Entz, Susan Carol

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Department of Geography

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MOLECULAR METHODS AND ISOLATES OF THE ENTOMOPATHOGENIC FUNGUS *Metarhizium anisopliae* FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE CONTROL OF GRASSHOPPERS IN CANADA

Susan Carol Entz
B.Sc., University of Lethbridge, 1985

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Abstract

*Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *acridum*, a hyphomycetous fungus registered worldwide for grasshopper and locust control, is currently under consideration as a potential alternative to chemical insecticides for grasshopper control in Canada. Research in this thesis has contributed data required for the registration of biological control agents in Canada.

A diagnostic PCR assay was developed for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA. The assay was highly sensitive and effective for the detection of fungal DNA in infected grasshoppers.

A survey of southern Alberta soils conducted in the spring of 2004 revealed the presence of *Metarhizium* spp. at low natural incidence. Two indigenous isolates demonstrated pathogenicity when bioassayed against laboratory-reared and field-collected grasshoppers. One of the isolates demonstrated virulence comparable to a commercial isolate.

An analysis of historical weather data revealed that summer weather in the Prairie provinces should not preclude the efficacy of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* under local conditions.
Preface

The following thesis is presented partially in manuscript format. The introduction and literature review are combined in a single chapter (Chapter 1) in traditional format. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are presented as manuscripts. References for Chapters 2 to 4 are combined in a general references section as outlined in the table of contents. Chapter 5 outlines a retrospective prediction of *Metarhizium* efficacy under local conditions and is also written in traditional format. A general summary and conclusions are incorporated into Chapter 6.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................ iii
Preface ........................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................... v
Table of Contents ....................................................................................... vi
List of Tables ............................................................................................... xi
List of Figures .............................................................................................. xii
List of Abbreviations ................................................................................... xiv

Chapter 1. Introduction, Review of Literature, and Objectives .................... 1
  1.0 Introduction .......................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Metarhizium taxonomy ....................................................................... 6
    1.1.1 Taxonomy based on morphological characterization ..................... 6
    1.1.2 Taxonomy based on molecular characterization ............................. 7
      1.1.2.1 Random amplification of polymorphic DNA (RAPD) .............. 7
      1.1.2.2 Random fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) ................. 8
      1.1.2.3 Amplified fragment length polymorphism (AFLP) .............. 8
      1.1.2.4 Isoenzyme polymorphism analysis ......................................... 9
      1.1.2.5 Ribosomal RNA (rRNA) and DNA (rDNA) sequence analysis ... 10
  1.2 The fungal infection process ............................................................... 14
    1.2.1 Recognition and spore attachment to host ................................... 14
    1.2.2 Germination and penetration of integument .................................. 14
    1.2.3 Growth and proliferation within host .......................................... 15
    1.2.4 Re-emergence from the host and conidiation ............................... 16
1.3 Abiotic factors affecting persistence of \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} ..... 16

1.3.1 Temperature ........................................................................................................ 17
1.3.2 Solar radiation ...................................................................................................... 19
1.3.3 Humidity ................................................................................................................ 21

1.4 Objectives .................................................................................................................. 22

Chapter 2. Development and Validation of a PCR Assay for the Specific Detection of \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} .............................................................................. 24

2.0 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 24

2.1 Materials and Methods ............................................................................................. 25
2.1.1 Fungal isolates and cultivation ............................................................................ 25
2.1.2 Fungal DNA isolation ......................................................................................... 25
2.1.3 Production of a positive DNA control for \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} ... 30
2.1.4 Construction of a simulated soil DNA pool spiked with \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} DNA ........................................................................................................... 31
2.1.5 Inoculation of soil with \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} conidia ...................... 31
2.1.6 Inoculation of grasshoppers ................................................................................. 32
2.1.7 Grasshopper DNA isolation ............................................................................... 33
2.1.8 PCR amplification ............................................................................................... 34

2.2 Results ....................................................................................................................... 36

2.3 Discussion .................................................................................................................. 39

Chapter 3. Determination of Natural Incidence of \textit{Metarhizium} in Southern Alberta
........................................................................................................................................ 44

3.0 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 44

3.1 Materials and Methods ............................................................................................. 45
3.1.1 Collection of soil samples .................................................................................. 45
3.1.2 Determination of soil moisture ........................................ 47
3.1.3 Isolation of soil fungi on selective medium ...................... 47
3.1.4 Isolation of soil fungi with waxworm larvae .................... 47
3.1.5 Identification of Metarhizium spp. in soil by PCR .............. 48
  3.1.5.1 Extraction of soil DNA ........................................ 48
  3.1.5.2 Production of a positive DNA control for M. flavoviride var. 
          flavoviride ...................................................... 48
  3.1.5.3 Design of PCR primers for the specific detection of M. flavoviride var. 
          flavoviride ...................................................... 49
  3.1.5.4 PCR amplification of soil DNA ................................ 49
3.2 Results ............................................................................. 50
  3.2.1 Isolation on selective medium ...................................... 50
  3.2.2 Isolation on Galleria bait assay .................................... 52
  3.2.3 PCR assays of soil samples with general fungal primers TW81 and 
        AB28 ................................................................. 55
  3.2.4 M. flavoviride var. flavoviride PCR assays ..................... 55
    3.2.4.1 Specificity ...................................................... 55
    3.2.4.2 PCR assays of soil samples with M. flavoviride var. flavoviride-
            specific primers .............................................. 57
  3.2.5 PCR assays of soil samples with M. anisopliae var. acridum-specific 
        primers ........................................................... 57
  3.2.6 M. anisopliae var. anisopliae PCR assays ....................... 57
    3.2.6.1 Specificity ...................................................... 57
    3.2.6.2 PCR assays of soil samples with M. anisopliae var. anisopliae-specific 
            primers ........................................................ 58
3.3 Discussion ....................................................................... 58
Chapter 4. Evaluation of Indigenous Isolates of *Metarhizium anisopliae* for Pathogenicity towards Grasshoppers in Southern Alberta................. 65

4.0 Introduction............................................................................. 65

4.1 Materials and Methods............................................................. 66

4.1.1 Fungal isolates and cultivation............................................. 66

4.1.2 Inoculation of grasshoppers .................................................. 67

4.1.3 Confirmation of *Metarhizium* infection in grasshoppers ......... 67

4.1.4 Data analysis ......................................................................... 68

4.2 Results...................................................................................... 68

4.2.1 Infection of laboratory-reared and field-collected grasshopper nymphs with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* isolate Evil 330189 ....................... 68

4.2.2 Infection of laboratory-reared grasshopper nymphs with *M. anisopliae* isolate 20W-5 .......................................................... 71

4.2.3 Infection of laboratory-reared and field-collected grasshopper nymphs with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolate S54 .................................. 74

4.3 Discussion................................................................................. 76

Chapter 5. Prediction of *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *acridum* Efficacy for Grasshopper Biocontrol in a Temperate Region Based on Historical Weather and Climate Data ................................................................. 81

5.0 Introduction............................................................................. 81

5.1 Thermoregulation................................................................... 82

5.1.1 Behavioural fever................................................................. 85

5.2 Efficacy of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* under tropical regimes ... 86

5.3 Historical weather data in the Prairie provinces of Canada and potential for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* application........................................ 87

5.3.1 Air temperature ................................................................... 88
List of Tables

Table 1-1. Chronological history of Metarhizium taxonomy ................................................. 11
Table 2-1. List of isolates studied .................................................................................................. 26
Table 3-1. List of primers used for PCR amplification in this study ............................................. 51
Table 4-1. Lethal time for 50 % population mortality (LT$_{50}$) with confidence limits
(1 − α = 95 %) of laboratory and field-collected grasshopper nymphs treated with
conidia of three Metarhizium isolates ......................................................................................... 69
Table 5-1. Thirty year summary of frequencies of ambient air temperatures that would
preclude the growth of M. anisopliae var. acridum during June, July, and August in
Canada’s Prairie provinces ............................................................................................................ 90
Table 5-2. Comparison of observed quantities of precipitation to climate normals over a
thirty-year period (1975-2005) for June, July, and August in Canada’s Prairie
provinces ......................................................................................................................................... 93
Table 5-3. Summary statistics of days in June and July 2003 at Lethbridge, AB suitable
for in vivo development of M. anisopliae var. acridum ................................................................. 94
List of Figures

Fig. 2-1. Specificity determination of the PCR assay using the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers and genomic DNA from various fungal isolates .......................... 37

Fig. 2-2. Sensitivity determination of the PCR assay using the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers and genomic DNA from *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* ............. 38

Fig. 2-3. Detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA in infected grasshoppers using PCR primers Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR ......................................................... 40

Fig. 3-1. Geographic locations in southern Alberta for soil survey of *Metarhizium* spp. 46

Fig. 3-2. Detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* DNA in nested PCR assays using Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 and Ma-IGSspF/Ma-IGSspR primers and genomic DNA from various *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolates ........................................... 53

Fig. 3-3. Two types of colony morphologies of *Metarhizium* isolated by *Galleria* bait method from southern Alberta soils ........................................................................... 54

Fig. 3-4. Amplification products from genomic DNA of *M. anisopliae* isolate 20W-5 and other various *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* in a PCR assay using general fungal primers TW81 and AB28 ........................................................................ 56

Fig. 4-1. Cumulative mortality of laboratory grasshopper nymphs treated with three isolates of *Metarhizium* under laboratory conditions of 24 °C/16 °C day/night with a corresponding 16/8 h light/dark photoperiod under ambient relative humidity (40-55 %) ........................................................................................................ 70

Fig. 4-2. Cumulative mortality of field-collected grasshopper nymphs treated with two isolates of *Metarhizium* under laboratory conditions of 24 °C/16 °C day/night with a corresponding 16/8 h light/dark photoperiod under ambient relative humidity (40-55 %) ........................................................................................................ 72

Fig. 4-3. Sporulation of southern Albertan soil isolates of *Metarhizium* on *Melanoplus sanguinipes* nymphs from a laboratory colony ........................................... 73

Fig. 4-4. Plague locusts infected with Green Guard® (*M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*) ...... 75

Fig. 5-1. Examples of an hourly pattern of thermoregulation for Australian plague locusts .................................................................................................................. 83

Fig. 5-2. Distribution of body temperature against ambient temperature .................. 84
Fig. 5-3. Frequency distribution of proportion of total daily hours suitable for *M. anisopliae var. acridum* growth *in vivo* at ambient temperatures of 24-27 °C (optimal development)
**List of Abbreviations**

ARSEF – (US Department of Agriculture) Agricultural Research Service Entomopathogenic Fungus Collection

bp – base pair

CFU – colony forming unit

dNTP – deoxynucleotide

dpa – days post application

dpi – days post infection

EDTA – ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid

EPA – (US) Environmental Protection Agency

ha – hectare

IGS – intergenic spacer

IITA – International Institute of Tropical Agriculture

ITS – internal transcribed spacer

LD50 – lethal dose required for mortality of 50% of population

LRC – Lethbridge Research Centre

LT50 – lethal time required for mortality of 50% of population

LUBILOSA – Lutte Biologique Contre les Locustes et Sauteriaux

PCR – polymerase chain reaction

PDA – potato dextrose agar

PDB – potato dextrose broth

PMRA – Pest Management Regulatory Agency

RAPD – random amplified polymorphic DNA

rDNA – ribosomal deoxyribonucleic acid
RFLP – random fragment length polymorphism
RH – relative humidity
rRNA – ribosomal ribonucleic acid
SDA – Sabouraud-dextrose agar
SDS – sodium dodecyl sulphate
TAE – 40 mM Tris acetate, pH approx. 8.3, containing 1 mM EDTA
TE – 10 mM Tris-HCl containing 1 mM EDTA, pH 8
UAMH – University of Alberta Microfungus Collection and Herbarium
Chapter 1. Introduction, Review of Literature, and Objectives

1.0 Introduction

Environmental and health concerns about the application of chemical insecticides to reduce large-scale insect pest infestations have led to renewed interest in the development of microbial agents for incorporation into integrated pest management strategies for the control of acridids. Grasshoppers and locusts are responsible for significant economic damage to the agriculture industry in grassland biomes of the world (Lomer et al., 2001); over eighty-five species of grasshoppers exist in Alberta, and of these, four are considered to be serious agricultural pests (Calpas & Johnson, 2003). Microbial agents considered so far for the control of acridids include all major types including fungi, bacteria, viruses, nematodes, and protozoans.

*Metarhizium anisopliae* is a hyphomycetous fungus that is pathogenic to a wide range of insect orders. *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* is cosmopolitan in nature; strains occur naturally in soil. Isolates with varying degrees of virulence have also been obtained from locusts and grasshoppers in Africa (Shah et al., 1997), Australia (Prior, 1997), Madagascar (Delgado et al., 1997a), and Spain (Hernández-Crespo & Santiago-Alvarez, 1997). The rarer, albeit more virulent, isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* from acridoid hosts possess a pantropical distribution and have been recorded in Africa (Bateman et al., 1996; Shah et al., 1997), Australia (Milner & Hunter, 2001), Madagascar (Delgado et al., 1997a), Brazil (Magalhães et al., 1997), Mexico (Hernández-Velázquez et al., 1997), and the Galapagos Islands (Prior, 1997).

Isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* have been investigated and developed as biocontrol agents in Africa under the name of Green Muscle® (Douthwaite et al., 2000)
and as Green Guard® in Australia (Milner & Hunter, 2001) for control of acridids. Registration has also been secured in Madagascar (Lomer et al., 2001), and field trials have been conducted in Brazil (Magalhães et al., 2000b). Currently, there are no Metarhizium-based products approved for grasshopper control in North America; however, *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* is under consideration as a potential alternative to chemical insecticides for grasshopper control in Canada.

Prior to the introduction of a pathogen into a new environment, risks to non-target organisms must be demonstrated as acceptable and the environmental fate of the pathogen determined (Bidochka, 2001). Extensive studies have focused on the effects of exposure on non-target organisms. Smits *et al.* (1999) found no significant pathological or behavioural effects in ring-necked pheasant chicks (*Phasianus colchicus*) exposed to *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* in contaminated food sources. Field application of the pathogen at recommended rates is not expected to pose any risks to fringe-toed lizards (*Acanthodactylus dumerili*) based on pathological and behavioural examination of treated lizards exposed to high challenge concentrations (Peveling & Demba, 2003). *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* was found non-pathogenic to non-target arthropods in the families Coccinellidae, Tenebrionidae, Carabidae, Formicidae, and Ephydridae (Peveling & Demba, 1997; Peveling *et al.*, 1999; Danfa & van der Valk, 1999) in addition to non-target scavengers and locust predators (Arthurs *et al.*, 2003; Peveling & Demba, 1997). Conversely, laboratory studies demonstrated susceptibility of parasitoids of acridids to standard dose rates under simulated field conditions, although it was concluded that *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* posed a low risk due to a lack or low levels of infection (Stoltz *et al.*, 2002; Danfa & van der Valk, 1999). A simulated field dose formulated in oil resulted
in 11% mortality of exposed bees (*Apis mellifera*) under laboratory conditions; however, application of a chemical pesticide at a dose that was just sub-lethal to locusts caused 100% mortality (Ball *et al.*, 1994). No adverse effects from exposure to doses almost one hundred times greater than would be expected in field applications were recorded on rainbow fish fry (*Melanotaenia duboulayi* Castelnau) or mayfly nymphs (*Ulmerophlebia* sp.) housed in artificial water containers whereas significant mortality was observed in cladocerans (*Ceriodaphnia dubia*) treated with high doses of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. When doses were lowered to rates comparable to realistic field operational conditions, however, cladoceran mortality decreased to less than significant levels (Milner *et al.*, 2002). Further, additional samples of actual water sources in spray areas revealed low levels of the entomopathogen; thus it was concluded that the level of conidia likely to be present in affected aquatic ecosystems would be unlikely to pose any hazard to the indigenous fauna.

In an analysis of published reports of the best-documented form of biological control (of arthropods by arthropods), it has been estimated that only around ten percent of attempts have been successful by definition of complete control of the target pest by the established biocontrol agent where no other control methods were required or used (Gurr & Wratten, 2000; Greathead & Greathead, 1992). The use of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* as a biocontrol agent for acridids in Africa has been considered a qualified success in terms of technical efficacy and public benefit (Gelernter & Lomer, 2000). In addition to the studies on non-target organisms, a wealth of information generated by global research (Lomer *et al.*, 2001) has been attained about the taxonomy, biology, and
effect of environmental abiotic factors on the entomopathogen. A summary of results and knowledge available in the scientific literature follows later in this chapter.

Current methods of diagnosis of M. anisopliae var. acridum in infected insects depend upon development of fungal growth and sporulation in cadavers. Confirmatory tests include observation of morphological features on culture media, microscopic examination of spores and associated structures, and bioassay of target hosts. Difficulties in identification may be encountered due to observed variation of spore morphology within the same culture and between isolates (Milner et al., 2003; Glare et al., 1996).

Further, Lomer et al. (2001) noted that M. anisopliae var. acridum cannot be distinguished from other M. anisopliae on the basis of spore size and shape.

Molecular probes have been developed for the specific detection of M. anisopliae var. acridum. Bidochka et al. (1994) used a random amplified polymorphic DNA (RAPD) fragment as a probe to differentiate acridid isolates of M. flavoviride (later renamed as M. anisopliae var. acridum) from acridid isolates of M. anisopliae. Inglis et al. (1999) applied telomeric fingerprinting to differentiate between M. flavoviride strains. Distinct telomeric fingerprints of acridoid M. flavoviride isolates were produced when genomic fungal DNA was hybridized with radiolabelled probe DNA prepared from a digest fragment of a plasmid carrying a repeated hexanucleotide telomere sequence. Application of both studies was limited due to a requirement for DNA extracted from axenic cultures.

