

25 **ABSTRACT**

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The present study reports on the daily and seasonal variations in plasma melatonin concentration, and also in optic tectum and hypothalamus melatonin binding sites, in male European sea bass maintained under natural photoperiod (NP) or continuous light (LL) from early stages of development. Samples were collected on a 24-h cycle, at four physiological phases of their first annual reproductive cycle, *i.e.*, pre-spermatogenesis, spermatogenesis, spermiation and post-spermiation. Under NP, (1) plasma melatonin levels were higher at night than during the day regardless of the year period, and the duration of the signal matched the duration of the dark phase; (2) daily variations in Kd and Bmax were found in the optic tectum, but only during spermiation, with the acrophase being 180° out of phase with the plasma melatonin variations; and (3) significant seasonal Kd and Bmax changes were seen in the hypothalamus. Under LL, (1) plasma melatonin showed no elevation during the subjective night; and (2) Kd and Bmax exhibited seasonal variations in the hypothalamus. These results led to the conclusion that long-term exposure to LL affected both plasma melatonin and receptor oscillations; particularly, LL disrupted the receptor density circadian oscillation found in the optic tectum during spermiation under NP. This oscillation appears to be important for sea bass to pursue gametogenesis until full spermiation. The persistence of both daily and seasonal variation of receptor affinity and density in the hypothalamus under LL indicates that these variations are controlled by internal circadian and circannual clocks that do not involve melatonin.

INTRODUCTION

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Reproduction, like many other biological functions, is a rhythmically programmed process that allows the offspring to arrive when the probability of survival is at its highest (Foster and Kreitzman, 2004). This has been extensively studied in teleost fish, in which seasonality shows a very marked effect on the onset of reproduction, and where the photoperiod, rather than temperature or food supply, appears as the most important cue for entraining the reproduction rhythms (Bromage et al., 2001). The pineal organ, through its rhythmic melatonin production, is one of the major transducers of photoperiod signalling. In a majority of cases, the melatonin rhythm is driven by internal clocks synchronized by the photoperiod, and the hormone is considered to be the physiological link between the circadian and reproductive systems (Falcón et al., 2010).

In recent years, interest has focused on the European sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*), a teleost species that is much appreciated in the Mediterranean market. The increasing amount of data that has been collected and the use of new experimental approaches have shed light on the photo-neuroendocrine control of reproduction and growth in this species. Artificial photoperiods have been proved efficient for controlling reproduction by altering spawning time in adult fish (Carrillo et al., 1993, 1995) or by inhibiting/delaying puberty in male sea bass (Zanuy et al., 2001; Begtashi et al., 2004; Rodríguez et al., 2004, 2005; Felip et al., 2008). Applications of constant long (rather than natural) photoperiods to pre-pubertal sea bass (i) induced delayed gonadal development, and (ii) enhanced the occurrence of precocious males (Rodríguez et al., 2001, 2004). Furthermore, continuous light (LL), which disrupts the plasma melatonin rhythm, also caused alterations in the rhythm of reproductive hormones and inhibited precocious puberty of males when applied from early stages of development in sea bass (Begtashi et al., 2004; Rodríguez et al., 2005; Felip et al., 2008; Bayarri et al., 2009).

72 As a hormonal photoperiod messenger, it is believed that melatonin mediates, at least
73 in part, the abovementioned effects. Recent data on the expression of melatonin receptors and
74 melatonin binding sites support this view (Falcón et al., 2007b, 2010). Melatonin acts through
75 specific binding sites, which are believed to correspond to MT1 receptor subtypes in sea bass
76 brain (Bayarri et al., 2004a,b; Sauzet et al., 2008). The highest density of melatonin receptors
77 has been found in the optic tectum and hypothalamus, two brain areas whose functionality is
78 closely related to photoperiod and reproductive responses, respectively (Bayarri et al.,
79 2004a,b). In sea bass, no significant Kd or Bmax daily variations were found in the optic
80 tectum or hypothalamus (Bayarri et al., 2004b) near the summer solstice, when fish are
81 sexually quiescent (Rodríguez et al., 2001). The present study was designed in order to
82 investigate whether melatonin binding changes in optic tectum and hypothalamus during
83 other stages of the reproductive cycle, at some of which fish showed higher reproductive
84 activity (Bayarri et al., 2009). For this purpose, we chose four physiological stages of the
85 reproductive cycle, namely pre-spermatogenesis in September (PSpg), spermatogenesis in
86 November (Spg), spermiation in February (Spm) and post-spermiation in May (PSpm).

87 The experimental design was aimed at testing whether the LL-induced suppression of
88 precocity mentioned above (Felip et al., 2008; Bayarri et al., 2009) could be related to
89 alterations in melatonin and/or melatonin receptor variations in sea bass. To that end, we
90 compared the daily and seasonal profiles of plasma melatonin and brain melatonin binding in
91 animals maintained under either natural photoperiod (NP) or LL conditions. Attention was
92 focussed on the optic tectum, known to express a high density of receptors in fish (Mazurais
93 et al., 1999), and on the hypothalamus, a major integrator of external as well as internal
94 information important for the control of pituitary function (Okuzawa et al., 2002).

