Hyper-specialized primates possess a reduced suite of xenobiotic-metabolizing cytochrome

P450 genes.

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Abstract

Subfamilies of cytochrome P450 proteins have been strongly linked to the metabolism

of physiologically disruptive compounds such as alkaloids, terpenoids, and other xenobiotics.

Consistent with this function, these genes have adaptively evolved in response to

environmental pressures exerted on animals, such as herbivores, that consume elevated

amounts of toxic xenobiotics or plant secondary metabolites (PSMs). Theory on evolutionary

tradeoffs predicts that highly specialized herbivores should exhibit a relatively narrow toolkit of

adaptations to accommodate the concomitantly narrow arrays of PSMs in their diets. The

bamboo lemurs of Madagascar (genera *Prolemur* and *Hapalemur*) represent an interesting test

case for this theory because of their dietary hyper-specialization, as these lemurs consume

bamboo and grasses at rates otherwise unseen in the order Primates. To test whether the

hyper-specialized folivory of these primates is reflected in a similarly specialized and narrow

P450 gene suite, we assembled a dataset of confidently assembled *CYP1-3* genes for two

species of bamboo lemur as well as additional lemur species. We tested the predictions that

bamboo lemurs would exhibit, first, greater rates of gene loss for xenobiotic-metabolizing

P450s and, second, relaxed selection on xenobiotic-metabolizing P450 subfamilies relative to

lemurs without such dietary hyper-specialization. We found support for the first prediction,

related to gene loss, in the *CYP2B, CYP2C, CYP2D, CYP2J,* and *CYP3A* subfamilies, all of which

encode xenobiotic metabolizers. We additionally inferred relaxation of selection for the *CYP2F*

and *CYP2J* subfamilies. The evolution of the P450 genes in bamboo lemurs provides support for

the evolutionary tradeoff hypothesis, and we further hypothesize that, rather than adapting to

a general array of PSMs, bamboo lemurs have instead adapted to the primary toxin in their

diet, the highly potent poison cyanide.

Keywords: Lemurs, plant secondary metabolites, *Prolemur*, *Hapalemur*, neutral evolution, gene

loss

Highlights

• Some of the most specialized diets among primates are those of bamboo lemurs.

• Bamboo lemurs have fewer xenobiotic-metabolizing P450 genes than other lemurs.

• Natural selection has relaxed on the *CYP2F* and *CYP2J* subfamilies in bamboo lemurs.

1. Introduction

Among mammals, a large proportion of xenobiotic compounds are transformed or detoxified by enzymes within the cytochrome P450 superfamily. Because of this role that P450s play in mediating potential environmental toxins and because species vary in their diets and exposure to such compounds, selective pressure has induced non-random additive and adaptive changes in genetic sequence and copy number among species (Chaney et al., 2018, 2020; Ingelman-Sundberg, 2022; Kawashima & Satta, 2014; Kirischian et al., 2011; Skopec et al., 2022). The effect of evolving toxin resistance has been especially well-documented for pest insect species because of the economic importance of pesticides and insects' evolutionary responses to those substances (Wondji et al. 2009; Feyereisen 2011; Bass et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2014; Walsh et al. 2018; Joussen and Heckel 2021). Studies of P450 gene adaptation outside of pest insects have often focused on dietary xenobiotics or plant secondary metabolites (PSMs). For example, research on a model system comprising several species of woodrat (*Neotoma* spp.) has shown that PSMs common in their diet (*e.g.*, alkaloids, terpenoids) are metabolized especially by CYP2B enzymes and, to a minor extent, other xenobiotic-metabolizing enzymes (Haley et al., 2007a, 2007b; Orr et al., 2020; Wilderman et al., 2014).

Comparisons between specialist and generalist species of these woodrats have shed light on the effects that diet can have on P450 evolution. For instance, the generalist woodrat species (*N. albigula*) was found to have lower copy number but greater sequence diversity of *CYP2B* relative to a specialist (*N. stephensi*). This greater diversity of the generalist is consistent with the broader array of PSMs with which the generalist must contend (Kitanovic et al., 2018). The increased copy number of the specialist, in contrast, is in line with the prediction that genes

important for coping with the specialist's narrow diet will be subject to *additive* evolutionary

processes (*e.g.*, gene duplication, positive-selection) that will enhance the species' ability to

mitigate a narrow range of metabolically harmful compounds (Dearing et al., 2005; Freeland &

Janzen, 1974). This is taken to an extreme for specialized koala (*Phascolartcos cinereus*), in

which the key xenobiotic metabolizing *CYP2C* subfamily has reached a copy number of 31 via

serial duplication (Johnson et al., 2018).

Mammalian dietary specialization has also been linked to patterns of gene loss (Blumer

et al., 2022; Hecker et al., 2019; Itoigawa et al., 2019; Lauterbur, 2019; Marciniak et al., 2021;

Wagner et al., 2022). For example, vampire bats (genera *Desmodus, Diaemus,* and *Diphylla*)

have lost sweet and umami taste receptors (Zhao et al., 2010b; Zhao et al., 2012) and have

experienced reduction of their bitter-taste sense through pseudogenization of *TAS2R* genes

(Hong & Zhao, 2014). Interestingly, losses of gustatory genes have also been found for

cetaceans, which have lost nearly all taste-receptor genes apart from those for salty taste (Feng

et al., 2014), and for pandas (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*), which have lost their umami taste-

receptors (Zhao et al., 2010a). Theory predicts that genes unimportant to a specialist's dietary

adaptation will be subject to a suite of *subtractive* evolutionary processes (*e.g.,* accumulation of

deleterious mutations, pseudogenization, or loss of protein coding region or entire gene). Gene

loss could either be for adaptive reasons (see Olson, 1999) or because of a release of selective

pressure (see Blumer et al., 2022; Huelsmann et al., 2019). Despite these examples and the

theory surrounding them, subtractive mechanisms such as gene loss have remained relatively

understudied compared to additive mechanisms such as gene duplication and positive or

directional selection.

