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ECOTOXICOLOGY

Phloxine B Effect on Immature Stages of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly, *Ceratitis capitata* (Diptera: Tephritidae) (Wiedemann)

JIMENA BERNI, ALEJANDRO RABOSSI, AND LUIS A. QUESADA-ALLUÉ¹

Instituto de Investigaciones Bioquímicas-Fundación Campomar CONICET and FCEyN University of Buenos Aires, Patricias Argentinas 435 (1405), Buenos Aires, Argentina

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ABSTRACT A laboratory bioassay was developed to determine both the chemical toxicity and the phototoxicity of the xanthene dye, phloxine B (D&C red N°28), to the immature stages of the Mediterranean fruit fly, *Ceratitis capitata* (Wiedemann). An additional goal was to find out which main tissues are affected first. A low, but significant, level of toxicity was observed when the insects were maintained in the dark: at the point of adult ecdysis, the LC_{50} was 11.03 mM. As expected, after 8-h exposure of late larva III to light, a high level of mortality was produced (LC_{50} at ecdysis: 0.45 mM) as a dose-dependent function of dye concentration. At sublethal concentrations of the dye, the surviving insects showed a number of physiological abnormalities. Phloxine B appeared to mainly affect the larval longitudinal muscles as well as the abdominal muscles of ecdysing adults, giving rise to abnormal puparia and failed adult ecdysis, respectively. Moreover, a significant phloxine B-dependent delay in the jumping of surviving larvae for dispersal was documented. This could be attributed to a delay in attaining a threshold weight for jumping and/or to abnormalities in neuromuscular coordination, thus reinforcing the idea of pleiotropic effects of the dye.

KEY WORDS *Ceratitis capitata*, Mediterranean fruit fly, phloxine B, metamorphosis, photoinsecticides

XANTHENE DERIVATIVES ARE photosensitizing agents that undergo rapid activation when exposed to sunlight or strong artificial light, leading to the formation of singlet oxygen and superoxide anion (Heitz and Wilson 1978). Certain xanthene derivatives, such as phloxine B and other halogenated eosin analogues, are effective pesticides that can be used to control populations of several insect species. The toxic effect of these photoactivated dyes on insects was first studied by Barbieri (1928) and then by Schilmacher (1950). More recently, the photoinsecticidal efficacy of xanthenes was investigated in detail by Heitz (1987, 1997) and others (see Ben Amor and Jori 2000, for review). As expected, the degree of phototoxicity depends on the chemical structure, rose bengal (a tetraiodine, tetrachloride derivative of fluorescein) being the most toxic. Interest is growing in the use of some of these photoinsecticides, which are environmentally friendly, because they are relatively safe for mammals (Lipman 1995) and are photodegraded by sunlight in aqueous media (Licudine et al. 2002), and therefore do not persist in the environment.

The light-dependent phototoxic effects of xanthenes, and most particularly of phloxine B (a tetrabromine, tetrachloride derivative of fluorescein), have been studied in adults of several insects: ants (Broome et al. 1975, David and Heitz 1978); boll weevil (Callaham et al. 1975); cockroaches Ballard et al. 1988); and grasshoppers (Capinera and Squitier 2000). Several species of dipterans have also been shown to be susceptible to these photosensitizers. Experiments with adult were carried out with the house fly *Musca domestica* (Yoho et al. 1971, 1973; Pimprikar et al. 1980) and the face fly *Musca autumnalis* (Fondren and Heitz 1978). Because they must be ingested to be effective, carefully designed bait formulations should assure the necessary insect selectivity (Liquido et al. 1995a).

Phloxine B is considered to be one of the less toxic xanthenes, because concentrations shown to be lethal for insects were not found to be toxic in the case of human contact and ingestion (FDA 1982, Lipman 1995). It has also been assumed that ingested phloxine B is nontoxic in the absence of exposure to light, although nonphototoxic effects have been described in ants (David and Heitz 1978).

In particular, phloxine B (red) alone or a mixture of phloxine B and uranine (yellow), commercially known as Sure Dye, has been extensively tested in the formulation of baits specifically designed for adult fruit flies. This showed acute toxicity in the Mexican fruit fly *Anastrepha ludens* (Mangan and Moreno 1995, 2001; Moreno and Mangan 1995; Moreno et al. 2001), in the West Indian fruit fly *Anastrepha oblicua*

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¹ E-mail: lualque@iib.uba.ar.

