Development of DNA Extraction Method for Forensics Studies of Preserved Hair and Skin Samples from Sumatran Tiger (Panthera tigris sumatrae, Pocock 1929)

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1. Introduction

As the only remaining tiger population in Indonesia, the Sumatran tigers suffer from threats such as poaching and illegal wildlife trade (Wibisono and Pusparini 2010). The high demand for tiger body parts has been inducing the rise of imitations, leading to bias in evaluating poaching impact and hindering law enforcement on wildlife trafficking due to difficulties in the identification process (Nyhus and Tilson 2004). Molecular-based species identification is considered promising to overcome the morphological approach limitations in terms of species identification, including tiger (Karmacharya et al. 2018; Lopez-Oceja et al. 2016; Vipin et al. 2016). However, most illegally traded tiger body parts have been preserved for an extended period of time, reducing DNA quantity and quality for an effective identification process.

The identification process is an essential stage, given only the Sumatran tiger is protected by the national law among other tiger subspecies. Thus, recovering a sufficient amount of DNA from wildlife forensic samples is key and developing DNA recovery protocols for wildlife forensic casework remains needed. This study aimed to develop a simple, fast, and relatively cost-efficient method to enable species identification from preserved hair and skin samples of Sumatran tiger and evaluate the recovered DNA using tiger-specific mtDNA markers that have been developed (Luo et al. 2004; Wetton et al. 2004). This study also examined genome enrichment-method to obtain a higher yield and integrity of recovered DNA for further wildlife forensic applications.
2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Samples collection

Biological samples (museum specimen, hairs, and skins) from 17 tigers were collected to assess the extraction methods. The museum samples obtained from Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense, Center of Biological Research, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI). The museum specimens were arsenic-treated hairs and skins with various preservation ages ranging from year 1911 to 1956. Besides museum specimens, we used confiscated samples of hairs and skins, consist of unpreserved hairs (four months) obtained from a dead female tiger found in Selingsingan, Bengkulu Province, provided by the Conservation of Natural Resource Office (BKSDA) of Bengkulu Province, and hairs from a piece of confiscated tiger skin (two years) provided by BKSDA Aceh. The tiger skin was confiscated in South Aceh Regency in 2018, originated from a male-predicted individual. Sample access were under the permission (SK.84/KSDAE/SET/KSA.2/3/2020) issued by the Directorate of Conservation of Natural Resources, the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry. We also used positive control of tiger blood obtained from two tigers belong to Taman Safari Indonesia, Bogor, West Java.

2.2. DNA Extraction and Genomic DNA Enrichment

Prior to the extraction process, samples were decontaminated from debris and exogenous contaminating DNA by immersion in 0.5% of bleach. We used 10 hair shafts (cut into ±0.5 cm each) and a piece of skin (cut into 0.5 cm × 0.5 cm) for each reaction. We examine three DNA extraction methods, [1] the ion exchange-based method using Chelex® 100 resin [Bio-Rad], [2] protease-based method using KAPA Express Extract Kit [KAPA Biosystems], and [3] salting out-based method as described by Sambrook and Russel (2001). The ion-exchange-based extraction was performed by incubating the sample in 200 μL 10% Chelex resin (75°C 25 mins; 95°C 20 mins). The lysate was centrifuged to precipitate the resin and the supernatant was transferred to a new fresh tube. The protease-based extraction was performed following the manufacturer protocol (incubation at 75°C 10 mins; 95°C 5 mins) in a 100 μL lysis buffer comprising 88 μL nuclelease-free water, 10 μL 10× KAPA Express Extract Buffer, and 2 μL KAPA Express Extract Enzyme (1 U/μL). Salting out-based method was performed by following the protocol described by Sambrook and Russel (2001) with DTT addition into the lysis buffer resulting in 1 mM final concentration, increased SDS concentration to 0.5%, and increased proteinase K volume to 20 μL. The lysis step was performed overnight, and the pelleted-DNA was resuspended in 50 μL TE buffer (low EDTA). The salting-out method also carried out for positive control DNA extraction. All the extracts were quantified using a nano volume spectrophotometer and stored at -20°C until further analysis.

Genomic DNA enrichment was performed with multiple displacement amplification (MDA) method using REPlI-g Mini Kit [QIAGEN]. Genome enrichment was carried out following the manufacturer’s protocol. Enrichment success was confirmed by running the MDA products on 0.8% agarose gel.

