ECOLOGY

First field records of *Pachycrepoideus vindemiae* as a parasitoid of *Drosophila suzukii* in European and Oregon small fruit production areas

M.V. Rossi Stacconi,¹ A. Grassi,¹ D.T. Dalton,² B. Miller,² M. Ouantar,¹,³ A. Loni,⁴ C. Ioriatti,¹ V. M. Walton,² G. Anfora¹

¹Research and Innovation Centre and Technology Transfer Centre, Edmund Mach Foundation, San Michele all’Adige, Italy; ²Department of Horticulture, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, USA; ³Plant Protection in Organic Agriculture, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari, CIHEAM, Valenzano, Italy; ⁴Section of Agricultural Entomology, C.D.S.L. Department, University of Pisa, Italy

Abstract

*Drosophila suzukii* (Matsumura) (Diptera: Drosophilidae) is a destructive crop pest native to Southeast Asia that recently invaded countries in Europe and North America, severely impacting commercial fruit production in its new host range. Here we report the results of a survey aimed at determining the presence of indigenous *D. suzukii* parasitoid populations carried out from May to October 2012 in two areas negatively affected by this fruit pest: Trento Province, Northern Italy, and Oregon in the Pacific Northwest of the USA. We conducted field and laboratory studies in order to determine the status of biological control agents utilizing *D. suzukii* as a host. Our study sites included a range of commercial soft fruits and natural non-commercial habitats. In each site, sentinel traps were baited with either *D. suzukii* or *Drosophila melanogaster* Meigen (Diptera: Drosophilidae) larvae in different food substrates. The generalist parasitoid, *Pachycrepoideus vindemiae* (Rondani) (Hymenoptera: Pteromalidae), was collected from both *D. suzukii* and *D. melanogaster* pupae in traps deployed in a selection of these sites. This report of *P. vindemiae* in 2012 represents the first identification of *D. suzukii* parasitoids in Europe. A successive parasitism efficacy test was set up under controlled laboratory conditions confirming the ability of *P. vindemiae* to attack *D. suzukii* pupae. In addition, an historical digression with analysis of the original documents in the Italian archives has been provided in order to unravel the correct species name. We finally discuss the possible practical implications of this finding for the biological control of *D. suzukii*.

Introduction

*Drosophila suzukii* (Matsumura) (Diptera: Drosophilidae) is a fly native to Asia that has been recently introduced to Europe (Calabria et al., 2012) and Oregon (Dalton et al., 2011). This species is included in the European Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) A2 list as a quarantine pest and is known to infest commercial small and stone fruits as opposed to most species of drosophilids which only infest overripe, fallen and rotting fruits. In marked contrast, female *D. suzukii* possess a serrated ovipositor, which enables them to lay eggs in healthy, ripening fruits. *Drosophila suzukii* poses a significant risk to marketable supply. A preliminary study estimated that in the Trento Province, Italy, the 400-ha soft fruit production areas faced losses of around 500,000 EUR in 2010 and 3 million EUR in 2011 (De Ros et al., 2012). Pacific USA production areas may suffer losses up to $500 million annually if no pest control...
measures are taken (Goodhue et al., 2011). The enormous impact of D. suzukii on fruit production is exacerbated by high population build-up, which is facilitated by a high rate of fecundity and a rapid developmental period (Walsh et al., 2011).

After the initial findings in North America in 2008, D. suzukii is now recognized as a key pest in all major small and stone fruit production areas of the USA and Canada (Lee et al., 2011a). In Europe, the pest was first recorded in Spain (Calabria et al., 2012) and Italy in 2008 (Cini et al., 2012). The first known damage to commercial small fruit in Italy was found in Trento during 2009 (Grassi et al., 2009). Additional local outbreaks were found in Italy, Spain, France, Slovenia and Croatia during 2010, and the following year in Austria, Switzerland, Germany and Belgium. Drosophila suzukii was reported in Great Britain, the Netherlands and Portugal in 2012. A recent genomic survey linked the invasive success of D. suzukii in North America and Europe to an ecological pre-adaptation to temperate climates. Its further spread to additional temperate climate areas therefore seems likely (Ometto et al., 2013).

Current control of D. suzukii is challenging because of a low number of effective chemical- and semi-chemical-based control strategies. Furthermore, the ability of invertebrates and microbial organisms to interfere with populations of the introduced pest is only now beginning to be investigated (Brown et al., 2011; Hamby et al., 2012; Siozios et al., 2013). Natural enemies in newly invaded areas may gradually adapt and establish new associations with D. suzukii, thus contributing to its future suppression. In Europe, for example, this has been observed specifically for the leaf miner Phyllocnistis citrella Stainton (Lepidoptera: Gracillariidae) (Urbaneja et al., 2000).

A number of hymenopteran parasitoids have been reported in association with D. suzukii in the areas of pest origin. In particular, species of the genera Ganaspis and Leptopilina (Hymenoptera: Figitidae), and Trichopria (Hymenoptera: Diaziidae), are reported as parasitoids of D. suzukii in Japan (Cini et al., 2012). Ganaspis species showed the highest rates of D. suzukii parasitism. These figitids lay eggs in larvae that are feeding in fruits and exhibit a high level of specificity for D. suzukii. By contrast, Leptopilina japonica Novkovic et Kimura and Azobara japonica Belokobylskij (Hymenoptera: Braconidae) were able to attack D. suzukii larvae and pupae only in fallen decaying fruits and also attacked a wide range of drosophilid hosts (Mitsui et al., 2007; Ideo et al., 2008; Mitsui & Kimura, 2010; Novkovic et al., 2011; Kasuya et al., 2013).

On the other hand, Chabert et al. (2012) have already demonstrated under laboratory conditions that several naturally occurring parasitoids of drosophilids in France were able to successfully parasitize D. suzukii: two larval parasitoids, Leptopilina heterotoma (Thomson) and Leptopilina bouardi Barb. et al., and two pupal parasitoids Pachycrepoides vindemiae (Rondani) (Hymenoptera: Pteromalidae) and Trichopria drosophilae (Perkins) (Hymenoptera: Diapriidae). Both Leptopilina parasitoids showed the highest levels of parasitism. Leptopilina bouardi was able to parasitize 67% of exposed hosts, while one population of L. heterotoma had a peak parasitism rate of 95%. The parasitism rate of the local pupal parasitoid P. vindemiae averaged 57%. This species has also been found in association with D. suzukii in fruit-producing regions of Oregon, USA (Brown et al., 2011). Kasoch & Schlenke (2012) found in laboratory experiments several promising parasitoids of D. suzukii, including A. japonica, which are able to overcome the host’s defense mechanism of encapsulation.

The present study focused to determine the current presence of indigenous parasitoid biological control agents in two severely affected areas of Trento Province, Italy, and the Willamette Valley, Oregon, USA, using sentinel baits placed in proximity to fruiting host species. Here we report the methodology used to determine the field occurrence of parasitoids of D. suzukii in these regions. We additionally describe the procedures conducted to validate parasitism of D. suzukii under laboratory conditions.

Materials and Methods

Parasitoids of D. suzukii were surveyed in Trento Province, Italy, and the Willamette Valley, Oregon, USA. The field surveys were carried out from July to October in Trento and from April to October in Oregon during 2012. In Trento the field study sites included a commercial blueberry orchard, a commercial vineyard and an alpine forest environment. In Oregon five field sites were established in areas of unsprayed non-commercial hosts in close proximity to commercial host crops.

Preparation of traps

Petri dishes (diameter 9 cm) containing either standard yeast-based medium diet for drosophilids, or fresh banana sliced 1-2 cm thick, were exposed either to D. suzukii or to Drosophila melanogaster Meigen (Diptera: Drosophilidae) adults in plastic oviposition cages (30×30×30 cm). Dishes were kept in oviposition cages containing ad libitum numbers of D. suzukii, for three to seven days depending on fly development time observed in the laboratory. Once removed from the oviposition cages, infested Petri dishes were filled with water in order to stimulate the larvae to come out from the food substrate. Subsequently, the surface of the Petri dishes was carefully rinsed and the larvae were collected on a fine mesh net. New Petri dishes containing about 70-90 g of either standard Drosophila food medium, or fruit (sliced bananas, pierced blueberries or sweet cherries, or crushed raspberries) were prepared. Each Petri dish was infested with either 1 g of D. melanogaster or 4 g of D. suzukii larvae (corresponding to approximately 800-1000 larvae for both species respectively). In Oregon, Petri dishes were substituted with 163 mL plastic soufflé cups (Solo®, Urbana, IL, USA) (Dalton et al., 2011) in order to minimize desiccation during the hot summer months.

In Italy, two trap types were prepared: one baited with three Petri dishes containing food medium, banana slices and blueberries respectively, each infested by D. suzukii larvae (treatment 1); and one with the same food substrates infested by D. melanogaster larvae (treatment 2). Both trap types also included a Petri dish filled with medium and left uninfested as blank control (Figure 1).

