

1 ***Drosophila melanogaster* infected with *Wolbachia* strain**

2 **wMelCS prefer cooler temperatures**

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23 **Abstract**

- 24 1. Temperature plays a fundamental role in the dynamics of host-pathogen
25 interactions.
- 26 2. *Wolbachia* is an endosymbiotic bacteria that infects about 40% of arthropod
27 species, which can affect host behaviour and reproduction. Yet, the effect of
28 *Wolbachia* on host thermoregulatory behaviour is largely unknown, despite its
29 use in disease vector control programs in thermally variable environments.
- 30 3. Here, we used a thermal gradient to test whether *Drosophila melanogaster*
31 infected with *Wolbachia* strain wMelCS exhibit different temperature
32 preferences (T_p) to uninfected flies.
- 33 4. We found that *Wolbachia*-infected flies preferred a cooler mean temperature
34 ($T_p = 25.06 \pm 0.25^\circ\text{C}$) than uninfected flies ($T_p = 25.78 \pm 0.24^\circ\text{C}$).
- 35 5. This finding suggests that *Wolbachia*-infected hosts might seek out cooler
36 microclimates to reduce exposure to and lessen the consequences of high
37 temperatures. This finding has generated hypotheses that will be fruitful in
38 areas of research for exploring the mechanisms by which the change in T_p
39 occurs in this complex and significant host-pathogen-environment interaction.

40

41 **Keywords:** host behaviour; host-pathogen interaction; temperature preference;
42 thermal gradient; vector control; *Wolbachia pipientis*

43

44 **Running title:** *Wolbachia* alters temperature preference

45 **Introduction**

46 *Wolbachia pipientis* is an endosymbiont bacteria that infects an estimated 40% of
47 terrestrial arthropod species (Zug & Hammerstein, 2012). The association between
48 *Wolbachia* and its hosts has been the subject of a wide array of studies, including
49 the alteration of host behaviours and reproduction (Weeks et al., 2002), cytoplasmic
50 incompatibility for disease vector control (Clancy & Hoffmann, 1998), and
51 environmental factors mediating host-pathogen interactions (Murdock et al., 2012).
52 Temperature is a key environmental modulator of host-pathogen interactions, which
53 constrains the rate of biological reactions and sets limits to performance and survival
54 (Thomas & Blanford, 2003).

55 For the insect host, there is little physiological capacity to differentiate their
56 body temperature (T_b) from the ambient temperature of their surrounding
57 environment (Angilletta, 2009). Physiological rates and performance are strongly
58 affected by T_b in ectotherms, so organisms should aim to maintain their T_b across a
59 range of temperatures that correspond to adequate performance (Huey &
60 Kingsolver, 1989). One strategy that ectotherms can employ to avoid exposure to
61 unsuitable temperatures is to modify their behaviour to seek more suitable
62 microclimates, such as in shade, to find their preferred temperature (T_p) (Sunday et
63 al., 2014). Temperature preference is the perception and neural integration of
64 thermal information, resulting in this crucial thermoregulatory behaviour (Abram et
65 al., 2017). *Drosophila melanogaster* exhibits strong circadian and neurally controlled
66 temperature preference behaviour, which centres around 24–27°C (Arnold et al.,
67 2015; Kaneko et al., 2012).

68 The thermal biology of *Wolbachia* and host associations is complex and
69 variable. High temperatures are unfavourable for some strains, where *Wolbachia*

70 density is much higher at lower temperatures (e.g., 13–19°C (Moghadam et al.,
71 2017)) and is reduced at higher temperatures (e.g., 26°C (Clancy & Hoffmann,
72 1998)). *Wolbachia* can also be mostly or completely eliminated by exposure to cyclic
73 heat stress or temperatures above 30°C, reducing vertical transmission of the
74 symbiont (Corbin et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2017). However, higher temperatures do
75 not always reduce *Wolbachia* titre and responses to temperature vary greatly among
76 study systems (e.g., Mouton et al., 2006; Murdock et al., 2014). The *Wolbachia*
77 strain wMelCS that we use here infects natural *D. melanogaster* populations, and at
78 high titres, confers some virus protection but also reduces host lifespan (Chrostek et
79 al., 2013; Hedges et al., 2008).

80 As temperatures ideally suited to *D. melanogaster* are generally higher than
81 those suited to *Wolbachia*, we predict that manipulating their host's behaviour to
82 seek cooler temperatures would be beneficial. Thus, our objective here is to use an
83 established behavioural assay to test the capacity for *Wolbachia* infection to alter
84 host T_p .

