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Evaluation of the Reproductive Potential and Competition between Two Entomopathogenic Nematodes, *Steinernema feltiae* Filipjev, 1934 (Rhabditida: Steinernematidae) and *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*, Poinar 1976 (Rhabditida: Heterorhabditidae)

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Abstract: The emergence in *Galleria mellonella* (L.) larva, which was infected by *Steinernema feltiae* and *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*, began on the ninth day after exposure to the former nematode and the sixth day of exposure to the latter nematode (25 ± 0.5 °C). The average number of nematodes developing in each host was as 13,829, and the range was from 4365 to 27,510 for *S. feltiae* infection. The average number of nematodes per host was 141,562, and the range was 50,905 - 271,593 for *H. bacteriophora* infection. When the 2 different species were inoculated simultaneously into the same host, *H. bacteriophora* caused higher mortality rates than *S. feltiae*. As a result of the application of 2 nematode species to the same host at different times, the first nematode species to be inoculated was responsible for the highest mortality rate in all cases.

Key Words: Entomopathogenic nematodes, *Steinernema feltiae*, *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*, Reproductive potential, Competition

***Steinernema feltiae* Filipjev, 1934 (Rhabditida: Steinernematidae) ve *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*, Poinar 1976 (Rhabditida: Heterorhabditidae) Arasındaki Üreme Potansiyeli ve Rekabetin Değerlendirilmesi**

Özet: *Steinernema feltiae* ve *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* ile enfekte olan *Galleria mellonella* larvalarından enfektif juvenil çıkışı, *S. feltiae*'de karşı karşıya kaldıktan 9 gün sonra, *H. bacteriophora*'da ise 6 gün sonra başladı. Her bir konakta gelişen nematodların ortalama sayısı 13.829 olup *S. feltiae* enfeksiyonu için bu sayı 4365 ile 27.510 arasında değişti. Konak başına düşen ortalama nematod sayısı 141.562 olup *H. bacteriophora* enfeksiyonu için bu sayı 50.905 ile 271.593 arasındadır. İki farklı tür aynı anda aynı konağa inoküle edildiğinde, *H. bacteriophora* *S. feltiae*'den daha fazla ölüme neden olmuştur. Aynı konağa farklı zamanlarda iki farklı nematod türünün uygulanması sonucunda gözlenen yüksek ölüm oranlarından, her durumda ilk olarak ortalama verilen nematod türü sorumludur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: entomopatojen nematodlar, *Steinernema feltiae*, *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*, üreme potansiyeli, rekabet

Introduction

Nematodes of the families Steinernematidae and Heterorhabditidae have been the subject of interest lately because of their great potential as biological agents. These nematodes, mutualistically associated with bacteria in the genera *Xenorhabdus* and *Photorhabdus*, are similar in their actions. The bacterial cells voided from the nematode's intestine into the hemolymph propagate and kill the insect host by septicemia within 48 h. The nematodes feed on bacterial cells and host tissue, produce 2 or 3 generations and emerge from the host as infective juveniles in search of new hosts. Infective juveniles are

the only free living stage of the nematodes in nature, and after entering susceptible hosts they and their bacterial partners kill their insect hosts so quickly that they do not form the intimate, highly adapted host-parasite relationships characteristic of other insect-nematode infections (1-7). They possess many key attributes for biological control, including a broad host range, high virulence, great ability for host seeking, ease of mass production and safety (8). Furthermore, researchers recently realized that both living and dead infective juveniles of EPN (*Steinernema carpocapsae*) cause more than a 50% reduction in total populations of plant parasitic nematodes (9).

* This is part of I. (Oğuzoğlu) Ünlü's MS thesis, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Nurdan Özer.

The host ranges of steinernematids and heterorhabditids are very broad, including several hundred insect species from at least 10 orders (10). Despite this impressive spectrum of activity, considerable variation has been found in the virulence of different nematode strains to specific insects (11-18). In the present study, 2 entomopathogenic nematode species, *Steinernema feltiae* (All type) and *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* TUR-H2, were used in a host-parasite model and the differences between their reproduction capacity and competition properties were investigated. We think that studies of this kind will provide fundamental knowledge useful in increasing our ability to use these 2 species effectively in biological control (19). We know very little about the population biology of entomopathogenic nematodes, yet such information is fundamental to understand their persistence, reproductive potential and effect on insect populations, and to develop predictive models for control programs (3,7,18).