2.3. Molecular Species and Sex Identification

We qualitatively evaluated each method’s performance if the extracts are effective for species and sex identification by PCR. Two different tiger-specific primers were used, C9366F/T9882R (Luo et al. 2004) targeting 571 bp area of \( \text{ND2} \) gene and \( \text{Tig117F/Tig231R} \) (Wetton et al. 2004) targeting 156 bp area \( \text{Cyt b} \) gene. For \( \text{Cyt b} \), we tailed each forward and reverse primer with M13 vector sequences of (5'-TGTAAAACGACGGCCAGT) and (5'-CAGGAAACAGCTATGAC) respectively, resulting a 35 bp longer amplicon (191 bp). The M13-tailed primers were chosen due to brighter PCR bands on agarose gel during optimization process compared to the original pairs. For sex identification, duplexed PCR reaction of \( \text{ZFX-PF/ZFX-PR} \) and \( \text{DBY-PF/DBY-PR} \) was performed (Sugimoto et al. 2006).

PCR reaction comprised of 12.5 μL 2× TopTaq™ PCR Master Mix Kit [QIAGEN], 0.5 μM each forward and reverse primer or 0.2 μM each for duplex reaction, additional 0.5 mM MgCl\(_2\) [Thermo Scientific] for duplex reaction, 3 μL template DNA, and RNase-free water [QIAGEN] up to 25 μL final volume. PCR cycles followed (95°C 3 mins; 35× of 95°C 30s, Ta 30s, 72°C 30’; 72°C 5 mins) on SimpliAmp™ thermal cycler [Applied Biosystem], with Ta comprised of 46°C, 53°C, and 56°C for \( \text{Cyt b}, \text{ND2} \), and duplexed \( \text{ZFX/DBY} \) respectively. PCR products were assessed on 1.5% (species identification) and 2% (sex identification) agarose gel stained with GreenSafe [NZYTech] and visualized under trans-UV illuminator.
2.4. Data Analysis

Successful PCR products proceeded for DNA sequencing by Macrogen, Inc. (South Korea and Singapore). The retrieved sequences were trimmed for ambiguous base-removal using DNA Baser Assembler version 5.15 [Visual Bioinformatics]. The trimmed sequences and primers were mapped to the Sumatran tiger mitochondrial reference sequence (JF357969.1) to verify primers and product specificity using Geneious Prime version 2021.0.1 [Biomatters, Ltd.]. The sequences were analyzed to find Sumatran tiger-specific nucleotide variation by performing multiple sequence alignment with other tiger subspecies sequences (Table 1) using ClustalW algorithm on BioEdit version 7.2.5. Felis catus mitochondrial sequence (U20753.1) was used for nucleotide numbering reference, following Luo et al. (2004). Phylogenetic analysis was performed to determine the species relationship to Sumatran tiger using Bayesian inference on BEAST2 version 2.6.3. Prior to running the phylogenetic analysis, the sequences were run on jModelTest to obtain the best substitution model and the MCMC was set to 10 million times with data retrieval every 10 thousand chains.

