
Entomopathogenic nematodes impact the volatile profile of their insect hosts with a cascading effect on the behaviour of uninfected hosts

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Preface

This master thesis was carried out in collaboration between Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, University of Liège (Sustainable Pest Management Division), and the TERRA research unit (Chemical and Behavioural Ecology). This master thesis is presented in article format. The formatting rules applied follow those of the Journal of Chemical Ecology.

Acknowledgments

With this writing, my journey within the old walls of Gembloux comes to an end. Each year spent here has been filled with emotions, pleasures, and discoveries. For no reason could I imagine pursuing bioengineering studies anywhere other than at Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech. I am grateful for everything I have learned.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor François Verheggen for allowing me to carry out my final year project in the Chemical and Behavioural Ecology Laboratory. His valuable advice has been instrumental throughout this period. Next, I would also like to thank the entire laboratory team, especially Clément Martin and Fanny Ruhland, for their support, guidance, and encouragement throughout this journey, which culminates in a well-rounded and satisfying piece of work, largely thanks to you. Thank you also to Elise; I'm very happy we were both TFE students at the same time.

A huge thank you to Thomas Jouant for supporting me throughout this period. Whether it was a listening ear, advice, ideas, or reviews, know that you played a significant role in the completion of this TFE. Thanks also to Laura, without whom the electronics classes and volleyball would have been less exciting.

To you, Dorian, Maxime, Charline, Louise, Amélie, with whom I shared incredible slides and unforgettable moments. From the first year to now, from the first exams to the final project, we're finishing together, and THAT is beautiful.

To Anaïs, Justine, Émilien, Sarah, with whom I spent wonderful moments full of joy and laughter both at the Ag and beyond (special mention to all the Van MeMe!) as well as with Babeth Cabaraux, my dear "cokotteuse"!

I would also like to thank the Ag 2023 committee. Experiencing student life from the other side was incredible, and I'm glad I shared it with you! To our discussions and our weekend! How can we talk about student life without mentioning the grand Bar de l'Ag and everyone who is part of it? Each artistic figure was crafted with precision (e.g., Dark Doudou). When the pig and the bird met, anything could happen. "Team Soft, ohé ého..."

Thank you also to you, Lola; your presence and help were instrumental in reaching the finish line. That Italian breath of fresh air will forever be etched in my memory. A Focaccia?

Finally, I would like to end these acknowledgments with a special mention to my family (with a warm thought for Lo and Jean-Marc) and especially to my parents, without whom living these years at Gembloux would not have been possible. Saying thank you would be an understatement compared to all the support and trust you have given me.

Résumé

Les nématodes entomopathogènes (EPN) sont de plus en plus utilisés comme alternatives biologiques aux insecticides pour la lutte contre les ravageurs. Les juvéniles infectieux libèrent des bactéries mutualistes qui se multiplient rapidement et tuent l'insecte hôte. Malgré de nombreuses recherches sur les interactions entre les EPN et les insectes, il reste incertain si les infections par les EPN modifient les composés organiques volatils (COV) émis par l'hôte, pouvant potentiellement influencer le comportement des insectes non infectés. Cette étude a testé deux hypothèses : (1) les nématodes entomopathogènes modifient les émissions de composés organiques volatils de leur hôte insecte, et (2) ces émissions volatiles attirent les insectes non infectés, augmentant ainsi la dispersion des EPN.

En utilisant des larves de *Galleria mellonella* et deux espèces d'EPN (*Steinernema carpocapsae*, *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*), les COV ont été collectés post-mortem en utilisant la méthodologie Hisorb et analysés par chromatographie en phase gazeuse couplée à la spectrométrie de masse. Des tests comportementaux, incluant des essais de pièges, de préférence et de temps d'évasion, ont évalué les réponses des insectes non infectés aux larves infectées.

Les résultats ont montré que les larves infectées par les EPN émettent des profils de COV significativement différents par rapport aux larves tuées par d'autres moyens, avec un taux de réussite de 100 % pour distinguer ces profils. Les tests comportementaux n'ont pas révélé d'effet d'attraction mais ont montré une réduction significative du temps d'évasion lorsque les insectes non infectés étaient exposés à des larves infectées au début du cycle de vie des EPN. Des composés sulfurés, typiques de la décomposition, ont été détectés dans les profils de COV. La variation des COV au cours du cycle reproductif des EPN pourrait être due aux bactéries symbiotiques. Une corrélation a été trouvée entre les profils de COV et les réponses comportementales, soutenant les hypothèses de l'étude.

Mots-clés : Nématode entomopathogène, *Steinernema*, *Heterorhabditis*, *G. mellonella*, VOC, comportement.

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Acronyms

AZ	Liquid nitrogen modality
EPN	Entomopathogenic Nematodes
Hb	<i>Heterorhabditis bacteriophora</i> modality
PMI	Post-Mortem Interval
Sc	<i>Steinernema carpocapsae</i> modality
VOC	Volatile Organics Compounds

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Abstract

Entomopathogenic nematodes (EPNs) are increasingly utilized as biological alternatives to insecticides for controlling pests. Infective juveniles release mutualistic bacteria that rapidly multiply and kill the host insect. Despite extensive research on EPN-insect interactions, it remains unclear if EPN infections alter the volatile organic compounds (VOC) emitted by the host, potentially influencing the behaviour of uninfected insects. This study tested two hypotheses: (1) entomopathogenic nematodes modify the emissions of volatile organic compounds of their insect host, and (2) these volatile emissions attract uninfected insects, therefore increasing EPN dispersal.

Using *Galleria mellonella* larvae and two EPN species (*Steinernema carpocapsae*, *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*), VOC were collected post-mortem using Hisorb methodology and analysed via gas chromatography-mass spectrometry.

Introduction

For over a century, synthetic pesticides have been widely used to control plant

Behavioural tests, including pitfall, preference, and escape time assays, assessed the responses of uninfected insects to infected larvae.

The results showed that EPN-infected larvae emit significantly different VOC profiles compared to larvae killed by other means, with a 100% success rate in distinguishing these profiles. Behavioural tests didn't reveal an attraction effect but a significant reduction in escape time when uninfected insects were exposed to larvae infected early in the EPN life cycle. Sulphur compounds, typical of decomposition, were detected in the VOC profiles. The variation in VOC during the EPN reproductive cycle may stem from symbiotic bacteria. A correlation was found between the VOC profiles and the behavioural responses, supporting the study's hypotheses.

Key Words: Entomopathogenic Nematode, *Steinernema*, *Heterorhabditis*, *G. mellonella*, VOC, Behavioural.

pests. With the recent ban on neonicotinoids, alternative methods are needed to control several insect species (Hurtado et al., 2023; Larsen et al., 2016) including soil-dwelling insects, which are

among the most challenging to control (P.S.Grewal, 2005). Biological alternatives, such as the use of entomopathogenic nematodes (EPNs) is considered one of the most promising (Barsics et al., 2013; Poggi et al., 2021). Although these microorganisms naturally inhabit the soil, their use in agricultural areas is challenging due to their sensitivity to temperature, UV radiation, and desiccation (Hiltpold et al., 2012). To overcome these limitations, EPNs can be formulated in biodegradable materials (Shapiro-Ilan & Gaugler, 2002), with or without specific attractants (Hurtado et al., 2023).

Entomopathogenic nematodes penetrate their insect hosts as infective juveniles (IJs) through natural openings (*e.g.*, spiracles, mouths) or by breaking through the integument (Eidt & Thurston, 1995). Then, IJs release symbiotic bacteria into the haemocoel. These bacteria produce toxins that kill the host within a few days (Ogier et al., 2015.; Shapiro-Ilan and Gaugler, 2002; Stock et al, 2019). Bacteria digest tissues into nutrients that EPNs feed on before initiating their reproduction. Finally, EPNs reproduce, undergoing multiple generations inside the insect body before releasing new IJs into the soil that seek new hosts (Stock et al. 2019).

Approximately 0.021% of the identified entomopathogenic nematode species exhibit pathogenicity towards insects (Grewal and al., 2005). *Steinernema carpocapsae* and *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* are among the most efficient EPNs in killing insects (Boemaret A N, 1988; Ogier et al., 2015; La Forgia et al.,2021). These species are in symbiosis with bacteria such as *Photorhabdus spp.*

and *Xenorhabdus spp.*(Boemare et al., 1993), which play a crucial role by excreting toxins leading to insects' death. These bacteria also secrete secondary metabolites, including those involved in inter-species communication and antimicrobial protection, preventing the development of saprophytes (*e.g.*, fungi), slowing down the decomposition process, and maintaining insect integrity (Chacón-Orozco et al., 2020; Mollah & Kim, 2020; Tarasco et al., 2023a; Ulug, 2023; Wollenberg et al., 2016). As a result, EPNs have a slow reproductive cycle that lasts about 10 to 14 days (Erdem et al., 2024; Schelkens, 2020).

Despite the extensive literature on EPN-insect interactions, it remains unknown whether the infection process modifies the volatile organic compounds (VOC) released by the insect body during entomopathogenic nematode infection. Usually after death, a complex process involving a wide range of chemical reactions leads to the decomposition of the animal, whether vertebrate or invertebrate. As a result, putrid odours are emitted from the remains (Verheggen et al., 2017). These by-products are released by the breakdown of the macromolecules constituting the insect. Bacterial activity during putrefaction decomposes proteins, lipids, and carbohydrates, resulting in the production of sulphur- and nitrogen containing compounds, aromatics, ketones, alcohols, and carboxylic acids (Gabriela Ioan et al., 2017). The presence of the symbiotic bacteria of the EPNs could impact the volatile profile, as they preserve the insect's integrity after death. Moreover, according to Baiome et al. (2022), each entomopathogenic bacterium produces distinct VOC. These compounds are typically oxygenated compounds like

alcohols, ketones, and aldehydes (Leroy et al., 2011).

