

The role of habitat and evolutionary allometry in the morphological
differentiation of *Pristurus* geckos (OR: Evolution along allometric
lines of least resistance: Morphological differentiation in *Pristurus*
geckos)

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35 **Abstract**

36 asdf

Introduction

Understanding how phenotypic diversity evolves, and elucidating the forces that generate and maintain this diversity, are major goals in evolutionary biology. Because adaptive evolution is the product of natural selection, changes in ecological selection pressures are expected to affect the evolutionary trajectory of phenotypic traits that facilitate an organism’s survival in their habitat. Evolutionary theory predicts that differing habitats will exert unique ecological selection pressures on organisms, resulting in associations between ecological and phenotypic traits. Indeed, species inhabiting differing habitats often display functional, behavioral, or phenotypic differences, that have presumably been the result of adaptive diversification in their respective ecological habitats (Collar et al. 2010; Kaliontzopoulou et al. 2015; Price et al. 2015; Martinez et al. 2021; Kolmann et al. 2022).

One possible evolutionary outcome of ecological specialization is that organisms inhabiting similar environments display common phenotypic characteristics. When such patterns occur repeatedly (e.g., Losos 1992; Schluter and McPhail 1992), this convergent evolution is treated as strong evidence of adaptation. Indeed the ecomorphological paradigm (sensu Arnold 1983) is predicated, in part, on such cases, which emphasize the strong association between the phenotypic traits that organisms display (morphological, behavioral, or physiological), and the ecological characteristics of their habitat that mediate organismal performance. In vertebrates, ecomorphological trends have been well studied in numerous taxonomic groups, and include the emblematic ‘ecomorphs’ of Caribbean *Anolis* lizards that exploit different microhabitats (Losos 1992, 2009; Mahler et al. 2013), differential beak morphology in species of Darwin’s finches (Schluter and Grant 1984; Grant and Grant 2006; Reaney et al. 2020), the recurring phenotypes of African lake cichlids across ecological regimes (Albertson and Kocher 2001; Urban et al. 2022), and the distinct body forms of freshwater fishes in benthic and limnetic habitats (Jastrebski and Robinson 2004; Berner et al. 2008; Stuart et al. 2017) among others.

However, while the patterns of morphological differences in distinct ecological contexts have been well

documented, less-well understood is how this differentiation has been influenced by the covariance between body parts resulting from body size variation (i.e., allometry). It has long been recognized that the interrelationships among traits can have a strong influence on how phenotypic evolution proceeds, as trait correlations influence the degree to which phenotypic variation is exposed to selection (Wagner and Altenberg 1996). Thus, the integration among traits can constrain phenotypic change in certain directions, or enhance variation along other phenotypic axes (Schluter 1996; Wagner and Altenberg 1996; Wagner and Zhang 2011; Klingenberg and Marugán-Lobón 2013; Goswami et al. 2014, 2016; Felice et al. 2018). Further, because nearly all linear traits covary strongly with overall body size (Jolicœur 1963; Bookstein 2022), allometric trends could be considered the quintessential measure of phenotypic integration. Thus, identifying whether allometric patterns differ across habitats, and how such patterns of trait covariation affect ecomorphological trends among species utilizing those habitats, remains an important understudied-question worthy of investigation.

The Afro-Arabian geckos in the genus *Pristurus* afford the opportunity to elucidate the interdigitating effects of allometry and habitat specialization on clade-level patterns of phenotypic diversity. Prior work on this system (Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a) revealed that the colonization of ground habitats has been a trigger of morphological change, specifically reflected in an increase in body size and shape disparity. Interestingly, some ground-dwelling species are among the largest of the genus and also show increased relative head sizes and limb proportions, while some other species with this ecological specialization have evolved to be among the smallest of the group. Additionally, among the species exploiting rocky habitats (the most common ecological feature in *Pristurus*), there are also species with both considerably large and small body sizes (Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a). What remains unexplored, however, is how the evolution of body shape is related to differences in body size and whether habitat specialization has an impact in this shape-size relationship.

