Metabolic adaptations underlie life-history evolution in a range expanding arthropod

Katrien H. P. Van Petegem [*a], David Renault [b], Robby Stoks [c] and Dries Bonte [a]

[a] Department of Biology, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium

[b] UMR CNRS 6553 Ecobio, Université de Rennes 1, Rennes Cedex, France

[c] Evolution and Conservation, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

[*] Corresponding author: Katrien.VanPetegem@ugent.be

Running headline: Metabolomics of a range expanding arthropod

Summary

1. During range expansions or range shifts, species' life histories evolve due to changing selection pressures or spatial sorting. Despite an increasing number of studies documenting such life-history evolution, we lack a mechanistic understanding of the underlying physiological processes.

2. We used a powerful metabolomics approach to study physiological changes associated with the recent range expansion of a model arthropod, the two-spotted spider mite *Tetranychus urticae.*

3. Mite populations were sampled in the field along a latitudinal gradient from range core to range edge, and reared under common garden conditions for two generations. Thereafter, we obtained metabolic population profiles using Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrophotometry (GC-MS).

4. We found gradual metabolic differentiation along the latitudinal gradient, indicating rapid evolution of the metabolome in association with range expansion. In addition, we observed that some of this differentiation covaried with the life-history evolution previously found to be associated with the mite's range expansion.

5. Particularly, more northern populations, which evolved a higher dispersal tendency, showed lowered concentrations of several essential and non-essential amino acids, suggesting a downregulation of certain metabolic pathways and a potential dispersal-foraging trade-off.

34   6. This study is the first to demonstrate how metabolic adaptations might underlie life-

35   history evolution during range expansion.

36 **Keywords**: amino acids, common garden, GC-MS metabolomics, global change, latitudinal

37 gradient, *Tetranychus urticae*

Introduction

During range expansions or range shifts, species' life histories can evolve at contemporary timescales (Phillips, Brown & Shine 2010). Changing environmental conditions force species to locally adapt and spatial assortment of dispersive phenotypes leads to increased dispersiveness at the expanding/shifting range edge (Shine, Brown & Phillips 2011). These evolutionary processes of local adaptation and spatial selection affect key life-history traits like fecundity, development and dispersal (reviewed in Chuang & Peterson 2015). We therefore expect range edge populations to exhibit physiological adaptations that underlie these observed trait evolutions, more particularly at the metabolism level. Indeed, any elevation of the performance of one life-history trait augments its energetic and metabolite demands at the expense of other traits (*cfr.* the "Y" model of resource allocation, Van Noordwijk & de Jong 1986; Zera & Harshman 2001), thus modifying the global metabolic network operation. As a result, life-history differentiation is expected to be associated with changes in the metabolome (*i.e.* the set of circulating metabolites within an organism, Oliver *et al.* 1998), as was for example found for ageing in *Caenorhabditis elegans* (Fuchs *et al.* 2010) and reproduction in the Malaria Mosquito (Fuchs *et al.* 2014).

Metabolomics is a powerful technique which can be used as a candidate approach to explore an organism's response to environmental variations and forthcoming environmental change (Hines *et al.* 2007; Miller 2007; Viant 2008; Bundy, Davey & Viant 2009; Lankadurai, Nagato & Simpson 2013; Hidalgo *et al.* 2014). It provides information on the interaction

between an organism's physiology and its natural environment by identifying metabolites of low

to moderate molecular mass within the whole body, cells, tissues or biofluids. Compared to

other –omics technologies like genomics and transcriptomics, metabolomics has the significant

advantage to focus on 'downstream' cellular functions (Snart, Hardy & Barrett 2015), providing

a more direct picture of the functional links between causes and consequences of

environmental variation (Foucreau *et al.* 2012). Essentially, metabolomics provides the link

between genotypes and phenotypes (Fiehn 2002). When applied on individuals originating from

different localities from range core to edge, but reared for several generations under common

garden conditions, it can provide insights on the physiological adaptations that underlie life-

history evolution during range expansion.

