

## Detection of the effect of aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> contaminated ration on Nile perch *Lates niloticus*

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### Abstract

The chemical analysis of ration, introduced to *Lates niloticus* fish reared in an experimental aquarium in a fish productive area in Ismailia Governorate was done. The analysis revealed the presence of high aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> levels. The chemical analysis of the tissues of the fish showed elevated aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> levels in the liver, kidney and musculature.

The fish showed signs of lethargy, sluggish movement, loss of appetite, excessive mucus over the skin, protruded eye and yellowish coloration of the body. The postmortem examination exhibited that liver was friable and dark in colour and viscera was congested. The gall bladder was enlarged and filled with bile. Biochemical analysis of the sera revealed significant increase in the alkaline phosphatase (ALP), aspartate aminotransferase (AST) and alanine aminotransferase (ALT) activities, creatinine, urea, uric acid, cholesterol concentrations and albumin/ globulin (A/G) ratio. On the other hand, serum total protein (TP), albumin, globulin, sodium, potassium, calcium and inorganic phosphorus concentrations were significantly decreased. From the present investigation it is advisable to feed the fish with healthy aflatoxin free rations.

### Key words:

Fish, aflatoxin, liver, kidney, musculature, ALP, AST, TP, albumin, globulin, creatinine, urea, uric, cholesterol, sodium, potassium, calcium, phosphorus.

### Introduction

Aflatoxins are secondary metabolites produced in specific ecological conditions by some strains of molds belonging to the groups of *Aspergillus flavus*, *A. parasiticus* and *A. nomius* (Miliță *et al.*, 2010). Aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> is known to be the most significant form that causes serious risk to animals and human health. Aflatoxins B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub> adversely affect the growth, feed utilization and results in deleterious impact on the production of fish (Adeniji *et al.*, 2014). The carcinogenic effect of aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> has been found in fish (Murjani, 2003). Domesticated rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) that were fed a pellet feed prepared with cottonseed meal contaminated with aflatoxins, developed liver tumors (Ashley, 1970).

The potential for development of aflatoxicosis increases in warm-water fishes, such as tilapia and channel catfish because plant ingredients, formulated in their diets have a higher potential than animal ingredients for contamination with aflatoxins. In tropical and subtropical conditions, this potential is further increased due to storage under humid and hot conditions. International trade in affected commodities and exposure to aflatoxins are worldwide concerns and the economic impact due to animal losses can be enormous (Russo and Yanong, 2010). The fish, when exposed to the aflatoxin-contaminated feed suffer from a series of adverse complications ranging from developmental abnormalities to reproductive failure. Importantly the ingested aflatoxins are not totally

eliminated from their system, instead they accumulate and cause greater threat not only to themselves but also to fish eaters. The subtle effects often go unnoticed and in the long run results in increased incidence of liver cancer (**Madhusudhanan *et al.*, 2006**). Aflatoxins lower production efficiency of cultured fish by reducing growth rates, impairing immunity, and, in some cases, causing mortality. Storing feed properly (in a cool, dry area on pallets and at least one foot away from any walls) can prevent unnecessary economic losses (**Russo and Yanong, 2010**). Common effects of aflatoxicosis in finfish include poor growth, pale gills, reduced RBCs, anemia, impaired blood clotting, damage to liver, decreased immune responsiveness and increased mortality (**Goldblatt, 1976**).

The aim of the present work is to throw light on the harmful effects of aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> on the health, liver and kidney functions and some biochemical changes in the blood serum of *Lates niloticus* fish.

## Material and methods

### 1- Fish.

Ten *Lates niloticus* weighing 3-5 kg were collected from an experimental traditional aquarium, exhibited health problems and high mortality rate in a fish productive area in Ismailia Governorate. Another 10 apparently healthy fish were collected and kept as control. Fish were transported alive to the Fish Disease Dept. in Animal Health Res. Inst.