Numerous studies on mycopathogens of insects and plants have targeted the internal transcribed spacer (ITS) region for development of assays for specific detection (Tymon et al., 2004; Salazar et al., 2000; Martinez-Culebras et al., 2000; Mishra et al.,
The DNA coding for the ribosomal RNA gene complex (rDNA) consists of genes encoding the 16S, 5.8S, and 28S fungal rRNA subunits that are separated by ITS sequences (Freifelder, 1983). The region that separates the 16S from the 5.8S subunit is referred to as ITS1; ITS2 separates the 5.8S from the 28S subunit. The section of DNA that encompasses the 16S-ITS1-5.8S-ITS2-28S complex is defined as a repeat unit. Multiple copies (up to 220), separated by nontranscribed spacer sequences, of the repeat unit occur in the fungal ribosomal genome (Pipe et al., 1995), a characteristic that makes this region of DNA ideal as a target for molecular characterization. Other suitable characteristics include high stability of rDNA as well as the combination of conserved sequences in the 16S, 5.8S, and 28S subunits and divergence of sequences coding for the ITS regions (White et al., 1990). One of the objectives of this thesis was to analyze sequence divergence within the ITS regions of the Metarhizium genome for the potential for development of a molecular assay to differentiate an introduced strain of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* from native populations of *M. anisopliae* and *M. flavoviride* in environmental samples. Additional objectives are introduced in section 1.4.
1.1 *Metarhizium* taxonomy

1.1.1 Taxonomy based on morphological characterization

The genus *Metarhizium* consists of a number of species complexes that are found worldwide and have been documented in more than two hundred species of seven orders of insects (Veen, 1968), but there has been limited success in correlation of association with either insect host or geographic origin. Early approaches to taxonomy relied upon morphological characterization at the macro- and microscopic level. Metschnikoff (1879) was the first to describe spores of *Entomophthora anisopliae*. In 1883, Sorokin renamed the fungus *Metarhizium anisopliae*. *Metarhizium* is the current name for the genus, although from 1880 to 1969 at least eight other names were proposed for the genus alone (Tulloch, 1976). The nomenclature was further confounded with the introduction of an incorrect spelling of *Metarrhizium* into numerous publications. Lack of museum specimens of sufficient quality has lead to the removal, and later reinstatement, of a second species *M. album* (Petch, 1931; Rombach *et al.*, 1987). *M. brunneum*, first described by Petch (1935), was later determined to be *M. anisopliae* by Roberts (1967) when irradiation of green spores of *M. anisopliae* produced brown coloured mutants resembling *M. brunneum*. Insofar as no microscopic differences could be found between *M. brunneum* and *M. anisopliae*, it was concluded that *M. brunneum* was a naturally occurring mutant of *M. anisopliae*. In 1915, Johnston proposed the classification of *M. anisopliae* into long- and short-spored forms. Gams and Rozsypal (1973) described a third species *Metarrhizium flavoviride* isolated from insects and soil. A short-spored form, *M. flavoviride* var. *minus*, was described by Rombach *et al.* (1986). Other species have been proposed in China and Japan, but lack of material deposited in
culture collections has led to difficulties for additional morphological and phylogenetic analyses (Tzean et al., 1993; Liang et al., 1991; Shimazu, 1989; Guo et al. 1986).

1.1.2 Taxonomy based on molecular characterization

1.1.2.1 Random amplification of polymorphic DNA (RAPD)

Based on the numerous difficulties described previously, the taxonomic classification of fungi has profited enormously from the possibilities offered by molecular characterization, and this has been particularly true for Metarhizium. The genetic diversity of isolates has been examined by RAPD analysis. RAPD uses a single primer of arbitrary nucleotide sequence to amplify genomic sequences wherever the primer finds regions of sufficient homology by polymerase chain reaction (PCR), thus no prior knowledge of the genome to be analyzed is required. Fegan et al. (1993) found considerable genetic diversity in Australian isolates that correlated weakly with geographical location. The existence of high genetic diversity in Brazilian strains was confirmed, but less variability was found in insect isolates in comparison with strains from soil, suggesting that the fungus had developed a certain degree of host specificity (Fungaro et al., 1996; Tigano-Milani et al., 1995). Bidochka et al. (1994) were unable to demonstrate association with host or geographic origin in acridid isolates of M. flavoviride, but did find evidence of high variability in acridid isolates of M. anisopliae.

In addition to confirmation of high DNA variability within isolates sampled throughout the world, Cobb and Clarkson (1993) were able to differentiate M. anisopliae from M. flavoviride, as well as establish a loose correlation of M. anisopliae with geographic origin (Australia, the Caribbean and Asia) although there was no association with insect host. Differentiation between isolates from different geographical locations and also
between isolates from the same country was possible, but whereas isolates from Australia, Brazil and the Philippines (*Oryctes rhinoceros*) were distinct, those from Finland and *Nilaparvata lugens* in the Philippines showed similar profiles (Leal *et al.*, 1994).

1.1.2.2 Random fragment length polymorphism (RFLP)

Intraspecific variation in *Metarhizium* from various geographical locations and insect hosts was also analyzed by RFLP. RFLP is a method that generates restriction endonuclease digestion patterns of total or specific (e.g. mitochondrial) DNA. Analysis of the derived patterns can assist with differentiation between species. Once again, considerable DNA heterogeneity was demonstrated with this method. Pipe *et al.* (1995) were able to group some *Metarhizium anisopliae* isolates with geographical origin, but obtained poor differentiation of isolates from the same geographical region. Insufficient numbers of isolates from the same geographic region but different insect hosts did not allow investigation of any correlation with insect host. Mavridou and Typas (1998) found that differences in intraspecific and interspecific variation were inadequate to allow for any correlation with either insect host or geographic origin.

1.1.2.3 Amplified fragment length polymorphism (AFLP)

Using an alternative molecular analysis, Leal *et al.* (1997) performed amplification and restriction endonuclease digestion of the major protease Pr1 gene to characterize *Metarhizium* strains. AFLP is similar to RAPD, except that the PCR primers in AFLP are complementary to specific adaptor sequences that have been ligated to the ends of the digestion fragments. With this technique, the digest patterns of forty global *Metarhizium* strains were clustered into four groups, with some of the groups correlated
to geographic origin. Strains from the same country displayed more similarities than
those from different countries. There appeared to be no correlation with host, except for
some strains which had been isolated from orthopteran hosts.

1.1.2.4 Isoenzyme polymorphism analysis

Rakotonirainy et al. (1994) used electrophoretic banding patterns of seven
enzymes to demonstrate the distinctiveness of *M. anisopliae* strains from New Zealand,
suggesting a different genetic evolution of *Metarhizium* for these isolates, either through
selective pressure by host or by environment. Banding patterns also permitted
differentiation of isolates of *M. anisopliae var. majus* from additional strains of *M.
anisopliae var. anisopliae*; however, there was no association with geographic region.

Bridge et al. (1997) applied a combination of isoenzyme analysis, RAPD PCR,
and protease production to examine the relationships of thirty strains of *Metarhizium*
from twenty-three countries. Isoenzyme analyses of catalase and propionyl-esterases
gave distinct banding patterns with isolates from acridid or pyrgomorphid hosts.
Principal Coordinate analysis of RAPD PCR results also showed isolates from acridid or
pyrgomorphid hosts to be clearly separated as a distinct group. Further, in the same
study, the strongest protease (elastase and chymoelastase) activity was demonstrated by
acridid and pyrgomorphid isolates compared to those from other hosts, with one cercopid
exception. They used their data to support the differentiation of *M. flavoviride* into 3
groups: 1) original isolates of *M. flavoviride var. flavoviride* from coleopteran hosts and
soil in northern Europe, 2) isolates of *M. flavoviride var. minus* from homopteran hosts in
Southeast Asia and 3) those isolates from acridoids in Africa (including Madagascar),
Australia and the Galapagos. However, it should be noted that some other isolates of *Metarhizium*, not classified with the group 3 isolates, are pathogenic to acridoids.

1.1.2.5 Ribosomal RNA (rRNA) and DNA (rDNA) sequence analysis

In conjunction with their study on isoenzyme comparison, Rakotonirainy *et al.* (1994) used phylogenetic analysis of partial 28S rRNA sequences to confirm separation of *M. flavoviride* from *M. anisopliae*. The sequences clustered isolates into three groups: 1) *M. flavoviride*, 2) New Zealand strains of *M. anisopliae*, and 3) *M. anisopliae*. In the third cluster, there was a distinct division between strains of *M. anisopliae* var. *majus* and *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*.

More recently, Driver *et al.* (2000) used rDNA sequences to assign representative isolates to ten separate clades. Acridoid isolates, most previously identified as *M. flavoviride* on the basis of conidial and phialide morphology, clustered as a distinct taxonomic group proposed as *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. Further, one of the proposed clades (*M. flavoviride* var. *novazealandicum*) incorporated a particular genotype of isolates from insects and soils in Australia and New Zealand. Table 1 outlines a simplified chronological history of the taxonomy of *Metarhizium*.

Although not all proposed clades have been universally accepted, it is generally agreed that there are three areas of consensus with regards to the taxonomy of *Metarhizium*: 1) *M. anisopliae* has a monophyletic evolution based on ITS and 28S rDNA sequence data, 2) *M. anisopliae* and *M. flavoviride* are related but can be distinguished with the use of molecular markers, and 3) genetically distinguishable subgroups exist within *M. anisopliae* and *M. flavoviride* (Bidochka & Small, 2005).
Table 1-1. Chronological history of *Metarhizium* taxonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>M. album</strong></th>
<th><strong>M. anisopliae</strong></th>
<th><strong>M. flavoviride</strong></th>
<th><strong>Reference</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initially identified as <em>Entomophthora anisopliae</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metschnikoff, 1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renamed as <em>Metarhizium anisopliae</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sorokin, 1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of long- and short-spored forms (forma <em>major</em> and forma <em>minor</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johnston, 1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition as authentic species</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Petch, 1931, Rombach <em>et al.</em>, 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M. brunneum</em> identified as new species by Petch, later renamed <em>M. anisopliae</em> based on morphological comparison and exposure to gamma irradiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Petch, 1935, Latch, 1965, Roberts, 1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of new species</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gams &amp; Rozsypal, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of <em>M. anisopliae</em> (Metsch.) Sorok. var. <em>anisopliae</em> and <em>M. anisopliae</em> (Metsch.) Sorok. var. <em>majus</em> (Johnston) comb. nov.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tulloch, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of genetic variability in this species but acknowledgement of homogeneity of <em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>majus</em> based on isozyme analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Riba <em>et al.</em>, 1986, St. Leger <em>et al.</em>, 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The hatched line represents the determination of taxonomy by morphological observation (above) and molecular characterization (below).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M. album</th>
<th>M. anisopliae</th>
<th>M. flavoviride</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confirmation of high genetic variability by RAPD analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fegan et al., 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of subgroups, loosely correlated with geographical origin, by RAPD analysis and restriction endonuclease digestion of a protease gene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bidochka et al., 1994, Fungaro et al., 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low intraspecific variability in isolates virulent to acridids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cobb &amp; Clarkson, 1993, Leal et al., 1994, Leal et al., 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of two subgroups with no correlation to geographic origin or insect host</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curran et al., 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation of M. album, M. anisopliae var. anisopliae, M. anisopliae var. majus, and M. flavoviride by analysis of rDNA sequences, rRNA sequences and isozyme profiles, and RFLPs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curran et al., 1994, Rakotonirainy et al., 1994, Pipe et al., 1995, Mavridou &amp; Typas, 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of acridid isolates as a single, distinctive genotype with a pantropical distribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bridge et al., 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition as a single distinct clade</td>
<td>Recognition of four distinct clades: M. anisopliae var. anisopliae, M. anisopliae var. majus, M. anisopliae var. lepidiotum var. nov., M. anisopliae var. acridum var. nov.</td>
<td>Recognition of five distinct clades: M. flavoviride var. flavoviride, M. flavoviride Type E, M. flavoviride var. minus, M. flavoviride var. novazealandicum var. nov.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Driver et al., 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1-1 con’t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M. album</th>
<th>M. anisopliae</th>
<th>M. flavoviride</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of three subgroups of <em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>anisopliae</em> by IGS sequence analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pantou <em>et al.</em>, 2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal that all three currently recognized species be reduced to a single species <em>M. anisopliae</em>, further defined as varieties, genetic groups, cryptic species as additional phylogenetic and phylogeographic data are obtained.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Milner et al.</em>, 1994, <em>Bidoehka &amp; Small</em>, 2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further consensus and correlation of molecular, morphological and ecological data will require examination of additional isolates.

1.2 The fungal infection process

The infectious propagule of *Metarhizium* is the uninuclear conidium, a fungal mitospore formed externally on a conidiogenous cell (Humber, 1997). Pathogenesis involves the following stages: recognition and spore attachment to host, germination and penetration of integument, growth and proliferation within host, and re-emergence from host followed by conidial production (Zacharuk, 1973).

1.2.1 Recognition and spore attachment to host

The process by which a spore recognizes an appropriate host has not yet been fully elucidated. Butt *et al.* (unpublished results in Butt, 2002) have observed a complex signalling apparatus (G-proteins, receptors, kinases, and secondary messengers) in some entomogenous fungi. Wang and St. Leger (2005) identified fungal transcriptional patterns induced by recognition of host-specific topography and chemical components displayed or released by the host. Attachment of the conidium to host cuticle is mediated through non-specific hydrophobic interaction between conidial rodlets and the waxy surface of the insect cuticle (St. Leger, 1993; Boucias *et al.*, 1988).

1.2.2 Germination and penetration of integument

Before production of a germ tube can be initiated, the spore must overcome fungistatic or toxic compounds present in the insect cuticle (Samuels & Reynolds, 2000; Sosa-Gómez *et al.*, 1997; St. Leger, 1991). Successful germination is also dependent upon appropriate humidity, available nutrients and surface topography (Dillon & Charnley, 1990; St. Leger *et al.*, 1994, 1991). Ibrahim *et al.* (1999) determined that
M. anisopliae conidia require water activity > 0.98 (=98% RH) for germination, irrespective of aqueous or oil-based formulations. Conversely, Bateman et al. (1993) demonstrated infectivity of desert locusts (Schistocerca gregaria) by an oil formulation of M. flavoviride at 35% RH, suggesting that the microclimate humidity of the insect cuticle was more of a determinant than ambient relative humidity for germination. Wang and St. Leger (2005) observed that M. anisopliae var. acridum conidia germinated on S. gregaria, however, germination on beetles or hemipteran bugs was either repressed or occurred with low levels of differentiation.

Penetration through the cuticle is accomplished by production of an appressorium, a specialized structure at the apex of the germ tube (St. Leger et al., 1989; Zacharuk, 1970a). Formation of the appressorium is influenced by surface topography, with preference for hard, smooth surfaces (St. Leger et al., 1991; St. Leger et al., 1989). Penetration pegs produced by the appressorium enter the cuticle, usually at intersegmental folds, with the aid of mechanical pressure and cuticle-degrading enzymes including proteases, chitinases, lipases, esterases and phosphatases (Freimoser et al., 2003; Gillespie et al., 1998; St. Leger et al. 1996; Bidochka & Khachatourians, 1994; Zacharuk, 1970b).

1.2.3 Growth and proliferation within host

Once the fungus has entered the haemocoel, colonization is dependent upon the ability of the fungus to overcome a combination of cellular and humoral responses that comprise the host immune system (Gillespie et al., 2000). Fungal cytotoxic compounds are produced by blastospores, free-floating yeast-like cells produced as hyphae bud within the haemocoel (Zacharuk, 1971). The production of secondary fungal metabolites,
primarily destruxins A, B and E, by isolates of *M. flavoviride* has been demonstrated *in vitro* (Amiri-Beshali *et al.*, 2000). In contrast, Kershaw *et al.* (1999) could only detect destruxins in early adults of *S. gregaria* that were infected in a bioassay with an Australian isolate of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*; destruxins were not detected with isolates from Africa or the Galapagos Islands. Destruxins have been shown to possess immunomodulatory ability (Vilcinskas *et al.*, 1997; Vey *et al.*, 1995; Huxham *et al.*, 1989) as well as disrupt normal cell metabolism (James *et al.*, 1993). Expression of genes involved in stress response, detoxification and transmembrane transport in *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (Freimoser *et al.*, 2003) is likely induced by the host humoral response.

Subsequent to successful suppression of the host immune response, colonization of the haemocoel is completed and the insect succumbs. The reasons for host mortality are not yet fully understood, but may be due to a combination of mechanical damage to internal organs, nutrient depletion and/or toxicosis (Gillespie & Claydon, 1989).

1.2.4 **Re-emergence from the host and conidiation**

Under favourable environmental conditions, mycelial growth resumes and hyphae emerge soon after host death to colonize the cadaver surface. Hyphal differentiation into conidiogenous cells occurs and concomitant sporulation completes the infection process. At this point, abiotic factors are the main determinants in persistence of the infectious propagule in the environment.

1.3 **Abiotic factors affecting persistence of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum**

The growth and survival of fungi are determined primarily by abiotic factors including temperature, solar radiation and humidity. Other meteorological factors such
as rainfall and wind contribute to the efficacy and dispersal of the entomopathogen in the field, but the impact of weather on the effectiveness of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* has not yet been widely studied. It should be noted that most data on abiotic factors have been acquired from laboratory results, thus, generalization of pathogen survival observed under controlled conditions must be verified or refuted by field experimentation (Ignoffo, 1992). Further, environmental parameters interact in their impact on entomopathogens (Inglis *et al.*, 2001).