In summary, specialized folivory is predicted to have two evolutionary effects on a

species' xenobiotic-metabolizing toolkit: First, genes involved in detoxification or avoidance of

xenobiotic toxins that are rich in a folivorous specialist's diet should show signals of selection in

the form of positive copy-number changes or positive selection. Second, genes *not* involved in

such species' defense against toxins in their specialized diet should exhibit signals of negative

copy-number changes and relaxation of selection. Although the first prediction is well-

supported by prior studies of P450 gene evolution, comparatively few studies have investigated

patterns of P450 gene loss or relaxation of selection in specialized folivores.

Bamboo lemurs represent a well-suited case for testing predictions about P450 gene

loss in specialized folivores due to their narrow diets, which are among the most specialized in

the entire primate order. Despite their diminutive body sizes (0.9-2.6 kg: Tan, 2006), they

inhabit an ecological niche that is often compared with that of the giant panda (Eronen et al.,

2017; McKenney et al., 2017; Tan, 2006) and are the only extant primates known to specialize

so intensely on bamboo or grass species (Table S1). The three sympatric species at Ranomafana

National Park (*i.e.*, *Hapalemur aureus, H. griseus*, and *Prolemur simus*) are the source of much

of the current understanding of bamboo lemur ecology. All three of these populations have

diets that are often predominantly composed of a small number of species of bamboo or liana

(Grassi, 2006; Overdorff et al., 1997; Tan, 1999), and the sympatry of these species has been

understood in terms of niche partitioning, notably by their differential reliance on separate

plant parts from the same species of giant bamboo (Glander et al., 1989). Although other

species outside of Ranomafana (*e.g.*, *H. meridionalis, H. alaotrensis*) do not actually consume

bamboo, they nonetheless eat grasses (Poaceae) or sedges (Cyperaceae) at similarly high

frequencies (Table S1). A recent report, also based on locations outside of Ranomafana,

demonstrated more dietary flexibility for *Prol. simus* than would have previously been expected

(Mihaminekena et al., 2024; see Table S1), but bamboo is nonetheless critical forthis species'

evolution, likely as a staple fallback food (Marshall & Wrangham, 2007), as evidenced by

alimentary traits that are likely related to a specialized folivorous (dentition: Jernvall et al.,

2008; Vinyard et al., 2008; gastrointestinal morphology: Yamashita et al., 2008; M.E. Chaney,

pers. obs.; see Campbell et al., 2000). Regardless, all three populations subsisted on diets

composed of 90% folivorous foods or more, even if one population's diet was only 41.5%

bamboo (Mihaminekena et al., 2024). Thus, regardless of habitat or species, bamboo lemurs

subsist on highly folivorous diets that are notably low in their diversity.

One bamboo PSM is particularly intriguing for its toxicity. Consumption of the specific

bamboo parts consumed by *H. aureus* and *Prol. simus* exposes these lemurs to high levels of

potent cyanogenic glycosides (Ballhorn et al., 2009; Eppley et al., 2017; Glander et al., 1989).

When plant tissue is disrupted by some destructive process like mastication, these glycosides

will be hydrolyzed by the plant cell's own β-glycosidase enzymes to release cyanide (Ballhorn,

2011; Cressey & Reeve, 2019). At Ranomafana, two bamboo lemur species have been

estimated to consume many times the estimated lethal dose of cyanide for mammals of their

body sizes (Ballhorn et al., 2009; Glander et al., 1989). Although cyanide, the primary known

antifeedant of this bamboo, is detoxified by a metabolic pathway that does not include any

cytochrome P450 enzymes (reviewed by Isom et al., 2015), bamboo lemurs likely have to

contend with other PSMs known to be present in bamboo species, such as phenolic and

polyphenolic compounds (Zhu et al. 2018). Thus, we still expect evolution of bamboo lemur

P450 genes to be impacted by their hyper-specialized diet.

For this project, we hypothesized that the highly specialized diet observed for bamboo

lemurs should be associated with a narrower P450 repertoire, streamlined to those subfamilies

that metabolize xenobiotic compounds found in bamboo. Therefore, we predicted that,

compared to other generalist Malagasy strepsirrhines, the bamboo lemur species *Prol. simus*

and *H. griseus* should exhibit a clear pattern of cytochrome P450 (1) gene loss and (2)

signatures of relaxed natural selection, because the specialist diet contains a narrow set of

PSMs, of which the primary toxin (*i.e.*, cyanide), is not even metabolized by P450s. Similar to

previous work (Chaney et al., 2020), we focus on P450 genes in the *CYP1-3* subfamilies. Briefly,

this decision was made because of these subfamilies' monophyletic placement within the

cytochrome P450 superfamily of genes (Kirischian et al., 2011) and the presence of genes

encoding both xenobiotic and endobiotic metabolizers within that gene-clade (see Guengerich,

2015).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Generation of *Hapalemur griseus* genome assembly

For this study, we constructed a genome assembly for a male *H. griseus* (named Beavis)

housed at the Duke Lemur Center in Durham, North Carolina. A fresh whole blood sample was

shipped to the Molecular Primatology Laboratory of New York University for processing and

sequencing. High molecular weight (HMW) DNA was extracted from 200 μL of whole blood

using a MagAttract HMW DNA Kit (QIAGEN Sciences Inc., Germantown, MD) following the

manufacturer's protocol. DNA was eluted into a low-bind 1.5 mL tube and stored at 4°C prior

to size selection. In order to obtain DNA fragments roughly 40 kilobases or longer, the extracted

HMW DNA was run through a Blue Pippin DNA Size Selection System (Sage Science Inc., Beverly,

MA) using a 0.75% agarose gel cassette with the R1 size standard. Following this size selection

protocol, the HMW DNA concentration was quantified using a Qubit 2.0 fluorometer (Thermo

Fisher Scientific Inc., Carlsbad, CA) using the broad range standard. The extraction yielded 3.2

ng/µL of HMW DNA.

