

1 Measuring Mass: Variation among 3,161 species of 2 Canadian Coleoptera and the prospects of a mass 3 registry for all insects

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17

18 Abstract

19

20 Although biomass values are critical for diverse ecological and evolutionary analyses, they are
21 unavailable for most insect species. Museum specimens have the potential to address this gap,
22 but the variation introduced by sampling and preservation methods is uncertain. This study
23 quantifies variation in the body mass of 3,161 species of Canadian Coleoptera, employing the
24 Barcode Index Number system for their discrimination, a critical requirement for the inclusion of
25 groups where the taxonomic impediment prevents the assignment of specimens to a Linnaean
26 species. By validating the reproducibility of measurements and evaluating the error introduced
27 by operational complexities such as curatorial practice and the loss of body parts, it demonstrates
28 that museum specimens can speed the assembly of a mass registry. The results  further indicate
29 that **congeneric species of Coleoptera generally have limited variation in mass**, so a genus-level
30 identification allows prediction of the body mass of species that have not been weighed or
31 measured. **Building on the present results, the construction of a mass registry for all insects is** 
32 **feasible.**

33

34 Introduction

35

36 Body mass is a key property of organisms which impacts factors ranging from metabolic rate to
37 community structure, foraging behavior, and predator-prey dynamics (Peters, 1986; Chown &
38 Gaston, 2010; Smith et al., 2016). Comprehensive body mass registries are available for
39 mammals (Jones et al., 2009), fishes (Froese & Pauly, 2021), and birds (Dunning, 2008), but

40 similar information is lacking for insects despite their abundance and ecological importance.
41 Three characteristics of insects have impeded its assembly: 1) high species diversity, 2) variable
42 curatorial practices, and 3) small size requires access to precision balances (Braun et al., 2009;
43 Chown & Gaston, 2010; Gilbert, 2011; Knapp, 2012). These barriers to direct mass
44 measurements have led many studies to employ estimates derived from body length, even for
45 groups with very divergent body plans (Rogers, Hinds & Buschbom, 1976). Despite its lack of
46 precision (Gowing & Recher, 1984; Johnston & Cunjak, 1999), this approach has been widely
47 applied due to its simplicity (Ulrich, 2007; Greve et al., 2018; Richard, Tallamy & Mitchell,
48 2019). Aside from the fact that direct measurements of body mass for arthropods are uncommon,
49 existing data are difficult to access because there is no structured data repository (Chown &
50 Gaston, 2010).

51
52 The construction of a mass registry for insect species would benefit studies that currently depend
53 on imprecise surrogates, facilitating comparisons across groups with differing morphology.
54 Aggregating data from all insect orders and other arthropods, which are typically studied
55 independently, would advance understanding of mass variation and its evolutionary trajectories
56 across lineages (Ulrich, 2007; Chown & Gaston, 2010). Museum specimens has been proposed
57 as a resource to assemble mass data for insects without new sampling effort (Gilbert, 2011).
58 However, to assess the quality of the mass data resulting from their analysis, the impact of
59 varying curatorial and preservation methods requires investigation.

60
61 With over 360,000 described species, Coleoptera is one of the most diverse orders of insects.
62 Occurring in both aquatic and terrestrial environments, it includes some of the largest and
63 smallest insects with its component taxa spanning eight orders of magnitude in mass (Chown &
64 Gaston, 2010). These factors make Coleoptera an ideal group for developing approaches to
65 support the construction of a mass registry for all insects. The present study targets the
66 Coleoptera of Canada, a fauna of nearly 9,000 species (Brunke et al., 2019), many possessing a
67 DNA barcode record on BOLD (Ratnasingham & Hebert, 2007). The mass data gathered in this
68 study provide a strong basis for comparison with previous surveys (Chislenko, 1981; Novotny &
69 Kindlmann, 1996; Ulrich, 2007). As well, because these values derive from specimens with
70 DNA barcodes, it begins to develop the information on mass variation needed to advance both
71 metabarcoding and eDNA analyses.

72
73 This study details variation in the body mass of 3,161 species of Coleoptera based on the
74 analysis of museum specimens. **It evaluates the impacts of humidity, tissue loss, and curatorial**
75 **variables on mass.** It also examines the extent of variation in mass among taxonomic lineages,
76 work which indicates that phylogenetic constraints are strong enough for the current data to
77 allow mass estimation for most Canadian Coleoptera. Finally, this study considers how best to
78 expand from the current registry that includes records for a few thousand species to one with
79 coverage for all insect species.

