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1 **Transcriptome-based phylogeny of the semi-aquatic bugs (Hemiptera: Heteroptera: Gerromorpha)**
2 **reveals patterns of lineage expansion in a series of new adaptive zones**
3
4

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1 **Abstract**

2 Key innovations enable access to new adaptive zones and are often linked to increased species
3 diversification. As such, innovations have attracted much attention, yet their concrete consequences on
4 the subsequent evolutionary trajectory and diversification of the bearing lineages remain unclear. Water
5 striders and relatives (Hemiptera: Heteroptera: Gerromorpha) represent a monophyletic lineage of insects
6 that transitioned to live on the water-air interface and that diversified to occupy ponds, puddles, streams,
7 mangroves and even oceans. This lineage offers an excellent model to study the patterns and processes
8 underlying species diversification following the conquest of new adaptive zones. However, such studies
9 require a reliable and comprehensive phylogeny of the infraorder. Based on whole transcriptomic datasets
10 of 97 species and fossil records, we reconstructed a new phylogeny of the Gerromorpha that resolved
11 inconsistencies and uncovered strong support for previously unknown relationships between some
12 important taxa. We then used this phylogeny to reconstruct the ancestral state of a set of adaptations
13 associated with water surface invasion (fluid locomotion, dispersal and transition to saline waters) and
14 sexual dimorphism. Our results uncovered important patterns and dynamics of phenotypic evolution,
15 revealing how the initial event of water surface invasion enabled multiple subsequent transitions to new
16 adaptive zones on the water surfaces. This phylogeny and the associated transcriptomic datasets constitute
17 highly valuable resources, making Gerromorpha an attractive model lineage to study phenotypic
18 evolution.

19

20 **Keywords**

21 **Adaptation, adaptive zone, Gerromorpha, key innovation, phylogeny, semi-aquatic bugs**

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Introduction

Key innovations enable access to new adaptive zones (see definition in (Volvenko 2022)) where lineages can diversify and occupy new niches (Simpson 1953; Mayr 1963; Schluter 2000; Rabosky 2017). These innovations have attracted much attention, because they are often linked to increased diversification (Liem 1973; Schluter 2000; Wagner and Lynch 2010; Wagner 2017; Ronco, et al. 2021). Spectacular examples of this process include the evolution of flight in bats and herbivory in insects. Understanding the processes underlying transitions to new adaptive zones and the consequences of these transitions on the evolutionary trajectory of lineages has greatly enriched our understanding of species diversification. These studies typically focus on the evolution and ecological function of traits or sets of traits that constitute the innovation and its consequences for diversity in the lineage. More recently, studies have begun to focus on the developmental genetics underlying these traits (Abzhanov, et al. 2004; Santos, et al. 2017).

Arthropods inhabit a great variety of habitats, from marine to freshwater, and from land to air. However, very few lineages permanently inhabit the air-water interface (e.g., whirligig beetles, fishing spiders and water striders). This lifestyle may be limited by the constraints of fluid dynamics on remaining on the water surface and generating efficient thrust for movement on the fluid substrate (Andersen 1982; Hu and Bush 2010). Here we focus on water striders and relatives, also known as semi-aquatic bugs (Hemiptera: Heteroptera: Gerromorpha), which represent a group of insects characterized by their ability to live on the air-water interface (Andersen 1982). This group is a prominent example of a lineage that transitioned to a new adaptive zone, the water surface, and offers a unique opportunity to study the causes and consequences of this transition on species diversification. Since the initial transition to water surface habitats, the semi-aquatic bugs radiated into over 2 000 extant species occupying a vast array of niches ranging from rain puddles to ponds, streams, lakes, mangroves, and even the open oceans (Andersen 1982; Polhemus and Polhemus 2008).

The Gerromorpha are characterized by a large array of adaptive, and often conspicuous, traits associated with water surface locomotion. Layers of hydrophobic setae covering their legs sequester air, forming a cushion between the legs and the water, thus allowing the animals to avoid breaking surface tension (Andersen 1982; Gao and Jiang 2004; Hu and Bush 2010). Other traits include the elongation of the legs relative to terrestrial species that increases speed on the water (Crumière, et al. 2016). This change is characteristic of lineages that occupy marginal aquatic zones and that can walk both on water and on land. Other lineages have specialized in open water zones and propel their body by means of surface rowing

1 (Andersen 1982; Crumière, et al. 2016). This derived mode of locomotion is tightly associated with a
2 change in the body plan to a derived state where midlegs are longer and are primarily responsible for
3 propulsion through simultaneous sculling motion, also known as the rowing gait (Andersen 1976). While
4 the contribution of the set of adaptive traits to the initial transition to the water surface has been the
5 subject of many studies (Andersen 1982; Gao and Jiang 2004; Hu and Bush 2010; Wang, et al. 2015), the
6 consequences of this transition on the subsequent evolutionary trajectories and diversification of the
7 lineage remain unclear.

8
9 The Gerromorpha also represents a prominent model for the study of sexual selection *e.g.* (Rowe, et al.
10 1994; Fairbairn and Preziosi 1996; Arnqvist 1997; Preziosi and Fairbairn 2000; Arnqvist and Rowe
11 2002a, b; Ronkainen, et al. 2010; Crumière and Khila 2019; Toubiana and Khila 2019; Toubiana,
12 Armisén, Dechaud, et al. 2021). In many species, the mating system is characterized by sexual conflict,
13 which is often manifested by rigorous pre-mating struggles where females resist costly mating attempts
14 and males persist (Arnqvist 1989; Rowe 1994; Ronkainen, et al. 2010). These premating struggles have
15 favored the repeated evolution of remarkable grasping structures in males and anti-grasping structures in
16 females (Rowe, et al. 2006; Crumière, et al. 2019), which appear to coevolve antagonistically (Arnqvist
17 and Rowe 2002a; Perry, et al. 2017; Crumière and Khila 2019). It is interesting that the characteristic
18 sexual conflict in the mating system of many members of this group may itself have resulted from the
19 transition to the 2-dimensional water surface habitat, where females are relatively easy to detect, locate
20 and approach (Arnqvist 1997).

21
22 Previous works documented the developmental genetic mechanisms underlying appendage diversification
23 in a selection of gerromorphans. The Hox gene *Ultrabithorax* has been key to increasing leg length and in
24 changes in body plan associated with water surface locomotion and predation escape (Khila, et al. 2009,
25 2014; Refki, et al. 2014; Armisén, et al. 2015; Refki and Khila 2015). Interestingly, the same gene is
26 involved in modifying male third legs into claspers under sexually antagonistic selection in the water
27 strider *Rhagovelia antilleana* (Crumière and Khila 2019). In addition, we recently began to elucidate the
28 developmental genetics of other sexually antagonistic traits consisting of modified antennae (Khila, et al.
29 2012) or other independent cases of male third leg modifications (Toubiana, Armisén, Dechaud, et al.
30 2021; Toubiana, Armisén, Viala, et al. 2021). However, the evolutionary history and the combined impact
31 of water surface locomotion and sexual conflict on the diversification of the legs in water striders remain
32 to be tested.

33

1 This rich natural history, phenotypic diversity, and the development of genetic tools, together with the
2 invasion of the water surface habitat, provide an invaluable opportunity to study the patterns and
3 processes underlying phenotypic evolution of lineages following the transition to new adaptive zones. A
4 major constraint on this opportunity is the lack of a well supported phylogeny of the whole infraorder,
5 since those currently available have been recovered using a limited number of morphological characters
6 and/or molecular markers (*e.g.* (Andersen 1982; Andersen and Weir 2004; Damgaard 2008a). While the
7 current phylogenies generally agree on the position of certain nodes at higher taxonomic levels, some
8 lineages remain problematic or unresolved (Damgaard 2008a). In particular, the currently accepted higher
9 classification of the group has inconsistencies at the levels of family and subfamily, and key taxa remain
10 unassessed (Damgaard 2008a; Damgaard 2012; Damgaard, et al. 2014; Román-Palacios, et al. 2020).
11 These inconsistencies hinder reliable reconstructions of ancestral character states, thus limiting our
12 understanding of the evolutionary history of this group.

13
14 In this work, we reconstructed the phylogeny of the infraorder using transcriptome-based genome-wide
15 markers. This effort resolved inconsistencies and uncovered strong support for previously unknown
16 relationships between some important taxa. We dated the phylogeny based on the available fossil record
17 and reconstructed the evolutionary history of a set of adaptive characters associated with water surface
18 locomotion, dispersal, transition from fresh to saline waters and sexual dimorphism. Our results reveal
19 how the initial event of water surface invasion enabled multiple subsequent transitions to new adaptive
20 zones and further diversification within the lineage.

21 **Results**

22 **Transcriptome assemblies and gene clustering**

23 We sequenced the transcriptomes of 95 species, of which 92 cover five out of the eight known families of
24 Gerromorpha and 3 are outgroup species (Supplementary Material Table 1). The number of Illumina
25 reads obtained ranged between 43 million and 275 million (Supplementary Material Table 2).
26 Transcriptome assemblies using Trinity yielded between 52 462 and 363 535 transcripts with BUSCOs
27 5.2.2 completeness ranging from 30.7 % to 95.1 % (Figure 1 and Supplementary Material Table 2). Nine
28 additional transcriptomes from other Gerromorpha or closely related species were included from other
29 sources (see material and methods). We used three different methods to define clusters of orthologous
30 genes (OrthoFinder (Emms and Kelly 2019), SiLiX (Miele, et al. 2011) and BUSCOs (Simao, et al. 2015;
31 Waterhouse, et al. 2018)) and selected those with at least 80% of the species (4 181, 3 174 and 1 869
32 respectively). After testing for stationary, reversible, and homogeneous (SRH) consistency (Naser-

1 Khdour, et al. 2019), a final list of 686, 851 and 528 gene clusters, respectively, was retained for
2 phylogeny reconstruction using IQ-TREE and TNT (see Methods for more details)

3

4 **Recovering Gerromorpha phylogeny using transcriptomic markers**

5 The infraorder Gerromorpha, as well as the families Mesoveliidae, Hebridae, and Gerridae, were all
6 recovered as monophyletic (Figure 2). Hydrometridae (hereafter “Hydrometridae”) is however
7 polyphyletic, because *Veliometra* (“Hydrometridae”: Heterocleptinae) is closer to *Hebrus* (Hebridae:
8 Hebrinae) than to *Hydrometra* (“Hydrometridae”: Hydrometrinae). Because this is the first time that this
9 relationship is recovered and we lack samples of other “Hydrometridae” genera except *Hydrometra*, we
10 refrain from proposing any classification changes at this time. Mesoveliidae is sister to (Hebridae +
11 *Veliometra*), the three are sister to *Hydrometra*, and the clade as a whole is sister to (Veliidae + Gerridae).
12 Veliidae (from now on “Veliidae”) is also not monophyletic (paraphyletic), consisting of a succession of
13 clades sister to Gerridae. The same is also true for the subfamily Veliinae (“Veliidae”), in which *Velia*
14 *caprai* was recovered as sister to all other clades of (“Veliidae” + Gerridae), while a clade containing
15 species of *Oiovelia* and *Paravelia* is sister to *Rhagovelia* (“Veliidae”: Rhagoveliinae), not to the rest of
16 the subfamily. Furthermore, the clade (Microveliinae + Haloveliinae) is more closely related to Gerridae
17 than to the other subfamilies of “Veliidae”. Within Gerridae in the current sense (e.g. Damgaard 2008),
18 Halobatinae was recovered as sister to all other subfamilies, and Rhagadotarsinae as sister to
19 (Trepobatinae + (Gerrinae + (Charmatometrinae + Cyliandrostethinae))).

