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1 **Effects of incubation temperature and maternal phenotype on Baltic herring**  
2 **(*Clupea harengus membras*) eggs and larvae: An experimental study**

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26 **Abstract**

27

28 Temperature modifies the reproductive success of fish, yet, in many species, we lack the  
29 information on its role in the early development. In this study, the effect of temperature on  
30 the relation between maternal traits (length, age, somatic condition, and muscle lipid and  
31 ovarian thyroid hormone concentrations), egg quality (fertilization success, development rate,  
32 mortality, and hatching success), and offspring traits (size-at-hatch, yolk sac size, and  
33 proportion of malformations) were studied in Baltic herring (*Clupea harengus membras*) in  
34 the northern Baltic Sea. The experiments were conducted at an ambient temperature of 7°C  
35 and at an elevated temperature of 14°C using 5 to 10 females and 3 replicates per female. The  
36 results indicate that elevated temperature may result in a faster developmental rate, a lower  
37 early-stage mortality and hatching success, smaller size-at-hatch, a larger yolk sac size and a  
38 higher amount of larval malformations when compared to an ambient temperature. The egg  
39 and offspring traits were also associated with the maternal traits, indicating especially that  
40 thyroid hormones play a mediating role in the physiological processes.

41

42 **Keywords**

43 Baltic herring, egg quality, maternal effects, climate change, thyroid hormones

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## 49 **Introduction**

50 In many areas, climate change is already affecting the reproductive and early life history events  
51 of small pelagic fish species. Concern has been raised because we lack a substantial  
52 understanding of the affected physiological mechanisms to make useful predictions of the  
53 future, except for a few species that have received most of the research attention (Pankhurst and  
54 Munday 2011). Maternal effects, i.e., the impact of the maternal environment or phenotype on  
55 that of her offspring, may be particularly important for small pelagic fish species as recruitment  
56 is often strongly influenced by early life stage survival that often also correlates with the larval  
57 phenotype (e.g., Marshall et al. 2008; Somarakis et al. 2019). Maternal effects on offspring  
58 fitness are observed across a wide range of taxa, but the mechanisms by which these effects  
59 operate seem to be less uniform. As small pelagic fish species exhibit a large variation in their  
60 traits and can also be prone to large fluctuations in their stock size, more species- and even  
61 population-specific information on these effects and their connection to reproductive resilience  
62 is therefore called for, in order to evaluate and ultimately implement management strategies to  
63 species or populations considered most at risk.

64

65 The Baltic herring (*Clupea harengus membras*), a subspecies of the Atlantic herring adapted  
66 to a life in the brackish Baltic Sea, is subjected to an interaction of environmental perturbations  
67 and stressors that are expected to increase in the oceanic coastal zones of the future (Harley et  
68 al. 2006; Gunderson et al. 2016; Reuch et al. 2018). In the Baltic Sea, herring forms several  
69 populations that also show spatial variation in their traits along the salinity gradient from south  
70 to north (Vainikka et al. 2009). In a spawning herring population that was annually monitored  
71 in the northern Baltic Sea, various temporal changes have also occurred in the past four decades  
72 in response to climate change-mediated temporal variability in salinity and temperature with  
73 an indirect connection also to the availability and quality of the food (e.g., Rajasilta et al. 2018,

74 2021). Previously, these changes were not reflected in the spawning stock biomass (SSB) of  
75 the Bothnian Sea, which is believed to represent the main overwintering area of the population  
76 (Kääriä et al. 2001), but the recent revised stock assessment suggests that the SSB has been  
77 decreasing since 2010 for reasons that are not currently fully understood (ICES 2022).

78

79 In order to understand and evaluate how environmental factors affect the reproductive success  
80 of small pelagic fish populations like that of the Baltic herring in the northern Baltic Sea, it is  
81 necessary to examine both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting the reproduction process,  
82 starting from the fertilization of eggs during the spawning act. For instance, the ability of the  
83 egg to become fertilized is determined by several physical, chemical and genetic parameters  
84 derived from the parents as well as by initial physiological processes occurring in the egg itself  
85 (Kjorsvik et al. 1990). The developing embryo and larva are dependent for example on the  
86 maternally derived lipid reserves and regulatory compounds such as thyroid hormones (THs)  
87 provided by the yolk (de Pablo and Roth 1990; Kamler et al. 1992; Rainuzzo et al. 1997; Brown  
88 et al. 2014; Ruuskanen and Hsu 2018). For the Baltic herring, the content of lipids and THs  
89 can vary among the females and during the course of time (Rajasilta et al. 2018, 2021). These  
90 can be potential factors influencing larval production, as the maternal contribution is ultimately  
91 limited by the level of resources that are available to the mother for her own needs.

92

93 The environmental conditions at spawning and during the incubation of eggs mediate the  
94 success of egg development into viable fry. Of these factors, the water temperature is  
95 particularly important as it can affect the metabolism, activity and structure of the developing  
96 embryo, and the growth and survival of the subsequent larvae (e.g., Kinne and Kinne 1962;  
97 Pepin and Myers 1991; Rijnsdorp et al. 2009; Pörtner and Peck 2010; Prankhurst and Munday  
98 2011; Jonsson and Jonsson 2019). Recently, a link between rising winter temperatures and a

99 reduction of the Baltic herring's reproductive success was shown in the southern Baltic Sea  
100 using long-term data (Polte et al. 2021). The temperature has risen in the northern Baltic Sea  
101 as well (e.g., Suikkanen et al. 2007; Mäkinen et al. 2017), and there are also indications that  
102 the low and temporally variable salinity conditions have affected the females' energy reserves  
103 and hormonal balance (Rajasilta et al. 2018, 2021).

104

105 The objective of this present study was to examine experimentally how maternal traits and  
106 incubation temperature influence the reproductive success of Baltic herring in the current  
107 environmental conditions that are highly variable and demonstrably can affect the fitness of the  
108 spawning individuals in different ways. In particular, we studied the relation between maternal  
109 phenotypes and egg quality as evaluated through fertilization success, egg development rate,  
110 early- and late-stage mortality and hatching success, and larval traits being size-at-hatch, yolk  
111 sac size, and the proportion of malformations in the hatched larvae. The experiments were  
112 conducted at two temperatures being at an ambient temperature (7°C), typical of the main  
113 spawning time at present, and at an elevated temperature (14°C), which, in the future, is a  
114 temperature expected to prevail at the spawning time. Female age, length, somatic conditions,  
115 and lipid resources in the muscle were considered as key maternal traits. Moreover, we were  
116 interested in how the female's ovarian thyroid hormone levels (ie., THs, prohormone thyroxine  
117 T4 and the biologically active tri-iodothyronine, T3) were related to the embryonic  
118 development and offspring quality, as THs are maternally derived and known to play a central  
119 role in the regulation of metabolic rate and ontogenesis (e.g., Brown et al. 2014; Deal and  
120 Volkoff, 2020).

121

122

123

## 124 **Methods and Materials**

125

### 126 *Herring and environmental conditions in the study area*

127

128 The study was conducted from May to June 2020 and 2021 in the northern Baltic  
129 Archipelago Sea, where one of the most well-known major spawning grounds of the Baltic  
130 herring is situated (Fig. 1). In this area, the spawning of herring starts at low temperatures (0–  
131 -2°C) in April and May, and continues for the following two to three months with a variable  
132 intensity (Rajasilta et al. 1993). The majority of individuals, however, reproduce between  
133 approximately May 15 and June 15. During the spawning period, several schools of herring  
134 migrate from the open sea to the spawning area where they reproduce on shallow bottoms  
135 (ca. 1–4 m depth). The spawning schools consist of different size-classes, with also ages  
136 ranging from two to more than ten years, and there is practically no sorting by size or age  
137 during the spawning season. The monitoring data from the years 1984 to 2020 indicate that,  
138 at present, the spawning population consists mainly of small fish, which are less than 17 cm,  
139 whose lipid resources are also low. In the spawning population, 2- to 6-year-old herring form  
140 the majority (Rajasilta et al. 1993), but the proportion of older individuals, those greater  
141 than 10 years, has also slightly increased, and the oldest reproducing females can be even  
142 greater than 20 years old (Fig. 1).

143

144 Environmental monitoring data obtained near the known herring spawning sites (Hertta open  
145 data portal, Finnish Environment Institute SYKE, 2022) show that the surface water  
146 temperature at a 1-m depth varies from a minimum of 0°C to a maximum of 22°C during the  
147 spawning season, but that in May, the long-term average is approximately 7°C. The data also  
148 show that from 1978 to 2000, water temperatures have exceeded 14°C in 10 years out of 22,

149 whereas in 2001 to 2020, high temperatures occurred almost every year being 16 years out of  
150 19. According to sea ice statistics, the winter in our first study year (2019/2020) was  
151 exceptionally warm in the Baltic Sea with a maximum ice extent of 37 000 km<sup>2</sup>, while the  
152 following winter of 2020 and 2021 was on average one with a maximum ice extent of  
153 127 000 km<sup>2</sup> (Open data, Finnish Meteorological Institute, 2022). During the study years, the  
154 mean surface salinity in the spawning area and in the overwintering area of the outer  
155 archipelago and the Bothnian Sea of the herring varied between ca. 5 to 6.1 PSU with no  
156 observable inter-annual differences (Hertta open data portal, Finnish Environment Institute  
157 SYKE, 2022).

