

The evolution of conspicuousness in frogs: when to signal toxicity?

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Abstract

Many organisms use conspicuous color patterns to advertise their toxicity or unpalatability, a strategy known as aposematism. Despite the recognized benefits of this anti-predator tactic, not all chemically defended species exhibit warning coloration. Here, we use a comparative approach to investigate which factors predict the evolution of conspicuousness in frogs, a group in which conspicuous coloration and toxicity have evolved multiple times. We extracted color information from dorsal and ventral photos of 594 frog species for which chemical defense information was available. Our results show that chemically defended and diurnal species have higher internal chromatic contrast, both ventrally and dorsally, than chemically undefended and/or nocturnal species. Among species that are chemically defended, conspicuous coloration is more likely to occur if species are diurnal. Contrary to previous studies, our results suggest that the evolution of conspicuous color is more likely to occur in chemically defended prey with smaller body size. We discuss potential explanations for this association and suggest that prey profitability (related to body size) could be an important force driving the macroevolution of warning signals.

25 **Introduction**

26 Aposematism can be defined as the advertisement of toxicity or unprofitability to a potential
27 predator, and is typically achieved through conspicuous coloration or patterning (Ruxton et
28 al. 2004). Warning signals have been shown to facilitate predator learning and lead to dietary
29 conservatism in predators (Leimar et al. 1986; Marples et al. 1998; Gamberale-Stille and
30 Tullberg 1999; Lindström 1999); the distinctiveness of warning signals may improve
31 detection by experienced predators and thus reduce recognition errors or forgetting (Guilford
32 1990). Recent meta-analyses have shown, across different taxa, that there is a positive
33 relationship between overall conspicuousness and the strength of chemical defenses (i.e. level
34 of toxicity), supporting the idea that aposematism is a quantitatively honest signal (White and
35 Umbers 2021). Not all chemically defended organisms, however, advertise their toxicity;
36 while the presence of conspicuous colors might be an honest signal, the absence of
37 conspicuous colors does not indicate lack of chemical defenses. For instance, Ithomiinae
38 butterflies are transparent despite being highly unpalatable; chemically defended shield bugs
39 from the family Acanthosomatidae are cryptic; and pufferfish have not evolved conspicuous
40 coloration to advertise one of the most potent toxins in nature (Wang 2011; McClure et al.
41 2019). Under what conditions do chemically defended prey evolve conspicuous colors? It
42 remains unclear to what extent the presence or absence of chemical defenses can predict the
43 evolution of conspicuous color features, and what drives the evolution of conspicuous colors
44 in organisms that are already chemically defended.

45

46 Perhaps the most expected variable to predict the presence of conspicuous coloration in
47 chemically defended species is diurnal activity. Diurnal species are more commonly at risk
48 from visually hunting predators and, in active species, effective camouflage might be harder
49 to achieve if there is day-time illumination, favoring instead the evolution of warning signals

50 (Ruxton et al. 2004; Merilaita and Tullberg 2005). In the conspicuous clade of poison-dart
51 frogs (Dendrobatidae) it is thought that a switch to diurnal activity facilitated the exploitation
52 of novel dietary sources, which could have led to increased toxicity and further selection for
53 aposematic coloration (Santos et al. 2003). In other lineages (e.g. Bufonidae) that contain
54 aposematic species it is also thought that shifts to diurnal activity occurred early on,
55 preceding the evolution of aposematism (Santos and Grant 2011). In species with chemical
56 defences, color signals are expected to target visually oriented predators, although colour
57 signals could be involved in sexual selection to some extent as well (Maan and Cummings
58 2008). Therefore, we would expect selection to favor the evolution of conspicuous coloration
59 in diurnal and chemically defended species, but not in species that are nocturnal or that are
60 not chemically defended.

61

62 Multiple experimental and comparative studies have also suggested a positive relationship
63 between body size and conspicuous coloration. Body size may enhance an aposematic signal
64 or, alternatively, when an animal is already aposematic there might be no selection from
65 predators for it to remain small, leading to a higher prevalence of aposematism in larger prey
66 (Ruxton et al. 2004; Smith et al. 2014). In insects, dendrobatid frogs and salamanders, for
67 example, there is a positive association between body size and antipredator signaling or
68 conspicuousness (Hagman and Forsman 2003; Winebarger et al. 2018; Loeffler-Henry et al.
69 2019; Medina et al. 2020). On the other hand, some studies suggest that a positive
70 relationship between body size and conspicuousness is not favored if prey are already
71 conspicuous due to their large size. Tseng et al. (2014), for instance, showed that body size in
72 weevils may already be used as a warning signal in the absence of aposematic coloration.
73 Selection for conspicuous coloration could also be influenced by prey profitability, whereby
74 in situations where prey is highly profitable, predators are more willing to ingest toxin in

75 exchange for the nutritional benefits (Smith et al. 2014; Skelhorn et al. 2016). Under this
76 scenario, the benefits of advertising toxicity with conspicuous colors may be lower in larger
77 prey. Given the variation in results across studies, and the restricted phylogenetic scope in
78 many of these, we still lack an understanding of the link between aposematism and body size
79 at a broad evolutionary scale.

