

Euclidean geometry explains why lengths allow precise body mass estimates in terrestrial invertebrates: the case of oribatid mites

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2	Euclidean geometry explains why lengths allow precise body mass estimates in
3	terrestrial invertebrates: the case of oribatid mites
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24 Abstract

25 Indirect measures of soil invertebrate body mass M based on equations relating the latter to 26 body length (l) are becoming increasingly used due to the required painstaking laboratory 27 work and the technical difficulties involved in obtaining some thousands of reliable weight 28 estimates for animals that can be very small. The implicit assumption of such equations is that $\frac{dM}{dV} = \delta$, where V is body volume and δ is a constant density value. Classical Euclidean 29 30 scaling implies that $V \propto l^3 \propto M$. One may thus derive M from l when the latter can provide a 31 good estimate of V and the assumption of a constant δ is respected. In invertebrates, equations 32 relating weight to length indicate that the power model always provides the best fit. However, 33 authors only focused on the empirical estimation of slopes linking the body mass to the length 34 measure variables, sometimes fitting exponential and linear models that are not theoretically 35 grounded. This paper explicates how power laws derive from fundamental Euclidean scaling 36 and describes the expected allometric exponents under the above assumptions. Based on the 37 classical Euclidean scaling theory, an Equivalent Sphere is defined as a theoretical sphere 38 with a volume equal to that of the organism whose body mass must be estimated. The 39 illustrated application to a data set on soil oribatid mites helps clarify all these issues. Lastly, 40 a general procedure for more precise estimation of M from V and δ is suggested.

41

42 Key words: volume; density; scaling; weight; indirect estimate; soil invertebrates

43 Introduction

44 Weighing soil invertebrates with accurate electronic microbalances involves painstaking 45 laboratory work to obtain a very high number of measures for animals that can be very small 46 (i.e., microarthropods < 0.5 mm³). Completing accurate estimates for relatively large 47 terrestrial invertebrates (molluscs, coleopterans) can be very time consuming, especially for 48 community studies requiring thousands of measures. There are high quality ecological works 49 based on indirect measures of body mass derived from equations relating the latter to body 50 size (e.g. Saint-Germain et al. 2007). Thanks to earlier research, similar equations are 51 available for other animal groups, including microarthropods such as oribatid mites (i.e., 52 Berthet 1964; Lebrun 1971) and springtails (Petersen, 1975), and many insects (Rogers et al. 53 1976). However, when using size equations for weight estimates, different parameters are 54 required for different shape types (Berthet 1967; Lebrun 1971). Bias may also arise from 55 sexual dimorphisms (females bigger than males) or life cycles (gravid vs non-gravid). 56 Unfortunately, equations are usually built on empirical grounds: authors search for the model 57 that best fits data on body mass (M) and length (l). In some cases models not theoretically 58 grounded in biometrical and geometrical principles, for example linear models, were also 59 tested and (not surprisingly) found to have a very poor fit (i.e. Brady and Noske 2006). The 60 present paper undertakes a theoretical analysis of the implicit assumptions and logic that 61 underlie past research on empirical *M*-*l* relationships. Furthermore, stemming from theory, a 62 more general approach is proposed with an example of application to the soil oribatid mite 63 data set compiled by Lebrun (1971).

65 Theory

66 In agreement with reports by specialists on many invertebrate taxa (i.e.: Petersen, 1975;

- 67 Rogers et al. 1976; Berg 2000; Brady and Noske 2006), Lebrun (1971) found a very good fit
- 68 when using the power model

69
$$M = cL^{a}W^{b} \rightarrow \log(M) = \log c + a\log(L) + b\log(W) \text{ (eq. 1)}$$

70 for relating body mass M to length measures L (total length) and W (maximum width) in

71 oribatid mites. Interestingly, Lebrun did not seem to realise the theoretical meaning of

- 72 parameters a, b and c. Instead, he implicitly used them as typical statistical parameters of
- 73 model fitting routine. We here argue that the fit of such equations is excellent because anusc

