Iridovirus infection of cell cultures from the Diaprepes root weevil, Diaprepes abbreviatus

W. B. Hunter and S. L. Lapointe

United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Horticultural Research Laboratory, 2001 South Rock Rd., Fort Pierce, Florida 34945
Whunter@ushrl.ars.usda.gov, Slapointe@ushrl.ars.usda.gov

Received 30 January 2002, Accepted 3 October 2003, Published 15 December 2003

Abstract

We here report the development and viral infection of a Diaprepes root weevil cell culture. Embryonic tissues of the root weevil were used to establish cell cultures for use in screening viral pathogens as potential biological control agents. Tissues were seeded into a prepared solution of insect medium and kept at a temperature of 24°C. The cell culture had primarily fibroblast-like morphology with some epithelial monolayers. Root weevil cells were successfully infected in vitro with a known insect virus, Invertebrate Iridescent Virus 6. Potential uses of insect cell cultures and insect viruses are discussed.

Keywords: Citrus, Diaprepes abbreviatus, Insect, Lethal-Male Delivery System, Pathogen, Suppression, Virus, Weevil

Abbreviation:
IIV-6 Invertebrate Iridescent Virus 6

Introduction

The Diaprepes root weevil, Diaprepes abbreviatus (L.) [Coleoptera: Curculionidae], was first reported in the mainland U.S. at Apopka, FL in 1964 (Woodruff 1964) and has become a key pest of citrus, crops, and ornamental plants throughout the state. The larvae of this weevil burrow through the soil feeding on progressively larger roots as they grow. Girdling of structural roots or the root crown can kill mature citrus trees. In addition to direct damage, larval feeding provides infection sites for plant pathogens, particularly Phytophthora spp., that contribute to tree mortality and reductions in yield (Rogers et al., 1996). This pest has become a major concern of citrus growers in Florida due to the difficulty of detecting larvae in the soil, and the fact that few effective and environmentally appropriate control options are currently available to growers for controlling subterranean pests (Lapointe and Shapiro 1999). To meet this challenge, we undertook to develop in vitro cultivation of Diaprepes root weevil cells that may provide materials for studies of cell biology, weevil physiology, and genetics. Our interests are in producing a method to screen for entomopathogenic organisms that may be used as biological control agents against the root weevil.

Materials and Methods

Source of Diaprepes root weevil

Insects were obtained from a laboratory colony maintained on artificial diet at the U.S. Horticultural Laboratory of the USDA-ARS at Orlando, FL as described by Lapointe and Shapiro (1999). Eggs were collected from caged adults on wax paper strips provided as oviposition substrates. Eggs were incubated at 26°C and hatched in approximately 7 days. Eggs were collected in 1.5 ml plastic vials and prepared as described below within 24-48 h of hatching (Fig. 1).

