

**Growth patterns along environmental gradients  
of tropical pomacentrid fishes**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Technology, Sydney**

**2008**

# Certificate of authorship

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I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in this thesis.

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# Acknowledgements

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This thesis is dedicated to my father.

Very warm thanks to my supervisors Prof. David Booth and Dr. Peter Biro. This project started at James Cook University and Prof. Howard Choat has been a tremendous help with many bureaucratic issues. This project was made possible by an International Postgraduate Research Grant from The Australian Government and an Internationalization Grant from The Danish Government.

Thanks to Kerryn Parkinson for priceless work, to Prof. Göran Nilsson, for the project saving loan of a small propeller, to Michael Berumen for showing me the ropes of fish catching, and to Prof. Maria Byrne and Vicki Taylor-Perkins for assistance on crucial histological processing. Thanks also to Ralph Alquezar, Christa Beckmann, Emily Buckle, Will Figueira, Marcus Gregson, Peter Grønkjær, Melanie Lewis, Matt Lockett, Stephanie Mutz, Katherine Richardson, and Paul York for sparring and advice. And everlasting gratitude to Rochelle Seneviratne, who patiently answered question after bureaucratic question.

Thanks to the managers of Orpheus, One Tree, and Lizard Island Research Stations for assistance and flexibility. A special thanks to Dive Safety Officers Lyle Vail at Lizard Island and Phil Osmond at James Cook University.

Very warm thanks to my family for supporting my decision to go to the other side of the world, to my friends in Denmark for staying in touch and my friends in Australia for taking me in and to you all for keeping me sane.

But most of all, thanks to Anders, who followed me to the other side of the planet and stuck by.

Finally thanks to Skype and World of Warcraft for bridging the distance between home and home away from home, and to Red Dwarf and Star Trek: “Never give up, never surrender”!

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## General abstract

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The goal of this thesis is to evaluate latitudinal patterns in the life history traits, standard metabolic rates, and growth potential of two geographically widespread damselfishes, the dispersing *Pomacentrus moluccensis* (Bleeker 1853) and the brood-caring *Acanthochromis polyacanthus* (Bleeker 1855) between Lizard Island, Orpheus Island, and One Tree Island along the Great Barrier Reef, Australia (14° 41' S, 18° 37' S, and 23° 30' S).

*P. moluccensis* displayed no clear latitudinal maximum age (7-10 years) or asymptotic size (57.3 mmSL +/-3.0) difference, between Lizard, Orpheus, and One Tree Islands. Based on experimental manipulations of water temperature at the three islands the metabolic rate at a given temperature (e.g. 27°C) was significantly lower at the lowest latitude Lizard Island (0.048 mgO<sub>2</sub>/g fish/hour) compared to mid- and high-latitude Orpheus and One Tree Islands (0.088 mgO<sub>2</sub>/g fish/hour +/-0.004). Regardless of location, the growth of *ad libitum* fed juveniles was consistently higher at higher temperatures (0.0641-0.1190 log(g<sub>(final)</sub>/g<sub>(initial)</sub>)/day), indicating higher potential growth rates at lower latitudes.

*A. polyacanthus* displayed a lower asymptotic size at the highest latitude One Tree Island (72.5 mm SL) compared to Orpheus and Lizard Islands (86.9 mmSL +/-2.3) though the maximum age was the same across latitudes (8-10 years). The metabolic rate at a given temperature (e.g. 27°C) was consistently significantly higher at higher latitudes (0.053-0.106 mgO<sub>2</sub>/g fish/hour). The growth of *ad libitum* fed juveniles was significantly lower at Lizard Island (0.0575 log(g<sub>(final)</sub>/g<sub>(initial)</sub>)/day +/-0.0057) than Orpheus and One Tree Islands (0.1303 log(g<sub>(final)</sub>/g<sub>(initial)</sub>)/day +/-0.0153). These two results in conjunction may indicate that *A. polyacanthus* maintenance costs are low at low latitudes through low metabolism, but has simultaneously reduced its ability to speed up growth rates in periods of abundant food, such as coral spawning (Oct-Nov).

Over the coming century rapid climate change is predicted to increase the average sea-surface temperatures on the GBR, with possible migration of widely distributed species from warmer areas of their distribution to colder. The ensuing

changes in reaction norms due to a lateral shift will largely depend on their current geographical and temperature ranges. Based on the results of this study, it appears that *P. moluccensis* might be able to tolerate a transition to warmer habitats, while *A. polyacanthus*, more adapted to its local habitat, would be less able to adjust to a change in temperature regime.