In Oregon, three trap types were prepared: one baited with two soufflé cups containing food medium and seasonal fruit respectively, each infested by D. suzukii larvae (treatment 1); one with the same food substrates infested by D. melanogaster larvae (treatment 2), and one with the same food substrates left uninfested as a blank control (Dalton et al., 2011) (Figure 1).

Petri dishes and soufflé containers containing larvae (or no larvae for the controls) in each of the media were placed inside red delta traps to constitute each sentinel trap. Sentinel traps were hung 1-2 m from the ground on either the crop plant or from surrounding vegetation in a relatively protected environment. In Oregon the desiccation levels found in sentinel baits were low enough to allow weekly service of the traps as opposed to many of the areas in Italy where desiccation of the bait materials necessitated more frequent service of traps (twice a week).

Placement of traps

In Italy. Three representative experimental sites in Trento Province were selected, taking into account altitude, presence of D. suzukii host plants and high D. suzukii population density in both natural and agroecosystems. Two hilly sites were selected, one in Cembra Valley, a commercial organic blueberry orchard in Gaggio (46°20'60''N, 11°28'89''E, 900 m a.s.l.), and the other in Sugana Valley representing a forested environment (Vigolo Vattaro, 45°'99'64''N, 11°19'25''E, 600 m a.s.l.). A third was chosen in the bottom of the Adige Valley, in a commercial vineyard (San Michele all’Adige, 46°19’01”N, 11°13’73”E, 200 m a.s.l.). In each site two sentinel traps (treatments 1 and 2) were deployed at least 10 m apart (Figure 1). Traps were collected and replaced twice a
week. The experiment started on 2 July 2012 and continued until the end of October 2012.

In Oregon. Five trap locations were selected based on high diversity of landscape vegetation surrounding a susceptible crop, as well as on preliminary data of percent parasitism from the previous growing season. Traps were first placed in the field during April 2012. The sites in Oregon included an organically managed raspberry field at Oregon State University North Willamette Research and Extension Center (45°216'53''N, 122°44'59''W, 60 m a.s.l.), an unmanaged wild riparian site containing a mix of Himalayan blackberries and seedling cherries (Salem, 44°54'19''N, 123°07'04''W, 43 m a.s.l.), a commercial blueberry and raspberry farm (Riverbend Farm, 44°12'58''N, 123°41'54''W, 89 m a.s.l.), a small-scale, mixed-production-commercial rural homestead with unsprayed soft and stone fruit species (Frasier Creek Farm, 44°37'42''N, 123°15'45''W, 100m), an organically managed mixed-production farm (Gathering Together Farm, 44°31'52''N, 123°22'15''W, 80 m a.s.l.). In each site, three traps (treatment 1, treatment 2 and control) were deployed at least 25 m apart (Figure 1). The first set of traps was placed on April 2, 2012. Traps were collected and replaced once a week until the end of October 2012.

Rearing and identification of parasitoids

Once collected from the field, all Petri dishes or soufflé cups were sealed and transported to the laboratory for further rearing and investigation. In the laboratory, Petri dishes and soufflé cups were placed into 250-720 mL plastic containers with lids equipped with fine mesh netting for ventilation and a moistened dental cotton ball to prevent desiccation of pupae. All containers were kept in controlled conditions (22°C, 55% RH, 14:10 L:D photoperiod) and checked for emerging parasitoids twice a week. Once emerged, flies and parasitoids were counted to determine the percent parasitism occurring in the sentinel traps. After every count, the parasitoids were taken out from the containers and kept in plastic vials with a cotton ball soaked in sugary water (5%), and at the same controlled conditions. To determine if a parasitoid had emerged from a puparium, we looked at the exit hole. In contrast to the same controlled conditions. To determine if a parasitoid had emerged from a puparium, we looked at the exit hole. In contrast to the emergence was checked daily and the outcomes were divided into three categories: emerged parasitoids, emerged D. suzukii individuals and D. suzukii individuals that incurred natural mortality. Percent parasitism was calculated considering only emerged fly and parasitoid adults. In order to exclude other possible causes of death, undeveloped D. suzukii pupae were examined under the light microscope, checking for any possible indication of parasitism. Emerged D. suzukii adults were checked for signs of resistance to the parasitoid, including presence of encapsulated eggs (Poyet et al., 2013).