80

81 Anurans represent an ideal clade to study the broad scale evolution of aposematic coloration.
82 Warning signals have been extremely well studied in poison dart frogs (Dendrobatidae), but
83 toxicity and aposematism are also common in other anuran families such as Bufonidae,
84 Myobatrachidae and Mantellidae (Vences et al. 2003). Capitalizing on the multiple
85 independent origins of aposematism in frogs, we use a comparative framework to study its
86 evolution and investigate 1) to what extent different aspects of conspicuous coloration are
87 associated with the presence of chemical defenses in frogs and 2) which species traits (body
88 size, diurnal activity) predict conspicuousness in frogs that are chemically defended.

89

90 **Methods**

91 ***Photograph collection***

92 We collected photographs of dorsal and ventral views for anuran species (dorsal: 594 spp.,
93 ventral: 445 spp.) which had previously had their chemical defense status established
94 (Arbuckle and Speed 2015). Most photos were obtained from websites such as
95 inaturalist.com or calphotos.com or google image search (supplementary file). To ensure that
96 species had not been mislabeled we checked that general colors matched across the different
97 views, and confirmed identity using AmphibiaWeb (<https://amphibiaweb.org>). We selected
98 photos that were not over or under exposed and minimized variation in view (i.e. were taken
99 as close as possible from a perpendicular view to dorsal or ventral). Although the photos are

100 unstandardized, they provide biologically meaningful color information for broad-scale
101 comparative analyses (Kang et al. 2017; Loeffler-Henry et al. 2019; Medina et al. 2020).
102 Photos or drawings from field guides can represent well the colouration of a species and
103 should offer comparable results to standardized measures when used across species (Dale et
104 al. 2015; Medina et al. 2020). In our case, photos were the best available resource given that
105 frog color is not retained in museum specimens and collecting standardized photos for
106 hundreds of live frog species is not feasible. In addition to data extracted from photographs,
107 we also use a previous classification of frog coloration into “conspicuous” and “not
108 conspicuous” from Arbuckle and Speed (2015).

109

110 *Color extraction*

111 Images were analyzed using the software Image J (Schneider et al. 2012). From each photo,
112 we manually extracted pixel intensity values for the red (R), green (G) and blue (B) channels
113 for each distinct color patch (from 1 to 5 colors) on the dorsal surface of the frog (all
114 extraction done by SR). As photos were not standardized, we did not use an automatic color
115 extraction and analysis software; instead, we chose specific regions in the photograph to
116 ensure that they were free of lighting artefacts (no specular highlights, not in shadow) and
117 that clearly represented each distinct color within the frog outline. Our preliminary analyses
118 indicated that this manual approach more reliably identified the primary color patches and
119 their color values than an automated approach for images that varied in angle of view and
120 illumination. Colors were classified into one of three categories according to the area they
121 occupied within the frog’s outline: >30%, between 30% and 10%, and less than 10% of the
122 area. We recorded which color patches were adjacent to each other and to the background
123 (i.e., were present at the edge of the frog’s outline and thus adjacent to the background, from
124 a dorsal view). We extracted color information for 60 backgrounds from the same

125 photographs, containing either green (leaves, grass) or brown (trunks, ground) coloration.

126 These values were used as samples of natural background colors, following (Medina et al.

127 2017), details are provided in the supplementary material.

128

129 Using RGB values from photos, we estimated internal and background contrast, which can

130 both be important elements in a warning signal (Prudic et al. 2006; Aronsson and Gamberale-

131 Stille 2009). Internal contrast was calculated as the contrast between the two dominant,

132 adjacent colors within the frog's outline, and background contrast was calculated as the

133 contrast of the dominant color adjacent to the natural background against both average green

134 and brown backgrounds. For each of these components (internal and background contrast) we

135 calculated both contrast in color (chromatic contrast) and contrast in brightness (luminance

136 contrast). Chromatic contrast was calculated as the Euclidean distance in a two dimensional

137 color space where axes are the standardized difference between red and green ((R-

138 G)/(R+G+B) and green and blue ((G-B)/(R+G+B) channels (Endler 1990; Grill and Rush

139 2000).

