ABSTRACT

One hundred and eighteen benthoepelagic fish specimens from the coastal zone of the Callao region, Peru, were necropsied from May 2015 to January 2016 to study their metazoan parasite community: 38 specimens of *Cheilodactylus variegatus* Valenciennes, 1833 (Cheilodactylidae), 66 of *Mugil cephalus* Linnaeus, 1758 (Mugilidae) and 14 of *Paralabrax humeralis* (Valenciennes, 1828) (Serranidae). Nineteen taxa of metazoan parasites were collected: 10 in *Ch.* *variegatus*, 4 in *M.* *cephalus* and 7 in *P.* *humeralis*. Only *Cheilodactylus variegatus* is a new host record for 7 species. Four species of parasites are new geographic records. The digeneans were the majority of the parasite specimens collected (37.85%) in *Ch.* *variegatus*. In *M.* *cephalus*, the majority of the parasite specimens collected were copepods and monogeneans which accounted for 77.78% of individuals collected. Five larval stages were found. The parasites of three host species showed the typical pattern of aggregate distribution observed in many communities of metazoan parasites of marine fish of Peru. In *M.* *cephalus*, the total length was correlated with the prevalence of 2 species of parasites. In *Ch.* *variegatus*, and *P.* *humeralis*, no relationship between the prevalence and abundance versus the length and sex of host was observed.

*Keywords*: ectoparasites – endoparasites – marine fish – parasite ecology – parasite of fish – South America
Three hierarchical levels in studies of parasite communities are recognized: (a) infracomunities, which include all individuals of different species of parasites within a single host. (b) component communities formed by all infracomunities within a population or host and (c) composite communities, that include all parasite communities in various hosts within an ecosystem (Bush et al., 1997, 2001).

Community studies form the basis of any parasitological study and are useful for making comparisons between host species by their parasitological descriptors for evaluation of biodiversity loss or as indicators of pollution (Lafferty, 2012; Madanire-Moyo et al., 2012; Madhavi & Lakshmi, 2012). Most studies of these biological systems consist of interpreting patterns of distribution and abundance of parasitic taxa as hosts themselves of variables such as their ontogenetic stage with samples usually taken in a lifetime opportunity (Ferrer-Castelló et al., 2007).

In the present study, we report the community ecology of the metazoan parasites of three benthopelagic fish species at the component and infracomunity level from Callao, Peru.

INTRODUCTION

Thirty eight specimens of Cheilodactylus variegatus Valenciennes, 1833 (Cheilodactylidae), 66 of Mugil cephalus Linnaeus, 1758 (Mugilidae) and 14 of Paralabrax humeralis (Valenciennes, 1828) were examined. The latter have been used as tools to discriminate host populations, trophic interactions and to identify contaminated environments (Muñoz & Cribb, 2006; Pulido & Monks, 2008). The length and sex of the fish host are considered important ecological variables that relate to fluctuations in parasitic communities (Luque & Poulin, 2008; Iannacone & Alvariño, 2009ab).

In the present study, we report the community ecology of the metazoan parasites of three benthopelagic fish species at the component and infracomunity level from Callao, Peru.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Thirty eight specimens of Cheilodactylus variegatus Valenciennes, 1833 (Cheilodactylidae), 66 of Mugil cephalus Linnaeus, 1758 (Mugilidae) and 14 of Paralabrax humeralis (Valenciennes,
1828) (Serranidae) were necropsied between May 2015 and January 2016 from the coast of Callao, Peru (12° 4’S, 77°10’W) to study their community of metazoan parasites (Eiras et al., 2006). Fishes were identified according to Chirichigno & Cornejo (2001). The average total lengths of the fishes were: Ch. variegatus 23 ± 4.61 (13–33) cm; M. cephalus 20.85 ± 5.31 (13–37) cm and P. humeralis 16.86 ± 0.84 (15–18) cm.

