

UNIT 3: Structured populations

1 Introduction

- Up until now we've tracked populations with a single state variable (population size or population density)
- Poll: What assumption are we making?
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- What are some organisms for which this seems like a good approximation?
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- What are some organisms that don't work so well?
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Structured populations

- If we think age or size is important to understanding a population, we might model it as an **structured** population
- Instead of just keeping track of the total number of individuals in our population ...
 - Keeping track of how many individuals of each age
 - * or size
 - * or developmental stage

1.1 Example: biennial dandelions

- Imagine a population of dandelions
 - Adults produce 80 seeds each year
 - 1% of seeds survive to become adults
 - 50% of first-year adults survive to reproduce again
 - Second-year adults never survive
- Will this population increase or decrease through time?

How to study this population

- Choose a census time
 - Before reproduction or after
 - Since we have complete cycle information, either one should work
- Figure out how to predict the population at the next census

Census choices

- Before reproduction
 - All individuals are adults
 - We want to know how many adults we will see next year
- After reproduction
 - Seeds, one-year-olds and two-year-olds
 - Two-year-olds have already produced their seeds; once these seeds are counted, the two-year-olds can be ignored, since they will not reproduce or survive again

What determines λ ?

- If we have 20 adults before reproduction, how many do we expect to see next time?
- $\lambda = p + f$ is the total number of individuals per individual after one time step
- Poll: What is f in this example?
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- Poll: What is p in this example?
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What determines \mathcal{R} ?

- \mathcal{R} is the average total number of offspring produced by an individual over their lifespan
- Can start at any stage, but need to close the loop
- Poll: What is the reproductive number?
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What does \mathcal{R} tell us about λ ?

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- If $\mathcal{R} = 1.2$, then λ
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1.2 Modeling approach

- In this unit, we will construct *simple* models of structured populations
 - To explore how structure might affect population dynamics
 - To investigate how to interpret structured data

Regulation

- *Simple* population models with regulation can have extremely complicated dynamics
- *Structured* population models with regulation can have insanely complicated dynamics
- Here we will focus on understanding structured population models *without regulation*:
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Age-structured models

- The most common approach is to structure by age
- In age-structured models we model how many individuals there are in each “age class”
 - Typically, we use age classes of one year
 - Example: salmon live in the ocean for roughly a fixed number of years; if we know how old a salmon is, that strongly affects how likely it is to reproduce

Stage-structured models

- In stage-structured models, we model how many individuals there are in different stages
 - I.e., newborns, juveniles, adults
 - More flexible than an age-structured model
 - Example: forest trees may survive on very little light for a long time before they have the opportunity to recruit to the sapling stage

Discrete vs. continuous time

- Structured models can be done in either discrete or continuous time
- Continuous-time models are structurally simpler (and smoother)
- Poll: How do population characteristics affect the choice?
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- Adding age structure is conceptually simpler with discrete time
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2 Constructing a model

- This section will focus on **linear, discrete-time, age-structured** models
- State variables: how many individuals of each age at any given time
- Parameters: p and f for each age that we are modeling

When to count

- We will choose a census time that is appropriate for our study
 - Before reproduction, to have the fewest number of individuals
 - After reproduction, to have the most information about the population processes
 - Some other time, for convenience in counting
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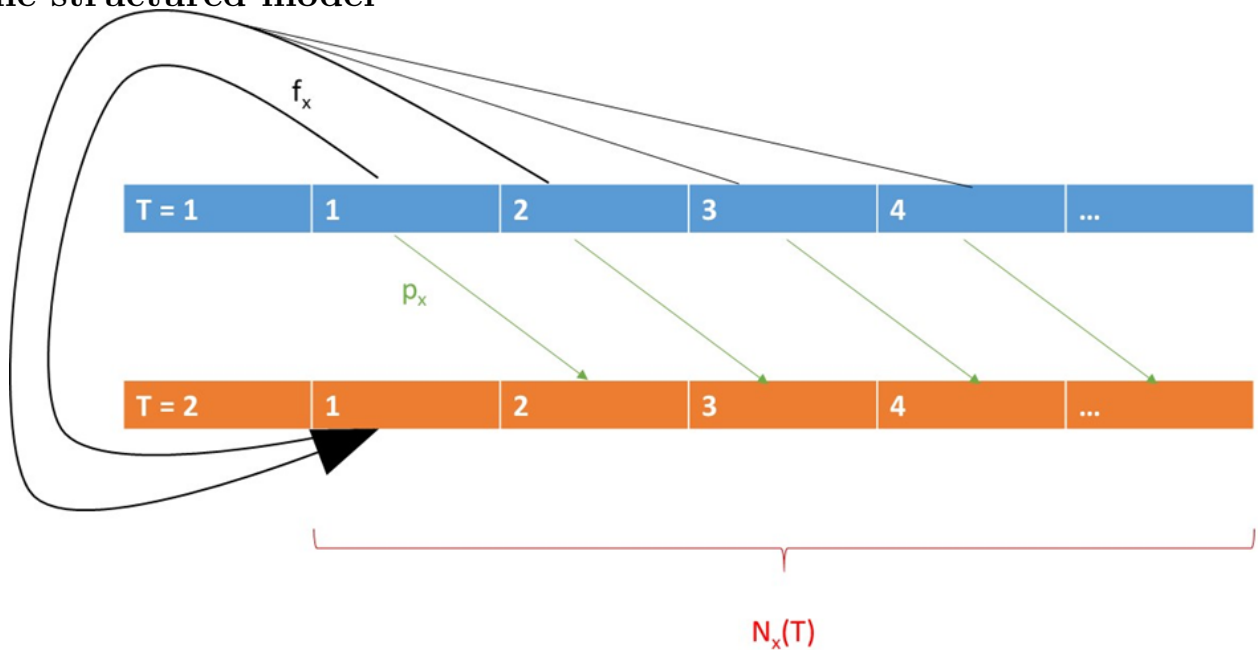
The conceptual model

