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Author for correspondence:

L. Holman

e-mail: luke.holman@unimelb.edu.au

Evolutionary simulations of Z-linked suppression gene drives

Luke Holman¹

¹School of BioSciences, The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia.

Synthetic gene drives may soon be used to suppress or eliminate populations of disease vectors, pathogens, invasive species, and agricultural pests. Recent proposals have focused on using Z-linked gene drives to control species with ZW sex determination, which include Lepidopteran pests and parasitic trematodes. These proposals include Z-linked ‘W-shredders’, which would suppress populations by cleaving the W chromosome and causing females to produce only sons, as well as Z-linked female-sterilising gene drives. Here I use eco-evolutionary simulations to evaluate the potential of some proposed Z-linked gene drives, and to produce recommendations regarding their design and use. The simulations show that W-shredders are likely to be highly effective at eradicating populations provided that resistance to W-shredding cannot evolve. However, the drive allele is likely to spread rapidly across meta-populations, making it unsuitable for some use cases.

1. Introduction

Developments in genetic engineering will soon make it feasible to alter or eliminate populations of disease vectors, pathogens, agricultural pests, and invasive species using 'gene drives' [1–6]. Gene drives cause particular alleles (usually transgenes) to propagate through populations via a range of mechanisms, which include gene conversion, poison-antidote systems, segregation distortion, and genetic incompatibility [7–9]. For example, CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing can be used to create a transgenic insertion that is transmitted to almost 100% of the offspring of heterozygous individuals instead of the usual 50%; this type of gene drive functions by inducing a double-stranded DNA break at the homologous wild type locus, which is then repaired using the transgene as a template. Gene drives are often categorised into two types: replacement drives, which aim to spread a human-beneficial allele throughout a population (e.g. a mosquito allele that interferes with the transmission of malaria [1,10]), and suppression drives, which reduce the size of a population (potentially to extinction). Suppression drives typically work by using non-Mendelian inheritance to spread alleles that cause lethality or sterility [2,5,11], or skew the offspring sex ratio – typically towards males [12–16].

Recent theoretical papers have investigated the feasibility, efficacy, and potential negative consequences of various types of gene drives. For example, Noble et al. [6] showed that the basic version of a CRISPR-Cas9 gene drive might be highly invasive and could rapidly spread to fixation across whole species, which is often an undesirable outcome. Conversely, other models have concluded that gene drives are likely to fail if populations can evolve resistance to their effects [17,18]. The issue of resistance is compounded because the standard implementation of CRISPR-Cas9 gene drive (but perhaps not updated versions; [4,5,18,19]) tends to create its own resistance alleles, e.g. when the double-stranded break induced by Cas9 is repaired using an alternative DNA repair pathway (non-homologous end joining; NHEJ) instead of homology-directed repair [1–3,18,20]. Given the potential safety, ethical, and sociopolitical concerns surrounding gene drives, some models have focused on gene drives that would go extinct after a time [15,21,22], would stay confined to particular populations [11,22], and/or could be reversed once they have spread [23].

Here, I focus on the evolutionary dynamics of Z-linked suppression gene drives. The simulation is inspired by proposals for various types of Z-linked gene drives by Kevin Esvelt and colleagues, as well as ongoing efforts to develop these Z drives (see www.sculptingevolution.org; at the time of writing, these ideas have not been published elsewhere). Various Z-linked suppression drives proposed by Esvelt and colleagues are shown schematically in Figure 1. Depending on its design, mode of action and the biology of the target species, Z chromosomes carrying the drive allele (denoted Z^*) might enjoy a transmission advantage in Z^*W females (Figure 1B, and perhaps also 1C), and optionally also in Z^*Z males. Esvelt et al. focus on using Z drives to control the *Schistosoma* trematodes responsible for schistosomiasis, though Z drives could theoretically be used to control any organism with female-heterogametic sex determination, such as Lepidopteran agricultural pests or even invasive populations of birds.

A Z-linked gene drive could suppress populations by biasing gametogenesis in females, for example by inducing double-stranded DNA breaks in the W chromosome in order to inactivate it; such a gene drive would be a 'W-shredder', analogous to the X- and Y-shredders under development for XY species [12,13,15,16,24,25]. Females carrying the gene drive would thus produce relatively few viable W-bearing eggs, and therefore produce mainly drive-carrying sons. Esvelt et al. point out that the evolutionary dynamics of the drive will depend on the fitness of drive carriers relative to wild types, the timing of W-shredding (e.g. in germ cells, ova, or zygotes), and the ecology of the target species. For example, some W-shredder designs might allow drive females to produce roughly the same number of (mostly-male) offspring as a wild-type female provided that the W chromosome is destroyed early enough in oogenesis/development that the lost daughters can be replaced by sons (Figure 1B). Alternatively, drive-carrying females might produce half the number of offspring (or less), e.g. if the drive works by destroying all ova or

