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Does multiple paternity explain phenotypic variation among offspring in 1 wild boar? 2 3 Marlène Gamelon^{1,2}, Thibault Gayet^{3,4}, Eric Baubet⁴, Sébastien Devillard³, Ludovic Say³, 4 Serge Brandt⁴, Christophe Pélabon¹ and Bernt-Erik Sæther¹ 5 6 ¹Centre for Biodiversity Dynamics, Department of Biology, Norwegian University of Science 7 8 and Technology, 7491 Trondheim, Norway. 9 ³Université Lyon 1; CNRS, UMR 5558, Laboratoire de Biométrie et Biologie Évolutive, 10 69622 Villeurbanne, France. ⁴Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage, 2 Bis Rue des Religieuses, BP 19, 11 12 52120 Châteauvillain, France. 13 ²E-mail: marlene.gamelon@ntnu.no, +47 73596051, corresponding author 14 15 Running title: Paternity and offspring diversification 16 17 **Abstract:** During pregnancy, littermates compete to extract maternal resources from the 18 19 placenta. Unequal extraction of resources leads to developmental differences among offspring and thus within-litter variation in offspring mass. Because competition among littermates can 20 be stronger among half-sibs, multiple paternity may represent an adaptive strategy allowing 21

females to increase within-litter phenotypic variation among offspring when facing variable environments. Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) females produce large litters with diversified offspring in terms of body mass. Additionally, multiple paternity within a litter has been observed in this promiscuous species. One can hypothesize that multiple paternity represents the mechanism by which females increase within-litter phenotypic variation. Combining long-term monitoring data with paternity analyses in a wild boar population, we tested whether the increase in the number of fathers within a litter explained the increase in within-litter variation in offspring mass observed in large litters. We showed that heavy females mated earlier during the rut, produced larger litters with a higher number of fathers and more variable fetus mass than lighter females. Within-litter variation of offspring mass increased with gestation stage and litter size, suggesting differential allocation of maternal resource among offspring *in utero*. However, we found only a weak paternal effect on offspring mass and no direct effect of the number of fathers on the within-litter variation in offspring mass. These results indicate that differential maternal allocation to offspring during pregnancy is unlikely related to paternal identity in this species.

Keywords: fetus mass, paternal identity, phenotypic polymorphism, sibling rivalry

Introduction

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Natural selection on body size is generally positive (Kingsolver and Diamond 2011), particularly during early life stages. For example, in mammals and birds, heavier offspring often exhibit high survival (see Ronget et al. 2017 for meta-analyses). However, because of trade-offs between the size and number of offspring (Smith and Fretwell 1974; Lloyd 1987; Winkler and Wallin 1987), producing many large offspring within a single reproductive event is not a sustainable reproductive tactic for polytocous species. Thus, maternal resources are either equally allocated among offspring (favoring an optimal offspring size sensu Smith and Fretwell 1974), or differentially allocated among them (Trivers 1974; see e.g. Kühl et al. 2007 in saiga antelope Saiga tatarica) leading to within-litter/clutch variation in offspring mass. In variable and unpredictable environments, such a diversification of offspring phenotypes through differential maternal allocation may contribute to minimizing variance in reproductive success among years (Philippi and Seger 1989; Starrfelt and Kokko 2012; Sæther and Engen 2015) and thus maximizing fitness (coin-flipping strategy sensu Kaplan and Cooper 1984; see also Gamelon et al. 2013b for a review in a variety of taxa). Within-litter variation in offspring mass can result from contrasting abilities for young to acquire and/or use maternal resources. Indeed, in the uterine environment of polytocous species, littermates compete to extract maternal resources from the placenta (Drake et al. 2008). Unequal extraction of resources ultimately leads to important developmental differences among offspring (Mock and Parker 1997) and potential high within-litter variation in offspring mass. In polyandrous species, where one female mates with multiple males in a single breeding event, littermates sired by different fathers are genetically more diverse (Williams 1975; Madsen et al. 1992). Hamilton's rule on kinship selection predicts that competition among offspring should be stronger when genetic relationship is low (Hamilton,

1964; Trivers, 1974; Watson, 1991; Mock & Parker, 1997; Yasui, 2001). One can thus hypothesize that multiple paternity represents an adaptive strategy allowing females to increase within-litter phenotypic variation among offspring (Yasui 1998; Fox and Rauter 2003). Importantly, this hypothesis posits that the ability of offspring to acquire and/or use maternal resources depends on paternally derived alleles.

