Hierarchical population genetic structure and signatures of adaptation in

Lates calcarifer

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Abstract

Context

Lates calcarifer is a widespread Indo-Pacific fish that is important in aquaculture, recreational and commercial fisheries. Genetic divergences from different data sources and sampling schemes have been reported.

Aims

To conduct phylogenetic and population genetic analyses from a geographically and phylogenetically representative data set to identify hierarchical divisions within *L. calcarifer*. We further test the evolutionary significance of genetic units in terms of signatures of adaptation.

Methods

Using a whole-genome sequence data set of 61 fish including an outgroup, we conducted phylogenetic and population genetic analyes. We also generated measures of F_{st}, nucleotide diversity (π) and Tajima's D (D).

Key Results

We identify three main lineages of *L. calcarifer* corresponding to the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and Australasia. Subdivision within each of the three main lineages is also identified and characterized. Adaptively significant differences are indicated within and between the three main lineages.

Conclusions

L. calcarifer exhibits genetic divergences at different levels that originate before and during the Pleistocene. These divergences are associated with adaptive divergence but unclear phenotypic changes.

Implications

This study highlights the need for comprehensive sampling and integrative study of genotypes and phenotypes across the range of *L. calcarifer*.

Key Words

Introduction

Essential processes necessary for life on Earth are sustained by biodiversity, and biodiversity provides for human needs in various ways. Regardless of its limits and challenges, the basic unit for understanding biodiversity is the concept of species (e.g. Agapow et al., 2004). While the recognition of species is indeed important, so is the recognition of units below the species level that contribute to biodiversity. The ecological effects of intraspecific variation can meet our exceed species effect and therefore are important to document and recognize (Des Roches et al., 2018). Conservation of both species-level and intraspecific variation serves to promote ecological, cultural and economic functions of organisms, resilience and genetic variation for future adaptive potential (e.g. Layton et al., 2021; Lehnert et al., 2023; Schindler et al., 2010). Specific and intraspecific variation can be considered through both isolation and adaptation without the reliance on formal species taxonomy (Waples, 1991).

We apply these basic ideas of isolation and adaptation to identify variation to a Indo-Pacific *Lates*. Most Indo-Pacific *Lates* are classified under *Lates calcarifer* (Bloch 1790), and it is a valuable commercial taxon of cultural and recreational significance e.g. (Cluney, 2004; Edwards-Vandenhoek, 2015; Shamsi et al., 2020). The common names 'barramundi' and 'Asian sea bass' are widely used. A broad-ranging taxon, *L. calcarifer* is often considered to be distributed from the Persian Gulf eastwards to Taiwan and Australia, and into Oceania (**Figure 1**). Abed et al. (2023) note that there are no reliable reports from the Persian Gulf of native *Lates* and indicate a natural distribution through western India. Within this broader range, two regional endemics may be recognized, in Sri Lanka *L. lakdiva* Pethiyagoda & Gill 2012 and Myanmar *L. uwisara* Pethiyagoda & Gill 2012 (Pethiyagoda and Gill, 2012). We refer to all these fishes together as Indo-Pacific *Lates*.

Aquaculture, beginning in Thailand in the 1970's, has increased greatly and Indo-Pacific *Lates* are now widely propagated across their range with some aquaculture outside the native range. Indo-Pacific *Lates* are now grown in diverse locations such as the United States of America (Arizona, Hawaii and Massachusetts), Israel, Taiwan and the Persian Gulf (Iraq) (Abed et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Mathew, 2009). Propagation is also undertaken for stocking programs in lakes across northern Australia (e.g. Manton Dam, Northern Territory; Lake Kununurra, Western

Australia) to support recreational fisheries and tourism in remote communities. Generally, Indo-

Pacific *Lates* are considered to be protandrous hemaphrodites, catadromous, and tolerant of a

wide range of salinities (Moore, 1979; Moore and Reynold, 1982). The sequential

hermaphrodism of the taxon requires the importation of young males into aquaculture facilities

as older fish become females, a potential source of hybridization and mixing of stocks of

different origin. Movement for aquaculture, e.g. from Thailand to Taiwan also can result in the

mixing of fish of different backgrounds and opportunities for release or escape (Chen et al.,

2024). Other qualities of Indo-Pacific *Lates* such as high fecundity, ease of culture and rapid

growth (i.e. harvestable size of 3 kg in less than two years) encourage their production (Rimmer,

2009).

The widespread culture and commercial fishing for Indo-Pacific *Lates* has led to genetic studies

to understand population genetic structure. Initial mitochondrial barcoding revealed a deep

divergence between Australian and Myanmar fish classified under *L. calcarifer* (K2P distance ~

9.50%) (Ward et al., 2008). Broader sampling geographically of mitochondrial lineages has

substantiated this divergence, showing a distinctive clade of Indian subcontinent and Bay of

Bengal fish (IND, including the Andaman Islands and Myanmar) separate from Southeast Asia

(SEA, e.g. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia) and Northern Australia (Vij et al.,

2014). Vij et al. (2014) did include the sequences from Ward et al. (2008) and demonstrated that

they are similar to a more broadly distributed IND mitochondrial lineage. Restriction site-

Associated DNA sequencing (RADseq) applied to population-level samples of Indo-Pacific

Lates (n = 131) from six localities (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Western Australia, Eastern

Australia and Papua New Guinea) revealed a high degree of differentiation of SEA fish from

Australia + New Guinea (AUS+NG). Pairwise F_{st} within SEA was 0.005-0.009 but 0.360-0.443

between SEA and AUS+NG without evidence of contemporary gene flow (Wang et al., 2016).

Some investigation of population genomic structure was applied to a range-wide data set at a

high level as part of a genome assembly study but did not investigate concordance between

mtDNA and genomic DNA or population genetic metrics (Vij et al., 2016). Broadly, Vij et al.

(2016) identified a separation of Indian Ocean fish, Southeast Asian fish and Australasian fish

into genetic clusters. Population genetic structure range-wide examined with microsatellites (K =

4 genetic clusters presented) produced rather unclear distinctions of Indian Ocean fish from parts

of Southeast Asia, and indicates a central Indonesian phylogroup and Australasian phylogroup

(Jerry and Smith-Keune, 2014). No study to date, has analyzed both mitochondrial data and

genomic data explicitly from the same individuals to evaluate concordance between data sources

and resolve possible discordance between mitochondrial and genomic signals.