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Vol. 96, no. 3



Fig. 1. (A) Main developmental events in the *C. capitata* life cycle under our well-synchronized laboratory standard conditions at 23°C and with a photoperiod of 16:8 (L:D). The age of larvae is expressed in hours bpf. Age within the puparium is expressed in hours apf starting at zero time (Rabossi et al. 1991). The arrows show the beginning of events or morphological changes. (B, C) Experimental scheme. (B) Batches of 100 insects were maintained in the dark throughout the life cycle until emergence of the imago, in the presence or absence of phloxine B. (C) Equivalent groups of insects were subjected to direct white light (see Materials and Methods) during a key developmental period: from 8 h bpf to 0 h. SKIP: refers to the first jump out of the food. PH. AD.: pharate adult.

(Moreno et al. 2001), in the Oriental fruit fly *Bactrocera dorsalis* (Liquido et al. 1995b), and the medfly *Ceratitis capitata* (Licudine et al. 2002, Liquido et al. 1995a, Moreno et al. 2001, Peck and McQuate 2000, Vargas et al. 2001).

2

Few studies have examined the effect of xanthene derivatives on immature stages of dipterans. Most of the experimental work was done in aquatic larvae of several mosquitoes (*Culex pipiens quinquefasciatus*, *Anopheles superpictus*, *Anopheles maculipennis*, *Aedes aegypti*, and *Aedes triseriatus*) using erythrosin B, fluorescein, octabromofluorescein, phloxine B, and rose bengal (Barbieri 1928; Carpenter and Heitz 1980, 1981; Pimprikar et al. 1979; Schilmacher 1950). Susceptibility of larvae to erythrosin B was also demonstrated in the house fly, *M. domestica* (Pimprikar et al. 1980) and in the face fly, *M. automnalis*, with rose and erythrosin B (Fairbrother et al. 1981).

When studying the larva to adult transition in the Mediterranean fruit fly, *C. capitata* (Rabossi et al. 1991, 1992), in detail, we became interested in determining the effect of phloxine B on immature stages, first to distinguish chemical toxicity from phototoxicity and then to establish sublethal conditions allowing further studies on the main targets at tissue and molecular levels.

The objectives of this study were to establish the degree of phloxine B toxicity in immature stages of *C. capitata* maintained in the dark, and to confirm the expected strong toxicity after exposure to light during a short developmental window encompassing the jumping period of the larvae. We also wanted to describe the macroscopic physiological symptoms of

phloxine B toxicity at sublethal doses, to infer which tissues are primarily affected.

Materials and Methods

Insects. Wild-type *C. capitata* stocks (strain Arg-17) were reared in a Teran's carrot-based medium, as described by Quesada-Allué et al. (1994). Larval and adult flies were maintained in a Conviron chamber CMP 3244, at 23°C, 50–60% RH, with a photoperiod of 16:8 (L:D). Under these conditions, the span of larval stages is 10 d and the stages within the puparium last 12 d. These insects were used to lay eggs representative of the standard laboratory population.

Feeding Trials. To test for toxic effects, we used different concentrations of phloxine B disodium salt (D&C red N° 28; Warner Jenkinson, St. Louis, MO). We developed a bioassay protocol (Fig. 1, B and C) based on the well-established life cycle at 23°C under our standard laboratory conditions (Fig. 1A). As control insects showed no or negligible differences in developmental time or occurrence of developmental landmarks, the age of individual insects was assigned using the previously described markers of the abovementioned *C. capitata* life cycle (Rabossi et al.1991, 1992) (see Fig. 1A).