After extraction and quantification, the HMW DNA sample was sent to NYU Langone

Medical School's Genome Technology Center for quality control tests, which consisted of DNA

quantification and fragment size determination using a Tape Station (Agilent Technologies Inc.,

Santa Clara, CA). After passing this checkpoint, the HMW DNA was prepared for sequencing

using a Chromium Genome Linked Reads Kit (10X Genomics Inc., Pleasanton, CA) and

sequenced on a HiSeq 2500 DNA Sequencing Platform (Illumina Inc., San Diego, CA) with 1200M

reads. The linked-read output data were assembled using the Supernova assembler (Weisenfeld

et al., 2017). We used the pseudohaplotype output as our genome assembly for all downstream

steps (Table 1).

2.2 Additional data gathering

For both the gene-birth/death and selection-analysis portions of this study, we gathered

data from publicly available genome assemblies for 14 species: *Prolemur simus* (Hawkins et al.,

2018), *Lemur catta* (Palmada-Flores et al., 2022), *Eulemur flavifrons* and *E. macaco* (Meyer et al.

2015), *Propithecus coquereli* (Lowe and Eddy 1997; Guevara et al. 2021), *Indri indri* (accession

number: GCA_004363605.1), *Daubentonia madagascariensis* (accession number:

GCA_004027145.1), *Mirza coquereli* (accession number: GCA_004024645.1), *Mirza zaza*

(Hunnicutt et al., 2020)*, and *Microcebus murinus* (Averdam et al., 2011; Lecompte et al., 2016),

as well as the following additional species of mouse lemur: *Mic. griseorufus, Mic. mittermeieri,*

Mic. ravelobensis, and *Mic. tavaratra* (Hunnicutt et al., 2020). These assemblies, along with any

associated annotation files, were downloaded locally and formatted into BLAST databases

within Geneious Prime, version 2022.1.1.

We located the loci for all annotated *CYP1-3* homologs in the *L. catta, Prop. Coquereli,*

and *Mic. murinus* by using the associated annotation (GFF3) files for each. We defined these

loci by the non-P450 genes that bounded them; therefore, those surrounding genes were used

initially as queries for local BLAST searches. In this way, each locus was linked to two searches

per species. The three reference genomes listed above were used because they are all

members of separate strepsirrhine families (Lemuridae, Indriidae, and Cheirogaleidae,

respectively), and they were each therefore used as a starting point to extract the desired

CYP1-3 genes or loci for confamilial species. Ideally, a pair of BLAST searches would return

results that included the same scaffold. By locating both BLAST hits on each of these scaffolds,

we were able to extract genomic regions that were hypothetically orthologous to those P450

loci in the *L. catta* assembly. After locating the scaffolds in each assembly corresponding to

each P450 locus, we used LASTZ (Harris, 2007) to interrogate the homology of those scaffolds

by aligning them to the confirmed P450 locus from the appropriate confamilial reference

genome. Positive results from these alignments were checked using the Mauve genome aligner

(Darling et al., 2004) on the same sequences. If output from both of these aligners indicated

that the reference had homology with the query scaffold(s), then the annotations from the

reference genome were used to extract the corresponding sequence in the other species'

genome. In this way, we mined the genome assemblies listed above for as many complete P450

genes loci as we could confidently locate.

To augment our dataset of codon sequences specifically for our selection analyses (see

below), we also devised a *blastn*-based strategy to gather such data from 25 recently published

assemblies in the Primate Genome Diversity Project (PGDP; Kuderna et al., 2023). Similar to

locating complete P450 loci for the birth-death analysis, we used one reference species for each

of three strepsirrhine families comprised by the portion of the PGDP data that we utilized:

Cheirogaleidae (reference species: *Mic. murinus*), Indriidae (*Prop. Coquereli*), and Lemuridae *(L.*

catta). Each of the *CYP1-3* genes for these references was transposed into a multifasta file with

each codon separated by sequence headers. Each of these exons were then used to

independently query each of the selected PGDP genome assemblies, which resulted in a large

dataset of BLAST hits for each of these searches. For each set of results, any orthologous

sequence was used only if it met the following criteria: all of the resultant exons were found on

the same contig, these exons were in the same relative order as in the reference (after

accounting for strandedness), and this locus did not appear elsewhere in the dataset (after all

sequence data had eventually been gathered). In order to maximize our statistical power in the

downstream selection analysis, we accepted partial sequences, or sequences with incomplete

coverage of each query sequence. In order to construct the trees needed for these analyses, we

downloaded all sequence between the first and last exons for each set of BLAST results and

used this for alignment and phylogenetics (see below).

2.3 Inference of gene birth and death

For this first portion of the study, we used only species for which each *CYP1-3* locus

could be wholly collected from a single scaffold or reasonably reconstructed if not found on a

single scaffold using the process described above. In order to model the events of gene birth

and death in this subset of lemur species, our alignment strategy followed a similar workflow as

outlined in previous work with other datasets (Chaney et al., 2018, 2020), but several

modifications were made for this project in order to allow for more standardization and

automation across subfamilies. First, all of the P450 genes were extracted from each species'

locus according to the annotation file associated with its confamilial reference. Then, all of the

genes from a given P450 subfamily were aligned using MAFFT (Katoh & Standley, 2013), and the

resulting alignment was stripped of all sites containing any gaps using trimAl (Capella-Gutierrez

et al., 2009). After the best-fitting nucleotide substitution model was inferred by jModelTest

(Darriba et al., 2012), this stripped alignment was visualized with PhyML 3.0 and the strength of

that resulting phylogenetic tree was tested by comparing it to 1000 bootstrap replicates

(Guindon et al., 2010).