### 2- Water analysis.

Water samples were collected from the affected and control fish aquaria and kept in closed glass bottles according to (**Tucker, 1992**). Water was subjected to chemical analysis for pH, dissolved oxygen (DO<sub>2</sub>), hardness, phosphorus, nitrate, nitrite and ammonia according to (**Tucker, 1992**) and (**Clescerl *et al.*, 1999**), lead, cadmium and iron according to (**Jackson, 1973**).

### 3- Fish ration analysis.

The rations of the affected fish and control fish were chemically analyzed for the detection of aflatoxins, oxidative rancidity and acid number

according to (**AOAC, 1980**).

### 4- Clinical examination.

The fish were clinically examined using the methods described by (**Lucky, 1977**).

### 5- Postmortem examination.

Postmortem examination of gills, abdominal cavity and internal organs was carried out according to (**Amalacher, 1970**).

### 6- Blood samples.

Blood samples were collected from the caudal vein of each fish in either group according to (**Stoscopf, 1992**). Each blood sample was kept in sloped glass tube at 4°C over night. Serum was then separated by centrifugation of blood at 3000 rpm for 20 minutes for biochemical analysis.

### 7- Biochemical analysis.

Serum alkaline phosphatase (ALP) activity was determined according to (**Marsh *et al.*, 1959**) by *Spectrum Diagnostics, Egypt* kits. Aspartate aminotransferase (AST) and alanine aminotransferase (ALT) activities in the blood serum were determined according to (**Reitman and Frankel, 1957**) using test kits of *Coral Co., India*. Serum total protein (TP) was measured by the method described by (**Cannon *et al.*, 1974**); *Spectrum Diagnostics, Egypt* kits. Serum albumin was measured after (**Doumas *et al.*, 1971**) by *Vitro Scient, Egypt* kits. Blood serum globulin level and albumin/globulin ratio (A/G ratio) were calculated mathematically according to (**Coles, 1986**). Serum creatinine concentration was determined using the method adopted by (**Bowers and Wong, 1980**); *Spectrum Diagnostics, Egypt* kits. Serum urea level was determined according to (**Fawcett and Scott, 1960**) by *Bio-Diagnostic Kits, Egypt*. Determining serum uric acid concentration was performed by the assay of (**Fossati *et al.*, 1980**) *Spectrum Diagnostics, Egypt* kits. Cholesterol level was determined according to (**Young, 1990**) by *Vitro Scient, Egypt* kits. Sodium concentration in serum was measured according to (**Henry *et al.*, 1974**); *Vitro Scient, Egypt* kits. Serum potassium concentration was determined as described by (**Hillman *et al.*, 1967**); *Spectrum Diagnostics, Egypt* kits. Serum calcium concentration was

determined according to (Barnett, 1965) by *Spectrum Diagnostics, Egypt* kits. Serum inorganic phosphorus concentration was determined according to (Daly and Ertingshausen, 1972) by *Spectrum Diagnostics, Egypt* kits.

#### Statistical analysis.

Data were presented as mean  $\pm$  standard error (SE) and the significance of differences was evaluated using analysis of variance (ANOVA) (SPSS 14, 2006).

### Results

#### Water chemical analysis.

Table (1) shows the chemical criteria of the aquaria water samples of affected fish and control fish.

#### Aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> in ration.

Chemical analysis showed that aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> in the ration of affected *Lates niloticus* was significantly elevated comparing with control (table, 2).

#### Aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> in fish tissues.

Table (3) represents that aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> residues appeared in the liver, kidney and musculature of affected culture fish. No detectable levels of

aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> in the tissues of control fish.

#### Clinical signs.

Clinical signs in *Lates niloticus* fed ration containing aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> included lethargy, sluggish movement, loss of appetite, increased mucous over the skin, exophthalmia and yellowish coloration of the body. High mortality rates were observed.

#### Postmortem findings.

The liver was friable and dark in colour and viscera was congested in *L. niloticus* fed ration containing aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub>. The gall bladder was enlarged and filled with bile.

