

1 **Full genome sequence of a novel circo-like virus detected in an adult European eel**  
2 **(*Anguilla anguilla*) showing signs of cauliflower disease**

3

4 **Andor Doszpoly<sup>1\*</sup>, Zoltán L. Tarján<sup>1</sup>, Róbert Glávits<sup>2</sup>, Tamás Müller<sup>3</sup>, Mária Benkő<sup>1</sup>**

5 <sup>1</sup> *Institute for Veterinary Medical Research, Centre for Agricultural Research, Hungarian*  
6 *Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary*

7 <sup>2</sup> *Veterinary Diagnostic Directorate, National Food Chain Safety Office, Budapest, Hungary*

8 <sup>3</sup> *Department of Fish Culture, Szent István University, Gödöllő, Hungary*

9

10

11

12 Keywords: cauliflower disease, stomatopapilloma, eel, fish circovirus, complete genome,  
13 phylogeny

14

15

16

17 The GenBank accession number of the sequences reported in this paper is KC469701.

18

19

20

21 Author's address: Andor Doszpoly, Institute for Veterinary Medical Research, Centre  
22 for Agricultural Research, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, H-1581 Budapest, P.O. Box 18,  
23 Hungary; e-mail: [adoszpoly@vmri.hu](mailto:adoszpoly@vmri.hu)

24

25

26 **Abstract**

27       An adult European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), showing typical signs of the so-called  
28 cauliflower disease, was subjected to pathological and molecular virological examinations.  
29 Samples, taken from the internal organs and the polypoid proliferative tissue from the mouth,  
30 were examined by PCR for the detection of several viruses. Positive results were obtained  
31 with a nested PCR targeting the *rep* gene of circoviruses. Analysis of the partial *rep* sequence  
32 indicated the presence of a putative novel circovirus, but attempts to isolate it remained  
33 unsuccessful. The missing part of the genome was acquired by an inverse nested PCR with  
34 two specific primer pairs, designed from the newly determined *rep* sequence, then genome  
35 walking was applied. The circular full genome was found to consist of 1378 nt. Two  
36 oppositely oriented ORFs were present. One of them could be identified as a circoviral *rep*  
37 gene unambiguously. However, the predicted product of the other ORF, though it is a clear  
38 positional counterpart of the *cap* genes, showed no obvious homology to any known  
39 circoviral capsid proteins. A stem-loop-like element in the intergenic region between the 5'  
40 ends of the ORFs was also found. Phylogenetic calculations indicated that the novel virus  
41 belongs to the *Circovirus* genus of the *Circoviridae* family. The relative amount of the viral  
42 DNA in the organ samples was estimated by quantitative real-time PCR. The results  
43 suggested that the examined fish was caught in an active viraemic status, albeit the role of this  
44 circovirus in the etiology of the cauliflower diseases could not be ascertained.

45

46

47

48

49

50

## 51 **Introduction**

52       The cauliflower disease (stomatopapilloma or orocutaneous papillomatosis) of the  
53 European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) was first described at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century  
54 (Wolf 1988). Sporadic occurrence of the disease, with no specificity for age and size of the  
55 affected fish, has been reported mostly from the tributary regions of northern European rivers  
56 (Delves-Broughton et al. 1980; Wolf 1988). The benign epidermal neoplasms usually grow on  
57 the head region, but lesions may occur on other parts of the body (Peters 1975). The  
58 papillomas consist of fibro-epithelium and are sometimes pigmented. The cause of the tissue  
59 proliferation is unknown. Different viruses, resembling birna-, orthomyxo- and rhabdoviruses  
60 have been detected in or isolated from eels with cauliflower disease, but experimental  
61 reproduction of the clinical signs has not been successful (Nagabayashi & Wolf 1979;  
62 Schwanz-Pfitzer et al. 1984; Ahne & Thomsen, 1985; Ahne et al. 1987). Because of the  
63 seasonality of the tumor development, the effect of chemical pollutants and water temperature  
64 changes were assumed to contribute to the manifestation of the disease (Peters 1975).

65       The European eel, presently a critically endangered species, were being introduced to  
66 Lake Balaton (the largest lake in Central Europe, located in the western part of Hungary)  
67 regularly from 1961 to 1991, except in 1985 and between 1989 and 1990. As a result, more  
68 than 83 million elvers (glass eel stage, which start to feed) were stocked in Lake Balaton. By  
69 the end of the 1980s, the lake had become overpopulated with eel, and there were two  
70 massive periods of eel deaths. These deaths were probably due to a nematode worm  
71 (*Anguillicoloides crassus*) infection in 1991 and 1995 (Molnár et al. 1991). Thereafter the  
72 Hungarian Government prohibited the introduction of additional eels. By now, the eel stock in  
73 Lake Balaton is composed of very old individuals, of which even the youngest are more than  
74 23 years old.

75 In this work, the detection and full genome analysis of a novel circo-like virus are  
76 described. The virus was found in different organs of an eel from Lake Balaton which  
77 exhibited typical signs of the so-called cauliflower disease.

78 Circoviruses (CVs) are small, naked DNA viruses. The icosahedral virions, with a  
79 diameter of 12–26 nm, contain a circular single-stranded DNA genome. The genome size of  
80 the CVs studied to date was found to range between 1.7-2.3 kb. The viral capsid is composed  
81 of one structural protein (capsid protein) (Biagini et al. 2011). Targeted screenings with a  
82 sensitive consensus nested PCR (Halami et al. 2008) resulted in the recognition of a large and  
83 still sharply increasing number of novel CVs and circo-like viruses in an incredible diversity  
84 of specimens including natural and waste waters, fecal samples from different mammals from  
85 bats to man, as well as in several invertebrates and on the surface of a variety of raw meat  
86 products (Blinkova et al. 2009; Li et al. 2010; Li et al. 2011). Up until a few years ago, only  
87 birds and swine had been known as frequent hosts for CVs. In the past several years, the  
88 vertebrate host spectrum has widened to include fish and amphibians (Lőrincz et al. 2011 &  
89 2012; Tarján et al. 2014). However, in the majority of these cases, the eventual pathological  
90 role of the detected CVs is unknown.