- Once we choose a census time, we imagine we know the population for each age x after time step T .
 - We call these values $N_x(T)$
- Now we want to calculate the expected number of individuals in each age class at the next time step
 - We call these values $N_x(T + 1)$
- Poll: What do we need to know?
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Closing the loop

- f_x and p_x must close the loop back to the census time, so we can use them to simulate our model:
 - f_x has units [new indiv (at census time)]/[age x indiv (at census time)]
 - p_x has units [age $x + 1$ indiv (at census time)]/[age x indiv (at census time)]

The structured model



2.1 Model dynamics

Short-term dynamics

- This model's short-term dynamics will depend on parameters ...
 - It is more likely to go up if fecundities and survival probabilities are high
- ... and starting conditions
 - If we start with mostly very old or very young individuals, it might go down; with lots of reproductive adults it might go up

Long-term dynamics

- If a population follows a model like this, it will tend to reach
 - a **stable age distribution**:
 - * the *proportion* of individuals in each age class is constant

- a stable value of λ
 - * if the proportions are constant, then we can average over f_x and p_x , and the system will behave like our simple model
- Poll: What are the long-term dynamics of such a system?

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Exception

- Populations with **independent cohorts** do not tend to reach a stable age distribution
 - A **cohort** is a group that enters the population at the same time
 - We say my cohort and your cohort interact if my children might be in the same cohort as your children
 - or my grandchildren might be in the same cohort as your great-grandchildren
 - ...
- As long as all cohorts interact (none are independent), then the unregulated model leads to a stable age distribution (SAD)

Independent cohorts

- Some populations might have independent cohorts:
 - If salmon reproduce *exactly* every four years, then:
 - * the 2015 cohort would have offspring in 2019, 2023, 2027, 2031, ...
 - * the 2016 cohort would have offspring in 2020, 2024, 2028, 2032, ...
 - * in theory, they could remain independent – distribution would not converge
- Examples could include 17-year locusts, century plants, ...

3 Life tables

- People often study structured models using **life tables**
- A life table is made *from the perspective of a particular census time*
- It contains the information necessary to project to the next census:
 - How many survivors do we expect at the next census for each individual we see at this census? (p_x in our model)
 - How many offspring do we expect at the next census for each individual we see at this census? (f_x in our model)

Cumulative survivorship

- The first key to understanding how much each organism will contribute to the population is **survivorship**
- In the field, we estimate the probability of survival from age x to age $x + 1$: p_x
 - This is the probability you will be *counted* at age $x + 1$, given that you were *counted* at age x .
- To understand how individuals contribute to the population, we are also interested in the overall probability that individuals survive to age x : ℓ_x .
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Calculating \mathcal{R}

