

1 **Title**

2 **Genetic variation and phenotypic plasticity in circadian rhythms of an armed**
3 **beetle, *Gnatocerus cornutus* (Tenebrionidae)**

4

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17

18 **Short running title**

19 Circadian rhythm variation in armed beetle

20

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23 **Abstract**

24 Circadian rhythms, their free-running periods and strength of the rhythm are often used

25 as indicators of biological clocks, and there is evidence that the free-running periods of
26 circadian rhythm are not affected by environmental factors like temperature. However,
27 there are few studies of environmental effects on the power of rhythms and it is not clear
28 if temperature compensation is universal. Additionally, genetic variation and phenotypic
29 plasticity in biological clocks are important for understanding the evolution of biological
30 rhythm, but genetic and plastic effects are rarely investigated. Here, we used 18 isofemale
31 lines (genotypes) of *Gnatocerus cornutus* to assess rhythms of locomotor activity, while
32 also testing for temperature effects. We found that total activity and power of circadian
33 rhythm were affected by interactions between sex and genotype or sex, genotype and
34 temperature, so that while males tended to be more active and showed greater increases
35 in activity, this effect varied across both genotypes and temperatures. The period of
36 activity only varied by genotype and was thus independent of temperature. The
37 complicated genotype-sex-environment interactions we recorded stress the importance of
38 investigating circadian activity in more integrated ways.

39

40 **Keywords**

41 circadian rhythm, power of circadian rhythm, isofemale line, *Gnatocerus cornutus*

42

43 **Introduction**

44 Many species show a rhythmicity of activity, from the timing of flowering in plants to
45 foraging behaviour in animals (Saunders 2002). Examining these rhythms in sexually
46 dimorphic animals is interesting because males and females could have different life-
47 history strategies and thus different daily patterns of activity (e.g., Anderson 1994; Emlen
48 2015). A rhythmicity approaching 24h is called the circadian rhythm, and many studies
49 have identified the genes underpinning circadian rhythms (Dunlap 1996). Additionally,
50 the time it takes for an organism to repeat endogenous rhythms in the absence of
51 environmental cues is known as the free-running period and, amongst other things, this
52 provides information on the accuracy of internal clocks (Klarsfeld et al. 2003). The power
53 of circadian rhythm (=strength of rhythm; hereafter “power”) is another measure of
54 activity cycles, and indicates the inherent strength of the rhythm (Klarsfeld et al. 2003).
55 However, while many previous studies have explored free-running periods, few have
56 investigated the power of circadian rhythm (but see Cavey et al. 2016; Fujioka et al. 2017;
57 King et al. 2017).

58 Free-running periods of circadian rhythms can vary with light intensity (Aschoff 1960,
59 1965), but rhythms can remain robust over a wide range of temperatures, a situation
60 known as temperature compensation (e.g., Zimmerman et al. 1968; Dunlap et al. 2004;
61 Pittendrigh 1954). Be that as it may, there are a few published reports of temperature
62 compensation in the power of circadian rhythms (e.g., Saunders 1976, Sorek and Levy
63 2012).

64 In addition to environmental affects, circadian rhythms can also differ between the sexes.
65 For example, in the fly *Drosophila melanogaster*, the free-running period of males is
66 shorter than that of females (Helfrich-Förster 2000). This suggests that males have

67 different periods of rhythm, possibly to facilitate searching for females (Helfrich-Förster
68 2000). It is also possible that the power is different between males and females. To date
69 however, no investigation of the effect of sex on power has been reported, although in
70 species with strong sexual selection (e.g., those with pronounced dimorphism in sexually
71 selected morphology) there may well be dimorphism in the strength and period of bio-
72 rhythms as a result of sex-specific selection.

73 Here we investigated the effects of temperature on the free-running period, power and
74 circadian rhythm of locomotor activity in the broad-horned flour beetle *Gnatocerus*
75 *cornutus* [Fabricius], while also testing for sex-specific effects. In *G. cornutus*, only males
76 developed mandibles and they often fight with rival males to obtain matings using these
77 condition-dependent weapons (Okada et al. 2006; House et al. 2016). Furthermore, there
78 is significant genetic variation in mandible size and this affects fighting and mating
79 outcomes (Harano et al. 2010). Thus this species is ideal to assess whether strong sexual
80 selection has resulted in sex differences in activity rhythms, power and periods, because
81 beetles generally show evidence of circadian activity (Harano and Miyatake 2011). Our
82 investigation used 18 iso-female lines (genotypes), making it possible to also test for
83 genetic variation in circadian rhythms of locomotor activity, their free-running period and
84 power. We also investigated the plasticity of the activity rhythm by measuring it at
85 different temperatures.

