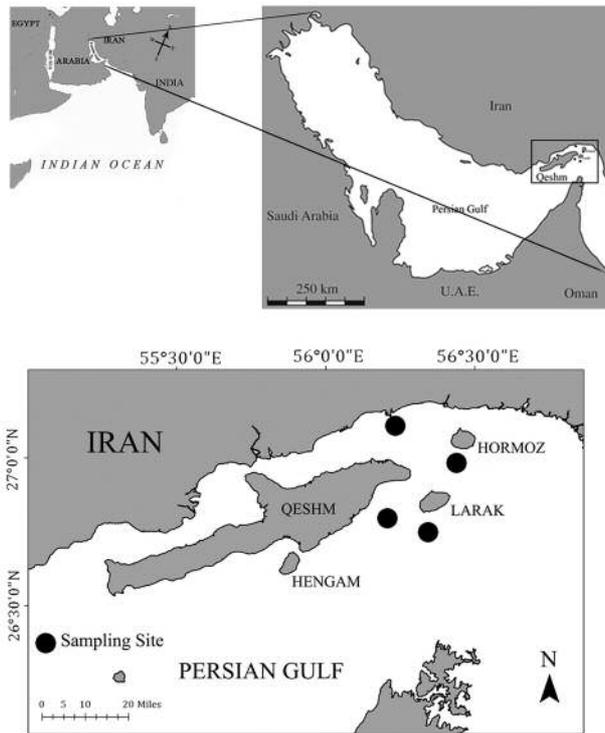


Fig. 1. – Map of the Persian Gulf (NE Indian Ocean) showing the study area where snappers were collected.

relationships between the fish length ( $X$ ) and otolith variables ( $Y$ ) were estimated using the power equation  $Y=aX^b$ , which was log transformed to estimate  $a$  and  $b$  with a simple linear regression. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to compare the slopes ( $b$ ) among species using a post hoc Tukey test. A one-way ANOVA was used to compare the ratio between the sulcus acusticus area and otolith area (S:O) among species (Gauldie 1988, Lombarte 1992). In all cases, variances were unequal at the 95% confidence level. Because the assumption of equal variances was rejected, Tamhane's  $T_2$  was used as a post hoc test. The statistical analyses were performed with the SPSS statistical package (SPSS Inc. 2010).

#### Interaction between otolith size and environment

To test the relevance of otolith size to the ecological role of snappers in the ecosystem, a multivariate analysis was performed with a categorical principal component analysis (CatPCA) (SPSS Inc. 2010). This procedure simultaneously quantified categorical variables and reduced the dimensionality of the data. A two-dimensional plot was then created to represent the morphological similarity of the categorical variables among snappers. The similarity between the variables was assessed on a nominal and numerical scale using the categories created at data collection (Meulman and Heiser 2005) (Table 2).

A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted with the morphometric measurements (OA, OH, OL, OP and SA) of the otoliths from all specimens to avoid multicollinearity. First, the effect of

