*Synedrella nodiflora* (L.) Gaertn Populations in Sumatra Island showing Low Genetic Difference: a study based on the intergenic spacer *atp*B – *rbc*L

Agus Hery Susanto1, Agus Nuryanto1and Budi Setiadi Daryono2

1 Faculty of Biology, Jenderal Soedirman University, Indonesia

2 Faculty of Biology, Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

*Corresponding author’s e-mail address:* [susanto1408@yahoo.co.id](mailto:susanto1408@yahoo.co.id)

**Abstract**. Previous study on *Synedrella nodiflora* (L.) Gaertn populations in Java Island shows both very low haplotype and nucleotide diversity, and at the same time reveals high connectivity among the populations. Sumatra Island, which is like Java Island located in Sunda Shelf, has been subjected to relatively increasing human population and overexploitation of natural resources in a few last decades. This makes it vulnerable to terrestrial ecosystem changes potentially having influence on the existing populations of *S. nodiflora*. Hence, this study aims to assess genetic difference among *S. nodiflora* populations in Sumatra Island using intergenic spacer (IGS) *atp*B – *rbc*L. This molecular marker has been used in the population genetic study of some plant species. In this study we collect randomly 20 individuals from four different locations in Sumatra. The results show that based on IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L sequences of 860 bp length, only two haplotypes are found. One of them is of the same haplotype mostly found in Java Island, while the other shows some base substitutions. Low genetic difference indicating high connectivity among populations of *S. nodiflora* in Sumatra Island is observed.

1. Introduction

*Synedrella nodiflora* (L.) Gaertn is a wild plant species widely distributed over approximately 50 tropical countries (Chauhan & Johnson, 2009). Interestingly, however, it has been known as the only member of genus *Synedrella*, family Asteraceae (The Plant List, 2013) showing significantly high reproductive ability and wide range of altitudes (Dwiati *et al.*, 2003). Both its potentials as useful plant and, oppositely, its existence as sufficiently important weed in some crops have been reported. Most references note its potentials as medicinal plants (Rathi & Gopalakrishnan, 2006; Bhogaonkar *et al*., 2011; Amoateng *et al*., 2012; Dutta, *et al.*, 2012; Islam *et al.*, 2013; Adjei *et al*., 2014; Adjibode *et al*., 2015; Amoateng *et al*., 2017a, 2017b), while some others also reveal its possibility to be used as bioinsecticide (Belmain *et al*., 2001), biofungicide (Sanit, 2016) and heavy metal detoxificant (Prekeyi & Oghenekevwe, 2007). On the other hands, as broad-leaf weed frequently present in several crops, it may lead to reduced yield (Moenandir *et al.*, 1996; Murrinie, 2011; Hasanudin *et al*., 2012; Srithi *et al*., 2017).

Due to its taxonomical status as a member of a monotypic genus, it is strongly asumed that *S. nodiflora* populations worldwide have extremely low genetic diversity. This has been proven in the case of Java Island, where *S. nodiflora* populations show both very low haplotype and nucleotide diversity when analyzed using intergenic (IGS) *atp*B – *rbc*L partial sequence as the molecular marker. Correspondingly, low genetic difference among populations indicating high connectivity is also reported. In other words, no population structure in the island is observed (Susanto *et al*., 2018).