The gene trees constructed with PhyML were then passed to Possvm (Grau-Bové &

Sebé-Pedrós, 2021). This program uses the intrinsic information contained in a phylogram to

infer speciation and gene-duplication events; it does this using the species-overlap algorithm in

the ETE3 toolkit (Huerta-Cepas et al., 2007, 2016). Briefly, this algorithm compares the

intersection of species present in both descendants of an internal node of a tree to the union of

species present in those descendants; using these values, the algorithm computes a species-

overlap score which it then uses to identify each internal node as either a speciation event,

having an overlap score, or a duplication event, having a high overlap score (Huerta-Cepas et

al., 2007). Once the identities of each node were estimated in this way, we then manually

examined each subtree rooted by a node called as a duplication event to infer whether any

gene loss had occurred. This was examined on a case-by-case basis using the reasoning that,

after a duplication event, each descendant of that node should recapitulate the organismal

phylogeny present at the time of duplication. Therefore, any species missing in one of those

subtrees must have lost one of the duplicates born in the earlier duplication event as long as

the subtree in question was well-resolved in terms of bootstrap support. In cases where

multiple species lineages may be absent, we deferred to the parsimonious hypothesis that a

loss event would have occurred prior to the divergence of those lineages, rather than a more

complicated hypothesis that the same paralog had been independently lost in both species

after their split. We visualized the Possvm output using the program Treerecs (Comte et al.,

2020) and then, in some cases, manually modified the depicted gene-evolution scenario in

order to accommodate the Possvm results.

<u>2.4 Selection analysis</u>

We used primarily used HyPhy's RELAX program (Wertheim et al., 2015) to test our

hypothesis concerning the relaxing of selectional pressure on the P450s covered in this project,

but the programs aBSREL (Smith et al., 2018) and BUSTED (Murrell et al., 2015) were also used

only in the case of *CYP2C* because of some preliminary tests indicating possible diversifying

selection in this gene subfamily (see below: section 3.2). For all runs, we made sure to include

estimates of synonymous rate variation because ignoring this parameter and setting it to 1.00,

as is often done for many *dN/dS* analyses, has been shown to bias results and, in the case of

detecting diversifying selection, inflate the number of false positives (Wisotsky et al.,

2021).Each HyPhy run requires, first, a codon alignment stripped of any stop codons and,

second, a phylogenetic tree that contains labels for the branches on which *a priori* relaxation of

natural selection is hypothesized to have occurred. For the codon alignments, we used

preexisting annotations from each of the annotated genome assemblies to extract the likely

coding DNA sequence (CDS) from each of the ostensibly complete P450 genes gathered in the

first portion of the study. Those annotations were then leveraged to find the likely CDS in

unannotated homologous sequences from confamilial relatives.

We aligned the CDS from each subfamily by translation using MACSE (Ranwez et al.,

2018), and we then checked each alignment by eye using MEGA 11 (Tamura et al., 2021). Once

the alignment had been checked by eye and the maximum number of useable sequences were

included, it was exported in FASTA format. The trees used for all HyPhy runs were were built

from genomic (*i.e.,* combined exonic and intronic) sequence using MAFFT (Katoh & Standley,

2013). We compared the rows in each subfamily's final CDS alignment to the leaves of the gene

tree constructed earlier with an R script using functions from the *phytools* (Revell, 2012) and

seqinr (Charif & Lobry, 2007) R packages, and a new tree was written that contained only the

intersection of these two sets. This filtered gene tree was then viewed with the web-based

phylotree.js platform (Shank et al., 2018), which allowed us to easily label branches on each

tree. Only foreground branches were labeled for *Prol. simus, H. griseus*, and any internal

branches exclusive to the clade formed by these two species. Accordingly, all unlabeled

branches were used for the estimation of the background *dN/dS* ratios for RELAX. Aside from

manually reading the text-file output, the HyPhy Vision platform

(http://vision.hyphy.org/RELAX) was used to generate some of the graphs made from the

output JSON files. For ancestral-sequence reconstruction of *CYP2F*, we used a HyPhy batch file

that makes use of parameters estimated from a selection analysis run beforehand

(https://github.com/veg/hyphy-analyses/tree/master/AncestralSequences). Rather than using

some other software for ancestral-sequence reconstruction, our use of this HyPhy batch file

increased our confidence in the comparability of our RELAX runs and the ancestral sequences

used in our *CYP2F* post-hoc analysis. Using these ancestral sequences, we then computed

pairwise *dN/dS* values using the Nei-Gojobori (1986)Nei-Gojobori (1986) method to more

closely examine signals of neutral evolution or selectional relaxation revealed by the earlier

HyPhy RELAX analysis.

3. Results

The evidence presented here largely displays a trend in which the common lineage of

bamboo lemurs has a diminished or expected number of gene copies relative to generalist

species, with several xenobiotic-metabolizing P450 subfamilies exhibiting a resolved gene-tree

topology indicating genic loss in one or both of the bamboo lemur species included here.

Because of the other species included in this data set, there are also some insights to be gained

from examining other portions of the gene trees outside of the portions focused on our species

of interest.

<u>3.1 Heightened gene loss within the bamboo-lemur lineage</u>

The topologies of the *CYP1A* and *CYP1B* subfamilies show strong bootstrap support and

near-perfect correspondence to the species phylogeny for their member orthologs (Figs. S1 &

S2). The only exception to this derives from the *Propithecus coquereli* lineage, which saw the

duplication of the *CYP1A1* ortholog after the divergence of the *Prop. coquereli* and *Indri indri*

lineages*.*

The shape of the *CYP2A* gene tree implies substantially more genic turnover than either

of the *CYP1* subfamilies (Fig. 1, top-left; Fig. S3). While the *Microcebus murinus* lineage shows a

very straightforward trajectory of no duplications, all other species have either duplicated or

lost orthologs according to the pattern of relatedness displayed in this tree. Due to the mid-

point rooting of this tree by Possvm, it is unclear whether two or three orthogroups are truly

present in this case (see Fig. S3), but we opt for a parsimonious interpretation of two

orthogroups here (see Fig. 1). Nonetheless, at least one duplication was certainly specific to the

