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TITLE

The relative importance of direct and indirect effects of large scale and local factors for stream fish population

Direct and indirect effects of large and small-scale drivers of fish abundance in streams

Dead wood can mediate effects of large and small-scale factors on fish abundances in stream ecosystems

Manuscript type: Article

**ABSTRACT**

Identifying drivers of fish abundance in running waters is challenged by high variation in physical conditions at both large and local spatial scales. Several fish species perform migrations upstream and downstream, covering longitudinal gradients in climatic and geographic factors. Moreover, streams typically encompass highly diverse adjacent habitats, where environmental conditions, such as water velocity, depth, and substrate, vary within short spatial ranges. Among the local-scale factors affecting fish abundance, the occurrence of woody debris has been reported to boost salmonid fish population growth. However, what species benefit from woody debris, to what extent relative to other biotic and abiotic drivers, and what factors influence woody debris local quantity is not clear yet, which limits our ability to use woody debris as an effective restoration measure.

We analyzed time series data collected between 1993 and 2016 from 3653 rivers (total of ca 7000 sampling sites) all over Sweden to investigate 1) the relative importance of large-scale and local factors for the abundance of three key freshwater fish species: salmon (*Salmon salar*), brown trout (*S. trutta*), and sculpin fish (*Cottus* spp.), 2) whether local abundance of woody debris has beneficial effects on these three species, and 3) the drivers of woody debris persistence.

We found that large-scale factors such as annual mean air temperature and altitude mainly explained *Cottus* abundance (negative effects), while local stream width was the strongest predictor of trout and salmon abundance, with negative and positive effects, respectively. Trout abundance also decreased with local stream depth and abundance of burbot, a predatory species, while it increased with mean air temperature. Woody debris appeared to benefit trout, but not salmon or *Cottus* spp. abundance. The quantity of woody debris strongly decreased with stream width, but also depended, albeit to a lesser extent, on stream bed slope, forest age and cover, altitude, and mean air temperature. Our study suggests that the weight of large- and local-scale factors on fish abundances in streams varies strongly with species, and that effectiveness of woody debris as a restoration measure depends on both the targeted species and local environmental conditions.

**Keywords**:

**INTRODUCTION**

Both economically and non-economically valuable fish population provides a range of ecosystem services for human societies (Holmlund and Hammer 1999). Fish populations are however undergoing increasing pressures (e.g. overfishing, habitat loss, climate change REF) in both marine and freshwater ecosystems, and is therefore crucial to understand drivers of abundance and distribution to aid management and conservation.

It is commonly accepted that large-scale factors and processes structure species assemblages by determining the potential range that any given species can occupy (Tonn et al. 1990, Ricklefs 1987, Moran-Lopez 2012). On the other hand, behavioral, morphological, and physiological adaptations to local conditions, as well as biotic interactions (competition and predation), further constrain the available pool of species and ultimately determine where and when a species will be found (Grossman et al. 1998 in Jackson et al 2001, Jackson et al 2001, Tonn 1990). A number of studies has addressed fine-scale habitat use of fish in freshwater systems, often in relation to competition and predation (e.g. check Gorman & Karr, 1978; Schlosser 1982 in Moran-Lopez and find recent), while others have focused on major abiotic constraints at large scales (e.g. Magalhaes et al., 2002). So far, however, a unified approach for understanding the relative importance of large- and local-scale drivers has been often prevented by the availability of resources to data collection, as well as the questions considered (Jackson et al. 2001). An integrated framework is especially needed/would be especially helpful for management purposes, as / Given that habitat restoration measures typically focus on the modification of local conditions (e.g other + removal of predators or competitors ….) and their effectiveness may be conditional on the specific abiotic and biotic context (ref). It is therefore important, for both our ecological understanding and management purposes, to evaluate together the relative weight of large-scale, local-scale and biotic factors in driving species distribution, and to assess potential context-dependent (interactive) effects.

