

1 Analysing individual specialisation and flexibility in predator hunting
2 mode and its effect on hunting success using an online multiplayer
3 videogame

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Abstract

11 This is my abstract paragraph

12 Keywords: individual variation, hunting success, foraging mode, hunting tactics, predator-prey
13 behaviour, online videogames

Introduction

15 Predator hunting mode plays a crucial role in structuring ecological communities and ecosystems
 16 (Huey and Pianka 1981; Preisser et al. 2007; Schmitz 2008; Kersch-Becker et al. 2018) and is usually
 17 described as 1) active/cursorial when hunters search, follow, and chase prey for long distances,
 18 2) sit-and-pursue, when hunters remain motionless and pounce on prey that are within chasing
 19 distance, and 3) sit-and-wait/ambush, when hunters wait for prey to be within immediate capture
 20 distance (McLaughlin 1989). Field studies show that predators with contrasting hunting modes
 21 (e.g. cursorial vs ambush) differ in the number of individuals or species, or in the type of prey that
 22 they capture (Miller et al. 2014; Donihue 2016; Glaudas et al. 2019). As a result, they can cause
 23 opposing trophic cascades and act at different trophic levels (Schmitz 2008; Romero and Koricheva
 24 2011).

25 Predator species tend to be classified either as active or sit-and-wait hunters based on their average
 26 behaviour (Lima 2002; Miles et al. 2007; Pettorelli et al. 2015; Schmitz 2017). Despite that
 27 categorising predators is still useful to predict community and ecosystem dynamics (Wirsing et
 28 al. 2021), it essentially ignores the complexity of predator foraging decision-making. Growing
 29 evidence suggest that individual predator behavioural variation can exert important consequences
 30 for predator-prey interactions (Pettorelli et al. 2015; Toscano et al. 2016; Schmitz 2017). For
 31 instance, individual predator behavioural type can mediate consumptive and non-consumptive effects
 32 during trophic interactions (Smith and Blumstein 2010; Griffen et al. 2012; Toscano and Griffen
 33 2014). Yet, the extent to which predators within populations differ in their foraging mode, and
 34 how these individual differences affect community and ecosystem processes remains unclear. It is
 35 therefore imperative that we account for individual variation in hunting mode during predator-prey
 36 interactions if we hope to understand the community consequences of predation.

37 Stable individual differences in hunting mode within populations can be driven by specialisation
 38 when individuals experience temporal and/or spatial fluctuations in the distribution, availability,
 39 or behaviour of their prey (Araújo et al. 2011; Carneiro et al. 2017; Phillips et al. 2017; Courbin
 40 et al. 2018). In sea predators, individuals specialise in specific tactics to meet the energy/time
 41 demands that are required to successfully capture the type of prey generally encountered (Bowen
 42 et al. 2002; Tinker et al. 2008; Arthur et al. 2016). Prey activity/mobility is an important trait

43 influencing encounter rates with predators (Gerritsen and Strickler 1977; Huey and Pianka 1981;
44 Scharf et al. 2006). Therefore, individual variation in encounter rates with prey activity-types may
45 lead to nonrandom interactions between predator-prey behavioural types (Wolf and Weissing 2012).
46 For example, the locomotor-crossover hypothesis (Huey and Pianka 1981) predicts that ambush
47 predators should be more successful when they hunt fast-moving prey, while cursorial predators
48 should have greater success with sedentary prey (Scharf et al. 2006; Belgrad and Griffen 2016;
49 Donihue 2016). Individual predators with contrasting hunting modes might thus coexist within a
50 population if their tactics allow them to reach similar capture rates (Kobler et al. 2009; Michel and
51 Adams 2009; Chang et al. 2017).