In this study, we employed a combination of multivariate morphometric and phylogenetic comparative analysis to interrogate macroevolutionary patterns of evolutionary allometry in *Pristurus* geckos of Afro-Arabia. Using phenotypic, phylogenetic, and ecological data, we first characterized allometric trends in body form in the group, to discern the extent to which allometric patterns differed across

species occupying distinct ecological habitats. We then examined changes in allometric trends across the phylogeny, and linked these patterns to overall phenotypic integration, diversification in morphospace, and ~~in relation to habitat utilization~~ habitat utilization among taxa. Overall our results demonstrate that the interplay between ecological specialization and differing allometric trajectories in species with disparate body size may have a determinant role in shaping the phenotypic evolution and hence in adaptive dynamics ~~at the clade level~~ in this clade.

Materials and Methods

Data

We used a combination of phenotypic, phylogenetic, and ecological data to characterize and evaluate intra- and interspecific allometric trends. The data utilized here were obtained from our prior work on this system (Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a, 2022), and are briefly described here. First we used a time-dated, molecular phylogeny that included all members of the genus *Pristurus*, including several currently undescribed taxa. The tree was estimated in a Bayesian framework, using five mitochondrial markers, six nuclear markers, and 21 calibration points (for details see Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2022). Next we categorized each species as belonging to one of three ecological groups (ground, rock, or tree), based on descriptions of habitat use found in the literature (see Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a). Finally, we obtained a phenotypic data set containing body size (snout-vent length: SVL) and eight linear measurements (Figure 1) that described overall body form: trunk length (TrL), head length (HL), head width (HW), head height (HH), humerus length (Lhu), ulna length (Lun), femur length (Lfe), and tibia length (Ltb) (Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a). We restricted our study to those species represented by nine or more individuals; resulting in a dataset of 687 individuals from 25 species (individuals per species: $\mu = 27$; min = 9, max = 56). Species in the phenotypic dataset were then matched to the phylogeny, which was subsequently pruned to arrive at the final topology. All measurements were log-transformed prior to statistical analyses. Additional details regarding data collection and formal descriptions of each linear measurement may be found in the original sources (see Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a, 2022). The data are found on DRYAD: <https://doi.org/10.5061/dryad.xwdbrv1f6> (Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021b).

Statistical and Comparative Analyses

We conducted a series of analyses to interrogate allometric trends, [patterns of integration](#), and macroevolutionary changes in allometry, relative to differentiation in body form. First we characterized evolutionary allometry in the genus by performing a phylogenetic multivariate regression of body form on size, using the species means as data. We then performed an analogous procedure at the individual level, regressing body form on size using our entire dataset. From both the species-level (phylogenetic) and the individual-level regression models, we obtained the set of regression coefficients, and calculated the difference between them to describe the extent to which patterns of allometry at the individual level were concordant with evolutionary allometric trends across species.

Next we used the individual dataset to determine whether allometric trends in body form differed across habitat groups. This was accomplished by performing a multivariate analysis of covariance, with body size (*SVL*), *habitat*, and $SVL \times habitat$ as model effects. Significance was evaluated using 999 iterations of a permutation procedure, where residuals from a reduced model were randomly permuted in each permutation (RRPP), model statistics were recalculated, and used to generate empirical null sampling distributions to evaluate the observed test statistics (following Freedman and Lane 1983; Collyer and Adams 2007; Collyer et al. 2015). We then compared the multivariate allometric vectors for each habitat group by calculating pairwise differences in their angular direction in morphospace, and evaluating these relative to empirical sampling distributions obtained through RRPP (Collyer and Adams 2007; Adams and Collyer 2009; Collyer and Adams 2013). Patterns of multivariate allometry relative to body size were visualized via regression scores (Drake and Klingenberg 2008) and predicted lines (Adams and Nistri 2010), based on the coefficients and fitted values from the linear model described above.

