

## ALLOMETRY AND BIOCHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF HORNED EYED GHOST CRAB *OCYPODE BREVICORNIS* FROM SOUTHEAST COAST OF INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Ghost crabs are the macro fauna species which recurrently rest in sandy shores. The present study deals with the estimation of biochemical composition and relationship between carapace length/width-body weight and condition factor (K) of the ghost crab *Ocypode brevicornis* collected from Pattinapakkam, Chennai, South east coast of India. Each crab was separated based on sex and measured. Proximate composition of ghost crabs showed that they had higher protein content  $60.8 \pm 1.81\%$  followed by carbohydrate  $27.4 \pm 0.29\%$  and lipid  $8.96 \pm 0.73\%$  respectively. Parameters of relationship between body weight and carapace length were calculated using the log form of the allometric growth equation. The values of the correlation coefficient (R<sup>2</sup>) were  $W=1.1623 + 2.5675 CL$  in males and  $W= 1.1238 \pm 2.6343 CL$  in females. The value of  $a>1$  which showed positively allometric in both sexes. The condition factor (K) which is dependent on environmental factors of the crab showed the K factor between two sexes varies significantly, it was 1.02 in males and 0.80 in females. The current study underscores the baseline data about carapace length – body weight relationship and the essential sustenance of ghost crab. The study evaluates to contribute to generate information to demonstrate the allometric relationship of the ghost crab. The findings of the study give pertinent information, crucial for the productive management and utilization of this species.

**Keywords:** Allometry, Condition factor, Ghost Crab, Protein, Lipid, Carbohydrate

### INTRODUCTION

The crustaceans belonging to phylum Arthropoda show an enormous diversity ranging from small planktonic forms to the giant crabs (Susanto, 2021). They are of great commercial significance to humans as food, health, environment and indicator species (Szaniawska and Szaniawska, 2018). A vast array of smaller species contributes to the complexity and functioning of the ecosystem in addition to the importance of a tremendous variety of larger species for human consumption (Hamed *et al.*, 2012). Ghost crab belonging to genus *Ocypode* is present enormously on sandy beaches in both tropical and temperate regions all over the world. They have box shaped bodies (trapezoidal) with thick and elongated eyestalks and one claw larger than the other in both sexes. They are not real land crabs, but they have adapted to semi-terrestrial environments through a variety of morphological, physiological, and behavioral changes. Ghost crabs are capable of progressively changing their body color to adapt to their habitat and the time of day but most species have pale bodies that blend in nicely with the sand (Rathbun, 1918; Green, 1964; Poore, 2004). They are crucial scavengers in sandy beaches, feeding on a variety of organic matter that gets washed ashore (Nagarajan *et al.*, 2022). In addition, they have evolved the ability to adapt heavy metal stress presenting as an abundant bioindicator species (Budijastuti *et al.*, 2023).

Allometry is the oldest method widely functional in biology, and is concerned with the study of the relationship between size in terms of physiology, morphology, life history and functioning of individual

body components and development or size of the whole body (Rowland, 2022). In general, characteristics like metabolic rate, dispersion ability, survival probability, and fecundity can be predicted using differences in body mass across individuals or species. Morphometric measurements serve as a practical tool for both taxonomists and ecologists help inspecting intra and inter specific morphological variations and also complements well with genetic and environmental stock identification methods (Costa and Gomes, 2008; Cadrin, 2000). Determining the growth patterns of aquatic creatures along their developmental routes can also be accomplished in larger manner (Oluwatoyin, 2013). Length-weight relationships allow the conversion of growth-in-length equations to growth-in-weight for use in a stock assessment model precisely for making the most of its use.

Several investigations have been performed around the world regarding the chemical composition and nutritional properties of crab meat (Kucukgulmez *et al.*, 2006; Adeyeye, 2002). Crabs are rich in protein having low levels of fat and cholesterol, and are particularly high in critical macro and trace components such vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, and amino acids making them highly nutritious for human consumption (Barrento *et al.*, 2010). The biochemical analysis provides important information for facilitating the aquaculture industry in different aspects such as farming, fattening, or processing crab products (Baklouti *et al.*, 2013; Gökoolu and Yerlikaya, 2003). Crab tissue comprises distinct amino acids that form the fundamental basis for human growth and functions. It promotes parthenogenesis and treatment of many diseases including rheumatoid arthritis. *Omega-3* polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) are principally from marine lipids which are crucial for protecting cardiac health. The crab meat is loaded with high levels of PUFAs (Celik *et al.*, 2004; Ramamoorthy *et al.*, 2016). Infrequent use of shellfishes (crab) in our country is notably due to inexperience in cooking and conservative food habits. Hence the present study attempts to study the interrelationship between various morphometric characters, carapace length in males and females, and the ghost crab's nutritional profile to promote increased use of these species in greater quantities and evaluate their potential as functional food.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The site of study, Foreshore Estate (13°02'N, 80°27'E) also known as Pattinapakkam is one of the most crowded beaches in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India along the Bay of Bengal located at the southern part of Marina beach and extends up to 437 m (1,434 ft). Besides being the major tourist attraction in the city, it is also the most familiar area for fish catching with its rich biodiversity and swarms an exceedingly crowded fish market. Regular field visits were conducted in the months of October and November for collection of samples with the assistance of fishermen early in the morning due to lesser human disturbance and better weather conditions and then transported to the laboratory for further analysis.