While there is evidence of genetic differentiation within Indo-Pacific *Lates* at a high

phylogenetic level (Vij et al. 2014), this has only been evaluated thoroughly with molecular

phylogenetic approaches using mtDNA. Within major genetic lineages, there is also genetic

differentiation evident (e.g. Chenoweth et al., 1998; Shaklee and Salini, 1985; Yue et al., 2009),

and the evolutionary significance of these differences are not substantiated. We apply a

hierarchical approach to identify isolation (discreteness) of Indo-Pacific *Lates* genetic lineages

with molecular phylogenetic and population genetic approaches, and test for adaptive

significance between these lineages. Within lineages, we test for additional isolation and

adaptive significance of these differences with population genetic approaches.(Lehnert et al.,

2023). We further evaluate evidence of hybridization between main genetic lineages to

determine if the hybridization is recent (F1, F2) and presumably a result of human activities or

represents older admixture events.

Methods

We approached the question of isolation within Indo-Pacific *Lates* by first constructing

phylogenies using mitochondrial DNA and genome-wide SNPs. Subsequently, population

genetic techniques were used, and divisions were examined at a high level (genetic lineages) and

then within those lineages. We tested for evolutionarily significance through identifying possible

adaptive loci between and within main lineages of Indo-Pacific *Lates.* An outstanding question is

if hybridization is recent as a result of human mediated translocations or a result of natural

admixture between lineages. We applied statistical testing to this question to determine if

evidence of recent introgression in mtDNA was corroborated at the genetic level. Finally, we

developed a timeline for diversification of Indo-Pacific *Lates* using a time-calibrated

phylogenetic approach.

Whole-Genome Sequence Data Set

Genome-wide sequence data from Indo-Pacific *Lates* were downloaded from the NCBI

Sequence Read Archive under the BioProject accession PRJNA311498. The 61 samples in

PRJNA311498 covered a broad distribution, from the Indian subcontinent, parts of Southeast

Asia, Northern Australia and Papua New Guinea. Two additional sequences of BP were obtained

from Bangladesh (PRJNA1021005) and for phylogenetic analyses an outgroup obtained (*L.*

japonicus, n =1, PRJDB13763). The paired-end data was aligned to the BP reference genome

GCF001640805.2 (TLL_Latcal_v3) with the Burrows-Wheeler aligner (BWA) with the mem

algorithm (Li and Durbin, 2010, 2009). Alignments were sorted, properly paired reads kept and

PCR duplicates removed with SAMTools (Danecek et al., 2021; Li et al., 2009). Total read

counts, filtered read counts and depth of coverage were calculated from alignments with

SAMTools. Those samples with coverage $\leq$ 3X were excluded from further analyses.

Mitochondrial Phylogeny

A mitochondrial alignment from the WGS data was created by creating a Binary Alignment Map

(BAM) file for each individual with more than 3X coverage only including reads aligned to the

reference mitochondrial genome (NC_007439.1, samtools view). These BAM files were

converted to consensus FASTQ files with the bam2cns subprogram of proovread (Hackl et al.,

2014) then to FASTA files turning all bases with quality scores below 20 to N with seqtk (seq -a

-q20 -n N) (https://github.com/lh3/seqtk). The mitochondrial Cytochrome Oxidase I (mtCOI)

gene was extracted from the complete mitochondrial FASTA-formatted sequences with

SAMtools (faidx NC_007439.1:6329-7879). For rooting, the corresponding region of the *L.*

japonicus mitochondrial genome was extracted from the NCBI reference sequence

(NC_034339.1) and sequences were aligned with MAFFT (Katoh et al., 2002; Katoh and Toh,

2008). A Maximum-Likelihood (ML) phylogeny of sequences was generated with IQTREE

specifying a Hasegawa-Kishino-Yano model of nucleotide substitution with gamma-distributed

rate variation (-m HKY+G) and support for nodes evaluated with rapid bootstrapping (-bb

10000) (Hoang et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2014). The tree was imported into R and visualized

with the ggtree package (Yu et al., 2017) collapsing nodes to polytomies receiving less than 50%

Bootstrap Support (BS) and rooting by the longest branch.

Genome-Wide Phylogenetic and Network Analyses

We generated a genome-wide set of called SNPs with Analysis of Next Generation Sequencing

Data (ANGSD) from the 24 main linkage groups in the BP assembly (Korneliussen et al., 2014).

Quality of called SNPs was enforced by ensuring that a SNP was present in at least 90% of

individuals, had a minimum Minor Allele Frequency (MAF) of 0.05, a minimum mapping

quality of 20, minimum base quality of 20, a SNP p – val of 1.00×10^{-6} and a posterior cutoff of

0.90. A SAMTools model was specified and a PLINK-formatted file created as the output. We

converted the PLINK-formatted file to a VCF-formatted file with PLINK (Purcell et al., 2007).

Linked SNPS were removed with BCFTools +prune (-l 0.20 -w 10000).

The multispecies coalescent was applied to model gene-tree and species-tree discordance

resulting from Incomplete Lineage Sorting, ILS (Maddison, 1997) on a set of called SNPs that

included the outgroup *L. japonicus*. A species-tree was generated using SVDQuartets in PAUP*

version 4.0a (Chifman and Kubatko, 2015, 2014; Swofford, 2003). Samples were pooled by

sampling region for the species tree. A random set of quartets (evalQuartets=random), partially

ambiguous SNPs were distributed over all compatible site patterns (ambigs=distribute), and

1,000 bootstrap replicates (bootstrap=standard nreps=1000) were options specified.

For ML phylogenetic analysis and network analysis we called SNPS with BP samples and a

phylogeny of SNPs was inferred with IQTREE by identifying a model of nucleotide evolution

with ModelFinder Plus and indicating the ascertainment bias correction should be applied (-m

MFP+ASC) (Kalyaanamoorthy et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2011). IQTREE was used to further

filter SNPs for suitability for ascertainment bias correction. Support for nodes was evaluated

with 10,000 rapid boostraps (Hoang et al., 2018). As concatenated phylogenetic analyses do not

explicitly model hybridization or ILS, we created an implicit network to identify potential

hybridization or ILS in our data set with SplitsTree (Huson and Bryant, 2005). The same

alignment provided to IQTREE was analyzed with SplitsTree.