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In wild boar (Sus scrofa), litter size increases with mother body mass. Heavy females produce large litters with a mixture of heavy and light offspring, whereas lighter females produce litters with similar-sized offspring (Gamelon et al. 2013b). In this polytocous species, contrary to other large mammalian species of herbivores (Gaillard et al. 2000), piglet body mass has little influence on survival (Baubet et al. 1995) allowing females to produce a large range of offspring phenotypes. Furthermore, by producing diversified offspring phenotypes at birth, heavy females may match the mass of their offspring with teat productivity, thus decreasing within-litter competition to get access to maternal milk, and thereby increasing the chance of rearing many offspring at a given breeding event (Gamelon et al. 2013a). The species has been classically described as polygynous with female monopolization by males, but a recent study has reported multiple paternity suggesting a promiscuous mating system in this species (Gayet et al. 2016). These observations open the possibility for polyandry in wild boar to be an adaptive strategy that increases offspring diversity within a litter. If mating with multiple males is the pathway by which females increase the phenotypic polymorphism of their offspring, differences in piglet mass should be partly determined by paternally derived alleles, and we expect a paternal genetic effect on offspring mass as well as more variable offspring in litters sired by many fathers.

Taking advantage of a unique long-term monitoring of a wild boar population, we tested the hypothesis that multiple paternity mediates within-litter diversification of offspring phenotypes. We extended previous works linking female body mass with diversification of

offspring phenotypes (see Gamelon et al. 2013b) by including paternity analyses. We identified fathers of fetuses from females killed during hunting and tested for a paternal effect on fetus mass. Moreover, we explored the pathways through which female body mass influences the diversification of offspring phenotypes by testing specifically a direct effect of the number of fathers per litter on phenotypic variation among offspring.

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Materials and methods

Study site and data collection

The study was conducted in northeastern France in the 11,000 ha forest of Châteauvillain-Arc-en-Barrois. In this area, wild boars are heavily hunted each year between October and February and the annual survival is 0.48 [95% CI: 0.44; 0.51] and 0.23 [0.17; 0.30] for adult females and adult males respectively (Toïgo et al. 2008). Between 2007 and 2014, we recorded the dressed body mass (BM: body mass without digestive tract, heart, lungs, liver, reproductive tract and blood) of 136 pregnant females shot and their sampling date. For each female, we also recorded the litter size (LS) and each fetus (n=711) was weighed, measured (crown-rump length, in millimeters) and sexed. From the average fetus length within a litter (*Length*), we estimated gestation stage in days by applying the model of Henry (1968): gestation stage (in days) = 23.43 + 0.32* Length (in mm) (see Gamelon et al. 2013b for a similar approach). From this estimated gestation stage and the sampling date, we backcalculated the timing of mating. In order to account for yearly variation in the timing of the mating season, we expressed the timing of mating for each female as the number of days elapsed since the first female has mated in each particular season (*Timing*). Thus, a *Timing* of zero characterizes the most precocious female in each given year. The average fetus length at sampling depends on both the timing of mating and the sampling date. Because both the mating season (ranging between July and January, see Results) and the sampling period (from October to February) are widely spread in the year, there is no correlation between the timing of mating and the average fetus length within a litter when sampled.

