# Evaluating proximate causes of longevity in ant queens by RNA-sequencing



# DISSERTATION ZUR ERLANGUNG DES DOKTORGRADES DER NATURWISSENSCHAFTEN (DR. RER. NAT.) DER FAKULTÄT FÜR BIOLOGIE UND VORKLINISCHE MEDIZIN DER UNIVERSITÄT REGENSBURG

vorgelegt von Katharina von Wyschetzki

> aus Augsburg

> > im Jahr 2016

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# Contents





# **Chapter 1 General introduction**

#### 1.1 What is aging?

The diversity on Earth is reflected in an enormous variation of life forms that range from primitive cells via multicellular organisms with specialized organs to complex societies, which are based on the division of labor. Evolutionary trends towards an increase in hierarchy (Bourke 2011) and morphological complexity (Carroll 2001) of biological systems are generally observed. Basically, such directional changes determine phylogenesis, which is the historical evolution of traits. However, these developments do not always provide a satisfactory explanation for differences and similarities between taxa. An important trait that appears to be relatively plastic across the animal kingdom is lifespan. Even considering exclusively sexually reproducing animals with determinate growth, the length of an organism's life can differ by a factor of 10–100 among species with similar bodyplans. For example, some parasitic nematodes live up to 15 years, whereas soil nematodes live for only a few months; lifespans of fish vary from several months (turquoise killifish) to more than 150 years (lake sturgeon); rodents are usually short-lived with the exception of the naked mole-rat that survives several decades in captivity (Finch 1990). This suggests that other principles than phylogenetic relatedness underlie the pattern of variation.

Why some species live longer than others, and why some people age faster than their companions, has been on mankind's mind long before the emergence of the modern life sciences. Aristotle already pointed out in his work 'On longevity and the shortness of life' (350BC) that "the larger live longer than the smaller", "salacious animals and those abounding in seed age quickly" and "males subject to great toil are short-lived and age more quickly owing to the labour". His observations on the relationships between lifespan and body size, energy expenditure and sexual activity may sound too simplistic, but exactly these correlations serve nowadays as a basis for the most comprehensive, broadly accepted and empirically supported theories on aging.

Comparing individuals of different ages illustrates that aging is a gradual process, which is characterized by an increase in the probability to die and a decrease in vitality (Medawar 1952), measurable on the physiological level through a progressive functional decline. Therefore, aging is often synonymous with 'senescence', although the term aging can also be used in a neutral sense. The general concept of senescence is that damage accumulates with age causing an impairment of body functions and an enhanced susceptibility to certain diseases (see Kirkwood 2005; López-Otín *et al.* 2013). The initial notion that the deterioration of the body is caused by its sole 'wear and tear', which presumably originated in the time of industrial revolution (see Speakman *et al.* 2002; Speakman 2005), has been increasingly extended in the last

decades by experimental findings about regulatory mechanisms involving gene networks.

The free radical theory of aging provided a first mechanistic, damage-based explanation for senescence (Harman 1956). Free oxygen radicals and oxidants, known as ROS (= reactive oxygen species), are toxic by-products of basic reactions in cells, mainly of aerobic respiration in mitochondria. ROS are thought to cause random damage to macromolecules, in particular proteins, lipids and DNA, hence linking energy metabolism with aging (e. g. Finkel & Holbrook 2000). However, it remains controversial if the pace of aging is correlated with the rate of energy metabolism (Austad 2010). It has been argued that the reason for the positive correlation between longevity and body size, first described by Aristotle, might be a lower mass-specific metabolic rate of larger mammals (Speakman 2005; Hulbert *et al.* 2007). Conflicting results were produced by an experimental intervention that extends lifespan in nearly all model organisms: caloric restriction does not decrease metabolic rate (Hulbert *et al.* 2004; Faulks *et al.* 2006), but reduces oxidative damage (Masoro 2000; Gredilla & Barja 2005). What further complicates the understanding of the connection between aging and metabolic activity is the presence of endogenous antioxidant defenses and mechanisms to repair or remove damaged macromolecules (reviewed by Beckman & Ames 1998; Finkel & Holbrook 2000). The oxidative stress theory predicts that longerlived species either produce less ROS than shorter-lived ones, or possess a better protection against damage through antioxidant enzymes (e. g. superoxide dismutase, catalase, glutathione peroxidase), free radical scavengers, repair mechanisms or resistant cell membranes (Hulbert 2005).

If organisms are equipped with machineries to counteract damage accumulation, why do some species age faster than others? Purely mechanistic theories do not provide a satisfying answer to this question, but an explanation can be found in the framework of life history theory. Its central theme is that life history traits, such as body size, reproductive effort or parental survival, are costly due to the scarcity of resources. For this reason, fitness traits cannot be optimized all at once, leading to trade-offs between them (Reznick 1985; Stearns 1989). The model of 'r- and K-selection' distinguishes two types of life history tactics (Pianka 1970; Stearns 1976). Fast development, small body size, early reproduction, semelparity, numerous offspring and short lifespan are favored by r-selection, corresponding to the maximization of reproductive rate. Slow maturation, larger body size, delayed reproduction, iteroparity, few offspring and long lifespan are favored by K-selection, which is equivalent to the maximization of competitive ability (Stearns 1976). Insects are relatively r-selected and vertebrates relatively K-selected (with several exceptions, as for example rodents and amphibians; see Pianka 1970). Kirkwood (1977) combined the concept of life-history trade-offs with the idea of age-dependent damage accumulation to one evolutionary explanation for aging. The disposable soma theory is based on an optimal resource allocation of metabolic resource between somatic maintenance and reproduction (Kirkwood  $\&$ Austad 2000). Somatic maintenance, which comprises DNA repair, antioxidants, stress response, the immune system and tumor suppression (Kirkwood 1996), is costly and

can only be optimized at a disadvantage to other energy-demanding processes, as for example the production of offspring. Thus, evolution might favor genes that increase early reproductive success, but reduce later survival. This idea that genes which have beneficial effects on fitness early in life would negatively affect fitness at old ages, had already been taken up by Williams (1957) before genes with such pleiotropic functions were discovered.

Since the discovery of the *Caenorhabditis elegans* mutant *age-1* in the late 1980s (Friedman & Johnson 1988), there is growing evidence that the evolutionary conserved insulin/IGF signaling (IIS) pathway has antagonistic effects on fecundity and longevity (Partridge *et al.* 2005; Flatt 2011; Partridge *et al.* 2011, and references therein). IIS mediates the adjustment of energy-demanding processes, such as growth (Brogiolo *et al.* 2001), reproduction (Burks *et al.* 2000) and immune response (DiAngelo *et al.* 2009), to nutrient status. Apart from nutrient availability, also stress signals are communicated to the IIS network, allowing the animal to adapt to environmental challenges. The Toll and JNK pathways, which are both involved in innate immunity, have been shown to antagonize IIS by direct molecular interactions, leading to an impairment of growth and nutrient storage (Wang *et al.* 2005; DiAngelo *et al.* 2009). The longevity-promoting effects of these signaling pathways are thought to be caused by the enhanced expression of protective genes (Wang *et al.* 2003). This molecular antagonism between growth and stress tolerance/longevity agrees with the traditional Y model of resource allocation (Zera & Harshman 2001; Figure 1.1). Similar signaling cascades involving IIS and downstream hormones, as for example juvenile hormone in insects, might also be the underlying mechanism of the fecundity/longevity trade-off (Harshman & Zera 2007). However, the Y model is more difficult to apply in this context, because endocrine signals from gonadal tissue can directly repress longevity without altering resource allocation (Tatar *et al.* 2003; Harshman & Zera 2007; Kenyon 2010).



Figure 1.1: Models for the mechanistic basis of the growth/longevity (left) and fecundity/longevity (right) trade-offs integrating Y models for resource allocation (top), and activating and inhibitory links of insulin/IGF signaling. G, growth; L, longevity; R, reproduction; IIS, insulin/IGF signaling; ROS, reactive oxygen species.

The discovery of the role of endocrine systems in the regulation of lifespan has given rise to the notion that aging is a genetically controlled process that could be programed. The term 'programed' can be misleading and is probably not appropriate to use with respect to aging. Senescence is not understood as a product of evolution in the sense of serving a purpose, even if some authors tend to draw such conclusions (Longo *et al.* 2005). The majority of evolutionary biologists consider senescence not as a trait favored by selection, but rather as a byproduct of the selection for reproduction (Austad 2004).

Even though many candidate genes have now been identified, it is still puzzling which molecular changes induce the gradual decay during the natural course of aging in most mammals, and which lead to the rapid senescence, for example in short-lived insects and semelparous species. Recent studies that measured genome-wide gene expression and DNA methylation at different time points throughout life revealed parallels between development and aging (de Magalhães 2012). Therefore, the search for a 'pacemaker' remains appealing.

#### 1.2 (Co-) Evolution of eusociality and longevity

Studies addressing putative universal mechanisms of aging are traditionally performed with rapidly aging, short-lived animals. Gradual (e. g. in humans and rodents) or rapid senescence (e. g. in flies and nematodes; classification according to Finch 1990) might be common, but it is important to bear in mind that certain organisms do not show an age-related increase in mortality (Vaupel *et al.* 2004; Jones *et al.* 2014). The phenomenon of negligible senescence is not restricted to long-lived species with indeterminate growth, as for example sea anemones and trees; it can also be found among colony-forming eusocial animals.

Species which are classified as 'eusocial' show a reproductive division of labor, cooperative brood care, and an overlap of parental and off-spring generations (Wilson 1971). Hence, a prominent feature of eusociality is the presence of altruistic individuals that gain indirect fitness by raising the offspring of close relatives (Hamilton 1964). In facultative eusocial animals (Crespi & Yanega 1995), individuals are not irreversibly confined to the reproductive or the non-reproductive helper caste, which makes it difficult to distinguish them by definition from animals regarded as 'cooperative breeders'. According to the broad definition after Bourke (2011), eusociality evolved several times independently in insects (termites, ambrosia beetle, aphids, wasps, bees and ants), crustaceans (social shrimps) and rodents (naked and Damaraland mole-rat). Other social animals, which are not strictly classified as eusocial, are cooperatively breeding vertebrates and spiders, and colonial marine invertebrates (e. g. corals and sea anemones).

A thorough investigation of the association between sociality and lifespan throughout all metazoans has possibly been hampered by the lack of detailed data on most species, but there is now profound empirical evidence that social lifestyle promotes longevity (Keller & Genoud 1997; Carey & Judge 2001; Healy 2015). Both low extrinsic mortality risk and help by workers are factors that favored the extension of lifespan in at least three clades of eusocial insects: the female reproductives, which are often referred to as queens, of honeybees, ants and termites, have extraordinary lifespans in comparison to solitary insects (Keller & Genoud 1997; Keller 1998; Carey 2001a; b). The degree of correlation between social behavior and longevity in mammals depends on the definition of sociality in this taxon (Lukas & Clutton-Brock 2012; Healy 2015), but the long lifespans of African mole-rats in general, and of the eusocial naked mole-rat *Heterocephalus glaber* in particular, indicates a strong association of these two traits.

The queens of eusocial insects and mammals belong to the category of organisms in which dysfunctional changes have so far eluded from detection (Finch 1990; Buffenstein 2008). Their long life expectancy, which can be up to 30 years (Keller 1998; Buffenstein & Jarvis 2002), makes it difficult to collect demographic data, as for example age-specific survival. For most species, only records for maximum lifespan exist. Exceptions are queens of the ant genus *Cardiocondyla*. Several studies conducted in the last years showed that they rarely survive more than one year even under optimal laboratory conditions (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; Heinze *et al.* 2013; Fuessl *et al.* 2015). The linear survival curves of *Cardiocondyla* queens from reproductive maturity onwards (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; Schrempf & Heinze 2008; Schrempf *et al.* 2011; Fuessl *et al.* 2015) are an indication for the lack of an acceleration of age-specific mortality and consequently for the lack of senescence as it is currently defined (Finch 1990; Jones *et al.* 2014). The absence of a decline in fecundity also points to negligible senescence in queens of eusocial animals (Buffenstein 2008; Heinze & Schrempf 2012). The well-studied naked mole-rat generally shows no typical signs of age-related

deteriorations in physiological or biochemical function (Buffenstein 2008). Comparable data on age-related changes is not available for insect queens. It is known that their behavior and physiology change significantly during the transition from a virgin to a mature, egg-laying queen (Fahrenholz *et al.* 1992; Fahrbach *et al.* 1995a; Julian & Gronenberg 2002; Groh *et al.* 2006; Bernadou & Heinze 2013) and these adaptive processes might persist throughout life.

#### 1.3 Eusociality and the reversal of the fecundity/longevity trade-off

Social insect queens are difficult to classify with regard to the r- and K-selection continuum. They appear to be selected for high reproductive output (some ant species lay up to a million of eggs per year), long lifespan and relatively late onset of sexual reproduction, as the first sexuals are only produced after an ergonomic stage in which a stabile workforce has been build up (Hölldobler & Wilson 1990). Furthermore, the disposable soma theory predicts that the female workers, which do not have to invest resources into the production of eggs, should live longer than the reproductive females. This seems not to be the case because in various ants, termites, bees and *Fukomys* molerats the worker caste lives considerably shorter than the queen caste (Hölldobler & Wilson 1990; Carey 2001a; Dammann & Burda 2006; Dammann *et al.* 2011; Schmidt *et al.* 2013). This observation contradicts the fecundity/longevity trade-off on the level of the population or colony, but it makes evolutionary sense regarding the workers as the disposable soma which can be regenerated and the queen as the germ line of one colonial superorganism. Fascinatingly, the release of the reproductive female from the costs of reproduction on the colony level seems to have been translated into a reversal of the negative association between fecundity and longevity on the individual level. Experiments in the three ant genera *Cardiocondyla*, *Platythyrea* and *Diacamma* revealed a positive association between lifespan and reproductive success (Tsuji *et al.* 1996; Hartmann & Heinze 2003; Heinze *et al.* 2013; Kramer *et al.* 2015). The reversal was also detected in annual bumblebee queens (Lopez-Vaamonde *et al.* 2009) and might be a universal feature of social Hymenoptera and termites. The reason for this exceptional relationship is unknown, but the fact that isolated *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queens only live longer than workers if they start to lay eggs (Rueppell *et al.* 2015) strongly supports a causal link. Finding the mechanistic basis for this phenomenon is a challenge because the molecular interactions that cause the trade-off in solitary species are not sufficiently resolved (see Figure 1.1).

#### 1.4 Eusociality and female-male coevolution

The assumed positive effect of reproduction in eusocial animals is not the only determinant of queen lifespan. With the exception of some clonal species, as for example the ant *Platythyrea punctata* (Bernadou *et al.* 2015), females of most eusocial animals mate with one or several males to reach their full reproductive potential. Since the early experiments by Partridge *et al.* (1986; 1987), it is known that insect males have an effect on female survival that cannot be explained by the mating-induced boost in fecundity. In the model organism *Drosophila melanogaster*, survival costs of mating are attributable to various manipulative accessory gland proteins, which are transferred in the seminal fluid during copulation. These substances have a significant impact on female physiology by preventing remating, eliminating competitive sperm, and increasing short-term fecundity (Chen *et al.* 1988; Herndon & Wolfner 1995; Lung *et al.* 2002).

To disentangle the effects of reproduction and mating on survival in queens of the species *C. obscurior*, the lifespans of three types of queens with varying mating and reproductive status were compared: 1) mated queens with high egg-laying rate; 2) sham-mated queens with low egg-laying rate, which were mated with a sterilized male to prevent fertilization of eggs, and 3) virgin queens with low egg-laying rate (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). As sham-mated queens lived as long as mated queens, despite having a reduced fecundity as the shorter-lived virgin queens, the conclusion could be drawn that mating alone prolongs queen lifespan. More recent data which shows a positive linear correlation of individual lifespan and egg-laying rate (Heinze *et al.* 2013; Kramer *et al.* 2015) suggests that a combination of mating- and fecundity-driven factors extends lifespan in *Cardiocondyla* queens. The sample size of sham-mated queens in the early experiment by Schrempf *et al.* (2005) was comparably low ( $n = 18$ ) and might have not revealed the full spectrum of fitness differences.

A positive effect of mating is rare, but not surprising in eusocial organisms because males are expected to benefit from a long lifespan of their mate. In contrast to females of solitary insects, virgin queens usually mate with one or few males early in life and never remate (Hughes *et al.* 2008). This stable pair bond and the late onset of reproduction should generally prevent the evolution of manipulative strategies that cause harmful side effects to the female. It has been suggested that analogous to the accessory gland proteins in solitary insects, seminal substances of eusocial insects mediate beneficial effects (Schrempf & Heinze 2008).

Nevertheless, male-male competition also exists in eusocial insects, especially in species in which queens mate multiply (Baer 2014). The accessory gland secretions of the highly polyandrous leafcutter ants and honeybees enhance the survival of their own (Boer *et al.* 2009; 2010), but reduce the survival of alien sperm. The fluids of the sperm-storage organ in *Atta* queens counteract this incapacitation indicating negative side effects on female fitness (Boer *et al.* 2010).

The degree of cooperation and conflict between the sexes might strongly depend on the species' mating system. Sexual cooperation is expected to be maximal when

females and males coevolve and fully agree with each other on their reproductive interests. Such a monogamous relationship can be found in the ant genera *Hypoponera*  (Yamauchi *et al.* 1996) and *Cardiocondyla* (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Stuart *et al.* 1987; Heinze *et al.* 1998), in which wingless males stay in the mother colony and fight for the control over all virgin queens. In this situation, a newly emerged queen only mates once with a closely related male, which has killed all his rivals before. Coadaptation may be less pronounced if males disperse, as in most eusocial insects including the winged males of some *Cardiocondyla* ants. The species *C. obscurior* possesses both wingless fighter males and winged disperser males and therefore provides a unique opportunity to test this hypothesis.

# 1.5 A tiny ant and computational biology offer new opportunities to study the regulation of longevity

Eusocial animals are still exotic, but attractive model organisms, and more and more used in the field of biogerontological research. An exploration of the proximate causes of slowed aging in eusocial insect queens has possibly been initiated by a study that demonstrated the enormous quantitative lifespan difference between solitary and social insects nearly 20 years ago (Keller & Genoud 1997). Since then, potential mechanisms have often been discussed (Jemielity *et al.* 2005; Keller & Jemielity 2006; Heinze & Schrempf 2008; Remolina & Hughes 2008; Lucas & Keller 2014), but mostly remained hypothetical because unequivocal evidence has not been found yet. A pitfall of previous studies is the assumption that a physiological factor that differs between queens and workers, or between reproductives and non-reproductives of the same species, is involved in the regulation of lifespan. Unfortunately, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the results of those former studies. For example, it is not clear if the expression of antioxidant enzymes is lower in queens than in workers (Parker *et al.* 2004; Corona *et al.* 2005; Schneider *et al.* 2011) because queens produce less oxidative damage, need less protection against oxidative damage, use other radical scavengers or because oxidative damage is not associated with senescence. More progress has been achieved in understanding senescence in the worker caste of the honeybee *Apis mellifera* by studying individuals of different age and social task (Seehuus *et al.* 2006; Rascón *et al.* 2012; Seehuus *et al.* 2013; Münch *et al.* 2013; Paoli *et al.* 2014). Such an approach has so far been hampered in queens by the difficulty to monitor their survival and their lifetime reproductive behavior, and to perform experiments under standardized conditions on a reasonable number of replicates. A species that is relatively short-lived in comparison to other eusocial insects in the field of biogerontology (Table 1.1), and therefore offers more opportunities to monitor and manipulate aged individuals, is the ant species *Cardiocondyla obscurior* (Wheeler, 1929).



Table 1.1: Overview of eusocial insects which are used for laboratory studies addressing the mechanistic basis of queen longevity. Maximum-recorded lifespan of queens and corresponding publications are listed.

Besides the relatively low life expectancy and the short generation time (around 4 weeks), this species fulfills additional requirements important for controlled laboratory studies. It forms small colonies in the field consisting of 20 to 30 workers on average, several reproductive queens, and a single wingless male (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Heinze & Delabie 2005). Its original natural habitat is unknown. Single nests have presumably been transferred from Southeast Asia to other subtropical regions by human activities (Heinze *et al.* 2006). Nowadays it can be found in anthropogenic habitats around the globe, as for example in park trees in East Asia (Figure 1.2) and in coconut and lemon plantations in South America. Because the small colonies inhabit cavities in bark, dead twigs, and enrolled leaves, whole nests do not have to be excavated and can easily be collected. Like all other *Cardiocondyla* species, *C. obscurior* is a tiny little ant (1–2 mm), which can be kept in Petri dishes or plastic boxes with a plaster floor.

A tremendous advantage over other eusocial insects is that sexuals are produced year-round and mate in the nest (Figure 1.2). Its general flexibility regarding colony characteristics facilitates the creation of experimental colonies from larger stock colonies with varying numbers of queens and workers. This opens the possibility to investigate the effect of single mating (Schrempf *et al.* 2005), polygyny (Schrempf *et al.* 2011), mating with alternative male morphs (Heinze & Schrempf 2008), and other factors on queen lifespan and lifetime fecundity. As mentioned above, colonies usually contain one wingless male, also referred to as ergatoid (worker-like) male, which monopolizes mating with all virgin queens by killing his rivals (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Stuart *et al.* 1987). Winged disperser males, which are produced in most other eusocial insects and in some *Cardiocondyla* species including *C. obscurior*, have never been observed in the field, but develop from unfertilized eggs under specific conditions in the lab (Cremer & Heinze 2003).

Because of its short life cycle, this species is well suited to study the interplay among aging, reproduction and mating using molecular and in-silico techniques. Recent advances in the field of DNA sequencing are now enabling the application of functional genomic studies to non-model organisms. One of the latest high throughput methods is RNA-Seq, which allows the determination and quantification of all mRNA molecules of a given organism, a specific tissue or even a single cell (Wang *et al.* 2009; Wilhelm &

Landry 2009). Transcriptional profiling is commonly used to monitor the activity of genes and to generate hypotheses about physiological differences between varying natural or experimental conditions. Genome-wide gene expression analysis is extensively applied to investigations of aging, for example to identify general agerelated changes, biomarkers for aging and modifications caused by life-prolonging interventions like caloric restriction (reviewed in de Magalhães *et al.* 2010; Wieser *et al.* 2011).

Whereas the preparation of the sequencing library and the sequencing itself is relatively straightforward and basically the same for model and non-model organisms, the strategy for the subsequent bioinformatic analysis depends on the species' available resources. Because the genome and transcriptome of *C. obscurior* was recently sequenced and electronically annotated (Schrader *et al.* 2014), next-generation sequencing reads can be mapped and counted against the 17552 predicted gene models. Further computational methods can then be used to predict the functions of genes and to test for a functional enrichment in a specific set of genes.



Figure 1.2: Photographs of the natural habitat (top left), a laboratory colony (top right and middle) and the two male phenotypes of the ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* (bottom). On the Japanese island Okinawa, colonies can typically be found in coral trees in the Oonoyama-park in Naha. The small colonies are kept in Petri dishes and fed ad libitum with chopped cockroaches and diluted honey 2–3 times per week. Young queens lose their wings after they mated with a territorial ergatoid or a winged disperser male, and start to lay eggs.