52 Habitat structure is a second important driver of stable individual differences in predator foraging
53 mode, as it shapes opportunities for prey encounter and prey capture (Robinson and Holmes 1982;
54 James and Heck Jr. 1994; Sargeant et al. 2007; Wasiolka et al. 2009; Donihue 2016). A growing
55 body of evidence points to predators who hunt in open and homogeneous habitats adopting a
56 cursorial strategy, contrary to those hunting in heterogeneous and closed habitats that typically
57 ambush their prey (James and Heck Jr. 1994; Wasiolka et al. 2009; Donihue 2016). Hence, the
58 habitat components of a predator’s hunting grounds can shape its hunting tactic. Heterogeneous
59 habitats are expected to favor sit-and-wait/sit-and-pursue hunters as they offer perches and cover,
60 which are useful for ambushes (James and Heck Jr. 1994; Laurel and Brown 2006). On the contrary,
61 active hunters should benefit from higher encounter rates in open habitats as prey detection is
62 easier, but, at the expense of being themselves more easily detected (Michel and Adams 2009). This
63 suggests that habitat structure could mediate tradeoffs between hunting strategies.

64 Trophic interactions are dynamic processes that can also trigger flexible behavioural adjustments by
65 individual predators (Helfman 1990; Heithaus et al. 2018). For instance, predators can respond to
66 changes in prey density (Inoue and Marsura 1983), prey behavioural type (McGhee et al. 2013),
67 prey condition (Wignall and Taylor 2008), seasonality (Miles et al. 2007; Phillips et al. 2017), or
68 habitat structure (Wasiolka et al. 2009). Unfortunately, most of this research is conducted under
69 controlled laboratory conditions, which can fail to capture the nuances and complexities of a predator
70 specie’s behaviour in the wild (Carter et al. 2013; Niemelä and Dingemanse 2014). Empirically
71 investigating individual variation in hunting mode requires repeated measures of behaviour of

numerous individuals under different environmental settings (Dall and Griffith 2014; Dingemanse and Wright 2020). Such an approach may impose considerable financial, technical, and ethical challenges when studying larger or elusive wildlife, such as apex predators (Hertel et al. 2020). An additional challenge in empirical studies of predator-prey interactions is identifying traits in predators and prey that are easily observable, but also ecologically relevant. For instance, foraging mode is expected to vary along a continuum of morphological, physiological, and behavioural traits (foraging syndrome hypothesis) (Perry et al. 1990; Perry 1999; Butler 2005; Cooper 2005; Miles et al. 2007), but few studies have investigated how habitat- and prey-specific characteristics jointly shape correlated foraging traits at different hierarchical levels.

Here, we propose a novel approach to circumvent these challenges by studying individual variation in predator behaviour that capitalizes on online multiplayer videogames (Balicer 2007; Lofgren and Fefferman 2007; Oultram 2013; Ahmad et al. 2014; Ross et al. 2015). Online multiplayer videogames could provide numerous opportunities for ecologists to study general ecological phenomena, including the mechanisms driving individual variation in behaviour (Barbe et al. 2020). First, online videogames provide abundant repeated measurements on millions of individual players across temporal and environmental gradients. Second, the structure of the virtual environment is known and can be used to evaluate how specific components affect the behaviour of interest. Third, videogames can reproduce realistic ecological settings in which complex interactions occur among players. A classic example is the case of the “Corrupted Blood” epidemic in *World of Warcraft*, where transmission modes/vectors and human reactions to the disease were surprisingly similar to what would be expected in a real-world outbreak (Balicer 2007; Lofgren and Fefferman 2007). In this sense, online multiplayer videogames could potentially constitute a complement to traditional field studies. They could permit ecologists (among other scientists) to bridge the gap between real-world ecological studies and large-scale computer simulations (Cere et al., accepted, Ross et al. 2015).

We used the online multiplayer videogame *Dead by Daylight* (*DBD*) as our study system. This game pits a single player (predator) against a group of four players (prey). The predator’s main objective is to search for and consume prey (Fig. 1A), whilst the preys’ objective is to exploit resources while escaping the predator. Prey can use a wide range of behaviours such as cooperation or hiding (Cere

et al., accepted) to successfully escape (Fig. 1 B-C), which predators can exploit to lure them in an ambush. These situations offer the possibility for predators to express different hunting tactics. Moreover, each match in *DBD* occurs within a specific habitat, including forests, farmlands, and urban areas. These environments differ in the heterogeneity and complexity of their structures (McCoy and Bell 1991), such as in the availability of perches and refugia, vegetation density, or surface area (Fig 1. D). Hence, predators may encounter prey that express different behaviours, and are expected to benefit from changing their behaviour accordingly to maximize hunting success.



