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1 **Multi-reassortant G3P[3] group A rotavirus in a horseshoe bat in Zambia**

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33 **Abstract**

34 Group A rotavirus is a major cause of diarrhoea in humans, especially in young
35 children. Bats also harbour group A rotaviruses, but the genetic backgrounds of bat
36 rotavirus strains are usually distinct from those of human rotavirus strains. We identified
37 a new strain of group A rotavirus in the intestinal contents of a horseshoe bat in Zambia.
38 Whole genome sequencing revealed that the identified virus, named
39 RVA/Bat-wt/ZMB/LUS12-14/2012/G3P[3], possessed the genotype constellation
40 G3-P[3]-I3-R2-C2-M3-A9-N2-T3-E2-H3. Several genome segments of LUS12-14 were
41 highly similar to those of group A rotaviruses identified from humans, cows, and
42 antelopes, indicating interspecies transmission of rotaviruses between bats and other
43 mammals with possible multiple genomic reassortment events.

44 **Main Text**

45 Group A rotavirus (RVA) is a major cause of diarrhoeal illness of humans worldwide.
46 The RVA genome comprises 11 segments of double-stranded RNA. Each segment encodes
47 one viral structural protein (VP1, VP2, VP3, VP4, VP6, or VP7) and one nonstructural
48 protein (NSP1, NSP2, NSP3, or NSP4), except for segment 11, which encodes both NSP5
49 and NSP6. A complete genotype classification system was proposed, defining the genotype
50 constellation of RVAs as follows: G_x-P_[x]-I_x-R_x-C_x-M_x-A_x-N_x-T_x-E_x-H_x, representing
51 VP7-VP4-VP6-VP1-VP2-VP3-NSP1-NSP2-NSP3-NSP4-NSP5 (Matthijssens *et al.*,
52 2008). This classification system has facilitated the comparison of various RVA genotypes
53 and increased our knowledge about the genetic diversity of RVA.

54 Domestic and feral animals as well as humans are susceptible to RVA infection. The
55 three bat-borne RVAs are as follows: RVA/Bat-wt/KEN/KE4852/2007/G25P[6] from a
56 straw-colored fruit bat (*Eidolon helvum*) in Kenya (Esona *et al.*, 2010) and
57 RVA/Bat-tc/CHN/MSLH14/2012/G3P[3] and RVA/Bat-tc/CHN/MYAS33/2013/G3P[10]
58 from a lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) and a Stoliczka's trident bat
59 (*Aselliscus storickanus*) in China, respectively (He *et al.*, 2013; Xia *et al.*, 2014). The
60 nucleotide sequences of these bat RVAs are distant from those of other mammalian RVAs
61 and are therefore considered bat-specific, and only the nucleotide sequences of the genes
62 encoding VP4 and NSP4 of RVA/Bat-wt/KEN/KE4852/2007/G25P[6] are highly similar to
63 those of other mammalian RVAs (Esona *et al.*, 2010; He *et al.*, 2013; Xia *et al.*, 2014). Here
64 we identified and characterized a new RVA strain isolated from an insectivorous bat in
65 Zambia.

66 We captured three horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus* spp.) and 13 Schreibers' long-fingered
67 bats (*Miniopterus schreibersii*) at Leopard's Hill Cave in Lusaka, Zambia with permission

68 from the then Zambia Wildlife Authority (Act No. 12 of 1998), now the Department of
69 National Parks and Wildlife, Ministry of Tourism and Arts. None of the bats showed signs
70 of acute infection. They were euthanized by inhalation of diethyl ether, and spleen, lung,
71 kidney, and liver tissues and intestinal contents were collected through dissection. The
72 species were identified according to the nucleotide sequence of the gene encoding
73 mitochondrial cytochrome b, as described previously (Sasaki *et al.*, 2012). For viral
74 metagenomic analysis, intestinal contents from three horseshoe bats were pooled and
75 enriched for viral sequences that were used to generate a library, which was sequenced
76 using the Ion Torrent PGM System (Life Technologies), as described previously (Sasaki *et al.*
77 *et al.*, 2015). Among 1,163,834 total sequence reads, BLASTN analysis assigned 452 reads to
78 RVA at an e-value cutoff of 10^{-4} . To screen for the gene encoding RVA VP7 in the 16
79 captured bats, we used the High Pure Viral RNA Kit (Roche Diagnostics) for extracting
80 nucleic acids from individual intestinal contents, which were then subjected to nested
81 reverse transcription-PCR using the primer sets described by Li *et al.* (Li *et al.*, 2016). RVA
82 nucleotide sequences encoding VP7 were detected in one bushveld horseshoe bat
83 (*Rhinolophus simulator*).

