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Journal article

**JANE Nerine potexvirus 1: a new Potexvirus species detected  
from Nerine in the United Kingdom**

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1 Title

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40

41 Keywords

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43

44 Main text

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46 Nerine potexvirus 1: a new potexvirus species detected from Nerine in the United Kingdom

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48 Main text

49 The correct classification of a novel potexvirus sequence, identified from a Nerine plant in

50 the UK, was possible due to the sequence comparison of contemporary field isolates with

51 newly generated sequence of historical isolates of nerine virus X (NVX), held in the Alan  
52 Brunt Collection at the University of Warwick.

53 Nerine virus X, is a species in the genus *Potexvirus*. The virus was originally described  
54 infecting *Nerine sarniensis* by Brunt *et al.* (1970) and later also inferred by particle  
55 morphology by electron microscopy (EM) in *Nerine* sp. from the Netherlands (Hakkaart *et*  
56 *al.*,1975). NVX was then identified in *Nerine* from the Netherlands using serological and EM  
57 methods (Maat, 1976) and in *Agapanthus* from England using EM and other biochemical  
58 techniques (Phillips & Brunt, 1980). Maat (1976) described two potexviruses in *Nerine*, for  
59 one he proposed the name nerine virus X (NVX), the other was identified serologically as  
60 narcissus mosaic virus (NMV). Hakkaart *et al.* (1975) reported that NVX often occurs in  
61 mixed infections with other viruses in *Nerine sarniensis*. Serologically indistinguishable  
62 isolates of NVX were identified in *Nerine sarniensis* (Brunt, 1977) and *Agapanthus africanus*  
63 (Phillips & Brunt, 1978). A potexvirus, serologically indistinguishable from NVX described  
64 by Brunt (1977) but showing distinct biological differences, was found in *Agapanthus*  
65 *praecox* subsp. *orientalis* (Phillips & Brunt, 1980). This isolate was more readily sap  
66 transmissible to other hosts and indicator plants, developed a higher concentration in  
67 indicator plants, and was more easily extracted and purified. This potexvirus was proposed to  
68 be the *Agapanthus* strain (NVX-A) of NVX. Brunt noted that NVX was common in some of  
69 the *Nerine* stocks tested (co-infecting with nerine latent virus (NeLV) and nerine yellow  
70 stripe virus (NeYSV) (Balasingham, 1989)).

71 Two complete NVX sequences from *Agapanthus* plants, one from Japan (NC\_007679) and  
72 one from Taiwan (HQ166713) and two partial RNA-dependent RNA-polymerase (RdRp)  
73 sequences from *Nerine* (EF203683) and *Agapanthus* (EF203684) plants from the Netherlands  
74 were available on the NCBI database. Pairwise alignment of the RdRp sequences from  
75 *Agapanthus* plants showed that they shared between 97 and 99% nucleotide (nt) identity, yet  
76 the nt identity shared between *Agapanthus* and *Nerine* sequences dropped to 77%. These  
77 sequences were suggestive that two strains exist, the *Agapanthus* strain (NVX-A) and a  
78 *Nerine* strain (NVX-N), as previously proposed by Brunt.

79 Here we describe experiments by which we isolated the first full-length potexvirus sequence  
80 from *Nerine*. By using historical NVX sources from virus collections, we were able to  
81 determine that the virus identified in this study was a novel potexvirus and not a strain of  
82 NVX-N that had been previously identified by biological tests. A *Nerine sarniensis* x

83 *bowdenii* cv. Hera plant, that was growing in a pot was donated to the project as it showed  
84 potential virus-like (chlorotic) symptoms (Fig.1).

85 Fig.1 Symptomatic *Nerine sarniensis* x *bowdenii* cv. Hera leaves, showing mild chlorotic  
86 patches, suggestive of viral infection.

