



Elena Gimmi mit ETH Rektor Günther Dissertori (Foto: Alessandro della Bella).

ETH-Medaille für Elena Gimmi

29. Januar 2025 | Annette Ryser

Themen: Biodiversität | Ökosysteme | Klimawandel & Energie | Institutionelles

Mit der ETH-Medaille zeichnet die ETH Zürich herausragende Master- und Doktorarbeiten aus. Elena Gimmi durfte den Preis am letzten Freitag, 24. Januar 2025 für ihre Dissertation entgegennehmen. Die Auszeichnung würdigt Gimmis Erkenntnisse über den Einfluss bakterieller «Bodyguards» auf die Koevolution der schwarzen Bohnenblattlaus, einem wichtigen Schädling im Lebensmittelanbau, und ihrem natürlichen Feind, der Schlupfwespe.

Als Doktorandin am Wasserforschungsinstitut Eawag nahm Elena Gimmi die Dreiecksbeziehung zwischen schwarzer Bohnenblattlaus (*Aphis fabae*), der winzigen Schlupfwespe *Lysiphlebus fabarum* und dem Bakterium *Hamiltonella defensa* unter die Lupe. Betreut wurde sie von Prof. Christoph Vorburger und Prof. Jukka Jokela. Die Forschungsgruppe von Vorburger verfolgt das Zusammenspiel der drei unterschiedlichen Partner schon seit Jahren. In Laboruntersuchungen zeigte sich, dass das Bakterium *H. defensa* als Symbiont im Körper der Blattläuse lebt: Es wird von diesen mit «Kost und Logis» versorgt und schützt sie im Gegenzug gegen die parasitischen Schlupfwespen, deren Larven die Läuse auffressen. Vermutlich produzieren die Bakterien Giftstoffe, welche die Eier der Wespen töten.

Umfassende Datenreihe aus dem Feld – Corona zum Trotz

Elena Gimmi hat die Ergebnisse aus der Grundlagenforschung nun erstmals unter natürlichen Bedingungen an wilden Populationen getestet und sich insbesondere angesehen, welche Muster und saisonalen Dynamiken bei der Resistenz der Blattläuse zu Tage treten. «Ich fand es spannend und herausfordernd, bekannte Laborresultate mit Beobachtungen aus der realen Welt zu vergleichen», so die Umweltbiologin.

Das Kernstück von Gimmis Arbeit bildete dabei eine gross angelegte, über zwei Jahre dauernde Feldstudie. In drei verschiedenen Gebieten rund um Zürich hat Gimmi monatlich die Häufigkeit der Bakterien in den Blattläusen verfolgt. Zudem hat sie über die gleiche Zeit untersucht, wie sich das Risiko der Blattläuse, von den Wespen parasitiert zu werden, veränderte. «Beim Start war klar, dass im Grunde sehr vieles dabei schief gehen könnte. Aber dank einer Kombination aus Hartnäckigkeit und Glück gingen die ursprünglichen Pläne für meine Arbeit ziemlich gut auf», blickt Gimmi zurück.

«Der betriebene Aufwand im Feld war enorm. Entsprechend hoch ist die Qualität der gesammelten Daten, aus denen wir viele neue und wichtige Erkenntnisse gewinnen konnten.»
Christoph Vorburger

Christoph Vorburger betont: «Der betriebene Aufwand für die Untersuchungen im Feld war enorm. Entsprechend hoch ist die Qualität der gesammelten Daten, aus denen wir viele neue und wichtige Erkenntnisse gewinnen konnten.» Das wichtige zweite Jahr des Feldprojekts war dabei durch die Corona-Pandemie ernsthaft gefährdet. Kurzerhand richtete die Forscherin mit Hilfe ihres Vaters ein kleines Insektenlabor zu Hause ein und engagierte ihren Bruder als Feldassistenten. Die Datenreihe blieb dadurch lückenlos und sieht aus, als hätte nie ein Lockdown stattgefunden. Vorburger: «Das war wirklich eine grosse Leistung, und ich bin auch Elenas Familie sehr dankbar für die Unterstützung.»



Christoph Vorburger und Elena Gimmi (Foto: Eawag).

Überraschender Einfluss der Umgebungstemperatur

Gimmis Daten liefern neues und zum Teil überraschendes Wissen über die Beziehung der drei ungleichen Partner. So konnte die Forscherin unter anderem zeigen, dass die Häufigkeit der Bakterien in den Blattlauspopulationen im Jahresverlauf schwankte – und dass die Umgebungstemperatur einen viel grösseren Einfluss darauf hatte als vermutet. Das heisst: Je wärmer es ist, desto mehr der bakteriellen «Bodyguards» wurden gefunden und desto grösser dürfte auch die Widerstandsfähigkeit der Blattläuse sein. Dies könnte darauf hindeuten, dass die Klimaerwärmung den Einsatz parasitischer Wespen in der biologischen Schädlingsbekämpfung beeinträchtigt.


