

Development of senescence biomarkers in the common woodlouse

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Abstract

Over time, damages accumulate in the cells leading to the process of cell senescence. Many cellular modifications can then attest to this process and are called senescence biomarkers. Senescence biomarkers are highly studied in humans and are particularly useful for understanding the processes involved in age-related diseases. However, while studies on ageing are increasingly focusing on invertebrate models, senescence biomarkers remain poorly

26 developed in these organisms. In this study, we looked at the effect of age on three known
27 biomarkers in vertebrates: immune cells (cell size, density and viability), beta-galactosidase
28 activity and telomerase expression on *A. vulgare*, a terrestrial isopod. As expected, the size of
29 immune cells was higher in older individuals while their density and viability decreased, β -
30 galactosidase activity increased with age while Telomerase Reverse Transcriptase (TERT) gene
31 expression decreased. These biomarkers classically used in vertebrates are thus correlated with
32 age in our invertebrate model and make good biomarkers to highlight cell senescence in *A.*
33 *vulgare*. A strong gender effect was also observed on markers and could indicate different
34 resource allocation strategies. This last point encourages us to use the biomarkers developed
35 here to understand the other factors involved in the diversity of senescence patterns observed
36 in living world.

37

38 **Keywords**

39 *Armadillidium vulgare*, cellular senescence, immunosenescence, invertebrates,
40 Telomerase Reverse Transcriptase (TERT) , β -galactosidase activity

41

42 **1.Introduction**

43 The cellular senescence corresponds to the progressive deterioration of the cell leading
44 the stop of the cellular cycle (Campisi and di Fagagna, 2007). The principal hypothesis
45 proposed to explain this deterioration is the oxidative stress hypothesis also known as free
46 radical theory of ageing (Finkel and Holbrook, 2000; Wickens, 2001). Among this theory,
47 oxygenated reagents lead an accumulation of damage modifying the integrity and functions of
48 lipids, proteins as well as DNA and mitochondria in the cell (Finkel and Holbrook, 2000;
49 Terman and Brunk, 2006). Many studies have examined senescence and highlighted parameters
50 related to this phenomenon (De Jesus and Blasco, 2012).

51 The observation of cells is the first clue of cellular senescence. The senescence
52 processes lead to an increase in the size of the senescence cell which becomes larger than a non-
53 senescent cell (Hayflick, 1965; Rodier and Campisi, 2011). The evolution of the efficacy and
54 integrity of cells implied in immunity has been studied many times and has shown effects of
55 age, making them particularly relevant to study cellular senescence: for example, a diminution
56 of the number of effective immune cells with age has been reported in wild vertebrates (Cheynel
57 et al., 2017) but also in invertebrates including mosquitoes *Aedes aegypti* (Hillyer et al., 2004)
58 and crickets *Gryllus assimilis* (Park et al., 2011).

59 The activity of proteins could also be related to cellular senescence. Among them, the
60 most popular is the activity of the lysosomal β -galactosidase enzyme, which increases when the
61 cell enters in senescence (Dimri et al., 1995; Itahana et al., 2007). This phenomenon was
62 observed in senescent cells of many organisms ranging from humans (Gary and Kindell, 2005)
63 to honeybees (Hsieh and Hsu, 2011). Another target protein is the telomerase, enzyme that
64 lengthens the ends of telomeres, essential structures at the end of chromosomes to protect the
65 integrity of the genome, which shorten with each cell division and conduct cell senescence as
66 when their telomeric size becomes critical (Chiu and Harley, 1997; Shay and Wright, 2005).
67 The activity of telomerase depends of organism, age but also tissues. In humans, telomerase is
68 active during the development before the birth and after lonely in stem and germ cells (Liu et
69 al., 2007; Morgan, 2013) while in the long-lived species *Daphnia pulicaria*, the telomerase
70 activity in all tissues of the body decreases with age (Schumpert et al., 2015). The Telomerase
71 Reverse Transcriptase (TERT) gene was detected in numerous organisms including vertebrates,
72 fungi, ciliates and insects (Robertson and Gordon, 2006). As it has been shown to be related to
73 cell survival in humans (Cao et al., 2002), it could thereby be directly link to cellular senescence
74 in others organisms.