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

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Animals and housing

99 Six-month-old sea bass fingerlings (approximately 3.5g), originating from L'Ecloserie
100 Marine (Gravelines, France), were raised at the Instituto de Acuicultura de Torre la Sal
101 (Castellón, Spain), at 40°N, 0°E. Fish were distributed into four identical 2000-litre light-proof
102 fibreglass tanks, 1-m in depth, provided with well-aerated running sea water (salinity 37‰)
103 and subjected to simulated NP or LL conditions from the day of their arrival in May. Light in
104 each tank was supplied by tungsten bulbs (PAR38Pro, Philips, Madrid, Spain), providing 650-
105 700 lux at the surface of the water, with the simulated NP controlled by an electronic clock
106 (ORBIS, Madrid, Spain), set weekly according to the geographical coordinates. Fish were
107 maintained under a natural temperature regime throughout the experiment (11-25.5°C), with
108 daily oscillations within a range of 0.5°C, and fed a commercial diet (Proaqua, Dueñas,
109 Palencia, Spain) *ad libitum* twice a day by hand.

110 The handling of fish and conduct of the experimental procedures were always
111 performed according to the national and institutional regulations and the current European
112 Union legislation on handling experimental animals (EEC, 1986).

113

Experimental procedure

115 Every 3 hours during a 24-h cycle, 6 fish reared under NP or LL were anaesthetized
116 with 2-phenoxyethanol (0.3 ppm), weighed and measured. The same procedure was
117 performed at 4 physiological stages during the reproductive cycle: PSpg (Sep), Spg (Nov),
118 Spm (Feb) and PSpM (May). Blood was collected by caudal puncture with heparinized
119 syringes; plasma was separated by centrifugation and frozen at -80°C until the time of
120 analysis. The optic tectum and hypothalamus were dissected out (Bayarri et al., 2004a) and

121 frozen separately in liquid nitrogen. During periods of darkness, the sampling was performed
122 under a dim red light.

123

124 *Melatonin analysis*

125 Individual plasma samples were analyzed using a commercial direct RIA kit (IBL,
126 Hamburg, Germany). Briefly, after enzymatic pre-treatment of the samples, these were
127 incubated for 40 hours with assay buffer, 2-[¹²⁵I]-melatonin (¹²⁵IMel) and antibody.
128 Radioactivity was counted using a γ -counter for 1 minute after addition of precipitating
129 antiserum, centrifugation and aspiration of supernatant.

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131 *Membrane preparation*

132 Membranes were prepared and assayed at the Laboratoire Aragó (Banyuls-sur-Mer,
133 France), as described earlier (Bayarri et al., 2004b). Individual optic tectum samples and
134 pooled (n = 2) hypothalamus samples were sonicated in Tris buffer (50mM / CaCl₂ 4mM /
135 PMSF (phenylmethylsulphonyl fluoride, a serine protease inhibitor) 1mM, pH 7.4), using 3
136 pulses of 3 seconds each (Sonics, Bioblock Scientist, France). Homogenates were centrifuged
137 at 800 g to eliminate melanin granules and thus reduce the non-specific binding (Isorna et al.,
138 2004). The supernatants were centrifuged at 13,000 g for 10 min. The pellets thus obtained
139 were resuspended in 700 μ l of Tris-HCl buffer, and the suspension was then centrifuged again
140 for 10 min at 13,000 g. The pellet was resuspended in Tris buffer (50mM / CaCl₂ 4 mM, pH
141 7.4), and a final protein concentration of 1 mg/ml was used in the binding assays. Membranes
142 were manipulated at 4°C during the process and stored at -80°C until assayed. Proteins were
143 determined using the Bradford assay (Bio-Rad, California, USA).

144

145 *Binding assays*

146 Saturation assays were performed on a total volume of 60 μ l containing 20 μ g of
147 membrane and 125 IMel as radioligand at concentrations ranging from 30 to 400 pM.
148 Unlabeled melatonin (150 μ M) was used to quantify the non-specific binding. The binding of
149 125 IMel was measured in duplicate, after incubation on an orbital shaker (200 rpm) at room
150 temperature for 90 minutes. The reaction was stopped by the addition of cold Tris buffer and
151 immediate vacuum filtration using a harvester (Brandel tygon 48 standard 220V,
152 Gaithersburg, MD, USA) and glass fiber filters (FPB-248L Whatman GF/C). Filters were
153 washed three times and radioactivity was quantified in a LKB γ -counter for one minute.
154 Specific binding, which was expressed as fmol/mg of protein, was calculated by subtracting
155 non-specific binding from total binding.

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157 *Data analysis*

158 Data are expressed as mean \pm SEM values. In the variations of Kd and Bmax
159 throughout the reproductive cycle, the value for any given reproductive period was calculated
160 as the average of the eight daily sampling time points for that period. The statistical
161 differences between groups were determined by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)
162 followed by Tukey's test, with $P < 0.05$ taken as the statistically significant threshold. The
163 significance of variations was determined by the cosinor method (Halberg et al., 1967) using
164 chronobiology software (Cosinor, by Prof. Díez-Noguera, University of Barcelona, Spain).

