



## Wild fauna as a carrier of Salmonella in Reunion Island: Impact on pig farms

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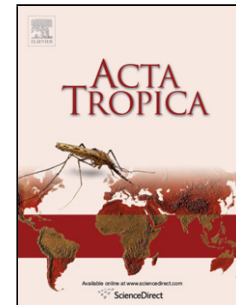


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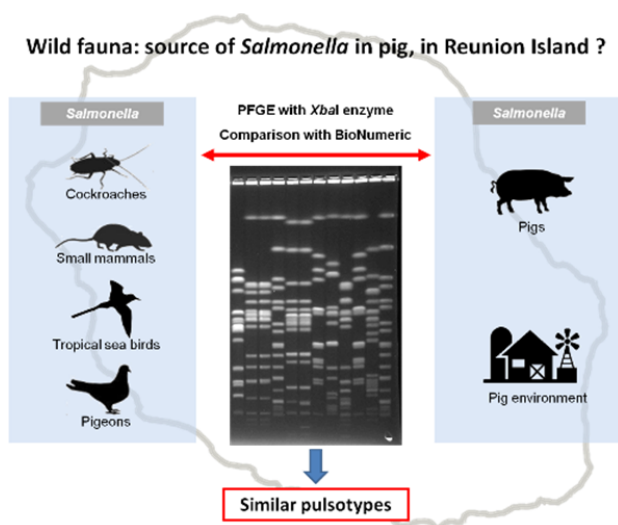
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## Graphical abstract



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**Highlights:**

- First isolation of *Salmonella* in tenrecs and two tropical seabirds species
- High prevalence of *S.* 4,[5],12:i:- and *S.* Typhimurium in wild fauna
- High prevalence of *Salmonella* in rodents and cockroaches
- Potential involvement of rodents and cockroaches in the dissemination of *Salmonella*
- Strengthening rodent control and insect disinfestations in tropical pig farms

## Abstract

Salmonellosis is an economic burden to the livestock industry in Reunion Island. In this study, we wanted to improve our understanding of *Salmonella* epidemiology by studying the wild fauna of Reunion Island. We assessed *Salmonella* diversity in small non-flying mammals, birds and cockroaches in order to evaluate their potential role in the epidemiology of *Salmonella*. A total of 268 samples were collected from cockroaches, small mammals and birds. The bacteriological analyses revealed that 11.7% of non-flying mammals and 25% of cockroaches tested were *Salmonella* infected; two wild bird species were also detected positive. The 128 *Salmonella* isolates were distributed in fifteen serotypes and the most predominant were *S.* 4,[5],12:i:- (21.9% of positive samples) followed by *S.* Enteritidis (15.6%), *S.* Typhimurium (15.6%), *S.* Infantis (12.5%) and *S.* Weltevreden (12.5%). A total of 27 *Xba*I profiles were identified using pulsed-field gel electrophoresis. Comparison of these *Salmonella* strains with our collection of *Salmonella* isolated from pigs and pig farm environments at the same period revealed 14 strains in common between wild fauna and pigs, especially for cockroaches. Our results suggest that wild fauna of Reunion Island could be infected by strains of *Salmonella* also isolated from pigs or pig environment. They may play a role in both persistence and spreading of *Salmonella* and therefore, could be a source of infection in pig farms. Pest control against cockroaches could be a helpful tool in the reduction of *Salmonella* infection of pigs, limiting contacts between wild fauna and both pigs and pig environment. Special attention should be paid to *S.* 4,[5],12:i:- since it was predominant in Reunion Island's wild fauna and pigs and was the third most frequently reported serotype in human salmonellosis in Europe.

**Keywords:** *Salmonella*; wild fauna; PFGE; pig; Reunion Island; tropics

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, knowledge on the role of the wild fauna as reservoirs of different zoonotic pathogens has been considerably demonstrated (Bengis et al., 2004; Kruse et al., 2004). Different studies actually revealed that the wild fauna hosts different infectious agents including viruses (Wilkinson et al., 2014b) and bacteria (Lagadec et al., 2012; Cloarec et al., 1992) or macroparasites (Wilkinson et al., 2014a; Guernier et al., 2014) that can have substantial impacts on public health. Recently, European studies pointed out that *Salmonella*, a widespread enterobacteria, was the second most frequent cause of human zoonoses in 2012 (EFSA and ECDC, 2014) and pigs and pig products are one of the main sources of human salmonellosis (FCC Consortium, 2013). Furthermore, different studies also demonstrated the role of wild fauna in the maintenance and transmission of *Salmonella* in farming environments (Greig et al., 2014; Meerburg and Kijlstra, 2007; Olson and Rueger, 1950; Umali et al., 2012) However, only one study showed that *Salmonella* strains isolated from wild birds or rodents were similar to those isolated from pigs (Andres-Barranco et al., 2014).