75 β -galactosidase activity, immune cell parameters (i.e. size, density and viability) and
76 telomerase activity do not directly reflect the age of the organisms, but the senescence process
77 itself; thus, they are classically considered as senescence biomarkers (Baker and Sprott, 1988).
78 These biomarkers are very useful for understanding the processes involved in senescence and
79 are widely used to understand processes of age-related diseases in humans (Hoos et al., 1998;
80 Xia et al., 2017). Although their usefulness is not in doubt, they are never used to understand
81 ageing patterns variability observed across and within species and still poorly studied in
82 invertebrates. However, the use of both these senescence biomarkers and invertebrate models
83 could meet the challenges of studies on factors impacting ageing variability that require long-
84 term monitoring using lots of replicates under controllable environmental conditions. Besides,
85 invertebrates are increasingly coveted in experimental approaches in the senescence study
86 because they have important similarities with vertebrates in terms of senescence process, but
87 also because they are more easy to manipulate experimentally and can be monitored throughout
88 their entire lifetime (Ram and Costa, 2018).

89 In this context, we developed in a long-lived invertebrate, the common woodlouse
90 *Armadillidium vulgare*, the senescence biomarkers presented above (β -galactosidase activity,
91 immune cell parameters and telomerase activity) to be used in future studies on factors involved
92 in ageing variability. According to the literature, we expected in *A. vulgare* both an increase in
93 β -galactosidase activity, a decrease of immune cell viability and density and a decrease of
94 TERT expression with increasing age. Sex specific patterns were also expected on these
95 senescence biomarkers.

96

97 **2. Materials & Methods**

98 ***2.1. Biological model***

99 Individual *A. vulgare* used in the following experiments were derived from a wild
100 population collected in Denmark in 1982. Individuals have been maintained on moistened soil
101 with the natural photoperiod of Poitiers (France 46.58°N, 0.34°E, 20°C) at 20°C with food (i.e.
102 dried linden leaves and carrots) *ad libitum*. Crosses were monitored to control and promote
103 genetic diversity. For each clutch obtained, individuals were sexed, and brothers and sisters
104 were separated to ensure virginity. In common woodlouse, individuals moult throughout their
105 lives according to a molting cycle (Lawlor, 1976). At 20°C, they approximately moult once per
106 month (Steel, 1980) and all the cells of the concerned tissues are renewed. However, the brain,
107 the nerve cord and gonads are not part of tissues renewed during molting and are therefore good
108 candidates for tissue-specific study of senescence in this species. Males and females were tested
109 separately to test the sex impact on candidates' biomarkers.

110

111 ***2.2 Measure of β -galactosidase activity***

112 **Animals**

113 To test the impact of age on the on β -galactosidase activity 180 individuals were used:
114 90 young (i.e. 6-months-old, 45 males and 45 females) and 90 old (2-years-old, 45 males and
115 45 females).

116

117 **Protocol**

118 Individuals were dissected separately in Ringer (Sodium Chloride 394 mM, Potassium
119 Chloride 2 mM, Calcium Chloride 2 mM, Sodium Bicarbonate 2 mM) and nerve cord was
120 removed. Nerve cords were chosen because they are not regenerated during molting. To obtain
121 a sufficient quantity of protein, we made pools of five nerve cords (from five different
122 individuals of the same age). The five nerve cords were filed in 500 μ L of Lyse Buffer 1X
123 (CHAPS 5 mM, Citric acid 40 mM, Sodium Phosphate 40 mM, Benzamidine 0.5 mM, PMSF

124 0.25 mM, pH = 6) (Gary and Kindell, 2005). Samples were centrifuged at 15000g at 4°C for 30
125 minutes. The supernatant was taken and kept at -80°C until its utilization. The protein
126 concentration was determined by the BCA assay (ThermoFisher) and were homogenized at 0.1
127 mg/mL. The β -galactosidase activity was measured as previously described by Gary and
128 Kindell (2005). Briefly, 100 μ L of protein extract at the concentration of 0.1 mg/mL were added
129 to 100 μ L of reactive 4-methylumbelliferyl-D-galactopyranoside (MUG) solution in a 96 well-
130 microplate. The MUG reactive, in contact to β -galactosidase, leads by hydrolysis to the
131 synthesis of 4-methylumbelliferone (4-MU), which is detectable using fluorescent
132 measurement. Measures were performed by the multimode microplate reader Mithras LB940
133 HTS III, Berthold; excitation filter: 120 nm, emission filter 460 nm, for 120 minutes. Two
134 technical replicates were measured for each pool.