86

87 **Materials & Methods**

88 *Stock population and isolines*

89 The *G. cornutus* beetle culture originated from adults collected in Miyazaki City (31°
90 54'N, 131° 25' E), Japan, in 1957 (see Okada et al. 2006), and has been maintained in the

91 laboratory of the National Food Research Institute and Okayama University for ~50 years
92 on whole meal enriched with yeast as food. Beetles were reared on whole meal enriched
93 with brewer's yeast and kept at 25–27°C and 60% relative humidity under a photoperiod
94 of 14:10 h light:dark (House et al. 2016). We established 18 iso-female lines (isolines =
95 standardized genotypes) from the stock population. Initially, 18 males and 18 females
96 were selected at random and paired. Subsequent full-sib-matings within each family were
97 used to propagate each line for 37 generations until the present study was conducted.
98 Differences between lines are then largely genetic and any within line variance is largely
99 environmental (David et al. 2005). Lines can effectively be thought of as different
100 genotypes (David et al. 2005). To obtain adults for the present experiments, one final
101 instar larva was placed in a separate well of a 24-well tissue culture plate because pupation
102 in *G. cornutus* is inhibited under high larval density (Okada et al. 2006).

103

104 *Locomotor activity*

105 To assess circadian rhythm, we maintained beetles at 14L10D conditions for more than
106 20 days in an incubator kept at 25°C before the measurement of locomotor activity, and
107 we then measured the locomotor activity of *G. cornutus* for 10 days in darkness. A beetle
108 from each isoline with enough food described above was put in a clear plastic Petri dish
109 (30 × 10 mm) in an incubator maintained at 25°C or 29°C. The beetles develop faster at
110 29°C (unpublished observation, TM), and almost investigation of the beetle's behaviour
111 has been conducted under 25°C (Okada et al. 2006; Okada and Miyatake 2009, 2010),
112 and thus we choose the two temperatures, 25°C and 29°C in this experiment. The
113 locomotor activity of each individual was monitored using an infrared actograph. An
114 infrared light beam was passed through a clear Petri dish, and the beam was projected

115 onto a photomicrosensor (E3S-AT11; Omron, Kyoto, Japan) that detected all
116 interruptions of the light beam. Signals of interruption of the infrared light beam were
117 recorded every 6 min. Sample size of each isoline is shown in S1 Table.

118

119 *Statistical analysis*

120 To determine the circadian rhythm, the locomotor activity data for 10 days (= total
121 activity) in constant dark condition was analyzed. The free-running period of circadian
122 rhythm was established using a χ^2 periodogram test (Sokolove and Bushell 1978) for data
123 on locomotor activity between 20–28 h (Halberg 1969). Circadian rhythmicity was
124 determined using χ^2 periodogram analysis, and used “power” as an index for the strength
125 of rhythms. Power of circadian rhythm was defined as the maximum difference between
126 the χ^2 value and the significance threshold line $P = 0.05$, that is the size of the peak above
127 5% threshold (see Fig. 1 in Klarsfeld et al. 2003). Power is high when rhythm is clear and
128 strong, and power of less than 0 indicates a statistically arrhythmic state.

129 To analyze the effects of temperature, isoline and sex on the period, power of the
130 circadian rhythm and total activity, we used MANOVA and post-hoc analysis of variance
131 (ANOVA). All statistics were based on R version 3.4.3 (R Development Core Team, 2017).

132

133 **Results**

134 MANOVA revealed significant main effects for all predictors and interactions on the
135 multivariate combination of power, period and total activity. All variables were significant
136 (see S2 Table). Post-hoc tests showed that power and total activity were the main drivers
137 of these effects, with all predictors and interactions being significant for power, while sex,
138 temperature and isoline plus the sex-by-isoline interaction being significant for total

139 activity (Table 1).