80

81 **Materials & Methods**

82

83 **BINs as a species proxy**


84

85 DNA barcoding employs sequence variation in a 658 bp segment of the cytochrome c oxidase
86 subunit I gene (COI) as a basis for specimen identification and species discovery in animals
87 (Hebert et al., 2003). The BIN system clusters these COI sequences into molecular operational
88 taxonomic units (Floyd et al., 2002) that correspond closely with Linnaean species. Each BIN is
89 assigned a unique alphanumeric that serves as a species proxy (Ratnasingham & Hebert, 2013).
90 For example, about 90% of all species in the well-studied European Coleoptera fauna show
91 perfect correspondence with BINs (Pentinsaari, Hebert & Mutanen 2014; Hendrich et al., 2015).
92 Because they provide a taxonomic assignment for undescribed species (Brunke et al. 2019;
93 Brunke et al. 2021), this study employed BINs to structure data collection. While substantial
94 efforts were also made to assign each BIN to a Linnaean species, this was not always possible
95 because of both the lack of taxonomic specialists for some families and difficulties in resolving
96 synonymies and cryptic species. As a result, we employ the BIN count as the best estimator of
97 the number of species examined in this study.

98

99 **Body mass data**

100

101 Specimens were available for 3,161 BINs of Canadian Coleoptera. They represented 1,100 of the
102 2,008 genera and 96 of the 111 beetle families known from Canada (Bousquet et al., 2013). Most
103 were morphologically identified to a genus (3,156 BINs) and many to a species (2,719 BINs to
104 2,389 recognized species). The specimens were obtained from sampling programs coordinated
105 by the Centre for Biodiversity Genomics (CBG) at the University of Guelph and are stored in its
106 voucher collection. Specimens missing major body segments (head, abdomen) were not weighed.
107 In total, 3,744 specimens were analyzed, meaning a single specimen was weighed for most s.
108 **However, 2–5 specimens were weighed for 334 BINs, and, for these taxa, a mean mass was**
109 **calculated.**

110

111 Specimens fell into three main curatorial categories (ethanol, pointed, pinned). Specimens from
112 70% ethanol were first air-dried and then weighed repeatedly until the mass measurement
113 stabilized. Specimens on points were unmounted using 70% ethanol, dried, and weighed. Pinned
114 specimens were weighed on their pin and the pin mass was subtracted. When mass variation
115 among pins of the size used on a specimen exceeded 12.5% of its overall weight (Gilbert, 2011),
116 it was unpinned and weighed directly.

117

118 The mass of small specimens (~2,800 representing 2,500 BINs) was quantified to the nearest
119 0.0001 mg using a high-precision balance (Mettler Toledo™ XP6U), while the ~950 larger

120 specimens (>10 mg) were weighed to the nearest 0.1 mg using a less sensitive instrument
121 (Mettler Toledo™ MS104S). Up to three significant figures were recorded. The BIN, taxonomic
122 assignment, and mass of each analyzed specimen are provided in a supplementary document
123 (Data S1).
124

125 **Data description and distribution analyses**

126

127 All analyses were performed in R version 3.6.3 (R Core Team, 2020). Mass values were log-
128 transformed before further analysis, and the interquartile range (IQR) was used as a measure of
129 variance. A two-sided D'Agostino test was employed to evaluate skewness in the data, and an
130 Anscombe-Glynn test to assess kurtosis. One-way ANOVAs using family, subfamily, and
131 generic assignments as variables were used to assess mass variation at different levels in the
132 taxonomic hierarchy using respective groups containing two or more quantified BINs. A nested
133 ANOVA was also used to examine variation partitioning in the 50 families and 449 genera that
134 were nested with two or more subgroups. Because taxonomic groups with low species diversity
135 tend to show less variation in mass (Chown & Gaston, 2010), a separate analysis was performed
136 to ascertain how variation in mass was partitioned in the most diverse groups of Canadian
137 Coleoptera. In particular, a one-way ANOVA examined 65 genera with mass data for 10 or more
138 BINs, while a nested ANOVA examined the six families with mass data for >100 BINs. To
139 quantify the extent of mass that could be partitioned at each taxonomic level, ω^2 values were
140 calculated for all ANOVAs.
141

