

Title: Colonial Architecture Modulates the Speed and Efficiency of Multi-Jet Swimming in Salp Colonies

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Running title: Architecture Modulates Salp Swimming

Summary Statement (30 words)

Linear arrangements in multi-jet propelled marine colonial invertebrates are faster than less streamlined architectures without incurring in higher costs of transport, offering insights for bioinspired underwater vehicle design.

Abstract

Salps are marine pelagic tunicates with a complex life cycle including a solitary and colonial stage. Salp colonies are composed of asexually budded individuals that coordinate their swimming by multi-jet propulsion. Colonies develop into species-specific architectures with distinct zooid orientations. These distinct colonial architectures vary in how frontal area scales with the number of zooids in the colony. Here, we address how differences in frontal area drive differences in swimming speed and the relationship between swimming speed and cost of transport in salps. We (1) compare swimming speed across salp species and architectures, (2) evaluate how swimming speed scales with the number of zooids across colony in architectures, and (3) compare the metabolic cost of transport across species and how it scales with swimming speed. To measure swimming speeds, we recorded swimming salp colonies using in situ videography while SCUBA diving in the open ocean. To estimate the cost of transport, we measured the respiration rates of swimming and anesthetized salps collected in situ using jars equipped with non-invasive oxygen sensors. We found that linear colonies swim faster, which supports idea that their differential advantage in frontal area scales with an increasing number of zooids. We also found that higher swimming speeds predict lower costs of transport in salps. These findings underscore the importance of considering propeller arrangement to optimize speed and energy efficiency in bioinspired underwater vehicle design, leveraging lessons learned from the diverse natural laboratory provided by salp diversity.

Keywords: salps, colonial architecture, multi-jet propulsion, swimming, cost of transport

Introduction

Salps (Tunicata: Thaliacea: Salpida) are planktonic invertebrates that have a two-phase life cycle comprised of a solitary oozoid that asexually buds colonies of sexually reproducing blastozooids. Salp colonies are composed of up to hundreds of genetically identical, physically and neurophysiologically integrated pulsatile zooids (Bone et al. 1980, Mackie 1986). Zooids in the colony feed and propel themselves by drawing water in through the oral siphon, using muscle contraction to compress their pharyngeal chamber, and ejecting a jet of water from their atrial siphon (Bone & Trueman 1983). While solitary oozoids move using single-jet propulsion, salp blastozooid colonies integrate multiple propelling jets, which increases their thrust and reduces the drag that results from periodical acceleration and deceleration via asynchronous swimming (Sutherland & Weihs 2017).

Currently, there are 48 described species of salps (WoRMS, 2024) and while salps are widely distributed, most species are restricted to open ocean environments, far from the coast, which poses unique challenges to accessing them for direct study in their environment (Hamner et al 1975, Haddock 2004). Moreover, salps cannot be maintained alive in containers beyond a few hours since they are extremely fragile and sensitive to the presence of solid walls. Therefore, many morphological, ecological, and functional aspects of salp diversity, such as swimming speeds and metabolic demands, have remained unexplored. One such aspect is colonial architecture or the way that the zooids are arranged relative to each other in the colony. Salp colonies develop into species-specific architectures with distinct zooid orientations, including transversal, oblique, linear, helical, and bipinnate chains; as well as whorls, and clusters (Damian-Serrano & Sutherland, 2023). These architectures likely drive aspects of swimming performance (Madin 1990, Damian-Serrano et al. 2023).

Linear salp chains have been described as more efficient swimmers due to the reduction of drag associated with a more streamlined form (Bone & Trueman 1983). In a multi-jet system, having a larger number of propellers can improve the hydrodynamic and inertial benefits granted by asynchronous multijet propulsion, in addition to providing additional thrust to the colony (Madin 1990, Sutherland & Weihs 2017). The effect of varying numbers of propeller zooids on swimming speed has never been investigated in salps, nor how this relationship may vary across their diverse colonial architectures. Salp colonial architectures differ in how the number of zooids in the colony scales with their frontal area relative to motion (Madin 1990). Some architectures (linear, bipinnate, and helical) have a constant frontal area, regardless of zooid number. These architectures may benefit from increased thrust delivered by larger numbers of zooids while maintaining a constant frontal area. However, the rest of the architectures (oblique, transversal, whorl, and cluster) have an increasing (directly proportional) frontal area as the number of zooids increases (Fig. 1). Therefore, we expect the latter architectures to not only obtain more thrust, but to also experience more frontal water resistance as zooid number increases. As a result, we anticipate that swimming speed will be greater in colonies that bear a larger number of zooids, but only (or more so) for species with architectures that have a constant frontal area.

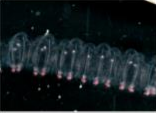







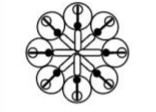





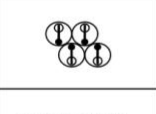
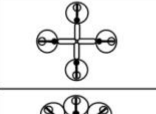
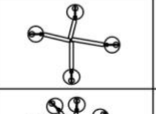
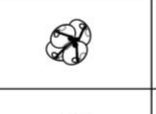
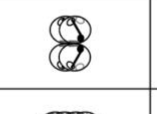
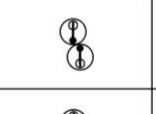
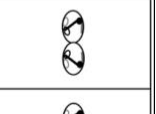
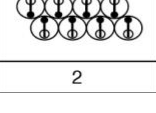
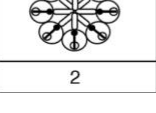
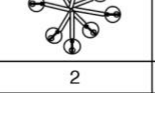
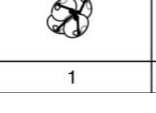
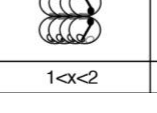
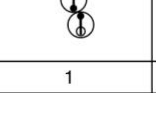
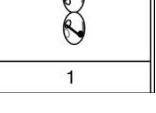
	Transversal	Whorl	Cluster	Helical	Oblique	Linear	Bipinnate
Architecture							
							
Frontal area 4 zooids							
Frontal area 8 zooids							
Scaling	2	2	2	1	$1 < \alpha < 2$	1	1

Figure 1. Salp colonial architectures with representative species photos (*Pegea* sp. for transversal, *Cyclosalpa affinis* for whorl, *Cyclosalpa sewelli* for cluster, *Helicosalpa virgula* for helical, *Thalia cicar* for oblique, *Soestia zonaria* for linear, and *Ritteriella retracta* for bipinnate) and diagrams showing the distinct zooid orientations. The subsequent rows show the frontal view of colonies with four and eight zooids, with the final row indicating the expected frontal area increase factor between the four and the eight zooid colonies. Full black circles in the diagrams represent viscerae (guts) while the open circle represent siphons. Black straight lines inside the zooids indicate gill bars while gray straight lines represent endostyles.

Linearity of colonies, as well as zooid size and pulsation rates, are additional factors that could influence swimming performance. The degree of linearity in a colony can be expressed as the degree of parallelism between the zooids and the elongation axis of the colony (Fig. 2). This angle is determined by the degree of developmental dorsoventral zooid rotation, which can span from 90°, in transversal chains with no rotation, to 0° (perfect linearity), in some linear chains such as those from the species *Soestia zonaria* (Damian-Serrano & Sutherland, 2023). Strong reductions in the dorsoventral zooid rotation angle toward linear forms have evolved multiple times independently (Damian-Serrano et al. 2023), possibly due to adaptive advantages related to their swimming efficiency. Body size predicts swimming velocity in many animals (Andersen et al. 2016), however colonies with multiple swimming units may circumvent this size-speed relationship by having multiple propellers. Pulsation rates may also influence swimming speed as has been shown in solitary salps (Madin 1990). Pulsation by salps serves the dual role of locomotion and filter feeding. The relationship between pulsation and speed might therefore be particularly relevant for species that undergo diel vertical migration (Madin et al. 1996) and in other species pulsation may serve to maximize filtration rates. Considering the tradeoffs between

swimming and filtering, the eco-evolutionary relevance of swimming speed, and the hydrodynamic efficiency likely varies between species (Damian-Serrano et al. 2023).

