

Denoising and Clustering amplicon data

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Amplicons, denoising, ASVs, OTUs, cluster... 🤔

- **Amplicons:** products of PCR (typically from a metabarcoding region)
- **Denoising:** cleaning of data. Reduce noise from PCR and sequencing
- **ASV:** Amplicons denoised by DADA2 are often called **ASVs** (amplicon sequence variants)
- **Clustering:** Groups of similar things (in this case amplicons or **ASV**)
- **OTU:** Operational Taxonomic Unit. Proxy for species, ecotypes, populations or another functional unit
- **Species:** who knows?

Illumina seq. and amplicon data

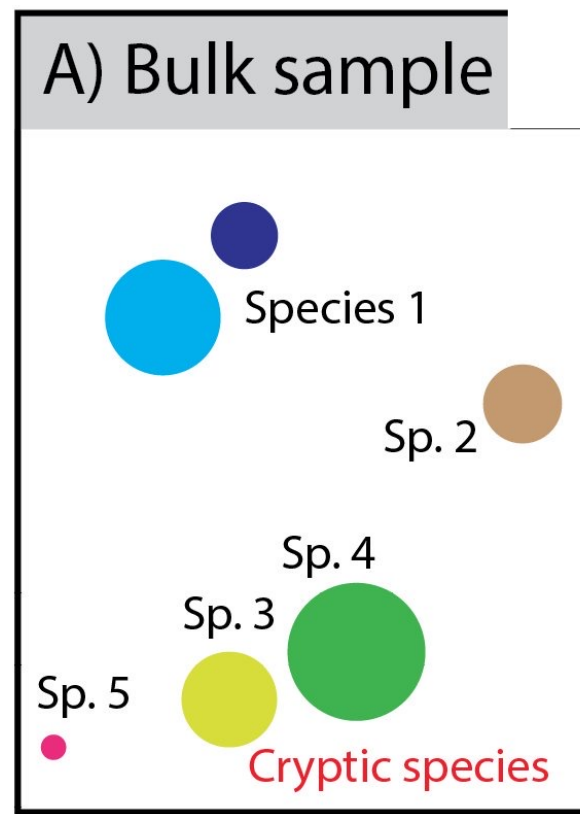
- Illumina HiSeq and MiSeq sequencing has been used extensively for amplicons sequencing in the last years
 - High yields with relative low cost
 - HiSeq (and NovaSeq) short fragments 2*150bp
 - MiSeq a bit longer reads 2*300bp
- Low error rate, but due to the high number of sequences generated (in the billions) errors are bound to occur in the library
 - (About 1% pr 1000 nt, not adjusted for improvements due to overlapping reads.)
- How to deal with errors, has been an ongoing discussion for high-throughput data for a quite some time

How to deal with PCR and sequencing errors?

- Reasons for clustering of metabarcoding data:
 - Reduce effect of sequencing error
 - Reduce “noise”

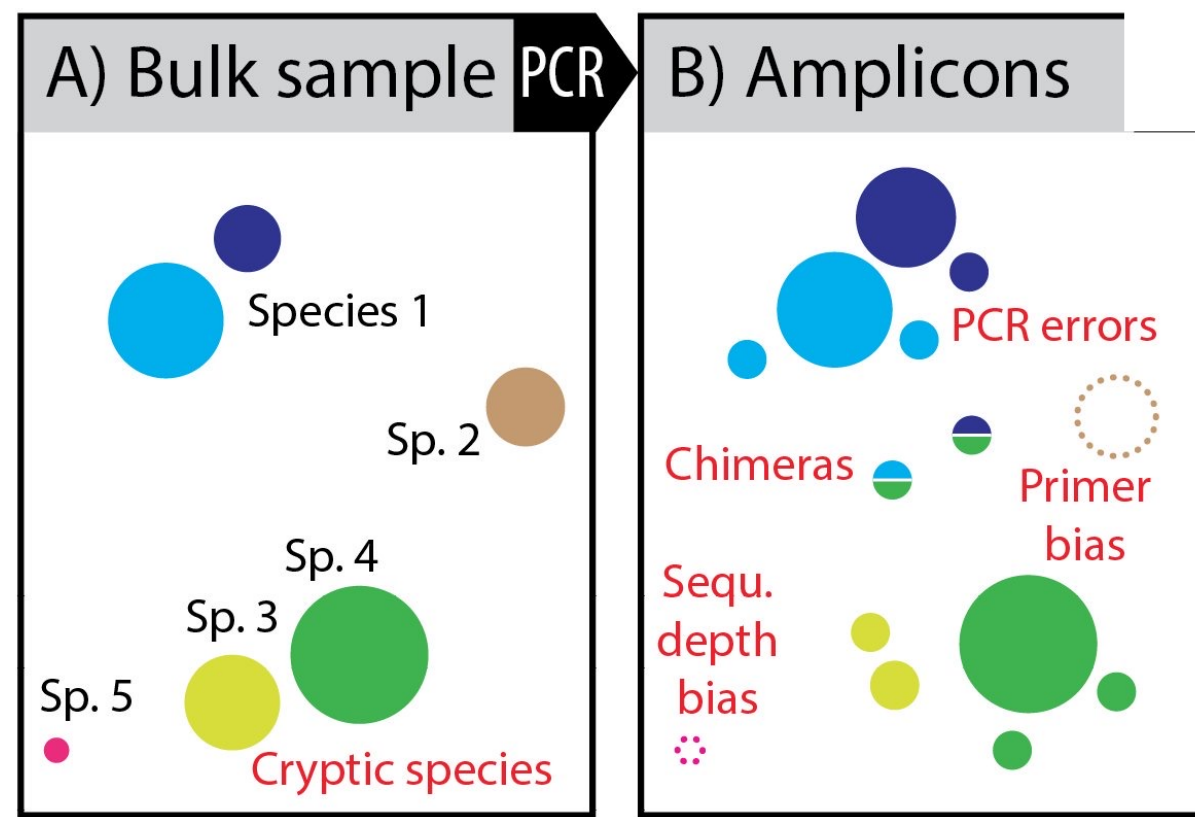
How to deal with PCR and sequencing errors?

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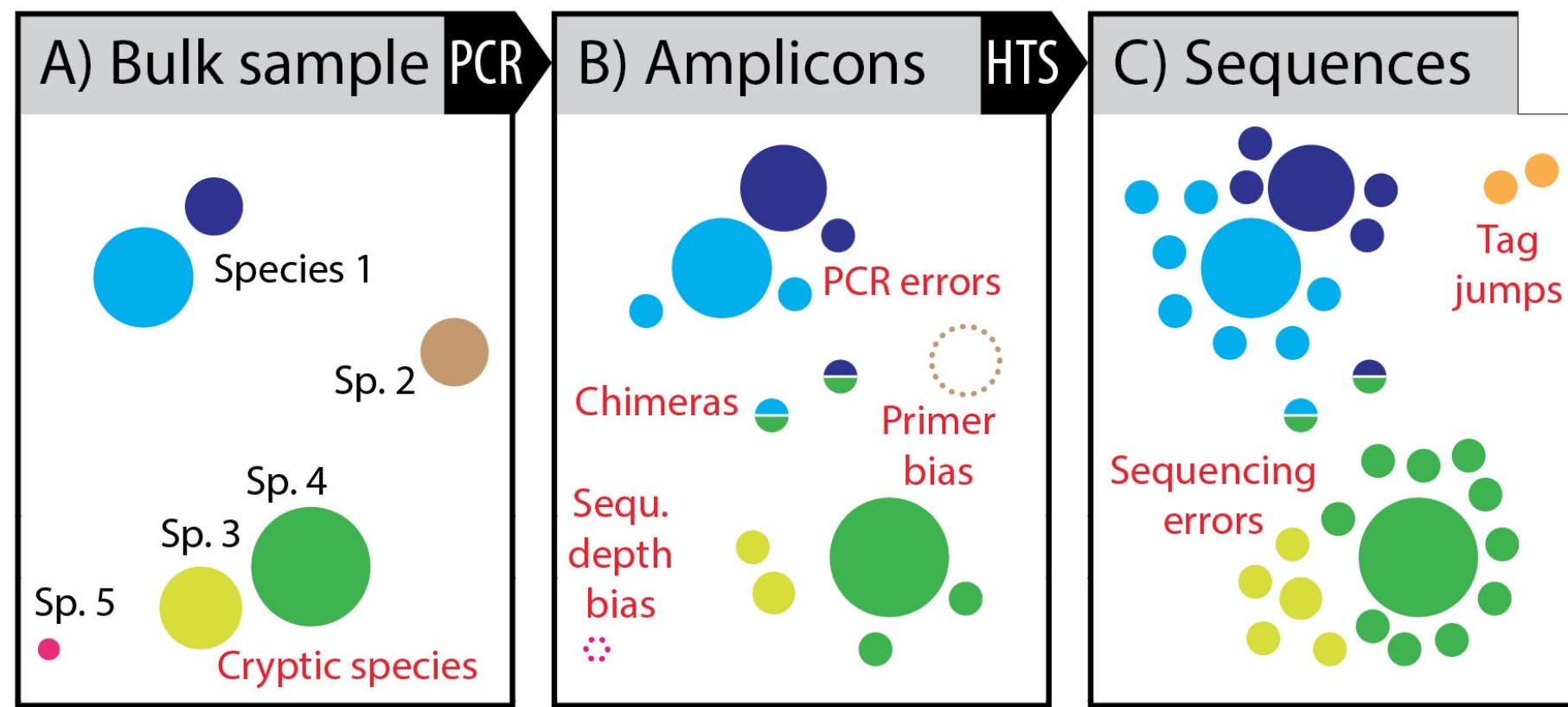
How to deal with PCR and sequencing errors?