**Figure 1: Male Ghost Crab**



**Figure 2: Female Ghost Crab**

In order to study sexes separately, sample crabs were segregated based on abdomen shape: male crabs with a V-shaped abdomen, while females with round-shaped abdomen (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) (Dai, 1991). Vernier

calipers with an accuracy of 0.01 mm and a digital balance (0.001 g) were used to measure carapace length (CL) and total weight (BW). The relationship between the carapace length-weight is indicated by the mathematical calculation (Rickter, 1973).

$W = aCL^b$  where W is the total weight (g), CL is the Carapace length (mm) (a) the intercept (b) the slope or allometric growth coefficient. The data were converted on a natural log to fit linear or straight line of log length and log weight. The equation can be demonstrated logarithmically as  $\text{Log } W = \log a + b \log CL$  (King, 1995). Linear relationships between carapace length and body weight were assessed for male and female crabs. To ascertain the strength of association in the linear regression, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was chosen. The Fulton's condition factor (K) was calculated from  $K = (BW/CW^3) * 100$  for both females and males separately (Fulton, 1911); where BW denoted total body weight (g) and CW denoted Carapace width (mm).

#### **Estimation of Protein** (Lowry et al., 1951)

The biochemical composition of total protein content of crab meat was estimated by employing the Folin-Ciocalteu method with a sample weighing around 100 mg homogenized in 80% ethyl alcohol and centrifuged at 4000 rpm for 10 minutes. The precipitate was re-dissolved in 4 ml of 1N NaOH solution and 5 ml of freshly prepared alkaline copper solution and allowed to stand for 20 minutes. 1N NaOH solution and 0.1% bovine serum albumin (W/V) served as blank and standard solution respectively and OD was read at 650 nm using a UV visible spectrophotometer.

#### **Estimation of Lipid** (Folch et al., 1957)

10 mg of dried powder sample was taken in a test tube containing 5 ml of chloroform and methanol (2:1) mixture and incubated at room temperature for 24 hours. Later, the mixture was filtered using filter paper and collected in a 10 ml pre-weighed beaker, which was kept on the hot plate. The chloroform methanol mixture evaporated leaving a residue at the bottom of the beaker. The weight of difference was calculated to know the weight of the lipid in the sample.

#### **Estimation of Carbohydrate** (Dubois et al., 1956)

The sample weighing 100 mg was homogenized with double distilled water and centrifuged for 10 minutes at 3000 rpm. To the supernatant, 1 ml of 5 % phenol solution and 5 ml of concentrated sulfuric acid was added and it was allowed to stand for 30 minutes and OD was measured at 490 nm using D-glucose as standard.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

India's economy greatly depends on the coastal ecology because of abundant resources, productive habitats, and rich biodiversity. Crustaceans are extensively employed in studies of relative growth. Ghost crabs belonging to the genus *Ocypode* have been extensively utilized for management and conservation purposes as a dependable bio-indicator species of human impacts on sandy beaches (Wolcott, 1978; Gul and Griffen, 2018). Due to the growing population densities, individual sizes decline dramatically under human pressure. In this study, the interrelationships between morphometric characters such as carapace length and body weight in males and females were analyzed. Among the specimens collected, it is noted that the number of females were drastically higher than the number of males. Maximum length of about  $4.89 \pm 0.01$  cm and a weight of  $77.5 \pm 0.5$  gm was observed in male ghost crabs *Ocypode brevicornis*. Similarly maximum length of  $5.05 \pm 0.05$  cm and weight of  $72.15 \pm 0.05$  gm was observed in female ghost crabs. The results showed that the ghost crabs had positive allometry growth with increasing length and body weight (Table. 1)

Regular variations in the "b" value in the length-weight relationship between different environments has been already reported (Ozaydin and Taskavak, 2006). These variations may be due to the influence of physiological, behavioral, and environmental factors such as feeding patterns, foraging, and temperature. In the present study, the calculated "a" value was  $>1$ . Similar results were observed in *Portunus pelagicus* (Josileen, 2011) and *Callinectes danae* (Araujo and Lira, 2012) showing a positive allometry in both the sexes. Supportive data was seen on the relationship between carapace length/ width-body weights of the red ghost crab *Ocypode macrocera* where the carapace length and width were found to be linearly related

to body weight and seem to be highly significant ( $P < 0.001$ ) in each case. Similarly, in this investigation the slope (a) and the regression coefficient value (b) of the length versus weight and width versus weight relationship indicated positive allometric growth. A positive allometric length-weight relationship specifies that, weight increases, as and when the carapace length increases (Dubey *et al.*, 2014). The calculated correlation coefficient “r” of males and females indicated a positive correlation between weight and length and the “p” value (0.1) indicated that the variables were not significant.