Materials and Methods

The *S. feltiae* (All type) used in the experiments was first isolated from Turkish soil samples taken from the Black Sea coast (20). The other species, *H. bacteriophora* TUR-H2, was obtained from the study field of the Agricultural Research Institute in Ankara (21). Nematode identifications were confirmed by Imperial College and Christian Albrechts University, Kiel (20,21). This species has been harvested from last instar larvae of *Galleria mellonella* (L.) in the laboratory at 25 °C and 86.77% humidity since that time. The infective juveniles were stored in deionized water and stored at 15 °C and used within 10 days of harvest.

Reproductive potential of *S. feltiae* and *H. bacteriophora*

Our experiments were conducted with larvae of a suitable host, *G. mellonella*, at 25 °C. One hundred infective juvenile nematodes (IJs) of *S. feltiae* and 100 *H. bacteriophora* in 1.4 ml of deionized water were allowed to each invade last instar *G. mellonella* larva, which weigh 200 mg, in filter paper-substrate petri dishes (3.5 x 1.2 cm). Density-dependent factors within a host can have an important influence on the population dynamics of parasites. According to Selvan et al., *S. carpocapsae* and *H. bacteriophora* have optimum survival at a density of

approximately 100 nematodes per host. In addition, *H. bacteriophora* is better able to tolerate higher densities (22). Depending on this data, we also decided to utilize 100 infective juveniles per host. Afterwards, 10 closed petri dishes, each containing 1 *G. mellonella* larva, were enclosed in plastic bags to maintain moisture and kept at 25 ± 0.5 °C. White traps were used to collect IJs emerging from *G. mellonella* cadavers (23) and the experiments were replicated 10 times. White traps for *S. feltiae* and *H. bacteriophora* were arranged using 2 x 1.2 cm plastic petri dish lids lined with a single Whatman No. 1 filter paper; 3.5 cm in diameter moistened with deionized this lid was floated on sterilized deionized water in a 10 x 1.2 cm glass petri dish for collecting IJs. Dead larvae were observed until the last infective juveniles emerged. The number of nematodes yielded was determined daily for each host by counting 10 subsamples per replicate in 0.2 ml (24,25).

Competition Trials

Application of 2 nematode species to the same host simultaneously

In the first test, 40 IJs of each nematode species in 0.60 ml of deionized water (*S. feltiae* and *H. bacteriophora*) were simultaneously applied to the same host synchronically in petri dishes (10 x 1.2 cm) padded with filter paper (Whatman No. 1) containing 12 *G. mellonella* last instar larvae. In the second test we used a concentration of 80 IJs in 0.60 ml of deionized water. In this manner we observed the competition between *S. feltiae* and *H. bacteriophora* in *G. mellonella* (26).

For this procedure we used different kinds of control groups. One group was exposed to 40 IJs (and 80 IJs for the other procedure) of either *S. feltiae* or *H. bacteriophora* only, and the other group that was free of nematodes. Three dishes were used for each nematode/host combination. The experiments were replicated 3 times. After 72 h the cadavers were examined for changes in coloration. The larvae infected by *H. bacteriophora* turned from red to dark brown (26). An other color was observed in *S. feltiae* infected larvae. Following the period of nematode emergence (6-7 days) the cadavers were dissected and examined to verify species. At the end of the trials when the nematodes were present, slides containing juvenile heterorhabditis and steinernematids were readily separated by several morphological characters (26). In this study, we

distinguished the nematodes from each other by IJ body length, tail shape and the different color of the infected larvae. Twenty nematodes were used to determine which species was present in the cadaver (26).

Application of 2 nematode species to the same host at different times

The infective juveniles of 1 species were inoculated into filter paper-substrate petri dishes containing *G. mellonella* last instar larvae 5 h earlier than the application of the other species (50 *S. feltiae* and 50 *H. bacteriophora*). Mortality was recorded after 72 h. The cadavers were dissected to ascertain nematode invasion and to determine which nematode species had entered the host. Observations of dead hosts were also made on the color of the larvae to determine whether they had a reddish look, a characteristic of infection by the symbiotic bacteria associated with heterorhabditids (26).

Results

The emergence of infective nematode stages from the nematode-killed wax moth larvae infected by *S. feltiae* began on day 9 after the hosts' death and continued for approximately 10 days (8-12 days). The mean number of nematodes emerging from each host larva was 13,829, ranging from 4365 to 27,510 (Fig. 1).