Materials and Methods

Insect and entomopathogenic nematode rearing

Insects_ Galleria mellonella larvae were reared in plastic boxes with a lid containing a metal grid (28x19x18 cm) to facilitate gas exchange. Their diet consisted of a mixture of honey (11% w/v), glycerine (11% w/v), dog food pellets (39% w/v), water (8% w/v), and wheat bran (“Ferme Baré”, 31% w/v). The containers were initially half-filled with the diet and continuously supplied over time. Only L5 and L6 larvae were selected for experiments (Jorjão et al., 2018). *G. mellonella* were kept in a storage box ($\varnothing = 7.5$ cm, $h = 3.5$ cm) containing wood shavings (Pet’s own choice Houtvezel; 2,5kg/35L) in an incubator at 13°C until use.

Nematodes_ Entomopathogenic nematodes (*Steinernema carpocapsae*, *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*) were bred on *Galleria mellonella* larvae placed on filter paper inside Petri dishes ($\varnothing = 5.5$ cm). In each Petri dish, 300 μ l of a solution containing entomopathogenic nematodes (834 EPN/ml) was applied per group of five *G. mellonella* larvae. Once the larvae were dead, a White trap system (White, 1927) was used to collect the emerging infective juvenile entomopathogenic nematodes (IJs). The IJs were stored in 100 mL of tap water in 250 ml ventilated culture flasks (75 cm² Falcon Brand Products, New-York, United-States) at 13°C to ensure their viability until the experiments.

Volatolomic analyses

Insect infestation_ We analysed the volatile organic compounds released by *Galleria mellonella* previously killed by entomopathogenic nematodes, either *Steinernema carpocapsae* or *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*. Five *G. mellonella* larvae were placed per Petri dish ($d = 5.5$ cm with a wet filter), and 300 μ l of a concentrated suspension of IJs ($C = 834$ IJs/mL) were spread on the larvae. The Petri dishes were then kept in the dark ($T = 21 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$) until the larvae died. The two entomopathogenic nematode strains differ in their infestation times: larvae died after 48 hours with *S. carpocapsae* and after 72 hours with *H. bacteriophora*. Upon death, the larvae were kept in the same dark conditions, with the filter paper humidity maintained, until the targeted post-mortem intervals (PMI) were reached.

VOC collection_ The volatile organic compounds (VOC) emitted by dead *G. mellonella* larvae were collected using a novel passive sampling method, namely HiSorb® extraction probes (DVB/CWR/PDMS, Markes, Llantrisant, United Kingdom). These probes are passive extraction devices composed of adsorbent materials designed to capture VOC. They were directly introduced into the headspace of 20 ml vials containing seven dead *G. mellonella* larvae. The crimped vials were then placed in a water bath set at $30 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$ to enhance VOC volatility. Empty vials were also sampled as controls.

To cover the entire entomopathogenic nematode reproduction cycle for the two strains (*S. carpocapsae* and *H. bacteriophora*), samples were collected at four distinct PMIs: the 1st day after death

(PMI1), the 3rd day (PMI3), the 7th day (PMI7), and the 11th day (PMI11). The control consisted of *G. mellonella* larvae killed with liquid nitrogen. Each modality (four PMIs, three killing agents: *S. carpocapsae*, *H. bacteriophora*, and liquid nitrogen) was tested in five replicates.

*Chromatographic analyses*_ The Hisorb® probes were analysed using a thermal desorption gas chromatograph coupled with a mass spectrometer and a flame ionisation detector (TD-GC-MS/FID, Shimadzu, Kyoto, Japan). Compounds were first desorbed at 280°C for 8 minutes in a thermodesorber (TD30R, Shimadzu, Kyoto, Japan) and then cryo-focussed by Peltier effect in a glass tube set at -20°C. The trap was then warmed up to 270°C and injected onto the column head in spitless mode.

Compounds separation was performed on a HP-5 ms capillary column (30 m × 0.25 mm × 0.50 µm; Agilent technology; Santa Clara, California, USA). The oven temperature was initially set to 40°C, then increased to 200°C at a rate of 5 °C/min, and finally to 300°C at a rate of 10°C/min. Helium was used as the carrier gas in constant pressure mode set at 200 kPa. The mass spectrometer interface temperature was maintained at 230°C, with the ion source set at 200°C. Mass spectra were collected from 35 to 300 *m/z* with a data acquisition time of 0.2 seconds. The detector voltage was set at 0,1 kV during the mass spectrometer tuning.

The volatile compounds were identified by comparing their mass spectra with those in available databases (NIST, FFNAC). Identifications were confirmed using the retention indices determined with a series of n-alkane (from C7 to C30, 10 mg/ml in n-hexane) and compared with retention

indices provided in the libraries. The methods used were previously tested to ensure accurate adsorption of VOC without carryover observation.

Chromatograms were integrated using GCms Solution software (Shimadzu, Kyoto, Japan). Compounds identified in the blank samples were removed using a predictive analysis (Partial Least Squares Discriminant Analysis, PLS-DA). The PLS-DA determined which compounds belonged to the blank by providing a confidence coefficient for each compound. Removed compounds had to reach a confidence coefficient above 15, were present in more than half of the blank replicates and were considered as non-trace (trace compounds were those with a mean area less than 1% of the mean area of compounds across all modalities).

Behavioural test

We determined whether the odour profile impacts the behaviour of uninfected *Galleria mellonella* using three different methodologies. These three behavioural experiments aimed to assess the response of *G. mellonella* to dead *G. mellonella* killed either by entomopathogenic nematodes or liquid nitrogen at different post-mortem intervals (PMIs: PMI1, PMI3, PMI7 and PMI11). These behavioural tests were conducted using *H. bacteriophora* since this entomopathogenic nematode species induces a reddish colour to infested insects, which simplifies the selection of infected larvae for the experiments.

*Test 1 - Preference Test*_ A single healthy *G. mellonella* larva was placed at the centre of a round glass dish with a humidified filter paper (Ø = 18.5 cm) (Figure 1a). The arena was mentally divided into two

distinct zones: one containing a dead *G. mellonella* larva (zone A) and the other one was kept empty (zone B) (Figure 1 a). After the introduction of the healthy larva in the arena, we noted the larva's position (Empty zone or Dead zone) during the five-minute test, as well as its position at the beginning and end of the test. Each dead larva was used for three consecutive replicates. Thirty replicates were conducted.

Test 2 - Pitfall Test_ We used a glass cylinder tube (Figure 1b), with each side connected to a Schott glass bottle (250 ml). A dead larva was placed in one of the Schott glass bottles, while the other one remained empty. A living *G. mellonella* larva was then placed at the centre of the tube. The test lasted for ten minutes. At the end of that period, the larva's choice was recorded: whether it moved to the side with the dead larva (choice A), the empty side (choice B), or it remained at the centre (choice C; non-responding). Each dead larva was used for three consecutive replicates. Thirty replicates were conducted.

Test 3 - Escape Time Test_ In a round glass dish with filter paper ($\text{Ø} = 18.5$ cm), a circle with a 5 cm radius was drawn at the centre of the dish. A dead larva and a healthy one were placed side by side within this central zone, with the infested larva placed first (Figure 1c). The timer was started when the living larva was introduced, and the time it took to exit the circle was recorded. Each dead larva was used for three consecutive replicates. Thirty replicates were conducted.

Statistical analyses

Volatolomic analyses_ Chromatograms were aligned using GCAligner 1.0

software. Pie charts were created for each PMI versus death type modalities to highlight major compounds of their volatile profiles using Excel software. To evaluate potential differences among the complete VOC profile released by larvae depending on the type of death (EPNs_*S. carpocapsae*, EPNs_*H. bacteriophora*, and liquid nitrogen), volatile profiles were compared using permutational multivariate analyses of variance (perMANOVA) with a Euclidean distance matrix and 999 permutations ('adonis' command, R-package vegan, (Jari Oksanen et al., 2020)). *P-values* were adjusted using Bonferroni's correction to mitigate type I error inflation due to multiple testing. Homoscedasticity was assessed using the 'betadisper' function. Finally, we used a partial least squares discriminant analysis (PLS-DA) to construct models for distinguishing samples at each PMI and death type based on their volatile composition. PLS-DA was chosen due to the correlation among some peaks. PLS-DA aims to establish a model that segregates observations into classes using the X matrix, comprising linear combinations of volatile composition called factors, and the Y matrix, containing dummy variables describing class membership. This analysis identifies a discriminant plan where the projected observations on the components are effectively separated according to class. From the PLS-DA model, confidence coefficients for each VOC were extracted to assess their importance in the predictive volatile profile released by entomopathogenic nematode-infested larvae at each PMI. A spider chart was then plotted to visually assess the number of VOC important in the predictive profile of each modality, using Excel software.

Behavioural analyses_ To compare each PMI condition with the larvae killed by liquid nitrogen (AZ condition)-, Rstudio software (Version 4.2.2) was used. Chi-square tests of independence were performed for the Pitfall Test for the Zone Preference Test. Statistical significance

was considered when the p -value was less than 0.05. For the Escape Time Test, modalities for each PMI were compared using the Kruskal-Wallis test, followed by a post-hoc Dunn test with a Bonferroni correction (packages “PSA” and “Dunn.test”).

