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Electrophoretic variation in large mammals

III. The ringed seal, *Pusa hispida*, the harp seal, *Pagophilus groenlandicus*, and the hooded seal, *Cystophora cristata*.

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Twenty-one enzyme loci have been resolved by starch gel electrophoresis from liver and muscle tissue of 82 ringed seals, 6 harp seals, and 10 hooded seals. Four loci were polymorphic in the ringed seal, but only one in the harp seal and the hooded seal. The genetic variability is, thus, low as in many large mammals.

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The intention of the present study is to examine seal species in order to test the proposal that low genetic variation as revealed by starch gel electrophoresis is a general phenomenon among carnivores; see SIMONSEN (1982); BONNELL and SELANDER (1974); McDERMID et al. (1972); and ALLENDORF et al. (1979). This study includes three North Atlantic seal species. The ringed seal (*Pusa hispida*) is a true Arctic species, which breeds in snow-covered lairs on solid ice and occurs single or in small groups all through the year. The harp seal (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*) and the hooded seal (*Cystophora cristata*), on the other hand, whelp in large concentrations on the open drift ice near Newfoundland, Jan Mayen, or in the White Sea, and conduct large annual migrations to and from feeding areas in the Arctic. All three species are rather long-living and, as a rule, give birth to a pup each year from the time when they attain maturity, at the age of 3 to 7 years.

Comparative chromosome studies in Pinnipedia have been carried out by FAY et al. (1967); ARNASON (1974); and by ARNASON (1977). The karyotypes of the pinnipeds are characterized by a pronounced uniformity. The diploid chromosomal number for the ringed and the harp seal is $2n=32$, whereas the hooded seal has $2n=34$. The $2n=32$ phocid karyotype has evolved from the $2n=34$

karyotype by a two-pair fusion, which has been demonstrated by ARNASON (1974). All the karyological analyses support the theory of monophyletic origin of the Pinnipedia. Immunological measurements of structural differences among various carnivore albumins also support the hypothesis; see SARICH (1969).

Studies on hemoglobins among pinnipeds by use of electrophoresis show that all the pinnipeds analysed have a major band in common, but the second major band has a migration rate shared by walrus, fur seal, and sea lion, and another for grey, harbor, and ribbon seal; see LINCOLN et al. (1973). This similarity in the zymograms of hemoglobin from carnivores led SEAL (1969) to propose that all species tested in six carnivore families (*Canidae*, *Procyonidae*, *Ursidae*, *Mustelidae*, *Otariidae*, and *Phocidae*) have a major hemoglobin component of identical primary structure, but this statement has been heavily attacked by SARICH (1972). SARICH (1972) has tested the hemoglobin of the dog (*Canis familiaris*) with the microcomplement fixation procedure and has observed that each non-Canis hemoglobin tested reacted less well than that of the dog, and each cross-reaction value was unique. Observing the same electrophoretic form of a given protein from two different species does not mean that the amino acid se-

quence of the protein is identical in the two species.

Previous electrophoretic studies on North Atlantic seals by NÆVDAL (1966a, b) reveal nearly no variation in hemoglobin for the harp, the bearded, the ringed, and the hooded seal, but transferrin is polymorphic in the harp seal. For the genotypic distributions in transferrin from different sampling areas, no significant differences are observed; see NÆVDAL (1966a, 1969).

MORE comprehensive electrophoretic studies have been done on the Macquarie Island elephant seal by MCDERMID et al. (1972) and on the northern elephant seal by BONNEL and SELANDER (1974). Both studies reveal very little genetic variation in these species. BONNEL and SELANDER (1974) have explained the low genetic variation of the northern elephant seal as the result of a population bottleneck in the nineteenth century. MCDERMID et al. (1972) have offered no genetic interpretation of the observed low genetic variation.

