Intro

Analyses:

CCA for insect species

Rationale

Foundation plants play a central role in structuring arid environments. Microclimate amelioration and other mechanisms can affect survival, growth, and reproduction of annuals plants. The positive effects of vegetation can propagate through other trophic levels, including both primary and secondary consumers. Complex direct and indirect effects.

Residual dry matter (rdm) is a common measure of productivity in drylands. It is comprised of both direct and indirect drivers on plant composition and structure including resource availability, plant-plant interactions, and interactions with consumers.

Arthropods depend on plants, vertebrates depend on arthropods and shrubs. Plants depend on shrubs. In arid ecosystems, arthropods mediate resource flow and structure the surrounding community (Whitford, 2000). Further, ground dwelling arthropods including Coleoptera and Orthoptera are the major component of the diet of Gambelia sila, the federally listed lizard (Germano, 2007).

We used a rainfall gradient of arid grasslands in Southern California. At Panoche and other semi-arid dryland sites, blunt-nosed leopard lizards are secondary consumers on grasshoppers and other invertebrates. A survey of rdm under shrubs and in the open will facilitate an assessment of productivity associated with foundation plant species and estimate the strength of plant-plant interactions. Importantly, burrow density will also be recorded at each sampling instance to infer secondary-consumer (and indirect) effects on community dynamics. The missing link, i.e. connector taxa in these systems, invertebrates will be also be sampled and identified using pan traps and pitfall traps.

In this study, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the relative importance of causal factors influencing arthropod community composition. To describe complex, interrelated systems such as this one it is necessary to partition the direct and indirect effects. SEM can be used to model multivariate relations (Grace 2006, Bollen 1989) which increases our understanding of complex systems (Grace 2006, Shipley 2000). To answer these questions, we developed a theoretical model of hypothesized causal relationships among variables in this shrub-annual–arthropod system.

Evaluating hypotheses that partition direct and indirect effects requires an analytic framework that is designed to model multivariate relations between system components (Grace, 2006). SEM is an extension of regression and path analysis that can be used to model multivariate relations and to evaluate multivariate hypotheses (Bollen, 1989). The use of SEM has gained favor in recent years due to its potential to increase understanding of complex systems (Shipley, 2000, Grace, 2006). In turn, resulting information can be used to improve effectiveness of resource conservation efforts. In this study, we asked the following specific research questions: (1) Are arthropod abundance and family richness on C. fendleri positively related to protection of plants from large ungulate herbivores? (2) Does protection of C. fendleri from ungulates increase diversity of arthropod functional groups? (3) Are direct effects of protection more important in determining arthropod abundance and richness than indirect effects? (4) Is aerial stem length more important in affecting changes in arthropod assemblage than number of stems or number of flowering stems? (Fig. 1).