**Testing for generality of pollinator recognition in *Heliconia***

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**Running head:** Cryptic pollinator filters in *Heliconia*

**Abstract**

Partner redundancy increases the robustness of plant-pollinator communities to extinctions of mutualistic partners. However, selection may reinforce floral traits that filter pollinator communities to promote pollination by efficient pollinators, reducing redundancy. We tested the generality of a recently described, cryptic pollinator filter termed ‘pollinator recognition’ (PR) which could drastically reduce the realized number of pollinators compared to the number of floral visitors. PR was first documented in *Heliconia tortuosa* on the grounds that with pollen quality experimentally held constant, pollen tube germination occurred following visits from some hummingbird species but not others. We assessed the prevalence of PR in four taxa spread widely across the Heliconiaceae.

With aviary experiments that standardized pollen quality and minimized variation in pollen quantity, we demonstrated that visits by pollen-free hummingbirds increased pollen tube rates compared to hand pollination in two species; we also corroborated previous results that visits by long-billed, but not short-billed hummingbirds increased pollen tubes in *H. tortuosa.* While the mechanism remains equivocal, cryptic pollinator filters could be more common than previously anticipated and could alter perspectives on redundancy in plant-pollinator communities.

**Key Words:** Pollinator filters, plant-pollinator interactions, specialization, pollinator efficiency

**Introduction**

Generalized pollination systems in which plants are pollinated by many floral visitors, each of which may visit many plants, are expected to result in communities that are more robust to fluctuations in the abundance of mutualistic partners (Waser et al. 1996; Rezende et al. 2007; Alarcón et al. 2008; Kaiser‐Bunbury et al. 2010; Thébault and Fontaine 2010; Rohr et al. 2014). This stability is derived through redundant interactions and may be important to the maintenance of biodiversity in plant-pollinator communities during an era of global climate change and anthropogenic disturbances (Bascompte et al. 2006; Kaiser‐Bunbury et al. 2010; Kaiser-Bunbury et al. 2017). However, natural selection may favor floral traits that filter these generalized communities of floral visitors to promote pollination by efficient mutualistic partners (Schemske and Horvitz 1984; Shuttleworth and Johnson 2009; Muchhala et al. 2010; Armbruster 2017).

Pollinator filters, in general, manipulate animal visitation patterns. For example, nectar that is distasteful to some pollinators will deter them from visiting (Stevenson et al. 2017) and exploitation barriers, such as long corolla tubes that limit access to floral rewards (Gill 1987; Temeles et al. 2009), may make visitation unprofitable for some animals (Rodríguez-Gironés et al. 2015; Temeles et al. 2019). These filters reduce the generality of visitation patterns so their effects should be evident in species interaction data (generally pollinator visits to flowers); however, previous work with *Heliconia tortuosa* (Heliconiaceae) documented a ‘cryptic pollinator filter’ that promotes pollen germination and pollen tube growth based on the identity, behavior, and bill morphology of hummingbird floral visitors (Betts et al. 2015).

In single-visit aviary experiments that controlled for variation in pollen deposition and visitation by different pollinator species (Betts et al. 2015), the number of pollen tubes that germinated in a style (henceforth ‘pollen tube rate’) was nearly six times greater in flowers visited by hummingbirds with bill shapes that are morphologically matched to the flowers (i.e., long, decurved bills) than in flowers visited by hummingbirds with mismatched bill shapes. Furthermore, in a separate experiment, manual nectar removal showed higher pollen tube rates than hand pollination alone. Betts et al. coined this behavior ‘pollinator recognition’ and posited that nectar removal and pollen deposition by long-billed hummingbirds provides a cue for pollen grain germination and pollen tube growth, thus reducing pollination efficiency by morphologically mismatched hummingbirds that visit and transfer pollen but cannot access the full nectar volume at the base of the flower (Betts et al. 2015). The authors suggest that despite receiving visits from at least six hummingbird species, *H. tortuosa* specializes on long-billed hummingbirds that are highly mobile (Stiles and Wolf 1970; Betts et al. 2015). The mobile foraging behaviors of these birds may make them more likely to carry high-quality pollen from geographically and genetically distant sources (Wright 1943), thereby promoting outcrossing and gene flow among *H. tortuosa* individuals (Wright 1943; Torres-Vanegas et al. 2019).