#### Biochemical changes.

As shown in table (4), ALP, AST and ALT activities, creatinine, urea uric acid, cholesterol concentrations and A/G ratio in the serum of *Lates niloticus* fed ration contained aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> were significantly higher than those of control fish. On the other hand the table showed that serum TP, albumin, globulin, sodium, potassium, calcium and inorganic phosphorus concentrations in the *L. niloticus* fed ration containing aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> were significantly decreased comparing with control fish.

**Table (1).** Chemical parameters of control and affected fish aquarium water (n=10).

| Parameter                             | Control | Affected aquarium | Standard value* |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-------------------|-----------------|
| pH                                    | 7.5     | 8.5               | 6.5-9.0         |
| DO <sub>2</sub> (mg/L)                | 5.5     | 5.1               | $\geq 5$        |
| Hardness (mg/L as CaCO <sub>3</sub> ) | 90.0    | 125.0             | 10-400          |
| Phosphorus (mg/L)                     | 1.3     | 1.5               | $\leq 3.0$      |
| Nitrate (mg/L)                        | 2.5     | 3.0               | $\leq 3.0$      |
| Nitrite (mg/L)                        | 0.1     | 0.1               | $\leq 0.2$      |
| Ammonia (un-ionized; mg/L)            | 0.01    | 0.01              | $\leq 0.0125$   |
| Lead (mg/L)                           | 0.01    | 0.02              | $\leq 0.03$     |
| Cadmium (mg/L)                        | 0.0005  | 0.0005            | $\leq 0.003$    |
| Iron (mg/L)                           | 0.01    | 0.01              | $\leq 0.15$     |

\* Standard water parameters related to (Swann, 1997).

**Table (2).** Chemical analysis of ration offered to affected *Lates niloticus*.

| Parameter \ Group              | Control      | Affected aquarium |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Aflatoxin B <sub>1</sub> (ppb) | 20.50 ± 1.20 | 168.65 ± 9.33**   |
| Rancidity                      | 18.42 ± 1.63 | 22.00 ± 1.54      |
| Peroxide value                 | 25.74 ± 1.85 | 30.50 ± 2.26      |

Each value represents Mean ± SE; n=10.

\*\* Significant difference against control at  $p \leq 0.01$ .

**Table (3).** Aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> level in *Lates niloticus* tissues (ppb).

| Organ \ Group | Control | Affected fish |
|---------------|---------|---------------|
| Liver         | n.d.    | 5.68 ± 0.24   |
| Kidney        | n.d.    | 5.20 ± 0.31   |
| Musculature   | n.d.    | 4.26 ± 0.21   |

Each value represents mean ± SE; n=10.

n.d. non detectable.

**Table (4).** Blood serum biochemical parameters in *Lates niloticus* fed aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> contaminated ration.

| Parameter \ Group            | Control       | Affected fish   |
|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| ALP (U/L)                    | 80.30 ± 3.59  | 103.64 ± 4.22** |
| AST (U/L)                    | 38.35 ± 1.65  | 64.4 ± 2.15**   |
| ALT (U/L)                    | 20.58 ± 1.75  | 55.46 ± 2.19**  |
| TP (g/dl)                    | 5.61 ± 0.37   | 4.11 ± 0.31**   |
| Albumin (g/dl)               | 3.25 ± 0.19   | 2.53 ± 0.10**   |
| Globulin (g/dl)              | 2.46 ± 0.11   | 1.66 ± 0.07**   |
| A/G ratio                    | 1.30 ± 0.06   | 1.53 ± 0.07*    |
| Creatinine (mg/dl)           | 1.20 ± 0.08   | 1.62 ± 0.09**   |
| Urea (mg/dl)                 | 8.74 ± 0.34   | 15.62 ± 0.68**  |
| Uric acid (mg/dl)            | 4.85 ± 0.23   | 5.83 ± 0.21**   |
| Cholesterol (mg/dl)          | 185.62 ± 5.11 | 224.50 ± 2.11** |
| Sodium (mM/L)                | 125.50 ± 5.23 | 108.10 ± 4.42*  |
| Potassium (mM/L)             | 5.43 ± 0.25   | 4.56 ± 0.18*    |
| Calcium (mg/dl)              | 11.27 ± 0.65  | 7.86 ± 0.26**   |
| Inorganic phosphorus (mg/dl) | 4.86 ± 0.22   | 4.02 ± 0.20*    |