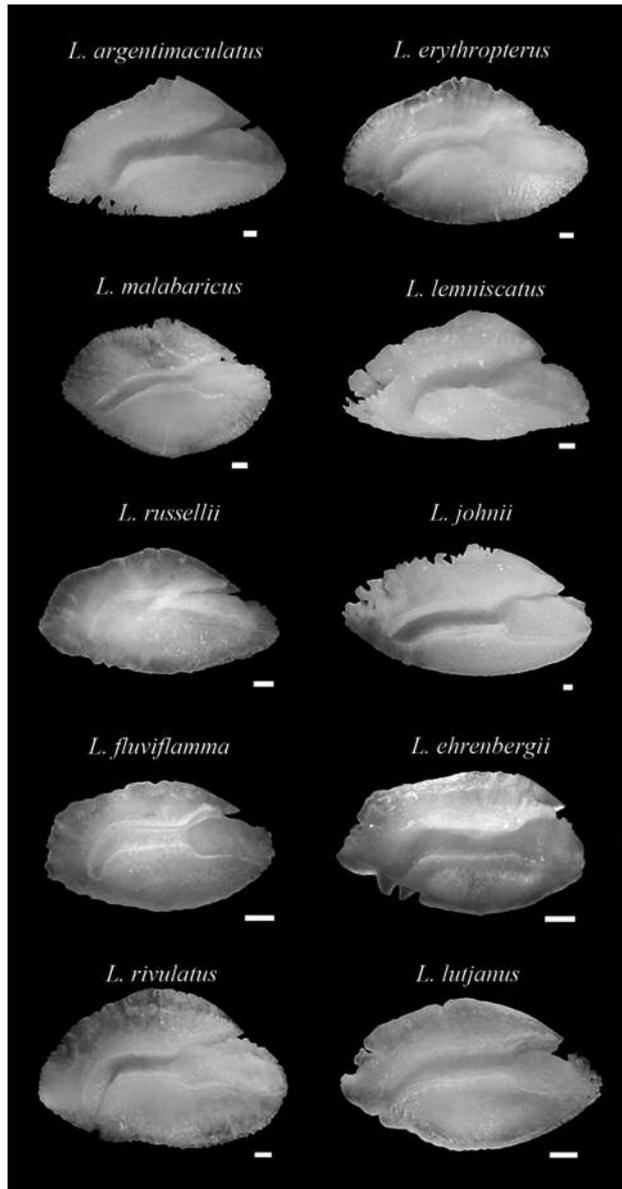


Fig. 2. – Sagittal otoliths of each species of snapper. Scale bars: 1 mm.

fish size on the otolith variables was removed according to Lombarte and Leonart (1993). The mean value of the variables for each species was then used in the PCA. Thus, the factors obtained were rescaled by dividing each observed value by the minimum value observed for that feature, yielding categorical values between 1 and 10. In addition, the following variables were also included in the CatPCA: visual field (adapted to light or dim light; species with nocturnal activity and species inhabiting turbid or deep habitats are considered species adapted to dim light conditions), environment (marine or euryhaline), depth distribution (coastal, deep or both), life history pattern (groups or primarily solitary) and visually contrasting markings (with spots on the body or lacking spots). The depth distribution was split into three categories; the remaining variables were each split into two categories. The ecological characteristics of each species are given in Table 2.

Table 1. – Summary of descriptive statistics of fish length and otolith size of snappers from the Persian Gulf. *L. argentimaculatus*, Llarg; *L. ehrenbergii*, Lehr; *L. erythropterus*, Lery; *L. fulviflamma*, Lflu; *L. johnii*, Ljoh; *L. lemmiscatus*, Llem; *L. lutjanus*, Llut; *L. malabaricus*, Lmal; *L. rivulatus*, Lriv; *L. russellii*, Lrus.

Variables		Llarg	Lehr	Lery	Lflu	Ljoh
Total length	min-max	423-802	146-260	316-523	176-260	167-754
	mean±sd	648.2±99.5	203.1±22.5	370.7±61.7	206.27±27.9	364.0±115.9
	min-max	67.8-174.7	18.12- 40.1	61.6-113.1	22.1-36.7	30.3-313.1
Otolith area	mean±sd	123.7±31.6	29.6±5.2	74.5±15.6	27.67±5.21	98.1±47.6
	min-max	7.4-12.5	3.8-5.7	7.7-10.0	4.3-5.5	5.1-15.5
	mean±sd	10.5±1.62	4.8±0.4	8.4±0.7	4.7±0.5	8.7±1.9
Otolith height	min-max	12.7-20.5	6.5-10.4	11.7-16.3	7.3-9.8	8.4-28.8
	mean±sd	17.0±2.4	8.6±0.8	12.9±1.4	8.2±0.8	15.1±3.8
	min-max	37.5-61.6	18.9-29.2	34.1-46.5	20.5-26.5	24.1-92.7
Otolith length	mean±sd	52.3±7.5	24.7±2.3	37.2±3.8	23.4±2.4	43.3±11.4
	min-max	0.16-0.83	0.03-0.11	0.15-0.38	0.04-0.11	0.05-2.20
	mean±sd	0.47±0.22	0.06±0.02	0.21±0.07	0.07±0.03	0.34±0.29
Otolith weight	min-max	0.55-0.69	0.51-0.61	0.61-0.68	0.53-0.64	0.53-0.66
	mean±sd	0.62±0.05	0.55±0.02	0.65±0.02	0.58±0.03	0.58±0.03
	Number	13	61	9	11	93
		Llem	Llut	Lmal	Lriv	Lrus
Total length	min-max	298-514	153-232	235-732	405-667	150-372
	mean±sd	379.8±61.7	195.7±19.7	317.6±86.0	484.9±84.0	250.8±54.4
	min-max	44.5-92.4	19.5-37.4	39.4-359.5	98.8-175.7	15.5-58.7
Otolith area	mean±sd	63.4±14.7	29.4±5.3	86.3±51.0	119.6±23.4	34.6±11.2
	min-max	5.9-8.7	3.9-5.5	5.9-17.3	9.3-12.5	3.5-7.0
	mean±sd	7.1±0.9	4.8±0.4	8.9±1.9	10.4±1.0	5.1±0.9
Otolith height	min-max	10.2-15.6	6.8-9.8	9.2-30.2	14.6-19.5	6.5-12.5
	mean±sd	12.8±1.5	8.5±0.9	13.3±3.3	16.6±1.5	9.6±1.7
	min-max	29.2-46.7	19.4-28.5	25.9-86.2	42.9-58.3	18.9-33.6
Otolith length	mean±sd	35.6±4.7	24.5±2.6	39.8±10.1	48.5±4.4	26.7±4.2
	min-max	0.10-0.40	0.04-0.11	0.10-2.45	0.33-0.86	0.02-0.16
	mean±sd	0.18±0.08	0.07±0.02	0.29±0.36	0.45±0.17	0.07±0.03
Otolith weight	min-max	0.51-0.62	0.54-0.60	0.57-0.72	0.63-0.68	0.47-0.58
	mean±sd	0.55±0.03	0.57±0.02	0.67±0.03	0.65±0.02	0.54±0.02
	Number	23	23	47	12	32

