Sampling networks of ecological interactions

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Summary

1. Sampling ecological interactions presents similar challenges, problems, potential biases, and constraints as sampling individuals and species in biodiversity inventories. Interactions are just pairwise relationships among individuals of two different species, such as those among plants and their seed dispersers in frugivory interactions or those among plants and their pollinators. Sampling interactions is a fundamental step to build robustly estimated interaction networks, yet few analyses have attempted a formal approach to their sampling protocols.

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- 2. Robust estimates of the actual number of interactions (links) within diversified ecological networks require adequate sampling effort that needs to be explicitly gauged. Yet we still lack a sampling theory explicitly focusing on ecological interactions.
- 3. While the complete inventory of interactions is likely impossible, a robust characterization of its main patterns and metrics is probably realistic. We must acknowledge that a sizable fraction of the maximum number of interactions I_{max} among, say, A animal species and P plant species (i.e., $I_{max} = AP$) is impossible to record due to forbidden links, i.e., life-history restrictions. Thus, the number of observed interactions I in robustly sampled networks is typically $I \ll I_{max}$, resulting in extremely sparse interaction matrices with low connectance.
- 4. Reasons for forbidden links are multiple but mainly stem from spatial and temporal uncoupling, size mismatches, and intrinsically low probabilities of interspecific encounter for most potential interactions of partner species. Adequately assessing the completeness of a network of ecological interactions thus needs knowledge of the natural history details embedded, so that forbidden links can be "discounted" when addressing sampling effort.
- 5. Here I provide a review and outline a conceptual framework for interaction sampling by building an explicit analogue to individuals and species sampling, thus extending diversity-monitoring approaches to the characterization of complex networks of ecological interactions. This is crucial to assess the fast-paced and devastating effects of defaunation-driven loss of key ecological interactions and the services they provide and the analogous losses related

to interaction gains due to invasive species and biotic homogenization.

Keywords

complex networks, food webs, frugivory, mutualism, plant-animal interactions, pollination, seed dispersal

Introduction

Biodiversity sampling is a labour-intensive activity, and sampling is often not sufficient to detect all or even most of the species present in an assemblage.

Gotelli & Colwell (2011).

- Biodiversity species assessment aims at sampling individuals in collections and
- ² determining the number of species represented. Given that, by definition, samples
- 3 are incomplete, these collections do not enumerate the species actually present.
- 4 The ecological literature dealing with robust estimators of species richness and di-
- ⁵ versity in collections of individuals is immense, and a number of useful approaches
- 6 have been used to obtain such estimates (Magurran, 1988; Gotelli & Colwell, 2001;
- ⁷ Colwell, Mao & Chang, 2004; Hortal, Borges & Gaspar, 2006; Colwell, 2009; Gotelli
- 8 & Colwell, 2011; Chao et al., 2014). Recent effort has been also focused at defining
- essential biodiversity variables (EBV) (Pereira et al., 2013) that can be sampled
- and measured repeatedly to complement biodiversity estimates. Yet sampling
- species or taxa-specific EBVs is just probing a single component of biodiversity;
- 12 interactions among species are another fundamental component, one that supports

the existence, but in some cases also the extinction, of species. For example, the extinction of interactions represents a dramatic loss of biodiversity because it entails the loss of fundamental ecological functions (Valiente-Banuet et al., 2014). This missed component of biodiversity loss, the extinction of ecological interactions, very often accompanies, or even precedes, species disappearance. Interactions 17 among species are a key component of biodiversity and here I aim to show that most problems associated with sampling interactions in natural communities relate 19 to problems associated with sampling species diversity, even worse. We consider 20 pairwise interactions among species at the habitat level, in the context of alpha di-21 versity and the estimation of local interaction richness from sampling data (Chao et al., 2014). In the first part we provide a succinct overview of previous work addressing sampling issues for ecological interaction networks. In the second part, after a short overview of asymptotic diversity estimates (Gotelli & Colwell, 2001), we discuss specific rationales for sampling the biodiversity of ecological interactions. Most of my examples come from the analysis of plant-animal interaction 27 networks, yet are applicable to other types of species-species interactions. 28

Interactions can be a much better indicator of the richness and diversity of
ecosystem functions than a simple list of taxa and their abundances and/or related
biodiversity indicator variables (EBVs). Thus, sampling interactions should be a
central issue when identifying and diagnosing ecosystem services (e.g., pollination,
natural seeding by frugivores, etc.). Fortunately, the whole battery of biodiversityrelated tools used by ecologists to sample biodiversity (species, sensu stricto) can
be extended and applied to the sampling of interactions. Analogs are evident
between these approaches (see Table 2 in 2004; 2009). Monitoring interactions
is a biodiversity sampling and is subject to similar methodological shortcomings,

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especially under-sampling (Jordano, 1987; Jordano, Vázquez & Bascompte, 2009; Coddington et al., 2009; Vazquez, Chacoff & Cagnolo, 2009; Dorado et al., 2011; 39 Rivera-Hutinel et al., 2012). For example, when we study mutualistic networks, 40 our goal is to make an inventory of the distinct pairwise interactions that made up the network. We are interested in having a complete list of all the pairwise interactions among species (e.g., all the distinct, species-species interactions, or links, among the pollinators and flowering plants) that do actually exist in a given community. Sampling these interactions thus entails exactly the same problems, 45 limitations, constraints, and potential biases as sampling individual organisms 46 and species diversity. As Mao & Colwell (2005) put it, these are the workings of Preston's demon, the moving "veil line" (Preston, 1948) between the detected and 48 the undetected interactions as sample size increases. 49 Early efforts to recognize and solve sampling problems in analyses of interac-50 tions stem from research on food webs and to determine how undersampling biases 51 food web metrics (Martinez, 1991; Cohen et al., 1993; Martinez, 1993; Bersier, 52 Banasek-Richter & Cattin, 2002; Brose, Martinez & Williams, 2003; Banasek-53 Richter, Cattin & Bersier, 2004; Wells & O'Hara, 2012). In addition, the myriad of classic natural history studies documenting animal diets, host-pathogen infection records, plant herbivory records, etc., represent efforts to document interactions occurring in nature. All of them share the problem of sampling incompleteness in-57

determine its influence (Ollerton & Cranmer, 2002; Nielsen & Bascompte, 2007; Vazquez, Chacoff & Cagnolo, 2009; Gibson et al., 2011; Olesen et al., 2011; Chacoff

