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# The Gas Bladder of Puffers and Porcupinefishes (Acanthomorpha: Tetraodontiformes): Phylogenetic Interpretations

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**ABSTRACT** The anatomy of the gas bladder of Diodontidae (porcupinefishes) and Tetraodontidae (pufferfishes) was studied on the basis of dissections and magnetic resonance imaging. Among the examined taxa of Tetraodontiformes, only puffers and porcupinefishes possess a thick walled and dorsally U-shaped or crescent-moon-shaped gas bladder. In the tetraodontid genus *Lagocephalus* the gas bladder is reduced to a rudiment. The species belonging to the genera *Canthigaster*, *Arothron*, and some species of *Tetraodon* differ in the positioning of their crescent-moon-shaped gas bladder. These observations confirm the close relationship of: (i) Diodontidae and Tetraodontidae and (ii) *Canthigaster*, *Arothron*, and some species of *Tetraodon*. The heterogeneity of the genus *Tetraodon* is supported by the gas bladder morphology, as previously suggested by molecular studies. *J. Morphol.* 275:894–901, 2014. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

**KEY WORDS:** gas bladder; anatomy; phylogenetics; Diodontidae; Tetraodontidae; Tetraodontiformes

## INTRODUCTION

Diodontidae (porcupinefishes) and Tetraodontidae (pufferfishes) are families of Tetraodontiformes composed of six genera, 19 species and about 18 genera, 98 species, respectively, (Nelson, 2006). They are well known at the alpha level, and their biology, morphology, and osteology have been described in great detail in numerous articles documenting their unusual structure (Winterbottom, 1974; Tyler, 1980), their toxicity (Arakawa et al., 2010), and their ability to inflate their body (Braidner, 1994). These two family clades are considered as sister groups. This close relationship has been successively established by the study of their myology (Winterbottom, 1974), their osteology (Tyler, 1980; Tyler and Sorbini, 1996; Santini and Tyler, 2003, 2004), their otoliths (Nolf and Tyler, 2006), and by the comparison of DNA sequences (Holcroft, 2004, 2005; Alfaro et al., 2007; Yamanoue et al., 2008, 2011; Near et al., 2012; Near et al. 2013; Santini et al., 2013a). Nevertheless, although the organization of the genome of some tetraodontiform species has been deciphered

(Aparicio et al., 2002; Jaillon et al., 2004), the internal soft anatomy of these fishes, with the exception of muscles (Winterbottom, 1974), has only been incompletely described (Saint-Hilaire, 1809; Lacépède, 1836; Gregory and Raven, 1934; Breder and Clark, 1947; Johnson and Britz, 2005; Chanet et al., 2012; Chanet et al., 2013) and the anatomy of the gas bladder only rarely detailed. The aim of this work is to describe the diversity of the structure of the gas bladder in Tetraodontiformes and to point out similarities and possible synapomorphies based on this organ. The study of the structure of the gas bladder of puffers and porcupinefishes is based on dissections of both fresh and alcohol preserved (AP) specimens and examinations of images obtained by noninvasive imaging techniques (magnetic resonance imaging [MRI]).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Following Harder (1975) and McCune and Carlson (2004), we use the term “gas bladder” rather than “swim bladder” as this organ is a gas-filled sac not only used for swimming and control of buoyancy but also, at least in some groups of fishes, in breathing, auditory reception, and sound production (Kasumyan, 2008).

The anatomy of 21 fresh (F) or AP specimens of 17 tetraodontiform species was studied. The examined fresh specimens were fished in the eastern European seashores or came from public aquariums where they died naturally. Standard Length (SL), is indicated for each examined specimen. For practical

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purposes, these specimens after classical dissection (CD) were not in a state that enables their preservation in a systematic collection. They do not then possess catalog number.

