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Title: A key metabolic gene for recurrent freshwater colonization and radiation in fishes

Authors: Asano Ishikawa[1,2], Naoki Kabeya[3,4], Koki Ikeya[5], Ryo Kakioka[1], Jennifer N. Cech[6], Naoki Osada[7], Miguel C. Leal[8,9], Jun Inoue[10,11], Manabu Kume[1,12], Atsushi Toyoda[13], Ayumi Tezuka[14], Atsushi J. Nagano[14], Yo Y. Yamasaki[1], Yuto Suzuki[15], Tomoyuki Kokita[15], Hiroshi Takahashi[16], Kay Lucek[8,17,18], David Marques[8,17], Yusuke Takehana[19,20], Kiyoshi Naruse[19], Seiichi Mori[21], Oscar Monroig[22], Nemiah Ladd[23,24,25], Carsten J. Schubert[23], Blake Matthews[8,26], Catherine L. Peichel[6,17], Ole Seehausen[8,17], Goro Yoshizaki[3], and Jun Kitano[1,2*]

Affiliations:

[1]Ecological Genetics Laboratory, National Institute of Genetics, Shizuoka, Japan.

[2]Department of Genetics, Graduate University for Advanced Studies (SOKENDAI), Shizuoka, Japan.

[3]Department of Marine Biosciences, Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, Tokyo, Japan.

[4]Department of Aquatic Bioscience, The University of Tokyo, Japan.

[5]Gifu World Freshwater Aquarium, Gifu, Japan.

[6]Divisions of Human Biology and Basic Sciences, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, USA.

[7]Graduate School of Bioengineering and Bioinformatics, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan.

[8]Department of Fish Ecology and Evolution, Eawag Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Biogeochemistry, Kastanienbaum, Switzerland.

[9]Present address: MARE – Marine and Environmental Sciences Centre, Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal.

[10]Marine Genomics Unit, Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University, Okinawa, Japan.

[11]Present address: Population Genetics Laboratory, National Institute of Genetics, Shizuoka, Japan.

[12]Present address: Field Science Education and Research Center, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan.

[13]Comparative Genomics Laboratory, National Institute of Genetics, Shizuoka, Japan.

[14]Faculty of Agriculture, Ryukoku University, Otsu, Shiga, Japan.

[15]Department of Marine Bioscience, Fukui Prefectural University, Obama, Fukui, Japan.

[16]Department of Applied Aquabiology, National Fisheries University, Shimonoski, Yamaguchi, Japan.

[17]Institute of Ecology and Evolution, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland.

[18]Present address: Department of Plant Ecology, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland.

[19]Laboratory of Bioresources, National Institute for Basic Biology, Okazaki, Aichi, Japan.

[20]Present address: Department of Animal Bioscience, Nagahama Institute of Bioscience and Technology, Nagahama, Shiga, Japan.

[21]Biological Laboratory, Gifu Kyoritsu University, Ogaki, Gifu, Japan.

[22]Instituto de Acuicultura Torre de la Sal (IATS-CSIC), Ribera de Cabanes, Castellón, Spain.

[23]Department of Surface Waters – Research and Management, Eawag Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Biogeochemistry, Kastanienbaum, Switzerland.

[24]Department of Earth Sciences, ETH-Zurich, Zurich Switzerland.

[25]Present address: Ecosystem Physiology, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany.

[26]Department of Aquatic Ecology, Eawag Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Biogeochemistry, Kastanienbaum, Switzerland.

*Correspondence to: Jun Kitano, jkitano@nig.ac.jp

Abstract: Colonization of new ecological niches has triggered large adaptive radiations. Although some lineages have made use of such opportunities, not all do so. The factors causing this variation among lineages are largely unknown. Here, we show that deficiency in docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), an essential ⎤-3 fatty acid, can constrain freshwater colonization by marine fishes. Our genomic analyses revealed multiple, independent duplications of the fatty acid desaturase gene *Fads2* in stickleback lineages that subsequently colonized and radiated in freshwater but not in close relatives that failed to colonize. Transgenic manipulation of *Fads2* in a marine stickleback increased their ability to synthesize DHA and survive on DHA-deficient diets. Multiple freshwater ray-finned fishes also show a convergent increase in *Fads2* copies, indicating its key role in freshwater colonization.

