

# Morphological integration during postnatal ontogeny: implications for evolutionary biology

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## Abstract

1  
2 How covariance patterns of phenotypes change during development is fundamental for a broader  
3 understanding of evolution. There is compelling evidence that mammalian skull covariance  
4 patterns change during ontogeny. However, it is unclear to what extent variation in covariance  
5 patterns during ontogeny can impact the response to selection. To tackle this question we  
6 explored: i) the extent to which covariance patterns change during postnatal ontogeny; ii) in  
7 which ontogenetic stages covariance patterns differ the most, and iii) the extent to which the  
8 phenotypic covariance pattern at different ontogenetic stages can be explained by the same  
9 processes determining additive genetic covariance. We sampled postnatal ontogenetic series for  
10 both marsupials, and placentals. Within each ontogenetic series, we compared covariance matrices  
11 (**P**-matrices) at different ontogenetic stages. Furthermore, we compared these **P**-matrices to two  
12 target matrices [adult **P**-matrix and an additive genetic covariance matrix (**G**-matrix)]. Our results  
13 show that for all ontogenetic series, covariance patterns from weaning onward are conserved and  
14 probably shaped by the same processes determining the **G**-matrix. We conclude that irrespective of  
15 eventual differences in how selection operates during most of postnatal ontogeny, the net response  
16 to such pressures will probably not be affected by ontogenetic differences in the covariance pattern.

## Introduction

17

18 Ontogenetic development is a multi-layered phenomenon in which developmental processes on a  
19 given stage act on the substrate laid out by processes that preceded them (Hallgrímsson et al.,  
20 2009). This sequential overlap leads to changes in the amount and distribution of morphological  
21 variation through time (Mitteroecker and Bookstein, 2009; Zelditch et al., 2006). Since natural  
22 selection is contingent on the availability and organization of morphological variation (Lande,  
23 1979; Lande and Arnold, 1983), changes in this variation between life history stages can affect how  
24 selection operates, and how populations respond to selection in different life stages (Wasserman  
25 et al., 2021). Therefore, a broader comprehension of evolution involves understanding to what  
26 extent morphological variation changes during ontogeny.

27 For example, consider a scenario in which a pair of traits are associated (i.e. high integration  
28 *sensu* Olson and Miller, 1958) in the juvenile phase, but in the adult phase these traits are much less  
29 integrated (Figure 1; e.g., Sydney et al. (2012)). If selection operates on a single trait at the juvenile  
30 stage, evolutionary responses will be aligned with the major direction of variation of juveniles,  
31 leading to a correlated response in the second trait, even in the absence of trait association in  
32 the adult phase. Furthermore, in this scenario, the reconstruction of selection using the adult  
33 stage would suggest that selection is acting on multiple traits simultaneously, while in fact it is  
34 acting on a single trait earlier in development. Conversely, if the covariance patterns are relatively  
35 stable throughout ontogeny, selection would produce evolutionary responses that are similar  
36 across ontogenetic stages. Therefore, understanding how the variance is distributed on different  
37 ontogenetic stages can provide further insight about how complex phenotypes might evolve in  
38 response to natural selection.

39 The mammalian skull is a common model system for investigating the evolution of complex  
40 structures (e.g., Goswami, 2006; Haber, 2014; Machado et al., 2018), and there is compelling evi-  
41 dence that skull covariance patterns change during ontogeny (Atchley, 1984; Coleman et al., 1994;  
42 Goswami et al., 2012; Hallgrímsson et al., 2009; Mitteroecker and Bookstein, 2009; Mitteroecker  
43 et al., 2012; Nonaka and Nakata, 1984; Sydney et al., 2012; Zelditch, 1988; Zelditch et al., 1992;

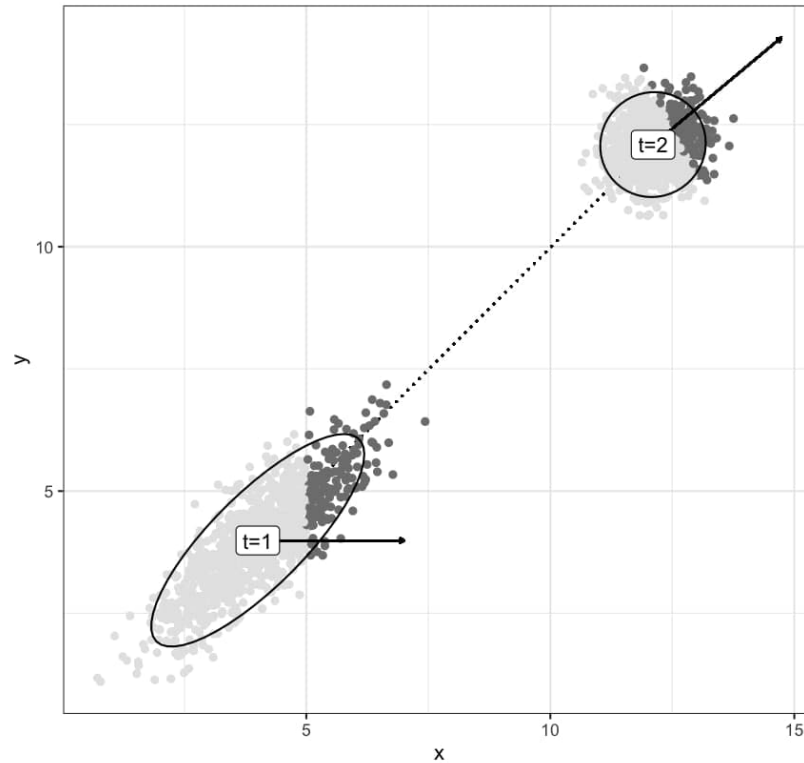


Figure 1: Effect of ontogenetic changes in covariance patterns on the evolutionary response of life-stage specific selection. Population is sampled in two moments:  $t=1$  with strong integration and  $t=2$  with weak integration. At  $t=1$ , the selection gradient (solid arrow) affect only the trait  $x$  (dark gray specimens), resulting in a selection differential that is correlated between  $x$  and  $y$  due to the high integration. At  $t=2$ , because  $x$  and  $y$  are not correlated, the reconstructed selection gradient (solid arrow) indicates that both traits where co-selected (dark gray specimens), while in fact, only  $x$  was.

44 Zelditch and Carmichael, 1989; Zelditch et al., 2006). Despite this, the majority of studies on the  
45 evolution of the mammalian skull morphology focus only on adult phenotypes. Because selection  
46 is the net result of pressures acting throughout life-history stages, ignoring these developmental  
47 changes in trait association might affect our understanding of the evolution of this structure.

48 Here, we explore whether the observed variation in covariance patterns during postnatal  
49 ontogeny can impact the response to selection in age-structured populations under directional  
50 selection by assessing: i) the extent to which covariance patterns change during postnatal ontogeny;  
51 ii) in which ontogenetic stages covariance patterns differ the most (if they do at all), and iii) the  
52 extent to which the phenotypic covariance pattern at different ontogenetic stages mirrors the

53 additive genetic covariance matrix (**G**-matrix). We developed a cross-sectional study of cranial trait  
54 covariances based on a sample of mammals with different developmental strategies. We sampled  
55 the Didelphimorphia marsupials *Didelphis virginiana* and *Monodelphis domestica*, the precocial  
56 platyrrhine primate *Sapajus apella*, and the altricial sigmodontinae rodent *Calomys expulsus* in  
57 different age classes encompassing the first months of life after birth to adulthood. We quantified  
58 covariance patterns of cranial morphological traits, and used published estimates of additive  
59 genetic covariance matrices for the same species or closely related taxa. Then, we compared  
60 covariance patterns among age classes within each one of these ontogenetic series to evaluate if  
61 observed differences would impact differentially the evolutionary responses under selection.

## 62 **Methods**

### 63 *Sample*

64 Our sample is composed of 1883 specimens belonging to five ontogenetic series: *Didelphis*  
65 *virginiana* and *Monodelphis domestica* (Marsupialia, Mammalia), *Sapajus apella* (Primates, Placentalia,  
66 Mammalia), and *Calomys expulsus* (Rodentia, Placentalia, Mammalia; Figure 2). Studied specimens  
67 are deposited in the following institutions: American Museum of Natural History (New York,  
68 USA), Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, USA), Museu Nacional (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil),  
69 Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi (Belém, Brazil), Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo  
70 (São Paulo, Brazil), Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (Berkeley, USA), National Museum of Natural  
71 History (Washington D.C, USA), and Texas Biomedical Research Institute (San Antonio, USA).

72 We sampled specimens that were either wild caught (*Didelphis*, *Monodelphis*, and *Sapajus*), or  
73 derived from captive-bred colonies kept under stable controlled conditions [*Calomys* (Garcia et al.,  
74 2014), and *Monodelphis* (Porto et al., 2015)]. The two independent data sets for *Monodelphis* were  
75 labeled *Monodelphis* (D) for the wild-caught specimens and *Monodelphis* (B) for the captive-bred  
76 specimens. The acronyms stand for dental age class and birth age class, respectively, as explained  
77 below.

78 We classified our specimens according to age classes. Wild-caught specimens were classified

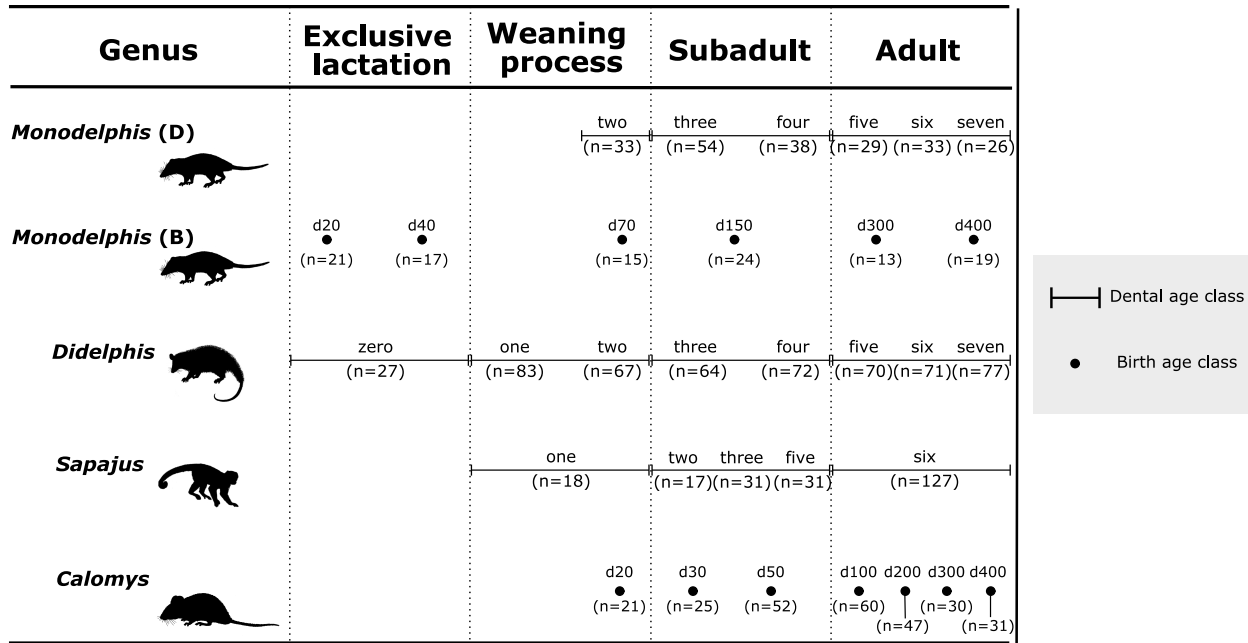


Figure 2: Schematic representation of the age classes and sample sizes (between parenthesis) for each ontogenetic series in relation to major life-history phases. Birth age classes are represented by dots and dental age classes by horizontal bars. The position of these symbols and the length of the bars are illustrative and are intended to show the broad distribution of data over the major life-history phases and differences in both sampling strategies (dental and birth age classes). Figures for each ontogenetic series are adapted from (Eisenberg, 1989; Eisenberg and Redford, 1999; Redford and Eisenberg, 1992). Figures not to scale.

