Inferring the landscapes of mutation and recombination in the common marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*) in the presence of twinning and hematopoietic chimerism

Vivak Soni[1,*], Cyril J. Versoza[1,*], Jeffrey D. Jensen[1,†], and Susanne P. Pfeifer[1,†]

[1] Center for Evolution and Medicine, School of Life Sciences, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, US
[*] these authors contributed equally to this work
[†] co-corresponding authors; jointly supervised the project
(jeffrey.d.jensen@asu.edu; susanne@spfeiferlab.org)

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ABSTRACT

The common marmoset is an important model in biomedical and clinical research, particularly for the study of age-related, neurodegenerative, and neurodevelopmental disorders (due to their biological similarities with humans), infectious disease (due to their susceptibility to a variety of pathogens), as well as developmental biology (due to their short gestation period relative to many other primates). Yet, despite being one of the most commonly used non-human primate models for research, the population genomics of the common marmoset remains relatively poorly characterized, despite the critical importance of this knowledge in many areas of research including genome-wide association studies, models of polygenic risk scores, and scans for the targets of selection. This neglect owes, at least in part, to two biological peculiarities related to the reproductive mode of the species — frequent twinning and sibling chimerism — which are likely to affect standard population genetic approaches relying on assumptions underlying the Wright-Fisher model. Using high-quality population genomic data, we here infer the rates and landscapes of mutation and recombination — two fundamental processes dictating the levels and patterns of genetic variability — in the presence of these biological features and discuss our findings in light of recent work in primates. Our results suggest that, while the species exhibits relatively low neutral mutation rates, rates of recombination are in the range of those observed in other anthropoids. Moreover, the recombination landscape of common marmosets, like that of many vertebrates, is dominated by PRDM9-mediated hotspots, with artificial intelligence-based models predicting an intricate 3D-structure of the species-specific PRDM9-DNA binding complex *in silico*. Apart from providing novel insights into the population genetics of common marmosets, given the importance of the availability of fine-scale maps of mutation and recombination for evolutionary inference, this work will also serve as a valuable resource to aid future genomic research in this widely studied system.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of new genetic variation through the process of mutation and its reorganization through crossover and non-crossover events — the two possible outcomes of meiotic recombination — are key evolutionary mechanisms that influence genomic diversity. Both processes are known to be highly variable across species, with rates differing between populations, individuals, and sites within a genome (see the reviews by Baer et al. 2007; Lynch 2010; Hodgkinson and Eyre-Walker 2011; Pfeifer 2020b for an overview of mutation rate variation and a discussion of its genetic determinants, and the reviews by Ritz et al. 2017; Stapley et al. 2017; Johnston 2024 for an overview of recombination rate variation). Importantly, the uneven distribution of mutation and recombination rates across genomes can profoundly influence interactions amongst other evolutionary processes; for instance, heterogeneity in these underlying rates may substantially modify the effects of selection at linked sites, and thereby modify expectations of both levels and patterns of genetic variation (reviewed by Charlesworth and Jensen 2021, 2022). Additionally, relying on simplified, species-averaged rates of mutation and recombination — as is common practice in many evolutionary inference applications — has been shown to potentially lead to mis-inference in downstream analyses, including those estimating population history and the distribution of fitness effects (Dapper and Payseur 2018; Samuk and Noor 2022; Ghafoor et al. 2023; Soni et al. 2024a; Soni and Jensen 2025). Yet, despite their crucial importance, both processes remain relatively poorly characterized in many vertebrates.

There are two primarily classes of approach for estimating both mutation and recombination rates in primates and other large organisms. Direct approaches utilize genomic data from parent-offspring trios or multi-generation pedigrees in order to detect *de novo* mutations (reviewed by Pfeifer 2020b, and see also Pfeifer 2021), or contemporary crossover

and non-crossover events occurring between generations (reviewed by Clark et al. 2010). The

resolution of these pedigree-based inference approaches at the genome scale remains

relatively coarse due to the limited number of *de novo* mutations and meiotic exchanges that

can be observed in the small number of generations characterizing the sample. Hence, given

the hundreds to thousands of pedigreed individuals required to obtain high resolution maps,

most studies typically yield only a genome-wide estimate over the limited generational span

studied, rather than providing detailed information about the finer scale landscapes. Moreover,

due to the extensive sample and sequencing requirements, direct approaches tend to be labor-

intensive and costly, limiting their application, particularly in organisms for which resources

remain limited. Indirect approaches, on the other hand, rely on population genetic theory and

information about the genealogy of the sample over longer evolutionary timescales. Indirect

estimates of mutation rate, for example, rely on species-level divergence data, based on the

observation that the neutral mutation rate is equal to the neutral divergence rate (Kimura 1968).

This allows for the inference of historically averaged mutation rates from phylogenetic sequence

data in neutrally-evolving genomic regions. Although in principle straightforward, this approach

is limited by the availability of high-quality genome annotations necessary to identify neutrally-

evolving regions — which are lacking for many non-model organisms — and is often

accompanied by significant uncertainties related to divergence and generation times, typically

resulting in a range of possible mutation rates (see e.g., Soni et al. 2024b). Indirect

recombination rate inference relies on polymorphism rather than divergence data, analyzing

unrelated individuals in order to estimate historical sex-averaged rates of recombination based

on the extent of observed linkage disequilibrium (LD) in the genome (reviewed by Stumpf and

McVean 2003; Peñalba and Wolf 2020). For this reason, these methods are sensitive to other

evolutionary forces shaping LD (Dapper and Payseur 2018; Samuk and Noor 2022) and it is

thus crucial to account for the underlying population history when performing such analyses

(Johri et al. 2020, 2022; Jensen 2023). Yet, despite these caveats, these approaches are also

uniquely capable of providing a fine-scale, genome-wide mapping of underlying sex-averaged

rates over many generations necessary for many evolutionary analyses (see the discussion in

Johri et al. 2022).

Within primates specifically, high-quality, fine-scale rate estimation has generally been

focused upon humans and their closest relatives, the great apes, as well as a handful of species

of biomedical or conservation interest (e.g., Kong et al. 2002; Auton et al. 2012; Stevison et al.

