

Biodiversity of the crustacean zooplankton in Carolina Bays of the Savannah River Site

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Background

Carolina Bays are ancient elliptical wetlands found within the Atlantic Coastal Plain from Delaware to Alabama. Most Carolina Bays have been dramatically impacted by agriculture and development, but on the Savannah River Site (Aiken, South Carolina) there exists a fairly large number of relatively intact Carolina Bays. Carolina Bays were anecdotally reported to exhibit extremely high biodiversity of crustacean zooplankton, particularly cladocera, copepods, ostracods, fairy shrimp, and clam shrimp. In January 2009, researchers from the Odum School of Ecology commenced a two year study of the composition and dynamics of crustacean zooplankton in sixteen bays on the Savannah River Site. A summary of this study is provided in @Zokan2015.

These data represent a phenomenal resource for studying population and community ecology. Data are drawn from 1,522 different sampling events and represent 485,047 individual organisms collected and identified. Some preliminary analysis has been reported by Zokan [-@Zokan2015], but the work remains largely unpublished. We will work with these data for the rest of the semester, using them to explore problems in population dynamics, species interactions, and the measurement of biodiversity.

Data

The data are archived in the zip directory `zooplankton.zip`. This directory contains two files, `SRSsurvey.xlsx` and `zooplankton.csv`. `SRSsurvey.xlsx` consists of multiple sheets with information collected about different dates of sampling, environmental conditions, and taxonomy of species collected. The file `zooplankton.csv` contains primary data on the abundance of zooplankton of each species obtained at each collection date and time.

Assignment

Working in designated groups, you must conduct a data-driven research project on one of the following questions related to the study of *biodiversity* using the Savannah River Site zooplankton survey data. Your project should address one or more of the concepts introduced in the third section of this course. Your first task will be to pose testable *hypotheses*. It is important that these hypotheses be amenable to testing with the compositional data provided. Groups are encouraged to investigate the data while discussing their hypotheses and to engage their instructors in this process. **Research topics and hypotheses must be approved by October 18, 2018.**

Once you have identified your hypotheses, work should begin in earnest. You are encouraged to consult your readings, outside material, and the instructors as you seek to answer your question. It is anticipated that considerable time outside of class will be required to complete your project. Such outside work may be achieved by meetings of the group, online meetings, or distributing responsibilities among group participants. Four class periods (starting, Oct 18) have been designated to work on these projects, primarily to enable you to consult the instructors for assistance with data analysis, programming, or other technical matters.

The required output of this work is a group presentation. In addition to your presentation, you are advised to keep track of your methods/code in an R Markdown file. Project presentations will be scored according to their *innovation, sophistication, comprehensiveness, and success in answering the question posed*. **Group presentations will be given on November 29, 2018.**

Research questions

1. Is there evidence to support the Intermediate Disturbance Hypothesis?
2. How many unrecorded zooplankton species are in this system?
3. How does species evenness change through time?
4. How does community composition vary among the three geological landforms?
5. How stable are patterns of dominance and rarity?
6. Is there evidence of priority affects in community assembly?

Group assignments

Group assignments are designated below (by student initials) - to be completed.

Group 1:

Group 2:

Group 3:

Group 4: