Study of the composition of seminal fluid and of sperm motility along the genital tract during a spawning season in the rainbow trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss).

Malgorzata Koldras, Maurice Loir, Gérard Maisse, Florence Le Gac

To cite this version:

Malgorzata Koldras, Maurice Loir, Gérard Maisse, Florence Le Gac. Study of the composition of seminal fluid and of sperm motility along the genital tract during a spawning season in the rainbow trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss) . Aquatic Living Resources, 1996, 9, pp.337-345. 10.1051/alr:1996036 . hal-02684699
Study of the composition of seminal fluid and of sperm motility along the genital tract, during a spawning season, in the rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)

Małgorzata Koldras (1), Maurice Loir (2)*, Gérard Maisse (2) and Florence Le Gac (2)

(1) Inland Fisheries Institute, 32-640, Zator, Poland.
(2) INRA, Physiologie des Poissons, 35042 Rennes Cedex, France.
*Address for correspondence: M. Loir, E-mail: ml@rennes.inra.fr.

Received July 3, 1996; accepted September 17, 1996.


Abstract

Sperm was collected from testes and from three or four parts of the deferent ducts of 4 to 6 winter-spawning male rainbow trout, about every two weeks over a three month period (January to March). Milt volume, spermatocrit, sperm motility, 11-ketotestosterone (11-KT) and 17α-hydroxy,20β-dihydroprogesterone (17,20P) levels and ionic composition were determined. Steroids and ions were also measured in blood plasma. The K⁺ concentrations and steroid levels in the seminal fluid from each part of the ducts did not vary significantly over the period of study. In two out of the three parts of the ducts, Na⁺ (parts I and III), Ca²⁺ (parts I and III) and Mg²⁺ (parts I and II) levels were significantly higher at the end of March than two months earlier. Motility of testicular sperm peaked (42%) in mid-February while that of sperm from ducts usually remained stable (80 to 100%) throughout the three months.

Seminal fluids and blood plasma were confirmed to be isotonic (300 mmol/kg). Levels of K⁺, Na⁺, Ca²⁺, 11-KT and 17,20P in the plasma and seminal fluid differed significantly (respectively 0.3 vs 34 mmol, 134 vs 116 mmol, 3.4 vs 2.0 mmol, 87 vs 13 ng/ml, 11 vs 3 to 13 ng/ml), with the Na⁺ and steroid levels being positively correlated in both liquids. Osmolality, Cl⁻, Na⁺, K⁺, Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺ concentrations remained constant along the genital tract. In contrast, spermatocrit and 11-KT and 17,20P levels decreased significantly and progressively from testis to the posterior or middle part of the ducts (respectively 97 to 49%, 39 to 17 ng/ml, 13 to 3 ng/ml) while sperm motility (percentage of motile cells and duration of motility) increased (74 to 96% and 41 to 51 s). No significant correlation was found between sperm motility and the studied physicochemical parameters of the seminal fluid.

Keywords: Trout, sperm motility, seminal fluid, hormones, ions, steroids.

Résumé

Le sperme testiculaire et celui contenu dans les canaux déférents, divisés en trois ou quatre parties, ont été collectés sur 4 à 6 mâles de truite arc-en-ciel de souche hivernale, environ toutes les deux semaines pendant trois mois (Janvier à Mars). Le volume de sperme, le spermatocrit, la motilité des spermatozoïdes, les concentrations en 11-ketotestosterone (11-KT) et en 17α-hydroxy,20β-dihydroprogesterone (17,20P), ainsi que la composition ionique, ont été déterminés. Les deux stéroïdes et les ions ont aussi été mesurés dans le plasma sanguin. Les concentrations en K⁺ et en stéroïdes dans le fluide séminal de chacune des parties des canaux déférents n’ont pas varié significativement pendant la période étudiée. Dans deux parties sur trois des canaux déférents, les concentrations en Na⁺ (parties I et III), en Ca²⁺ (parties I et III) et en Mg²⁺ (parties I et II) étaient significativement plus élevées à la fin Mars que deux mois plus tôt. La motilité des spermatozoïdes testiculaires était maximale (42%) à la mi-Février, tandis que celle des spermatozoïdes des canaux déférents restait stable pendant les trois mois (80 à 100%).