140 Chromatic contrast = $\sqrt{\left[\left(\frac{R_1 - G_1}{R_1 + G_1 + B_1}\right) - \left(\frac{R_2 - G_2}{R_2 + G_2 + B_2}\right)\right]^2 + \left[\left(\frac{G_1 - B_1}{R_1 + G_1 + B_1}\right) - \left(\frac{G_2 - B_2}{R_2 + G_2 + B_2}\right)\right]^2}$

141 Luminance contrast was calculated as the difference between the average RGB value

142 (luminance) of adjacent color patches.

143

144 Luminance contrast = $\left[\frac{(R_1 + G_1 + B_1)}{3}\right] - \left[\frac{(R_2 + G_2 + B_2)}{3}\right]$

145

146 where subscripts denote the two color patches. Full details of contrast calculations are given

147 in the supplementary material. These measures are independent of a viewer's visual system,

148 but highly correlated with perceived conspicuousness to tetrachromatic predators such as

149 birds (Smith et al. 2016). In total, we used eight variables to describe dorsal and ventral
150 conspicuousness: six contrast measures for dorsal coloration (internal chromatic and
151 luminance contrast; chromatic and luminance contrast against green and brown backgrounds)
152 and two for ventral coloration (internal chromatic and luminance contrast). These variables
153 were used as response variables in subsequent analyses.

154

155 *Additional variables: toxicity, body size and activity time*

156 We used information on toxicity data from Arbuckle and Speed (2015). This dataset
157 classified species into two categories (chemically defended or not) based on a range of
158 different published sources. Data on nocturnal and diurnal activity of frog species was
159 obtained mainly from a global database of ecological traits (Oliveira et al. 2017) in which
160 activity during the day or night was recorded independently as “yes” or “no”. From this
161 information we created a new variable with three levels: nocturnal, diurnal and “no data”.
162 Species that exhibited both nocturnal and diurnal activity were scored as diurnal, since we
163 were interested in the presence of activity during the day. As additional sources we also
164 extracted information from Anderson and Wiens (2017) and Callaghan and Rowley (2021).
165 For the first one, we collated information on whether a species was diurnal/nocturnal or
166 arrhythmic, if these were ‘arrhythmic’ we re-classified them as diurnal, given they could be
167 found also during the day. Callaghan and Rowley published information on the ‘percentage
168 of diurnality’ of a species, based on the number of calls that were recorded during the day
169 relative to the total number of calls recorded. We considered a species as diurnal or nocturnal
170 if more than 90% of the time they were recorded calling during the day or night, respectively.
171 We highlight that these classifications only reflect available evidence; for example, if a
172 species has been recorded as nocturnal (but not diurnal) it does not mean that it is not diurnal,

173 it means that so far there is no evidence of diurnal activity. Lastly, we also extracted
174 information on overall species size (SVL, mm) from Womack and Bell (2020).

175

176 *Statistical analyses*

177 *Association between conspicuous coloration and chemical defense*

178 For all analyses we used the PGLS function (phylogenetic generalized least squares) in the R
179 package CAPER 1.0.1 (Orme 2018) in R 4.0.3 (RStudio-Team 2020), and used maximum
180 likelihood to estimate the phylogenetic signal (lambda) of each model. To test the link
181 between chemical defense and conspicuousness, we ran models with each of the eight
182 contrast measures as the response variable and a predictor variable with four categories
183 (defended/diurnal, defended/nocturnal, undefended/diurnal, undefended/nocturnal). We used
184 this approach rather than a model with two predictor variables (defense and time of activity)
185 because there was an association between diurnal activity and toxicity, and diurnal species
186 were more likely to be toxic. We also ran models that only included a binary variable of
187 chemical defense (defended/undefended) because not all species had information on time of
188 activity, so the sample size is larger (n=455 spp. vs 594 spp.).

189

190 *Predictors of conspicuousness in chemically defended species*

191 In a second set of models, we performed PGLS analyses to test which variables were the best
192 predictors of conspicuousness in chemically defended frog species (n=370 spp). We ran
193 models with each of the eight contrast measures as the response variable and log(body size)
194 and time of activity (diurnal, nocturnal and ‘no information’) as predictors. Results were
195 qualitatively identical when including or excluding species with no information, so we
196 present analyses on the largest dataset. We included interactions between time of activity and
197 body size, since we expected body size to be associated with conspicuousness in diurnal but

198 not nocturnal species. Using the Arbuckle and Speed (2015) dataset, we also tested whether
199 species classified as conspicuous vs. inconspicuous differed in body size. This color
200 classification is independent from our colour data, so this analysis offers an additional source
201 of evidence for the patterns presented. As conspicuousness was classified as a binary
202 variable in this dataset, we used the R package brms (Bürkner 2017) and ran a Bernoulli
203 linear mixed model (logit link) with conspicuousness (1/0) as response and log body size as
204 predictor. We included a matrix with phylogenetic relationships as a random factor.