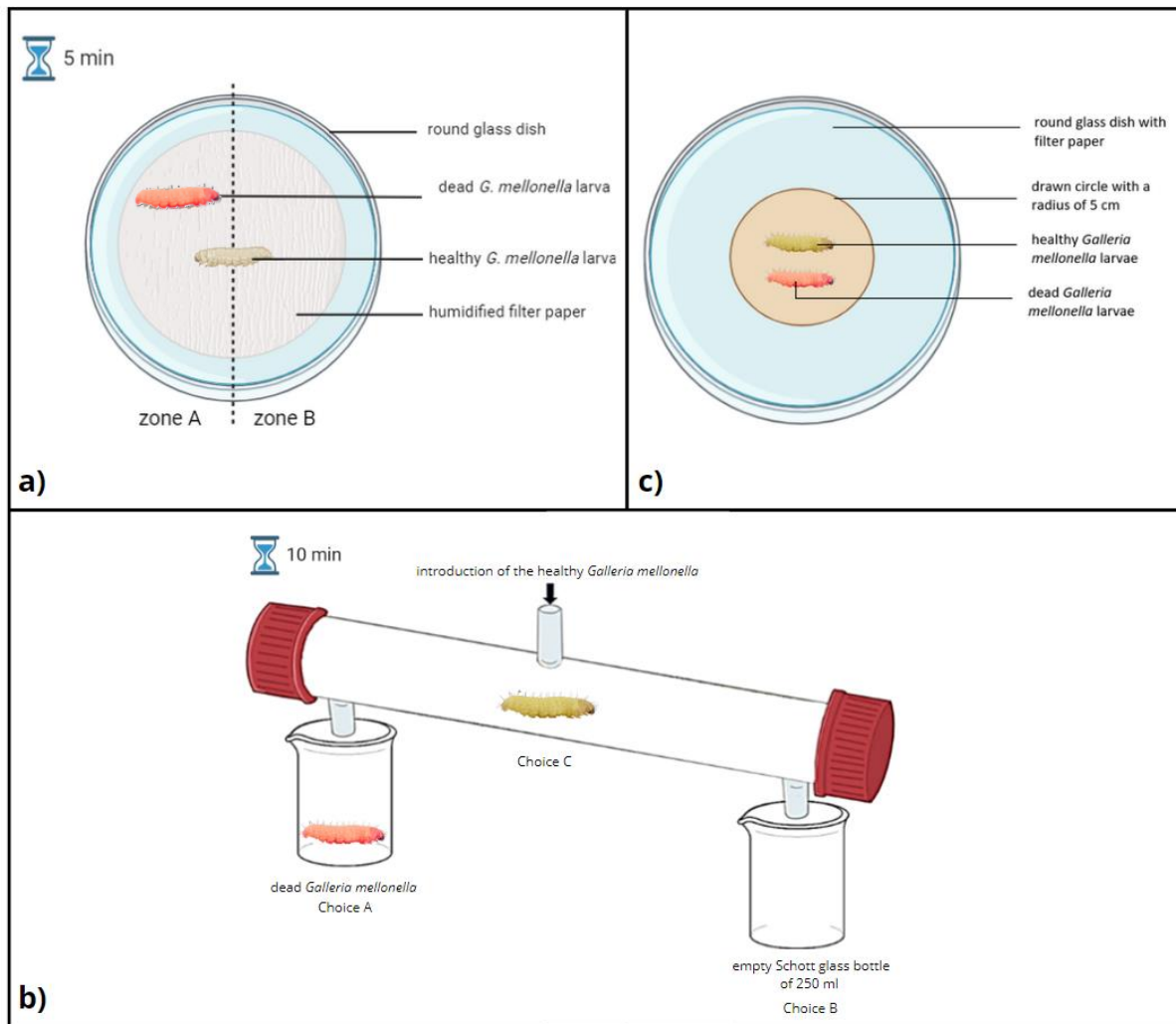


Figure 1 Experimental set up for the Preference test (a), Pitfall test (b) and Escape time test (c).

Results

Volatolomic Analyses

The analyses of all the 60 odour samples revealed a complex blend of 183 volatile organic compounds (VOC) across all conditions: larvae killed by liquid nitrogen (AZ, n=183), larvae killed by *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* (Hb, n=179), and larvae killed by *Steinernema carpocapsae* (Sc, n=175) (Table 1). Eleven chemical classes were identified, with the most significant being alkanes (n=32), alcohols (n=34), ketones (n=61), alkenes (n=23), amines (n=9), and sulphur compounds (n=7).

Larvae killed by liquid nitrogen (AZ) displayed a gradual increase in the number of compounds in the odour profile depending on the post-mortem interval (PMI) (Figure 2). At PMI1 and PMI3, the profile is characterised by two major compounds: 2,3-butanedione and acetoin (55% for PMI1 and 50% for PMI3). Then, at PMI7, the predominant compounds shifted to 2-nonanone and 2-heptanone (20%), along with the appearance of sulphide compounds (dimethyl disulfide and trimethyl disulfide) as major components. The odour profile at PMI11 was more complex, with 10 compounds representing half of the total odour profile, where methyl disulfide was the most abundant (6%).

Regarding larvae killed by *H. bacteriophora* (Hb): PMI1 was marked by

five major compounds (carbon disulfide, dimethyl disulfide, dimethyl trisulfide, 2,5-dimethyl pyrazine, and prenol) which together represented nearly half of the emitted blend. At PMI3, the major compounds identified are 2-butenal, 3-methyl among the 12 compounds making up 50% of the profile. At PMI7, a greater diversity of compounds is present, with isoprene as the major compound. This diversity decreases at PMI11, where dimethyl disulfide (24%) and acetophenone (14%) were the two dominant compounds. The volatile profile of larvae killed by *S. carpocapsae* (Sc) was similar to that of larvae killed by *H. bacteriophora* (Hb). Indeed, the same three compounds were identified in nearly the same proportions: carbon disulfide (16%), dimethyl disulfide (12%), and dimethyl trisulfide (7%). The number of major compounds then slightly increases up to PMI7, with PMI3 being predominantly composed of cyclohexene 3-butyl and 1-butanol, 2-methyl. At PMI7, half of the odour profile is predominantly composed of cyclohexene, 3-butyl, 1-butanol, 2-methyl, and propyl alcohol. The presence of similar compounds between PMI3 and PMI7 is noted, namely cyclohexene 3-butyl, 2-methyl-butanol, 1-ethenyl-3-ethyl-benzene, 2-heptanone, and heptan-2-ol. Compounds at PMI11 differ from the other two conditions by the predominant presence of propyl tetradecyl ether, propyl alcohol, and 2(3H)-furanone, dihydro-5-methyl-5-(2-methylpropyl) (54%).