2016; Pfeifer 2020a; Xue et al. 2020; Wall et al. 2022; Soni et al. 2024b Versoza et al. 2024,

2025a,b). In the primates studied to date as well as in numerous other organisms, meiotic

recombination has been found to be concentrated in hotspots, the location of which is primarily

determined by the zinc-finger protein PRDM9 (Baudat et al. 2010; Myers et al. 2010; Parvanov

et al. 2010). Notably, PRDM9 has evolved rapidly across primates, showing a high variability in

the number of zinc-fingers as well as their nucleotide contact residues, resulting in differences in

the predicted nucleotide binding sequence and, consequently, in the hotspot positioning even

between closely-related species (reviewed by Stapley et al. 2017; Lorenz and Mpaulo 2022;

Johnston 2024; and see Schwartz et al. 2014 for a characterization of the allelic diversity in

PRDM9 zinc finger domains of different primate species). As many evolutionary and biomedical

studies require knowledge of the fine-scale patterns of recombination across the genome —

such as rare disease gene mapping and genome-wide associate studies that rely on patterns of

LD to detect associations between genetic variants and phenotypic traits — and given the

extensive variation in the distribution of recombination observed, it is thus important to obtain

detailed maps characterizing the recombination frequency specific to the organism of interest.

Yet, deeper in the primate clade, high-quality estimates of fine-scale mutation and

recombination rates, or hotspot mapping, remain sparse — particularly across New World

monkeys (platyrrhines) and prosimians (strepsirrhines) — limiting both our understanding of

primate evolution in general and the accuracy and resolution of clinically-relevant genomic

studies in primate model systems specifically.

In order to extend this inference, we here examine the common (or white-tufted-ear)

marmoset, *Callithrix jacchus*, a relatively abundant platyrrhine monkey of the Callitrichidae

family. As one of the smallest statured anthropoids, common marmosets have risen in

biomedical prominence over the past two decades particularly as a commonly used model for

the study of aging, neurodegeneration, and neurodevelopment disorders, as well as

autoimmune and infectious disease dynamics (see e.g., the reviews by Miller et al. 2016;

Philippens and Langermans 2021; Han et al. 2022), owing largely to their early sexual maturity

(~15 to 18 months of age), short gestation period (~145 days), and high fecundity (birthing up to

four offspring in a single pregnancy, with pregnancies occurring biannually). Interestingly, a

notable peculiarity of marmoset biology, and that of several other callitrichines, is the frequent

ovulation of two (or more) ova per cycle (Tardif and Jaquish 1997), resulting in common

dizygotic (fraternal) twin births (Ward et al. 2014), and the exchange of hematopoietic stem cells

during embryonic development via anastomoses in a single shared placenta, causing sibling

chimerism (Hill 1932; Wislocki 1939; Benirschke et al. 1962; Gengozian et al. 1969). As a result,

samples of blood and many other tissues obtained from marmosets have been observed to

contain a mixture of genetic material originating from both the sampled individual and their

unsampled littermate (Ross et al. 2007; Sweeney et al. 2012; del Rosario et al. 2024; and see

the commentary by Chiou and Snyder-Mackler 2024). Notably, recent genomic analyses have

demonstrated that the high frequency of twinning together with chimeric sampling shape both

levels and patterns of observed genetic variation — including LD — in this species, with Soni et

al. (2025b) finding that a neglect of these biological factors can result in significant mis-inference

of population history. Yet, the impact of these unusual reproductive dynamics on other types of

population genomic inference remains unexplored to date.

131   Although a direct mutation rate point estimate exists for common marmosets (0.43×10^{-8}

132 per base pair per generation; Yang et al. 2021), this estimate was based on a single trio and,

133 although the sampled tissues are expected to exhibit lower levels of chimerism than blood, the

134 authors did not correct for the effects of chimerism. In this instance, the potential 'counting' of

135 twin-shared variants in a single individual sampled from a triplet may be expected to confound

136 mutation counts and thus calculated rates. To lower the potential impact of chimerism on their

137 estimate, the authors applied highly stringent filter criteria; however, this in turn may be

138 expected to impact the overall number of genuine *de novo* mutations identifiable in their study.

139 More recently, Mao et al. (2024) inferred a much-increased human-marmoset neutral

140 divergence relative to the closely-related owl monkey-human divergence. In this case, the long-

141 term neutral divergence rate would not be expected to be impacted by twinning and chimeric

142 sampling (i.e., neutral divergence will be driven by the neutral mutation rate, μ). In contrast to

143 these studies of mutation, to the best of our knowledge, no fine-scale genetic map yet exists for

144 the species. Helpfully, utilizing novel population genomic data from individuals sequenced to

145 high-coverage and annotated at the gene-level — and directly accounting for twinning and

146 chimerism — Soni et al. (2025b) recently described a well-fitting population history consisting of

147 a rapid reduction in population size roughly 7,000 years ago, followed by a modest recovery —

148 a necessary prerequisite to interpret patterns of genetic variation and LD. Here, we utilize this

149 modelling framework accounting both for this unique reproductive biology as well as population

150 history, combined with high-quality whole-genome sequencing data, in order to quantify the

151 rates and characterize the landscape of mutation and recombination in the common marmoset.

152 Beyond providing valuable biological insights into the location and frequency of mutation and

153 recombination in this New World monkey, these fine-scale maps will play a crucial role in

154 enhancing future biomedical and evolutionary analyses integrating the significant nuance of

155 accurate patterns of underlying genomic rate heterogeneity, thus improving our ability to study

156   heritable genetic disorders in this widely used model system. In this effort, we have also

157   uniquely characterized the effects of twinning and chimeric sampling on indirect rate estimation

158   more generally and describe the underlying impact on patterns of LD — insights which will be

159   beneficial to future research focused on organisms characterized by chimerism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Population genomic data

In order to infer fine-scale rates of neutral divergence, mutation, and recombination, we sequenced the genomes of 15 captive common marmoset (*C. jacchus*) individuals (seven females and eight males) to an average 35-fold coverage. Using a mapping-based approach, we identified 7.2 million single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) across the autosomal genome with a transition-transversion ratio of 2.2 (Supplementary Table S1). To facilitate rate inference, we estimated haplotypes from this population-level genotype data analogously to the 1000 Genomes (1000 Genomes Project Consortium 2015), PanMap (Auton et al. 2012), and Great Ape Recombination Maps (Stevison et al. 2016) projects, which previously generated fine-scale genetic maps for humans (*Homo sapiens*), Western and Nigerian chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes verus* and *P. t. ellioti*), bonobos (*P. paniscus*), and Western gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*).