85

86 **Materials and Methods**

87 *Drosophila melanogaster* from the Oregon RC line were infected with the wMelCS
88 line of *Wolbachia pipientis* (hereafter +*Wol*) (Hedges et al., 2008). All flies were
89 reared in 25°C incubators on a standard cornmeal diet and 12 h light/dark cycle. The
90 paired *Wolbachia*-free fly line (hereafter control) was generated from the same
91 wMelCS-infected fly line by treating flies with 0.03% tetracycline. We confirmed that
92 the *Wolbachia* strain was wMelCS by PCR using two primer sets as described in
93 Riegler et al. (2012). These flies were reared on a standard cornmeal diet for at least
94 five generations before use to recover after tetracycline treatment, and microbiota

95 was reconstituted and standardised following standard procedures. Here,
96 temperature preference assays were conducted on adult male flies aged 4–7 days,
97 but both male and female flies of various ages have been shown to exhibit very
98 similar temperature preferences even when infected by *Wolbachia* (Truitt et al.,
99 2018).

100 Temperature preference assays used an identical thermal gradient apparatus
101 to that previously described in (Arnold et al., 2015). The apparatus achieved a stable
102 linear gradient of 0.2°C per cm across a temperature range of 17.5–33.5°C (Arnold
103 et al., 2015). Temperatures were measured throughout the experiment by five K-type
104 thermocouples suspended in the gradient airspace, held by bungs that were fitted
105 into an acrylic cover, recorded by a Squirrel 2040 temperature meter.

106 For each trial, five flies were gently tipped into the centre of the apparatus
107 (25°C) and allowed to freely move about the apparatus for 30 minutes. At the end of
108 the trial period, flies were anaesthetised by CO₂ that was introduced into both ends
109 of the gradient at a low-flow rate to prevent changes to the position of flies. Distance
110 along the gradient was then used to determine the preferred temperature at the
111 position of rest for each fly in the gradient, T_p . A total of 58 flies for each treatment
112 were assessed for T_p , across 24 replicate trials.

113 As circadian rhythm affects T_p in *Drosophila*, we always conducted
114 temperature preference assays between 09:30 and 13:30, a time period across
115 which T_p is stable (Kaneko et al., 2012). Assays were also conducted in darkness by
116 covering the apparatus in black material to prevent phototactic behaviour affecting
117 positioning.

118 Exploratory data analyses where flies in each trial were treated as non-
119 independent in a mixed-effects model (trial as a random variable) found the variance

120 component of trial to be essentially zero. We therefore assumed that T_p of individual
121 flies were independent and not affected by social interactions during the trial itself
122 (see supplementary material of Arnold et al., 2015). Data were not normally
123 distributed, therefore we conducted a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test to
124 compare the preferred temperatures of control and +*Wol* flies. We then calculated
125 Cohen's d with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) as a measure of effect size, given that
126 p is not always robust. All analyses were conducted in the R environment for
127 statistical computing (v3.4.1).

128

129 **Results and discussion**

130 We found that flies infected with *Wolbachia* strain *wMelCS* preferred cooler
131 temperatures compared to those without any *Wolbachia* (Fig. 1). The difference
132 between populations was significant even at $\alpha = 0.01$ (Mann-Whitney U test; $W =$
133 2179, $p = 0.006$), which was supported by an effect size and 95% CIs that did not
134 overlap with zero (Cohen's $d = 0.394$ [0.189 – 0.563]). Both populations exhibited
135 large variance in T_p , ranging between 18.5 and 29°C (Fig. 1A). There is some
136 overlap in T_p distributions between the populations (Fig. 1B). In absolute terms, +*Wol*
137 flies preferred a cooler mean (\pm SE) temperature of $25.06 \pm 0.25^\circ\text{C}$ compared to the
138 control flies, which preferred $25.78 \pm 0.24^\circ\text{C}$.

139 Our finding is one of the first empirical accounts of *Wolbachia*-infected flies
140 exhibiting a preference for cooler temperatures. Recently, Truitt et al. (2018)
141 demonstrated that three strains of *Wolbachia* (*wMel*, *wMelCS*, and *wMelPop*) all
142 significantly reduce the T_p of *D. melanogaster* (strain w^{1118}). The authors found that
143 w^{1118} flies infected with *wMelCS* had a 4°C lower mean T_p compared to uninfected
144 flies, although the T_p of uninfected w^{1118} flies was 24.4°C, which is 1.4°C lower than

145 the Oregon RC flies from the present study. We have identified a similar T_p shift of
146 *Wolbachia*-infected flies in the same direction (although lower magnitude) in a
147 different host strain, using a different temperature preference apparatus. Our results
148 not only support the findings of Truitt et al. (2018), but also suggest that this
149 biologically-interesting phenomenon could be reasonably common.

