Complex population structure and haplotype patterns in Western Europe honey bee from

sequencing a large panel of haploid drones

Short title: Haploid drone sequence for population and genome analysis

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Abstract

Honey bee subspecies originate from specific geographic areas in Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

The interest of beekeepers in specific phenotypes has led them to import subspecies to regions outside

of their original range. The resulting admixture complicates population genetics analyses and

populations stratification can be a major problem for association studies. As a typical example, the

case of the French population is studied here. We sequenced 870 haploid drones for SNP detection and

identified nine genetic backgrounds in 629 samples. Five correspond to subspecies, two to isolated

populations and two to human-mediated population management. We also highlight several large

haplotype blocks, some of which coinciding with the position of centromeres. The largest is 3.6 Mb

long on chromosome 11, representing 1.6 % of the genome and has two major haplotypes,

corresponding to the two dominant genetic background identified.

Introduction

The honey bee *Apis mellifera* comprises more than 30 subspecies, each of which defined according to

morphological, behavioural, physiological and ecological characteristics suited to their local habitat

[1–4]. European subspecies broadly group into two evolutionary lineages representing on one side

western and northern Europe (M lineage), and on the other eastern and southern Europe (C lineage)

[1]. The two European M lineage subspecies are the Dark European or 'black' honey bee *A. m.*

mellifera and the Iberian honey bee *A. m. iberiensis*, while the C lineage subspecies include amongst

others, the Italian honey bee *A. m. ligustica* and the Carniolan honey bee *A. m. carnica* [4]. Prior to the

involvement of apiarists, the Alps are thought to have presented a natural barrier between *A. m.*

mellifera to the north, *A. m. carnica* to the southeast, and *A. m. ligustica* to the southwest [5]. Before

the turn of the 19th century, French honey bee populations were solely represented by the native *A. m.*

mellifera, for which regional ecotypes have previously been described [6,7]. However, during the 20th

century much interest arose amongst apiarists in developing hybrids between the endemic *A. m.*

mellifera and other subspecies including *A. m. ligustica*, *A. m. carnica* and the Caucasian *A. m.*

caucasia from Georgia [1,8,9]. Apiarists found the hybrids to perform better with regards to the

production of honey and royal jelly than the native *A. m. mellifera*, spurring further interest in these

subspecies which were also reported to be more docile and easier to manage [1]. *A. m. ligustica* is a

very popular subspecies worldwide amongst apiarists because of its adaptability to a wide range of

climatic conditions, its ability to store large quantities of honey without swarming, and its docile

nature if disturbed [10]. *A. m. ligustica* queens are also frequently exported worldwide, and most of the

honey bees imported during the last centuries into the New World were also of Italian origin [10,11].

Apiculture involving *A. m. carnica*, is also very popular among apiarists [12]. *A. m. carnica* became

increasingly popular for further selection throughout central and western Europe [13,14] on account of

their calm temperament and higher honey yield compared to *A. m. mellifera* [1], to the point where *A.*

carnica almost replaced entirely *A.m. mellifera* in Germany [15]. *A. m. caucasia* is a subspecies that

was also imported to France, to generate *A. m. ligustica* x *A. m. caucasia* hybrids, that were

themselves crossed naturally to the *A. m. mellifera* present in the local environment. Another popular

hybrid used in apiculture is the so-called Buckfast, created and bred by Brother Adam of Buckfast

Abbey in England [16]. Following the extensive imports of queens from "exotic" subspecies, the

genetic makeup of honey bee populations in France was unclear. The genetic pollution of local

populations soon emerged with clear phenotypic consequences such as changes in the colour of the

cuticle [17]. The increasing admixture of divergent honey bee subspecies has fostered conservationists

to protect the native genetic diversity of regional ecotypes, such as *A. m. iberiensis* in Spain and

Portugal, *A. m. ligustica* and *A. m. siciliana* in Italy (Fontana et al., 2018), and *A. m. mellifera* in

France, Scotland and Switzerland amongst other places [18–22].

As a result of the different breeding practices, the necessity for a study targeted towards *A. m.*

mellifera conservatories and French bee breeders specialized in rearing and selling queens arose and in

this context the genomic diversity project "SeqApiPop" was started. Within this project, samples from

French conservatories, from individual French breeders and breeder organisations were analysed,

including Buckfast samples. Traditionally, such wide diversity studies have been performed using a

small number of molecular markers such as microsatellites [23] or limited sets of single-nucleotide

polymorphisms (SNPs) [24–27], enabling population stratification, introgression and admixture levels

to be characterized. However, to understand complex population admixture events, as has happened

for the managed honey bee populations in France and elsewhere, or to identify signatures of natural

[25,28–30] or artificial [31,32] selection in the genome, a much higher density of markers is required.

As no high-density SNP chip was available for honey bee at the onset of the project, and as the honey

bee genome is very small compared to most animal genomes, being only 226.5 Mb long [33], we

employed a whole-genome sequencing approach [28,34]. Although the sequencing of honey bee

workers has proved successful for detecting selection signatures or admixture events [28,34–36],

analysing haploid drones allows to sequence at a lower depth and with greater accuracy in variant

detection [20,29,31]. An additional advantage of sequencing haploids is that the alleles are phased,

which is invaluable for studies investigating genome dynamics such as recombination hotspots and

haplotype structure. Although some insights into recombination patterns in the honey bee have been

made through the analysis of drones from individual colonies [37,38] and Linkage Disequilibrium

(LD)-based approaches [39,40], a deep understanding of the recombination landscape, essential for

fine-scale genetic analyses, requires hundreds of phased genomes. Such 'HapMap' projects have been

conducted in humans and cattle, initially using SNP arrays [41,42] and more recently by whole-

genome sequencing as in the "1000 genome" projects [43,44].