1.3.1 Temperature

Temperature acts not only on the germination of fungal spores and hyphal development, but also on the speed and quantity of sporulation (Benz, 1987). Ambient temperatures in most agroecosystems range from about 10 to 40 °C during the growing season (Ignoffo, 1992). Many studies have determined that *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* would not be adversely affected by most temperatures within this range. The optimum temperature for growth for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* has been shown to be around 28 to 30 °C, with some degree of growth noted over a range from 15 to 35 °C, although an isolate from Madagascar has demonstrated the ability to grow at 38 °C (Welling *et al.*, 1994). Thomas and Jenkins (1997) observed optimal temperatures of ca. 30 °C for Green Muscle® and another isolate of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. However, the optimal temperatures for hyphal extension and conidial yield on Sabouraud-dextrose agar (SDA) were 27 °C and 25 °C, respectively, for Green Muscle® and 25.5 °C and 24 °C, respectively, for isolate 191-609. It was noted that conidial production rose steeply with increasing temperatures towards the optimum followed by a more gradual decline as temperatures increased above the optimum. They also determined that the optimal
temperature for infection of *Zonocerus variegatus* under controlled environmental conditions was ca. 30 °C for both isolates. In a study of vegetative growth on a semi-synthetic medium, Ouedraogo *et al.* (1997) demonstrated growth of several *M. flavoviride* isolates over a range of 8 to 35 °C. No isolates grew at 37 °C. Most isolates had optimal growth at 28 to 30 °C, but a few fell in the range of 25 to 28 °C. An optimal temperature of 30 °C for conidial germination was shown by Fargues *et al.* (1997); however, while Green Guard® still exhibited 98 % germination after 48 hours at 37 °C, Green Muscle® displayed only 11 % germination for the same temperature and duration. No germination was observed at 40 °C. In a comparison of isolates from Australia and Mexico, Milner *et al.* (2003) showed that all had optimal growth at 28 °C on SDA but found significant differences in growth rates, with the most rapid rate displayed by one of the Mexican isolates. All isolates showed little or no growth at 36 °C and slow growth at 16 °C. High mortality in wingless grasshopper, *Phaulacridium vittatum*, from varying doses was demonstrated in a laboratory bioassay over a range of temperatures from 20 to 35 °C, but sporulation occurred only at high doses at 20 °C, as well as at all doses at 25 °C and 30 °C. At 35 °C, one of the Mexican isolates was the only one to produce substantial sporulation. Arthurs and Thomas (2001a) found similar results with maximum conidiogenesis in cadavers in contact with a damp surface at 25 °C. Little sporulation occurred at 15 °C or 40 °C.

Studies have also focused on the thermal tolerance of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* conidia in oil formulations. McClatchie *et al.* (1994) observed a slight decrease in germination in oil-formulated conidia exposed to 60 °C for five hours. Even after five hours at 80 °C, 10 % of the exposed conidia were still capable of germination. A longer
storage time at a lower temperature (six weeks at 55 °C) resulted in 20 % survival of
dried conidia. Morley-Davies et al. (1995) demonstrated germination rates greater than
75 % after ninety days storage at temperatures ranging from -10 to 40 °C for Green
Muscle® for both oil and dry powder formulations. Dry formulations generally
outperformed oil formulations at all temperatures tested. Rangel et al. (2005) determined
the conidial thermotolerance for Green Guard®. Germination of a conidial suspension in
an aqueous solution was 90 % after twelve hours exposure to 45 °C. The median lethal
dose (LD50) was calculated as 49.4 °C for two hours.

Additional studies have investigated the effects of fluctuating temperature
regimes on virulence in bioassays of acridids. Inglis et al. (1999) found a mean lethal
time of 4.8 days for grasshopper nymphs infected with a Brazilian isolate of M.
flavoviride under a regime of 20/30 °C (12 h:12 h) compared to 5.4 days for those
incubated at a constant 25 °C. Both regimes produced ca. 80 % external colonization of
cadavers compared to 24 % external colonization for infected nymphs that had been
incubated under a regime of 10/40 °C (12 h:12 h). Welling et al. (1994) determined a
median lethal time of 8.55 days for locust nymphs inoculated with an isolate of M.
flavoviride from Madagascar and incubated at 30/25 °C (8 h:16 h) versus 6.83 days for
nymphs exposed to 36/25 °C (8 h:16 h).

1.3.2 Solar radiation

Ignoffo (1992) declared natural sunlight to be the most destructive environmental
factor affecting the persistence of entomopathogens. It has been determined that
wavelengths in the 285 to 315 nm range (UV-B) are the most damaging to fungi.
Morley-Davies et al. (1995) exposed oil formulations of M. flavoviride conidia to
simulated sunlight for up to twenty-four hours at 40 °C to approximate conditions that would exist at the equator. The impact on conidial germination after 24 hours exposure was severe, with germination reduced to 28.6 % from 82.2 % for unexposed Green Muscle® conidia and a decline from 69.4 % to 31 % for Green Guard®. After only eight hours exposure, germination for Green Muscle® declined to 39.4 %. Fargues et al. (1996) found isolates of M. flavoviride to be the most resistant, followed by Beauveria bassiana, M. anisopliae and Isaria (formerly Paecilomyces) fumosorosea, to irradiation by artificial sunlight. Green Muscle® was reduced to 5.2 % surviving colony forming units (CFU) relative to a non-irradiated control, whereas Green Guard® declined to 11.1 % surviving CFU following eight hours of irradiation. As with the study by Morley-Davies et al. (1995), Fargues et al. (1996) observed that Green Guard® conidia were more resistant to simulated radiation than Green Muscle®, thus demonstrating intravarietal differences. Braga et al. (2001a) compared the effects of full-spectrum sunlight and UV-A radiation (320-400 nm) exposure on Green Guard® conidia. The exposures were performed in Utah under naturally occurring sunlight and different filter combinations. Radiation was recorded as irradiance measurements. Relative to full-spectrum sunlight, conidia showed less decline in mean relative percent culturability (ca. 90 %) from four hours exposure to UV-A radiation compared to 70-80 %. Measurements of mean relative percent germination over a period of 48 hours after four hours exposure to either full-spectrum sunlight or UV-A radiation revealed no significant difference from unexposed controls; however, there was a significant delay in germination when measured over 24 hours for both spectra. Moore et al. (1996) found that temperature influenced germination decay curves for oil formulations of Green Muscle® conidia.
exposed to natural solar irradiation in Niger. Minimal loss of germination was experienced at 5 °C and 10 °C during the first two hours of exposure, followed by a decline in the subsequent two hours. Conversely, germination was reduced by half at temperatures of 40 °C and above, with less than one hour exposure.

Some studies have looked at formulation composition as a source of stability enhancement in a natural setting. Moore et al. (1993) discovered that oil formulations of *M. flavoviride* showed 36.5 % germination over a 24-hour period after one hour exposure to UV from a solar simulator compared with 4.7 % germination of conidia in water. Addition of a sunscreen (oxybenzone) to an oil-based formulation resulted in 81.9 % conidial germination after three hours exposure compared with 28.1 % in a formulation without sunscreen. In contrast, Shah et al. (1998a) found no significant differences between field treatments of oil formulations of *M. flavoviride* conidia that contained oxybenzone and those without. Hunt et al. (1994) could not corroborate the findings of Moore et al. (1993) in an analysis of the protective effects offered by several sunscreens. None of the sunscreens tested, including oxybenzone, offered significant protection for oil-formulated conidia after five hours exposure to UV from a solar simulator.

1.3.3 Humidity

Free water is a critical element required for fungal spore germination and sporulation on mycosed cadavers. Whereas water availability in the microclimate of the host cuticle is more of a determinant for conidial germination than ambient relative humidity, conidiogenesis on cadavers is dependent on high moisture in the surrounding environment. Ibrahim et al. (1999) determined that conidia of *M. anisopliae* required water activity > 0.98 (= 98 % RH) for germination. The type of formulation (oil or
aqueous) did not influence this requirement. They also demonstrated ability of water to
diffuse from the haemocoel through a locust cuticle through to the surface, presumably
via pore channels. Magalhães et al. (2000a) observed that *M. anisopliae var. acridum*
sporulated internally within the grasshopper *Rhammatocerus schistocercoides* under
ambient humidities of 53 % and 75 %; however, there was no external sporulation for
either condition. Arthurs and Thomas (2001a) found conidial yield to be closely related
to the water content of locust cadavers. In a simulation of overcast/wet weather
conditions at field sites in the Sahel and South Africa, *S. gregaria* cadavers were exposed
to a fluctuating regime of 25 °C/100 % RH and 40 °C/80 % RH (12 h: 12 h). Sporulation
under this regime was less than that yielded by cadavers held at 25 °C/100 % RH and 40
°C/100 % RH, evidence that conidial yield was reduced by periodic exposure to low
humidity. Fargues et al. (1997) found that a range of 13 to 100 % ambient humidity had
no effect on cumulative mortality, cumulative mycosis or median lethal time in locusts
treated with *M. flavoviride*. An estimated LT₅₀ of five days was established by Bateman
et al. (1993) for locusts inoculated with an oil formulation of *M. flavoviride* and
incubated at 35 % RH. Death due to mycosis was confirmed by incubation of cadavers
under high humidity to permit fungal outgrowth.

1.4 Objectives

As part of the initial studies necessary for the implementation of a biological
control plan, the research in this thesis involved (i) the development of a molecular assay
for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae var. acridum* and analysis of the efficacy of the
assay for detection of the fungus in infected grasshoppers and spiked soil samples
(Chapter 2), (ii) a survey of southern Alberta soils to determine natural incidence of
Metarhizium (Chapter 3), (iii) bioassay of grasshoppers with native isolates of
Metarhizium to determine potential virulence (Chapter 4), and (iv) evaluation of
historical weather and climate data in the Prairie provinces to estimate *M. anisopliae* var.
*acridum* efficacy in a temperate regime (Chapter 5). The research described within will
provide information for the determination of an integrated pest management strategy
applicable to current local conditions, and under a range of weather scenarios.
Chapter 2. Development and Validation of a PCR Assay for the Specific Detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*

2.0 Introduction

Comparative studies of nucleotide sequences of rRNA genes have provided significant data for analysis of phylogenetics and taxonomy (White *et al.*, 1990). Ribosomal DNA is present in multiple copies in the fungal genome and is thereby a preferred choice over single-copy genes for PCR amplification. White *et al.* (1990) introduced the use of PCR methods for amplification of the ITS region in nuclear rDNA of the fungal genome. The ITS sequences of the rDNA region are an ideal target for the development of species-specific primers because they evolve relatively rapidly and are highly variable in length and nucleotide content between closely related species and sometimes within a species as has been demonstrated for the genus *Metarhizium*. Driver *et al.* (2000) showed 14 to 18 % nucleotide divergence for the ITS region between the morphologically defined species of *M. album*, *M. anisopliae* and *M. flavoviride*, and up to 5 % divergence between recognized varieties within a species.

Sequence data from the distinct ITS rDNA regions for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* were analyzed for primer development for a PCR assay capable of specific detection of this entomopathogen. The objective was to develop a pair of primers that could differentiate *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* from native isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* and *M. flavoviride*. The assay was also required to detect specific *Metarhizium* DNA from a soil matrix and from infected grasshoppers.

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2.1 Materials and Methods

2.1.1 Fungal isolates and cultivation

The fungal isolates used in this study are listed in Table 2-1. All were propagated and maintained on potato dextrose agar (PDA). *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (IMI 330189; commercialized as Green Muscle® by the Lutte Biologique Contre les Locustes et Sauteriaux [LUBILOSA] programme) was obtained from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA, Benin). *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolates 421 and 4450 and other fungi coded as UAMH were obtained from the University of Alberta Microfungus Collection and Herbarium, Edmonton, Canada. *Metarhizium* isolates coded as ARSEF were obtained from the USDA-ARS Collection of Entomopathogenic Fungal Cultures, Ithaca, NY, USA. Those coded as LRC and *Isaria* (formerly *Paecilomyces*) *fumosorosea* (PFR-97) were obtained from the Lethbridge Research Centre (LRC), Canada. *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *acridum* SP9 and *Beauveria bassiana* (GHA 726) were previously obtained from Mycotech Corporation, Butte, MT, USA. *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* FI-985 (commercialized as Green Guard®) was procured from Bio-Care Technology Pty Ltd., Somersby, Australia.

2.1.2 Fungal DNA isolation

The procedure of Cenis (1992) was used for fungal DNA extraction. Briefly, hyphae were used to inoculate 500 µl of potato dextrose broth in a 1.5 ml Eppendorf tube. Following 3-5 days incubation at 25 °C, the mycelial mat was pelleted by centrifugation for 5 min at 16 000 X g, washed with 500 µl 10 mM Tris-HCl, 1 mM EDTA, pH 8 (TE), and pelleted again. The TE was decanted and 300 µl of 200 mM Tris-
Table 2-1. List of isolates studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolate code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Host</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMI 330189</td>
<td><em>Metarhizium anisopliae</em> var. <em>acridum</em></td>
<td><em>Ornithacris cavroisi</em> (Orthoptera: Acrididae)</td>
<td>Niger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP9</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>acridum</em></td>
<td><em>Locusta migratoria capito</em> (Orthoptera: Acrididae)</td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI 985</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>acridum</em></td>
<td><em>Austracris guttolosa</em> (Orthoptera: Acrididae)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSEF 3391</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>acridum</em></td>
<td><em>Zoonocerus elegans</em> (Orthoptera: Pyrgomorphidae)</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSEF 6421</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>acridum</em></td>
<td><em>Kraussaria angulifera</em> (Orthoptera: Acrididae)</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSEF 437</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>anisopliae</em></td>
<td><em>Teleogryllus commodus</em> (Orthoptera: Gryllidae)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSEF 727</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae</em> var. <em>anisopliae</em></td>
<td>Unidentified tettigonid (Orthoptera: Tettigoniidae)</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolate code</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Host</td>
<td>Country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAMH 421</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae var. anisopliae</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAMH 4450</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae var. anisopliae</em></td>
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<td>S54</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae var. anisopliae</em></td>
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<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6W-2</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae var. anisopliae</em></td>
<td>Soil</td>
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<tr>
<td>11S-1</td>
<td><em>M. anisopliae var. anisopliae</em></td>
<td><em>Galleria mellonella</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Lepidoptera: Pyralidae)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSEF 1184</td>
<td><em>M. flavoviride</em> Gams &amp; Rozsypal</td>
<td><em>Otitobranchus sulcatus</em></td>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Coleoptera: Curculionidae)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARSEF 2023</td>
<td><em>M. flavoviride var. minus</em></td>
<td>Unidentified acridid</td>
<td>Galapagos Islands</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Orthoptera: Acrididae)</td>
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### Table 2-1. con’t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolate code</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Country of origin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GHA 726</td>
<td><em>Beauveria bassiana</em></td>
<td><em>Melanoplus sanguinipes</em></td>
<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Orthoptera: Acrididae)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UAMH 4756</td>
<td><em>Colletotrichum gloeosporioides</em></td>
<td><em>Laeliocattleya sp.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(telomorph <em>Glomerella cingulata</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UAMH 1656</td>
<td><em>Emericella nidulans</em></td>
<td>Feed</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRC 2111</td>
<td><em>Fusarium oxysporum</em></td>
<td>Soil</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRC 2087</td>
<td><em>Clonostachys rosea f. catenulata</em></td>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAMH 772</td>
<td><em>Hydropisphaera peziza</em></td>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAMH 2876</td>
<td><em>Isaria farinosa</em></td>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFR 97</td>
<td><em>I. fumosorosea</em></td>
<td><em>Phenacoccus solani</em></td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Homoptera: Pseudococcidae)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRC 2176</td>
<td><em>Penicillium bilaii</em></td>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Canada</td>
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Table 2-1. con’t.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Isolate code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Host</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other isolates:</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRC 2391</td>
<td><em>Rhizopus</em> sp.</td>
<td>Soil</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRC 2524</td>
<td><em>Trichoderma reesei</em></td>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRC race 1</td>
<td><em>Verticillium albo-atrum</em></td>
<td><em>Solanum tuberosum</em></td>
<td>Canada</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a IMI = International Mycological Institute, Egham, UK  
ARSEF = Agriculture Research Service Entomopathogenic Fungus Collection,  
US Department of Agriculture  
UAMH = University of Alberta Microfungus Collection and Herbarium, Edmonton,  
Canada  
LRC = Lethbridge Research Centre, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada  

b name as received
HCl pH 8.5, 250 mM NaCl, 25 mM EDTA, 0.5% SDS extraction buffer added. The mycelial mat was hand-ground for 1-2 minutes with a conical microtube pestle. Following homogenization, 150 µl of 3 M sodium acetate, pH 5.2, was added. The suspension was briefly vortexed and placed at -20 °C for 10 min. The microtube was then centrifuged as previously described, and the supernatant transferred to a new tube. An equal volume of isopropanol was added and after incubation at room temperature for approximately 10 min, the precipitated DNA was pelleted by centrifugation. The supernatant was removed, and the pellet washed with 70% ethanol. After another centrifugation and removal of the supernatant, the pellet was dried before being resuspended in 50 µl of TE and stored at -20 °C. Estimates of DNA quantities were obtained by electrophoresis in 0.9% TAE (40 mM Tris acetate, pH approx. 8.3, containing 1 mM EDTA) agarose gels containing 10 µg ml⁻¹ ethidium bromide (Sambrook et al., 1989). PCR amplifications with general fungal primers TW81 and AB28 (Curran et al., 1994) and M. anisopliae var. acridum-specific Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers were performed on 50 ng DNA.

2.1.3 Production of a positive DNA control for M. anisopliae var. acridum

A positive control was generated by cloning the PCR product resulting from amplification of M. anisopliae var. acridum IMI 330189 DNA with primers TW81 and AB28 in vector pGEM®-T Easy using the pGEM® and pGEM®-T Easy Vector Systems cloning kit (Promega, Madison, WI). Standard protocols were used for plasmid DNA isolation, buffers, and electrophoresis techniques (Sambrook et al., 1989). Correct nucleotide sequence of the cloned product was confirmed by sequencing (University
Core DNA and Protein Services, University of Calgary) and comparison to the published sequence for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (AF137062; Driver et al., 2000).

### 2.1.4 Construction of a simulated soil DNA pool spiked with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA

A simulated soil DNA pool was prepared with fungal DNA (section 2.1.2), with the exception of that from *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* and *M. flavoviride* var. *minus*, at a final concentration of 100 ng/μl. The pool consisted of equal proportions of *Metarhizium* spp. DNA versus non-*Metarhizium* spp. DNA. The pool was spiked by addition of 100 ng *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA (concentration of 100 ng/μl) to 900 ng soil DNA pool. Four 10-fold dilutions were made of the spiked DNA pool using the simulated soil DNA pool as diluent, representing final concentrations of 1 ng, 100 pg, 10 pg, and 1 pg per μl *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA. PCR amplifications using the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers were performed with 1 μl of each spiked sample.

