The impact of tornado and salvage-logging on ground beetle (Coleoptera: Carabidae) taxonomic and functional diversity

**Research objectives**

The goal of this study is to understand the impacts of combined natural and anthropogenic forest disturbance on ground dwelling arthropods. In 2012, a tornado event knocked over canopy trees in a mature deciduous forest. After logging occurred on part of the tornado-affected area, we were curious how these combined disturbances would affect the invertebrates living on the forest floor.

**Methods**

Study site and tornado event

Research was conducted at Powdermill Nature Preserve in Rector, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. This is an area of temperate deciduous forest which serves as the field research station for the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. In June 2012, a tornado touched down, uprooting canopy trees in two areas, each about 120 × 480 m. The areas are located approximately at (40.14266, -79.27889) and (40.1447, -79.27491). These two areas are on the north- or northwest-facing slopes, which were dominated by maples (*Acer* spp.), tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), and other deciduous trees (Murphy et al. 2015), with an understory of predominately spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) (Calinger et al. 2015). Before the tornado, this area had been forested since at least 1939 (Murphy et al. 2015).

Salvage logging

In summer through winter of 2013, half of each wind-disturbed area was salvage-logged using heavy machinery to remove the fallen and residual standing trees. In the southwest windthrow, the northwestern (lower elevation) side of the windthrow was logged, while in the northeast windthrow, the southeastern (higher elevation) side was logged. The operation of salvage logging on only half of each tornado-impacted area allowed us to compare arthropod communities between salvaged and un-salvaged forest.

Invertebrate sampling

In 2015 and 2022 (three and ten years post-tornado), ground-dwelling invertebrates were sampled as part of a larger research effort to understand the impacts of salvage-logging. Six transects were established across the disturbances, each with a site in windthrow (n=6), salvaged (n=6), and surrounding undisturbed forest (n=12). To capture invertebrates, one barrier pitfall trap was installed in each site and monitored every two weeks during the summer months. In 2015, traps were set up on May 27-28 and taken down on August 17 for a total of 6 collection intervals. In 2022, traps were set up on June 1-2 and taken down on September 6 for a total of 8 collection intervals. A pitfall trap consisted of two pairs of plastic cups (each pair having an inner 500 mL cup and an outer 1 L cup) which were placed into the ground so that the lip of the cup was flush with the ground surface. The two pairs of cups were placed 1 m from each other, and garden edging (Suncast® eco edge) was placed between them to create a barrier. Cups were filled 4 cm high with propylene glycol (recreational vehicle and marine antifreeze, Peak Company Old World Industries, Clear Lake, Texas) with a few drops of detergent added to prevent escapes. Masonite board (100 cm2) was placed at 3 cm above each cup to prevent overfilling due to rain. Steel landscaping cloth was secured over cups using 30 cm stakes in order to limit mammal disturbance. Traps were collected every 2 weeks by pouring sample through a fine mesh strainer and placing the contents into 70% ethanol, before refilling the sample cups with propylene glycol for the following interval.

Annual temperature and rainfall

In 2022 in Donegal, winter air temperatures (Jan-Feb) were about 30-40 F highs and 0-20 F lows (ranging down to -10 F in January), while summer temperatures were around 70-90 F highs and 50-60 F lows. At Laurel Summit, trends are similar. [Insert information about precipitation – not sure how to sum up all the rainfall events].

In 2015 in Donegal, winter temperatures (Jan-Feb) were about 20-40 F highs and 0-20 F lows (ranging down to -14 F in February), while summer temperatures were around 70-80 F highs and 50-70 F lows. [Insert info about precipitation]. <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/past-weather/40.24770172431236,-79.57671787154743,40.06053164832756,-79.12775827691024>

Environmental variables of the forest floor

Environmental variables of the forest floor relating to light availability, ground cover, vegetation height, and soil moisture were collected near each pitfall trap. Light availability was recorded using a spherical crown densiometer, which measures canopy openness. The densiometer was turned in each of the four cardinal directions and the number of squares with sky visible was recorded. Canopy openness was measured on June 9-10 and August 5, 2015, and on June 1-2, 2022. To record ground cover, we randomly selected two 1 m2 quadrats around the pitfall trap. Ground cover was estimated using the following categories: ground-level vegetation, leaf litter, bare ground, fine woody debris (<10 cm diameter at the large end), coarse woody debris (>= 10 cm diameter), and rocks. Ground cover estimates were collected monthly during the growing season. We additionally measured the average height of vegetation within the quadrats. Values from the two quadrats around each pitfall trap were averaged together. We measured soil moisture at three locations adjacent to each pitfall trap using a Dynamax Inc. (Houston, Texas) TH20 portable soil moisture meter with a Theta Probe ML2x sensor. Soil moisture measurements were taken biweekly when pitfall samples were collected. The three readings were averaged together for a single value at each plot-date combination.

Ground beetle identification

Beetles were counted and removed from the samples, and all ground beetles (Carabidae) were pinned or pointed. Ground beetles were identified to species using keys in (Lindroth 1961; Bousquet 2010; Freitag 1969; Bousquet and Messer 2010; Harden and Guarnieri 2017) and the nomenclature was verified using (Bousquet 2012).

