# **Coupling between tolerance and resistance differs between related *Eimeria* parasite species: implications for coevolution with their mouse hosts**

# Abstract

Resistance (host capacity to reduce parasite burden) and tolerance (host capacity to reduce impact on its health for a given parasite burden) manifest two different lines of defenses. Tolerance can be uncoupled from resistance, traded-off against it, or the two are positively correlated because of redundancy in underlying (immune) processes. We here tested whether different parasite species could show difference in this coupling between tolerance and resistance.

We tested this in infections with two closely related parasite species of genus *Eimeria.* We measured proxies for resistance ((inverse of) number of parasite transmission stages (oocysts) per gram of feces at the day of maximal shedding) and tolerance (slope per host strain of maximum relative weight loss compared to day of infection on number of oocysts per gram of feces at the day of maximal shedding) in four inbred mouse strains belonging to two mouse subspecies, *Mus musculus domesticus* and *M. m. musculus*.

We found a negative correlation between resistance and tolerance against *E. falciformis*, while the two are uncoupled against *E. ferrisi*. This is indication that resistance and tolerance are constraint by each other for the first parasite species, and evolve independently in different mouse genotypes for the latter. This might be explained by intrinsic parasite components, e.g. length of life cycle and replication rate. We argue that host parameters can be studied largely irrespective of parasite strains if coupling is absent (*E. ferrisi*) but host-parasite coevolution is best studied in a system with coupled tolerance and resistance (*E. falciformis*).

# Introduction

Host defense mechanisms evolve to alleviate the detrimental effect of parasites. They can be categorised into two components: resistance and tolerance (Råberg, Graham, & Read, 2009). Resistance is the ability of a host to reduce parasite burden, resulting from defense against parasite infection or proliferation early after infection (Schmid-Hempel, 2013). Its resulting negative effect on parasite fitness can lead to antagonistic coevolution. According to theoretical models, fluctuating host and parasite genotypes arise, and balancing selection maintains resistance alleles polymorphic (Boots, Best, Miller, & White, 2008; Roy & Kirchner 2000). Resistance has been the classical “catch all” measure for host-parasite systems, but recently it has been shown to be incomplete, especially with respect to potential fitness effects on the host (Kutzer & Armitage, 2016; Råberg et al., 2009).

Disease tolerance (not to be confused from “immunological tolerance”, unresponsiveness to self antigens; Medzhitov, Schneider, & Soares, 2012) is the ability of the host to limit the impact of parasite on its fitness (Råberg et al., 2009; Vale & Little, 2012; Kutzer & Armitage, 2016). This defense mechanism improves, or at least does not deteriorate, the fitness of the parasite and tolerance alleles are thus predicted by theoretical models to evolve to fixation due to positive feedback loops (Boots et al., 2008; Restif & Koella, 2004; Roy & Kirchner 2000). From a mechanistic perspective tolerance alleviates direct or indirect (e.g. excessive immune response underlying resistance against parasites, called immunopathology; Graham, Allen, & Read, 2005) damage caused by parasites (Råberg et al., 2009). Tolerance mechanisms include modulation of inflammatory response (Ayres & Schneider, 2012), tissue repair (stress response, damage repair and cellular regeneration mechanisms; Soares, Teixeira, & Moita, 2017), and compensation of parasite‐induced damage by increase of reproductive effort (Baucom & de Roode, 2011). The resulting metabolic costs for the host associated with parasitism, with resistance and with tolerance determine the optimal value of both immune defenses (Sheldon & Verhulst, 1996).

Resistance and tolerance can be genetically and physiologically independent, involving entirely different proximate mechanisms. Lack of correlation between both defenses was shown for example in monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) infected by the protozoan parasite *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*. This study found genetic variation in resistance between butterflies families, but a fixed tolerance (Lefèvre, Williams, & de Roode, 2010). Similarly, no correlation could be find between resistance and tolerance for the fish *Leuciscus burdigalensis* in response to infection with its parasite *Tracheliastes polycolpus*. The authors explain the decoupling of both defenses by the fact that, in this system, tolerance likely involves wound repair rather than immune regulation, hence resistance and tolerance mechanisms are likely independant (Mazé-Guilmo, Loot, Páez, Lefèvre, & Blanchet, 2014).

In other systems, the two lines of defense can rely on similar genes and mechanisms, and be positively correlated. This has been shown in defense against herbivory by the plant model *Arabidopsis thaliana*: chemical defense (resistance) and enhanced (re-)growth of tissue (tolerance) involve the same metabolic pathway, and are thus simultaneously induced by herbivory (Mesa, Scholes, Juvik, & Paige, 2017). Similarly, genetic association studies of resistance and tolerance of *Drosophila melanogaster* against the bacterium *Providencia rettgeri* have shown genetically positively correlated effects (Howick & Lazzaro, 2017).

Finally, resistance and tolerance can be negatively constrained by each other, either through genetic linkage disequilibrium or antagonistic pleiotropy. Redundancy between resistance and tolerance results then in metabolic trade-offs (Sheldon & Verhulst, 1996; Restif & Koella, 2004; Råberg et al., 2009). Accordingly, resistance and tolerance have been found negatively correlated in empirical studies. Inbred laboratory mouse strains lose weight upon infection with *Plasmodium chabaudi.* The extent of this impact on host health is negatively correlated with the peak number of parasites found in the blood (Råberg, Sim, & Read, 2007), meaning that mouse strains with higher resistance present lower tolerance. Similarly, infections of sea trout (Salmo trutta trutta) and Atlantic salmon (Salmo salar) with the trematode Diplostomum pseudospathaceum showed that resistance and tolerance were negatively correlated when assessing mean levels of both traits in different host populations (Klemme & Karvonen, 2016).