Otolith contour

The analysis of otolith shape was based on a mathematical descriptor, a wavelet (WT), related to the one-dimensional decomposition of the contour (Fig. 3). This procedure is based on expanding the contour into a family of functions obtained as the dilations and translations of a unique function known as a mother wavelet (Mallat 1991):

$$\psi_s(x) = \frac{1}{s} \psi\left(\frac{\varphi}{s}\right),$$

where  $\Psi_s$  is a function with a support occupying a limited range of the abscissa; choosing its shape adequately and setting a scaling parameter (s) allows the wavelet transform to detect singularities of different sizes in the function analysed. These functions describe the most prominent features of the curve (sharp transitions) in both space and wave number (Fig. 3) (Parisi-Baradad et al. 2005, 2010). To obtain the wavelets, a total of 512 Cartesian coordinates on each of the orthogonal projections of the otolith were extracted using Age & Shape software (Infaimon SL, Spain). Wavelet functions from 1 to 3 gave details of small variations of the otolith contour, whereas wavelet functions between 7 and 9 showed few contour features. Wavelet number 5 was selected as an intermediate function (Fig. 3). It was also used in a previous study to discriminate *Lutjanus* species (Sadighzadeh et al. 2012).

A graphical feature, the wavelet variance, was used for all species to find zones with higher variability that

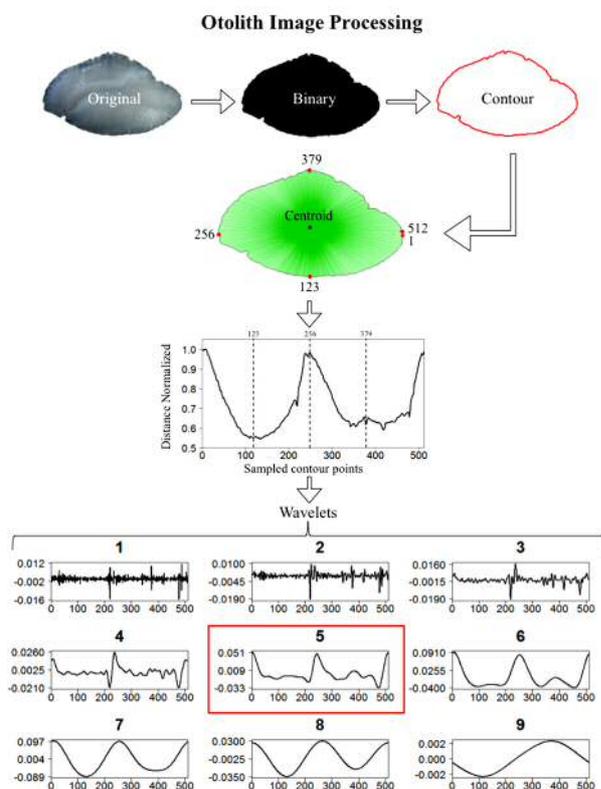


Fig. 3. – Scheme showing the procedure for obtaining wavelets.

Table 2. – Summary of ecological, functional, morphological and feeding characteristics of snappers in the Persian Gulf according to Allen (1985), Kuitert and Tonozuka (2001).