- We calculate \mathcal{R} by figuring out the estimated contribution at each age group, *per individual who was ever counted*
 - We figure out expected contribution given you were ever counted by multiplying:
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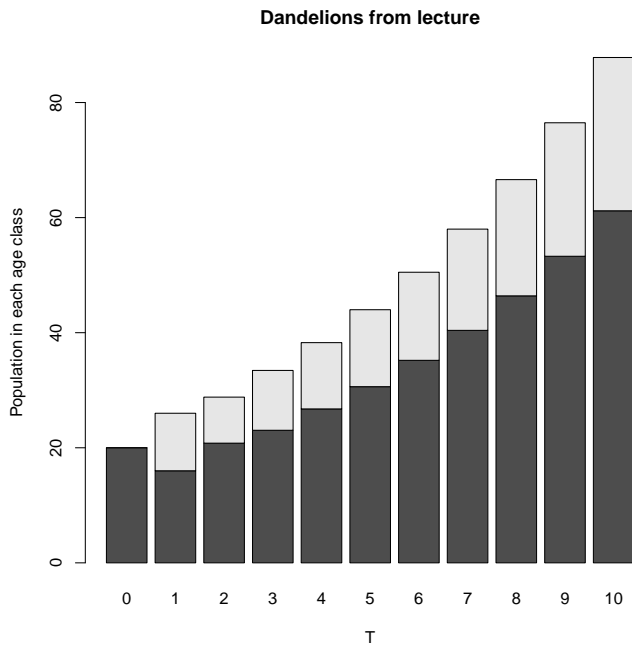
3.1 Examples

Dandelion example

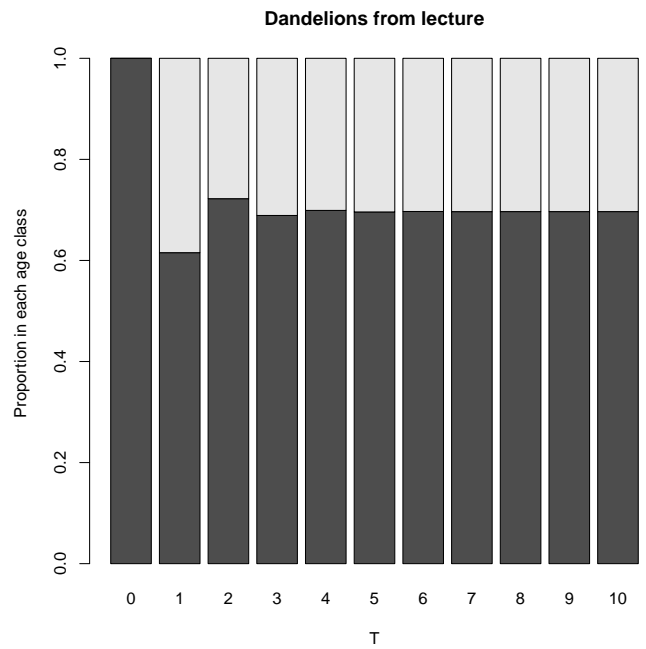
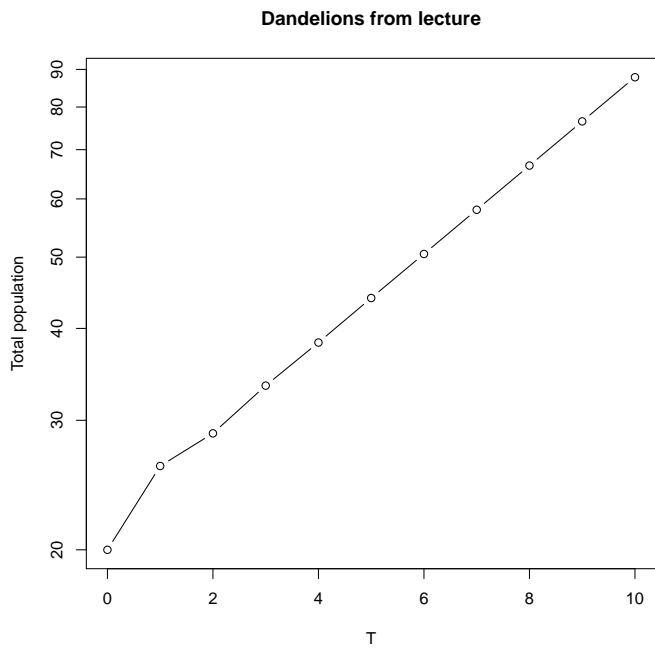
Dandelion life table