We have seen that resistance and tolerance can be (1) uncoupled (independent), (2) positively correlated (involving same genes and mechanisms), or (3) negatively correlated (due to metabolic traded-off). Understanding this coupling has two major implications. From a practical “measurement” perspective we can ask whether tolerance can be predicted from resistance, easier to measure (e.g. in field sampling). Indeed, a large number of studies draw conclusions about the impact of parasite on host fitness solely based on resistance, an approach potentially misleading (Baird & Goüy de Bellocq, 2019). Moreover, in a evolutionary perspective, this might determine whether coevolution between host and parasite can be expected. Indeed, Janzen (1980) notes that not all parasite-host systems are coevolving. For example, the presence in host of defenses efficient against a given parasite are not necessarily produced in response to this parasite, but could be the product of formerly present, totally independent, parasites. In a given system, if tolerance can evolve independently of resistance, the host fitness is decoupled from the parasite fitness, and coevolution is less likely to occur.

~~We here hypothesize that c~~oupling between resistance and tolerance (or absence thereof) depends not only on host factors, but could also be conditioned by parasite intrinsic factors. We tested differences in the resistance-tolerance coupling upon infection with two closely related parasite species. We infected four inbred mouse strains representative of two house mouse subspecies, *M. m. domesticus* and *M. m. musculus*, with three parasite isolates representative of two naturally occuring parasite species, the protozoan parasite *Eimeria ferrisi* and *E. falciformis* (Jarquín-Díaz, Balard, Jost, et al. 2019). *Eimeria*spp. are monoxenous parasites that expand asexually and reproduce sexually in intestinal epithelial cells, leading to malabsorption of nutrients, tissue damage and weight loss (Chapman et al., 2013). The evolutionary history of these different *Eimeria* species in the two house mouse subspecies is unknown and it is unclear whether subspecies-specific adaptation exists in one or the other. We tested (1) if coupling between resistance and tolerance of each host differs between both parasite species; and (2) local adaptation of *E. ferrisi* using a parasite isolated in a *M. m. domesticus* host and one in a *M. m. musculus* host. We expected that local (host sub-species) adaptation would be more likely if resistance and tolerance are coupled for this parasite.

# Material and methods

## Parasite isolates

The three parasite isolates used in this study were isolated from feces of three different *M. m. domesticus/M. m. musculus* hybrid mice captured in Brandenburg, Germany, in 2016 (capture permit No. 2347/35/2014). Hybrid index (HI) of each individual wild-caught mouse was calculated to account for the admixture of mouse genomes as a proportion of *M. m. musculus* alleles in a set of 14 diagnostic markers (Balard et al., 2020). The parasite isolates belong to both the most prevalent *Eimeria* species in this area, namely *E. ferrisi* (isolates Brandenburg64 and Brandenburg139) and *E. falciformis* (isolate Brandenburg88)(Jarquín-Díaz et al., 2019). Isolate Brandenburg64 was isolated in a 92% *M. m. domesticus* individual (HI=0.08), isolate Brandenburg139 in a 85% *M. m. musculus* (HI=0.85) and isolate Brandenburg88 in a 80% *M. m. domesticus* (HI=0.2). Pre-patency and the peak day of parasite shedding for these isolates were estimated during infection in NMRI laboratory mice (Al-khlifeh et al., 2019) which were also used for serial passaging of all the isolates. Parasite infective forms (oocysts) were recovered by flotation in saturated NaCl solution followed by washing and observation under light microscope (following the protocole described in Clerc, Fenton, Babayan, & Pedersen, 2019) and stored at room temperature in 1mL of 2% potassium dichromate for a maximum of 2 months before infection of the wild-derived mouse strains. Oocysts were allowed to sporulate 10 days before infection in a water bath at 30°C.

## Mouse strains

We used four wild-derived inbred mouse strains: two representing *M. m. domesticus*: **SCHUNT** (Locality: Schweben, Hessen, Germany [N: 50° 26’, E: 9° 36’] (Martincová, Ďureje, Kreisinger, Macholán, & Piálek, 2019)) and **STRA** (Locality: Straas, Bavaria, Germany [N: 50° 11’, E: 11° 46’] (Piálek et al., 2008), and two derived from *M. m. musculus*: **BUSNA** (Locality: Buškovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic [N: 50° 14’, E: 13° 22’] (Piálek et al., 2008)) and **PWD** (Locality: Kunratice, Bohemia, Czech Republic [N: 50° 01’, E: 14° 29’] (Gregorová & Forejt, 2000))(**Figure 1**). Age of the mice at the time of infection ranged between 7.6 and 21.4 weeks. All mouse strains were maintained before infection in the Institute of Vertebrate Biology in Studenec (licence number 61974/2017‐MZE‐17214; for further details on strains see <https://housemice.cz/en>).

Parasites of the *Eimeria* genus are known to induce host immune protection against reinfection (Rose, Hesketh, & Wakelin, 1992; Smith & Hayday, 2000). To ensure that our mice were *Eimeria*-naive, mice fecal samples were tested before infection for the presence of *Eimeria* spp. oocysts, by flotation in saturated NaCl solution followed by washing and observation under light microscope.