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 - Reduce effect of sequencing error
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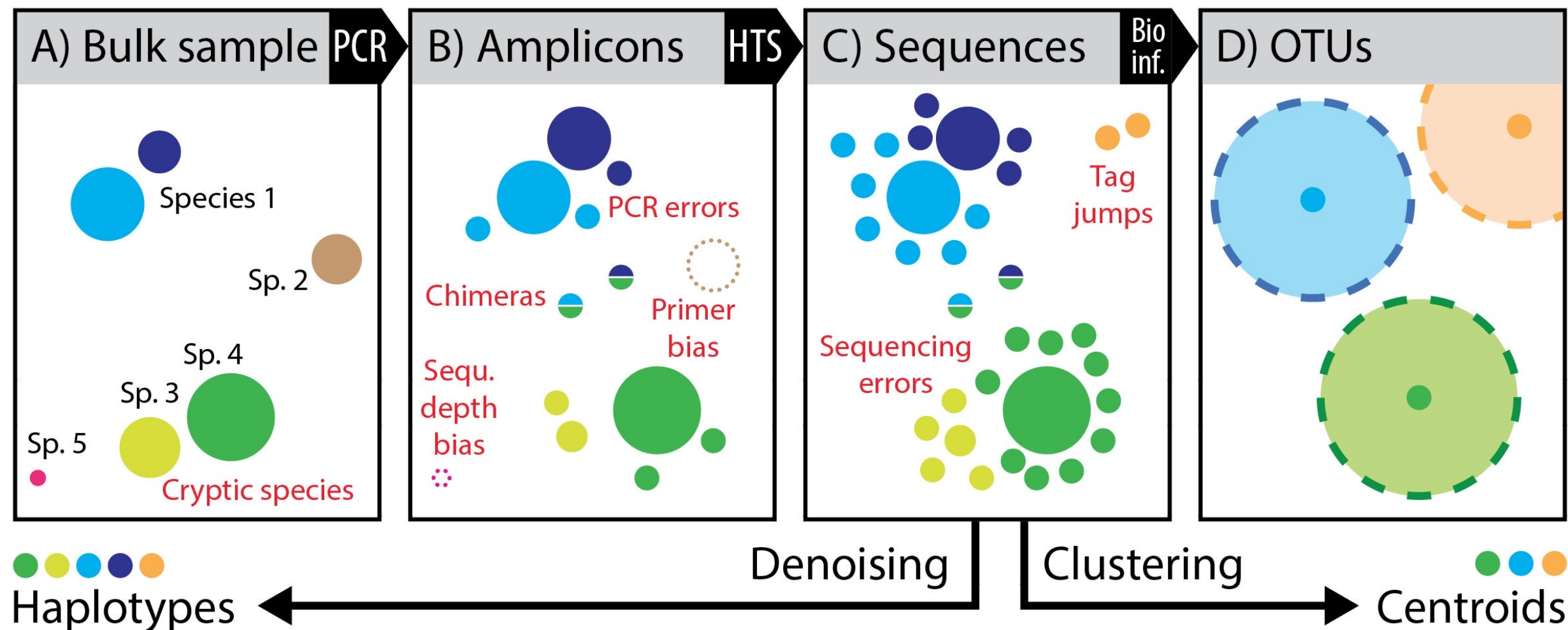
How to deal with PCR and sequencing errors?

- Reasons for clustering of metabarcoding data:
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How to deal with PCR and sequencing errors?

- Reasons for clustering of metabarcoding data:
 - Reduce effect of sequencing error
 - Reduce “noise”



DADA2

- An update of DADA (Rosen et al., 2012)
- **Divisive Amplicon Denoising Algorithm**
 - Originally made for 454 data.
- **DADA2** Infers “amplicon sequence variants from Illumina-scale amplicon data data without imposing the *arbitrary dissimilarity* thresholds that define molecular OTUs”

DADA2: High-resolution sample inference from Illumina amplicon data

Benjamin J Callahan¹, Paul J McMurdie²,
Michael J Rosen³, Andrew W Han², Amy Jo A Johnson² &
Susan P Holmes¹

DADA2

- Advantages (according to themselves, aka the selling point...)
 - **Resolution:** DADA2 infers exact amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) from amplicon data, resolving biological differences of even 1 or 2 nucleotides.
 - **Accuracy:** DADA2 reports fewer false positive sequence variants
 - **Comparability:** The ASVs output by DADA2 can be directly compared between studies, without the need to reprocess the pooled data.
 - **Computational Scaling:** The compute time of DADA2 scales linearly sample number, and memory requirements are essentially flat.

DADA2

- The error model incorporates quality information, which is usually ignored by other methods (after filtering).
- The error model incorporates quantitative abundances, whereas most other methods use abundance ranks (if they use abundance at all).
- The error model have different error rates for different substitutions,
 - eg. A->C, is different from A->G whereas other methods merely count the mismatches.
- DADA2 can parameterize its error model from the data itself, rather than relying on previous datasets that may or may not reflect the PCR and sequencing protocols used in your study.

sample
sequences



sample
sequences



amplicon reads



Errors

A large black arrow pointing to the right, indicating the direction of errors.

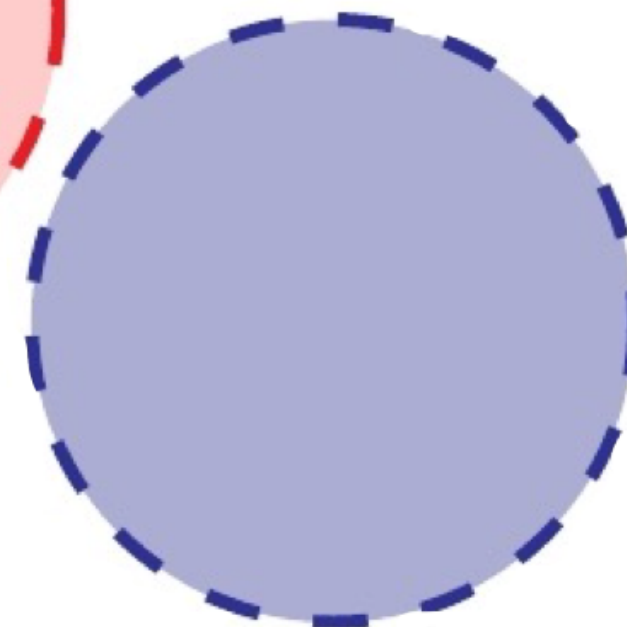
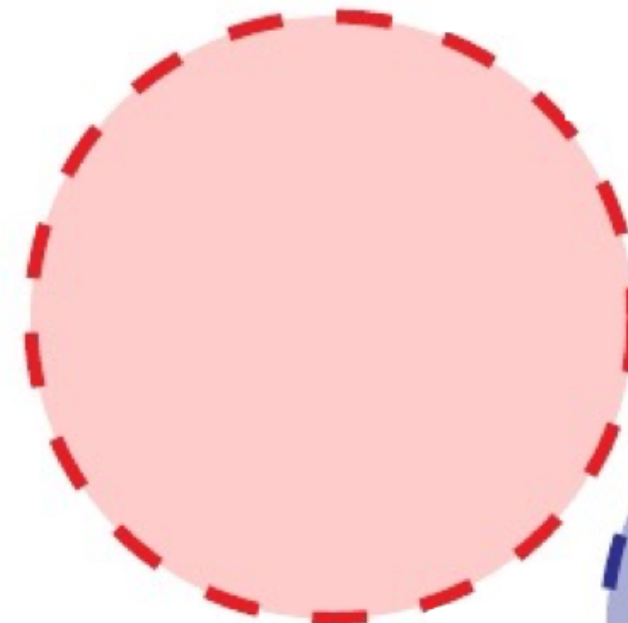
sample
sequences



amplicon reads



OTUs



Errors



Make OTUs



DADA2



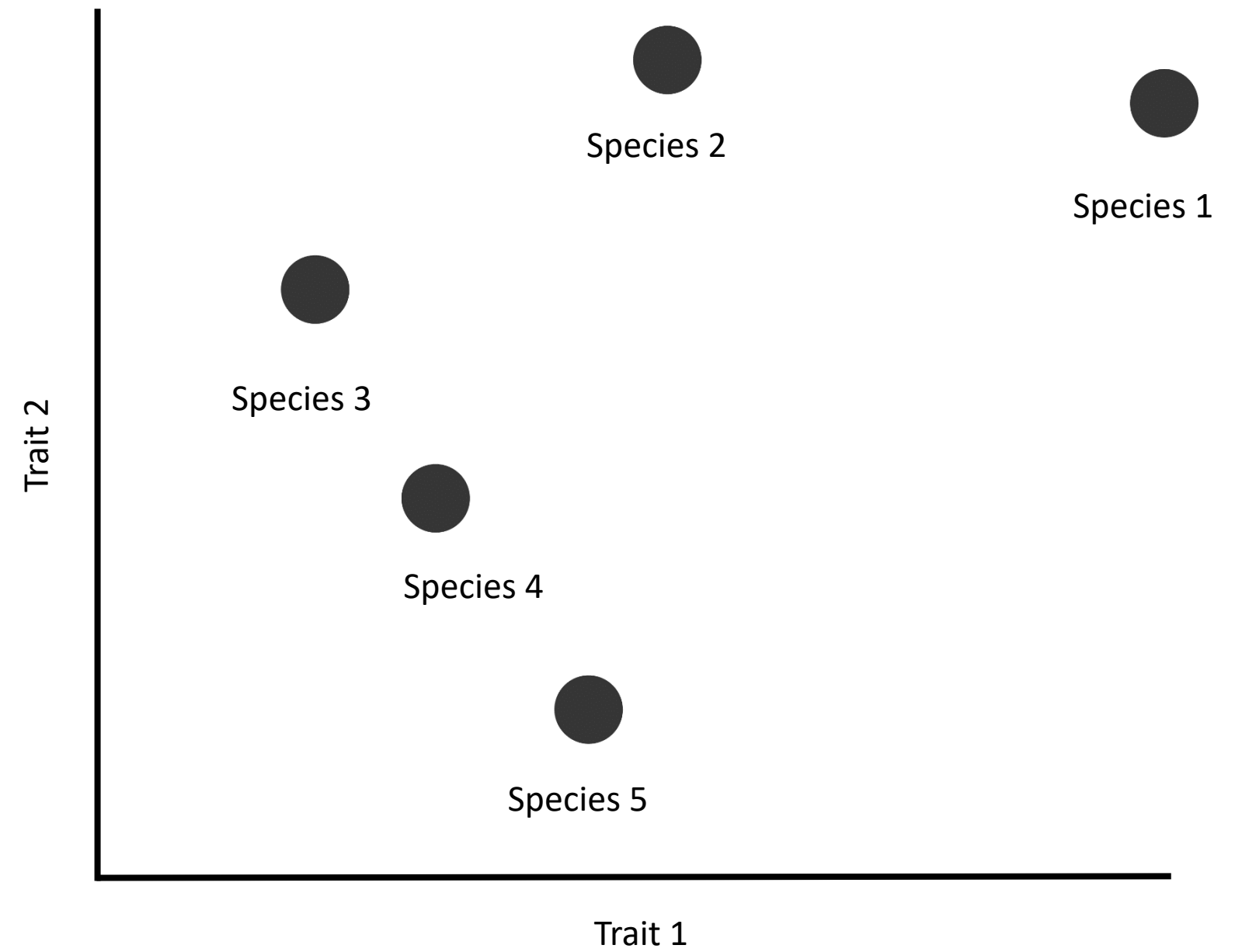
DADA2

- The core denoising algorithm in the DADA2 is built on a model of the errors in Illumina-sequenced amplicon reads.
- **However:** Clustering might still be needed since there are other sources of noise.
- And depends on the marker sequenced
 - SSU (18S) has multiple copies in many eukaryotes
 - Intragenomic variation might be around the “usual” cut-off used for vsearch/usearch type clustering (i.e. 2-3% difference).
 - The marker ITS is highly variable