158

### 159 *Experimental procedure*

160

161 In all experiments, the fish were collected during the peak spawning season (2020: May 27,  
162 2021: May 26) from two trap nets, deployed at the herring spawning grounds in the inner  
163 region of the Archipelago Sea (60°18'40" N 22°04'31" E and 60°20'38" N 22°02'31" E) (Fig.  
164 1). From the trap nets, a random sample of ca. 200 to 300 live herring were taken with a dip  
165 net, of which a subset of ripe and running females and males was chosen for the experiments.  
166 The fish were transferred in a cool box filled with ice to the laboratory within 1 hour after  
167 collecting them from the trap net. To study the effect of female length on egg development,  
168 we chose females of different lengths for the experiments, but were able to determine the  
169 other female traits only afterwards.

170

171 In the laboratory, the experiments were carried out at two incubation temperatures. The first  
172 experiment in May 2020 was conducted only at 7°C (n=10 females), which corresponds to  
173 the ambient seawater temperature at the time of the experiment. In 2021, two experiments

174 were conducted simultaneously in May of which one was at a 7°C temperature (n=5 females)  
175 and the other was at 14°C (n=10 females), which is, in the future, the temperature expected to  
176 prevail at the spawning time (Table 1). Different fish were used in each experiment.

177  
178 In all experiments, eggs from each female were stripped on three wetted microscope glass  
179 slides (76 x 26 mm), i.e. 75 egg slides were examined in total (2020: n= 30; 2021, 7°C: n=15;  
180 2021, 14°C: n=30 slides). Each slide contained ca. 250 eggs in 2 rows. The stripping of the  
181 eggs was carried out carefully to avoid blood and broken eggs, which can inhibit fertilization  
182 (Crim and Glebe 1990). In case the eggs did not adhere tightly to the slide, the female was  
183 rejected from the experiment. We aimed at keeping the number of eggs on the slides low in  
184 order to facilitate the examination of single eggs, and clump formations were avoided due to  
185 their potential effect on egg mortality. After strip spawning, the slides were immediately  
186 placed onto the bottom of a large fertilization basin (600 x 400 x 300 mm) that was filled  
187 with ca. 20 L of filtered, using a 20-µm mesh, and acclimated seawater at 7°C or  
188 14°C, collected from nearby coastal waters in the archipelago at a 1 m depth and 6.0 PSU. In  
189 the fertilization basin, the eggs were fertilized with the sperm from 10 randomly chosen ripe  
190 and running males in order to secure fertilization success. To do that, several small drops of  
191 milt were gently squeezed from the males onto a petri dish, which was then diluted with  
192 seawater before adding to the respective basin. After that, the water was again stirred  
193 vigorously, and the aerated fertilization basin was transferred to a cold room acclimated to  
194 the study temperature. The slides were kept at the fertilization basin for 5 hours, after which  
195 the number of fertilized eggs on each slide was counted using a stereomicroscope with 40x  
196 magnification and a cold light. Grey eggs with no sign of cell division were classified as  
197 unfertilized. As it was not possible to build a flow-through system, the slides were placed in

198 0.5-L glass jars filled with acclimated and filtered seawater using 1 slide per jar and  
199 transferred immediately back to the cold room for incubation.  
200

201 During the experiments, temperature ( $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), salinity (PSU), oxygen saturation (%) in the  
202 incubation jars were monitored regularly and no measurable differences were observed. The  
203 jars were kept at constant aeration, albeit oxygen deficiency is not believed to be a major  
204 cause of unnatural mortality (Aneer, 1987). Artificial lighting conditions in the cold rooms  
205 were set up to a regular light:dark cycle (17:7 LD), which is typical for the area in May and  
206 June. As we could not use a flow-through system, the water was manually changed every  
207 second day to prevent the influence of metabolic end-products on the eggs. The risk of fungus  
208 infection was controlled by sterilizing the handling equipment before use, washing them  
209 regularly during the experiment in hot water, and by carefully removing dead eggs infested  
210 by the fungus. Nevertheless, fungal infection developed with varying intensity in all slides  
211 and experiments between the developmental stages 10 to 12 (Klinkhardt 1984). In order to  
212 inhibit as well as treat the slides for the emergence of fungi, the slides were bathed once in a  
213 1% formalin solution for 30 minutes right after the infection was observed. As no increase in  
214 mortality was observed as a result of the treatment, the formalin bathing was repeated in the  
215 experiment conducted at  $14^{\circ}\text{C}$  with the aim to inhibit the slightly more intense fungal  
216 infestation.  
217

218 Every second day, the slides were removed from their jar and placed onto a petri dish filled  
219 with water for stereomicroscopic examination under 40x magnification (Zeiss Stemi 305) and  
220 a cold light. The developmental stage of the eggs was estimated using a scale from 1 to 17  
221 (Klinkhardt 1984). In addition, egg mortality being (the number of dead eggs, was counted  
222 from all slides. After the onset of hatching, the eggs were checked daily, and the newly

223 hatched larvae were immediately removed from the jars, counted, and stored in small vials  
224 containing a 4% formalin solution with a drop of dishwasher detergent to prevent curling of  
225 the larvae.

226

227 From each slide, the following egg quality traits were determined: Fertilization success (F %)   
228 was calculated as the percentage of fertilized eggs of all eggs on the slide. Hatching success   
229 (Hsucc%) was calculated as the percentage of hatched larvae of all eggs on the slide. Distinct   
230 periods of elevated mortality are typically observed during egg development (Kamler 2005).   
231 Therefore, the percentage of egg mortality of all eggs on the slide was calculated both for the   
232 embryological stages occurring before the development of eye pigment being at tages 1 to15   
233 (Early M %) and for the embryological stages occurring after stage 15 until hatching began   
234 (stages 16 and 17) (Late M %). Two egg development rate indices were also calculated: 1)   
235 “First hatched” describes the length of the period, in days, between fertilization and the onset   
236 of hatching of the larvae, and 2) “Hatching peak” denotes the length of the period, in days,   
237 from fertilization to the day with the most hatched larvae.

238

239 The standard length (mm) and yolk sac surface area (yolk sac size, mm<sup>2</sup>) of hatched larvae (n   
240 = 10 per replicate, total n = 750) were measured with Zeiss ZEN Core microscope software   
241 (v. 3.2) from images taken under 1.65x magnification with a microscope camera (Axiocam   
242 ERc5s) linked to a stereomicroscope (Zeiss Stemi 508). To measure the length and yolk sac   
243 size, the larvae were placed on their lateral side and photographed in a similar position. The   
244 measurements were done from larvae collected at the peak hatching day within 1 to 12   
245 months after the larvae were stored in the 4%-formalin solution. As formaldehyde is known   
246 to have some effect on the length of preserved larvae (Fox 1996), in 2021 we measured the   
247 length of 10 larvae at 0-, 7-, and 365 -days post-storage. Based on those measurements, the

248 average shrinking effect of the 4% -formalin storage solution is estimated to be 4.2% in all  
249 experiments. In addition, the proportion of malformations in the hatched larvae was  
250 determined from all hatched larvae (n=12056) using the stereomicroscope under 40x  
251 magnification. All malformations and abnormalities visible in the microscopic examination  
252 were documented and classified, but only clear skeletal, fin, yolk sac, and pigmentation  
253 deformities are considered in this paper.

254

### 255 *Female traits*

256

257 After the strip spawning, the females were immediately stored at -75°C until their traits were  
258 determined with standard methods (Rajasilta 1993). To start with, the females were thawed at  
259 room temperature and measured for total length (cm) and total weight (0.1 g), and their gonad  
260 stage and weight (0.01 g) were determined. The weights and gonad weights of females were  
261 measured after stripping the eggs for the experiment, but since the total weight of the  
262 removed eggs was small, it was not added to the measured weights. Fulton's somatic  
263 condition factor (K) was calculated using the equation  $K = 100 \times (\text{Weight} - \text{Gonad}$   
264  $\text{weight}) / \text{Length}^{3.14}$  (Laine and Rajasilta 1999). The age of the females was estimated by  
265 counting the number of winter rings in the otoliths. The age determination was conducted  
266 with a light microscope under 40x magnification from whole sagittal otoliths, carefully  
267 polished to the nucleus.

