

1 **Active eukaryotes in microbialites from Highborne Cay, Bahamas and Hamelin**
2 **Pool (Shark Bay), Australia**

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32

33 **ABSTRACT**

34

35 Microbialites are organosedimentary structures that are formed through the interaction of
36 benthic microbial communities and sediments and include mineral precipitation. These
37 lithifying microbial mat structures include stromatolites and thrombolites. Exuma Sound
38 in the Bahamas, and Hamelin Pool in Shark Bay, Western Australia are two locations
39 where significant stands of modern microbialites exist. Although prokaryotic diversity in
40 these structures is reasonably well documented, little is known about the eukaryotic
41 component of these communities and their potential to influence sedimentary fabrics
42 through grazing, binding and burrowing activities. Accordingly, comparisons of
43 eukaryotic communities in modern stromatolitic and thrombolytic mats can potentially
44 provide insight into the coexistence of both laminated and clotted mat structures in close
45 proximity to one another. Here we examine this possibility by comparing eukaryotic
46 diversity based on Sanger and high-throughput pyrosequencing of small subunit
47 ribosomal RNA (18S rRNA) genes. Analyses were based on total RNA extracts as
48 template to minimize input from inactive or deceased organisms. Results identified
49 diverse eukaryotic communities particularly stramenopiles, Alveolata, Metazoa,
50 Amoebozoa, and Rhizaria within different mat types at both locations, as well as
51 abundant and diverse signatures of eukaryotes with <80% sequence similarity to
52 sequences in GenBank. This suggests presence of significant novel eukaryotic diversity,
53 particularly in hypersaline Hamelin Pool. There was evidence of vertical structuring of
54 protist populations and foraminiferal diversity was highest in bioturbated/clotted
55 thrombolite mats of Highborne Cay.

56

57 **INTRODUCTION**

58

59 Fossilized stromatolites, dating back to 3.45 billion years ago, comprise the earliest
60 visible record of life on Earth (e.g. Allwood *et al.*, 2006; Grotzinger and Knoll, 1999;
61 Walter, 1983). There are only a few locations in the world where modern analogues of
62 marine stromatolites are actively forming, and these include the margin of Exuma Sound,

63 with regular seawater salinity, Bahamas (Reid *et al.* 2000), and hypersaline Hamelin
64 Pool, Australia (Jahnert and Collins, 2011). Stromatolites are laminated microbialites,
65 that can be further classified according to degree of lithification and cell-taxonomic
66 richness of different microbial groups (discussed in Baumgartner *et al.* 2009; Foster *et al.*
67 2009). Hamelin Pool and Exuma Sound are both sites of formation of oolitic sands and
68 lithifying microbial mats. Additional carbonate occurs in these environments, including
69 in the form of metazoan skeletal remains and micrite. These carbonates are trapped and
70 bound by extracellular polymeric substances (EPS), produced by filamentous
71 cyanobacteria and other bacteria (Dupraz and Visscher, 2005; Reid *et al.* 2000).
72 Thrombolites are microbialites that lack lamination, having instead, a clotted fabric.
73 Some attribute this to a specific microbial flora and contend thrombolites are essentially a
74 lower Paleozoic phenomenon (Kennard and James, 1986). Others propose thrombolites
75 result from ‘remodeling of a precursor fabric’ by a combination of processes that include
76 physical and metazoan disruption (Planavsky and Ginsburg, 2009; Walter and Heys,
77 1985). Regardless, both types of microbialites reflect the activities of complex microbial
78 communities and their interactions with the environment. A better understanding of
79 factors influencing microbialite structure has implications for interpretation of the
80 paleorecord.

81 While stromatolites are characterized by steep gradients of oxygen, sulfide and
82 light (Visscher and Stolz, 2005; Visscher *et al.* 1998; summarized in Dupraz *et al.* 2009),
83 thrombolites often lack a single oxygen maximum and the oxic zone typically extends to
84 greater depth (Myshrall *et al.* 2010). Independent of the debate on the origins of
85 thrombolites, it seems likely grazing, burrowing, and sediment-binding activities of
86 specific eukaryotes such as the foraminifera may significantly contribute to the more
87 bioturbated mat structures (Bernhard *et al.* 2013). In alternative proposals, thrombolites
88 might result from interactions between eukaryotic green algae and various coralline algae
89 (Feldmann & McKenzie, 1998), the patchy calcification of the filamentous
90 cyanobacterium *Dichotrix* (Planavsky *et al.* 2009), or by a combination of coccoid and
91 filamentous cyanobacterial photosynthesis, as was proposed for Green Lake, Fayetteville,
92 NY, USA (Thompson *et al.*, 1990).

93 Flagellate protists have been identified in some modern stromatolites (Al-Qassab
94 *et al.*, 2002), as well as ciliates in stromatolite microbial nodules (Westphalen, 1993), and
95 foraminiferal tests (shells) in some thrombolites (e.g., Mastandrea *et al.*, 2006; Papineau
96 *et al.*, 2005). These three groups are known to be successful in sulfide-enriched, oxygen-
97 depleted environments (e.g., Bernhard, 2003; Bernhard *et al.*, 2006; Fenchel and Finlay,
98 1995). Myshrall *et al.* (2010) propose a relatively minor role for eukaryotes in
99 thrombolites, and suggest based on the lower diversity and higher productivity they
100 detected in thrombolites compared to stromatolites, that thrombolite communities are
101 distinct from those in adjacent stromatolites, and not simply ‘bioturbated stromatolites.’

102 Due to the limited depth of sequencing and methodological biases (e.g., primer
103 choice), numerous other potentially bioturbating eukaryotes may have been undetected
104 by Myshrall *et al.* (2010). Here, we analyzed eukaryotic communities in different
105 microbialite structures along the margin of Exuma Sound, Bahamas, and in Hamelin
106 Pool, Australia by applying high-throughput sequencing of eukaryotic SSU rRNA
107 combined with multivariate statistical analyses. By utilizing RNA and not DNA as
108 template, we focus on the active fraction of the community in order to determine: a) if the
109 eukaryotic composition in different microbialite types is distinct, b) if there are common
110 communities in microbialites at both locations, and c) if a greater diversity of SSU rRNA
111 signatures of potential eukaryotic bioturbators other than metazoa can be found in more
112 clotted microbialites that might help explain their structure.