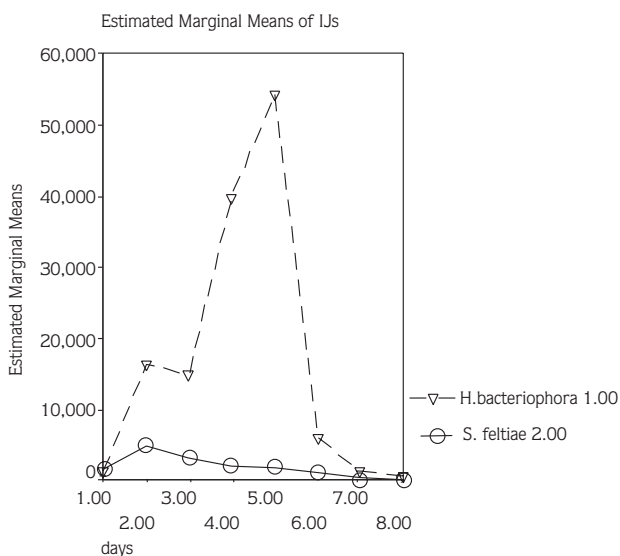


Figure 1. The mean number of nematodes (*H. bacteriophora* and *S. feltiae*) recovered from hosts between 1 and 8 days after the beginning of emergence.

Emergence first occurred on the day 7 after the hosts' death when infected with *H. bacteriophora* and continued for approximately 12 days (11-14 days). The same treatments were repeated and similar results were obtained in the proceeding experiments. The mean number of nematodes was 141,562, from a minimum of 50,905 to a maximum of 271,593 (Fig. 1).

The highest number of emerged infective juveniles from *G. mellonella* larvae was observed on days 4 and 5 after the beginning of the emergence period for *H. bacteriophora*, and on days 2 and 3 for *S. feltiae* (Fig. 1).

A two-way ANOVA of the data (Table 1) shows that the difference between the species in the number of nematodes released is significant (two-way ANOVA as performed by log-transformed data). The specific time at which nematodes were released is also significant within and between species. Overall results strongly suggest that the 2 species have distinct host features with substantial dependence on releasing time.

In competition bioassays, the mortality rate of the *G. mellonella* infected by *S. feltiae* only was 62.9% (40 IJs per petri dish) The mortality rate was 67.5% with *H. bacteriophora* (40 IJs per petri dish). When 80 IJs were inoculated per petri dish we found the same rate of mortalities for both *S. feltiae* and *H. bacteriophora* (75.8%). However, when both nematode species were inoculated into the same host simultaneously, the mortality rate was 99% (20 *S. feltiae* and 20 *H. bacteriophora*). When 40 infective juveniles from each species were given simultaneously, the mortality rate was 98%. Those rates were much higher than that of each species inoculated respectively (Table 2).

In another procedure, the 2 nematode species were applied at definite time intervals rather than being applied synchronically. *G. mellonella* larvae were exposed to *S. feltiae* infective juveniles and after 5 h *H. bacteriophora* infective juveniles were added to the medium. At the end of 72 h when *S. feltiae* was first applied a 96.2% infection rate was observed and 21.2% of the mortality rate was due to *H. bacteriophora*, while 75% was due to *S. feltiae*, according to dissections and color changes (Table 3). When *H. bacteriophora* was applied first, the infection rate was 94.4% after 72 h and 72.2% of the mortality was due to *H. bacteriophora*, while 22.2% of the mortality rate was due to *S. feltiae* (Table 3). The mortality rate of *G. mellonella* larvae exposed to only one entomopathogenic species was less than the rate after the

Table 1. ANOVA of the nematodes released by the two species.

Dependent Variable A					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sign.
Species	22.717	1	22.717	97.589	.000
Day	57.717	7	8.257	35.469	.000
Species Day	7.308	7	1.044	4.485	.000
Error	33.521	144	0.233		

a. R Squared = 0.724 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.695)

Table 2. Infection rate of *G. mellonella* by *H. bacteriophora* and *S. feltiae*, following simultaneous inoculation of the species.

Number of IJs	Time	Rate of infection (%)		
		Sf ^a (%)	Hb ^b (%)	Sf and Hb(%)
40	48	50.9	53.7	87.9
	72	12.03	13.8	11.1
	Total	62.93	67.5	99
80	48	66.6	71.2	95.3
	72	9.2	4.6	2.7
	Total	75.8	75.8	98

^a *S. feltiae*

^b *H. bacteriophora*

Table 3. Infection rates of *G. mellonella* by *H. bacteriophora* and *S. feltiae* following consecutive inoculations.

