

Blue Crab

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Molecular Identification and Phylogenetic Trees Reconstruction of Blue Swimming Crabs (Decapoda: Portunidae) from Pangpang Bay, Banyuwangi

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Abstract

Crabs are a group of Decapoda (Portunidae) that act as keystone species from Pangpang Bay as the marine benthic organism. Besides having an ecological function, crab also provides essential components for human health. The crab identification technique is usually conducted based on morphology and anatomy characteristics, in which certain body parts as the key for identification. This study used two identification methods, i.e. morphological features and a molecular approach. Although morphological identification has been carried out, the molecular techniques provide better accuracy and, at the same time, provide additional information about the characteristics of mitochondrial DNA. The purpose of this study is to identify the blue swimming crab caught by a traditional fisherman at Pangpang Bay, Banyuwangi, based on mitochondrial DNA sequence on cytochrome c oxidase subunit I, and reconstructed the phylogenetic tree including genetic distance also was analysed. The nucleotide sequences of the COI gene were analysed by Chromas, Clustalw, Reverse-Complement, and the MegaX. The phylogenetic tree and genetic distance calculations were carried out using Mega X software through the Neighbor-Joining (NJ) Algorithm with the addition of several sequences from the NCBI online database. This study confirmed that the specimen of Pangpang Bay is *Portunus pelagicus* (BWIPPO01 and BWIPPO03) and *Portunus sanguinolentus* (BWIPPO02). The species of *P. pelagicus* have 99.99% similarities with the same species (KJ168060) from China, while the *P. sanguinolentus* is close to the same species (EU284144) with a per cent identity is 99.97%. The genetic distance, for *P. pelagicus* and *P. sanguinolentus*, were in range of 0.00-0.066 and 0.00-0.005 respectively.

Keywords: crabs, genetic, molecular, phylogenetic, diversity

Introduction

The Pangpang Bay is located in the coast of Banyuwangi Regency which is rich with aquatic fauna diversity (Andriyono and Suciyono, 2020). This ecosystem acts as physical protection for coastlines, and for habitat, spawning, nursery, and feeding ground of many marine organisms, one of which are blue swimming crabs which act as keystone species (Buwono et al., 2015). Beside Central of Java (Redjeki et al., 2020), East Java is one of high blue swimming crab producing Province in Indonesia

The production of blue swimming crab capture fisheries in Banyuwangi reached 4,566 tons.y⁻¹ and in 2018 decreased to 289 tons.y⁻¹ (Santoso et al., 2016). No data mentions the abundance of crab production in the Bay until now. This may be due to

many fishermen sold their catch directly to collectors or often not being recorded by local fisheries service officials. These absence or lack of data make it challenging to know the diversity of blue swimming crab species from fishermen's catches (Lai et al., 2010).

There are many variations in colouration (Han et al., 2018), size, spination, habitat, and other characteristics of blue swimming crab that cause confusion in the identification process. The crab identification technique is usually used their morphological traits and characters (Hidayani et al., 2018). It has also been strengthened by references for critical identification of crabs. Although it has already based on the species identification key, they still have a high level of morphological diversity (Dharmayanti, 2011), so it is necessary to do more

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accurate identification techniques by molecular identification (Vartak *et al.*, 2018). Some mitochondrial DNA region have been used for blue swimming crab identification, such as COI, 16S rDNA (Hidayania *et al.*, 2015), and 12 S rDNA (Klinbunga *et al.*, 2010). This study is the first-time molecular identification using partial COI region for blue swimming crab specimens from Pangpang Bay, Banyuwangi.

Materials and Methods

Sampling of crabs

A total of 3 samples were collected from traditional fishermen around Ringin Putih village, Muncar Banyuwangi who caught the crabs from Pangpang Bay, on mid-March 2020. All samples were dead upon purchasing. The digital camera was used to take individual photograph before further treatments applied. Morphologically, identification and species confirmation have been carried out, including length, width, carapace phase, Claw arm, claw arm thorn, swimming toe, and coloration of the carapace (Table 1.). Then, molecular identification was carried out based on universal barcoding for mitochondrial DNA on COI region gene (Briski *et al.*, 2011). No specific permit was required for this study. All specimens were kept in a conical tube including 90% ethanol to avoid DNA degradation.