### 2.1.5 Inoculation of soil with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* conidia

Spores of *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *acridum* were applied at various concentrations to a local southern Alberta soil (clay-loam). Prior to inoculation, the soil was examined for *Metarhizium* spp. as per the method of Rath et al. (1992). Moist soil equivalent to 20 g oven-dried weight of the soil sample was added to 200 ml of sterile Ringer’s solution (Oxoid, Ogdensburg, NY), the suspension shaken on an orbital shaker at 150 rpm for 30 min at room temperature, and then spread-plated as 0.1 ml of neat or 10^1 dilutions in Ringer’s solution onto a 100 x 15 mm Petri dish containing selective media consisting of 3.5% mycological agar (Difco, Franklin Lakes, NJ) with 10 μg/ml dodine (Cyprex 65-W, American Cyanamid, Wayne, NJ), 50 μg/ml chloramphenicol (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO), and 200 μg/ml cycloheximide (Sigma-Aldrich) (Liu et
al., 1993). Each dilution was plated as 5 replicates. Plates were incubated at 25 °C for 15 days before examination for colonies of *Metarhizium* spp. Also prior to inoculation, DNA was extracted from 0.25 g of the soil using the Ultra Clean Soil DNA kit (MoBio, Carlsbad, CA). Following extraction, the DNA was then subjected to PCR amplification with the general fungal TW81 and AB28 primers to confirm successful DNA extraction, and amplification with a set of primers (Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR) designed for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA.

Spores of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (IMI 330189) were scraped from a PDA plate and resuspended in 0.05% Tween 20. Spore concentration was estimated with a hemocytometer and concentrations adjusted to $10^2$, $10^3$, $10^4$, and $10^5$ spores, each in 200 μl of 0.05% Tween 20. The spore suspensions were each added to 0.25 g of soil, followed immediately by soil DNA extraction using the MoBio Ultra Clean Soil DNA kit. Extracted DNA (1 μl) was subsequently subjected to PCR amplification with the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers.

### 2.1.6 Inoculation of grasshoppers

Nymphs (third and fourth instar) of a non-diapausing strain of *Melanoplus sanguinipes* (Pickford & Randell, 1969) were collected at random from a laboratory colony at the LRC and placed individually in sterile 20 ml glass vials stoppered with a sterile polyurethane foam plug. The experiment involved a total of 152 insects (26 in the control group, 126 in the treatment group) with approximately equal proportions of males and females in each group. On the day of inoculation, conidia of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* were harvested from PDA cultures (15-20 days of growth) and resuspended in sunflower oil (Safflo, Concord, ON). Formulation of the inoculum has been previously
described by Johnson et al. (2002). Briefly, the concentration of conidia was estimated with a hemocytometer and adjusted to $5 \times 10^7$ conidia/ml. Subsequently, 2-μl aliquots were pipetted onto lettuce-leaf wafers (0.7 cm diameter), resulting in a dose of approximately $10^5$ spores per insect (via handling and feeding). Each grasshopper was confined with one wafer for 24 h. Control grasshoppers were confined with wafers containing only sunflower oil. After 24 h confinement, all grasshoppers were removed and individually housed in 240-ml transparent plastic containers. Nymphs that did not survive the 24 h confinement were discarded (mortality was attributed to handling). Throughout the experiment, insects were exposed to a temperature regime of 24 °C/16 °C day/night with a corresponding 16/8 h light/dark photoperiod under ambient relative humidity (40-55%). Nymphs were observed and fed daily with fresh wheat leaves. Cadavers were removed daily with sterile forceps and stored in sterile 1.5 ml Eppendorf vials at -20 °C prior to DNA extraction. All treated grasshoppers were dead by day 8; all remaining control grasshoppers were then killed at -20 °C. Viability of conidia was determined by microscopic examination of germination following 48 h incubation at 25 °C of 2 X 10-μl replicate aliquots of the inoculum onto PDA blocks on a microscope slide.

2.1.7 Grasshopper DNA isolation

The method of Hegedus and Khachatourians (1993) was modified for the extraction of DNA from infected and noninfected grasshoppers. Individual nymphs were homogenized in 500 μl of TE with a sterile microtube pestle for 2-3 minutes accompanied by vigorous vortexing. A 25-μl aliquot of the homogenate was removed and spread on a 60 X 15 mm Petri dish containing selective media for *Metarhizium* spp.
as described above. Inoculated agar plates were incubated at 25 °C for confirmation of presence/absence of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* colonies (maximum of 20 days). The remaining solution was extracted with an equal volume of phenol:chloroform (1:1, v/v) followed by a 10 min centrifugation at 16 000 x g. The upper aqueous phase was removed and extracted once more with chloroform:isoamyl alcohol (24:1, v/v), followed by addition of 0.1 volume of 3 M sodium acetate, pH 5.2, and one volume of isopropanol to the aqueous phase. Following incubation at room temperature (ca. 20 °C) for 10 min, the mixture was centrifuged, and the supernatant removed. The pellet was washed with 1 ml of ice-cold 70% ethanol, centrifuged, and was dried briefly. The DNA was then resuspended in 500 μl of TE containing 2 μl RNase A (Sigma-Aldrich) and stored at -20 °C. Quantitation of DNA was determined with use of a spectrophotometer (Pharmacia Biotech, Piscataway, NJ) and 100 ng was later subjected to PCR amplification.

### 2.1.8 PCR amplification

General fungal primers TW81 (5'-GTTTCCGTAGGTGAACCTGC-3') and AB28 (5'-ATATGCTTAAGTTCAGCGGGT-3') (Curran *et al.*, 1994) were used to amplify the region of the ribosomal repeat from the 3' end of the 16S rDNA to the 5' end of the 28S rDNA flanking the ITS1, the 5.8S rDNA, and ITS2 sequences, from total fungal DNA. PCR amplifications were performed in a total volume of 50 μl containing 10 mM Tris, pH 8.4, 50 mM KCl, 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 0.05% Tween 20, 0.05% NP40, 0.4 μM of each primer, 25 μM of each dNTP (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA), 2.5 units *Taq* DNA polymerase (MBI Fermentas, Hanover, MD) and template DNA. Negative controls contained sterile water in place of DNA. DNA amplification was performed in a GeneAmp® PCR System 9700 (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA) programmed as follows: initial denaturation
5 min at 94 °C; 30 cycles of: denaturation 1 min at 94 °C, annealing 1 min 30 sec at 55 °C, extension 2 min at 72 °C; with a final extension 5 min at 72 °C. PCR products were analyzed on a 1.5% TAE agarose gel in with a 100 bp DNA ladder (MBI Fermentas) included as a size marker.

Primers Mac-ITS-spF (5'-CTGTCACTGTGCTTGGCGGTAC-3') and Mac-ITS-spR (5'-CCCCTGGCGACTGAGTTACTGCACTGC-3') were designed based on the ITS1 and ITS2 regions of the rDNA sequence data for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (clade 7, Driver et al., 2000). Total fungal and soil DNA and grasshopper DNA from infected and noninfected insects were used in PCR assays with this primer combination. Amplifications were performed in a total volume of 50 µl containing 20 mM Tris, pH 8.3, 50 mM KCl, 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 0.1% Triton X-100, 0.4 µM of each primer, 25 µM of each dNTP, 2.5 units Taq DNA polymerase and template DNA. As previously noted, negative controls contained sterile water in place of DNA. DNA amplification was also performed in a GeneAmp® PCR System 9700 programmed as follows: initial denaturation 5 min at 94 °C; 30 cycles of: denaturation 1 min at 94 °C, combined annealing and extension 3 min at 72 °C; with a final extension 5 min at 72 °C. PCR products were analyzed as previously mentioned.

Nested PCR amplifications were carried out on grasshopper DNA from infected insects that initially produced weak products in a single amplification with the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers. DNA from infected grasshoppers was amplified in an initial reaction with the TW81 and AB28 primers using conditions previously described. A second amplification was then performed with a 1-µl aliquot from the initial reaction
and the Mac-ITS-spF/Mac-ITS-spR primer combination using conditions described above.

2.2 Results

As expected, use of the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers in a PCR assay successfully amplified a 420 bp DNA sequence from the total genomic DNA extracted from *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (Figure 2-1). *M. anisopliae* var. *minus* also produced a 420 bp amplification product. Isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* and *M. flavoviride* Gams & Rozsyval produced no amplified product, nor did isolates of *B. bassiana*, *I. fumosorosea*, *I. farinosa*, *V. albo-atrum*, *C. gloeosporioides*, *E. nidulans*, *T. reesei*, *F. oxysporum*, *C. rosea f. catenulata*, *P. bilatii*, *H. peziza*, or an isolate of *Rhizopus* sp. (data not shown). In contrast, the TW81 and AB28 primers produced a varying range (most around 500-600 bp) of amplified products in all isolates tested, thus confirming successful extraction of PCR-quality DNA from all fungal species (data not shown).

The sensitivity of the *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*-specific PCR assay was determined for genomic fungal DNA extracted from an axenic culture of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. The assay was sensitive enough to detect approximately 1 pg of genomic DNA (Fig. 2-2).

The *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*-specific PCR assay successfully detected *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA in the presence of a simulated soil DNA pool. A detection limit of 10 pg was observed, representing 0.001% of total DNA in the sample.

*M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* spores were detected at a concentration of $10^4$ spores per 0.25 g of soil. Use of general fungal TW81 and AB28 primers in conjunction with specific Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers in a nested PCR assay increased the
Fig. 2-1. Specificity determination of the PCR assay using the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers and genomic DNA from various fungal isolates

Lane 1: 100 bp ladder
Lane 2: Positive control (cloned *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*)
Lane 3: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* UAMH 421
Lane 4: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* UAMH 4450
Lane 5: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* S54
Lane 6: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* 6W-2
Lane 7: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* 11S-1
Lane 8: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* ARSEF 437
Lane 9: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* ARSEF 727
Lane 10: *M. flavoviride* Gams & Rozsypal ARSEF 1184
Lane 11: *M. flavoviride* var. *minus* ARSEF 2023
Lane 12: *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* IMI 330189
Lane 13: *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* SP9
Lane 14: *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* FI 985
Lane 15: *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* ARSEF 3391
Lane 16: *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* ARSEF 6421
Lane 17: Water
Fig. 2-2. Sensitivity determination of the PCR assay using the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers and genomic DNA from *M. anisopliae var. acridum*

Lane 1: 100 bp ladder
Lane 2: 1 ng
Lane 3: 100 pg
Lane 4: 10 pg
Lane 5: 1 pg
Lane 6: 100 fg
Lane 7: Water
detection limits to $10^2$ spores per 0.25 g of soil. *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA was not detected and no *Metarhizium* spp. were isolated from the soil prior to inoculation.

The specific assay also successfully detected *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA in each of the 126 infected grasshoppers. Counts of viable conidia in the inoculum revealed a germination rate of >90% at 48 h after incubation at 25 °C. Ecdysis was either completed or initiated by 65 of the treated nymphs prior to death; however, this did not inhibit detection of fungal DNA. Only 28 of the treated cadavers displayed the reddish discolouration of the cuticle associated with infection by *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. Fungal colonies with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* morphological features, namely dark green conidia, were observed on 116 agar plates for the treated group. No growth was observed on nine plates, and for another plate, overgrowth by *Rhizopus* sp. interfered with examination for colonies of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*.

No amplified products were observed with PCR assay of the control group, and no colonies of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* were isolated from any of the agar plates for the control nymphs. Figure 2-3 shows the var. *acridum*-specific PCR amplification results for a representative group of infected and noninfected nymphs.

### 2.3 Discussion

Primers designed from the ITS nucleotide sequences for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* were used successfully in a PCR-based assay for amplification of a 420 bp sequence with genomic DNA extracted from *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. A 420 bp product observed after amplification of *M. flavoviride* var. *minus* DNA was also expected as this species has been recognized as *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* by Driver *et al.* (2000). The ability to produce an amplified product specific to *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*
Fig. 2-3. Detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA in infected grasshoppers using PCR primers Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR

Lane 1: 100 bp ladder
Lane 2: *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (positive control)
Lane 3: DNA from uninfected grasshopper
Lane 4: DNA from uninfected grasshopper
Lane 5: DNA from grasshopper infected with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (4 dpi)
Lane 6: DNA from grasshopper infected with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (5 dpi)
Lane 7: DNA from grasshopper infected with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (6 dpi)
Lane 8: Water

*days post-infection*
supports the concept of divergence between taxa and also corroborates the hypothesis of divergent evolutionary lines within the genus *Metarhizium* (Driver *et al.*, 2000). Although representatives from only two other clades of *Metarhizium* were evaluated, the high sequence variability of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* in comparison with other clades combined with the highly stringent composition of the synthesized sequences support the specificity of the Mac-ITS-spF and Mac-ITS-spR primers.

The fungal genera other than *Metarhizium* analyzed in this study encompassed a range of entomopathogenic, phytopathogenic, mycopathogenic, and soil saprophytic organisms. Several of the genera have previously been isolated from southern Alberta soils (Inglis *et al.*, 1998). *V. albo-atrum* and *C. gloeosporioides* are phytopathogens (Domsch *et al.*, 1980; Evans *et al.*, 2001). Others, such as *Isaria* (syn. *Paecilomyces* p.p) are entomopathogenic (Inglis *et al.*, 2001). One of these other entomopathogens, *B. bassiana*, was selected because it is an acridid pathogen (Johnson & Goettel, 1993). *Gliocladium* spp., *Trichoderma* spp., and *Fusarium* spp. have been identified as pathogens of fungi (Vey *et al.*, 2001). A pending survey of southern Alberta soils and insects necessitated analysis of these genera with the *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*-specific primers to determine specificity of the PCR assay. Further, demonstration of successful amplification of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA in the presence of other DNA, particularly from soil, was essential and has been demonstrated in this work.

Extraction of PCR-amplifiable DNA from insects is often difficult due to the number of PCR inhibitors in the form of tannic acids, quinones, polyphenols and chelators coisolated from the insect cuticle (Hackman, 1974). Some weak amplification products were experienced with the var. *acridum*-specific primers in a single
amplification from infected grasshopper DNA but these products were subsequently more strongly amplified with a nested PCR assay that employed the TW81/AB28 primers for the first amplification and the Mac-ITS-spF/Mac-ITS-spR primers for the second amplification. Inhibitory compounds were diluted to a negligible amount when 1 μl of the first amplification reaction was used as template for the second amplification. Moltling did not interfere with the ability of the assay to detect M. anisopliae var. acridum DNA in infected grasshoppers that underwent ecdysis. This supports a previous observation by Milner and Prior (1994) that ecdysis did not interfere in the infection of the Australian plague locust (C. terminifera) with M. anisopliae var. acridum.

Studies have demonstrated that, depending on the dose, the majority of laboratory bioassay mortality in acridids infected with M. anisopliae var. acridum occurs between 4-6 d post-infection (Delgado et al., 1997b; Lomer et al., 1997b; Magalhães et al., 1997; Milner, 1997). In this study, the M. anisopliae var. acridum-specific PCR assay amplified sequences from DNA extracted from treated nymphs that died 1-3 d post-inoculation. Presumably, the majority of nymphs at this stage died from complications due to contact with the sunflower oil component of the inoculum rather than from active fungal infection. The M. anisopliae var. acridum-specific diagnostic PCR assay is qualitative and not designed to determine activity levels of the target organism. However, confirmation of M. anisopliae var. acridum colony growth for 92.1% of the treated grasshoppers indicates that the presence of viable spores can be detected early post-infection. Moreover, the intensity of amplification products increased with DNA from cadavers from the later days of the experiment, thus suggesting a progressive increase in fungal mass in the infected host.
Surveys for natural incidence of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* have indicated that these levels are generally very low. In northern Benin, Shah *et al.* (1998b) found levels of 0.3-1.7% and 1.2-3.2% at different sites, respectively. Also in Benin, Douro-Kpindou *et al.* (1995) detected fungal incidence at 15% in field trial plots before application of a formulation of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* for biocontrol of *Zonocerus variegatus*. The ability of our assay to detect levels of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA as low as 0.001% of total DNA present demonstrates its suitability for detection of this fungus at low incidence.

Laboratory and field tests indicate differential impacts of weather affect the operation and efficacy of entomopathogenic fungi (Inglis *et al.*, 1997). Further, spring temperature, overwintering conditions, and moisture strongly affect the target insect. Insect body temperature can be calculated (Lactin & Johnson, 1998) and is largely a result of immediate weather factors; however, the probable impact of weather on the effectiveness of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* is largely unknown. Improved knowledge of the biology and ecology of this fungus in a natural setting is a prerequisite for the development of an effective long-lasting pest management strategy for the biological control of acridids. This study offers a reliable, specific, and sensitive diagnostic PCR assay that can be performed on a number of templates including those with non-target DNA. This molecular method can be used to investigate the geographical extent of *Metarhizium* spp. in soils and native insects, to compare this distribution to possible future distributions under changing weather and climate, and to assess the opportunities for including *Metarhizium* spp. in integrated grasshopper management plans.
Chapter 3. Determination of Natural Incidence of *Metarhizium* in Southern Alberta Soils

3.0 Introduction

Documentation of the natural incidence of entomopathogenic fungi in the environment is crucial to the successful application of biocontrol agents. Surveys yield valuable knowledge on the distribution and quantification of naturally occurring genotypes, as well as the suitability of the target area for persistence of the fungus. Further, the best source for potentially effective biocontrol agents is the site of natural interaction between a pathogen and its host (Hofstein & Chapple, 1999).

Detection of entomopathogens may be direct through observation of endemic levels of disease in target insect populations or indirect by culture on selective media, use of insect larvae in bait assays, or application of molecular techniques such as PCR. Direct isolation of a pathogen from a diseased target insect is more likely to yield a virulent pathotype than indirect isolation from soil; however, the incidence of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* infection in Orthoptera is very rare. In the last twenty years, only two isolates have been found on acridid hosts in Australia (Milner *et al.* 2003) and one hundred and twenty one isolates of *M. flavoviride* were collected from a survey of West Africa and Madagascar that involved tens of thousands of grasshoppers and locusts maintained in cages (Shah *et al.*, 1997). Various degrees of virulence were determined in the African isolates (Bateman *et al.*, 1996), possibly a consequence of increased levels in susceptibility that resulted from stressed insects in high population densities under controlled conditions at the time of isolation.