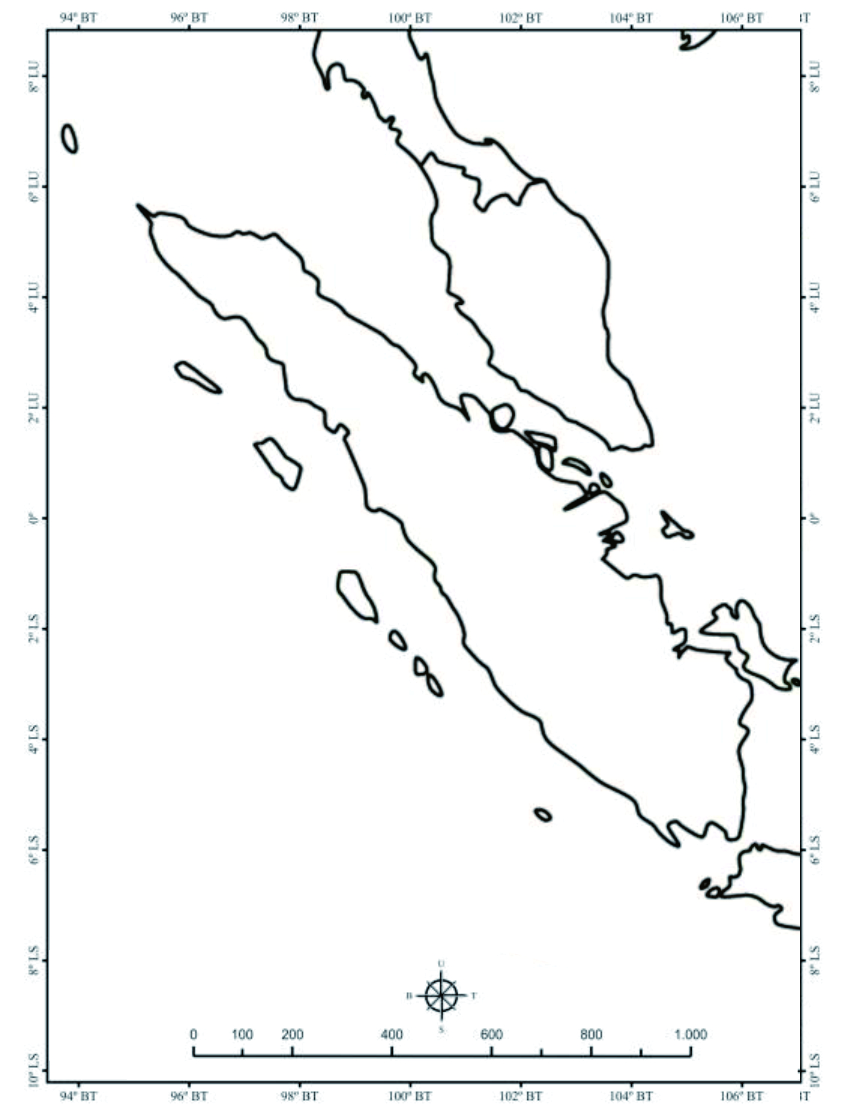
Sumatra Island, which is also located in Sunda Shelf, has been separated from Java Island since the end of Last Glacial Maximum. Consequently, the terrestrial ecosystems in both islands may have evolved differently. Then, Sumatra Island has underwent relatively increasing human population and overexploitation of natural resources since many years ago. This makes it vulnerable to ecosystem alteration potentially having influence on the existing populations of *S. nodiflora*. Hence, population genetics of this species in Sumatra Island, especially in terms of genetic difference among populations, is interestingly studied.

Genetic difference among populations can be analyzed by the use of a particular molecular marker, e.g. intergenic spacer (IGS) *atp*B – *rbc*L. This marker has been shown highly variable in several populations of Alismataceae species in China, i.e. *Sagittaria trifolia* (Chen *et al.*, 2008), *S. potamogetifolia* (Tan *et al.*, 2008) and *S. lichuanensis* (Liu *et al*., 2010). In addition, it has been reported to have high variation in the populations of *Hygrophila pogonocalyx* (Acanthaceae) in Taiwan (Huang *et al*., 2005) and *Ceriops tagal* (Rhizophoraceae) in Southeast Asia (Liao *et al.*, 2007). The high variation of IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L sequences is probably because this chloroplast genome region is not responsible for any protein synthesis (Taberlet *et al.*, 1991; Chiang & Schaal, 2000a, 2000b; Small *et al*., 2005).