20

21 These observations indicate that Microveliinae and Haloveliinae are not veliids and were consistently
22 recovered regardless of dataset and methods we used (Supplementary Figure 1 and 2), which leads us to
23 propose transferring them to the family Gerridae. Even with the removal of these two subfamilies, the
24 current classification of “Veliidae” remains highly artificial and in need of a thorough revision.

25 **Time of divergence of the main clades of Gerromorpha**

26 The split of Gerromorpha dated using six fossil calibration points obtained from eleven fossil records
27 (Supplementary Material Table 3) was estimated to have occurred during the Upper Permian about 259
28 million year ago (MYA) (95% CI 225.55-296.3 Mya) (Figure 2), consistent with other phylogenetic
29 analyses (Wang, et al. 2016; Johnson, et al. 2018; Wang, et al. 2021). The divergence of the major clades
30 of Gerromorpha is estimated to have started during the mid Triassic about 202 MYA (95% CI 174.16-
31 232.01 Mya) (Figure 2) when the clade (Gerridae + “Veliidae”) split from (“Hydrometridae” +
32 (Mesoveliidae + Hebridae + Heterocleptinae)) early during the evolution of Gerromorpha. Again, those
33 relationships were found regardless of dataset and methods we used (Supplementary Figure 3 and 4).

1
2 This result is inconsistent with classic phylogenies using either only morphological characters or
3 combined with few molecular markers that recovered (Gerridae + Veliidae) as a derived and later
4 branching clade (Andersen and Weir 2004; Damgaard 2008a), but consistent with most recent
5 phylogenetic analyses using larger datasets (Wang, et al. 2016; Johnson, et al. 2018; Wang, et al. 2021).
6 In this scenario, “Hydrometridae” split from ((Hebridae + Heterocleptinae) + Mesoveliidae) 178.29 MYA
7 (95% CI 146.16-210.79 Mya), whereas (Hebridae + Heterocleptinae) split from Mesoveliidae about 156
8 MYA (95% CI 126.28-185.73 Mya). In turn, Heterocleptinae split from Hebrinae about 124.42 MYA
9 (95% CI 85.27-161.22 Mya).

10
11 On the other side of the tree, the split between “Veliidae” (already excluding Microveliinae and
12 Haloveliinae) and Gerridae took place during the Mesozoic (Lower Cretaceous), about 128 MYA (95%
13 CI 116.13-141.32 Mya) (Figure 2). Finally, Microveliinae + Haloveliinae diverged from the other
14 Gerridae subfamilies about 115 MYA (95% CI 105.11-126.39 Mya).

15 16 **Single origin of rowing as a derived mode of locomotion in “Veliidae” and Gerridae**

17 Ancestral character state reconstruction shows a significant increase in the ratio of midleg to body length
18 in both males and females (Supplementary Figures 6 and 9) at the base of Gerromorpha coinciding with
19 the transition to water surface habitats (Crumière, et al. 2016). The increase in length is more modest for
20 the forelegs and hindlegs (Supplementary Figures 5, 7, 8 and 10), consistent with the primary role of the
21 midlegs in generating propulsion even when the animals retain the ancestral walking gait (Crumière, et al.
22 2016). This data suggest that increased leg length is among the phenotypic changes associated with the
23 acquisition of marginal water areas as a new adaptive zone.

24
25 Lineages of Gerromorpha that transitioned to open waters use the rowing gait, which is tightly associated
26 with a novel body plan where midlegs are the longest (Andersen 1976; Hu, et al. 2003; Crumière, et al.
27 2016). We scored the state of body plan across our sample to reconstruct the evolutionary history of
28 locomotion modes in Gerromorpha (Figure 3). We found that leg morphology associated with the walking
29 gait is ancestral and that the switch to midlegs being longer evolved only once some 153 MYA in the
30 common ancestor of (“Veliidae” + Gerridae) (Figure 3). Within this clade, we detected four independent
31 reversals from the rowing morphology back to the walking morphology, three times in the “Veliidae’ and
32 once in the Microveliinae (Figure 3).

33

1 **Repeated co-option of male hindlegs into grasping structures through a common genetic pathway**

2 The biomechanical requirements of movement on the water surface may have driven the evolution of
3 relative leg lengths in the Gerromorpha (Andersen 1982; Khila, et al. 2014; Crumière, et al. 2016).
4 Sexually antagonistic coevolution has also resulted in elaboration and dimorphism of these appendages,
5 sometimes profound (Rowe, et al. 2006; Crumière, et al. 2019). Some of the most common grasping
6 structures in males are the modifications of the appendages into clamps that increase male ability to
7 overcome female resistance to mating. Modification of the mid- and forelegs to increase their utility as
8 clamps are common in the veliids and gerrids, yet modification of the midlegs into claspers, the primary
9 appendage for water surface locomotion, is rare. Phylogenetic reconstruction revealed that the elaboration
10 of male hindlegs into clamps evolved at least seven times independently in our sample (Figure 4). In some
11 genera such as *Rheumatobates* or *Microvelia*, male modifications of the hindlegs evolved multiple times
12 within the genus and are represented twice in our sampling (Figure 4). This is an under-estimation, as
13 Rowe and colleagues have shown that male modified hindlegs evolved four times independently within
14 the genus *Rheumatobates* (Rowe, et al. 2006). The modifications resulted in either divergent
15 (*Rheumatobates*) or convergent (e. g. *Microvelia*, *Rhagovelia*, *Stridulivelia*) morphologies. Among the
16 seven lineages that independently evolved modifications of male hindlegs, the females of five do not bear
17 any modifications, suggesting frequent resolution of intra-locus sexual conflict (Stewart, et al. 2010). In
18 the two genera *Stridulivelia* and *Rhagovelia* (except *R. plumbea* in our sample), females retain hindleg
19 modifications albeit to a lesser degree than males, suggesting that genetic regulation underlying these
20 modifications is common between the sexes and may constrain the evolution of sexual dimorphism in
21 these two taxa (Figure 4). Interestingly, modified male hindlegs evolved only after the evolutionary
22 elongation of the midlegs associated with rowing – a mode of locomotion that relies primarily on the
23 midlegs (Andersen 1976; Hu et al. 2003; Crumière et al. 2016;). These results suggest that the primary
24 use in locomotion of the midlegs may constrain their elaboration, whereas hindlegs (and forelegs or even
25 antennae) are free to evolve in response to sexual conflict.

26
27 The Hox gene *Ultrabithorax* (*Ubx*) is involved in the increase of the absolute length of both mid- and
28 hindlegs in the walking species (Khila, et al. 2014; Refki, et al. 2014), in reversing the relative lengths of
29 the mid- and hindlegs (and their segments) in the rowing species (Khila, et al. 2009, 2014; Refki, et al.
30 2014; Armisén, et al. 2015), and for the modifications of male hindlegs into clamps in the water strider
31 *Rhagovelia antilleana* (Crumière and Khila 2019). Furthermore, *Ubx* depletion removes the modifications
32 from female hindlegs, thus confirming that *R. antilleana* males and females share the genetic basis of
33 hindleg modifications (Crumière and Khila 2019) (Figure 4). To test whether *Ubx* was involved in the
34 other independent events of male hindleg modifications, we depleted *Ubx* transcripts using RNAi in three

1 additional species, each representing an independent event of hindleg modifications in males (*Microvelia*
2 *americana*, *Microvelia* sp. (new) and *Rheumatobates rileyi*). *Rheumatobates rileyi* males present hindleg
3 modifications that are deeply divergent from *Rhagovelia antilleana* and *Microvelia* spp. (Figure 4).
4 Strikingly, *Ubx* depletion across these three additional species resulted in the loss of the modifications of
5 male hindlegs regardless of the morphology of the leg or the phylogenetic position of the bearing species
6 (Figure 4). These findings support the repeated and independent use of *Ubx* during the evolution of male
7 sexually antagonistic traits driven by sexual conflict throughout the evolutionary history of the
8 Gerromorpha.

9

10 **Independent transitions from fresh to saline waters**

11 Out of the million or so described species of insects, the Gerromorpha have been astonishingly successful
12 in colonizing saline water habitats, including the open oceans (Andersen 1982; Cheng 1989; Ryland and
13 Tyler 1989; Andersen 1999; Ikawa, et al. 2012). Various lineages occupy habitats with different degrees
14 of salinity ranging from brackish to high salinity seawaters. The salty *versus* freshwater preference covers
15 both micro- and macro-evolutionary scales (Andersen 1999). In some genera, both salty and freshwater
16 populations of the same species can be found, but some lineages either at the family level or at the genus
17 level are exclusively marine (Andersen 1999; Ikawa, et al. 2012). Our sampling included 10 lineages
18 represented by 10 species out of 97, which were known to inhabit and were collected in marine or
19 brackish environments (Figure 5). The ability to occupy salty water bodies evolved early in the
20 Gerromorpha during the Cretaceous in the Mesoveliidae, “Veliidae”, and Gerridae (Figures 2 and 5). Our
21 character state reconstruction revealed that, of these 10 lineages, seven have independently transitioned
22 from fresh to saline environments (Figure 5). Some of these transitions occurred below the genus level, as
23 is the case for *Rheumatobates*, *Rhagovelia* or *Mesovelia* (Figure 5). Other events characterize entire
24 lineages; such is the case for *Halobates* or *Halovelia*. Among these transitions, some lineages specialize
25 in mangroves where water salinity fluctuates from almost fresh to entirely marine within the same day.
26 These include *Rheumatobates trinitatis*, *Husseyella halophyla*, *Rhagovelia mangle* and *Rhagovelia*
27 *ephydros*. This indicates that these lineages are versatile and have evolved phenotypic plasticity that
28 allows them to expand their habitat range to environments with short-term fluctuations in salinity. Other
29 lineages, including *Halobates* or *Halovelia*, are exclusively marine, except for secondary reversions to the
30 freshwater life (Román-Palacios, et al. 2020), indicating that they have become specialized on salt water
31 (Cheng 1976; Sekimoto, et al. 2014).

