The first phylogenetic analysis of Palpigradi (Arachnida) – the most enigmatic arthropod order

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Abstract. Palpigradi are a poorly understood group of delicate arachnids, often found in caves or other subterranean habitats. Concomitantly, they have been neglected from a phylogenetic point of view. Here we present the first molecular phylogeny of palpigrades based on specimens collected in different subterranean habitats, both endogean (soil) and hypogean (caves), from Australia, Africa, Europe, South America and North America. Analyses of two nuclear ribosomal genes and COI under an array of methods and homology schemes found monophyly of Palpigradi, Eukoeneniidae and a division of Eukoeneniidae into four main clades, three of which include samples from multiple continents. This supports either ancient vicariance or long-range dispersal, two alternatives we cannot distinguish with the data at hand. In addition, we show that our results are robust to homology scheme and analytical method, encouraging further use of the markers employed in this study to continue drawing a broader picture of palpigrade relationships.

Introduction

The arachnid order Palpigradi (micro-whip scorpions or palpigrades) is one of the smallest, rarest and most neglected groups of terrestrial arthropods, and one of the last arachnid orders to be discovered – it was first reported only in 1885 (Grassi and Calandruccio 1885). The first photographs of living palpigrades did not appear published until the first decade of the 21st century (Kováč *et al.* 2002; Beccaloni 2009). Additionally, only a handful of DNA sequence data are available in GenBank; with only 64

sequences, 56 are for *Prokoenenia wheeleri* (Rucker, 1901), a species that was part of a multi-gene phylogeny of arthropods (Regier *et al.* 2010), while the remaining eight sequences are unidentified specimens from three studies on chelicerate phylogenetics (Giribet *et al.* 2002; Pepato *et al.* 2010; Arabi *et al.* 2012). Contrary to this, one can find more DNA sequences for other small arachnid orders in GenBank: 105 for Uropygi, 200 for Schizomida, 200 for Ricinulei, 251 for Amblypygi and 502 for Pseudoscorpiones (checked on October 25th, 2013).

In addition, there are only two sequences available on the Barcode of Life website (http://www.barcodinglife.org).

Palpigrades are delicate animals that walk sensing the substrate with what seems a nervous behaviour of the first pair of walking legs, and use their unmodified palps for walking, unlike all other arachnids (Fig. 1). While moving, most palpigrades keep the flagellum upward, moving it laterally. Accordingly, it is possible that the uplifted flagellum is associated with perception of the environment (Ferreira and Souza 2012). These small, depigmented and highly translucent arachnids range in size from 0.65 mm in *Eukoenenia grassii* (Hansen, 1901) to 2.4 mm in the 'giant' *E. draco* (Peyerimhoff, 1906) from caves on the island of Majorca (Mayoral and Barranco 2013). *Eukoenenia spelaea* (Peyerimhoff, 1902) from Slovakia has recently been reported

to feed on heterotrophic Cyanobacteria (Smrž *et al.* 2013). The mode of sperm transfer in these arachnids remains unknown.

The living members of the order are currently divided in two families, Eukoeneniidae Petrunkevitch, 1955, with four genera and 85 named species, and Prokoeneniidae Condé, 1996, with two genera and seven named species (Harvey 2002; Prendini 2011; Souza and Ferreira 2013). Eukoeneniidae includes the genera *Allokoenenia* Silvestri, 1913 (one species from West Africa), *Eukoenenia* Börner, 1901 (71 spp., on all continents under tropical and subtropical climate; in temperate regions predominantly in caves), *Koeneniodes* Silvestri, 1913 (eight Palaeotropical spp.) and *Leptokoenenia* Condé, 1965 (five spp. in the Afrotropical, Neotropical and Palearctic regions). Prokoeneniidae includes the genera *Prokoenenia* Börner, 1901 (six spp. in the Nearctic, Neotropical and Oriental regions) and

Fig. 1. Photographs of (*A*) *Eukoenenia spelaea*, Ardovská Cave (Slovak Karst, Slovakia), photographed by Ľ. Kováč & V. Kóňa; (*B*) *Prokoenenia wheeleri*, Austin (Texas, USA), photographed by L. McCutchen; (*C*) *Eukoenenia mirabilis*, flagellum, segments 1–10; (*D*) *Eukoenenia bonadonai*, male genital lobes; (*E*) *E. bonadonai*, female genital lobes; (*F*) *E. bonadonai*, mouth cone and chelicerae (*C*, *D* photographed by E. Christian).

Triadokoenenia Condé, 1991 (one species from Madagascar). Further unnamed new species are known to us from various parts of the world.

The position of Palpigradi among the arachnid orders remains highly debated. The largest set of data analysed to date places them as the sister group to Acariformes mites in a basal position within arachnids, although without support (Regier *et al.* 2010). The most recent morphological cladistic analysis of arachnid relationships leaves them mostly unresolved among the clades Stomothecata, Haplocnemata, Pantetrapulmonata and Acaromorpha (Shultz 2007). Earlier studies combining morphology and a small set of molecular data placed Palpigradi as the sister group of Ricinulei + Tetrapulmonata or as sister to Pycnogonida when fossils were considered, although again, without significant clade support (Giribet *et al.* 2002); as sister to a clade including Acari and Solifugae, based on the same two markers used in earlier studies (Pepato *et al.* 2010); or in an unresolved position within arachnids (Arabi *et al.* 2012). Even less is known about the internal relationships of the group, since no published study – molecular or morphological – has yet incorporated information for more than one palpigrade species, and only one unpublished masters thesis has explored palpigrade relationships cladistically, using morphology (Montaño Moreno 2008).