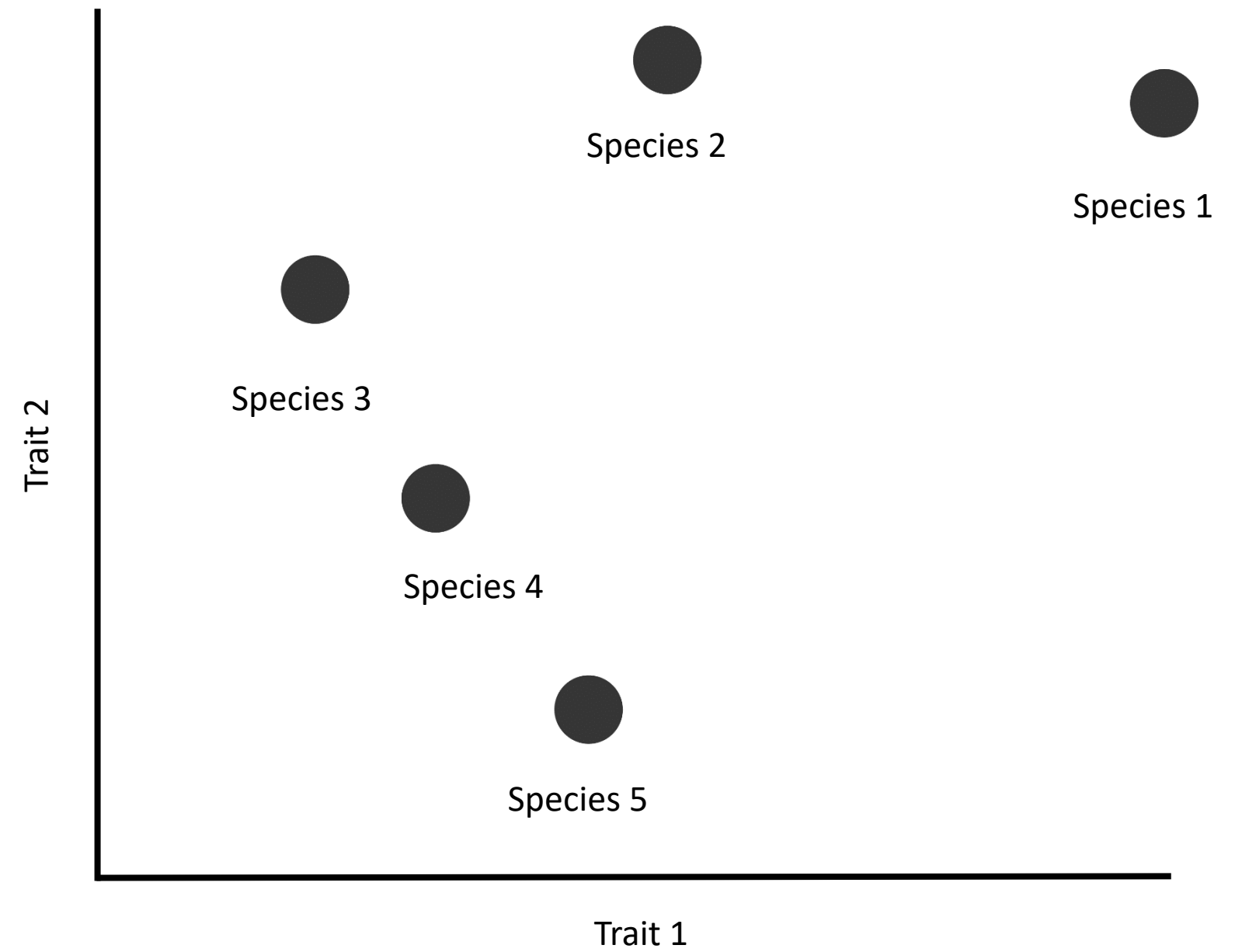
Do you still need to cluster?

- Clustering might still be needed since there are other sources of “noise”.
 - I.e. even though an inferred read is a “true sequence” with a discernible abundance it might not by itself be representative for individuals of that species.

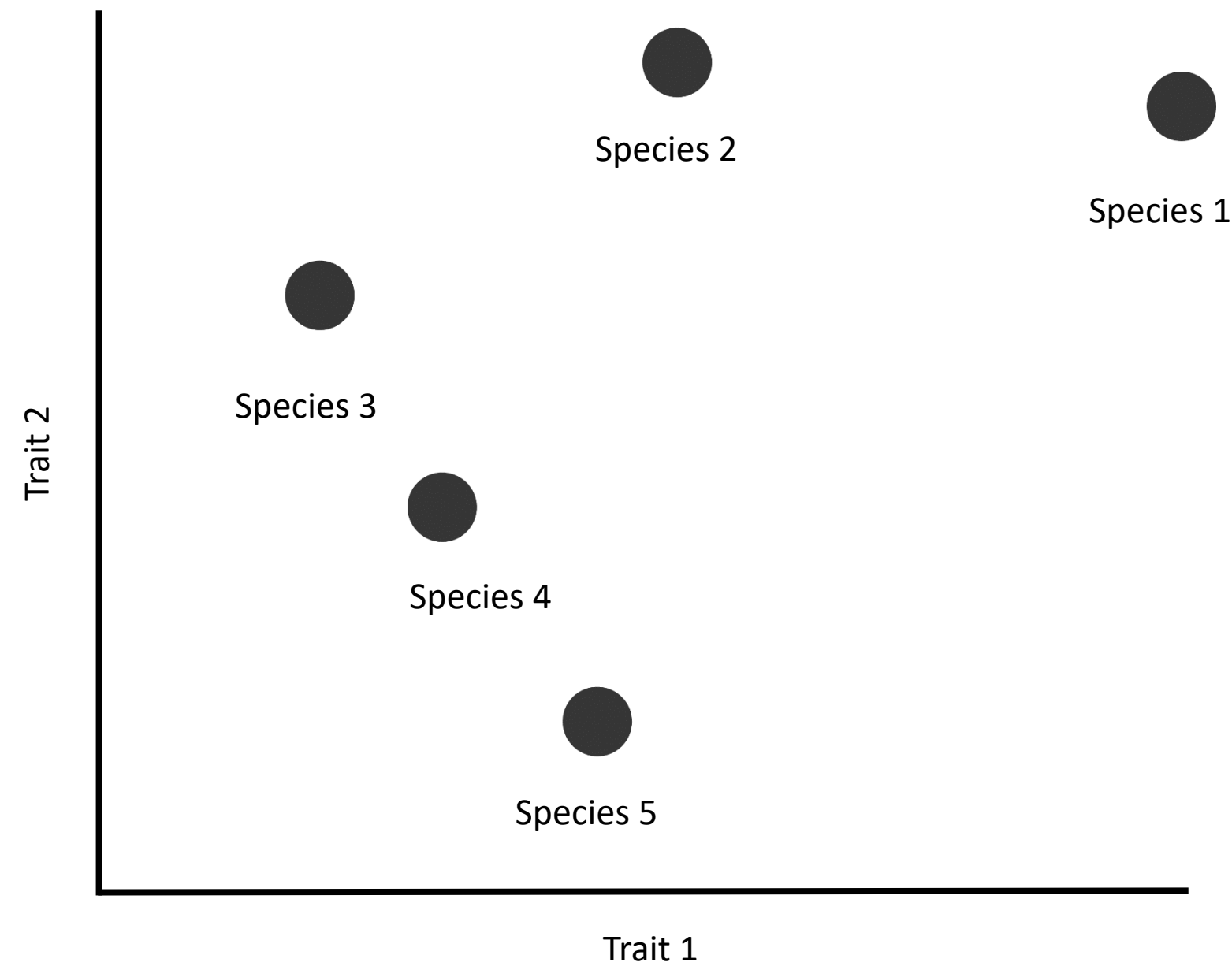
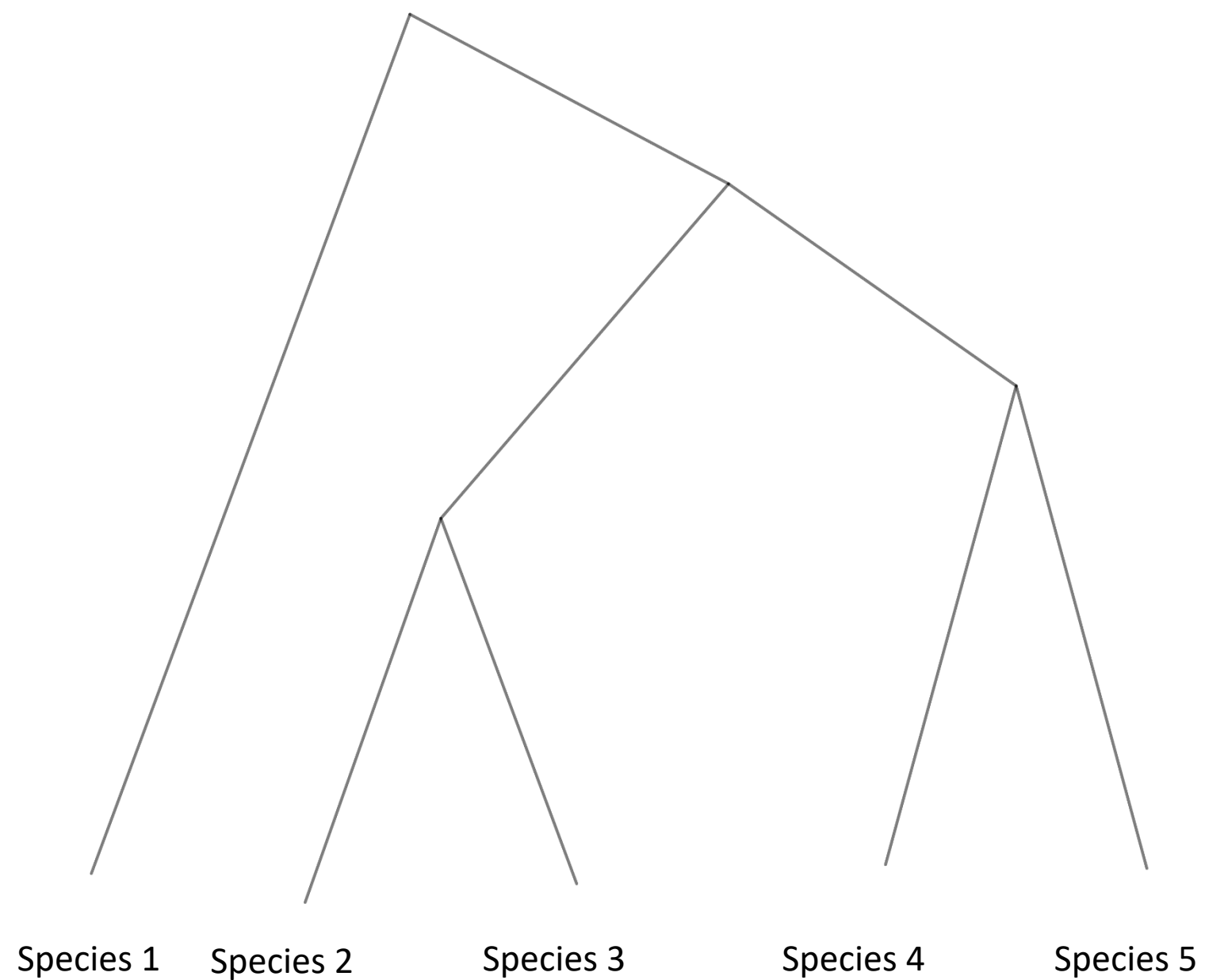
The ideal picture