135 **Statistics**

136 The β -galactosidase activity was analyzed with linear mixed effect models using the R
137 software (R. Core Team, 2016) and the R package lme4 (Bates et al., 2014). As two technical
138 replicates were measured for each pool, the model including the pools fitted as a random effect
139 and age and sex and their two-way interactions as fixed factors.

140

141 ***2.3 Measure of immune cell parameters***

142 **Animals**

143 To test the impact of age on the immune cell parameters (i.e. density, viability, and size)
144 that were candidates for providing biomarkers of senescence in *A. vulgare*, 60 mature
145 individuals were used: 30 young (i.e. 1-year-old, 15 males and 15 females) and 30 old (3-years-
146 old, 15 males and 15 females).

147 **Protocol**

148 To study the impact of age on the immune parameters, 3 μ L of haemolymph were
149 collected per individual. A hole was bored in the middle of the 6th segment and 3 μ L of
150 haemolymph were collected with an eyedropper and deposited promptly in 15 μ L of MAS-
151 EDTA (EDTA 9 mM, Trisodium citrate 27 mM, NaCl 336 mM, Glucose 115 mM, pH 7,
152 (Rodriguez et al., 1995)). Then, 6 μ L of Trypan blue at 0.4% (Invitrogen) were added to permit
153 the coloration of dead cells. Thereafter, 10 μ L of this solution were deposed in (Invitrogen
154 Countess®) counting slide (Thermofisher). The immune cell density, the immune cell viability
155 and the immune cell size were evaluated using an automated Cell Counter (Invitrogen
156 Countess®).

157 **Statistics**

158 Linear models with Gaussian distribution were fitted to analyze variation in the cell size
159 and viability. For the cell density, a linear model of the cell number (log-transformed, (Ives and
160 Freckleton Robert, 2015) was fitted using the R software (R. Core Team, 2016).

161

162 ***2.4 Measure of TERT expression***

163 The identification of the Telomerase Reverse Transcriptase (TERT) was firstly
164 performed from the annotation of the ongoing *A. vulgare* genome project (Chebbi et al., 2019).
165 In order to verify whether this gene was present and preserved in this gene in crustaceans,
166 phylogenetic analyses were carried out upstream, all of these analyses are presented in
167 Supplementary materials 1, 2 and 3. This gene has been found in most crustacean
168 transcriptomes and was very well conserved within the phylogenetic tree (Supplementary
169 material 3), thus a significant role of the TERT is expected.

170

171 ***2.4.1 Genes expression***

172 **Animals**

173 To test the effect of age in the expression of TERT gene, we needed 4 different age
174 groups: (1) 4-months-old, (2) 1-year-old, (3) 2-years-old and (4) 3-years-old. Females and
175 males were tested separately by pools of 5 individuals in 1-, 2-, 3-years-old groups and by pools
176 of 7 individuals in 4-months-old group. All conditions require 4 replicates of males and 4
177 replicates of females. 176 individuals were used for this experiment. For each group we tested
178 the expression level of the TERT in two different tissues: the nerve cord and gonads.