To bridge this important gap in the knowledge of this arachnid order, although acknowledging the difficulties in sampling and identification of these elusive animals, we obtained samples for as many species of palpigrades as possible and from as many localities as possible with the aim to obtain molecular DNA sequence data to generate a first hypothesis of internal palpigrade relationships.

Materials and methods

Taxon sampling

Palpigrades are difficult to obtain and identify, and success of field sampling differed among regions included in the study. In Western Australia, many samples were collected indirectly in caves and boreholes. In Brazil and Europe, they can be abundant in caves, where fresh specimens have recently become available for inclusion in molecular studies. Additional samples were from soil samples in Australia, Italy and the USA. In addition to fresh material collected for this study, older specimens were used, especially from the diverse cave systems in Brazil, where several new species have been recently described (Souza and Ferreira 2010, 2011*a*, 2011*b*, 2012*a*, 2012*b*; Ferreira *et al.* 2011). While a recently collected specimen of *Eukoenenia ferratilis* Souza & Ferreira, 2011 amplified well for some of the studied markers, none of the six specimens of *Allokoenenia* spp. and the two specimens of *Leptokoenenia* sp. collected from the caves yielded workable DNA. We also obtained a relatively large collection of specimens from the Western Australian boreholes from Barrow Island and the Pilbara, but these were collected from litter traps and many specimens did not amplify or only yielded some amplicons. Some of these specimens are probably related to the Western Australian endemic *E. guzikae* Barranco & Harvey, 2008, but unrelated to the more widespread species *E. mirabilis* (Grassi & Calandruccio, 1885), also found in Western Australia (Harvey *et al.* 2006; Barranco and Harvey 2008). A single

specimen of *Prokoenenia wheeleri* was obtained from the Austin area (Texas, USA), but amplified well for all fragments attempted. In addition, we obtained samples of *Eukoenenia mirabilis* from Italy (Christian *et al.* 2010) and Australia (Harvey *et al.* 2006), *E. spelaea* (Peyerimhoff, 1902) from multiple localities in Slovenia and Slovakia (Kováč *et al.* 2002; Zagmajster and Kováč 2006; Král *et al.* 2008). Italian samples also include *E. bonadonai* Condé, 1979 and *E. strinatii* Condé, 1977, collected in caves. We also included specimens from multiple localities from the hanseni-chilanga group of *Eukoenenia* from Mexico and the USA (Montaño-Moreno 2012). Additional specimens come from Mexican caves and South Africa. Details on collecting localities are available in Table 1 and in MCZBASE (http://mczbase.mcz.harvard.edu/ SpecimenSearch.cfm). Vouchers or additional specimens are deposited in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University (MCZ), and in the Western Australian Museum (WAM).

We included three species available in GenBank, one from South Africa sequenced by Giribet *et al.* (2002), one from Brazil from Pepato *et al.* (2010), and one of unknown origin published by Arabi *et al.* (2012). Here we added sequences from an additional South African specimen from the same collection of that from Giribet *et al.* (2002), and a specimen of *E. ferratilis* from Brazil, which was identical to the specimen reported by Pepato *et al.* (2010) as *Eukoenenia* sp., and to which we refer to as *E.* cf. *ferratilis* in the present study. Outgroup taxa were selected from GenBank (Table 2), mostly from previous studies on arthropod or arachnid phylogeny using nuclear ribosomal genes (Giribet *et al.* 2002; Mallatt and Giribet 2006).

Molecular methods

Although we attempted to amplify and sequence five molecular markers typically used in other analyses of arachnid systematics (e.g. Dimitrov *et al.* 2012; Giribet *et al.* 2012), the mitochondrial 16S rRNA gene only amplified for *Prokoenenia wheeleri*, and the nuclear protein-encoding gene histone H3, although amplified for several samples, did not produce clean reads. We thus restricted our study to the two broadly available nuclear ribosomal genes, the complete 18S rRNA and ca. 2.2 Kb of 28S rRNA, and the mitochondrial protein-encoding cytochrome *c* oxidase subunit I (COI) (as in Murienne *et al.* 2008), although the latter gene only amplified for about a third of the specimens (Table 1). For two of the borehole Western Australian specimens, poorly preserved, only the middle amplicon of 28S rRNA worked.

