De Novo Genome Assembly Highlights the Role of Lineage-Specific Gene Duplications in the Evolution of Venom in Fea’s Viper (Azemiops feae)

Edward A. Myers 1,*, Jason L. Strickland 1,2, Rhett M. Rautsaw 1, Andrew J. Mason 1,3, Tristan D. Schramer 1, Gunnar S. Nystrom 4, Michael P. Hogan 4, Shibu Yooseph 5, Darin R. Rokyta 4, and Christopher L. Parkinson 1,6,*

1Department of Biological Sciences, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634, USA
2Department of Biology, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688, USA
3Department of Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA
4Department of Biological Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306, USA
5Department of Computer Science, Genomics and Bioinformatics Cluster, University of Central Florida, 4000 Central Florida Blvd, Orlando, FL 32816, USA
6Department of Forestry and Environmental Conservation, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634, USA

*Corresponding authors: E-mails: eddie.a.myers@gmail.com; viper@clemson.edu.

Accepted: 25 May 2022

Abstract

Despite the medical significance to humans and important ecological roles filled by vipers, few high-quality genomic resources exist for these snakes outside of a few genera of pitvipers. Here we sequence, assemble, and annotate the genome of Fea’s Viper (Azemiops feae). This taxon is distributed in East Asia and belongs to a monotypic subfamily, sister to the pitvipers. The newly sequenced genome resulted in a 1.56 Gb assembly, a contig N50 of 1.59 Mb, with 97.6% of the genome assembly in contigs >50 Kb, and a BUSCO completeness of 92.4%. We found that A. feae venom is primarily composed of phospholipase A2 (PLA2) proteins expressed by genes that likely arose from lineage-specific PLA2 gene duplications. Additionally, we show that renin, an enzyme associated with blood pressure regulation in mammals and known from the venoms of two viper species including A. feae, is expressed in the venom gland at comparative levels to known toxins and is present in the venom proteome. The cooption of this gene as a toxin may be more widespread in viperids than currently known. To investigate the historical population demographics of A. feae, we performed coalescent-based analyses and determined that the effective population size has remained stable over the last 100 kyr. This suggests Quaternary glacial cycles likely had minimal influence on the demographic history of A. feae. This newly assembled genome will be an important resource for studying the genomic basis of phenotypic evolution and understanding the diversification of venom toxin gene families.

Key words: snake genomics, Viperidae, venom evolution, gene family expansion.

Significance

We provide the first de novo genome assembly for Fea’s Viper (Azemiops feae). This genome was assembled with PacBio continuous long read data, polished using Illumina short-read data, and annotated with transcriptome data from numerous tissues. Using venom gland transcriptomics and the venom proteome, we ascertain the expression profile of toxins and evaluate the evolution of the phospholipase A2 gene family, one of the most abundant and functionally diverse toxins in Viperidae. These genomic resources will be valuable for better understanding the genomic basis of complex traits, investigating the origins and diversification of the highly diverse and successful radiation of Viperids, and exploring community-wide patterns of historical demography in East Asia throughout the Quaternary.

© The Author(s) 2022. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.
Introduction
Snakes in the family, Viperidae, are a diverse group of venomous snakes that have received significant investigation, particularly in terms of life histories, systematics, and venom composition (Lynch 2007; Hendry et al. 2014; Alencar et al. 2016). For example, this clade contains both viviparous and oviparous species and many taxa exhibit parental care behaviors (e.g., Greene et al. 2002). Body sizes of vipers span over an order of magnitude, from a maximum body length of 375 cm (Lachesis muta) to <28 cm (Bitis schnedi; Vitt and Caldwell 2013). Vipers are nearly globally distributed, spanning a wide latitudinal range, from 45°S latitude in Argentina to 66.5°N above the Arctic circle in Scandinavia (Vitt and Caldwell 2013), and they occur in habitats ranging from sea level to high elevation montane forests and from deserts to tropical rainforests. Finally, vipers display extensive variation in venom from highly neurotoxic venoms to lipase A2 (PLA2) gene family and the expression of renin in venom gland transcriptomes, however, the venom evolution of whole genome assemblies in many taxa (Feng 2010). The extensive ecological, morphological, and physiological diversity found across vipers provides an exemplary system for comparative analyses.