113

114 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

115 **Field site and sample collection**

116 Samples of microbialite mat types were collected from just below the water line at low
117 tide on the windward side of Highborne Cay (24°43.5’N, 76°49’W), Bahamas in March
118 2010 and from Hamelin Pool near Carbla Station on Hamelin Pool, Australia (26°15.4’S,
119 114°13.5’E) in June 2011. Highborne microbialite mat types were designated according
120 to Reid *et al.* (2000) for stromatolite (i.e., laminated) mats and according to Myshrall *et*
121 *al.* (2010) for thrombolite (i.e., clotted) mats. Samples collected at Highborne included
122 stromatolite surface Type 1 mats, which result from binding and trapping of ooids by the
123 filamentous cyanobacterium *Schizothrix* sp., surface Type 2 mats, which are biofilm

124 structures comprised of a complex community that includes aerobic and anaerobic
125 heterotrophic prokaryotes that precipitate a microcrystalline (ca. 30 μm in diameter)
126 CaCO_3 crust, Incipient Type 2 mats (transitioning from Type 1 to Type 2, with crust
127 firming, but not complete), and thrombolitic mats, referred to as button types by Myshrall
128 *et al.* (2010), which are irregular, clotted structures.

129 Hamelin Pool microbialites, which were classified using nomenclature of Jahnert
130 and Collins (2011) and Logan (1961), included pustular mats, which are irregular, clotted
131 mats, colloform mats, which are coarse, laminoid wavy mats, and smooth mats, which are
132 fine, laminoid structures. In Hamelin Pool we also sampled a smooth mat that was
133 recently scoured (“smooth scoured”). Only the 1-2cm fraction of this was sampled
134 because of disturbance to the top 1 cm. We also sampled the water column (500 ml) in
135 the immediate vicinity of these microbialite types, as well as sulfidic waters (~2m below
136 pool surface) of a nearby ‘blue hole’ (a stratified shallow hypersaline [78 PSU] pool on a
137 platform on the western edge of Hamelin Pool ~20 km from the microbialite sampling
138 site) for comparison. Samples from both locations are described in Table 1. The salinity
139 at the time of collection was 33-35.5 PSU at Highborne, and 66-72 PSU at Hamelin Pool.
140 Water temperature at Highborne during sampling was 25.4-25.9°C and in Hamelin Pool,
141 14.1-15.0°C. Maximum light intensity during midday at Highborne and Hamelin Pool
142 during the time of sampling was between 2000-2100 $\mu\text{Em}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ and 1100 and 1300 $\mu\text{Em}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$,
143 respectively. Microbialite samples were collected using 50cc syringe cores (2.6-cm
144 inner diameter), which were immediately sectioned into 1-cm intervals to 2 cm and
145 preserved in RNALater (Ambion).

146

147 **Microelectrode measurements**

148 Depth profiles of oxygen, sulfide and pH were determined using needle microelectrodes
149 (Visscher *et al.* 1998, 2002, Myshrall *et al.* 2010) *ex situ* under ambient temperature and
150 light intensity. Small samples (~5x5 cm) were collected and submerged in 3 cm water
151 collected from the site and pre-incubated for 12-24hr prior to the first measurement.
152 Daytime electrode readings were carried out during the peak of photosynthesis between
153 noon and 2pm, and nighttime measurements were made at the end of the dark period
154 between 3:30 and 5:30am. Light measurements were done using a LiCor LI 250 meter

155 equipped with a SA190A quantum sensor and salinity and temperature measurements
156 were obtained with an Accumet AP75 temperature/conductivity meter.

157

158 **RNA extraction and small subunit ribosomal RNA (SSU rRNA) gene sequencing**

159 Samples stored in RNAlater (0.5 gm of preserved material) were rinsed three times with
160 RNase-free and sterile 1X phosphate buffered saline (PBS) prior to RNA extraction.

161 RNA was extracted using the FastRNA Pro Soil-Direct Kit (MP Biomedical). The
162 manufacturer's extraction protocol was modified to include the addition of 2M sodium
163 acetate following cell lysis and a Turbo DNase (Ambion) treatment prior to the RNA

164 Matrix cleanup included in the extraction kit. DNA removal was confirmed by 45 cycles
165 of PCR (see below) using extracted RNA as template. RNA was reverse transcribed and
166 PCR amplified in one step using the Superscript One-Step RT-PCR kit (Invitrogen) and
167 either general eukaryotic small subunit ribosomal RNA (SSU rRNA) gene V4

168 hypervariable region primers and protocols (TAREuk454FWD1/ TAREukREV3, Stoeck
169 *et al.* 2010) or general primers for foraminifera (S14F1/S17, Pawlowski 2000). The
170 foraminifera-specific amplifications were required because general V4 primers do not
171 detect most foraminifera. Barcoded PCR products were purified from 1% agarose gels
172 using the Zymoclean Gel DNA Recovery Kit (Zymo Research). Foraminiferal PCR
173 products were cloned into pCR4-TOPO using the TOPO TA Cloning Kit (Invitrogen) for
174 Sanger sequencing (1 96-well plate per microbialite sample).

175 Pyrotags and clone sequences were processed for quality control and chimera
176 removal using Bellerophon Chimera Check and the Check_Chimera utilities (Ribosomal
177 Database Project) (Cole *et al.* 2003). After denoising of the pyrosequencing dataset using
178 AmpliconNoise (Quince *et al.* 2009), sequences from clone libraries and pyrosequencing
179 were clustered into operational taxonomic units (OTUs) at 97% similarity in QIIME
180 (Caporaso *et al.* 2010), and taxonomy of OTU representatives was assigned using JAguc
181 (Nebel *et al.* 2011). Taxonomy was linked to the QIIME OTU table via a PERL script
182 available from the authors. Since V4 primers did not encompass foraminifera, the V4 and
183 clone library datasets were clustered separately and then 97% OTUs were combined from
184 each library for each sample. We ran ordination and statistical analyses (described in
185 detail below) on both foraminifera-only, and combined datasets. For combined datasets,

186 we ran analyses using non-normalized data sets as well as normalized datasets, where V4
187 libraries were resampled to generate data sets of similar size to our foraminiferal data
188 sets. Normalization did not produce a different outcome, and so to retain the most
189 detailed picture of eukaryotic diversity, we present the non-normalized analyses. An
190 unweighted presentation of diversity data (stacked histograms) in each sample was used
191 for foraminifera-only analyses, since clone libraries may not be saturated. Weighted
192 analyses were used for total eukaryotes (combined foraminiferal clone and
193 pyrosequencing data). We interpret fine scale taxonomic assignments (species-level;
194 sometimes genus-level assignments) with caution because BLAST-based assignments are
195 complicated by the hypervariable nature of the V4 region of eukaryotic rRNA. Variable
196 taxon representation in public databases means JAguc may make taxonomic assignments
197 down to genus or species, but in others, only down to higher levels. Accordingly, our
198 stacked histograms presenting snapshots of diversity typically do not present a single
199 level of taxonomic resolution.

