Families matter: Comparative genomics provides insight into the function of phylogenetically diverse sponge associated bacterial symbionts

Samantha C. Waterworth[a,b], Jarmo-Charles J. Kalinski [b], Luthando S. Madonsela[b], Shirley Parker-Nance[b,c], Jason C. Kwan[a], Rosemary A. Dorrington* [b,d]

[a]Division of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Wisconsin, 777 Highland Ave., Madison, Wisconsin 53705, USA

[b]Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

[c]South African Environmental Observation Network, Elwandle Coastal Node, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

[d]South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity, Makhanda, South Africa

*Correspondence:

Rosemary A. Dorrington

r.dorrington@ru.ac.za

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Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests, financial or otherwise, in relation to the work described here.

Abstract

Background. Marine sponges play an important role in maintaining marine ecosystem health. As the oldest extant metazoans, sponges have been forming symbiotic relationships with microbes that may date back as far as 700 million years. These symbioses can be mutual or commensal in nature, and often allow the holobiont to survive in a given ecological niche. Most symbionts are conserved within a narrow host range and perform specialized functions. However, there are ubiquitously distributed bacterial taxa such as Poribacteria, SAUL and Tethybacterales that are found in a broad range of invertebrate hosts. What is not currently clear, is whether these ubiquitously distributed, sponge associated symbionts have evolutionarily converged to fulfil similar roles within their sponge host, or if they represent a more ancient lineage of specialist symbionts. Here, we aimed to determine the roles of codominant Tethybacterales and spirochete symbionts in Latrunculid sponges and use this system as a starting point to contrast the functional potential of ubiquitous and specialized symbionts, respectively.

Results. This study shows that the dominant betaproteobacterial symbiont Sp02-1 conserved in latrunculid sponges belongs to the newly proposed Tethybacterales order. Extraction of 11 additional Tethybacterales metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs) revealed the presence of a third, previously unknown family within the Tethybacterales order. Comparative genomics revealed that the Tethybacterales taxonomic families dictate the functional potential, rather than adaptation to their host, and that ubiquitous sponge associated bacteria (Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria*) likely perform distinct functions within their host. The divergence of the Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria* is incongruent with their host phylogeny, which suggests that ancestors of these bacteria underwent multiple association events, rather than a single

association event followed by co-evolution. Finally, we investigated the potential role of the

unique, dominant spirochete Sp02-3 symbiont in latrunculid sponges and found that it is likely a

specialized nutritional symbiont that possibly provides active forms of vitamin B6 to the

holobiont and may play a role in the host sponge chemistry.

Conclusions. This study shows that functional potential of Tethybacterales is dependent on their

taxonomic families and that a similar trend may be true of the *Entoporibacteria*. We show that

ubiquitous sponge-associated bacteria likely do not perform similar functions in their hosts, and

that the Tethybacterales may be a more ancient lineage of sponge symbionts than the

Entoporibacteria. In the case of the unusual dominant Spirochete symbiont, the abundance of

which appears to be dependent on the sponge host family, evidence provided here suggests that it

may play a role as a specialized nutritional symbiont.

Keywords: Latrunculiidae, Tethybacterales, Spirochete, Poribacteria, Symbiosis, Porifera,

Comparative Genomics.

Background

Sponges (Phylum Porifera) are the oldest living metazoans and they play an important role in

maintaining the health of marine ecosystems[1]. Sponges are remarkably efficient filter feeders,

acquiring nutrients via phagocytosis of particulate matter, compromising mainly microbes, from

the surrounding water[2]. Since their emergence almost 700 million years ago, sponges have

evolved close associations with microbial symbionts that provide services essential for the fitness

and survival of the host in diverse ecological niches[3]. These symbionts are involved in a

diverse array of beneficial processes, including the cycling of nutrients[4,5] such as nitrogen[5–

10], sulphur [11,12], phosphate[13,14], the acquisition of carbon[15,16], and a supply of

vitamins[17–20] and amino acids[17]. They can play a role in the host sponge life cycle, such as

promoting larval settlement[21]. In addition, some symbionts provide chemical defenses against

predators and biofouling through the production of bioactive compounds[22–25]. In turn, the

sponge host can provide symbionts with nutrients and minerals, such as creatinine and ammonia

as observed in *Cymbastela concentrica* sponges[8]. In most cases, these specialized functions are

performed by bacterial populations that are conserved within a given host taxon.

As filter-feeders, sponges encounter large quantities of bacteria and other microbes. How

sponges are able to distinguish between prey bacteria and those of potential benefit to the

sponge, and the establishment of symbiotic relationships, is still not well understood, but the

structure and composition of bacterial lipopolysaccharide, peptidoglycan, or flagellin may aid the

host sponge in distinguishing symbionts from prey[26]. Sponge hosts encode an abundance of

Nucleotide-binding domain and Leucine-rich Repeat (NLR) receptors, that recognize different

microbial ligands and potentially allow for distinction between symbionts, pathogens, and

prey[27]. Additionally, it has recently been shown that phages produce ankyrins which modulate

the sponge immune response and allow for colonization by bacteria[28].

Symbionts are often specific to their sponge host with enriched populations relative to the

surrounding seawater[29]. However, there are a small number of "cosmopolitan" symbionts that

are ubiquitously distributed across phylogenetically distant sponge hosts. The Poribacteria and

"sponge-associated unclassified lineage" (SAUL)[30] are examples of such cosmopolitan

bacteria species. The phylum Poribacteria were thought to be exclusively found in sponges[31].

However, the identification of thirteen putative Poribacteria-related metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs) from ocean water samples[32], led to the classification of sponge-associated *Entoporibacteria* and free-living *Pelagiporibacteria* within the phylum[33]. *Entoporibacteria* are associated with phylogenetically divergent sponge hosts in distant geographic locations, with no apparent correlations between their phylogeny and that of their sponge host or location[33,34]. Different Poribacteria phylotypes have been detected within the same sponge species[35]. The *Entoporibacteria* carry several genes[36,37] that encode enzymes responsible for the degradation of carbohydrates, and metabolism of sulfates and uronic acid[38–40], prompting the hypothesis that these bacteria may be involved in the breakdown of the proteoglycan host matrix[40]. However, subsequent analyses of Poribacteria transcriptomes from the mesohyl of *Aplysina aerophoba* sponges showed that genes involved in carbohydrate metabolism were not highly expressed[39]. Instead, there was a higher expression of genes involved in 1,2-propanediol degradation and import of vitamin B12, which together suggest that the bacterium may import vitamin B12 as a necessary cofactor for anaerobic 1,2-propanediol degradation and energy generation[39].

The SAUL bacteria belong to the larger taxon of candidate phylum PAUC34f and have been detected, although at low abundance in several sponge species[41]. Host-associated SAUL bacteria were likely acquired by eukaryotic hosts (sponges, corals, tunicates) at different evolutionary time points and are phylogenetically distinct from their planktonic relatives[41]. Previous investigations into the only two SAUL bacteria genomes provided evidence to suggest that these symbionts may play a role in the degradation of host and algal carbohydrates, as well as the storage of phosphate for the host during periods of phosphate limitation[30].

Recently, a third group of ubiquitous sponge-associated betaproteobacterial symbionts were described[42]. The proposed new order, the Tethybacterales, comprises two families, the Tethybacteraceae and the Persebacteraceae[42]. Based on assessment of MAGs representative of different species within these two families, it was shown that the bacteria within these families had functionally radiated, as they coevolve with their specific sponge host[42]. The Tethybacterales are distributed both globally and with phylogenetically diverse sponges that represent both high microbial abundance (HMA) and low microbial abundance (LMA) sponges[42]. These bacteria have also been detected in other marine invertebrates, ocean water samples, and marine sediment[42] suggesting that these symbionts may have, at one point, been acquired from the surrounding environment.

Tethybacterales are conserved in several sponge microbiomes[43] and can be the numerically dominant bacterial population[12,44–51], with some predicted to be endosymbiotic[12,44,49]. In *Amphimedeon queenslandica*, the AqS2 symbiont, *Amphirhobacter heronislandensis* (Family Tethybacteraceae), is co-dominant with sulfur-oxidizing gammaproteobacteria AqS1. *A. heronislandensis* AqS2, is present in all stages of the sponge life cycle[52] and appears to have a reduced genome[12]. Interestingly, the AqS2 MAG shares some functional similarity with the codominant AqS1, including the potential to generate energy via carbon monoxide oxidation, assimilate sulfur and produce most essential amino acids[12]. However, these sympatric symbionts differ significantly in what metabolites they could possibly transport[12].

There are thus two types of sponge-associated symbionts: those that are conserved within a

narrow host range, and those that have a broader host range, such as the SAUL, *Entoporibacteria*

and Tethybacterales. What is currently unknown, is whether the broad-host range symbionts

arose from a single association event, or multiple serendipitous events. Furthermore, if the latter

were true, do these symbionts fulfil the same roles regardless of their host or respond to the

needs of the host? In this study we sought to provide answers to these questions, using the

relationship between phylogenetically diverse co-dominant, conserved Tethybacterales and

spirochetes symbionts of *Tsitsikamma favus* sponge species (Family Latrunculiidae)[53–56] as a

springboard into a deeper investigation into the role of these two types of symbionts. Here, we

report a comparative study using new and existing Tethybacterales genomes and show that

functional potential follows that of their taxonomic ranking rather than host-specific adaptation.

