

1 **The evolution of red blood cell shape in a continental radiation of fishes**

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16

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29

30 **Abstract**

31 The size and shape of Red Blood Cells (RBC) can provide key information on life  
32 history strategies in vertebrates. However, little is known about how RBC shape  
33 evolved in response to environmental factors and the role of phylogenetic relationship.  
34 Here, we analyzed RBC morphometrics in a continental radiation of fishes testing the  
35 hypothesis that phylogenetic relationship determines species occupation of  
36 morphospace. We collected blood samples of five specimens of 15 freshwater fish  
37 species from six orders and used basic stereological methods to measure cell and  
38 nucleus area, perimeter, and diameter, cell and nucleus volume, nucleus:cytoplasm  
39 ratio, and shape factor of 50 cells per specimen. Then, we conducted a phylogenetic  
40 Principal Components Analysis using a dated phylogeny and built a phylomorphospace.  
41 To test if the phylogenetic relationship predicted the phenotypic similarity of species,  
42 we calculated multivariate phylogenetic signal. We also estimated the evolution rate of  
43 RBC shape for each node and tip using ridge regression. Finally, we tested if the  
44 position in the water column influenced RBC shape using a phylogenetic GLS. RBC  
45 shape seems to have evolved in a non-stationary way because the distribution pattern of  
46 species in the phylomorphospace is independent of the phylogeny. Accordingly, the rate  
47 of evolution for shape was highly heterogeneous, with an increase in the genus  
48 *Pygocentrus*. Water column position does not influence RBC shape. In conclusion,  
49 RBC shape seem to have evolved in response to multiple selective pressures  
50 independent of life history characters.

51 **Key-words:** phylomorphospace, erythrocytes, stereology, phylogenetic signal, rate of  
52 evolution.

53

54 **Introduction**

55

56           The shape, size, and number of Red Blood Cells (RBC) vary greatly in  
57   vertebrates (Wintrobe 1934). Although the reasons for this variation are not well  
58   understood, phylogenetic relationships can at least partially explain it, because early  
59   diverging vertebrate lineages have larger but fewer RBC (Anderson et al., 2018). Early  
60   diverging vertebrates also have round and flattened RBCs with a central nucleus, while  
61   derived lineages have ellipsoid cells (Nikinmaa 1990; Glomski et al. 1992).

62           Both abiotic factors and life history traits can also affect the composition and  
63   morphology of fish RBC (Dal'Bó et al., 2015; Kumar, 2016; Yakhnenko et al., 2016).  
64   For example, RBC size is inversely related to swimming ability in teleosts (Lay and  
65   Baldwin 1999; Witeska 2013), while size of RBCs is highest at intermediate altitude in  
66   one lizard species (González-Morales et al. 2017). In addition, cell size has an inverse  
67   relation with metabolic rate, suggesting lowest metabolic cost to maintain active  
68   membrane transport in large cells (Szarki, 1970; Graham et al. 1985, Maciak et al,  
69   2011). Deep-sea fish species have large RBC, compatible with their low metabolism  
70   (Graham et al. 1985). Then, RBC size in teleost has an adaptative value and changes in  
71   response to external factors (Lay and Baldwin 1999). RBC volume is another  
72   morphological variable correlated with physiological state in fish. For example, cell  
73   volume is negative correlated with hemoglobin concentration, while nuclear volume  
74   explains only 17% of cell volume (Lay and Baldwin 1999).

75           The nucleus of RBC is strongly related to species adaptation to environmental  
76   conditions. Nucleus size is positively correlated with genome size in vertebrates  
77   (Gregory 2001). Accordingly, the amount of DNA regulates the size of cells as well as  
78   the nucleus. Larger nuclei have more room for protein synthesis that are required in the  
79   metabolism of larger cells (Gregory 2001). Variations in RBC DNA content are also  
80   directly related to hematopoiesis, which in turn influence species adaptation. Genome

81 size seems also related to life-history traits. For example, genome size is positively  
82 related with the size and diameter of eggs, and negatively related with growth rate and  
83 standard size in fish (Hardie and Hebert, 2004; Smith and Gregory 2009).

