## **ORIGINAL PAPER**



# **Heavy metals used as fungicide may positively afect** *Trichogramma* **species used as biocontrol agents in IPM programs**

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## **Abstract**

The use of biological control agents in Integrated Pest Management programs has increased in the last decades, but may be afected by antagonistic efects generated by the accumulation of some pesticides and other chemicals. The objective of this study was to evaluate the performance of *Trichogramma cordubensis* (Hymenoptera: Trichogrammatidae), a candidate agent to control grapevine moths, when these benefcial insects are exposed to copper treatments through trophic accumulation. A generation of the host *Lobesia botrana* (Lepidoptera: Tortricidae) was reared on a diet with diferent concentrations of copper from Bordeaux mixture incorporated into the diet. The host eggs laid by these females were then exposed to female parasitoids. Our results showed that copper consumed by the host parental generation had no efects on the parasitism rate but had positive efects on the emergence rate and size of emerging parasitoids at the highest copper concentration. These efects of copper on parasitoids may be due to stress efects of copper on the host parental generation, linked with a tradeof between development and defenses leading to a reduced immunity in their host eggs. Another hypothesis may be that copper has been transferred into the host eggs at potentially benefcial concentrations for parasitoids due to detoxifcation mechanisms of the hosts' mothers facing a chemical stress. These positive efects of copper pesticides on parasitoids have been observed at the highest copper concentration, consistent with real exposure conditions in the feld. This study thus highlights potential synergetic effects between pesticides and natural enemies.

**Keywords** *Trichogramma* · Pesticides · Non-target organisms · Copper · Biocontrol

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# **Introduction**

With the overall objective of maintaining yields, conventional agriculture uses large quantities of synthetic pesticides. The numerous non-target efects of these pesticides on human health, environment, and benefcial organisms (Baldi et al. [2013](#page-8-0); Bonner and Alavanja [2017;](#page-8-1) Brühl and Zaller [2019](#page-8-2); Rajput et al. [2019;](#page-10-0) Rehman et al. [2019](#page-10-1); Moreau et al. [2022](#page-10-2)) have led to a reduction in the use of these products. In this context, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is increasingly valued, as it uses current and comprehensive information on the life cycle of pests in their agroecosystems to optimize the combination of agricultural practices, biological and chemical controls to manage pest populations (Stern et al. [1959](#page-11-0); Peshin and Dhawan [2009](#page-10-3)), while maintaining high yields (Stenberg [2017\)](#page-11-1). Although this global pest management method aims at reducing the use of pesticides, it does not forbid a well-reasoned use of such products as a last resort. However, the use of multiple methods of pest control can result in synergistic or antagonistic efects, making it hard to predict the overall success of IPM (Barzman et al. [2015](#page-8-3)). For example, the use of pesticides can lead to several negative efects on the natural enemies used in IPM programs. Predators and parasitoids used as biocontrol agents are generally more sensitive to pesticides than their prey or hosts, and can be greatly afected by short and longterm exposure to pesticides (Aveling [1981](#page-8-4); Martinou et al. [2014;](#page-10-4) Di et al. [2016](#page-9-0)). Due to their low specifcity (Aktar et al. [2009](#page-8-5); Gill and Garg [2014](#page-9-1); Rani et al. [2021\)](#page-10-5), pesticides sometimes consequently lead to secondary pest outbreaks by reducing their natural enemies populations (Gill and Garg [2014](#page-9-1); Guedes et al. [2016](#page-9-2)). Pesticides used in IPM programs may thus reduce the performance of biological control programs when non-target efects on biocontrol agents are underestimated (Desneux et al. [2007](#page-9-3); Stark et al. [2007\)](#page-10-6).