*Aquat. Living Resour.* ISSN 0990-7740/96/$ 7.00© IFREMER-Gauthier-Villars
Il a été confirmé que le fluidé séminal et le plasma sanguin sont isotoniques (300 mmol/kg). Les concentrations en K⁺, Na⁺, Ca²⁺, 11-KT et 17,20P dans le plasma sanguin et le fluidé séminal différaient significativement (respectivement 0,3 et 34 mmol, 134 et 116 mmol, 3,4 et 2,0 mmol, 87 et 17 à 39 ng/ml, 11 et 3 à 13 ng/ml). Les concentrations en Na⁺ et en stéroïdes dans les deux milieux étaient corrélées. L’osmolarité et les concentrations en Cl⁻, Na⁺, K⁺, Mg²⁺ et Ca²⁺ restaient constantes tout au long du tractus génital. Par contre, la spermotocrit et la concentration en 11-KT et en 17,20P diminuaient progressivement des testicules à la partie postérieure des canaux (respectivement 97 à 49%, 39 à 17 ng/ml, 13 à 3 ng/ml), alors que la motilité des spermatozoïdes (pourcentage de cellules mobiles et durée de la motilité) augmentait (74 à 96% et 41 à 51 s). Il n’a pas été trouvé de corrélation significative entre la motilité des spermatozoïdes et les paramètres physicochimiques du fluidé séminal.

**Mots-clés :** Truite, spermatozoïdes, motilité, fluidé séminal, hormones, ions, stéroïdes.

**INTRODUCTION**

Some studies have provided information about the osmolality, ionic composition and steroid concentrations of seminal fluid from ejaculated milt in salmonid fish, some of them comparing this with blood plasma (Morisawa et al., 1983; Morisawa, 1985; Piironen, 1985; Munkittrick and Moccia, 1987; Malejat et al., 1990; Loir et al., 1990; Lahnsteiner et al., 1992). Seminal fluid is mainly characterized by a far higher K⁺ concentration than that of blood plasma, which is responsible for the suppression of sperm motility (Billard, 1975; Benau and Terner, 1980; Morisawa et al., 1983; Morisawa, 1985). Steroids may be involved in the control of the ionic composition of the seminal fluid and of the volume of milt (Baynes and Scott 1985; Marshall and Bryson, 1988; Marshall et al., 1989).

Contradictory reports occur concerning the evolution of the physicochemical parameters of salmonid milt throughout the breeding season, the differences perhaps reflecting interspecies or interstrain variations. While the fertility of sperm from a spring-spawning trout strain does not decrease at the end of the breeding season (Maise et al., 1988), it decreases for a winter-spawning strain (Billard, 1976). As the breeding season progresses, spermotocrit, motility, seminal plasma ion concentrations (Munkittrick and Moccia, 1987), ATP and cAMP levels (Benau and Terner, 1980) decline in the trout, while in the Finnish landlocked salmon, some of these parameters either increase continuously or show specific changes (Piironen, 1985).

Very little information has been published that describes the changes which occur along the salmonid genital tract, for various physicochemical parameters of milt (Morisawa and Morisawa, 1986; Billard and Cosson, 1992; Morisawa et al., 1993; Loir et al., 1990). For one trout strain, intratesticular sperm are active in fertilization, but sperm from the deferent duct are significantly more active (Billard, 1976). When the motility of testicular trout spermatozoa is checked after dilution of K⁺ in the presence of a low concentration of Ca²⁺, the motility and the pattern of flagellar movement of these sperm are comparable to those of sperm in the semen (Billard and Cosson, 1992). However, the motility of testicular spermatozoa is close to zero when checked in the absence of Ca²⁺ (Miura et al., 1992; Maise et al., 1995). The gametes then acquire the potential for motility during the transition from the testis to the sperm duct as a consequence of increases of seminal fluid bicarbonate concentration and of 17α-hydroxy-21β-dihydroprogesterone (17,20P) which is mediated through an increase in sperm duct pH (Morisawa and Morisawa, 1986, 1988; Miura et al., 1992; Morisawa et al., 1993). These observations indicate the importance of divalent cations and the possible role of steroids in the control of sperm motility. In mammals, steroids have been shown to modify Ca²⁺ exchange across the spermatozoan membrane and induce ultimate maturational events in the gametes (Meisel and Turner, 1991; Blackmore et al., 1990).