1 Evolution of wing polymorphism

2 Wing polymorphism is widespread in the Gerromorpha and a variety of wing morphs, from complete
3 absence (apterous) to long wing morphs (macropterous) have been described both within and across
4 species (Figure 6). An intermediate morph (brachypterous) has also been described in some species, but
5 for simplicity this morph was not included in the reconstruction as amongst our sample it only occurs in
6 few species. Among the species we sampled, 16 have exclusively long wings, 19 exclusively no wings,
7 and the remaining species are polymorphic. *Cylindrostethus hungerfordi* was herein considered as
8 entirely apterous, because only one macropterous specimen was recorded in the literature (Nieser 1970),
9 which pends verification. The complete loss of wings is characteristic to marine species, which are
10 represented in our sampling by the genera *Darwinivelia*, *Halovelina* and *Halobates* (Andersen 1982;
11 Polhemus and Polhemus 2008). Among the 91 Gerromorpha species included in our phylogeny for which
12 we had reliable wing morph data, we reconstructed 7 independent events of wing loss, either at the genus
13 level such as in *Veliometra*, *Darwinivelia*, *Halovelina*, *Halobates* and *Euvelia/Husseyella*, or at the species
14 level such as in *Rhagovelina*, *Rheumatobates* and *Cylindrostethus*, where four, two and one species lost
15 macropterous morphs respectively (Figure 6). Wing polymorphism, i. e. the presence of more than one
16 wing morph in a single species, evolved twice independently within Mesoveliidae and in the common
17 ancestor of (“Veliidae” + Gerridae) (Figure 6). Within the latter clade, the complete loss of wings evolved
18 seven times and regains of a unique macropterous wing morph at least five times (Figure 6). These data
19 suggest that the evolution of wing polymorphism is a dynamic process potentially influenced by the large
20 heterogeneity of habitats, in terms of stability and seasonality, and the wide geographical distribution that
21 these insects have occupied (Spence 1989; Harada and Numata 1993; Spence and Anderson 1994; Harada
22 and Spence 2000; Fairbairn and King 2009).

23 Discussion

24 Using hundreds of molecular markers, we generated a new phylogeny of the Gerromorpha that resolved
25 inconsistencies and revealed that the evolutionary history of the lineage is rich in terms of transitions and
26 expansions into new adaptive zones, enabled by important phenotypic changes to their appendages in
27 association with new modes of locomotion on water. The multiple subsequent transitions to new adaptive
28 zones may have been contingent on the initial event of water surface invasion common to all
29 Gerromorpha.

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Evolutionary history of Gerromorpha

The results from our divergence time analysis suggest that the origin of Gerromorpha dates between Upper Triassic and Lower Triassic as suggested by fossil data reinterpretation (Damgaard 2008a; Damgaard 2008b) and similar to other recent phylogenomic analysis (Johnson, et al. 2018; Wang, et al. 2021). Our phylogenomic approach using a large number of genetic markers, instead of classical ribosomal DNA phylogenies combined with morphological traits (Damgaard 2008a; Damgaard 2008b), provided three major outcomes. First, we could clearly define “Hydrometridae” as sister to (Mesoveliidae + Hebridae) split. This result contrasts with earlier analysis that placed Mesoveliidae as the earliest branching clade within Gerromorpha and sister to all other families of the infraorder (Damgaard 2008a; Damgaard 2008b), but is consistent with the latest reconstructions for true bugs and hemiptera (Johnson, et al. 2018; Wang, et al. 2021). Second, we found that (“Veliidae” + Gerridae) diverged early in the evolution of Gerromorpha and is sister to (“Hydrometridae” + (Mesoveliidae + (Hebridae + Heterocleptinae))) rather than a later branching clade (Damgaard 2008a; Damgaard 2008b). These two results are inconsistent with the widely accepted hypothesis and our own previous results (Crumière, et al. 2016; Santos, et al. 2017; Vargas-Lowman, et al. 2019). However they are not unexpected, because: i) fossil specimens attributed to the families Hydrometridae and Veliidae first appeared at a similar age, while records for Hebridae are much more recent; ii) it is possible that our increased number of species in the families “Hydrometridae”, Mesoveliidae and Hebridae allowed us to avoid long branch attraction artifacts that might be present in our previous phylogenetic reconstructions when only one representative for each family was used; and iii) phylogenetic analyses focused on other heteropterans already suggested a similar evolutionary scenario for Gerromorpha (Johnson, et al. 2018; Wang, et al. 2021). Finally, our phylogenetic reconstruction supports the hypothesis that Microveliinae and Haloveliinae are subfamilies of Gerridae instead of “Veliidae”. The sister relationship between Gerridae and (Microveliinae + Haloveliinae) had already been detected by Damgaard (Damgaard 2008a), who did not propose any classification changes. The whole clade was recovered here with full support and has two strong morphological synapomorphies. The first is the fusion of tarsomeres I and II in all legs that results in the tarsal formula 2:2:2 in Haloveliinae and Gerridae, which is further reduced to 1:2:2 by the fusion of all foreleg tarsomeres in Microveliinae (Andersen 1982). The second is the presence of a fecundation pump on the female gynatrial complex, which is believed to assist in the ejection of sperm through the apical part of the fecundation canal and into the lumen of the common oviduct prior to the fertilization of the passing egg (Andersen 1982).

1 **Diversification of the legs in the Gerromorpha**

2 The unique event of transition to water surface locomotion was accompanied by multiple phenotypic
3 changes associated with exploiting surface tension, and generating efficient thrust on water (Hu and Bush
4 2010), such as increased density of hydrophobic bristles (Andersen 1976). We previously hypothesized
5 that locomotion on water favors increased speed, which requires changes in locomotion parameters such
6 as increased leg length and stroke frequency (Crumière, et al. 2016). This change was brought about
7 through a gain of a new expression domain of the gene *Ubx* in the midlegs, in addition to its ancestral
8 expression in the hindlegs (Khila, et al. 2009; Refki, et al. 2014). This role of *Ubx* had been possible after
9 the initial gain of expression in the midlegs at the base of Gerromorpha, which enabled the increase in
10 midleg length. The current ancestral character state reconstruction shows that leg length increased
11 significantly at the base of the phylogeny, coinciding with the transition to the water surface
12 (Supplementary Figures 5 to 10). Ancestral leg length relationship with hindlegs longer than midlegs was
13 retained in, or regained by, lineages occupying the ancestral adaptive zone at the margin of water bodies
14 (Figure 3). The (“Veliidae”+Gerridae) split early during the diversification of the infraorder and the split
15 coincided with the evolution of rowing, enabling access to yet another adaptive zone composed of open
16 waters (Figure 3). It appears that this new zone had many open niches as these two families now account
17 for about 80% of all Gerromorpha (Polhemus and Polhemus 2008). The early change to the rowing body
18 plan (Figure 3) brought about deep changes in locomotion behavior (Andersen 1982; Crumière, et al.
19 2016). Rowing gerromorphans generate fast and efficient thrust with significantly low frequency of
20 strokes compared to walking Gerromorpha (Crumière, et al. 2016). This change is thought to allow these
21 animals to sustain fast and efficient movement and expand into the vast surfaces of open water zones
22 ranging from ponds to oceans (Cheng 1976; Andersen 1999).

23
24 Subsequent to the acquisition of rowing, certain taxa further evolved evolutionary innovations that
25 allowed the transition to numerous other new niches. The family “Veliidae” contains about 60 genera and
26 some 900 species, and the genus *Rhagovelia* alone accounts for almost half of the species count of the
27 entire family (over 400 species) (Andersen 1982; Polhemus and Polhemus 2008). *Rhagovelia* spp. use
28 rowing and all members of the genus possess a plummy fan on each midleg that allows generating efficient
29 locomotion on fast flowing streams (Andersen 1982). The plummy fans are exclusive to the genus
30 *Rhagovelia* and their evolution is likely to have enhanced their ability to survive in these fast-flowing
31 streams. Four lineages (*Oioivelia*, *Paravelia*, *Callivelia* and *Microvelia*) made the move back from the
32 rowing to the walking body plan, and also back to the margins of water bodies (Figure 3) (Andersen
33 1976; Crumière, et al. 2016). Interestingly, among these lineages, *Oioivelia* became specialized in foamy
34 habitats that form on the margins of streams, typically trapped by fallen tree trunks or other obstacles

1 (Rodrigues, et al. 2014). Therefore, phenotypic changes, and the associated genotypic changes, not only
2 can allow lineages to acquire new adaptive zones, but access to these also opens the possibility for further
3 transition in a succession of niches where each new transition is facilitated by the previous.

4
5 In our character state reconstruction, it is noticeable that the modifications of male hindlegs into grasping
6 structures evolved multiple times independently but exclusively in the lineages that diverged after the
7 acquisition of rowing as a mode of locomotion (Figure 4). It is possible that the evolution of rowing,
8 which almost exclusively relies on the midlegs to generate movement (Andersen 1976; Hu, et al. 2003;
9 Crumière, et al. 2016), may have reduced constraints on the shape of the hindlegs due to biomechanical
10 and hydrodynamics requirements no longer imposed by the ancestral walking mode. This change of
11 functional emphasis on the role of the hindlegs may have freed these structures to evolve under sexual
12 selection pressures. Coincident with the move to this two-dimensional habitat are high intersexual
13 interactions that may increase sexual conflict, which in turn favors the evolution of male grasping traits
14 such as modified hindlegs (Rowe, et al. 1994; Arnqvist 1997).