Though a consideration of the whole-organism physiology allows a better understanding

of how life-history evolution in natural populations might occur and why this evolution is

sometimes constrained (Zera *et al.* 2001; Ricklefs & Wikelski 2002), few studies documented

metabolic variation in wild populations along natural gradients (Sardans, Penuelas & Rivas-

Ubach 2011). Instead, most studies assess plastic or evolutionary responses to environmental

stressors by manipulating abiotic variables in controlled environments (Sardans *et al.* 2011;

Colinet *et al.* 2012; Padfield *et al.* 2016). Notable exceptions are the studies on *Arabidopsis*

lyrata that demonstrated distinct metabolic phenotypes along the species' latitudinal

distribution, with a typical cold-induced metabolome in the north, indicating adaptation to the

local climate (Davey *et al.* 2008; Davey, Woodward & Quick 2009), but no difference in

metabolic fingerprint between large connected *versus* marginal fragmented populations (Kunin

et al. 2009). These studies, however, used plants that were grown from seeds collected directly

from the field. Environmental maternal effects can therefore not be excluded. In fact, so far, no

study to our knowledge assessed true evolutionary changes in the metabolome of natural

populations.

The two-spotted spider mite*, Tetranychus urticae* Koch (Acari, Tetranychidae), a

generalist pest species in greenhouses and orchards, expanded its European range from the

Mediterranean to at least southern Scandinavia (K. H. P. Van Petegem, personal observation)

during the last decades (for more information, see Carbonnelle *et al.* 2007). Previous research

with *T. urticae* showed quantitative genetic life-history differentiation along this latitudinal

gradient, with daily fecundity, lifetime fecundity and longevity decreasing from range core to

edge, and egg survival, dispersal propensity and sex ratio increasing from range core to edge

(Van Petegem *et al.* 2015). We expected this life-history differentiation to be associated with an

enhancement of different metabolic pathways and thus distinct metabolic phenotypes.

Using a metabolomics approach, the current study aimed to test (i) whether the

metabolome of *T. urticae* evolved during its recent range expansion; *i.e.* whether a gradual

change in the mite's metabolic phenotype is present from range core to range edge, (ii) whether

this metabolic differentiation is associated with the up- or downregulation of certain metabolic

pathways and (iii) whether this evolutionary change in the species' metabolic phenotype is

associated with the life-history differentiation that has occurred during its range expansion.

Materials and methods

Field sampling and common garden

In August 2012, we hand-sampled mites from nine localities (one population per locality) along an 800 km latitudinal gradient from north-western Belgium to northern Denmark (Fig. 1). Mites were found on infested leaves of *Lonicera periclymenum* (European honeysuckle) at high latitudes and on *Euonymus europaeus* (European spindle), *Humulus lupulus* (common hop) or *Sambucus nigra* (European black elderberry) at lower latitudes. (More information is provided in online supporting information SI.1.) In the laboratory, fifty to several hundreds of mites per population were put on separate whole bean plants (*Phaseolus vulgaris*, variety Prélude) and kept under controlled conditions at room temperature with a light-regime of 16:8 LD. After one generation, ten adult female mites per population were taken from their bean plant and put on a piece of bean leaf on wet cotton in a Petri dish. Two such Petri dishes were prepared for each population. The Petri dishes were then used to create a pool of synchronised two-day adult female mites for each population. (Two-day adult females were preferred, since these are significantly bigger than fresh adults.) For this purpose, all females were allowed to lay eggs during 24 hours in a climate room at 27 °C, with a light-regime of 16:8 LD. The resulting same-aged eggs were subsequently left to develop until they were two-day adult mites, of which only females (which are easily recognized) were selected. As mites were kept in common garden for two generations, all direct environmental effects were excluded.