The assessment of drivers of fish abundance in running waters is often challenged by broad variation in environmental conditions at multiple spatial and temporal scales (Jackson et al. 2001, Cooper et al. 1998 find more recent). Rivers typically form vast interconnected networks that include strong longitudinal gradients of climatic and geographic factors. While the occurrence of some species is restricted to specific environmental conditions (e.g. colder temperatures, distance to the sea), other fish species migrate long distance upstream and downstream (ref). Moreover, streams offer a multitude of adjacent habitats, where local conditions such as depth, water velocity, and substrate composition can vary widely within few meters and from day to day, due to fluctuations in stream flow (Cooper et al. 1998, Grossman and Freeman 1987 find more recent). Many freshwater fish species show basic habitat preferences, i.e. trout tend to occupy shallower areas, while graylings deeper areas, as well as habitat choice conditional to the presence of competitors or predators (Grossman and freedman, Degerman et al. 2000, find recent). Overall, such spatial and temporal variability in abiotic and biotic factors is not easily accounted for in monitoring programs, and ultimately challenges our understanding of the effect size of significant drivers.

Among the local-scale factors affecting fish abundance, the occurrence of woody debris is suggested to benefit fish population growth by providing refugia from predators and elevated flow, and substrate for spawning and feeding (Degerman et al. 2004, Dollof and Warren 2003, Crook and Robertson 1999, Sievers et al. 2017). Beneficial effects of woody debris are mostly reported for juvenile and adult salmonids, while evidence for non-salmonid fish is equivocal (Roni et al. 2014, Langford et al. 2012). Furthermore, most studies have not accounted for other potential drivers of fish abundances when investigating the influence of woody debris (e.g. Degerman et al. 2004, Langford 2012). Therefore, what species benefit from woody debris and to what extent relative to other biotic and abiotic drivers is not clear yet. Finally, several knowledge gaps remains on the factors affecting woody debris abundances and persistence (Seo et al. 2010), which limits our ability to use woody debris as an effective restoration measure.

In the current study we analyzed time series data from 3653 rivers (total of ca 7000 sampling sites) across Sweden to investigate 1) the relative importance of large-scale, local-scale and biotic factors for the abundance of three key freshwater fish species: salmon (*Salmon salar*), brown trout (*S. trutta*), and sculpin fish (*Cottus* spp.). Specifically, we asked 2) whether local abundance of woody debris had beneficial effects on these three species, and 3) what drivers determined woody debris persistence. We used path analyses (Grace 2006), a statistical technique that allows not only to evaluate simultaneously the relative strength of multiple causal links, but also to assess indirect effects, hence the significance of woody debris as mediator factor for fish abundances.

**METHODS**

*Data*

The dataset was extracted from the Swedish Electrofishing Register (SERS) and consisted of 33278 records from 9096 sites spread in 3641 rivers across Sweden. Each site was sampled up to twenty times but at least once between 1993 and 2016. Electrofishing was performed mostly between July and October along sections on average 45 ± 23m (SD) long and spanning the whole width of the river, by using DC-equipment from LUGAB or BIOWAVE (Sweden). The abundance of each fish species was estimated through successive removals according to Bohlin (1984), and expressed as number per 100m2. For the current study we used abundances of three key species: salmon (*Salmon salar*), brown trout (*S. trutta*), and sculpin fish (*Cottus* spp.). Type of migration salmon and brown trout were classified either as migrating or resident based on..

In each sampling occasion, stream width, average depth, and maximum depth were measured. The date of fishing was expressed as Julian date (ranging from 1 to 354). The bottom substratum was classified into 5 categories, from 1 to 5, according to increasing particle size (fine: <0.2mm, sand: 0.2–2mm, gravel: 2–20mm, stones: 20–200mm, boulders: >200mm). Water velocity was scored from 0 to 3 with 1 being slow flow and 3 being rapids. Woody debris with diameter ≥ 10 cm and length ≥ 50 cm were counted and given as number per 100 m2.