DNA extraction and PCR protocol

Each specimen has been collected based on the morphological characters and, after collection, directly preserved in 90% ethanol for other experimental purposes. According to the product guidelines, genomic DNA was extracted using an Accuprep® Genomic DNA Extraction Kit (Bioneer). Approximately 1 cm long of pereopod tissues was dissected, taken and mixed with 6X lysis buffer, then homogenised by TissueLyser II (Qiagen). Quantification of purified genomic DNA performed by nanoDrop (ThermoFisher Scientific D1000), aliquoted and stored at the -70°C for further analysis.

One set universal fish primer targeting cytochrome c oxidase I (COI) region, BCL-BCH (Baldwin *et al.*, 2009, Handy *et al.*, 2011), was used to obtain the partial sequences of each gene. The PCR mixture (20µL) included 11.2 µL ultra-pure water, 1 µL primer forward and reverse (0.5 µM), 0.2 µL Ex Taq DNA polymerase (TaKaRa, Japan), 2 µL 10X ExTag Buffer, 2 µL dNTPs (1 µM, TaKaRa, Japan), and 2 µL genomic DNA as template. The PCR condition was carried out under the following setting: 95°C for

5 min in initial denaturation, followed by denaturation at 95°C for 30 s in 40 cycles, 50°C for 30 s in annealing, and 72°C for 45 s in extension step, and a final extension at 72°C for 5 min. Before being sent to MacroGen for sequencing, the PCR product was passed through 1.5% gel electrophoresis, for 30 minutes to obtain bands in the range of 500-600 bp (Figure 2.). The band formed in the electrophoresis process was purified with the AccuPrep@Gel purification kit (Bioneer, Korea).

Data analysis

All sequences were aligned to reference on GenBank database by BLASTN (<https://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi>). Species confirmation is done if the percent identity is 99-100%. A number of sequences of the same species from NCBI were added in the arrangement of the phylogenetic tree. The pairwise evolutionary distance among the family is determined by the Kimura 2-Parameter method. The Neighbor-joining (NJ) tree was constructed. Mega X carried 1000 bootstrap analyses, and genetic distance used a nucleotide substitution model by comparing a DNA sequence of one nucleotide with another nucleotide (Kumar *et al.*, 2018).

Result and Discussion

Morphology identification

The morphology of the blue swimming crab (*Portunus pelagicus*) is as follows. The carapace shape tends to be oval and varies in colour, from brown to bluish-green (Figure 1). The blue swimming crab *P. pelagicus* usually has a greenish-brown carapace colour (Anbarasu *et al.*, 2019). In addition, there is also a bluish-green in colouration (de Lestang *et al.*, 2003); this species has varied colours so males and females can be distinguished through their colour and shape of the carapace (Lai *et al.*, 2010). The carapace of male *P. pelagicus* has a greenish-blue colour with purple-bluish chelipeds and white spots on it. In contrast, the female tends to have a greenish carapace colour accompanied by white dots. These characteristics indicate that the specimen code BWIPPO01 is female and BWIPPO03 is male.

The specimens obtained from Pangpang Bay, Banyuwangi may be two different species, namely *P. pelagicus* and *P. sanguinolentus*. The most strong difference between both species is the carapace's colour and pattern (Figure 1.). Several morphology measurement were also conducted (Table 1.) and compared with the crab identification book to support a high level of accuracy so that the morphological

identification process can be continued with molecular identification (Lai *et al.*, 2010).

