Isolation and characterization of 50 microsatellite loci for two shearwater species, *Ardenna pacifica* **and** *Puffinus bailloni*

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Abstract :

Background

Shearwaters (order Procellariiformes) are an excellent study system to investigate the genetic consequences of the co-called "seabird paradox", as they are able to disperse long distances but many species exhibit natal and breeding philopatry. However, few microsatellite markers are currently available for these taxa, hampering genetic inferences.

Methods and results

In this study, 25 novel microsatellite loci were isolated and characterized for each of two distantly related shearwater species: the wedge-tailed shearwater (Ardenna pacifica) and the tropical shearwater (Puffinus bailloni). Polymorphism tests were performed for a total of 91 A. pacifica individuals sampled at Reunion and Round Island, and 48 P. bailloni individuals from Reunion and Europa Island, in the western Indian Ocean. The analyses revealed 23 polymorphic loci for A. pacifica, with the number of alleles per locus (Na) ranging from 2 to 8 (mean = 3.957 ± 0.364). Nineteen polymorphic loci were found for P. bailloni, with Na varying from two to five (mean = 3.053 ± 0.247). The observed heterozygosity (Ho) was relatively low for the two species, with Ho ranging from 0.022 to 0.725 (mean = 0.326 ± 0.044) for A. pacifica and from 0.021 to 0.688 (mean = 0.271 ± 0.051) for P. bailloni, but comparable to the estimates available for other Puffinus species.

Conclusions

The new microsatellite loci provide a valuable tool for further population genetic studies, and will allow for design of effective conservation and management plans for A. pacifica, P. bailloni and other closelyrelated species.

Keywords : Seabirds, Wedge-tailed shearwater, Tropical shearwater, Microsatellites, Population genetics, Conservation

Introduction

 Seabirds, one of the most diverse group of avifauna, are distributed across all oceans and marine ecosystems of the world, and are renowned for their ability to migrate long distances [1]. Shearwaters (order Procellariiformes) are highly pelagic seabirds, which undertake long- distance non-breeding migrations and large-scale movements when central placed foragers during breeding [2]. In contrast, many shearwater species exhibit natal philopatry and return repeatedly to the same colony for breeding, often close to their natal nest site. This is often described as the "seabird paradox" [3]. Although this behavior may increase the probability that adequate resources and mates are available for reproduction [4], it may also result in limited gene flow between colonies, high levels of endemism, and in an increased risk of inbreeding depression and vulnerability to stochastic demographic fluctuations [5].

 The taxonomic history of shearwaters has been revised repeatedly [6–8]. A recent study using genomic data from 25 of the 32 recognized shearwaters species provided the first well- resolved phylogeny for this taxa [9]. The study supported the monophyly of the three genera of shearwaters, *Ardenna*, *Calonectris* and *Puffinus*, and positioned *Ardenna* and *Calonectris* as sister genera [9]. The three genera exhibit differences in species richness [10], and are an ideal study system to investigate the genetic processes underlying species diversification in marine ecosystems. However, molecular nuclear markers are still unavailable for most of the shearwaters species (but see [11–13]), which limits our ability to explore these genetic processes.

 In this study, we identify and characterize new polymorphic microsatellite loci for two distantly related shearwater species: the wedge-tailed shearwater (*Ardenna pacifica*, Gmelin 1789) and tropical shearwater (*Puffinus bailloni*, Bonaparte 1857). These microsatellite markers will provide a valuable tool for population genetic studies and allow researchers to identify conservation or management units, made up of one or more connected breeding colonies, and hence develop effective conservation actions for *A. pacifica* and *P. bailloni*, and potentially for 82 other closely-related species.