For each site, stream bed slope, altitude, latitude, upstream catchment area, and forest data were estimated in a GIS environment using ArcMap 10.2. Forest data were collected in 2000, 2005 and 2010, and were matched respectively with electrofishing data collected before and during 2000, between 2001 and 2005, and from 2006 onwards. Coverage, mean forest age, and total forest volume from 25mx25m pixels were averaged from an area of 700m diameter and 150 hectares surface around each sampling site. Average annual air temperatures between 1960 and 1990 were provided by the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute ([www.smhi.se](http://www.smhi.se)).

*Statistical analyses*

We consider rivers rather than sites as replicates to simplify the hierarchical structure of the data and overcome potential issues related to sites mislabeling. However, we wanted to keep the year-to-year variation to investigate changes over time. Hence, averages by rivers and year for all variables were calculated. Preliminary data exploration where fish and woody debris abundances were plotted against total water volume sampled (calculated as width\*length\*average depth of the sampled section of each site) did not reveal any issues related to samples size.

We used path analyses to evaluate 1) the relative contribution of drivers of abundance of salmon, brown trout and sculpin, 2) potential beneficial effects of woody debris on the abundance of these three species after accounting for the effects of other explanatory variables, and 3) drivers of woody debris abundance, which could indirectly affect fish abundance. We first formulated hypotheses based on current empirical and theoretical knowledge (FIG). We expected large-scale factors (factors that vary on large-scales) such as latitude, altitude, and average air temperature, to set the limits of species distribution (REF). Local-scale factors (factors that vary on local scales) such as stream width and bed slope, upstream catchment area (which correlates with the river size), average and maximum depth, water velocity, and substrate type, were expected to further constrain species habitat use (REF), together with biotic interactions, i.e. predation from pike and burbot (REF), and competition between brown trout, brook trout, grayling, salmon and sculpin fish (REF). Type of migration was included as explanatory factor of trout and salmon abundance. We expected the abundance of woody debris to be affected by the above-mentioned large-scale factors as well as forest coverage, age and volume (REF), and factors related to stream size and hydrology (i.e stream width and bed slope, upstream catchment area, average and maximum depth, water velocity, REF). Finally, abundances of fish and woody debris were hypothesized to vary within and between years. To test the hypothesis that woody debris are especially important as shelter when predators are abundant (Enefalk et al. 2016), we incorporated an interaction between woody debris and predators (pike and burbot). Also, the interaction between stream bed slope or depth and competitors was included to investigate whether habitat partitioning is more likely to occur when species occur in sympatry (Degerman et al. 2000). Finally, we included an interaction between average air temperature and competitors to test potential effects of temperature on the outcome of competitive interactions (Ohlund et al. 2008).

After formulating the conceptual model, we used path analysis to test the significance of causal links (paths) corresponding to our hypotheses for each fish species separately. Models included 20 or 21 exogenous variables (i.e. not caused by other variables) and 2 endogenous variables (i.e. caused by other variables) (TABLE). Due to the hierarchical nature of our data we used the *piecewiseSEM* package, version 1.1.1 (Lefcheck & Duffy 2015) in R 3.2.3 (R Development Core Team, 2015) to construct our path models as sets of hierarchical linear mixed models, each of which included a two-nested random-effect structure, taking into account catchments and rivers within a catchment, and a lag-1 autoregressive correlation structure accounting for repeated measures. Collinearity in each component model was checked by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each predictor. As latitude and average air temperature were collinear (VIF ≥ 2), as well as average and maximum depth, and forest coverage and volume, they were included in separate models. Abundances of each fish species and woody debris were log-transformed to attain normal error distribution.

Finally, we compared the relative fit of alternative piecewise models to the data, first using the test of directional separation (Shipley 2009), which produces a Chi-square distributed Fisher’s C statistic, where *P* values > 0.05 indicate adequate fit, and second, through comparison of AIC values (Shipley 2013). For the best-fitting (final) models, we calculated standardized path coefficients (scaled by subtracting the minimum and dividing by the difference of the range) to compare the relative importance of predictors (Lefcheck 2015). Marginal R2 values for endogenous variables were estimated following Nakagawa and Schieltze (2013). Model validation was performed visually by plotting residuals versus fitted values for each component model.