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RESULTS

Daily and seasonal plasma melatonin levels.

Plasma melatonin displayed day/night variations under NP, with significantly higher values during the dark phase than during the light phase for all four periods studied (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$; Fig. 1). The Cosinor method revealed a significant daily variation ($p < 0.05$) during Spg and Spm, with acrophases at 01:02 and 00:25, respectively. Under LL, melatonin showed no daily variations. However, significant differences were found during PSpg (Sep) and Spm (Feb), with the highest values occurring during the subjective day (14:30 in PSpg and 11:30 in Spm) and the first half of the subjective night in Spm (20:30 and 23:30).

Variations in melatonin concentration were seen at different times of the year under both lighting conditions, beginning to increase in November, during Spg, and reaching maximal values in February, during Spm (>500 pg/ml for NP and 300 pg/ml for LL, which are comparable to those found in the NP group the day-time (14:30, 17:30, 08:30 and 11:30)).

¹²⁵IMel binding sites

1. - Optic tectum

Daily variations

Significant daily Kd variations (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$) were seen under NP, but only in February (Spm) (Fig. 2A), with the highest values occurring at 14:30 (>300 pM), and the lowest values 12 hours later, *i.e.*, at 02:30 (<150 pM). No daily variations were observed at other times of the year. Under LL, a significant daily variation in Kd was found in May (PSpm), with a peak being observed at the end of the subjective day (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$; not shown). When both light regimes were compared in February (Spm), the highest Kd value observed at 14:30 under NP (318 pM) was significantly higher than that seen under LL (220

192 pM) at the same time of the day, whereas the lowest value at 02:30 was significantly lower
193 (137 vs. 263 pM for NP and LL, respectively) (Fig. 2A).

194 Bmax also displayed significant daily variations in February (Spm) in fish maintained
195 under NP conditions (ANOVA and COSINOR, $p < 0.05$; Fig. 2B). The lowest values were
196 seen at the end of the night (05:30), and the highest values were observed in the afternoon
197 (14:30). This daily variation was not significant under LL (Fig. 2B), although a significant
198 rhythmic component did appear in September (PSpg; ANOVA, $p < 0.05$, data not shown).
199 When comparing between treatments, the fish maintained under LL conditions had
200 significantly higher Bmax values in February (Spm) at the two last time points of the night
201 (02:30 and 05:30).

202 *Seasonal variations*

203 Kd, but not Bmax, exhibited significant variations under NP, with maximum values in
204 November (Spg) and minimum values in September (PSpg) (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$; Fig. 3A,B).
205 Under LL conditions, neither Kd nor Bmax displayed significant differences throughout the
206 reproductive period. Compared to NP fish, LL fish showed significantly higher Kd values
207 during September (PSpg) and Bmax values during November (Spg) (Kd: 225 pM vs. 156 pM;
208 Bmax: 42 vs. 34 fmol/mg prot for LL and NP, respectively).

209 2. - Hypothalamus

210 *Daily variations*

211 In this tissue, Kd did not vary on a daily basis under any of the treatments tested, and
212 no relevant differences were found between light treatments.

213 Bmax did not show any daily variation in hypothalamic membranes under NP. In
214 contrast, significant daily variations in Bmax were seen under LL in May (PSpm) (ANOVA,
215 $p < 0.05$, data not shown), showing minimum levels at 14:30 (17 fmol/mg prot) and maximum
216 levels at 08:30 (27 fmol/mg prot).

217 Differences in Bmax between the two treatments were observed at certain time points
218 throughout the reproductive cycle (data not shown).

219 *Seasonal variations*

220 Kd variations were significant (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$; Fig. 4A) in hypothalamic
221 membranes under both NP and LL conditions throughout the reproductive cycle. In both
222 cases, the highest Kd values were detected in November (Spg) (169 pM under NP and 192
223 pM under LL). No significant differences were found between the light treatments at any time
224 of the year.

225 Bmax also exhibited significant variations among the reproductive stages studied
226 under both light treatments (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$; Fig. 4B). Under NP conditions, the highest
227 values were seen during May (PSpm) (31 fmol/mg prot), while under LL, maximum values
228 occurred in November (Spg) and February (Spm). When both light treatments were
229 compared, Bmax differences were statistically significant for all the reproductive periods
230 except PSpg (September), with higher values under LL conditions during November (Spg)
231 and February (Spm), but lower during May (PSpm).

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DISCUSSION

These results improve our understanding of the melatonin system in sea bass. Aside from this, they provide interesting new information concerning brain melatonin binding sites in relation to the annual reproduction cycle. Not only do they extend previous data indicating that melatonin binding is under circadian control, they also complete the picture by demonstrating that a circadian clock is present in sea bass brain, and that this clock drives an annual rhythm of melatonin binding.