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Paternity assessment

Tissue samples were collected from 136 saws, their litters, and from sampled putative fathers. As putative fathers we considered all the 762 males shot larger than 30 kilograms. The age class of each putative father was recorded based on tooth eruption patterns (Matschke 1967). Three age classes were considered: juvenile (less than one year of age), subadult (between one and two years of age) and adult (two years of age or older). All tissue samples were genotyped at 12 microsatellite loci (see Gayet et al. 2016 and Appendix S1 for details). The genotypes of mothers, offspring and putative reproductive males, as well as the known mother-offspring relationships were used in COLONY 2.0.6.1 (Jones and Wang 2010) to assess, for each hunting season t, the father (whether sampled or not) of each sampled fetus. We analyzed all the litters considering as putative fathers all males sampled at season t, subadult and adult males sampled at season t+1 and adult males sampled at season t+2. Parentage among individuals was inferred by maximum likelihood with COLONY (Jones et al. 2010). As derived parameter from the paternity analysis, we calculated the number of fathers per litter. To ensure that the number of fathers per litter was correctly estimated, the paternity analysis has been performed four times as recommended (see for example Wang and Santure 2009; Todd et al. 2013). The estimated number of fathers per litter was effectively consistent among paternity analyses (results not shown here).

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Effect of father identity on fetus mass

For multiple paternity to translate into an increase in within-litter variation in offspring mass, father identity should affect offspring mass *in utero*. We estimated this effect for fathers that

have produced more than one offspring by fitting a linear mixed-effect model using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) techniques (Hadfield 2010). Individual fetus mass was included as response variable, fetus sex and mother identity as fixed factors and father identity as a random factor and we assumed a Gaussian distribution. Including maternal identity and sex as fixed effects allowed us correcting offspring mass for factors (female body mass and condition, gestation stage, year and litter size) inducing among-litter variation in body mass as well as the sex effect on offspring mass. The remaining part of the variance in offspring mass thus only results from paternal effects and residual variation. We calculated the paternal effect as the ratio of the variance in offspring mass due to father identity, divided by the total variance: $\frac{\sigma_{Father}^2}{\sigma_{Father}^2 + \sigma_{Residuals}^2}$, where σ_{Father}^2 is the random variance associated with the father identity, and $\sigma_{Residuals}^2$ is the residual variance. Half-sibs in different litters, i.e. from the same father but different mothers, may have different body mass simply because they were sampled at different gestation stages. Using mother identity as fixed factor does not entirely account for this effect because mass and mass differences among fetuses do not increase linearly during gestation. Neglecting such non-linear growth may artificially increase the residual variance and thus decrease the estimate of the paternal effect. Therefore, the response variable fetus mass was log-transformed in order to perform the analysis on a proportional scale.

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We ran 260,000 MCMC iterations, with a burn-in of 10,000 iterations thinning every 250th observation, and non-informative priors were used (for the variance structures (R and G), we used an expected variance of 1 and 0.002 degree of belief parameter for the inverse-Wishart). We computed the posterior modes and the 95% credible intervals of this ratio, of fetus sex and of the variance associated with the father identity with the "HPDinterval" function of the package MCMCglmm (Hadfield 2010) in R 3.4.0 (R Development Core Team 2017). We assessed convergence with the functions "heidel.diag" (Heidelberger and Welch's

convergence diagnostic) and "geweke.diag" (Geweke's convergence diagnostic) in R and from visual inspection. We checked normality and homoscedasticity of the residuals.

Effect of the number of fathers on within-litter variation in fetus mass

We estimated the within-litter variation in offspring mass by calculating the coefficient of variation (CV = SD/mean) of fetus mass (on the natural scale) for each full litter, corrected for small samples as suggested by Haldane (1955). To assess whether multiple paternity mediates the increase of within-litter variation, we used confirmatory path analyses (Shipley 2009, 2013). We determined the causal pathways from mother body mass (BM) to within-litter variation, through the number of fathers (F) within a litter and/or litter size (LS). We included a correlation between F and LS (see Gayet et al. 2016). Because mating ranged between July and January (see Results) and because females were killed from October to February, we observed litters at different periods of the year and at different gestation stages. Therefore, we included both the timing of mating (Timing) and the average fetus length (Length) (as a measure of gestation stage) in our models.