**RESULTS**

Our path analyses suggest that large-scale, local-scale and, to a minor extent, biotic factors affected the abundances of the studied fish populations, but their relative importance varied with species. Overall, large scale-factors had larger weight than local-scale factors for sculpin fish population, while the opposite is true for trout and salmon population. This is also suggested by a more prominent latitudinal gradient apparent in the geographic distributions of sculpin fish abundances (FIG).

Our best-supported models fit the data well (trout: Fisher's C = 21.50, *P* = 0.255, salmon: Fisher's C =6.06, *P* = 0.641, sculpin fish: Fisher's C =13.81, *P* = 0.313, Fig). The total explained variation was respectively 0.79 for trout, 0.69 for salmon and 0.82 for sculpin fish abundance, while it was 0.52 for woody debris abundance. The relatively large differences between conditional R squared (that associated to the sum of fixed and random effects) and marginal R squared (that associated to the fixed effects), in general indicated strong variation between catchments. The many zeros in salmon abundances (FIG map) may have partly contributed to the especially low variation explained by fixed effects (FIG).

Among the large-scale factors, average air temperature was preferred over latitude as it gave a better overall fit (AIC = … vs …). Average air temperature was the stronger predictor of sculpin fish abundance, showing negative effects, while it had weaker positive effects on trout abundance and no effects on salmon abundance. Both sculpin fish and salmon, but not trout, abundances decreased with altitude.

Local-scale factors especially contributed to explained variation in trout and salmon abundances. Stream width was the most important driver, though with opposite effects; trout was more abundant in smaller streams, while salmon in larger streams. All three studied species preferred shallower areas, with trout showing the strongest effect size of maximum depth (preferred over average depth as it gave a better overall fit: AIC = … vs …). Stream bed slope had weak positive and negative effects on trout and sculpin fish abundances respectively, while water velocity moderately increased salmon abundance. Trout was the only species affected by substrate type, with higher abundance associated to finer sediments. Abundances of predators such as burbot and pike only (negatively) affected trout population, while no evidence of competitive interactions between brown trout, salmon, sculpin fish, grayling and brook trout was found. Temporal variation had overall little bearing on our models, which revealed a slight seasonal decrease of salmon and trout abundances, and an average year-to-year increase of salmon abundance.

Woody debris appeared to benefit trout but not salmon and sculpin fish populations. The abundance of woody debris strongly decreased with stream width, and to a lesser extent with depth, while it slightly increased with stream bed slope and water velocity. Forest coverage, which gave a better overall fit than forest volume (AIC = … vs ..), boosted the number of woody debris, which instead lessened with forest age. Average air temperature and altitude showed moderate negative effects on woody debris abundances.

**DISCUSSION**

By looking at data it seems like Cottus distribution is mainly determined by large scale factors, while salmonids respond promptly to variation in local conditions. As large-scale drivers typically define the fundamental niche of species, while small-scale factors define the applied niche of species, our results suggest that salmonids may undergo higher competition/predation pressure than Cottus.

Wootton 2017: wood debris may decrease omnivore interactions therefore increase stability of communities.(These predictions are important for effective freshwater management because actions which decrease the strength of omnivorous interactions, such as main- taining habitat refuges for consumers (e.g. woody debris and aquatic plants), may be essential for sustaining biodiversity.)

hierarchical screening provided by Smith and Powell (1971) . also Tonn 1990: fish assemblages are structured by a series of filetrs. But it does not talk about their relative importance

look at Jackson et al 2001

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCE LIST

TABLES

Table 1.

Table 2. Path coefficients (single-headed arrow) and correlated errors (double-headed arrows) from the best-supported structural equation model (Figure 5). The last column shows the link function for each component model (see Materials and Methods for details).

FIGURES

Fig. 1. Schematic representation of all variables and paths included in the models. Interactive effects are not shown. Average and maximum depth were considered in separate models. White and grey boxes indicate exogenous and endogenous variables, respectively. Type of migration was included only in models for sculpin fish abundance.