79 according to dental eruption and wear (i.e., dental age class), while captive-bred specimens were  
 80 classified according to days after birth (i.e., birth age class; Figure 2). Dental age class for *Didelphis*  
 81 and *Monodelphis (D)* were determined based on maxillary dental eruption and wear (Tribe, 1990;  
 82 Tyndale-biscoe and Mackenzie, 1976). We added an extra class (zero), composed of specimens  
 83 with no erupted teeth. For *Didelphis*, the ontogenetic stages sampled most likely include lactation  
 84 (dental age class zero), the start of solid food ingestion (dental age class one), end of the weaning  
 85 (between dental age classes one and two), to adulthood [dental age class above four; Abdala et al.  
 86 (2001); McManus (1974); Sebastião and Marroig (2013); Tyndale-biscoe and Mackenzie (1976); van  
 87 Nievelt and Smith (2005)].

88 For *Monodelphis (D)*, the ontogenetic stages sampled most likely include the end of the weaning  
 89 process (during dental age class two) to adulthood [dental age class above four; Sebastião and

90 Marroig (2013); van Nievelt and Smith (2005)]. *Monodelphis* (B) specimens were classified according  
91 to birth age classes 20, 40, 70, 150, 300, and 400 days after birth. These classes encompass exclusive  
92 lactation (20 and 40), to the very end of the weaning process (70), to adulthood [300 and 400;  
93 Nievelt and Smith (2005)]. The birth age classes are analogue to the following dental age classes:  
94 20 = zero; 40 = zero to one; 70 = two;  $\geq 150 = \geq$  four (Nievelt and Smith, 2005; van Nievelt and  
95 Smith, 2005). The dental age classes for *Sapajus* were determined based on the premaxillary and  
96 maxillary dental eruption (Richtsmeier et al., 1993). They span from weaning (dental age class  
97 one) to adulthood [dental age class six; Fragazy et al. (2004); Marroig and Cheverud (2001)]. The  
98 *Calomys* were classified according to the birth age classes 20, 30, 50, 100, 200, 300 and 400 days  
99 after birth. Specimens comprise from around weaning (20 days) to adulthood [100 days onwards;  
100 Hingst-Zaher et al. (2000)].

101 For *Sapajus*, almost all specimens we studied are assigned to *S. apella* (n = 200), however 24  
102 specimens are of uncertain classification (*Sapajus* sp.). These specimens belong to the age classes  
103 one (n = 6), two (n = 11) and three (n = 7). Inspections of Principal Component Analysis (PCA)  
104 plots showed that specimens with unknown species fell within the distribution of *S. apella*, cluster  
105 along other juveniles. (Figure A1). A non-parametric multivariate analyses of variance (NP-  
106 MANOVA, Anderson, 2001; Collyer and Adams, 2018; McArdle and Anderson, 2001) using size  
107 (to control for ontogenetic variation) and species assignment as factors showed no differentiation  
108 between *S. apella* and *Sapajus* sp. (Table A1). Based on these results, we pooled both groups in our  
109 analysis to improve sample sizes.

## 110 *Landmarks and Measurements*

111 Traits on this study are linear distances derived from the 3D coordinates of 32 homologous  
112 landmarks measured on all specimens using a 3D digitizer. All specimens were measured with  
113 the same instrument (Microscribe MX; Immersion Corporation, San Jose, California) with the  
114 exception of adult *Sapajus* that were measured with a 3Draw digitizer (Polhemus Inc., Colchester,  
115 Vermont). Based on these landmarks, 35 linear distances were calculated in millimeters [for details  
116 related to the landmarks and distances acquisition refer to (Cheverud, 1995; Porto et al., 2009;



117 Shirai and Marroig, 2010)]. The set of distances calculated aimed to represent the whole cranium  
118 morphology and important developmental and functional relationships among cranial regions,  
119 while avoiding redundancy (Cheverud, 1982; Marroig and Cheverud, 2001).

120 Some sources of measurement error could introduce non-biological variance in our data  
121 sets. First, more than one equipment was used to collect data. However, tests performed with  
122 adult specimens measured with both devices indicated that this source of variation is negligible  
123 (G. Marroig, *pers. comm.*). Second, specimens were measured by different observers. *Didelphis*  
124 and *Monodelphis* (D) crania were measured by HS. *Monodelphis* (B) crania were measured by AP.  
125 *Calomys* crania were measured by GG, and *Sapajus* crania were measured by GM. Nevertheless, all  
126 specimens were measured following the same protocol, and since we are studying covariances  
127 within each ontogenetic series, and all specimens per ontogenetic series were measured by the  
128 same person, we expect inter-observer error to be irrelevant.

129 Lastly, to evaluate the possible effect of within-sample measurement error in covariance  
130 estimates we calculated trait repeatabilities (Lessells and Boag, 1987) for samples which were  
131 measured twice, namely *Didelphis*, *Monodelphis* (D), and *Calomys*. Measurement errors were  
132 calculated for each ontogenetic series at each age class with more than 14 specimens for each  
133 linear distance independently. In most cases, measurement errors are negligible, since most  
134 repeatabilities were high ( $> 0.8$ ; Figure A2). Low repeatabilities ( $< 0.8$ ) were observed for  
135 traits exhibiting low variances (Figure A3). These traits were also very short, approaching the  
136 spatial resolution of the digitizer (Figure A3). In all subsequent analyses, specimens' traits were  
137 represented by the mean of replicated measurements. Although the *Sapajus* and the *Monodelphis*  
138 (B) specimens were not measured twice, the measurement errors observed for other Platyrrhini  
139 measured by GM (Marroig and Cheverud, 2001), and for smaller Didelphimorphia measured  
140 by AP (Porto et al., 2009) were negligible. Therefore, we assume the *Sapajus* and *Monodelphis* (B)  
141 specimens also presented negligible measurement errors.

## 142 *Phenotypic covariance matrices*

143 Our study is concerned with how the association among traits changes during ontogeny. To  
144 quantify trait associations, we calculated phenotypic covariance matrices (**P**-matrices) of each  
145 age class per ontogenetic series. Because our sample includes both male and female specimens  
146 (Table A2), we evaluated if the presence of sexual dimorphism could affect our covariance  
147 estimation. To verify this possibility, we used the following approaches. First, we used pairwise  
148 NP-MANOVA (significance at  $p(\alpha) < 0.05$ ) to evaluate the effect of sex on morphology for each  
149 age class. In cases of insufficient sample sizes for NP-MANOVA we used pairwise non-parametric  
150 univariate analysis of variance (NP-ANOVA), and considered sexual dimorphism to be present  
151 whenever two or more traits had significantly covaried with sex at  $p(\alpha) < 0.01$ . Second, sexual  
152 dimorphism was also graphically evaluated using Principal Component Analyses. Lastly, we  
153 assessed the impact that controlling for sexual dimorphism have on the covariance estimates  
154 by evaluating the extent to which the covariance structure is altered by the exclusion of sex in  
155 the analyses. To do that, first we calculated matrices with and without controlling for sexual  
156 dimorphism and compared them using the Random Skewers method (for details on the method  
157 see below) and also calculating the difference between the trace of the matrices. Because sexual  
158 dimorphism was identified as a source of variance in at least one age class per ontogenetic series,  
159 we calculated the residual pooled within-group **P**-matrices for all samples using the general linear  
160 model approach (Marroig and Cheverud, 2004). This step is important because if an effect is a  
161 strong source of variance, it distorts matrix estimates, which will reflect inter-group (e.g., female  
162 and male differences) instead of intra-group covariances [see Figure SI1 in Machado et al. (2018)].  
163 For the adult age class, we also controlled for the effect of the age classes involved (Figure 2), as  
164 described above.

165 Any matrix is estimated with error, and the lower the ratio between the number of trait and  
166 sample size the worst is the estimation. We quantified error in matrix estimation by using a  
167 Bayesian posterior sample of the covariance matrices using a multivariate normal likelihood  
168 function on the residuals of the linear models and an inverse Wishart prior on the covariance

169 structure. The prior covariance matrix is set to a diagonal matrix with the observed variances  
170 on the diagonal, and the prior degrees of freedom is set to the number of traits ( $k = 35$ ). This  
171 particular choice for the likelihood and prior distribution can be solved analytically and results  
172 in a posterior distribution from which we can sample directly (Murphy, 2012). Furthermore,  
173 this method has the added benefit of ensuring that the matrices from the posterior sample are  
174 positive-definite and, therefore, invertible. We took 100 posterior samples for each age-class from  
175 each ontogenetic series, producing 3,600 matrices in total.

176 To visualize differences and similarities between the **P**-matrices we performed a Principal  
177 Coordinate Analysis (PCoA). The PCoA generates a lower-dimensional representation of a multi-  
178 variate dataset similarly to the Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Different from PCA, the  
179 PCoA is based on the spectral decomposition of the double-centered distance matrix that repre-  
180 sents the dissimilarities among samples. The eigenvectors of this analysis (Principal Coordinates;  
181 PCo) express the scores of each sample on this reduced space, with the leading eigenvectors  
182 representing the axes in which covariance matrices differ the most, and the latter representing  
183 the axes in which they differ the least. The dissimilarity between matrix was calculated based on  
184 the Riemmanian distance, which is the metric of the space of square symmetric positive definite  
185 matrices (Bookstein and Mitteroecker, 2014; Le Maître and Mitteroecker, 2019; Mitteroecker, 2009).  
186 Because Matrices Riemmanian distances are sensitive to scale, matrices were set to have the same  
187 size (trace=1) prior to the calculation. The resulting PCo space then only relates to matrix shape.

### 188 *Additive genetic covariance matrices*

189 The **P**-matrix is determined by the additive genetic covariance matrix (**G**-matrix), plus the environ-  
190 mental covariance (Falconer and MacKay, 1996). The **G**-matrix quantifies the genetic contribution  
191 to trait's patterns of inheritance and co-inheritance (covariance), and is essential for predicting  
192 multivariate evolution of these traits (Falconer and MacKay, 1996; Lande, 1979; McGuigan, 2006).  
193 Because of that, we evaluated if patterns of covariance quantified in our age-specific **P**-matrices  
194 can be explained by the distribution of heritable variation encoded in the **G**-matrix. To do this, we  
195 compared our age-specific **P**-matrices within ontogenetic series with estimated target **G**-matrices

196 (see details regarding the comparison method below). The reasoning behind this approach is  
197 that since **G**-matrices of complex traits represent the net-effect of multiple pleiotropic effects  
198 channeled through developmental pathways (Cheverud, 1996a), finding a high similarity between  
199 the age-specific **P**-matrices and the target **G**-matrix means that trait associations within **P**-matrices  
200 are probably determined by the same processes determining the **G**-matrix pattern.