Understanding evolutionary history and the genetic basis of species-specific traits has been accelerated by the proliferation of whole genome assemblies in many taxa (Feng et al. 2020; Kim et al. 2021). Genomic sequencing efforts within vipers thus far have focused on the pitvipers (Crotalinae), largely within Crotalus (five species sequenced to date) and Protobothrops (two species sequenced), to understand the evolution of venom and sensory biology (Gilbert et al. 2014; Aird et al. 2015; Shibata et al. 2018; Schield et al. 2019; Hogan et al. 2021; Margres et al. 2021). To fully understand the genetic mechanisms driving phenotypic evolution and species diversification, additional genomic resources are needed across the viperid tree of life.

Here, we sequence the genome of a Fea’s Viper, A. feae, an enigmatic viperid species representative of the monotypic subfamily Azemiopinae (but see Nikolai et al. 2013; Li et al. 2020). This taxon is sister to the Crotalinae, a successful radiation of ~230 species, which currently accounts for nearly all genomic resources available for vipers. With this first full-genome assembly of A. feae, we investigate the origins of venom components with a focus on the phospholipase A2 (PLA2) gene family and the expression of renin in the venom gland, which has been previously identified in Azemiopsis and Echis venom. Furthermore, we explore the demographic history of A. feae and discuss this in comparison to codistributed species.

Results and Discussion
Genome Assembly and Structural Contents
Sequencing resulted in 4.21 million PacBio Sequel I reads (average read length 7,631 bp, a total of 32.2 gigabases, and ~20χ genome coverage) and 665 million 250 bp PE Illumina reads (~104χ genome coverage). Using MaSuRCa v3.2.8 (Zimin et al. 2013), we estimated the genome size for A. feae as 1.56 Gb, similar to other snakes (supplementary table S1, Supplementary Material online). The final hybrid assembly resulted in 4,303 total scaffolds, with an N50 of 1.597 Mb, a maximum contig length of 9.67 Mb, with 97.6% of the genome assembly in contigs >50 Kb (fig. 1A). Kraken (Wood and Salzberg 2014) identified 17 scaffolds of potential bacterial contamination, however, BLAST results of these scaffolds identified them as eukaryotic sequence, often as repetitive sequence from snakes.

We recovered 3,101 (92.4%) complete and 89 (2.7%) fragmented BUSCO loci (fig. 1B). Using MAKER v2.31.8, a total of 13,229 protein-coding genes were annotated throughout the genome. Repeat masking indicated that 37.8% of the assembled genome consisted of repetitive sequence (fig. 1C). These repetitive sequences were primarily composed of long interspersed nuclear elements (LINEs; 14% of the total genome assembly), unclassified repetitive sequences (10.6%), and DNA transposons (5.3%). We find that the total repeat content of A. feae falls within the range of other viperid genomes publicly available, where repetitive element content ranges from 27.5% to 46.7% (fig. 1C). Furthermore, repetitive elements within the LINE families are abundant and recently active in squamates when compared with mammals and birds (Pasquesi et al. 2018). An abundance of LINE repetitive elements is also observed in A. feae where chicken repeat 1, Bovine-B, and L2 LINEs together account for ~10% of the genome.

Venom Evolution
The venom gland transcriptome assembly and annotation resulted in 3,020 nonredundant nontoxin and 40 nonredundant toxin transcripts (fig. 2A). These annotated toxins accounted for 69.6% of the total transcriptome expression. Using mass spectrometry (MS), we generated proteomic data to confirm the presence of 18 (45%) of the toxin transcripts in the venom. Using the venom gland transcriptome data, we identified and annotated a total of 51 genes encoding toxic proteins across 30 genomic scaffolds (supplementary table S2, Supplementary Material online).

