

1 **Article - Method**

2 **Title**

3 SHOOT: phylogenetic gene search and ortholog inference

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14 **Keywords**

15 Phylogenetic tree inference; sequence similarity search; orthology inference

16 **Abstract**

17 Determining the evolutionary relationships between genes is fundamental to comparative  
18 biological research. Here we present the phylogenetic search, SHOOT. SHOOT searches  
19 a user query sequence against a database of phylogenetic trees and returns a tree with the  
20 query sequence correctly placed within it. We show that SHOOT performs this analysis with  
21 comparable speed to a BLAST search. We demonstrate that SHOOT phylogenetic  
22 placements are as accurate as conventional tree inference and it can identify orthologs with

23 high accuracy. In summary, SHOOT is a fast and accurate tool for phylogenetic analyses of  
24 novel query sequences. It is available online at [www.shoot.bio](http://www.shoot.bio).

25 **Background**

26 Resolving the phylogenetic relationships between biological sequences provides a  
27 framework for inferring sequence function, and a basis for understanding the diversity and  
28 evolution of life on Earth. The entry point to such phylogenetic analyses is provided by  
29 algorithms that either align or identify regions of local similarity between pairs of biological  
30 sequences. The first implementations of such algorithms utilised global alignments to  
31 provide a basis to score similarity between sequences [1]. Later, faster local alignment  
32 methods were developed [2], followed by the FASTA heuristic database search [3] and  
33 culminating with the development of the BLAST algorithm and statistical methods for  
34 homology testing [4] in the 1990s. Since then, BLAST and other local alignment methods  
35 [5-7] have provided a critical foundation of biological science research and form the entry  
36 point to the majority of biological sequence analyses.

37 One feature of the problem that is under-utilised in BLAST and related local alignment  
38 search tools is the transitive nature of homology. Because local alignment searching  
39 methods do not store the relationships between sequences, a search of a query gene  
40 against a large database will involve carrying out many needless pairwise local alignments  
41 against numerous closely related homologs. An alternative approach would be to infer the  
42 relationships between all database sequences ahead of time using phylogenetic inference  
43 methods. These phylogenetic relationships can then be stored as part of the database,  
44 facilitating the use of lighter-weight search approaches or sparse reference databases with  
45 relationships already computed. Existing methods that take these kind of approaches  
46 include TreeFam for genes within the Metazoa [8] and TreeGrafter for annotating protein  
47 sequences using annotated phylogenetic trees [9].

48 Although local similarity searches such as BLAST are the primary entry point to the  
49 sequence analysis, a frequent end-goal of such analyses is to identify orthologs of the query  
50 sequence in other species. The use of phylogenetic methods is the canonical method for  
51 assessing gene relationships. Phylogenetic methods for estimating sequence similarity are  
52 more accurate than using local pairwise alignments, and critically they provide contextual  
53 information about the place of the query gene within its gene family. This includes the  
54 identification of orthologs, paralogs, and gene gain and loss within each clade in of the  
55 resultant phylogenetic tree. Although the similarity scores returned by local alignment  
56 methods can be used to approximate phylogenetic trees [10], they are not accurate and can  
57 be limited by only having alignments against a single query gene rather than alignments  
58 between sequences already in the database [11]. Moreover, even when all pairwise  
59 similarity scores are calculated the accuracy of phylogenetic trees inferred from these scores  
60 is limited [10]

61 Here we present SHOOT, a software tool for rapidly searching a phylogenetically partitioned  
62 and structured database of biological sequences. There are a number of advantages to  
63 taking a phylogenetic approach to sequence searching. We show that by grouping  
64 homologous genes in the database, a gene can then be rapidly assigned to its homology  
65 group, irrespective of the number of homologous genes. Further, false negatives are unlikely  
66 since complete homology groups can be identified securely ahead of time. This helps avoid  
67 the reduced sensitivity that results from local sequence similarity database search algorithm  
68 heuristics used to determine which sequences to consider aligning [6]. Phylogenetic  
69 inference methods can then be used to rapidly and accurately assign the gene to its correct  
70 position within the otherwise pre-computed gene tree for its homology group [12]. This  
71 avoids the need to evaluate gene-relatedness using e-values, which are a measure of the  
72 certainty that a pair of genes are homologous, rather than a direct evaluation of the  
73 phylogenetic relationship between genes [13]. In summary, SHOOT efficiently and

74 accurately places query sequences directly into phylogenetic trees. In this way the  
75 phylogenetic history of the query sequence and its orthologs can be immediately visualised,  
76 interpreted, and retrieved. SHOOT is provided for use at [www.shoot.bio](http://www.shoot.bio).

77 **Results**

78 ***Pre-computed databases of phylogenetic trees allow ultra-fast phylogenetic  
79 orthology analysis of novel gene sequences***

80 The conventional procedure for sequence orthology analysis is to first assemble a group of  
81 gene sequences which share similarity and then perform phylogenetic tree inference on this  
82 group to infer the relationships between those genes. The SHOOT algorithm was designed  
83 to make such a phylogenetic analysis feasible as a real-time search using a two-stage  
84 approach. The first stage comprises the ahead-of-time construction of a SHOOT  
85 phylogenetic database and the second stage implements the SHOOT search for a query  
86 sequence (Figure 1). The database preparation phase includes multiple automated steps  
87 including homology group inference, multiple sequence alignment, phylogenetic tree  
88 inference, and homology group profiling (see Methods). Thus, prior to database searching  
89 the phylogenetic relationships between all genes in the database are already established.  
90 Subsequent SHOOT searches exploit the fact that the alignments and trees have already  
91 been computed to enable the use of accurate phylogenetic methods for placement of query  
92 genes within pre-computed gene trees with little extra computation required.

93 The median time for a complete a SHOOT search of a database containing 984,137 protein  
94 sequences from 78 species was 5.5 seconds using 16 cores of an Intel Xeon E5-2683 CPU  
95 for (Figure 2A). This compared with 1.19 seconds for a conventional BLAST search of the  
96 same sequence set (Figure 2A). However, unlike BLAST (or similar) sequence search  
97 methods, the output of a SHOOT search is not an ordered list of similar sequences but is  
98 instead a maximum likelihood phylogenetic tree with bootstrap support values inferred from

99 a multiple sequence alignment with the query gene embedded within it. SHOOT also  
100 computes the orthologs of the query gene using phylogenetic methods.

101 ***SHOOT is more accurate than BLAST in identifying the closest related gene sequence***

102 A leave-one-out analysis was conducted to test SHOOT's ability to find the most closely  
103 related gene sequence in a given database. Here a set of 1000 test cases was randomly  
104 sampled from the UniProt Reference Proteomes database. Each test case consisted of a  
105 pair of genes sister to each other with at least 95% bootstrap support in a maximum  
106 likelihood gene tree. One member of the test pair was arbitrarily designated the "query  
107 sequence" and the other gene was designated "the expected closest gene" i.e. the gene  
108 that should be identified by a search method as the most similar gene in the database. To  
109 provide a comparison, BLAST [11] was also tested on the same dataset. The set of query  
110 genes were searched against the database and each method was scored on whether or not  
111 the closest/best scoring gene in each search result was "the expected closest gene". The  
112 tests showed that SHOOT identified "the expected closest gene" as the most closely related  
113 gene in 94.2% of cases (Figure 2A). For comparison, BLAST correctly identified the "the  
114 expected closest gene" as the most similar gene sequence in 88.4% of cases. To put this in  
115 context, there is a 1 in 9 chance that the top hit returned by BLAST is not the most closely  
116 related sequence in the database while there is a 1 in 17 chance that the same is true for  
117 SHOOT. Thus, SHOOT is better able to identify the closest related gene to a given query  
118 gene in a given database and can be used as an alternative to BLAST for this purpose.

119 ***SHOOT gives evolutionary context of a query gene's position within its gene family***

120 Although for many users knowledge of the closest related gene as described above may be  
121 sufficient, in many instances there will be more than one gene that is equally closely related  
122 to the query gene in a given species. Thus, to generalise the "best hit" analysis above for  
123 larger gene sets the "Mean Average Precision at k" score [14] was calculated, to quantify  
124 the precision at which the k closest homologs identified by SHOOT or BLAST correspond to

125 the k expected closest homologs in maximum likelihood gene trees. This analysis was  
126 conducted for values of k between 1 (equivalent to the “best hit” analysis above) and 50  
127 (Figure 2B). As k increased, MAP@k for BLAST fell to 71.8%. i.e. there was a 71.8%  
128 agreement between the closest homologs identified using BLAST and those identified using  
129 phylogenetic methods. In contrast, the use of phylogenetic methods in the database  
130 construction stage of SHOOT coupled with the accurate placement of genes within the  
131 database trees (Figure 2A), resulted in MAP@50 for SHOOT of 90.3%. Thus, both the list  
132 of most closely related genes and their rank order of relationship to the query gene is  
133 substantially more accurate for SHOOT than for BLAST.

134 ***SHOOT has high accuracy in identifying orthologs of the query gene***

135 A frequent goal of sequence similarity searches is to identify orthologs of the query gene in  
136 other species. As stated above, local similarity search tools such as BLAST do not do this.  
137 Instead, they return a list of genes that should be subject to multiple sequence alignment  
138 and phylogenetic inference in order to infer the orthology relationships between genes. The  
139 phylogenetic tree returned by SHOOT provides the evolutionary relationships between  
140 genes inferred from multiple sequence alignment and maximum likelihood tree inference  
141 allowing orthologs and paralogs to be identified. SHOOT also automatically identifies  
142 orthologs and colours the genes in the tree according to whether they are orthologs or  
143 paralogs (Supplementary Figure 1), as identified using the species overlap method [15, 16],  
144 which has been shown to be an accurate method for automated orthology inference [17].  
145 The tree viewer also supports a zoom functionality to view a progressively larger or smaller  
146 clade of genes around the query gene. An image of the tree can be downloaded, the tree  
147 can also be exported in Newick format, and the FASTA file of protein sequences in the tree  
148 can be downloaded to support further downstream analyses.

149 To evaluate the accuracy of ortholog inference 6 species were chosen at increasing time  
150 since divergence from human. These query species comprised Mouse, Chicken, Zebrafish,

151 the Tunicate *Ciona intestinalis*, fruit fly, and the yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (Figure  
152 3A). Orthologs between these species and Human were determined from OrthoFinder on  
153 the 2020 Quest for Orthologs benchmark dataset [13, 17]. For each query species 100 query  
154 genes were selected, creating a test set of 600 genes in total. For these 600 genes SHOOT  
155 was evaluated on its accuracy in identifying the orthologs in human. For comparison BLAST  
156 best hit (BH) and reciprocal best hit (RBH) were likewise evaluated (Figure 3B). SHOOT  
157 was between 11% (Mouse) and 47% (*S. cerevisiae*) more accurate than either method using  
158 BLAST and the difference was greatest for more diverged species (Figure 3B). The greatest  
159 difference between SHOOT and BLAST was in the percentage of orthologs that were  
160 recovered (Recall, Figure 3C). For all species, the ortholog recall for SHOOT was >79%.  
161 Whereas the ortholog recall for BLAST RBH was for 37% for *S. cerevisiae*, the most distant  
162 species from human in the analysis (Figure 3C). The precision of SHOOT orthologs was  
163 intermediate between BLAST RBH and BH (Figure 3D). Thus, SHOOT ortholog  
164 assignments are more accurate than performing a “top hit” or “reciprocal best BLAST hit”  
165 analysis for identification of orthologs.

166 ***Curated databases place the gene in the context of model species and key events in***  
167 ***the gene’s evolution***

168 The initial release of SHOOT includes phylogenetic databases for Metazoa, Fungi, Plants,  
169 Bacteria & Archaea, and also the UniProt Quest for Orthologs (QfO) reference proteomes,  
170 which cover all domains of cellular life (Supplementary Tables 1-5). To maximise the utility  
171 of the gene trees to a wide range of researchers, the species within the databases have  
172 been chosen to contain model species, species of economic or scientific importance, and  
173 species selected because of their key location within the evolutionary history covered by the  
174 database. Each database also contains multiple outgroup species to allow robust rooting of  
175 the set of gene trees. As an example, Supplementary Figure 2 shows the phylogeny for the  
176 metazoan database, highlighting the taxonomic groups of the included species. Although a

177 number of databases are provided on the SHOOT webserver, the SHOOT command line  
178 tool has been designed so that databases can be compiled from any species set.

179 ***Discussion and Conclusions***

180 SHOOT is a phylogenetic search engine for analysis of biological sequences. It has been  
181 designed to take a user-provided query sequence and return a phylogenetic analysis of that  
182 sequence using a database of reference organisms. We show that SHOOT can perform this  
183 search and analysis with comparable speed to a typical sequence similarity search and thus  
184 SHOOT is provided as a phylogenetically informative alternative to BLAST, and as a  
185 general-purpose sequence search algorithm for analysis and retrieval of related biological  
186 sequences.

187 Local similarity or profile-based search methods such as BLAST [11], DIAMOND [5] or  
188 MMseqs [18] have a wide range of uses across the biological and biomedical sciences. The  
189 near-ubiquitous utility of these methods has led to them being referred to as the Google of  
190 biological research. However, one of the most frequent use cases of these searches is to  
191 identify orthologs of a given query sequence. Due to the frequent occurrence of gene  
192 duplication and loss, orthologs are often indistinguishable from paralogs in the results of  
193 local similarity searches. This is because a given query sequence can have none, one, or  
194 many orthologs in a related species. Accordingly, the sequences identified by local similarity  
195 searching methods will be an unknown mixture of orthologs and paralogs [19]. The problem  
196 of distinguishing orthologs from paralogs can be partially mitigated by a reciprocal best hit  
197 search, but with low recall [19]. Phylogenetic methods are required to correctly distinguish  
198 orthologs from paralogs as they are readily able to distinguish sequence similarity (branch  
199 length) and evolutionary relationships (the topology of the tree).

200 SHOOT was designed to provide the accuracy and information of a phylogenetic analysis  
201 with the speed and simplicity of a local sequence similarity search. By pre-computing the

202 within-database sequence relationships, SHOOT can perform an individual search in a  
203 comparable time to BLAST. However, instead of returning a list of similar sequences  
204 SHOOT provides a full maximum-likelihood phylogenetic tree as a result enabling immediate  
205 phylogenetic interrogation of the sequence search results. A phylogenetic tree provides the  
206 best representation available of the evolutionary history of a gene family. The tree allows  
207 the identification of speciation and gene duplication events and thus the identification of  
208 orthologs and paralogs. While, SHOOT identifies orthologs and paralogs algorithmically the  
209 phylogenetic tree can and should also be examined by a user to gain an understanding of  
210 how the gene family has evolved, using the orthology assignment by SHOOT as a guide.

211 A standard phylogenetic approach to identifying orthologs of a query gene is to begin a local  
212 sequence similarity search or profile search (HMMER [20], MMseqs [18]). Frequently, an e-  
213 value cut-off is applied to identify a set of similar sequences for subsequent phylogenetic  
214 analysis. Because e-values (and their constituent bit-scores) are imperfectly correlated with  
215 evolutionary relatedness, the set of similar sequences meeting the search threshold will  
216 often be missing some genes as well as often including genes that should not be present. A  
217 systematic study using HMMER found that for all  $n$  genes from an orthogroup clade to pass  
218 an e-value threshold, on average the threshold would have to be set such that  $1.8n$  genes  
219 in total met the threshold [21]. i.e. an additional 80% of genes needed to be included, on  
220 average, to ensure the orthogroup was complete [21]. Thus, unless a very lenient search is  
221 used, genes will be incorrectly absent from the final tree. This can lead to incorrect rooting  
222 and subsequent mis-interpretation even by phylogenetic experts [21]. Thus, even for  
223 bespoke phylogenetic analyses, it is better to use phylogenetic methods to first select the  
224 clade of genes of interest. SHOOT supports this by inferring the tree for the entire family of  
225 detectable homologs. The use of trees for complete sets of homologs, together with the use  
226 of OrthoFinder's robust tree-rooting algorithm [13], avoids the problem of mis-rooting and  
227 misinterpretation of a tree inferred for a more limited set of genes. Also, by using OrthoFinder

228 clustering approach [13, 22], hits missed for a single sequence are also corrected by multiple  
229 hits identified for its homologs. This “phylogenetic gene selection workflow” is supported by  
230 SHOOT’s web interface, which allows a clade of genes to be selected and the protein  
231 sequences for just this clade to be downloaded for downstream user analyses.

232 In summary, SHOOT was designed to be as easy to use as BLAST, but to provide  
233 phylogenetically resolved results in which the query sequence is correctly placed in a  
234 phylogenetic tree. In this way the phylogenetic history of the query sequence and its  
235 orthologs can be immediately visualised, interpreted, and retrieved.

## 236 **Materials and Methods**

### 237 ***Database preparation***

238 SHOOT consists of a database preparation program and a database search program. The  
239 database preparation program takes as input the results of an OrthoFinder [13] analysis of  
240 a set of proteomes.

241 To prepare phylogenetic databases for the SHOOT website, the OrthoFinder version 3.0  
242 option, “-c1”, was used to cluster genes into groups consisting of all homologs, rather than  
243 the default behaviour which is to split homologous groups at the level of orthogroups. The  
244 advantage of the creating complete homologous groups is that their gene trees show an  
245 expanded evolutionary history of those genes, including ancient gene duplication events  
246 linking gene families, rather than only reaching back to the last common ancestor of the  
247 included species. This differs from a default OrthoFinder orthogroup analysis, for which the  
248 partitioning of genes into taxonomically comparable orthogroups groups is the priority.  
249 OrthoFinder-inferred rooted gene trees for these homolog groups are computed using  
250 MAFFT [23] and IQ-TREE [24] by using the additional options “-M msa -A mafft -T iqtree -s  
251 species\_tree.nwk”, where “species\_tree.nwk” was the rooted species tree for the included

252 species. For IQ-TREE, the best fitting evolutionary model was tested for using “-m TEST”  
253 and bootstrap replicates performed using “-bb 1000”.

254 The OrthoFinder results were converted to a SHOOT database in two steps: splitting of large  
255 trees and creation of the DIAMOND profiles database for assigning novel sequences to their  
256 correct gene tree. Large trees are split since the time requirements for adding a sequence  
257 to an MSA for a homologous group and for adding a sequence to its tree can grow super-  
258 linearly in the size of the group, leading to needlessly long runtimes. It was found that  
259 DIAMOND could instead be used to assign a gene to its correct subtree and then  
260 phylogenetic placement could be applied to assign the gene to its correct position within the  
261 subtree (Figure 4).

262 The script “split\_large\_tree.py” was used to split any tree larger than 2500 genes into  
263 subtrees of no more than 2500 genes each. Each subtree tree also contained an outgroup  
264 gene, from outside the clade in the tree for that subtree, which was required for the later  
265 sequence search stage. For each tree that was split into subtrees, a super-tree was also  
266 created by the script of the phylogenetic relationships linking the subtrees. For each subtree,  
267 the script extracted the sub-MSA for later use. This subtree size of 2500 genes was chosen  
268 as it is the approximate upper limit tree size for which SHOOT could place a novel query  
269 gene in the tree in 15 seconds. This was judged to be a reasonable wait for users of the  
270 website to receive the tree for their query sequence. For the databases provided by the  
271 SHOOT website, between 2 and 40 of the largest trees were split into subtrees.

272 The script “create\_shoot\_db.py” was used to create a DIAMOND database of “profiles” for  
273 each unsplit tree or each subtree. A profile here refers to a set of representative sequences  
274 that best describe the sequence variability within a homologous group. These profiles are  
275 used to assign a novel query sequence to the correct tree or subtree. The representative  
276 sequences for a gene tree are selected using k-means clustering applied to the MSA  
277 corresponding to that (sub)tree using the python library Scikit-learn [25]. For each cluster,

278 the sequence closest to the centroid is chosen as a representative. For a homologous group  
279 of size N genes,  $k=N/10$  representative sequences are used, with a minimum of  $\min(20, N)$   
280 representative sequences. This ensures that large and diverse homologous groups have  
281 sufficient representative sequences in the assignment database.

282 ***Database search***

283 A query sequence is searched against the profiles database using DIAMOND [5] with default  
284 sensitivity and an e-value cut-off of  $10^{-3}$ . If no hit is found, a second search is performed with  
285 the "--ultra-sensitive" setting. The top hitting sequence is used to assign the gene to the  
286 correct tree or subtree. The query gene is added to the pre-computed alignment using the  
287 MAFFT “--add” option and a phylogenetic tree is computed from this alignment using the  
288 precomputed tree for the reference alignment using EPA-ng [12] and gappa [26].

289 If the gene is added to a subtree then the tree is rooted on the outgroup sequence for that  
290 subtree. The outgroup is then removed from the subtree and the subtree is grafted back into  
291 the original larger tree, using the supertree to determine the overall topology. This method  
292 provides the accuracy of phylogenetic analysis to place the gene in its correct position within  
293 the subtree while at the same time providing the user with the full gene history for the  
294 complete homologous group given by the supertree, which was calculated in full in the  
295 earlier database construction phase. All tree manipulations by SHOOT are performed using  
296 the ETE Toolkit [27].

297 ***Curated databases***

298 For the Plants database, the protein sequences derived from primary transcripts were  
299 downloaded from Phytozome [28]. The Uniport Reference Proteomes database was  
300 constructed using the 2020 Reference Proteomes [17]. For the Fungi and Metazoa  
301 databases the proteomes were downloaded from Ensembl [29] and the longest transcript  
302 variant of each gene was selected as a representative of that gene using OrthoFinder’s  
303 “primary\_transcripts.py” script [13]. The Bacterial and Archaeal database proteomes were

304 downloaded from UniProt [30]. The parallelisation of tasks in the preparation of the  
305 databases was performed using GNU parallel [31].

306 ***Accuracy validation & performance***

307 The UniProt Reference Proteomes database was used for validation of the SHOOT  
308 phylogenetic placements using a leave-one-out test. As this database covers the greatest  
309 phylogenetic range (covering all domains of life), its homologous groups contain the greatest  
310 sequence variability, and it provides the severest test of the accuracy of SHOOT. Test cases  
311 were constructed by selecting 1000 'cherries' (pairs of genes sister to one another) with 95%  
312 bootstrap support from gene trees with median bootstrap support of at least 95%. The use  
313 of cherries allowed BLAST to be tested alongside SHOOT. This test was possible for BLAST  
314 since it would only have to identify a single closest gene, rather than having to identify a  
315 gene as the sister gene to a whole clade of genes (as SHOOT is designed to be able to do).  
316 The bootstrap support criteria ensured that the correct result was known with high  
317 confidence so that both methods could be assessed accurately. To ensure an even sampling  
318 of test cases, at most one test case was extracted from any one gene tree. Both the BLAST  
319 and SHOOT databases were completely pruned of the 1000 test cases. Each of the 1000  
320 test cases was run using 16 cores of an Intel Xeon E5-2683 CPU and the runtime recorded  
321 (Figure 2).

322 To calculate the Mean Average Precision at k score, the expected trees were re-inferred  
323 using RAxML with the best-fitting model [32] so that a different method were used to that  
324 used in the SHOOT database construction. For each test gene the ordered list of closest  
325 homologs was calculated using branch length distance in the SHOOT results trees and e-  
326 values (with ties broken by bit score) for the BLAST results. These ordered homologs were  
327 compared to the expected ordered list of closest homologs from the expected RAxML trees  
328 to calculate the precision at each value of k from 1 to 50 and these precision scores were  
329 averaged over the 1000 test cases.

330 The ortholog prediction accuracy tests calculated the precision, recall and F-score for  
331 identifying orthologs in *Homo sapiens* for genes from *Mus musculus*, *Gallus gallus*, *Danio*  
332 *rerio*, *Ciona intestinalis*, *Drosophila melanogaster* and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. For each  
333 of these 6 species 100 genes were sampled at random. The expected orthologs were  
334 obtained from OrthoFinder 2020 Quest for Orthologs benchmark results, obtained from the  
335 benchmarking server: <https://orthology.benchmarkservice.org>. . For SHOOT, the orthologs  
336 were inferred using the species-overlap method [15] on the SHOOT results trees. For  
337 BLAST orthologs were predicted using the best hit (BH) method and the reciprocal best hit  
338 (RBH) method using the e-value scores.

339 ***SHOOT website***

340 The tree visualisation is provided by the phylotree.js library [33]. The SHOOT website is  
341 implemented in JavaScript and Bootstrap and using the Flask web framework.

342 ***Declarations***

343 ***Ethics approval and consent to participate***

344 Not applicable

345 ***Consent for publication***

346 Not applicable

347 ***Availability of data and material***

348 The SHOOT source code is available at <https://github.com/davidemms/SHOOT>. The code  
349 for the SHOOT webserver is available at  
350 [https://github.com/davidemms/SHOOT\\_webserver](https://github.com/davidemms/SHOOT_webserver). A compressed archive of all data is  
351 available at the Zenodo research data archive at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5602736>  
352 [34]. A webserver running SHOOT is available at <https://shoot.bio>.

353 ***Competing interests***

354 The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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359 **Authors' contributions**

360 DE and SK conceived and designed the project. DE developed the algorithms. DE and SK  
361 discussed the results and wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final  
362 manuscript.

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452

453 **Figure Legends**

454 **Figure 1.** The workflow for the two separate stages of SHOOT: **A)** The database preparation  
455 stage. **B)** The sequence search stage. MSA, multiple sequence alignment. HG, homologous  
456 group. Individual shapes represent individual protein sequences.

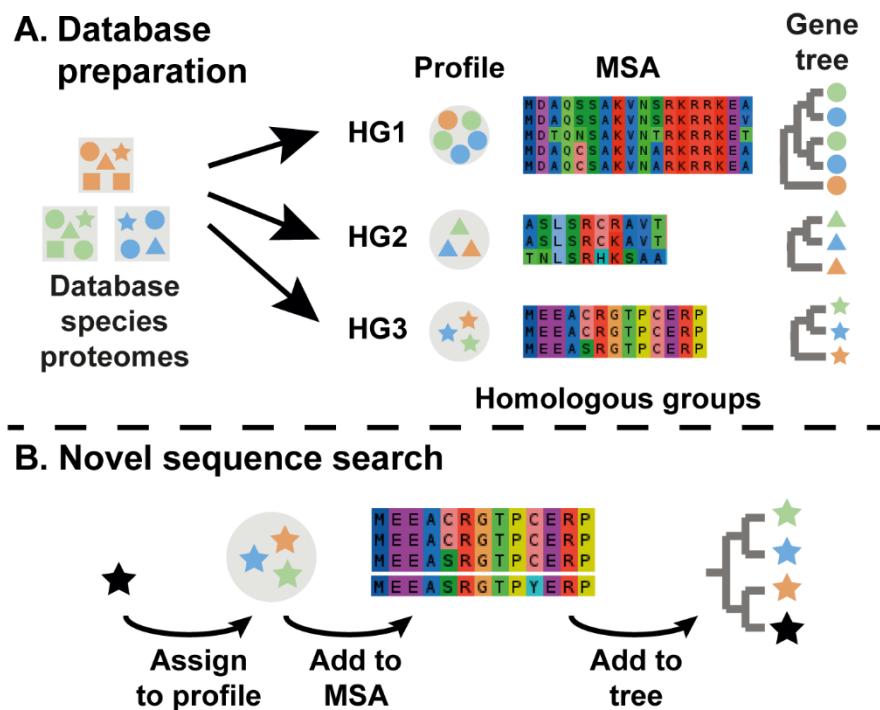
457 **Figure 2.** Runtime and closest homologs identification accuracy for SHOOT and BLAST..  
458 A) Violin plot of runtimes for 1000 searches of randomly sampled sequences against the  
459 same database of 984,137 protein sequences from 78 species. B) Accuracy at identifying  
460 the closest related database gene to a randomly selected query sequence. C) Mean  
461 Average Precision at k (MAP@k).

462 **Figure 3.** F-score, precision and recall at identifying orthologs in *Homo sapiens* for 100  
463 query genes in each of *Mus musculus*, *Gallus gallus*, *Danio rerio*, *Ciona intestinalis*,  
464 *Drosophila melanogaster* and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* for BLAST best hit (BH), BLAST  
465 reciprocal best hit (RBH) and SHOOT.

466

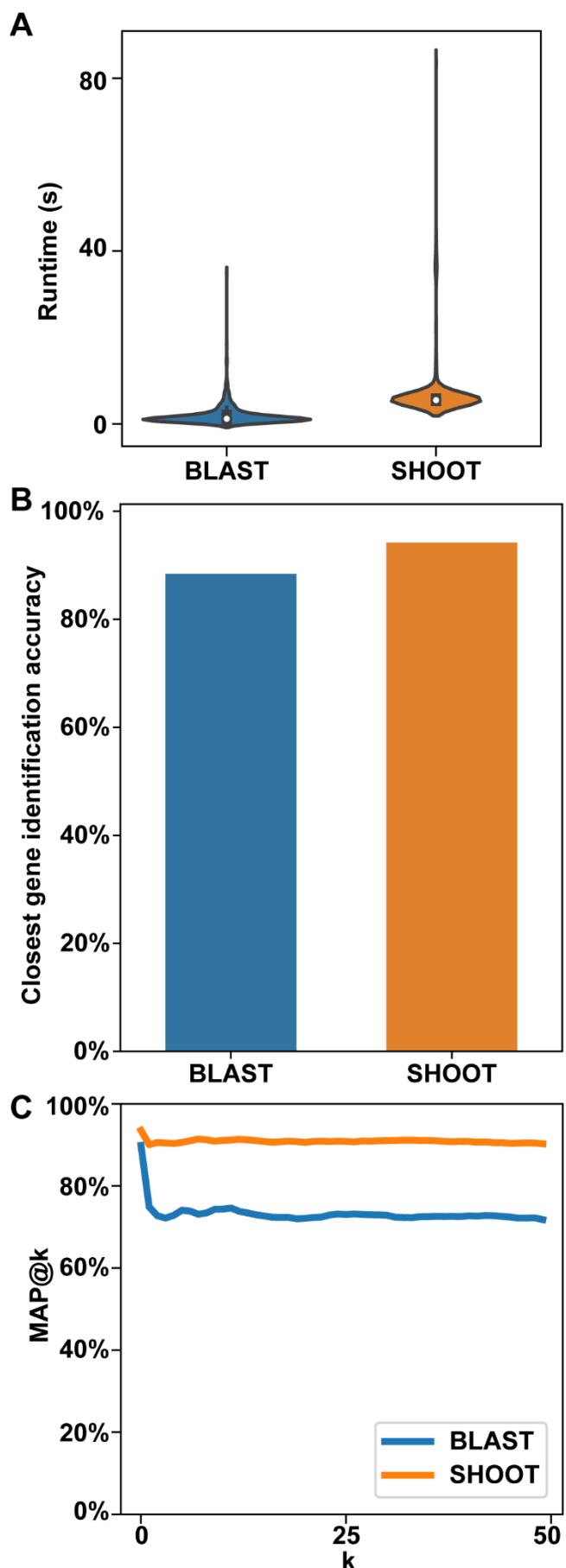
467 **Figures**

468 **Figure 1**



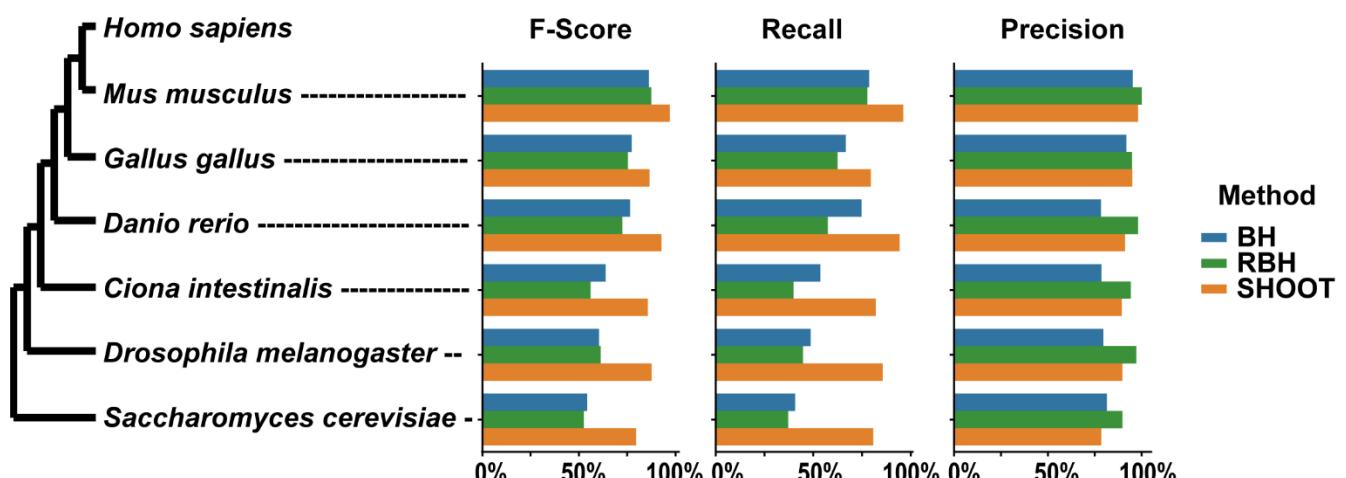
469

470 **Figure 2**



471

472 **Figure 3**



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474

475 **Supplementary Table 1: UniProt 2020 Reference Proteomes – Species list**

Domain	Species
Archaea	<i>Halobacterium salinarum</i>
Archaea	<i>Korarchaeum cryptofilum</i>
Archaea	<i>Methanocaldococcus jannaschii</i>
Archaea	<i>Methanosarcina acetivorans</i>
Archaea	<i>Nitrosopumilus maritimus</i>
Archaea	<i>Saccharolobus solfataricus</i>
Archaea	<i>Thermococcus kodakarensis</i>
Bacteria	<i>Aquifex aeolicus</i>
Bacteria	<i>Bacillus subtilis</i>
Bacteria	<i>Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron</i>
Bacteria	<i>Bradyrhizobium diazoefficiens</i>
Bacteria	<i>Chlamydia trachomatis</i>
Bacteria	<i>Chloroflexus aurantiacus</i>
Bacteria	<i>Deinococcus radiodurans</i>
Bacteria	<i>Dictyoglomus turgidum</i>
Bacteria	<i>Escherichia coli</i>
Bacteria	<i>Fusobacterium nucleatum</i>
Bacteria	<i>Geobacter sulfurreducens</i>
Bacteria	<i>Gloeobacter violaceus</i>
Bacteria	<i>Helicobacter pylori</i>
Bacteria	<i>Leptospira interrogans</i>
Bacteria	<i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i>
Bacteria	<i>Mycoplasma genitalium</i>
Bacteria	<i>Neisseria meningitidis</i>
Bacteria	<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i>
Bacteria	<i>Rhodopirellula baltica</i>
Bacteria	<i>Streptomyces coelicolor</i>
Bacteria	<i>Synechocystis sp.</i>
Bacteria	<i>Thermodesulfovibrio yellowstonii</i>
Bacteria	<i>Thermotoga maritima</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Anopheles gambiae</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Bos taurus</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Branchiostoma floridae</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Caenorhabditis elegans</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Candida albicans</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Chlamydomonas reinhardtii</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Ciona intestinalis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Cryptococcus neoformans</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Danio rerio</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Dictyostelium discoideum</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Drosophila melanogaster</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Giardia intestinalis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Gorilla gorilla gorilla</i>

Eukaryota	<i>Helobdella robusta</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Homo sapiens</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Ixodes scapularis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Leishmania major</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Lepisosteus oculatus</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Monodelphis domestica</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Monosiga brevicollis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Mus musculus</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Nematostella vectensis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Neosartorya fumigata</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Neurospora crassa</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Oryza sativa subsp. japonica</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Oryzias latipes</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Paramecium tetraurelia</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Phaeosphaeria nodorum</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Physcomitrella patens</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Phytophthora ramorum</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Plasmodium falciparum</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Puccinia graminis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Schizosaccharomyces pombe</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Sclerotinia sclerotiorum</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Thalassiosira pseudonana</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Tribolium castaneum</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Trichomonas vaginalis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Ustilago maydis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Xenopus tropicalis</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Yarrowia lipolytica</i>
Eukaryota	<i>Zea mays</i>

476

477

478 **Supplementary Table 2: Fungi species list**

<i>Agaricus bisporus</i>	<i>Cryptococcus neoformans</i>	<i>Rhizoctonia solani</i>
<i>Amanita muscaria</i>	<i>Encephalitozoon intestinalis</i>	<i>Rhizopus delemar</i>
<i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	<i>Enterocytozoon bieneusi</i>	<i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i>
<i>Aspergillus nidulans</i>	<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>	<i>Schizosaccharomyces pombe</i>
<i>Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans</i>	<i>Magnaporthe oryzae</i>	<i>Sclerotinia sclerotiorum</i>
<i>Blumeria graminis</i>	<i>Mortierella elongata</i>	<i>Spizellomyces punctatus</i>
<i>Botrytis cinerea</i>	<i>Neurospora crassa</i>	<i>Ustilago maydis</i>
<i>Candida albicans</i>	<i>Phaeosphaeria nodorum</i>	<i>Yarrowia lipolytica</i>
<i>Colletotrichum graminicola</i>	<i>Puccinia graminis</i>	<i>Zymoseptoria tritici</i>

479

480 **Outgroup**

<i>Caenorhabditis elegans</i>	<i>Homo sapiens</i>	<i>Dictyostelium discoideum</i>
<i>Drosophila melanogaster</i>	<i>Monosiga brevicollis</i>	

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482

483 **Supplementary Table 3: Metazoan species list**

<i>Amphimedon queenslandica</i>	<i>Danio rerio</i>	<i>Octopus bimaculoides</i>
<i>Anolis carolinensis</i>	<i>Daphnia magna</i>	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>
<i>Anopheles gambiae</i>	<i>Drosophila melanogaster</i>	<i>Ornithorhynchus anatinus</i>
<i>Apis mellifera</i>	<i>Gadus morhua</i>	<i>Oryzias latipes</i>
<i>Astatotilapia calliptera</i>	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>
<i>Bombyx mori</i>	<i>Glossina morsitans</i>	<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>
<i>Bos taurus</i>	<i>Helobdella robusta</i>	<i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i>
<i>Branchiostoma lanceolatum</i>	<i>Homo sapiens</i>	<i>Poecilia formosa</i>
<i>Bubo bubo</i>	<i>Ixodes scapularis</i>	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>
<i>Caenorhabditis elegans</i>	<i>Latimeria chalumnae</i>	<i>Schistosoma mansoni</i>
<i>Callithrix jacchus</i>	<i>Lepisosteus oculatus</i>	<i>Strongylocentrotus purpuratus</i>
<i>Callorhinchus milii</i>	<i>Leptobrachium leishanense</i>	<i>Tetraodon nigroviridis</i>
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	<i>Mnemiopsis leidyi</i>	<i>Thelohanellus kitauei</i>
<i>Chrysemys picta</i>	<i>Monodelphis domestica</i>	<i>Trichinella spiralis</i>
<i>Ciona intestinalis</i>	<i>Mus musculus</i>	<i>Trichoplax adhaerens</i>
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	<i>Nematostella vectensis</i>	<i>Xenopus tropicalis</i>
<i>Amphimedon queenslandica</i>	<i>Danio rerio</i>	<i>Octopus bimaculoides</i>

484

485 **Outgroup**

<i>Dictyostelium discoideum</i>	<i>Phaeosphaeria nodorum</i>	<i>Schizosaccharomyces pombe</i>
<i>Monosiga brevicollis</i>	<i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i>	

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487

488 **Supplementary Table 4: Plants species list**

<i>Amborella trichopoda</i>	<i>Glycine max</i>	<i>Picea glauca</i>
<i>Anthoceros punctatus</i>	<i>Gossypium raimondii</i>	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>
<i>Aquilegia coerulea</i>	<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	<i>Prunus persica</i>
<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	<i>Manihot esculenta</i>	<i>Selaginella moellendorffii</i>
<i>Azolla filiculoides</i>	<i>Marchantia polymorpha</i>	<i>Setaria italica</i>
<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	<i>Micromonas spRCC299</i>	<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>
<i>Chara braunii</i>	<i>Musa acuminata</i>	<i>Spirodela polyrhiza</i>
<i>Chlamydomonas reinhardtii</i>	<i>Oryza sativa</i>	<i>Triticum aestivum</i>
<i>Eucalyptus grandis</i>	<i>Ostreococcus lucimarinus</i>	<i>Volvox carteri</i>
<i>Gingko biloba</i>	<i>Physcomitrella patens</i>	<i>Zea mays</i>

489

490 **Outgroup**

<i>Chondrus crispus</i>	<i>Chondrus crispus</i>	<i>Chondrus crispus</i>
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492

493 **Supplementary Table 5: Bacterial & Archaeal strains list**

UniProt proteome	NCBI taxon	Name in SHOOT	Selection
UP000000425	122586	<i>Neisseria_meningitidis</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000429	85962	<i>Helicobacter_pylori</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000431	272561	<i>Chlamydia_trachomatis</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000536	69014	<i>Thermococcus_kodakarensis</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000554	64091	<i>Halobacterium_salinarum</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000557	251221	<i>Gloeobacter_violaceus</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000577	243231	<i>Geobacter_sulfurreducens</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000625	83333	<i>Escherichia_coli</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000718	289376	<i>Thermodesulfovibrio_yellowstonii</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000792	436308	<i>Nitrosopumilus_maritimus</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000798	224324	<i>Aquifex_aeolicus</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000805	243232	<i>Methanocaldococcus_jannaschii</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000807	243273	<i>Mycoplasma_genitalium</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001025	243090	<i>Rhodopirellula_baltica</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001408	189518	<i>Leptospira_interrogans</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001414	226186	<i>Bacteroides_thetaiotaomicron</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001425	1111708	<i>Synechocystis_kazusa</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001570	224308	<i>Bacillus_subtilis</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001584	83332	<i>Mycobacterium_tuberculosis</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001686	374847	<i>Korarchaeum_cryptofilum</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001973	100226	<i>Streptomyces_coelicolor</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000001974	273057	<i>Saccharolobus_solfataricus</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000002008	324602	<i>Chloroflexus_aurantiacus</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000002438	208964	<i>Pseudomonas_aeruginosa</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000002487	188937	<i>Methanosarcina_acetivorans</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000002521	190304	<i>Fusobacterium_nucleatum</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000002524	243230	<i>Deinococcus_radiodurans</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000002526	224911	<i>Bradyrhizobium_diazoefficiens</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000007719	515635	<i>Dictyoglomus_turgidum</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000008183	243274	<i>Thermotoga_maritima</i>	QfO UniProt ref. prot.
UP000000265	272620	<i>Klebsiella_pneumoniae</i>	Highly cited
UP000000579	71421	<i>Haemophilus_influenzae</i>	Highly cited
UP000000580	262316	<i>Mycobacterium_paratuberculosis</i>	Highly cited
UP000000584	243277	<i>Vibrio_cholerae</i>	Highly cited
UP000000586	171101	<i>Streptococcus_pneumoniae</i>	Highly cited
UP000000588	242619	<i>Porphyromonas_gingivalis</i>	Highly cited
UP000000609	272624	<i>Legionella_pneumophila</i>	Highly cited
UP000000799	192222	<i>Campylobacter jejuni</i>	Highly cited
UP000000813	176299	<i>Agrobacterium_fabrum</i>	Highly cited
UP000000815	632	<i>Yersinia_pestis</i>	Highly cited
UP000000817	169963	<i>Listeria_monocytogenes</i>	Highly cited
UP000000818	195102	<i>Clostridium_perfringens</i>	Highly cited
UP000001006	623	<i>Shigella_flexneri</i>	Highly cited
UP000001014	99287	<i>Salmonella_typhimurium</i>	Highly cited
UP000001978	272563	<i>Clostridioides_difficile</i>	Highly cited
UP000002196	272623	<i>Lactococcus_lactis</i>	Highly cited
UP000002256	395491	<i>Rhizobium_leguminosarum</i>	Highly cited

UP000006381	272621	<i>Lactobacillus_acidophilus</i>	Highly cited
UP000007477	871585	<i>Acinetobacter_calcoaceticus</i>	Highly cited
UP000008319	529507	<i>Proteus_mirabilis</i>	Highly cited
UP000008816	93061	<i>Staphylococcus_aureus</i>	Highly cited
UP000014594	1260356	<i>Enterococcus_faecalis</i>	Highly cited
UP000075229	140	<i>Borrelia_hermsii</i>	Highly cited
UP000198289	615	<i>Serratia_marcescens</i>	Highly cited
UP00028936	1528098	<i>Rickettsiales_bacterium</i>	Mitochondrion relative
UP000180235	1188229	<i>Gloeomargarita_lithophora</i>	Chloroplast relative
UP000000543	279808	<i>Staphylococcus_haemolyticus</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000000547	167879	<i>Colwellia_psychrerythraea</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000000645	232721	<i>Acidovorax_JS42</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000001169	272569	<i>Haloarcula_marismortui</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000001361	883	<i>Desulfovibrio_vulgaris</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000001362	243159	<i>Acidithiobacillus_ferrooxidans</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000001961	64471	<i>Synechococcus_CC9311</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002011	471854	<i>Dyadobacter_fermentans</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002139	448385	<i>Sorangium_cellulosum</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002145	203119	<i>Hungateiclostridium_thermocellum</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002148	388919	<i>Streptococcus_sanguinis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002208	546414	<i>Deinococcus_deserti</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002257	395965	<i>Methylocella_silvestris</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002386	471223	<i>Geobacillus_WCH70</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002457	521011	<i>Methanospaerula_palustris</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000002495	235279	<i>Helicobacter_hepaticus</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000003277	742743	<i>Dialister_succinatiphilus</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000003415	469616	<i>Fusobacterium_mortiferum</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000003446	661087	<i>Olsenella_F0356</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000003855	665956	<i>Subdoligranulum_4-3-54A2FAA</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000003981	621372	<i>Paenibacillus_D14</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000004073	1105031	<i>Clostridium_MSTE9</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000004090	428127	<i>Absiella_dolichum</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000004259	246199	<i>Ruminococcus_albus</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000004478	1225176	<i>Cecembia_ionarensis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000004870	638300	<i>Cardiobacterium_hominis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000005262	768704	<i>Desulfosporosinus_meridiei</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000006229	1131455	<i>Mycoplasma_canis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000006415	857290	<i>Scardovia_wiggiae</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000006556	370438	<i>Pelotomaculum_thermopropionicum</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000006743	557723	<i>Haemophilus_parasuis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000007271	1185325	<i>Lactobacillus_coryniformis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000007753	452662	<i>Sphingobium_japonicum</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000007995	997888	<i>Bacteroides_finegoldii</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000008204	41431	<i>Rippkaea_orientalis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000008212	243275	<i>Treponema_denticola</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000008308	263358	<i>Micromonospora_maris</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000008701	290317	<i>Chlorobium_phaeobacteroides</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000009044	634177	<i>Komagataeibacter_medellinensis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000009154	1112204	<i>Gordonia_polyisoprenivorans</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000011615	1230457	<i>Haloterrigena_limicola</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000011728	931276	<i>Clostridium_saccharoperbutylacetonicum</i>	Phylo. sampling

UP000013232	1123367	Thauera_linaloolentis	Phylo. sampling
UP000017993	1262970	Subdoligranulum_CAG314	Phylo. sampling
UP000018014	1262708	Bacillus_CAG988	Phylo. sampling
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UP000018237	1262989	Firmicutes_bacterium	Phylo. sampling
UP000018329	1262693	Alistipes_CAG268	Phylo. sampling
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UP000095256	762845	Enterococcus_rivorum	Phylo. sampling
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UP000316304	2528004	<i>Novipirellula galeiformis</i>	Phylo. sampling
UP000318165	92402	<i>Mycoplasma equirhinis</i>	Phylo. sampling
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UP000500686	754515	<i>Mycoplasma ES2806-GEN</i>	Phylo. sampling
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UP000503441	2714933	<i>Leucobacter HDW9A</i>	Phylo. sampling

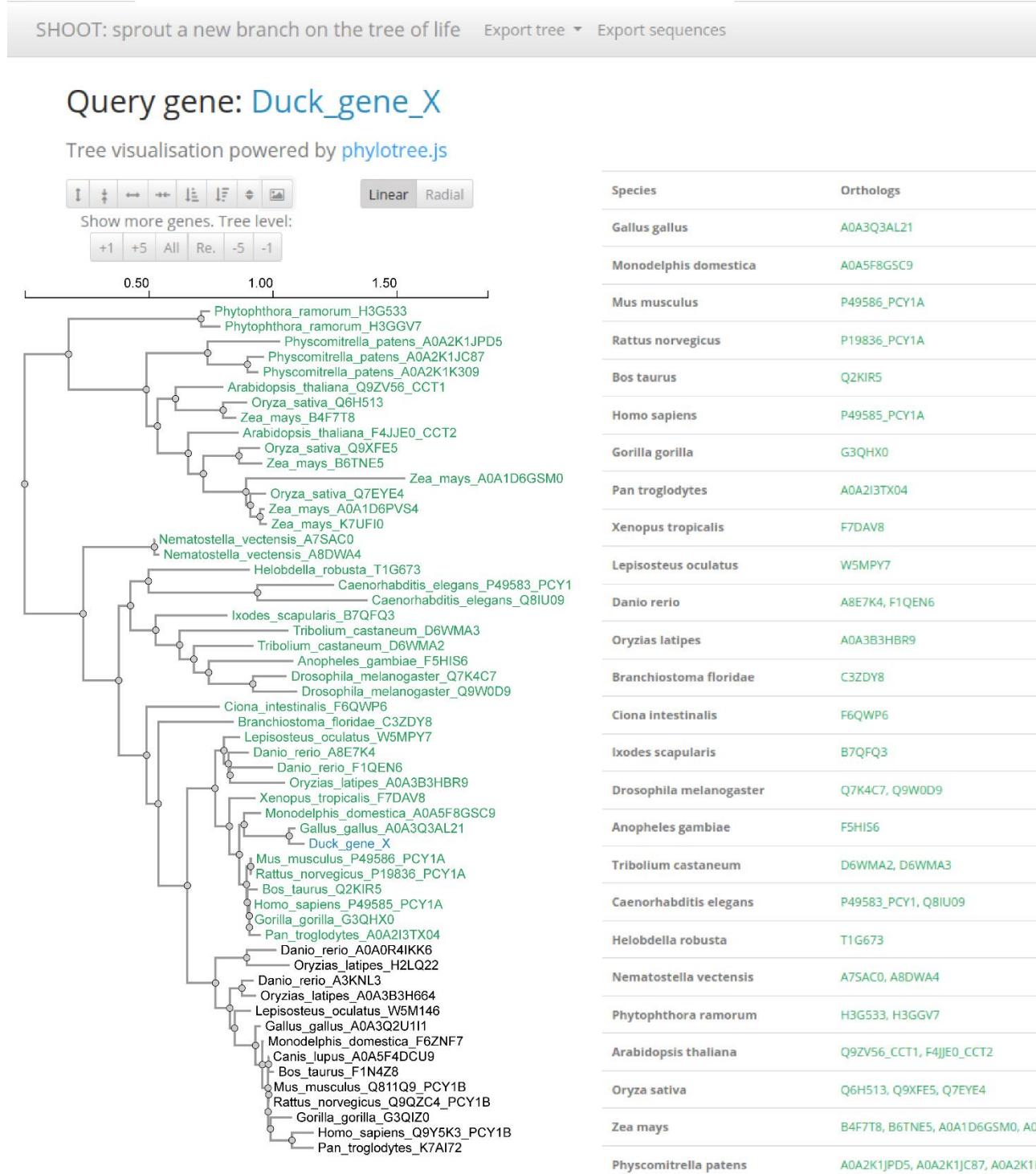
UP000505377	2736640	Pseudonocardia_broussonetiae	Phylo. sampling
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496 **Supplementary Figures**

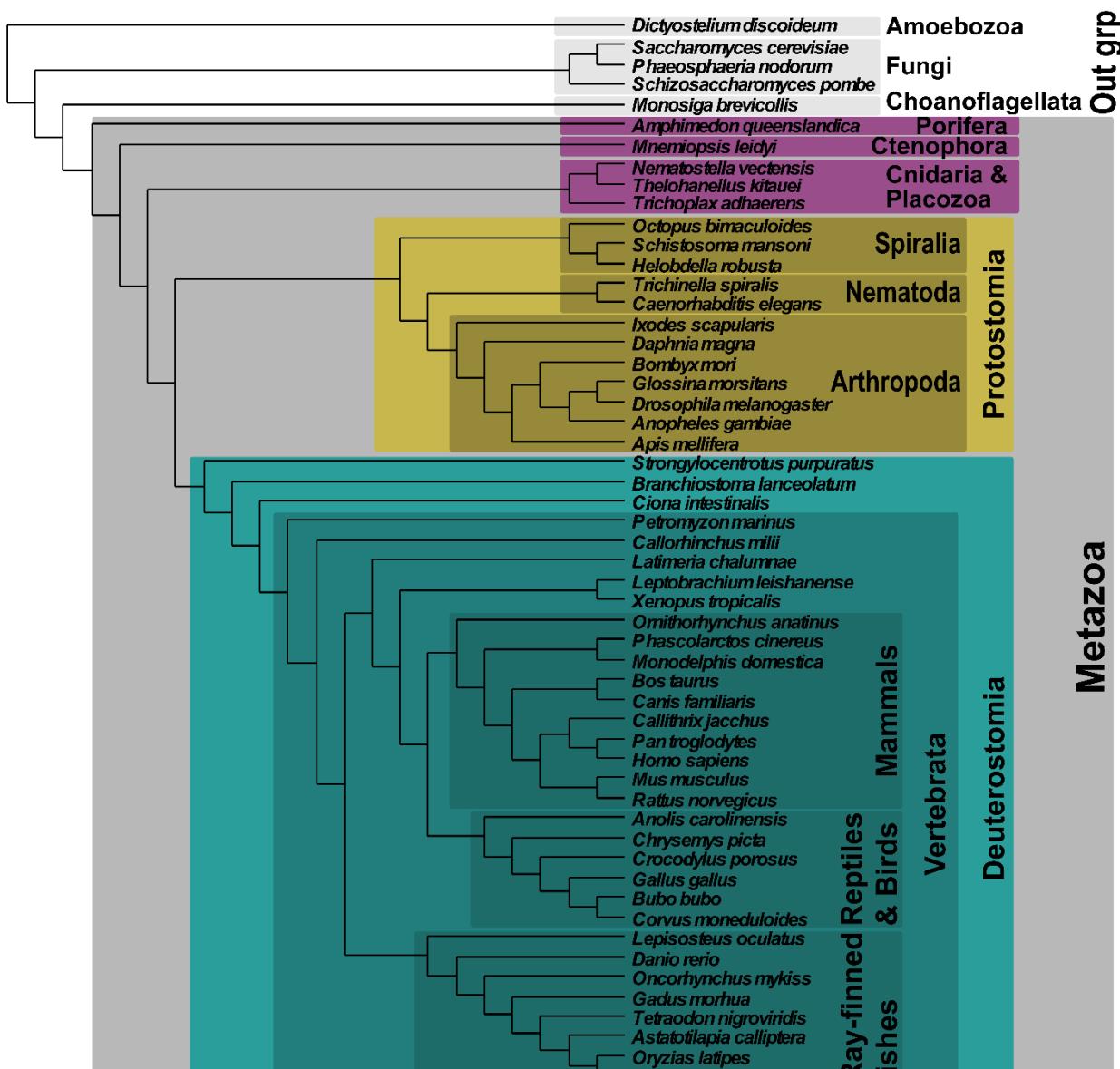
497 **Supplementary Figure 1**



498

499

500 Supplementary Figure 2



503 ***Supplementary Figure Legends***

504 **Supplementary Figure 1.** An example gene tree and orthologs table returned by SHOOT.

505 Here, the UniProt Reference Proteomes database was searched using a for a query gene

506 sequence labelled “Duck\_gene\_X”. This corresponds to the Duck protein

507 ENSAPLP00000002788, which is not included in the database.

508

509 **Supplementary Figure 2.** Phylogeny for the species in the Metazoan dataset.