

Results of Vertebrate Zooarchaeology from MC-6, Middle Caicos, Turks and Caicos Islands

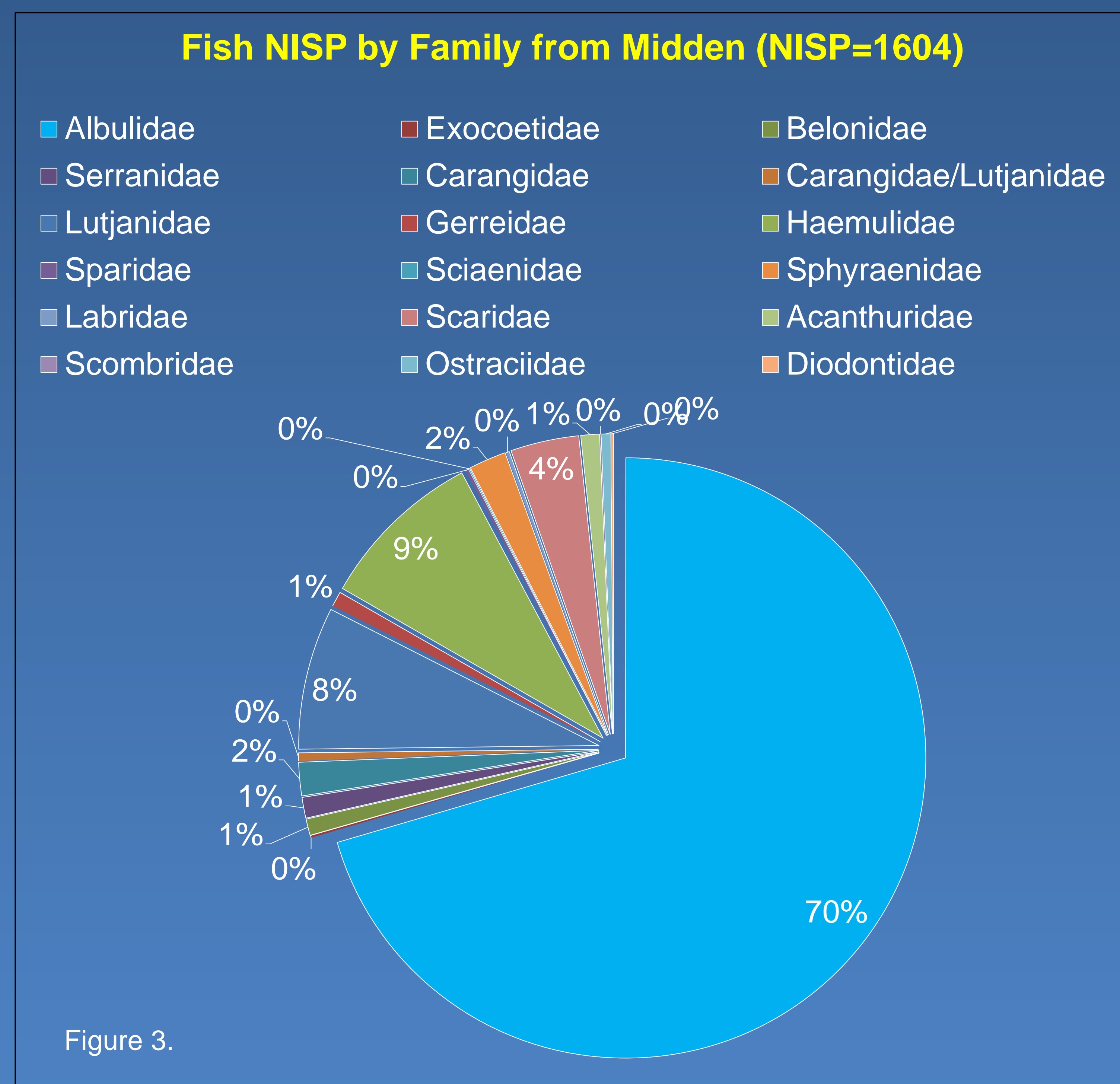
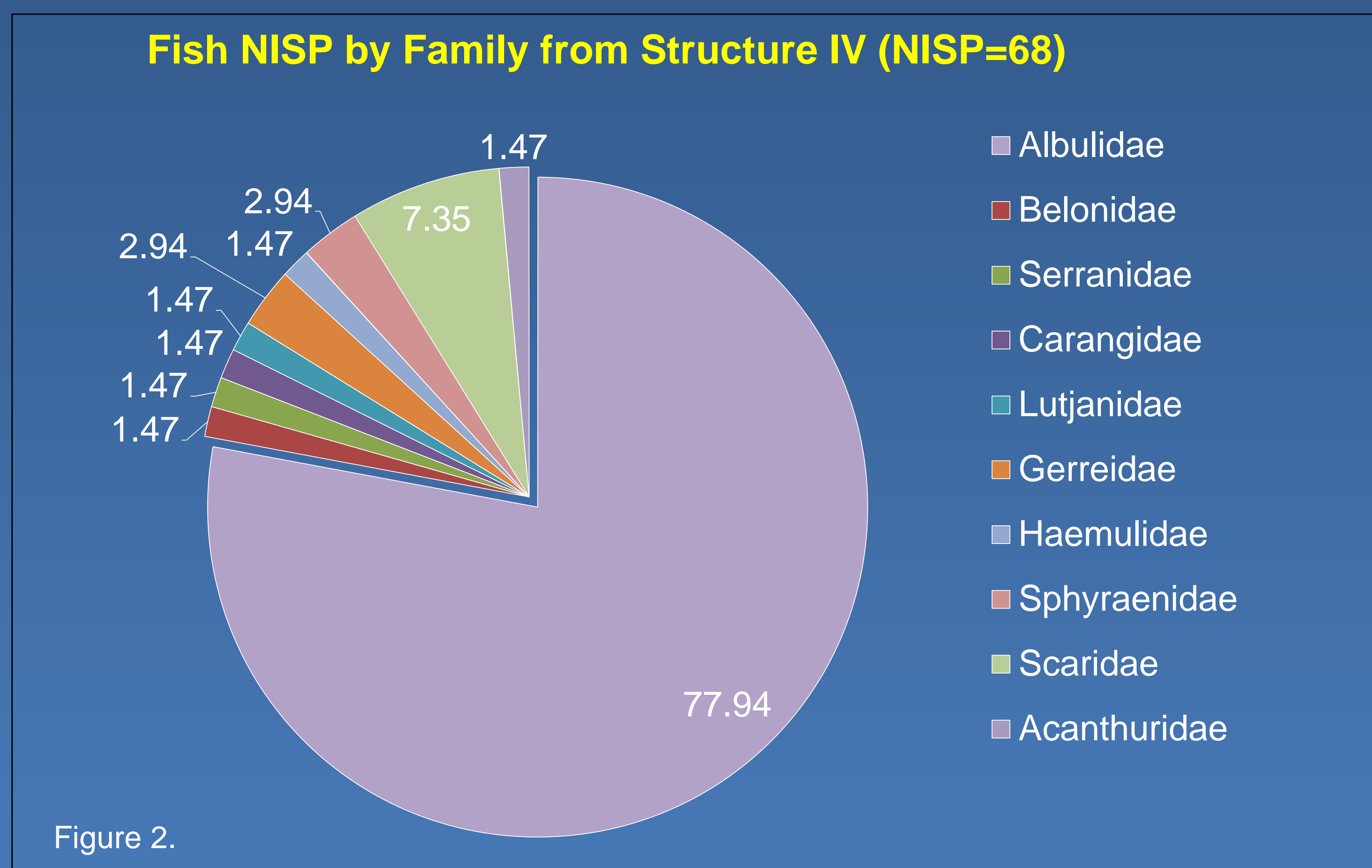
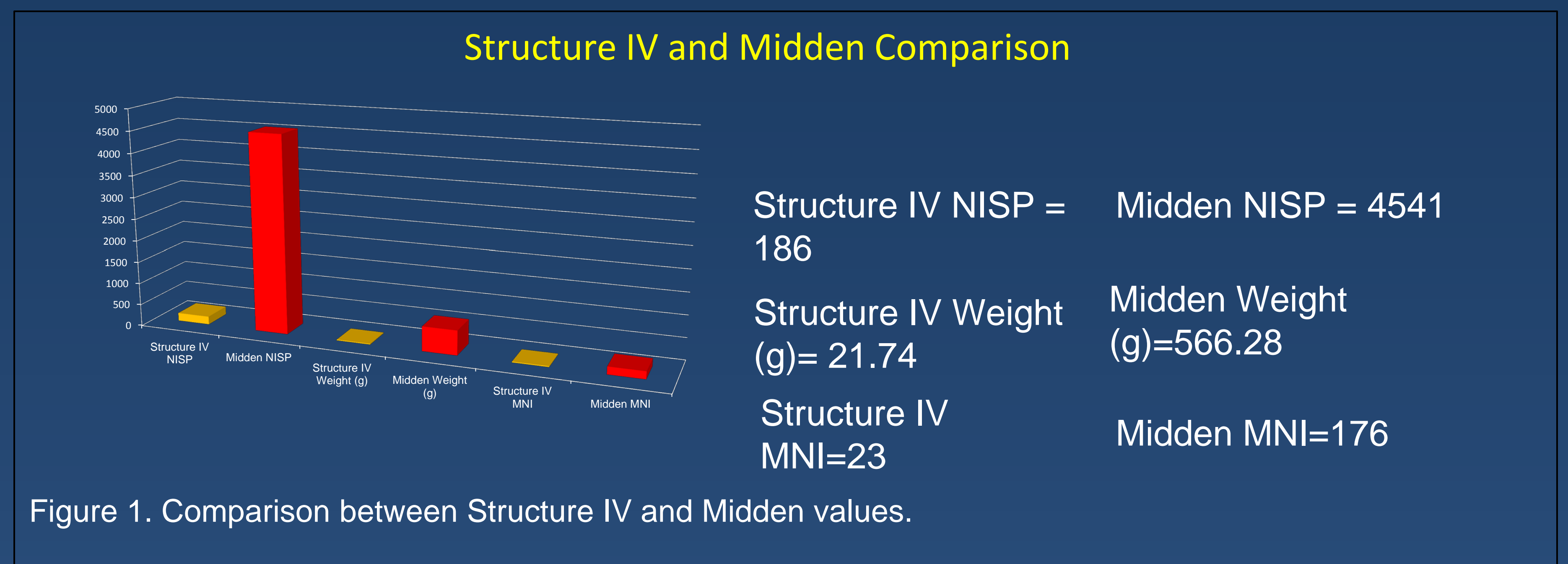
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Introduction: This poster presents the results of recent zooarchaeological analysis of vertebrate faunal materials from MC-6, a prehistoric site located on Middle Caicos, Turks and Caicos Islands. Eight vertebrate samples from 2 different contexts were analyzed: 2 samples recovered from within a stone “structure”, Structure IV, and 6 samples from the surrounding midden. Results indicate clear spatial distinctions in vertebrate processing (and presumed consumption) and deposition at the site, and suggest that the habitation of MC-6 may have been influenced in part by the procurement and processing of bonefish (*Albula vulpes*).