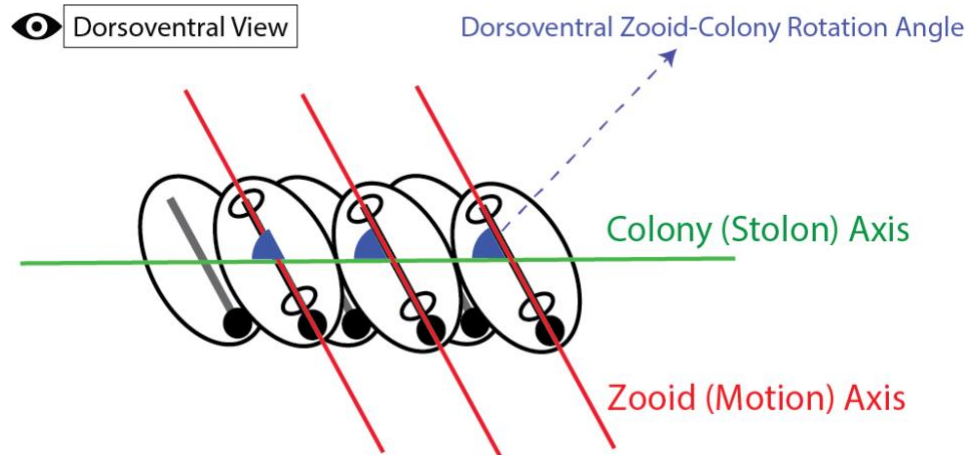


Figure 2. Schematic of an oblique chain from the dorsoventral perspective showing the zoid and stolon axes and the zoid rotation angle (degree of linearity) relative to those axes. Black lines indicate gill bars (mostly occluded by zoid axis) while gray lines represent endostyles.

The energetic costs of salp locomotion from mechanically estimated propulsive efficiency suggest that like other jet-propelled swimmers, salps are hydrodynamically efficient (Sutherland & Madin 2010, Gemmell et al. 2021, Trueman et al. 1984). The few metabolic measurements of swimming salps show that more active species-- in terms of swimming speed and pulsation rates-- have the highest respiration rates (Cetta et al. 1986) and that salps have higher respiration rates than other gelatinous taxa (Biggs 1977, Schneider 1992, Mayzaud et al. 2005, Trueblood 2019). However, the specific costs incurred by their swimming activity and their relationship to swimming speed have never been examined across the diversity of salp species.

In this study, we compare swimming speeds across 17 salp species and energetic costs of swimming across 15 species, encompassing all seven known salp colony architectures (Fig. 1, Table S1). In addition, we investigate how swimming speed varies with the number of propeller zooids and differences in frontal area scaling between colonial architectures. Finally, we compare cost of transport (COT) across salp species and assess how COT scales with swimming speed and pulsation effort.

Materials and Methods

Fieldwork – We observed salps via 48 bluewater SCUBA dives (Haddock & Heine, 2005) from a small vessel off the coast of Kailua-Kona (Hawai'i Big Island, 19°42'38.7" N 156°06'15.8" W), over 2000 m of offshore water during September 2021, April 2022, September 2022 and May 2023. We spent a total of 42.2 hours (84.4 person hours: ADS & KRS) collecting and imaging salp colonies. Some dives were diurnal, where we collected most of the specimens of *Iasis cylindrica*, *Cyclosalpa affinis*, *Cyclosalpa sewelli*, and *Brooksia rostrata*. We observed and collected most specimens of other species during night dives (blackwater diving). We recorded in situ underwater videos of salp colonies swimming using a variety of cameras including primarily a dark field stereovideography system (Sutherland et al. 2024), as well as a lightweight dual GoPro stereo system, a brightfield single-camera system (Colin et al. 2022), and a darkfield single-camera system. The primary stereovideography system was comprised of two synchronized high-resolution cameras (Z Cam E2, Nan Shan, Shenzhen, China and Sync Cable; 4K at 60 or 120 fps) with 17mm f/1.8 lenses (Olympus M.Zuiko Digital) housed in custom aluminum housings (Sexton Company, Salem, OR, USA). Each field of view was 23 x 42 mm and in-focus depth was 20-25 mm. The image from the right-hand camera was viewed using an external monitor (Aquatica Digital, Montreal, Quebec, Canada), and illumination was provided with two 10,000-lumen lights (Keldan, Bruegg, Switzerland). An L-shaped plastic framer helped the videographer position colonies in the field of view of both cameras. Before diving, the stereo system was calibrated in a swimming pool using a cube with reflective landmarks. Calibration images were processed using the CAL software package (SeaGIS measurement science, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, Australia). Over the course of the study, we observed 241 salp colonies (N) from 18 species and recorded 1,946 measurements (n) (Dataset1A, Table S1). Throughout the manuscript, we refer to the number of specimens as N and the number of measurements as n.

Measuring salp colony swimming speed – For most species, we collected and analyzed footage from multiple specimens (Dataset1A, Table S1). We analyzed the swimming behavior of salp colonies arranged in linear (six species, 64 specimens), bipinnate (three species, 17 specimens), whorl (three species, 10 specimens), cluster (two species, eight specimens), and transversal (one species, two specimens) architectures, with oblique and helical architectures represented by a single specimen. We used a combination of spatially calibrated stereo video and 2D videos with a reference scale in the frame. From the stereo videos, we manually selected and measured the relative XYZ positions of salp colony zooids in EventMeasure (SeaGIS). We implemented a cutoff in the RMS (root mean squared) point error estimate of < 2 mm.

We complemented gaps in taxon sampling with archived 2D videos in the lab from previous expeditions to West Palm Beach (FL, USA) and the Pacific coast of Panama. These two-dimensional single-camera videos were collected using a Sony FDR-AX700 4K Camcorder (3840x2160 pixels, 60-120 fps) with a Gates Underwater Housing (Poway, CA, USA) using brightfield illumination (Colin et al 2022) or darkfield illumination. For these 2D videos, we used the FFMPEG plugin in ImageJ to manually select and measure the relative XY positions of salp zooids in sequences where the colony was swimming horizontally within the focal plane. The colonies were assumed to be in the same plane as the scale bar so at same distance from the camera. However, in videos with a broad focal depth, this may not always had been the case, thus potentially introducing some measurement error.

We tracked and manually selected the position of the first zooid's viscera (using a contrast-based centering macro to mark the center point) as well as the position of a reference particle in the water (methods described in Sutherland et al. 2024) in 10-30 frames across 50-500 frame windows spanning 2-4s of swimming on the synchronized left and right videos in EventMeasure. The reference particle was a non-swimming organism (such as a foraminiferan or radiolarian) or a non-living particle. In addition, we recorded the pulsation rates of the specimens measured by counting the number of times the atrial siphon contracted in a known period. For each analyzed frame, we calculated the horizontal x, vertical y, and depth z (in the case of the stereo video measurement files) components of the relative positions of the frontal zooid to the reference particle as shown in Eq. 1.

$$\begin{aligned} x_n &= x_{n \text{ animal}} - x_{n \text{ particle}} \\ y_n &= y_{n \text{ animal}} - y_{n \text{ particle}} \\ z_n &= z_{n \text{ animal}} - z_{n \text{ particle}} \end{aligned} \quad \text{Eq. 1}$$

Then we calculated the instantaneous relative speeds of the frontal zooid using Eq. 2 (without the z component in the case of the 2D videos) given the known frame rate of each video.

$$U = \frac{\sqrt{(x_2 - x_1)^2 + (y_2 - y_1)^2 + (z_2 - z_1)^2}}{t_2 - t_1} \quad \text{Eq. 2}$$

Salp colonial architecture – To examine the relationships between locomotory variables and colonial architecture, we adopted the species-specific architecture characterizations and dorsoventral zooid rotation angle measurements for each species from Damian-Serrano et al.