87 RNA was extracted from a fresh leaf using an RNeasy Plant Mini Kit (Qiagen) and cDNA  
88 was synthesised with an RNA to cDNA EcoDry Premix (Double Primed) kit (TakaraBio)  
89 following the manufacturer's instructions. Specific primers (NVX09/NVX10NEW,  
90 Supplementary 1) were designed based on the sequence of GenBank accession NVX-A  
91 isolate J (NC\_007679.1) but did not amplify fragments, however, degenerate potexvirus  
92 primers (Supplementary 1, Potex-5 and Potex-1RC) designed to the RdRp region (Van der  
93 Vlugt & Berendsen, 2002) amplified fragments of the expected size of 737 bp. Purified  
94 (QIAquick PCR Purification Kit, Qiagen) fragments were ligated to pCR2.1 TA vector  
95 (Invitrogen) and sequenced by the Sanger method (DBS Genomics). The resulting sequence  
96 was similar (Blastn 97.61% nt identity over 13% coverage with e-value 0) to partial NVX-N  
97 IVT80054 RdRp sequence (EF203683.1). This suggested that there were some significant  
98 differences between NVX-A isolate J (NC\_007679.1) and the potexvirus isolated from  
99 *Nerine* 'Hera' outside of the RdRp region. A MiSeq cDNA library was created from a dried  
100 leaf sample using the method described by Fowkes *et al.* (2021). The library was then  
101 sequenced and analysed. Reads were assembled using Angua version 3 (Fowkes *et al.* 2021),  
102 and a complete contig of a potexvirus-like sequence was produced. The coverage of the  
103 potexvirus was 1567x. The 6873 nt contig exhibited the expected ORFs associated with  
104 potexviruses and included a 17 nt 3' polyA. The MiSeq contig was validated by RT-PCR  
105 using primers (Supplementary 1, Nvx-mi-A-f/r, Nvx-mi-B-f/r, Nvx-mi-C-f/r, Nvx-mi-D-f/r,  
106 nvx.r.3.f.p1-p5, nvx.r.3.r.p1-p3, nvx.r.5.r.p1-p6) designed based on the MiSeq contig in  
107 overlapping regions, and the resulting amplicons were sequenced by the Sanger method  
108 (DBS Genomics). The 5' and 3' untranslated regions (UTR) were confirmed by RACE PCR  
109 (5' and 3' RACE PCR kit by TakaraBio) as per the manufacturer's instructions, using the  
110 primers shown in Supplementary 1 (nvx.gsp1, nvx.gsp2, nvx.gsp1.v2, nvx.gsp1.v3). The  
111 genome (6849 nt) organisation was typical of a potexvirus, including a 91 nt 5' UTR  
112 followed by 5 ORFs, replicase, triple gene block (TGB) 1-3, coat protein (CP) and a 125 nt 3'  
113 UTR (Fig.2). The 5' and 3' UTR lengths fell within the range of other potexvirus UTR  
114 lengths. The sequence was submitted to GenBank under accession number MZ643995.1 and  
115 is hereafter referred to as MZ643995.1 and/or nerine potexvirus 1 (NePV1).

116 Fig.2 Schematic representation of the NePV1 potexvirus genome identified from sequence  
117 obtained from *Nerine sarniensis x bowdenii* cv. Hera (MZ643995.1). Potexvirus-like regions  
118 were observed including a 5' untranslated region (UTR), replicase, triple gene block (TGB),  
119 coat protein (CP), 3'UTR and a poly(A) tail. Replicase; nt 92-4834 (1580 aa). TGB; nt 4867-  
120 6035. TGB1; 4867-5553 (228 aa), TGB2; nt 5540-5878 (112 aa), and TGB3; nt 5694-6035  
121 (113 aa). CP; nt 6049-6723 (224 aa). The genome was 6849 nt long.

122 In addition to genome organisation the analysis of predicted ORFs also revealed the  
123 conserved amino acid (aa) motifs that would be expected within potexviruses, these are  
124 summarised in Supplementary 2. The potexvirus sequence described here shared similarities  
125 with the NVX-A genomes available on NCBI (NC\_007679.1 and HQ166713.1). Pairwise  
126 alignment EMBOSS Stretcher (Madeira *et al.*, 2022 available at  
127 [https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/psa/emboss\\_stretcher/](https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/psa/emboss_stretcher/)) tool was used to calculate aa identities  
128 over the replicase and CP regions. NePV1 had significant sequence differences from the  
129 published NVX isolates derived from *Agapanthus*. It was not clear whether NePV1  
130 represented a *Nerine* strain of NVX as distinct from the *Agapanthus* strain of NVX (NVX-A),  
131 as proposed by Brunt, or was a distinct and novel potexvirus. It was also not clear how  
132 previously reported NVX-A sequences (NC\_007679.1, HQ166713.1) related to original NVX  
133 isolates and the previously proposed strains (NVX-N and NVX-A), as those original isolates  
134 had not been sequenced. To determine the relationship between NePV1 and the various  
135 *Nerine* potexvirus strains described and proposed by Brunt, Maat and others, we sequenced  
136 samples from an historical plant virus collection, with provenance to indicate these were  
137 related to the originally described isolates of NVX and agapanthus virus X.