201 Depending on the ontogenetic series, a different target **G**-matrix was adopted. For comparisons  
202 within Didelphimorphia [*Didelphis*, *Monodelphis* (D), and *Monodelphis* (B)] we used a matrix for  
203 *Monodelphis domestica* (Porto et al., 2015) and for the comparison within *Calomys*, we used a matrix  
204 estimated for the same species (Garcia et al., 2014). These matrices were estimated using the same  
205 individuals from the *Monodelphis* (B) and *Calomys* ontogenetic series, respectively. There is no  
206 available **G**-matrix for *Sapajus*. Therefore, we used a matrix estimated for *Saguinus* (Cheverud,  
207 1996b). The *Saguinus* **G**-matrix is highly similar to **P**-matrices for adult samples of all New World  
208 Monkey genera, including *Sapajus* (Marroig and Cheverud, 2010). Thus, this **G**-matrix can be  
209 considered a good rough approximation of the **G**-matrix for *Sapajus*, at least for patterns of  
210 covariance since differences due to scale (*Saguinus*: 400 g; *Sapajus*: 2800 g) result in larger variances  
211 and covariances for *Sapajus*.

212 The **G**-matrix for *Calomys* was estimated from 365 specimens comprising individuals of both  
213 sexes and of different age classes, and that were raised in an unbalanced colony design (i.e.,  
214 containing both paternal and maternal half-sibs). The **G**-matrix for *Monodelphis* was estimated  
215 from 199 adult specimens belonging to 16 partially inbred strains. Both matrices were estimated  
216 using a Bayesian sparse factor model (Runcie and Mukherjee, 2013), in a full animal model for  
217 *C. expulsus* and a structured random effect model for *M. domestica* that used the genetic distance  
218 between strains to define the covariance between random effect levels. For *Saguinus*, the **G**-matrix  
219 was estimated from 462 specimens pooled from two different species: *S. oedipus* and *S. fuscicollis*.  
220 Colony designs were unbalanced, including full and half-siblings, and various kinds of collateral  
221 relatives. The matrix was estimated under a Maximum Likelihood framework in a full animal  
222 model (Cheverud, 1996b; Konigsberg and Cheverud, 1992). In all cases, unwanted sources of  
223 variation, like sex, were controlled using fixed effects.

## Matrix comparisons

To evaluate how much covariance patterns change during ontogeny, we compared age-specific **P**-matrices within ontogenetic series using two different approaches: the Krzanowski Subspace Comparison for multiple matrices [KC; (Aguirre et al., 2014; Krzanowski, 1979) and the Random Skewers [RS; (Cheverud and Marroig, 2007)].

We used KC to compare age-specific **P**-matrices within each of the five ontogenetic series (Figure 2). KC is a global test of similarity among all matrices, and measures the alignment of the morphospaces spanned by the first few eigenvectors of the matrices being compared. Structurally similar matrices should have most of their variation in a similar subspace. The matrix that describes the common subspace is defined as

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^p A_i A_i^t \quad (1)$$

where  $A_i$  is a column matrix containing the first  $k = n/2 - 1$  eigenvectors of the  $i$ -th matrix being compared,  $p$  is the number of matrices being compared, and  $^t$  denotes matrix transposition. The eigenvalues of  $H$  are at most  $p$ , and any eigenvector of  $H$  whose associated eigenvalue is equal to  $p$  can be reconstructed by a linear combination of the eigenvalues included in the  $A_i$  matrices, and so is shared by all the matrices.

To create a null distribution for the eigenvalues of  $H$ , we used a permutation approach (Aguirre et al., 2014), randomizing the residuals from the fixed effect models used to calculate the **P**-matrices between the age classes within lineage 1000 times. For each permuted sample, we repeat the Bayesian posterior sampling of the **P**-matrix in each age class and calculate the  $H$  matrix. This provides a null distribution for the eigenvalues of  $H$  under the hypothesis that the residuals for each age class came from the same population. The confidence intervals in the observed  $H$  matrix are obtained using the posterior distribution of the true **P**-matrices, while the permuted confidence interval under the null hypothesis combines the uncertainty from the randomization and from the posterior distributions for each randomized sample. If the observed eigenvalues of  $H$  were significantly different from the randomized eigenvalues, we concluded

249 that the matrices from each age class have a different structure, otherwise, we concluded that the  
250 matrices are similar.

251 Additionally, we used the RS method to compare the median of each posterior distribution of  
252 age-specific **P**-matrices within each ontogenetic series against two target matrices: the median of  
253 the posterior distribution of the adult pooled within-group **P**-matrix of each ontogenetic series  
254 and a **G**-matrix (see above for details on the **G**-matrices compared in each case). RS is based on  
255 the following equation:

$$r_i = \mathbf{C}_i v \quad (2)$$

256 where  $v$  is a random vector,  $\mathbf{C}_i$  is a matrix being compared and  $r_i$  is the response vector. The RS  
257 similarity is then defined as the mean vector correlation between the response vectors obtained by  
258 applying the same set of random vectors to two covariance matrices (Cheverud and Marroig, 2007;  
259 Melo et al., 2015). If the covariance matrices have similar structures, their response vectors will be  
260 closely aligned and the RS will be close to 1. If they have unrelated structures, the direction of the  
261 response will be different and the RS will be close to zero.

262 For reasonably similar matrices, as in our case,  $r$  is strongly and negatively correlated to  
263 the Riemannian distance (Figure A4), with the advantage that, under certain conditions, RS  
264 has a straightforward biological interpretation. The RS equation has the same format as the  
265 multivariate response to selection equation  $\Delta z = \mathbf{G}\beta$  (Lande, 1979), where  $\beta$  is the selection  
266 gradient (direction of maximum fitness increase),  $\mathbf{G}$  is the **G**-matrix and  $\Delta z$  is the evolutionary  
267 response to selection vector. Thus, for evolutionary studies, RS is a measure of the average  
268 alignment between the evolutionary responses of two populations subjected to the same selective  
269 pressures. We can calculate this if we have access to the **G**-matrices or to **P**-matrices that are good  
270 proxies for the corresponding **G**-matrices. This is why we compared the age-specific **P**-matrices  
271 within ontogenetic series not only with adult **P**-matrices, which allows us to scrutinize phenotypic  
272 differences in covariance patterns within the ontogenetic series, but also with **G**-matrices.

273 As explained above, if the RS for age-specific **P**-matrices within ontogenetic series are similar to  
274 the target **G**-matrices, we can infer that the phenotypic covariance patterns within each ontogenetic

275 series can be sufficiently explained by the same processes determining the (co)inheritance of traits.  
276 Furthermore, this similarity would also suggest that different age classes respond similarly to  
277 selection. The proportionality between **P**- and **G**-matrices, sometimes referred to as the *Cheverud*  
278 *Conjecture* (Roff, 1995), has been verified for adult skull traits in many lineages of mammals  
279 (Cheverud, 1995; Hubbe et al., 2016; Machado et al., 2018; Marroig and Cheverud, 2001; Oliveira  
280 et al., 2009; Porto, 2009; Shirai and Marroig, 2010), and specifically for the lineages investigated  
281 here (Cheverud, 1995; Garcia et al., 2014; Marroig and Cheverud, 2010; Porto et al., 2015). Thus, by  
282 evaluating the RS similarity between age-specific **P**-matrices within ontogenetic series and target  
283 **G**-matrices, we are also testing if the Cheverud Conjecture can be extended to other ontogenetic  
284 stages besides the adult one.

285 Due to sampling error associated with the estimation of covariance matrices, the maximum RS  
286 value ( $r_{max}$ ) between two matrices will never be one, even if the underlying samples come from  
287 the same population. To account for this, we calculated matrices repeatabilities ( $t$ ), which is a  
288 measure of the expected similarity between the true underlying covariance structure and the one  
289 calculated from the sample. The  $t$  value for all matrices was determined using a Monte Carlo  
290 resampling procedure of self-correlation (Marroig and Cheverud, 2001; Porto et al., 2009). For  
291 every covariance matrix, 1,000 Monte Carlo samples were made keeping sample size constant.  
292 Repeatabilities for the *Calomys* and *Monodelphis* **G**-matrices were calculated using the published  
293 effective sample sizes, and the one for *Saguinus* was taken from the literature (Cheverud, 1996b;  
294 Marroig and Cheverud, 2010). Covariance matrices were estimated for each of the resamples and  
295 RS was used to compare the original and the resampled matrices. The  $t$  value was then obtained  
296 as the mean RS value between original and resampled matrices. Adjusted RS similarity was then  
297 estimated as  $r_{adj} = r_{obs} / r_{max}$ , where  $r_{obs}$  is the observed similarity among samples and  $r_{max}$  is the  
298 geometric mean of  $ts$  of the pair of matrices being compared (Cheverud, 1996b). The procedure  
299 described above provides inflated estimates of repeatabilities for poorly estimated **P**-matrices,  
300 thus providing conservative corrections for RS when at least one poorly estimated **P**-matrix is  
301 considered in the analysis.

302 Lastly, it is important to notice that both KC and RS are primarily concerned with the directions

303 of variance in the morphospace. Magnitudes of variance are strongly correlated with the scale  
304 of the organisms, which changes considerably across different age classes. More specifically,  
305 KC considers only the eigenvectors (directions) of the matrices under study, disregarding the  
306 corresponding eigenvalues (variance in these directions); and RS considers the direction and  
307 magnitude of covariance patterns, but quantifies only the alignment (directions) of response  
308 vectors, and not their length (magnitude). In other words, the RS similarity depends on the  
309 relative distribution of variances, not on its magnitude.

### 310 *Statistical analyses*

311 All analyses were done in the R Core Team (2019) programming environment. The EvolQG v0.3-1  
312 (Melo et al., 2015) package was used for matrix estimation, RS and KC comparisons, the package  
313 RRPP (Collyer and Adams, 2018, 2019) was used for the NP-ANOVAs and MANOVAs and the  
314 package vcvComp (Le Maître and Mitteroecker, 2019) was used for the PCoA. Analyses were done  
315 independently by three authors (FAM, DM and GG), and results were consistent between runs.

## 316 **Results**

317 The first two leading eigenvectors of the PCoA explained 29.97% and 4.11% of the total variation  
318 in the sample, respectively (Figure 3). PCoA1 separates *Didelphis* and *Sapajus* samples with higher  
319 scores from *Monodelphis* (B), *Monodelphis* (D) and *Calomys* samples with lower scores. PCoA2 shows  
320 a contrast between *Monodelphis* (B), *Monodelphis* (D), and *Didelphis* with lower scores from *Calomys*  
321 and *Sapajus* with higher ones. PCoA1 presents some ontogenetic structuring of the marsupial  
322 species, with younger age classes showing lower values than adult classes. Furthermore, the  
323 *Monodelphis* (B) and *Monodelphis* (D) form almost a continuum, with latter stages of *Monodelphis* (B)  
324 neighboring intermediary to late stages of *Monodelphis* (D). The following eigenvectors explained  
325 < 3% of the total variation and show no clear taxonomic or ontogenetic structure (Figure A5).