53 offspring that carry a *W* chromosome, and this loss is not compensated by reduced competition
 54 on the surviving offspring. Esvelt et al. also proposed that one could suppress populations using
 55 a *Z*-linked locus that caused sterility or lethality in females, either by shredding the *W* in somatic
 56 tissues, or by spreading some other allele that harms females only. If this female-harming allele
 57 were capable of gene drive in males, or were continually released into the wild, it could perhaps
 58 reach high enough frequencies to suppress the population. The *W*-shredder could be designed
 59 to also cause gene drive in males. Male gene drive could be accomplished using ‘standard’
 60 CRISPR-Cas9 gene conversion, whereby the driving *Z* allele would convert the wild type locus
 61 using homing endonuclease activity followed by homology-directed repair, causing heterozygous
 62 males to produce mostly drive-carrying sperm. Esvelt et al. note that male gene drive might not
 63 be necessary, since a *Z*-linked locus that prevents transmission of the *W* may already enjoy a
 64 transmission advantage (Figures 1B–1C).

65 Here, I present an evolutionary simulation that can accommodate all of these hypothetical *Z*-
 66 linked drives. I aimed to test which properties of the gene drive and the ecology of the target
 67 species are critical to determining the likelihood and speed of extinction. For example, the gene
 68 drive will presumably spread faster if it can bias transmission in both sexes, but perhaps a
 69 simpler female-only drive would be perfectly adequate. Also, since the population will become
 70 more male-biased as the gene drive invades, there will be eco-evo feedback that might affect the
 71 evolutionary outcome in non-intuitive ways. For example, the altered sex ratio might intensify
 72 the fitness advantage accruing to any resistant *W* chromosomes or autosomal modifiers that
 73 prevent *W*-shredding (due to Fisherian selection for an even sex ratio; [26]), relative to that
 74 observed in earlier models focusing on gene drives carried on autosomes [17,18]. Moreover, the
 75 change in sex ratio could affect the ecology and evolution of the population, particularly if males
 76 and females contribute differentially to density-dependent population growth [27,28], or have
 77 different dispersal rates [29]. The model incorporates the possibility that *Z*-linked resistant-to-
 78 drive alleles are sometimes created by NHEJ in heterozygote males, to test whether resistance is
 79 just as problematic as for autosomal drives [1–3,18,20].

80 2. Methods

81 A full description of the simulation is provided as Supplementary Material. In brief, I simulate a
 82 finite population of dioecious diploids with *ZW* sex determination, living in *j* discrete habitat
 83 patches that are arranged linearly in a ring, and examine the demographic and evolutionary
 84 consequences of releasing $n_{release}$ homozygote males carrying a *Z*-linked gene drive allele, Z^* .
 85 The drive allele causes biased inheritance and/or reduced fecundity in females, and optionally
 86 also causes biased inheritance in heterozygous males (e.g. via gene conversion). Each generation
 87 proceeds in discrete steps: birth, dispersal between patches, breeding within patches, and death
 88 of the parental generation. The equilibrium population size was roughly 10,000 in all simulations
 89 upon release of the gene drive, and the main outcomes of interest are the likelihood and speed of
 90 extinction. The simulation was written in R 3.4.0 and run on the Spartan cluster at the University
 91 of Melbourne; Table 1 lists the simulation parameters that were manipulated to study their effects.

92 Each male carries two autosomal loci (termed *A/a* and *B/b*) and one *Z*-linked locus, while
 93 females carry both autosomal loci, a single allele at the *Z*-linked locus, plus a *W* chromosome.
 94 There are three possible *Z*-linked alleles: the drive allele (Z^*), a wild-type allele (Z^+) that is
 95 vulnerable to gene drive in Z^*Z^+ males, and a resistant allele (Z^r) that is immune to gene
 96 drive in Z^*Z^r males. Similarly, there are two types of *W* chromosome: a wild-type *W* that is
 97 vulnerable to shredding by the Z^* allele (W^+), and an immune variant (W^r). The alleles *A* and
 98 *B* are dominant ‘trans-acting’ resistance alleles that confer immunity to *W*-shredding and gene
 99 conversion, respectively. The Z^* allele imposes a cost c_f on the fecundity of female carriers, and a
 100 cost c_m on the mating success of male carriers. The resistance alleles W^r , Z^r , *A* and *B* are assumed
 101 to be cost-free. Setting $c_f = 1$ allows simulation of a female-sterilising *Z*-linked drive (Figure 1D).