Population Genetic Structure and Statistics

Total signal in the data set was assessed by the generation of covariance matrix with ANGSD

and a PC analysis. The covariance matrix was generated by with a single read sampling approach

due to a wide range of individual coverage (minimum 4.73, maximum 34.81, mean 9.38 and

median 6.41) with the options -doIBs 1 and -doCov 1 in ANGSD. The 24 main linkage groups of

the reference assembly were sampled for this analysis. A variable site was required to be present

in >90% of individuals with a minimum MAF of 0.05. A minimum mapping quality of 10 was

specified with a minimum base quality of 20 and a GATK genotype likelihood model was used

(-GL 2). The resulting covariance matrix was imported into R for PC analysis.

To calculate genetic differentiation in terms of F_{st} was calculated by generating Site Frequency

Spectra (SFS) for each sampling region with ANGSD and the realSFS subprogram, splitting

Indonesia into two locations based on metadata available with the sequences ("K" n=5 and and

"SJ" n=5). Vietnam (n=2), Indonesia "SU" (n=1) and Bangladesh (n=2) were excluded due to

small sample sizes. Two-dimensional SFS were calculated between each possible pair of

sampling regions and F_{st} calculated (see code repository accompanying this paper). Nucleotide

diversity (π) and Tajima's D (D) estimates were calculated for each chromosome with realSFS

using the saf2theta option followed by the thetaStat subprogram of ANGSD and the do_stat

option.

Admixture analysis was conducted with NGSadmix (Skotte et al., 2013) on genotype likelihoods

generated with ANGSD as for the PC analysis using a single read sampling approach. The

resulting BEAGLE-formatted file was used with NGSadmix to produce an admixture plot of $K =$

2-5 genetic clusters.

Tests for Adaptative Genetic Variation

Genotype calls produced for phylogenetic network analysis after pruning were imported into R

for analysis with PCAdapt (Luu et al., 2017; Privé et al., 2020). The *pcadapt* function was then

used to generate a scree plot and identify an objective number of PCs with the first 20 PCs

examined. From the resulting object from the *pcadapt* function, outlier loci were identified by

filtering for a Benjamini and Hochberg (1995) and Bonferroni corrected *p* – values with

significance values less than 0.10. We repeated this analysis for individuals in each main genetic

lineage by filtering for variants with a minimum minor allele frequency of 0.05 and examining

the first 5 PCs.

Evaluation of Hybridization Levels

It is possible that Southeast Asian *Lates* exhibit a mixture of hybridization levels between IND

and SEA lineages, with possible F1s, F2s and advanced backcrosses. Two wild-caught samples

in the data set from Cambodia (sequence read accessions SRR3165998, SRR3165999) had IND

lineage mtDNA sequences (see results, Figure 2). We applied NewHybrids (Anderson and

Thompson, 2002) to test if these two Cambodian fish were recent (F1, F2) or older hybrids

(advanced backcrosses). Using the called and pruned SNP data sets, we excluded recently

reported potential chromosomal inversions (Campbell and Hale, 2024) and imported the data

into R and analyzed with functions of the dartR package (Gruber et al., 2018). We restricted the

analysis to fish from the SEA and IND lineages as NewHybrids functions with two populations

and mixtures of those populations then filtered out low MAF SNPS (threshold of 0.25). The

gl.nhybrids function of dartR was used to drive a NewHybrids analysis with India Western Coast

and Bangladesh sampling locations designated as one parental lineage (P0) and Indonesia-K and

Indonesia-SU as another (P1). We allowed SNPs to not be entirely fixed between parental

populations (threshold=0.01) and chose a subset of 200 SNPs for analysis with the 'AvgPIC'

criterion. Analysis included a 100,000 step burnin and 50,000 sweeps.

Divergence Time Estimation

Existing efforts have covered a broad geographic and lineage sampling of Indo-Pacific *Lates*

with barcoding (mitochondrial *cox1*) (Vij et al., 2014; Ward et al., 2008). The effort of this study

was then to calculate divergence times of the three lineages (IND, SEA and AUS+NG). We

downloaded barcode sequences from the Barcode of Life Database and Genbank for Latidae.

With BLAST (blastn) we confirmed the major lineages of Indo-Pacific *Lates* in barcode data

(Altschul et al., 1997) then selected representative sequences from these three lineages to

conduct a divergence time analysis (**Table 1**). We also searched for representation across Latidae

for broad taxonomic representation of this family including sequences from *L. japonicus*, *L.

microlepis* and *L. niloticus*. We included representatives of the two main mitochondrial lineages

present in *Psammoperca* corresponding to *P. waigiensis* and *P. datnioides*. Centropomidae has

been confirmed to be the sister lineage of Latidae in molecular phylogenetic study e.g.

(Campbell et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2007; Li et al., 2011) and inclusion of Centropomidae allows

dating the Time to Most Recent Common Ancestor (TMRCA) of Centropomidae and Latidae to

48.6 million years ago (mya) (Campbell et al. 2013; Otero, 2004). We also included sequences

from the outgroup lineages Channidae and Nandidae as an additional calibration point dating the

TMRCA of those taxa to be 48 mya (Santini et al., 2009).

Sequences were aligned with MAFFT (Katoh et al., 2002; Katoh and Toh, 2008), in frame

coding was confirmed by translation in the NCBI ORF finder and a NEXUS file made for a

time-calibrated phylogenetic analysis in MrBayes (Ronquist et al., 2012). The third codon

position was excluded due to the age of the data set and expected saturation occurring in

mitochondrial sequences from carangimorph taxa at these timescales e.g. (Campbell et al., 2014).