We then examined changes in allometric trends across the phylogeny. Here we treated the head dimensions and limb dimensions separately, as allometric trends could potentially differ between these body regions due to differential functional or selective constraints (Kaliontzopoulou et al. 2010). Because both the head and limb data were multivariate, we first performed a partial least

squares analysis (Rohlf and Corti 2000) of the head traits versus SVL, and the limb traits versus SVL, to describe the direction of maximal covariation between each body region and size. PLS scores from each analysis were obtained, and species-specific slopes describing the extent of head and limb allometry within each species were extracted from an analysis of covariance modeled as: $PLS1_{head} \sim SVL * species$ and $PLS1_{limb} \sim SVL * species$ respectively. The species-specific allometric slopes were then mapped on the phylogeny of *Pristurus* using a Brownian motion model of evolution, to qualitatively evaluate shifts in allometry across the phylogeny for the group (for a similar approach see Adams and Nistri 2010).

Next, because allometry describes the extent to which traits covary with size and with each other (i.e., integration), we conducted an analysis of integration. Here we characterized the extent of morphological integration in body form for individuals within each habitat group. Integration was estimated by summarizing the dispersion of eigenvalues of the trait covariance matrix (sensu Pavlicev et al. 2009). This measure (V_{rel}) was subsequently converted to an effect size (a Z-score), which quantified the strength of morphological integration (see Conaway and Adams 2022). We then performed a series of two-sample tests to compare the strength of morphological integration across habitat groups. Additionally and for comparison, we repeated these analyses on the set of size-standardized trait data, found as a set of shape ratios (sensu Mosimann 1970) where each trait was divided by body size (Supplemental Information).

Finally, to relate within-species allometric trends with patterns of phenotypic diversification in the group we generated a phylomorphospace, based on the size-standardized species means obtained from a phylogenetic regression (see Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a). Here, phenotypic similarities among species, relative to their phylogenetic relationships and habitat affiliations, were observed. A similar phylomorphospace was constructed for species means not corrected for body size, and the phenotypic disparity among species means in each habitat was calculated and subsequently compared (Supplemental Information). All analyses were conducted in R 4.2.1 (R Core Team 2022), using RRPP version 1.3.1 (Collyer and Adams 2018; Collyer and Adams 2022) and geomorph 4.0.4 (Baken et al. 2021), and scripts written by the authors (available at XXX).

Results

Using phylogenetic regression, we found significant evolutionary allometry in body form across species ($N_{sp} = 25$; $F = 217.9$; $Z = 5.53$; $P < 0.001$). Likewise, when allometry in body form was examined across individuals, a similar pattern was observed ($N_{ind} = 687$; $F = 7910.8$; $Z = 9.20$; $P < 0.001$). Further, the vectors of regression coefficients between the two analyses were highly correlated ($\rho = 0.94$) and were oriented in nearly parallel directions in morphospace ($\theta = 1.49^\circ$). This revealed that the pattern of multivariate allometry across individuals was concordant with macroevolutionary trends of interspecific allometry among species of *Pristurus* across the phylogeny.

Our analyses also exposed significant differences in the allometry of body form among *Pristurus* utilizing distinct habitats (Table 1). Here, comparisons of multivariate allometric vectors identified that ground-dwelling *Pristurus* displayed a distinct allometric trend as compared with *Pristurus* occupying both the rock and tree habitats (Table 2). In addition, allometric patterns in both rock and tree habitats were similar to the multivariate line of isometry (Figure 2), while patterns of multivariate allometry in ground-dwelling *Pristurus* was decidedly steeper. Inspection of the regression coefficients for each trait (Supplemental Information) confirmed the steeper allometric coefficients for all head and limb traits in ground-dwelling *Pristurus* as compared with rock and tree-dwelling taxa, corroborating this result. Taken together, these findings implied that larger individuals of ground-dwelling *Pristurus* species displayed proportionately larger heads and limbs, as compared with large individuals in taxa utilizing other habitat types. A visualization of multivariate allometric trends (Figure 2) confirmed these statistical findings, and indicated that the allometric trajectory in ground-dwelling animals was more extreme as compared with either rock or tree-dwelling *Pristurus*.

