**Running title: Dating geological history with simulated molecular data**

**Introduction:**

Biological and geographic information have long reciprocally informed hypotheses on one another (Bueno-Hernández et al., 2023). Traditionally, pattern-based comparisons between geographic and biological distribution data informed most biogeographic hypotheses. Through the development of different strategies in statistical methods applying fossil calibrations to phylogenies (Parham et al., 2012), and an increase in high-quality DNA data (Rieux & Balloux, 2016), biogeographic research now not only focus on searching for pattern congruence but also may explicitly test data-driven hypotheses. In fact, many large clades across the tree of life now are now broadly accepted as reliably dated (dos Reis et al., 2012; Harris & Davies, 2016). Research focused on dating phylogenies has recently trended to applying biogeographic priors to time phylogenetic models. In both theoretical and empirical (Landis, 2017) systems, tip-based methods have been successful in using biogeographic information to calibrate dated phylogenies. Like fossil tip-dating methods, the observed biogeographic states of present organisms can successfully create a posterior distribution of speciation times to calibrate trees. When combined with known biogeographic priors, such as the advent of islands (Landis et al., 2018), calibration can be further refined.

While geographic history has now been repeatedly successful in analyzing biological data, research on the inverse of these reciprocal analyses has only just begun to inspire further investigation. The rapidly expanding resources of high-quality genetic data have led researchers to use molecular information to address questions about historic geographic processes. In “geogenomics”, genetic data is used to test or constrain geological hypotheses (Baker et al., 2014), allowing genetic information to fill in knowledge gaps where other paleogeographic methods are limited. Geogenomic methods do not just confirm or deny the validity of biogeographic patterns, but specifically aim to understand the mechanisms by which biological and geological forces act upon one another (Dolby et al., 2022). This geogenomic framework provides opportunities to model biogeographic history strictly from molecular data, such as where topographic disruptions existed in presently continuous landscapes using phylogenetic divergence of extant species (Sanín et al., 2022), and the configuration of drainage basins over time (Bedoya et al., 2021). Further unexplored empirical hypotheses remain to be tested, such as using genetic data to predict timing of geological events like volcanic eruptions or landslides (Dolby et al., 2022). Yet, theoretical testing of the geogenomic method is lacking. We address this issue here with a simulated dataset.

We use an existing methodological framework (Landis, 2017) to ask if a well-supported, accurately-dated molecular phylogeny estimate the dates of biogeographic events without prior information. Answering this question will support the increasing interest in and need for applying biological data to answer biogeographic questions. In using this simulated dataset with known evolutionary and biogeographic history, we test the potential for well-calibrated phylogenies to estimate biogeographic events. In a model scenario, a river-dwelling angiosperm lineage occurs in a river basin that has experienced two historic biogeographic barriers. This model group of aquatic riparian species is suitable for analyses, because individuals do not migrate and species are restricted to highly specific and diagnosable ranges. We assume a barrier, such as mountain uplift, creates a branching in a river ecosystem at three and one million years before present. The ensuing three distinct river branches allow for speciation, with a phylogeny whose branches mirror the river ecosystem (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Biogeographic model for simulated organisms. Dotted lines represent known biogeographic dates of uplift marking epoch transitions at three and one million years ago.

**Methods:**

**Demographic and molecular simulation:**

A model phylogeny containing three taxa was generated in python using the package msprime (Baumdicker et al., 2022). The model phylogeny has taxon C splitting from taxa A and B three million years ago and taxon A splitting from taxon B one million years ago. Each taxon has a generation time of one year. Model sequences of 10,000 base pairs were generated for each taxa using the HKY model assuming a mutation rate of 1e-8 and a recombination rate of 4.8e-8, realistic for angiosperms (SOURCE). Divergence times were calculated for each node. All sites labelled “?” were filled in with random invariant bases. In one demographic model, gene flow between taxa was never allowed. In a second demographic model, gene flow occurred between ingroup taxon A and outgroup taxon C from 0.8 to 0.6 million years ago

**Biogeographic dating:**

Biogeographic dating analyses for the model data was performed in RevBayes (Höhna et al., 2016) according to the DEC model (Landis, 2017; also see Landis et al., 2018). Scripts were adapted from the publicly available RevBayes analyses used in these studies. In this model, molecular sequence data, a phylogeny, present ranges and distances, and geological epoch times are defined as inputs to jointly estimate phylogeny and biogeography. Two Markov chains Monte Carlo were run with 10 million generations for each of the fifteen model scenarios. For all of the model scenarios, we manually set the root age of the tree to a uniform distribution between three and four million years ago and set the extirpation rate to zero.

First, we ran five biogeographic knowledge-level scenarios (Figure 2); uniform-informed, normal-informed, normal-uninformed, normal-incorrect, and unknown. We then ran the same five biogeographic knowledge-level scenarios with the second demographic model that allowed for a period of gene flow. After finding comparable results with a dispersal models of dispersal = 0.05 and 0.10, we report simulations with the higher dispersal model to best reflect biological reality.

**Figure 2:** Five biogeographic knowledge-level scenarios. Red dotted line represents the true time for the node where taxon C splits from taxa A and B, and green dotted line represents thestrue time for the node where taxon A splits from taxon B.

**Results:**

**Discussion:**

Perfect simulated data successfully being able to predict the timing of the emergence of biogeographic barriers without prior information suggests exciting opportunities to test new biogeographic historical hypotheses. In fact, models with a flat, unknown prior performed just as well as models with a uniform or normal geological prior centered around correct times. Furthering genomic data acquisition and empirical analyses in model systems such as montane or riparian species has been proposed (Bedoya, 2024) as the next steps in furthering the empirical testing of reciprocal geographic-biological dating methods.

With the introduction of incorrect prior information, however, models performed significantly worse in predicting geological history. This supports the idea that researchers should be conservative and cautious when creating strict priors in geogenomic methods.

Talk about gene flow results. Gene flow is not a problem to be solved, but another tool to understand past geographic connections! But also, talk about limitations.

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