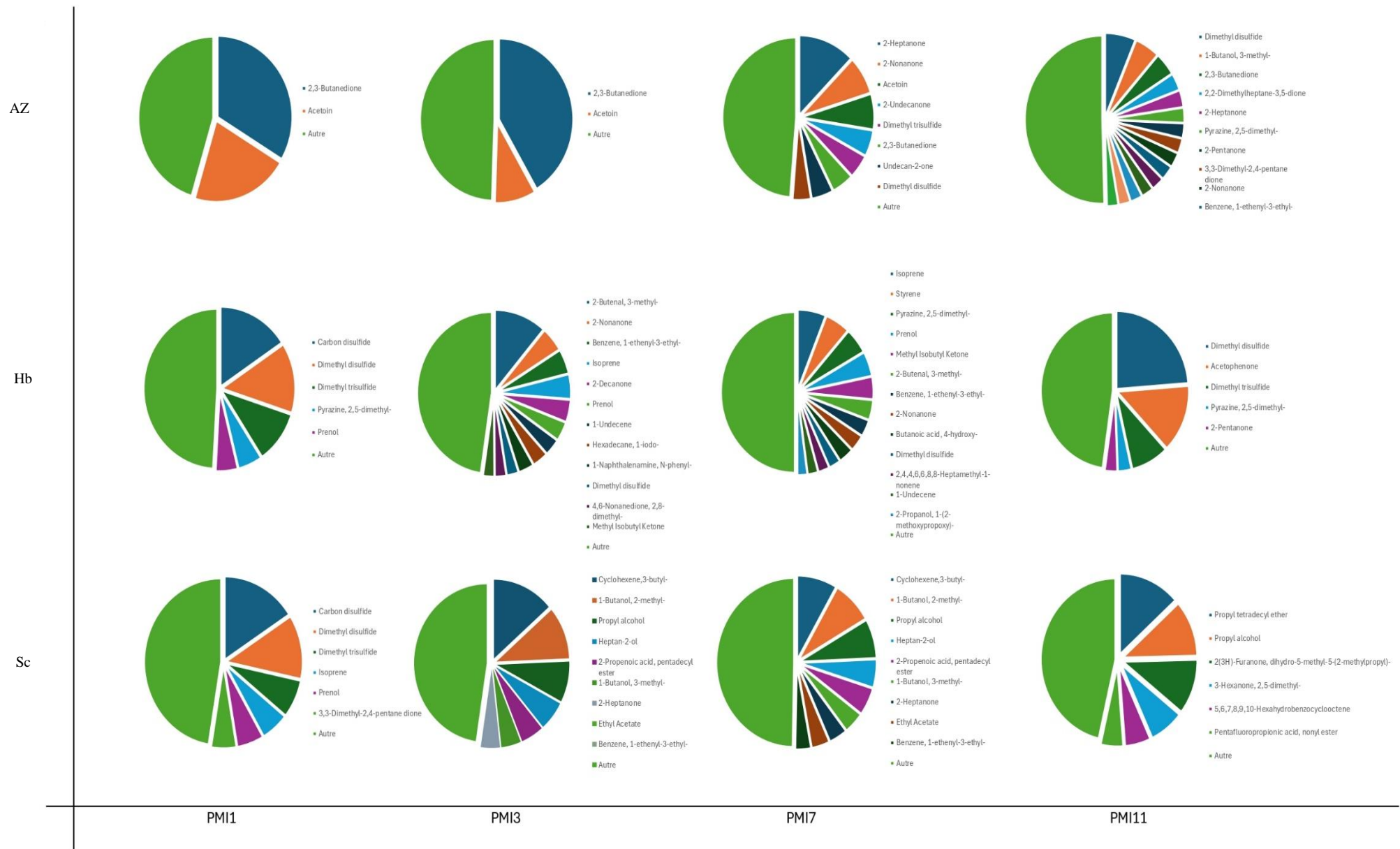


Figure 2 Relative proportions of the VOC contributing to each modality: killing method (liquid nitrogen (AZ), *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* (Hb), and *Steinernema carpocapsae* (Sc)) and post-mortem intervals in days (PMI1, PMI3, PMI7 and PMI11). The x-axis represents the different moments of odour sampling covering the duration of a complete entomopathogenic nematode reproductive cycle. Less abundant compounds are grouped under the label "Others" (green).

To identify differences among the complete volatile profile released by larvae infested by EPNs and by larvae killed by liquid nitrogen, a PermMANOVA was performed. The analysis reveals that the

odour profile of larvae differs according to the killing method ($F_{2,57}=6.3643$; p -value=0.001). These results are illustrated by the PCA (Figure 3).

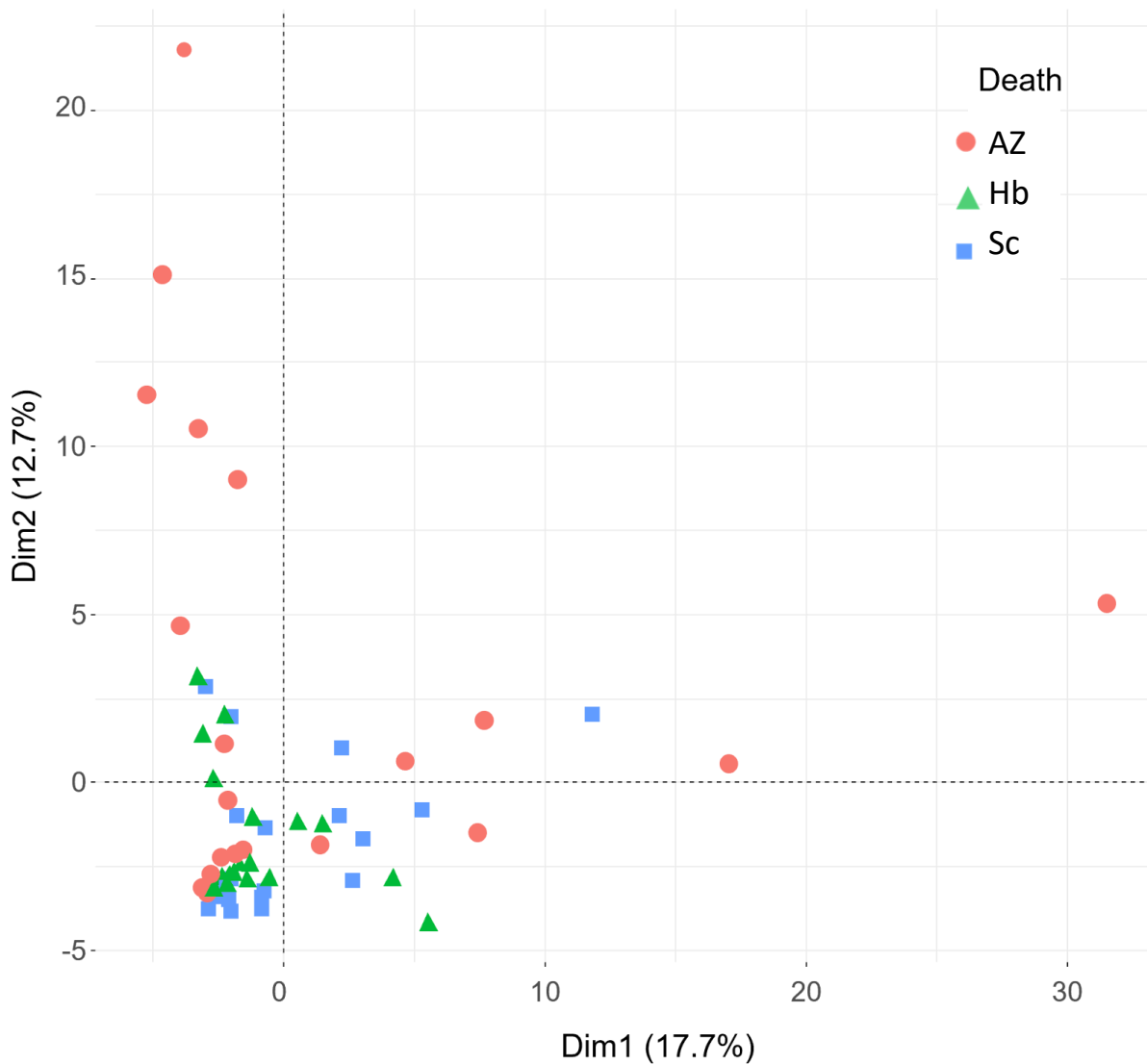


Figure 3 Principal Component Analysis (PCA) performed on the VOC profiles of liquid nitrogen (AZ), *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* (Hb), and *Steinernema carpocapsae* (Sc) conditions (n = 20).

To identify differences among the odour profile originating from the three killing methods and various PMI, a predictive analyse has been performed using a PLS-DA test. The analysis of volatile fingerprints highlights the important variables of the different conditions. This model includes 12 factors and achieves an overall accuracy of 100% (Kappa = 1). The high sensitivities (all factors = 1.00) and high specificities (all factors = 1.00) demonstrate strong reliability of the model. The high accuracy of this model indicates that each modality is characterised by a VOC profile in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

Table 2 Classification performance metrics for the PLS-DA models based on the odour profile

Reference	AZJ1	AZJ3	AZJ7	AZJ11	HbJ1	HbJ3	HbJ7	HbJ11	ScJ1	ScJ3	ScJ7	ScJ11
AZJ1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AZJ3	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AZJ7	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AZJ11	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HbJ1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HbJ3	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
HbJ7	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
HbJ11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
ScJ1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0
ScJ3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
ScJ7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
ScJ11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Sensitivity	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Specificity	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Each identified VOC was associated with a confidence coefficient, indicating its degree of influence in the prediction profile for each class/factor (AZJ1, AZJ3, AZJ7, AZJ11, HbJ1, HbJ3, HbJ7, HbJ11, ScJ1, ScJ3, ScJ7, and ScJ11). A higher coefficient suggests a greater contribution of the compound to the discrimination of the factor compared to others. The representation of these coefficients on a spider chart (Figure 4) revealed that the odour profiles of larvae infested by the two

entomopathogenic nematode strains (*S. carpocapsae* and *H. bacteriophora*) at PMI1, PMI3, and PMI7 are influenced by a reduced number of significant variables, unlike the odour profile of larvae killed by liquid nitrogen. Moreover, each of these variables has a higher coefficient, which makes it stand out from the other variables. Furthermore, starting from PMI11, a similarity emerges between the odour profiles of infected larvae and those of larvae killed by liquid nitrogen.