Materials and methods

 A. pacifica ranges throughout the tropical and subtropical waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans (latitudes 35°N and 35°S) and is known to breed on a large number of oceanic islands

 and on the east and west coast of Australia [14]. In contrast, the congener *P. bailloni* is widely distributed in the western tropical Indian and Pacific Oceans. In the western Indian Ocean the main colonies are in the Seychelles, the Chagos Archipelago, Reunion and Europa Island [15]. For the present study, biological samples were collected in two study sites for each species between 2009 and 2019. *A. pacifica* individuals were sampled in Reunion (21°70 S, 55°31 E) and Round Island (Mauritius; 19°51 S, 57°47 E), in the western Indian Ocean. *P. bailloni* were sampled 93 in Reunion and Europa Island (southern Mozambique channel; 21°21 S, 40°22 E). Two distinct breeding colonies were selected for each species to allow for potential variation in microsatellite genotypes. Shearwaters were captured at breeding colonies by hand. Additionally, samples from all *P. bailloni* from Reunion and some *A. pacifica* were collected from dead birds, fatally injured as a consequence of light pollution [16]. Blood samples (approx. 0.5 ml) were collected from live birds from the medial metatarsal or basilic veins, while muscle samples (approx. 10 g) were collected from dead animals. All samples were preserved in 70% ethanol. A total of 91 *A. pacifica* (55 from Reunion and 36 from Round Island) and 48 *P. bailloni* (30 from Reunion and 18 from Europa Island) samples were available for genetic analyses. Additionally, three *A. pacifica* and five *P. bailloni* blood samples from Cousin Island (Seychelles; 4°20 S, 55°40 E) were available from previous field expeditions and included in the microsatellite library.

 A microsatellite library was designed and established for each shearwater species by GenoScreen (Lille, France). Genomic DNA was extracted from whole blood and muscle samples using the NucleoSpin Tissue kit (Macherey-Nagel), following the manufacturer's protocol. A total of nine individuals for *A. pacifica* and ten for *P. bailloni* were equimolarly pooled and 1µg of DNA was used for the development of the genomic library. The libraries were analyzed on an Illumina MiSeq platform to generate 250bp paired-end reads using the MiSeq Reagent Nano Kit v2. A total of 1,128,338 reads were obtained for *A. pacifica* and 1,211,564 for *P. bailloni*. The resulting sequences were assembled using Usearch software, producing 131,356 contigs for *A. pacifica* and 161,218 contigs for *P. bailloni*. The bioinformatics program QDD v3 [17] was used to analyze the sequences. All bioinformatic steps from the raw sequences until obtaining the primers were performed using this software, including the removal of adapters/vectors, the detection of microsatellites, the detection of redundancy/possible mobile element association, the selection of sequences with target microsatellites, and the primer design using BLAST, ClustalW and Primer3 software. A total of 2,524 primer sets were finally designed on suitable microsatellite flanking regions for *A. pacifica* and 3,102 for *P. bailloni*. Of these, 421 primer pairs were selected for *A. pacifica* and 507 for *P. bailloni*, by keeping only perfect di/tri/tetra motives, with A and B quality design (from internal parameters of QDD), and with at least 20bp between primer and microsatellite. Finally, 95 microsatellite loci were randomly selected for preliminary molecular tests for each shearwater, using DNA of eight individuals. Thereafter, a subset of 48 microsatellite loci were tested for polymorphism for each species, using DNA from an additional fifteen individuals (2 from Round Island, 10 from Reunion and 3 from Cousin Island for *A. pacifica,* and one from Europa Island, 9 from Reunion and 5 from Cousin Island for *P. bailloni*). [Polymerase](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/polymerase-chain-reaction) [Chain Reaction](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/polymerase-chain-reaction) (PCR) was performed for each microsatellite locus in a 10 µl reaction containing 127 0.5 U of TAQ DNA polymerase, 6 pmol of dNTP, 37.5 pmol of MgCl₂, 10 pmol of each forward 128 and reverse primer, and 1 μ l (\sim 10 ng) of DNA template. PCR amplifications were carried out using the following thermal conditions: initial denaturation step at 95 ºC for 15 min, followed by 40 130 cycles of 95 °C for 30 s, 55 °C for 30 s, and 72 °C for 60 s, and a final extension step at 72 °C for 10 min. PCR products were separated on an ABI 3730XL DNA analyzer (Applied Biosystems) and sized with GeneScan-500 LIZ size standard. All molecular analyses were performed by GenoScreen (Lille, France).

