Draft genomes of a male and female Australian jacky dragon (*Amphibolurus muricatus*)

Ran Tian^{1,2}, Han Guo¹, Chen Yang¹, Guangyi Fan^{3,4}, Sarah L. Whiteley^{5,6}, Clare E. Holleley⁶, Inge Seim^{1,7}, Arthur Georges^{5,8*}

¹ Integrative Biology Laboratory, College of Life Sciences, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing 210046, China

² Jiangsu Key Laboratory for Biodiversity and Biotechnology, College of Life Sciences, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing 210046, China

³ BGI-Qingdao, Qingdao 266555, China

⁴ BGI-Shenzhen, Shenzhen 518083, China

⁵ Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra, Canberra 2617, Australia

⁶ Australian National Wildlife Collection, CSIRO, Canberra 2601, Australia

⁷ School of Biology and Environmental Science, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane 4000, Australia

⁸ AusARG consortium, Bioplatforms Australia, Research Park Drive, Macquarie University, Macquarie Park 2109, Australia

*Corresponding author: Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia. E-mail: georges@aerg.canberra.edu.au

1 ABSTRACT

2 Australia is remarkable for its lizard diversity, with very high endemism because of
3 continental-scale diversification and adaptive radiation. We employed 10X Genomics
4 Chromium linked-reads technology to generate male and female draft genomes of the jacky
5 dragon (*Amphibolurus muricatus*), an Australian dragon lizard (family Agamidae). The
6 assemblies are 1.8 Gb in size and have a repeat content (38%) and GC content (42%) similar
7 to other dragon lizards. The contig N50 values for the assemblies were 37.2 kb (female) and
8 28.8 kb (male), with corresponding scaffold N50 values of 720.5 kb and 369 kb. The longest
9 scaffold was 6.5 Mb in each assembly. The BUSCO completeness percentages were 92.2%
10 and 90.8% respectively. These statistics are comparable to other lizard genomes assembled
11 using similar technology. Phylogenetic comparisons show that Australian dragon lizard
12 species split from a common ancestor around 33.4 million years ago. The draft *A. muricatus*
13 assemblies will be a valuable resource for understanding lizard sex determination and the
14 evolution and conservation of Australian dragon lizards.

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16 **Keywords:** agamid lizard; Agamidae; squamate; nuclear genome; genome assembly

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21 Introduction

22 The Australian jacky dragon, *Amphibolurus muricatus* (**Figure 1**), is lizard widespread in dry
23 sclerophyll forests of south-eastern and eastern Australia (Cogger, 2014). It is a model
24 species for biogeography (Pepper et al., 2014), evolutionary biology (Warner and Shine,
25 2008; Warner et al., 2013), social behaviour (Peters and Evans, 2003; Woo and Rieucou,
26 2013), and development (Esquerré et al., 2014; Whiteley et al., 2021).

27 Species in the genus *Amphibolurus* and *Chlamydosaurus* are a major clade in the
28 Australian radiation of the Agamidae (Hugall et al., 2008). The draft assembly of *A.*
29 *muricatus*, together with that of *Pogona vitticeps* (Georges et al., 2015), represents the first
30 foray into generating the necessary high-quality genomes for the Agamidae. In particular,
31 *A. muricatus* occupies mesic habitats and so is intermediate between the Australian water
32 dragon *Intellagama lesueurii* and the forest dragon *Lophosaurus boydii* that occupy hydric
33 habitats and the central bearded dragon *Pogona vitticeps* and the Lake Eyre dragon
34 *Ctenophorus maculosus*, for example, that occupy more xeric habitats. As such, it is one of
35 several species important for understanding genomic adaptation to the progressive aridity that
36 has occurred in Australia in the past 15 Myr. *Amphibolurus muricatus* is also of particular
37 interest because it has temperature-dependent sex determination (TSD) (Harlow and Taylor,
38 2000) and it is unclear as to whether this arises from classical TSD or a combination of
39 genetic and environmental influences (Whiteley et al. 2021). Studies of the underlying
40 mechanisms of TSD require a genome assembly and knowledge of genome organisation to
41 identify genes on the sex chromosomes of species with genotypic sex determination (GSD)
42 and their chromosomal and gene homology in closely related TSD species. This is
43 particularly so in species with TSD that show evidence of cryptic residual or de novo
44 genotypic influence on offspring sex ratios, as is suspected for *A. muricatus* (Whiteley et al.,
45 2021).

