GENETIC DIFFERENTIATION AMONG GEOGRAPHIC POPULATIONS OF *GONATOCERUS ASHMEADI*, A PRIMARY EGG PARASITOID OF THE GLASSY-WINGED SHARPSHOOTER

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ABSTRACT

The aim of genetically comparing different populations of the same species of natural enemies is to identify the strain that is most adapted to the environment where it will be released. In the present study, Inter-Simple Sequence Repeat-Polymerase Chain Reaction (ISSR-PCR) was utilized to estimate the population genetic structure of *Gonatocerus ashmeadi*. Six populations from throughout the U. S. and a population from Argentina identified as near *G. ashmeadi* were analyzed. Four populations [California (CA), San Antonio, TX (SATX), Weslaco, TX (WTX-2), and Quincy, Florida (QFL)] were field collected and two [Louisiana (LA) and Weslaco, TX (WTX-1)] were reared. Three ISSR-PCR reactions were pooled to generate 41 polymorphic markers among the six U. S. populations. Nei's expected heterozygosity values (*h*), including the reared population from Louisiana were high (9.0-14.3%) for all populations, except for a reared population from WTX-1 (2.9%). The total genetic diversity value (Ht) for the field populations was high (23%). Interestingly, the Florida population that was collected from one egg mass generated the greatest number of polymorphic markers (20) and was observed with the highest gene diversity value (14.3%). All populations, except WTX-2 generated population-specific markers. Comparison of genetic differentiation estimates, which evaluate the degree of genetic subdivision, demonstrated good agreement between G_{ST} and θ values, 0.38 and 0.50, respectively for field populations, and 0.44 and 0.50, respectively for all populations. Average genetic divergence (D) indicated that the WTX-1 population was the most differentiated. Average D results from the Argentina population support the taxonomic data that it is a different species. The present results estimate the population genetic structure of *G. ashmeadi*, demonstrating extensive genetic divergence and restricted gene flow (Nm = 0.83) among populations. These results are of interest to the Pierce's Disease/Glassy-winged Sharpshooter biological control program because the key to successful biological control may not be in another species, but instead in different geographic races or biotypes.

INTRODUCTION

Gonatocerus ashmeadi (Girault) (Hymenoptera: Mymaridae) is a primary egg parasitoid of *Homalodisca coagulata* (Say) (Homoptera: Cicadellidae), the glassy-winged sharpshooter (Huber 1998). A biological control program is currently in progress in California against *H. coagulata* because this xylem feeding sharpshooter is a serious economic pest that vectors a strain of *Xylella fastidiosa* (Wells), a bacterium that causes Pierce's Disease in grapevines. Studies of allele or marker frequencies in naturally occurring parasitoid populations are important, not only for identifying genetic variation of potential benefit in the selection and screening of biological control organisms, but also for the detection of genetic markers indicative of specific biological traits or geographic origins. In addition, the recognition of intraspecific variation can be as crucial for the success of biological control programs as is sound species determination. Populations of parasitoids from distinct geographical regions may differ in relevant biological characteristics of importance to biological control (Powell and Walton 1989; Narang *et al*. 1993; Unruh and Woolley 1999). An aim of genetically comparing different populations of the same species of natural enemies is to identify the strain that is most adapted to the environment where it will be released (Messenger and van den Bosch 1971); in other words, the key to successful biological control may not be in another species, but instead in different geographic races or biotypes (Diehl and Bush 1984). Reliable methods are needed for distinguishing various exotic strains of these biological control agents from those indigenous to the U. S., including parasitoids from different states within the U. S. Release of unidentified and uncharacterized strains can make it difficult to document their establishment and dispersal. Therefore, genetic typing of strains prior to their release in the field is highly desirable (Narang *et al*. 1993).

OBJECTIVES

1. Estimate genetic variation or gene diversity within and among populations.
2. Estimate the population genetic structure.
3. Determine whether ISSR-PCR was sensitive enough to identify diagnostic markers in geographic populations.
4. Confirm the species identification of a population of egg parasitoids from Argentina identified as near *G. ashmeadi*.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

ISSR-PCR Marker Heterozygosity and Genetic Diversity

A total of 41 polymorphic markers were generated in the six populations of G. ashmeadi (163 individuals) from the U. S. with three pooled ISSR-PCR reactions. G^2-contingency tests indicated significant heterogeneity of marker frequency across all U. S. populations for 31 of 41 markers and for 25 of 34 markers for the field populations (not shown). All populations,