Six days before starting the experiments, small experimental dishes were prepared. Carrot-based larval food (25.0 g per dish) was blended with 9 ml per dish of standardized orange juice containing phloxine B (final volume 30 ml). Final concentrations of the dye from 0.1 to 10 mM were prepared and maintained at 4°C until use. Control food contained orange juice

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BERNI ET AL.: PHLOXINE B EFFECTS ON MEDFLY

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without phloxine B. Batches of eggs oviposited during a 2-h period were collected in plastic fruits, washed, and counted. For each concentration tested, batches of 100 eggs were placed on small circles of filter paper (Whatman 1) located on the surface of the food. The dishes containing the small C. capitata colonies were covered with light-proof lids and maintained under experimental conditions, as described in the legend to Fig. 1 and in Results and Discussion. The light-promoted toxicity experiments were performed on groups of jumping larvae (8 h puparium formation (bpf)) illuminated until immobilization (0 h) with 15 W white fluorescent lamps (Philips F15T8/0, made in Chile) mounted at a height of 7 cm above the petri dishes. The light intensity at the level of flies was 47 photon micromoles $/m^{-2}/s^{-1}$ (measured with a Quantum Meter model QMSW-SS, UT). After immobilization, the prepupae were returned to dark conditions (Fig. 1C). Light-independent experiments were carried out on groups of insects held in the dark during the entire time course of the experiment (Fig. 1B).

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> To test the delay in jumping behavior, we placed each dish in a tray containing sterilized sand. This tray was also covered, as described above. Individual jumping larvae from parallel cultures were immediately collected and chilled at 4°C, weighed on a Mettler Ae-240 precision balance, and measured with a Vernier caliper (± 0.02 mm).

> Statistical Analysis. GraphPad Instat software V2.02 (1993) (San Diego, CA) was used for analysis of variance (ANOVA). Separation of means was determined by the Student-Newman-Keuls test. The concentration dose-response relationship, LC_{50} values, and 95% fiducial limits were determined by probit analysis (PROC LOGISTIC, SAS System, Stokes et al. 2000).

Results and Discussion

The times of the occurrence of the main developmental events of the *C. capitata* standard life cycle in the laboratory, under our well-synchronized conditions, are indicated in the scheme in Fig. 1A. All of the results below refer to time-dependent events occurring at 23°C, before or after puparium formation (bpf, apf), as shown in Fig. 1.

Two experimental protocols (Fig. 1, B and C) were designed to determine the light-dependent and lightindependent effects of phloxine B during development. As shown in Fig. 1B, batches of 100 insects were maintained in the dark throughout the life cycle until emergence of the imago, in the presence or absence of phloxine B. Equivalent groups of insects were subjected to direct white light (see Materials and Methods) during a key developmental period: from 8 h bpf to 0 h (Fig. 1C). At the beginning of this period, the larva III starts to jump off the food, to find a suitable dry substrate for pupariation (skip behavior) (see first thick arrow, Fig. 1A). After reaching a definitive pupariation site, the larva shortens the body to adopt an ovoid shape and reaches an irreversible stage of immobilization (at zero time, according to Rabossi et al. 1991).



Fig. 2. Dose-dependent mortality $(\pm SEM)$ of *C. capitata* from egg eclosion to adult ecdysis, when maintained in dark (\bullet) or subjected to 8-h illumination (\bigcirc) .

As expected, the rate of noneclosed eggs (10.28 \pm 0.85%) in our control (no dye) series of experiments was similar to that of the much larger, wild-type population, Arg-17, maintained permanently in our insectary under the L16/D8 regime shown in Fig. 1A (9.97 \pm 1.80%). Moreover, embryo development did not appear to be affected when up to 3 mM phloxine B was present in the food (nonsignificant, P = 0.2).

Effect of Phloxine B in the Dark

We were interested in determining the intrinsic chemical toxicity of phloxine B in larvae and stages within the puparium of the Mediterranean fruit fly. Figure 2 shows the phloxine B dose-dependent rates of accumulated mortality from egg eclosion to adult ecdysis. A low level of toxicity of phloxine B was found in insects not exposed to light: the mortality at adult emergence was $15.98 \pm 5.03\%$ with 3 mM phloxine B and $49.48 \pm 8.94\%$ with 10 mM phloxine B. The LC₅₀, in completely dark conditions, based on the number of ecdysed insects, was 11.03 mM (6.78–15.19, 95% CL; slope 3.59 ± 0.61) (Fig. 2). As far as we know, this is the first observation of chemical toxicity of phloxine B, under controlled conditions, for larval stages of cyclorraphan flies.