205

206 Finally, we examined whether the use of either dorsal or ventral conspicuous coloration for
207 aposematic signaling was associated with body size. To do this, we created a new variable by
208 calculating the difference between dorsal and ventral internal chromatic contrast (with larger
209 values representing more contrasting dorsal coloration). We did not necessarily expect a
210 linear relationship between body size and this new variable, because small values could be
211 present in species that are either cryptic or contrasting on both sides. Therefore, we grouped
212 species into four categories based on the difference between dorsal and ventral internal
213 chromatic contrast, and overall contrast: species with higher dorsal contrast, higher ventral
214 contrast, high contrast on both sides and low contrast on both sides. Categories were created
215 based on the distribution of the continuous variable described before (difference between
216 dorsal and ventral chromatic contrast), details are shown in supplementary material (Figure
217 S1). We then used a PGLS to test whether there were differences in body size (response
218 variable) between species that signal dorsally, ventrally or on both sides.

219

220 In all analyses, we accounted for phylogenetic relationships by using a published time
221 calibrated consensus tree (Jetz and Pyron 2018). When significant patterns were detected, we
222 tested the effect of phylogenetic uncertainty by repeating the analyses using 100 additional

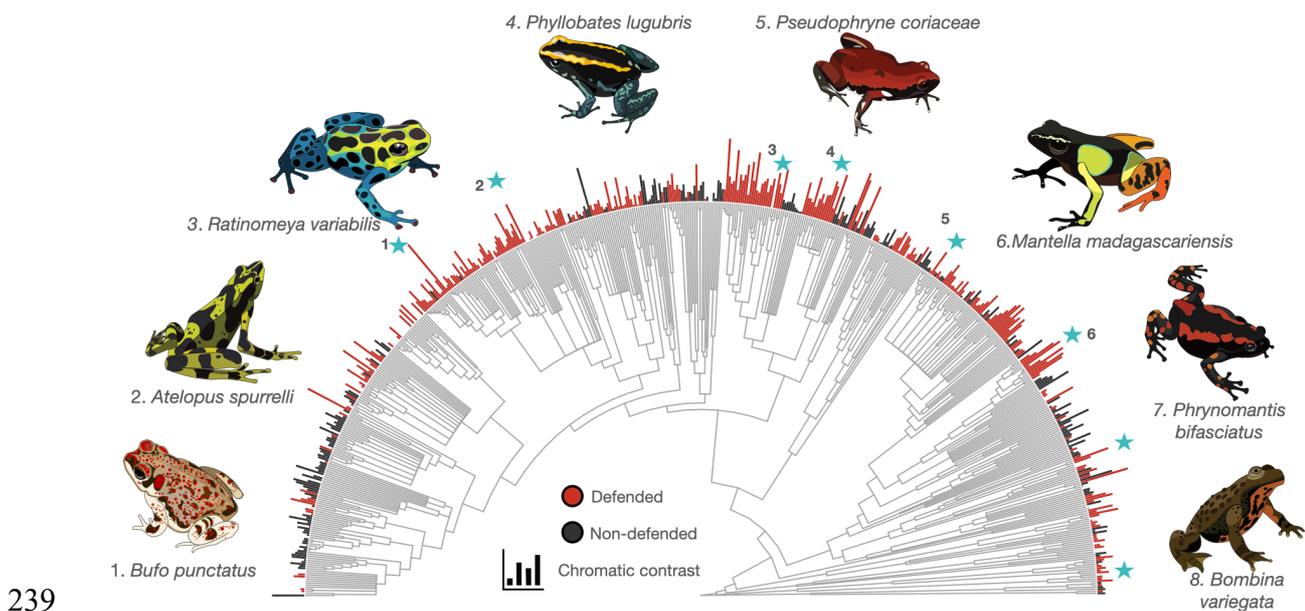
223 trees taken from the posterior distribution of a Bayesian phylogenetic analysis (Jetz and
224 Pyron 2018). For all models we report estimates, t-values and p-values. We used the R
225 packages ggplot2 (Wickham 2016) and ggtree (Yu 2020) for all figures.

