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IDENTIFICATION OF FUSARIUM OXYSPORUM f. sp OPUNTIARUM ON NEW HOSTS OF THE CACTACEAE AND EUPHORBIACEAE FAMILIES

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1 **IDENTIFICATION OF *FUSARIUM OXYSPORUM* F. SP. *OPUNTIARUM***
2 **ON NEW HOSTS OF THE CACTACEAE AND EUPHORBIACEAE**
3 **FAMILIES**

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8
9 Running title: *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* on succulent plants

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26 **SUMMARY**

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28 *Fusarium oxysporum* has recently been detected in commercial nurseries in the Ligurian
29 region (northern Italy) on new succulent plants belonging to the Cactaceae family
30 (*Astrophytum myriostigma*, *Cereus marginatus* var. *crispata*, *C. peruvianus monstruosus* and
31 *C. peruvianus florida*) and to the Euphorbiaceae family (*Euphorbia mammillaris*). The
32 pathogen has been identified, for all the new hosts, from morphological characteristics
33 observed *in vitro*. The identifications have been confirmed by means of ITS (Internal
34 Transcribed Spacer) analysis and/or by Translation Elongation Factor 1 α (TEF) analysis. The
35 aim of this work was to identify the *forma specialis* of the *F. oxysporum* isolates obtained
36 from new succulent plants. This has been investigated by means of phylogenetic analysis,
37 based on the Translation Elongation Factor 1 α gene and intergenic spacer (IGS), carried out
38 on single-spore isolates, together with pathogenicity assays. The results of this research led to
39 include the new isolates from succulent plants in the *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum*. This
40 *forma specialis* has been identified for the first time on a new host (*Euphorbia mammillaris*)
41 not belonging to the Cactaceae family.

42 *Key words:* ornamentals, succulent plants, soil-borne pathogens, Fusarium wilt.

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51 INTRODUCTION

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53 The ornamental industry is economically important throughout the world and it also
54 represents an interesting growth opportunity for developing countries. In industrialized
55 countries, ornamental plants are purchased throughout the year by a significant portion of the
56 population, and moving the production of ornamental plants to developing countries would
57 provide a remarkable source of income: in the USA, the wholesale value of floriculture crops
58 was more than 4 billion dollars in 2014 (USDA, 2015); in Canada, the import and export
59 value of ornamental plant products was about 418 and 312 million dollars, respectively, in
60 2013 (Statistical Overview of the Canadian Ornamental Industry, 2013); in Europe, the
61 importing of live plants and floriculture products reached more than 1,500 million Euros in
62 2014 (European Commission, Agriculture and rural development, 2015).

63 The ornamental industry in Italy is important in the agricultural sector because of its
64 favourable climatic conditions and specific economic situations that positively influence the
65 economic returns, with a production of about 2,670 million Euros in 2011 (Schimmenti *et al.*,
66 2013). The value of the production of plants and flowers in the European Union was 21
67 billion Euros in 2013. Italy ranks second after the Netherlands and before Germany, with a
68 share of 13.7% of the total value (Vanderelst and Zolichova, 2014). In 2013, the production
69 of ornamental and flowering plants represented 5.4% of the total production in the
70 agricultural sector in Italy (INEA, 2014). In 2010, a total of 4,271 farms producing
71 ornamental and flowering plants were located in the Ligurian region, over an area of about
72 2,672 hectares (ISTAT, 2010). Various different new genera and species are exploited in this
73 region, because of their commercial importance. A particular fragment of the ornamental
74 industry is that of succulent plants, which currently show a good market potential.