Another characteristic is the shape of the abdomen. Male crabs have a sharper abdomen than females, which are broader and more oval because they store eggs in them (de Lestang *et al.*, 2003). The copulatory organ is a distinct morphological feature in male crabs. This organ is similar to all other crab species. However, parts of this organ are specific which is called gonopods, which are only found in the *Portunus* species. In addition, it is seen as a line in males, especially in the posterior and branchial areas. Different white spot patterns on the carapace of *P. pelagicus* correlated with gene interactions (Fujaya *et al.*, 2016). In addition, it can be used as an indicator for species identification in a population.

Based on the crab identification key, a crab can be assumed to be a species of *P. pelagicus* if it has characteristics that are almost the same as some of that identification keys, as in the carapace, which tends to be convex, the teeth are small and conspicuous, the claw arms are relatively long and flat, have three spines on the claw arms, the shape of the swimming legs are round and relatively long, and the colour of the male carapace is blue, greenish, blue-purple claws, and has white patches that almost spread over the entire carapace. Compared with the sampling results from Pangpang Bay, Banyuwangi, there are similarities between the specimen codes

BWIPP001, BWIPP003 (Table 1.) and (Figure 1.) with identification keys, so it is assumed that the specimen is *P. pelagicus*. There are many similarities between the two species, so this still needs to do further identification with molecular analysis so that the specimen is valid for the *P. pelagicus* species from Pangpang Bay, Banyuwangi.

Molecular identification

Molecular identification is the next step in confirming morphological identification. Specimens were tested for the correctness of the species by aligning them with the website (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) and the Basic Local Alignment Search Tool Nucleotide (BLASTN) to see the level of similarity. The sample code sequence BWIPP001 identified *P. pelagicus* species, BWIPS002 identified *P. sanguinolentus* species, and BWIPP003 identified *P. pelagicus* species (Table 2.). The identification data were based on morphological characteristics, then were identified based on DNA barcoding techniques and conservation status (Table 3.).

The phylogenetic tree was generated using MEGAX, including genetic distance (Figure 3.). The phylogenetic tree consists of species caught from Pangpang Bay and the same species from the Genbank database. Then, we added KC959891” or *Panulirus homarus* as an outgroup.

Table 1. The Morphology of the Crab Specimens Obtained from Pangpang Bay.

| Morphological Parameters | BWIPP001 (<i>P. pelagicus</i>) | BWIPS002 (<i>P. sanguinolentus</i>) | BWIPP003 (<i>P. pelagicus</i>) |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Length (cm) | 13.1 | 13.4 | 13.6 |
| Width (cm) | 4.4 | 3.2 | 4.1 |
| Carapace Phase | Very convex | Convex | Very convex |
| Claw Arm | Relatively long and big | Relatively long and flat | Relatively long and big |
| Claw Arm Thorn | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Swimming Toe | Relative oval | Round | Relative oval |
| Carapace Colour | Greenish brown with white spot | Light brown with three red spots | Green with white spot |

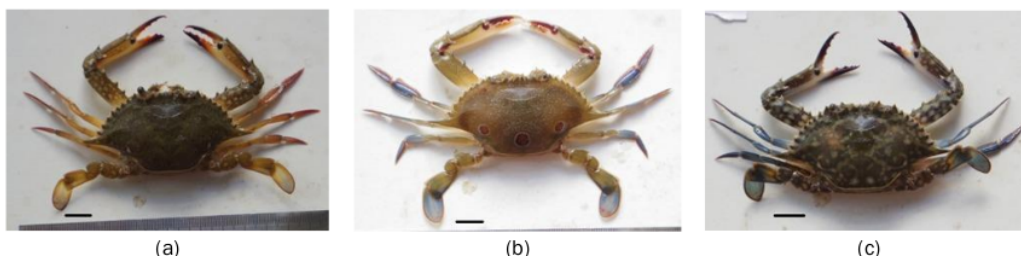


Figure 1. Morphology characteristic of three specimens. (a) BWIPP001; (b) BWIPS002; (c) BWIPP003 are three specimens of this study. The black bar is showing one cm in length.