15
16 A characteristic of all Gerromorpha is the expansion of the domain expression of the Hox gene
17 *Ultrabithorax* to cover both the midlegs and the hindlegs (Khila, et al. 2014; Refki, et al. 2014). It is
18 possible that this initial genetic change enabled the midlegs to function as oars in association with water
19 surface locomotion. It is also possible that this change provided the developmental genetic context for
20 further modification of the legs, particularly the hindlegs, under sexual conflict again in association with
21 Ubx function. The finding in four tested lineages, out of seven, that Ubx is always required for male
22 hindleg modification indicates that few developmental genetic paths may be available for sexual conflict
23 to drive male modifications. However, while the modifications are highly similar in species that possess
24 spines (*e. g. Rhagovelia* and *Microvelia*), they are divergent from others (*Rheumatobates* in particular)
25 where the elaborations involve deeper changes in the shape of the segments and the presence of sets of
26 large setae along the proximo-distal axis. This is an indication that the developmental genetic programs
27 controlled by Ubx might diverge among these lineages, resulting in phenotypic differences of the
28 modifications of male legs.

29 30 **Specialization in saline habitats and dispersal through flight**

31 In our reconstruction, the ancestral habitat of the Gerromorpha is freshwater, which is consistent with
32 previous reconstructions (Cheng 1976; Andersen 1999). Within Gerromorpha, the transition to saline
33 water evolved throughout the phylogeny in at least seven independent instances out of the ten we sampled
34 (Figure 5). Lineages transiting from freshwater to salty habitats faced a significant environmental change

1 that is expected to affect fluid balance and concentration of electrolytes, which in turn is expected to pose
2 significant challenges to osmoregulation. Common garden experiments testing tolerance to change in
3 salinity revealed that many marine and freshwater lineages die quickly, with spasms and other signs of
4 disrupted osmoregulation, when exposed to fresh and salty waters, respectively (Kishi, et al. 2006). The
5 lineages that have made this transition must have undergone, independently, a series of physiological
6 changes to regulate body fluid homeostasis. The nature of osmotic adaptation to brackish and saline water
7 and the genetic mechanisms underlying these adaptations remain unknown in Gerromorpha.

8
9 Wings in Gerromorpha are important for dispersal through flight. Dispersal however is heavily influenced
10 by environmental factors. In species with multiple wing morphs, population composition will depend on a
11 combination of both genetic factors and the environment (Järvinen and Vepsäläinen 1976; Roff 1986;
12 Simpson, et al. 2011), such as population density (Harada, et al. 1997; Harada and Spence 2000), food
13 scarcity (Harada and Nishimoto 2007), salinity (Kishi, et al. 2007), temperature (Harada, et al. 2011),
14 dryness (Harada 1998), photoperiod (Harada and Numata 1993), and habitat state (Cunha, et al. 2020).
15 Wing development is an energy consuming process that is known to tradeoff with fertility (Hyun and Han
16 2021) and the presence of two or more wing morphs is widespread in Gerromorpha. Apterous,
17 micropterous and brachypterous individuals can be considered as a single functional category with the
18 inability to disperse by means of flight. We found that the presence of multiple wing morphs is ancestral
19 in Gerromorpha, with highly dynamic patterns of gains and losses as the lineages diversified within the
20 various aquatic habitats (Figure 6). Interestingly, the complete loss of wings, and therefore the ability to
21 disperse, is tightly associated with the transition to salty water bodies, as there is an over-representation of
22 wing loss in halophilic species (Cheng 1976; Andersen 1982). The loss of wings has been linked to the
23 stability of marine water environments, which may have favored investment in reproduction rather than
24 dispersal. Nevertheless, some freshwater lineages, such as *Velimetra* and *Euvelia*, are also exclusively
25 wingless, raising the question as to what characteristics of their habitat or reproductive behavior may have
26 driven wing loss.

27 **Conclusions**

28 Water striders and relatives (Hemiptera: Heteroptera: Gerromorpha) provide a great opportunity to study
29 the patterns and processes underlying species diversification following the conquest of new adaptive
30 zones. The new phylogeny allowed us to illustrate how multiple subsequent transitions to new adaptive
31 zones may have been contingent on the initial adaptation to water surface life that is shared by all
32 Gerromorpha. This adaptation, which occurred 259 million years ago, a unique event of transition to
33 water surface locomotion was accompanied by multiple phenotypic changes associated with exploiting

1 surface tension. This first event was followed about 202 MYA by a split whereby a set of Gerromorpha
2 lineages evolved rowing as novel mode of locomotion and transitioned to live in open water zones. Our
3 results show that the evolution of this new mode of locomotion, and its associated body plan, occurred
4 earlier than previously thought, suggesting a rapid diversification of the Gerromorpha to occupy new
5 habitats from marginal shore waters to open oceans. A particular genus, *Rhagovelia*, which accounts for
6 almost half of the Veliidae, evolved plummy fans that enhance locomotion in fast-flowing streams. We
7 mapped the divergence of *Rhagovelia* to about 84 MYA followed by an impressive radiation with over
8 400 extant *Rhagovelia* spp. that specialize in fast flowing streams. Other processes, including sexual
9 selection and phenotypic plasticity, have contributed to the diversification of the Gerromorpha. Our
10 phylogenetic reconstruction show male evolved sexually antagonistic traits in the form of modified
11 hindlegs at least seven times independently in species where locomotion relies primarily on the midlegs.
12 We propose that the change in locomotion mode freed the hindlegs from their primary locomotory role
13 allowing their modification under sexual conflict. Moreover, our gene function analyses identified the
14 gene *Ubx* as a primary developmental player involved in the evolution of male modified hindleg
15 regardless of their morphology or the phylogenetic position of the lineage that carries them. Finally,
16 further independent adaptations have been important in the diversification of the Gerromorpha including
17 transitions from freshwater to saline habitats and multiple events of gains and losses of wing
18 polymorphism.

19
20 From a methodological point of view, next-generation sequencing technologies, by decreasing costs and
21 increasing the amount of information generated have been key to our ability to reconstruct the
22 phylogenetic history of previously understudied lineages. The use of transcriptome datasets is even more
23 affordable and realistic as whole genome sequencing of a large number of species is still costly and
24 requires accurate genome annotation. Drawbacks of phylotranscriptomics based on next generation
25 sequencing include difficulties to obtain complete gene sequences, limited data for weakly expressed or
26 non-expressed genes and uncertainties in gene number mainly due to the presence of multiple isoforms.
27 However, many of these potential problems can be mitigated with a proper design of sampling, good
28 specimen preservation, enough sequencing depth, and third generation sequencing technologies.
29 Transcriptome-based phylogenomics have been already used with success in the study of Hemiptera
30 (Johnson, et al. 2018), true water bugs (Wang, et al. 2021) and, as presented here, in the semi-aquatic
31 bugs. This approach has been critical in accurately rebuilding the phylogeny and allowed a reliable
32 mapping and reconstruction of the evolutionary history of traits associated with their diversification. The
33 data presented here constitute a valuable resource to the community interested in the study of phenotypic
34 evolution.

1

2 **Methods**

3 **Sample collection and culture**

4 Natural populations were collected mainly during fieldwork in French Guyana and Brazil (Supplementary
5 Material Table 1). Additional samples were obtained from short trips to Canada and USA or from
6 personal communication. Field samples were classified and stored in individual tubes per species in
7 RNAlater™ Stabilization Solution (Thermo Fisher Scientific). When possible, lab populations were
8 generated from this initial natural population. The bugs were isolated by species and maintained in a bug
9 room at 25 °C and 50% humidity in water tanks and fed on crickets. RNA was extracted either from lab
10 populations or from natural population samples if lab breeding was unsuccessful.

11 **Taxonomy**

12 Specimen identification was performed based on morphology using (Polhemus. 1997; Moreira, et al.
13 2018) and by comparison with original descriptions, available redescrptions, and type or reference
14 material previously deposited in collections accessible to the authors.

15

16 **Transcriptome sequencing and assembly**

17 Poly-A RNA was isolated from embryos, nymphs and/or adults of ninety-two Gerromorpha, two
18 Notonectidae and one Pyrrhocoridae (Supplementary Material Table 1). Total RNA was extracted using
19 TRIzol (Invitrogen) according to manufacturer's protocol. A first batch of libraries were sequenced using
20 Hiseq 2500 paired end 100 nucleotides while a second batch was sequenced using Hiseq X ten paired end
21 150 nucleotides (Supplementary Material Table 1). Transcriptomic reads were assembled using Trinity
22 2.5.1 (Grabherr, et al. 2011) and long ORFs with minimum protein length of 100 aa were extracted using
23 TransDecoder 3.0.1 (Hass and Papanicolau). Transcriptome completeness was assessed using the 2 510
24 BUSCOs in OrthoDB v10 Hemiptera (Figure 1, Supplementary Material Table 2). To reduce
25 computational burdern, we used CD-HIT (Li and Godzik 2006; Fu, et al. 2012) with a sequence identity
26 threshold of 0.995 and a word size of 5 to reduce the number of redundant transcripts.

27

28 **Other transcriptomes**

29 In addition to our 95 newly sequenced species, we included in our analyses the transcriptomes of six
30 additional Gerromorpha as well as three close species available. *Limnoporus dissortis* (Gerromorpha)
31 transcriptome was sequenced using 454 technology (Armisen, et al. 2015). *Gerris buenoi* (Gerromorpha)
32 transcriptome was obtained from its annotated gene set (Armisen, et al. 2018). The transcriptomes of

1 *Gigantometra gigas* (Gerromorpha), *Hebrus nipponicus* (Gerromorpha) and *Stenopirates* sp.
2 (Encicocephalomorpha) were sequenced independently using Illumina Hiseq 2000 paired end 90
3 nucleotides, while *Halovelgia* sp. (Gerromorpha) was sequenced using Illumina Hiseq 2000 paired end 150
4 nucleotides (Wang, et al. 2016). Finally, *Oncopeltus fasciatus* (Pentatomomorpha) gene transcripts were
5 obtained from official gene set v1.1 (Panfilio, et al. 2019). *Hoplitocoris* sp. (Encicocephalomorpha) and
6 *Ceratocombus* sp. (Dipsocoromorpha) transcriptomes were downloaded from (Johnson, et al. 2018). As
7 with newly sequences transcriptomes, we extracted long ORFs with TransDecoder 3.0.1 (Hass and
8 Papanicolau) and filtered with CD-HIT (Li and Godzik 2006; Fu, et al. 2012) to create a reduced dataset
9 and limit the computational burden.