Figure 1: Images of the online videogame Dead by Daylight A) The predator player's first person vision. B) The prey (survivor) player's third person vision. Prey can cooperate to repair generators. Once all generators are repaired, prey may activate one of the two C) doors in order to escape and win the match. D) Representative pictures of the different game environments where matches take place. The game environments settings vary between urban, farmland, and forest areas.

In this study, we use an extensive and complete dataset on the hunting behaviour of predator players in *DBD* to investigate environmental and individual variation in hunting mode, and how hunting mode affects prey capture. We use four hunting-related behaviours as proxies of hunting mode: travel speed, the rate of space covered in the environment, the proportion of time spent in an ambush position, and the time elapsed before the first prey capture. We use multivariate

mixed-modelling to quantify variation in multiple behaviours and their correlations at different hierarchical levels (i.e. among and within-individuals, Dingemanse and Dochtermann 2013) as a way to describe the variation in hunting mode within a population of predators (Perry et al. 1990; Perry 1999; Butler 2005; Cooper 2005; Miles et al. 2007). Within-population variation includes among-environment differences in average hunting behaviour, variation in tactic use arising when some individuals use one tactic more often than others (i.e. individual specialisation), and variation arising from individuals adjusting tactic use over time in response to temporal changes in environmental conditions or prey behaviour (i.e. individual flexibility). First, we hypothesize that predators use hunting tactics according to habitat-specific characteristics. Therefore, we expect correlated trait values associated with ambush tactics in smaller and heterogeneous environments, and correlated trait values associated with cursorial tactics in open/wider and homogeneous environments (James and Heck Jr. 1994; Wasiolka et al. 2009; Donihue 2016). Second, we hypothesize that individual predators consistently differ in their hunting mode over time, with some specialising as cursorial hunters, and others as ambush hunters. Thus, we predict that individual predators should differ in their average trait values along a continuum for all combinations of the four hunting traits (among-individual behavioural correlations). Following the locomotor-crossover hypothesis (Huey and Pianka 1981), we predict that ambush and cursorial predator-types will coexist in the population, because both achieve similar hunting success by performing better against prey with the opposite locomotor tendency. Lastly, we hypothesize that individual predators will express flexible hunting behaviour, by switching from cursorial to ambush tactics between foraging bouts (i.e. between matches). Thus, we predict that the individuals' residual trait values in contrasting hunting behaviours (ambush vs cursorial) should be negatively correlated (within-individual behavioural correlations).

Materials and methods

Study system

The datasets used to test our hypotheses were provided by Behaviour Interactive Inc., the owner and developer of *DBD*. The company records the behaviour of players for every match played online. During our study period, *DBD* offered 15 playable predator avatars. Players who adopt the predator's role choose their avatar before a match. Each predator avatar has unique abilities that may encourage

different playstyles. Some have abilities that make them stealthier, while others can run faster, or have more powerful attacks. We thus controlled for the chosen avatar in our models since it may impact the playstyle of the predator player. In addition, the game environment where players compete is usually randomly assigned from a list of 27 maps differing in their physical components. For example, some maps have large playable surface areas with low vegetation density, which may favor the use of a cursorial strategy. Other maps have a smaller surface area with high vegetation density, which may impair visibility and alter prey detection, favoring the use of an ambush strategy. For additional details on the game settings and map characteristics, refer to <https://deadbydaylight.com/en>, and https://deadbydaylight.gamepedia.com/Dead_by_Daylight_Wiki.

Data collection

The study period ranged from 20 March to 17 June 2019. Our population consisted of 2 171 new anonymous players who initiated their first match between 20 March and 22 March, with a total record of 70 831 matches (average: 177 matches per individual, range: 1 - 972 matches). The average match duration was 11 minutes (range: 5 - 58 minutes). For each match, we recorded the date (date-hour-minutes), the duration, the predator player's anonymous ID, the prey players' anonymous ID's, the predator's avatar, and the game environment where the match took place. We also recorded predator and prey behaviour. We retained matches that lasted more than 5 minutes (short matches are usually interrupted because of technical issues). Players also score points during a match by performing different actions. To control for matches where players did not play, or for errors in the data collection, we removed matches where predators earned less than 1 point.