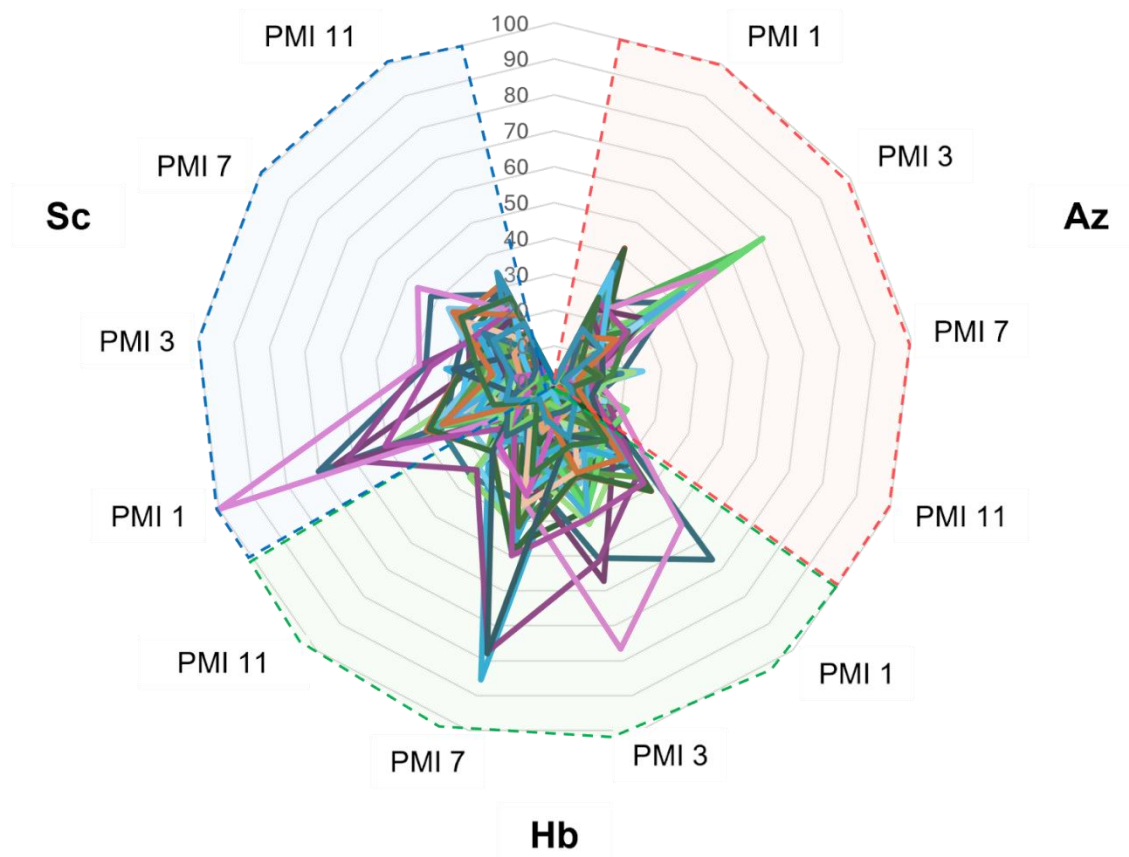


Figure 4 The spider chart displays all detected compounds represented by each line and their respective contribution in the predicted models generated from the PLS-DA analysis. Compounds that do not contribute to the predicted model are centralised on the chart, whereas those extending towards the periphery significantly influence the model predictions. Colours allow to individualise each compound on the chart.

The PLS-DA indicated that the chemical compounds present in each olfactory profile allow for significant differentiation of modalities (p -value = $2.2e-16$).

AZ-PMI1 profiles are characterised by six compounds with a confidence coefficient of $\approx 40\%$: pentadecafluorooctanoic acid tridecyl ester, pentadecafluorooctanoic acid tetradecyl ester, dodecane 4,6-dimethyl-, 1-dodecanol 3,7,11-trimethyl-, pentadecafluorooctanoic acid undecyl ester, and pyrrole. Regarding their respective relative abundances (Table 2), we can observe that their high contribution to the profile characterization is associated with high abundances. In comparison, the major compounds acetoin and 2,3-

butanedione also contribute highly to the profile specificity but with a lower confidence coefficient of 24% and 20%, respectively.

AZ-PMI3 profiles are characterised by Trimethyl oxazole, 2,3-butanedione, and 1-Hexanol are the compounds with the highest confidence coefficients, at 70%, 65%, and 54%, respectively. This aligns with the ranking as major compounds and confirms the importance of 2,3-butanedione in identifying the AZJ3 odour profile.

AZ-PMI7 profiles are characterised by 2-Propanol, 1-(2-methoxypropoxy)-, 3-Pentanol, 2,4-dimethyl-, Octanal, and 2-Heptanone are key variables with confidence coefficients of at least 20%. There is little difference in confidence among these compounds, which corresponds to the increased number of major compounds described earlier for AZ-PMI7.

AZ-PMI11 profiles are characterised by Trimethyl oxazole and 2,3-butanedione are the key variables with confidence coefficients exceeding 20%. As with AZ-PMI7, the difference in confidence values across all compounds in the AZ-PMI11 odour profile is minimal, which aligns with the increase in the number of major compounds.

Hb-PMI1 profiles are characterised by Hexane, 2,4-dimethyl- and 1-Hexanol have confidence coefficients of 66% and 53%. These trace compounds have very low relative abundance, but still contributes to the characterization of the profile of this modality.

Hb-PMI3 profiles are characterised by 1-Hexanol, 3-Heptanol 5-methyl-, 2-Pentanol 4-methyl-, and Hexane 2,4-dimethyl- have confidence coefficients of 76%, 57%, 51%, and 50%, respectively. Given their high percentages, these traces are significant for the odour profile.

Hb-PMI7 profiles are characterised by Pentafluoropropionic acid nonyl ester, Hexadecane, 1,16-dichloro-, and 2-Pentanol 4-methyl- have confidence coefficients of 85%, 77%, and 77%, respectively. Although these trace compounds have low relative abundance, they carry significant confidence coefficients.

Hb-PMI11 profiles are characterised by Acetophenone, Methyl Isobutyl Ketone, 2-

Pentanol 4-methyl-, and Dimethyl disulfide are the four compounds with confidence coefficients reaching 30%. Notably, the presence of Dimethyl disulfide as a major compound highlights its importance in the odour profile.

Sc-PMI1 profiles are characterised by This profile has compounds with relatively high confidence coefficients compared to the previous ones. The five compounds with percentages exceeding 50% are 1-Hexanol (100%), Hexane, 2,4-dimethyl- (70%), 3-Heptanol, 5-methyl- (65%), 2-Pentanol 4-methyl- (61%), and 1-Nonanol (50%). The significance of 1-Hexanol as a trace compound in the SCJ1 odour profile should be noted.

Sc-PMI3 profiles are characterised by 1-Hexanol, 2-Pentanol 4-methyl-, Hexane, 2,4-dimethyl-, 1-Nonanol, and Pentafluoropropionic acid nonyl ester are the key variables with confidence coefficients exceeding 30%. These trace compounds have low relative abundance.

Sc-PMI7 profiles are characterised by 1-Hexanol and Hexane, 2,4-dimethyl- have confidence coefficients of 46% and 41%, respectively. Given their recurrence across the different odour profiles previously described, these trace compounds should be considered.

Sc-PMI11 profiles are characterised by Pyrrole, Pentadecafluorooctanoic acid tetradecyl ester, Pentadecafluorooctanoic acid tridecyl ester, Dodecane, 4,6-dimethyl-, 1-Dodecanol, 3,7,11-trimethyl-, Pentadecafluorooctanoic acid undecyl ester, and 2-Pentanol are the compounds that reach 30%. It is worth noting, once again, that the gap in confidence coefficients across all compounds narrows as the number of major compounds increases (Figure 2).

Behavioural test

*Test 1 - Preference Test*_ This test assesses whether a *G. mellonella* larva prefers to stay near a larva infected by entomopathogenic nematodes (*H. bacteriophora*) rather than in an empty zone. The results for PMI1, PMI3, and

PMI11 showed an initial preference for dead zones, with 67%, 53%, and 60 %, respectively. For the final choice, only PMI3 reached a percentage greater than 50% (63%).

Table 3 Preference zone test results. The *p*-values are obtained through the Chi-square independence test.

		Initial Choice				Final Choice				Average time (seconde±Sd)			
		Empty	Dead	p-value	X-squared	Empty	Dead	p-value	X-squared	Empty	Dead	p-value	X-squared
Infected	PMI1	33	67	0,020	5,454	53	47	0,549	0,360	145,5±11,3	154,5±11,6	0,603	0,270
	PMI3	47	53	0,549	0,360	37	63	0,009	6,760	133,3±10,8	166,7±12,5	0,1	3,700
	PMI7	53	47	0,549	0,360	50	50	1,000	1,000	143,3±11,5	156,5±11,7	0,455	0,455
	PMI11	40	60	0,046	4,000	63	37	0,020	5,454	155,3±12,1	144,7±11,6	0,616	0,252
AZ	PMI1	50	50	1,000	0,000	62	38	0,016	5,760	177,9±14,7	122,1±14,7	0,001	10,390
	PMI3	71	29	<0,001	17,640	57	43	0,162	1,960	229,4±11,8	70,6±11,8	<0,001	84,058
	PMI7	57	43	0,162	1,960	43	57	0,162	1,960	87±13	213±13	<0,001	52,920
	PMI11	38	62	0,016	5,760	50	50	1	0	136±13,4	164±13,4	0,106	2,613

The larvae were significantly attracted to the infested larvae in the initial choice for the PMI1 and PMI11 modalities (Table 3). The larvae were significantly attracted to the infested larvae (death zone) in the final choice for the PMI3 modality and PMI11. For AZ, the larvae were significantly attracted to the empty zone in the initial choice for the PMI3 and PMI11. The larvae were significantly attracted to the empty zone in the final choice for the PMI1. Regarding the average time, the larvae showed a significant preference for the empty zone in PMI3 and a significant preference for the dead zone for the death zone in PMI7.

*Test 2 - Pitfall Test*_ This test assesses if a larva was attracted to a larva infested by Hb EPNs at PMI1, PMI3, PMI7, and PMI11, and to larva killed by liquid nitrogen (AZ). For the PMI1, PMI7, PMI11, and AZ conditions, only 4% of the 30 larvae made a choice (n=12). Over 63% of the tested larvae had made a choice during the PMI3 assays.

Larvae that made a choice were attracted to liquid nitrogen-killed larva (X-squared = 0.667; *p*-value = 0.321). Larvae were also attracted to infested larvae at PMI3 (X-squared = 0.889; *p*-value = 0.346) and PMI11 (X-squared = 0.667; *p*-value = 0.321). At PMI7, a similar number of larvae were attracted to the infested side as to the empty side. The chi-square test showed no significant difference (Figure 5).