Dodine has successfully been used as a selective agent for the isolation of *Metarhizium* spp. from soil (Liu *et al.*, 1993). Milner and Lutton (1976) determined that
mycological agar with 1% chloramphenicol and 0.5% cycloheximide permitted detection levels down to \(10^3\) conidia of \(M.\ anisopliae\) per gram of soil. \(Metarhizium\ anisopliae\) has also been successfully isolated from Canadian soils by investigation of laboratory cultures of dead elaterids (Zacharuk & Tinline, 1968) and by bait assays of waxworm larvae (Bidochka et al., 1998). Recently, DNA-based PCR has been used to target the highly variable ITS region for identification of various fungal pathogens from soils (Lochman et al.; Ippilito et al., 2002; Cumagun et al., 2000; Bell et al., 1999).

The objective of this study was to determine the natural incidence of \(Metarhizium\) spp. in southern Alberta soils by indirect isolation on selective media and bait assay with waxworm larvae, and by identification with nested PCR for three varieties of \(Metarhizium\).

3.1 Materials and Methods

3.1.1 Collection of soil samples

Soil samples were collected in May 2004 from twenty geographical locations in southern Alberta (Fig. 3-1). Sites were chosen on the basis of highest grasshopper densities as determined from the previous year’s data collected by agricultural field surveyors. All sites included fields that had been under cultivation of various types of cereal crops and the adjoining uncultivated ditches. At each site, five replicates were taken from the cultivated field and five taken from the adjacent ditch. Soil samples were taken with a cylindrical soil corer with an internal diameter of 12 cm and from a soil depth of 10 to 15 cm. Samples were double-bagged and stored at 4 °C until they were used for fungal isolation.
Fig. 3-1. Geographic locations in southern Alberta for soil survey of *Metarhizium* spp. Map courtesy of Southern Alberta Sustainable Strategy (SASS).
3.1.2 Determination of soil moisture

The mean soil moisture content of each sample was calculated after drying three separate 20 to 25 g quantities of the soil in an oven at 105 °C for 16 to 20 h. The sampling spoon was immersed in 70 % ethanol, rinsed in running distilled water, and dried between samples to eliminate sample-to-sample contamination.

3.1.3 Isolation of soil fungi on selective medium

Inoculation of soil extracts onto selective medium was performed according to the method outlined by Rath et al. (1992). A soil corer (2.5 cm diameter, 20 cm length), decontaminated as per section 3.1.2, was used to remove a subsample of each soil sample. The subsample was thoroughly mixed in a new clean plastic bag, and then moist soil equivalent to 20 g oven-dried weight was added to 200 ml sterile Ringer's solution (Oxoid) in a 500 ml Erlenmeyer flask. The suspension was shaken at 150 rpm for 30 min on an orbital shaker, then 0.1 ml of neat and 1:10 dilutions in sterile distilled water were spread-plated on mycological agar (Difco) containing 50 μg/ml chloramphenicol and 200 μg/ml cycloheximide (Veen & Ferron, 1968), and modified with 10 μg/ml dodine. Five replicate plates were inoculated for each dilution. Plates were sealed with Parafilm® and incubated in the dark at room temperature (ca. 20 °C) for 20 days before examination. *M. anisopliae var. anisopliae* isolate UAMH 421 was inoculated as a positive control onto one plate from each batch of medium produced.

3.1.4 Isolation of soil fungi with waxworm larvae

The *Galleria* bait method described by Zimmermann (1986) was used for isolation of soil fungi. Soil samples were aseptically transferred individually to sterile 115-ml containers with perforated screw-capped lids. Each sample was moistened with 5
ml of sterile distilled water, after which four waxworm (Galleria mellonella) larvae were added with sterile forceps to each container. The assay was conducted at room temperature (ca. 20 °C) for twenty-one days. Dead larvae were removed every seven days; larvae not showing any signs of fungal outgrowth were disinfected by immersion for one minute in 70 % ethanol followed by one minute in sterile distilled water. Cadavers were then placed individually on moistened sterile filter paper in a 60 mm x 10 mm Petri dish, the dish sealed with Parafilm®, and incubated at ca. 20 °C for a maximum of twenty-one days. Conidia from fungal outgrowth on dead larvae were transferred with a sterile loop to selective medium described in section 3.1.3. Uninoculated waxworm larvae were maintained on a wheat germ/oatmeal/honey mash shipped by the supplier (Massasauga Imports, Acton, ON). Two sets of control larvae (ten larvae per isolate) were inoculated with Metarhizium anisopliae isolates UAMH 421 and S54 by rolling individual larva onto actively growing cultures.

3.1.5 Identification of Metarhizium spp. in soil by PCR

3.1.5.1 Extraction of soil DNA

Soil DNA was extracted from 0.25 g quantities for four replicates of each soil sample as per the manufacturer’s instructions for the Ultra Clean Soil DNA kit (MoBio). PCR primers TW81 and AB28 (Curran et al., 1984) were used to confirm successful DNA extraction as previously described (section 2.1.8). Extracted DNA (1 µl) was subsequently subjected to PCR amplification.

3.1.5.2 Production of a positive DNA control for M. flavoviride var. flavoviride

A positive control for M. flavoviride Gams & Rozsypal ARSEF 1184 was constructed as previously described (section 2.1.3). Correct nucleotide sequence of the
cloned product was confirmed by sequencing and comparison to the published sequence for *M. flavoviride* var. *flavoviride* (AF138267, clade 4, Driver et al., 2000).

### 3.1.5.3 Design of PCR primers for the specific detection of *M. flavoviride* var. *flavoviride*

Primers Mf-ITS-spF and Mf-ITS-spR were designed based on the ITS1 and ITS2 regions of the rDNA sequence data for *M. flavoviride* var. *flavoviride* (clade 4, Driver et al., 2000).

### 3.1.5.4 PCR amplification of soil DNA

Each soil DNA extract was subjected to three different nested PCR. Assays for specific detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* and *M. flavoviride* were conducted in conjunction with a primary assay with general fungal primers TW81 and AB28. PCR amplifications were described previously in section 2.1.8. Conditions for the *M. flavoviride*-specific assay were identical to those used for the *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* assay.

Nested PCR assays that targeted the variable intergenic spacer (IGS) region between the 16S and 28S rRNA subunits for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* were conducted with an initial reaction with primers Ma-28S4 and Ma-IGS1 (Pantou et al., 2003). Amplifications were performed in a total volume of 50 µl containing 20 mM Tris, pH 8.3, 50 mM KCl, 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 0.1% Triton X-100, 0.4 µM of each primer, 25 µM of each dNTP, 2.5 units Taq DNA polymerase and template DNA. DNA amplification was performed in a GeneAmp® PCR System 9700 programmed as follows: initial denaturation 5 min at 94 °C; 30 cycles of: denaturation 1 min at 94 °C, annealing 1 min at 54 °C, extension 2 min at 72 °C; with a final extension 5 min at 72 °C. PCR products were analyzed on 1 % TAE agarose gels with a 100 bp DNA ladder.
included as a size marker. A second reaction was performed with a 1-μl aliquot from the initial amplification and primers Ma-IGSspF and Ma-IGSspR (Pantou et al., 2003). Reaction mixtures were as described above. DNA amplification was performed in a GeneAmp® PCR System 9700 programmed as follows: initial denaturation 5 min at 94 °C; 30 cycles of: denaturation 1 min at 94 °C, annealing 1 min at 58 °C, extension 2 min at 72 °C; with a final extension 5 min at 72 °C. PCR products were analyzed as previously mentioned (section 2.1.8). Negative controls for all amplifications consisted of sterile water in place of DNA. Genomic DNA (50 ng) from M. anisopliae var. anisopliae isolate UAMH 421 was used as a positive control for the M. anisopliae var. anisopliae specific assays. In a preliminary study on specificity, nested PCR assays with the Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 and Ma-IGSspF/Ma-IGSspR primer combinations were conducted on genomic DNA from the fungal isolates listed in section 2.1.1. Table 3-1 contains a list of all primers used in this study and their sequences.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Isolation on selective medium

M. anisopliae var. anisopliae was isolated from three of the twenty (15 %) geographical locations sampled in southern Alberta. Two sites had a single colony forming unit (CFU) and the third site had one replicate sample with one CFU on one plate and another replicate with two colonies on another plate. PCR testing confirmed the identification of all isolates as M. anisopliae var. anisopliae. PCR products produced by amplification of the partial 3' end of the large subunit ribosomal RNA and IGS region with the Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 primers were cloned and sequenced for all isolates. One isolate from a wheat field, 6W-2, was identified as a group-B
Table 3-1. List of primers used for PCR amplification in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primer</th>
<th>Sequence (5’-3’)</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TW81</td>
<td>GTTTCCGTAAGTGAACTGC</td>
<td>Curran et al. (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB28</td>
<td>ATATGCTTAAGTTCAGGCGGT</td>
<td>Curran et al. (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac-ITS-spF</td>
<td>CTGCACGTGTTGCTTCGCGGTAC</td>
<td>Entz et al. (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac-ITS-spR</td>
<td>CCCGGTTCGAGTGAGTTAAGCTGC</td>
<td>Entz et al. (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mf-ITS-spF</td>
<td>TGTCTACCGTTGCTTCGCGGTTTC</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mf-ITS-spR</td>
<td>TACGGCAGCAGGCGGGCACCAGTT</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma-28S4</td>
<td>CCGGTTCGAGTGAGTTAAGCTGC</td>
<td>Pantou et al. (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma-1GS1</td>
<td>CGTCACCTTAGTGCTTGCA</td>
<td>Pantou et al. (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma-1GSspF</td>
<td>CTACCGGGGAGCCAGGCAAG</td>
<td>Pantou et al. (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma-1GSspR</td>
<td>AAGCAAGCTACCCCTAAGC</td>
<td>Pantou et al. (2003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
M. anisopliae var. anisopliae based on the presence of a 20 bp GT-rich insertion sequence found to be present in group-B strains (Pantou et al., 2003). The other two sites (a wheat field and the adjoining brome ditch) yielded a strain (S54) that was identified as a group-B variant lacking the priming site for the Ma-IGSspF primer. The Ma-IGSspF primer false-primed upstream of the missing site, resulting in a PCR product 300 bp larger than expected (Fig. 3-2). Colony morphologies (dark green conidia) for the group-B and variant group-B isolates were similar. Nucleotide sequences for the cloned PCR fragments amplified by the Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 primers for these isolates can be found in Appendices 1 and 2. Mean soil moisture content for the soil samples taken was quite variable, ranging from 4.39 to 22.70 %. No isolates of M. anisopliae var. acridum or M. flavoviride grew on the selective medium. Each batch of medium produced supported the growth of M. anisopliae var. anisopliae UAMH 421.

3.2.2 Isolation on Galleria bait assay

Two Metarhizium isolates were recovered from only two infected Galleria larvae. Both isolates came from two sites that differed from the sites positive for M. anisopliae var. anisopliae isolation on selective medium. One isolate (11S-1) recovered from a brome ditch next to a wheat field resembled the selective medium isolates in colony morphology (Fig. 3-3a) and was confirmed as a non-variant (in terms of expected band size) M. anisopliae var. anisopliae by PCR. The other isolate (20W-5), despite exhibiting similar morphology on Galleria to the first isolate, showed a distinct morphology characterized by white mycelial growth with very sparse green conidiation (Fig. 3-3b) after six weeks incubation at ca. 20 °C on various media, including PDA, SDA + 1 % yeast extract, Czapek-Dox agar, and the selective medium previously
Fig. 3-2. Detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* DNA in nested PCR assays using Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 and Ma-IGSpF/Ma-IGSpR primers and genomic DNA from various *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolates

Lane 1: 100 bp ladder
Lane 2: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* UAMH 421
Lane 3: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* UAMH 4450
Lane 4: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* ARSEF 437
Lane 5: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* ARSEF 727
Lane 6: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* 6W-2
Lane 7: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* 11S-1
Lane 8: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* 854
Lane 9: Water
Fig. 3-2. Two types of colony morphologies of *Metarhizium* isolated by *Galleria* bait method from southern Alberta soils. Additional isolates obtained from direct plating onto selective media had morphologies similar to (a).
mentioned. Further, amplification of genomic DNA from isolate 20W-5 produced a band approximately 250 bp in size in a PCR assay with general fungal primers TW81 and AB28 (Fig. 3-4), but no product was produced in assays with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*-specific primers Ma-IGSpF and Ma-IGSpR. The isolate was tentatively identified as *M. anisopliae* on the basis of microscopic examination of spores and resemblance in colony morphology to *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* ARSEF 727, an isolate from a tettigonid host in Brazil. Further DNA and morphological characterization for this isolate is pending.

No mortality in uninoculated control larvae was attributed to fungal infection. All larvae infected with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* UAMH 421 showed fungal outgrowth typical of *Metarhizium* (green conidiation). All larvae inoculated with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* S54 died but no fungal mycosis attributable to *Metarhizium* was observed on any of the cadavers. No *Metarhizium* sp. were isolated from S54-inoculated cadavers.

### 3.2.3 PCR assays of soil samples with general fungal primers TW81 and AB28

All soil DNA extracts produced amplification products of varying sizes with primers TW81 and AB28 (data not shown), thus indicating the presence of PCR-quality DNA in the soil extracts produced by the MoBio Ultra Clean Soil DNA kit.

### 3.2.4 *M. flavoviride* var. *flavoviride* PCR assays

#### 3.2.4.1 Specificity

A PCR assay with Mf-ITS-spF and Mf-ITS-spR primers successfully amplified a 340 bp DNA sequence from genomic DNA extracted from *M. flavoviride* var. *flavoviride* (data not shown). No amplified product was produced by isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*, *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*, *M. flavoviride* var. *minus*, *B. bassiana*, 55
Fig. 3-4. Amplification products from genomic DNA of *M. anisopliae* isolate 20W-5 and other various *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* in a PCR assay using general fungal primers TW81 and AB28

Lane 1: 100 bp ladder  
Lane 2: *M. anisopliae* 20W-5  
Lane 3: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* UAMH 421  
Lane 4: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* UAMH 4450  
Lane 5: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* ARSEF 437  
Lane 6: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* ARSEF 727  
Lane 7: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* 6W-2  
Lane 8: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* 11S-1  
Lane 9: *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* S54  
Lane 10: Water
3.2.4.2 PCR assays of soil samples with *M. flavoviride* var. *flavoviride*-specific primers

With one exception, no products were produced in nested PCR assays with TW81 and AB28 primers in initial reactions and *M. flavoviride* var. *flavoviride*-specific primers in secondary amplifications (data not shown). One site produced a weak 340 bp band in a nested PCR with primer combinations TW81/AB28 and Mf-ITS-spF/Mf-ITS-spR (data not shown), but could not be more strongly amplified in a tertiary amplification of the nested reaction with the *M. flavoviride*-specific primers.

3.2.5 PCR assays of soil samples with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*-specific primers

No products were produced in nested PCR assays with TW81 and AB28 primers in initial reactions and *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*-specific primers in secondary amplifications (data not shown).

3.2.6 *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* PCR assays

3.2.6.1 Specificity

Most isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* produced a 380 bp product in a nested PCR assay with primer combinations Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 and Ma-IGSpF/Ma-IGSpR (Fig. 3-2). Most other isolates from section 2.1.1 produced either no product or weak amplification products of varying sizes, some of which were around 400 bp in size (data not shown). *Trichoderma reesei* produced a strongly amplified product of approximately 500 bp (data not shown).
3.2.6.2 PCR assays of soil samples with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*-specific primers

Eleven of the twenty sites produced PCR products in a nested assay with the Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 (outer) and Ma-IGSspF/MaIGSspR (inner) primer combinations (data not shown). Ten of these sites produced a 380 bp product comparable to the expected size for *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*. Two of the ten sites corresponded to those from which *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolates 6W-2 and S54 were recovered on selective medium (section 3.2.1). Another site was the same as the one from which the non-variant *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* (11S-1) was isolated from a *Galleria* cadaver (section 3.2.2). One site produced a strongly amplified product approximately 500 bp in size. No sites produced a product corresponding to the size (approximately 700 bp) yielded by the variant group-B isolate from above (section 3.2.1).

3.3 Discussion

Results from the isolation of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* on selective medium and by *Galleria* bait assay indicate that this species is present at very low densities (< $10^2$ CFU per g of soil) and occurrence (25%) in southern Alberta. The global abundance and distribution of *M. anisopliae* is wide ranging. Six of 163 soil (3 %) samples yielded isolates of *M. anisopliae* in subantarctic Macquarie Island (Roddam & Rath, 1997), while 96 % of investigated fields in Switzerland were positive for *M. anisopliae* isolation with either selective medium and/or *Galleria* bait method (Keller *et al*., 2003), albeit at densities < $10^4$ CFU per g of soil. Klingen (2000) detected *M. anisopliae* in 10 % of locations sampled in Norway, but Kleespies *et al*. (1989) recorded the presence of *M. anisopliae* in 42 % of samples tested in Germany. Hokkanen and Zimmermann (1986) isolated the entomopathogen in 16.7 % of Finnish agroforestry soil with *Galleria* larvae;
ten years later, Vänninen (1996) recorded 15.6% incidence in natural and agricultural soils in Finland that resulted from bait assays of *Tenebrio molitor*, *Tribolium castaneum*, *Acanthocinus aedilis*, and *G. mellonella*. In Tasmania, Rath *et al.* (1992) found *M. anisopliae* in 28% of pasture soil samples but at low abundances (≤ 5 x 10⁴ CFU per g of soil), and Milner *et al.* (1998) isolated *M. anisopliae* on selective medium from 14% of Australian termite nests and feeding sites at levels close to 10³ conidia per g of material. In contrast, in the Near East, Shah *et al.* (1997) obtained no isolates from 243 soils screened on dodine oatmeal agar in Oman; however, since numerous variables, including incubation temperature, humidity, composition of medium, and inoculum, influence the degree of successful isolation on synthetic medium, it is difficult to form any conclusions about the lack of success. Moreover, the cosmopolitan distribution of *M. anisopliae* was confirmed when Bidochka *et al.* (1998) found the fungus in 66.7% of sites in Ontario baited by *Galleria*. They also recognized an association with agricultural, cultivated habitats.