Prop. coquereli lineage, depicted here by the common node of *CYP2A13L1* and *CYP2A13L2*. The

lemurid portion of the tree indicates a gene duplication in the common ancestor of all three

species and another duplication that was specific to *L. catta*. Conversely, the topology displayed

here implies genic loss for *E. macaco* and for *Prol. simus.*

The only members of *CYP2B* examined in this study are *CYP2B6* homologs because

another group of orthologs in the *L. catta* genome assembly (*CYP2B11*) did not show a CDS

length that was remotely close to the normal length of a functional primate P450 gene (*i.e.*, *ca.*

1500 nt). In the *CYP2B6* tree (Fig. 1, bottom-left; Fig. S4), we find two major orthogroups among

the five species analyzed. One of these shows a topology that, in itself, appears to recapitulate

the organismal phylogeny with no duplications. However, the other orthogroup exhibits a

signature of interesting dynamism. There are two serial duplication events in the *Prop.*

coquereli lineage (*CYP2B6L1, 3,* and *4P*). In the lemurid portion of this subtree, there are two

more serial duplications prior to the speciation of *L. catta* and *Prol. simus.* The pattern in this

part of the tree most parsimoniously indicates, first, that the bamboo-lemur common ancestor

lost genes orthologous to the *CYP2B6L3* and *CYP2B6L4* genes in the *L. catta* assembly and,

second, that the *H. griseus* lineage further lost its final remaining gene in this orthogroup.

The *CYP2C* genes yielded a phylogeny whose complexity is underscored by the large

number of duplications within it (Fig. 1, right; Fig. S5). Possvm separated this phylogeny into

five coherent orthogroups. The first of these (*i.e.,* OG-0) contained a duplication prior to the

divergence of *L. catta* and the bamboo lemurs. Following the *Prolemur-Hapalemur* divergence,

Prol. simus lost one of these genes but the other paralog was lost by *H. griseus*; thus, both

species retained separate paralogs. OG-1 and OG-2 lack *Prol. simus* genes but do contain genes

belonging to *H. griseus*; this pattern indicates two lineage specific events of gene loss for *Prol.*

simus. While this latter species, the greater bamboo lemur, showed a pattern of complete loss

for these orthogroups, *Mic. murinus* experienced a duplication in OG-2. All lemurid genes were

ostensibly lost from OG-3, while the mouse-lemur lineage saw a single-gene expansion of this

orthogroup. The final clade of genes, OG-4, contained three duplication events and,

parsimoniously, three instances of gene loss. While *L. catta* retained every one of the

duplicated genes from this sequence of events, bamboo lemurs likely lost the ortholog to *L.*

catta CYP2C18L1, and both *Prol. simus* and *H. griseus* further lost one more gene each.

However, these two final losses were lineage-specific, and each involved a separate genic

lineage. Thus, with the exception of genes in one orthogroup (*i.e.*, OG-3), bamboo lemurs

exhibited all of the losses detected in this tree.

Similar to *CYP2C*, the *CYP2D* subfamily also showed an increased amount of evolutionary

dynamism with regard to gene birth and death (Fig. 2, top-left; Fig. S6). Along a basal branch of

the phylogeny, there are two serial duplications, resulting in three *Mic. murinus* homologs

equally related to all lemurid *CYP2D* homologs. Each of the black lemur (*E. macaco*) species has

two very similar *CYP2D* genes which arose from the duplication specific to the *Eulemur* lineage.

Prior to the divergence of the *L. catta* lineage from that of the bamboo lemurs, there is some

uncertainty in these results whether only a single duplication occurred or whether two

occurred. This uncertainty stems from two nodes displaying low bootstrap support (73.0% and

57.5%; see Fig. S6) in the original PhyML tree. The topology displayed in Figure S6 describes two

duplications and parsimoniously implies just as many deletions. In light of the low bootstrap

support for this pattern, however, it is conceivable that the true topology could place the *L.*

catta CYP2D17L2 gene into the clade with the two bamboo-lemur genes. Such a revision would

reduce the number of deletions and duplications. The other duplicated gene in the lemurid

lineage, while secondarily duplicated in the *L. catta* lineage, was lost in the *H. griseus* lineage.

Lastly, no functional homologs for the *CYP2D* subfamily could be retrieved for *H. griseus*

because no open reading frames devoid of stop codons could be found in the extracted

sequence for this species' single *CYP2D* gene. However, this isolated instance may be due to an

assembly artifact, as the *CYP2D* locus was located on the ends of two separate scaffolds in the

original Supernova assembly. In all, the general pattern of this subfamily is similar to that of

CYP2C: evidence of heightened genic turnover with an emphasis on loss in the specific

lineage(s) of the bamboo lemurs.

The *CYP2J* subfamily divided into three orthogroups (Fig. 2, top-right; Fig. S7). The first

of these (OG-0) contains only a single duplication node before the speciation node for the split

of *L. catta* from the bamboo lemurs. The complete lack of any bamboo-lemur genes in this

portion of the tree parsimoniously indicates a loss of that duplicate prior to the *Prolemur-*

Hapalemur divergence. The remaining two *CYP2J* orthogroups (OG-1 and OG-2) arose as the

product of a duplication event prior to the first speciation event of all species involved in this

analysis. While no more duplications were called in the OG1-OG2 clade, several deletions are

implied by the tree's topology. First, one gene appears to have been lost in the *Prop. coquereli*

lineage. Second, another deletion was ostensibly lost in the ancestral lemurid lineage. Last, *H.*

griseus lost one more homolog after that lineage's split from that of *Prol. simus.* Thus, the

CYP2J subfamily displays more of the above-mentioned pattern wherein the bamboo lemurs

stand out for their likelihood of losing P450 genes.

The topologies of the remaining *CYP2* subfamilies (*i.e., E, F, G, R, S, U,* and *W*) show no

evidence of duplication (Figs. S8-S13). Degeneration of one *CYP2F* gene may have occurred in

the *Mic. murinus* lineage (see Fig. S9), but anthropoids and at least some lorisiforms appear to

possess only a single *CYP2F* gene as well (Chaney et al., 2020; Chaney, 2023). Therefore, the

ancestral primate number of *CYP2F* orthologs is uncertain without the inclusion of a

phylogenetically broader set of species. With this single possible exception, bamboo lemurs

have clearly maintained the same number of gene copies in each of these subfamilies as the

other lemur species analyzed here.

