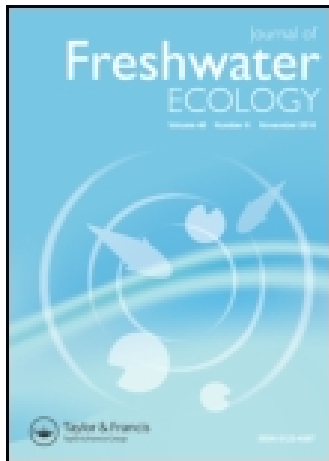


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The Impact of Planktivorous Fishes on Microcystin Concentrations in Meiliang Bay, Lake Taihu, China

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The Impact of Planktivorous Fishes on Microcystin Concentrations in Meiliang Bay, Lake Taihu, China

ABSTRACT

In an eight-month enclosure experiment in Meiliang Bay of Lake Taihu, a shallow subtropical lake in China, silver carp (*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*) and bighead carp (*Aristichthys nobilis*) collectively reduced cyanobacterial biomass. Microcystin concentration was six times higher in the 0.35 km² control enclosure (without fish) than in two similar-sized enclosures that had been stocked with both carp species. Furthermore, toxic *Microcystis* spp. increased microcystin production when exposed to silver carp and bighead carp.

Several studies have documented the influence of planktivorous fishes on cyanobacteria and have led to the suggestion that the use of silver carp (*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*) and bighead carp (*Aristichthys nobilis*) might be a way to control excess bluegreen algae (Starling and Rocha 1990, Starling 1993, Fukushima et al. 1999, Xie and Liu 2001). Consequently, we conducted an enclosure experiment for eight months in Meiliang Bay of Lake Taihu in China to assess whether silver carp and bighead carp could suppress natural cyanobacterial blooms.

Using steel posts and polyethylene fish nettings (3.5-4.0 cm mesh), we constructed three enclosures of about 0.35 km² each in Meiliang Bay (120° 12' 46" – 120° 13' 07" E, 31° 29' 07" – 31° 29' 55" N). Three hundred thousand silver carp and bighead carp (1:3 ratio) were introduced into two of the enclosures; the third was used as a control and lacked fish. The average individual weights at stocking were 100 g for silver carp and 125 g for bighead carp. Replicate water samples were collected monthly from April to November 2005. Each water sample was a mixture of two sub-samples – one from 0.5 m

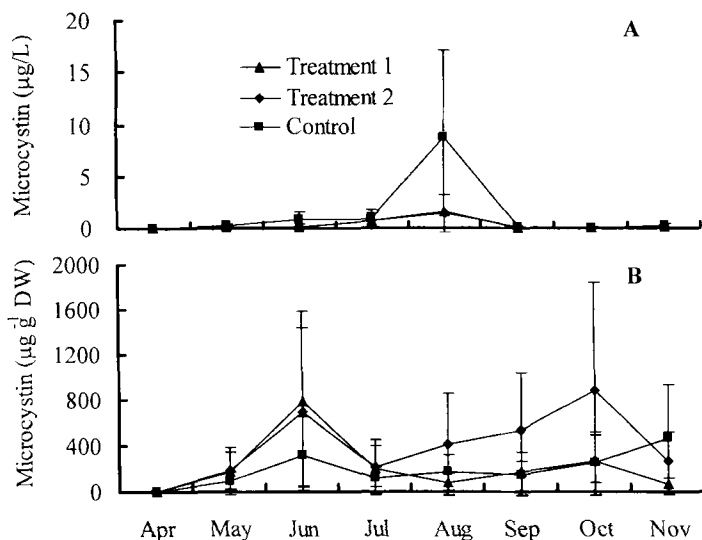


Figure 1. Seasonal variations in total microcystin concentration in water (A) and microcystin in the algae per se (B) in enclosure systems in Meiliang Bay, Lake Taihu.

below the surface and one from 0.5 m above the bottom. Phytoplankton was preserved with 1% acidified Lugol's iodine solution and counted under 400× magnification. Taxonomic identification was according to Hu et al. (1979). Biomass was estimated from approximate geometric volumes of each taxon, and microcystin was measured according to Park (1998) and Welker et al. (1999).

Three cyanobacterial taxa dominated during the study period – *Microcystis* spp. (95%), *Spirulina* spp. (3%), and *Anabaena* spp. (2%). In August, the peak of the algal bloom, biomass in the control enclosure was 93 mg L⁻¹, which was 5 - 22 times greater than the biomass in the two treatments enclosures (Fig. 1). At the same time, the total microcystin concentration in water was six times higher in the control (8.76 µg L⁻¹) as in the treatment enclosures (1.5 and 1.6 µg L⁻¹). Additionally, toxic *Microcystis* spp. increased microcystin production in the treatment enclosures when exposed to silver carp and bighead carp. Microcystin content of the blooming algae was 0.32 µg g⁻¹ (dry weight) in the control but was 0.70 - 0.79 µg g⁻¹ in the treatment enclosures (Fig. 1).

In an enclosure experiment, Kajak et al. (1975) found that silver carp reduced bluegreen algae and total phytoplankton biomass. Through enclosure experiments in Lake Donghu China, Xie (1996) also reported that both silver carp and bighead carp could eliminate cyanobacterial blooms directly by grazing. Our study provided strong support for the view that silver carp and bighead carp could effectively control cyanobacterial blooms.

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