(2023). Using stills from the underwater videos, we measured zooid length, zooid width, and number of zooids in ImageJ manually selecting the point coordinates. These measurements were repeated in at least three locations from each colony. When a distinct zooid size gradient was observed, we measured zooids in locations from the proximal, middle, and distal regions to capture the full range of variation in the specimen.

Respiration measurements – We collected healthy, adult blastozooid (aggregate stage) colonies across 18 salp species (Dataset S1B) during blue- and black-water SCUBA dives off the coast of Kona (Hawaii, USA) between September 2021 and May 2023. We analyzed the respiration rates of salp colonies arranged in linear (seven species, N = 46), bipinnate (three species, N = 29), whorl (three species, N = 23), cluster (two species, N = 18), and transversal (one species, N = 13) architectures, oblique chains (*Thalia* sp., N = 7), and helical architectures represented by *Helicosalpa virgula* (N = 2). Specimens were sealed *in situ* with their surrounding water in plastic jars equipped with a PreSens oxygen sensor spot (Regensburg, Germany) and a self-healing rubber port to allow for the injection of solutions without the introduction of air bubbles. We removed as many symbiotic animals from the salps as possible before closing the lid without damaging the colony. The same method was applied to one or more seawater controls to account for the oxygen demand of the local seawater's microbiome. Several collection events occurred during each 20-60 min long SCUBA dive. Jars with larger animals were opened during the safety stop to allow them to re-oxygenate. Upon the divers' return to the boat, we measured the initial oxygen concentration (mg/l) and temperature, and then repeated the measurements at intervals between 15min and 3h, for total periods ranging between 2h and 5h, depending on logistic constraints in the field and the rate of oxygen depletion. The exact interval time for each measurement was variable but recorded (Dataset S1B).

To estimate the energetic expenditure of different salp species while actively swimming, we recorded the oxygen consumption of intact specimens while swimming inside the jar. To obtain a baseline of basal respiration rate (while not swimming), we anesthetized some specimens before the start of the first oxygen measurement time. A few specimens were used for paired experiments, where their swimming respiration was recorded for a few hours, then inoculated with the anesthetic, and recorded anesthetized for another set of hours. To anesthetize salps, we injected their jars with small volumes of concentrated (50 g/l) bicarbonate-buffered MS-222 through the rubber ports on the lids. We tailored the injection volume to the jar size aiming for a final concentration of 0.2g/l, following the methods in Trueman et al. (1984). We also injected some seawater control jars to evaluate the effect of MS-222 on oxygen concentration in seawater and found no effect.

When multiple seawater controls were collected using jars of different sizes, we paired each jar with the control that had the most similar volume. If among multiple controls only some were jars injected with anesthetic, we paired the anesthetized specimen jars with the injected controls and the intact specimen jars with the intact controls. In experiment 26 (see Dataset S1B for experiment numbers), the control jar was lost due to an encounter with an oceanic white tip shark, thus we paired those measurements with the nearest relative time points from the control jar in experiment 25, collected the same day hours earlier. At the end of each experiment, we identified the salp specimens used in the experiments to the species level, counted the number of zooids, measured the zooid length (total length including projections), and measured the biovolume of the colony using a graduated cylinder. For those specimens where colony or zooid volume was not measured directly, we estimated the colony volume from their zooid length and the number of zooids using a Generalized Additive Model with the measured specimens.

We estimated the oxygen consumption rate for each specimen by fitting a linear regression of consumed oxygen mass (concentration by container volume) against the duration of the measurement series. We subtracted the slope calculated for the relevant control jar to the estimated slope of the animal jar. Since our seawater controls were not filtered, some experiments had abnormally high estimated background respiration rates, leading to negative values. We removed these data points before the analysis. To estimate biovolume-specific rates, we divided the rates by the colony volumes. We then compared the biovolume-specific respiration rates of active (swimming) and anesthetized specimens within each species, calculating the difference as a measure of biovolume-specific swimming cost respiration rate. Biovolume was used instead of dry mass to normalize measurements due to the inherent difficulties of accurately measuring dry mass of these fragile gelatinous organisms in the field. Biovolume provides a consistent and reliable measure of the live size of the colony, which is directly relevant to the volume of water being displaced during swimming. We also calculated the relative investment in swimming as the proportion of biovolume-specific respiration rate comprised by the swimming-specific rate. To capture variability within species, we calculated the mean respiration rate of anesthetized specimens for each species and subtracted it from each intact specimen's total respiration rate to get multiple swimming-specific rate values within each species. We noticed that some species had higher average respiration rates among the anesthetized specimens than among the swimming specimens, leading to negative swimming-specific respiration estimates. We interpreted this anomaly as a systematic error due to the extremely low respiration rates of some species that fall within the effective detection limit of our experimental setup given the random variation range of respiration rates in seawater both in experimental jars and in control jars. Small

absolute negative values get amplified into large relative values, especially in small animals with a minuscule biovolume denominator. Therefore, we removed the swimming specimens that had lower respiration rates than the mean anesthetized respiration rate for their species. We also removed two respirometry outliers of *Thalia* sp. which had extremely high swimming respiration rates (>7500 pgO₂/ml/min, whereas all other measurements across species including other *Thalia* sp. were limited to 0-1700 pgO₂/ml/min), which were likely due to amplification of experimental error (presence of organic matter or symbionts, underestimation of colony volume due to loss of tiny zooids in the sieves) with the small biovolume denominators in this species.

Estimating costs of transport – We define the cost of transport (COT) as the amount of oxygen consumed per tissue volume per distance traveled by the colony. To estimate the COT, we divided the swimming-specific respiration rates by the mean swimming speed for each species measured from the stereo and 2D video data. Since the specimens used for speed measurements in the videos and those used in the respirometry experiments had different zooid sizes, we used the mean zooid-lengths per second speeds from the video measurements and then multiplied them by the actual zooid lengths of the respirometry specimens to estimate their absolute (mm/s) speeds. Pulsation rate estimates were taken from species averages from the video specimens. We also calculated the size-specific COT by transforming the swimming distances into zooid lengths measured from the respirometry specimens.

Statistical Analyses – All data wrangling and statistics were carried out in R 3.6.3 (R Core Team 2021). To test for differences between architectures, we used ANOVAs with Tukey's post-hoc pairwise contrasts, reporting the difference magnitude and the adjusted p-value in supplementary tables S2A and S2B. To test the relationships between pairs of continuous variables across architectures (e.g. swimming speed vs. number of zooids), we used linear regressions. We evaluated the significance of the slope parameter when compared against a flat slope (one-tailed t-test) to test whether changes in the independent variable (e.g. number of zooids) were associated with changes in the dependent variable (e.g. swimming speed). Owing to the patchiness of some species despite 80+ hours spent underwater (Table S1), we used replicate measurements (n) from each specimen (N) in swimming speed ANOVAs and regressions. We used an exponential regression to test the relationship between speed and COT. Specimen means (N) were used for all COT comparisons and regressions. Individual measurements (n) were used up to determine oxygen consumption rates. To evaluate the relative contribution of zooid size, pulsation rate, zooid number, and architecture type on swimming speed, we fitted a generalized linear model and evaluated the significance and proportion of variance explained by each factor using their partial R².