fluencing the patterns and metrics reported. Yet, despite the early recognition that

incomplete sampling may seriously bias the analysis of ecological networks (Jor-

dano, 1987), only recent studies have explicitly acknowledged it and attempted to

et al., 2012; Rivera-Hutinel et al., 2012; Olito & Fox, 2014; Bascompte & Jordano, 2014; Vizentin-Bugoni, Maruyama & Sazima, 2014; Frund, McCann & Williams, 2015). The sampling approaches have been extended to predict patterns of coextintions in interaction assemblages (e.g., hosts-parasites) (Colwell, Dunn & Harris, 2012). Most empirical studies provide no estimate of sampling effort, implicitly assuming that the reported network patterns and metrics are robust. Yet recent evidences point out that number of partner species detected, number of actual links, 69 and some aggregate statistics describing network patterns, are prone to sampling 70 bias (Nielsen & Bascompte, 2007; Dorado et al., 2011; Olesen et al., 2011; Chacoff 71 et al., 2012; Rivera-Hutinel et al., 2012; Olito & Fox, 2014; Frund, McCann & Williams, 2015). Most of these evidences, however, come either from simulation studies (Frund, McCann & Williams, 2015) or from relatively species-poor assemblages. Most certainly, sampling limitations pervade biodiversity inventories in tropical areas (Coddington et al., 2009) and we might rightly expect that frequent interactions may be over-represented and rare interactions may be missed entirely in studies of mega-diverse assemblages (Bascompte & Jordano, 2014); but, to what 78 extent?

Sampling interactions: methods

When we sample interactions in the field we record the presence of two species that interact in some way. For example, Snow and Snow(1988) recorded an interaction whenever they saw a bird "touching" a fruit on a plant. We observe and record feeding observations, visitation, occupancy, presence in pollen loads or in fecal samples, etc., of *individual* animals or plants and accumulate pairwise interactions, i.e., lists of species partners and the frequencies with which we observe them.
Therefore, estimating the sampling completeness of pairwise interactions for a
whole network, requires some gauging of the sampling completeness (i.e., how the
number (richness) of distinct pairwise interactions accumulates as sampling effort
is increased) and/or estimating the uncertainty around the missed links (Wells &
O'Hara, 2012).

Most types of ecological interactions can be illustrated with bipartite graphs, 92 with two or more distinct groups of interacting partners (Bascompte & Jordano, 93 2014); for illustration purposes I'll focus more specifically on plant-animal inter-94 actions. Sampling interactions requires filling the cells of an interaction matrix with data. The matrix, $\Delta = AP$ (the adjacency matrix for the graph representation of the network), is a 2D inventory of the interactions among, say, A animal 97 species (rows) and P plant species (columns) (Jordano, 1987; Bascompte & Jor-98 dano, 2014). The matrix entries illustrate the values of the pairwise interactions 99 visualized in the Δ matrix, and can be 0 or 1, for presence-absence of a given 100 pairwise interaction, or take a quantitative weight w_{ji} to represent the interaction 101 intensity or unidirectional effect of species j on species i (Bascompte & Jordano, 102 2014; Vazquez et al., 2015). The outcomes of most ecological interactions are 103 dependent on frequency of encounters (e.g., visit rate of pollinators, number of 104 records of ant defenders, frequency of seeds in fecal samples). Thus, a frequently 105 used proxy for interaction intensities w_{ji} is just how frequent new interspecific 106 encounters are, whether or not appropriately weighted to estimate interaction ef-107 fectiveness (Vazquez, Morris & Jordano, 2005). 108

We need to define two basic steps in the sampling of interactions: 1) which type of interactions we sample; and 2) which type of record we get to document

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the existence of an interaction. In step #1 we need to take into account whether 111 we are sampling the whole community of interactor species (all the animals, all the plants) or just a subset of them, i.e., a sub matrix $\Delta_{m,n}$ of m < A animal 113 species and n < P plant species of the adjacency matrix Δ_{AP} (i.e., the matrix 114 representation of interactions among the partner species). Subsets can be: a) all 115 the potential plants interacting with a subset of the animals (Fig. 1a); b) all the 116 potential animal species interacting with a subset of the plant species (Fig. 1b); 117 c) a subset of all the potential animal species interacting with a subset of all the 118 plant species (Fig. 1c). While some discussion has considered how to establish 119 the limits of what represents a network (Strogatz, 2001) (in analogy to discussion 120 on food-web limits; Cohen, 1978), it must be noted that situations a-c in Fig. 121 1 do not represent complete interaction networks. As vividly stated by Cohen 122 et al. (1993): "As more comprehensive, more detailed, more explicit webs become 123 available, smaller, highly aggregated, incompletely described webs may progressively 124 be dropped from analyses of web structure (though such webs may remain useful for 125 other purposes, such as pedagogy)". Subnet sampling is generalized in studies of 126 biological networks (e.g., protein interactions, gene regulation), yet it is important 127 to recognize that most properties of subnetworks (even random subsamples) do 128 not represent properties of whole networks (Stumpf, Wiuf & May, 2005). 129 In step #2 above we face the problem of the type of record we take to sample 130 interactions. This is important because it defines whether we approach the problem 131 of filling up the interaction matrix in a "zoo-centric" way or in a "phyto-centric" 132 way. Zoo-centric studies directly sample animal activity and document the plants 133

'touched' by the animal. For example, analysis of pollen samples recovered from the

body of pollinators, analysis of fecal samples of frugivores, radio-tracking data, etc.

Phyto-centric studies take samples of focal individual plant species and document which animals 'arrive' or 'touch' the plants. Examples include focal watches of fruiting or flowering plants to record visitation by animals, raising insect herbivores from seed samples, identifying herbivory marks in samples of leaves, etc.