91

## 92 **Material and methods**

93 **Origin of the sample.** During a routine limnological survey, an approximately 50-cm-long  
94 adult eel with cauliflower-like growths on both sides of its mouth was caught in Lake Balaton,  
95 Hungary on 21st September 2009. After euthanasia, a necropsy was performed. Small pieces  
96 from the labial tissue proliferation, the gills, heart, liver, spleen and kidney were collected in  
97 duplicate. One part of the samples was fixed in Bouin's fixative, embedded in paraffin,  
98 sectioned (at 4–5  $\mu\text{m}$ ), stained with hematoxylin and eosin, and viewed by light microscopy

99 according to standard procedures. The other set of samples were frozen, and used for virus  
100 isolation and molecular studies.

101 **Virus isolation.** Virus isolation was attempted on the EK-1 cell line (Chen et al. 1982). The  
102 pooled organ homogenates were diluted to a 10% (w/v) suspension in an L-15 medium  
103 (Gibco) complemented with antibiotics (Penicillin 300 U/ml, Streptomycin 300 µg/ml). The  
104 suspension was centrifuged at  $2000 \times g$  for 10 min, and the supernatant was transferred into a  
105 new tube immediately. Three parallel inoculations (500 µl suspension per flask) were made in  
106 25-cm<sup>2</sup> flasks of EK-1 monolayers at 80% confluency. The flasks were incubated at three  
107 temperatures (15°C, 19°C, and 22°C) and checked for the appearance of cytopathic effect  
108 (CPE) daily.

109 **PCR.** For PCR, the nucleic acid extraction was made from approximately 25 mg tissue as  
110 described in detail by Dán et al. (2003). The tissues were homogenized in a 1× TE buffer, and  
111 100 µl from each organ suspension was digested with proteinase K (20 mg/ml) in the  
112 presence of sarcosyl (10%). After incubation with guanidine-hydrochloride (8 M) for one  
113 hour at room temperature, the DNA was precipitated with ethanol. The presence of adenoviral  
114 DNA in the organ samples was tested by a sensitive nested PCR with consensus primers  
115 targeting the DNA dependent DNA polymerase gene (Wellehan et al. 2004). For the detection  
116 of herpes- irido- or poxviral DNA, a broad spectrum PCR method was used (Hanson et al.  
117 2006). Demonstration of the circoviral DNA was attempted by a widely used and very  
118 efficient consensus nested PCR described by Halami et al. (2008). For the amplification of the  
119 missing part of the putative circular genome of the newly detected CV, two specific primer  
120 pairs were designed and used in a nested inverse PCR. The primer sequences were as follows:  
121 outer forward: 5'-GCG CTT GAG GAT TCT CAT TC-3'; outer reverse: 5'-CAG ATC GTT  
122 CCT CTT CCC TT-3'; inner forward: 5'-GAC TTT GGA TGG AAG AAG CC-3'; inner  
123 reverse: 5'-CCT TGT TAT GCT GGT CGT TG-3'.

124 The PCR program consisted of an initial denaturation step of 98°C for 5 min, followed by 45  
125 cycles of 98°C for 30 sec/56°C for 30 sec/72°C for 60 sec and a final elongation cycle of  
126 72°C for 3 min. The reaction mixture consisted of 34 µl distilled water, 10 µl of 5×HF buffer  
127 (Phusion, Thermo Scientific), 0.5 µl Phusion enzyme (Phusion, Thermo Scientific), 1 µl (50  
128 µM) of each (forward and reverse) primer, 1.5 µl of dNTP solution of 10 mM concentration,  
129 and 2 µl of the target DNA in a final volume of 50 µl. The reactions were performed in a T1  
130 Thermocycler (Biometra). The results of the PCRs were analyzed by electrophoresis in  
131 agarose gels.

132 Quantitative, real-time PCRs for determining the relative amount of the viral DNA in five  
133 organs (the labial proliferative tissue, the gills, liver, spleen and kidney) were carried out in an  
134 Applied Biosystems® StepOnePlus™ Real-Time PCR System instrument (Life  
135 Technologies). Two specific primers, suitable for the amplification of a 100-bp product were  
136 designed. The reaction mixture contained 25 µl 2× PrimeSTAR Max Premix (Takara Bio  
137 Inc.), 17.5 µl distilled water, 2.5 µl EvaGreen™ Dye (Biotium) 1 µl of each primer (forward:  
138 5'-AGGCAACGACCAGCATAACA-3'; reverse: 5'-AGTCGTCGATGCAGGCCAAG-3')  
139 and 3 µl of the target DNA in a final volume of 50 µl. The program consisted of an initial  
140 denaturing at 98°C for 5 min, followed by 40 cycles of 98°C for 10 sec, 55°C for 5 sec, and  
141 72°C for 10 sec. The beta-actin gene (with forward 5'- ACCGGTATCGTCATGGACTC-3';  
142 and reverse 5'-CGTCAGGGTCTTCATCAGGT-3' primers) was used as an internal standard.  
143 The results were analyzed by the StepOne Software v2.1 (Applied Biosystems).

144 **Sequencing and sequence analyses.** All PCR products were excised from the gels, purified  
145 with the QIAquick Gel Extraction Kit (Qiagen), and sequenced directly with the inner  
146 primers. The sequencing reactions were performed with the use of the BigDye Terminator  
147 v3.1 Cycle Sequencing Kit (Applied Biosystems). The electrophoresis was carried out by a  
148 commercial service provider on an ABI PRISM 3100 Genetic Analyzer. The amplification

149 product from the inverse PCR, encompassing more than 1000 bp, was cloned with the use of  
150 the CloneJET Kit (Fermentas), and sequenced with the primers supplied with the kit. The  
151 newly obtained nucleotide sequences were compared with their homologs in the GenBank by  
152 using different BLAST algorithms at the NCBI portal. The genome was assembled manually  
153 and confirmed with the use of the Staden Package as described elsewhere recently (Dospoly  
154 & Shchelkunov 2010). The size and orientation of ORFs and putative genes were examined  
155 after a 6-frame translation of the genomic DNA with the use of the JavaScript DNA  
156 Translator 1.1 program (Perry 2003).

