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# **Evolutionary Dynamics in Taro** **(*Colocasia esculenta* L.)**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Plant Biology

at Massey University, Palmerston North,

New Zealand

**Ibrar Ahmed**

**2014**



## ABSTRACT

Understanding domestication is fundamental to understanding crop history and one of the most significant advancements in human history – the emergence of agriculture. Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*; family Araceae) is a root crop of importance to hundreds of millions of people in tropical to sub-tropical and temperate regions of the world. Despite its cultural and historical significance, the origins, domestication and worldwide distribution of this crop have been the focus of only a few phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies. This gap in understanding the history of taro can be partly attributed to the non-suitability of available molecular markers, and the scale of targeted plant sampling required. In this study, chloroplast genome sequences were determined for two morphotypes of taro (var. RR and var. GP) using an Illumina sequencing protocol and bioinformatic analyses. These genomes were compared to each other as well as to four publicly available aroid chloroplast genomes. Such comparisons enabled an analysis of the extent of genome-wide correlations between oligonucleotide repeats, substitutions and insertion – deletion mutations (indels). Recent studies have suggested such correlations in eukaryotic and prokaryotic genomes, but genome-wide studies on organelles have not been undertaken. The finding of a significant correlation among different kinds of mutational events in the chloroplast genomes of aroids led to a further hypothesis being proposed that the distribution of oligonucleotide repeat sequences in a single representative chloroplast genome could be used to predict mutational hotspot loci suitable for population genetic, phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies in other closely related plant species. To test this hypothesis, 30 primer pairs were designed to amplify and sequence loci predicted to be mutational hotspots in the chloroplast genome of taro. The phylogenetic and phylogeographic usefulness of these loci was then determined in a range of intra-specific to inter-generic analyses, which included samples from taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), four other *Colocasia* species (*C. affinis*, *C. fallax*, *C. formosana*, *C. gigantea*), and species from three other aroid genera (*Remusatia vivipara*, *Alocasia brisbanensis* and *Amorphophallus konjac*). Six of the 30 chloroplast DNA loci were sequenced from 170 wild and cultivated taro accessions from 20 Asian and Oceanic countries, and 35 accessions from closely related out-group species. This study provided further evaluation of novel markers that can be used to elucidate the origins, domestication and dispersal history of taro. The results provided a number of insights on the history of taro. Taro as a species most likely originated in

South to Southeast Asia during the Miocene to Pliocene period, and reached Australia and New Guinea separately in wild and possibly cultivated forms. Neighbor-Net and maximum likelihood analyses of the chloroplast DNA loci revealed the existence of three main super-clades in the wider taro germplasm. These super-clades were identified as: (i) a subtropical to tropical Indo-Pacific (IP) super-clade consisting of wild and cultivated, as well as diploid and triploid taros, (ii) a temperate to subtropical Himalayan (H) super-clade consisting of triploid cultivars, and (iii) a tropical Southeast Asian – Australian (SEAA) super-clade consisting of wild diploid taros. The current study does not support the prevailing hypothesis of taro domestication in New Guinea, but suggests that the domestication might have taken place independently for taros belonging to the IP and H super-clades. Hybridization of taro with other sympatric species in northern Vietnam was indicated by analysing sequences from six chloroplast and two nuclear DNA loci (Phytochrome C and internal transcribed spacer) in a subset of taro and other sympatric *Colocasia* species. This observation suggests that in taro as in many other plant species, hybridization has been a significant feature of their evolution. In total, this study significantly advances our understanding of the history of taro. The inferred phylogenetic relationships also have relevance for developing future taro breeding strategies.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my late mother, who always encouraged me to seek and spread knowledge.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to Allah for all His bounties throughout my life. I highly regard Massey University for providing me an excellent learning environment, and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan for awarding me a scholarship to pursue doctoral studies at Massey University.

I am indebted to my supervisor Professor Peter J. Lockhart at the Institute of Fundamental Sciences, Massey University, Palmerston North, for his kind guidance and support throughout this study. He provided me an excellent working atmosphere to plan, work and learn. I consider myself very fortunate to have learnt a lot from him.

I am grateful to my co-supervisor Dr. Peter J. Matthews at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, for not only providing most of the plant samples used in this study, but also for remaining available for useful discussions throughout the study. His long experience of working on taro has been very beneficial in this study.

I am thankful to my co-supervisors, Professor Michael D. Hendy at Otago University, Dunedin, and Dr. Austen R. Ganley at New Zealand Institute for Advanced Study, Massey University, Albany, for all their help and discussions. Professor Michael Hendy and Professor David Penny were instrumental in encouraging me to study in New Zealand and to work on this project. I am glad that this has been such an enjoyable experience.

I am thankful to Dr. Lesley Collins and Dr. Patrick Biggs for their support in developing my expertise in bioinformatics analyses. I acknowledge and thank Patricia A. McLenachan (Trish) for her help in this study. Thanks also go to my current and past colleagues at Institute of Molecular Biosciences and Allan Wilson Centre: Tariq Mahmood, Atheer Matroud, Simon Hills, Gillian Gibb, Bennet McComish, Barbara Schoenfeld, Robin Atherton, Andrew Clarke, Timothy White, Jing Wang, Bojian Zhong, Jian Han, Matthias Becker, Simon Cox and Christina Marshall for their pleasant company.

The period of my study at Massey University became much more memorable due to my sincere friends Muhammad Naeem, Aamir Ghafoor, Hamid Irshad, Zahid-ur-Rehman, Islah-ud-Din, Jibran Tahir, Saqib Sharif, Faisal Rana, Abdur Rehman, Asad Razzaq,

Zafar Iqbal, Shujaat Khan, Zia-ur-Rehman, Jawad Hussain and all other Pakistani students at Massey University. I would also like to commend Pakistani community at Palmerston North, particularly Zulfiqar Haider Butt, Babar Saeed, Muhammad Imran, Khawaja Ahmer, Wajid Hussain, Muhammad Islam, Majid Hussain and Kamran Khan. In presence of such a caring community, I did not feel as if I have been away from home for so many years.

I am very thankful to my family, Sammia, Saad and Muhammad, for spending a very pleasant time. I always consider myself as having been blessed with such loving parents, siblings, extended family and friends, who always cared and prayed for me. My father has been an icon of motivation and hard work for me. My parents always longed for me to complete my studies and serve people with what I learned. Sadly, my beloved mother departed in March 2012 while I was still a doctoral student. I wish she could have lived to see me completing my career as a student!



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# CHAPTER 1

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## Introduction

## General introduction

*Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott, commonly known as taro, is a starchy root crop in tropical to temperate regions of Africa, the Mediterranean, Asia, and the Pacific (Matthews 2006). It belongs to a monocot family Araceae (aroids), which is global in its distribution. Within this large family, only a few genera include species that have been domesticated as a carbohydrate source: *Alocasia*, *Amorphophallus*, *Colocasia*, *Cyrtosperma*, and *Xanthosoma* (Matthews 1995). Taro is grown mainly for its edible leaves and corms, although all parts of the plant including corms, cormels, leaves, flowers, rhizome and stalk are edible (de Candolle 1885; Lakhanpaul *et al.* 2003). According to an earlier classification, two morphotypes of taro can be recognized: dasheen or *C. esculenta* var. *esculenta*, and eddoe or *C. esculenta* var. *antiquorum* (Purseglove 1972). These types have also been treated as two separate species, *C. esculenta* and *C. antiquorum*. The crop has a close association with the culture and history of people in New Zealand and elsewhere (Best 1976; Ivancic & Lebot 2000). Taro is regarded as among one of the oldest (Hill 1939; Segawa 1953; Kumazawa *et al.* 1956; Lebot 2009, p279) and widely cultivated starch crops (Matthews 2004). *Yu Jing* (The Book of Taro), written by Huang Shengzheng in 1597 in China (Chu 2012; English translation) cites use of wild taro during famine conditions 2000 years ago. Taro was also mentioned in *Historical Memoir*, an ancient Chinese book of about 100 BC (Tanimono 1998).

## Species in the genus *Colocasia*

Historically, there has been considerable confusion about the number and naming of species within *Colocasia*, and varieties within *C. esculenta* (Plucknett 1983; Hay 1996). This reflects both the polymorphic and plastic nature of *C. esculenta*, the brevity of many descriptions, and the lack of field research on the distribution and variation of *Colocasia* species generally. The number of species in this genus might be up to 20 (Li & Boyce 2010), with some species yet to be described. The genus name *Colocasia* is supposedly derived from colcus or qolqas, an ancient name for taro in Egypt (de Candolle 1885: p 74). Hooker (1894: p 523, 524) described six species of *Colocasia* from India: *C. antiquorum* (syn. *C. esculenta*), *C. affinis*, *C. fallax*, *C. virosa*, *C. mannii*, and *C. gigantea*. *Colocasia esculenta* was reported to be widely distributed in wild and cultivated forms in most parts of India and Sri Lanka, growing up to an altitude of 7600

feet in the Himalayas. *Colocasia affinis*, *C. fallax* and *C. mannii* were reported from Sikkim / Assam region in India, *C. virosa* was reported from Bengal and lowland areas, whereas *C. gigantea* was reported from southern Vietnam and Java. This largely Himalayan, tropical Asian genus was revised later by Engler & Krause (1920) and Hill (1939). Further species were later recognized in this genus, including *C. formosana* (Hayata 1919), *C. oresbia* (Hay 1996), *C. gaoligongensis* (Li & Long 1999), *C. gongii* (Long & Li 2000), *C. lihengiae* (Long & Liu 2001), *C. bicolor* (Cao & Long 2003), *C. menglaensis* (Yin *et al.* 2004), *C. tibetensis* (Yin 2006), *C. yunnanensis* (Cai *et al.* 2006), *C. boyceana* and *C. dibangensis* (Gogoi & Borah 2013). *Colocasia formosana* was discovered in Taiwan; *C. bicolor*, *C. gaoligongensis*, *C. gongii*, *C. lihengiae*, *C. menglaensis* and *C. yunnanensis* were all discovered in Yunnan, southern China; *C. tibetensis* was discovered in Tibet, and *C. oresbia* was discovered in Borneo. *Colocasia oresbia* was also reported from Bangladesh (Ara & Hassan 2005). *Colocasia affinis* and *C. fallax* are widely distributed from Nepal to China, through mainland Southeast Asia, and are not reported as cultigens (Matthews 1991; Li & Boyce 2010), though they are widely traded as ornamentals. *Colocasia gigantea* is widely cultivated in Southeast Asia and East Asia, and is wild in mainland Southeast Asia (Matthews 1991; Li & Boyce 2010). *Colocasia lihengiae*, *C. menglaensis* and *C. yunnanensis* were collected in northern Vietnam by Peter Matthews and Nguyen van Du during 2012 (samples also used in this study), while *C. lihengiae* was also reported in northeast India (Gogoi & Borah 2013). The geographical distribution of these species indicates that the genus is naturally distributed from South Asia to Southeast Asia (including southern China to Indonesia), in lowland tropical areas as well as in the cooler conditions of the Himalayan mountains.

## **Ploidy in taro**

*Colocasia esculenta* has two karyotypes: diploid with  $2n = 28$  chromosomes and triploid with  $3n = 42$  chromosomes (Rattenbury 1956; Yen & Wheeler 1968; Coates *et al.* 1988). Tetraploids can also be observed occasionally (Isshiki *et al.* 1999), although they might occur in extremely low frequencies (Matthews 2004). A basic set of 14 chromosomes has been inferred for taro (Kokubugata & Konishi 1999) as well as for wider Colocasoid species (Cusimano *et al.* 2012). The majority of cultivated and wild genotypes are diploids (Matthews 1990) and are found throughout Asia and Oceania

(Kawahara 1978; Matsuda & Nawata 1999). Triploids have been documented in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, Japan, Philippines, Timor, New Caledonia, Australia and New Zealand (Yen & Wheeler 1968; Coates *et al.* 1988; Zhang & Zhang 1990; Isshiki *et al.* 1999). Earlier studies suggested that all dasheen types are diploids, and most eddoe types are triploids (Spier 1951; Kuruvilla & Singh 1981; Irwin *et al.* 1998), but more data are needed to test this suggestion (Ivancic & Lebot 2000).

Studies of chromosome numbers indicate that Indian genotypes of *C. esculenta* have more genetic diversity than those from any other geographic area (Yen & Wheeler 1968). Darlington & Wylie (1955) reported that *C. esculenta* has two basic chromosome numbers:  $x = 12$  (with somatic chromosome counts of 24 and 48) in Indian varieties, and  $x = 14$  (with somatic chromosome counts of 28 and 42) in Indian and Japanese varieties. Lack of uniformity in chromosome counts in taro during cell division has also been shown; chromosome counts of  $2n = 22, 26, 28, 38$  and 42 have been reported in plants collected from different locations (Onwueme 1978). Parvin *et al.* (2009) documented a taro variety called *Ashu Kachu* in Bangladesh, having 21 chromosomes. If the species identity of this variety as *C. esculenta* is confirmed, this observation lends support to an earlier assumption that the basic chromosome number is 7 instead of 14 in taro (Sreekumari 1997). Alternatively, examples of chromosome numbers other than 28 or 42 might represent interspecific hybrids with *C. esculenta* as one progenitor. Both of these explanations need stronger empirical support to be accepted.

Cytogenetic, morphological and biochemical studies suggest autopolyploid origin for triploid taro (Bai *et al.* 1971; Tanimoto & Matsumoto 1986; Lebot & Aradhya 1991; Isshiki *et al.* 1995, 1999). Allopolyploid origin for triploids is also possible (Okada & Hambali 1989; Yoshino 1994, 1995; Yoshino *et al.* 1998).

## **Growth habitat and cultivation**

*Colocasia esculenta* can be found in wild and cultivated habitats, and is cultivated for food or as an ornamental plant. Wild taros thrive in hot and humid, lowland tropical areas, close to or in water. The water can be flowing as in streams or river banks, or stagnant as in seasoned ponds or pools. Taro cultivars can grow in a range of drained, rain fed or irrigated agricultural systems in tropical, subtropical and temperate environments. During thousands of years in cultivation, hundreds (perhaps thousands?)

of cultivars have been developed by farmers and scattered across the tropical to temperate regions of the world (Plucknett 1983; Rao *et al.* 2010). Matthews (1995) defined various related terms such as wild, cultivated, wildtype and domesticate. The term 'wild' refers to plants in non-cultivated habitats. A 'cultivated' habitat refers to a place where the vegetation or the soil has been modified to support growth of some desired plant(s). The term 'wildtype' refers to a plant genotype that has not been modified by the human activity. The term 'domesticate' refers to a plant genotype which has been modified by human activity. The term 'cultivar' represents a particular line or breed of a domesticated type. Most often, wildtypes are associated with wild, whereas domesticates and cultivars are associated with the cultivated habitats. However, occasionally a wildtype may be found growing in a cultivated habitat, or a cultivar or domesticate may be seen growing in a wild habitat. De Candolle (1885) was among the first scientists to emphasize the importance of observing the habitats of the plants in order to investigate which varieties are the most ancient ones and which are a result of human-mediated breeding.

The principal mode of propagation for taro as a crop is vegetative for which cormels, corms and stolons are used (Nyman & Arditti 1985; Matthews 1990). Flowering is rare in plants under cultivation (Jianchu *et al.* 2001), probably because most cultivated plants are harvested prior to flower, fruit and seed maturation (Matthews 1990). There is either no flowering, or infertile flowers are produced in conditions of heavy rainfall or continuous rainy weather (Ivancic & Lebot 2000). Thus successive selection of plants occurs without seed setting, particularly in sub-tropical to temperate areas with seasonal cropping systems such as Pakistan (author's observation). However in tropical regions, seeds can reach maturity and germinate. Fruit and seed production have been widely reported in the tropical parts of Asia and the Pacific, including from Bangladesh (Isshiki *et al.* 1995), Myanmar (Matthews & Naing 2005), Vanuatu (Caillon *et al.* 2006), New Guinea (Lebot 1999), and Australia (Hunt *et al.* 2013). Both self-pollination (Carson & Okada 1982) and cross-pollination (Patel *et al.* 1984) have been proposed, although the floral morphology and differential rate of development of male and female floral parts favour cross-pollination (Jackson & Pelomo 1980). In addition to diploids, triploids have also been shown to undergo meiosis but with unusual chromosome behaviour: monovalents, bivalents and trivalents were observed and the chromosome count in pollen nuclei from triploids ranged from 8 – 25 (Bai *et al.* 1971).



Figure 1 shows taro growing in different habitats in New Zealand, Vietnam and Pakistan. Two taro morphotypes, var GP (Figure 1a) and var. RR (Figure 1b), were used for chloroplast genome sequencing, as detailed in Chapter 2. In New Zealand, these morphotypes and the ornamental *C. esculenta* var. *fontanesii* (Figure 1c) are not known to produce seeds. Figure 1(d) shows taro growing in wild habitat in Hu Lien, Vietnam (Courtesy of PJM). Figures 1(e) and 1(f) show taro crop at a juvenile stage in district Attock, but close to its harvest in district Multan at the same time. In Pakistan, taro is grown as a crop in both the summer and winter seasons.

### **Natural geographic range**

The natural geographic range of a species represents the extent of spread achieved without human mediation. A species distribution can be the outcome of innumerable biological, ecological and geographical factors, interacting over potentially long periods of time. Some of these factors include geography, availability of habitats, natural barriers to dispersal, habitat preferences (e.g. concerning temperature, daylight cycles, physiological availability of water, soil conditions, presence of pollinators, absence of plant competitors, herbivores, pests and diseases), and the species inherent genetic capability which enables it to respond to a multitude of ecological and physiological stresses or signals.

The likely natural range of taro extends from India and Southeast Asia to northern Australia and New Guinea (Figure 2). This conclusion was supported by considerations of taxonomic, ecological, ethnobotanical and geographic factors. Taro was reported growing in India along with five other *Colocasia* species (Hooker 1894). Further *Colocasia* species have since been reported growing in tropical Southeast Asia, southern China and Indonesia (Hooker 1894; Hay 1996; Long & Liu 2001; Cao & Long 2003; Yin *et al.* 2004; Cai *et al.* 2006). Pests such as insects and viruses, and pollinators of taro might represent a coevolution spanning a time frame of thousands to millions of years. Taro planthoppers were described in Asia and Pacific (Asche & Wilson 1989) including those in northern Australia (Matthews 2003). Pollinating flies belonging to the genus *Colocasiomyia* (formerly *Drosophilella*) were found on taro inflorescences in New Guinea (Carson & Okada 1982) and Australia (Hunt *et al.* 2013). Together, these observations provide circumstantial support for the natural distribution range of taro stated above.



(a)



(b)





(c)



(d)





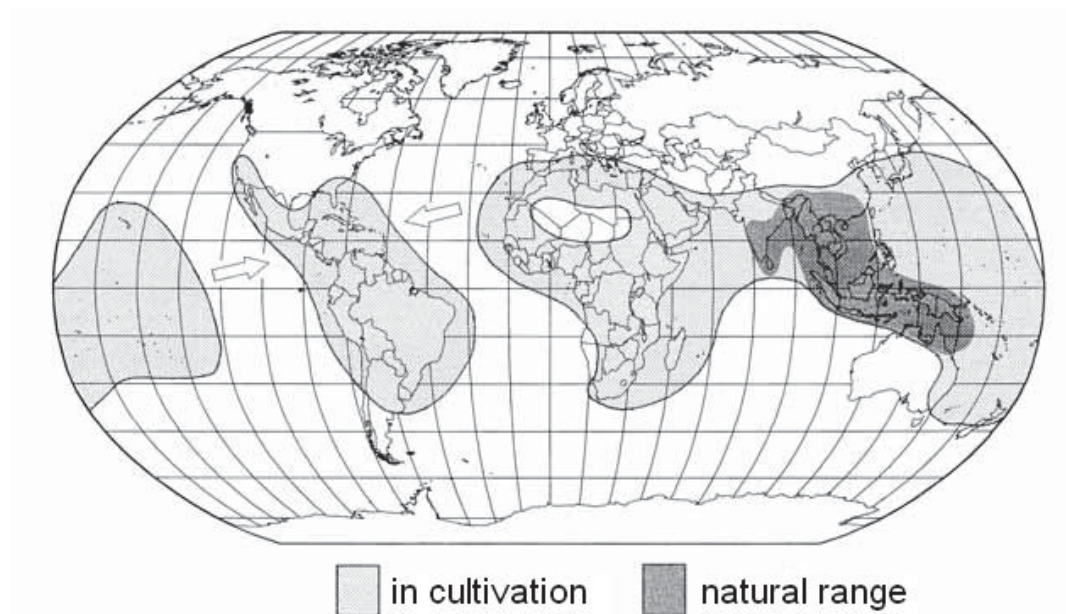
(e)



(f)

**Figure 1. Taro growing in different habitats in New Zealand (NZ), Vietnam (VN) and Pakistan (PK):** (a) var. GP morphotype, an exotic wild form in New Zealand, growing in a stream near Whangarei, NZ (October 2009); (b) var. RR morphotype, an edible cultivar at the University of Auckland campus, NZ (June 2008); (c) *C. esculenta*

*var. fontanesii*, an ornamental form with an inflorescence, growing in backyard of a house in Ohaeawai, Northland, NZ (October 2009); (d) wild taro from Hu Lien district, VN (October 2011); (e) an undescribed cultivar growing in district Attock, PK (April 2009); (f) an undescribed cultivar in district Multan, PK (April 2009).



**Figure 2. Natural and cultivated range of taro distribution across the globe.** (Redrawn from Matthews, 2006).

### **Geographic origin, dispersal and domestication history**

Researchers including de Candolle (1885), Hooker (1894), Spier (1951), Yen & Wheeler (1968), Matthews (1990, 1991, 1995), Lebot & Aradhya (1991), Lebot (1992, 1999) have discussed the geographic origin, domestication and dispersal of taro across different parts of the world. However, no general consensus on these matters has been established yet. The generally accepted view during early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century recognized taro origin and domestication in a region from eastern India to Southeast Asia, from where it dispersed to other parts of the world (Yen & Wheeler 1968; Kuruvilla & Singh 1981). The hypothesis of an Asian origin of taro and its dispersal in the Pacific region is linked with records of prehistoric human settlements and their cultures in the Pacific Islands (Greenwell 1947; De la Pena 1970; Cable 1984;



Matthews 1995). An alternate hypothesis is that taro was independently domesticated in New Guinea (Coates *et al.* 1988; Yen 1991, 1993; Lebot 1999). This hypothesis has mostly relied on the archaeological evidence of ditch systems in New Guinea, which are considered suitable for taro cultivation, and which belong to early Holocene calibrated as 9000 to 6000 years BP (Golson 1976, 1977; Denham *et al.* 2003, 2004). Fossil evidence for taro use in the Solomon Islands (Loy *et al.* 1992) and New Guinea (Fullagar *et al.* 2006), as well as pollen records in New Guinea (Haberle 1995) and northern Australia (Haberle 2005) have strengthened this hypothesis. Field observations of the presence of wild taros in New Guinea and northern Australia (Matthews 1990, 1991; Ivancic *et al.* 1995) are also supportive of this hypothesis, as wild taro would need to be naturally present in New Guinea for its domestication. Molecular methods for isozyme, RAPD, AFLP, and SSR (microsatellite) analysis that have been developed and applied to various collections of taro in Asia and the Pacific have indicated the presence of more-or-less two distinct regional gene pools for cultivated taro, lending support to the possibility of domestication in different regions of Southeast Asia and Melanesia (Lebot & Aradhya 1991; Irwin *et al.* 1998; Matsuda & Nawata 1999; Ochiai *et al.* 2001; Lakhanpaul *et al.* 2003; Kreike *et al.* 2004; Mace *et al.* 2006; Singh *et al.* 2007). However, the hypothesis of domestication in New Guinea has not been sufficiently tested by genetic comparisons of wild and cultivated examples of taro from Asia and the Pacific, or by selection of appropriate molecular markers to study the evolutionary history of the crop. These points are further elaborated in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

## **Hybridization in taro**

A potential role for hybridization in speciation and adaptive diversification of plants has been considered by many researchers (Arnold 1997; Seehausen 2004; Mallet 2007). In general, hybridization simply extends the gene pool available to populations and species for acquiring genetic traits that contribute to phenotypes of adaptive significance (Becker *et al.* 2013).

Natural hybridization between *Colocasia* and *Alocasia* has previously been suggested (Long & Liu 2001). Artificial hybrids have been created with crosses between *C. esculenta* and *C. gigantea* (Okada & Hambali 1989), and between *C. esculenta* and *Alocasia macrorrhizos* (Yoshino 1994; 1995; Yoshino *et al.* 1998). Hybridization has

also been suggested for other species within the family Araceae (Long & Liu 2001; Nauheimer 2012). However, while possible hybrids within *Colocasia* have been speculated upon (Long and Liu, 2001), this hypothesis requires further empirical evidence.

