

Table 1. Continued

Sample name	Lineage ^{b)}	Species ^{c)}	Isolated city	Isolated State	Isolated year	Accession no.
BRdg643 ^{a)}	A-1	Dog	Santa Rita	Maranhão	2004	AB263337
BRdg646 ^{a)}	A-1	Dog	Codó	Maranhão	2004	AB263338
BRdg652 ^{a)}	A-1	Dog	Lima Campos	Maranhão	2004	AB263339
BRdg657 ^{a)}	A-1	Dog	São Vicente Ferrer	Maranhão	2005	AB263340
BRdg659 ^{a)}	B-1	Dog	Viana	Maranhão	2005	AB263341
BRdg661 ^{a)}	B-1	Dog	Pindaré Mirim	Maranhão	2005	AB263342
BRdg665 ^{a)}	A-1	Dog	São João Batista	Maranhão	2005	AB263343
BRdg666 ^{a)}	A-1	Dog	São João Batista	Maranhão	2005	AB263344
BRdg669 ^{a)}	A-1	Dog	Monção	Maranhão	2005	AB263345
BR-Pfx 1	A-3	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB206407
BR-Pfx 2	A-3	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2000	AB206408
BR-Pfx 3	A-2	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2001	AB206409
BR-Pfx 4	A-2	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB206410
BR-Pfx 5	A-3	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB206411
BR-Pfx 6	A-3	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB207884
BR-Pfx 7	A-3	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB206412
BR-Pfx 8	A-3	Fox (<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.)	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB206413
BR-DR1	BT	Vampire Bat (<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>)	Lindóia	São Paulo	2002	AB201803
BR-DR2	BT	Vampire Bat (<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>)	Lindóia	São Paulo	2002	AB201804
BR-MM1	BT	Insect Bat (<i>Molossus molossus</i>)	Jales	São Paulo	2002	AB201815
BR-NL1	BT	Insect Bat (<i>Nyctinomops laticaudatus</i>)	São José do Rio Preto	São Paulo	2002	AB201806

a) Samples with determined nucleotide sequences in this study. b) Lineage as observed in the phylogenetic tree is denoted. BT indicates RV isolates that belonged to the cluster of Chiroptera rabies virus variants. c) Scientific names are given in parentheses. d) There is no reliable information.

Table 2. Primers used in this study

Primer	Nucleotide sequences (5'-3')	Position ^{a)}	Sense	Use
RHN1	ACAGACAGCGTCAATGCAAAGC	28-50	+	RT-PCR/sequencing
BRADN-S2	TGCAGATAGGATAGAGCAGA	565-584	+	Sequencing
BRADN-S4	TGTCTGTTCTAGGGGGCTAT	1083-1102	+	Sequencing
RHNS3	CTAGGATTGACAAAGATTTTGCTC	1539-1516	-	RT-PCR/sequencing
BRADN-C2	GACTTCCACTCAAGCCTAG	963-944	-	Sequencing
BRADN-C4	TCAGTACGCTTGATCTCCAC	414-395	-	Sequencing
P1 ^{b)}	CTACAATGGATGCCGACAAGA	66-86	+	RT-PCR/sequencing
BRABN-S1 ^{b)}	GGACTAGCTATGGAATCCTG	336-355	+	Sequencing
BRABN-S3 ^{b)}	GGACTGGTGCATTACAGG	782-801	+	Sequencing
N8 ^{b)}	AGTTTCTTCAGCCATCTC	1585-1568	-	RT-PCR/sequencing
BRABN-C1 ^{b)}	TCCTCATAAGCAGTGACAACCT	774-754	-	Sequencing
BRABN-C3 ^{b)}	TGTCCAGAGATTTTGCTCA	537-519	-	Sequencing

a) Nucleotide positions are numbered according to the PV sequences (M13215). b) These primers were used for BRdg339 and BRct319.

RESULTS

Phylogenetic analysis revealed two major genetic clusters corresponding to the Carnivora and Chiroptera RV variants (Fig. 1). The Brazilian Carnivora RV isolates from dogs, cats and foxes were grouped within the Carnivora RV cluster of variants with a high bootstrap value (bootstrap value: 919), with the exception of BRct319 and BRdg339. BRct319 and BRdg339 belonged to the Chiroptera RV variant cluster and were closely related to BR-DR1 and BR-DR2, which are vampire bat isolates. The Brazilian Carnivora RV isolates formed a monophyletic group and were divided into 2 major lineages identified as lineage A, containing domestic dogs and foxes, and lineage B, containing

domestic dogs and cats. RV isolates from domestic dogs and foxes in Argentina and Bolivia were observed to cluster into 2 major groups, with 1 group, which was typed as antigenic variant (AgV) 2 [5, 9], belonging to lineage B (data not shown). Another group, which was typed as AgV1 [5, 9], was located at a remote position from the cluster containing the Brazilian Carnivora RV variants. Lineage A was further divided into three sublineages (A-1, A-2, and A-3). Sublineage A-1 consisted of RV isolates from dogs in the state of Maranhão, and sublineages A-2 and A-3 consisted of fox RV isolates from the state of Paraíba (Fig. 2). Lineage B was further divided into 2 sublineages (B-1 and B-2). Sublineage B-1 consisted of RV isolates from dogs and a cat from the states of Maranhão, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas

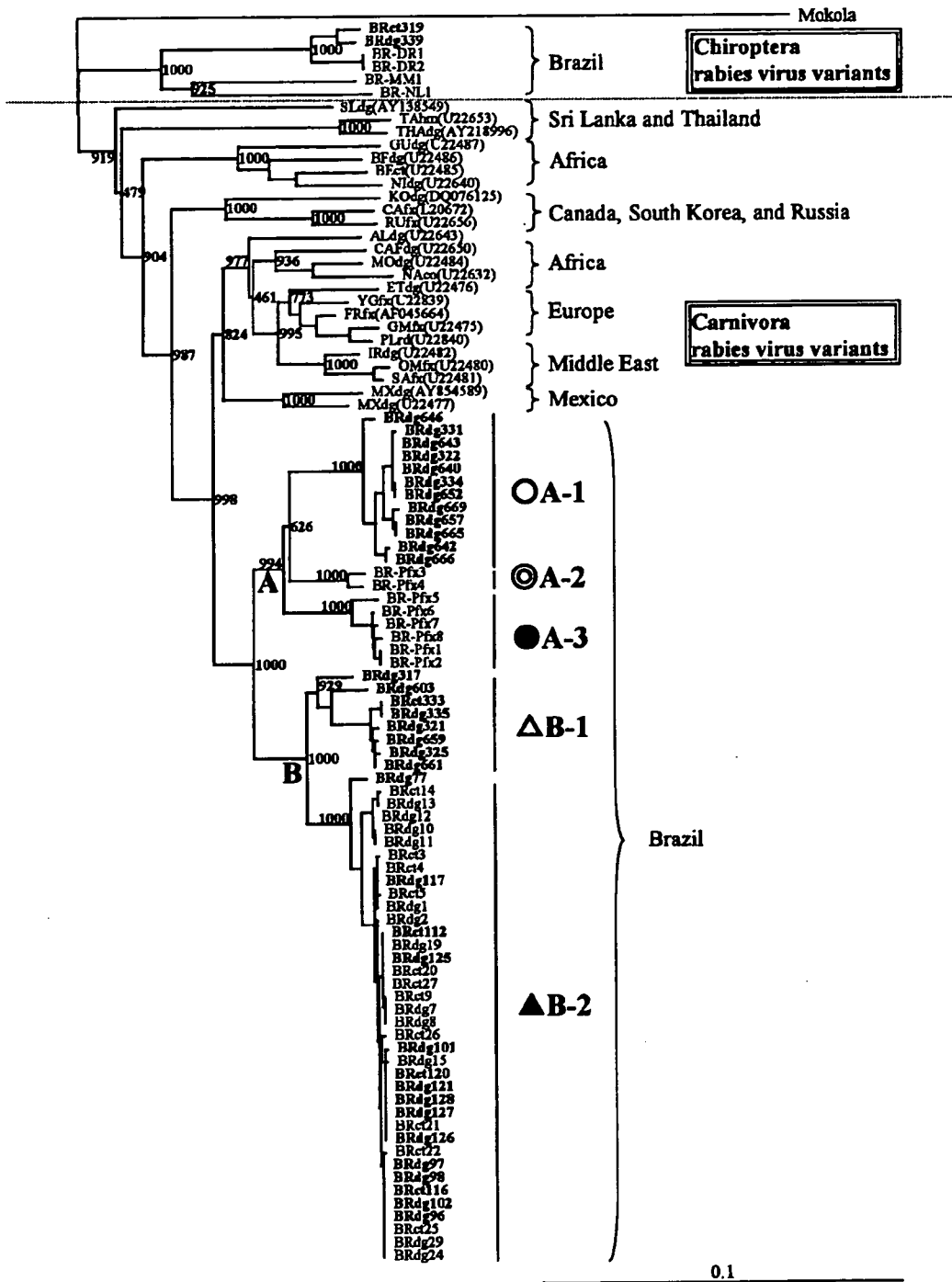


Fig. 1. A phylogenetic tree based on the N gene sequences of 1332 nucleotides (89-1420). Bold font indicates the samples for which nucleotide sequences were determined in this study. Accession numbers are given in parentheses.