#### 1.6 Aims of this thesis

The four different experiments carried out in the framework of this thesis were initiated to improve the understanding of the molecular causes for two phenomena: 1) the reversal of the usually observed negative association between reproduction and lifespan, and 2) the positive effect of mating on lifespan.

Previous comparisons of reproductives and non-reproductives regarding antioxidant enzyme levels, membrane composition, vitellogenin expression, hormone titres, and telomere length, yielded interesting results. For an evaluation of the factors that really play a role in the regulation of queen longevity, it is important to determine the progression of age-related changes within this caste. Transcriptomic comparisons of young and old individuals have been carried out multiple times in the model organism *Drosophila melanogaster* (Zou *et al.* 2000; Pletcher *et al.* 2002; Landis *et al.* 2004; Girardot *et al.* 2006; Zhan *et al.* 2007; Doroszuk *et al.* 2012; Zhou *et al.* 2014), but not in eusocial insects before. For this reason, the whole body transcriptomes of 4-week-old and 18-week-old *C. obscurior* queens, which had mated with a single ergatoid male shortly after eclosing, were contrasted (chapter 2). Analogous to cross-species comparisons of genome-wide data among model organisms (McCarroll *et al.* 2004; de Magalhães *et al.* 2009), the study aimed to identify commonalities and differences between solitary and social insect females.

As the trade-off between fecundity and longevity seems to be reversed in ants and other eusocial animals, the question arises if queens do not have to compensate for the costs of reproduction. The second study dealt with this topic by challenging *C. obscurior* queens through amputating both middle legs and by measuring the effect of this injury on egg-laying rate and the expression of immune, reproductive, and metabolic genes (chapter 3).

Building on the knowledge that mating is beneficial in *C. obscurior* queens (Schrempf *et al.* 2005) and that the extent of this effect depends on the type of male (Schrempf & Heinze 2008), three experiments were performed to better understand the physiological link between mating and longevity, and the impact of female-male coevolution. The idea was to disentangle the effects of mating and reproduction on lifespan by comparing the transcriptomes of 18-weeks-old queens, which had either mated with a fertile male, a sterile male, or no male (chapter 2). Furthermore, it was tested if differences in the degree of cooperation between the sexes through varying male phenotype (chapter 4) and varying male origin (chapter 5) are reflected in the transcriptome.

# **Chapter 2**

# **Transcriptomic signatures mirror the lack of the fecundity/longevity trade-off in ant queens\***

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Transition from a virgin (left) to a mated, egg-laying *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queen (right).

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## Abstract

Life history theory predicts a trade-off between reproductive investment and selfmaintenance. The negative association between fertility and longevity found throughout multicellular organisms supports this prediction. As an important exception, the reproductives of many eusocial insects (ants, bees, termites) are simultaneously very long-lived and highly fertile. Here, we examine the proximate basis for this exceptional relationship by comparing whole body transcriptomes of differently aged queens of the ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior*. We show that the sets of genes differentially expressed with age significantly overlap with age-related expression changes previously found in female *Drosophila melanogaster.* We identified several developmental processes, such as the generation of neurons, as common signatures of aging. More generally, however, gene expression in ant queens and flies changes with age mainly in opposite directions. In contrast to flies, reproduction-associated genes were upregulated and genes associated with metabolic processes and muscle contraction were downregulated in old relative to young ant queens. Furthermore, we searched for putative *C. obscurior* longevity candidates associated with the previously reported lifespan-prolonging effect of mating by comparing the transcriptomes of queens that differed in mating and reproductive status. We found 21 genes, including the putative aging candidate *NLaz*  (an insect homolog of *APOD*), which were consistently more highly expressed in shortlived, unmated queens than in long-lived, mated queens. Our study provides clear evidence that the alternative regulation of conserved molecular pathways that mediate the interplay among mating, egg laying, and aging underlies the lack of the fecundity/longevity trade-off in ant queens.

*Keywords*: fecundity/longevity trade-off, transcriptome, aging, mating, social insect, RNA-Seq

#### 2.1 Introduction

Why organisms age and die and why they do so at different rates are among the most fundamental and least understood phenomena in biology. Of the various mechanistic and evolutionary explanations for aging and death (e.g., Rose 1990; Hughes  $\&$ Reynolds 2005), those that involve a trade-off between fecundity and longevity have gained considerable empirical support. Throughout multicellular organisms, including volvocine algae, *Drosophila*, *Caenorhabditis* and human beings, increased investment in early and current reproduction negatively affects longevity (Stearns 1989; Westendorp & Kirkwood 1998; Michod *et al.* 2006; Flatt 2011; Tabatabaie *et al.* 2011). On the molecular level, there is evidence that this trade-off might be mediated by Insulin/insulin-like growth factor signaling (IIS) and downstream endocrine signals, for example, juvenile hormone (JH) in insects (Flatt *et al.* 2005; Flatt & Kawecki 2007). Mutations in the IIS pathway were shown to have antagonistic pleiotropic effects on lifespan and reproduction in *Drosophila melanogaster, Caenorhabditis elegans,* and mice (Tatar *et al.* 2001; Partridge *et al.* 2005).

Perennial eusocial insects, such as termites, ants, and many bees, and eusocial *Fukomys* mole-rats, are a striking exception: dependent on their environment, individuals may grow into long-lived reproductives or short-lived, non-reproductive workers (Keller & Genoud 1997; Keller 1998; Jemielity *et al.* 2005; Heinze & Schrempf 2008; Schmidt *et al.* 2013). This suggests that, on the population level, the trade-off between fecundity and longevity is reversed in these organisms. In addition, mating might not be that detrimental for the female reproductives (queens) of social insects as for solitary insects (Partridge *et al.* 1987; Trevitt & Partridge 1991). The short mating period early in life and the storage of sperm by queens result in a lifelong pair bond of males and females. This predicts that males benefit from increasing the lifespan of their female partners, as was already shown in the ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* (Schrempf *et al.* 2005).

Understanding how reproductives of eusocial animals evade the fecundity/longevity trade-off not only serves to identify idiosyncratic pathways that link mating, fecundity, and lifespan, but might also provide fundamental insight into the evolution of aging in general. Hence, considerable efforts have been made to reveal the physiological, endocrine, and transcriptomic correlates of the different life expectancies of reproductives and non-reproductives (Parker *et al.* 2004; Corona *et al.* 2005; Jemielity *et al.* 2007; Corona *et al.* 2007; Haddad *et al.* 2007; Grozinger *et al.* 2007; Schneider *et al.* 2011). For example, experiments addressing the oxidative stress theory of aging (which considers reactive oxygen species as a cause of aging; e.g., Finkel & Holbrook 2000) consistently showed that antioxidant enzyme gene expression and activity are lower in queens than in workers (Parker *et al.* 2004; Corona *et al.* 2005; Schneider *et al.* 2011). This might be explained either by a lower generation of reactive oxygen species in queens or by the mediation of oxidative stress resistance through other molecules, such as vitellogenin (Vg; Seehuus *et al.* 2006; Havukainen *et al.* 2013). Honeybee queens indeed have a higher titer of vitellogenin, associated with

lower JH titers and lower expression of insulin-like peptide and receptor genes compared with workers (Corona *et al.* 2007). As this observation disagrees with the opposing effects of IIS and JH on lifespan and reproduction in *Drosophila melanogaster* (Flatt *et al.* 2005), it has been suggested that the traditional positive relationships between nutrition and IIS, and between JH and Vg, are reversed in honeybee queens (Corona *et al.* 2007; Remolina & Hughes 2008).

However, comparisons between queens and workers are often confounded because the two female castes typically differ not only in fecundity, but also in developmental, morphological, physiological, and behavioral traits. All of these might affect the tempo of aging and senescence. To disentangle the effects of variation in phenotype, mating status, fecundity, and resource availability on lifespan requires alternative approaches, for example, a comparison among reproductives of different fecundity and longevity.

Here, we used the ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* as a social insect model to investigate the proximate mechanisms underlying variation in lifespan independent of variation in genotype, development, and morphology. Its colonies are typically inbred because young queens mate in the nest with wingless males and stay there to reproduce (e.g., Heinze & Hölldobler 1993). Queens are relatively short-lived (approximately 6 months), which allows monitoring their total lifespan and lifetime reproductive success (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; Heinze & Schrempf 2012). We used two approaches to investigate the effects of age and mating on gene expression.

First, we compared the transcriptomes of young mated (4-week-old) and old mated (18-week-old) *C. obscurior* queens to identify general signatures of aging. We then compared these data with transcriptomes of female *D. melanogaster* of different age (Pletcher *et al.* 2002; Doroszuk *et al.* 2012).

Second, we contrasted transcriptome data among three different types of 18 week-old queens, which were subjected to different mating regimes known to affect future life expectancy and fecundity: 1) Virgin queens (short average lifespan and low average fecundity, 18.2 weeks and 6.8 eggs per week); 2) mated queens (long lifespan and high fecundity, 26.0 weeks and 20.5 eggs per week), and 3) queens mated to sterilized males (Schrempf *et al.* 2005).

Finally, we investigated whether mating-induced gene expression changes in *C. obscurior* match those previously found in female *D. melanogaster* and honeybees.

Our results reveal for the first time a comprehensive picture of gene expression patterns associated with age, mating, and fecundity in a social insect and indicate that conserved pathways involved with senescence in solitary species may experience a reversal in gene expression patterns. The commonality of aging found between two species with opposite life histories indicates a persistent action of developmental genes later in life.

#### 2.2 Materials and methods

#### 2.2.1 The study organism

*Cardiocondyla obscurior* is a tropical tramp species (Heinze *et al.* 2006), which nests in cavities of dead twigs and leaves (Seifert 2002). Its successful establishment around the globe through human activities is possible because of several specific life history traits, such as the continuous production of sexuals, the presence of multiple queens per nest, mating in the nest, and colony propagation by budding. These traits also facilitate rearing and maintenance of *Cardiocondyla* colonies in the lab. Its small colonies contain on average 20 female workers, several reproductive queens, and a single wingless male, which monopolizes mating with any newly produced queen by killing younger rival males reared in the colony (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Stuart *et al.* 1987; Heinze & Delabie 2005).

#### 2.2.2 Experimental design and sampling

We established 73 experimental colonies from laboratory stock colonies derived from the genome reference population in Bahia, Brazil (Schrader *et al.* 2014). Each nest contained 20 workers, 10 larvae, and a single queen pupa, which was assigned to one of three treatments: Mated (MQ), sham-mated (SQ) and virgin (VQ). MQ colonies were set up with an additional male pupa about to eclose simultaneously with the queen, whereas VQ did not have contact to males. For the SQ treatments, we sterilized the added male prior to its introduction to the nest by exposure to X-rays (120 G; 2.95  $\pm$ 0.12 G/min; Schrempf *et al.* 2005). Colonies with males that died within 1 week after irradiation were excluded from further analysis. Sterilized males transfer only unviable sperm and consequently SQ can only produce male offspring from unfertilized eggs (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). From these three treatments (MQ, SQ, and VQ), individuals were sampled after 18 weeks (MQ18, SQ18, and VQ18), corresponding to the age when 50 % of virgin queens had died in a previous experiment (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). In addition, mated queens which were set up as the mated queens described above were sampled after 4 weeks (= MQ4; Schrempf *et al.* 2015) to assess age-related changes under normal circumstances. These young queens started to lay eggs 1 week after emergence and consistently increased their egg-laying rate within the 3 weeks before sampling.

The colonies were reared in Petri dishes with plaster and fed three times per week with chopped cockroaches and diluted honey according to standard protocols ad libitum. All eggs were counted and removed twice per week in the first month and subsequently once per week. The number of workers and larvae was standardized by adding or removing individuals to 20 workers and 10 larvae per colony. Developing male and queen pupae were removed to avoid replacement or (additional) mating of the

We monitored survival and reproductive output of queens. Mating type had no significant effect on the survival of queens until 18 weeks, but mean egg-laying rates differed significantly between all three queen types (details in Appendix 7.1.1).

## 2.2.3 Library preparation and sequencing

80 °C until further processing.

Individual queens were transferred into RLT Plus buffer (QIAGEN) and homogenized by using Lysing Matrix Tubes and a FastPrep bead shaker (MP Biomedicals). Subsequently, total RNA was extracted following the RNeasy Plus Micro Kit protocol (QIAGEN). We measured RNA content and quality with an Agilent 2100 Bioanalyzer, which indicated yields of 20–200 ng of total RNA per queen. To obtain sufficient RNA to prepare a sequencing library, whole RNA was amplified after conversion into cDNA (NuGEN Ovation RNA-Seq System V2). After sonic fragmentation, and adapter ligation and incorporation of multiplex barcodes (NuGEN Encore Rapid Library Systems), the 28 samples were randomly distributed across different lanes of a flow cell and sequenced on an Illumina HiSeq1000 platform.

## 2.2.4 RNA-Seq analysis

On average, 24 million 100-bp single reads were generated per sample. Quality of raw reads (phred scores  $> 30$ ) was assessed by FastQC version 0.10.1 (Andrews 2010). Adapter residuals were trimmed with Cutadapt version 1.2.1 (Martin 2011). Using Bowtie2 version 2.1.0 (Langmead & Salzberg 2012) in combination with the splice junction mapper TopHat version 2.0.8 (Trapnell *et al.* 2009), the sequences were mapped with default settings against the *C. obscurior* reference genome Cobs1.4 (Schrader *et al.* 2014; mapping statistics in Appendix 7.1.2). Subsequently, HTSeqcount version 0.5.4 (Anders *et al.* 2015) was used for counting reads. Normalization of raw counts and the tests for differential gene expression were performed with DESeq2 version 1.6.2 (Love *et al.* 2014) in R version 3.1.2 (R Core Team 2014). We tested MQ18 against MQ4 and then contrasted the three treatments MQ18, SQ18 and VQ18. Raw *P* values were adjusted for multiple testing (Benjamini & Hochberg 1995). A principal component analysis was conducted on expression values of the top 500 genes with the highest variance across all samples after variance stabilization in DESeq2. Centroids were added by means of the package Vegan version 2.2-1 (Oksanen *et al.* 2015). Area-proportional Venn diagrams were generated with EulerAPE (Micallef & Rodgers 2014).

#### 2.2.5 Functional annotation

We inferred orthology by applying a reciprocal BLASTp [Basic Local Alignment] Search Tool] between all 17,552 predicted *C. obscurior* genes and the *D. melanogaster* (dmel-all-translation-r5.56.fasta) and *A. mellifera* (amel\_OGSv1.1\_pep.fa) genomes by means of the BLAST+ toolkit (Camacho *et al.* 2009). This resulted in 6,959 fruit fly and 7,948 honeybee orthologs, corresponding to 68 % and 72 % of the annotated fly or bee genes, respectively. For the remaining genes, the most similar homolog was defined as the best hit of the one-way protein BLAST against the fruit fly or honeybee genome on condition that the *e* value was smaller than  $10^{-05}$ . Functional annotation of genes was obtained by loading all 6,959 genes with reciprocal orthologous relationships to fly genes as background into DAVID (Huang *et al.* 2009). A modified Fisher´s exact test was used for testing of enrichment  $(EASE < 0.05)$  for Gene Ontology (GO) terms (Ashburner *et al.* 2000) and KEGG pathways (Kanehisa & Goto 2000) in the sets of differentially expressed genes (DEGs) relative to the background. As the lists of DEGs between VQ18 and MQ18 and of the common genes between the contrasts VQ18– MQ18 and VQ18–SQ18 did not reveal a functional enrichment considering orthologs, we repeated the test by including homologs.

#### 2.2.6 Cross-species comparisons

We compared our results with similar studies in insects that addressed mating- and aging-related transcriptome changes. We compared our data with two independent studies to determine overlap in age-related changes between *C. obscurior* queens and *D. melanogaster* females: A study of young and old virgin female *D. melanogaster*  (90 % vs. 10 % survival) by Doroszuk *et al.* (2012) and a study that compared the transcriptomes of 7- and 23-day-old mated fly females ( $=$  aged females with about 65  $\%$ survival) from Pletcher *et al.* (2002). We did not identify any other data sets that were suitable to compare age-related transcriptome changes in insect females.

We assessed six further data sets for similarities to our transcriptomic comparisons among mated, sham-mated, and virgin *C. obscurior* queens. Three of these data sets focused on mating-induced changes in gene expression of *D. melanogaster* females (McGraw *et al.* 2004) and *A. mellifera* queens (Kocher *et al.* 2008; 2010). The other three comparative data sets were derived from studies of reproduction- or ovarystatus-associated gene expression changes in *A. mellifera* workers (Grozinger *et al.* 2007; Cardoen *et al.* 2011; Wang *et al.* 2012). We excluded another study (Zhou *et al.* 2014) because it did not report on a sufficient number of orthologs of our genes  $(< 50\%$ ) to allow for a meaningful comparative analysis (see Appendix 7.1.3). We also screened our lists of DEGs for the presence of putative *D. melanogaster* aging candidates retrieved from the GenAge database (Tacutu *et al.* 2013).

The given identifiers were converted to the current gene annotations that we used for determining orthologs (as described above). Normalized log-transformed expression values from microarrays of two studies on flies (Pletcher *et al.* 2002; Doroszuk *et al.* 2012) were analyzed with limma version 3.22.4 (Ritchie *et al.* 2015). The definition of DEGs was based on a false discovery rate  $(FDR) < 0.05$  for all data sets, only Grozinger *et al.* (2007) applied a 97.5 % confidence level cutoff. As for the functional enrichment analyses, we restricted the comparison to the set of unambiguous orthologs. Up- and downregulated genes were analyzed separately. To perform quantitative comparisons we generated contingency tables containing the number of DEGs found in both studies, the number of DEGs not found in the other study in each case and the number of all remaining genes. A one-sided Fisher´s exact test then revealed whether more genes overlapped than expected by chance.

## 2.3 Results

#### 2.3.1 Gene expression patterns of all four types of queens

To reveal the effects of age and mating on gene expression, we analyzed transcriptomic data of four types of queens:  $MQ4 = 4$ -week-old mated queens,  $MQ18 = 18$ -week-old mated queens,  $SO18 = 18$ -week-old sham-mated queens,  $VO18 = 18$ -week-old virgin queens. We sequenced individual queens to account for biological variation across samples and achieved a final sample size of seven (MO4, MO18, SO18) and six (VO18) replicates. The principal component plot of all samples indicated a separation of MQ4 and VQ18 from all other groups and considerable overlap of SQ18 and MQ18 (Figure 2.1). To analyze age-specific expression, we first compared the transcriptomes of MQ4 and MQ18 and found 783 DEGs (adjusted  $P$  value  $\leq 0.05$ , Appendix 7.1.4).

To disentangle the effects of mating and reproduction, we contrasted the gene expression profiles of MQ18, SQ18, and VQ18. VQ18 differed from MQ18 in 37 genes and from SQ18 in 350 genes, whereas SQ18 and MQ18 differed in five genes (adjusted *P* value < 0.05, Appendix 7.1.4).



Figure 2.1: Principal component analysis plot of the top 500 genes with highest variance across all samples illustrating variation within and between treatments. Variance stabilizing transformation of expression values was performed prior to analysis. The labels represent the center of mass of each group.

## 2.3.2 Functional annotation of genes differentially expressed with age and reproduction (MQ4 vs. MQ18)

We used the corresponding *D. melanogaster* orthologs of all genes (determined by a reciprocal BLAST) in DAVID to test for a functional enrichment in all lists of DEGs. The 242 genes more highly expressed in MQ18 compared with MQ4 (160 orthologs) revealed an enrichment for GO terms associated with reproduction, which reflects the higher rate of reproduction in older queens (Appendix 7.1.5). Clustering of these 102 GO annotations for biological processes (BP) resulted in five groups, which are best described by the terms cell cycle, cellular component assembly, female germ-line cyst encapsulation, germ cell development, and establishment or maintenance of cell polarity (Table 2.1).

KEGG pathway analysis of the 541 genes more highly expressed in MQ4 (336 orthologs) revealed a significant enrichment in fructose and mannose metabolism  $(P = 0.01)$ , purine metabolism, pentose phosphate pathway, and metabolism of xenobiotics by cytochrome P450 ( $P < 0.05$ ). The 37 significant GO terms also pointed to an association with mainly catabolic and biosynthetic processes. The most significant terms of the three generated clusters were cellular carbohydrate catabolic, organic acid metabolic, and nucleoside monophosphate biosynthetic process. Besides, genes involved in muscle contraction were overrepresented in the set of downregulated genes  $(P = 0.0009)$ .





## 2.3.3 Functional annotation of genes associated with mating (VQ18 vs. MQ18 and SQ18, SQ18 vs. MQ18)

Neither the 33 genes with higher expression (19 orthologs), nor the 4 genes with lower expression (one ortholog) in VQ18 compared with MQ18 showed a significant functional enrichment. However, when we included eight genes for which homology was established by simple BLAST to *D. melanogaster* (*e* value  $\leq 10^{-05}$ ), GO analysis suggested an elevation in carbohydrate metabolic process in VQ18 ( $P = 0.008$ ).

The 93 genes with lower expression in VQ18 compared with SQ18 (74 orthologs) were enriched for the GO terms protein localization in organelle  $(P = 0.004)$ , organelle fission  $(P = 0.022)$ , and 14 related BP. The 257 genes with lower expression in SQ18 (186 orthologs) were enriched for more diverse categories, which were summarized by the following terms: neurological system process, muscle cell development, phototransduction, cyclic nucleotide metabolic process (*P* < 0.001), alcohol catabolic process, and homeostatic process  $(P < 0.01$ , a complete list of enriched terms is provided in Appendix 7.1.5).

An enrichment in nucleobase, nucleoside, nucleotide, and nucleic acid metabolism  $(P = 0.045)$  was found in the four genes more highly expressed in SQ18 compared with MQ18 (four orthologs).

#### 2.3.4 Overlap of age- and mating-associated expression patterns

We determined the overlap of age- and mating-associated expression differences by comparing all four lists of DEGs (Figure 2.2). We found the highest overlap between genes with higher expression in MQ4 relative to MQ18 and genes with higher expression in VQ18 than in MQ18 or SQ18 (Figure 2.2, bottom right). Fewer genes showed the opposite pattern, that is, had lower expression in MQ4 and VQ18 than in MQ18 (top right).



Figure 2.2: Overlap of age- and mating-associated expression patterns. Venn diagrams showing the general overlap between all four comparisons (left) and specifically the overlap of genes upregulated with age in the mated queen type and downregulated in virgin compared to mated or sham-mated queens (top right) as well as vice versa (bottom right).

Twenty-one genes were differentially expressed in both the comparison of VQ18– MQ18 and VQ18–SQ18. They presumably reflect physiological changes as consequence of mating rather than of fertilization. All of them had higher transcript abundances in the shorter-lived phenotype, and all except *PRL-1* were more highly expressed in MQ4 than in MQ18 (Figure 2.3). Thirteen genes have orthologs in *D. melanogaster* (Table 2.2). Including five genes with putative homologs in *D. melanogaster* yielded a significant enrichment in carbohydrate metabolic process  $(P = 0.024)$ . Across all three treatments, expression of these 21 genes showed a minimum at intermediate egg-laying rates instead of a linear relationship (Appendix 7.1.6).