Phototoxicity of Phloxine B

An important phototoxic lethal effect occurred in flies exposed to light during the 8-h jumping period. The rates of mortality from egg eclosion to adult ecdysis were 100% at concentrations of phloxine B in the food >3 mM (Fig. 2). The mortality rate was directly dependent on concentrations up to 1 mM phloxine B. The LC₅₀ at ecdysis, after 8-h exposure to light, was 0.45 mM (0.41–0.49, 95% CL; slope 1.36 ± 0.05) (Fig. 2), which is ≈ 25 times more toxicity than that obtained under dark conditions. The toxicity rapidly became evident during the 8-h light period and persisted during the stages within the puparium (see below).

4

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JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC ENTOMOLOGY

Vol. 96, no. 3

The postulated mechanism of eosin (fluorescein) toxicity involves the absorption of visible light energy by the ingested dye, apparently leading mainly to the formation of intracellular singlet oxygen and superoxide anions (Carpenter and Heitz 1980). Singlet oxygen is highly reactive and may attack and oxidize many cellular components, including small metabolic intermediates, proteins, and membranes (Krinsky 1979). This occurs because of the long lifetime of singlet oxygen, particularly in hydrophobic media. In turn, superoxide anions can be converted to very reactive and cytotoxic species, such as the hydroxyl radical and hydrogen peroxide (Bensasson et al. 1983). The main factors related to the photosensitivity of insect tissues are the reactivity of the dye, the dose, and the light intensity.

Toxicity Within Stages of Development

To determine the levels of sensitivity to phloxine B of the different stages, we analyzed mortality within larval stages (246 h to 8 h bpf), during the jumping to immobilization period (8 h bpf to 0 h) and within the stages in the puparium (0–288 h apf) separately. Because no exposure to light occurred during the larval stages (Fig. 1, B and C) under our experimental conditions, both experimental series of larval groups were identical.

Larval Stages. Fig. 3A shows that there is a dosedependent increase in mortality (slope 3.21 ± 0.49 , $r^2 = 0.85, P < 0.001$) during the larval stages from 1 mM phloxine B (no significant mortality) up to 10 mM phloxine B concentrations when $43.36 \pm 4.60\%$ mortality was obtained. As expected, the rate of unsuccessful larvae (that do not reach the jumping stage) in the absence of phloxine B $(9.21 \pm 1.95\%)$ was identical with that of the standard population in the laboratory $(\sim 8.0\%)$. Therefore, the resulting difference of $\approx 35\%$ in larval death at 10 mM phloxine B should be attributed to the chemical toxicity of this dve (P < 0.001). This result might be useful in the control of other dipterans such as the horn fly, Hematobia irritans, and the stable fly Stomoxys calcitrans, in which all of the immature stages of development occur within the manure, which, eventually, could be produced containing phloxine B. This idea was first explored by Pimprikar et al. (1980), who tested the effect of ervthrosin B in *M. domestica* by spraying plots of manure, and by Fairbrother et al. (1981), who demonstrated strong toxicity for the face fly, M. automnalis, in the manure of cattle fed with eosin B. It is noteworthy that, because of its presumptive absence of toxicity at low concentrations, phloxine B is used in human drug coatings and in cosmetics (FDA 1982). Therefore, in theory, low levels of phloxine B might be added to the food or water of poultry and other farm animals, to control immature stages present in the manure, the only inconvenience being the red stain produced by the dve.

Larva III Jumping Period. Almost no mortality was observed in insects not exposed to light during the critical jumping period, from 8 h bpf to 0 h (Fig. 3B).



Fig. 3. Percent mortality (\pm SEM) within developmental stages of *C. capitata* fed with phloxine B. Insects maintained in dark conditions (\bullet), and exposed to light during the jumping immobilization period (\bigcirc) are compared. (A) Mortality of larval stages up to 8 h bpf larva III. (B) Mortality during the jumping immobilization period (8 h bpf to 0 h). (C) Mortality from 0 h to adult ecdysis.

This suggests that the period after initial jumping is more refractory to the chemical, nonphototoxic effect of phloxine B, because the absence of feeding and the preparation for immobilization are accompanied by a slowing of the metabolism. In contrast, starting at a concentration of 0.5 mM phloxine B, the larvae exposed to light during this jumping period showed highly dose-dependent mortality (slope 0.23 ± 0.02 , $r^2 = 0.92$, P < 0.001) during the 8 h of exposure to light (Fig. 3B). Mortality was $17.94 \pm 6.04\%$ at 3 mM and $75.05 \pm 18.37\%$ at 10 mM of phloxine B.