Betts et al. (2015) speculated that pollinator recognition may occur in other plant taxa, particularly in relatively stable tropical systems with high pollinator diversity. Determining whether this is the case is important for two reasons. First, pollinator recognition could be one means through which tight morphological matching evolves despite apparently generalized interaction networks. Second, if the number of realized pollinator species is much smaller than the number of observed floral visitors, pollination networks could be more vulnerable to anthropogenic change (Kaiser‐Bunbury et al. 2010; Thébault and Fontaine 2010). Here, we test for evidence of generality of pollinator recognition in four species distributed widely across the Heliconiaceae phylogeny.

**Materials and Methods**

*Study species*

Heliconiaceae is a monogeneric family consisting of an estimated 200-250 species which radiated rapidly c.a. 39-24 million years ago (Iles et al. 2016). *Heliconia* species are rhizomatous perennial herbs distributed widely throughout the Neotropics and on some South Pacific islands. Flowers are situated within showy bracts and composed of six tepals, five of which are fused to create a cylindrical perianth, the sixth peels back upon anthesis. A defining feature of the Heliconiaceae is a staminode (modified stamen) that partially covers the opening to the nectar chamber at the base of the perianth. Flowers of the Heliconiaceae last a single day from anthesis to dehiscence, allowing pollination experiments to be conducted daily.

We targeted species that were common in the living collection at the Organization of Tropical Studies Las Cruces Biological Station, Puntarenas Province, Coto Brus, Costa Rica, (8° 47′ 7″ N, 82° 57′ 32″ W) and could be found naturally or in ornamental gardens in the area. We additionally required that plants were setting seed and that local hummingbirds could be seen visiting the flowers. The fulfillment of the first criterion indicated that a viable pollen source existed in the area, since previous work on mating systems in *Heliconia* suggests that the hermaphroditic flowers of many species are self-incompatible to partially self-compatible, but not largely selfing (Kress 1983; Pedersen and Kress 1999; Schleuning et al. 2011; Betts et al. 2015; Torres-Vanegas et al. 2019; Janeček et al. 2020). The fulfillment of the second criterion indicated that local hummingbirds would visit the flowers inside aviaries despite the fact that many plant species in the collection are not native to Costa Rica. The plant species that met these criteria included *H. hirsuta*, which is native to South America and Trinidad (Bernal et al. 2016), *H. rostrata*, native to western South America (Bernal et al. 2016) but a common ornamental throughout the tropics, and *H. wagneriana*, native to Costa Rica (Stiles 1979).Furthermore, because so little is known of this unusual plant behavior, we also sought to replicate the results of the original study in *H. tortuosa,* an exercise rarely undertaken in experimental ecology (Fraser et al. 2020).

We selected two hummingbird species with different bill morphologies and foraging behaviors as “treatments” in order to accentuate differences in morphological matching to and nectar depletion from the range of flower shapes exemplified by the four *Heliconia* species (Figure 1). Green hermit hummingbirds (*Phaethornis guy*) are common traplining hummingbirds in the region with long ( = 41.90 mm, = 1.52 mm, = 27 birds of mixed sex), moderately decurved bills (Figure 1), whereas rufous-tailed hummingbirds (*Amazilia tzacatl*) are common territorial hummingbirds with short ( = 22.03 mm, = 1.45 mm, = 357 birds of mixed sex; data from Hadley et al. (2018)), straight bills. If visits from morphologically matched floral visitors increase the numbers of successful pollen tubes for each species, we would predict the following: 1) For *H. wagneriana* and *H. tortuosa*, we would predict greater numbers of pollen tubes in flowers visited by green hermit hummingbirds compared to rufous-tailed hummingbirds. 2) Because both *H. hirsuta* and *H. rostrata* have shorter, straighter flowers and both hummingbird bill shapes approximate the shape of the flowers well (Figure 1), we would not predict a large difference in the number of pollen tubes between flowers visited by green hermits and those visited by rufous-tailed hummingbirds. We therefore use hand pollinations as a control treatment in all experiments since hand pollinations do not replicate a pollinator visit in any way aside from pollen deposition. Hence, we would predict the fewest pollen tubes in flowers pollinated by hand. Furthermore, this helped us control for potentially low genetic diversity in the pollen pool since the control flowers (hand pollination only) and the treatment flowers (hand pollination followed by a visit from a pollen-free hummingbird) received pollen by hand from the same donor.