Figure 2.3: Expression of all 21 mating-associated genes across all four conditions. Illustrated are mean and standard errors of log2-values of normalized counts. Genes are named according to *D. melanogaster* orthologs/homologs if present and grouped by functions.





2.3.5 Comparison of genes differentially expressed with age in mated queens and fruit fly females

We performed a quantitative comparison of age-related gene expression changes in *C. obscurior* and *D. melanogaster* females by including expression differences between young and aged females (about 65 % survival; Pletcher *et al.* 2002) as well as between young and extremely old females (10 % survival; Doroszuk *et al.* 2012). The *D. melanogaster* studies resembled each other regarding the lists of genes upregulated in older individuals (Table 2.3). A significant number of these upregulated genes were downregulated in aged *C. obscurior* queens. Ten genes were consistently upregulated in flies and downregulated in ant queens (Figure 2.4). Analysis of GO terms suggested that cellular ketone, carbohydrate and organic acid metabolic processes are oppositely regulated in aging ant and fly females (Table 2.4). Furthermore, transcripts, which contribute to the development and contraction of muscles, were less abundant in MQ18, but more highly abundant in extreme old flies. Genes that were increasingly expressed with age in *C. obscurior*, but downregulated in very old *D. melanogaster*, play a role in cell division and reproduction.

Genes expressed in the same direction did not overlap significantly, but showed a significant enrichment in cell differentiation  $(P = 0.004)$ . In addition, cell fate determination, neurogenesis, and anatomical structure homeostasis were identified as processes upregulated with age in both species.

Table 2.3: Overlap of genes found to be upregulated (+) or downregulated (-) with age in *Cardiocondyla obscurior* and *Drosophila melanogaster* females (Pletcher *et al.* 2002; Doroszuk *et al.* 2012). Number of common genes are shown with statistical significance as extracted from Fisher's exact tests and FDR-correction in parentheses. Significant overlaps are italicized.

			$MQ18$ vs. $MQ4$		Pletcher <i>et al.</i>	
			$^+$	$\,$	$^+$	
		<b>DEGs</b>	160	336	176	134
Pletcher <i>et al.</i> $(65\%$ survival)		-176	2(1)	16(0.026)		
	$\blacksquare$	134	3(1)	10(0.2)		
Doroszuk <i>et al.</i> $(10\%$ survival)		648	12(1)	$84(2.6e-15)$	$50(1.0e-12)$	22 (0.018)
		.233	43 (0.009)	16(1)	19(1)	7 (1)



Figure 2.4: Relation of expression changes (log2 fold changes = lfc) of genes showing age-regulated transcription in *C. obscurior* and *D melanogaster*. Ten genes were consistently upregulated in aged (Pletcher *et al.* 2002) and very old flies (Doroszuk *et al.* 2012) and downregulated in ant queens: *ref(2)P, emp, IscU, P5cr-2, CAP, CCHa*2, CG3168, CG13124, CG9701, CG11796. For these genes, the mean lfc of both analyses is given.

Table 2.4: Overlap of significant GO terms in genes upregulated (+) or downregulated (-) with age in *Cardiocondyla obscurior* (CO) and *Drosophila melanogaster* (DM). The number of annotated genes for each GO category contained in the lists of DEGs is given in the last two columns together with whole-genome annotations for both organisms in parentheses. Underlined, both *D. melanogaster* studies (first number corresponds to Pletcher *et al.*, second to Doroszuk *et al.*); italic, Doroszuk *et al.* only.





# 2.3.6 Cross-species comparison of mating- and reproduction-associated transcriptomic changes

We compared our data with several previous studies in *D. melanogaster* and honeybees, *Apis mellifera*, which focused on short-term gene expression changes linked to mating or reproduction (Appendix 7.1.3). Though we examined queens only several weeks after mating, we found significant overlap of the DEGs in these studies with our DEGs in VQ18 versus SQ18, but not with the other two contrasts (Table 2.5). Genes with higher expression in VQ18 were significantly enriched for genes downregulated by sperm, but surprisingly also for genes upregulated by accessory gland proteins in female fruit flies. Likewise, genes downregulated in the brains of mated honeybee queens and genes downregulated in reproductive honeybee workers were overrepresented in the list of genes with higher expression in VQ18. A GO term enrichment analysis revealed that the expression of genes involved in muscle development and contraction is consistently reduced by mating in *C. obscurior* queens and *D. melanogaster* females and by the onset of reproduction in *A. mellifera* workers. Furthermore, significantly more genes were found to be upregulated in SQ18 and brains of incompletely mated honeybee queens ("intermediate") compared to virgin individuals than expected by chance.

Table 2.5: Overlap of genes found to be differentially expressed due to mating and/or the onset of reproduction in *Cardiocondyla obscurior, Drosophila melanogaster* and *Apis mellifera* (-, downregulated; +, upregulated). Fisher's exact tests were performed on comparisons revealing at least two common genes, resulting *P* values after FDR-correction are shown in parenthesis. Significant overlaps are italicized.


#### 2.3.7 Genes related to aging in *D. melanogaster*

We screened the *C. obscurior* genome for 136 genes with documented effects on longevity in *D. melanogaster* and found 95 orthologs. Eight of them showed differential expression with age or mating status or both (Table 2.6). *Neural Lazarillo* (*NLaz*) was identified to be less expressed in both SQ18 and MQ18 types. *Nlaz* and *Sirt6* were oppositely expressed in ant queens and fly females with regard to age, whereas *rutabaga* and *Muscle LIM protein at 84B* were regulated in the same direction.

Table 2.6: *Drosophila melanogaster* aging candidate genes showing differential expression (-, downregulated; +, upregulated) with age and/or mating in *Cardiocondyla obscurior* (CO). The following references provided information about age- and mating-related expression in *D. melanogaster* (DM) and *Apis mellifera* (AM): (1) Pletcher *et al.* (2002), (2) Kocher *et al.* (2008), (3) Kocher *et al.* (2010), (4) Doroszuk *et al.* (2012), (5) Zhou *et al.* (2014).



## 2.4 Discussion

#### 2.4.1 Opposite gene expression changes in aging queens and female flies

Female reproductives of social insects appear to suffer less "mortality costs" from mating and reproduction than females of solitary insects (Partridge *et al.* 1987; Trevitt & Partridge 1991; Eady *et al.* 2007). On the contrary, mating extends the lifespan of *Cardiocondyla* ant queens (Schrempf *et al.* 2005) and their longevity increases with egg-laying rate (Heinze & Schrempf 2012; Heinze *et al.* 2013). Evolutionary theories of

aging explain the long lifespan of social insect queens and the absence of the fecundity/longevity trade-off from their low extrinsic mortality, as queens live in the relative safety of well-protected, often subterraneous, nests (Keller & Genoud 1997; Carey 2001b). Proximately, this suggests an alternative regulation of the conserved pathways that mediate the interplay among mating, egg-laying, and aging. Our study provides support for this hypothesis at the transcriptome level: age-related changes in gene expression had opposite directions in two taxa with opposite life histories.

Transcriptional changes of aged female (Pletcher *et al.* 2002; Doroszuk *et al.* 2012) and male (Zou *et al.* 2000; Girardot *et al.* 2006) flies reflect their decline in reproductive capacity (e.g., Tatar *et al.* 1996). In contrast, the observation that *C. obscurior* queens increase their reproductive efforts with age and show reproductive senescence only immediately before they die, if at all (Heinze  $\&$  Schrempf 2012), is consistent with the differences between the transcriptomes of young and older *C. obscurior* queens found in this study.

Furthermore, aged and extremely old female *D. melanogaster* exhibit a higher expression of genes involved in cellular ketone, carbohydrate, and organic acid metabolism than young female flies, whereas these genes were downregulated in older relative to young *C. obscurior* queens. The decline of muscle formation and contraction in aging *C. obscurior* queens is consistent with the adaptation to a stationary mode of life and might contribute to save energy. Together with the downregulation of metabolism genes, it might also delay the accumulation of physiological damage. Reproductives of several social insects have lower levels and activities of oxidant enzymes than non-reproductives, which might indicate a reduced generation of oxygen radicals (Parker *et al.* 2004; Corona *et al.* 2005; Schneider *et al.* 2011), perhaps because of reduced metabolism.

## 2.4.2 Common gene expression changes in aging queens and female flies

Aging is largely regarded as the result of wear and tear. At the same time, the overlap of gene expression changes found during aging and during development in mammals suggests that aging is a regulated process under genetic control (de Magalhães 2012). From this point of view, genes showing age-specific expression changes in the same direction across taxa might be universal regulators of aging. Here, we identified the downregulation of *rut* and *Mlp84B* and the upregulation of genes involved in cell fate determination, neurogenesis, and anatomical structure homeostasis as common signatures of aging. This result supports the idea that developmental processes might continue beyond maturity and become detrimental later in life when selection is relaxed (de Magalhães & Church 2005). In *Caenorhabditis elegans*, age-related expression changes are controlled by three transcription factors, which are not affected by the accumulation of damage (Budovskaya *et al.* 2008). Extending this theory to our study, selection for late reproduction in social insect queens might specifically prevent the drift

or cessation of developmental programs, which optimize reproduction, such as insulin signaling.

## 2.4.3 Gene expression changes associated with the lifespan-prolonging effect of mating

A comparison of the transcriptomes among 18-week-old egg-laying virgin queens, mated queens, and queens mated with sterilized males yielded additional insight into the effects of mating and reproduction. *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queens that are unmated (or sham-mated) and lay only few eggs are tolerated in the colony and receive the same treatment from workers as more fecund, mated queens (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; 2011). Nevertheless, both mated and sham-mated queens live significantly longer than virgin queens do. Consistent with this phenotypic similarity, MQ18 and SQ18 differed in their transcriptomic profiles in only five genes. Interestingly, the transcriptomic profile of VQ18 was more similar to the profile of MQ18 than to the profile of SQ18 considering the number of gene expression differences. Similar to our results, Kocher *et al.* (2008) found more DEGs between unmated and "intermediate" queens than between unmated and mated, egg-laying queens. Furthermore, significant overlap of genes downregulated in SQ18 compared with VQ18 with genes downregulated by sperm in *D. melanogaster* (McGraw *et al.* 2004) and by mating in brains of honey bees (Kocher *et al.* 2008; 2010) indicates that short- and long-term consequences of the mating event are similar, even across taxa. However, our analysis revealed that genes downregulated by sham-mating in ant queens contained a significant part of genes upregulated by the transfer of accessory gland proteins during mating in flies (McGraw *et al.* 2004).

The differential regulation of conserved, public mechanisms may relate to lifespan regulation in these different biological contexts, although presumably with opposing consequences. This corresponds to the contrasting effect of mating on longevity in these taxa. Out of the 257 genes with higher expression in VQ18 compared with SQ18, 21 genes had also significant higher expression than in MQ18. Given that sham-mated queens live as long as mated queens and at the same time display low fecundity similar to that of virgin queens, these genes are particularly interesting because they might be correlated with the different speed of aging. The five carbohydrate-degrading and proteolytic enzymes *Trehalase*, *Maltase B1*, *cathD*, CG4678, and CG3108 point to a reduced need of these energy resources in mated queens. The differential expression of *Trehalase*, *Maltase B1*, *NLaz*, *obstructor-E*, *Glucose dehydrogenas*e and a homolog of human *DAK* give further support that mating has an effect on carbohydrate metabolism and homeostasis. In addition, *Neural Lazarillo*, *Adenylyl cyclase 76E* (*Ac76E*) and a JH binding protein (homolog to CG34316) indicate an involvement of IIS and JH. Noticeably, our data does not hint at a major role of vitellogenin in regulating fecundity or longevity in *C. obscurior*. So far, we identified Cobs 01486 as the only gene in the genome of this species possessing the vitellogenin domain (pfam01347). This gene is orthologous to the honeybee

"vitellogenin-like" GB52464 and was moderately downregulated in MQ18 compared with MQ4 (fold change  $= 0.7$ ).

#### 2.4.4 Candidate genes

The lipocalin *NLaz*, which is homologous to vertebrate *Apolipoprotein D* (*APOD*), was shown to promote metabolic homeostasis and tolerance to certain types of stress by repressing IIS in the fly model (Hull-Thompson *et al.* 2009). Consequently, flies overexpressing *NLaz* have an extended lifespan at the expense of reduced growth (Hull-Thompson *et al.* 2009; Ruiz *et al.* 2011). Experiments with female flies predict that *NLaz* decreases food intake, decreases fat storage with age, increases locomotor activity, and enhances mating behavior. Ant queens depend on extensive energy intake for the continuous production of eggs. It is therefore not surprising that this gene is less expressed in older, more fertile queens than in younger queens. Furthermore, *NLaz* expression was reduced in mated *C. obscurior* and *A. mellifera* queens (Kocher *et al.* 2010) relative to virgin queens, indicating a regulatory function of post-mating behavior and metabolism. Consistent with the expression pattern of *NLaz*, the differential regulation of *Ac76E* – a direct transcriptional target of *foxo* (Mattila *et al.* 2009) – indicates that IIS activity is lower in short-lived virgin queens. Corona *et al.* (2007) hypothesized that a reduction of IIS in the head of bee queens contributes to their longer lifespan compared with workers. In contrast, *Insulin-like receptor* (*InR*) was shown to be important for ovary development and reproduction in dipterans and ants (Tatar *et al.* 2001; Okada *et al.* 2010; Lu & Pietrantonio 2011). Our results, including the upregulation of *InR* in older, more fertile queens, point to the involvement of IIS but do not suggest a general reversal of the traditional relationship between nutrition and IIS as proposed for the honeybee (Corona *et al.* 2007). Instead, we found that lifespan differences are accompanied by the differential expression of carbohydratemetabolizing enzymes. This suggests that mating triggers a change in metabolism to allow a long life and maximize the reproductive output at the same time.

## **Conclusions**

Our study reveals a number of genes that change expression with age and as a function of reproductive status. The important commonalities and differences in age-related expression changes between *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queens and *Drosophila melanogaster* females may be of broad interest in the community of aging researchers working on diverse organisms.

The comparison among virgin, sham-mated, and mated queens shows how the effects of mating and fecundity on queen longevity can be separated and suggest a number of promising candidates for further in depth studies on the complex regulation of fundamental life history traits in social insects.

## Data accessibility

Raw sequencing data have been deposited in SRA under the BioProject accession numbers PRJNA293450 (MQ18, SQ18, VQ18: SRR2177525–SRR2177544) and PRJNA284224 (MQ4: SRR2033894–SRR2033897, SRR2033903–SRR2033905).

## Supplementary material

Supplementary files S1–S5 are available at Molecular Biology and Evolution online (http://www.mbe.oxfordjournals.org/).

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## **Chapter 3**

# **Transcriptomic response to injury sheds light on the physiological costs of reproduction in ant queens\***

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Injured *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queen

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## Abstract

The trade-off between reproduction and longevity is widespread among multicellular organisms. As an important exception, the reproductive females of perennial social insects (ants, honeybees, termites) are simultaneously highly fertile and very long-lived relative to their non-reproductive nestmates. The observation that increased fecundity is not coupled with decreased lifespan suggests that social insect queens do not have to reallocate resources between reproduction and self-maintenance. If queens have to compensate for the costs of reproduction on the level of the individual, the activation of other energy-demanding physiological processes might force them to reduce the production of eggs. To test this hypothesis in ant queens, we increased immunity costs by injury and measured the effect of this treatment on egg-laying rates and genomewide gene expression. Amputation of both middle legs led to a temporary decrease of egg-laying rates and affected the expression of 947 genes corresponding to 9 % of the transcriptome. The changes comprised the upregulation of the immune and wound healing response on one hand, and the downregulation of germ cell development, central nervous system development and learning ability on the other hand. Injury strongly influenced metabolism by inducing catabolism and repressing amino acid and nitrogen compound metabolism. By comparing our results to similar transcriptomic studies in insects, we found a highly consistent upregulation of immune genes due to sterile and septic wounding. The gene expression changes, complemented by the temporary decline of egg-laying rates, clearly reveal a trade-off between reproduction and the immune response in social insect queens.

*Keywords*: reproduction, trade-off, immunity, social insect, transcriptome, RNA-Seq

## 3.1 Introduction

Life history theory explains how evolution shapes fitness-relevant traits to maximize reproductive success of organisms (Stearns 1976; Bell 1980; Stearns 2000). Individual fitness traits are typically costly and can only be optimized at a disadvantage to other fitness traits (Reznick 1985; Stearns 1989). The constraints intrinsic to organisms result in compromises, such as a trade-off between reproduction and longevity. Investment into reproduction reduces metabolic resources, which otherwise could be used for the maintenance and repair of the soma, and therefore indirectly shortens lifespan (Kirkwood 1977; Kirkwood & Austad 2000).

While numerous studies have revealed this trade-off (Westendorp & Kirkwood 1998; Michod *et al.* 2006; Tabatabaie *et al.* 2011), the female reproductives of perennial eusocial insects (often referred to as queens in ants, honeybees, termites) appear to be an exception: they are simultaneously highly fertile and extraordinarily long-lived (Keller & Genoud 1997; Keller 1998). The observation that queens outlive their nonreproductive nestmates, the workers (Hölldobler & Wilson 1990; Carey 2001b; Heinze & Schrempf 2008), suggests that an increase in fecundity is not coupled with a decrease in survival. Clear evidence that the fecundity/longevity trade-off is absent on the level of the individual was found in several ant species (Tsuji *et al.* 1996; Hartmann & Heinze 2003; Schrempf *et al.* 2005). Furthermore, lifespan and weekly egg-laying rate were shown to be positively correlated in the ant genus *Cardiocondyla* (Heinze & Schrempf 2012; Heinze *et al.* 2013; Kramer *et al.* 2015; Rueppell *et al.* 2015).

However, the lack of a trade-off under certain environmental conditions does not necessarily imply the general absence of costs (Flatt 2011). In social species, the costs of reproduction are thought to be compensated on the level of the whole colony, i.e., by the help of workers. Through the release from other energy-demanding tasks, as for example resource acquisition, the queen might be able to reduce its investment in nonessential somatic repair systems to a minimum, allowing most resources to be used for the production of eggs. Especially defense systems, such as the stress and immune response, are not expected to be continuously activated at high levels, as mature ant queens live in protected nests under predictable conditions.

To understand the mechanisms of longevity in social insect queens, it is important to clarify if queen physiology is affected by of the costs of reproduction. We predicted that the costs associated with a challenge of the immune system can not be compensated by the workers and forces the queen to balance them by the reduction of other nutrient-demanding processes, in particular growth and reproduction (Sheldon & Verhulst 1996; Siva-Jothy *et al.* 1998; Lochmiller & Deerenberg 2000; Schmid-Hempel 2003).

To test this hypothesis, we challenged the somatic maintenance and repair systems of *C. obscurior* queens by mimicking a physical injury, which is observed to occur in the natural environment but does not lead to the queen's death. Insects generally accumulate injuries, such as the loss of legs, antennae and parts of wings, with age (Burkhard *et al.* 2002; Sepulveda *et al.* 2008). Queens in our lab colonies

occasionally lack one or several legs, but whether this impairment affects fitness has not been studied. Female *Drosophila melanogaster* were shown to cope with artificial leg amputations by decreasing fecundity (Carey *et al.* 2007; Sepulveda *et al.* 2008). Since the loss of the middle leg is the least harmful among the interventions tested in Carey *et al.* (2007), we decided to amputate both middle legs, and compared egg-laying rate before and immediately after the manipulation.

The immune response is known to deprive resources from growth and reproduction by molecular interactions between inflammatory signals and the insulinlike/IGF signaling (IIS) pathway in the insect fat body (Dionne *et al.* 2006; DiAngelo *et al.* 2009). We expected to find signatures of altered resource allocation after injury in the whole body transcriptome and measured genome-wide gene expression differences by RNA-Seq. For a detailed analysis of the treatment's effect on immunity, reproduction and metabolism, we screened the *C. obscurior* genome for genes known to be involved in these physiological systems. By comparing our result with similar insect studies on the level of shared differently expressed genes, we aimed to determine the degree of conservation of the transcriptomic response to different treatments (sterile and septic wounding) and across different species (*C. obscurior*, carpenter ant *Camponotus floridanus*, and fruit fly *D. melanogaster*).

Our comparison of injured and uninjured queens demonstrates that a considerable part of the transcriptome is affected by the treatment. The gene expression changes clearly reflect a trade-off between the immune response and reproduction, which is also reflected in a temporary decline of egg-laying rates.

## 3.2 Materials and methods

#### 3.2.1 The organism and stock colonies

The cosmopolitan tramp ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* occurs in anthropogenic habitats of subtropical regions (Heinze *et al.* 2006). Colonies contain one or several reproductive queens, which mate in their natal nest after eclosing, and continuously lay eggs until the end of their life (Heinze & Schrempf 2012). Different from solitary insects, the fertile queens never leave the sheltered nest and are cared for by the sterile workers.

The genome reference stock colony was collected in Una (Bahia, Brazil) in 2009 (Schrader *et al.* 2014). All laboratory colonies, which were used for RNA-Seq, were derived from this stock colony. Queens whose egg-laying rates were studied after injury also came from Bahia, Brazil, but have been kept in the lab since being collected in 2004. All colonies were kept under standard conditions in incubators (12h 28°C light/12h 24°C dark) and fed ad libitum with chopped cockroaches and honey.

#### 3.2.2 Injury treatment

For the gene expression analysis, queen pupae were reared individually with 1 male pupa, 20 workers and 10 larvae in a Petri dish with plaster. Young queens and males usually mate a few days after eclosion (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). Once per week we counted the number of eggs in the nest. Queens laying only a low amount of eggs, which developed into haploid males due to the failure of mating, were excluded. Additionally developing queen and male pupae were removed from the nest as well as surplus worker pupae and larvae to maintain the initial size of the colony. At the age of 6 months, which is equivalent to the average life span of mated *C. obscurior* queens (Schrempf & Heinze 2008), the 50 surviving queens were divided equally among the two treatments: "injured" and "control". Injured individuals were artificially wounded by amputating both middle legs at the level of the tibia with fine clippers as shown in Figure 3.1. Before freezing, injured queens were kept in vials in the incubator for six hours. Injured and control queens were snap-frozen and stored at -80°C until further processing.

To determine the impact of the injury on the reproductive performance of queens, we set up 30 colonies consisting each of a dealate queen of unknown age, 20 workers, and 5 large larvae from two large stock colonies. Because egg-laying rates differed tremendously among queens we decided to compare individual egg-laying rates before and after injury rather than comparing injured queens with uninjured controls. Egg-laying rates were monitored during two weeks by counting all eggs and small larvae, then the middle legs of all queens were cut and brood items were counted again during the next two weeks. Nine queens died during the first weeks of the experiment. Among the 21 surviving queens, the increase of the number of brood items during 48 hours one week before, immediately after injury, and one week after injury was compared by Friedman ANOVA with subsequent Bonferroni-corrected Wilcoxon signed rank tests using the software PAST 3.0.7 (Hammer *et al.* 2001). The change in the number of brood items reflects both the number of newly laid eggs but takes the development of eggs to larvae into account. Twelve of the 21 queens produced only male offspring and might therefore not have been inseminated.