except the WTX-2, were associated with population-specific markers (data not shown). Within populations, gene diversity values (h) were observed ranging from 2.9 to 14.3% with WTX-1 having the lowest and QFL having the highest value (Table 1). In general, the two Weslaco populations (WTX-1 and -2) were found to have the lowest h values. No significant differences in h were seen between the two Weslaco populations ($t = 1.49$, $df = 58$, $P > 0.05$), but significant differences ($P < 0.05$) were observed between WTX-1 and the rest of the U. S. populations. Interestingly, no significant differences in h were observed between the reared LA and the rest of the field populations. The fact that QFL was associated with an h value of 14.3% was surprising since this population was from a single egg mass. Overall, the field populations and all the U. S. G. ashmeadi populations together had an h value of 23.0 and 20.8%, respectively. The number of polymorphic markers ranged from 12 to 20 with WTX-1 and -2 having the lowest and QFL the highest. Percentage of polymorphic markers (%P) ranged from 29.3 to 58.8%, but overall, 100% of the ISSR-PCR markers were polymorphic, including the field populations analyzed separately. The two Weslaco populations were associated with the lowest %P and QFL with the highest. It is interesting to note that even though both LA and WTX-1 were reared, WTX-1 is presented with a significantly ($P < 0.05$) lower h value. These results may indicate a real genetic difference between the two Weslaco populations, including the possibility of sympatric strains.

ISSR-PCR Differentiation Among US G. ashmeadi Populations

Table 2 presents the results from the different approaches used to apportion variation into within- and among-populations levels. Simultaneous exact tests for population differentiation indicated that highly significant differences in marker frequencies exist among the six U.S. populations (All: $\chi^2 = 676.2$; $df = 82$; $P = 0.0000$, and fc: $\chi^2 = 485.2$; $df = 68$; $P = 0.0000$). These statistically significant tests suggest that discrete subpopulations exist. The average genetic diversity within populations (Hs) value for the field populations is 14.4%. Table 2 also shows a comparison of other genetic differentiation estimates, G_{ST} and θ. Good agreement was seen between G_{ST} and θ values, respectively for field and for all populations. The G_{ST} values for field and all populations indicate that about 38 and 44% of the variance is distributed among populations, and 62 and 56% is distributed within populations, respectively. The θ values show that about 50% of the variance is seen among populations in both field and all populations. The indirect estimate of gene flow, Nm base on G_{ST}, demonstrated low values for both field and all U. S. populations. These values indicate restricted gene flow among the populations.

Genetic Relatedness among G. ashmeadi Populations from the US

Average genetic divergence (D) among both field [Nei = 0.1702 (0.1021-0.2230); Reynolds = 0.6208 (0.4069-0.8138)] and all populations [Nei = 0.1304 (0.0715-0.2024); Reynolds = 0.6512 (0.3705-0.8890)] was high (Table 3). We compared the level of genetic divergence between the field populations and the WTX-1 and LA reared populations and found mean D values of 0.1806 (Nei) and 0.8589 (Reynolds) and 0.1065 (Nei) and 0.5371 (Reynolds), respectively. These results indicate that WTX-1 is more diverged than LA. A comparison of Nei's genetic distance within the Texas populations, WTX-2 vs WTX-1 (0.1391) and WTX-2 *vs* SATX (0.1286), showed that divergence is slightly higher between the Weslaco populations. Sympatric species tend to have higher levels of genetic differentiation; more work is needed to confirm this possibility. The divergence between ARG and all U. S. *G. ashmeadi* populations was very high, 0.3633 (Nei) and 1.6093 (Reynolds), respectively. These results support the taxonomic data that ARG is another species. Dendrograms based on Nei's genetic distance are shown on Fig. 1 with all populations including ARG (Fig. 1A) and the field populations analyzed separately (Fig. 1B). At least two main clusters are identified on the dendrogram with ARG clustered as an outlier (Fig. 1A). Within a second cluster or all *G. ashmeadi* from the U. S., WTX-1 appears to be the most differentiated (Fig. 1A). The CA population appears to form a second subcluster and the two southeastern populations, LA and QFL form a single cluster. The WTX-1 and –2 populations are distributed in different clusters. Also within Texas (Fig. 1B), WTX-2 and SATX show divergence as they appear on a separate cluster. It is interesting to note that this same pattern of differentiation is seen with *H. coagulata* within Texas (de León *et al*. 2004).

In summary, the major observations of this study were that 1) among *G. ashmeadi* populations, based on genetic differentiation measurements (exact test, G_{ST}, θ), extensive genetic structure was identified; 2) the mean expected gene diversity value for LA did not differ from field populations, whereas WTX-1 was observed with a significantly lower mean expected gene diversity value as compared to field populations (except WTX-2); 3) QFL generated the most polymorphic markers (20) with only 13 individuals, even though they were all siblings or from one egg mass. This is an interesting result since it may be assumed that siblings are not associated with high variability or have isofemale line characteristics. These results indicate that *G. ashmeadi* parasitoid siblings somehow manage to maintain their genetic diversity. Further studies are required to confirm this observation in this species and other *Gonatocerus* species. Variation within 10 male individuals (*Anaphes* sp.nov.) was demonstrated with RAPD markers by Landry *et al*. (1993), but they were not from the same egg mass; 4) based on genetic distance or average divergence, WTX-1 appeared to be the most differentiated population. Within Texas, field populations WTX-2 and SATX appeared on separate clusters, indicating that these populations are differentiated even though they are within the same state; and 5) The ARG population is confirmed to be a different species. More research is required to confirm these results, sequencing of standard genes [e. g., mitochrondia cytochrome oxidase (COI)] and ITS-2 fragments are in progress.