The AP specimens are from the collections of the USNM (National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC), except for a single specimen of a longhorn cowfish *Lactoria lactoria* (Linnaeus, 1758), Ostraciidae, from the collections of the Department of Comparative Anatomy (ENVN-ONIRIS, Nantes, France). A MRI examination (1.5 T) was conducted on a fresh gray triggerfish *Balistes capriscus* in the Unité d'imagerie médicale (ONIRIS, Nantes). MRI examinations were performed using a 1-T supraconductor magnet (Harmony Siemens). A standard body coil was used along with a three planes localizer.  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  ponderations were performed. The  $T_1$  (TR = 516–656 ms and TE = 13 ms) and  $T_2$  (TR = 3840–5170 ms and TE = 91–115 ms) sequences in three planes (virtual sagittal, horizontal [= coronal], and transverse) extending from the anterior extremity of the snout to the distal tip of the caudal fin were acquired after the specimens were thawed [more technical information for these MRI examinations can be found in Chanet et al. (2012)]. CD and parasagittal mechanical sections (PMS) on frozen large fishes using an electric meat saw (La Bovida, BG) were performed on the following specimens:

### Balistidae

*Balistes capriscus* Gmelin, 1789, fished in the eastern Atlantic Ocean, F, 300 mm SL, MRI, CD.

*Balistes capriscus* Gmelin, 1789, fished in the eastern Atlantic Ocean, F, 267 mm SL, PMS.

*Melichthys vidua* (Richardson, 1845), F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 123 mm SL, CD.

### Diodontidae

*Diodon holocanthus* Linnaeus, 1758, F, from the Aquarium de Vannes (Vannes, France), 232 mm SL, CD.

*Diodon liturosus* Shaw, 1804, F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 185 mm SL, CD.

### Molidae

*Mola mola* (Linnaeus, 1758), F, two specimens, 124 cm TL (fished in the English Channel) and 142 cm TL (fished in the eastern Atlantic Ocean), MRI (Chanet et al., 2012) and CD.

### Ostraciidae

*Acanthostracion quadricornis* (Linnaeus, 1758) USNM 110416,<sup>1</sup> 340 mm SL, (dry skeleton with dry gas bladder preserved).

*Lactoria cornuta* (Linnaeus, 1758), AP, collection Anatomie comparée ENVN-ONIRIS spécimen no. PV2011-007, 150 mm SL, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France).

*Lactoria cornuta* (Linnaeus, 1758), F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 283 mm SL, CD.

*Ostracion cubicus* Linnaeus, 1758, F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 147 mm SL, CD.

*Tetrosomus gibbosus* (Linnaeus, 1758), F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 74 mm SL, PMS.

### Tetraodontidae

*Arothron hispidus* (Linnaeus, 1758), AP, USNM 374361,<sup>1</sup> 138 mm SL, CD.

*Arothron nigropunctatus* (Bloch and Schneider, 1801), F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 256 mm SL, CD.

*Canthigaster compressa* (Marion de Procé, 1822), F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 64 mm SL, CD.

*Lagocephalus lagocephalus* (Linnaeus, 1758), F, fished in the eastern Atlantic Ocean, 393 mm SL, CD.

*Lagocephalus laevigatus* (Linnaeus, 1758), AP, USNM 122000,<sup>1</sup> 228 mm SL, CD.

*Lagocephalus laevigatus* (Linnaeus, 1758), AP, USNM 289361,<sup>1</sup> 165 mm SL, CD.

*Tetraodon cutcutia* Hamilton, 1822, F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), 68 mm SL, CD.

*Tetraodon mbu* Boulenger, 1899, F, from the Aquarium de la Porte Dorée (Paris, France), 316 mm SL, CD.

*Tetraodon Palembangensis* Bleeker, 1852, F, from the Aquarium Mare Nostrum (Montpellier, France), SL: 88 mm SL, CD.