Most recent analyses of plant-animal interaction networks are phyto-centric; 140 just 3.5% of available plant-pollinator (N=58) or 36.6% plant-frugivore (N=22) 141 interaction datasets are zoo-centric (see Schleuning et al., 2012). Moreover, most 142 available datasets on host-parasite (parasitoid) or plant-herbivore interactions are 143 "host-centric" or phyto-centric (e.g., Thébault & Fontaine, 2010; Morris et al., 144 2013; Eklöf et al., 2013). This may be related to a variety of causes, like preferred 145 methodologies by researchers working with a particular group or system, logistic 146 limitations, or inherent taxonomic focus of the research questions. A likely result 147 of phyto-centric sampling would be adjacency matrices with large A: P ratios. 148 In any case we don't have a clear view of the potential biases that taxa-focused 149 sampling may generate in observed network patterns, for example by generating 150 consistently asymmetric interaction matrices (Dormann et al., 2009). System sym-151 metry has been suggested to influence estimations of generalization levels in plants 152 and animals when measured as I_A and I_P (Elberling & Olesen, 1999); thus, differ-153 ences in I_A and I_P between networks may arise from different A:P ratios rather 154 than other ecological factors (Olesen & Jordano, 2002). 155

Reasonably complete analyses of interaction networks can be obtained when combining both phyto-centric and zoo-centric sampling. For example, Bosch *et al.* (2009) showed that the addition of pollen load data on top of focal-plant sampling of pollinators unveiled a significant number of interactions, resulting in important network structural changes. Connectance increased 1.43-fold, mean plant connectance

tivity went from 18.5 to 26.4, and mean pollinator connectivity from 2.9 to 4.1; 161 moreover, extreme specialist pollinator species (singletons in the adjacency matrix) decreased 0.6-fold. (Olesen et al. 2011) identified pollen loads on sampled insects 163 and added the new links to an observation-based visitation matrix, with an extra 5% of links representing the estimated number of missing links in the pollination 165 network. The overlap between observational and pollen-load recorded links was only 33%, underscoring the value of combining methodological approaches. Zoo-167 centric sampling has recently been extended with the use of DNA-barcoding, for 168 example with plant-herbivore (Jurado-Rivera et al., 2009), host-parasiotid (Wirta 169 et al., 2014), and plant-frugivore interactions (González-Varo, Arroyo & Jordano, 170 2014). For mutualistic networks we would expect that zoo-centric sampling could 171 help unveiling interactions of the animals with rare plant species or for relatively 172 common plants species which are difficult to sample by direct observation. Fu-173 ture methodological work may provide significant advances showing how mixing 174 different sampling strategies strengthens the completeness of network data. These 175 mixed strategies may combine, for instance, timed watches at focal plants, spot 176 censuses along walked transects, pollen load or seed contents analyses, monitoring 177 with camera traps, and DNA barcoding records. We might expect increased power 178 of these mixed sampling approaches when combining different methods from both 179 phyto- and zoo-centric perspectives (Bosch et al., 2009; Bluthgen, 2010). Note also 180 that the different methods could be applied in different combinations to the two 181 distinct sets of species. However, there are no tested protocols and/or sampling 182 designs for ecological interaction studies to suggest an optimum combination of 183 approaches. Ideally, pilot studies would provide adequate information for each 184 specific study setting.

Sampling interactions: rationale

The number of distinct pairwise interactions that we can record in a landscape 187 (an area of relatively homogeneous vegetation, analogous to the one we would 188 use to monitor species diversity) is equivalent to the number of distinct classes in 189 which we can classify the recorded encounters among individuals of two different 190 species. Yet, individual-based interaction networks have been only recently studied 191 (Dupont, Trøjelsgaard & Olesen, 2011; Wells & O'Hara, 2012). The most usual 192 approach has been to pool individual-based interaction data into species-based 193 summaries, an approach that ignores the fact that only a fraction of individuals 194 may actually interact given a per capita interaction effect (Wells & O'Hara, 2012). 195 Wells & O'Hara (2012) illustrate the pros and cons of the approach. We walk in 196 the forest and see a blackbird Tm picking an ivy Hh fruit and ingesting it: we 197 have a record for Tm - Hh interaction. We keep advancing and record again a 198 blackbird feeding on hawthorn Cm fruits so we record a Tm - Cm interaction; 199 as we advance we encounter another ivy plant and record a blackcap swallowing a 200 fruit so we now have a new Sa - Hh interaction, and so on. At the end we have 201 a series of classes (e.g., Sa - Hh, Tm - Hh, Tm - Cm, etc.), along with their 202 observed frequencies. Bunge & Fitzpatrick (1993) provide an early review of the 203 main aspects and approaches to estimate the number of distinct classes C in a sample of observations. 205 Our sampling above would have resulted in a vector $n = [n_1...n_C]'$ where n_i is 206 the number of records in the i^{th} class. As stressed by Bunge & Fitzpatrick (1993), 207 however, the i^{th} class would appear in the sample if and only if $n_i > 0$, and we 208 don't know a priori which n_i are zero. So, n is not observable. Rather, what we

get is a vector $c = [c_1...c_n]'$ where c_j is the number of classes represented j times 210 in our sampling: c_1 is the number of singletons (interactions recorded once), c_2 is the number of twin pairs (interactions with just two records), c_3 the number 212 of triplets, etc. The problem thus turns to be estimating the number of distinct classes C from the vector of c_j values and the frequency of unobserved interactions 214 (see "The real missing links" below). 215 More specifically, we usually obtain a type of reference sample (Chao et al., 216 2014) for interactions: a series of replicated samples (e.g., observation days, 1h 217 watches, etc.) with quantitative information, i.e., recording the number of in-218 stances of each interaction type on each day. This replicated abundance data, 219 220

can be treated in three ways: 1) Abundance data within replicates: the counts of interactions, separately for each day; 2) Pooled abundance data: the counts of 221 interactions, summed over all days (the most usual approach); and 3) Replicated 222 incidence data: the number of days on which we recorded each interaction. Assum-223 ing a reasonable number of replicates, replicated incidence data is considered the 224 most robust statistically, as it takes account of heterogeneity among days (Colwell, 225 Mao & Chang, 2004; Colwell, Dunn & Harris, 2012; Chao et al., 2014). Thus, both 226 presence-absence and weighted information on interactions can be accommodated 227 for this purpose. 228