The present study has been undertaken in order to address the following two questions: which physicochemical and biological milt parameters vary throughout the breeding season and which parameters undergo changes along the trout genital tract? Is there any relationship between these changes and the maturation and/or ageing of sperm, as estimated by sperm motility? Such knowledge would be useful for fish farming management and especially for handling and storage of salmonid sperm.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Fish and collection of milt samples from the genital tract**

The experiments were carried out on male rainbow trout at the INRA experimental fish farm, in Drennec (Brittany).

**Experiment 1**

A total of 28 spawning winter-spawning males were used. They were 3 years old (average weight 2.9 kg) and sexually mature for the first time. They were kept in freshwater tanks under natural photoperiod, without any feeding during the experiment. Water temperature varied from 5.5 (January) to 8.5°C
Characterization of milt from the trout genital tract

Sperm motility

Sperm motility was determined by subjective estimates ofpercentage of motile sperm cells and by the duration of motility (length of time before most cells became immotile; Billard and Cosson, 1992) according to Billard and Cosson (1992; 100 fold dilution then 20 fold dilution directly on the microscope slide; light microscope, magnification x 160). Motility was tested in diluent for artificial insemination (DIA 532: 100 mmol NaCl, 50 mmol glycine, 20 mmol Tris; Billard, 1977) and in 4 solutions containing 0, 5, 10 and 20 mmol KCl plus respectively 120, 115, 110 and 100 mmol NaCl. pH of the above 5 solutions was adjusted to 9.0 and osmolality was equal to 250 mmol/kg.

Osmolality and ion measurements

The osmolality of blood and seminal fluids was measured with a vapour pressure osmometer (Wescor 5000). The concentrations of sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium were determined using an atomic absorption spectrophotometer (Varian AA-1275). Fifty to 100 μl samples were appropriately diluted to fit in the range 0.5-2.0 ppm. Sodium and potassium levels were measured in the presence of 2 mmol HCl and 30 mmol CsCl. Calcium and magnesium were measured in the presence of 2 mmol HCl and 0.6% lanthanum.

Steroid hormone measurement

Steroids were assayed in blood plasma and seminal fluid after extraction with ethylacetate:cyclohexane (50:50). The radioimmunoassay for 17,20P was performed according to Fostier and Jalabert (1986). Cross-reactivities with progestagens and other steroids were equal to or less than 2% (expressed as the ratio of the mass of 17,20P to the mass of steroid required to decrease bound level of the tracer to half its value without competitor). The sensitivity was 50 pg/ml. The radioimmunoassay for 11-KT was performed as described by Fostier et al. (1982). The main cross-reactivity with other androgens was under 2%. The sensitivity was 50 pg/ml. For both steroids, the intra-assay coefficients of variation were under 10%.

Data analyses

All parameters were expressed as arithmetical means±1.96 SEM or ±standard deviation. Relationships between particular parameters were characterized using correlation coefficients and were considered to be significant at the level of p=0.01. Paired-sample t-test and Mann-Whitney U-test were employed to analyze differences between means, which were considered to be significant at the level of p≤0.05.

Experiment 2

Nine spermiating autumn-spawning males were used on December 3rd. They were gently anaesthetized in the tanks, without being netted, with 0.018% phenoxyethanol. Blood was collected and plasma processed as indicated above. Milt was collected from deferent ducts and testes as above, with the following modification. The anterior juxtatesticular portion of each deferent duct was divided in 2 equal parts with a third clamp. Thus, every duct was divided into 4 parts (I, II, III, IV). "Spermatocrit 1 000 g" was measured. The tubes were then centrifuged again at 3 000 g for 10 min and the supernatants were collected and frozen. The osmolality and the concentrations of 11-KT and 17,20P were assayed in every blood plasma and seminal fluid sample.

Aquat. Living Resour., Vol. 9, n° 4 - 1996
RESULTS

Changes of milt parameters during the spermiation period (experiment 1)

During the period of study, the twin deferent ducts contained large volumes of milt. The mean total milt volume obtained from the ducts and this volume expressed per kg body weight (Fig. 1) do not vary significantly between sampling times. Individual values varied between 10 and 82 ml. Throughout the period, about as much milt was stored in the ducts as was contained in the testes (Fig. 1). The highest individual total volume of milt collected from a whole genital tract (testes plus deferent ducts) was 159 ml.

