Seasonal and diel effects on the activity of northern pike studied by high-resolution positional telemetry

Temperate lakes can be ice covered for several months each year, yet little is known about the behaviour and activity of the fish during the cold season. As northern pike represents the top of the food web in many northern temperate lakes and may structure the ecosystem both directly and indirectly, a detailed understanding of the behaviour of this species during winter is important. We continuously monitored the activity of adult northern pike (Esox lucius) in a small temperate lake from late summer to winter for two consecutive years using an automatic acoustic positional telemetry system. Four subsample periods representing different temperature regimes from each year were chosen for further investigation. The results revealed that pike activity was similar between seasons. In all periods, a distinct diel pattern, showing increased activity during day as compared to night, was evident. Our findings indicate that the fish component of temperate lentic ecosystems can be more active during the cold season than previously assumed. This may have implications for the structuring effect of pike on the lower trophic levels.