Metabolomic profiling using Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrophotometry (GC-MS)

As we wanted to scan metabolites from different metabolite families (because of their

various but connected roles in general organismal physiology), we used GC-MS metabolomics

(Koek *et al.* 2011; Khodayari *et al.* 2013). For each population, we constructed the metabolomic

profile of five replicated pooled sets of fifty two-day-adult female mites. Each set was placed in

a microtube and snap-frozen at -80 °C. To be able to measure true quantities of the metabolites,

it is important to standardise the initial masses of each extract. However, even when pooling

fifty individuals, the masses of the replicates were too low to be accurately measured. Yet,

previous research showed that female adult size does not differ among the nine sampled

populations (Van Petegem *et al.* 2015). We could thus confidently use and interpret metabolite

concentrations in nmol/sample. The samples were first homogenized in ice-cold (-20 °C)

methanol-chloroform (2:1), using a tungsten-bead beating equipment (RetschTM MM301,

Retsch GmbH, Haan, Germany) at 25 Hz. After addition of ice-cold ultrapure water, the samples

were centrifuged at 4,000 g for 5 min at 4 °C. The upper aqueous phase was then transferred to

new chromatographic glass vials, dried-out and resuspended in 30 µl of 20 mg L-1

methoxyamine hydrochloride (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) in pyridine and incubated

under automatic orbital shaking at 40 °C for 60 min. Subsequently, 30 µl of N-methyl-N-

(trimethylsilyl) trifluoroacetamide (MSTFA; Sigma, #394866) was added and the derivatisation

was conducted at 40 °C for 60 min under agitation. The samples were then analysed in a GC-MS

system (Thermo Fischer Scientific Inc., Waltham, MA, USA), using the same settings as in

Khodayari *et al.* (2013). For this purpose, one microliter of each sample was injected in the GC-

MS system using the split mode (split ratio: 25:1). After that, the selective ion monitoring (SIM)

mode (electron energy: -70 eV) was used to search for the sixty primary metabolites that are

most often found in insect samples and that were included in our spectral database(see online

supporting information SI.2 for a complete overview of these sixty metabolites). This database

consisted, amongst others, out of sixteen amino acids and eleven sugars. The SIM mode

ensured a precise annotation of the detected peaks. The calibration curves were set using

samples consisting of sixty pure reference compounds at concentrations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50,

100, 200, 500, 750, 1000, 1500 and 2000 μM. Chromatograms were deconvoluted using

XCalibur v2.0.7 software (Thermo Fischer Scientific Inc., Waltham, MA, USA). Finally, metabolite

concentrations were quantified according to their calibration curves.

Statistics

A total of forty-three metabolites were identified. In a first step, we examined whether a

general pattern in the concentrations of these metabolites exists along the invasion gradient of

our study species (*i.e.* whether the metabolic profile is gradually changing from range core to

edge). More specifically, we examined whether the metabolite concentrations could be sorted

as a function of latitude or as a function of one of the six life-history traits that were previously

shown to covary with latitude (daily and lifetime fecundity, egg survival, longevity, dispersal

propensity and sex ratio, see Van Petegem *et al.* 2015). The metabolite concentrations were

first auto-scaled and cube root- (when looking for covariation with daily fecundity and egg

survival) or log- (for latitude) transformed (no transformation was needed for lifetime fecundity,

longevity, dispersal propensity and sex ratio). Then, a Partial Least Squares – Discriminant

Analysis (PLS-DA) was performed to examine interpopulation variation in the metabolite

concentrations. This multivariate analysis was performed using MetaboAnalyst 3.0 (Xia *et al.*

2009; Xia *et al.* 2012; Xia *et al.* 2015). By ordering the populations according to their latitude or

according to one of the six life-history traits covarying with latitude, it was possible to check for

trends in the metabolite concentrations. To check the significance of this interpopulation

variation, permutation tests (2,000 permutations) were run using separation distance (B/W) test

statistics. The PLS-DA provided Variable Importance in Projection (VIP) scores, which were

subsequently used to select the most important metabolites in explaining the variation among

populations (low VIP-scores depict a weak, and high scores a strong global pattern). Using a

step-wise procedure, only those metabolites with a VIP score of at least 1.2 (1.0 for egg survival

because removing the metabolites with a score between 1.0 and 1.2 resulted in a decreased

percentage of variation explained) for the first and/or second component were retained for

further analysis (compared to 0.8 in Tenenhaus 1998).