74
$$\frac{dM}{dV} = \delta$$
 (eq. 2)

75 and

76
$$V \propto l^3 \propto M$$
 (eq. 3)

77 which implies that the constant c of (eq. 1) must also include information on density δ . Let us 78 assume that the body shape of oribatids is well approximated by an ellipsoid of dimensions L, 79 W and H (Fig. 1). The letter H indicates body height, a rarely available parameter that is difficult to measure. Let us also define an equivalent sphere (EqSph) as the sphere with a 80 81 volume equal to that of the above ellipsoid or of any other shape oribatids can assume. The 82 oribatid volume is therefore

83
$$V = \frac{4}{3}\pi LWH = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$$
, where *r* is the radius of EqSph and *L*, *W* and *H* are the three axes of

It follows that $r = L^{1/3} W^{1/3} H^{1/3}$. 85

86 From eq. 2 and Lebrun's model of eq. 1 it follows that

87
$$V = \frac{c}{\delta} L^a W^b = \frac{4}{3} \pi r^3 \Rightarrow r^3 = \left(\frac{3c}{4\delta\pi}\right) L^a W^b \text{ eq. (4).}$$

From Euclidean scaling and the proportionality of eq. 3, the first perhaps evident but
important conclusion is that
$$a + b = 3$$
 because $V \propto l^3 \propto L^a W^b$ and *L* and *W* are lengths. This
result is empirically confirmed by the regression results of Lebrun (1971), who for example
found that in three different data sets on oribatid mites with different shapes, *a* and *b* were
respectively 1.50 and 1.50, 2.10 and 0.90, 1.60 and 1.40. This is simply a consequence of
classical Euclidean scaling by eq. 2 and 3 and indicates that *L* and *W* allow a good estimation
of the volume *V*. This definitely clarifies the theoretical meaning of original Lebrun's
parameters: they regulate the allometric scaling between body mass and length and are not
simple statistical parameters. The same would be true if it were possible to accurately estimate
M from just *L*. In this case, the equation would become

98
$$\delta \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 = cL^b \Rightarrow r^3 = \frac{3c}{4\delta\pi}L^b$$
 eq. (5)

and b = 3 because $V \propto L^3 \propto l^3$. Accordingly, empirical results obtained for several taxa (e.g. spiders, beetles, flies and midges) usually obey or very nearly obey this equation (Petersen, 1975; Rogers et al. 1976; Berg 2000; Brady and Noske 2006). The interpretation is that the more *L* allows good estimation of *V*, the more it allows estimation of *M*. Accordingly, if $b \neq 3$ then the one known dimension does not allow correct indirect estimation of volume. Alternatively, the assumption of eq. 2 is wrong but, as clearly shown below, this is highly unlikely because of the fundamental characteristics of biological tissues.

106 Eq. 5 can be written as

107
$$r^3 = \frac{3c}{4\delta\pi} l^3 \Rightarrow c = \frac{4}{3} \delta\pi \left(\frac{r}{l}\right)^3$$
 eq. (6)

108 with l is any linear length that combined with the parameter δ allows precise estimation of V. 109 The most interesting feature of this formulation is that when regressions relating M to l result 110 in a very good fit, it is possible to appropriately estimate V from l. Note that l is not 111 necessarily a classical standard length like total length or width. It can also be a combination

of several *l* that allow a good estimation of *V*. This is more clearly explained below. The more l is similar to *r*, the more *c* is near to δ in the sense that