84 We next determined the nucleotide sequences of 11 genome segments of the detected
85 RVA. The RNA sample was denatured at 98 °C for 2 min in the presence of 1 M betaine
86 and 2.5% DMSO (Darissa *et al.*, 2010), and was then subjected to conventional reverse
87 transcription-PCR, using SuperScript IV Reverse Transcriptase (Life Technologies), Tks
88 Gflex DNA Polymerase (Takara Bio), and specific primers for the sequence reads and
89 universal primers for RVA (Fujii *et al.*, 2012). The 11 genome segments of RVA were
90 sequenced using RNA from the intestinal contents positive for the gene encoding VP7. We
91 then attempted to confirm the 5'- and the 3'-terminal regions of each genome segment using

92 the rapid amplification of cDNA end (RACE) approach with the SMARTer RACE cDNA
93 Amplification Kit (Takara Bio). The 5'-termini of VP4- and VP2-encoding segments and
94 the 3'-termini of VP2- and NSP2-encoding segments were recovered using RACE analysis.
95 Information on all primers used in this study is summarized in Tables S1, S2 and S3
96 (available in the online Supplementary Material). The sequences were deposited in the
97 GenBank/EMBL/DDBJ database under accession numbers LC158116–LC158126.
98 According to the RVA nomenclature proposed by the Rotavirus Classification Working
99 Group (Matthijssens *et al.*, 2011a), we named the RVA strain as
100 RVA/Bat-wt/ZMB/LUS12-14/2012/G3P[3] (LUS12-14). We used RotaC 2.0
101 (<http://rotac.regatools.be>) to assign LUS12-14 to the
102 G3-P[3]-I3-R2-C2-M3-A9-N2-T3-E2-H3 genotype constellation (Maes *et al.*, 2009). It has
103 been reported that group A rotavirus was detected in some tissues of domestic and
104 experimental animals (Ramig, 2007). To assess the infection of the bat by LUS12-14, we
105 extracted RNA from the spleen, lung, kidney and liver tissues of the bat in which
106 LUS12-14 was detected in the intestinal contents. VP4- and NSP2-encoding segments of
107 LUS12-14 were exclusively detected in the spleen RNA by RT-PCR using specific primers
108 (Table S2, available in the online Supplementary Material).

109 Table 1 shows the genotype assignment of LUS12-14, the nucleotide positions
110 determined in this study and the nucleotide sequence identities between each segment of
111 LUS12-14 and the strain with the most closely related genome segments. The genome
112 sequences encoding VP7, VP4, VP3, and NSP2 of LUS12-14 shared >97% nucleotide
113 identities with those of RVA/Human-tc/ITA/PA260-97/1997/G3P[3] (Table 1), which was
114 isolated from a child with acute diarrhoea in Italy (De Grazia *et al.*, 2007). We used the
115 maximum likelihood component (500 bootstrap replicates) parameter of MEGA7 software

116 to deduce the phylogenies of VP7 and VP4 segments according to their nucleotide
117 sequences (Kumar *et al.*, 2016). LUS12-14 VP7 and VP4 clustered with related G3- and
118 P[3]-genotype RVA strains, respectively (Fig. 1). The VP1 genome segment of LUS12-14
119 exhibited 97.8% nucleotide sequence identity with
120 RVA/Antelope-wt/ZAF/RC-18-08/2008/G6P[14] isolated from a sable antelope with
121 gastroenteritis in South Africa (Matthijssens *et al.*, 2009). The NSP4 and NSP5 genome
122 segments of LUS12-14 showed 98.0% and 98.6% nucleotide sequence identities with
123 RVA/Cow-wt/ZAF/1604/2007/G8P[1] and RVA/Cow-wt/ZAF/1603/2007/G6P[5],
124 respectively, from the genomes extracted from stool samples of calves with diarrhoea in
125 South Africa (Jere *et al.*, 2012).