## Experimental infection

Mice were kept in individual cages during infection. Water and food (SNIFF, Rat/Mouse maintenance feed 10 mm) were provided *ad libitum* supplemented with 1 g of sunflower and barley seeds per day. Mice were orally infected with 150 sporulated oocysts of one *Eimeria* isolate suspended in 100 µl phosphate-buffer saline (PBS) and monitored daily until their sacrifice by cervical dislocation at 11 days after infection (dpi) (experiment license Reg. 0431/17). Individuals presenting severe health deficiency and/or a weight loss approaching 18% relative to their starting weight were sacrificed earlier. Weight was recorded and feces collected on a daily basis. Fecal pellets were collected every day from each individual cage and suspended in 2% potassium dichromate. Parasite oocysts were recovered using NaCl flotation (see above).

All individuals were negative for *Eimeria* at the beginning of our experiment (before infection of first batch, as described in the next paragraph). In total, 108 mice were infected. Mice were randomly allocated to experimental groups ensuring homogeneous distribution of ages and sexes between groups. Our experiments were conducted in four (partially overlapping) consecutive batches for logistical reasons. The first two batches were infected with the two *E. ferrisi* isolates (Brandenburg64 and Brandenburg139), the third and fourth by one *E. ferrisi* isolate (Brandenburg64) and one *E. falciformis* isolate (Brandenburg88). Our experimental design is summarized in **Table 1** (chronology of experimental batches can be scrutinized in **Supplementary Table 1**).

Before arrival to the infection facility, nematode eggs were observed in flotated feces of mice belonging to all genotypes. Nematode infection is common in breeding facilities (Baker, 1998). Despite treatment of the first infection batch of mice (B1, 22 mice) with anthelminthics (Profender®, Bayer AG, Levekusen, Germany) following the protocole of Mehlhorn et al. (2005), nematodes were still detected with PCR (following the protocole of Floyd, Rogers, Lambshead, & Smith, 2005) in randomly sampled fecal samples a week later. We therefore decided not to treat mice of the following infection batches. Moreover, we observed *Eimeria* oocysts in the feces of 9 mice belonging to the last experimental batch (batch B4) at the day of infection, likely due to cross-contamination between batches. For following statistical analyses, we considered along with the full data set (N=108) a conservative data set in which cross-contaminated animals and animals treated by anthelminthic were removed (N=77).

Of note a considerable number of *M. m. musculus* mice (8/14; 5 BUSNA and 3 PWD) infected with *E. falciformis* (isolate Brandenburg88) died (or had to be sacrificed at humane end points specified in animal experimental procedures) before the peak of oocyst shedding. Moreover, one *M. m. domesticus* mouse (strain SCHUNT) infected by *E. ferrisi* isolate Brandenburg139 had liquid diarrhea in the peak shedding day, making its feces not collectable. For following statistical analyses, we considered a second conservative data set in which these animals were removed (N=99).

Results obtained on the two conservative data sets can be found in **Supplementary Material S2**. Despite differences in significance for some post-hoc tests due to a lower statistical power, the main conclusions of our analyses were consistent with those obtained on the main data set.

## Statistical analyses

### Modeling of resistance, impact of parasite on host and tolerance

As resistance is the capacity of a host to reduce its parasite burden, it is usually estimated by the inverse of infection intensity (Råberg et al., 2009). Pre-patency (the time to shedding of infectious stages, so called oocysts) is longer for *E. falciformis* (7 days) than for *E. ferrisi* (5 days) (Al-khlifeh et al., 2019). Therefore, as a proxy of resistance we used the (inverse of) number of oocysts per gram of feces (OPG) at the day of maximal shedding. We found this measurement to be tightly correlated with the sum of oocysts shed throughout the experiment (Pearson correlation coefficient 0.91). Due to the aggregation characteristic of parasites (Shaw & Dobson, [1995](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jeb.13578" \l "jeb13578-bib-0070)), the appropriate distribution for maximum number of OPG was found to be the negative binomial distribution. This was confirmed based on log likelihood, AIC criteria and goodness-of-fits plots (density, CDF, Q-Q, P-P plots; R packages MASS (Venables & Ripley, 2002) and fitdistrplus (Delignette-Muller & Dutang, 2015)).

Both parasite species provoke inflammation, cellular infiltration, enteric lesions, diarrhea, and ultimately weight loss (Ankrom, Chobotar, & Ernst, 1975; Ehret, Spork, Dieterich, Lucius, & Heitlinger 2017; Schito et al., 1996; Al-khlifeh et al., 2019). Therefore, the impact of parasites on host health was measured as the maximum relative weight loss compared to day 0 (body weight measured at the start of the experimental infection). Tolerance is usually defined as a reaction norm, i.e. the regression slope of host fitness (approximated by health condition) on infection intensity per genotype (Simms, 2000; Råberg et al., 2009). Thus tolerance was assessed as the slope of maximum relative weight loss compared to day 0 on number of OPG at the day of maximal shedding, within each mouse strain and for each parasite isolate. A steep slope indicates a low tolerance (high weight lost for a given parasite burden).

### Statistical design

Maximum OPG and relative weight loss were modelled separately as a response of mouse strain (N=4), parasite isolate (N=3) and their interaction, using a negative binomial generalised linear model for maximum OPG, and a linear model for relative weight loss. For tolerance, we performed a linear regression with null intercept (as each mouse was controlled against itself at start of the experiment, before losing weight or shedding parasite), modelling relative weight loss as a response of maximum OPG interacting with mouse strain (N=4), parasite isolate (N=3) and their interaction. To test the significance of the marginal contribution to each parameter to the full model, each parameter was removed from the full model, and the difference between full model and sub-model was assessed using likelihood ratio tests (G).