Cell Culture Medium Components

The medium used for the culturing of weevil cells was a mix of Kimura’s modified medium (Kimura, 1984) with an addition of 20% Excell 401 medium (JRHBiosciences, www.jrhibio.com). Components were mixed as follows: 100 ml of Schneider’s Drosophila Medium, liquid 1X, with L-glutamine, (Gibco BRL, #11720-034, www.lifetech.com) plus 100 ml of L-histidine hydrochloride, monohydrate, pH 6.2 (1.3g/ 100 ml dH2O) (Gibco BRL, #11062-015), 10 ml of Medium 199, 10X, with Hank’s salts (Gibco BRL, #11181-039), and 5 ml of CMRL Medium-1066, 1X, (Gibco BRL, #11530-037). Penicillin-streptomycin solution (10,000 U/ml) was added 2.5 ml/250 ml medium, prior to filtration (Gibco BRL, #11062-015), 10 ml of Medium 199, 1X, with Hank’s salts (Gibco BRL, #11181-039), and 5 ml of CMRL Medium-1066, 1X, (Gibco BRL, #11530-037). Penicillin-streptomycin solution (10,000 U/ml) was added 2.5 ml/250 ml medium, prior to filtration (Gibco BRL, #11530-037). After these components were mixed together, the pH was adjusted to 6.35 with 1 M NaOH or 1 M HCl. The medium was then filter sterilized by passing through a 0.2 µm membrane. To this sterile medium, 50 ml of sterile Excell 401 medium (JRHBiosciences), and 30 ml of sterile fetal bovine serum (Gibco BRL, #26140-079, www.sigmaaldrich.com) were added. Cells were subcultured using Cell Dissociation Solution, 1X (Sigma...
Embeddage from Diaprepes abbreviatus emerge. Head capsule is visible at left end of egg (bar = 1 mm). (d). Neonate egg mass (bar = 2 mm). (c). Light micrograph of mature embryo ready to is approx. 15 mm long. (b). Light micrograph of root weevil, Diaprepes abbreviatus (L.) on citrus leaf. Adult is approx. 15 mm long. (b). Light micrograph of root weevil, Diaprepes abbreviatus egg mass (bar = 2 mm). (c). Light micrograph of mature embryo ready to emerge. Head capsule is visible at left end of egg (bar = 1 mm). (d). Neonate Diaprepes abbreviatus, 1 d old. (e). Phase contrast light micrograph of cell cultures from Diaprepes abbreviatus (bar = 100 µm). (f). Transmission electron micrograph of IIV-6 virus in Diaprepes abbreviatus cell showing virogenic stroma (Vs) and virus (V) outside of cell nucleus (N) (bar = ~ 1200 nm).

Results

Diaprepes root weevil cell cultures (Fig. 1e), were successfully started using mature eggs as the source material. Initial cell growth was observed within 72 hrs. Continued growth was slow with a doubling time of 8 d. The first subculture was performed after four months in culture. The cells were firmly attached to the substrate and require either scraping or a cell dissociation solution for passage. Cells were passed every 10-15 d. Cells were maintained through 12 passages. The cell culture consists of cells with fibroblast-like morphology with some epithelial-like monolayers. Examination of root weevil cells after a 48 h exposure to purified IIV-6, by electron microscopy showed infected cells with virion accumulation just outside of cell nuclei, along with the presence of virogenic stroma, indicating virus replication (Fig. 1f). Virion size (~ 120 nm diameter), shape (icosahedral), and location of accumulation within the cells were comparable to other reports of typical IIV-6 infections (Funk, et. al., 2001, Marina et al., 1999).

Discussion

We describe methods for producing cell cultures of the Diaprepes root weevil, and on their subsequent infection with the Iridovirus, IIV-6. Previous studies support classifying IIV-6 as an entomopathogenic virus (Hall 1985, Hunter et al., 2003, Tesh and Andreadis 1992). Further evaluations of the interactions between IIV-6 and root weevils have also been reported (Hunter et al., 2003). However, host range of this virus in insects still needs to be completed before we fully understand its potential use as a biological control agent in an area-wide suppression program against the root
weevil.

Cell cultures represent an easy and safe method to screen new insect viruses for pathogenicity to the target organism without having to use live insects. Obtaining cell cultures from Coleoptera have also been quite successful. At least six cell lines have been produced from the cotton Boll weevil *Anthonomus grandis* (Barcenas et al., 1989, Stiles et al., 1992) and cell lines from *Heteronychus arator* (Crawford 1982), *Leptinotarsa decemlineata*, the Colorado potato beetle (Dubendorfer and Leibig 1991) and from *Diabrotica undecimpunctata* (Lynn and Stoppleworth 1984) have been reported. Boll weevil cell cultures have been used to study hormonal regulation in insect cells (Dhadialla and Tzertzinis 1997, Stiles et al., 1992) as have other insect cultures (Lynn et al., 1987).