Therefore, as a first step towards a deep understanding of French and Western European managed

honey bee populations and of their genome dynamics, we undertook the sequencing of a large dataset

of haploid drones. This set is composed of samples from French conservatories or commercial

breeders in addition to samples from several European countries each representing potentially pure *A.*

m. ligustica, *A. m. carnica, A. m. mellifera* and *A. m. caucasia* populations typically imported by

French breeders. Finally, *A. m. iberiensis*, the Iberian subspecies only separated from the native

French *A. m. mellifera* by the natural barrier of the Pyrenees was also studied. In total, 870 samples

were sequenced for SNP detection and 629 were used for a detailed genetic analysis of present-day

honey bee populations in France.

Methods

Sampling and sequencing

For the population genomics analyses, one individual drone per colony was sampled before

emergence, from colonies throughout France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the UK, Slovenia,

Poland, Denmark, China and from a French beekeeper having imported queens from Georgia,

amounting to a total of 642 samples (Supplementary figure 1). To improve the robustness of the

primary SNP detection and filtering steps, additional samples of similar genetic backgrounds from two

other projects in progress were used. These included 198 samples from two other projects and 30

colony duplicates from the present population genomics project. Thus, although 642 colonies were

included for population genomics analyses, in total 870 samples were used for SNP detection

(supplementary table 1).

DNA was extracted from the thorax of adult bees or from pupae as described in Wragg *et al.* (2016).

Briefly, drones were sampled at either the pupae/nymph or larval stage and stored in absolute ethanol

at -20°C. DNA was extracted from the thorax or from diced whole larvae. Tissue fragments were first

incubated 3 hours at 56° in 1 mL of a solution containing 4 M urea, 10 mM Tris-HCl pH 8, 300 mM

NaCl, 1% SDS, 10 mM EDTA and 0.25 mg proteinase K, after which 0.25 mg proteinase K was

added for an incubation over-night at 37°C. Four hundred μL of a saturated NaCl solution was added

to the incubation, which was then gently mixed and centrifuged for 30 minutes at 15000 g. The

supernatant was treated for 5 minutes at room temperature with RNAse (Qiagen) and then centrifuged

again, after which the DNA in the supernatant was precipitated with absolute ethanol and re-suspended

in 100 μL TE 10/0.1. Pair-end sequencing was performed on Illumina[TM] HiSeq 2000, 2500 and 3000

sequencing machines with 20 samples per lane, or on a NovaSeq machine with 96 samples per lane,

following the manufacturer's protocols for library reparations.

Mapping and genotype calling

Sequencing reads were mapped to the reference genome Amel_HAv3.1 [33] using BWA-MEM

(v0.7.15) [45], and duplicates marked with Picard (v2.18.2;) (http://broadinstitute.github.io/picard/).

Libraries that were sequenced in multiple runs were merged with Samtools (v1.8) merge [46] prior to

marking duplicates. Local realignment and base quality score recalibration (BQSR) were performed

using GATK (v4.1.2.) [47], using single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) called with GATK

HaplotypeCaller as covariates for BQSR. Each drone was processed with the pipeline independently,

and genotyped independently with HaplotypeCaller. Although the drones sequenced are haploid,

variant calling was performed using a diploid model to allow the detection and removal of SNPs that

called heterozygous genotypes in > 1% of samples, which might have arisen for example as a result of

short-tandem repeats repeats and could highlight Copy Number Variants on the genome. Individual

gVCF files were combined with CombineGVCFs, and then jointly genotyped with GenotypeGVCFs,

resulting in a single VCF file for the 870 samples containing 14.990.574 raw variants detected,

10.601.454 potential SNPs were retained once Indels were removed with GATK SelectVariants.

Sequencing depth was estimated using Mosdepth [48]. Further details are given in supplementary file

SeqApiPop_1_MappingCalling.pdf.

Quality filters on SNPs

The first run of filters concerns technical issues related to the sequencing and alignment steps and

were therefore used for the total dataset of 870 samples, to benefit from its large size for SNP

detection and validation (supplementary figure 2). These were (i) strand biases and mapping quality

metrics (SOR ≥ 3; FS ≤ 60 and MQ ≥ 40), (ii) genotyping quality metrics (QUAL > 200 and QD < 20)

and (iii) individual SNP genotyping metrics (heterozygote calls < 1%; missing genotypes < 5%, allele

number < 4 and genotypes having individual GQ < 10 < 20%). Distribution and ECDF plots of values

for all the filters used on the dataset were used to select thresholds and are shown in supplementary

file SeqApiPop_2_VcfCleanup.pdf.

Haplotype blocks detection, LD pruning, PCA, Admixture, Treemix, RFMix

Haplotype blocks were detected in Plink (v1.9) [49] using the blocks function, "--blocks no-pheno-req

no-small-max-span", with the parameter "--blocks-max-kb 5000". LD pruning was performed in Plink

with the indep-pairwise function. Principal component analyses were performed in Plink and the

contribution of individual SNPs to the principal components were estimated using smartpca from the

eigensoft package v7.2.1. Further details are given in supplementary file

SeqApiPop_3_LDfilterAndPCAs.pdf. Admixture analysis was performed with the program Admixture

v 1.3.0 [50], with values of K ranging from 2 to 16. Fifty runs were performed each time using a

unique random seed. The Pong software [51] was used for aligning runs with different K values and

for grouping results from runs into clustering modes, setting the similarity threshold to -s = 0.98.

Further details are given in supplementary file SeqApiPop_4_Admixture.pdf. Population migration

analysis was performed with TreeMix [52], with the option for grouping SNPs set to -k=500, testing

between 0 and 9 migrations and performing 100 runs per migration with a unique random seed. The

optimum number of migrations was estimated with the R package OptM (Fitak, R. R.:

https://github.com/cran/OptM) using the Evanno method provided [53]. Tree summaries for the 100

runs per migration tested were performed with DendroPy [54] and drawn with FigTree v1.4.4

(http://tree.bio.ed.ac.uk/software/figtree/). Further details are given in supplementary file

SeqApiPop_5_TreeMix.pdf. Local ancestry inference and positioning of haplotype switches were

performed with RFMix v2.03-r0 [55]. Three main genetic backgrounds were considered for this

analysis, corresponding to the three major groups highlighted in the PCA analysis.

Reference samples were selected as having > 95 % pure background. Before performing the RFMix

analysis, the vcf files were phased with shapeit.v2.904 [56]. RFMIX was run using genetic maps

generated from the data of Liu et al. [37]. Briefly, reads from the project SRP043350 were retrieved

from Short Read Archive (SRA) (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sra), aligned to the reference genome

for SNP detection and recombinants were detected with the custom script find_crossing_overs.py to

produce a genetic map. Further details on the RFMix analysis are given in supplementary file

SeqApiPop_6_RFMix.pdf.

Results

Sequencing and genotyping

Sequencing of the honey bee drones for the SeqApiPop diversity project began in 2014 on Illumina

HiSeq instruments and some of the first samples had such low coverage that a second run (or even

three in the case of OUE8) sequencing was performed. For these samples, the resulting BAM files

were merged prior to variant calling. Only four samples of the diversity project were sequenced on

Novaseq instruments, for which higher sequencing depths were achieved. Therefore, to improve the

robustness of the SNP detection pipeline, we decided to add drone genome sequences from other

ongoing subsequent projects using the same genetic types, that were produced with Novaseq

instruments. Samples sequenced with the HiSeq and NovaSeq instruments have sequencing depths of

12.5 ± 6.1 and 33.5 ± 10.2 respectively (Supplementary Table ST1, Supplementary figures 3 and 4).

Genotyping the whole dataset of 870 drones with the GATK pipeline allowed the detection of

10,601,454 raw SNPs (supplementary figure 2). Results of the subsequent filtering steps are shown in

the Venn diagrams in supplementary figures 5, 6 and 7. A total of 7,023,976 high-quality SNPs

remained after filtering. The 198 samples from the other projects and 30 within-colony duplicate

samples from the present diversity project were removed from the dataset for downstream analyses.

Although a filter on genotyping rate ≥ 95% was applied in the primary filtering steps, the final filter on

heterozygote calls was set to keep SNPs with up to 1% of heterozygote samples, and these remaining

heterozygous genotypes were set to missing (supplementary figure 2). After this, a final filter on

missing data in samples was applied and 15 samples were removed due to the fraction of missing

genotypes exceeding 10 %. The ultimate diversity dataset comprised 629 drones (supplementary table

1) and 7,012,891 SNPs, and was used for all subsequent analyses unless stated otherwise.

Contribution of SNPs to the variance in PCAs: detection of large haplotype blocks

Principal component analysis was performed on the 629 samples and 7 million SNPs, retaining 20

eigenvectors, resulting in clear differentiation of three groups of samples. The first principal

component, representing 47.4 % of the total variance over the 20 dimensions estimated, broadly

differentiates M lineage bees, *A. m. mellifera* and *A. m. iberiensis*, from the *A. m. ligustica, A. m.*

carnica and *A. m. caucasia* bees. The second principal component, representing 13.8 % of the

variance, separates the O lineage *A. m. caucasia* bees from the C lineage *A. m. ligustica* and *A. m.*

carnica bees (supplementary figure 8). The remaining principal components each represent 5.2 % or

less of the variance (ean = 2.1 %). When looking at the individual contributions of SNPs to the

variance, we can see that only a very small proportion of the ~7 million markers contribute

significantly to PC1 (red lines on supplementary figure 9) and that this proportion is even much

smaller for PCs 2 and 3. Two reasons for such a limited contribution to the variance of the majority of

markers is the low informativity of markers of low minor allele frequency and the redundancy of

markers that are in strong linkage disequilibrium (LD). Therefore, to thin the dataset, we tested the

effect of several minor allele frequency (MAF) filters and chose the most pertinent one for subsequent

testing of various LD pruning values. The effects of these filters were estimated by inspecting the

contributions of the SNPs to the principal components. The MAF filters tested showed clearly that

datasets containing only SNPs with MAF > 0.01 or MAF > 0.05 are sufficient to allow a higher

proportion of markers contributing to the PCs, with a notable increase of SNPs contributing to PC2

and PC3 (supplementary figure 9). To avoid losing too many potential population-specific markers

present at low frequency in the data, we chose to use the lowest MAF threshold tested, leaving a

dataset of 3,285,296 SNPs having MAF > 0.01 for subsequent analyses. On inspecting the

contributions of individual SNPs to principal components along the genome, a striking feature we

observe is that for several large chromosomal regions, five of which being larger than 1 Mb, most

SNPs make a significant contribution, with the observed values being amongst the strongest observed

genome-wide (Supplementary Figures 10 and 11). Such observations suggest the existence of large

haplotype blocks driving differentiation along principal components, in particular principal component

1. To explore this further we compared these genomic regions to the haplotype blocks detected with

Plink (supplementary table 2) revealing significant overlap by visual inspection (Supplementary

Figure 12). The largest of these blocks spans 3.6 Mb on chromosome 11, which is close to 1.6 % of

the honey bee genome size, and four others on chromosomes 4, 7 and 9 are larger than 1 Mb (figure 1,

supplementary figures 10, 11, 12, supplementary table 2).