179 **Protocol**

180 Animals were washed by immersion for 30s in a 30% sodium hypochlorite solution
181 followed by two 30s immersion in distilled water. Tissues were dissected in Ringer solution
182 (Sodium Chloride 394 mM, Potassium Chloride 2 mM, Calcium Chloride 2 mM, Sodium
183 Bicarbonate 2 mM) and deposited by specific tissues pools of 5 on TRIzol reagent (Invitrogen)
184 to extract RNA according to the manufacturer's protocol after an homogenisation using a Vibra
185 Cell 75,185 sonicator (amplitude of 30%). RNA was quantified by NanoDrop technology and
186 at -80°C until their use. Reverse transcriptions (RT) were made from 500ng of RNA previously
187 extracted and using the kit SuperScriptTM IV Reverse Transcriptase (Thermo Fisher Scientific)
188 according to the supplier's instruction. Primers were designed using the identified gene: primer
189 TERT_F: 5'-AGGGAAAACGATGCACAACC-3' and primer TERT_R: 5'-
190 GTTCGCCAAATGTTCGCAAC- 3'. Quantitative RT-PCR was performed using 0.6 µl of
191 each forward and reverse primer (10 µM), 2.4 µl of nuclease-free water and 1.5 µl of cDNA
192 template and the LightCycler LC480 system (Roche) with the following program: 10 min at 95
193 °C , 45 cycles of 10 s at 95 ° C, 10 s at 60 °C, and 20 s at 72 °C. Expression levels of target
194 genes were normalized based in the expression level of two reference genes previously
195 established: the Ribosomal Protein L8 (RbL8) and the Elongation Factor 2 (EF2) (Chevalier et
196 al., 2011).

197 **Statistics**

198 The level of TERT expression according to age in the two different tissues were
199 compared by a Kruskal–Wallis rank sum test in combination with Nemenyi’s post hoc multiple
200 comparison test with the Tuckey correction using the R software (R. Core Team, 2016) and the
201 R package PMCMR.

202

203 3. Results

204 β -galactosidase activity

205 The β -galactosidase activity was higher in old individuals (i.e. 2-years-old) than in
206 young ones (i.e. 6-months-old) ($X^2_1=6.15$, $p=0.013$, Figure 1). We also detected a sex effect
207 with a higher β -galactosidase activity in females than in males ($X^2_1=7.26$, $p=0.007$, Figure 1).

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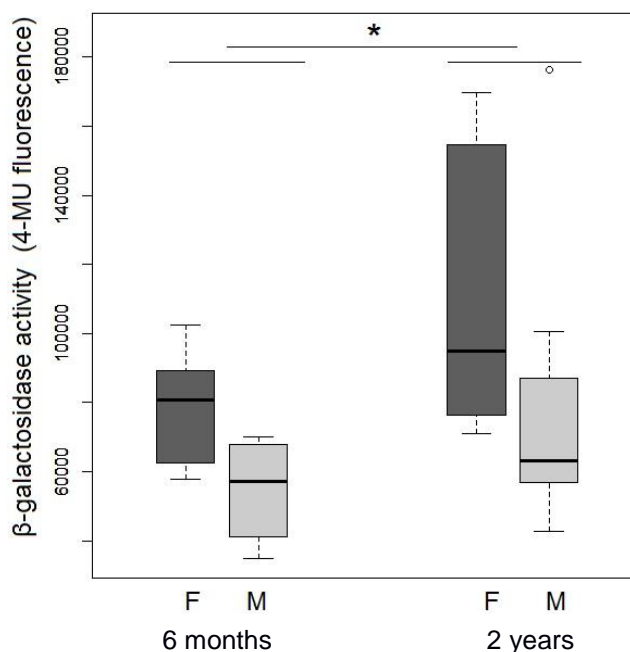
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218 **Figure 1: β -galactosidase activity according to age and sex in *A. vulgare* (F=females, M=males)**

219 The thick line depicts the median, the box the interquartile range, and the whisker are bounded to the most
220 extreme data point within 1.5 the interquartile range. The outliers outside this range are displayed as open
221 circles. N= 24 pools of 5 individuals. * $p<0.05$

221

222

223 **Immune cells parameters**

224 Age had a statistically significant effect on cell size ($F_{1,58}=8.54$, $p=0.005$, Figure 2A).
225 Cell size was larger in 3-years-old than in 1-year-old individuals. Conversely, the cell density
226 was higher in 1-year-old than in 3-years-old individuals ($F_{1,58} =4.33$, $p=0.01$, Figure 2B).
227 Concerning the immune cell viability, a statistically significant interaction occurred between
228 age and sex, with a relatively lower immune cell viability in 3-years-old females ($F_{3,56}=6.85$,
229 $p=0.01$, Figure 2C). No sex effect was detected on cell size ($F_{2,57}=0.76$, $p=0.38$, Figure 2A) or
230 cell density ($F_{2,57}=0.32$, $p =0.57$, Figure 2B).