200 The BLASTn output and the OTU table were combined to calculate the number
201 of sequences across each sample belonging to a specific taxonomic group. The relative
202 abundance of each protistan group in a given sample was calculated as a percentage value
203 by dividing the raw number of sequences associated with the specific taxon by the total
204 number of sequences in the sample. This was used to generate heatmaps in QIIME.

205 Canonical correspondence analysis (CCA) was used to visualize relationships
206 between community structure and concentrations of dissolved oxygen, sediment depth,
207 and sites. Multi-Response Permutation Procedure (MRPP) was used as a statistical test of
208 significance for each of these factors on OTU distribution. A Monte Carlo test was also
209 used to assess a null hypothesis of no relationship between OTU distribution and these
210 variables. Ordination and multivariate statistics were performed on our dataset clustered
211 at 97% sequence identity threshold. MRPP, Monte Carlo tests, and CCA analyses used
212 the PC-ORD software package (MjM Software Design, Gleneden Beach, OR, USA).
213 Non-metric multidimensional scaling (NMS; goodness of fit measured by stress values,
214 with values <15 indicating a low probability of drawing the wrong inferences from the
215 results) and Principal Component Analysis, as implemented within PC-ORD, were used
216 to confirm CCA results (data not shown). An unweighted Unifrac analysis comparing the

217 eukaryotic communities (beta diversity) in all Hamelin Pool and Highborne Cay samples
218 was performed within QIIME.

219 Nucleotide sequences for foraminifera have been deposited in GenBank
220 (Accession numbers JX872558 - JX873273 (Hamelin Pool) and JX873274 - JX873955
221 (Highborne Cay)). V4 pyrosequencing tag sequences for Highborne Cay and Hamelin
222 Pool have been deposited in the GenBank (SRA061992 and SRA061825, respectively).

223

224 **RESULTS**

225

226 After removal of low-quality and potentially chimeric sequences, pyrosequencing yielded
227 a total of ~150,000 eukaryotic tags and Sanger sequencing produced 733 and 820
228 foraminifera clone sequences for Hamelin Pool and Highborne, respectively. The
229 Hamelin Pool and Highborne datasets were clustered into 2388 (including 129
230 foraminiferal) and 1571 (including 96 foraminiferal) OTUs, respectively. These data
231 were interpreted together with physicochemical data (Table 1).

232

233 **Eukaryotic SSU rRNA diversity in Highborne Cay, Bahamas microbialites**

234 All mat types appear to support diverse eukaryotes, however significant differences in
235 SSU rRNA signatures are not generally observed between different mat types above
236 Order-level. Groups with the greatest representation in combined Sanger and
237 pyrosequencing libraries were (in decreasing order): stramenopiles (e.g. diatoms),
238 Alveolata (ciliates and dinoflagellates), Metazoa (Annelids, Cnidaria, Gastrotricha,
239 Nematoda, Platyhelminthes, and Echinodermata), Amoebozoa, and Rhizaria (Figure 1).
240 However, within those dominant groups, there were differences in composition between
241 mat types and between depths. For example, within Rhizaria (which includes
242 foraminifera), Type 1 mat signatures in the 0-1cm fraction affiliated with the
243 foraminiferal taxa *Texulariida*, *Miliolina*, 3 types of *Rotaliida*, and undescribed
244 foraminifers with no close described relatives in GenBank (80% sequence similarity
245 cutoff) (Figure 2). In the 1-2 cm fractions, signatures of *Allogromida* were detected.
246 Replicate 0-1cm samples from two Incipient Type 2 mats were different in composition
247 and relative proportions of foraminiferal OTUs, and different in composition from Type 1

248 mats, with more than half of OTUs coming from Textulariida (Figure 2). Differences
249 may represent variations in the transitional state of one mat type to another. Thrombolite
250 samples had the highest foraminiferal diversity; sixteen OTUs in the 0-1cm fraction, and
251 14 OTUs in the 1-2cm fraction (Figure 2), and differences between the 0-1 and 1-2 cm
252 fractions. A heatmap of foraminiferal OTUs indicates unique foraminiferal populations
253 inhabiting thrombolites compared to stromatolites (Figure 3). Ciliate OTUs represented
254 >50% of alveolate OTUs (Figure 1), with no clear difference in community composition
255 between mat types and representatives from almost every ciliate class (10/12)
256 (Supplementary Figure 1).

257 CCA of the Highborne data indicates that mat type and depth below the sediment-
258 water interface explain much of the observed community structure (30% of the variation
259 explained by axes 1 and 2 together). Values for MRPP tests of significance were
260 combined for sediment depth and oxygen for all data sets because all 0-1cm samples
261 were at least partly oxic and all 1-2cm samples were anoxic. The analysis shows a
262 separation of protist communities within samples from different mat types and between
263 the 0-1 and 1-2cm fractions (Figure 4). CCA analysis considering depth and mat type
264 also explains 31% of the foraminifera sequence variation, and shows a clear separation
265 between the 0-1 cm fraction and the 1-2 cm fractions (Figure 5). Depth/oxygen was
266 found to have a significant effect ($p \leq 0.05$) on foraminifera OTU distributions in
267 Highborne samples, and mat type was found to have a significant effect on whole
268 eukaryotic community OTU distribution (Table 2).

269

270 **Eukaryotic SSU rRNA gene diversity in Hamelin Pool, Australia microbialites**

271 Eukaryotic rRNA sequences were dominated by Alveolata (10-50%), stramenopiles (10-
272 30%), and unclassified eukaryotes (5-45%) (Figure 6). Alveolates were dominated by
273 Heterocapsaceae and *Protodinium* (Dinophyceae) in colloform mats (with more diversity
274 of alveolates in the 1-2cm fraction), and Litostomatea (Ciliophora) in smooth mats.
275 Pustular mats had the greatest variety of ciliate and dinoflagellate OTUs, most of which
276 were also represented in the overlying water-column sample (Supplementary Figure 2).

277 The Hamelin Pool (Carbla Beach) water sample collected from above the
278 microbialites had almost 40% of total OTUs from fungi, 35% from stramenopiles, and

279 signatures of metazoa, choanoflagellates, rhizarians, glaucocystophytes (primarily a
280 freshwater algae group), and low (<5%) contribution from unclassified eukaryotes. OTUs
281 present in the sulfidic water sample from the shallow hypersaline ‘blue hole’ at a distant
282 location on the western shore of Hamelin Pool, were distinct from those in Hamelin Pool,
283 likely due to presence/absence of sulfide.