In Reunion Island, the ARS (Agence Régionale de la Santé) notified 22% of food-borne outbreaks caused by *Salmonella* between 1996 and 2005. However, it is known that human salmonellosis is under-estimated in this small French overseas department (D'Ortenzio et al., 2008). Furthermore, prevalence of *Salmonella* in pig farms has been reported as being particularly high in Reunion Island: with more than 60% of pig batches being infected with this pathogen towards the end of the fattening period (Cardinale et al., 2010; Tessier et al., 2013b). More than 26 600 tones of pork are consumed per year (around 30 kg/inhabitant/year) and half of the pork consumed is locally produced, making the pig industry the second largest local production, after poultry. Thus, *Salmonella* is considered as a socioeconomic burden by the health authorities (D'Ortenzio et al., 2008).

Appropriate sanitary and hygiene standards are recommended to limit *Salmonella* infection in pigs. Reduction of *Salmonella* prevalence at the end of the fattening period will limit its introduction to the slaughterhouse, and thus minimize the risk to consumers (Kirchner et al., 2011; van der Wolf et al., 1999). However, *Salmonella* is able to persist in the environment for several months (Berends et al., 1996; Davies and Wray, 1996), making its exclusion from open areas almost impossible, as wild animals or insects may act as a source of reinfection (Liebana et al., 2003). Pest control is one of the recommended biosecurity measures for pig farmers; however, the role of pests in *Salmonella* epidemiology and pig infection has not been described in Reunion Island. Cockroaches, rodents, shrews, tenrecs and peridomestic birds are widely distributed in Reunion Island and are frequently observed inside or in close vicinity of pig premises (Tessier et al., 2013a). A preliminary study carried out in pig farms in Reunion Island supported the potential role of these members of the local wild fauna in *Salmonella* epidemiology (Cardinale et al., 2010).

In the present study we assessed *Salmonella* diversity in small non-flying mammals, birds and cockroaches of Reunion Island and evaluate the potential role of that wild fauna in *Salmonella* epidemiology.

## 2. Material and methods

### 2.1. Sample collection

From January 2011 to April 2013, cockroaches, small mammals and birds were collected throughout Reunion Island. Cockroaches (Blattodea) were collected from pig farms. For that purpose, 50 pig farms were selected randomly among the 154 members of the pig producer association in Reunion Island. Most cockroaches were collected in cleaned and disinfected fattening rooms before the introduction of a new batch of pigs. When several cockroaches were



trapped from the same site, they were pooled (between two to nine individuals per pool). Alive cockroaches were transported to the laboratory and immersed in 90% ethanol to decontaminate their external surface before being air-dried and crushed. Small mammals were trapped in different biotopes along two altitudinal transects lying on each side of the island: twelve different sites were investigated (including three pig farms). Trapping was conducted following a standardized protocol described in Guernier et al. (2014). Intestines and liver of each animal were removed aseptically in the laboratory. Finally, samples from wild birds were also collected in two different ways. Cloacal swabs were taken from rescued birds and liver and intestines of deceased birds were sampled by the Society of ornithological studies of Reunion Island (SEOR). Intestines and liver of pigeons trapped from industrial sites and removed aseptically in the laboratory were included. Samples collected in the field were transported to the laboratory in cold conditions and stored at +4°C at the laboratory for no more than 48 h before analysis.

## 2.2. Ethic statement

All small mammals procedures carried out in this study were performed in accordance with the European Union legislation for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes (Directive 2010/63/EU). The ethical terms of the research protocol were approved by the CYROI Institutional Review Board (*Comité d’Ethique du CYROI* n° 114).