75 The diversity of the crops and varieties, the effect of globalisation and of the intensive
76 productions all lead to a multiplication of the number of potential pests and diseases that are
77 able to infect new hosts. More than 120 different *formae speciales* of *F. oxysporum* have
78 been described (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1981; O'Donnell and Cigelnik, 1999; Baayen *et*
79 *al.*, 2000; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2009; Leslie, 2012). The detection and identification of *formae*
80 *speciales*, which are classically based on pathogenicity assays (Recorbet *et al.*, 2003), are at
81 present supported by molecular diagnostic tools (Lievens *et al.*, 2012). Several markers have
82 been developed, on the basis of DNA sequences, in order to identify different *formae*
83 *speciales* (Baayen *et al.*, 2000; Groenewald *et al.*, 2006). Genomic regions, such as the
84 intergenic spacer region (IGS) or the Elongation factor (TEF), are useful but not enough for a
85 correct identification (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2009).

86 Over the last few years, Fusarium rot or wilt symptoms have appeared on five new
87 succulent hosts grown as potted plants in commercial nurseries located in the Imperia
88 province (Liguria region, northern Italy). The new hosts were succulent plants belonging to
89 the Cactaceae family, that is, *Astrophytum myriostigma* (Garibaldi *et al.*, 2015b), *Cereus*
90 *peruvianus monstruosus* (Garibaldi *et al.*, 2011), *C. peruvianus florida* (Garibaldi *et al.*,
91 2015a) and *C. marginatus* var. *crinata* (Garibaldi *et al.*, 2014) as well as to the
92 Euphorbiaceae family, that is, *Euphorbia mammillaris* (Garibaldi *et al.*, 2015c). *Fusarium*
93 *oxysporum* has been isolated and identified as the causal agent of the diseases on all the host
94 plants by means of morphological and molecular methods.

95 The aim of this work was to investigate the *forma specialis* of the new isolates of *F.*
96 *oxysporum* obtained from succulent plants.

97

98 MATERIALS AND METHODS

99

100 **Fungal isolates.** The *F. oxysporum* isolates were obtained from diseased plants, placing
101 on Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA) and/or Komada Fusarium selective medium (Komada, 1975)
102 small pieces taken from the margin of affected tissues. To obtain pure isolates, colonies were
103 subcultured on Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA). Two *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* strains
104 coming from different collections were used as reference isolates. To obtain the single-spore
105 isolates used in this work (Table 1), a fungal suspension of each isolate was prepared in
106 Potato Dextrose Broth (PDB), shaking cultures (90 r.p.m.) at 25°C for 10 days. Then, each
107 suspension was diluted to 1×10^{-8} CFU/ml. A drop from more diluted concentrations was
108 subcultured on Komada selective medium. Single germinated microconidia were selected
109 using an optical microscope.

110 **Pathogenicity essays.** The isolates listed in table 2 were artificially inoculated on
111 *Schlumbergera truncata* plants, which are notoriously susceptible to *F. oxysporum* f. sp.
112 *opuntiarum* (Lops *et al.*, 2013). The plants were inoculated by wounding the stems (3
113 lesions/plant) with a sterilized needle contaminated with spores and mycelium taken from
114 pure PDA cultures of the isolates (Talgø and Stensvand, 2013). Control plants were wounded
115 with sterilized needles without any inoculum. All the plants were maintained under
116 greenhouse conditions, at temperatures ranging from 20 to 35°C and at RH ranging from 40
117 to 65%.

118 Furthermore, two *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* reference isolates (Table 3) were
119 inoculated on each new host and on *S. truncata* for comparison purposes. Three plants were
120 inoculated for each isolate (3 wounds/plant), according to the method described by Talgø and
121 Stensvand, 2013. The control plants were wounded with sterilized needles without any
122 inoculum. All the plants were kept in a greenhouse, at the same environmental conditions
123 described above.

