

— Assessing the importance of food for improving noble crayfish culture conditions —

Captive breeding and crayfish culture are considered important measures in species protection activities. Thus, knowledge on optimal feeding of crayfish in captivity is needed in order to secure minimal mortality and prevent detrimental effects to health. To optimize conditions of crayfish prior to subsequent stocking, feeding trials were conducted with the aim of investigating the connection between food intake, food preference and temperature under near natural conditions. During a five-month period, noble crayfish were fed on fish, carrots, algae and chironomid-larvae according to a pre-defined rotation system, whereby the ambient water temperature ranged from 5 °C to 13 °C, following the natural temperature regime. The results of these feeding trials demonstrate a direct correlation between rising temperature and increasing food intake for water temperatures exceeding 8 °C. Food intake is further influenced by the variety of food items available at any one time. The results also confirm that *Astacus astacus* has a strong preference for fish and that alternation of food types has an impact on consumption. Our results prompt the following recommendations for optimized feeding conditions of crayfish in captivity prior to their release: (1) a balanced diet containing not only plant tissue but also a significant proportion of animal tissue and (2) the amount of available food must be adjusted according to the carapace length of the crayfish.

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