



Conference Abstract

Phylogenetic diversity of water scorpions (*Nepa* spp., Insecta, Hemiptera)

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Received: 30 Jun 2022 | Published: 14 Jul 2022

Citation: Ștefan A, Flot J-F, Iorgu EI, Popa LO, Keffer SL, Stoch F, Sârbu ȘM (2022) Phylogenetic diversity of water scorpions (*Nepa* spp., Insecta, Hemiptera). ARPHA Conference Abstracts 5: e89707.

<https://doi.org/10.3897/aca.5.e89707>

Abstract

Water scorpions belonging to the genus *Nepa* are predatory freshwater aquatic insects of the order Hemiptera. There are currently five accepted species, with a Holarctic distribution: *N. cinerea* (Eurasia and Northern Africa), *N. sardiniensis* (Sardinia and Corsica), *N. anophthalma* (endemic to Movile Cave, Romania), *N. apiculata* (North America) and *N. hoffmanni* (Eastern Asia). Mitochondrial and nuclear genetic markers indicate a correlation between genetic diversity and geographic distribution. Analyses also reveal a cryptic diversity in the Western Mediterranean basin, with specimens of the *cinerea* clade being assigned to the *sardiniensis* clade. The cave-adapted *N. anophthalma* is genetically closest to *N. cinerea*, suggesting surface populations of *N. cinerea* as possible ancestors. *N. cinerea* samples from three cave systems in Italy indicate various degrees of gene flow between surface and subterranean populations and an instance of a possible incipient speciation event. Despite the overlap in distribution range in mainland Eastern Asia between *N. cinerea* and *N. hoffmanni*, there is a high genetic distance between the two species. A similar value of genetic distance is found between *N. cinerea* and *N. apiculata*, but also between *N. hoffmanni* and *N. apiculata*, suggesting the assignment of *N. hoffmanni* and *N. apiculata* to different genera. The single species

currently considered as stygobiotic, *N. anophthalma*, deserves more research to understand the timing of colonization of Movile groundwater by its surface ancestors.

Keywords

Nepa, Nepa anophthalma, water-scorpion, Movile Cave, cryptic diversity

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Presented at

The 25th International Conference on Subterranean Biology (Cluj-Napoca, 18-22 July 2022)

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many colleagues and researchers that provided water scorpion specimens from all over their distribution range.

Funding program

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-CEI-BIM-PBE-2020-0048 / 11 BM/2021, within PNCDI III (NEPA-GENSIZE); and by a grant of the Ministry of Research and Innovation (UEFISCDI) project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-2843 (EVO-DEVO-CAVE).

Grant title

Genome size in a big world: can geographic distribution explain nuclear DNA content in water-scorpions (*Nepa* sp.)? - NEPA-GENSIZE

Convergent evolution, development and adaptations of crustaceans from chemosynthesis-based cave ecosystems (EVO-DEVO-CAVE)