Laboratory test of parasitism validation and efficacy

In order to test the ability of P. vindemiae to parasitize D. suzukii, an additional laboratory experiment was established at Fondazione Edmund Mach. Field collected P. vindemiae individuals were maintained in the laboratory on D. melanogaster (22°C, 55% RH, 14:10 LD photoperiod) in order to obtain a first mass rearing. From this stock newly emerged pairs were reared for five days, fed with honey and allowed to mate. Subsequently, six mated P. vindemiae females were placed into a plastic cup (720 mL) including a Petri dish filled with standard Drosophila food medium infested with 100 D. suzukii larvae (3rd/4th instar) and a water soaked cotton ball (N=5). After 5 days P. vindemiae females were removed from the cups. Fly and parasitoid emergence was checked daily and the outcomes were divided into three categories: emerged parasitoids, emerged D. suzukii individuals and D. suzukii individuals that incurred natural mortality. Percent parasitism was calculated considering only emerged fly and parasitoid adults. In order to exclude other possible causes of death, undeveloped D. suzukii pupae were examined under the light microscope, checking for any possible indication of parasitism. Emerged D. suzukii adults were checked for signs of resistance to the parasitoid, including presence of encapsulated eggs (Poyet et al., 2013).

Results and Discussion

The idiobiont pupal ectoparasitoid P. vindemiae was collected from both D. suzukii and D. melanogaster pupae in traps deployed in a selection of sites in Italy and Oregon.

In Italy, no parasitoids were obtained from any location during the first two months of the experiment. During 24-28 September, 33 specimens of P. vindemiae (Figure 3 A-C), were however recovered from Petri dishes containing Drosophila-infested blueberries from traps deployed in the vineyard at San Michele all’Adige. Of these, 27 individuals were from D. melanogaster- and six individuals from D. suzukii.
Adult parasitoid emergence started in the laboratory on 4 October and continued for the following five days. As far as we know this is the first evidence in Europe of parasitization of D. suzukii by a local parasitoid. This report supports findings of the same parasitoid species in cherry orchards in the Columbia Gorge of Oregon in the USA (Brown et al., 2011). Interestingly, in our experimental vineyard in Italy, sex pheromone-mediated mating disruption against grapevine moths had been applied for several years allowing a marked reduction in insecticide use (Ioriatti et al., 2011).

In Oregon, P. vindemiae were retrieved from all field locations between 29 May to 30 October. Pachyceropoideus vindemiae were reared from sentinel baits seeded with both D. suzukii and D. melanogaster. A total of 1932 P. vindemiae emerged from sentinel baits during this period constituting approximately 94% of all parasitoids reared from sentinel baits. Approximately equal numbers of parasitoids emerged from the two host species. This finding supports earlier studies that P. vindemiae is a generalist parasitoid found on many dipteran species. In addition we reared 133 (6%) individuals of an unidentified cynipid species coming from sentinel baits seeded with D. melanogaster. Parasitism estimations revealed approximately 1% seasonal parasitism rates from our sites in Oregon (Miller B., unpublished data).

It was possible to determine that all developmental larval and pupal stages of host materials were present at equally abundant levels based on the similar protocol used in the preparation of the traps during the exposure period. Standardization of exposure period will not necessarily result in more uniform results between the two continents. The results found in this study probably may be due to differences in the current populations of resident parasitoids in the regions where the trials were conducted.

Pachyceropoideus vindemiae is a major natural enemy of D. melanogaster (Martelli, 1910), having a cosmopolitan world distribution and a wide host range comprising over 60 known species belonging to cyclorrhaphous Diptera (including families Anthomyiidae, Calliphoridae, Muscidae, Sarcophagidae, Tachinidae, Tephritidae and Drosophilidae).

In international literature the species is mentioned indifferently as P. vindemiae or P. vindemmiae. Actually it was originally described by Rondani (1875) as Pteromalus vindemiae (Figure 4). However, within this first report a figure caption reported also the version P. vindemmi-ae (Figure 4), probably fled by mistake from the Italian language. However, according to the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, the first citation P. vindemiae would take priority.

It has been demonstrated that P. vindemiae can act also as a hyper-parasitoid of beneficial Hymenoptera (Goubault et al., 2003; Wang & Messing, 2004). The broad polyphagy of P. vindemiae is explained by its marked physiological flexibility and its ability to adapt to different host sizes.