LD filtering

Population structure and admixture analysis rely on the assumption that markers along the genome are

independent Indeed, markers in strong LD such as those in haplotype blocks, have drastic effects by

shaping the genetic structure. Therefore, we sought to investigate the impact of LD pruning on

population structure inference. The number of SNPs used in a window for LD pruning was determined

such that most windows would correspond to a physical size of 100 kb. To achieve this, we used the

mode of the distribution of the number of SNPs in 100 kb bins, which is 1749 for the dataset of

3,285,296 SNPs with MAF > 0.01 (supplementary figures 13 and 14). LD pruning was thus performed

with a window size of 1749 SNPs and 175 bp (10 %) overlap and various values were tested, spanning

between $0.1 \leq$ LD $r^2 \leq 0.9$. PCA following these various thresholds show that with LD $r^2 < 0.3$ the

global structure of the dataset is lost, with only one population (*A. m. iberiensis*) contributing strongly

to the variance (supplementary figure 15), whereas with LD $r^2 > 0.3$, the contributions to the variance

in PC1 is not so widely distributed (supplementary figure 16). The effect of LD pruning on the

haplotype blocks is drastic, with the few SNPs retained having a distribution of their contributions to

the variance in PC1 and PC2 similar to that of the rest of the genome (supplementary figure 17). After

pruning for LD $r^2 < 0.3$, 601,945 SNPs were left in the dataset which were subsequently used in the

analysis of population structure.

Analysis of population structure

The PCA revealed distinct population structure within the data. For instance, some populations from

French breeder's organisations, such as the Royal Jelly breeder organisation (GPGR: Groupement des

Producteurs de Gelée Royale), or the Corsican breeder's organization (AOC Corse) appear quite

homogenous (figure 2), the first clustering close to the *A. m. ligustica* and *A. m. carnica* reference

populations and the latter appearing as a group between the C lineage *A. m. ligustica* and *A. m. carnica*

on one side and the M lineage *A. m. mellifera* and *A. m. iberiensis* on the other. Other populations

from French breeders appear much less homogenous, with individuals scattered across the whole

graph, see for examples Tarn 2 on figure 2, suggesting various degrees of admixture between the three

principal genetic groups (supplementary figure 18).

To further investigate the genetic structure and the effects of human-mediated breeding, we performed

admixture analyses. Our dataset consists of reference samples from thirteen origins, including two

islands, in addition to samples from several commercial breeders and conservatories. The genetic

makeup is therefore expected to be complex and the first task was to estimate the optimal number of

genetic backgrounds (K). We performed 50 independent runs with the Admixture software for each

value of $2 \leq K \leq 16$ on the LD-pruned dataset, totaling 750 independent analyses. Cross-validation

(CV) error estimates of the results computed by the software are shown in figure 3A. Results suggest

that the most likely number of genetic backgrounds is 8 or 9, with K = 8 having runs with the lowest

CV values overall, and K = 9 having the lowest median CV value over its 50 runs. The resulting Q

matrices were jointly analyzed using Pong [51], where for each value of K runs are grouped together

by similarity into modes and the mode containing the largest number of similar runs is defined as the

major mode. As Pong failed to find disjoint modes with the default similarity threshold of 0.97, we

increased the stringency of this value to 0.98 for our analyses. Naturally, for low values of K, such as

2 or 3, most of the Q matrices are very similar and the major modes contain most runs, if not all.

Typically, for K = 2, all 50 runs are in a single mode and for K = 3, the major mode contains 49 out of

all 50 runs and reflects the three main groups from the PCA analysis. Amongst the values of K having

the lowest CV values (figure 3A), K = 9 stands out as having a major mode containing 33 runs out of

50. While K = 8 had the lowest overall mean CV value, its major mode contains only 12 runs,

indicating K = 9 to be the better model (figure 3B and supplementary table 3). Interestingly, the

pattern observed when considering only K = 3 genetic backgrounds, recapitulates the general pattern

observed in the PCAs, in which the reference populations separate into three groups. These groups

reflect the main evolutionary lineages present in the dataset, being the M lineage (*A. m. mellifera* and

A. m. iberiensis), C lineage (*A. m. ligustica*, *A. m. carnica*), and O lineage (*A. m. caucasia*). For K = 2,

these *A. m. caucasia* bees are considered as having the same genetic background as the *A. m. ligustica*

and *A. m. carnica* samples, also reflecting the results from the PCA (figure 2, supplementary figure

19). Our results support the assumption that *A. m. caucasia* bees are assigned to the O lineage by

morphometry 20/09/2021 16:51:00 and to the C lineage by mtDNA [57]. Some admixture can be

observed for a small proportion of the reference samples. For instance, the reference samples from the

Savoy conservatory appear to have a small proportion of genetic background from *A. m. ligustica*

and/or *A. m. carnica,* which is consistent with the PCA results (figure 2). Likewise, the *A. m. carnica*

samples from Poland have a small proportion of genetic background from *A. m. caucasia*. Finally, the

A. m. carnica from Switzerland show some proportion of *A. m. mellifera* genetic background.

When examining the admixture pattern representing the 33 runs at K = 9 genetic backgrounds, the

three main groups are now separated. The M lineage group from the K = 3 backgrounds is now

composed of four genetic backgrounds: *A. m. iberiensis* is now separated from *A. m. mellifera* and the

A. m. mellifera bees are separated in three groups from mainland France, and the two islands of

Ouessant and Colonsay. The other three subspecies *A. m. ligustica*, *A. m. carnica* and *A. m. caucasia*

each have their own genetic background. An eighth background corresponds to the samples from the

bees selected for the production of royal jelly and a ninth appears in the two populations that were

noted as Buckfast bees. Although it is a major background in these two populations, a majority of

samples have also a large proportion of *A. m. carnica* and, to a lesser extent, of *A. m. ligustica*

backgrounds. This ninth background can also be found in other breeder's populations principally in

Hérault and Tarn1 (figure 3C). Apart from the royal jelly population, all honey bees from breeders

show high levels of admixture. Moreover, there is a great variability in the genetic origins and

proportions of backgrounds, even for samples coming from a same location (figure 4). The exception

is the population from Corsica, for which all samples show proportions close to 75% - 25% of *A. m.*

mellifera and *A. m. ligustica* backgrounds respectively.