3. Results

3.1. Concentration and Purity of DNA Extracted from Hair and Skin Samples

DNA concentrations from all samples are listed in Table 2 and summarized into plots in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>GenBank accession number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bos javanicus</td>
<td>Javan cattle</td>
<td>7901819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capra hircus</td>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>1485868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cervus unicolor</td>
<td>Sambar deer</td>
<td>AF423201.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muntiacus muntjak</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>AF042717.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neofelis diardi</td>
<td>Sunda clouded leopard</td>
<td>HM748845.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neofelis nebulosa</td>
<td>Asian clouded leopard</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthera pardus</td>
<td>Leopard</td>
<td>6262383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthera tigris altaica</td>
<td>Siberian tiger</td>
<td>AF053026.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panthera tigris amoyensis</td>
<td>South China tiger</td>
<td>NC_014770.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthera tigris corbetti</td>
<td>Indochinese tiger</td>
<td>AF053049.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthera tigris sumatrae</td>
<td>Sumatran tiger</td>
<td>AF053040.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthera tigris tigris</td>
<td>Bengal tiger</td>
<td>AF053018.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GenBank species references were involved in phylogenetic analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bos javanicus</td>
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<td>Panthera tigris amoyensis</td>
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<td>Panthera tigris corbetti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panthera tigris sumatrae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthera tigris tigris</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. DNA concentration and purity yielded from preserved hair and skin samples of Sumatran tiger extracted using three different methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source (individual)</th>
<th>Sample type (total specimen)</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Averaged concentration per method (ng/μL)</th>
<th>Averaged purity per method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BKSDA Aceh</td>
<td>Skin (1)</td>
<td>Chelex</td>
<td>115.48</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>KAPA</td>
<td>244.83</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Salting out</td>
<td>26.25</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hair (1)</td>
<td>Chelex</td>
<td>25.58</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KAPA</td>
<td>23.48</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Salting out</td>
<td>24.73</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BKSDA Bengkulu</td>
<td>Hair (1)</td>
<td>Chelex</td>
<td>22.25</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>KAPA</td>
<td>15.37</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Salting out</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Zoologicum</td>
<td>Hair (14)</td>
<td>Chelex</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogoriense LIPI</td>
<td></td>
<td>KAPA</td>
<td>12.61</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Salting out</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chelex</td>
<td>66.60</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KAPA</td>
<td>48.75</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Salting out</td>
<td>41.75</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kruskal-Wallis test showed that the difference among hair samples' DNA concentration was not significant ($p = 0.146; \alpha = 0.05$), but significant for skin samples ($p = 3.69e-05; \alpha = 0.05$). KAPA Express Extract Kit yielded the most optimal DNA concentration from both hair and skin samples, indicated by highest second-quartile values for hair and skin samples and widest interquartile range for skin samples, which correspond to higher DNA concentration distribution (Figure 1).

3.2. Molecular Species and Sex Identification of Sumatran Tiger from Hair and Skin Samples

Species identification was successfully performed for the newly aged samples from Aceh and Bengkulu, but unsuccessful for samples obtained from LIPI and all sex identification process. Successful PCR products presented different band intensity on agarose gel due to sample type and amplicon size (Figure 2 and 3). PCR products from hair samples showed a lower success rate at longer amplicon (517 bp; ND2) compared to the shorter amplicon (191 bp; Cyt b), while skin samples succeeded in giving PCR bands with relatively similar consistency across the sizes.

3.3. Sequence and Phylogenetic Analysis

Mapping results of the sequenced PCR products to the Sumatran tiger mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) reference sequence (JF357969.1) showed correspondence to the region flanked by the primers' annealing sites. PCR products of ND2 primers mapped from the mid to the 3' end of the gene (base 5.454 to 5.903), while PCR products of Cyt b primers mapped to the region near the 5' end of the gene (base 15.199 to 15.322). These results showed primer and PCR product specificity and verified that the samples originated from tigers.

Multiple sequence alignment showed a single nucleotide variation specific to Sumatran tiger within the sequenced region of each gene. The variations consist of a transversion (T→A) at base 15.223 within...
Figure 2. PCR products of partial (A) Cyt b, 191 bp and (B) ND2, 517 bp target genes from preserved Sumatran tiger hair samples (Aceh and Bengkulu).

Figure 3. PCR products of Cyt b (191 bp) and ND2 (517 bp) target genes from the preserved Sumatran tiger skin samples (Aceh).
Cyt b (Figure 5A) and a transition (C→T) at base 5.608 within ND2 (Figure 4B). This finding strengthens the previous statement that the samples originated from tiger and provides potential utilization of both primers in wildlife forensic cases involving Sumatran tiger.

Our identification of Sumatran tiger subspecies is also supported by Bayesian phylogenetic analysis using GTR+I+Γ substitution model. Our PCR products were monophyletic to tiger clade (*Panthera tigris*) and bifurcated into a separated branch comprising the Sumatran tiger reference sequence (*P.t. sumatrae*) and the PCR products of both target genes. A high posterior probability number (1 for Cyt b and 0.97 for ND2) supported Sumatran tiger’s monophyly to the tiger clade (Figure 5).