138 Dried leaf samples were obtained from the Alan Brunt collection (University of Warwick)  
139 and two accessions, labelled NVX and agapanthus virus X were used. RNA extraction,  
140 library preparation and analysis were performed as described by Fowkes *et al.* (2021). The  
141 coverage of the NVX sequence from *Nerine* (submitted to GenBank, OQ731797) was 42672x  
142 and the coverage of the 'agapanthus virus X' sequence from *Agapanthus* (submitted to  
143 GenBank, OQ731796) was 4577x. Coverage figures were calculated using bwa mem 2,  
144 samtools and the BamToCov software (<https://github.com/telatin/bamtocov>). Sequence data  
145 from full-length sequences; NVX-A isolates (NVX-A isolate J, NC\_007679.1 and NVX-A  
146 isolate AL1, HQ166713.1), NePV1 (MZ643995.1) and NMV (NC\_001441.1) were compared  
147 to determine which sequences were most similar to the originally described NVX isolates  
148 NVX-N Brunt (OQ731797) and NVX-A Brunt (OQ731796).

149 The ICTV species demarcation criteria for the genus *Potexvirus* state that distinct species  
150 share < 72% nucleotide (or < 80% amino acid) identity over the replicase or CP regions  
151 (ICTV, 2022). The percentage aa and nt identity comparisons for the replicase (Table 1) and  
152 CP (Table 2) regions for the NVX isolates, NePV1 and NMV are shown in the tables below.

153 Table 1 Pairwise comparisons between the replicase nt and aa sequences of NVX isolates,  
154 NePV1 and NMV. Percentage nt identity is shown above the diagonal while aa identity is  
155 shown below. Virus isolates (with accession number) compared were: NVX-N Brunt  
156 (OQ731797), NVX-A Brunt (OQ731796), NVX-A isolate J (NC\_007679.1), NVX-A isolate  
157 AL1 (HQ166713.1), NePV1 (MZ643995.1), NMV (NC\_001441.1). The aa and nt sequences  
158 of the replicase for the four NVX isolates are highly similar and clearly distinct from the  
159 replicase sequences of NePV1 and NMV. The replicase of NePV1 is clearly distinct from that  
160 of NMV. Species differences are indicated by nt comparisons of < 72% and/or aa  
161 comparisons < 80% identity, and are shown in bold.

162 Replicase differences for demarcation between *Potexvirus* species are that they share < 72%  
163 nucleotide or < 80% amino acid identity (ICTV, 2022). The data presented in Table 1 suggest  
164 that NePV1 is a distinct virus from both NVX and NMV as both nt (~65% compared to NVX  
165 isolates and 53% compared to NMV) and aa identities (~67% compared to NVX isolates and  
166 ~41% compared to NMV) fall well below the threshold cutoff points. The NePV1 replicase  
167 protein consists of 1580 aa compared with 1504 aa of the four NVX isolates. Domain  
168 analysis using NCBI CDD (Marchler-Bauer A *et al.*, 2015 available at  
169 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Structure/cdd/wrpsb.cgi>) revealed a domain between the  
170 helicase and methyltransferase motifs in NePV1, which showed potential similarity (Bit  
171 Score: 67.63 E-value: 5.55e-11) to the Herpes virus major outer envelope glycoprotein  
172 (BLLF1), which equated to a 24.1% aa identity by pairwise analysis using EMBOSS  
173 Stretcher. This BLLF1 domain was not present in the replicase of the NVX isolates, nor in  
174 the replicase of the other 46 potexviruses (Supplementary 3) used in phylogenetic analysis  
175 (see below), suggesting that this domain may be unique to NePV1 within the potexviruses.  
176 Analysis of CP similarities is displayed in Table 2.

177 Table 2 Pairwise comparisons between the CP nt and aa sequences of NVX isolates, NePV1  
178 and NMV. Percentage nt identity is shown above the diagonal while aa identity is shown  
179 below. Virus isolates (with accession number) compared were: NVX-N Brunt (OQ731797),  
180 NVX-A Brunt (OQ731796), NVX-A isolate J (NC\_007679.1), NVX-A isolate AL1

181 (HQ166713.1), NePV1 (MZ643995.1) and NMV (NC\_001441.1). The aa and nt sequences of  
182 the CP for the four NVX isolates were highly similar and clearly distinct from the CP  
183 sequence of NMV. The nt identity of the CP of NePV1 was clearly distinct from that of the  
184 four NVX isolates and of NMV. However, while the aa identity between NePV1 and NMV  
185 was clearly distinct, there was >80% similarity between the aa sequence of NePV1 and the  
186 four NVX isolates. Species differences are indicated by nt comparisons of < 72% and/or aa  
187 comparisons < 80% identity, and are shown in bold.