46 Here, we employ high-throughput linked-read sequencing (10X Genomics) (Zheng et
47 al., 2016) to generate draft, annotated genome assemblies for a male and a female *A.*
48 *muricatus* that are comparable in contiguity and completeness to other published Agamid
49 genomes generated using Illumina short-read technologies (Georges et al., 2015). We used
50 transcriptomes sequenced and assembled for *A. muricatus* and published assemblies (*Anolis*,
51 *Varanus*, *Pogona*) to annotate the genomes. Our assemblies will provide a resource to
52 increase capacity and accelerate the progress of studies into the evolution, ecology, and
53 conservation of Australian dragon lizards.

54

55 **Materials and methods**

56

57 **Sample collection**

58 To reduce the high heterozygosity that presented difficulties in the assembly of the genome of
59 *Pogona vitticeps* (Georges et al., 2015), we generated inbred lines of *A. muricatus*. The
60 founding male and female pair were sourced from the wild and bred in captivity. The two
61 animals used to generate the genome were obtained from the fourth generation of the inbred
62 pedigree produced by sib-sib matings and back crossing (see **Figure S1** for the complete
63 pedigree). The male (AA069033) and female (AA069032) individual used for the genome
64 and transcriptome sequencing were humanely euthanised via intraperitoneal injection of
65 sodium pentobarbitone (60 mg/ml in isotonic saline). Organs were rapidly dissected and snap
66 frozen in liquid nitrogen.

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68 **Linked-read whole-genome sequencing and de novo assembly**

69 High molecular weight DNA was extracted from liver (female) and blood (male) using the
70 Gentra Puregene DNA Isolation kit (Qiagen). DNA yield and quality was assessed using a
71 NanoDrop spectrophotometer (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) and a Qubit
72 fluorometer (Thermo Fisher Scientific). Male and female *A. muricatus* genome sequencing
73 libraries were constructed on the Chromium system (10X Genomics, Pleasanton, CA, USA)
74 by the Ramaciotti Centre for Genomics (Sydney, Australia). The Chromium instrument
75 enables unique barcoding of long stretches of DNA on gel beads. The barcodes allow later
76 reconstruction of long DNA fragments from a series of short DNA fragments with the same
77 barcode (i.e. linked-reads). After barcoding, DNA was sheared into smaller fragments and
78 sequenced on the NovaSeq 6000 platform (Illumina, CA, USA) to generate 151 bp paired-
79 end (PE) reads. A total of 904.9 M raw 10X Genomics Chromium linked-reads were
80 generated.

81 To estimate the genome sizes and heterozygosity of the female and male *A. muricatus*
82 samples, we used GenomeScope (Vurture et al., 2017). Briefly, we employed KmerGenie
83 v1.7051 (Chikhi and Medvedev, 2014) and short-read sequencing data (paired-ends reads
84 generated above) to determine the optimal k -mer-value range, indicating that a minimum k -
85 mer length of 31 and 41 for the male and female, respectively. Next, k -mers in the paired-end
86 sequencing reads were counted and converted to histogram files using Jellyfish (v2.2.10)
87 (Marcais and Kingsford, 2011), followed by analysis using GenomeScope v1.0.