226 Results

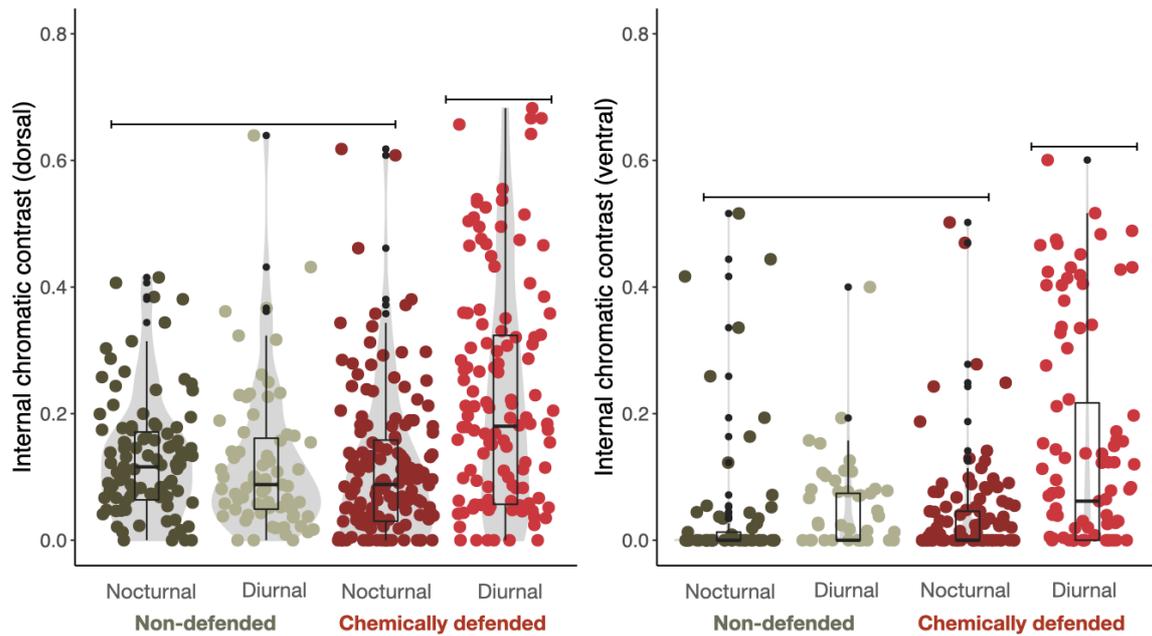
227 *Association between conspicuous coloration and chemical defense*

228 Of the 594 frog species for which we extracted RGB values, 370 were chemically defended
229 whilst 224 lacked chemical defenses (Figure 1). Color variables extracted were correlated to
230 some extent, but most correlations were moderate ($r^2 < 0.30$, Figure S2). Six out of eight
231 color variables were strongly linked to the presence of chemical defenses. Across all species,
232 those that were diurnal and chemically defended had higher internal chromatic contrast (both
233 dorsally and ventrally; Table 1, Table S4) and higher dorsal chromatic contrast against brown
234 backgrounds (Figure 2, Table S1 and S4). For luminance contrast, ventral internal contrast
235 and dorsal contrast against brown and green was associated with chemical defense and
236 diurnal activity (Table 1); whereas there was no relationship for dorsal internal luminance
237 contrast.

238



240 **Figure 1.** Phylogenetic tree showing species included in the study (594 spp.) and information
 241 on chemical defenses (red vs. grey) and internal chromatic contrast (bar length). We note that
 242 the prevalence of chemical defenses in this sample of species is high, and possibly a result of
 243 biases in searching for defenses in species that are already suspected to have those.
 244 Illustrations by Daniela Perez.
 245



246
 247 **Figure 2.** Differences in internal chromatic contrast according to defense status and time of
 248 activity, for dorsal (left) and ventral (right) views.

249

250 *Predictors of conspicuousness in chemically defended species*

251 For chemically defended species, both dorsal and ventral internal chromatic contrast were
 252 higher in smaller species, if these were diurnal (Figure 2, Table S2 and S5). Diurnal species
 253 were significantly smaller ($F= 6.851$, $p\text{-value}=0.001$) but this did not cause multicollinerarity
 254 issues in our models, as all VIF (Variance Inflation Factors) were below 2. In any case,
 255 models including only body size as predictor showed the same association with colour (Table

256 S3). We found strong negative associations between body size and multiple colour variables
257 in species that are chemically defended. We did not find an association between body size
258 and conspicuousness in species that are not chemically defended (Table S3). We also found
259 negative associations between body size and ventral internal luminance contrast and dorsal
260 luminance contrast against the background (Table S2 and S5). Associations between body
261 size and conspicuousness were also evident when using Arbuckle & Speed's (2015) binary
262 measure of conspicuousness; however, models using phylogenetic control presented biased
263 estimates and convergence issues, that could not be solved (Figure 3a, Estimate= -10.49; 95%
264 HPD interval= -50.41 to 9.52). The model without phylogenetic control showed a similar
265 pattern to our analysis, that is, a negative association between conspicuousness and body size
266 (Estimate= -3.95; 95% HPD interval= -5.36 to -2.76).