*Aviary Experiments*

To test whether pollen germination and tube growth is dependent on the identity and morphology of a floral visitor, we conducted 110 pollination experiments (N= 214 flowers; Table 1) with captive hummingbirds inside portable aviaries (Figure S1) during the 2018 and 2019 dry seasons (Feb-Mar). In these experiments, we randomly assigned flowers to one of three experimental treatments: 1) hand-pollination only (HP treatment); 2) hand pollination followed by a visit from a pollen-free short-billed hummingbird (SB treatment; = 14 *A. tzacatl* individuals used in experiments); 3) hand pollination followed by a visit from a pollen-free long-billed hummingbird (LB treatment; = 12 *P. guy* individuals used in experiments).

In all experiments, we used only virgin flowers that had been covered with mesh bags prior to anthesis in order to preclude pollination by free-ranging pollinators. Flowers were not emasculated, however, due to extremely low numbers of pollen tubes in emasculated flowers in natural settings (A. S. Hadley, *unpublished data*). Using small, portable aviaries (1m x 1m x 2m; Figure S1) that we erected around live inflorescences, we standardized the number of pollinator visits to the flowers that were visited by birds (limited to one). Additionally, we standardized the quality of pollen available to flowers that received the control treatment (HP; no interaction with a hummingbird) and those visited by a hummingbird. We did this by hand pollinating two virgin flowers using pollen from the same donor, then randomly assigning one as a control which we covered with a paper sleeve during the experiment. The other was left open to a visit from a captive hummingbird (LB or SB) that we cleaned under 20x magnification prior to releasing into the aviary. We further attempted to reduce variation in the quantity of pollen available to the flowers by applying pollen in an even layer across the stigmatic surface with a toothpick under 20x magnification. The size of Heliconia pollen grains makes it impractical to quantify the number of grains on the stigma in the field, but all hand pollinations were conducted by the same experimenter to limit variability. After the hummingbird visited the treatment flower, we checked the stigma again to ensure that pollen was still present and in an even layer on the stigmatic surface (see Appendix S1 for more details).

*Tests for a mechanism*

We conducted additional experiments to test hypotheses of the mechanism of pollinator recognition. Betts et al. (2015) found increased pollen tube rates in flowers from which nectar was removed compared to hand pollination alone. As an independent test of whether nectar removal provides a cue to which plants respond, we manually extracted nectar from flowers of three of the four species (*H. hirsuta* did not produce flowers regularly enough to conduct the full suite of experiments) and compared pollen tube rates to control flowers that were hand-pollinated on the same day (Table 2; Figure 2). Alternatively, it is possible that the long-billed hummingbirds trigger a mechanical cue (Braam 2005) when they insert their bills into the flower. To test whether we could induce an increase pollen tube success rates by inserting a pipette tip molded in the shape of a green hermit bill, we conducted experiments in which we simply inserted the pipette tip as a hummingbird would, then removed it without removing any nectar (Table 2; Figure 2). Finally, because we were unable to perfectly replicate the timing of events in a natural pollinator visit in which nectar removal and pollen deposition happen concurrently, we conducted some experiments in which we hand pollinated before manually removing nectar and some in which we hand pollinated after removing nectar. Differences in these pollen tube rates may indicate the importance of the timing of pollen transfer and nectar removal or bill insertion (see Appendix S1 for more detail).

*Statistical methods*

We separately analyzed pollen tube count data from each set of experiments (i.e., 1. aviary experiments and 2. nectar removal experiments). We fit hierarchical Poisson models of pollen tube counts using a Bayesian regression approach implemented in the R package ‘rstan’ (Carpenter et al. 2017; R Core Team 2019). We included effects for each plant of each species (i.e., random effects) to account for potentially correlated observations that could arise from scoring pollen tubes in multiple flowers from the same plant. A Bayesian approach allowed us flexibility in defining the variance structure such that plant-level effects are considered draws from distributions unique to each plant species, each with a different variance. We assumed plant effects are distributed normally (on the log scale) with mean of zero and unknown, species-specific variance, and used weakly informative Gaussian priors for all regression coefficients (see Appendix S1 for full model specification and prior justification). Furthermore, we defined our priors for regression coefficients to concentrate mass around zero such that evidence of an effect needs to be strong to shift the posterior distribution away from zero; our effect sizes are therefore conservative.