Results

Salp colony swimming speeds, pulsation rates, and respiration rates varied within and across species and colony architectures. When considering speed in terms of mm/s, we found a relationship between pulsation rate (effort) and absolute speed ($n = 947$, $N = 111$, 18 species, $\text{Speed mm/s} = 0.41 \times \text{Pulsation rate} + 52.14$, $p < 0.0001$, Fig. S1A), as well as with zooid-size corrected swimming speed ($n = 848$, $N = 100$, 18 species, $\text{Speed zooid lengths/s} = 0.96 \times \text{Pulsation rate} + 1.73$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.18$, $p < 0.0001$, Fig. S1B). Normalized swimming speeds (zooid lengths per pulse) allow for a more direct comparison of swimming speed across colonial architectures.

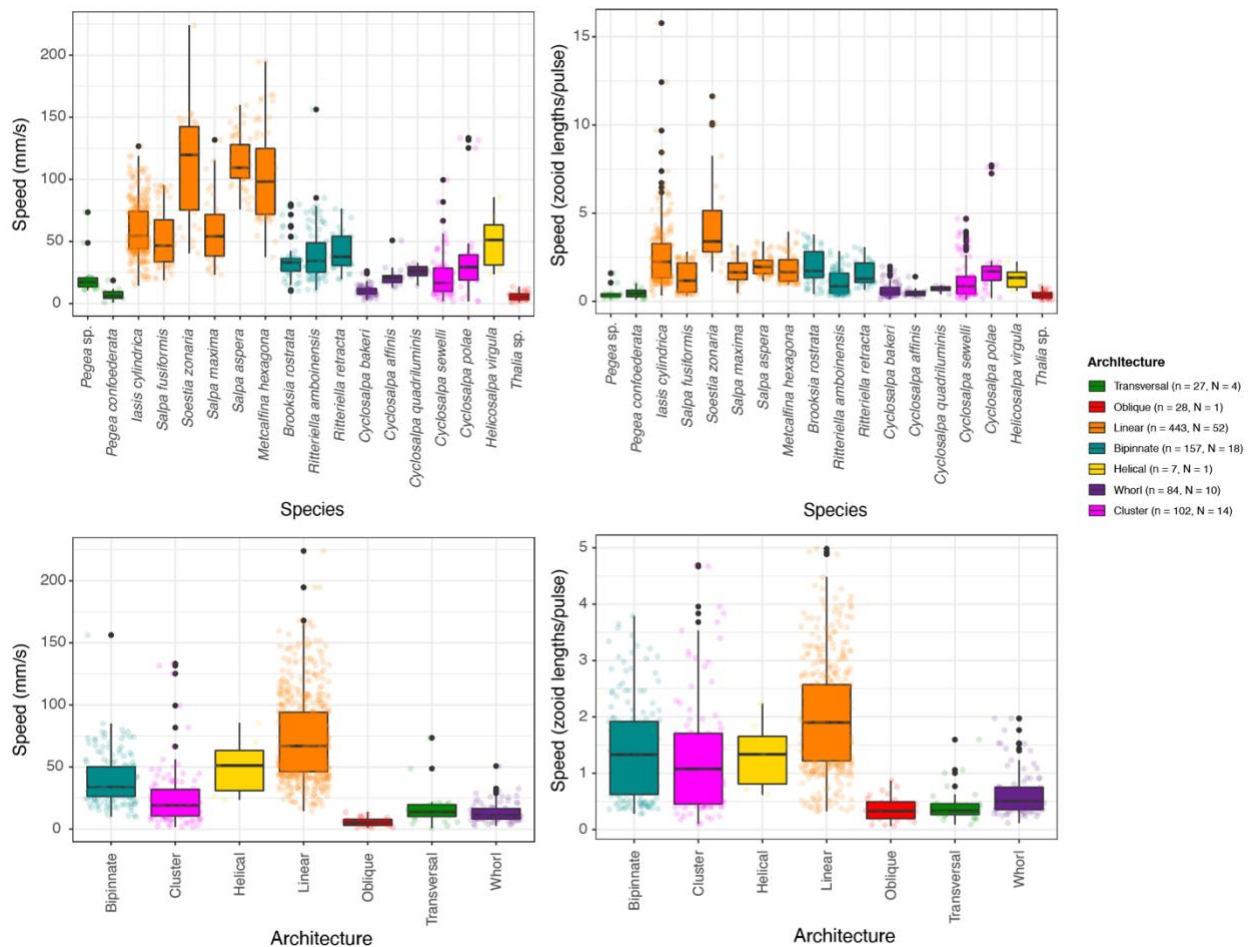


Figure 3. Boxplots showing the absolute (A) and corrected for body size and pulsation rate (B) swimming speeds recorded for each salp species and architecture (C, D) respectively. Colors correspond to colonial architecture types. Sample sizes are included in the legend and Tukey's

post-hoc pairwise comparisons across architecture types are listed in Dataset 1 A and Table S2A, respectively.

Swimming speeds across salp architectures

Swimming speed varied significantly (5 architectures, 16 species, $N = 109$, $n = 913$, ANOVA $F > 38$, $p < 0.001$) between colonial architecture types (Fig. 3C, D, Table S2A). Speeds measured with 2D methods were slightly slower than those measured with 3D methods within the species in which they overlapped. This is to be expected since 2D methods cannot account for the z (depth) component of the speed vector. Measurements of helical and oblique chains were limited to a single specimen, so they were excluded from the analysis. In terms of absolute speed (mm/s), linear architectures were significantly faster than every other architecture (Tukey's $p < 0.001$). While bipinnate chains were significantly slower than linear chains, they were significantly faster than transversal chains, clusters, and whorls (Tukey's $p < 0.002$). Clusters were not significantly faster than transversal chains nor whorls. Transversal chains were on par to whorls, with no significant differences between them.

In terms of relative speed (zooid lengths/pulse), linear architectures were significantly faster than every other architecture (Tukey's $p < 0.001$). Bipinnate chains were significantly faster than whorls and transversal chains (Tukey's $p < 0.01$), but not significantly different from clusters. Clusters were significantly faster than whorls (Tukey's $p < 0.001$) in relative speed. Whorls and transversal chains presented similar relative swimming speeds with no significant differences.

Since linear architectures had the fastest mean swimming speeds (Fig. 3C, D), we investigated the relationship between swimming speeds with the dorsoventral zooid rotation angle, which represents the degree of linearity of the colony (Fig. 4). Species with more parallel (lower angles) dorsoventral zooid rotation presented faster absolute speeds ($n = 910$, $N = 107$, 16 species, $\text{Speed mm/s} = -0.78 \cdot \text{DV Zooid angle} + 81.25$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.33$, $p < 0.0001$) and faster size-and-effort corrected swimming speeds ($n = 810$, $N = 96$, 16 species, $\text{Speed zooids/pulse} = -0.016 \cdot \text{DV Zooid angle} + 2.37$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.09$, $p < 0.0001$).