Raw 10X data were assembled with Supernova v2.1.1 (Weisenfeld et al., 2017) and a FASTA file was generated using the ‘pseudohap style’ option in Supernova mkoutput. All female (~450 M) and male (~550 M) read pairs were utilised (female sequencing depth *ca* 50.3x; male, *ca* 47.8x). The resulting assembly was further scaffolded with ARKS v1.0.3 (Coombe et al., 2018), reusing the 10X reads, and the companion LINKS program (v1.8.7) (Warren et al., 2015). ARKS employs a *k*-mer approach to map linked barcodes to the contigs in the initial Supernova assembly to generate a scaffold graph with estimated distances for LINKS input. Next, RNA-seq reads (from brain, ovary, and testis; see below) were filtered (i.e. cleaned) to remove adapters and low-quality reads using Flexbar v3.4.0 and used to further re-scaffold the assembly with P_RNA_scaffolder (Zhu et al., 2018). The default Flexbar settings discards all reads with any uncalled bases. A final round of scaffolding was performed on the resulting assembly using L_RNA_scaffolder (Xue et al., 2013). We used GapCloser v1.12 (part of SOAPdenovo2) (Luo et al., 2012) to fill gaps in the assembly. GapCloser was run using the parameter -l 150) and cleaned 10X Genomics reads PE reads. Genome assemblies were assessed using BUSCO 5.0.0_cv1 (Seppey et al., 2019).

RNA-seq and transcriptome assembly

Raw data 125 bp PE reads, generated on an Illumina HiSeq 2500 instrument was filtered using Flexbar v3.4.0 (Dodt et al., 2012; Roehr et al., 2017) with default settings (removes reads with any uncalled bases). Any residual ribosomal RNA reads (the majority removed by poly(A) selection prior to sequencing library generation) were removed using SortMeRNA v2.1b (Kopylova et al., 2012) against the SILVA v119 ribosomal database (Quast et al., 2013). Tissue transcriptomes were de novo assembled using Trinity v2.11.0 (Grabherr et al., 2011; Haas et al., 2013; Henschel et al., 2012) and assessed using BUSCO 5.0.0_cv1 (Seppey et al., 2019).

Genome annotation

We identified repetitive elements by integrating homology and de novo prediction data. Protein-coding genes were annotated using homology-based prediction, de novo prediction, and RNA-seq-assisted prediction methods.

Homology-based transposable elements (TE) annotations were obtained by interrogating a genome assembly with known repeats in the Repbase database v16.02 (Bao et al., 2015) using RepeatMasker v4.0.5 (DNA-level) (Tarailo-Graovac and Chen, 2009) and RepeatProteinMask (protein-level; implemented in RepeatMasker). De novo TE predictions

were obtained using RepeatModeler v1.1.0.4 (Smit and Hubley, 2010) and LTRharvest v1.5.8 (Ellinghaus et al., 2008) to generate database for a RepeatMasker run. Tandem Repeat Finder (v4.07) (Benson, 1999) was used to find tandem repeats (TRs) in the genome. A non-redundant repeat annotation set was obtained by combining the above data.

Protein-coding genes were annotated using homology-based prediction, de novo prediction, and RNA-seq-assisted [generated from ovary, testis, and brain (both sexes)] prediction methods. Sequences of homologous proteins from three lizards [*Anolis carolinensis* (green anole) assembly AnoCar2.0 (RefSeq assembly GCF_000090745.1) (Alfoldi et al., 2011); *Varanus komodoensis* (Komodo dragon) assembly ASM479886v1 (GCA_004798865.1) (Lind et al., 2019); and *Pogona vitticeps* (central bearded dragon) assembly pvi1.1 (GCF_900067755.1)] (Georges et al., 2015) were downloaded from NCBI. These protein sequences were aligned to the repeat-masked genome using BLAT v0.36 (Kent, 2002). GeneWise v2.4.1 (Birney et al., 2004) was employed to generate gene structures based on the alignments of proteins to a genome assembly. De novo gene prediction was performed using AUGUSTUS v3.2.3 (Stanke et al., 2006), GENSCAN v1.0 (Burge and Karlin, 1997), and GlimmerHMM v3.0.1 (Majoros et al., 2004) with a human training set. Transcriptome data (cleaned reads) were mapped to the assembled genome using HISAT2 v2.1.0 (Kim et al., 2019) and SAMtools v1.9 (Li et al., 2009), and coding regions were predicted using TransDecoder v5.5.0 (Grabherr et al., 2011; Haas et al., 2013). A final non-redundant reference gene set was generated by merging the three annotated gene sets using EvidenceModeler v1.1.1 (EVM) (Haas et al., 2008) and excluding EVM gene models with only ab initio support. The gene models were translated into amino acid sequences and used in local BLASTp (Camacho et al., 2009) searches against the public databases Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG; v89.1) (Kanehisa and Goto, 2000), NCBI non-redundant protein sequences (NR; v20170924) (O'Leary et al., 2016), Swiss-Prot (release-2018_07) (UniProt Consortium, 2012), TrEMBL (Translation of EMBL [nucleotide sequences that are not in Swiss-Prot]; release-2018_07) (O'Donovan et al., 2002), and InterPro (v69.0) (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Phylogeny and divergence time estimation

