

Molecular Phylogeny of Bony Fishes, Based on the Amino Acid Sequence of the Growth Hormone

Giacomo Bernardi,* Giuseppe D'Onofrio,** Simone Caccio', Giorgio Bernardi

Laboratoire de Génétique Moléculaire, Institut Jacques Monod, 2, Place Jussieu, 75005 Paris (France)

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Abstract. Bony fishes (Osteichthyes) comprise over 22,000 species, about half of all vertebrate species. In order to investigate the phylogenetic relationships within this vertebrate class, we have studied the only protein whose primary structure is known in a rather large (27) number of fish species belonging to seven orders—the growth hormone. The phylogeny obtained using the maximum parsimony method based on amino acid sequences represents the first molecular phylogeny of teleostean fishes based on an extensive set of data. This phylogeny agrees remarkably well with the generally accepted phylogeny based on morphological characters and paleontological data.

Introduction

The bony fishes (Osteichthyes) are the largest class of vertebrates (see Fig. 1 for the systematics of the fishes under consideration here), comprising as many species (>22,000) as all other classes together (MacAllister 1987). Within Osteichthyes, the subdivision Teleostei has been shown by morphological systematics to be monophyletic (Patterson 1973, 1977; Patterson and Rosen 1977; Rosen 1982;

Lauder and Liem 1983), whereas several phylogenetic relationships among Teleostei and other groups of fishes are still unclear.

In the case of fishes, molecular approaches have not been widely used in phylogenetic studies. So far, only mitochondrial DNA sequences (Kocher et al. 1989; Meyer et al. 1990; Meyer and Wilson 1990; Normark et al. 1991; Martin and Palumbi 1992) or nuclear ribosomal sequences (Stock et al. 1991; Bernardi et al. 1992) have been used for reconstructing some fish phylogenies (in fact, either for several closely related taxa, or for a small number of taxa separated by large evolutionary distances). Indeed, very few genes coding for proteins have been sequenced in fishes (less than 200 for all fishes vs over 3,000 for man). Among them, the coding sequences of the growth hormone gene are the most widely known in primary structure and are potentially useful for phylogenetic studies covering broad phylogenetic spectra both in cold- and warm-blooded vertebrates.

In the present work we have used all the available amino acid sequences (27) for the growth hormone gene of fishes for phylogenetic reconstructions. The results obtained agree remarkably well with the generally accepted phylogenies based on morphology and paleontology (Fig. 1).

Materials and Methods

Sequences. We studied the amino acid sequences from 24 euteleostean fishes (see Table 1 for a list and Fig. 1 for the system-

* Present address: Hopkins Marine Station, Stanford University, Department of Biological Sciences, Pacific Grove, CA 93950-3094, USA