Examination of patterns of trait covariation revealed strong levels of morphological integration within each habitat type ($Z_{ground} = 3.97$; $Z_{rock} = 3.72$; $Z_{tree} = 2.15$). Further, two-sample tests revealed that the strength of morphological integration was significantly greater in ground-dwelling *Pristurus* than either those utilizing rock ($Z_{Ground-Rock} = 6.59$; $P < 0.001$) or tree habitats

($Z_{Ground-Tree} = 11.17$; $P < 0.001$). *Pristurus* utilizing tree habitats displayed the lowest levels of integration, which were also significantly less than in the rock habitat ($Z_{Rock-Tree} = 7.19$; $P < 0.001$). When size was accounted for in the data, levels of integration dropped considerably, though the overall pattern and differences among habitat groups remained the same (Supplemental Information).

When allometric patterns were mapped on the phylogeny, traitgrams elucidated that changes in allometric trends were not concentrated to specific regions of the phylogeny (Figure 3). Rather, increases and decreases in allometry of both the head traits and the limb traits occurred repeatedly (see also Supplemental Information). When these patterns were viewed relative to body size, large ground-dwelling species tended to display steeper head allometry as compared to large rock-dwelling species, who displayed shallower head allometry (Figure 3A). Likewise, a similar pattern was observed when comparing small species utilizing these habitats. In contrast, large ground-dwelling species exhibited intermediate patterns of limb allometry, and small species in general were more variable in such patterns (Figure 3B). Inspection of traitgrams thus revealed some degree of discordance in patterns of allometry across body regions; a pattern evidenced by the relatively low correlation between slopes representing head and limb allometry respectively ($\rho = 0.42$).

~~When~~ Finally, when body shape differentiation in *Pristurus* was viewed in phylomorphospace (Figure 4), we found broad overlap among habitat groups, though arboreal (tree-dwelling) species were somewhat more separated in morphospace. Rock-dwelling species occupied a slightly larger region of morphospace as compared with the other groups, though this pattern was not statistically significant (Supplemental Information). Intriguingly, when viewed in relation to body size, large *Pristurus* species were not localized to a particular region of morphospace, nor were smaller species. Instead, the largest rock-dwelling species were found in close proximity to the smallest ground-dwelling species, indicating that they were similar in overall body shape. Likewise, the smaller rock-dwelling species were found close to large ground-dwelling species in morphospace, indicating they displayed similar body shapes as well. ~~Finally, integrating~~ Thus, synthesizing the patterns revealed in the phylomorphospace with those identified in our earlier analyses revealed a complex interplay between

body shape, body size, habitat use, morphological integration, and multivariate allometry; where species with similar body shapes displayed differing overall size, were found in distinct habitats, and exhibited different allometric trends.

Discussion

- First paragraph; restate topic/questions (see last par of Intro); summarize general findings ...
 - something about linking allometry and phenotypic diversification?
- result 1: ~~implication~~ allometry; overall trend among species nearly identical to that among individuals. Thus, patterns of static and evolutionary allometry are consistent in *Pristurus*... Something else about this
- result 2: ~~implication~~ Allometry differs among habitat groups: ‘steeper’ allometry in Ground-dwelling (implication: proportionately larger heads and longer limbs in species at larger body sizes).
- result 3: ~~implication~~ Morphological integration differs among habitat groups. Strongest in ground-dwelling; weakest in tree-dwelling. SOME MEANING (combined with allometric trend implies that patterns of trait covariation are more constrained within ground-dwelling.... Thus, differences in body form are most likely found along this primary axis... (harken to Schluter evolution along lines of least resistance)
 - Additionally, rank-order of magnitude of integration across habitat groups corresponds with the range of body sizes in each: ground-dwelling display the largest size-range, while tree-dwelling the least (Supp. Information). On the one hand this matches the expectation that much of the integration observed in *Pristurus* is the result of allometric trends.... And the fact that levels of integration drop so precipitously when data are size-standardized are in accord with this interpretation. Nevertheless, when size is accounted for, the rank-order of magnitudes of integration remain the same, implying that ground-dwelling *Pristurus* are still relatively constrained in patterns of trait covariation as compared with the other two groups.

