The InterMine Android app: Cross-organism genomic data in your pocket [version 1; peer review: 1 approved, 1 approved with reservations]

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Abstract
InterMine is a data integration and analysis software system that has been used to create both inter-connected and stand-alone biological databases for the analysis of large and complex biological data sets. Together, the InterMine databases provide access to extensive data across multiple organisms. To provide more convenient access to these data from Android mobile devices, we have developed the InterMine app, an application that can be run on any Android mobile phone or tablet. The InterMine app provides a single interface for data access, search and exploration of the InterMine databases. It can be used to retrieve information on genes and gene lists, and their relatives across species. Simple searches can be used to access a range of data about a specific gene, while links to the InterMine databases provide access to more detailed report pages and gene list analysis tools. The InterMine app thus facilitates rapid exploration of genes across multiple organisms and kinds of data.

Keywords
Android app, Genomics data, Gene search, InterMine

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Author roles: Komkova D: Software; Lyne R: Writing – Original Draft Preparation; Sullivan J: Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing; Yehudi Y: Software; Micklem G: Funding Acquisition, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

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**Introduction**

InterMine is a data integration and analysis software system that has been used to create a suite of both inter-connected and stand-alone biological databases for the analysis of large and complex biological data sets. InterMine databases have been developed for the major model organisms budding yeast\(^1\), nematode worm, fruit fly\(^2\), zebrafish, mouse\(^3\) and rat\(^4\), (which we will refer to as the Model Organism Database (MOD-) InterMines, together with a human database and databases for plants, bees and wasps\(^5\), cows\(^6\), Medicago truncatula\(^7\), mitochondrial proteomics\(^8\) and drug targets\(^9\) (Table 1; https://registry.intermine.org/). Together, the InterMine databases provide access to extensive data across multiple organisms (for full listings of data included see the website for each individual InterMine, Table 1). To provide more convenient access to these data from Android mobile devices, we have developed the InterMine app\(^10\), an application that can be run on any Android mobile phone or tablet.

The InterMine app provides a single interface for data access, search and exploration of the above databases. It can be used to retrieve information on genes and gene lists, and their relatives across species. Simple searches can be used to access a range of data about a specific gene, while links to the InterMine databases provide access to more detailed report pages and gene list analysis tools.


**Methods**

**Data sources**

The InterMine app allows users to search a default subset of InterMine data warehouses (Table 1). This list is configurable, and so users are able to refine or add mines to match their interests. See https://registry.intermine.org for the full list of known public InterMine instances.

InterMine databases typically integrate data from many resources. For instance BioGRID\(^11\), IntAct\(^12\), UniProt\(^13\), and can include high quality curated data (from the Model Organism Databases), genome-wide high-throughput data and data from smaller more focused studies (See individual InterMine websites for more details).

**Search and analysis**

The InterMine app provides several ways to search and explore the data available, including a keyword search, sets of pre-defined template searches and list analysis functionality. These features are described in more detail in the use case section.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Data</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>url</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MyMine accounts
InterMine databases allow users to create an account through which they can, between sessions, store lists and searches. The InterMine App therefore allows users to log in to any accounts they hold on the underlying databases, so enabling user-created lists to be accessed.

Favourite genes
Users are also able to mark genes in search results as favourite. These genes are stored on the Android device and can be accessed without needing to log in to any of the underlying databases.

Implementation

Communication

The InterMine App draws all data from the RESTful Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that InterMine databases provide\(^1\). RoboSpice, an Open Source (Apache 2.0 Licence) Android communications library\(^2\), provides core network communication functionality. Data are loaded asynchronously over HTTP or HTTPS, depending on the preferred protocol of the database being accessed. For performance enhancement, most web service responses are stored on the device if headers state an appropriate cache lifetime.

When the app receives a JSON response from the web service, it transforms the data from a table-structured format to a more hierarchical view, which presents data more effectively on smaller-screened mobile devices.

Authentication

Each InterMine database is discrete and often maintained by different organisations. If a user wishes to authenticate with multiple InterMines - perhaps to view private gene lists stored on different databases - they will need to provide separate authentication details for each InterMine database. However this is only necessary once, as after a user has successfully authenticated in a given InterMine via a username/password pair, the app retrieves and stores an API authentication token. This ensures that the user can authenticate in the future without having to re-enter or store sensitive password details.

All of the user configuration settings and authentication tokens are stored locally on the device via SharedPreferences, Android’s dedicated settings storage mechanism\(^3\).

Internal storage

Tabular data, such as favourite genes within the app, are not suited to the key/value pair storage used in SharedPreferences\(^4\), and therefore are stored within an SQLite database on the user’s device. Data stored include the InterMine instance the data originated from, the (e.g.) gene’s identifiers, description, organism, and genomic coordinates.

Search

Keyword search is available across lists, templates and gene search results. Search results from different databases are presented to the user as a single result set, sorted by the search relevance score generated by each originating database. Search results can be shared via email, instant messaging, and other sharing media in text format, using Android’s ACTION_SEND Intent functionality\(^5\).