84 The shape of RBC also changes according to cell maturation stage. While  
85 immature RBC (erythroblasts) are usually rounded, older cells are fusiform (Fijan 2002,  
86 Passantino et al. 2004). However, the degree of ellipticalness seems to vary among  
87 species (Dal'Bó et al., 2015). However, little is known about the physiological  
88 implications of the variation in the fusiform shape for species. Similarly, little is known  
89 about the factors involved in the variation of RBC volume and its implications (Lay and  
90 Bladwin 1999) but increasing temperature and body mass increase RBC volume in  
91 tetrapods (Gillooly and Zenil-Ferguson 2014). Also, RBC volume is related to  
92 polyploidy in fish (Gregory 2001). However, little is known about the relative role of  
93 phylogenetic relationships and abiotic factors in determining RBC shape.

94 No study has yet analysed how RBC shape have evolved in fish using modern  
95 phylogenetic comparative methods. As shape is multivariate, here we used a set of first-  
96 and second-order stereological variables to describe the shape of RBC. Also, we tested  
97 if the position in the water column, as a proxy for partial oxygen pressure, species are  
98 usually found affect RBC shape. Our hypothesis is that neustonic species (that live  
99 closer to the surface) would have smaller RBC due to higher surface area to volume  
100 ratio. We also built the phylomorphospace of RBC shape and tested for phylogenetic  
101 signal. We expect species with similar habitat use would be close together in the  
102 morphospace. This is the first study combining common stereological analysis and  
103 phylogenetic comparative method to understand how fish RBC evolved. Our results can  
104 help understand how fish species evolved to occupy habitats with different oxygen

105 concentration or toxicity, besides understanding how metabolic rate vary among  
106 species.

107

## 108 **Methods**

### 109 **Specimen sampling**

110 We analyzed five individuals of 15 species belonging to 15 genera and 2  
111 superorders: *Pygocentrus nattereri*, *Gymnotus inaequilabiatus*, *Astyanax lineatus*,  
112 *Bujurquina vittata*, *Cichlasoma dimerus*, *Metynnis maculatus*, *Prochilodus lineatus*,  
113 *Piaractus mesopotamicus*, *Rhamdia quelen*, *Poecilia reticulata*, *Hypostomus*  
114 *boulengeri*, *Pseudoplatystoma corruscans*, *Synbranchus marmoratus*, *Brycon hilarii*,  
115 and *Hyphessobrycon anisitsi* (Figure 1). We obtained adult fish specimens from both  
116 sexes between 2017 and 2018 from a number of sources: *Pygocentrus nattereri* was  
117 fished in a river the Pantanal field station (Corumbá, Mato Grosso do Sul, central  
118 Brazil); *Gymnotus inaequilabiatus*, *Hyphessobrycon anisitsi*, and *Synbranchus*  
119 *marmoratus* were bought from a fish store; *Astyanax lineatus* and *Bujurquina vittata*  
120 were collected in an urban lake in Campo Grande; *Cichlasoma dimerus*, *Metynnis*  
121 *maculatus*, *Prochilodus lineatus*, *Piaractus mesopotamicus* were donated by the city  
122 aquarium; *Pseudoplatystoma corruscans*, *Brycon hilarii*, and *Hypostomus boulengeri*  
123 were obtained from the university Aquaculture Research ponds; *Poecilia reticulata* was  
124 collected in an urban stream in Campo Grande. These species were selected because  
125 they are common in our region, use distinct habitats, and belong to distant lineages.

126 Fish were anaesthetized with eugenol solution (50 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) before blood  
127 sampling. Blood was collected by caudal vein or cardiac puncture with syringe with 3%  
128 EDTA or by decapitation in small species (Ranzani-Paiva et al., 2013). Blood smears  
129 were stained with May-Grunwald-Giemsa-Wright for erythrocyte morphometry

130 (Tavares-Dias and Moraes 2002). Detailed protocol is available at Rodrigues et al.  
131 (2020; see also Figure S1).

132

### 133 **Red blood cell stereology**

134 Design-based stereological methods have been used since the 1970s to quantify  
135 shape and size changes in cells and histological structures (West 2012). This approach  
136 uses linear (first-order) measurements to derive tridimensional (second-order) variables  
137 that describe the shape of cells in tissues. To take measurements, we used a digital  
138 camera (Nikon D3500) coupled in a light microscopy (Zeiss Primo Star®). Digital  
139 images in 1000x magnification were used to measure the following first-order variables:  
140 area ( $\mu\text{m}^2$ ), perimeter, and largest and smallest diameter ( $\mu\text{m}$ ) of cells and area,  
141 perimeter, and diameter of the nucleus in 50 randomly selected cells per animal (see  
142 Supporting material), i.e., 250 cells per species (50 cells \* 5 animals). From these linear  
143 measurements, we calculated the following second-order stereological measurements:  
144 To calculate length, we took the mean of the largest and smallest diameters. Then, to  
145 calculate radius, we simply divided length by 2. Cell volume ( $\mu\text{m}^3$ ) was calculated using  
146 the formula:

$$\frac{4}{3\pi}r^3$$

147 , where  $r$  is radius (see West 2012); nucleus volume ( $\mu\text{m}^3$ ) was calculated by the  
148 formula:

$$\frac{CV * N:C}{100}$$

149 , where CV is cell volume and N:C is nucleus:cytoplasm ratio. Cell and nucleus  
150 circularity (or shape factor) were estimated by the formula:

$$\frac{4\pi A}{P^2}$$

151 , where  $A$  is cell area and  $P$  cell perimeter (Russ and Dehoff 2000). Circularity ranges  
152 from 0 (elliptical shape) to 1 (circular shape). All measurements were made in Motic  
153 Images Plus 2.0 in a double-blind fashion (see Fig. S2).

154 We calculated the mean of each variable for each species (Table S1), which were  
155 used as phenotypic traits in further analysis. To visualize the correlation pattern between  
156 variables, we built a correlogram considering the average of each variable (Fig. S3)  
157 using the *corrplot* package (Wei and Simko, 2017) of R software.

158

### 159 **Phylogenetic comparative methods**

160 To carry out the comparative analyzes, we first obtained a phylogeny with  
161 branch length in millions of years representing the relationship of the 15 species for  
162 which we have phenotypic data (Figure 1). This phylogeny was obtained from a fully-  
163 sampled topology for Actinopterygii recently published (Rabosky et al., 2018). Analysis  
164 was done in the *fishtree* package (Chang et al., 2019).

165 Then, we performed a phylogenetic Principal Components Analysis (pPCA) on  
166 the matrix of phenotypic data with the eight variables considering the phylogeny  
167 (Revell, 2009). The pPCA was performed using the correlation matrix of variables and  
168 assuming that traits have evolved according to a Brownian Motion (BM) model of  
169 evolution. The pPCA uses a  $\mathbf{C}$  matrix that describes the variance-covariance structure  
170 between species given by the phylogeny and the evolutionary model (BM in this case)  
171 to obtain the Principal Components and species scores (see also Adams & Collyer  
172 2019). Analysis was performed using the `phyl.pca` function of the *phytools* package  
173 (Revell, 2012).

174 From this exploratory analysis, we built a morphospace for all 15 species  
175 showing their similarity in relation to RBC shape. The analysis estimates the node

176 values using a Maximum Likelihood method. Finally, we built the phylomorphospace  
177 by projecting the phylogeny onto the morphospace built with the first two Principal  
178 Components, which allows us to explore how lineages occupied the morphospace as  
179 their traits evolved (Adams and Collier 2018, 2019). Analysis was performed using the  
180 `phylomorphospace` function of the `phytools` package.

181 Finally, we calculated a phylogenetic signal measure for multivariate data called  
182  $K_{\text{mult}}$  (Adams, 2014) using all pPCs to avoid missing variation (Uyeda et al., 2015). This  
183 method allows calculating a statistic that measures how similar closely related species  
184 are in relation to their phenotypic measurements. Blomberg's K (Blomberg et al., 2003)  
185 is a measure widely used to measure phylogenetic signal for univariate data and ranges  
186 from 0 <math>K</math> 1. High phylogenetic signal ( $K>1$ ) indicates that closely related species  
187 tend to be similar in relation to phenotypic attributes (Münkemüller et al., 2012). This  
188 method has been adapted for multivariate data recently (Adams, 2014), along with a  
189 Monte Carlo randomization procedure that allows testing the significance of the  
190 statistic. Analysis was performed with the `physignal` function of the `geomorph`  
191 package (Adams et al. 2020).

192 To test the effect of the position in the water column species usually occupy on  
193 RBC shape, we gathered data on depth range from FishBase (Froese and Pauly 2019)  
194 and treated it as a categorical variable, henceforth referred to as habitat. Thus, species  
195 were classified as demersal (n=4), pelagic (n=2), and benthopelagic (n=9). Afterwards,  
196 we compared the fit of evolutionary models to the eight pPCs. Specifically, we fit  
197 Pagel's lambda transformation, Brownian Motion, and Ornstein-Uhlenbeck models to  
198 data using the leave one out cross-validation of the penalized log-likelihood, as  
199 implemented in the `mvglms` function (Clavel and Morlon 2020) of the package  
200 `mvMORPH` (Clavel et al. 2015) including habitat as a predictor variable. Then, we



201 compared the model fit using the Extended Information Criterion (EIC), which showed  
202 that the best model was Brownian Motion (BM; Table S2). We built a phylogenetic  
203 Generalized Least Squares (Clavel and Morlon 2020) using BM to test the effect of  
204 habitat on RBC shape, with the Pillai's trace as test statistic and Type I Sum of Squares.