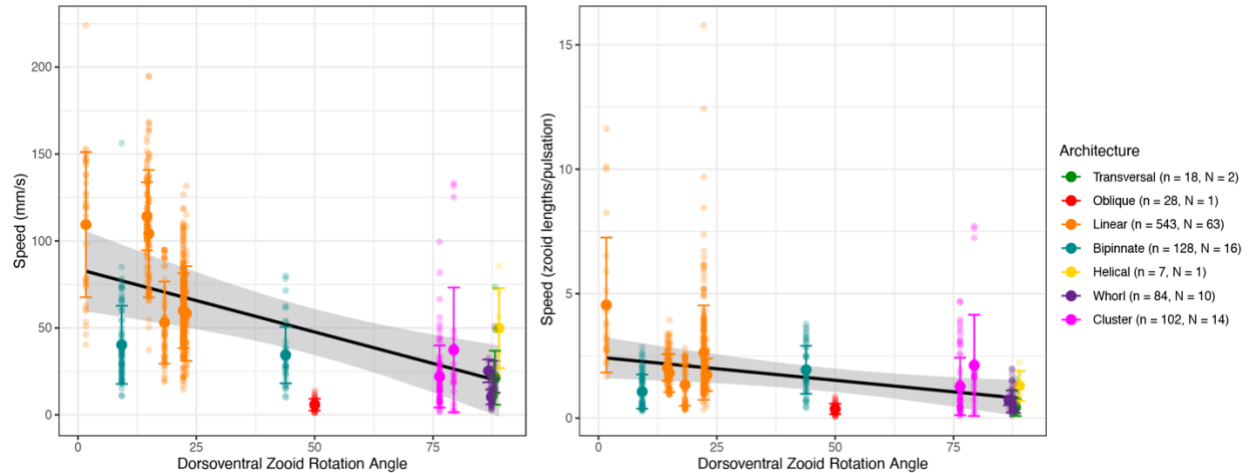


Figure 4. Absolute (A) and relative (B) colony swimming speed (specimen mean with standard errors, total $n=103$) for each salp species across their degree of dorsoventral zooid rotation. Error bars indicate standard error. The color indicates colonial architecture. Gray areas indicate the 95% confidence interval of the linear regression (black line).

We compared how swimming speeds scale with the number of zooids in the colony and found differences between colonial architectures. Swimming speed in whorls increased with number of zooids ($n = 84$, $N = 10$, 3 species, $\text{Speed mm/s} = 0.08 \times \text{Number of zooids} + 0.12$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.3$, $p < 0.0001$), though the data for this architecture was limited to small numbers of zooids (4 to 13) and relatively slow speeds (under 51 mm/s). Linear chain architectures did increase in relative speed with the number of zooids ($n = 443$, $N = 52$, 6 species, $\text{Speed mm/s} = 0.02 \times \text{Number of zooids} + 1.77$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$), as did bipinnate chains ($n = 157$, $N = 18$, 3 species, $\text{Speed mm/s} = 0.015 \times \text{Number of zooids} + 1.05$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.04$, $p < 0.02$). This relationship was not significant for any of the other architectures.

We pooled the data from multiple architectures into scaling modes to evaluate the overall relationship in colonies with a constant frontal area (linear, bipinnate, and helical species) and in colonies with scaling frontal area (transversal, whorl, cluster, and oblique species) with linear regressions (Fig. 1). This aggregation allowed the inclusion of data from architectures for which we only have one specimen (helical and oblique). When pooled by scaling mode (Fig. 5), the regression on colonies with a constant frontal area had a higher intercept on the swimming speed axis than in those with a scaling frontal area (1.54 and 1.09 zooid lengths/pulse, respectively), reflecting the generally higher swimming speed of the former. Moreover, the regression on colonies with constant frontal area had a significant positive slope ($n = 607$, $N = 71$, 10 species, $\text{Speed mm/s} = 0.02 \times \text{Number of zooids} + 1.55$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$), while the regression

on those with scaling frontal area was not significant ($n = 241$, $N = 29$, 8 species, $p = 0.073$). However, the limited sample sizes for helical and oblique chains prevent us from drawing firm conclusions about these architectures.

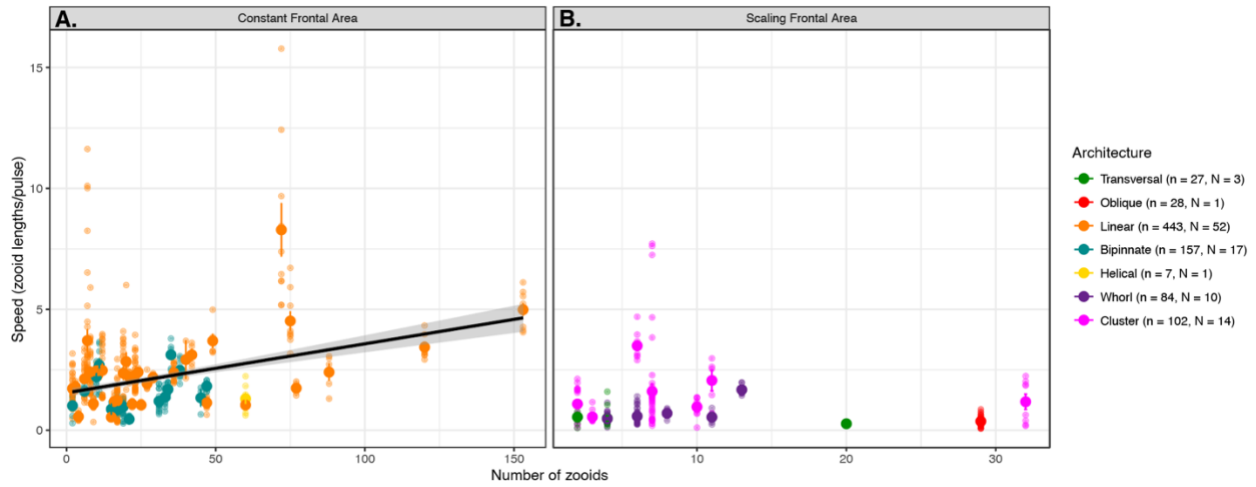


Figure 5. Linear relationships between relative swimming speed (zooid lengths per pulsation, specimen mean with standard errors) and number of zooids in the colony for constant (A) and scaling (N=71) (B) frontal motion-orthogonal frontal area (N=29) scaling modes. Gray areas represent the 95% confidence intervals of the regressions.

Putting together all the different organismal factors that we analyzed in this study, we calculated a generalized linear regression model to predict absolute salp swimming speed (U) from zooid length (L), pulsation rate (P), number of zooids (Z), and colonial architecture represented as frontal area scaling mode (A) as expressed in Eq. 3. While our results suggest that the effect of Z depends on A , we favored this simpler regression formula because it had a significantly lower ($\Delta AIC > 70$) AIC score than those with interaction terms between Z and A .

$$U \sim L + P + Z + A \quad \text{Eq. 3}$$

In this global model, we found significant effects on swimming speed (848 measurements, 100 videos, 18 species, $U = 0.29L - 0.60P - 0.2Z - 50.34A$, pseudo- $R^2 = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$) for L , Z , and A . We found that our global regression explains 36.8% of the variance in our swimming speed data: 5.8% is explained by zooid size, 3.5% by pulsation rate, 0.8% from zooid number, and 26.6% by the frontal scaling mode.

Respiration rates and cost of transport (COT)

The respiration rates of swimming and anesthetized salps revealed broad differences between species (Fig. 6, S2A). After estimating COT, we found a few significant differences

between architectures (Fig. 6, ANOVA $F > 5.9$, $p < 0.001$, Table S2B). In terms of absolute COT per mm traveled, all architectures except oblique chains had similar high transport efficiencies under 13 pgO_2/ml . Every one of these architectures was significantly more efficient per mm traveled than oblique architectures (Tukey's $p < 0.001$). In terms of relative COT per zooid length traveled, linear chains, clusters, and whorls had similar transport efficiencies that are significantly faster than transversal and oblique chains (Tukey's $p < 0.05$). Some of the differences between COT per mm and COT per zooid length are likely due to scaling with body size, as can be observed with the relative shift in the minuscule *Thalia* sp. (5.2 mm zooids) and the massive *Salpa maxima* (93.4 mm zooids).