102 Females carrying Z^* (and no *A* or W^r alleles) produce $\frac{1}{2}(1 + p_{shred})$ *Z*-bearing gametes and
 103 $\frac{1}{2}(1 - p_{shred})$ *W*-bearing gametes, and thus produce mostly sons when $p_{shred} > 0$. Secondly,

104 Z^*Z^+ males produce $\frac{1}{2}(1 + p_{conv} - p_{conv}p_{nhej})$ gametes carrying the Z^* allele, $\frac{1}{2}(1 - p_{conv})$
 105 gametes carrying the Z^+ allele, and $\frac{1}{2}(p_{conv}p_{nhej})$ gametes carrying the Z^r allele. Thus, gene
 106 conversion occurs in males if $p_{conv} > 0$, meaning that the Z^* allele is over-represented in the
 107 gametes of these three male genotypes. The parameter p_{nhej} represents the creation of resistance
 108 alleles via non-homologous end joining.

109 Female fecundity depends on the local and/or global density and fitness of other females,
 110 and the density of males, via functions involving the parameters K , r , α , δ and ψ (Table 1),
 111 allowing the simulation to capture a variety of different ecologies and life histories. Female and
 112 male offspring disperse to other patches with probabilities x_f and x_m respectively, allowing for
 113 variable and sex-specific gene flow between patches. Dispersal was either local or global (i.e. to a
 114 neighbouring patch or a random patch).

115 3. Results

116 (a) Three illustrative simulation runs

117 Figure 2 shows three contrasting simulation runs. In Figure 2A, the release of 20 Z^*Z^* males
 118 at generation 50 resulted in invasion of the Z^* allele, causing rapid extinction due to a lack of
 119 females. This simulation run assumed that the Z^* alleles causes complete W -shredding, that Z^*
 120 has minimal fitness costs, and there is no resistance to W -shredding (Table S3).

121 In Figure 2B, Z^* invaded but failed to cause extinction, even though it was assumed that
 122 $p_{shred} = 1$ and W -shredding was not resistable. However, this simulation did assume that
 123 individuals carrying at least one Z^* allele paid heavy fitness costs ($c_f = 0.5$ and $c_m = 0.2$), and
 124 that there was no gene drive in males ($p_{conv} = 0$). The assumptions $p_{shred} = 1$ and $c_f = 0.5$ could
 125 imply that the W -bearing eggs/offspring of Z^*W^+ females are destroyed and not replaced, such
 126 that W -shredding increases the proportion but not the absolute number of offspring that inherit
 127 the Z^* allele. Essentially Z^* spreads via ‘spite’ [30], in that it removes W chromosomes from the
 128 local population and thereby makes room for more Z^* alleles, creating indirect fitness benefits.
 129 However, the net fitness returns of the Z^* allele’s ‘strategy’ (i.e. sacrificing 20% fitness in males in
 130 order to remove W chromosomes in females) decline as females become rarer, halting the spread
 131 of Z^* .

132 Lastly, Figure 2C shows a case where the invasion of Z^* was reversed by the evolution of
 133 autosomal and Z -linked resistance alleles. Following the introduction of the Z^* allele, resistant
 134 Z^r mutants were created via non-homologous end joining, and then Z^r spread to fixation due
 135 to its immunity to gene conversion in males. The autosomal resistance allele A also spread; A
 136 confers resistance to W -shredding and was initially present in the population at 5% frequency.
 137 The spread of A caused the sex ratio to revert to normal, preventing extinction, and Z^* went
 138 extinct due to its direct fitness costs no longer being outweighed by the benefits of W -shredding
 139 and gene conversion. Incidentally, the resistant allele A was favoured over a because the male-
 140 biased population sex ratio created by Z^* favours the production of daughters, and AA and Aa
 141 females produce more daughters than aa females in populations where Z^* is present.

142 (b) Effects of each parameter on the evolution of a W -shredder

143 Figure 3 shows the effects of each parameter for simulations of a W -shredder that potentially
 144 also benefits from gene drive in Z^*Z males. Figure 4 shows the importance of each main effect
 145 and two-way interaction term to the extinction probability, while Figure S1 shows the effect of
 146 each parameter on the number of generations until extinction. Under favourable assumptions,
 147 extinction occurred around 20 generations after releasing Z^* , though it often took longer (Figure
 148 S1). Tables S1-S2 give the relative frequencies of the various possible outcomes (e.g. extinction of
 149 the population, or loss of Z^*).

In Figure 3, the parameters are arranged in order of their importance to extinction probability (see also Figure 4). By far the most important predictors of extinction were the efficiency of *W*-shredding in females (p_{shred}) and the existence of resistance against *W*-shredding: extinction never occurred unless p_{shred} was high and autosomal alleles conferring resistance to *W*-shredding (allele *A* in the model) were absent. This makes sense because a *W*-shredder cannot cause extinction unless Z^* -carrying females produce a strongly male-biased sex ratio and resistance to *W*-shredding cannot readily evolve. Extinction also occurred more quickly when p_{shred} was 1 rather than 0.95 (Figure S1), further highlighting efficient *W*-shredding as an important design consideration.