Viticulture requires high amounts of pesticides in order to control various pests and pathogens (Agreste [2021;](#page-8-6) Fouillet et al. [2022\)](#page-9-4). Therefore, it represents an ideal agricultural system to explore the interplay between pesticides and biological control agents used in IPM programs. For instance, the most devastating diseases of grapevines, downy mildew and powdery mildew, are caused by fungal pathogens (*Plasmopara viticola* and *Erysiphe necator*). These cryptogamic diseases are responsible for severe yield and economic losses in vineyards (Šrobárová and Kakalíková [2007](#page-10-7); Pertot et al. [2017](#page-10-8)). To control these pathogens, fungicides are widely used and represent up to 96% of the pesticides applied in vineyards (El-Wakeil et al. [2013](#page-9-5); Agreste [2021](#page-8-6)). Among fungicides, copper-based fungicides such as Bordeaux Mixture are the most widely used, even in organic agriculture for which their active substances are authorized (European Commission [2018](#page-9-6)). In France for example, copper-based fungicides are used on 85% of vineyards in conventional agriculture and 98% in organic agriculture (ANSES [2022\)](#page-8-7). Copper-based fungicides currently remain necessary as no efficient enough alternatives exist (Dagostin et al. [2011;](#page-9-7) Andrivon et al. [2019](#page-8-8)). This extensive use of copper-based fungicides has led to copper accumulation in vineyard soils (Brun et al. [1998;](#page-8-9) SOGREAH [2007](#page-10-9); Andrivon et al. [2019\)](#page-8-8), which may have indirect effects on phytophagous insects like moth pests (Lepidoptera: Tortricidae), *e.g.,* the European grapevine moth (*Lobesia botrana*) (Denis and Schifermüller, 1775) or the grape berry moth (*Eupoecilia ambiguella*) (Hübner, 1796). These insect pests cause damage throughout the grape fructifcation period and facilitate the development of fungal infections (Cozzi et al. [2006;](#page-9-8) Delbac and Thiéry [2016](#page-9-9)). The application of copperbased fungicides may increase the damage caused by insect pests as it has been shown to reduce predation and parasitism of pest eggs and pupae by their natural enemies (Pennington et al. [2018](#page-10-10); Vogelweith and Thiéry [2018](#page-11-2); Reif et al. [2021](#page-10-11)). As such, the efficacy of commonly used insect parasitoids to control moth pests, *e.g.,* oophagous parasitoids of the genus *Trichogramma* (El-Wakeil et al. [2009;](#page-9-10) Sentenac [2011](#page-10-12); Walton et al. [2012](#page-11-3); Thiéry et al. [2018;](#page-11-4) Di Giovanni et al. [2022\)](#page-9-11), could be reduced by the use of copper-based fungicides in vineyards. *Trichogramma* species are sensitive to environmental conditions, such as temperature (Chen et al. [2021\)](#page-9-12), or the use of several pesticides (insecticides and fungicides), which have been shown to reduce the survivorship, longevity and fertility of *Trichogramma achaeae* (Hymenoptera: Trichogrammatidae) (Fontes et al. [2018\)](#page-9-13). *Trichogramma* species are also sensitive to the developmental conditions of their hosts (*e.g.,* temperature, diet), which have been shown to afect the parasitism rate, the emergence rate of parasitoids and increase the size of emerging parasitoids (Moreau et al. [2009;](#page-10-13) Thiéry and Desneux [2018;](#page-11-5) Iltis et al. [2020](#page-9-14)). Based on previous studies, exposure to copper fungicides, however, seems to have minor efects on *Trichogramma* species, when exposed on the surface of host eggs or after parasitoid emergence (Vieira et al. [2001](#page-11-6); Garcia et al. [2009](#page-9-15)). On the other hand, exposure to copper through bioaccumulation in their host's tissue could lead to sublethal efects, which has not been studied. Studying these pernicious efects is crucial to quantify the long-term efects of copper on biological control methods.

We assessed the effects of an extensively used copper-based fungicide (Bordeaux Mixture) on *Trichogramma cordubensis* performance, by offering wasps host eggs from European grapevine moths that ingested diferent concentrations of copper. *T. cordubensis* has recently been identifed as a species with a high parasitism rate *in natura* on the European grapevine moth (Lucchi et al. [2016\)](#page-9-16), and thus represents a promising biological control agent. Larval diet is known to infuence host egg quality and the parasitism and life history traits of *Trichogramma* species (Thiéry and Desneux [2018](#page-11-5); Moghaddassi et al. [2019\)](#page-10-14). We thus expected the exposure of *L. botrana* larvae to copper to have indirect effects on *T. cordubensis*. Copper is indeed a key oligo-element and a heavy metal, involved in the mechanisms of cellular respiration (Collins [2016\)](#page-9-17) and oxygen transport in connection with hemocyanins (Coates and Costa-Paiva [2020\)](#page-9-18). We expected copper to impact the development and reproductive success of *T. cordubensis*, as it has been shown on other parasitoids before (Ye et al. [2009](#page-11-7)). We also expected copper to have indirect efects on the survival and development of the parasitoids in their host eggs, through alterations of their host metabolism, as copper can affect *L. botrana* survival, development and immune parameters (Iltis et al. [2022\)](#page-9-19).