Plasma melatonin profile

Under NP, the daily variations in plasma melatonin showed high levels at night and low levels during the day, thus matching the prevailing photoperiod. This is the usual pattern observed in teleost fish (Falcón, 1999; Falcón et al., 2007a,b, 2010). Under a natural light/dark cycle, melatonin profiles varied from one time of the year to another. The highest amplitudes were seen in November and February, coinciding with Spg and Spm, respectively. In September (PSpg) and May (PSpm), nocturnal levels were lower. Annual rhythms of nocturnal melatonin production have been reported for a number of fish species, including sea bass (García-Allegue et al., 2001), but contrary to what we have observed, these rhythms tend to be of low amplitude/long duration during the winter, and of high amplitude/short duration in the summer (Falcón, 1999). These discrepancies could be due to the differences in the experimental protocols used (months analyzed, strains within the species, ambient light and temperature, etc.).

Light is known to inhibit pineal melatonin production through the inhibition of arylalkylamine N-acetyltransferase2 (AANAT2) activity (Falcón et al., 2007b). It is therefore not surprising that the LL treatment applied here disrupted the plasma melatonin variation. In

259 fish, many experiments have been performed under constant illumination or darkness. A
260 circadian melatonin rhythm has been shown to persist *in vitro* under constant darkness in
261 several non-salmonid species (Bolliet et al., 1994, 1996a,b), including sea bass (Bayarri et al.,
262 2004c). *In vivo*, however, studies performed on sea bass under DD conditions showed high
263 levels of plasma melatonin without any significant variation after day 2 following the onset of
264 the treatment, most probably as a result of the uncoupling of multioscillatory units (Iigo et al.,
265 1997). In the present study, it might be possible that the daily variations found under LL
266 conditions during September (PSpg) and February (Spm) reflect the presence of some active
267 circadian component controlling AANAT2, as (i) the sea bass pineal gland contains a
268 circadian oscillator (Bayarri et al., 2004c), (ii) in contrast to AANAT2 protein and AANAT2
269 enzyme activity, AANAT2 mRNA is not light sensitive (Coon et al., 1999), (iii) *Aanat2* gene
270 expression is controlled by the clock machinery (Appelbaum et al., 2006), and (iv) a minor
271 part of the pineal AANAT2 protein pool is photo-stable (Falcón et al., 2010).

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273 **Daily and seasonal variations in melatonin binding**

274 Many studies have described the location and distribution of melatonin binding sites in
275 fish brains; however, few of them report on their daily variations, and their results have been
276 contradictory. Furthermore, none have investigated variations throughout the reproductive
277 cycle. Here we provide evidence showing that K_d and B_{max} exhibit daily variations in the
278 optic tectum at some times during the year, whereas no such variations may be detected in the
279 hypothalamus. The specific differences related to tissue and/or time-of-year indicates the
280 existence of different mechanisms regulating the binding sites, most probably a multifactorial
281 process. One of these regulators could be melatonin itself, as is the case in mammals
282 (Guerrero et al., 2000). This would explain the differences observed between NP and LL fish
283 in terms of B_{max} variations. The observation that under NP conditions, B_{max} reached its

284 minimum level when melatonin was high (*i.e.*, at night) agrees with data other researchers
285 have obtained for pike, goldfish and seabream (Gaildrat et al., 1998; Iigo et al., 2003; Falcón
286 et al., 1996), and with the idea that melatonin could contribute to down regulate its own
287 receptors. However, this is not a general rule, because plasma melatonin, Kd and Bmax are all
288 in phase in masu salmon maintained under NP conditions (Amano et al., 2003a). More studies
289 are needed to elucidate which factors, others than melatonin, are involved in the control of
290 melatonin binding. Nervous inputs from both the retina and the pineal gland are good
291 candidates, since the areas studied here are targeted by both pinealfugal and retinofugal
292 innervations (Ekström and Meissl, 1997). The variations observed under LL also indicate that
293 a circadian control of melatonin binding is at work, as seen in pike (Gaildrat et al., 1998).

294 One of the new findings of this study is the existence of variations among four
295 reproductive stages, particularly significant in the hypothalamus, in melatonin binding under
296 both NP and LL conditions. This further supports the notion that the melatonin system is
297 involved in annual time measurement, rather than being merely the result of seasonal
298 variations in plasma melatonin levels. Moreover, variations persisted under constant light,
299 which provides strong support for the idea that the brain of sea bass contains a circannual
300 clock, and that melatonin binding sites are one of its outputs.

301 In summary, it appears that both melatonin production and melatonin binding sites are
302 controlled by circadian and circannual clocks in the brain of sea bass, and that the effects of
303 melatonin depend not only on its rhythmic production, but also on the rhythmic expression of
304 its binding sites. Where the clocks that control the circadian and circannual variations in
305 melatonin binding sites are located, and how they interact with the clocks that control
306 melatonin production are among the questions to be answered in the future.