## 3.2.3 RNA sequencing and analysis

We extracted total RNA of queens by homogenizing whole bodies with a FastPrep bead shaker (MP Biomedicals) and subsequent application of the RNeasy Plus Micro Kit protocol (QIAGEN) as described before (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015). We performed an additional DNase treatment step before the RNA was converted into cDNA and amplified (NuGEN Ovation RNA-Seq System V2). Following fragmentation and ligation of adapters with barcodes (NuGEN Rapid DR Multiplex System), 14 individual queens per treatment were sequenced on an Illumina HiSeq1000 platform.

Twenty-five to 58 million 75-bp single reads were generated per sample.

Adapter sequences were removed with Cutadapt version 1.7.1 (Martin 2011). The trimmed reads were mapped against the *C. obscurior* reference genome Cobs1.4 (Schrader *et al.* 2014) using Bowtie2 version 2.2.3 (Langmead & Salzberg 2012) and TopHat version 2.0.13 (Trapnell *et al.* 2009; see mapping statistics in Appendix 7.2.1). Counting of reads, which mapped to gene models, was performed with HTSeq-count version 0.6.1 (Anders *et al.* 2015). We analyzed the quality of the data by means of the clustering functions implemented in the packages 'DESeq2' version 1.6.3 (Love *et al.* 2014) and 'Vegan' version 2.2-1 (Oksanen *et al.* 2015) in R (R Core Team 2014). The PCA indicated a batch effect caused by the distribution of biological samples on eight different lanes of the flow cell (Appendix 7.2.2). To account for this lane effect, we included "lane" as a second variable in the generalized linear model implemented in DESeq2 (design =  $\sim$  lane + treatment; see Leek *et al.* 2010). *P* values were adjusted for multiple testing by the FDR-procedure (Benjamini & Hochberg 1995). To enable a PCA with expression values corrected for the batch effect, the ComBat function of the package 'SVA' version 3.12.0 (Leek *et al.* 2012) was applied on the normalized and transformed (VST=variance-stabilizing transformation) gene counts. Furthermore, the 20 genes with the highest variance were chosen to conduct a hierarchical clustering in 'pheatmap' version 1.0.2 (Kolde 2015).

## 3.2.4 General gene annotation and functional enrichment

In order to determine orthologs, we performed a reciprocal protein blast between all 17552 predicted *C. obscurior* genes and the proteomes of *Drosophila melanogaster* (dmel-all-translation-r5.56.fasta) and the ant *Camponotus floridanus*  (protein\_sequences.fa retrieved from http://www.bioinfo.biozentrum.uniwuerzburg.de/computing/Camponotus) by means of the Blast+ toolkit (Camacho *et al.* 2009). The closest homolog of the genes remaining without ortholog was defined as the best hit of the one-way protein blast on condition that the  $e$  value was smaller than  $10^{-5}$ . Gene names were adopted from *D. melanogaster*.

Functions of *C. obscurior* genes were predicted from annotations of the corresponding *D. melanogaster* orthologs. All genes with reciprocal orthologous relationships to fly genes were uploaded as background into DAVID (Huang *et al.* 2009). The sets of up- and downregulated genes ( $P$  adjust  $\leq$  0.05) were tested for enrichment in Gene Ontology (GO) terms (Ashburner *et al.* 2000) and KEGG pathways (Kanehisa & Goto 2000) relative to the background by the implemented modified Fisher's exact test. Significant GO terms of all levels in the category biological process (EASE < 0.05) were clustered to reduce redundancy.

#### 3.2.5 Screening of immune, developmental and metabolic genes

To identify putative immune genes in the *C. obscurior* transcriptome, we retrieved the set of *D. melanogaster* immune genes from Insect Innate Immunity Database (De

Gregorio *et al.* 2001; Bordenstein Lab 2011) and the set of recently classified immune genes of the carpenter ant *C. floridanus* from Gupta *et al.* (2015).

In addition, we were interested in the regulation of genes involved in metabolic and developmental processes. The classification in energy storage (glycogen synthesis or degradation, triglyceride synthesis) and energy generation genes (glycolysis or gluconeogenesis, mitochondrial and peroxisomal fatty acid beta-oxidation, pyruvate dehydrogenase or citric acid cycle, pentose-phosphate pathway, lactate production or degradation) was adopted from the *D. melanogaster* study by Dionne *et al.* (2006). Finally, we screened our data and the above-mentioned publications for DEGs represented in the GO categories amino acid metabolism (GO:0006520), nucleobase, nucleoside and nucleotide metabolism (GO:0055086), germ cell development (GO:0007281), central nervous system development (GO:0007417), learning or memory (GO:0007611) and programmed cell death (GO:0012501). We exclusively considered genes with reciprocal orthologous relationships. Figures were mainly generated with ggplot 2 in R (Wickham 2009).

## 3.2.6 Quantitative comparisons with other studies on sterile or septic wounding

Previous studies investigated genome-wide gene expression changes due to puncture wounding in larvae (Patterson *et al.* 2013) and bacterial injection in mated females and males of *D. melanogaster* (Dionne *et al.* 2006; Short & Lazzaro 2013) and *C. floridanus* pooled workers and larvae (Gupta *et al.* 2015). We determined the overlap with these studies on the level of shared differently expressed genes (DEGs). First, we collected the reported gene identifiers with significant expression changes (corrected  $P < 0.01$  in Patterson *et al.*  $(2013) / \leq 0.05$  in others) and converted them to the current gene annotations in FlyBase if needed. We tested by a one-sided Fisher's exact test in R if more genes overlapped than expected by random sampling the set of 6959 (*D. melanogaster*) and 8824 (*C. floridanus*) orthologs. GO term enrichment analysis of the shared DEGs was done in DAVID as described above.

## 3.3 Results

#### 3.3.1 Fecundity of injured queens

Three of 50 queens of this experiment lost one leg due to unknown causes. All three queens were still alive at the age of 6 months; survival seemed not to be affected by this impairment. Weekly egg-laying rates of uninjured and naturally injured queens strongly varied within individuals and between individuals in the 3 months before sampling (median 17, range 0–35; Figure 3.1). We did not detect a significant difference in the number of eggs laid in the week before and the week after the loss of one leg occurred  $(n = 3, Wilcoxon signed rank test, P = 0.17).$ 

For a more detailed analysis of the effect of injury on reproduction we cut off the two middle legs of queens in small experimental colonies. On average, queens produced 2.6 eggs in 48 hours 1 week before leg amputation ( $n = 21$ , median, quartiles: 2, 1, 3, range 0–8), 0.9 eggs in the 48 hours immediately after leg amputation (median, quartiles:  $0, 0, 1.5$ , range  $0-4$ ), and  $1.9$  eggs (median, quartiles:  $1, 1, 3$ ; range  $0-8$ ) in 48 hours 1 week after leg amputation (Friedman test, tie-corrected  $\chi^2 = 12.8$ ,  $P = 0.0017$ ; Bonferroni-corrected Wilcoxon tests, 1 week before vs. immediately after injury,  $P =$ 0.0022, 1 week before vs. 1 week after injury:  $P = 1$ , immediately after vs. 1 week after injury:  $P = 0.012$ ; Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1: Leg amputation and fecundity in *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queens. Schematic view of the surgical treatment resulting in the loss of both middle legs from the tibia (top left). Reproductive investment of the three queens that naturally lost one leg in the course of the experiment (top right). The number of eggs produced by individual queens over 48 hours one week before, in the 48 hours immediately after and one week after artificial leg amputation is given (bottom).

#### 3.3.2 Overview of gene expression differences 6 hours after leg amputation

We analyzed the early response to experimental leg amputation by comparing the transcriptomes of 14 injured and 14 control animals. As illustrated by the first principal components of the PCA with the 500 most variable genes, samples clustered in accordance with the treatment (Figure 3.2). We found 947 differently expressed genes (DEGs; adjusted *P* value  $\leq$  0.05; Appendix 7.2.3) corresponding to 5 % of all annotated genes and 9 % of all genes whose transcription could be confirmed in this study (average gene count  $\geq$  10). Plotting the number of DEGs for several FDR cutoffs showed that the treatment had caused considerable differences in transcript abundances even at more stringent significance levels (Figure 3.2, center).



Figure 3.2: PCA, DEG and MA plots of the RNA-Seq data. The PCA plot was generated with transformed (VST) and batch effect-corrected expression values of the top 500 genes with the highest variance; labels represent the center of masses of each treatment (c, control; i, injury). The bar graph in the middle shows the number of differently expressed genes at different *P* value (FDR) cutoffs; positive/negative log2 fold changes refer to genes upregulated/downregulated by injury. Red dots in the MA plot represent differently expressed genes with adjusted *P* value < 0.05.

*Hymenoptaecin*, an antimicrobial peptide specific to Hymenoptera, was identified to be the most variable gene across all samples (Table 3.1). It was consistently more highly expressed in all injured queens (Figure 3.3). Hierarchical clustering of the 20 top-ranked variable genes resulted in an almost complete separation of injured and control queens into two distinct clades. Five further genes with significant expression changes separated injured and control queens. Two immune genes (Cobs\_11839, homologous to *Tep2*, and *pale*) and *Dopamine transporter (DAT)* were upregulated, and two metabolic genes (Cobs\_17854, homologous to *Ugt86De,* and CG5618) were downregulated due to the injury.



- Figure 3.3: Heatmap based on hierarchical clustering of the 20 most variable genes. Expression values were transformed (VST), and corrected for the batch effect prior to the analysis. The colorcoding in each cell reflects the deviation from the gene's average across all samples.
- Table 3.1: List of top 20 genes with the highest expression variance across all samples. The order of genes corresponds to the ranking according to row variance.



#### 3.3.3 Functional enrichment of DEGs

Two thirds of all DEGs had reciprocal orthologous relationships to genes from *Drosophila melanogaster* (Figure 3.4 A). To obtain an overview of gene functions, we extracted the ortholog's annotations for the first Gene Ontology (GO) term level of the category biological process from DAVID. An essential part of the genes were involved in metabolism, development and the response to stimulus (Figure 3.4 B). The proportion of genes annotated for the term reproduction was twice as high in the set of downregulated (11.7 %) than in the set of upregulated DEGs (5.7 %).

Enrichment analysis of genes more highly expressed in injured queens yielded 78 significant GO terms which could be grouped to six annotation clusters and described by the following processes: immune and stress response, growth, response to external stimulus, programmed cell death/ gland development, aging and protein modification (Figure 3.4 C, Table 3.2). Furthermore, the number of genes associated with catabolism, proteolysis, alcohol metabolism, nicotinate and nicotinamide metabolism as well as the mTOR pathway in the list of upregulated genes was higher than expected by chance. Decreased gene expression due to wounding affected developmental processes, in particular the formation of germ cells, the nervous system and memory (Figure 3.4 C, Table 3.2). In addition, the treatment repressed metabolic processes involving carboxylic acids, amino acids, and other nitrogenous compounds, as for example nucleotides, as well as the biosynthesis of proteins. All significant categories can be found in Appendix 7.2.4.



Figure 3.4: Functional annotation of DEGs. A) Proportion of DEGs possessing an ortholog (reciprocal relationship) or a homolog (unidirectional relationship) in *D. melanogaster*. B) GO term annotation for the category biological process (first level). C) Number of DEGs in enriched clusters (AC) and single GO terms (GO) in all levels of the category biological process which can be found in Table 3.2. Count, number of DEGs in each category; Up, upregulated by injury; Down, downregulated by injury.



Table 3.2: Enriched annotation terms. Significant GO term annotation clusters (AC), single GO terms (GO) and KEGG pathways are listed with corresponding enrichment scores (ES) and *P* values respectively.

## 3.3.4 Differential expression of immune, developmental and metabolic genes

The functional enrichment and comparative analyses indicated that the injury led to an activation of the innate immune system. By means of our orthology search, we found 157 orthologs of *D. melanogaster* immune genes (De Gregorio *et al.* 2001; Bordenstein Lab 2011) and 343 orthologs of putative immune genes recently classified in *C. floridanus* (Gupta *et al.* 2015). The early response to injury comprised the elevated expression of genes associated with the Toll (*GNB1, PGRP-SA, Pellino, spirit, Serpin 27A, Serpin 42Da, Serpin 88Ea, Toll, Traf6*), IMD (*immune deficiency, croquemort, Nos, pirk, Relish, santa-maria,* homolog of *PGRP-LC*), Jak/Stat (*eater, Cdk4, Pdk1, Pi3K92E, Socs44A, Tep3*) and, to a lesser extent, the JNK pathway (*Diap1, kayak*; Figure 3.5 A.1). In total, 55 putative immune genes were upregulated and 22 downregulated, corresponding to 13 and 6 % respectively of all DEGs with orthologs in either *D. melanogaster*, *C. floridanus,* or both species (Figure 3.5 A.2).

Expression of many genes known to play a role in insect development (122 of 1218 annotated orthologs) was significantly changed after leg amputation. First, the enrichment test pointed to a reduced development of germ cells (*Actin 5C, Dystroglycan, boule, Hsp83, nudel, windbeutel*) and structures of the central nervous system *(brain tumor, Calreticulin, disembodied, Drop, Laminin A, Dsam1, Semaphorin-5c, short stop, twinstar)*, as well as a decline in learning or memory formation (for example *foraging, period, nord*; Figure 3.5 B). A part of the respective genes are pleiotropic and cannot be conclusively classified in one of the mentioned processes (*14- 3-3ε, alpha Spectrin, chickadee, hedgehog, minibrain, pumilio, staufen*). The few representatives that we identified among the upregulated genes were linked to immunity (*Pvr, zfh1, kayak, gastrulation-defective*) and cell growth (*InR, chico, Dopa decarboxylase*). Second, genes assigned to the category programmed cell death (*ALiX, bigmax, Cysteine proteinase-1, croquemort, Diap1, Drep4, Drice, Pdk1, Rab7, raw, santa-maria*) were overrepresented in the set of upregulated genes.

The significant enrichment for catabolic and anabolic processes, as for example nucleotide biosynthesis, suggested that metabolism was considerably affected already six hours after the amputation. Following Dionne *et. al* (2006), we specifically searched our data for gene expression changes in energy metabolism. We noticed a slight tendency towards downregulation of genes involved with the storage of energy in the form of glycogen and fat or triglycerides (*fabp, miday, scheggia*; Figure 3.5 C.1). However, the proportion of genes associated with the generation of energy, for example through glycolysis and beta-oxidation, was higher in the set of induced genes (*brummer*, CG3902, CG44252, *Hexokinase A, Hsl, l(1)G0156, Nc73EF, Rim2, whd*) matching the enrichment for catabolism.

On the contrary, we identified a repression of amino acid and nucleobase, nucleoside and nucleotide metabolism. In total, we found 23 genes associated with either one or both metabolic categories to have lower mRNA levels in injured *C. obscurior* queens (*Adenylosuccinate Lyase*, CG1315, CG33298, CG3714, CG3999, CG5421, CG6415, CG8745, CG9510, CG9674, *Eip55E, Glutamate dehydrogenase, Mtap, nahoda, Phosphogluconate dehydrogenase, PMCA, α-PheRS, pugilist, rudimentary, rudimentary-like, S-adenosylmethionine Synthetase* (*Sam-S*)*, Sarcosine dehydrogenase* (*Sardh*)*, vermilion*).

Recent work in *D. melanogaster* suggests associations between methionine metabolism and the regulation of metabolic homeostasis during inflammation and aging (Obata *et al.* 2014; Obata & Miura 2015). S-adenosyl-methionine (SAM) is an important methyl-group donor and enhanced SAM catabolism mediated by the enzyme *glycine N-methyltransferase* (*Gnmt*) has beneficial effects on lifespan. Interestingly, expression of *Gnmt* was not changed in *C. obscurior* queens ( $P = 0.7$ ), which contrasts with the widespread upregulation in immune challenged flies (Patterson *et al.* 2013; Short & Lazzaro 2013; Obata *et al.* 2014). Instead, we detected the downregulation of three other enzymes of the methionine and sarcosine metabolism (*Sam-S*, *Sardh*, *Ahcy13*; Figure 3.5 C.2).



Figure 3.5: Differential expression of immune, developmental and metabolic genes. A.1) Number of immune genes in *D. melanogaster* (Dmel) and the ant *C. floridanus* (Cflo) according to classifications in previous studies (Total) and orthologous genes found in *C. obscurior* (Orthologs). A.2) Overlap of immune gene sets and DEGs. B) Means of transformed (VST) and batch effect-corrected expression values of all DEGs involved in central nervous system (CNS) development, germ cell development, learning or memory, and programmed cell death (PCD). Several genes are annotated for multiple of these processes. C.1) Up- and downregulated metabolic genes in injured *C. obscurior* queens (Cobs), infected *D. melanogaster* males (Dmel m, Dionne *et al.* 2006), females (Dmel f , Short & Lazzaro 2013) and infected *C. floridanus* workers/larvae (Cflo, Gupta *et al.* 2015). C.2) Schematic overview of the methionine cycle with arrows indicating downregulated enzymes. Gly, glycine; Sar, sarcosine; SAM, S-adenosyl-methionine; SAH, S-adenosyl-homocysteine; Hcy, homocysteine; Met, methionine. Up, upregulated by injury; Down, downregulated by injury.

We found one suitable *D. melanogaster* study for a quantitative comparison of expression changes induced by sterile wounding (Patterson *et al.* 2013). Experiments on septic wounding are more common in insects and usually performed by the injection of bacteria (*Drosophila*: Short & Lazzaro 2013; Dionne *et al.* 2006; the carpenter ant *Camponotus floridanus*: Gupta *et al.* 2015).

Genes upregulated in injured *C. obscurior* queens significantly overlapped with the sets of upregulated genes in all four studies, with the highest conformity to the study in *C. floridanus* (Gupta *et al.* 2015; Table 3.3). GO term enrichment of shared genes showed that wounding and infection in ants and fruit flies consistently induced an immune response. We found much less congruence among the repressed genes. Expression of several genes contributing to protein targeting or amine metabolism was reduced in ant queens, but elevated in fruit flies. Only the data obtained from fly males 3 days after the treatment (Dionne *et al.* 2006) indicated a repression of specific metabolic processes involving carboxylic acids and other amines, matching our results. The complete comparative gene matrices can be accessed in Dryad (doi:10.5061/dryad.d6bc7).





## 3.4 Discussion

Lifespan and offspring number are positively associated in *Cardiocondyla* ant queens (Heinze & Schrempf 2012; Heinze *et al.* 2013). This challenges the concept of an optimal resource allocation between different energy-demanding processes, in particular reproduction and self-maintenance (Reznick 1985). Though the fecundity/longevity trade-off is a central tenet of life history theory, several recent studies show that the costs of reproduction may be difficult to document when individuals live in a superoptimal environment or differ in the availability or acquisition rate of resources (e. g., Reznick *et al.* 2000). To reveal the costs of reproduction in *C. obscurior* queens, we increased immunity costs by injury and measured the early effect of injury on egglaying rate and genome-wide gene expression. Our results clearly show that the activation of immune and wound healing mechanisms is accompanied by the suppression of competing processes including reproduction and changes in metabolism, which on the organismic level are reflected in a transient decreased reproductive performance. We outline the transcriptomic signatures of a fecundity/immunity tradeoff in the following sections. In addition, we discuss indications for a repression of learning ability and metabolism.

#### 3.4.1 Upregulation of the wound healing and immune response

Insects have open circulatory systems and therefore must quickly stop the loss of hemolymph and the invasion of pathogens caused by epithelial injuries (Theopold *et al.* 2004). The response to tissue damage comprises the sealing of wounds by clotting, regeneration of the epithelium and activation of the immune system (Razzell *et al.* 2011). Six hours after leg amputation, we discovered that many genes involved in the latter two events were upregulated.

Epithelial tissue repair in adult *Drosophila* is characterized by the polyploidization and growth of healthy epithelial cells, and the subsequent fusion of these cells to giant syncytia to close the wound (Rämet *et al.* 2002; Razzell *et al.* 2011; Losick *et al.* 2013). The JNK pathway activator *kayak* controls the initiation of the cell shape change in adult *D. melanogaster* (Rämet *et al.* 2002) and had significant higher expression in injured than in control queens. The significant enrichment for processes contributing to cell growth, including insulin receptor and mTOR signaling, in the set of upregulated DEGs, is consistent with an early stage of re-epithelialization. Furthermore, the migration of cells or cell protrusions might have been facilitated by the downregulation of genes involved in cell adhesion and the maintenance of location.

By screening the *C. obscurior* genome for genes with immune-related functions in other insects, we detected the upregulation of the conserved key immune pathways Toll, Imd, JAK/STAT, and JNK (Viljakainen 2015) upon injury. Sterile laser wounding of *D. melanogaster* embryos, which does not breach the vitelline membrane, demonstrated that a part of the insect innate immune repertoire is activated in the absence of microbes (Stramer *et al.* 2008). Bacteria from the surface of the animal might have entered the wound in our experiment, as well as in similar manipulations (Patterson *et al.* 2013; Johnston & Rolff 2013), but it is possible that the pathogen response was partially induced by endogenous signals to reduce the risk of future infection (Razzell *et al.* 2011).

Among upregulated genes, we found a significant enrichment in the category programmed cell death (PCD). Corresponding genes with elevated transcript levels might have mediated PCD or apoptosis of damaged cells and promoted regeneration (Fuchs & Steller 2011).

## 3.4.2 Competing processes: reproduction and learning

Developmental processes apart from the above-mentioned, in particular germ cell development, were exclusively overrepresented in the set of downregulated genes. This matches the observation that experimental leg amputation led to a transient decline of egg-laying rates. *C. obscurior* queens lay eggs until the end of their lives (Heinze &

Schrempf 2012) and the expression of genes associated with reproduction increases with age (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015). The downregulation of genes involved in oocyte development including axis specification clearly demonstrates that nutrients and energy are redistributed away from reproductive systems to vitally important metabolic processes, indicating the cost of reproduction (Lochmiller & Deerenberg 2000).

In addition, several genes associated with central nervous system and brain development were downregulated in injured queens. Whereas the formation of tissues and organs usually terminates at the pupal stage in insects, adult neurogenesis has been found in the mushroom body of several insect species (Corley & Lavine 2006) and only recently in *D. melanogaster* optic lobes (Fernández-Hernández *et al.* 2013). Plasticity in the visual and olfactory systems and higher brain regions is documented for adult insects and correlates with caste-dependent behavioral changes in Hymenoptera (Julian & Gronenberg 2002; Groh & Meinertzhagen 2010). The downregulation of several genes known to be involved in memory foundation in *Drosophila* (e. g., Figure 3.5 B) suggests a diminished learning ability of ant queens in response to injury. Challenging the immune system of honeybees or bumblebees indeed reduces the ability for associative learning (Mallon *et al.* 2003; Riddell & Mallon 2006; Alghamdi *et al.* 2008), but data for the learning capability of ant queens are not available.