– This notion was further supported when viewing the phylomorphospace of the species means not adjusted for size (SI). Here (and not surprisingly), PC1 is dominated by size, with small species at one end and larger species at the other. More importantly however, is that the disparity among species utilizing different habitats differed significantly in this space. Here, ground-dwelling displayed significantly greater phenotypic disparity than did the other groups (SI).

- result 4: morphospace: Thus there was a reciprocal relationship between body shape and body size across ground-dwelling and rock-dwelling species. SOMEHOW TIE THIS TO integration (DCA pondering this one)
- one interesting... head vs. (correlation of head vs. limb slopes: 0.42. Pretty low. Implies some sort of differential something here, resulting in distinct allometric patterns for these two body regions. SImlar to Antigoni's work (and refs therein). IMPLICATION: tie this into integration/modularity. Less integrated across the whole organism, and more modular... Future studies should examine this.
- In conclusion... -Synthesizing these patterns together ... (summarize: steeper allometry, higher integration, greater disparity in body size and body form all in ground-dwelling species). TOgether the patterns uncovered in our study imply that phenotypic diversification among ground-dwelling *Pristurus* follows tightly along its allometric trajectory, as evidenced by the higher disparity and stronger morphological integration... some reference back to Goswami 'fly in a tube' paper. Thus, *Pristurus* body forms appear to diversify along allometric* lines of least resistance... (Schluter ref again)

~~closing paragraph~~

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Table 1: Multivariate analysis of covariance describing variation in body form in *Pristurus*.

	Df	SS	MS	Rsqr	F	Z	Pr(>F)
svl	1	516.036559	516.0365588	0.9203096	10188.69842	9.490057	0.001
habitat	2	6.218510	3.1092552	0.0110902	61.38957	9.322480	0.001
svl:habitat	2	3.974307	1.9871536	0.0070879	39.23464	7.077264	0.001
Residuals	681	34.491245	0.0506479	0.0615124			
Total	686	560.720622					

Table 2: Pairwise comparisons of multivariate allometry vectors. Effect sizes ($Z_{\theta_{12}}$) based on pairwise differences in angular direction are below the diagonal, and their corresponding significance levels are above diagonal. Significant values in bold.

	Ground	Rock	Tree
Ground	0	0.001	0.001
Rock	6.872	0	0.261
Tree	3.657	0.649	0

Figures

Figure 1. Linear Measurements used in this study. SVL = snout-vent length, TL = trunk length, HL = head length, HW = head width, HH = head height, Lhu = humerus length, Lun = ulna length, Lfe = femur length, Ltb = tibia length (for details see Tejero-Cicuéndez et al. 2021a).

Figure 2. Plot of regression scores and predicted lines representing the relationship between linear body measurements and size (SVL). Individuals are colored by habitat use: ground (beige), rock (dark purple), and tree (magenta). Isometric trend represented by the dashed line.

Figure 3. Traitgrams showing the evolution of body size (SVL) through time based on the phylogenetic tree of *Pristurus*. Colors represent an evolutionary mapping of regression slopes describing the relationship of (A) head morphology versus body size, and (B) limb proportions versus body size (see text for descriptions). Species names are colored by habitat use: ground (beige), rock (dark purple), and tree (magenta).

Figure 4. Phylomorphospace of *Pristurus*, based on residuals from a phylogenetic regression of body measurements on size (SVL). Species means are colored by habitat use: ~~ground~~-ground (beige), rock (dark purple), and tree (magenta). Large and small rock-dwelling and ground-dwelling are highlighted with darker colors to highlight their differentiation and relative positions in morphospace.

