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**Host-race specificity in the endemic
pygmy mistletoe *Korthalsella
salicornioides* (Viscaceae)**

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ABSTRACT

Korthalsella Tiegh. is a genus of stem hemiparasites in the family Viscaceae, represented in New Zealand by three endemic species: *K. clavata*, *K. lindsayi*, and *K. salicornioides*. The most host-specific is *K. salicornioides* as it parasitizes two main host genera *Leptospermum* (Myrtaceae) and *Kunzea* (Myrtaceae), while the other two species are considered generalists parasitizing a wider range of host species. *K. salicornioides* is naturally uncommon and sparse, although it can be locally abundant on occasion. Mistletoe populations are at risk primarily due to habitat destruction and subsequent loss of hosts. Cross-infection experiments in *K. salicornioides* provided some insight into the presence of putative host races, as better mistletoe seedling establishment success rates were apparent when the maternal and recipient hosts were the same. However, because previous molecular sequence data (nuclear internal transcribed spacers and chloroplast *trnQ-rps16*) for *K. salicornioides* were not informative about specific host-races, more rapidly evolving molecular markers might be expected to detect host races.

In this study, next generation sequencing was used to develop novel microsatellite markers for *Korthalsella*. Eleven markers were reliably amplifiable and the most polymorphic for *K. salicornioides* were used to genotype 272 *K. salicornioides* individuals from 16 populations. Across all populations few alleles were identified, and within-population assessment of genetic variation indicated that many populations have low levels of genetic diversity and high proportions of homozygotes. Despite the presence of few alleles, a high degree of genetic differentiation between most populations was detected and was found to reflect host species and geography.

The findings of this study that *Korthalsella salicornioides* populations have low levels of genetic variation but host-specific races, has important conservation implications. The main conservational focus should be maintaining and increasing host *Leptospermum* and *Kunzea*

populations. The spread of mistletoe seed on hosts within or between populations may also increase the chances of continued survival. However, it is imperative that genetic material comes from the same host species, and consideration should also be given to the geographic area, especially in the Wairarapa. This study provides insights into the population structure within and between the different host populations and suggests several interesting areas of future study.

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ABBREVIATIONS

%P	-percentage of polymorphic loci
A	-number of alleles
A _S	-allele size
A _T	-total number of alleles
AFLP	-Amplified Fragment Length Polymorphism
AMOVA	-analysis of molecular variance
BLAST	-basic local alignment search tool
bp	-base pairs
cpDNA	-chloroplast DNA
CASS	-cheaply amplified size standard
CTAB	-hexa-decetylammonium bromide
DNA	-deoxyribonucleic acid
dNTP	-deoxyribonucleotide triphosphate
DOC	-Department of Conservation (New Zealand)
ER	-Ecological Region
F _{IS}	-component of Wright's (1921) fixation index, used to define within population structure by calculating the average observed heterozygosity of an individual relative to the expected heterozygosity of individuals in the population it belongs to
F _{ST}	-component of Wright's (1921) fixation index, used to define between population structure by comparing the expected heterozygosity of individuals within a subpopulation to the total expected heterozygosity of individuals across all populations
H _E	-expected heterozygosity
H _O	-observed heterozygosity
IBD	-Isolation by Distance
ITS	-internal transcribed spacer
LnP(D)	-mean posterior probability

MA	-Million years
MPN	-Dame Ella Campbell Herbarium
mtDNA	-mitochondrial DNA
N	-number of individuals
N_A	-number of alleles
N_E	-effective number of alleles
PCR	-Polymerase Chain Reaction
RAPD	-Randomly Amplified Polymorphic DNA
SNP	-Single Nucleotide Polymorphism
T_m	-melting temperature
VNTR	-Variable Number of Tandem Repeat loci

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Abbreviations	vi
List of Figures.....	xi
List of Tables.....	xii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Parasitic Flowering Plants	1
1.2 Mistletoes	5
1.3 <i>Korthalsella</i> in New Zealand	6
1.3.1 Conservation of <i>Korthalsella</i> and its hosts	10
1.3.2 Dispersal mechanisms and life history traits.....	12
1.3.3 Evidence for host-race.....	13
1.4 Markers to Assess Genetic Variation	17
1.5 Analysis Methods for Population Structure.....	19
1.6 Focus of this Research.....	21
1.7 References	22
2. Microsatellite Markers for <i>Korthalsella</i> (Viscaceae) in New Zealand.....	29
2.1 Abstract	29
2.2 Introduction	30
2.3 Methods and Results	30
2.4 Conclusions	34
2.5 References	39