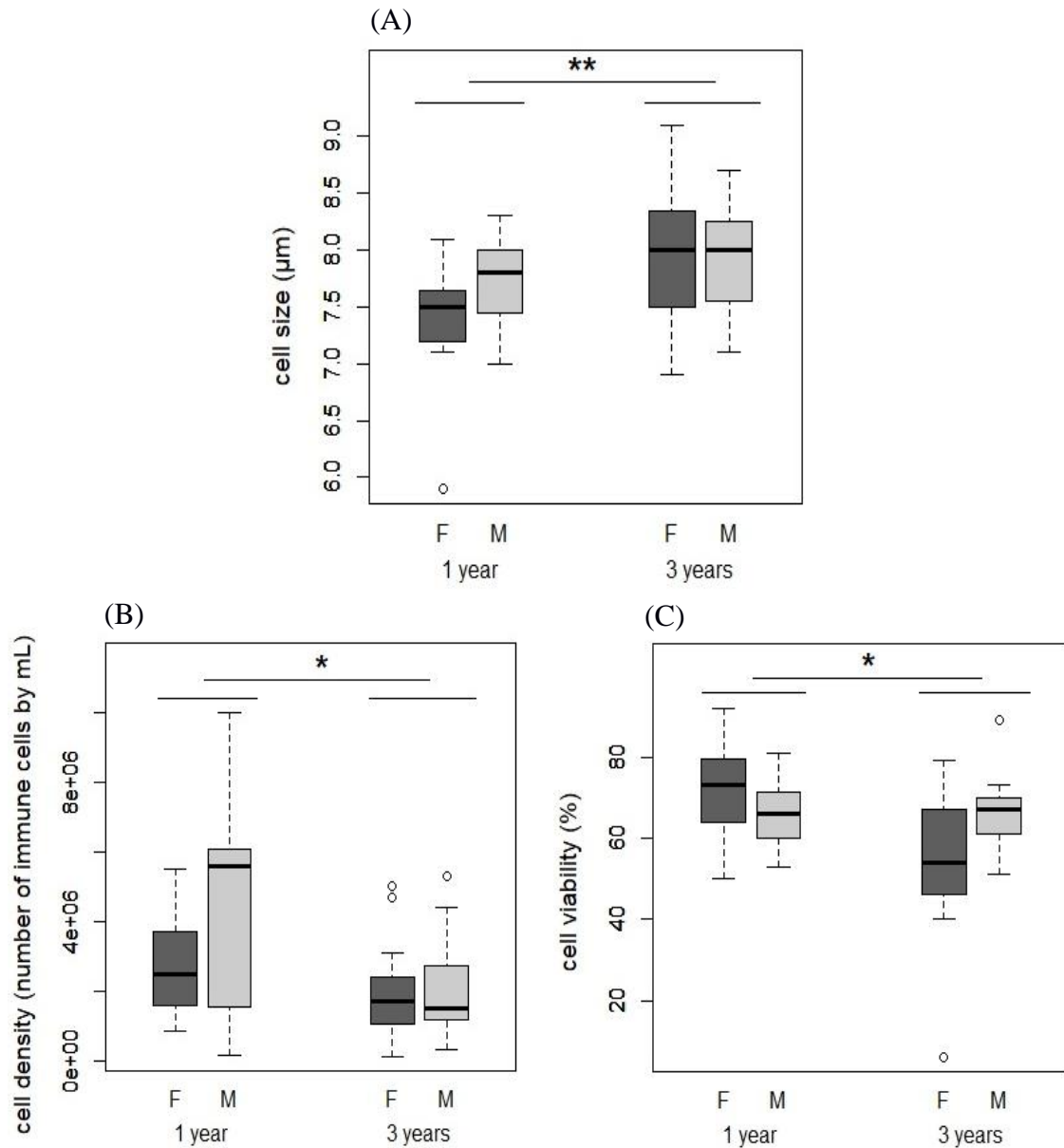


Figure 2: Immune cell size (A), density (B) and viability (C) according to age and sex in *A. vulgare* (F=females, M=males)