These observations were compared to descriptions present in the literature and to MRI images available at the digital fish library (DFL), <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org>. The specimens are deposited at the Marine Vertebrate Collection, Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO), University of California, San Diego, CA. The specimens examined through the DFL are:

### Balistidae

*Balistes polylepis* Steindachner, 1876, SIO 07-163, 174 mm SL, AP, MRI, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=103>

### Diodontidae

*Chilomycterus reticulatus* (Linnaeus, 1758), AP, SIO 07-187, 370 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=211>

*Diodon holocanthus* Linnaeus, 1758, SIO 60-76, 226 mm SL, AP, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=5>

### Molidae

*Masturus lanceolatus* (Liénard, 1840), AP, SIO 89-79, 139 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=80>

*Mola mola* (Linnaeus, 1758), AP, SIO 47-188, 290 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=93>

*Ranzania laevis* (Pennant, 1776), AP, SIO 70-250, 314 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=94>

### Monacanthidae

*Pervagor spilosoma* (Lay and Bennett, 1839), AP, SIO 53-539, 74 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=363>

### Ostraciidae

*Acanthostracion quadricornis* (Linnaeus, 1758), AP, SIO 91-75, 204 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=6>

*Ostracion nasus* Bloch, 1785, AP, SIO 73-189, 158,5 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=7>

### Tetraodontidae

*Arothron immaculatus* (Bloch and Schneider, 1801), AP, SIO 73-189, 150,5 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=11>

*Canthigaster punctatissima* (Günther, 1870), AP, SIO 61-225, 57 mm SL, images can be downloaded at: <http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org/library/ViewSpecies.php?id=1>

<sup>1</sup>Specimens were examined on our behalf by J.C. Tyler at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

TABLE 1. Distribution of characters

Characters	Distribution
Gas bladder with developed anterior lateral lobes	Balistidae and Ostraciidae
Gas bladder absent in adult	Molidae
Gas bladder abortive in adult	<i>Lagocephalus</i>
Gas bladder with two conic expansions: conic expansions anteriorly oriented	Diodontidae and in the following tetraodontid species: <i>Chelododon patoca</i> , <i>Torquigener hypselogeneion</i> , <i>Sphoeroides maculatus</i> , <i>Takifugu oblongus</i> , <i>Tetraodon cutcutia</i> and <i>T. palembangensis</i>
conic expansions posteriorly oriented	Following tetraodontid species: <i>Arothron immaculatus</i> , <i>A. firmamentum</i> , <i>Canthigaster punctatissima</i> , <i>Tetraodon mbu</i> and <i>T. lineatus</i>

See text and Figs 3, 4, and 5.

Technical information for these MRI can be examined for each species on the website of the DFL (<http://www.digitalfishlibrary.org>)

## RESULTS

Tetraodontiformes exhibit a diversity of gas bladder shapes (Table 1).

### Triacanthodidae

In spikefishes, the gas bladder is an oblong, usually thin walled, somewhat rounded sac (Tyler, 1968:27, Fig. 5, left; Tyler, 1980:46).

### Triacanthidae

In triplespines, the gas bladder is thick walled, somewhat elongated, large, and extends posteriorly almost the entire length of the abdominal cavity (Tyler, 1968:27, Fig. 5, right; Tyler, 1980:78).

### Monacanthidae

In filefishes, the gas bladder is a large and elongated sac present all along of the dorsal part of the abdominal cavity (Fig. 1).

### Triodontidae

Little is known about the gas bladder of the treetooth puffer, but this organ appears as a long sac, without segmentation or diverticula, present

in the dorsal part of the abdominal cavity (Johnson and Britz, 2005:180, Fig.3D).

### Balistidae

The gas bladder of triggerfishes is an oblong, thick-walled sac occupying the entire dorsal part of the abdominal cavity (Fig. 2). The anterior lateral extremities exhibit small evaginated lateral lobes (Fig. 2B). Each lobe is in contact with a thin layer of integument and some enlarged scales (Salmon et al., 1968; Tyler, 1980). This peculiar structure was called a “tympanum” by Gregory (1933:285) and “drumming membrane” by Moulton (1958). Those two authors suggested that this membrane was involved in sound production by triggerfishes and this hypothesis was confirmed by the experimental work of Salmon et al. (1968).

### Ostraciidae

The gas bladder of the examined taxa of boxfish species is similar to that present in triggerfishes: it is a voluminous and elongated thick-walled dorsal sac with two anterior and evaginated lateral lobes. It is possible that these lobes are involved, like in balistids, in sound production (Lobel, 1996).