11 **Contaminant removal**

12 A list of 73 737 464 sequence identifiers (gi) for archaea, bacteria, other, unclassified and viruses, were e-
13 fetched from NCBI database to detect potential contaminants. A second list of potential contaminant
14 sequences from *Gryllus* and *Acheta* (34 738) was created because manual checks of first gene clusters
15 detected traces of their ribosomal RNA in some samples. The origin of this contamination are brown
16 crickets used as a food source for all Gerromorpha species bred in the laboratory. We searched potential
17 contaminant from each source independently using BLASTN (Altschul, et al. 1990; Altschul, et al. 1997)
18 (option: -db nt -gilist contaminant.txt -dust yes -evaluate 1e-5 -max_target_seqs=1000). We then recovered
19 the id of any hit with an identity >90 and coverage >25% (for archaea, bacteria, other unclassified and
20 viruses) and a minimum hit identity of 90 for *Gryllus* and *Acheta* (no minimum coverage). A total of 45
21 453 transcripts amongst all the species were identified as potential contaminants in CD-HIT reduced
22 dataset (40 964 for archaea, bacteria, other unclassified and viruses and 4 489 for *Gryllus* and *Acheta*) and
23 removed from further analysis.

25 **Orthologous gene clusters**

26 We generated three different datasets of orthologous genes using OrthoFinder (Emms and Kelly 2019),
27 SiLiX (Miele, et al. 2011) and BUSCOs (Simao, et al. 2015; Waterhouse, et al. 2018).

28 OrthoFinder: All transcriptomic sequences were used as input (option -f). Hierarchical Ortho Groups
29 (HOGs) were recovered and those not containing at least 80% of the 104 species filtered out. The 4 181
30 remaining clusters (out of 181 933) were used as input clusters in the next steps.

31 SiLiX: Transcripts from coding proteins were aligned all-against-all using BLASTP (Altschul, et al.
32 1990; Altschul, et al. 1997) masking low complexity regions and threshold of 1e-5. Output results were
33 then clustered for homologous sequences using the software package SiLiX 1.2.11 which implements an
34 ultra-efficient algorithm based on single transitive links with alignment coverage constraints (Miele, et al.

1 2011). We ran SiLiX using stringent values of minimum 70% of identity and 80% overlap to define the
2 clusters (options: -i 0.7 -r 0.8 -l 100 -m 0.5). The 3 258 665 protein-coding transcripts from all species
3 yielded a total of 1 702 195 clusters, including singletons. Clusters were then filtered to remove those
4 that fail to contain at least 80% of the species. A total of 3 174 clusters were retained. Nevertheless, while
5 OrthoFinder applies a phylogenetic reconstruction per gene to distinguish the orthologs from the
6 paralogous, and BUSCOs uses by definition only single-copy orthologs, SiLiX clusters might contain
7 orthologous and paralogous genes (hence a possible explanation for the reduced number of clusters
8 compared with OrthoFinder).

9 BUSCOs: Finally, we generated a third dataset of single-copy orthologous genes using BUSCOs results
10 we used to assess transcriptome completeness on which we removed potential contaminants. A total of 1
11 869 clusters containing sequences for at least 80% of the species were recovered (out of 2 510 BUSCOs
12 in OrthoDB v10 Hemiptera).

13 Once the clusters of orthologous genes were defined for each method, we applied a custom PERL script
14 to select a single sequence per species as multiple sequences might be present for a given species in the
15 cluster. First, we selected for each species the transcript with cumulative best scores against the
16 transcripts of other species in an all-against-all BLASTP. Manual checking of the SiLiX clusters results
17 showed the existence of some chimeric clusters (containing two or more different genes) due to long
18 conserved domains. To resolve this, in a second step we sorted the transcripts by value, selected the
19 transcripts with highest and lowest cumulative score to start and assigned the rest of transcripts to one or
20 the other based on their hit p-values. This effectively divided the transcripts in two lists. Third, we
21 selected the longest list and repeated the same list division process again. Finally, for each missing
22 species in the longest list we selected the best hit transcript in the cluster. This method allowed us to
23 select the more conserved transcripts for each species and manual check showed that it effectively solved
24 the problems of chimeric SiLiX clusters.

25 Manual checking of clusters alignments also showed the presence of gaps that might be filled with other
26 transcripts of the cluster. This situation might be due either a real gene split in two, or most probably, due
27 to a *de novo* transcriptome assembly artifact. As trying to fill the gaps or merge transcripts might increase
28 the alignment size across species, we decided to remain cautious and avoid possible propagation of errors
29 from a chimeric transcript in one species (i.e. a chimeric transcript in one species will appear as a gap in
30 all the remaining species and might eventually lead to chimeric constructions in all the other species).

31 **Alignment, selection of conserved blocks and check for model violation partitions**

32 Prior to phylogeny reconstruction each of the transcript clusters from OrthoFinder, SiLiX and BUSCOs
33 were aligned using MAFFT (Kato and Standley 2013) and we used GBLOCKS (Castresana 2000) to
34

1 retrieve conserved codon regions (options: `-t=c -b5=h`). We then concatenated per gene the blocks
2 covering >50% of the gene size and at least 100 nucleotides. This resulted in 1 645, 1 923 and 1 329 gene
3 blocks for OrthoFinder, SiLiX and BUSCOs respectively. To avoid partitions that can violate common
4 assumptions in most substitution models, we tested each cluster to verify if nucleotic data was stationary,
5 reversible and homogeneous (SRH) (Naser-Khdour, et al. 2019). A total of 686, 851 and 528 gene
6 clusters passed the SRH test at position 1 and 2 in OrthoFinder, SiLiX and BUSCOs respectively. Third
7 codon position was discarded as it only fulfilled SRH condition in up to three clusters. By not considering
8 position 3 we also avoided possible substitution saturation problems in our analyses. Finally, for all genes
9 which position 1 and 2 passed the SRH test, we generated an aminoacid dataset from their conserved
10 codon regions. Nucleotide dataset contained 261 936, 374 586 and 203 920 positions while aminoacid
11 dataset contained 130 968, 187 293 and 101 960 positions for OrthoFinder, SiLiX and BUSCOs
12 respectively. An overview figure of the workflow steps can be found in Supplementary Figure 11.
13

14 **Phylogeny reconstruction**

15 To reconstruct a phylogeny we used two approaches: Maximum-Likelihood (ML) with IQ-TREE
16 (Nguyen, et al. 2015) and Maximum-Parsimony (MP) with TNT (Giribet 2005). In both cases we used
17 nucleotides (position 1+2) and aminoacids matrix resulting from OrthoFinder, SiLiX and BUSCOs
18 clusters.

19 Maximum-Likelihood approach: To identify the best partitioning schemes and determine the best amino
20 acid substitution model for each partition we used ModelFinder within IQ-TREE (Nguyen, et al. 2015;
21 Kalyaanamoorthy, et al. 2017) (option: `-m TESTMERGE`) and an edge unlinked model (option: `-sp`)
22 (Chernomor, et al. 2016). To save time we restricted the search to substitution models: LG, JTT,
23 JTTDCMUT, MTZOA, DAYHOFF and WAG (option: `-mset LG,JTT,JTTDCMUT,MTZOA,`
24 `DAYHOFF, WAG`) and limited the computation to the top 10% partition schemes (option: `-rcluster 10`).
25 We then selected the models that minimize *Bayesian information criterion* (BIC) score and launch a new
26 run to reconstruct a tree using the best partitions schemes found (option: `-m MFP`), resampling partitions
27 and then resampling sites within resampled partitions (Gadagkar, et al. 2005; Seo, et al. 2005) (option: `-`
28 `bsam GENESITE`). To provide robustness estimates for the resulting maximum likelihood tree we
29 generated 1 000 bootstrap replicates (option: `-bb 1 000`) using ultrafast bootstrap (UFBoot) approximation
30 (Minh, et al. 2013). To reduce the risk of overestimated branch support we used nearest neighbor
31 interchange (NNI) option (`-bnni`). Finally, to asses branch supports we used single branch tests in
32 combination with UFBoot (options: `-alrt 1 000`) (Supplementary Figures 12, 13 and 14). We used same
33 parameters to reconstruct nucleotides trees from amino acids merged partitions (Supplementary Figures
34 15, 16 and 17).

1 Maximum-Parsimony approach: To reconstruct the trees using maximum-parsimony we used TNT
2 (Giribet 2005) on amino acid sequences with 100 replications using TBR branch swapping (option:
3 mult=replic 100 tbr) to get branch lengths, and resampling 1 000 times the matrix to calculate group
4 support (option: resample replications 1 000) (Supplementary Figures 18, 19, and 20).
5 Once all reconstructions done, we used TreeShrink package (Mai and Mirarab 2018) to detect outlier long
6 branches in all our reconstructed trees. A single long branch corresponding to *Neogerris hesione* was
7 detected, although not in all reconstructed trees. Additionally, although *Velia caprai* was consistently
8 branching sister to the rest of (“Veliidae” + Gerridae), we wondered if its position could explain the early
9 divergence found between those two groups and the (Hydrometridae + Hebridae + Mesoveliidae). To test
10 this hypothesis and discard any possible artifact of those two species on tree reconstruction, we removed
11 those two species from OrthoFinder data and repeated the tree reconstruction using IQ-TREE for
12 aminoacid and nucleotide sequences as described previously (Supplementary Figures 21 and 22). Finally,
13 we also built complementary trees with IQ-TREE for BUSCOs data with no partition merging (option: -
14 bb 1 000 -bsam GENESITE) to test robustness of the merging results (Supplementary Figures 23 and 24).
15 Overall, all tree reconstruction approaches find the same relationships between the Gerromorpha families
16 and subfamilies regardless of the dataset and method used (Supplementary Figures 1 to 4). However,
17 branch supports, and more particularly UFBOOT values, are worse in trees reconstructed with SiLiX
18 datasets which might indicate the presence of paralogous genes hindering the signal, as discussed in
19 orthologous genes cluster section.