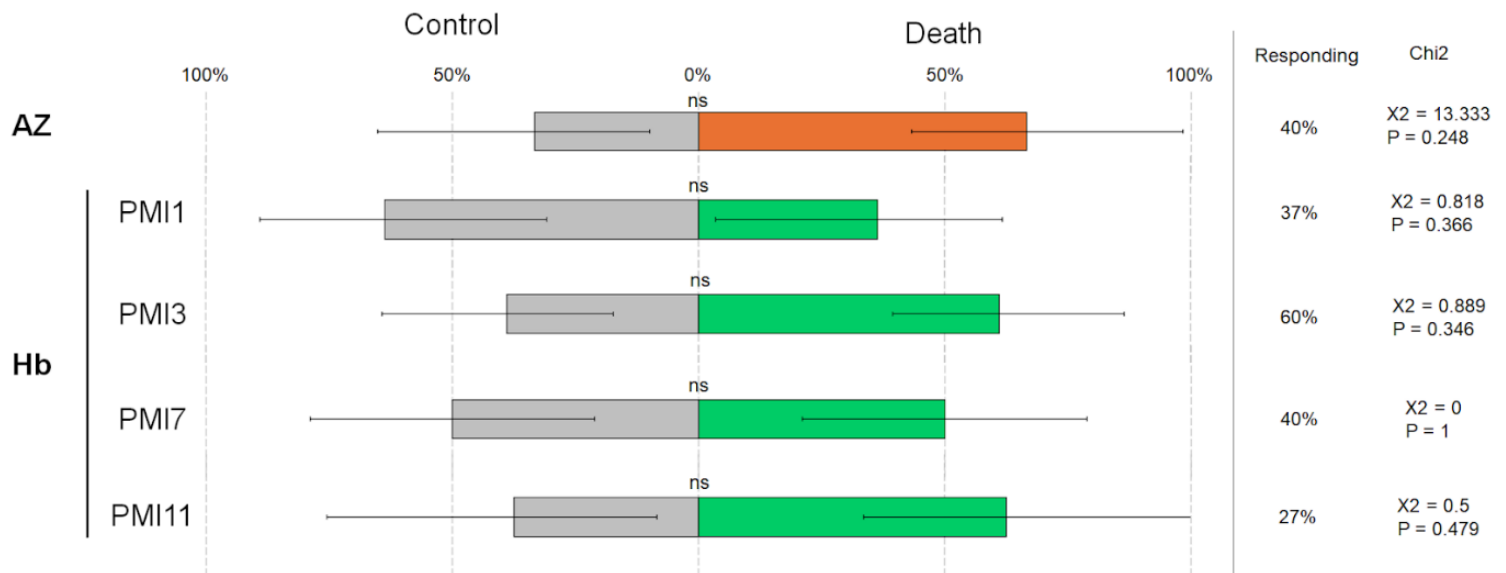


Figure 5 Percentage of larvae reaching one side of the glass cylinder tube during the pitfall test. Statistical values were determined by Chi-square independence test (ns = not significant differences).

Test 3 - Escape Time Test_ This test was performed to assess the escape behaviour of larvae in an arena containing either a larva infested with *H. bacteriophora* EPNs or a larva killed by nitrogen (AZ). On average, larvae exit the area after 19.0 ± 14.1 in presence of AZ killed larva, while they escaped after 50.4 ± 8.5 , 32.9 ± 6.3 , 23.4 ± 1.9 , and 40.1 ± 7.5 , for infested larva at PMI1, PMI3, PMI7, and PMI11, respectively (Figure 6).

The results from the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that the larvae escape times measured in PMI, PMI3 and PMI7 were significantly different (PMI1: chi-squared

= 9.6, p -value = 0.008; PMI3: chi-squared = 8.4, p -value = 0.015; PMI7: chi-squared = 8.3, p -value = 0.016). The times measured in PMI11 were not significantly different (chi-squared = 4.0, p -value = 0.138). Post-hoc tests showed that larvae took longer to escape in the presence of Hb-infested larvae compared to larvae killed by liquid nitrogen in PMI1 ($Z = -2.7$; p -value = 0.022) and PMI3 ($Z = -2.8$; p -value = 0.014). The comparison between the PMI of the AZ modality and the comparison between the PMI of the Hb modality are not significant (all p -values > 0.05).

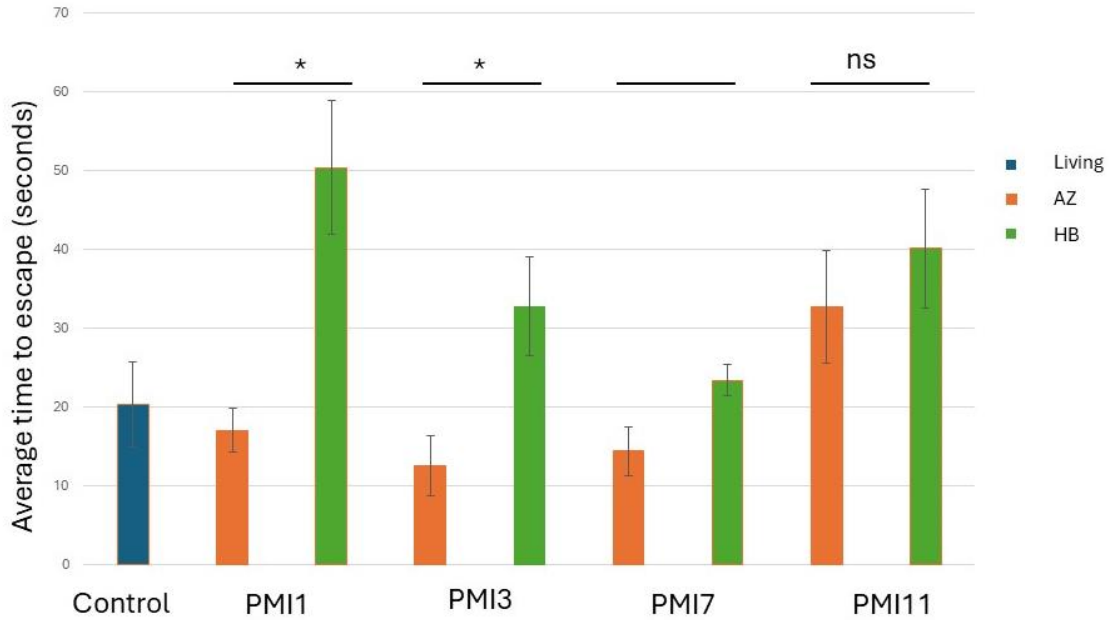


Figure 6 Larvae time to escape (mean \pm SD) in presence of alive, or dead larvae. Significance was determined using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The figure 6 shows the p-values of the Dunn test between liquid nitrogen (AZ), and *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* (Hb). ns: not significant; *: <0,05 ; **: <0,01 ; ***: <0,001.

Discussion

The first objective of this study was to identify the odour profiles of larvae infected by entomopathogenic nematodes. We observed differences in odour profiles between infected and non-infected insects, as well as between different stages of infection. The second objective was to determine whether these volatile organic compounds (VOC) attract non-infected insects. We observed an attractive effect on non-infected insects, at least at the beginning of the entomopathogenic nematodes' reproductive cycle.

The volatile profile of dead insects infected by entomopathogenic nematodes differs between the two species of entomopathogenic nematodes, as well as from the odour of non-infected dead insects, and each profile was statistically distinct. However, we noted similarities in

the composition of volatile profiles, particularly in terms of major compounds, some of which are markers of decomposition (Verheggen et al., 2017). Among these, the sulphide class and 2-heptanone are characteristic and particularly abundant ((Benbow & Pechal, 2019; LeBlanc et al., 2020)). The sulphide class is predominant at the beginning and end of the entomopathogenic nematode cycle (PMI1 and PMI11). However, the physical appearance of the larvae during the experiments was quite different, with marked decomposition observed only at the end of the cycle. Indeed, a dark coloration of the larvae and a loss of rigidity, which was present at the beginning of the cycle, were observed. Previous studies (Tarasco et al., 2023) have shown that the integrity of the larvae supports the functioning of the nematode reproductive cycle. This integrity is maintained due to the role of symbiotic bacteria, which kill the host and produce secondary metabolites that slow the

decomposition process (Vallet-Gely et al., 2008). The exponential growth of bacteria occurs throughout the entomopathogenic nematode cycle. Once the cycle is complete, the bacteria are reabsorbed by the nematodes and enter an inactive state. Thus, this leads to the cessation of secondary metabolite production that preserves the host's integrity (Tarasco et al., 2023b). This could also explain the increasing number of compounds released during decomposition, up until the final moment when this number decreased. Most major compounds (e.g., 2,3-butanedione; 2-nonanone; 2-heptanone) exhibit high coefficients, reinforcing the idea that these compounds play a central role in distinguishing odour profiles between different entomopathogenic nematode species and the AZ odour profile corresponding to larvae killed with liquid nitrogen. Interestingly, some compounds, although present in very low quantities, also have high predictive coefficients. This observation highlights that beyond the major compounds, certain low-concentration or absent compounds can significantly influence the total odour profiles. These minor compounds could act as attractants or repellents to other larvae (Gajger & Dar, 2021).

Regarding the behavioural tests, our results did not show a significant attraction of live larvae towards infected larvae, except during the initial choices in test1 (PMI1 and PMI11). However, studies have shown that pathogens can attract insects by producing VOC. For example, this is the case with an entomopathogenic fungus (Muslim & Al-Zurfi, 2019).