Total DNA was extracted from whole specimens or from the opisthosomal region using the Qiagen DNeasy Tissue Kit (Qiagen, Valencia, CA, USA). Although we were aiming to preserve the digested carcass as a morphological voucher, it was completely digested and not recoverable. Purified genomic DNA was used as a template for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) amplification. Polymerase chain reaction, visualisation by agarose gel electrophoresis, and direct sequencing were conducted for most specimens as described in earlier work, e.g. Edgecombe and Giribet (2009). Chromatograms obtained from the automatic sequencer were read and sequences assembled using the sequence editing software Sequencher (Gene Codes Corporation, Ann Arbor, MI, USA). Sequence data were edited in MacGDE (Linton 2005). The three genes were analysed as follows:

Table 1. Palpigrade specimens, accession numbers, collecting information and amplified loci with GenBank accession numbers

IZ: Department of Invertebrate Zoology, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge; DNA: MCZ DNA collection; WAM: Western Australian Museum, Perth; MNHN: Muséum national d'histoire Naturelle, Paris. A dash (−) indicates a missing amplicon; new sequences are KF823823 to KF823883

Species	MCZ No.		Country	18S rRNA			28S rRNA			COI
				a	b	c	a	b	c	
Prokoenenia wheeleri	IZ-134477	DNA107078	Texas, USA	KF823823	KF823823	KF823823	KF823848	KF823848	KF823848	KF823874
Eukoenenia austriaca	IZ-19349	–	Slovenia	KF823824	KF823824	KF823824	KF823849	KF823849	KF823849	–
Eukoenenia bonadonai	IZ-19340	–	Italy	KF823825	KF823825	KF823825	KF823850	KF823850	KF823850	–
Eukoenenia ferratilis	IZ-127609	–	Brazil	KF823826	KF823826	KF823826	KF823851	KF823851	KF823851	KF823875
Eukoenenia cf. *ferratilis*	–	GenBank		HM070336	HM070336	HM070336	HM070299	HM070299	HM070299	–
Eukoenenia florenciae	IZ-19351	–	Slovakia	KF823827	KF823827	KF823827	KF823852	KF823852	KF823852	–
Eukoenenia cf. *florenciae*	IZ-19343	–	Brazil	KF823828	KF823828	KF823828	KF823853	KF823853	KF823853	–
Eukoenenia mirabilis	IZ-127901	–	Italy	KF823829	KF823829	KF823829	KF823854	KF823854	KF823854	KF823876
Eukoenenia mirabilis	IZ-127902	–	Italy	KF823830	KF823830	KF823830	KF823855	KF823855	KF823855	KF823877
Eukoenenia mirabilis	IZ-16117	–	Australia	KF823831	KF823831	KF823831	KF823856	KF823856	KF823856	–
Eukoenenia spelaea	IZ-135126	DNA106786	Slovakia	–	KF823832	KF823832	KF823857	KF823857	KF823857	KF823878
Eukoenenia spelaea	IZ-19346	–	Slovenia	KF823833	KF823833	KF823833	KF823858	KF823858	KF823858	–
Eukoenenia spelaea	IZ-19347	–	Slovenia	KF823834	KF823834	KF823834	KF823859	KF823859	KF823859	–
Eukoenenia spelaea hauseri	IZ-19348	–	Slovenia	KF823835	KF823835	KF823835	KF823860	KF823860	KF823860	–
Eukoenenia strinatii	IZ-19341	–	Italy	KF823836	KF823836	KF823836	KF823861	KF823861	KF823861	–
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-19350	–	Slovenia	KF823837	KF823837	KF823837	KF823862	KF823862	KF823862	KF823879
Eukoenenia sp.	–	DNA100456.1	South Africa	AF207648	AF207648	AF207648	–	AF207653	–	–
Eukoenenia sp.	–	DNA100456.2	South Africa	KF823838	–	KF823839	–	KF823863	–	–
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-134549	DNA107079	USA	KF823840	KF823840	KF823840	KF823864	KF823864	KF823864	KF823880
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-127598.1	–	Mexico	KF823841	KF823841	KF823841	KF823865	KF823865	KF823865	KF823881
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-127598.2	–	Mexico	KF823842	KF823842	KF823842	KF823866	KF823866	KF823866	KF823882
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-128499	–	Mexico	KF823843	KF823843	KF823843	KF823867	KF823867	KF823867	KF823883
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-136274	–	Mexico	KF823844	–	KF823844	KF823868	KF823868	KF823868	–
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-127636	WAM T81111	Australia	–	–	–	–	KF823869	–	–
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-127639	WAM T116012	Australia	KF823845	KF823845	KF823845	–	KF823870	KF823870	–
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-127640	WAM T111422	Australia	–	–	–	–	KF823871	–	–
Eukoenenia sp.	IZ-127643	–	Australia	KF823846	KF823846	KF823846	–	KF823872	KF823872	–
Eukoenenia, sp. nov.	IZ-19345	–	Brazil	KF823847	KF823847	KF823847	–	KF823873	KF823873	–
Palpigradi sp.	–	MNHN-JAA76		JN018286.1	JN018286.1	JN018286.1	JN018383.1	JN018383.1	JN018383.1	JN018169.1

Table 2.   Outgroup sampling with GenBank accession numbers

		18S rRNA	28S rRNA	COI
Anoplodactylus portus	Pycnogonida	AY859551	AY859550	GQ912859
Limulus polyphemus	Xiphosura	U91490	AF212167	AF216203
Pandinus imperator	Scorpiones	AY210831	AY210830	AY156582
Metasiro americanus	Opiliones	DQ825542	DQ825595	DQ825645
Calocheiridius termitophilus	Pseudoscorpiones	AY859559	AY859558	EU559544
Dermacentor sp.	Acari	Z74480	AY859582	–
Eremobates sp.	Solifugae	AY859573	AY859572	–
Mastigoproctus giganteus	Uropygi	AF005446	AY859587	JN018215