Our validation test to determine parasitism efficacy confirmed that P. vindemiae is able to parasitize D. suzukii pupae under controlled conditions. Our data, however, display highly variable rates of parasitism, ranging from 25% to 68%. The overall parasitism rate in this experiment was 53.19±18.6 (SD) (Figure 5), which is compatible with results presented by Chabert et al. (2012) using similar methodologies. We observed that P. vindemiae females laid their eggs between the pupal body and puparium of the host, in the late pupal stage. The emergence hole was mostly localized toward the anterior end of the puparium, just below the breathing spiracles (Figure 2A). Among undeveloped pupae, no sign of parasitism was found, nor was there evidence of parasitoid resistance in emerged D. suzukii adults. The mean percentage of individuals that incurred natural mortality, not due to parasitoid activity, was 20.0±11.1.

Parasitism of P. vindemiae on D. suzukii in our experimental field conditions appears to be negligible so far. The preliminary evidence, together with the highly generalist host-choice behaviour including beneficial species, would not make P. vindemiae a feasible candidate for development of classic or augmentative biological programs against D. suzukii in the production regions where the current experiment was conducted. Sufficient pest suppression in fruit cropping systems would require the preventive and repeated augmentation of effective control agents. Although P. vindemiae has been mass-released over a long period for the control of several tephritid pests in the Hawaiian Islands and South America, other parasitoid species of fruit flies have been considered more effective biological control agents (Guillén et al., 2002). Nevertheless, the first finding of a local natural enemy able to attack D. suzukii in major European and American fruit production areas is a promising indication toward a gradual adaptation of the local fauna to the newly introduced pest.

Figure 2. Comparative pictures of Drosophila suzukii puparia A) The adult Pachyceropoideus vindemiae emerges by chewing its way out of the puparium. Circles indicate the exit holes. B) The adult D. suzukii emerges from a hinged flap in the puparium. Circle indicates the exit point.

Figure 3. A) P. vindemiae adult female on D. suzukii puparia. B) P. vindemiae developing inside the fly puparium. C) P. vindemni-ae emerged from a D. suzukii puparium.
Accordingly, it is noteworthy that a relevant number of more specialist larval parasitoids, belonging to the genera Asobara and Leptopilina, were by-caught in bottle traps baited with vinegar and wine placed in the Italian experimental sites along the duration of the described survey with the purpose to monitor the D. suzukii population density (personal observation by the authors). This may open the possibility that some parasitoids may undergo a host shift. Species belonging to these two genera were shown to successfully parasitize D. suzukii in their native areas. In particular, L. japonica and Asobara tabida (Nees) (Hymenoptera: Braconidae) have been reported amongst emerging parasitoids from field sampling of D. suzukii in Japan, even though the latter species was found at a very low rate (Mitsui et al., 2007). Despite its wide European distribution (Carton et al., 1986), A. tabida was only recently reported in Italy from an area in Trento Province highly infested with D. suzukii (Anfora et al., 2013). However, European populations of A. tabida were not yet able to attack D. suzukii pupae in laboratory experiments (Chabert et al., 2012).

Accumulating evidence reveals that, to take a biological control approach to deal with D. suzukii infestations, the apparently high resistance of this insect pest to larval parasitoids should be taken into account. Indeed, Kacsoh & Schlenke (2012) showed that the constitutively high haemocyte load in D. suzukii enhances the encapsulation process of eggs in response to parasitism by at least 15 parasitoid species. Furthermore, European strains of the pest present a higher level of haemocytes involved in the immune response than Japanese strains (Poyet et al., 2013), making the European D. suzukii populations even more resistant to potential indigenous larval parasitoids. A similar response was seen in North American USA D. suzukii populations (Kacsoh & Schlenke 2012). In addition, in European populations of L. heteroma, this effect is not sufficient to prevent the encapsulation reaction (Poyet et al., 2013), even though the immunosuppressive factors in the venom act on some haemocytes of D. suzukii larvae, since they are not sufficiently adapted to this newly introduced host insect. Considering only this aspect, a pupal parasitoid, such as P. vindemiae, should be more likely to overcome the resistance of the D. suzukii populations.

In conclusion, the potential for control of D. suzukii by natural enemies present in newly invaded regions may depend on the efficacy with which natural enemies feed in each particular native drosophilid community, as well as on gradual adaptation of indigenous parasitoids to the new host drosophilid. Therefore, continuing investigations on diversity and impact of the natural enemy complex in agro-ecosystems must be performed. A more extensive sampling regime is warranted for 2013, using improved sentinel traps, including more locations and taking into consideration quantitative data on parasitism on both D. suzukii and D. melanogaster. Additional foreign exploration for eventual release of more suitable natural enemies is of importance to all industries affected by this pest.

References


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