### Diodontidae

The gas bladder of the examined species of porcupinefishes is very peculiar. It is a large thick walled and bilobed structure: it is dorsally U-

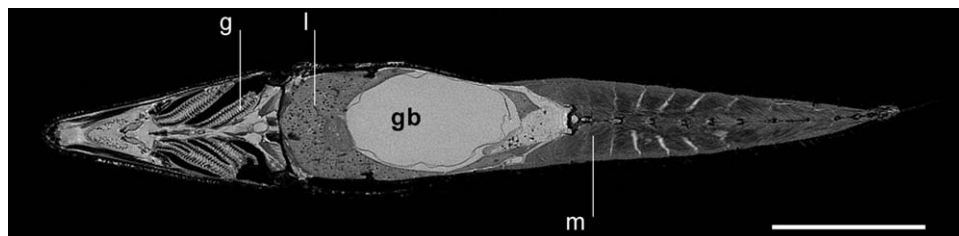


Fig. 1. *Pervagor pilosoma* (fantail filefish) horizontal magnetic resonance image (SIO 53-539, 74 mm SL). g, gill; gb, gas bladder; l, liver; m, muscles. Scale = 10 mm.



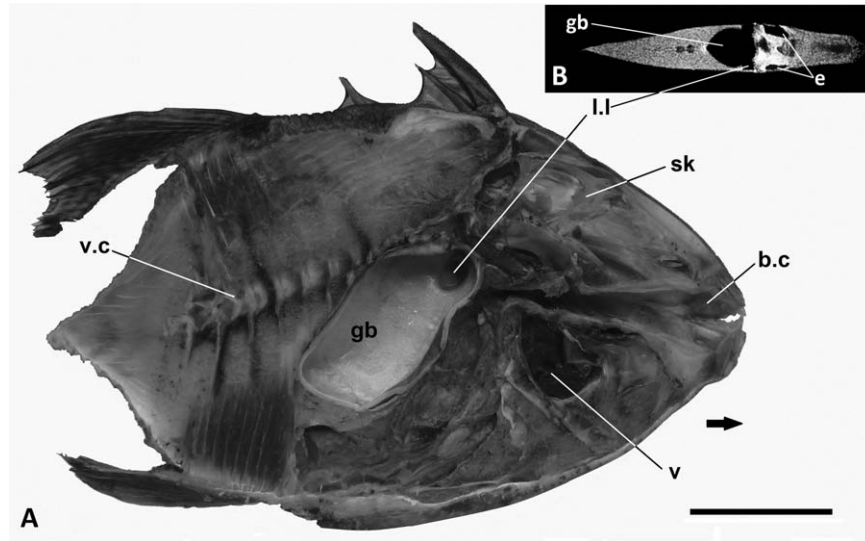


Fig. 2. **A.** *Balistes capriscus* (267 mm SL; gray triggerfish), sagittal section of a frozen specimen, right lateral view. **B.** Horizontal plan (MRI) through a fresh *B. capriscus* (300 mm SL). b.c, buccal cavity; e, eye; gb, gas bladder; l.l, lateral lobe; sk, skull; v, ventricle; v.c, vertebral column. The black arrow indicates the anterior part of the specimen. Scale = 50 mm.

shaped, crescent-moon-shaped, or kidney-shaped with two conic expansions (Fig. 3).

These expansions are antero-dorsally oriented and the bladder is concave posteriorly (Fig. 3). We have found this pattern in all of the examined diodontid taxa and it has been mentioned in the genus *Diodon* by Leis (1978:538), Winterbottom (1974:195, Fig. 173), Tyler (1980:9), and Brainerd (1994, Fig. 5:249), and also in *D. rivularis* (synonym of *Chilomycterus schoepfii*) by Delaroche (1809:272).