The K⁺ concentrations (Fig. 2) in seminal fluid from each part of the duct and in blood plasma were stable, especially from Jan. 22th to March 24th. Blood plasma Na⁺ (Fig. 2) displayed its lowest mean concentration at the beginning of February. In at least parts I and III of the deferent ducts, the mean Na⁺ levels were significantly higher on March 24th than 2 months earlier. While the mean Cl⁻ concentration in blood plasma showed moderate variations (125 to 148 mmol) which paralleled those of plasma Na⁺, the mean concentration of this ion in the ducts did not show significant changes.

Mean blood plasma Ca²⁺ level (Fig. 3) was significantly lower in the March 24th sample than in that from January 7th. Seminal Ca²⁺ levels fluctuated below the plasma level, with the exception of the last sampling time when they were maximal and not significantly different from the blood level. In parts I and III of the deferent ducts, the mean Ca²⁺ levels were significantly higher on March 24th than two months earlier. The Mg²⁺ levels (Fig. 3) in seminal fluids from the deferent ducts and in blood were not different and quite stable with the exception of the last sampling time when in parts I and II the Mg²⁺ levels were significantly higher than two months earlier and than in blood.

Mean blood plasma 11-KT level (Fig. 4) was maximal at the beginning of February. Plasma levels of 17,20P (Fig. 4) which did not vary until the end of February, increased, with large individual variations, at the end of March. From the end of January to the end of March the ratio 17,20P:11-KT increased progressively being equal to 0.07, 0.08, 0.14 and 0.44 respectively. In every part of the genital tract, the 11-KT levels (Fig. 4) were stable throughout the period of study and generally significantly lower (p<0.01) than the blood levels with the exception of the testis value in March. At least in parts I and II of the deferent ducts, the 17,20P levels (Fig. 4) were higher in March than one month and a half earlier (Feb. 10th). In parts II and III of the deferent ducts, 17,20P levels were significantly lower than in blood plasma in January 22th and February 10th.

Figure 1. – Changes of the body weight and of the volume of milt collected, per kg body weight, from a genital tract (testes plus deferent ducts), from a pair of testis and from the deferent ducts. Mean ± standard deviation (n = 6, or 4 for the last sampling time).

Figure 2. – Changes of the Na⁺ and K⁺ concentrations in blood and in the seminal fluid over the sampling period and along the genital tract. Mean ± standard deviation (n = 6, or 4 for the last sampling time). In January, no testicular fluid could be obtained. Blood K⁺ concentrations were around 0.3 mmol.

Figure 3. – Changes of the Ca²⁺ and Mg²⁺ concentrations in blood and in the seminal fluid over the sampling period and along the genital tract. Mean ± standard deviation (n = 6, or 4 for the last sampling time). In January, no testicular fluid could be obtained.
Characterization of milt from the trout genital tract

In January, no testicular fluid could be obtained. Percentages of motile testicular spermatozoa (Fig. 5) peaked at the beginning of February, i.e. at the time of highest plasma 11-KT levels, and just before the largest volume of milt could be collected from the genital tract. These percentages then decreased until the end of March. The percentages of spermatozoa from the deferent ducts motile in DIA 532 and in the 0, 5 and 10 mmol KCl solutions (Fig. 5 for part III; parts I and II which displayed similar variations of the motility of sperm are not shown) did not vary significantly between January and March. During this period which corresponded to the middle of the period of spermiation, 20 mmol K\(^+\) completely inhibited sperm cell motility.

Milt parameter changes along the genital tract

**Experiment 2**

Blood osmolality was equal to 298±6.7 mmol/kg (n=9). Seminal fluids from testes and from the 4 parts of the deferent ducts had similar osmolality, equal to about 285 mmol/kg (284±3.6 to 287±6.4). “Spermatocrit 1000 g” (Fig. 6) decreased progressively from the testes to the posterior part of the ducts.

Due to the occurrence of low and high steroid levels, the nine males were classified into 2 groups according to the relative concentrations of 17,20P and 11-KT in blood plasma. For the 1st group (A; 5 males), the mean ratio 17,20P:11-KT was equal to 0.09 (0.03-0.14) in the blood. In the 2nd group (B; 4 males), the relative level of 17,20P was about four-fold higher, i.e. the mean ratio was equal to 0.38 (0.29-0.70). Based on the data obtained by Baynes and Scott (1985) and on the steroid data presented above for experiment I, group B males were assumed to be more advanced in their individual spermiation period. This was also suggested by a higher mean milt volume obtained from the twin deferent ducts: 20.7 ml (16-30) vs 14.7 ml (4-22).