114
$$\lim_{l\to r} c = \frac{4}{3} \,\delta\pi$$

115 If one can therefore find any l for which the volume of EqSph can be calculated assuming r =116 *l*, then the regression model allows the estimation of animal density. In practice this is very 117 difficult. However, in theory, assuming that one can find such an l, one must then collect a 118 large array of weights and lengths for the best estimate of δ : under the above assumptions, this 119 is achieved using the model that provides the most accurate estimate of M based on l, and this is possible because l allows estimation of V. If one finds a very good model ($R^2 > 0.98$), then 120 121 the estimated δ can be used to also estimate the M of other animals, provided that one has an 122 equation for estimating V from length measures. This would eliminate the need to estimate the parameters of eq. (4), which seem to be affected by shape variations, as stressed in earlier 123 works (e.g. Lebrun, 1971). Unfortunately, there is no principle or geometrical rule allowing 124 the *a priori* identification of an l = r. The only solution is to obtain precise estimates of 125 density δ through direct laboratory measurements. Firstly, this would help verify the 126 127 reasonable assumption of eq. 2. Secondly, when a close estimate of δ is obtained, it is possible to fit models derived from eq. (5). If these provide an excellent fit ($R^2 > 0.98$), the ratio (r/l) 128 129 can be precisely estimated from δ and c, the latter being the regression constant. One can then 130 use this ratio and the experimental value of δ to estimate any M using the EqSph volume. 131 Knowledge of r/l and δ from the model estimate of c allows a priori calculation of any organism volume by estimating the volume of the EqSph with $r^3 = \frac{3c}{4\delta\pi}l^3$. One can then use 132 $M = \delta V$ to estimate body mass. 133

An important feature of this theory is that, at first approximation, an almost optimal value of δ can be derived on physical and basic biological grounds. Oribatid mites float in a NaClsaturated water solution, which has a specific gravity ≈ 1.20 : this means that the specific

137 gravity of oribatids is below this value. This characteristic buoyancy allows wet extraction of 138 soil animals and does not come as a surprise. Indeed, the specific gravity of all biological 139 tissues is slightly higher than that of water (1.00) because cells and tissues mainly consist of 140 water and dissolved or suspended macromolecules and organelles. For instance, early works 141 already indicated that the specific gravity of arthropod blood ranges from 1.012 to 1.043 142 (Rustum Maluf, 1969). Accordingly, the specific gravity of *Chironomus* larvae ranges from 143 1.026 to 1.045 (Edwards, 1957). In general, classical laboratory measurements of specific 144 gravity performed across several phyla (from protozoa to higher invertebrates) result in values 145 of 1.001 to 1.046 (Williams, 1900). Such narrow ranges are characteristic of living organisms, 146 including vertebrates, notwithstanding the macroscopic differences between tissues like bone 147 and blood (i.e. Morales et al., 1945; Watanabe et al. 2006). For example, recent measures on Baikal seals indicate that this species has a specific gravity of 1.027 to 1.046 (Watanabe et al. 148 149 2006). Although small variations of the third decimal digit may have important biological 150 implications because, for instance, they affect body buoyancy, for the aim of this paper and given the lack of precise experimental measurements on oribatid mites, an average value of 151 152 1.030 ± 0.015 is assumed. Specific gravity is a dimensionless number equal to the ratio 153 between the density of the target object and that of water at 4 °C and 1 atm, which is $0.999 \approx$ 1 g/cm³. However, at a given environmental pressure, water density changes as function of 154 155 temperature. Nevertheless, between 4°C and 30 °C water density varies from 0.999 g/cm³ to 156 0.996 g/cm³ and thus, given the adopted approximation for specific gravity, a density $\delta = 1.03$ g/cm^3 can be assumed. 157

158

159 An example: models for oribatid body mass estimates

160 We reanalysed data reported in Appendix (1) from the original work of Lebrun (1971).

161 They consist of 44 associated measures of body length, width and weight from 36 oribatid

162 mites species of different shape that are encountered within this ecologically important soil

- 163 taxon. Linear models (obtained by least squares estimates) were used to derive log M from log
- 164 L and log W. In particular, competing models built on the above theory were: model 1,
- 165 Lebrun's model of eq. 1; model 2, called the "L model", which assumes that l = L; model 3,
- 166 called the "W model", is the same as model 2 but with l = W; model 4, called the "Mean
- 167 model", where l = f(L, W) = L + W.
- 168 Competing model equations were:
- 169 model 1: $\log M = \log c + a \log L + b \log W$, with a + b expected to equal 3.
- 170 models 2 and 3: $\log M = \log c + a \log l$, with l = L or W and a = 3
- 171 model 4: $\log M = \log c + a \log (l = f(L, W))$ with a = 3 and l = L + W