229 The species assemblage

Estimating the number of interactions with resulting robust estimates of network parameters is a central issue in the study of ecological networks (Jordano, 1987; Bascompte & Jordano, 2014). When we consider an observed and recorded sample

of interactions on a particular assemblage of A_{obs} and P_{obs} species (or a set of 233 replicated samples) as a reference sample (Chao et al., 2014) we may have three sources of undersampling error that are ignored by treating a reference sample as a 235 true representation of the interactions in well-defined assemblage: 1) some animal 236 species are actually present but not observed (zero abundance or incidence in the 237 interactions in the reference sample), A_0 ; 2) some plant species are actually present 238 but not observed (zero abundance or incidence in the interactions in the reference 239 sample), P_0 ; 3) some unobserved links (the zeroes in the adjacency matrix, UL) 240 may actually occur but not recorded. Thus a first problem is determining if A_{obs} 241 and P_{obs} truly represent the actual species richness interacting in the assemblage. 242 To this end we might use the replicated reference samples to estimate the true 243 number of interacting animal A_{est} and plant P_{est} species as in traditional diversity 244 estimation analysis (Chao et al., 2014). If there are no uniques (species seen on 245 only one day), then A_0 and P_0 will be zero, and we have A_{obs} and P_{obs} as robust 246 estimates of the actual species richness of the assemblage. If A_0 and P_0 are not 247 zero they estimate the minimum number of undetected animal and plant species 248 that can be expected with a sufficiently large number of replicates, taken from the 249 same assemblage/locality by the same methods in the same time period. We can 250 use extrapolation methods (Colwell, Dunn & Harris, 2012) to estimate how many 251 additional replicate surveys it would take to reach a specified proportion g of $A_e st$ 252 and $P_e st$. 253

254 The interactions

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We are then faced with assessing the sampling of interactions I. Table 1 sum-255 marizes the main components and targets for estimation of interaction richness. 256 In contrast with traditional species diversity estimates, sampling networks has 257 the paradox that despite the potentially interacting species being present in the 258 sampled assemblage (i.e., included in the A_{obs} and Pobs species lists), some of 259 their pairwise interactions are impossible to be recorded. The reason is forbidden 260 links. Independently of whether we sample full communities or subset communi-261 ties we face a problem: some of the interactions that we can visualize in the empty 262 adjacency matrix Δ will simply not occur. With a total of $A_{obs}P_{obs}$ "potential" in-263 teractions (eventually augmented to $A_{est}P_{est}$ in case we have undetected species), 264 a fraction of them are impossible to record, because they are forbidden (Jordano, 265 Bascompte & Olesen, 2003; Olesen et al., 2011). 266 Our goal is to estimate the true number of non-null AP interactions, including interactions that actually occur but have not been observed (I_0) from the repli-268 cated incidence frequencies of interaction types: $I_{est} = I_{obs} + I_0$. Note that I_0 269 estimates the minimum number of undetected plant-animal interactions that can 270 be expected with a sufficiently large number of replicates, taken from the same 271 assemblage/locality by the same methods in the same time period. Therefore we 272 have two types of non-observed links: UL* and UL. 273 Forbidden links are non-occurrences of pairwise interactions that can be ac-274 counted for by biological constraints, such as spatio-temporal uncoupling (Jordano, 1987), size or reward mismatching, foraging constraints (e.g., accessibility) (Moré 276

et al., 2012), and physiological-biochemical constraints (Jordano, 1987). We still

have extremely reduced information about the frequency of forbidden links in natu-278 ral communities (Jordano, Bascompte & Olesen, 2003; Stang et al., 2009; Vazquez, Chacoff & Cagnolo, 2009; Olesen et al., 2011; Ibanez, 2012; Maruyama et al., 2014; 280 Vizentin-Bugoni, Maruyama & Sazima, 2014) (Table 1). Forbidden links are thus 281 represented as structural zeroes in the interaction matrix, i.e., matrix cells that 282 cannot get a non-zero value. [ROB] UL*: unobserved links between the [Aest = 283 Aobs + A0] * [Pest = Pobs + P0] interacting species. The total number of cells in 284 the augmented adjacency matrix is thus Aest * Pest. (2) Thus, UL* is a mixture 285 of unobserved links between A and P (your UL), and unobserved links that involve 286 unobserved A or unobserved P (or both). [ROB] 287 We might expect different types of FL to occupy different parts of the Δ ma-288

trix, with missing cells due to phenological uncoupling, FL_P , largely distributed 289 in the lower-right half Δ matrix and actually missed links ML distributed in its 290 central part (Olesen et al., 2010). Yet, most of these aspects remain understud-291 ied. Therefore, we need to account for the frequency of these structural zeros in 292 our matrix before proceeding. For example, most measurements of connectance 293 C = I/(AP) implicitly ignore the fact that by taking the full product AP in the 294 denominator they are underestimating the actual connectance value, i.e., the frac-295 tion of actual interactions I relative to the biologically possible ones, not to the 296 total maximum $I_{max} = AP$. 297

Our main problem then turns to estimate the number of true missed links, i.e., those that can't be accounted for by biological constraints and that might suggest undersampling. Thus, the sampling of interactions in nature, as the sampling of species, is a cumulative process. In our analysis, we are not re-sampling individuals, but interactions, so we made interaction-based accumulation curves. If an interaction-based curve suggests a robust sampling, it does mean that no new interactions are likely to be recorded, irrespectively of the species, as it is a whole-network sampling approach (N. Gotelli, pers. com.). We add new, distinct, interactions recorded as we increase sampling effort (Fig. 2). We can obtain an Interaction Accumulation Curve (*IAC*) analogous to a Species Curve (*SAC*) (see Supplementary Online Material): the observed number of distinct pairwise interactions in a survey or collection as a function of the accumulated number of observations or samples (Colwell, 2009).

311 0.1 Empirical data on Forbidden Links

Adjacency matrices are frequently sparse, i.e., they are densely populated with zeroes, with a fraction of them being structural (unobservable interactions) (Bas-313 compte & Jordano, 2014). Thus, it would be a serious interpretation error to attribute the sparseness of adjacency matrices for bipartite networks to undersam-315 pling. The actual typology of link types in ecological interaction networks is thus more complex than just the two categories of observed and unobserved interactions 317 (Table 1). Unobserved interactions are represented by zeroes and belong to two 318 categories. Missing interactions may actually exist but require additional sampling 319 or a variety of methods to be observed. Forbidden links, on the other hand, arise 320 due to biological constraints limiting interactions and remain unobservable in na-321 ture, irrespectively of sampling effort (Table 1). Forbidden links FL may actually 322 account for a relatively large fraction of unobserved interactions UL when sam-323 pling taxonomically-restricted subnetworks (e.g., plant-hummingbird pollination 324 networks) (Table 1). Phenological uncoupling is also prevalent in most networks, 325