In addition to *A. carolinensis*, *V. komodoensis*, and *P. vitticeps* (see section above), the genome and sequences of homologous proteins from *Gekko japonicus* (Schlegel's Japanese gecko) assembly Gekko_japonicus_V1.1 (GCA_001447785.1) (Liu et al., 2015) and *Crotalus tigris* (tiger rattlesnake) assembly ASM1654583v1 (GCA_016545835.1) (Margres

et al., 2021) were downloaded from NCBI. The genome and annotations of *Ophisaurus*
gracilis (Anguidae lizard) were downloaded from GigaDB (Song et al., 2015a; Song et al.,
2015b). No gene annotation data was available for three species: *Intellagama lesueurii*
(Australian water dragon; assembly EWD_hifiasm_HiC generated as part of the AusARG
consortium and (downloaded from DNA Zoo (Cheng et al., 2021; Dudchenko et al., 2017;
Dudchenko et al., 2018)) and the Chinese agamid lizards *Phrynocephalus przewalskii*
(Przewalski's toadhead agama) (Gao et al., 2019) and *Phrynocephalus vlangalii* (Ching Hai
toadhead agama) (Gao et al., 2019) (CNCBdb accession no. CNP0000203). Their protein-
coding genes were annotated using homology-based prediction, de novo prediction, and
RNA-seq-assisted prediction methods (see genome annotation section above).

We identified 4,242 high-confidence 1:1 orthologs by interrogating the predicted
proteins from the gene models of ten species using SonicParanoid v1.3.0 (Cosentino and
Iwasaki, 2019). The corresponding coding sequences (CDS) for each species were aligned
using PRANK v100802 (Loytynoja and Goldman, 2005) and filtered by Gblocks v0.91b
(Talavera and Castresana, 2007) to identify conserved blocks (removing gaps, ambiguous
sites, and excluding alignments less than 300 bp in size), leaving 4,242 genes. Maximum-
likelihood (ML) phylogenetic trees were generated using RaxML v7.2.8 (Stamatakis, 2006)
and IQ-Tree v2.1.3 (Minh et al., 2020) with three CDS data sets: the whole coding sequence
(whole-CDS), first codon positions, and fourfold degenerate (4d) sites. Identical topologies
and similar support values were obtained (1,000 bootstrap iterations were performed). The
divergence time between species was estimated using MCMCTree [a Bayesian molecular
clock model implemented in PAML v4.7 (Yang, 2007)] with the JC69 nucleotide substitution
model, and the whole-CDS ML tree and concatenated whole-CDS supergenes as inputs. We
used 100,000 iterations after a burn-in of 10,000 iterations. MCMCTree calibration points
(million years ago; Mya) were obtained from TimeTree (Kumar et al., 2017): *G. japonicus*-*P.*
przewalskii (190-206 Mya), *V. komodoensis*-*O. gracilis* (121-143 Mya), *V. komodoensis*-*C.*
tigris (156-174 Mya), *V. komodoensis*-*A. carolinensis* (155-175 Mya), *I. lesueurii*-*A.*
carolinensis (139-166 Mya), *I. lesueurii*-*P. przewalskii* (73-93 Mya), *I. lesueurii*-*A.*
muricatus (25.5-42.4 Mya), *P. vitticeps*-*A. muricatus* (20.2-34.6 Mya).