The ecological approximation of the metazoan parasite community was made to component and infracomunity levels (Esch et al., 1990). The analyses included only parasite species with prevalence higher than 10% (Bush et al., 2001).

The variance-to-mean ratio of parasite abundance (index of dispersion), computed using the program Quantitative Parasitology 3.0 (Rózsa et al., 2000), was used to detect distribution patterns of the infrapopulations (Poulin, 1993; Amarante et al., 2015). The dominance frequency and the relative dominance (number of specimens of one species/total number of specimens of all species in the infracomunity) of each parasite species were calculated according to Rohde et al. (1995). The parasite species diversity was calculated using the Brillouin index (H; Zar, 1996). For dominance, the Berger-Parker index (Bautista-Hernández et al., 2013) was used. The Pearson's correlation coefficient rp was used to indicate the relationship between the host's total length and parasite abundance. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient rs was calculated to determine possible correlation between the total length of host and parasite prevalence, with previous arcsine transformation of the prevalence data (Zar, 1996; Bautista-Hernández et al., 2013). The possible influence of host sex on abundance and prevalence of parasites was tested using the t-Student test and the chi-square test, respectively. Parasite species diversity was calculated using the Brillouin's index (H) (Zar, 1996). The probable variation of diversity in relation to host sex (Mann-Whitney test) and to host total length (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient) was tested.

The ecological terminology used follows Bush et al. (1997). Statistical significance level was evaluated at p ≤ 0.05. Voucher specimens of metazoan parasites were deposited in the Helminthological Collection and Related Invertebrates of the Museum of Natural History at the San Marcos University (MUSM), 3570-3590, Lima, Peru.

Ethic aspects
The authors point out that they fulfilled all national and international ethical aspects.

RESULTS

Component community
Nineteen different species of metazoan parasites were collected: 2 monogeneans, 4 digeneans, 1 cestode, 3 nematodes, 7 copepods and 2 acanthocephalans. Two species of metazoan parasites were common in at least two communities.

Cheilodactylus variegatus. Ten species of metazoan parasites were collected (1 monogenean, 2 digeneans, 1 cestode, 2 nematodes, 2 acanthocephalans and 2 copepods) (Table 1). Cheilodactylus variegatus is a new host record for many of these species except the monogenean Microcotyle nemadactylus Dillon & Hargis, 1965, and the copepods Caligus cheilodactyli Krøyer, 1863 and Clavellotis dilatata (Krøyer, 1863). The monogenean M. nemadactylus was the most prevalent species and Opecoelidae gen. sp. the most abundant parasite collected 323 individuals (37.16% of all parasites). Gonocercella aff. pacifica was the species with the highest average value of relative dominance (0.37 ± 0.19), followed by M. nemadactylus (0.34 ± 0.17) and Corynosoma sp. (0.14 ± 0.03). Ectoparasite adults account for 42.58% of all collected parasites, endoparasite adults around 38.78% and larval endoparasites just 18.64%. The dispersion index (ID) showed five parasites found in Ch. variegatus the typical aggregation distribution pattern with the following sequence from highest to lowest: M. nemadactylus (12.40)> Corynosoma sp. (7.89)> C. dilatata (3.08)> C. cheilodactyl (2.86)> Dichelyne sp. (2.60). The type of distribution was not determined in 5 parasites due to lower prevalence (Table 1).

The total length of the host showed no correlation with the prevalence and abundance of any parasite. Sex of host did not influence the prevalence and abundance of species of parasites.
**Mugil cephalus.** Four species of metazoan parasites were collected (Table 2). The monogenean *Metamicrocotyla macracantha* (Alexander, 1954) was the most abundant and prevalent and 82 specimens (59.94% of all parasites) were collected. *Metamicrocotyla macracantha* had the highest value of mean relative dominance (0.57 ± 0.23), followed by *Contracaecum* sp. (0.22 ± 0.02) and *Bomolochus nitidus* Wilson, 1911 (0.17 ± 0.05). All parasites of *M. cephalus* showed the typical pattern of aggregated distribution observed in many parasites systems: *M. macracantha* (4.21)> *B. nitidus* (3.97)> *Contracaecum* sp. (3.01)> *N. lizae* (1.56). Specimens of *Contracaecum* sp. (rs = -1.00; p = 0.000) and *B. nitidus* (rs = 1.00; p = 0.000) showed correlation between the total length of *M. cephalus* and prevalence. The total length of the host showed no correlation with the abundance of any parasites. Host sex did not influence the prevalence and abundance of any species of parasite.