157 **Phylogeny inference.** Phylogenetic calculations were performed online at the Mobyly portal  
158 (<http://mobyly.pasteur.fr/cgi-bin/portal.py>) of the Pasteur Institute (Paris) using the distance  
159 matrix analysis (Protdist) with the Jones–Taylor–Thornton matrix, then the Fitch calculations  
160 were performed with global rearrangements. The tree topology was tested by bootstrap  
161 analysis (Seqboot/1000 samplings, Protdist, Fitch, Consense).

162

## 163 **Results**

164 **Gross and Microscopic Pathology.** On both sides of the mouth, soft polypoid, raspberry-  
165 coloured masses (approximately 1 cm in diameter) were seen (Fig 1a). The fish was slightly  
166 emaciated. The only other gross lesions were restricted to the heart where a small flat grayish  
167 oval-shaped patch (of about 5 mm in diameter) was revealed on the epicardial surface which  
168 extended into the myocardium (Fig. 2a). By light microscopy, no lesions were seen in the gills  
169 or kidney. The labial polypoid masses were benign papillomas composed of proliferating  
170 connective tissue and covered by a multilayered epithelium. Proliferation of the malpighian  
171 cells upon a narrow base of connective tissue without an invasion down into the underlying  
172 dermis was also seen (Fig. 1b). The grayish spot on the heart was a benign myoma composed  
173 of collections of cross-striated muscle fibres and surrounded by connective tissue (Fig. 2b).

174 Additionally, vacuolization in the hepatocytes, and multifocal hemosiderin deposition in the  
175 red pulp of the spleen were revealed.

176 **Virus isolation.** Rounding and detachment of the cells appeared on 12, 14 and 17 days post-  
177 inoculation in the tissue cultures incubated at 22°C, 19°C and 15°C, respectively. In the  
178 negative controls, no CPE was observed. A few days later, the CPE was complete. However,  
179 in the second and third passages, no CPE was observed. PCR testing of samples from the  
180 successive passages for the detection of the CV or certain dsDNA viruses (adeno-, herpes-  
181 and iridovirus) also remained negative.

182

183 **PCR and sequencing.** All PCRs, performed for the detection of different large DNA viruses,  
184 gave negative results. However, the circovirus PCR resulted in specific products from every  
185 examined organ (including the gills, liver, spleen and kidney) as well as from the labial  
186 proliferative tissue. Interestingly, the gills, the spleen, and the labial tissue all initially  
187 displayed a heavy longitudinal smear and discrete bands of amplicons were obtained after  
188 only 10× dilution of the target DNA solutions. The size of the identical amplicons was found  
189 to be 303 bp after editing out the primer sequences. By homology search, the conservative  
190 region of the circoviral replication-associated protein (Rep) was identified. The inverse nested  
191 PCR yielded an 1192 bp DNA fragment. It was first sequenced directly, then it was cloned  
192 and sequenced again for a better quality outcome. This fragment contained the whole *cap*  
193 gene, the rest of the *rep* gene with the two intergenic regions.

194 **Genome sequence analysis.** The complete genome of the putative eel CV was found to  
195 encompass 1378 nt with an average G+C content of 48.7%. The full genome sequence was  
196 deposited to the GenBank and assigned to accession number KC469701. The genome  
197 organization was found to be somewhat divergent from one typical of CVs, inasmuch as the  
198 putative *cap* gene proved to be significantly shorter (Fig. 3). Nonetheless, two oppositely



199 oriented major ORFs which flanked a putative stem-loop element were found. The stem-loop  
200 element, situated in the 5' intergenic region, possessed 12-bp stem. Its loop region consisted  
201 of 12 nucleotides with the conserved circoviral nonamer sequence (TAGTATTAC) therein as  
202 shown in Fig. 4. The deduced product of the *rep* gene was predicted to consist of 286 amino  
203 acid (aa) residues containing the conserved RNA helicase domain. Its closest homologue in  
204 the GenBank, with 51% aa identity, was the corresponding region of the CV recently  
205 described in the wels catfish (Lőrincz et al. 2012). The other ORF, supposedly corresponding  
206 to the gene of the capsid protein (Cap), was predicted to code for 114 aa only. This protein did  
207 not show convincing homology to any proteins in the GenBank. Nonetheless, similar to the  
208 Cap proteins of other known CVs, a 32 aa-long arginine-rich stretch  
209 (RRRVYRRKSNRRPIRNCQRRYRRPIRRERNNR) was found close to the N terminus. The  
210 length of the intergenic regions between these ORFs was 107 and 65 nt, at their 5' and 3'  
211 termini, respectively. Two additional, oppositely oriented ORFs overlapping the *rep* gene  
212 were also found. One of these, in the same orientation as the *rep* gene, encompasses 309 nt,  
213 the translated aa sequence shows homology to a small hypothetical (17 kDa) protein of the  
214 beak and feather disease virus (Niagro et al. 1998). The other ORF, in a reverse position  
215 compared to *rep*, consists of 483 nt. Its deduced product shows homology to hypothetical  
216 genes described from pigeon and duck CVs (Mankertz et al. 2000; Chen et al. 2006). It has to  
217 be mentioned however, that this 483-nt ORF has no ATG. A possible alternative start codon  
218 could be the ATA triplet (in nt position 19 to 21). If so, then the predicted protein product  
219 would consist of 155 aa.

220 **Quantitative PCR.** With qPCR, the virus was successfully detected in all five of the  
221 examined organs. The statistical mean of five parallel qPCRs for the viral genome resulted in  
222 the following cycle threshold (Ct) values: liver 23.6, spleen 23.9, gills 26.0, kidney 27.5,  
223 stomatopapilloma 28.1. It means that the relative amount of the viral DNA in the examined

224 organs is the following: 1 unit in the tissues of the stomatopapilloma, 1.25 unit in the kidney,  
225 20 units in the gills, 130 units in the spleen, and 157 units in the liver.

226

227 **Phylogenetic analysis.** The phylogeny reconstruction made by the distance matrix analysis  
228 on complete deduced Rep sequences from 27 CVs is presented in Fig. 5. The alignments  
229 consisted of 229 aa. The newly detected putative European eel CV appeared in the clade of  
230 the *Circovirus* genus within the *Circoviridae* family as a sister group of the wels catfish CV  
231 (Lőrincz et al. 2012). However, the monophyly of fish CVs was not confirmed.