18S rRNA: This marker was amplified in three amplicons (*a*, *b*, *c*), as in previous studies (Edgecombe and Giribet 2009; Giribet *et al*. 2010, 2012). In the present study we include 27 palpigrade specimens plus eight outgroups, for a total of 1760–1771 bp per complete sequence (up to 1805 bp for one of the outgroups). From the 27 palpigrade sequences all but three were complete; *E. spelaea* is missing fragment *a* and the sample of *Eukoenenia* from South Africa (DNA100456.2) is missing fragment *b*. For the direct optimization analyses the three amplicons were treated as a single input file, containing 23 sequences, and divided into six fragments. The three amplicons were concatenated for the static alignment analyses.

28S rRNA: This nuclear gene was amplified in three amplicons (*a*, *b*, *c*), as described in Giribet and Shear (2010). The dataset includes 29 palpigrade specimens plus eight outgroups, for a total of 2150–2204 bp, with some length variation among species. These three fragments correspond to primer pairs 28S rd1a–28D rd4b, 28Sa–28S rd5b, and 28S rd4.8a–28S rd7b1. Some of the published sequences were amplified with a shorter fragment *b*, generated with primers 28Sa–28Sb (Whiting *et al*. 1997), and therefore fragment *b* was divided into fragments *b1* and *b2* to accommodate these two amplicons. Fragment *a* was available for 22 palpigrades and divided into three fragments, fragment *b* for 29 palpigrades and three fragments, and fragment *c* for 25 palpigrades and analysed as a single fragment. These were treated as three different amplicons for the dynamic homology analyses, but aligned together for the static homology approaches.

COI: This widely used mitochondrial marker amplified for ten palpigrade terminals in a single amplicon using primers LCO–HCO, showing no length variation (654 bp analysed), plus one available in GenBank. COI did not amplify for many individuals, perhaps due to major changes in this marker, as evidenced by the deletion of one amino acid with respect to the outgroups. Five outgroup sequences were obtained from GenBank, but these were 3 bp longer in all cases except for the pseudoscorpion. It was analysed as a single fragment; not pre-aligned due to the length difference with some outgroups.

Phylogenetic analyses

Parsimony analyses were based on a direct optimization (DO) approach (Wheeler 1996) using POY ver. 5.0 (Varón *et al*. 2012). Tree searches were performed using the timed search function in POY, i.e. multiple cycles of (a) building Wagner trees, (b) subtree pruning and regrafting (SPR), and (c) tree bisection

Table 3.   Result of the POY timed searches (search) and stabilisation after each round of SATF for the six explored parameter sets

	1	SATF2	SATF3
111	6520	6520	6520
121	10 076	10 076	10 076
211	7543	7543	7543
221	11 851	11 851	11 851
3211	10 408	10 408	10 408
3221	13 526	13 526	13 526

Table 4.   Number of weighted steps for each data partition, the combination of them (MOL) and $_w$ILD value
The optimal parameter set is indicated in italics

	18S	28S	COI	MOL	wILD
111	1125	3967	1354	6520	0.01135
121	1655	6272	2051	10 076	0.00973
211	1246	4840	1381	7543	0.01008
221	1867	7780	2080	11 851	0.01046
3211	*1704*	*6535*	*2074*	*10 408*	*0.00913*
3221	2314	8305	2777	13 526	0.00961

and reconnection (TBR), (d) ratcheting (Nixon 1999), and (e) tree-fusing (Goloboff 1999, 2002) [command: search (max_time:00 : 01 : 00, min_time:00 : 00 : 10, hits:20, memory: gb:2)]. For the individual partitions, timed searches of 1 h were run on four processors under six parameter sets, as in Giribet *et al*. (2012) (see Table 3). For the combined analysis of the three markers we started with the same search strategy, giving the 28S rRNA trees as input – as these contained all the taxa in the combined dataset – and the resulting trees were given as input for a second round of analyses (sensitivity analysis tree fusing; SATF), as described by Giribet (2007), and continued until the tree lengths stabilised (Giribet *et al*. 2012). The optimal parameter set was estimated using the modified $_w$ILD metrics (Wheeler 1995; Sharma *et al*. 2011) as a proxy for the parameter set that minimises overall incongruence among data partitions (Table 4). Nodal support for the optimal parameter set was estimated via jackknifing (250 replicates) with a probability of deletion of e^{-1} (Farris *et al*. 1996) using auto_sequence_partition, as discussed in earlier work (Giribet *et al*. 2012).

Maximum likelihood (ML) analyses were conducted on static multiple sequence alignments (MSA) inferred in MUSCLE ver.

