

Outline of lectures 25-26

Chromosome Evolution

1. Chromosomes can change by many kinds of rearrangement. These involve breakage of chromosomes and rejoining. Chromosomes when broken have “sticky ends” that seem to want to be healed by sticking to another sticky end. We now know that these sticky ends are DNA helices, whose stickiness comes from a partially single-stranded stretch at the end. *Telomeres*, the ends of the chromosomes, are not sticky – we now know that they have a covalent bond across the end of the chromosome between the two helices.
2. *Inversions* are rearrangements that make two breaks in the same chromosome, and flip the piece in between. They are of two types: *pericentric* (inversions that include a centromere) and *paracentric* (those that do not).
3. Immediately after a paracentric inversion occurs, or after a paracentric inversion chromosome is passed on to an individual which also has a normal, uninverted chromosome, the individual is an *inversion heterozygote* (at the chromosome level – the individual genes may or may not be heterozygous). Heterozygotes for paracentric inversions form at 1st division of meiosis a loop. If there is crossing-over in such a structure, two gametes of the four are normal, one has two centromeres and forms a chromosome *bridge* and the other has no centromeres and gets lost.
4. The result are gametes that have duplications or deficiencies, so they do not have the same number of copies of all loci. This generally results in lethality (or at least sterility) of the offspring. In *Drosophila*, however, there happens to be no crossing-over in males, and in females the cells line up in such a way that a bridge will involve two of the three cells out of four that will not be parents of the egg. So the loss of offspring by crossing-over in paracentric inversions is much less in *Drosophila*. They have a lot of polymorphisms for paracentric inversions.
5. Pericentric inversion heterozygotes also form a loop at meiosis. Crossing-over does not lead to bridge-fragment problems, but results in two of the four gametes being duplication/deficiency gametes, and again the offspring are lost.
6. Thus inversions will generally be partially underdominant (to the extent that there is crossing-over within them) and they will be strongly selected against. They may be able to fix only in small populations, or if they happen to occur in a highly fit chromosome.
7. Once they fix, the new population is not at any disadvantage (at least unless there are “position effects” where genes care where they are on the chromosome).

8. *Translocations* are double-break events that exchange a segment of one chromosome with part of another. In heterozygotes, a cross configuration forms at meiosis. If the segregation is *adjacent*, duplication-deficiency problems arise and the gamete will result in inviable offspring. If the segregation is *alternate* there is no such problem. The fraction of adjacent segregations is near 50% but varies depending on how close to the centromeres the break points are.
9. Crossing over modifies which kind of segregation – adjacent or alternate – gets the gamete into duplication-deficiency trouble, but it's about 50-50 anyway,
10. Thus translocations too are resisted as a result of being underdominant.
11. The preceding kinds of rearrangements change the relative sizes of chromosome arms but not the numbers of chromosomes.
12. Chromosome numbers vary widely (from 1 pair to 610 pairs!) and there is no obvious correlation of this with anything of evolutionary importance. However they do not vary infinitely rapidly, and related species do have similar chromosome numbers.
13. Chromosomes can be *metacentric* (have two roughly equal-sized arms) *acrocentric* (have two very unequal-sized arms, or *telocentric* have one arm and the other too small to be noticed.
14. *Robertsonian fusions or fissions* are rearrangements that combine two telocentrics into one metacentric (or acrocentric), or which split one chromosome into two telocentrics.
15. (*Not covered in lecture but worth mentioning*). After a Robertsonian rearrangement there may be segregation problems in a chromosome heterozygote, unless the two centromeres of the telocentrics tend to go to the same pole. This can again result in underdominance.
16. If two species with different chromosomes cross, if they are different enough not to pair as bivalents, big segregation problems can arise owing to *aneuploidy* (not equal numbers of all chromosomes) with duplication-deficiency gametes.
17. However, if the cross doubles its chromosome complement by an unreduced division happening, then one can get all chromosomes pairing normally. This individual is a *polyploid*, specifically a *tetraploid* (and more specifically an *allotetraploid* as its tetraploidy combines two different diploid genomes).
18. Tetraploids may be relatively normal, as they have equal numbers of all genes (though twice as many of all of them). They thus have comparable dosages of all loci. But they will produce *triploid* offspring when they mate with a normal diploid, and those do not have proper segregation and get into big trouble with aneuploidy when they produce gametes themselves.
19. A tetraploid is thus a “hopeful monster” with no one to mate with.

20. Tetraploidy is common among angiosperm plants who often have both sexes on the same plant, and thus have no sex chromosomes and also have at least the possibility of self-fertilizing. Animals have it much more rarely (there are some exceptions: salmonid fishes are all doubled compared to their relatives) owing to problems with sex-determination in XXYY individuals and owing to not being able to self-fertilize.
21. Angiosperm plants often have groups that have numbers of chromosomes that can be sums of smaller numbers that are also present. Thus in the herbaceous plant *Clarkia* we find species with 8 pairs of chromosomes, some with 9 pairs, some that are tetraploids with 17 pairs ($= 8 + 9$) and some that are hexaploids with 26 ($= 17 + 9$).
22. Is there anything special about our chromosome numbers or shapes? Humans have 46 chromosomes (23 pairs), some large metacentrics and a fair number of smaller acrocentrics. This is about average for eutherian (placental) mammals, which range from 6 (in the Muntjak) to about 80.
23. Great apes have 48 chromosomes – there seems to have been a Robertsonian fusion in the lineage to humans. Which chromosomes fused is known. There is no reason to believe that this fusion was an important event in the evolution of humans.
24. Distributions of numbers of chromosomes and of their shapes (arm ratios) in various groups seem to come close to those predicted by random rearrangement models (work by H. Imai, T. Maruyama and Ross Crozier).
25. The number of chromosomes in eukaryotes ranges from 2 (the Australian ant *Myrmecia*) to about 1260 (the fern *Ophioglossum reticulatum*). The latter is probably the result of multiple rounds of polyploidy. With too many chromosomes, there are likely to be segregation problems. While this keeps the numbers from going too high, within that constraint it is a good “null hypothesis” that the karyotype (the chromosome numbers and shapes) evolves randomly and that there is little or no selection for it to have a particular form in particular species.
26. Amounts of DNA are not, contrary to one’s naive expectation, correlated closely with the complexity of the organism. The Congo Eel (*Amphiuma*) a particularly nasty legless salamander, is the DNA champion among tetrapods with 26 times as much DNA per cell as humans. The lungfish *Lepidosiren* is the champion among vertebrates with about 28 times as much as humans. It is believed that this is the result of having a lot of junk DNA.