The venom gland transcriptome of A. feae was dominated by six PLA2s, a bradykinin-potentiating peptide (azemiopsin; Utkin et al. 2012), and a cysteine-rich secretory protein (CRISP) (fig. 2A; supplementary table S2, Supplementary Material online). PLA2s accounted for 61.9% of toxin expression (fig. 2A). Previous studies have found that PLA2s are the most dominant toxin in Azemiopsis venom gland transcriptomes, however, the...
**Fig. 1.**—(A) Snail plot visualization summarizing metrics of the Azemiops feae genome including the length of the longest contig (~9.7 Mb; red line), N50 (1.59 Mb; dark orange), N90 (190 Kb; light orange), and base composition; (B) BUSCO completeness comparing the assembled Azemiops feae genome to all published Viperidae genomes. Current phylogenetic relationships within Viperidae are (Viperinae [V. berus], Azemiopinae [A. feae], Crotalinae [all others]); (C) repeat content comparison of major classes for repeat elements across all published Viperidae genomes; (D) demographic history of A. feae using PSMC, shaded lines represent 100 bootstrap estimates demonstrating that this taxon has had a low, stable effective population size for the last 100 ka; (E) photograph of the A. feae specimen sequenced here (photo credit to Danny Goodding).
frequencies of other toxin components differ between our study and published Azemiops venom gland transcriptomes (Babenko et al. 2020). Variation in venom composition within populations and between species is commonly documented in snakes (Schenberg 1959; Glenn and Straight 1989); additional sampling and studies...
are necessary to fully understand the variation present in Azemiops venom composition as well as the molecular mechanisms underlying this variation.

Proteomic analyses confirmed the presence of most toxin classes identified in the transcriptomic data. For example, many of the SVMPs, CRISP, snake-venom nerve growth factor (NGF), vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), and renin were confirmed via quantitative MS along with most of the PLA2s (fig. 2A). Many toxins not verified had low expression levels, but this also included the highly expressed azemiopsin and several snake-venom metalloproteinase III toxins. There is a high correlation between venom gland transcriptomes and proteomes and a failure to detect putative toxins proteomically is likely a result of the misassignment of mRNA as toxins or because of proteomic detection thresholds (Rokyta et al. 2015). We suggest the reason some highly expressed toxins in the transcriptome were not verified with MS is because of posttranslational modifications that reduce the active toxins to very small peptides (e.g., note that the BPP toxin was not confirmed here because the <14mers of BPPs are below the threshold of detection using MS; Sciani and Pimenta 2017), resulting in false-negative results.

We identified six distinct toxin PLA2 genes present in the genome, transcriptome, and confirmed five of these via MS (PLA2-gC1a was not confirmed; fig. 2C). Each of these PLA2 genes had transcript per million values >42,000 inferred using StringTie (supplementary table S3, Supplementary Material online). This is in contrast to previous work that identified several PLA2 isoforms, only a few of which were thought to be expressed in the venom gland (Tsai et al. 2016; Babenko et al. 2020). It is possible that differences in the number of PLA2 genes identified between these studies and here could reflect gene copy number polymorphism within A. feae. The proliferation of the PLA2 gene family has gained interest because of its prominent role in venom within both elapids and vipers as two distinct expansion events (Lynch 2007). All six Azemiops PLA2 genes were tandemly repeated between two nonvenom expressed PLA2 genes (PLA2-g2e and PLA2-g2f), flanked by the OTUD3 and MUL1 genes, a conserved pattern across tetrapods (Dowell et al. 2016). To classify the sequenced PLA2s, we combined our data with publicly available sequences and reconstructed a phylogeny based on amino acid-translated sequences (fig. 3). Five of the six Azemiops PLA2s clustered with the PLA2-gC group. It has been hypothesized that this group is ancestral to the pit viper PLA2 gene family expansion, which many true vipers and pitvipers possess (this gene is also present in Ophiophagus and Python; fig. 3; Dowell et al. 2016). The high number of PLA2-gCs likely represents Azemiops lineage-specific gene duplications leading to novel venom proteins. PLA2 gene duplications with subsequent neofunctionalization resulting in increasingly complex venom composition are well documented (Kini 2005; Lynch 2007). The sixth PLA2, along with a previously published Azemiops PLA2 (Tsai et al. 2016), clustered with the PLA2-gA1 group (fig. 3). The gC::gA1 PLA2s are the only two genes that are shared across several pitviper taxa (Dowell et al. 2018; Almeida et al. 2021) and this pair of PLA2 genes would have been present in the ancestor of Azemiops and pitvipers. Additional PLA2 genes are shared between vipers and other tetrapods, for example, the PLA2-2d gene in C. adamanteus and Bothrops jararaca (PLA2-GD; fig. 2B) suggests that this gene has an ancient origin. However, its absence in several other Crotalus species and Azemiops, suggests that PLA2 genes are frequently lost. Overall, this supports the notion that gene loss and lineage-specific duplications together lead to a diversity of toxins expressed in snake venoms (Rokyta et al. 2013; Dowell et al. 2016; Mason et al. 2020).

