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Citation of this paper:
Ferguson, Laura V.; Dhakal, Pranav; Lebenzon, Jacqueline E.; Heinrichs, David E.; Bucking, Carol; and Sinclair, Brent, "Seasonal shifts in the insect gut microbiome are concurrent with changes in cold tolerance and immunity" (2018). *Biology Publications*. 98.
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/biologypub/98

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This article is available at Scholarship@Western: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/biologypub/98

1 Seasonal shifts in the insect gut microbiome are concurrent with changes in cold
2 tolerance and immunity

3

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15

16 Key words: bacteria, cold, cricket, symbiosis, winter

17 ## Abstract

18 1. Seasonal changes in the environment, such as varying temperature, have the potential to
19 change the functional relationship between ectothermic animals, such as insects, and their
20 microbiomes. Our objectives were to determine: a) whether seasonal changes in
21 temperature shift the composition of the insect gut microbiome, and b) if changes in the
22 microbiome are concomitant with changes in the physiology of the host, including the
23 immune system and response to cold.
24 2. We exposed laboratory populations of the spring field cricket, *Gryllus veletis*
25 (Orthoptera: Gryllidae), to simulated overwintering conditions in both a laboratory
26 microcosm and a field-like microcosm containing soil and leaves. In summer, autumn,
27 winter and spring, we extracted and sequenced 16S bacterial genomic DNA from cricket
28 guts, to capture seasonal variation in the composition of the microbiome.
29 3. The composition of the gut microbiome was similar between microcosms, and overall
30 highly anaerobic. In both microcosms, we captured similar seasonal variation in the
31 composition of the microbiome, where overwintering resulted in permanent changes to
32 these microbial communities. In particular, the abundance of *Pseudomonas* spp.
33 decreased, and that of *Wolbachia* spp. increased, during overwintering.
34 4. Concurrent with overwintering changes in the gut microbiome, *G. veletis* acquire freeze-
35 tolerance and immune function shifts temporarily, returning to summer levels of activity
36 in the spring. Specifically, haemocyte concentrations increase but survival of fungal
37 infection decreases in the winter, whereas the ability to clear bacteria from the
38 haemolymph remains unchanged.

39 5. Overall, we demonstrate that the gut microbiome does shift seasonally, and in concert
40 with other physiological changes. We hypothesize that these changes may be linked, and
41 suggest that it will next be important to determine if these changes in the microbiome
42 contribute to host overwintering success.

43

1 Introduction

Animal biology is shaped by interactions with symbiotic communities of microbes (the 'microbiome'), the large majority of which are housed in the gut (Douglas 2011, 2015; Engel & Moran 2013). The insect gut microbiome includes bacteria, archaea, yeasts and protozoa that may colonise the mucosa of the gut or exist transiently in the food as it passes through the digestive tract (Douglas 2015; Engel & Moran 2013). These microbes contribute to digestion of food, provide essential nutrients, protect the host from colonisation by pathogenic microbes, and communicate with the host through neuroendocrine signaling to regulate host physiology (Douglas 2015; Engel & Moran 2013; Shin *et al.* 2011). Changes in these communities of bacteria can affect a range of host phenotypes (Douglas 2011, 2015), thus it is important to explore how microbiomes may shift in response to changes in the environment. In particular, insects in temperate areas spend prolonged periods of time overwintering (Williams *et al.* 2015) which has the potential to influence the composition of the microbiome and its relationship with the host.

Because microbes are ectotherms, the microbiome of ectothermic animals will be exposed to the same temperature fluctuations as their hosts. These fluctuations have the potential to challenge individual microbe species, modify community interactions, and alter the functional host-symbiont relationship (i.e. the holobiont; Lokmer & Mathias Wegner 2015; Webster *et al.* 2008). Insects that overwinter in temperate environments are exposed to low temperatures for prolonged periods (Williams *et al.* 2015), and undergo profound seasonal changes in feeding (Hahn & Denlinger 2007), gut contents (Olsen & Duman 1997; Olsen *et al.* 1998), immunity (Ferguson & Sinclair 2017), and physiology (Denlinger & Lee 2010). Because the composition of the

67 microbiome depends on the physiological state of the host (Douglas 2015), these seasonal
68 changes in host physiology are also likely to influence the composition of the gut microbiome
69 (Carey & Duddleston 2014). Further, because the microbiome may differ depending on diet
70 (Franzini *et al.* 2016; Maes *et al.* 2016; Wang *et al.* 2011), seasonal changes in food or
71 microbiota in the external environment likely contribute to changes in the insect microbiome
72 (Ludvigsen *et al.* 2015). However, we know little about the seasonality of the insect gut
73 microbiome in the context of low temperatures and overwintering.
74
75 Overwintering influences the composition of the microbiome in other taxa, and these changes
76 can have important physiological consequences. For example, overwintering favours pathogens
77 in the gut microbiome of bullfrogs, *Rana catesbianae,* leading to systemic infection and
78 mortality (Carr *et al.* 1976). In this example, seasonal changes in the immune system likely work
79 in concert with dysbiosis and subsequent host mortality (Maniero & Carey 1997). Insects that
80 physiologically avoid freezing during the winter, such as *Dendroides canadensis*, actively
81 regulate the gut microbiome by voiding or masking bacteria that contribute to ice nucleation
82 (Olsen & Duman 1997). Further, *Drosophila melanogaster* that are reared at high temperatures
83 but receive transplants of gut bacteria from flies reared at low temperatures become more cold-
84 tolerant (Moghadam *et al.* 2017). Thus, we hypothesize that the composition and function of the
85 insect microbiome is related to the physiological processes that allow insects to survive multiple
86 overwintering pressures (e.g. cold and pathogens).
87
88 By understanding concurrent shifts in both the microbial community and host physiology (e.g.
89 immunity, cold tolerance), we can begin to understand the functional links between them, and

90 the potential consequences of climate change for host fitness. If the microbiome is directly
91 regulated by the external temperature, then the warmer or more variable winters predicted for
92 many temperate regions under climate change will modify the microbiome. By contrast, if the
93 microbiome is directly regulated by the host, the host will either continue to regulate the
94 microbiome and thus maintain performance under novel conditions, or the regulation of the
95 microbiome under novel conditions will impair their ability to shift physiology to suit new
96 environments. We hypothesise that the composition and function of the insect gut microbiome
97 could change during overwintering in four, non-mutually-exclusive, ways: 1) low temperatures
98 select for the growth of psychrophilic microbes that outcompete others; 2) cold directly kills
99 those microbes intolerant of low temperatures, thereby increasing the relative abundance of those
100 tolerant of cold; 3) seasonal changes in physiochemical conditions in the gut select for particular
101 microbes; or 4) the host actively manipulates the composition of the microbiome *via* the immune
102 system (Carey *et al.* 2013) or microRNAs (Hussain *et al.* 2011).
103
104 To explore how the microbiome contributes to host success in different seasons, we examined
105 concurrent changes in the composition of a gut microbiome with changes in host physiology
106 during different seasons. We exposed the overwintering stage of a temperate species of field
107 cricket native to Ontario, Canada, *Gryllus veletis,* to simulated overwintering conditions in either
108 a lab or field-like microcosm. During the overwintering period, we characterised the composition
109 of the gut microbiome. Further, we measured seasonal shifts in both immune activity and cold
110 tolerance. We show that the community of gut microbes changes with season, and that these
111 changes are conserved across both microcosms. Further, the microbiome does not reset in the
112 spring, suggesting that winter causes permanent perturbation or a plastic change in function of

113 the microbiome. In addition, immune activity decreases while cold tolerance increases in *G.*

114 *veletis* during the overwintering period. Overall, concurrent changes in the composition of the

115 microbiome and host physiology indicate that these changes may be interconnected, and that

116 changes in the microbiome are likely linked to overwintering success.

117

118 2 Materials and Methods

119 2.1 Cricket housing and overwintering conditions

120 *Gryllus veletis* were derived from a population collected in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada in 2010.

121 In 2014-2015, we reared *G. veletis* from egg to 6th instar nymph at 25 °C (14 L:10 D) as

122 described by Coello Alvarado (Coello Alvarado *et al.* 2015). Rearing conditions represented

123 summer conditions. We maintained crickets in groups of approximately 100 individuals in

124 plastic bins (28 × 17 × 15 cm) on *ad libitum* rabbit chow (Little Friends Rabbit Food, Martin

125 Mills, Elmira, ON, Canada) and water with cardboard shelters.

126

127 To determine if microbes in the external environment influence the composition and seasonal

128 plasticity of the microbiome, we divided crickets into two bins with the same food, water, and

129 shelter conditions as during rearing (28 × 17 × 15 cm; n = 100 crickets in each bin): a field-like

130 microcosm (FM) and a lab microcosm (LM). We exposed all crickets in a temperature-controlled

131 incubator to a gradual, fluctuating decline in temperature and photoperiod to mimic autumn

132 temperatures and photoperiods in London, ON, Canada until the temperature reached 0 °C (Fig.

133 1). To determine if changes in the microbiota of the external environment also influence any

134 seasonal changes in the insect gut microbiome, we created both a lab and field-like microcosm.

135 At the beginning of autumn (i.e. directly after summer samples were collected), we introduced
136 soil and humus collected from local areas where we had previously heard *G. veletis* males
137 calling, thereby creating the field-like microcosm. To mimic the conditions under snow cover
138 (where *G. veletis* nymphs overwinter), we maintained crickets in darkness at 0 °C and under
139 darkness for four weeks. We then gradually increased temperature and photoperiod to mimic
140 conditions in the spring (Fig. 1).

141 **2.2 Gut dissection and DNA extraction**

142 In summer, autumn, early winter, mid-winter and spring (21 – 26 d between sampling points;
143 Fig. 1) we haphazardly selected ten crickets from each microcosm, surface-sterilised them with
144 70 % ethanol and removed the hindgut [as described by MacMillan and Sinclair (2011)] under
145 sterile conditions in a laminar-flow clean bench. We immediately snap-froze samples in liquid
146 nitrogen in sterile tubes, and stored them at -80 °C until DNA extraction. To choose a method of
147 extraction based on suggestions by Hart et al. (2015), we initially extracted DNA from a test gut
148 sample of *G. veletis* using a QIAamp DNA Stool Mini Kit (QIAGEN, Valencia, CA, USA),
149 DNeasy blood and tissue kit (QIAGEN, Valencia, CA, USA), and QIAamp DNA Microbiome
150 Kit (QIAGEN, Valencia, CA, USA), according to manufacturer's instructions. We achieved the
151 highest OTU with the DNeasy blood and tissues kit, and proceeded with this extraction method
152 for all samples. We pooled two guts for each replicate (n = 5 per time point, per microcosm) and
153 extracted total bacterial genomic DNA (gDNA) using the DNeasy blood and tissue DNA
154 extraction kit according to the manufacturer's instructions. We only used samples with a 260/280
155 ratio >2, and confirmed the presence of bacterial DNA using PCR with the universal bacterial
156 DNA primers 27F BacU (AGRGTTTGATCMTGGCTCAG) and 519R BacU

157 (GTNTTACNGCGGCKGCTG; Integrated DNA Technologies, Coralville, Iowa, USA; Rogers
158 *et al.* 2014).

159 **2.3 DNA sequencing**

160 We pooled extracted bacterial gDNA for each sampling point (n = 5 per microcosm) for a total
161 of one sample per time point, per microcosm. A fragment of the Bacterial 16S rRNA gene,
162 spanning the V1 – V2 hypervariable regions, was amplified by MR DNA (Shallowater, TX,
163 USA 79363) using universal bacteria primers that were modified by adding ligation adaptors and
164 barcodes (sample identification sequences) to the 5`- ends. MR DNA performed PCR using a
165 high fidelity polymerase (HotStarTaq Plus Master Mix Kit, Qiagen, Valencia, CA, USA) and
166 with the following conditions: 94ºC for 3 minutes, followed by 28 cycles of 94ºC for 30 seconds;
167 53 °C for 40 seconds and 72 °C for 1 minute; after which a final elongation step at 72 °C for 5
168 minutes was performed. MR DNA performed three PCR reactions per sample before pooling to
169 reduce PCR amplification bias in the library preparation. MR DNA further examined PCR
170 products in a 2% agarose gel to determine the success of amplification and the relative intensity
171 of bands. MR DNA purified the amplicons using calibrated Ampure XP beads (Agencourt
172 Bioscience Corporation, MA, USA) and mixed amplicons in equal concentrations (following
173 quantification via Qubit) before sequencing. The pooled samples were sequenced using Illumina
174 MiSeq sequencing at 300 bp reads and >20,000 reads per sample following the manufacturer's
175 protocol by Molecular Research LP (MR DNA, Shallowater, TX, USA 79363). The Truseq
176 Illumina reagent kit (TruSeq Nano DNA LT; Illumina) was used for library preparation and
177 sequencing.

178 We used Qiime software (Caporaso *et al.* 2010a) on the obtained raw sequences to filter and
179 remove unique barcodes and primers, low quality reads (quality score <25 bp), short and long
180 sequences (< 200 bp; >1000 bp), zero ambiguous base calls, gaps, zero primer sequence
181 mismatch, and sequences with homopolymer runs exceeding 6bp. We checked the resulting
182 filtered sequences for chimeras; subsequently removing them from the dataset using uchime [part
183 of USEARCH v5.2.236; (Edgar *et al.* 2011)]. We then sorted the remaining filtered sequences
184 into OTUs (Operational Taxonomical Units) using USEARCH at a 97 % threshold of sequence
185 similarity through a open-reference OTU picking protocol (Edgar *et al.* 2011). As each OTU
186 may consist of many related sequences, Qiime software was used to pick a representative
187 consensus sequence from each OTU for taxonomic identification and phylogenetic alignment.
188 Taxon identity (kingdom to species level) was assigned to the representative OTU sequences
189 based on the curated GreenGenes database (v. 13.5; DeSantis *et al.* 2006) using the Uclust
190 consensus taxonomy assigner (Edgar 2010). Following identity assignment, we removed all
191 unassigned sequences (i.e. OTUs unidentifiable at the kingdom level) from the data before
192 continuation with further downstream processing. Phylogenetic alignment of the representative
193 OTU sequences was determined against existing alignments using PyNAST (Caporaso et al.,
194 2010b) following filtering (to remove positions that are all gaps and those that are known to be
195 highly variable). This alignment was used for subsequent UniFrac beta diversity measurements.

196 We examined alpha diversity, or diversity within each community or sample, using Qiime
197 software to calculate Observed species (count of unique species), Chao1 (estimate of species
198 richness), and Shannon Index (estimate of species richness and evenness) metrics for each
199 sample (Caporaso *et al.* 2010a). Rarefaction curves (graphs of each diversity metric vs

200 sequencing depth) were then generated up to the minimal observed sequencing depth (58, 669
201 sequences).

202 We then examined the beta diversity (or diversity between communities or samples) by creating
203 weighted (species abundance based) and unweighted (species identity based) Unifrac matrices,
204 based on the normalized abundance data and phylogenetic alignment created by Qiime
205 (Lozupone *et al.* 2011). These matrices represent the dissimilarity or distance calculated between
206 every pair of community samples and were then used to generate distance histograms and
207 Principal Coordinate Analysis (PCoA) plots. Distance histograms were generated by
208 constructing a bootstrap consensus tree using the UPGMA (Unweighted Pair Group Method with
209 Arithmetic mean) hierarchical clustering method to interpret the distance between each sample.
210 To measure the robustness of the distance histograms, jackknife support for each node was
211 determined (Caporaso *et al.* 2010b; Caporaso *et al.* 2011) by selecting subsamples of the full
212 dataset to generate replicates of the above distance matrices and subsequently generate distance
213 histograms. The jackknifed UPGMA results were then compared to the UPGMA clustering
214 based on all available sequences to determine how frequently a node had the same set of
215 samples. PCoA plots were based on computed principal coordinates (Vázquez-Baeza *et al.*
216 2013) to statistically identify and compare the bacterial OTU abundance and association between
217 the samples.

218 **2.4 Abundance estimation of *Pseudomonas* and *Wolbachia* spp.**

219 To confirm the largest changes we observed in the abundance of bacterial species (i.e. an
220 increase or decrease of at least 40 % of abundance), we used quantitative real-time PCR and
221 genus-specific primers to amplify bacterial 16s rRNA genes in our samples (Table S2). We then
222 calculated gene copy numbers by coordinating mean Cq (quantification cycle) values with

223 corresponding copy numbers on a standard curve based on known copy numbers of *Escherichia*
224 *coli* (Livak & Schmittgen 2001) (see Supplemental methods).

225

226 **2.5 Seasonal changes in cold tolerance of *G. veletis***

227 To determine if cold tolerance of *Gryllus veletis* differs between summer and mid-winter, we
228 assessed survival of low temperatures in the laboratory microcosm, following Sinclair et al.
229 (2015). Briefly, we cooled crickets from 0 °C to –10 °C at a rate of 0.25 °C/min and determined
230 the supercooling point from the freezing exotherm (Sinclair *et al.* 2015). Following 4 h at -10 °C,
231 we rewarmed crickets to 0 °C at 0.25 °C/min and recorded survival 24 h following cold
232 exposure. We compared supercooling points using a t-test in R (R Development Core Team
233 2010).

234 **2.6 Seasonal changes in immune activity of *G. veletis***

235 To determine if constitutive (i.e. activity present without infection) and realised (i.e. response to
236 infection) immunity change from summer through to spring, we haphazardly selected crickets in
237 the laboratory microcosm in the summer, mid-winter, and spring and measured circulating
238 haemocyte concentrations, melanisation, *in vivo* bacterial clearance, and survival of fungal
239 infection (Ferguson & Sinclair 2017). All crickets were sampled immediately after being
240 removed from their incubation temperature, so that we could avoid or minimise acclimation
241 effects and attempt to capture a snapshot of their seasonal immunity. Due to sample size
242 constraints following mortality during overwintering, we were unable to measure bacterial
243 clearance in the spring. To understand whether or not substrate availability might limit the
244 melanisation response, we also measured hemolymph protein concentration. All statistical

245 analysis of immune activity was performed in R (version 3.2.2; R Development Core Team
246 2010).
247
248 To measure the concentration of circulating haemocytes, we collected 1 µL of haemolymph and
249 diluted it in 24 µL of anticoagulant buffer (98 mM NaOH, 186 mM NaCl, 1.7 mM EDTA, 41
250 mM citric acid, pH 6.8) immediately after removing an individual cricket from its incubation
251 temperature, to avoid any effects of a temperature change on haemocyte number. We counted the
252 total number of circulating haemocytes (CHC) in a Neubauer improved hemocytometer (Hausser
253 Scientific, Blue Bell, PA, USA) at 400 × magnification following Ferguson and Sinclair (2017).
254 We compared CHC among groups (summer, winter, & spring) using ANOVA.

255 We assessed the strength of the melanisation response as described by Ferguson et al. (2016).
256 Briefly, we inserted a nylon filament into the hemocoel of the cricket, removed the filament after
257 24 h at 25 °C, and measured melanisation as the grey value of the filament. We compared the
258 melanisation response among groups using ANOVA with a log-transformation of the grey value.

259 We measured clearance of the Gram-positive bacteria, *Staphylococcus aureus*, at 25 °C
260 following Ferguson et al. (2016). Briefly, we injected *G. veletis* with a suspension of
261 streptomycin-resistant *S. aureus* [1×10^7 colony forming units (CFU)/mL] and spot-plated
262 homogenised whole crickets in PBS on an agar plate containing streptomycin (25 µg/mL) either
263 1 min or 24 h post-injection to capture the remaining bacteria. We compared clearance in
264 summer and winter samples using a t-test.

265 We infected *G. veletis* with the entomopathogenic fungus *Metarhizium anisopliae* following
266 Marshall and Sinclair (2011). Briefly, we injected 1 µL of a spore suspension (1×10^7 spores/µL)

267 of *M. anisopliae* diluted in 0.01 % Tween 80 (1 μL of Tween 80 only, for controls) in the
268 membrane under the pronotum using a Hamilton syringe and a 32-gauge needle. We housed
269 infected and control crickets individually in vials (25 mm × 95 mm; 46 cm^3) with *ad libitum*
270 rabbit chow and water and paper shelters at 25 °C. We used the *survival* package in R (version
271 2.41-3; Therneau & Grambsch 2015) to generate Kaplan-Meier survival curves and compared
272 the fit of generalised linear models to the data using log-likelihood. Based on log-likelihood, we
273 chose a lognormal model and compared survival curves among treatments.
274
275 We measured haemolymph protein as described by Ferguson et al. (2016), using a Bicinchoninic
276 Acid assay (BCA; Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA). We measured absorbance at 562 nm
277 in a microplate spectrophotometer (SpectraMax, Molecular Devices, Sunnyvale, CA, USA). We
278 then converted absorbance to concentration values using a standard curve created from bovine
279 serum albumin. We compared protein in summer, winter, and spring using ANOVA.

280 3 Results

281 3.1 The composition of the gut microbiome changes seasonally

282 We obtained an average of 79026 ± 10 211 (standard deviation) reads per sample, ranging from
283 58669 to 90453 (Table S1). We assigned reads to 1377 OTUs at 97% sequence identity
284 threshold. There were 906 to 1127 OTUs per sample (Table S1) with an average of 991 ± 59
285 OTU/sample. The gut microbiome was dominated by Bacteroidetes (the majority of these
286 bacteria in the genera *Bacteroides* and *Parabacteroides*), Firmicutes, and Proteobacteria across
287 all seasons and environmental treatments (Fig. 2 A,B; see Supplementary Figure S3 for coloured
288 bar chart). Due to high overwintering mortality in the field-like microcosm, we did not complete

289 sampling in that microcosm beyond the mid-winter timepoint. We were unable to confirm why
290 mortality occurred in this microcosm.

291 The rarefaction curves of the OTU's approached saturation (Supplementary Fig. S1A),
292 suggesting that we captured the majority of microbial diversity in each sample. Species richness
293 of the gut microbiome (e.g. total number of species) was highest in the autumn (LM) and lowest
294 in early and mid-winter (FM); however, species richness was similar among seasonal time points
295 and between microcosms (Supplementary Fig. S1 B). Autumn and summer (LM) microbiomes
296 had the most diverse bacterial communities (i.e. the abundance of species is distributed evenly
297 among number of species), whereas early- and mid-winter (FM) had the lowest diversity (i.e. the
298 abundance of species is dominated by few species; Supplementary Fig. S1 C).

299 Overall, changes in the composition of the microbiome can be explained by season, as well as by
300 microcosm (i.e. by the addition of soil and leaves). The first axis of the principle coordinates
301 analysis (PCoA; Fig. 3A) explains 42 % of the variation among samples, and is driven largely by
302 season. The second axis describes 31 % of the variation among samples and appears to be driven
303 by microcosm. Jackknifed bootstrap trees (Fig. 3B) lend a confidence level of 75-100 % in
304 support of how samples group by season and microcosm in the PCoA. As such, spring is separate
305 from all other samples, autumn samples cluster together and then most closely with summer
306 samples, and winter samples cluster together based on whether or not soil and leaves were
307 present in the microcosm (Fig. 3B).

308 The trends between the two microcosms were similar across season. As season progressed, the
309 relative abundance of Proteobacteria increased from 5 % to 26 % of the relative abundance of the
310 microbiome from summer to spring in the LM, or 7 % to 26 % from summer to mid-winter in the

311 FM (Fig. 2A,B), whereas the relative abundance of Firmicutes decreased from 47 % to 25 %
312 from summer to spring in the LM and 50 % to 38 % from summer to mid-winter in the FM (Fig.
313 2A,B).

314 The *Wolbachia* sp. present displayed the greatest change across season, increasing from less than
315 50 % to almost 90 % of the Proteobacteria, and from approximately 5 % to 20 % of the total
316 bacterial abundance in mid- and late-winter (Fig. 2C,D); however, the relative abundance of
317 *Wolbachia* sp. decreased back to summer levels, or lower, in the spring (Fig. 2C). By contrast,
318 *Pseudomonas* spp. (several species that we were unable to identify beyond genus) decreased
319 from summer through winter, and remained at low relative abundance in the spring (Fig. 2C).
320 Additionally, *Pragia fontium* appeared to increase in abundance in the spring (Fig. 2C). Within
321 the Firmicutes, the relative abundance of *Blautia* sp. and Erysipelatoclostrichaceae peaked in the
322 winter. In both microcosms, the relative abundance of species in the genus *Clostridium*
323 decreased over the winter (Fig. 2 E,F). Finally, we detected at least three genera of facultative
324 pathogens (e.g. *Serratia, Escherichia,* and *Pseudomonas*) in the gut (Lysenko 1985), as well as
325 potential ice nucleators [e.g. *Pseudomonas* spp. (Lee *et al.* 1993)]. In particular, *Serratia*
326 *marcescens* comprised >1 % of Proteobacteria in summer, but fell below detectable levels in the
327 winter before increasing above 1% in the spring. Similarly, *Pseudomonas* spp. decreased in
328 relative abundance in both microcosms. We confirmed changes in the abundance of both
329 *Pseudomonas* spp. and *Wolbachia* sp. (i.e. the largest changes in abundance) using Q-RT-PCR
330 (Supplementary Figs S2 A,B).

331 **3.2 Cold tolerance increases in the winter**

332 Winter-acclimated crickets were more cold-tolerant than summer-acclimated crickets: four of
333 seven winter-acclimated crickets survived exposure to – 10 °C for 4 h, whereas no summer-
334 acclimated crickets (n=7) survived this exposure. There was no significant change in the
335 supercooling point (winter: -8.7 ± 0.4 °C; summer: -8.1 ± 1.8 °C; $t_{12} = 0.78$, $p = 0.23$).

336 **3.3 Immune activity is differentially affected by overwintering**

337 During the winter, crickets displayed a weaker melanisation response (Fig. 4A, $F_{2,11} = 5.46$, p =
338 0.02; n = 5-10 per season), decreased total hemolymph protein (Fig. 4B; $F_{2,21} = 24.91$, $p < 0.001$;
339 n = 5-10 per season) and decreased survival of fungal infection (Fig. 4D; winter *vs* summer: z = -
340 3.41, $p < 0.001$; n = 10 per season). However, circulating haemocyte counts increased (Fig. 4C;
341 $F_{2,24} = 51.66$, $p < 0.001$; n = 5-16 per season), and the ability to clear bacteria from the
342 haemolymph remained unchanged ($F_{1,11} = 0.8$, $p = 0.39$; n = 5-10 per season). Further, CHC,
343 melanisation, and survival of fungal infection returned to summer levels in the spring.

344 ## 4 Discussion

345 Here we show that overwintering affects both the composition of the gut microbiome and
346 physiology of the spring field cricket, *Gryllus veletis.* Regardless of the microbial conditions in
347 the external environment (i.e. presence or absence of soil and leaves), the gut microbiome is
348 similar in summer and autumn, but changes in winter to favour an increase in the relative
349 abundance of Proteobacteria. Immune activity changes during the winter, but the direction of
350 change depends on the type of activity measured. Simultaneously, crickets also increase their

351 cold-tolerance. These concurrent shifts in the microbiome and host physiology suggest that these
352 changes may be connected, and play a role in the overwintering success of *G. veletis*.

353 Overall, the microbiome in both the laboratory and field-like microcosm was dominated by
354 anaerobic bacteria across seasons (e.g. *Bacteroides* and *Parabacteroides*), in concordance with a
355 previous study on the hindgut bacteria of *Acheta domesticus* crickets (Santo Domingo *et al.*
356 1998b). Indeed, the cricket hindgut appears to be fermentative (Santo Domingo *et al.* 1998a), and
357 the bacteria are essential for the digestion of complex plant polysaccharides (Kaufman & Klug
358 1991). Although the specific function of *Bacteroides* spp. has not been determined in crickets,
359 *Bacteroides* spp. dominate the human gut microbiome and perform carbohydrate fermentation
360 (Wexler 2007). Thus, the predominantly anaerobic nature and dominance of *Bacteroides* and
361 *Parabacteroides* across season indicates that the overarching dietary function of the microbiome
362 is likely conserved across seasons and between microcosms.

363 Apart from the consistent dominance in abundance of *Parabacteroides* and *Bacteroides* we
364 observed seasonal variation in abundance in a variety of taxa. In particular, the abundance of the
365 endosymbiont *Wolbachia* sp., as well as *Clostridium symbiosum* and *Pragia fontium* increased in
366 the winter. Similarly, *Wolbachia* spp. are more prevalent in the gut tissue microbiome in
367 *Drosophila melanogaster* reared at 13 °C compared to 31 °C (Moghadam *et al.* 2017), which
368 suggests that *Wolbachia* spp. associated with insect guts may be psychrophilic. Conversely, other
369 *Clostridium* species, as well as *Pseudomonas* spp. decreased in relative abundance over the
370 winter. In the spring, although the increase in *Wolbachia* sp. reversed, the overall relative
371 abundance of Proteobacteria (potentially driven by *Pragia fontium*) remained elevated. The
372 composition of bacterial communities can permanently shift when microbial interactions are

373 disrupted (Coyte *et al.* 2015) and we suggest that, unlike the reversible changes in host
374 immunity, the microbiome of the overwintering, juvenile stage of *G. veletis* is sensitive to
375 disruption via environmental pressures present during overwintering.

376 We expected that the introduction of soil, leaves, and humus would change the composition of
377 microbes in the external environment and food of the crickets, thereby introducing new microbes
378 into the gut. However, because the overall composition of the microbiome shifts similarly across
379 season, the dominant bacterial taxa do not appear to have been disturbed by a change in
380 microcosm for the host. Further, the conserved changes between microcosms suggests that we
381 were able to minimise the influence of inter-individual variation that is overlooked by pooling
382 samples. Changes in diet can lead to shifts in the composition of the gut microbiome in crickets
383 (Santo Domingo *et al.* 1998a); however, these shifts are likely to be driven by a switch in
384 nutrients available to the microbial community. Further, core microbiota (i.e. those that are
385 consistently found among individuals in a species) are less likely to be perturbed by changes in
386 microbial habitat (Cariveau *et al.* 2014; Sudakaran *et al.* 2012). Thus, it appears that the hindgut
387 of *G. veletis* houses a core group of resident microbiota. Further, the conserved shifts between
388 microcosms suggests that we can predict generalisable shifts in core microbiota following
389 environmental perturbations.

390 Because the microbiome appears to respond in a consistent way to variation in season, our task
391 becomes to determine the driving force behind these patterns. In the introduction, we suggested
392 four hypotheses and we will address the likelihood of each as the driver of changes in the
393 microbiome of *G. veletis.* We largely focus on the largest changes in abundance of bacterial
394 species to support or refute each hypothesis, as these changes are likely to also represent
395 significant functional shifts in the microbiome.

396 *1) Low temperatures may directly select for psychrophilic bacteria*

397 If low temperatures select for psychrophlic bacteria, we would predict an increase in the
398 abundance of such species. For example, *Pseudmonas* spp. include ice-nucleating bacteria (Lee
399 *et al.* 1993) and psychrophiles that are selected for in the gut of overwintering bullfrogs (Carr *et*
400 *al.* 1976), and we were able to detect *Pseudomonas* spp. in the gut of *G. veletis* during summer.
401 However, *Pseudomonas* spp. decline to nearly undetectable levels in the winter. Thus, we
402 believe that it is unlikely that changes in the gut microbiome are driven by low temperatures
403 favouring psychrophiles.

404 2) *Low temperatures directly kill or select against bacteria that are intolerant of cold*

405 If low temperatures kill or select against bacteria intolerant of cold, we would expect to see
406 decreases in the abundance of such species, and relative increases in cold-tolerant species.
407 Similar to the first hypothesis, we might expect *Pseudomonas* spp. to increase in relative
408 abundance as cold-intolerant bacteria decline; however, these putatively cold-tolerant species
409 decline in abundance during the winter. Further, the abundance of *Clostridium* spp., which are
410 often soil-dwelling in temperate areas (Wobeser *et al.* 1987) declines as winter progresses.
411 Together, the decrease in putatively cold-tolerant species suggests that low temperatures are not
412 directly driving changes in the composition of the microbiome.

413 3) *Low temperatures indirectly mediate the gut microbiome by modifying the physiochemical*
414 *environment of the gut.*

415 *Gryllus veletis* cease feeding but do not void the gut in the winter (L.V. Ferguson, personal
416 observation), which likely alters available nutrients and selects for bacteria capable of using

417 these nutrients. For example, the gut microbiome of hibernating *Ictidomys tridecemlineatus*
418 ground squirrels changes to favour bacteria that survive on host-derived mucins (Carey *et al.*
419 2013). Similarly, the gut could become increasingly anaerobic throughout the winter if insects
420 close their spiracles to reduce water loss (Danks 2000) or maintain a barrier against pathogens
421 (Hajek & Leger 1994) and ice-nucleating bacteria (Olsen *et al.* 1998). Indeed, *Pseudomonas* spp.
422 decrease in the winter, which are the only dominant, obligate aerobes we observed in the
423 microbiome (excluding *Wolbachia,* which are intracellular and less likely to be affected by
424 oxygen gradients within the gut). This suggests that the gut could become increasingly anaerobic
425 in the winter such that the abundance of aerobic bacteria in the gut microbiome declines.

426 *4) The host may directly regulate the microbiome.*

427 Immunity in *G. veletis* may have been seasonally restructured to maintain a constitutive baseline
428 of activity (e.g. phagocytic activity of haemocytes) while suppressing costly immune activity
429 [e.g. melanisation; (González-Santoyo & Córdoba-Aguilar 2012)] to account for energy
430 maintenance and trade-offs during the winter (Ferguson & Sinclair 2017). We do note that
431 increased constitutive activity through an increase in haemocyte numbers may instead be a by-
432 product of haemocytes losing adherence to tissues in the cold, thereby increasing haemocytes in
433 circulation without increasing realised immune responses. Indeed, survival of a fungal infection
434 (a realised immune response) was nonetheless reduced, suggesting that these insects may be
435 vulnerable to infection during overwintering. If hosts are threatened by pathogens that enter *via*
436 the gut (Sinclair *et al.* 2013), while some aspects of systemic immunity are suppressed, then they
437 would benefit from actively reducing populations of potential pathogens in the gut, such as
438 *Pseudomonas* spp. and *Serratia marcescens*. Indeed, we observed a reduction in both

439 *Pseudomonas* spp. and *Serratia marcescens* in the gut during overwintering. Further,
440 *Pseudomonas* spp. are also known ice nucleators and may be regulated by the host to control ice
441 formation (Olsen & Duman 1997). However, *G. veletis* are freeze-tolerant (McKinnon 2015) and
442 may be more likely to benefit from maintaining ice nucleators (Lee & Costanzo 1998).
443 Therefore, we hypothesise that these crickets may either control ice nucleators for an unknown
444 reason, or control potential pathogens in the gut. However, as we did not measure immune
445 activity within the gut itself, we are limited in our understanding of the mechanism that may
446 underlie active control of the microbiome. Further, the pronounced increase in *Wolbachia* spp.,
447 which may become increasingly pathogenic as density increases (Caragata *et al.* 2016) suggests
448 that the host is actually impaired in its ability to control endosymbionts and gut bacteria during
449 overwintering. In either case of control or lack-there-of, it would be likely that changes in the
450 microbiome would impact host overwintering success.
451
452 Seasonal changes in the gut microbiome may also result from variables that are independent of
453 temperature. First, microbiomes can change in composition as insects age (Clark *et al.* 2015),
454 and as our study spanned several weeks, it is possible that age is a contributing factor to seasonal
455 changes in the cricket microbiome. However, age-related changes in the microbiome are likely
456 functional shifts linked to metamorphosis to a new instar (Chen *et al.* 2016) or dysbiosis as an
457 insect approaches death (Clark *et al.* 2015). Prolonged exposure to low temperatures (e.g. during
458 this study) should instead slow the aging process (Le Bourg 2007), we sampled all crickets
459 within the same instar, and as these crickets were juveniles, they would be unlikely to be
460 approaching aging-related death. Second, the density of crickets did decline during our study,
461 which could reduce potential social transmission of microbes (Lombardo 2007). We suggest that

462 this may be a relatively small contribution to changes in microbial composition in our study as
463 we used confined spaces and were primarily concerned with changes during a period of
464 dormancy. However, overwintering could increase aggregation (Copp 1983) or decrease
465 population density through overwintering mortality, leading to changes in the social transmission
466 of microbes and resulting composition of microbiomes. Overall, we suggest that seasonal
467 changes in the microbiome are complex, and likely to arise from several, integrated variables that
468 must be teased apart to understand their relative contributions to the microbiome and its stability
469 under phenomena such as climate change.

470

471 We did observe mortality in both microcosms, which was more pronounced in the field-like
472 microcosm, but we were unable to confirm the cause. We did not observe any outward signs of
473 infection (e.g. growth of fungal spores) but can not rule out the role of pathogens in the gut or
474 surrounding environment. Mortality may have been higher in the field-like microcosm due to
475 inoculative freezing *via* ice nucleators in the soil, leading to lethal freeze-thaw cycles for the
476 crickets. Dehydration and starvation are also possible explanations for winter mortality
477 (Williams *et al.* 2015), although both food and water were continuously available so these seem
478 unlikely causes. Overall, it appears that *G. veletis* do experience overwintering mortality in
479 conjunction with changes in physiology and the composition of the microbiome, so it will next
480 be important to determine whether or not these events are linked.

481

482 ## 5 **Conclusions**

483

484 Overall, the gut microbiome of *Gryllus veletis* changes during overwintering, and these changes
485 correlate with changes in host physiology. Further, the patterns of change in both host
486 physiology and microbiome composition support host-driven changes (passive or active) in
487 microbial community composition, as opposed to independent, temperature-driven changes.
488 Concurrent changes in immunity and composition of the microbiome imply that insect hosts may
489 be faced with pathogen pressure within the microbiome during overwintering. It will next be
490 important to move towards a functional understanding of these shifts in the microbiome, as their
491 role may be an important contribution to insect overwintering success that we have previously
492 ignored.
493

494 **Acknowledgements**

495 We would like to thank Drs. Yolanda Morbey, Graham Thompson, Barb Katzenback, Beth
496 MacDougall-Shackleton, Rodney Dekoter and several anonymous reviewers for comments on an
497 earlier draft of the manuscript. We thank the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
498 for Discovery Grants to BJS and CB, and a graduate scholarship to LVF. We have no conflicts of
499 interest to declare.

500

501 **Author Contributions**

502 LVF, BJS, CB and DEH conceived the ideas and designed the methodology; LVF and JEL
503 collected the data; LVF and PD analysed the data; LVF and BJS led the writing of the
504 manuscript. All authors contributed critically to the drafts and gave final approval for
505 publication.

506 ## Data Accessibility

507 We have uploaded sequence files to Pubmed and will provide submission number upon

508 acceptance of the manuscript.

509

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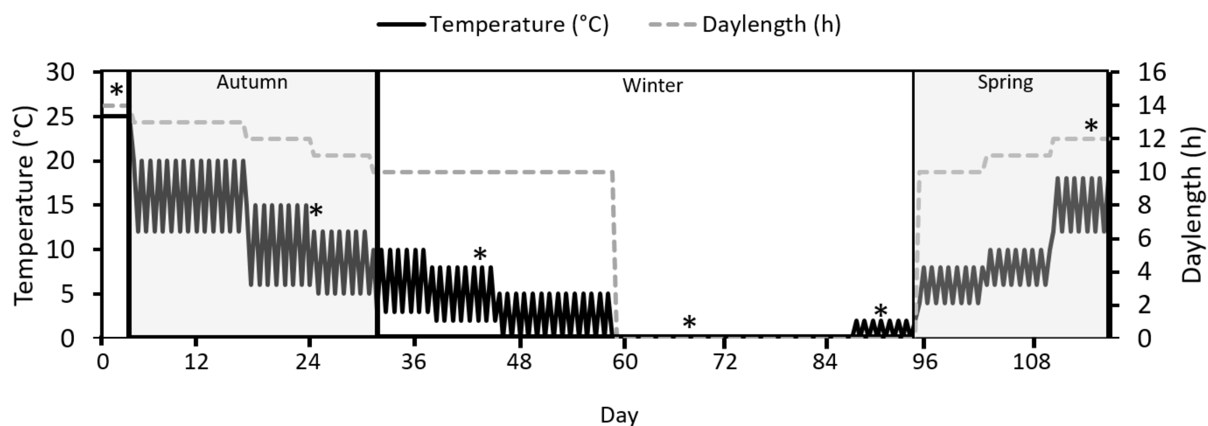

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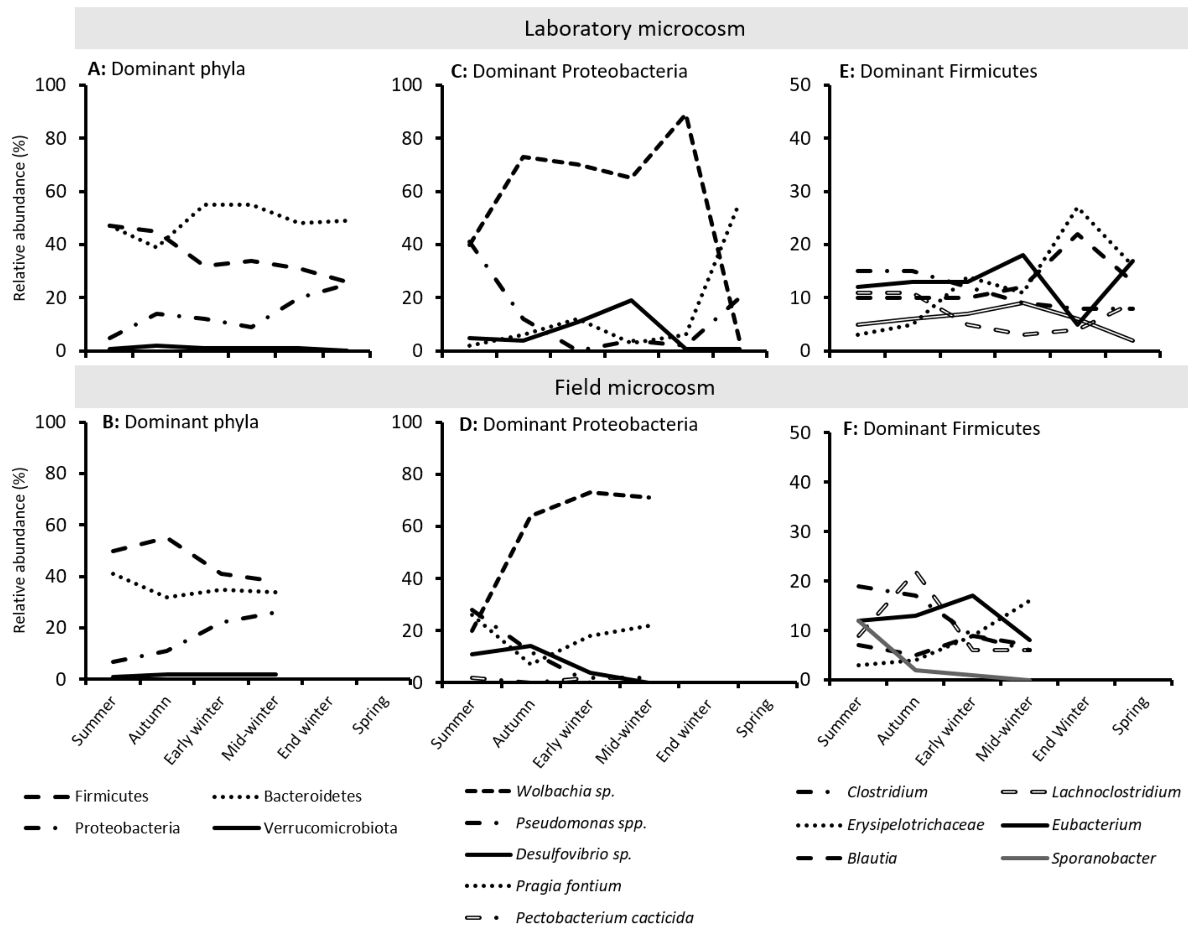
Figure 1. Temperature and photoperiod of simulated overwintering conditions of *Gryllus veletis*. Grey dashed lines line represents hours of daylight; black lines represent temperature. Asterisks indicate sampling points, in order of summer, autumn, early winter, mid-winter, late winter, and spring Alternating white and shaded regions represent the span of a season. Sampling begins in summer, under rearing conditions.



652

653 **Figure 2. Relative abundance of the dominant phyla and species or genera within phyla that show the most variation across**
654 **season in the microbiome of the hindgut in *Gryllus veletis***. Relative abundance data for all taxa including those poorly resolved
655 available in Figures S3 and S4. Dominant taxa represent those accounting for > 1% of the relative abundance, and/or those
656 demonstrating a >5% change in relative abundance over season. Top panels represent crickets in a lab microcosm and bottom panels
657 represent crickets in a simulated field-like microcosm. A/B. Dominant phyla; C/D. Dominant species within the Proteobacteria; E/F.
658 Dominant genera within the Firmicutes.

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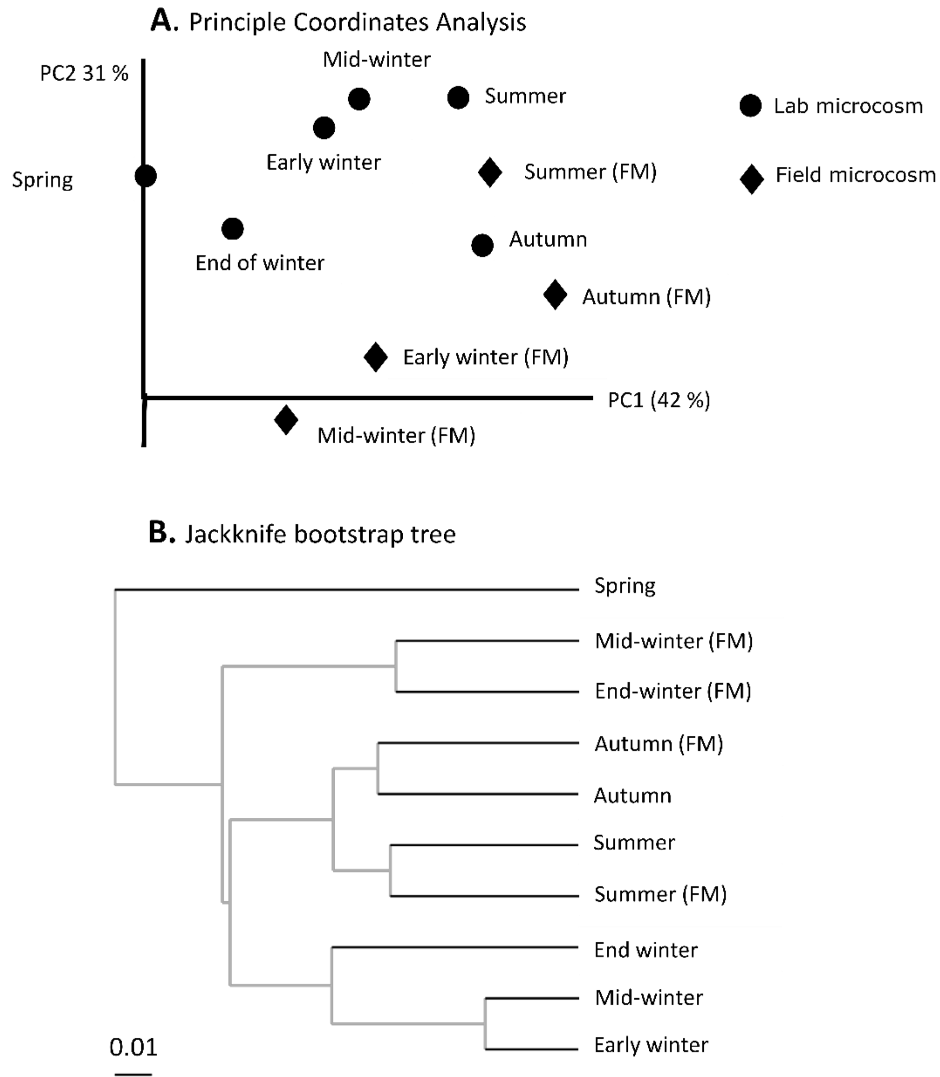

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Figure 3. Measures of beta-diversity in the microbiome of *Gryllus veletis* across season and between two microcosms. A. Principal coordinates analysis (PCoA) of the composition of the gut microbiome. B. Jackknife bootstrap tree as a measure of validation for the PcoA. Grey lines indicate a bootstrap level of 75 – 100 %. Circles represent the lab microcosm, and diamonds represent the field-like microcosm. Output from the PCoA is relative, so we provide no scale on the axis in panel A.

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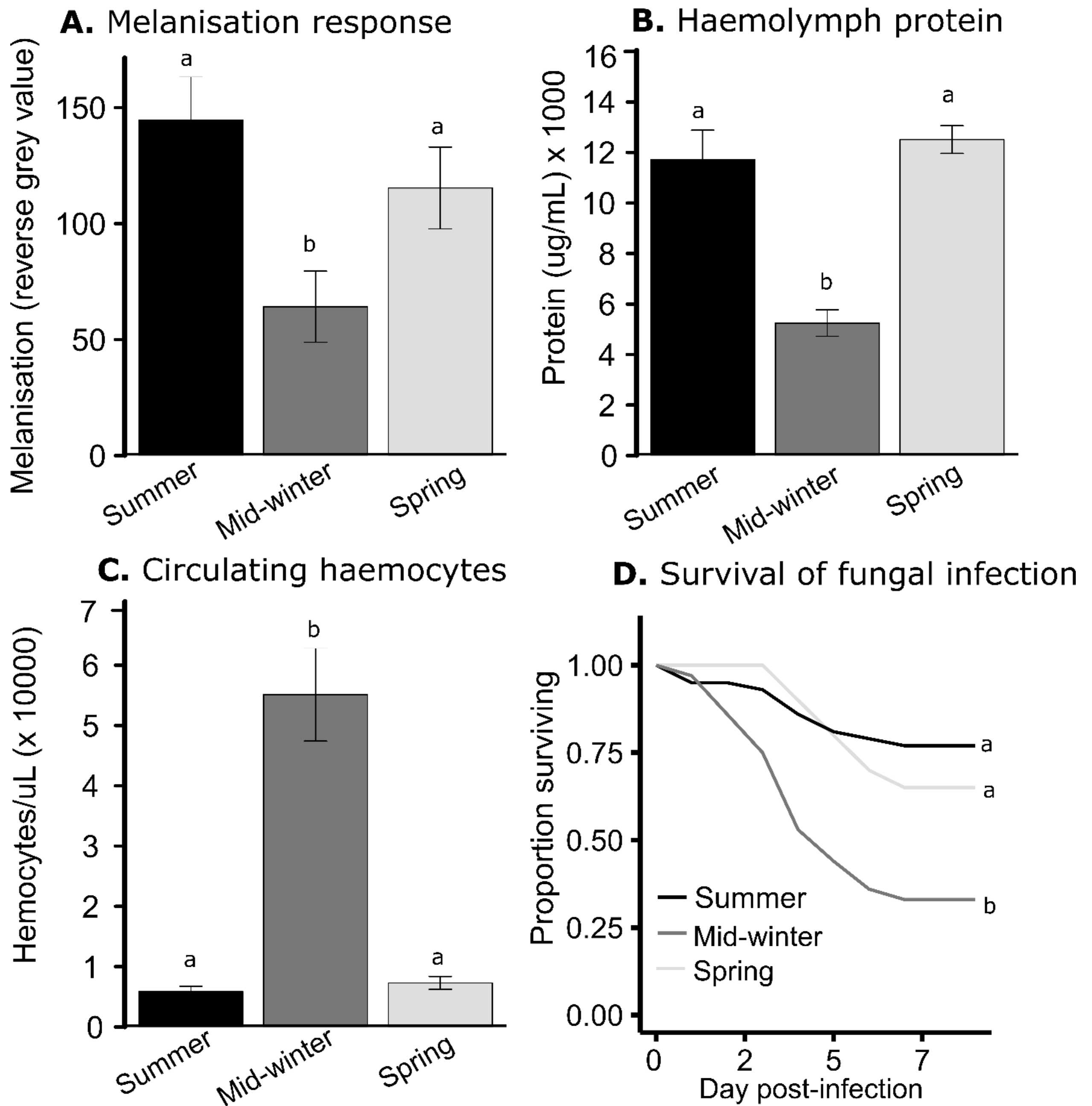

Figure 4. Measures of immune activity and haemolymph protein in summer, mid-winter and spring in *Gryllus veletis* in a laboratory microcosm. **A**. the strength of the melanisation response against a simulated pathogen (n = 5-10 per season) **B.** Concentration of haemolymph protein as a correlate for substrate available for the melanisation response (n = 5-10 per season). **C.** Concentration of haemocytes in the haemolymph (n = 5-16 per season). **D.** Survival against the fungal entomopathogen, Metarhizium anisopliae (n = 10 per season). Different letters indicate seasons that differ significantly from each other. Error bars indicate SEM.

662