Crab is one of the commodities from Pangpang Bay besides fish and shrimp (Buwono *et al.*, 2015). Currently, identification is carried out based on morphological and anatomical characteristics. However, several crabs are considered the same even though they have several different morphological and anatomical features. In general, the shape of the carapace on the crab can distinguish the classification of species by being marked by the presence of spots or different carapace colours. The specimens in this study suggest that these species are *P. pelagicus* and *P. sanguinolentus* (Figure 1.).

Based on the morphological characteristics, the specimens were identified as *P. pelagicus* dan *P. sanguinolentus*. The carapace of *P. pelagicus* usually has a greenish-brown colour. In addition, there is also a bluish-green color (Hidayani *et al.*, 2018), adding that this species has a varied coloration that can

distinguish between males and females crabs through the color and shape of the carapace.

Male crabs have a blue-green color pattern with purple-bluish chelipeds and white spots on the carapace, while the female crabs tend to have a greenish carapace color accompanied by white spots (Lai *et al.*, 2010). Morphological characteristics confirm that the BWIPP001 specimen is a female crab and the specimen code BWIPP003 is a male crab. Another characteristic that is often found is the shape of the abdomen. The male crab has a sharper abdomen than the female, which is wider and oval to store the eggs in it (de Lestang *et al.*, 2003). Copulatory organs are different morphological characteristics in a male crab. This organ is similar to all other crab species. However, there are parts of this organ that are specific and distinct, namely the

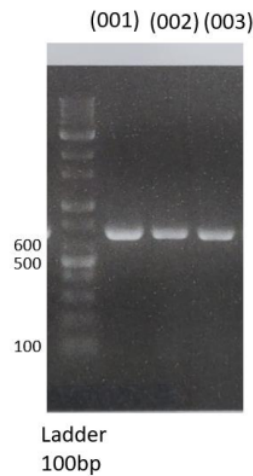


Figure 2. Gel electrophoresis of three PCR product from crab sample including 100bp ladder

10 Table 2. The Results of the BLAST Analysis Based on the Level of Similarity of the Crab Sample with the Genbank Database

| Sample Code | Species | Common Name | % Identity | GenBank Accession No. |
|-------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| BWIPP001 | <i>Portunus pelagicus</i> | Blue swimming crab | 99.99% | KJ168060 |
| BWIPS002 | <i>Portunus sanguinolentus</i> | Three-spot swimming crab | 99.97% | EU284144 |
| BWIPP003 | <i>Portunus pelagicus</i> | Blue swimming crab | 99.99% | KJ168060 |

Table 3. Conservation Status Based on IUCN

| Sample Code | Morphological Identification | BLASTN Result | Similarities (%) | IUCN Status |
|-------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| BWIPP001 | <i>Portunus pelagicus</i> | <i>Portunus pelagicus</i> | 99,99% | Not Evaluated (NE) |
| BWIPS002 | <i>Portunus sanguinolentus</i> | <i>Portunus sanguinolentus</i> | 99,97% | Not Evaluated (NE) |
| BWIPP003 | <i>Portunus pelagicus</i> | <i>Portunus pelagicus</i> | 99,99% | Not Evaluated (NE) |