Models 2, 3 and 4 have interesting potential applications. For instance, if model 4 had the best 172 173 fit, then one could estimate the EqSph volume V by assuming $\delta = 1.03$ g/cm³ and calculating 174 the ratio r/l using eq. 6, without having to take into account body shape and associated 175 variations in a and b (Lebrun, 1971). The model 4 assumption that l = L+W is based on the 176 idea that oribatids usually have an ovoidal shape, the volume of which could be well 177 approximated by a sphere with a radius intermediate between that of half the two largest body 178 measures (total Length and maximum Width). According to this idea, one can simply include 179 this information by summing the two linear measures (l = L+W).

180 Lastly, Lebrun (1971) stated that the model 1 parameters change if one performs separate 181 analyses on species after grouping them into morphological categories. For example, Lebrun 182 (1971) identified three main categories: Achipteriforms, which have a more or less elongate 183 oval shape (this includes superfamilies like Pelopoidea, Oribatelloidea and Ceratozetoidea), 184 Caraboidiforms, which have a squared silhouette (e.g. the genera Carabodes and 185 Tectocepheus) and Nothroiforms, with a squared to almost triangular shape (e.g. Camisia 186 and *Nothrus*). Other morphological types may include Phthiracariform (spheroidal to ovoidal) 187 or Hypochthoniiform, which may be approximated by a combination of different (squared

188 trapezoid shape. Lebrun's estimate of parameters a and b varied a lot among the different 189 categories. Here, the classification used in assessing the Lebrun hypothesis does not exactly 190 match but strongly resembles that proposed by Lebrun (1971; see the "Shape" column in 191 Appendix 1). The following two models were thus also considered among the competing 192 ones: 193 model 5: $\log M = \log c + a \log L + b \log W + \text{shape}$, under the hypothesis that shape only 194 effects c. model 6: $\log M = \log c + \operatorname{shape}^* a \log L + \operatorname{shape}^* b \log W + \operatorname{shape}^* under Lebrun's interaction$ 195 hypothesis that different shapes also have different *a* and *b* values. 196 197 The model-building strategy was based on the idea that not all possible models but only those 198 with precise theoretical foundations must be considered during statistical analysis (Burnham 199 and Anderson, 2002; Johnson and Omland, 2004). This approach is rather different from that 200 adopted in past similar studies, where authors just empirically searched for the best fitting 201 model and accordingly tested several different types of regressions, including very 202 improbable ones that assume $M \propto l$. In keeping with the logic of this paper, model 203 assessment and selection was thus based on Akaike's theoretic approach and information 204 criterion corrected for sample size (AICc: Burnham and Anderson, 2002; Johnson and 205 Omland, 2004). One of the advantages of this strategy with respect to more traditional ones

(e.g. hypothesis testing based on likelihood ratios) is that the competing models analysed in the present paper are not nested. In these cases, AIC is one of the best model-assessment tools (Johnson and Omland, 2004). Models were ranked according to Akaike's criterion and the minimum AIC_c (below AIC_{min}) was used as the reference for calculating the AIC difference (Δ_i) and model weights (w_i). Models within 2 AIC units of the AIC_{min} were considered competitive and more plausible than the others, and their weights were considered a measure of their robustness (Burnham and Anderson 2002). Linear models were performed using R

- 213 (The R Foundation for Statistical Computing Version 2.3.0 (2006-04-24) ISBN 3-900051-07-
- 214 0), available at <u>http://www.r-project.org</u>.
- 215