Each value represents mean ± SE; n=10.

\* Significant difference against control at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*\* Significant difference against control at  $p \leq 0.01$ .

## Discussion

The chemical properties of water samples in the affected *Lates niloticus* culture were within the safe limits for fish according to (Swann, 1997).

The aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> concentration in the rations of affected fish was significantly high comparing with those of control. In addition, aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> residues were present in the affected *L. niloticus* liver, kidney and musculature.

*Lates niloticus* fed on ration containing aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> exhibited signs of lethargy, sluggish movement, loss of appetite, increased mucous over the skin and protrusive eye while, fish body had yellowish colour. High mortality rates were observed in the affected fish.

The postmortem lesions included deformed liver and viscera. The gall bladder was enlarged and filled with bile. These clinical and anatomical findings nearly confirm those of (El-Barbary and Mehrim, 2009 and Mehrim *et al.*, 2006) aflatoxicated *Oreochromis niloticus* fish.

Respecting the blood serum biochemical findings, the enzymes, ALP, AST and ALT activities were significantly elevated in the serum of *Lates niloticus* fed on ration containing aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> comparing with control. Nearly similar results were stated by (El-Sayed and Khalil, 2009) who recorded increase in serum transaminases and alkaline phosphatase activities in sea bass exposed to prolonged oral administration of aflatoxins and (Selim *et al.*, 2014) who observed increases in serum AST and ALT in *Oreochromis niloticus* fed aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> containing ration. However our result nearly disagreed with that of (Huang *et al.*, 2014) who stated that the exposure of gibel carp fish to aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> in diet at levels up to approximately 2000 µg AFB<sub>1</sub> kg<sup>-1</sup> had no significant effect on serum AST and ALT enzymes activities. The increase in the liver enzymes activities may be due to hepatic cell injury or increased synthesis of the enzymes by the liver as clarified by (Yang and Chen, 2003).

Serum TP, albumin and globulin concentra-

tions were significantly lowered while A/G ratio was increased in *Lates niloticus* fed on aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> containing rations comparing with control. Nearly similar results were recorded by (Sahoo and Mukherjee, 2001) who recorded reductions of total protein, globulin levels and enhanced albumin-globulin ratio in Indian major carp (*Laboe rohita*) fish exposed to aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> and (Selim *et al.*, 2014) who recorded a decrease in plasma proteins and globulin in *Oreochromis niloticus* fed aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> containing ration. Blood proteins are used for energy production during toxicity and the protein catabolism is induced by stress (Pfeifer and Weber, 1979). Moreover, aflatoxin hepatotoxicity leads to alterations in protein synthesis and cellular integrity of the liver (Jindal *et al.*, 1994). Serum globulin reduction may be related to hemopoietic toxicity (anterior kidney and spleen) and lymphocytolysis (Sahoo *et al.*, 2001). Aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> also proved to be immunosuppressive in fish (Sahoo and Mukherjee, 2001). So, the increase of A/G ratio in *L. niloticus* fed on aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> containing ration in the present study may be due the immunosuppressive effect of the aflatoxin.

