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Some aspects of feeding of catfish- *Arius bilineatus* in Bolgoda Lake System

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Some aspects of feeding of cat fish *Arius bilineatus* (Family Ariidae), inhabiting the Bolgoda Lake system was studied with the objective of acquiring knowledge on the types of food they consume and

the variation in food composition with their size and the habitat they live. Such information is vital in aquaculture of this species, which has a good potential as an export commodity. Samples for the study were collected from commercial fishermen operating in three selected sites (namely, a Jakotu trap, a site within the close proximity to two tourist hotels, a site close to the estuarine mouth where a fish landing site and a number of poultries are located), throughout six consecutive months with a sample collection frequency of twice a month. A total of 66 specimens were used for the study and the preserved gut contents of these specimens were analyzed using a stereo microscope following a numerical method.

Arius bilineatus in the study sites have fed on a variety of food items which included fish (e.g. *Ambasis sp, Mugil sp*) (between 21.5% -41.2% in composition), crustaceans [e.g. *Metapenaeus ensis* (Koralissa), *Metapenaeus dobsonii* (Malissa)] (between 5% -35.5% in composition), Molluscs (between 3.5% -17.5% in composition), other invertebrates (e.g. aquatic insects, bristle worm, nematode worm, Oligochaeta, Polychaeta, *Tubifex*, *Planaria*, *Hydropsyche, Nympula*) (between 4% -18.2% in composition). In addition to these items, only those who were caught from the site near the estuarine mouth had a high percentage (66.5%) of fish/meat offal in their stomach contents. These observations show that this species is carnivorous. A high percentage of meat/fish offal in the stomachs of fish caught from the site near the estuarine mouth where fish and meat offal are thrown into the surrounding waters from fish landing site and poultries reveal the fact that they are able to thrive on live as well as non-living food organisms thus can be easily fed with a variety of food items when cultured.

There was no marked difference in the percentage composition of the above food items in stomach contents of fish caught from three sites and different size ranges of this fish species also have consumed the same variety of food. These observations suggest that this species is an opportunistic feeder which further qualifies it as a potential candidate for aquaculture.

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