** Present address: Stazione Zoologica, Naples, Italy
Correspondence to: G. Bernardi

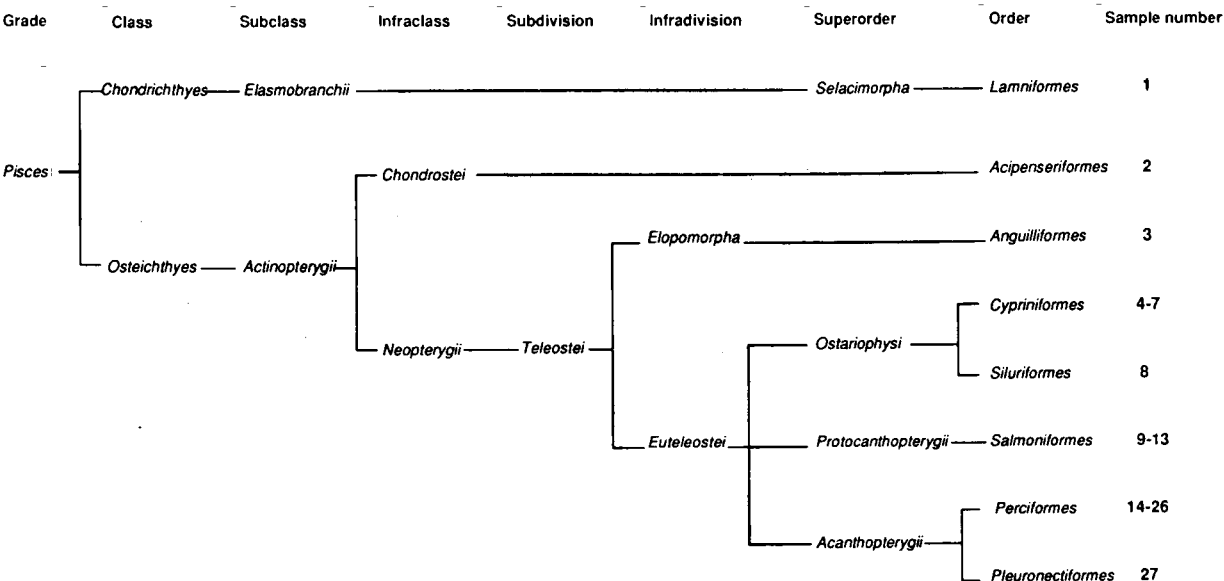


Fig. 1. Hierarchy of higher categories of fishes (Nelson 1984), based on morphological characters.

atics of the species) ranging from the older superorders Ostariophysi and Protacanthopterygii to the most recent order Pleuronectiformes, one elopomorph, the Japanese eel *Anguilla japonica* (Teleostei, Anguilliformes), and one chondrosteian fish, the blue shark *Prionace glauca* (Chondrichthyes, Lamniformes), was used as the outgroup. The source of most sequences was the NBRF (National Biomedical Research Foundation), release 33 (June 1992); sequences 6 and 7 were from GenBank release 71 (June 1992); sequences 1, 2, 8, 9, and 16 were from recently published data not yet available in databanks; sequence 22 was from a personal communication; the sequences for *Tilapia buttikofferi* and *Oreochromis grahami* (sequences 14 and 15, respectively, in Fig. 1) were determined in our laboratory (S. Caccio', G. D'Onofrio, G. Bernardi, and G. Bernardi, manuscript in preparation). Table 1 lists the mnemonics and references of the analyzed sequences.

Alignments of Sequences. Amino acid sequences were aligned (Fig. 2) using the CLUSTAL program (Higgins and Sharp 1988). Out of 193 residues for the consensus sequence, only 150 were used for the phylogenetic analysis; insertions, deletions, and regions of ambiguous alignments were removed from the analysis. Of the 150 positions, 108 were variable, and 96 were phylogenetically informative.

Phylogenetic Analyses. Phylogenetic analyses were done using the maximum parsimony (MP) method. The most parsimonious trees were determined using the heuristic or branch and bound options of the phylogenetic analyses using parsimony (PAUP) program (Swofford 1990). The degree of confidence that could be assigned to the various groupings in the most parsimonious trees was determined by bootstrapping with 100 replicates, using the corresponding options in the program. The recommended 2,000 replicates (Hedges 1992) were not performed because of the excessive computer time involved. Grouping is usually considered to be significantly supported if it appears in 95% or more of the most parsimonious trees (Felsenstein 1985).

Results and Discussion

Sequences

The longest among the growth hormone sequences analyzed here, those of cyprinids and salmonids, contained 186 amino acids, while the shortest one, that of the flounder, was only 168 residues long (Fig. 2). Apart from a few deletions and insertions, the growth hormone is a remarkably conserved protein. The molecule is composed of four conserved regions, which are likely to be functionally important, Ag, Bg, Cg, Dg, and four variable regions, V1, V2, V3, V4 (Kawauchi and Yasuda 1989; Watanabe et al. 1992). These variable regions may create ambiguities responsible for the slight differences found between the alignment presented here (Fig. 2) and those previously published (Watanabe et al. 1992). To avoid ambiguities for the phylogenetic reconstructions, insertions and deletions were excluded from our analysis, as already mentioned. However, it should be stressed that these differences are informative. Some deletions were characteristic of particular groups. A deletion of 14 amino acids (at position 144) was only found in Pleuronectiformes; a deletion of five residues (at position 102) in Acanthopterygii; another one of two amino acids (at position 89) in Salmonidae; and two deletions of one amino acid each (positions 139 and 150) in Ostariophysi.

Sequence Homologies

Several closely related fishes from the same genus did not show any difference at the protein level.