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Parasitoids production**

All parasitoids originated from an industry-reared thelytokous population (only constituted by females) of *T. cordubensis* used as biological control agents. The strain was maintained in climatic chambers (ST 2/2 BASIC, Pol-Eko-Aparatura, Wodzisław Śląski, Poland) under standardized conditions (temperature:  $22 \pm 0.5$  °C, relative humidity:  $60 \pm 5\%$ , photoperiod: L18:6D, and luminosity: 650 lx) for the duration of the experiments. Rearing took place on adhesive strips coated over a width of 1 cm with alternative host eggs of *Ephestia kuehniella* (allowing mass rearing of *Trichogramma*) in glass tubes  $(100 \times 15 \text{ mm})$  containing female *T. cordubensis* for three days. These strips covered with parasitized host eggs were then isolated in new glass tubes of the same size so that emerging parasitoids could be used in experiments after twelve days. Each day, the parasitoid rearing tubes were emptied of previously emerged parasitoids to obtain adult females that were no more than 24 h old for the experiments. For *Trichogramma* species, the oviposition rate, developmental time, and emergence rate (of the ofspring) depend strongly on the age the females (Pizzol et al. [2012](#page-10-15); Iltis et al. [2020\)](#page-9-14); therefore, parasitoid age was restricted to less than 24 h. These females had not parasitized any host eggs prior to contact with *L. botrana* eggs.

#### **Host eggs production for Trichogramma exposition**

All *L. botrana* individuals originated from a laboratory-reared population (INRAe, Villenave d'Ornon, Fance) maintained under standardized conditions (temperature:  $22 \pm 0.5$  °C, relative humidity:  $60 \pm 5\%$ , photoperiod: L18:6D, and luminosity: 650 lx). Pupae were introduced into a cylindrical cage  $(28\times25$  cm in diameter). A few days after the emergence of the adults, oviposition papers carrying *L. botrana* eggs near hatching were isolated every day in climatic chambers (ST 2/2 BASIC, Pol-Eko-Aparatura, Wodzisław Śląski, Poland) under the same standardized conditions as the rearing. Larvae less than 24 h old  $(n=1168)$  were gently isolated with a brush and placed single in 2 ml pierced-lid Eppendorf tubes containing 1.5 ml of nutrient medium considered ad libitum (composition for 1000 ml: 1000 ml water, 15 g agar, 84.6 g corn four, 41.3 g wheat germ, 45.5 g beer yeast, 6 g ascorbic acid, 3.4 g mineral salt, 128 mg pyrimethanil, 2.7 g benzoic acid, 2.8 g methyl 4-hydroxybezoate and 5 ml 95% ethanol) (Thiéry and Moreau [2005;](#page-11-8) Muller et al. [2016](#page-10-16); Iltis et al. [2020](#page-9-14)).

In order to be representative of real feld conditions, Bordeaux Mixture (20% copper content in the form of copper sulfate  $CuSO<sub>4</sub>$  RSR Disperss NC, UPL) was used as the copper source, as it is one of the most widely used fungicides in vineyards. Diferent copper concentrations were chosen to encompass a wide range of possible copper concentrations usually found in vineyards, from a control treatment with distilled water, to an increasing concentration of copper reflecting low (25 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) (Angelova et al. [1999;](#page-8-10) Miotto et al. [2014](#page-10-17)), high (100 mg kg−1) (Lai et al. [2010;](#page-9-20) Miotto et al. [2014](#page-10-17)), and extreme copper concentrations in highly treated vineyards (225 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) (Pietrzak and McPhail [2004;](#page-10-18) Mirlean et al. [2007;](#page-10-19) Mackie et al. [2012;](#page-10-20) Ballabio et al. [2018](#page-8-11); Hummes et al. [2019](#page-9-21)).

*Lobesia botrana* larvae were separated into four groups exposed to increasing copper concentrations contained in the medium, which was prepared several times for each concentration (*n*=296 larvae for 0 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, *n*=298 for 25 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, *n*=295 for 100 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, *n*=279 for 225 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> of copper). Larvae were individually deposited over four days in 2 ml Eppendorf tubes flled with 1.5 ml of nutrient medium either containing 0 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, 25 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, 100 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> or 225 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> of copper. Each larva remained in the same tube until pupation, which was monitored daily. The three-day-old pupae (strong enough to be handled) were gently extracted from their cocoons with fne fexible forceps and weighed (±0.1 mg, Pioneer PA214C, OHAUS, Greifensee, Switzerland). Pupae were isolated in glass tubes  $(100 \times 15 \text{ mm})$ in diameter), sealed with moistened cotton, then stored and monitored every day until the emergence. The 48-h-old females were transferred into new glass tubes  $(100 \times 15 \text{ mm})$ , sealed with moistened cotton, and then placed in contact with 24–96 h-old males for four hours in the dark. Each mating was performed between partners previously developed with the same copper treatment. After the couple's separation, mated females were then isolated in their tubes for 24–96 h to lay their eggs on the glass wall. The number of eggs laid on the inner surface of each glass tube was monitored every morning. Only the tubes containing at least 30 eggs laid in less than 24 h were used for the experiments as the classical procedure using both *L. botrana* and *Trichogramma* species (Moreau et al. [2009](#page-10-13); Pizzol et al. [2012](#page-10-15); Iltis et al. [2020\)](#page-9-14). Oviposition tubes were observed through a 5×amplifcation stereomicroscope (Stemi 508, Zeiss, France), and fve random photographs of eggs per tube were taken in order to estimate the average egg diameter as an indicator of egg size (Becker et al. [2022](#page-8-12)).