In a second step, univariate analyses were performed to test, metabolite by metabolite,

whether the global patterns obtained in the previous step could be confirmed. Using SAS 9.4

(SAS Institute Inc. 2013), linear regressions were run for all those metabolites that were

retained during the above described multivariate analysis. As our study is explorative (though

on highly standardised samples regarding environmental conditions during development), we

wanted to avoid false negatives (with the chance of making a Type II error). We therefore did

not correct for multiple comparisons (*e.g.* Bonferroni correction). Given the large number of

statistical tests, such a correction would have greatly diminished our statistical power.

In a final step, a metabolic pathway analysis was performed in Metaboanalyst 3.0 (Xia *et*

al. 2009; Xia *et al.* 2012; Xia *et al.* 2015) with those metabolites that showed significant effects

in the univariate analyses. These pathway analyses were performed with a Fisher's exact test

algorithm, which we ran using the metabolic pathways of *Drosophila melanogaster* (*i.e.* the

closest relative of *T. urticae* available in the program). The algorithm calculates the match

(number of hits) between the metabolites in a dataset and the totality of metabolites present in

a specific pathway. Furthermore, it uses a pathway topology analysis to compute a value for the

impact of these metabolites on the pathway. As multiple comparisons are made, corrected

Holm p-values are provided. This final step linked the selected individual metabolites with one

or more metabolic pathways, thus identifying those pathways that were potentially up- or

downregulated during the range expansion of *T. urticae*.

Results

Latitudinal covariation

The PLS-DA showed a separation between the nine populations, which was visible on 3-D score plots (see online supporting information SI.3). Of the forty-three identified metabolites, seventeen had VIP scores of at least 1.2 and were thus retained in the analysis (Fig. 2A). They showed a clear general trend from high values in southern to low values in northern populations (Fig. 2A).

In the subsequent linear regressions, thirteen of these seventeen metabolite concentrations decreased significantly with increasing latitude (Fig. 2A). Among these thirteen metabolites, six essential amino acids, five non-essential amino acids (see Rodriguez & Hampton (1966) for an overview of all essential amino acids in *T. urticae* –we defined tryptophan, which is not included in this overview, as essential) and one intermediate of the citric acid cycle can be mentioned.

Pathway analysis indicated that of these thirteen metabolites, eleven play a significant role in the aminoacyl-tRNA biosynthesis (total: 67, hits: 11, impact=0, Holm *p*=2.6066E-10) and four in the valine, leucine and isoleucine biosynthesis (total: 13, hits: 4, impact=0.9999, Holm *p*=8.5705E-4) (both pathway maps are provided in online supporting information SI.6).

Life history covariation

The PLS-DA showed a separation between the nine (eight for egg survival, for which no

data were available for population SVI) populations, which is visible on 3-D score plots (see

online supporting information SI.3). Of the forty-three identified metabolites, only those which

explained most of the interpopulation variation for a certain life-history trait (high VIP score, see

above) were retained for further analysis. Fourteen were retained for daily and sixteen for

lifetime fecundity, twenty were retained for egg survival, eleven for longevity, thirteen for

dispersal propensity and ten for sex ratio (Fig. 2B-G). Figure 2 (B-G) shows clear indications of a

positive correlation between lifetime fecundity and its sixteen selected metabolites. In contrast,

figure 2 (B-G) suggests a negative correlation between the twenty and thirteen metabolites

selected for, respectively, egg survival and dispersal propensity. For daily fecundity, longevity

and sex ratio, no clear trends were visible.