326 The KC analysis shows that the posterior eigenvalue distribution fully overlaps with the null-  
327 distribution for all ontogenetic series (Figure 4), suggesting that, despite the dispersion observed



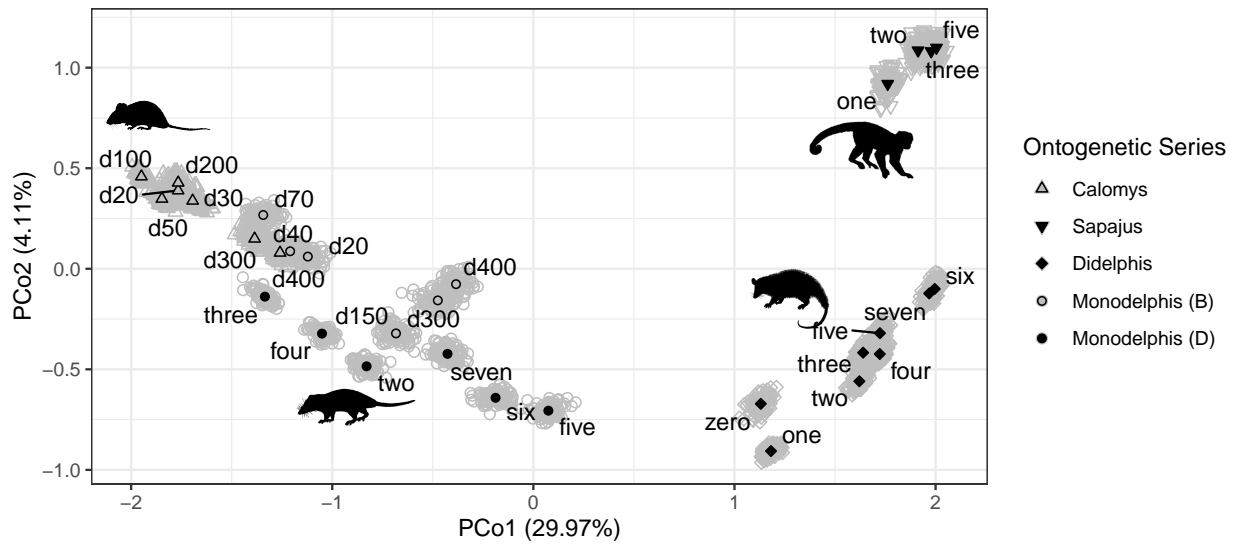


Figure 3: Distribution of age-specific **P**-matrices on the first two leading principal coordinates based on the Riemannian distance. Black symbols represent the median of each posterior distribution of age-specific **P**-matrices within each ontogenetic series. Gray symbols represent 100 matrices from the posterior distribution of age-specific **P**-matrices within each ontogenetic series.

328 in Figure 3 for some age classes, covariance structures tend to be similar with ontogenetic series.  
 329 The only possible exception is within the *Monodelphis* (B), where the posterior distribution of the  
 330 leading eigenvalue falls partly outside of the null-distribution (Figure 4B).

331 The pairwise RS analysis is consistent with this interpretation for most of the sample (Figure 5),  
 332 showing that comparisons between age-specific **P**-matrices and the adult **P**-matrix yielded high  
 333 similarity values ( $RS > 0.81$ ), the exceptions being the age classes d20 and d40 for *Monodelphis*  
 334 (B) ( $RS = 0.64, RS = 0.73$ , respectively). The RS comparison between age-specific **P**-matrices  
 335 and target **G**-matrices presented a very similar result to the comparison with adult **P**-matrices,  
 336 except that similarity values tended to be slightly lower ( $RS > 0.69$ ). Exceptions were *Sapajus*,  
 337 which yielded consistently lower similarity values than the comparison with the adult's **P**-matrix  
 338 ( $0.68 < RS < 0.79$ ), and *Monodelphis* (B), which showed lower values in general, and particularly  
 339 for the two younger age classes ( $RS < 0.44$ ). In the case of *Sapajus*, these lower similarities are still  
 340 remarkably high considering that they are being compared to a **G**-matrix estimated for a species  
 341 of a different family (Callitrichidae). With the exception of *Monodelphis* (B), there is a trend of

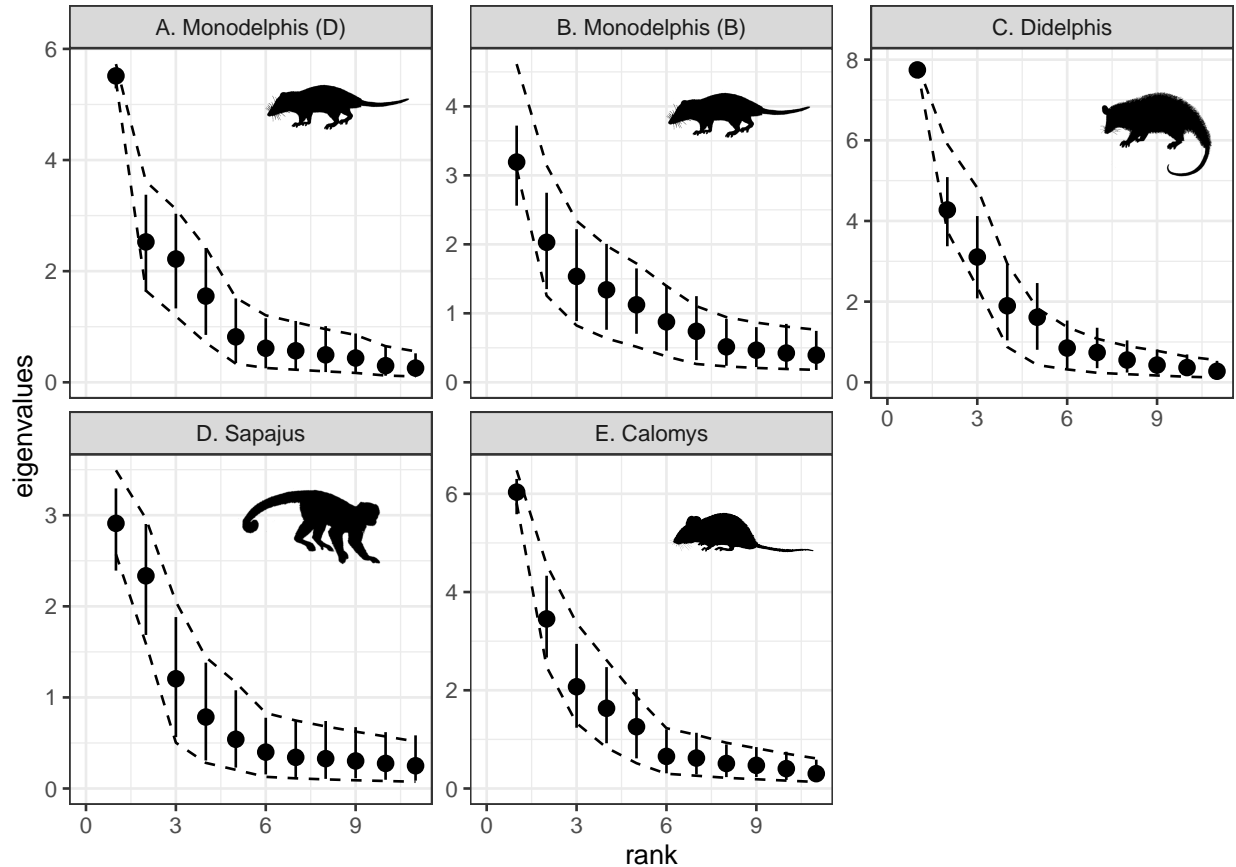


Figure 4: Distribution of the empirical (bars) and null (dashed lines) distributions of the eigenvalues of the Krzanowski Subspace Comparison for each ontogenetic series. Overlap between empirical and null eigenvalue distributions indicates that observed covariance matrices are as similar as matrices in which age-class was randomized across individuals. While not identical, this is evidence that observed matrices are compatible with a single underlying covariance structure across age classes.

342 comparisons involving poorly estimated matrices presenting lower RS values, which is expected  
343 given the contribution of noise to the covariance patterns added by sampling error. Nevertheless,  
344 even the comparisons involving these matrices are fairly high.

345

## Discussion

346 In this contribution, we have investigated how the covariance pattern of mammalian skull traits  
347 changes during the postnatal ontogeny in five ontogenetic series of four mammalian species,

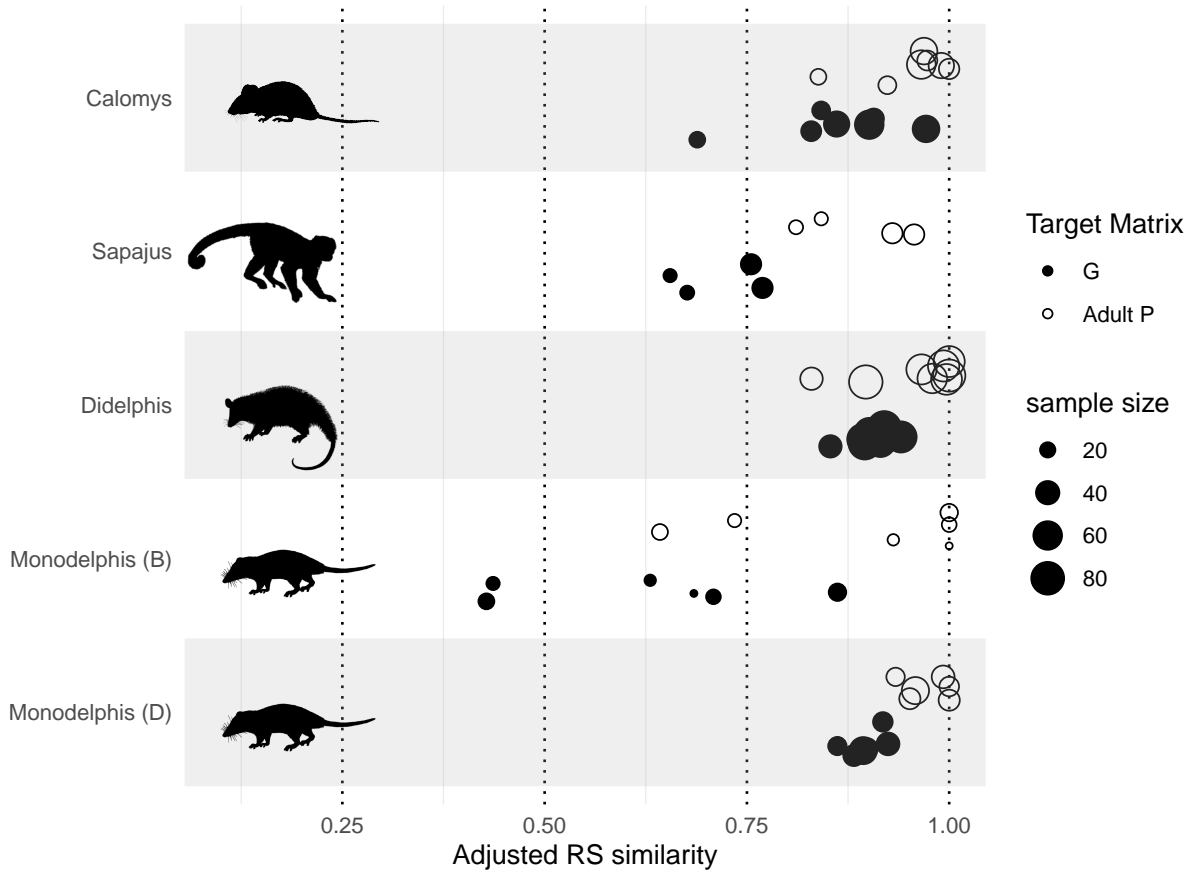


Figure 5: Distribution of adjusted Random Skewers similarity between age-specific covariance matrices and adult phenotypic matrix or a target additive genetic covariance matrix.