We assessed HMC chain convergence using the statistic, checking that the value was below 1.1 for all parameters being estimated (Gelman et al. 2013) and used posterior predictive checks for a range of summary statistics to evaluate model fits. Below, we report posterior mean pollen tube counts per style for a given treatment and plant species as with a subscript indicating the treatment and plant species. We use *HP*, *SB*, *LB*, *HPNE*, *NEHP,* and *BM* to indicate the treatment. Treatment codes are as follows: *HP* identifies the hand-pollinated control flowers; *SB* indicates the treatment in which we hand pollinated flowers, then allowed a clean, rufous-tailed hummingbird (short, straight bill) to visit; *LB* indicates the treatment in which we hand pollinated flowers, then allowed a pollen-free green hermit hummingbird (long bill) to visit; *HPNE* identifies the treatment in which we hand pollinated the flowers then manually removed the nectar; *NEHP* identifies the treatment in which we hand pollinated the flowers after removing nectar; and *BM* identifies the treatment in which we inserted a pipette tip but did not attempt to remove nectar. We use the letters *h*, *r*, *t*, and *w* to identify *H. hirstuta*, *H. rostrata*, *H. tortuosa*, and *H. wagneriana* in the subscripts (respectively). We additionally report differences between treatments as the fold change in pollen tube rates and use the notation for the fold change between treatments and for plant species . Ninety-five percent credible intervals for posterior estimates are presented in square brackets.

**Results**

When we standardized pollen quality between control (HP) and treatment flowers (SB or LB) by hand-pollinating flowers prior to allowing a single visit by a cleaned hummingbird, we found evidence that a visit by a morphologically matched, long-billed hummingbird increases pollen tube rates for *H. tortuosa* over hand pollination alone*.* Pollen tube rates were 4.978 times greater [1.590, 12.590] following visits from long-billed hummingbirds compared to the control treatments with only hand pollination. However, short-billed hummingbird visits did not boost pollen tube rates for *H. tortuosa* above the hand pollinated controls(= 0.228 tubes per style [0.050, 0.556]; = 0.284 tubes per style [0.0482, 0.761]; Figure 1). Thus, the pollen tube rate in flowers visited by morphologically matched hummingbirds was greater (4.509 times greater [1.070, 13.883]) than the pollen tube rate in flowers visited by morphologically mismatched hummingbirds.

In *H. rostrata* flowers, pollen tube rates in those visited by hummingbirds were greater than hand pollination alone regardless of the bird species used in experiments. The estimated rates were nearly identical in flowers visited by long-billed hummingbirds and those visited by short-billed hummingbirds, but were approximately double the rate in hand pollinated controls ( = 0.390 tubes per style [0.226, 0.621]; = 0.701 tubes per style [0.393, 1.11]; = 0.722 tubes per style [0.377, 1.219]; Figure 2).

For *H. hirsuta* and *H. wagneriana,* single visits from cleaned hummingbirds did not enhance pollen tube success rates above hand pollination alone(Figure 1), and pollen tube rates in *H. wagneriana* flowers that were visited by clean birds were actually reduced. The number of pollen tubes per style in *H. wagneriana* flowers visited by green hermits were a little more than half those of hand pollinations (0.644 [0.362, 1.065]) and short-billed hummingbird visits yielded pollen tube rates less than half of hand pollination treatments (0.433 [0.181, 0.819]; Figure 2).

When we experimentally removed nectar using pipette tips to test the hypothesis that differential nectar removal may be the mechanism for pollinator recognition, the effect of nectar removal on pollen tube rates for *H. rostrata* and *H. tortuosa* was negligible (Figure 2). We did find some evidence that our nectar removal treatments had a positive effect on pollen tube germination relative to hand-pollinations alone for *H. wagneriana* ( = 0.415 [0.094, 1.043]; = 0.885 [0.257, 2.068]; Figure 2), but this effect is driven in part by a small number of influential observations (>5 pollen tubes found in 2 styles), and disappears after removing them, so we caution readers in their interpretation of this result. Inserting a hummingbird bill mimic (i.e., pipette tip) into flowers as a mechanical signal without removing nectar also did not induce substantially higher pollen tube rates in any of the tested species (Figure 3), and, in all cases, hand pollinating flowers after removing nectar resulted in the fewest pollen tubes per style out of all treatments, generally about half of hand pollination alone ( = 0.449 [0.090, 1.240]; = 0.637 [0.049, 2.332]; = 0.442 [0.097, 1.151]).