232

### 233 **Discussion**

234 In the present work, the full genome sequence of a putative novel CV was determined.  
235 The virus originated from a European eel showing typical signs of the so-called cauliflower  
236 disease. We propose to name this virus the European eel circovirus (EeCV). The isolation of  
237 the virus on an eel kidney cell line failed. The CPE, observed after the first inoculation, did  
238 not appear again in the consecutive passages. We speculate that the cell degeneration was  
239 probably due to a direct cytotoxic effect by some material or unknown, uncharacterized virus  
240 that was not detectable by our PCRs.

241 Apart from the heart myoma and the stomatopapillomas, which were probably large  
242 enough to interfere with feeding, no other significant pathological alterations were revealed. It  
243 seems that the examined eel was caught in a viraemic status, since every examined organ  
244 contained circoviral DNA. The initial PCR with undiluted samples of the stomatopapilloma,  
245 gills, and spleen resulted in a heavy smear. This signaled the possibility of too high  
246 concentration of the total DNA. Indeed, the 10-fold dilution of the same samples produced  
247 discrete bands of the expected size.

248 Thanks to the significant improvement in the efficiency of detection methods (Halami et  
249 al. 2008), an incredible increase in the number of the known small circular ssDNA viruses has  
250 occurred in the second half of the past decade. The known host range of CVs (including  
251 mainly birds and swine) has also grown rapidly (Delwart & Li, 2012). Besides a couple of  
252 additional mammals, a number of invertebrate hosts have also been found to harbor seemingly  
253 specific CVs. The first CVs from lower vertebrates have been published most recently. These  
254 viruses, detected in barbel (*Barbus barbus*) and wels catfish (*Silurus glanis*), have been  
255 characterized by full genome analyses (Lőrincz et al. 2011 & 2012). Additional putative  
256 piscine CVs have been discovered by PCR in other fishes, as well as in two species of  
257 amphibians. But, these CVs have not been confirmed yet by complete genomic sequences  
258 (Fehér et al. 2013; Tarján et al. 2014). Although the barbel and wels catfish CVs have been  
259 found during investigations for the cause of increased mortality, the role of these viruses in  
260 disease could not be confirmed.

261 In this case, a direct connection between the presence of the putative circoviral DNA  
262 and the cauliflower disease could be revealed. The porcine and most avian CVs are known to  
263 have an immunosuppressive effect (Todd 2004), which may exacerbate the pathogenicity of  
264 certain concurrent infectious agents. Nonetheless, it is also possible that CVs can cause  
265 generalized infection in individuals whose immune system is temporarily or permanently  
266 impaired. Ng et al. (2009) have drawn similar conclusions when they examined a novel small  
267 ssDNA virus in sea turtles with fibropapillomas.

268 The taxonomy of EeCV is somewhat ambiguous. According to the phylogeny  
269 reconstruction based on the Rep sequence, the piscine (barbel and wels catfish) CVs seem to  
270 form a common clade with an interesting small circular ssDNA virus. This common clade is  
271 formed with NG13, which was recently discovered by screening human fecal samples  
272 collected in Nigeria (Li et al. 2010). The NG13 virus had originally been described as an

273 outlier to the proposed new genus *Cyclovirus* (Li et al. 2011) however, its exact taxonomic  
274 place is still unclear. The nonamer sequence of the stem-loop of the NG13 is identical to that  
275 of the CVs, but its genome organization resembles that of the cycloviruses (CyVs) (Delwart  
276 & Li, 2012). Our analysis shows that NG13 and fish CVs might share a close evolutionary  
277 origin. It seems that the EeCV does not form a monophyletic group with the other two fish  
278 CVs. A possible reason for such a result could be the incomplete taxon representation.  
279 Perhaps the full genome analyses of additional novel CVs from fishes and other lower  
280 vertebrates will help discern the phylogenetic relationships more precisely in the future.

281         The family *Circoviridae* is currently facing a radical revision. It has been proposed that  
282 the *Gyrovirus* genus be moved to the *Anelloviridae* family. Furthermore, the establishment of  
283 a new genus, *Cyclovirus* within the *Circoviridae* has also been proposed (Biagini et al. 2013).  
284 There are however, numerous circovirus-like viruses with unknown ancestry at the moment.

285         Based on its genome organization, the putative EeCV most closely resembled the  
286 members of the *Circovirus* genus. It encodes a Rep protein on the virus sense strand and a  
287 putative Cap protein in the opposite direction. The presence of the two additional smaller  
288 ORFs exhibit a clear homology to the hypothetical genes of yet unknown function, described  
289 in pigeon (Mankertz et al. 2000) and duck CVs (Chen et al. 2006), and in the beak and feather  
290 disease virus (Niagro et al. 1998). These homologies further confirm the place of EeCV in the  
291 same genus. Furthermore, the stem-loop structure, which is involved in the initiation of the  
292 viral genome replication (Steinfeldt et al. 2001), had a typical circoviral nonamer sequence in  
293 EeCV, identical to that of the fish CVs, porcine CV1, pigeon, gull and finch CVs (Li et al.  
294 2010). The lengths of the intergenic regions between the *rep* and *cap* genes also show  
295 differences between CVs and CyVs (Li et al. 2010). These regions in EeCV are also  
296 characteristic for CVs. Its closest evolutionary relative is the wels catfish CV.

297           Interestingly, the exceptionally short *cap* gene of EeCV did not show obvious homology  
298 to its counterparts in any known CVs or CyVs. Yet, a characteristic feature of the circoviral  
299 Cap proteins, namely the arginine-rich stretch close to the N-terminus, was identified.

300           It is intriguing to speculate about a recombination event between a progenitor and an  
301 unknown circular virus resulting in EeCV. Among ssDNA viruses (even originating from  
302 distantly related virus families), recombination events occur frequently (Gibbs & Weiller,  
303 1999; Martin et al. 2011). Moreover, a recombination between a circo-like virus and ssRNA  
304 virus has also been hypothesized (Diemer & Stedman, 2012). At the moment however, the  
305 origin of the *cap* gene of EeCV remains enigmatic since the BLAST searches did not find any  
306 reliable homology to any known sequences among the environmental samples.