124 After the first symptoms of rot appeared around the needles on the inoculated plants, the
125 severity of *Fusarium* rot was evaluated every 4-7 days by measuring the size of the rotted
126 area and by removing the dead plants. The presence of *Fusarium* symptoms was assessed
127 using a 0 to 100 scale, where 0 indicates the absence of rot; 25: rot diameter of 0 to 5 mm; 50:
128 rot diameter of 5 to 10 mm; 75: rot diameter of 10 to 20 mm; 100: rot diameter of more than
129 20 mm. The disease index was then calculated using the following formula:
130 $(25n_1+50n_2+75n_3+100n_4)/(n_0+n_1+n_2+n_3+n_4)$, where n_0 is the number of rotting areas that
131 scored 0; n_1 is the number of rotting areas that scored 25; n_4 is the number of rotting areas
132 that scored 100. Finally, each tested species was classified in 5 susceptibility classes: R =
133 Resistant (disease index 0–5); PR = Partially Resistant (disease index 6–20); AS = Averagely
134 Susceptible (disease index 21–50); S = Susceptible (disease index 51–75); HS = Highly
135 Susceptible (disease index 76–100) (Tables 2 and 3).

136 **DNA extraction.** DNA extraction was carried out using an E.Z.N.A. Fungal DNA Mini
137 Kit (Omega Bio-Tek), according to the manufacturer's instructions. Fresh mycelium was
138 obtained for each isolate listed in table 1 in 50ml of a liquid PDB culture incubated at 25°C.
139 The cultures were filtered after 6 days and 50µg of mycelium was transferred to a 2 ml tube
140 containing 400 µL of lysis buffer and two tungsten beads (Qiagen Stainless Steel Beads, 5
141 mm). Homogenization was performed using Qiagen TissueLyser for 4 min with 30
142 repetitions per minute, and the obtained lysate was used for DNA extraction. The DNA
143 concentration was measured using a NanoDrop spectrophotometer, and the extracted DNA
144 was stored at -20°C until further use.

145 **PCR amplification.** *Elongation factor 1-α (EF1-α)* and intergenic spacer (IGS) regions
146 were used for the phylogenetic analysis. *EF-1α* was amplified with the EF1/EF2 primers
147 (Table 4) using a T100 Thermal cycler (Biorad) in a 20 µL reaction mixture containing: 10 ng
148 of gDNA, 1 µL of 10 µM stock (final concentration 0.5 µM) of each primer, 1 unit of Taq

149 DNA polymerase (Qiagen), 2 μ L of PCR buffer 10 \times , 1 μ L of dNTPs stock (final
150 concentration 0.25 mM) and 0.8 μ L of MgCl₂ (final concentration 1 mM). Amplification was
151 carried out with an initial denaturing step at 94°C for 5 min, followed by 35 denaturation
152 cycles at 94°C for 1 min, annealing at 58°C for 1 min, extension at 72°C for 1 min and final
153 extension at 72°C for 7 min. For the IGS amplification, a PCR reaction was performed in a
154 50 μ L reaction mixture containing: 30 ng of gDNA, 5 μ L of 10 μ M stock (final concentration
155 1 μ M) of primers CNL12 and CNS1 (Table 5), 3 units of Taq DNA polymerase (Qiagen), 5
156 μ L of PCR buffer 10 \times , 5 μ L of dNTPs stock (final concentration 0.25 mM) and 10 μ L of 5X
157 Q solution to amplify the G-C rich regions. A negative control (no template DNA) was
158 included in all the experiments. Amplifications were checked by electrophoresis on 1%
159 agarose gel (Agarose D-1 LOW EEO, Eppendorf). After purification with a QIAquick PCR
160 purification kit (Qiagen), the PCR products were measured using a NanoDrop
161 spectrophotometer and were then sent to Macrogen for sequencing
162 (<http://www.macrogen.com/eng/>). *EF-1 α* was sequenced in both directions, while the two
163 internal primers CNS and CRU were also used for the IGS region. The sequences were
164 deposited at GenBank and the accession numbers are listed in table 5.