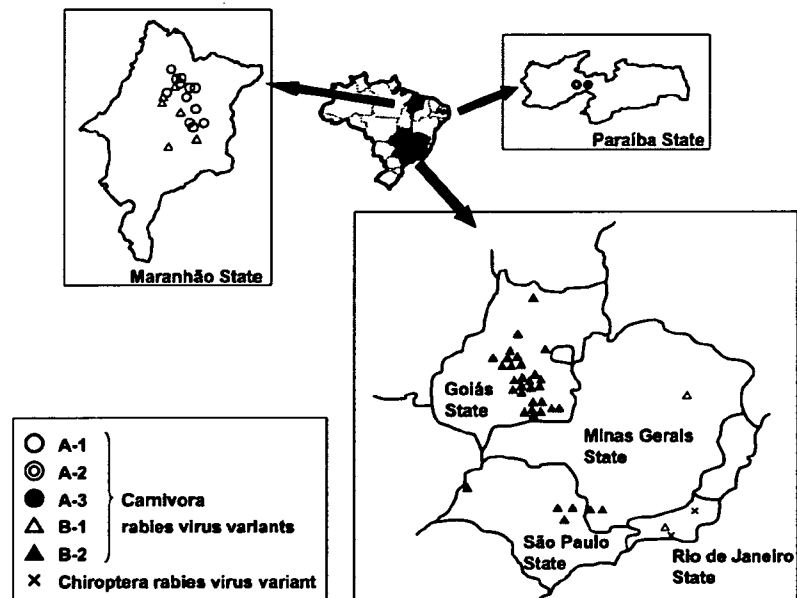


Fig. 2. Geographic distributions of the Brazilian rabies virus isolates used in this study. The symbols denote the sample's affiliation to the phylogenetic groups illustrated in Fig. 1.

Gerais in Brazil and Bolivian dog RV isolates. Sublineage B-2 consisted of RV isolates from dogs and cats from the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Goiás.

DISCUSSION

RV transmissions among dogs and wild canids has been reported in Africa, Europe, Colombia, Mexico, and Turkey, and infection of wildlife species contributes to the difficulties associated with controlling and eradicating rabies in wildlife [3, 16, 19, 20, 25]. Fox RV isolates from northeastern Brazil have been reported to form specific clades that group independently of dog RV isolates despite evidence suggesting that dog and fox rabies are derived from a common ancestor [2, 4, 22, 23]. In this study, although lineage A consisted primarily fox RV isolates, several RV isolates from sublineage A-1, which consisted of dog RV isolates, were placed within sublineages of A-2 and A-3, which consisted of fox RV isolates. One dog infected with fox-typed RV was found in the state of Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil [4]. While not conclusively demonstrated, it is postulated that the dog RV isolates of sublineage A-1 may have been directly or indirectly transmitted by rabid foxes, and the virus might have been spread in the dog population of northeastern regions in the past. RV transmission events among wildlife and dogs have the potential to generate new RV variants, which complicates control of viral infectious disease, and RV transmission from wildlife to dogs especially increases public health problems. Therefore, further epidemiological analysis of these RV variants is needed. Additionally, dog and cat RV isolates that were genetically very similar to vampire bat RV isolates were found in this

study, suggesting that these Carnivora RV isolates were transmitted by vampire bats.

Lineage B, which consisted of dog and cat RV isolates, contained RV isolates from Brazilian, Argentinean, and Bolivian Carnivora with a wide geographical distribution that were collected along the borders of Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil and typed as AgV2 [5, 9]. Analyses using monoclonal antibody panels revealed that RVs isolated from dogs in Latin America can be characterized as AgV 1 or 2 and that these AgVs correspond to the 2 phylogenetic groups [5, 9]. AgV1 was found in dogs throughout Latin America, while AgV2 was only isolated in dogs from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay [8, 10]. Since the Carnivora-related RVs isolated in Brazil consisted mainly of the AgV2 type, the AgV2 type is referred to as the Brazilian-type RV [4, 8, 10]. Furthermore, given that dogs migrate with humans along transport routes, such as roads and borders [5, 6, 9], it seems likely that lineage B would be maintained within the dog reservoir in extensive regions of Brazil and that it might spread from Brazil into neighboring countries with human migration. Rabies incidences associated with dogs and coyotes have been reported at the border between the United States and Mexico, suggesting that the coyote RV variant may have emerged via dog translocation at some time in the past [25]. These findings suggest that controlling both canine rabies and dog translocation is essential for preventing the spread of rabies infection.

Contact between dogs and wildlife has the potential to generate new rabies variants. To prevent future spread of rabies infection and the incidence of new rabies variants, it is important to control RV infection cycles in both dogs and wildlife. In addition, we believe that both continuation of

vaccination programs for dogs and surveillance of wildlife rabies are necessary.

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Genetic diversity of bat rabies viruses in Brazil

Y. Kobayashi¹, G. Sato¹, M. Kato¹, T. Itou¹, E. M. S. Cunha², M. V. Silva³, C. S. Mota⁴,
F. H. Ito⁴, T. Sakai¹

¹Nihon University Veterinary Research Center, Kanagawa, Japan

²Research and Development Center for Animal Sanitation, Biological Institute-São Paulo State Agency of Agribusiness (APTA)-São Paulo State Secretary of Agriculture and Supply, São Paulo, Brazil

³Rabies Diagnostic Section SC2, Jorge Vaitzman Municipal Veterinary Medicine Institute, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

⁴Department of Preventive Veterinary Medicine and Animal Health, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Zootechny, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

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Summary

Thirty-three Brazilian bat rabies viruses (RVs) were studied by sequence analysis and were compared against sequences of bat-related RVs from other regions of the Americas. Phylogenetic analysis revealed that bat-related RVs formed several monophyletic lineages and that these were associated with bat species. Brazilian bat RVs were found to include nine major lineages, one of which grouped with RVs isolated from *Lasiurus* spp. from different regions of the Americas. These results suggest that there is considerable diversity among Brazilian bat RV variants and that some of these RV variants may be associated with bats from other countries.

Introduction

Rabies virus (RV), which belongs to genotype 1 of the genus *Lyssavirus* within the family *Rhabdo-*

viridae, causes lethal neurological diseases in mammals. Bats inhabit most regions of the world and are known to frequently act as lyssavirus vectors [1, 17]. The RVs associated with bats are widespread in the Americas, and it is believed that genetic differentiation in RVs occurred in response to their association with particular host species [19]. In Brazil, the transmission of rabies by vampire bats (*Desmodus rotundus*), a known principal RV transmitter, has caused serious problems in the public health sector and livestock industry [4, 16]. In addition, several RV variants have been isolated from both insectivorous and frugivorous bats in the country [3, 12, 23]. While no cases of human rabies associated with non-hematophagous bats have been reported in Brazil to date, most of the human rabies cases in the USA are associated with insectivorous bats [18, 22], which suggests that non-hematophagous bats in Brazil have a similar associated risk potential for latent rabies transmission.

The authors previously reported that Brazilian bat RVs had been considered to be divided into four distinct genetic RV-variant lineages, and that these were associated with *Eptesicus* spp., *Nyctinomops*

Correspondence: Prof. Takeo Sakai, Nihon University Veterinary Research Center, 1866 Kameino, Fujisawa, Kanagawa 252-8510, Japan
e-mail: sakai@brs.nihon-u.ac.jp