### Tetraodontidae

Among examined tetraodontids, the studied species of *Lagocephalus* do not have easily recognizable gas bladders. Several dissections, on fresh and AP specimens, indicate that the gas bladder is aborted or reduced to a small flacid sac on the ventral surface of the kidney. When well developed, the gas bladder of puffers has a shape similar to the gas bladder of porcupinefishes, with two large conic expansions. Nevertheless, these expansions are oriented posteriorly, instead of anteriorly as previously described in several species of porcupinefishes.

Abe (1952) has described that in *Chelonodon patoca*, *Torquigener hypselogeneion*, *Sphoeroides maculatus*, *Takifugu oblongus* these conic expansions are anteriorly directed, as in diodontids. We observed the same disposition in *Tetraodon cutcutia* and *Tetraodon palembangensis*. By contrast, in *Arothron immaculatus* (Fig. 4A), *Arothron firmamentum*, *Canthigaster punctatissima* (Berquist et al., 2012:8, Fig.3; Fig. 4B), *Tetraodon mbu*, *Tetraodon lineatus* (Saint-Hilaire, 1809), the conic expansions are posteriorly directed (Fig. 4C). In

*Tetraodon cutcutia* and *Tetraodon palembangensis*, the wall of the gas bladder is very thin; in other species of *Tetraodon* this organ is thick walled.

### Molidae

Adult molas have no gas bladder (Cuvier, 1805; Gregory and Raven, 1934; Tyler, 1980; McCune and Carlson, 2004; Pope et al., 2010; Chanet et al., 2012). It would be interesting to determine if this organ is present in larval stages and in juvenile molas.

### DISCUSSION

The structure, shape, and presence or absence of the gas bladder within teleostean fishes have been the subject of several surveys (Tominaga et al., 1996; McCune and Carlson, 2004). This organ is absent in numerous species and the multiple cases of regression of the gas bladder among teleosts are considered as adaptations related to benthic habitats, like flatfishes or anglers, or to deep sea environments, like aulopiforms, to fast swimming, like some tunas and one species (*S. scombrus*) of the genus *Scomber*, and to quick or frequent movements within the water column, like remoras and molas (McCune and Carlson, 2004). Nevertheless, the absence of the gas bladder in teleosts that feed in the water column is interpreted as involving phyletic inertia, like in some notothenioids, because it is inherited from an ancestral loss (Eastman, 1993:156; Ekau, 1991). Numerous peculiarities of the gas bladder have been described, like the simple heart shaped gas bladder of some species of the family Auchenipteridae (Birindelli et al., 2012), the two-chambered gas bladder of the