165 **Alignment and phylogenetic analysis.** Similarity searches (BLASTN, default
166 parameters) were performed for all the obtained sequences before a phylogenetic analysis
167 was performed. The sequences were then considered for CLUSTALW multiple sequence
168 alignments using MEGA6 software set to the default parameters. The sequences were
169 corrected manually for each alignment in order to delete any external trimmer regions and
170 discard any incomplete sequences. Phylogenetic trees were constructed in MEGA6 (Tamura
171 et al. 2013) using the Neighbor joining method with 1,000 bootstrap repeats and the pairwise
172 deletion option. The evolutionary distances were computed using the Tajima-Nei method,
173 and are in the units of the number of base substitutions per site. Sequences derived from

174 different *F. oxysporum formae speciales* obtained from the GenBank database were included
175 in each analysis.

176

177 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

178

179 **Fungal isolates.** The single-spore isolates selected for this work are listed in table 1.

180 **Pathogenicity essays.** After the artificial inoculation on *Schlumbergera truncata*, all the
181 isolates listed in table 2 developed necrosis around the wounds, only on the inoculated stems.
182 The necrosis then became extended as far as the stems that rotted, whereas the controls
183 remained healthy. *F. oxysporum* was consistently re-isolated from symptomatic plants for all
184 the new hosts. *S. truncata* showed high susceptibility to all the tested isolates, including the
185 *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* reference isolates (Table 2).

186 Furthermore, all the artificially inoculated succulent hosts were also susceptible to various
187 degrees to the *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* isolates, as reported in table 3.

188 **Molecular phylogenetic analysis of the *EF-1 α* region.** Amplification of the *EF-1 α* gene
189 resulted in 750bp fragments of DNA. After multi-alignment with other *formae speciales*
190 present in Genbank, the obtained sequences were used for the phylogenetic analyses. The
191 results of the analyses showed that the isolates obtained from *Astrophytum myriostigma*,
192 *Cereus peruvianus monstrosus*, *C. peruvianus florida*, *C. marginatus* var. *cristata* and
193 *Euphorbia mammillaris* were included in *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum*, with a 66 bootstrap
194 value (Fig. 1). Two different reference strains were used in this cluster: *F. oxysporum* f. sp.
195 *opuntiarum* CBS 743.79 and a strain isolated from barrel cactus (*Echinocactus grusonii*) in
196 Italy (Polizzi and Vitale, 2004). The sequences used for the phylogenetic analysis were
197 deposited at Genbank (Table 5).

198 **Molecular phylogenetic analysis of the IGS region.** As observed for the *EF 1- α*
199 analysis, all the isolates in the analysis based on the IGS sequences also grouped together
200 within the *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* clade with a high bootstrap value (100) (Fig. 2). A
201 reference sequence deposited by O'Donnell et al. in 2009 was used for this phylogenetic
202 tree. A 1994 bp sequence was obtained for each isolate, and the sequences used for the
203 phylogenetic analysis were deposited at Genbank (Table 5).

204 Phylogenetic analysis permitted to include the new *F. oxysporum* isolates from succulents
205 in f. sp. *opuntiarum*, according to the results of the pathogenicity essays. These last showed
206 that all the new isolates were pathogenic on *Schlumbergera truncata*, and when inoculated,
207 provided the same effect as that caused by the tested *F. opuntiarum* reference strains. These
208 last also caused disease on all the artificially inoculated new succulent hosts.