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and may add up to explain ca. 25–40% of the forbidden links, especially in highly 326 seasonal habitats, and up to 20% when estimated relative to the total number of un-327 observed interactions (Table 2). In any case, we might expect that a fraction of the 328 missing links ML would be eventually explained by further biological reasons, depending on the knowledge of natural details of the particular systems. Our goal as 330 naturalists would be to reduce the fraction of UL which remain as missing links; to 331 this end we might search for additional biological constraints or increase sampling 332 effort. For instance, habitat use patterns by hummingbirds in the Arima Valley 333 network (Table 2; Snow & Snow, 1972) impose a marked pattern of microhabitat 334 mismatches causing up to 44.5% of the forbidden links. A myriad of biological 335 causes beyond those included as FL in Table 2 may contribute explanations for 336 UL: limits of color perception and or partial preferences, presence of secondary 337 metabolites in fruit pulp and leaves, toxins and combinations of monosaccharides 338 in nectar, etc. For example, aside from FL, some pairwise interactions may sim-339 ply have an asymptotically-zero probability of interspecific encounter between the 340 partner species, if they are very rare. However, it is surprising that just the limited 341 set of forbidden link types considered in Table 1 explain between 24.6-77.2% of 342 the unobserved links. Notably, the Arima Valley, Santa Virgáia, and Hato Ratón 343 networks have > 60\% of the unobserved links explained, which might be related 344 to the fact that they are subnetworks (Arima Valley, Santa Virgínia) or relatively 345 small networks (Hato Ratón). All this means that empirical networks may have 346 sizable fractions of structural zeroes. Ignoring this biological fact may contribute 347 to wrongly inferring undersampling of interactions in real-world assemblages. 348

To sum up, two elements of inference are required in the analysis of unobserved interactions in ecological interaction networks: first, detailed natural history infor-

mation on the participant species that allows the inference of biological constraints imposing forbidden links, so that structural zeroes can by identified in the adjacency matrix. Second, a critical analysis of sampling robustness and a robust estimate of the actual fraction of missing links, M, resulting in a robust estimate of I. In the next sections I explore these elements of inference, using IACs to assess the robustness of interaction sampling.

Asymptotic diversity estimates

Let's assume a sampling of the diversity in a specific locality, over relatively homogeneous landscape where we aim at determining the number of species present for a particular group of organisms. To do that we carry out transects or plot samplings across the landscape or use any other type of direct or indirect recording method, adequately replicated so we obtain a number of samples. Briefly, S_{obs} is the total number of species observed in a sample, or in a set of samples. S_{est} is the estimated number of species in the community represented by the sample, or by the set of samples, where est indicates an estimator. With abundance data, let S_k be the number of species each represented by exactly k individuals in a single sample. Thus, S_0 is the number of undetected species (species present in the community but not included in the sample), S_1 is the number of singleton species (represented by just one individual), S_2 is the number of doubleton species (species with two individuals), etc. The total number of individuals in the sample would be:

$$n = \sum_{k=1}^{S_{obs}} S_k$$

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A frequently used asymptotic, bias corrected, non-parametric estimator is S_{Chao} (Hortal, Borges & Gaspar, 2006; Chao, 2005; Colwell, 2013):

$$S_{Chao} = S_{obs} + \frac{S_1(S_1 - 1)}{2(S_2 + 1)}$$

Another frequently used alternative is the Chao2 estimator, S_{Chao2} (Gotelli & Colwell, 2001), which has been reported to have a limited bias for small sample sizes (Colwell & Coddington, 1994; Chao, 2005):

$$S_{Chao2} = S_{obs} + \frac{S_1^2}{2S_2}$$

[ROB] No. The unbiased form of Chao2 is identical in formation to Chao1 (above),

but instead of counts it uses incidence frequencies among samples (usually Q instead of S). [ROB]

A plot of the cumulative number of species recorded, S_n , as a function of some
measure of sampling effort (say, n samples taken) yields the species accumulation
curve (SAC) or collector's curve (Colwell & Coddington, 1994). Similarly, interaction accumulation curves (IAC), analogous to SACs, can be used to assess the
robustness of interactions sampling for plant-animal community datasets (Jordano,
1987; Jordano, Vázquez & Bascompte, 2009; Olesen et al., 2011), as discussed in
the next section.

tions

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Assessing sampling effort when recording interac-

The basic method we can propose to estimate sampling effort and explicitly show the analogues with rarefaction analysis in biodiversity research is to vectorize the 377 interaction matrix AP so that we get a vector of all the potential pairwise inter-378 actions $(I_{max}, \text{ Table 1})$ that can occur in a community of A animal species and P 379 plant species. The new "species" we aim to sample are the pairwise interactions 380 (Table 3). So, if we have in our community $Turdus\ merula\ (Tm)$ and $Rosa\ canina$ 381 (Rc) and $Prunus\ mahaleb\ (Pm)$, our problem will be to sample 2 new "species": 382 Tm - Rc and Tm - Pm. In general, if we have A = 1...i, animal species and 383 P = 1...j plant species (assuming a complete list of species in the assemblage), 384 we'll have a vector of "new" species to sample: $A_1P_1, A_1P_2, ...A_2P_1, A_2P_2, ...A_iP_j$. 385 We can represent the successive samples where we can potentially get records of 386 these interactions in a matrix with the vectorized interaction matrix and columns 387 representing the successive samples we take (Table 3). This is simply a vectorized 388 version of the interaction matrix. This is analogous to a biodiversity sampling ma-389 trix with species as rows and sampling units (e.g., quadrats) as columns (Jordano, 390 Vázquez & Bascompte, 2009). The package EstimateS (Colwell, 2013) includes 391 a complete set of functions for estimating the mean IAC and its unconditional 392 standard deviation from random permutations of the data, or subsampling with-393 out replacement (Gotelli & Colwell, 2001) and the asymptotic estimators for the 394 expected number of distinct pairwise interactions included in a given reference sample of interaction records (see also the specaccum function in library vegan of 396 the R Package, 2010) (Jordano, Vázquez & Bascompte, 2009; Olesen et al., 2011).

In this way we effectively extend sampling theory developed for species diversity to the sampling of ecological interactions. Yet future theoretical work will be needed to formally assess the similarities and differences in the two approaches and developing biologically meaningful null models of expected interaction richness with added sampling effort.