 Microsatellite alleles were scored using GeneMapper® v4.0 (Applied Biosystems). The twenty-five best microsatellite loci for each study species (di- and trinucleotide repeats) were then selected for multiplex development, based on the allelic diversity, fragment size and peak patterns in the electropherograms. Five multiplex reactions were developed for each shearwater species with the help of the Multiplex Manager v1.2 [18]. Each multiplex included primers that amplify fragments of different size and were labelled with four fluorescent dyes (6-FAM, PET, VIC, NED) to enable fragment analysis multiplexing. Multiplex conditions were optimized using seven individuals per study species (5 individuals from Reunion and 2 from Cousin Island for *A. pacifica*, and 7 individuals from Reunion for *P. bailloni*). PCR were subsequently performed for the entire *A. pacifica* (n = 91) and *P. bailloni* (n = 48) dataset, considering the same conditions and thermal cycle as for the simplex PCR, but with an uneven quantity of primer per multiplex (see Table 1 for details).

 Evidence of null alleles, large-allele dropout, and stutter bands were examined for each locus with MicroChecker 2.2.3 [19]. Genepop 4.7.5 [20, 21] was used to test for deviations from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium (HWE) for each locus, and to test for linkage disequilibrium for each locus-pair combination. The p-values were adjusted using the Benjamini and Yekutieli correction method for multiple comparisons [22, 23]. The mean observed number of alleles per locus (Na), 151 observed heterozygosity (H_o), and unbiased expected heterozygosity (uH_e) estimated according to Nei [24] were computed using GenAlEx 6.5 [25]. To ensure that the set of microsatellite loci could reliably identify unique genotypes for the two species, the probability of identity (pID; [26]) was computed using GenAlEx 6.5 [25].

Results and discussion

 The initial microsatellite primer screening revealed twenty-three polymorphic loci for *A. pacifica* (Table 2) and nineteen for *P. bailloni* (Table 3), which amplified a total of 91 and 58 alleles for each study species. Despite the uneven sample sizes (n = 91 for *A. pacifica* and n = 48 for *P. bailloni)*, the number of alleles per locus (Na), and observed (H_O) and expected unbiased (uH_e) heterozygosities were comparable for the two shearwater species. The Na for *A. pacifica* ranged from two to eight (mean = 3.957 ± 0.364), and the Na for *P. bailloni* from two to five (mean = 3.053 ± 0.247). For *A. pacifica*, the H_o varied from 0.022 to 0.725 (mean = 0.326 \pm 0.044) and the uH_e 164 from 0.022 to 0.730 (mean = 0.343 ± 0.044 ; Table 2). Likewise, the H_O for *P. bailloni* ranged from 165 0.021 to 0.688 (mean = 0.271 ± 0.051) and the uH_e from 0.021 to 0.709 (mean = 0.298 ± 0.053 ; Table 3). No heterozygote deficit was detected when combining the two study sites for each shearwater species (i.e.; global FIS was not significantly different from zero for both *A. pacifica* and *P. bailloni*), suggesting that we did not violate the assumption of population panmixia in the present study.

 No large-allele dropout and stutter peaks were detected for the two shearwaters. However, two loci (Pb72 and Pb83) exhibited null alleles for *P. bailloni* and three loci (Ap19, Ap23, Ap36) for *A. pacifica*. No significant linkage disequilibrium was detected among any locus-pairs for the two study species, after correcting for multiple tests comparison. Significant deviations from HWE were found for three loci (Ap19, Ap21, Ap36) for *A. pacifica,* after Benjamini and Yekutieli correction (p-value > 0.05). All the loci developed for *P. bailloni* were in HWE (Table 2

176 and Table 3). The probability of identity (pID) using the present set of loci was 9.27 x 10⁻⁹ for *A.* 177 pacifica and 3.01 x 10⁻⁶ for *P. bailloni*, suggesting that the probability of two unrelated individuals drawn randomly from our dataset sharing the same multilocus genotype is approximately zero.

