Medium-term responses to and changes in fitness with selection for parameters of the allometric-autoregressive model

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Part of a D.Sc. (Agric) thesis submitted by MMS to the University of Pretoria

Received 28 March 1988; accepted 6 November 1989

The allometric-autoregressive model describes growth accurately and is useful in the characterization of growth responses. Hence, the potential of the model for selection was investigated. Rats were used in a selection experiment, where selection was practised for slope (b) and intercept (In a) of the allometric function: \( w = \ln a + bv \) [where \( w = \ln \) (body mass) and \( v = \ln \) (cumulative feed intake)], and for \( p \), the autoregression slope of \( \ln \) (cumulative feed intake). Facilities for five selection groups of 40 rats each were available. Both upward and downward within-family selections were practised for \( \ln a \) and \( b \), and only downward selection for \( p \). In the medium-term, the observed direct responses to selection for parameters of the allometric-autoregressive model were irregular, and there was a marked discrepancy between the observed and expected responses. It was postulated that poor fit of the model in later generations, a lack of genetic variance, mutation, genetic drift and/or natural selection may be causing these discrepancies. The selection responses were accompanied by losses of fitness during certain generations, while in others, the responses disappeared altogether. In certain generations, however, fitness was regained and this was followed by renewed appearance of responses. This pattern of response points to the presence of natural selection, which was corroborated by the differences between the effective and expected selection intensities. It was concluded that the slope of the allometric function seems to be the only parameter worth considering as a selection criterion.

Introduction

The short-term direct and correlated responses to selection for \( \ln a \) and \( b \) of the allometric function: \( w = \ln a + bv \) [where \( w = \ln \) (body mass) and \( v = \ln \) (cumulative feed intake)], and for \( p \), the autoregression slope of \( \ln \) (cumulative feed intake) were presented by Scholtz, Roux, de Bruin & Schoeman (1990b).

In general, response to selection cannot be expected to continue indefinitely (Falconer, 1981) and, sooner or later, some deviations from the original response are to be expected. Normally, selection response remains fairly stable as long as selection lasts for only a few generations, although the response may, in some experiments, cease earlier than in others (Pirchner, 1983). Furthermore, extended selection for a trait originally neutral for fitness may cause a negative relationship between the particular trait and fitness. In this respect, a classic example was discussed by Lerner (1958), where selection was applied to shank length in the fowl. Thus, the results on the medium term of selection are also of importance. This article will be devoted to the variability in response in the medium term and the problems with fitness which occurred. The results of 12 generations of selection will be discussed.

Material and Methods

The article by Scholtz et al. (1990b) should be consulted for details regarding materials and methods. In the current article, the response was measured as the percentage difference between \( L \) (downward selection)

Keywords: Allometric-autoregressive model, fitness, genetic drift, natural selection, selection.

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and $H$ (upward selection), or as deviation from a control. This made it possible to illustrate graphically in which generations the direct response and fitness were positively or negatively associated, and in which generations these differences or changes occurred.

**Results and Discussion**

**Response in $\ln a$ and $b$**

The observed and expected direct responses for $\ln a$ and $b$ are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. The expected responses were calculated using the equation: 

$$r = ir_0h_w$$  

(Falconer, 1981).

![Figure 1](Observed vs Expected Response in $\ln a$)

![Figure 2](Observed vs Expected Response in $b$)

Estimates of $\sigma_w^2$ (within-family variance) and $h_w^2$ (within-family heritability) were calculated from the parental generation, while the specific effective intensity of selection ($i$) was used for each generation and selection group. Regressions were also fitted to these responses, and it was found that a linear regression ($y = c + dx$) fits the response in $\ln a$ best ($r^2 = 0.32$), while an exponential regression ($y = ce^{dx}$) fits the response in $b$ best ($r^2 = 0.02$). In both cases, however, the fit was poor.

From Figures 1 and 2, it was clear that the observed responses were irregular, as illustrated by the poor fit of the regressions, especially in the case of $b$ where a response in the wrong direction was also illustrated. Furthermore, there was a marked discrepancy between the observed and expected responses. In the case of $\ln a$, the difference between the observed and expected response was 185%, while the difference in the case of $b$ was 1840%.

Five possible reasons for the discrepancies between the observed and expected responses and the negative response in the case of $b$ were tendered. The reasons were:

1. **Poor fit of the model**

There may be a problem concerning the genetic bases of the parameters of the allometric-autoregressive model when used as criteria of selection. This possibility was investigated by inspecting the accuracy of fit of the model in the initial (generations 0, 1 & 2), middle (generations 5, 6 & 7), and later (generations 10, 11 & 12) stages of selection. The average accuracy of fit ($r^2$) for the selection groups during the initial, middle or later stages of selection are given in Table 1.