348 which show substantial life-history and pre and postnatal development differences (Smith, 1997).  
349 Covariance patterns from weaning onward are fairly stable within ontogenetic series (Figure 4,  
350 5), and these patterns are largely driven by the same processes governing the (co)inheritance of  
351 traits (Figure 5), which suggest that the Cheverud Conjecture holds for covariance patterns during  
352 all post-weaning development, not only for adults as previously reported (Akesson et al., 2007;  
353 Cheverud, 1988, 1996b; House and Simmons, 2005; Porto et al., 2009; Reusch and Blanckenhorn,  
354 1998; Roff, 1995). Furthermore, the extension of the Cheverud Conjecture throughout the ontogeny  
355 suggests that similar selective pressures operating on different life history stages will probably  
356 result in a similar evolutionary response.

357 One potential exception to this pattern is *Monodelphis* (B). While the KC failed to find any

358 significant difference between age classes, this ontogenetic series was the only case where a  
359 substantial part of the posterior distribution of eigenvalues of the common subspace matrix  
360 (**H**-matrix) fell outside the null distribution (Figure 4B, first eigenvalue). Furthermore, the leading  
361 axis of the PCoA is mainly associated with ontogenetic differences within *Monodelphis*, and  
362 Didelphimorphia to a lesser degree (Figure 3) and the RS showed differences during the lactation  
363 phase, at birth age classes d20 and d40 (Figure 5). At these early postnatal stages, covariance  
364 patterns were shown to be different to some extent from the patterns of additive genetic covariance  
365 as well (Figure 5). This suggests that at least for this group, the skull trait covariance is subject  
366 to changes during early stages of postnatal development, which stabilizes only around weaning.  
367 Even though our sample sizes at this early postnatal stage are among the lowest in our sample,  
368 making their matrices the worse estimates we have, these results seem to be at least in part  
369 real biological signals (Figure A6). Nevertheless, probably due to low sample sizes, specific  
370 investigation into how trait covariances are changing between age-classes are unfortunately  
371 inconclusive (Figure A7,A8).

372 In contrast, *Didelphis* during lactation (dental age class zero) presented similar covariance  
373 patterns with older dental age classes, but this result could be the consequence of sampling  
374 specimens based on dental age classes (Figure A9). Specifically, by pooling individuals with  
375 different absolute ages within the same class, one might be artificially inflating the effect of size,  
376 forcing eigenvectors to align themselves with those of latter stages, which are usually dominated  
377 by size variation. Consequently, in such cases, RS will detect high similarities between matrices  
378 (Porto et al., 2013; Rohlf, 2017). In fact, the leading eigenvector of the age class zero for *Didelphis*  
379 shows almost all loadings with the same signal, as expected for size (Jolicoeur, 1963), while  
380 the same is not true for age classes d20 and d40 of *Monodelphis* (B) (Figure A10). For placental  
381 mammals (*Sapajus* and *Calomys*), we do not have samples before weaning (Figure 2), so it is unclear  
382 if the same pattern observed on *Monodelphis* could be extended to all mammals. More studies  
383 focusing on earlier ontogenetic stages, and on larger samples based on birth age classes will be  
384 required to better understand this phenomenon.

385 At this point, we cannot further discuss potential changes in covariance patterns prior to

386 weaning, and we can only speculate on the reasons for the maintenance of covariance pattern  
387 from weaning onward. The mammalian postnatal ontogeny occurs over major life-history phases  
388 (Abdala et al., 2001; McManus, 1974; Nievelt and Smith, 2005) that may influence development  
389 (Atchley, 1984; Hallgrímsson et al., 2009; Sibly et al., 2014; Zelditch, 1988), such as lactation,  
390 beginning of solid food ingestion, and weaning. The postnatal stage is also characterized by  
391 several changes in the skull (Abdala et al., 2001; Flores et al., 2006; Zelditch et al., 1992), such as  
392 the faster growth of the viscerocranium in relation to the neurocranium, and the development  
393 of muscles of the masticatory apparatus to deal with solid food, which influences the growth of  
394 underlying bones (Kiliaridis, 1995). Nevertheless, most postnatal development is shaped by growth  
395 and muscle–bone interactions, which are relatively late developmental inputs (Hallgrímsson et al.,  
396 2009, 2007). Given that the covariance pattern observed in adult populations are the end result  
397 of several hierarchical developmental processes (Hallgrímsson et al., 2009, 2007), it is possible  
398 that events that occur later in development might have smaller effects on determining covariance  
399 patterns due to constraints imposed by early processes (Atchley, 1984) and thus may have limited  
400 influence over covariance patterns. Alternatively, these later stages can be shaping the covariance  
401 pattern, overwriting early developmental inputs (Hallgrímsson et al., 2009).

402 Irrespective of the reasons for the maintenance of covariance patterns from weaning onward,  
403 our findings have important implications for evolutionary, genetic, and ecological studies. We  
404 showed that during lactation covariance patterns may vary considerably, at least in marsupials,  
405 but that from weaning onward, covariance patterns become relatively stable. Thus, for specimens  
406 spanning from weaning to adulthood, selection operating on different postnatal ontogenetic stages  
407 might have similar consequences on the responses produced in terms of the pattern of changes in  
408 traits averages.

409 Given that during lactation individuals should be subjected to very different selective regimes  
410 than after weaning, our results are reassuring in that working with a single ontogenetic stage  
411 will not lead to misleading conclusions. We have sampled species that are distantly related and  
412 that show profoundly different pre- and postnatal developmental strategies. While future studies  
413 will no doubt be important to reevaluate this conclusion, we suggest that the broad taxonomic

414 and life history range encompassed by our sample implies that our results can be extended to all  
415 therian mammals. Given that adult covariance matrices tend to be very similar among closely  
416 related groups (Hubbe et al., 2016; Machado et al., 2018; Marroig and Cheverud, 2001; Rossoni  
417 et al., 2019; Shirai and Marroig, 2010), there is little reason to believe that evolutionary lineages  
418 with more similar developmental patterns, such as within placentals or marsupials, will have a  
419 higher influence of developmental changes over covariance patterns.

## 420 **Conclusion**

421 Our findings suggest that for mammals the study of the life-history changes and evolutionary  
422 consequences under selection (or genetic drift) is much facilitated by shared and common co-  
423 variance patterns among traits during most of postnatal ontogeny. Thus, even though selection  
424 might be operating in different directions during most of postnatal ontogeny, due to differences in  
425 life-history phases and fitness components, the net response to such pressures will probably not  
426 be biased by differences in the covariance pattern during the postnatal ontogeny.

427 While our findings support using a single weaning-onward ontogenetic stage in the investiga-  
428 tion of selective pressures and evolutionary responses, they also highlight the need for a more  
429 comprehensive understanding of how covariances changes between birth and weaning. In addi-  
430 tion, it is important to better understand species life histories to evaluate when and how selection  
431 is operating, selective explanations inferred from adult morphologies might be a consequence  
432 of selection operating on other life stages. This is particularly relevant if species show relatively  
433 drastic change in some ecological aspect during ontogeny [e.g., Drago et al. (2009); Tanner et al.  
434 (2010)]. Lastly, a full account of how changes in selective pressures during ontogeny can impact  
435 the response to selection would require considering the covariances for the same trait across  
436 ontogenetic stages as well. This requires longitudinal morphological data on the animals, which  
437 is a challenging but interesting venue for future research.

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## Appendix A: Supplementary Tables and Figures

Table A1: Non-parametric RRPP MANOVA results for the effect of size (measured as the geometric mean of traits) and species identity on trait variation for the *Sapajus* sample. Df- degrees of freedom. SS- Sum of squares. MS- Mean squares. Rsq- coefficient of determination. F- F statistic. Z- z-transformed effect sizes. Pr(>F)- P-value based on 1000 permutations. \*- effects considered significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

	Df	SS	MS	Rsq	F	Z	Pr(>F)
<i>Sapajus</i>							
size	1	35377.587	35377.587	0.527	368.774	10.292	0.001*
species	1	55.970	55.970	0.001	0.581	-0.630	0.747
size:species	1	63.965	63.965	0.001	0.668	-0.359	0.645
Residuals	220	21105.245	95.933	0.314			
Total	223	67111.417					

Table A2: Sample sizes (Females/Males) for each age class and ontogenetic series.

Species	Dental age class								Adults		
	Zero	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven			
<i>Didelphis</i>	17/20	37/46	36/31	25/39	36/36	39/31	30/41	34/43	103/115		
<i>Monodelphis</i> (D)			15/18	29/25	18/20	15/14	16/17	10/16	41/47		
<i>Sapajus</i>		05/13	08/09	15/16		10/21	57/70		57/70		
	Birth age class										
	20	30	40	50	70	100	150	200	300	400	Adults
<i>Monodelphis</i> (B)	13/08		09/08		06/09		12/12		08/05	10/09	18/14
<i>Calomys</i>	14/07	14/11		25/27		35/25		29/18	16/14	12/19	92/76



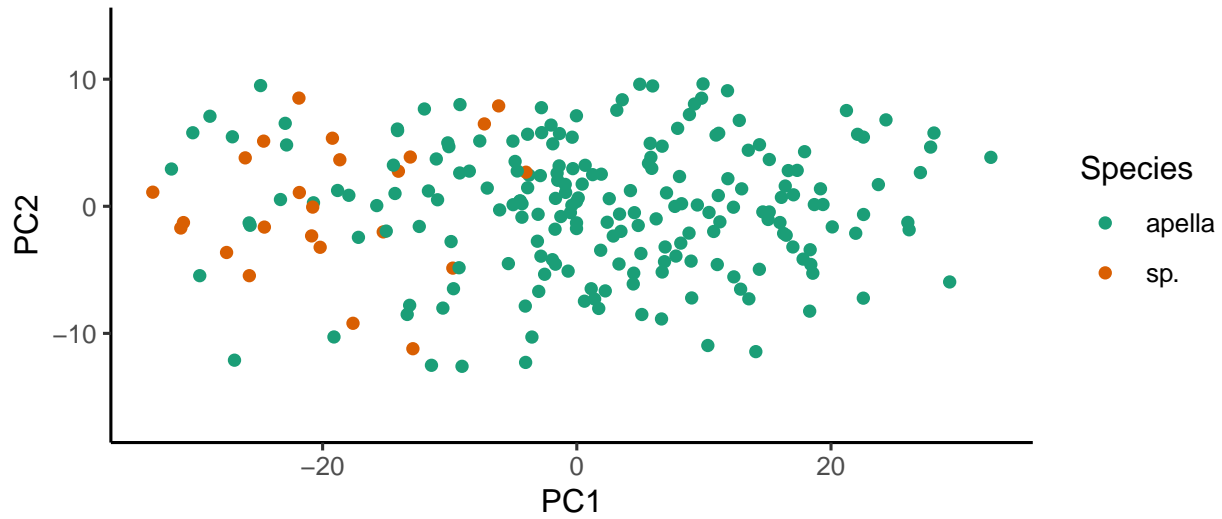


Figure A1: Principal component analysis for the *Sapajus* dataset, including specimens with unknown species.