We also show that the Tethybacterales and Poribacteria have distinct functional repertoires, that

these bacterial families can co-exist in a single host and that the Tethybacterales may represent a

more ancient lineage of ubiquitous sponge-associated symbionts.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Sponge Collection and taxonomic identification. Sponge specimens were collected by SCUBA

or Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) from multiple locations within Algoa Bay (Port

Elizabeth), the Garden Route National Park, and the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area. In

addition, three *L. apicalis* specimens were collected by trawl net off Bouvet Island in the South

Atlantic Ocean. Collection permits were acquired prior to collections from the Department

Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries

(DEFF) under permit numbers: 2015: RES2015/16 and RES2015/21; 2016:RES2016/11;

2017:RES2017/43; 2018: RES2018/44. Collection metadata are provided in Table S1. Sponge

specimens were stored on ice during collection, and thereafter at -20 °C. Subsamples collected

for DNA extraction were preserved in RNALater (Invitrogen) and stored at -20 °C. Sponge

specimens were dissected, thin sections generated and spicules mounted on microscope slides

and examined to allow species identification, as done previously [57–59]. Molecular barcoding

(28S rRNA gene) was also performed for several of the sponge specimens (Fig. S1) as described

previously[53].

Metagenomic sequencing and analysis. Small sections of each preserved sponge (approx.

2cm^3) were pulverized in 2ml sterile artificial seawater (24.6 g NaCl, 0.67 g KCl, 1.36 g

CaCl$_2$.2H$_2$O, 6.29 g MgSO$_4$.7H$_2$O, 4.66 g MgCl$_2$.6H$_2$O and 0.18 g NaHCO$_3$, distilled H$_2$O to 1

L) with a sterile mortar and pestle. The resultant homogenate was centrifuged at 16000 rpm for 1

min to pellet cellular material. Genomic DNA (gDNA) was extracted using the ZR

Fungal/Bacterial DNA MiniPrep kit (D6005, Zymo Research). Shotgun metagenomic

sequencing was performed for four *T. favus* sponge specimens using Ion Torrent platforms.

Shotgun metagenomic libraries, of reads 200bp in length, were prepared for each of the four

sponge samples respectively (TIC2016-050A, TIC2018-003B, TIC2016-050C and TIC2018-

003D) using an Ion P1.1.17 chip. Additional sequence data of 400bp was generated for

TIC2016-050A using an Ion S5 530 Chip. TIC2016-050A served as a pilot experiment and we

wanted to identify which read length was best for our investigations. However, we did not want

to waste additional sequence data and included it when assembling the TIC2016-050A

metagenomic contigs so the 400bp reads were included in the assembly of these metagenomes.

Metagenomic datasets were assembled into contiguous sequences (contigs) with SPAdes version

3.12.0[60] using the --iontorrent and --only-assembler options. Contigs were clustered into

genomic bins using Autometa[61] and manually curated for optimal completion and purity.

Validation of the bins was performed using CheckM v1.0.12.[62]. Of the 50 recovered genome

bins, 5 were of high quality, 13 were of medium quality and 32 were of low quality in

accordance with MIMAG standards[63] (Table S2).

Acquisition and assembly of reference genomes. The genome of *A. queenslandica* symbiont

Aqs2 (GCA_001750625.1) was retrieved from the NCBI database. Similarly, other sponge

associated Tethybacterales MAGs from the JGI database were downloaded and used as

references (3300007741_3, 3300007056_3, 3300007046_3, 3300007053_5, 3300021544_3,

3300021545_3, 3300021549_5, 2784132075, 2784132054, 2814122900, 2784132034 and

2784132053).

Thirty-six raw read SRA datasets from sponge metagenomes were downloaded from the SRA

database (Table S3). Illumina reads from these datasets were trimmed using Trimmomatic

v0.39[64] and assembled using SPAdes v3.14[60] in --meta mode and resultant contigs were

binned using Autometa[61]. This resulted in a total of 393 additional genome bins, the quality of

which was assessed using CheckM[62] and taxonomically classified with GTDB-Tk[65] with

database release95 (Table S2). A total of 27 bins were classified as AqS2 and were considered

likely members of the newly proposed Tethybacterales order[42]. However, 10 of the 27 bins

were low quality and were not used in downstream analyses. In addition, 59 Poribacteria genome

bins were downloaded from the NCBI database for functional comparison (Table S4) and three

were used from the 393 genome bins generated in this study (*Geodia parva* sponge hosts).

Finally, genomes of symbiont and free-living species *Sphaerochaeta coccoides* DSM 17374

(GCA_000208385.1) (termite-associated), *Salinispira pacifica* (GCA_000507245.1),

Spirochaeta africana (CP003282.1), *Spirochaeta thermophila* DSM 6192 (CP001698.1) and

Spirochaeta perfilievii strain P (CP035807.1) (outgroup) were downloaded from the NCBI

database. Additional MAGs, representing spirochetes associated with different invertebrate hosts

were retrieved from the JGI database (3300004122_5, 3300005978_6, 3300006913_10,

3300010314_9 and 3300027532_25). These reference genomes were chosen because they were

either a identified relative of the *T. favus* associated spirochete (e.g. *S. pacifica*) or they are a

known, characterized spirochete symbiont (e.g. *S. coccoides).* All genomes were assessed using

CheckM[62] and bins were taxonomically classified with GTDB-Tk[65] (Table S2).

Taxonomic identification. Partial and full-length 16S rRNA gene sequences were extracted

from bins using barrnap 0.9 (https://github.com/tseemann/barrnap). Extracted sequences were

aligned against the nr database using BLASTn[66]. Genomes were additionally uploaded

individually to autoMLST[67] and analyzed in both placement mode and *de novo* mode (IQ tree

and ModelFinder options enabled, and concatenated gene tree selected). All bins and

downloaded genomes were taxonomically identified using GTDB-Tk[65]. ANI between the four

spirochete bins was calculated using FastANI (https://github.com/ParBLiSS/FastANI) with

default parameters.

Genome annotation and metabolic potential analysis. All bins and downloaded genomes were

annotated using Prokka 1.13[68] with NCBI compliance enabled. Protein-coding amino-acid

sequences from genomic bins were annotated against the KEGG database using kofamscan[69]

with output in mapper format. Custom Python scripts were used to summarize annotation counts

(Find scripts here: https://github.com/samche42/Family_matters). Potential Biosynthetic Gene

Clusters (BGCs) were identified by uploading Genome bins 003D_7 and 003B_4 to the

antiSMASH web server[70] with all options enabled. Predicted amino acid sequences of genes

within each identified gene cluster were aligned against the nr database using BLASTn[66] to

identify the closest homologs. Protein sequences of genes within each identified gene cluster

were aligned against the nr database using BLASTn[66] to identify the closest homolog.

Phylogeny and function of Tethybacterales species. A subset of orthologous genes common to

all medium quality Tethybacterales genomes/bins was created. Shared amino acid identity (AAI)

was calculated with the aai.rb script from the enveomics package[71]. 16S rRNA genes were

analyzed using BLASTn[66]. Functional genes were annotated against the KEGG database using

kofamscan[69]. Annotations were collected into functional categories and visualized in R (See

https://github.com/samche42/Family_matters for all scripts). A Non-metric Multidimensional

Scaling (NMDS) plot of the presence/absence metabolic counts was constructed using Bray-

curtis distance using the vegan package[72] in R. Analysis of Similarity (ANOSIM) analyses

were also conducted using the vegan package in R using Bray-Curtis distance and 9999

permutations.

Genome divergence estimates. Divergence estimates were performed as described

previously[73]. Briefly, homologous genes in Tethybacterales genomes were identified using

OMA v. 2.4.2.[74]. A subset of homologous genes present in all genomes was created.

Homologous genes were aligned using MUSCLE v.3.8.155[75] and clustered into fasta files

representing each genome using merge_fastas_for_dNdS.py (See

https://github.com/samche42/Family_matters for all scripts). Corresponding nucleotide

sequences extracted from PROKKA annotations using multifasta_seqretriever.py. All stop

codons were removed using remove_stop_codons.py. All nucleotide sequences, per genome,

were concatenated to produce a single nucleotide sequence per genome using the union function

from EMBOSS[76]. All amino acid sequences were similarly concatenated. This resulted in a

single concatenated nucleotide sequence and a single concatenated amino acid sequence per

genome. Concatenated nucleotide sequences were clustered into two fasta files (one nucleotide,

one protein sequence) and then aligned using PAL2NAL[77]. The resultant alignment was then

run in codeml to produce pairwise synonymous substitution rates (dS). Divergence estimates can

be determined by dividing pairwise dS values by a given substitution rate, and further divided by

1 million. Pairwise synonymous substitution rates can be found in Table S5. Pairwise divergence

values were illustrated as a tree using MEGAX[78]. Concatenated amino acid and nucleotide

sequences of the 18 orthologous genes were aligned using MUSCLE v.3.8.155[75] and the

evolutionary history inferred using the UPMGA method[79] in MEGAX[78] with 10000

bootstrap replicates.