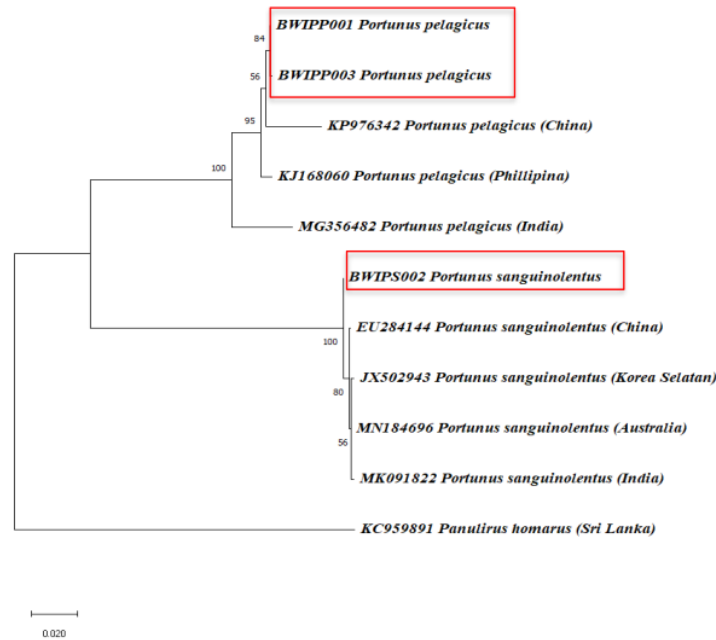


Figure 3. Phylogenetic tree of *Portunus pelagicus* and *Portunus sanguinolentus* with 1000 bootstrap including same reference sequence from GenBank database. The red square shape indicates the samples in this study.

gonopods, which is only found in the *Portunus* (Ewers-Saucedo *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, in the male, there is a line, especially in the posterior and branchial areas. added that the different white spot patterns on the carapace of *P. pelagicus* correlated with gene interactions. Besides, it can be used as an indicator for species identification in a population (Fujaya *et al.*, 2016). Based on its morphological characteristics, the BWIPS002 specimen has a carapace that tends to be sharp and the characteristic of this species is a carapace pattern with three dark spots (Soundarapandian *et al.*, 2013). A common characteristic of the *P. sanguinolentus* crab is brown carapace color with 3 blood-red spots on the posterior of the body (Lai *et al.*, 2010).

The results of molecular identification (Table 2) on the three specimen indicate that the species is identified as *P. pelagicus* (BWIPP001 and BWIPP003), and species *P. sanguinolentus* (BWIPS002). The sequence obtained in the molecular identification is then compiled in a phylogenetic tree (Figure 3). The results of the phylogenetic tree showed that BWIPP001 and BWIPP003 had a 100% similarity with the specimen from China, as was seen in the specimen BWIPP002. The higher the similarity in the BLASTN analysis, the more accurate the results are because there is a match between the sample and the data on Genbank (Suriana *et al.*, 2019). The

similarity may be due to the similarity of geographical characteristics of habitat and feeding habits (Chi *et al.*, 2010).

In the nature, female crabs with gonad could be found in high salinity waters, especially in sandy areas so that the egg hatching process can be successful and support the development of their larvae (Kangas, 2000). Ovigerous female crabs migrate to deeper and clear waters to spawn (Xiao and Kumar, 2004). Specimen BWIPP001 are female crabs, BWIPS002 male crabs, and BWIPP003 male crabs. The male crabs prefer waters with salinity of 28‰ so that they are spread around relatively shallow coastal waters, while female crabs prefer higher salinity (34‰) for spawning so they are distributed in deeper waters (Jaya and Sondita, 2006).

The sampling of crabs in present work was carried out in March 2021, which was not a crab catching season. December-April period is not included in the index of crab catching season due to bad weather conditions and large waves, so the number of fishing trips is limited (Ihsan *et al.*, 2021). The *P. pelagicus* habitat can usually be found in shallow lagoon waters with sandy substrates. In these conditions, it is necessary to adapt the environment in the form of carapace color patterns. The crab has a variety of carapace colors and is usually used as an

adaptation strategy for self-protection against predators. In addition, this color pattern also supports to better obtaining food and is also possible related to success in mating (Ze-Lin *et al.*, 2012).