The landscape of neutral divergence and mutation in the common marmoset genome

We first extracted the 239 primate genomes (Kuderna et al. 2024) from the 447-way multiple species alignment (Zoonomia Consortium 2020) and updated the common marmoset genome to the current reference assembly available for the species (Yang et al. 2021). With this updated whole-genome alignment on hand, we identified fixed single nucleotide differences along the marmoset lineage, i.e., between the genome of the common marmoset and the genome of the closely related Wied's black-tufted-ear marmoset (*C. kuhlii*). In contrast to the common marmoset genome generated by the Vertebrates Genomes Project using a combination of short-read (Illumina) and long-read (PacBio) sequencing data and scaffolded using high-throughput chromosome conformation capture (Hi-C) and Bionano optical data, the

genome of Wied's marmoset remains highly fragmented, containing nearly 300,000 scaffolds. In

order to avoid spurious and/or incomplete alignments that might artificially inflate estimates of

neutral divergence and mutation, we thus removed any alignments shorter than 10 kb in length.

In order to obtain neutral substitutions between *C. jacchus* and *C. kuhlii*, we additionally masked

both regions within 10 kb of known conserved or functional elements — thus, avoiding purifying

and background selection effecting our analyses (Charlesworth et al. 1993) — and variants

known to segregate in the species. Using this dataset, we then calculated neutral divergence

across accessible sites at both the broad (genome-wide) scale and the fine scale (for additional

details, see "Materials and Methods").

At the 1Mb-scale, we observed a neutral divergence rate of 9.85×10^{-4} along the

marmoset lineage relative to the reconstructed ancestor (see Supplementary Figure S1 for the

distributions of neutral divergence across a range of window sizes). To calculate the neutral

mutation rate, we then drew the point estimate, upper and lower bounds of common marmoset

divergence times relative to *C. kuhlii* (0.59 million years ago [mya], with bounds of 0.82 to 1.09

mya; Malukiewicz et al. 2021), and generation times of 1.5 and 2.0 years (Tardif et al. 2003;

Okano et al. 2012; Schultz-Darken et al. 2016; Han et al. 2022). Depending on the underlying

assumptions, the mean neutral mutation rate varied from 0.14×10^{-8} mutations per base pair per

generation (under a divergence time of 1.09 mya and a generation time of 1.5 years) to $0.33 \times$

10^{-8} mutations per base pair per generation (under a divergence time of 0.59 mya and a

generation time of 2.0 years; Table 1 and see Figure 1a for density plots of neutral mutation rate

estimates across this range of possible divergence and generation times and Figure 1b for the

inferred genome-wide neutral mutation rates). Notably, these indirectly inferred neutral mutation

rates are lower than the direct estimate of 0.43×10^{-8} mutations per base pair per generation

obtained by Yang et al. (2021) from a single trio. While indirect phylogenetic approaches are

naturally unable to observe strongly deleterious / lethal mutations that are purged from the

population, the higher pedigree-based estimate observed by Yang et al. (2021) might also

partially be attributed to unaccounted for chimerism present in their genomic data (with non-

germline tissues sampled from a single individual of a triplet).

Given that the divergence time between *C. jacchus* and *C. kuhlii* is relatively short, we

also generated fine-scale divergence estimates along the human-marmoset branch to obtain

information over longer evolutionary time scales. Notably, comparisons between the mutation

rate estimates indirectly obtained from the *C. jacchus–C. kuhlii* divergence and the neutral

divergence estimates based on *C. jacchus–H. sapiens* alignments demonstrated a significant

positive correlation at the fine scale (*r* = 0.235, *P*-value = 1.71E-59; and see Supplementary

Figure S2 for the heterogeneity in neutral divergence and mutation rates across each

autosome), providing additional confidence in our estimates. Moreover, mutation rates inferred

using the divergence along the human-marmoset branch are highly similar to those obtained

using *C. jacchus–C. kuhlii* divergence, ranging from 0.25×10^{-8} mutations per base pair per

generation (under a divergence time of 36 mya and a generation time of 1.5 years) to 0.37×10^{-8}

mutations per base pair per generation (under a divergence time of 0.32 mya and a generation

time of 2.0 years; Table 1). Although it is unlikely that the generation time of common

marmosets has remained constant over the >30 million years separating the two species

(Glazko and Nei 2003), it is nevertheless encouraging that the marmoset-based and human-

marmoset-based estimates are in such close correspondence.

Taking the opposite approach, we inferred marmoset divergence times based on the

mean neutral divergence rate observed in the empirical data and the previously published

pedigree-based mutation rate estimates for both common marmosets (0.43×10^{-8} mutations per

base pair per generation; Yang et al. 2021) as well as the closely related (but non-chimeric) owl

monkeys (0.81×10^{-8} mutations per base pair per generation; Thomas et al. 2018) for which a

larger number of trios were available. The estimated divergence times ranged from 0.18 mya

(under a per-site per-generation mutation rate of 0.81×10^{-8} and a generation time of 1.5 years)

to 0.49 mya (under a per-site per-generation mutation rate of 0.43×10^{-8} and a generation time

of 2 years) (Supplementary Table S2). Notably, these whole-genome divergence times based

on the marmoset and owl monkey mutation rates are considerably lower than those inferred by

Malukiewicz et al. (2021) from mitochondrial DNA, due to the mutation rates being considerably

higher than those inferred in this study.

242   The landscape of recombination in the common marmoset genome

We used two different approaches to infer fine-scale rates of recombination — the

demography-unaware estimator LDhat (McVean et al. 2002, 2004; Auton and McVean 2007)

and its successor, the demography-aware estimator pyrho (Spence and Song 2019) — both of

which rely on coalescent theory and the theoretical foundation provided by the Wright-Fisher

(WF) model to infer fine-scale recombination rates from population genomic data.