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species protects the other from dangers, in exchange for another benefit. Protagonist of this thesis is *Hamiltonella defensa*, a vertically transmitted bacterial endosymbiont of aphids. *H. defensa* can defend its aphid host against parasitoid wasps and in return profits from nutrients and shelter inside the aphid body. In wild aphid populations, *H. defensa* often occurs at intermediate prevalence, that is, some aphid individuals carry the bacteria, but others do not. This might be explained by balancing selection, as carrying *H. defensa* has not only benefits but also costs for the aphid. The tripartite interaction between aphids, *H. defensa* and aphid parasitoids is considered a model system for symbiont-driven host-parasite coevolution and has been studied from various angles during the past twenty years. However, there is still a lack of data on the role of defensive symbiosis in the ecology and evolution of natural communities. With my PhD work, I sought to improve on that by studying patterns and dynamics of *H. defensa*-conferred resistance in the field. [...]

Symbiose beschreibt das enge Zusammenleben zweier unterschiedlicher Organismen. In sogenannten defensiven Symbiosen bietet eine Art der anderen Schutz oder Resistenz gegen Feinde oder Gefahren. Protagonist der vorliegenden Arbeit ist *Hamiltonella defensa*, ein endosymbiotisches Bakterium, das im Körper von Blattläusen lebt und von einer zur nächsten Blattlausgeneration vererbt wird. *H. defensa* kann Blattläusen Resistenz gegen parasitische Schlupfwespen verleihen, welche wichtige natürliche Feinde der Läuse sind. *H. defensa* ist also ein defensiver Symbiont von Blattläusen. Im Gegenzug profitiert *H. defensa* von 'Kost und Logis' im Inneren der Blattlaus. In natürlichen Blattlauspopulationen leben meist einige Individuen mit, andere ohn...'

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ternating and migrate between specific summer host plants and shared winter hosts, with mating occurring on the shared hosts. This provides a yearly opportunity for gene flow among aphids using different summer hosts, and raises the question if and to what extent the ecologically defined taxa are reproductively isolated. Here, we analyzed a geographically and temporally structured dataset of microsatellite genotypes from *A. fabae* that were mostly collected from their main winter host *Euonymus europaeus*, and additionally from another winter host and fourteen summer hosts. The data reveals multiple, strongly differentiated genetic clusters, which differ in their association with different summer and winter hosts. The clusters also differ in the frequency of infection with two heritable, facultative endosymbionts, separately hinting at reproductive isolation and divergent ecological selection. Furthermore, we found evidence for occasional hybridization among genetic clusters, with putative hybrids collected more frequently in spring than in autumn. This suggests that similar to host races in other phytophagous insects, both prezygotic and postzygotic barriers including selection against hybrids maintain genetic differentiation among *A. fabae* taxa, despite a common mating habitat.

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ld community' (88 chars) journal => protected'Journal of Evolutionary Biology' (31 chars) year => protected2024 (integer) volume => protected37 (integer) issue => protected'2' (1 chars) startpage => protected'162' (3 chars) otherpage => protected'170' (3 chars) categories => protected'host-parasite interactions; specificity of resistance; genotype-by-genotype interactions; aphids; *Hamiltonella defensa*; local adaptation' (138 chars) description => protected'Host-parasite coevolution is mediated by genetic interactions between the antagonists and may lead to reciprocal adaptation. In the black bean aphid, *Aphis fabae fabae*, resistance to parasitoids can be conferred by the heritable bacterial endosymbiont *Hamiltonella defensa*. *H. defensa* has been shown to be variably protective against different parasitoid species, and different genotypes of the black bean aphid's main parasitoid *Lysiphlebus fabarum*. However, these results were obtained using haphazard combinations of laboratory-reared insect lines with different origins, making it unclear how representative they are of natural, locally (co)adapted communities. We therefore comprehensively sampled the parasitoids of a natural *A. f. fabae* population and measured the ability of the five most abundant species to parasitize aphids carrying the locally prevalent *H. defensa* haplotypes. *H. defensa* provided resistance only against the dominant parasitoid *L. fabarum* (70% of all parasitoids), but not against less abundant parasitoids, and resistance to *L. fabarum* acted in a genotype-specific manner (G × G interactions between *H. defensa* and *L. fabarum*). These results confirm that strong species- and genotype-specificity of symbiont-conferred resistance is

indeed a hallmark of wild *A. f. fabae* populations, and they are consistent with symbiont-mediated adaptation of aphids to the parasitoids posing the highest risk.' (1539 chars) serialnumber => protected'1010-061X' (9 chars) doi => protected'10.1093/jeb/voad013' (19 chars) uid => protected32442 (integer) _localizedUid => protected32442 (integer)modified _languageUid => protectedNULL _versionedUid => protected32442 (integer)modified pid => protected124 (integer) 3 =>