First, we fitted the global path model including all these possible effects (model 8 in table 1 and Appendix S2). Therefore, the global path model consisted in five linear relationships implemented with the lm function: one linking number of fathers F as a response variable to mother body mass BM and timing of mating Timing, one linking litter size LS as a response variable to BM, one linking Timing as a response variable to BM, one linking average fetus length Length to Timing and one linking CV of fetus mass within a litter as a response variable to LS, Length and F. Second, we fitted 12 competing models derived from the global path model (see table 1 and Appendix S2). For the 13 competing path models, we recovered the standardized regression coefficients of each linear relationships and their

associated SE. We used the Akaike Information Criterion corrected for small sample size (AICc) to select the best path model among the ones presented in table 1 and Appendix S2. We calculated the Fisher's C statistic of the path model retained as well as the chi-squared test degrees of freedom. The C statistic should follow a chi-squared distribution if the data are effectively generated following the cause-order effect modeled in the path model (Shipley 2009; 2013). The analyses were implemented using the package piecewiseSEM (Lefcheck 2016) in R version 3.4.0 (R Development Core Team 2017).

Results

Effect of father identity on fetus mass

This analysis has been restricted to fathers that have produced more than one offspring. The sample consists in 148 fathers (42 sampled males and 106 unsampled males) and 624 fetuses, with 178 offspring assigned to sampled fathers and 446 assigned to unsampled fathers. We found no marked difference between sampled and unsampled fathers in terms of number of offspring sired, with sampled fathers siring on average 4.24 ± 2.94 (mean \pm SD) offspring while unsampled fathers sired 4.21 ± 2.37 offspring (figure 1). Remember that fathers siring only one offspring have been excluded from the analysis. Errors in paternity assignment for unsampled fathers would have led to lower average number of offspring sired by these unknown males. The absence of marked difference in the number of offspring between sampled and unsampled fathers confirms that the unsampled fathers have been correctly assigned to their offspring. Overall, fathers sired offspring with one (61.5% of the cases), two (29.1%), three (8.1%) or four (1.4%) partners.

The linear mixed-effect model evaluating paternal effect on fetus mass *in utero* showed no lack of convergence (Appendix S3). After accounting for maternal effects, we found that female fetuses were 5% [95% CRI: 0.04; 0.07] lighter than male fetuses, in accordance with previous studies (Servanty et al. 2007). The variance associated with paternal identity, σ_{Father}^2 , was low 0.0005 [95% CRI: 0.0002; 0.002]. The ratio $\frac{\sigma_{Father}^2}{\sigma_{Father}^2 + \sigma_{Residuals}^2}$ was 0.09 [95% CRI: 0.03; 0.21] indicating that paternal identity only explained 9% of the within-litter variance in offspring mass, which is the variance remaining when sex and all maternal effects were accounted for. Noticeably, the same analysis restricted to the 178 fetuses for which fathers were known (i.e., sampled) also indicated a small contribution of father identity to the within-litter variance (10% [95% CRI: 0.02; 0.37]).

Effect of the number of fathers on within-litter variation in fetus mass

Because this analysis required the estimation of within-litter coefficient of variation in fetus mass (CV), it has been restricted to the 116 full litters; 15 had all fathers known (i.e., identified from sampled males), 30 had some fathers sampled while the others were unsampled, and 71 litters had all fathers unsampled. The sample consists in 211 fathers (48 sampled and 163 unsampled males) and 617 fetuses, with 154 offspring assigned to sampled fathers and 463 assigned to unsampled fathers. In this dataset, sampled fathers sired on average 3.21 ± 2.88 offspring while unsampled fathers sired 2.84 ± 2.31 offspring (figure 2a). Once again, this confirms that unsampled fathers have been correctly assigned to their offspring. The average number of fathers within a litter was 2.28 ± 1.28 (figure 2b) and multiple paternity was observed in 63.8% of the litters.