140 Strictly speaking it is the highest order interactions that need to be interpreted, which for
141 power was the three-way interaction between sex, temperature and isoline, indicating that
142 there is a genotype-by-environment affect that varies by sex affecting rhythm power
143 (Figure 1 A ; S1 Figure A; Table 1). Males showed higher power than females at 25°C,
144 while the difference looks disappear at 29°C (Figure 1 A).

145 The period of activity was only significantly affected by isoline; large variances with a
146 weak trend for a temperature-isoline effect and all other effects being non-significant
147 (Figure 1 B; S1 Figure B; Table 1). Examples of activity rhythm figures of male and
148 female under two temperatures were shown in S3 Figure.

149 While for total activity there is a sex-by-isoline interaction suggesting genetic variation
150 for activity that varies across the sexes (Figures 1 C, S1 Figure C; Table 1). Males showed
151 higher activity than females at both temperatures (Figures 1 C, S2 Figures; Table 1).

152

153 **Discussion**

154 In *G. cornutus*, only males fight with rival males to obtain matings using the developed
155 mandibles (Okada et al. 2006), mandibles are condition dependent (House et al. 2016),
156 and the significant genetic variation in mandible size affects fighting and mating
157 outcomes (Harano et al. 2010). This could generate sexual difference in activity and
158 circadian related traits. Furthermore, sex difference in circadian characters may be
159 especially prevalent across different environments because male sexual traits tend to be
160 condition dependent and thus males may be susceptible to stressors like elevated
161 temperatures (Rashed & Polak 2010). To test these ideas, we measured the locomotor
162 activity of a number of *G. cornutus* genotypes (isolines) at 25°C and 29°C, assessing the

163 free-running period and power of the circadian rhythm, as well as total activity, across
164 genotype, sex and temperature environments. Findings suggest that males tended to be
165 more active and showed greater increases in activity than females in this species. However,
166 we found complicated interactions as well as main effects (temperature, sex, genotype)
167 for the multivariate combinations of these activity measures, as well as very strong
168 univariate effects that also included interactions between some of our predictors. The
169 exception was the period of the activity rhythm, which was only affected by genotype
170 (isoline).

171 Many previous studies have suggested that the free-running period of activity rhythm
172 should show temperature compensation and remain robust over a wide range of
173 temperatures (e.g., Zimmerman et al. 1968; Dunlap et al. 2004; Pittendrigh 1954), and
174 this is what we also find. Temperature had no impact on the activity rhythm period
175 (rhythm was temperature compensated), which was only impacted by genotype,
176 suggesting period can evolve in spite of temperature compensation, and that the
177 environmental impacts on it are buffered across the range of temperatures we tested.
178 Additionally, there were no sex effects or interactions affecting period, so the genetic
179 effects were the same across environments and were the same for males and females, but
180 genotypes differ in their period of circadian rhythm. Given the strong sexual selection in
181 this beetle (Okada and Miyatake 2009, 2010; Harano et al. 2010; Okada et al, 2014), it
182 was surprising that the sexes did not differ in their activity period, especially since studies
183 of other taxa have found sex difference in this measure, even if it only relates to
184 development and emergence times (e.g., Simmons et al. 1994).

185 While many previous studies have investigated temperature effects on free-running
186 periods, few have focused on the power of circadian rhythms. We found all main effects

187 and their interactions affected power, generating a genotype-by-temperature-by-sex
188 interaction for power - which measures how much activity increases during active periods.
189 So for example, the power of male circadian rhythms was much higher at 25°C than at
190 29°C, while females tended to be about the same at either temperature, but this effect
191 differed across genotypes, so that for some genotypes females were more active at higher
192 temperature for example. The sex element of this interaction affecting the power of
193 circadian rhythm response probably relates to reproductive behaviours, with males
194 searching for mates and rivals, generating a much greater up-lift in male-activity during
195 the circadian cycle (e.g., Parker 1978; Muniz et al. 2018; Matsumura et al. 2019). This
196 affect seems to be very pronounced in some genotypes, which may relate to genetic
197 variation in male aggression (Harano et al. 2010; Okada and Miyatake 2010).