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308 **Variations in melatonin binding and seasonal reproduction**

309 Seasonal reproduction is a well known feature of living organisms. In fish,
310 photoperiod manipulation may advance or delay reproduction. It has long been suspected that
311 melatonin, as a hormonal signal of photoperiod and season, could play a role in the effects of
312 photoperiod on annual reproduction (Falcón et al. 2007b, 2010). In fact, melatonin has been
313 demonstrated to modulate LH secretion in Atlantic croaker by *in vivo* and *in vitro* studies
314 (Khan and Thomas, 1996)

315 Here we investigated the characteristics of melatonin binding in sea bass optic tectum
316 and hypothalamus and found differences between both tissues throughout the reproductive
317 cycle. These differences most certainly reflect differences in their functions: the optic tectum
318 is tightly linked to integration of light information (Mazurais et al., 1999), which makes it
319 sensitive to circadian changes, while the hypothalamus is more closely related to reproduction
320 (González-Martínez et al., 2002), and therefore to circannual rhythms.

321 The optic tectum of sea bass showed, under NP, daily variations of both Kd and Bmax
322 in February, during spermatogenesis, one of the periods when reproductive activity is at its
323 peak, supported by the highest levels of expression of pituitary LH and FSH β sub-units
324 (Mateos et al., 2003) and plasma levels of LH and 11-ketotestosterone (Rodríguez et al.,
325 2005; Felip et al., 2008). However, no daily variations were reported in the optic tectum near
326 the summer solstice (Bayarri et al., 2004a,b), a quiescent period for sea bass reproduction.
327 Therefore, the daily fluctuation of Kd and Bmax observed during or before the reproductive
328 stage suggests that this rhythmic behaviour could be very important for the hormonal
329 hierarchy regulation of maturation, as occurs in mammals (Ojeda et al., 2006). In the present
330 experiment, under LL, the period showing significant daily Bmax variations in optic tectum
331 was pre-spermatogenesis (September) instead of spermiation (February). The fact that a lower
332 number of precocious individuals was detected among fish maintained under LL compared to
333 those maintained under NP (Begtashi et al., 2004; Felip et al., 2008; Bayarri et al., 2009)

334 supports our hypothesis that the daily variations in melatonin receptor density are important
335 for the reproduction process to be completed during the spermiation period. On the other
336 hand, Amano et al. (2006) failed to find any daily Kd or Bmax rhythms under LL or DD
337 conditions for masu salmon, and Iigo et al. (2003) found a significant rhythm only for Bmax
338 in goldfish under DD conditions, with fish being sampled after a few days of constant
339 conditions of illumination in both cases. As suggested above, the long period during which
340 our fish were subjected to LL may have drastically altered their circadian oscillators,
341 changing the affinity and density of melatonin receptors throughout the 24-h cycle.

342 Regarding variations on melatonin binding during the reproductive stages, only the
343 hypothalamus showed, under NP, significant fluctuation on receptor density, with lowest
344 values during September (PSpg) and highest during May (PSpm). To date, there are very few
345 studies available regarding the annual rhythms of melatonin binding sites in fish.
346 Nevertheless, Amano et al. (2003b) described maturational differences of melatonin binding
347 sites in the whole brain of masu salmon. These authors found a higher density in July in
348 precocious males, which have initiated testicular development, than in October, when fish had
349 spermiated. No maturational differences were evident in the Kd. In the present study, density
350 was highest during May (PSpm), a period with no sexual activity, and Kd was the parameter
351 which showed the highest values during November (Spg).. Considering the well-known
352 differences between the circadian system of salmonid and non-salmonid species (including
353 the presence in the latter, but not in the former, of endogenous intrapineal oscillators), it was
354 not surprising to also find species-dependent differences in the sensitivity of melatonin
355 receptors. However, what appears to be entirely clear is that the maturational status of fish
356 correlates with the daily and seasonal variation characteristics of melatonin binding sites. The
357 effect of treatment with LL throughout the reproductive cycle was observed especially in the
358 hypothalamus, where the Bmax of fish maintained under LL showed significantly higher

359 values during November (Spg) and February (Spm), but lower values during May (PSpm), as
360 compared to fish kept under NP conditions. The physiological meaning of these differences
361 may need further research, however.

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363 In summary, male European sea bass reared under NP conditions exhibited daily
364 variations in plasma melatonin, with nocturnal elevations that were abolished in fish
365 maintained under LL conditions from early stages of development. This prolonged
366 submission to LL also affected melatonin receptor affinity and density variations. In the optic
367 tectum, a marked role of daily variations of Bmax during the period of maximal sexual
368 activity is suggested, since there was no significant oscillation present during the rest of the
369 reproductive periods or during the same period in fish under LL conditions. The latter group
370 of fish showed a lower percentage of precocity, as seen in previous studies. The presence of
371 seasonal, but not daily, changes in Kd and Bmax in the hypothalamus is thought to be due to
372 the role this tissue plays in the rhythmic control of reproduction. Moreover, the persistence of
373 reproductive stage-related variations of affinity and density in the hypothalamus while under
374 LL conditions may indicate that these variations are controlled by internal clocks, which may
375 not involve melatonin.

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509

FIGURE LEGENDS

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Figure 1. Daily variations in plasma melatonin throughout a 24-h cycle during pre-spermatogenesis (PSpg), spermatogenesis (Spg), spermiation (Spm) and post-spawning (PSpm), in fish maintained under NP (black) and LL (white). Horizontal white and black bars represent day and night, respectively. Different lowercase and capital letters indicate significant variations (ANOVA, Tukey's test, $P < 0.05$) among different time points throughout the 24-hour period and among the four different phases of the reproductive cycle, respectively. Differences between treatments at each time point are represented by an asterisk.