**Paralabrax humeralis.** Seven species of metazoan parasites were collected (3 digeneans, 1 acanthocephalan and 7 copepods) (Table 3). *Paralabrax humeralis* is a new host record for the digeneans *Macvicaria* sp. and *Opecoelidae* gen. sp. The copepod *Hatschekia amphiprocessa* Castro-Romero & Baeza-Kuroki, 1986 was the most prevalent and abundant parasite with 169 individuals (52.81% of all parasites) collected. The copepod *H. amphiprocessa* was the species that had the highest frequency value of relative dominance (0.53 ± 0.27), followed by *Helicometra fasciata* (Rudolphi, 1819) Odhner, 1902 (0.33 ± 0.14) and *Hamaticolax paralabracis* (Luque & Bruno, 1990) (0.07 ± 0.05) (Table 2). Adult ectoparasites represented 63.43% of all collected parasites, adult endoparasites around 35.31%, and endoparasitic larvae just 1.25%. The dispersion index (ID) showed five parasites of *P. humeralis* with the typical aggregated distribution pattern followed by *H. fasciata* (67.64)> *H. paralabracis* (3.99)> *H. amphiprocessa* (7.84)> *C. quadratus* (2.81)> *Corynosoma* sp. (2.06). The distribution of 2 parasites was not determined due to lower prevalence of less of 10% (Table 3). The total length of the host showed no correlation with the prevalence and abundance of any parasite. The sex of *P. humeralis* was positively correlated with the prevalence of the copepod *H. paralabracis* (X² = 4.66; p = 0.03). However, the abundance of the remaining parasites was not correlated with the sex of the host (p>0.05).

**Infracommunities**

**Cheilodactylus variegatus.** Thirty-six (94.73%) specimens were parasitized by at least one parasite species. A total of 869 individual parasites were collected averaging 22.86 ± 35.04 per host. The total length of the host was positively correlated with the abundance (r = 0.42; p = 0.008) and with the richness of parasites (rs = 0.48, p = 0.002). Infections with 1 parasite species were found in five hosts (13.16%), biparasitism in 17 hosts (44.74%), triparasitism in 11 hosts (28.95%), tetraparasitism two hosts (5.26%) and pentaparasitism in a host (2.63%). The dominance index of Berger-Parker for infracommunities was 0.45 ± 0.19. The average value of Brillouin diversity index (H) was 1.31 ± 0.27. The average diversity of parasite species did not correlate with the total length of the host (rs = 0.21; p = 0.19) and no significant differences between the diversity of parasites between male (H = 1.32 ± 0.29) and female hosts were observed (H = 1.26 ± 0.22) (Zc = 102.5; p = 0.13).

**Mugil cephalus.** Fifty-eight (80.55%) specimens were parasitized by at least one parasite species. A total of 144 individual parasites were collected averaging 2.83 ± 2.71 parasite / host. Host length did not correlate with the abundance (r = 0.15; p = 0.22) or with the richness of parasites (rs = 0.12, p = 0.30). Infections with 1 species of parasite were found in 33 hosts (46%), double infections in 17 (24%) and triple infections in 8 hosts (11%). The dominance index of Berger-Parker for infracommunities was 0.44 ± 0.14. The average value of Brillouin diversity index (H) was 0.80 ± 0.07. The average diversity of parasite species did not correlate with the total length of the host (rs = 0.05; p = 0.65) and no significant differences between the diversity of parasites of male (H = 0.80 ± 0.06) and female hosts were observed (H = 0.79 ± 0.02) (Zc = 95; p = 0.45).