198 It seems plausible that all this explains why circadian activity has greater power in males,
199 but not why male power falls to female levels at 29°C. Perhaps this decrease is stress-
200 related, as stress can shift resource from activity to maintenance, and effects can be
201 genotype specific (Mitton 1997). Stress could be important here because beetles are
202 normally reared at 25-27°C, and because males have large condition-dependent mandibles
203 (House et al. 2016), they may be especially sensitive to stress (David et al. 2000). We
204 need to further investigate the effect of temperature on male-male competition and sexual
205 selection more generally, but in any case, this seems to be the first report of a sex
206 difference in response of the power of circadian rhythm across temperature environments.

207 The genotype effect indicates genetic variance for power of circadian rhythm. Similar
208 findings have been reported in other studies, including recent work investigating output
209 pathways of the circadian clock in *Drosophila* (Cavey et al. 2016; King et al. 2017). That
210 work revealed molecular genetic components that affect the power of circadian rhythm

211 and perhaps our findings similarly involve output pathways. Furthermore, if the output
212 pathways were effected in our beetles, it seems that the power, but not the period, of
213 circadian rhythm was impacted. More work on across environment effects needs to be
214 undertaken to test for genotype-environment-interactions, matching calls made in other
215 fields of study (Hunt and Hosken 2014). Additionally, although the power of circadian
216 rhythm has been investigated in several previous studies (Fujioka et al. 2017; Malpel et
217 al. 2004; Meshi and Bloch 2007), there are few studies that have investigated the fitness
218 impacts of variation in power. It would seem prudent to conduct such investigations
219 across environments.

220 We found no significant effect of temperature on the free-running period. This is
221 consistent with previous studies, which report temperature compensation in the free-
222 running period of circadian rhythm in other species (e.g., Pittendrigh 1954; Zimmerman
223 et al. 1968; Dunlap et al. 2004). We also found no sex-differences. This contrasts with *D.*
224 *melanogaster* where males had a shorter period of circadian rhythm than females
225 (Helfrich-Förster 2000). This probably relates to male *Drosophila* searching for females
226 (Helfrich-Förster 2000), while in *G. cornutus*, the period of mate searching may be less
227 beneficial because of male-male fighting and strong territoriality (Okada et al. 2014;
228 Yamane et al. 2010). Additionally, males that lose fights do not engage in fighting
229 behaviour for four days (Okada and Miyatake 2010), and losers transferred more sperm
230 to females during copulation (Yamane et al. 2010). Therefore, males may invest more in
231 fighting than searching for females in *G. cornutus*. However, males do seem to generally
232 increase power more than females (see above), so rather than increase the duration of
233 activity, they instead increase how active they are during periods of activity. This suggests
234 finding females at the right times, when they are receptive, is important, noting that for

235 many insects males cannot force copulations after adulthood cuticles have hardened
236 (Markow 2000; Eberhard 2002). In any case, males seem to increase the amount of
237 activity within a period, rather than increase the duration of activity, and there was
238 significant genetic variation in the free-running period of circadian rhythm - this was the
239 only significant main effect. This again implies period can evolve which is arguably as
240 expected for a behavioural phenotype (Hosken et al. 2019) and all the more so given that
241 there is variation in animal activity periods across taxa (e.g., diurnal vs. nocturnal).

242 The total locomotor activity over 10 days was affected by the interaction between
243 genotype (isoline) and sex, with males tending to be more active than females over both
244 temperatures, although this affect varied with genotype. Again this interaction could be
245 understood in terms of stress and the condition dependence of male sexual-traits and how
246 both vary across genotypes. There was also an independent (of the interaction) effect of
247 temperature such that activity was higher at 25°C than 29°C, which again supports the
248 notion of the higher temperature being more stressful. And again, the genotype (isoline)
249 effect on activity shows there is genetic variation for this trait. We need to undertake
250 additional work to uncover the details of all these effects to more fully understand some
251 of our findings, especially as they relate to mechanism and fitness.

252 To conclude, we found strong effects of sex, genotype and environment (temperature)
253 on a range of circadian activity measures. These effects interacted and did not act
254 consistently on all the activity elements we measured. Thus it appears that activity is like
255 many other behaviours, being affected by genes and environment and their interaction
256 and elements of activity seem to be somewhat independent of each other. However,
257 additional work is needed to both clarify the detail of our findings and to test their
258 generality across taxa.