Unlike most primates, twinning and chimerism are the norm rather than the exception in

marmosets (Hill 1932; Wislocki 1939; Benirschke et al. 1962; Ward et al. 2014). To evaluate the

impact of these two violations of the WF model inherent to the biology of marmosets, we first

assessed the performance of the two recombination rate estimators on simulated data. Using

the framework recently described in Soni et al. (2025b), we modelled twinning and chimerism

from hematopoietic stem cells (as observed in blood samples) by first simulating a non-WF

model in SLiM (Haller and Messer 2023) in which pairs of marmoset individuals reproduce each

generation to give birth to non-identical twins and then combining their genotypes post-

simulation to mimic a single chimeric individual (for additional details, see "Materials and

Methods"). More specifically, we simulated genomic regions of 1 Mb under the demographic

model of the population inferred by Soni et al. (2025b) — consisting of an ancestral population

of ~60k individuals that experienced a population decline before recovering to about half of its

original size — using a non-WF model with twinning only as well as with both twinning and

chimeric sampling, assuming a constant per-site per-generation mutation rate of 0.81×10^{-8} and

recombination rate of 1 cM/Mb (as per the rates used in Soni et al. 2025b), and sampling 15

chimeric individuals to match our empirical data. To aid the interpretation of the inference

results, we additionally performed simulations under a standard WF model (i.e., without twinning

or chimerism) for comparison. We then inferred the genome-wide recombination rates in the

simulated data using LDhat and pyrho. In contrast to pyrho, LDhat outputs the population-scaled

recombination rate (ρ) and we thus used the effective population size (N_e) based on the mean

nucleotide diversity (Θ) observed in each simulation scenario to obtain a per-generation

recombination rate.

Our simulations highlighted that both LDhat and pyrho tend to underestimate genome-

wide recombination rates inferred under the marmoset demographic model (Figure 2a), likely

due to the recent population contraction and subsequent exponential expansion having resulted

in a ρ at the time of sampling that is substantially different from that during most of the

population history. This observation is consistent with the recent findings of a simulation study

conducted by Dutheil (2024) which highlighted that classical LD-based approaches tend to

underestimate recombination rates in populations characterized by population size declines and

recent growths, particularly when sample sizes are moderate as is the case here (see Figures 1

and 2 in Dutheil 2024; and see their Figure 4 for the increased mis-inference in the presence of

gene conversion). In contrast, both approaches overestimate the per-generation recombination

rate when twinning is common, as populations in which non-singleton births are the

predominant mode of reproduction are characterized by both an increased LD and decreased

N_e relative to the standard expectations. Chimerism, on the other hand, has the opposite effect,

with chimeric sampling expected to both break up haplotypes — as evidenced by the reduced

mean r^2 (a measure of LD) — and increase haplotype diversity due to the generation of novel

haplotypes relative to the standard expectations (Figure 2b).

Re-scaling the empirically observed recombination rate estimates to take into account

the mis-inference caused by twinning and chimerism yielded an average sex-averaged genome-

wide recombination rate of 0.91 ± 0.83 cM/Mb (100 kb windows) in common marmosets (Figure

3a), with sex-averaged crossover rates ranging from 0.65 cM/Mb for one of the longest

autosomes (chromosome 4) to 1.29 cM/Mb for one of the shortest autosomes (chromosome 22)

(Supplementary Figure S3). Although the rates inferred here for common marmosets are in the

same range as those previously reported in the great apes (e.g., 1.32 ± 1.40 cM/Mb in humans

[International HapMap Consortium 2007], with an average rate of 0.945 cM/Mb in males and

1.518 cM/Mb in females [Halldorsson et al. 2019], and ~1.19 cM/Mb in chimpanzees, bonobos

and gorillas [Stevison et al. 2016]), rates previously estimated for biomedically-relevant Old

World monkeys are substantially lower (e.g., 0.43 ± 0.33 cM/Mb in rhesus macaques [Xue et al.

2016] and 0.43 ± 0.44 cM/Mb in vervet monkeys [Pfeifer 2020a]) — however, it should be noted

that many of the earlier studies did not account for the potentially confounding effects of

population demography during inference (see discussions of Dapper and Payseur 2018; Johri et

al. 2022), thus hindering the interpretation of the biological differences in observed rates.

In addition to the nearly two-fold variation between autosomes, the recombination

landscape in common marmosets — like that of many other primates (e.g., Spencer et al. 2006;

Auton et al. 2012; Pfeifer and Jensen 2016; Stevison et al. 2016; Pfeifer 2020a; Wall et al. 2022;

Soni et al. 2024b; Versoza et al. 2024) — is highly heterogenous, with a pronounced enrichment

in the distal (sub)telomeric regions and reduced rates within centromeric and pericentromeric

regions (Figure 3a, and see Supplementary Figure S4 for recombination rate heterogeneity

across all autosomes). Moreover, genome-wide recombination rates exhibit a strong positive

association with nucleotide diversity (r_τ = 0.49, *P*-value = 0) — highlighting the likely importance

of selection at linked sites in shaping the landscape of genomic variation in the species (Soni et

al. 2025a) — and, to a lesser extent, divergence (r_τ = 0.06, *P*-value = 2.07E-17) and GC-content

(r_τ = 0.03, *P*-value = 6.90E-06), as may be expected if recombination in common marmosets

exhibits mutagenic effects (Halldorsson et al. 2019; Hinch et al. 2023) and is prone to GC-

biased gene conversion (reviewed by Duret and Galtier 2009) (Supplementary Figure S5). In

concordance with PRDM9 directing recombination away from functional elements (Brick et al.

2012; Pratto et al. 2014), recombination rates significantly decrease within, and around the

boundaries of, protein-coding genes (r_τ = -0.03, *P*-value = 1.09E-04) compared to neighboring

regions (Supplementary Figure S6). Notably, while these inferred patterns of recombination

were highly similar between the two approaches (*r* = 0.57, *P*-value < 2.2E-16 at the 1kb-scale),

the mean inferred rates of pyrho were much lower (0.25 ± 0.27 cM/Mb) as, despite accounting

for historical fluctuations in population size, its internal conversion to the per-generation

recombination rate does not account for the lower N_e caused by twinning (Supplementary Figure

S7).

Characterization of recombination hotspots in the common marmoset genome

To gain insights into the landscape of recombination hotspots in the common marmoset

genome, we inferred recombination hotspots using LDhot (Auton et al. 2014) — a statistical

method implemented to directly process the recombination rate estimates obtained from LDhat.

To obtain a high-quality dataset, we implemented a three-step filtering approach by combining

the recommendations from the Great Ape Recombination Project (Stevison et al. 2016) with

those of Brazier and Glémin (2024). First, as genuine recombination hotspots tend to be narrow

(with ~70-80% of recombination occurring in hotspots with a mean width of 2.3 kb in humans;

1000 Genomes Project Consortium 2010), we excluded hotspot candidates with a width larger

than 10 kb. Second, as artificial breaks in LD resulting, for example, from mis-assembly and/or

mis-alignment, can lead to localized peaks in recombination rate, we calculated the intensity of

each hotspot candidate by dividing the recombination rate at its peak by the rate estimated for

the 100 kb surrounding region and removed candidates with an intensity higher than 200.