Behavioural traits

We selected four out of eight behavioural variables that summarized most of the variation in predator hunting tactics based on a principal component analysis (see Fig. S1 and Table S1 in Supporting information): average travel speed (m/s), the rate of space covered (square/s), the proportion of time spent in an ambush position over the match duration, and the proportion of time predators took to capture their first prey over the match duration. Travel speed and the rate of space covered differ in that speed describes the average distance traveled in meters per second, while space coverage describes the number of 16x16 meters squares (from a grid that covers the whole virtual environment)

entered per second in the environment (similar to the open field test, Montiglio et al. 2010). The proportion of time spent ambushing describes the total amount of time a predator spent monitoring around capture sites to ambush prey that try to rescue a conspecific (see section ‘Behavioural traits measurements’ in the Supporting information for details).

We quantified prey average travel speed (m/s) and rate of space covered (square/s). These two traits were measured using the same method described for predators (refer to Supporting information). For both traits, we averaged the four individual prey values within each match since we were interested in the average effect of prey behaviour on the predator’s hunting behaviour. Thus, we used one average value per prey trait, for each match played.

Statistical analyses: Software and computer setup

We performed all statistical analyses using the R software (version 4.0.2, R Core Team, 2020) on a remote computer cluster (Cedar, Compute Canada, <https://docs.computecanada.ca/wiki/Cedar>) running on CentOS Linux 7. All models were fitted using the R package “brms” version 2.14.4 (Bürkner 2017). We provide the R code and outputs on this GitHub repository (https://github.com/quantitative-ecologist/videogame_hunting_tactics-Rscripts) with the R sessions information to ensure reproducibility.

Statistical analyses: Variation in hunting mode

We first parametrised a multivariate Bayesian mixed model to quantify unadjusted repeatability of hunting behaviour, and evaluate among-environment, among-individual (specialisation), and within-individual (flexibility) behavioural correlations. We included the predator’s population-response to prey behaviour by adding prey travel speed (x_1) and rate of space covered (x_2) as linear fixed effects. We square-root transformed the four hunting behaviours (y_1 = speed, y_2 = space, y_3 = time in ambush, y_4 = time 1st capture) to achieve normality and then defined each as having a Gaussian distribution. All traits were then standardised to mean and unit variance (z-scores). The model is described by the following equations (see section ‘Parametrisation of the multivariate mixed model’ in the Supporting information for details):

$$y1_{ij} = (\beta_{0y1} + id_{0y1,i} + env_{0y1,i} + avatar_{0y1,i}) + \beta_{1y1}x_1 + \beta_{2y1}x_2 + \varepsilon_{0y1,ij} \quad (1)$$

$$y2_{ij} = (\beta_{0y2} + id_{0y2,i} + env_{0y2,i} + avatar_{0y2,i}) + \beta_{1y2}x_1 + \beta_{2y2}x_2 + \varepsilon_{0y2,ij} \quad (2)$$

$$y3_{ij} = (\beta_{0y3} + id_{0y3,i} + env_{0y3,i} + avatar_{0y3,i}) + \beta_{1y3}\text{prey speed} + \beta_{2y3}\text{prey space} + \varepsilon_{0y3,ij} \quad (3)$$

$$y4_{ij} = (\beta_{0y4} + id_{0y4,i} + env_{0y4,i} + avatar_{0y4,i}) + \beta_{1y4}\text{prey speed} + \beta_{2y4}\text{prey space} + \varepsilon_{0y4,ij} \quad (4)$$

where i indexes individual players and j the recorded match. Player ID ($id_{0y,i}$), the game environment ($env_{0y,i}$), the predator avatar ($avatar_{0y,i}$), and the residuals ($\varepsilon_{0y,i}$) are, respectively, random intercepts (among- individual, environment, and avatar variance) and residuals (within-individual variance). Random intercepts and residuals were assumed to follow a multivariate Gaussian distribution, with their associated variance-covariance matrixes (Ω_{id} , Ω_{env} , Ω_{avatar} , Ω_{ε}) (refer to equations S1-S4 in Supporting information). For each combination of behaviours, we extracted from our variance-covariance matrices the behavioural correlations among- individuals, environments, and avatars, as well as within-individual (residual) behavioural correlations.

