

March 17, 2022

Dr. Kathryn Cottingham  
Editor-in-Chief  
Ecology

Dear Dr. Cottingham,

I would be grateful to you for considering my manuscript — titled “*High variation in handling times confers 35-year stability to predator feeding rates despite community change*” — for publication in Ecology as a regular article. I am submitting this manuscript to Ecology as I believe it will appeal to many of the readership’s interests, particularly as these relate to inferences of community change as studied using historical (or spatial) resurveys.

My manuscript combines natural-history type information (i.e. predator diet surveys), a relatively new approach for inferring process (i.e. feeding rates) from such static surveys, and a 100+ year-old (yet universally unappreciated) result of statistical theory. Through these, my manuscript provides two primary insights of respective empirical and theoretical importance, showing how high variation in predator-prey handling times will (1) cause a predator’s apparent diet to differ from its true diet, and (2) confer temporal stability to a predator’s prey-specific feeding rates even when its prey preferences and its prey’s abundances exhibit dramatic change.

Although my study is specifically motivated by my historical resurveys of an intertidal predatory whelk that the renowned ecologist Robert Paine surveyed in the late 1960s, high variation in handling times (or digestion times) is evident in many predatory taxa across the animal kingdom. The two insights therefore apply broadly, casting uncertainty on aspects of both old and current efforts to link predator-prey data and theory to understand how food webs and communities function. A direct relevance to behavioral and evolutionary ecology in the context of inferring the occurrence and consequence of so-called adaptive foraging dynamics ought to broaden its interested readership further still.

The manuscript has already been positively reviewed by Kyle Coblentz, Cheyenne Jarman, Bruce Menge, Rebecca Terry, and Tim Wootton.

Lastly, please note that the writing style I attempted to use for this manuscript was to a large extent inspired by Paine’s classic papers. That style, as well as many of the papers I have cited, make my identity very clear. There is therefore no need for a double-blind review process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mark Novak