150 One explanation for our findings is that *Wolbachia* could potentially
151 manipulate an important aspect of host thermoregulatory behaviour. Pathogens can
152 improve their transmission probability and reproductive capacity by inducing host
153 behavioural changes (Lefèvre & Thomas, 2008), and *Wolbachia* can affect host mate
154 choice and activity levels (van Houte et al., 2013). Changes in thermoregulation
155 behaviour has been well studied from the perspective of the infected host,
156 particularly behavioural fever, where the host elevates its T_b by behavioural means
157 to rid itself of the pathogen (Kluger, 1979). However, it is less clear whether
158 pathogens manipulate host T_p , especially when the pathogen is not parasitic (i.e.,
159 commensalistic or mutualistic) and for decreases to T_p .

160 Variance of temperatures in nature may lead to populations with mixed or
161 incomplete *Wolbachia* infection (van Opijnen & Breeuwer, 1999), but it is possible
162 that *Wolbachia* could manipulate host T_p to maximise its own fitness without
163 negatively affecting the host. Cyclic heat stress fluctuating between 26°C and 37°C
164 at 12 h intervals significantly reduced *Wolbachia* density and cytoplasmic
165 incompatibility of *wMel* and *wMelPop-CLA*, but not *wAlbB* in *Aedes aegypti* (Ross et
166 al., 2017). The *wMelCS* strain used in the present study likely shares a recent field
167 origin with *wMel* (Riegler et al., 2005), which is a widely used dengue-suppressing
168 *Wolbachia* strain that itself also alters host T_p to prefer cooler temperatures (Truitt et
169 al., 2018). Temperature fluctuations like the cyclic heat stress experiment by Ross et

170 al. (2017) might well be experienced naturally in tropical regions. This would likely
171 result in incomplete infection and reduced transmission success, which could explain
172 the erratic temporal and spatial dynamics of *Wolbachia* spread in controlled infected-
173 vector release programs (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2017). Our finding suggests that
174 *Wolbachia*-infected hosts prefer cooler temperatures and might be likely to seek out
175 cooler microclimates, which would reduce exposure to and lessen the fitness
176 consequences of high temperatures.

177 An alternative hypothesis is that flies infected with *Wolbachia* exhibit a
178 behavioural chill to restrict pathogen replication. Infection with *Pseudomonas*
179 *aeruginosa* lowered the T_p of *D. melanogaster*, but this behavioural chill response
180 was inefficient and did not reach the critical temperature that would increase survival
181 and limit bacteria growth rate (Fedorka et al., 2016). The change T_p that we
182 observed in flies infected with wMelCS could also be a host behavioural response.
183 However, as discussed earlier, *Wolbachia* tends to perform worse at higher
184 temperatures than are optimal for *D. melanogaster*, and therefore we suggest that
185 manipulation of the host T_p by the pathogen is more likely.

186 The absolute decrease in T_p of less than 1°C that we observed in flies infected
187 with *Wolbachia* wMelCS provides little buffer to the predicted 2–4°C increase by
188 2100 due to climate change. However, *Wolbachia* are maternally inherited and
189 exposure to high temperatures can reduce vertical transmission in only a few
190 generations (Corbin et al., 2016). If the infected host prefers cooler temperatures,
191 then this behaviour would confer a selective advantage for *Wolbachia*. Arthropod
192 hosts of *Wolbachia* have rapid generation times relative to the forecast rate of
193 temperature increase, therefore it is conceivable that a minor change in T_p could be

194 enhanced by selection across generations to allow continued transmission and
195 mitigate fitness consequences.

196 This study paves the way for discovering the mechanisms by which *Wolbachia* -
197 infection alters host T_p . Whether the observed phenomenon is due to *Wolbachia*
198 directly manipulating host behaviour, a host defense response, or a by-product of
199 infection will need to be determined. The efficacy of introductions of populations of
200 *Wolbachia*-infected vectors may hinge upon a better understanding of complex host-
201 pathogen-environment interactions. Testing for *Wolbachia*-induced changes in
202 thermal preference across multiple host and pathogen strains will elucidate whether
203 unexpected ecological and evolutionary responses might occur in planned vector
204 releases in a changing climate.

205

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210 **Competing interests**

211 The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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217

218 **Contribution of authors**

219 PAA established the methodology, lead the analyses, interpreted results, and wrote
220 the manuscript; SL and ALS collected the data and contributed to the manuscript
221 draft; KNJ supervised the project, interpreted results, and contributed substantially to
222 the manuscript draft.

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295 **Figure legend**

296

297 **Figure 1.** Preferred temperature of uninfected control (orange fill, solid line) and
298 +*Wol* (blue fill, dashed line) *Drosophila melanogaster*. (A) Boxplot of preferred
299 temperature showing median (thick black line), upper and lower quartiles (box), 95%
300 confidence intervals (error bars), and raw data points for control and +*Wol* flies. Each
301 population had $n = 58$ individuals. (B) Density plot showing smoothed distributions of
302 the preferred temperature data for each population.