268

### 269 *Lipid analyses*

270

271 The concentration of lipids in the female's muscle, being all females, and ovaries in 2020  
272 were determined within some weeks or months after sampling from the frozen (-75°C)

273 samples. The analyses were conducted with the standard method used for the extraction of  
274 storage lipids from fish tissues (e.g., Srigley and Mossoba 2017). First, the females were  
275 thawed at room temperature, the skin was removed, and a 3–5 g piece of the dorsal muscle  
276 was dissected between the dorsal fin and the tail. For the analysis of the ovarian lipids, one  
277 ovary was taken. The samples' wet weight was determined at 0.1 mg precision, and they were  
278 dried to a constant weight in a freeze-drier for 48–72 h. Next, the samples were homogenized,  
279 mixed with a small amount of anhydrous sodium sulphate (Merck KGaA, Darmstadt,  
280 Germany) to remove excess moisture, transferred to cellulose tubes, and extracted in a  
281 Soxhlet apparatus for 6 hours with 150 ml diethyl ether (Merck KGaA, Darmstadt,  
282 Germany). The ether was evaporated in a vacuum, and the lipid residue was weighed to the  
283 nearest 0.1 mg. The lipid concentration of the ovary and muscle tissue was expressed as a  
284 percentage of the sample's dry mass (% DW).

285

### 286 *Thyroid hormone analyses*

287

288 The concentration of thyroid hormones (THs), i.e. T4 (Thyroxin, Tetraiodothyronine) and  
289 T3 (Triiodothyronine), in the ovaries of the females was determined within one year of the  
290 sampling from the frozen samples (-75°C). The THs were analyzed from all females, but  
291 in 5 cases, no results could be obtained (Table 1). The THs were analyzed using validated  
292 methods (Ruuskanen and Hsu 2018, Ruuskanen et al. 2018). In the analyses, a small  
293 sample of the ovarian tissue (ca. 50 mg WW) was weighed and then homogenized in  
294 methanol using a tissue lyser (Qiagen, Retsch GmbH, Haan, Germany). As an internal  
295 recovery tracer, a known amount of  $^{13}\text{C}_{12}$ -T4 (Larodan, Sweden) was added to each sample  
296 to allow us to control for the variation in recovery (i.e., extraction efficiency) for each  
297 sample. Next, 600  $\mu\text{l}$  of chloroform was added to sample. After centrifugation (15 min,

298 1900 g, +4°C), the supernatant was collected, and the pellet was re-extracted in a mixture  
299 of chloroform and methanol (2:1). Back-extraction into an aqueous phase (0.05% CaCl<sub>2</sub>)  
300 was followed by a re-extraction with a mixture of chloroform:methanol: 0.05% CaCl<sub>2</sub>  
301 (3:49:48) and this phase was further purified in-house on Bio-Rad AG 1-X2 (USA) resin  
302 columns. The iodothyronines were eluted with 70% acetic acid and evaporated under N<sub>2</sub>  
303 until dry. Blanks, being plain reagents without any sample, were analyzed in each  
304 extraction batch to detect any contamination.

305

306 T3 and T4 were quantified using a nanoflow liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry  
307 (nano-LC-MS/MS) method, which was developed and validated by Ruuskanen and Hsu  
308 (2018) and Ruuskanen et al. (2018, 2020). Before the analysis, the dry samples were  
309 diluted in ammonium (NH<sub>3</sub>). Internal standards <sup>13</sup>C<sub>6</sub>-T<sub>3</sub> and <sup>13</sup>C<sub>6</sub>-T<sub>4</sub> (Sigma-Adrich, St.  
310 Louis, USA) were added to each sample to identify and quantify the THs. A triple  
311 quadrupole mass spectrometer (TSQ Vantage, Thermo Scientific, San Jose, CA) was used  
312 to analyze the samples. For the chromatographic separation of hormones, a nanoflow  
313 HPLC system Easy-nLC (Thermo Scientific) was applied. On-column quantification  
314 limits were 10.6 amol for T4 and 17.9 amol for T3 (Ruuskanen et al. 2018). Mass  
315 spectrometry data were acquired automatically using Thermo Xcalibur software (Thermo  
316 Fisher Scientific) and analyzed using Skyline (MacLean et al. 2010). For the analyses,  
317 peak-area ratios of sample to internal standard were calculated. For calculating water  
318 content and dry mass, another sample of the same ovarian tissue was weighed and dried  
319 for 24 h at 60 °C. T3 and T4 were quantified as pg/mg of tissue. In addition, we examined  
320 the effect of T3/T4 ratio, as both hormones (via conversion of T4 to T3) can influence the  
321 development of the eggs.

322

### 323 **Statistical analyses**

324

325 All statistical analyses were conducted using R statistical software (R Core Team 2021).

326 Before any statistical analyses, mean values of the three replicates (slides) were calculated

327 and used in the tests in order to avoid pseudoreplication (Hurlbert 1984). In an effort to study

328 the effects of the two incubation temperatures, we also combined the data from the two

329 experiments conducted at 7°C in 2020 and 2021 (n=15).

330

331 Differences between the incubation temperatures were studied with T-test and one-way

332 ANOVA or with their non-parametric equivalents Wilcoxon signed-rank sum test and

333 Kruskal-Wallis tests. The same tests were also used to study differences between the study

334 years 2020 to 2021, i.e. experiments conducted at 7°C, and between all three experiments. Test

335 assumptions in question, e.g., normality of the residuals and homogeneity of variances, were

336 checked visually with histograms and qqplots and with Shapiro-Wilk and Levene tests. The

337 associations between the maternal traits and the egg and offspring traits were studied with

338 Pearson's product-moment correlation ( $r$ ) or with Spearman's correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ).

339 Spearman's correlation was used if the variables were non-normally distributed and included

340 ties, as it calculates the strength and direction of monotonic, but not necessarily linear,

341 relationship between two variables (Puth et al. 2015).

342

343 In all analyses, the egg quality traits, i.e., fertilization success, early- and late-stage mortality,

344 hatching success, the development rate indices "First hatched" and "Hatching peak" as well

345 as the larval size-at-hatch, yolk sac size, and the proportion of malformations in the hatched

346 larvae were treated as dependent variables. By contrast, the female traits, i.e., age, total

347 length, somatic CF, muscle lipid content, ovarian T3 and T4 contents, and T3/T4 ratio, were

348 treated as independent variables. Ovarian lipid content, representing the total investment in  
349 reproduction, was also determined from the females in 2020, but it was left out of the  
350 statistical analyses as we did not have enough sample material from the females used in 2021.

351

## 352 **Results**

353

### 354 *Female traits*

355

356 Altogether 25 females were used in the three experiments conducted in 2020 to 2021. Albeit  
357 it was not possible to measure age, ovarian lipid and THs levels from all females, the data  
358 available showed that the studied females represented a range of age, size, condition and THs  
359 classes as shown in Table 1. The data also showed that some of the female traits were  
360 correlated. Specifically, a negative association between age and somatic condition was found  
361 among the females used in 2020 and 2021 (experiments no. 1 and 2, 7°C) ( $r(13)=-0.64$ ,  
362  $p=0.01$ ,  $n=15$ ), but no association was found among the females used at the elevated  
363 temperature experiment (experiment no. 3, 14°C) ( $r(6)=0.22$ ,  $p=0.59$ ,  $n=8$ ). The data  
364 available from 2020 also indicated that there was no correlation between muscle and ovarian  
365 lipid content ( $r_s(8)=0.77$ ,  $p=0.07$ ,  $n=10$ ).

366

367 There were also some mean inter-annual differences among the females used in the ambient  
368 temperature experiments (experiments no. 1 and 2, 2020 and 2021). Specifically, in 2020 the  
369 females were slightly younger ( $t(7.96)=-2.68$ ,  $p=0.03$ ,  $n=15$ ), and their somatic condition was  
370 higher ( $t(6.93)=4.92$ ,  $p=0.002$ ,  $n=15$ ) than in 2021 (Table 1). By contrast, no inter-annual  
371 differences in fish length were found ( $t(6.83)=-2.14$ ,  $p=0.07$ ,  $n=15$ ), and there were no  
372 differences in muscle lipid content either ( $W=30$ ,  $p=0.59$ ,  $n=15$ ). No significant differences

373 were found in ovarian TH levels between the study years (T3: W=22, p=1, n=14; T4: W=41,  
374 p=0.06, n=15; T3/T4 ratio: W=10, p=0.11, n=14).