3.6 (Edgar 2004) through the EMBL-EBI server (http://www.ebi.
ac.uk/Tools/msa/muscle/). We also used an implied alignment
(IA) generated in POY (Wheeler 2003; Giribet 2005) for
subsequent analyses based on static alignments, as recently
explored by Giribet and Edgecombe (2013b) for a centipede
dataset. The MUSCLE alignments were conducted for each gene
independently. The IA and MSA therefore were based on the
same data (see length for each gene in Table 5). In order to
evaluate the impact of the hypervariable regions in the dataset,
MSAs and IAs were subsequently trimmed with Gblocks ver.
0.91b (Castresana 2000; Talavera and Castresana 2007) to cull
positions of ambiguous homology (see length for each trimmed
gene in Table 5). In the case of 28S, fragments *a* and *bc* were
Gblocked separately, due to the larger proportion of missing
data in the *a* fragment, which otherwise would be deleted from the
final 28S alignment. These datasets are thus based on different
data from their original sources and from each other, but the
remaining data use the same homology scheme as the source.
Datasets were concatenated with SequenceMatrix (Vaidya *et al*.
2011).

Maximum likelihood analyses were conducted using RAxML
ver. 7.2.7 (Stamatakis *et al*. 2008b) in the CIPRES server (Miller
et al. 2010). For the searches, a unique general time reversible
(GTR) model of sequence evolution with corrections for a
discrete gamma distribution (GTR + Γ) was specified for each
data partition, and 100 independent searches were conducted.
Nodal support was estimated via the rapid bootstrap algorithm
(1000 replicates) using the GTR-CAT model (Stamatakis *et al*.
2008a). Bootstrap resampling frequencies were thereafter
mapped onto the optimal tree from the independent searches.

In total we analysed five datasets accounting for different
optimality criteria, homology schemes, and/or amount of data, as
follows:

- Analysis 1. Direct optimization (dynamic homology) under
  parsimony (full sensitivity analysis of 6 parameter sets)
  analysed in POY
- Analysis 2. Static homology from the implied alignment for the
  optimal parameter set under ML (analysed in RAxML)
- Analysis 3. Static homology from the implied alignment for
  the optimal parameter set trimmed with Gblocks under ML
  (analysed in RAxML)
- Analysis 4. Static homology based on MUSCLE multiple
  sequence alignment (analysed in RAxML)

Table 5. Length of each data partition (28S rRNA is divided into three amplicons) and total length of alignment

IA (121) is for implied alignment under parameter set 121; IA+Gb is for
implied alignment trimmed with Gblocks; Muscle is for MUSCLE multiple
sequence alignment; Muscle+Gb is for multiple sequence alignment trimmed
with Gblocks

	18S	28Sa	28Sbc	COI	TOTAL
Unaligned	1760–1805	832–873	1265–1347	654–657	
IA (3211)	1860	1323	1555	669	5407
IA+Gb	1676	378	1162	626	3842
Muscle	1818	1046	1409	663	4936
Muscle+Gb	1695	609	1212	636	4152

- Analysis 5. Static homology based on MUSCLE/Gblocks
  (analysed in RAxML)

Results and discussion

All phylogenetic analyses yielded very similar results with
respect to the ingroup relationships, while the outgroup
relationships were incongruent from analysis to analysis and
unsupported for the most part (Figs 2 and 3). The latter was
expected given the small amount of data and outgroup taxa and the
poor resolution in deep arachnid relationships in other studies
(e.g. Wheeler and Hayashi 1998; Giribet *et al*. 2002; Pepato *et al*.
2010; Regier *et al*. 2010). The optimal parameter set under
parsimony direct optimization was 3211 (where indel opening
costs 3, indel extension 1, transversions cost 2 and transitions cost
1; $_wILD = 0.00913$), with a cost of 10 408 weighted steps (Fig. 2).
Nearly all examined parameter sets concurred on the topology of
the optimal parameter set, with the exception of *Eukoenenia
spelaea* IZ-19346 from Slovenia, and the resolution of one of the
Eukoenenia clades (see below). Likewise, the analyses of the four
datasets analysed under maximum likelihood were nearly
identical, except for some of the shallowest relationships. One
of these trees, the one for the multiple sequence alignment
trimmed with Gblocks – the one that could be potentially the
most different from the POY analysis – is presented in Fig. 3, and
it is virtually identical to the direct optimization tree. From the 10
nodes depicted in Fig. 2 summarising the six direct optimization
and the four maximum likelihood analyses, five were recovered
in all analyses. Support values for these five nodes is high for
most analyses (jackknife values are lower by definition), with the
exception of clades III and IV in the DO analysis. Basically,
nearly all analyses concur on the overall topology of the
palpigrade tree.