Identification of host-associated and unique genes in putative symbiont genome bins. "Host

associated" genes were defined as genes that were detected exclusively in symbiont genomes and

absent in free-living relatives of the symbionts. The reasoning being that genes that are

exclusively present in symbionts may play a role in the symbiosis, as these gene functions would

not be required in a free-living relative. To identify "host-associated" genes, orthologous groups

of putative Sp02-3 spirochete bins and reference genomes were found using OMA (v.2.4.1)[74].

Genes were considered "host-associated" if the gene was present in at least two of the three

Sp02-3 genome bins and at least five of the seven host-associated genomes and absent in the

free-living spirochetes.

A custom database of genes from all non-Sp02-1 *T. favus*-associated bacterial bins was created

using the "makedb" option in Diamond[80] to identify genes that were unique to the Sp02-1

spirochete symbionts. To be exhaustive and screen against the entire metagenome, genes from

low-quality genomes (except low-quality Sp02-1 genomes), small contigs (<3000 bp) that were

not included in binning and unclustered contigs (i.e. included in binning but were not placed

within a bin) were included in this database. Sp02-1 genes were aligned using diamond blast[80].

A gene was considered "unique" if the aligned hit shared less than 40% amino acid identity with

any other genes from the *T. favus* metagenomes and had no significant hits against the nr

database or were identified as pseudogenes. All "unique" Sp02-1 genes annotated as

"hypothetical" (both Prokka and NCBI nr database annotations) were removed. Finally, we

compared Prokka annotation strings between the three Sp02-1 genomes and all other *T. favus*

associated genome bins and excluded any Sp0213 genes that were found to have the same

annotation as a gene in one of the other bins. Unique spirochete Sp02-3 (putative spirochete

symbiont) genes were identified as described for the Sp02-1 genes.

16S rRNA gene amplicon sequencing and analysis. 16S rRNA gene amplicons were prepared

and analyzed as described in Kalinski et al., 2019[81]. ANOSIM analysis of the sponge-

associated microbial communities was performed using the commercial program Primer7.

Indicator species analysis of microbial communities associated with sponge chemotypes was

performed using the "indicspecies" package in R (See

https://github.com/samche42/Family_matters for all scripts).

Chemical profiling of *T. favus* and *T. michaeli* sponges. Approximately 5 cm³ pieces of *T.*

favus sponge material of sponge specimens were removed from freshly collected sponge material

and extracted in 10 mL methanol (MeOH) on the day of collection. Samples were filtered (0.2

μm) and analyzed at 2 μL injection volumes. The samples of the *T. michaeli* specimens collected

in 2015 were prepared by extracting approx. 2 cm³ wedges, cut from frozen sponge material,

with 12 mL MeOH, followed by filtration (0.2 μm). These samples were analyzed with injection

volumes of 5 μL. The *T. michaeli* specimens collected in 2017 were extracted with DCM-MeOH

(2/1 v/v) and dried *in vacuo*. Samples were prepared at 10 mg/mL in MeOH, followed by

filtration (0.2 μm) and analyzed using injection volumes of 1 μL. Correspondingly, other sponge

specimens indicated in the Principal Component Analysis (PcoA) were processed. The High-

Resolution Tandem Mass Spectrometry (LC-MS-MS) analyses were carried out on a Bruker

Compact QToF mass spectrometer (Bruker, Rheinstetten, Germany) coupled to a Dionex

Ultimate 3000 UHPLC (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Sunnyvale, CA, USA) using an electrospray

ionization probe in positive mode as described previously [7]. The chromatograph was equipped

with a Kinetex polar C-18 column (3.0 x 100 mm, 2,6 μm; Phenomenex, Torrance, CA, USA)

and operated at a flow rate of 0.300 mL/min using a mixture of water and acetonitrile (LC-MS)

grade solvents (Merck Millipore, Johannesburg, South Africa), both adjusted with 0.1 % formic

acid (Sigma-Aldrich, Johannesburg, South Africa)[81]. The Principal Component Analysis was

performed as part of a molecular networking job on the GNPS platform[82]. Visualization of the

base peak chromatograms was done using MZMine2 (v. 2.5.3)[83].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The microbiomes of sponges of the Latrunculiidae family are highly conserved and are

dominated by populations of co-dominant betaproteobacteria and spirochetes symbionts. Based

on their 16S rRNA gene sequence, the betaproteobacteria symbionts from different latrunculid

sponges are closely related and are likely members of the newly described Tethybacterales. The

spirochete symbiont has thus far only been found in *Tsitsikamma* and *Cyclacanthia* sponge

species and unlike the betaproteobacterium symbiont, they are only distantly related to other

sponge-associated spirochetes[53]. In this study we focussed on the microbiome of *T. favus*,

which is endemic to Algoa Bay and has been well-characterized with respect to

pyrroloiminoquinone production[55,56,81,84,85].

Characterization of putative betaproteobacteria Sp02-1 genome bin

Genome bin 003B_4, from sponge specimen TIC2018-003B, included a 16S rRNA gene

sequence that shared 99.86% identity with the *T. favus*-associated betaproteobacterium Sp02-1

full-length 16S rRNA gene clone (HQ241787.1). The next closest relatives were uncultured

betaproteobacterium 16S clones from a *Xestospongia muta* and *Tethya aurantium* sponges (Fig.

S2). Bins 050A_14, 050C_6 and 003D_6 were also identified as possible representatives of the

betaproteobacterium Sp02-1 based on their predicted phylogenetic relatedness. However, they

were of low quality and not used in downstream analyses.

Genome bin 003B_4 was used as a representative of the Sp02-1 symbiont. Bin 003B_4 is

approximately 2.95 Mbp in size and of medium quality per MIMAG standards[63] (Table S2),

and it has a notable abundance of pseudogenes (~25% of all genes), which resulted in a coding

density of 65.27%, far lower than the average for bacteria[86]. An abundance of pseudogenes

and low coding density, is usually an indication that the genome in question may be undergoing

genome reduction [87] similar to other betaproteobacteria in the proposed order of

Tethybacterales[42].

The Sp02-1 genome encodes all genes necessary for glycolysis, PRPP biosynthesis and most

genes required for the citrate cycle and oxidative phosphorylation were detected in the gene

annotations. Also present are the genes necessary to biosynthesize valine, leucine, isoleucine,

tryptophan, phenylalanine, tyrosine and ornithine amino acids as well as genes required for

transport of L-amino acids, proline and branched amino acids. This would suggest that this

bacterium may exchange amino acids with the host, as observed previously in both insect and

sponge-associated symbioses[8,88,89].

A total of 13 genes unique to the Sp02-1 were identified (i.e., not identified elsewhere in the *T.*

favus metagenomes). One gene was predicted to encode an ABC transporter permease subunit

that was likely involved in glycine betaine and proline betaine uptake. A second gene encoded 5-

oxoprolinase subunit PxpA (Table S6). The presence of these two genes suggests that the Sp02-1

genome can acquire proline and convert it to glutamate[90] in addition to glutamate already

produced via glutamate synthase. Other unique genes encode a restriction endonuclease subunit

and site-specific DNA-methyltransferase, which would presumably aid in defense against

foreign DNA. At least seven of the unique gene products are predicted to be associated with

phages, including the anti-restriction protein ArdA. ArdA is a protein that has previously been

shown to mimic the structures of DNA normally bound by Type I restriction modification

enzymes, which prevent DNA cleavage, and effectively results in anti-restriction activity[91]. If

functionally active in the Sp02-1 Tethybacterales symbiont, we speculate that this protein may

similarly prevent DNA cleavage through its mimicry of the targeted DNA structures and protect

the genome against Type I restriction modification enzymes. Finally, two of the unique genes

were predicted to encode an ankyrin repeat domain-containing protein and a VWA domain-

containing protein. These two proteins are known to be involved in cell-adhesion and protein-

protein interactions[92,93] and if active within the symbiont, they may help facilitate the

symbiosis between the Sp02-1 betaproteobacterium and the sponge host.

Comparison of putative Sp02-1 with other Tethybacterales

Several betaproteobacteria sponge symbionts have been described to date and these bacteria are

thought to have functionally diversified following the initiation of their ancient partnership[42].