375

### 376 *Egg development and offspring traits at hatching*

377

378 The egg and larvae traits showed a large variation among the females (Fig. 2; Table 2).

379 Fertilization success was high in all females (79–92%, n=25) with the exception of one

380 female in 2020 that exhibited distinctly lower fertilization success in all three slides

381 (mean±SD =72.10 ± 5.67%). Egg mortality was relatively low overall, with the extremes

382 ranging from 0.2% to 11.3% (n=25). We observed no temporal breaks between early and

383 late-stage mortality, and no clear peaks in mortality were observed at any specific

384 developmental stage. The two indices “First hatched” and “Hatching peak” describing the

385 rate of embryonic development, showed a similar variation per female and temperature

386 (Table 2). Hatching success ranged from 42% to 89% among the females (n=25). The length

387 and yolk sac size of the newly hatched larvae also showed variation among the females. The

388 length of larvae ranged from 6.18 mm to 7.43 mm and the yolk sac size from 0.17 mm<sup>2</sup> to

389 0.48 mm<sup>2</sup>. The proportion of malformed larvae of all larvae produced by a female varied with

390 a range of 0 to 13.90%. On average, 51% of all malformed larvae showed skeletal

391 abnormalities, such as, but not limited to, scoliosis (i.e., lateral curvature), lordosis (i.e., V-

392 shaped dorsal-ventral curvature), and kyphosis (i.e., Λ-shaped dorsal-ventral curvature). In

393 addition, malformations related to fin and tail development and pigmentation were observed

394 to a variable degree.

395

396 In addition to between-female variation in the egg quality traits, there were also some

397 apparent inter-annual differences between the experiments conducted in 2020 and 2021 at

398 7°C (Table 2). Specifically, we observed that the mean fertilization success of eggs was  
399 slightly better in 2021 ( $W=6$ ,  $p=0.02$ , Fig. 2). In addition, late-stage mortality was  
400 significantly higher in 2021 ( $W=9.38$ ,  $p=0.002$ ), but no differences were found for early-  
401 stage mortality ( $W=27$ ,  $p=0.86$ ; Fig. 2). Hatching success also differed between the study  
402 years being higher in the latter year ( $W=4$ ,  $p=0.008$ ; Fig. 2). In addition, the hatching rate  
403 indices “First hatched” and “Hatching peak” indicated that the overall development rate was  
404 slightly slower in 2021 than in 2020 ( $W=0$ ,  $p=0.002$  for both tests; Fig. 2). By contrast, no  
405 inter-annual differences in larval length, yolk sac size or in the proportion of malformations  
406 were observed ( $W=29$ ,  $p=0.68$ ,  $W=25$ ,  $p=1$ ,  $W=23$ ,  $p=0.86$ , respectively) (Fig. 2).

407

#### 408 *Effects of incubation temperature*

409

410 Six out of the 9 studied traits were found to show significant differences between the 7°C and  
411 14°C incubation temperatures (Tables 2 and 3; Fig. 2). The most apparent difference was the  
412 overall faster development rate of eggs incubated at the higher temperature ( $W=150$ ,  $p<0.001$   
413 for both First H and H peak indices; Table 2). At 7°C, embryonic development from  
414 fertilization until all larvae had hatched took on average 21 days, whereas at 14°C, the mean  
415 development rate was 8 days. Fertilization success was similar at both incubation  
416 temperatures ( $W=59$ ,  $p=0.40$ ; Table 2). Early-stage mortality was significantly lower at the  
417 higher temperature ( $W=142$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Table 2), whereas no differences were found for late-  
418 stage mortality ( $W=85$ ,  $p=0.61$ ; Table 2). Hatching success was also slightly lower at the  
419 higher temperature ( $W=121$ ,  $p=0.01$ ; Table 3). In addition, we found that the hatched larvae  
420 were significantly shorter at the higher temperature ( $W=143$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Table 3), whereas the  
421 size of yolk sacs was larger ( $W=16$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Table 3). No apparent differences in  
422 development stage were observed between the measured individuals. The proportion of larval

423 malformations also showed a significant difference between the study temperatures ( $W=7$ ,  
424  $p<0.001$ ; Table 3).

425

#### 426 *Associations with maternal age, size and condition*

427

428 As many of the egg and larval traits showed temperature-dependent differences, we chose to  
429 examine the associations separately for each temperature treatment (Figs. 3 and 4; Table 4).

430 At 7°C, maternal age was positively correlated with hatching success indicating that the older

431 females produced eggs with higher hatching success in comparison to the younger ones

432 ( $r(13)=0.58$ ,  $p=0.02$ ). Age was also positively correlated with late-stage mortality

433 ( $r_s(13)=0.61$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). The data also indicated a connection between maternal age and the

434 “First hatched” and “Hatching peak” indices ( $r_s(13)=0.51$ ,  $p=0.05$ ;  $r_s(13)=0.52$ ,  $p=0.05$ ,

435 respectively), indicating that the younger females produced offspring that suffered less

436 mortality after the eye-spot stage and which embryonic development might proceed at a

437 slightly faster rate (Table 4). In addition, the data indicated that the female’s length was

438 positively correlated with fertilization success ( $r_s(13)=0.52$ ,  $p=0.05$ ), which can indicate that

439 the larger females produced eggs with slightly higher fertilization success.

440

441 The somatic condition of the females was also associated with the offspring traits at 7°C

442 (Table 4). A strong negative correlation with late-stage mortality was found ( $r_s(13)=-0.70$ ,

443  $p=0.004$ ) indicating that the females with a lower somatic condition, i.e., between 0.25 to

444 0.28, produced larvae that suffered higher mortality after the eye-spot stage (Fig. 3). The data

445 also indicated that somatic condition was negatively correlated with fertilization success

446 ( $r_s(13)=-0.53$ ,  $p=0.05$ ) and with the “First hatched” and “Hatching peak” indices, indicating

447 that the females with a higher condition produced eggs in which the embryonic development

448 proceeded at a ca. 3 to 5 day faster rate ( $r_s(13)=-0.56, p=0.03$ ;  $r_s(13)=-0.52, p=0.05$ ,  
449 respectively). Somatic condition was also negatively related to hatching success ( $r(13)=-$   
450  $0.62, p=0.01$ ). The muscle lipid content of the females showed no associations with the  
451 offspring traits at  $7^\circ\text{C}$  ( $p>0.05$ ; Table 4).

452

453 At the elevated incubation temperature, an apparently smaller amount of significant  
454 correlations was found in comparison to the lower temperature (Table 4, Fig. 4). At this  
455 temperature, female length showed a strong positive correlation with hatching success ( $r$   
456  $(8)=0.69, p=0.03$ ). In addition, muscle lipid content showed a moderate positive correlation  
457 with the size-at-hatch ( $r_s(8)=0.56, p=0.03$ ) indicating that at this temperature, the females  
458 with higher muscle lipid content ( $>8\%$  DWt) produce slightly larger offspring.

459

#### 460 *Associations with maternal TH levels*

461

462 At  $7^\circ\text{C}$ , maternal T3 levels indicated a strong positive correlation with larval size-at-hatch ( $r$   
463  $(12)=0.76, p=0.05$ ). In addition, T4 levels were negatively correlated with late-stage mortality  
464 ( $r_s(13)=-0.59, p=0.02$ ), hatching success ( $r_s(13)=-0.51, p=0.04$ ) and with the “Hatching peak”  
465 index ( $r_s(13)=-0.53, p=0.04$ ). The ratio of T3 and T4 in the ovary also showed a positive  
466 correlation with the “Hatching peak” index ( $r_s(13)=0.65, p=0.01$ ) indicating that females with  
467 a higher T3/T4 ratio produced eggs with a ca. 2 to 4 day faster embryonic development. The  
468 data also indicated that there was a negative correlation between T4 and hatching success  
469 ( $r(13)=-0.51, p=0.05$ ).

470

471 At  $14^\circ\text{C}$ , strong positive associations were found between the T3 level and the “First  
472 hatched” index and yolk sac size ( $r_s(4)=0.92, p=0.008$ ;  $r_s(4)=0.88, p=0.02$ ). At  $14^\circ\text{C}$ , the

473 ovarian T4 levels also showed a strong negative correlation with the size-at-hatch ( $r_s(4)=-$   
474 0.89,  $p=0.02$ ; Table 4).

475

## 476 **Discussion**

### 477 *Effects of incubation temperature*

478

479 Maternal effects play an important role in buffering the impacts of environmental  
480 heterogeneity and can either increase or decrease the fitness of offspring in the presence of  
481 environmental variability (e.g., Burgess and Marshall 2011; Marshall and Uller 2007;  
482 Mousseau and Fox 1998). The results of this study show the associations between maternal  
483 effects, offspring quality and temperature conditions in the Baltic herring, a marine species  
484 living in the low and variable salinity conditions of the Baltic Sea. Overall, the results  
485 indicate that elevated and variable springtime temperatures may influence the embryonic  
486 development and larval quality of Baltic herring. The strip spawning of eggs took place at the  
487 end of May, and thereby, the temperature conditions simulated the conditions the eggs of  
488 early-spawning herring would experience in the study area. In the field, the eggs of late  
489 spawning herring develop in a different environment than those of early spawners, which  
490 may bring about differences in egg mortality (Rajasilta et al. 1993).