## 3.4.3 Metabolic changes

Our data shows that metabolism was strongly affected by the treatment. Which changes are expected? Infection (Dionne *et al.* 2006; Chambers *et al.* 2012) and sterile inflammation (Obata *et al.* 2014) may lead to an increase in metabolic rate (Martin *et al.* 2003; Ardia *et al.* 2012) followed by a lasting loss of fat and glycogen, generally referred to as wasting of body tissue (Beisel 1977).

The transcriptome data of queens shows signs of elevated catabolic and energygenerating activities. The accelerated breakdown of lipids, carbohydrates and proteins might be necessary to supply the fuel for macrophages and the synthesis of acute-phase inflammatory proteins like antimicrobial peptides (Lochmiller & Deerenberg 2000). The closure of the relatively large wounds caused by leg amputation probably claims additional resources.

We did not find indications for an excessive depletion of fat and carbohydrate stores that would be comparable to the long lasting changes observed in male fruit flies (Dionne *et al.* 2006) and female *Tenebrio molitor* beetles (Johnston *et al.* 2014). Instead, the repression of amino acid and nitrogen compound metabolism in injured queens points to a lack of certain amino acids and a negative nitrogen balance, which are commonly observed consequences of infection in vertebrates (Beisel 1977; Le Floc'h *et al.* 2004). In contrast, amino acid metabolism was upregulated in immune challenged female flies (Patterson *et al.* 2013). This matches the general inconsistency of repressed processes we found across different species and treatments with possibly varying impacts (see Table 3.3).

## Conclusion

Our study gives molecular evidence that the deployment of immune and wound healing mechanisms in ant queens requires the reduction of reproductive and other somatic systems. This demonstrates that eusocial organisms have to compensate the elevated need for energy and nutrients on the level of the individual and strongly suggests that queens are not exempted from the physiological costs of reproduction. How the exceptional longevity of queens is facilitated despite these costs is an open question. This experiment, as well as our previous genome-wide gene expression analysis of young and aged *C. obscurior* queens (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015), indicates a repression of metabolism that is undetectable in comparable data sets of female reproductives of the solitary model *D. melanogaster*. This could be an adaptive strategy to cope with the burden of continuous and extensive egg production and other highly energy-demanding challenges, as inflammation.

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## Data accessibility

Raw sequencing data have been deposited in SRA under the BioProject accession number PRJNA309926 (SRP069794). Fecundity data of queens from both experiments, RNA-Seq counts and results, a script for the RNA-Seq analysis in R and the crossspecies comparison matrix have been uploaded to Dryad doi:10.5061/dryad.d6bc7.

## Author contributions

K.v.W. and J.H. designed the study; K.v.W prepared the RNA-Seq experiment, analyzed the sequencing data and drafted the manuscript; H.L. conducted RNA extractions and library preparation; J.H. performed the experiment on egg-laying rates

and drafted the corresponding part of the manuscript; all authors carefully revised the manuscript.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Increased fitness in mated ant queens depends on the expression of genes associated with neural and reproductive activity\***

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Section of the head of a 6-month-old mated queen. Photograph provided by Jürgen Heinze.

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## Abstract

Mating can be harmful to female insects and shorten their lifespans. This is a result of the male's attempt to prevent the female from remating and maximize its short-term fecundity. However, if females and males form stable pairs over their whole lifetime, as it is the case in eusocial insects (ants, bees, wasps, termites), both partners benefit from female longevity and are expected to cooperate. Consistent with this prediction, mating prolongs the life of *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queens, and this effect is influenced by the magnitude of female-male coevolution and the phenotype of the male. In this study, we find that queens paired with a wingless fighter male from the same colony have a higher survival advantage over virgin queens than queens paired with a nest-mate winged male. Our transcriptome analysis shows that the higher fitness of queens mated with the fighter male morph is associated with enhanced oogenesis, neurogenesis and neurotransmitter transport revealing reproductive and neural activity as important determinants of queen longevity.

*Keywords*: mating, sexual cooperation, queen, fecundity, transcriptome, RNA-Seq

## 4.1 Introduction

Females and males of sexually reproducing organisms have evolved elaborate strategies to manipulate the behavior and physiology of their mates for their own benefit. A wellknown example are the seminal fluid proteins of insect males, which are produced in the accessory glands and may have a striking impact on female biology (Chen *et al.* 1988; Herndon & Wolfner 1995; Wolfner 1997). Surprisingly, seminal fluid can be harmful to the female and shorten her lifespan (Chapman *et al.* 1995). What seems to be a paradox is the outcome of the male's attempts to prevent the female from remating, eliminate competitive sperm, and boost the female's investment into production of the male's progeny. The costs of mating in *Drosophila melanogaster* females were shown to be attributed to the transfer of toxic substances (Lung *et al.* 2002) and pheromones, which interfere with the endocrine system (Rice 2000; Wigby & Chapman 2005). Thus, malemale competition indirectly gives rise to a conflict between the sexes when females repeatedly mate with different males (Arnqvist & Nilsson 2000; Johnstone & Keller 2000; Rice 2000; Snook 2001).

In contrast, when females form a lifelong association with only a single male, both partners benefit from maximizing female longevity. Stable pair formation seems to be rare in solitary species, but is distinctive of eusocial insects, such as ants, bees and termites. The queens of social Hymenoptera mate with one or few males in a short period of time early in their lives (Hughes *et al.* 2008). The rearing of sexual offspring begins only after an ergonomic phase during which sterile workers are produced. Therefore, males do not benefit from trying to increase the queen's short-term reproductive efforts at a cost to its longevity and lifetime reproductive success (Boomsma *et al.* 2005). In the ant species *Cardiocondyla obscurior*, mating with both fertile and sterile males even increased the lifespan of queens (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). Nevertheless, sperm competition, as in honeybees and leafcutter ants (Boer *et al.* 2008; 2009; 2010; Baer 2014), may lead to collateral damage in the queen.

The utilization of harmful substances in eusocial insects might depend on the male's strategy to monopolize paternity. A male morph, which is relatively long-lived among social Hymenoptera (Heinze & Schrempf 2008), occurs in the genus *Cardiocondyla* (Kugler 1983). The wingless males are territorial and possess sabreshaped mandibles in some species in order to fight to death. In *C. obscurior*, one ergatoid (worker-like) male eliminates all his rivals and thus acquires absolute control over all virgin queens in the colony (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Stuart *et al.* 1987; Schrempf *et al.* 2007). Even though *C. obscurior* queens have been observed to mate multiply (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987), the likelihood of encountering another wingless male is very low. Occasionally, colonies also produce peaceful winged males, which in morphology and behavior resemble males from other ants and which cannot rely on their predominance in the nest (Cremer & Heinze 2003; Schrempf *et al.* 2007). They possibly increase their fitness by investing more into postcopulatory reproductive tactics, such as seminal fluids, consistent with their larger accessory glands (Schrempf & Heinze 2008). More than 50 accessory gland proteins, which are not yet completely

identified, differ in their relative quantities between winged and ergatoid males (Fuessl *et al.* 2014). The transfer of semen with similar amounts of sperm (Schrempf *et al.* 2007), but varying compositions of accompanying substances, might explain why mating with a winged male has a different effect on queen survival than mating with a wingless male (Schrempf & Heinze 2008).

To extend our knowledge about proximate causes leading to longevity differences between queens mated with an ergatoid male, queens mated with a winged male, and virgin queens, we monitored survival and egg-laying rates of all three groups and compared their whole body transcriptomes at the age of 6 months. To avoid any confounding effects of varying genetic relatedness among mates (Schrempf *et al.* 2015), we exclusively used queens produced in one stock colony and paired them with a male from the same colony. Our results show that the survival advantage of queens, which were mated with an ergatoid male from the same nest, over queens of the other two treatments, is reflected in profound gene expression differences.

## 4.2 Materials and methods

#### 4.2.1 The study organism and experimental design

*Cardiocondyla obscurior* is a tramp ant, which was globally transferred to subtropical regions through human activities (Heinze *et al.* 2006). Colonies found in the field in Japan and Brazil are usually small and contain on average 20 to 30 workers, several reproductive queens, and a single wingless male (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Heinze & Delabie 2005). Wingless fighter males, also referred to as ergatoid males, monopolize mating with any newly produced queen by killing younger rival males reared in the colony (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Stuart *et al.* 1987). In the lab, queens and ergatoid males are produced year-round, whereas winged disperser males only develop under specific stressful conditions, for example the decrease of colony size and temperature (Cremer & Heinze 2003).

We used laboratory colonies, which were derived from the genome reference stock colony, collected in Bahia, Brazil in 2009 (Schrader *et al.* 2014) and kept under controlled conditions in incubators (12h 28°C light/12h 24°C dark). Few weeks after splitting half of the colonies into smaller fragments and moving them to room temperature in summer 2013, we found emerging winged disperser males besides pupae of ergatoid males in the nests. We established 200 experimental colonies from these stocks by transferring one queen pupae, 20 workers and ten larvae into a Petri dish with plaster. We assigned the queens to one of the three treatments: mated with an ergatoid male (MQE), mated with a winged male (MQW), virgin (VQ). One ergatoid male (EM) pupa was added to the MQE colonies and one winged male (WM) pupa to the MQW colonies, whereas VQ were reared without male.

The experimental colonies were kept under standard conditions in incubators (as described above) and fed three times per week with chopped cockroaches and diluted honey ad libitum. All colonies were scanned once per week and additionally developing male and queen pupae were removed. Furthermore, the number of workers and larvae was standardized by adding or removing individuals to 20 workers and 10 larvae per colony. From three months after eclosing, all eggs in the nest where counted as part of the weekly scan. Mated queens, which did not produce diploid offspring (worker or queen pupae) as well as virgin queens, which produced diploid offspring were excluded from subsequent analyses. Individuals of all treatments were sampled after 24 weeks, corresponding to the age when 50% of queens mated with a wingless male had died in a previous experiment (Schrempf & Heinze 2008). All queens were individually snapfrozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C until further processing.

#### 4.2.2 Analysis of phenotypic data

We analyzed survival of queens beyond the age of four weeks by fitting a Cox proportional hazards regression model with the package 'survival' version 2.38-1 (Therneau 2015) in R version 3.2.1 (R Core Team 2014). We excluded queens, which had died in the first four weeks, as it was done in all previous studies on *C. obscurior* queen survival (MQE:  $n = 47$ , MQW:  $n = 52$ , VQ:  $n = 40$ ). Survival of corresponding male mating partners was similarly evaluated by including individuals, which outlived the queen, as censored (EM:  $n = 44$ , WM:  $n = 52$ ). Mortality curves were fitted by means of the Gompertz model in 'flexsurv' version 0.6 (Royston & Parmar 2002). The y-intercept in the mortality curve represents the background (age-independent) mortality and the slope represents the age-dependent acceleration of the mortality rate indicating senescence.

Furthermore, we compared survival of the three queen types to data obtained in previous *C. obscurior* longevity studies (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; Schrempf & Heinze 2008; Heinze & Schrempf 2012; Schrempf *et al.* 2015) and to lifespans of queens from a former RNA-Seq experiment (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015). Since the origin of the mate can have profound effects on longevity in *C. obscurior* queens (Schrempf *et al.* 2015), we only considered lifespans of queens, which were collected in Brazil and mated with a male from the same sample site. Individuals, which lived longer than 6 months, were included as censored data.

The number of eggs laid per week represents the queen's reproductive activity. As most queens were sampled before their natural death, we could not determine their lifetime reproductive investment. Instead, we calculated the mean number of eggs laid in each week from the age of 12 to 23 weeks (MQE:  $n = 30$ , MQW:  $n = 19$ , VQ:  $n =$ 15). To reveal putative differences in fecundity close before natural death, we determined age-specific egg-laying rates of queens, which had died during the experiment and calculated the means over week 12 to week 1 before death (MOE:  $n =$ 7-12, MQW:  $n = 10-22$ , VQ:  $n = 18-25$ ). We compared these values among the three treatments by non-parametric tests with Bonferroni correction in R.

#### 4.2.3 Sequencing and RNA-Seq analysis

Total RNA of individual queens was extracted following the RNeasy Plus Micro Kit protocol (QIAGEN) as described before (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015). Following DNase treatment, the pure RNA was amplified and converted into cDNA (NuGEN Ovation RNA-Seq System V2). We sequenced seven samples per treatment on an Illumina HiSeq1000 platform. Eight barcodes were used for multiplexing (NuGEN Rapid DR Multiplex System).

We generated on average 44 million 75 bp single reads per sample. After trimming adapter sequences with Cutadapt version 1.7.1 (Martin 2011), the reads were mapped against the *C. obscurior* reference genome Cobs1.4 (Schrader *et al.* 2014) using Bowtie2 version 2.2.3 (Langmead & Salzberg 2012) and TopHat version 2.0.13 (Trapnell *et al.* 2009; see mapping statistics in Appendix 7.3.1). Subsequently, reads mapping to each gene model were counted with HTSeq-count version 0.6.1 (Anders *et al.* 2015). We performed normalization of raw counts, variance-stabilizing transformation (VST) and subsequent sample clustering by means of the packages 'DESeq2' version 1.6.3 (Love *et al.* 2014) and Vegan version 2.2-1 (Oksanen *et al.* 2015). By means of the plot of the first two principal components, we identified a batch effect caused by the distribution of biological samples on eight different lanes of the flow cell (Appendix 7.3.2). As recommended for linear models (Leek *et al.* 2010), we could account for this batch effect by incorporating lane as a second variable in addition to treatment in the generalized linear model implemented in DESeq2. Then we contrasted all three treatments and adjusted the *P* values for multiple testing (Benjamini & Hochberg 1995). We used Gene Set Enrichment Analysis (GSEA; Subramanian *et al.* 2005) to test if the genes significantly up- or downregulated in VQ relative to MQE were similarly rank-ordered by fold change in the contrasts VQ vs. MQW and MQW vs. MQE. The area-proportional Venn diagram was drawn with EulerAPE (Micallef & Rodgers 2014). For downstream visualization, we corrected the counts for the lane effect by applying the ComBat function of the package 'SVA' version 3.12.0 (Leek *et al.* 2012).

## 4.2.4 Gene annotation and functional enrichment

We determined *Drosophila melanogaster* and *Apis mellifera* orthologs by a reciprocal protein blast as described before (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015). The closest homolog of the genes remaining without ortholog was defined as the best hit of the one-way protein blast on condition that the  $e$  value was smaller than  $10^{-5}$ . Gene names were adopted from *D. melanogaster*. We uploaded all genes with reciprocal orthologous relationships to fly genes as background into DAVID (Huang *et al.* 2009) and tested for a functional enrichment for Gene Ontology terms (Ashburner *et al.* 2000) in the sets of differentially expressed genes (DEGs) relative to the background.

To find all putative neurotransmitter transporters of the SLC6 subfamily

encoded in the *C. obscurior* genome, we screened the list of *D. melanogaster* orthologs and homologs for the 21 members identified by Thimgan *et al.* (2006). Furthermore, we were interested in the most variable genes in the whole data set and calculated expression variances across all samples in R. Hierarchical clustering of 500 most variable genes was performed with 'pheatmap' version 1.0.2 (Kolde 2015). Finally, we determined the overlap with previous transcriptomic comparisons of 18-week-old mated and virgin *C. obscurior* queens (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015) and young mated and virgin *A. mellifera* queens (Kocher *et al.* 2008; 2010; Manfredini *et al.* 2015) on the level of shared orthologous DEGs.

## 4.3 Results

#### 4.3.1 Survival of queens and males

Mating status had a significant effect on survival of queens until they were killed at the age of 24 weeks (Cox proportional hazards model, logrank-test:  $P = 0.007$ ; Kaplan Meier estimates: MQE: 0.7, MQW: 0.5, VQ: 0.4; Figure 4.1). Pairwise comparisons revealed that MQE had a significant lower risk to die than VQ, whereas the difference between MQE and MQW was only marginally significant (Cox proportional hazards model, pairwise logrank-tests with FDR-correction:  $MOE-VO$ :  $P = 0.005$ ,  $MOE-MOW$ :  $P = 0.08$ , MQW-VQ:  $P = 0.2$ ). Fitted Gompertz curves confirmed that age-independent mortality was highest in VQ, whereas MQW showed the highest age-dependent parameter (Gompertz intercept: MQE: 0.002, MQW: 0.004, VQ: 0.008; slope: MQE: 0.12, MQW: 0.13, VQ: 0.11).

Singly mated ergatoid males lived longer than singly mated winged males (Cox proportional hazards model, logrank-test: *P* = 2.2e-16; Kaplan Meier estimates: EM: 0.1, WM: 0.0; median lifespans: EM: 19 weeks (estimated from censored data), WM: 4 weeks). Background mortality of both male morphs exceeded the values of queens, whereas the age-dependent parameter was only higher in the winged phenotype (Gompertz intercept: EM: 0.01, WM: 0.1; slope: EM: 0.13, WM: 0.17).



Figure 4.1: Survival and mortality of all queen and male types until the age of 24 weeks. Markings represent censored individuals. MQE, queens mated with ergatoid (wingless) male; EM, ergatoid male; MQW, queens mated with winged male; WM, winged male; VQ, virgin queen.

#### 4.3.2 Fecundity of sampled and dead queens

Egg-laying rates of surviving queens differed significantly among groups (Kruskal-Wallis test:  $P = 8.166e-06$ ; Figure 4.2). Pairwise tests revealed differences between virgin and both types of mated queens, but not between the two mating types (pairwise Wilcoxon rank sum tests with Bonferroni correction: MQE-VQ: *P* = 0.0001, MQW-VQ: *P* = 0.0001, MQE-MQW: *P* = 1; median, quartiles, range: MQE: 16.9, 16.3, 17.5, 16.2–19.2, MQW: 17.6, 16.0, 18.3, 15.1–19.7, VQ: 4.5, 4.2, 5.6, 3.4–6.3). The same held true when only sequenced queens were taken into account  $(n = 21)$ .

In contrast to the sampled queens, we could compare the queens, which had died before sampling with respect to their lifetime reproductive investment (Figure 4.2). This approach revealed that MQW laid significantly fewer eggs in the twelve weeks before death than MQE (pairwise Wilcoxon rank sum tests with Bonferroni correction: MQE-VQ: *P* = 0.0001, MQW-VQ: *P* = 0.0001, MQE-MQW: *P* = 0.001; median, quartiles, range: MQE: 15.6, 14.8, 16.2, 13.4–14.8, MQW: 12.7, 11.7, 13.8, 9.9–14.5, VQ: 3.9, 3.6, 4.4, 3.0–5.5).



Figure 4.2: Fecundity of queens. Distribution of weekly egg counts for queens which survived until the age of 24 weeks (top left), queens which were sequenced (top middle) and queens which died before the age of 24 weeks (top right); egg counts refer to means per week from week 12 to week 23 after eclosing (across all replicates per treatment). Egg counts of dead queens for each of the twelve weeks before death illustrate the terminal investment phase (bottom); treatments appear in the following order at each time point: MQE, MQW, VQ.

## 4.3.3 Overview of gene expression differences between MQE, MQW and VQ

We analyzed the effect of mating with alternative male morphs on gene expression by contrasting the whole body transcriptomes of MQE, MQW and VQ ( $n = 7, 7, 7$ ). Multivariate analyses of gene counts resulted in a separation of all samples into three clusters, which were in accordance with the three treatments (hierarchical clustering; Figure 4.3, top), but also indicated a considerable overlap of MQW with MQE and VQ (principal component analysis; Figure 4.3, middle).

We found 293 differentially expressed genes (DEGs) between VQ and MQE (adjusted  $P$ -value  $\leq$  0.05; Appendix 7.3.3). MQW showed few DEGs to both other queen types at a FDR of 5 %. MQW and VQ differed in eleven, whereas MQW and MQE differed in only two genes. We applied Gene Set Enrichment Analysis (GSEA) to test if all genes up- or downregulated in VQ compared to MQE were similarly rankordered by fold change in both other contrasts VQ vs. MQW and MQW vs. MQE. Indeed, the 136 genes with higher expression in VQ than in MQE were significantly overrepresented at the top of both pre-ranked gene lists implying that they had mainly lower expression values in VQ than in MQW and higher values in MQW than in MQE (Normalized Enrichment Score, NES, and FDR: VQ vs. MQW: 8.7, *P* < 0.001, MQW vs. MQE:  $9.8$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; Appendix 7.3.4). Similarly, 157 genes with higher expression in MQE were significantly overrepresented at the bottom of both lists (NES and FDR: VQ vs. MQW: -11.2, *P* < 0.001, MQW vs. MQE: -9.2, *P* < 0.001).


Figure 4.3: Clustering of all samples and Venn diagram of DEGs. Normalized counts were transformed (VST) and corrected for the batch effect prior to principal component analysis (top) and hierarchical clustering (middle); the top 500 genes with the highest variance were analyzed. The Venn diagram illustrates the overlap of all three pairwise comparisons; upregulated by mating refers to a higher expression in MQE and MQW than VQ, as well as upregulation in MQW compared to MQE.

#### 4.3.4 Expression changes specific to treatments and single contrasts

By determining the overlap of all three pairwise comparisons, we could isolate gene expression changes associated with a certain queen type (MQE, MQW, VQ) from those specific to a single contrast (Figure 4.3, bottom).

Seven genes were upregulated in both MQE and MQW compared to VQ (Table 4.1). These mating-associated genes were enriched for 42 GO terms related to cell and neuron development (Table 4.2, Appendix 7.3.5). The MQW treatment was associated with the upregulation of the neurotransmitter transporter CG5549, whereas no gene was consistently associated with the MQE treatment.

The 150 genes exclusively upregulated in MQE compared to VQ were enriched for 90 GO categories, which could be grouped to five annotation clusters (Table 4.2, Appendix 7.3.5). A considerable number of DEGs that contributed to the enrichment for neurogenesis, neurotransmitter transport and/or oogenesis (*alpha-Spec, AP-1-2beta, Apc, ash1, asteroid, bazooka, bruchpilot, Chc, Chd1, coracle, Dap160, Disabled, gbb, Hsp83, Khc, klarsicht, l(2)gl, Liprin-alpha, Moesin, nudC, off-track, Rab3-GEF, still life, trio*) had maximum expression levels in MQE, minimum levels in VQ, and intermediate levels in MQW (Figure 4.4). The neurotransmitter transporter CG5549 and *fend,* which is a gene involved in axon growth of motor neurons, were exceptionally most highly expressed in MQW.

The 136 genes downregulated in MQE showed a functional enrichment in only 8 GO categories, which were related to the biosynthesis of macromolecules and apoptosis (Table 4.2, Appendix 7.3.5).

Table 4.1: List of the number of expression changes associated with the three queen treatments (MQE, MQW, VQ) and those that are specific to each of the three comparisons (VQ-MQE, VQ-MQW, MQW-MQE). o, ortholog; h, homolog.