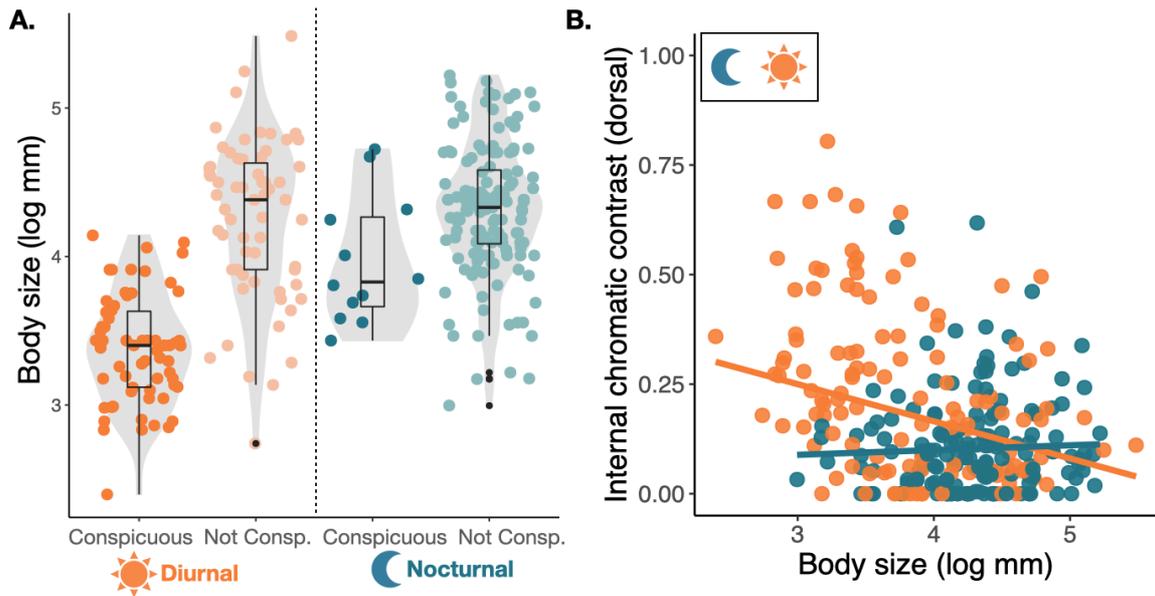
267

268 There was no significant association between body size and categories of chemically
269 defended species with only dorsal or ventral contrasting colouration (Figure S4, Estimate=
270 0.151, t-value=1.653, p-value=0.101). However, sample size was small for some categories
271 in this analysis, due to lack of species signalling exclusively dorsally or ventrally (26 spp.
272 with only dorsal signal and 14 spp. with only ventral signal).

273

274 For all analyses with significant patterns, these were consistent when the analyses were
275 performed across 100 trees (supplementary material, Tables S4 and S5). A graphic summary
276 of main results can be seen in Figure 4.

277



278

279 **Figure 3.** Association between body size and internal chromatic contrast for diurnal (orange)

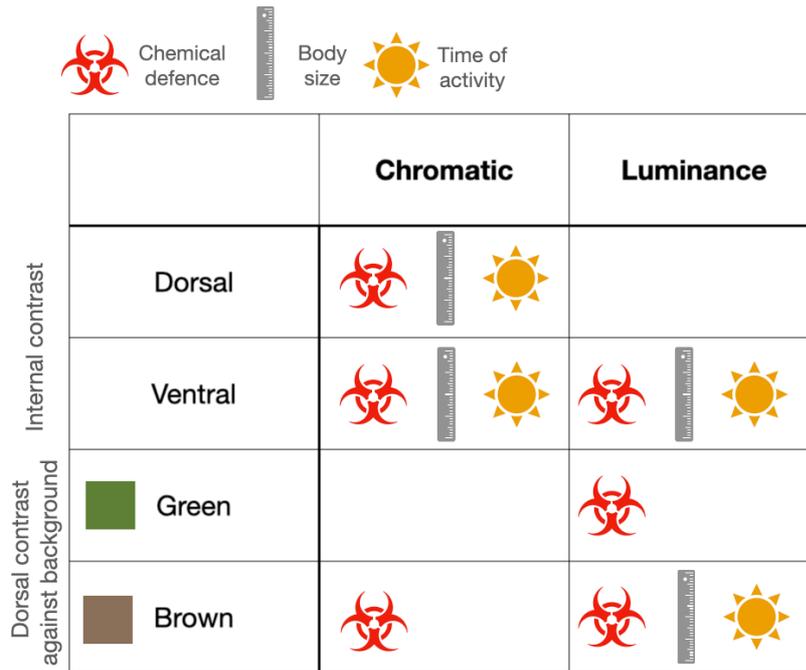
280 and nocturnal species (blue). **A.** When using binary color classification from Arbuckle and

281 Speed (2015). **B.** When using continuous measures of conspicuousness extracted in this

282 study. All species included in these figures are chemically defended. Slopes in B calculated

283 from phylogenetically controlled models (Table S2).