x	f_x	p_x	ℓ_x	$\ell_x f_x$
1				
2				
R				

Dandelion dynamics



Dandelion dynamics



Squirrel example

Gray squirrel population example

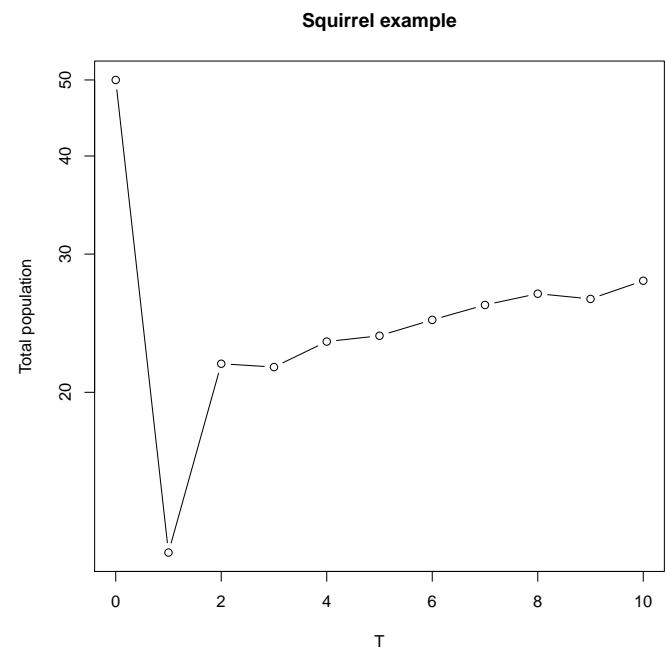
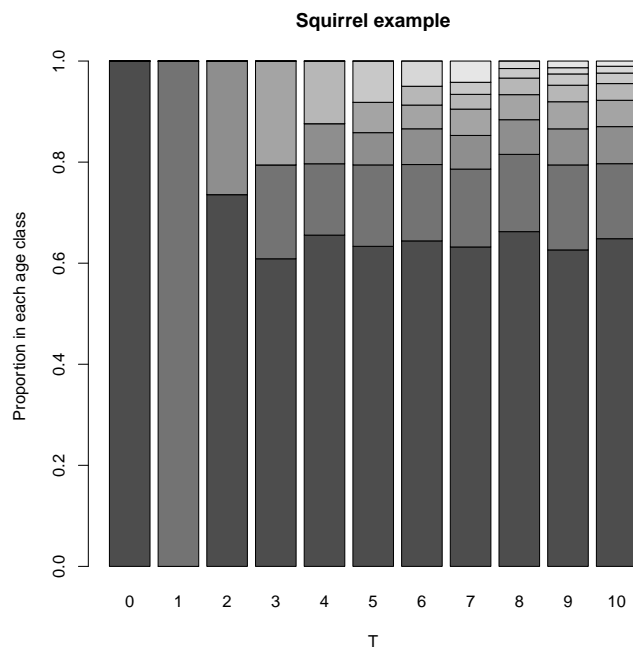
x	f_x	p_x	ℓ_x	$\ell_x f_x$
1	0	0.25		
2	1.28	0.46		
3	2.28	0.77		
4	2.28	0.65		
5	2.28	0.67		
6	2.28	0.64		
7	2.28	0.88		
8	2.28	0.0		
R				

Squirrel observations

- Poll: Do you notice anything strange about the squirrel life table?

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Gray squirrel dynamics



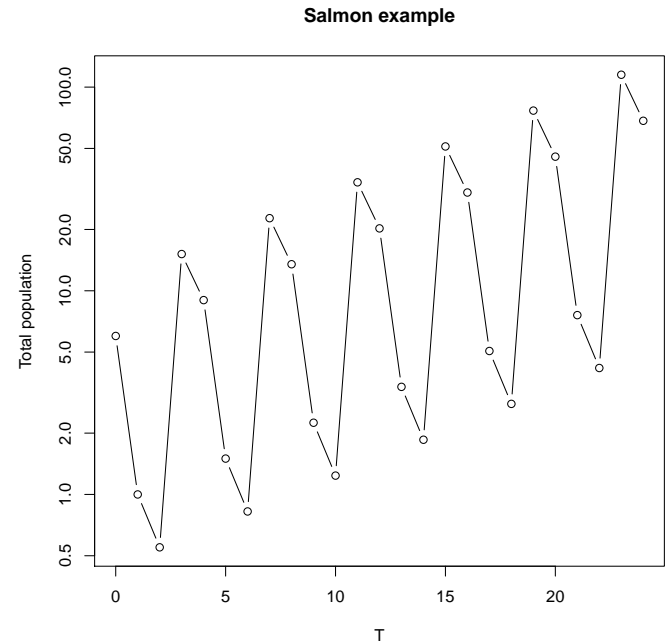
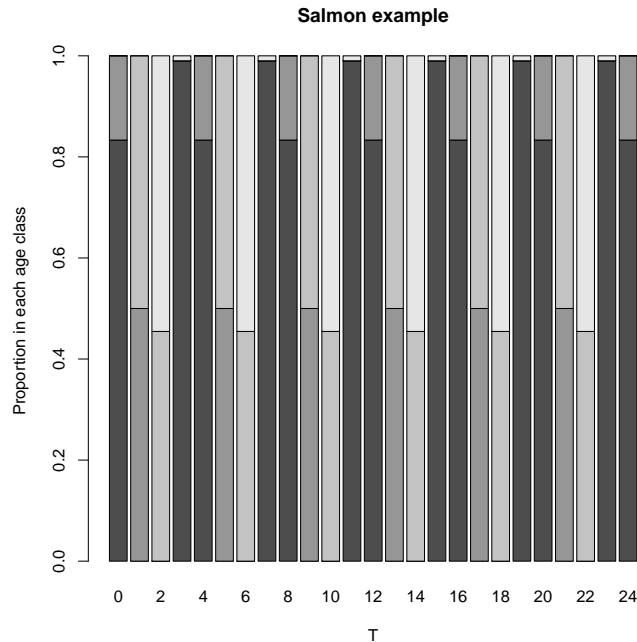
Salmon example