A nucleotide substitution model of General Time Reversible (GTR) with a proportion of

invariant sites (I) and gamma-distributed rate variation (Γ) was specified. Constraints were

applied to Centropomidae + Latidae to date with an exponential distribution used,

offsetexp(48.60, 63.18), and the outgroup, offsetxp(48.00,62.40). Initially, three runs and three

chains were specified with a run length of 1 million generations sampled ever 1,000 generations

and a 25% burnin applied. Evaluation of parameters and convergence with Tracer (Rambaut et

al., 2018) was assessed, and run length increased until sufficient ESS for all parameters (>200)

was reached. Tree summarization was done in MrBayes with the sumt command and an all

compatible consensus tree made.

Results

Whole-Genome Sequence Data Set

From the original 63 Indo-Pacific *Lates* sequences, 60 had coverage over 3X and were included

in additional analyses (**Table 1**). Sample sizes for regions were 13 for putative members of the

IND lineage, 30 for putative members of the SEA lineage, and 17 for putative members of the

AUS+NG lineage from ten sampling regions (**Figure 1**). The *L. japonicus* sequence aligned to

the *L. calcarifer* reference genome with high success with 110X coverage and was down-

sampled to 20X coverage with SAMtools to be more consistent with genome coverage measures

of Indo-Pacific *Lates*.

Mitochondrial Phylogeny

The 61 samples (60 Indo-Pacific *Lates* and one *L. japonicus*) produced an alignment of 1,576

base pairs in length with 71 distinct patterns and 128 parsimony-informative sites. In the

alignment, 1,441 sites were invariant. The ML phylogeny indicates a clear division of *L.*

calcarifer IND individuals with two Cambodian-origin fish from all other fish (**Figure 2**).

Support for monophyly of this IND mtDNA lineage is maximal. Support for monophyly of SEA

+ AUS+NG is maximal, and support for a clade of *L. calcarifer* AUS+NG is moderate

(BS=80%). Individuals sourced from the putative *L. calcarifer* SEA clade do not form clear

geographic clusters, with the exception of a Central Indonesia mtDNA lineage that receives low

support for monophyly (BS=57%) and includes a single sequence from the Philippines. Support

for the arrangement of major mtDNA lineages SEA and AUS+NG lineages is low (BS=55%).

The Assemble Species by Automatic Partition algorithm indicated the strongest support for two

species, with a threshold distance of 4.10% (results provided in the Data Supplement). This

division separates the IND mitochondrial lineage from the combined SEA and AUS+NG lineage.

Genome-Wide Phylogenetic and Network Analyses

For analysis with SVDQuartets to generate a rooted species-tree, 8,529 variants that all have

unique alignment patterns were analyzed and is presented as **Figure 3**. The SNP alignment

consisted of 6,456 parsimony informative and 2,073 singleton sites. Three lineages were

apparent in the species-tree with maximal support for monophyly corresponding to the *L.*

calcarifer IND, *L. calcarifer* SEA and *L. calcarifer* AUS+NG. The SEA and AUS+NG lineages

were highly supported (BS=100%) as sister lineages. Within the IND lineage, the India Eastern

Coast and Bangladesh sampling locations were indicated to be sister lineages (BS=100%). The

AUS+NG lineage individuals from the Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea were indicated

to be most closely related (BS=100%). The first division within the SEA lineage is between

Central Indonesia sampling locations (Indonesia-SU + Indonesia-K) and receives maximal

support for monophyly and branching patterns. The Philippines sampling location separates with

the next successive branching within the SEA lineage (BS=100%). Relationships among

Cambodia, Indonesia-SJ, Thailand and Vietnam sampling locations were not clearly resolved.

For ML phylogenetic analysis and phylogenetic network analysis an alignment of 60 BP

individuals with 7,661 SNPs having 7,661 distinct unique alignment patterns and 5,571

parsimony informative sites was created. The alignment contains 2,090 singleton sites. Support

for monophyly of IND lineage fish is maximal, as well as geographic divisions into Eastern and

Western Indian subcontinent (**Figure 4A**). Indo-Pacific *Lates* from SEA as a grouping receives

low support (BS = 76%) with concordance between sampling locations and placement not

complete. Indonesia-K and the Philippines sampling locations were highly supported to be

monophyletic, but Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia-SJ were not. Support for a group of

AUS+NG sampling locations is maximal, with maximal support for division between

Queensland and Northern Territory + Papua New Guinea fish. Monophyly of samples from the

Northern Territory is poorly supported (BS = 68%).

The phylogenetic network resolves an IND lineage containing two sub-lineages (India Eastern

Coast + Bangladesh, India Western Coast) with separation of all three sampling locations

(**Figure 4B**). The SEA lineage is present separated between Central Indonesia and all other

locations as two main sub lineages, with reticulations with the IND lineage occurring with a

subgroup of 10 individuals, disrupting monophyly of some sampling locations. The Indonesia-K

and Philippines locations were monophyletic, but the Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia-SJ

sampling locations were not. The AUS+NG grouping is composed of three subclades

Queensland (Australia), Northern Territory (Australia) and Papua New Guinea. In the network,

Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea fish were most-closely related to each other.

Population Genetic Structure and Statistics

The PC analysis included 7,321,852 variable sites in the genome and indicated a separation into

three larger genetic clusters corresponding to IND, SEA and AUS+NG individuals

(**Supplemental Figure S1**). The first PC separated AUS+NG, SEA and IND individuals (PC 1

12.57% of variation) with the second PC showing variation within SEA and IND clusters (PC2

4.71%). Clear separation of Indian East Coast + Bangladesh and Indian West Coast individuals is

present on both PC 2 and PC 3 (PC 3 3.51%).

Genetic differentiation (F_{st}) was lowest within main genetic lineages, such as Thailand and

Cambodia (F_{st} = 0.06) within the *L. calcarifer* SEA lineage and between the Indian East Coast

and Indian West Coast sampling locations (F_{st} = 0.11) within the *L. calcarifer* IND lineage

(**Figure 5A**). The highest levels of genetic differentiation were found between main genetic

lineages, between AUS+NG and SEA F_{st} = 0.15-0.35, between AUS+NG and IND F_{st} = 0.22-

0.33, between SEA and IND F_{st} = 0.12-0.26). Nucleotide diversity is the lowest in the AUS+NG

lineage (π = 20,067-22,775) and highest in the IND lineage (π = 207,299-214,485) (**Figure**

5B). Tajima's D was strongly negative (< -1) in the Indonesia-SJ, Thailand, India Eastern Coast

and India Western Coast sampling locations (**Figure 5C**). The AUS+NG sampling locations had

D values between -0.58 and -0.77.