**Table 1** Average accuracy of fit ($r^2$) for the selection groups during the initial (generations 0, 1, 2), middle (generations 5, 6, 7), and later (generations 10, 11, 12) stages of selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of selection</th>
<th>$\ln a$</th>
<th>$b$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>0.994</td>
<td>0.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later</td>
<td>0.990</td>
<td>0.991</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 1 it is clear that the accuracy of fit of the model did not change during selection, ruling out, therefore, the possibility of problems with the model during the later generations of selection.

2. **Lack of genetic variance**

The discrepancy between the observed and the expected response may be due to lack of additive genetic variance. This possibility was investigated by estimating the heritabilities of those generations where the discrepancy between the two responses appeared.

When selecting for $\ln a$, the discrepancy appeared after generation 3. However, at this point the heritability estimate of $\ln a$ was still 0.25, compared to the initial estimate of 0.31 from the parental generation (Scholtz, Roux, de Bruin & Schoeman, 1990a). Thus, in this experiment, a discrepancy between the observed and expected response of $\ln a$ cannot be explained by lack of additive genetic variance.
When selecting for b, the situation was nearly identical. The discrepancy between the observed and expected responses appeared after generation 4. At this point, the heritability estimate was still 0.27, compared to 0.29 of the initial estimate (Scholtz et al., 1990a).

3. Mutation
Mutation may be regarded as a possible reason for the discrepancy between the observed and expected responses. However, where a metric trait is involved, it seems that mutation may be ignored as a possible source of variation during the initial stages of selection (Hill, 1986). Thus, it is unlikely that a mutation was causing the discrepancy between the observed and expected responses.

4. Genetic drift
The magnitude of the expected standard errors of the selection response was investigated to determine whether the variability or discrepancy in the responses encountered here, were within the normal limits of chance (genetic drift). The standard errors were estimated using Hill’s (1971) equation for divergent selection for the case where the same proportion of males and females are evaluated. In the case of within-family selection, the variance in response, V(R), is given by:

\[ V(R) = \frac{2\sigma^2}{Ne h^2 \left[ 1 - h^2 (1 - P) \right]} + (1 - 3/2h^2)P \]

where
\[ Ne = \text{effective population size} \]
\[ t = \text{generation} \]
\[ P = \text{proportion selected} \]

The standard error of the expected response (R) is \( \sqrt{V(R)} \). To get the 95% confidence intervals, the standard error was multiplied by 1.96 and this value was added to, or subtracted from the expected response (R). The expected responses, 95% confidence intervals, and observed responses are illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 for ln a and b, respectively.

5. Natural selection
According to Falconer (1981), a difference between the effective and expected intensity of selection is an indication that natural selection is operating against artificial selection. From Table 2 it can be seen that the effective intensity of selection, expressed as a proportion of the expected intensity of selection, decreased with selection for all the parameters, and in some generations it was less than 50% of that expected. This decrease in the proportion effective/expected intensity of selection, points to the presence of natural selection in this experiment.

Additional evidence on the presence of natural selection will be presented when the correlated responses in fitness are considered.

Fitness
To understand the operation of natural selection, it is necessary to study the correlated responses in fitness. In this study, fitness was defined as the number of mature animals/female mated/100-day period. There were no differences in fitness between the L and H lines; hence their fitnesses were combined, and expressed in absolute terms, and not as a percentage difference between L and H. The fact that there were no differences in fitness between H and L, indicates an optimum value of the metric traits in a and b associated with maximum fitness, and that any deviation from this optimum, whether it be upwards or downwards, will have an influence on fitness.

Natural selection acts on fitness; thus, the individual with the highest fitness, irrespective of its superiority
Table 2 Effective intensity of selection and the proportion (effective/expected) where the expected intensity of selection is 1,163

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>In a H</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>In a L</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>b H</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>b L</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>p L</th>
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<td>0,809</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>0,771</td>
<td>0,663</td>
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<td>0,723</td>
<td>0,930</td>
<td>0,800</td>
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<td>0,925</td>
<td>1,080</td>
<td>0,929</td>
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<td>1,021</td>
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<td>0,826</td>
<td>0,710</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
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<td>0,864</td>
<td>0,743</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td>0,891</td>
<td></td>
<td>0,960</td>
<td>0,826</td>
<td></td>
<td>0,888</td>
<td>0,763</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Selection response versus fitness

To simplify the discussion for this particular experiment, the response is divided into different parts according to pattern. The divisions were made at generations where the pattern of the direct response changed, the direction of the correlated response in fitness changed, and/or where the sign or magnitude of the relationship between the direct response and fitness changed.