- What happens when a population has independent cohorts?
 - Does not necessarily converge to a SAD

Salmon example

x	f_x	p_x	ℓ_x	$\ell_x f_x$
1	0	0.1		
2	0	0.5		
3	0	0.6		
4	50	0		
R				

Salmon dynamics



3.2 Calculation details

f_x vs. m_x

- Here we focus on f_x – the number of offspring seen at the next census (next year) per organism of age x seen at this census
- An alternative perspective is m_x : the total number of offspring per reproducing individual of age x
- Poll: How would I calculate one from the other?

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When do we start counting?

- Is the first age class called 0, or 1?
 - In this course, we will start from age class 1

- If we count right *after* reproduction, this means we are calling newborns age class 1. Don't get confused.

Calculating \mathcal{R}

- The reproductive number \mathcal{R} gives the average lifetime reproduction of an individual, and is a valuable summary of the information in the life table
 - $\mathcal{R} = \sum_x \ell_x f_x$
 - If $\mathcal{R} > 1$ in the long (or medium) term, the population will increase
 - If \mathcal{R} is persistently < 1 , the population is in trouble
- We can ask (for example):
 - Which ages have a large *contribution* to \mathcal{R} ?
 - Poll: Which values of p_x and f_x is \mathcal{R} sensitive to?

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The effect of old individuals

- Estimating the effects of old individuals on a population can be difficult, because both f and ℓ can be extreme
 - The contribution of an age class to \mathcal{R} is $\ell_x f_x$
 - Poll: Extreme how?
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- Reproductive potential of old individuals *may* or *may not* be important
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3.3 Measuring growth rates

- In a constant population, each age class replaces itself:
 - $\mathcal{R} = \sum_x \ell_x f_x = 1$
- In an exponentially changing population, each year's **cohort** is a factor of λ bigger (or smaller) than the previous one
 - λ is the finite rate of increase, like before
- Looking back in time, the cohort x years ago is λ^{-x} as large as the current one
- The existing cohorts need to make the next one:
 - $\sum_x \ell_x f_x \lambda^{-x} = 1$

The Euler equation

- If the life table doesn't change, then λ is given by $\sum_x \ell_x f_x \lambda^{-x} = 1$
- We basically ask, if the population has the structure we would expect from growing at rate λ , would it continue to grow at rate λ .
- On the left-side each cohort started as λ times smaller than the one after it
 - Then got multiplied by ℓ_x .
- Under this assumption, is the next generation λ times bigger again?
- Example from spreadsheet

λ and \mathcal{R}

- If the life table doesn't change, then λ is given by $\sum_x \ell_x f_x \lambda^{-x} = 1$
 - What's the relationship between λ and \mathcal{R} ?
- When $\lambda = 1$, the left hand side is just \mathcal{R} .
 - If $\mathcal{R} > 1$, the population more than replaces itself when $\lambda = 1$. We must make $\lambda > 1$ to decrease LHS and balance.
 - If $\mathcal{R} < 1$, the population fails to replace itself when $\lambda = 1$. We must make $\lambda < 1$ to increase LHS and balance.
- So \mathcal{R} and λ tell the same story about whether the population is increasing

Time scales

- λ gives the number of individuals per individual *every year*
- \mathcal{R} gives the number of individuals per individual *over a lifetime*
- Poll: What relationship do we expect for an annual population (individuals die every year)?
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- Poll: For a long-lived population?
 - - *
 - *

Studying population growth

- λ and \mathcal{R} give similar information about your population
- \mathcal{R} is easier to calculate, and more generally useful
- But λ gives the actual rate of growth
 - More useful in cases where we expect the life table to be constant with exponential growth or decline for a long time