284 Stramenopile OTUs were distinct between the local water samples and the
285 microbialite samples (Supplementary Figure 3). The water samples were dominated by
286 diatom stramenopiles, and microbialite stramenopiles were dominated by labyrinthulids.
287 Between the two water samples, stramenopile OTUs in the sulfidic ‘blue hole’ (90%
288 Bacillariophyceae) were distinct from those in the sulfide-free seawater at Carbla Station
289 (50% Coscinodiscophyceae and ~40% silicoflagellates affiliating with
290 Dictyochophyceae). Labyrinthulids affiliating to Thraustrochytridae represented between
291 60 and 85% of microbialite stramenopile sequences. Ten to fifty percent of OTUs were
292 unassigned (defined as having <80% similarity to GenBank sequences) suggesting the
293 presence of a novel eukaryotic community in Hamelin Pool, which will be the subject of
294 a future study.

295 Smooth mats were dominated by Alveolata (50-90% ciliates), stramenopiles
296 (~20%), and unclassified eukaryotes (10-20%) (Figure 6). Dinoflagellate representatives
297 in the 0-1 cm fraction included 40% Gymnodiniales, and several other taxa. In the 1-2
298 cm fraction, 90% of alveolate OTUs affiliated with Litostomatea (Ciliophora). The
299 smooth mat that had been recently scoured (sample “SS”) exhibited a shift in eukaryotic
300 composition.

301 The colloform mats differed from the smooth mats by having a slightly lower
302 contribution from alveolate signatures, and shifts within the alveolate signatures
303 (Supplementary Figure 2), with OTUs affiliating with Dinophyceae dominating at both
304 depth intervals. The pustular mat sample (only the 0-1cm fraction was analyzed) differed
305 from the others by having a greater representation of rhizarian signatures, new
306 contributions from Cryptophyta, and no signatures from Centroheliozoa.

307 When examining foraminiferal sequences from Hamelin Pool microbialites,
308 differences in community composition are observed between microbialite types and
309 between depths within a single mat core (Figure 7). Smooth mat samples were dominated

310 by one OTU within Rotaliida. In the 0-1cm fraction, there were additional OTU
311 contributions from Textulariida, Rotaliida, Milliolina, and Allogromida (i.e., thecate, or
312 non-mineralized forms). Relative to the unscoured smooth mat, the scoured smooth mat
313 had 8 vs. 2 OTUs at the 1-2 cm depth, and mostly distinct OTUs, overall.

314 Foraminiferal OTU compositions in the two depth fractions of the colloform and
315 smooth mats were very different from one another (3 out of 8, and 3 out of 13
316 overlapped, respectively) (Supplementary Figure 4). The pustular mat type exhibited a
317 distinct foraminiferal community composition in the 0-1 cm fraction, with 85% of the
318 OTUs coming from Miliolina, and the rest from Allogromida (Supplementary Figure 4).
319 A heatmap of foraminiferal OTUs supports the unique nature of foraminiferal
320 communities in the different mat types (minimal overlap) and depth intervals within
321 individual microbialite types (Supplementary Figure 5).

322 CCA of our Hamelin Pool microbialite data identified mat type and depth as
323 parameters that impact much of the observed protistan community distribution. This
324 analysis supports the differentiation of eukaryote communities within different
325 microbialite types and between different depths within individual microbialite types
326 (Figure 7). As observed in our Highborne data, depth/oxygen was found to have a
327 significant effect ($p \leq 0.05$) on the observed distribution of OTUs for the foraminiferal
328 data set only. Significantly different eukaryotic communities inhabit different mat types.

329

330 **Combined CCA analysis of eukaryotic SSU rRNA diversity**

331 Highborne and Hamelin Pool each contain distinct eukaryote communities
332 (including foraminifera). Microbialite type and depth explained only 22.8% of the
333 variation in a combined CCA analysis, implying other environmental factors such as
334 salinity are driving most of the community differences between these two sites
335 (Supplementary Figure 6). This notion is supported by MRPP analysis of this combined
336 data set, where salinity is shown to be a significant influence ($p \leq 0.05$) on eukaryotic
337 OTU composition (Table 2). Site had a significant impact on distribution of OTUs for
338 foraminifera separately. For the inclusive eukaryotic data set, mat type and site had a
339 significant effect on distribution of OTUs.

340

341 **DISCUSSION**

342 **A new view of eukaryotic microbial diversity in microbialites.** Microbialites in
343 Hamelin Pool and Highborne Cay have been the subject of several recent investigations
344 into their microbial communities and biogeochemistry (e.g., Baumgartner *et al.* 2009;
345 Myshrall *et al.* 2010; Visscher *et al.* 1998; Reid *et al.* 2000; Foster *et al.* 2009; Foster and
346 Green 2011; Allen *et al.* 2009; Burns *et al.* 2004). To our knowledge, only three studies
347 have gathered information on microbial eukaryotes, one for Hamelin Pool (Allen *et al.*
348 2009) and two for Highborne (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009; Myshrall *et al.* 2011); and in
349 comparison to this study, were more limited (and DNA-based) rRNA gene sequencing
350 efforts. In the study of Hamelin Pool microbialites, only a limited number of signatures
351 (11 unique clones from a pustular mat sample, and 10 from a smooth mat) were detected,
352 and most were from Nematodes (Allen *et al.* 2009). Fungal, tardigrade, and microalgal
353 OTUs were also detected. When using small sediment volumes and clone libraries,
354 libraries can often be saturated by metazoan sequences. This was observed previously in
355 microbialite samples, where nematode sequences dominated eukaryotic sequences in
356 marine (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009; Feazel *et al.* 2008) and in freshwater microbialites
357 (Couradeau *et al.* 2011).

358 In one of the studies of Highborne thrombolites, Myshrall *et al.* (2010) recovered
359 low eukaryote diversity (only 26 unique eukaryotic ecotypes) relative to bacteria, with
360 nematode sequences again figuring prominently in their clone libraries. Myshrall *et al.*
361 (2010) also detected members of Alveolata and Chlorophyta, including sequences
362 affiliating with those from hypersaline mats of Guerrero Negro (Feazel *et al.* 2008) and
363 sequences in public databases from Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (HAVO) cave mats.
364 They attributed their low recovered eukaryotic diversity in Highborne thrombolites at
365 least in part, to the dynamic nature of microbialite environments, where they are
366 periodically buried in oolitic sands, potentially for months (e.g. Reid *et al.* 2000). PCR
367 primers can also influence recovered diversity. While no PCR primer set can be assumed
368 to be inclusive for its target group, in the original description of the primers used by
369 Myshrall *et al.* (Moon-van der Staay *et al.* 2001), it is acknowledged this set has biases
370 against certain groups of eukaryotes including Chrysophyceae, some
371 Chlorarachniophyceae, some Apicomplexa, some Ciliophora, and deep-branching

372 eukaryotes. In addition, we have found this set to be biased against many members of
373 foraminifera, precluding its use in this study. The inclusion of foraminifera and other
374 groups such as Ciliophora is particularly important for making valid comparisons of
375 different microbialite communities.