A major use of insect cell cultures is for the examination of virus/cell interactions in an environment wherein insect colonies are not necessary (Crawford, et al., 1984, Funk et al., 2001, Gopinadhan et al., 1992, Hunter and Polston 2001, Kimura 1984). There are other potential benefits to the development of new insect cell cultures. Since insect cell cultures are often grown without fetal bovine sera, relying on sera substitutes, the use of insect cell cultures have expanded to include many aspects of medicine. Researchers find that products made in insect cell cultures grown in media with sera substitutes are less likely to contain pathogens to vertebrates. Also, isolation of products is easier, less expensive, and specialty proteins can easily be produced in small or large quantities (Glaser 2002). For these reasons pharmaceutical companies have shown a growing interest in expanding their use of insect cells for the production of vaccines and other medicinal products (Glaser 2002). Each new insect cell culture may provide material for numerous types of future studies.

One of the best examples of using a virus to control a beetle pest is the control of the Palm rhinoceros beetle, *Oryctes rhinoceros* a pest of coconut and oil palms with a nonocluded virus (Lacey et al., 2001). In this control strategy males are infected with a pathogenic insect virus and then set free to seek out and spread the virus to female beetles during mating (Zelazny 1973, Zelazny et al., 1992). We coined the term “Lethal-Male Delivery System” to represent this strategy and are conducting tests to determine an appropriate insect virus to be used in an area-wide suppression program to reduce the impact of the *Diaprepes* root weevil in citrus and other crops. Coleoptera in general have had several viruses identified from them. Iridoviruses have been reported to infect the Boll weevil, *Anthonomus grandis*, Boheman (McLaughlin et al., 1972) and have been identified from other scarab beetles such as the Black beetle, *Heteroniscus arator* Say (Carey et al., 1978, Longworth et al., 1979) and *Sericesthis pruinosa* (Dalman) (Day and Mercer 1964). Nodaviruses have also been isolated from scarab beetles in New Zealand (Crawford et al., 1984) and a nuclear polyhedrosis virus has reportedly been isolated from the Boll weevil (Ryel and Cline 1970). As more insect viruses are discovered the possibility of developing an efficient, viral based, management system against the *Diaprepes* root weevil, comes closer to being realized.

Acknowledgments

We thank Drs; J. Funk and Dr. J. Kalmakoff, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, for providing IIV-6, Diann Achor, Lake Alfred, University of Florida, for assistance in TEM methodologies, and Karin Crosby for rearing of *Diaprepes abbreviatius*.

Disclaimer

Mention or use of products within does not imply nor guarantee endorsement by the USDA to the exclusion of other similar products which may also be suitable.

References

Barcenas NM, Norman JO, Cate JR, 1989. Establishment of two cell lines from the cotton boll weevil *Anthonomus grandis* Boheman (Coleoptera: Curculionidae). In Vitro Cellular Developmental Biology 25: 47A.

Carey GP, Lescott T, Robertson JS, Spencer LK, Kelly DC. 1978. Three African isolates of small iridescent viruses: Type 21 from *Heliotis armigera* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae), Type 23 from *Heteroniscus arator* (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae), and type 28 from *Lethocerus columbiae* (Hemiptera Heteroptera: Belostomatidae). Virology 85: 307-309.

Crawford AM. 1982. A coleopteran cell line derived from *Heteroniscus arator* (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae). In Vitro 18: 813-816.

Crawford AM, Scotti P, Sheehan C, Frederiksen S. 1984. Replication of two coleopteran nodaviruses in the coleopteran cell line DSIR-HA-1179 from *Heteroniscus arator* and the dipteran cell line from *Drosophila melanogaster* line 1. New Zealand Journal of Zoology 11: 93-96.

Dawes CJ. 1979. Biological techniques for transmission and scanning electron microscopy. Ladd Research Industries, Inc, Burlington.

Day MF, Mercer EH. 1964. Properties of an iridescent virus from the beetle *Sericesthis pruinosa*. Australian Journal of Biological Sciences 17: 892-902.

Dhadialla RS, Tzertzinis G. 1997. Characterization and partial cloning of ecdysteroid receptor from a cotton boll weevil embryonic cell line. Archives of Insect Biochemistry and Physiology 35: 45-57.

Dubendorfer A., Leibig B. 1991. Primary culture of embryonic cells of the Colorado potato beetle, *Leptinotarsa decemlineata* Say: cell differentiation in vitro and establishment of a permanent cell line. In Vitro Cellular Developmental Biology 27: 38A.