One Sentence Summary: Duplication of an ⎤-3 fatty acid metabolism gene plays a key role in colonization of freshwater habitats in fishes.

Main Text:

Empty niches can provide organisms with ecological opportunities to diversify (*1-3*). Many of the known large adaptive radiations followed invasion of underutilized habitats (*1, 2*). However, not all lineages appear to take advantage of such opportunities. For example, habitat shifts from marine to freshwater have repeatedly triggered radiations, but only in a limited number of fish lineages (*4-6*). The physiological and genetic factors causing this variation are unknown.

One of the under-appreciated constraints for freshwater colonization by marine animals is the poor nutritional quality of food in freshwater ecosystems. Generally, the food chain in marine environments is rich in ⎤-3 long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids, especially docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) (Fig. S1A) (*7*), which is essential for animal development and health (*8, 9*). However, freshwater ecosystems contain very little DHA (Fig. S1A) (*7*). Here, we test and confirm that DHA deficiency can constrain freshwater colonization by marine fishes and identify genetic changes that appear to have enabled some lineages to overcome this constraint.

Threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus* species complex) are primarily marine or anadromous (hereafter we call both marine), but when new freshwater habitats emerged after glacial retreat, they successfully colonized freshwater and radiated into diverse ecotypes on multiple continents (*10*) (Fig. 1, Fig. S2, and Table S1-S2). In contrast, the closely related Japan Sea stickleback (*G. nipponicus*), which diverged from *G. aculeatus* around 0.68-1.5 million years ago (MYA) (*11*), failed to colonize freshwater environments and remains phenotypically homogenous (Fig. 1). Although *G. nipponicus* co-occur with Pacific Ocean populations of *G. aculeatus* (Pacific Ocean stickleback) in some localities in Japan (*12-14*), have geographical access to many freshwater habitats, and can use freshwater for spawning (*14*), our phylogenomic analysis showed that all known Japanese freshwater populations belonged to *G. aculeatus* (Fig. 1C, and Fig. S3) (*15-17*).

Since stickleback prey differs in DHA levels between marine and freshwater habitats (Fig. S1B), we tested the hypothesis that Japan Sea stickleback may have a lower physiological ability than Pacific Ocean stickleback to survive on DHA-free diets (*18*). Our rearing experiments showed that irrespective of salinity, Japan Sea had higher mortality than Pacific Ocean stickleback starting around 40 days after fertilization when fed DHA-free *Artemia* ($P < 0.01$) (Fig. 2A, Fig. S4, Table S3); this age is close to the timing of seaward migration in nature (*19*). Marine-derived diets or *Artemia* enriched with several fatty acids, including DHA, significantly improved survival of Japan Sea stickleback ($P < 0.01$) (Fig. 2A-2B). Further, Japan Sea stickleback had a lower DHA content than Pacific Ocean stickleback when fed DHA-free *Artemia* ($P < 0.01$ for both brain and eye) (Fig. 2C, and Fig. S5), suggesting that they have either lower DHA biosynthetic capabilities or higher rates of DHA degradation or secretion.

Our whole genome resequencing revealed that *Fatty acid desaturase 2* (*Fads2*), a gene encoding a key enzyme catalyzing desaturation in DHA biosynthesis (Fig. S6, Table S4) (*20-22*), has a higher copy number in Pacific Ocean stickleback than in Japan Sea stickleback (Fig. 2D and Fig. S7) ($F_{1,12} = 79.8$, $P < 0.01$). Higher *Fads2* copy numbers in females than males ($F_{1,12} = 11.7$, $P < 0.01$) (Fig. 2D and Fig. S7) are due to the X-linkage of *Fads2* (see below). RNA sequencing further revealed that Pacific Ocean stickleback express *Fads2* at higher levels than Japan Sea stickleback ($F_{1,12} = 5.3$, $P < 0.05$ for brain; $F_{1,12} = 7.0$, $P < 0.05$ for eyes) when fed only DHA-free *Artemia* (Fig. 2E and Fig. S8).