## **Biochemical and molecular markers used to study genetic diversity in taro resources**

*Colocasia esculenta* has a widespread distribution in a wide range of environmental and ecological niches since ancient times. Its widespread distribution and different niche preferences might reflect either plasticity or genetic variability between different cultivars and wild forms. The genetic diversity of taro has been examined using various types of biochemical and molecular markers. Most studies have not focused on an investigation of phylogeographic history. However, the marker systems investigated have some relevance to the history of the crop. A brief summary of the relevant literature on use of the molecular markers in taro is given here.

Using restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), ribosomal DNA variation in taro accessions from New Zealand, Australia, New Guinea, tropical Polynesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Japan and Madagascar was analyzed (Matthews 1990; Matthews *et al.* 1992; Matthews & Terauchi 1994; Matthews 1995). Variation in the large spacer region of the nuclear ribosomal DNA revealed considerable variation within taro, but this was not amenable to phylogenetic interpretation. Matsuda & Nawata (2002) analysed RFLPs in the rDNA locus in 227 taro accessions from Japan, China, Vietnam and Taiwan and suggested two routes of introduction of taro in Japan: from China and from Southeast Asia. RFLP analysis of chloroplast DNA was also used to study phylogenetic affinities between taro and species in genus *Alocasia* (Yoshino 1994, 1995; Yoshino *et al.* 1998). These studies indicated the presence of *Alocasia* chloroplast DNA in *Colocasia* samples, suggesting possible hybridization between the two genera.

Lebot & Aradhya (1991) studied isozyme variation in 1417 cultivars and wild type taros from Asia and Oceania. With seven polymorphic enzymes, 143 zymotypes were revealed. Asian cultivars showed greater variation than the Oceanic cultivars. Maximum variation was found for Indonesian cultivars. The Oceanic cultivars were thought to

originate from Indonesia. Isozyme polymorphism in taro from Southeast Asia and Oceania was studied further by (Lebot *et al.* 2004b) in taro accessions from seven countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea. In 2298 plant samples, 319 distinct zymotypes were found. Six zymotypes represented more than 51% of plants, while 21 zymotypes represented more than 70% of plants, indicating a narrow genetic base among the cultivars. At the isozyme level, significant genetic diversity was found in the plant samples from Malaysia (0.52) and Vietnam (0.35), while limited diversity was found in samples from Vanuatu (0.05), Papua New Guinea (0.05) and the Philippines (0.11). Both of the above studies indicated presence of more or less distinct gene pools in Asia and Oceania.

Irwin *et al.* (1998) used 73 randomly amplified polymorphic DNA (RAPD) primers to characterize 44 taro accessions from Hawaii, Indonesia, Micronesia, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Japan and New Caledonia. Consistent with Ivancic *et al.* (2004), the Indonesian accessions displayed high genetic diversity. The RAPD markers were also useful in distinguishing accessions with respect to the country of origin and ploidy level (diploids and triploids). Lakhanpaul *et al.* (2003) studied genetic diversity in Indian taro cultivars. They used 13 RAPD primers to characterise genetic diversity in 32 plant samples, with some primers displaying 60 – 100% polymorphism. All 32 plant samples were found to be the unique genotypes.

van Eck *et al.* (1998) analysed amplified fragment length polymorphism (AFLP) markers to assess genetic diversity in a core collection of 217 taro accessions from Southeast Asia and Oceania. Most of these samples were cultivars. Low genotypic polymorphism was observed in all accessions except diploids and triploids from Indonesia (0.11 and 0.14 respectively) and triploids from Vietnam (0.13). (Lebot *et al.* 2004b) analysed AFLPs in elite cultivars from six countries, and suggested two distinct genepools in Southeast Asia and Oceania. Kreike *et al.* (2004) studied 255 taro accessions from Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. With 3 AFLP primers, they generated 465 scorable amplicons. Wild accessions showed higher average gene diversity compared to cultivated diploid and triploid accessions in each country. Maximum gene diversity (0.19) was found in wild accessions from Thailand, while minimum gene diversity (0.007) was observed for diploid cultivars from Thailand. A dendrogram used to group wild accessions and cultivated diploid and triploid accessions resolved accessions belonging to Asia and the



Pacific into two distinct groups. Caillon *et al.* (2006) used AFLP analysis to characterize 96 morphotypes from Vanuatu; all 96 morphotypes could be differentiated, but intra-clonal variation was non-significant.

Mace *et al.* (2006) studied a core collection of 515 taro accessions taken from 10 countries in Oceania using microsatellite markers. Seven microsatellite markers displayed 38 alleles (average of 5.4 alleles per locus). Maximum polymorphism (88%) was found within populations, while only 12% variation was found between populations, with accessions from one country treated as one population. Highest gene diversity was observed for Palau (0.658), Solomon Islands (0.618) and Papua New Guinea (0.589). Singh *et al.* (2007) used microsatellite analysis to form a core collection of taro accessions from Papua New Guinea. In a subset of 151 accessions, seven microsatellite markers displayed 30 polymorphic alleles (an average of 4.28 alleles per locus). The average polymorphic information content (PIC) was 0.59 for these microsatellite markers.

Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in chloroplast DNA were studied by Tahara *et al.* (1999) in 13 accessions including taro and other aroid species. Of the two loci used, only a single locus (*trnL – trnF* intergenic spacer) showed polymorphism in accessions across four genera. However, polymorphism at this locus was not enough to distinguish between *Alocasia* and *Colocasia* accessions.

### **Limitations of previous studies with respect to elucidating the evolutionary history of taro**

Previous studies of the genetic variation in taro (summarized above) have largely been focused on molecular characterisation and estimating the genetic diversity of taro cultivars (including vegetatively propagated clones). These studies have not sufficiently included comparison with wild taro populations, and the markers assayed are not the ones most suitable for locating the possible genetic and geographic origins of cultivated forms. Little attention has been given to relationships with other species of *Colocasia*. With little molecular data available, it has not been possible to develop molecular tests appropriate for inferring evolutionary and phylogeographic relationships among diverse forms of taro.

Among the hundreds and possibly thousands of taro cultivars (Plucknett 1983; Rao *et al.* 2010), some cultivars have been developed using modern breeding methods. Recent breeding projects have been aimed at either generating better yielding varieties or introducing resistance against diseases. One of the aims of the TANSO (Taro Network for Southeast Asia and Oceania) project which was conducted during 1998 to 2002 and involved researchers from several countries, was to breed taro cultivars resistant to taro leaf blight (Lebot *et al.* 2004a). Similar breeding projects are also currently being supported by the International Network for Edible Aroids (<http://www.ediblearoids.org/INEANEWS.aspx/> retrieved 14<sup>th</sup> August 2013).

De Candolle (1885; p13) stated the importance of recognising and excluding modern cultivars from comparisons involving ancient cultivars – such distinction separates the natural history from the human history of domestication of a crop. During the last three decades, one of my co-supervisors (PJM) has accumulated samples of wild and cultivated taro, including presumably ancient taro cultivars, together with samples of closely related species, from countries within the natural distribution range of taro. This set of samples provided a valuable resource, and was used in the present work to investigate the evolutionary origin, spread and domestication history of taro. However, a first step was to develop molecular markers (SNPs) that might be better suited for phylogenetic and phylogeographic analyses of taro. These are the type of markers for which it is possible to model nucleotide substitution properties. Such markers which are the foundation of molecular systematics and divergence time estimation (e.g. Hillis 1996; Renner 2005; Ripplinger & Sullivan 2010) were developed for *Colocasia* and closely related species.

### **Aims of the present study**

Following the discussion above, the major aims of the present study were to:

- I. Develop molecular markers appropriate for phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies of taro and closely related taxa.
- II. Investigate the evolutionary history of the crop by comparing wild and cultivated taros from across the natural range of the species, and beyond.

## Organization of the thesis

The above aims were achieved by dividing the work into three parts, two of which have been published. The last component constitutes work towards a manuscript, the work for which is drawing to a completion. Thus the thesis comprises in essence of three manuscripts, each of which is outlined as a separate thesis Chapter. Each Chapter has its own relevant literature review, methodology, results and discussion.

Aim I has been fulfilled by completion of Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Chapter 2 describes the determination and comparative analyses of chloroplast genome sequences from two taro morphotypes. These genomes were also compared with other available aroid chloroplast genomes to identify mutational hotspots in aroid chloroplast genomes, and determine the extent of genome wide association between different kinds of mutations. From the observations made, a hypothesis was put forward that the distribution of oligonucleotide repeats in a single representative genome could be used *a priori* to design molecular markers most appropriate for phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies. To test this hypothesis, molecular markers were designed from the chloroplast genome of taro, and their usefulness was investigated for resolving relationships among a subset of taro and closely related species. The findings from this analysis have been presented in Chapter 3. Aim II has been accomplished in Chapter 4, where analyses are reported for six of these chloroplast loci on a much bigger set of taxa, alongside analyses of two independent nuclear loci. Analyses of these data were used to resolve relationships within and among species, in a more diverse representation of taro and closely related species. An overall conclusion from the studies undertaken in this project, and the future outlook for further studies constitute Chapter 5. Many references to the literature are common among these Chapters. For this reason references from all Chapters have been combined together in a single reference list to avoid redundancy. The appendix section includes the Statements of Contribution (DRC16 forms) by the present author to the published manuscripts (Chapters 2 and 3), a reprint of the Figure 2 in Chapter 2 which was selected for the cover page of the journal (Genome Biology and Evolution), and a license by the publisher to reuse published materials in Chapter 3.

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## CHAPTER 2

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Ibrar Ahmed, Patrick J. Biggs, Peter J. Matthews, Lesley J. Collins, Michael D. Hendy, Peter J. Lockhart (2012). **Mutational dynamics of aroid chloroplast genomes.** *Genome Biology and Evolution* 4(12): 1316-1323.

Note: This paper was selected for the cover page of Volume 5 Issue 2 (February 2013) of *Genome Biology and Evolution* (the cover page is reproduced in Appendix section).

## **Abstract**

A characteristic feature of eukaryote and prokaryote genomes is the co-occurrence of nucleotide substitution and insertion/deletion (indel) mutations. While similar observations have also been made for chloroplast DNA, genome-wide associations have not been reported. We determined the chloroplast genome sequences for two morphotypes of taro (*Colocasia esculenta*; family Araceae) and compared these to four publicly available aroid chloroplast genomes. Here we report the extent of genome wide association between direct and inverted repeats, indels and substitutions in these aroid chloroplast genomes. We suggest that alternative but not mutually exclusive hypotheses explain the mutational dynamics of chloroplast genome evolution.

**Key words:** Araceae, indels, phylogeny, repeats, substitution mutations, taro

## Introduction

Comparative studies of chloroplast genome sequences have investigated divergences spanning an enormous range of evolutionary times. These have included studies of intraspecific variation in domesticated plants (e.g. Yamane *et al.* 2003), studies of early land plant evolution (e.g. Kugita *et al.* 2003) and also the earliest events of oxygenic photosynthesis (e.g. Martin *et al.* 2002). This range of comparisons has been possible because of the conservative nature of chloroplast (cp) genome evolution (Palmer 1985), which involves relatively slow rates of sequence evolution in some parts of the cp genome (Sammut & Huttley 2011) and elevated rates in other parts (Magee *et al.* 2010; Sammut & Huttley 2011).

Molecular evolution of the cp genome sequences is typically modelled as a time reversible substitution process, in which changes at any one site are independent of changes at any other site (Liò & Goldman 1998; Drouin *et al.* 2008). However, observations have suggested more complex processes of evolution in which both lineage-specific and non-random spatial patterns of substitution (Liò & Goldman 1998; Lee *et al.* 2007; Gruenheit *et al.* 2008; Magee *et al.* 2010; Wu *et al.* 2011; Zhong *et al.* 2011). Such observations have practical significance for understanding the limitations of cp genomes in phylogenetic analyses of highly diverged lineages (Gruenheit *et al.* 2008), and for understanding the mutational dynamics of ‘hotspot’ regions studied in comparisons of closely related taxa (Shaw *et al.* 2007; Worberg *et al.* 2007).

In prokaryotes and eukaryotes, analyses of DNA sequence alignments show that indels commonly occur in regions that are hotspots for nucleotide substitutions. Alternative hypotheses have been proposed to explain this co-occurrence. It has been suggested that certain genome regions are predisposed to mutational events such as substitutions and insertion/deletions – ‘the regional difference hypothesis’ (Silva & Kondrashov 2002; Hardison *et al.* 2003). A second hypothesis explaining the association between indels and substitutions is that certain (large) indels act to induce substitutions through a DNA repair process that recruits error prone DNA polymerases – ‘the indel-induced mutation hypothesis’ (Tian *et al.* 2008; Zhu *et al.* 2009). A third and related hypothesis is that it is the presence of repeat sequences rather than indels *per se*, that actually promotes replication fork arrest, causing the recruitment of the error-prone DNA polymerases, and in doing so generates nucleotide substitutions (McDonald *et al.* 2011).

These hypotheses have not been explicitly investigated in cp genomes yet these genomes are known to contain very high densities of direct and inverted oligonucleotide repeats. Associations between repeats, indels and substitutions have previously been reported in cp DNA (McLenachan *et al.* 2000; Lockhart *et al.* 2001 and references cited therein). Cp genome repeats include simple sequence repeats (SSRs, also known as microsatellites) and other moderate to long (8 – 48 bp) repeats. Contraction and expansion of the SSR units, caused by slipped strand mispairing during DNA replication (Levinson & Gutman 1987), frequently produces short indels at these SSR loci (Masood *et al.* 2004). The moderate to long repeats have also been suggested to cause indels (Kawata *et al.* 1997) and inversions (Kim & Lee 2005; Whitlock *et al.* 2010). Most angiosperms also contain two large inverted repeat regions, commonly known as IRa and IRb (5 – 76 kb; Palmer 1991).

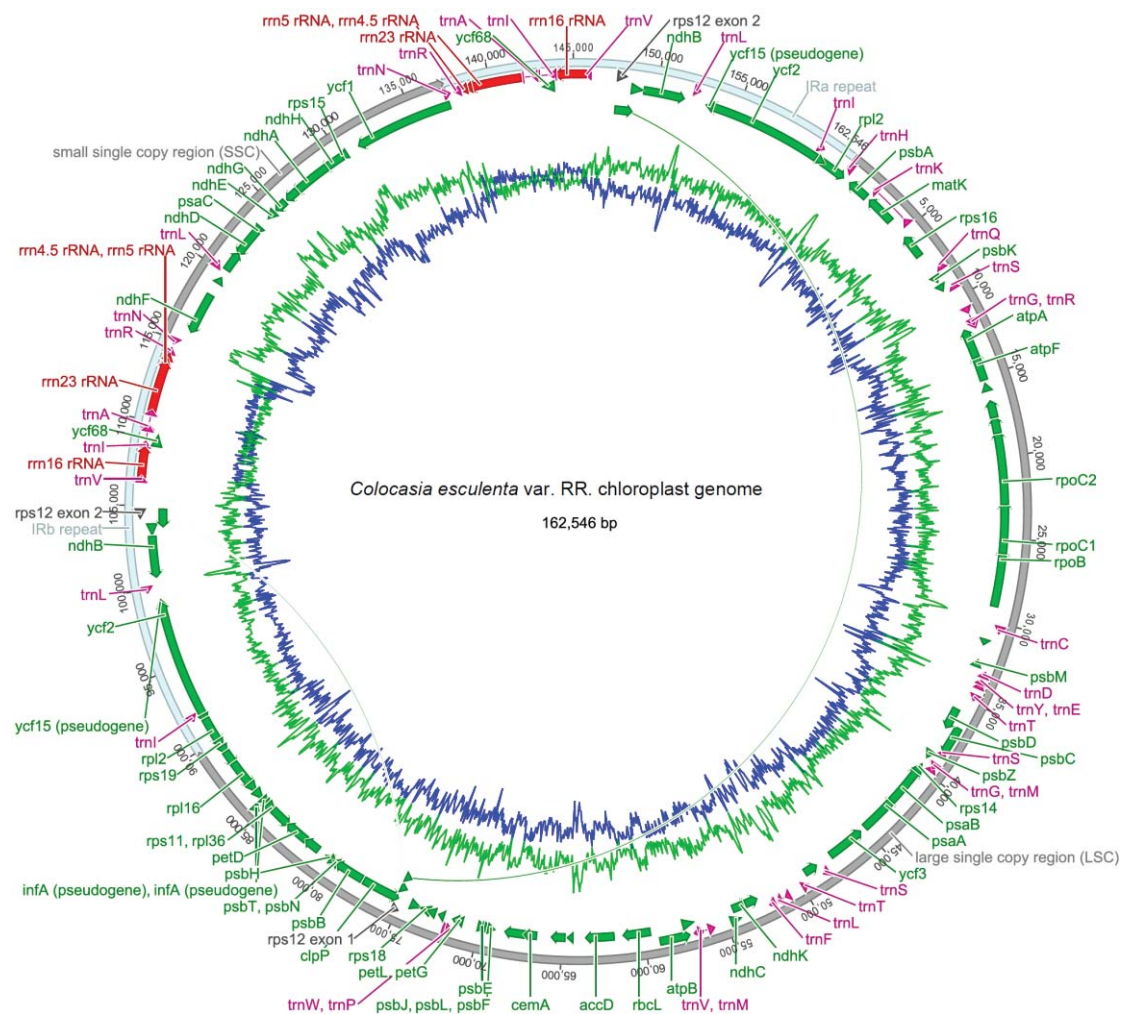
Here we report the cp genome sequences of two morphotypes of taro (*Colocasia esculenta*; var. RR and var. GP; Matthews 1985) and examine the genome wide association of repeats (excluding IRa and IRb), indels and substitutions in the cp genomes of these taro morphotypes and four other distantly related aroids in the duckweed (Lemnoideae) sub-family.

### **The *Colocasia esculenta* chloroplast genome**

*Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott, commonly known as taro, is an ancient root crop in sub-family Aroideae of the monocot family Araceae. This species is distributed in the tropical to subtropical and some temperate regions of the world (Bown 1988).

Gene arrangement and other features of the *C. esculenta* cp genome are shown in Figure 1. Size of the cp genome was 162,546 bp (GC content: 36.1%) in var. RR, and 162,424 bp (GC content: 36.2%) in var. GP. The GC content varied from 42.4% in inverted repeats (IR) to 34.4% in the large single copy (LSC) and only 28.4% in the small single copy (SSC) regions of the taro cp genomes. Higher GC content in the IR regions corresponded to the presence of the ribosomal DNA locus. Pair-wise sequence alignment between the taro cp genomes revealed 99.5% identical sequence, 241 substitutions and 92 indels. The LSC region contained 141 (58.6%) substitutions and 65





**Figure 1.** *Colocasia esculenta* var. RR chloroplast genome (GenBank accession: JN105690). Brown lines in the outer circle represent the large and small single copy regions, cyan lines represent the inverted repeats, while inner green lines show AT and blue lines show GC percentage throughout the cp genome.

(71%) indels, the SSC region contained 83 (34.4%) substitutions and 25 (27%) indels, while the IRA and IRB regions collectively contained only 17 (7%) substitutions and 2 (2%) indels, indicating that the IR was the most evolutionarily stable region. Prominent differences between the two taro cp genomes were found at the IRb-SSC boundary (numerous indels making up a 91 bp difference in size), and at the SSC-IRA boundary (a shift of 64 bp in the repeat boundary without causing indels). Thus the IR boundaries at both ends of the SSC region were polymorphic at intraspecific level in taro. Polymorphism between the two taro cp genomes included 59 substitutions in 29 protein



coding genes. Among these, the most polymorphic gene was *ycf1* even when normalized for its size, showing 16 substitutions between the two genomes. Some protein coding genes (including *atpH*, *psbM* and *psbZ*) and tRNA genes (including *trnH*, *trnG* and *trnW*) in particular showed a relatively high density of substitutions and indels within 20 bp upstream of their respective coding regions. Whether or not this observation has functional significance needs to be further explored. A set of 30 functional tRNA genes covering all 20 amino acids required for protein synthesis was present in the taro cp genome.

The overall gene arrangement was similar between taro (*C. esculenta*) and the duckweed (*Lemna minor*; Mardanov *et al.* 2008) cp genomes. However, notable differences were as follows:

- (a) *trnH* gene is reported in the LSC region in duckweed, while the 5'-end of this gene extended into the IRa region in taro.
- (b) *infA* gene is completely missing in duckweed, but a pseudo-copy of this gene with internal stop codons was observed in taro.
- (c) A single functional *rpl2* gene spanning the IRb-LSC boundary is reported in duckweed, whereas two functional copies of this gene were found in taro, one in each of the IR regions.
- (d) A pseudo-copy of *ycf68* gene is reported in duckweed, however a functional copy of this gene was observed in each IR region in taro.
- (e) Duckweed has *ycf1* and *rps15* genes within its IR regions, whereas these genes were placed within the SSC region in taro.

The *infA* gene is considered to be among the most mobile cp genes. Multiple independent gene transfers from cp to nuclear genomes are thought to have occurred during angiosperm evolution (Millen *et al.* 2001). The *ycf68* gene is present in a range of plant families as a functional or a pseudo-gene, and may have functional significance even in its non-coding form (Raubeson *et al.* 2007). Other genes showing variation in comparison with *L. minor* include *trnH*, *rpl2*, *ycf1* and *rps15*. These are located at or near the boundaries of inverted repeats with single copy regions. These boundaries are well known to exhibit expansion and contraction in angiosperms (Whitlock *et al.* 2010) as well as in gymnosperms (Lin *et al.* 2012). A comparison of the size and percentage proportions of LSC, SSC and IR regions in taro and other aroid cp genomes is given in

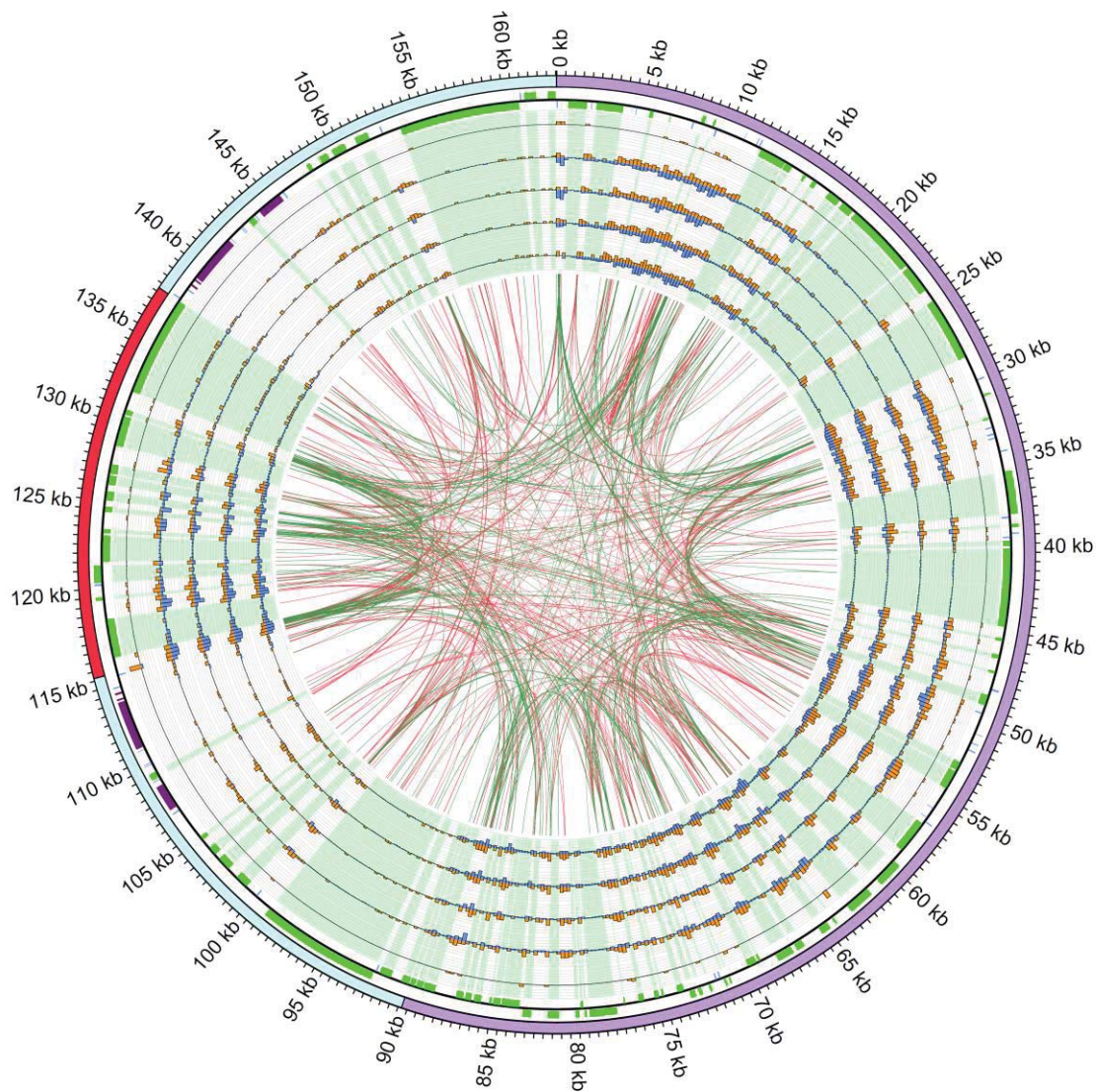
Table 1. Characterization of these boundaries is likely to provide useful insights into the dynamics of single copy – inverted repeat boundary shifts in *Colocasia* and other aroid cp genomes.