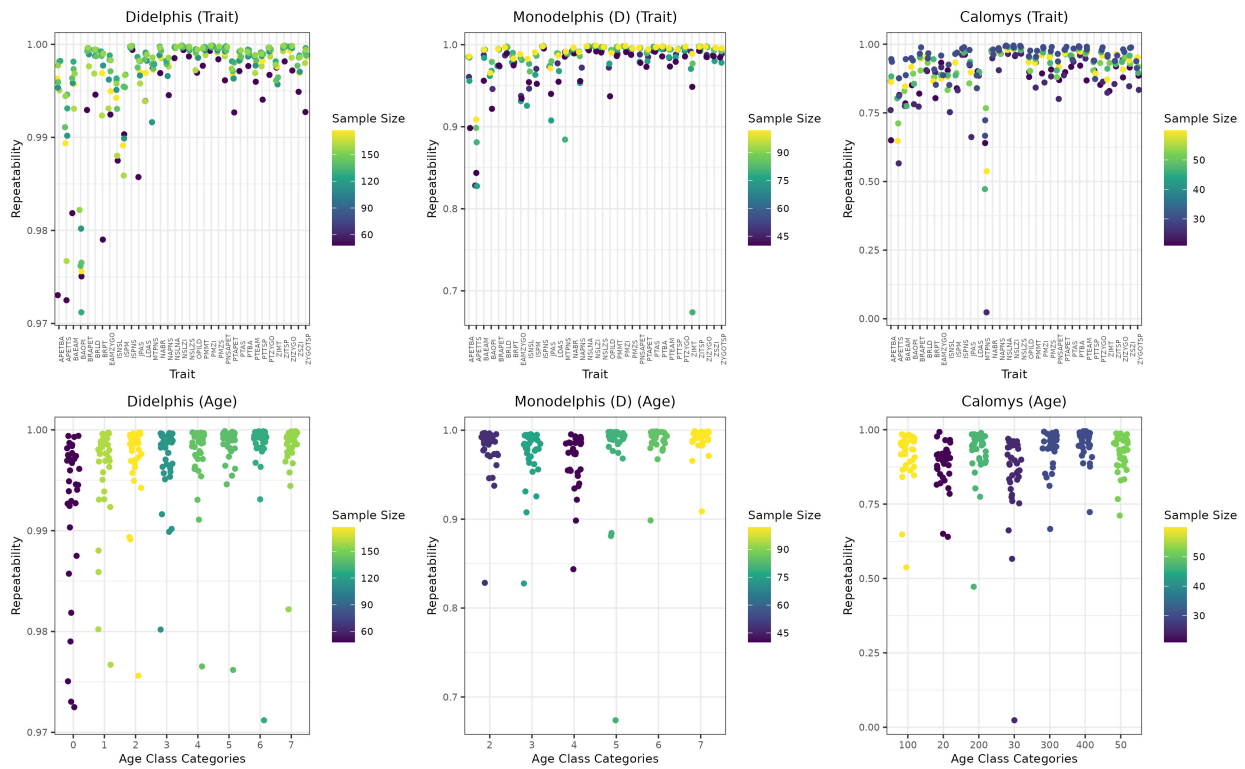


Figure A2: Repeatabilities for all measured traits for *Didelphis*, *Monodelphis* (D) and *Calomys* separated by trait, and age classes.

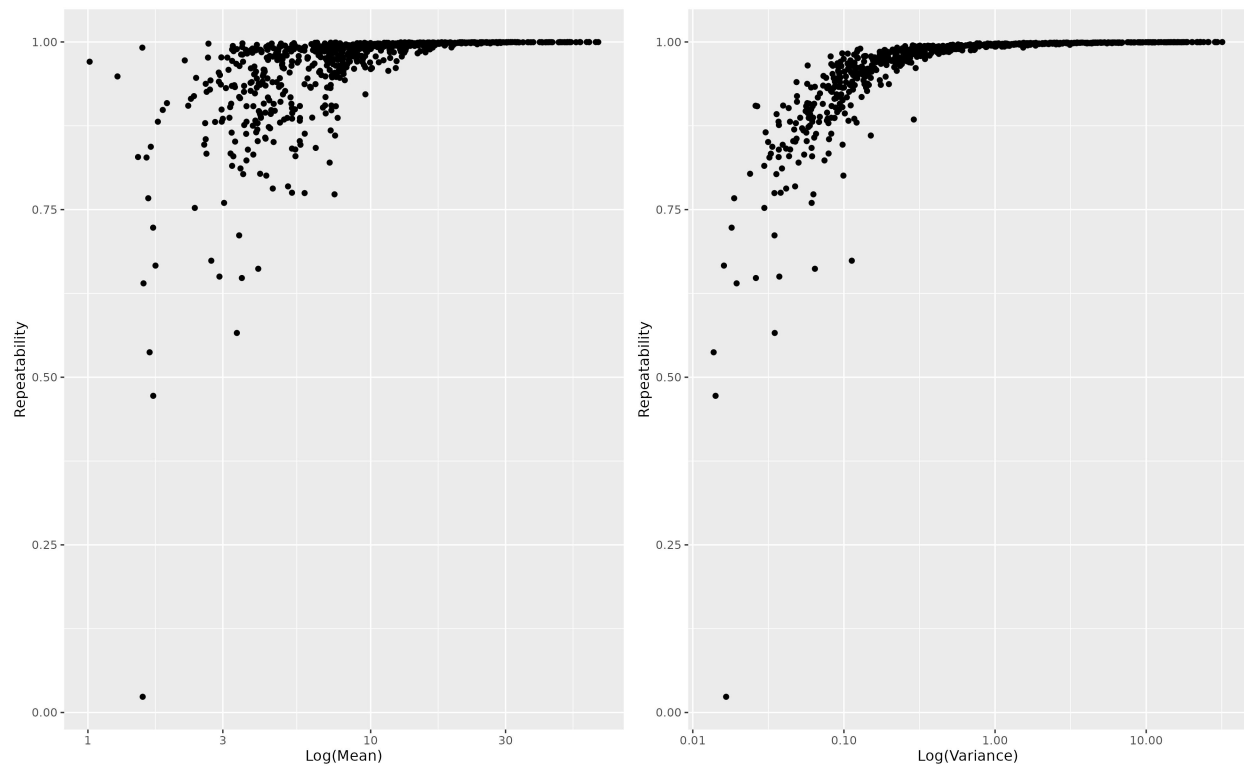


Figure A3: Scatterplot between repeatabilities for all traits, age classes, and ontogenetic series and respective traits' mean (left) and variance (right).

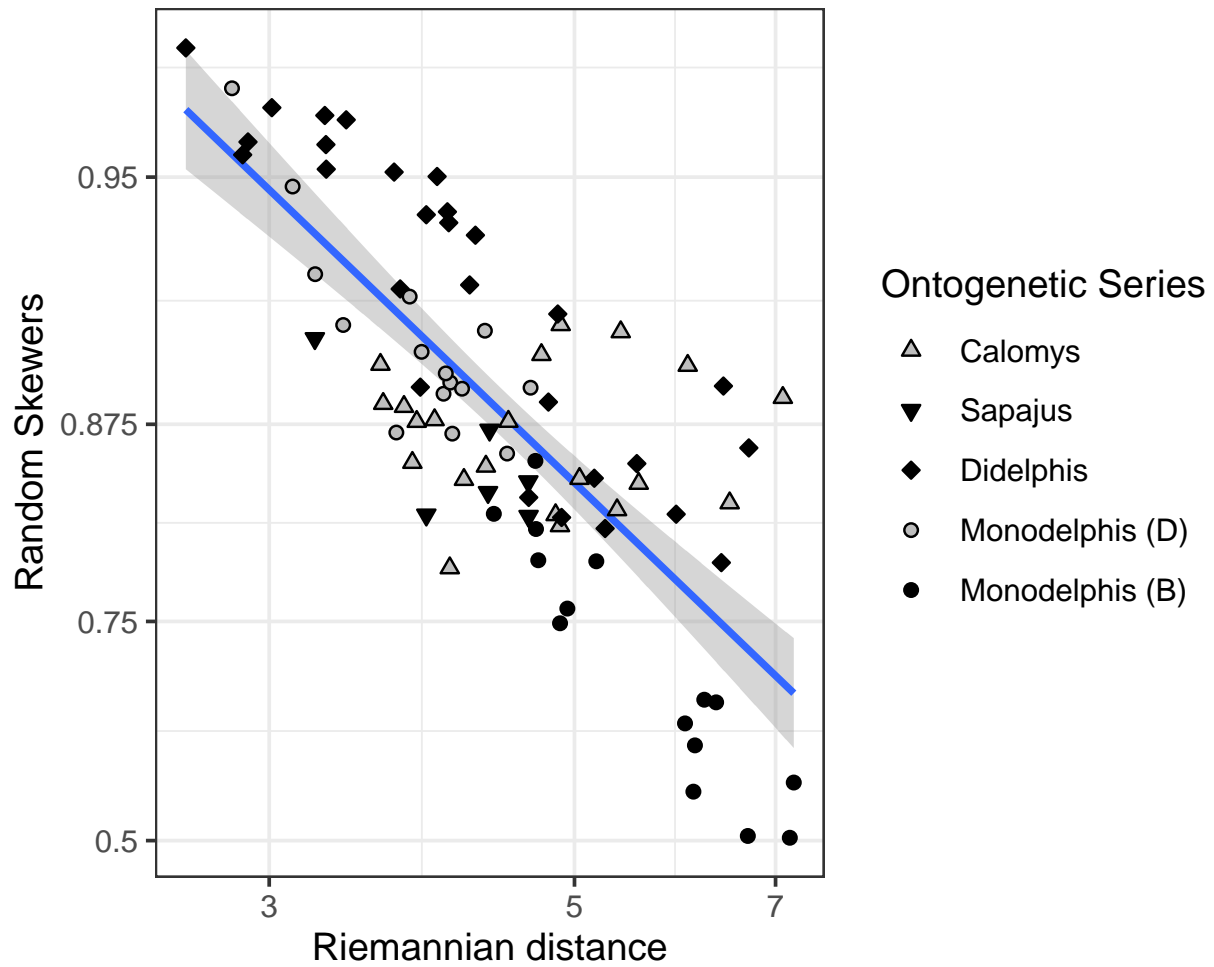


Figure A4: Relationship between Riemannian distance and uncorrected Random Skewers between age classes within the ontogenetic series.