To directly demonstrate the effects of *Fads2* copy number on survival, we made transgenic Japan Sea stickleback overexpressing *Fads2*. When fed only DHA-free *Artemia*, the *Fads2*-trangenics showed higher survival rates (Fig. 2F) and higher DHA content at 40 days after fertilization than the control *GFP*-transgenics ($P < 0.01$) (Fig. 2G and Fig. S9). Analysis of an F_2 intercross further showed that hybrids with higher *Fads2* copy number had higher survival rates at 40-60 days after fertilization ($P < 0.01$: 10.0-12.1% of variance explained) and longer overall lifespan ($P < 0.05$) (Fig. S10). Higher survival rate of females than males in Japan Sea stickleback is consistent with the higher *Fads2* copy number in females ($P < 0.01$) (Fig. S11). These data suggest that the lower *Fads2* copy number may be a constraint to colonization of DHA-deficient freshwater niches by Japan Sea stickleback.

Fluorescence *in situ* hybridization (FISH) revealed that *Fads2* was located only on the X chromosome (Linkage Group [LG] 19) in Japan Sea, but on LG12 and LG19 in Pacific Ocean stickleback (Fig. 3A). This result was confirmed by linkage analysis of *Fads2* copy number using an F_2 intercross (Fig. S12). Genes flanking *Fads2* on LG19, but not on LG12, showed conserved synteny with other teleosts (Fig. S13). Furthermore, an outgroup, *G. wheatlandi*, another marine stickleback with no known freshwater populations (*10*), has *Fads2* on LG19 but not on LG12 (Table S5) and similar copy numbers to Japan Sea stickleback (Fig. S14). Thus, LG19 is the ancestral location of *Fads2*, and copy-and-paste transposition of *Fads2* from LG19 to LG12 increased the ability to synthesize DHA in *G. aculeatus*, but not in *G. nipponicus* or *G. wheatlandi*. At the LG12 locus where a 12kb-insertion containing *Fads2* and several types of transposons exist in *G. aculeatus* (Fig. 3B and Fig. S15), *G. wheatlandi* and *G. nipponicus* possess transposons without *Fads2* (Fig. S16-S18). This suggests that transposons might have mediated the *Fads2* transposition and/or that this locus is a hotspot of insertion-deletion mutations (*23*).

The estimated timing of *Fads2* duplication within *G. aculeatus* is 0.80 MYA (95% highest posterior density: 0.47-1.16 MYA) (Fig. S19), which is much earlier than the end of the last glacial period (0.012 MYA), when the majority of stickleback freshwater colonization occurred (*1, 10*). Marine sticklebacks from western North America and Europe also repeatedly colonized freshwater and radiated into diverse ecotypes (*10*). Our results show that they also have the extra-copy of *Fads2* on LG12 with copy numbers similar to those of the Pacific Ocean stickleback in Japan (Fig. 4A, Fig. S16 and S22C-S22F). These data confirm that transposition onto LG12 occurred before the split between the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean lineages (0.3-0.5 MYA) (*24*). Thus, the pre-existing duplication of *Fads2* has likely given *G. aculeatus* an advantage over other *Gasterosteus* species in colonizing freshwater. However, our estimate suggests that *Fads2* on LG12 is younger than the oldest known freshwater *Gasterosteus* fossil (*10*). Ancient extinct freshwater species may therefore have possessed additional *Fads2* copies somewhere in the genome or adapted to DHA-deprived diets through other mutations.