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263

264 **Compliance with ethical standards**

265 **Competing interests**

266 The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

267

268 **Ethical approval**

269 All procedures performed in studies involving animals were in accordance with the
270 ethical standards of Okayama University and University of Exeter which the studies were
271 conducted.

272

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364

365 ***Ethical notes***

366 We followed all of the COPE guidelines.

367

368 ***Conflict of Interest***

369 Kentarou Matsumura, Masato S Abe, Manmohan D Sharma, David J. Hosken, Takashi

370 Yoshii, and Takahisa Miyatake declare that they have no conflict of interest.

371

372 **Figure legends**

373 **Figure 1. A.** Power of activity rhythm, **B.** period of circadian rhythm, and **C.** total
374 locomotor activities by sex when measured at 25⁰C and 29⁰C respectively. The error bars
375 represent SEM.

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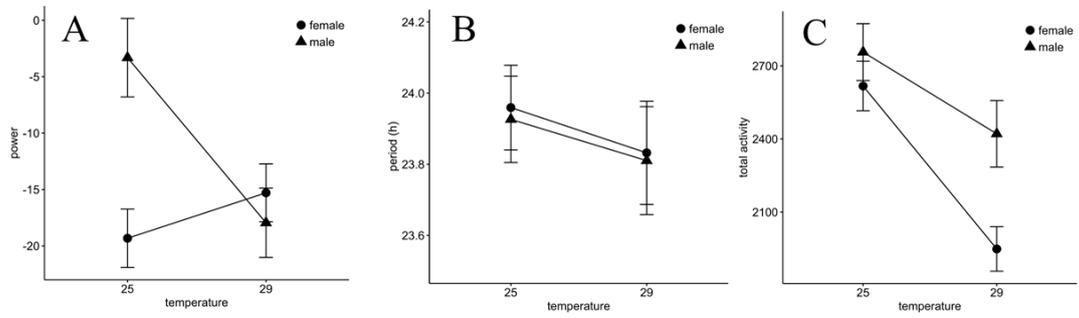
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391 Figure 1

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402 **Legends for supplementary materials**

403 **S1 Figure** A: The three-way interaction between temperature, sex and genotype (isoline)
404 affecting activity rhythm power. This shows that the effects of temperature depend on sex
405 and on genotype, such that for some genotypes males are more active at 29°C and for
406 others females are for example (S2 Fig. shows the sex-by-temperature element of this
407 interaction). B: The period of activity for different genotypes (isolines). Genotype was
408 the only variable that explained significant variation in activity period. C: The interaction
409 between sex and genotype (isoline) affecting total activity. On average males tend to be
410 more active but this varies across genotypes, so that in isolate 10 for example, females
411 are more active. In the all graphs, the error bars represent SEM.

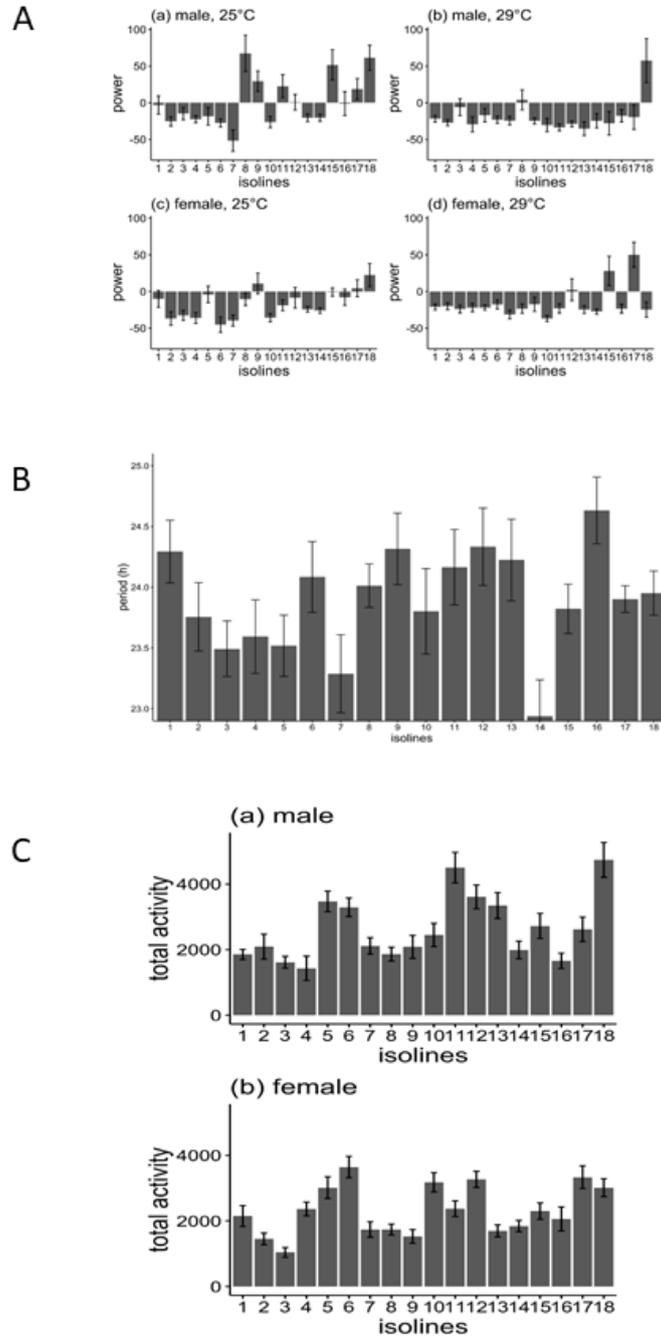
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413 **S2 Figure** The three-way interaction between temperature, sex and genotype (isoline)
414 affecting total activity. This shows that the effects of temperature depend on sex and on
415 genotype. The error bars represent SEM.