209 *Fusarium oxysporum* has been identified as the causal agent of stem and root rot on
210 different hosts belonging to the Cactaceae family: *Echinocactus grusonii* in England
211 (Hazelgrove, 1979), *Zygocactus truncatus* in the U.S.A. (Moorman and Klemmer, 1980),
212 *Schlumbergera truncata* (Petrone et al., 2007) and *Hylocereus undatus* in Argentina (Wright
213 et al., 2007). *F. oxysporum* on Cactaceae has been identified as belonging to f. sp.
214 *opuntiarum*: on *Zygocactus* and *Rhipsalidopsis* in Germany (Gerlach, 1972), on *Opuntia*
215 *ficus-indica* in Brazil (Souza de et al., 2010), on *Echinocactus grusonii* (Polizzi and Vitale,
216 2004) and *Schlumbergera truncata* in Italy (Lops et al., 2013). Moreover, on new succulent
217 hosts belonging to Crassulaceae family (*Crassula ovata*, *Echeveria agavoides* and *E.*
218 *tolimanensis*) two new *formae speciales*, named f. sp. *crassulae* (Ortu et al., 2013) and f. sp.
219 *echeveriae* (Ortu et al., 2015; Garibaldi et al., 2015d), respectively, have been recently
220 identified. Up to the present, *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* has only been identified on
221 Cactaceae, and it has never been detected on hosts belonging to other families: this *forma*
222 *specialis* is reported on *Euphorbia mammillaris*, Euphorbiaceae family, for the first time.

223 Some strains of *F. oxysporum* isolated from diseased wild *Euphorbia* spp. in European
224 countries have been shown to be virulent when artificially inoculated for the biological
225 control of leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) (Caesar, 1996). *F. oxysporum* was also isolated
226 from affected poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) (Orlikowski *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless,
227 the *forma specialis* was never investigated in any of these cases. Usually, *formae speciales*
228 of *F. oxysporum* are assigned on the basis of their ability to infect a specific host. However,
229 the acquisition of a pathogenicity genes by horizontal transfer is common on *F. oxysporum*
230 species complex (Van der Does and Rep, 2007). In addition, *F. oxysporum* genome is about
231 70% larger compared to *F. verticilloides* with a more large intergenic regions, as well as the
232 possibility of rearrange his genome by the high presence of transposable element sequences.
233 The common presence of different transposable elements (Daboussi and Capy, 2003)
234 suggests the ability to genomic rearrangement in response to the selection pressure, as well as
235 to the intensive cultivation of host crop plants.

236 Because a large number of succulent species and cultivars are grown in the same farms,
237 there is the risk of spread of *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* among the susceptible hosts
238 listed above. In these farms of intense floriculture, strategies to avoid the diffusion of *F.*
239 *oxysporum* f. sp. *opuntiarum* are particularly recommended, especially in the case of rooted
240 cuttings production. Finally, there is the necessity to test the susceptibility to this pathogen of
241 the most diffused succulent plants in the Italian market, specially Cactaceae and
242 Euphorbiaceae, to provide growers with a list of resistant and/or tolerant species and
243 cultivars.

244

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246

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370 Table 1. The *Fusarium oxysporum* single-isolates used in this study.

Strain	Host plant	Place
DB13GIU05-22M	<i>Cereus marginatus</i>	Italy
DB13GIU06-26M	<i>Cereus marginatus</i>	Italy
DB210211-18M	<i>Cereus peruvianus monstrosus</i>	Italy
DB220211-21M	<i>Cereus peruvianus monstrosus</i>	Italy
DB14OTT05-M1	<i>Astrophytum myriostigma</i>	Italy
DB14OTT07-M1	<i>Astrophytum myriostigma</i>	Italy
DB14NOV08-M1	<i>Cereus peruvianus florida</i>	Italy
DB14NOV09-M1	<i>Cereus peruvianus florida</i>	Italy
DB14OTT16-M1	<i>Euphorbia mammillaris</i>	Italy
DB14OTT17-M1	<i>Euphorbia mammillaris</i>	Italy
Polizzi-31M (<i>F. oxysporum</i> f. sp. <i>opuntiarum</i> reference strain)	<i>Echinocactus grusonii</i>	Italy
CBS 743.79 (<i>F. oxysporum</i> f. sp. <i>opuntiarum</i> reference strain)	<i>Zygocactus truncatus</i>	Germany

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378 Table 2. Pathogenicity test carried out on *Schlumbergera truncata* plants artificially
 379 inoculated with *Fusarium oxysporum* isolates obtained from succulent plants.