**Discussion**

We tested for generality of pollinator recognition in *Heliconia,* which may act in conjunction with physical exploitation barriers such as long and/or curved corolla tubes to filter the pollinator community. If the capacity for plants to filter floral visitors based on morphological trait matching is widespread, this would have implications in the robustness of plant-pollinator communities. Given local extinction or reduced densities of morphologically matched pollinators, mismatched pollinators may alter their foraging behaviors to exploit newly available resources (Brosi and Briggs 2013; Temeles et al. 2016; Bezemer et al. 2019; Temeles and Bishop 2019); however, visits from mismatched pollinators would not compensate for the pollination services lost to a plant with a pollinator recognition mechanism, even if they deposit pollen at the stigma. This could increase the likelihood of coextinctions.

We provide evidence that the pollinator recognition behavior likely occurs beyond a single species. Experiments that allowed us to standardize pollen quality and minimize variation in the quantity of pollen at the stigmatic surface showed that pollen tube rates in flowers pollinated by hand were elevated if also visited by pollen-free hummingbirds with morphologically matched bills compared to hand-pollination alone in two of four species tested. Furthermore, flowers that were visited by birds with mismatched bill shapes did not enhance pollen tube rates compared to hand pollination alone in *H. tortuosa* flowers. These results substantiate the findings of Betts et al. (2015) for *H tortuosa,* and provide new evidence supporting pollinator recognition in *H. rostrata*.

*The mechanism of pollinator recognition*

Previous work demonstrated increased pollen tube rates with manual nectar extraction treatments compared to hand-pollinations alone in *H. tortuosa* (Betts et al. 2015). Betts et al. (2015) hypothesized that, because birds with well-matched bill morphologies can drain the nectar chamber but those with mismatched bills often cannot (Betts et al. 2015; Temeles et al. 2019), nectar removal could provide a cue to which plants respond to promote successful pollen tube growth. Our results do not corroborate these findings as we did not find a substantial increase in pollen tube rates for *H. tortuosa* or *H. rostrata* following manual nectar removal treatments. While we found increased pollen tube rates in *H. wagneriana* flowers following manual nectar removal (Figure 2), this result is tenuous because the pollen tube counts in the flowers from which we removed nectar are similar to the pollen tube counts in our hand pollinated flowers from the aviary experiments (Figures 1&2).

An alternative explanation for the increase in pollen tube rates following bird visits (*H. tortuosa* and *H. rostrata*; Figure 1) is that pollen supplied by hand was subsequently removed or rearranged by pollen-free hummingbirds. This could reduce pollen competition at the stigmatic surface, potentially promoting pollen tube germination (Young and Young 1992). However, there are two primary reasons we find this explanation unlikely. First, both long-billed and short-billed hummingbirds contact the stigmas of *H. tortuosa*, but only the long-billed hummingbird visits resulted in increased pollen tube counts. Second, neither the pollen tube rates in flowers that received the bill mimic treatment nor the flowers for which pollen was applied before nectar removal (potential for pollen rearrangement) differed strongly from those in the hand pollinated control flowers, which also have no potential for pollen rearrangement (Figure 2). While not a perfect test of this hypothesis since the physical properties of a pipette tip do not perfectly replicate those of a hummingbird bill , we do not believe that a parsimonious explanation is one in which hummingbirds arrange pollen at the stigmatic surface in precisely the right way to stimulate germination. We note, however, this could still result in a cryptic pollinator filter. In summary, the evidence that nectar removal provides the cue for pollinator recognition is equivocal and further experiments are necessary to verify nectar removal or establish a new mechanism.

*Implications of pollinator recognition*

*Heliconia tortuosa* and *H. rostrata* represent two distant branches of the >200-branch Heliconiaceae phylogeny (Iles et al. 2016). Given the positions of these two taxa on the tree, pollinator recognition could be basal and potentially prevalent in the Heliconiaceae and other related families. The realized degree of specialization in *Heliconia*-hummingbird pollination systems may therefore be more specialized than what interaction data (flower visits) show. Data on pollination efficiencies of morphologically matched and mismatched pollinators could help to support or refute this idea, but little is known about pollination of these *Heliconia* species in their home ranges. More generally, mismatched pollinators are often less efficient pollinators (Muchhala 2003, 2007; Peralta et al. 2020), but this is largely thought to be due to differences in pollen transfer efficiency and not active filtering by the plant. More data is needed on these and other taxa to understand the implications of pollinator recognition in natural populations.