Additionally, due to the difficulty of distinguishing genuine low-intensity hotspots from

background variation, we also applied a low-intensity filter, retaining only candidates with a

minimum intensity of 4. Third, accounting for recombination rate variation across chromosomes

to further narrow down the location of recombination hotspots, we split each remaining

candidate region into windows of 2 kb with a step size of 1 kb, keeping only the hotspot

windows exhibiting rates of at least five times the chromosome-wide average rate. This three-

step filtering approach yielded 26,831 candidate hotspots — similar to the number of

recombination hotspots initially identified in human populations (International HapMap

Consortium 2005, 2007; Myers et al. 2005; 1000 Genomes Project Consortium 2010; Kong et

al. 2012; though note the larger number of hotspots identified in subsequent, larger-scale

studies, e.g., Halldorsson et al. 2019).

In order to identify sequences that predict potential PRDM9 binding, we searched the

1,000 hotspots with the highest intensity for consistent sequence motifs. To this end, we used

the ZOOPS model implemented in MEME (Bailey and Elkan 1994) to identify degenerate motifs

present not more than once in each hotspot region, while accounting for genomic background

using cold spot regions matched for sequence length and GC-content. As sequence motifs

underlying recombination hotspots in other primates tend to be short (e.g., 10-15 bp in humans,

chimpanzees, and gorillas; Schwartz et al. 2014; Auton et al. 2012; Stevison et al. 2016), we

limited the search to motifs with a minimum width of 10 bp and maximum width of 15 bp,

keeping only motifs below a discovery threshold of 1e-05. Next, we used FIMO to scan the

complete set of hotspot windows for occurrences of each of these motifs. As the predicted

motifs are highly repetitive, we also performed permutation tests to compare the frequency of

each motif in hotspot regions with that observed in 25,000 background regions randomly

sampled from the common marmoset genome by matching the position weight matrix of each

motif against the genomic sequences of each hotspot and cold spot region using the MOtif

Occurrence Detection Suite (MOODS; Korhonen et al. 2009), requiring a *P*-value < 0.01 for a

match (see Supplementary Table S3 for the complete list of candidate motifs for the PRDM9

binding sequence). To further narrow down the list of candidates, we used AlphaFold3

(Abramson et al. 2024) to predict the sequence-specific binding between the marmoset PRDM9

sequence and the putative PRDM9 binding motifs. Interestingly, for the best candidate DNA

binding motifs — the 15-mer GCTGGGATTACAGGC (*e*-value: 6.80E-54), present in 83.5% of

the candidate hotspots and only 2.0% of the matching cold spots, and its degenerate

generalization, the 15-mer GCTGGGAKYASWGGC (*e*-value: 5.40E-17) — AlphaFold3's

machine-learning guided model predicted a protein-DNA complex with high-confidence (ipTM =

0.94 and 0.96, respectively; with 1.0 being the maximum value of the ipTM performance metric),

indicating a very well-defined protein-DNA interface and supporting PRDM9-DNA binding *in*

silico (see Figure 3b for a visualization of the predicted binding complex). Notably, while this

predicted degenerate PRDM9 binding motif shares several key features with motifs previously

observed in other primates (including the C/G-rich terminal regions and its overall length), there

are also species-specific differences (such as the A/T-rich internal region) as might be

anticipated from the rapid evolution of the PRDM9 zinc finger array across the primate lineage.

CONCLUSION

By investigating, and ultimately correcting for, the effects of twinning and sibling

chimerism on the inference of fine-scale mutation and recombination rate maps, we have here

described these landscapes in one of the most commonly used non-human primate models in

research, *C. jacchus*. Using high-quality population genomic data, we found that the species

exhibits relatively low neutral mutation rates, and rates of recombination within the range

observed amongst other anthropoids. Moreover, like many vertebrates, the recombination

landscape in common marmosets is dominated by PRDM9-mediated hotspots, and we have

described a 3D-structure of the species-specific PRDM9-DNA binding complex *in silico*. Apart

from providing novel insights into the population genetic processes shaping variation in common

marmosets, these maps will also serve as a valuable resource for future studies in this

biomedically important species — including in genome-wide association studies, polygenic risk

score modelling, and genomic scans for targets of selection — with implications ranging from

the improved study of neurodevelopment disorders to infectious disease dynamics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Animal subjects

Animals were maintained in accordance with the guidelines of the Harvard Medical

School Standing Committee on Animals and the Guide for Care and Use of Laboratory Animals

of the Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources, National Research Council. All samples were

collected during routine veterinary care under approved protocols.

Whole genome sequencing

We sequenced the genomes of 15 captive common marmosets (*C. jacchus*) from the

colony previously housed at the New England Primate Research Center using DNA derived

from whole blood samples. For each DNA sample, we generated 150 bp paired-end reads from

a PCR-free library sequenced on the DNBseq platform at the Beijing Genomics Institute (BGI

Group, Shenzhen, China), targeting a genome-wide average coverage of ~35X. Genetic

analysis confirmed that the selected individuals were largely unrelated, sharing no more than

1/16 of their DNA with any other individual from the colony included in this study.

Read mapping, variant calling, and filtering

Following best practices in the field (Pfeifer 2017), we trimmed adapters, polyX tails, and

low-quality ends from the raw reads using SOAPnuke v.1.5.6 with BGI-recommended

parameter settings (i.e., ' *-n* 0.01 *-l* 20 *-q* 0.3 *-A* 0.25 *--cutAdaptor -Q* 2 *-G --polyX --minLen* 150';

Chen et al. 2018) before mapping them to the species-specific reference genome

(mCalJa1.2.pat.X; GenBank accession number: GCA_011100555.2; Yang et al. 2021) using

BWA-MEM v.0.7.17 (Li and Durbin 2009). To avoid potential biases during variant calling and

genotyping, we marked duplicates in the mapped reads using the Genome Analysis Toolkit

(GATK) v.4.2.6.1 *MarkDuplicates* (van der Auwera and O'Connor 2020). From these high-

quality, duplicate-marked reads (' *--minimum-mapping-quality* 40 '), we called variants for each

individual using the GATK *HaplotypeCaller* in the ' *--pcr-indel-model* NONE ' mode as our data

was obtained from PCR-free libraries. We then combined individual-level variant call sets and

jointly genotyped them using GATK's *CombineGVCFs* and *GenotypeGVCFs*, respectively. In

order to obtain information regarding the genomic regions accessible to our study, we emitted

reference confidence scores at each locus (' *--emit-ref-confidence* BP_RESOLUTION ') and

included genotypes of both variant and invariant loci in the output (' *--include-non-variant-sites* ').