21 Likelihood mapping analyses

22 A final additional likelihood mapping analysis was performed to confirm early split of
23 (“Hydrometridae”+Hebridae+Mesoveliidae) and (“Veliidae”+Gerridae) as well as sister position of
24 “Hydrometridae” to (Hebridae+Mesoveliidae). To do so, we used IQ-TREE (option: -n 0 -lmap 4000 -m
25 TEST -mset LG,JTT,JTTDCMUT,MTZOA,DAYHOFF,WAG) to test possible topologies between:
26 Outgroups, Hydrometrinae, (Hebridae+Mesoveliidae+Heterocleptinae) and (“Veliidae”+Gerridae)
27 (Supplementary Figure 25 A and B).. Similar to phylogenetic reconstruction we tested possible topologies
28 with and without *Velia caprai* with similar results (Supplementary Figure 25 C and D respectively).
29 Results show that our reconstructed tree topology is well supported, but almost 25% of the quartets
30 support alternative topology with (Hebridae+Mesoveliidae+Heterocleptinae) being sister to
31 (Hydrometrinae+(“Veliidae”+Gerridae)) which reinforces the importance of using large datasets when
32 possible.

33

1 **Fossil calibration**

2 Estimated age of seven fossils of extinct Gerromorpha species, two extinct Nepomorpha species and two
3 extinct Heteroptera were used to calibrate divergence time at six points of our phylogenetic tree
4 (Supplementary Material 3). To date the phylogeny, we use MCMC implementation in BEAST2
5 (Bouckaert, et al. 2019) using accompanying GUI BEAUTi to build the launch file. As starting tree we
6 used IQ-TREE phylogenetic trees from OrthoFinder nucleotide data. To increase the site coverage, we
7 retained only positions present in 98% taxa which accounted for 45 672 nucleotides. We fixed the
8 topology by setting “Wide-exchange”, “Narrow-exchange”, “Wilson-Balding” and “Subtree-slide” weight
9 to zero and ran five independent runs of 200 000 000 generations using a Birth Death Model sampling
10 every 1 000 generations. We analyzed the combined results with Tracer (part of BEAST2 package) and
11 all ESS values were higher than 200. We manually combined the five replicates’ trees and a final tree
12 with median ages was constructed using Treeannotator (part of BEAST2 package) with a 25% burnIn.
13 Tree visualization was performed with Figtree 1.4.4 (Rambaut 2018). Root age was estimated at 273.95
14 Mya (95% CI 252-297.68).

15 To test if fossil calibration point on *Velia caprai* combined with its position sister to the rest of (‘Velliidae’
16 + Gerridae) can have an impact on tree dating, in particular if we speculate on a possible reconstruction
17 artifact, we repeated the dating by removing fossil calibration point on *Velia caprai*. We run five new
18 independent runs and combined their results (all ESS higher than 200). Compared to first tree, we
19 obtained with very similar results (i.e. (Mesoveliidae + Hebridae + “Hydrometridae”) and (“Veliidae” +
20 Gerridae) split dated 202.75 Mya and 198.319.1 Mya respectively, (“Veliinae”+Rhagoveliinae) split
21 dated at 100.41 Mya and 89.53 Mya respectively, and Microveliinae split from other Gerridae dated
22 115.18 and 113.3 Mya respectively. Root age was estimated at 276.08 Mya (95% CI 223.4-306.1 Mya).
23 In this second run we also removed (Mesoveliinae+Madeoveliinae) calibration point. Indeed, fossil
24 records evidence of both families differ in 50 Mya (see Supplementary Table 3) and trying to set their
25 divergence at 150 Mya in the initial tree (as suggested by Madeoveliinae fossil) failed to find a proper
26 state to initialize. Therefore, we set the lower boundary distribution to 100 Mya in the first run and used
27 this second run to confirm that split of Madeoveliidae from Mesoveliinae date from 104 Mya (106 Mya in
28 first run) (Supplementary Figure 26).

30 **Ancestral character state reconstruction**

31 Reconstruction of ancestral character states was performed in Rstudio using ‘ape’ (Paradis, et al. 2004),
32 ‘phytools’ (Revell 2012) and ‘geiger’ (Pennell, et al. 2014) packages. First, as suggested by (Litsios and
33 Salamin 2012) we computed phylogenetic signal (Pagel lambda) for both phylogram (molecular
34 phylogeny) and chronogram (time-calibrated phylogeny). To do so we use phytools:: phylosig function

1 (method="lambda", nsim=1000). In both cases we excluded *Negogerris hesione*. Based on the results
2 obtained we retained the phylogram for ancestral character state reconstruction. Second, we used
3 'phytools::make.simmap' function to simulate character maps on the phylogenetic tree. This is an adapted
4 version of 'ace' function from 'ape' and allows to test three different transition models to reconstruct a
5 discrete trait: equal-rates model (ER), all-rates-different model (ARD) and symmetrical model (SYM). To
6 decide which model fit better our data, we used 'geiger::fitDiscrete' function. We checked AICc values
7 and selected the best transition model for each dataset based on a likelihood ratio test. To do so we
8 compared the square distribution with the degrees of freedom to calculate a p-value of the likelihood ratio
9 test (Command example: `p_value_ER_versus_SYM <- pchisq(abs(2*(ER_geigeroptlnL-
10 SYM_geigeroptlnL)), abs(SYM_geigeroptk-ER_geigeroptk), lower.tail=FALSE)`). Main figures
11 were composed based on best transition model. Additionally, we also computed maximum-parsimony
12 ancestral reconstruction using Rstudio package 'castor' (Louca and Doebeli 2018) with transition costs
13 "all_equal" and "exponential". All model results can be found summarized in Supplementary Figures 27,
14 28, 29 and 30. A summary of Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 can be found in Supplementary Figure 31. For leg
15 length continuous trait, we used 'phytools:fastAnc' to estimate ancestral states including variances and
16 95% confidence intervals (options: `vars=TRUE, CI=TRUE`).

17 Nymphal RNAi

18 Double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) was produced for *Ultrabithorax* gene (*Ubx*) as described in (Refki, et al.
19 2014). T7 PCR fragments were amplified from complementary DNA (cDNA) template using forward and
20 reverse primers both containing the T7 RNA polymerase promoter. The amplified fragments were
21 purified using the QIAquick PCR purification kit (Qiagen, France) and used as a template to synthesize
22 the dsRNA as described in (Refki, et al. 2014). The synthesized dsRNA was then purified using a RNeasy
23 purification kit (Qiagen) and eluted in Spradling injection buffer (Rubin and Spradling 1982) in a 2 to 3
24 µg/µl concentration. For primer information, see (Refki, et al. 2014). Nymphal injections were performed
25 in parallel in nymphs with either *Ubx* dsRNA or injection buffer as negative controls. Nymphs were
26 reared in water tanks and fed with crickets until they developed into adults. We then compared adults
27 obtained from *Ubx* dsRNA injection to those obtained from injection of buffer injection alone.

28 Supplementary material

29 Scripts used to define the conserved blocks can be found here:
30 <https://gitlab.com/davidarmisen/transcriptomic-based-phylogeny-in-gerromorpha>. A general overview of
31 the scripts pipeline can be found at Supplementary Figure 11. A more detailed description of each script
32 function can be found in "master-script.pl" file.

1 Aligned conserved blocks from OrthoFinder, SiLiX and BUSCOs used for phylogeny reconstruction can
2 be found in the same site.

3 Additionally, a BLAST web page including transcriptome sequences of the ninety-two Gerromorpha, two
4 Notonectidae and one Pyrrhocoridae (Supplementary Material Table 1) we newly sequenced, plus
5 *Limnoporus dissortis* and *Gerris buenoi*, can be found at: [https://igfl.ens-lyon.fr/equipes/a.-khila-](https://igfl.ens-lyon.fr/equipes/a.-khila-developmental-genomics-and-evolution/blast)
6 [developmental-genomics-and-evolution/blast](https://igfl.ens-lyon.fr/equipes/a.-khila-developmental-genomics-and-evolution/blast) .
7

8 **Declarations**

9 Ethics approval and consent to participate: Not applicable

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1 **Figure legends**

2 **Figure 1:** Abundance and completeness of transcriptomics datasets. (A) Green histogram: Number of
3 complete BUSCOs (db10) found in the assembled transcriptome of each newly sequenced species (92
4 Gerromorpha and 3 outgroup species); Blue line: Number of *de novo* assembled transcripts by Trinity. (B)
5 Breakdown of BUSCOs results percentages including complete (single-copy in dark purple and
6 duplicated in light purple), fragmented in orange and missing in red. In both cases names of outgroup
7 species (i.e. not Gerromorpha) were colored in blue.

8
9 **Figure 2:** Dated phylogeny of Gerromorpha. Phylogenetic tree was reconstructed with IQ-TREE
10 (Nguyen, et al. 2015) using Maximum-Likelihood (ML) on nucleotide sequence (position 1+2) from
11 OrthoFinder clusters (Emms and Kelly 2019). Best partitioning scheme and substitution model for each
12 partition were identified using ModelFinder (Kalyaanamoorthy, et al. 2017). Robustness was estimated
13 from 1 000 bootstrap replicates using ultrafast bootstrap (UFBoot) approximation (Minh, et al. 2013)
14 (more details in Methods section). Timescale was estimated from 6 calibration points (marked with an
15 asterisk (*)). Estimated ages are indicated on each node and the 95% confidence interval is indicated with
16 a blue box while confidence interval ages are presented between square brackets. Families and
17 subfamilies are highlighted in various colors with names indicated. Paraphyletic taxa are indicated in
18 quotation marks.

19
20 **Figure 3:** Ancestral character state reconstruction of relative leg length, with midlegs being the longest
21 associated with rowing and hindlegs being the longest associated with walking (See (Crumière, et al.
22 2016). Reconstruction was performed with ‘phytools::make.simmap’ R function using an equal-rates
23 model (ER). Pies represent the probability of ancestral state. Images represent samples of the two relative
24 leg length phenotypes and associated locomotion mode. Derived body plan (midlegs longer than
25 hindlegs) event and transition to open waters is marked with an asterisk (*). Reversals to ancestral body
26 plan (hindlegs longer than midlegs) are marked with a double asterisk (**).

27
28 **Figure 4:** Ancestral character state reconstruction of male hindleg modifications into grasping traits
29 driven by sexual conflict. Reconstruction was performed with ‘phytools::make.simmap’ R function using
30 a symmetrical model (SYM). Pies represent the probability of ancestral state. Images of four lineages that
31 evolved male hindleg modifications, along with female hindleg comparisons, are represented. *Ubx* RNAi
32 removes male modification in all lineages regardless of morphology or phylogenetic position.
33 Independent leg modification events are marked with an asterisk (*).