Renin was located on a genomic scaffold with several SVMP genes, expressed in the venom gland transcriptome, and confirmed using proteomic analyses to be present in the venom (fig. 2A). Previous analysis of Azemiops venom has also identified the presence of renin in the transcriptome and proteome (Babenko et al. 2020). Furthermore, renin has been found in the venom of Echis and hypothesized to have toxic properties including inducing local hypertension in envenomated prey, thereby exacerbating tissue disruption by other toxins in the venom (Wagstaff and Harrison 2006). We tested whether this gene was expressed in other tissues of Azemiops and found that, whereas renin made up to 0.22% of the total venom gland transcriptome, it composed only 0.02% of the blood transcriptome and was not detected in any other tissue. We suggest that renin has been coopted as a venom protein within vipers and may be found to be more widespread taxonomically than currently recognized.

Demographic History

Climate has fluctuated greatly throughout the Quaternary, influencing the geographic distributions and population sizes of species globally (Hewitt 2000). However, the extent of these climatic changes influencing population size change in East Asia is less well known; codistributed species have been reported as having stable population sizes, population expansions, or declining population sizes through time (Yan et al. 2013; Qu et al. 2015; Guo et al. 2016). The results from our PSMC analysis demonstrate that A. feae effective population size has been relatively stable over the past 100,000 years, suggesting glacial cycles of the Quaternary have had little influence on the demography of this taxon (fig. 1D). These results are consistent with the East Asian mountains being climatically stable throughout glacial cycles allowing for effective population size persistence for many species (Qu et al. 2015). Future
Fig. 3.—Maximum-likelihood protein phylogeny of PLA2g2 proteins sampled broadly across the Viperidae. Different colors represent named classes of PLA2g2 proteins. Newly sequenced *A. feae* PLA2s are in bold and highlighted in yellow, five of these PLA2 proteins cluster within the PLA2-gC clade, whereas one is nested within the PLA2-gA1 clade. Black circles represent >90% bootstrap support, gray circles represent >80% BS. All terminals include Genbank accession numbers, those listed as “genomic translation” are from Dowell et al. (2016).
comparative population genomic studies that can take a trait-based approach can illuminate community-level demographic processes across this region (Provost et al. 2021).

**Materials and Methods**

**Sample Preparation**

A single adult female was acquired from the pet-trade for this study. Venom was collected, vacuum dehydrated, and stored at −20 °C. The snake was euthanized 4 days after venom collection with MS-222 (Beaupre et al. 2004) and the specimen was accessioned at the Florida Museum of Natural History (UF-Herp:192944). DNA was extracted using a standard phenol–chloroform–isoamyl protocol. Genomic libraries were prepared with the TruSeq DNA PCR-Free library prep kit and two lanes of Illumina HiSeq PE250 genomic reads were generated at Florida State University. High molecular weight (HMW) DNA was sent to the University of Delaware Core for PacBio library prep and sequenced using six cells on the Sequel I. See Supplementary Material online for details on morphology and sample prep.

Total RNA was extracted from 12 tissues (see Supplementary Material online) using a standard TRizol method (Rokyta et al. 2012). mRNA was isolated from 1,000 ng total RNA using the NEB-Nexrt Poly(A) mRNA magnetic isolation kit and cDNA library preparation was performed using NEB-Nexrt Ultra RNA Library Prep Kit (New England Biolabs) following the manufacturer’s protocols. Libraries were sequenced on an Illumina HiSeq PE250.