Figure 2. Kd (A) and Bmax (B) daily variations of melatonin binding in optic tectum membranes under NP (black) and LL (white) during Spm. Different letters indicate statistically significant variations, only present under NP (ANOVA, Tukey's test, $p < 0,05$). Differences between light treatments at each sampling point are represented by an asterisk. The significance of the daily Bmax variation was also demonstrated by cosinor analysis ($p < 0.05$). Horizontal bars represent the illumination regime (light period in white and dark period in black).

Figure 3. Kd (A) and Bmax (B) changes of melatonin binding throughout the reproductive cycle in the optic tectum for fish maintained under NP (black) and LL (white) conditions. Different lowercase and capital letters indicate significant variations (ANOVA, Tukey's test, $p < 0.05$) among the four study periods for fish under NP and LL, respectively. Differences between treatments at each sampling period are represented by an asterisk.

534 Figure 4. Kd (A) and Bmax (B) variations of melatonin binding throughout the reproductive
535 cycle in the hypothalamus for fish maintained under NP (black) and LL (white) conditions.
536 Different lowercase and capital letters indicate significant variations (ANOVA, Tukey's test,
537 $p < 0.05$) among the four study periods for fish under NP and LL, respectively. Differences
538 between treatments at each sampling period are represented by an asterisk.

Figure 1
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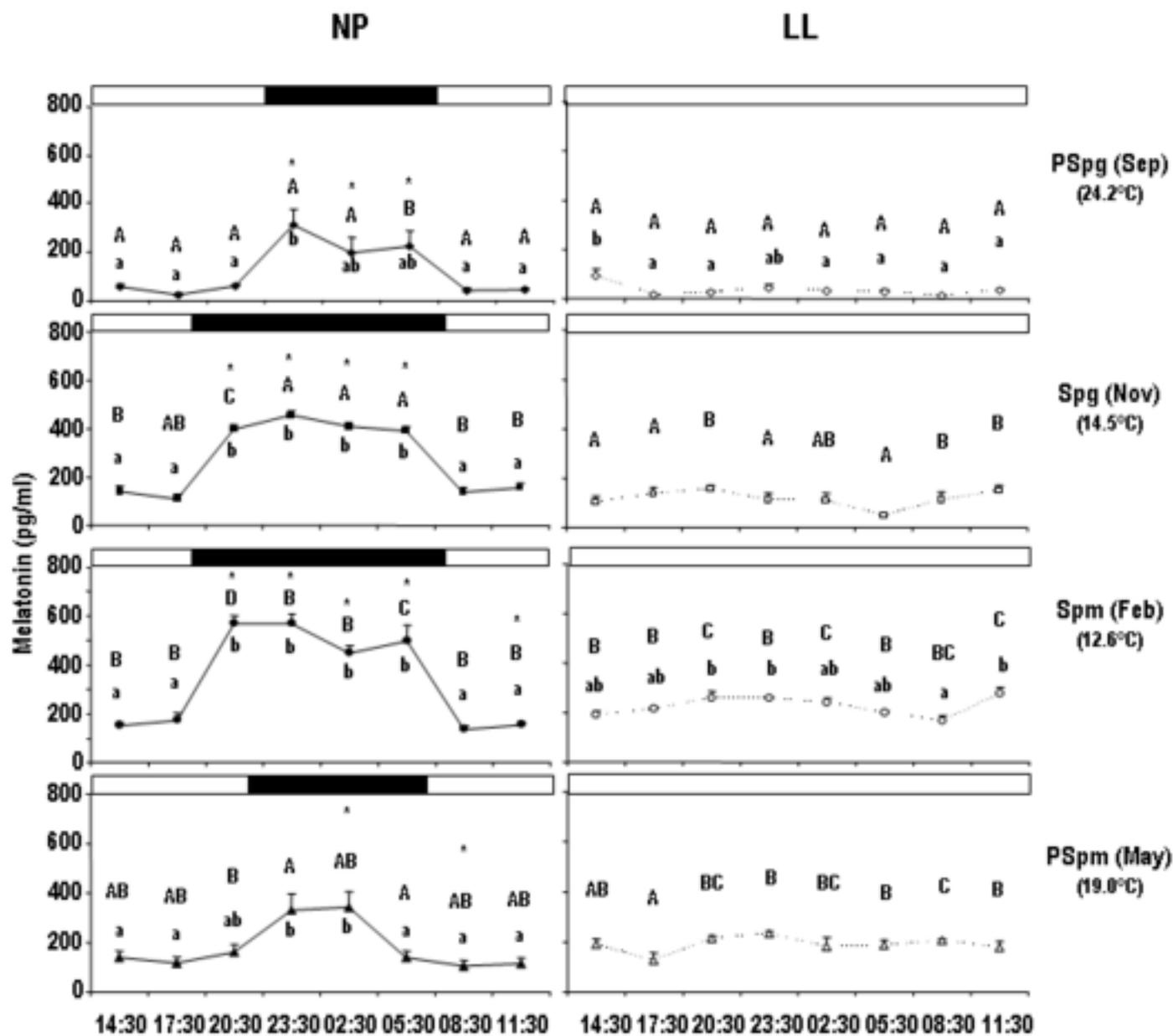