**Table 1. Comparison among total size (bp) and sizes of the large single copy (LSC), small single copy (SSC) and two inverted repeat (IR) regions in taro and other aroid chloroplast genomes. Percentage proportions of the LSC, SSC and IRs are given in parenthesis.**

Species	GenBank I.D.	Genome size	LSC	SSC	IR
<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> var. GP	JN105689	162424	89670 (55.21)	22208 (13.67)	25273 (31.12)
<i>C. esculenta</i> var. RR	JN105690	162546	89817 (55.26)	22075 (13.58)	25327 (31.16)
<i>Lemna minor</i>	NC010109	165955	89906 (54.17)	13603 (8.20)	31223 (37.63)
<i>Spirodela polyrhiza</i>	JN160603	168788	91222 (54.04)	14056 (8.33)	31755 (37.63)
<i>Wolffiella lingulata</i>	JN160604	169337	92015 (54.34)	13956 (8.24)	31683 (37.42)
<i>Wolffia australiana</i>	JN160605	168704	91454 (54.21)	13394 (7.94)	31930 (37.85)

### **Correlations among repeats, indels and substitutions in aroid cp genomes**

We have visualized the extent to which indel and substitution mutations are non-randomly distributed between taro and other aroid cp genomes, using a Circos (Krzywinski *et al.* 2009) plot as given in Figure 2. This plot shows that substitutions are very closely correlated in their distribution with moderate (15 bp) to long (48 bp) repeat sequences mainly found in non-coding regions. Correlation ( $r$ ) and related values for these data are given in Table 2. Correlations were highly significant in comparisons of three types of mutations, including (a) repeats and substitutions, (b) substitutions and indels, and (c) repeats and indels. In a pairwise comparison of the two closely related taro genomes, the strength of correlations was greatest for ‘repeats and indels’ followed by ‘substitutions and indels’ and then ‘repeats and substitutions’. In contrast, when



**Figure 2.** Circos plot of taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) var. RR showing the relationship between short repeats within the chloroplast genome and distribution of indels and substitutions in pairwise comparisons of taro var. RR cp genome with other aroid cp genomes. All data in the histogram tracks are shown in non-overlapping 250 bp bins, with the taro var. RR genome taken as a reference for the coordinate space. Tracks from the outermost to innermost show: taro var. RR chloroplast ideogram (large single copy in purple, small single copy in red and inverted repeats in cyan); genome annotation on the positive and negative strand (genes in green; tRNAs in blue and rRNAs in purple); five circular plots showing comparisons between *C. esculenta* var. RR with (1) *C. esculenta* var. GP, (2) *L. minor*, (3) *S. polyrhiza*, (4) *W. australiana* and (5) *W. lingulata*. For each genome comparison, the number of indels in each 250 bp bin is shown in orange (scale of 0 to 10), and the number of

**substitutions is shown in blue (scale of 0 to 160). Across these five plots, the light green colouring indicates the coding regions. The figure centre shows the results of Reputer mapping using the taro var. RR chloroplast genome. Two ends of a red line mark the two locations of the forward (direct) repeats, while those of a green line mark the two locations of the reverse (inverted) repeats on the genome. In this part of the figure, the large inverted repeats are not plotted, as they would obscure a large part of the figure. Number of repeats shown in the diagram is 667, with a size range from 15 bp to 48 bp (average repeat size: 16 bp).**

pairwise comparison was made between a taro genome and a more distantly related aroid genome, the strength of correlations reversed. The strongest correlation was for ‘repeats and substitutions’ followed by ‘substitutions and indels’ and then ‘repeats and indels’ (Table 2). The strongest correlation value observed was for ‘repeats and indels’ in comparison of the two taro genomes. Similar observations have previously been reported in prokaryotes and eukaryotes (Kawata *et al.* 1997; McDonald *et al.* 2011), and have led to a hypothesis that repeat sequences play a pivotal role in generation of indel and substitution mutations (McDonald *et al.* 2011).

Since Tian *et al.* (2008) proposed that moderate to large sized indels induce substitutions in their surrounding sequences, we also investigated this relationship in a multiple sequence alignment (parental alignment) of all six aroid cp genomes. From this parental alignment, we extracted data partitions containing distinct indel location points (ILPs) to make mutually exclusive partitions with respect to locations of the ILPs. Partition A contained ILPs associated with SSR indels in both coding and non-coding regions. Partition B contained ILPs associated with large (oligonucleotide long, non-SSR) indels in both coding and non-coding regions. Partition C contained ILPs in non-coding regions, associated with both SSR indels and large indels. Partition D contained ILPs in coding regions, associated with both SSR and large indels. The density of substitutions in all partitions was highly dependent upon inverse of distance from the ILPs ( $r^2$  ranged from 0.85 to 0.97 for all bin sizes; Supplementary Figure 1). Higher substitution density in bins closer to the ILPs was a general trend in all five comparisons above, including the partition in which coding regions were removed (partition C); however in this case distance from the ILPs was relatively shorter than in the other four

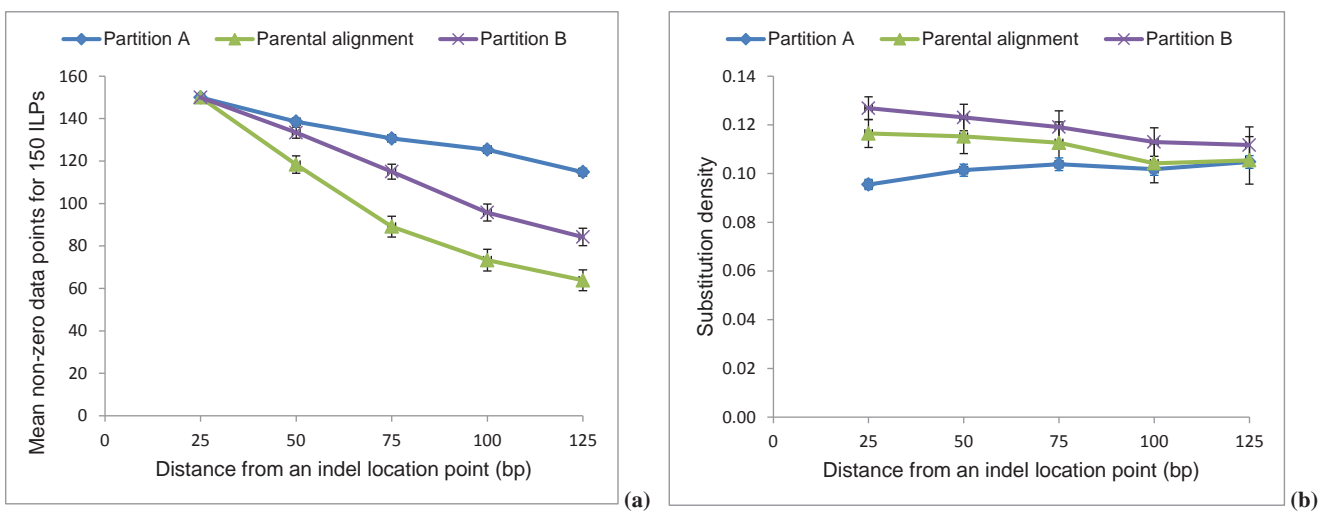
comparisons. The indel-induced mutation hypothesis was further explored in a comparison including the parental alignment and partitions A and B, as shown in Figure 3. From this comparison, it is evident that the partition B (containing ILPs associated with large indels) displayed a higher density of substitutions closer to ILPs, and the density of substitutions decreased with an increase in distance from the ILPs. In contrast, the partition A (containing ILPs associated with SSRs) exhibited a low density of substitutions close to ILPs, and the density of substitutions showed a net increase with increase in distance from the ILPs. These observations are consistent with the indel-induced mutation hypothesis suggested for diploid eukaryote (Tian *et al.* 2008) as well as bacterial genomes (Zhu *et al.* 2009).

It is well known that certain regions of the chloroplast genome show different rates of mutations (e.g. Lee *et al.* 2007; Gruenheit *et al.* 2008; CBOL Plant Working Group 2009; Zhong *et al.* 2011). These are observations consistent with a regional difference hypothesis (Silva & Kondrashov 2002; Hardison *et al.* 2003) and the suggestion that purifying selection operates at both coding and non-coding regions (e.g. Peterson *et al.* 2011). However, these explanations are alone insufficient to explain substitution and indel patterns of the chloroplast genome. The extent of genome wide correlations reported here for indels, repeats and substitution provides further support for the hypothesis by McDonald *et al.* (2011) which emphasizes the evolutionary importance of the repeats in causing mutations. In addition, our observations on substitution densities also provide support for an indel-induced mutation hypothesis (Tian *et al.* 2008; Zhu *et al.* 2009) and further our understanding for the sometimes poor fit between time reversible substitution models and chloroplast sequence data. Perhaps most interestingly the relationship between repeats, substitutions and indels implies that, if the distribution of repeat sequences in a chloroplast genome is determined, there is a possibility to predict the mutational hotspot regions and other sequences that are most appropriate for population genetic, phylogeographic and phylogenetic analyses.



**Table 2.** Comparisons among the pairwise alignments (*Colocasia esculenta* var. RR taken as a reference) to calculate the correlations between (a) repeats and substitutions, (b) insertion-deletions (indels) and substitutions, and (c) repeats and indels. The alignments compared closely related (var. RR to var. GP) and distantly related (var. RR to *Wolffiella lingulata*, *Wolffia australiana*, *Lemna minor* and *Spirodela polyrhiza*) aroid chloroplast genomes. The alignments were partitioned into 651 non-overlapping bins of 250bp size each to calculate these correlations. All correlations were highly significant (as indicated by stars) at 0.001  $\alpha$  and 649 degree of freedom.

Comparison	<i>C. esculenta</i> var. GP	<i>W. lingulata</i>	<i>W. australiana</i>	<i>L. minor</i>	<i>S. polyrhiza</i>
Correlation between repeats and substitutions ( $r$ )	0.245	0.391	0.416	0.424	0.491
Significance of correlation ( $t$ )	6.44***	10.81***	11.657***	11.92***	14.37***
Coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ )	0.060	0.152	0.173	0.180	0.241
Correlation between indels and substitutions ( $r$ )	0.391	0.220	0.245	0.323	0.387
Significance of correlation ( $t$ )	10.82***	5.75***	6.43***	8.71***	10.69***
Coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ )	0.153	0.048	0.060	0.105	0.150
Correlation between repeats and indels ( $r$ )	0.640	0.168	0.178	0.224	0.212
Significance of correlation ( $t$ )	21.20***	4.33***	4.59***	5.87***	5.51***
Coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ )	0.409	0.028	0.032	0.050	0.045



**Figure 3. Results showing (a) the number of mean non-zero data points used to calculate the substitution density, and (b) the values of substitution density in 125 bp sequence adjacent to the indel location points (ILPs) for the parental alignment as well as two of its partitions, A and B (Partition A contains ILPs associated with SSR indels in coding & non-coding regions, while partition B contains ILPs associated with large indels in coding & non-coding regions). Lower than 150 values for non-zero data points at >25 bp distance in (a) represents that taking an average for 1000 random iterations, lesser than 150 ILPs are 125bp apart from each other in all three types of comparisons.**

## Materials and methods

Taro plants (*Colocasia esculenta* var RR; voucher number MPN:46548, and var GP; voucher number MPN:46549 in the Dame Ella Campbell Herbarium, Massey University, New Zealand) were obtained from the University of Auckland campus. Chloroplasts were enriched following procedure given in Atherton *et al.* (2010). DNA was extracted using a DNeasy Plant mini Kit (Qiagen, USA) and quantified using a Qubit® Fluorometer (Invitrogen) and Quant-iT-ds DNA HS Assay kit (Invitrogen). Illumina sequence reads were generated using the GAIIx platform at the Massey Genome Service, Massey University, New Zealand. Illumina sequencing produced 33 million reads of 75 base long (16.5 million paired-end reads) for var. RR, and 26.4 million reads of 75 base long (13.2 million paired-end reads) for var. GP. The reads were mapped to the duckweed cp genome (*L. minor*; Mardanov *et al.* 2008) using BWA mapping tool (Li & Durbin 2009). Mapping results were visualized using Tablet (Milne *et al.* 2010). The reads from var. RR were *de-novo* assembled into contiguous sequences ('contigs') of variable lengths using Velvet (v.0.7.60; Zerbino & Birney 2008), as described elsewhere (Collins *et al.* 2008). These contigs were BLAST-searched (Altschul *et al.* 1997) to determine homology to the duckweed cp genome. The contigs of cp origin were assembled in Geneious Pro (Drummond *et al.* 2009) to deduce the cp genome of the taro var. RR morphotype. The two inverted repeats were distinguished by visual inspection of the boundaries between the repeat and single copy regions. Genome annotation was carried out using Dual Organellar GenoMe Annotator (DOGMA; Wyman *et al.* 2004) and also by direct comparison to the duckweed cp genome. Contigs were generated similarly for the var. GP morphotype. The completed var. RR cp genome was then used as our reference genome to help assemble the var. GP cp genome. To verify integrity of the *de-novo* assembly process, the original 75 base long reads from both taro samples were mapped back to their respective, assembled cp genomes. Summary statistics for the BWA mapping of 75 base long reads to the *L. minor* cp genome, as well as to their respective assembled var. RR and var. GP genomes are given in Table 3.

The var. RR cp genome was pairwise aligned to the var. GP cp genome, as well as to four aroid cp genomes from the Lemnoideae sub-family, using DIALIGN alignment (Morgenstern 2004). The four aroid cp genomes included *Lemna minor* (GenBank ID:



NC010109; Mardanov *et al.* 2008), *Spirodela polyrhiza* (GenBank ID: JN160603), *Wolffiella lingulata* (GenBank ID: JN160604), and *Wolffia australiana* (GenBank ID: JN160605; Wang & Messing 2011). Selecting *C. esculenta* var. RR cp genome as a reference for the coordinate positions, indels and substitutions were counted in pairwise comparisons in non-overlapping bins of 250 bp through the entire length of the aligned cp genomes (partitioning each of the five alignments into 651 bins). For the substitution count, indels in the var. RR cp genome were deleted from the alignments to preserve the coordinate positions. Similar patterns of indel and substitution counts were obtained using a MAFFT alignment (Kato *et al.* 2005; results not shown). A total of 5000 forward (direct) and reverse (inverted) repeats with a minimum size of 14 bp, a maximum size of 48 bp, and a maximum of 3 nucleotide mismatch between the two repeat copies in the taro var. RR cp genome were calculated using Reputer (Kurtz *et al.* 2001). Of these 5000 repeats, 667 locations of the direct and inverted repeats in var. RR (minimum size: 15bp; zero mismatch between the two copies), as well as polymorphic sites (indels and substitutions) in all five pairwise comparisons with respect to the var. RR cp genome were plotted as a circular diagram using Circos (Krzywinski *et al.* 2009). Correlations ( $r$ ) were calculated between numbers of (a) repeats and substitutions, (b) substitutions and indels, and (c) repeats and indels. This was done for comparisons of closely related (two taro genomes) and distantly related (taro with other Lemnoidea) cp genomes. The correlation values ( $r$ ) were used to determine the significance of correlation ( $t$ ) and the coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ), according to Lowry (2012).

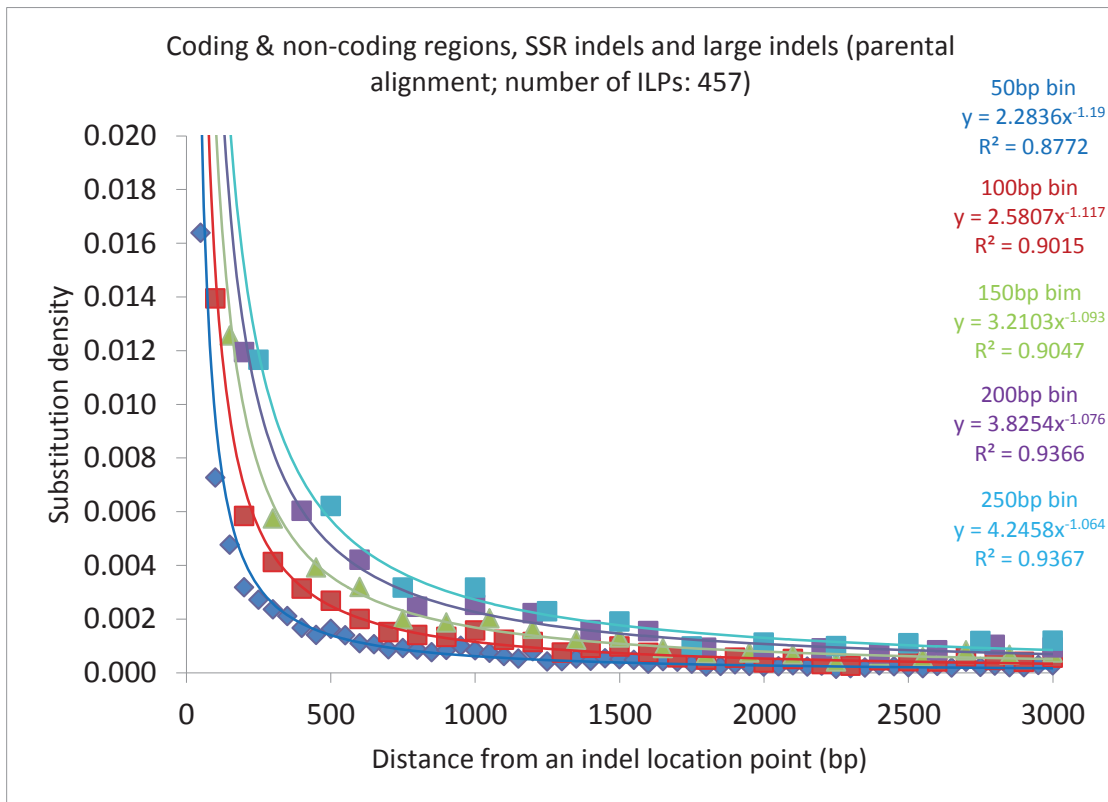
**Table 3. Summary statistics for BWA mapping of 75 base, paired-end reads obtained from the *Colocasia esculenta* var. RR and var. GP morphotypes to the *Lemna minor* chloroplast genome, and to their assembled chloroplast genomes. The acronyms RR1, RR2 and RPE represent mapping with the read 1, read 2 and paired-end (reads 1 and 2 taken together) reads obtained from the var. RR morphotype. Similarly, GR1, GR2 and GPE represent mapping with the read 1, read 2 and paired-end reads obtained from the var. GP morphotype.**

Parameter	<i>L. minor</i>						<i>C. esculenta</i> var. RR			<i>C. esculenta</i> var. GP		
	RR1	RR2	RPE	GR1	GR2	GPE	RR1	RR2	RPE	GR1	GR2	GPE
Genome coverage (percentage)	68.5	68.1	85	68.5	68.7	85.6	99.99	100	100	100	100	100
Average coverage depth	129	128	337	319	317	825	296	294	593	665	659	1338
Maximum coverage depth	674	623	1531	1984	1853	5194	641	656	1020	1940	2021	3304

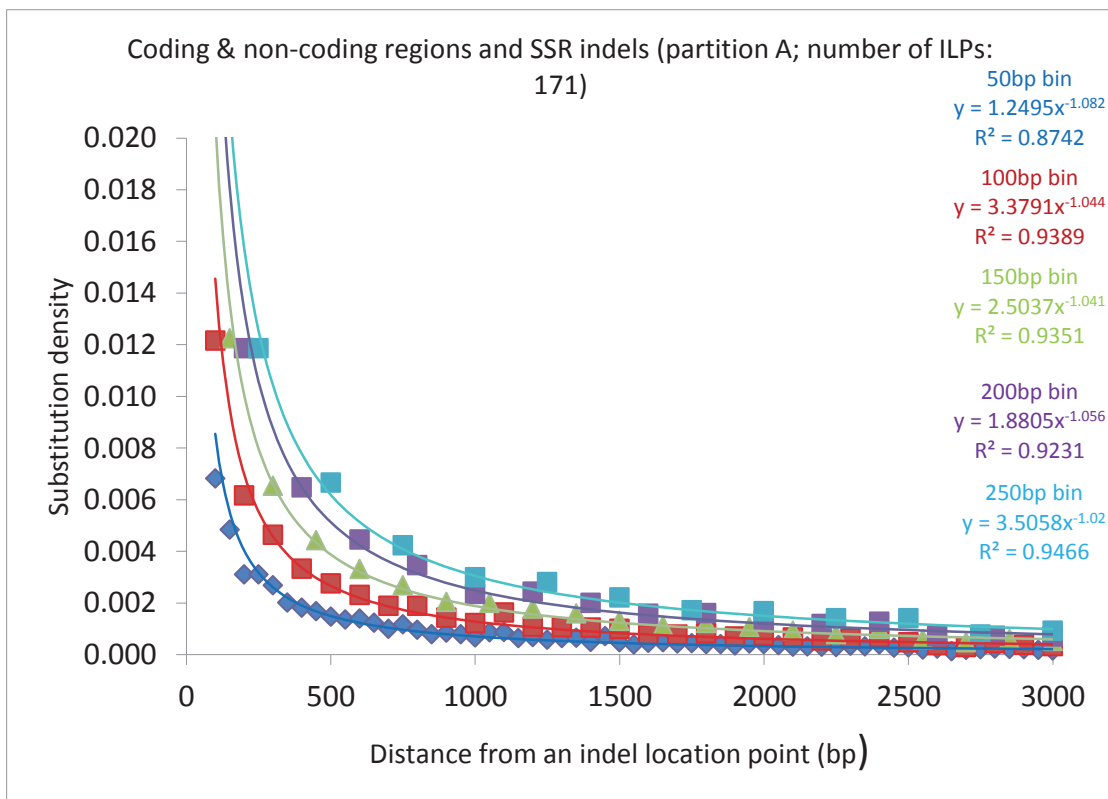
In order to further investigate the relationships between substitutions and indels, a multiple sequence alignment of all six aroid cp genomes was generated using DIALIGN alignment (Morgenstern *et al*, 2004). Hyper variable regions causing problems in the alignment were removed to ensure conservative estimates. This 122 kb long parental alignment contained 457 indel location points (ILPs). This parental alignment was used to generate mutually exclusive alignment combinations with respect to locations of the ILPs, to include ILPs associated with coding & non-coding regions and SSR indels (171 ILPs; partition A) and coding & non-coding regions and large indels (286 ILPs; partition B). The parental alignment was also used to generate two further mutually exclusive alignment combinations to include ILPs associated with SSR indels and large indels in non-coding regions (376 ILPs; partition C) and SSR indels and large indels in coding regions (81 ILPs; partition D). Using a Perl script, we counted the number and positions of substitutions with respect to the ILPs, and plotted the substitution density as a function of distance from the ILPs in non-overlapping bins of 50, 100, 150, 200, and 250 bp each for the parental alignment as well as partitions A, B and D; and 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 bp for the partition C. The effect of large indels in causing substitutions was further explored by comparing first three alignment combinations (parental alignment along with partitions A and B) and plotting the substitution density as a function of distance from the ILPs in 125 bp sequence adjacent to the ILPs. For this purpose, a jackknifing approach was used to randomly select 150 ILPs from each of these three partitions with 1000 random iterations to count substitutions within the 125 bp distance, divided into five non-overlapping bins of 25 bp in size. Plots showing the relationship between substitutions and ILPs were generated using MS Excel 2010 worksheets.

**Funding:** Authors acknowledge financial assistance of the New Zealand Royal Society (The New Zealand Marsden Fund and James Cook Fellowship scheme), and the Higher Education Commission, Government of Pakistan.