491

492 The Baltic herring eggs incubated at the elevated temperature developed into smaller larvae  
493 with a larger yolk sac volume in comparison to those incubated at the ambient temperature.

494 This observation of a trend towards a reduction in hatched larval length with warming is  
495 congruent with other studies conducted with the Baltic, Atlantic and Pacific herring (Ojaveer  
496 1981; Geffen 2002; Peck et al. 2012; Leo et al. 2018; Villalobos et al. 2020). This suggests  
497 that at elevated temperatures, a fast development is prioritized over the growth in the length

498 of larvae. In this way, more energy would remain for their use after hatching giving the larvae  
499 more time to learn independent feeding. As the larvae hatch in warm water, their growth is  
500 also faster with the help of their external temperature (Hakala et al. 2003), which saves the  
501 egg's energy resources to use for survival. Similar to our study, a link between the yolk sac  
502 reserves and temperature has been reported with the Baltic and Norwegian herring (Blaxter  
503 and Hempel 1961; Høie et al. 1999). Nevertheless, contradicting observations of no  
504 association between temperature and larval length and lower reserves at higher temperatures  
505 were recently published with Downs herring (Toomey et al. 2023) possibly indicating some  
506 geographical differentiation to temperature that needs to be further investigated.

507

508 Temperature is also known to be one of the most important environmental factors that can  
509 induce morphological deformities during fish development (e.g., Dionisio et al. 2012;  
510 Rombough 1996). We found that rearing the eggs in the elevated temperature increased the  
511 proportion of larval malformations. Approximately 50% of all malformations observed were  
512 spinal and skeletal deformities. Depending on the type of the abnormality, this could have an  
513 effect on the survival probability of the larvae (Boglione et al. 2013), but further studies with  
514 larvae after the yolk-sac phase are nevertheless needed to assess the severity of the  
515 phenomenon in later life-stages and in the natural population.

516

517 The eggs incubated at the elevated temperature also had ca. 10% lower hatching success  
518 compared to those incubated at the ambient temperature. The result is in line with a study  
519 conducted with herring in the Gulf of Riga, where a decline of a similar degree in the percent  
520 of total hatch was found at the 7°C and 17°C temperatures (Ojaveer 1981). We also found  
521 that early-stage mortality was lower at the elevated incubation temperature, whereas no  
522 significant differences in late-stage mortality were found. The exact explaining mechanisms

523 for the observations cannot be verified in this study, but according to Thompson (1989), a  
524 lower mortality in the egg stages is expected at higher temperatures due to the shorter time  
525 the eggs remain at the most vulnerable developmental stages. This train of thought is also  
526 supported by the results of Rannak (1971) and Ojaveer (1981) showing that the most  
527 sensitive stages in the embryonic development of the Baltic herring are gastrulation and  
528 division of the mesoderm, mainly due to an increased need of oxygen, which is connected  
529 with the formation of different organs.

530

531 Incubation temperature seemingly also had an effect on the severity of fungal infection as a  
532 more intense fungal infection was observed on the slides incubated at 14°C. Albeit we cannot  
533 completely exclude the possibility that the more intense fungal infection did not have any  
534 effects on egg mortality or development and that the overall impact is presumed to be of  
535 minor importance as the fungus mostly contaminated unfertilized or deceased embryos. The  
536 estimated severity of infection also showed no correlation with either mortality stage or with  
537 the hatching success ( $p > 0.05$  in all cases).

538

### 539 *Maternal influence on the embryonic development*

540

541 In the recent decades, the environmental conditions in the overwintering and spawning areas  
542 of the herring in the northern Baltic Sea have changed with the result that the growth rate and  
543 energy reserves of the spawning females have diminished (e.g., Rönkkönen et al. 2004;  
544 Rajasilta et al. 2021). The traits of the females used in this study fall within the average  
545 variation observed in the population today (e.g., Rajasilta et al. 2018, 2021). The influence of  
546 female size, age and somatic condition on the success of embryonic development was most  
547 apparent at the ambient temperature, whereas no associations were found with the larval

548 traits. By contrast, at an elevated temperature the only association observed was between the  
549 female size and hatching success, potentially highlighting the effect temperature has on the  
550 embryonic development.

551

552 At the ambient temperature, both late-stage mortality and hatching success were lower in the  
553 eggs of younger females than in those of the older ones. By contrast, the somatic condition  
554 showed a negative relation with late-stage mortality and hatching success indicating that a  
555 higher maternal somatic condition could be generally beneficial for the embryonic  
556 development. Earlier experimental results show that egg mortality can be caused not only by  
557 a direct environmental effect but also by parental origin (Laine and Rajasilta 1999). However,  
558 those results suggested that the somatic condition of herring females was related to early-  
559 stage mortality but not with later developmental stages. This may be explained by a  
560 difference in the nutritional status of the spawning females, as in some cases, it may  
561 contribute to the hatching success by affecting the early phases of embryonic development.

562

563 Many species of marine fish exhibit long life spans with the adapted value that the  
564 reproductive output is allocated across many years. In variable environmental conditions,  
565 longevity provides an intuitive advantage, but can also affect the reproductive success  
566 negatively for instance, because fecundity may vary with age (McBride et al. 2013). In our  
567 study, the age and somatic condition of the females used in the ambient temperature  
568 experiments (experiments no. 1 and 2, 2020–21) were negatively correlated, indicating that  
569 the somatic condition of female herring may deteriorate with age, presumably because of  
570 energetic costs caused by the previous two to five reproduction events. A larger number of  
571 females depicting a larger variation in age and condition need to be included in future  
572 investigations, but the result nevertheless parallels our previous findings in which a trade-off

573 between somatic growth and investment in reproduction was shown in 2- to 6-year-old  
574 herring using monitoring data collected from 1984 to 2002 (Rajasilta et al. 2015). Small inter-  
575 annual differences in maternal age and somatic condition were also observed between the  
576 study years. The differences were not surprising, as the herring shoals arriving to the  
577 spawning grounds consist of individuals varying in size, age, and condition. The results also  
578 indicate that this variability may explain the inter-annual differences observed in  
579 development rate (First H and H peak indices), late-stage mortality, and hatching success.

580

581 The results also suggest that the size of the females could be positively associated with the  
582 fertilization success of eggs at the ambient temperature. Albeit fertilization success was  
583 already relatively high in all females and consistent with our previous observations (Laine  
584 and Rajasilta 1999), the result may generally indicate that a larger body size can further  
585 improve the fertilization success of eggs at least to some degree. At the elevated temperature,  
586 the size of the females was positively associated with the hatching success indicating that, at  
587 elevated temperatures, a larger body size may provide an additional benefit in terms of  
588 hatching success. It is evident, however, that a higher number of females should be examined  
589 to get more insight on this topic.

590

591 Throughout a fish's life, the total energy available is allocated to basic maintenance, somatic  
592 growth, storage, and to reproduction (McBride et al. 2013). Like many other fish species, the  
593 Baltic herring annually undertakes energetically costly migrations to their spawning area, and  
594 thus reproductive output comes either largely or entirely from surplus energy acquired and  
595 stored during the previous year. Our previous studies show that egg mortality and hatching  
596 success are somewhat dependent on the condition or lipid reserves of the spawning females  
597 (Laine and Rajasilta 1999). Therefore, in addition to somatic condition we studied the

598 female's muscle lipid content (% DWt) as a measure of energy left after growth; metabolic  
599 demands; and reproduction being the build-up and maturation of gonads and migration to the  
600 spawning grounds. In 2020 and 2021, the female's muscle lipid content showed a large  
601 variation (2.29 to 17.41 % DWt), but on average, the lipid content was lower than in the  
602 1990s ( $12.81 \pm 5.16$  % DWt, Laine and Rajasilta 1999). In contrast to our previous results,  
603 the female's muscle lipid content was not associated with any of the egg traits at the ambient  
604 temperature, albeit the data indicated a possible association with larval size-at-hatch ( $p < 0.10$ ).  
605 However, a strong positive correlation was found between muscle lipid content and larval  
606 size-at-hatch at 14°C, which may indicate that the combination of elevated temperature and  
607 low maternal energy reserves ( $< 8$  % DWt) yielded a synergistic negative effect on the size of  
608 the larvae produced. Unfortunately, the effect of ovarian lipid content could not be examined  
609 in this study leaving this issue open for further investigations, but the available data  
610 nevertheless indicated that the studied females fitted within the average variation found in the  
611 current population samples (Rajasilta et al. 2021).