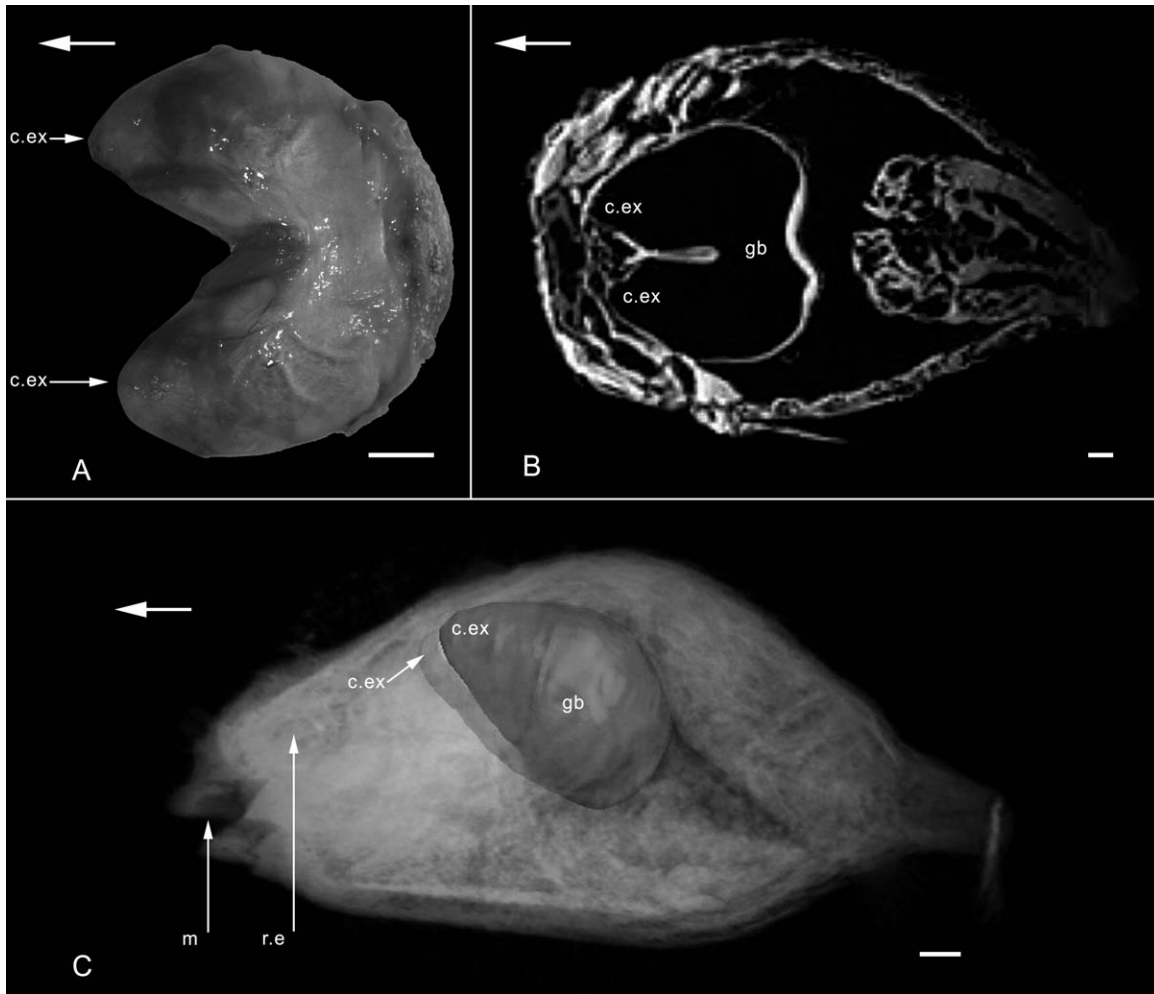


Fig. 3. **A.** Isolated gas bladder of a longspined porcupinefish, *Diodon holocanthus* (232 mm SL), dorsal view. **B.** Horizontal section (MRI) through *D. holocanthus* (SIO 60-76, 226 mm SL). **C.** 3D segmentation display of the gas bladder of *D. holocanthus* (SIO 60-76, 226 mm SL). c.ex, conic expansion; gb, gas bladder; m, mouth; r.e, right eye. Each arrow indicates the anterior part of the specimen. Scale = 10 mm.

ostariophysans (Fink and Fink, 1981) or the gas bladder composed of many small bubbles present in Istiophoridae (Collette et al., 2006). Adult molas excepted, tetraodontiform fishes are known to possess a well-developed thick-walled and physoclistous gas bladder (Cuvier, 1817:149–150; Tyler, 1968, 1980:15, 43, and 264). This work provides evidence that the structure of this organ is diverse within this order and that the examined species of the genus *Lagocephalus* are the first non-molid taxa showing an absence, or at least a great reduction, of the gas bladder in adult Tetraodontiformes. A more extensive study of this structure among all species of the genus *Lagocephalus* would be needed to confirm its rudimentation as a generic character and to specify at which developmental stage this organ regresses to a rudiment or is totally absent. The examined taxa of balistids and ostraciids have anterior and evaginated lateral lobes of their gas bladder; this character may

corroborate the traditional morphologically based interpretation of these two families being closely related, as proposed by Gregory (1933), Winterbottom (1974), Matsuura (1979), Tyler (1980), Winterbottom and Tyler (1983), Klassen (1995), and Santini and Tyler (2003, 2004). Nevertheless, several studies have challenged this relationship. One of the many analyses conducted by Santini and Tyler (2004) supports an ostracioid + tetraodontoids relationship, even if the majority of the analyses of that work support a balistoid + ostracioid clade. Rosen (1984), on osteological characters, Leis (1984), on larval characters, Britz and Johnson (2005), on occipital-vertebral fusion, and molecular studies (Holcroft, 2004, 2005; Alfaro et al., 2007; Yamanoue et al., 2008; Near et al., 2012; Near et al. 2013; Santini et al., 2013a [Fig. 5]) present evidence contradicting the existence of a clade composing triggerfishes and boxfishes. The present data about the anatomy of