Species	Environment	Stage ontogenic	Habitat	Depth	Visual field	Life pattern	Feeding habits	Colouration and visual contrasting marks
<i>L. argentimaculatus</i>	Euryhaline	Juvenile	Mangroves, freshwater streams, tidal creeks	Coastal	Dim light	Groups	Fishes and crustaceans	Greenish brown on back, grading to reddish on sides and ventral parts. No spots
		Adult	Reef and mangroves	Deep				
<i>L. ehrenbergii</i>	Euryhaline	All	Coast and freshwater stream	Coastal	Light	Groups	Fishes and invertebrates	Often with a series of four or five narrow yellow stripes on the sides below the lateral line. Spots
<i>L. erythropterus</i>	Marine	Juvenile	Muddy substrates	Coastal	Dim light	Groups	Fishes, crustaceans and cephalopods	No spots
		Adult	Trawling grounds and reefs	Deep				
<i>L. fulviflamma</i>	Euryhaline	Juvenile	Mangroves, freshwater streams, tidal creeks	Coastal	Light	Groups	Fishes, shrimps, crabs and other crustaceans	A series of six or seven horizontal yellow stripes runs on the side, mainly below the lateral line. Spots
		Adult	Reef	Deep				
<i>L. johnii</i>	Euryhaline	Juvenile	Mangroves	Coastal	Light	Groups	Fishes, shrimps, crabs and cephalopods	Generally yellow with a bronze to silvery sheen. A large black spot
		Adult	Reef	Deep				
<i>L. lemniscatus</i>	Marine	Adult	Offshore reef and muddy habits	Deep	Dim light	Solitary	Fishes and invertebrates	Gray-brown or olive. No spots
<i>L. lutjanus</i>	Marine	Adult	Offshore reef and trawling grounds	Deep	Light	Groups	Fishes and crustaceans	Generally silvery white, with a broad yellow stripe running along the side from the eye to the caudal fin base. No spots
<i>L. malabaricus</i>	Marine	Juvenile	shallow inshores	Coastal	Dim light	Groups	Fishes, crustaceans and cephalopods	No spots
		Adult	Offshore reef	Deep				
<i>L. rivulatus</i>	Marine	Adult	Reefs, shallow flats, coastal slopes	Coastal and deep	Light	Groups	Fishes, crustaceans and cephalopods	Large adults brownish to grey. No spots
<i>L. russellii</i>	Euryhaline	Juvenile	Mangroves, freshwater streams	Coastal	Light	Groups	Fishes and invertebrates	Whitish or pink with silvery sheen. Spots
		Adult	Offshore and inshore reefs	Deep				

could indicate different patterns in the shape of the otolith. To determine whether this variability could group the species, a cluster analysis was performed based on quadratic Euclidean distance using Ward's method. To detect significant differences between the mean functions of groups, an ANOVA test was applied based on the analysis of randomly chosen one-dimensional projections (Cuesta-Albertos and Febrero-Bande 2010). This test is implemented in the function `anova.RPM` in the R library `fda.usc` (Febrero-Bande and Oviedo de la Fuente 2011). The p-values were obtained using 1000 bootstrap replicates.

## RESULTS

### Otolith morphometric analysis

All morphometric variables of the sagittal otoliths showed a good relationship with fish length for each species, with more than 75% of the variance explained, independently of sample size. Otolith area was the variable with the strongest relationship to fish length ( $r^2 > 0.870$ ), whereas the variation in otolith height was

more diverse among species (Table 3). The comparison of slopes showed no specific differences among species for any variables except in the case of *L. rivulatus* (Table 4). However, the comparisons based on the S:O ratio (Tamhane's T2 test,  $p > 0.05$ ) clustered the species into six groups in decreasing order of relative size (major to minor): 1) *L. lutjanus*, 2) *L. ehrenbergii* and *L. fulviflamma*, 3) *L. fulviflamma* and *L. russellii*, 4) *L. malabaricus*, *L. lemniscatus* and *L. johnii*, 5) *L. erythropterus* and *L. rivulatus*, and 6) *L. argentimaculatus* (Fig. 4).

The PCA reduced the otolith dimensions to two sets, OTO1 and OTO2, which were related to the otolith perimeter. The two-dimensional plot of the CatPCA analysis indicated that the first dimension was primarily influenced by environment, visually contrasting markings, the depth distribution and the otolith perimeter. The second dimension was influenced by the otolith morphometry (OTO1) and the visual field (Fig. 5). The total variance explained by the model was 65.8%, including 45.9% along the first dimension and 19.9% along the second. The increase in the depth distribution of the species was positively related to the absence of a spot (visually contrasting markings) on the body of

Table 3. – Power relationships between fish length and otolith variables for snappers from the Persian Gulf. OA, otolith area; OH, otolith height; OL, otolith length; OP, otolith perimeter; OW, otolith weight; TL, total length.

<i>L. argentimaculatus</i> (n= 13)		<i>L. ehrenbergii</i> (n= 61)		<i>L. erythropterus</i> (n= 9)		<i>L. fulviflamma</i> (n= 11)		<i>L. johnii</i> (n= 93)	
Equation	r <sup>2</sup>	Equation	r <sup>2</sup>						
OA=0.004 TL <sup>1.616</sup>	0.898	OA=0.011 TL <sup>1.485</sup>	0.870	OA=0.067 TL <sup>1.186</sup>	0.930	OA=0.023 TL <sup>1.333</sup>	0.908	OA=0.0164 TL <sup>1.469</sup>	0.979
OH=0.027 TL <sup>0.918</sup>	0.878	OH=0.097 TL <sup>0.733</sup>	0.814	OH=0.424 TL <sup>0.505</sup>	0.865	OH=0.107 TL <sup>0.712</sup>	0.803	OH=0.141 TL <sup>0.7005</sup>	0.968
OL=0.102 TL <sup>0.790</sup>	0.808	OL=0.119 TL <sup>0.807</sup>	0.867	OL=0.261 TL <sup>0.660</sup>	0.959	OL=0.164 TL <sup>0.734</sup>	0.907	OL=0.156 TL <sup>0.7772</sup>	0.978
OP=0.218 TL <sup>0.852</sup>	0.869	OP=0.403 TL <sup>0.774</sup>	0.810	OP=0.904 TL <sup>0.629</sup>	0.958	OP=0.511 TL <sup>0.717</sup>	0.868	OP= 0.484 TL <sup>0.7632</sup>	0.953
OW=2 10 <sup>-9</sup> TL <sup>2.962</sup>	0.866	OW=2 10 <sup>-7</sup> TL <sup>2.428</sup>	0.851	OW=4 10 <sup>-6</sup> TL <sup>1.818</sup>	0.972	OW=8 10 <sup>-8</sup> TL <sup>2.546</sup>	0.792	OW=7 10 <sup>-7</sup> TL <sup>2.1904</sup>	0.970

<i>L. lemniscatus</i> (n= 23)		<i>L. lutjanus</i> (n= 23)		<i>L. malabaricus</i> (n= 47)		<i>L. rivulatus</i> (n= 12)		<i>L. russellii</i> (n= 32)	
Equation	r <sup>2</sup>	Equation	r <sup>2</sup>	Equation	r <sup>2</sup>	Equation	r <sup>2</sup>	Equation	r <sup>2</sup>
OA=0.015 TL <sup>1.409</sup>	0.969	OA=0.003 TL <sup>1.743</sup>	0.902	OA=0.007 TL <sup>1.65</sup>	0.885	OA=0.187 TL <sup>1.044</sup>	0.891	OA=0.006 TL <sup>1.559</sup>	0.978
OH=0.081 TL <sup>0.754</sup>	0.931	OH=0.064 TL <sup>0.818</sup>	0.858	OH=0.105 TL <sup>0.771</sup>	0.829	OH=0.332 TL <sup>0.557</sup>	0.910	OH=0.078 TL <sup>0.759</sup>	0.951
OL=0.206 TL <sup>0.695</sup>	0.901	OL=0.062 TL <sup>0.933</sup>	0.887	OL=0.0823 TL <sup>0.883</sup>	0.912	OL=0.658 TL <sup>0.516</sup>	0.860	OL=0.132 TL <sup>0.777</sup>	0.969
OP=0.38 TL <sup>0.765</sup>	0.913	OP=0.135 TL <sup>0.985</sup>	0.891	OP=0.256 TL <sup>0.876</sup>	0.811	OP=3.426 TL <sup>0.429</sup>	0.584	OP=0.543 TL <sup>0.706</sup>	0.951
OW= 8 10 <sup>-8</sup> TL <sup>2.455</sup>	0.924	OW=2 10 <sup>-7</sup> TL <sup>2.469</sup>	0.745	OW=2 10 <sup>-7</sup> TL <sup>2.475</sup>	0.894	OW=4 10 <sup>-6</sup> TL <sup>1.893</sup>	0.950	OW=3 10 <sup>-7</sup> TL <sup>2.229</sup>	0.979

Table 4. – Otolith variables presenting significant differences (Tukey’s test) in the slope of relationships between fish length and otolith variables among snappers from the Persian Gulf. ns, not significant; OA, otolith area; OH, otolith height; OL, otolith length; OP, otolith perimeter; OW, otolith weight. Differences are significant (p<0.05) when otolith variables appear.

	L.arg	Lehr	Lery	Lflu	Ljoh	Llem	Llut	Lmal	Lriv	Lrus
<i>L. argentimaculatus</i> (Larg)	-									
<i>L. ehrenbergii</i> (Lehr)	OH	-								
<i>L. erythropterus</i> (Lery)	OW	ns	-							
<i>L. fulviflamma</i> (Lflu)	ns	ns	ns	-						
<i>L. johnii</i> (Ljoh)	ns	ns	ns	ns	-					
<i>L. lemniscatus</i> (Llem)	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-				
<i>L. lutjanus</i> (Llut)	ns	ns	OA	ns	ns	OL	-			
<i>L. malabaricus</i> (Lmal)	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-		
<i>L. rivulatus</i> (Lriv)	OH, OP	OP	OL	ns	OL, OP	ns	OA, OL, OP	OA, OL, OP	-	
<i>L. russellii</i> (Lrus)	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	OL	-

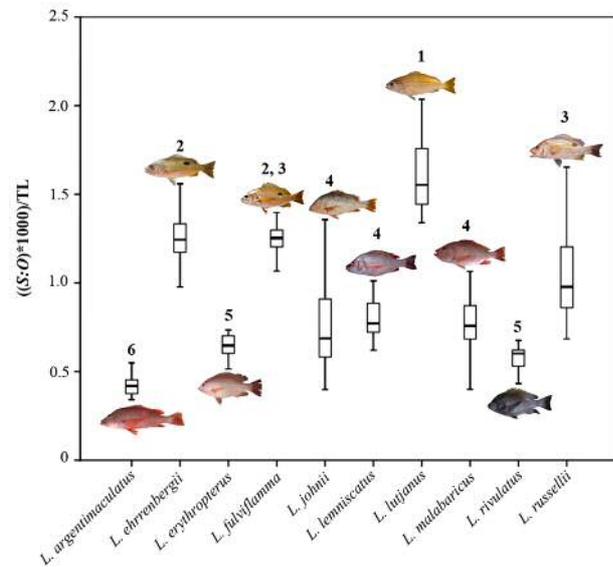


Fig. 4. – Box plots (maximum, minimum, upper and lower quartiles) for the sulcus acusticus area: otolith area ratio (S:O) for snappers from the Persian Gulf. Numbers indicate the corresponding group.

the fish. The species adapted to dim light conditions and deeper distribution had a greater otolith perimeter.

**Otolith contour**

The graphical illustration of wavelet number 5 showed specific variations associated with prominent features of the otolith contour (Fig. 6). An ANOVA indicated three zones with a high variability (Fig. 7A, B):

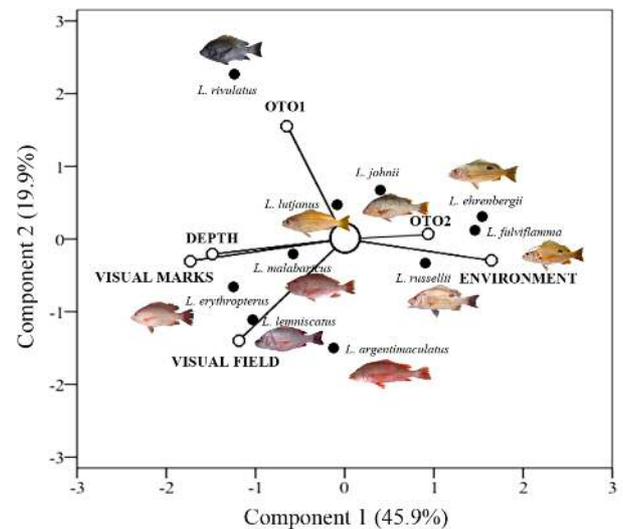


Fig. 5. – Scatterplot of the CatPCA analysis of ecological, functional and morphological factors influencing the ecomorphological distribution of snappers from the Persian Gulf.

posterior, antero-dorsal and excisura ostii. The posterior and excisura ostii zones were associated with development of the rostrum, anti-rostrum and post-rostrum. However, only the antero-dorsal zone of the wavelet (Fig. 7C) showed well-defined patterns. A cluster analysis grouped the species into three significant patterns (ANOVA, p<0.05) (Fig. 8A, B): 1) otoliths with a flattened antero-dorsal zone, e.g. *L. ehrenbergii*, *L. fulviflamma*, *L. lutjanus* and *L. rivulatus*; 2) otoliths with a slight development of the antero-dorsal zone,

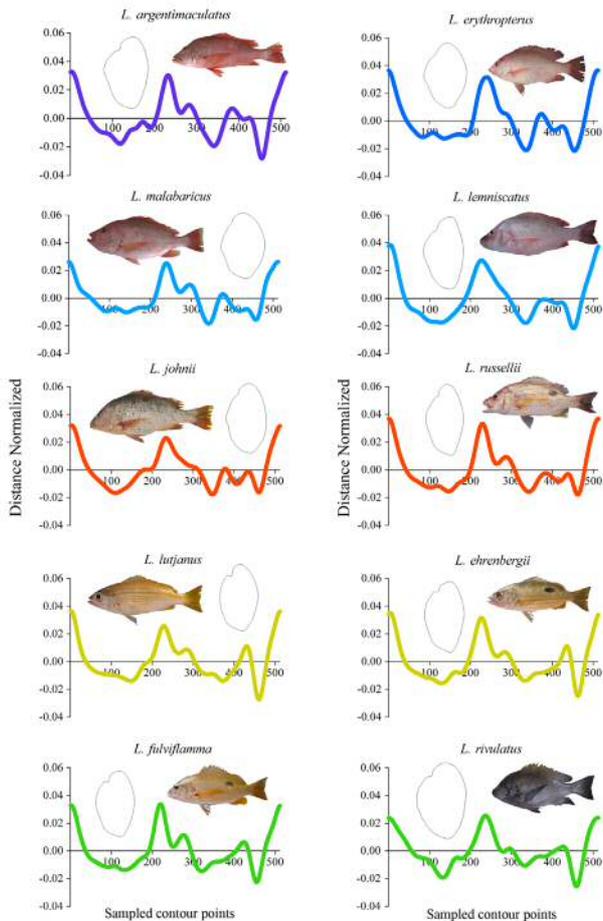


Fig. 6. – Signals of wavelet 5 from the otoliths of snappers from the Persian Gulf. Colours show the similarities between signals.

e.g. *L. russellii* and *L. johnii*; and 3) otoliths with an extensive development of the antero-dorsal zone, e.g. *L. argentimaculatus*, *L. erythropterus*, *L. malabaricus* and *L. lemniscatus*.

## DISCUSSION

The S:O ratio and otolith size are related to the hearing capabilities of marine fishes (Gauldie 1988, Montgomery and Pankhurst 1997) and ecological factors such as depth distribution, fish mobility and differences in food and spatial niches (Lombarte 1992, Aguirre and Lombarte 1999, Tuset et al. 2010). Our results stressed the relevance of the sagittal otolith characteristics to the ecomorphological characteristics, showing otolith shape patterns associated with functional and ecological factors.

Several species groups of snappers are recognized on the basis of morphology and external colouration, e.g. ‘blue-lined’, ‘black spot’ complex, ‘yellow-lined’ or ‘red-lined’. These groups are congruent with phylogenetic evolution (Miller and Cribb 2007). The fishes living in shallower water have acquired a tendency to be yellowish with stripes and form aggregations to avoid large predators. They also have larger eyes and bright colour patterns favouring visual communication. The otoliths are small, most likely to avoid the

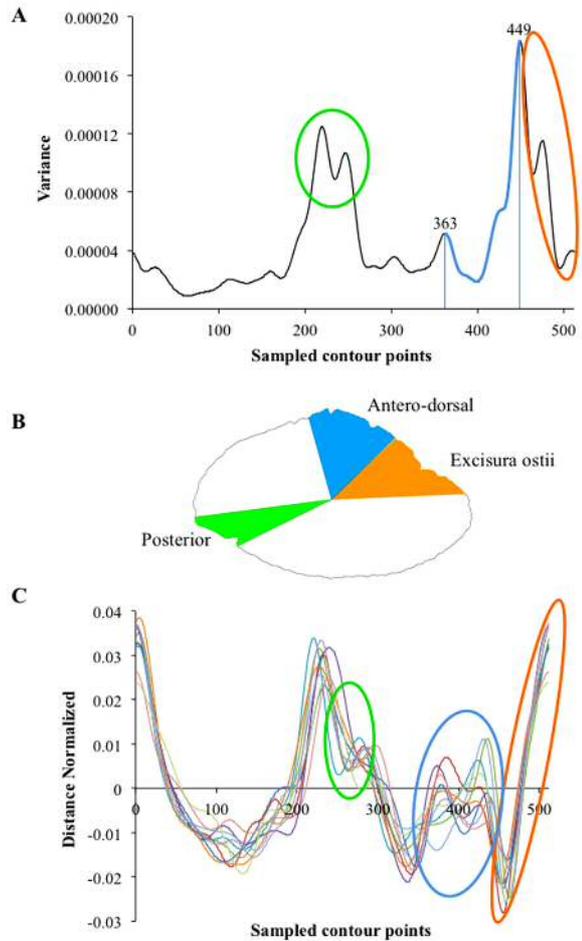


Fig. 7. — Graphics indicating zones with higher variability in wavelet 5. (A) variance for all species, (B) otolith contour, (C) wavelet 5 for each species.

background noise produced by rough seas (Paxton 2000, Volpedo and Echeverria 2003, Cruz and Lombarte 2004). In contrast, species inhabiting deeper or dimly illuminated waters have a darker colouration. Many are solitary, exhibit territorial behaviour, and possess larger otoliths (Volpedo and Echeverria 2003, Cruz and Lombarte 2004, Lombarte et al. 2010). This ecological pattern was clearly noted in the species studied, illustrating the relationship of morphology and external colouration vs. otolith size. Thus, the snappers of the ‘black spot’ complex and the ‘yellow-lined’ group (*L. ehrenbergii*, *L. fulviflamma*, *L. lutjanus* and *L. russellii*), which inhabit shallow waters (Druzhinin 1970, Kuitert and Tonzuka 2001), showed the highest S:O ratio and the smallest otolith size. The clade containing the ‘red-lined’ and ‘blue-lined’ snappers (*L. argentimaculatus*, *L. erythropterus*, *L. malabaricus*, *L. lemniscatus*, and *L. rivulatus*), which live in deeper or dimly illuminated waters and have a dark colouration (Allen 1985), showed the lowest S:O ratio and highest otolith size. *L. johnii* has characteristics common to both groups. Although it should have been closer to the ‘black spot’ species complex, it is genetically closer to *L. erythropterus* (Miller and Cribb 2007).