34

1 **Figure 5:** Ancestral character state reconstruction of habitat preference with regard to salinity.
 2 Reconstruction was performed with ‘phytools::make.simmap’ R function using a symmetrical model
 3 (SYM). Pies represent the probability of ancestral state. Independent transitions marked with an asterisk
 4 (*).

5
 6 **Figure 6:** Ancestral character state reconstruction of wing polymorphism. Reconstruction was performed
 7 with ‘phytools::make.simmap’ R function using a symmetrical model (SYM). Pies represent the
 8 probability of ancestral state. Images represent examples of wing polymorphism in two species:
 9 macropterous and apterous in *Limnogous franciscanus*, and macropterous and micropterous in *Gerris*
 10 *buenoi*. Apterous: No wing morph; Micropterous: Short wing morph; Macropterous: Long wing morph.

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ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

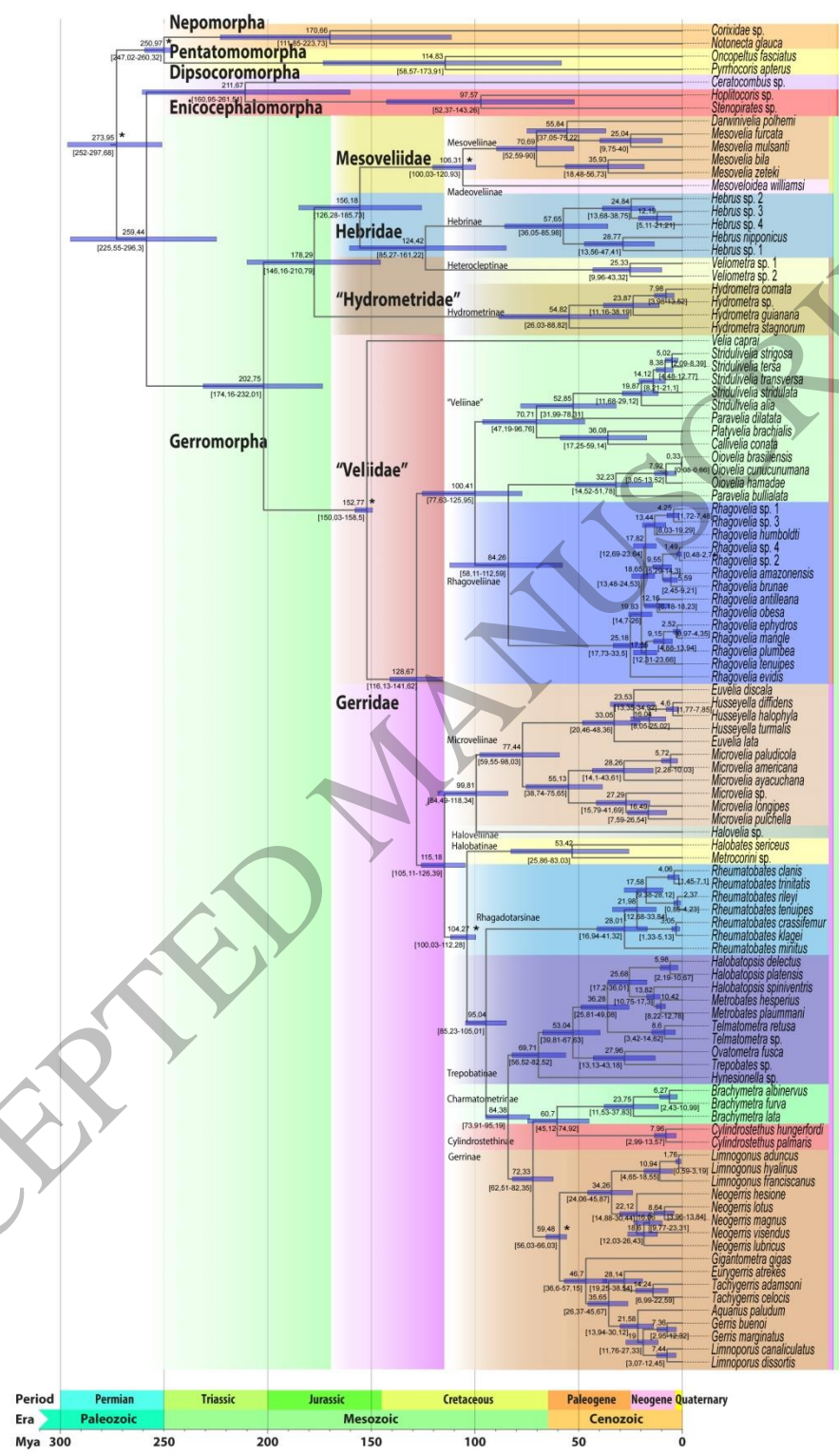
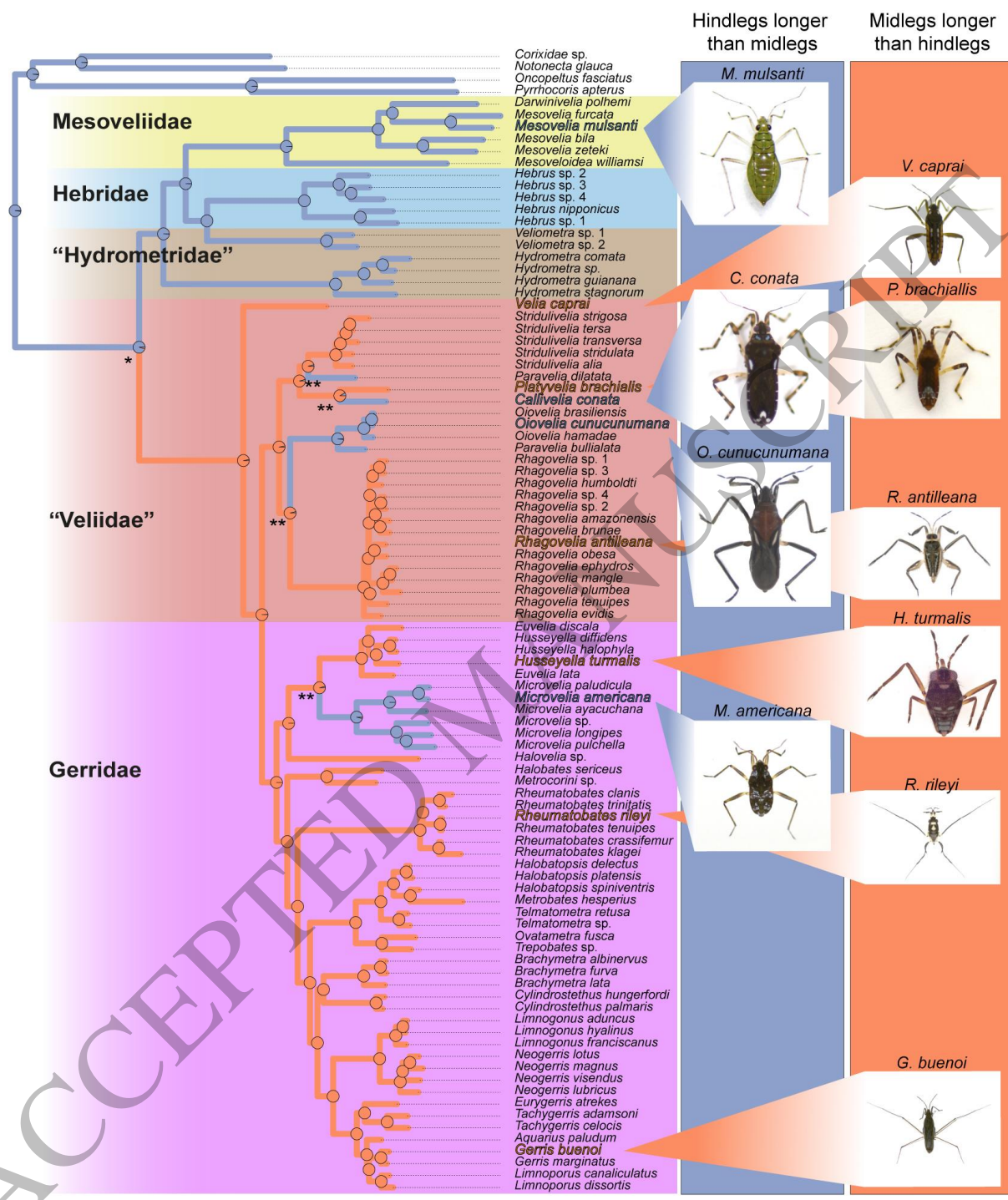


Figure 2
143x246 mm (3.4 x DPI)