612

613 In addition to maternal traits, embryonic development can also be affected by the properties  
614 of the male, e.g. by sperm density (i.e., number of spermatozoa per unit volume),  
615 gonadosomatic index (i.e., an individual's relative investment in reproduction), and/or sperm  
616 motility (Rosenthal 1988; Evans and Geffen 1998; Griffin et al. 1998). In this study, we could  
617 not control the density of spermatozoa in the fertilization basin but assumed it to be at a  
618 sufficient level as it is to be higher at the time of the sampling in May than later in the season  
619 (Rajasilta et al. 1997). Similarly, the fertilizing capacity of sperm is better during the start of  
620 the season due to cool water temperatures (Rajasilta et al. 1997). The possible effects of  
621 varying sperm quality were also diminished by using milt from several males and by keeping  
622 the eggs in the fertilization basin for several hours. For the herring living in our study area,

623 the optimum salinity for fertilization is estimated to be approximately 8 PSU, as below this  
624 level, the fertilization rate and sperm motility were clearly reduced (Griffin et al. 1998). As  
625 this is higher than the current level in the study area (ca. 5–6 PSU), it remains a possibility  
626 that the low salinity had some effect on the reproductive process, but herring have also been  
627 shown to reach high fertilization rates in distinctly different salinities than their spawning  
628 area (Berg et al. 2019).

629

### 630 *Effect of thyroid hormones*

631

632 Many studies show that thyroid hormones (THs) play a significant role in the reproduction  
633 process, but there are still uncertainties regarding the mechanisms and regulation of TH  
634 uptake by maturing oocytes in fish as well as regarding the absolute requirements of THs that  
635 fish have during early development (e.g., Ruuskanen and Hsu 2018; Deal and Volkoff 2020).  
636 Nevertheless, several studies show that the THs in maternal circulation can be transferred to  
637 eggs with subsequent effects on offspring development, survival and growth (as reviewed by  
638 Brown et al. 2014; Deal and Volkoff 2020). Thyroid activity is related to temperature (Little  
639 et al. 2013; Besson et al. 2020). In our previous study, T3 levels in the Baltic herring ovaries  
640 fluctuated in the past decades. The fluctuation was connected mainly to salinity but also to  
641 the temperature conditions of the preceding winter, being generally lower after mild winters  
642 (Rajasilta et al. 2021). In this study, the maternal T3 levels showed no mean differences  
643 between the study years preceded by mild (2019/2020) and more severe winter temperature  
644 conditions (2020/2021). No significant differences were found in the ovarian T4 levels and  
645 T3/T4 ratio either, albeit the data initially indicated that the females had slightly higher T4  
646 levels in the latter study year.

647

648 As expected on the basis of our previous results (Rajasilta et al. 2021), the studied females  
649 exhibited between-individual variation in their TH levels. The positive association between  
650 T3 and larval size-at-hatch at the ambient temperature indicated that the females with higher  
651 ovarian T3 levels generally produced larger larvae. In contrast, at the elevated temperature,  
652 the ovarian T3 levels were positively associated with the yolk sac size, which could also  
653 provide an alternative explanation or mechanism describing why larvae with larger yolk sacs  
654 were found in this group. A strong positive association between T3 and the “First hatched”  
655 index was also found at the elevated temperature possibly because both T3 and temperature  
656 have an accelerating effect on embryonic development (e.g., Pepin and Myers 1991; Deal and  
657 Volkoff 2020).

658

659 Several associations with the prehormone T4 were also found. At the ambient temperature,  
660 higher ovarian T4 levels were moderately associated with lower late-stage mortality but also  
661 with a faster development rate and lower hatching success. At the elevated temperature,  
662 higher T4 levels were also associated with a smaller size-at-hatch that contradicts the positive  
663 association between size-at-hatch and T3 at the ambient temperature. Elevated maternal T4  
664 levels yield negative effects on the developing larvae (Deal and Volkoff 2020), but further  
665 studies using a larger amount of females are needed. Overall, the results support that, in  
666 addition to fish age, size, or condition, the role of maternal thyroid hormones should be  
667 further investigated in fish to further understand the role and impact of THs in the  
668 reproductive process in variable environmental conditions. The differing results between T3  
669 and T4 suggest that more information on the metabolization of T4 to T3 by deiodinase  
670 enzymes in herring would be needed as it may change with temperature and be subject to  
671 species-specific variation (Deal and Volkoff 2020).

672

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679

680 **Author contribution statement**

681

682 Conceptualization: KM, MR; Funding acquisition: KM, SR, MR; Investigation: KM, SR, AL,  
683 TK, SR; Formal analysis: KM, SR; Methodology: KM, MR, SR, AL, TK, JS; Data curation:  
684 KM, AL; Writing – original draft: KM, MR; Writing – review and editing: KM, MR, SR, AL,  
685 TK, JS

686

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689

690 **Competing interest statement**

691 The authors have no competing interests to declare.

692

693 **Data availability statement**

694 Data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author  
695 upon reasonable request.

696

697

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**Table 1.** Description and observed values (mean and range) of the Baltic herring female traits in the three incubation experiments (no. 1-3), conducted in 2020 and 2021. The number of females in the experiments is given in parenthesis. The upper footnote (a-c) indicates the number of analyses.

Experiment no. (n females)	2020		2021			
	1. (10)		2. (5)		3. (10)	
Description	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Age (years) of female	4.60	3-6	6.20	5-7	4.65 <sup>a</sup>	4-7 <sup>a</sup>
Total length (cm) of female	17.01	15.30-19.90	18.64	16.50-20.30	17.58	16.40-19.30
Body weight (g) of female	29.09	20.20-48.00	33.1	22.90-40.10	28.65	21.10-40.40
Ovarian weight (g DWt)	5.26	1.50-9.59	5.93	3.41-7.60	4.44	2.66-7.45
Somatic condition factor	0.32	0.30-0.36	0.28	0.25-0.29	0.29	0.25-0.37
Muscle lipid content (% DWt)	7.17	2.82-12.37	7.06	2.37-17.41	7.91	2.29-16.45
Ovarian lipid content (% DWt)	5.83 <sup>c</sup>	4.06-9.05		NA		NA
Ovarian T3 (pg/mg)	37.31 <sup>b</sup>	20.65-57.20 <sup>b</sup>	39.71	25.41-41.25	52.12 <sup>c</sup>	17.88-75.34 <sup>c</sup>
Ovarian T4 (pg/mg)	61.54	36.28-69.90	41.92	21.43-72.35	56.10 <sup>c</sup>	33.46-105.62 <sup>c</sup>
Ovarian T3/T4 ratio	0.60 <sup>b</sup>	0.37-1.09 <sup>b</sup>	1.06	0.35-1.40	1.19 <sup>c</sup>	0.17-2.18 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a)</sup> n=8; <sup>b)</sup> n=9, <sup>c)</sup> n = 6, NA = no data

**Table 2.** Mean and standard error (SE) of the Baltic herring egg and offspring traits in the three incubation experiments (no. 1-3) conducted in 2020 and 2021. See text for further details.

	2020		2021			
	1. (10)		2. (5)		3. (10)	
Experiment no. (n females)	7		7		14	
Temperature (°C)	7		7		14	
Trait	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
F (%)	83.75	1.69	89.50	0.60	88.25	0.70
Early M (%)	2.27	0.27	2.22	0.54	0.91	0.24
Late M (%)	1.81	0.24	6.43	3.76	2.73	0.62
Hsucc (%)	68.48	2.01	81.77	3.03	62.16	2.97
First H (days)	14.80	0.24	20.00	1.41	5.45	2.23
H peak (days)	17.60	0.66	20.60	0.33	6.87	2.09
Larvae length at hatch (mm)	6.99	0.05	6.99	0.15	6.53	0.07
Yolk sac area (mm <sup>2</sup> )	0.26	0.01	0.29	0.02	0.38	0.05
Malformed larvae (%)	5.54	0.94	1.93	0.72	7.68	1.45

F, fertilization success; Early M, early-stage mortality; Late M, late-stage mortality; Hsucc, hatching success; H, development rate of hatched larvae (days from fertilization)

**Table 3.** Hatching success and traits of the newly-hatched Baltic herring larvae, incubated at 7°C and 14 °C temperature in 2020-21. Mean and standard error (SE) of the traits per incubation temperature is shown with results of the pairwise comparisons made with two-sample Wilcoxon test. n depicts the number of replicates or the total number measured/inspected larvae together with the number of females in parenthesis. See text for further details.

Trait	7 °C			14 °C			Wilcoxon test
	Mean	SE	n	Mean	SE	n	
Hatching success (%)	72.91	2.33	45 (15)	62.16	2.97	30 (10)	W= 121, p=0.01
Larvae length at hatch (mm)	6.99	0.06	450 (15)	6.53	0.07	300 (10)	W=143, p<0.001
Yolk-sac area (mm <sup>2</sup> )	0.27	0.02	450 (15)	0.38	0.02	300 (10)	W=16, p<0.001
Malformed larvae (%)	1.88	0.30	2736 (15)	7.36	1.35	1282 (10)	W=7, p<0.001

**Table 4.** Correlation coefficients showing the associations between the Baltic herring maternal traits and egg quality and offspring traits at 7°C and 14°C incubation temperatures (T). Notice the differences in sample sizes (n). Values in bold show significant correlations ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ). See text for further details.