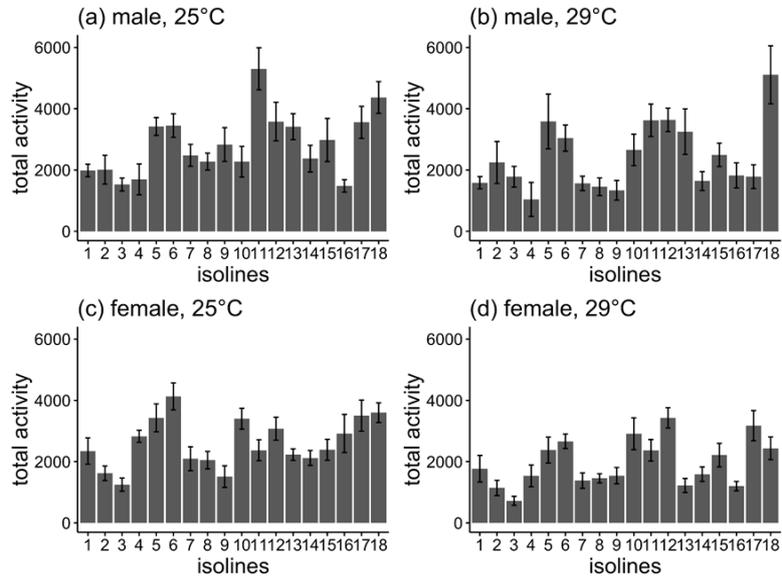
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417 **S3 Figure** Examples of activity rhythm figures of males and females under two
418 temperatures, 25°C and 29°C.