284



285

286 **Figure 4.** Graphic summary of results for different color variables extracted, and different
 287 predictors used. Models testing links with chemical defense included the complete dataset,
 288 and models testing links between body size and time of activity included only chemically
 289 defended species (since we were interested in predictors of conspicuousness in these species).

290

291 **Discussion**

292 Conspicuousness in toxic species often serves as an anti-predator warning signal, yet the
 293 global evolutionary drivers of these signals remain poorly understood (Kikuchi et al. 2021).
 294 We evaluated whether factors such as chemical defense, diurnal activity, and body size could
 295 predict conspicuous coloration in frogs. We found that chemically defended species that are
 296 diurnal have greater chromatic contrast between color pattern elements, both dorsally and
 297 ventrally, and against brown backgrounds. They also had greater luminance contrast between
 298 ventral color pattern elements. In addition, we found that toxic species are more conspicuous
 299 when they are diurnal and have a smaller body size. Together, these results support at a
 300 broader scale the role of color contrast as a warning signal in frogs and reveal that the

301 association between body size and conspicuousness could be different from what has been
302 previously proposed for frogs.

303

304 Our analyses suggest that the chromatic component of the internal color (i.e. hue, saturation)
305 is a more important aspect of aposematic signaling than luminance, at least dorsally, which is
306 consistent with broad observations in other clades (Ruxton et al. 2004). Chromatic contrast
307 can be more important than luminance contrast for object recognition in birds, especially
308 when targets are large (Zylinski and Osorio 2013). Chromatic signals provide robust
309 information under variable illumination conditions, and color associations are more
310 efficiently learned than achromatic associations, which could be key in the evolution of
311 warning signals (Osorio et al. 1999; Stevens 2007; Kazemi et al. 2014). However, the lack of
312 association between chemical defense and internal contrast in luminance can also be expected
313 for other reasons, besides predator cognition. High internal luminance contrast can be found
314 in both conspicuous and camouflaged color patterns, especially in the case of disruptive
315 coloration (Schaefer and Stobbe 2006). For instance, cryptic color patterns comprising black
316 and light grey or brown patches will have high internal luminance contrast (Stevens and
317 Merilaita 2009). Given the closer correspondence between conspicuousness and chromatic
318 than luminance contrast, we would expect a stronger association between chemical defense
319 and the former, and this expectation was corroborated by our results.

320

321 Our analyses also revealed that variation in *internal contrast* across species can be better
322 explained by time of activity and body size than variation in contrast against backgrounds.
323 Most internal contrast variables were linked to the presence of chemical defenses and, in
324 toxic frogs, to body size and time of activity. This was not the case for contrast against green,
325 and only partially for contrast against brown backgrounds. We acknowledge that this could

326 be product of our approach, were using one color measure to represent green and brown
327 natural backgrounds could limit our power to explain variation in background contrast.
328 Nevertheless, the approach of using average brown and green backgrounds has been able to
329 explain color evolution in other systems (Delhey et al. 2010; Delhey et al. 2013; Medina et al.
330 2017). It has been shown experimentally that chicks learn faster to avoid prey when it
331 contrasts against the background, but not when there is a high internal contrast (Aronsson and
332 Gamberale-Stille 2009). However, internal contrast is independent of variation in background
333 coloration; thereby ensuring conspicuousness against any background. For active or mobile
334 species that may encounter a variety of backgrounds, internal contrast may provide a more
335 consistent and reliable signal; and indeed is a feature of most warning coloration (Stevens
336 and Ruxton 2012; Barnett et al. 2016).

337

338 Ventral coloration is often involved in deimatic displays and could also have an important
339 function in intraspecific communication (Maan and Cummings 2008; Umbers et al. 2017).
340 Our results show a strong link between ventral internal luminance contrast and chemical
341 defense. It is unclear, however, why some chemically defended species signal ventrally
342 instead of dorsally, and this does not seem to be related to body size (although species
343 signaling only ventrally tend to be smaller). For species with available information, we found
344 that having only a conspicuous dorsal signal was more common than having only a ventral
345 one. For those groups with only ventral signaling (e.g. *Bombina*, *Melanophryniscus*),
346 camouflage may be the main defense, with warning colors as a secondary defense, once the
347 prey is detected (Toledo et al. 2011).