The best path model (model 1, table 1 and figure 3) satisfactorily fitted the data based on comparison of the Fisher's C statistic to a chi-squared distribution (C_{16} =21.53, p-value=0.159). It included indirect positive effects of mother body mass and number of fathers per litter on the within-litter variation through an increase of litter size (figure 3). Indeed, heavy females produced large litters sired by many fathers with diversified offspring mass, but there was no direct link between the number of fathers per litter and the within-litter variation in fetus mass. This was confirmed by the second best path model (model 2, table 1 and Appendix S2), close in terms of AICc value, that did not include direct effect of the number of fathers per litter on CV of fetus mass either. In accordance with these results, the global path model (model 8) confirmed the absence of effect of multiple paternity on within-litter variation (effect size \pm SE = 0.003 \pm 0.10; table 1 and Appendix S2).

The earliest mating reported in our study occurred in mid-July (in 2014) and the latest in mid-January (in 2011) suggesting a particularly long mating season. We found that *Timing*, a metric indicating how precocious was the mating for a female in a given season, is negatively associated with female mass (figure 3). Therefore, heavy females reproduced earlier than lighter ones during the mating season. Moreover, within-litter variation increased with gestation stage (defined as the average fetus length *Length*) (figure 3). Because within-litter variation in offspring mass was estimated using the coefficient of variation (CV), this effect indicates that variation in offspring mass increases more during gestation than the expected proportional increase of the standard deviation with the mean. Although based on cross-sectional data, this result suggests that offspring differ in their growth rate.

Discussion

Our findings showed that, contrary to expectations, the diversification of offspring phenotypes within a litter did not directly result from multiple paternity and the genetic diversification of the offspring. Indeed, our path analysis showed that although larger litters were sired by more fathers as previously observed (Gayet et al. 2016) and contained fetuses of more variable mass than smaller litters, within-litter variation in fetus mass did not directly result from an increase in the number of fathers siring the litter. This result is further supported by the lack of paternal effect on fetus mass *in utero*, as indicated by the small proportion of the within-litter variance explained by paternal identity. Although expected for early-life stages (Wilson et al. 2005), this weak paternal effect on offspring mass strongly limits the possibly for the females to diversify the mass of their offspring by mating with several, genetically distinct, fathers. It is noteworthy that, due to high genetic diversity among offspring belonging to different fathers, other types of genetic effects such as dominance or epistatic interactions may also affect within-litter variance in offspring mass (Neff and Pitcher 2005). Exploring such effects would require repeated measurements of offspring produced by a given pair of mother and father, which is unfortunately impossible in our study system.

The reliability of these results from the path analysis and the paternal effect analysis depends on the correct assignment of fathers to their offspring. Correct assignment may be problematic when the genotype of the father is not available (unsampled father). Error in paternity assignment should lead to an underestimation of kinship among offspring by assigning offspring from the same father to different fathers. This type of error would underestimate the paternal (random) variance and would artificially increase the estimated number of fathers per litter. However, we found similar contribution of paternal identity to the within-litter mass variation when all offspring were included in the analysis and when the

analysis was restricted to offspring for which fathers were sampled. In addition, we showed similar average number of offspring sired by sampled fathers and unsampled fathers. Finally, the estimated number of fathers per litter was consistent among four paternity analyses.

Consequently, we are confident that potential errors in paternity assignment are unlikely to affect our results.

Our path analysis identifies the most likely pathways through which female body mass affects within-litter variation in fetus mass. Depending on their body mass, females mate at different periods during the rut. Heavy/old females mate earlier during the rut and have larger litters sired by a high number of fathers than lighter/younger ones. These findings suggest inter-individual heterogeneity among females, with earlier mating and thus parturition dates in old and heavy females compared to young and light ones (see Feder et al. 2008 for similar pattern on bighorn sheep *Ovis canadensis*). Because wild boar females having reached 33–41% of their full body mass are able to reproduce (Servanty et al. 2009), it is likely that light/young females are primiparous, born in spring and reaching this threshold body mass to reproduce only later during the mating season. In turn, large litters produced by heavy females tended to have higher within-litter variation in offspring mass, this variation increasing during gestation.