**Paralabrax humeralis.** All specimens of hosts were parasitized by at least one parasite species. A total of 320 individual parasites were collected averaging 3.26 ± 7.19. The length of the host did not correlate with the abundance (r = 0.13; p = 0.64) or with the richness of parasites (rs = 0.35, p = 0.21). One host (7.14%) showed infection with one
parasite species and 7 (50%) with 3 (21.43%) and 2 (14.29%), and 1 (7.14%) with multiple infections of 2, 3, 4 and 5 species, respectively. The dominance index of Berger-Parker for infracommunities was 0.52 ± 0.14. The average value of Brillouin diversity index (H) was 1.09 ± 0.15. The average diversity of parasite species did not correlate with the total length of the host (r = 0.32; p = 0.26) and no significant differences between the diversity of parasites of male (H = 0.83 ± 0.46) and female hosts were observed (H = 0.91 ± 0.43) (Zc = -0.19; p = 0.84).

Table 1. Prevalence, intensity range, mean intensity, mean abundance, and site of infection of metazoan parasites found in Cheilodactylus variegatus from the coastal zone of Callao, Peru.

| Parasites | Prevalence (%) | Intensity range | Mean intensity ± SD | Mean abundance ± SD | Site of infection |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Monogenea |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Microcotyle nemadactylus | 76.32 | 2–57 | 10.28± 2.80 | 7.84± 3.98 | Gills |
| Digenea |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Gonocercella aff. pacifica †* | 5.26 | 1–5 | 3± 7.95 | 0.16± 1.46 | Intestine |
| Opecoelidae gen. sp. †* | 7.89 | 57–203 | 107.67± 66.06 | 8.50± 4.44 | Intestine |
| Cestoda |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Adenocephalus pacificus (larvae)* | 2.63 | 1 | 1± 9.36 | 0.03± 1.55 | Mesenteries |
| Acantocephala |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Corynosoma sp. (larvae)* | 50 | 1–22 | 6.79± 5.27 | 3.39± 0.83 | Mesenteries |
| Profilicollis altmani (larvae)* | 2.63 | 27 | 27± 9.36 | 0.03± 1.55 | Intestine |
| Nematoda |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Dichelyne sp.* | 10.53 | 1–4 | 2± 8.66 | 0.21± 1.42 | Intestine |
| Proleptus carvajali (larvae)* | 2.63 | 5 | 5± 6.54 | 0.13± 1.48 | Intestine |
| Copepoda |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Caligus cheilodactyli | 21.05 | 1–5 | 2.75± 8.13 | 0.58± 1.16 | Gills |
| Clavellotis dilatata | 44.74 | 1–7 | 2.94± 7.99 | 1.32± 0.64 | Gills |

† New geographical record. *New host record.

Table 2. Prevalence, intensity range, mean intensity, mean abundance, and site of infection of metazoan parasites found in Mugil cephalus from the coastal zone of Callao, Peru.

| Parasites | Prevalence (%) | Intensity range | Mean intensity ± SD | Mean abundance ± SD | Site of infection |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Monogenea |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Metamicrocotyla macracantha | 51.39 | 1–7 | 2.22± 0.29 | 1.14± 0.45 | Gills |
| Nematoda |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Contracaecum sp. (larvae) | 34.72 | 1–4 | 1.28± 0.38 | 0.44± 0.04 | Kidney |
| Copepoda |                |                |                     |                     |                  |
| Bomolochus nitidus | 11.11 | 1–5 | 3.125± 0.93 | 0.35± 0.11 | Gills |
| Naobranchia lizae | 11.11 | 1 | 0.63± 0.84 | 0.07± 0.30 | Gills |
Table 3. Prevalence, intensity range, mean intensity, mean abundance, and site of infection of metazoan parasites found in *Paralabrax humeralis* from the coastal zone of Callao, Peru.