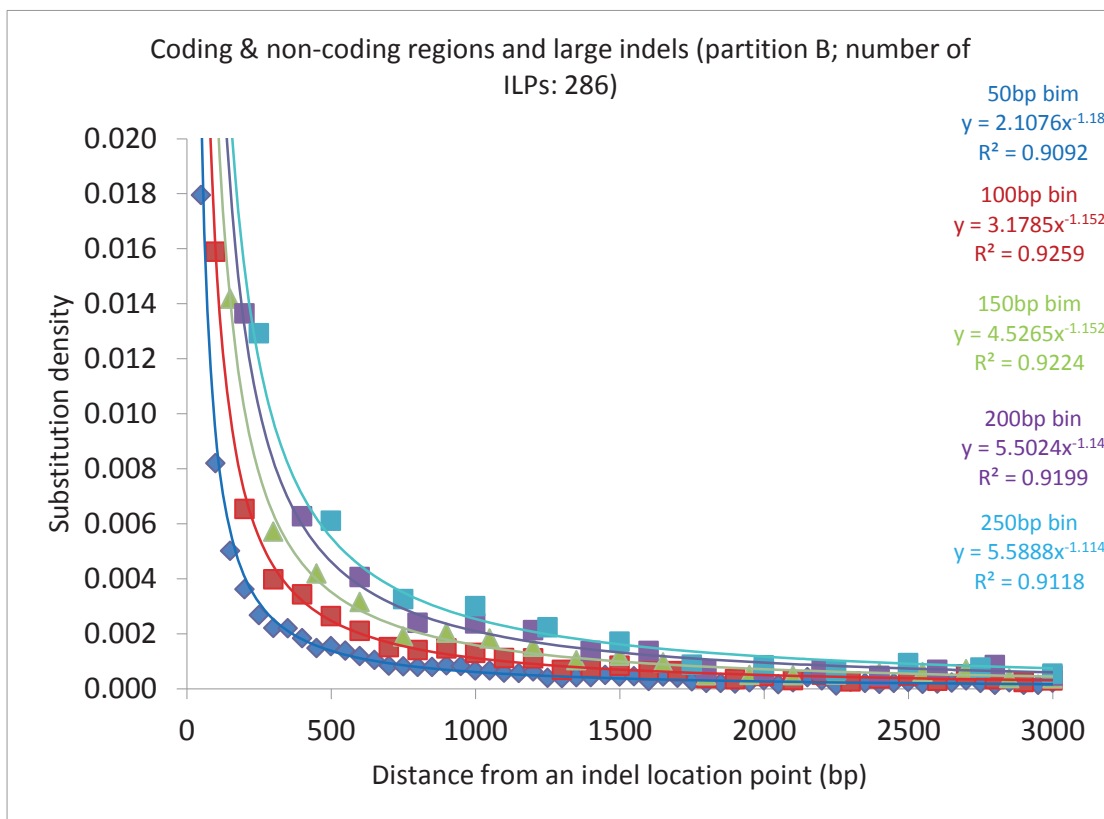
## Supplementary information



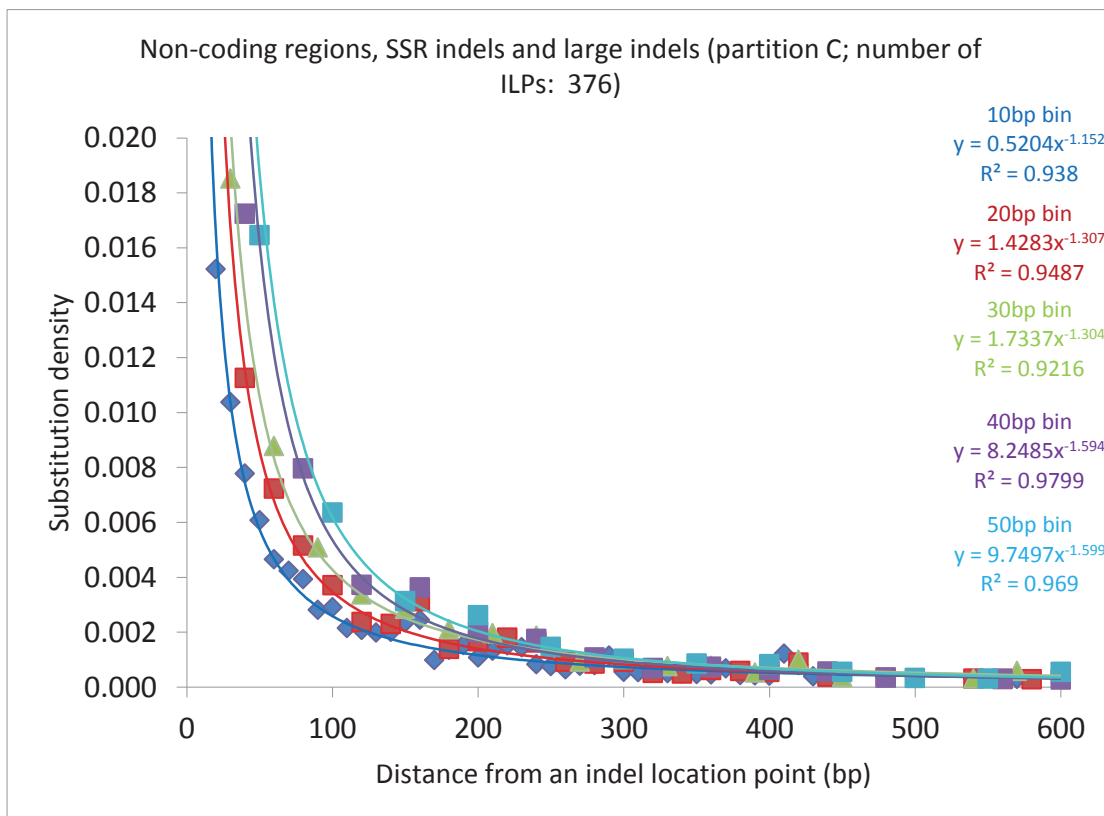
(a)



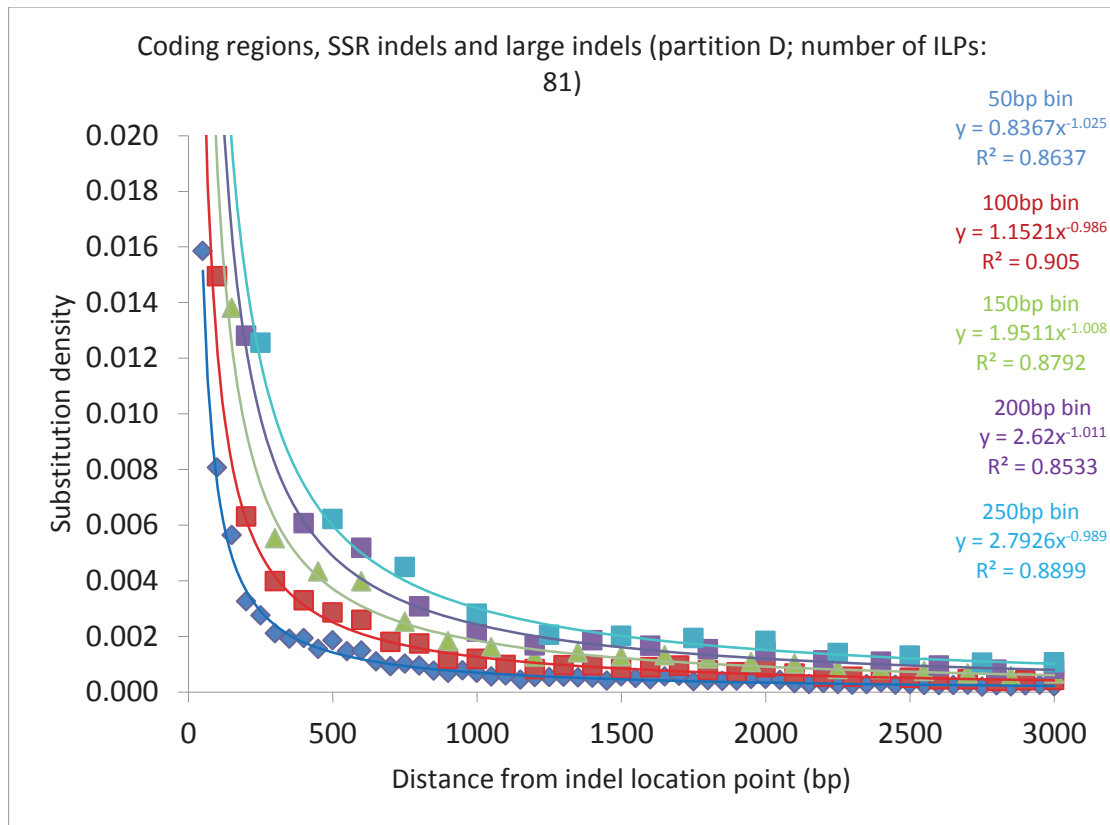
(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)

**Supplementary Figure 1. Density of substitution mutations decreases with increase in distance from the indel location points (ILPs) in five partitions of the multiple sequence alignment using aroid chloroplast genomes. Reduced bin sizes were used in (d) because of absence of suitable number of sites as much distant from the ILPs as in the case of all other combinations (a, b, c and e).**



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## CHAPTER 3

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Ibrar Ahmed, Peter J. Matthews, Patrick J. Biggs, Muhammad Naeem, Patricia A. McLenachan, Peter J. Lockhart (2013). **Identification of chloroplast genome loci suitable for high-resolution phylogeographic studies of *Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott (Araceae) and closely related taxa.** *Molecular Ecology Resources* 13: 927-937.

## Abstract

Recently we reported the chloroplast genome-wide association of oligonucleotide repeats, indels and nucleotide substitutions in aroid chloroplast genomes. We hypothesized that the distribution of oligonucleotide repeat sequences in a single representative genome can be used to identify mutational hotspots and loci suitable for population genetic, phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies. Using information on the location of oligonucleotide repeats in the chloroplast genome of taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), we designed 30 primer pairs to amplify and sequence polymorphic loci. The primers have been tested in a range of intra-specific to inter-generic comparisons, including ten taro samples (*Colocasia esculenta*) from diverse geographic locations, four other *Colocasia* species (*C. affinis*, *C. fallax*, *C. formosana*, *C. gigantea*), and three other aroid genera (represented by *Remusatia vivipara*, *Alocasia brisbanensis* and *Amorphophallus konjac*). Multiple sequence alignments for the intra-specific comparison revealed nucleotide substitutions (point mutations) at all 30 loci, and microsatellite polymorphisms at 14 loci. The primer pairs reported here reveal levels of genetic variation suitable for high-resolution phylogeographic and evolutionary studies of taro and other closely-related aroids. Our results confirm that information on repeat distribution can be used to identify loci suitable for such studies, and we expect that this approach can be used in other plant groups.

**Key words:** Araceae; chloroplast genome, *Colocasia esculenta*, point mutations, phylogeographic study

## Introduction

*Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott, commonly known as taro, is a starchy root crop in the monocot family Araceae. The natural distribution range of this species extends from northeast India to Australia and New Guinea (Matthews 1991). Archaeological studies indicate its usage as early as 28000 years ago in the Solomon Islands (Loy *et al.* 1992). Taro was among the crops used and possibly cultivated 7000 years ago in Papua New Guinea (Denham *et al.* 2003). The greatest diversity of wild *Colocasia* species appears to extend from northeast India to southern China, within the Himalayan region of mainland Southeast Asia (see Matthews 1991, Li *et al.* 2010). China has a relatively well-documented historical record of taro cultivation since around 2000 years ago (Jianchu *et al.* 2001).

Taro has two cytotypes: diploid with 28 chromosomes and triploid with 42 chromosomes (Yen & Wheeler 1968; Ramachandran 1978; Coates *et al.* 1988). Cytogenetic, morphological and biochemical studies indicate that triploids may have originated as a result of autopolyploidy (Bai *et al.* 1971; Lebot & Aradhya 1991; Isshiki *et al.* 1999). Wide hybridization has been reported in experimental crosses between *C. esculenta* and *C. gigantea* (Okada & Hambali 1989), and also between *C. esculenta* and *Alocasia macrorrhizos* (Yoshino 1994, 1995; Yoshino *et al.* 1998). The success of these crosses suggests that hybridization and allopolyploidy involving taro might also occur under natural conditions.

Despite much interest in the genetic and geographic origins, domestication, and spread of taro (e.g. Spier 1951; Yen & Wheeler 1968; Matthews 1990, 1991), relevant empirical evidence is still lacking. To date, most of the molecular techniques and sampling strategies used (Irwin *et al.* 1998; Ochiai *et al.* 2001; Mace & Godwin 2002; Matsuda & Nawata 2002; Hu *et al.* 2009) have been designed to investigate the extent of genetic diversity in cultivated taro. New approaches to sampling and analysis are needed to reveal relationships between wild and cultivated taros, and among wild *Colocasia* species, in order to clarify the evolutionary and cultural history of taro. A small number of chloroplast (cp) DNA loci have been sequenced and used in studies of phylogeny and biogeography in the family Araceae (e.g. Renner & Zhang 2004; Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b). However, these loci allow only limited phylogenetic resolution within genus *Colocasia*.

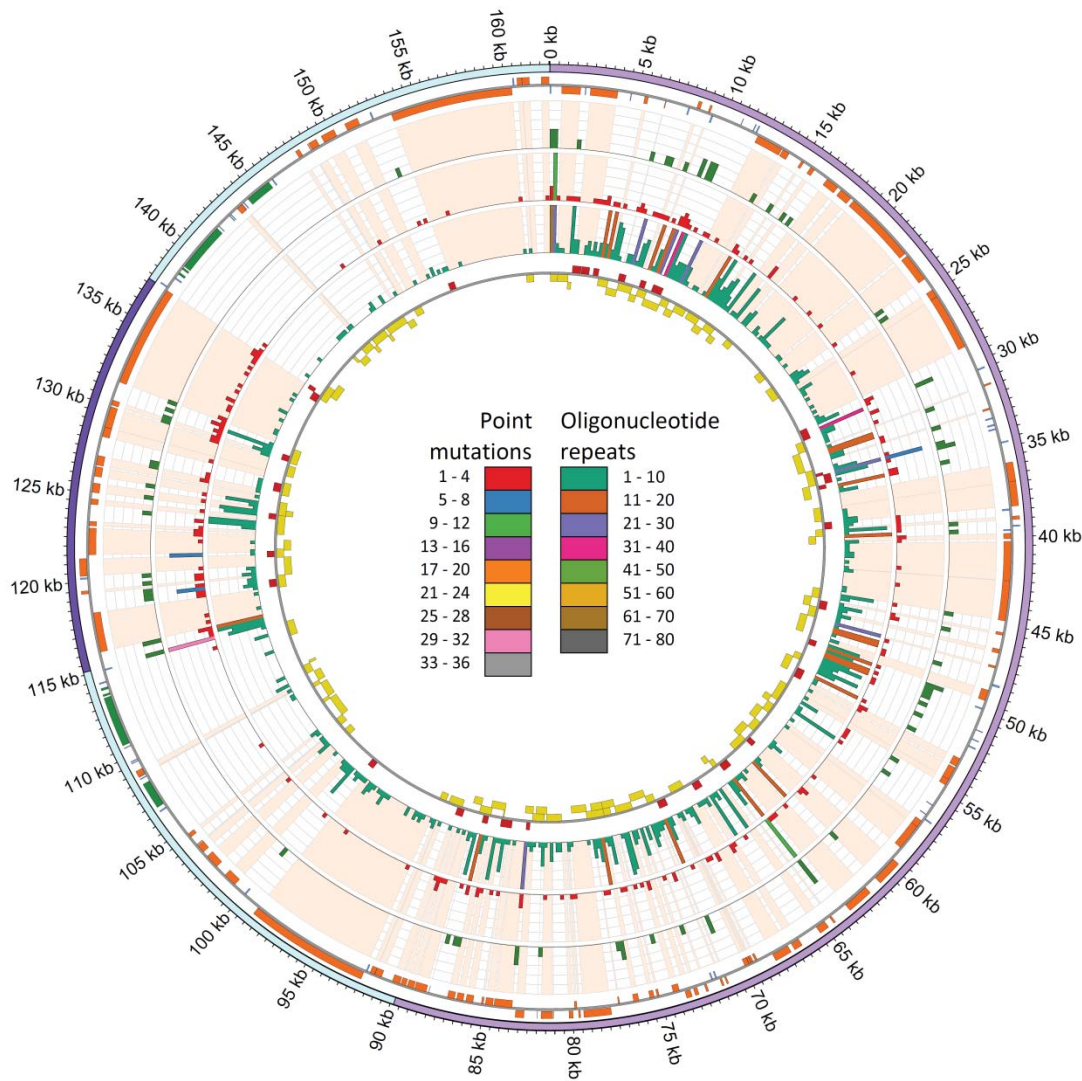
Chloroplast DNA loci are commonly used in studies of plant population genetics, phylogeny and phylogeography (Chase *et al.* 1993; Powell *et al.* 1995; Rothwell *et al.* 2004; Renner & Zhang 2004; Parks *et al.* 2009; Hao *et al.* 2010; Scarcelli *et al.* 2011; Barniske *et al.* 2012; Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b). Typically an *ad hoc* approach has been used in selecting the loci used: they are usually selected because they have worked well in other related taxa. Recent reports of full genome sequences allow a more systematic approach, one that takes into account the mutational dynamics of chloroplast genomes (Ahmed *et al.* 2012).

Chloroplast genomes are rich in oligonucleotide repeat sequences. Recently we sequenced the complete cp genomes of two morphotypes of taro, and demonstrated that the distribution of oligonucleotide repeat sequences in aroid cp genomes is closely linked to the distribution of insertions – deletions (indels) and nucleotide substitutions (Ahmed *et al.* 2012). We also hypothesized that the distribution of repeats could be used to predict mutational hotspots in the cp genomes. Here we investigate the mutational properties and utility for phylogenetic analysis of many of the mutational hotspot regions identified.

We report results for 30 cp DNA loci, most of which are associated with repeat sequences. We demonstrate the utility of repeat loci analysed for resolving phylogenetic relationships among diploid and triploid taros sampled from a wide geographic range, and among closely related aroid taxa.

## **Materials and methods**

Forward and reverse oligonucleotide repeats (14 – 48 bp) in the taro cp genome (GenBank accession JN105690; Ahmed *et al.* 2012) were identified using Reputer (Kurtz *et al.* 2001). The cp genomes (JN 105689 and JN 105690) of two taro morphotypes var. RR and var. GP (Matthews 1985) were aligned to identify stable sequences suitable for designing primers. Forward and reverse primers were designed using Primer3 (Rozen & Skaletsky 2000) incorporated in Geneious Pro 5.5.6 (Drummond *et al.* 2009), for 30 loci that displayed variable density of repeats, and polymorphism in the comparison between two taro genomes (Figure 1). These primer pairs were used to amplify and sequence cp DNA from ten taro accessions of wide geographic provenance, and seven other aroid taxa. Taro accessions included five from



**Figure 1. Circos plot showing distribution of point mutations and indels in a pairwise comparison of chloroplast genomes in *C. esculenta* (taro) var. GP (GenBank accession: JN105689) and var. RR (GenBank accession: JN105690). Outermost track shows ideogram of taro var. RR cp genome (large single-copy region in light purple, small single-copy region in dark purple, large inverted repeats in cyan). Next innermost track shows gene locations on positive and negative strands (genes for rRNA in dark green, tRNA in blue, proteins in dark orange). Histograms, in three circles, show position and number of indels (outer circle, green colour) and point mutations (middle circle) in var. RR (relative to var. GP). The distribution of oligonucleotide repeats in var. RR is also shown (inner circle; calculated using Reputer, and combining the forward and reverse repeats). The height and colour of each histogram show numbers as follows. For lower numbers, height and number correspond directly, on scales of 0 – 5 for indels (1**

bar = 1 unit), and 0 – 10 (1 bar = 2 units) for point mutations and repeats. Using qualitative Brewer palettes, point mutations are divided into 9 number classes (Set1-qual palette), and repeats into 8 number classes (Dark2-qual palette), as shown in the central key. For point mutations and repeats, the number of events >10 are indicated by colour (i.e. number class), with no gain in histogram height. Numbers are shown for non-overlapping 250 bp bins across the entire cp genome. The positions of protein-coding genes across the three plots are marked by light orange shading. Around the innermost track, red boxes show the 30 loci analysed in the present study. Their coordinate positions are given in Table 1. Yellow boxes indicate 83 loci reported in a previous study of monocots (Scarcelli *et al.* 2011), here mapped onto the taro chloroplast genome.

New Zealand (CESNZ01, CESNZ02, CESNZ03, CESNZ04 and CESNZ14), two from Pakistan (CESPK03 and CESPK04), two from Australia (CESAU10 and CESAU18) and one from Japan (CESJP01). Species other than *C. esculenta* included *C. fallax* (CFANZ01), *C. affinis* (CAFAU01), *C. formosana* (CFOTW01), *C. gigantea* (CGIJP01), *Remusatia vivipara* (RVIAU01), *Alocasia brisbanensis* (ABRAU01) and *Amorphophallus konjac* (AKOJP01). Further details about these accessions are given in Supplementary Table 1.

Plant DNA was either extracted according to Ahmed *et al.* (2009) from freshly grown leaf tissues, using a DNeasy Plant mini kit (Qiagen, USA) for silica-gel dried leaf tissues, or was obtained from a DNA archive maintained by the second author (PJM) at the Field Sciences Laboratory, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka (Japan). The PCR reaction mix consisted of 10-50 ng template DNA, 0.5  $\mu$ M each of forward and reverse primers (IDT Inc. Belgium), 0.2 mM of each dNTP, 1 unit *Taq* polymerase (Roche Inc. Germany) and 1x PCR buffer including 1.5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub> in 20  $\mu$ L total volume. Thermocycling conditions were: 94 °C for 7 minutes followed by 30 cycles of 94 °C for one minute, 50 °C for 30 seconds (48 °C for the primer pair ACECP024), 72 °C for 45 seconds, and the final extension at 72 °C for 10 minutes. After amplification, unused primers were removed from PCR products by adding 1 unit SAP (shrimp-alkaline phosphatase; Affymetrix Inc. USA) and 5 units EXO (Exonuclease I; Affymetrix Inc. USA) per 15  $\mu$ L PCR product and keeping the reaction mix at 37 °C for



30 minutes, followed by 80 °C for 15 minutes in a thermocycler. The products were then used as template for subsequent Sanger sequencing reactions using their respective forward and reverse primers in separate reactions. The reaction mix for Sanger sequencing consisted of 1 µL PCR product, 0.2 µM primer (forward or reverse), 1 µL BigDye Terminator v 3.1 (Invitrogen Inc. USA) and 3 µL sequencing buffer in 20 µL reaction volume. Thermocycling conditions for the sequencing reaction consisted of 95 °C for 1 minute followed by 25 cycles of 95 °C for 10 seconds, 50 °C for 10 seconds and 60 °C for 4 minutes. The products were sequenced using an ABI 3730 DNA analyser at the Massey Genome Service, Massey University, Palmerston North.

The sequences obtained were visualized and edited using Sequencher 3.1 (Gene Codes Inc. USA). Sequences were aligned using MUSCLE (Edgar 2004). Sequence alignments for all 30 loci were used to generate trees for intra-specific comparisons. Either the primers did not successfully amplify or the aligned sequences were too divergent at some of the hyper-variable loci, for distantly related taxa. Accordingly, the alignments for 24 loci were used for inter-specific analysis, and alignments for 21 loci were used for inter-generic comparisons (see Supplementary Table 2 for particular loci). Indels from the alignments were removed using PAUP\* (Swofford 2003). Maximum likelihood trees were generated using PhyML (Guindon & Gascuel 2003). Two types of substitution models were employed: a) the JC69 substitution model (Jukes & Cantor 1969) for the intra-specific sequence comparisons of taro accessions, and b) the GTR +  $\Gamma$  substitution model (Tavare 1986) for inter-specific comparisons within genus *Colocasia* and for inter-generic comparison of *Colocasia*, *Alocasia*, *Remusatia* and *Amorphophallus*. TreeView (Page 1996) was used to edit and save trees in Phylip / Newick format. Individual trees were concatenated and used to generate a filtered Super Network (Whitfield *et al.* 2008) in SplitsTree4 program (Huson & Bryant 2006) for each set of trees generated in intra-specific, inter-specific and inter-generic comparisons. Since the loci used in this study were identified based upon the values of genome-wide correlations among substitutions, indels and repeats, for designing the primer pairs we assumed similar correlations exist at the locus level. Subsequently, correlations between (i) repeats and point mutations, (ii) point mutations and indels, and (iii) indels and repeats were calculated for the intra-specific, inter-specific and inter-generic comparisons in MS Excel 2010.

## Results

Thirty loci were sequenced in taro, 24 among these loci were sequenced in closely related species in genus *Colocasia* and in related aroid genera. Table 1 describes a) names and sequences of forward and reverse primers, b) information about the locus, c) the coordinate positions of amplified loci on the taro var. RR cp genome (JN105690), d) amplicon size, e) observed polymorphisms in the intra-specific sequence alignments of taro accessions, and f) GenBank accession numbers for the amplified products obtained from all loci. The 30 primer pairs collectively amplified a total of 19411 bp sequence (11.94% of the taro cp genome size), and the amplified region contained 811 (25.22%) of the 3216 oligonucleotide repeats found in the *C. esculenta* var. RR cp genome, having two identical copies of the repeats that were  $\geq 14$  bp in size.

The correlations in densities of oligonucleotide repeats, indels and point mutations at the loci studied are shown in Table 2. These were determined for intra-specific (within *C. esculenta*), inter-specific and inter-generic comparisons. At all levels of comparison, correlation coefficients were significant at  $p < 0.05$ , indicating that regions containing point mutations can be accurately predicted from the distribution of oligonucleotide repeats. Supplementary Table 2 gives values for the individual loci which were used to calculate the correlation coefficients given in Table 2.