Migrations between populations

Due to the commercial interest expressed by beekeepers for the Buckfast bees and the peculiar genetic

composition observed in the Corsican population, we performed a population migration analysis with

TreeMix [52]. All samples having more than 80% ancestry from one of the 9 backgrounds detected in

the Admixture analysis were selected from one of the K = 9 major mode Q-matrices (supplementary

table 4), and the list supplemented with the 43 Corsican samples, making our data set composed of ten

representative groups for the European populations.

Estimations on the number of migrations (m) between the populations in the dataset, based on the

Evanno method [53], return a mode of m = 1, strongly suggesting a single migration, and a relatively

high Δm value for m = 2 supports the existence of a second migration. The Δm values for 3 or more

migrations are close to zero, suggesting that more than 2 migrations between populations in the dataset

is unlikely (figure 5A). For m = 1 the 100 TreeMix runs indicated a migration from *A. m. ligustica* to

the Corsican population. For m = 2 the 100 TreeMix runs show the two migrations as being from *A. m.*

ligustica to the Corsica population, and from *A. m. caucasia* to the Buckfast bees (figure 5B).

Summaries of the resulting trees with DendroPy [54] are shown in figure 5C, indicating that when the

two migrations are taken into account, the Corsican samples are grouped with the *A. m. mellifera* M

lineage bees, and the Buckfast bees group with the *A. m. ligustica* and *A. m. carnica* C lineage bees.

Haplotype conservation in the admixed populations

To investigate further the haplotype blocks detected, we performed a local ancestry inference on our

dataset with RFMix. Reference samples were selected as bees having > 95 % ancestry for a given

background following the Admixture analysis at K = 3 (figure 3C), resulting in 131 samples for group

1, 148 for group 2 and 17 for group 3, while the remaining 333 samples formed the query dataset. To

perform the local ancestry inference, we constructed a genetic map from cross overs identified in the

sequence data of 43 males from 3 colonies [37] aligned to the HAv3.1 reference genome. Results

indicate that few historical recombination events have occurred in the large haplotype blocks since the

admixture between the subspecies. The most notable example is that of the 3.6 Mb haplotype block

between positions 3.7 and 7.3 Mb on chromosome 11, in which almost all 333 samples from the query

dataset show one continuous stretch for one of the three backgrounds. Typically, only one of the 43

samples from Corsica presents two different ancestral haplotypes within this interval, with a switch

from a group 1 to a group 2 haplotype at position ~4.5 Mb on chromosome 11, within the 3.6 Mb

haplotype block, whereas numerous switches can be observed on the rest of the chromosome (figure

6A). When counting the haplotype switches detected in all 333 query samples, only 28 are situated

within the 3.6 Mb haplotype block on chromosome 11, whereas other regions of the chromosome can

have more than 50 switches per 100 kb (figure 6B and see supplementary figure 20 for the other

chromosomes). Interestingly, *LOC724287,* which is the largest gene described in the Gnomon

annotation set for the genome assembly HAv3.1, is found in this block at position 11:5,292,072-

6,161,805. This gene is 869,734 bp long and encodes protein rhomboid transcript variant X2, its large

size being largely due to intron 4, which is 596,047 bp long. However, on investigating a possible

relationship between haplotype block and gene sizes in the honey bee genome no obvious association

could be found (data not shown).

Discussion

SNP detection in a haploid dataset

Our complete dataset of haploid drones is composed of 870 samples sequenced using Illumina's HiSeq

and NovaSeq technologies. Results clearly show that although a few of the early sequences produced

on the HiSeq are of lower depth, only 15 samples were eliminated due to the fraction of missing

genotypes exceeding 10%. By contrast, the fraction of missing genotypes over the ~7 million SNPs

detected was considerably lower in samples sequenced on the NovaSeq sequencing platform. Having

sequenced haploids, the removal of heterozygote SNPs in individual samples is recommended to

reduce the likelihood of "pseudo SNPs", as we have shown previously that heterozygote SNPs tend to

cluster together [31] and co-locate with repetitive elements (data not shown). This set of ~7 million

markers can now be used as a basis for the realization of high-density SNP chips, allowing selections

of markers according to optimized spacing and to defined MAF values in the main subspecies of

interest. Indeed, an important technical issue in SNP chip design, is that very high SNP densities, such

as found in the honey bee, can potentially cause allele dropout when genotyping, due to interference in

the probe designs. Deep knowledge of SNP and indel positions will help select candidates flanked by

monomorphic sequences. Conversely, for lower density chips, the spacing of markers can be

optimized by taking the haplotype structure into account, thus avoiding redundancy while maintaining

the highest possible level of genetic information. Another advantage of sequencing haploid samples, is

that the whole dataset represents phased chromosomes. Notably, the present dataset will be invaluable

for genotype imputation in future studies using lower density genotyping, such as DNA chips or low-

pass sequencing [58–60].

Population structure in managed honey bees

The deep understanding of European honey bee populations and of their recent admixture via imports

of genetic stocks by breeders is not a simple task. The analyses of admixture events in complex

population structures can be sensitive to a number of parameters and sometimes yields misleading

results, especially if one or several populations went through a recent bottleneck [61]. PCA on all ~7

million markers indicate that our dataset is structured into three main genetic types (supplementary

figure 8). The first principal component, representing 47.4 % of the variance, separates two major

groups corresponding respectively to subspecies from north-western (M lineage) and south-eastern

Europe (C lineage). These two groups are represented by several populations, including the Savoy and

Porquerolles conservatories from South-East France on one side, and bees that are not so far

geographically from Italy or Slovenia on the other. This large genetic distance despite relatively close

geographic proximity of the populations supports the hypothesis of the colonization of Europe by

honey bees via distinct western and eastern routes [1,24,62,63], and the separation between subspecies

due to the Alps forming a natural barrier preventing genetic exchange [5]. Along the second principal

component, representing 13.8 % of the variance, the population originating from *A. m. caucasia*

separates from the south-eastern European populations (supplementary figure 8). Prior to investigating

admixture we pruned SNPs in LD taking care to maximize the removal of redundancy while

maintaining the general structure of the data (figure 2 and supplementary figures 15, 16, 17).

