Rapid communication

Phylogenetic relationships in the genus Apis inferred from mitochondrial DNA sequence data

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Summary — The nucleotide sequence of the 5'end of the mitochondrial cytochrome-oxydase subunit II gene was obtained through direct sequencing of PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) product from 4 Apis species (mellifera, cerana, dorsata and florea) and Bombus lucorum (Apidae) and Xylocopa violacea (Anthophoridae) as outgroups. Phylogenetic trees were built using Neighbor-Joining and parsimony methods. Three branches, dorsata, florea and cerana-mellifera diverged almost simultaneously and cerana separated from mellifera later but not as early as generally thought.

Apis/Phylogeny/molecular systematics/mitochondrial DNA/nucleotide sequence/cytochrome-oxydase

INTRODUCTION

To-date, phylogenetic relationships between the species of the genus Apis are mainly based on morphological, eco-ethological and biogeographic considerations (Ruttner, 1988). Recently, a phylogenetic tree has been obtained from allozyme data (Sheppard and Berlocher, 1989). In addition, preliminary reports of molecular systematics of Apis species have been presented by MacPheron (1989) and Sheppard (1989). In this rapid communication, we provide sequence data of the mitochondrial subunit II of the cytochrome-oxydase gene (CO-II) which allow to infer phylogenetic relationships between Apis cerana, A dorsata, A florea and A mellifera.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Origin of samples

Individuals of A cerana, A dorsata and A florea were sampled in Faridpur (Bangladesh) during January 1990. A cerana and A dorsata were taken from feral nests and workers of A florea were caught when they were feeding on palm sugar. A mellifera (subspecies mellifera) is represented by a colony from France. A second

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sequence was taken from the literature (Crozier et al, 1989) for A m ligustica. Two other species have been used as an outgroup: Bombus lucorum (Apidae, Bombinae) and Xylocopa violacea (Anthophoridae, Xylocopinae). One individual of each species was caught in Bures.

**Extraction of DNA**

mtDNA from Apis mellifera was cloned in pUC8. For the other species, total DNA was extracted from single individuals (one individual per species) according to Kocher et al (1989). The head and thorax for the small A florea and the head alone for the other species were ground in 750 μl of extraction buffer (Tris-HCl 100 mmol.l-1, pH 8.0, EDTA 1 mmol.l-1, NaCl 100 mmol.l-1, SDS 0.1% and DTT 50 mmol.l-1) containing 0.1 mg of proteinase K. The homogenate was incubated for 2-4 h at 37°C. After centrifugation (5 min at 1 500 rpm), the supernatant was deproteinated by 2 successive phenol-chloroform extractions. Nucleic acids were subsequently ethanol precipitated and dissolved in 1 ml of TE (10 mmol.l-1 Tris, 1 mmol.l-1 EDTA, pH 8.0).

**Sequencing**

The DNA template was produced through polymerase chain reaction (PCR) with the primers: E2: 5’-GGCAGAATAAGTGCATTG-3’ located in the tRNAleu gene and H2: 5’-CAATATCATTGATGACC-3’, 300 bp downstream from the 5’ end of the CO-II gene (Cornuet et al, in press). Single-stranded DNA was obtained according to Higuchi and Ochman (1989): amplification was achieved with one kinased primer, the other being unchanged. After amplification, the strand with the 5’-terminal phosphate was specifically digested with lambda exonuclease. Sequencing was performed through the dideoxy chain-termination method (Sanger et al, 1977) with the Pharmacia sequencing kit. Both strands were sequenced for all species.

**Phylogeny reconstruction**

The Neighbor-Joining (N-J) algorithm (Saitou and Nei, 1987) applied to corrected nucleotide distances (Kimura, 1980) and the parsimony method (program DNAPARS from the package PHYLIP v3.01) were used to infer phylogenetic trees.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the CO-II gene of each species, a region of 269 nucleotides was sequenced of which 93 were polymorphic and 41 informative (fig 1). The number of substitutions observed in pairwise comparisons and the corresponding distance are given in table I. The tree obtained through the N-J method indicates that the ancestor species diverged in 2 lineages giving rise to single comb open air species (dorsata and florea) and multiple comb cavity nesting species (mellifera and cerana) respectively (fig 2A). A dorsata and A florea then diverged rapidly, the separation of A mellifera and A cerana occurring later. The DNAPARS program provides 2 equiparsimonious trees. The first one has the same topology as above (fig 2A) and the second one infers a phylogeny in which florea diverged first, followed by dorsata and finally cerana and mellifera (fig 2B). Because of this discrepancy, a consensus tree is presented (fig 2C) in which dorsata and florea branch at the same level as the mellifera-cerana lineage. Solving this trifurcation would require far larger sequences because the level of homoplasy is high in mtDNA owing to the low number of sites able to substitute, the number of sites able to make multiple substitutions at these sites and to the simplified pattern of substitutions dominated by transitions and A<>T transversions.