Diversity-accumulation analysis (Magurran, 1988; Hortal, Borges & Gaspar, 403 2006) come up immediately with this type of dataset. This procedure plots 404 the accumulation curve for the expected number of distinct pairwise interactions 405 recorded with increasing sampling effort (Jordano, Vázquez & Bascompte, 2009; 406 Olesen et al., 2011). Asymptotic estimates of interaction richness and its associ-407 ated standard errors and confidence intervals can thus be obtained (Hortal, Borges 408 & Gaspar, 2006) (see Supplementary Online Material). It should be noted that 409 the asymptotic estimate of interaction richness explicitly ignores the fact that, 410 due to forbidden links, a number of pairwise interactions among the I_{max} number 411 specified in the adjacency matrix Δ cannot be recorded, irrespective of sampling effort. We may expect undersampling specially in moderate to large size networks 413 with multiple modules (i.e., species subsets requiring different sampling strategies) (Jordano, 1987; Olesen et al., 2011; Chacoff et al., 2012); adequate sampling may 415 be feasible when interaction subwebs are studied (Olesen et al., 2011; Vizentin-416 Bugoni, Maruyama & Sazima, 2014), typically with more homogeneous subsets 417 of species (e.g., bumblebee-pollinated flowers). In any case the sparseness of the 418 Δ matrix is by no means an indication of undersampling the issue of structural 419 zeroes in the interaction matrices is effectively incorporated in the estimates. 420

For example, mixture models incorporating detectabilities have been proposed to effectively account for rare species (Mao & Colwell, 2005). In an analogous line,

mixture models could be extended to samples of pairwise interactions, also with 423 specific detectability values. These detection rate/odds could be variable among groups of interactions, depending on their specific detectability. For example, 425 detectability of flower-pollinator interactions involving bumblebees could have a higher detectability than flower-pollinator pairwise interactions involving, say, ni-427 tidulid beetles. These more homogeneous groupings of pairwise interactions within 428 a network define modules (Bascompte & Jordano, 2014), so we might expect that 429 interactions of a given module (e.g., plants and their humming bird pollinators; Fig. 430 1a) may share similar detectability values, in an analogous way to species groups 431 receiving homogeneous detectability values in mixture models (Mao & Colwell, 432 2005). In its simplest form, this would result in a sample with multiple pairwise 433 interactions detected, in which the number of interaction events recorded for each 434 distinct interaction found in the sample is recorded (i.e., a column vector in Table 435 3, corresponding to, say, a sampling day). The number of interactions recorded for 436 the i_{th} pairwise interaction (i.e., $A_i P_j$ in Table 3), Y_i could be treated as a Poisson 437 random variable with a mean parameter λ_i , its detection rate. Mixture models 438 (Mao & Colwell, 2005) include estimates for abundance-based data (their analogs 439 in interaction sampling would be weighted data), where Y_i is a Poisson random 440 variable with detection rate λ_i . This is combined with the incidence-based model, 441 where Y_i is a binomial random variable (their analogous in interaction sampling 442 would be presence/absence records of interactions) with detection odds λ_i . Let 443 T be the number of samples in an incidence-based data set. A Poisson/binomial 444 density can be written as (Mao & Colwell, 2005):

$$g(y;\lambda) = \begin{cases} \frac{\lambda^y}{y!e^{\lambda}} & [1] \\ \binom{T}{y} \frac{\lambda^y}{(1+\lambda)^T} & [2] \end{cases}$$

where [1] corresponds to a weighted network, and [2] to a qualitative network. 446 The detection rates λ_i depend on the relative abundances ϕ_i of the interactions, the probability of a pairwise interaction being detected when it is present, and the 448 sample size (the number of interactions recorded), which, in turn, is a function of the sampling effort. Unfortunately, no specific sampling model has been de-450 veloped along these lines for species interactions and their characteristic features. 451 For example, a complication factor might be that interaction abundances, ϕ_i , in 452 real assemblages are a function of the abundances of interacting species that de-453 termine interspecific encounter rates; yet they also depend on biological factors 454 that ultimately determine if the interaction occurs when the partner species are 455 present. For example, λ_i should be set to zero for all FL. It its simplest form, ϕ_i 456 could be estimated from just the product of partner species abundances, an ap-457 proach recently used as a null model to assess the role of biological constraints in 458 generating forbidden links and explaining interaction patterns (Vizentin-Bugoni, 459 Maruyama & Sazima, 2014). Yet more complex models (e.g., Wells & O'hara 460 2012) should incorporate not only interspecific encounter probabilities, but also 461 interaction detectabilities, phenotypic matching and incidence of forbidden links. 462 Mixture models are certainly complex and for most situations of evaluating sam-463 pling effort better alternatives include the simpler incidence-based rarefaction and extrapolation (Colwell, Dunn & Harris, 2012; Chao et al., 2014). 465

The real missing links

Given that a fraction of unobserved interactions can be accounted for by for-467 bidden links, what about the remaining missing interactions? We have already 468 discussed that some of these could still be related to unaccounted constraints, and 469 still others would be certainly attributable to insufficient sampling. Would this 470 always be the case? Multispecific assemblages of distinct taxonomic relatedness, 471 whose interactions can be represented as bipartite networks (e.g., host-parasite, plant-animal mutualisms, plant-herbivore interactions- with two distinct sets of 473 unrelated higher taxa), are shaped by interspecific encounters among individuals of the partner species (Fig. 2). A crucial ecological aspect limiting these inter-475 actions is the probability of interspecific encounter, i.e., the probability that two individuals of the partner species actually encounter each other in nature. 477

Given log-normally distributed abundances of the two species groups, the ex-478 pected probabilities of interspecific encounter (PIE) would be simply the product 479 of the two lognormal distributions. Thus, we might expect that for low PIE val-480 ues, pairwise interactions would be either extremely difficult to sample, or just 481 simply not occurring in nature. Consider the Nava de las Correhuelas interaction 482 web (NCH, Table 2), with A = 36, P = 25, I = 181, and almost half of the unob-483 served interactions not accounted for by forbidden links, thus M = 53.1%. Given 484 the robust sampling of this network (Jordano, Vázquez & Bascompte, 2009), a 485 sizable fraction of these possible but missing links would be simply not occurring 486 in nature, most likely by extremely low PIE, in fact asymptotically zero. Given 487 the vectorized list of pairwise interactions for NCH, I computed the PIE values for 488 each one by multiplying element-wise the two species abundance distributions. The