| Parasites               | Prevalence (%) | Intensity range | Mean intensity ± SD | Mean abundance ± SD | Site of infection |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| **Digenea**             |                |                 |                     |                     |                   |
| *Helicometra fasciata*  | 78.57          | 1−37            | 9.73±2.96           | 7.64±3.10           | Intestine         |
| *Macvicaria* sp. †      | 7.14           | 1               | 1±3.21              | 0.07±2.26           | Intestine         |
| Opecoelidae gen. sp. †  | 7.14           | 5               | 5±0.38              | 0.36±2.06           | Intestine         |
| **Acantocephala**       |                |                 |                     |                     |                   |
| *Corynosoma* sp. (larvae)* | 14.28          | 2               | 2±2.50              | 0.29±2.11           | Mesenteries       |
| **Copepoda**            |                |                 |                     |                     |                   |
| *Caligus quadratus*     | 21.42          | 1−8             | 3.67±1.32           | 0.79±1.75           | Gills             |
| *Hamaticolax paralabracis* | 50            | 1−8             | 3.29±1.59           | 1.64±1.15           | Gills             |
| *Hatschekia amphiprocessa* | 85.71          | 3−37            | 14.08±6.04          | 12.07±6.23          | Gills             |

†New geographical record.

**DISCUSSION**

Findings indicate that the ectoparasites are the main components of parasite community of *M. cephalus*, where monogeneans dominance was observed, and *P. humeralis* dominance was with copepods. In the parasitic community of *C. variegatus*, digeneans endoparasites were the dominant.

Parasite community of *M. cephalus* is dominated by ectoparasites (copepods and monogeneans), that has previously been reported by Luque (1985) and by Iannacone & Alvariño (2009a) on the marine coast of Lima, Peru. However, the dominance of endoparasites in *M. cephalus* has been reported by Özer & Kurca (2015) off the coast of Turkey. These differences in the dominance of a particular group of parasites (ectoparasites and endoparasites) may be influenced by the hydrobiological conditions or regional environmental or ecological conditions where the fish were caught (Ibagy & Sinque, 1995). The dominance of ectoparasites has been reported for other parasitic communities in marine fish from the South Pacific Coast (Luque, 1994; Oliva & Luque, 1998).

Iannacone & Alvariño (2009a) indicated that the monogenean parasite *M. macracantha* and copepod *N. lizae* were the most prevalent species with prevalences of 36.4% and 22.9%, respectively. However, in the present research the monogenean *M. macracantha* and the nematode *Contracaecum* sp. were the most common species with prevalences of 51.39% and 34.72%, respectively. However, the copepods *B. nitidus* and *N. lizae* presented prevalence lower than 12%. The behavior of forming schools in the flathead grey mullet would probably facilitate the transmission of *M. macracantha*, since this species of parasite has a direct life cycle. The foraging habits would favor the transmission of the nematode
Contracaecum sp. when consuming infected free living copepods.

No correlation between the abundance of each parasite species and the length in the composition of the parasite community of M. cephalus was found. In contrast, only a correlation was found between the prevalence of Bomolochus sp. and Contracaecum sp. with the size of the hosts. Luque (1994) found that both the prevalence and mean infection intensity of M. macracantha were positively correlated with host length. However, Iannacone & Alvariño (2009a) did not find correlation between the prevalence and the abundance of each species of parasite with the length of flathead grey mullet. These differences may be caused by the influence of regional ecological disturbances. Poulin & Morand (2004) mention that larger body size host fish could provide more space, more nutrients, and possibly a wider variety of niches for parasitic species.