**Genome Assembly and Annotation**

Illumina reads were first trimmed using Trim Galore! (https://github.com/FelixKrueger/TrimGalore) with default settings. Bacterial contamination in the assembly was assessed using Kraken v2.0 (Wood and Salzberg 2014). The assembled venom gland contigs were annotated via blastx (v. 2.2.31+) searches against the UniProt database. Toxins were parsed from “nontoxin” sequences and coding regions were annotated by clustering sequences using cd-hit-est to a known database of annotated snake toxins (Rokyta et al. 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017). Additional toxin contigs were manually annotated by comparing sequences to the blastx results. After genome annotation, we used StringTie (Pertea et al. 2015) to estimate transcript expression. See Supplementary Material online for details on transcriptomic and proteomic analyses.

**Venom Evolution**

To investigate the evolutionary history of the PLA2 gene family within Azemiops, we downloaded the PLA2 protein dataset used in Dowell et al. (2016) and Tsai et al. (2016). These amino acid sequences were aligned with the PLA2s sequenced here and identified as toxins using muscle (Edgar 2004). A maximum-likelihood gene-tree was inferred with 1,000 bootstrap replicates to assess node support in IQtree v1.6.10 (Hoang et al. 2018).

Because renin was present in both the venom gland transcriptome and MS analysis, we tested whether this gene is expressed elsewhere in the body. We measured relative expression of this gene across the combined venom glands and the other tissues sequenced using RSEM v1.3.0 (Li and Dewey 2011) with default Bowtie2 settings.

**Demographic History**

To assess historical changes in $N_e$, we used the Pairwise Sequentially Markovian Coalescent (PSMC; Li and Durbin 2011). This method infers $N_e$ and identifies recombination events from a single diploid genome sequence using a hidden Markov model. Using coalescent theory, PSMC models pairwise sequence divergence as proportional to the time of coalescence, and where the rate of coalescence in a time period is inversely proportional to $N_e$. We used samtools (Li et al. 2009) following authors’ recommendations to generate a diploid consensus sequence (https://github.com/lh3/pasmc). PSMC was run with default settings and 100 bootstrap replicates. This analysis was scaled assuming a genome-wide mutation rate of $2 \times 10^{-8}$ per site per year (Harrington et al. 2017) and a generation time of 3 years.

**Supplementary Material**

Supplementary data are available at Genome Biology and Evolution online.
Acknowledgments

This work was supported, in part, by the National Science Foundation grants DUE 1161228, DEB 1638879, and DEB 1822417 to C.L.P, DEB 1638902 to D.R.R. and from the Clemson University Genomics and Bioinformatics Facility, which receives support from two Institutional Development Awards (IDeA) from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health under grant numbers P20GM109094 and P20GM139767. Parallel computing resources were provided by the Clemson Palmetto High-Performance Computing Cluster. We also thank D. Blackburn and C. Sheehy III for quickly accessioning the specimen used in this study at the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Data Availability

Data presented in this article are available from NCBI under BioProject PRJNA817186, BioSample SAMN26749269, and the SRA: SAMN26749269 (Illumina genomic data); SAMN26749269 (PacBio genomic data); SAMN26749269 (Illumina RNAseq data).

Literature Cited

Aird SD, et al. 2015. Snake venoms are integrated systems, but abundant venom proteins evolve more rapidly. BMC Genomics 16: 1–20.

Alencar LRV, et al. 2016. Diversification in vipers: phylogenetic relationships, time of divergence and shifts in speciation rates. Mol Phylogenet Evol. 105:50–62.

Almeida DD, et al. 2021. Tracking the recruitment and evolution of snake toxins using the evolutionary context provided by the Bothrops jararaca genome. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 118: e2015159118.

Babenko VV, et al. 2020. Novel bradykinin-potentiating peptides and three-finger toxins from viper venom: combined NGS venom gland transcriptomics and quantitative venom proteomics of the Azemiops feae viper. Biomedics 8:249.

Beaupre SJ, Jacobson ER, Lillywhite HB, Zamudio K. 2004. Guidelines for use of live amphibians and reptiles in field and laboratory research. American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists.

Dowell N, et al. 2016. The deep origin and recent loss of venom toxin genes in rattlesnakes. Curr Biol. 26:2434–2445.