Table 4.2: Functional enrichment of treatment- and contrast-specific DEGs. Significant GO terms for biological processes were clustered; one representative term of each cluster is shown including statistics. dev., development.





## Figure 4.4: Mean expression of all DEGs, which are involved in neurogenesis, the transport of neurotransmitters (NT) and oogenesis, across all three treatments. VST and batch-effect correction were applied to normalized counts prior to plotting. A part of the DEGs are involved in several of the three processes.

#### 4.3.5 Differential expression of SLC6 transporters

Two genes with elevated transcript levels in MQW belong to the SLC6 family of neurotransmitter transporters (Figure 4.5). CG5549 is a glycine transporter and the gene homologous to CG15279 is a putative member of a novel subfamily described as insect amino acid transporters (Thimgan *et al.* 2006) or nutrient amino acid transporters (NATs; Boudko *et al.* 2005). We detected nine further expressed homologs of the 21 *Drosophila melanogaster* SLC6 transporters in the *Cardiocondyla obscurior* genome (mean number of counts  $> 10$ , Table 4.3). Five of all eleven representatives of this group differed in expression between mated and virgin insect females in previous transcriptomic studies.

Table 4.3: Homologs of SLC6 transporters and their mating-associated expression patterns. Classification and characterization of *Drosophila melanogaster* homologs refers to (2006). Information about functions was provided in three references: (1) (2006), (2) (2015), (3) (2014). The following transcriptomic data sets were screened for mating-associated expression changes in *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queens (4), and corresponding orthologs in *Apis mellifera* queens (5,7) and *D. melanogaster* females (6): (4) (2015), (5) (2015), (6) (2004), (7) (2010). o, ortholog; h, homolog, AA, amino acid; NT, neurotransmitter; MT, malphigian tubules; M, mated; S, sham-mated; V, virgin.





**SLC6 transporters**

Figure 4.5: Expression of neurotransmitter transporters of the SLC6 family across all treatments. Mean transcript levels of two genes significantly upregulated in MQW (FDR < 0.05) are shown in the left panel; all other genes in the right panel. Error bars represent standard errors of VSTand batch-corrected counts. Gene names were adopted from *D. melanogaster* orthologs and homologs (h).

#### 4.3.6 Gene expression variability among queens independent of mating status

The gene Cobs\_10979, which is orthologous to GB55450 in *Apis mellifera*, but has no homolog in *D. melanogaster*, showed the highest variance across all 21 queens. Hierarchical clustering of the 500 most variable genes resulted in a clear separation of a clade consisting of Cobs\_10979 and eight further covarying genes (Appendix 7.3.6). This group contained genes which are thought to be involved in the formation of the egg shell (*Cp7Fb*, *Es2*, *yellow-g* and *yellow-g2*). Their expression was not correlated with the mating or reproductive status (Table 4.4, Figure 4.6). Analysis of genome-wide counts from a previous comparison of mated and virgin *C. obscurior* queens (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015) confirmed their high variability and coexpression (Appendix 7.3.7).

Table 4.4: List of candidate genes with highly varying expression that is independent of mating status. For genes, which do not have a homolog in *D. melanogaster*, the honeybee ortholog is indicated (bo). Gene counts were normalized for library size and arithmetically averaged. The variability rank V refers to the position in the list of all genes rank-ordered according to their variance. V (2015) presents the variability rank in a previous transcriptomic comparison of mated and virgin *C. obscurior* queens (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015).





Figure 4.6: Hierarchical clustering of nine candidate genes showing a similar varying expression pattern across all queens independent of mating status. Normalized counts were transformed (VST), corrected for the batch effect and subtracted by the gene's mean expression value prior to clustering.

#### 4.3.7 Comparison with previous transcriptomic studies

We sequenced the whole body transcriptome of *C. obscurior* queens at a higher depth than in a former RNA-Seq study (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015). As expected, an increase in the size of the sequencing library resulted in a considerable increase in the number of detected genes (count  $\geq 1$ ; Appendix 7.3.8). However, we noticed that the detection of new genes approximated a plateau in the larger, recent libraries suggesting saturation. The current study revealed eight times more DEGs between MQE and VQ than before. Out of the 37 previously discovered DEGs, only the transcription factor *Pif1A* exhibited altered expression levels. Finally, we compared the gene expression differences between MQE and VQ to the outcomes of transcriptomic comparisons of young mated

and virgin *A. mellifera* queens (Kocher *et al.* 2008; 2010; Manfredini *et al.* 2015). Consistent with the previous *C. obscurior* study, we did not find a significant overlap with these honeybee studies on the level of orthologous genes. The number of common genes can be found in Appendix 7.3.9.

#### 4.3.8 Cross-study comparison of queen survival

We compared the survival of queens of all three mating types (MQE, MQW, VQ) across this and four other longevity studies by fitting a Cox proportional hazards model with the variables 'mating type' and 'study'. Mating type had a significant effect on survival across studies ( $P = 0.0003$ ), whereas the factor 'study' did not significantly affect survival until the age of 24 weeks  $(P = 0.2$ ; Appendix 7.3.10 and 7.3.11). The reanalysis of a previous comparison of MQE and MQW lifespans confirmed that MQW had lived significantly longer than MQE as reported in the corresponding publication (Schrempf & Heinze 2008), but the difference was above the significance level when queens, which lived longer than 24 weeks, were censored (logrank-test:  $P = 0.09$ ).

We also analyzed survival until the age of 18 weeks to enable a comparison with a former RNA-Seq study in which queens were sampled at this time point (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015). Differences between mating types turned out to be consistent with the analysis until 24 weeks (Cox proportional hazards model, pairwise logrank-tests with FDR-correction: MQE-VQ: *P* = 0.01, MQE-MQW: *P* = 0.06, MQW-VQ: *P* = 0.3). In the former transcriptomic experiment, mated queens did not live significantly longer than virgin queens (logrank-test:  $P = 0.4$ ). Importantly, the sample size of mated queens was considerably lower than in this study (17 vs. 47, Appendix 7.3.10).

## 4.4 Discussion

#### 4.4.1 Overview of survival and gene expression differences

By comparing the transcriptomic profiles of both mated queen types (MQE, MQW) with those of virgin queens (VQ) we could determine the overlap and dissimilarity of genes affected by mating with one of the two male morphs.

The overall pattern of gene expression differences matched the extent of survival differences between MQE, MQW and VQ. Mating with a long-lived ergatoid male prolonged the lifespan of queens and significantly influenced the expression of 293 genes. Mating with a short-lived winged male had a similar positive effect on survival until the age of three months, but then mortality increased drastically resulting in survival rates more similar to VQ, and a relatively low number of DEGs to both other treatments. Two findings indicate that mating with one or the other male type affects mainly the same genes. First, most of genes upregulated in MQW relative to VQ (seven out of eleven) were upregulated in both mated queen types. Second, gene set enrichment analysis and the individual evaluation of genes involved in oogenesis and neurogenesis revealed that MQW had intermediate transcript levels of genes differently expressed between MQE and VQ. Significant changes in the majority of those genes might have not been detected on the level of the whole body transcriptome because differences in small tissues of a composite structure can be washed out by signals from larger tissues (Johnson *et al.* 2013).

#### 4.4.2 Survival advantage is associated with neurogenesis and oogenesis

Genes involved in axonogenesis were overrepresented in the set of genes with higher expression in both mating treatments. Furthermore, we found enrichments for oogenesis, neurogenesis and neurotransmitter secretion/transport in genes with significant higher expression in MQE and intermediate transcript levels in MQW.

MQE did not lay more eggs than MQW in the three months before sequencing, but the analysis of the terminal investment phase of dead queens revealed a higher fecundity of MQE. The absence of a difference in surviving queens possibly resulted from the advanced physiological age of MQW because egg-laying rates increase with age in *C. obscurior* (Heinze & Schrempf 2012). Higher reproductive activity in longerlived queens contradicts the commonly observed fecundity/longevity trade-off, but is in agreement with recent studies indicating that these traits are positively correlated in *Cardiocondyla* ants (Heinze & Schrempf 2012; Heinze *et al.* 2013; Kramer *et al.* 2015; Rueppell *et al.* 2015).

Enhanced neuron development in mated queens is surprising, as ant queens were shown to lose brain volume after the mating flight and are generally expected to decrease nonessential costly neuronal tissue, for example of the visual system, to save energy (Julian & Gronenberg 2002). Adult neurogenesis in Hymenoptera is rare (Fahrbach *et al.* 1995b; Gronenberg *et al.* 1996). Therefore, age- and task-related volume changes, which have been found within he mushroom bodies of ants, bees and wasps (Fahrbach *et al.* 1995a; Gronenberg *et al.* 1996; Gronenberg & Liebig 1999; Molina & O'Donnell 2007), more likely arise through the growth of cell processes, i. e. axons and dendrites (Farris *et al.* 2001), and the plasticity of synaptic complexes (Groh *et al.* 2006). Mature honeybee queens - in contrast to virgin queens - rely more on olfactory than on visual cues, leading to a continuous increase of the corresponding olfactory-input region in the mushroom bodies with age (Groh *et al.* 2006). Environmental stimuli, especially those resulting from social interactions with conspecifics, may have an influence on the growth of neural structures in social insects, but empirical data on queens is not available.

A link between neurotransmitter activity and the drastic behavioral and physiological changes triggered through mating in social insect queens has been established by several studies (Harano *et al.* 2005; 2008; Aonuma & Watanabe 2012). Levels of dopamine, for example, permanently decrease in bee queens, probably associated with their reduced locomotor activity (Harano *et al.* 2008). The differential

expression of genes contributing to the transport or secretion of neurotransmitters predicts differences in neuronal signaling between mated and virgin queens (Gether *et al.* 2006; Kristensen *et al.* 2011). Interestingly, two of the five genes with exceptionally highest expression in queens mated with a winged male are transporters of the SLC6 family. Both CG5549 and CG15279 belong to subfamilies, which move compounds other than neuromodulators across membranes. The localization of these amino acid transporters in the broad CNS and the gut respectively point to a role in nutrient uptake (Thimgan *et al.* 2006). By our comparative analysis, we found several other members of this family, including the dopamine transporter, to be differently regulated due to mating in solitary and social insect females. The classical SLC6 transporters (e.g. dopamine and serotonine transporters), as well as the less known representatives, provide promising candidates for future investigations on mating-induced physiological changes.

In summary, these findings suggest that queen longevity is associated with increased neural and reproductive activity. The high number of DEGs and the lack of an overlap with a former *C. obscurior* RNA-Seq dataset (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015) could result from the higher sequencing depth and slight changes in the library preparation step, such as the additional DNase treatment and a larger size of cDNA fragments. Furthermore, the survival advantage of MQE over VQ seemed to be more strongly pronounced in the present study. Although the life-prolonging effect of mating is generally consistent across *C. obscurior* laboratory studies, individual survival curves vary considerably (Appendix 7.3.11). Among the factors, which could be responsible for this variation, is the degree of female-male co-evolution. We recently found out that queens mated with an ergatoid male from the same population live longer than queens mated with an ergatoid male from a population 50 km apart (Schrempf *et al.* 2015). Therefore, we standardized the evolutionary distance between females and males by crossing sexuals derived from the same collected colony, resulting in a higher survival of MQE than expected from the earlier 'out-crossing' experiments (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; Schrempf & Heinze 2008; Heinze & Schrempf 2012; Schrempf *et al.* 2015), but a lower survival of MQW (Schrempf & Heinze 2008). This confirms that queen physiology is optimally adapted to respond to coevolved ergatoid males (Schrempf *et al.* 2015), but also questions the degree of cooperation between queens and the rare winged phenotype. *Drosophila melanogaster* females, which are artificially prevented from coevolving with harmful males, evolve to be less resistant to male-induced harm (Rice 1996; Holland & Rice 1999). We analogously hypothesize that our examined queens, which had not been exposed to winged males at least since the year of sampling in 2009, are lacking mechanisms to counteract toxic seminal substances from winged males. This theory could be tested in future by experiments using artificial selection.

#### 4.4.3 Candidate genes for egg development

In addition to the mentioned reproduction-related genes with higher expression in mated, more fecund queens, we identified nine candidates for egg development that are not associated with mating status. The chorion protein gene *Cp7Fb*, *Es2* and the two yellow genes *yellow-g* and *yellow-g2* are located on two different genomic regions in *D. melanogaster*. These are amplified in follicle cells at the late stages of oogenesis in order to rapidly increase the number of templates available for transcription (Claycomb *et al.* 2004; Fakhouri *et al.* 2006). Thus, the elevated expression of these genes in a part of the queens more likely arose from amplification of DNA rather than upregulation. Chorion proteins, such as *Cp7Fb*, and *yellow-g* are essential for the formation of the different eggshell layers in *D. melanogaster* (Claycomb *et al.* 2004). Several studies proposed a link between the expression of *yellow-g*, or its homologs, and the activation of the reproductive system in solitary and social insect females (Tian *et al.* 2004; Gräff *et al.* 2007; McGraw *et al.* 2008; Niu *et al.* 2014). In contrast to other insects, virgin reproductive females in *C. obscurior* regularly oviposit. This explains the large proportion of virgin queens in our dataset that had expression levels as high as mated queens.

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## Author contributions:

KW and JH designed the study; KW carried out the experiment, analyzed the data and drafted the manuscript; JH carefully revised the manuscript.

## **Chapter 5**

# **Mating with an allopatric male triggers immune response and decreases longevity of ant queens\***

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Parasitized terminal shoots of *deigo* (coral tree), which are abundantly inhabited by Japanese *Cardiocondyla obscurior* colonies and other insects.

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## Abstract

In species with lifelong pair bonding, the reproductive interests of the mating partners are aligned, and males and females are expected to jointly maximize their reproductive success. Mating increases both longevity and fecundity of female reproductives (queens) of the ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior*, indicating a tight co-evolution of mating partners. Here, we show that mating with a male from their own population increases lifespan and reproductive success of queens more than mating with a male from a different population, with whom they could not co-evolve. A comparison of transcriptomes revealed an increased expression of genes involved in immunity processes in queens, which mated with males from a different population. Increased immune response might be proximately associated with decreased lifespan. Our study suggests a synergistic co-evolution between the sexes and sheds light on the proximate mechanisms underlying the decreased fitness of allopatrically mated queens.

*Keywords*: longevity, outbreeding depression, sexual cooperation, social insects

### 5.1 Introduction

Choosing the right mating partner(s) is one of the most important decisions in the life of a sexually reproducing organism. On the one hand, mating among close relatives may decrease progeny fitness due to homozygosity of recessive, deleterious mutations ('inbreeding depression'; Charlesworth & Charlesworth 1987). On the other hand, mating of distantly related partners may result in the disruption of co-adapted gene complexes ('outbreeding depression'; Templeton 1986; Waser & Price 1989; Edmands 2002). Many studies have documented the costs of mating with a 'wrong partner' by analysing the quantity and fitness of the offspring of the breeding pair. However, mating may also directly affect life history traits of the mating partners themselves, for example when males manipulate females via nutritious nuptial gifts and spermatophores, injurious genital spines or toxic seminal fluids (e.g. Merritt 1989; Chapman *et al.* 1995; Chapman & Partridge 1996; Schoofs *et al.* 1997; Yi & Gillott 1999; Lung *et al.* 2002; Bonduriansky *et al.* 2005). For example, in *Drosophila*, seminal fluids transferred during mating enhance the fecundity of females (Herndon & Wolfner 1995) and stimulate their innate immune system (Peng *et al.* 2005), but at the same time reduce their attractiveness to further mates, their probability of mating again (Chen *et al.* 1988) and their future lifespan (Chapman *et al.* 1995).

Manipulative sexual traits and mate preferences may diverge rapidly among local populations because of Fisherian sexual selection, co-evolutionary arms races driven by sexual conflict, and other causes (Rowe *et al.* 2003). Mating of individuals from different populations (allopatric crosses) therefore may have other consequences for the mating partners than mating of individuals from the same population (sympatric crosses). Several studies indicate that females are able to evolve resistance against manipulating males when they are able to co-evolve with them, but suffer from manipulations after mating with males from another population (e.g. Holland  $\&$  Rice 1998; Parker & Partridge 1998; Holland & Rice 1999; Nilsson *et al.* 2002). However, the extent of male harm and female resistance might also depend on the local environment and condition of the interacting individuals (e.g. Fricke *et al.* 2009; Arbuthnott *et al.* 2014). It remains controversial whether this indeed reflects an ongoing arms race driven by sexual conflict or whether other processes of sexual selection are responsible (Chapman *et al.* 2003; Rowe *et al.* 2003; Arnqvist 2004; Long *et al.* 2006).

Ants are characterized by lifelong pair bonding, that is queens mate with one or a few males early in their adult life and use the obtained sperm to fertilize all femaledestined eggs throughout their lives without ever mating again (Boomsma *et al.* 2005; Boomsma 2009). Hence, the interests of the mating partners are predicted to be aligned and males are not expected to harm their mate or to shorten its lifespan (even though immunity costs of sperm storage and competition among the ejaculates from different males can negatively affect a multiply mated queen; Baer *et al.* 2006; Boer *et al.* 2010). By comparing the lifespans of virgin queens, mated queens and queens mated with sterilized males, we could show that the act of mating and/or the transfer of seminal fluids significantly increase the lifespan and lifetime reproductive success of queens of the ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* (Schrempf *et al.* 2005), suggesting 'sexual cooperation'.

Here, we investigate whether sympatric mating and allopatric mating differently affect the fitness of queens by comparing their longevity and reproductive output. We show that outcrossing drastically lowers the fitness of queens. To elucidate associated physiological mechanisms, we compared genome-wide gene expression of queens from sympatric and allopatric crosses. Upregulation of genes linked to immunity in outcrossed queens suggests that mating with alien males triggers physiological responses typical of infections.

## 5.2 Materials and methods

#### 5.2.1 Study organism

Colonies of *Cardiocondyla obscurior* (Wheeler, 1929) were collected in two sites in Bahia, Brazil, *c*. 50 km apart (Ilheus and Una), in February 2004, and in Okinawa, Japan, in June 2005.

*Cardiocondyla obscurior* is a cosmopolitan tramp species, presumably of South-East Asian origin, which through trade with potted plants, fruits, etc., has been distributed across large parts of the tropics and subtropics (e.g. Heinze *et al.* 2006). Colonies are small (Heinze & Delabie 2005), so that our experimental set-up (see below) reflects natural colony size. Queens are short-lived with an average lifespan of 26 weeks (maximum 56 weeks; Schrempf *et al.* 2005), which makes it possible to record the complete reproductive output of a queen.

In our study populations in Brazil, colonies were found in aborted fruits of coconut trees and rolled leaves of lemon trees, while in Japan, colonies were found in bark cavities of coral trees. Since then, all colonies were reared under the same conditions in the laboratory, eliminating possible effects of different environment. Ants were kept in three-chambered nest boxes with a plaster floor in incubators under seminatural temperature and light cycles (12 h light 30  $\degree$ C/12 h dark 25  $\degree$ C) and fed three times a week with honey and pieces of insects (cockroaches and fruit flies). *C. obscurior* is characterized by a male diphenism with wingless fighter males and winged disperser males (Kinomura & Yamauchi 1987; Stuart *et al.* 1987; Cremer *et al.* 2002). Winged males are only produced under extreme environmental conditions (Cremer & Heinze 2003), and colonies usually contain a single wingless male, which eliminates all rival males. Queens mate only during the first few days of their adulthood and queen monogamy appears to be the rule, probably because of the mating monopoly of wingless males. Genetic data from 18 experimentally double-mated queens suggest that queens use sperm only from a single male, in most cases the first one (A. Schrempf and J. Heinze, unpublished).

#### 5.2.2 Experimental crosses

We determined longevity (day of eclosion till death) and lifetime reproductive success (total number of male and female sexuals produced) from (i) queens from the Ilheus and the Okinawa population, which had mated with males from their own population (sympatric crosses: Ilheus queen with Ilheus male: IxI,  $n = 12$ ; Okinawa queen with Okinawa male: OxO,  $n = 12$ ), (ii) Ilheus queens, which had mated with males from a different, but relatively close population (allopatric crosses: distance *c*. 50 km, Una: IxU,  $n = 10$ ), and (iii) queens from Ilheus and Okinawa, which had mated with a male from the other population (allopatric crosses: Ilheus queens mated with a male from Okinawa: IxO,  $n = 16$ ; Okinawa queens mated with males from Ilheus, OxI,  $n = 13$ ).

For the experimental crosses, we transferred a queen pupa and 20 workers from their natal nest into a new nest box and added a wingless male pupa from the same or a different population. Males usually mate with virgin queens within a few days after eclosion (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). We counted the number of eggs twice per week until the death of the queen. Workers of *C. obscurior* do not have ovaries; thus, all eggs were laid by the queens. To standardize between colonies, we kept the number of adult workers constant by removing surplus worker pupae. Similarly, all sexual pupae were removed and counted to obtain complete sex ratio data. All queens produced at least one (female) worker offspring, indicating that all queens had been inseminated as males are haploid and can emerge from unfertilized eggs (Schrempf *et al.* 2006).

Where data showed deviance from normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests), we used appropriate nonparametric statistics. For each queen, we had a data point on its longevity and the number of sexuals produced, from which we calculated sex ratio (female sexuals/total sexuals). We were able to distinguish between the effects of queen origin (Ilheus or Okinawa) and mating combination (allopatric or sympatric) by conducting generalized linear models (GLMs) in R version 3.1.2 (R Core Team 2013).

Starting with the full models including queen origin, mating combination and the interaction of both, we successively excluded nonsignificant terms. We considered overdispersion by assuring that the residual deviance was smaller than the degrees of freedom using chi-squared tests. As data on longevity followed a right-skewed distribution, we used a GLM with gamma distributed error structure. For the number of sexuals produced, we used a negative binomial model (glm.nb() in the MASS package) as count data typically exhibits overdispersion and negative binomial models account for this. For modelling of sex ratio, we started with a GLM with binomial error distribution, as sex ratio data are proportions (females/total number of sexuals) and finally used a model of the quasibinomial family to deal with overdispersion.

For egg-laying rate, we had continuous data for each single queen over the complete lifespan available. We compared egg-laying rates with a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM, lme4 package, R version 3.1.2), including colony as random factor and testing for the influence of queen origin, mating combination and the interaction of both. In addition, to indicate the differences between the distinct groups, we compared the means/medians of the colonies and conducted an ANOVA with subsequent post hoc Tukey's HSD tests for egg-laying (Kolmogorov–Smirnov test n. s.) and median tests with subsequent Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons for the number of sexuals and sex ratio (Table 5.1 and Table 5.2).

Finally, we compared the lifespans of differently mated queens by a survival analysis. Two queens that were still alive at the end of the experiment and their lifespans were included as censored data.