188 CP differences for demarcation between *Potexvirus* species are that they share < 72%  
189 nucleotide or < 80% amino acid identity (ICTV, 2022). The data presented in Table 2 suggest  
190 that NePV1 is a separate species from NVX, as although the aa identity is above the threshold  
191 value (~84-88%) when compared to the four NVX isolates, the nt identity of ~67% falls  
192 below the threshold criterion.

193 This combined comparative analysis of nt and aa identities of the replicase and CPs strongly  
194 suggests that NePV1 represents a distinct potexvirus and not an isolate/strain of NVX.

195 The relationship of NePV1 to other potexviruses was further investigated with two  
196 phylogenetic analyses. In the first analysis eight sequences were aligned using ClustalW.  
197 These sequences included NePV1, the four complete NVX sequences (NVX-A isolate J,  
198 NC\_007679.1; NVX-A isolate AL1, HQ166713.1; NVX-N Brunt, OQ731797; NVX-A Brunt  
199 (OQ731796); and NMV (NC\_001441.1), which had previously been described as infecting  
200 *Nerine* and had been identified in *Nerine* using serological assays (Matt, 1976). Potato virus x  
201 (PVX) NC\_011620.1 was included as a potexvirus outlier and nerine yellow stripe virus  
202 (NeYSV) MT396083.1 was included as a non-potexvirus outlier. The evolutionary history  
203 was inferred by using the Maximum Likelihood method and Tamura-Nei model (Tamura &  
204 Nei, 1993). A phylogenetic tree was generated using MegaX (Fig.3) and this analysis showed  
205 NePV1 as distinct from the four NVX isolates and from NMV.

206 Fig.3 Phylogenetic tree comparing four nerine virus X (NVX) sequences (NVX-A isolate J,  
207 NC\_007679.1; NVX-A isolate AL1, HQ166713.1; NVX-N Brunt, OQ731797; NVX-A  
208 Brunt, OQ731796) with NePV1 (MZ643995.1) and narcissus mosaic virus (NMV,  
209 NC\_001441.1). Potato virus x (PVX, NC\_011620.1) was included as a potexvirus outlier and  
210 nerine yellow stripe virus (NeYSV, MT396083.1) was included as a non-potexvirus outlier.  
211 Sequences were aligned using ClustalW and the tree was generated using MegaX. The



212 analysis showed that NePV1 (MZ643995.1) sat alone, distinct from the four NVX sequences  
213 and NMV.

214 The phylogenetic analysis showed that 1) the original NVX-A Brunt (OQ731796) and NVX-  
215 N Brunt (OQ731797) viruses described by Brunt and sequenced from the historical isolates in  
216 the Brunt Collection shared a high similarity with the NVX-A isolates (NVX-A isolate J,  
217 NC\_007679.1 and NVX-A isolate AL1, HQ166713.1) that appeared in the NCBI database  
218 from *Agapanthus*; 2) from the 4 sequences available to us there did not appear to be a unique  
219 *Agapanthus* strain sequence of NVX.

220 A further phylogenetic analysis was undertaken to investigate how NePV1 related to other  
221 potexviruses. Fifty-one full-length potexvirus sequences were aligned using ClustalW. The  
222 evolutionary history was inferred by using the Maximum Likelihood method and Tamura-Nei  
223 model (Tamura & Nei, 1993). A phylogenetic tree was generated using MegaX. This analysis  
224 showed that NePV1 clustered with the NVX sequences, although it was distinct from them  
225 (Supplementary 4).

226 Complete potexvirus nucleotide sequences were tested for the presence of phylogenetic  
227 anomalies using the full suite of options in RDP4 with default parameters (Martin *et al.*,  
228 2015; Martin & Rybicki, 2000). No recombination events involving NePV1 or NVX were  
229 detected by four or more methods.

## 230 Summary

231 Many viruses were described in the pre-molecular age (Jones *et al.*, 2020). The publication of  
232 the first, named, full-length genome on NCBI can become the *de facto* descriptor. There is no  
233 guarantee that this sequence is representative of the original viruses described, therefore  
234 obtaining data from historical collections can aid in taxonomic clarification.