To test this hypothesis, we downloaded twelve genomes/MAGs of Tethybacterales (classified as

AqS2 in GTDB) from the JGI database. Additionally, we assembled and binned metagenomic

data from thirty-six sponge SRA datasets, covering fourteen sponge species and recovered an

additional fourteen AqS2-like genomes. Ten of these bins were of low quality, so Bin 003B_4

(Sp02-1) and sixteen medium quality Tethybacterales bins/genomes were used for further

analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. General characteristics of putative Tethybacterales genomes/MAGs

Genome	Sponge host	Size (Mbp)	Complete (%)	Contam (%)	Quality	"Core" genes	Study/ Accession
"Candidatus Ukwabelana africanus" (003B_4)	*Tsitsikamma favus*	2.96	72.92	3.56	Medium	84.52	This study

"*Candidatus* Regalo mexicanus" (ImetM1_9)	*Iophon methanophila*	1.56	85.58	0.61	Medium	83.33	This study
"*Candidatus* Regalo mexicanus" (ImetM2_1_1)	*Iophon methanophila*	1.6	84.36	0.61	Medium	86.9	This study
Persebacter sydneyensis (C29)	*Crella incrustans*	1.52	82.87	0.61	Medium	78.57	Taylor et al., 2021 2784132075
Tethybacter castellensis (ccb2r)	*Cymbastela concentrica*	1.69	81	0.3	Medium	85.71	Taylor et al., 2021 2784132054
Beroebacter blanensis (Crambe1)	*Crambe crambe*	2.25	80.38	1.81	Medium	73.8	Taylor et al., 2021 2814122900
Amphirhobacter heronislandensis (AqS2)	*Amphimedon queenslandica*	1.61	71.13	1.52	Medium	80.95	Gauthier et al., 2016 GCA_001750 625.1
Calypsobacter congwongensis (B3)	*Scopalina sp.*	1.05	64.33	0.04	Medium	53.57	Taylor et al., 2021 2784132034
Telestobacter tawharauni (TSB1)	*Tethya stolonifera*	1.24	56.3	0	Medium	57.14	Taylor et al., 2021 2784132053
"*Candidatus* Hadiah malacca" (Csing_1)	*Coelocarteria singaporensis*	1.58	65.47	0.61	Medium	73.81	3300007741_3

"*Candidatus* Hadiah malacca" (Csing_2)	*Coelocarteria singaporensis*	1.36	58.12	0	Medium	72.62	3300007056_3
"*Candidatus* Hadiah malacca" (Csing_3)	*Coelocarteria singaporensis*	1.44	57.04	0.61	Medium	76.19	3300007046_3
"*Candidatus* Hadiah malacca" (Csing_5)	*Coelocarteria singaporensis*	1.15	55.82	0.61	Medium	75.00	3300021544_3
"*Candidatus* Hadiah malacca" (Csing_6)	*Coelocarteria singaporensis*	1.36	58.12	0	Medium	72.62	3300021545_3
"*Candidatus* Hadiah malacca" (Csing_7)	*Coelocarteria singaporensis*	0.98	54.76	1.93	Medium	69.05	3300021549_5
"*Candidatus* Dora taiwanensis" (CCyA_2_3)	*Cinachyrella sp.*	3.08	84.92	1.83	Medium	78.57	This study
"*Candidatus* Dora taiwanensis" (CCyB_3_2)	*Cinachyrella sp.*	3.45	79.58	5.93	Medium	75.00	This study
CCyA_16_0	*Cinachyrella sp.*	0.86	16.95	3.81	Low	35.71	This study
CCyA_3_0	*Cinachyrella sp.*	0.62	29.31	0	Low	15.48	This study
CCyA_3_39	*Cinachyrella sp.*	0.41	22.01	4.88	Low	36.90	This study
CCyB_501_11	*Cinachyrella sp.*	0.04	7.51	0	Low	17.86	This study
CCyB_502_83	*Cinachyrella sp.*	0.43	17.01	0	Low	21.43	This study
CCyC_2_7	*Cinachyrella sp.*	1.81	47.5	0	Low	57.14	This study
050C_6	*Tsitsikamma favus*	2.21	24.03	4.51	Low	32.14	This study
Csing_4	*Coelocarteria singaporensis*	1.07	39.35	0.61	Low	54.76	3300007053_5

050A_14	*Tsitsikamma favus*	6.08	61	19.4	Low	73.81	This study
003D_6	*Tsitsikamma favus*	0.32	0	0	Low	0	This study

First, the phylogeny of the Tethybacterales symbionts was determined using single-copy marker

genes, revealing a deep branching clade of these sponge-associated symbionts and that bin

003B_4 clustered within the proposed Persebacteraceae family (Fig. 1). All members of the

Persebacteraceae family dominate the microbial community of their respective sponge

hosts[44,53,54,94]. We additionally identified what appears to be a third family, consisting of

symbionts associated with *C. singaporensis* and *Cinachyrella* sponge species (Fig. 1).

Assessment of shared AAI (Average Amino acid Identity) indicates that these genomes represent

a new family, sharing an average of 80% AAI within the family (Table S7)[95]. These three

families share less than 89% sequence similarity with respect to their 16S rRNA sequences, with

intra-clade differences of less than 92% (Table S8). Therefore, they may represent novel classes

within the Tethybacterales order [95]. In keeping with naming the families after Oceanids of

Greek mythology[42], we propose the family name Polydorabacteraceae, which means "many

gifts". Additionally, we propose species names for the newly identified genera as follows: Bin

003B_4 is a single representative of "*Candidatus* Ukwabelana africanus", Bin Imet_M1_9 and

Bin ImetM2_1_1 are both representatives of "*Candidatus* Regalo mexicanus", Bin CCyA_2_3

and CCyB_3_2 are both representatives of "*Candidatus* Dora taiwanensis", and all six bins from

C. singaporensis are representative of "*Candidatus* Hadiah malacca". In each case, the genus

name means "gift from" in the local language (where possible) from where the host sponge was

collected, and the species name reflects the region/country from which the sponge host was

collected.

We identified 4306 groups of orthologous genes between all seventeen Tethybacterales genomes,

with only eighteen genes common to all the genomes. More common genes were expected, but

as several of the genomes investigated are incomplete, it is possible that additional common

genes would be found if the genomes were complete. Hierarchical clustering of gene

presence/absence data revealed that the gene pattern of Bin 003B_4 most closely resembled that

of Tethybacterales genomes from *C. crambe*, *C. incrustans* and the *Scopalina* sp. sponges

(family Persebacteraceae) (Fig. 2A). Thirteen of the shared genes between all Tethybacterales

genomes encoded ribosomal proteins or those involved in energy production. Genes encoding

chorismate synthase were found across all seventeen genomes and suggest that tryptophan

production may be shared among these bacteria. According to a recent study, *Dysidea etheria*

and *A. queenslandica* sponges cannot produce tryptophan (a possible essential amino acid),

which may indicate a common role for the Tethybacterales symbionts as tryptophan

producers[96].

Several other shared genes were predicted to encode proteins involved in stress responses,

including protein-methionine-sulfoxide reductase, ATP-dependent Clp protease and chaperonin

enzyme proteins, which aid in protein folding or degradation under various stressors[97–101].

Internal changes in oxygen levels[102], and temperature changes[103–105] are examples of

stressors experienced by the sponge holobiont. It is unsurprising that this clade of largely

sponge-specific Tethybacterales share the ability to deal with these many stressors as they adapt

to their fluctuating environment.

Alignment against the KEGG database revealed some noteworthy trends that differentiated the

three Tethybacterales families (Fig. 2B, Table S9): (1) the genomes of the proposed

Polydorabacteraceae family include several genes associated with sulfur oxidation; (2) the

Persebacteraceae are unique in their potential for reduction of sulfite (*cysIJ*) and (3) the

Tethybacteraceae have the potential for cytoplasmic nitrate reduction (*narGHI*), while the other

two families may perform denitrification. Similarly, the families differ to some extent in what

can be transported in and out of the symbiont cell (Fig. 2C). Proposed members of the

Polydorabacteraceae are exclusively capable of transporting hydroxyproline which may imply a

role in collagen degradation[106]. The Tethybacteraceae and Persebacteraceae appear able to

transport spermidine, putrescine, taurine, and glycine which, in combination with their potential

to reduce nitrates, may suggest a role in C-N cycling[107]. All three families transport various

amino acids as well as phospholipids and heme. The exchange of amino acids between symbiont

and sponge host has previously been observed[108] and may provide the Tethybacterales with a

competitive advantage over other sympatric microorganisms[109] and possibly allow the sponge

hosts to regulate the symbioses via regulation of the quantity of amino acids available for

symbiont uptake[110]. Similarly, the transfer of heme in the iron-starved ocean environment

between sponge host and symbiont could provide a selective advantage as heme may act as a

supply of iron[111]. The Tethybacteraceae were distinct from the other two families in their

potential to transport sugars. As mentioned earlier, the transport of sugars plays an important role

in symbiotic interactions[103,112–114] and it is possible that this family of symbionts require

sugars from their sponge hosts.