Polymorphic, mononucleotide microsatellites were observed in the intra-specific sequence alignments at 13 loci, as given in Table 1. All these loci feature mononucleotide (poly-A or poly-T) SSRs, with two loci having two polymorphic SSR sites in each. These loci included *accD* and an intergenic spacer (IGS) region flanking *psaI* amplified using the primer pair ACECP027, and the IGS between *ndhF* and *rpl32*, amplified using the primer pair ACECP041. A polymorphic, dinucleotide microsatellite motif (poly-AT) was also observed in the intra-specific sequence alignment at the locus *trnY* – intergenic spacer – *trnE*, amplified using the primer pair ACECP016. This motif appeared as a simple repeat in some taro accessions, and a compound repeat in others.

**Table 1. Thirty primer pairs developed for polymorphic loci in the taro (*C. esculenta*) chloroplast genome. Shown are: forward (F) and reverse (R) primer sequences, description of locus, coordinate positions on the var. RR (JN105690) genome, size of PCR product, polymorphisms observed in multiple sequence alignments of taro accessions and GenBank accession numbers. All primer pairs amplify at 50 °C annealing temperature except ACECP024, which amplifies at 48 °C. Primer pairs 1 – 21 amplify from the large single copy region, 22 from the large single copy / inverted repeat-b boundary, 23 – 28 from the small single copy region, 29 from the inverted repeat-a / large single copy boundary, and 30 from the small single copy region.**

No.	Primer pair	Sequence	Locus	Coordinates	Size	Polymorphisms	GenBank
1	ACECP002	F: CTTGCAGTTTTTCATTGCACA R: TTCACTTTTGGTCTCAACCC	<i>trnK</i> intron / <i>matK</i>	2096 – 2890	795	1 SNP	JN105358 – JN105367
2	ACECP003	F: AGATGAGTCCCTTTTGAAGC R: AGCTCATTACTTGTGAAACG	<i>trnK</i> intron / <i>matK</i>	2941 – 3665	725	3 SNP	JN105368 – JN105380
3	ACECP004	F: TATTTTTGCAACCCAATCGC R: CGTCCAGACTTTTGGTAGAG	<i>trnK</i> intron	4054 – 4539	486	4 SNPs	JN105381 – JN105394
4	ACECP005	F: AAAATGGGGTTCCTAGTGGA R: ACTCGAACTCGAAGAAATGG	<i>rps16</i> intron - 5'- <i>rps16</i> CDS - IGS towards <i>trnQ</i>	6447 – 7077	631	11 SNPs, 3 indels of 1, 8, 2 bp, polyA SSR	JN105395 – JN105409
5	ACECP006	F: CAAGCTGCTGTAAGTTTTCG R: AGCATTACACAATCTCCAAGA	<i>psbK</i> - IGS - <i>psbI</i>	8513 – 9020	508	3 SNPs, polyT SSR	JN105410 – JN105424
6	ACECP007	F: AGGCCTTAGGACTAATATCAT R: ACTCCCCCTTAATTTCCCA	IGS between <i>trnS</i> & <i>trnG</i>	9731 – 10689	959	5 SNPs, 9 indels of 9, 13, 21, 6, 14, 14, 7, 35, 5 bp	JN105425 – JN105430
7	ACECP014	F: AGTACCAAAAGTAGATTCTGGG	IGS between <i>rpoB</i> &	29361 –	977	4 SNPs, 5 indels	JN105431 –

		R: GGGGATTACTGACGTTTGT	<i>trnC</i>	30337		of 10, 15, 78, 20, 5 bp, polyA SSR	JN105442
8	ACECP016	F: TTTACAGTCCGTCCCATTA R: CATCTCTCTTTCAAGGAGGC	<i>trnY</i> - IGS - <i>trnE</i>	33667 – 33921	255	2 SNP, 5 indels of 11, 18, 2, 1, 4 bp	JN105443 – JN105457
9	ACECP017	F: TGCCTCCTTGAAAGAGAGAT R: TACCATGGCGTTACTCTACC	<i>trnE</i> - IGS - <i>trnT</i>	33901 – 34720	820	1 SNP, 4 indels of 2, 5, 27, 9 bp	JN105458 – JN105470
10	ACECP018	F: AGAGAGATCTTGTTGATATTTGT R: TAGTCATGATTCAACGGGTC	IGS between <i>trnT</i> & <i>psbD</i>	34802 – 35155	354	4 SNPs, 1 indel of 17 bp	JN105471 – JN105486
11	ACECP019	F: GATCGTGATTTGGAACCTGT R: AAAACAGCCAATTGGAAAGC	<i>psbC</i> , IGS - <i>trnS</i> - IGS - <i>psbZ</i>	38274 – 38904	631	3 SNPs, 1 indel of 5 bp	JN105487 – JN105501
12	ACECP021	F: ACCGTACTTGAGAGTTTCCT R: TGTCATTACGTGCGACTATC	<i>ycf3</i> intron	45612 – 46388	777	2 SNP, 2 indel of 5, 7 bp	JN105502 – JN105516
13	ACECP022	F: TCCTCGGTAACGAGACATAA R: ATGGTCATCGTTTCGACT	<i>rps4</i> - IGS - <i>trnT</i>	49354 – 49859	506	2 SNPs, 3 indels of 7, 16, 16 bp; polyA SSR	JN105517 – JN105531
14	ACECP024	F: TCGATTATGCTCCCTTTTCT R: ATCAACCGGAGGAAGTATGT	IGS between <i>trnF</i> & <i>ndhJ</i> - <i>ndhJ</i>	52265 – 53164	900	6 SNPS, 4 indel of 1, 1, 2, 1 bp; polyA SSR	JN105532 – JN105542
15	ACECP026	F: ACTACGGTAGAGCGGTTTAT R: AAAGTCATCTCACGTTCCACC	<i>rbcL</i>	60237 – 60714	478	3 SNPs	JN105543 – JN105558
16	ACECP027	F: GGCTTATTCGATCCAATCGT R: GAGTTCGCGACTCTAACTAA	<i>accD</i> - IGS between <i>accD</i> & <i>psal</i>	63287 – 64111	825	8 SNPs, 5 indels of 13, 5, 2, 19, 1 bp. polyA and polyT SSRs	JX971448 – JX971454

17	ACECP028	F: GGCAATCCGAAACTTTCTTG R: TCCCTATCCACAAGTCTGTC	IGS between <i>ycf4</i> & <i>cemA</i> - <i>cemA</i> - IGS between <i>cemA</i> & <i>petA</i>	66541 – 67284	744	3 SNPs, 1 indel of 14 bp	JN105559 – JN105572
18	ACECP030	F: AACGCGGTTTTGATCAGTAT R: CAATTCATTGCGCAACTTGT	IGS between <i>psbE</i> & <i>petL</i>	70141 – 70945	805	6 SNPs, 3 indels of 4, 10, 19 bp	JN105573 – JN105586
19	ACECP035	F: TGGTTAGGTATTGGAGCAAC R: GTGGACATTCTACAGAAGCA	<i>petD</i> - IGS - <i>rpoA</i>	83126 – 83461	336	5 SNPs, 3 indels of 29, 1, 1 bp; polyT SSR	JN105587 – JN105602
20	ACECP036	F: TGAAACTCGCTTGAACATGA R: CCCTGCGACATAAAAGAAGCA	<i>rps11</i> - IGS - <i>rpl36</i> - IGS - <i>infA</i> - IGS - <i>rps8</i>	84803 – 85835	1033	5 SNPs, 2 indels of 9, 8 bp, polyT SSR	JN105603 – JN105617
21	ACECP038	F: ACGGAATCTGGTTCTTTTGG R: AAAGAGTCAATATTCGCCCCG	<i>rpl 16 CDS</i> – <i>intron</i>	87055 – 87550	496	3 SNPs, 3 indels of 9, 19, 2 bp	JX971455 – JX971459
22	ACECP039	F: AGTTACTCCCTTTTCCACCA R: GTAATGTTGGGGTGAACCAA	IGS between <i>rpl22</i> & <i>rps19</i> - <i>rps19</i> - IGS - <i>rpl2</i>	89428 – 90106	679	5 SNPs, 1 indel of 1 bp, polyT SSR	JN105618 – JN105632
23	ACECP041	F: GTTCCGATTCACCAACTCT R: ATAGCCCCATCTGAATCTGT	IGS between <i>ndhF</i> & <i>rpl32</i>	118286 – 118978	693	11 SNPs, 5 indels of 6, 6, 5, 1, 1 bp, 2 polyA SSRs	JN105633 – JN105647
24	ACECP043	F: AGCAGTATGGGCTAATGAGG R: CCCGTAATAGCGATTGGT	<i>ccsA</i> - IGS - <i>ndhD</i>	121060 – 121603	544	3 SNPs (5 bp inversion taken as equal to one SNP)	JX971460 – JX971470
25	ACECP045	F: CTAACCATGCTTCGACTTGT R: TCTATAATTCTTTTAGTTGCCTT	<i>ndhE</i> - IGS - <i>ndhG</i>	124576 – 125079	504	1 SNP, 3 indels of 19, 1, 2 bp.	JX971471 – JX971477

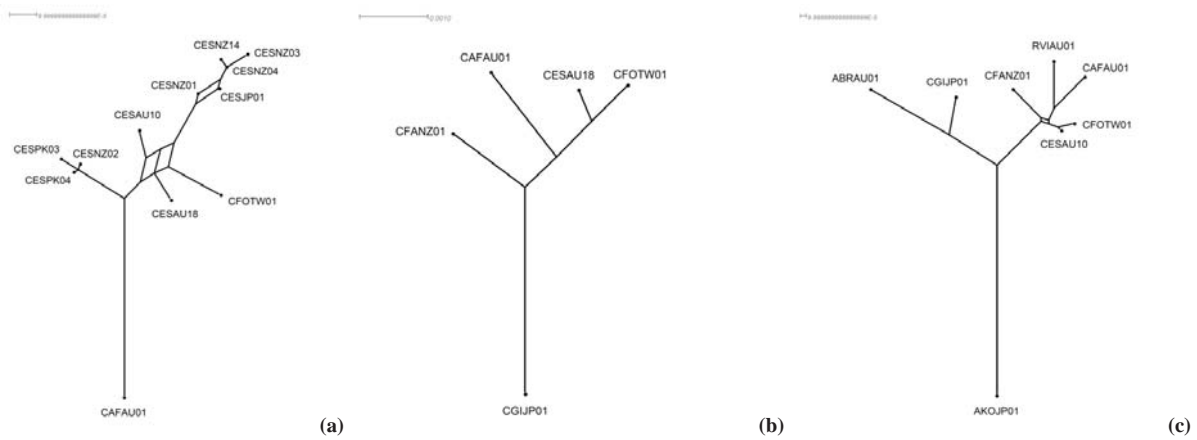
						polyT SSR	
26	ACECP046	F: TCCAGAACCGTACATGAAAC R: CGGGTACAAAGGATCAACTG	<i>ndhA</i> intron	127156 – 127939	784	2 SNPs, 2 indels of 44, 1 bp. polyA SSR	JX971478 – JX971484
27	ACECP048	F: TTTCTTTGACAAATACGCCA R: AAGGCCGAAAGATATACACA	<i>rps15</i> - IGS between <i>rps15</i> & <i>ycf1</i>	130119 – 130660	542	6 SNPs, 2 indels of 1, 2 bp. polyT SSR	JX971485 – JX971491
28	ACECP051	F: AAAGATTTTCTTCGGCGGAT R: TCTCTCCTTCTTCGAGCTT	<i>ycf1</i>	136299 – 137014	716	4 SNPs	JN105648 – JN105659
29	ACECP052	F: AAGCTCGAAGAAGGAAGAGA R: ACTGAGCTACTGAGGAACAA	<i>ycf1</i> - IGS - <i>trnN</i>	136995 – 137357	363	3 SNPs	JN105660 – JN105674
30	ACECP055	F: TCTAACGGAAGGCTATTGGA R: TAGGCTCAGTCAACTGGAAT	5' <i>ycf2</i> - IGS between <i>ycf15</i> & <i>trnL</i>	98776 – 99349; 153015 – 153588	575	1 SNP	JX971492 – JX971504



**Table 2. Correlation values between oligonucleotide repeats, point mutations, and insertion-deletions (indels). Intra-specific correlations (within *C. esculenta*) are based upon 30 loci (28 degrees of freedom or *df*), inter-specific correlations (within *Colocasia*) are based upon 24 loci (*df*: 22), whereas inter-generic comparisons (among *Colocasia*, *Alocasia*, *Remusatia* and *Amorphophallus*) are based upon 21 loci (*df*: 19).**

Comparisons	Intra-specific	Inter-specific	Inter-generic
Correlation between repeats and point mutations ( <i>r</i> )	0.410	0.510	0.492
<i>p</i> value (non-directional)	0.024	0.010	0.010
Correlation between point mutations and indels ( <i>r</i> )	0.443	0.584	0.766
<i>p</i> value (non-directional)	0.014	0.003	<0.0001
Correlation between indels and repeats ( <i>r</i> )	0.778	0.799	0.800
<i>p</i> value (non-directional)	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001

Figure 2 shows filtered Super Networks obtained for a) intra-specific, b), inter-specific, and c) inter-generic comparisons, calculated using SplitsTree4 (Huson and Bryant, 2006). Figure 2a shows some poorly resolved intra-specific relationships. All taxa were nevertheless genetically distinct. Taro cultivars from Pakistan (CESPK03 and CESPK04) clustered with triploid cultivar var. RR from New Zealand (CESNZ02). They formed a group distinct from wild diploid taros from Australia (CESAU10 and CESAU18), and a range of taros present as exotic introductions in New Zealand (CESNZ01, CESNZ03 and CESNZ04). Two diploid Australian wild taros, from geographically separate but morphologically similar populations in Queensland, were genetically distinct from each other (Figure 2a). *Colocasia formosana* from Taiwan (CFOTW01) appeared closer to the Australian wild accessions than other taxa sampled (Figure 2a). Relationships inferred in the inter-specific (Figure 2b) and inter-generic (Figure 2c) comparisons were relatively tree-like. *Colocasia gigantea* appeared closer to *Alocasia* than to other *Colocasia* species (Figures 2b and 2c), while *Remusatia vivipara* (RVIAU01) appeared closer to *Colocasia* than to *Alocasia* (Figure 2c).



**Figure 2. Filtered Super-Networks showing phylogenetic relationships at (a) intra-specific level (within *C. esculenta*) for 30 loci, (b) inter-specific level (within genus *Colocasia*) for 24 loci, and (c) inter-generic level (among *Colocasia*, *Alocasia*, *Remusatia* and *Amorphophallus* genera) for 21 loci. Figure (a) shows splits present in minimum of 10 trees (9 of 65 splits), (b) shows splits present in minimum of 6 trees (2 of 7 splits), and (c) shows splits present in minimum of 6 trees (6 of 36 splits). Accession names indicate species (first three letters), country of collection (fourth and fifth letters) according to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and accession number (last two digits). Further details about these accessions are given in the Supplementary Table 1.**

## Discussion

We recently demonstrated associations between repeats, indels and substitutions in aroid cp genomes (Ahmed *et al.* 2012). The association is likely to be common in most seed plant families, since it has also been found in gymnosperms (Yi *et al.* 2013). Here we demonstrate that information on the distribution of oligonucleotide repeat sequences can be used to design high-resolution phylogenetic markers, useful in phylogeographic studies.

Significant values of correlation coefficients at  $p < 0.05$  for all comparisons in this study (Table 2) as well as the values reported in previous studies (Ahmed *et al.* 2012; Yi *et al.* 2013) imply that regions in cp genomes which have the greatest number of oligonucleotide repeat copies tend to exhibit the greatest number of point mutations. The tree-like structure of the filtered-Super Network indicates that the present set of 30 primer pairs can be used to resolve intra-specific relationships within *Colocasia esculenta*, inter-specific relationships within genus *Colocasia*, and inter-generic relationships among aroids close to genus *Colocasia* (Fig. 2). Poor resolution of relationships for some accessions in the intra-specific Super Network comparison (Fig. 2a) could be explained by non-mutually exclusive reasons: (i) not all accessions were available for each of the 30 trees used to make the network (nevertheless the taxon sets overlapped for most accessions), (ii) Parallel or convergent changes some lineages have produced homoplasy and site pattern incompatibilities between gene loci. The latter appears common-place in chloroplast genomes (e.g. Vogl *et al.* 2003; Shepherd *et al.* 2008).

All polymorphic chloroplast loci characterised here were easy to amplify using all 30 primer pairs in taro. All except one pair have the same annealing temperature, so multiplex analyses can be considered in future studies. Most amplified loci sequenced well, including those containing mononucleotide simple sequence repeats (SSRs). Microsatellites or SSRs are abundant in non-coding chloroplast DNA, and are important for population genetic studies (Provan *et al.* 2001). Mono-nucleotide SSRs are most common and are the most widely studied SSRs in chloroplast DNA (Provan *et al.* 2004). Few di-nucleotide, tri-nucleotide or larger SSRs have also been reported in monocots (Scarcelli *et al.* 2011). The presence of microsatellites at 14 cp loci in this

study makes their respective primer pairs potentially useful for future genotyping studies of taro.

The size of PCR amplicons here was designed to be suitable for efficient single read Sanger sequencing (average size range for all loci: 648, standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) 201 bp, which is well within the range for ABI3730 sequencing protocols). Among 100 primer pairs designed for cp DNA of monocots (Scarcelli *et al.* 2011), 83 primer pairs can be mapped to the taro cp genome we previously reported (Ahmed *et al.* 2012), and are thus potentially useful for studies of taro. The coordinate positions of these predicted amplicons are also indicated in Figure 1. Sixteen of the 83 primer pairs amplify the same loci identified in our analyses. *In-silico* alignments of the 83 primer pairs to the cp genome (JN105690) showed an average amplicon size of 1063,  $\sigma$  453 bp in taro, compared to that of 648,  $\sigma$  201 bp for 30 primer pairs used in the present study. As an amplicon length of 650 bp is comfortably within the current range of 454 amplicon resequencing protocols, our primer pairs might prove more practical for future high-throughput sequencing and genotyping of large sample sets. As it is becoming relatively routine to sequence whole cp genomes (e.g. Atherton *et al.* 2010; Zhong *et al.* 2011; Ahmed *et al.* 2012; Dong *et al.* 2013; Goremykin *et al.* 2013), our approach for developing primer sets has the potential to be readily adapted for population genetic, phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies in other plant groups.

Our analyses suggest a need to reconsider the current taxonomic classification of two species: *Colocasia gigantea*, which appears to lie far outside the genus *Colocasia*, and *Colocasia formosana*, which appears to lie well within the species *C. esculenta*. However detailed investigation of these taxa is outside the scope of this paper. *Colocasia gigantea* appears phylogenetically closer to *Alocasia* than to other species in *Colocasia*. Mitochondrial RFLP data (Matthews 1990), and previous studies of cp DNA variation in aroids (Yoshino 1994; Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b) also indicate a need to review the classification of *C. gigantea*. This species was previously placed in a monotypic genus, and was named as *Leucocasia gigantea* (Blume) J.D. Hooker (Li & Boyce 2010; Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b).

The close relationship of *C. formosana* (abundant in Taiwan) with geographically distant wild taros (*C. esculenta*) in Australia suggests that it could be a northern ecotype of *C. esculenta*. Alternatively, it might instead represent peri-patric speciation in

Taiwan (where wild *C. esculenta* has not been reported). Further ecological, geographical and genetic studies of wild *C. esculenta* and *C. formosana* are required to test these alternative hypotheses.

### **Acknowledgements**

Authors acknowledge financial assistance of the New Zealand Royal Society (The New Zealand Marsden Fund and James Cook Fellowship scheme) to P.J.L., JSPS KAKENHI Japan (grant number 23405004) funding to P.J.M., and the Higher Education Commission, Government of Pakistan funding to I.A.

### **Authors' contributions**

I.A., P.J.M. and P.J.L. conceived the idea and designed the study. I.A., P.J.M. and M.N. carried out the field work or contributed archived DNA. I.A. and P.A.M. carried out PCRs and sequencing. I.A., P.J.B. and P.J.L. carried out phylogenetic and bioinformatics analyses. I.A. prepared the initial draft of the manuscript, with input from P.J.L. and P.J.M. towards its final version. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

### **Data Accessibility**

GenBank accession numbers: JN105358 – JN105674; JX971448 – JX971504. Sequence alignments using all 30 loci: Dryad doi:10.5061/dryad.388ds.

## Supplementary information

**Supplementary Table 1. Accessions of taro and other aroid taxa used to identify polymorphic chloroplast loci and develop PCR primers for those loci. Collection country codes: NZ (New Zealand), PK (Pakistan), AU (Australia), JP (Japan), and TW (Taiwan). IA, PJM and MN are the collector's initials (authors of this paper).**

No.	Species	Massey ID	Collection site	Herbarium / unique code numbers and comments
1	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	CESNZ01	University of Auckland campus, NZ	Massey University herbarium number MPN:46547, Purple ornamental A, leaf coll. 25-06-08 (IA, MN)
2	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESNZ02	University of Auckland campus, NZ	Massey University herbarium number MPN:46548. unprovenanced, triploid 'var. RR', leaf coll. 25-06-08 (IA, MN)
3	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESNZ03	University of Auckland campus, NZ	Massey University herbarium number MPN:46549, Presumed wild origin, 'var. GP', leaf coll. 25-06-08 (IA, MN)
4	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESNZ04	University of Auckland campus, NZ	purple ornamental B, leaf coll. 25-06-08 (IA, MN)
5	<i>C. esculenta</i> var. <i>fontanesii</i>	CESNZ14	Tandara Nursery, Auckland, via Auckland Botanic Gardens, NZ	Auckland Botanic Garden ID: 20040128. Ornamental, leaf coll. 26-06-08 (IA, MN)
6	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESPK03	Hasan Abdal District, PK	PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi herbarium number: 125751. Cultivar, coll. 10-05-09 (IA, MN)
7	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESPK04	Pakpattan District, PK	PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi herbarium number: 125752. Cultivar, coll. 15-05-09 (IA, MN)
8	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESAU10	Qld, AU	wild, diploid, J2C, Jiyer Cave, DNA extr. 19-01-88 (PJM)



9	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESAU18	Qld, AU	wild, diploid, N1, Combo's Crossing, DNA extr. 1988 (PJM)
10	<i>C. esculenta</i>	CESJP01	JP	cv. <i>tono-imo</i> , Japan. Leaf sent 23-11-05 (PJM)
11	<i>Colocasia formosana</i>	CFOTW01	Wulu, TW	wild seed coll., lab. seedling 1, leaf sent 04-08-09 (PJM)
12	<i>Colocasia fallax</i>	CFANZ01	University of Auckland campus, NZ	Massey University herbarium number MPN:46546. Grown as campus ornamental, leaf coll. 25-06-08 (IA, MN)
13	<i>Colocasia affinis</i> <i>var. jenningsii</i>	CAFAU01	ex culti England (1974) via Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, to Canberra, AU	cultivar, T328, DNA extr. 1988 (PJM)
14	<i>Remusatia vivipara</i>	RVIAU01	ex Australian National Botanic Gardens, AU	wild origin, T221, DNA extr. 02-12-86 (PJM)
15	<i>Colocasia gigantea</i>	CGIJP01	Nara, JP	cv. <i>hasu-imo</i> , low acidity cultivar coll. 04-08-09 (PJM)
16	<i>Alocasia brisbanensis</i>	ABRAU01	vic. Palmerston River, Qld, AU	wild, N3, DNA extr. 1988 (PJM)
17	<i>Amorphophallus konjac</i>	AKOJP01	Osaka, JP	cultivar, leaf coll. 2009 (PJM)

**Note. Supplementary Table 2 (Number of oligonucleotide repeats, point mutations and indels in the 30 loci marked by the primer pairs developed for taro chloroplast genome) is not suitable for the MS Word file format, and is provided in the soft copy of the thesis.**

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## CHAPTER 4

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Ibrar Ahmed, Peter J. Matthews, Peter J. Lockhart (2013). **A Phylogeographic study of the origins, domestication and dispersal of taro (*Colocasia esculenta*, Araceae)**. In preparation

## **Abstract**

Taro (*Colocasia esculenta* L.) is a root crop in tropical to sub-tropical and temperate regions of the world. Despite its historical and cultural significance, very few phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies have investigated the origin, domestication and geographically wide distribution of this crop. To provide a phylogenetic framework for examining these issues further, 170 wild and cultivated taro accessions from Asian and Oceanic countries were compared using six chloroplast DNA loci and two nuclear DNA loci. Closely related out-group species were included to root the phylogenetic tree. Findings from these analyses were that taro as a species most likely originated in South to Southeast Asia during the Miocene to Pliocene period, and reached Sahul (Australia and New Guinea) separately in wild and possibly cultivated forms. Neighbor-Net and maximum likelihood analyses of the chloroplast DNA loci revealed the existence of three main super-clades in the wider taro germplasm. These super-clades are: (i) a subtropical to tropical Indo-Pacific (IP) super-clade consisting of wild and cultivated, as well as diploid and triploid taros, (ii) a temperate to subtropical Himalayan (H) super-clade consisting of triploid cultivars, and (iii) a tropical Southeast Asian – Australian (SEAA) super-clade consisting of wild diploid taros. Support was not found for a prevailing hypothesis of independent taro domestication in New Guinea, nor to previous suggestions of a Gondwana origin of taro. Comparative chloroplast and nuclear DNA analyses suggest hybridization of taro with other sympatric species in northern Vietnam. Our inferred phylogenetic relationships provide a framework for future taro breeding programs.