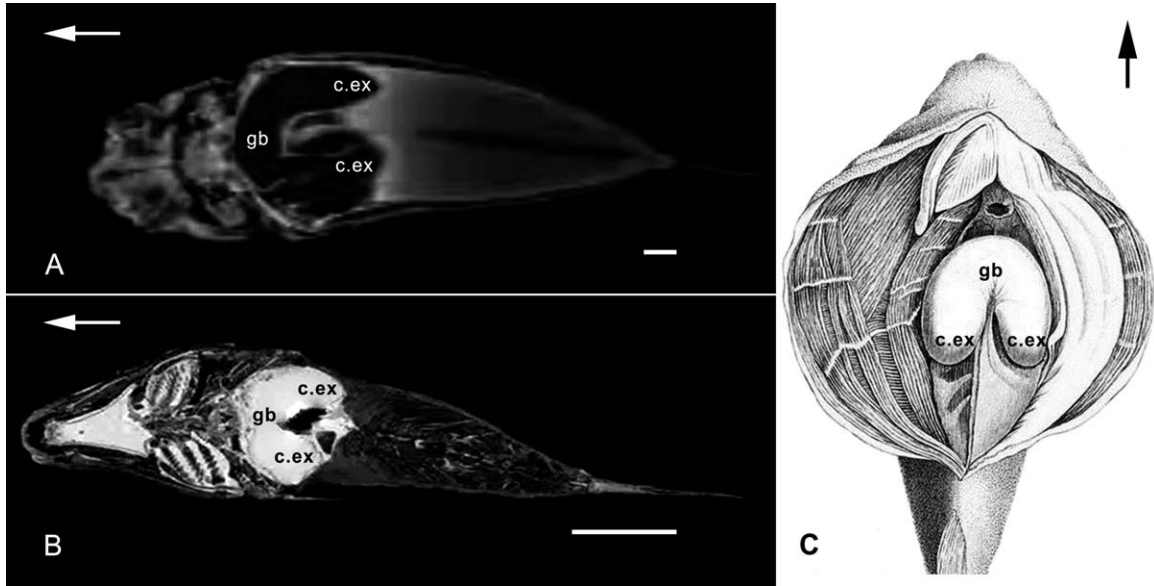


Fig. 4. **A.** Horizontal section (MRI) through an immaculate puffer, *Arothron immaculatus* (SIO 73-189, 150,5 mm SL). **B.** Horizontal section (MRI) through a spotted sharpnose puffer, *Canthigaster punctatissima* (SIO 61-225, SL 57 mm). **C.** Illustration of the gas bladder of a dissected fresh water puffer fish, *Tetraodon lineatus*, ventral view, modified from Saint-Hilaire (1809: pl. II, Fig. 2). Each arrow indicates the anterior part of the specimen. c.ex, conic expansion; g, gill; gb, gas bladder. Scale = 10 mm.

the gas bladder should be taken into consideration in future works dedicated to tetraodontiform inter-familial relationships before assessing that this similarity in the structure of their gas bladder is a