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 $PIE_{max} = 0.0597$, being a neutral estimate, based on the assumption that interac-490 tions occur in proportion to the species-specific local abundances. With PIE_{median} $< 1.4\ 10^{-4}$ we may safely expect (note the quantile estimate $Q_{75\%} = 3.27\ 10^{-4}$) 492 that a sizable fraction of these missing interactions may not occur according to this neutral expectation (Jordano, 1987; Olesen et al., 2011) (neutral forbidden 494 links, sensu Canard et al., 2012). 495 When we consider the vectorized interaction matrix, enumerating all pairwise 496 interactions for the AP combinations, the expected probabilities of finding a given 497 interaction can be estimated with a Good-Turing approximation (Good, 1953). 498 The technique, developed by Alan Turing and I.J. Good with applications to linguistics and word analysis (Gale & Sampson, 1995) has been recently extended in 500 novel ways for ecological analyses (Chao et al., 2015). It estimates the probability 501 of recording an interaction of a hitherto unseen pair of partners, given a set of past 502 records of interactions between other species pairs. Let a sample of N interactions 503

$$P(X) = \frac{(N_X + 1)}{T} \left(1 - \frac{E(1)}{T}\right) \tag{1}$$

where X is the pairwise interaction, N_X is the number of times interaction X is recorded, T is the sample size (number of distinct interactions recorded) and E(1) is an estimate of how many different interactions were recorded exactly once. Strictly speaking Equation (1) gives the probability that the next interaction type recorded will be X, after sampling a given assemblage of interacting species. In other words, we scale down the maximum-likelihood estimator $\frac{n}{T}$ by a factor of

so that n_r distinct pairwise interactions have exactly r records. All Good-Turing

estimators obtain the underlying frequencies of events as:

Turing estimators, the traditional asymptotic estimators, do not account in our case for the forbidden interactions.

Discussion

Recent work has inferred that most data available for interaction networks are 520 incomplete due to undersampling, resulting in a variety of biased parameters and 521 network patterns (Chacoff et al., 2012). It is important to note, however, that 522 in practice, many surveyed networks to date have been subnets of much larger 523 This is true for protein interaction, gene regulation, and metabolic 524 networks, where only a subset of the molecular entities in a cell have been sam-525 pled (Stumpf, Wiuf & May, 2005). Despite recent attempts to document whole 526 ecosystem meta-networks (Pocock, Evans & Memmott, 2012), it is likely that most 527 ecological interaction networks will illustrate just major ecosystem compartments. Due to their high generalization, high temporal and spatial turnover, and high 529 complexity of association patterns, adequate sampling of ecological interaction 530 networks requires extremely large sampling effort. Undersampling of ecological 531 networks may originate from the analysis of assemblage subsets (e.g., taxonomically or functionally defined), and/or from logistically-limited sampling effort. It is 533 extremely hard to robustly sample the set of biotic interactions even for relatively simple, species-poor assemblages; thus, we need to assess how robust is the characterization of the adjacency matrix Δ . Concluding that an ecological network dataset is undersampled just by its sparseness would be unrealistic. The reason stems from a biological fact: a sizeable fraction of the maximum, potential links that can be recorded among two distinct sets of species is simply unobservable, irrespective of sampling effort (Jordano, 1987). In addition, sampling effort needs to be explicitly gauged because of its potential influence on parameter estimates for the network.

Missing links are a characteristic feature of all plant-animal interaction net-543 works, and likely pervade other ecological interactions. Important natural history details explain a fraction of them, resulting in unrealizable interactions (i.e., for-545 bidden interactions) that define structural zeroes in the interaction matrices and 546 contribute to their extreme sparseness. Sampling interactions is a way to monitor 547 biodiversity beyond the simple enumeration of component species and to develop 548 efficient and robust inventories of functional interactions. Yet no sampling theory 549 for interactions is available. Some key components of this sampling are analo-550 gous to species sampling and traditional biodiversity inventories; however, there 551 are important differences. Focusing just on the realized interactions or treating 552 missing interactions as the expected unique result of sampling bias would miss 553 important components to understand how mutualisms coevolve within complex 554 webs of interdependence among species. 555

Contrary to species inventories, a sizable fraction of non-observed pairwise interactions cannot be sampled, due to biological constraints that forbid their occurrence. Moreover, recent implementations of inference methods for unobserved species (Chao *et al.*, 2015) or for individual-based data (Wells & O'Hara, 2012)

can be combined with the forbidden link approach. They do not account either for the existence of these ecological constraints, but can help in estimating their relative importance, simply by the difference between the asymptotic estimate of interaction richness in a robustly-sampled assemblage and the maximum richness I_{max} of interactions.

Ecological interactions provide the wireframe supporting the lives of species, 565 and they also embed crucial ecosystem functions which are fundamental for sup-566 porting the Earth system. We still have a limited knowledge of the biodiversity 567 of ecological interactions, and they are being lost (extinct) at a very fast pace, 568 frequently preceding species extinctions (Valiente-Banuet et al., 2014). We urgently need robust techniques to assess the completeness of ecological interactions 570 networks because this knowledge will allow the identification of the minimal com-571 ponents of their ecological complexity that need to be restored to rebuild functional 572 ecosystems after perturbations. 573

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588 Data accessiblity

This review does not use new raw data, but includes some re-analyses of previously published material. All the original data supporting the paper, R code, supplementary figures, and summaries of analytical protocols is available at the author's GitHub repository (https://github.com/pedroj/MS_Network-Sampling), with DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.29437.

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Figure captions

Figure 1. Sampling ecological interaction networks (e.g., plant-animal interac-797 tions) usually focus on different types of subsampling the full network, yielding 798 submatrices $\Delta[m,n]$ of the full interaction matrix Δ with A and P animal and 799 plant species. a) all the potential plants interacting with a subset of the animals 800 (e.g., studying just the humming bird-pollinated flower species in a community); 801 b) all the potential animal species interacting with a subset of the plant species 802 (e.g., studying the frugivore species feeding on figs Ficus in a community); and c) 803 sampling a subset of all the potential animal species interacting with a subset of all 804 the plant species (e.g., studying the plant-frugivore interactions of the rainforest 805 understory). 806

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Figure 2. Sampling species interactions in natural communities. Suppose an 808 assemblage with A=3 animal species (red, species 1-3 with three, two, and 1 809 individuals, respectively) and P=3 plant species (green, species a-c with three 810 individuals each) (colored balls), sampled with increasing effort in steps 1 to 6 811 (panels). In Step 1 we record animal species 1 and plant species 1 and 2 with a total of three interactions (black lines) represented as two distinct interactions: 813 1-a and 1-b. As we advance our sampling (panels 1 to 6, illustrating e.g., additional sampling days) we record new distinct interactions. Note that we actu-815 ally sample and record interactions among individuals, yet we pool the data across 816 species to get a species by species interaction matrix. Few network analyses have 817 been carried out on individual data(Dupont et al., 2014). 818