## Introduction

Crop history, and especially the history of staple food crops, has long been a subject of interest to agricultural scientists, archaeologists and social historians. In the modern era of global population expansion, rapid global transport, international trade, agricultural industrialisation, and scientific plant breeding, a small number of starchy staple crops including sweet potato have dominated global food production, and have also dominated crop history research across multiple disciplines. Despite being one of the most widely-distributed food plants in pre-modern times, the phylogeography of starchy root crop taro, *Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott (Araceae), has been studied very little. Taro contributed an estimated 50% of staple food energy for the people living in New Guinea during 17<sup>th</sup> century (Bourke 2012). It is still part of the diet for hundreds of millions of people in tropical to temperate regions (Bown 1988). In 1962, worldwide taro production was 5.06 million tonnes, which almost doubled in 50 years to yield 9.97 million tonnes in 2012 (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations; <http://faostat3.fao.org/faostat-gateway/go/to/download/Q/QC/E>; retrieved 27 September 2013).

The natural distribution of taro extends from Southeast Asia to tropical northern Australia and New Guinea (Matthews 1991). Most wild taros are diploid with 28 chromosomes (Kuruvilla & Singh 1981). They produce long stolons and small corms with low starch content, and usually have high concentrations of acrid, calcium oxalate crystals (Matthews 1990, 1991, 2004). Cultivated taros are either diploid with 28 chromosomes, or triploid with 42 chromosomes (Yen & Wheeler 1968; Coates *et al.* 1988). Taro has been categorized into dasheen and eddoe morphotypes (Onyilagha *et al.* 1987). Dasheen types are generally diploid and have a central large corm; eddoe types are generally triploid and possess numerous small corms. The two types cannot be completely differentiated on the basis of ploidy levels (Ivancic & Lebot 2000). Cultivars with large corms are common in humid tropical to sub-tropical regions, while the cultivars with many side-corms are common from sub-tropical to temperate regions (Matthews 2004). Triploid taros may arise through autopolyploidy (Bai *et al.* 1971; Lebot & Aradhya 1991; Isshiki *et al.* 1999) or allopolyploidy with species in *Colocasia* and *Alocasia* genera (Okada & Hambali 1989; Yoshino 1994, 1995; Yoshino *et al.* 1998), possibly through unreduced gamete formation (Matthews 1990).

Despite its historical and cultural significance, only a handful of studies have focused on origin, domestication and spread of taro across different parts of the world (e.g. Spier 1951; Yen & Wheeler 1968; Matthews 1990, 1991; Lebot & Aradhya 1991). Early botanists recorded wild taros in India, Sri Lanka, Sumatra and Malay archipelago (de Candolle 1885; p73 and references cited therein). Most other species in genus *Colocasia* are distributed in South to Southeast Asia (Matthews 1991). One suggested origin for *C. esculenta* is Northeast India (Spier 1951). However, the proposal of an Asian origin for taro is complicated by the presence of wild taro in some Pacific countries east of the Wallace line, including Australia, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. Lebot (2009; p 279) speculates that taro originated elsewhere, not in India, and that the related species reported in India originated from taro. The widespread presence of taro from South to Southeast Asia to the Pacific countries has also been regarded as an indication of a Gondwana origin for the species (Jones & Meehan 1989; Ivancic & Lebot 1999; Quero-garcia *et al.* 2010). Alternatively, wild taros in many regions might have originated as a result of escape from cultivation followed by naturalization (Ivancic *et al.* 1995; Lakhanpaul *et al.* 2003) or deliberate introduction into the disturbed or wild habitats (Matthews 1991, 1995). In summary there are multiple hypotheses for the widespread distribution of taro.

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the generally accepted view was that taro was domesticated in India, from there the cultivars dispersed eastwards to Southeast and Eastern Asia and the Pacific Islands, and westwards to Madagascar and Africa, and from there onwards to the Caribbean region and the Americas (Yen & Wheeler 1968; Kuruvilla & Singh 1981). In the 1970s, the discovery of archaeological evidence for agricultural infrastructure in the highlands of New Guinea around 9000 years before present (BP) (Golson 1976, 1977) led to the suggestion that taro, an important crop in Melanesia, might also have been independently domesticated in New Guinea (Yen 1980; Coates *et al.* 1988). Subsequent field observations of wild and apparently wildtype populations of taro in northern Australia and New Guinea (Coates *et al.* 1988; Matthews 1990, 1991), and archaeological reports of starch residues derived from taro (Loy *et al.* 1992; Denham *et al.* 2003; Fullagar *et al.* 2006), led credence to the suggested domestication of taro in New Guinea (Yen 1991, 1993; Bayliss-Smith & Golson 1992; Lebot 1999). The hypothesis of a New Guinean domestication of taro has become a prevalent view in recent scientific literature (Matthews 2003; Denham 2004;

Denham *et al.* 2004; Lebot *et al.* 2004b; Purugganan & Fuller 2009; Denham 2011; but also see Fuller 2007 for a view on domestication in India).

However, the hypothesis of taro domestication in New Guinea remains unproven. It has very weak empirical support from the genetic and molecular analyses. Comparisons between wild and cultivated forms of taro are needed from throughout the likely natural geographic range of taro to substantiate this theory. Most published biochemical, genetic and molecular studies have focused on the genetic diversity of extant cultivars as it pertains to crop germplasm conservation, cultivar assessment, and plant breeding (Lebot & Aradhya 1991; Matthews *et al.* 1992; Isshiki *et al.* 1995; Irwin *et al.* 1998; Matsuda & Nawata 1999, 2002a; Ochiai *et al.* 2001; Lakhanpaul *et al.* 2003; Lebot, Prana, *et al.* 2004; Kreike *et al.* 2004; Caillon *et al.* 2006; Mace *et al.* 2006; Singh *et al.* 2007). Less consideration has been given to data that might be more useful for testing phylogenetic hypotheses of relationship and origin. One of the most frequently referred papers in support of the New Guinean domestication theory is by Lebot & Aradhya (1991) which compares isozyme variation in Asian and Oceanic wild and cultivated taros. It revealed a narrow genetic base of the Oceanic cultivars; these cultivars were shown to be associated with, and possibly introduced from, Indonesia. In a subsequent review (Lebot 1999), the Oceanic cultivars were interpreted as being introduced from New Guinea. However, the empirical data provided little support for or against this hypothesis. The possibility that Indonesia was part of the Sundaland during the last glacial maxima, and therefore its flora being part of the larger Asian flora, was not discussed when interpreting the results. Archaeological studies indicate that taro was being used in the Solomon's Islands 28000 years BP (Loy *et al.* 1992). If the identification of starch grains reported from the Solomon's Islands is reliable as belonging to taro (Loy *et al.* 1992), the same argument can be applied to the New Guinean scenario, where it is reasonable to assume that taro was 'cultivated' but not necessarily 'domesticated' in New Guinea (Neumann 2003). It is possible that people in pre-historic times might have better physiological tolerance to acidity in wild taros. Efforts might also have been made by the pre-historic people to identify and select lesser acid varieties and/or some pre-processing might have been undertaken before human consumption.



Recently the chloroplast genomes of two morphotypes of taro were sequenced (Chapter 2; Ahmed *et al.* 2012). Analyses of these genomes have been used to identify and develop 30 polymorphic chloroplast DNA loci suitable for phylogeographic studies in taro and closely related species (Chapter 3; Ahmed *et al.* 2013). Chapter 3 reports chloroplast genomic diversity in a limited selection of wild and cultivated taro, including closely related taxa. More extensive sampling for a subset of the loci has been investigated here. Our phylogenetic analyses suggest the existence of three main chloroplast super-clades in taro, and numerous sub-clades. As far as possible, the phylogenetic relationships have been examined in relation to chromosome numbers (ploidy level), sample provenance (area of collection), and habitat (cultivated or wild). In addition, two nuclear loci have also been characterised for a subset of taro and three other *Colocasia* species. Their inclusion allows inferences to be drawn concerning the taro super-clades, hybridization and possible polyploid origins. In geographical, biological, and cultural terms, there are many obvious gaps in our sample set, but we believe that the coverage achieved is sufficient to provide significant new insight into the origins, dispersal, and domestication of taro.

## Materials and methods

A total of 222 plant samples were used, 170 of which are taro, *Colocasia esculenta* L.(Schott), sampled from 20 countries (Table 1). The taro samples include wild, cultivated and ornamental accessions, as well as known diploid and triploid taros. Table 1 also lists out-groups included in phylogenetic analyses. Among 52 out-groups, 38 samples were from species within genus *Colocasia* and 14 samples from other aroid genera. Details for individual accessions regarding their dates and places of collections, habitat (wild, cultivated, ornamental) and ploidy if it is known or can be inferred are given in Supplementary Table 1. We devised a seven-letter coding system for all accessions, wherein the code for each accession indicates species name (first three letters), country of collection (fourth and fifth letters), and accession number (last two digits). For example, CESAU01 represents *Colocasia esculenta*, collected from Australia, accession number 1. Where applicable, the two-letter country codes were selected from the list of the International Organization for Standardization ([http://www.iso.org/iso/country\\_codes/iso\\_3166\\_code\\_lists/country\\_names\\_and\\_code\\_elements.htm](http://www.iso.org/iso/country_codes/iso_3166_code_lists/country_names_and_code_elements.htm); retrieved 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012).

**Table 1. Number of samples of taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) and other aroid species collected in various countries. Numbers in brackets represent number of taro accessions belonging to the three super-clades: Himalayan (H), Indo-Pacific (IP) and Southeast Asian Australian (SEAA), respectively. The super-clades are shown in Figures 1 – 3.**

Species	Country	Number of samples
<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Australia	23 (0, 3, 20)
	Bangladesh	1 (0, 1, 0)
	Easter Island, Chile	3 (0, 3, 0)
	Egypt	1 (0, 1, 0)
	Ethiopia	1 (1, 0, 0)
	Hawaii, USA	1 (0, 1, 0)
	India	10 (1, 9, 0)
	Japan	28 (7, 21, 0)
	Madagascar	4 (3, 1, 0)
	Myanmar	10 (0, 5, 4)*
	Nepal	3 (2, 1, 0)
	New Zealand	23 (14, 9, 0)
	Pakistan	7 (7, 0, 0)
	New Guinea	19 (0, 16, 3)
	Philippines	9 (0, 9, 0)
	Sri Lanka	4 (1, 3, 0)
	Society Islands, French Polynesia	3 (0, 3, 0)
	Timor-Leste	1 (0, 1, 0)
	Thailand	5 (0, 2, 3)
	Vietnam	14 (0, 8, 6)
<i>C. affinis</i>	Philippines	1
<i>C. affinis</i> var. <i>jenningsii</i>	Australia	1
<i>Colocasia fallax</i>	New Zealand	1
	India	2
<i>Colocasia formosana</i>	Taiwan, China	2
	Philippines	1
<i>C. gigantea</i>	Japan	2
	Vietnam	2
<i>C. lihengiae</i>	Vietnam	3
<i>C. menglaensis</i>	Vietnam	3
<i>Colocasia</i> sp.	Cyprus	1
	Fiji	6
	India	1
	Myanmar	2

	Vietnam	5
<i>C. yunnanensis</i>	Vietnam	5
<i>Alocasia brisbanensis</i>	Australia	1
<i>Alocasia cucullata</i>	New Zealand	1
<i>Alocasia sp.</i>	New Zealand	1
<i>Amorphophallus konjac</i>	Japan	1
<i>Remusatia sp.</i>	Myanmar	1
	Vietnam	1
<i>Remusatia vivipara</i>	Australia	1
<i>Steudnera sp.</i>	Vietnam	1
<i>Xanthosoma sp.</i>	India	5
<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>	New Zealand	1

\*One taro accession from Myanmar (CESMM12) appeared as an out-group, as shown in Fig. 2.

Plant DNA was (a) provided by PJM from his DNA archive held at the Field Sciences Laboratory, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, (b) freshly extracted according to Ahmed *et al.* (2009), or (c) extracted using DNeasy Plant mini kit (Qiagen, USA). Six chloroplast DNA loci were selected for sequencing from our previously reported loci (Ahmed *et al.* 2013). Selection of the loci was aimed at yielding maximum phylogenetic resolution within the genus *Colocasia* and within the species *C. esculenta*. In the current study, primers were also designed for two nuclear DNA loci: Phytochrome C (PhyC; single- or low-copy number locus), and internal transcribed spacers (ITS; high-copy number locus) region from the ribosomal DNA region. For designing the nuclear DNA loci specific for taro and closely related species, relevant nucleotide sequences from GenBank were searched, downloaded and aligned together to find maximum parsimony informative sites to be amplified, flanked by conserved regions suitable for designing the primer sequences. The primer sequences are given in Table 2. The PCR reaction mix, thermocycling conditions, and sequencing conditions for the chloroplast loci have been detailed in Ahmed *et al.* (2013). PCR amplification of nuclear loci used the same conditions except that the annealing temperature was 55°C for amplification of the ITS locus and 45°C for the PhyC locus.

**Table 2. Forward and reverse primer sequences and locus information for the chloroplast and nuclear loci used in this study. Last column shows size (bp) in the final alignment, not for the individual sequences.**

No.	Primer pair	Sequence	Locus	GenBank Accession numbers	Size
1	ACECP005	F: AAAATGGGGTTCCTAGTGGA R: ACTCGAACTCGAAGAAATGG	<i>rps16</i> intron - 5'- <i>rps16</i> CDS - IGS towards <i>trnQ</i>	KF284854 - KF285047	548
2	ACECP016	F: TTTACAGTCCGTCCCCATTA R: CATCTCTCTTCAAGGAGGC	<i>trnY</i> - IGS - <i>trnE</i>	KF285048 - KF285088	139
3	ACECP018	F: AGAGAGATCTTGTTGATATTTGT R: TAGTCATGATTCAACGGGTC	IGS between <i>trnT</i> & <i>psbD</i>	KF284164 - KF284369	254
4	ACECP026	F: ACTACGGTAGAGCGGTTTAT R: AAAGTCATCTCACGTTCCACC	<i>rbcL</i>	KF284370 - KF284574	402
5	ACECP035	F: TGGTTAGGTATTGGAGCAAC R: GTGGACATTCTACAGAAGCA	<i>petD</i> - IGS - <i>rpoA</i>	KF285089 - KF285278	253
6	ACECP039	F: AGTTACTCCCTTTCCACCA R: GTAATGTTGGGGTGAACCAA	IGS between <i>rpl22</i> & <i>rps19</i> - <i>rps19</i> - IGS - <i>rpl2</i>	KF284575 - KF284775	589
7	PhyC	F: AAACATTTCCCTCTTGTG R: TACTTAAGCCTGTAGTAGTA	Nuclear Phytochrome C	KF284811 - KF284853	769
8	ITS(colo)	F: GACACACTCGCGAACGGTTGAC R: GCGTGTGCCACGGCGACGATG	Nuclear internal transcribed spacer (ITS) 1, 5.8S rDNA, ITS2	KF284776 - KF284810	563

The sequences from chloroplast and nuclear DNA were visualized, aligned and edited using Geneious Pro v.6.5 (Drummond *et al.* 2009). Indels of varying length in the alignments, including a hypervariable dinucleotide (AT)<sub>n</sub> microsatellite motif amplified in the locus ACECP016, were deleted from the alignments. These sequence alignments from six chloroplast DNA loci were concatenated using Mesquite (Maddison & Maddison 2011) to identify putative chloroplast haplotypes. From this concatenated alignment of 2185 nucleotides, haplotypes having identical sequence were grouped together using SplitsTree4 (Huson & Bryant 2006). Site patterns in the alignment were visualized as a Neighbor-Net (Bryant & Moulton 2004) constructed using SplitsTree4. JModelTest v.2.1.3 (Darriba *et al.* 2012) was applied to the data to find the best model of substitution, which happened to be the GTR+I+ $\Gamma$  model (Tavare 1986). The concatenated alignment was used to build an optimal maximum likelihood tree in PhyML (Guindon & Gascuel 2003), and variation was evaluated using non-parametric bootstrap resampling (100 bootstrap replicates). In searching for the optimal tree, tree space was searched using the SPR (sub-tree prune and regraft; Swofford *et al.* 1996) algorithm implemented in PhyML program. FigTree v.1.4 (available at <http://tree.bio.ed.ac.uk/software/figtree/>) and TreeDyn 198.3 (Chevenet *et al.* 2006; available at <http://www.phylogeny.fr/>) were used to draw, edit and save trees.

Taking a secondary date calibration for the mean value for the split of *Colocasia esculenta* from *Remusatia* and *Steudnera* (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b), divergence times were estimated for the taro super-clades using BEAST v.1.7.5 (Drummond & Rambaut 2007; Drummond *et al.* 2012). Divergence time estimates for the split between *Remusatia* and *Steudnera* obtained in our study were compared with those reported by (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b) to provide an internal check on our BEAST analyses. We did not constrain this divergence time, rather it was inferred in our runs as a tree prior. BEAUTi v.1.7.5 (part of BEAST package) was used to generate xml files for the BEAST input. We selected an uncorrelated lognormal relaxed clock (Drummond *et al.* 2006) for divergence time estimation using GTR+I+ $\Gamma$  model of substitution, and Coalescent constant model as tree priors. Five independent runs, each with one million MCMC chain lengths were executed. Trees were sampled at every 1000<sup>th</sup> step. Tracer v.1.5 (BEAST package) was used to evaluate effective sample size (ESS) in different runs. Trees from the five runs were combined using LogCombiner v.1.7.5 (BEAST package). A maximum clade credibility tree displaying median node heights was

inferred using TreeAnnotator v.1.7.5 (BEAST package), selecting burnin limit of 5000. To study the impact of calibration dates on our inferences for the age of taro clades, we also used calibration dates at the lower and upper ends of the 95% highest posterior distribution (HPD) limits estimated by (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b) for the split of *Colocasia esculenta* from *Remusatia* and *Steudnera*.

Evidence for phylogenetic relationships and chloroplast capture suggested by the chloroplast sequences were investigated further by analysing two nuclear loci (PhyC and ITS) for a subset of the samples. Using the optimal GTR+I+ $\Gamma$  model as determined by JModelTest v.2.1.3 (Darriba *et al.* 2012), maximum likelihood trees were inferred separately for these loci and then were combined to reconstruct a consensus network in SplitsTree4 (Huson & Bryant 2006). Indels in the ITS sequence alignment were excluded from the analyses.

## Results

For six chloroplast and two nuclear DNA loci, 1285 new sequences were determined in this study. Of these, 170 sequences were shorter than a GenBank threshold limit of 200 nt, and were not included by GenBank in their database. GenBank accession numbers for 1115 new sequences are shown against their respective loci in Table 2. The accession numbers assigned to individual samples for each locus are given in Supplementary Table 2. Where applicable, we also included sequences reported previously (Ahmed *et al.* 2013), as well as from the 170 sequences mentioned above, to complement our concatenated sequence alignment. The alignments generated for the chloroplast and nuclear loci will be submitted to Dryad. We excluded the out-groups distant to *C. esculenta* from further analyses where (a) PCR primers did not amplify the distant out-group samples at a majority of the six loci, or where (b) long-branch attraction problems were evident in the reconstructed tree. Seventeen excluded samples were: *Zantedeschia* (one), *Amorphophallus* (one), *Colocasia* sp. from Fiji (two samples, apparently misidentified by collectors and belonging to genus *Alocasia*), *Alocasia* (three), *Colocasia gigantea* (four), *Colocasia fallax* (one) and *Xanthosoma* (five). The remaining 205 samples were included in subsequent analyses.

After concatenation of sequences from six chloroplast DNA loci, identical haplotypes were grouped together using SplitsTree4 (Huson & Bryant 2006), which clustered 172

of 205 accessions into 14 distinct haplotypes. A further 13 accessions were manually assigned to their respective haplotypes, as these accessions contained partial missing data but no sequence polymorphism with respect to the types to which they were assigned. Table 3 lists all accessions grouped into 14 haplotypes. Statistics of the missing data for these 13 accessions are given in Supplementary Table 3. Including these type groups, a total of 34 distinct haplotypes were observed for all accessions used in this study. Figure 1 shows a Neighbor-Net reconstruction of these 34 haplotypes, using their concatenated sequence alignment. Although the data are not strictly tree-like due to presence of many internal splits, four main clusters were apparent in the data. One of the clusters contained all out-groups, also including one accession from Myanmar which was identified as *C. esculenta* (CESMM12). The remaining three clusters consisted largely of *Colocasia esculenta* with the exception of haplotypes TYPE1, TYPE11 and TYPE12, which were also present in at least four other *Colocasia* species (Table 3). These exceptions may reflect widespread interspecific hybridization, as discussed later.

A maximum likelihood tree built for 2185 nt long concatenated sequence alignment of six chloroplast DNA loci is shown in Figure 2. This tree was based upon the same data used for the Neighbor-Net analysis. In this phylogenetic reconstruction, taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) was largely monophyletic, an exception being one taro accession from Myanmar (CESMM12) which joined as an out-group. This sample, from Zi Gon in Myanmar, was identified as wild *C. esculenta* at the time of collection by the collector (PJM), and has later been reconfirmed as such from field photographs.