Materials and methods

The tissues used for this study were from seals collected in Greenland 1974, 1975, and 1976 by Dr. Christian Vibe, Zoological Museum, Copenhagen and by F. O. Kapel and J. Christiansen for Greenland Fisheries Investigations, and the Ringed Seal Project sponsored by the Danish Natural Science Research Council. Liver and muscle samples were removed shortly after the animals had been killed, and were stored at -18°C or -70°C until use. A total of 82 specimens of the ringed seal, 6 of the harp seal, and 10 of the hooded seal were collected.

The samples were analysed by starch gel electrophoresis; buffer systems and staining procedures were the same as described by SIMONSEN (1982).

Results

For the three species of seals the results of the enzyme analysis are reported below.

Acid phosphatase (ACP). — Liver tissue revealed the greatest amount of activity. The enzyme consisted of one heavy band and some minor bands, which were not possible to score. There was no

variation in migration of the heavy bands within or between the three species.

Adenosine deaminase (ADA). — Liver tissue exhibited the greatest amount of activity. All three seal species had a single zone of activity, which migrated an equal distance for all the species.

Adenylate kinase (AK). — Activity was found in both liver and muscle tissues. Muscle tissue expressed one heavily stained band and two minor bands. No variation among the species was observed.

Catalase (CAT). — Activity was present in both tissues. Only one band was seen and no variation existed among the species.

Diaphorase (DIA). — Liver samples revealed the greatest activity. Two bands were found and no variation within or among the species was observed.

Esterase (EST). — Two zones of activity were found in liver tissue, and the same two zones were found in muscle tissue. Staining with 4-MUB-acetate revealed no additional zones of activity. No variation among the species was observed.

Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD). — Muscle tissue showed a single heavy activity band, whereas liver tissue expressed a rather diffuse zone of activity. There were no differences in the migration for G6PD among the muscle samples from the three species.

Glutamic-oxaloacetic transaminase (GOT). — Both tissues possessed two bands of activity. No variation in the species was seen, but the anodic migrating band from the hooded seal migrated faster towards the anode than the anodic band of the other two species, which comigrated.

Glutamic-pyruvic transaminase (GPT). — Both liver and muscle tissue expressed enzyme activity. One main zone and two weaker zones of activity were observed. No variation among the species or within the species was seen.

Isocitrate dehydrogenase (ICD). — A single band was found in liver tissue and two bands in muscle tissue. No variation among the species was obtained.

Lactate dehydrogenase (LDH). — As expected, both liver and muscle tissue expressed five bands. The band that migrates fastest towards the anode was rather weak in several of the samples. No variation among the species was observed.

Malate dehydrogenase (MDH). — Both liver and muscle tissue exhibited two zones of activity, each with a heavily stained band and one to two additional, more weakly stained bands. The two zones are interpreted as products of two loci, separately termed *MdhI* and *MdhII*. A single ringed seal expressed variation in *MdhI* (a slower migrating phenotype), and for the *MdhII* locus a single ringed seal showed a faster migrating phenotype. A third ringed seal expressed a mixture of the common and rare phenotype of the *MdhII* locus. No further variation was found.

The variation seen in the *MdhI* locus in the ringed seal is unusual. It can be explained by assuming one locus with two alleles, one dominant (the common phenotype), and one recessive (the rare phenotype), because no heterozygotes were observed, and because it is unlikely to get a sample of 82 specimens consisting of 81 common homozygotes and 1 rare homozygote, if the genetic interpretation is one locus with two codominant alleles. Anyhow, this model is not the only one which can explain the observation, but with the information available is a possibility.

Peptidase (PEP). All hooded seals possessed a single activity band both in the liver and in the muscle tissue. In the ringed seal, fourteen specimens had two bands and 68 seals had a single band identical in mobility to the fast band seen in the hooded seal. The genetic interpretation is that the double-banded phenotype is heterozygous and the single-banded phenotype is homozygous for PEP. Among the harp seals, one heterozygote was found, with the remainder possessing a zymogram identical to that seen in the hooded seal.