## 5.2.3 Gene expression and *Wolbachia* strains

To detect underlying physiological causes for the different performance of allopatric and sympatric crosses, we sequenced the transcriptomes of 14 individual Ilheus queens mated with either an Ilheus ( $n = 7$ ) or an Okinawa male ( $n = 7$ ), 3 weeks after the queens had begun to lay eggs. Queen mating types were set up as described above. For each sample, total RNA (Qiagen RNeasy Plus) from whole bodies was converted into cDNA and amplified using oligo-dT and random 9-mer primers (Ovation RNA-Seq System V2, Nugen). Between 17 million and 25 million 100-bp-long reads per sample were generated on an Illumina HiSeq1000 (Encore Rapid Multiplex System, Nugen). Following adapter trimming (cutadapt, Martin 2011), reads were mapped against the reference genome of *C. obscurior* (Schrader *et al.* 2014) using the TOPHAT (v2.0.8b) /BOWTIE (2.1.0.0) package (Trapnell *et al.* 2009; Langmead & Salzberg 2012). Gene counts for all three data sets were obtained with HTSeq-count 0.5.4 (Anders *et al.* 2015) by counting reads that unambiguously mapped to a single gene model. Normalization of raw counts and statistical inference was performed in DESEQ2 (v1.2.9, Love *et al.* 2014) using a Benjamini–Hochberg correction for multiple testing. The implemented filtering function automatically excludes genes with low expression to optimize the number of adjusted *P* values. Raw sequencing reads have been deposited in the NCBI short read archive.

The common endosymbiotic bacterium *Wolbachia* could induce cytoplasmic incompatibilities when insects are infected with different strains, which may contribute to reproductive isolation among populations (Bordenstein *et al.* 2001). To test whether populations have different *Wolbachia* strains, we isolated DNA of individual workers of the different populations and conducted a PCR of the highly variable *wsp* gene using the primers wsp81F and wsp691R (Braig *et al.* 1998).

## 5.3 Results

#### 5.3.1 Experimental crosses

Queens that mated with allopatric males had a reduced longevity  $(16.4 \pm SD 5.1 \text{ vs.})$  $21.6 \pm 5.9$  weeks), laid fewer eggs per week (7.6  $\pm$  3.2 vs. 12.5  $\pm$  3.5 eggs) and had a lower lifetime reproductive success  $(14.9 \pm 12.1 \text{ vs. } 34.7 \pm 42.9 \text{ sexuals})$  than queens that mated with a male from their own population. The shortest-lived queen died after 6.5 weeks. Two of the queens were still alive at the end of the experiment (after 29 weeks), and their longevities were included as censored data.

Longevity was significantly associated with mating combination (allopatric vs. sympatric), but not with queen origin (GLM with a 'log' link function and gamma errors: mating combination:  $F_{61} = 12.96$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; queen origin  $F_{60} = 0.313$ ,  $P =$ 0.58; the interaction mating combination x queen origin was removed because it was not significant). The survival analysis revealed that sympatrically mated queens lived longer than allopatrically mated queens (Cox F test allopatric vs. sympatric:  $F = 2.50$ , *P*  $= 0.0002$ ; yet, the difference between allopatric and sympatric mating within the Brazilian populations was just marginally significant in a pairwise comparison (survival analysis over all five groups:  $\chi^2 = 11.53$ , d.f. = 4,  $P = 0.02$ , pairwise comparison Cox F test: sympatric vs. allopatric: all  $P < 0.04$ , IxI vs. IxU:  $P = 0.06$ ; all other comparisons P  $> 0.1$ ; mean lifespan in weeks  $\pm$  SD: IxI 21.83  $\pm$  4.05; OxO 21.46  $\pm$  7.58; IxU:17.05  $\pm$ 6.21; IxO  $16.5 \pm 5.48$ ; OxI  $15.69 \pm 4.06$ ; Figure 5.1)



Figure 5.1: Lifespan (weeks) of queens of the ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* dependent on mating partner (male from the own population: IxI (Ilheus, Brazil, black rectangles) and OxO (Okinawa, Japan, black circles); male from another Brazilian population: IxU (Ilheus x Una, Brazil; grey circles); cross between the Japanese and Brazilian population: IxO (Ilheus x Okinawa, Japan; white diamonds), OxI (Okinawa x Ilheus; crosses)). Censored data are indicated by a black star.

Likewise, the GLMM (Poisson errors with colony origin as random factor) shows that egg number is independent of queen origin ( $\chi^2$  = 0.90, *P* = 0.34), but highly affected by mating combination ( $\chi^2$  = 24.87, *P* < 0.001). The interaction term queen origin x mating combination was removed from the final model as it was not significant.

The ANOVA with post hoc pairwise comparisons shows that egg number was generally higher in Ilheus queens than in Okinawa queens (ANOVA:  $F_{4.58} = 20.27$ ,  $P <$ 0.00001; post hoc Tukey's HSD test; IxI vs. OxO:  $P = 0.005$ ). Sympatrically mated Ilheus queens had more eggs than allopatrically mated Ilheus queens (IxI vs. IxO, *P* < 0.001; IxI vs. IxU, *P* < 0.02; Figure 5.2). Okinawa queens showed a similar trend, but the difference between sympatrically and allopatrically mated queens was not significant at the 0.05 level (OxO vs. OxI:  $P = 0.068$ ; Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2: Mean ( $\pm$  SE, SD) number of eggs (left y-axis) observed per observation scan in nests with a single queen after mating. Queens mated with a male from their own population (Ilheus, Brazil: IxI, Okinawa, Japan: OxO), a male from a second Brazilian population (Ilheus x Una: IxU) or a reciprocal cross of a Brazilian and Japanese population (Ilheus x Okinawa: IxO, Okinawa x Ilheus: OxI). Significant differences are indicated by different letters.

A GLM (with a negative binomial error distribution and a log link function) shows that total number of sexual offspring was significantly correlated with queen origin but more so with mating combination (queen origin:  $\chi^2 = 6.88$ , d.f. = 60, P < 0.01; mating combination:  $\chi^2 = 11.88$ , d.f. = 61, *P* < 0.001; queen origin x mating combination: n. s.). Queens from Ilheus produced significantly more sexual offspring when mating with a male from their own population than in either type of allopatric cross. The number of sexual offspring of sympatrically mated Okinawa queens varied among colonies and overlapped with allopatric crosses (median test:  $\chi^2 = 10.93$ , d.f. = 4,  $P = 0.027$ , for pairwise comparisons see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Lifetime production of sexual offspring of queens mated with different males (median, upper and lower quartiles; *P* values and *Z* values (in parentheses) after post hoc comparison with Bonferroni-adjusted significance levels; *P*\* values indicate significant differences between the groups (I: individuals from Ilheus, Brazil; O: individuals from Okinawa, Japan; U: individuals from Una, Brazil)).



Finally, sex ratio (number of female sexuals/total sexual offspring) also differed considerably among the five combinations (median test:  $\chi^2 = 25.39$ , d.f. = 4,  $P = 0.001$ ; for pairwise comparisons see Table 5.2). The GLM, in which we controlled for the number of sexuals produced, revealed that sex ratio is strongly associated with both queen origin and mating combination (GLM with quasi-binomial error and a logit link function: queen origin:  $\chi^2 = 123.7$ , d.f. = 56,  $P < 0.001$ ; mating combination:  $\chi^2 = 62.43$ ,  $d.f. = 57$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; queen origin x mating combination: n. s.).

Table 5.2: Sex ratio of queens mated with different males (I: individuals from Ilheus, Brazil; O: individuals from Okinawa, Japan; U: individuals from Una, Brazil). Sex ratio is calculated as number of female sexuals/total sexual offspring (median, quartiles; *P* values and *Z* values (in parentheses) after post hoc comparison with Bonferroni-adjusted significance levels; *P*\* values differences between the groups).

	Sex ratio (median, quartiles)	$I \times O$	$I\times U$	$0 \times 0$	$O\times I$
$I \times I$ , $n = 12$	0.57(0.46; 0.68)	0.06 $(Z=2.73)$	0.18 $(Z=2.36)$	$(Z=1.41)$	$(Z=1.14)$
$O \times O$ , $n = 12$	0.80(0.56; 0.875)	$0.0004*$ $(Z=4.07)$	0.003 $(Z=3.61)$		$(Z=0.32)$
$I \times U$ , $n = 10$	0.27(0.22; 0.33)	$(Z=0.11)$		$0.003*$ $(Z=3.61)$	$0.006*$ $(Z=3.45)$
$IXO, n = 16$	0.14(0; 0.5)		$(Z=2.73)$	$0.0003*$ $(Z=4.07)$	${}< 0.001*$ $(Z=3.93)$
$O\times I$ , n = 13	0.67(0.61; 0.72)	${}< 0.001*$ $(Z=3.93)$	$0.006*$ $(Z=3.45)$	$(Z=0.32)$	

#### 5.3.2 Gene expression and *Wolbachia* strains

We analysed whole-body gene expression patterns of individual 4-week-old mature queens. At a false discovery rate of 10 %, we found 13 genes to be significantly differentially expressed between sympatrically and allopatrically mated queens (Table 5.3). A reciprocal blast between the corresponding protein sequences and the *Drosophila melanogaster* proteome (dmel-all-translation-r5.56.fasta) showed orthology for ten of these candidates. The *Drosophila* homolog for Cobs\_00625 was defined as the best hit of a one-way BLASTP against the fruit fly proteome, and the two remaining genes have orthologs in other sequenced ant genomes but not in other insects.

Three of the ten genes more highly expressed in allopatrically compared to sympatrically mated queens are associated with endoplasmic reticulum-associated processes (*Derlin-2*, *ergic53*, CG32276). Three further genes encode for lipid or sterol binding and transporting proteins (*Apolipoprotein lipid transfer particle*, *Niemann–Pick type C-2b*, CG3246). *Hayan* and *Derlin-2* were shown and CG3246 is predicted to be involved in innate immunity. Furthermore, RNA levels of an odorant-binding protein and the transketolase CG8036 were elevated in allopatrically mated queens. Only three genes were less expressed in allopatrically mated queens, including the isocitrate dehydrogenase *lethal (1) G0156* and midnolin-like CG32676.

The 577-bp-long *wsp* sequences from representative workers of each population were identical and matched the *Wolbachia* strain previously described for *C. obscurior* (Russell *et al.* 2012).





## 5.4 Discussion

Our results show that the origin of their mating partners directly affects the fitness of *Cardiocondyla obscurior* ant queens. Allopatric mating reduced the lifespan of *C. obscurior* queens to about 75 % of the lifespan of sympatrically mated queens and also negatively affected the number of eggs they produced. Surprisingly, matings between sexuals from two neighbouring populations just 50 km apart, which both were presumably introduced to Brazil less than a few hundred years ago, had a similar negative effect on queen longevity as mating with a male from a very distant population in Japan.

#### 5.4.1 Consequences of mating on queen fecundity

Outbreeding depression is commonly associated with decreased reproductive success due to the disruption of co-adapted gene complexes (Lynch 1991; Edmands 2002), maternal effects (Wolf 2000; Kawasaki *et al.* 2010), or through endosymbiotic bacteria, in particular *Wolbachia* (Hoffmann & Turelli 1997; Kawasaki *et al.* 2010; Cordaux *et al.* 2011; Brucker & Bordenstein 2012; 2013). According to the sequence similarity of the *wsp* gene, all studied populations had the same *Wolbachia* strain, speaking against an involvement of this endosymbiont. However, we cannot completely rule out possible double infections or differences in strains, which might have contributed to the observed outbreeding depression.

Alternatively, disruption of co-adapted gene complexes or maternal effects could in principle explain the lower productivity of outcrossed *C. obscurior* queens in our study. Cytoplasmic incompatibility through a mismatch of mother–offspring genes might explain variation in queen bias, that is the propensity of fertilized eggs to develop into queens rather than workers, and consequently also sex ratio. Such a phenomenon has been suggested to cause the variation in queen bias associated with the origin of males and queens in *Pogonomyrmex* harvester ants (Cahan *et al.* 2002; Volny & Gordon 2002; Schwander & Keller 2008), although maternal effects may also play an important role (Schwander *et al.* 2008). As an alternative nongenetic explanation, different treatment by workers might have contributed to the observed differences in our study. Social insect workers are involved in brood care and have the power to manipulate sex ratios (Trivers & Hare 1976). In our study, queens were initially kept with workers from their maternal nests, which were gradually replaced by the queens' own offspring. Assuming that workers are capable of recognizing their relatedness to the queen's offspring, original workers in colonies with allopatrically mated queens might have preferred the queen's sons over 'hybrid' daughters. However, this preference should quickly have vanished with the eclosion of F1 workers. Furthermore, *C. obscurior* queens appear to be capable of predetermining the caste fate of their eggs and workers have only a limited influence on sex ratio if at all (Cremer & Heinze 2002).

#### 5.4.2 Consequences of mating on queen longevity

Our study shows that queens suffer reduced longevity after mating with a male from a different population. This matches previous observations in *Drosophila*, where the lifeshortening effects of allopatric mating have originally been interpreted as evidence for sexually antagonistic co-evolution (Rice 1996; Holland & Rice 1998; Parker & Partridge 1998; Holland & Rice 1999). While this phenomenon may also arise through other factors (Rowe *et al.* 2003; Long *et al.* 2006), the original idea of antagonistic evolution remains appealing (Fricke & Arnqvist 2004; Geuverink *et al.* 2009; Matute & Coyne 2010).

By analogy, we propose two mutually nonexclusive mechanisms of sexual selection to explain the decreased life expectancy of outcrossed queens of *C. obscurior*. First, we have previously shown that mating with a sterilized male prolongs the lifespan of queens relative to that of virgin queens even though both sterile-mated and virgin queens laid only few haploid, male-destined eggs (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). This suggests a positive effect of seminal fluid or tactile stimulation during mating on queen physiology. We suggest that sexuals of *C. obscurior* are co-adapted so that queen physiology responds optimally to sympatric males. This 'sexual cooperation' (Schrempf *et al.* 2005) might be impaired when queens mate with males from another population.

Second, co-evolution might allow queens mated to males from their own population to avoid costs resulting from ejaculate competition after multiple mating (Boer *et al.* 2010). Traits evolved by males to promote their own sperm at the cost of other males might accidentally harm queens despite sexual cooperation, and queens might be better adapted to neutralize 'collateral damage' from copulations with local males. Under laboratory conditions, *C. obscurior* queens have been observed to mate with multiple males, but at present there is no evidence that seminal fluid and sperm are transferred during all copulations. In contrast, genetic maternity analyses show that queens use only sperm from a single male to fertilize their eggs, indicating that multiple mating does not lead to the storage of several ejaculates (A. Schrempf, unpublished). However, a higher sample size is necessary to confirm that sperm mixing never occurs. Moreover, to distinguish between strict sexual cooperation and adaptation to harmful by-products of male–male conflict will require more detailed investigations into the mechanisms of sperm transfer and the frequency of multiple copulations. In both scenarios, divergence of male and female sexual traits among the three populations parsimoniously explains all the results of our study: the shorter lifespan of outbred queens, their lower productivity and also the lower queen bias and the more malebiased sex ratio of their broods.

The alternative nongenetic explanation that workers differentially provision or groom the queen depending on queen fecundity and in this way affect lifespan is unlikely. Previous studies did not reveal worker discrimination among differently fecund queens (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; 2011), and although productivity differences among differently mated Okinawa queens were small, lifespan differences matched those of Ilheus queens, indicating that queen physiology is affected by mating combination and not by workers.

#### 5.4.3 Gene expression

In general, seminal proteins evolve rapidly and have been shown to evoke immune responses in females (Peng *et al.* 2005; Rodríguez-Martínez *et al.* 2011). In Ilheus queens, the origin of the mating partner affected the expression of 13 genes (at a FDR < 0.1). While this cut-off allows for 1.3 false-positive genes, the redundancy in gene functions and the analogy to previous studies suggest that our results are reliable. Of the nine characterized genes overexpressed in allopatrically mated Ilheus queens, five have also been found to be overexpressed after single and/or double mating in *Drosophila* (Innocenti & Morrow 2009). Four of these five genes code for proteins suggested to be involved in the innate immune response: *Hayan* is a serine protease activated following injury (Nam *et al.* 2012), CG3246 codes for an antimicrobial protein domain (IPR017943), *Niemann–Pick type C-2b* is one of eight npc2 genes assumed to have a function in immune signalling pathways (Shi *et al.* 2012), and *Apolipoprotein lipid transfer particle* is overexpressed in immune challenged haemocytes (Johansson *et al.* 2005). Furthermore, *ergic53* is associated with endoplasmic reticulum stress (Chow *et al.* 2013) as are two other overexpressed candidates *Derlin-2* (IPR007599) and CG32276 (IPR010580).

It has been hypothesized that the exclusive overexpression of *Hayan*, *Niemann– Pick type C-2b* and 30 other immune response genes after the second but not the first mating in *Drosophila* females is a counter-reaction to seminal fluids (Innocenti & Morrow 2009). The immune response in our study therefore might similarly be caused by incompatible seminal fluid proteins (comparable to sex peptide influencing the TOLL pathway in *Drosophila* (Peng *et al.* 2005)). Whether undetected variability of *Wolbachia* strains or immune responses resulting from a mismatch of genitalia in allopatric mating (Yassin & Orgogozo 2013) also contribute to the observed differences remains to be studied.

## Conclusion

Male–female co-evolution in species with lifelong pair bonding appears to be an important determinant of reproductive success. In our study, the disruption of coevolved sexual traits may be an explanation for the overall reduction in fitness in outcrossed queens. Incompatible seminal fluid proteins potentially cause an immune response in females, which in turn reduces their lifespan. Given the interest in the interdependencies among population structure, genetic relatedness and reproductive tactics (Boomsma *et al.* 2005; Boomsma 2007; Bourke 2009; Rankin 2011), we believe that our finding will be of considerable interest for disentangling the complex interrelations between reproductive isolation and sexual selection.

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## Author contributions

A.S., K.v.W. and A.K. carried out the practical work; A.K., A.S., K.v.W., L.S. and J.O. analysed the data and participated in the design of the study; A.S., J.H., J.O. and K.v.W. drafted the manuscript; A.S. and J.H. designed the study. All authors gave final approval for publication.

## Data accessibility

Raw sequencing data have been deposited in SRA under the BioProject accession PRJNA284224 (SRR2033892-SRR2033905).

HTseq-count data, Wolbachia sequences (363 bp alignment) and fitness data: Dryad doi:10.5061/ dryad.846qk

## **Chapter 6 General discussion**

#### 6.1 General considerations

The four studies conducted in the framework of this thesis provide new and important insights into the proximate regulation of longevity in eusocial insect queens. The myrmicine ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* served as a model for investigations concerning the reversal of the fecundity/longevity trade-off (chapter 2 and 3). This phenomenon is widespread among eusocial insects and seems to be a universal principle of eusocial organisms. The possibility to carry out controlled crossings, as it is routinely done in model organisms, for example in the fruit fly *Drosophila melanogaster*, and the relative short lifespan of the study organism were essential prerequisites for experiments related to the effect of mating (chapter 2) and the effect of mating with varying partners (chapter 4 and 5).

On one side, the state-of-the-art technique RNA-Seq allowed to test concrete hypotheses, whereas on the other side, this approach was to a certain extent exploratory. For example, the differential expression of genes, which are involved in enhanced reproduction, in older (see chapter 2) and injured (see chapter 3) queens gave support for theoretical considerations and was consistent with phenotypic data. For genes with other functions there were no precise expectations. A great advantage of RNA-Seq is that the whole mRNA content of organisms can be quantified. This inspection of the full genetic spectrum can yield interesting and surprising results, which would otherwise remain concealed.

The conclusions drawn from the experiments of this thesis relied basically on the knowledge achieved from the model organism *D. melanogaster*. Even if the functional characterization of genes is by far not complete in the fruit fly, the determination of orthologs contributed substantially to the realization of this work. Barely 7000 out of 17552 genes are reciprocal orthologs and presumably have the same functions in *D. melanogaster* and *C. obscurior* (see Koonin 2005). Although these genes make up only 40 % of the whole *C. obscurior* gene repertoire, the proportion of differently expressed genes (DEGs) with *D. melanogaster* orthologs was generally higher (at least 60 %; see Figure 3.4 and Appendix 7.1.3 ).

For a comparison with previous transcriptomic studies, the protein coding sequences of two further pioneer species in field of genomics were screened for homologs. The honeybee *Apis mellifera* and the carpenter ant *Camponotus floridanus* were the first eusocial insects for which genome assemblies and electronic gene annotations were obtained (Honeybee Genome Sequencing Consortium 2006; Bonasio *et al.* 2010). These early annotations were incomplete and recently re-evaluated (Elsik *et al.* 2014; Gupta *et al.* 2015). Considering the latest genome versions, *C. obscurior* shares 8824 reciprocal orthologs with *C. floridanus* and 7948 with *A. mellifera*. The low number of 1:1 orthologs with other eusocial insect genomes is surprising. If the remaining 50 % of genes are orphan genes or *Cardiocondyla*-specific homologs has not been analyzed in detail. As in the comparison with *D. melanogaster,* the proportion of DEGs with orthologs in the carpenter ant and the honeybee was considerably higher (up to 80 %; see Appendix 7.1.3). Therefore, the downstream analysis of the genes with orthologous relationships should be representative for the whole set of DEGs. The remaining DEGs were excluded from the subsequent enrichment tests and cross-study comparisons.

Because comprehensive functional information on genes, for example in the form of Gene Ontology (GO) terms, cannot be derived from other insects than the fruit fly, a transcriptome- or proteome-wide BLAST search is an obligatory step for all eusocial insect microarray and RNA-seq studies. However, previous studies defined different criteria for the adoption of GO terms. Many authors applied a unidirectional BLAST against the *D. melanogaster* annotation, for example by means of the tool Blast2GO, without verifying orthology reciprocally (Yek *et al.* 2013; e. g. Nipitwattanaphon *et al.* 2013; Feldmeyer *et al.* 2013). So far, there is no general agreement whether to use all homologs, which possibly contain paralogs, or exclusively 1:1 orthologs. The stringent strategy used in the experiments of this thesis reduced the risk of comparing genes, which are closely related but have not kept the same functions.

Another unclear point in transcriptomics is the definition of false discovery rate (FDR)- and fold change-cutoffs for DEGs. In principle, the investigator is free to adjust the application of such thresholds to the purpose of the study. Downstream analyses usually profit from larger input lists. Thus, overly stringent values might only be helpful if the focus is on a specific set of genes. As it is common in this field, an FDR of 0.05 was applied in the majority of tests for differential expression (chapter 2–4). Because the number of DEGs was comparably low in one study (chapter 5), the proportion of false positives was increased to 10 %. Additional filtering criteria were not used. The various physiological insights revealed by the corresponding gene lists are discussed in the following paragraphs.