#### **Host eggs exposition to Trichogramma females**

On the day of the experiments, a single 24 h-old *T. cordubensis* laboratory-reared female was gently introduced into each host egg tube using a lighted fat surface to avoid their flight due to phototropism. Only actively moving female parasitoids were selected for the experiments, to avoid using unresponsive parasitoids and those potentially harmed by manipulations. Host eggs were exposed to *T. cordubensis* females for six hours. This exposure time was chosen in conjunction with studies conducted on the number of *L. botrana* eggs parasitized by *Trichogramma cacoeciae* females (Moreno et al. [2009](#page-10-21); Iltis et al. [2020](#page-9-14)), so that the number of host eggs ( $>30$  per tube) would not be limiting. After six hours of exposure, *T. cordubensis* females were isolated in 1 ml Eppendorf tubes and frozen. A total number of 149 parasitized host egg tubes were analyzed (*n*=57 for 0 mg kg−1, *n*=37 for 25 mg kg−1, *n*=37 for 100 mg kg−1,  $n=18$  for 225 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> of copper).

## **Parasitism measures and data acquisition**

All *T. cordubensis* females used to parasitize host eggs were frozen. The hind tibia length of each female was measured using a  $40 \times$  amplification stereomicroscope (Stemi 508, Zeiss, France) and measurement software  $(\pm 0.01 \,\mu m, M$ otic Image Plus, MoticEurope, Spain) (Olson and Andow [1998](#page-10-22); Farahani et al. [2016](#page-9-22); Iltis et al. [2020\)](#page-9-14). Oviposition tubes containing parasitized host eggs were left unmanipulated in climatic chambers for 20 days. This duration was sufficient to allow the complete development of either *L. botrana* non-parasitized eggs until hatching, or of parasitoid larvae until their emergence (Moreau et al. [2009;](#page-10-13) Moreno et al. [2009](#page-10-21)). After 20 days of incubation, oviposition tubes were observed with a stereomicroscope (Stemi 508, Zeiss, Göttingen, Germany) in order to determine: (1) the total number of eggs (>30 eggs) laid by *L. botrana* females in less than 24 h, (2) the number of unfertilized and unparasitized eggs, with an undifferentiated yellow vitellus, (3) the number of fertilized and unparasitized eggs from which a *L. botrana* larva emerged, (4) the number of unparasitized eggs in which there was a dead *L. botrana* larva, (5) the number of parasitized eggs with a fully developed parasitoid, appearing blackened with a hole, and (6) the number of parasitized eggs with an unsuccessfully developed parasitoid, appearing blackened (Hutchison et al. [1990](#page-9-23)).

The total number of parasitized eggs (with or without parasitoid development) was used to assess the success of parasitism (Iltis et al. [2020\)](#page-9-14). Parasitoid emergence rate was evaluated as the ratio of the number of eggs from which a parasitoid emerged to the total number of parasitized eggs. The emerging parasitoids were gently collected with a brush and then observed under a  $40 \times$  amplification stereomicroscope (Stemi 508, Zeiss, France) to measure their hind tibia length in the same way as for their mother parasitoids. For each tube of parasitized host eggs, the size of all emerging parasitoids was measured if they were less than fve; otherwise, five parasitoids randomly selected. As super-parasitism (two parasitoid larvae in the same host egg) was observed sporadically (4.4% of the parasitized eggs), the number of host eggs exhibiting super-parasitism was included in the total number of parasitized eggs and each emergence was taken into account in the total number of emerging parasitoids per host egg tube and then factored into the parasitoid emergence rate.