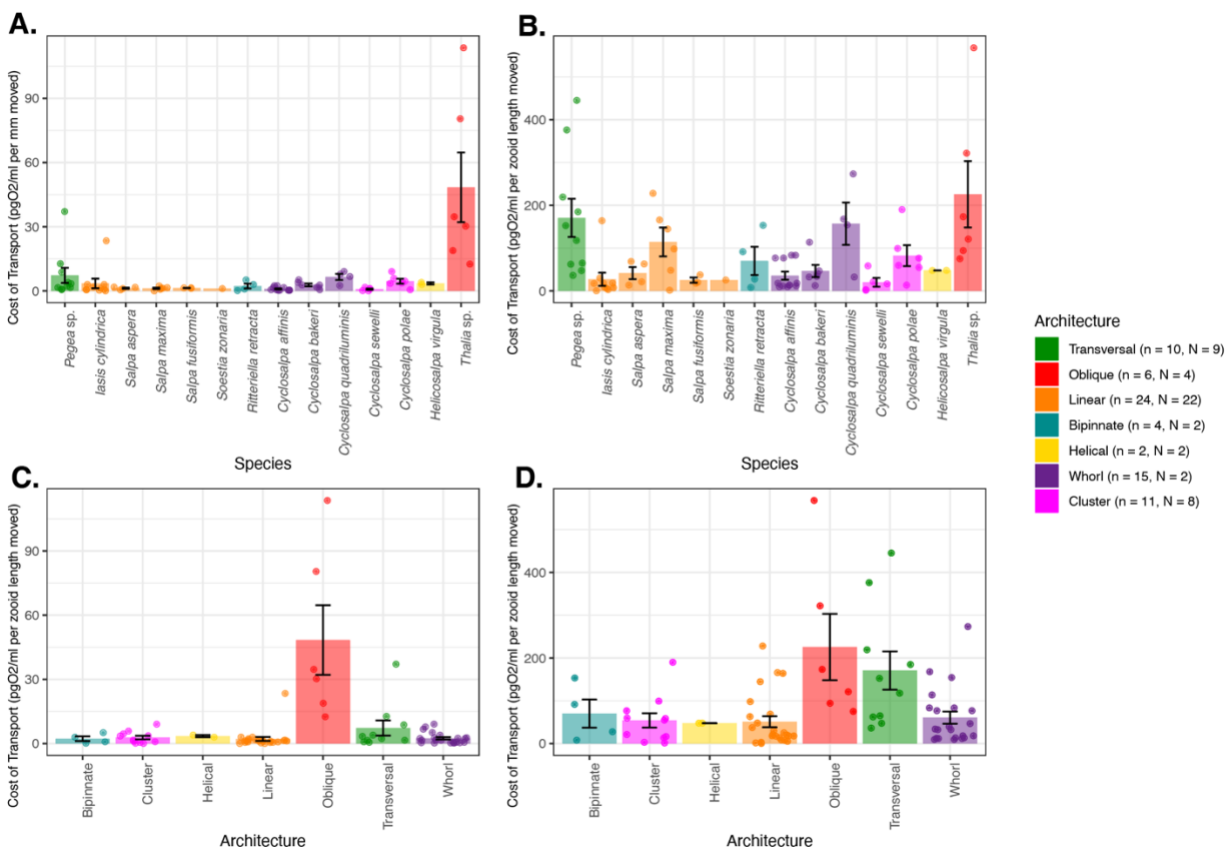


Figure 6. Mean cost-of-transport per mm (A) and per zooid length (B) moved for each salp species, and for each colonial architecture (C, D) with standard errors. Bar colors indicate colonial architecture. Sample sizes and Tukey's post-hoc pairwise comparisons across architecture types are listed in Dataset 1B and Table S2B, respectively.

When comparing the proportion of investment of metabolic costs into swimming (compared to the species mean baseline) across salp species (Fig. S2B), eight species had locomotion budgets under 50%, and the other seven have budgets above 50%. We then

compared the proportion of energetic investment in swimming to the COT values across species (Fig. S3A,B). We found no relationship with absolute COT ($N = 74$, 14 species, $p = 0.24$). We found a positive relationship with zooid-length scaled COT ($N = 74$, 14 species, Swimming % = $0.11 \cdot \text{COT per zooid length} + 34.4$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that species with more costly locomotion per zooid length invest a larger proportion of their energy budget in swimming. Finally, we compared the proportion of energetic investment in swimming with speed (Fig. S3C,D). We found no relationship (neither in mm/s nor in zooids/s), indicating that faster swimmers do not invest more of their energy budget into their locomotion efforts. We found that regardless of whether we consider transport in terms of absolute distances (Fig. 7A, $N = 64$, 14 species, linear regression: COT per mm = $-0.12 \cdot \text{Speed mm/s} + 13.46$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.09$, $p < 0.005$; exponential regression: $\log \text{COT per mm} = -0.015 \cdot \text{Speed mm/s} + 1.39$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$) or relative to body lengths (Fig. 7B, 64 specimens, 14 species, linear regression COT per zooid length = $-12.9 \cdot \text{Speed zooid lengths/s} + 116.1$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$, exponential regression $\log \text{COT per zooid length} = -0.24 \cdot \text{Speed zooid lengths/s} + 4.28$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$), the COT decreases in species with faster swimming speeds.

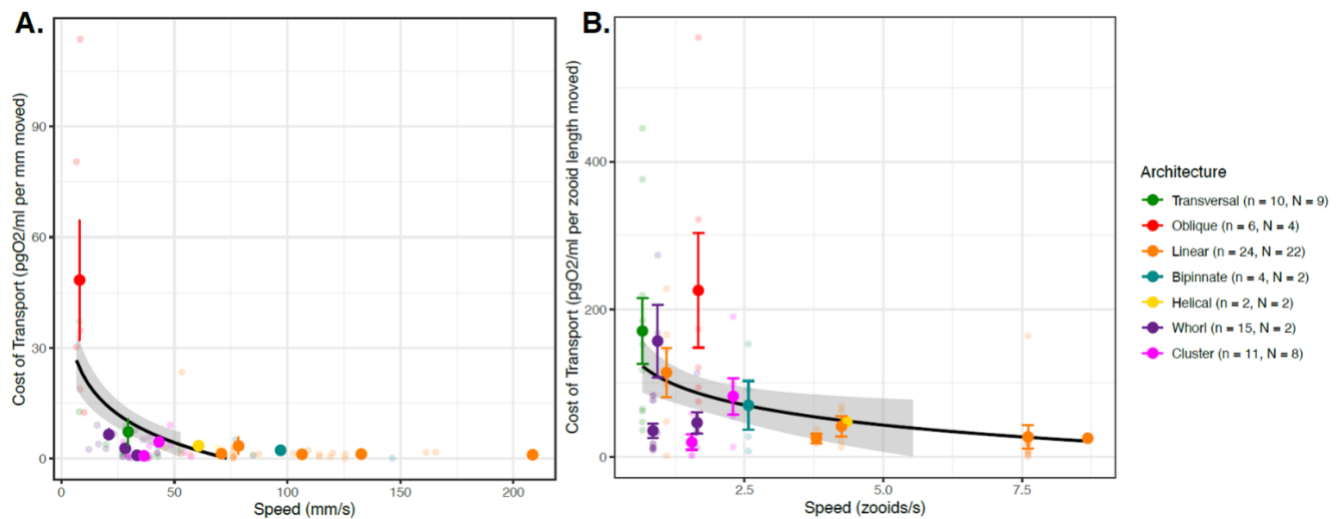


Figure 7. COT (specimen mean with standard error, $n=75$) per mm (A) and zooid length (B) moved across the specimen mean absolute (A) or relative (B) swimming speeds. The dot color indicates colonial architecture. Gray areas represent the 95% confidence intervals of the exponential regressions (black lines).