Table 1. Brazilian bat rabies virus isolates using in this study

Sample name	Host species	Isolated State ^c	Isolated city	Year	Accession no.
BR-A1 ^a	<i>Artibeus</i> sp.	RJ	Paracambi	2002	AB297627
BR-A2 ^a	<i>Artibeus</i> sp.	RJ	Mesquita	2004	AB297628
BR-AF1 ^a	<i>Artibeus fimbriatus</i>	RJ	Rio de Janeiro	2002	AB297629
BR-AL1	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	SP	Itapira	1998	AB117969
BR-AL2	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	SP	São José do Rio Preto	1998	AB117970
BR-AL3	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	SP	Novo Horizonte	1998	AB117971
BR-AL4	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	SP	Dracena	2002	AB201802
BR-AL6 ^a	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	RJ	Rio de Janeiro	2001	AB297630
BR-AL7 ^a	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	SP	Vargem Grande Paulista	2004	AB297631
BR-AP1	<i>Artibeus planirostris</i>	SP	São José do Rio Preto	1998	AB117972
BRvmbt33	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	SP	Taubate	Unknown ^d	AB083806
BRvmbt34	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	SP	Pindamonhangaba	1998	AB083807
BR-DR1	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	SP	Lindóia	2000	AB201803
BR-DR2	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	SP	Lindóia	2000	AB201804
BR-DR3	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	SP	São José do Barreiro	2001	AB201805
BR-DR5 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	RJ	Valença	2002	AB297632
BR-DR6 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	RJ	Laje do Muriae	1998	AB297633
BR-DR7 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	RJ	Itaperuna	1997	AB297634
BR-DR8 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	SP	Tambaú	2003	AB297635
BR-DR9 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	SP	Guarulhos	2000	AB297636
BR-DR10 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Cocalzinho de Goiás	2005	AB297637
BR-DR11 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Cocalzinho de Goiás	2005	AB297638
BR-DR12 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Cocalzinho de Goiás	2005	AB297639
BR-DR13 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Guapó	2005	AB297640
BR-DR14 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Uruaçu	2005	AB297641
BR-DR16 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Niquelândia	2005	AB297642
BR-DR18 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Uruaçu	2006	AB297643
BR-DR19 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Nova Iguaçu de Goiás	2006	AB297644
BR-DR20 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Cocalzinho de Goiás	2006	AB297645
BR-DR21 ^a	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	GO	Cocalzinho de Goiás	2006	AB297646
BR-EF1	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	SP	São José do Rio Preto	1998	AB201811
BR-EF2	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	SP	Olímpia	2001	AB201812
BR-EF3	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	SP	São José do Rio Preto	2001	AB201813
BR-EF4	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	SP	Catanduva	2002	AB201814
BR-Pbt1	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	PB	Patos	2003	AB206414
BR-Pbt2	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	PB	Patos	2003	AB206415
BR-Pbt3	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	PB	Patos	2003	AB206416
BR-Pbt4	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	PB	Patos	2003	AB206417
BR-MM1	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	SP	Jales	1999	AB201815
BR-MM2	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	SP	Ilha Solteira	2002	AB201816
BR-NL1	<i>Nyctinomops laticaudatus</i>	SP	São José do Rio Preto	1998	AB201806
BR-NL2	<i>Nyctinomops laticaudatus</i>	SP	São José do Rio Preto	1999	AB201807
BR-NL3	<i>Nyctinomops laticaudatus</i>	SP	Ipiguá	2001	AB201808
BR-NL4 ^a	<i>Nyctinomops laticaudatus</i>	RJ	Rio de Janeiro	2004	AB297647
BR-TL1 ^a	<i>Tadarida laticaudata</i>	RJ	Rio de Janeiro	1990	AB297648
BR-TL2 ^a	<i>Tadarida laticaudata</i>	RJ	Rio de Janeiro	1990	AB297649
BR-BAT3 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Campinas	2004	AB297650
BR-BAT13 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Presidente Prudente	2003	AB297651
BR-BAT15 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Oswaldo Cruz	2003	AB297652
BR-BAT16 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Álvares Machado	2006	AB297653

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Sample name	Host species	Isolated State ^c	Isolated city	Year	Accession no.
BR-BAT22 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Presidente Prudente	2004	AB297654
BR-BAT26 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Panorama	2005	AB297655
BR-BAT27 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Presidente Prudente	2006	AB297656
BR-BAT28 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Oswaldo Cruz	2005	AB297657
BR-BAT29 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Presidente Prudente	2004	AB297658
BR-BAT31 ^a	Non-hematophagous bat ^b	SP	Dracena	2004	AB297659

^a The samples analyzed in this study.

^b These bats were unclassified.

^c State abbreviations are as follows: *GO* Goiás state; *PB* Paraíba state; *RJ* Rio de Janeiro state; *SP* São Paulo state.

^d No information is available from a reliable source.

spp., *Molossus* spp. and *D. rotundus* [12]. The present study corroborates these findings and provides new evidence regarding various epidemiological characteristics of bat rabies in Brazil.

Materials and methods

The 33 RVs used in the study were obtained from vampire bats (*D. rotundus*, $n = 15$), frugivorous bats (*Artibeus* spp., $n = 5$), insectivorous bats (*Nyctinomops laticaudatus*, $n = 1$; *Tadarida laticaudata*, $n = 2$) and 10 unclassified non-hematophagous bats (Table 1). Samples were diagnosed as rabies positive by the immunofluorescence antibody assay and mouse inoculation test [5, 14]. In addition, 23 RVs were collected from vampire bats ($n = 5$), frugivorous bats ($n = 5$), and insectivorous bats (*Eptesicus furinalis*, $n = 4$; *Molossus molossus*, $n = 6$; *N. laticaudatus*, $n = 3$) as reported previously [11, 12, 23, 24]. The extraction and purification of viral RNA, RT-PCR and sequencing were performed as described previously [12]. In addition, the BRABN-C4 primer (5'-ATGTTGT(C/T)TTGTAATGCC-3': 564–545), BRABN-C5 primer (5'-GGGTT(C/T)ATAAAGCA(A/G)ATAAA-3': 800–819) and BRABN-S7 primer (5'-TTATGAGGA(C/T)TGCTCAGGG-3': 766–784) were designed and used for sequencing. Nucleotide sequences were determined for 1394 nt of the nucleoprotein (N) gene, corresponding to positions 89–1482 of the PV strain. Multiple alignments were performed using Clustal W [25]. Phylogenetic analyses using distance matrix (neighbor joining) were conducted using MEGA version 3.1 [15]. For neighbor joining, corrected nucleotide substitutions were calculated using the Kimura two-parameter model. The statistical significance of the phylogenies constructed was estimated by bootstrap value analysis with 1000 pseudoreplicate data sets. The Mokola virus (Mokola) (Accession No. Y09762) and the Australian bat lyssavirus (ABL) (Accession No. AF418014) were used as outgroups. Detailed information on bat-related RVs isolated from other regions is presented in Table 2.

The TREEVIEW program was used to present the graphical output [20], and sequence identities of the nucleotides and deduced amino acids were calculated using BioEdit software [10].

Results

The phylogenetic tree based on 1394 nt of the N gene revealed that the Brazilian bat RV isolates could be separated into nine distinct genetic lineages with high bootstrap values (Fig. 1). Lineages IV, V, VI, VIII and IX were identified as new RV variants in Brazil, but the vector species of the virus were uncertain. Lineage I consisted mainly of *D. rotundus* and *Artibeus* spp. and was further divided into the two sub-lineages Ia and Ib. Sub-lineage Ia consisted of RV isolates from the states of São Paulo and the neighboring state of Rio de Janeiro, while sub-lineage Ib consisted of RV isolates from the state of Goiás. All RV isolates from *Artibeus* spp. belonged to sub-lineage Ia. Lineages II and VII primarily consisted of RV isolates from *M. molossus* and *E. furinalis*, respectively. Lineage III consisted of RV isolates from *N. laticaudatus*, *T. laticaudata* and *M. molossus* from the states of Paraíba, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, respectively (Fig. 2). The sequence identities of nucleotides and deduced amino acids among the Brazilian bat RV isolates were greater than 84.3% and 93.5%, respectively.

The phylogenetic tree based on the 217 nt of the N gene that was used to compare bat-related RVs from Brazil with those from other countries revealed the existence of several monophyletic clusters in the

Table 2. Bat-related rabies virus samples obtained from GenBank

Sample name	Country	Species	Accession no.	References	
ARBV1	Argentina	Bovine	AY233446	Cisterna et al. [2]	
ARBV2	Argentina	Bovine	AY233444		
ARBV3	Argentina	Bovine	AY233437		
ARBV4	Argentina	Bovine	AY233430		
ARHIM	Argentina	<i>Histiotus montanus</i>	AY233448	Favi et al. [6]	
ARMY	Argentina	<i>Myotis</i> sp.	AY233449		
ARMYN	Argentina	<i>Myotis nigricans</i>	AY233450		
ARTB1	Argentina	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AY233426		
ARTB2	Argentina	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AY233427		
ARTB3	Argentina	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AY233428		
USATB1	USA	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AF396063		
CHLAB	Chile	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	AF396035		
CHMYC	Chile	<i>Myotis chilensis</i>	AF396064		
BOCT	Bolivia	Feline	AY340783		Favi et al. [7]
BODG1	Bolivia	Canine	AY340782	Favi et al. [7]	
BODG2	Bolivia	Canine	AY340771		
USALASN1	USA	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>	DQ445382		
USALASN2	USA	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>	DQ445380		
USAPS1	USA	<i>Pipistrellus subflavus</i>	DQ445349		
USAPS2	USA	<i>Pipistrellus subflavus</i>	DQ445354		
CAEF1	Canada	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AF351828		Nadin-Davis et al. [19]
CAEF2	Canada	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AF351829		
CAEF3	Canada	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AF351830		
CAEF4	Canada	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AF351831		
CALASN1	Canada	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>	AF351834		
CALASN2	Canada	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>	AF351837		
CALASN3	Canada	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>	AF351840		
CALAB1	Canada	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	AF351844		
CALAB2	Canada	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	AF351856		
CALAC1	Canada	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	AF351845		
CALAC2	Canada	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	AF351846		
CALAI	Canada	<i>Lasiurus intermedius</i>	AF351843	Favi et al. [6]	
CAMYC	Canada	<i>Myotis californicus</i>	AF351836		
CAMYE	Canada	<i>Myotis evotis</i>	AF351835		
CAMYL	Canada	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	AF351838		
TRDR	Trinidad	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	AF351852		
USALAI	USA	<i>Lasiurus intermedius</i>	AF394878		Rohde et al. [21]
USALAC1	USA	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	AF394883		
USALAC2	USA	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	AF394884		
USALAB1	USA	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	AF394885		
USALAB2	USA	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	AF394886		
USAMYC	USA	<i>Myotis californicus</i>	AF394871		
USAMYE	USA	<i>Myotis evotis</i>	AF394874		
USAMYA	USA	<i>Myotis austroriparius</i>	AY039225		
USANCH	USA	<i>Nycticeius humeralis</i>	AY208164		
USAPLT1	USA	<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>	AF394877		
CHHI1	Chile	<i>Histiotus</i> sp.	AF533775	Yung et al. [26]	
CHHI2	Chile	<i>Histiotus</i> sp.	AF533776		
CHHI3	Chile	<i>Histiotus</i> sp.	AF533778		
CHLA1	Chile	<i>Lasiurus</i> sp.	AF533782		

