Response to Reviewers’ Comments

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**Title of Article**: An experimental framework for quantifying the degree of intraguild predation in a three-species omnivorous food web in the field

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Dear Dr. Richelle Tanner,

Thank you for inviting me to submit a revised version of the manuscript. I greatly appreciate the valuable comments and suggestions from the reviewers, and the revision made accordingly has substantially improved the manuscript. Based on the associate editor’s and reviewers’ comments, I have made the following major changes in this revised manuscript:

* Revised the “Relevant hypothesis” section by referring to Rickers et al’s (2006) study
* Revised the “New research idea” section by clarifying the principal idea of the proposed framework

My point-by-point responses are provided in the following section.

Sincerely,

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**Associate Editor's Comments to the Author:**  
  
**Comment** > Both reviewers are positive about this manuscript and make important recommendations that will improve its scope and strength. The author might wish to consider a revision of their title, especially in line with the discussions and implications suggested by reviewer 2 (i.e. is their approach only relevant to a three-species food web?). The author might also wish to explore advanced approaches of stable isotope trophic ecology beyond bulk isotopes, such as compound-specific stable isotopes (e.g. essential amino acids) - might this add value to the interpretations that can be made from complicated food webs where not all dietary items are known or sampled? (again, in line with some of reviewer 2's comments)

**Response** >

**Reviewer 1's Comments to the Author:**

Intraguild predation (IGP) is very common in arthropods. However, due to too many uncertain environmental factors and technical methods, it is difficult to quantify IGP. In this study, the control feeding experiment and stable isotope analysis of field samples were combined to evaluate the degree of IGP in a three-species omnivorous food web (top predator + mesopredator + shared prey). The experimental design of this study is reasonable, and the stable isotope analysis technology used is relatively mature and reliable, which can solve the problem of quantifying IGP to a certain extent.

Enumerated Concerns:

1. Manuscripts should quote more literatures published in the past five years, while the current cited literatures have been published for a long time, which does not reflect the cutting-edge research.

2. Please check the description format of references in and after the text. The format is inaccurate in some places.

3. In the sentence of collecting samples in the field (L 132 − 134), it is necessary to clarify the type and spatial location of the sampling habitat, or explain the environmental factors in the collection area, so as to eliminate the impact of other different environmental factors as far as possible and improve the accuracy of evaluating the degree of IGP.

**Reviewer 2's Comments to the Author:**

The present manuscript propose a method to evaluate the intraguild predation in trophic webs by using the N15 isotopic content of top predators, meso-predators and a shared prey aiming to construct an IGP curve based on controlled feeding trials. The author proposes to use this IGP curve to estimate the degree of intraguild predation in the field. IGP is a problematic issue in trophic web studies when a large number of taxa are included. The author´s proposal is an interesting point of view aiming to facilitate the management of field data but I believe it could be useful for simpler trophic interactions than the example proposed in the manuscript (although is asimple tri-trophic web, spiders have very complex feeding preferences). I am aware of the difficulty of studying arthropod food webs in the field and the advantages and disadvantages of using stable isotopes. I would like to expose several considerations about the proposal in general:

The main problem of the IGP to study trophic interactions in very generalist predators, such as spiders, is the high number of potential prey available in the field (including cannibalism) that could be determinant to establish correct levels of N15 and unapproachable in an experimental trial. In fact, although these generalist taxa belong to agricultural systems (simplified systems), the variety of prey can be very high. The author considers this limitation and recommends collecting large enough field samples of top predator to reflect the overall IGP patterns. However, other limitation comes from those cases where phytophagous insects show high levels of N15. For example, in Lepidoptera, the metamorphosis metabolism results in adult individuals with N15 levels comparable to those of predators (see Tibbets et al. 2008). Predating on such phytophagous insects could lead to a high enrichment in the N15 content of top predators not produced by the IGP. Therefore, I consider that this procedure could be useful for other less complex food webs in which IGP is present but the number of potential prey for top and meso-predators is less varied (Acari or Neuroptera for instance). In line with the same subject, in lines 168-172 the author indicates that it is possible to adjust the N15 signature of top predators that feed on non-focal prey. What is the way to do this calibration without knowing the N15 of these other preys? Please specify the way to calibrate N15 and add references.

As the author rightly points out, this is a promising proposal but one that needs to be refined in the future. Therefore, in order to be able to carry out the necessary experiments to fine-tune this protocol, it would be necessary to set out in more detail its limitations.

Tibbets TM, Wheeless LA, Del Rio CM, 2008. Isotopic enrichment without change in diet: An ontogenetic shift in δ15N during insect metamorphosis. Funct. Ecol. 22, 109–113.

Other comments:

Abstract

Line 32: to study

Introduction

Line 101: Quinby, Creighton & Flaherty 2020 (add a comma between authors).

The proposed experimental framework

Line 96-108: Have been the arthropods kept under starving for a time before the experimental trial?

Line 108-110: In the case of spiders or other arthropods such as larval green lacewings it would be desirable to consider the cannibalism event in the experiment including individuals from the same species in the proportions of the diet.

Is the meso-predator fed with the shared prey before the assay or is kept under starving for a time? It would be important to include these two treatments in the experimental assay because the gut content of the meso-predator may affect the N15 content of the top predator.

Line 120-121: Likewise the top predator, the mesopredator is a generalist spider that can eat other resources different from the shared prey used in the experimental trial. Therefore, the N15 content of mesopredators may vary respect to the individuals used in the experimental trial. It would be necessary to collect mesopredator individuals from the field aiming to know the N15 content in field conditions.

Applications

Line 138: to study