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Inclusion of facilitation into ecological theory

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Abstract

Investigations of the role of competition, predation and abiotic stress in shaping natural communities were a staple for previous generations of ecologists and are still popular themes. However, more recent experimental research has uncovered the largely unanticipated, yet striking influence of facilitation (i.e. positive species interactions) on the organization of terrestrial and aquatic communities. Modern ecological concepts and theories were well established a decade before the current renaissance of interest in facilitation began, and thus do not consider the importance of a wide variety of facilitative interactions. It is time to bring ecological theory up to date by including facilitation. This process will not be painless because it will fundamentally change many basic predictions and will challenge some of our most cherished paradigms. But, ultimately, revising ecological theory will lead to a more accurate and inclusive understanding of natural communities.

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