Species inhabiting environments with a limited visual field can increase their hearing capabilities (Lombarte

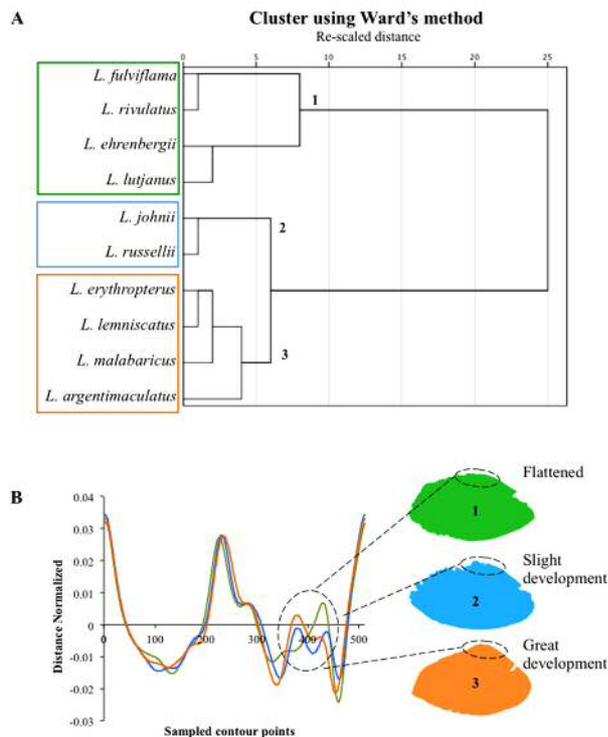


Fig. 8. – A, hierarchical clustering of snappers from the Persian Gulf using antero-dorsal zone; B, mean signal of wavelet 5 for each group showing the morphology of the antero-dorsal zone of the otolith. Numbers indicate the otolith patterns obtained.

and Fortuño 1992, Deng et al. 2013). The development of the ostial area of the sulcus acusticus region of the sagittal otolith is correlated with an increase in the proportion of horizontally oriented sensory hair cells (Popper and Coombs 1982, Ramcharitar et al. 2006), which may help to detect directional acoustic stimuli and to locate prey (Popper and Fay 1993). Moreover, the species that use environments with dim illumination tend to show increases in otolith size and adopt non-visual communication (acoustic or chemical) (Paxton 2000, Cruz and Lombarte 2004). Our study showed a relationship between the variations in the antero-dorsal area of the sagittal otolith of snappers and fish behaviour. A flattened shape was observed in *L. rivulatus*, which forages during the day, whereas extensive development of the antero-dorsal area was found in *L. argentimaculatus*, a species that is active at night (Martínez-Andrade 2003). Accordingly, we infer that *L. argentimaculatus*, *L. erythropterus*, *L. malabaricus* and *L. lemniscatus* (all 'red-lined') should be adapted to dim light conditions or nocturnal activity; *L. ehrenbergii*, *L. fulviflamma* ('black spot' complex), *L. lutjanus* ('yellow-lined') and *L. rivulatus* ('blue-lined') should be more active during the day; whereas *L. russellii* and *L. johnii* ('black spot' complex) should show a nocturnal-diurnal dichotomy. Thus, the diel activity rhythm facilitates coexistence between competitors extending beyond the effects of adaptation to different behavioral strategies and feeding habitats (Colmenero et al. 2010, Fox and Bellwood 2011, Azzurro et al. 2013).

The results presented here demonstrate that wavelet analysis is a very useful mathematical procedure for

ecomorphological studies in addition to its use in species discrimination (Parisi-Baradad et al. 2005, 2010, Sadighzadeh et al. 2012). The identification of otolith zones with high morphological variability implies that information on shape of the whole otolith may not be necessary for the identification of stocks or species or for ontogenetic or ecomorphological studies. These findings constitute a novel approach to species discrimination. Finally, discrimination of the activity of fishes will be essential for a better understanding of ecosystem functioning and the ecological roles played by fish species (Pulcini et al. 2008, Colmenero et al. 2010, Meakin and Qin 2011, Aguzzi et al. 2013).

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