Results and discussion

Draft genome assembly and comparisons with other squamates

We used GenomeScope (Vurture et al., 2017) to obtain a *k*-mer-based estimate of genome size and heterozygosity from paired-end sequence reads. The size of the *A. muricatus* genome is estimated to be around 1.8 Gb (**Figure S2**). The genome-wide heterozygosity from our inbred *A. muricatus* lines was estimated to range from 0.58% (female) to 0.78% (male) (**Figure S2**), slightly lower than the central bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*) (0.85%) (Georges et al., 2015).

10X Genomics sequencing data were assembled into contigs, then oriented and merged into scaffolds. Combining ARKS and P_RNA_scaffolder (employs RNA-seq reads from brain, ovary, and testis) (**Table S1**) and L_RNA_scaffolders (employs Trinity transcriptome assemblies) (**Tables S2 and S3**), the scaffold N50 size of the female *A. muricatus* (named AmuF1.1) assembly improved by 38.3% (from 371.5 kb to 720.5 kb), while the BUSCO completeness percentage improved from 84.1% to 92.2% (**Table S4**). The male assembly (AmuM1.1) saw a similar improvement, with the scaffold N50 and BUSCO score increasing from 180.2 kb to 369.9 kb and from 78.9% to 90.8%, respectively. The final assemblies had a total scaffold length (contain gaps) of 1.84 Gb (female) and 1.83 Gb (male) with a longest scaffold *ca* 6.5 Mb in each assembly (**Table 1**). The contig N50 values for the assemblies were 37.2 kb (female) and 28.8 kb (male). The scaffold and contig N50 values are similar to those of other squamate genome assemblies (**Figure 2**), with the exception of the chromosome-assigned assemblies of Australian water dragon (*Intellagama lesueurii*; scaffold N50 268.9 Mb), tiger rattlesnake (*Crotalus tigris*; scaffold N50 2.1 Mb) (Margres et al., 2021), green anole (*Anolis carolinensis*; scaffold N50 150.1 Mb), and Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*; scaffold N50 23.8 Mb) (Lind et al., 2019). The BUSCO metrics of the *A. muricatus* assemblies indicate that they compare well to other squamate assemblies, including agamids from Australia [*P. vitticeps* (Georges et al., 2015) and *I. lesueurii* (Australian water dragon)] and China (toad-headed agamas of genus *Phrynocephalus* sp. (Gao et al., 2019)) (**Figure 3**) and **Table S5**).

Genome annotation

The *A. muricatus* assemblies are composed of 38% repeat elements and have a GC content of 42% (**Tables S4 and S6**), similar to that of *P. vitticeps* (Georges et al., 2015) – with LINEs being the predominant subtype. Protein-coding genes were annotated by combining

transcriptome evidence with homology-based (*A. carolinensis*, *V. komodoensis*, and *P. vitticeps*) and de novo gene prediction methods. Gene statistics (**Table S8**) (see (Georges et al., 2015)) and gene set BUSCO scores (**Table S9**) are comparable to other squamates. Using ab initio, transcriptome, and homology-based prediction methods, we functionally annotated 18,197 (85.0%) and 17,360 (88.0%) protein-coding genes in the female and male assembly (**Tables S10 and S11**) and recovered 94.7% and 93.1% of 3,354 vertebrate benchmarking universal single-copy orthologs (BUSCOs) (Seppey et al., 2019), respectively.