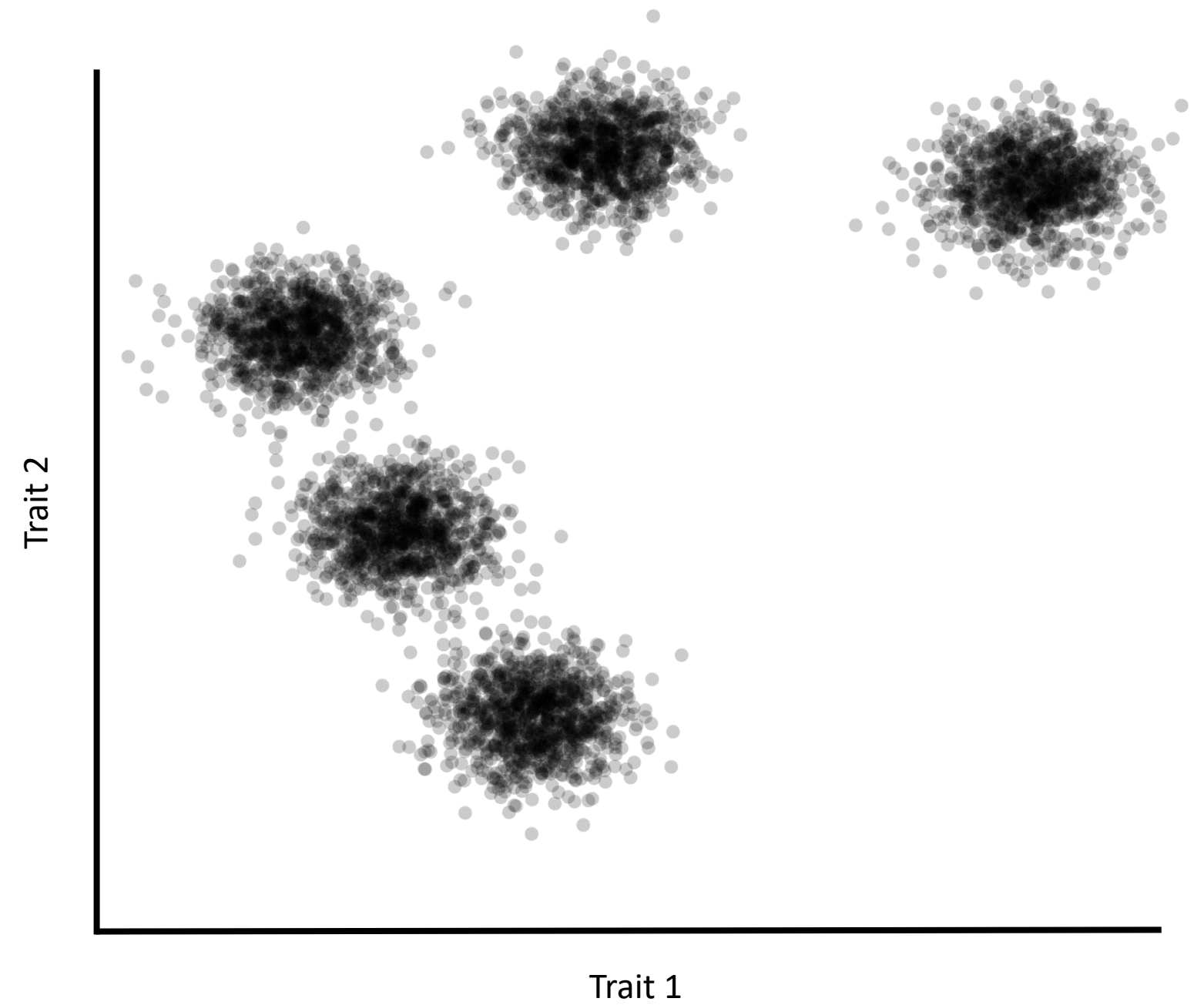
The ideal picture



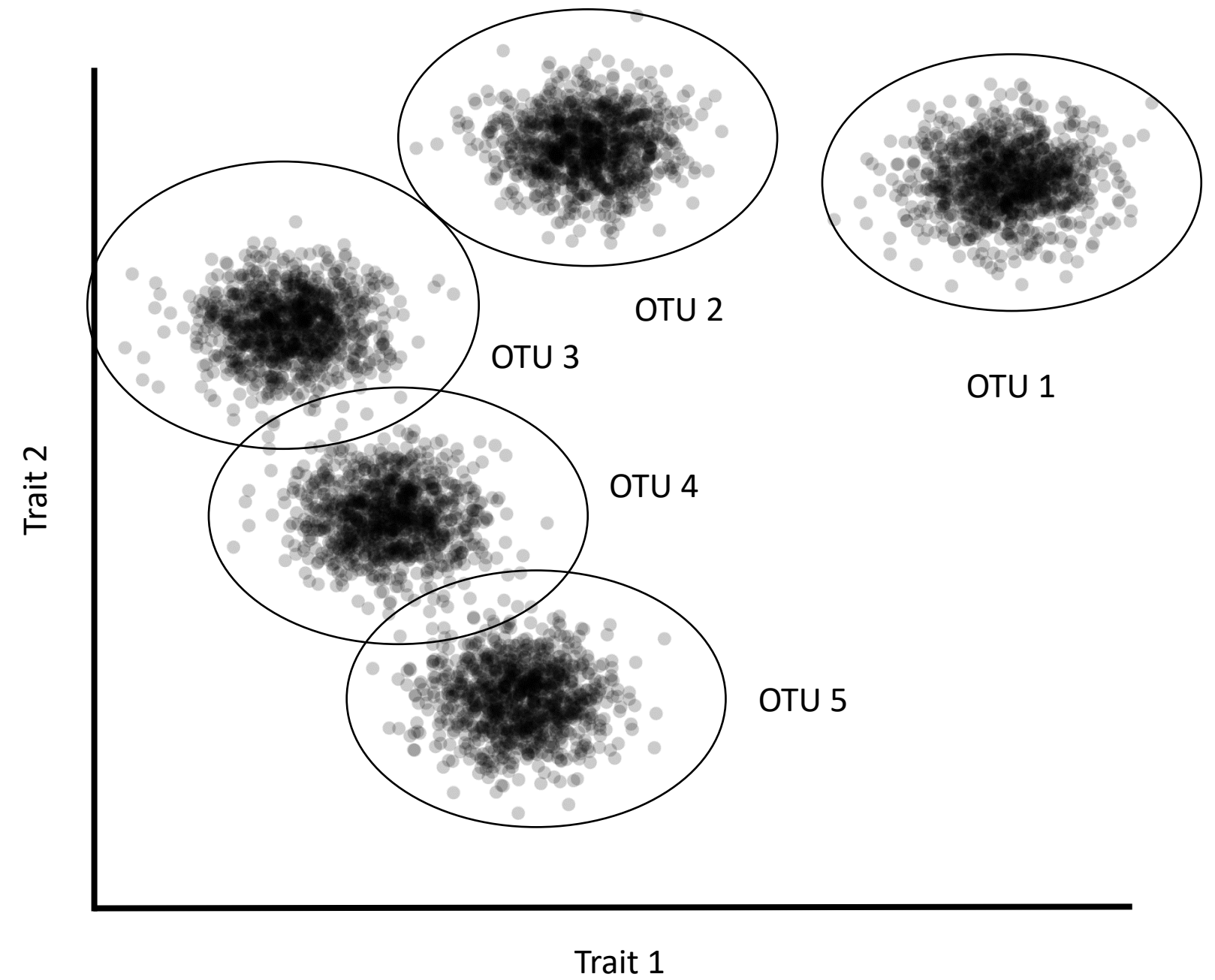
The ideal picture



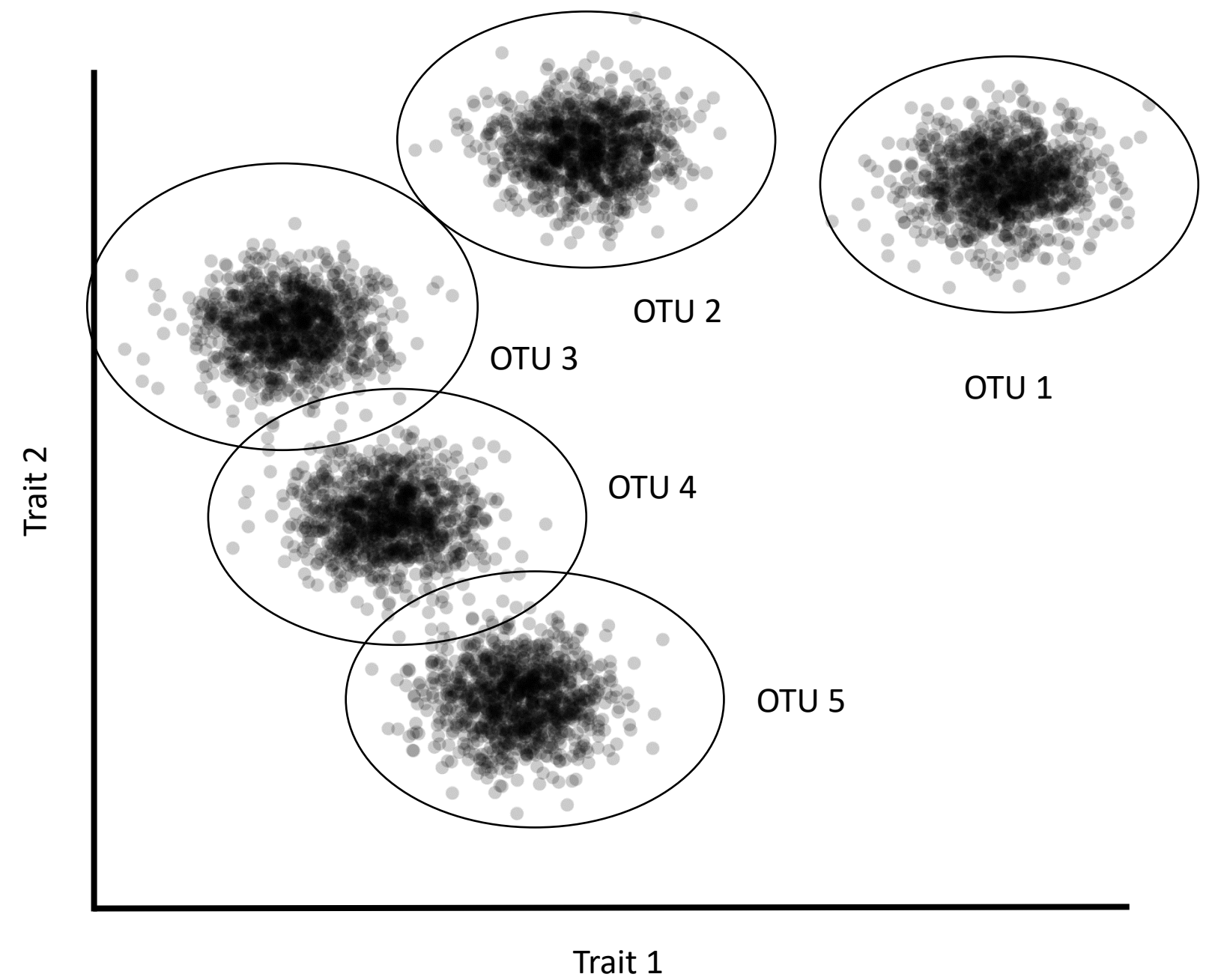