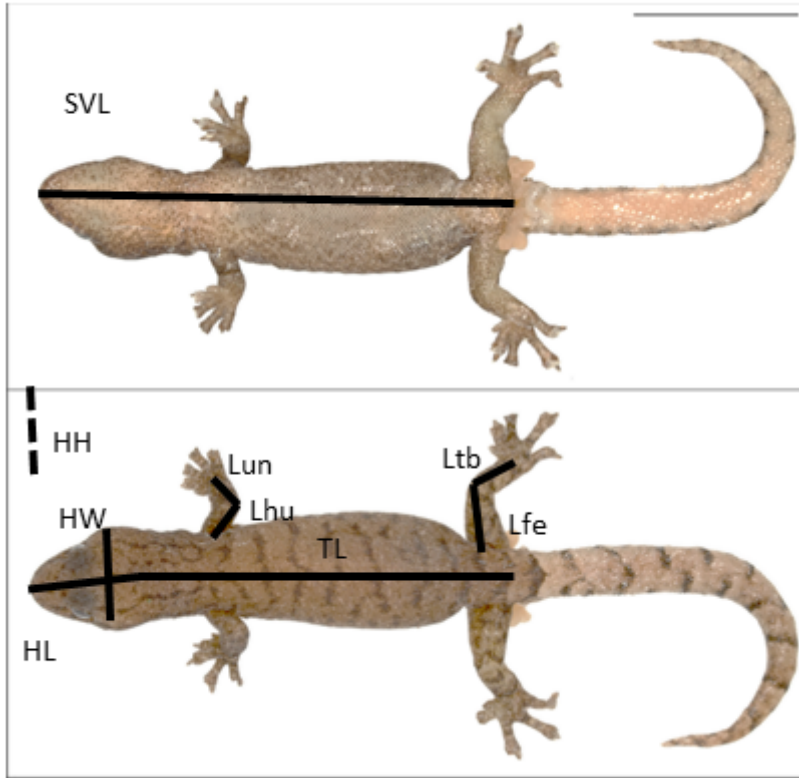


Figure 1: Linear Measurements used in this study. SVL = snout-vent length, TL = trunk length, HL = head length, HW = head width, HH = head height, Lhu = humerus length, Lun = ulna length, Lfe = femur length, Ltb = tibia length (for details see Tejero-Cicu'endez et al. 2021a).