Comparative analyses of functional potential between Tethybacterales and Poribacteria

We wanted to determine whether ubiquitous sponge-associated symbionts have converged to

perform similar roles in their sponge hosts. Accordingly, we annotated 62 Poribacteria genomes

which consisted of 24 Pelagiporibacteria (free-living) and 38 *Entoporibacteria* (sponge-

associated) genomes, and the 17 Tethybacterales genomes against the KEGG database. We

catalogued the presence/absence of 896 unique genes spanning carbohydrate metabolism,

methane metabolism, nitrogen metabolism, sulphur metabolism, phosphate metabolism and

several transporter systems (Figure 3, Table S9). Inspection of the functional potential in the

Tethybacterales and Poribacteria revealed several insights (Fig. 3). The gene repertoires of the

Poribacteria and the Tethybacterales are distinct from one another (Fig. S3), with notable

differences including the genes associated with denitrification, dissimilatory nitrate reduction,

thiosulfate oxidation, hydroxyproline transport, glycine betaine/proline transport, glycerol

transport, taurine transport, tungstate transport and glucose/mannose transport, all of which are

present in the Tethybacterales and absent in the Poribacteria (Fig. 3). Conversely, several gene

clusters were detected in the Poribacteria and absent in the Tethybacterales, including trehalose

biosynthesis, the Entner Doudoroff pathway, galactose degradation, phosphate metabolism,

phosphonate transport, assimilatory sulfate reduction, molybdate transport, osmoprotectant

transport, hydroxymethylpyrimidine transport (Fig. 3). It has been reported that both

Entoporibacteria and *Pelagiporibacteria* include genes associated with denitrification[33],

however we could not detect many genes associated with nitrogen metabolism in our analyses

(Fig. 3). We cross-checked gene annotations generated using Prokka (HAMAP database) and

Blast (nr database). Genes associated with assimilatory nitrate reduction (*narB*, and *nirA)* were

identified in Poribacteria using these alternate annotations, but we could not detect genes

associated with denitrification in the Poribacteria. Conversely, genes associated with

denitrification (*napAB* and *nirK*) were detected in the Persebacteraceae of the Tethybacterales in

Prokka, Blast and KEGG annotations (Fig. 3B), indicating that their absence in Poribacteria

genomes was not an artefact of our analyses.

Pairwise ANOSIM analysis (using Bray-curtis distance) confirmed that the functional genetic

repertoire (KEGG annotations) of the Tethybacterales bacteria showed a strong, significant

dissimilarity to that of the sponge-associated *Entoporibacteria* and the free-living

Pelagiporibacteria (Table 2). In addition, the Polydorabacteraceae and the Persebacteraceae

were significantly different from one another, but the lower R-statistic would suggest that the

dissimilarity is not as strong as between other groups in this analysis, while the Tethybacteraceae

appear to be more functionally distinct from the other two Tethybacterales families.

Table 2: Pairwise ANOSIM of presence/absence of KEGG-annotated functional genes in

Poribacteria and Tethybacterales

Taxon A	Taxon B	p-value	R statistic
Entoporibacteria	Polydorabacteraceae	0.0001	0.9965
Entoporibacteria	*Pelagiporibacteria*	0.0001	0.8881
Entoporibacteria	Persebacteraceae	0.0001	0.9985
Entoporibacteria	Tethybacteraceae	0.0001	0.9938
Polydorabacteraceae	*Pelagiporibacteria*	0.0001	0.9951
Polydorabacteraceae	Persebacteraceae	0.0045	0.3974

Polydorabacteraceae	Tethybacteraceae	0.0025	0.9908
Pelagiporibacteria	Persebacteraceae	0.0001	0.9961
Pelagiporibacteria	Tethybacteraceae	0.001	0.9741
Persebacteraceae	Tethybacteraceae	0.0085	0.7500

Taken together, these data suggest that the three Tethybacterales families and the

Entoporibacteria lineages may each fulfil distinct functional or ecological niches within a given

sponge host. Interestingly, some sponges such as *A. aerophoba* and *C. singaporenesis*, can play

host to both Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria* species which provides further evidence that

these symbionts may serve different purposes within their sponge host.

We investigated the approximate divergence pattern of the Tethybacterales and the

Entoporibacteria and whether their divergence followed that of their sponge host. The eighteen

homologous genes shared between the Tethybacterales were used to estimate the rate of

synonymous substitution, which provides an approximation for the pattern of divergence

between the species[115]. We found that the estimated divergence pattern (Fig. 4A) and the

phylogeny of the host sponges (Fig. 4B) was incongruent. Phylogenetic trees inferred using

single-copy marker genes (Fig. 1), and the comprehensive 16S rRNA tree published by Taylor

and colleagues[42] confirm this lack of congruency between symbiont and host phylogeny.

Other factors such as collection site or depth could not explain the observed trend. Similar

incongruence of symbiont and host phylogeny was observed for the *Entoporibacteria* (34

homologous genes used to estimate synonymous substitution rates) (Fig. 4C-D), in agreement

with previous phylogenetic studies [31,33,34]. This would suggest that these sponges likely

acquired a free-living Tethybacterales or Poribacteria common ancestor from the environment at

different time points throughout their evolution. Evidence of coevolution of betaproteobacteria

symbionts within sponges families [46,52,53,116] implies that Tethybacterales symbionts were

likely acquired horizontally at various time points and may have coevolved with their respective

hosts subsequent to acquisition.

Finally, the estimated rates of synonymous substitution of homologous genes were used to

estimate the relative times at which the Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria* taxa began

diverging, respectively. Regardless of substitution rate used, it was found that the sponge-

associated Tethybacterales genomes began diverging from one another before the

Entoporibacteria began diverging from one another (Table S5). This earlier divergence of

sponge-associated Tethybacterales relative to the *Entoporibacteria* may suggest that the

Tethybacterales may have begun associating with sponge hosts before the *Entoporibacteria*, and

may represent a more ancient symbiont. However, this hypothesis may prove false if additional

Entoporibacteria lineages are discovered and added to the analyses, or other factors such as

mutation rates, time between symbiont acquisition and transition to vertical inheritance of

symbionts or fossil records disprove this hypothesis.

Characterization of putative spirochete Sp02-3 genome bin

Spirochetes have been noted as minor members of several sponge microbiomes [2,117,118], but

have only been reported as dominant symbionts in several latrunculid sponge species[53,54] and

Clathrina clathrus[119]. As there were no genomes available for these symbionts, their function

was unknown. Spirochaetes are known to be dominant in bacterial communities associated with

several corals[120–122], where they may be involved in the fixation of carbon or nitrogen, as

performed by spirochaete symbionts in termite guts[120,122,123].

Following assembly and binning of four *T. favus* metagenomic datasets, 16S rRNA and 23S

rRNA gene sequences were extracted from individual bins and used to identify four genomes as

potentially representative of the conserved spirochete Sp02-3 (OTU3), sharing 99.52% sequence

identity with the 16S rRNA gene reference sequence (HQ241788.1), and an average of 97% ANI

(Table 3). Sp02-3 is one of the spirochetes previously identified in the *T. favus* microbiome[54].

Table 3. Characteristics of putative representative genomes of *T. favus* spirochete symbiont

species

Bin	Size (Mbp)	Quality	16S rRNA (% ID)	23S rRNA (% ID)	Chemotype
003B_7	1.97	Medium	N/A	*Salinispira pacifica* L21-RPul-D2 (89.54%)	Chemotype I
003D_7	2.48	High	Uncultured marine clone Sp02-3 (99.52%)	*Salinispira pacifica* L21-RPul-D2 (89.54%)	Chemotype II
050A_2	2.73	Low	Uncultured marine clone Sp02-3 (99.52%)	*Salinispira pacifica* L21-RPul-D2 (89.54%)	Chemotype I
050C_7	1.72	Medium	Uncultured marine clone Sp02-3 (99.52%)	N/A	Chemotype II

Salinispira pacifica, previously identified as a close relative of Sp02-3 [6], was the closest

characterized relative to the putative Sp02-3 genomes (Table 3). In both placement and *de novo*

mode, autoMLST assigned *S. pacifica* L21-RPul-D2 as the closest relative to the putative Sp02-3

genomes (67.1% ANI) (Fig. 5) and GTDB-Tk placed the bin within the *Salinispira* genus,

confirming the taxonomic classification based on the 16S rRNA gene sequence. Validation using

CheckM showed that genome bin 003D_7 was of the highest quality (Table 3, Table S2), and it

was therefore used in subsequent analyses as a representative genome of Sp02-3. The Sp02-3

genome is approximately 2.48 Mb in size, with an average GC content of 49.87%. The bin

comprises 95 contigs, the longest of which was 98 374 bp, and an N50 of 37 020 bp. The Sp02-3

genome is substantially smaller than that of *S. pacifica* (2.48 Mbp vs. 3.78Mb, respectively),

with a marginally lower GC content than *S. pacifica* (49.87% vs. 51.9%). The putative Sp02-3

genome coding density is 77.05%, which is lower than the average bacterial coding density of 85

- 90%[86]. Finally, the identification of 81% of essential genes[73] suggests that this genome is

likely complete and may be reduced, however further study is required to confirm this. Given the

divergence of the putative Sp02-3 genomes (Fig. 5) and low (<94%) shared identity[95] (Fig. S4)

with other spirochetes, we propose a new taxonomic classification using Bin 003D_7 as the type

material. Bin 003D_7 is of high quality as defined by MiMAG standards, with full-length 16S

rRNA gene (1524 bp), full-length 23S rRNA gene (2979 bp), two copies of the 5S rRNA genes

(111 bp each), as well as 40 tRNAs. We propose the name "*Candidatus* Latrunculis umkhuseli"

which acknowledges both the sponge family with which it is associated (Latrunculiidae) and

"umkhuseli", which means "protector" in isiXhosa.