In the subsequent linear regressions, performed with the selected metabolites, one

significant correlation was found for daily fecundity (a polyol), four for egg survival (one

essential amino acid, two non-essential amino acids and one intermediate of the citric acid

cycle), eight for dispersal propensity (including five essential amino acids) and two for sex ratio

(including one intermediate of the citric acid cycle). No significant results were found for

lifetime fecundity or longevity (Fig. 2B-G).

Pathway analysis indicated that three of the four metabolites that were negatively

correlated with egg survival play a significant role in the alanine, aspartate and glutamate

metabolism (total: 23, hits: 3, impact=0.2770, Holm p=0.0032) and that five of the eight

metabolites which negatively correlated with dispersal propensity play a significant role in the

aminoacyl-tRNA biosynthesis (total: 67, hits: 5, impact=0, Holm p=0.0041) (both pathway maps

are provided in online supporting information SI.6). No associated pathways were found for

daily fecundity and sex ratio.

Discussion

Of the forty-three metabolites identified in the GC-MS analysis, twenty-one correlated with latitude and/or one or more life-history traits. More specifically, thirteen showed a significantly reduced concentration with increasing latitude, eight showed a negative correlation with dispersal propensity, four showed a negative correlation with egg survival, two showed a correlation (one positive, one negative) with sex ratio and one showed a negative correlation with daily fecundity. Of the twenty-one different metabolites, thirteen amino acids and one intermediate of the citric acid cycle could be shown to play an important role in the aminoacyl-tRNA biosynthesis, the valine, leucine and isoleucine biosynthesis and/or the alanine, aspartate and glutamate metabolism (see pathway maps provided in online supporting information SI.6).

Our results indicate that the life-history evolution which occurred during the recent range expansion of *T. urticae* (Van Petegem *et al.* 2015) was not associated with shifts in the mites' energetic metabolism, but rather with shifts in its anabolism. While our spectral database contained eleven sugars, not a single sugar accounted for the separation among populations. This suggests that the genes involved in encoding the mite's energetic metabolism (*i.e.* glycolysis, citric acid cycle, which typically involve sugars) have not been affected during the range expansion of *T. urticae*. Instead, the observed differentiation in the mites' metabolome probably involved evolutionary changes in the mites' anabolism, where amino acids play a central role in the metabolic turnover of proteins. In more northern and more dispersive populations, the aminoacyl-tRNA biosynthesis was downregulated. In this pathway, aminoacyl-

tRNA is formed by charging tRNA with an amino acid. The aminoacyl-tRNA then serves as a

substrate in protein synthesis or plays one of its many other roles in, for example, cell wall

formation or antibiotic biosynthesis (Raina & Ibba 2014). In accordance, the valine, leucine and

isoleucine biosynthesis, important for protein synthesis as well (Ahmed & Khan 2006; Tamanna

& Mahmood 2014), was downregulated in more northern populations. We did nonetheless find

one possible connection with the energetic metabolism. In populations with a high egg survival,

the alanine, aspartate and glutamate metabolic pathway, which acts directly in fuelling

energetic metabolism (Sacktor 1955; Maity *et al.* 2012), was downregulated.

The affected amino acids showed decreased concentrations toward higher latitudes and

showed a negative correlation with the dispersal propensity and egg survival of *T. urticae*, both

of which increase towards the north. While, in general, amino acids are considered fundamental

for egg production and thus fecundity (Tulisalo 1971; O'Brien, Fogel & Boggs 2002; Mevi-Schutz

& Erhardt 2005; Fuchs *et al.* 2014, but see Heagle *et al.* 2002), not a single correlation was found

for fecundity, despite a clear positive trend in the PLS-DA. Of the fourteen affected amino acids,

eight were essential and six non-essential. While the non-essential amino acids could have been

synthesized *de novo* from glucose, the essential amino acids could only have been supplied

through the mite's diet (Rodriguez *et al.* 1966). Though all mites were kept in common garden,

mites from northern, more dispersive populations were found to contain lower essential amino

acid concentrations. In line with the recent finding of Fronhofer & Altermatt (2015) that a

dispersal-foraging trade-off leads to a reduced exploitation of resources at range margins, our

results could indicate that northern, dispersive mites evolved lower essential amino acid

concentrations because they consume less of their food source. We should, however, keep in

mind that metabolites were measured only at one point in time and from whole organism

samples. We are therefore missing the temporal fluctuations of the metabolome over a day,

and our data therefore represent only a snapshot of the existing balance in terms of metabolite

demand among metabolic pathways.