In general, the choice of method of isolation of fungi from soils has inherent limitations. Successful isolation and characterization are dependent upon the ability of the fungus to grow and sporulate on the medium of choice. It has been assumed that *Metarhizium* spp., although usually associated with a specific host, are readily capable of saprophytic growth as demonstrated by nonfastidious growth on various culture media. However, based on their experience, Milner *et al.* (1998) noted that *M. anisopliae* rarely, if ever, grows saprotrophically in soil. Further, isolation directly from soil fails to indicate if the recovered propagule was in the form of conidia, resting spores, mycelia surviving on fragments of host tissue or mycelia living on non-insect substrates (Prior,
1992). The selection of insect host for larval bait method will influence the degree of success in isolation of a host-specific entomopathogen. Assays that employ *Galleria* as the target require that the fungal genotype possesses the capability to recognize Lepidoptera receptors in a suitable host. This capability was not evident in the variant genotype of *M. anisopliae var. anisopliae* isolated in this study that grew well on selective medium but failed to grow or sporulate on *Galleria* larvae. Coleoptera larvae (*T. molitor, T. castaneum* and *A. aedilis*) have also been chosen for bait assays since beetles have been documented as the most common host for *Metarhizium* (Zimmermann, 1993).

Climate conditions have also been correlated to distribution of *M. anisopliae*. Rath *et al.* (1992) observed an increase in the proportion of soils that yielded *M. anisopliae* as average annual rainfall increased from 450 to 1250 mm. In undisturbed pastures, Milner (1992) found densities exceeding $10^6$ spores per g of soil in wet climatic zones. In contrast, densities were less than $2 \times 10^3$ in frequently cultivated fields in hot dry climates. Further, Milner *et al.* (1998) collected most of their *M. anisopliae* isolates from termite material located in the cooler wetter parts of southeast Australia. Low densities of *M. anisopliae* in southern Alberta may be attributable to precipitation amounts approximately two-thirds of average levels and an annual mean temperature more than half a degree higher than the normal mean during the twelve months prior to sampling.

The fact that *M. anisopliae var. acridum* and *M. flavoviride* were not detected is in accord with the absence of documented reports of these varieties in North America. There have been no documented records of *M. anisopliae var. acridum* isolated in
temperate regions and, as previously mentioned; the occurrence in tropical regions is rare. Only seven isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* are listed in a collection of more than seven hundred cultures of *Metarhizium* (Humber, 2004); all originate from tropical regimes. Although *M. flavoviride* has been obtained from both tropical and temperate regions, no naturally occurring isolates from North America have been entered into the USDA-ARS Collection of Entomopathogenic Fungal Cultures (ARSEF) based in New York. Moreover, the geographical distribution for *M. flavoviride* var. *minus* has thus far been mostly restricted to the Philippines and the Solomon Islands, with a few isolates recorded from Brazil, Australia and Benin (Humber, 2004).

The successful isolation of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolates from southern Albertan soils confirms their cosmopolitan distribution. Further, the isolation of distinct genetic (isolate S54) and morphological (isolate 20W-5) variants supports the high genetic diversity within this clade (Driver *et al.*, 2000).

Soil samples from one-half of the sites produced PCR products comparable to the expected size with DNA primers for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*. Isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* were recovered by direct isolation on selective medium or by waxworm bait assay from three of these 10 sites in support of the PCR results. All isolates were recovered at low incidence, a factor that may explain the lack of isolates recovered from additional PCR-positive sites. Further, the contributions of low levels of soil moisture in the samples (4.39 to 22.70 %), as well as a history of severe drought in southern Alberta over the summers of 2001 – 2003, to low recovery of fungal isolates are unknown.
The Ma-IGSpF/Ma-IGSpR primers used in this study for the detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* DNA were reported as species-specific in the amplification of a 380 bp product for this entomopathogen (Pantou *et al.*, 2003). Contrary to the findings of that study, isolate ARSEF 437, obtained from an orthopteran host in Australia, was observed to produce a slightly smaller product of approximately 350 bp (Fig. 3-2). More importantly, an isolate of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* found in southern Alberta produced a 670 bp product when amplified in nested PCR with the Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 and Ma-IGSspF/MaIGSspR primer combinations. Further, it is not known if the 500 bp product obtained from one soil sample is the result of a *Trichoderma* sequence or another *M. anisopliae* genetic polymorphism. Sequence analysis of amplification products could be used for verification, but is not practical for screening purposes. No *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* were detected by nested PCR in this study, but whether this is a result of lack of this species in a temperate region or inability to detect low levels of target due to inherent low densities or purification losses is unknown. It was also not possible to verify detection of *M. flavoviride* by PCR in one sample due to inability to further amplify the product for additional analysis. The inability to more strongly amplify the weak 340 bp band in a tertiary amplification of the nested PCR reaction with the *M. flavoviride*-specific primers could be attributed to insufficient template DNA that could not be further increased without an accompanying increase in inhibitory products present in the nested reaction mixture, or the weak amplification product may have been an artefact inherent in performance of PCR assays.

Another southern Albertan *M. anisopliae* isolate (20W-5) failed to produce any product in nested PCR assays with the Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 and Ma-IGSspF/MaIGSspR
primer combinations. This isolate also produced a much smaller than expected band size of approximately 250 bp in a PCR with the general fungal primers TW81 and AB28 (Fig. 3-4). Driver and Milner (1998) found products that ranged in size from 506 to 573 bp when they sequenced the ITS1-5.8S-ITS2 region for a number of species/varieties of *Metarhizium*. However, Jackson (unpublished data in Glare *et al.*, 1998) identified a *M. anisopliae* isolate from Papua New Guinea that had an ITS1-5.8S-ITS2 region of approximately 300 bp and which displayed only 40-50% homology to other *Metarhizium* isolates. It is therefore apparent that use of sequence information from the rDNA region for separation of *Metarhizium* isolates into various clades may be confounded by some inconsistencies.

Soil samples are problematic for PCR assays due to the presence of inhibitory compounds such as humic and fulvic acids that inhibit *Taq* DNA polymerase through chelation of Mg$^{2+}$ ions (Tebbe & Vahjen, 1993; Tsai & Olson, 1991). The most crucial limitation to PCR is nucleic acid quality. Extensive purification is required, but each purification step can result in 50 to 90 % loss of DNA. The loss of starting material, however, is offset by the sensitivity of PCR assays in the ability to detect very minute amounts of target. However, copy fidelity, formation of chimeric products (artifacts), sequencing errors, and variable hybridization efficiencies from a mixed pool of templates all contribute to PCR bias (von Wintzingerode *et al.*, 1997). Although PCR has been successfully used to detect soil-based fungal pathogens (Lochman *et al.*, 2004; Ippilito *et al.*, 2002; Cumagun *et al.*, 2000; Bell *et al.*, 1999), in this study inconsistencies were observed with the results of the PCR assays. In this case, the primers would be more
suitable in confirmation of identification of *Metarhizium* isolates, rather than direct identification within an environmental matrix.

Nonetheless, successful isolation of isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* from soils in southern Alberta indicates that this species can survive and even possibly persist in agroecosystems under semi-arid conditions and thereby offers promise as recourse for grasshopper management. Moreover, employment of molecular methodology will permit differentiation of an applied strain of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* from native southern Albertan strains of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* during the phase of environmental monitoring.
Chapter 4. Evaluation of Indigenous Isolates of *Metarhizium anisopliae* for Pathogenicity towards Grasshoppers in Southern Alberta

4.0 Introduction

By definition, classical biological control has been defined as the intentional introduction of an exotic, sometimes co-evolved, biological control agent for permanent establishment and long-term pest control (Eilenberg *et al.*, 2001). Steps for this process include determination of a target, acquisition of natural enemies, selection of an environmentally safer natural enemy for release, establishment of the natural enemy in a suitable habitat, management of the project through education and integration of cooperative parties, and assessment of the final outcome (Van Driesche & Hoddle, 2000). Although the general consensus is that the pest’s area of origin is the best location for finding natural controls, in the case of North American grasshopper species, there is much disagreement on determination of a pest’s original home range. Carruthers and Onsager (1993) have argued that grasshoppers have not evolved in North America and therefore should not be considered native, thus supporting their claim that use of exotic agents for control of nonindigenous pests is merely a reunion of current pests with former natural enemies. Conversely, Lockwood (1993a,b) contended that orthoptera have indeed speciated over 300 million years on the North American land mass known as Laurasia (Rehn, 1954) and, therefore, should be considered native. This argument was used to emphasize the significant differences that potentially exist for undesirable ecological consequences expected from introduction of an exotic species for control of a native target versus use of a native species to control a native pest.

In North America, indigenous and exotic introductions of fungal biocontrol agents have been attempted for the control of grasshoppers, albeit with qualified success. In
Canada, 70% mortality due to mycosis was obtained in grasshoppers confined in laboratory cages following treatment with a US isolate of *Beauveria bassiana* and collection within two days of application (Johnson & Goettel, 1993). However, significant and declining levels of infection were observed in insects collected after this time up to 19 days post-application. In the United States, an introduced Australian pathotype of *Entomophaga grylli* was identified in up to 23% of *E. grylli*-infected grasshoppers one year after fungal introduction (Bidochka *et al.*, 1996). This figure declined to less than 2% two years following introduction and no infection attributable to the exotic pathotype could be confirmed three years post-introduction. Currently, there has been no documentation in the literature on any introductions of *Metarhizium* (exotic or indigenous) for control of North American orthoptera.

This study shows the results of pathogenicity screening of two southern Albertan isolates of *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* in comparison to a standard strain (IMI 330189) of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* in nymphs of a laboratory colony of *Melanoplus sanguinipes* and field-collected grasshoppers following application of spores in bioassays.

4.1 Materials and Methods

4.1.1 Fungal isolates and cultivation

*Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* fungal isolates S54 (genetic group-B variant) and 20W-5 (distinctive colony morphology from other native isolates), isolated from southern Alberta soils, were propagated and maintained on PDA. *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* IMI 330189 was obtained and propagated as previously mentioned (section 2.1.1).
4.1.2 Inoculation of grasshoppers

Third and fourth instar nymphs of a laboratory colony of *Melanoplus sanguinipes* were randomly collected, inoculated, and housed as previously described (section 2.1.6). Third and fourth instar field-collected nymphs of *M. sanguinipes, M. bivittatus, M. packardii,* and *Camnula pellucida* were also randomly collected, inoculated, and housed as previously described (section 2.1.6).

All three *Metarhizium* isolates listed in section 4.1.1 were used to treat nymphs of a laboratory colony of *M. sanguinipes*, but only isolates S54 and IMI 330189 were evaluated in assays with field-collected nymphs. Due to sparse sporulation on solid culture media, isolate 20W-5 was not tested on field-collected nymphs.

4.1.3 Confirmation of *Metarhizium* infection in grasshoppers

*M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* infection in grasshopper nymphs treated with IMI 330189 spores was confirmed by PCR assay with specific primers Mac-ITS-F1 and Mac-ITS-R1 (section 2.1.8). Cadavers were frozen as previously described (section 2.1.6) prior to DNA extraction as per section 2.1.7. In order to minimize environmental contamination with an exotic isolate of *Metarhizium*, external sporulation was not allowed on IMI 330189-infected cadavers.

Mortality attributed to native isolates 20W-5 and S54 was recorded as incidence of mycosis with evidence of external sporulation characteristic of *Metarhizium*. Dead insects were removed daily and disinfected by immersion for one minute in 70 % ethanol followed by one minute in sterile distilled water. Cadavers were then placed individually on moistened sterile filter paper in a 60 mm x 10 mm Petri dish, the dish sealed with Parafilm®, and incubated at ca. 20 °C for a maximum of twenty-one days. In the case of
S54, *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* infection in infected cadavers was also confirmed by PCR. Conidia from the surface of infected cadavers were transferred with a sterile loop to 500 μl of potato dextrose broth (PDB) and incubated in the dark at room temperature (ca. 20 °C) for 3 to 4 days; 1 μl of culture was then used directly as template in nested PCR assays with outer primers Ma-28S4 and Ma-IGS1 followed by a second reaction with inner primers Ma-IGSspF and Ma-IGSspR as per section 3.1.5.3. Insects that did not display signs of external sporulation after 21 days were then frozen at -20 °C until DNA extraction as per section 2.1.7.

### 4.1.4 Data analysis

For all treated grasshopper experiments, mortality data from control insect groups were used in Abbott’s (1925) formula to correct total insect mortality. Corrected daily mortality data were then fitted to a Weibull distribution and the LIFEREG procedure (SAS Institute, 2005) used to estimate lethal times for mortality of 50 % of treated insects (LT50) with upper and lower 95 % confidence limits (CL).

### 4.2 Results

#### 4.2.1 Infection of laboratory-reared and field-collected grasshopper nymphs with *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* isolate IMI 330189

Complete mortality was observed by 8 days for laboratory colony nymphs versus 9 days for field-collected grasshoppers for treated insects exposed to *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* isolate IMI 330189. The LT50 value for the IMI 330189-treated laboratory colony assay was 4.1 days versus 4.7 days for the IMI 330189-treated field-collected assay (Table 4-1). Daily corrected cumulative mortalities for laboratory-reared and field-collected grasshopper nymphs challenged with IMI 330189 are shown in Figs. 4-1 and
Table 4-1. Lethal time for 50 % population mortality ($LT_{50}$) with confidence limits ($1 - \alpha = 95\%$) of laboratory and field-collected grasshopper nymphs treated with conidia of three *Metarhizium* isolates.

Numbers followed by the same letter in column are not significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insect Source/ Fungal Isolate</th>
<th>Number of insects (N)</th>
<th>$LT_{50}$ (days)</th>
<th>Confidence limit Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Mycosis attributed to <em>Metarhizium</em> (%)</th>
<th>Specific PCR positive (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory colony nymphs:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IMI 330189</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.87 - 4.37&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20W-5</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.92 - 6.68&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S54</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.20 - 7.29&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>97.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field-collected nymphs:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IMI 330189</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.43 - 4.93&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>S54</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.28 - 4.60&lt;sup&gt;s&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>97.6</td>
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69
Fig. 4-1. Cumulative mortality of laboratory grasshopper nymphs treated with three isolates of *Metarhizium* under laboratory conditions of 24 °C/16 °C day/night with a corresponding 16/8 h light/dark photoperiod under ambient relative humidity (40-55 %).
The presence of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* DNA in IMI 330189-challenged insects was confirmed by successful amplification of a 420 bp DNA sequence from the total DNA extracted from 100% of treated laboratory colony and field-collected grasshopper nymphs in a PCR assay with the Mac-ITS-F1 and Mac-ITS-R1 primers (data not shown) and supported by isolation of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* from 92.1% and 92.0% of treated laboratory colony and field-collected insects, respectively. No *Metarhizium* spp. were isolated from the control group for either laboratory colony or field-collected nymphs. No amplified products were produced with the *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*-specific primers in PCR assays of the control groups (data not shown).

As observed earlier, molting (51.6% in the treated colony, 16.1% in the treated field-collected group) did not inhibit detection of fungal DNA. Frequency of ecdysis was lower at 34.6% eight days post-treatment in untreated laboratory colony nymphs; the converse was true for field-collected insects where molts were observed in 52.2% of untreated grasshoppers 9 days post-treatment.

### 4.2.2 Infection of laboratory-reared grasshopper nymphs with *M. anisopliae* isolate 20W-5

Cumulative mortality in laboratory colony nymphs treated with spores of *M. anisopliae* isolate 20W-5 was 98.7% twelve days post-inoculation. Sporulation was observed in 79.2% of treated insects and occurred within 2 weeks after death (Fig. 4-3a). Molting occurred in 9.1% of infected nymphs and LT$_{50}$ was 6.3 days for insects exposed to isolate 20W-5 (Table 4-1). Daily corrected cumulative mortality for treated nymphs is shown in Fig. 4-1.
Fig. 4-2. Cumulative mortality of field-collected grasshopper nymphs treated with two isolates of *Metarhizium* under laboratory conditions of 24 °C/16 °C day/night with a corresponding 16/8 h light/dark photoperiod under ambient relative humidity (40-55 %).
Fig. 4-3. Sporulation of southern Albertan soil isolates of *Metarhizium* on *Melanoplus sanguinipes* nymphs from a laboratory colony.
(a) isolate 20W-5  (b) isolate SS4
4.2.3 Infection of laboratory-reared and field-collected grasshopper nymphs with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolate S54

Similar final mortality was observed in laboratory colony nymphs treated with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolate S54. At 12 days post-inoculation, cumulative mortality was 98.6 % (Fig. 4-1). Conidial appearance on infected cadavers (Fig. 4-3b) was very similar to published photos of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* sporulation on infected locusts (Fig. 4-4). Sporulation occurred in 91.5 % of S54-treated insects and LT\(_{50}\) was 6.7 days (Table 4-1). Rate of sporulation on S54 cadavers was more rapid compared to insects challenged with isolate 20W-5, with 100 % conidiation completed within one week following death. Slightly less than 10 % of S54-infected insects molted in this bioassay.

Nested PCR assays with primer combinations Ma-28S4/Ma-IGS1 and Ma-IGSspF/Ma-IGSspR produced amplified products 670 bp in size, corresponding to that expected for S54 DNA, in 97.2 % of S54-treated laboratory colony nymphs, including all insects that exhibited sporulation. No band sizes corresponding to those expected for *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* with these primers were detected in untreated insects. The sole surviving insect 12 days post-inoculation of the treated group also tested negative with the nested PCR assay.

