



Parasite Analysis of Native and Non-native Fish in the Angeles National Forest

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
WESTERN ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH CENTER

Parasite Analysis of Native and Non-native Fish in the Angeles National Forest

By Manna Warburton¹, Boris Kuperman², Victoria Matey², and Robert Fisher¹

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[¹San Diego Field Station
USGS Western Ecological Research Center
5745 Kearny Villa Road, Suite M
San Diego, CA 92123]

[²Center for Inland Waters
Biology Department
San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive
San Diego, CA 92182]

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GALE A. NORTON, SECRETARY

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Charles G. Groat, Director

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For additional information, contact:

Center Director
Western Ecological Research Center
U.S. Geological Survey
7801 Folsom Blvd., Suite 101
Sacramento, CA 95826

Introduction

Southern California is a region of strong biological contrasts in aquatic environments. We possess a highly depauperate and endemic native fauna (Moyle, 2002), and a correspondingly diverse exotic fauna. Over the last century California waterways have been exposed to over 140 different exotic fish species, 58 of which have successfully reproducing populations in the state (Swift et al. 1993; Dill & Cordone, 1997). There has been much debate regarding the net good or bad caused by such introductions, however little attention has been paid to the invisible riders accompanying these exotic fish and the unintended and less observable effects of their introduction. These invisible riders are the parasite and disease fauna of the numerous exotic fish species that have been and continue to be introduced throughout the state (Lafferty, 1997).

In an attempt to explore the status and distribution of the introduced parasite fauna of both exotic and native fishes on forest service land, we sampled fishes from 3 watersheds draining the Angeles National Forest. Funding from the Angeles National Forest contributed to a portion of a larger study that covers 13 watersheds from the Santa Clara River to the Tijuana River (Table 1). In this report we highlight our findings in the Angeles National Forest but are also making available our larger dataset which includes information from all watersheds surveyed.

Potential consequences of the presence of specific parasite species in waterways on forest land include but are not limited to: elimination or degradation of fisheries resources through fish kills and reduction in aesthetic value of catchable animals, elimination or degradation of native aquatic resources and hindrance of conservation and restoration efforts in aquatic environments. Fish kills of unarmored threespine stickleback due to white spot disease (an extremely virulent hatchery disease) have been reported from San Francisquito Canyon as early as 1995 (Chen, 1995). Most native parasite species are not capable of the effects described above, and such effects are generally attributed to a short list of parasites classified as commercially significant, all of which would be considered to be exotic or alien species within the Angeles National Forest.

Methods

Fish sampling methods consisted of multiple seine hauls at multiple locations within each study site using a 3 meter by 1.2 meter net with 3 mm mesh. Dip netting was employed to supplement seine hauls when appropriate. Dip nets were also 3 mm mesh size. Efforts were sustained until approximately 20 individuals of each species detected (not including T&E species) had been collected from a study location. In certain circumstances when we were unable to collect 20 individuals of a given species from a single location, parasite analysis was conducted on lower numbers of specimens. Information from specimens included in this report were collected from December 5th 2000 to February 6th of 2002.

Specimens were transported live to the Biology Department of San Diego State University where they were examined for parasites. Parasite examination of all specimens included examination of fins, skin, gills, body cavity and major organs. Only

live or freshly caught fish were examined. The fish was measured (standard length in cm.), and any wounds, deformities, scale abnormalities and tumors were noted.

External examination:

Visual analysis was followed by a microscopic examination of mucus scrapings for parasitic protozoans. Body surface and eyes were examined visually and under the dissecting microscope for parasitic protozoans, crustaceans and monogeneans. The nasal cavities were irritated and resultant fluid was examined under the dissecting microscope. The fins, tail, and gills were examined visually and under the dissecting microscope followed by an examination under a compound microscope for parasitic protozoans, monogeneans and crustaceans. All parasitic organisms found were collected, identified and counted separately. Parasites selected for light microscopy (LM) and scanning electron microscopy (SEM) were fixed in appropriate fixative solutions.