Annotation of the genes in the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli (Sp02-3) genome against the KEGG database

indicated that glycolysis and aerobic pyruvate oxidation pathways were present. These genes are

usually identified in aerobic bacteria but were also present in its close relative *S. pacifica*, which

is an aerotolerant anaerobe. Very few genes associated with oxidative phosphorylation were

identified in Sp02-3 genomes. However, *atpEIK* and *ntpABDE* were detected in representative

Sp02-3 genome bins 003D_7, 003B_7 and 050C_7 and may serve either as a proton pump, or for

the anaerobic production of ATP, as proposed for both *S. pacifica* and *Thermus*

thermophilus[124]. The putative *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genome includes all genes required for the

assimilatory reduction of sulfate to sulfite and two copies of genes encoding sulfite exporters. No

genes involved in dissimilatory sulfate reduction were detected and therefore it is unlikely that

Ca. L. umkhuseli uses sulfur for anaerobic respiration. It is possible that the produced sulfite

may be exported and potentially used by other symbiotic bacteria, such as the conserved

Tethybacterales. The *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genome carries a single putative terpene BGC that has a

homologous gene cluster in present in *S. pacifica* L21-RPul-D2 (38 - 59% amino acid identity

between genes). This gene cluster in *S. pacifica* L21-RPul-D2 is predicted to produce a red-

orange pigment hypothesized to protect the bacterium against oxidative stress[124]. If a similar

terpene is expressed in the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genome, the compound may perform a similar

protective function for *Ca.* L. umkhuseli, which appears to be a facultative anaerobe.

Identification of unique genes in *Ca.* L. umkhuseli relative to *T. favus* metagenome

We identified a total of 23 genes that were functionally unique to the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genomes,

relative to the other bacteria of the *T. favus* metagenomes. Nine of these were common to all

three *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genomes (Table S10). Eight of these unique genes encode proteins

potentially involved in the transport and metabolism of sugars. As mentioned previously, sugar

transport/uptake plays an important role in symbiotic interactions[103,112–114], therefore, the

presence of these genes would suggest that sugars, as with the Tethybacterales symbionts, are

important to the spirochete-sponge interaction. Additionally, two unique genes encoding proteins

associated with nitrogen fixation were detected (*rnfD* and *nirD:* Electron transport to nitrogenase

[125]), but no core genes involved in nitrogen metabolism were found in the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli

spirochete genomes.

The putative *Ca.* L. umkhuseli symbionts also possess additional unique genes (i.e. not identified

in the entire metagenome, including unbinned contigs) that are predicted to encode an

unspecified methyltransferase, a tetratricopeptide repeat protein and *N*-acetylcysteine and

pyridoxal 5'-phosphate synthases PdxS and PdxT. Pyridoxal 5′-phosphate, the only active form

of Vitamin B6, can be produced *de novo* via two possible pathways: 1) The DXP-dependent

pathway, which requires 5 enzymes (*pdxA*, *pdxB*, *serC*, *pdxJ,* or *pdxH* genes[126,127]) or 2) The

DXP-independent pathway, which requires only two enzymes, PdxS and PdxT, that produce

pyridoxal 5′-phosphate (active vitamin B6) from a pentose and a triose in the presence of

glutamine[127]. This would imply, in the context of the *T. favus* metagenome, that the spirochete

may be the only symbiont capable of producing the active form of vitamin B6, as genes for either

pathway could not be detected in the rest of the metagenome (i.e. all assembled contigs, binned

and unbinned, were checked). Vitamin B6 acts as a cofactor to a wide variety of enzymes across

all kingdoms of life [126,128], and is an essential vitamin of marine sponges [20] and may

potentially be used by spirochete symbionts as a competitive advantage in the sponge holobiont

[129]. However, whether the vitamin is used by the host itself or sympatric microorganisms is

not known at this point.

Comparison of putative *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genome bin with other symbiotic spirochetes

Spirochete MAGs from two sponges (*Aplysina aerophoba* and *Iophon methanophila* M2), a

Neotermes castaneus termite, and three species of gutless marine worms were acquired along

with five free-living species and compared to the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genome bins (Table S2). We

identified a total of 4037 orthologous gene groups (OGs) between the 14 genomes/bins and the

hierarchical clustering of gene presence/absence showed that the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli symbionts did

not cluster with *S. pacifica* and other free-living spirochetes (Fig. 6A). However, the *Ca.* L.

umkhuseli bins shared the greatest abundance of orthologous genes with free-living spirochete *S.*

pacifica (~21% average shared OGs) (Fig. 6B) and less than 14% with any of the host-associated

spirochetes which would confirm *S. pacifica* as the closest relative and suggests that the

difference in gene repertoire (Fig. 6A) may be due to gene loss in the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genomes.

Only six genes were shared between the *Ca.* L. umkhuseli genomes and other host-associated

spirochetes that were not present in the free-living species. There may be more functionally

similar genes present between the genomes, but as identification of orthologous genes is based

on shared sequence, sequence drift may confound this identification and result in an

underestimation of functional conservation. The shared genes were predicted to encode L-fucose

isomerase, L-fucose mutarotase, xylose import ATP-binding protein XylG, ribose import

permease protein RbsC, an ABC transporter permease and autoinducer two import system

permease protein LsrD. Fucose mutarotase and isomerase perform the first two steps in fucose

utilization and are responsible for converting beta-fucose to fuculose[130]. The role of

fucosylated glycans in the mammalian gut as points of adherence for various bacteria has been

well documented[131–134] and it is possible that *Ca.* L. umkhuseli spirochetes are similarly

capable of binding fucose in their respective hosts. Alternatively, *Ca.* L. umkhuseli spirochetes

may simply degrade the fucose of algal and bacterial cells that have been ingested by the sponge

host, as is hypothesized for other sponge symbionts[135]. The remaining genes are likely

involved in the uptake and utilization of sugars.

Conservation of spirochete symbiont populations in Latrunculiidae sponges

Previous studies identified two closely related spirochete species, Sp02-3 and Sp02-15, in the *T.*

favus microbiome[54]. Subsequently, the Sp02-3 symbiont was identified as consistently

conserved in the microbiomes of additional *Tsitsikamma* and *Cyclacanthia bellae* sponges

species[53]. We aimed to expand these studies by investigating the microbial communities of 61

sponge specimens, representing seven genera within the Latrunculiidae family (Table S1). Using

16S rRNA gene amplicon sequencing we profiled the microbiomes of these sponges relative to

the surrounding seawater and, in agreement with previous studies[53,54], found that different

latrunculid species are associated with distinct bacterial communities which differ significantly

from the surrounding water (Table S11). Each of the sponge species is associated with a distinct

microbial community, where each sponge microbiome is dominated by a betaproteobacterium

(Fig. S5). *T. favus*, *T. nguni* and *T. pedunculata* are all dominated by OTU1 and a closely-related

betaproteobacterium, OTU2, which dominates *T. michaeli* and *C. bellae* sponges. The *L.*

algoaensis sponge and *L. apicalis* sponges harbor their own dominant, and closely related

betaproteobacteria (OTU21 and OTU7 respectively).

Six OTUs were present in all sixty-one sponge specimens (Fig. 7A), three of which were closely

related to the dominant betaproteobacterium Sp02-1 and two shared the greatest sequence

identity to spirochete species Sp02-3 and Sp02-15, all of which had been previously identified in

T. favus[53,54]. These bacteria were also present (although in low abundance) in the three *L. apicalis* sponges collected from Bouvet Island, approximately 2850 km southwest of Algoa Bay in the Southern Atlantic Ocean. OTU17, is most closely related to uncultured bacteria isolated from seawater collected from the Santa Barbara channel (MG013048.1) and the North Yellow sea (FJ545595.1) and interestingly this OTU was also present in multiple samples of seawater collected over several years in Algoa Bay (Fig. S5). This OTU may represent a ubiquitous marine bacterium that may be present as a food bacterium.

In previous studies[56,81], we profiled the compounds present in the crude chemical extracts from these latrunculid sponge specimens and obtained distinct chemical profiles for each species (Fig. 7B and Fig. S6). In addition, it was found that *T. favus* and *T. michaeli* sponges exhibited two distinct chemotypes (Fig. 7B). For *T. favus*, Chemotype I, containing discorhabdins and tsitsikammamines, is considered "normal" and is characteristic of these sponges dating back to collections made since 1996[136]. The second chemotype has only very recently been discovered (2017) and was found to contain, almost exclusively, simple pyrroloiminoquinones such as makaluvamines. Regarding *T. michaeli*, both chemotypes appear to predominantly contain discorhabdins, with the chemical profile of chemotype I being closely related to *T. favus* chemotype I, whereas *T. michaeli* chemotype II is a source of new, yet unknown discorhabdins.