## 2.3. *Salmonella* isolation

The detection method was adapted from ISO 6579:2002, Annex D (International Organization for Standardization, 2007) with minor modifications. Samples were diluted 1:10 in buffered peptone water (BPW) and homogenised with stomacher before incubation. Swabs were pre-enriched with 10 ml of BPW respectively. After incubation at 37°C for 18 h  $\pm$  2 h, one ml of

BPW broth was inoculated onto 10 ml of Müller–Kauffmann Tetrathionate-Novobiocin broth (MKTn; bioMérieux, Marcy l'Etoile, France) and three drops of 100 µl each of BPW broth were inoculated on a Modified Semisolid Rappaport Vassiliadis agar (MSRV; bioMérieux, Marcy l'Etoile, France) plate. MKTn and MSRV cultures were incubated at 37°C for 24 h and 41.5°C for 24 to 48 h, respectively. MKTn cultures and MSRV plates with a characteristic halo of migration were then streaked on both Xylose-Lysine-Desoxycholate Agar (XLD; bioMérieux, Marcy l'Etoile, France) and Rambach Agar (RA; Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany). After 24 h at 37°C, four typical colonies per sample (2 colonies per selective enrichment when possible) were purified and biochemically identified as *Salmonella* by assays on Kligler-Hajna medium, urea-indole broth and o-nitrophenyl-β-D-galactopyranose (ONPG) disks (bioMérieux, Marcy l'Etoile, France). Suspected *Salmonella* colonies were confirmed using the Rapid'One system based on biochemical tests (Oxoid, Dardilly, France). *Salmonella* isolates were stored at -80°C in a peptone glycerol broth.

#### 2.4. Genetic characterization and serotyping

Pulsed-Field Gel Electrophoresis (PFGE) using *XbaI* restriction endonuclease was performed on all the isolates using the CHEF-DR III system (Bio-Rad, France), according to the standard PulseNet protocol (Ribot et al., 2006). For some of the isolates from which the extracted DNA was not stable, we used HEPES buffer instead of Tris buffer at each step preceding the DNA restriction analysis and we added 100 µM thio-urea to the running buffer as previously described (Liesegang et al., 2002). *Salmonella enterica* serotype Braenderup H9812 digested by *XbaI* was used as molecular marker (Hunter et al., 2005). DNA patterns were analyzed with BioNumerics® software (V 6.5, Applied Maths, Sint-Martens-Latem, Belgium). Each PFGE pattern with a difference of at least one band from a known pattern type was considered to be a new pattern

(Tenover et al., 1995). Similarities between profiles based on band positions, were calculated using Dice's coefficient, with a maximum position tolerance of 1% and an optimization of 1%. Strains were clustered by the unweighted pair-group method using the arithmetic mean (Struelens, 1996).

Kerouanton et al. (2007) demonstrated that all isolates with the same *Xba*I pattern could be attributed to the same *Salmonella* serotype given the strong relationship between *Xba*I pattern and *Salmonella* serotype. We therefore serotyped one isolate per PFGE pattern in the French National Reference Laboratory of *Salmonella* (Anses, Ploufragan, France) according to the Kauffmann-White scheme (Grimont and Weill, 2007) using a slide agglutination test for the determination of somatic O and phase 1 and 2 flagellar antigens with standard antisera (BioRad, Marnes la Coquette, France; bioMérieux, Bruz, France).

### 2.5. Isolate collection

For the genotypic comparison, we considered one isolate per PFGE profile and per sample collected from wild birds, small mammals and cockroaches. We also considered *Salmonella* isolates collected from *Salmonella*-positive pig farms (pool of faeces or pair of gauze socks of pens) investigated during the same period (Tessier et al., 2013b). Out of these 50 investigated pig farms, a collection of 127 isolates was taken into account, still considering one isolate per PFGE profile and per farm.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Isolation of *Salmonella* in wild fauna

A total of 268 samples from wild fauna (cockroaches, birds and small mammals) were collected from 37 different sites (including 24 pig farms) throughout Reunion Island (Figure 1 and Table 1).

Cockroaches have been collected from 24 out of the 50 pig farms selected. We collected 185 cockroaches pooled into 44 samples (mean of 4 cockroaches per pool) and 25% (11/44) of the samples were *Salmonella*-positive. Nine out of the 24 pig farms (37.5%) had *Salmonella*-infected cockroaches.