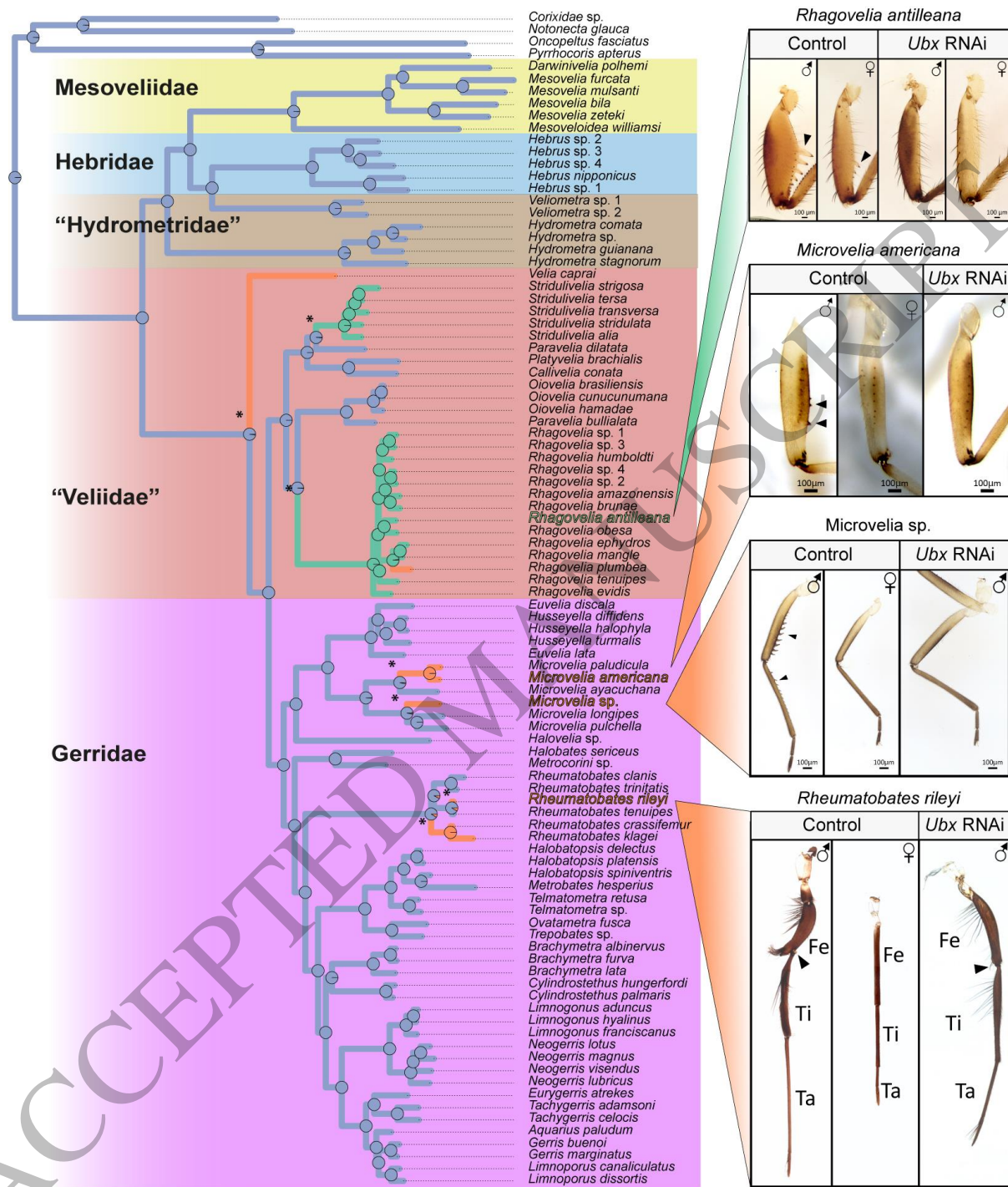
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■ Ancestral body plan (hindlegs longer than midlegs) ■ Derived body plan (midlegs longer than hindlegs)

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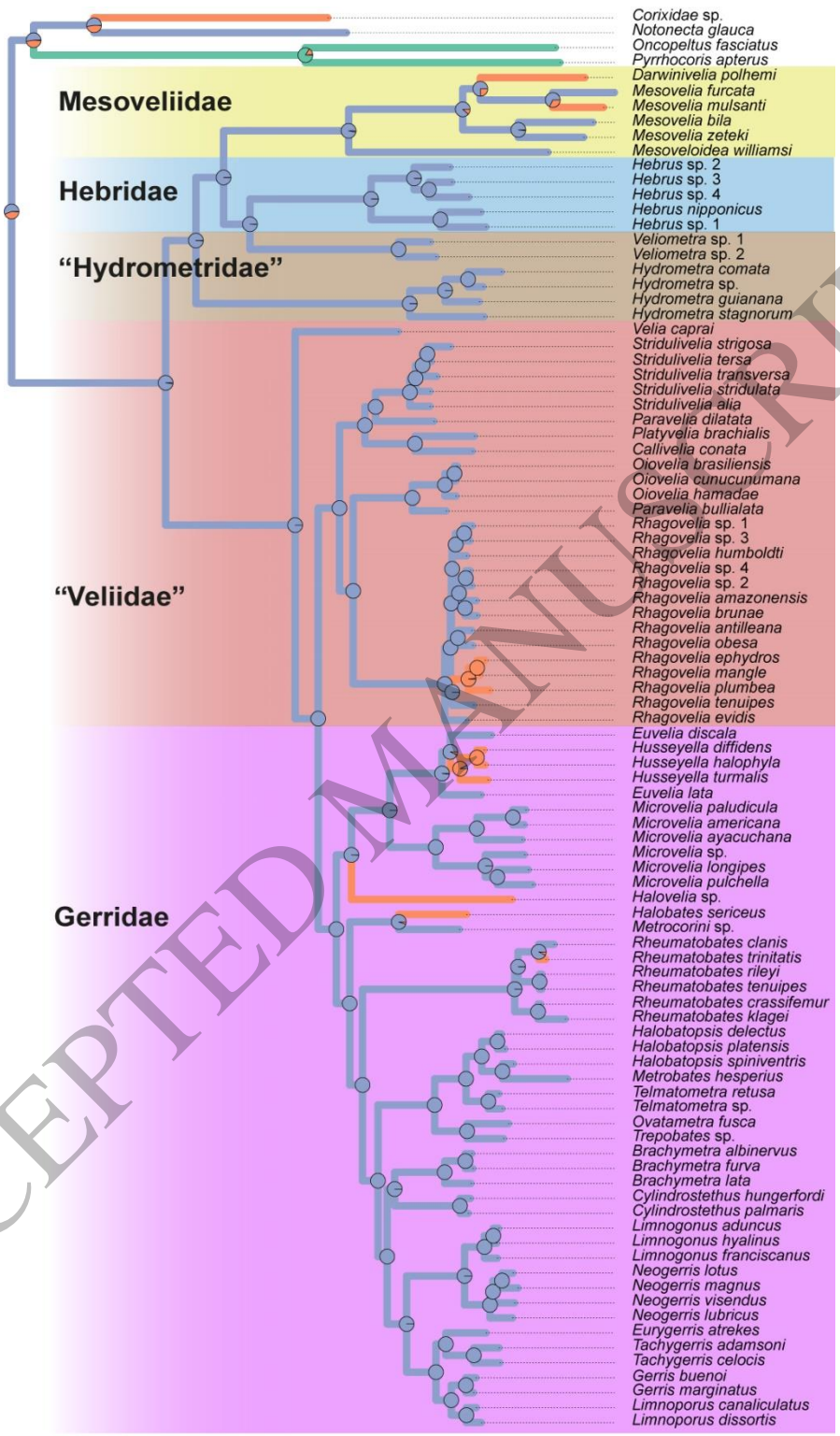
Figure 3
159x198 mm (3.4 x DPI)



■ No hindleg modification ■ Hindleg modification in males ■ Hindleg modification both in males and females

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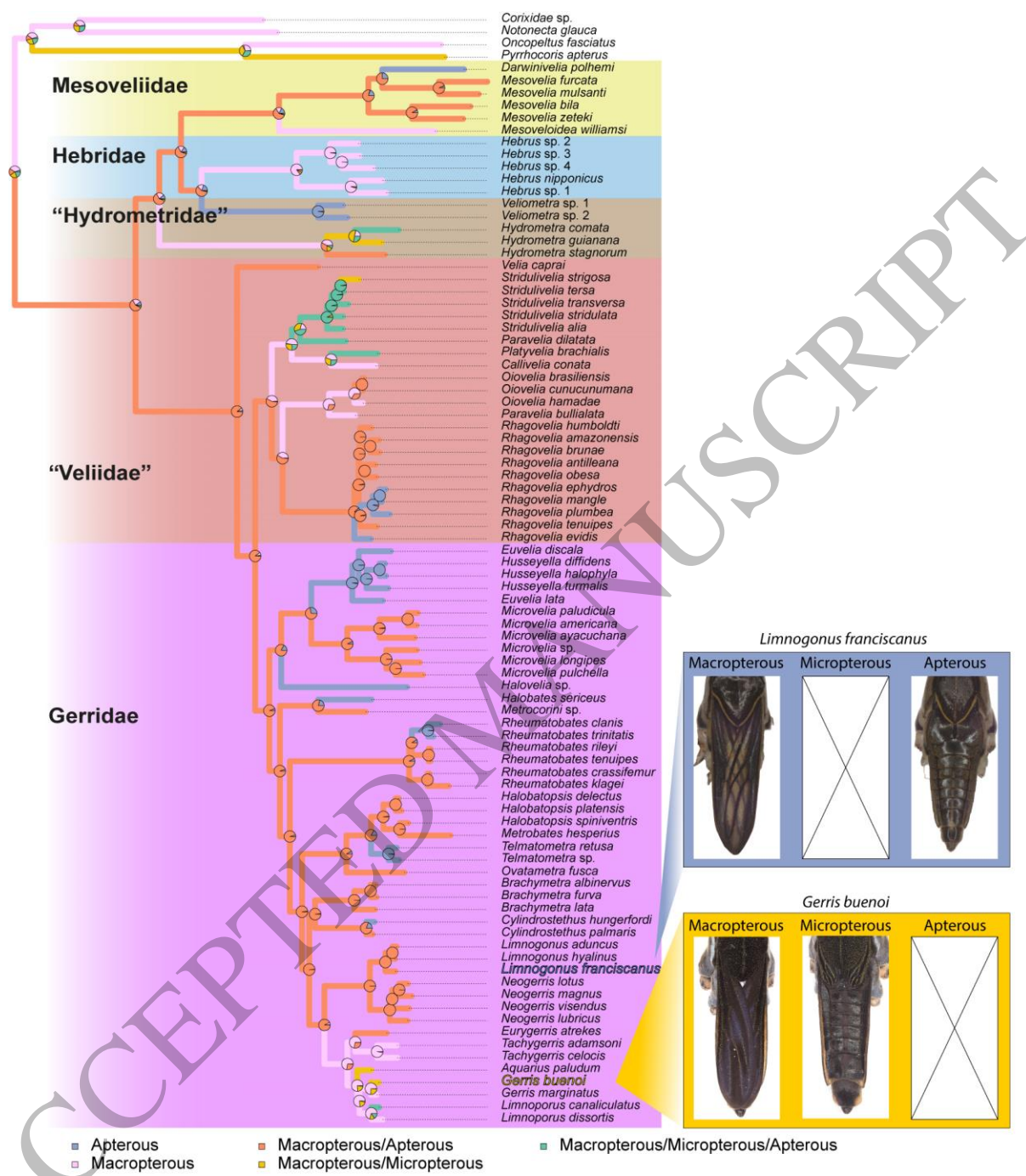
Figure 4
159x198 mm (3.4 x DPI)



■ Freshwater only species ■ Marine species or tolerant to saline waters ■ Terrestrial species

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Figure 5
136x246 mm (3.4 x DPI)



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Figure 6
159x181 mm (3.4 x DPI)