The strength of gene drive in Z^*Z males (p_{conv} ; colours in Figure 3) also predicted extinction probability. However, p_{conv} was less important than p_{shred} , and the *W*-shredder frequently caused extinction even when it showed normal Mendelian inheritance in males, or if resistance to male gene drive was common. The effect of male gene drive on extinction depended on other factors in the model (Figures 3, 4 and S2); for example, male gene drive was at its most beneficial when resistance to it could not evolve (either through pre-existing genetic variation, or the creation of resistant Z^r alleles through NHEJ). Although its effects on extinction probability were somewhat small, male gene drive did hasten extinction considerably (Figure S1). For example, assuming perfect *W*-shredding, adding male gene drive with $p_{conv} = 0.95$ reduced the expected time to extinction from around 75 to 22 generations.

The cost of the Z^* allele to female fitness also affected extinction probability, and its effect interacted with the strength of gene drive in Z^*Z males. Specifically, assuming that the Z^* allele halves female fitness ($c_f = 0.5$) negates the fitness benefits of segregation distortion for the Z^* allele, and so extinction could only occur when $c_f = 0.5$ if there was gene drive in males. Reassuringly, increasing c_f from 0.01 or 0.1 had almost no effect on the likelihood of extinction, meaning that *W* shredders might be an effective means of population control even if females carrying the gene drive suffer a 10% fitness cost. Similarly, assuming that Z^* was costly to male carriers had little effect on extinction probability: extinction occurred almost as frequently when the reduction in male mating success was 20% rather than 1%. Both c_f and c_m were positively correlated with the time to extinction, particularly when there was no gene drive in males (Figure S1).

Some of the ecological variables also affected extinction probability. Chief among these was the shape parameter of the density-dependence function, α . Setting $\alpha < 1$ causes female fecundity to decline at a decelerating rate with increasing population density, such that per-female fecundity only approaches its maximum value when the population is heavily depleted, making extinction more likely. Conversely for $\alpha > 1$, fecundity declines at an accelerating rate with increasing density, making extinction less likely due to the immediate increases in female fecundity that manifest once the population begins to shrink. Unsurprisingly, populations in which females have a higher maximum possible fecundity (r) were less likely to go extinct. Also, extinction was slightly more probable when female fecundity was determined by local density more than global density (ψ). This is because local density can remain high (and thus, per-female fecundity can remain low) even in meta-populations that are declining due to the spread of the Z^* allele in some of their sub-populations.

Extinction probability also increased with δ , the parameter that determines how male density affects female fecundity. When δ is high, female fecundity is constrained from increasing as the drive allele spreads by the ever-increasing proportion of males, contributing to extinction. Conversely, lower values of δ mean that male numbers are relatively unimportant in determining female fecundity, making extinction less likely because the shortage of females created by the gene drive alleviates competition on the remaining females. This result highlights that it is worth considering the ecology and population dynamics of target species when designing suppression drives that eliminate one sex.

Populations that are split into many semi-isolated patches were more difficult to drive extinct than those comparatively free of spatial structure, though the effect on extinction rate was small.

202 The likely reason is that a highly-structured population creates refuges from the gene drive allele.
203 The frequency and sex bias in dispersal was relatively unimportant to extinction probability,
204 though there was a slight tendency for higher dispersal rates to stave off extinction, presumably
205 because dispersal allows recolonisation of patches emptied by the gene drive. Similarly, it did
206 not matter whether dispersal carried individuals to any patch, or only to neighbouring patches.
207 Finally, there was no effect of the release strategy, suggesting that it may be unnecessary to
208 release a W-shredding gene drive across the species' entire range provided that there is gene
209 flow between patches. An additional implication of this result is that we cannot expect Z-linked
210 gene drives to remain confined to their release sites, as previously found for autosomal drives [6].

211 (c) Effects of each parameter on a female-sterilising Z drive

212 I also used the model to examine the evolution of a Z-linked allele that causes gene drive in males
213 and also causes total sterility in females ($c_f = 1$; Figures S3-S6). This alternative type of gene drive
214 was also effective at causing extinction, but only under the assumption that the population has
215 little or no resistance to gene drive in males. For example, extinction never occurred if even 1% of
216 the progeny of Z^*Z males inherited a resistant Z^r allele created by non-homologous end joining
217 [c.f. 18]. Extinction also required that gene drive in males was strong (high p_{conv}), and that there
218 were no autosomal resistance alleles to male gene drive. The effects of the other parameters in the
219 model were similar as for a W-shredder, and extinction (when it occurred) took a fairly similar
220 number of generations (around 25-30).

221 (d) Interactions between model parameters

222 Many of the model parameters interacted in their effects on extinction probability (Figures
223 4 and S2). For W-shredders, increasing p_{shred} only increased extinction probability provided
224 that resistance to W-shredding was absent from the population, reaffirming the importance of
225 resistance. Male gene drive was most beneficial when Z^*W females had half the fecundity of wild
226 types (i.e. $c_f = 0.5$) and when p_{shred} was high, but male gene drive made little difference when
227 $c_f \leq 0.1$ or p_{shred} was low. The demographic parameters α and r were important to extinction
228 rate only when $p_{shred} \leq 1$; for $p_{shred} = 1$, the W-shredder was likely to cause extinction regardless
229 of the ecological assumptions. For female-sterilising Z drives, the most important interaction
230 terms underscored the importance of efficient and unresistable male gene drive (Figures S5-S6).