Table 1. List of fish species analyzed in this work^a

Number	Species	Mnemonics	Source
1	<i>Prionace glauca</i>		Yamaguchi et al. (1989)
2	<i>Acipenser guldenstadt</i>		Yasuda et al. (1992)
3	<i>Anguilla japonica</i>	A27268	NBRF
4	<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>	S02764	NBRF
5	<i>Ctenopharyngodon idella</i>	A32424	NBRF
6	<i>Hypophthalmichthys multitrchs</i>	Hyppgh	GenBank
7	<i>Hypophthalmichthys nobilis</i>	Hyppgi	GenBank
8	<i>Ictalurus punctatus</i>		Watanabe et al. (1992)
9	<i>Esox lucius</i>		Schneider et al. (1992)
10	<i>Oncorhynchus keta</i>	A23154	NBRF
11	<i>Oncorhynchus kisutch</i>	STONC	NBRF
12	<i>Salmo gairdneri</i>	A25791	NBRF
13	<i>Salmo salar</i>	S03709	NBRF
14	<i>Tilapia buttikofferi</i>		Our data ^b
15	<i>Oreochromis grahami</i>		Our data ^b
16	<i>Oreochromis mossambicus</i>		Yamaguchi et al. (1991)
17	<i>Oreochromis niloticus</i>	A32478	NBRF
18	<i>Euthynnus pelamis</i>	JK0021	NBRF
19	<i>Thunnus albacares</i>	JU0030	NBRF
20	<i>Thunnus thynnus</i>	S01746	NBRF
21	<i>Acanthopagrus butcheri</i>	X59377	NBRF
22	<i>Acanthopagrus latus</i>		H.J. Tsai, personal comm.
23	<i>Pagrus major</i>	S00747	NBRF
24	<i>Lates calcarifer</i>	X59378	NBRF
25	<i>Sparus auratus</i>	S54890	NBRF
26	<i>Seriola quinqueradiata</i>	STFI	NBRF
27	<i>Paralichthys olivaceus</i>	S04355	NBRF

^a Fish species have been listed in the order used in Figs. 1–4. Mnemonics from NBRF (release 33, June 1992), Genbank (Release 71, June 1992), literature data, or personal communication were used to obtain the sequences

^b S. Caccio', G. D'Onofrio, G. Bernardi, and G. Bernardi (paper in preparation)

Within the genera *Oreochromis*, *Oncorhynchus*, and *Hypophthalmichthys*, amino acid identity was 100%. Within families, a high identity was also found: 95.8% for salmonids, 99.5% for cichlids (tilapiine cichlids), and 97.7% for cyprinids. This situation clearly rules out any problems that might potentially arise from the fact that salmonids and cyprinids, being ancient tetraploids, contain several copies of the gene. Since the growth hormone gene is a highly conserved protein, it provided a better resolution for more distantly related taxa. Nucleic acid sequences may, however, be more informative for studying the relationships between closely related taxa (paper in preparation).

Phylogenetic Trees

The maximum parsimony (MP) analysis of our data using the program PAUP resulted in 12 most parsimonious trees (length = 340 steps; the Consistency Index [CI] was 0.862; the CI excluding uninformative characters was 0.853). One of these trees is shown in Fig. 3. The branching orders were very highly statistically supported, with bootstrap results often higher than 95%. The results of the bootstrap

analysis are shown in Fig. 4 superimposed with the consensus tree (majority rule, 50%) for the 6 most parsimonious trees.

The 6 most parsimonious trees differed only for relationships below the order level, such as the relationship within salmonids, which corresponded to taxa with few differences in sequence, as mentioned before. On the other hand, the relationships between the major lineages, Teleostei, Elopomorpha, Euteleostei, Ostariophysii, Protacanthopterygii, and Acanthopterygii, were always the same for all the 6 most parsimonious trees. Their positions were statistically well supported (Fig. 4) with bootstrap values ranging from 94 to 100% (with the exception of the Protacanthopterygii, which showed a bootstrap value of 69%).