Admixture analysis of 7,321,852 genotype likelihoods from 60 BP individuals for K = 2-5 is

presented as **Supplemental Figure S2**. At K = 2, the Bangladesh, Indian Eastern Coast and

Indian Western Coast have high ancestry coefficients (Q) > 0.99 for a single genetic cluster and

the AUS+NG lineage and Indonesia-K sampling location have high ancestry coefficients for the

other. The remaining SEA sampling locations have a mixture of contributions from both genetic

clusters. At K = 3 the AUS+NG individuals form a clearly genetic cluster with Q > 0.99 for

ancestry coefficients, the SEA sampling locations were heterogenous mixture proportions from

sampling locations largely composed of the third genetic cluster, with the Indonesia-K and

Indonesia-SU sampling locations exhibiting a near uniform ~0.27% admixture proportion with

the genetic cluster typical of AUS+NG sampling locations. Higher values of K lead to separating

of genetic units within the SEA lineage that may or may not correspond to sampling locations.

Tests for Adaptation

The variation within the pruned genotype calls of 22,088 SNPs from the n=60 WGS sequences

with >3X coverage supported an optimal K = 3 PCs (**Supplemental Figure S3**). These PCs

separated the three main lineages of *L. calcarifer*, with the third PC separating the Indonesia-K

sampling location and to a lesser degree the Indonesia-SU individual from other SEA fish.

Benjamini and Hochberg (1995) adjusted p – values (BH) identified 134 candidate adaptive

SNPs and Bonferroni corrected p – values (BF) indicates 34 candidate adaptive SNPs across the

three PC axes.

Filtering to IND individuals (n=13) resulted in 12,075 SNPs with a minimum MAF of 0.05, with

the first PC separating the Bangladesh, India Eastern Coast and India Western Coast with 738

BH and 379 BF candidate adaptive SNPs identified on this axis (**Supplemental Figure S4**). The

second PC axis separated India Eastern Coast with 285 BH and 59 BF candidate adaptive SNPS.

From the SEA lineage, 30 individuals with 17,556 SNPs with a minimum MAF of 0.05 were

analyzed. The first three PCs were considered, separating Indonesia-K and Indonesia-SU

sampling locations on PC 1, the Philippines along PC 2 and some Thailand and Cambodia

individuals along PC 3 with 190 BH and 29 BF candidate adaptive SNPs identified in total

(**Supplemental Figure S5**). The data set of AUS+NG individuals (n=17) for loci with a

minimum MAF of 0.05 resulted in 14,642 SNPs. We found strong support for $K = 2$ PCs, the

first PC separating Queensland from the Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea

(**Supplemental Figure S6**). The second PC separated Papua New Guinea from the other

locations with 234 BH candidate adaptive SNPs and 57 BF candidate adaptive SNPs across the

two PC axes.

Evaluation of Hybridization Levels

The NewHybrid analysis of 43 individuals from the SEA and IND lineages indicated all IND

lineage fish were most likely a parent population (P0, **Supplemental Figure S7**). This includes

India Eastern Coast, which was not designated *a priori* as a potential parent population.

Indonesia-K and Indonesia-SU were resolved as P1 fish with high probability. The two wild-

caught fish from Cambodia with IND lineage mtDNA were indicated to be F2s, with other fish

from Cambodia P1 (n=2) and a backcrossed P1 fish.

Divergence Time Estimation

We compiled a barcode alignment of 13 sequences with 660 characters resulting in 440

characters (399 invariant) when including the first and second codon positions only. Sufficient

effective sample sizes (ESS >200, range of 712-3,002) was reached with 20 million generations

and two runs of three chains each as evaluated after a 25% burnin. The resulting consensus tree

presented in **Figure 6.** The median divergence time of the IND lineage from the other two

lineages is estimated to be 6.76 mya with a 95% Highest Posterior Density (HPD) of 1.31-14.24

mya. The divergence of AUS+NG from SEA is estimated to be 1.02 mya with a 95% HPD range

of 0.00-5.03 mya. The relationships of Indo-Pacific *Lates* mitochondrial lineages were highly

supported, with the placement having a Posterior Probability (PP) of 0.99, and the sister

relationship between AUS+NG and SEA having a PP of 0.97. The NEXUS file for use with

MrBayes and the consensus tree are provided in Data Supplement of this paper.

Discussion

We identify from mitochondrial and nuclear genomic data three main genetic lineages of Indo-

Pacific *Lates*. These are an Indian Ocean lineage (IND), and a Pacific Ocean lineage split

between Southeast Asia (SEA) and Australasia (AUS+NG). A Central Indonesian genetic

cluster, representing Borneo and Sulawesi appears as distinctive group with placement poorly

supported in our mtDNA analysis (Figure 2). Phylogenetic and population genetic analyses using

data from the nuclear genome, place the Central Indonesian samples as more closely related to

Southeast Asian fish (SEA), and we treat them as part of that (SEA) lineage.

The three main genetic lineages of Indo-Pacific *Lates* are present with substantial differences

quantified in terms of genome-wide estimates of F_{st}, candidate adaptive loci and deep divergence

times. We observed F_{st} values up to 0.36 and in terms of divergence times, we estimated 6.76

million years for the divergence of IND from other Indo-Pacific *Lates* and a divergence time

estimate of 1.02 million years for AUS+NG from SEA. The previously published estimate based

on RADseq data for divergence times by Wang et al. (2016) is restricted to AUS+NG from the

SEA lineage and is an approximate 644,100-878,900 years before present. Both of these

estimates, the estimate presented here from fossil-calibrated phylogeny and Wang et al. (2016),

support a divergence during the glacial cycling and changes in sea level and conditions during

the Quaternary. The three main lineages of Indo-Pacific *Lates* exhibit discreteness (genetic

isolation) and evolutionary significance (i.e. adaptive differentiation).