The early separation of A florea, hypothesized by Michener (1974), is supported by a cladistic analysis of 19 morphological characters (Alexander, personal communication) and by the allozyme study of Sheppard and Berlocher (1989). Our sequence data, which are not opposed to this possi-
Fig 1. Nucleotide sequence of the 5'end of the mitochondrial DNA cytochrome-oxidase subunit II (COII) gene for four *Apis* species (Apidae), *Bombus lucorum* (Apidae) and *Xylocopa violacea* (Anthophoridae). The first line is the reference sequence of *Apis mellifera lingusta* (Crozier et al., 1989). Dots represent nucleotides common to all species.

Table I. Distances between taxa: number of observed substitutions between sequence and nucleotide distances with Kimura's correction (between parentheses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A. mel. lig.</th>
<th>A. mel. mel.</th>
<th>A. cerana</th>
<th>A. dorsata</th>
<th>A. florea</th>
<th>B. lucorum</th>
<th>X. violacea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A mellifera mellifera</td>
<td>4 (0.0151 ± 0.0076)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A cerana</td>
<td>19 (0.0744 ± 0.0173)</td>
<td>17 (0.00661 ± 0.0162)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dorsata</td>
<td>25 (0.0992 ± 0.0202)</td>
<td>25 (0.0992 ± 0.0202)</td>
<td>27 (0.1121 ± 0.0216)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A florea</td>
<td>23 (0.0909 ± 0.0193)</td>
<td>26 (0.1039 ± 0.0208)</td>
<td>26 (0.1037 ± 0.0208)</td>
<td>26 (0.1036 ± 0.0207)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B lucorum</td>
<td>52 (0.2236 ± 0.0325)</td>
<td>52 (0.2236 ± 0.0325)</td>
<td>52 (0.2236 ± 0.0324)</td>
<td>54 (0.2338 ± 0.0334)</td>
<td>55 (0.2387 ± 0.0338)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X violacea</td>
<td>46 (0.1943 ± 0.0298)</td>
<td>47 (0.1990 ± 0.0302)</td>
<td>55 (0.2391 ± 0.0339)</td>
<td>52 (0.2186 ± 0.0320)</td>
<td>52 (0.2186 ± 0.0320)</td>
<td>51 (0.2439 ± 0.0343)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
bility, indicate that *A. florea* and *A. dorsata* diverged almost simultaneously of the cluster *A. mellifera - A. cerana*, as considered by Ruttner (1988, fig 3.11).

Considering now the separation between *A. cerana* and *A. mellifera*, the allozyme study of Sheppard and Berlocher, by dating this event at the time of divergence of dorsata or slightly later casts doubt on the old and still widely accepted hypothesis that both species separated quite recently (Culliney, 1983; Ruttner, 1988). An intermediate situation is obtained with our present data: the divergence of *A. cerana* and *A. mellifera* is clearly posterior to the dorsata-(mellifera/cerana) node but the nucleotide distance between them is hardly compatible with a quaternary speciation.

Nucleotide distances between the different molecules can be used to calculate dis-
tance between species and then the absolute time of divergence, provided the rate of evolution is known (Wilson et al., 1985). This rate is not known in *Apis*, but it has been found close to 2% per million year (mya) for the whole mtDNA genome in Dipterans as well as in vertebrates (De Salle et al., 1987). The rate of evolution of the sequenced CO-II region is about half that of the whole genome (a similar ratio is found in *Drosophila* sequenced mtDNA).

The nucleotide distance between the CO-II region of *mellifera* and *cerana* is 7%; the corresponding value for the whole genome would be 14%; the nucleotide diversity of the ancestral species is assumed to be the same as in *A. mellifera*, i.e. 2% (unpublished results) and the rate of divergence 2% per mya. Their absolute time of speciation is then: \((14 - 2)/2 = 6\) mya. A similar computation would date the trifurcation *florea-dorsata-cerana/mellifera* around -9 mya. These time values should be considered as underestimates, owing to a rapid saturation effect for substitutions in mtDNA (De Salle et al., 1987).

The trees have been rooted by way of 2 external species (*Bombus lucorum* and *Xylocopus violacea*), the relative position of which is irrelevant.

Résumé - Relations phylogénétiques dans le genre *Apis* déduites de données de séquences d’ADN mitochondrial. La séquence nucléotidique de l’extrémité 5’ du gène de la sous-unité II de la cytochrome-oxydase mitochondriale a été obtenue par séquençage direct du produit de PCR (Polymerase chain reaction) de 4 espèces d’*Apis* (*mellifera*, *cerana*, *dorsata* et *florea*) et de *Bombus lucorum* (Apidae) et *Xylocopa violacea* (Anthophoridae) comme références externes. Des arbres phylogénétiques ont été construits à l’aide de la méthode du Neighbor-Joining et d’une méthode de parcimonie. L’arbre consensus indique que les 3 rameaux *florea*, *dorsata* et *mellifera-cerana* ont divergé à peu près à la même époque et que *mellifera* et *cerana* ont divergé plus tard, mais pas aussi récemment qu’on le croyait généralement.

*Apis* / phylogenèse / taxonomie moléculaire / ADN mitochondrial / séquence de nucléotides / cytochrome oxydase


*Apis* / Phylogenesis / molekulare Systematik / mitochondrial DNA / Nukleotid-Sequenz / Cytochromoxydase

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