The thick line depicts the median, the box the interquartile range, and the whisker are bounded to the most extreme data point within 1.5 the interquartile range. The outliers outside this range are displayed as open circles. N= 60 individuals: 15 1-year-old females, 15 1-year-old males, 15 3-years-old females and 15 3-years-old males. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

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235 **TERT expression**

236 The TERT expression decreased with age in nerve cords ($X^2_3=23.30$, $p<0.001$, Figure 3A).
237 More precisely, the TERT expression was higher in 4-months-old individuals comparing to 2-
238 years-old individuals and 3-years-old individuals (Respectively: $p=0.001$, $p<0.001$) and in 1-
239 year-old individuals comparing to 3-years-old individuals ($p=0.038$), without sex impact
240 ($X^2_1=0.14$, $p=0.70$, Figure 3A). In gonads, the TERT expression was strongly higher in females
241 ($X^2_1=17.81$, $p<0.001$, Figure 3B) and tended to decrease with age ($X^2_3=7.5$, $p=0.057$, Figure
242 3B) as the TERT expression tended to be higher in 4-months-old females comparing to 3-years-
243 old females ($p=0.054$). In males, a general tendency was also observed ($X^2_1=7.34$, $p=0.061$,
244 Figure 3B), the TERT expression tending to be higher in 2-years-old individuals comparing to
245 1-year-old individuals and 3-years-old individuals (Respectively: $p=0.14$, $=0.12$).

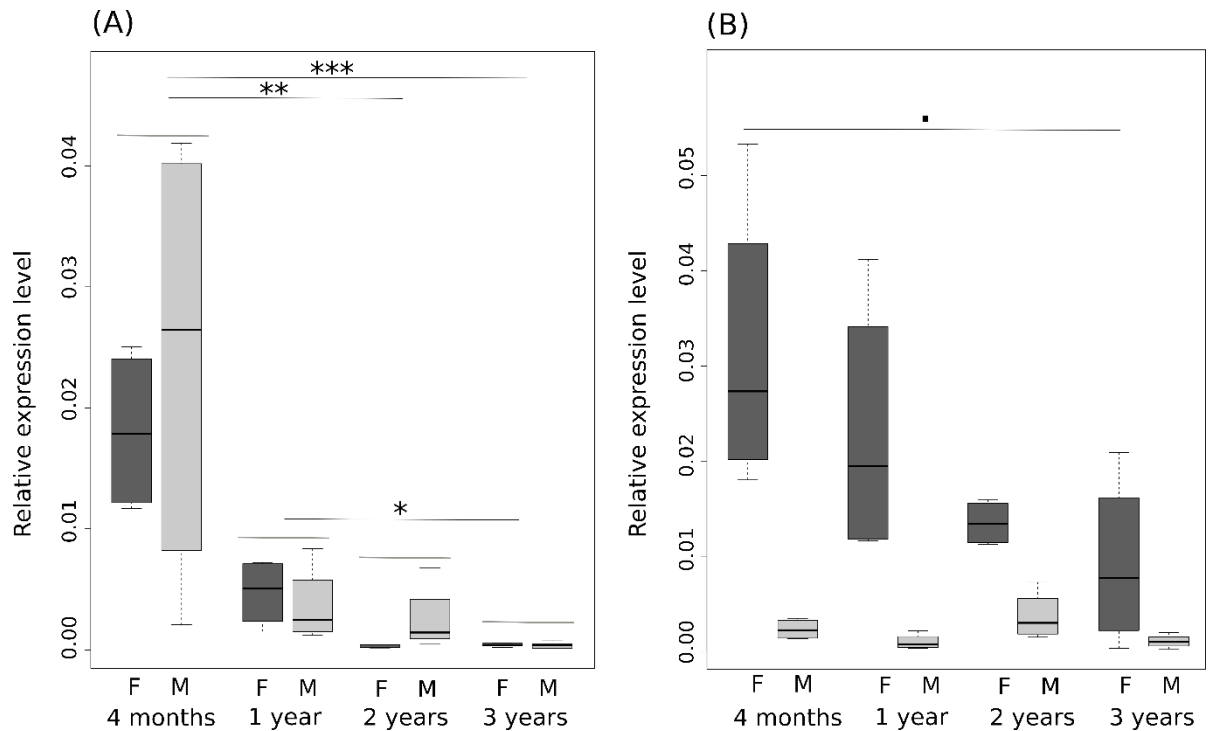
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252 **Figure 3: Relative expression level of TERT in (A) nerve cords and (B) in gonads in *A. vulgare***