Figure 1

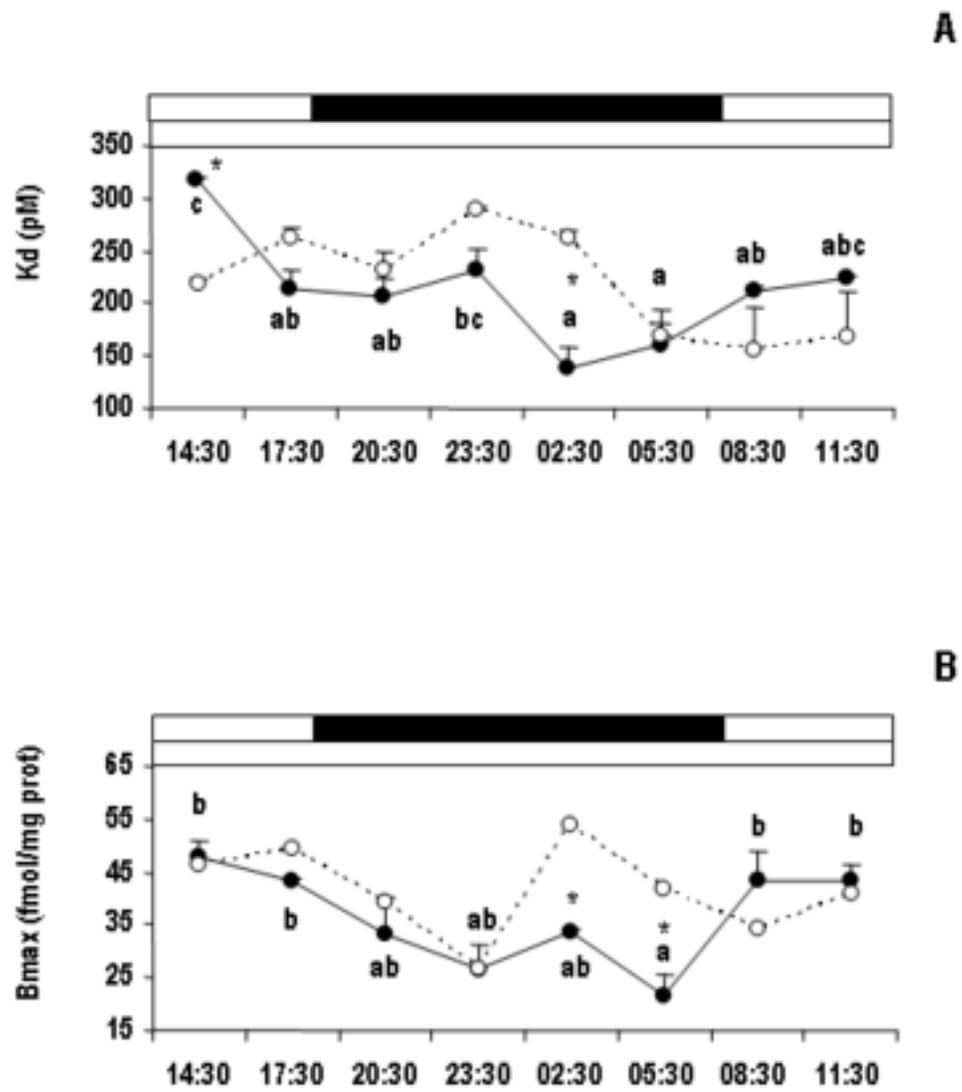


Figure 2

Figure 3
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