The increase in CV of fetus mass during gestation indicates that initial differences in body mass among offspring are magnified during gestation most likely due to different growth rates among offspring. This differential growth is not affected by the fathers' genotype and the number of fathers in the litter. Indeed, if multiple paternity was involved in within-litter variation in offspring mass, through different abilities among half-sibs to acquire and/or use maternal resources, we should have detected a direct effect of the number of fathers on within-litter diversification. This was not the case and we regard multiple paternity as an unlikely mechanism to explain diversification of offspring mass in large litters. Differential

maternal allocation among offspring thus does not depend on father identity. Noticeably, although polyandry does not affect offspring mass variation *in utero*, it may still lead to the production of diversified offspring later in life and therefore might represent an adaptive strategy for the females in variable environments.

Several mechanisms, not mutually exclusive, could explain differential maternal allocation among offspring in utero. Competition among offspring to get access to maternal resources might be particularly strong in the uterus (Drake et al. 2008), making sibling rivalry one possible explanation for differential maternal allocation (Mock and Parker 1997; Hudson and Trillmich 2007). For instance, some embryos may prevent the release of some uterine secretions, thus affecting directly the growth of other littermates (Pope et al. 1990). Development constraints can also favor differential maternal allocation among offspring. Indeed, implantation sites along the uterine horns are heterogeneous in terms of space, vascular supply and placental efficiency (Argente et al. 2006). Thus, the acquisition of maternal resources clearly depends on the position of the offspring in the uterine environment. This can ultimately lead to differences in offspring mass. In support of that, in domestic pig (Sus scrofa) and rabbit (Oryctolagus cuniculus), there is evidence that offspring occupying central positions in the uterine horns are generally lighter than the ones implanted at end positions (Dziuk 1992; Bautista et al. 2015). Whether differential maternal allocation among offspring in utero is a female strategy to produce diversified offspring and thus to minimize variance in reproductive success among years (Philippi and Seger 1989; Starrfelt and Kokko 2012; Sæther and Engen 2015) or simply results from developmental constraints remains to be carefully explored and offers promising avenues of research.

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Data accessibility

- Analyses reported in this article can be reproduced using the data provided by Gamelon et al.
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Figure 1. (a) Number of offspring per father for the 148 identified fathers (sampled in dark gray and unsampled in light gray) in the wild boar population of Châteauvillain-Arc-en-Barrois, France. Only males siring at least two offspring are included here.

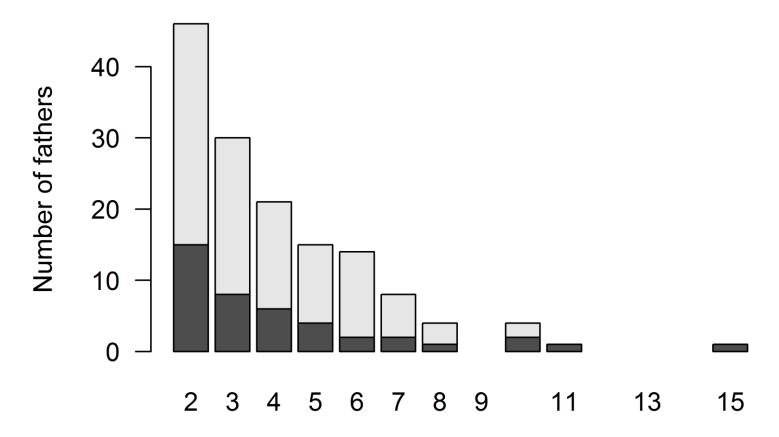
Figure 2. (a) Number of offspring per father for the 211 identified fathers (sampled in dark gray and unsampled in light gray) in the wild boar population of Châteauvillain-Arc-en-Barrois, France; (b) Number of litters with 1 to 6 identified fathers, for the 116 litters included in the study. Only full litters are included here.