We explored a range of K number of genetic backgrounds, running multiple iterations of each, to

determine the most likely admixture pattern (figure 3). Our results indicate that this approach is

necessary to ensure the results from each K model are stable prior to interpretation. We observe from

our Admixture analyses that CV outliers within a K model are common. For instance, at K = 8, the

mode with the lowest CV is only represented by 8 out of 50 Admixture runs, whereas the major mode

has 12 runs. On examining the admixture patterns from these two modes, the major mode suggests the

A. m. mellifera bees from conservatories on mainland France to be hybrids between bees from

Ouessant and Spain, with roughly 50% of each genetic background moreover on the same mode, the

A. m. iberiensis background represents also 50% of the M lineage background in the bees from

Corsica (supplementary figure 19). This is extremely unlikely given the geography of Western Europe

and our knowledge of the history of the bees of Ouessant. Indeed, Ouessant is a very small island

(15.6 km^2) off the coast of western Brittany, isolated from the rest of the French honey bee population

since its installation in 1987 and the prohibition of imports since 1991 mostly for sanitary reasons.

Contrarywise the mode with the 8 runs and lowest CV presents a better separation of *A. m. mellifera*

and *A. m. iberiensis,* which is also found in the major mode at K = 9 backgrounds. A smaller level of

admixture can still be found between *A. m. mellifera* and *A. m. iberiensis,* that is quite likely due to the

shared ancestry between these two subspecies.

The major mode at K = 9 is represented by 33 out of 50 runs and returned the lowest mean CV value.

This mode identifies mainland France *A. m. mellifera* samples as having a distinct genetic background

and suggests that honey bees from Ouessant may have been re-introduced in the mainland

conservatories. This mode also identifies a distinct genetic background in French and Swiss Buckfast

bees. Buckfast bees were developed by Brother Adam, and are described on page 14 of "Beekeeping

at the Buckfast Abbey" as a cross performed around 1915 between "the leather-coloured Italian bee

and the old native English variety" [16]. Brother Adam also notes that the Italian bees that were

imported in later years were distinct from the ones used in the development of the Buckfast strain. Our

analysis of migrations between populations with TreeMix suggests that the Buckfast in our dataset

were subject to introgression with genetic material from *A. m. caucasia* (figure 5B), although the

timing of this potential admixture event could not be determined. When the two migrations of *A. m.*

ligustica into Corsica and *A. m. caucasia* into the Buckfast are considered, which is a likely scenario

suggested by the Evanno analysis, the latter is close to *A. m. carnica*, as seen in figures 5B and 5C.

Interestingly, a whole genome sequence study of Italian honey bees, also suggest that the Buckfast

bees are closer to *A. m. carnica*, than to *A. m. ligustica* [64] and no proximity of the Buckfast bees

with M lineage bees were found neither in this study nor in ours, despite the cross at the origin of the

Buckfast including an old native variety. Further investigations including more Buckfast samples and

additional honey bee subspecies will be needed to fully elucidate this question. The *A. m. carnica*

samples from Slovenia, Germany, France, Switzerland and Poland all share the same genetic

background, reflecting their identical origin, probably recent imports.

The population of bees from Corsica has the distinct characteristic of being homogenous in

composition, despite being admixed, with all samples showing mean proportions of 75% and 25% of

A. m. mellifera and *A. m. ligustica* backgrounds, respectively (figures 2 and 3). The introgression of

Italian bees is confirmed by the TreeMix migration analysis and when this is accounted for, the

Corsican samples group with *A. m. mellifera* bees from mainland France instead of being situated

between the two main genetic subgroups of western and eastern European bees (figures 2B and 2C).

This result likely reflects the fact that Italian bees may have been imported on the Island until the

1980's, following which the import of foreign genetic material was prohibited. As beekeepers

generally prefer the *A. m. ligustica* Italian bees over *A. m. mellifera*, it is very likely that the latter is

the original population, as also suggested by Ruttner [1]. Although the hypothesis of the separation of

the two subspecies on the mainland by the Alps seems appropriate [5], the situation of the

Mediterranean islands in the region is not so clear. Based on physical geography alone, Corsica being

at a closer distance to Italy than to France, the chances would have been greater to have originally M

lineage rather than C lineage Italian bees. Moreover, Corsica was under the control of Pisa, then fell to

Genoa in 1284 and was only purchased by France in 1768. Further studies including samples from

Sardinia would certainly help defining the Mediterranean boundaries between the M lineage and C

lineage honey bees and confirm observations based on morphology [1].

Apart from the subspecies references and the royal jelly populations, the honey bees provided by

breeders are largely admixed, exhibiting high variability in background proportions - even for samples

sourced from the same region. A typical example is that of the Tarn1 and Tarn2 populations, revealing

that two breeders situated very close to one another (less than 100 km), have very different genetic

management strategies. Tarn1 samples are mainly composed of Buckfast and *A. m. carnica*

backgrounds, whereas in Tarn2 a large proportion of *A. m. mellifera* background is also present and

the population is far less homogenous (figures 2, 3 and 4). This shows the great heterogeneity of the

managed populations found in France and a question that needs further investigation is the influence

of the mating strategies used by the breeders, such as artificial insemination, mating stations, with

drone producing hives to saturate the environment with the desired genetic strains, or open mating.

These strategies influence variable levels of control on the genetic makeup of a breeder's stock. The

higher proportion of *A.m. mellifera* background in the Tarn2 population can either be deliberate or due

to a lower level of control over the mating of the queens, with a proportion of queens mating to *A. m.*

mellifera drones from the environment.