## 6.2 Results concerning the reversal of the fecundity/longevity trade-off

The DEGs between 4-week-old and 18-week-old queens (chapter 2) present the first report of genome-wide age-related expression changes in eusocial insect queens. Because of their long lifespan, high vitality at old ages and general low mortality, it is assumed that queens do not suffer from senescence. The idea of negligible senescence in female reproductives of eusocial animals (Finch 1990; Buffenstein 2008) is now supported by our comparison of young and aged individuals. First, the higher expression of reproduction-associated genes in older queens is consistent with an increase in egg-laying rate with age (Heinze & Schrempf 2012; Kramer *et al.* 2015). Second, no other senescence-related changes, as for example an elevation of the

immune response as in *D. melanogaster* (Pletcher *et al.* 2002; Landis *et al.* 2004; Girardot *et al.* 2006; Curtis *et al.* 2007; Doroszuk *et al.* 2012), could be identified. The most important finding of this study was that gene expression changes are reversed in *C. obscurior* queens in comparison to *D. melanogaster* females reflecting the opposite life histories in ants and fruit flies. Oppositely regulated processes are mainly reproduction and metabolic processes involving carbohydrates, amino acids and alcohol. This indicates that an increase in reproductive effort is accompanied by a slowed metabolism.

The connection between aging and metabolism seems to be more complex than initially postulated (see rate of living theory; reviewed in Speakman 2005), but the generation of toxic by-products by metabolic reactions provides mechanistic support for an association (Harman 1956). According to the oxidative stress theory, either the production of less damage or the better protection against damage in queens than in workers or females of solitary insects could be responsible for the longevity of queens. Previous experiments gave evidence for the first possibility because antioxidant enzymes were shown to have lower expression and activity levels in reproductive than in non-reproductive females in the three Hymenopteran species *Apis mellifera*, *Lasius niger* and *Harpegnathos saltator* (Parker *et al.* 2004; Corona *et al.* 2005; Schneider *et al.* 2011). Moreover, the expression of antioxidant enzymes and mitochondrial genes involved in respiration showed a significant age-related decline in honeybee queens (Corona *et al.* 2005). The RNA-seq data of *C. obscurior* queens reveals that *Superoxide dismutase*, a homolog of *Glutathione peroxidase* and *Glutathione S transferase D1* are downregulated in older queens (Table 6.1). None of the antioxidant enzyme genes tested in honeybees is upregulated. Unfortunately, mitochondrial genes could not be screened because a mitochondrial genome has not been assembled yet for *C. obscurior*.

Table 6.1: Differential expression of antioxidant enzymes between 18-week-old and 4-week-old *C. obscurior* queens. If a gene is duplicated, it is indicated which gene is the ortholog (o) or a non-orthologous homolog (h) to the *D. melanogaster* gene.

Name	Gene ID	BaseMean	P-adi	Fold change
Superoxide dismutase	Cobs 08876	35	$5.5e-06$	0.5
Superoxide dismutase 2 (Mn)	Cobs 13627	455	0.4	1.1
Superoxide dismutase 3	Cobs 08867	1356	0.9	1.0
Catalase	Cobs 01787	1661	0.4	0.9
Glutathione peroxidase	Cobs 09272 (h)	1098	$6.4e-03$	0.6
(PHGPX)	Cobs 18028 (o)	460	0.1	0.8
Thioredoxin reductase-1	Cobs 10638	888	0.7	1.0
Glutathione S transferase	Cobs $05225$ (o)	668	$1.2e-07$	0.6
D1	Cobs 00703 (h)	$\bf{0}$	NA	NA

Calorimetric measurements in honeybees demonstrated that metabolic rates decrease with age in queens, but increase in workers (Fahrenholz *et al.* 1992). The authors examined virgin and relatively young egg-laying queens. Thus, the difference between workers and queens might be even more pronounced at older ages. Building on the knowledge gained so far, it could be the next step to test if *C. obscurior* queens accumulate less damage than workers, and if so because of a slowed metabolism. In the Damaraland mole-rat, protein carbonyls and malondialdehyde, which are biomarkers for oxidative damage, are less abundant in specific tissues of reproductive than of nonreproductive females (Schmidt *et al.* 2014).

In the light of the disposable soma theory (Kirkwood  $\&$  Austad 2000), the idea of 'metabolic quiescence' only makes sense if queens invest less resources into selfmaintenance than workers and solitary insects. In social insects, resources might not have to be allocated between reproduction and self-maintenance because each individual of the colony is responsible for just one of these two tasks. The workers of a colony can be regarded as the disposable soma that protects the germ line, i. e. the queen. The importance of work load was highlighted by previous studies on *Diacamma* subordinate workers, which live shorter when their selfish dominant nest-mates start to reproduce (Tsuji *et al.* 2012). Reproductive behavior might not be less metabolically intense than the tasks carried out by the workers, as for example foraging, nest guarding, cleaning and nursing, but the execution of the latter may require the additional activation of energy-demanding maintenance systems, for example the immune response. The above described results regarding lower antioxidant enzyme levels, and the repression of 15 immune genes in older, more fertile *C. obscurior* queens (Table 6.2) indicate that reproductives invest less into stress resistance and are consequently to some degree released from the costs associated with these expensive defense systems.

Table 6.2: Upregulated (fold change  $> 1$ ) and downregulated (fold change  $< 1$ ) immune genes in 18week-old compared with 4-week-old queens. Immune genes were identified by means of the *D. melanogaster* annotation (see chapter 3).

Symbol	Category	Gene ID		BaseMean	$P$ -adj	Fold change
CG13618	undesignated	Cobs_10873	$\mathbf{O}$	111	$3.8e-10$	0.4
CG14661	undesignated	Cobs 04248	h	18	8.5e-9	0.4
CG10345	<b>IMD</b>	Cobs_10252	$\mathbf{O}$	104	1.8e-9	0.4
Snmp1	<b>IMD</b>	Cobs 00383	$\mathbf{o}$	32	$6.9e-6$	0.5
CG1358	undesignated	Cobs 09767	h	116	$9.0e-6$	0.5
Toll-6	TOLL	Cobs 01322	h	10	$5.5e-4$	0.5
CG9701	undesignated	Cobs 17851	$\mathbf{o}$	36	$8.5e-5$	0.5
CG14661	undesignated	Cobs 04247	h	330	$5.2e-4$	0.6
PebIII	Antimicrobial peptide	Cobs 03389	h	3472	$8.2e-3$	0.6
emp	<b>IMD</b>	Cobs 00088	$\mathbf{o}$	166	$4.5e-5$	0.6
CG14661	undesignated	Cobs 04238	$\mathbf{O}$	384	$2.0e-2$	0.6
DNaseII	Cell cycle regulation	Cobs_01796	$\mathbf{O}$	62	$3.4e-3$	0.7
Pu	Humoral response	Cobs 18022	$\mathbf{O}$	282	$7.9e-5$	0.7
<b>Nos</b>	<b>IMD</b>	Cobs 06158	$\mathbf{O}$	176	$9.0e-3$	0.8
ref(2)P	Antimicrobial peptide	Cobs_14221	$\mathbf{O}$	1547	$3.7e-2$	0.8
Tsf3	Cell cycle regulation	Cobs 01059	$\mathbf{O}$	548	$5.4e-3$	1.2
N	Humoral response	Cobs 08231	$\mathbf{O}$	451	$4.2e-2$	1.3
AGO <sub>2</sub>	Antimicrobial peptide	Cobs 05737	h	102	$3.4e-2$	1.4

Based on the trade-off between reproduction and stress response, two life history modes have been proposed for solitary animals by Tatar *et al.* (2003). Quiescence, in which reproduction and metabolism is reduced to ensure survival under adverse conditions, corresponds to diapause and hibernation. Analogous to this model, a new mode termed 'social reproduction' is suggested for eusocial insect queens, in which the investment of resources into self-maintenance is low to facilitate a continuous high rate of egg production (Figure 6.1).



Life history modes

Figure 6.1: Life history modes in reproductive females of solitary and social animals. The reproductive and quiescent modes are based on the model by Tatar *et al.* (2003). Survival of social insect queens under favorable conditions might not require an elevation of the stress response. The additional deployment of maintenance mechanisms under adverse conditions necessitates the decrease in reproduction.

According to this model, reproduction and stress response are negatively associated in social insects despite the reversal of the fecundity/longevity trade-off. As in solitary insects, this interaction might be mediated by juvenile hormone (JH), which was shown to promote egg production and to suppress stress resistance and immunity leading to reduced survival in a solitary (Flatt *et al.* 2005, and references therein), but possibly not in a social environment. JH titers were not directly measured in *C. obscurior* queens, but the age-related expression changes of genes involved in JH biosynthesis and degradation suggest higher levels in older, more fertile queens (Table 6.3). Therefore, it is unlikely that JH has reversed its positive gonadotropic function as proposed by some authors for other eusocial insect species (Corona *et al.* 2007; Pamminger *et al.* 2016).

Table 6.3: Age-related expression changes of enzymes involved in the biosynthesis and degradation of juvenile hormone in *C. obscurior*. Fold change > 1 refers to higher expression in 18-week-old compared with 4-week-old queens. No other homologs were found in the *C. obscurior* genome.



The model also predicts that defense systems can only be activated at the expense of a reduced fecundity, similar to the quiescent stage in solitary insects. That the costs of reproduction can be detected indirectly by increasing immunity costs was clearly demonstrated by the amputation of both middle legs (chapter 3). Both egg-laying rates and the expression of genes involved in germ cell development showed a significant decline after injury. Notably, *C. obscurior* queens are extremely robust and survive the loss of one or several legs, which was observed to occur in laboratory colonies. The consequences of this injury on fitness seem to be temporary.

## 6.3 Results concerning the effect of mating

The positive effect of single-mating on queen survival was revealed by Schrempf *et al.* (2005). This result was pioneering, but it did not allow conclusions on whether virgin queens have a higher age-independent background mortality or whether they age faster. Considering new data which was collected in the framework of this thesis (see 4.3.1), the former case may be more likely because background mortality was higher in virgin queens, whereas age-specific mortality rate was similar for both virgin and mated queens. However, as usually much larger sample sizes are required to accurately estimate Gompertz parameters (Promislow *et al.* 1999), this finding should be treated with care for the moment.

Importantly, survival of queens that had mated with a single ergatoid male (chapter 2 and 4) was higher than expected from average lifespan estimates of previous experiments (Schrempf *et al.* 2005; Schrempf & Heinze 2008; Heinze & Schrempf 2012; see Appendix 7.3.11). Even more surprising, the survival advantage of queens mated with a winged disperser male over queens mated with an ergatoid male was reversed (Schrempf & Heinze 2008; chapter 4). In contrast, median lifespans of virgin queens were consistent across studies (Schrempf *et al.* 2005 and chapter 4). Therefore, this discrepancy cannot be explained by differences between *C. obscurior* populations or experimental conditions. A factor that likely had an impact is the degree of femalemale coevolution. Queens which were mated with a male from the same collection site lived longer, laid more eggs and showed a decreased expression of genes involved in immune and stress response than queens which were mated with an allopatric male (chapter 5). All queens examined in the experiments of chapter 2 and 4 originated from

one single colony collected in Una (Brazil) in 2009. Since this colony was brought to the laboratory, queens have been regularly exposed to closely related ergatoid males, but never to males from other colonies and presumably not to winged males. Inbreeding and monogamy are predicted to reduce sexual conflict (Holland & Rice 1999; Hosken *et al.* 2001; Chapman *et al.* 2003) and promote sexual cooperation (Schrempf *et al.* 2005). To what extent the effect of mating in *C. obscurior* and other eusocial insects is shaped by the adaptation to male-induced benefits, male-induced harm, or both, and if accessory gland proteins are proximately involved, are open questions.

Fitness differences between shorter-lived virgin and longer-lived mated queens are reflected in the whole body transcriptomes of mature queens. A deeper sequencing in the second experiment (chapter 4) enabled the discovery of vastly more differently expressed genes than in the first study (chapter 2) at the same significance cutoff. Combining the results of both sequencing runs, longer-lived queens possibly have a lower carbohydrate metabolism, which is consistent with a downregulation of specific metabolic processes with increasing age and fecundity, and produce more eggs as it is predicted from the positive correlation between egg-laying rate and lifespan. Enhanced neuron development is an unexpected finding because Hymenoptera do not seem to have adult neurogenesis (Fahrbach *et al.* 1995b; Gronenberg *et al.* 1996). A possibility is that these genes induce structural changes, as for example axon growth and the formation of synapses, in already existing cells (Farris *et al.* 2001; Groh *et al.* 2006). Environmental stimuli, in particular social interactions, could be responsible for an increase in brain volume (Scotto Lomassese *et al.* 2000; Scotto-Lomassese *et al.* 2002; Molina *et al.* 2009; Smith *et al.* 2010).

The DEGs between mated and virgin queens from both experiments did not overlap with gene lists from former studies which focused on the short-term effect of mating in *D. melanogaster* and *A. mellifera* (McGraw *et al.* 2004; Kocher *et al.* 2008; 2010; Manfredini *et al.* 2015; see Table 2.5 and Appendix 7.3.9). Interestingly, more genes were shared between these previous transcriptomic investigations and the DEGs resulting from the comparison between sham-mated and virgin queens. Time course data shows that the majority of gene expression changes after mating are transient (McGraw *et al.* 2008; Zhou *et al.* 2014). Due to the lack of fertilization, sham-mated queens might not complete the transitions that normal mated queens undergo.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

Eusocial insect queens do not seem to suffer 'mortality costs' from reproduction or mating. Transcriptomic experiments reveal that proximate mechanisms of *Cardiocondyla obscurior* queen longevity involve oogenesis, metabolism, immunity and neural activity. Furthermore, comparisons with reproductive females of the fruit fly *Drosophila melanogaster* show that conserved genes which are associated with senescence in solitary species experience a reversal in gene expression patterns. The alternative regulation of genes that mediate the interplay among aging, egg-laying and

mating might be responsible for the exceptional positive association of fecundity and longevity in eusocial species. An experimental increase of immunity costs demonstrates that the stress response can only be upregulated at the expense of a reduced production of eggs as predicted by life history theory. Consequently, queens might not avoid the costs of reproduction, but the costs of self-maintenance which can be borne by the workers under favorable conditions.

# **Chapter 7 Appendix**

## 7.1 Appendix for Chapter 2

#### 7.1.1 Survival and fecundity of queens

We analyzed survival of queens beyond the age of four weeks with the package Survival version 2.37-7 (Therneau 2015) in R. Data on queens, which died from other causes, as for example squeezed by the glas cover of the nest, or in whose colonies males or additional queens had eclosed, were included as censored data. One-way ANOVA was applied to ln-transformed data on fecundity of the experimental 18-weekold queens in SPSS (22.0).

Log-rank test did not reveal a significant difference in survival between the mated, sham-mated, and virgin queens until the age of 18 weeks when they were censored (Kaplan-Meier estimates: MQ18: 0.78, SQ18: 0.8, VQ18: 0.66, *P* = 0.4). Similarly, a re-analysis of data from the previous study of (Schrempf *et al.* 2005) revealed that up to week 18 the MQ, SQ, and VQ survival did not differ  $(P = 0.09)$ .

MQ18 produced more eggs per week than the other two types of queens (mean +/- standard deviation: MQ: 18.8 +/- 2.9, SQ: 7.5 +/- 0.8, VQ: 4.7 +/- 0.5). Egg-laying rates were also significantly different between sham-mated and virgin queens (ANOVA on ln-transformed number of eggs laid per week with post hoc Bonferroni t-test, all pairwise: VQ18-MQ18, SQ18-MQ18, VQ18-SQ18: *P* < 0.001). MQ18 started to lay eggs earlier than virgins did, but the onset of reproduction was not different between SQ18 and VQ18 (mean +/- standard deviation of queen age at first egg-laying MQ18: 6.9 +/- 2.0, SQ18: 8.9 +/- 2.7, VQ18: 14.0 +/- 7.1; ANOVA on ln-transformed values with post hoc Bonferroni t-test, all pairwise: VQ18-MQ18: *P* = 0.023, SQ18-MQ18:  $P = 0.7$ , VQ18-SQ18:  $P = 0.3$ ).



Plot of the survival of queens destined for sequencing at the age of 18 weeks. MQ18, mated queens; SQ18, sham-mated queens; VQ18, virgin queens. Markings illustrate censored individuals.
# 7.1.2 Mapping statistics of reads

Sample-wise number of raw, adapter-trimmed and mapped reads; the proportion of mapped reads is given in the last column.



#### 7.1.3 List of similar experiments

The total number of reported DEGs is given after conversion to new IDs. In accordance with the studied organism, either the set of *Drosophila* or the set of *Apis* orthologs was used to determine the number and proportion of comparable DEGs.



# 7.1.4 List of DEGs

All genes differently expressed in at least one of the four pairwise tests. Mean, mean of counts per gene across replicates; logFC, log2-transformed fold change; *P*-adj, BH corrected *P* value.





























# 7.1.5 Lists of significant GO terms of the category biological process

Functional enrichments in genes differently expressed with age (MQ18 versus MQ4) or due to shammating (VQ18 versus SQ18). Count, number of genes in list annotated for the corresponding term; Pop Hits, total number of annotated genes; FE, fold enrichment.

Genes upregulated in MQ18 compared with MQ4.





#### Genes downregulated in MQ18 compared with MQ4.



Genes upregulated in VQ18 compared with SQ18.





#### Genes downregulated in VQ18 compared with SQ18.







Expression corresponds to means of log2-transformed normalized counts; egg-laying rate is equivalent to the mean of laid eggs per week until 18 weeks; the line is a fitted loess regression.

# 7.2 Appendix for Chapter 3

# 7.2.1 Mapping statistics of reads

Sample-wise numbers of raw and mapped reads are shown.



# 7.2.2 Principal component plot of all samples



The graph was generated with normalized and transformed data (VST), and shows the grouping according to lane; orange = injured, blue = control.

#### 7.2.3 List of DEGs

List of DEGs with corresponding homologs in *Drosophila* and *Camponotus*. BaseMean, mean expression; logFC, log2FoldChange; padj, BH corrected *P*-value; o, ortholog; h, homolog.
































## 7.2.4 Lists of significant GO terms of the category biological process

Functional enrichments in genes differently expressed due to injury. Count, number of genes in list annotated for the corresponding term; Pop Hits, total number of annotated genes; FE, fold enrichment.

Genes upregulated in injured queens compared with control.





Genes downregulated in injured queens compared with control.





## 7.3 Appendix for Chapter 4

## 7.3.1 Mapping statistics of reads

Sample-wise numbers of raw and mapped reads are shown.





## 7.3.2 Principal component plots of all samples

The graphs were generated with normalized and transformed (VST) counts and illustrate the assignment of samples according to treatment (left) and lane (right).

### 7.3.3 List if DEGs

List of DEGs with corresponding homologs in *Drosophila melanogaster.* Mean, mean of counts per gene across replicates; logFC, log2-transformed fold change; *P*-adj, BH corrected *P* value; o, ortholog; h, homolog.











#### 7.3.4 Gene Set Enrichment Analysis (GSEA)

**Pre-ranked list: VQ vs. MQW**







Gene set enrichment plots illustrating the overrepresentation of gene sets in the corresponding pre-ranked list. Genes upregulated (VQ  $>$  MQE) and downregulated (VQ  $<$  MQE) in VQ compared to MQE were tested for an enrichment.

### 7.3.5 Lists of significant GO terms of the category biological process

Functional enrichments in genes differently expressed due to mating with one of both male types (MQE and MQW versus VQ) or due to mating with only the ergatoid type (MQE versus VQ). Count, number of genes in list annotated for the corresponding term; Pop Hits, total number of annotated genes; FE, fold enrichment.

Genes upregulated in MQE and MQW compared to VQ.



Genes exclusively downregulated in MQE compared to VQ.











Hierarchical clustering of the top 500 genes with the highest variance across all samples. Nine genes including the most variable gene Cobs\_10979 formed one separated clade (bottom). Normalized counts were transformed (VST), corrected for the batch effect and subtracted by the gene's mean expression prior to clustering.



#### 7.3.7 Hierarchical clustering of coexpressed candidates

Hierarchical clustering of coexpressed candidate genes (Table 4.4) on the basis of gene counts obtained in the framework of a previous RNA-Seq study. Normalized counts from von Wyschetzki *et al.* (2015) were transformed (VST) and subtracted by the gene's mean expression value prior to clustering. MQ, queen mated with ergatoid male; VQ, virgin queen.

#### 7.3.8 Comparison of library sizes



The number of detectable genes increases with the number of sequenced reads (left) and gene counts (right). Samples from this and a former RNA-Seq study (Wyschetzki *et al.* 2015) were plotted.

#### 7.3.9 Comparison with previous studies

Overlap of this and previous comparisons of mated and virgin queens on the level of orthologous genes. +, upregulated in virgin; -, downregulated in virgin; V/VQ, virgin; M, mated; MQE, mated with ergatoid male.



### 7.3.10 Overview of all longevity studies performed in *C. obscurior* queens

MQE, queen mated with ergatoid male; MQW, queen mated with winged male; VQ, virgin queen. Both colony collection sites Ilheus and Una are located in Bahia, Brazil.





#### 7.3.11 Cross-study comparison of queen survival

Comparison of queen survival in this study with survival until 24 weeks in previous longevity studies (left) and survival until 18 weeks in the former RNA-Seq study (right). Labels refer to the year of publication as indicated in the table above.

## **Chapter 8 Summary**

Why organisms age and why some species do so at a faster rate than others are fundamental questions in biology. The queens of perennial eusocial insects (ants, honeybees and termites) are extraordinarily long-lived compared with females of solitary insects. Similar to the reproductive females of eusocial mammals, they do not exhibit signs of functional senescence and terminate reproduction only shortly before they die. In contradiction to the widespread fecundity/longevity trade-off, lifespan and reproductive success seem to be positively associated in eusocial animals. Evolutionary theories explain the long lifespan of queens from their low extrinsic mortality. They live in sheltered, often subterraneous nests, and are cared for by the workers. Furthermore, the queens of eusocial insects use the sperm of only one or a few males to fertilize all their eggs. The lifelong pair bond between males and females predicts that both partners benefit from an increased lifespan of the queen.

If and how the reproductive females of eusocial insects avoid the costs of reproduction are open questions. In this study, the myrmicine ant *Cardiocondyla obscurior* served as a model to investigate the regulation of queen longevity on the proximate level. Due to their relative short life expectancy, the survival and lifetime reproductive success of *C. obscurior* queens could be monitored in the laboratory.

This study is the first to report age-related changes in the transcriptome of mature social insect queens and shows that these changes are exactly opposite to what has previously been reported to aging females of fruit flies, *Drosophila melanogaster*. The results match the opposing reproductive and mortality patterns observed in social and solitary species and provide a first mechanistic explanation for the simultaneous increase of fecundity and longevity in ant queens (chapter 2).

The compensation of putative reproductive costs has not been thoroughly investigated in social insect queens. To test the prediction that reproduction competes for energy and nutrients with other processes, ant queens were forced to increase their investment into somatic repair. This experiment provides clear evidence on the phenotypic and transcriptome level that queens reallocate resources between the reproductive and immune systems (chapter 3).

The positive effect of mating on queen longevity was addressed in three analyses (chapter 2, 4 and 5). Physiological changes could be identified which are attributable to mating independent of reproduction (chapter 2) and the male type with whom the queen had mated (chapter 4 and 5).

In conclusion, this study suggests an alternative regulation of the conserved pathways that mediate the interplay among reproduction, metabolism and longevity. Queens might not avoid the costs of reproduction, but the costs of self-maintenance which are possibly borne by the workers.

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