To investigate whether there are any other loci involved in survivorship on DHA-deficient diets, we conducted quantitative trait locus (QTL) mapping of survival rates using an F_2 intercross between the Pacific Ocean and Japan Sea sticklebacks. In addition to a suggestive QTL overlapping the *Fads2* gene on LG12 (3.3% of variance in survival explained), one significant and two additional suggestive QTLs were found on different autosomes (Fig. S20). The QTL on LG12, but not other QTLs, explained *Fads2* copy number variation. Two other QTLs, including a

significant one, showed overdominance rather than additive effects on the survival, which may reflect an epistatic interaction between inter-species alleles (*25*) (Fig. S21). Although survival rate is a polygenic and complex trait, our unbiased QTL analysis confirmed that the additional *Fads2* copy of the Pacific Ocean stickleback on LG12 contributes to survivorship on DHA-deficient diets.

Because the Japanese Pacific Ocean stickleback also have increased survivorship with marine-derived diets (Fig. 2A), additional *Fads2* duplications beyond the LG12 copy may further increase DHA biosynthetic ability and be beneficial for permanent freshwater residency. Indeed, in Japan, freshwater populations had even higher *Fads2* copy numbers than Pacific Ocean populations ($^2_2 = 17.1$, $P < 0.01$) (Fig. 4A, Fig. S22-S23). Even within freshwater populations, those that had a longer evolutionary history in freshwater had higher *Fads2* copy numbers ($^2_3 = 35.3$, $P < 0.01$) (Fig. 1C and Fig. S22). Additional copy number increase also occurred in North American ($^2_1 = 4.4$, $P = 0.035$) and European freshwater populations ($^2_2 = 7.2$, $P = 0.028$) (Fig. 4A and Fig. S22). We confirmed that freshwater populations with additional copies of *Fads2* had more DHA than the Pacific Ocean or a freshwater population with fewer copies when fed only DHA-free diets ($F_{2,8} = 12.6$, $P < 0.01$) (Fig. S24). Both linkage analysis and long-read genome sequencing showed that tandem duplications on the X chromosome are responsible for additional copy number increase in both Japanese and Canadian freshwater populations (Fig. S25 and Fig. S26). Transposons near *Fads2* might have facilitated these tandem duplications (Fig. S26) (*26*).

To test the generality of the mechanism, we first investigated ninespine sticklebacks (genus *Pungitius*). The freshwater species, *P. tymensis* and *P. kaibarae*, had higher *Fads2* copy numbers than *P. pungitius* ($P < 0.05$), which inhabits only brackish environments in Japan. *P. sinensis*, which inhabits both freshwater and brackish environments (*27, 28*), had intermediate copy numbers between *P. pungitus* and freshwater ninespine sticklebacks (Fig. 4B, and Fig. S27). We finally investigated *Fads2* copy numbers in the ray-finned fishes whose whole genome sequences have been determined (Fig. S28). Fish species that form freshwater populations had significantly higher *Fads2* copy numbers than entirely marine species (Fig. 4C and Fig. S29; MCMCglmm accounting for phylogeny, pMCMC < 0.01), suggesting convergent increases of *Fads2* copies in diverse taxa that successfully colonized freshwater.

Gene duplications not only enhance overall gene expression levels but also allow duplicated copies to acquire new functions (*29*). Our yeast functional assay suggested that *Fads2* genes in the Pacific Ocean stickleback acquired an additional enzymatic function in the DHA synthetic pathway (Fig. S6 and Table S4). Some of the Pacific Ocean-specific amino acid changes were shared by other freshwater ray-finned fishes (Table S6), suggesting that they may be responsible for the acquisition of new enzymatic function. In addition to amino acid changes, both *cis*- and *trans*-regulatory changes cause expression differences between *Fads2* haplotypes (Fig. S30). Given that overexpression of *Fads2* rescued the lethality in Japan Sea sticklebacks (Fig. 2F-2G), differences in the copy number itself likely contribute to differences in survival on DHA-deficient diets, although the possible involvement of changes in *Fads2* protein sequence and regulation cannot be excluded.

Taken together, our data demonstrate that *Fads2* is a key metabolic gene important for overcoming the nutritional constraint associated with freshwater colonization in fishes.

Intriguingly, *Fads* shows strong signatures of selection in human populations that colonized polar regions, suggesting the importance of *Fads* in even more diverse taxa, including humans (*30*).