231 4. Discussion

232 The model shows that W-shredders are, in principle, very effective at eliminating populations,
233 especially if Z^*W females produce no daughters ($p_{shred} = 1$) and resistance to W-shredding
234 cannot evolve. The results have implications for the design of Z-linked W-shredders and
235 female-sterilising suppression drives.

236 One design consideration is whether to engineer W-shredders that are also capable of gene
237 drive in males, e.g. by including guide RNAs that target the Z as well as the W chromosome. In
238 the model, W-shredders very often caused extinction even without male gene drive (i.e. when
239 $p_{conv} = 0$), provided that females carrying the W-shredder had comparable fecundity to wild
240 type females, and that carrier females produce very few daughters (as in Figure 1B). Conversely
241 if W-shredder females had low fecundity (around half that of a wild type, or below; Figure
242 1C) or produced some daughters, male gene drive was often essential for the W-shredder to
243 cause extinction, or at least for extinction to occur rapidly enough to be useful. Although male
244 gene drive was not always essential to extinction, it did reduce the number of generations until
245 extinction occurred, sometimes substantially. Therefore, I conclude that it would almost certainly
246 be worth the effort to incorporate a male-acting gene drive if developing a W-shredder for species
247 with long generation times, such as invasive birds. Conversely, the rate of population decline
248 may be adequate even without male gene drive for species that have multiple generations per

249 year, such as Lepidoptera and *Schistosoma* parasites. Foregoing male drive could simplify the
250 design of W-shredders since they would only need to target the W chromosome (and not also the
251 Z), particularly because male-acting gene conversion drives seem more challenging to develop
252 than female-acting ones in some taxa (due to sex differences in DNA repair; [31]). Conversely,
253 strong male gene drive was always essential to extinction for female-sterilising suppression drives
254 (Figure 1D). Z-linked alleles that drive in males and cause sterility in females were effective at
255 causing extinction, but were very vulnerable to the evolution of resistance to male gene drive
256 (e.g. via drive-resistant alleles created by NHEJ; [18]).

257 Another aim when designing W-shredders should be to ensure that female carriers produce
258 as few daughters as possible (ideally none), while producing a large number of drive-carrying
259 sons (ideally as many as the total offspring produced by non-carriers). This implies that one
260 should ideally design a construct that cleaves the W chromosome early in gametogenesis or
261 development, to increase the chance that the number of surviving progeny produced by each
262 female is unaffected. Cleavage of the W should also be restricted to the female germ line, to
263 minimise fitness losses due to the loss of the W in somatic cells. For some species, this may
264 be as simple as placing the W-shredder under the control of a promoter such as *nanos* [32,33],
265 assuming that females are able to replace lost W-bearing oocytes before they are provisioned with
266 limiting resources. Even if the lost daughters are not replaced with sons, the Z^* allele might still
267 exhibit drive because the surviving Z^* sons will experience reduced competition (somewhat like
268 *Medea* [34]). In Lepidoptera, juvenile density is often strongly negatively correlated with survival,
269 and there are various maternally-transmitted endosymbionts that drive through populations
270 by killing males to lessen competition on their infected sisters (e.g. [35,36]); these observations
271 suggest that W-shredder alleles might invade Lepidopteran populations even if Z^*W females
272 produced half as many viable eggs, though male gene drive would certainly help the invasion.

273 The W-shredding mechanism should also be designed in a way that makes it difficult for W-
274 linked or *trans*-acting resistance to shredding to evolve. One way to do this would be to use a
275 single guide RNA that targets high copy number W-specific sequences, or to use multiple guide
276 RNAs that target multiple W-linked sequences [32,37]. This way, multiple changes to the reference
277 sequence would be required for a W chromosome to acquire resistance to cleavage by the W-
278 shredder. To ensure that the targets of cleavage do not become resistant as a result of indels
279 induced by NHEJ, one can ensure that the guide RNA's target lies within an essential gene where
280 an indel would be selectively disadvantageous, preventing resistant alleles from accumulating in
281 the population [32,37]. This may not be necessary if the W-shredder targets many W-linked loci,
282 but it is an important design consideration for the male component of the gene drive, because
283 the evolution of Z-linked resistance completely nullified the usefulness of male gene drive in the
284 simulation (echoing [18]). Recent work demonstrated the feasibility of arrays containing many
285 guide RNAs separated by spacers [38], suggesting it may soon be easier to create gene drives
286 with multiple guide RNAs.