142 **Pin variation and reproducibility assessment**

143

144 A pinned insect is not easily separated from it, creating a complexity because the pin can
145 outweigh the specimen. Gilbert (2011) proposed a workaround that involves estimating pin mass
146 from key parameters (material, shape, size) before subtracting this value from the total weight to
147 produce a mass value for the insect. Because the CBG employs insect pins from a single
148 supplier, this source of variation was readily assessed. The mean and standard deviation in both
149 diameter and mass was determined for 100 pins of each size. Because there was no overlap in
150 diameter among different pin sizes, the size associated with each specimen could be determined,
151 allowing its mass to be subtracted.
152

153 The consistency in determinations of pin size and of body mass was assessed by comparing mass
154 values for 120 specimens weighed in 2014 and again in 2018. The congruence in net mass values
155 was examined using a paired-sample t-test.
156

157 To evaluate short-term variation in mass, 20 specimens were weighed daily for a week when
158 variation in humidity was pronounced. As well, 50 specimens were examined to determine the
159 reduction in mass caused by the loss of a leg.

160

161 Results

162

163 Mass variation in Canadian Coleoptera

164

165 Measurements for 3,744 beetles representing 3,161 BINs revealed their mass varied by more
166 than five orders of magnitude (0.0024–17 mg) (Fig 1). Among BINs with a species assignment,
167 *Ptiliola kunzei* (BOLD:ACI8875) and *Ptiliolium fuscum* (BOLD:AAM7677) possessed the lowest
168 mass (0.0056 mg). However, six BINs in the same subfamily (Ptiliinae) weighed less, and a
169 specimen identified to the genus *Nanosella* (BOLD:ADH5266) had the lowest mass (0.0024
170 mg). The largest species was *Hydrophilus triangularis* (Hydrophilidae, BOLD:AAQ2470) at 797
171 mg. The median mass of all species was ~1.3 mg, represented in the data by species such as
172 *Bembidion nitidum* (Carabidae, BOLD:AAD2752) and *Dichelotarsus piniphilus* (Cantharidae,
173 BOLD:AAH0933). Considering all BINs, the mass distribution approximated a lognormal
174 distribution with strong kurtosis ($z = -7.39$, $p = 1.49 \cdot 10^{-13}$) but insignificant skew ($z = 1.96$, $p =$
175 0.051).

176

177 Much of the variation in mass among species was linked to their higher taxonomic assignments
178 (family, subfamily, genus) (Table 1. a-c). In fact, ω^2 values indicated that 90% of the mass
179 variation could be explained by higher taxonomic placement with 55% of the variation at the
180 family level, 20% at the subfamily level, and 15% at the genus level. Because of these
181 relationships, variation in mass among congeneric species was typically limited (Fig 2). In all,
182 for the 519 genera where two or more BINs were examined, the variance, measured by IQR, had
183 a median of 0.163 \log_{10} (mg), which is a 1.4-fold difference and translates to +/- 20% divergence
184 from the median for the genus. Cases of extreme variation where the larger members of the
185 genus were as twice as massive as the median (IQR > 0.6) were only observed in nine genera.

186

187 Reliability of specimen mass measurements

188

189 Diameter measurements allowed the discrimination of each pin size as differences among pins of
190 a particular size were an order of magnitude (± 0.005 mm) less than the diameter difference (0.05
191 mm) between adjacent pin sizes. Pins of one size did vary in mass (± 0.2 -0.9 mg) with this
192 variation increasing with larger pins, but it usually represented a small component of the overall
193 mass. In the few cases where variation in pin mass represented >12.5% of the total weight, the
194 specimen was unmounted and weighed directly.

195

196 High humidity slowed analysis as the balances required longer to stabilize, but changes in mass
197 linked to variation in temperature and humidity were small. For example, the mean standard
198 error based on seven measurements of 20 specimens over a week was 1–2% of their mean.
199 Comparison of specimen weights between 2014 and 2018 further indicated that differences


200 between paired measurements were within $\pm 3\%$ of their average in 117 of 120 cases while the
201 others were within $\pm 5\%$. A t-test demonstrated that mean mass increased by 0.3% ($p = 0.02$)
202 over the interval, likely reflecting higher humidity when the second measurements were made.
203

204 Analysis further established that the loss of an appendage had a small impact on mass. For
205 example, a leg typically represented 1–2% of the specimen's mass, while the tibia plus tarsus
206 were around 0.5%. The loss of a major body segment (head, abdomen) had much larger impacts
207 as they comprised about 12% and 50% respectively of the total mass.
208