235 Based on nt (~65%) and aa (~67%) identities of the replicase region, NVX from the Brunt  
236 collection and the newly identified and characterised potexvirus NePV1 are not the same  
237 species. NePV1 is distinct from the historical original NVX isolate and current NVX  
238 genomes and, as per the demarcation threshold for *Potexvirus* species (ICTV, 2022), could be  
239 classified as a novel species. The demarcation of a distinct *Potexvirus* species relies on one of  
240 four criteria being met based around nt or aa identities within the replicase or coat protein  
241 (ICTV, 2022). NePV1 meets 3 of these criteria to be classified as a distinct species from  
242 NVX.

243 Historical collections have enabled us to confirm that the complete NVX-A sequences  
244 (NC\_007679.1 and HQ166713.1) in GenBank are NVX as described by Brunt (1977). Brunt  
245 described NVX in *Agapanthus* as being serologically indistinct from NVX from *Nerine*, but  
246 suggested the presence of *Nerine* and *Agapanthus* strains, based on infectivity assays. The  
247 data presented here suggests that these biologically distinct strains are genetically very  
248 closely related.

249 We have also been able to identify and characterise a novel potexvirus, which is not NVX or  
250 narcissus mosaic virus (NMV), which was also previously suggested (Maat, 1976) as a  
251 potexvirus that infected *Nerine* (*N. manselli*). We have tentatively named the newly described  
252 virus as NePV1, and propose a species name of *Potexvirus hera*.

253 The value of maintaining and sequencing historical collections has been clearly shown in this  
254 study, as access to the historical Alan Brunt collection has enabled clarification of the  
255 situation regarding NVX and potexvirus infection of *Nerine* and *Agapanthus*. The sequences  
256 of the historical isolates now provide information that can be related to the historically  
257 published virus biology. Furthermore, the ability to compare new sequence data to those from  
258 historical isolates has aided in the identification of a novel potexvirus, providing more data  
259 for those working in biosecurity to test for a virus that may be entering the country in plants  
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261

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304

305 Abstract

306 We identified full-length sequence of a potexvirus infecting *Nerine* plants in the UK. By  
 307 sequencing viruses in historical collections we have been able to demonstrate that the  
 308 identified virus is a potentially novel species, for which we propose the name nerine  
 309 potexvirus 1. Analysis of the potexviruses in the historic collections has also enabled us to  
 310 generate the first full length sequence of nerine virus X (NVX) to be isolated from *Nerine*;  
 311 and to clarify the taxonomy of NVX isolates infecting *Nerine* and *Agapanthus*. Analysis of  
 312 isolates from the historical collections has enabled us to link biological data gathered in the  
 313 pre-genomic era to specific isolate sequences.

314

315

316 Table 1

	NePV1	NVX-N Brunt	NVX-A Brunt	NVX-A isolate J	NVX-A isolate AL1	NMV	
NePV1	X	<b>65.5</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>53</b>	Nucleotide
NVX-N Brunt	<b>67.2</b>	X	99.9	99	98.6	<b>53.6</b>	
NVX-A Brunt	<b>67.2</b>	99.9	X	99	98.7	<b>53.5</b>	
NVX-A isolate J	<b>67</b>	99.1	99.1	X	98.7	<b>53.3</b>	
NVX-A isolate AL1	<b>66.9</b>	98.5	98.5	98.5	X	<b>53.3</b>	
NMV	<b>41.5</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>43.0</b>	X	
Amino acid							

317

318 Table 2

	NePV1	NVX-N Brunt	NVX-A Brunt	NVX-A isolate J	NVX-A isolate AL1	NMV	
NePV1	X	<b>67.4</b>	<b>67.3</b>	<b>67.4</b>	<b>67.1</b>	<b>53.7</b>	Nucleotide
NVX-N Brunt	87.7	X	99.8	99.7	99	<b>49.5</b>	
NVX-A Brunt	87.7	100	X	99.5	98.9	<b>49.4</b>	
NVX-A isolate J	87.7	100	100	X	99	<b>49.5</b>	

NVX-A isolate							
AL1	84.2	96.1	96.1	96.1	X	<b>49.5</b>	
NMV	<b>35.8</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>33.9</b>	X	
	Amino acid						

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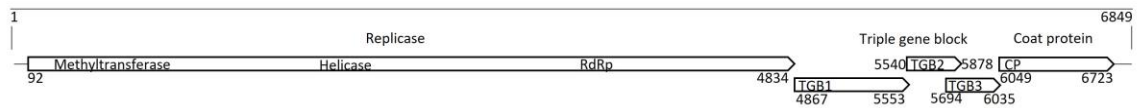
320 Figure 1



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323 Figure 2



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326 Figure 3

