
In the tropical and subtropical Pacific, swordfish, *Xiphias gladius*, about to spawn are found throughout the year but are most abundant from March to July (Palko et al. 1981). There is, however, little information on the reproductive potential of swordfish during their summer and autumn migrations into the Southern California Bight, a temperate region encompassing the principal U.S. west coast swordfish fishing grounds. In 1978 scientists from the Southwest Fisheries Center collected the gonads of swordfish harpooned in the Bight (from Point Conception to the United States-Mexico border) in order to determine sex ratios, gonad indices, and the reproductive condition of these fish.

**Methods**

Ninety swordfish were sampled from 25 August through 20 November 1978. After capture their gonads were preserved in 10% Formalin and, in the laboratory, were weighed to the nearest gram and their sex determined visually. Ovarian sections used in the histological analysis were obtained from segments removed from the centers of the ovaries. Segments were imbedded in Paraplast and 8 µm sections were cut, stained in iron hematoxylin, and counterstained in eosin.

Two gonad indices were calculated for each pair of ovaries to permit comparisons with two existing studies on the sexual maturity of Pacific swordfish. The first (from Uchiyama and Shomura 1974) is simply the percentage of the fresh weight of the ovaries to the total weight of the fish:

\[
GI = \frac{WTO}{WTF} \times 100 
\]

where \(GI\) = gonad index, \(WTO\) = fresh weight of both ovaries, and \(WTF\) = fresh weight of whole fish.

The second index (from Kume and Joseph 1969) is

\[
GI = (WL^3) \times 10^4
\]

where \(GI\) = gonad index, \(W\) = fresh weight of both ovaries in grams, and \(L\) = post-orbital fork length in centimeters.

Because the gonads used in this study were preserved, and thus subject to shrinkage and loss of weight, it was necessary to estimate their fresh weight using the relationship (from Uchiyama and Shomura 1974):

\[
Y = e^{\ln X - 0.155} \
\]

where \(Y\) = estimated fresh weight of ovaries, and \(X\) = weight of preserved ovaries.

The estimated weight loss due to preservation was as high as 7%.

**Results and Discussion**

All 90 swordfish collected were mature with fork lengths ranging from 133 to 218 cm. Of these, 23 (26%) were males and 67 (74%) were females for a sex ratio of 0.34:1 (M:F). Although the proportion of females varied among months, our sample sizes were too small to demonstrate such variation.

Female swordfish in our sample all had gonad indices that were considerably lower than those of comparable studies. Uchiyama and Shomura (1974) collected 16 pairs of ovaries from swordfish caught near Hawaii and found three pairs to be ripe. These had gonad indices (from Equation (1)) of 6.4, 8.4, and 9.8 whereas our highest value (from Equations (1) and (3)) was 1.0. Kume and Joseph (1969) examined 362 pairs of ovaries from swordfish captured in the eastern Pacific (east of long. 130°W) and found two ripe specimens whose gonad indices (from Equation (2)) were 10.8 and 11.1. By comparison, the highest from our study (from Equations (2) and (3)) was 1.8. These results indicate swordfish in the Southern California Bight during our sampling period were not spawning.

A histological analysis was performed on a subset of 16 pairs of ovaries from our sample. Histological analyses can be used to determine not only if a fish...
is in spawning condition but, also, if it has recently
spawned (Hunter and Maciewicz 1985). Ovaries from
our sample contained no mature oocytes and, in
addition, did not contain abundant atretic oocytes
indicative of the resorption process. Instead the
ovaries were in the regressed stage and contained
primary oocytes lining connective tissue septa. These
results indicate that the swordfish were reproduc-
tively inactive during the sampling period and for
at least a month or two before capture. Although this
conclusion does not preclude the possibility of spawn-
ing early in the year, swordfish then are scarce. Also
water temperatures favorable for spawning (Palko
et al. 1981) are not widespread in the summer and
autumn, and are virtually nonexistent the remainder
of the year.

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