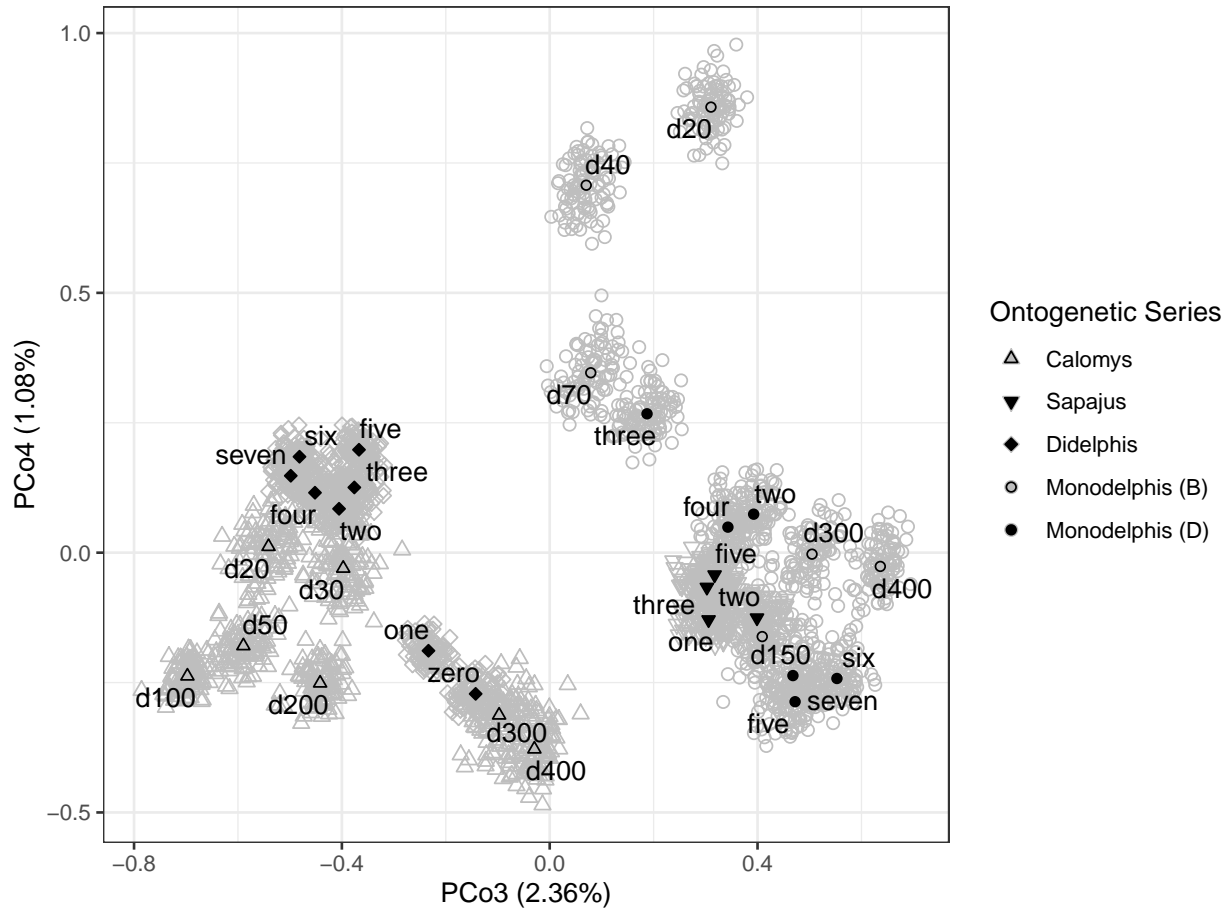


Figure A5: Distribution of age-specific **P**-matrices on the third and fourth principal coordinates based on the Riemannian distance. Black symbols represent the median of each posterior distribution of age-specific **P**-matrices within each ontogenetic series. Gray symbols represent 100 matrices from the posterior distribution of age-specific **P**-matrices within each ontogenetic series. The remaining PCoAs explained < 1% and are not figured.

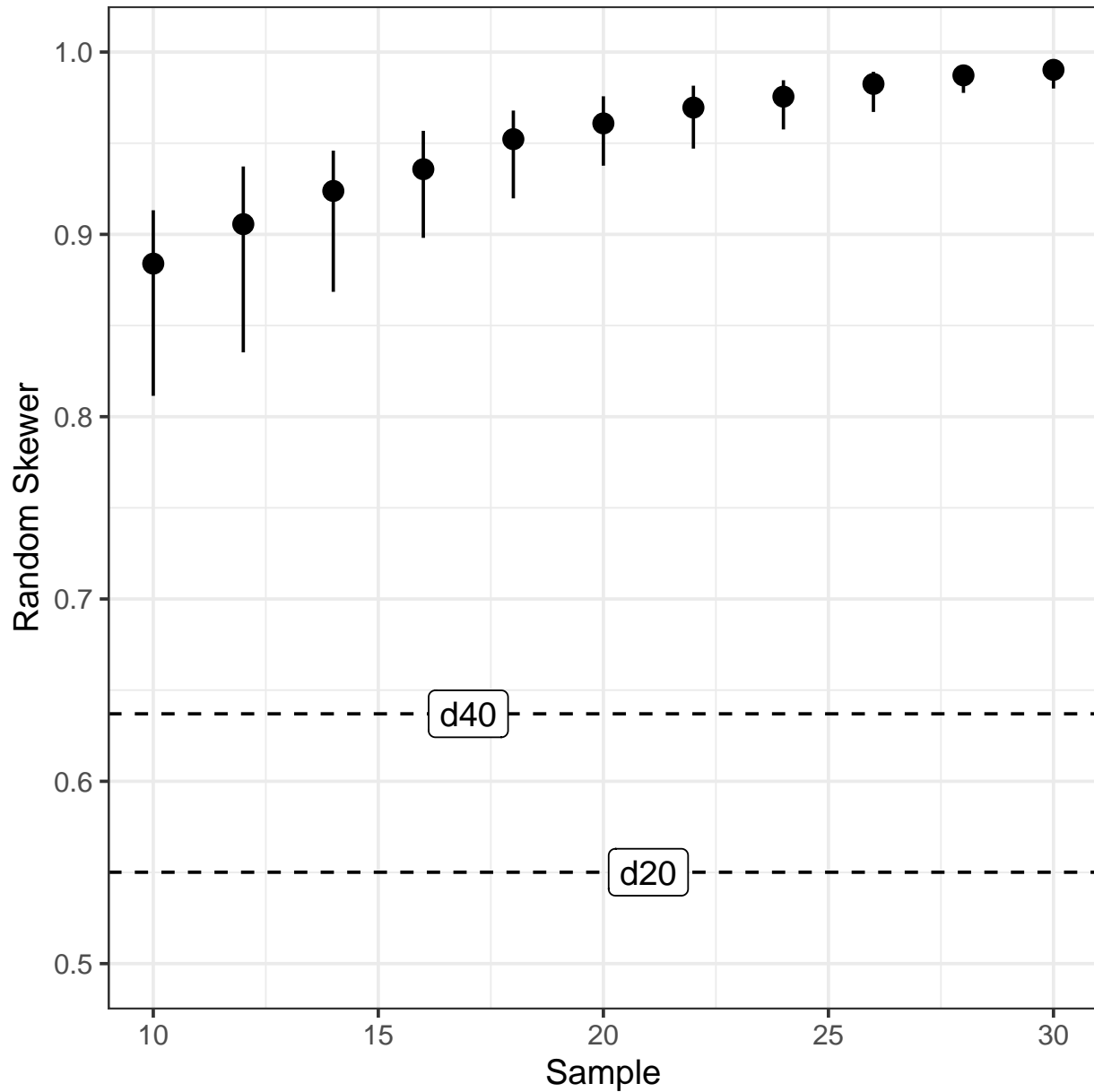


Figure A6: Rarefaction analysis of the *Monodelphis* (B) median of the posterior distribution for the adult  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrix. Solid lines represent 95% confidence intervals for the Random Skewer statistics based on the resampling of the full *Monodelphis* (B) posterior median adult matrix using different sample sizes. Dashed lines represent the comparisons of the two posterior median younger age-classes (20 and 40)  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrices against the posterior median adult  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrix. If sample size was the main cause for differences in  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrices patterns, we would expect that the Random Skewers value for  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrices between birth age classes 20 or 40 and adult would fall within the confidence interval. Since this is not the case, at least part of the observed results are not sampling artifacts.

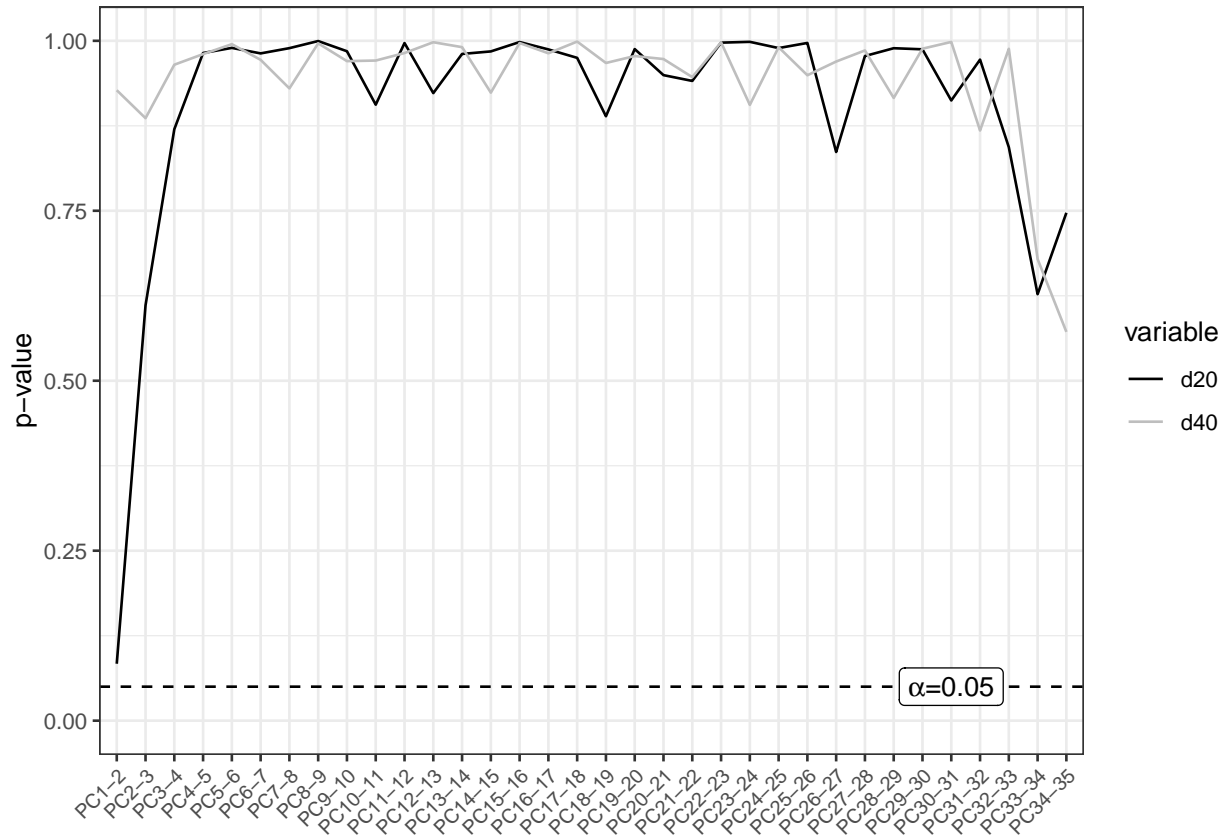


Figure A7: P-values for comparison of sequential eigenvectors in a relative eigenanalysis of the posterior median d20 and d40  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrices against the posterior median adult  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrix for *Monodelphis* (B). The relative eigenanalysis is calculated as the eigendecomposition of the  $\Sigma_B^{-1}\Sigma_A$ , where  $\Sigma_A$  is a covariance matrix of interest (the younger age-class matrices) and  $\Sigma_B$  is a target matrix (the adult matrix in this case) (Bookstein and Mitteroecker, 2014). The eigenvectors of  $\Sigma_B^{-1}\Sigma_A$  are the linear combination of traits that most differ between the two matrices. The leading principal components (PCs) are the directions in which  $\Sigma_A$  contains more variation than  $\Sigma_B$ , and the last PCs are the ones in which  $\Sigma_A$  contains less variation than  $\Sigma_B$ . The middle PCs are thought to be the ones in which  $\Sigma_A$  and  $\Sigma_B$  are most similar. We employed a test to evaluate if sequential eigenvalues were significantly different from each other (Le Maître and Mitteroecker, 2019), and the p-values are displayed above. No PC was considered clearly divergent from the following one, hindering their interpretation.