216 **Results and concluding remarks**

All models resulted in an excellent fit with very high adjusted R^2 , but ranking based on 217 218 Akaike's criterion (Tab. 1) clearly showed that model 4 was the best model with a weight > 219 0.80 and Δ AIC_c with respect to the second-best model > 3, indicating that all other 220 competing models are weak to very weak with respect to the best one (Burnham and 221 Anderson 2002). Although Lebrun's interaction hypothesis represented by model 6 apparently resulted in the best fit because it had the highest R^2 , it was highly penalised by Akaike's 222 information criterion because of the very high number of parameters, which make it non-223 224 parsimonious relative to its predictive power (Burnham and Anderson 2002). This shows that 225 one can simply estimate the EqSph volume without taking into account shape variations: they do play a role, but in the framework of the presented theory their role seems irrelevant. 226

The estimated *a* parameter is always consistent with theoretical expectations (Table 2): the 227 228 only significant exception is the poor fit of model 3, which indicates that W alone does not 229 provide a reliable estimate of V and thus of M. In general, the two worst models are those that 230 consider only one measure; it therefore seems fundamentally important to have at least two 231 linear measures to jointly represent body size and allow a reliable estimate of body volume. For the best model the constant $log c = -17.17 \pm 0.46$. For $\delta = 1.03 \ 10^{-6} \ \mu g/\mu m^3$, (r/l) = 0.201232 233 (the same units of Appendix 1 were used in these calculations). Therefore, future estimates of 234 the body mass M of an oribatid can be based on the volume of the EqSph with r =0.201(L+W). For example, one can take $L = 571 \,\mu\text{m}$ and $W = 249 \,\mu\text{m}$ from the first entry of 235 Appendix (1). This results in an $r = 165 \,\mu\text{m}$, an oribatid volume $V = \text{EqSph } V = 4/3\pi r^3 = 1.88$ 236 $10^7 \text{ }\mu\text{m}^3$ and body mass $M = 19.4 \text{ }\mu\text{g}$. The observed $M = 18.1 \text{ }\mu\text{g}$. One can also estimate r for 237 238 each datum and plot M as function of r or, equivalently, of its EqSph V (Fig. 2). A power law

with exponent a \approx 3 obviously relates *r* to *M*, whereas a linear model with slope $\approx \delta$ relates *M* to EqSph *V*.

Part of the residual variations are likely due to the fact that δ was assumed and not 241 experimentally measured. It probably also varies slightly (of the order of 10^{-3}) across species. 242 243 populations and individuals. Nevertheless, the collected data allow reliable estimates and are 244 therefore promising for future application, especially if one considers the very small size of 245 these animals. Ecological studies which aim to obtain precise population biomass and energy 246 estimates would of course require accurate length measures of the populations inhabiting the study area, because generic measures from literature are subject to very high local variability 247 248 (known since Lebrun, 1971). Furthermore, error propagation occurs when estimates are derived from functions combining estimated variables and their errors. Lastly, the formulated 249 theory has been particularly successful in the case of oribatids and its extension to other taxa, 250 251 especially to those for which weight and length data are already available, deserves further 252 attention.

253

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256

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- 286

Model	R^2	K	ΔAIC_{c}	Akaike's Weight
4: $\log M = \log c + a \log[L + W]$	0.979	3	0.000	0.823
1: $\log M = \log c + a \log L + b \log W$	0.978	4	3.362	0.153
5: $\log M = \log c + a \log L + b \log W + \text{shape}$	0.978	7	7.781	0.017
6: $\log M = \log c + \operatorname{shape}^* a \log L + \operatorname{shape}^* b \log W + \operatorname{shape}^* b \log W$	0.983	13	9.532	0.007
$2:\log M = \log(c) + a\log L$	0.957	3	31.435	<0.001
$3: \log M = \log c + a \log W$	0.931	3	52.520	<0.001

286 Table 1. Competing models ranked according to the AIC criterion

287 *, interaction; R², adjusted squared R; K, number of parameters including the estimation of

288 residual σ^2 ; shape, four morphological categories defined after Lebrun (1971)