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Sample name	Country	Species	Accession no.	References
CHLA2	Chile	<i>Lasiurus</i> sp.	AF533810	
CHLA3	Chile	<i>Lasiurus</i> sp.	AF533814	
CHMY1	Chile	<i>Myotis</i> sp.	AF533813	
CHMY2	Chile	<i>Myotis</i> sp.	AF533833	
CHTB1	Chile	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AF533786	
CHTB2	Chile	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AF533787	
CHTB3	Chile	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AF533792	
MELA1	Mexico	<i>Lasiurus</i> sp.	DQ416121	Velasco-Villa et al. [27]
MELA2	Mexico	<i>Lasiurus</i> sp.	DQ416120	
MELAC1	Mexico	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	DQ416119	
MELAC2	Mexico	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	DQ416118	
MEDR1	Mexico	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	DQ416104	
MEDR2	Mexico	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	DQ416103	
MEDR3	Mexico	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	DQ416049	
MEBV1	Mexico	Bovine	DQ416078	
MEBV2	Mexico	Bovine	DQ416099	
MEAJ	Mexico	<i>Artibeus jamaicensis</i>	DQ416085	
METB1	Mexico	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	DQ416110	
METB2	Mexico	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	DQ416111	
METB3	Mexico	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	DQ416113	
PEHM	Peru	Human	AF045166	Warner et al. [28]
BRLAB	Brazil	<i>Lasiurus blossevillii</i>	AY739722	–
USAEF1	USA	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AY039228	–
USAEF2	USA	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AY170278	–
USAEF3	USA	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AY170281	–
USAEF4	USA	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	AY170296	–
USANM	USA	<i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i>	AY170304	–
USAPH1	USA	<i>Pipistrellus hesperus</i>	AY170250	–
USAPH2	USA	<i>Pipistrellus hesperus</i>	AY170251	–
USAPH3	USA	<i>Pipistrellus hesperus</i>	AY170252	–
USAPLT2	USA	<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>	AY170244	–
USATB2	USA	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AY170231	–
USATB3	USA	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	AY170236	–

bat species examined (Fig. 3). BR-BAT15, 16 and 22, which belonged to lineage IX, formed a monophyletic cluster with RV isolates from *Lasiurus* spp. in Canada, Chile, Mexico and the USA (bootstrap value of 77%). A high nucleotide identity of greater than 99% was also observed among the RV isolates in lineage IX and those from *Lasiurus cinereus* in Canada, Mexico and the USA. With a nucleotide identity of greater than 96%, lineage VIII was closely related to the RV isolate from *Lasiurus blossevillii* in Brazil and shared a common ancestor with clusters containing *Lasiurus* spp. and *Lasiorycteris noctivagans* RV isolates (bootstrap value of 80%). Lineage III shared a common ancestor with

the RV isolate from *Nyctinomops macrotis* and had a nucleotide identity of greater than 96% (bootstrap value of 89%).

The cluster consisting of vampire bat-related RV isolates was divided into two sub-clusters with a high level of certainty (bootstrap value of 79%). One sub-cluster was comprised of vampire bat-related RV isolates from Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico, Peru and Trinidad. The other consisted of RV isolates from Mexican vampire bats and was closely related to RV isolates from *Tadarida brasiliensis* in the USA and Mexico. The RV isolates from Brazilian frugivorous bats did not group with RV isolates from Mexican frugivorous bats.

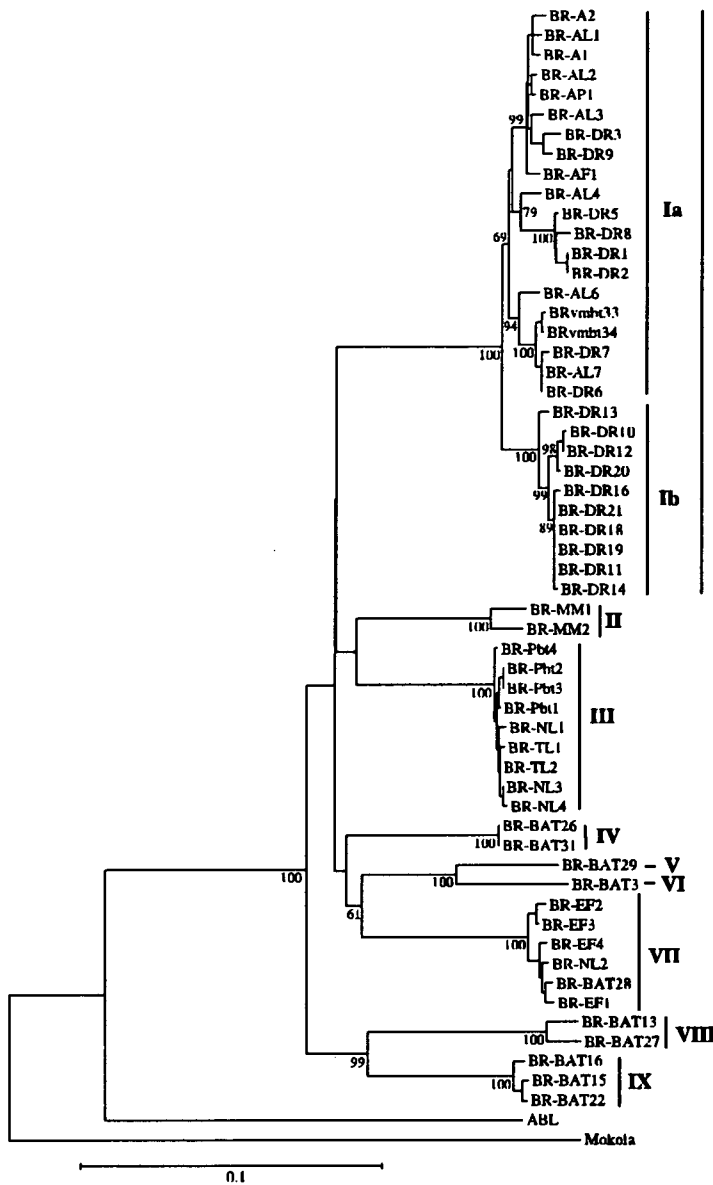


Fig. 1. Phylogenetic tree using NJ method (Kimura two-parameter model) based on 1394 nt of the N gene (89–1482) of Brazilian bat RVs. Bootstrap values above 60% are shown at the branch node. A scale bar indicates the genetic distance represented by the horizontal branches

Discussion

Phylogenetic analysis revealed the existence of nine major bat RV variants in Brazil, with some of these being associated with bat RV isolates from other countries. The long migrations of *Lasiurus* spp. and its wide distribution in the Americas [17] may have contributed to the inclusion of Brazilian bat RV isolates from lineage IX in this study grouping with the RV isolates from *Lasiurus* spp. from

other countries. In addition, the Brazilian bat RV isolates were most closely related to RV isolates from *L. cinereus*, which has been implicated in the widespread distribution of the viruses in the Americas, an inference made because of the high levels of genomic sequence identity within *L. cinereus* RV isolates from several countries [27]. These results suggest that *L. cinereus*-associated RV variants are widely distributed in several regions of the Americas, including Brazil.