The final subfamily of this part of the analysis further underscores the pattern described

for other subfamilies above (Fig. 2, bottom-left; Fig. S14). While OG-0 within the *CYP3A* tree

possesses only speciation nodes, one loss is evident in the absence of *Prop. coquereli* from this

clade. The other part of the tree exhibits a very complex topology because of the number of

duplication nodes contained within it. Many of these outside of the lemurid portion of the tree

are taxon-specific: *Prop. coquereli* and *Mic. murinus* each experienced two and four exclusive

duplication events, respectively. The lemurid portion of OG-1 shows at least three duplication

events prior to the divergence of *L. catta* and from the ancestral bamboo-lemur lineage. One

more duplication event, leading to the *L. catta* genes *CYP3A4L1* and *CYP3A4L2*, would be most

parsimoniously interpreted as having occurred specifically in ring-tail lemur lineage, but it is not

ruled out that this duplication may have occurred in an ancestral species and been lost by both

bamboo lemur species. Regardless, at least two separate events of genic loss seem to have

occurred in the lineage of the bamboo lemurs. Thus, while *L. catta* appears to exhibit six

separate *CYP3A* homologs, bamboo lemurs possess half that number; furthermore, we

conclude that this pattern is attributable nearly wholly to gene loss by bamboo lemurs rather

than lineage-specific expansion of *CYP3A* for *L. catta.*

<u>3.2 Selection relaxed on two P450 xenobiotic metabolizers</u>

Out of all P450 subfamilies studied here, only *CYP2F* and *CYP2J* showed significant

signals of selectional relaxation within the bamboo-lemur clade (Table S2). The *CYP2F*

subfamily's estimated *dN/dS* distributions were interesting in that all rate classes in the test-

branch distribution collapsed to a ratio of 1.00, indicating neutral evolution of these genes since

their divergence from their *L. catta* orthologs. After examining all bamboo-lemur sequences

and comparing them to their ancestral reconstructions, we found that all $dN - dS$ calculations

for the bamboo-lemur *CYP2F1* and *CYP2F2* ancestral sequences and all of their descendent

sequences were virtually zero (*CYP2F1* range: -9.2e-3, -9.4e-4; *CYP2F2* range: 0.018, -6.6e-3).

This result is consistent with the above RELAX results, which indicate that both *CYP2F* orthologs

appear to be evolving neutrally in the bamboo-lemur clade.

The *CYP2C* subfamily exhibited a significant signal of selectional *intensification* (p = 6.8e-

8, k = 1.42; see Table S3). Examination of the omega distribution for the test branches showed

that this appears to be driven by a heightened estimate for the highest *dN/dS* rate class, and

follow-up analysis with aBSREL and BUSTED showed this result was driven by a site in the *H.*

griseus ortholog for *CYP2C21* (Fig. S15). Indeed, aBSREL detected diversifying selection only

along the this terminal branch (likelihood ratio = 41.92, p < 0.00001), with a very high estimate

for the highest *dN/dS* rate class (> 1000). Some, but not all, of this variation was shared by the

closely related *H. meridionalis*, but this species' terminal branch did not show any positive

result from our aBSREL or BUSTED analyses.

4. Discussion

In this study, we have demonstrated that the genomes of two bamboo lemur species (*H.*

griseus and *Prol. simus*) harbor, at a conservative maximum, the modal number of cytochrome

P450 genes across the other lemur species included here (Table S1). Indeed, in most cases

where losses of P450 genes were inferred, they are most parsimoniously attributed to a

bamboo lemur-specific branch of the phylogeny in question (see Figs. 1-2). Thus, bamboo

lemurs appear to show a narrower repertoire of xenobiotic-metabolizing P450s insofar as they

have generally fewer genes than other species of lemur, especially in comparison to their

closest relative, *Lemur catta.* Bamboo lemurs also show signals of relaxation of natural selection

for the *CYP2F* and *CYP2J* subfamilies (see Fig. 3), which are known to be involved in xenobiotic

metabolism (Danielson, 2002; Guengerich, 2015).

These results are perhaps best understood in terms of an evolutionary tradeoff on

detoxification strategies (Dearing et al., 2005; Freeland & Janzen, 1974; Ueno, 2001). In a

pivotal paper outlining several nutritional-ecological hypotheses, Freeland and Janzen (1974)

formalized the notion that generalist and specialist herbivores should differ inversely with

regard to the breadth of their arsenals for the metabolism of toxic plant secondary metabolites.

In their view, herbivores should possess a comparatively wide array of detoxification

mechanisms to handle low doses of a commensurately broad variety of toxins, and specialist

herbivores should, conversely, possess a smaller array of such mechanisms able to handle large

doses of a narrow variety of toxins (Dearing et al., 2005; Freeland & Janzen, 1974; Marsh et al.,

2006). The general pattern of copy-number differences and the more limited result of

selectional relaxation shown in this study seems to support this hypothesis in the case of

bamboo lemurs, alongside this taxon's high degree of specialization (see Table S1) and the

stupendous amounts of cyanide consumed by them (Ballhorn et al., 2009; Glander et al., 1989).

In this set of results, the *CYP2F* subfamily stood out from other P450 subfamilies by

having a particular signal of selectional relaxation that suggested neutral evolution, as all of the

rate classes for *CYP2F* bamboo-lemur orthologs collapsed toward dN/dS = 1.00. Follow-up

comparisons of dN and dS were consistent with this result (Table S4). Although this P450

subfamily is most highly expressed in the respiratory tract, hepatic expression has been

demonstrated, albeit at lower levels (Duff et al., 2015; Fagerberg et al., 2014; Yue et al., 2014).