307           According to the proposed new rules of the Circoviridae Study Group of the ICTV, the  
308 comparative analysis of the complete genomes would replace the earlier practice of  
309 comparing the *cap* sequences in the establishment of new species (Biagini et al. 2013).  
310 Considering the demarcation criteria, EeCV unequivocally represents a novel species.

311           At the discussion of the qPCR results, we emphasize that these results are based on the  
312 examination of one specimen and at one time-point. Thus, these data should be considered as  
313 preliminary results. The qPCR confirmed the results of the conventional PCR, inasmuch as all  
314 examined organs contained the viral DNA suggesting that the examined eel was caught in a  
315 viraemic status. The relative amount of the viral DNA may indicate that the viral replication  
316 takes place in the liver and spleen.

317           To examine the pathogenicity of EeCV in experimental infections, the isolation of the  
318 virus would be essential. Nonetheless, screening eels, especially those showing clinical signs  
319 of the cauliflower disease, for the presence of circoviral DNA should also be continued.

320

321 **Acknowledgements**

322 The authors are indebted to Gary Reaney for the critical review of the manuscript. The  
323 financial support (OTKA PD104315) provided by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund  
324 and Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (project no. 12252178) are gratefully  
325 appreciated. A. Doszpoly and T. Müller are the recipient of the János Bolyai Research  
326 Scholarship awarded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Thanks are also due to Dr.  
327 András Speciár for his kind assistance in the sample collection.

328

#### 329 LITERATURE CITED

330 Ahne W, Schwanz-Pfitzner I, Thomsen I (1987) Serological identification of 9 viral  
331 isolates from European eels (*Anguilla anguilla*) with stomatopapilloma by means of  
332 neutralization tests. J Appl Ichtyol 3:30-32

333 Ahne W, Thomsen I (1985) The existence of three different viral agents in a tumor  
334 bearing European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*). J Vet Med B 32:228-235

335 Biagini, P., Bendinelli, M., Hino, S., Kakkola, L., Mankertz, A., Niel, C., Okamoto, H.,  
336 Raidal, S., Teo, C.G., Todd, D. (2011) Family Circoviridae, in: King, A.M.Q., Adams,  
337 M.J., Carstens, E.B., Leftkowitz, E.J. (Eds.), Virus Taxonomy, IXth Report of the  
338 International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses, Elsevier, Academic Press, London,  
339 pp. 99-123

340 Biagini P, Breitbart M, Delwart E, Segales J, Todd D, Varsani A (2013): Restructuring  
341 and expansion of the family *Circoviridae*. Proposal for the International Committee on  
342 Taxonomy of viruses. 2013.005a-eV.  
343 [http://talk.ictvonline.org/files/proposals/taxonomy\\_proposals\\_vertbrate1/m/vert01/45](http://talk.ictvonline.org/files/proposals/taxonomy_proposals_vertbrate1/m/vert01/4593.aspx)  
344 [93.aspx](http://talk.ictvonline.org/files/proposals/taxonomy_proposals_vertbrate1/m/vert01/4593.aspx)

345 Blinkova O, Rosario K, Li L, Kapoor A, Slikas B, Bernardin F, Breitbart M, Delwart E  
346 (2009) Frequent detection of highly diverse variants of *Cardiovirus*, *Cosavirus*,

347 *Bocavirus*, and *Circovirus* in sewage samples collected in the United States. J Clin  
348 Microbiol 47:3507-3513

349 Chen SN, Ueno Y, Kou GH (1982) A cell line derived from Japanese eel (*Anguilla*  
350 *japonica*) kidney. Proc Natl Sci Counc POC 6:93-100

351 Chen CL, Wang PX, Lee MS, Shien JH, Shien HK, Ou SJ, Chen CH, Chang PC (2006)  
352 Development of a polymerase chain reaction procedure for detection and  
353 differentiation of duck and goose circovirus. Avian Dis 50:92-95

354 Dán Á, Molnár T, Biksi I, Glávits R, Shaheim M, Harrach B (2003) Characterisation of  
355 Hungarian porcine circovirus 2 genomes associated with PMWS and PDNS cases.  
356 Acta Vet Hung 51:551-562

357 Delves-Broughton J, Fawell JK, Woods, D (1980) The first occurrence of “cauliflower  
358 disease” of eels *Anguilla anguilla* L. in the British Isles. J Fish Dis 3:255-256

359 Delwart E, Li L. (2012) Rapidly expanding genetic diversity and host range of the  
360 *Circoviridae* viral family and other Rep encoding small circular ssDNA genomes. Vir  
361 Res 164:114-121

362 Diemer GS, Stedman KM. (2012) A novel virus genome discovered in an extreme  
363 environment suggests recombination between unrelated groups of RNA and DNA  
364 viruses. Biology Direct 7:13

365 Doszpoly A, Shchelkunov IS (2010) Partial genome analysis of Siberian sturgeon  
366 alloherpesvirus suggests its close relation to AciHV-2. Acta Vet Hung 58:269-274

367 Fehér E, Székely C, Lőrincz M, Cech G, Tuboly T, Singh HS, Bányai K, Farkas SL  
368 (2013): Integrated circoviral rep-like sequences in the genome of cyprinid fish. Virus  
369 Genes, 47(2): 374-377

370 Gibbs MJ, Weiller GF. (1999) Evidence that a plant virus switched hosts to infect a  
371 vertebrate and then recombined with a vertebrate-infecting virus. Proc Natl Acad Sci  
372 USA 96:8022-8027

373 Halami MY, Nieper H, Müller H, Johne R. (2008) Detection of a novel circovirus in mute  
374 swans (*Cygnus olor*) by using nested broad-spectrum PCR. Vir Res 132:208-212

375 Hanson LA, Rudis MR, Vasquez-Lee M, Montgomery RD. (2006) A broadly applicable  
376 method to characterize large DNA viruses and adenoviruses based on the DNA  
377 polymerase gene. Virol J 3:28

378 Li L, Kapoor A, Slikas B, Bamidele OS, Wang CL, Shaukat S, Masroor MA, Wilson ML,  
379 Ndjango JBN, Peeters M, Gross-Camp ND, Muller MN, Hahn BH, Wolfe ND, Triki  
380 H, Bartkus J, Zaidi SZ, Delwart E. (2010) Multiple Diverse Circoviruses Infect Farm  
381 Animals and Are Commonly Found in Human and Chimpanzee Feces. J Virol 84:  
382 1674-1682