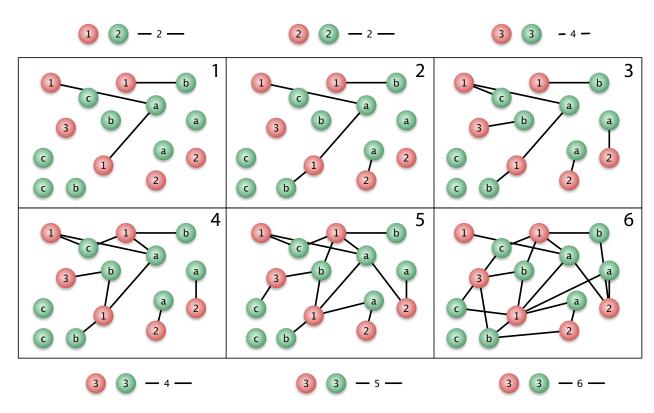
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Figures Figures

Figure 1:



Figure 2:



Jordano - Figure 1

21 Table captions

Table 1. A taxonomy of link types for ecological interactions (Olesen et al. 2011).

A, number of animal species; P, number of plant species; I, number of observed links; C = 100I/(AP), connectance; FL, number of forbidden links; and ML, number of missing links. As natural scientists, our ultimate goal is to eliminate ML from the equation FL = AP - I - ML, which probably is not feasible given logistic sampling limitations. When we, during our study, estimate ML to be negligible, we cease observing and estimate I and FL.

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Table 2. Frequencies of different type of forbidden links in natural plant-animal 830 interaction assemblages. AP, maximum potential links, I_{max} ; I, number of ob-831 served links; UL, number of unobserved links; FL, number of forbidden links; 832 FL_P , phenology; FL_S , size restrictions; FL_A , accessibility; FL_O , other types of 833 restrictions; ML, unknown causes (missing links). Relative frequencies (in paren-834 theses) calculated over $I_{max} = AP$ for I, ML, and FL; for all forbidden links types, 835 calculated over FL. References, from left to right: Olesen et al. 2008; Olesen & 836 Myrthue unpubl.; Snow & Snow 1972 and Jordano et al. 2006; Vizentin-Bugoni 837 et al. 2014; Jordano et al. 2009; Olesen et al. 2011. 838

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⁸⁴⁰ Table 3. A vectorized interaction matrix.

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Table 4. Sampling statistics for three plant-animal interaction networks (Olesen et al. 2011). Symbols as in Table 1; N, number of records; Chao1 and ACE are asymptotic estimators for the number of distinct pairwise interactions I (Hortal

et~al.~2006), and their standard errors; C, sample coverage for rare interactions (Chao & Jost 2012). Scaled asymptotic estimators and their confidence intervals (CI) were calculated by weighting Chao1 and ACE with the observed frequencies of forbidden links.

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850 Tables

Table 1:

Link type	Formulation	Definition
Potential links	$I_{max} = AP$	Size of network matrix, i.e. maximum number of potentially observable interactions; A and P , numbers of interacting animal and plant species, respectively.
Observed links	I	Total number of observed links in the network given a sufficient sampling effort. Number of ones in the adjacency matrix.
Unobserved links	$UL = I_{max} - I$	Number of zeroes in the adjacency matrix.
Forbidden links	FL	Number of links, which remain unobserved because of linkage constraints, irrespectively of sufficient sampling effort.
Missing links	ML = AP - I - FL	Number of links, which may exist in nature but need more sampling effort and/or additional sampling methods to be observed.

Table 2:

		Pollination			Seed dispersal	
Link type	Zackenberg	g Grundvad	Arima Valley	Sta. Virginia	Hato Ratón	Nava Correhuelas
I_{max}	1891	646	522	423	272	825
I	268 (0.1417)	212 (0.3282)	185 (0.3544)	86 (0.1042)	151 (0.4719)	181 (0.2194)
UL	1507 (0.7969)	$ 434 \\ (0.6718) $	337 (0.6456)	337 (0.4085)	$ \begin{array}{c} 169 \\ (0.5281) \end{array} $	644 (0.7806)
FL	530 (0.3517)	107 (0.2465)	218 (0.6469)	260 (0.7715)	118 (0.6982)	302 (0.4689)
FL_P	530 (1.0000)	94 (0.2166)	0 (0.0000)	120 (0.1624)	67 (0.3964)	195 (0.3028)
FL_S	$\cdots (\cdots)$	8 (0.0184)	30 (0.0890)	140 (0.1894)	31 (0.1834)	46 (0.0714)
FL_A	$\cdots (\cdots)$	5 (0.0115)	$150 \\ (0.445)^a$	$\cdots (\cdots)$	20 (0.1183)	61 (0.0947)
FL_O	$\cdots (\cdots)$	$\cdots (\cdots)$	$38 (0.1128)^b$	$\cdots (\cdots)$	$\cdots (\cdots)$	363 (0.5637)
ML	977 (0.6483)	327 (0.7535)	119 (0.3531)	77 (0.1042)	51 (0.3018)	342 (0.5311)

^a, Lack of accessibility due to habitat uncoupling, i.e., canopy-foraging species vs. understory species. b , Colour restrictions, and reward per flower too small relative to the size of the

bird.

Table 3:

Interaction	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	 Sample i
A1 - P2 A1 - P2	12 0	2 0	0	 6
A5 - P3 A5 - P4	5 1	0 0	1 1	 18 3
 A _i - P _i	1	0	1	 2

Table 4:

	Hato Ratón	Nava Correhuelas	Zackenberg
\overline{A}	17	33	65
P	16	25	31
I_{max}	272	825	1891
N	3340	8378	1245
I	151	181	268
C	0.917	0.886	0.707
Chao1	263.1 ± 70.9	231.4 ± 14.2	509.6 ± 54.7
ACE	240.3 ± 8.9	241.3 ± 7.9	566.1 ± 14.8
CI	[169.5–187.4]	[161.8–177.6]	[327.8–357.4]
$\% \ unobserved^a$	8.33	15.38	47.80

 $[^]a,$ estimated with library Jade (R
 Core Development Team 2010, Chao $\it et~\it al.~2015)$