Phylogenetic relationships

To construct a time-calibrated species tree (**Figure 4**), we identified 4,242 high-confidence single-copy orthologs from the female *A. muricatus* assembly and nine other squamate species. There are currently five agamid lizard genome assemblies: three Australian dragon lizard assemblies (*A. muricatus*, *P. vitticeps*, and *I. lesueurii*) and two toad-headed agama assemblies (genus *Phrynocephalus*) (Gao et al., 2019; Georges et al., 2015). Our analysis shows that the five agamid species shared an ancestor about 85.7 Mya [81.3-88.2 Mya 95% credibility interval (CI)]. We estimate that the three Australian dragon lizard species split from a common ancestor about 33.4 Mya (95% CI 28.8-39.1), while the lineages leading to *A. muricatus* and *P. vitticeps* diverged 23.6 Mya (95% CI 19.4-28.2). These observations are in agreement with an appraisal from a small set of mitochondrial and nuclear genes (Hugall et al., 2008).

Conclusions and perspectives

In this study, we generated the first annotated genome assemblies of *Amphibolurus muricatus*. Overall, the assemblies are similar in quality to a range of squamate genomes and will be immediately useful for researchers. Nevertheless, it is appreciated that the assemblies can be further improved. Such efforts will be particularly important for future studies on squamate chromosome evolution and sex determination. Single-tube Long Fragment Read (stLFR) sequencing (Fan et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019) and re-scaffolding using SLR-superscaffolder (Guo et al., 2021), and chromatin conformation capture (Hi-C) (Lieberman-Aiden et al., 2009) sequencing to generate a chromosome-level assembly is planned by the AusARG initiative of Bioplatforms Australia (<https://bioplatforms.com>). In conclusion, the *A. muricatus* assemblies described here should prove valuable for the understanding of agamid lizard evolution, ecology, and conservation.

Data availability

A. muricatus raw genome and transcriptome reads have been deposited to the NCBI Short Read Database (BioProject ID: PRJNA767251). The male and female *A. muricatus* assemblies are available at Zenodo (Tian et al., 2021b). Gene annotation files and associated FASTA files for *A. muricatus* (assembly AmuF1.1), *I. lesueurii*, *P. przewalskii*, and *P. vlangalii* are available at Zenodo (Tian et al., 2021c). *A. muricatus* transcriptome assemblies are available at Zenodo (Tian et al., 2021a). Various scripts used for data processing and analyses are available on GitHub at <https://github.com/sciseim/JackyDragon>.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approvals

All sampling and breeding experiments were conducted with approval of the Animal Ethics Committee of the University of Canberra and in accordance with their Standard Operating Procedures.

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482 **Figure legends**

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484 **Figure 1** Photograph of an adult male jacky dragon (*Amphibolurus muricatus*). Image credit:
485 David Cook Wildlife Photography.

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Figure 2 Comparison of the contiguity of two *A. muricatus* assemblies and nine publicly available squamate assemblies. N(x)% graphs show the (A) contig and (B) scaffold lengths (y-axis), where x% (x-axis) of the genome assembly consist of scaffolds and contigs of at least that size. Dashed, grey lines denote N50 and N90 values.

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496 **Figure 3** BUSCO assessment of assemblies from ten squamate species. All genome
 497 assemblies were examined using the same version and library of BUSCO (5.0.0_cv1 with the
 498 3,354-gene vertebrata_odb10 dataset). AmuF_1.1 and AmuM_1.1 denotes the female and
 499 male *A. muricatus* assembly, respectively.

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Figure 4 Inferred phylogeny of ten squamate species based on whole-coding sequences of 4,242 1:1 orthologs. Numbers at nodes represent the estimated divergence time from present (million years ago; Mya) between lineages. Agamid (family Agamidae) lineages are indicated in red.

519 Tables

520 **Table 1** *A. muricatus* genome assembly statistics. Lengths in base pairs (bp).

Assembly methods	Female (AmuF.1.1)	Male (AmuM.1.1)
Contig number	124,200	151,787
Contig length	1,750,545,991	1,741,048,453
Contig N50 (bp)	37,220	28,761
Contig max length	348,284	288,200
Scaffold number	57,227	73,856
Scaffold length	1,841,491,868	1,833,283,242
Scaffold N50 (bp)	720,518	369,860
Scaffold max length	6,534,950	6,446,322
Gaps (bp)	90,945,877	92,234,789
Gaps (%)	4.94	5.03
GC content (%)	41.77	41.70

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