To the Editor,

Please consider the associated manuscript, *Selection against instability: stable subgraphs are most frequent in empirical food webs*, by J. J. Borrelli for publication in Oikos. Empirical networks are typically characterized by specific structural regularities, such as modularity or nestedness. Further, it has been previously shown that there is a link between the structure of a network, such as a food web or plant-pollinator web, and the population dynamics of the species that make it up. In this paper I suggest that observed patterns of food web structure may be the result of a selection against unstable configurations.

In the associated manuscript I demonstrate that there is a signature of this selection against unstable configurations in food web subgraphs. Of the thirteen different possible subgraphs (ways to arrange three species in feeding relationships) some tend to be over-represented, while others are observed less frequently than expected by chance. Additionally, those subgraphs that tend to be over-represented are also associated with a higher probability of being stable. Thus there is a clear signature of selection against instability.

This paper demonstrates a rather useful approach to generate an expectation of what should be observed in nature using quasi sign-stability. Given the hypothesis of selection against instability the expectation is that what is observed in nature should be what is most stable. Quasi sign-stability is then a tool that can be used, even in cases when relatively little is known about the system, to determine how likely it is that a configuration will be stable.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Borrelli