We noticed that most of the mortality seemed to occur during the last 2 h of this short illumination period (data not shown). One of the most relevant June 2003

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BERNI ET AL.: PHLOXINE B EFFECTS ON MEDFLY



Fig. 4. (A) Effect of phloxine B on puparium formation. Control insects (0 mM) showed the typical barrel shape. Some larvae treated with 1 mM phloxine B were unable to retract the three first segments to acquire the typical body shape. (B) Adult unable to complete ecdysis after photosensitization with 1 mM of phloxine B.

effects was that, at the end of the 8-h period, observation of the dead larvae revealed that they had been unable to retract the anterior part of the body (Fig. 4A, right) to acquire the typical barrel shape (Fig. 4A, left). Few of the nonretracted larvae were able to initiate cuticle sclerotization and coloration to give rise to an elongated tanned puparium (Fig. 4A, right). This points to possible rapid phototoxic damage of all or some of the muscles involved in the retraction of the first three segments. It is possible that muscle mitochondria were affected, thus impairing muscle performance. Preliminary analysis of these organelles isolated from insects maintained under the same experimental conditions supports this idea (not shown).

Stages Within the Puparium. Fig. 3C shows that, again, in dark conditions, negligible chemical toxicity of phloxine B was detected in stages within the puparium, because mortality was only detected at very high (10 mM) concentrations of the dye.

The phloxine B dose-dependent phototoxic effect was linear (slope 73.28 ± 10.04 , $r^2 = 0.93$, P < 0.01) in the corresponding groups up to 1 mM phloxine B, and full mortality was reached at concentrations of phloxine B >3 mM (Fig. 3C). As also shown in Fig. 2, this concentration seems to represent a full mortality threshold. Most of the nonecdysed insects died during the pharate adult stage (data not shown) and, significantly, many of those that survived until the end of the pharate adult stage were unable to complete the last steps of ecdysis. Figure 4B shows that, after the opening of the operculum and the beginning of emer-



Fig. 5. Percentage of cumulative larval jumping after ingestion of phloxine B; (\blacksquare) 0 mM, (\checkmark) 3 mM, (\blacktriangle) 5 mM, (\blacklozenge) 7 mM, (X) 10 mM. Inset: Relationship between cumulative jumping (%) and phloxine B concentration on the first day (top) and on the second day (bottom). Regression slopes are -5.72 ± -1.05 and -6.89 ± -0.81 , respectively.

gence from the puparium, in many cases $(12.15 \pm 6.26\% \text{ and } 15.47 \pm 4.2\%, \text{ respectively, of } 0.5 \text{ and } 1 \text{ mM}$ phloxine B-treated insects) ecdysis was interrupted, because the emerging adults remained trapped. Again, this seems to indicate damage in the muscles commanding the required peristaltic movements for emergence from the puparium.

Sublethal Effect of Phloxine B on Skip Behavior

From the above results, mortality caused by phloxine B phototoxicity seems to result from pleiotropic toxic effects because of multiple targets of singlet oxygen and other reactive species generated by the dye (see above). Under sublethal conditions and, in general, in surviving insects, the main targets first affected seem to be the muscular and/or neuromuscular systems. However, nothing is known about the target(s) of the chemical toxicity (i.e., in the absence of light) described in this work. To study this, we focused on the skip behavior of larvae emerging from the food, which, according to our previous experience, seems to be a sensitive health indicator.

When no phloxine B was present in an experimental population synchronized at oviposition, >60% of the larvae (63.81 \pm 4.58%) jumped during the first day, and almost all of them (97.14 \pm 0.73%) were off the food on the second day (Fig. 5). This is close to the normal behavior in light/dark conditions (laboratory standard population), which has around 75% jumping on the first day, thus indicating that the eventual