An important challenge for metabolomics is understanding the relative contribution of

environmental and genetic factors in shaping an organism's metabolic phenotype (Bundy *et al.*

2009). In the current study, mites were kept in common garden for two generations, during

which they were reared under optimal conditions. As such, only genetic factors were retained.

Though genetic factors are considered less determining than environmental factors (Robinson

et al. 2007; Frank, Noerenberg & Engel 2009; Matsuda *et al.* 2012), our results demonstrate a

clear genetic signal of metabolic differentiation. With our common garden setup, we could

show that the metabolome of *T. urticae* underwent persistent changes through local adaptation

and/or spatial selection along the species' invasion gradient. Interestingly, as metabolic changes

were mainly linked with latitude and dispersal propensity, the metabolic differentiation is

anticipated to be mostly caused by spatial selection and not local adaptation.

This explorative study is the first that specifically examined whether range expansion

results in evolutionary changes in an organism's metabolism. Despite non-stressful common

garden conditions, approximately forty per cent of the identified metabolites showed rapid

evolutionary changes. Though effects were small, our results clearly indicate that the

metabolome of *T. urticae* underwent genetic changes during the species' recent range

expansion. By linking this metabolic differentiation with the life-history evolution observed in a

previous study, we could furthermore show that for dispersal propensity and egg survival, some

of the trait variation was associated with changes in the mite's metabolism.

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Data accessibility

- Sample locations and life-history trait values: uploaded as online supporting information

- Results of GC-MS analysis: will be deposited in the Dryad repository (and added to the

reference list)

- Outcomes of statistical analyses: uploaded as online supporting information

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Figure legends

Figure 1

The map shows the nine field collection sites, which are situated in Belgium, The Netherlands

and Denmark. The graph shows the yearly number of frost days and the average yearly

temperature for each collection site along the latitudinal gradient. These climatic data were

obtained from FetchClimate (Microsoft Research, Cambridge) and were averaged over a period

of 35 years (1980 to 2015). Below the graph, arrows for each of six life-history traits depict their

trend along the latitudinal gradient (increase, decrease). (For more detailed information, see

online supporting information SI.1 and Van Petegem *et al.* 2015.)

Figure 2

Variable importance plots resulting from the multivariate analyses (PLS-DA) on the metabolomic

data. These plots list those metabolites that, based on their VIP score, contribute the most to

explaining the variation among the nine populations in our dataset (ODK, KVS, CAS, LAU, HED,

BLA, TVE; SVI, SKA). The metabolites are ordered from high to low VIP scores for component 1

(an overview off all scores for component 1 and 2 is provided in online supporting information

SI.4). The colour codes indicate the relative concentration of a given metabolic compound for

each population (green=low concentration, to red= high concentration). The populations

themselves are ordered according to their latitude (A), or from low values at the left to high

values at the right for a given life-history trait (daily (B) or lifetime (C) fecundity, egg survival (D),

longevity (E), dispersal propensity (F) or sex ratio (G)). For example, in Fig. 3A, LAU is the

population with the highest concentration of proline and ODK is the southernmost population

(lowest latitude). At the bottom of each plot, the p-value resulting from the permutation test is

given. At the left side of each plot, an asterisk next to a metabolite name indicates a significant

correlation between this metabolite and latitude or the denoted life-history trait. For example,

in Fig. 3A, proline shows a significant negative correlation with latitude. (A detailed overview,

including p- and F-values, of all significant linear regressions is found in online supporting

information SI.5.)

Figures

Figure 1

Figure 2