6-phosphogluconate dehydrogenase (PGD). In the ringed and the hooded seals, both liver and muscle tissue expressed variation. Two of the hooded seals were heterozygous, and the remainder homozygous. One ringed seal was a heterozygote. Regardless of species, all homozygotes migrated with the same speed. The heterozygotes among the hooded seals expressed an additional band migrating towards the anode; however, the heterozygous ringed seal showed a band migrating slower towards the anode than the band seen in homozygotes.

Phosphoglycerate kinase (PGK). Only muscle tissue revealed activity, and all individuals expressed the same zymogram, which consisted of two identically migrating bands in all species.

Discussion

The results are compiled in Table 1, which shows the enzymes studied, the genetic interpretation, and the frequency of the common allele. Four loci in the ringed seal are polymorphic, and one in each of the other two species.

The proportion of polymorphic loci in the three species of seals is extremely low; at the 0.99 criterion level for the most frequent allele, the proportion of polymorphic loci is 0.095 for the ringed seal, and only 0.048 for the harp and hooded seals. The individual heterozygosity estimates for the species are 0.009 for the ringed and hooded seal, and 0.007 for the harp seal. As for the great apes (see BRUCE and AYALA 1979) and several carnivores, as mentioned in the introduction, the proportion of polymorphic loci and individual heterozygosity is rather low among the three species of seals.

It seems apparent now that the level of genetic variation in the large mammals (see REUTERWALL and RYMAN 1979), is substantially reduced in comparison to small mammals such as the house mouse (see SELANDER et al. 1969). The lowered genetic variation seen in the large mammals is often explained as the consequence of population bottle-necks, as proposed by BONNELL and SELANDER (1974). However, it seems unlikely that each of the large mammals studied, including man, would have passed through a recent bottle-neck. Other reasons for low genetic variation among the large mammals must now be considered, and several of these are discussed in ALLENDORF et al. (1979).

Calculating the genetic distance according to NEI (1972) for the three species we obtain the following results D (ringed versus harp seal) = 0.000, D (ringed versus hooded seal) = 0.050, and D (harp versus hooded seal) = 0.050. These results are in accordance with the expectations from studies of karyotypes and of classification based on morphology, as reported by ARNASON (1974) and MAXWELL (1967), respectively.

The conclusion of this study is that the genetic variation among and within the three species of seals is extremely low, as in several carnivore species.

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Table 1. Enzymes studied in three species of seals, designation of the loci, number of alleles observed, and frequency of the most common allele. Number of individuals of the species is in parentheses

Enzyme	Designation of locus	Number of alleles (and designation)			Frequency of the common allele. (and designation)		
		Ringed (82)	Harp (6)	Hooded (10)	Ringed (82)	Harp (6)	Hooded (10)
Acid phosphatase	<i>Acp</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Adenosine deaminase	<i>Ada</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Adenylate kinase	<i>Ak</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Catalase	<i>Cat</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Diaphorase	<i>Dia I</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
	<i>Dia II</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Esterase	<i>Est I</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
	<i>Est II</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase	<i>G6pd</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Glutamic-oxaloacetic transaminase	<i>Got I</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
	<i>Got II</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Glutamic-pyruvic transaminase	<i>Gpt</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Isocitrate dehydrogenase	<i>Icd I</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
	<i>Icd II</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Lactate dehydrogenase	<i>Ldh I</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
	<i>Ldh II</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000
Malate dehydrogenase	<i>Mdh I</i>	2 (a, b)	1 (a)	1 (a)	0.998 (a)	1.000	1.000
	<i>Mdh II</i>	2 (a, b)	1 (b)	1 (b)	0.982 (b)	1.000	1.000
Peptidase	<i>Pep</i>	2 (a, b)	2 (a, b)	1 (a)	0.915 (a)	0.917 (a)	1.000
6-Phosphogluconate dehydrogenase	<i>Pgd</i>	2 (b, c)	1 (b)	2 (a, b)	0.994 (b)	1.000 (b)	0.900 (b)
Phosphoglycerate kinase	<i>Pgk</i>	1	1	1	1.000	1.000	1.000

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