209 Discussion

210

211 Because of its strong association with crucial biological traits, mass data is valuable in many
212 ecological and evolutionary contexts. By assembling mass data for 3,161 species of Coleoptera,
213 this study confirms that museum specimens are a valuable resource for constructing a mass
214 registry. It further demonstrates that factors such as the loss of an appendage, variation in
215 humidity, specimen age, and curatorial practices have small impacts on these measurements.
216

217 This study further demonstrates that mass variation among beetles has strong phylogenetic
218 constraints with much of the variation residing at the family, subfamily, and generic levels. As a
219 consequence, **the analysis of a single or a few individuals of a species provides a good estimate** 
220 of its mass. Prior studies have demonstrated that adult body size can be impacted by diverse
221 environmental factors and that the extent of such variation differs among species (Emlen &
222 Allen, 2003; Chown & Gaston, 2010; Tseng et al., 2018). These impacts can even shift the
223 relationship between morphometric measurements (e.g., body length) and biomass (Gouws,
224 Gaston & Chown, 2011). Given the millions of insect species, it is not feasible to investigate
225 such impacts on a species-by-species basis, but it is unnecessary in most contexts because they
226 cause minor modulations in body mass as $> 90\%$ of variation resides at higher taxonomic levels
227 (Chown & Gaston, 2010). Importantly, the accuracy of mass estimates derived from generic
228 assignments is similar to those resulting from the standard approach to mass estimation: the use
229 of a power equation to estimate mass from body length (Rogers, Hinds & Buschbom, 1976).
230 While our data set is larger and spans a greater range of mass, our residual SE (0.62) was less
231 than that resulting from the use of a power equation (Table 1.c). In fact, even when our analysis
232 targeted genera with the most variation in mass among their component species, the residual SE
233 (0.69) was similar to that (0.66) reported with the use of a power equation (Rogers, Hinds &
234 Buschbom, 1976) (Table 1.d). While this residual translates into an average two-fold difference
235 in mass from the predicted value, it indicates that a generic assignment can generate mass
236 estimates with a precision similar to those based on estimates from direct length measurements.
237 In short, mass values for a few species in each genus allow the estimation of mass for congeneric
238 taxa. Although our results only document this fact for Coleoptera, similar relationships
239 undoubtedly extend to other groups, as strong phylogenetic signal in body size occurs in many


240 arthropod lineages (Rainford, Hofreiter & Mayhew, 2016). Understanding the extent of
241 phylogenetic constraint in arthropods could greatly speed the development of a functional mass
242 registry by allowing analysis to focus on groups where size variation is most pronounced and to
243 use proxy measures in those where it is not.

244
245 By delivering information on body mass for about 0.2% of all described insect species, the
246 present study indicates that it is feasible to construct a mass registry for all insects. Furthermore,
247 it reveals shortcuts to develop this registry. Specifically, the strong phylogenetic constraints on
248 mass indicate that early efforts should focus on gaining coverage for higher taxonomic categories
249 – every insect family and subfamily. Work should then extend to every genus and in time to
250 every species. Because this effort will generate a substantial volume of data, it needs a home and
251 the BOLD platform (Ratnasingham & Hebert, 2007) is well-suited to meet this need. Although
252 specimens with mass data need not possess barcode records, the inclusion of sequence
253 information will maximize the utility of these records for metabarcoding and eDNA analysis.
254 Moreover, the barcode records will ensure that specimens in the mass registry are properly
255 identified, one of the key problems confronting any large-scale repository of biological
256 collaterals. To demonstrate its capacity, the current records are deposited in a dataset on BOLD
257 (DS-MASSCOL; dx.doi.org/10.XYZZ/DS-MASSCOL [NOTE to editors and reviewers: a DOI
258 has been requested for the dataset, but it was not yet available at the time of submission]) that
259 couples barcode records with mass information on each specimen examined in this study.
260 Because DS-MASSCOL is a dynamic dataset where BIN assignments may shift and where
261 specimens that currently lack a genus or species assignment may gain one, a supplemental file
262 (Data S2) provides a snapshot at the time of submission.

263

264 Conclusions

265

266 Aside from its value on providing a basis for extending understanding of the evolution of body
267 mass, comprehensive body mass data on insect species is needed for ecological modeling. By
268 confirming that variable curatorial and preservation practices have little impact on body mass,
269 the present study establishes that museum specimens provide a resource for the rapid assembly
270 of mass data. Employing this approach, the present study assembled mass data for 3,161 species
271 of Coleoptera, nearly 1% of all known species in this order. Moreover, because of the strong
272 phylogenetic constraints on body size, the current records enable accurate mass estimation (+/-
273 20%) for nearly all Canadian beetles. The extension of this approach to other arthropod groups
274 and other geographic regions would facilitate the assembly of a mass registry for all insects.
275 Incorporation of the resultant mass value  for each BIN into the parameters on BOLD will
276 ensure easy access to these data.