376 Our analysis reveals diverse communities of eukaryotes in all microbialite types
377 at both sites. The major difference in results (high vs. low diversity) can be attributed to
378 different nucleic acid extraction procedures, templates (RNA vs. DNA), PCR primers,
379 and sequencing efforts/technologies. We attempted to minimize methodological biases by
380 combining pyrosequencing of the V4 region of the SSU rRNA with Sanger clone
381 libraries specifically targeting the foraminifera (missed by the employed V4 primers). In
382 spite of the greater depth of sequencing in this study, for reasons explained above, and
383 because of minimal replication for specific microbialite types, we focus our observations
384 on broad differences in taxonomic composition of higher groups (family and higher)
385 between microbialite types that are likely representative of shifts in *in situ* populations.

386 CCA indicates distinct eukaryotic communities in the different microbialite types
387 and in different depth horizons within individual microbialite types in Highborne Cay and
388 Hamelin Pool (Figures 4 and 8). It is notable that the water samples analyzed from
389 Hamelin Pool (at the microbialite sampling site) and from the sulfidic ‘blue hole’ (away
390 from the sampling site) had eukaryotic communities largely distinct from the microbialite
391 samples (Figure 6 and Supplementary Figure 2). The sulfidic ‘blue hole’ water sample
392 also contained stramenopile species that were distinct from those in the Hamelin Pool
393 water sample, and dominated almost exclusively by diatoms, which are known to tolerate
394 sulfide (e.g. Nagai and Imai, 1999; Admiral and Pelletier 1979). In contrast, stramenopile
395 signatures from Hamelin Pool microbialites came primarily from Labyrinthulomycetes,
396 which are known to degrade complex polysaccharides (Raghukumar 2002). These
397 organisms may be attracted to, and involved in, the degradation of the abundant
398 polysaccharides in microbialite exopolymer matrices at this site.

399 The eukaryotic taxa that we report in microbialites at these two locations reflect
400 modern microbialite ecosystems in our present oxic biosphere. The extent that taxonomic
401 groups overlap with those in ancient microbialite ecosystems is unknown, primarily

402 because of their poor fossilization potential. Exploration of preserved eukaryotic
403 biosignatures in fossilized microbialites is an area of future investigation.

404

405 **Potential metazoan bioturbators.** Stable isotope data indicate that filaments of the
406 cyanobacterium *Dichotrix* play a role in formation of microbialite clots (Planavsky *et al.*
407 2009). Bioturbation by eukaryotes may also impact mat structures (Farmer 1992), and
408 includes churning of sediments caused by movements of fauna. Many eukaryotes,
409 including metazoa (e.g. Reichardt 1988; Pike *et al.* 2001), foraminifera (Gross, 2002),
410 and ciliates (e.g. Glud and Fenchel 1999) are known to bioturbate sediments. Such
411 activities stimulate bacterial community activity (Reichardt, 1988) and have been
412 proposed as an explanation for the formation and coexistence of clotted mat structures
413 such as thrombolites in the same vicinity as laminated mat structures (e.g. Type 1, 2,
414 smooth and colloform mats) (Walter and Heys, 1985).

415 On Highborne Cay the dominant cyanobacteria in stromatolites (Type 1 and 2
416 mats) is *Schizothrix* (Reid *et al.* 2000) and in thrombolites is *Dichotrix* sp. (Myshrall *et*
417 *al.* 2010; Planavsky *et al.* 2009). Previous studies have shown that nematodes may be
418 attracted to volatile compounds produced by cyanobacteria via chemotaxis (Höckelmann
419 *et al.* 2004). At Hamelin Pool, we detected signatures of diverse metazoa (Annelida,
420 Cnidaria, Gastrotricha, Nematoda, Platyhelminthes, and Echinodermata), including
421 specific nematode signatures detected previously (Allen *et al.*, 2009). Nematode
422 signatures detected previously by Myshrall *et al.* (2011) and affiliating with
423 *Syngolaimus* were found in Highborne microbialites.

424

425 **Potential protist bioturbators.** Bioturbation may occur as a result of feeding activities
426 of ciliates and foraminifera (e.g. Pusch *et al.* 1998; Gross 2002) and biofilm degradation
427 (e.g., by Thraustochytrids (Labyrinthulomycetes); Raghukumar 2002). Ciliate signatures
428 figured prominently among alveolate OTUs in microbialites at both locations
429 (Supplementary Figure 1). Alveolates in Hamelin Pool microbialites were dominated by
430 dinoflagellate subgroups Heterocapsaceae and *Protodinium* in colloform mats, and by the
431 ciliate class Litostomatea (includes taxa described from anoxic environments; Vd'ačny *et*
432 *al.* 2011) in smooth mats. The 0-1cm and 1-2cm fractions of microbialite samples

433 contained very different alveolate communities that correlated with oxygen concentration
434 (Table 1 and Supplementary Figure 3).

435 As noted above, foraminifera are also capable of significantly altering sediment
436 fabric (e.g. Gross, 2002). The subgroup Allogromida feed on bacteria and smaller
437 eukaryotes, are known to rend bacterial biofilms (Bernhard and Bowser, 1992), and
438 through their reticulopodial activities can disrupt the fine laminations of microbialites
439 (Bernhard *et al.*, 2013). Aside from some overlapping taxonomic groups, foraminiferal
440 communities in different microbialite structures were distinct, and thrombolites harbored
441 a greater family-level diversity than stromatolite types examined from Highborne (14-16
442 vs. 4-11) (Figure 2). Signatures affiliating with Allogromida were detected in the 1-2cm
443 fraction of Type 1 stromatolite mats, and the 0-1cm fraction of Type 2 stromatolite as
444 well as thrombolite mats from Highborne Cay, and the 0-1cm fraction of smooth,
445 colloform, and pustular mats, and the 1-2cm fraction of colloform mats from Hamelin
446 Pool (Supplementary Figure 4). No signatures of Allogromida were recovered from the
447 1-2cm fraction of smooth mat samples, consistent with their greater lamination.
448 Heatmaps of foraminifera OTU distribution show very little taxonomic overlap between
449 foraminiferal communities from either site (Figure 3 and Supplementary Figure 5). The
450 distinction of foraminiferal communities between different depth fractions within the
451 same mat type was supported by CCA and MRPP analyses for both Highborne and
452 Hamelin Pool samples (Figures 5 and 8 and Table 2). Since foraminiferal populations can
453 be patchy, the 0.5g samples processed for molecular analyses may under-sample
454 foraminifera (and possibly other eukaryotic groups). Our study also did not examine
455 whether or not there was a seasonal component, so it is possible that there are seasonal
456 differences in protist communities at both of these sites, particularly Hamelin Pool, where
457 relatively greater seasonal fluctuations in temperature, salinity, and light occur.