287 The model also indicated that extinction does not require the release of large numbers of
288 individuals: releasing just 20 Z^* males was often enough to eliminate a spatially-structured
289 metapopulation of 10,000 individuals in a few generations. On the one hand, this is advantageous
290 because W-shredders would be cheap and easy to deploy once they are developed, and they
291 are likely to extirpate whole metapopulations even if gene flow is weak. However, such high
292 invasiveness is not always desirable, because it makes the gene drive more difficult to restrict
293 to a particular area. This could limit the usefulness of W-shredders to control species like
294 Lepidoptera and birds, where one may wish to eradicate only invasive or agriculturally damaging
295 populations, while leaving other populations untouched. Modifications to gene drive design –
296 such as the self-limiting 'daisy drive' system – are being developed to address this important
297 concern [21,22].

298 The model further showed that W-shredders can fail to cause extinction if carrier individuals
299 have low fitness, although extinction was frequently observed even if these fitness costs were
300 substantial. Populations in which females can become highly fecund as the population shrinks

(i.e. low α and high r) were also less likely to go extinct, though extinction tended to occur anyway provided $p_{shred} = 1$. The model also highlighted that W-shredders, and indeed any gene drive that creates a male-biased sex ratio, are most effective in suppressing species in which the density of males is an important determinant of population growth, e.g. because males use resources that females need [28]. By contrast, if male density is not very important to population growth (e.g. because females are limited by a resource that is not consumed by males), female fecundity increases as females become rarer, slowing the decline in population size caused by the W-shredder and potentially staving off extinction. Interestingly, the sexes are very different in the *Schistosoma* trematodes responsible for schistosomiasis, which have been proposed as candidates for control using a W-shredder by Kevin Esvelt and colleagues. Female *Schistosoma* live inside the body of the much larger male, who feeds on the host's blood and passes some of it to the female. Presumably, this means that the number of males (not females) is the primary determinant of whether a host or habitat is saturated, making *Schistosoma* a good candidate for control with W-shredders. In Lepidoptera and birds – two other ZW taxa that could potentially be controlled with W-shredders – males and females generally have similar ecological niches, such that W-shredders should be effective. Other ecological parameters like the patchiness of the population (k), the frequency and sex bias of dispersal (x_f and x_m), and the scale of competition (ψ) had relatively little effect on the probability of extinction.

Finally, I note that W-shredders might in general be easier to develop than X-shredders. Efforts to develop an X-shredder in *Anopheles* mosquitos were initially hindered because the I-PpoI protein used to cleave the X was paternally transmitted to the embryo inside sperm, causing all embryos to die (not just daughters) due to loss of the maternally-inherited X. Although this technical issue was later mitigated [13], such intergenerational effects would not trouble a W-shredder since the W chromosome is unique to females (provided that the W-shredding protein was not expressed in males and/or was not transmitted in their sperm). Additionally, W-shredders might sometimes be easier to develop than gene drives that work by deleting genes that are essential to female (but not male) fitness [e.g. 15]. This is because one could design a prototype W-shredder based only on sequence data from the sex chromosomes, while identifying genes with female-specific fitness effects requires more detailed data (e.g. expression profiling or knockout studies) that are unavailable for some taxa.

331 5. Tables

332 **Table 1:** List of variables, and their corresponding parameter(s) in the model, which were varied
 333 in order to study their effects on extinction.

Variable	Parameter(s)
Strength of gene drive in females (e.g. W-shredding)	p_{shred}
Strength of gene drive in males (e.g. gene conversion)	p_{conv}
Cost of gene drive allele to female fecundity	c_f
Cost of gene drive allele to male mating success	c_m
Frequency of W-linked resistance mutations	μ_W
Frequency of Z-linked resistance mutations and NHEJ	μ_Z and p_{nhej}
Frequency of autosomal resistance alleles	μ_A and μ_B
Patchiness of the population	k
Dispersal rate of males and females	x_m and x_f
Global versus local density-dependence of female fecundity	ψ
Contribution of males relative to females in density-dependence	δ
Number of gene drive carrier males released	$n_{release}$
Release strategy: all in one patch, or global	-
Fecundity of females at low population densities	r
Shape of density dependence	α