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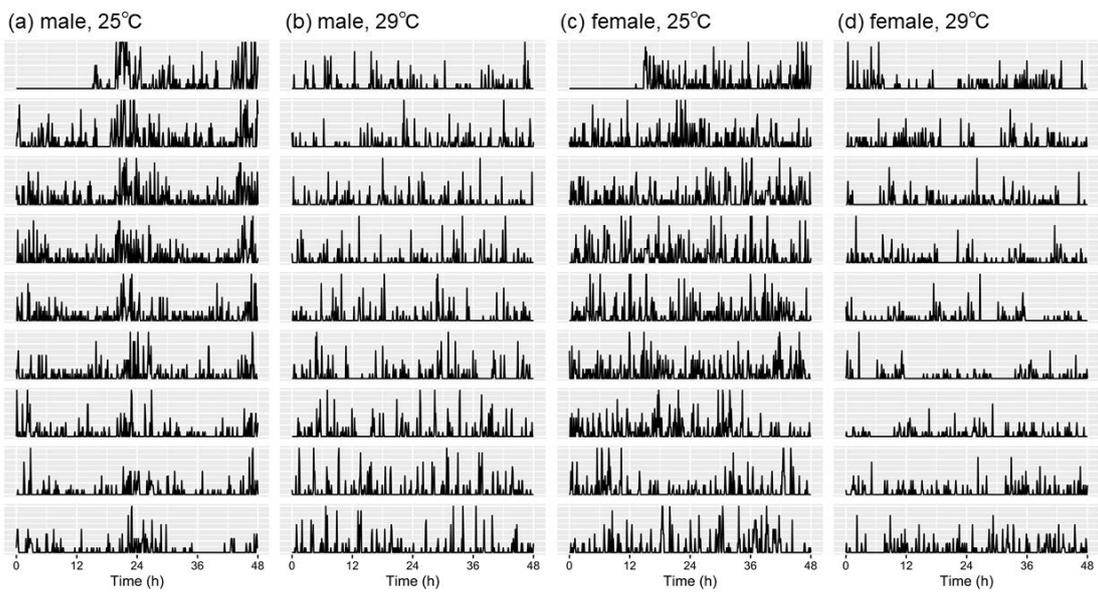
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425 S2 Figure

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428 S3 Figure

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430 **Table 1.** Post-hoc ANOVAs of the MANOVA outcomes testing effects on each activity
 431 trait (period and power of rhythm, and total activity) separately.

Traits	Variables	d. f.	Sum sq	Mean Sq	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Power of rhythm	Sex	1	13358	13838	8.9481	0.0029
	Temperature	1	5794	5794	3.8811	0.0492
	Isoline	17	283308	16665	11.1636	< 0.0001
	Sex*temperature	1	19396	19396	12.9927	0.0003
	Sex*isoline	17	82189	4835	3.2386	< 0.0001
	Temperature*isoline	17	60760	3574	2.3942	0.0013
	Sex*temperature*isoline	17	60981	3587	2.4029	0.0012
	Residuals	793	1183807	1493		
Period of rhythm	Sex	1	15	15	0.0395	0.8425
	Temperature	1	316	316	0.8517	0.3564
	Isoline	17	14474	851	2.2961	0.0021
	Sex*temperature	1	0	0	0.0001	0.9911
	Sex*isoline	17	4405	259	0.6988	0.806
	Temperature*isoline	17	9671	569	1.5341	0.0763
	Sex*temperature*isoline	17	4885	287	0.775	0.7234
	Residuals	793	294043	371		
Total activity	Sex	1	18867003	18867003	9.1322	0.0026
	Temperature	1	54091677	54091677	26.182	< 0.0001
	Isoline	17	4.97E+08	29211404	14.1392	< 0.0001
	Sex*temperature	1	5260553	5260553	2.5463	0.1109
	Sex*isoline	17	1.35E+08	7952461	3.8492	< 0.0001
	Temperature*isoline	17	24922413	1466024	0.7096	0.7949
	Sex*temperature*isoline	17	54409111	3200536	1.5492	0.0717
	Residuals	793	1.64E+09	2065983		

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433 **S1 Table.** Sizes of samples of each isoine of *G. cornutus*.

Isoine	25°C		29°C	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	23	21	11	11
2	21	17	11	9
3	17	18	9	12
4	12	18	8	10
5	18	17	7	11
6	19	20	12	10
7	15	12	10	12
8	12	10	12	11
9	11	9	11	11
10	12	12	10	10
11	12	12	11	11
12	11	10	11	12
13	11	10	9	11
14	11	11	12	12
15	9	11	10	11

16	10	11	11	11
17	9	10	10	11
18	11	10	11	10

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S2 Table MANOVA with period and power of circadian rhythm, and total activity

Variables	Df	Pillai	Approx. F	num Df	den DF	<i>P</i>
sex	1	0.0198	5.3128	3	791	0.0013
temperature	1	0.0339	9.2477	3	791	<0.0001
isoline	17	0.4575	8.3935	51	2379	<0.0001
sex*temperature	1	0.0222	5.9977	3	791	0.0005
sex*isoline	17	0.1513	2.4770	51	2379	<0.0001
temperature*isoline	17	0.0994	1.5986	51	2379	0.0048
sex*temperature*isoline	17	0.0926	1.4854	51	2379	0.0150
residuals	793					