

Deducing interspecific competition from community data: preface

A few years ago, community ecology was so much characterized by an emphasis of interspecific competition that one felt tempted to define community ecology as the study of interspecific competition. Fortunately, the scope of the field has now broadened (again), even though the role of interspecific competition is still a controversial issue.

As this is the heyday of creationism, we may well perform a *Gedankenexperiment* and create an impartial observer. What would she say about the present competition controversy? I predict that she would find the controversy somewhat overheated, as there is no doubt that interspecific competition sometimes occurs, sometimes not. But she would also pay attention to the fact that the paradigmatic status of competition theory has led to sloppy and loose formulations invoking interspecific competition even when the data do not really support such a conjecture. However, the problem is not that simple, she would add. Sometimes biological evidence almost compels us to suspect that interspecific competition is important; and then assuming the null hypothesis of no interspecific interactions (until the null hypothesis has been experimentally rejected) makes us clever but not necessarily wise. Finally, null hypotheses do not appear out of the blue but must also be based on some assumptions — but which assumptions are the valid ones?

With such an impartial observer in mind, serious attempts at materializing her were made at Lammi (August 9–13, 1982) and at Tvärminne (September 13–17, 1982). The Nordic Council for

Ecology sponsored two international courses, one (Lammi) on the ecological significance of morphological variation in vertebrate populations, and the other (Tvärminne) on competition deduced from community data. The courses were popular, and included more than 60 papers. This issue of *Annales Zoologici Fennici* includes a selection of papers specifically related to the problems of studying interspecific competition in animal communities. The selection includes very different standpoints, which certainly well fits the present situation. Other papers presented at Lammi or Tvärminne were more autecologically oriented, or botanical, or were based on papers published or to be published elsewhere.

I thank all authors for their understanding in meeting the tight production schedule. My thanks are also due to the Nordic Council for Ecology for sponsoring the two meetings, to the Editorial Board of *Annales Zoologici Fennici* for providing space for this special issue, to the referees for the ability to combine the demands of high-quality refereeing with the urgency required, and to all the countless individuals who have helped to bring this venture to fruition. I personally thank Dr. Samuel Panelius for his pleasant cooperation in producing this special issue, Yrjö Haila and Heikki Henttonen for gratifying hours spent in planning the Lammi and Tvärminne meetings, and the staff of the Lammi Biological Station and the Tvärminne Zoological Station for their abundant assistance.

Olli Järvinen

Organizer of the symposia