Genetic diversity of bat rabies virus

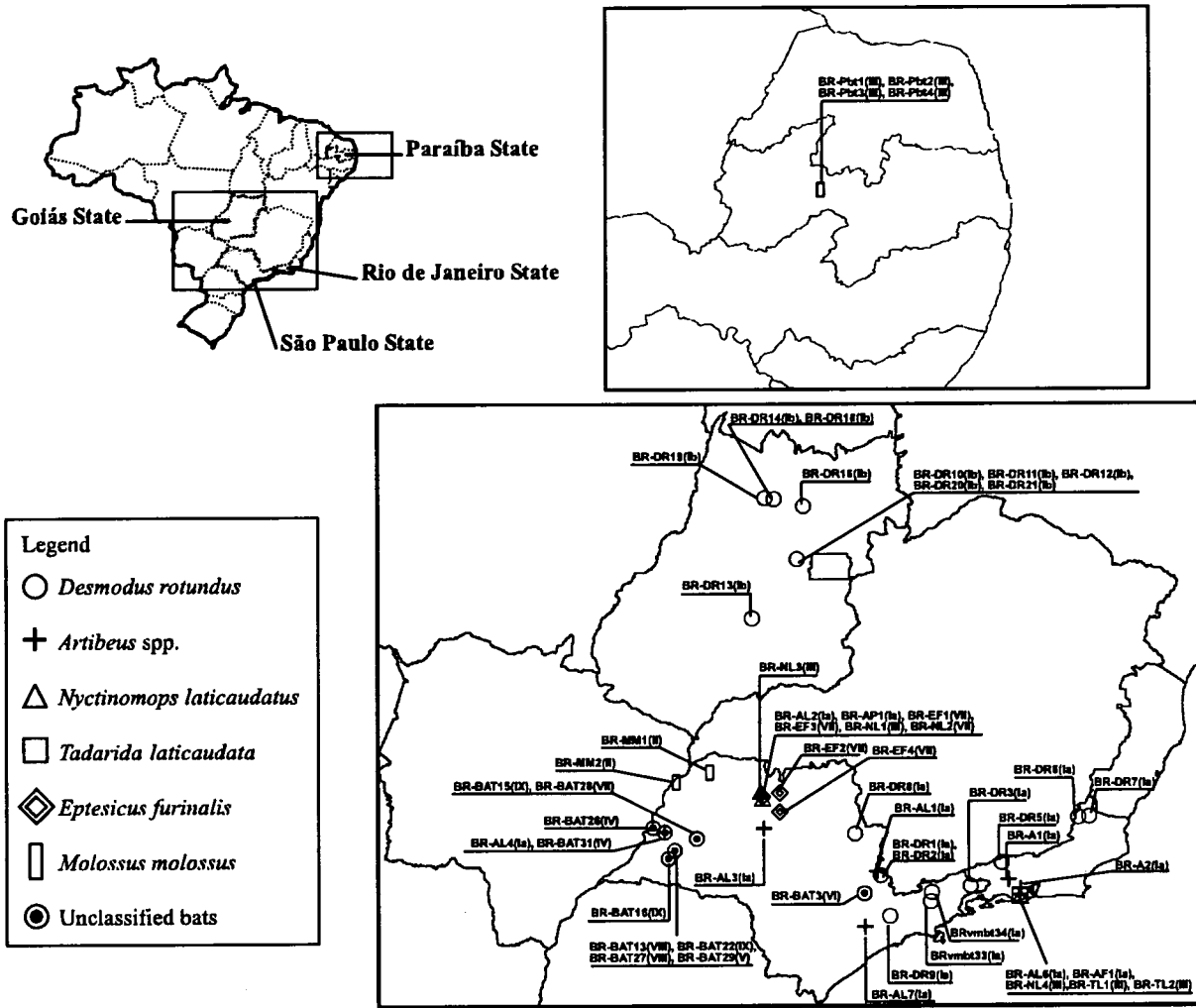


Fig. 2. Geographic distribution of bat RV isolates in Brazil. The symbols illustrate the host bat species. Roman numerals

Lineage III, which was previously characterized as a *Nyctinomops* spp.-related RV variant [12], consisted of RV isolates from *N. laticaudatus*, *T. laticaudata* and *M. molossus* from several regions of Brazil. These results indicate that cross-species transmission events of the virus associated with lineage III may have occurred, and that an as yet unidentified host may have carried the viruses into different regions of Brazil. Further analysis is necessary in order to determine which bat species is the rabies transmitter in this lineage.

The distribution of RVs associated with non-migratory bats tends to reflect the geographic distribu-

tions of the reservoir bat populations [19]. Natural barriers such as mountain ranges promote the genetic divergence of these viruses, which result in the same pattern being observed in bat-related RVs from vampire bats [13, 27]. In this study, the segregation of sub-lineages Ia and Ib, both of which consisted of RV isolates from vampire bats, corresponded to the geographic distribution of the viruses, suggesting that these viruses may be maintained among geographically distinct vampire bat populations. Rabies transmission events between vampire and frugivorous bats have frequently been reported [12, 23, 27]. In this study, RV isolates from frugiv-

orous bats grouped with RV isolates from vampire bats, and the distributions of these viruses overlapped in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Vampire and frugivorous bats have also been observed to utilize the same roost in Mexico [8]. These findings suggest that RV transmission from vampire bats to frugivorous bats might occur as a result of similarities in the life histories of these bats.

The present study examined the genetic diversity of Brazilian bat RVs and their relationships with RV isolates from other regions of the Americas. These findings showed that RV variants exhibit epidemiological characteristics that are reflected in aspects of the ecology such as migratory patterns and range, of the reservoir bats. Consequently, risk evaluation measures directed at preventing the transmission of rabies, as well as the development of control measures that will benefit public health, need to consider the importance of bat ecology. Additionally, since the transmitters of some bat-related RV variants are not yet known, further epidemiological analyses are necessary in order to elucidate the infection cycles associated with bat rabies.

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Genetic Analysis of Phosphoprotein and Matrix Protein of Rabies Viruses Isolated in Brazil

Yuki KOBAYASHI¹⁾, Hiromi OKUDA¹⁾, Kana NAKAMURA¹⁾, Go SATO¹⁾, Takuya ITOU¹⁾, Adolorata A. B. CARVALHO²⁾, Marlon V. SILVA³⁾, Carla S. MOTA⁴⁾, Fumio H. ITO⁴⁾ and Takeo SAKAI^{1)*}

¹⁾Nihon University Veterinary Research Center, 1866 Kameino, Fujisawa, Kanagawa 252-8510, Japan,

²⁾Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Science, UNESP, Via de Acesso Prof. Paulo Donato Castellane, Jaboticabal, São Paulo 14884-900,

³⁾Jorge Vaitsmann Municipal Institute, Av. Bartolomeu de Gusmão, 1120, São Cristóvão, Rio de Janeiro and

⁴⁾Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Zootechny, University of São Paulo, Av. Prof. Dr. Orlando Marques de Paiva, 87, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo 05508-000, Brazil

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ABSTRACT. To investigate the genetic characteristics of phosphoprotein (P) and matrix protein (M) genes of variable rabies virus (RV) prevalent in Brazil, the authors genetically characterized the P and M genes from 30 Brazilian RV field isolates. Phylogenetic analysis based on the P and M genes revealed the presence of six RV variants that consisted primarily of three insectivorous bats, the vampire bat, dog and fox in Brazil. Specific amino acid substitutions corresponding to these phylogenetic lineages were observed, with Asp₄₂ and Glu₆₂ in the P protein found to be characteristic of Brazilian chiroptera- and carnivora-related RVs, respectively. Amino acid sequence motifs predicted to associate with a viral function in the P and M proteins were conserved among Brazilian RV variants.

KEY WORDS: Brazil, genetic analysis, matrix protein, phosphoprotein, rabies virus.

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Rabies virus (RV) is a member of the *Lyssavirus* genus, which belongs to the *Rhabdoviridae* family. Lyssavirus is characterized as having seven genotypes (GTs) comprising, rabies virus (GT 1), Lagos bat virus (GT 2), Mokola virus (GT 3), Duvenhage virus (GT 4), European bat lyssavirus type (EBL) 1 (GT 5), EBL 2 (GT 6) and Australian bat lyssavirus (GT 7). Lyssaviruses have approximately 12-kb of unsegmented negative-stranded genomic RNA for encoding the genes of the nucleoprotein (N), phosphoprotein (P), matrix protein (M), glycoprotein (G) and polymerase (L).

RV has an almost global distribution and infects a wide range of mammalian species in which it causes a lethal form of encephalopathy. In Brazil, the principal RV transmitters to humans and domestic animals - dogs and vampire bats - have caused serious problems in the public health sector and the livestock industry [6, 19]. In addition, RVs have been isolated from other animal species [8]. Previously, phylogenetic analyses targeting the N and G genes revealed that there were several RV variants which varied depending on the host species, which included vampire bats, insectivorous bats, dogs and foxes. Furthermore, RV isolates from cattle and frugivorous bats (*Artibeus* (*A.*) sp.) have frequently been typed as vampire bat-related RVs in Brazil [19, 25, 26, 41, 42, 44, 45]. Variability has also been reported in the G protein, a major contributor to the pathogenicity of the virus, in which several amino acid substitutions at antigenic sites associated with the pathogenicity and immunogenicity of the virus have been identified in Brazilian RV variants [41]. However, differences in the pathogenicity and antigenic

characteristics of these Brazilian RV variants are not yet known. Recently, in addition to the G protein, both P and M proteins have also been reported to be associated with the pathogenicity of the virus [43]. The P protein forms a ribonucleoprotein (RNP) with N and L proteins, which then wraps around the viral RNA, and plays an important role in transcription and replication in conjunction with the L protein [3, 5, 11]. In addition, the P protein acts to counteract the host's interferon (IFN) responses in infected cells [1, 2]. The M protein is responsible for recruiting RNPs to the cell membrane, as well as their condensation into tightly coiled 'skeleton'-like structures [36]. In addition, the M protein is involved in viral assembly and budding, and is associated with regulating the balance between viral transcription and replication [9, 10, 20]. Furthermore, the M protein acts as a major inducer of apoptosis in neuronal cells [23].

However, although P and M proteins have been demonstrated to have several important functions in viral infection, these investigations have all been conducted using laboratory-adapted strains. In addition, few studies on P and M proteins in wild-type RV strains have been reported to date [30, 31, 32, 33], and no reports have genetically characterized the P and M genes in Brazilian RV isolates. In this study, we conducted genetic analyses of P and M genes of several RV field isolates prevalent in Brazil.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Viruses: Thirty RV isolates were collected from brain specimens of frugivorous bats (*A. lituratus*, *A. planirostris*), insectivorous bats (*Eptesicus* (*E.*) *furinialis*, *Molossus* (*M.*) *molossus*, *Nyctinomops* (*N.*) *laticaudatus*), vampire bats (*Desmodus* (*D.*) *rotundus*), cattle, cats, dogs, and foxes

*CORRESPONDENCE TO: Prof. SAKAI, T., Nihon University Veterinary Research Center, 1866 Kameino, Fujisawa, Kanagawa 252-8510, Japan.

e-mail: sakai@brs.nihon-u.ac.jp

Table 1. Brazilian rabies virus isolates used in this study

Isolate No.	Species of origin	Geographic origin		Year of isolation	Accession No.	
		City	State		P gene	M gene
BR-AL1	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	Itapira	São Paulo	1998	AB291108	AB291078
BR-AL2	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	São José do Rio Preto	São Paulo	1998	AB291109	AB291079
BR-AL3	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>	Novo Horizonte	São Paulo	1998	AB291110	AB291080
BR-AP1	<i>Artibeus planirostris</i>	São José do Rio Preto	São Paulo	1998	AB291111	AB291081
BRbv303	Cattle	Casimire de Abreu	Rio de Janeiro	2002	AB291112	AB291082
BRbv306	Cattle	Vassouras	Rio de Janeiro	2004	AB291113	AB291083
BRct112	Cat	Morrinhos	Goiás	1999	AB291114	AB291084
BRct116	Cat	Itaberaí	Goiás	1999	AB291115	AB291085
BRct333	Cat	Gonçarves Dias	Maranhão	2003	AB291116	AB291086
BRdg96	Dog	Itaguaçu	Goiás	2001	AB291120	AB291090
BRdg97	Dog	Itaguaçu	Goiás	2001	AB291121	AB291091
BRdg101	Dog	Sta Tereza	Goiás	2001	AB291117	AB291087
BRdg317	Dog	Rio de Janeiro	Rio de Janeiro	1985	AB291118	AB291088
BRdg335	Dog	Barra do Corda	Maranhão	2003	AB291119	AB291089
BR-DR1	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	Lindóia	São Paulo	2000	AB291122	AB291092
BR-DR2	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	Lindóia	São Paulo	2000	AB291123	AB291093
BR-DR3	<i>Desmodus rotundus</i>	São José do Barreiro	São Paulo	2001	AB291124	AB291094
BR-EF1	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	São José do Rio Preto	São Paulo	1998	AB291125	AB291095
BR-EF2	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	Olimpia	São Paulo	2001	AB291126	AB291096
BR-EF3	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	São José do Rio Preto	São Paulo	2001	AB291127	AB291097
BR-EF4	<i>Eptesicus furinalis</i>	Catanduva	São Paulo	2002	AB291128	AB291098
BR-Pfx1	<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB291133	AB291103
BR-Pfx3	<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.	Patos	Paraíba	2001	AB291134	AB291104
BR-Pfx4	<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB291135	AB291105
BR-Pfx5	<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB291136	AB291106
BR-Pfx6	<i>Dusicyon</i> sp.	Patos	Paraíba	2002	AB291137	AB291107
BR-MM1	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	Jales	São Paulo	1999	AB291129	AB291099
BR-MM2	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	Ilha Solteira	São Paulo	2002	AB291130	AB291100
BR-NL1	<i>Nyctinomops laticaudatus</i>	São José do Rio Preto	São Paulo	1998	AB291131	AB291101
BR-NL3	<i>Nyctinomops laticaudatus</i>	Ipiguá	São Paulo	2001	AB291132	AB291102

Table 2. Primers used for RT-PCR and sequencing of the P and M genes

Primer	Sequence	Position ^{a)}	Sense
Psense1	CGAATCATGATGAATGGAGG	1292-1311	+
Psense2	CAAATAGTCAGACAAATGA	1820-1838	+
Psense3	CAAATGGTCAGACGAATGA	1820-1838	+
RVP860-879	TGCAAGACGACCTGAACCGT	2273-2292	+
P781-802	TGTGT(A/G)CTGGGATGGGT(C/T)GCTT	2294-2315	+
Panti1	TCATTTATCAGTGGTGTG	2499-2480	-
Panti2	AAGTTCCTCATGTTCTTCTTGC	2653-2632	-
Panti3	AAGCTCTCAGCAATCTGGTGAGC	2139-2117	-
Panti4	TTATAACAAGAATATCCCTGA	2190-2171	-
DG129	GATGATGTATGTCAATCGGG	3438-3419	-
RVG62-81	TGGTATCGTGTAGACGGGGA	3398-3379	-
GfoM1	CTTGAGTGGAG(A/G)GA(C/T)TTGTCGTA	3827-3805	-

a) Nucleotide positions are numbered according to the PV sequences (M13215).

(*Dusicyon* sp.), that had been diagnosed as rabies positive by the immunofluorescence antibody assay and the mouse inoculation test [7, 27] (Table 1).

RT-PCR and sequencing: RT-PCR and sequencing were performed as previously described [41]. The primers used for RT-PCR and sequencing for complete P and M genes are shown in Table 2. Reference data used in the phylogenetic analysis are shown in Table 3.

Phylogenetic analysis: Phylogenetic trees were generated

using the neighbor-joining method of Saitou and Nei [40, 46]. Mokola virus was used as an outgroup. Bootstrap values were calculated using 1,000 replicates, and homologies and multiple alignment between nucleotide and deduced amino acid sequences were identified using BioEdit software [14].

Hydrophobic profiles: The hydrophobic profiles were characterized using the Kyte and Doolittle parameter (GENETYX Version 6.0.3, Software Development, Tokyo,

Table 3. Rabies virus isolates used in this study

Isolate No.	Species of origin	Country	Accession No.	
			P gene	M gene
058.BBB	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	Canada	AF369338	-
WCS1	Skunk	Canada	AF369285	AF360848
WCS2	Skunk	Canada	AF369286	AF360849
3694.MYO	<i>Myotis</i> sp.	Canada	AF369349	-
6832.RB	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	Canada	AF369351	-
FL.RAC	Raccoon	U.S.A.	AF369294	AF360856
FT2891.DG	Dog	U.S.A.	AF369308	-
115.DG	Dog	India	AF369309	-
119.DG	Dog	India	AF369310	-
IR.5.DG	Dog	Iran	AF369311	-
KY2877.SK	Dog	U.S.A.	AF369292	-
M4.VB	Cattle	Mexico	AF369366	-
M29.DG	Cat	Mexico	AF369313	-
NY.RAC	Raccoon	U.S.A.	AF369293	AF360857
ONT1.RFX	Red fox	Canada	AF369265	AF360850
ONT5.RFX	Red fox	Canada	AF369269	AF360854
P4.VB	Cattle	Paraguay	AF369364	-
V027.DG	Dog	Tunisia	AF369322	-
V037.MG	Mongoose	Botswana	AF369300	-
V077.SHB	<i>Lasiorycteris noctivagans</i>	Canada	AF369346	-
V078.BBB	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	Canada	AF369341	-
V084.BBB	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	Canada	AF369340	-
V089.LBB	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Canada	AF369343	-
V103.HB	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	Canada	AF369347	-
V113.DG	Dog	Sri Lanka	AF369320	-
V118.DG	Dog	Sri Lanka	AF369321	-
V121.DG	Dog	Nepal	AF369317	-
V211.SK	Skunk	U.S.A.	AF369287	-
V213.SK	Skunk	U.S.A.	AF369289	-
V216.SK	Skunk	U.S.A.	AF369291	-
V230.BBB	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	U.S.A.	AF369342	-
V235.FTB	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>	U.S.A.	AF369359	-
V264.MG	Mongoose	S. Africa	AF369302	-
V265.BFX	Bat-eared fox	Tanzania	AF369296	-
V280.FX	Red fox	France	AF369278	-
V461.DG	Dog	Nigeria	AF369326	-
V464.DG	Dog	Nigeria	AF369328	-
V660.FX	Fox	Israel	AF369280	-
SHBRV-18	<i>Lasiorycteris noctivagans</i>	U.S.A.	AY705373	AY705373
USASK	Skunk	U.S.A.	-	AY170396
ZAMRAV5100	Dog	Zambia	AB285215	AB285215
PV	Unknown	Unknown	M13215	M13215
ABL	Human	Australia	AF418014	AF418014
Mokola	Unknown	Unknown	Y09762	Y09762

Japan).

RESULTS

The ORF of the P gene contained 894 nucleotides encoding 297 amino acids in the most of the RV isolates studied, while isolates BR-Pfx3 and BR-Pfx4 contained 906 nucleotides encoding 301 amino acids, as well as raccoon RV isolates from the U.S.A. (NY.RAC and FL.RAC), and BR-Pfx5 contained 891 nucleotides encoding 296 amino acids, as well as dog RV isolates from Asia (115.DG, V113.DG and V118.DG) (Fig. 1). The similarities between the nucleotide and amino acid sequences within the Brazilian RV iso-

lates were greater than 77.5% and 80.6%, respectively.

A phylogenetic tree based on partial P genetic data revealed two large genetic clusters (Fig. 2). One cluster consisted of chiroptera-related RV isolates and could further be divided into several monophyletic lineages according to host bat species. The other cluster consisted mainly of carnivora-related RV isolates, and was further divided into several lineages according to geographic origin and the host species. Some skunk and raccoon RV isolates from North America were placed in outlying lineages of the chiroptera-related RV cluster.

Brazilian RV isolates consisted of six RV variants which were associated with specific host species; the three insect-

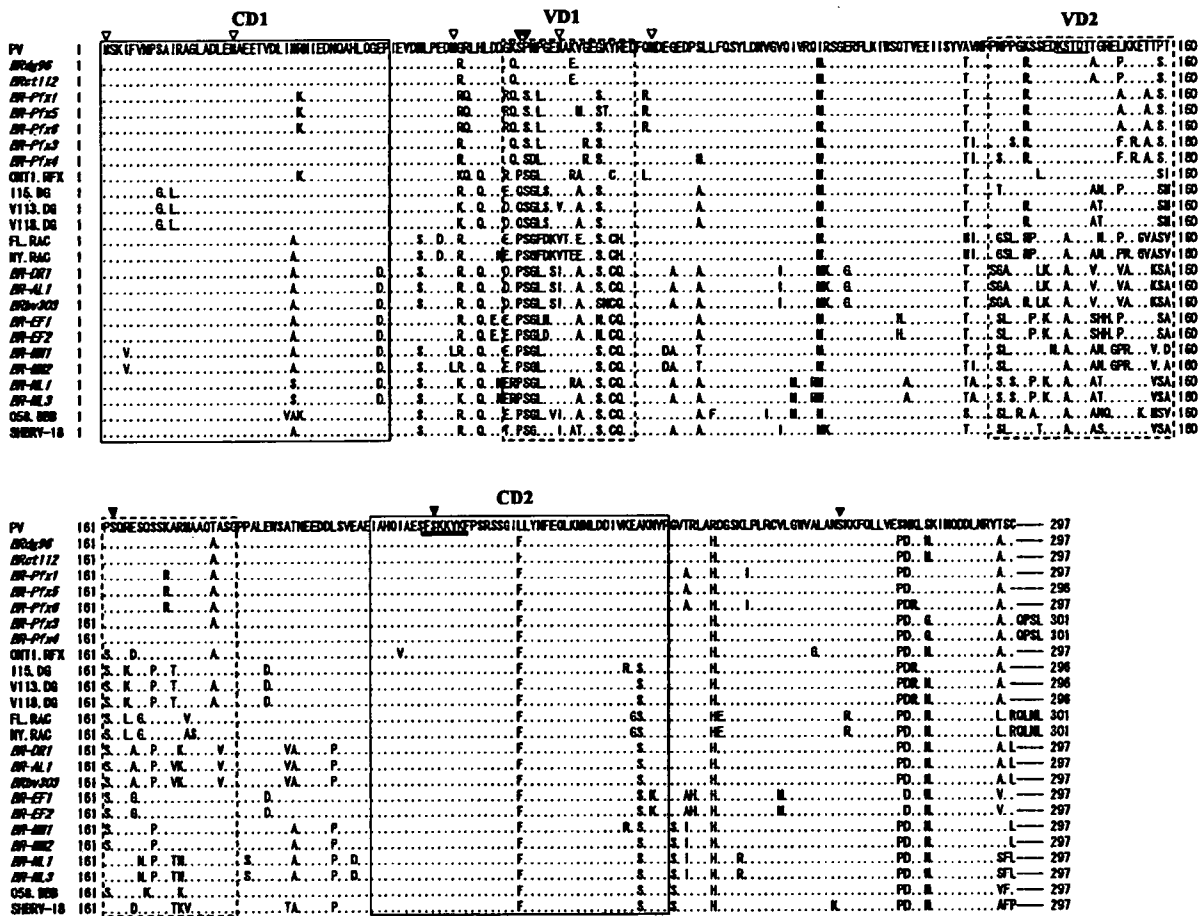


Fig. 1. Multiple alignments of P protein amino acid sequences. Italic font indicates the samples for which nucleotide sequences were determined in this study. Dots indicate amino acids that are in agreement with the sequence in the first line. Boxes with continuous lines delimit conserved domains (CD1 and 2), while those with dashed lines delimit variable domains (VD1 and 2). Black triangles indicate the positions of serine residues identified as phosphoacceptors in the P protein of the CVS strain. White triangles indicate the positions of methionine residues and confirmed translation initiation in the CVS strain. Continuous and double-continuous underlining show the LC8 binding motif and the lysine-rich motif, respectively.

tivorous bat RV lineages consisted of *N. laticaudatus*, *M. molossus* and *E. furinalis* and the vampire bat-related RV lineage consisted of *D. rotundus*, *Artibeus* sp. as well as cattle RV isolates (Fig. 2). In addition, Brazilian carnivora-related RVs formed a monophyletic cluster and were divided into dog- and fox-related RV lineages.

Based on multiple alignments of P protein amino acid sequence data, two conserved domains (CD1 and 2) comprising positions 1–50 and 201–245, respectively, and two variable domains (VD1 and 2) comprising positions 61–80 and 134–180, respectively, have been identified [30, 32]. These conserved and variable domains were observed in the Brazilian RV isolates of this study (Fig. 1). Specific amino acid substitutions corresponding to the phylogenetic lineages were observed throughout the P protein, as the result that Asp₄₂ and Glu₆₂ were found to be retained among Bra-

zilian chiroptera- and carnivora-related RV isolates, respectively. The distribution of amino acid substitutions was particularly concentrated on the VD2, in which the hydrophobic profiles associated with specific RV variants were observed in the hydrophilic region (data not shown).

The lysine-rich motif, FSKKYKF, which was identified as an important component of C-terminal N protein-binding [22], was conserved in amino acids 209–214 in all Brazilian RV isolates analyzed (Fig. 1). The binding site for the cytoplasmic light chain of dynein (LC8), which is involved in viral nucleocapsid axoplasmic transport [21, 39], has been reported as the RSEDKSTQTGR sequence of amino acids 139–151 in the P protein of the PV strain [38]. However, Lo *et al.* reported that the consensus sequence (K/R)XTQT is the common target-acceptor of LC8 [28]. In this study, the consensus sequence of Brazilian RV isolates was

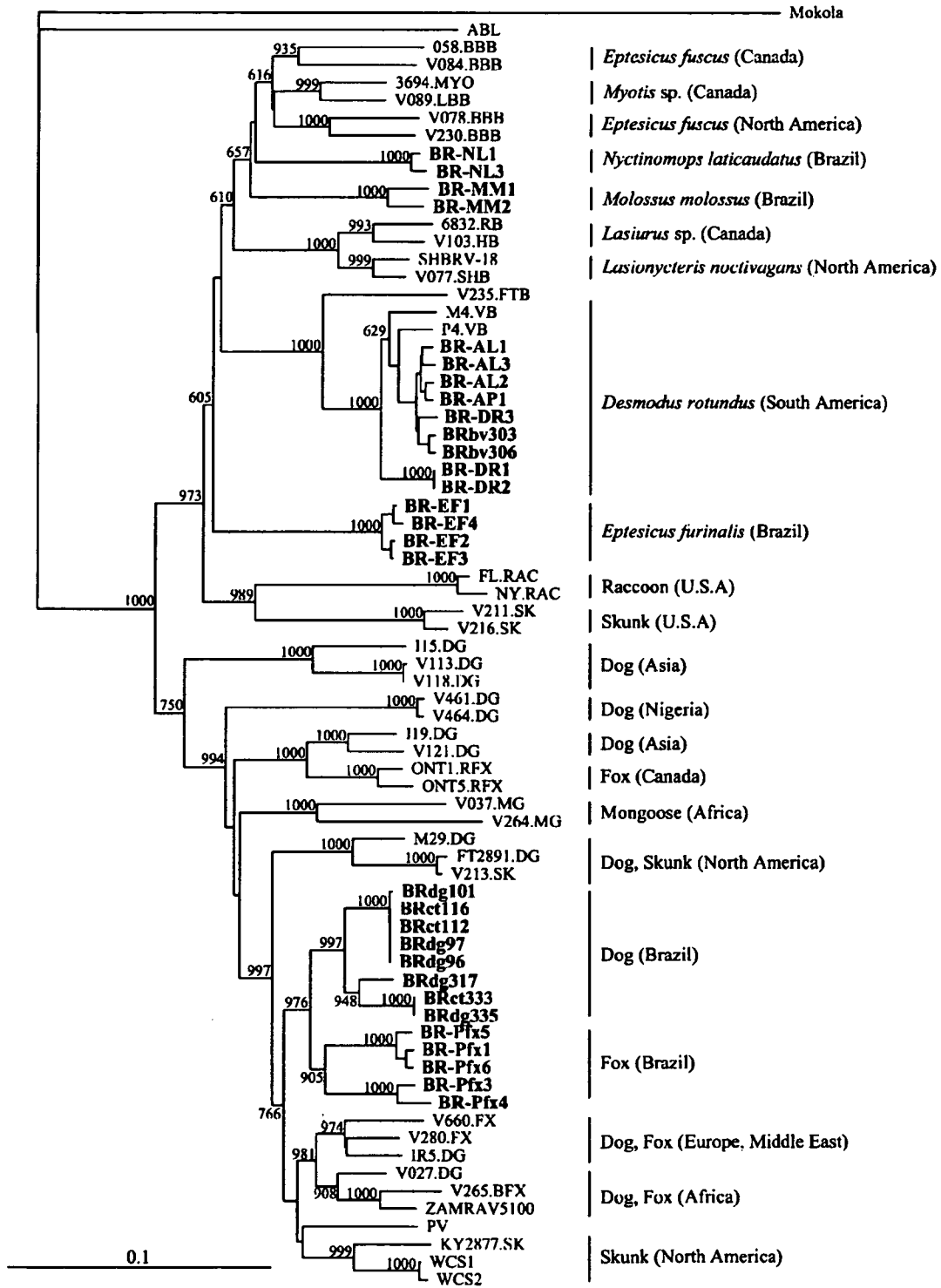


Fig. 2. Phylogenetic tree based on the P gene (1514–2404 compared to PV strain). Bold font indicates the samples for which nucleotide sequences were determined in this study. Bootstrap values are shown at major branches.

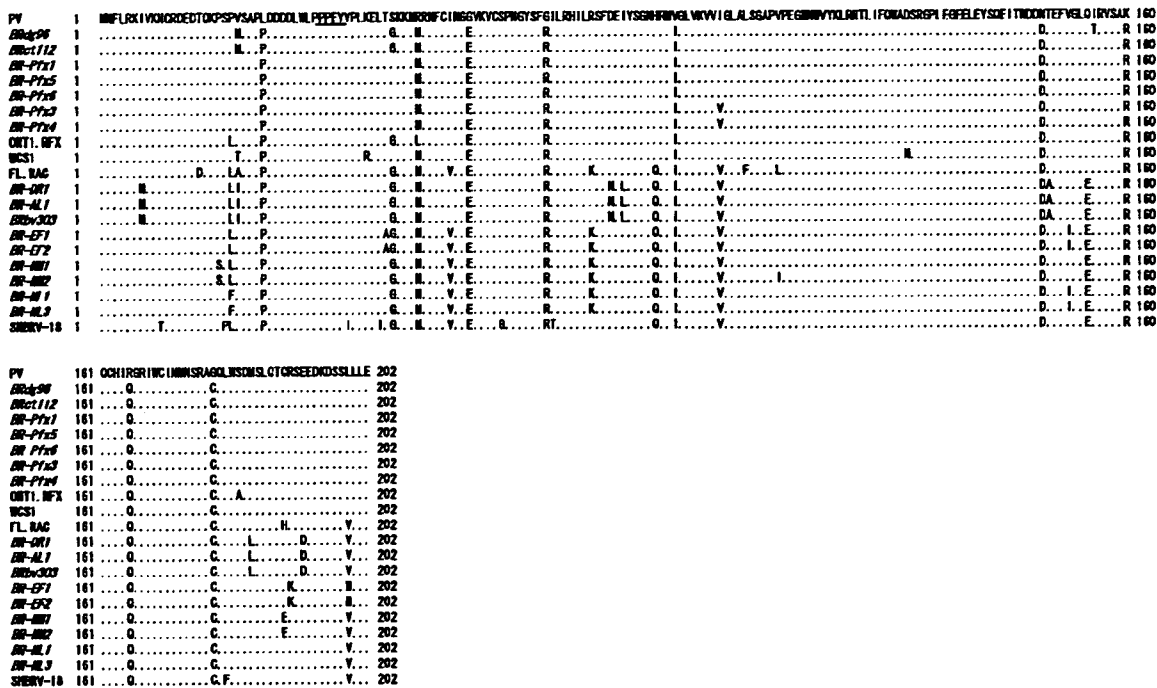


Fig. 3. Multiple alignments of M protein amino acid sequences. Italic font indicates the samples for which nucleotide sequences were determined in this study. Dots indicate amino acids that are in agreement with the sequence in the first line. Continuous underline shows the PPXY motif.

K(S/A)TQT encoded by amino acids 144–148. In addition, Ser₁₄₅ was found to be conserved predominantly carnivora-related RV isolates while Ala₁₄₅ was predominant in chiroptera-related RV isolates.

Phosphoacceptors associated with protein kinase C (PKC) or RV protein kinase (RVPK) were identified as Ser₆₃, Ser₆₄, Ser₁₆₂, Ser₂₁₀ and Ser₂₇₁ in the P protein of the CVS strain [13]. The phosphoacceptors associated with PKC, Ser₁₆₂, Ser₂₁₀ and Ser₂₇₁, were retained in all Brazilian RV isolates, while those of RVPK, Ser₆₃ and Ser₆₄, were not. Ser₆₃ was retained in Brazilian carnivora-related RVs, and was substituted by Pro₆₃ in Brazilian chiroptera-related RVs. Ser₆₄ was retained in Brazilian fox- and chiroptera-related RVs, and was substituted by Pro₆₄ in Brazilian dog-related RVs. Of the four methionine residues located in-frame of the single P protein sequences, Met₂₀, Met₅₃, Met₆₉ and Met₈₃, all have been shown to translate four proteins of various lengths in the CVS strain [4]; Met₂₀ and Met₈₃ were conserved in all Brazilian RV isolates.

The ORF of the M gene contained 609 nucleotides encoding 202 amino acids in Brazilian RV isolates (Fig. 3). The similarities between the nucleotide and amino acid sequences in the Brazilian RV isolates exceeded 82.4% and 92.5%, respectively. As with the analysis of the P gene, phylogenetic trees based on the ORF of the M gene revealed two large genetic clusters, one chiroptera- and one carnivora-related RV cluster, containing six Brazilian RV lineages associated with the host species and geographic

distributions (Fig. 4). Some raccoon RV isolates from the U.S.A. were placed within outlying lineages to the chiroptera- and carnivora-related RV clusters. Specific amino acid substitutions associated with host species were found scattered throughout the sequences of the M protein, for example Met₇, Ile₂₂, Asn₈₀, Leu₈₂, Ala₁₄₈, Leu₁₈₄ and Asp₁₉₂ were all retained in vampire bat-related RVs (Fig. 3). However, the hydrophobic profiles did not differ significantly among the Brazilian RV isolates (data not shown). The proline-rich motif (PPXY motif), which interacts with the WW domain of cellular proteins [15, 16], formed consensus sequence PPEY at amino acids 35–38 in all Brazilian RV isolates.

DISCUSSION

Phylogenetic analyses based on the P and M genes revealed the existence of several Brazilian RV variants corresponding to phylogenetic analyses targeting the viral N and G genes [19, 25, 26, 41, 42, 44, 45]. Phylogenetic analysis showed two clusters consisting of chiroptera- or carnivora-related RV isolates. The chiroptera-related RV cluster was further divided into several lineages depending on host bat species, with four Brazilian chiroptera-related RV lineages observed. While several Brazilian fox RV isolates were characterized as encoding either extended or deleted P proteins, these formed a monophyletic cluster with other Brazilian carnivora-related RVs encoding general P