MC-6: MC-6 is a prehistoric village site situated on the south eastern edge of Middle Caicos, Turks and Caicos Islands (see Morsink, this exhibit). The materials presented here date to 200 cal AD 1336-1396 through cal AD 1473-1636. Previous zooarchaeological research at MC-6 has provided evidence of an economy heavily focused on the exploitation of marine resources (O’Day 2002). MC-6’s location along the Caicos Bank, a large marine bank over 3000 square kilometers, provided the site’s inhabitants with access to an array of resources including several species of fish and shellfish. MC-6 inhabitants also had ample access to Armstrong Pond and associated salt flats.

Zooarchaeological Methods: Zooarchaeological analysis of the eight vertebrate samples was conducted in Environmental Archaeology (EA) and Ornithology at the Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville. All specimens were identified to the lowest taxonomic category possible. Once identified, numbers of individual specimens (NISP), weight in grams, and the minimum number of individuals (MNI) were recorded. MNI calculation was based on element count, size, size, portion, and archaeological context. In addition, observations of both natural and human-wrought taphonomic alterations were noted. For the purpose of this study, NISP was selected as the main count from which to compare overall diversity in fauna presence at the site.



Results: 4,727 individual vertebrate specimens were analyzed, producing a minimum of 199 individual animals and a combined weight of 588.02g. 4,635 are identifiable to at least Class while 92 are not categorized beyond general Vertebrata. Bony fish are the most abundant animal present in the samples, including 4,365 NISP, 433.19g, and 167 MNI. Second to bony fish are reptiles, namely sea turtle (*Cheloniidae*) and the Turks and Caicos Iguana (*Cyclura carinata*). Birds contribute significantly less to the samples, and as expected given the biogeography of Middle Caicos Island, mammals are the least abundant class of fauna at MC-6.

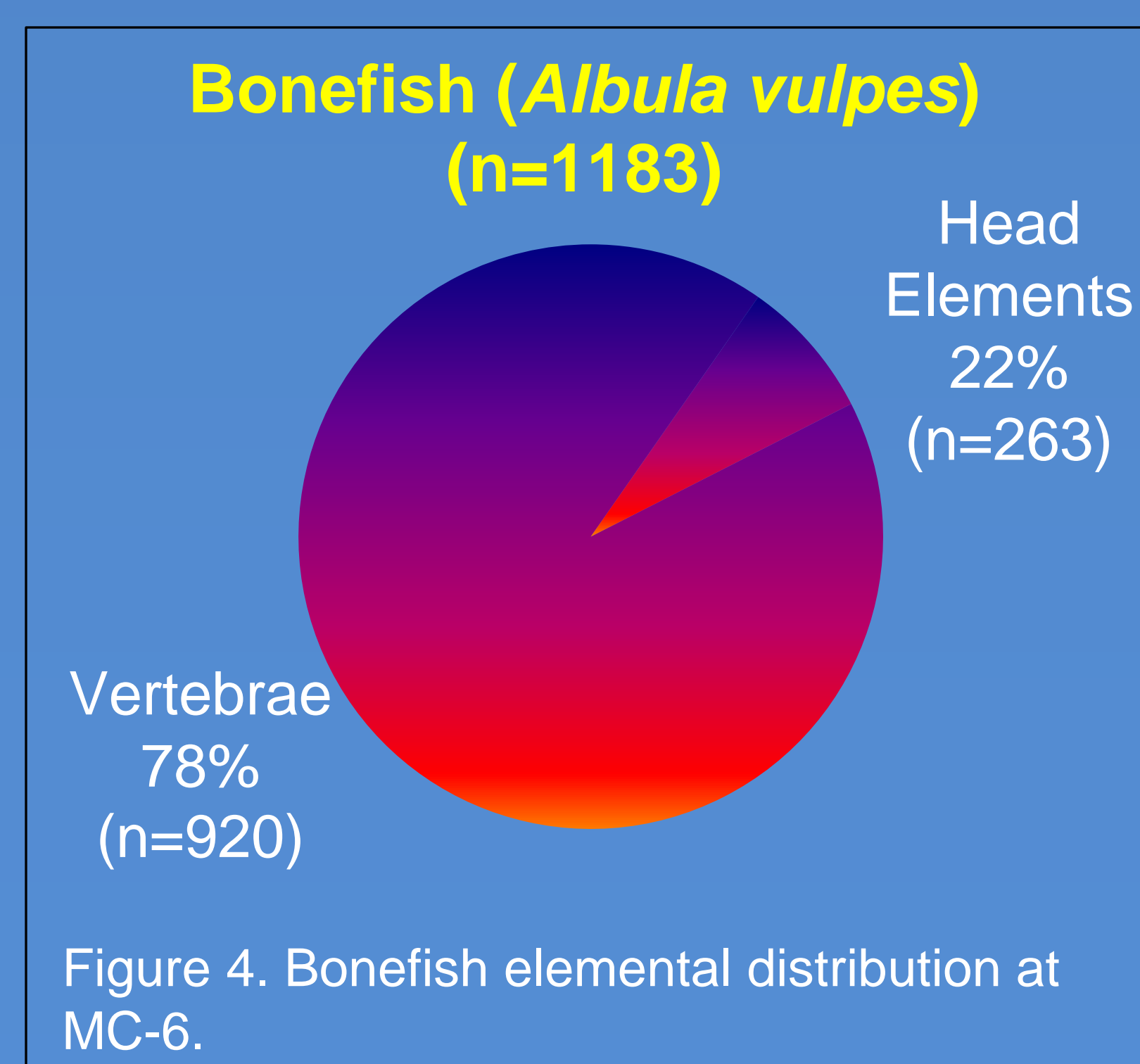
Structure IV vs. Midden: Ninety-six percent of all analyzed materials are from the midden (Figure 1). Samples from both Structure IV and the midden are dominated by bony fish (Figures 2 and 3). Of the 17 families present in the midden samples, seven are exclusive to the midden and not found in Structure IV. Reptiles in Structure IV are nearly absent compared to the midden, with 16 NISP from Structure IV and 184 from the midden. Sea turtle appears to be from juvenile individuals and in several cases hatchlings. Birds are a minority in both contexts, with only 8 and 2 specimens from Structure IV and the midden respectively, identifiable beyond Class. The six mammal specimens identified are from the midden exclusively and were not identifiable beyond Class.