Growth and decline

- If we think a particular period of growth or decline is important, we might want to study how factors affect λ
 - Complicated, but well-developed, theory
 - In a growing population, what happens early in life is more important to λ than to \mathcal{R} .
 - In a declining population, what happens late in life is more important to λ than to \mathcal{R} .
- Which is likely to be more important to ecology and evolution?
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4 Life-table patterns

4.1 Survivorship

Patterns of survivorship

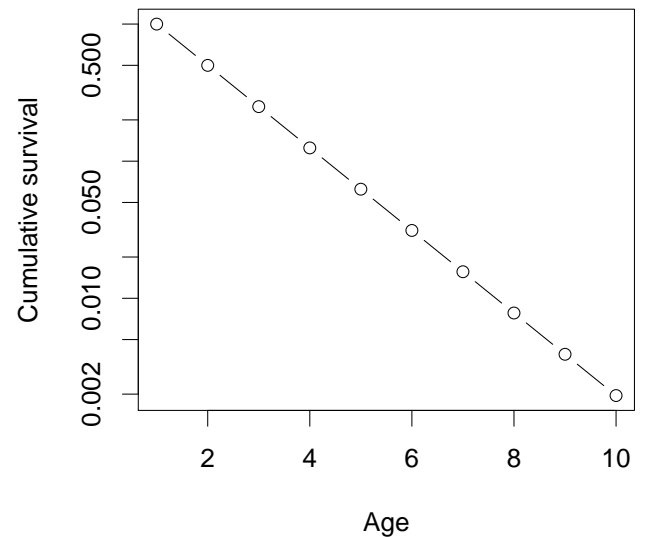
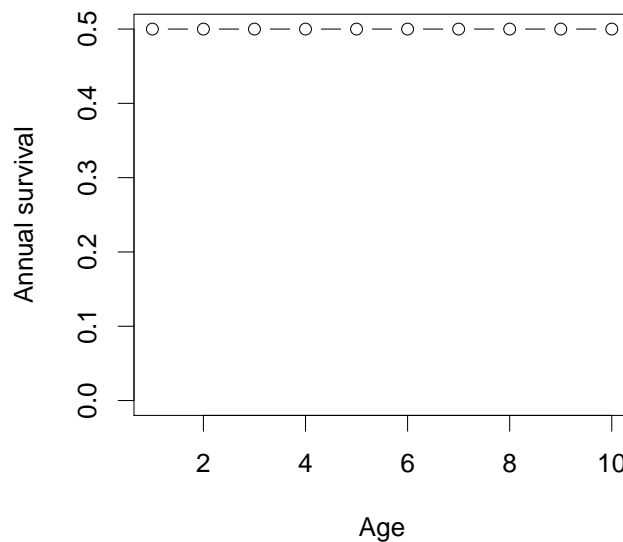
- Poll: What sort of patterns do you expect to see in p_x ?
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- What about ℓ_x ?
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Starting off

- Recall: we always start from age *class* 1
 - If we count newborns, we still call them class 1.
- Poll: What is ℓ_1 when we count before reproduction?

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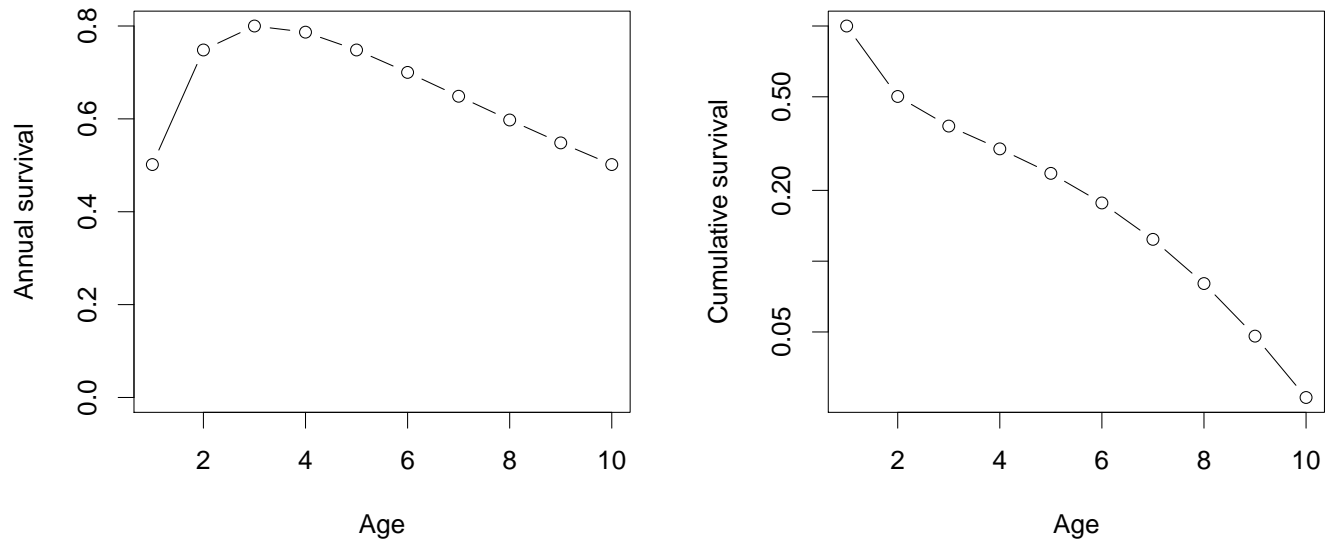
Constant survivorship