Our results indicate that there is no effect of host sex on parasite prevalence and abundance. These same results were found by Iannacone & Alvariño (2009a). Iannacone (2004) points out that the selection of parasites for one of the two sexes of host fish could be attributed to differences in the ecological relationships (habitat, behavior and feeding) of males and females. In this work, the same pattern was observed in other marine fishes of the Peruvian coast, where fish showed no difference in parasite prevalence and abundance in relation to host sex (Iannacone, 2003, 2004; Iannacone & Alvariño, 2008).

The parasites B. nitidus and N. lizae showed low prevalence values (11.11%). In contrast, Iannacone & Alvariño (2009a) observed low prevalence values (4.1%) for B. nitidus and relatively higher values (22.9%) for N. lizae. In a congeneric species of Brazil Mugil platans (Günther, 1880), a prevalence of 30.6% was observed for B. nitidus (Knoff et al., 1997).

The most prevalent taxa for M. cephalus were not the same in different years. During 1983-1986, the most prevalent taxa were N. lizae, M. macracantha and Contracaecum sp. (Luque, 1994). During 2008, M. macracantha, N. lizae and H. manteni were more prevalent (Iannacone & Alvariño, 2009a). In contrast, during 2015-2016 (present study), M. macracantha and Contracaecum sp. were more prevalent. Also, species richness was not the same in different years: during 1983-1986, we recorded a total of 6 parasite taxa, 5 species in 2008, and 4 taxa in the present study (2015-2016).

With the exception of ectoparasites that have been previously reported in C. variegatus in Peru by Oliva & Luque (1998) and Iannacone et al. (2003), all other species of parasites constitute new records for this host. On the other hand, most of the species of parasites that are in the Peruvian morwong have been previously reported in other hosts that inhabit the Peruvian sea (Luque et al., 2016).

The results obtained in the present study show the predominance in numerical abundance and endoparasite taxa richness over ectoparasites (copepods and monogeneans) for the parasite community of C. variegatus. However, Oliva & Luque (1998) and Iannacone et al. (2003) reported the dominance of ectoparasites in C. variegatus off the coast of Chorrillos, Lima, Peru. For other communities of parasites in fish of the family Cheilodactylidae, the dominance of endoparasites has been well documented. Thus, Vooen & Tracey (2010) reported the dominance of endoparasites in the coastal zone of New Zealand in Nemadactylus macropterus (Forster, 1801). Rossin & Timi (2010) point to Nemadactylus bergi (Norman, 1937) from the coast of Mar de Plata (Argentina) dominance of endoparasites. According to Tam et al. (2008) dominance of endoparasites in the parasitic community component of marine fish can be attributed to the trophic behavior of hosts because they are mainly omnivorous fish, which include a
wide range of aquatic invertebrates that can act as intermediate hosts in the life cycle of several endohelminths. Alves & Luque (2006) attributed the dominance of endoparasites to the food habit, the trophic level and the geographical distribution of fish hosts (Gomez del Prado-Rosas et al., 2017). Most studies of parasite communities in marine fishes on the Peruvian coast show a dominance pattern of endoparasites (Iannacone & Alvariño, 2008; Iannacone et al., 2010; Iannacone et al., 2012; Nacari & Sánchez, 2014; Chero et al., 2014abcd; Iannacone et al., 2015).

Oliva & Luque (1998) and Iannacone et al. (2003) indicated a low parasite richness in the community of *C. variegatus*, registering 4 and 3 species of ectoparasites, respectively. However, our data show intermediate parasite richness, registering 10 species (three ectoparasites and seven endoparasites). These differences in parasite richness in *C. variegatus* could be attributed to the sampling period that may be related to seasonal variations in species richness. Intermediate richness of parasitic species have been reported for other fish communities in the Cheilodactylidae family (Marcogliese, 2002; Vooren & Tracey, 2010; Rossin & Timi, 2010).