Internal examination:

Following visual examination, each fish was examined for internal parasites. First, the body cavity was opened and examined visually. Internal organs such as heart, liver, spleen, kidneys, gonads, gall bladder and swim bladder were dissected out, placed in separate containers and then dissected and examined using dissecting and compound microscopes. The gastrointestinal tract was removed, split from mouth to rectum and examined for parasites in the lumen and attached to the walls. All helminthes were collected, counted, examined with a dissecting and compound microscopes, and then fixed for LM and SEM.

Identification of parasites was based on the LM and SEM data. Specimens selected for LM were fixed in 70 % ethanol, AFA, or 5% formalin, stained with hematoxylin, and examined with a Diastar microscope. Specimens of protozoans and helminths selected for SEM, were fixed in Karnovsky's solution, processed according to standard methods, and examined with a Hitachi S-2700 scanning electron microscope.

Prevalence, mean intensity, abundance and infection sites for each parasite were determined for each species of parasite.

Results

Results at All Sites:

In examinations of 21 fish species consisting of 1933 individual specimens from 13 watersheds we detected at least 23 parasite species, 4 of which were confirmed to be exotic species of commercial significance.

Results at Angeles Forest Sites:

In examinations of 11 fish species from three watersheds (Table 2) we detected at least 9 separate parasite species (Table 3), many of which were native and only identifiable to family or genus. Due to the variable numbers of specimens and species captured at sample locations, no conclusions regarding the absence of a given parasite species within a drainage were inferred.

Three commercially significant parasites were detected by our surveys and they are the Asian tapeworm (*Bothriocephalus acheliognathi*), white spot disease (*Ichthiophthirius sp.*), and anchor-worm (*Lernaea sp.*). The Asian tapeworm was detected in the Los Angeles river at two localities (Haines Creek: infecting mosquitofish, fathead

minnows and arroyo chub, Big Tujunga Creek: infecting arroyo chub) and in the Santa Clara River at one locality (San Francisquito Canyon: infecting mosquitofish). White spot disease was detected in the Los Angeles River at two localities (Haines Creek, Big Tujunga Creek: infecting arroyo chub at both locations), in the Santa Clara River at one locality (San Francisquito Canyon: infecting unarmored threespine stickleback and arroyo chub) and in the San Gabriel River at three localities (San Gabriel River, East Fork: infecting speckled dace, West Fork: infecting speckled dace, Robert's Canyon: infecting arroyo chub). Anchor-worm was detected in the Los Angeles River at one locality (Big Tujunga Creek: infecting arroyo chub, fathead minnows, rainbow trout) and the Santa Clara River at one locality (San Francisquito Creek: infecting goldfish, green sunfish, unarmored threespine stickleback and arroyo chub).

Discussion

Because of the extremely diverse parasite fauna, and the difficulty of identifying certain parasitic organisms during detected life stages, we were not always able to classify parasites as exotic or native, and indeed, some parasite species detected have extremely cosmopolitan distributions, further complicating the issue of classification.

Three parasite species readily identifiable as exotic stand out as important because of their commercial significance and prior classification as hatchery diseases. These were the Asian tapeworm, white spot disease, and anchor worm. For a disease to reach commercial significance, it has to be capable of destroying or reducing the value of commercial products of resources like fish hatcheries, commercial fisheries and public fisheries (Meyer and Barclay, 1990). These three diseases can be considered to be virulent, destructive threats to any fisheries or wildlife conservation resources they are present in. Any hatcheries associated with the watersheds covered by this study may be vulnerable to infection through water taken from these systems, and may also be acting as sources for re-infection into the natural systems if the parasites are already present in the hatchery. Sensitive native species infected by these three parasites included speckled dace, arroyo chub and unarmored threespine stickleback. Furthermore, white spot disease was detected in the San Gabriel drainage, and although we were unable to sample Santa Ana suckers from the San Gabriel or Big Tujunga drainages, they have been exposed and are likely subjects for infection by the disease. The "big three" diseases (white spot disease, Asian tapeworm, anchorworm) were found in the San Gabriel River, Los Angeles River, San Jacinto River, and the Santa Clara River but were absent from tributaries of the Santa Ana River. Of the "big three", white spot was not detected at all in the Santa Ana River, and the Asian tapeworm and anchorworm appeared to be restricted to the main drainage as well. In spite of the widespread nature of these parasites, actual die-offs that could be attributed to them were only observed in San Francisquito Canyon in the Santa Clara watershed.