<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> tested isolates	Susceptibility of <i>Schlumbergera truncata</i>
Controls	R*
DB13GIU05-22M (from <i>Cereus marginatus</i>)	HS
DB13GIU06-26M (from <i>Cereus marginatus</i>)	HS
DB210211-18M (from <i>Cereus peruvianus monstrosus</i>)	HS
DB220211-21M (from <i>Cereus peruvianus monstrosus</i>)	HS
DB14OTT07-M1 (from <i>Astrophytum myriostigma</i>)	HS
DB14NOV09-M1 (from <i>Cereus peruvianus florida</i>)	HS
DB14OTT16-M1 (from <i>Euphorbia mammillaris</i>)	HS
<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> f. sp. <i>opuntiarum</i> Polizzi-31M	HS
<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> f. sp. <i>opuntiarum</i> CBS 743.79	HS

380 *R = Resistant (disease index 0–5); PR = Partially Resistant (disease index 6–20); AS =
 381 Averagely Susceptible (disease index 21–50); S = Susceptible (disease index 51–75); HS =
 382 Highly Susceptible (disease index 76–100).

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391 Table 3. Susceptibility of succulent species artificially inoculated with *Fusarium oxysporum*
 392 f. sp. *opuntiarum* isolates.

Tested species	<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> f. sp. <i>opuntiarum</i> tested isolates		
	Controls	Polizzi-31M	CBS 743.79
<i>Astrophytum myriostigma</i>	R*	HS	HS
<i>Cereus marginatus</i>	R	AS	AS
<i>Cereus peruvianus Monstruosus</i>	R	AS	S
<i>Cereus peruvianus florida</i>	R	HS	HS
<i>Euphorbia mammillaris</i>	R	AS	AS

393 *R = Resistant (disease index 0–5); PR = Partially Resistant (disease index 6–20); AS =
 394 Averagely Susceptible (disease index 21–50); S = Susceptible (disease index 51–75); HS =
 395 Highly Susceptible (disease index 76–100).

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Table 4. Primers used to amplify polygalacturonase genes.

Gene	Primer	Nucleotide Sequences (5'→3')	Source
<i>EF-1α</i>	Ef1	ATGGGTAAGGAAGACAAGAC	O'Donnell <i>et al.</i> , 1998
	Ef2	GGAAGTACCAGTGATCATGTT	
<i>IGS</i>	CNS1	CCAGAGTGCCGATACCGATT	Appel and Gordon, 1995
	CNL12	GCTTAGYGAACAKGGAGTG	

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404 Table 5. Accession numbers of the *EF-1 α* and IGS sequences obtained from *Fusarium*
 405 *oxysporum* and deposited in the GenBank database.

Isolates	Accession numbers in GenBank	
	<i>EF-1α</i>	IGS
DB13GIU05-22M	KU575888	KU575870
DB13GIU06-26M	KU575889	KU575871
DB210211-18M	KU575886	KU575872
DB220211-21M	KU575887	KU575873
DB14OTT05-M1	KU575882	KU575876
DB14OTT07-M1	KT183483	KU575877
DB14NOV08-M1	KU575885	KU575878
DB14NOV09-M1	KT183484	KU575879
DB14OTT16-M1	KT183485	KU575880
DB14OTT17-M1	KU575883	KU575881
<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> f. sp. <i>opuntiarum</i> Polizzi-31M	KU575890	KU575868
<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> f. sp. <i>opuntiarum</i> CBS 743.79	KU575891	KU575869

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418 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

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420 Figure 1. Phylogenetic tree based on the *EF-1 α* gene sequences, built by means of Mega5
421 software with the Neighbor joining method, using default parameters, and a standard
422 bootstrapping with 1,000 replicates.

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424 Figure 2. Phylogenetic tree based on the IGS sequences, built by means of Mega5 software
425 with the Neighbor joining method, using default parameters, and a standard bootstrapping
426 with 1,000 replicates.

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