Lastly, we separated the jointly-genotyped call set into biallelic SNPs and invariant loci with

genotype information available in all individuals (' *AN* = 30 '), with downstream analyses

focusing on the autosomes (i.e., chromosomes 1-22) only.

Due to the lack of a well-curated, experimentally-validated dataset that could be

harnessed for filtering variants via a machine-learning framework, we used the GATK

VariantFiltration tool to quality-control the discovered loci following the developers' hard filtering

recommendations (i.e., *QD* < 2.0, *QUAL* < 30.0, *MQ* < 40.0, *FS* > 60.0, *SOR* > 3.0,

MQRankSum < -12.5, *ReadPosRankSum* < -8.0). As spurious variation can complicate the

estimation of recombination rates from patterns of linkage disequilibrium (LD) observed in

population genomic data, we applied several additional stringent filtering criteria to limit the

number of false positives in our data set, following the methodologies established in prior

research (e.g., Auton et al. 2012; Stevison et al. 2016; Pfeifer 2020a; Soni et al. 2024b). In brief,

as a skewed read coverage often results in poorly supported genotypes, we first used GATK's

SelectVariants to remove loci located within genomic regions exhibiting less than half, or more

than twice, the individual's genome-wide average coverage. Second, we excluded variants that

were tightly clustered (using GATK's *VariantFiltration* with ' *--cluster-size* 3 ' and ' *--cluster-*

window-size 10 ') as well as those exhibiting high levels of heterozygosity (using VCFtools

v.0.1.14 to filter out variants that have a Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium exact test *P*-value < 0.01;

Danecek et al. 2011), a common indicator of local genome mis-assembly. Lastly, we used

BEDTools v.2.30.0 (Quinlan et al. 2010) to eliminate regions blacklisted by the ENCODE Project

Consortium due to their poor performance in next-generation sequencing

(wgEncodeDacMapabilityConsensusExcludable.bed and

wgEncodeDukeMapabilityRegionsExcludable.bed; Amemiya et al. 2019) by converting genomic

coordinates between the human (hg38) and the common marmoset genome assemblies using

the UCSC liftOver tool (Raney et al. 2024).

After filtering, the population-level dataset contained 7,198,428 autosomal biallelic SNPs

in the accessible genome (Supplementary Table S1).

Phasing

We estimated haplotypes from the population-level genotype data using BEAGLE v.5.5

(Browning et al. 2021), a progressive phasing algorithm that has been shown to be highly

accurate (Williams et al. 2012). During phasing, a total of 16,701 loci (0.23%) became non-

polymorphic due to a change in genotype and were thus excluded from further analyses.

Inferring fine-scale rates of neutral divergence and mutation

In order to infer fine-scale rates of neutral divergence and mutation, we first used Cactus

v.2.9.2 (Armstrong et al. 2020) to extract the 239 primate genomes (Kuderna et al. 2024) from

the 447-way multiple species alignment (Zoonomia Consortium 2020) and update the common

marmoset genome with the most recent reference genome for the species utilized in this study.

To this end, we removed the common marmoset genome included in the multiple species

alignment using the *halRemoveGenome* function and then extracted the alignment block

consisting of the ancestral PrimateAnc232 genome and the genome of the closely related

Wied's black-tufted-ear marmoset (*C. kuhlii*) using the *hal2fasta* function. We then re-aligned the

current reference genome for the common marmoset with the genomes of PrimateAnc232 and

C. kuhlii using the previously inferred branch lengths and updated the alignment using the

halReplaceGenome function. With this updated multiple species alignment on hand, we

identified fixed single nucleotide differences along the marmoset lineage (i.e., between the

common marmoset and the ancestral primate PrimateAnc232 genomes) using the

halSummarizeMutations function. In contrast to the common marmoset genome, the genome of

Wied's marmoset is highly fragmented (293,512 scaffolds with a scaffold N50 of 15.1 kb totaling

2.6 Gb compared to 1,233 scaffolds with a scaffold N50 of 137 Mb totaling 2.9 Gb), thus we

removed alignments less than 10 kb in length in order to avoid spurious and/or incomplete

alignments that might artificially inflate estimates of neutral divergence and mutation.

Additionally, in order to obtain fixed differences along the human-marmoset branch, we obtained

the sub-alignment consisting of the common marmoset, human, and PrimatesAnc003 genomes

from the multi-species alignment using the *cactus-hal2maf* function, converted this alignment

back into HAL format (Hickey et al. 2013) using the *maf2hal* function, and then retrieved point

mutations along the branch from *C. jacchus* to the ancestral PrimatesAnc003 using the

halBranchMutations function. In order to obtain neutral substitutions between *C. jacchus* and *C.*

kuhlii as well as between *C. jacchus* and humans, we excluded both variants known to

segregate in any of the species (based on published population-level polymorphism data

available for humans of Yoruba ancestry [1000 Genomes Project Consortium 2015] and

common marmosets [Soni et al. 2025b]; note that no such population-level polymorphism data

was available for Wied's marmoset) as well as sites within 10 kb of functional regions (based on

the protein-coding genes annotated in the common marmoset genome). Using these datasets,

we then calculated neutral divergence at both the broad (genome-wide) scale and the fine scale

(using 1 kb, 10 kb, 100 kb, and 1 Mb sliding windows with a step size of 500 bp, 5 kb, 50 kb,

and 500 kb, respectively) by dividing the number of substitutions by the number of sites

accessible to our study. To derive mutation rates, we divided the rates of neutral divergence

between *C. jacchus* and *C. kuhlii* by the divergence time in generations. For this, we used three

possible divergence time estimates — 0.59 million years ago (mya), 0.82 mya and 1.09 mya

(based on the range of divergence times between *C. jacchus* and *C. kuhlii* inferred by

Malukiewicz et al. 2021) — and two possible generation time estimates — 1.5 years and 2.0

years (Tardif et al. 2003; Okano et al. 2012; Schultz-Darken et al. 2016; Han et al. 2022).