“Types” of survivorship

- There is a history of defining survivorship as:
 - Type I, II or III depending on whether it increases, stays constant or decreases with age (*don't memorize this, just be aware in case you encounter it later in life*).
 - Real populations tend to be more complicated
- Most common pattern is: high mortality at high and low ages, with less mortality between

Changing survivorship



4.2 Fecundity

- Just as in our simple population growth models, we define fecundity as the expected number of offspring at the next census produced by an individual observed at this census
 - Parent must survive from counting to reproduction
 - Parent must give birth
 - Offspring must survive from birth to counting
- Remember to think clearly about gender when necessary
 - Are we tracking females, or everyone?

Fecundity patterns

- f_x is the average number of new individuals *counted* next census per individual in age class x *counted* this census
- Fecundity often goes up early in life and then remains constant
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- It may also go up and then come down
 -
- It may also go up and up as organisms get older

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5 Age distributions

- <http://www.gapminder.org/population/tool/>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

Learning from the model

- If a population has constant size (ie., the same number of individuals are born every year), what determines the proportion of individuals in each age class?

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- What if population is growing?

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Stable age distribution

- If a population has reached a SAD, and is increasing at rate λ (given by the Euler equation):
 - the x year old cohort, born x years ago originally had a size λ^{-x} relative to the current one
 - a proportion ℓ_x of this cohort has survived
 - thus, the relative size of cohort x is $\lambda^{-x}\ell_x$
 - SAD depends only on survival distribution ℓ_x and λ .

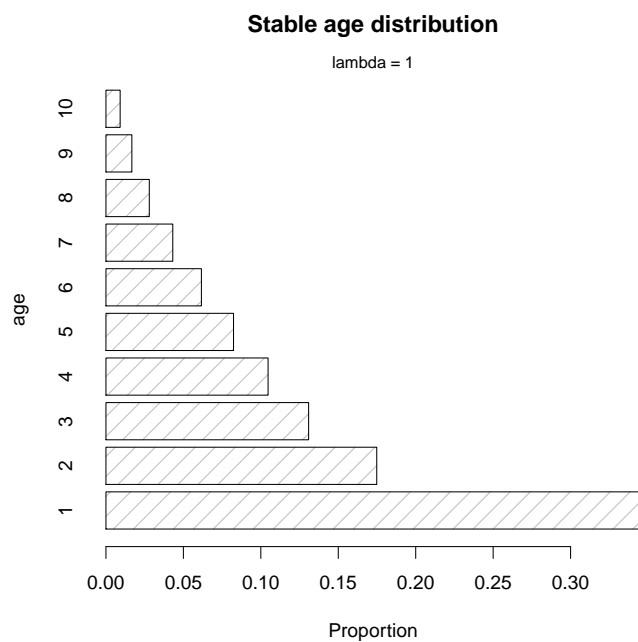
Patterns

- Populations tend to be bottom-heavy (more individuals at lower age classes)
 - Many individuals born, few survive to older age classes
- If population is growing, this increases the lower classes further
 - More individuals born more recently
- If population is *declining*, this shifts the age distribution in the opposite direction
 - Results can be complicated
 - Declining populations may be bottom-heavy, top-heavy or just jumbled