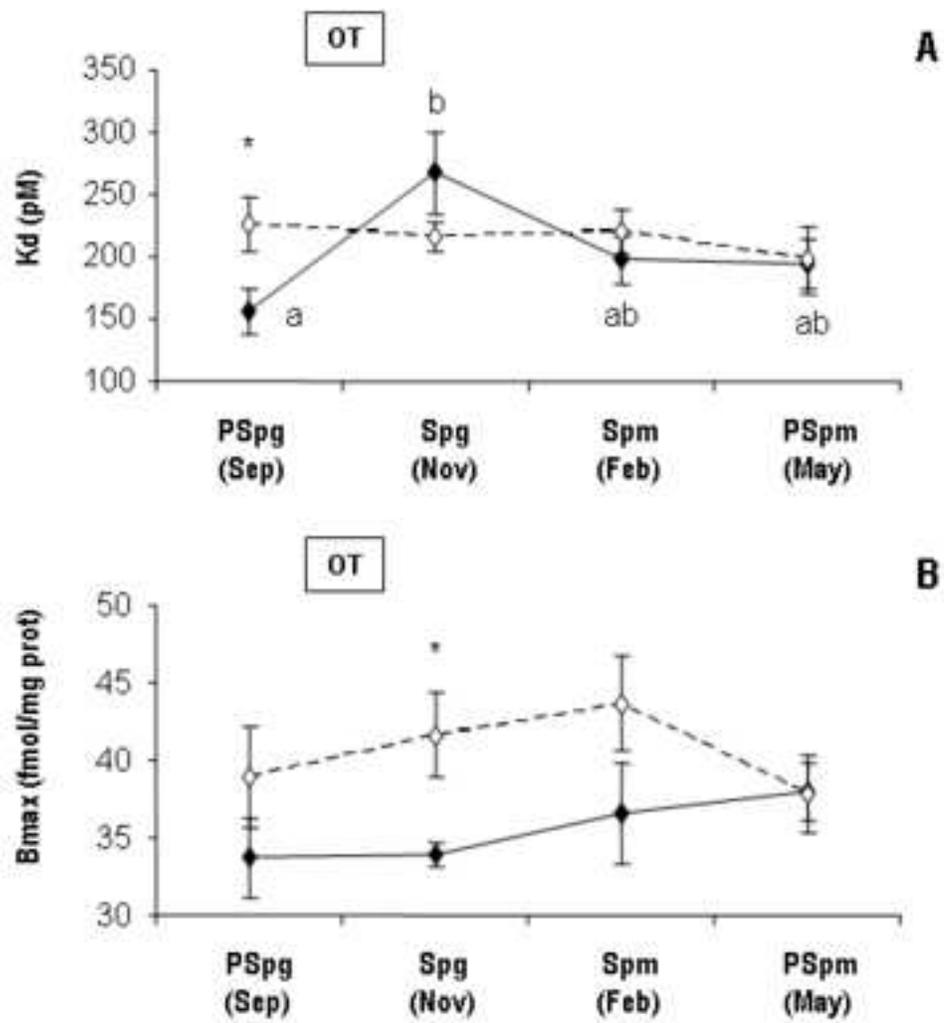


Figure 3

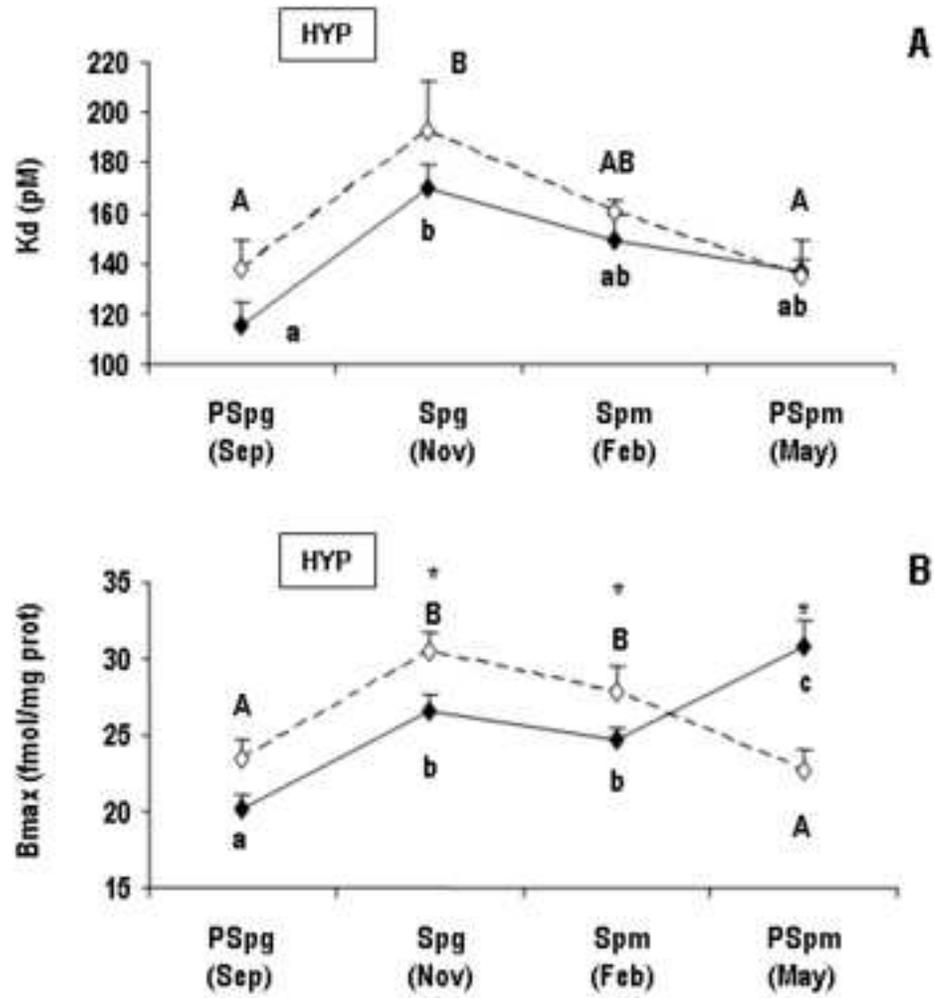


Figure 4