334 6. Figures

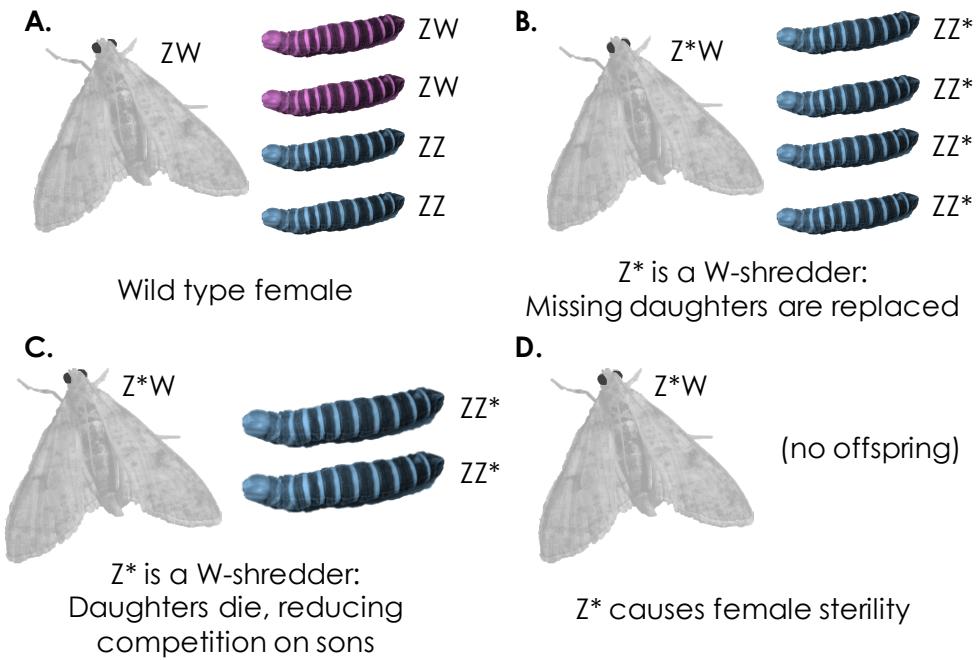


Figure 1. Some hypothetical Z -linked suppression drives considered in this study. Panel A illustrates normal inheritance of sex chromosomes in a wild type ZW female (assumed to be mated to a wild type ZZ male; not shown): the offspring sex ratio is even. In panel B, the female carries a W -shredder allele (Z^*) that kills gametes or offspring early enough that missing daughters are replaced with more Z^* -bearing sons. In panel C, the lost daughters are not replaced, though their absence increases the survival probability of the sons somewhat (shown by their larger size), causing super-Mendelian inheritance of the Z^* allele. Lastly, panel D shows a Z -linked female-sterilising allele (e.g. an allele that cleaves the W chromosome or a female-essential gene in somatic cells); since it is strongly disadvantageous in females, such an allele would go extinct unless it benefits from gene drive in heterozygous males.

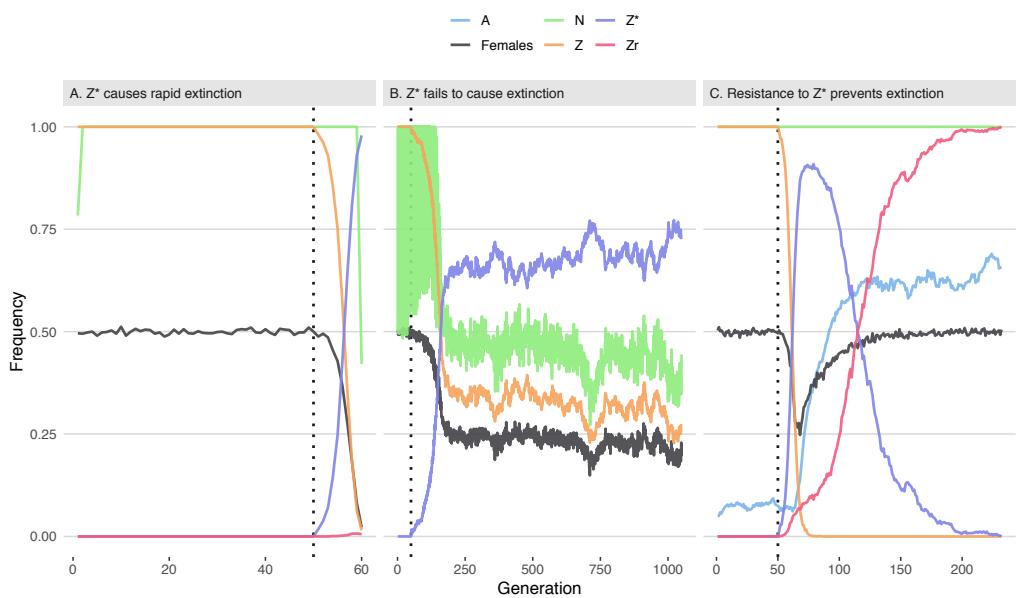


Figure 2. Three illustrative runs of the simulation, showing evolution in response to the introduction of 20 males carrying a *W*-shredder at Generation 50 (dotted line). In panel A, the driving Z^* allele fixed very quickly, causing population extinction through a shortage of females. In panel B, the Z^* allele spread until its fitness costs began to negate its transmission advantage, causing the population to persist at a reduced size. In panel C, the Z^* allele invaded, which selected for the resistance alleles A and Z^r and caused Z^* to go extinct. The population size N is shown as a fraction of its maximum value of 10,000. Table S3 gives the parameter spaces used for these three runs.

335 Data Accessibility. A website presenting all R scripts used to run the simulation and analyse the data
336 can be found at https://lukeholman.github.io/W_shredder/.