126 The VP6, VP2, NSP1, and NSP3 genome segments of LUS12-14 showed relatively
127 low (<97%) nucleotide sequence identities with RVA sequences deposited in the
128 GenBank/EMBL/DDBJ nucleotide database. Therefore, we deduced the phylogenies of
129 these segments according to their nucleotide sequences. The LUS12-14 VP6 genome
130 segment clustered with I3-genotype RVA strains and was closely related to
131 RVA/Rat-wt/CHN/WC179/2013/G3P[45], the rat RVA strain detected in China (Li *et al.*,
132 2016) (Fig. 2). The VP2 genome segment of LUS12-14 clustered with the human RVA C2
133 genotype (Fig. 2). The NSP1 genome segment of LUS12-14 clustered with the A9 genotype
134 of bat RVAs, although it was more closely related to the rabbit strain
135 RVA/Rabbit-tc/CHN/N5/1992/G3P[14] (Guo *et al.*, 2012) (Fig. 2). The NSP3 genome
136 segment of LUS12-14 clustered with the T3-genotype RVA strains and was most closely
137 related to RVA/Human-tc/THA/T152/1998/G12P[9], the human RVA strain in Thailand
138 (Pongsuwanna *et al.*, 2002) (Fig. 2). Moreover, there was no close genetic relationship
139 between LUS12-14 and other bat-derived RVAs.

140 Complete genome classification studies have revealed the emergence of reassortant
141 RVAs carrying genome segments of RVAs from different mammalian species, suggesting
142 interspecies transmission (Esona *et al.*, 2010; Jere *et al.*, 2012; Li *et al.*, 2016;
143 Matthijnssens *et al.*, 2011b; Matthijnssens *et al.*, 2009). Reassortment contributes to the
144 high genetic diversity of RVA strains. In the present study, we identified and characterized a
145 new RVA strain designated LUS12-14 in the faeces of an insectivorous bat in Zambia. In
146 contrast to known bat-borne RVAs, the LUS12-14 genome comprises segments that are
147 nearly identical or closely related to those of other mammalian RVA strains, suggesting that
148 LUS12-14 represents a multireassortant RVA derived from other mammalian RVA strains
149 that presumably emerged from recent interspecies transmission.

150 Among the related RVA strains, RVA/Human-tc/ITA/PA260-97/1997/G3P[3] may
151 originate from canine and feline RVA strains (Matthijnssens *et al.*, 2011b), and strains
152 RVA/Cow-wt/ZAF/1604/2007/G8P[1] and RVA/Cow-wt/ZAF/1603/2007/G6P[5] may have
153 been generated through reassortment events between bovine, giraffe, and antelope RVAs
154 (Jere *et al.*, 2012). The identification of LUS12-14 suggests that bats are susceptible to
155 infection by zoonotic RVAs and serve as a host involved in the evolution of RVA through
156 cycles of interspecies transmission accompanied by genome reassortment events.

157 Although diarrhoea in humans caused by RVA is common in Zambia (Beres *et al.*,
158 2016; Mpabalwani *et al.*, 2016), little is known about the genotypes of endemic RVA strains
159 of human and other mammals. We detected LUS12-14 in the spleen tissue and faeces of
160 one insectivorous bat, suggesting that LUS12-14 originated from the bat. However, it is
161 unclear whether other bats are infected with LUS12-14 and whether the virus-host
162 relationship detected here is fortuitous. Further studies on LUS12-14 or other zoonotic RVA
163 strains in bats are required to confirm that bats serve as a reservoir of zoonotic RVA strains.

164 These studies also contribute to our understanding of the evolution of RVA in nature,
165 including that in bats.
166

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257

258

259 **Table 1. Genotype constellation of rotavirus LUS12-14 and strains with the most**
 260 **closely related segments**

Gene	Genotype of LUS12-14	Nucleotide position *	Strains with the most closely related segments	Nucleotide identity (%)
VP7	G3	23–1043	RVA/Human-tc/ITA/PA260-97/1997/G3P[3]	98.5%
VP4	P[3]	1–2347	RVA/Human-tc/ITA/PA260-97/1997/G3P[3]	97.5%
VP6	I3	21–1339	RVA/Rat-wt/CHN/RA108/2013/G3P[3]	96.1%
VP1	R2	23–3276	RVA/Antelope-wt/ZAF/RC-18-08/2008/G6P[14]	97.8%
VP2	C2	1–2717	RVA/Human-wt/GHA/GH018-08/2008/G8P[6]	96.1%
VP3	M3	45–2565	RVA/Human-tc/ITA/PA260-97/1997/G3P[3]	97.5%
NSP1	A9	26–1531	RVA/Rabbit-tc/CHN/N5/1992/G3P[14]	89.5%
NSP2	N2	22–1059	RVA/Human-tc/ITA/PA260-97/1997/G3P[3]	98.1%
NSP3	T3	26–1053	RVA/Human-tc/THA/T152/1998/G12P[9]	91.7%
NSP4	E2	29–720	RVA/Cow-wt/ZAF/1604/2007/G8P[1]	98.0%
NSP5	H3	21–642	RVA/Cow-wt/ZAF/1603/2007/G6P[5]	98.6%