205 Finally, to test the hypothesis if a change in evolution rate is the mechanism  
206 allowing species to occupy different positions in the morphospace, we estimated tip-  
207 level evolution rate of RBC shape using phylogenetic ridge regression, as implemented  
208 in the RRphylo package (Castiglione et al. 2018). For this analysis we used all eight  
209 pPCs. This analysis also automatically finds nodes in which there was a rate shift. The  
210 R markdown dynamic document describing how analyses were conducted and  
211 associated data are available at FigShare (Martins et al. 2020).

212

## 213 **Results**

214

215 The shape of Red Blood Cells (RBC) of fish species studied varied from oval to  
216 ellipsoid and a rounded nucleus (Figure 2). Cell size varied by an order of magnitude,  
217 from the largest cell of *Synbranchus* to the smallest in *Poecilia*. The same phenomenon  
218 happened to cell volume (Fig. 3). Nucleus area varied from  $7.45 \mu\text{m}^2$  ( $\pm 1.2$  SD) in  
219 *Poecilia* to  $27.30 \mu\text{m}^2$  ( $\pm 4.9$  SD) in *Synbranchus*. Additionally, the range of  
220 intraspecific variation in some measurements varied among species. For example, cell  
221 volume had the highest standard deviation, while shape factor, nucleus area and cell  
222 perimeter seem to vary less within species (Table S1).

223 The pPC1 retained 66.1%, while pPC2 retained 21.4% of the variation in RBC  
224 shape. Cell and nucleus area, cell and nucleus perimeter, cell and nucleus volume were  
225 highly negatively correlated ( $> 0.84$ ) with pPC1, whereas the nucleus:cytoplasm ratio  
226 was highly ( $-0.87$ ) correlated with pPC2 (Table S2). Species positively correlated with

227 pPC1 had higher shape factor, whereas those negatively correlated had higher cell and  
228 nucleus area, nuclear and cell perimeter, cell and nucleus volume, and  
229 nucleus:cytoplasm ratio (Table S2). Species positively correlated with pPC2 had higher  
230 cell perimeter, cell and nuclear area, whereas those negatively correlated had higher  
231 nucleus:cytoplasm ratio, nucleus and cell volume, and nucleus area (Fig. S4).

232 The distribution of species in the phylomorphospace suggest that closely related  
233 species do not have RBC with similar shape (Fig. 4). Accordingly, RBC shape does not  
234 exhibit phylogenetic signal ( $K_{\text{mult}} = 0.6317$ ; Effect size = 0.7863;  $P = 0.159$ ). The low  
235 effect size suggest phylogenetic signal is not concentrated in a few dimensions. To test  
236 if only a subset of dimensions displays phylogenetic signal (see Adams & Collyer  
237 2019), we re-run the analysis with only the first two pPCs. Results did not change (see  
238 Martins et al. 2020). However, the morphospace suggest a non-stationary pattern in the  
239 evolution of RBC shape, since most closely related species occupy distant positions, but  
240 the position of siluriformes (*Pseudoplatistoma*, *Rhamdia*, and *Hypostomus*) mirror their  
241 phylogenetic relationship in the upper part of the morphospace. Interestingly, the  
242 Acanthopterygii included in our sampling: *Synbranchus*, *Poecilia*, *Bujurquina*, and  
243 *Cichlosoma* had the most divergent pattern, occupying extreme positions in the  
244 phylomorphospace, whereas species of Ostariophysi were more packed together. There  
245 is a high divergence in RBC shape within Characiformes. Therefore, there seems to be a  
246 variation in the pattern of RBC shape evolution at the level of higher order groups  
247 (Superorders), instead of a homogeneous pattern throughout the whole phylogeny.