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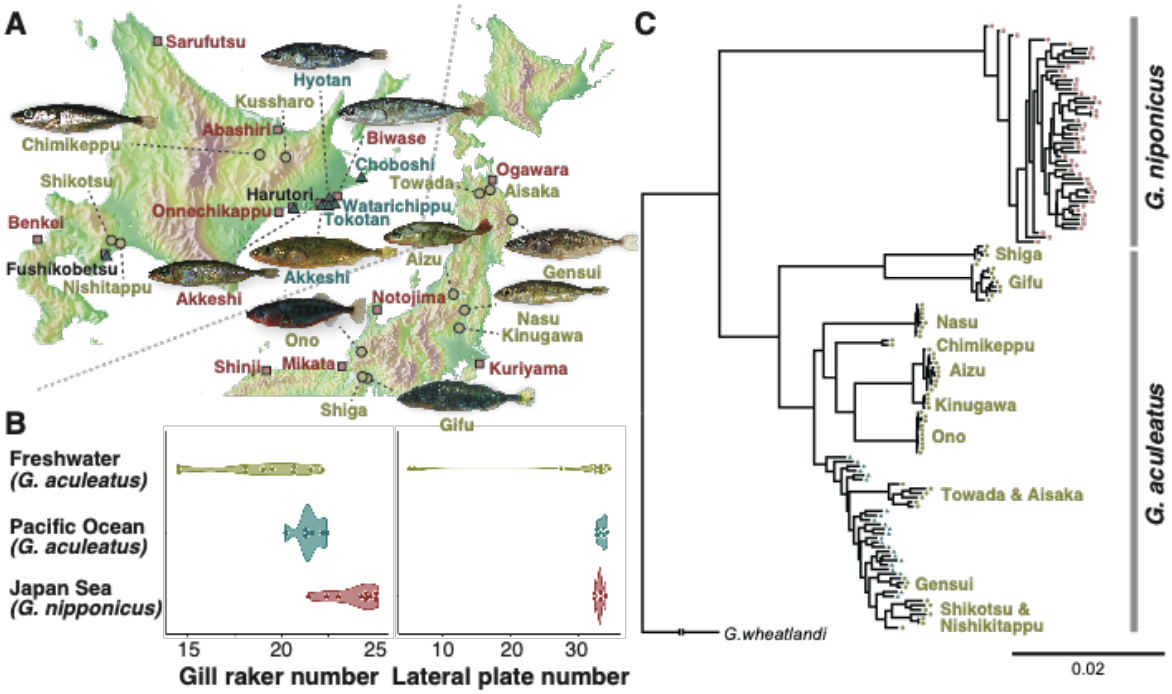

Fig. 1. Freshwater colonization and diversification in *G. aculeatus* but not in *G. nipponicus*. (**A**) Sampling sites in Japan: pink square, *G. nipponicus*; blue triangle, Pacific Ocean stickleback; green circle, freshwater. (**B**) Diversification of key foraging (gill raker number) and armor traits (lateral plate number) in freshwater populations. (**C**) ddRAD-seq phylogeny of Japanese *Gasterosteus* indicating that all freshwater populations (green circle) belonged to *G. aculeatus* (blue triangle) rather than *G. nipponicus* (pink square). Bar, the substitution rate. For bootstrap values, see Fig. S3.