Human CYP2F1 and its model-rodent homologs can activate coumarins through epoxidation

reactions, leading to cytotoxicity and necrosis at varying species-dependent levels (Born et al,

2002; Vassalo et al., 2004). Similarly, CYP2F enzymes have been linked with bioactivation of the

toxin naphthalene, also through an oxidation reaction (Lanza et al., 1999; Li et al., 2011; Zhang

& Ding, 2008). These biochemical associations are notable here because chromatographic

assays and microbiome studies of various species of bamboo have implied or directly indicated

the presence of both naphthalene (Li et al., 2002; Takahashi et al., 2010) and coumarins (Coffie

et al., 2014) in those bamboo species (reviewed by Gagliano et al., 2022). Generalizing from

these findings, we would hypothesize, first, that naphthalene and coumarins are present in

Malagasy bamboo consumed by bamboo lemurs and, second, that bamboo lemurs would be

susceptible to toxicity from their metabolite oxides (napthalene: see Yost et al., 2021;

coumarins: see Foroozesh et al., 2019). Therefore, neutral evolution of bamboo lemurs' *CYP2F*

orthologs may have allowed for marginally lowered efficiency of the bioactivation of these

PSMs into more toxic metabolites. Experimental testing of this hypothesis would help to clarify

this interesting result.

CYP2J, the other subfamily to show significant relaxation of selection pressure for

bamboo lemurs, is largely responsible for the metabolism of arachidonic acid, an endogenous

molecule, and other polyunsaturated fatty acids (Xu et al., 2013; Q.-Y. Zhang & Ding, 2008).

However, CYP2J enzymes have been shown to be important in the metabolism of some

xenobiotic compounds such as linoleic acid and a variety of pharmaceutical compounds

(Capdevila & Wang, 2013; Falck et al., 2009; Hildreth et al., 2020; Michaelis et al., 2003;

Pidkovka et al., 2013; Tang et al., 2009; M.-Z. Zhang et al., 2013; cited in Guengerich, 2015). We

suggest therefore that bamboo-lemur diets are likely sparse in such xenobiotics that would be

targeted by CYP2J enzymes.

The difference between bamboo lemurs and the sifaka *Propithecus coquereli* stands out

as a second confirmatory signal of Freeland and Janzen's (1974) tradeoff hypothesis because,

while both of these taxa are generally classified as folivorous, they differ in their amount of

dietary specialization. As mentioned previously, all species of bamboo lemur that have been

studied are heavily reliant on either grasses (usually bamboo) or sedges, and very few plants,

often only a single species, are required to describe a large majority of their diets (see Table

S1). Conversely, sifakas (*Propithecus* spp.) consume much more varied foods (Hemingway,

1998; Norscia et al., 2006; Powzyk & Mowry, 2003; Rowe et al., 2016), seasonally trending

toward gramnivory or frugivory depending on the species in question (Irwin 2006). Despite this

dietary diversity, sifakas do possess clear gastrointestinal adaptations related to hindgut

fermentation, such as a greatly elongated intestine and an expanded, haustrated cecum

(Campbell et al., 2000). For this reason, sifakas are often described as *anatomical folivores*, with

the implication that they are more behaviorally flexible with their diet choice than one might be

led to believe upon viewing their gastrointestinal anatomy. Meanwhile, bamboo lemurs of all

three major species possess a relatively simpler gastrointestinal anatomy, with an overall

relatively shorter intestine and a shorter, though completely haustrated, colon (Campbell et al.

2000; Yamashita et al. 2008). All of this information serves to position sifakas and bamboo

lemurs on opposite sides of a specialist-generalist continuum among herbivores.

Such dietary differences between these two taxa helps to clarify an ultimate explanation

for the opposite pattern of gene birth and death seen in the *CYP2B6* gene cluster for bamboo

lemurs and *Prop. coquereli* (see Fig. 1). This is also true, but to a less pronounced degree, for

the *CYP2A* subfamily (see Fig. 1). In both of these cases, bamboo lemurs exhibit clade-specific

gene losses and *Prop. coquereli* shows an opposite signal of lineage-specific gene duplications.

Indeed, (Guevara et al. 2021), utilizing this same genome assembly for *Prop. coquereli,*

independently found that these two P450 subfamilies had been enriched in so-called "rapidly

evolving genes," or genes with increased *dN/dS* ratios according to PAML branch-site models

(Yang, 2007). Because both *CYP2A* and *CYP2B* subfamilies are involved in the metabolism of

xenobiotic compounds (Guengerich 2015; Orr et al. 2020), at least these two P450 subfamilies

stand out as candidate gene groups supporting Freeland and Janzen's (1974) prediction, that

specialist and generalist herbivores should differ oppositely in the diversity of their means for

detoxifying plant secondary metabolites. This interesting natural experiment, of comparing

bamboo lemurs and sifakas (or indriids in general), deserves future investigation.

A second line of inquiry is the contrast between *Lemur catta* and the bamboo lemurs.

The number of xenobiotic-metabolizing P450 genes in the *L. catta* genome was always greater

than or equal to those in either bamboo lemur genome. The highly varied and very seasonal

diet documented for *L. catta* (Jolly, 1966; LaFleur, 2012; Sauther, 1992; Sauther et al., 1999;

Simmen, Sauther, et al., 2006; Soma, 2006) stands out as a potential explanation for this large

number of detoxification mechanisms. Indeed, Sauther et al. (1999) argue that the best dietary

classification for *L. catta* should be "opportunistic omnivores" (p. 122) because of the breadth

of this species' dietary repertoire and the drastic spikes of certain foods based on their seasonal

availability. This species also appears to be relatively inured to plant secondary metabolites

based on the high tannin and alkaloid content of their foods (Gould et al., 2009; Simmen,

Sauther, et al., 2006) and their relatively high rejection threshold for the bitter alkaloid quinine

(Simmen, Peronny, et al., 2006). This constellation of information portrays a pattern of an

animal that is exposed to a broad array of plant secondary metabolites and, perhaps because of

the annual variety of their foods, exposed to them at relatively low levels.