Aquat. Living Resour., Vol. 9, n° 4 - 1996
The mean concentrations of the 2 studied steroids, in seminal fluids along the genital tract of the two groups are shown in Figure 6. The decrease already observed in experiment 1 (Fig. 4 and Table 1) was confirmed for both steroids. In addition, it appeared that along the genital tract both steroid levels decreased proportionally faster than the spermatoocrit.

In group A, the mean 11-KT level in testis fluid was about half that of the corresponding blood plasma level. In group B the two values were similar. In contrast, in both groups, 17,20P is 2 to 3-fold more concentrated in testis fluid than in blood plasma.

**Experiment 1**

For each parameter, values obtained at the last four sampling times were pooled for statistical analyses of changes along the genital tract. As observed in experiment 2, mean osmolalities of blood plasma and seminal fluid from the different parts of deferent ducts and from testes did not differ significantly and varied around 300 mmol/kg (Table 1). As in experiment 2 and as already observed by Morisawa and Morisawa (1988), the spermatoocrit decreased significantly from the genital tract for 17,20P, twice as high in testis fluid as in blood plasma, and decreased regularly between testis and the posterior part of the deferent duct. A similar decrease was observed along the genital tract for 17,20P, but, in contrast to 11-KT, the testicular 17,20P level was high than the plasma level. In the seminal fluid, 17,20P level was positively correlated to Mg^{2+} level (p < 0.001) and to the spermatoocrit (p < 0.01) when the localization along the deferent duct was not taken into consideration (values from parts I to III were pooled). However, because these two correlations were not significant in each part of the duct, this suggests that 17,20P levels may not be functionally related to Mg^{2+} level and to the spermatoocrit.

The values measured in each of the 3 parts of the ducts for osmolality, Na^{+}, Cl^{-}, 11-KT and 17,20P were positively correlated (p < 0.001) with the respective blood plasma values. There was no such correlation significantly higher concentrations than in the fluids from the genital tract (Table 1).

High individual variations were observed in the steroid levels measured in blood plasma and seminal fluids. However, 11-KT mean concentrations were twice as high in blood plasma as in testicular seminal fluid, but decreased regularly between testis and the posterior part of the deferent duct. A similar decrease was also observed along the genital tract for 17,20P, but, in contrast to 11-KT, the testicular 17,20P level was higher than the plasma level. In the seminal fluid, 17,20P level was positively correlated to Mg^{2+} level (p < 0.001) and to the spermatoocrit (p < 0.01) when the localization along the deferent duct was not taken into consideration (values from parts I to III were pooled). However, because these two correlations were not significant in each part of the duct, this suggests that 17,20P levels may not be functionally related to Mg^{2+} level and to the spermatoocrit.

The values measured in each of the 3 parts of the ducts for osmolality, Na^{+}, Cl^{-}, 11-KT and 17,20P were positively correlated (p < 0.001) with the respective blood plasma values. There was no such correlation significantly higher concentrations than in the fluids from the genital tract (Table 1).

High individual variations were observed in the steroid levels measured in blood plasma and seminal fluids. However, 11-KT mean concentrations were twice as high in blood plasma as in testicular seminal fluid, but decreased regularly between testis and the posterior part of the deferent duct. A similar decrease was also observed along the genital tract for 17,20P, but, in contrast to 11-KT, the testicular 17,20P level was higher than the plasma level. In the seminal fluid, 17,20P level was positively correlated to Mg^{2+} level (p < 0.001) and to the spermatoocrit (p < 0.01) when the localization along the deferent duct was not taken into consideration (values from parts I to III were pooled). However, because these two correlations were not significant in each part of the duct, this suggests that 17,20P levels may not be functionally related to Mg^{2+} level and to the spermatoocrit.

The values measured in each of the 3 parts of the ducts for osmolality, Na^{+}, Cl^{-}, 11-KT and 17,20P were positively correlated (p < 0.001) with the respective blood plasma values. There was no such correlation significantly higher concentrations than in the fluids from the genital tract (Table 1).