### **Statistical analyses**

Statistical analyses were divided into two steps and were performed using R software version 4.1.2 (R Core Team [2021](#page-10-23)). The first step aimed at quantifying the effects of copper treatments on measured traits of *L. botrana* and *T. cordudensis*. The effects of copper on the pupal mass and the development time of *L. botrana* females and males were analyzed using Generalized Linear Mixed Models (GLMM, package 'lme4') (Bates et al. [2015\)](#page-8-13) according to Poisson distributions with a log link function. The effects of copper treatments on success, the emergence rate, and emergent size (estimated by their tibia) were evaluated using statistical models factoring in the four copper treatments, female and male *L. botrana* pupal mass, *L. botrana* egg size, and the size of the parasitoid mothers (estimated by their tibia). As development time was negatively correlated with *L. botrana* male and female pupal mass ( $\chi^2$ <sub>1</sub> = 17.87, *p* < 0.001, slope = -0.25 for females;  $\chi^2$ <sub>1</sub> = 9.77, *p* = 0.002, slope = -0.16 for males), we evaluated the variance infation factor (function vif, package 'car') (Fox and Wiesberg [2019\)](#page-9-24) for models encompassing every variable showing a multicollinearity for the development times of both males and females (VIF>3.8 for each model). To avoid effects of multicollinearity in the analyses, only the pupal masses were used in the models to analyze the potential efects of host egg parental generation. Since no transformation achieved normality, GLMMs were used to analyze parasitism performances, incorporating tube ID as a random efect. The number of parasitized eggs and hind tibia length of emerging parasitoids were analyzed using GLMMs according to Poisson distributions with a log link function. Parasitoid emergence rate was analyzed using a GLMM based on a binomial distribution with a logit link function. For each mixed model, overdispersion (presence of more variability in the data set than expected based on the model) was checked and no model modifcations were required. Tests and *p* values were obtained after type II ANOVAs applied on the diferent models.

The second step aimed at revealing the nature of the efects of copper on *T. cordubensis*. We considered here that parasitoids may be exposed to copper transferred into the host eggs by *L. botrana* parents, which may be responsible for direct toxic efects on *T. cordubensis*. We also considered that copper may indirectly afect parasitoids through any transgenerational alteration of *L. botrana* host eggs, resulting from exposure of their parental generation to copper. In order to disentangle the relative infuence of these two modes of action, (*i.e.,* direct and indirect) of copper treatments on parasitism, the emergence rate and the size of the emerging parasitoids, path analyses were used (package 'lavaan') (Rosseel [2012](#page-10-24)). Path analysis is a statistical method based on the analysis of a theoretical model which enables one to evaluate linear relationships among variables in a system and the comparative strength of direct and indirect relationships among these variables (Wright [1934](#page-11-9)). The model used for the path analyses was conceptualized according to information gathered in the literature leading to hypotheses linking the variables between them. In our experiment, parasitoid mothers were not exposed to copper during their development, so that direct and indirect effects of copper were supposed to act on all measured variables except for the size of the parasitoid mothers. Since copper was introduced into the diet that the parental generation of *L. botrana* fed on, one of the frst hypotheses was that copper may alter the larval development time, known to be linked with pupal mass and the size of the eggs laid by the adults (Iltis et al. [2021\)](#page-9-25). Parasitism response variables were then assumed to be dependent on the size of the host eggs, which has previously been shown as an indicator of egg quality (Moreau et al. [2016](#page-10-25)). Finally, parasitism response variables were assumed to be dependent on the size of the parasitoid mothers used for the experiments (Iltis et al. [2020\)](#page-9-14). The conceptual model was divided into fve levels: (1) the copper treatments, (2) the parental generation of the *L. botrana* hosts represented by the development time and the pupal masses of the males and females, (3) the host generation of *L. botrana* represented by the size of the host eggs, (4) the parasitism performances represented by the number of parasitized eggs, the emergence rate and the hind tibia length of the emerging parasitoids, and (5) the parental generation of *T. cordubensis* parasitoids represented by the hind tibia length of the mothers. Once the conceptual model was established, the analyses assessed the valence and strength of the relationships between the variables in the conceptual model.

Direct effects were evaluated by observing the paths from one variable to another that depends directly on it. Indirect effects were evaluated by multiplying the coefficients of the successive paths between them (either within or between levels). The total effects were evaluated by adding the direct and indirect efects.