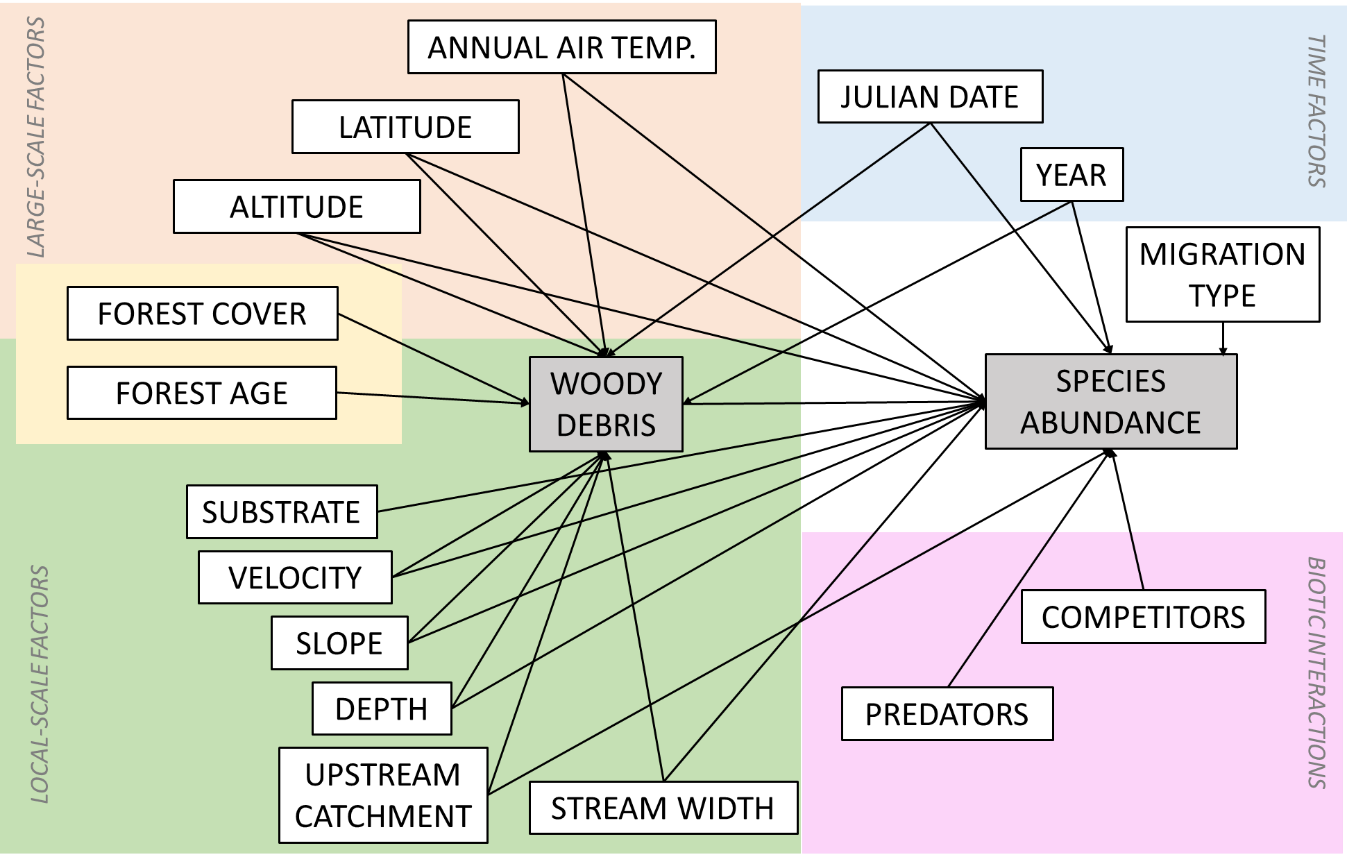


Fig. 2. Maps showing abundances of trout (A), salmon (B), sculpin fish (C) and woody debris (D) as averages over the years and rivers within 25×25km squares.