Discussion

We compared the swimming speeds and costs of transport of salp colonies across the most comprehensive representation of salp species diversity. Our results show a wide range of colonial swimming speeds across salp species and architectures with linear species swimming fastest (Fig. 3). Moreover, this study shows for the first time how salp colonial swimming speed scales with the number of zooids in the colony (Fig. 5), suggesting that incremental propulsive power from additional zooids does can produce higher swimming speeds for species with a constant frontal area. Across species, salps have a low COT (Fig. 6) and as speed increases, COT decreases (Fig. 7), which may be a unique advantage of multi-jet swimmers.

Architectural determinants of salp swimming speed

Colonial architecture was the strongest predictor of swimming speed, though there is a large amount of unexplained variation which may relate to species-specific differences, behavioral, or environmental factors (see global GLM results). We expected that swimming speed in colonial salps would be predicted by pulsation rate as a measure of swimming effort. Our results indicate that this relationship only exists when accounting for zooid size (Fig. S1B), suggesting an underlying relationship between pulsation rate and zooid length that may be masking its predictive power over absolute speeds. This is consistent with the distribution of our data and our observations in the field where larger salps pulsate at a slower rate than smaller ones. We find a significant increase in speed with larger zooid sizes (Fig. S1C,D), consistent with previous findings of jet propelled invertebrates (Gemmell et al 2021; Bone and Trueman 1983) and more broadly across aquatic swimmers (Andersen et al. 2016).

The relationship between the number of zooids and speed in linear chains is complicated by shifts in zooid orientation during development. Salp colonies start their free-living phase when the developing buds detach from the solitary oozoid. The newly released colony has the maximum number of zooids since the zooid number only gets reduced as the colony splits or loses zooids to turbulence, disease, or predation. Therefore, colonies with higher numbers of zooids are typically composed of smaller, younger zooids. In linear architectures, these younger colonies could still be developing their dorsoventral rotation (Damian-Serrano & Sutherland 2023), thus effectively being more like oblique architecture. A less acute dorsoventral rotation angle would explain why these more numerous linear chains are not as fast as we would expect, given that our results support a significant relationship between this angle and swimming speed (Fig. 4). Finding a strong relationship between zooid number and speed in whorls was surprising given their less streamlined configuration (Fig. 5). This could be due to the smaller range of slow speeds and few zooids in the data we obtained for these species. Our regression results on pooled architectures, as well as finding a significant relationship between number of zooids and speed

for linear and bipinnate chains but not for clusters nor transversal chains, support our primary hypothesis that the different frontal area scaling relationships across architectures has an impact on swimming speed.

Linear chains swam faster than all other architectures, including those that share a constant frontal area feature like bipinnate chains (Fig. 3, Table S2). One potential explanation for this difference could come from the relative thrust provided by the jets. Linear chains eject their jet plumes at very small angles (near parallel) to the axis of locomotion (Sutherland et al. 2024), just wide enough to avoid interaction between jet plumes (Sutherland & Weihs 2017). Bipinnate and helical chains (both with constant frontal area) have the atrial siphons (point of jet ejection) of their constituent blastozooids oriented at a wider angle (Madin 1990), which may lead to wider angles of their jets relative to the axis of locomotion. This in turn would result in a larger proportion of the force exerted by the jet to be applied as torque rather than thrust onto the colony. This hypothesis could be tested by measuring the 3D angles of the actual jets instead of the angles of the zooids since salps can use their atrial muscles and siphon morphology to direct the angle of their jets.

Finding that clusters can swim at speeds comparable to those of bipinnate and helical chains, even faster than whorls, defies our intuitive understanding of the mechanical properties of these colonies and thus warrants further investigation into how these species coordinate their jets to produce forward thrust. While oblique chains are architectural intermediates between transversal and linear chains (Damian-Serrano & Sutherland 2023), our data indicate that oblique chains may be the slowest swimmers among salps. This incongruence may be explained by the fact that we only had speed data from one oblique specimen (of *Thalia* sp.) with very small zooid sizes. Small salps might operate at notably lower Reynolds numbers than large ones, which may require a non-linear size correction for meaningful speed comparisons. Swimming speed data from the much larger oblique chains of *Thetys vagina* may provide a more comparable example of the locomotory performance of this oblique colonial configuration.

The questions addressed in this study focus on the effect of frontal area of colonial architectures on swimming speed. This effect may be associated with form and pressure drag differences between more and less streamlined colony shapes. To test whether these are the forces responsible for differences in swimming speed, drag would have to be measured or calculated, which is beyond the scope of this study. Other unaccounted forces may be significant energetic contributors to the system that explain the remainder of the observed variation. Chain length for the streamlined forms (helical, linear, and bipinnate chains) could have negative effects on swimming speeds that may partially counteract the positive effect of increased propeller thrust.

For example, skin drag increases proportionally to the surface area of the system, and the smoothness of the chain may increase pressure drag through vortex shredding (Vogel 1981). While added (virtual) mass could also be an issue, asynchronously swimming colonies do not suffer as much from these acceleration-related costs, since their speed is maintained near constant while cruising (Bone & Trueman 1983). Chain length could also lead to reduced stability and efficiency, though some linear species capitalize on this by swimming in corkscrew orbital spirals (Sutherland et al. 2024). However, if friction drag, chain stability, or vortex shredding were indeed more important contributors than frontal form drag, we would predict that linear chains would appear slower than other more stable and compact architectures. Future studies may unravel these potential confounding effects on the biomechanics of colonial salp swimming.

Salp swimming speed and diel vertical migration

Salps are important players in the oceanic carbon cycle, grazing upon both phytoplankton and bacteria (Henschke et al. 2016). Their carcasses and fecal pellets export large quantities of fixed carbon into the deep sea, accelerating carbon sequestration in the biological carbon pump (Wiebe et al. 1979, Décima et al. 2023). Part of this process is enhanced by the diel vertical migrations by some salp species though the distribution of this behavior across species diversity is poorly known. Off Bermuda, Madin et al. (1996) reported *Pegea* spp., *B. rostrata*, and *C. polae* as non-migratory, all of which we found to have slow swimming speeds. Other slow-swimmer species like *C. affinis* were found to only migrate a few meters through the diel cycle. The species *S. aspera*, *S. fusiformis*, *S. zonaria*, *I. punctata*, and *R. retracta* have been observed vertically migrating off Bermuda (Madin et al 1996, Stone & Steinberg 2014), which is congruent with our observations during fieldwork. These species all have constant frontal area and fast swimming speeds.

Vertical migrators need to be fast enough to follow the dark isolumens as they shift during dawn and dusk in time to maximize their exploitation of the food resources near the surface. Thus, absolute speed is important to the autoecology of these animals. Other *Salpa* species have also been reported as strong vertical migrators throughout the literature (Henschke et al. 2021, Madin et al. 2006, Pascual et al. 2017). A species that does not fit this pattern is *I. cylindrica*, a fast-swimming non-migratory species that spends night and day near the surface (Madin et al 1996; and pers. obs.). However, other studies do report moderate diel vertical migration for this species (Stone & Steinberg 2014), so it may be adapted for facultative vertical migration under specific oceanographic conditions. Some migratory species, such as *S. aspera*, are known to travel distances of over 800m at dawn and dusk, at rates predicted to require 5-10 m/min (83-166 mm/s)

based on MOCNESS trawl intervals (Wiebe et al. 1979). These predictions are consistent with the speeds we recorded for this species (88-145 mm/s) and similar congeners.