The Royal Jelly population is the inverse: beekeepers from all over France exchange their genetic

stock within a selection programme and controlled mating. As a result, a specific background with

individuals presenting very little admixture, is found for this population at very distant locations. Most

of the worldwide production of Royal Jelly comes from China, where high Royal Jelly-producing

lineages of honey bees were developed from an imported *A. m. ligustica* lineage [65]. Interestingly, in

our dataset, only three *A. m. ligustica* and all of the bees from China have some Royal Jelly genetic

background.

Large haplotype blocks in the honey bee genome, specific to the M and C lineages

When investigating the contribution of SNPs to variance in the PCA, we noted several large genomic

regions, up to 3.5 Mb long, in which almost all markers contributed very strongly to the first principal

component, separating bees from north-western (M lineage) and south-eastern Europe (C lineage).

These regions were noted to coincide with haplotype blocks detected with Plink. To investigate the

matter further, we performed local ancestry inference in the admixed samples with RFMix, using

samples exhibiting 95% ancestry for the three main genetic backgrounds as references. A low

recombination rate is confirmed by the observation of only very few switches between the three main

genetic backgrounds within these haplotype blocks. Interestingly, some of our regions, including the

largest one detected on chromosome 11, coincide with regions of low recombination rate detected in

other studies. These include a LD map produced with 30 diploid sequences from African worker bees

[39], ancestry inference in an admixed population [35], low resolution genetic maps produced by Rad

or ddRAD sequencing, with microsatellite or SNP markers, ddRAD sequencing [66,67] or higher

resolution genetic maps produced by whole genome sequencing of European [37] and African

subspecies [38].

Most of these regions coincide with the position of the centromeres such as described in the reference

genome assembly, which is primarily based on the combination of the location of *Ava*I repeats, that

were previously assigned to centromeres by cytogenetic analysis, and of a low GC content [33,68].

However, the *Ava*I repeats only represent a very small fraction of the centromeric regions described,

with the largest one only covering 14 kb [33], whereas the estimation of the extent of the centromeres,

based on a GC content lower than the genome average is much larger although imprecise and supposes

a similar organization as for the AT-rich alpha-satellite repeats in vertebrates, such as human [69].

Whereas in some cases the boundaries of our regions of low recombination rate coincide with the

actual positioning of the centromere on the genome assembly [33], such as in chromosomes 5 or 8, in

other instances, such as in chromosome 12, the region defined is much narrower. Due to the

difficulties in interpreting banding patterns in honey bee chromosomes, the position of the centromeres

is not well settled. Some evidence based on G- and C- banding suggests there are four metacentric and

12 submetacentric or subtelocentric chromosomes [70], whereas other evidence based on the

fluorescent *in situ* hybridization of a centromere probe suggests there are two metacentric, four

submetacentric, two subtelocentric and eight telocentric chromosomes [71]. Our evidence suggests at

least six chromosomes that could be telocentric or acrocentric: chromosomes 3, 5, 6, 9, 14 and 15.

Some of the haplotype blocks/regions of low recombination can seem very large, such as representing

up to 21 % in the case of chromosome 11 (figure 6). This may seem a lot, but recent findings in a

complete sequencing of the human genome give a similar proportion for chromosomes 9, in which 40

Mb of satellite arrays represent 20 % of the chromosome [72]. One important difference, however, is

that the block on honey bee chromosome 11 contains some genes, except in the central region,

whereas the satellite array described on human chromosome 9 does not. This suggests that the exact

position of the centromere in honey bee chromosome 11 and other chromosomes still has to be

refined. The specific case of the acrocentric chromosomes in terms of gene content (supplementary

figure 20) seems to compare better to the situation described in human, as the sequencing of the p-arm

of the five human acrocentric chromosomes has allowed the discovery of novel genes within the

satellite repeat-containing regions [69].

Some haplotype blocks may have another origin than centromeric DNA. For instance, some may have

maintained genetic divergence by limiting recombination via the presence of structural variants such

as inversions. Indeed, two of the blocks described here, between positions 4.0 - 5.1 Mb and 5.8 - 6.9

Mb on chromosome 7, seem to coincide at least partially with two regions of haplotype divergence

possibly due to inversions, detected between positions 3.9 – 4.3 and 6.3 – 7.3 Mb on the same

chromosome, in a highland versus lowland study of East African bees [36]. The slight differences in

coordinates found between the two studies can be due to the fact that a different version of the HAv3

Hav3.0 had been used. If confirmed, this finding suggests that haplotype blocks differing between M

lineage and C lineage bees such as found here, can coincide with blocks found in other subspecies in

Africa. Another study identifying the thelytoky locus (*Th*) in the South African Cape honey bee *Apis*

mellifera capensis showed it was in a non-recombining region over 100 kb long on chromosome 1,

although long-read mapping failed to detect any inversion [73].

Given the current hypotheses on the colonization of Europe by honey bees via distinct western and

eastern routes [1,24,62,63], it is not surprising that the haplotype blocks described here, whether or not

representing centromeric regions, tend to separate mainly the M and C lineage bees. Further analyses

will be necessary to define the centromeric regions more precisely and study their implication,

together with the other haplotype blocks, in the sub species structure of the honey bee populations.

Conclusion

The sequencing of close to 900 haploid honey bee drones, was shown here to be an invaluable

approach for variant detection and for understanding the fine genetic makeup of a complex population

having gone through multiple events of admixture. In addition, the extent of regions of extremely low

recombination rate could be defined with a higher precision than previously. The dataset generated

here is a solid base for future research involving other honey bee populations and for any analyses

requiring data phasing or imputation.