While *L. catta* possesses a sizeable number of xenobiotic-metabolizing P450 genes in

comparison to both species of bamboo lemur (see Table S1), these genes are not the products

of species-specific duplications, as is plain from the phylogenetic pattern of relatedness among

all the genes falling into the clade of ringtail and bamboo lemurs. Instead, many of these

duplicated genes seem to have arisen during the internode of a lemurid common ancestor, or

that of a common ancestor of the *Hapalemur* and *Lemur* genera, and then subsequently lost by

one or both of the bamboo lemurs species included here. This result accords well with

experimental work on bitter taste receptors (TAS2R16), which shows that the species of

bamboo lemur included here (as well as *H. aureus*) show a decreased sensitivity to several

bitter β-glycoside compounds (Itoigawa et al., 2021). Revealingly, however, the missense

mutations that most altered the response of the TAS2R16 protein were separate for *Prol. simus*

and *Hapalemur* spp., and ancestral reconstructions of the last common ancestors for both the

genus *Hapalemur* and for all bamboo lemurs showed a more sensitive response to these bitter

compounds than any of the present-day species-specific TAS2R16 isoforms (Itoigawa et al.,

2021). Given this earlier work and the pattern of P450 gene birth and death presented here, a

generalist dietary pattern is clearly the best estimate for an ancestral ecology of the

Hapalemur-Lemur last common ancestor. Furthermore, the complex pattern of loss and

retention of separate P450 paralogs by *Prol. simus* and *H. griseus* seems to agree with the

conclusion of Itoigawa et al. (2021) that these species' varying, but in all cases intense,

specialization on cyanogenic bamboo may have evolved in parallel rather than what would be

predicted based on parsimony, namely that this specialization would have evolved in the

common ancestor of all extant bamboo-lemur species.

On a methodological note, the pattern of gene gain and loss reported here is certainly

not the conclusion that would be reached by using an approach where the gene-count table is

parsimoniously compared to an organismal phylogeny to estimate ancestral states of gene

counts, as with the commonly used program for studying gene-family evolution, CAFE (De Bie

et al., 2006). This software program takes phylogeny into account only insofar as the species

themselves are concerned but does not include any information about the genes' own

phylogenetic relatedness, and for this reason, we see it as an undesirable alternative to

examining a phylogeny built from the genes themselves. While CAFE is very useful in its ability

to be easily automated, manual examinations of gene trees, or perhaps the use of programs

such as Possvm (Grau-Bové & Sebé-Pedrós, 2021) that make direct use of gene trees via the

species-overlap method (Huerta-Cepas, et al., 2007, 2016), would yield more accurate ancestral

reconstructions of gene copy-number differences among species.

A lingering question remains as to what compounds, or families of compounds, are

leading to the evolutionary expansions and contractions on display in this study. However,

there is currently a clear disconnect in the literature that inhibits any discussion between those

who have precise knowledge of P450 substrate compounds (*e.g.,* Guengerich 2015) and those

who perform phytochemical assays on foods of wild primates (*e.g.,* Eppley et al. 2017; Thurau

et al. 2021; Windley et al. 2022). The disconnect arises from differing levels of scale on which

each of these two groups operates: pharmacologists often use precise molecules (*e.g.,*

benzo[a]pyrene, aflatoxin B1) in their experiments and parlance, while phytochemists and

primatologists speak in the more general terms of compound families (*e.g.,* alkaloids,

condensed tannins). This nomenclatural gulf between these two camps is a foggy one, and it

serves to cloud any inferences that may be gained about the functions of free-ranging, non-

model primate species.

5. Conclusion

Here, we have found that bamboo lemurs have, on average, fewer *CYP1-3* gene copies

than other lemurs, and this is especially true when they are viewed alongside their closest

relative, the ringtail lemur. Viewed another way, bamboo lemurs have, at most, the same

number of P450 genes per subfamily as *L. catta*, and they often have fewer such genes. The

retention of these specific P450 homologs was not parsimonious when compared with the

organismal phylogeny, and the complexity of this pattern may imply some information about

bamboo-lemur evolution in general, namely that their specialization on cyanogenic bamboo

may have evolved in parallel rather than as a sort of ecological synapomorphy early after the

divergence of these two lineages. Only two P450 subfamilies (*CYP2F* and *CYP2J*), both of which

are linked with xenobiotic metabolism in humans (Guengerich, 2015), showed a statistical

decrease in the intensity of selection on the CDS for the genes within those subfamilies. As in

previous work on the evolution of the cytochrome P450 superfamily of genes, this topic

provides an interesting and complex window into biological evolution. Future work that

includes other species of bamboo lemur (*e.g.*, *H. alaotrensis, H. aureus*) will doubtless only

clarify that view.

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7. Author contributions

MEC had the following roles for this study: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis,

investigation, methodology, visualization, and writing (original draft). AJT had the roles of

funding acquisition, resources, software, supervision, and writing (reviewing and editing). CMB

was responsible for methodology, project administration, resources, supervision, and writing

(reviewing and editing).

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<u>Data Accessibility and Benefit-sharing</u>

FASTQ reads from the genomic sequencing of *Hapalemur griseus* have been deposited

in the NCBI SRA (accession number XXXXX), and the alignments and trees necessary to

reproduce this work are available on Dryad.

1011

1012   Table 1: Select statistics from *de novo* assembly of *Hapalemur griseus* (Beavis) using the

1013   Supernova assembler.

Raw coverage	Contig N_{50}	Scaffold N_{50}	Est. genome size	Primate BUSCO genes recovered (Simão et al. 2015)
69.49x	277.73 kb	20.47 Mb	2.61 Gb[1]	3927/4104 (95.7%)

1014

Specialized folivory and its effects on xenobiotic-metabolizing cytochrome P450 genes

Monotonous diet largely consisting of bamboo

Bamboo

Relaxation of natural selection:
CYP2F
CYP2J

Selection pressure:
■ Relaxed
■ Standard

ω - selection pressure

Evolutionary loss of *CYP* orthologs:
CYP2B
CYP2C
CYP2D
CYP2J
CYP3A