T 7 °C	F (%)	Early M (%)	Late M (%)	HSucc (%)	First H	H peak	Length at hatch (mm)	Yolk sac area (mm <sup>2</sup> )	Malformed larvae (%)
Age (n=15)	0.47*	-0.06	<b>0.58**</b>	<b>0.59**</b>	<b>0.51**</b>	<b>0.52**</b>	-0.20	-0.02	0.27
Length (n=15)	<b>0.52**</b>	-0.12	0.29	0.30	0.40	0.34	-0.26	-0.004	0.03
Somatic CF (n=15)	<b>-0.53**</b>	0.004	<b>-0.70**</b>	<b>-0.62**</b>	<b>-0.56**</b>	<b>-0.52**</b>	0.21	-0.1	-0.11
Muscle lipid content (n=15)	-0.09	-0.03	-0.31	-0.26	-0.17	0.03	0.47*	0.35	-0.33
T3 (n=15)	0.11	-0.08	-0.07	0.22	0.16	0.36	<b>0.76**</b>	0.31	-0.27
T4 (n=14)	-0.18	-0.12	<b>-0.59**</b>	<b>-0.51**</b>	-0.21	<b>-0.53**</b>	-0.09	-0.05	-0.23
T3/T4 (n=14)	0.06	0.23	0.45	0.41	0.37	<b>0.65**</b>	0.34	0.27	0.07
<b>T 14 °C</b>									
Age (n=8)	0.07	-0.30	-0.21	-0.28	-0.47	0.28	0.43	0.21	-0.01
Length (n=10)	0.25	-0.54	-0.49	<b>0.69**</b>	-0.14	0.52	-0.04	-0.07	-0.20
Somatic CF (n=10)	-0.10	-0.54	-0.48	0.32	-0.02	0.06	0.48	0.33	-0.22
Muscle lipid content (n=10)	-0.43	-0.25	-0.20	0.05	0.49	-0.29	<b>0.56**</b>	0.31	0.18
T3 (n=6)	0.54	-0.26	-0.26	-0.60	<b>0.92**</b>	0.39	0.25	<b>0.88**</b>	0.37
T4 (n=6)	-0.09	-0.31	-0.31	0.31	0.31	0.65	<b>-0.89**</b>	0.09	-0.43
T3/T4 (n=6)	0.60	0.03	0.03	-0.25	0.61	-0.13	0.71	0.31	0.37

Coefficients significant at level \*\* $\alpha \leq 0.05$ , \*  $\alpha < 0.10$

F, fertilization success; M, mortality; Hsucc, hatching success; H, development rate of hatched larvae;

CF, condition factor; T3, triiodothyronine; T4, thyroxine

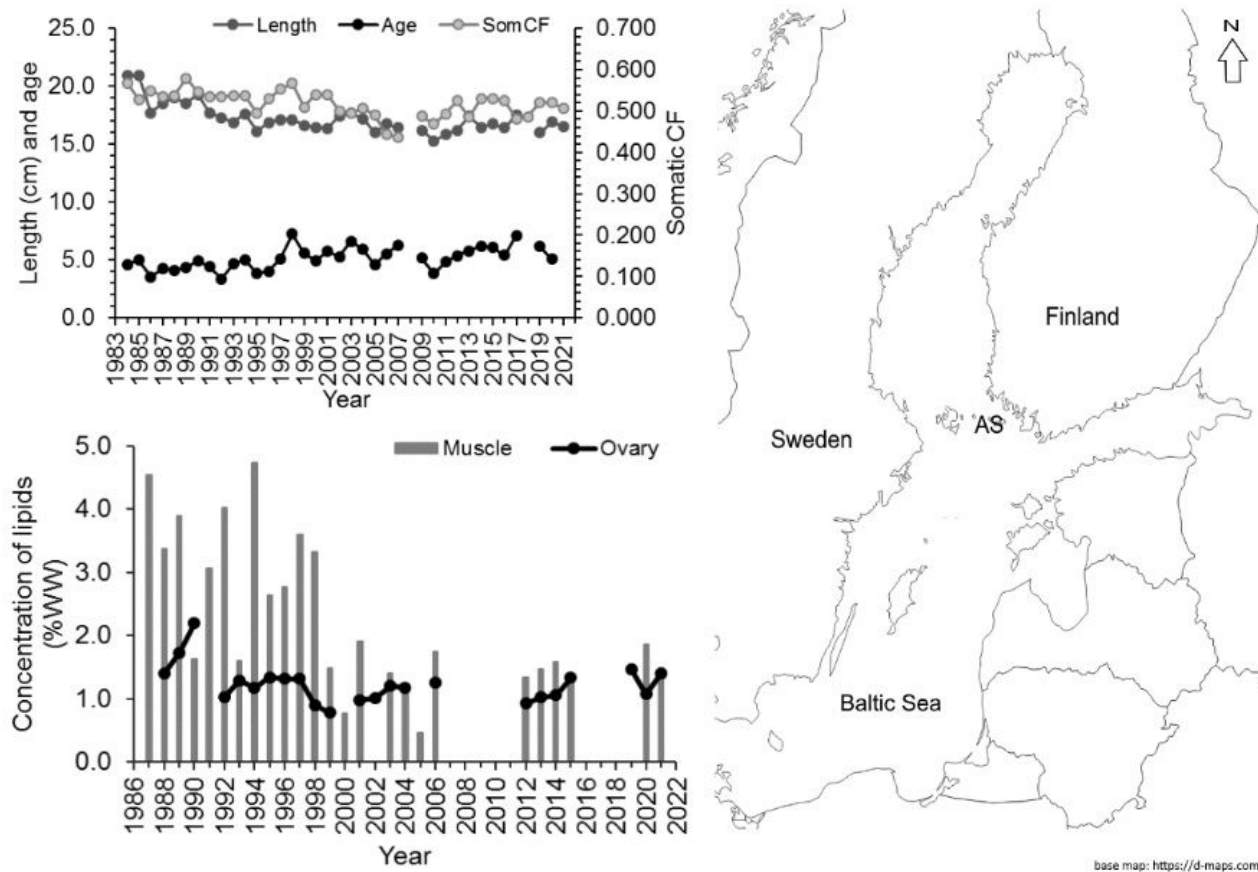


Figure 1. Three-panel figure showing a map of the study area in the northern Baltic Sea (Archipelago Sea, AS) and key characteristics of the spawning Baltic herring females from 1984 to 2021. Upper panel shows the length (cm), age (years) and somatic condition factor (SomCF) of the females. Mean concentration of lipids (% WW) in the muscle and ovarian tissue are shown in the lower panel. All values are sample means; the gaps between the lines and columns indicate the years when no data is available.