For each of our three models, we asked within each infection group if the response differed between mouse genotypes (i.e. variable “mouse strain” significant) using likelihood ratio tests (G) as described above. Of note, four mice infected by *E. falciformis* isolate Brandenburg88 did not shed any oocysts as death occured at or one day before the peak of oocysts shedding. For this reason, we modelled maximum OPG in this infection group using a zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) generalised linear model, after verifying that it provided a better fit than the simple negative binomial based on log likelihood and AIC criteria.

Post-hoc multiple comparison tests (Tukey Multiple Comparisons of Means) were performed within each infection group to test the significant difference in response of each host against all others (R package emmeans; Lenth, 2019).

Eventually, we tested the correlation between resistance and tolerance for each of our three parasite isolates. We estimated Spearman’s rank correlation estimate as measure of the strength of the monotonic relationship, and comped the mean and 95% confidence intervals of the two proxies between mouse strains. Indeed, the tolerance is calculated at the mouse strain level, meaning that the Spearman’s rank correlation test alone would not be sufficient to detect an effect, as N=4 for this test.

All analyses were performed using the R software version 3.5.2 (R Development Core Team, 2018; negative binomial: function glm.nb from R package MASS (Venables & Ripley, 2002); ZIBN: function zeroinfl from R package pscl (Jackman, 2017; Zeileis, Kleiber, & Jackman, 2008); linear model: function lm from R core package stats; mean and 95% confidence intervals: function ggpredict from R package ggeffect (Lüdecke, 2018)). Graphics were produced using the R package ggplot2 (Wickham, 2016) and compiled using the free software inkscape ([https://inkscape.org](https://inkscape.org/)). Codes and data used for this article can be found at: <https://github.com/alicebalard/Article_RelatedParasitesResTol>

# Results

## 1. General

The life cycle of all isolates was successfully completed in all mouse strains (**Figure 2**). For *E. ferrisi* (both isolates), the pre-patent period was 5 dpi and the median day of maximal oocyst shedding was 6 dpi (standard deviation sd=0.7 and 1, respectively). The median day of maximum weight loss was 5 dpi for both isolates (sd=2.1 and 1.9 respectively). For *E. falciformis* (isolate Brandenburg88) pre-patency was 7 dpi, median day of maximal shedding was 8 dpi (sd=1.8) and median day of maximal weight loss 9 dpi (sd=1.5). All tested *Eimeria* isolates infected all individuals of the tested mouse strains.

We tested the difference between mouse strains infected by each parasite of: maximum number of OPG as a measure of (inverse of) resistance, weight loss upon infection relative to day 0 as a proxy for impact on host health in response to infection, and the slope between the two as a measure of (inverse of) tolerance. For our three proxies, we found statistically significant effects of parasite isolate, mouse strain, as well as an interaction between parasite isolate and mouse strain (**Table 2**). Our results indicate that the four mouse strains are differently resistant, affected, and tolerant to the three parasite isolates.

## **2. Resistance and tolerance to both *E. ferrisi* isolates are uncoupled**

We then tested within each infection group if our proxies for resistance, impact on weight and tolerance were different between the four mouse strains.

We found the maximum number of OPG to be statistically different between mouse strains for *E. ferrisi* isolate Brandenburg64 (LRT: G=19, df=3, P<0.001). More precisely, the SCHUNT mouse strain (*M. m. domesticus*) was more resistant than both *M. m. musculus* strains (Tukey test: SCHUNT-BUSNA: P<0.01; SCHUNT-PWD: P<0.001). No differences between mouse strains were found for resistance against the second *E. ferrisi* isolate Brandenburg139 (LRT: G=5.3, df=3, P=0.15; **Figure 3A**). The maximum relative weight loss was different between mouse strains infected with *E. ferrisi* Brandenburg64 (LRT: G=14.6, df=3, P=0.002), as one *M. m. musculus* strain (PWD) lost more weight than both *M. m. domesticus* strains (Tukey test: PWD-SCHUNT: P=0.03, PWD-STRA: P<0.01). Again, no differences between mouse strains could be detected upon infection with the second *E. ferrisi* isolate Brandenburg139 (**Figure 3B**). Finally, we did not find significant differences of tolerance slope between mouse strains for both *E. ferrisi* isolates. Brandenburg64 seems better tolerated than Brandenburg139, regardless of the mouse strains (**Figure 3C**).

Then, we tested the correlation between resistance (inverse of maximum number of OPG) and tolerance (inverse of slope of maximum weight loss on maximum OPG; **Figure 4**). We found a week correlation for Brandenburg64 (Spearman's rho = -0.2). 95% confidence intervals indicate that the average resistance varies between mouse strains, but the tolerance remains constant, mice losing on average around 5% of their weight per million oocysts per gram. For the second isolate, Brandenburg139, the monotonic correlation between resistance and tolerance was stronger (Spearman's rho = -0.8), but the resistance-tolerance values for all four strains were found similar, all 95% confidence intervals overlapping. In conclusion, we did not find indication of resistance-tolerance trade-off in both of our *E. ferrisi* isolates.

## 3. No indication of local adaptation of *E. ferrisi*

We hypothesised a possible local adaptation of *E. ferrisi*. The prediction drawn from this would be that mouse strains belonging to Eastern mouse subspecies (*M. m. musculus*) are more tolerant to the Eastern parasite (Brandenburg139) than to the Western one (Brandenburg64), and vice-versa. As seen in the previous section, we did not find difference of tolerance between mouse strains within both infection group, Brandenburg64 isolate being overall better tolerated than Brandenburg139 by all mouse strains. We summarised in **Table 3** the expected and observed tolerance values. Our results do not indicate local adaptation of *E. ferrisi* to its murine host. This is consistent with the absence of resistance-tolerance coupling for both isolates described in the previous section.