One hundred and sixty-two small mammals belonging to five species including *Mus musculus*, *Rattus* spp., *Suncus murinus* and *Tenrec ecaudatus* were trapped throughout different sites in Reunion Island and 11.7% (19/162) of the total samples were *Salmonella*-positive. While all the samples of mice (*Mus musculus*) were *Salmonella*-negative, 9 rats (2 from the same pig farm and 7 from different natural sites) out of the 121 rats trapped (20 from pig farms and 101 from natural sites) were *Salmonella*-infected, representing 6.7 % (9/134) positive rodents. In addition, *Salmonella* was isolated from 21.7 % (5/23) of the shrews (*Suncus murinus*) tested. Only five tenrecs (*Tenrec ecaudatus*) were trapped, all from the same biotope and interestingly they were all *Salmonella*-positive. Small mammals were sampled from 13 sites and 5 of them were *Salmonella*-positive (with at least one positive-sample) (Figure 1 and Table 1).

In total, we also tested 62 birds belonging to four species including *Columba livia*, *Phaethon lepturus*, *Pterodroma baraui* and *Puffinus lherminieri*. Only two samples collected from white-tailed tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*) and shearwaters (*Puffinus lherminieri*) were *Salmonella*-infected.

### 3.2. Distribution of *Salmonella* serotypes in wild fauna

From the 32 *Salmonella*-positive samples, 128 strains could be isolated. A total of 15 *Salmonella* serotypes were identified (Figure 2). The most predominant serotype was *S. 4,[5],12:i:-* detected in 21.9% of positive samples followed by *S. Enteritidis* (15.6%), *S. Typhimurium* (15.6%), *S. Infantis* (12.5%) and *S. Weltevreden* (12.5%). The serotype *S. 4,[5],12:i:-* was isolated from birds, rodents (rats) and cockroaches. Cockroaches, shrews and rats were shedding six, seven and four different serotypes, respectively. In cockroaches, *S. 4,[5],12:i:-* was the most predominant (36.4%), followed by *S. Typhimurium* (27.3%), *S. Livingstone* (18.2%) and *S. Weltevreden* (18.2%). The most predominant serotype in shrews was *S. Infantis* (60% of positive samples) whereas in rats, it was *S. Kisangani* (22.2%), *S. Typhimurium* (22.2%) and *S. Weltevreden* (22.2%). Birds and tenrecs were shedding only one serotype, *S. 4,[5],12:i:-* and *S. Enteritidis*, respectively.

### 3.3. *Salmonella* characterization

Out of 32 *Salmonella*-infected samples, one isolate per sample and per *Xba*I profile was considered giving a total of 37 isolates (Figure 3); two isolates from wild birds (one from Audubon's Shearwater and one from White-tailed Tropicbird), 13 from cockroaches and 22 from small mammals (11 from rats, 5 from tenrecs and 6 from shrews). The 37 isolates were distributed in 27 *Xba*I profiles with 1, 11 and 16 *Xba*I profiles for birds, cockroaches and small mammals, respectively with a single *Xba*I profile shared between cockroaches and small mammals. Interestingly, one *Xba*I profile was detected in shrews and a rat trapped at the same site.

The 127 isolates selected from pig faeces and pen floors in pig farms in Reunion Island (Tessier et al., 2013b) were distributed into 83 *Xba*I profiles. Fourteen *Xba*I profiles (36 isolates) were common between wild fauna and pig samples: nine from cockroaches, two from rats, one

from tenrecs, one from birds and one from both cockroaches and rats (Figure 3). Most *Salmonella* isolates from wild fauna (67.6%) were identical to isolates from pig farm environment. All isolates from birds (100%) and 92.3% of isolates from cockroaches were identical to isolates from pig farms. Six serotypes detected either in rats or shrews (*S. Aberdeen*, *S. Brancaster*, *S. Hofit*, *S. Infantis*, *S. Kibusi* and *S. Uganda*) were not detected elsewhere. It is noted that the two rats which were trapped from farms were infected with different serotypes and pulsotypes from those detected in the farm.

#### 4. Discussion

We have showed that the wild fauna of Reunion Island was possibly infected by *Salmonella* highlighting that it could play a potential role in the epidemiology of *Salmonella*. Proportions of positive samples between the different species of wild fauna and the different sites (farms, industrial or natural sites, rescue center) were not easily comparable because of different methods of trapping; however, this study demonstrated that wild fauna shared the same *Salmonella* serotypes and pulsotypes also isolated from pig and pig environment, suggesting that pests may introduce *Salmonella* into local pig farms or be contaminated from these *Salmonella*.