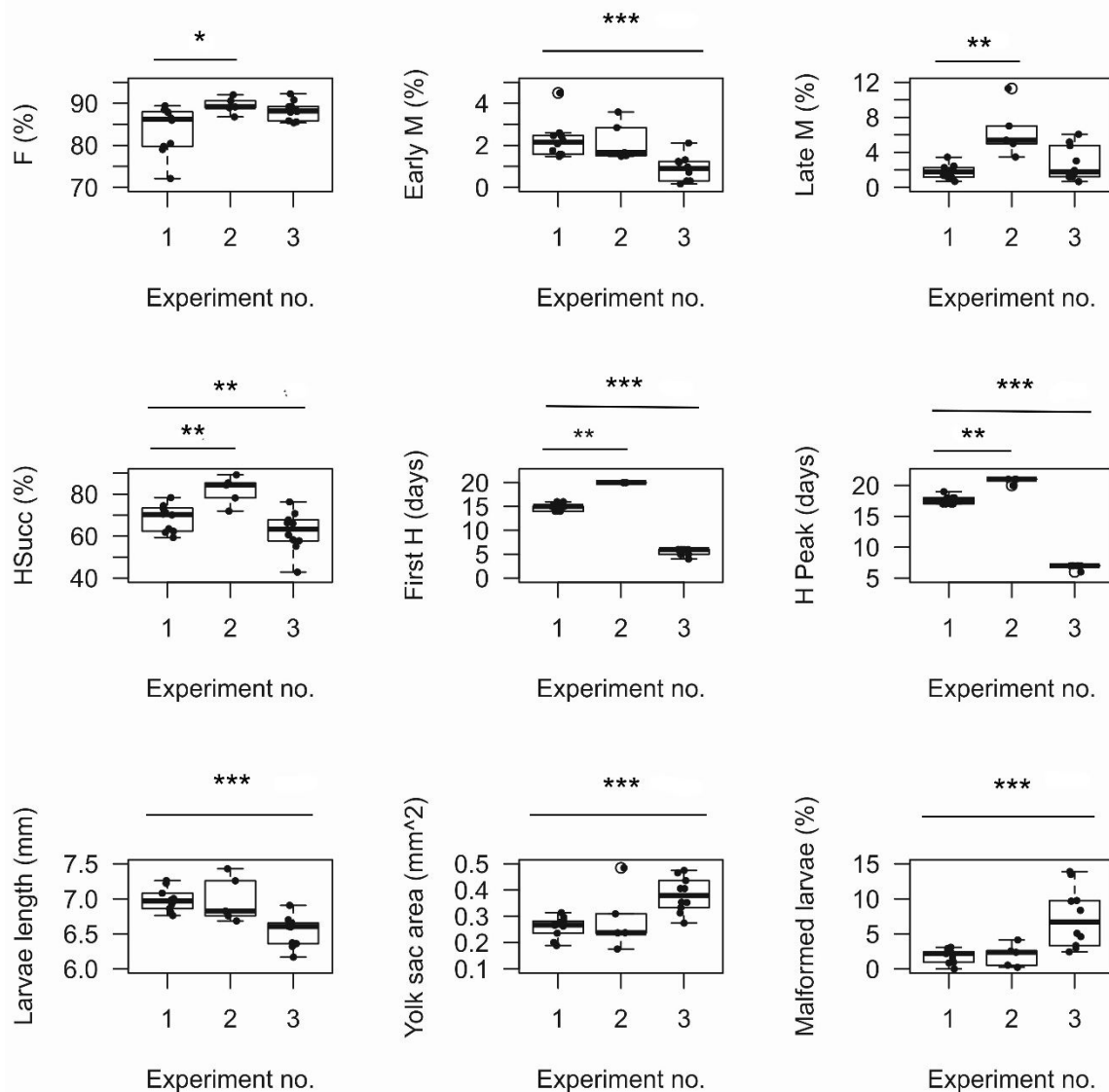


Figure 2. Boxplots showing the fertilization success (F%), early and late stage mortality (M%), hatching success (HSucc%), egg development rate indices (First H and H peak), larval size-at-hatch, yolk-sac size, and the proportion of larval malformations. The boxplots display the median, lower and upper quartiles, and minimum and maximum values, and outliers outside 1.5 times the interquartile range above the upper quartile and below the lower quartile. The experiments (no. 1-3) were conducted at an ambient incubation temperature of 7°C (1: n=10; 2: n=5) and at an elevated temperature of 14°C (3: n=15). Asterisks above the

boxplots show significant differences (\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ) between the study years 2020 and 2021 and between the temperature treatments. Please see text for further details.

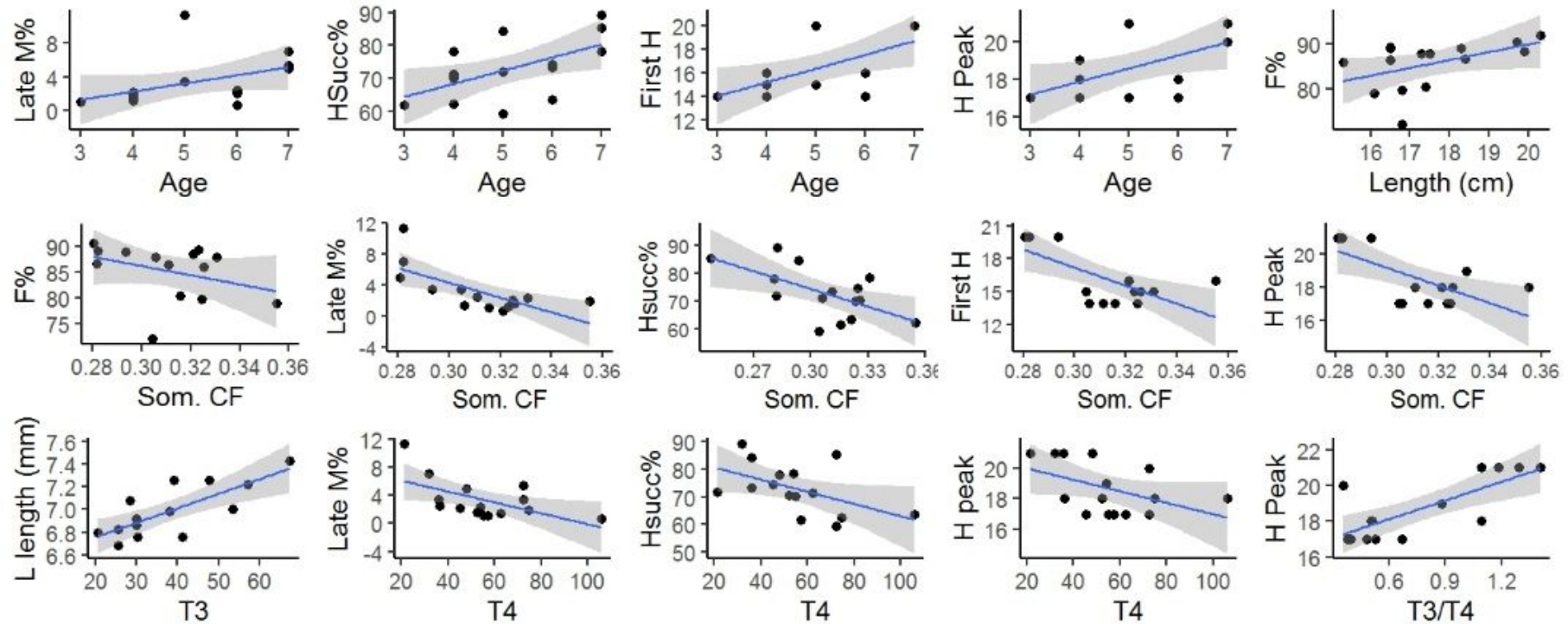


Figure 3. Scatter plots with linear trend lines and standard error bands showing significant correlations ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) between the maternal traits (i.e., age, length, somatic condition factor (Som. CF), ovarian T3 and T4 (pg/mg), and T3/T4 ratio) and the egg and offspring traits (i.e., fertilization success (F%), early and late mortality (M%), hatching success (HSucc%), development rate indices (First H and H peak, days), and larval size-at-hatch (L length)) at an ambient incubation temperature of 7°C. See text for further details.

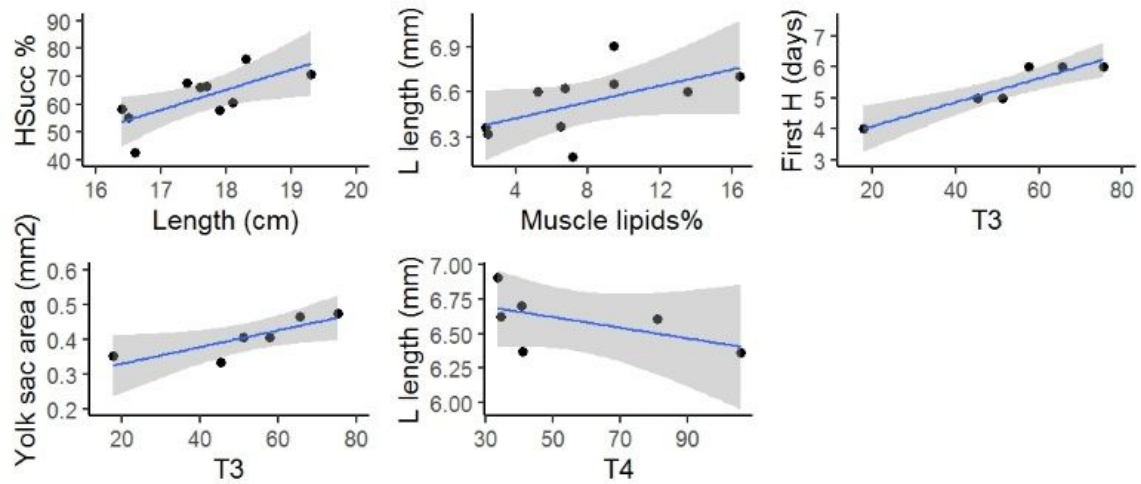


Figure 4. Scatter plots with linear trend lines and standard error bands showing significant correlations ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) between the maternal traits (i.e., length (cm), muscle lipid content (% DWt), and ovarian T3 and T4 levels (pg/mg)) and the egg and offspring traits (i.e., hatching success (HSucc %), development rate index (H, days), larval size-at-hatch (mm), and yolk sac size ( $\text{mm}^2$ )) at an elevated incubation temperature of  $14^\circ\text{C}$ . See text for further details.