## **Results**

#### **Host development**

Copper had a significant effect on developmental time (day) of both female and male *L. botrana* larvae ( $\chi^2$ <sub>3</sub> = 16.87,  $p < 0.001$  for the female larvae;  $\chi^2 = 17.01$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for the male larvae). High copper concentrations (100 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> and 225 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) increased the development time (by 17%) (Fig. [1](#page-4-0)a). Copper concentrations had a negative efect on male and female pupal mass (mg), with 100 mg kg−1and 225 mg  $kg^{-1}$  of copper showing lower mass (Fig. [1b](#page-4-0)). The pupal mass of *L. botrana* females had a positive effect on the host egg size ( $\mu$ m) ( $\chi^2$ <sub>1</sub> = 16.95, *p* < 0.001, slope = 5.3). The age and pupal mass of males had no efects on the host egg size ( $\chi^2$ <sub>1</sub> = 0.73, *p* = 0.39 for the age;  $\chi^2$ <sub>1</sub> = 0.65, *p* = 0.41 for the mass).



<span id="page-4-0"></span>**Fig. 1** Efects of copper treatments on the development time of *L. botrana* females and males from hatching to emergence (**a**) and on the pupal mass of female and male *L. botrana* (**b**). The represented values correspond to the means $±95\%$  confidence interval. the values

written next to the dots indicate the sample sizes. Each letter **a**, **b**, **c** or **d** denotes a signifcantly diferent result according to the Newman– Keuls post hoc test



<span id="page-5-0"></span>**Fig. 2** Efects of copper treatments on the parasitoid emergence rate (**a**) and the size of emerging parasitoids (**b**). The represented values correspond to the means $\pm 95\%$  confidence interval. The values

written next to the dots indicate the sample sizes. Each letter **a** or **b** denotes a significantly different result according to the Newman-Keuls post hoc test

#### **Parasitism performances**

Copper had no effect on the number of parasitized eggs (mean 12.81  $CI_{95\%} = [8; 18]$  parasitized host eggs for all treatments taken together) (Table [1\)](#page-6-0). However, the parasitoid emergence rate and the size of emerging parasitoids ( $\mu$ m) were affected by copper treatments (Table [1\)](#page-6-0). These efects were observable at the highest copper concentration  $(225 \text{ mg kg}^{-1})$ , which doubled the average parasitoid emergence rate (Fig. [2](#page-5-0)a) and increased the size of emerging parasitoids, as denoted by hind tibia length (Fig. [2b](#page-5-0)). None of the three response variables used to assess parasitism performances were signifcantly afected by pupal mass or host egg size (Table [1](#page-6-0)). The number of parasitized eggs and the size of emerging parasitoids were signifcantly afected by the size of the female parasitoids (Table [1](#page-6-0)). Larger female parasitoids parasitized signifcantly more eggs than smaller females (*y*=0.19*x*−15.16, *r*=0.37) and had larger progeny ( $y = 0.23x + 106.68$ ,  $r = 0.25$ ).

### **Path analysis**

The path analysis showed that copper had two direct positive effects, one on the developmental time of host eggs of the parental generation and one on the parasitoid emergence rate (Fig. [3](#page-7-0)). The pupal masses of the parental generation were not directly afected by copper, but indirectly

through their development time (respective correlation coefficients of  $0.37 \times (-0.67) = -0.25$  for the females and  $0.36 \times (-0.56) = -0.20$  for the males). Host egg size was indirectly infuenced by copper through parental generation developmental time and pupal mass of females (coefficient of  $-0.084$ ). According to the path analysis, copper had no signifcant infuence (direct or indirect) on the number of parasitized eggs or the size of emerging parasitoids (Fig. [3\)](#page-7-0). The size of emerging parasitoids was indirectly infuenced by the size of their mothers through the number of parasitized eggs (coefficient of  $0.098$ ).

## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to evaluate the non-target effects of a copper-based fungicide commonly used in vineyards on the parasitism performance of *T. cordubensis* when consumed by grapevine moth larvae. Our results showed that the highest copper concentration used in this study (225 mg  $kg^{-1}$ ) had positive effects on the emergence rate and the size of emerging parasitoids, which could affect their performance as biological control agents. Efects of copper on *T. cordubensis* could have at least two origins, a direct one and an indirect one. The frst hypothesis is that *T. cordubensis* could have been exposed to copper in their host eggs (direct efect), this hypothesis is supported by the direct efect of copper on the emergence rate shown by the path analysis.

The second hypothesis is that *T. cordubensis* was indirectly afected by copper, via stress responses of their hosts to copper (at the parental generation or at the host egg stage), including traits which were not considered in this study (*e.g.,* host egg immunity). In addition, copper negatively impacted larval developmental time and the pupal mass of the parental generation. Taken together, these results indicate that the stress caused by high copper concentrations could reduce pest pressure on grapevines, both by altering pest development and by favoring their control by parasitoids. The efects of copper pesticides on *T. cordubensis* have only been observed at the highest copper concentration, which should be the rarest as well in viticulture. We can thus assume that the use of biological control methods facing exposures to copper pesticides through trophic accumulation remains efective in most of the vineyards.