This study aims to assess genetic difference and the level of connectivity among *S. nodiflora* populations in Sumatra Island based on IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L. It is expected from this study that molecular data can be obtained to compare with the existing taxonomical status of the species, which has been based merely on phenotypical characters.

1. Methods
   1. *Plant Materials*

Twenty samples of *S. nodiflora* were collected randomly from four different locations in Sumatra Island, i.e. Medan, Pakanbaru, Padang and Palembang, each of which was represented by five plant individuals (Figure 1). The plants were taken up with the roots and put into plastic bottles which have previously been filled with a little water. They were then planted in polybags in a glass house.



1

2

3

4

**Figure 1.** **Locations of sampling**

1 = Medan, 2 = Pakanbaru, 3 = Padang 4 = Palembang

* 1. *Genomic DNA Extraction*

Genomic DNAs were extracted from the uppermost leaves following CTAB method (Doyle & Doyle, 1990). As much as 0.1 g of the leaf pieces of individual plant was used as sample. The extracted DNAs were dissolved in 100 µl TE buffer and were kept at 4oC. Measurement of DNA quantity and quality was carried out using genequant.

* 1. *IGS atpB – rbcL Amplification and Sequencing*

The genomic DNAs were used as PCR templates to amplify IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L employing universal primers, i.e. 5’ – ACA TCK ART ACK GGA CCA ATA A – 3’ as forward primer and 5’ – AAC ACC AGC TTT RAA TCC AA – 3’ as reverse primer (Chiang *et al*., 1998). Amplification was performed using thermocycler Boeco in a total volume of 46 µl reaction mixture containing 20 µl Kapa, 17 µl nuclease free water; 8 µl genomic DNA; 0.5 µl of the respective primer. The mixture was applied to a touch down PCR condition as follows: pre-denaturation at 94oC for 4 mins, followed by 10 reaction cycles (94oC 45 secs, 49oC 45 secs, 72oC 2 mins), 10 reaction cycles (94oC 45 secs, 48oC 45 secs, 72oC 2 mins), 10 reaction cycles (94oC 45 secs, 47oC 45 secs, 72oC 2 mins), 10 reaction cycles (94oC 45 secs, 46oC 45 secs, 72oC 2 mins), terminated by final extension at 72oC for 10 mins and storage at 4oC. The PCR products were put onto a 1.5% agarose electrophoretic gel using 1x TBE buffer. Then, the electrophoresis was run in 100 V, 87 mA for 45 mins after which the fluorosafestained gelwas exposed to UV transilluminator for documentation.

Purification of the PCR products was carried out using QIAquick kit (Qiagen, Germany), and the purified PCR products were then sequenced employing automated dideoxy method (Sanger *et al.*, 1977) with dye terminator. Sequencing was performed in Firstbase Malaysia.

* 1. *Data Analysis*

Sequences were edited using Bioedit version 7.0.4.1 (Hall, 1999) and were checked manually. Sequence alignment was performed using ClustalW (Thompson *et al*., 1994), which was also implemented in Bioedit version 7.0.4.1 (Hall, 1999). Haplotype diversity *h* (Nei, 1987) and nucleotide diversity *π* (Nei & Jin, 1989) were calculated using Arlequin 2.0 (Schneider *et al*., 2000). Phylogeography analysis using AMOVA (Excoffier *et al*., 1992) was carried out to see whether population structure occurred or not.

1. Results

All samples produced amplicons of 860 bp length, which were then aligned using BLAST. The alignment showed 88% to 96% homology to various *atp*B – *rbc*L sequences available in NCBI database, ensuring that the amplicons are undoubtedly IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L. Two haplotypes of some base substitutions in various positions were observed (Table 1). Haplotype 1 is entirely of the same sequence as that of haplotype 1 from Java Island already available in NCBI database with accession number of KX096801. At present, haplotype 2 have also been registered in NCBI database with accession numbers of MF285608.

Table 1. Parts of the IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L sequences of *Synedrella nodiflora* (L.) Gaertn in Sumatra Island

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Haplotype | Origin of sample | Number of individuals | Sequences showing mutation (5’ – 3’) | NCBI accession number |
| 1 | Medan, Pakanbaru, Padang, Palembang | 19 | tccctccctacaa**C**tcatgaa  (bases 10 to 30)  tttttatc**G**aaatacctaaaa  (bases 230 to 250)  tg**T**acgtgatatatg**T**tg**T**a  (bases 295 to 314)  **G**tgaaaatatgtggaatattt**T**  (bases 328 to 349)  **G**gtaaaaaaaagaacaacagacta**G**  (bases 361 to 384)  gaagagtc**G**atgatatagaaa  (bases 420 to 440)  ttc**G**tctactt  (bases 540 to 550) | KX096801 |
| 2 | Palembang | 1 | tccctccctacaa**A**tcatgaa  (bases 10 to 30)  tttttatc**C**aaatacctaaaa  (bases 230 to 250)  tg**G**acgtgatatatg**G**tg**G**a  (bases 295 to 314)  **A**tgaaaatatgtggaatattt**A**  (bases 328 to 349)  **A**gtaaaaaaaagaacaacagacta**A**  (bases 361 to 384)  gaagagtc**A**atgatatagaaa  (bases 420 to 440)  ttc**A**tctactt  (bases 540 to 550) | MF285608 |

Extremely low haplotype diversity *(h)*, i.e. 0.1000 + 0.0880, and nucleotide diversity (*π*), i.e. 0.001409 + 0.001046, were obtained. Analysis of molecular variance (AMOVA) showing a very low fixation index of 0.02343 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. AMOVA of *Synedrella nodiflora* (L.) Gaertn populations in Sumatra Island

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sources of Variation | df | Sum of Square | Variance Components | Percentage of Variation |
| Among populations | 3 | 1.933 | 0.01017 | 2.34 |
| Within populations | 16 | 10.600 | 0.42400 | 97.66 |
| Total | 19 | 12.533 | 0.43417 |  |
| Fixation index (FST) = 0.02343 *p* = 1.00000 | | | | |

1. Discussion

Similar results showing considerably low molecular diversity of *S. nodiflora* (L.) Gaertn populations in Java Island based on IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L have been reported. The haplotype diversity and nucleotide diversity values are of 0.0345 + 0.0330 and 0.000040 + 0.000127 respectively (Susanto *et al*., 2018). As in the case of Java Island, haplotype 1 is also found as the most dominant one in Sumatra Island, while haplotype 2 consists of only one individual in Palembang.

Different results using IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L in the population of a mangrove species *Ceriops tagal* (Rhizophoraceae) in Southeast Asia was obtained. Much higher calculated *h* and *π* values were found, i.e. 0.667 and 0.0031 respectively. In addition, most of the mutations involved not only base substitutions as in the case of *S. nodiflora* population in Sumatra Island, but also several long insertion and deletion (Liao *et al.*,2007). The vast difference between the two results is probably due to the highly adaptable *C. tagal* to any mangrove ecosystem condition of the newly occupied areas (Mori & Kajita, 2016), while *S. nodiflora* shows merely phenotypic plasticity without alteration in genetic constitution. Phenotypic plasticity is very common to observe in invassive plant species, such as in the case of *Polygonum cespitosum* (Polygonaceae), which is an ideal weed species showing two mechanisms of invassive distribution, i.e. high tolerance to a wide range of environmental conditions supported by high reproductive ability and competitiveness against other surrounding plants (Sultan & Matesanz, 2015).

The low fixation index indicates high connectivity among *S. nodiflora* populations in Sumatra Island, or in other words, no population structure occurs. This is because of high gene flow among populations, by means of pollen/seed dispersal either naturally or artificially due to crop seed transportation. Natural pollen/seed dispersal can be mediated by wind, water, or pollinating insects, while dispersal through crop seeds may occur at harvest time if *S. nodiflora* grows in or near a crop land.