All analyses show a basal dichotomy between *Prokoenenia
wheeleri* (the only Prokoeneniidae represented in our analyses)
and the remaining samples, which we consider as *Eukoenenia*
for further discussion – even if some samples from GenBank or
from the Australian boreholes were not identified. *Eukoenenia* is
divided into four main clades, indicated in Figs 2 and 3. Clade I
includes *E. florenciae* from Slovakia, Brazil and unidentified
specimens probably belonging to the same species from the
USA and Mexico, and another species from a cave in
Guerrero, Mexico (IZ-128499). Clade II includes *E. spelaea*
and *E. s. hauseri* Condé, 1974 from Slovenia and Slovakia,
and several additional samples from Slovenia and Italy,
including *E. strinatii*, *E. bonadonai* and *E. austriaca* (Hansen,
1926); *E. spelaea* IZ-19346 from Slovenia clusters with these
species in some analyses, but not all (Fig. 2). Clade III includes
E. ferratilis from Brazil, the specimens from the Australian
boreholes, and an undescribed species from Brazil (IZ-19345).
Clade IV includes *E. mirabilis* from Australia and Italy, and
unidentified specimens from South Africa, plus a specimen from
a cave in Chiapas, Mexico (IZ-136274) and a GenBank specimen
(JA-2011) of unknown origin. Clades I and II are supported in
all analyses; Clade III is supported in all analyses except for
the DO analysis under parameter set 211; Clade IV is unsupported
in the ML analysis of the trimmed MSA. *Eukoenenia spelaea*
IZ-19346 appears as the sister group to Clade II under four
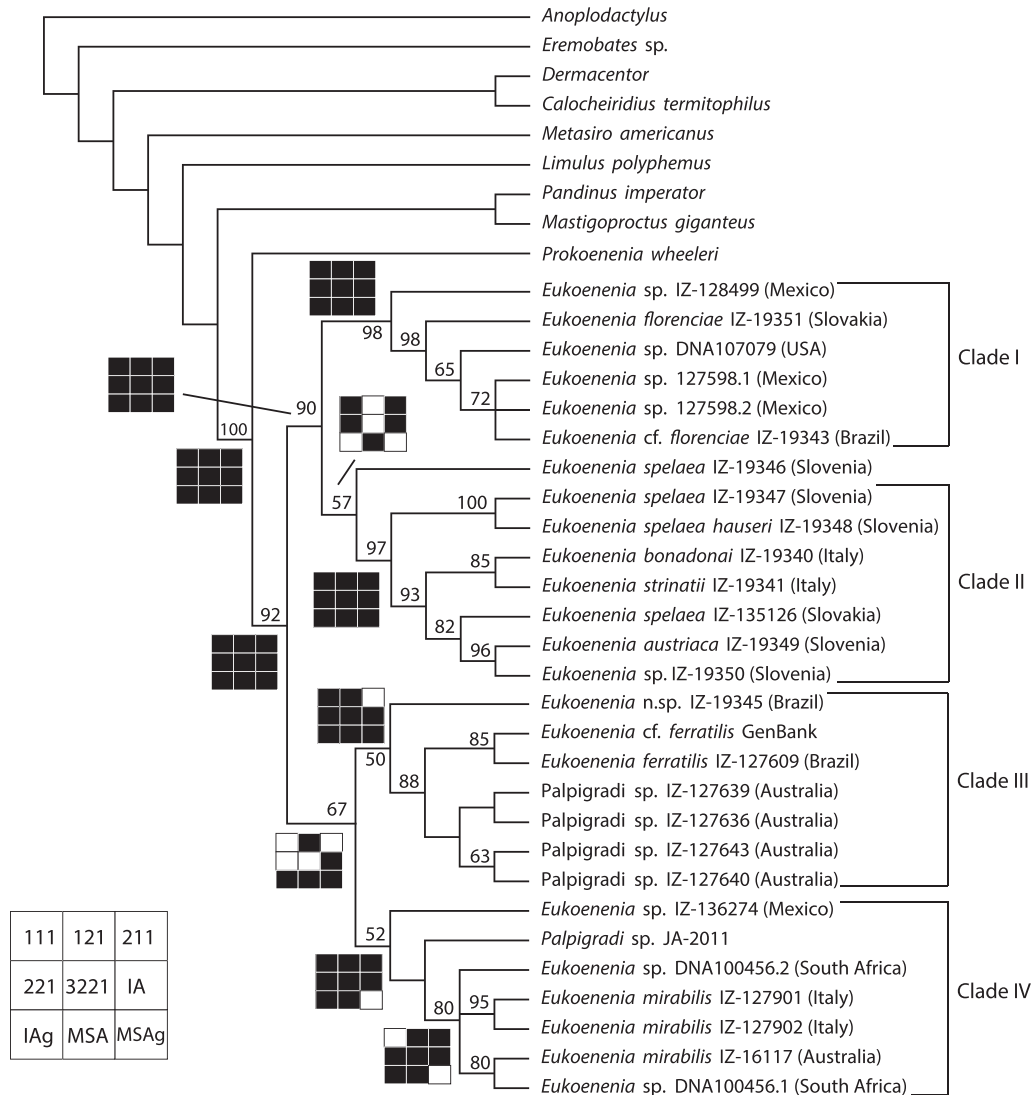analytical parameter sets in DO and in the untrimmed ML

Fig. 2. Optimal tree at 10 408 weighted steps obtained from the direct optimization analysis under parameter set 3211 of the combined analysis of the three genes. Numbers on branches indicate jackknife support values. Navajo rugs are shown in selected nodes; black square indicates monophyly, white square non-monophyly. Specific parameter sets or analyses indicated in the figure. Numerals indicate parameter set under parsimony direct optimization; implied alignment (IA) (maximum likelihood, ML, analysis using IA under parameter set 3211); IAg (Idem, Gblocked); multiple sequence alignments (MSA) (ML analysis of the MUSCLE multiple sequence alignment); MSAg (Idem, Gblocked). Clades I to IV are indicated.

analyses, both for the IA and for the MSA. The *E. florenciae* clade (Clade I) always forms the sister group of the *E. spelaea* clade (Clade II), although *E. spelaea* IZ-19346 sometimes is the sister group of the *E. florenciae* clade. While the *E. ferratilis* clade (Clade III) often forms the sister group to the *E. mirabilis* clade (Clade IV) (Figs 2, 3), and is well supported in the probabilistic analyses (97–100% bootstrap support, depending on the analysis), under some parameter sets Clade III is sister to the *E. spelaea–E. florenciae* clade (parameter sets 111, 211, 221, 3221).