High individual variations were observed in the steroid levels measured in blood plasma and seminal fluids. However, 11-KT mean concentrations were twice as high in blood plasma as in testicular seminal fluid, but decreased regularly between testis and the posterior part of the deferent duct. A similar decrease was also observed along the genital tract for 17,20P, but, in contrast to 11-KT, the testicular 17,20P level was higher than the plasma level. In the seminal fluid, 17,20P level was positively correlated to Mg^{2+} level (p < 0.001) and to the spermatoocrit (p < 0.01) when the localization along the deferent duct was not taken into consideration (values from parts I to III were pooled). However, because these two correlations were not significant in each part of the duct, this suggests that 17,20P levels may not be functionally related to Mg^{2+} level and to the spermatoocrit.
for K⁺, Ca²⁺ and Mg²⁺. This suggests that the concentrations of these latter ions in the seminal fluid are probably regulated independently of their blood levels. In each of the three parts, 1) the Na⁺ concentration was positively correlated to Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺ concentrations (p<0.01), while it was not in blood, 2) Ca²⁺ and Mg²⁺ concentrations were positively correlated (p<0.01), and they were also in blood, 3) the spermatocrit was positively correlated to the Mg²⁺ concentration (p<0.01). This last correlation may suggest that the damaging of spermatozoa may have contributed to the increase in the seminal Mg²⁺ level.

When sperm motility was tested (Table 2) in DIA or in "0 mmol KCl" solution, about one third of the testicular spermatozoa were motile. Percentage of motile sperm cells in DIA 532 and in "0 mmol KCl" solution and the duration of motility increased from testes to part III of the ducts. In all parts of the genital tract, as little as 5 mmol KCl significantly decreased the percentage of motile sperm cells and 20 mmol KCl completely inhibited sperm motility everywhere. Sensitivity of motility to inhibition by 10 mmol KCl did not differ along the genital tract. Indeed, in each part about 10% of the sperm motile in DIA 532 were still motile in 10 mmol KCl and duration of motility was also reduced in similar proportion.

While the percentage of motile spermatozoa and the duration of motility in DIA increased along the deferent ducts, spermatocrit and 17,20P level declined. Observed negative correlations between the percentage of motile cells and 17,20P level in duct seminal fluid (p<0.001) or spermatocrit values (p<0.01), probably reflect independent changes.

No correlation was found between parameters of sperm motility as estimated in this study and the ionic components, the osmolality or the 11-KT level of the seminal fluid.

DISCUSSION

Changes of milt parameters during the spermatiation period

The concentrations of monovalent ions in seminal fluid from each part of the ducts either were stable (K⁺, Cl⁻) or increased in March (Na⁺). Munkittrick and Moccia (1987) had observed that the concentration of monovalent ions in seminal fluid of trout semen declined as the spermatiation season progressed, while Piironen (1985) observed an inverse change in semen of landlocked salmon. In both studies, semen was obtained by hand-stripping and the changes the authors observed for osmolality and ion changes may be due to varying amounts of urine contamination (Rana, 1995).

The observed changes of 11-KT and 17,20P levels in blood plasma are in agreement with data obtained in rainbow trout by Baynes and Scott (1985) and in amago salmon by Sakai et al. (1989b) who have observed that plasma levels of testosterone and 11-KT peak before 17,20P peaks. In addition, Baynes and Scott (1985) have concluded 1) that periods of maximum plasma 17,20P concentrations correspond to those of maximum milt production (milt obtained by hand-stripping) and 2) that there could be a positive correlation between blood plasma 17,20P levels and the ratio of K⁺:Na⁺ in seminal fluid (idem). In our study, 1) the mean volume of milt stored in deferent ducts was maximal one month (Feb. 24th) before maximum blood plasma 17,20P levels, and 2) the mean ratio K⁺:Na⁺ in the various seminal fluids was maximal (0.28-0.32 vs 0.25-0.27) when blood plasma 11-KT concentrations were high (Jan. 22th and Feb. 10th). However, the studies are hardly comparable because 1) the strains were different, 2) in our study the same fish were not sampled over the period, 3) the methods used to estimate milt production differed and 4) the method we used to collected milt avoided contamination by urine.

Milt parameter changes along the genital tract

The 17,20P and 11-KT levels decreased along the genital tract, proportionally faster than the spermatocrit. This suggests that the decrease in sex steroid concentrations is not only due to dilution by secretion of seminal fluid, but results also from additional unknown events such as re-absorption, degradation, binding and metabolization of steroids by sperm cells and/or cells of the ducts. Whereas the level of 11-KT in testis fluid either was similar to that in blood plasma or lower, the level of 17,20P was higher in testis fluid than in plasma. Androgens are secreted by Leydig cells (Loir, 1990), i.e. by cells located outside the germinal compartment. Conversely, although it cannot be excluded that 17,20P is also produced in small amounts by interstitial cells (Loir, 1990) this progestagen is mainly produced in the germinal compartment by spermatozoa (Sakai et al., 1989a) and spermatogenic cells (Vizziano et al., 1995) which convert 17a-hydroxyprogesterone. This difference in origin of androgens and 17,20P probably explains that testicular levels of 17,20P are higher than the plasma levels while it is the inverse situation for 11-KT.