Table 1. Single-populations descriptive statistics for *G. ashmeadi* from the U. S. and genetic variation statistics for all loci. Genetic variation was analyzed using the POPGENE 3.2 genetic software program and the program Tools for Population Genetic Analyses (TPFGA). No. M, number of monomorphic markers; No. P., number of polymorphic markers; %P, percentage of polymorphic loci; Poym. ratio, number of polymorphic markers per number of insects; *h*, gene diversity (SD). One-tailed unpaired *t* test performed for *h* values.

Pop.	No. Insects	No. M	No. P	Total# markers	%P	Polym. ratio	*h* (SD)
CA	30	5	16	21	39.2	0.53	0.1329 (0.182)[a]
WTX-1	30	7	12	19	29.3	0.40	0.0290 (0.158)
WTX-2	30	6	13	19	31.7	0.43	0.0901 (0.160)
SATX	30	5	16	21	39.0	0.53	0.1123 (0.170)[a]
LA	30	5	17	22	41.5	0.57	0.1252 (0.182)[a]
QFL	13	1	20	21	58.8	1.54	0.1431 (0.199)[a]
Fc	103	0	34	34	100.0	0.33	0.2300 (0.184)
All	163	0	41	41	100.0	0.25	0.2082 (0.187)
ARG	30	11	8	19	16.7	0.27	0.0434 (0.127)

[a]Significantly different from WTX-1, $P < 0.05$; df = 58

Table 2. Nei's analysis of gene diversity in populations of *G. ashmeadi* from the US (fc, field collected; Ht, total genetic diversity (SD); Hs, average genetic diversity within populations (SD); G_{ST} (mean), coefficient of gene differentiation; θ (mean), theta (SD) is analogous to F_{ST}; and Nm, gene fow).

Ht	Hs	G_{ST}	θ	Nm
fc				
0.2312	0.1442	0.3761	0.4957	0.8295
(0.032)	(0.016)		(0.077)	
All				
0.2087	0.1161	0.4438	0.4927	0.6267
(0.034)	(0.013)		(0.057)	

Table 3. Nei's unbiased (1987) genetic distance (below diagonal) and Reynolds et al. (1983) genetic distance (above diagonal). Six populations *of G. ashmeadi* from the US field populations were also analyzed separately (bottom portion of table).

Pop.	CA	WTX-1	WTX-2	SATX	LA	QFL
CA	*****	0.8682	0.6818	0.6441	0.6275	0.4227
WTX-1	0.2024	*****	0.8080	0.8703	0.6871	0.8890
WTX-2	0.1341	0.1391	*****	0.7213	0.6663	0.5322
SATX	0.1384	0.1789	0.1286	*****	0.4842	0.4956
LA	0.1422	0.1335	0.1233	0.0890	*****	0.3705
QFL	0.0896	0.2020	0.0890	0.0951	0.0715	*****

Pop.	CA	WTX-2	SATX	QFL
CA	*****	0.8138	0.8075	0.4559
WTX-2	0.2215	*****	0.7741	0.4069
SATX	0.2230	0.2015	*****	0.4666
QFL	0.1308	0.1021	0.1328	*****

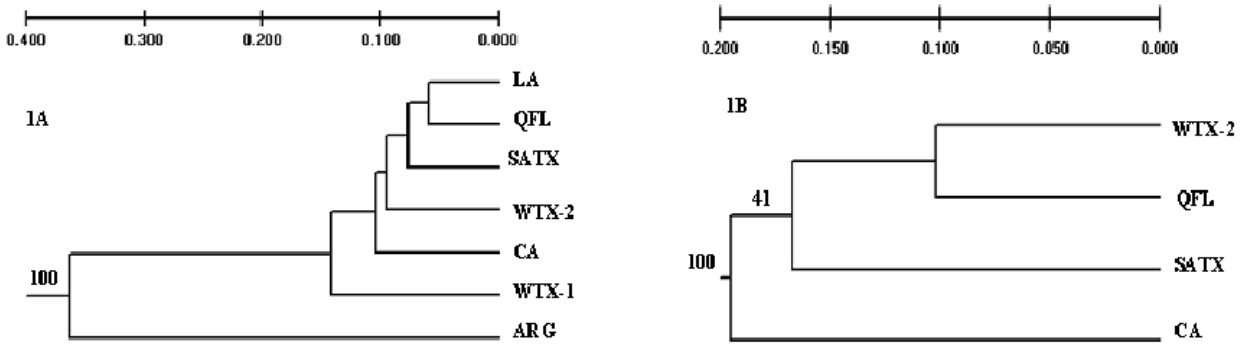

Figure 1: Dendrograms based on Nei's genetic distance by the method of UPGMA. Relationships (A) showing the six US geographic populations of *G. ashmeadi* and a population classified as near *G. ashmeadi* (M2012) from Argentina performed by ISSR-PCR DNA fingerprinting. Field collected populations were also analyzed separately (B). Genetic distances are indicated above the dendrograms and bootstrap support values are indicated at the nodes.

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