Inferring fine-scale rates of recombination

We used two different approaches to infer fine-scale rates of recombination: the

demography-unaware estimator LDhat (McVean et al. 2002, 2004; Auton and McVean 2007)

and its successor, the demography-aware estimator pyrho (Spence and Song 2019).

LDhat: We inferred genome-wide fine-scale recombination rates in the common marmoset using

LDhat v.2.2 (McVean et al. 2002, 2004; Auton and McVean 2007). To this end, we first

generated a lookup table containing the coalescent likelihoods for every two-locus haplotype

configuration possible in our sample of 15 diploid individuals (i.e., 30 haploids: ' -*n* 30 '), using

LDhat *complete* with the suggested maximum population-scaled recombination rate ρ of 100 (' -

rhomax 100 ') and a grid size of 201 (' -*n_pts* 201 ') to improve accuracy. Next, we obtained

region-based population-scaled estimates by running the *interval* function of LDhat with a block

penalty of 5 (' *-bpen* 5 ') for 60 million iterations (' *-its* 60000000 ') using a sampling scheme of

40,000 iterations (' *-samp* 40000 ') across windows of 4,000 SNPs with a 200 SNP step size.

After discarding the burn-in of the Monte Carlo Markov Chain using LDhat's *stat* function (' *-burn*

500 '), we then combined the region-based estimates at the midpoint of each overlapping

window to obtain estimates at the chromosome-scale. Following standard practices in the field

(e.g., Auton et al. 2012; Pfeifer 2020a), we excluded large localized peaks in recombination rate

(with $\rho > 100$ between adjacent SNPs) to minimize the impact of genome assembly errors

leading to artificial breaks in LD. In total, we identified 1,352 such regions and masked them

together with the 50 SNPs adjacent on each side by setting the recombination rate to 0

(masking a total of 42,348 SNPs, or 0.59%). Finally, we used N_e based on the mean Θ

observed in the empirical data to convert the population-scaled recombination rate to a per-

generation recombination rate, assuming a per-site per-generation mutation rate of 0.81×10^{-8}

as per Soni et al. 2025b.

pyrho: We also inferred genome-wide recombination rates using pyrho v.0.1.7 (Spence and

Song 2019). In brief, as recommended by the developers, we first used pyrho's *make_table*

function to compute an approximate likelihood lookup table (' *--approx* ') for a 50% larger sample

size (' *-N* 45 ') under the demographic model previously inferred by Soni et al. 2025b to account

for historical population size changes in the species (i.e., a population size reduction

approximately 3,500 generations ago, followed by an exponential population recovery) and then

down-sampled this table to 15 diploid individuals (' *-n* 30 ') to match our empirical sample size.

Next, we used the *hyperparam* function to determine suitable hyperparameter settings for pyrho

and then ran the *optimize* function with the recommended window size (' *--windowsize* 30 ') and

smoothness penalty (' *--blockpenalty* 50 ') to estimate genome-wide recombination rates. In all

steps, we assumed a per-site per-generation mutation rate of 0.81×10^{-8} (' *--mu* 0.81e-8 ') as per

Soni et al. 2025b to internally convert the population-scaled recombination rate to a per-

generation recombination rate.

To account for the impact of twinning and chimerism (see "Evaluating the impact of twinning and

chimerism on recombination rate inference" below), we rescaled the LDhat and pyrho estimates

by multiplying the rates by a factor of 0.574 and 0.761, respectively.

Evaluating the impact of twinning and chimerism on recombination rate inference

Both LDhat and pyrho rely on coalescent theory and the theoretical foundation provided

by the Wright-Fisher model to infer fine-scale recombination rates from population genomic

data. To evaluate the impact of twinning and chimerism — two model violations inherent to the

biology of marmosets — on the recombination rate inference with these two approaches, we

used SLiM 4.0.1 (Haller and Messer 2023) to simulate a population of marmoset individuals

using the modelling framework recently described in Soni et al. (2025b). Specifically, we

simulated 10 replicates of a 1 Mb genomic region in a population of 10,000 marmosets under

the demographic model of the species recently inferred by Soni et al. (2025b) — consisting of

an ancestral population of 61,198 individuals that collapsed to 17,931 individuals 3,513

generations ago before recovering via exponential growth to a current day size of 33,830

individuals — assuming a mutation rate of 0.81×10^{-8} per base pair per generation and a

recombination rate of 1.0×10^{-8} per base pair per generation (as per the rates used in Soni et al.

2025b). From each replicate, we sampled 15 chimeric individuals 0.01 N generations after burn-

in (10 $N_{ancestral}$ generations) and estimated recombination rates using LDhat and pyrho (as

described in "Inferring fine-scale rates of recombination").

Inferring recombination hotpots

To infer the positions of recombination hotspots in the common marmoset, we used the

software package LDhot v.0.4 (Auton et al. 2014). In brief, we first ran the *ldhot* function to

identify putative recombination hotspots in 3 kb windows with a step size of 1 kb and a

background window of 100 kb centered around the hotspot, using 1,000 simulations as

recommended by the developers. Afterward, we combined significant windows to merge

adjacent candidates using the *ldhot_summary* function with significance thresholds of 0.001 and

0.01 for calling and merging hotspots, respectively. To limit the number of spurious hotspots, we

implemented a three-step filtering approach by combining the recommendations from the Great

Ape Recombination Project (Stevison et al. 2016) with those of Brazier and Glémin (2024),

filtering out any hotspot candidates with a width longer than 10 kb, an intensity lower than 4 or

higher than 200, or a rate less than five times the chromosome-wide average rate.

In silico prediction of PRDM9 binding motifs

We used the ZOOPS model implemented in MEME v.5.5.7 (Bailey and Elkan 1994) to

identify 10-15 bp motifs present not more than once in each of the 1,000 hotspots with the

highest intensity (including the flanking 500 bp to ensure that the entire hotspot is captured)

while accounting for genomic background using cold spot regions matched for sequence length

and GC-content. With these putative motifs on hand, we used FIMO v.5.5.7 to scan the

complete set of hotspot windows for any occurrences and compared the frequency of each motif

in the hotspot regions with that observed in 25,000 randomly sampled background regions using

MOODS v.1.9.4.1 (Korhonen et al. 2009). We assessed the statistical significance by

performing a Fisher's exact test in R v.4.2.2 (R Core Team 2022).