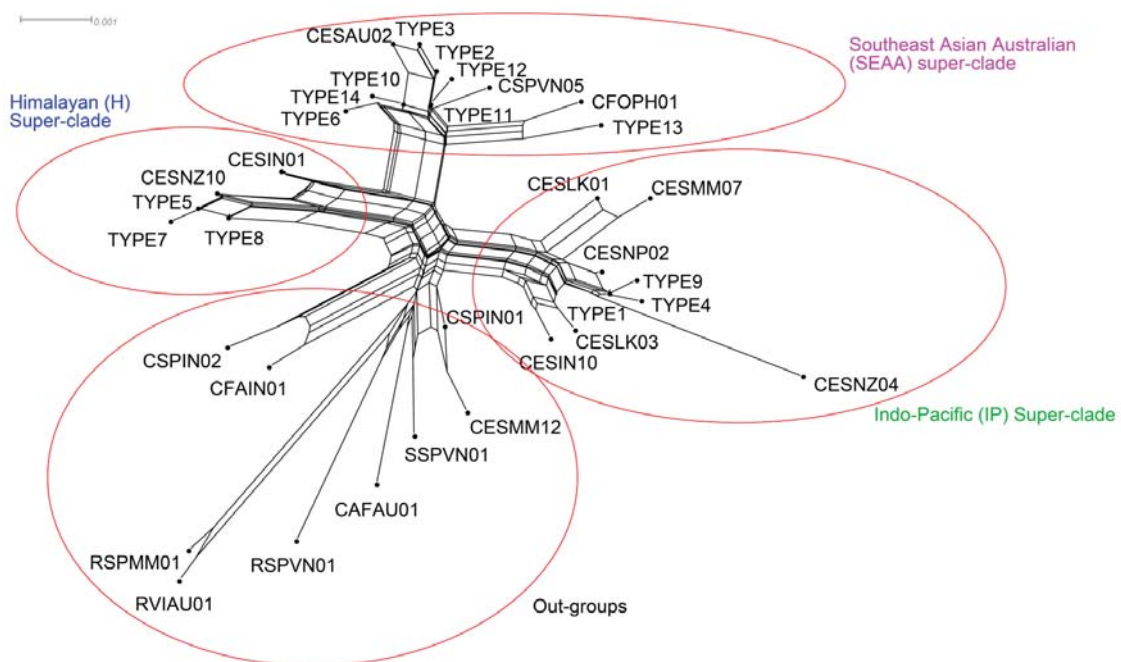


**Table 3. Grouping of 185 accessions into 14 haplotypes. For each haplotype, we show the species having that type, countries of their collection, number and identification of the accessions involved. Accessions identified in bold were manually added, as they displayed sequences with partial missing data, but could be unequivocally assigned to the haplotypes (see Supplementary Table 3).**

Type	Species	Country	No. of accessions	Accessions
TYPE1	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Australia	3	CESAU04, CESAU07, CESAU20
		Easter Island, Chile	3	CESEI01, CESEI02, <b>CESEI03</b>
		Egypt	1	CESJP02
		Hawaii, USA	1	<b>CESHW01</b>
		India	3	CESIN03, CESIN06, <b>CESIN09</b>
		Japan	21	CESJP01, CESJP05, CESJP09, CESJP10, CESJP11, CESJP14, CESJP15, CESJP16, CESJP17, CESJP18, CESJP19, CESJP20, CESJP21, CESJP22, CESJP23, CESJP24, CESJP25, CESJP26, CESJP27, CESJP28, CESJP29
		Madagascar	1	CESMG04
		Myanmar	1	<b>CESMM11</b>
		New Zealand	5	CESNZ01, CESNZ13, CESNZ14, CESNZ15, CESNZ20
		New Guinea	16	CESPG02, CESPG03, <b>CESPG04</b> , CESPG05, CESPG08, CESPG09, CESPG10, CESPG11, CESPG12, CESPG13, CESPG14, CESPG15, CESPG16, CESPG17, <b>CESPG18</b> , CESPG19
		Philippines	6	CESPH01, CESPH02, CESPH03, CESPH04, CESPH05, CESPH09
		Society Islands, French Polynesia	3	CESSI01, CESSI02, CESSI03
		Thailand	2	CESTH04, CESTH05

		Vietnam	7	CESVN01, CESVN04, CESVN05, CESVN08, CESVN09, CESVN12, CESVN14
	<i>Colocasia sp.</i>	Cyprus	1	CSPCY01
		Fiji	4	CSPFJ01, CSPFJ02, CSPFJ03, <b>CSPFJ05</b>
	<i>C. affinis</i>	Philippines	1	CAFPH01
TYPE2	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Australia	7	CESAU01, CESAU03, CESAU05, <b>CESAU06, CESAU09, CESAU21, CESAU23</b>
		New Guinea	3	CESPG01, CESPG06, CESPG07
TYPE3	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Australia	12	CESAU08, CESAU10, CESAU11, CESAU12, CESAU13, CESAU14, CESAU15, CESAU16, <b>CESAU17, CESAU18</b> , CESAU19, CESAU22
TYPE4	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Bangladesh	1	CESBD01
		India	5	CESIN02, CESIN07, CESIN08, CESIN11, CESIN12
		Sri Lanka	1	CESLK02
		Myanmar	5	CESMM03, CESMM04, CESMM05, CESMM09, CESMM13,
		New Zealand	3	CESNZ03, CESNZ08, CESNZ16
		Timor-Leste	1	CESTL01
		Vietnam	1	CESVN06
TYPE5	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Ethiopia	1	CESET01
		Japan	7	CESJP03, CESJP04, CESJP06, <b>CESJP07</b> , CESJP08, CESJP12, CESJP13
		Sri Lanka	1	CESLK04
		Madagascar	3	CESMG01, CESMG02, CESMG03
		Nepal	1	CESNP03
		New Zealand	11	CESNZ02, CESNZ05, CESNZ06, CESNZ07, CESNZ09, CESNZ11, CESNZ12, CESNZ17, CESNZ18, CESNZ19, CESNZ21
		Pakistan	2	CESPK03, CESPK04

TYPE6	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Myanmar	2	CESMM02, CESMM10
TYPE7	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Nepal	1	CESNP01
		Pakistan	5	CESPK01, CESP02, CESP05, CESP06, CESP07
TYPE8	<i>C. esculenta</i>	New Zealand	2	CESNZ22, CESNZ23
TYPE9	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Philippines	3	CESPH06, CESP07, CESP08
TYPE10	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Thailand	3	CESTH01, <b>CESTH02</b> , CESTH03
TYPE11	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Vietnam	5	CESVN02, CESVN03, CESVN07, CESVN10, CESVN13
	<i>C. lihengiae</i>	Vietnam	1	CLIVN03
	<i>C. menglaensis</i>	Vietnam	1	CMEVN03
	<i>Colocasia sp.</i>	Vietnam	4	CSPVN01, CSPVN02, CSPVN03, CSPVN04
	<i>C. yunnanensis</i>	Vietnam	5	CYUVN01, CYUVN02, CYUVN03, CYUVN04, CYUVN05
TYPE12	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Vietnam	1	CESVN11
	<i>C. lihengiae</i>	Vietnam	2	CLIVN01, CLIVN02
	<i>C. menglaensis</i>	Vietnam	2	CMEVN01, CMEVN02
TYPE13	<i>C. formosana</i>	Taiwan, China	2	CFOTW01, CFOTW02
TYPE14	<i>C. esculenta</i>	Myanmar	2	<b>CESMM06</b> , CESMM08



**Figure 1.** Neighbor-Net diagram showing clusters and splits among the samples used, based on the concatenated sequence alignment of six chloroplast loci. Accessions grouped together as TYPES are identified in Table 3.

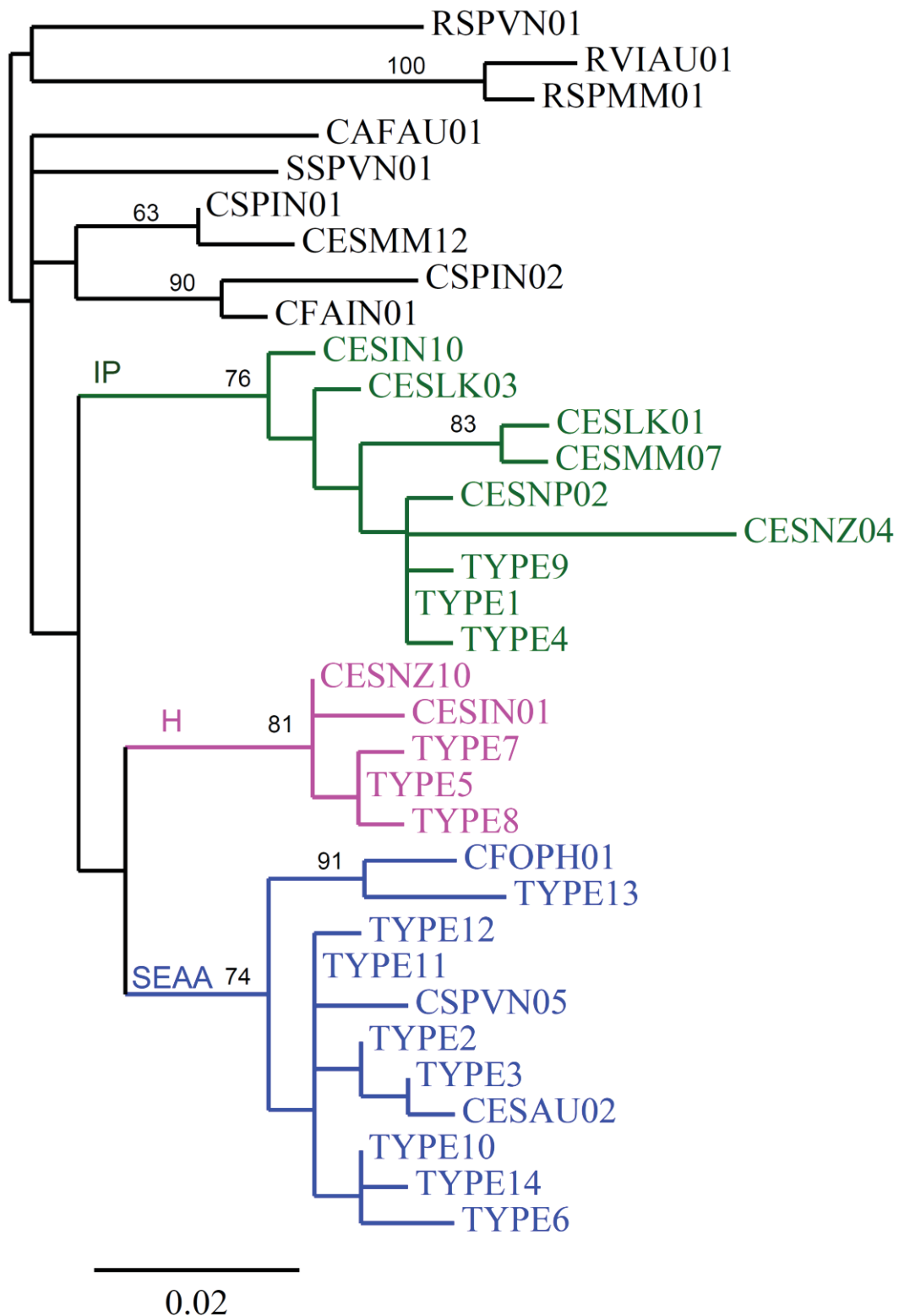


Figure 2. Maximum likelihood reconstruction based on the concatenated sequence alignment of six chloroplast loci, showing three super-clades in taro (IP, H and SEAA). Bootstrap values above 70 are shown. One accession of taro from Myanmar (CESMM12) appears among the out-groups, and is likely to be a hybrid.

Neighbor-Net (Figure 1) and maximum likelihood tree (Figure 2) show taro accessions clustered into three super-clades. Here we name these according to their geographic associations as the Indo-Pacific (IP), Himalayan (H), and Southeast Asian – Australian (SEAA) super-clades. Among these super-clades, 60% of our taro samples belonged to the IP super-clade which is geographically the most widely distributed superclade in sub-tropical to tropical regions. This super-clade contained wild and cultivated, as well as diploid and triploid taros. Exact habitat status of each Indian sample in this haplotype is not yet known, but from the available literature about the local names for different taros in Assam, we expect these samples to be a mix of wild as well as cultivated or escaped taros. Apart from the Indian samples, wild taros in this super-clade which did not have the most common haplotype (TYPE1) were from Sri Lanka (CESLK03, CESLK01) and Myanmar (CESMM07). The haplotype with the largest number of samples in our sample set (TYPE1, with 79 accessions) belonged to this super-clade. This haplotype contained wild as well as cultivated taros, one ornamental accession from Philippines identified by PJM as *C. affinis* (CAFPH01), and five accessions belonging to genus *Colocasia* but unidentified at species level. Wild taros exhibiting this haplotype were from Myanmar, Vietnam, southern Japan, northwest Australia, and New Guinea. Cultivars in this type ranged from Cyprus and Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean to Madagascar, South Asia, Southeast Asia, New Guinea, and remote Oceania (Hawaii, Society Islands and Easter Island), as shown in Table 3.

The second super-clade, H, has been named so to reflect the likely distribution and origin of this cool adapted super-clade in the Himalayan ranges. Among accessions belonging to this super-clade, all those for which ploidy have been determined (Supplementary Table 1) are triploids. The accessions for which ploidy is yet unknown may include diploids as well as triploids. The known triploids are distributed in temperate to sub-tropical regions from India to Ethiopia and Madagascar in the west and New Zealand in the east. No examples of this super-clade were found in Australia or New Guinea, areas where triploids have also not been found in previous cytological surveys (Yen & Wheeler 1968; Coates *et al.* 1988; Matthews 1990). All accessions in this super-clade are cultivars.

The third super-clade, SEAA, contained only accessions that are wild, and which were collected from breeding taro populations. This super-clade is distributed in tropical

regions from Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar) to New Guinea and northern Australia, but is not currently found in India. *Colocasia formosana*, which is a close wild relative of *C. esculenta* and endemic to Taiwan and Philippines, appears as a distinct sub-clade within this super-clade. Two haplotypes from Vietnam (TYPE11 and TYPE12) in this super-clade were also found in accessions from three species, namely *Colocasia lihengiae*, *C. menglaensis*, and *C. yunnanensis*.

Estimates for the divergence times of the three taro lineages extend from late Miocene to Pliocene, while most of the crown group representatives in the tree diverged during the Pleistocene (Figure 3). CESNZ04, an ornamental taro accession from New Zealand which appeared to be a fast evolving outlier (Figure 2) was excluded from the analyses for divergence times estimates. These estimates are based upon the secondary time calibration of 10.84 Million years ago (Ma) for the split between *C. esculenta* and *Remusatia / Steudnera* (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b). Our observation of a median value of time of split of *C. esculenta* from *Remusatia / Steudnera* was 10.65 Ma, with median lower and upper 95% HPD values of 4.90 Ma and 16.90 Ma, respectively. Using tree priors, the median value of time of split between *Remusatia* and *Steudnera* calculated in our study was 7.4 Ma, close to that of 7.75 Ma calculated by (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b). The estimated times of split for each numbered node (Figure 3) in all BEAST runs are given in Supplementary Table 4. The lower 95% HPD values in time estimates indicate that TYPE1 diverged from its nearest type no later than the late Pleistocene to Holocene. The wide range of this haplotype is clearly a result of human mediated dispersal, most likely after primary domestication of taro had taken place somewhere in mainland Asia (India to Southeast Asia) during the early Holocene.

A consensus network of the maximum likelihood trees for a subset of taro and closely related species, reconstructed using the nuclear loci (ITS and PhyC) is shown in Figure 4. The consensus network shows that *C. esculenta* does not follow grouping into three distinct super-clades which are evident in the chloroplast DNA analyses. Representative triploids from the Himalayan super-clade clustered together, but triploids from the IP super-clade clustered randomly (Figure 4a). Wild species in northern Vietnam having TYPE11 and TYPE12 chloroplast haplotype (*C. esculenta*, *C. menglaensis*, *C. lihengiae*, and *C. yunnanensis*) were distinct from each other, while *C. lihengiae* appeared very close to *C. esculenta* (Figure 4b).



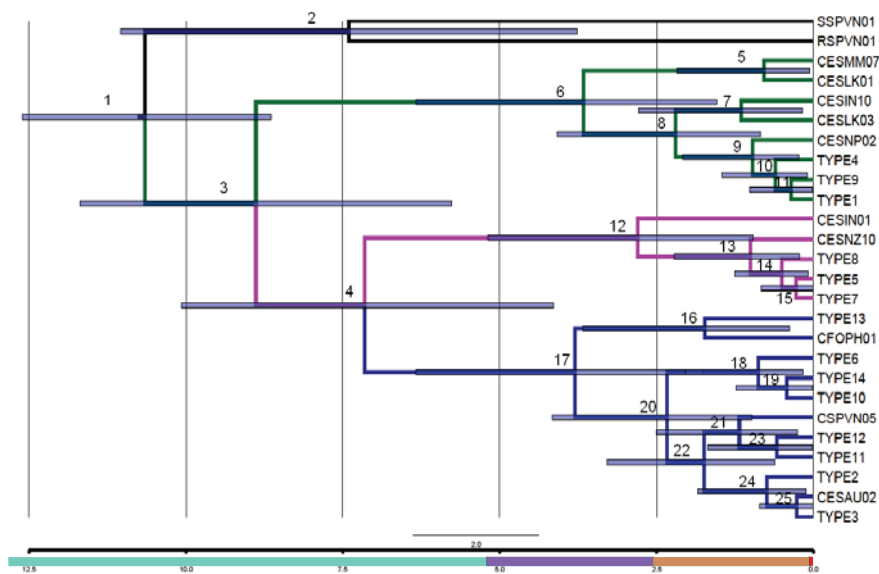
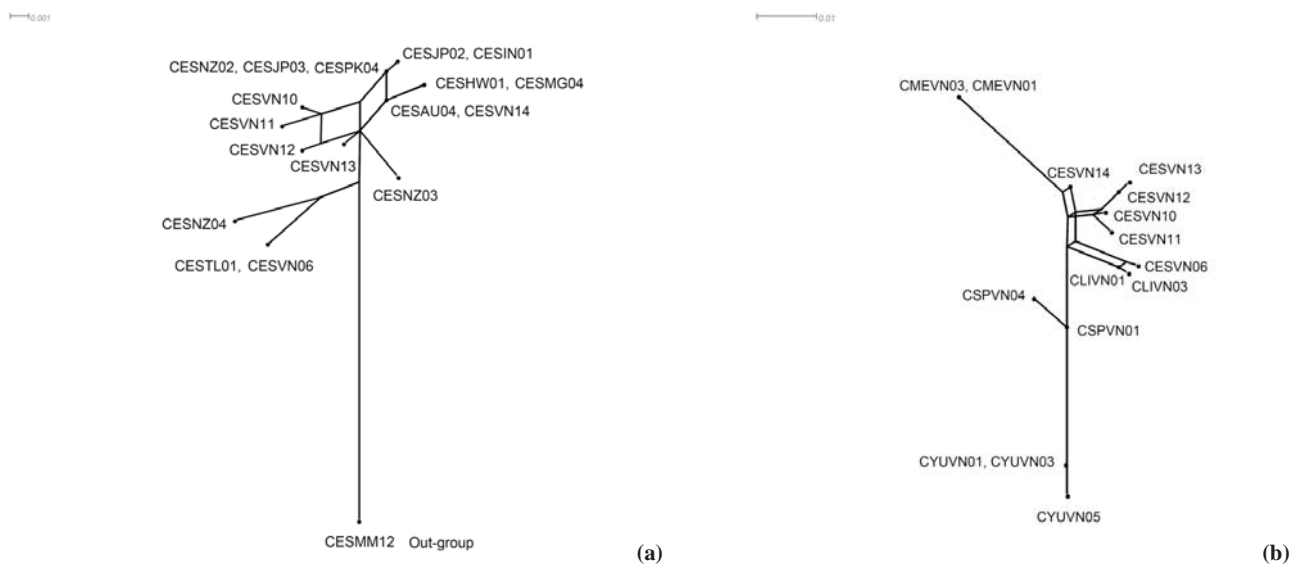


Figure 3. Bayesian estimates of divergence times in the taro super-clades. The estimates for node 1 (the root) are based on mean value for the split of *Colocasia esculenta* from *Remusatia* and *Steudnera*, estimated in (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b). Blue bars at the nodes represent 95% Highest Posterior Distribution (HPD) range. Scale shows time in millions of years (Ma) and geological epochs where Holocene is shown by red, Pleistocene by brown, Pliocene by purple and Miocene by cyan colours. Estimates of the divergence times at each numbered node are given in Supplementary Table 4.



**Figure 4. Consensus network based on the maximum likelihood trees inferred for the ITS and PhyC trees loci: (a) wild and cultivated, diploid and triploid taros sampled across the three chloroplast super-clades, (b) *Colocasia* species from Vietnam displaying the chloroplast haplotypes, TYPE11 and TYPE12.**

## Discussion

Chloroplast DNA has been the most widely used source of genetic data used in plant phylogenetic, phylogeographic and population genetic studies (e.g. Palmer 1985; Chase *et al.* 1993; Powell *et al.* 1995; Small *et al.* 2004; Renner & Zhang 2004; Pleines *et al.* 2009; Vachon & Freeland 2011; Barniske *et al.* 2012; Nauheimer *et al.* 2012a,b). It was thus an obvious choice in the search to find molecular markers most suited to investigations of the evolutionary history of taro. We designed primer sets for the loci specifically useful in yielding phylogenetic resolution at the intraspecific level in *C. esculenta* (Ahmed *et al.* 2013), targeting mutational hotspots in taro chloroplast genome (Ahmed *et al.* 2012). The present study is based upon a selection of loci from those we previously reported.

## Natural history

Our phylogenetic reconstruction (Figure 2) and divergence time estimates (Figure 3) suggest a number of hypotheses. Specifically evident is a late Miocene to Pliocene origin for *C. esculenta*. The previous suggestion of a Gondwanaland origin for taro (Jones & Meehan 1989; Ivancic & Lebot 1999; Lebot 1999; Quero-garcia *et al.* 2010) is not supported by our analyses. Our results suggest that taro reached Australia and New Guinea from mainland Asia (Figure 2; Figure 3) by natural dispersal of a wild form (SEAA super-clade) and also as a cultivated form (IP super-clade). Taro may have reached tropical regions of northern Australia and New Guinea during glacial periods in the Pleistocene (Figure 3), when sea levels were considerably lower than today (Heaney 1991). About 40,000 years ago when humans first colonized Sahul, its landmass (today's New Guinea, Australia and Tasmania) was connected (Bellwood 1979). A distance of around 100 km across open ocean had to be crossed to reach Sahul from Sundaland (Lebot 1999). Before human-mediated dispersal, birds might have played an important role in spread of wild taro seeds between the two super-continent of Sundaland and Sahul. In Vanuatu, the purple swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) has been reported to disperse taro seeds (Caillon *et al.* 2006). Several subspecies of the swamphen are distributed in Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand (Doss *et al.* 2009). The swamphen (known as Pukeko in New Zealand) has a dispersal range that includes the Kermadec and Kempbell Islands (McLintock 1966). These are islands that are hundreds of kilometres away from their nearest islands. As both taro and swamphen

prefer marshy, semi-aquatic habitats, swamphen is a good candidate agent for the long-distance spread of taro between Sundaland and Sahul.

Despite uncertainty in estimates of times of divergence, particularly when relying on secondary estimates rather than direct fossil calibrations (Graur & Martin 2004; Sauquet *et al.* 2012), secondary estimates of times of divergence might still be useful when results are not over interpreted (e.g. Schaefer *et al.* 2009; Michalak *et al.* 2010; de Paz *et al.* 2011; Wicker *et al.* 2013). We have used the secondary time estimates to approximate the times of divergence of taro lineages. The three distinct super-clades suggested from the chloroplast DNA analysis in taro reported in this study most likely originated early in the history of this species, during late Miocene to Pliocene (Figure 3). Such divergence time estimates have assumed that the split between *C. esculenta* and *Remusatia* occurred within the 95% highest posterior probability range of 3.95 – 19.34 Ma, as (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b).

While chloroplast DNA analyses revealed three main lineages in our taro sample set, these lineages were not observed for the nuclear DNA loci (Figure 4a). This might reflect differences in lineage sorting between linked chloroplast markers and nuclear markers. Alternatively, it might be due to a more complex history of relationship for biparental inheritance of nuclear markers and higher rates of mutations in nuclear DNA compared to those in chloroplast DNA (Drouin *et al.* 2008). Breeding taro populations belonging to the IP and SEAA super-clades and growing in sympatry are likely to have mixed to yield new gene combinations in the nuclear genomes of wild breeding populations.

Incongruence between gene trees inferred from nuclear DNA and organelle DNA analyses can be indicative of hybridization (McBreen & Lockhart 2006; Joly *et al.* 2009; Hayakawa *et al.* 2011). However, phylogenetic incongruence can also result from incomplete lineage sorting, and this needs to be considered as an alternative explanation and rejected before accepting hybridization as the most likely explanation for the data (Joly *et al.* 2009). In our findings, four *Colocasia* species (*C. esculenta*, *C. lihengiae*, *C. menglaensis* and *C. yunnanensis*) along with putative morphological hybrids between *C. esculenta* and *C. yunnanensis* accessions (Supplementary Table 1) clustered together in chloroplast DNA analyses as haplotypes TYPE11 and TYPE12 (Table 3). The two haplotypes were highly similar, being separated only by a single point mutation. In

contrast, the nuclear DNA sequences from these species are genetically very distinct. While these observations need more rigorous testing, the findings are consistent with chloroplast capture and hybridization among these species. In principle, the statistical test of Joly *et al.* (2009) could be used to distinguish hybridization from incomplete lineage sorting in this case. However, sequences from more nuclear loci are first needed to reconstruct a robust, multi-locus species tree of *Colocasia* to apply this statistical test. Short of applying this test, a comparative measure of the differences in nuclear and chloroplast phylogenetic diversity (PD) among taxa might be informative. PD is defined as the minimum combined length of all the phylogenetic branches necessary to span a given set of taxa on the phylogenetic tree (Faith 1992b). In essence, larger PD values correspond to greater diversity among the taxa (Faith 1992a). PD values can be readily calculated in SplitsTree4 (Huson & Bryant 2006). We have compared the PD of *Colocasia* species from northern Vietnam to the PD of *C. esculenta* accessions from northern Vietnam. This was done for both nuclear and chloroplast DNA loci (Table 4). The individual accessions studied are shown in Figure 4b. If sequence variation is best explained by divergence and incomplete lineage sorting, relative PD values (*Colocasia* species PD / *C. esculenta* PD) for the same taxon sets should be similar for nuclear and chloroplast DNA loci. That is, in the absence of hybridization, and even if rates of evolution differ between nuclear and chloroplast genomes, we would still expect to see similar relative amounts of phylogenetic diversity when comparing the same sets of taxa. However, the results in Table 4 are inconsistent with this expectation. The ratio of PD values for *Colocasia* species with respect to *C. esculenta* differs greatly for the chloroplast and nuclear DNA loci. For the chloroplast DNA loci, this ratio is a fraction of 1 (0.08). However for the nuclear DNA loci, this ratio is almost three times larger than 1 (2.91). This observation indicates that there is much less chloroplast genetic variation among sympatric species in northern Vietnam than there is nuclear genetic variation. This observation is consistent with regional introgression and loss of chloroplast diversity as a result of chloroplast capture during hybridization between *Colocasia* species in Northern Vietnam.

This interpretation is also consistent with previous reports which indicate hybridization involving *C. esculenta*. Okada & Hambali (1989) reported an experimental cross between *C. esculenta* and *C. gigantea*. Yoshino (1994) reported a diploid *C. esculenta* plant sample having RFLP results from chloroplast DNA similar to an *Alocasia*

*macrorrhizos* plant sample; both plants were growing in sympatry at low altitudes in Nepal. The taro plant was found to be sterile, presumably reflecting genomic incompatibility between the two species, since the ancestors of these two species diverged more than 40 Ma (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012a). Intergeneric hybrids subsequently produced by Yoshino *et al.* (1998) also suggest the possibility of interspecific hybridization in *Colocasia*. The extent of reproductive compatibility among the putative *Colocasia* hybrid plants in Northern Vietnam reported in this study has not yet been investigated. Of particular interest would be in determining what pollinators might be important in formation of natural interspecific hybrids. Drosophilid flies in the genus *Colocasiomyia* are known pollinators of aroid plants, including *Alocasia* and *Colocasia* (Sultana *et al.* 2006). Though generally considered to be host-specific, some species of these flies are known to pollinate multiple host species (Miyake & Yafuso 2005; Sultana *et al.* 2006; Toda & Lakim 2011), which could facilitate interspecific hybridization.