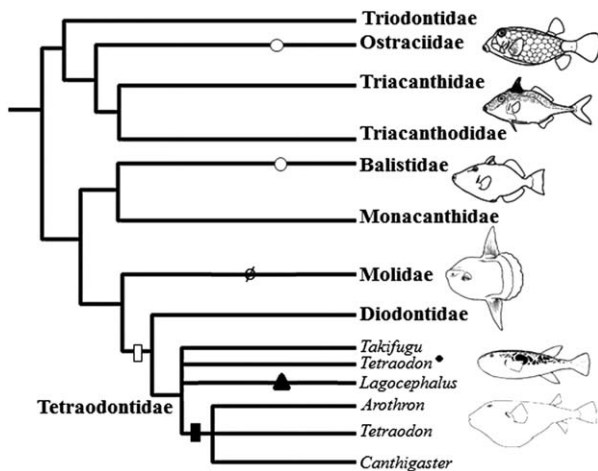


Fig. 5. Summary tree depicting the placement of the present gas bladder synapomorphies on the interrelationships of Tetraodontiformes as recovered by Santini et al. (2013a), the paraphyly of *Tetraodon* being additionally displayed according to Yamanoue et al. (2011) and our findings in *Tetraodon cutcutia* and *Tetraodon palembangensis* (top “*Tetraodon*” • in the figure). The white circles O represent the distribution of a gas bladder with developed anterior lateral lobes. The black triangle ▲ indicates the great reduction of gas bladder in *Lagocephalus* while the Ø indicates the absence of gas bladder in adult *Mola*, the white rectangle □ represents the distribution of a gas bladder with two conic expansions. The black rectangle ■ represents the distribution of a gas bladder with two posterior conic expansions. See text for comments.

convergence and the result of possible recurrent adaptations to sound production rather than an inheritance from common ancestry.

Moreover, porcupinefishes (Diodontidae) and pufferfishes (Tetraodontidae) are unique among Tetraodontiformes in possessing a U-shaped or crescent-moon-shaped gas bladder with two conic expansions. This peculiar structure can be considered as a putative synapomorphy of these two families, representing complementary evidence to corroborate the close relationship between these groups. Prior works established this relationship on the basis of the study of their myology (Winterbottom, 1974), of their osteology (Tyler, 1980; Tyler and Sorbini, 1996; Santini and Tyler, 2003, 2004), of their otoliths (Nolf and Tyler, 2006) and by the comparison of DNA sequences (Holcroft 2004, 2005; Alfaro et al., 2007; Yamanoue et al., 2008; Near et al., 2012; Near et al. 2013; Santini et al., 2013a,b). To this existing evidence, we add here gas bladder anatomy as structure supporting the previous phylogenies.

However, within the Tetraodontidae, various genera differ by the orientation of the conic expansions that are anteriorly oriented (like in diodontids) in at least two species of the genus *Tetraodon* (*T. cutcutia* and *T. palembangensis*), or posteriorly oriented in the genera *Arothron*, *Canthigaster* and in at least two species of the genus *Tetraodon* (*T. mbu*, *T. lineatus* (Saint-Hilaire, 1809); *Tetraodon* appears as paraphyletic or polyphyletic according to molecular studies. The gas bladder with two anterior conic expansions appears to be phylogenetically basal to the derived character state of a



gas bladder with posterior conic expansions (Fig. 5). When these observations are compared to the results of several recent molecular works (Holcroft, 2004, 2005; Alfaro et al., 2007; Yamanoue et al., 2011; Near et al., 2012; Near et al. 2013; Santini et al., 2013a) elucidating the interrelationships of tetraodontid species (Fig. 5), it appears that *Arothron*, *Canthigaster*, and several *Tetraodon* species are closely related; they share a common ancestor more recent than the one shared with other pufferfishes. Our finding of anterior conic expansions in *T. cutcutia* and *T. palembangensis*, contrasting with *T. mbu* and *T. lineatus*, conforms to the findings of Yamanoue et al. (2011) who place the two former species outside the *Canthigaster* + *Tetraodon* clade. Santini et al. (2013b) found different relationships among these genera and species, and explained these discrepancies between their results and those of Yamanoue et al. (2011) by a different partitioning. In Santini et al. (2013b), *Arothron* and *Canthigaster* are contained in a same clade with all the sampled species (14) of the genus *Tetraodon*, including *T. cutcutia* and *T. palembangensis*. *Tetraodon* still appears as polyphyletic in this work, as species of the genus *Tetraodon* form three unrelated groups within the *Arothron-Canthigaster-Tetraodon* clade.

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