***In silico* characterization of PRDM9 binding**

We used AlphaFold3 to predict the sequence-specific binding between PRDM9 and the

putative PRDM9 binding motifs. To this end, we first retrieved the nucleotide sequence of

PRDM9 from the common marmoset genome and aligned it against the PRDM9 protein

sequence annotated in the human telomere-to-telomere assembly (T2T-CHM13v2.0; Nurk et al.

2022) using GeneWise v.2.4.1 (Birney et al. 2004) to visually inspect the sequence for

completeness. Next, we used the ExPASy web server (Duvaud et al. 2021) to translate the

nucleotide sequence into an amino acid sequence. We then used this translated amino acid

sequence as input for a protein-protein BLAST (Altschul et al. 1990) search against the NCBI

non-redundant protein sequences database (Supplementary Figure S8) and visualized the

resulting phylogenetic tree using EMBL's interactive Tree of Life (Letunic and Bork 2021), noting

a high similarity of the query to PRDM9 sequences previously annotated in haplorrhines

(Supplementary Figure S9). Next, we used InterPro (Blum et al. 2025) to predict protein

domains within this sequence, confirming the presence of a Krueppel-associated box (KRAB)

domain, a SSX repressor domain (SSXRD), a PR/SET domain, and a C2H2-type zinc finger

array (Supplementary Figure S10). Finally, we ran AlphaFold3 (Abramson et al. 2024) by

providing both the marmoset PRDM9 amino acid sequence and the putative PRDM9 binding

motifs as input.

Assessing the correlation of fine-scale rates of recombination with genomic features

To assess the correlation of fine-scale rates of recombination with different genomic

features, we calculated a number of summary statistics across 100 kb windows along the 22

autosomes of the common marmoset genome — including nucleotide diversity (based on our

marmoset population genomic data), divergence (based on the updated 447-way mammalian

multiple species alignment as described in "Inferring fine-scale rates of neutral divergence and

mutation"), GC-content and exon-content (both based on the annotations of the common

marmoset assembly; Yang et al. 2021) — and calculated partial Kendall's rank correlations

across windows in which at least 50% of sites were accessible using R v.4.2.2 (R Core Team

2022).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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	divergence time	generation time	
		1.5 years	2.0 years
C. jacchus – C. kuhlii	0.59 mya	2.50E-09	3.34E-09
	0.82 mya	1.80E-09	2.40E-09
	1.09 mya	1.36E-09	1.81E-09
C. jacchus – H. sapiens	32 mya	2.80E-09	3.74E-09
	33 mya	2.72E-09	3.62E-09
	36 mya	2.49E-09	3.32E-09

Table 1. **Inferred rates of neutral mutation.** Comparison of indirectly inferred mean neutral mutation rate estimates based on *C. jacchus–C. kuhlii* divergence (mean neutral divergence rate: 0.0029) and *C. jacchus–H. sapiens* divergence (0.06) for three possible divergence times (0.59 million years ago [mya], 0.82 mya, and 1.09 mya for *C. jacchus–C. kuhlii* [Malukiewicz et al. 2021]; 32 mya, 33 mya, and 36 mya for *C. jacchus–H. sapiens* [Glazko and Nei 2003]) and two possible generation times (1.5 years and 2.0 years; Tardif et al. 2003; Okano et al. 2012; Schultz-Darken et al. 2016; Han et al. 2022).

Figure 1

Figure 1. Fine-scale rates of neutral mutation. (a) Density plots of the per-site per-generation mutation rate implied by the neutral divergence for two possible generation times (1.5 years and 2.0 years; Tardif et al. 2003; Okano et al. 2012; Schultz-Darken et al. 2016; Han et al. 2022) and three possible divergence times between the common marmoset (*C. jacchus*) and the closely related Wied's black-tufted-ear marmoset (*C. kuhlii*) (0.59 million years ago [mya], 0.82 mya, and 1.09 mya; Malukiewicz et al. 2021). (b) Genome-wide per-site per-generation neutral mutation rates for genomic windows of size 1 Mb, with a 500 kb step size (and see Supplementary Figure S2 for the heterogeneity in neutral mutation rates across all autosomes). Neutral mutation rates were estimated from the rates of neutral divergence observed in >10kb-long alignments between *C. jacchus* and *C. kuhlii* (note that due to the limited number of such alignments on chromosomes 14 and 22, neutral mutation rate estimates for these two autosomes are relatively coarse).

Figure 2

Figure 2: **Performance of recombination rate estimators under twinning and chimerism**. (a) Performance of the demography-unaware recombination rate estimator LDhat (shown in blues) and the demography-aware recombination rate estimator pyrho (shown in browns) under the demographic history inferred for the population by Soni et al. (2025b) using a Wright-Fisher (WF) model and a non-WF framework that models twinning and chimerism — two model violations inherent to the biology of marmosets. The dashed line depicts the recombination rate that was used in the simulations (1 cM/Mb). (b) Mean r^2 (shown in black; left y-axis) and haplotype diversity (gray; right y-axis) calculated over 10 kb windows (with a 5 kb step size) across 10 simulation replicates under the demographic history inferred for the population by Soni et al. (2025b) using a WF model and a non-WF framework that models twinning and chimerism. Data points represent the mean value, whilst confidence intervals represent the standard deviation.

Figure 3

(a)

(b)

Figure 3: Fine-scale rates of recombination. (a) Genome-wide per-site per-generation recombination rates as inferred by LDhat for genomic windows of size 1Mb, with a 500kb step size (and see Supplementary Figure S4 for recombination rate heterogeneity across all autosomes and Supplementary Figure S5 for the genome-wide recombination rates inferred by pyrho). (b) *In silico* binding prediction between PRDM9 and the putative binding sites. Predictions were performed using AlphaFold3 (predictions are provided for non-commercial use only, under and subject to AlphaFold Server Output Terms of Use found under alphafoldserver.com/output-terms). Per-atom confidence scores are color-coded with very high confidence predicted structures shown in dark blue (pLDDT > 90), confidently predicted structures in turquoise (90 > pLDTT > 70), low confidence predicted structures in yellow (70 > pLDTT > 50), and very low confidence predicted structures in orange (pLDTT < 50).