458

459 **Comparison of Hamelin Pool and Highborne Cay eukaryotic communities.** Unifrac
460 Analysis shows a clear distinction between communities at each site (Figure 8).
461 Differences are likely impacted by salinity and temperature. Hamelin Pool is a
462 hypersaline system within the wider Shark Bay environment, with salinities between 66
463 and 72 PSU compared to 33-33.5 PSU at Highborne Cay, and had lower temperatures at

464 the time of sampling (14-15°C vs. 25.4-25.9°C) (Table 1). MRPP analyses of
465 depth/oxygen, mat type, and salinity indicate that salinity drives, in part, the structure of
466 the eukaryotic community ($p < 0.001$). It was impossible to differentiate between
467 influences of depth and oxygen at the scale of our sectioning since all 1-2cm fractions
468 were anoxic, and all 0-1cm fractions were at least partly oxic. Eukaryotic communities
469 are distinct between microbialite types, and foraminiferal communities are distinct at
470 different depths (Table 2), most likely the result of different types of habitat/substrate,
471 and varying prokaryotic and algal populations. The observation that sediment depth is a
472 more significant driver of foraminifera OTU composition than mat type in the combined
473 analysis likely reflects sensitivity of different foraminiferal taxa to oxygen concentration
474 and differences in ability to migrate in response to fluctuations in oxygen and sulfide
475 occurring within microbialites during diurnal cycles. A similar pattern probably exists for
476 other individual protistan taxonomic groups.

477

478 **CONCLUSIONS**

479

480 The sites sampled in this study are dynamic environments impacted by tides, storms, and
481 currents, all of which subject microbialites to a continual cycle of mat construction and
482 deconstruction. Eukaryotes in the different microbialite types at Highborne and Hamelin
483 Pool were more diverse than previously reported, and distinct, suggesting they may shape
484 or be shaped by different microbialite fabrics. Metazoa and protists are potential
485 bioturbators of microbialite mat structure. Our analyses resulted in several hypotheses
486 regarding the impact of eukaryotes on microbialite structures, including 1) eukaryotic
487 bioturbation may contribute to the more clotted structures of several microbialite types,
488 2) eukaryotic communities transition in composition during mat rebuilding after scouring
489 events, and as microbialites transition from one type to another, and 3) Protists such as
490 Thraustochytrids may actively degrade/consume the mat extracellular matrix. These
491 hypotheses can be tested using more refined sampling, time-course studies, laboratory-
492 based experiments, and comparisons with non-lithifying, soft, organic-rich mats.

493

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495

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507

508

509 **TABLE AND FIGURE LEGENDS**

510

511 Table 1. Temperature, Salinity, Oxygen, Sulfide, Temperature and Salinity data for
512 Hamelin Pool, Australia and Highborne Cay, Bahamas microbialite samples. n/a = not
513 observed. For sulfide data, depth noted is where free sulfide ($H_2S/HS^-/S^{2-}$) is first
514 observed, and the maximum concentration during the day during sampling is based on
515 single profiles (note: replicate profiles are very similar). Oxygen data are presented as
516 the ranges of maximum depth and maximum % oxygen saturation in each sample.

517

518 Table 2. Multi Response Permutation Procedure (MRPP) P values for sample parameters
519 for Highborne Cay (HC), Hamelin Pool (HP) and combined data sets. MRPP values are
520 combined for depth and oxygen for all data sets because all 0-1cm samples were oxic and
521 all 1-2cm samples were anoxic. na=not applicable.

522

523 Figure 1. Stacked histogram of eukaryotic OTU composition of (97% sequence
524 similarity, weighted data presentation) in Highborne Cay, Bahamas microbialite samples

525 based on SSU rRNA signatures (cDNA template). Y-axis corresponds to fraction of
526 OTUs affiliating with each taxonomic grouping out of 100%.

527

528 Figure 2. Stacked histogram of foraminiferal OTU composition of (97% sequence
529 similarity, unweighted data presentation) in Highborne Cay, Bahamas microbialite
530 samples based based on SSU rRNA signatures (cDNA template). Y-axis corresponds to
531 fraction of OTUs affiliating with each taxonomic grouping out of 100%. Mat type noted
532 for each sample (note: Type 1-2=Incipient Type 2 mat, Throm=Thrombolite).

533

534 Figure 3. Heatmap of foraminiferal OTUs (97% sequence similarity) from Highborne
535 Cay, Bahamas. Y axis represents log transformed abundance. Mat type noted for each
536 sample (note: Type 1-2=Incipient Type 2 mat, Throm=Thrombolite). Depths of fractions
537 for each sample given in cm.

538

539 Figure 4. Biplot generated from Canonical Correspondence Analysis (CCA) of the 18S
540 rRNA data set from Highborne Cay, Bahamas, for all eukaryotes clustered at the 97%
541 sequence identity level. Sampled microbialite types are circled. Depths of each sample
542 are noted. Filled circles represent 0-1cm fractions, and hollow circles represent 1-2 cm
543 fractions. Mat type noted for each sample (note: Type 1-2=Incipient Type 2 mat,
544 Throm=Thrombolite).

545

546 Figure 5. Biplot generated from Canonical Correspondence Analysis (CCA) of our 18S
547 rRNA data set from Highborne Cay, Bahamas, for foraminiferal sequences clustered at
548 the 97% sequence identity level. Line separates samples from 0-1 cm depths for different
549 microbialite types. Depths of each sample are noted. Filled circles represent 0-1cm
550 fractions, and hollow circles represent 1-2 cm fractions. Mat type noted for each sample
551 (note: Type 1-2=Incipient Type 2 mat, Throm=Thrombolite).

552

553 Figure 6. Stacked histogram of eukaryotic OTU composition of (97% sequence
554 similarity, weighted data presentation) in Hamelin Pool, Australia microbialite and water
555 samples based on SSU rRNA signatures (cDNA template). Y-axis corresponds to fraction

556 of OTUs affiliating with each grouping out of 100%. S=smooth mat, C=colloform,
557 P=Pustular, SS=smooth Scoured, SB Water=Shark Bay (Hamelin Pool) waters at
558 microbialite sampling site, and BH Water=coastal enclosed sulfidic water body behind
559 beach on Hamelin Pool, ~20km from microbialite sampling site.