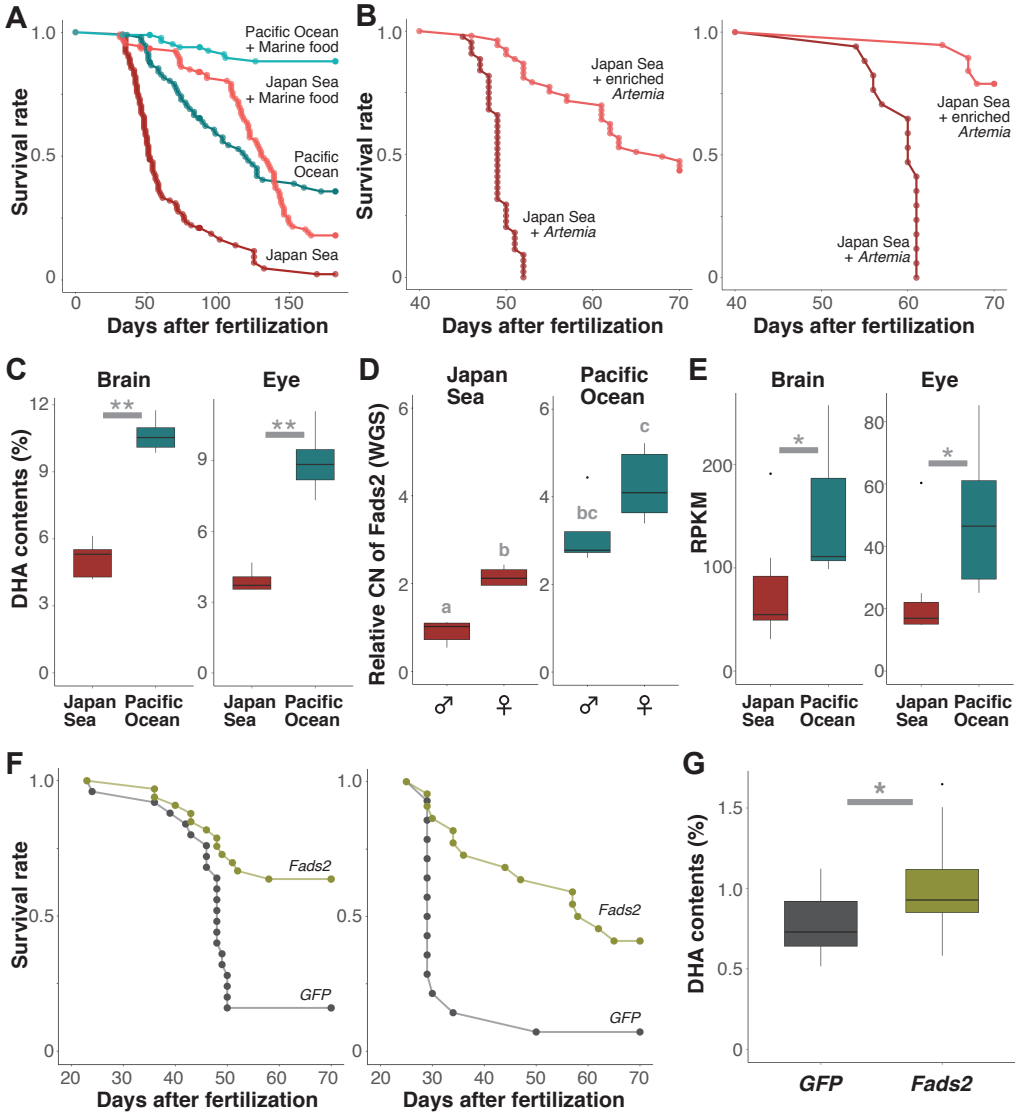

Fig. 2. Contribution of higher *Fads2* copy numbers to survival with DHA-free diets. (**A**) Survival curves of Japan Sea (red) and Pacific Ocean stickleback fed only DHA-free *Artemia* (blue) and Japan Sea (pink) and Pacific Ocean stickleback fed marine-derived diets (light blue). (**B**) Survival curves of Japan Sea fed with DHA-free *Artemia* (dark-red) and *Artemia* enriched with several fatty acids, including DHA (pink). Two panels indicate independent replicate crosses. (**C**) DHA contents in brain and eye of two species fed only DHA-free *Artemia*. ** $P < 0.01$. (**D**) Relative copy numbers of *Fads2* in males and females of Japan Sea and Pacific Ocean sticklebacks, estimated from whole genome resequencing data. Different letters above the boxes indicate significantly different pairs ($P < 0.05$). (**E**) Expression levels of *Fads2* at 40-60 days after fertilization. * $P < 0.05$. (**F**) Survival curves of *Fads2*- (yellow-green) and *GFP*-transgenic (grey) Japan Sea fish fed only DHA-free *Artemia*. Two panels indicate independent replicate crosses. (**G**) Whole body DHA content of *Fads2*- (yellow-green) and *GFP*-transgenics (grey) at 40 days after fertilization, when Japan Sea fish start to die with DHA-free diets. *$P < 0.05$.