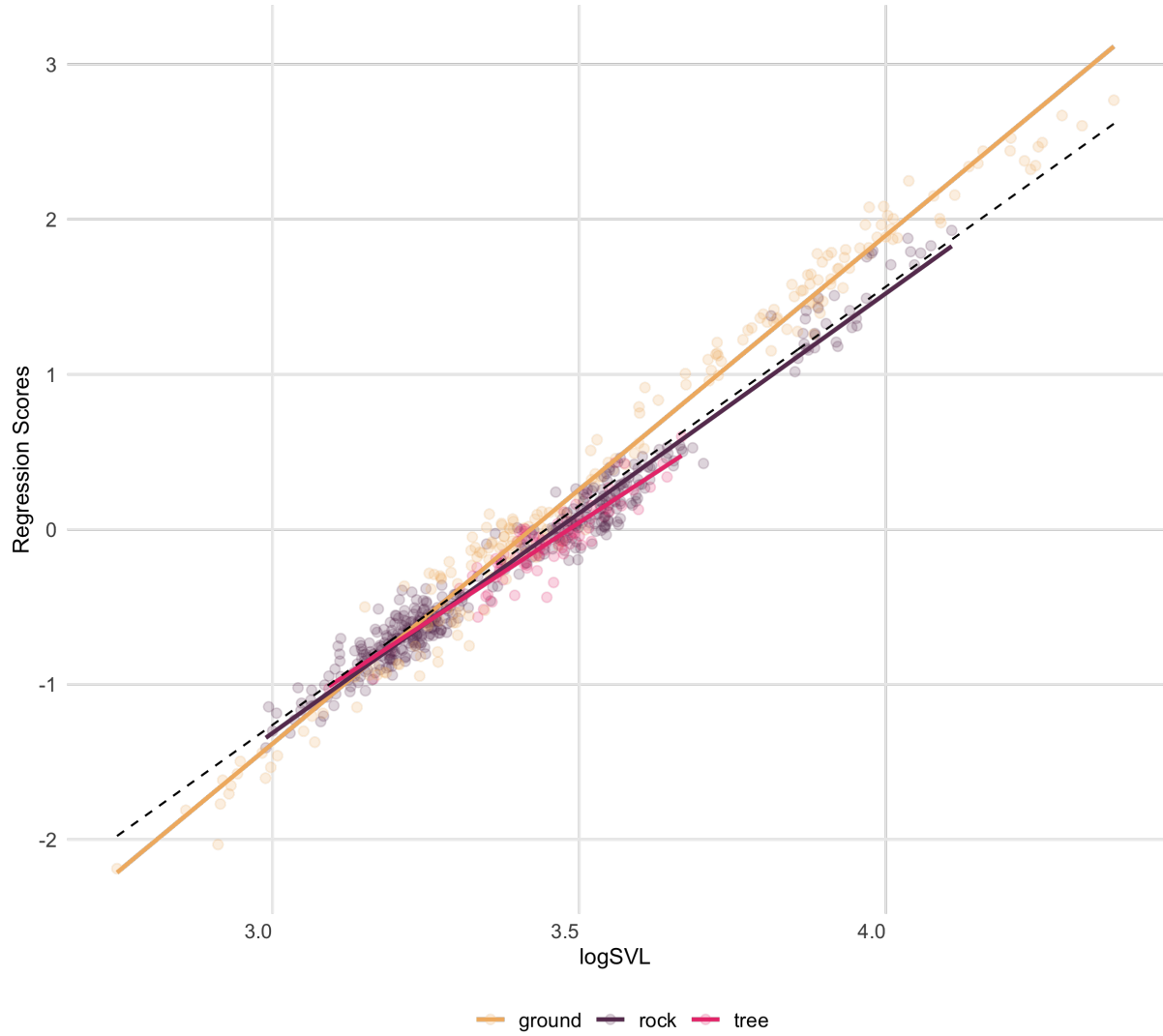


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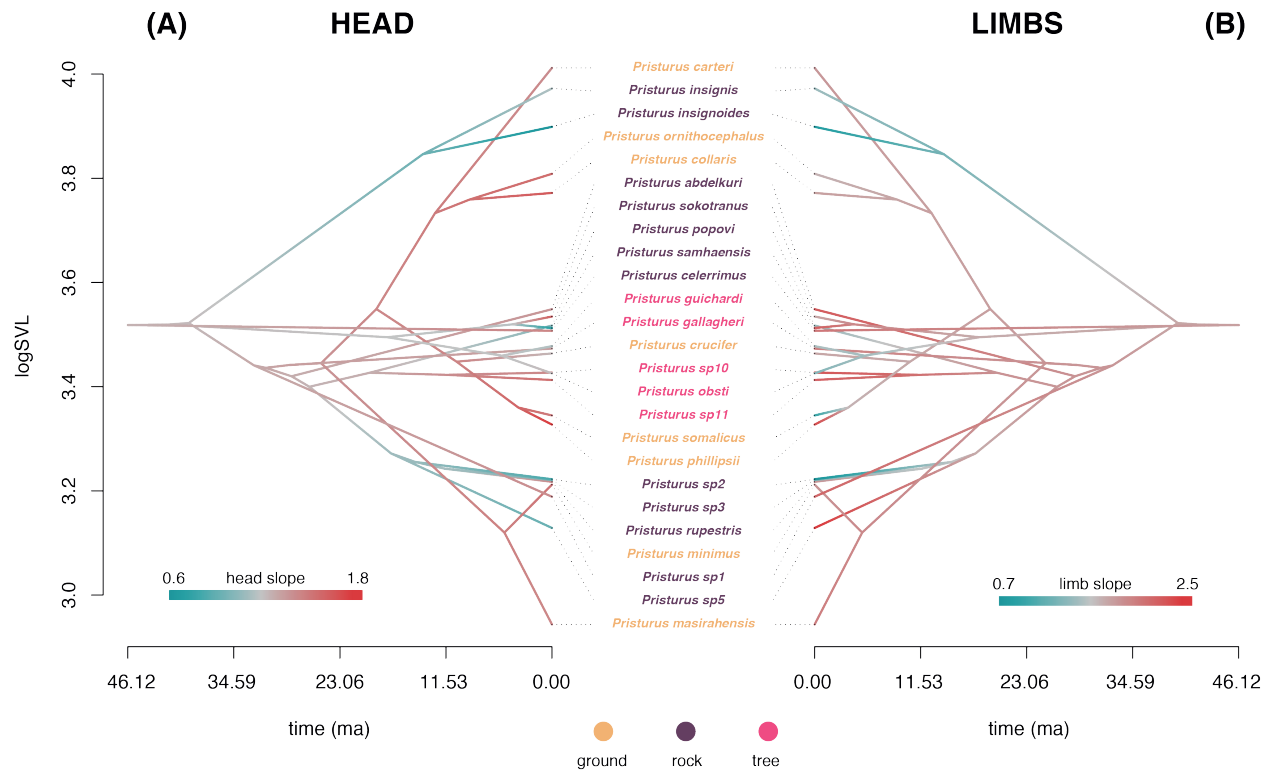