In our study, 25% of samples of cockroaches were detected *Salmonella*-positive. It is significantly higher than it has been reported elsewhere (Devi and Murray, 1991). Preliminary measures for decontamination of cockroach exoskeletons before testing ensured that our results reflected only internal bacterial carriage. The observed elevated prevalence may result from sample pooling, which has been shown to be optimal for *Salmonella* detection however but this result is not indicative of individual infection of cockroaches (Arnold et al., 2005; Arnold et al., 2014). Furthermore, all samples were collected from pig farms across Reunion Island, where presence of *Salmonella* is known to be frequent (Cardinale et al., 2010; Tessier et al., 2013b). *Salmonella*-positive cockroaches were detected in 37.5% of the farms that had cockroaches,

indicating a significant circulation of *Salmonella* in this insect. Similar PFGE profiles obtained from *Salmonella* strains were detected both in cockroaches and pigs, suggesting cross-contaminations. Although infection could be bidirectional, pig infection may occur either directly after consumption of infected wild fauna or indirectly after contact with infected faeces (Kilonzo et al., 2013; Meerburg et al., 2006; Rose et al., 2000). Due to their feeding behaviour, cockroaches have a great potential to disseminate faecal bacteria, potentially contaminating pig feed or water via excretions or regurgitations (Olson and Rueger, 1950; Fathpour et al., 2003; Ahmad et al., 2011; Chaichanawongsaroj et al., 2004). Furthermore, *Salmonella* is known to persist on cockroaches for up to 10 months (Fathpour et al., 2003).

We reported that 11% of the tested small mammals (6 % of rodents, 21 % of shrews and 100% of tenrecs) were infected by *Salmonella*. Other studies have reported positive results in these species to be variable, ranging from 0% to 47% for rodents and 10% to 76% for shrews (Meerburg and Kijlstra, 2007; Andres-Barranco et al., 2014; Kilonzo et al., 2013; Singh et al., 1980; Joseph et al., 1984; Nkogwe et al., 2011). *Salmonella* was not detected in house mouse (*Mus musculus*) despite evidence of infection in this species in other studies (Kilonzo et al., 2013; Shimi et al., 1979), however this may be a result of the small number of specimens available. Unexpectedly, all the tested tenrecs (*Tenrec ecaudatus*) were infected by the same *S. Enteritidis* pulsotype but there were only five samples trapped from the same site. The tenrec is endemic to the Mascarene Islands and has elsewhere been identified as an important reservoir of bacterial infection (Tortosa et al., unpublished results). To date, no case of *Salmonella* infection has been reported in this species. However, the *S. Enteritidis* pulsotype was displayed by both tenrecs and pigs, suggesting that it will be interesting to carry out further studies on a more representative sampling in order to elucidate its role in regional *Salmonella* epidemiology. A large diversity of PFGE profiles was detected from other small mammals, but 3 profiles were similar to those isolated from pigs, suggesting cross-contaminations as well. Besides, some *Salmonella* serotypes

were only recovered from small mammals such as *S. Brancaster*, *S. Infantis* *S. Kibusi* and *S. Aberdeen*; for instance the same *S. Infantis* pulsotype was isolated from rats and shrews confirming other sources of contamination such as broiler chicken flocks (Henry et al., 2013) ocellated lizards (Martinez et al., 2011) and pet birds (Seepersadsingh and Adesiyun, 2003).

Only two birds were detected *Salmonella*-positive. All birds were collected from industrial sites or from the bird rescue Center (SEOR), where no elevated risk of *Salmonella* infection was expected. Comparable low positive results have been observed in healthy wild birds in other countries (Andres-Barranco et al., 2013; Brittingham et al., 1988; Gaukler et al., 2009; Krawiec et al., 2015). Different studies have highlighted that *Salmonella* detection is strongly influenced by sampling locality, with higher proportion being observed at sites in proximity to infected areas, such as pig farms (Andres-Barranco et al., 2014; Andres-Barranco et al., 2013; Cizek et al., 1994). Furthermore, different methods of sampling were used which could lead to different sensitivity of *Salmonella* detection. Although several studies have previously isolated *Salmonella* from seabirds (Stoddard et al., 2008; Palmgren et al., 2000), we provide the first evidence of *Salmonella* infection in two species of tropical seabirds, *Phaethon lepturus* and *Puffinus lherminieri*. Elsewhere, *Salmonella* shedding has been reported in pigeons (Gargiulo et al., 2014; Gong et al., 2014), but all the samples tested in our study were negative. Despite similar strains were isolated from seabirds and pigs, the low detection of *Salmonella* did not suggest that seabirds play a major role in pig infection. But it would be indicative to look at the small sparrows that are often seen in the pig houses.

The serotype *S.* 4,[5],12:i:- was the most predominant, and was isolated from birds, rodents and cockroaches confirming a broad distribution of this serotype within Reunion Island's wild fauna. Despite the predominance could be explained by our sampling strategy, these results could also be related to the emergence of this serotype in the pig and poultry production in Reunion Island (Tessier et al., 2013a; Tessier et al., 2013b; Henry et al., 2015; Cardinale et al., 2010). This



observation is in contrast with other studies, which have scarcely detected *S. 4,[5],12:i:-* in wild animal communities (Andres-Barranco et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2002). In Europe also, *S. 4,[5],12:i:-* has emerged over the last two decades (EFSA Panel on Biological Hazards (BIOHAZ), 2010) and was the third most frequently reported serotype in human salmonellosis in 2012 (EFSA and ECDC, 2014).

Here, we have demonstrated that birds, small mammals and cockroaches are carriers of *Salmonella* in Reunion Island, and thus that the local wild fauna could play a role in the epidemiological cycles of several different *Salmonella* subtypes. This is particularly true in the context of mixed or high density farming of pigs and poultry, which is commonplace in Reunion Island. Serological and molecular evidence seemed to corroborate the dual role of wild fauna in both maintenance and spreading of *Salmonella* in the environment, which may either result from direct physical contact with the bacterium or by established infection in wild animal or insect populations. High *Salmonella* detection and strong similarity between *Salmonella* strains isolated from cockroaches, small mammals (rodents and shrews) and pigs could suggest that thorough insect disinfection procedures and pest control plans should be effective in reducing *Salmonella* re-introduction into pig farms. Although implementation of correct sanitation measures will go a long way to reducing infection levels, the added complication of pest-origin *Salmonella* re-introduction will make this challenging, especially in Reunion Island due to its (i) unique ecology, (ii) tropical climate (optimal for both pest densities and *Salmonella* growth) and (iii) high density of pig and poultry farms.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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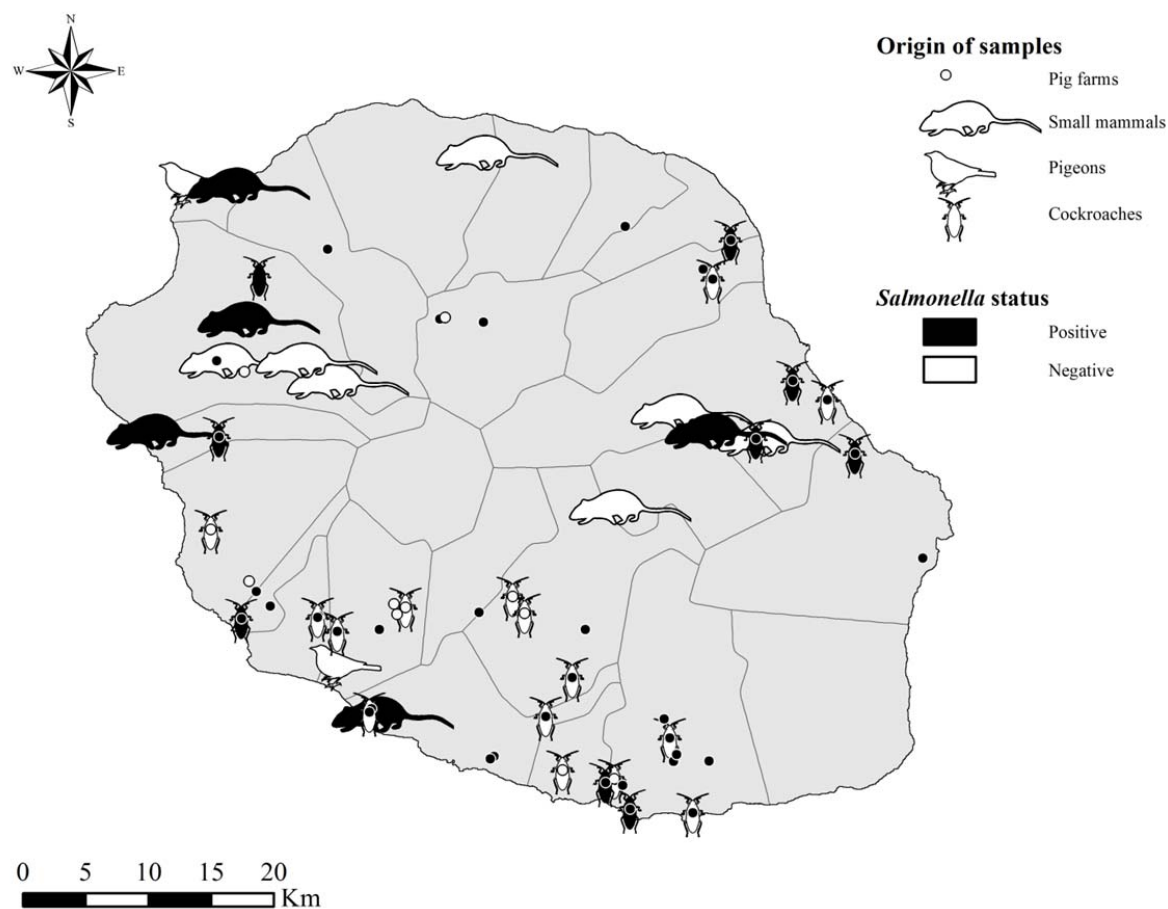
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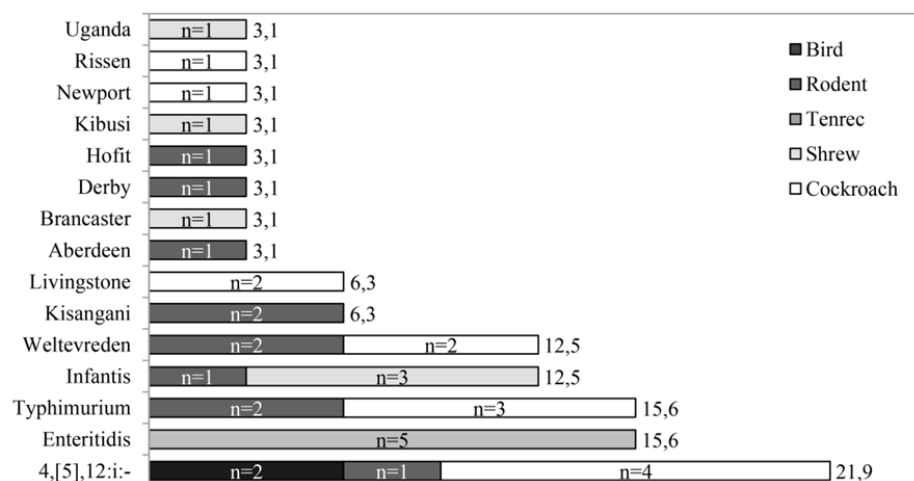
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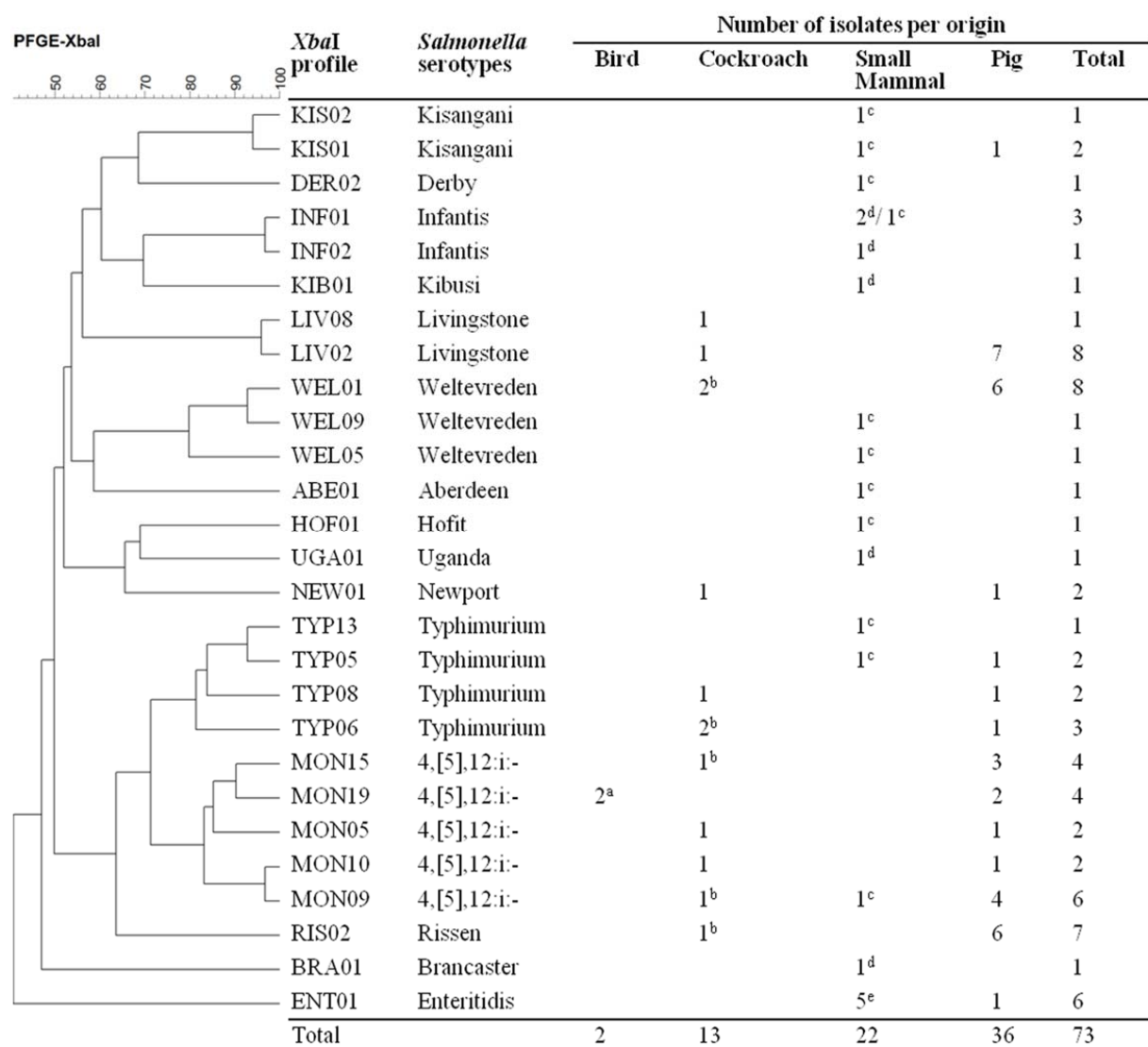
## Figure Captions