277

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Figure 1

Distribution of the log-transformed body masses for 3,161 BINs of Canadian Coleoptera.

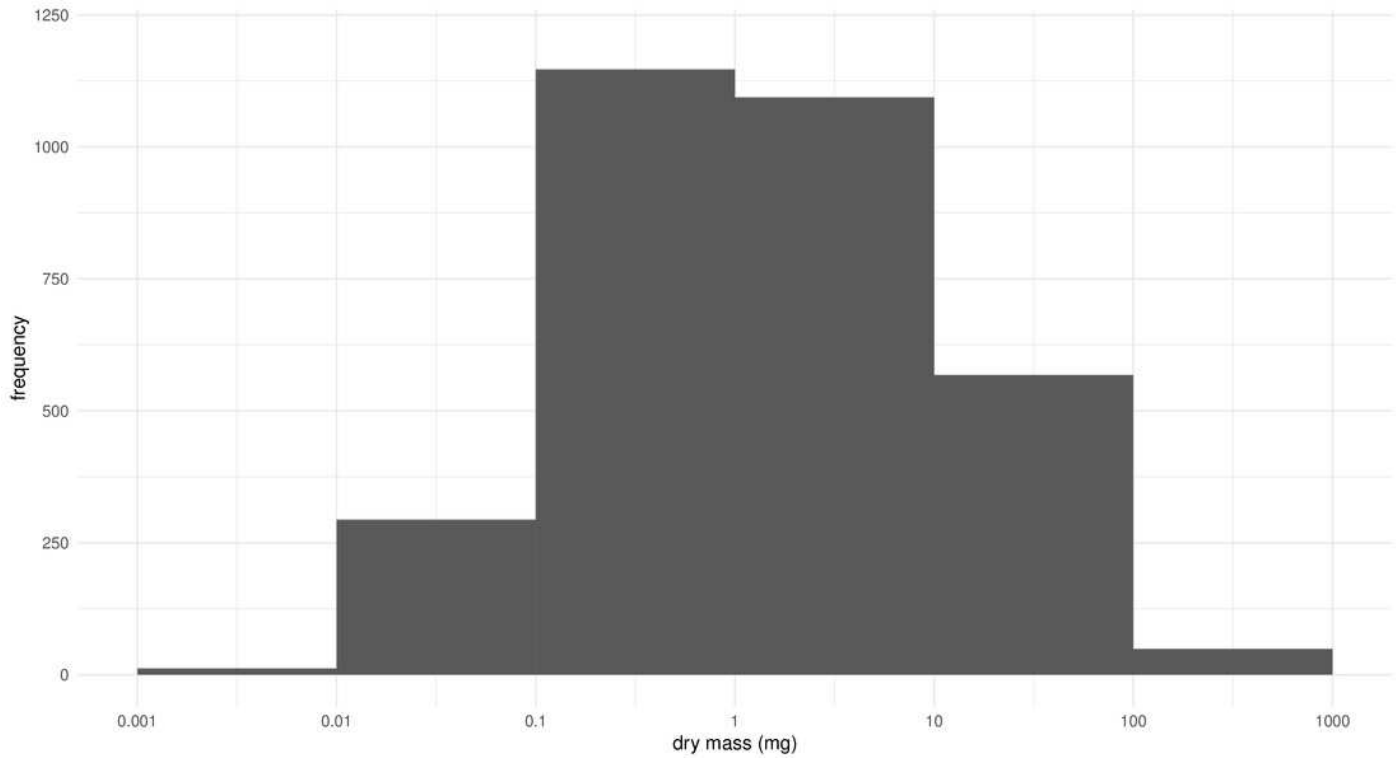


Figure 2

Distribution of the variance in body mass for Coleoptera genera.

Interquartile range measures the difference between the upper and lower quartiles and can be converted to fold-difference or used to estimate the typical deviation from the median (e.g., IQR 0.2 = 1.6-fold difference between quartiles \approx \pm 23% from median; IQR 0.4 = 2.5-fold difference between quartiles \approx \pm 57% from median).