Figure 3. Path model with the best fit (see table 1) showing how mother body mass (BM) and number of fathers per litter (F) influence the within-litter variation in fetus mass (CV) through litter size (LS), timing of mating (Timing) and mean fetus length (Length). Numbers indicate standardized regression coefficients and their associated S

Table 1. Model fit of the 13 competing path models exploring the relationship between female body mass (BM), number of fathers within the litter (F), litter size (LS), timing of mating (Timing), mean fetus length (Length) and within-litter variation in fetus mass (CV) for each litter (n=116). Displayed are the likelihood degrees of freedom (N), the AICc of the tested models, and the difference between each model and the best one $(\Delta AICc)$.

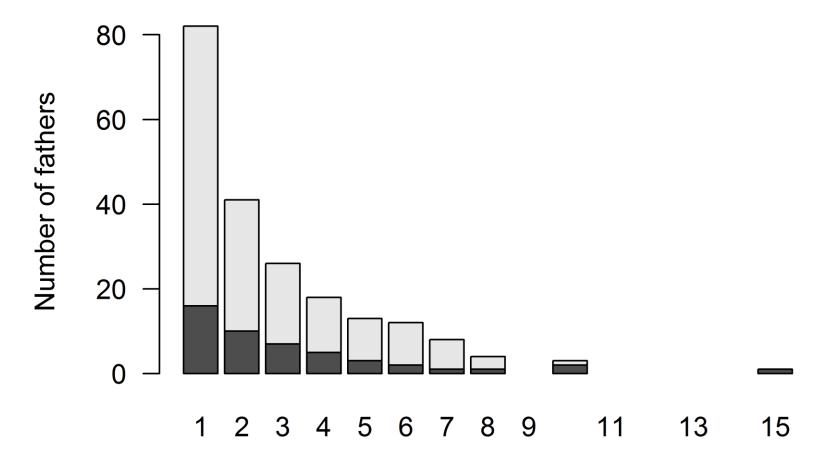
Model notation	N	AICc	ΔAICc
1. F~BM / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~LS+Length	16	59.03	0
2. F~BM / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~Length	15	60.67	1.65
3. F~BM / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~ LS+Length+F	17	61.76	2.73
4. F~BM / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~LS	15	62.05	3.03
5. F~BM / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~Length+F	16	62.84	3.81
6. F~BM / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~Length	16	63.18	4.15
7. F~BM+Timing / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~LS+Length	16	64.20	5.17
8. F~BM+Timing / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~LS+Length+F	18	64.47	5.45
9. F~BM+Timing / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~LS	16	64.68	5.65
10. F~BM+Timing / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~Length+F	17	65.51	6.48
11. F~BM+Timing / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~LS+F	17	66.85	7.82
12. F~BM / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~F	15	67.50	8.48
13. F~BM+Timing / LS~ BM / Timing~BM / Length~Timing / CV~F	16	70.11	11.08

Fig. 1



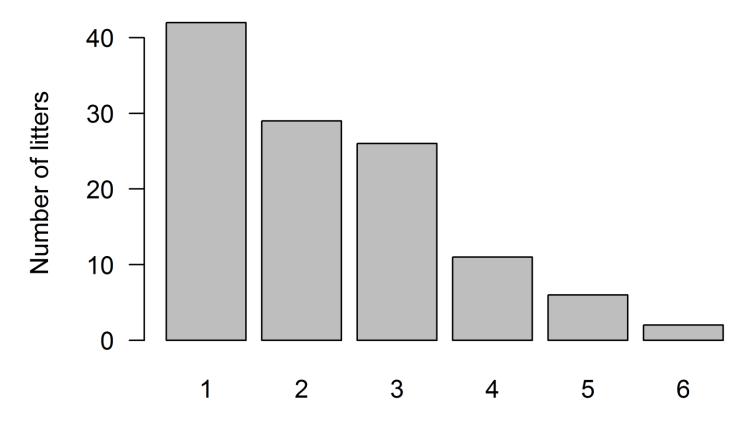
Number of offspring produced per father

Fig. 2a



Number of offspring produced per father

Fig. 2b



Number of father within a litter

Fig. 3