**Figure 1.** Localisation of the different sites sampled in Reunion Island and *Salmonella* status, January 2011 – January 2013. Pig farms (n=50) screened in a previous study are presented by a black spot if positive and a white spot if negative. Seabirds were not presented on the map since they were sampled at the rescue center.



**Figure 2.** Number of *Salmonella* spp. positive samples (n=268) in wild fauna according to serotypes and origin of samples. The percentage (%) of each serotype and the number of positive samples per species is indicated respectively on the right and inside of the bars.



**Figure 3.** Dendrogram of *XbaI* profiles of *Salmonella* spp. isolated from wild fauna in Reunion Island and from a selection of strains from pig farms. The number of isolates of each origin (bird, cockroach, small mammals and pig) was shown in the right side. <sup>a</sup>: isolated from White-tailed tropicbird and Audubon's shearwater, <sup>b</sup>: isolated from cockroach in farm with pig isolates sharing the same *XbaI* profile, <sup>c</sup>: isolated from rat, <sup>d</sup>: isolated from shrews, <sup>e</sup>: isolated from tenrecs.

## Tables

**Table 1. Number of collected samples and number of *Salmonella*-positive samples in wild fauna of Reunion Island.**

Type of samples	No. samples	No. (%) of positive samples	95% CI
<b>Insects – Cockroach</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>11 (25)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>12.2-37.8</b>
<b>Small mammals</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>19 (11.7)</b>	<b>6.8-17.7</b>
Mouse ( <i>Mus musculus</i> )	13	0 (0)	0-20.6
Rat ( <i>Rattus rattus</i> , <i>Rattus norvegicus</i> )	121	9 (7.4)	2.8-12.1
Shrew ( <i>Suncus murinus</i> )	23	5 (21.7)	9.9-43.7
Tenrec ( <i>Tenrec ecaudatus</i> )	5	5 (100)	-
<b>Wild birds</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>2 (3.2)</b>	<b>1.1-11.2</b>
Audubon's Shearwater ( <i>Puffinus lherminieri</i> )	10	1 (10)	2.2-44.5
Barau's Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma barau</i> )	19	0 (0)	0-14.6
Pigeon ( <i>Columba livia</i> )	30	0 (0)	0-9.5
White-tailed Tropicbird ( <i>Phaethon lepturus</i> )	3	1 (33.3)	4.4-90.6

<sup>a</sup>samples of pooled cockroaches