337 Authors' Contributions. LH performed the analyses and wrote the manuscript.

338 Competing Interests. The author declares no conflict of interest.

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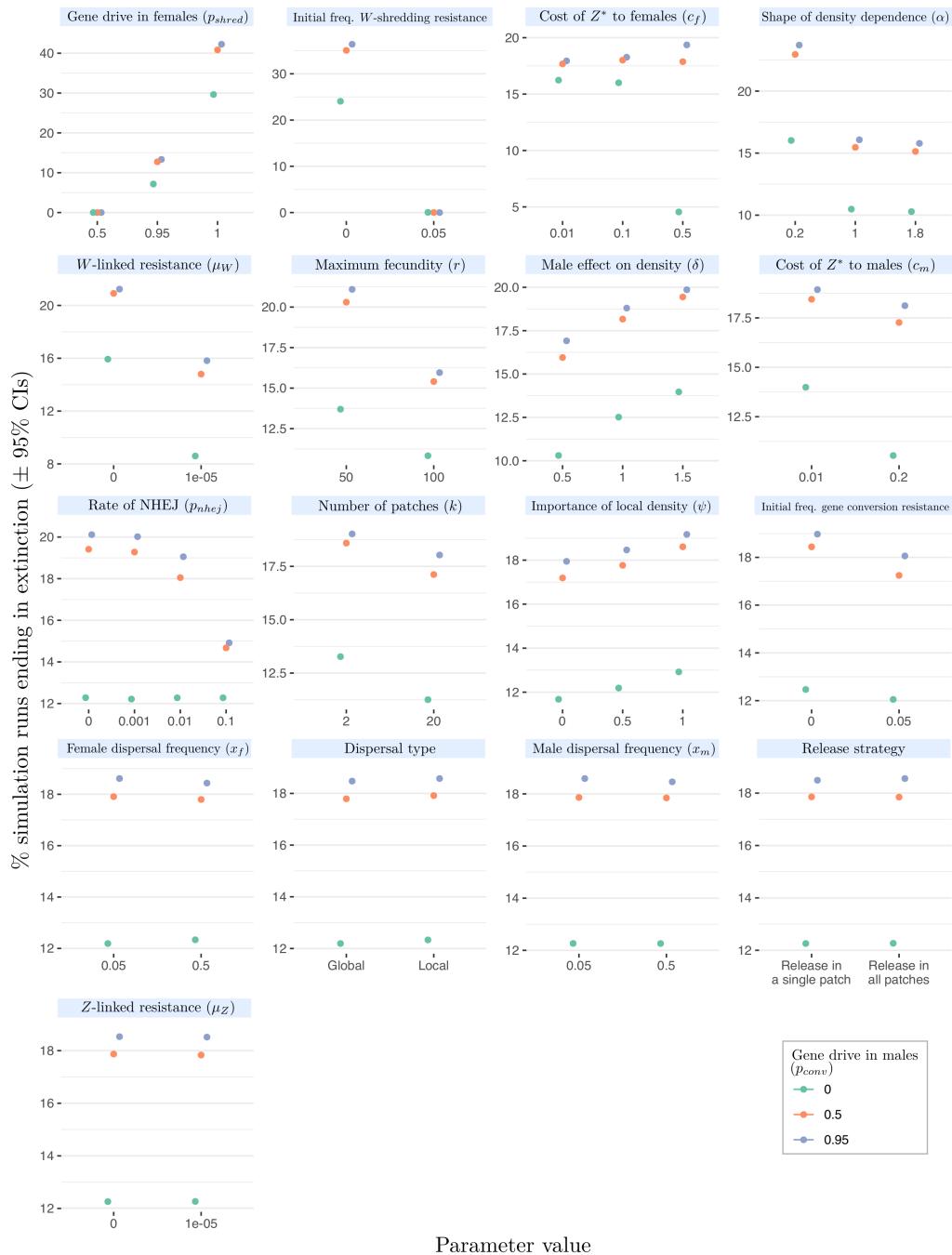


Figure 3. The percentage of simulations of a W -shredder that ended in extinction, for all runs with a particular value (shown on the x -axis) for a given parameter (shown in the panels). For example, there were no extinctions in any of the thousands of runs for which I assumed $p_{shred} = 0.5$, while 60% of runs where $p_{shred} = 1$ resulted in extinction. The panels are ordered by the range of the x -axis, which indicates the relative importance of each variable to extinction probability. Figure S3 gives a similar plot for simulations of a female-sterilising Z^* allele.



Figure 4. Relative parameter importance in the simulations of W -shredders, for the top 25 most important main effects or two-way interactions (from a binomial GLM that included all the main effects and all their two-way interactions). Each predictor variable was scaled before running the model, meaning that the absolute effect size indicates how important each parameter is to the extinction probability, given the range of values plotted in Figure 3. Figure S5 gives a similar plot for simulations of a female-sterilising Z^* allele.