560

561 Figure 7. Biplot generated from Canonical Correspondence Analysis (CCA) of our 18S
562 rRNA data set from Hamelin Pool, Australia for all eukaryotes clustered at the 97%
563 sequence identity level. Sampled microbialite types are circled. Depths of each sample
564 are noted. Filled circles represent 0-1cm fractions, and hollow circles represent 1-2 cm
565 fractions. S=smooth mat, C=colloform mat, P=pustular mat, and SS=smooth Scoured
566 mat.

567

568 Figure 8. Unifrac analysis of Hamelin Pool and Highborne Cay samples. Hamelin Pool
569 mat identifiers: 1 and 2=S=smooth mat, 0-1 and 1-2cm depths, 3 and 4=C=colloform
570 mat, 0-1 and 1-2cm depths, 5=pustular mat, 0-1 cm depth, and 6=Shark Bay (Hamelin
571 Pool) water, 7=Blue Hole water, 8=smooth Scoured mat 0-1cm depth. Highborne mat
572 identifiers: 1 and 2=Type 2 mat, 0-1 and 1-2cm depths, 3 and 4=Incipient Type 2 mat 0-
573 1cm and 1-2cm depths, 5=thrombolite 0-1cm depth, 6=Incipient Type 2 mat 0-1cm
574 depth, 7=Type 1 mat 0-1cm depth, 8=thrombolite 1-2cm depth, 9=Type 1 mat 1-2cm
575 depth.

576

577 Supplementary Figure 1. Stacked histogram of ciliate OTU composition of (97%
578 sequence similarity, weighted data presentation) in Highborne Cay, Bahamas microbialite
579 samples based ciliate on SSU rRNA signatures (cDNA template). Y-axis corresponds to
580 fraction of OTUs affiliating with each taxonomic grouping out of 100%.

581

582 Supplementary Figure 2. Stacked histogram of alveolate taxonomic composition (OTUs
583 at 97% sequence similarity, unweighted data presentation) in Hamelin Pool microbialite
584 and water samples based on SSU rRNA signatures (cDNA template). Y-axis corresponds
585 to fraction of OTUs affiliating with each taxonomic grouping out of 100%. S=Smooth
586 mat, C=colloform, P=pustular, SS=smooth scoured, SB Water=Shark Bay (Hamelin

587 Pool) waters at microbialite sampling site, and BH Water=coastal enclosed sulfidic water
588 body behind beach on Shark Bay, ~20km from microbialite sampling site.

589

590 Supplementary Figure 3. Stacked histogram of stramenopile taxonomic composition
591 (OTUs at 97% sequence similarity, unweighted data presentation) in Hamelin Pool
592 microbialite and water samples based on SSU rRNA signatures (cDNA template). Y-axis
593 corresponds to fraction of OTUs affiliating with each grouping out of 100%. S=smooth
594 mat, C=colloform, P=pustular, SS=smooth scoured, SB Water=Shark Bay (Hamelin
595 Pool) waters at microbialite sampling site, and BH Water=coastal enclosed sulfidic water
596 body behind beach on Shark Bay, ~20km from microbialite sampling site.

597

598 Supplementary Figure 4. Stacked histogram of foraminiferal OTU composition of (97%
599 sequence similarity, unweighted data presentation) in Hamelin Pool, Australia,
600 microbialite and water samples based on SSU rRNA signatures (cDNA template). Y-axis
601 corresponds to fraction of OTUs affiliating with each taxonomic grouping out of 100%.
602 S=smooth mat, C=colloform, P=pustular, SS=smooth Scoured, SB Water=Shark Bay
603 (Hamelin Pool) waters at microbialite sampling site, and BH Water=coastal enclosed
604 sulfidic water body behind beach on Shark Bay, ~20km from microbialite sampling site.

605

606 Supplementary Figure 5. Heatmap of foraminiferal OTUs (97% sequence similarity)
607 from Hamelin Pool, Australia. Y axis represents log transformed abundance. P=pustular
608 mat, C=colloform mat, SB water=Shark Bay (Hamelin Pool) water above microbialite
609 sampling site, BH water=coastal enclosed sulfidic water body behind beach on Shark
610 Bay, ~20km from microbialite sampling site, S=smooth mat, SS=smooth scoured mat.

611

612 Supplementary Figure 6. Biplot generated from Canonical Correspondence Analysis
613 (CCA) of our combined 18S rRNA data sets from Hamelin Pool, Australia and
614 Highborne Cay, Bahamas, for all eukaryotes clustered at the 97% sequence identity level.
615 Depths of each sample are noted. Hollow circles represent Hamelin Pool samples:
616 S=smooth mat, C=colloform mat, P=pustular mat, and SS=smooth Scoured mat. Filled

617 circles represent Highborne Cay sample types noted for each (note: Type 1-2=Incipient
618 Type 2 mat, Throm=Thrombolite).
619
620

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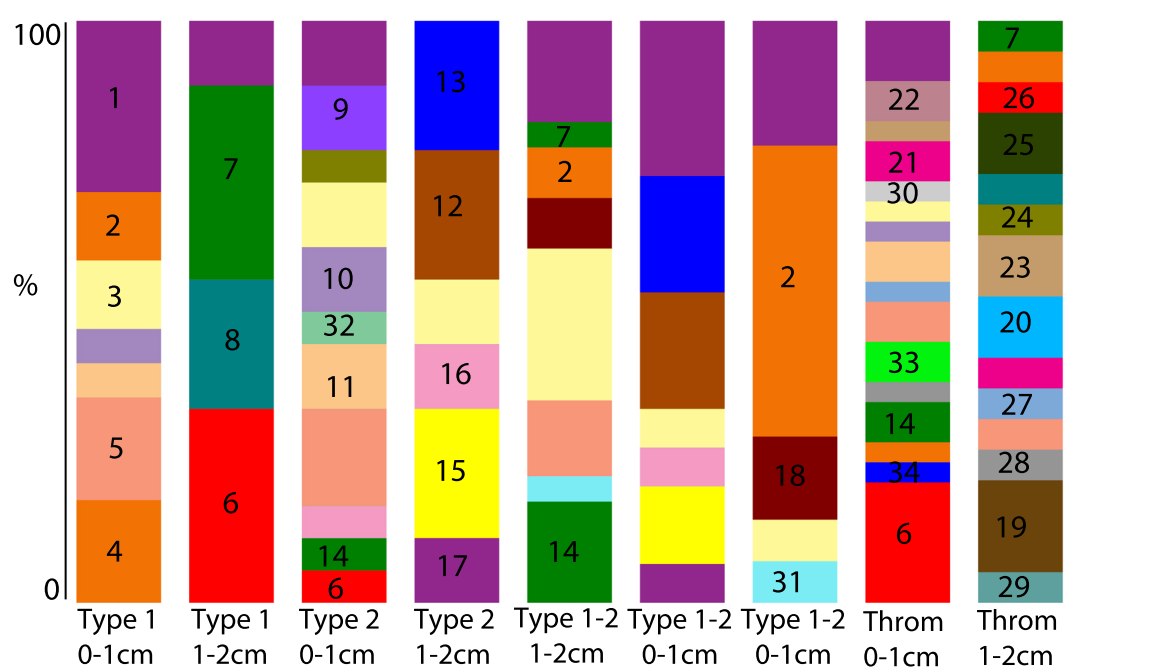
Table 1. Temperature, Salinity, Oxygen, Sulfide, Temperature and Salinity data for Hamelin Pool, Australia and Highborne Cay, Bahamas microbialite samples. n/a = not observed. For sulfide data, depth noted is where free sulfide ($\text{H}_2\text{S}/\text{HS}^-/\text{S}^{2-}$) is first observed, and the maximum concentration during the day during sampling is based on single profiles (note: replicate profiles are very similar). Oxygen data are presented as the ranges of maximum depth and maximum % oxygen saturation in each sample.