Dowell NL, et al. 2018. Extremely divergent haplotypes in two toxin gene complexes encode alternative venom types within rattlesnake species. Curr Biol. 28:1016–1026.

Edgar RC. 2004. MUSCLE: multiple sequence alignment with high accuracy and high throughput. Nucleic Acids Res. 32:1792–1797.

Feng S, et al. 2020. Dense sampling of bird diversity increases power of comparative genomics. Nature 587:252–257.

Flynn JM, et al. 2020. RepeatModeler2 for automated genomic discovery of transposable element families. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 117: 9451–9457.

Gilbert C, et al. 2014. Endogenous hepadnaviruses, bornaviruses and circoviruses in snakes. Proc R Soc Lond B Biol Sci. 281:20141122.

Glenn JL, Straight RC. 1989. Intergradation of two different venom populations of the Mojave rattlesnake (Crotalus scutulatus scutulatus) in Arizona. Toxicon 27:411–418.

Greene HW, May PG, Hardy Sr DL, Scituro JM, Farrell TM. 2002. Parental behavior by vipers. In: Schuett GW, Högnren M, Douglas ME, Greene HW, editors. The biology of the vipers. Eagle Mountain, Utah: Eagle Mountain Publishing. p. 179–205.

Guo P, et al. 2016. Complex longitudinal diversification across South China and Vietnam in Stejneger’s pit viper, Vindobovipera stejnegeri (Schmidt, 1925) (Reptilia: Serpentes: Viperidae). Mol Ecol. 25: 2920–2936.

Harrington SM, Hollingsworth BD, Higham TE, Reeder TW. 2017. Pleistocene climatic fluctuations drive isolation and secondary contact in the red diamond rattlesnake (Crotalus ruber) in Baja California. J Biogeogr. 45:64–75.

Hendry CR, Guiher TJ, Pyron RA. 2014. Ecological divergence and sexual selection drive sexual size dimorphism in new world pitvipers (Serpentes: Viperidae). J Evol Biol. 27:760–771.

Hewitt G. 2000. The genetic legacy of the Quaternary ice ages. Nature 405(6789):907–913.

Hoang DT, Chernomor O, Von Haeseler A, Minh BQ, Vinh LS. 2018. UFBoot2: improving the ultrafast bootstrap approximation. Mol Biol Evol. 35: 518–522.

Hogan MP, et al. 2021. The chemosensory repertoire of the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake (Crotalus adamanteus) reveals complementary genetics of olfactory and vomeronasal-type receptors. J Mol Evol. 89:313–328.

Holding ML, Margres MJ, Mason AJ, Parkinson CL, Roktya DR. 2018. Evaluating the performance of de novo assembly methods for venom-gland transcriptomics. Toxins 10:249.

Holt C, Yandell M. 2011. MAKER2: an annotation pipeline and genome-database management tool for second-generation genome projects. BMC Bioinform. 12:1–14.

Kim BY, et al. 2021. Highly contiguous assemblies of 101 drosophilid genomes. Elife 10:e66405.

Kini RM. 2005. Structure-function relationships and mechanism of anticoagulant phospholipase A2 enzymes from snake venoms. Toxicon 45:1147–1161.

Li H, et al. 2009. The sequence alignment/map format and SAMtools. Bioinformatics 25:2078–2079.

Li J-N, et al. 2020. A large-scale systematic framework of Chinese snakes based on a unified multilocus marker system. Mol Phylogenet Evol. 148:106807.

Li B, Dewey CN. 2011. RSEM: accurate transcript quantification from RNA-Seq data with or without a reference genome. BMC Bioinform. 12:1–16.

Li H, Durbin R. 2011. Inference of human population history from individual whole-genome sequences. Nature 475:493–496.

Lynch VJ. 2007. Inventing an arsenal: adaptive evolution and neofunctionalization of snake venom phospholipase A2 genes. BMC Evol Biol. 7:1–14.

Mackessy SP. 2010. Evolutionary trends in venom composition in the western rattlesnakes (Crotalus viridis sensu lato): toxicity vs. tenacity versus renderizers. Toxicon 55:1463–1474.

Margres MJ, et al. 2021. The Tiger Rattlesnake genome reveals a complex genotype underlying a simple venom phenotype. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 118:e2014634118.