We performed an Indicator Species analysis (Fig. 7C), which showed that there was a statistically significant shift in the abundance of several OTUs between chemotypes (Table S12). Most notably, there was a significant increase in the abundance of OTU5 (Sp02-15 spirochete) in *T. favus* chemotype II ($p = 0.005$, R = 0.51) and *T. michaeli* chemotype II ($p = 0.03$, R = 0.87)

(Fig. 7C). Chemotype II is characterized by the presence of makaluvamines, which are the

simplest form of pyrroloiminoquinone compounds and are hypothesized to be the starter

compounds for more complex pyrroloiminoquinones (e.g., tsitsikammamines and discorhabdins).

Although in no way conclusive evidence, the significant increased abundance of Sp02-15,

suggests that it may play a role in preventing the formation of more complex

pyrroloiminoquinone compounds. Extracting the genome of the Sp02-15 spirochete is the subject

of ongoing studies in an effort to determine whether this symbiont plays a significant role in

latrunculid chemotypes.

CONCLUSION

Here, we have shown that the family to which a broad host-range symbiont belongs, such as the

Tethybacterales, dictates the functional potential of the symbiont, whereas in narrow host-range

symbionts, such as the spirochete, potential function is dictated by the sponge host. This work

has expanded our understanding of the Tethybacterales and the possible functional specialization

of the families within this new order. Here we found that Tethybacterale symbiont family rank is

a determining factor of it's functional potential, rather than functional radiation in response to its

sponge host. The Tethybacterales are functionally distinct from the Poribacteria which would

suggest that although these bacteria are both ubiquitously associated with a wide range of sponge

hosts, they likely have not converged to fulfil the same role. The incongruence of both

Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria* suggests that their ancestors were horizontally acquired at

different evolutionary timepoints and co-evolution may have occurred following the

establishment of the association. Estimates of when the Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria*

began diverging from their respective common ancestors implied that Tethybacterales may have

begun diverging before the *Entoporibacteria* and therefore the Tethybacterales may be an older

sponge-associated symbiont. However, additional data is required to validate or disprove this

hypothesis.

Finally, the conserved spirochete Sp02-3 (*Ca.* L. umkhuseli) may be the exclusive producer of

active vitamin B6 in the sponge metagenome, and therefore it is possible that this bacterium is

consistently present within the *T. favus* sponges as a nutritional symbiont through the provision

of this essential vitamin. Conversely, the closely related spirochete Sp02-15 may play a role in

the production of complex cytotoxic pyrroloiminoquinone alkaloids that are characteristic of

these sponges.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials

All 16S rRNA gene amplicon sequence data, sponge 28S rRNA gene sequences and raw shotgun

metagenomic read data can be accessed from the NCBI website under BioProject

PRJNA508092.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests, financial or otherwise, in relation to the work

described here.

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Author Contributions

S.C.W and R.A.D. drafted the manuscript, which was substantively revised by all other co-

authors. L.M. generated 16S amplicon data and J-C.J.K. generated and analyzed all chemical

data. S.P.-N taxonomically identified all sponges using both gross morphology and spicule

analysis. S.C.W. generated 16S rRNA gene amplicon data, 28S rRNA gene sequence data, all

shotgun metagenomic data and was responsible for the analyses thereof. J.C.K aided in

bioinformatic analysis.

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1074

1075   **FIGURE LEGENDS**

1076

Figure 1. Phylogeny of the Tethybacterales sponge symbionts.

Using autoMLST, single-copy markers were selected and used to delineate the phylogeny of

these sponge-associated betaproteobacteria revealing a new family of symbionts in the

Tethybacterales order. Additionally, it was shown that the *T. favus* associated Sp02-1 symbiont

belongs to the Persebacteraceae family. The phylogenetic tree was inferred using the de novo

method in AutoMLST using a concatenated alignment with IQ Tree and ModelFinder enabled.

Branch lengths are proportional to the number of substitutions per site.

1084

1085   **Figure 2.** Functional specialization of Tethybacterales families.

1086   The newly proposed Tethybacterales order appears to consist of three bacterial families. These

1087   families appear to have similar gene distribution (A) where the potential function of these genes

1088   indicates specialization in nutrient cycling (B) and solute transport (C).

1089

Figure 3. Functional differences between Tethybacterales and Poribacteria

Sponge-associated Tethybacterales genomes include significantly different functional gene

repertoires to those found in Poribacteria. Detailed presence/absence of metabolic genes (KEGG

annotations) detected in Tethybacterales and Poribacteria genome bins. Genomes are listed at the

bottom of the figure and clustered according to the presence/absence of functional genes (top).

Taxonomic classification of each genome is indicated using a colored bar (top). Functional genes

are collected into their respective pathways, which are further organized into larger functional

categories. A colored key is provided (right) and is in the same order as that of the colored

blocks in the graph (left).

1099

Figure 4. The divergence pattern of sponge-associated Tethybacterales, *Entoporibacteria* and

their respective host sponges.

The divergence of the Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria* is incongruent with the phylogeny

of the host sponges. (A and C) Branch length of symbiont divergence estimates is proportional to

the pairwise rate of synonymous substitution calculated (ML estimation) using a concatenation

of genes common to all genomes. Rate of synonymous substitution was calculated using

PAL2NAL and CodeML from the PAML package and visualized in MEGAX. (B and D)

Phylogeny of host sponges (or close relatives thereof) was inferred with 28S rRNA sequence

data using the UPGMA method and Maximum Composite Likelihood model with 1000 bootstrap

replicates. Branch lengths indicate the number of substitutions per site. All ambiguous positions

were removed for each sequence pair (pairwise deletion option). Evolutionary analyses were

conducted in MEGA X.

1112

1113 **Figure 5.** Putative spirochete Sp02-3 genomes form a distinct clade.

1114 A multi-locus de novo, concatenated species tree of putative *T. favus* associated Sp02-3

1115 spirochete symbiont genomes (highlighted in green). The scale bar indicates the number of

1116 substitutions per site of the concatenated genes.

1117

1118 **Figure 6.** Gene repertoires of free-living and symbiotic spirochetes.

1119 (A) Hierarchical clustering of shared orthologous genes between genomes showed that *T. favus*

1120 spirochete symbionts cluster with other host-associated spirochetes, but (B) share the greatest

1121 number of orthologous genes with *S. pacifica*, their closest phylogenetic relative.

1122

Figure 7. The relative abundance of conserved bacterial symbionts in all latrunculid sponges and

chemical profiles.

A total of six OTUs were present in all 61 latrunculid sponges investigated here, 58 of which

were collected off the eastern coast of South Africa and three were collected from Bouvet Island

in the Southern Ocean. (A) Analysis of the 16S rRNA gene sequence amplicon data revealed the

presence of six bacterial species conserved across all sponge samples. The abundance of

conserved OTUs (clustered at a distance of 0.03) relative to the total reads per sample is shown

(B) Principal Component Analysis (using Bray-Curtis dissimilarity metrics) of

pyrroloiminoquinone compounds in latrunculid sponge specimens illustrates the distinct

chemistry associated with the different sponge species, as well as the different chemotypes

observed in *T. favus* and *T. michaeli* sponges. (C) An indicator species analysis revealed that the

abnormal Chemotype II sponges (denoted with *) were associated with a significant increase in

the abundance of OTU5 (spirochete Sp02-15).

1136

1137   **Figure S1.** Phylogeny of sponges within the family Latrunculiidae.

1138   Sponge phylogeny was inferred using 28S rRNA sequence data using the Maximum-likelihood

1139   method and Tamura-Nei model with 1000 bootstrap replicates. Branch lengths indicate the

1140   number of substitutions per site. All ambiguous positions were removed for each sequence pair

1141   (pairwise deletion option). Evolutionary analyses were conducted in MEGA X.

1142

Figure S2. Phylogeny of *T. favus*-associated betaproteobacterium bin.

The phylogenetic relationship between the putative betaproteobacteria Sp02-1 genome and

closest relatives was based on 16S rRNA sequences and inferred using the UPGMA method. The

percentage of replicate trees in which the associated taxa clustered together in the bootstrap test

(10000 replicates) are shown next to the branches. The tree is drawn to scale, with branch lengths

in the same units as those of the evolutionary distances used to infer the phylogenetic tree. The

evolutionary distances were computed using the Maximum Composite Likelihood method and

are in the units of the number of base substitutions per site. This analysis involved 17 16S rRNA

gene sequences with a total of 1291 positions analyzed. All ambiguous positions were removed

for each sequence pair (pairwise deletion option). Evolutionary analyses were conducted in

MEGA X.

1154

1155   **Figure S3.** The potential functional ability of the three Tethybacterales families and the two

1156   lineages within the Poribacteria appear to be distinct.

1157   A Non-Metric Multi-Dimensional Scaling (NMDS) plot of the presence/absence metabolic

1158   counts from the Tethybacterales and Poribacteria calculated using Bray-Curtis distance.