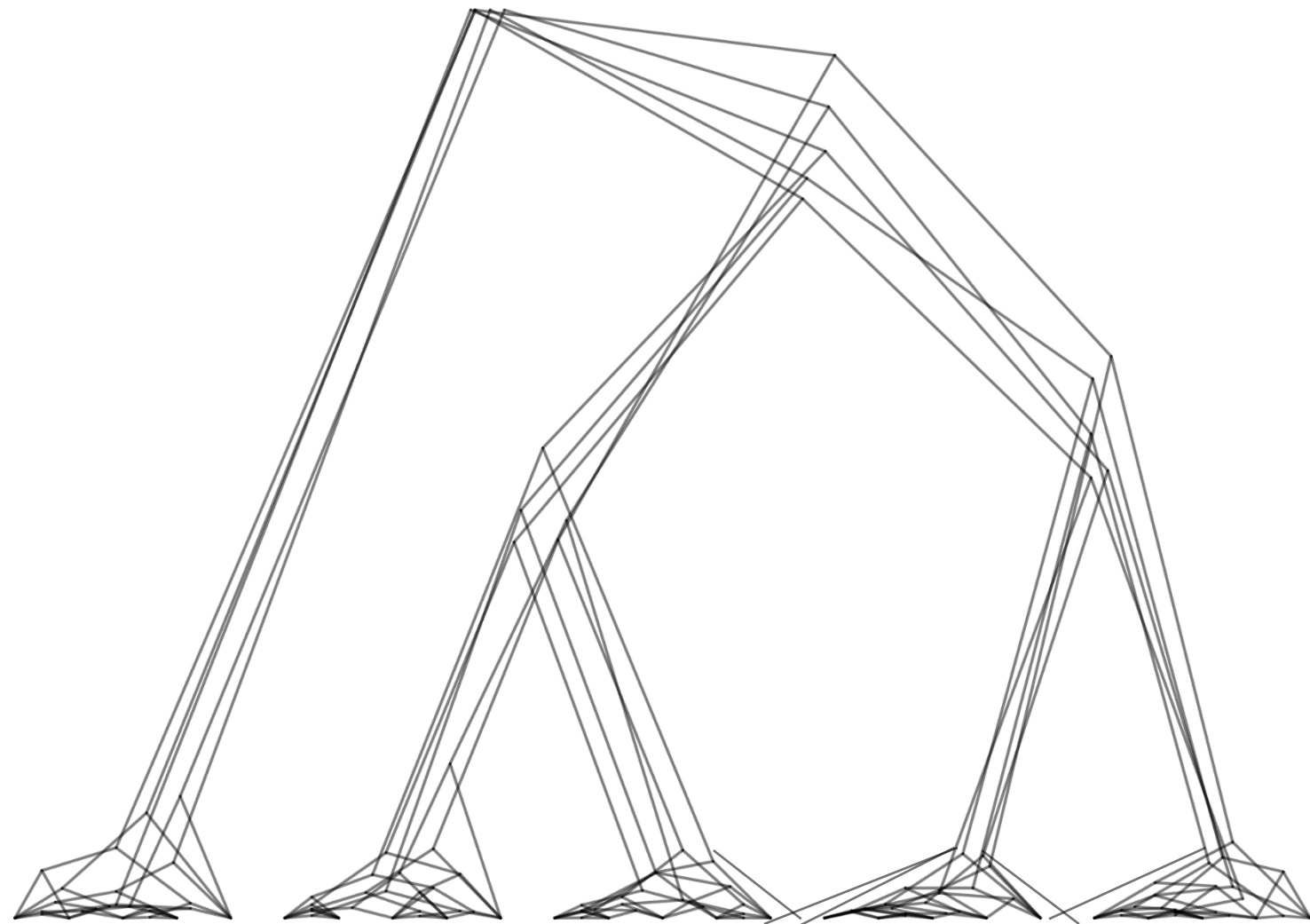
The reality



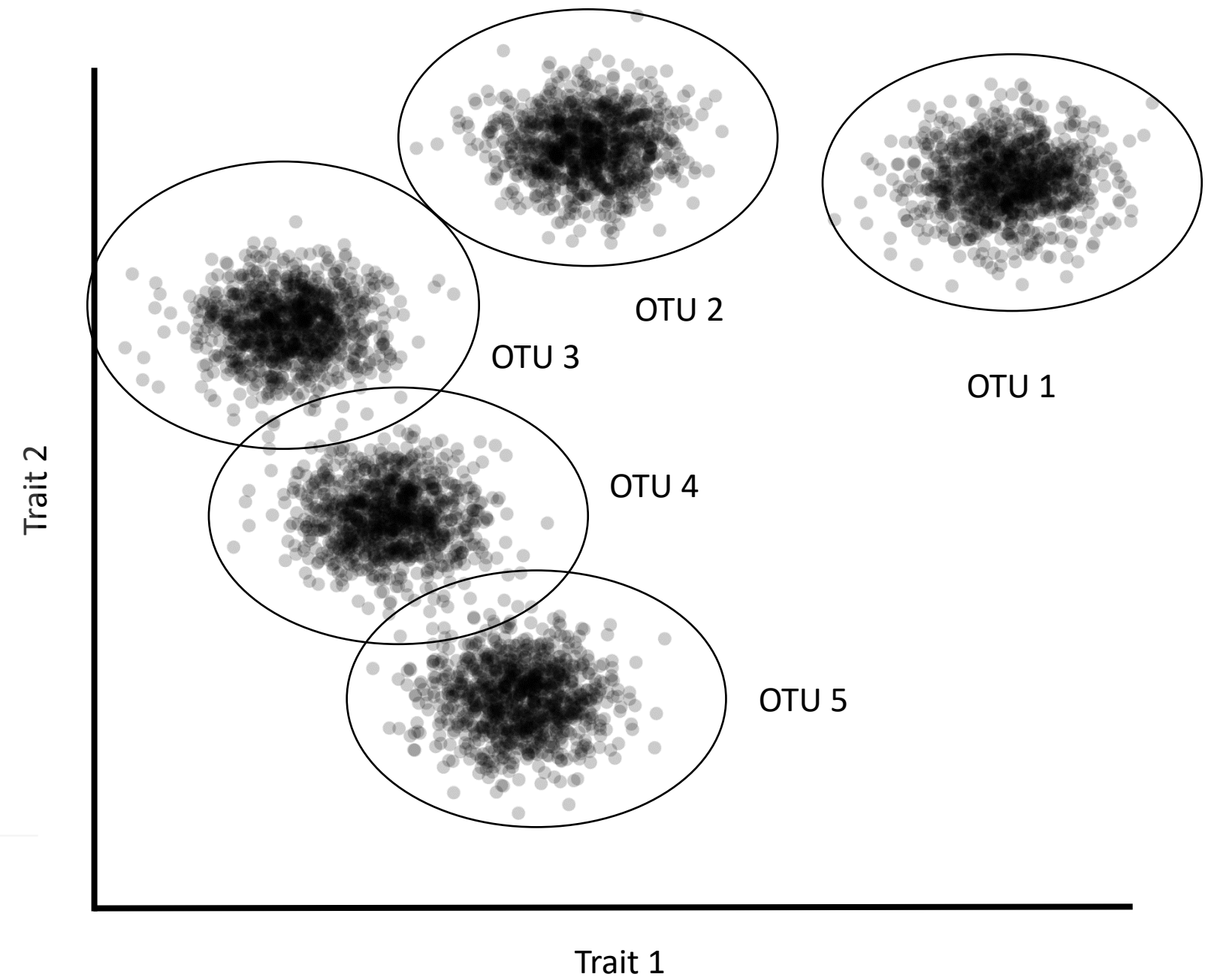
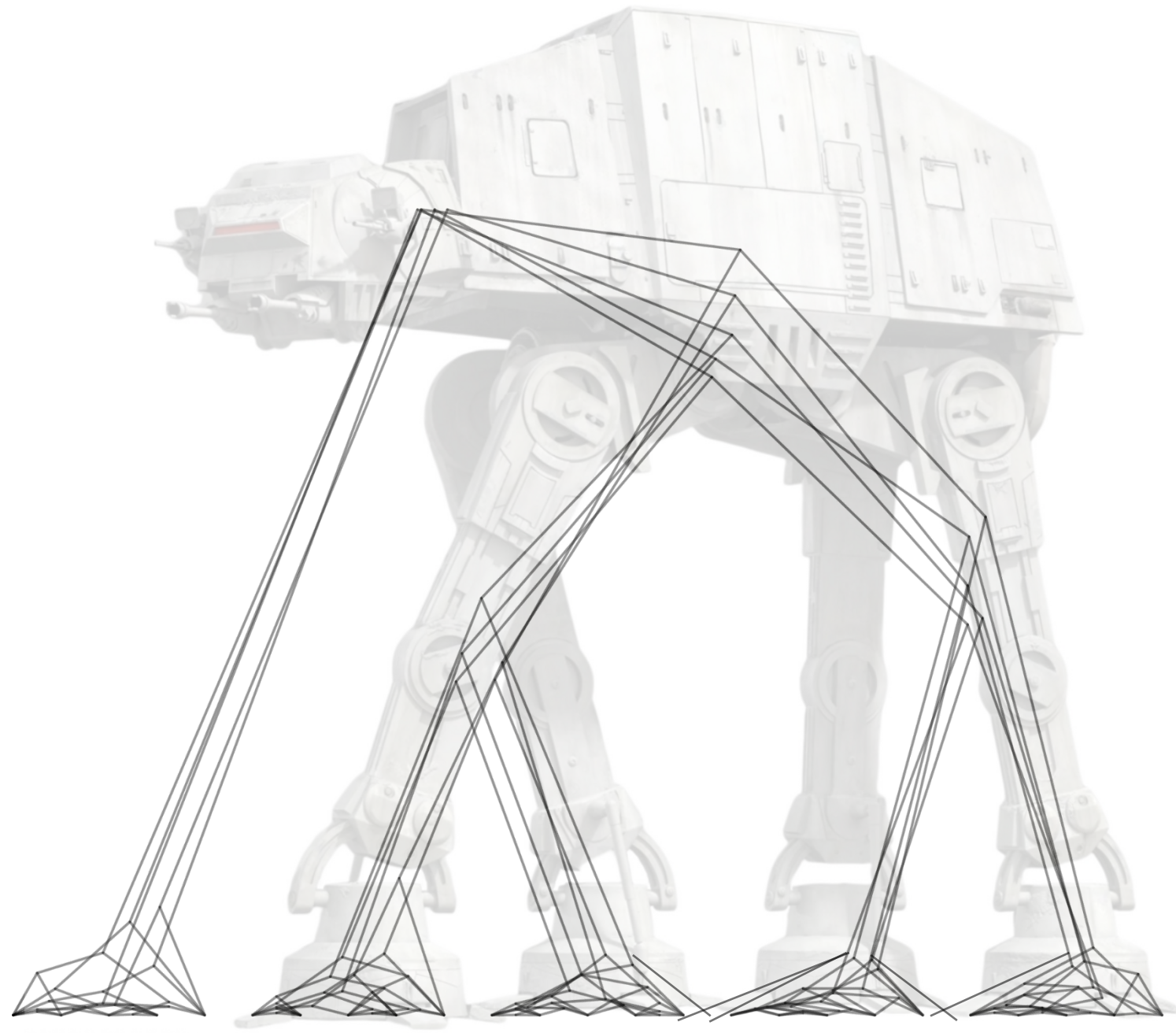
The reality