Mason AJ, et al. 2020. Trait differentiation and modular toxin expression in palm-pitvipers. BMC Genomics 21:1–20.

Nikolai LO, Sergei AR, Tao TN. 2013. On the taxonomy and the distribution of snakes of the genus Azemiops Boulenger, 1888: description of a new species. Russ J Herpetol. 20: 110–128.

Pasquesi GM, et al. 2018. Squamate reptiles challenge paradigms of genomic repeat element evolution set by birds and mammals. Nat Commun. 9:1–11.
Pertea M, et al. 2015. StringTie enables improved reconstruction of a transcriptome from RNA-seq reads. Nat Biotechnol. 33:290–295.

Provost KL, Myers EA, Smith BT. 2021. Community phylogeographic patterns reveal how a barrier filters and structures taxa in North American warm deserts. J Biogeogr. 48:1267–1283.

Qu Y, et al. 2015. The influence of geological events on the endemism of East Asian birds studied through comparative phylogeography. J Biogeogr. 42:179–192.

Rokyta DR, Lemmon AR, Margres MJ, Aronow K. 2012. The venom-gland transcriptome of the eastern diamondback rattlesnake (Crotalus adamanteus). BMC Genomics 13:1–23.

Rokyta DR, Margres MJ, Calvin K. 2015. Post-transcriptional mechanisms contribute little to phenotypic variation in snake venoms. G3 Genes, Genomes, Genet. 5:2375–2382.

Rokyta DR, Margres MJ, Ward MJ, Sanchez EE. 2017. The genetics of venom ontogeny in the eastern diamondback rattlesnake (Crotalus adamanteus). PeerJ 5:e3249.

Rokyta DR, Wray KP, Margres MJ. 2013. The genesis of an exceptionally lethal venom in the timber rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus) revealed through comparative venom-gland transcriptomics. BMC Genomics 14:1–21.

Schenberg S. 1959. Geographical pattern of crotamine distribution in the same rattlesnake subspecies. Science (80-.) 129:1361–1363.

Schield DR, et al. 2019. The origins and evolution of chromosomes, dosage compensation, and mechanisms underlying venom regulation in snakes. Genome Res. 29:590–601.

Sciani JM, Pimenta DC. 2017. The modular nature of bradykinin-potentiating peptides isolated from snake venoms. J Venom Anim Toxins Incl Trop Dis. 23:45.

Shibata H, et al. 2018. The habu genome reveals accelerated evolution of venom protein genes. Sci Rep. 8:11300.

Smit AFA, Hubley R, Green P. 2015. RepeatMasker Open-4.0. 2013–2015.

Stanke M, et al. 2006. AUGUSTUS: ab initio prediction of alternative transcripts. Nucleic Acids Res. 34:W435–W439.

Tsai I-H, Wang Y-M, Huang K-F. 2016. Structures of azemiops feae venom phospholipases and cys-rich-secretory protein and implications for taxonomy and toxicology. Toxicon 114:31–39.

Utkin YN, et al. 2012. Azemiopsin from Azemiops feae viper venom, a novel polypeptide ligand of nicotinic acetylcholine receptor. J Biol Chem. 287(32):27079–27086.

Vitt LJ, Caldwell JP. 2013. Herpetology: an introductory biology of amphibians and reptiles. 4th ed. Academic Press.

Wagstaff SC, Harrison RA. 2006. Venom gland EST analysis of the saw-scaled viper, Echis ocellatus, reveals novel α9β1 integrin-binding motifs in venom metalloproteinases and a new group of putative toxins, renin-like aspartic proteases. Gene 377:21–32.

Wood DE, Salzberg SL. 2014. Kraken: ultrafast metagenomic sequence classification using exact alignments. Genome Biol. 15:1–12.

Yan F, et al. 2013. Geological events play a larger role than Pleistocene climatic fluctuations in driving the genetic structure of Quasipaa boulengeri (Anura: Dicroglossidae). Mol Ecol. 22:1120–1133.

Zimin AV, et al. 2013. The MaSuRCA genome assembler. Bioinformatics 29:2669–2677.

Associate editor: Wenfeng Qian