**Table 1: Parameters of the relationship ( $W = aL^b$ ) and Fulton’s condition factor (K) for Ghost Crab *Ocypode brevicornis***

n	Sex	Carapace Length (CL) (cm)	Carapace Width (CW) (cm)	Body Weight (BW) (gm)	Regression equation (BW = a+b CL)	R <sup>2</sup>	K value	P-Value
		Mean ± SE	Mean ± SE	Mean ± SE			Mean ± SE	
20	Male	4.52 ± 0.09	4.32 ± 0.11	56.96 ± 6.05	W=1.1623 + 2.5675 CL	0.103	1.02 ± 0.09	0.534
20	Female	4.62 ± 0.17	4.46 ± 0.20	51.4 ± 6.38	W= 1.1238 ± 2.6343 CL	0.546	0.80 ± 0.07	0.154

**Table 2: Proximate Composition of Ghost Crab *Ocypode brevicornis***

Protein %	Carbohydrate %	Lipid %
Mean ± SE	Mean ± SE	Mean ± SE
60.8 ± 1.81	27.4 ± 0.29	8.96 ± 0.73

The condition factor is usually used in order to compare the condition, heaviness or well-being of marine organisms. The condition factor is highly influenced by exogenous (e.g., environmental factors) and endogenous parameters (e.g., feeding rate, growth rate, sexual cycle, etc.) and may vary over time and across populations (Froese, 2006; Pinheiro and Fiscarelli, 2009). Several factors can affect length-weight relationship including sample size, size-weight distributions, sampling time, and ecological conditions (Aydin, 2018). In ghost crab *Ocypode brevicornis* the condition factor was 1.02 in males and 0.80 in females. Oocyte development and growth in females requires much more energy than gonadal development in males which results lower condition factor in females and the values were in accordance with other findings (SumanKumari *et al.*, 2019; Noori *et al.*, 2015). Indirectly, temporal changes in the condition of the crabs caught in the area are also reflected in changes in the Fulton condition coefficients (Czerniejewski, 2010). The results will be useful in comparing the different stocks of the same species at different geographical locations as well as in the examination of ontogenetic shifts and various other factors of fish or crustacean population dynamics (Lagler, 1968). The study is also perceived to establish precise mathematical equations between length and weight, so that if one is measured, the other dimension could be computed.

Biochemical studies are very important from a nutritional point of view and biochemical constituents in animals are known to vary with season, size of the animal, stage of maturity, temperature, and availability of food etc. The proximate composition of protein was higher 60.8±1.81% followed by carbohydrate 27.4±0.29 % and lipid 8.96±0.73% respectively. Protein is essential for the sustenance of life and accordingly exists in larger quantities (Okuzumi and Fujii, 2000). The acceptability and easy digestibility

of crab proteins make them very valuable in combating protein malnutrition, especially in children. Crab's protein ability to promote growth gives it a high biological value (Sakthivel *et al.*, 2014). Carbohydrates are a group of organic compounds including sugars, starches, and fiber, which are major source of energy necessary for growth of animals (NRC, 1993). Some environmental and physiological factors including seasons and feed intake affect the levels of carbohydrates in fish. However, compared to terrestrial species, aquatic animals use carbohydrates at a very modest rate (Wang and Chen, 2016; NRC, 1993; Zodape, 2023). The biochemical estimation of total carbohydrate values showed significant levels.

In crustaceans, lipids are essential for maintaining cellular integrity and serve as the primary organic reserve and precursor to hormones, eicosanoids, and enzyme cofactors and source of metabolic energy to transports fat-soluble vitamins (Tocher, 2003; Zhao *et al.*, 2015). Crab meat is highly beneficial for expectant mothers as it helps to develop the cell membrane of the brain. The results of biochemical analysis obtained in this study will be essential in providing basic information regarding nutrition and health benefits of ghost crab consumption. In terms of biology and management of fisheries, constant observation of natural stocks is essential for sustainable ecosystem management. Culturing crab will serve as income generation as well as protein production for people (Olusoji *et al.*, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

These investigations are therefore, believed to be necessary in order to keep an eye on the region's crab supplies. In addition, the findings of this study will constitute an important database for future studies related to the ghost crab species. Allometry study reveals fundamental data for any species to assess the stock management system in aquaculture. Despite their smaller size, the proximate composition of the ghost crab *Ocypode brevicornis* results were promising and showed they are loaded with high nutritive profile.

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