Our study has shown that host exposure to the highest concentration of copper had positive efects on the emergence rate and the size of emerging parasitoids. According to the path analysis, copper had a direct positive efect only on the emergence rate of parasitoids. Copper may have been transferred to the host eggs and made available to the parasitoids at a favorable concentration (Calabrese [2014;](#page-8-14) Cutler and Guedes [2017\)](#page-9-26) as a nutrient, promoting the development of the parasitoids at the larval stage. Copper is involved in mitochondrial respiration processes via cytochrome c oxidases and in the transport of oxygen in the hemolymph by hemocyanins (Coates and Costa-Paiva [2020\)](#page-9-18), which can directly affect insect development (Collins [2016\)](#page-9-17). The positive efects of copper on the parasitoid emergence rate suggests that parasitoids encountered copper concentrations below their hypothetical sensitivity or resistance thresholds during their development. The hypothesis that copper has been transferred from insect parents to their eggs seems consistent as heavy metals such as nickel and cadmium are known to accumulate in reproductive organs of insects (Schmidt and Ibrahim [1994;](#page-10-26) Su et al. [2014;](#page-11-10) Sun et al. [2016](#page-11-11)), and a heavy metal such as zinc is known to be transferred from exposed parents to their eggs (Shu et al. [2009](#page-10-27); Kim et al. [2012](#page-9-27)). Although there is little evidence in the literature that copper is transferred maternally from terrestrial insect parents to their eggs, this phenomenon was described in aquatic insects (Cid et al. [2010\)](#page-9-28). It is thus plausible that copper accumulated in the reproductive organs of *L. botrana* parents has been transferred into their eggs, which could support the hypothesis that parasitoids have been exposed to copper during their development in the host eggs.

We showed overall that high copper exposure of *L. botrana* as host for *T. cordubensis* can positively impact the performance of parasitoids. Under the hypothesis that copper has been transferred into the host eggs, both species may have not been exposed to similar copper concentrations. Following the example of zinc accumulated in aquatic insects, the concentration of a heavy metal transferred maternally to the eggs does not seem proportional to the concentration in the contaminated environment (Shu et al. [2009\)](#page-10-27), but may be impacted by detoxifcation mechanisms of the parental generation. Copper had a positive efect on the development time of *L. botrana* parental generation but a negative efect on the pupal mass, which suggests that costs for detoxifcation are paid at high concentrations*.* Further studies would be necessary to determine the dose–response to copper on the interaction between *L. botrana* or *Trichogramma* species, as dose–response to copper has been shown to strongly vary between aquatic insects (Leland et al. [1989;](#page-9-29) Van Der Geest et al. [2000](#page-11-12); Mebane et al. [2020](#page-10-28)). There could have been competition between growth and detoxifcation processes as a stress response of *L. botrana* larvae, including copper inactivation by proteins such as glutathione and metallothioneins (Tibbett et al. [2021](#page-11-13)), copper storage in mineral-rich granules in the lysosomal systems (Hopkin [1990;](#page-9-30) Barka [2007\)](#page-8-15), copper excretion through the exoskeleton or the digestive system (Pigino et al. [2005\)](#page-10-29). The implementation of these detoxifcation mechanisms is however very energetically costly, which could explain the increase of the development time and the reduction of the pupal mass of *L. botrana* with copper exposure. Although these mechanisms may have reduced copper toxicity and concentration in the parental generation and hence maybe in the host eggs, their high energetic costs in addition to copper toxicity could have led to the negative efects on the development of *L. botrana*. However, parasitoids may have faced reduced and benefc copper

<span id="page-6-0"></span>**Table 1** Results of the generalized linear mixed models (GLMM) on parasitism performances. Signifcant results  $(p < 0.05)$  are shown in bold. The letters indicate the nature of the statistical test performed before type II ANOVAs



<sup>a</sup>GLMM with Poisson distribution; <sup>b</sup>GLMM with binomial distribution

<span id="page-7-0"></span>**Fig. 3** Evaluation of the conceptual model of direct and indirect efects of copper through a path analysis. The model was built by refecting on the dependence or independence of the variables between them. Arrows indicate dependence relationships between variables which have been included in the model. Blue arrows indicate positive relationships. Red arrows indicate negative relationships. Relationship signifcance is given by asterisks:  $(**) p < 0.01$ ,  $(***)$   $p < 0.001$ . Non-significant relationships are represented by transparent dotted arrows. Path coefficients indicate the strength of direct relationships between variables. The strength of indirect relationships is obtained by multiplying the coefficients along the path



concentrations due to detoxifcation mechanisms used by *L. botrana* facing the stress of a heavy metal contaminant in its diet.