Irrespective of these small differences, our analyses show high congruence between alternative methods (parsimony and maximum likelihood) based on identical raw data with different

homology schemes (implied alignments versus multiple sequence alignments), or different datasets (trimmed implied alignments and trimmed multiple sequence alignments). There are very few cases with such consistency across weighting schemes, homology schemes, and methodologies, but a recent case was documented for scutigeromorph centipedes (Giribet and Edgecombe 2013*b*). In that case, the fossil record and denser sampling allowed for accurate molecular dating and analyses of diversification of lineages through time, and it was suggested that the congruence across analyses was due to constant rates of diversification through more than 400 million years of evolution in the group. We can only guess this for palpigrades, as the fossil record for this group is rare, and a
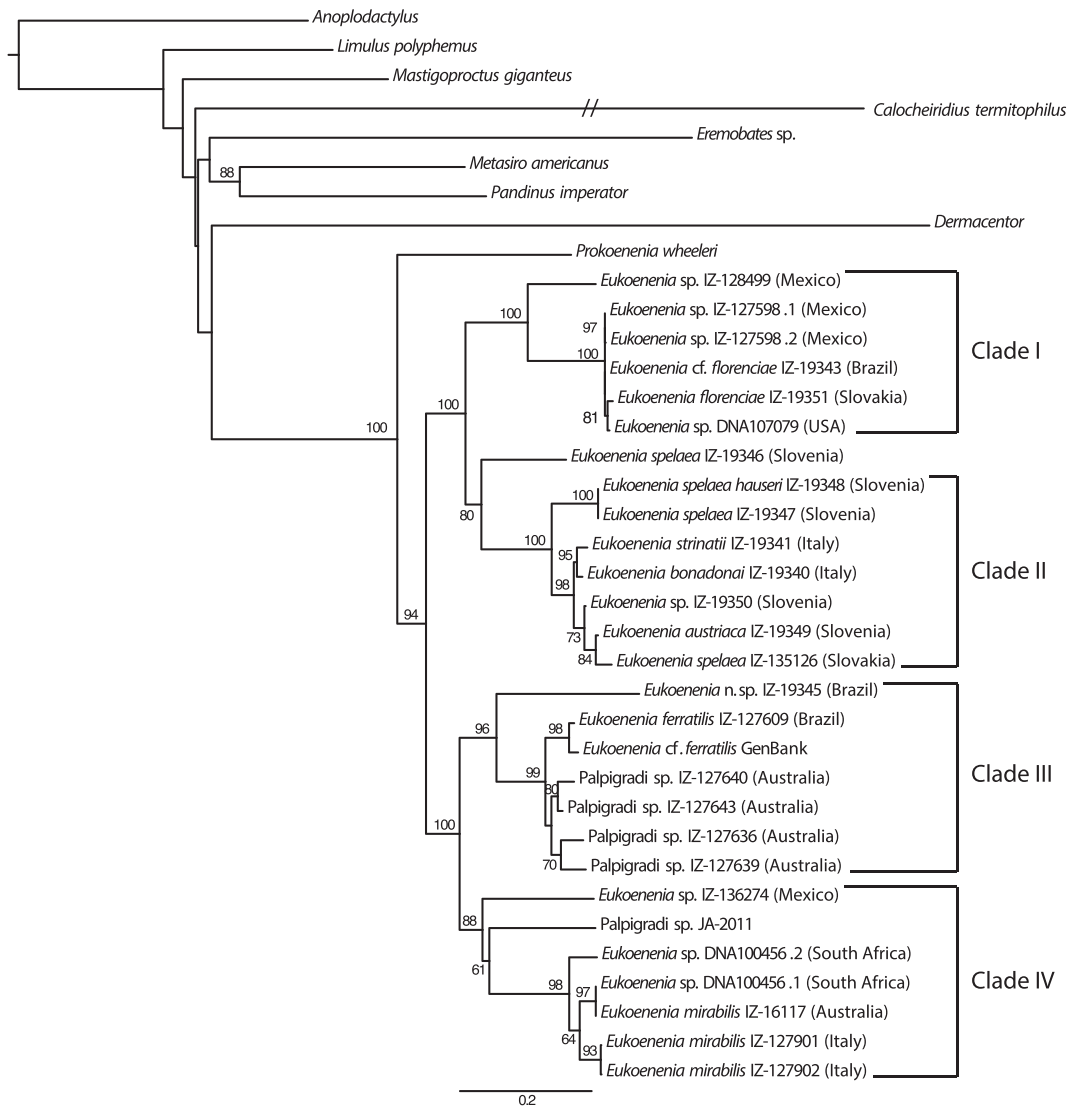
Fig. 3. Optimal maximum likelihood tree (–LnL = 24955.690470) of the combined dataset using the MUSCLE multiple sequence alignment trimmed with Gblocks. Numbers on nodes indicate bootstrap support values.

single Pliocene specimen is known (Rowland and Sissom 1980; Delclòs *et al.* 2008; Dunlop 2010), although the group must be much older in origin (see for example Giribet and Edgecombe 2013*a*).

