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PHYSICAL DISTURBANCE OF
POTAMOGETON TRICARINATUS
AND SEDIMENT BY CARP
(CYPRINUS CARPIO)
IN EXPERIMENTAL PONDS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Applied Science

February 1999



Koi carp and waterlily in a temple pond at the Heian Shrine, Kyoto Japan.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank Anthony Swirepik, Dr David Williams, Dr John Harris and Dr Craig Schiller who all provided invaluable support consistently over what became a long and tiring project on a part-time basis. Stephen Thurstan and other NSW Fisheries staff all made extensive efforts during the collection and preparation of carp as well as generally through the experiments and I am grateful for their efforts. I am indebted to Dr David Williams and others who painstakingly commented on various forms of my manuscript including Dr John Harris, Dr Jane Roberts and Lisa Evans. Wayne Robinson kindly assisted with statistical analyses and Shaun Meredith, Dr Jane Roberts and Dr Margaret Brock helped with obtaining key literature. Thanks to Surrey Jacobs who assisted with plant identification, Michelle Casanova who identified *Chara* species and Dr Russel Shiel who identified *Euglena rubra*. The research was funded by the CRC for Freshwater Ecology. Lastly, I thank my colleagues at the NSW Environment Protection Authority, particularly David Dutailis, Derek Rutherford and Gary Whytcross who have been understanding about taking time off work during a hectic schedule.

Abstract

The impact of carp on a rhizomatous macrophyte was examined in two consecutive years using three outdoor aquaculture ponds with naturally established beds of *Potamogeton tricarinatus*. Each pond was divided with wire fencing to form a carp (500 kg ha⁻¹) and control treatment. After 6 weeks, plant biomass had declined to the same extent in the carp and control treatments, indicating that direct physical disturbance by carp was not reducing the biomass of *P. tricarinatus*. In a second experiment, carp were added to two of the same ponds when plants were regenerating after a 9-11 month drying period. After 8 weeks, *P. tricarinatus* biomass in the carp treatments was between one half and one tenth of the biomass in the control treatments and one control treatment supported more *Najas tenuifolia* than the paired carp treatment. The lower biomass of *Potamogeton* in the carp treatments was a result of fewer shoots and less growth per shoot. Rhizomes had been undermined in the carp treatment with less than 1% of plants growing from rhizome compared to 36% in the control treatment. Accumulation of sediment into traps was significantly higher in the carp treatments (2.5 to 77.5 times more than the control). On average, carp resuspended 662 kg dry sediment ha⁻¹ for each 100 kg ha⁻¹ of carp or 6.6 times their wet weight biomass in dry sediments each day. Some implications of high sediment resuspension are discussed. The research demonstrates that well anchored macrophyte species can show tolerance to the physical disturbance associated with carp benthic feeding, however, these same species are vulnerable during regenerating and recruitment stages. It is suggested that anchorage is the most important factor for determining plant tolerance to carp. The implications for aquatic plant and riverine management are discussed, including the importance of excluding carp from newly flooded wetlands and the role of carp in determining alternative stable states.

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