248 Habitat did not influence RBC shape (Pillai's trace=0.6936;  $P=0.461$ ). The  
249 results did not change if we use a multivariate PGLS (Table S4). We also found that  
250 evolution rate of RBC shape was very heterogeneous at the tip level (Fig. 5). The  
251 species with the highest rate was *Pygocentrus* (0.741) and the lowest was *Bujurquina*

252 (0.087). There was a tendency to increase the rate in the common ancestor of  
253 *Pygocentrus*, *Metynniss*, and *Piaractus* in relation to the background rate, but the rate  
254 shift was not significant (rate difference = 0.392;  $P > 0.005$ ). Interestingly, the species  
255 occupying the most extreme positions in the phylomorphospace, such as *Synbranchus*  
256 (0.514), *Astyanax* (0.555), and *Gymnotus* (0.17) were not the ones with the highest rates  
257 of evolution. Therefore, our results suggest that an increase in the rate of evolution does  
258 not necessarily produces morphological specialization and rate disparity is not the main  
259 pattern involved in the formation of RBC morphospace.

260

## 261 **Discussion**

262

263 We found that the shape of Red Blood Cells (RBC) varies greatly among and  
264 within freshwater fish species. Contrarily to our initial hypothesis, we did not find a  
265 correlation between water column position (proxy for oxygen availability) and RBC  
266 shape. Accordingly, we did not find phylogenetic signal in RBC shape, suggesting  
267 closely related species do not have similar RBC shape. There does not seem to be a  
268 single mechanism driving the evolution of RBC shape, since the phylomorphospace  
269 shows a non-stationary pattern in the species similarity.

270 Small RBC allow species to occupy environments with low dissolved oxygen,  
271 since they usually have a higher number of cells, making them more efficient in oxygen  
272 uptake and transport (Silkin et al., 2019; Hawkey et al., 1991). Species with RBCs that  
273 have large surface area and volume have low metabolic rate, since the cell  
274 surface:volume ratio decreases the metabolic cost of gas exchange between membranes  
275 (Jones 1979, Lay and Baldwin, 1999). *Synbranchus* had higher perimeter (i.e., higher  
276 surface) and higher area. Thus, our results suggest that this species could have a lower  
277 metabolic rate than *Poecilia*, because the later has a smaller cell area and perimeter.

278 Most species occupied the center of the morphospace, independent of the  
279 phylogenetic relationship. This clustering of distantly related species suggests that  
280 convergence, apparently not caused by water column position, could be a mechanism  
281 influencing RBS shape evolution (Adams and Collyer 2019). Clustering in  
282 morphospace can also suggest a developmental constraint (Jablonski 2020) that impedes  
283 species to change their traits after speciation (Pie and Weitz 2005). Also, a few species  
284 were in extreme positions. Even though water column position did not explain RBC  
285 shape, the extreme position of *Synbranchus*, *Astyanax*, and *Poecilia* in the morphospace  
286 could be explained by differences in their life history strategies. For example,  
287 *Synbranchus* displays facultative pulmonary respiration, usually occurs in habitats with  
288 hypoxia, and burry itself during the dry season (Froese and Pauly, 2019). *Astyanax* also  
289 occurs in habitats with hypoxia (Froese and Pauly, 2019). The pattern we found points  
290 to clade disparity differences (Adams & Collyer 2019), with Acanthopterygii having  
291 higher dispersion in the morphospace than Ostariophysii (Fig. S6). These two orders  
292 have different ecological and biogeographic characteristics. Species from Ostariophysii  
293 are essentially from freshwater, while Acanthopterygii has marine origins, with  
294 secondary freshwater introgressions. One interesting pattern that emerges from the  
295 morphospace is that apparently there is no constraints in the morphospace, because  
296 almost all regions have one species. Siluriformes seem to have similar RBC shape,  
297 given their position in the morphospace, and similar evolution rate. This lineage  
298 occupies the upper position of the morphospace, along with *Piaractus* and  
299 *Hyphessobrycon*, and had high cell area and perimeter, and low nucleus:cytoplasm ratio,  
300 nucleus volume, and circularity. Exception for *Rhamdia* and *Hyphessobrycon*, all those  
301 species are demersal (benthic). Together these results suggest that the evolution of

302 RBC shape was driven by fluctuating selection, although this result should be taken  
303 with care, since our sample size is not large.