## 4. Negative correlation between resistance and tolerance to *E. falciformis*

We tested if our proxies for resistance, impact on weight and tolerance were different between the four mouse strains upon infection with thegit second *Eimeria* species, *E. falciformis*, represented by the isolate Brandenburg88.

We found the maximum number of OPG to be statistically different between mouse strains (LRT: G=16.3, df=6, P=0.01). More precisely, STRA mice (*M. m. domesticus* strain) were less resistant than PWD (*M. m. musculus* strains) (Tukey test: P=0.03; **Figure 3A**). The maximum relative weight loss was different between mouse strains infected with *E. falciformis* Brandenburg88 (LRT: G=18.3, df=3, P<0.001). Precisely, both *M. m. musculus* strain (PWD and BUSNA) lost more weight than one *M. m. domesticus* strain (STRA) (Tukey test: STRA-BUSNA: P<0.01, STRA-PWD: P<0.01; **Figure 3B**). Finally, and in contrary to our results on both *E. ferrisi* isolates, the tolerance slopes for *E. falciformis* isolate Brandenburg88 were different between mouse strains (LRT: G=8.1, df=3, P=0.04; **Figure 3C**).

We found a perfect monotonic negative correlation between resistance (inverse of maximum number of OPG) and tolerance (inverse of slope of maximum weight loss on maximum OPG), (Spearman's rho = -1). Moreover, 95% confidence intervals indicate that the resistance-tolerance couple was distinct between SCHUNT (*Mus musculus domesticus* strain) and PWD (*Mus musculus musculus* strain), while the two other strains presented intermediate values. Our data indicate a trade-off between resistance and tolerance for this parasite isolate (**Figure 5**).

# Discussion

In this study, we assessed resistance and tolerance to two closely related parasites, *E. ferrisi* (two isolates) and *E. falciformis* (one isolate), in four different inbred strains representative of two house mouse subspecies. We used this controlled infection experiment to investigate whether resistance and tolerance are correlated in this system. We asked (1) if, in our system, resistance can predict tolerance, and (2) if resistance-tolerance coupling can provide indications on host-parasite coevolution.

We found tolerance to be decoupled from resistance against *E. ferrisi,* while the two types of response against *E. falciformis* were negatively correlated, suggesting a trade-off between resistance and tolerance for this parasite. Coupling between resistance and tolerance can then differ between closely related parasite species. This finding is relevant in our system: it has been shown that hybrids between *M. m. domesticus* and *M. m. musculus* are more resistant not only to *Eimeria* but also to other parasites including pinworms (Baird et al., 2012; Balard et al., 2020) but impact on tolerance could not be measured under natural conditions (Balard et al., 2020). The effect of parasites on host fitness and in the evolution of the house mouse hybrid zone is thus still rather ambiguous. Careful distinction between parasite species is necessary when analysing the influence of host genetics on such phenotypes. We here show that it is indispensable to measure both resistance and tolerance in *Eimeria* infections of house mice, measurements that can best be made in future laboratory experiments with hybrid mice.

The more pathogenic parasite *E. falciformis* was poorly tolerated but strongly resisted by one strain of *M. m. musculus,* while one strain of *M. m. domesticus* tolerated it well but showed low levels of resistance. The two other strains showed a similar pattern but more intermediate resistance-tolerance levels. This might indicate trade-off between resistance and tolerance as observed in similar experimental infections for other host parasite systems before (Råberg et al., 2007; Klemme & Karvonen, 2016). Resistance-tolerance trade-off could be explained by intrinsic characteristics *E. falciformis.* This parasite has a relatively long life cycle (Al-khlifeh et al., 2019; Haberkorn, 1970), meaning that it multiplies asexually for a relative long time. If the parasite is not resisted well enough, infection might lead to high tissue load and – once the parasite starts to reproduce sexually – extremely high reproductive output in strongly impacted hosts. Tissue damage is observed during sexual reproduction for this parasite (Ehret et al., 2017) and might mean that a certain level of resistance is required. But also immunopathology has been observed in advanced *E. falciformis* infections. For example, proinflammatory T cell mediators have been shown to decrease parasite load but increase body weight loss upon infection (Stange et al., 2012). This might lead to multiple different optima for resistance and tolerance.

In addition to more or less stable optima in the two mouse subspecies we could speculate two related alternative explanations. Firstly, *E. falciformis* could originally be a *M. m. domesticus* parasite dissipated into *M. m. musculus* territory by a spillover through the hybrid zone. As an argument against this explanation, no significant difference in *E. falciformis* prevalence at each side of the hybrid zone has be observed (unpublished data). Secondly, the *E. falciformis* isolate employed here was collected from a predominantly *M. m. domesticus* mouse (hybrid index 0.2). The isolate could hence be locally adapted to *M. m. domesticus*. Experiments with additional *E. falciformis* isolates (especially from *M. m. musculus*) are needed to test whether host subspecies adaptation can lead to tolerance in matching pairs of *E. falciformis* isolates and mouse subspecies. This seems plausible, as a coupling between resistance and tolerance could couple host and parasite fitness potentially leading to coevolution. Interestingly, parasite and host coevolution in this perspective wouldn’t be antagonistic with regards to tolerance and parasite reproduction (that is, the inverse of resistance), as co-adaptation would optimize both for host and parasite fitness.