Bonefish at MC-6: Bonefish are the most abundant fish at MC-6 and dominate each archaeological context (Figures 2 and 3). Vertebrae comprise the majority of identified elements (Figure 4). However, MNI was based on head elements.

Discussion:

Subsistence and Economy

As expected, MC-6 vertebrate exploitation focused on marine fishes with an emphasis on bonefish. Interestingly, the elemental distribution of bonefish does not appear to be an anomaly of sampling, and may shed light on the prehistoric political economy of MC-6. Based on head elements alone, bonefish MNI is 62. Based on vertebrae, bonefish MNI is 13. These data suggest a few possibilities: 1) bonefish bodies (i.e., vertebrae) were deposited in an unexcavated portion of the site, 2) once severed from the head, bonefish bodies and meat were prepared and consumed elsewhere at the site, or 4) bonefish bodies and meat were salted for preservation and consumed off site and/or island.



Site Use

When placing the zooarchaeological results in spatial context, a better understanding of site use at MC-6 emerges (see Morsink, this exhibit). Furthermore, if the above suggestions regarding bonefish elemental distribution are plausible, it is necessary to incorporate the vertebrate and invertebrate faunal data with artifact data (such as pottery and shell tools) across the site. This would allow for a holistic, spatially structured study of the fauna and site, and presumably reveal areas of different or combined activities between different site components (i.e., inside and outside of structures). Following Morsink (2012), this data could then be further extrapolated to situate the MC-6 fauna within larger inter-island relationships.

References Cited:

Morsink, J. 2012: The Power of Salt. Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Florida.
 O’Day, S.J., 2002. Late Prehistoric Lucayan Occupation and Subsistence on Middle Caicos Island, Northern West Indies. *Caribbean Journal of Science* 38 (1-2): 1-10.
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