In forest fragments around Coto Brus, mismatched hummingbirds account for c.a. 10% of honest visits (those in which the visitor contacts the reproductive organs of the flower) to *H. tortuosa* (K. Leimburger, *unpublished data*). Pollinator recognition is therefore likely to be an additional pollinator filter acting in conjunction with morphological barriers that often result in only imperfect resource partitioning by floral visitors (Feinsinger 1976; Rodríguez-Gironés et al. 2015; Vlašánková et al. 2017; Metelmann et al. 2020). The morphologically matched hummingbirds of Coto Brus carry taxonomically diverse pollen loads, but the ratio of *Heliconia* to other pollen tends to be greater than it is on mismatched pollinators (Betts et al. 2015). Because these morphologically matched pollinators forage over a larger range (Stiles 1975) and carry high *Heliconia* pollen loads, the genetic pool available to a plant on a given visit may be more diverse than on a visit from a mismatched pollinator. We therefore agree with Betts et al. (2015) that filtering the short-billed, territorial hummingbirds could enhance the genetic diversity of pollen grains that reach the ovules. Indeed, Torres-Vanegas et al. (2019) found genetic signatures in *H. tortuosa* populations that are consistent with this hypothesis.

In *H. rostrata* styles, visits from clean hummingbirds to hand-pollinated flowers also increased pollen tube rates, but regardless of the bird species. The effects in *H. rostrata* were nearly identical for two species of hummingbirds with substantially different morphologies and feeding behaviors (Stiles and Wolf 1970; Betts et al. 2015). However, given the relatively short, straight corolla of *H. rostrata*,both hummingbird species we used for experiments were able to achieve excellent morphological matches and might not be expected to differ in their visitation characteristics, such as nectar consumption. We did not destructively sample flowers after hummingbird visits to measure the nectar remaining, but both species of birds can be seen drinking from *H. rostrata* flowers in recorded videos (supplementary video S1&S2).

In Peru, seven hummingbird species of various sizes and with various bill shapes have been observed visiting *H. rostrata*, but nothing is known of their pollination efficiencies (B. Dalsgaard, *personal communication*). Based on our results showing increased pollen tube rates in bird visited flowers compared to hand pollination, we posit that *H. rostrata* could filter visits from animals without complementary morphologies. This idea is supported by data from Janeček et al. (2020) who recorded olive sunbirds (*Cyanomitra olivacea*) and Camaroon sunbirds (*Cyanomitra oritis*) visiting *H. rostrata* flowers in South Africa where it has been introduced. These authors found that *H. rostrata* flowers left open to visits from sunbirds had extremely low pollen tube rates, as did hand-pollinated flowers.

Conversely, we were not able to detect an effect of hummingbird visits to *H. hirsuta* and even found reduced pollen tube rates in *H. wagneriana* flowers that were visited by hummingbirds relative to hand-pollinations alone. While the mechanisms underlying this result in *H. wagneriana* remain unclear, we identified one way in which this species differs from the others that could produce this result. Gannon et al. (2018) discovered that *H. wagneriana* plants have a mechanism for keeping the anthers protected within the perianth and then rapidly extending them as a hummingbird visits. This is thought to protect pollen from desiccation and/or increase pollen transfer to pollinators during the first visit. Once exposed, however, pollen grains desiccate relatively quickly, and often fail to adhere to the stigmatic surface. This may make the pollen grains of *H. wagneriana* especially easy to dislodge. While we checked that pollen was still present on the stigma after a bird visited, the size of *Heliconia* pollen makes exact quantification in the field infeasible. Thus, it is possible that reduced pollen loads after the birds visited resulted in reduced pollen tube counts relative to hand pollination alone.

Using camera traps, Gannon et al. (2018) found that c.a. 97% of the visits to open *H. wagneriana* flowers around Las Cruces are by traplining species with morphologically matched bill shapes. Similarly, Snow and Snow (1972) report only green hermit and rufous-breasted hermit (*Glaucis hirsutus*) visitors at *H. hirsuta* flowers in Trinidad (part of its native range), both of which have well-matched bills. While we did not find evidence for pollinator recognition in these two *Heliconia* species, it is unlikely that a pollinator recognition mechanism would help to filter floral visitors given that morphologically mismatched pollinators may not account for a considerable proportion of floral visits.