	<i>Estimated</i> $a \pm SE$	<i>Estimated</i> $b \pm SE$	Theoretical Value
Model 4 (Mean model)	3.00 ± 0.07	NP	a = 3
Model 1 (Lebrun)	$\textbf{1.90}\pm0.20$	$\textbf{1.10}\pm0.17$	a + b = 3
Model 5 (Lebrun shape)	$\textbf{2.01}\pm0.32$	$\textbf{1.01}\pm0.28$	a + b = 3
*Model 6 (Lebrun interaction) for shape A	$\textbf{2.10}\pm0.85$	$\textbf{0.93}\pm0.74$	a + b = 3
Model 2 (L model)	$\textbf{3.09} \pm 0.10$	NP	a = 3
Model 3 (W model)	$\textbf{2.63} \pm 0.11$	NP	a = 3

289 Table 2. Observed and expected scaling exponents

eccepteon and a serie of the serie of the series of the se * shape parameters for C, Q and S were not significantly different with respect to A and are 290

291 therefore not reported. NP, not present.

292 Figure captions

- Fig.1 The oribatid mite *Scheloribates laevigatus*. L = total length, W = maximum width, H = height.
- Fig. 2 Plot of observed weight versus the radius r and equivalent sphere volume EqSph, as
- estimated from model 4 (Mean model) parameters and assuming $\delta = 1.03 \ 10^{-6} \ \mu g/\mu m^3$
- 296

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296 Figure 1:



298 Figure 2:



300	Appendix 1.	The Lebrun data set ((Lebrun, 1971)	. The "Shape'	' column is after Lebrun (1971)
			())			

Species	Length (µm)	Width (µm)	Weight (µg)	Shape	
Nanhermannia nana	571	249	18.1	С	
Hypochthonius rufulus	632	316	22.1	Q	
Eniochthonius minutissimus	358	179	4.4	Q	
Nothrus silvestris	739	343	47.2	Q	
Platynothrus peltifer	826	444	62.9	Q	
Hermannia gibba	905	531	94.2	S	
Ceratoppia bipilis	740	451	64.8	S	
Hermanniella granulata	750	531	75.3	S	
Tectocepheus velatus	307	173	4.2	С	
Xenillus tegeocranus	960	600	55.8	С	
Cepheus cepheiformis	677	483	58.8	С	
Carabodes femoralis	646	383	42.6	С	
Adoristes ovatus	649	401	42.8	А	
Oribatula tibialis	435	279	14.6	S	
Chamobates incisus	351	205	6.5	А	
Euzetes globulus	1174	893	329.9	А	
Diapterobates humeralis	727	476	60.9	S	
Achipteria coleoptrata	620	406	39.6	А	
Oribatella calcarata	623	417	38.1	А	
Oribatella quadricornuta	507	321	24	А	
Oppia quadricarinata	220	120	1.3	S	
Oppia ornata	275	150	2.2	S	
Oppia subpectinata	325	170	3.2	S	
Damaeus auritus	1030	691	195	S	
Damaeus onustus	1511	1018	625	S	
Nothrus palustris	1025	611	172	Q	
Nothrus palustris	424	209	9.3	Q	
Nothrus palustris	490	232	16.2	Q	
Nothrus palustris	637	311	35.2	Q	
Nothrus palustris	825	431	62.8	Q	
Chamobates schützi	367	255	8.3	А	
Liebstadia similis	503	289	19.4	А	
Scheloribates laevigatus	564	348	28.1	А	
Parachipteria punctata	572	386	34.8	А	
Eupelops sp	474	328	19.9	А	
Carabodes femoralis	626	382	40.7	С	
Odontocepheus elongatus	613	243	21.4	С	
Nothrus silvestris	503	221	15.3	Q	
Nothrus silvestris	605	275	27.2	Q	
Platynothrus peltifer	483	227	12.7	Q	
Platynothrus peltifer	693	341	38.5	Q	

Camisia spinifer	1023	459	115	Q
Camisia spinifer	590	276	24.1	Q
Camisia exuvialis	609	254	25.9	Q

301 A, achipteriform; C, caraboidiform; S, spheroidal; Q, quadrangular

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