Advanced information

InterMine also includes advanced analysis tools - particularly data visualisations - which may not be available via the API. To access the extended information about genes or gene lists, a user can load InterMine’s advanced report pages within the app itself. This is implemented via Android’s WebView\(^6\) functionality which allows live web pages to be embedded in an application (for example, Figure 2 shows an example of an embedded InterMine WebView).

Operation

The app is implemented in accordance with Google Material Design\(^7\) guidelines, providing a predictable environment for the user, and also supports Android version 4.0 and above, ensuring it is able to run on over 99% of active Android phones as of November 2018\(^8\).

Use case

Cross-organism gene search

The keyword search simultaneously searches all InterMine databases selected through the settings option. Thus, a cross-organism overview of data available for further investigation is provided. Link-outs from the search results to each originating InterMine database provide access to detailed gene report pages. These pages collate information integrated for that gene and typically include functional summaries, ontology annotation, pathway, expression, interaction and disease data and links to additional related data.

As an example, searching for ‘dopamine’ returns dopamine-related genes from PhytoMine, MouseMine, HumanMine, TargetMine, FlyMine, RatMine, ZebrafishMine, WormMine, YeastMine, ThaleMine and HymenoperaMine (Figure 1; see Table 1 for urls). Selecting a gene from the results, for instance the human gene **DRD4** (dopamine receptor D4) displays summary information about the gene, with a link to the full gene report available from the HumanMine database. Here we learn, for example, that polymorphisms in the **DRD4** gene are associated with the disorder attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Figure 2), a condition associated with low dopamine levels. The search results therefore facilitate rapid exploration across multiple organisms and kinds of data.
Template searches

In addition to cross-organism gene search, the InterMine databases provide libraries of pre-built searches, called template searches. Such searches provide a user-friendly interface where the parameters for search filters can be specified. These templates range from simple searches, such as for a specified gene (or genes), return the corresponding Gene Ontology terms (represented as “Gene → Gene Ontology terms”), to more complex searches combining data of more than one type, such as “Tissue + interaction → genes”, which returns any genes expressed in the specified tissue that also interact with the product of a specified gene. Templates from each InterMine database are available within the InterMine App. The results are provided with a simple keyword search to facilitate further data browsing. For instance, continuing the above dopamine example, we can use a template search to identify genes in Drosophila associated with ADHD: on the templates page for the FlyMine database, we find the template “Disease → Human genes and Orthologues” (Figure 3). This template allows one to specify disease names that contains “attention deficit”, and on running the template, this returns the disease Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder along with associated human genes and their orthologues from the available InterMine databases. Using the ability to search within the results we are able to verify that the human gene we are interested in (DRD4) is associated with this condition, and that this gene has a predicted orthologue in Drosophila melanogaster, FBgn0053517, Dop2R. Through such iterative searching we can continue our investigation of this fly orthologue to identify, for instance, interacting partners, pathway and Gene Ontology annotations.

Lists

InterMine databases are especially suited to the analysis of lists of genes or other entities. Users can create their own lists, which can be stored between sessions if the user has an account for the relevant InterMine database. Again, direct links from

Figure 1. Example keyword search results. A search for dopamine returns genes from PhytoMine, MouseMine, HumanMine, FlyMine, TargetMine, RatMine, ZebrafishMine, YeastMine and ThaleMine. A section of the results from HumanMine and FlyMine is shown.
lists to the underlying InterMine databases provide access to list analysis tools, for instance enrichment statistics that help identify surprising properties, such as publications that cite an unexpectedly large number of the list members, or GO terms or protein domains that are associated with an unexpectedly large number of list members.

Public lists, which are typically interesting sets of genes derived from publications and other studies, are often provided by the database operators. For instance, in FlyMine, eleven of the public lists provide sets of genes whose expression increases at defined times during drosophila embryogenesis, as derived from Hooper et al. Further lists show genes that are expressed at increased levels in various adult fly tissues according to data from the FlyAtlas resource. Within one of these sets, PL FlyAtlas_brain_top, we can identify a set of genes up-regulated in the brain. Checking within this list, we find that the dopamine receptor gene Dop2R (FBgn0053517) identified above is present. By following the link to the corresponding list analysis page on the underlying FlyMine website, and examining the enrichment statistics, we find that the Dop2R gene is part of a set in which the Gene Ontology term dopamine receptor signaling pathway (GO:0007212) occurs unexpectedly frequently (p-value 0.001303, with Holm-Bonferroni correction). It is also apparent that two other fly dopamine receptors, Dop1R1 (FBgn0011582) and Dop1R2 (FBgn0266137) are also found in this list (Figure 5).

Figure 2. The human DRD4 report page from the HumanMine webapp, displayed in the InterMine app. (a) This view shows the first part of the report page with a summary of the Gene identifiers and data available. (b) This view shows the Disease section of the report page.
Figure 3. A FlyMine template search, “Disease -> Human genes and Orthologues”. The disease name is an editable constraint, in this case set to search for human genes associated with diseases with a name that “contains” Attention deficit, as well as their orthologues.