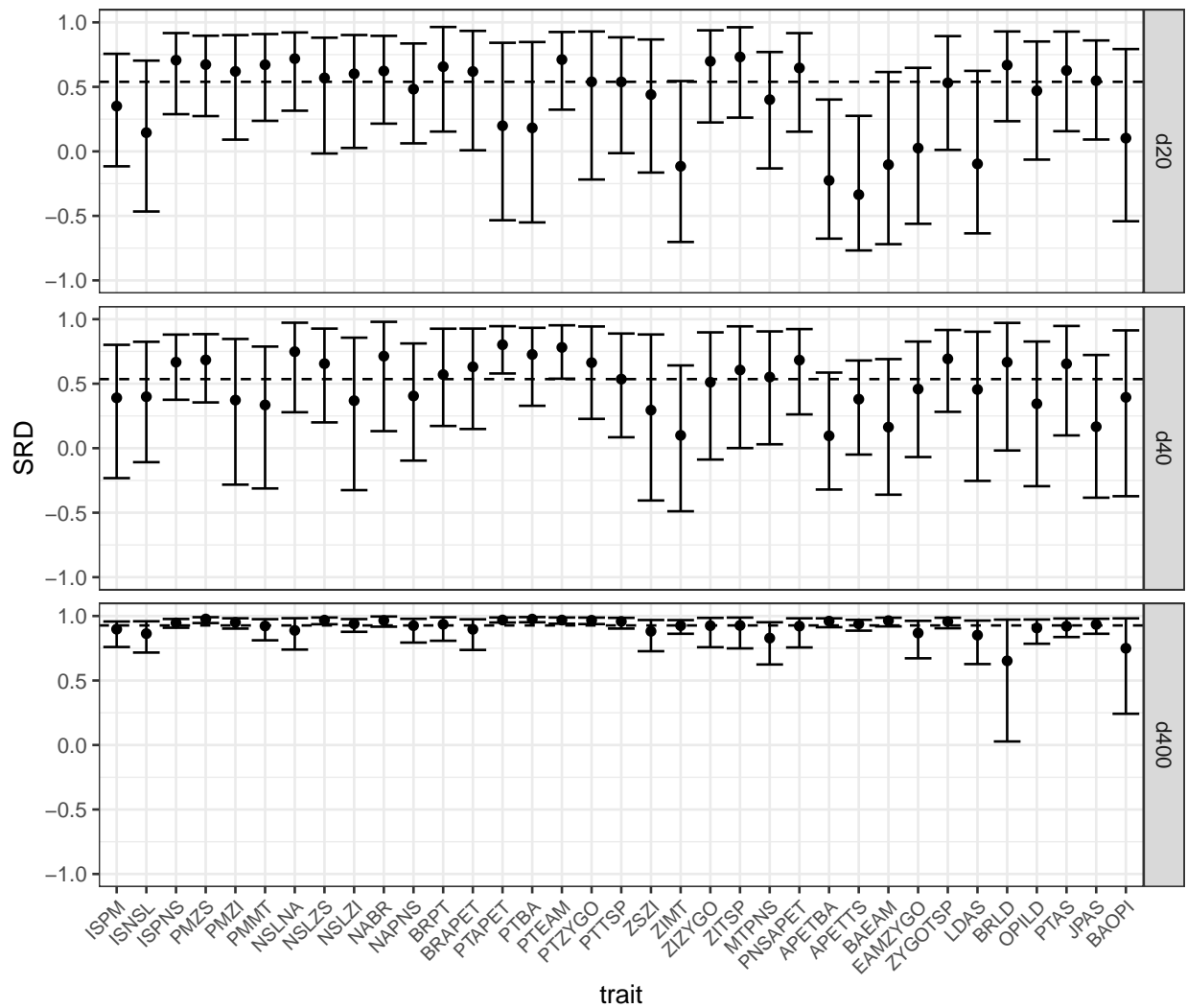


Figure A8: Selection response decomposition analysis (SRD) comparing posterior distribution median early (d20, d40) and late (d400) developmental stage **P**-matrices to the adult posterior median **P**-matrix for *Monodelphis* (B). SRD decomposes the Random Skewers equation into direct and indirect effects (Marroig et al., 2011). Traits with higher SRD values are responding similarly among matrices, while lower values mean that traits are responding differently. Confidence intervals are generated through 1000 random vectors, and the dashed line is the posterior median SRD value (a value similar to the uncorrected RS value). The SRD values for the d400 age class are given for comparison, showing the SRD profile for similar matrices. Both d20 and d40 differ from the adult matrix, but the dissimilarity do not seem to be restricted to a specific set of traits.

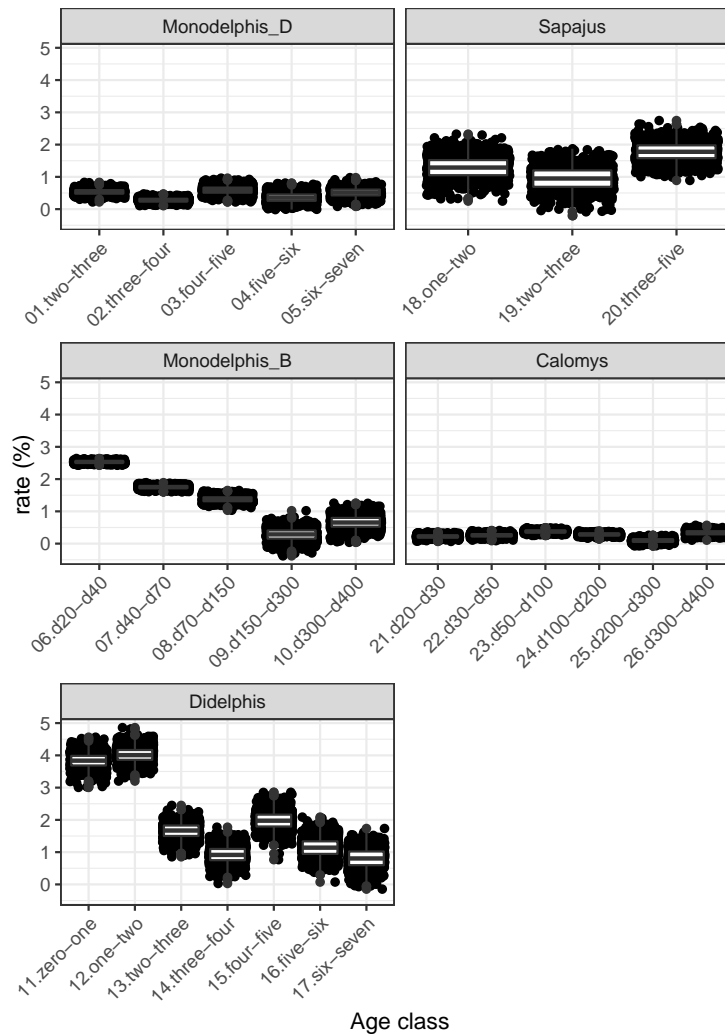


Figure A9: Growth rate for each ontogenetic series between contiguous age classes. Growth rate was calculated as the percentage increase in the average geometric mean of all cranial traits one age to the next. Distributions were generated by a Monte-Carlo resampling (1,000 times). Note that *Monodelphis* (B) and *Didelphis* younger age classes are growing faster than the other age classes. The fact that covariance patterns for *Monodelphis* (B) during lactation show a different pattern than older age classes while *Didelphis* do not, may be explained by differences in sampling specimens based on birth age classes and dental age classes, respectively. Dental age classes combine in a single age class specimens with different absolute ages (Richtsmeier et al., 1993; van Nievelt and Smith, 2005). This may inflate the total amount of morphological variance explained by size, particularly for dental age classes in which specimens are experiencing higher growth rates, since relatively small variation in absolute ages within the dental age class will result in relatively large variance in size. Since size is a major component of variance in Didelphimorphia skull traits, (Shirai and Marroig, 2010), the overestimation of size influence in younger dental age classes will lead to more similar covariance patterns between them and the older ones.



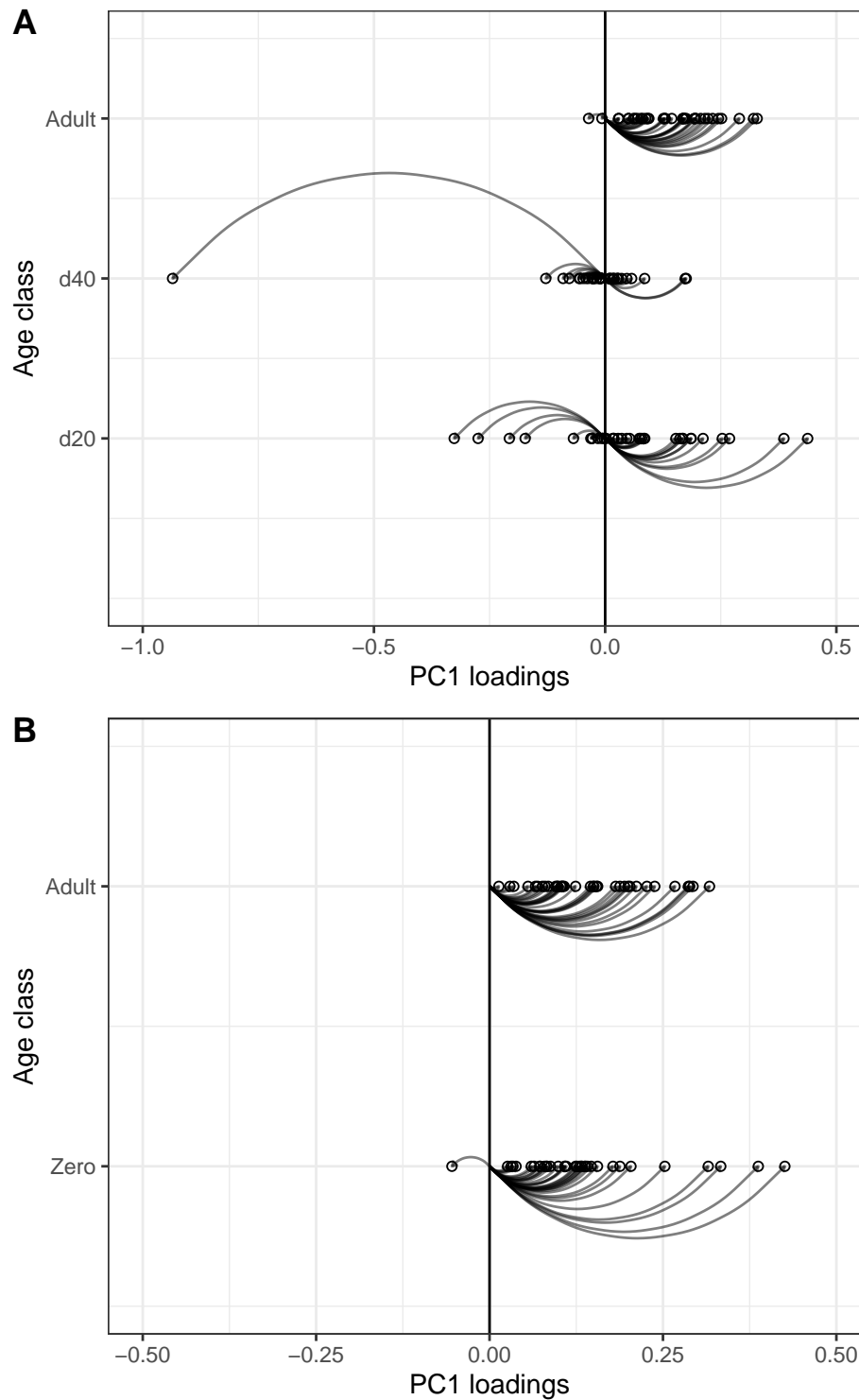


Figure A10: Loadings for the principal component 1 for both median of the posterior distribution for adults and the younger age-classes  $\mathbf{P}$ -matrices for *Monodelphis* (A) and *Didelphis* (B).