Complete mortality was obtained 7 days post-inoculation in field-collected nymphs treated with isolate S54 (Fig. 4-2). The LT\(_{50}\) value for this bioassay was lower at 4.4 days compared to 6.7 days for infected laboratory colony nymphs (Table 4-1). Nested PCR assays with *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*-specific primers produced positive results for 97.6 % of infected nymphs. *Metarhizium*-induced mycosis was confirmed by
Fig. 4-4. Plague locusts infected with Green Guard® (M. anisopliae var. acridum)
Photo courtesy of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australia
sporulation in 83.2 % of infected insects one week after death. As with S54-infected laboratory colony grasshoppers, the incidence of ecdysis was low at 12.8 %.

In tandem with an observation of increased lethargy, there was also a noticeable reduction in food consumption by all insects in all Metarhizium-treated groups, with the sole exception of the surviving S54-treated laboratory colony nymph, versus their untreated counterparts although these observations were not quantified. As previously demonstrated, ecdysis did not interfere with development of mycosis. No mortality in control groups was attributable to Metarhizium-induced mycosis. Final cumulative mortalities in control groups were 46.2 % and 34.5 % for laboratory colony and 17.4 % for field-collected grasshopper nymphs.

The cumulative mortality curves for treated laboratory colony grasshoppers (Fig. 4-1) and treated field-collected nymphs (Fig. 4-2) approach the sigmoidal shape expected for populations of target insects treated with entomopathogenic fungi (Bateman et al., 1996).

4.3 Discussion

Prior to application of a biological control agent, a method is required that allows discrimination of the introduced organism from indigenous populations. The two native isolates of M. anisopliae evaluated in bioassays against M. sanguinipes in this study were selected on the basis of their distinctive genetic characteristics. One isolate, S54, was chosen because it could be distinguished from other native isolates of Metarhizium in a PCR assay. The other isolate (20W-5) possessed unique morphological characteristics that would permit visual differentiation of this fungal isolate from others. The four grasshopper species (M. sanguinipes, M. bivittatus, M. packardii, and C. pellucida) used
in assays of field-collected grasshoppers were selected as they represent the main cereal
pest species in Alberta.

The discovery of two soil isolates of *Metarhizium* that demonstrated comparable
virulence with a commercialized isolate towards orthopteran species in southern Alberta
is contrary to earlier studies that showed direct isolation from a target host was the most
appropriate method for isolation of target-specific pathotypes. Kooyman and Shah
(1992) collected one hundred and twenty-eight isolates of *Metarhizium* directly from
orthopteran hosts, but failed to find isolates in two hundred and forty-three soils screened
with dodine oatmeal agar (Shah, 1994) in a survey conducted in Africa and the Near East.
Further, documentation of isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* from orthopteran
hosts is not common. In Spain, *M. anisopliae* (Metschnikoff) was isolated from four
individuals out of three hundred and seventeen Moroccan locusts but degree of virulence
was not determined (Hernández-Crespo & Santiago-Álvarez, 1997). Of the one hundred
and twenty-eight isolates of *Metarhizium* identified by Kooyman and Shah (1992), only
seven were classified as *M. anisopliae*. The remainder were *M. flavoviride*, some to be
later renamed as *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. Prior (1992) noted that as of 1992, no
examples had been found of non-orthopteran isolates of *Metarhizium* spp. with high
virulence to the desert locust *S. gregaria*.

However, other studies have demonstrated the value of *Metarhizium* isolates that
have non-orthopteran origins for pathogenicity to acridids. Bateman *et al.* (1996)
recorded nine non-orthopteran isolates of *Metarhizium* spp., one of which originated from
a coleopteran host in the US, which showed virulence to *S. gregaria* that was comparable
to a highly virulent standard isolate originally isolated from an acridid in Niger. Further,
four of the nine isolates originated from tropical soils. As well, in Madagascar Welling et al. (1994) found a native virulent strain of \textit{M. anisopliae} isolated from soil caused faster and higher mortality than an indigenous orthopteran isolate of \textit{M. flavoviride} in bioassays of a laboratory strain of desert locusts. Their conclusion was that soil-derived isolates may also be effective against certain target species and therefore should be included in routine bioassays.

In this study, the LT$_{50}$ value of 4.1 days for laboratory-reared grasshoppers exposed to \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} IMI 330189 fell within the range of reported values between 4 and 6 days in bioassays of laboratory stocks of acridids infected with \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} in previous studies (Smits et al., 1999; Inglis et al., 1999; Bateman et al., 1996; David Hunter, pers. comm.). The LT$_{50}$ value of 4.7 days for field-collected nymphs treated with the same isolate also was comparable to results from previous works (Shah et al., 1998a; D. Hunter, pers. comm.).

In contrast with previous results from bioassays of field-collected grasshoppers, in this study southern Albertan isolates of \textit{M. anisopliae} induced a significantly slower mortality compared to an exotic isolate of \textit{M. anisopliae} var. \textit{acridum} in treated nymphs from a laboratory stock of \textit{M. sanguinipes}. This may be a reflection of the genetic homogeneity of a laboratory culture of insects that has resulted from inbreeding within a closed genetic pool for over forty years. Over the initial twelve-year period during which the laboratory insect stock was established, Pickford and Randell (1969) noted no evidence of deleterious mutants, although admitted that the population had been reduced to very small numbers on several occasions due to disease. The plot of cumulative mortality for laboratory-reared insects exposed to the exotic isolate IMI 330189 showed
almost no initial lag in mortality contrary to what would be expected of a sigmoidal curve for a heterogeneous population treated with a pathogen, suggesting a narrow range of physiological response from the laboratory-reared insects. Similarly, since both native isolates of *M. anisopliae* demonstrated a longer lag phase initially, this may be an indication that the individual laboratory stock nymphs possessed similar levels of resistance to the two indigenous strains; however, this resistance was insufficient to prevent almost 100% mortality twelve days post-treatment. The degree of variability in susceptibility of the target population could be confirmed by treatment with a varying range of spore concentrations and use of probit transformation to convert the sigmoidal curve resulting from a plot of mortality versus dose into a straight line. A slope with a value of less than one indicates a greater variation in host susceptibility in terms of concentration lethal to 50% of the population. However, it should be noted that slope is also a function of variability in actual dose administered (Meynell, 1957) in that application of a particular dose is not necessarily an indication of the number of spores that actually result in infection. Nonetheless, it has been well documented that there can be large differences among host genotypes in insect populations in response to microbial pathogens (Watanabe, 1987). In this case, the results suggest that bioassays of native field-collected insects may better reflect the target response to indigenous fungal entomopathogens.

Regardless of the type and duration of physiological response shown by treated insects in assays of laboratory stock and field-collected nymphs, reduction in feeding was observed in all treated groups. These results are supported by a previous study that
quantified reduced feeding in variegated grasshoppers infected with *M. flavoviride* (Thomas et al., 1997).

Concerns over the safety and efficacy of exotic agents used to control native pests have led to the promotion of strategies for augmentation of native agents for biological control (Lockwood, 1993a,b). Hokkanen and Pimentel (1984) calculated a 75% higher rate of success for biological control programs that employed new parasite-host associations over those that were based on long-evolved associations applied in classical biological control. Further, Lockwood (1993a,b) has pointed out that native biological agents can and do play a major role in the control of grasshopper population dynamics and that indigenous evolutionary and ecological processes would provide constraints on augmented native organisms, thus any potential effects would more likely be predictable, localized, and temporary. This study has identified an indigenous southern Albertan isolate of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* that shows high virulence to native grasshoppers, is readily propagated on culture media, and can be differentiated from other native isolates of *Metarhizium* with a simple molecular assay. Much more work is required to determine host specificity of this fungus, since there is no indication of the entomopathogen's host range because it was isolated from soil, but failure to sporulate on *Galleria* larvae suggests that the host range may not include lepidopterans. Specific non-target and efficacy trials should be done as the scale on control is expanded to commercial levels because implementation of a native pathogen in a biological control program would help alleviate regulatory concerns about ecological consequences.
Chapter 5. Prediction of *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *acridum* Efficacy for Grasshopper Biocontrol in a Temperate Region Based on Historical Weather and Climate Data

5.0 Introduction

Biocontrol of grasshoppers and locusts with an entomopathogenic fungal agent is typically constrained primarily by environmental temperature (Blanford & Thomas, 2000; Carruthers *et al.*, 1992). A key factor mediating pathogen development is the ability of target acridids to regulate their body temperature to a preferred set point (thermoregulation) independent of daytime ambient temperatures through interaction of environmental, physical, and behavioural factors (Lactin & Johnson, 1998; Chappell & Whitman, 1990; Kemp, 1986). Further, these insects have the capacity to increase the preferred set point in response to infection by *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (Ouedraogo *et al.*, 2003; Elliot *et al.*, 2002; Gardner & Thomas, 2002; Blanford & Thomas, 1999a,b; Blanford *et al.*, 1998).

In conjunction with temperature, humidity has been shown to play a more pivotal role in horizontal transmission of the entomopathogen through sporulation on infected cadavers and persistence in the environment (Arthurs & Thomas, 2001a, 1999; Arthurs *et al.*, 2001; Thomas *et al.*, 1997) than in germination on the insect cuticle (Bateman *et al.*, 1993). The impact of solar radiation on pathogen persistence in the environment has been acknowledged (Braga *et al.*, 2001a; Shah *et al.*, 1998a; Moore *et al.*, 1996), but confounded by conflicting results and difficulties in quantification of conditions in a natural setting. Intravarietal differences between isolates in tolerances to temperature, humidity and solar radiation also contribute to the uncertainty but also confer persistence in the environment to entomopathogens.
In a few instances, weather conditions have been recorded and efficacy of *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *acridum* estimated in tropical climates. These observations will be used to estimate *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* efficacy in the temperate Prairie provinces of Canada based on historical weather and climate data as well as observations of native grasshopper thermoregulatory behaviour.

5.1 Thermoregulation

Several studies have shown that, given conditions optimal for thermoregulation, grasshoppers and locusts aspire to reach a preferred body temperature of 38–42 °C under laboratory (Blanford & Thomas, 1999a,b; Lactin & Johnson, 1995, 1996a) and field (Blanford & Thomas, 2000; Blanford *et al*., 1998; Carruthers *et al*., 1992; Kemp, 1986) conditions. The adaptive advantages for this behaviour include optimum temperatures for rates of feeding and development (Lactin & Johnson, 1995, 1996a). Depending on ambient temperature and availability of solar radiation, body temperatures will increase rapidly from a few degrees below ambient up to preferred body temperatures, followed by a decline as ambient temperatures decrease (Fig. 5-1). Equilibrium at preferred body temperatures is maintained by adoption of heat aversion strategies through microhabitat selection and postural adjustment (Blanford* et al*., 1998), as well as behaviour such as hyperventilation to promote reduction of body temperature by evaporative cooling (Carruthers *et al*., 1992; Chappel & Whitman, 1990). Figure 5-2 demonstrates the nonlinear relationship between body and ambient temperatures.

In contrast, Lactin and Johnson (1998) noted a linear relationship between ambient air temperature at 1 meter and mean body temperature of rangeland grasshoppers distributed and oriented randomly within the vegetation canopy in southern Alberta.
Fig. 5-1. Examples of an hourly pattern of thermoregulation for Australian plague locusts (data courtesy of D. Hunter)
Fig. 5-2. Distribution of body temperature against ambient temperature. The curve estimates best fit nonlinear regression describing the pattern of active thermoregulation (modified from Blanford & Thomas, 2000).
They observed that within a range of ambient temperatures between 15-28 °C, body temperatures were usually three to four degrees higher than ambient. Grasshopper data from Australia are consistent with the Lactin and Johnson observations and suggest that grasshoppers do not increase their body temperatures as much as locusts (D. Hunter, pers. comm.).

Optimal in vivo development rates for *M. anisopliae var. acridum* occur at 28-30 °C (Arthurs & Thomas, 2001b; Fargues *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Jenkins, 1997). Pathogen growth and mortality still occur over a range of 15-35 °C, but the period of latent infection can be significantly longer (Arthurs & Thomas, 2001b, 1999; Fargues *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Jenkins, 1997). Maintenance of a set body temperature of 38-42 °C has been shown to not alter the final outcome of infection but does influence the rate of mortality since duration at temperatures sub-optimal for pathogen growth is constrained by environmental factors such as ambient temperature and solar radiation (Arthurs & Thomas, 1999). Blanford *et al.* (1998) noted that in tropical regimes, in vivo fungal development can be checked for a maximum of 7-8 hours per day and most growth will occur during cooler periods in the evening.

5.1.1 Behavioural fever

Some acridids have shown the ability to raise the preferred body temperature set point a few degrees approaching 44 °C, resulting in possible suppression of infection (Ouedraogo *et al.*, 2003; Elliot *et al.*, 2002; Gardner & Thomas, 2002; Blanford & Thomas, 1999a,b; Blanford *et al.*, 1998). This response, known as behavioural fever, is believed to assist the host immune system in suppression of pathogen development and although therapeutic benefits have been recognized, the underlying mechanisms for this
host-mediated adaption are unclear (Gardner & Thomas, 2002). Further, the costs associated with this behaviour include impacts on feeding efficiency, host development, and susceptibility to predation (Gardner & Thomas, 2002). Negative consequences on the pathogen are temporary and, as with regular thermoregulation, outcome of infection will probably not be affected (Ouedraogo et al., 2002; Blanford & Thomas, 1999a,b; Blanford et al., 1998). However, it has been speculated that low numbers of pathogen may be eliminated (Elliot et al., 2002) and that variability in behavioural fever effects among host species may contribute to the variation in efficacy experienced with application of biocontrol agents (Blanford et al., 1998).

5.2 Efficacy of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* under tropical regimes

As previously mentioned, a common observation of efficacy of an applied pathogen is variable performance and is likely due to spatial and temporal variations in biotic and abiotic factors (Blanford et al., 1998). In Brazil, Magalhães et al. (2000b) estimated 88% mortality of grasshopper nymphal bands 14 days post application (dpa) (2 x 10^{13} conidia per hectare [ha]) with a native isolate of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* in field trials at the beginning of the rainy season with maximum temperatures ranging from 28-31 °C and minimum temperatures from 18-22 °C. Approximately 250 mm of precipitation accumulated during this time from nine events of rainfall. In Mauritania, Langewald et al. (1997) achieved mortality rates of 99% in caged samples of treated desert locusts (5 x 10^{12} conidia per ha) in 15 days and estimated 70% reduction in population numbers between 2 and 8 days post application of a treated hopper band in a semi-desert area where air temperature varied between 40 °C around 2 p.m. and 16 °C around 5 a.m. (local time) with Green Muscle®. Similarly with isolate 191-690, Douro-
Kpindou et al. (1995) observed 96% reduction in counts of treated *Zoncerus variegatus* populations 15 dpa with $2 \times 10^{12}$ conidia per ha applied to 1 ha plots under conditions of 31.5 to 35 °C at time of treatment in southern Benin. However, Kooyman and Abdalla (1998) calculated an average control efficiency of 68% of tree locusts in Sudanese plots ranging from 10-25 ha treated with ca. $5 \times 10^{12}$ Green Muscle® conidia per ha with maximum temperatures ranging from well below 30 °C on heavily clouded days to close to 40 °C on sunny days and temperatures in the low 20s recorded in the early morning during the trial.

Milner (1997) also noted considerable variation in field trials in Australia with Green Guard®. Treatment of 50 ha for the wingless grasshopper *P. vittatum* with $4 \times 10^{12}$ conidia per ha required 7 days for high levels of mortality where daily maximum temperatures were hot (approaching 40 °C) compared to 21 days for sites (5 ha) where temperatures did not exceed 20 °C. Hunter et al. (1999) estimated less than 10% survival of treated migratory locust bands in open grassland and crops in Australia 15-18 dpa of $3-4 \times 10^{12}$ conidia per ha of the same isolate. Air temperatures during these trials ranged from mild (28-32 °C) to hot (≥ 35 °C).

5.3 **Historical weather data in the Prairie provinces of Canada and potential for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* application**

Weather data, where available, were obtained for the years 1975 to 2005 from nine agriculture research weather stations located in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The meteorological variables included daily values of maximum air temperature, minimum air temperature, sunshine hours, and precipitation. Means for the months of June, July, and August over the thirty years were calculated for each variable.
at each station with the MEANS procedure of SAS (SAS Institute, 2005) (Appendices 3-6).

5.3.1 Air temperature

For each location, July was the warmest month and was significantly warmer than the other two months (Appendix 3). The means for all three months ranged from a low of 18.6 °C for June at Stavely, AB to 26.9 °C for July at the Onefour, AB station. These temperatures fall within the 15-35 °C range for growth of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*, indicating that high temperatures will probably not be a factor that precludes pathogen efficacy in a temperate environment. The minimum daily high temperature was recorded at Lethbridge, AB (2.7 °C) and the maximum was 40 °C at Morden, MB. Although outside the range for pathogen development, these temperatures would have a transient impact on the fungus.

June proved to be significantly cooler than July and August, with mean minimum air temperatures ranging from 5.7 °C at Stavely, AB to 14.5 °C at Morden, MB (Appendix 4). These temperatures would certainly inhibit fungal growth but, as with maximum temperatures, probably only temporarily. Of greater concern is the observation of several recordings of temperatures below 0 °C. Eight stations recorded at least one instance of a below freezing temperature in June; all nine stations experienced subzero temperatures in August (range of -0.5 to -7.0 °C). The minimum requirements for duration or magnitude of subzero temperatures necessary for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* or grasshopper mortality are unknown.