Selection for In a

The medium-term response in ln a and the correlated change of fitness are illustrated in Figure 5. There was a favourable response to selection for ln a during the first three generations of selection, but at the cost of fitness (part A). However, from the third to the fourth generation, the attained response nearly disappeared. This level of no response lasted until generation 7 (part B). In Part B, natural selection seemed more powerful than artificial selection, and only a slight decrease in fitness was encountered. It is in this part that natural selection seemed to cause movement of the mean of the metric trait in the direction contrary to that of artificial selection, so that the selection response is forced outside the normal limits of chance (Figure 3).
Linear regression \( (y = c + dx) \) was fitted to both the response in \( \ln a \) and fitness, with generation as the \( x \)-variable in the different parts. The schematic presentation hereof, in Figure 5, illustrates the points more clearly. For instance, in part A the slope (d) for fitness is \(-1.18\) and in part B \(-0.27\), indicating a much larger drop in fitness in part A. In case of the direct response, the slope in part A is \(-4.70\) versus \(-0.15\) in part B, which illustrates practically no response in part B.

Generation 8 (part C) witnessed renewed response to artificial selection, probably due to new genetic combinations formed in part B. Although the response is fluctuating to a large extent, a rather large response is encountered in the first generation (Figure 5). Fitness is also fluctuating, but it seems to increase slowly with a slope of 0.29.

The response in \( \ln a \) is correlated with fitness, with correlation coefficients of 0.89, 0.91 and 0.28 for parts A, B and C respectively. It is interesting to note that fitness and the response in \( \ln a \) is strongly correlated in parts A and B, whilst the correlation is much lower in part C. This indicates that the effect of natural selection may be overcome by new genetic combinations formed through recombination, the occurrence of crossing-over between chromosome segments, etc.

Selection for \( b \)

The medium-term response in \( b \) and the correlated change of fitness are illustrated in Figure 6.

When selecting for \( b \), a remarkable response was found during the first four generations of selection, which is in accordance with the expected response. During this part (A) there was no effect on fitness, which is illustrated by a slope of zero in Figure 6.

With further selection there was a sharp decline in the attained response until generation 8 (part B). During part B, natural and artificial selection seem to be in conflict. From generation 6, natural selection seems to be more powerful than artificial selection and a negative response in \( b \) was found with a slope of 2.82 (Figure 6).

At this point, the observed response moved outside the normal limits of chance (Figure 4).

As was the case with selection for \( \ln a \), part C witnessed renewed response in \( b \) to artificial selection \((d = -4.13)\) accompanied by a remarkable recovery in fitness \((d = 0.62)\).

In part A, the response in \( b \) is unrelated to fitness \((r^2 = 0.30)\). In parts B and C, however, there is a significant correlation between the response in \( b \) and fitness with correlation coefficients of 0.83 and 0.91, respectively.

Selection for \( p \)

Despite a negligible heritability, selection for \( p \) resulted in a moderate initial response (Figure 7), together with a decline in fitness (part A). Hereafter, natural selection seems to become more powerful than artificial selection, and a negative response in \( p \) occurred from generation 3 to 4. In part B, an equilibrium between natural and artificial selection seems to exist, with no change in the value of \( p \). In part B (1) fitness is fluctuating with no perceptible pattern (generations 4—7). From generation 7 onwards, fitness has stabilized, with a slow but steady recovery in fitness.

**Conclusion**

In the short term, the direct response to selection for parameters of the allometric-autoregressive model was in accordance with expectation based on genetic theory. In the medium term, however, irregular responses occurred. It seems that these irregular responses can be explained biologically.

Balch and Reid (1976) maintained that feed intake and, therefore, also growth rate are under control of the homeostatic mechanisms of the body. The inherent capacities for growth, and thus also \( p \), which is a function of the rate constant of relative growth, must therefore be kept within certain limits to maintain
homeostasis (Balch, 1973). Balch & Reid (1976) believed that deviations from the homeostatic limits may result in metabolic disorders and even death. Hence, the need for the canalization of $p$ is evident.

In the medium term, ln $a$ and ln $b$ showed irregular responses with selection, together with a marked discrepancy between the observed and expected responses. These discrepancies might have been caused by poor fit of the model during later generations, lack of genetic variance, mutation, genetic drift and/or natural selection. All these aspects were investigated, and it was concluded that natural selection seems to be the most acceptable explanation for the observed discrepancies.

Fitness is very important in any production system. It is, therefore, important to investigate whether the problems with fitness encountered in this experiment are common to all selection experiments. A thorough literature survey is therefore needed.

The parameter $b$ seems to be the only parameter of the allometric-autoregressive model which can be used as a selection criterion. Selection for $b$ resulted in an increase in efficiency, while intake tended to decrease (Scholtz et al., 1990b). This is in contrast to selection for a conventional criterion such as growth rate, which increases intake (Hetzel & Nicholas, 1978). Furthermore, selection for $b$ seems to be successful in altering the shape of the efficiency curve (Scholtz et al., 1990b). Unfortunately, selection for $b$ seems to have an adverse effect on fertility in the medium term, and thus necessitates concurrent selection for fertility. This seems to be true for most selection criteria (Roux & Scholtz, 1984).

References