 Overall, the genetic diversity indices for *A. pacifica* and *P. bailloni* were comparable to 180 previous estimates for other *Puffinus* species (e.g., H_O = 0.377 ± 0.241 for *Puffinus mauretanicus* [11]; H^O = 0.436 ± 0.257 for *Puffinus yelkouan* [11]; H^O = 0.549 ± 0.175 for *Puffinus carneipes* [12]), but lower than those reported for other local seabirds using microsatellites datasets (e.g., *Onychoprion fuscatus* and *Pseudobulweria aterrima*; [27, 28]).

 The deficit of heterozygotes observed in *P. bailloni* may reflect the smaller distribution of the species and the potential isolation of the colonies, as *Puffinus* are known to be extremely philopatric [11]. The results are, however, remarkable for the widely-distributed and abundant *A. pacifica*. It is important to emphasize that the polymorphism of each 25 microsatellite loci was evaluated with individuals from only two study sites per species. Microsatellite loci may exhibit new alleles when genotyping individuals from other geographic areas and, consequently, display a higher genetic variance than revealed in this study.

 Altogether, the newly developed microsatellite loci provide a valuable tool to investigate genetic diversity, population genetic structure, population connectivity and reconstruct the demographic history of *A. pacifica* and *P. bailloni* at a large geographic scale. Although the new primer pairs have not been tested for cross-amplification in both of our study species or in other seabird species, there is potential application of these markers in other closely related species, for which genetic studies are a priority and microsatellite markers are not yet available (e.g., [27, 29]). Future molecular studies are needed to investigate the cross-species transferability and genetic variability of the newly described microsatellites loci in other shearwater species.

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 Author Contributions: The study was conceptualized and designed by Laurence Humeau and Matthieu Le Corre. Field work was organized by Matthieu Le Corre, Vikash Tatayah, Nirmal Jivan Shah and Malcolm Nicoll. Data collection were performed by Matthieu Le Corre, Audrey Jaeger, Arthur Choeur, Merlène Saunier, François-Xavier Couzi, Vikash Tatayah, and Naïs Avargues. Data analysis was performed by Helena Teixeira and Laurence Humeau. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Helena Teixeira and all authors revised the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

 Ethics approval: Bird capture, handling and sample collection were approved and carried out in concordance with the principles of the Centre de Recherche sur la Biologie des Populations d'Oiseaux (PP 616 and banding authorization 44 of MLC; CRBPO, National Museum of Natural History, Paris). In addition, sample collection in Europa was conducted under the approval of the Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises (TAAF). Sample collection and exportation permits at Round Island were granted by the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) (Government of Mauritius). Sample collection and exportation permit at Cousin Island were granted by the Seychelles Bureau of Standards.

 Data availability: Sequences of the twenty-five microsatellites markers developed for *Ardenna pacifica* and *Puffinus bailloni* are publicly available in GenBank under the accession numbers ON854684 – ON854733.

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328 *bailloni*.

329 Multiplex, multiplex mix in which the locus was amplified; Dye, fluorescent label of the microsatellite primers;

330 Quantity, Quantity of primers used per PCR reaction.

332 **Table 2.** Results of the initial microsatellite primer screening in *Ardenna pacifica*. Analyses were performed using 91 individuals from Reunion and Round

333 (Mauritius) Island.

- 334 F, sequence of forward primer, R, sequence of reverse primer; Fragment size, observed allele size range; N, sample sizes per locus; Na, number of alleles per locus across
- 335 samples; Ho, observed heterozygosity; uHe, unbiased expected heterozygosity; HWE, p-value for departure from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium test; Null alleles, presence (Yes)
- or absence (No) of null alleles.
- * p-value < 0.5, ** p-value < 0.1, *** p-value < 0.01
-

339 **Table 3.** Results of the initial microsatellite primer screening in *Puffinus bailloni*. Analyses were performed using 48 individuals from Reunion and Europa

340 Island.

- 341 F, sequence of forward primer, R, sequence of reverse primer; Fragment size, observed allele size range; N, sample sizes per locus; Na, number of alleles per locus across
- 342 samples; Ho, observed heterozygosity; uHe, unbiased expected heterozygosity; HWE, p-value for departure from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium test; Null alleles, presence (Yes)
- or absence (No) of null alleles.
- * p-value < 0.5, ** p-value < 0.1, *** p-value < 0.01
-