304 We found a high heterogeneity in evolution rate of RBC shape. This high rate  
305 heterogeneity helps explain why we did not detect a significant phylogenetic signal, i.e.,  
306 the change in shape seems to vary strongly at the tip level, instead of large clades. This  
307 is consistent with the model selection procedure that pointed Brownian Motion (BM) as  
308 best fit model to the data. BM can be caused by genetic drift, when selection randomly  
309 varies in direction through time, or when selection is weak compared to the time scale  
310 analysed (Felsenstein 1988). The large intraspecific variation in most variables (Table  
311 S1) may suggest that variables describing RBC shape are under weak selection pressure  
312 (Nikinmaa 2019). Interestingly, the position extreme positions of *Synbranchus* (0.514),  
313 *Astyanax* (0.555), and *Pygocentrus* (0.741) could be explained at least partially by an  
314 increase in evolution rate, which allowed them to diverge from their sister species,  
315 remaining Acanthopterygii, *Hyphessobrycon*, and *Metynnis* respectively. However,  
316 given our sample size we cannot rule out that RBC shape of these species are evolving  
317 under directional selection. Conversely, if lineages followed a random walk (akin of  
318 BM) one would expect species to diverge and occupy positions in the morphospace  
319 irrespective of their habitat or phylogenetic position (Pie and Weitz 2005).

320 Water column position did not explain RBC shape in this freshwater fish species  
321 radiation. This result suggest that RBC shape may not be entirely determined by partial  
322 pressure of dissolved oxygen in water. It also suggests that water column position does  
323 not represent a main constraint in the evolution of these traits. A recent study (Minias  
324 2020) also found that life history traits did not explain hemoglobin and hematocrit  
325 evolution in birds. Differently from mammals, fish RBC are nucleated cells and have  
326 many cytoplasmic organelles, such as mitochondria, Golgi complex, centrioles,

327 ribosomes, microtubules, rough and smooth endoplasmic reticulum (Sekhon and Beams  
328 1969), as well as a range of cytoplasmatic enzymes involved in the anaerobic glycolysis  
329 (Sephton et al. 1991). These organelles and enzymes allow the functions of RBC to be  
330 finely regulated and somewhat independent from other components of the  
331 hematopoietic system, enabling fish to occupy a wide range of environments (Nikinmaa  
332 et al. 2019). Therefore, species may respond rapidly to changes in oxygen availability  
333 (Witeska, 2013), which indicates that it is not constrained by inheritance (Arnold 1992)  
334 or phylogenetic inertia, at least to a certain degree.

335 In conclusion, our study provides a novel macroevolutionary perspective on fish  
336 RBC shape by combining commonly used design-based stereological techniques with  
337 modern phylogenetic comparative methods. We found that the RBC of the two main  
338 orders of Neotropical freshwater fish vary greatly in shape, but that their water column  
339 alone does not explain it. Future studies should use quantitative genetic approaches to  
340 explore the underlying genetic basis for RBC morphology, possibly using geometric  
341 morphometrics and experimental approaches motivated by ecological data.

342

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489

#### 490 Figure Legends

491

492 Figure 1. Dated phylogenetic tree with species to which we have phenotypic data used  
493 in the analysis, pruned from Rabosky et al. (2018).

494

495 Figure 2. Shape and size of Red Blood Cells of the 15 fish species analysed. Staining:  
496 MMGW. Scale bars = 10 µm.

497

498 Figure 3. Diagram showing the mean of each stereological variable with the  
499 phylogenetic tree of the species sampled. Data on standard deviation for each variable is  
500 available at Table S1.

501

502 Figure 4. Phylomorphospace constructed with phylogenetic Principal Components 1  
503 and 2 showing species distribution in the reduced space. Red Blood Cell (RBC) images  
504 are all in the same magnification and belong to species occupying the extreme positions  
505 along each pPC. The RBC associated positively with pPC1 is from *Poecilia*, which has  
506 a high shape factor, while the RBC associated negatively with pPC1 is from  
507 *Synbranchus* that has high cell area and perimeter, and high nucleus area and perimeter.  
508 The RBC associated positively with pPC2 belongs to *Pseudoplatystoma*, which has high  
509 cell perimeter. The RBC image associated negatively with pPC2 is from *Astyanax* and  
510 has a high shape factor, high nucleus:cytoplasm ratio, and high nucleus volume. Colours  
511 represent depth in the water column species are usually found, green = Pelagic; black =  
512 Benthopelagic; red = Demersal.

513

514 Figure 5. Phylogenetic tree showing the results of the tip-level evolution rate estimated  
515 using ridge regression for the stereological variables describing the Red Blood Cell  
516 shape. Analysis was conducted in RRphylo.

517

518 Data accessibility statement

519

520 All the data and R code used to run the analysis will be deposited in FigShare upon  
521 acceptance.