Funk CJ, Hunter WB, Achor DS. 2001. Replication of insect iridescent virus 6 in a whitefly cell line. Journal of Invertebrate Pathology 77: 144-146.

Glaser V. 2002. Adapting insect cell culture for therapeutics: Turning to baculovirus systems for easy, rapid, protein production. Genetic Engineering News 22(4): 8-9, 68. GEN Publishing, Inc., Larchmont, NY.

Gopinadhan PB, Mohandas N, Nari KPV. 1990. Cytoplasmic polyhedrosis virus infecting redpalm weevil of coconut. Current Science 59: 577-580.

Hall DW. 1985. Pathobiology of invertebrate icosahedral
Hunter WB, Lapointe SL. 2003. Iridovirus infection of cell cultures from the *Diaprepes* root weevil, *Diaprepes abbreviatus*. 4pp. *Journal of Insect Science*, 3:37, Available online: insectscience.org/3.37

---

Kimura I. 1984. Establishment of new cell lines from leafhopper vector and inoculation of its cell monolayers with rice dwarf virus. *Proceeding of the Japanese Academy* 69(B): 198-201.

Lacey LA, Frutos R, Kaya HK, Vail P. 2001. Insect pathogens as biological control agents: Do they have a future? *Biological Control* 21: 230-248.

Lapointe SL, Shapiro JP. 1999. Effect of soil moisture on development of *Diaprepes abbreviatus* (Coleoptera: Curculionidae). *Florida Entomologist* 82: 291-299.

Longworth JF, Scotti PD, Archibald RD. 1979. An iridovirus from the black beetle, *Heteronychus arator* (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae). *New Zealand Journal of Zoology* 6: 637-639.

Lynn DE, Feldlaufer MF, Lusby WR. 1987. Isolation and identification of 20-hydroxyecdysone from a Lepidopteran continuous cell line. *Archive Insect Biochemistry and Physiology* 5: 71-79.

Lynn DE, Stoppelworth A. 1984. Established cell line from the beetle *Diabrotica undecimpunctata* (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae). *In Vitro* 20: 365-368.

Marina CF, Arrendondo-Jimenez JJ, Castillo A, Williams T. 1999. Sublethal effects of iridovirus disease in a mosquito. *Oecologia* 119: 383-388.

McLaughlin RE, Scott HA, Bell MR. 1972 Infection of the boll weevil by *Chilo* iridescent virus. *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology* 19: 285-290.

Rogers S, Graham JH, McCoy CW. 1996. Insect-plant pathogen interactions: Preliminary studies of *Diaprepes* root weevil injuries and *Phytophthora* infections. *Proceedings of the Florida State Horticultural Society* 109: 57-62.

Ryel RB, Cline GB. 1970. Isolation and characterization of a nuclear polyhedrosis inclusion body from the boll weevil, *Anthonomus grandis*. *Journal of the Alabama Academy of Science* 41: 193-194.

Stiles B, McDonald IC, Gerst JW, Adams TS, Newman SM. 1992. Initiation and characterization of five embryonic cell lines from the cotton boll weevil *Anthonomus grandis* in a commercial serum-free medium. *In Vitro Cellular Developmental Biology* 28: 355-363.

Tesh RB, Andreadis TG. 1992. Infectivity and pathogenesis of iridescent virus type 22 in various insect hosts. *Archives of Virology* 126: 57-65.

Woodruff RE. 1964. A Puerto Rican weevil new to the United States (Coleoptera: Curculionidae). *Florida Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industry Entomological Circular No*. 30: 1-2.

Zelazny B. 1973. Studies on *Rhabdionvirus rhinoceros*. II. Effects on adults of *Oryctes rhinoceros*. *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology* 22:122-126.

Zelazny B, Lolong A, Pattang B. 1992. *Oryctes rhinoceros* (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae) populations suppressed by a baculovirus. *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology* 59: 61-68.