Ecophysiological implications

While the importance of a few well-studied linear chain salp species in the biological carbon pump has been delineated, the question of whether this ecological role is generalizable to other salp species remains unanswered. In addition to vertical migration behavior, another likely important factor in their carbon flow is their respiration rate. The higher their respiration rate, the larger the proportion of assimilated carbon that will be released back into the water as dissolved carbon dioxide. This study provides the broadest taxonomic perspective on respiration rates (18 species, Fig. S2A) and swimming cost of transport (14 species), finding 17-fold differences in their respiration rates and over 77-fold differences in their mean COT. Except for a few species with extremely high and low values, most respiration rates are centered between 0.2 and 1 $\mu\text{mol/g/hour}$, assuming a salp tissue density of 1.025 g/ml. In general, the respiration rates we estimated for salps are within the range of those reported in the literature (Trueblood 2019, Iguchi and Ikeda 2004). Compared to the metabolic rates estimated for the broader diversity of marine pelagic animals (Seibel & Drazen 2007), the rates that we measured for salps are in a similar range to those measured for *Salpa thompsoni* (Iguchi and Ikeda 2004). Our values are also similar to those measured by Seibel & Drazen (2007) in nemerteans, chaetognaths, and most fishes (0.1-1 $\mu\text{molO}_2/\text{g/h}$), which are generally higher than other gelatinous animals like ctenophores or scyphomedusae (0.01-0.1 $\mu\text{molO}_2/\text{g/h}$), but generally lower than those of cephalopods, crustaceans, or large fish (1-10 $\mu\text{molO}_2/\text{g/h}$). Salp species known to have strong vertical migration behaviors (*Salpa* spp., *S. zonaria*, *I. punctata*, and *R. retracta*) have low basal metabolic rates (Fig. S2A) and low costs of transport. These results indicate that many non-migratory species, while likely still being important players in the biological carbon pump via their fecal pellet production, are releasing more of the consumed carbon as carbon dioxide near the surface than their more metabolically efficient relatives. The ultimate ecological outcome of each species needs to be assessed holistically, considering their microbial filtration and pellet deposition rate as well as their relative abundance in the water column.

Our metabolically calculated costs of transport range between 5-50 J/kg/m when converting the mg of oxygen to J via aerobic respiration free energy equations at 23°C. These values are higher than the highly efficient 1-2 J/kg/m reported for salps in the literature (Bone & Trueman 1983, Gemmell et al. 2021), and approach the less-efficient values found in single jet-propelled invertebrates like scallops or squids. We suspect that COT calculated from mechanical parameters such as the displacement of water mass is not directly comparable to the COT

calculated from respiration rates. Furthermore, the standard aerobic respiration free-energy equation based on glucose may not fully represent the metabolic energy-conversion processes in salps, which could rely on a combination of sugars and fatty acids derived from their microscopic prey.

While COT increases with swimming speed fishes (Rubio-Gracia et al. 2020) and jet-propelled squid (Bi & Zhu 2019), multi-jet swimmers may circumvent this tradeoff by having multiple swimming units. In colonial siphonophores, as zooid number increases swimming speed increases together with a decrease in COT (Du Clos et al. 2022). Our results show that faster swimming species have lower COT (Fig. 6), which suggests that faster speeds and higher locomotory efficiency have a common cause, where both speed and efficiency depend on frontal area which may partly drive form and pressure drag forces. However, this hypothesis is not supported by the distribution of COT across architectures (Fig 6C, D), where except for oblique and transversal chains, all architectures present similarly efficient COT values. Perhaps there are other underlying explanatory factors linking swimming speed and swimming efficiency, such as shared ancestry, muscle content, jet coordination, or jetting angles (thrust-to-torque ratios).

Evolutionary implications

Across the evolutionary history of salps, linear chains have evolved multiple times independently from oblique ancestors (Damian-Serrano et al. 2023), suggesting the adaptive role of this architecture as a functional trait. Linear chain architectures evolved independently in *M. hexagona*, *S. zonaria*, *I. punctata*, and before the common ancestor of *Iasis* and *Salpa*. Our results show that going from an oblique form to a linear one may confer significant advantages in locomotory speed and energetic efficiency. However, multiple colonial architectures, which we find to be slower swimmers (such as transversal chains, helical chains, whorls, and clusters in the genus *Pegea* and the Cyclosalpidae family) had also evolved from oblique and linear ancestors. This is incongruent with a scenario where natural selection strongly favors locomotion efficiency across all ecological niches of salps. Therefore, the evolution of colonial architecture may be driven by ecological trade-offs with other non-locomotory functions. Alternatively, in some of these lineages, locomotion at the colonial stage may not be important enough for selection to maintain these highly streamlined forms, allowing for neutral evolutionary processes to produce a diversity of non-adaptive forms. In the current study, we did not use phylogenetic comparative methods in our analysis because like other investigators comparing biomechanical properties across species (e.g. Dabiri et al. 2010, DiSanto et al. 2021) we were interested in inherent mechanical relationships dictated by the colony architectures. For instance, a linear arrangement of zooids inherently reduces drag due to a cluster arrangement, leading to faster swimming

speeds and potentially higher efficiency regardless of phylogenetic history. In other words, any phylogenetic inertia is irrelevant in instantaneous relationships between traits (Felsenstein 1985). Moreover, independence of data is often incorrectly assumed to be an assumption of standard (nonphylogenetic) regressions (Uyeda et al. 2018), when in reality the assumptions relate to the independence and distribution of the error terms. Thus, when all the phylogenetic signal is present in the predictor, as it is in the case with colonial architecture (Damian-Serrano et al. 2022) and its associated characteristics, there is no need for any “phylogenetic correction” (Uyeda et al. 2018). However, there may be unaccounted factors explaining the residual variation in our analyses that may bear phylogenetic signal. For example, tunic stiffness, tunic smoothness, muscle band number, muscle fiber density, swimming behavior, as well as metabolic and physiological baselines may be more similar between more closely related species, potentially erasing some of the architecture-specific signal. Future studies could address the role of phylogeny and heritable factors in salp swimming speed and cost of transport using phylogenetic comparative methods. These analyses could reveal whether these factors have co-evolved with each other and/or with respiration rate or colonial architecture.

Insights for bioinspired underwater vehicle design

Pulsatile jet propulsion is a promising avenue for bioinspired aquatic vehicles and robots (Mohensi 2006, Gohardini 2014, Yue et al. 2015). Multijet propulsion systems with multiple propellers akin to salp colonies have been explored in an engineering context (Chao et al. 2017, Costello et al. 2015) with direct inspiration from gelatinous animals (Marut 2014, Krummel 2019, Bi et al 2022, Du Clos et al. 2022). Salp diversity provides a natural laboratory to explore the hydrodynamic implications of different multijet arrangement designs. Our findings underscore the importance of considering the scaling hydrodynamic properties of propeller arrangements to optimize speed and energy efficiency in bioinspired underwater vehicle design. While linear chain arrangements were the fastest and among the most energy efficient, robot (or vehicle) configurations such as a cluster form may confer unique object manipulation or maneuverability advantages. Our results show that these seemingly inefficient propeller configurations do not impose large disadvantages in terms of speed and fuel efficiency.

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Data availability

Data used to generate the results presented in this paper are available in the supplementary information. Any other datasets used directly or indirectly for this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Competing interests

No competing interests declared.

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