261 ***The nucleotide positions correspond to those of the Wa strain**
 262 **(RVA/Human-tc/USA/Wa/1974/G1P[8], JX406747–JX406757).**

263

264 **Figure Legends**

265 **Fig. 1. Phylogenetic analyses of the genes encoding VP7 and VP4**

266 The rotavirus strain LUS12-14 identified in this study, its related strains, and the
267 representative reference strains were included in the analysis. LUS12-14 is shaded gray.
268 Genotypes are shown to the right of the trees. The bootstrap values obtained after 500
269 replicates are indicated at major tree roots. The scale bars represent the numbers of
270 nucleotide substitutions per site.

271

272

273 **Fig. 2. Phylogenetic analyses of the genes encoding VP6, VP2, NSP1 and NSP3**

274 The rotavirus strain LUS12-14 identified in this study, its related strains, and the
275 representative reference strains were included in the analysis. The analysis is described in
276 the legend for Fig. 1.

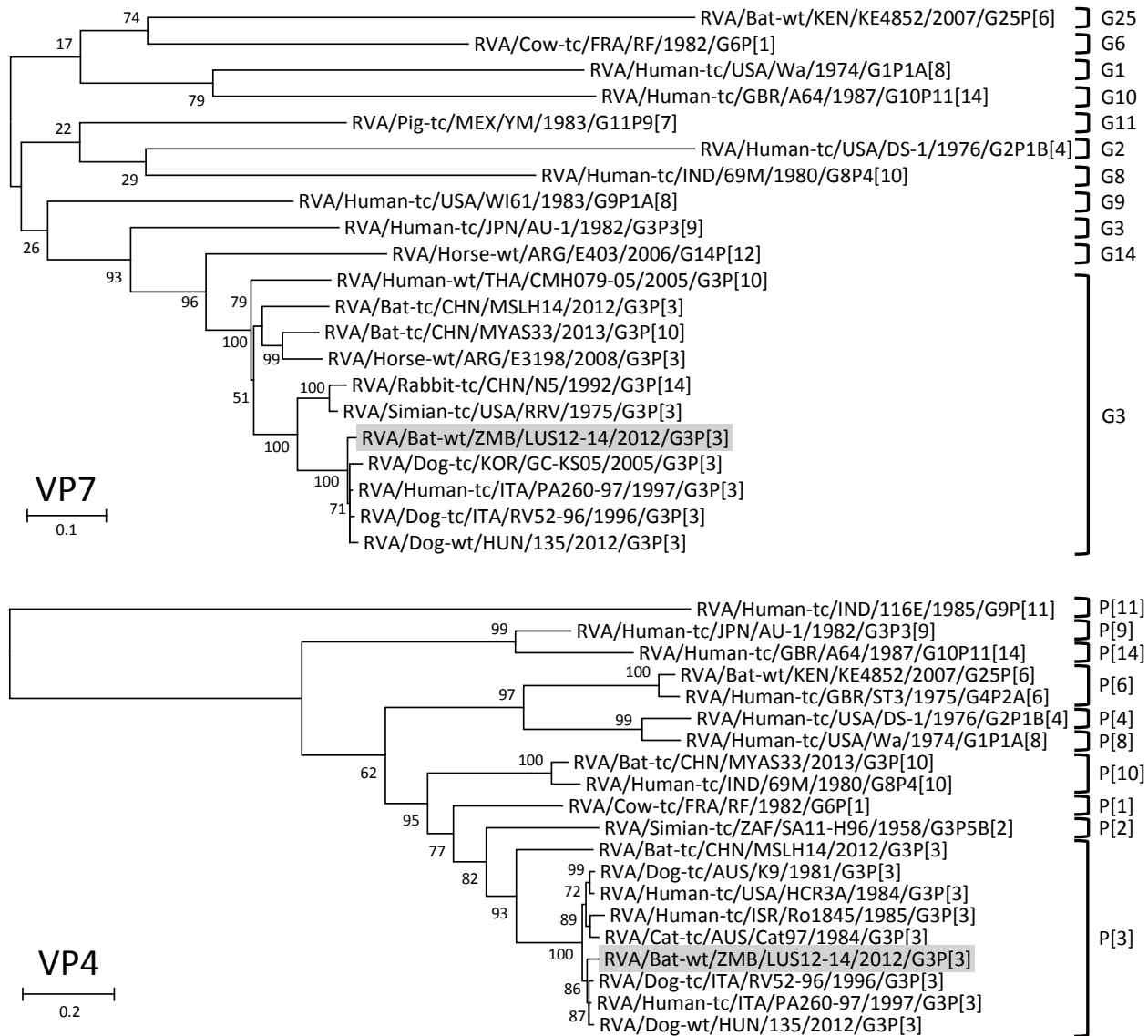


Fig. 1

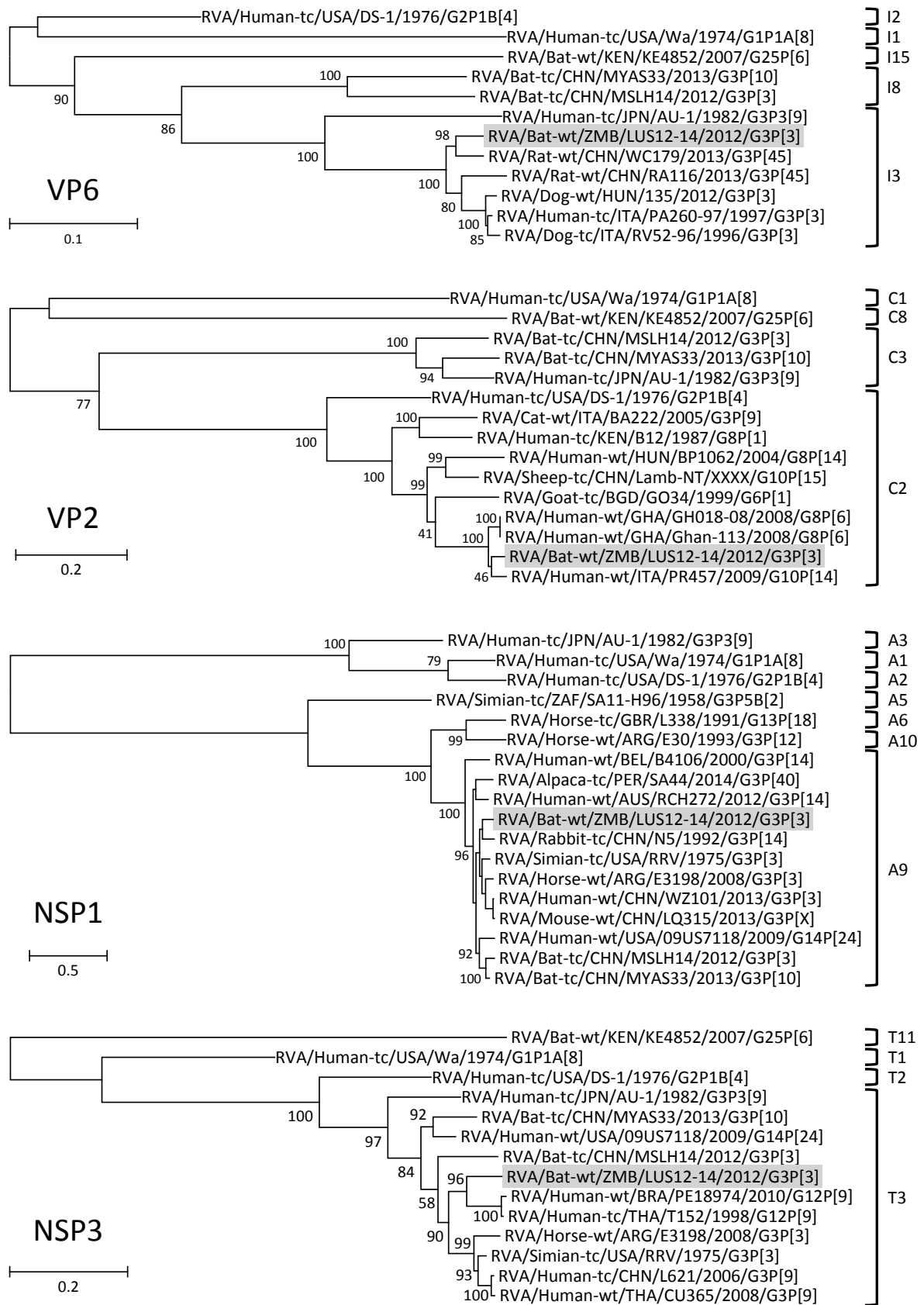


Fig. 2