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Upon infection by the second parasite species, *E. ferrisi*, we did not find such resistance-tolerance trade-off. One isolate presented heterogeneity of resistance, but homogeneous impact on host weight and tolerance in each mouse strain. The second parasite isolate showed uniform resistance, impact on weight and tolerance in each mouse strain. As we did not find indications of higher tolerance to Western parasite of Western host (*M. m. domesticus*) than of Eastern host (*M. m. musculus*) and vice versa, local adaptation of *E. ferrisi* is not supported. This might be explained by tolerance uncoupling parasite and host fitness and therefore making host-parasite coevolution less likely.

*E. ferrisi* commits to sexual reproduction after a relatively short time with few cycles of asexual expansion (Al-khlifeh et al., 2019; Ankrom et al., 1975). As *E. ferrisi* infections do not reach extremely high intensities with this infection strategy, high tolerance might be the optimal strategy for both house mouse subspecies. Resistance could then evolve relatively freely without any major impact of the parasite on the hosts’ health. Enhanced virulence (reduction of host fitness upon infection e.g. due to prolonged asexual replication before commitment to sexual replication and transmission) might not evolve because the low resistance of the host already allows an optimal transmission rate, especially considering the fast production of transmission stages (Anderson & May, 1982). A global optimum of high tolerance might also be the reason why no subspecies-specific adaptation of *M. m. domesticus* or *M. m. musculus* infected strains, i.e. no increased tolerance of matching host-parasite pairs, is detected for this parasite in the present study. This is in line parasite population structure not correlated with host-structure in the house mouse hybrid zone (ref Jarquin). In summary this implies that we might expect the prevalent *E. ferrisi* to be a less likely coevolving with it’s house mouse host than *E. falciformis*.

In conclusion, we argue that the contrast between resistance and tolerance coupling in two different parasite can guide research on in this host-parasite system: if the effects of hybridisation should be studied independently of potential host-parasite co-adaptation the prevalent *E. ferrisi* might be the most suitable parasite. If coevolution between hosts and parasites should be studied the pathogenic *E. falciformis* is a more plausible target*.* The coupling between resistance and tolerance can differ between closely related parasite species and we argue that this trait of the host-parasite system determines the questions to be best approached with a particular parasite.

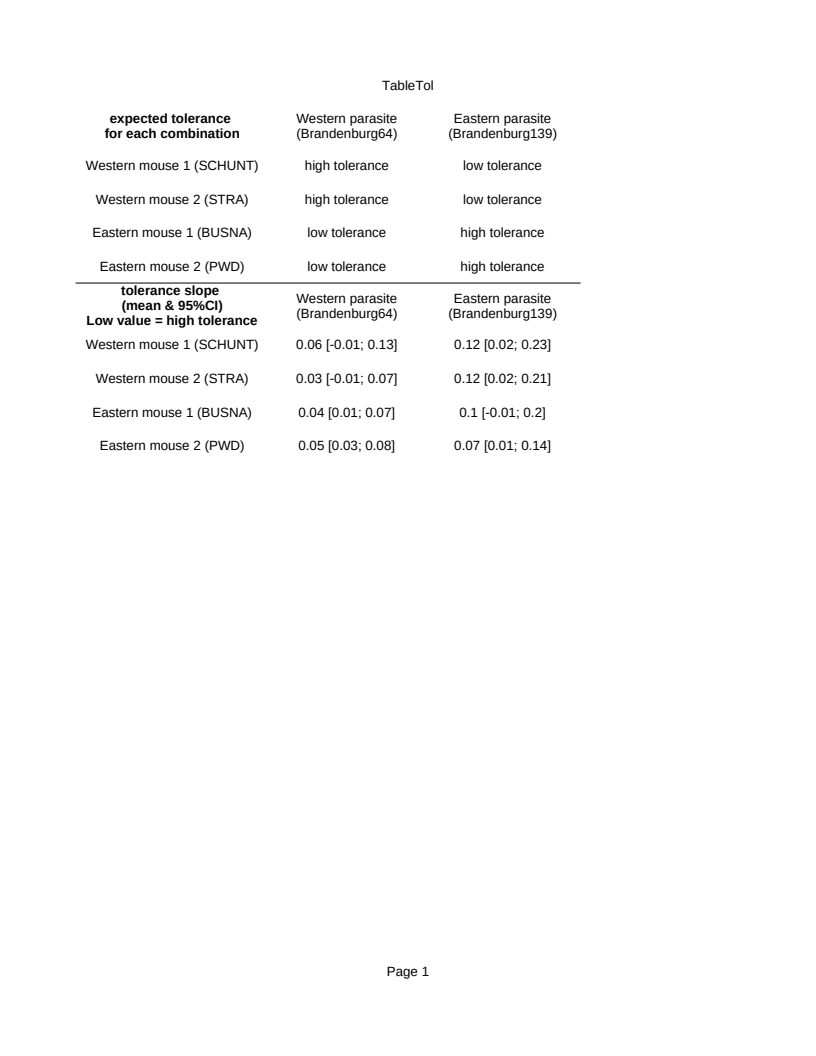
# Tables

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Mouse** | | **Eimeria species / isolate** | | |
| **strains** | **subspecies** | ***E. ferrisi***  **Brandenburg139** | ***E. ferrisi***  **Brandenburg64** | ***E. falciformis***  **Brandenburg88** |
| SCHUNT | *M.m.domesticus* | 7 (5M / 2F) | 14 (6M / 8F) | 6 (3M / 3F) |
| STRA | *M.m.domesticus* | 6 (2M / 4F) | 15 (8M / 7F) | 7 (4M /3F) |
| BUSNA | *M.m.musculus* | 6 (2M / 4F) | 14 (8M / 6F) | 7 (3M /4F) |
| PWD | *M.m.musculus* | 6 (3M / 3F) | 13 (10M / 3F) | 7 (1M / 6F) |