Conclusions

The InterMine app provides a convenient way of searching for biological information across many model organism and other databases, allowing an overview of gene function and gene relationships to be pursued. Importantly, the InterMine app reduces the effort required to obtain data available in a range of InterMine databases by removing the need to visit each one individually. Further development of the app is planned, including

a single sign-in for all of the InterMine instances through OAuth2; further search and analysis capabilities including extending the keyword search to include all data types (instead of just genes); better cross-InterMine search result ordering; an offline mode with data cached in a local database for access when no internet connection is available, and a more sophisticated query construction capability for more advanced users.

Figure 4. Results from the template “Disease -> Human genes and Orthologues”, with disease constraint set to “contains” Attention deficit, available from FlyMine. Shows the human dopamine receptor D4 associated with the disease attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder and with the D. melanogaster orthologue FBgn0053517, Dop2R.
Data availability
All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

Software availability


Archived source code at time of publication: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14786416.

License: GNU General Public License v2.

Grant information
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The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.
References


Open Peer Review

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Version 1

Reviewer Report 18 February 2019

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Authors have produced a smart phone app, and I would like to congratulate them for good work.

Here, I provide some comments:

Introduction is brief; there is no background and rational provided, which can justify the need of such application. Moreover, there are no details provided of similar smart phone applications and other related platforms (e.g. web, desktop etc.). I would suggest to address these points comprehensively and add comparative analysis of their app with other related applications, including a table based on common and variable features would be helpful.

As authors are interested in publishing their app as a scientific contribution, it’s important to have scientific justifications and discussion. At this time paper is more like a brief report.

Methodology; why Android based smart phone app, why not iOS?

Is data behind the app (collection of databases) freely accessible to the users, so they can download, and even verify the results and with other referenced databases? If not, then mention it in the paper, and give reasons for that. As this is an open source work, and data is collected from multiple open sources, its expected to have access to the data linked at the backend.

Authors have mentioned list of databases, it’s important to mention licensing information of those database, to avoid any conflict of interest. Moreover, its important to clearly mention it in the conflict of interest section.

Author’s contribution are missing, it’s also important to list those.

I would suggest to write supplementary material and there explain the app in detail (step-by-step). Guide a new user as to how to get access to the app and how each interface can be used, and what are
expected inputs/outputs. Furthermore, if word count restriction does not allow, then further extend supplementary material and provide comprehensive details of software implementation, database design and data workflow with rational for choosing those options. Make some diagrams (based on software engineering concepts) explaining design and implementation parts.

I would suggest authors to also mention:
1. Current limitations of the app.
2. Current advantages of the app, which signifies it technically and scientifically.
3. What were the major technical, non-technical, and scientific difficulties they have faced while designing and developing this app.
4. Future recommendations, in their view and for other readers.

Regarding Figures: Figure 1 seems isolated. I would rather suggest make one good multi panel Figure, and add 1, 2, 3, 4 to that.

Is the rationale for developing the new software tool clearly explained?
No

Is the description of the software tool technically sound?
Partly

Are sufficient details of the code, methods and analysis (if applicable) provided to allow replication of the software development and its use by others?
Partly

Is sufficient information provided to allow interpretation of the expected output datasets and any results generated using the tool?
Partly

Are the conclusions about the tool and its performance adequately supported by the findings presented in the article?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Bioinformatics

I have read this submission. I believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 10 January 2019
https://doi.org/10.5256/f1000research.18593.r42072

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The authors describe the InterMine Android app, which makes data available from InterMine applications on Android devices. Significantly, it is able to combine data from multiple data warehouses, and users can add their own InterMine instances to this list.

The source code is GPL licensed and available on GitHub, and the source code as it was at the time of publication has also been archived.

For this review, unfortunately I did not have access to an Android device, so I assume that the application functions as described.

The app seems to contain a carefully chosen set of core features to enable quick searches, for example by gene or template, and presents combined search results in a streamlined user interface. It is also possible to access gene lists. The WebView feature to display visualisations should also be useful, although most likely the user experience here is harder to control by nature (owing to the different widgets that may be available in InterMine instances being accessed).

I am curious as to how the app would behave if one queries different InterMine instances that have very different response times and displays the combined results. Hopefully, the app would display results incrementally as they are available, instead of waiting for the slowest instance to reply and then combining the results.

The authors have also taken reasonable care to handle authentication details and transmitted information securely.

In summary, the InterMine Android App should be useful for querying InterMine instances on the go from handheld devices, but also for combining data from different instances in a way that, as far as I know, has not been possible until now. I recommend acceptance of this report.

Is the rationale for developing the new software tool clearly explained? Yes

Is the description of the software tool technically sound? Yes

Are sufficient details of the code, methods and analysis (if applicable) provided to allow replication of the software development and its use by others? Yes

Is sufficient information provided to allow interpretation of the expected output datasets and any results generated using the tool? Yes

Are the conclusions about the tool and its performance adequately supported by the findings presented in the article? Yes
**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

**Reviewer Expertise:** Bioinformatics, software development, genomics

I have read this submission. I believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

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