Figures

Figure 1: Contribution of SNPs to the principal components, MAF and LD filters and detection of large haplotype blocks. A: contribution to PC1 (top) and PC2 (bottom). When all 7 million SNPs are analysed simultaneously, the majority share a small contribution to PC1 and have no contribution to PC2 (blue). When retaining only markers with MAF > 0.01 or 0.05, (3,285,296 and 2,525418 SNPs; green and red lines, respectively), markers retained have a stronger contribution to PC1 and a higher proportion of markers contribute to PC2. B: LD pruning on the 3,285,296 SNPs with MAF > 0.01 (red line). Top: out of the 1,011,918 and 601,945 SNPs retained after pruning at LD = 0.5 (green line) or 0.3 (blue line), the distribution of the contribution of the markers is more even. Bottom: contribution of SNPs to PC1 in a 3 Mb region of chromosome 11. Almost all markers in this region show

contributions amongst the highest genome-wide (red line). The distribution of these contributions is

improved by LD pruning (green and blue lines). C: blue points show the contribution of individual

SNPs along a 6 Mb region of chromosome 11 containing two haplotype blocks of > 3 Mb and ~200 kb

(yellow backgrounds) before (top) and after (bottom) LD pruning. The LD pruning eliminates

successfully the markers in the haplotype blocks and the distribution of marker approaches that of the

rest of the genome, as shown in the corresponding density plots on the right.

Figure 2: PCA on the reference populations and on a sample of representative breeder

populations. The 601,945 SNPs obtained after MAF filtering and LD pruning were used. Left:

reference populations only, with a colouring scheme according to their origin. Middle and left:

the reference populations with a high proportion of pure background individuals, as observed after

Admixture analysis, were kept and coloured according to the five subspecies. Some breeder

populations appear homogeneous, such as the honey bees selected for Royal Jelly or those from

Corsica. Others are heterogeneous, such as populations Tarn1 and Tarn2, from breeders.

Figure 3: Admixture analysis. A: estimation of Cross validation error for 50 runs of Admixture for 3

≤ K ≤ 16. B: Major modes and modes with the lowest mean cross-validation (CV) error for Admixture

runs. For each value of K ranging between 2 and 12, Q matrices from Admixture runs were grouped

by similarity in modes by using the Pong software (Behr et al. 2016). Blue: number of runs in the

major mode; orange: number of runs in the major or minor mode having the lowest mean CV value.

Amongst the values of K having the lowest CV values from Admixture runs (see figure 12), K = 9

stands out as having a major mode containing 33 runs out of 50, which is also the mode having the

lowest mean CV value from the Admixture runs. For other values of K, such as 4, 6, 7, 8, the major

modes do not have the lowest mean CV values. C: Admixture plots for all 629 samples for K = 3

(major mode containing 49 out of 50 runs) and K = 9 (major mode containing 33 out of 50 runs).

Reference populations on the left have a colour code under the admixture plot that recapitulates their

colour on the PCA plots of figure 2; other populations are indicated with alternating grey and white

colours.

Figure 4: Admixture proportions and location of sample populations used in the diversity study.
The size of the pie charts indicates the number of samples from a given location, with the number
ranging from 2 samples (e.g. Denmark) to 43 samples (Corsica). Positions in France indicate the
coordinates of the breeder or honey bee conservatory sampled. In other countries, reference samples
are all grouped together, unless two genetic types were sampled (e.g. Switzerland). Colours in the pie
charts correspond to the backgrounds found in the admixture analysis for K = 9, as presented in figure
3. Reference populations for the five subspecies are indicated in italics. Two Buckfast populations in
France and Switzerland are indicated, so as the four breeders from the Royal Jelly breeder organisation
(GPGR: Groupement des Producteurs de Gelée Royale) having provided samples.

Figure 5: Analysis of migrations with Treemix. A: the OptM package was used to determine the optimal number of migrations between populations and backgrounds. The Δm values suggest one or two migrations. B: summaries of trees from TreeMix, estimated from 100 runs per migration with DendroPy. C: TreeMix graph selected amongst the 100 runs showing the two migrations identified.

Figure 6: Local ancestry inference on chromosome 11 in the admixed samples from Corsica. A:

each horizontal line represents the ancestry inference on one of the 43 individual samples from

Corsica. Grey: *A. m. mellifera* and *A. m. iberiensis* backgrounds; yellow: *A. m. ligustica* and *A. m.*

carnica backgrounds; green: *A. m. caucasia* background. B: haplotype switches in all 412 admixed

samples analysed. The 3 Mb haplotype block at positions 4-7 Mb on chromosome 11 shows very little

historical recombination.

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Data Accessibility

DNA Sequences for this project have been deposited in the Sequence Read Archive (SRA) at

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sra under the BioProject accessions PRJNA311274 as part of the SeqApiPop

French honet bee diversity project dataset and PRJEB16533 as part of the Swiss honey bee population

and conservation genomics project dataset. Individual SRA run and BioSample accessions for all

samples are given in supplementary table 1.

Authors' contributions

YLC, J-PB, BB and AV designed the experiment. BB, YLC, and AV coordinated colony selection and

sampling and samples were provided by KB, MB, CC, AG, PK, MP and AP. KC-T, EL and OB

performed DNA extraction, library preparation and sequencing. DW, AV, SE and BS performed the

bioinformatic analyses and co-wrote the manuscript.

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Mellifera
Colonsay

Denmark

Carnica

Carnica

Mellifera
Ouessant

Brittany

Sarthe

Buckfast

Carnica

Caucasia

Royal Jelly

Tarn

Mellifera
Savoy

Isère

Carnica

Vaucluse

Hautes Pyrénées

Ligustica

Mellifera
Solliès

Ariège

Hérault

Mellifera
Porquerolles

Corsica

Iberiensis

A: Local ancestry inference in chromosome11: samples from Corsica

B: Gene density and haplotype switches for all 333 admixed samples in 100 kb bins