We propose several explanations for the lack of general attraction. The first is the choice of the insect model, *Galleria*

mellonella. These larvae naturally exhibit an instinct to seek food and avoid danger. This suggests that they might not be naturally attracted to others of the same species, and therefore, a cooperative system may not have developed in this species, unlike what is observed in some other insects. Indeed, this species is not known to be gregarious (Kwadha et al., 2017). During the tests, it was observed that the larvae often circled the glass dish, seemingly trying to find an exit. Additionally, in the "pitfall" test, the larvae's response rate was low (<50%), which may reflect their natural behaviour, more focused on escaping the setup rather than making a definitive choice. To improve the response rate, we suggest extending the duration of both the "pitfall" and preference tests. Moreover, increasing the number of replicates could help confirm or refute the observed attraction trend. Finally, the experimental setup for the behavioural tests used a single infected larva compared to seven larvae for odour profile determination. If there is any attraction or repulsion by *G. mellonella*, it is possible that the amount of volatile organic compounds influencing the larvae's behaviour was insufficient in the test setup. We found that uninfected larvae display significant escape behaviour when exposed to infected conspecifics. Other examples of insect-pathogen relationships have already been demonstrated by (Mann et al., 2012). A pathogen found in the plant's phloem produced VOC that attracted the insect. This reaction is lower at the beginning of the entomopathogenic nematode reproductive cycle, while the reaction is quicker in the presence of larvae killed with liquid nitrogen. This suggests that uninfected larvae detect a scent, and their reaction varies depending on the odour

profile identified earlier. It is noteworthy that there is a correlation between the behavioural test results and the obtained odour profiles. Specifically, the VOC emitted throughout the entomopathogenic nematode reproductive cycle influence the reactions of *G. mellonella* (Chantab et al., 2024).

Samples were collected after the death of *G. mellonella* larvae. We suggest collecting odour samples from larvae infected before their death (Baiocchi et al., 2017). Indeed, during this very short phase, the nematodes enter their host and release symbiotic bacteria. These bacteria then become pathogenic and produce various chemical compounds (toxins, secondary metabolites). It is interesting to analyse this phase because the internal chemical reactions could be reflected externally. Moreover, the significance of these compounds could vary, with some being predominant at the beginning but only

present in trace amounts compared to the odour profile of still-living infected larvae. The odour profiles identified for the two entomopathogenic nematode species may differ in terms of major compounds. Each of the two nematode species is associated with a specific bacterial species. It would be interesting to identify the odours produced by *G. mellonella* larvae in the presence of only these bacteria, for example, by directly injecting the bacteria into the host.

It would also be interesting to conduct behavioural tests with the second species of entomopathogenic nematode (*Sc*) and compare the results. Given that their profile is different, it may be possible to identify chemical compounds - whether trace or major - that affect the behaviour of *G. mellonella*. Finally, it would be interesting to identify characteristic compounds emitted by *G. mellonella* larvae after infection by entomopathogenic nematodes. These could be tested separately or in combination on insect behaviour.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Additional manipulations conducted during this study related to entomopathogenic nematodes (not presented).

Materials and Methods

Insect rearing _ Wireworms (*Agriotes spp.*) were collected from a field located in Gembloux (Belgium) and then reared under laboratory conditions (21°C ± 1; 40% RH). The larvae were raised in pots (11x11x6 cm) containing a mix of potting soil (Terreau universel “La Plaine Chassart”) and vermiculite (v:v, 1:1) at 65% Water Holding Capacity (WHC). They were fed *ad libitum* with germinating organic barley (Walagri, Belgium). Fifth-stage larvae, which are the most voracious and thus the most likely to consume many beads, were selected for the experiments (Poggi et al., 2021).

Nematodes _ Entomopathogenic nematodes (*Steinernema carpocapsae*, *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*) were bred on *Galleria mellonella* larvae in Petri dishes ($\text{\O} = 5.5$ cm) on filter paper. In each Petri dish, 300 μl of a solution containing entomopathogenic nematodes (834 EPN/ml) was applied per group of five *G. mellonella* larvae. Once the larvae are dead, a White trap system (White, 1927) was used to collect the emerging infective entomopathogenic nematode juveniles (IJs). The IJs were stored in 100 mL of tap water in 250 ml cell culture flasks (75 cm^2 Falcon Brand Products, New-York, United-States) at 13°C to ensure their viability until the experiments.

Bacterial culture _ Bacteria, *Photorhabdus laumondii*, were removed from cryopreservation (-80°C) using a loop and streaked onto Lysogeny Broth Agar (LBA) medium in a Petri dish ($\text{\O}=9$ cm) under a laminar hood. The dishes were then placed in an incubator at 28°C for 48 hours to allow the bacteria to reproduce sufficiently for the experiments. Then, to conduct the experiment with wireworms and *G. mellonella*, an isolated bacterial colony was transferred from LBA medium to an Erlenmeyer flask containing Lysogeny Broth (LB) medium. The Erlenmeyer flask was placed in a shaking incubator at 35°C for 24 hours to ensure a homogeneous distribution of nutrients, uniform thermal exchange, and to prevent cell sedimentation (Vitta et al., 2018).

Optimisation of the formulation

To identify the compounds most attractive to wireworms and address the first objective (1) (cf. introduction), different solutions encapsulated in beads were prepared (Table 4). The factors that varied to find the optimal formulation included the matrix (alginate or agar), the sucrose concentration (1% and 5%), and the infecting agent (entomopathogenic nematodes, bacteria with their secondary metabolites, secondary metabolites alone, or bacteria alone).

Testing different sucrose concentrations aimed to enhance the beads' attractiveness to wireworms (Forst & Nealson, 1996). Examining various infecting agents is important because entomopathogenic nematodes can face difficulties penetrating the wireworm, while bacteria, being smaller, might offer a more effective solution (Gangwar et al., 2022). Additionally, some beads were prepared without infecting agents (Alg-3, Agr-2) (Table 4) to assess their impact on wireworm attraction.

Alginate formulation _ The beads were produced by mixing sodium alginate (2%, w/v) with water at 50°C. The solution was homogenised and heated using a heated magnetic stirrer and a magnetic stirring bar (Heidolph ; 750 rpm). Sucrose (1% or 5%, w/v; acting as a phagostimulant) (Table 4) and glycerol (18%, w/v; allowing for entomopathogenic nematode dormancy) were then added (Hiltpold et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2021). Once the solution returned to room temperature, alpha-tocopherol (1.5%, w/v; antioxidant) and potato juice (50%, w/v; variety Monalisa; attractant) were incorporated. To obtain the beads, the final solution was conveyed through a tube using a peristaltic pump (Shenchen), producing droplets that fell into a solution of calcium chloride (1.48% w/v; 0.1M) under magnetic stirring (750 rpm). The polymerization process lasted 30 minutes. Finally, the different infecting agents were added into the beads (Table 4) following the procedures described below.

- *EPNs in alginate formulation (Alg-1 and Alg-2)*_ 300 entomopathogenic nematodes were added into each bead (Hiltpold et al., 2012). The beads were then stored in an incubator at 14°C until used for the tests described below (cf. Testing of formulation).
- *Bacteria alone in alginate formulation (Alg-4)*_ The bacteria, *Photorhabdus laumondii*, were added at 35°C during the final stage of the alginate bead preparation. Prior to incorporation into the beads, the bacterial culture was centrifuged to isolate the bacteria from their secondary metabolites. Then the bacterial concentration was determined using optical density and the "Thoma chamber" method (Campbell, 2010; Selmani, 2021). The quantities were adjusted to reach a concentration of 39k bacteria per bead.

*Agar formulation*_ To produce agar baits, agar (1% w/v, Sigma-Aldrich) was dissolved in boiling water for 10 minutes. The solution was homogenised and heated using a heated magnetic stirrer and a magnetic stirring bar (Heidolph, 750rpm). Then, glycerol (18% w/v) and sucrose (5% w/v) were added. The temperature was reduced to 50°C before adding potato juice (50% w/v). Finally, alpha tocopherol was added at 35°C. The solution was then poured into a Petri dish ($\Theta = 9$ cm), and cubes of 0.02 g were cut to match the mass of alginate beads. After

preparing the solution, the infecting agents were added (Table 4) following the procedures described below.

- *EPNs in agar formulation (Agr-1)*_ Entomopathogenic nematodes were added at 35°C (Smeets, 2022). The concentration of IJs in the solution was evaluated under a binocular microscope and adjusted to 3000 entomopathogenic nematodes per agar cube by filtration (Hiltpold et al., 2012). It is estimated that one agar cube is equivalent to 10 alginate beads, resulting in 3000 entomopathogenic nematodes (10*300) per agar cube to maintain the same EPNs concentration in both the alginate and agar matrices.

- *Entomopathogenic bacteria in agar formulation (Agr-3, Agr-4 and Agr-5)*_ The bacteria and the cell-free supernatant were added separately or together (Table 4) at 35°C during the final stage of agar preparation. The cell-free supernatant is separated from the bacteria through centrifugation of the culture. Thus, an agar formulation with bacteria was obtained, an agar formulation with cell-free supernatant, an agar formulation with both bacteria and cell-free supernatant (Table 4). Each agar cube contained approximately 195000 *Photorhabdus laumondii* bacteria.

Testing of the formulation

All beads' formulations were then presented to wireworms and *Galleria mellonella*, which served as a positive control. Either an appetence test or a dead/ alive test was conducted to determine which biodegradable formulation was most palatable to the wireworms (Table 4).

Appetence test _ To assess bead attractiveness, 10 beads of each formulation (Alg-1, Alg-3, Alg-4, Agr-2, Agr-3, Agr-4, Agr-5) (Table 4) were placed in a plastic pot (5.8x4x4.7 cm) with a pierced lid containing 10 g of sterile sand (Hubo river sand 0-2 mm) at 90% Water Holding Capacity (WHC). Then, either a wireworm or a *Galleria mellonella* (reference model) was placed into the pot. For each solution formulation and each insect model, 10 replicates were made (n=10) (Figure 7). The insects were exposed for one week in a climate-controlled chamber (21 ± 1°C) in darkness. After 7 days, all 10 beads in each plastic pot were examined under a binocular microscope to detect bite marks from either wireworms or *G. mellonella*, estimating feeding activity and the attractiveness of the solution formulation.