Within each of the three main lineages, there was additional evidence for discreteness and

evolutionary significance. The IND sampling locations were divided phylogenetically (**Figures 3**

& 4), and in PC analysis (**Supplemental Figure S4**) with candidate adaptive SNPs identified.

We find that all three sampling locations within IND (Bangladesh, India Eastern Coast and India

Western Coast) can be separated clearly with genomic data but exhibit some mixing of mtDNA

haplotypes. The SEA lineage exhibited notable separation of the Indonesia-K and Indonesia-SU

sampling locations, the Philippines sampling location and some Thailand fish (**Figure 4**,

Supplemental Figure S5). Clear differentiation of all Philippines and Thailand fish may be

impacted by hybridization (**Supplemental Figure S2**). The RADseq data set of Wang et al.

(2016) did not show clear evidence of genetic structure with three sampling locations within

SEA, but broader sampling with microsatellites did appear to support genetic structuring (Yue et

al., 2009). The AUS+NG sampling exhibited a clear division between Queensland and other

sampling locations (**Figures 3 & 4**) and all three sampling locations could be clearly

differentiated on two PC axes with candidate adaptive loci apparent (**Supplemental Figure S6**).

Within the AUS+NG lineage there are several studies demonstrating genetic differentiation

within that lineage (e.g. Chenoweth et al., 1998; Loughnan et al., 2019; Shaklee and Salini, 1985;

Wang et al., 2016) with 16 discrete genetic populations identified in Australia only (Keenan,

1994).

What is Lates calcarifer*?*

Our fundamental understanding of nature is based at the species level and the lack of recognition

of species is a major knowledge shortfall in conservation and management (Brown and

Lomolino, 1998). Molecular genetic techniques have continued to identify candidate species of

fishes which may or may not have diagnostic morphological characters typical of species

descriptions (e.g. Campbell et al., 2023; Moyle and Campbell, 2022). Instead of being a

historical aspect of biology, the need for continued taxonomic work is very important (e.g. Delić

et al., 2017; Godfray et al., 2004). Taxonomic work often involves the detailed anatomical

investigation of organisms that can reveal phenotypic differences related not only to speciation,

but also life history variation. What remains outstanding is if Indo-Pacific *Lates* can be

accurately represented within Linnean taxonomy or if an alternative approach is better suited to

the biological realities of Indo-Pacific *Lates*.

The most recent taxonomic effort relevant to BP led to the description of *L. lakdiva* Pethiyagoda

& Gill 2012 from western Sri Lanka and *L. usiwara* Pethiyagoda & Gill 2012 from eastern

Myanmar (Pethiyagoda and Gill, 2012). The specimens of *L. usiwara* were the same as featured

in the barcoding study of Ward et al. (2008) highlighting deep mitochondrial divergences, but in a

wider context the barcode sequences of *L. usiwara* are identical to samples from the Indian

subcontinent (Vij et al., 2014). However, in comparison to *L. calcarifer*, a differential diagnosis

was possible and the distribution of *L. usiwara* is perhaps indicative of a recently derived species

or ecotype. The anatomical study undertaken by Vij et al. (2014) along with barcoding did not

clearly separate all these newly described species of *Lates* from *L. calcarifer* noting small sample

sizes used in the description of *L. usiwara* and *L. lakdiva* and conclude that there is substantial

mismatch between anatomical descriptions of new species of *Lates* (within the Indian Ocean) and

candidate species of *Lates* apparent genetically (between the Indian and Pacific oceans at the

broadest scale). Barcode sequences, it should be noted, will not reflect proportion of ancestry as

do genomic data and ascertaining the ancestry proportions of fish used in taxonomic studies is

critical going forward due human translocations of *Lates*. Furthermore, it is possible for a high

degree of genome-wide differentiation or substantial reproductive isolation be present that would

not be apparent in barcode data. Pethiyagoda and Gill (2012) themselves observe that due to the

large body size and sequential hermaphodism of *L. calcarifer sensu lato*, they were restricted to

examining many juveniles for their study.

The three genetic lineages of Indo-Pacific *Lates* remain unclear in distribution and have unclear

anatomical differentiation (Vij et al., 2014). Portions of the range, such as Taiwan, remain

unsampled for genomic data and genetic structuring is apparent across all three lineages (**Figures**

3 & 4, Supplemental Figures S1-S6). Differentiation between and within the main lineages can

be clarified with additional sampling and representation of nominal taxa in genomic data sets

(i.e. *L. usiwara* and *L. lakdiva*). Given the strong genetic differentiation and deep inferred time

scales (**Figure 6**), one possible resolution is to recognize at least two species-level taxa that

correspond to the IND lineage and a combined SEA and AUS+NG lineage. At a potential

species-level, the taxonomy of Indo-Pacific *Lates* is complex and the recognition of types and

their origins is also challenging, reviewed by Pethiyagoda and Gill (2012). The type locality of *L.*

calcarifer (Bloch 1790) may be Tamil Nadu, India (10.4°N, 79.3°E) (Pethiyagoda and Gill,

2012). Thus, the IND lineage may be represented by this name. There are numerous available

names that may be applicable to the SEA lineage, but this requires substantial time and expertise

to resolve. There is, however, an available name, *L. cavifrons* (Alleyne & Macleay 1877) that

could be applied to AUS+NG fish. The collection locality is either the Torres Strait or the coast

of New Guinea with a lost holotype with the drawing providing the current synonymy

(Pethiyagoda and Gill, 2012).

Without formal taxonomic recognition, the three main genetic lineages of Indo-Pacific *Lates* can

be recognized for management purposes such as mixed stock fisheries. Vij et al. (2014) note that

the assumption of single species of Indo-Pacific *Lates* has undoubtedly influenced previous

studies and microsatellite data from Thailand showing the highest allelic richness may reflect

genotyping of two divergent genetic lineages along the west coast of Thailand (Yue et al., 2009).

If different species of Indo-Pacific *Lates* are recognized, then questions of biology can be

researched such as the causes of speciation and what the mechanisms for reproductive isolation

of IND may be. Development of an anatomical key usable in the field that can separate these

species e.g. (Wang et al., In Revision) would be of great practical utility and could be used to

resolve the distributions and overlap of IND and SEA lineages. A high-throughput sequencing

assay that can discriminate the main lineages could provide a rapid assessment of genetic

lineage, hybridization levels and possible provenance in studies of food adulteration.