383 Li L, Shan T, Bamidele OS, Masroor MA, Kunz TH, Zaidi SZ, Delwart E. (2011)  
384 Possible cross-species transmission of circoviruses and cycloviruses among farm  
385 animals. J Gen Virol 92:768-772

386 Lőrincz M, Cságola A, Farkas SL, Székely C, Tuboly T (2011) First detection and  
387 analysis of a fish circovirus. J Gen Virol 92:1817-1821

388 Lőrincz M, Dán Á, Láng M, György C, Tóth ÁG, Székely C, Cságola A, Tuboly T (2012)  
389 Novel circovirus in European catfish (*Silurus glanis*). Arch Virol 157:1173-1176

390 Mankertz A, Hattermann K, Ehlers B, Soike D (2000) Cloning and sequencing of  
391 columbid circovirus (CoCV), a new circovirus from pigeons. Arch Virol 145:2469-  
392 2479



393 Martin DP, Biagini, P, Lefeuvre P, Golden M, Roumagnac P, Varsani A (2011)  
394 Recombination in Eukaryotic Single Stranded DNA Viruses. *Viruses-Basel* 3:1699-  
395 1738

396 Molnár K, Székely C, Baska F (1991) Mass mortality of eel in Lake Balaton due to  
397 *Anguillicola crassus* infection. *Bull. Eur. Ass. Fish Pathol.* 11: 211

398 Nagabayashi T, Wolf K (1979) Characterization of EV-2, a virus isolated from European  
399 eels (*Anguilla anguilla*) with stomatopapilloma. *J Virol* 30:358-364

400 Ng TF, Manire C, Borrowman K, Langer T, Ehrhart L, Breitbart M (2009) Discovery  
401 of a novel single-stranded DNA virus from a sea turtle fibropapilloma by using viral  
402 metagenomics. *J Virol* 83:2500-2509

403 Niagro FD, Forsthoefel AN, Lawther RP, Kamalanathan L, Ritchie BW, Latimer KS,  
404 Lukert PD (1998) Beak and feather disease virus and porcine circovirus genomes:  
405 intermediates between the geminiviruses and plant circoviruses. *Arch Virol* 143:1723-  
406 1744

407 Perry WL 3<sup>rd</sup> (2003) JavaScript DNA translator: DNA-aligned protein translations.  
408 *Biotechniques* 33:1318-1320

409 Peters G (1975) Seasonal fluctuations in the incidence of epidermal papillomas of the  
410 European eel *Anguilla anguilla* L. *J Fish Biol* 7:415-422

411 Schwanz-Pfitzer I, Özel M, Darai G, Gelderblom H (1984) Morphogenesis and fine  
412 structure of eel virus (Berlin), a member of the proposed birnavirus group. *Arch Virol*  
413 81:151-162

414 Steinfeldt T, Finsterbusch T, Mankertz A (2001) Rep and Rep ' protein of Porcine  
415 circovirus type 1 bind to the origin of replication in vitro. *Virology* 291:152-160

416 Tarján ZL, Péntes JJ, Tóth RP, Benkő M (2014) First detection of circoviruses-like  
417 sequences in amphibians and novel putative circoviruses in fishes. Acta Vet Hung  
418 DOI: 10.1556/AVet.2013.061

419 Todd D (2004) Avian circovirus diseases: lessons for the study of PMWS Vet Microbiol  
420 98:169-174

421 Wellehan JF, Johnson AJ, Harrach B, Benkő M, Pessier AP, Johnson CM, Garner MM,  
422 Childress AL, Jacobson ER. (2004) Detection and analysis of six lizard adenoviruses  
423 by consensus primer PCR provides further evidence of a reptilian origin for the  
424 atadenoviruses. J Virol 78:13366-13369

425 Wolf K (1988) Fish Viruses and Fish Viral Diseases. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

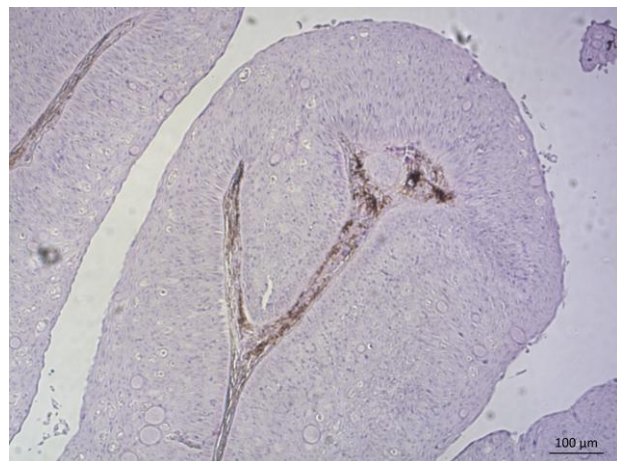
426

427

428 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

429

430 **Figure 1a.** *Anguilla anguilla*. Clinical appearance and microstructure of the cauliflower  
431 disease. (A) Bilateral labial polypoid masses in the eel from the Lake Balaton. (B)  
432 Microphotograph of the labial mass composed of proliferating connective tissue covered by  
433 multilayer epithelium. Proliferation of the malpighian cells upon a narrow base of connective  
434 tissue without invasion down into the underlying dermis.



