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## Nucleosides, Nucleotides and Nucleic Acids

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## NEW NUCLEOBASE ANALOGS FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE TRIPLE HELIX RECOGNITION CODE

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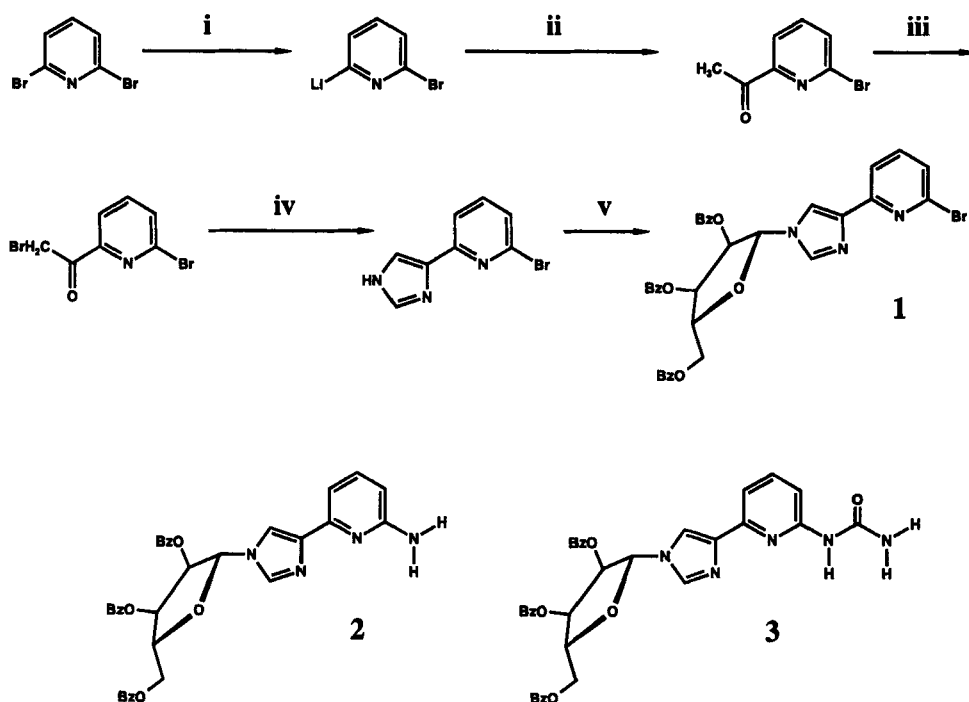
**ABSTRACT:** Molecular modeling was used to design novel nucleobases for the specific recognition of Watson-Crick base pairs within a triple helix. The synthesis for one of the nucleoside analogs is described in detail. Preliminary NMR measurements on the monomeric nucleobases in apolar solvents indicate preferred association modes and affinities towards a guanosine-cytidine Watson-Crick base pair.

Targeting double helical DNA with an oligonucleotide to form a triple helical structure offers an attractive approach to specifically modulate gene expression at the DNA level (antigene strategy). Unfortunately, with natural nucleobases the recognition is mostly limited to homopurine tracts of the double helix. Thus, novel base analogs are required to extend the recognition code to all four possible Watson-Crick base pairs, prerequisite for targeting any arbitrary sequence of genomic DNA.

In a first step we have performed semi-empirical calculations on several designed nucleobases which were expected to satisfy the various steric and electronic requirements for effective recognition of a CG base pair in a parallel triple helix motif. Interaction energies between the Watson-Crick base pair and the third base analog were determined in vacuo on the PM3 (tm) level. Due to their favorable energy of hydrogen bond formation, the three substituted 4-pyridinyl(2)-imidazoles **1**, **2** and **3** were selected as possible candidates in triple helix forming oligonucleotides.

The synthesis of the pyridinyl-imidazole ribosides is outlined in fig. 1. Starting with 2,6-dibromopyridine the heterocycle is lithiated with butyllithium and subsequently reacted with N,N-dimethylacetamide at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  to give 2-acetyl-6-bromo-pyridine in an overall yield of 55 %. After bromination of the acetyl group by addition of  $\text{Br}_2$  in glacial

acetic acid, ring closure to the substituted imidazole is achieved with formamide at 190°C within 3 hrs. Glycosylation of the heterocyclic base to give **1** was carried out under Vorbrüggen conditions. Substitution of the bromo substituent in **1** by standard methods should lead to nucleosides **2** and **3**.



**Fig. 1.** i) *n*BuLi, -70 °C; ii) *N,N*-dimethylacetamide, -80 °C; iii) Br<sub>2</sub>, HOAc, 34 %; iv) formamide, 190 °C, 3 hrs, 74 %; v) Vorbrüggen conditions, 37 %.

We have performed preliminary NMR experiments on suitably derivatized guanosine, cytidine and **1** in CD<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> at ambient and low temperatures. In this apolar solvent equimolar amounts of cytidine and guanosine strongly associate to form stable Watson-Crick GC base pairs. Addition of **1** results in a downfield shift of the non-hydrogen bonded cytosine amino proton. At the same time the guanine imino proton remains unaffected indicating the formation of a hydrogen bond between **1** and the amino proton of an intact GC base pair. Further NMR experiments on different base analogs are expected to yield preferred association modes as well as affinities towards the canonical base pair on the monomeric level.