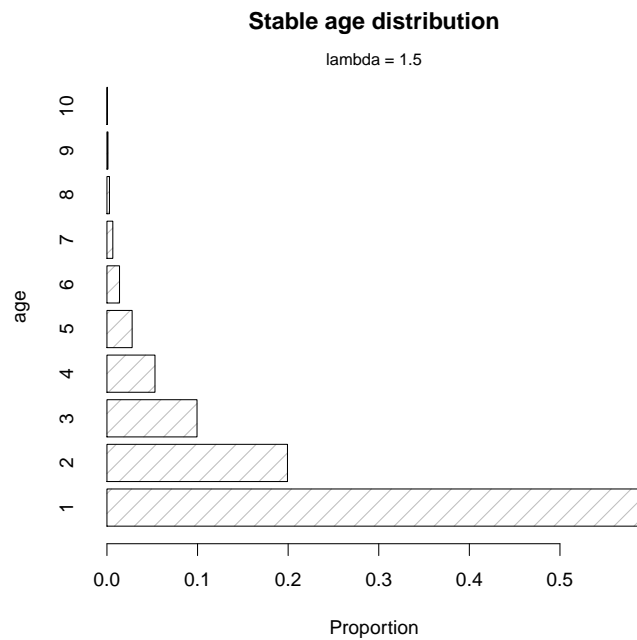
University cohorts

- McMaster accepts only first-year students. For any given stage (e.g., end of third year) the same proportion drop out each year
- What can you say about the relative size of the classes if:
 - The same number of students is admitted each year?
 - *
 - Poll: More students are admitted each year?
 - *
 - Poll: Fewer students are admitted each year?
 - *

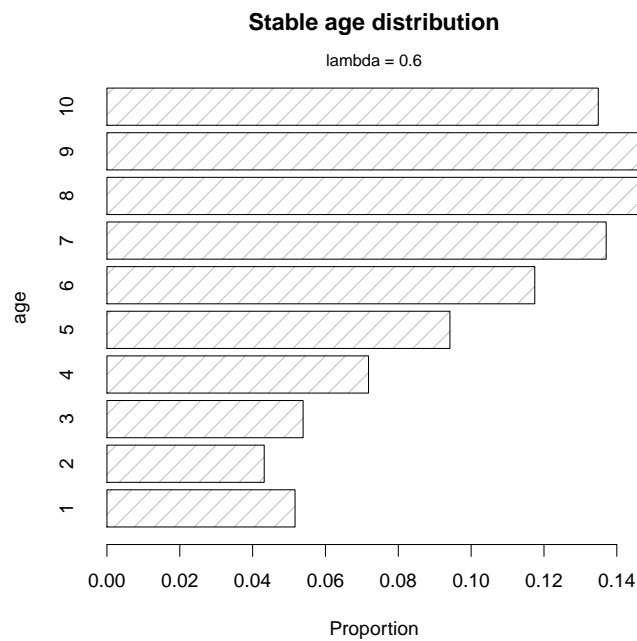
Age distributions



Age distributions



Age distributions



6 Other structured models

Forest example

- Forests have obvious population structure
- They also seem to remain stable for long periods of time

- Populations are presumably *regulated* at some time scale

Forest size classes

- When we go to an apparently stable forest ecosystem, it seems to be dominated by large trees, not small ones. What up?
- Poll: How is it possible that these systems are dominated by large trees?
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6.1 Stage structure

- Stage structure works just like age structure, except that what stage you are in is not strictly predicted by how old you are
 - Age-structured models need fecundity, and survival probability
 - - *
 - *
 - More complicated models are also possible

Advantages

- Stage structured models don't need a maximum age
- Nor one box for every single age class

Unregulated growth

- What happens if you have a constant stage table (no regulation)?
 - Fecundity, and survival and recruitment probabilities are constant
- Similar to constant life table
 - Can calculate \mathcal{R} and λ (will be consistent with each other)
 - Can calculate a stable stage distribution
- Unregulated growth cannot persist

Summary

- If the life table remains constant (no regulation or stochasticity):
 - Reach a stable age (or stage) distribution
 - Grow or decline with a constant λ
 - Factors behind age distribution can be understood

6.2 Regulated growth

- Our models up until now have assumed that individuals are independent
- In this case, we expect populations to grow (or decline) exponentially
- We do not expect that the long-term average value of \mathcal{R} or λ will be exactly 1.

The value of simple models

- There is a lot of mathematical study of unregulated, age-structured populations, but it should be taken with a grain of salt
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- Understanding this behaviour is helpful:
 - interpreting age structures in real populations
 - beginning to understand more complicated systems

Regulation and structure

- We expect real populations to be regulated
- The long-term average value of λ under regulation *could* be exactly 1
- There is also likely to be substantial variation from year to year, due to changing conditions and other random-seeming forces

Dynamics

- We expect to see smooth behaviour in many cases
- Cycles and complex behaviour should arise for reasons similar to our unstructured models:
 - Delays in the system
 - Strong population response to density

- Age distribution will be determined by:
 - ℓ_x , and
 - whether the population has been growing or declining recently