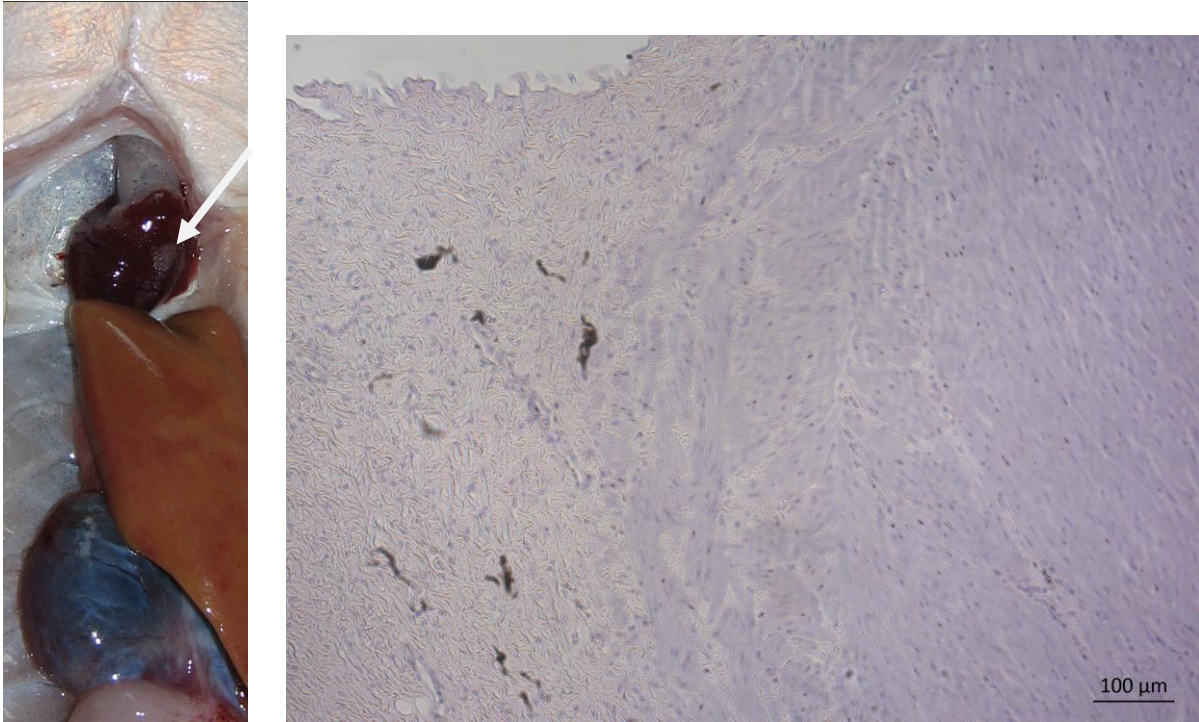
435

436

437 **Figure 2a.** Macroscopic picture of the abdominal cavity. The white arrow points to the lesion

438 on the epicardium. (B) Microphotograph of the benign myoma composed of collections of

439 cross-striated muscle fibres and surrounded by connective tissue.



440

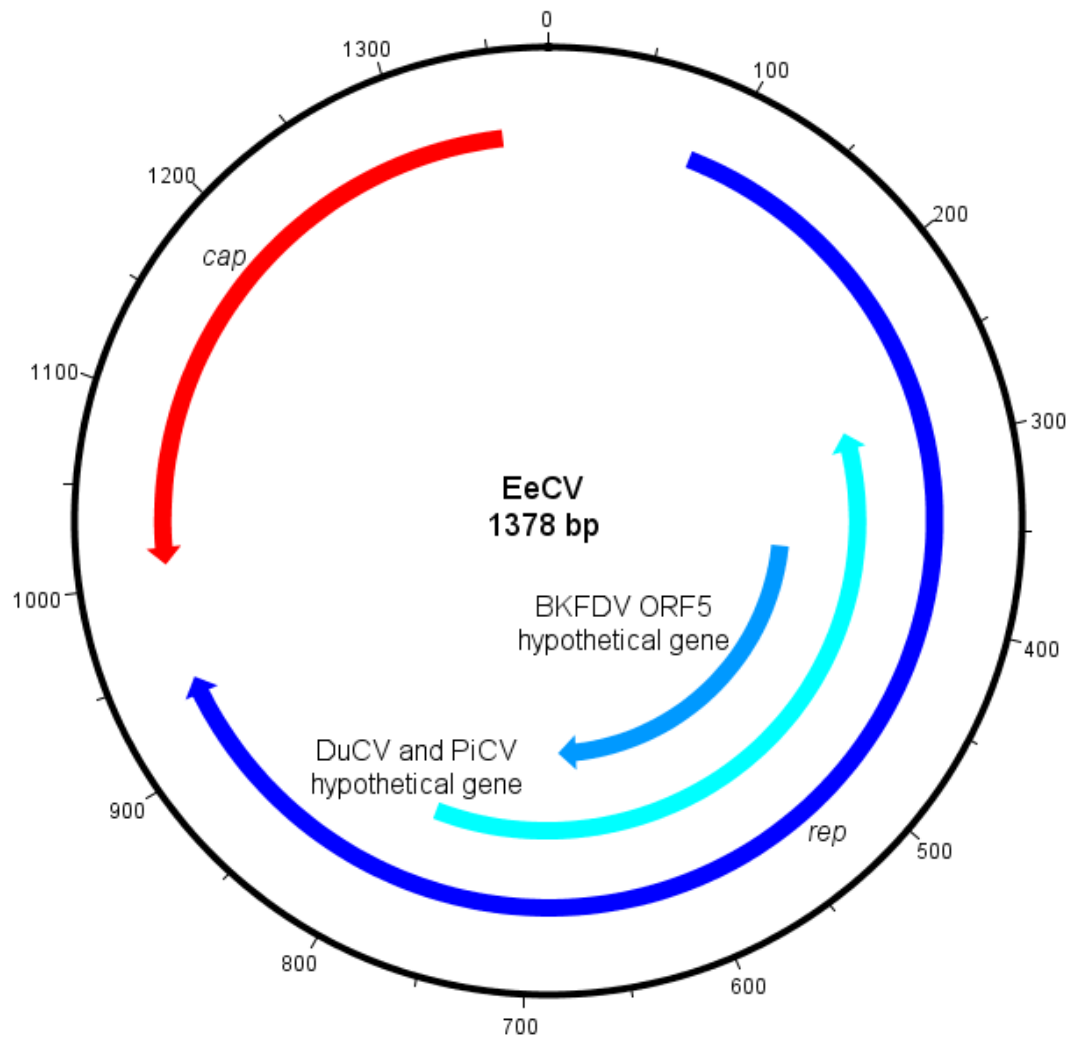
441

442 **Figure 4.** Genome organization of the EeCV. Besides the two major ORFs, there are two

443 additional hypothetical ORFs. One of them (BKFDV ORF5) shows similarity to the ORF 5 of

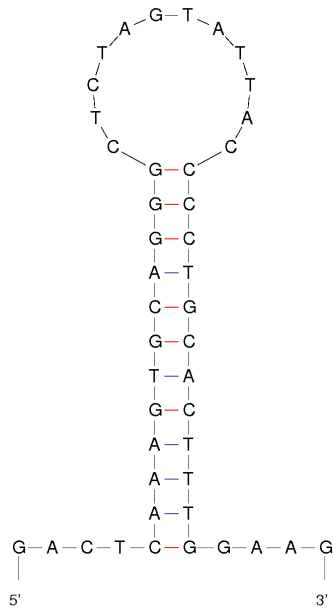
444 Beak and feather disease virus (BKFDV). The other (DuCV and PiCV) is homologous to

445 hypothetical ORFs of duck (DuCV) and pigeon (PiCV) CVs.



446

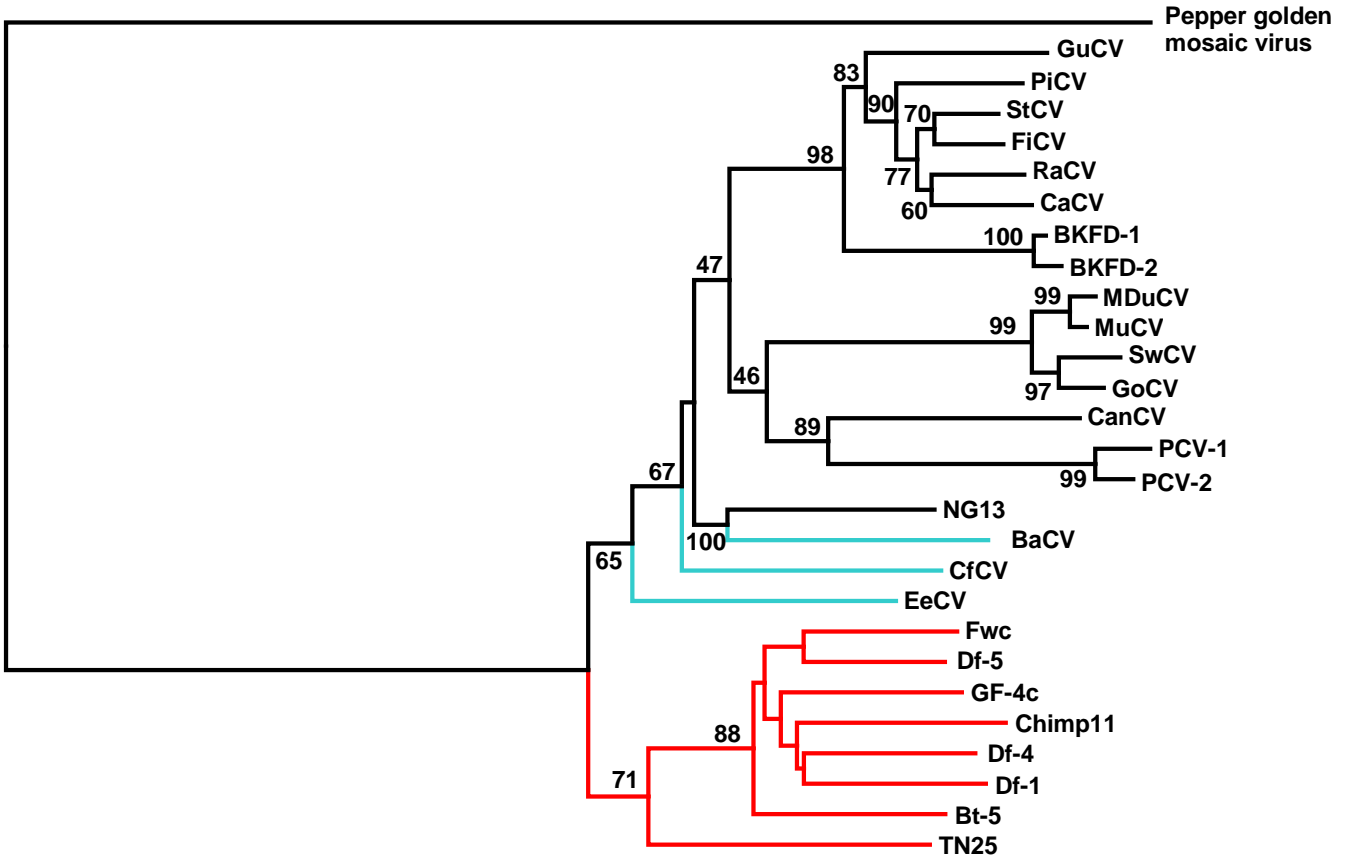
447 **Figure 4.** The structure and sequence of the putative stem-loop



448

449

450 **Figure. 5.** Phylogenetic tree reconstruction based on the distance matrix (JTT model) of the  
 451 deduced amino acid sequences (229 aa) of the rep genes of ssDNA viruses. Bootstrap values  
 452 are shown on the branches. The cycloviruses, the circoviruses and the fish circoviruses within  
 453 the family *Circoviridae* are designated by different colored lines on the tree. Abbreviations:  
 454 GuCV=gull circovirus; PiCV=pigeon circovirus; StCV=starling circovirus; FiCV=finch  
 455 circovirus; RaCV=raven circovirus; CaCV=canary circovirus; BKFD-1=beak and feather  
 456 disease virus 1; BKFD-2=beak and feather disease virus 2; MDuCV=muscovy duck  
 457 circovirus; MuCV=mallard circovirus; SwCV=swan circovirus; GoCV=goose circovirus;  
 458 CanCV=canine circovirus; PCV-1=porcine circovirus 1; PCV-2= porcine circovirus 2;  
 459 NG13=human stool associated circovirus; BaCV=barbel circovirus; CfCV=catfish circovirus;  
 460 EeCV=European eel circovirus; Fwc= Florida woods cockroach-associated cyclovirus; Df-  
 461 5=dragonfly cyclovirus 5; GF-4c=bat cyclovirus; Chimp11=chimpanzee Cyclovirus 11; Df-  
 462 4=dragonfly Cyclovirus 4 ; Df-1=dragonfly cyclovirus 1; Bt-5=bat feces cyclovirus ;  
 463 TN25=human feces cyclovirus



464

465