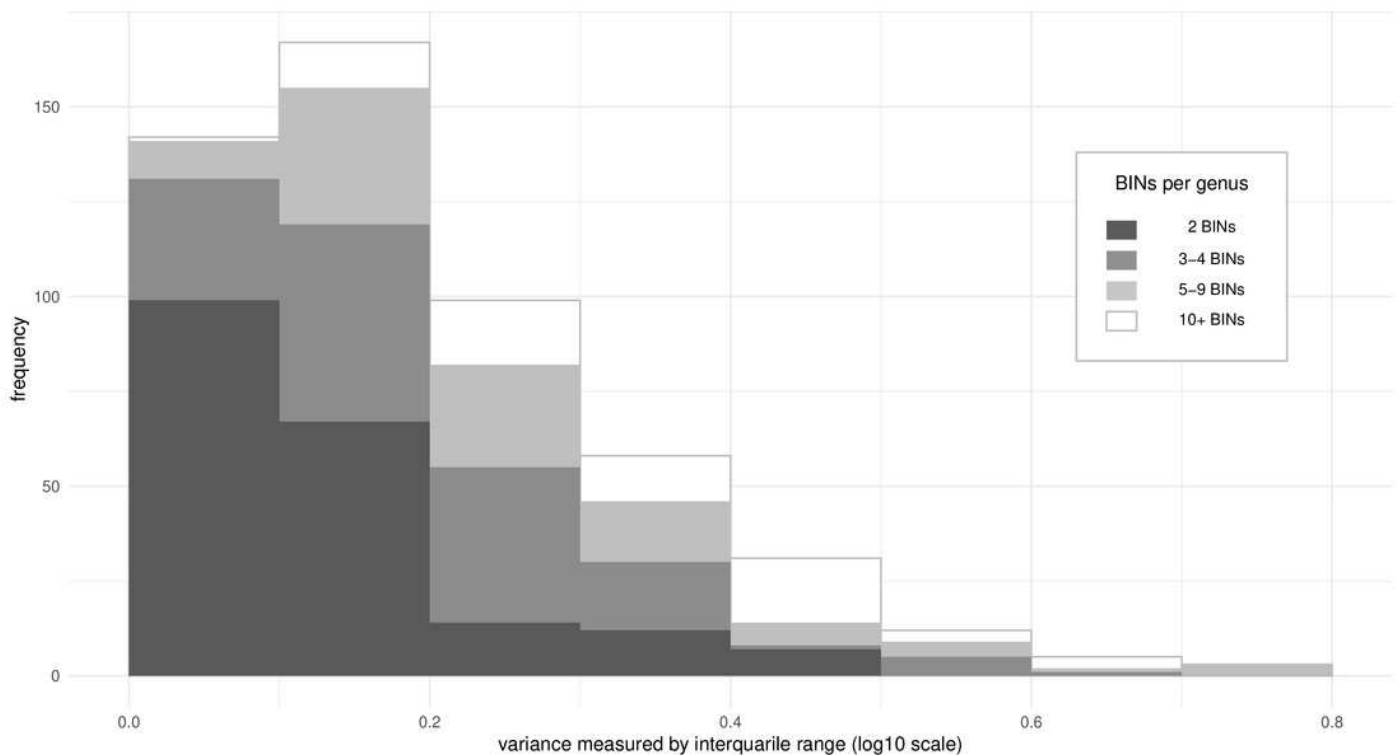


Table 1 (on next page)

Output of one-way and nested analyses of variance.

1 **Table 1.** *Output of one-way and nested analyses of variance.*

Analysis	Factor	D.f.	Sum Sq.	Mean Sq.	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	ω^2
a) One-way: family	Family	78	7644	98.0	51.6	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.56
	Residual	3068	5821	1.9			
b) One-way: subfamily	Subfamily	183	9412	51.4	46.0	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.74
	Residual	2749	3075	1.12			
c) One way: genus	Genus	518	9934	19.2	50.0	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.91
	Residual	2059	790	0.38			
d) One way: genera with n ≥ 10	Genus	64	3630	56.7	118.2	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.88
	Residual	957	459	0.48			
e) Nested: family and genus levels	Family	49	6185	126.2	329.6	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.59
	Family/Genus	448	3561	7.95	20.8	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.32
	Residuals	2013	771	0.38			
f) Nested: families with n ≥ 100	Family	5	3046	609.2	1407	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.51
	Family/Genus	269	2383	8.9	20.5	< 2.2 ⁻¹⁶	0.38
	Residuals	1174	508.4	0.4			

2