The reality



The reality

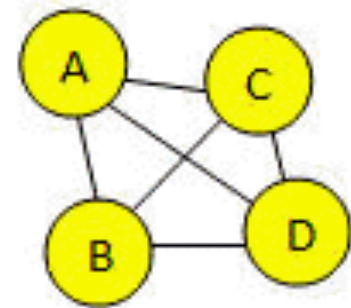


Clustering and OTUs

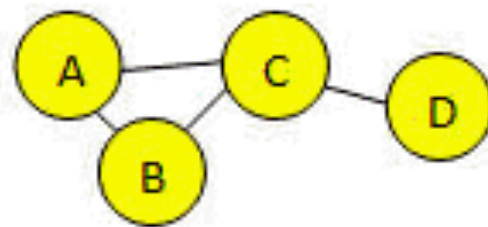
- Clusters of similar amplicons is called OTUs (operational taxonomic units)
 - Proxies for species, ecotypes, populations or another functional unit
 - Clustered often based on a similarity cut-off
 - But what cut-off to choose?
 - And how to calculate the similarity/dissimilarity?
- One solution is UPGMA¹-style clustering.
 - I.e. clustering at a fixed sequence distance
 - For instance 97%, which is often used for 18S V4

Clustering types

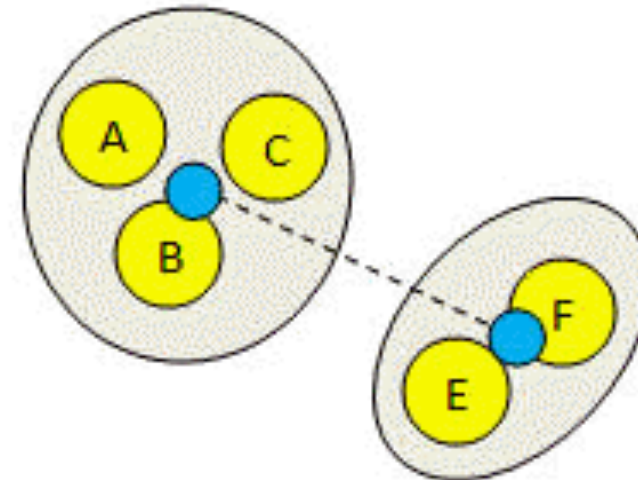
- **Complete linkage** means that *all* pairs of sequences in a cluster must be closer than the threshold.
- **Single linkage** means that a sequence should be included in a cluster if the distance to any other sequence is below the threshold.
- **Average linkage** (similar to UPGMA) distance between the “average sequence” for a cluster with the other cluster (the average is in fact calculated over all pairs).
- With average linkage, clusters tend to be larger than maximum linkage and smaller than minimum linkage.



Maximum distance
Complete linkage



Minimum distance
Single linkage



Average linkage

UPARSE - (U/VSEARCH)

- UPARSE-OTU takes sequences in order of decreasing abundance as input. This means that OTU centroids tend to be selected from the more abundant reads, and hence are more likely to be correct biological sequences.
1. All pairs of OTU sequences should have pair-wise sequence identity for a set value (typically 97%)
 2. An OTU sequence should be the most abundant within a 97% neighbourhood.
 3. Chimeric sequences should be discarded.
 4. All non-chimeric input sequences should match at least one OTU with $\geq 97\%$ identity.