**Table 1. Infection experiment design.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Likelihood ratio test for each factor | | |
| Proxy of | Measured variable | Mouse strain | Parasite isolate | Interaction |
| Resistance | maximum oocysts per gram of feces (high value = low resistance) | G=21.7  df=9  P=0.01 | G=20  df=8  P=0.01 | G=17.5  df=6  P=0.008 |
| Impact on weight | maximum weight loss during patent period relative to starting weight | G=38  df=9  P<0.001 | G=47.6  df=8  P<0.001 | G=16.2  df=6  P=0.01 |
| Tolerance | slope of the two previous for each mouse strain (high value = low tolerance) | G=24.3  df=9  P=0.004 | G=23.8  df=8  P=0.002 | G=18.5  df=6  P=0.005 |

**Table 2. Likelihood ratio tests of factors significance.**



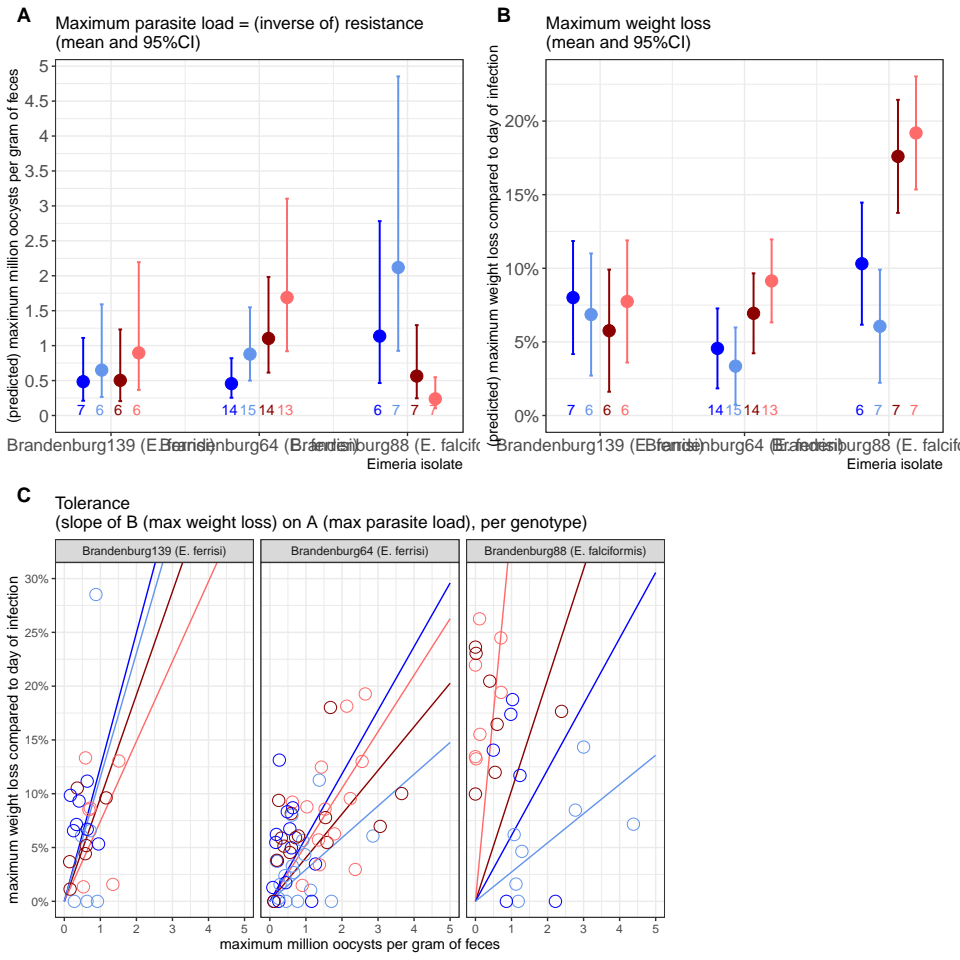
**Table 3. Expected tolerance of *E. ferrisi* in the case of local adaptation versus observed tolerance. Our data do not indicate local adaptation for this parasite.**

# Figures

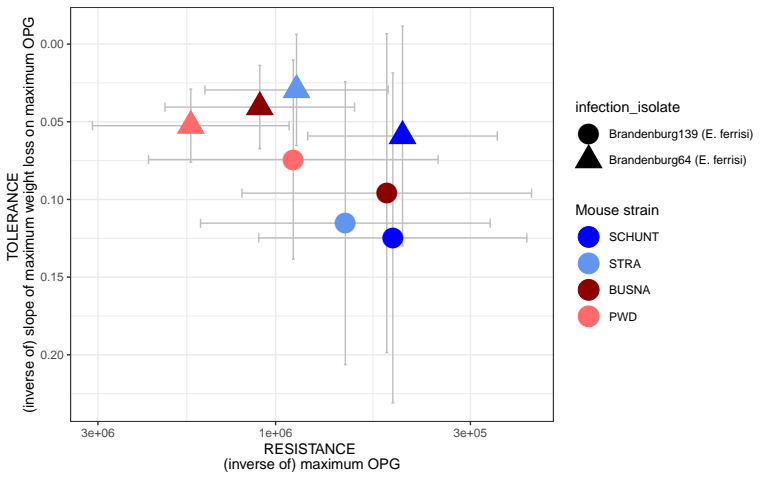
**Figure 1. Parasite isolates and mouse strains.** The map shows locations at which mice were collected for breeding of mouse strains and isolation of parasites. The purple line is an estimation of the center of the house mouse hybrid zone between *M. m. domesticus* and *M. m. musculus* based on sampling and genotyping of mice in this area (Balard et al., 2020; Ďureje, Macholán, Baird, & Piálek, 2012, Macholán et al. 2019).