A looming question posed by the presence of these parasites in forest drainages is the means of their initial introduction. It is important to identify potential routes of introduction because natural stochastic events may eliminate or reduce parasites from locations where they currently are in high prevalence. By preventing re-introduction, we may slow the spread or even contribute to the eventual elimination of these noxious pests from forest drainages. Potential sources of historic introduction, reintroduction,

and potential future introductions of novel species include: legal stocking of infected animals (e.g. bait minnows, game fish, vector control), illegal human transport of infected animals between waterways, unintentional stocking of waterways by parasites or infected host organisms through water diversions and transfers (i.e. Los Angeles Aqueduct transfers of largemouth bass, green sunfish and carp) and illegal release of infected pet animals into natural waterways (i.e. presence of pet goldfish in San Francisquito and Bouquet Canyons).

Management Recommendations

Watersheds were defined as separate drainages reaching the ocean. For the purpose of managing watersheds for parasite concerns, wetted portions within a watershed must be considered to be connected, as fish may use periods of high rainfall or flood events to spread within a watershed, taking their parasite fauna with them. Although beyond the scope of this study, limited connectivity may even exist between watersheds for anadromous species such as Steelhead/Rainbow trout. Furthermore, the diverse life history of some parasites detected allow for ready colonization of available habitat downstream, or even across watersheds through avian intermediate hosts.

There is a need to prevent continued introduction of noxious pest parasite species into waterways on forest service land. These waterways represent valuable sport fisheries as well as critical aquatic conservation resources whose value may be compromised by the introduction or spread of these parasite species.

The primary means of prevention should come through education. When private citizens are educated as to the dangers of moving organisms from place to place or introducing pet organisms into wilderness environments, the number of such introductions (potentially the majority of novel parasite introductions) will be reduced.

Prevention may also come through enforcing pathogen assay standards that would detect and bar introduction of stock animals that were infected with these parasites. This would help in remote areas where fish stocking is the primary anthropogenic influence on the fish community. Pathogen assays are relatively inexpensive and can be performed rapidly by technicians with appropriate training. When weighed against the potential damage that these diseases are capable of, disease assays prior to stocking are a relatively cost effective procedure.

Reducing the spread of exotic parasite species in southern California waterways is extremely important for conservation efforts linked to the recovery of threatened and endangered species including Santa Ana suckers, speckled dace, unarmored threespine stickleback, and southern steelhead trout. White spot disease appears to be concentrated in areas where these species occur and could be compromising recovery or leading to declines of the aforementioned species. White spot disease has been detected in areas where California red-legged frogs occur, and its effects on this sensitive native amphibian are unknown. Any future recovery plans for these species need to take into account the current disease status of known populations, as well as the distribution of exotic diseases in current and potential habitat.

In closing, there is a continued need to explore the temporal and spatial extent of commercially significant parasites throughout the waterways of southern California. Our

current work has revealed a great deal of information even in the limited range our surveys were conducted in. However there are still gaps in the current knowledge base that could be filled by more directed studies in the future. These gaps include prevalence and intensity of parasites across seasons, ecological impacts of these parasites on sensitive native fishes, as well as the full extent of parasite distribution throughout southern California waterways.

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Appendix:

Table 1. Study Sites throughout southern California

Table 2. Fish species detected on the Angeles National Forest

Table 3. Parasite species detected on the Angeles National Forest

Table 4. Parasite species detected throughout southern California

Figure 1. Map of sample locations throughout southern California

Table 1 - Study Sites throughout southern California 2000-2002:

Watershed	Site Name	# of species (# of specimens)
Los Angeles*		
	Big Tujunga Creek	3(78)
	Haines Creek	4(100)
Otay	Hollenbeck Canyon	1(20)
	Rancho Jamul Kiln Pond	1(16)
	Rancho Jamul Pump Pond	4(37)
Salton Sea	Alamo River	1(94)
	San Felipe Creek	1(14)
	Trifolium drain	2(12)
	White Creek	2(37)
San Dieguito	Santa Ysabel Creek	1(20)
San Diego	San Diego River near Santee	1(18)
San Gabriel*		
	Roberts Canyon	1(17)
	San Gabriel River, East Fork	2(16)
	San Gabriel River, North Fork	2(10)
	San Gabriel River, West Fork	2(30)
San Jacinto	San Jacinto Wash	2(51)
San Juan	Arroyo Trabuco	1(10)
	Bell Canyon	2(76)
	San Juan Creek	1(24)
San Mateo	Los Alamos Creek	1(7)
	San Mateo Creek	4(73)
Santa Ana	Cajon Wash	1(15)
	City Creek, West Fork	2(23)
	Lytle Creek	2(16)
	Plunge Creek	2(18)
	Santa Ana River (MWDC)	5(174)
	Santa Ana River below Prado Dam	10(225)
	Strawberry Creek	1(4)
	Sugarloaf Meadow Pond	1(33)
	Santiago Creek above Santiago Reservoir	1(20)
	Santiago Creek at Modjeska	1(20)
Santa Clara*		
	Bouquet Canyon Creek	3(56)
	Lake Elizabeth Canyon Creek	1(30)
	San Francisquito Creek, Dam Reach	4(197)
	San Francisquito Creek, Drinkwater Reach	1(20)
	San Francisquito Creek, Womens Club	2(103)
	Santa Clara River	2(22)
Santa Margarita	Murietta Creek at USGS stream gage	2(63)
	Rainbow Creek	2(21)
	Santa Margarita River at the gorge	5(103)
Sweetwater	Sweetwater River at R. Cuyamaca State Park	2(10)

***Study Sites in the Angeles National forests are listed in bold**

Table 2: Fish Species Detected on the Angeles National Forest

		Watershed	Los Angeles		San Gabriel			Santa Clara							
Species Origin	Common Name	Species	Big Tujunga Creek	Haines Creek	Roberts Canyon	San Gabriel River, East Fork	San Gabriel River, North Fork	San Gabriel River, West Fork	Bouquet Canyon Creek	Lake Elizabeth Canyon Creek	San Francisquito Creek, Dam Reach	San Francisquito Creek, Drinkwater Reach	San Francisquito Creek, Womens Club	Santa Clara River	# of Species Detected
	Exotic	Fathead Minnow	<i>Pimephales promelas</i>	1	1										
Goldfish		<i>Carassius auratus</i>							1		1				2
Green Sunfish		<i>Lepomis cyanellus</i>								1					1
Largemouth Bass		<i>Micropterus salmoides</i>		1		1									2
Mosquitofish		<i>Gambusia affinis</i>		1							1		1		3
Exotic Total			1	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	10
Native	Arroyo Chub	<i>Gila orcutti</i>	1	1	1					1	1	1	1	1	8
	Partially Armored Threespine Stickleback	<i>Gasterosteus aculeatus microcephalus</i>							1						1
	Rainbow Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss (hatchery stock)</i>	1				1	1	1						4
	Santa Ana Sucker	<i>Catostomus santaanae</i>												1	1
	Speckled Dace	<i>Rhinichthys osculus</i>				1	1	1							3
	Unarmored Threespine Stickleback	<i>Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni</i>									1				1
Native Total			2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	18

Table 3: Fish Parasite Species Detected on the Angeles National Forest

		Watershed	Los Angeles		San Gabriel			Santa Clara					Grand Total			
Parasite Origin	Family	Parasite	Big Tujunga Creek	Haines Creek	Roberts Canyon	San Gabriel River, East Fork	San Gabriel River, North Fork	San Gabriel River, West Fork	Bouquet Canyon Creek	Lake Elizabeth Canyon Creek	San Francisco Creek, Dam Reach	San Francisco Creek, Drinkwater Reach	San Francisco Creek, Womens Club	Santa Clara River		
			exotic	Cestoda	<i>Bothriocephalus acheliognathi</i>	1	1							1		1
	Copepoda	<i>Lernaea cyprinacea</i>	1								1		1		3	
	Oligohymenophorea (ciliates)	<i>Ichthyophthirius multifiliis</i>	1	1	1	1		1			1				6	
exotic Total			3	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	0	2	0	13	
unknown	Monogenea	<i>Gyrodactylus sp.</i>									1	1	1		3	
		<i>Urocleidus sp.</i>									1		1		2	
	Nematoda	<i>Contracaecum sp.</i>		1		1										2
		<i>Rhabdochona canadensis</i>									1	1				2
		<i>Rhabdochona cascadiilla</i>							1							1
		<i>Rhabdochona sp.</i>					1									1
	Oligohymenophorea (ciliates)	<i>Trichodina sp.</i>								1					1	
	Trematoda	<i>Crepidostomum farionis</i>						1		1						2
		<i>Posthodiplostomum minimum</i>		1												1
<i>trematode sp.</i>										1					1	
<i>Uvulifer ambloplitis</i>										1		1			2	
unknown Total			1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0	6	2	3	0	18	
Grand Total			4	3	1	2	1	3	1	0	9	2	5	0	31	