Morphological trait measurement

We selected a set of ecomorphological traits of beetles, meaning that these morphological traits have relationships with ecological variables (Fountain-Jones, Baker, and Jordan 2015). The traits we selected have been shown in previous studies to be related to environmental variables on the forest floor such as ground cover type and light availability (Table 1). For each species of ground beetle, we chose three male and three female individuals to measure trait values (Fountain-Jones, Baker, and Jordan 2015). These individuals were chosen in a way that attempted to encompass the intraspecific variation in body size. The individuals chosen for trait measurement were deposited as vouchers at the Ohio State Triplehorn Insect Collection (OSUC). Because the objective of this study was to capture interspecific variation in traits, we took the average of the six individuals to obtain mean trait values for each beetle species. Because we were interested in body proportions as opposed to absolute trait values, we analyzed traits after dividing by body length (Table 1). We used body length as a proxy for overall size of the beetle (Ribera et al. 2001).

Table 1. Ecomorphological traits measured in this study.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Trait** | **Calculation** | **Connection to habitat** |
| Body length | **a** | Shorter body length was found for ground beetles caught in wind-disturbed forests, relative to undisturbed forests (Sklodowski and Garbalinska 2011). Body length is correlated with many other morphological traits (Barton et al. 2011). |
| Antenna length | **b/a** | Tactile hunter species, which rely on sense of touch more than vision, tend to have longer antennae (Bauer and Kredler 1993). Longer antenna length relative to body length was found for ground beetles caught under a tree, versus in the open (Barton et al. 2011). |
| Eye protrusion | **(c – d)/a** | A greater eye protrusion was found in a tree-climbing ground beetle, and it may allow partial overlap in the frontal visual field. However, greater eye protrusion might prevent a ground beetle from moving through thick vegetation or soil (Talarico et al. 2007). |
| Eye length | **e/a** | Diurnal ground beetle species and/or those adapted to open environments tend to rely on vision for predator avoidance or prey detection (Talarico et al. 2007). |
| Pronotum width | **f/a** | A proportionally wider pronotum can be found in robust-bodied beetles, which tend to be found within open habitats (Barton et al. 2011). |
| Abdomen width | **g/a** | Similar pattern to pronotum width (Barton et al. 2011). |
| Rear leg length | **h/a** | Open habitats seem to favor ground beetle species with shorter legs relative to body length (Barton et al. 2011). |
| Rear trochanter length | **i/a** | The rear trochanter connects to the femur of the rear leg. It is longer, on average, in species that push themselves through soil and underneath leaf litter. It is shorter in species that walk or run above the surface of the substrate (Talarico et al. 2007). |

Ground beetle activity-abundance calculation

Because pitfall traps preferentially collect insects that are more active and mobile, the number of ground beetles caught in pitfalls is reported as activity-abundance rather than true abundance. Before analyzing activity-abundance, we first accounted for missing data. In 2022, mammals disturbed some of the pitfall traps, resulting in an occasional loss of trap catch. When the sample from one of the two sides of the barrier pitfall trap was lost, which occurred in 12 instances, we doubled the counts of species found at that plot during that interval. This resulted in an additional 13 beetles being added as a correction factor to the original count of 852 ground beetles in 2022 (3 beetles in forest, 8 in salvaged, 0 in windthrow). In 5 instances, which were all in the undisturbed forest plots, we lost both sides of the barrier pitfall sample. To correct for this, we standardized activity abundance. First, we summed the counts of ground beetles caught over the entire season. Then we divided the counts by the number of days each pitfall was operational (Sklodowski and Garbalinska 2011). This gave a measure of number of ground beetles caught per day at each plot.

We tested for differences in activity-abundance of ground beetles between windthrow, salvaged, and undisturbed forest using a linear mixed-effects model. Area (northeast blowdown or southwest blowdown) and transect nested within area were both included as random intercepts in the model to account for spatial structure. Residuals were tested for assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances.

Taxonomic alpha-diversity measures

To understand the alpha-diversity of plots, we calculated measures of species richness, Shannon diversity, and Simpson diversity using the package “HillR” in R (Li 2018). Shannon diversity was calculated using the Hill diversity with Hill number q=1. This form of Shannon diversity has a minimum of 0 and a maximum value of the species richness. Simpson diversity (Inverse Simpson Index) was calculated using the Hill diversity with Hill number q=2. Simpson evenness was calculated as the Inverse Simpson Index divided by the species richness. This metric measures the degree to which species have similar abundances.

To understand if our sampling effort was sufficient to make estimates of species richness, we used species accumulation curves (Chao and Chiu 2016). We created species accumulation curves using the rarefaction method, which accumulates individuals rather than sites. This was implemented using the “specaccum” function in the R package “vegan” (Oksanen, J. et al. 2024).

To estimate the number of undetected species and thus estimate the true species richness of ground beetles, we used an asymptotic approach (Chao and Chiu 2016). We calculated the Chao1 estimator, which is a nonparametric estimator which can give a lower bound on the true species richness. This estimator, incorporates the number of singletons and doubletons to estimate the number of undetected species and was implemented using the function “ChaoSpecies” using the R package “SpadeR” (Anne Chao et al. 2016).

Taxonomic beta-diversity measures

This includes a nonmetric multidimensional scaling graph to look at differences in community composition between the treatments. Also, a principal components analysis can help figure out what species are contributing most to variation in overall species composition. Likely I will need to remove singletons (need to look in the books).

I also need to consider whether in the NMDS to use Bray-Curtis distance or some other distance measure such as chord distance.

I’m also interested in which beetle species have positive spatial autocorrelation and which have negative spatial autocorrelation. For this I can use something called “Global Moran’s I”.

Community-weighted mean traits

Functional alpha-diversity

Functional beta-diversity