The parasites *M. nemadactylus*, *Corynosoma* sp. and *C. dilatata* were the most prevalent species, with prevalences of 76.32%, 50% and 44.74%; respectively. In this study, these parasites are considered core species. These results are consistent with those obtained by Oliva & Luque (1998) and Iannacone et al. (2003) who point to *M. nemadactylus* as the most prevalent species. Rossin & Timi (2010) found a prevalence of 21%, for *M. nemadactylus* while *Corynosoma australis* was the most prevalent species.

The digenean *Hemidruridae* gen. sp., the tapeworm *A. pacificus*, the acanthocephalans *P. almani* and the nematode *Proleptus* sp. presented low values of prevalence (<6%) and are considered accidental species. Iannacone et al. (2009ab) assign the low prevalence of marine fish macro-parasite communities to the environmental conditions of the collection area, mainly to the abiotic environmental factors of the Peruvian Fauna, to the El Niño event, and to the upwelling phenomenon. They can be attributed to the low number of hosts analyzed or the narrow range of sizes analyzed (Oliva & Luque, 1998).

A characteristic found during the sampling period (May 2015 to January 2016) indicates that 4 larval forms of endohelminths (*A. pacificus*, *Corynosoma* sp., *P. almani* and *Proleptus* sp.) are part of the parasite community of *C. variegatus*. The presence of endohelminth larvae in the present study can be considered a reflection of the trophic level of *C. variegatus* that would act on an intermediate scale in the marine food chain, a consequence of a bentholpelagic habitat.

All the parasites showed an aggregated or contagious distribution. This pattern is common in most host-parasite systems (Poulin, 2007). This fact seems to be related to the bentholpelagic fish, because of the three fish species studied, 2 of them: *M. cephalus* and *P. humeralis* have an aggregate pattern and form large schools with a dominance of ectoparasites. This pattern of aggregate distribution (ID> 1) is typical for parasitic marine fish fauna on the Peruvian coast (Chero et al., 2014abc). This type of pattern is common in most host-parasite systems (Poulin, 2007; Amarante et al., 2015). According to Von Zuben (1997), 3 factors can lead to an aggregated pattern of distribution: (1) heterogeneity in host susceptibility to infection; (2) direct playback of the parasite within the host and (3) heterogeneity in the ability of the host to eliminate the parasites by immune response or other response (Amarante et al., 2015).

In the present study, the total length of the Peruvian morwong correlated with the abundance and richness of parasites. According to Poulin & Moran (2004), larger fish hosts harbor greater parasite richness because they provide a wide variety of niches and can sustain a greater number of parasites. In fact, ontogenic changes in the composition of parasite communities in fish hosts are commonly reported in the literature (Rossin & Timi, 2010). Henríquez & González (2012) point out that another factor that could explain the results is the sampling period, which would cause seasonal variations in *M. cephalus* parasites; as well as those presenting intermediate hosts (Gomez del Prado-Rosas et al., 2017).

The fact that copepods were the most abundant group in *P. humeralis* clearly shows that having a
direct life cycle, which does not involve more than one host, is an attribute that favors the dispersion and persistence of this group of parasites (Salgado-Maldonado & Rubio-Godoy, 2014).

Three species of digeneans, Helicometra fasciata (Rudolphi, 1819) Odhner, 1902, Macvicaria sp. and Opecoelidae gen. sp. have been recorded in P. humeralis. Of these species, H. fasciata presented high prevalence values in comparison with the other 2 species. This high prevalence could be related to fish diet and the availability of infective stages which depend mainly on the presence of appropriate mollusk first intermediate hosts and the crustaceans second intermediate hosts (Keeney et al., 2008). Helicometra fasciata is a general species that has been recorded along the coast of the South Pacific (Peru and Chile) in 11 species of carnivorous fish hosts (Kohn et al., 2007, Chero et al., 2014ad; Luque et al., 2016).

Paralabrax humeralis sex was positively correlated with the prevalence of H. paralabracis copepod. Iannacone et al. (2012) points out that the selection of parasites to one of the two sexes of host fish could be attributed to differences in ecological relationships (habitat, behavior and feeding) of males and females.

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