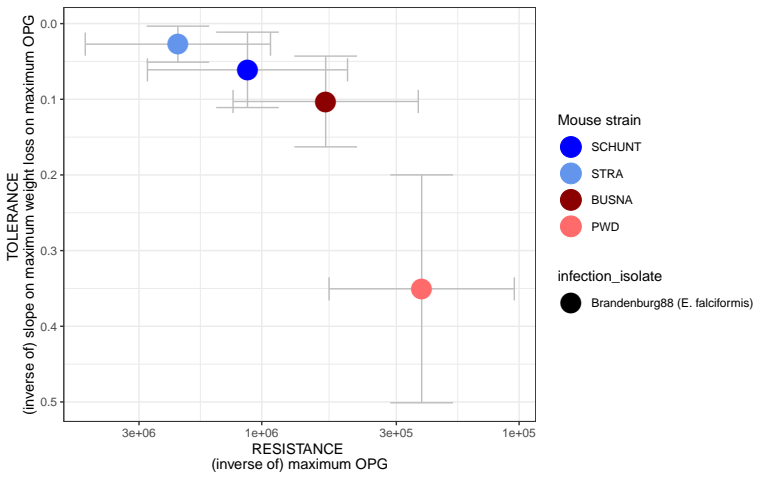
**Figure 2. Parasite density (A) and relative weight loss (B) during *Eimeria* infection.** Parasite density is calculated as number of oocysts detected (x10e6) per gram of feces, relative weight loss is calculated compared to day 0.Mean and 95% CI are plotted for each parasite isolate. All hosts strains are pooled together.



**Figure 3. Comparison of resistance, impact on weight and tolerance between mouse strain for each *Eimeria* isolates.** (A) Maximum oocysts per gram of feces used as a proxy for (inverse of) resistance; (B) Impact on host health measured as the maximum weight loss during patent period relative to starting weight (%). Differences of maximum parasite load and of maximum weight loss could be detected between mouse strains infected by *E. ferrisi* Brandenburg64 and *E. falciformis* Brandenburg88, but not *E. ferrisi* Brandenburg139 (stars indicate significant differences in post-hoc Tukey test xxx). (C) Tolerance estimated by the slope of the linear regression with null intercept modelling relative weight loss as a response of maximum oocysts per gram of feces. A steep slope corresponds to a low tolerance. Tolerance differed between mouse strains only upon infection with *E. falciformis* Brandenburg88.



**Figure 4. No indication of resistance-tolerance coupling for both each *E. ferrisi* isolate****s.** X-axis represents resistance (maximum oocysts per gram of feces used as a proxy, a high value corresponding to a low resistance); Y-axis represent tolerance (slope of the linear regression with null intercept modelling relative weight loss as a response of maximum oocysts per gram of feces, a high value corresponding to a low tolerance). Grey error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.



**Figure 5. negative correlation between resistance and tolerance for *E. falciformis* isolate Brandenurg88.** X-axis represents resistance (maximum oocysts per gram of feces used as a proxy, a high value corresponding to a low resistance); Y-axis represent tolerance (slope of the linear regression with null intercept modelling relative weight loss as a response of maximum oocysts per gram of feces, a high value corresponding to a low tolerance). Grey error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

# Supplementary material

**Supplementary Table 1. Chronology of experimental batches**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Supplementary Table S2. TODO** | | Likelihood ratio test for each factor | | |
| Proxy of | Measured variable | Mouse strain | Parasite isolate | Interaction |
| **Data set: conservative 1** | |  |  |  |
| Resistance | maximum oocysts per gram of feces (high value = low resistance) | G=36.3  df=9  P<0.001 | G=35.5  df=8  P<0.001 | G=21.8  df=6  P=0.001 |
| Impact on weight | maximum weight loss during patent period relative to starting weight | G=35.9  df=9  P<0.001 | G=37.1  df=8  P<0.001 | G=16.8  df=6  P=0.01 |
| Tolerance | slope of the two previous for each mouse strain (high value = low tolerance) | G=30.6  df=9  P<0.001 | G=30.2  df=8  P<0.001 | G=24  df=6  P<0.001 |
| **Data set: conservative 2** | |  |  |  |
| Resistance | maximum oocysts per gram of feces (high value = low resistance) | G=13.7  df=9  P=0.08 | G=13.7  df=8  P=0.09 | G=11.9  df=6  P=0.06 |
| Impact on weight | maximum weight loss during patent period relative to starting weight | G=36.7  df=9  P<0.001 | G=45  df=8  P<0.001 | G=23.4  df=6  P<0.001 |
| Tolerance | slope of the two previous for each mouse strain (high value = low tolerance) | G=24.4  df=9  P=0.004 | G=21.7  df=8  P=0.005 | G=18  df=6  P=0.006 |

# Add a figure with conservative datasets.

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