Serum creatinine, urea and uric acid concentrations were significantly increased in *Lates niloticus* fed on aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> containing ration comparing with control. Our findings are likely in agreement with those of (Zaki *et al.*, 2010) who found that aflatoxicosis increased urea and creatinine in *Tilapia Zilli* fish and (Selim *et al.*, 2014) who stated that aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> increased serum creatinine level in *Oreochromis niloticus*. The increase of serum creatinine concentration fish fed on aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> containing ration may be attributed to renal damage (El-Boshy *et al.*, 2008). The elevation of urea in the present study may be due to gill dysfunction (Lockhart and Metner, 1984). The increase of uric acid levels in aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> affected fish could be resulted from liver damage induced by aflatoxin (Carlson *et al.*, 2001 and Ottinger and Kaattari, 1998).

Serum cholesterol level was significantly elevated in aflatoxin affected *L. niloticus*. Nearly

similar result was concluded by (Zaki *et al.*, 2010) in *Tilapia zilli* fish supplied with aflatoxin contaminated ration. In the current study, the hypercholesterolaemia in aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> affected fish may be due to liver injury.

Significant decrease in the blood serum minerals, sodium, potassium, calcium and inorganic phosphorus levels occurred in the aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> affected *Lates niloticus* comparing with control. The gills are the major sites of osmotic and ionic regulation in fish, any changes in gill morphology may result in perturbed osmotic and ionic status (Al-Attar, 2007). In the present study, hyponatraemia in the aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> affected fish might reflect a decrease in the sodium influx rate through the gills as showed by (Martinez *et al.*, 2004). The hypokalaemia in the affected fish might result from impaired active reabsorption of potassium in renal tubules (Gill *et al.*, 1989). The hypocalcaemia observed in the aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> fed *L. niloticus* may be due to diffusional losses caused by increased permeability of gill epithelium to water and ions (Giles, 1984), defective intestinal calcium absorption or impaired calcium reabsorption in the renal tubules (Gill *et al.*, 1988). The decreased serum inorganic phosphorus may be attributed to disturbance in metabolism resulted from gastrointestinal malfunction (Glavind and Tryding, 1960).

Conclusion: In the present study, aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> residues appeared in the tissues of *Lates niloticus* fed on rations polluted with that toxin. The aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> had bad impacts on the organs function and blood serum parameters. So, it is advisable to control the feeding of fish and supplying the fish with healthy aflatoxin free rations.

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### قياس تأثير الأفلاتوكسين بي<sub>1</sub> في أسماك قشر البياض النيلي

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#### الملخص العربي

تم فحص العلف المقدم إلى أسماك قشر بياض مرباة في حوض تجريبي في منطقة إنتاج سمكي بمحافظة الإسماعيلية. وقد أظهر التحليل وجود مستويات عالية من الأفلاتوكسين بي<sub>1</sub>. كما أظهر الفحص الكيميائي لأنسجة الأسماك وجود نسبة عالية من الأفلاتوكسين بي<sub>1</sub> في الكبد والكلى والعضلات. وقد ظهر على الأسماك أعراض الخمول وبطء الحركة وفقدان الشهية وزيادة المخاط على الجلد وجحوظ العين واصفرار لون الجسم. وأظهرت الصفة التشريحية أن الكبد سهل التفطيت وداكن اللون والأحشاء محتقنة وانتفاخ الحوصلة المرارية واكتنازها بالعصارة الصفراوية. وقد لوحظ من التحليل الكيميائي الحيوي لأمصال دم السمك وجود زيادة معنوية في أنشطة إنزيمات الفوسفاتاز القاعدي والأسبارات أمينوترانسفيراز والألانين أمينوترانسفيراز وزيادة معنوية في تركيزات الكرياتينين واليوريا وحمض اليوريك والكوليستيرول ونسبة الألبومين/جلوبيولين. ومن ناحية أخرى حدث نقص معنوي في تركيزات البروتين الكلي والألبومين والجلوبيولين والصوديوم والبوتاسيوم والكالسيوم والفوسفور غير العضوي في مصل دم هذه الأسماك. لذلك ينصح بالعناية بغذاء الأسماك وتغذيتها على عليقة خالية من الأفلاتوكسين.