At the major-lineages level, the Ostariophysii seem to be the sister group of the Protacanthopterygii + Acanthopterygii (a group present in 99% of the generated trees). The Ostariophysii would be, in this case, at the start of the Euteleostei, in agreement with Rosen (1973) and Greenwood and Lauder (1981). The Acanthopterygii seem to be derived from the Paracanthopterygii, confirming previous hypotheses (Nelson 1984). Interestingly, the posi-

1 *P. glauca* YPLLPLS*****DLFAKAVHRAQHLLHVAETTKDFERKYIPEEQRHSSKSPSAFCQSETIPAPTGKEDAQRSDRELLYSLLLIQSWLNPINQL

2 *A. guldenstadt* *****YPMPI.LSSLFTNVLRAQYLHLQAAIDYKDFERTYMEQNRHSSKNPSAFCYSETIPAPTGKEDAQRSDRELLYSLLLIQSWLNPINQL

3 *A. japonica* VEPISLY*****NLFTSAVNRAQHLLHAAEIKYEFERSIPPEAHRQLSKTSPLAGCNSDIPPTGKDETKQKSSDGLLRLISGALIQSWYPLKTL

4 *C. carpio* HARALVLLSVLVSLVLLVQGRASDNQRLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEDNLLPEERRQLSKI FPLSFCNSDIETAPTKGDETKQKSSMLKLLRISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

5 *C. idella* HARALVLLSVLVSLVLLVQGTASENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEDNLLPEERRQLSKI FPLSFCNSDIETAPTKGDETKQKSSMLKLLRISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

6 *H. multitrix* HARALVLLSVLVSLVLLVQGTASENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEDNLLPEERRQLSKI FPLSFCNSDIETAPTKGDETKQKSSMLKLLRISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

7 *H. nobilis* HARALVLLSVLVSLVLLVQGTASENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEDNLLPEERRQLSKI FPLSFCNSDIETAPTKGDETKQKSSMLKLLRISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

8 *I. punctatus* *****FEQRLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEALLPEERRQLSKI FPLSFCNSDIETAPAGKDEAQKSSVLLKLLHSTYRLIESWEFFSRNL

9 *E. lucius* MGQVFLMPEVLLVAGYLSGAEMENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEGTLLPEERRQLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

10 *O. keta* MGQVFLMPEVLLVAGYLSGAEMENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEGTLLPEERRQLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

11 *O. kisutch* MGQVFLMPEVLLVAGYLSGAEMENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEGTLLPEERRQLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

12 *S. gairdneri* MT*****MINT*****SRGSAEMENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEGTLLPEERRQLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

13 *S. salar* MGQVFLMPEVLLVAGYLSGAEMENQRLLFNNAIVRVQHLHQLAAKMINDFEGTLLPEERRQLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

14 *T. buttkofferi* MNSVLLLSVLCVCG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

15 *O. grahami* MNSVLLLSVLCVCG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

16 *O. mossambicus* *****QIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

17 *O. niloticus* MNSVLLLSVLCVCG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

18 *E. pelamis* *****PIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

19 *T. albacares* *****PIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

20 *T. thynnus* MDRVLLLSVLSLG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

21 *A. butcheri* MDRVLLLSVLSLG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

22 *A. latus* MDRVLLLSVLSLG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

23 *P. major* MDRVLLLSVLSLG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

24 *L. calcarifer* MDRVLLLSVLSLG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

25 *S. aurata* MDRVLLLSVLSLG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

26 *S. quinqueradiata* MDRVLLLSVLSLG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

27 *P. olivaceus* MDRVLLLSVLCVCG**VSSQIITDQRFLSIAVNRVTHLHLLAQRFLSDFESSLQTEEQRLNKIFLDFCNSDIETAPVDKHETQKSSVLLKLLHISFRILIESWEFFSQTL

1 *P. glauca* R*****TSDRVYDKLRDLEEGIFALMKTLEDGG*SSQGFAMLKF*SYERFDGNLSEEA*LMKNYGLLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

2 *A. guldenstadt* SRVFTNSLVLFTSDRVFEKLDLEEGIVALMRDLGEG*FGSSTLL*KL*TYDKFDVNLNRDDALFNKYGLLSCFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

3 *A. japonica* SDAPFNSLMLFCTSDGIFDKLEDLNRGINELMRKVVDGG*YIYEDVNR*NL*RYENFDVNLNRDDAGLKNYGLLSCFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

4 *C. carpio* SGTVNSLTVGNPNQITTEKLADLKVGIISVLIKGCGLDQPNMDDNDSLPLP*FEDFYLTMG*ENLRESFRLLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

5 *C. idella* SGGVNSLTVGNPNQITTEKLADLKVGIISVLIKGCGLDQPNMDDNDSLPLP*FEDFYLTMG*ESSLRESFRLLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