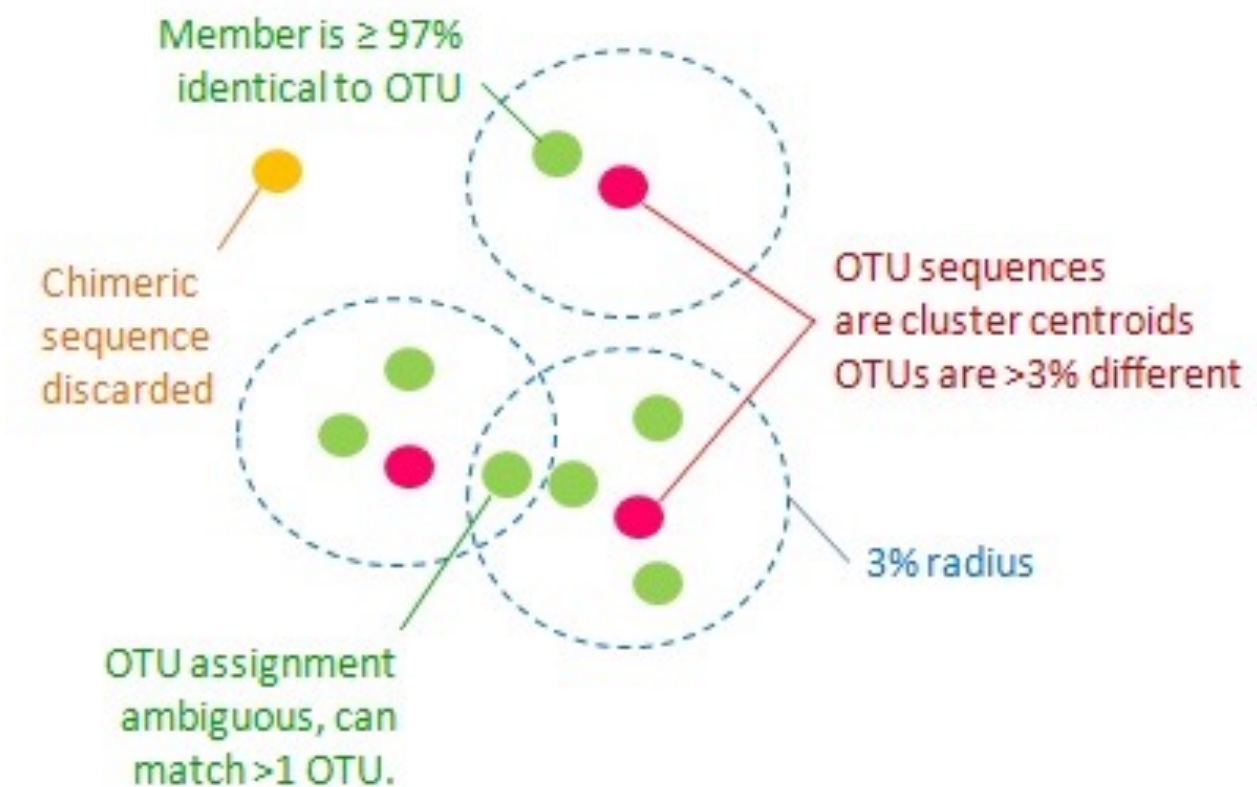
Published: 18 August 2013

UPARSE: highly accurate OTU sequences from microbial amplicon reads

Robert C Edgar ✉

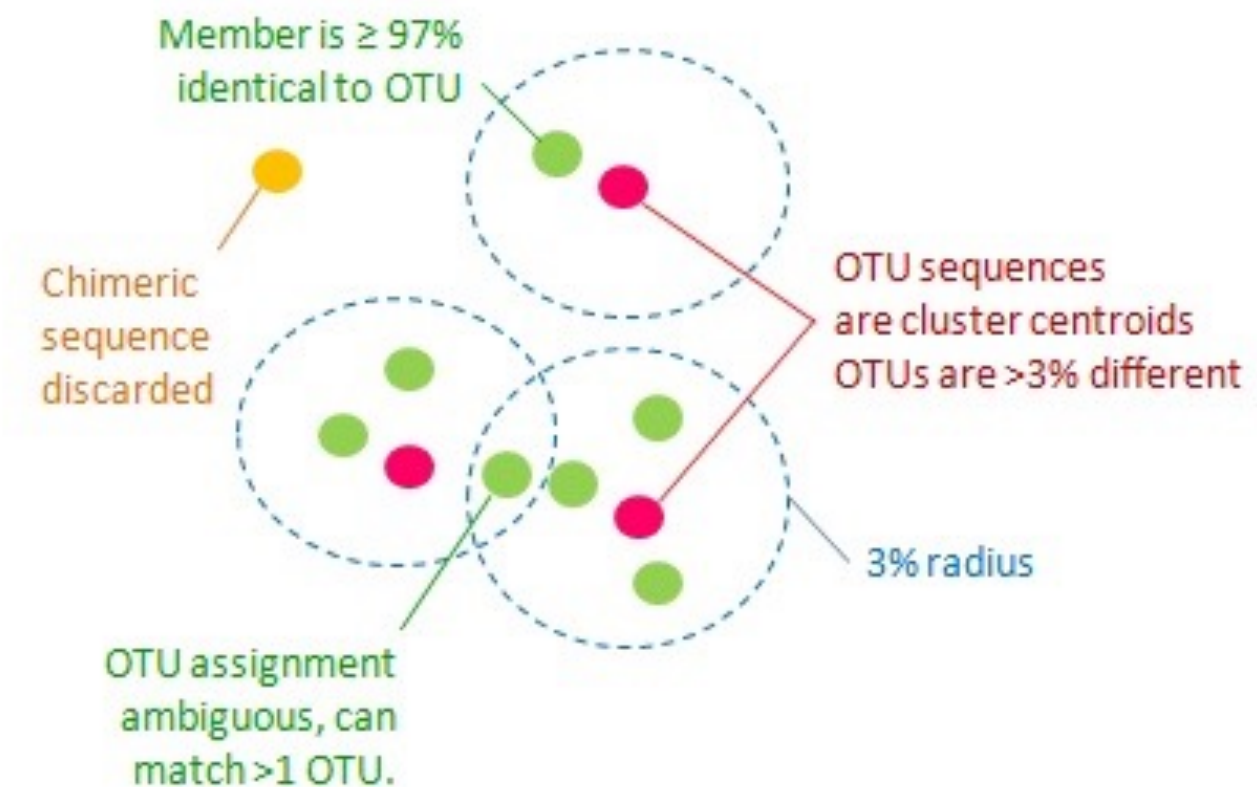
Nature Methods 10, 996–998(2013) | [Cite this article](#)

6924 Accesses | 5903 Citations | 113 Altmetric | [Metrics](#)



UPARSE

- UPARSE implements a greedy algorithm that performs OTU clustering
- Advantages
 - Fast and greedy
 - Similarity threshold is relatively easy to interpret (although not necessarily easy to decide...)
- Disadvantages
 - Arbitrary fixed global clustering threshold. But different lineages evolve at different rate, which means that there is no single cut-off value for the entire tree of life
 - The input order of the amplicons strongly influences the clustering results. Centroid selections are not re-evaluated during the clustering process, this might lead to inaccurately formed OTUs.



SWARM



**Swarm: robust and fast clustering
method for amplicon-based studies**

Frédéric Mahé^{1,2,3}, Torbjørn Rognes^{4,5}, Christopher Quince⁶,
Colomban de Vargas^{1,2} and Micah Dunthorn³

- Fast and exact, two-phased, agglomerative, unsupervised (de novo) single-linkage-clustering algorithm.
- Advantage
 - No global (and arbitrary) clustering threshold
 - The result is not dependent on the input sequence order
- SWARM builds OTUs in two steps
 - An initial set of OTUs is constructed by iteratively agglomerating similar amplicons
 - Amplicon abundances are used to break clusters into sub-OTUs



Greedy cluster vs. SWARM

PeerJ

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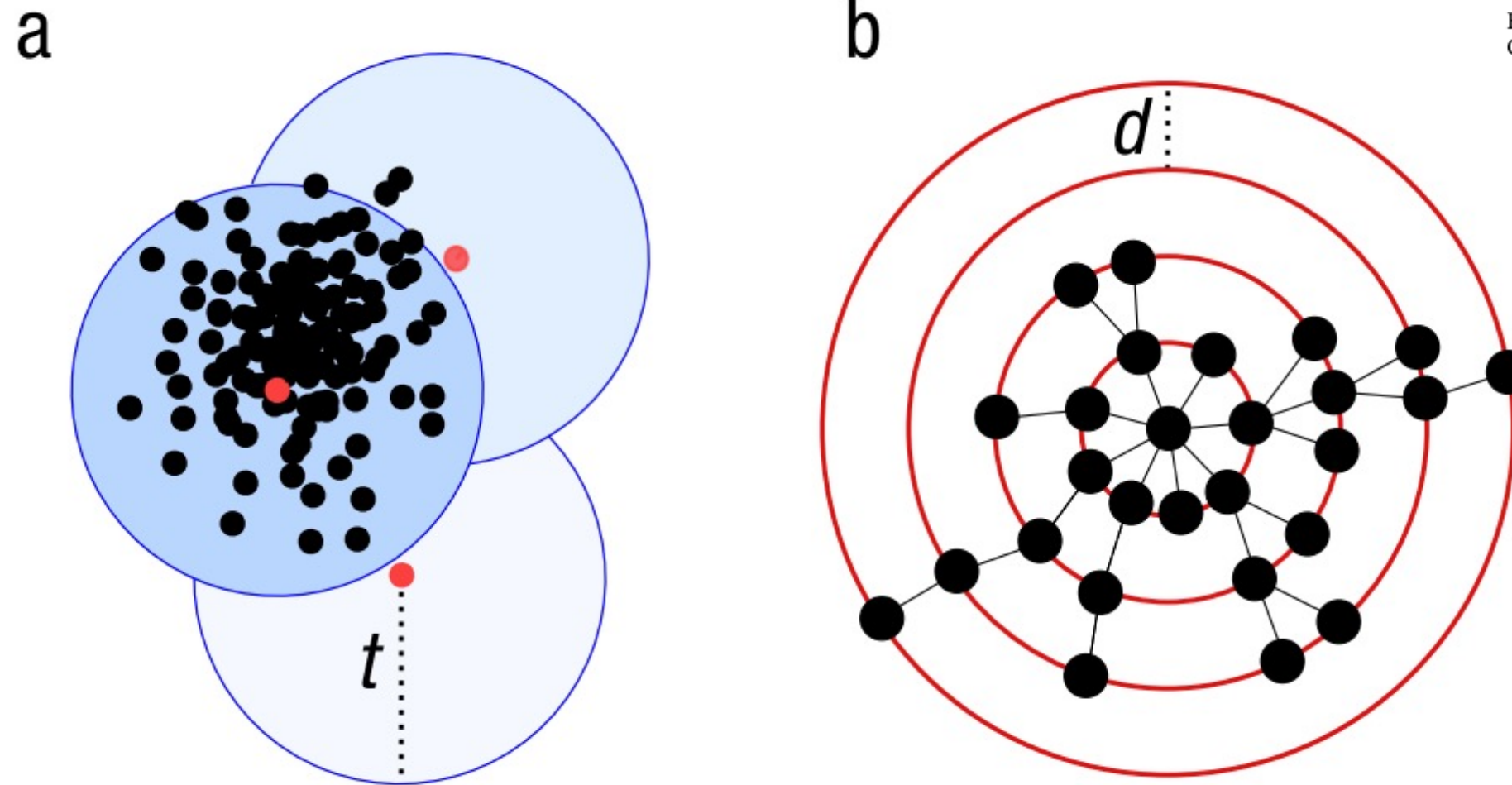
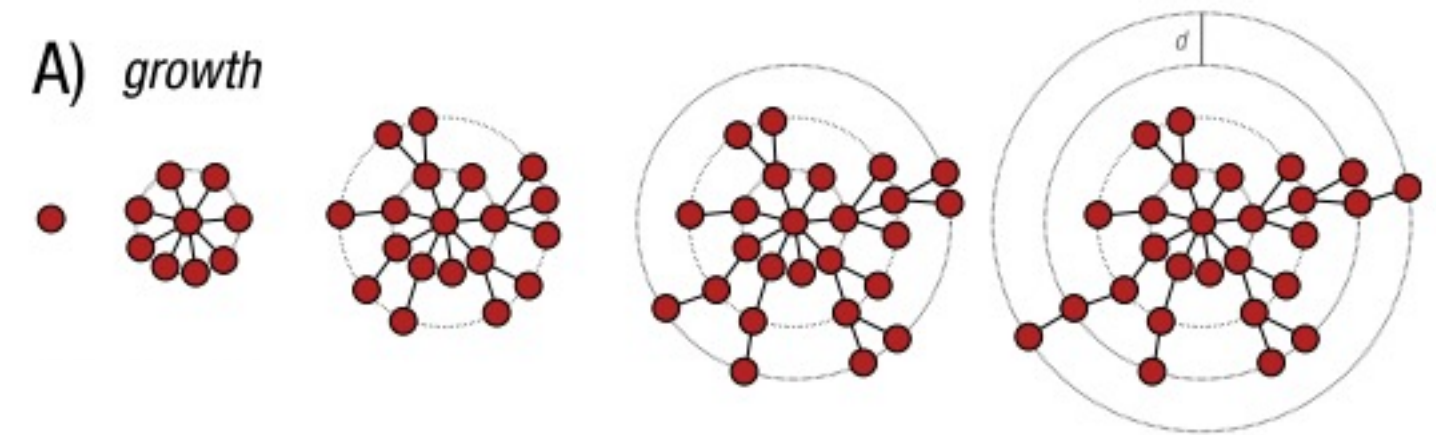


Figure 1 Schematic view of the greedy clustering approach and comparison with swarm. (A) Visualization of the widely used greedy clustering approach based on centroid selection and a global clustering threshold, t , where closely related amplicons can be placed into different OTUs. (B) By contrast, Swarm clusters iteratively by using a small user-chosen local clustering threshold, d , allowing OTUs to reach their natural limits.

SWARM

- (A) Swarm clusters amplicons iteratively by using a small user-chosen local threshold, d , allowing OTUs to grow to their natural limits, where no other amplicons can be added.