Table 4: Fish Parasite Species Detected in Southern California

Parasite Origin		Watershed	Watershed																			Grand Total																									
Family		Parasite	Los Angeles	Otay				Salton Sea				San Dieguito			San Gabriel			San Jacinto		San Mateo		Santa Ana					Santa Clara				Santa Margarita		Sweetwater	Grand Total													
			Big Tujunga Creek	Haines Creek	Hollenbeck Canyon	Rancho Jamul Kiln Pond	Rancho Jamul Pump Pond	Alamo River	San Felipe Creek	Trifolium drain	White Creek	Santa Ysabel Creek	San Diego River near Santee	Roberts Canyon	San Gabriel River, East Fork	San Gabriel River, North Fork	San Gabriel River, West Fork	San Jacinto Wash	Arroyo Trabuco	Bell Canyon	San Juan Creek	Los Alamos Creek	San Mateo Creek	Cajon Wash	City Creek, West Fork	Lytle Creek	Plunge Creek	Santa Ana River (MWD)	Santa Ana River below Prado Dam	Santiago Creek above Santiago Reservoir	Santiago Creek at Modjeska	Strawberry Creek	Sugarloaf Meadow Pond	Bouquet Canyon Creek	Lake Elizabeth Canyon Creek	San Francisco Creek, Dam Reach	San Francisco Creek, Drinkwater Reach	San Francisco Creek, Womens Club	Santa Clara River	Murieta Creek at USGS stream gage	Rainbow Creek	Santa Margarita River at the gorge	Sweetwater River at Rancho Cuyamaca State Park	Grand Total			
Exotic	Cestoda	Bothriocephalus acheliognathi	1	1		1			1	1							1	1	1																											15	
		Bothriocephalus cuspidatus			1																						1																				2
	Copepoda	Lernaea cyprinacea	1											1	1												1	1																			5
	Oligohymenophorea (ciliates)	Ichthyophthirius multifiliis	1	1														1																													8
Exotic Total			3	2	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	30
Unknown	Acanthocephala	Acanthocephalus sp.					1																																								2
	Arachnida	acarina								1																																					1
	Cestoda	Caryophyllaeus sp.																																													1
		Corralbothrium sp.																																													1
		Proteocephalus sp.					1																					1																			2
	Copepoda	Ergasilus sp.																																												0	
	Monogenea	Dactylogyrus sp.																				1							1																		3
		Gyrodactylus olsoni																																												0	
		Gyrodactylus sp.			1	1		1										1		1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1					1									19	
		monogenean sp.								1																																				2	
		Urocleidus sp.				1	1		1	1	1	1																																		7	
	Nematoda	Contraecaecum sp.	1		1																																									8	
		Nematode sp.																																												0	
		Rhabdochona canadensis																																													3
		Rhabdochona cascadiilla																																													2
		Rhabdochona sp.																																													1
	Oligohymenophorea (ciliates)	Epistylis sp.																																													1
		Trichodina sp.									1																																				2
	Trematoda	Crepidostomum cooperi																																													1
		Crepidostomum farionis																																													1
		Echinocasmus sp.																																													2
		Posthodiplostomum minimum	1				1																																							5	
		Posthodiplostomum sp.																																													5
		trematode sp.																																													1
		Uvulifer ambloplitis																																													3
Unknown Total			1	1	1	2	6	1	2	2	4	2	1	0	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	5	1	1	1	2	1	5	9	1	1	0	1	1	0	6	2	3	0	0	1	5	1		76	
Grand Total			4	3	1	3	7	1	2	3	5	2	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	1	7	12	1	1	0	1	1	0	9	2	5	0	1	2	6	2			106	