Admixture

Overall, analyses that can quantify hybridization in this study are challenging because of the high

innate diversity of the SEA lineage and limited sample sizes, notably that of the IND lineage (n =

13). The sequences were also obtained opportunistically from the NCBI Sequence Read Archive

and not collected by the authors. With these cautions in mind, we find evidence of admixture

between major genetic lineages within our data set as evidenced by the placement of Cambodia-

origin samples, with a largely SEA genomic background within the mitochondrial IND lineage

(**Figures 2, 3 & 4**). When examining all 60 individuals at $K = 3$, the two Cambodia individuals

with IND mtDNA have ancestry coefficients (Q) of 0.29 and 0.43 with the IND genetic cluster,

however, there is such a degree of variation in the SEA group with respect to admixture

proportions and inconsistency across sampling locations that these measurements should not be

accepted at face value. The Cambodia group has two individuals with Q = 0.00 for the IND

genetic cluster and one with 0.17 for example when examining all individuals. Separate analysis

of Cambodia and *L. calcarifer* IND individuals only show $Q = 0.23$ and 0.33 for the two

Cambodia individuals with IND mtDNA and no evidence for nuclear genomic admixture of

other Cambodian individuals with IND. This finding is congruent with the NewHybrids analysis

indicating the presence of two F2 hybrids in the Cambodian fish, in line with the ancestry

proportions of these fish analyzed with IND fish separately (**Supplemental Figure S7**).

Nucleotide diversity in the SEA Indonesia-SJ location is very high (**Figure 5B)** and no doubt

influences the reduced F_{st} of this lineage to other sampling regions (**Figure 5A**). Combined with

the large negative *D* value which arises from admixture (Hahn et al., 2013), this sampling

location may contain admixed individuals. A similar pattern of high nucleotide diversity, low-F_{st},

and strongly negative *D* is apparent with the Thailand sampling location (**Figure 5**). Both the

Indonesia-SJ and Thailand sampling locations show substantial contributions of the IND genetic

cluster in their ancestry (**Supplemental Figure S2**), but it is not uniformly distributed across

sampling locations. If the distribution of ancestry is uniform across sampling locations, it would

suggest an older age of hybridization. In NewHybrid analyses, Indonesia-SJ and Thailand

contain numerous recent (F2) hybrids (Supplemental Figure S7). Furthermore, the admixture

analyses suggest that Thailand at $K = 4$ is represented by more than one distinct genetic unit from

within the SEA lineage with additional contributions from the IND lineage. The dearth of F1

hybrids found by NewHybrids was surprising but may have to do with a high degree of diversity

within the SEA lineage as a result of (1) retained ancestral variation and (2) historical admixture.

Furthermore, the selection of a random set of 200 SNPs due to computational limitations may not

capture informative loci for hybridization assessment.

Conclusions

We provide several advances in the study of Indo-Pacific *Lates*, presenting molecular

phylogenetic analyses of a geographically and genomically representative data set and testing for

adaptive differentiation and recent or more advanced hybridization. The analysis of genome-

wide nuclear variants also provides evidence of hierarchical divergences, that is within the IND,

SEA and AUS+NG lineages there is genetic structuring. The SEA lineage demonstrates a

complex history with a combination of natural genetic differentiation and what is likely human

mediated admixture events. Clearly, samples of known provenance, the use of informative loci

that are diagnostic to lineages, and boosting of sampling locations and sample sizes focused

across the possible intergrade zone IND and SEA would help resolve these ambiguities. Future

studies making use of archive and museum samples to provide genetic baselines prior to use of

BP as an aquaculture species can be used to create a genetic baseline to compare modern

genetics against to identify potential translocations and adaptation to changing environments

(Turbek et al., 2023).

Phenotypic and life history variation within Indo-Pacific *Lates* remain poorly characterized and

are other aspects of variation that can substantially contribute to ecosystem productivity and

commercial applications. Research indicates that within Australia for instance, there is strong

local adaptation related to temperature (Newton et al., 2013) that could be applied to various

goals. The wide and varied use of Indo-Pacific *Lates* in commercial, recreation and subsistence

fisheries as well as aquaculture creates differing priorities across user groups. Further exploration

of genotypic and phenotypic variation can support conservation aquaculture and food production

as well as the preservation of productivity and adaptive potential of Indo-Pacific *Lates* stocks.

Data Availability

Genomic sequence data are available from the NCBI Sequence Read Archive under BioProject

accessions PRJNA311498, PRJNA1021005 and PRJDB13763. Alignments for phylogenetic

analyses include the control block for SVDQuartets are included in the Data Supplement of this

paper. Sequence data examined in this study for time-calibrated phylogenetic analysis are

publicly available with mitochondrial sequence accessions reported in Table 1.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Figures

Figure 1   Distribution of *Lates calcarifer sensu lato* from AquaMaps (Kaschner et al., 2015) with probability of occurrence (Overall

Probability) colored from yellow (low) to red (high). The type locality of *L. calcarifer* is indicated by a purple square. Sampling of

main genetic lineages included in this paper are indicated by shape, AUS+NG circles, SEA triangles and IND diamonds. Locations of

WGS are approximate as specific coordinates are not available. Cambodia is represented by four separate collection locations (shown

as one).

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Figure 2 Maximum-Likelihood phylogeny of mitochondrial Cytochrome Oxidase I from 60
Indo-Pacific *Lates* individuals derived from whole-genome sequence data. The tree is rooted by
L. japonicus. Node shape indicates the putative lineage of origin and collection information is
provided as tip labels. Nodes with < 50% bootstrap support are collapsed to polytomies. Nodes
with ≥ 75% bootstrap support but < 90% bootstrap support are indicated as grey squares and
nodes ≥ 90% bootstrap support as black squares.

612 **Figure 3** Species-tree from SVDQuartets of Indo-Pacific *Lates* sampling locations in this study

613 based on 8,529 variants rooted by *Lates japonicus*. Values at nodes are bootstrap support values.