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mbiont?conferred resistance' (105 chars) journal => protected'Molecular Ecology' (17 chars) year => protected2023 (integer) volume => protected32 (integer) issue => protected'14' (2 chars) startpage => protected'4063' (4 chars) otherpage => protected'4077' (4 chars) categories => protected'balancing selection; defensive symbiosis; *Hamiltonella defensa*; host-parasit

e interactions; symbiont-conferred resistance; trade-offs' (133 chars) description => protected'Parasite-mediated selection can rapidly drive up resistance levels in host populations, but fixation of resistance traits may be prevented by costs of resistance. Black bean aphids (*Aphis fabae*) benefit from increased resistance to parasitoids when carrying the defensive bacterial endosymbiont *Hamiltonella defensa*. However, due to fitness costs that come with symbiont infection, symbiont-conferred resistance may result in either a net benefit or a net cost to the aphid host, depending on parasitoid presence as well as on the general ecological context. Balancing selection may therefore explain why in natural aphid populations, *H. defensa* is often found at intermediate frequencies. Here we present a 2-year field study where we set out to look for signatures of balancing selection in natural aphid populations. We collected temporally well-resolved data on the prevalence of *H. defensa* in *A. f. fabae* and estimated the risk imposed by parasitoids using sentinel hosts. Despite a marked and consistent early-summer peak in parasitism risk, and significant changes in symbiont prevalence over time, we found just a weak correlation between parasitism risk and *H. defensa* frequency dynamics. *H. defensa* prevalence in the populations under study was, in fact, better explained by the number of heat days that previous aphid generations were exposed to. Our study grants an unprecedentedly well-resolved insight into the dynamics of endosymbiont and parasitoid communities of *A. f. fabae* populations, and it adds to a growing body of empirical evidence suggesting that not only parasitism risk, but rather multifarious selection is shaping *H. defensa*

prevalence in the wild.' (1777 chars) serialnumber => protected'0962-1083' (9 chars) doi => protected'10.1111/mec.16976' (17 chars) uid => protected30906 (integer) _localizedUid => protected30906 (integer)modified _languageUid => protectedNULL _versionedUid => protected30906 (integer)modified pid => protected124 (integer) 4 => Snowflake\Publications\Domain\Model\Publicationprototypepersistent entity (uid=23917, pid=124) originalId => protected23917 (integer) authors => protected'Gimmi, E.; Vorburger, C.' (34 chars) title => protected'Strong genotype-by-genotype interactions between aphid-defensive symbionts a

nd parasitoids persist across different biotic environments' (135 chars) journal =>

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ite coevolution; parasitoids; resistance' (116 chars) description => protected'The dynamics of coevolution between hosts and parasites are influenced by their genetic interactions. Highly specific interactions, where the outcome of an infection depends on the precise combination of host and parasite genotypes (G x G interactions), have the potential to maintain genetic variation by inducing negative frequency-dependent selection. The importance of this effect also rests on whether such interactions are consistent across different environments or modified by environmental variation (G x G x E interaction). In the black bean aphid, *Aphis fabae*, resistance to its parasitoid *Lysiphlebus fabarum* is largely determined by the possession of a heritable bacterial endosymbiont, *Hamiltonella defensa*, with strong G x G interactions between *H*. *defensa* and *L*. *fabarum*. A key environmental factor in this system is the host plant on which the aphid feeds. Here, we exposed genetically identical aphids harbouring three different strains of *H*. *defensa* to three asexual genotypes of *L*. *fabarum* and measured parasitism success on three common host plants of *A*. *fabae*, namely *Vicia faba*, *Chenopodium album* and *Beta vulgaris*. As expected, we observed the pervasive G x G interaction between *H*. *defensa* and *L*. *fabarum*, but despite strong main effects of the host plants on average rates of parasitism, this interaction was not altered significantly by the host plant environment (no G x G x E interaction). The symbiont-conferred specificity of resistance is thus likely to mediate the coevolution of *A*. *fabae* and *L*. *fabarum*, even when played out across diverse host plants of the aphid.' (1846 chars) serialnumber => protected'1010-061X' (9 chars) doi => protected'10.1111/jeb.13953' (17 chars) uid => protected23917 (integer) _localizedUid => protected23917 (integer)modified _languageUid => protectedNULL _versionedUid => protected23917 (integer)modified pid => protected124 (integer) Gimmi, E. L. (2023) Defensive symbiosis in the wild - patterns and dynamics of symbiont-conferred resistance in natural host-parasitoid communities, 175 p, doi:10.3929/ethz-b-000617575, Institutional Repository

Gimmi, E.; Wallisch, J.; Vorburger, C. (2024) Ecological divergence despite common mating sites: genotypes and symbiotypes shed light on cryptic diversity in the black bean aphid species complex, *Heredity*, 132, 320-330, doi:10.1038/s41437-024-00687-0, Institutional Repository

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Gimmi, E.; Vorburger, C. (2021) Strong genotype-by-genotype interactions between aphid-defensive symbionts and parasitoids persist across different biotic environments, *Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, 34(12), 1944-1953, doi:10.1111/jeb.13953, Institutional Repository

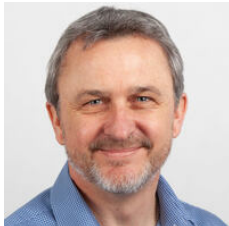
Finanzierung / Kooperationen

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Links

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