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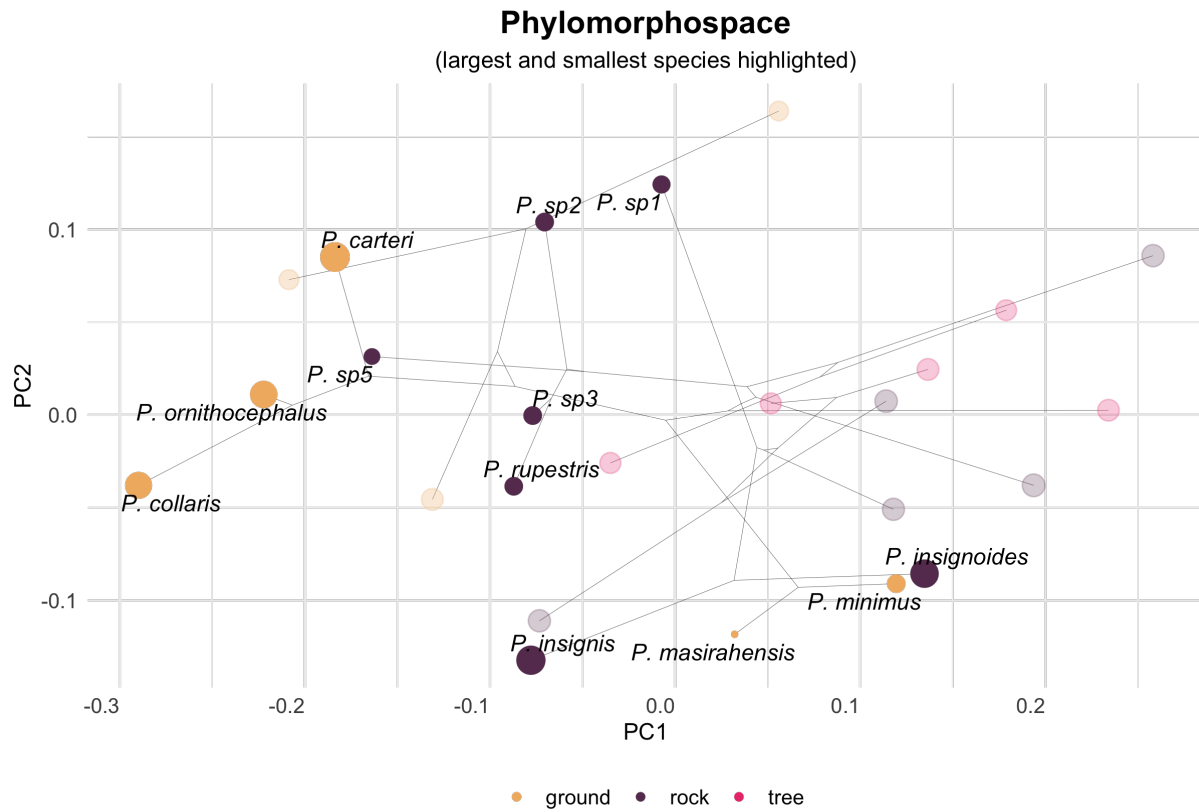


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