Figure 4 (A) Maximum-Likelihood phylogeny of genome-wide SNPs of 60 individual Indo-Pacific *Lates*. Nodes with < 75%

bootstrap support are collapsed to polytomies. Nodes with ≥ 75% bootstrap support but < 90% bootstrap support are indicated as grey

squares and nodes with ≥ 90% bootstrap support as black rectangles. **(B)** Implicit phylogenetic network of genome-wide SNPs from

60 individual Indo-Pacific *Lates*. Node shape indicates the putative lineage of origin and color indicates collection location.

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622 **Figure 5** Population genetic statistics of Indo-Pacific *Lates* from WGS data. **(A)** Pairwise F_{st}

623 values between regions. **(B)** Nucleotide diversity of sampling locations in the WGS data set. **(C)**

624 Tajima's D of sampling locations in the WGS data set. Indonesia is represented by two sampling

625 locations. Indonesia-SU, Vietnam and Bangladesh were excluded due to low sample sizes (n $\leq$

626 2).

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629 **Figure 6** Time-calibrated phylogeny of main mitochondrial lineages of Indo-Pacific *Lates*. Node

630 age is from the posterior medians with 95% Highest Posterior Density (HPD) indicated by

631 horizontal bars.

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Supplemental Figure S1 Principal Component (PC) analysis of the whole-genome sequence

data set of 60 Indo-Pacific *Lates* utilizing 7,321,852 genotype likelihoods. The first PC is on the

x – axis in both figures with the second PC on *y* – axis in (A) and third PC in (B).

Supplemental Figure S2 Genome-wide admixture analysis of Indo-Pacific *Lates* from WGS

data (n = 60) from 7,321,852 genotype likelihoods for *K* = 2 - 5 genetic clusters. Individuals are

plotted on the *x* – axis and ancestry coefficient (*Q*) on the *y* – axis.

Supplemental Figure S3 PCAdapt analyses for identification of adaptive genetic loci of all
Indo-Pacific *Lates* analyzed in this study. **(A)** Proportion of explained variance for each Principal
Component (PC), supporting $K = 3$ PCs. **(B)** Plot of PC 1 & PC 2, IND, SEA and AUS+NG. **(C)**
Plot of PC 1 & PC 3, PC 3 separates Indonesia-K and Indonesia-SU sampling locations from all
other samples.

655 **Supplemental Figure S4** PCAdapt analyses for identification of adaptive genetic loci from the

656 IND genetic lineage. **(A)** Proportion of explained variance for each Principal Component (PC).

657 **(B)** Plot of PC 1 & PC 2.

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Supplemental Figure S5 PCAdapt analyses for identification of adaptive genetic loci within the SEA lineage. **(A)** Proportion of

explained variance for each Principal Component (PC), supporting at least $K = 3$ PCs. **(B)** Plot of PC 1 & PC 2, **(C)** Plot of PC 1 & PC

3.

Supplemental Figure S6 PCAdapt analyses for identification of adaptive genetic loci within the

AUS+NG lineage. **(A)** Proportion of explained variance for each Principal Component (PC). **(B)**

Plot of PC 1 & PC 2, separating Queensland, Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea

sampling locations.

Supplemental Figure S7 NewHybrids output from analysis of IND and SEA fish. For display,

Indonesia-SU was combined with Indonesia-K. Individual sequence numbers, Sequence ID, are

indicated on the x – axis. Parental populations, (P0, P1), recent hybrids (F1, F2) and backcrosses

(0-BX, 1-BX) are indicated on the y – axis. Probability of assignment is indicated by a color

gradient (Prob). Two individuals from Cambodia with IND lineage mtDNA are indicated to be

recent hybrids (SRR3165998, SRR3165999).

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680   **Tables**

681   **Table 1** Sample origins by region of whole-genome sequence data set for Indo-Pacific *Lates*.

682   The sample size and average coverage is presented for each sampling region.

Region	Additional Geographic Information	Source	Sample Size	Average Coverage
Northern Territory, Australia	Darwin Harbor	Wild-Caught	6	5.80
Queensland, Australia	Hinchinbrook Channel	Wild-Caught	6	5.34
Papua New Guinea	Fly River	Wild-Caught	5	5.83
Indonesia	K - Kalimantan	Unknown	5	5.73
Indonesia	SJ – South of Jakarta	Wild-Caught	5	17.8
Indonesia	SU - Sulawesi	Unknown	1	6.13
Philippines		Hatchery Broodstock	5	6.32
Vietnam		Hatchery Broodstock	2	6.21
Cambodia	Three locations	Wild-Caught	5	5.90
Thailand	East Coast	Wild-Caught	7	15.60
Bangladesh	Bakkhali River	Unknown	2	10.04
India Eastern Coast	Tamil Nadu	Wild-Caught	7	8.50
India Western Coast	Mumbai	Wild-Caught	4	20.22

Table 2 Taxa and sequences included in time-calibrated phylogeny of Indo-Pacific *Lates* mitochondrial lineages. Lates *calcarifer* is represented by three lineages, Australia + New Guinea (AUS+NG), Southeast Asia (SEA) and Indian subcontinent (IND) as described in the text. The family is given, with the taxon, corresponding BOLD or NCBI accession and the geographic origin of the sample if known.

Family	Taxon	Accession	Origin
Latidae	*Lates calcarifer* AUS+NG	EU189379.1	Western Australia
	Lates calcarifer SEA	KJ573921.1	Indonesia
	Lates calcarifer IND	KJ573895.1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands
	Lates japonicus	LC269832.1	Japan
	Lates microlepis	ISZA082-21	Democratic Republic of the Congo
	Lates niloticus	LT853908.1	Not Specified
	Hypopterus macropterus	LC269834.1	Australia
	Psammoperca waigiensis	OQ387793.1	Philippines, Luzon
	Psammoperca datnioides	NC035737.1	Australia, Darwin
Centropomidae	*Centropomus ensiferus*	MW183492.1	Brazil, Para, Braganca
	Centropomus undecimalis	JQ841102.1	Belize, Belize City
Channidae	*Channa maculata*	KP112195.1	China, Hubei, Wuhan
Nandidae	*Nanus nandus*	KX245097.1	India

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