Swarm v2: highly-scalable and high-resolution amplicon clustering

Frédéric Mahé¹, Torbjørn Rognes^{2,3}, Christopher Quince⁴,
Colomban de Vargas^{5,6} and Micah Dunthorn¹

¹ Department of Ecology, Technische Universität Kaiserslautern, Kaiserslautern, Germany

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³ Department of Microbiology, Oslo University Hospital, Rikshospitalet, Oslo, Norway

⁴ Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, Warwick, United Kingdom

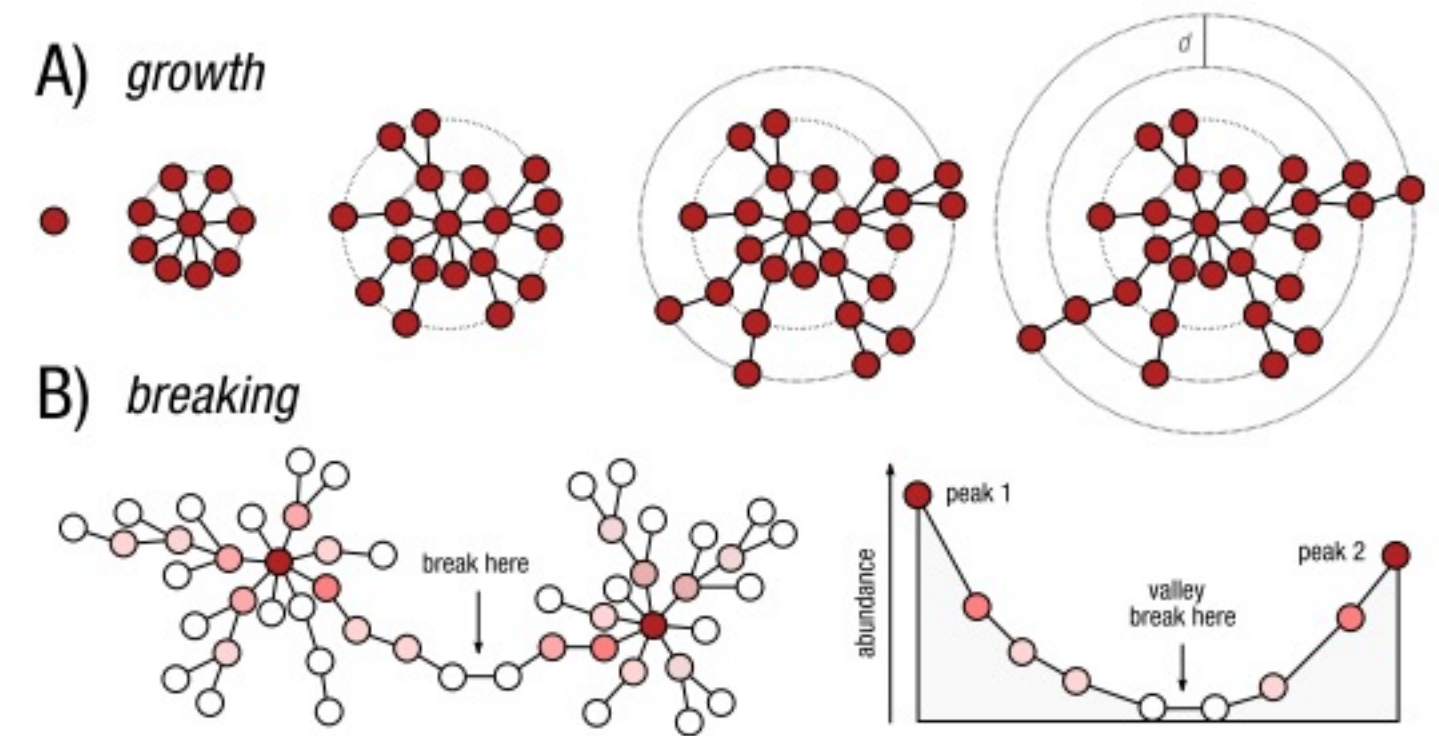
⁵ UMR 7144, EPEP-Evolution des Protistes et des Écosystèmes Pélagiques, Station Biologique de Roscoff, CNRS, Roscoff, France

⁶ UMR7144 Station Biologique de Roscoff, Sorbonne Universités, UPMC Univ Paris 06, Roscoff, France



SWARM

- (A) Swarm clusters amplicons iteratively by using a small user-chosen local threshold, d , allowing OTUs to grow to their natural limits, where no other amplicons can be added.
- (B) Swarm takes into account the abundance of each amplicon to produce higher resolution clusters, by not allowing the formation of amplicon chains. The darker the red, the higher the abundance.



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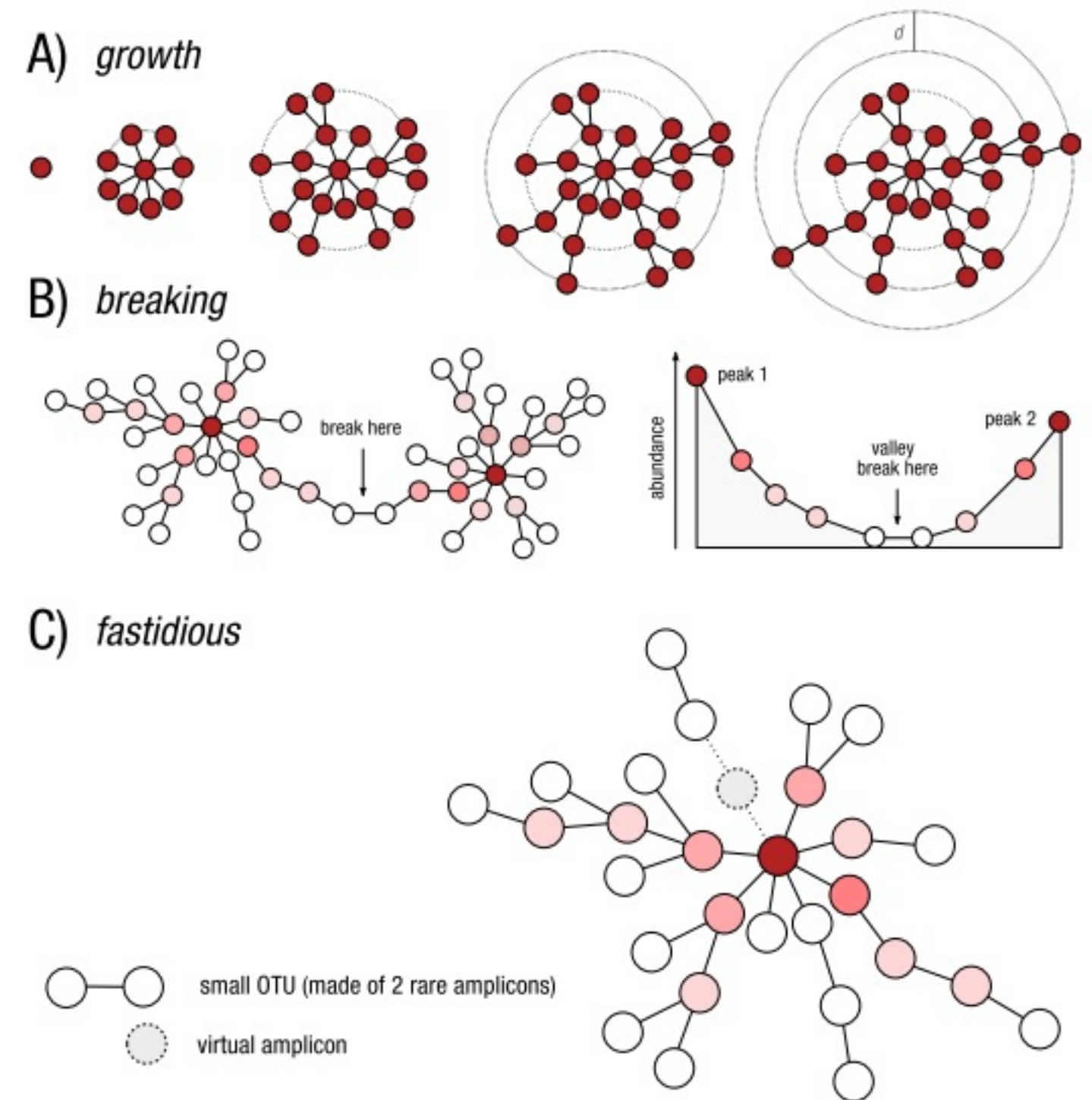
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SWARM

- (A) Swarm clusters amplicons iteratively by using a small user-chosen local threshold, d , allowing OTUs to grow to their natural limits, where no other amplicons can be added.
- (B) Swarm takes into account the abundance of each amplicon to produce higher resolution clusters, by not allowing the formation of amplicon chains. The darker the red, the higher the abundance.
- (C) The fastidious option avoids under-grouping (e.g., the production of small OTUs such as singletons and doubletons) by postulating the existence of virtual linking amplicons to graft smaller OTUs onto larger ones.



Swarm v2: highly-scalable and high-resolution amplicon clustering

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The output

- For our purpose, the important part is that the output is a table with the *read* abundance for *OTUs* across the samples.
- Keep in mind that these are *Operational Taxonomic Units* **not** necessarily the same as species
- *Read abundance* does not equal organismal abundance

	Sample_1	Sample_2	Sample_3	Sample_4	Sample_5	Sample_6	etc...
OTU_1	1	563	87	459	43	0	
OTU_2	213	7	5	3	68	8	
OTU_3	15	6	88	95	9	6	
OTU_4	762	5	43	1	0	0	
....etc							

Long read amplicon sequencing

- Recent development in long read sequencing technologies:
 - PacBio HiFi reads are 99.9% accurate and up to 15 kbp long!
 - Still not as many reads as Illumina sequencing, but there is no need for denoise.
 - The much longer reads have a higher phylogenetic signal

MOLECULAR ECOLOGY RESOURCES

RESOURCE ARTICLE | [Full Access](#)

Long-read metabarcoding of the eukaryotic rDNA operon to phylogenetically and taxonomically resolve environmental diversity

Mahwash Jamy, Rachel Foster, Pierre Barbera, Lucas Czech, Alexey Kozlov, Alexandros Stamatakis, Gary Bending, Sally Hilton, David Bass , Fabien Burki 

First published: 09 November 2019 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/1755-0998.13117> |
Citations: 20 |

DADA2

- Resources:
- The developer has a nice tutorial
 - <https://benjjneb.github.io/dada2/>
 - <https://benjjneb.github.io/dada2/tutorial.html>
- DADA2 for ITS
 - https://benjjneb.github.io/dada2/ITS_workflow.html