Nematodes	Number of IJs	Rate of infection (%)		
		Sf ^a (%)	Hb ^b (%)	Sf ve Hb(%)
<i>S. feltiae</i> ^c	50	75	21.2	96.2
<i>H. bacteriophora</i> ^d		22.2	72.2	94.4

^a *S. feltiae*

^b *H. bacteriophora*

^c *S. feltiae* first inoculated

^d *H. bacteriophora* first inoculated

inoculation of the 2 species. In reciprocal tests, the species inoculated first had the competitive advantage. According to statistical analyses, the differences between these results ($X^2_{0.001(5)} = 20.517$) were significant.

Discussion

It is difficult to know how many IJs have entered a host body for such a procedure, because we have to trace the dauer larvae that leave the host body (25). The

experiments showed that the reproductive potential of *H. bacteriophora* was higher than that of *S. feltiae* considering the number of infective juveniles emerging from the cadavers and the duration of emergence. Due to *H. bacteriophora*'s hermaphroditic life cycle, this result is not surprising (22,23).

According to Poinar, entomopathogenic nematodes can be reared by in vivo methods, with yields of 100,000-200,000 infective stage juveniles per *G. mellonella* larva (10). According to Woodring and Kaya (1988), up to 350,000 *H. bacteriophora* infective juveniles have been harvested from one last-instar *G. mellonella* larva (23). Average production is much less, in the order of 30,000 to 50,000 infectives per insect. In our study we obtained similar numbers of IJs for *H. bacteriophora*; however, we could not attain such great numbers for *S. feltiae* IJs. The body size of the host definitely affects the total number of IJs developing inside the cadaver. We used 200 mg of *G. mellonella* for our experiments and this apparently affected the result.

Differences between the reproduction potential of entomopathogenic nematodes may be related to the isolates, species, host susceptibility, number of bacteria per infective stage, invasion rate, temperature and humidity. It is possible that differences in virulence between species and isolates might be greater for a less susceptible host. Prior to biocontrol applications, bioassays should be performed against the target pest insect (27). Supporting the ideas above, according to Mari et al., 30,400 IJs were yielded from *G. mellonella* (100 IJs per larvae) when they were infected with *H. megidis* NLH-E87.3, although this result is not as high as is normally expected from the genus *Heterorhabditis* (28).

Under in vivo conditions, *H. bacteriophora* IJs entering a host insect encounter a food signal that immediately induces the recovery of IJs. The hermaphrodite that develops from recovered IJs first lays eggs until the egg production rate decreases. At that moment, the first stage juveniles hatch within the uterus. Owing to the low food concentration in the uterus, the development of infective juveniles is induced. The juveniles develop and feed on the body of the hermaphrodite until all tissues are digested (endotokia matricida). After the hermaphrodite has died, the IJs emerge from the empty carcass. These IJs either recover and develop into a second generation of hermaphrodites

or are arrested in the infective juvenile stage, depending on the food signal concentration in the surrounding medium. Thus the bacterial food signal indicates whether food is abundant for another propagative life cycle or whether the resources have been used up (29). If the nutrients are consumed, the IJs leave the insect cadaver in search of other hosts (30). An overview of *H. bacteriophora*'s life cycle supports our findings about the early emergence of *H. bacteriophora*. Time of emergence also strongly depends on the host, especially on its size. It is known from *S. feltiae* that time of emergence can vary dramatically with the size of the host. In the small sciarid flies nematodes will emerge within 6-7 days whereas in *G. mellonella* it can take 2-3 weeks (31). Probably, the use of 200 mg *G. mellonella* larvae is responsible for such surprising results in our study.

According to Rosas and Kaya (26), in competition trials between *S. carpocapsae* and *H. bacteriophora*, *S. carpocapsae* was the most successful species in every competitive condition they tested. In our applications, the nematode species inoculated first has an advantage in parasitizing the host. According to these researchers, *S. carpocapsae* infected more *G. mellonella* larvae than *H. bacteriophora* when *H. bacteriophora* was inoculated first. We speculate that *S. feltiae* does not seem to have as much competitive advantage as *S. carpocapsae*. In their research they also obtained a high mortality rate when they used 2 species together, and our results resemble their findings in this respect.

In biological-control campaigns, it is vital to know whether releasing one natural enemy against a pest is likely to be more effective than the release of many, especially where competition between enemies might reduce their overall effectiveness (22). As Gaugler and Kaya (8) reported, the combination of 2 nematode species with different search strategies to control 1 or 2 susceptible insect pest species in a soil habitat appears feasible. Indeed, combinations of different nematode species and other biological control agents may increase their overall efficacy against an insect pest (27).

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