253 **(F=females, M=males).**

254 Expression of each gene was normalized based on the expression of Ribosomal Protein L8 (RbL8) and Elongation
 255 Factor 2 (EF2) as reference genes. The thick line depicts the median, the box the interquartile range, and the
 256 whisker are bounded to the most extreme data point within 1.5 the interquartile range. N= 176 individuals: 28 4-
 257 months-old females, 28 4-months-old males, 20 1-year-old females, 20 1-year-old males, 20 2-years -old females,
 258 20 2-years-old males, 20 3-years-old females, 20 3-years-old males.

259 • p<0.10, ** p<0.01

260

261 4. Discussion

262 As expected, immune cells showed an increase in their size and a decrease in their
 263 density and viability with age. In nerve cords, the activity of the β -galactosidase enzyme
 264 increased while the TERT gene expression decreased with age. These results prove the presence
 265 of increasing cellular senescence in *A. vulgare* with age. In the gonads, TERT expression was
 266 too low in males and did not decrease sufficiently in both sexes to provide good biomarkers of
 267 senescence. Our study is not the first evidence that vertebrate biomarkers can be useful in

268 invertebrates as the β -galactosidase enzyme also increases in honeybees *Apis mellifera* with age
269 (Hsieh and Hsu, 2011), the immune cells also decreases in density in *Aedes aegypti* (Hillyer et
270 al., 2004) and crickets *Gryllus assimilis* (Park et al., 2011) and the telomerase activity decreases
271 with age in *Daphnia pulicaria* (Schumpert et al., 2015). By testing a set of different biomarkers,
272 often studied independently, our study supports the idea that routine biomarkers used in
273 vertebrates can be adapted in invertebrates and confirms that the senescence process is quasi-
274 ubiquitous in living world and can be expressed in a similar way in very different organisms.

275 Previously study showed that the probabilities to survive decreases with age in *A.*
276 *vulgare* (Paris and Pitelka, 1962). The damage accumulated during the animal's life could be
277 the cause of cell senescence and therefore the driving force behind actuarial senescence. (Barja,
278 2000; Barja and Herrero, 2000; Finkel and Holbrook, 2000; Harman, 1956). In *A. vulgare*, the
279 2- and 3-years-old individuals could have therefore accumulated more damages during their
280 life leading the cellular senescence observed.

281 Our present study also showed a strong difference in cellular senescence patterns on
282 biomarkers between males and females, females presenting higher β -galactosidase activity and
283 lower immune cell viability than males. Between-sex differences in lifespan have been reported
284 in *A. vulgare* with a longer lifespan in males than in females (Geiser, 1934; Paris and Pitelka,
285 1962). Exact differences in actuarial senescence patterns remain to be quantified in *A. vulgare*
286 but recent reviews have revealed that such differences are common in both vertebrates and
287 invertebrates (Tidière et al. 2015; Marais et al. 2018 for reviews). One of the main theory
288 proposed to explain sex differences in longevity senescence patterns relies on different resource
289 allocation strategies between sexes (Bonduriansky et al., 2008; Vinogradov, 1998), which was
290 already evoked to explain the shorter lifespan observed in females *A. vulgare* (Paris and Pitelka,
291 1962).

292 The resources allocation strategies proposed to explain sex differences could also be
293 disturbed by environment (Shertzer and Ellner, 2002). As our biomarkers were able to highlight
294 differences between sexes, they will probably constitute useful tools to underline other factors
295 (e.g. environment stressors) involved in the diversity of senescence patterns observed in *A.*
296 *vulgare* and more generally in the living world.

297

298

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