3. Population genetics and host-race specificity in <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i> (Viscaceae) ...	41
3.1 Abstract	41
3.2 Introduction	42
3.3 Materials and Methods.....	46
3.3.1 Sample collection	46
3.3.2 DNA extraction and genotyping	50
3.3.3 Assessing genetic variation.....	51
3.3.4 Resolving genetic structure and differentiation.....	52
3.4 Results.....	53
3.4.1 Genetic Variation.....	53
3.4.2 Genetic Structure	55
3.4.3 NeighborNet	62
3.5 Discussion.....	64
3.5.1 Genetic variation within <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i> populations	64
<i>Private alleles</i>	64
<i>Seed dispersal and vector limitation of Korthalsella salicornioides</i>	66
<i>Lower North Island genetic “hot spot”</i>	68
3.5.2 Host-races in <i>Korthalsella</i>	70
<i>Mechanisms of parasite differentiation</i>	71
3.5.3 Conservation implications for <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i> and its hosts	72
<i>Conservation of Korthalsella salicornioides</i>	73
<i>Host trees as economic benefits</i>	75
3.5.4 Future directions	77
3.6 Conclusion.....	79
3.7 References	81

4. Conclusion	89
4.1 Introduction	89
4.2 Findings	91
4.3 Limitations.....	93
4.4 Future Directions	94
4.5 References	97

Appendix 1: Population genetic diversity estimates for 16 populations of <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i> based on the seven polymorphic loci.....	98
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LIST OF FIGURES

1. Introduction

Figure 1.1 *Korthalsella salicornioides* parasitic on *Leptospermum scoparium* and *Kunzea tenuicaulis* 8

Figure 1.2 Primary, secondary and tertiary host of *Korthalsella salicornioides*, *K. clavata* and *K. lindsayi* 9

Figure 1.3 ITS sequence type diversity in *Korthalsella salicornioides*..... 16

3. Population genetics and host-race specificity in *Korthalsella salicornioides*

Figure 3.1 Distribution map of the populations of *Korthalsella salicornioides* sampled for this study 48

Figure 3.2 Plot of ΔK vs K for STRUCTURE results based on 15 replicates for each K value.. 58

Figure 3.3 Plot of mean posterior probability values per cluster, based on 15 iterations per K from STRUCTURE analyses..... 58

Figure 3.4 STRUCTURE cluster assignment of *Korthalsella salicornioides* individuals..... 59

Figure 3.5 Mantel test results displayed in graph of pairwise $F_{ST}(1-F_{ST})$ against the natural log of geographic distance (km) for *Korthalsella salicornioides* 61

Figure 3.6 Mantel test results displayed in graph of pairwise $F_{ST}(1-F_{ST})$ against the natural log of geographic distance (km) for *Korthalsella salicornioides* mānuka-host populations (A), and kanuka-host populations (B)..... 61

Figure 3.7 NeighborNet generated in SPLITSTREE4 based on pairwise genetic distances between all *Korthalsella salicornioides* populations..... 63

Figure 3.8 *Kunzea amathicola* at Hokio Beach 68

4. Conclusion

Figure 4.1 Leaf shapes of herbarium specimens of *Leptospermum scoparium* parasitized by *Korthalsella salicornioides*..... 95

Figure 4.2 Two *Leptospermum scoparium* host populations at Kohi Point coastal habitat along walking track (A), and Kerikeri swamp habitat (B) 96

LIST OF TABLES

1. Introduction

Table 1.1 The 12 orders of parasitic angiosperms with example families and genera	3
--	---

2. Microsatellite Markers for *Korthalsella* (Viscaceae) Species in New Zealand

Table 2.1 Locations and herbarium voucher information for <i>Korthalsella</i> populations used in this study	35
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Table 2.2 Primer sequences and characteristics of 16 microsatellite loci developed from <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i>	36-37
---	-------

Table 2.3 Genetic properties of the newly developed 11 microsatellite loci across five North Island populations of <i>Korthalsella</i>	38
---	----

3. Population genetics and host-race specificity in *Korthalsella salicornioides*

Table 3.1 Relative <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i> population size information based on the estimated number of host trees parasitized for locations used in this study	47
---	----

Table 3.2 Locations, host tree and herbarium voucher information for <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i> populations used in this study	49
---	----

Table 3.3 Characteristics of eleven microsatellite loci for 272 samples of <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i>	54
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Table 3.4 Population information and genetic diversity estimates for 16 populations of <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i>	55
--	----

Table 3.5 Clustering of K=7 STRUCTURE results examining genetic structure within the <i>Kunzea</i> and <i>Leptospermum</i> genera.....	60
---	----

Table 3.6 AMOVA results for the partitioning of microsatellite variation in: A) all <i>Korthalsella salicornioides</i> populations, B) comparing between four regions identified in STRUCTURE	62
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