*S. nodiflora* seeds are contained in a characteristic structure known as cypsela (Brandel, 2007), especially in central cypselas which are longer and lighter than peripheral cypselas, enabling considerably remote dispersal. Then, cypsela germination occurs more readily under higher light intensity rather in shaded areas. Nevertheless, *S. nodiflora* can really grow well in a wide range of environmental conditions, since other factors than light intensity have less influence on cypsela germination (Souza Filho & Takaki, 2011).

In addition to wind and water assisted, *S. nodiflora* seed dispersal may be mediated by insects, particularly those belonging to the order of Thysanoptera. This group of insects usually have developmental period of stage from egg to larvae which is in accordance with the development of the host flowers. Sticky pollen surfaces enable the insects to carry pollens in a large quantity, either in legs, wings, or setae in the abdominal segments. The capacity of Thysanoptera in carrying *S. nodiflora* pollens can reach 5,536 to 5,716 per capitulum (Varatharajan *et al*., 2016). Commonly, Thysanoptera has only about 1 mm body length and by the wind can spread across the sea as far as 1,600 km (Mound, 2009).

Although pollens can be distantly dispersed, the more possible mechanism is through seed dispersal, since this is the only way of gene flow among terrestrial plant species populations located in farther places in which pollen dispersal can not sufficiently support connectivity among the populations (Cain *et al.*, 2000; Nathan *et al.*, 2008). One of the most effective seed dispersal mechanisms is sea-dispersal, which can disperse seeds up to more than 100 km (Harwell & Orth, 2002). For instance, *Ipomoea pes-caprae* has been reported to be globally distributed by sea-dispersal (Miryeganeh *et al.*, 2014).

In the case of *S. nodiflora*, sea-dispersal is constrained by the low viability in high salt concentration. The seeds can only survive in a moderate salt concentration, i.e. 40 mM NaCl (Chauhan & Johnson, 2009), while most sea water has approximately 600 mM NaCl. However, *S. nodiflora* seed has been reported to be found in the dung of Galapagos turtle *(Chelonoidis nigra)* known to possess mobility among islands. The seed was found intact and could still germinate. Hence, *S. nodiflora* sea-dispersal can seemingly occur by means of diet and soft digestion of particular vertebrates such as turtles (Blake *et al.*, 2012).

The absence of *S. nodiflora* population structure in Sumatra Island resembles that reported in *Sagittaria lichuanensis* (Alismataceae) population in central China. Based on IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L, high connectivity among *S. lichuanensis* populations was also observed. As well, no significant correlation between genetic and geographical distance was obtained (Liu *et al*., 2010). Similarly, by the use IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L high connectivity among *S. trifolia* (Chen *et al*., 2008) and *S. potamogetifolia* populations in China (Tan *et al.,* 2008) have been reported. Oppositely, genetic difference between *C. tagal* populations in the west and east of Malay Peninsula was observed. This big land was considered as the cause of genetic difference between *C. tagal* populations in Indian Ocean and China Sea coastal areas based on IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L and IGS *trn*L – *trn*F (Liao *et al*., 2007). Population structure due to land barrier was also reported in other mangrove plant population, i.e. *Avicennia germinans* (Avicenniaceae) showing genetic difference between that in the west coast of Atlantic and the east coast of Pacific (Dodd & Rafii, 2002). Genetic difference has also been reported between *Hygrophila pogonocalyx* (Acanthaceae) populations in the west and east Taiwan employing IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L as molecular marker (Huang *et al*., 2005).

1. Conclusion

Supported by the low value of fixation index indicating the absence of population structure, it could be concluded that high connectivity among *Synedrella nodiflora* (L.) Gaertnpopulations in Sumatra Island occurs. This leads to low genetic difference among the populations based on IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L partial sequence as the marker. Studies on population genetics of *S. nodiflora* in larger areas is needed to confirm this finding, either employing IGS *atp*B – *rbc*L or other highly variable molecular markers.

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