Our results help to highlight the potential for cryptic filters and therefore cryptic specialization. Detailed and manipulative experiments to assess realized pollination network structure and vulnerability to disturbance are therefore warranted (Bascompte et al. 2006; Kaiser‐Bunbury et al. 2010; Thébault and Fontaine 2010; Rohr et al. 2014). A starting point to identify possible cryptic pollinator filters is the comparison of pollen tube rates (or other proxies/metrics for reproduction) in hand-pollinated flowers versus open pollination. Reduced pollen tube success in hand pollinated flowers compared to open pollination would identify the potential for more complex dynamics than the simple placement of pollen on the stigma. Notably, Pedersen and Kress (1999) report a c.a. four-fold increase in pollen tube rates in *Heliconia paka* flowers that were visited by honeyeaters compared to those pollinated by hand. These results would be consistent with what we would predict for *H. paka* given a pollinator recognition mechanism. More generally, Young and Young (1992) report that hand-pollinated flowers had reduced reproductive output compared to open-pollinated flowers for 17 of 52 plant species from highly divergent lineages. We know of no follow-up experiments with these or related taxa, but we urge others to conduct similar experiments to those presented here to examine the potential for cryptic specialization in other pollination systems.

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**Data accessibility**

Data from pollination experiments are available on the Dryad Digital Repository (<https://doi.org/10.5061/dryad.2280gb5nj>).

**Author contributions**

MGB, ASH, and DGG designed experiments. DGG analyzed the data and wrote the original version of the manuscript. All authors contributed to data collection and critical review of the manuscript.

**Ethical statement**

All experimental methods involving hummingbirds were approved by the Oregon State University Animal Care and Use Committee (Animal Care and Use Permit 5020) and all international research guidelines and practices were followed.

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**Table 1:** Sample sizes for individual plants (grouping factor) and flowers (experimental units) for each species treatment combination.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Hand pollination**  **(HP)\*** | **Hand pollination + short-billed bird (SB)** | **Hand pollination + long-billed bird (LB)** | **Hand pollination (HP)\*\*** | **Hand pollination + pipette** | **Hand pollination + nectar extraction** | **Nectar extraction + hand pollination** |
| ***H. hirsuta*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Plants | 7 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Flowers | 11 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ***H. rostrata*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Plants | 19 | 13 | 10 | 13 | 7 | 15 | 5 |
| Flowers | 39 | 25 | 19 | 24 | 8 | 38 | 11 |
| ***H. tortuosa*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Plants | 10 | 8 | 6 | 10 | 7 | 10 | 4 |
| Flowers | 16 | 10 | 11 | 27 | 7 | 36 | 5 |
| ***H. wagneriana*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Plants | 12 | 6 | 11 | 11 | 7 | 8 | 4 |
| Flowers | 31 | 17 | 23 | 17 | 7 | 12 | 10 |

\*Hand pollination controls for aviary experiments

\*\*Hand pollination controls for nectar removal experiments

**Diagram

Description automatically generated**

**Figure 1:** **a)** Pollen tube rates in flowers that received hand pollination only (HP) and those visited by a pollen-free hummingbird following hand pollination. Flowers were visited by either short-billed (SB), rufous-tailed hummingbirds (*Amazilia tzacatl*) or long-billed (LB) green hermit hummingbirds (*Phaethornis guy*). Thick, interior error bars show 80% posterior credible intervals and thin error bars show 95% credible intervals. The grey, horizontal dashed lines show estimates () of the pollen tube rates in flowers left open to free ranging pollinators. **b)** Silhouettes of the hummingbird species used in aviary experiments coupled with typical flowers of each *Heliconia* species.

**Diagram

Description automatically generated**

**Figure 2:** Results from experimental tests of the effect of nectar depletion on pollen tube rates. We used hand-pollination (HP) as a control treatment and compared pollen tube rates in flowers that received the control treatment to those in flowers that received out-cross pollen by hand either before (HP + nectar extraction) or after (Nectar extraction + HP) manual removal of the nectar in the flower. As a test of whether pollen germination success could be boosted after the mechanical stimulus of a hummingbird inserting its bill to drink from the flower, we tested for an effect of pipette insertion without removing any nectar (HP + pipette). Interior, thick error bars show 80% posterior credible intervals and narrow bars show 95% credible intervals.