6 *H. multitrix* SGAVNSLTVGNPNQITTEKLADLKVGIISVLIKGCGLDQPNMDDNDSLPLP*FEDFYLTMG*ESSLRESFRLLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

7 *H. nobilis* SGAVNSLTVGNPNQITTEKLADLKVGIISVLIKGCGLDQPNMDDNDSLPLP*FEDFYLTMG*ESSLRESFRLLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

8 *I. punctatus* *****GNPNHISEKLDLKVGIISVLIKGCGLDQPNMDDNDSLPLP*FEDFYLTMG*EGNLRSEFRLLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

9 *E. lucius* THTMSNML**N*GNQMSKELNLIKVGINLITKSGDQVLSLDDNDSQLLPYGNYYQNLGDDNDRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

10 *O. keta* **IISNLSMWRNANQITSEKLSDLKVGINLITKSGDQVLSLDDNDSQLLPYGNYYQNLGDDNDRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

11 *O. kisutch* **IISNLSMWRNANQITSEKLSDLKVGINLITKSGDQVLSLDDNDSQLLPYGNYYQNLGDDNDRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

12 *S. gairdneri* **IISNLSMWRNANQITSEKLSDLKVGINLITKSGDQVLSLDDNDSQLLPYGNYYQNLGDDNDRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

13 *S. salar* **IISNLSMWRNANQITSEKLSDLKVGINLITKSGDQVLSLDDNDSQLLPYGNYYQNLGDDNDRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

14 *T. buttkofferi* SGGSSLRNQIS*P*****RLSELKTGILLIRANQDEAENYPTDITLQHPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRQTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

15 *O. grahami* SGGSSLRNQIS*P*****RLSELKTGILLIRANQDEAENYPTDITLQHPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRQTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

16 *O. mossambicus* SGGSSLRNQIS*P*****RLSELKTGILLIRANQDEAENYPTDITLQHPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRQTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

17 *O. niloticus* SGGSSLRNQIS*P*****RLSELKTGILLIRANQDEAENYPTDITLQHPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRQTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

18 *E. pelamis* SG**AQRNQISE*****KLSLKMGIQLLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

19 *T. albacares* SGGSSLRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

20 *T. thynnus* SGGSSLRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRNRYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

21 *A. butcheri* AGGSAPRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGDYHSPGCTDE.SLRRTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

22 *A. latus* AGGSAPRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRRTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

23 *P. major* SGGSSAPRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRRTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

24 *L. calcarifer* SGGSSAPRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRRTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

25 *S. aurata* SGGSSAPRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRRTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

26 *S. quinqueradiata* SGGSSAPRNQIS*P*****KLSLKTGILLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRRTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

27 *P. olivaceus* VASFAVRTQVTS*****KLSLKMGIQLLIRANQDEAEMFADSSALQIAPYGNYYQSLGGNE.SLRRTYELLACFKKDMHKVETYLKVMCKRFAESNCTV

Fig. 2. Aligned amino acid sequences from the pregrowth hormone gene for 26 teleostean fishes, compared with the corresponding sequence from the blue shark, *P. glauca*. Entire sequences are shown, with gaps (*) inserted to increase sequence

similarity. A line above the sequence indicates the regions used in the phylogenetic analysis. The first amino acid after the signal peptide is numbered, and dots mark every 10th position.