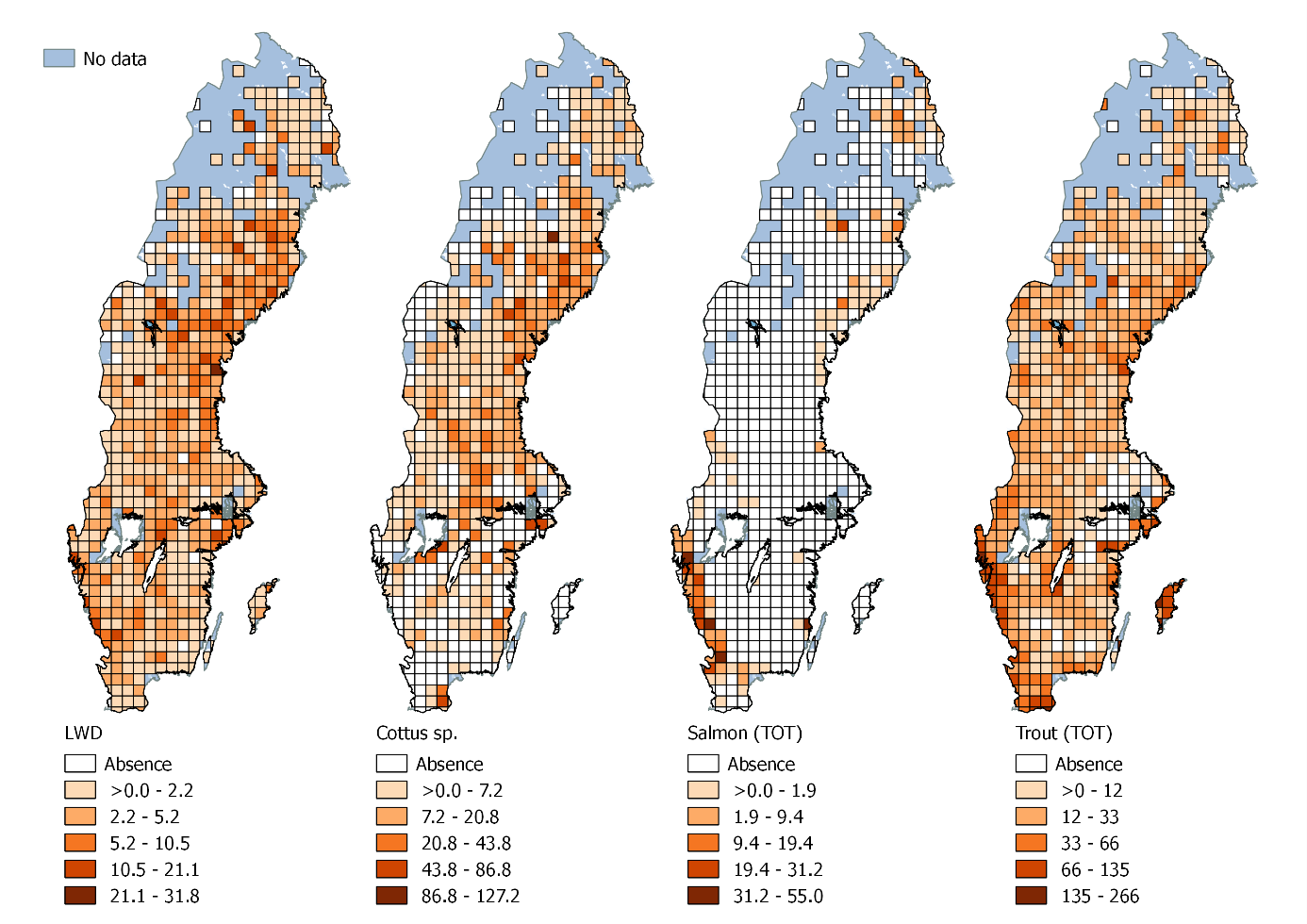


Fig. 3. Best-supported structural equation models representing significant relationships between all predictors and abundances of trout (A), salmon (B), and sculpin fish (C). Arrow widths are proportional to the standardized path coefficients. Conditional and marginal R2 values are shown for endogenous variables.