6

JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC ENTOMOLOGY

Vol. 96, no. 3

desynchronization of the circadian clock caused by the lack of light during the first 238 h does not produce more than a 15% deviation from the normal jumping pattern. Figure 5A shows that the skip behavior of larvae was affected by phloxine B in a concentrationdependent manner. Analysis of the correlation of the delay of jumping with phloxine B concentration during the first day (Fig. 5, inset; slope -5.72 ± -1.05 , $r^2 =$ 0.91, P < 0.01) and during the second day (Fig. 5 inset; slope -6.89 ± -0.81 , $r^2 = 0.96$, P < 0.01) showed a clear dose-dependent pattern; when exposed to 3 mM phloxine B, <40% (39.07 \pm 14.74%) of the surviving larvae (see Figs. 2 and 3) jumped the first day and 100% was only reached on the fourth day. The phloxine B effect was more evident at concentrations of 5 mM or higher. Cumulative jumping rates at this concentration were $\approx 22\%$ (21.60 \pm 18.99) on the first day, 65% ($62.55 \pm 17.66\%$) on the second day, and 80% $(80.44 \pm 10.05\%)$ on the third day, and jumping continued until the sixth day (Fig. 5). However, it should be taken into account that, because of toxicity, the number of surviving insects was constantly being reduced. The weight and size of the 3 mM phloxine B-surviving jumping insects (11.9 \pm 0.5 mg and 8.07 \pm 0.37 mm, respectively) were found to be similar to those of controls $(12.1 \pm 0.5 \text{ mg and } 8.26 \pm 0.34 \text{ mm})$ respectively: the difference was not statistically significant, P = 0.22 and P = 0.19, between the treated insects and the control), thus suggesting that some kind of weight threshold is required for jumping, under conditions of unlimited food availability.

The delay in jumping behavior is probably a reflection of the significant chemical toxicity described above, occurring when a concentration of 3 mM phloxine B or more is present in the food. Therefore, possible reasons for the skip delay are the above postulated damage to muscles, in turn provoking slow mobility, as well as observed damage to midgut cells (not shown) that might lead to a lower rate of nutrient absorption. If this were the case, the surviving larvae may require more days to reach the threshold jumping weight, but the possibility that neural damage delays jumping cannot be discarded.

In conclusion, the present contribution shows a low, but significant chemical toxicity of phloxine B, as measured in *C. capitata* insects maintained in the dark from egg oviposition until adult ecdysis. As far as we know, this is the first time such an observation has been documented in dipterans and only the second report in insects, following the published data on ants (David and Heitz 1978). However, light-independent toxicity of the more reactive rose bengal has been previously documented in the house fly and in other insects (Heitz and Wilson 1978). The documented delay in jumping (Fig. 5), in otherwise apparently normal flies, is also a consequence of the toxicity produced in the dark. This result points to a greater sensitivity of the gut required for food intake and/or of the neuromuscular system for jumping, probably reflecting pleiotropic toxic effects of the dye. More investigations should be performed to infer which molecular species are responsible for the toxicity observed in the dark

and to identify the main tissue and cellular targets. As expected, we found that the immature stages within the puparium were very sensitive to phototoxicity when exposed to artificial light for a relatively short 8-h period. Most of the significant phototoxicity during this period seems to target the anterior muscles directly or indirectly, because most of the dving larvae, as well as some survivors, were unable to contract the first three segments to achieve the typical barrel shape of the puparium (Fig. 4). In normal flies, this change of shape is provided by alternated retractions and extensions of the anterior muscle segments (Zdarek 1985). Interestingly, the surviving uncontracted larvae were able to tan the larval cuticle, thus indicating that this process, triggered by the molt hormone 20-OH-ecdysone and mediated by catecholamines, is probably unaffected by phloxine B. Furthermore, we observed a similar lack of performance of the abdominal muscles at the time of ecdysis, when many flies were unable to leave the puparium and remained trapped (Fig. 4), probably because of a lack of proper contraction of these muscles. This is in agreement with similar results obtained with erythrosin B in the face fly (Fairbrother et al. 1981).

Experiments are underway to determine the extent and rate of mitochondrial damage, if any, caused by phloxine B, under both dark and illuminated conditions.

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AUTHOR QUERIES

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- A: Should 'red' be changed to 'Red'? Please see throughout.
- B: Please verify location for Warner Jenkinson.
- C: Please verify change to 'photon micromoles/ m^{-2}/s^{-1} .'
- D: Please include city in UT in which Quantum Meter is located.
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