**Table 4. Values and ratios of Phylogenetic Diversity (PD) between *Colocasia* species versus *C. esculenta* collected from northern Vietnam. All PD calculations for both chloroplast and nuclear DNA loci are based upon phylogeny data for the accessions represented in Figure 4b.**

DNA	* <i>Colocasia</i> species	** <i>C. esculenta</i>	Ratio
Chloroplast	0.000458	0.00542	0.08
Nuclear	0.1149	0.0395	2.91

\**Colocasia* accessions having chloroplast haplotypes TYPE11 and TYPE12.

\*\**C. esculenta* accessions having chloroplast haplotypes TYPE1, TYPE4, TYPE11 and TYPE12.

The evidence of hybridization between *C. esculenta* and other aroid species leads to the speculation that triploids in the H super-clade have arisen through interspecific hybridizations, in which unreduced gametes were most likely contributed by *C. esculenta* as a maternal parent. Presence of ambiguous codons in some of the nuclear sequences reported in the present study might be indicative of hybridization (e.g.

Wagstaff *et al.* 2010). For example, at position 706 in the PhyC alignment, ‘R’ was observed in the sequence chromatograms, indicating presence of both ‘A’ and ‘G’ nucleotides at this nucleotide position for all triploids in the H super-clade. In all other accessions including the out-groups, ‘G’ was observed at this position. An allele with ‘G’ at this position codes for Glycine, but an allele with ‘A’ at this position codes for Glutamic Acid in the translated Phytochrome C protein. The ‘A’ allele at this position might have been contributed by yet an unknown species (not included in our sample set) to which taro hybridized to produce triploids. Examples of hybrid triploids where the unreduced gametes have been provided by *C. esculenta* acting as a maternal parent are documented by Okada & Hambali (1989) and Yoshino *et al.* (2000). Yoshino (1994) also found a triploid taro for which the unreduced gamete was supposedly contributed by *Alocasia macrorrhizos*, raising the possibility that *C. esculenta* can act as both a maternal as well as paternal donor of unreduced gametes. In our analysis, the taro accession CESMM12 from Myanmar is the only example of *C. esculenta* not grouping within any of the three super-clades of taro. It is possible that this accession might also be a hybrid, having *C. esculenta* as the paternal parent.

Cold stress has been shown to enhance the chances of diploid gamete production in *Arabidopsis* (De Storme *et al.* 2012). The greater prevalence of triploid taros at higher altitudes (Kuruvilla & Singh 1981; Zhang & Zhang 1990) might also indicate that some triploid taros have physiologies better suited for cold tolerance. Triploids in the IP super-clade seem to have originated independent of triploids in the H super-clade, and may involve auto- or allopolyploidy. Autopolyploidy in taro has been well documented (e.g. Bai *et al.* 1971; Tanimoto & Matsumoto 1986; Lebot & Aradhya 1991; Isshiki *et al.* 1995, 1999), primarily due to occasional non-reduced gamete formation.

### **Domestication history**

The most common chloroplast haplotype (TYPE1) is cosmopolitan in its distribution as a cultivated lineage across continents and islands. The widespread occurrence of this haplotype is certainly the result of human dispersal of cultivars during the Holocene. We speculate that domestication occurred in South to Southeast Asia (most likely in north-eastern to eastern parts of India, also suggested by Fuller 2007) for warm-adapted cultivars in the IP super-clade, and in the eastern Himalayan region (most likely in Southeast Asia to southern China) for cool-adapted triploid cultivars in the H super-



clade. The grouping of all cultivars and some wild taros from New Guinea in TYPE1 is inconsistent with the hypothesis of New Guinea being an independent centre of primary domestication of taro. However, secondary domestication might have taken place in New Guinea, as a result of breeding among local wild and exotic cultivated taros. The suggested cultivation of taro at Kuk, New Guinea 9000 – 10000 years ago might reflect primitive ‘cultivation’ but not domestication (Neumann 2003), or a use of wild taros similar to that suggested for the Solomon’s Islands about 28000 years ago (Loy *et al.* 1992). Taro starch residues from Kuk highlands belonging to above time period could not be distinguished into cultivated or wild forms (Fullagar *et al.* 2006). Fullagar *et al.* (2006) argue that during 6950 to 6440 years before present (BP), taro became integrated into the New Guinean cultivation system. This remains a possibility, but earlier use of New Guinean wild taros or local domesticates might have ceased if more elite and successful cultivars were introduced from Asia before or after the Austronesian expansion, 4000-3000 years ago (Spriggs 2011). The proposed *Colocasian* revolution during phase 4 of Kuk highlands, after 1200 years BP (Bayliss-Smith & Golson 1992) might actually have followed the introduction of Asian cultivars. This argument arises from the fact that not a single cultivar from lowland or highland New Guinea appears outside of the widely distributed haplotype (TYPE1) in our dataset. Indigenous New Guinean cultivars with the SEAA chloroplast genome might still exist, but might be rare. The presence in New Guinea of wild taros having TYPE1 haplotype is most easily interpreted as (i) a result of chloroplast capture by local wild taro populations (which otherwise have TYPE2 haplotype of the SEAA super-clade), (ii) naturalization of TYPE1 cultivars, with or without reversion to a wildtype phenotype, or (iii) deliberate introduction of TYPE1 wildtype taros, perhaps as pig fodder or as a food plant. Apparently wildtype taros from Okinawa island in Japan all displayed the TYPE1 haplotype, and are likely to have been introduced for use as a pig fodder or food plant. Historically, the use of wild taros as a pig fodder has been promoted in Vietnam, and is still a common practice (Matsuda & Nawata 2002b). Use of wild taros in Okinawa and the Philippines as a fodder and a famine food has also been documented previously (Matthews 1991; Matthews *et al.* 2012).

## Supplementary information

**Note: Supplementary Table 1 (Information about the individual Accessions used in this study) and Supplementary Table 2 (GenBank accession numbers of the individual sequences generated during this study) are not suitable for the MS Word file format, and are provided in the soft copy of the thesis.**

**Supplementary Table 3. Number and percentage of the missing sites for 13 accessions manually assigned to their respective haplotypes. Number of missing sites is based on a concatenated, 2185 nucleotides long alignment. Average percentage of the missing data is 12.58, and standard deviation is 13.11 for all 13 accessions taken together.**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Accession I.D.</b>	<b>Type assigned</b>	<b>No. of missing sites</b>	<b>Percent of missing sites</b>
1	CESEI03	TYPE1	289	13.23
2	CESHW01	TYPE1	29	1.33
3	CESIN09	TYPE1	853	39.04
4	CESMM11	TYPE1	593	27.14
5	CESPG04	TYPE1	6	0.27
6	CESPG18	TYPE1	139	6.36
7	CSPFJ05	TYPE1	32	1.46
8	CESAU06	TYPE2	62	2.84
9	CESAU09	TYPE2	62	2.84
10	CESAU21	TYPE2	62	2.84
11	CESJP07	TYPE5	593	27.14
12	CESTH02	TYPE10	260	11.90
13	CESMM06	TYPE14	593	27.14

**Supplementary Table 4. Bayesian estimates of divergence times in the three taro super-clades inferred from the concatenated alignment of six chloroplast DNA loci. Age estimates for root:  $10.84 \pm 1$  Ma are shown in Figure 3; age estimates for root:  $5.00 \pm 0.5$  and root:  $17.00 \pm 1$  Ma show estimates towards lower and upper 95% highest posterior distribution (HPD) estimates in Nauheimer *et al.* (2012b). Node numbers are shown in Figure 3.**

Node	Root: $5.00 \pm 0.5$ Ma		Root: $10.84 \pm 1$ Ma		Root: $17.00 \pm 1$ Ma	
	Age	95% HPD	Age	95% HPD	Age	95% HPD
1	4.90	3.91 – 5.86	10.65	6.65 – 12.60	16.90	14.95 – 18.90
2	3.39	1.64 – 5.06	7.40	3.78 – 11.40	11.72	6.24 – 17.05
3	4.06	2.65 – 5.44	8.88	5.78 – 11.70	13.95	9.63 – 17.92
4	3.31	1.9 – 4.68	7.15	4.14 – 10.10	11.40	6.95 – 15.72
5	0.45	0.02 – 1.02	0.80	0.05 – 2.20	1.15	0.11 – 3.55
6	1.77	0.73 – 2.95	3.66	5.53 – 6.33	6.09	2.45 – 9.80
7	0.60	0.10 – 1.29	1.15	0.17 – 2.80	2.09	0.27 – 4.44
8	1.08	0.37 – 1.88	2.20	0.85 – 4.10	3.73	1.42 – 6.60
9	0.48	0.12 – 0.96	0.97	0.23 – 2.10	1.67	0.35 – 3.25
10	0.32	0.04 – 0.68	0.62	0.10 – 1.45	1.10	0.13 – 2.28
11	0.20	0 – 0.47	0.35	0 – 1.30	0.68	0 – 1.60
12	1.37	0.49 – 2.46	2.80	0.97 – 5.18	4.65	1.70 – 8.05
13	0.53	0.10 – 1.03	1.20	0.22 – 2.23	1.75	0.04 – 3.50
14	0.16	0 – 0.40	0.51	0.08 – 1.25	0.54	0 – 1.29
15	0.26	0 – 0.59	0.28	0 – 0.85	0.90	0.10 – 1.95
16	0.86	0.20 – 1.72	1.74	0.37 – 3.68	3.0	0.67 – 5.80
17	1.81	0.80 – 2.92	3.80	1.77 – 6.20	6.23	2.90 – 9.90
18	0.46	0.08 – 0.94	0.88	0.17 – 2.40	1.57	0.29 – 3.25
19	0.24	0 – 0.57	0.43	0 – 1.24	0.82	0 – 1.96
20	1.14	0.44 – 1.95	2.35	0.97 – 4.17	3.90	1.60 – 6.40
21	0.58	0.13 – 1.15	1.18	0.25 – 2.51	2.05	0.46 – 3.90
22	0.87	0.27 – 1.52	1.75	0.63 – 3.29	2.95	1.03 – 5.10
23	0.34	0 – 0.77	0.59	0.02 – 1.68	1.11	0.03 – 2.62
24	0.40	0.05 – 0.86	0.75	0.13 – 1.85	1.38	0.21 – 2.95
25	0.16	0 – 0.41	0.27	0 – 0.87	0.53	0 – 1.36

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# CHAPTER 5

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## Conclusions and future outlook

## **Important conclusions of the study and future work directions**

This study was aimed at (i) developing suitable molecular markers for investigating phylogenetic and phylogeographic history of taro and closely related species, and (ii) investigating the evolutionary relationships of a range of wild and cultivated taros, collected from across the natural and cultivated geographic range of the species. These aims have been met, and in so doing the work undertaken has provided a body of new information that is significant in a number of respects.

For the sequencing of taro chloroplast genomes, two morphotypes (var. RR and var. GP) were selected because of their distinct phenotypes and their status as historically documented varieties in New Zealand (Matthews 1985). Subsequent chloroplast DNA analyses assigned these two morphotypes to two of the three major super-clades within taro. The two morphotypes have been sampled from outside of the natural geographical range of taro. These are thought to have been introduced to New Zealand and Africa from Asia. Some present day taro cultivars in Africa are either morphologically similar to var. RR or to var. GP morphotypes (Ilaria Grimaldi; personal communication).

## **Mutational dynamics**

The development of chloroplast markers for taro necessitated inquiry into the mutational dynamics of aroid chloroplast genomes. The findings from this study corroborate earlier observations reported for other plant groups concerning expansion and contraction of single copy – inverted repeat boundaries and the translocation of genes across these boundaries. The study also provided some new insights into the overall mutational dynamics of aroid chloroplast genomes.

The two sequenced taro chloroplast genomes differed from each other in exhibiting numerous point mutations and insertion – deletion mutations (indels). These point mutations and indels were more densely clustered at the junctions of the small single copy region (SSC) and inverted repeat-b (IRb).

In general, IR and SSC boundaries are very plastic in nature and known to frequently expand or contract in angiosperms (Wang *et al.* 2008; Whitlock *et al.* 2010) and gymnosperms (Lin *et al.* 2012). The polymorphic SSC – IRa boundary (also called J<sub>SA</sub> to represent the junction of small single copy and inverted repeat-a; Lockhart *et al.*

2001) contains a variable length gene, *yeast cadmium factor 1* (*ycf1*). This gene has been shown important in conferring tolerance in plants against salt and metal ion stresses (Li *et al.* 1997; Song *et al.* 2004; Koh *et al.* 2006). It is located inside the inverted repeats in Lemnoidea chloroplast genomes, but is transferred to the SSC region in taro. Since the two large inverted repeats (IRa and IRb) are slow evolving regions in comparison to the SSC region, *ycf1* when transferred into the inverted repeat regions is expected to display less polymorphism than in the SSC region. This has also been found in ferns where the *psbA – trnH* region has been translocated from the LSC into the IR (Li *et al.* 2011). The evolutionary significance of such translocations is unclear. In the case of taro, while *ycf1* is located at one end of the SSC region (SSC – IRa boundary), the *NADH dehydrogenase F* (*ndhF*) gene is located at the other (IRb – SSC boundary). Both genes have been thought to confer tolerance to cold stress in plants (Kupsch *et al.* 2012). It is interesting to speculate whether or not the genomic location and rapid evolution has any adaptive significance. Analyses of the boundary region dynamics in other aroid taxa might be informative in this respect. With more chloroplast genomes being currently sequenced from representative aroid taxa at the Missouri Botanical Garden (Claudia Henriquez; personal communication), further data on the locations of these genes are expected in the near future. In addition, comparisons of the *ycf1* and *ndhF* gene sequences in taro samples from different geographic regions might also reveal the importance of distinct haplotypes in relation to abiotic conditions and stresses in such geographic regions.

A correlation between point mutation density and indel location points has previously been demonstrated in eukaryotic and prokaryotic nuclear genomes (Tian *et al.* 2008; Zhu *et al.* 2009). A further association between these mutational events and oligonucleotide was also more recently demonstrated in prokaryotic and eukaryotic nuclear genomes (McDonald *et al.* 2011). The present study demonstrated and visualised for the first time the extent of such correlations in chloroplast genomes (Chapter 2; Ahmed *et al.* 2012). Since our findings were published, a subsequent study also demonstrated a similar correlation in gymnosperm chloroplast genomes (Yi *et al.* 2013). If such correlations are a very general phenomenon in plant chloroplast genomes, then there are significant theoretical and practical implications. These correlations are unexpected under the *independently and identically distributed* (i.i.d.) assumption of molecular evolution, a basic assumption for most model-based methods of phylogenetic

analyses. Such models include the General Time-Reversible (GTR; Tavaré 1986) family of models. Interestingly, the translocation of genes between the inverted repeat region and single copy regions is also likely to represent another significant departure from model based assumptions of phylogenetic analysis. A standard assumption for such analyses is that the sequences compared in a phylogenetic analysis are under the same evolutionary pressures. If the mutational pressure on sequence evolution differs between the SSC and IR regions then this could amount to a type of asymmetric covariation process currently not modelled in phylogenetic analyses (Lockhart & Steel 2005; Gruenheit *et al.* 2008).

### **Novel chloroplast DNA markers for taro and related species**

A genome-wide correlation between the locations of oligonucleotide repeats and point mutations also suggests that knowledge of the distribution of oligonucleotide repeats will be informative for designing molecular markers appropriate for phylogenetic and phylogeographic studies (Chapter 2; Ahmed *et al.* 2012). This hypothesis was evaluated and confirmed in the case of taro and closely related taxa (Chapter 3; Ahmed *et al.* 2013). This study shows that loci with a high density of oligonucleotide repeats identified marker regions most suitable for comparing very closely related taxa, while regions with a lower repeat density identified markers for more distantly related taxa. These findings are highly encouraging for the development of future markers targeted at different levels of required phylogenetic resolution in other plant taxa also. In the past, it has been more common to simply use one locus at multiple phylogenetic levels. For example, the chloroplast *trnL – trnF* region has been used to study relationships within species (Wang *et al.* 2011), within a genus (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012a), among close genera (Renner & Zhang 2004), within a family (Cabrera *et al.* 2008), among families (Rothwell *et al.* 2004), and even at the basal angiosperm levels (Borsch *et al.* 2003). The findings from the present study offer an alternative approach for identifying loci, suitable to the kind of study being undertaken.

### **Distinct chloroplast DNA super-clades and domestication of taro**

Genus *Colocasia* has been reported to be polyphyletic, on the basis of chloroplast as well as nuclear DNA analyses (Nauheimer *et al.* 2012a). However our chloroplast DNA analyses (Chapter 3; Ahmed *et al.* 2013) indicated monophyly for *Colocasia* with an



exception of *C. gigantea*. New species in this genus have been described in recent years and remain genetically uncharacterised. A comprehensive investigation representing as many species as possible is needed to clarify the monophyly or polyphyly of *Colocasia*. *Colocasia gigantea* has been reported as an out-group to genus *Colocasia* in multiple studies (Matthews 1990; Yoshino 1994; Li & Boyce 2010; Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b; Ahmed *et al.* 2013). Consequently, its previous classification as member of a monotypic genus, *Leucocasia gigantea* (Li & Boyce 2010; Nauheimer *et al.* 2012b) seems more appropriate.

This is the first study to report the existence of three main super-clades in taro, based upon chloroplast DNA analyses. The initial field sampling of the taro accessions used in this study did not aim to include or exclude any of these super-clades, as these super-clades were previously unknown. Figure 2(a) in Chapter 3 and Figure 2 in Chapter 4 represent contrasting associations of the taro super-clades with the out-groups, with the former figure showing the resolution achieved with a lesser number of taro samples (10) and more loci (30), while the latter figure showing the resolution with more taro samples (170) and fewer loci (6). Figure 2(a) in Chapter 3 suggests that the SEAA super-clade might be close to the out-group taxa, but figure 2 in Chapter 4 suggests that the IP super-clade is close to the out-groups. For logistical reasons, only six loci were selected for the wider comparisons in taro (Chapter 4). The three super-clades have very short internal branches (Figure 1, Chapter 4); their current relationships might need to be reconsidered with further targeted sampling from each of the three super-clades, and complementing our dataset with more loci from chloroplast DNA. Figure 2(a) in Chapter 3 also shows that the two wild taro accessions from Australia (CESAU10 and CESAU18) are distinct from each other, whereas these share haplotype TYPE3 in subsequent analyses (Table 3, Chapter 4). In investigating this anomaly, it was revealed that sequences for both accessions were available at 10 of the 30 loci, for either one or the other accession at 16 loci, while sequences were unavailable at the remaining four loci for both accessions in data used to generate Figure 2(a) in Chapter 3. At the 10 loci for which sequences were available for both accessions, a careful investigation of the sequence chromatograms did not reveal any sequence polymorphism between the two accessions. Hence the two accessions appear distinct (Figure 2a, Chapter 3) because of comparisons at majority of alternate loci. In fact, both have the same haplotype, TYPE3, as shown in Table 3 in Chapter 4.

Perhaps the most significant contribution in understanding the history of this crop is the evidence suggesting a primary domestication in mainland Asia and not in New Guinea. The prevailing hypothesis of taro domestication in New Guinea is mainly supported by the archaeological studies and field observations of wild taros in New Guinea, as discussed in Chapter 4. Wild and cultivated taros from New Guinea used in this study were sampled from both, the archaeologically important highlands around Kuk, as well as from lowlands. All cultivated samples from New Guinea belonged to the most widely distributed haplotype TYPE1, which mainly includes cultivars. Thus New Guinean cultivars have affinities with Asian cultivars, which probably reached the upland societies of New Guinea and most of the tropical and subtropical regions of the world as a result of human mediated dispersal in the Holocene time period. Domestication, however, occurred separately for taros in the IP and H super-clades. As far as the ploidy is known for cultivars in the H super-clade, these are all triploids (independent from the triploid cultivars in the IP super-clade). Further targeted field exploration is required to identify the wild diploid progenitors of the H super-clade triploids and the natural geographic range of each of the three super-clades.

Molecular indications of interspecific hybridization, involving *C. esculenta*, *C. lihengiae*, *C. menglaensis*, *C. yunnanensis* (Chapter 4), are the first such observations for *Colocasia* in northern Vietnam. With the recent report of *C. lihengiae* in South Asia (Gogoi & Borah 2013), it is possible that hybridization has taken place in an extended region along the Himalayas, from India to China. Further wild taro populations as well as new *Colocasia* species may exist in isolated valleys of the eastern and western Himalayan foothills. This vast region, spanning from southern China to South Asia, Southeast Asia and northern Pakistan, requires further exploration in order to define the natural geographic range of *Colocasia*.

Our findings have implications for future taro breeding programs. In the past, taro from Thailand (CESTH01 accession in our study) was used to incorporate resistance to the fungus *Phytophthora colocasiae* in the Pacific taro germplasm. This multi-year breeding program (Okpul *et al.* 1996; Singh & Okpul 2000) attained limited success due to the difficulty of removing acidity and other undesirable wild characteristics in the offspring generations (Singh *et al.* 2010). Our results show that the wild progenitor used in that breeding program (CESTH01) belongs to SEAA super-clade, while the Pacific

cultivars are evidently derived from the IP super-clade. Resistance to *P. colocasiae* has been reported in many existing Indian taro cultivars (Misra *et al.* 2008 for a review). It is likely that those cultivars belong to the IP super-clade, and their resistance may have been derived from the wild taro populations of the IP super-clade present in South Asia. Looking for resistance in taros belonging to the IP super-clade and using these in the future breeding programs might significantly increase the success of introducing fungal resistance into the Pacific taro cultivars.

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# APPENDIX

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We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

**Name of Candidate:** Ibrar Ahmed

**Name/Title of Principal Supervisor:** Prof. Peter J. Lockhart

**Name of Published Research Output and full reference:**

Ibrar Ahmed, Patrick J. Biggs, Peter J. Matthews, Lesley J. Collins, Michael D. Hendy, Peter J. Lockhart (2012). Mutational Dynamics of Aroid Chloroplast Genomes. *Genome Biology and Evolution* 4(12): 1316-1323.

**In which Chapter is the Published Work:** Chapter 2

Please indicate either:

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and / or
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Initial planning of the work with input from supervisors, chloroplast DNA extraction and preparation for the Illumina run, NGS data analyses including mapping of the short reads and de novo assembly of the two chloroplast genomes with annotations, pair-wise and multiple sequence alignments, indel and SNP counts and Reputer run, input files for the bioinformatic analysis, statistical analysis, GenBank submission of the sequences, co-development of paper concept, writing of manuscript with input from supervisors and co-authors, submission of documents and author for correspondence with the journal.

**Ibrar Ahmed**

Digitally signed by Ibrar Ahmed  
DN: cn=Ibrar Ahmed, o=Massey University,  
ou=Institute of Fundamental Sciences,  
email=I.Ahmed@massey.ac.nz, c=NZ  
Date: 2013.08.30 09:27:46 +12'00'

Candidate's Signature

**30-08-13**

Date

**Peter Lockhart**

Digitally signed by Peter Lockhart  
DN: cn=Peter Lockhart, o=Massey University,  
ou=College of Sciences,  
email=p.j.lockhart@massey.ac.nz, c=NZ  
Date: 2013.09.16 13:46:23 +12'00'

Principal Supervisor's signature

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**Name of Candidate:** Ibrar Ahmed

**Name/Title of Principal Supervisor:** Prof. Peter J. Lockhart

**Name of Published Research Output and full reference:**

Ibrar Ahmed, Peter J. Matthews, Patrick J. Biggs, Muhammad Naeem, Patricia A. McLenachan, Peter J. Lockhart (2013). Identification of chloroplast genome loci suitable for high-resolution phylogeographic studies of *Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott (Araceae) and closely related taxa. *Molecular Ecology Resources* 13: 927-937.

**In which Chapter is the Published Work:** Chapter 3

Please indicate either:

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and / or
- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:

Planning and designing the study with input from supervisors, field work in New Zealand and Pakistan for plant sampling, designing primer pairs for the polymorphic, chloroplast genome loci, DNA extractions, PCRs and sequencing, phylogenetic analyses, input files for the bioinformatic analysis, GenBank submission of the sequences, co-development of paper concept, writing of manuscript with input from supervisors and co-authors, submission of documents and author for correspondence with the journal.

**Ibrar Ahmed**

Digitally signed by Ibrar Ahmed  
DN: cn=Ibrar Ahmed, o=Massey University,  
ou=Institute of Fundamental Sciences,  
email=I.Ahmed@massey.ac.nz, c=NZ  
Date: 2013.08.30 09:28:38 +1200

Candidate's Signature

**30-08-2013**

Date

**Peter Lockhart**

Digitally signed by Peter Lockhart  
DN: cn=Peter Lockhart, o=Massey University,  
ou=College of Sciences,  
email=p.j.lockhart@massey.ac.nz, c=NZ  
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