*Dead/ alive test*_ This test was conducted on two solution formulations (Alg-2, Agr-3) (Table 4). Like the appetence test, 10 beads of each formulation were placed in a plastic pot (5.8x4x4.7 cm) with a pierced lid containing 10 g of sterile sand (Hubo river sand 0-2 mm) at 90% WHC, and either a wireworm or a *Galleria mellonella*. Each formulation and insect model had 10 replicates (n=10). The exposure lasted for one week in a climate-controlled chamber (21 ± 1°C) in darkness. After 7 days, all beads were removed from the plastic pots, and the number of dead or alive wireworms and *G. mellonella* were counted in each replicate. Dead individuals were placed in White traps to confirm that the death was caused by entomopathogenic nematode infection.

To ensure that no infections were missed, which might have occurred towards the end of the seven-day period and had not yet led to the death of the insects, the plastic pots containing only the insect's model (wireworms or *G. mellonella*) were kept in the same dark chamber for an

additional seven-day post-exposure to the beads. On the 14th day, the insects' dead or alive status was reassessed, and the number of dead insects per formulation was recorded.

Matrix		Alginate matrix				Agar matrix				
Solution's name		Alg-1	Alg-2	Alg-3	Alg-4	Agr-1	Agr-2	Agr-3	Agr-4	Agr-5
Sucrose concentration	1%	X								
	5%		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Infecting agent	Nematodes with their symbiont bacteria	X	X			X				
	Bacteria (<i>P.laumondi</i>) with their secondary metabolites									X
	Secondary metabolites alone, called supernatant								X	
	Bacteria (<i>P.laumondi</i>) alone				X			X		
Test realised	Dead / alive test		X			X				
	Appetence test	X		X	X		X	X	X	X

Table 4 Bead formulations based on the matrix (alginate or agar), the sucrose concentration (1% and 5%), and the infecting agent (entomopathogenic nematodes with their symbiont bacteria, bacteria with their secondary metabolites, secondary metabolites alone, or bacteria alone), along with the tests conducted using these beads.

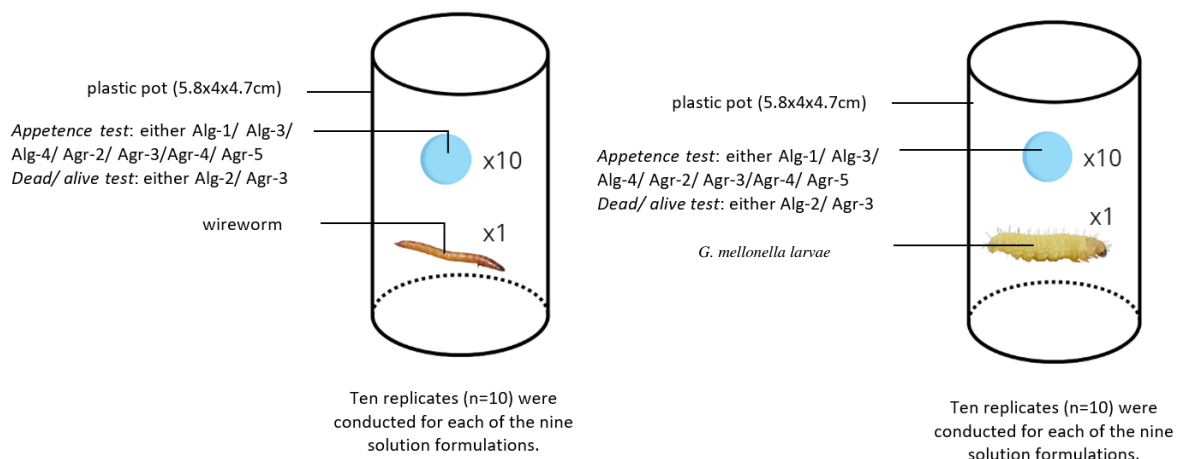


Figure 7 Experimental unit for the appetite and dead/ alive tests.

Result

Testing of the formulation

Comparison of sucrose percentage in alginate beads fabrication with EPN (Alg-1; Alg-2):

To optimise the palatability of alginate beads containing entomopathogenic nematodes, we first tested the impact of sucrose concentration by comparing beads containing 1% and 5% sucrose. The number of bitten beads was recorded. The results were 56% for the 1% sucrose concentration and 69% for the 5% sucrose concentration. The result reveals that the sucrose concentration does not impact the appetite of the beads (t-student = 0.141; p -value = 0.161).

Assessment of entomopathogenic nematode strategies in the appetite of alginate beads:

When comparing the palatability of alginate beads containing EPNs with beads without EPNs, the number of bitten beads was recorded. There were 69% bitten beads containing EPNs compared to 0% for beads without EPNs. The results reveal that the presence of entomopathogenic nematodes in the granules affects the wireworm's appetite. (t-student = 8.835, p -value = 5.8e-08). Subsequently, the underlying reasons for this observation were explored by testing with entomopathogenic bacteria.

Assessment of entomopathogenic bacteria (*P. laumondi*) strategies in the appetite of alginate of beads:

To determine the wireworms' interest in alginate beads containing entomopathogenic nematodes, we encapsulated the entomopathogenic bacteria that live symbiotically within these EPNs. The number of bitten beads was measured. The biting rate for the beads containing bacteria was 40% compared to 0% for the control treatment. The results reveal that the presence of bacteria in the beads affects the wireworm's appetite ($W = 0.80176$, p -value = 0.000918).

Gellant impact on wireworms' feeding behaviour (Alg-3; Agr-2):

To assess whether wireworms exhibit a preference in feeding behaviour depending on the gellant used, the percentage of bitten beads or cubes was recorded. 50% of agar cubes were bitten, while no bites were recorded for alginate beads. The results reveal that the agar matrix affects the wireworm's appetite compared to the alginate matrix. (X-squared = 5, $df = 1$, p -value = 0.02535), the pathogenicity of entomopathogenic nematodes was tested on this specific gellant.

Pathogenicity of entomopathogenic nematodes in agar cube on *Galleria mellonella* (Agr-1):

It was studied whether the pathogenicity of entomopathogenic nematodes on *G. mellonella* remained identical when replacing an alginate matrix with an agar matrix. The mortality rate was measured and found to be 100%. The results reveal that the presence of entomopathogenic nematodes in an agar matrix influences the mortality of wireworms (X-squared = 16.2, $df = 1$, p -value = 5.699e-05).

Gellant impact on wireworm feeding behaviour with *P. laumondii* Bacteria:

Given the palatability of alginate beads containing bacteria and the wireworms' preference for the agar matrix (test no. 2), the percentage of bitten beads or cubes was recorded. We compared the two matrices containing entomopathogenic bacteria. The obtained percentages were 40% for the agar matrix compared to 30% for the alginate beads. The results show that the presence of bacteria in the agar does not influence the wireworm's appetite ($F = 0.449$, p -value = 0.654). Although the results were not significant, the agar matrix was chosen because the appetite was 10% higher.

Role of secondary metabolites produced by *P. laumondii* in agar for wireworms' appetite:

The previous result revealed a significant appetite for the beads containing bacteria. It is of interest to know if the secondary metabolites produced by these bacteria have an impact on wireworms' appetite. Thus, four treatments (Agr-1; Agr-2; Agr-3; Agr-4) based on *P. laumondii* bacteria were applied in agar, and appetite was measured. 80% of agar pieces containing the bacteria and the cell-free supernatant (Agr-2) were bitten. 50% of agar pieces containing the bacteria were bitten, and 10% of agar pieces containing secondary metabolites were bitten. However, the results reveal that the presence of secondary metabolites does not affect the wireworm's appetite (z value = -1.788 ; p -value = 0.0739).

Annex 2. Personal Contribution

My final year project (TFE) began with extensive bibliographic research to better understand and assimilate the subject I would be working on. After familiarising myself with the state of the art regarding the click beetle (*Agriotes sp*) and entomopathogenic nematodes, I proposed several ideas to my supervisors to address the optimization of an "Attract and Kill" method. Following discussions, we developed protocols to initiate the first tests. In parallel, I had the opportunity to carry out some microbiology applications, such as performing multiple PCRs and bacterial cultures.

The optimization tests for the "Attract and Kill" method were conducted over a period of approximately two months. During this time, I learned to use the appropriate laboratory equipment. These tests required continuous exploration of new ideas to develop an effective application.

Once most of the optimization tests were completed, I began odour sampling in May. The method applied for these samples had been optimised by other members of the lab. Through these collections, I became familiar with volatolomic equipment (Hisorb) as well as gas chromatography coupled with mass spectrometry. This work required careful planning and daily monitoring.

Finally, I conducted behavioural tests to correlate them with the expected results from the odour samples. The protocols for these tests were designed in collaboration with my supervisors.

Once all the experiments were completed, I focused on data analysis. I primarily used Excel for data entry, and the data processing was done with RStudio.

Throughout my TFE period, I managed the rearing of entomopathogenic nematodes, click beetles, and *G. mellonella*, which took considerable time alongside the tests. The rearing ensured a constant supply of specimens for the experiments. Similarly, the writing of this document was done in parallel with the tests, until the end of July, when I could fully dedicate myself to it as the submission deadline approached.