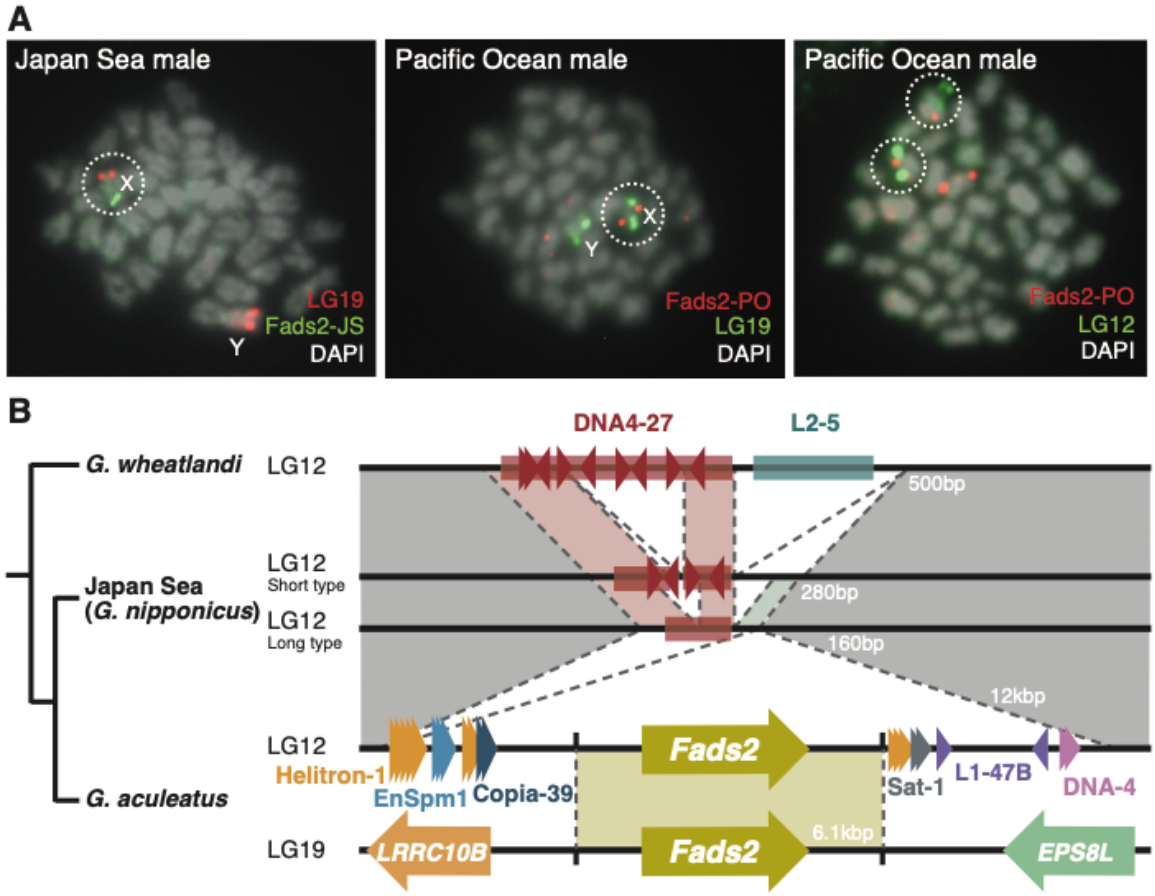

Fig. 3. Extra-copy of *Fads2* on LG12 in *G. aculeatus*. (**A**) FISH results with DAPI-nuclear staining. The left panel indicates a Japan Sea male with one *Fads2* copy (green) on the X chromosome (circled). In a Pacific Ocean male, *Fads2* (red) was located on the X chromosome (circle in the middle panel) and both copies of autosomal LG12 (circles in the right panel). The colors for *Fads2* and LG19 or LG12 are flipped between the Japan Sea and Pacific Ocean males. Note that LG19 is either the X or Y chromosome, and the LG19 probe detects the region retained on the Y chromosome. (**B**) Genome structure around *Fads2* on LG19 and LG12 of *G. aculeatus* and the corresponding region on LG12 of *G. nipponicus* and *G. wheatlandi*. Arrows and arrowheads indicate genes and repetitive sequences, respectively. White numbers indicate the insertion size.

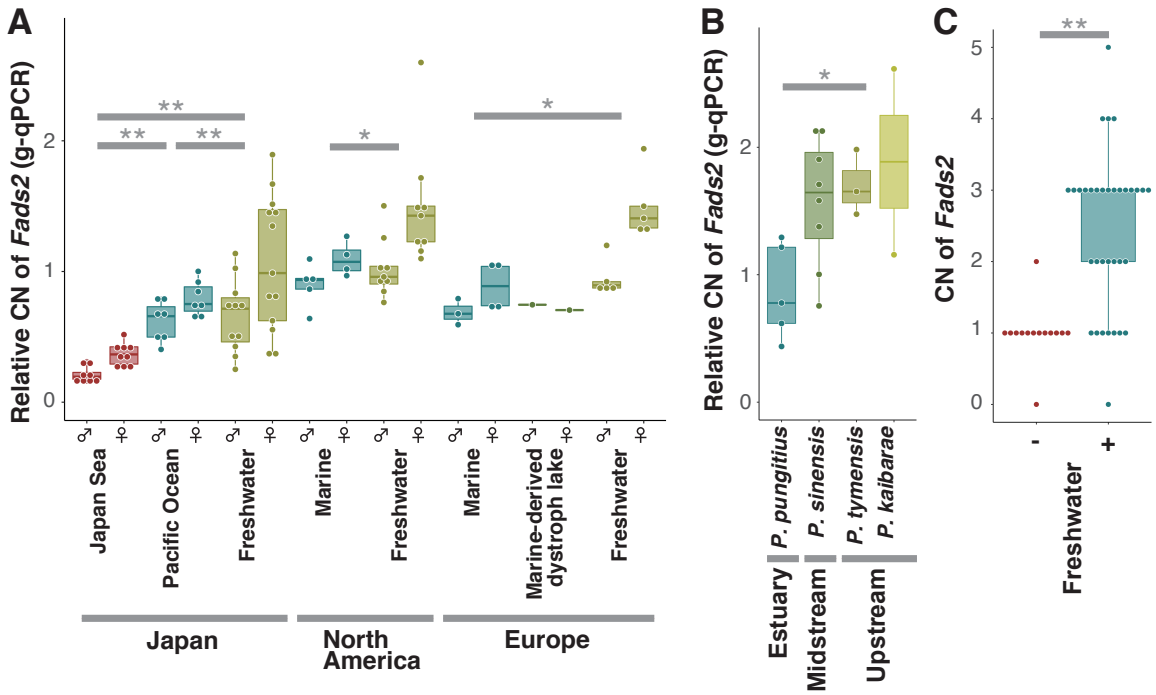

Fig. 4. Parallel increase in *Fads2* copies in freshwater fishes. (**A**) Relative copy numbers (CN) of *Fads2* in males and females of *Gasterosteus* populations: red, Japan Sea; blue, Japanese Pacific Ocean, North American and European marine ecotypes; green, freshwater ecotypes. $*P < 0.05$, $**P < 0.01$. (**B**) Relative CN of *Fads2* in *Pungitius*. A single dot indicates the median of a single population in (A) and (B). (**C**) Comparison of *Fads2* copy numbers among ray-finned fishes utilizing marine (-) or freshwater (+) niches.