Highborne Cay	Temperature	Salinity (PSU)	Max. % O₂ Saturation (depth in mm)	Sulfide(μM) (depth first observed in mm)
Type 1 mat 0-1cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	225-264 (2.2-2.4mm)	n/a
Type 1 mat 1-2cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	0 (0mm)	24 (12.25)
Type 2 mat 0-1cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	394-456 (5.8-6.4)	76 (7.25)
Type 2 mat 1-2cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	0 (0)	282 (throughout)
Incipient Type II mat 0-1cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	285-346 (7.4-8.2)	17 (9.25mm)
Incipient Type II mat 1-2cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	0 (0)	192 (throughout)
Thrombolite 0-1cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	536-622 (8.2-9.6)	10 (9.75)
Thrombolite 1-2cm	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	0 (0)	168 (throughout)
Highborne water	25.4-25.9°C	33-35.5	100	n/a
Hamelin Pool				
Pustular mat 0-1cm	14-15°C	66-72	174-218 (5.8-6.4)	38 (6.25)
Pustular mat 1-2cm	14-15°C	66-72	0 (0)	81 (throughout)
Colloform mat 0-1cm	14-15°C	66-72	188-230 (5.8-6.2)	19 (7.75)
Colloform mat 1-2cm	14-15°C	66-72	0 (0)	189 (throughout)
Smooth mat 0-1 cm	14-15°C	66-72	229-312 (7.4-8.2)	26 (7.5)

Smooth mat 1-2cm	14-15°C	66-72	0 (0)	170 (throughout)
Smooth Scoured mat 0-1cm	14-15°C	66-72	100-108 (2.6-3.4)	32 (4.0mm)
Smooth Scoured mat 1-2cm	14-15°C	66-72	0 (0)	76 (throughout)
Hamelin Pool water	14-15°C	66-72	100	n/a
Blue Hole sulfidic water	18°C	78	0	n/a

Table 2. Multi Response Permutation Procedure (MRPP) P values for sample parameters for Highborne Cay (HC), Hamelin Pool (HP) and combined data sets. MRPP values are combined for depth and oxygen for all data sets because all 0-1cm samples were oxic and all 1-2cm samples were anoxic. na=not applicable.

	Depth/Oxygen	Site	Mat Type	Salinity
HC-all eukaryotes	0.455	na	0.028	na
HC-foraminifera	0.027	na	0.776	na
HP-all eukaryotes	0.817	na	0.000	na
HP-foraminifera	0.001	na	0.000	na
Combined-all eukaryotes	0.061	0.001	0.001	<0.001
Combined-foraminifera	0.051	0.007	0.055	na



- 6 Allogromida;unclassified Allogromida
- 34 Miliolina;Alveolinidae;Borelis
- 4 Miliolina;Hauerinidae;Pyrgo
- 14 Miliolina;Miliolidae;Quinqueloculininae;Quinqueloculina
- 17 Miliolina;Peneroplidae;Spirolina
- 15 Miliolina;Soritidae;Archaiasinae;Androsina
- 31 Miliolina;Soritidae;Laevipeneroplis
- 16 Rotaliida;Bolivinacea;Bolivinidae;Bolivina
- 29 Rotaliida;Bulminacea;Uvigerinidae;Uvigerina
- 19 Rotaliida;Cassidulinacea;Cassidulinidae;Cassidulinoides
- 28 Rotaliida;Cibicididae;Cibicides
- 33 Rotaliida;Discorbacea;Discorbidae;Cancris
- 5 Rotaliida;Discorbacea;Discorbidae;Discorbis
- 27 Rotaliida;Discorbacea;Glabratellidae;Angulodiscobis
- 11 Rotaliida;Discorbacea;Glabratellidae;Glabratella
- 32 Rotaliida;Discorbacea;Rosalinidae;Rosalina
- 10 Rotaliida;Discorbinellacea;Pseudoparrellidae;Epistominella
- 3 Rotaliida;Elphidiidae;Elphidium

- 30 Rotaliida;Globigerinacea;Globigerinidae;Globigerinita
- 21 Rotaliida;Nonionacea;Anomalinidae;Cibicidoides
- 20 Rotaliida;Nonionacea;Nonionidae;Haynesina
- 23 Rotaliida;Nonionacea;Nonionidae;Nonionella
- 24 Rotaliida;Nummulitidae;Nummulites
- 9 Rotaliida;Nummulitidae;Planostegina
- 22 Rotaliida;Planorbulinacea;Planorbulinidae;Planorbulina
- 8 Rotaliida;Planorbulinacea;Planorbulinidae;Planorbulinella
- 18 Rotaliida;Rotaliacea;Rotaliidae;Ammonia
- 25 Rzhakinidae;Milliammina
- 12 Spirillinida;Patellinidae;Patellina
- 26 Textulariida;Astrorhizida;Bathysiphonidae;Bathysiphon
- 13 Textulariida;Astrorhizida;Saccaminidae;Hippocrepinella
- 2 Textulariida;Textulariacea;Eggerellidae;Eggerelloides
- 7 Textulariida;Trochamminacea;Trochamminidae;Trochammina
- 1 Other