Phylogenetic analysis of the three molecular markers combined and for all analyses performed resolves into Prokoeneniidae (although represented by a single species) and Eukoeneniidae, supporting the monophyly of Eukoeneniidae – palpigrades without sternal opisthosomal vesicles (Condé 1996). We were, however, unable to obtain samples of *Triadokoenenia* or of additional *Prokoenenia* species, thus not being able to test the taxon Prokoeneniidae. Within Eukoeneniidae, the four main clades discussed above are supported in nearly all analyses. But species identifications in palpigrades are not straightforward. Within Clade I, the specimens of *Eukoenenia* from Texas (USA), the Mexican state of Yucatán, *E.* cf. *florenciae* from Brazil and *E. florenciae* from Slovakia

show nearly identical COI sequences and identical nuclear rRNA sequences, suggesting that they may be conspecific (see Edgecombe and Giribet 2008; Vélez *et al.* 2012). In contrast, Clade II includes three lineages of the morphospecies *E. spelaea*. From these, two samples identified as *E. spelaea* and *E. spelaea hauseri* from Slovenia appear identical for the nuclear ribosomal genes (but did not amplify for COI).

Clade III includes the Western Australian samples and *Eukoenenia ferratilis* from the Iron caves of Minas Gerais (Brazil). Difficulties in amplifying the Australian samples and the lack of COI information for any of the members of the clade precludes us from understanding genetic variability within this clade of geographically distant species (both between the continents, but also among the Western Australian localities), although most analyses consistently resolve this clade of six individuals with reciprocal monophyly of the two geographic regions.

Clade IV, although with less support than the other three clades, includes the sample of unknown provenance sequenced by Arabi *et al.* (2012), a specimen from caves in Chiapas, and the cosmopolitan *E. mirabilis*, including two specimens from Italy (identical for all markers) and two putative members of this species from South Africa plus a sample of *E. mirabilis* from Australia. While *E. mirabilis* has been suggested to be a synanthropic species originating in the Mediterranean region with recent introductions to South Africa, Australia, Chile and Madagascar (Harvey *et al.* 2006), our limited data suggest a close relationship between one of the South African samples and the Australian specimen, even in the absence of COI data, and therefore suggesting changes in the nuclear ribosomal genes with respect to the Italian sample. Further study of Gondwanan *E. mirabilis* and addition of circum-Mediterranean samples should be undertaken to bring this matter to conclusion.

Given the sampling of this study it is still early to make any firm conclusions about palpigrade relationships. We were not able to test for the monophyly of Prokoeneniidae, and monophyly of *Eukoenenia* is not thoroughly tested either. Attempts to sequence *Allokoenenia* and *Leptokoenenia* were unsuccessful, and we were unable to obtain specimens of the Palaeotropical *Koeneniodes* and *Triadokoenenia*. Few studies have looked at variation among palpigrade species, but Král *et al.* (2008) investigated the karyotypes of *E. spelaea* from Slovakia and *E. mirabilis*, which appear in different clades in our study (Clades II and IV, respectively). However, the karyotypes of both species showed no variation, both consisting of a low number of tiny chromosomes that decrease gradually in size and a lack of morphologically differentiated sex chromosomes, suggesting that molecular data may be more informative than karyotypic data for separating species.

Morphologically, the characters used to differentiate *Eukoenenia* species are mostly restricted to the number of lobules in the lateral organs or the number of setae in different body regions, but the significance of these characters has not been tested phylogenetically, for example, *E. mirabilis* and *E. ferratilis* are very similar morphologically with many somatic traits, considered important for taxonomy, virtually identical (Souza and Ferreira 2011*a*). However, these two species belong to different clades, reflecting that their differences in genital morphology and chaetotaxy may be better systematic characters than the ones outlined above. Our study thus provides a new framework for adding new sequences and testing the significance of these characters. Additional samples and especially more genera must, however, be added before we can attempt a taxonomic revision of the higher taxa in Palpigradi.

Conclusions

Palpigrades are a poorly understood group of tiny soil arthropods, often found exclusively in caves, and have received little attention from a phylogenetic point of view. Here we were able to amass specimens from different environments (caves and soil) from Australia, Africa, Europe, South America and North America with the aim of generating a molecular phylogenetic hypothesis for the group. The difficulty in obtaining well preserved material for molecular work is reflected in the large number of specimens that did not yield DNA of enough quality for sequencing, but we were able to propose the first phylogenetic hypothesis of the group based on molecular data to find monophyly of Eukoeneniidae and its division into four main clades, three of these including samples from multiple continents. Given the absence of denser sampling and proper clock calibrations, our data cannot discern whether palpigrades are a very old group that diversified before the break-up of Pangaea, or a group of animals that disperses across large geographic distances, as suggested by some widespread species. Long-range dispersal is, however, difficult to reconcile with the narrow ecological conditions and the facility with which these animals desiccate once removed from their environments.

Acknowledgements

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