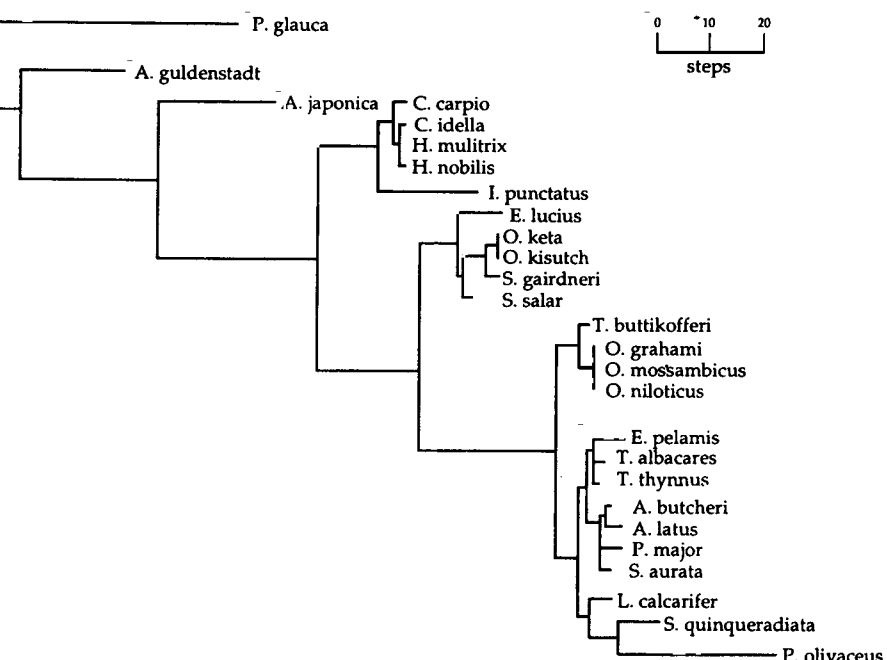


Fig. 3. One of the six most parsimonious trees obtained for the growth hormone. (See Materials and Methods.) The length of each branch (steps) is indicated above the tree, as a legend. For each of the shortest trees, the number of steps was 340, the Consistency Index (C.I.) was 0.862, and the C.I. excluding uninformative characters was 0.853.

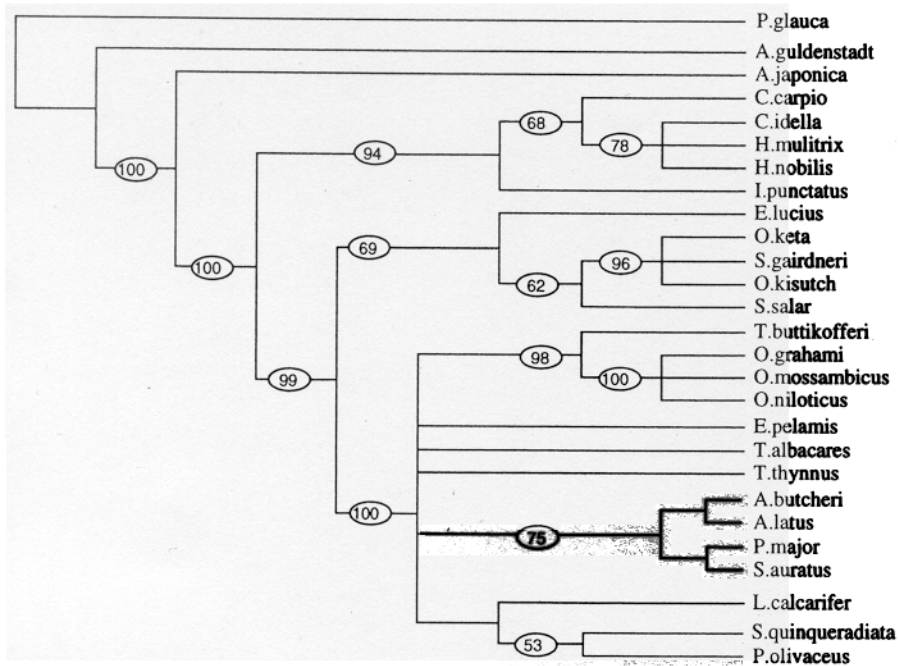


Fig. 4. Consensus tree (majority rule) obtained from the six most parsimonious trees. The circled numbers indicate the bootstrapping results for the node. See Results for details.

tion of the recent order Pleuronectiformes, derived from the order Perciformes, is in agreement with classical phylogenies (Lauder and Liem 1983; Nelson 1984).

The excellent agreement of the molecular data obtained in the present work (Figs. 3 and 4) with phylogenies (Fig. 1) based on morphological characters and paleontological data (Nelson 1984) is of interest in two respects: (1) It is in sharp contrast with the frequent divergencies between molecular and morphological-paleontological data found in the case of mammals (even when using the growth hormone sequence), a point which will be discussed elsewhere in detail (G. D'Onofrio, G. Bernardi, S. Caccio', and G. Bernardi, paper in preparation); and (2) it is the first case in which such a congruence has been found over extended evolutionary time in the case of vertebrates; in turn, this suggests that phylogenetic studies based on the growth hormone might be useful in order to solve issues like the controversial positions of Crossopterygii and Dipneusti.

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