1159

Figure S4. Phylogeny of *T. favus*-associated spirochete bins.

The phylogenetic relationship between putative spirochete genome bins and closest relatives was

based on 16S rRNA sequences and inferred using the UPGMA method. The percentage of

replicate trees in which the associated taxa clustered together in the bootstrap test (10000

replicates) are shown next to the branches. The tree is drawn to scale, with branch lengths in the

same units as those of the evolutionary distances used to infer the phylogenetic tree. The

evolutionary distances were computed using the Maximum Composite Likelihood method and

are in the units of the number of base substitutions per site. This analysis involved 12 16S rRNA

gene sequences with a total of 1583 positions analyzed. All ambiguous positions were removed

for each sequence pair (pairwise deletion option). Evolutionary analyses were conducted in

MEGA X.

1171

1172   **Figure S5.** Latrunculid microbial community analysis.

1173   The top 24 OTUs (clustered at 0.03) associated with latrunculid sponges collected from Algoa

1174   Bay, South Africa and Bouvet Island in the Southern Ocean. Colored key shows the closest

1175   relative when aligned against the NCBI nr database.

1176

1177   **Figure S6.** Base peak chromatograms of *Tsitsikamma* sponge chemotypes.

1178   Positive mode ESI-LC-MS base peak chromatograms of *T. favus* extracts exhibiting chemotype I

1179   or II (A-B) and *T. michaeli* extracts exhibiting chemotype I or II (C-D).

1180

1181   **Table S1.** Collection metadata for all latrunculid sponges used in this study.

1182

1183   **Table S2.** Metadata and taxonomic classification of all bins/genomes used in this study.

1184

1185   **Table S3.** SRR accessions for all Illumina metagenomic datasets assembled and binned in this

1186   study.

1187

1188   **Table S4.** Accessions and metadata for all Poribacteria genomes analyzed in this study.

1189

1190   **Table S5.** Pairwise synonymous substitution rates (dS) between genomes within the sponge-

1191   associated Tethybacterales and *Entoporibacteria*, respectively.

1192

1193   **Table S6.** Genes unique to the putative betaproteobacteria symbiont Bin 003B4, relative to all

1194   other genes present in the four *T. favus* metagenomes.

1195

1196   **Table S7.** Pairwise average amino acid identity scores between Tethybacterales genomes

1197

1198   **Table S8.** Pairwise average 16S rRNA gene sequence identity scores between Tethybacterales

1199   genomes.

1200

1201   **Table S9.** KEGG annotation counts for all Tethybacterales and Poribacteria genomes grouped by

1202   metabolic pathway.

1203

1204   **Table S10.** Unique genes in Sp02-3 spirochete genome bins, relative to all other genes present in

1205   the four *T. favus* metagenomes.

1206

1207   **Table S11.** Pairwise ANOSIM analysis of OTUs (distance of 0.03) showed that bacterial

1208   communities associated with different sponge genera are significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

1209

1210   **Table S12.** Indicator Species Analysis found that there was a significant ($p < 0.05$) shift in the

1211   abundance of OTU5 between Type I and Type II *T. favus* and *T. michaeli* chemotypes.

Category

Metabolism
- Carbohydrate
- Nitrogen
- Phosphate
- Sulfur

Transporters
- Amino acid
- Metallic cation/siderophore/vitamin B12
- Mineral/organic ion
- Peptide/nickel
- Polysaccharide
- Saccharide/polyol/lipid
- Oxidative phosphorylation

Pathways within categories

- D-galactonate degradation
- D-Galacturonate degradation
- Entner-Doudoroff pathway
- Galactose degradation
- Gluconeogenesis
- Glycolysis
- Glyoxylate cycle
- Pentose phosphate pathway
- Pyruvate oxidation
- Trehalose biosynthesis
- Wood-Ljungdahl pathway
- CO2 fixation
- Denitrification
- Dissimilatory nitrate reduction
- Phosphate metabolism
- Phosphate transporter
- Phosphonate transporter
- Assimilatory sulfate reduction
- Thiosulfate oxidation (SOX)

- Branched-chain amino acid transporter
- General L-amino acid transporter
- Hydroxyproline transporter
- Polar amino acid transporter
- Urea transporter
- Cobalt transporter
- Heme transporter
- Iron complex transporter
- Manganese/zinc transporter
- Nickel transporter
- Iron(II) transporter
- Iron(III) transporter
- Mn/Fe transporter
- FeoB/TauT family transporter
- Molybdate transporter
- Osmoprotectant transporter
- Hydroxymethylpyrimidine transporter
- Spermidine/putrescine transporter
- Putrescine transporter

- Spermidine/putrescine transporter
- Taurine transporter
- Tungstate transporter
- Micro/n C transporter
- Peptides/nickel transporter
- Lipopolysaccharide transporter
- Lipoprotein-releasing transporter
- Hexachlorocyclohexane transporter
- Glucose/mannose transporter
- Glycerol transporter
- Inositol-phosphate transporter
- Phospholipid transporter
- Putative multiple sugar transporter
- Ribose transporter
- Trehalose/maltose transporter
- Cytochrome c oxidase
- Type A ATPase
- NADH quinone oxidoreductase
- Succinate dehydrogenase

A.

S. pacifica (GCA_000507245.1)

S. africana (CP003282.1)

S. thermophila DSM 6192 (CP001698.1)

S. perfilievii P (CP035807.1)

Inanidrilus sp. gutless
worm symbiont (3300010314_9)

O. loisae gutless
worm symbiont (3300005978_6)

Olavius sp. DAHAB.1 gutless
worm symbiont (3300006913_10)

O. algarvensis gutless
worm symbiont (3300004122_5)

Neotermes castaneus termite symbiont *Sphaerochaeta
coccoides* DSM 17374 (GCA_000208385.1)

"*Ca*. Latrunculis umkhuseli" (Bin 003D_7)
T. favus Sp02-3 symbiont

"*Ca*. Latrunculis umkhuseli" (Bin 003B_7)
T. favus Sp02-3 symbiont

"*Ca*. Latrunculis umkhuseli" (Bin 050C_7)
T. favus Sp02-3 symbiont

A. aerophoba symbiont (3300027532_25)

I. methanophila M2 Bin M2_1_10

0.8   0.6   0.4   0.2   0.0

B.

"*Ca*. Latrunculis umkhuseli" (Bin 003B_7)
T. favus Sp02-3 symbiont

"*Ca*. Latrunculis umkhuseli" (Bin 003D_7)
T. favus Sp02-3 symbiont

"*Ca*. Latrunculis umkhuseli" (Bin 050C_7)
T. favus Sp02-3 symbiont

A. aerophoba symbiont

Olavius sp. DAHAB.1 gutless worm symbiont

O. algarvensis gutless worm symbiont

O. loisae gutless worm symbiont

Inanidrilus sp. gutless worm symbiont

I. methanophila M2 Bin M2_1_10

S. africana

S. pacifica

S. perfilievii P

S. thermophila DSM 6192

Neotermes castaneus termite symbiont
Sphaerochaeta coccoides DSM 17374

% Shared OGs

"*Candidatus* Ukwabelana africanus" (Bin 003B_4) | *Tsitsikamma favus* sponge TIC2018-003B

67
100 HQ241787.1 Uncultured betaproteobacterium Sp02-1 | *Tsitsikamma favus* sponge TIC2009-002

74 HQ241773.1 Uncultured betaproteobacterium Sp01-1 | *Tsitsikamma favus* sponge TIC2009-001

86 EF159852.1 Uncultured bacterium clone XmA231 | *Xestospongia muta* sponge

100 AM259836.1 Uncultured proteobacterium clone TAA-5-58 | *Tethya aurantium* sponge

99 AM259833.1 Uncultured proteobacterium TAA-5-01 | *Tethya aurantium* sponge

AM259835.1 Uncultured proteobacterium clone TAA-5-43 | *Tethya aurantium* sponge

99 100 DQ889930.1 Uncultured betaproteobacterium clone EC24 | *Erythropodium caribaeorum* soft coral

DQ889915.1 Uncultured betaproteobacterium clone EC67 | *Erythropodium caribaeorum* soft coral

100 JF824778.1 Uncultured gammaproteobacterium clone 912-C1 | *Haliclona tubifera* sponge

97 EF076241.1 Uncultured beta proteobacterium clone AnCha111f | *Antho chartacea* sponge

99 GU799622.1 Uncultured bacterium clone transformant10 | *Crambe crambe* sponge

100 GU799620.1 Uncultured bacterium clone transformant11 | *Crambe crambe* sponge

NR 074736.1 *Nitrosospira multiformis* strain ATCC 25196 | Soil from Suriname

100 X83531.1 *Azoarcus* sp. EbN1 | Freshwater mud

100 AF011329.1 *Azoarcus* sp. PH002 | East River New York N.Y.

KX772781.1 Uncultured beta proteobacterium clone AqS2 | *Amphimedon queenslandica* sponge

0.080   0.060   0.040   0.020   0.000