### 4. Discussion

The higher concentration distribution yielded by KAPA Express Extract Kit might be resulted by its simple extraction step and protease activity. Protease enzyme catalyzes protein degradation and cell membrane disruption, promoting higher DNA release and yield (Barbosa *et al.* 2016; van Pelt-Verkuil *et al.* 2008). Compared to the protease-based extraction, the ion-exchange method only relies on high incubation temperature. In contrast, as a method with multiple steps, the salting-out may not be the most suitable to recover DNA from relatively small samples, samples with low copy number or degraded DNA due to potential DNA loss during the extraction process (Fahzan *et al.* 2016; Fazzini *et al.* 2018). Moss *et al.* (2003) also

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**Figure 4.** Multiple sequence alignment of PCR products from (A) Cyt b gene and (B) ND2 with other tiger subspecies. The sequences were aligned to Felis catus mtDNA sequence (U20753.1) as numbering reference.
presented that protease-based extraction produced better DNA profiling in forensic samples compared to the ion-exchange and phenol-chloroform-based method. This intrigues that the thermostable protease-based extraction has a valuable potency as a simple, fast, and relatively cost-efficient DNA recovery method in wildlife forensic cases.

None of the samples retain intact genomic DNA since it failed to be visualized through electrophoresis, which reflected high degradation rate (Sharma et al. 2020). Hair is not generally considered as a reliable sample type for DNA recovery. Furthermore, our hair samples from Bengkulu were no longer retained its root, which is the primary source of DNA in hair (Fulton 2012; Guan et al. 2016; Heywood et al. 2003; Jun et al. 2011).

In contrast, the enriched genomic DNA by multiple displacement amplification (MDA) was successfully visualized by electrophoresis. It indicates that the isolates still contained the required DNA to perform MDA reaction, as REPLI-g Mini Kit recommends using DNA isolates with minimum of 2 kb and several >10 kb double-stranded DNA. Nevertheless, the copy number might be very low since it failed to be visualized by electrophoresis. In addition, the MDA products need to be confirmed by species-specific PCR to verify that the target DNA was co-amplified during the reaction, given the hexamers in MDA reaction annealed randomly instead of the desired region (Schneider et al. 2004).

We assume that the amplification results in the Figure 2–4 corresponded to the DNA amount and...
reflect the preservation time. Although the hair samples from Bengkulu were preserved in a more recent time, our results demonstrated that hair samples' success rate from Aceh was higher than Bengkulu counterpart. The success rate might be affected by the hair follicle's presence in hair samples from Aceh, increasing DNA yield. Our results also agreed to the common understanding that a shorter amplicon is more considerable to encounter DNA with poor quality (Lopez-Oceja et al. 2016; Wandeler et al. 2007) and consensus that follicle is the primary source of hair parts for DNA extraction. However, we failed to obtain sex profiles from all samples, including the newly aged samples. We assumed that our methods still need to be optimized further to recover low abundance of sex chromosomes from this kind of samples.

PCR using MDA products showed positive results compared to PCR using pre-enriched DNA, particularly for hair samples from Bengkulu. However, our PCR reaction using MDA products required 7°C increment of annealing temperature due to the lower dilution number of MDA products in TE buffer. We diluted our MDA products in 1:5 ratio since the recommended 1:20 did not yield positive results. Lower dilution number will increase MDA reaction residue (e.g., as hexamers, salts, and polymerase) affecting standard PCR conditions by stabilizing double-stranded DNA bond and contributes to the higher temperature needed to denature the hydrogen bonds (van Pelt-Verkuil 2008). Nevertheless, our results showed the combination of protease-based extraction and multiple displacement amplification has the potency for further application in encountering DNA samples with low copy number.

Using multiple sequence alignment, we also identified Sumatran tiger single subspecies-specific nucleotide variation in the PCR products from both target genes. Single variation in ND2 gene was C→T transition at base 5.608 of Sumatran tiger mtDNA, corresponded to the nucleotides variation among tiger subspecies described by Luo et al. (2004). Single variation in Cyt b gene was T→A transversion at nucleotide number 15.223 of the Sumatran tiger mtDNA and corresponded to Liu et al. (2018). However, the variation was not described by Wetton et al. (2004). Both variations demonstrated its respective potency to be reference in identifying Sumatran tiger subspecies by molecular-based identification. In addition, the M13-tailed Tig117F/Tig231R primers since it produces a shorter amplicon, which is more desired when encountering poor DNA samples.

Based on this study, KAPA Express Extract Kit outperformed the others due to time efficiency and higher DNA yields. The combination of multiple displacement amplification as post-extraction genome enrichment can be further applied to obtain higher genomic DNA yield when encountering low quality and quantity of DNA samples. The use of Tig117F/Tig231R primer pairs developed by Wetton et al. (2004) may be more desired since it yielded a higher success rate of PCR reaction in low DNA samples. However, further studies are needed to obtain sex profiles from newly preserved samples and species profiles from older specimens such as samples from LIPI.

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