Mean osmolalities of blood plasma and seminal fluid were around 300 mmol/kg. Isotonicity of both fluids in the trout has been observed when milt was obtained directly from the deferent duct, either by opening the abdomen (Morisawa et al., 1983) or by catheterization (Rana, 1995). In contrast, when milt was collected by hand-stripping, lower osmolality values were obtained for seminal fluid, due to 5-80% dilution by urine, even when care was taken to avoid such contamination (Piironen, 1985; Munkittrick and Moccia, 1987; Malejac et al., 1990; Rana, 1995).

Most of the values we obtained for the ion levels were close to those previously found (Morisawa, 1985;
Baynes and Scott, 1985; Marshall, 1986), except for the blood plasma K⁺ level that was ten-fold lower than that found by Morisawa (1985), possibly reflecting the low K⁺ level present in the water at the fish farm. K⁺ and Mg²⁺ levels significantly higher in the testes fluid than in the deferent duct fluids may result from the damaging of the spermatozoa and the release of intracellular ions during the extraction of this particular fluid. Similar artefacts have been observed in seminal fluid ion concentrations after damaging of spermatozoa by freeze-thawing (Schmehl et al., 1987).

Motility of sperm from testis and from deferent ducts was completely inhibited with 20 mmol K⁺. Billard and Cosson (1992) observed the same inhibiting effect on ejaculated sperm with 40 mmol K⁺, with the exception of the beginning and the end of the period of spermation, as spermatozoa were motile even in the presence of 80 mmol K⁺. One third of the testicular spermatozoa were motile in DIA 532. When Billard and Cosson (1992) assayed motility of sperm from trout testes just at the end of spermatogenesis, they observed that 10% of sperm cells were motile. Miura et al. (1992) have reported that, in masu salmon, sperm from spermiating testes are immotile. This could reflect species differences but more probably this reflects differences in the dilution media used for those assays.

No correlation was found between the studied parameters of sperm motility and the studied physicochemical parameters of the seminal fluid. However, motility parameters such as flagellar beat frequency or trajectory shape (Billard and Cosson, 1992) were not measured and an effect on these parameters cannot be excluded. In the present state of our knowledge, no ionic constituent of the seminal fluid, with the exception of proton (pH; Morisawa and Morisawa, 1990; Miura et al., 1992) and bicarbonate concentration (Morisawa and Morisawa, 1990) seems to influence the acquisition of sperm motility, the percentage of motile spermatozoa and the duration of movement in trout. Sperm motility is supported by intracellular ATP resulting from glycolysis and catabolism of triglycerides (Lahnsteiner et al., 1993). Benau and Terner (1980) observed that the intracellular content of ATP decreases during the breeding season and that the shortest duration of motility was when level of ATP was low. This suggests that investigation of the changes of energy metabolites in spermatozoa and seminal fluid during the spermiation period would probably provide information about the semen components which could influence sperm motility.

CONCLUSION

Our results confirm that the ionic and steroidal composition of the seminal fluid differs conspicuously from that of the blood plasma and that active processes of secretion and reabsorption are probably involved in its regulation. For some parameters (osmolality, Na⁺, Cl⁻, 11-KT, 17,20P), the values in seminal fluid were correlated with those in blood plasma, while they were not for others (K⁺, Ca²⁺, Mg²⁺); this suggests that diverse mechanisms control the composition of the seminal fluid. Finally, no seminal fluid parameter was identified to which sperm cell motility would be functionally related. Further studies of possible relationships between the major parameters of sperm movement (beat frequency, sperm velocity, diameter of sperm trajectories; Billard and Cosson, 1992) and inorganic and organic constituents of seminal fluid and spermatozoa are needed to identify which constituents influence sperm motility, i.e. sperm quality from the point of view of artificial salmonid fertilization.

Acknowledgments

This work was financially supported by the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique. The authors are grateful to the staff of the INRA fish hatchery for help and cooperation.

REFERENCES


Aquat. Living Resour., Vol. 9, n° 4 - 1996
Characterization of milt from the trout genital tract