The path analysis showed no efects of copper on the size of emerging parasitoids as opposed to the GLMMs. This apparent statistical inconsistency could be because copper may have had an indirect efect on the size of emerging parasitoids through an alteration of traits in the host that have not been considered in the present study, such as immune parameters. Previous studies carried out on several insects such as *Epirrita autumnata* (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) (van Ooik et al. [2007](#page-11-14), [2008\)](#page-11-15), or on *Formica aquilonia* (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) (Sorvari et al. [2007\)](#page-10-30), as well as on *L. botrana* (Iltis et al. [2022](#page-9-19)), have shown that copper reduces immune activity of larvae at high concentrations due to its role as regulator of these mechanisms (Cerenius and Söderhäll [2004;](#page-9-31) González-Santoyo and Córdoba-Aguilar [2012\)](#page-9-32). Other studies carried out on insects have suggested that immune and dietary stresses experienced by the parental generation are exacerbated in the ofspring, including the egg stage (Sadd et al. [2005](#page-10-31); Sadd and Schmid-Hempel [2007](#page-10-32); Pölkki et al. [2012;](#page-10-33) Triggs and Knell [2012](#page-11-16); Grueber et al. [2018](#page-9-33)). In line with this, we hypothesize that the host eggs exposed to the highest parental copper concentration may have been less able to mount an immune response against the parasitoids, improving their development and emergence.

The treatments tested in the present study encompass a wide range of copper concentrations in grapes and three parasitism variables which can be used to evaluate the performance of biological control agents used in IPM programs. Our results showed that copper had no efects on the number of parasitized eggs and positive efects on the emergence rate and the size of emerging parasitoids. These results indicate that the use of copper fungicides can have positive efects on the performance of *T. cordubensis* as biological control agents. Our study also showed that copper exposure of host parents had positive effects on the fertility (emergence rate) of parasitoids but no efects on fecundity (number of parasitized eggs). In line with previous studies showing efects of copper fungicides on the fecundity and fertility of other benefcial insects (Michaud and Grant [2003](#page-10-34); Ye et al. [2009](#page-11-7); El-Sheikh et al. [2010\)](#page-9-34), we propose that the next generation of biological control agents could be indirectly afected by copper. The emerging parasitoids, although more numerous at the highest copper concentration, could then show altered abilities to locate and reach their hosts. Thus, studying a wider range of exposures and efects of copper fungicides would be useful to evaluate the overall performance of biological control agents used in IPM programs.

# **Conclusion**

This study provides new insights into the non-targeted efects of copper pesticides on oophagous parasitoids used as biological control agents. Exposure to a copper fungicide through trophic accumulation generates sublethal efects on the size and emergence of *T. cordubensis* after exposure of the parental generation of *L. botrana* host eggs, itself afected by copper. The results showed positive efects of copper at a very high copper concentration on the parasitism performance of the frst generation of *T. cordubensis*. Similarly, only high copper concentrations appear to afect pest development by increasing its development time and reducing its mass. Thus, exposure of *T. cordubensis* to copper fungicides through their hosts does not seem to reduce their efectiveness as biological control agents against the grape berry moth *L. botrana*, at the most commonly observed copper concentrations in vineyards. At a very high concentration, copper even had positive efects on the performance of *T. cordubensis* as a biological control agent. The efects of copper observed at the highest concentrations seem to be related to alterations in the metabolism of the pests and potentially in their immune system, favoring the development and survival of *T. cordubensis*, depending on the differences in sensitivity or resistance of these organisms to copper. However, this study does not take into account the full range of exposures and environmental conditions that *T. cordubensis* may face under feld conditions, including for example, leaching after rainfall, bioaccumulation or exposure through the multiple treatments during pest development. Further studies will therefore be necessary to evaluate the overall efficacy of *T. cordubensis* as a biological control agent in vineyards.

# **Author contribution**

WN and PL conceived and designed the research; JM and DT were associated to this refection. WN and TG maintained the insect stock and conducted the experiments. WN, YL and PL analyzed the data. WN, PL, JM, DT, JF, GG led the writing of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the intellectual content and the writing of the manuscript and gave their fnal approval for submission.

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#### **Declarations**

**Conflict of interest** The authors have no relevant fnancial or non-fnancial interests to disclose.

**Ethics approval** All applicable institutional and/or national guidelines for the care and use of animals were followed.

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