Besides, from the morphological and molecular analysis data, specimens BWIPP001 and BWIPP003 are the same species, namely *P. pelagicus* with 100% similarity. The closeness or resemblance of specimens is closely related to genetic distance. The genetic distance between *P. pelagicus* specimens was low, ranging from 0.00 to 0.066 (Table 4.). The smallest genetic distance is 0.00 by specimens BWIPP001 and BWIPP003 which means it has a closeness of 100%. While with the Philippines specimen, it has a distance of 0.008 from Pangpang Bay specimens and has a closeness of 99.99%. The Indian specimen had a genetic distance of 0.049 where there was a 99.51% similarity. While the genetic distance of 0.066 was obtained from India and China intraspecies. Pangpang Bay waters area has a very strategic location facing directly to the Indian Ocean and also facing the Bali Strait (Andriyono and Suciyo, 2020). This confirms that the *P. pelagicus* sample is related to samples from some Southeast Asian countries north of Indonesia so that the *P. pelagicus* species found in the two countries have a high degree of kinship (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2018).

Above result is also similar with *P. sanguinolentus* species. Based on the results of the phylogenetic tree (Figure 7.), the Pangpang Bay specimen (BWIPS002) has a close relationship with the Chinese specimen. For *P. Sanguinolentus*, the genetic distance between specimens were ranging from 0.00 to 0.005 (Table 4.), as BWIPS002 with China specimen that has closest genetic distance (0.003) which is showed by the similarity of DNA sequences of 99.97% (China) in marine waters connected to the western Indo-Pacific region (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2018). Meanwhile, the farthest genetic distance was in South Korea and India specimens, which had a distance of 0.005 with BWIPS002 specimens. The greatest genetic distance can be influenced by the habitat of the species. *P. sanguinolentus* is widely distributed in the Indo-Pacific region, but small numbers are also found in the east coast of South Africa to Hawaiian waters, north of Japan and south of Australia (Pan, 2010). This species can usually be found in sandy marine habitats up to a depth of 30 meters (Rasheed and Mustaqim, 2010). In addition, genetic distance can also be influenced by characteristics, environmental heterogeneity, and large population sizes (Avisé, 2000).

Both *P. pelagicus* dan *P. sanguinolentus* are often found in fishermen's catches from Pangpang

Bay, Banyuwangi because they have the same habitat, i.e. muddy to sandy with abundance of nutrients. High biomass in non-fish fauna identified the species of crabs *P. pelagicus* and *P. sanguinolentus* as much as 13,609.38 gr (Buwono *et al.*, 2015). The condition of the bottom texture of the waters in the Pangpang Bay area adjacent to the settlement is dominated by clay-sand substrate and while the area adjacent to aquaculture ponds has a dominant sandy clay substrate (Munirul and Ardiyansyah, 2018). Other conditions are also supported by the mangrove area in Pangpang Bay which is still good in supplying the availability of nutrients in the form of leaf litter detritus and is able to increase soil and water nutrients (Kawamuna *et al.*, 2017).

The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) status for two crab species (*P. pelagicus* and *P. sanguinolentus*) is not evaluated (NE) (Cites, 2017). However, the exploitation of this species is quite high as a food and protein source. In addition, the use of non-selected fishing gear also reduces the natural stock of crabs in several areas (Andriyono and Suciyo, 2020). Thus, it is necessary to pay attention on the natural stock of crabs by conducting periodic monitoring and prohibiting the use of fishing gear that is not environmentally friendly.

Conclusion

Based on the results of morphological and molecular analysis, it was found that Pangpang Bay crab specimens (BWIPP001 and BWIPP003) were *P. pelagicus*, while the other specimen (BWIPS002) was identified as *P. sanguinolentus*. Equalization of sequences (BWIPP001 and BWIPP003) with the NCBI database on sequences KJ168060 (99.99%) and *P. sanguinolentus* BWIPS002 with EU284144 (99.97%). The genetic distance of *P. pelagicus* (Banyuwangi) ranged from 0.00-0.066, with the largest intragenetic distance of *P. pelagicus* from India and China, which was 0.066. *P. sanguinolentus* (Banyuwangi) the largest intergenetic distance between South Korean and Indian sequences. While the genetic distance of *P. pelagicus* and *P. sanguinolentus* is 0.216. The results of present works flourish the diversity of crabs in Indonesia waters.

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