Under the assumption that native grasshoppers increase their body temperatures three to four degrees above ambient (Lactin & Johnson, 1998) if conditions allow for
thermoregulation, an adjusted range of ambient temperatures for development of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* would be 15 °C (no thermoregulation) to 31 °C (thermoregulation would increase host body temperature to 34-35 °C). The FREQ procedure of SAS (SAS Institute, 2005) was used to calculate frequencies for ambient temperatures that would preclude growth of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* (i.e. maximum temperatures > 31 °C, maximum temperatures < 15 °C, and mean temperatures < 15 °C). Results are presented in Table 5-1. For the month of June, all stations have a very small percentage of days for which the ambient temperature would have been too warm for part of the day for pathogen growth (> 31 °C). For example, 6.45 % of days in June over 30 years would have had some temperatures too warm in Morden, the location with the highest mean maximum air temperature (Appendix 3). The number of days in July and August with too warm temperatures for part of the day increased slightly, but still remained less than 25 %, suggesting that hot weather will not be a concern for application of *Metarhizium* for biocontrol. Cool weather will probably be more of a determining factor in pathogen efficacy as more than half the locations recorded mean temperatures < 15 °C at frequencies greater than 50 % over at least one of the summer months, thus indicating a delay in fungal development for part of the day. However, there is no location for which there would be a permanent cessation of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* growth due to cool temperatures during the summer. The data indicate that summer temperatures in the Prairie provinces of Canada would not be a deterrent to *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* efficacy.
Table 5-1. Thirty year summary of frequencies of ambient air temperatures that would preclude the growth of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* during June, July, and August in Canada's Prairie provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Month(s)</th>
<th>Max &gt; 31 °C</th>
<th>Max &lt; 15 °C</th>
<th>Mean &lt; 15 °C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lethbridge, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>23 (2.48)</td>
<td>78 (8.40)</td>
<td>446 (48.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>125 (13.13)</td>
<td>21 (2.21)</td>
<td>145 (15.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>128 (13.36)</td>
<td>46 (4.80)</td>
<td>242 (25.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer*</td>
<td>276 (9.72)</td>
<td>145 (5.11)</td>
<td>833 (29.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onefour, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>56 (6.02)</td>
<td>67 (7.20)</td>
<td>414 (44.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>214 (22.27)</td>
<td>16 (1.66)</td>
<td>108 (11.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>214 (22.27)</td>
<td>28 (2.91)</td>
<td>195 (20.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>484 (16.97)</td>
<td>111 (3.89)</td>
<td>717 (25.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vauxhall, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>47 (5.52)</td>
<td>47 (5.52)</td>
<td>358 (42.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>148 (16.48)</td>
<td>7 (0.78)</td>
<td>122 (13.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>171 (19.04)</td>
<td>30 (3.34)</td>
<td>207 (23.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>366 (13.82)</td>
<td>84 (3.17)</td>
<td>807 (25.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavely, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>1 (0.13)</td>
<td>192 (24.68)</td>
<td>615 (79.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>36 (4.44)</td>
<td>62 (7.65)</td>
<td>375 (46.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>22 (2.72)</td>
<td>92 (11.36)</td>
<td>407 (50.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>59 (2.46)</td>
<td>346 (44.43)</td>
<td>1397 (58.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacombe, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>5 (0.54)</td>
<td>125 (13.44)</td>
<td>641 (68.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>19 (1.98)</td>
<td>38 (3.95)</td>
<td>395 (41.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>20 (2.11)</td>
<td>108 (11.38)</td>
<td>497 (52.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>44 (1.55)</td>
<td>271 (9.54)</td>
<td>1533 (54.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaverlodge, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2 (0.22)</td>
<td>135 (14.64)</td>
<td>642 (70.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>9 (0.94)</td>
<td>62 (6.45)</td>
<td>453 (47.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>19 (1.98)</td>
<td>125 (13.02)</td>
<td>552 (57.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>30 (1.66)</td>
<td>322 (11.33)</td>
<td>1647 (58.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft. Vermilion, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>4 (0.83)</td>
<td>41 (8.54)</td>
<td>223 (46.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>17 (3.43)</td>
<td>15 (3.02)</td>
<td>105 (21.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>10 (2.02)</td>
<td>71 (14.31)</td>
<td>254 (51.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>31 (2.11)</td>
<td>127 (8.63)</td>
<td>582 (39.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, SK</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>23 (2.47)</td>
<td>100 (10.75)</td>
<td>498 (52.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>58 (6.04)</td>
<td>22 (2.29)</td>
<td>239 (24.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>82 (8.53)</td>
<td>71 (7.39)</td>
<td>371 (38.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>163 (5.72)</td>
<td>193 (6.77)</td>
<td>1108 (38.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morden, MB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>60 (6.45)</td>
<td>57 (6.13)</td>
<td>267 (28.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>112 (11.65)</td>
<td>8 (0.83)</td>
<td>57 (5.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>112 (11.67)</td>
<td>13 (1.35)</td>
<td>157 (16.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>284 (9.96)</td>
<td>78 (2.74)</td>
<td>481 (16.88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*months of June, July, and August combined*

*numbers in parentheses represent percentages for the respective month(s) over 30 years*
5.3.2 Sunshine hours

At the time of the summer solstice (June 21) in Canada, the stations at Lethbridge, Onefour, Stavely, and Vauxhall could expect a 16-hour daylight period with a maximum approaching 18 hours for the most northerly station at Fort Vermilion (Atlas of Canada, Natural Resources Canada). Solar radiation has been identified as a key factor in thermoregulation of grasshoppers (Lactin & Johnson, 1998, 1996b). Stations such as Lethbridge, Onefour, Stavely, and Vauxhall observed the highest mean values of sunshine hours, representing more than 50% of available daylight hours in most months (Appendix 5). Thermoregulation, therefore, will play a significant, albeit infrequent and short-termed, role in the determination of pathogen development at higher temperatures due to low frequencies of maximum air temperatures in excess of 31 °C (Table 5-1). However, at ambient temperatures suboptimal for fungal growth, solar radiation may contribute to an increase in host body temperatures to a more optimal range for the pathogen.

5.3.3 Precipitation

It has previously been shown that initiation (germination) of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* infection is not dependent upon ambient humidity (Bateman et al., 1993); however, sporulation and horizontal transmission of the pathogen only occur under high levels of relative humidity (Arthurs & Thomas, 2001a, 1999; Arthurs et al., 2001; Thomas et al., 1997). The observed means for precipitation for the months of June, July, and August over a thirty-year period (Appendix 6) indicate that sporulation is highly unlikely in the semi-arid Prairies and is supported by observations of a lack of sporulating cadavers in arid regions of Australia following aerial application of *M. anisopliae* var.
acridum (D. Hunter, pers. comm.). On the other hand, the impact of observed levels of precipitation should they approach climate normals on sporulation and horizontal transmission is as yet unknown (Table 5-2).

5.4 Lethbridge summer 2003 – a possible scenario for efficacy of M. anisopliae var. acridum for control of grasshoppers

The most recent significant outbreak of grasshoppers in southern Alberta occurred during the summer of 2003. Agriculture and AgriFood Canada, in conjunction with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, established a joint federal/provincial program to compensate producers for costs of grasshopper control. Funding levels were set at $10.5 million and were estimated to cover only one-third of total incurred costs. Economic damage if no control was implemented was estimated at $80 to $100 million in crop losses. At the time, biological methods of control were not available.

June and July are usually considered the target months for control of pest grasshopper species, as early instar nymphs are the preferred target for chemical or biological control. Analysis of daily observed weather in Lethbridge, AB for June and July suggest that environmental conditions may have been highly suitable for control by M. anisopliae var. acridum (Appendices 7 and 8, also Table 5-3). One-half of the days in June and almost 85 % of those in July had at least 12 hours of the day during which air temperatures were in a range suitable for fungal growth (15-31 °C). June had two days where maximum air temperatures were <15 °C (likely no fungal growth at all on those days) and one day where the maximum was >31 °C (no fungal growth for at least part of the day). There were no days in July where temperatures were too cool for pathogen development for the entire day and nine days where part of the day was too warm for
Table 5-2. Comparison of observed quantities of precipitation to climate normals over a thirty-year period (1975-2005) for June, July, and August in Canada’s Prairie provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Observed mean (mm)</th>
<th>Normal(^f) (1971-2000) (mm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lethbridge, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onefour, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>48.3(^g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>34.2(^g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>38.6(^g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacombe, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>89.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaverlodge, AB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, SK</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morden, MB</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^f\) data obtained from Environment Canada
\(^g\) data obtained from nearby community of Manyberries, AB
Table 5-3. Summary statistics of days in June and July 2003 at Lethbridge, AB suitable for *in vivo* development of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of days where max. temp. &lt; 15 °C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of days where max. temp. &gt; 31 °C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of days suitable for pathogen growth for at least part of day</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of days where 15 °C &lt; ambient temp. &lt; 31 °C for ≥ 12 hrs</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean daily hours where 15 °C &lt; ambient temp. &lt; 31 °C</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of days with at least part of day suitable for optimum growth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean daily hours where 24 °C ≤ ambient temp. ≤ 27 °C (optimal)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
development. Of the days in June where temperatures existed at least partially in the 15-31 °C range, the mean daily time frame for this range was 11.4 hours, compared to 15.3 hours in July. Ten days in June had at least part of the day suitable for optimum growth at ambient temperatures of 24-27 °C (range of 8.3-41.1 % of total hours available for fungal development, Fig. 5-3a), with four of these ten days in possession of an additional 1-9 hours at temperatures above 27 °C but not exceeding 31 °C which may or may not have been suitable for pathogen growth depending on influences of cloud cover and solar radiation on host body temperature at the time. Conversely, July had twenty-seven days with temperatures in the optimum growth range (6.7-45.5 % of suitable total hours, Fig. 5-3b) and an additional 1-8 hours at higher temperatures that had the potential to contribute to optimal growth on nineteen days. Sporulation and horizontal transmission were not likely due to low and sporadic episodes of precipitation, except for the occurrence of 21.8 mm of rain over a seven-day period in June (Appendix 7).

Table 5-3 shows that temperature conditions in Lethbridge, AB during June and July 2003 were permissive for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* development *in vivo* (range of 15-31 °C) more than 50 % of every 24-hour period. Rapid mortality during an Australian summer is in the order of 8-11 days in the field (D. Hunter, pers. comm.). A model based on the interaction between locust body temperature and air temperature has suggested that daily *Metarhizium* development over a 14-18 hour period is required to achieve mortality that quickly (D. Hunter, pers. comm.). The model has also predicted that mortality due to *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* application in southern Canada would take two weeks or so, increasing to three weeks or more in the northern Prairies. Analysis of
Fig. 5-3. Frequency distribution of proportion of total daily hours suitable for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* growth *in vivo* at ambient temperatures of 24-27 °C (optimal development)
2003 temperature data for Lethbridge, AB during part of the summer suggests that local mortality rates may be more rapid than predicted due to increased daily hours available for pathogen development as a result of the difference in magnitude of elevation of native grasshopper body temperatures (3-4 °C above ambient) versus the 12-15 °C increase in locust body temperature above ambient predicted by the model. However, mortality rate is a result of the interaction of numerous biotic and abiotic variables and it has been demonstrated that theoretical predictions usually do not extrapolate well to field results. It may be inferred from these key abiotic factors that summer weather in the Canadian Prairies supports the hypothesis of efficacy of *M. anisopliae* as part of a biological control program for grasshoppers and therefore can be considered as a viable alternative to the chemical control of this significant agricultural pest. As scale-up experiments will be conducted and documented as part of the registration, the extent of the entomopathogen’s role in terms of efficacy, costs, and health improvement will be determined.
Chapter 6. General Discussion and Conclusions

The main objectives of the research in this thesis were to develop and validate a molecular assay for the specific detection of the entomopathogenic fungus *Metarhizium anisopliae var. acridum*, conduct a soil survey to determine the natural occurrence of *Metarhizium* spp. in southern Alberta soils, screen native isolates for virulence towards grasshoppers, and analyze historical weather conditions in the Canadian Prairies for suitability for implementation of *M. anisopliae var. acridum* as a biocontrol agent for indigenous grasshopper pest species.

6.1 Summary of results

A diagnostic PCR assay was developed using DNA primers that targeted the ITS rDNA regions for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae var. acridum*. A 420 bp DNA sequence was successfully amplified from *M. anisopliae var. acridum* but not from other *Metarhizium* spp. or other soil fungal biota. The highly sensitive assay was also successful in the amplification of specific fungal DNA from infected grasshoppers and soil matrices.

*Metarhizium anisopliae* isolates were recovered at low incidence (5 out of 20 sites) from southern Alberta soils by direct isolation on semi-selective media and waxworm larvae bait assay. Evidence of *M. anisopliae* presence in soils was further supported by amplification of a 380 bp sequence in nested PCR assays with DNA primers for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae var. anisopliae*. Most isolates were identified through DNA sequencing as Group-B strains (Pantou et al., 2003) and were morphologically similar in appearance. One isolate (S54) was identified as a Group-B variant that produced a 670 bp sequence in nested PCR assays with *M. anisopliae var.*
anisopliae-specific primers. Another isolate (20W-5) had a distinct morphological appearance (Fig. 3-2b) as well as a smaller than expected amplification product of approximately 250 bp in a PCR assay with general fungal primers TW81 and AB28 (Fig. 3-3). Isolate 20W-5 also failed to produce an amplification product in nested PCR assays with primers specific for the detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*. No isolates of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* or *M. flavoviride* were recovered from southern Alberta soils and all soils tested negative for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* and *M. flavoviride* DNA by specific PCR.

The genetic Group-B variant *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolate S54 and the morphologically distinct *M. anisopliae* isolate 20W-5 were screened for virulence towards grasshoppers in bioassays of laboratory and field-collected insects. Both isolates induced mycosis in grasshoppers. Isolate 20W-5 produced mortality in 98.7% of laboratory-reared treated insects 12 days post-inoculation (LT₅₀ = 6.3 days) compared to 100% mortality 8 dpi (LT₅₀ = 4.1 days) for a commercial isolate of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*. *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolate S54 caused 98.6% mortality 12 dpi (LT₅₀ = 6.7 days) in treated laboratory-reared insects. In bioassays of field-collected grasshoppers, exposure to isolate S54 resulted in 100% mortality 7 dpi (LT₅₀ = 4.4 days) compared to 100% mortality 9 dpi (LT₅₀ = 4.7 days) from treatment with the commercial isolate. Isolate 20W-5 was not evaluated in bioassays of field-collected insects due to poor sporulation on culture media.

Maximum air temperatures, minimum air temperatures, sunshine hours, and precipitation data from nine weather stations were analyzed over a thirty-year period (1975-2005) for occurrences that would preclude use of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* as a
biocontrol agent in the Prairie provinces. The analysis indicated that Canadian temperate weather conditions were suitable for *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* development and initiation of infection. Low levels of ambient humidity were projected to be key factors in sporulation and horizontal transmission of the fungus. It was hypothesized that mortality rates induced by fungal infection in temperate zones might equal or exceed those observed in field trials in tropical regimes.

6.2 Conclusions

In Canada, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) has issued a comprehensive set of guidelines for the registration of microbial pest control agents and products (PMRA, 2001). These guidelines outline the data required in terms of characterization of the microbial control product (origin, derivation, and taxonomic identification as well as biological properties such as level of natural occurrence, distribution, habitat, and host range) in addition to human health and safety testing (various routes of exposure and levels of infectivity), food and feed residue studies, environmental fate (effects on indicator non-target species and persistence in the environment), and value assessment (identification of potential benefits to and efficacy in sustainable crop and pest management systems). The guidelines were established after consultation with interested parties in the biotechnology, agri-food, and forestry sectors, and have been harmonized with the US directive mandated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Research described in this thesis has contributed important data necessary to fulfill some of the requirements for registration of a microbial pesticide in Canada. A molecular assay for the specific detection of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum* will permit
differentiation of the introduced exotic organism from native inhabitants, provide knowledge about the course of infection in target and nontarget organisms, and provide information on the fate of the biocontrol agent in the environment.

Ecological concerns over the release of exotic organisms are a driving force in a search for indigenous biocontrol agents. Further, uncertainty regarding issues behind regulatory decisions will frequently preclude the use of nonindigenous agents. The identification of native strains of *Metarhizium*, especially one with a unique built-in genetic fingerprint, that demonstrate high virulence towards native grasshopper pest species will ease some of the impediments to registration by providing precision tools for monitoring and tracking the fate of the pest control product in the target population and in the environment. Moreover, there is a higher probability of better ecological fitness with native isolates and, thereby, a higher probability of successful application.

These studies are an important advancement towards investigation of a suitable pathogen for biocontrol. More work is required to identify impacts on non-targets, since it has been demonstrated that individual isolates can differ significantly in host specificity. Compatibility of the pathogen with agroecosystems management practices also need to be determined as part of the multidisciplinary approach in integrated pest management strategies. Scientists, governments, industry, and interested stakeholders need to interact in a positive cooperative program to ensure delivery of a biological alternative for efficacious and environmentally sustainable control of an agroecosystem pest of economic significance.
References


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Environment Canada http://www.ec.gc.ca/envhome.html


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111


Appendix 1. Partial nucleotide sequence for large subunit ribosomal RNA gene and ribosomal intergenic spacer region for *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolate 6W-2

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Letters in bold indicate nucleotide sequence amplified by *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*-specific Ma-IGSspF/Ma-IGS-spR primers.
Appendix 2. Partial nucleotide sequence for large subunit ribosomal RNA gene and ribosomal intergenic spacer region for group-B variant *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *anisopliae* isolate S54

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| 941-960  | Location of 20 bp GT-rich insertion sequence definitive of group-B strains (Pantou et al., 2003)

Letters in bold indicate nucleotide sequence amplified by *M. anisopliae* var. *anisopliae*-specific Ma-IGSspF/Ma-IGS-spR primers.
Appendix 3. Mean summary statistics for maximum air temperature for weather stations in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba during June, July, and August over a thirty-year period (1975-2005)

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a confidence level

Data generated by the MEANS procedure of SAS (SAS Institute, 2005).
Appendix 4. Mean summary statistics for minimum air temperature for weather stations in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba during June, July, and August over a thirty-year period (1975-2005)

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1 confidence level

Data generated by the MEANS procedure of SAS (SAS Institute, 2005).
Appendix 5. Mean summary statistics for sunshine hours for weather stations in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba during June, July, and August over a thirty-year period (1975-2005)

Data generated by the MEANS procedure of SAS (SAS Institute, 2005).

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Data generated by the MEANS procedure of SAS (SAS Institute, 2005).
Appendix 7. June 2003 observed daily weather data for Lethbridge, AB

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Numbers in parentheses represent percentage of total hours available suitable for growth of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*
### Appendix 8. July 2003 observed daily weather data for Lethbridge, AB

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*Numbers in parentheses represent percentage of total hours available suitable for growth of *M. anisopliae* var. *acridum*