348

349 For chemically defended species we found that diurnal and smaller species were more likely
350 to evolve conspicuous coloration. Warning signals that involve color to advertise toxicity are

351 thought to be directed towards visually oriented predators, such as birds or lizards (Ruxton et
352 al. 2004; Ratcliffe and Nydam 2008). To our knowledge, this is the first time a link between
353 diurnal activity and conspicuousness has been reported across frogs, but this association has
354 been shown in other lineages. In lepidoptera, in seven phylogenetically matched pairs of
355 clades, aposematic color evolved in the diurnal but not in the nocturnal clades (Merilaita and
356 Tullberg 2005). It is unclear whether changes from nocturnal to diurnal behaviours preceded
357 the evolution of toxicity and conspicuousness in frogs, but in Dendrobatidae and Bufonidae
358 (two of the families with the highest number of aposematic species) diurnal activity is
359 suggested to be ancestral, and to have preceded the evolution of toxicity, which was then
360 followed by the evolution of conspicuous coloration in chemically defended species (Grant et
361 al. 2006; Santos and Grant 2011).

362

363 Previous studies have found a positive association between conspicuousness and body size in
364 frogs, opposite to what we found. These studies, however, included both defended and
365 undefended species. Therefore, these studies suggest that aposematic species are larger than
366 species that are non-toxic and cryptic, but they do not provide information on whether size
367 can predict the evolution of conspicuousness in chemically defended frogs. In our dataset,
368 chemically defended species tended to be larger than non-defended species, broadly
369 supporting the idea that larger species are better defended; however, among species that are
370 toxic, those that are large are less likely to be conspicuous (in both chromatic and luminance
371 contrast). Our results match previous findings in nudibranchs, where larger species were
372 more likely to be cryptic (Cheney et al. 2014). Most nudibranchs are chemically defended,
373 which means that, similar to our results, chemically defended nudibranchs that are smaller are
374 more likely to be conspicuous.

375

376 A negative link between body size and conspicuousness could arise because the increased
377 profitability of toxic prey (in this case their large size) could reduce selection for conspicuous
378 signals, and instead favor crypsis to avoid detection. It has been shown experimentally that
379 when relative profitability is high, then crypsis is a better alternative than aposematism
380 (Johansen et al. 2011). Intake of toxic prey increases when the nutritional content is
381 artificially increased, suggesting that the nutritional value of prey can impact the evolution of
382 anti-predator strategies (Halpin et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2014; Skelhorn et al. 2016). Body
383 size may be negatively associated with conspicuous coloration in toxic frogs for other reasons
384 too. For example, if size serves as a memorable signal in itself, as demonstrated by Tseng et
385 al. (2014) in weevils, this may reduce the need for conspicuousness in larger species,
386 although some studies have shown that color is a more salient feature than size (Halpin et al.
387 2013). In addition, larger animals generally contain more toxin and may, therefore, be less
388 palatable and already better defended (Jeckel et al. 2019). Interestingly, it has been suggested
389 that ingesting toxic, but profitable prey, could allow investment in detoxification processes
390 and can favor the evolution of mechanisms to overcome toxicity in predators (Halpin et al.
391 2013). If this is the case, then predator-prey coevolution related to toxicity could be more
392 common in larger defended species, where their high relative profitability increases the
393 probability that predators ingest toxic prey. This, in turn, relaxes selection for warning
394 signals in larger prey because these signals are less likely to deter predators.

395

396 Our study has shown that chromatic aspects of color patterns and internal contrast are
397 strongly related to the evolution of chemical defenses in frogs. We have also established that
398 diurnal activity and smaller body size can predict the evolution of more conspicuous colors in
399 chemically defended species, and these variables could help explain the prevalence of
400 warning signals in different communities. Future studies could explore the extent to which

401 these macroevolutionary patterns apply to other aposematic clades, marine and terrestrial, and
402 the precise mechanisms driving the negative link between body size and conspicuousness.

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410

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Tables

Table 1. Model results (PGLS) for association between chemical defenses, diurnal activity and internal chromatic and luminance contrast (dorsal and ventral). Estimates from analysis on MCC tree, results across 100 trees reported in supplementary material.

Internal contrast (chromatic)	Dorsal			Ventral		
	Estimate	t-value	P-value	Estimate	t-value	P-value
Defended diurnal vs. Defended nocturnal	-0.072	-4.090	< 0.001	-0.055	-3.116	0.002
Defended diurnal vs. Not defended diurnal	-0.084	-4.012	< 0.001	-0.070	-3.388	0.001
Defended diurnal vs. Not defended nocturnal	-0.065	-3.183	0.002	-0.051	-2.428	0.016
Chemically defended vs. Not defended	0.033	2.681	0.007	0.028	2.163	0.031
Internal contrast (luminance)						
Defended diurnal vs. Defended nocturnal	-7.869	-1.282	0.201	-18.007	-2.229	0.026
Defended diurnal vs. Not defended diurnal	-13.441	-1.845	0.066	-26.203	-2.778	0.006
Defended diurnal vs. Not defended nocturnal	-0.867	-0.122	0.903	-32.486	-3.389	0.001
Chemically defended vs. Not defended	2.070	0.472	0.636	16.540	2.735	0.006

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