Following Nakagawa and Schielzeth (2010), we calculated each hunting trait's adjusted repeatability estimate (intra-class correlation coefficient, ICC) for the player ID, the game environment, and the predator avatar by dividing the variance associated with the random effect by the total phenotypic variance (ex. $ICC_{id0,y1} = V_{id0,y1} / (V_{id0,y1} + V_{env0,y1} + V_{avatar0,y1} + V_{\varepsilon0,y1})$). We computed the 95% credible intervals for each repeatability estimate using the highest posterior density intervals.

Statistical analyses: Effect of hunting behaviour and prey behaviour on prey capture

Since predators can capture a maximum of four prey, we used the number of prey captured per total number of prey in a match (four) as a binomial response variable ($\omega_{ij} \sim \text{Binom}(\max_{ij}, P_{ij})$).

211 We first quantified the linear relationship between hunting success and predator behaviour by
 212 fitting a binomial Bayesian generalized linear mixed model (glmm) with a logit link function. The
 213 model fits a linear function ($\beta_{n,pred}x_i$) where we could estimate if hunting success increased or
 214 decreased with increasing hunting behaviour scores. We fitted the mean probability of capturing
 215 four prey (P_{ij}) for individual i on its j match as a function of its travel speed, rate of space covered,
 216 proportion of time spent ambushing, and proportion of time before the first capture (equation
 217 S5 in Supporting information). We computed a second model to account for variation in hunting
 218 success explained by prey behaviour ($\beta_{n,prey}x'_i$). We thus added prey travel speed and their rate
 219 of space covered in the model equation (equation S6 in Supporting information). Both models
 220 had random intercepts for the predator player's ID ($id_{0,i}$) and the game environment ($env_{0,i}$) to
 221 partition the variance in hunting success explained by differences among players (individuals) and
 222 environments where matches occurred. Player ID and the game environment were assumed to follow
 223 a normal distribution with estimated variance ($id_{0,i} \sim N(0, V_{id})$, $env_{0,i} \sim N(0, V_{env})$). We included
 224 an observation-level random effect to account for overdispersion and compared the models to a
 225 beta-binomial model to ensure that the estimates were robust (Harrison 2015). Trait values were
 226 standardised to mean and unit variance (z-scores).

227 We built a third model (equation S7 in Supporting information) with the same structure as the first
 228 model and included quadratic terms ($\frac{1}{2}\gamma_{n,pred}x_i$) to determine whether the relationships between
 229 hunting success and predator behaviour are concave or convex. Concave gradients suggest that
 230 individuals at the extremes of the trait distribution perform poorly while the opposite is true when
 231 the gradient is convex (Brodie et al. 1995). We also added interaction terms for each combination
 232 of predator traits ($\gamma_{n,pred}$) to estimate correlated effects on hunting success. Lastly, we computed
 233 a fourth model (equation S8 in Supporting information) that included quadratic terms for prey
 234 behaviour ($\frac{1}{2}\gamma_{n,prey}x'_i$), and interaction terms between predator and prey behaviours ($\gamma_{n,pred \text{ prey}}$)
 235 to test if predators perform better against prey with the opposite locomotor tendency (locomotor
 236 crossover). This model was built within the same structure as the third model. All trait values were
 237 standardised to mean of 0 and unit variance (z-scores).

238 The reported estimates are partial coefficients which are the effect of the behaviour on hunting
 239 success while holding the other behaviours constant. We calculated the models' ICCs following

Nakagawa et al. (2017). For each model parameter, we computed the 95% credibility intervals using the highest posterior density intervals. We assumed the fixed effects and the ICCs reached statistical significance when the 95% credible intervals did not overlap zero (Nakagawa and Cuthill 2007).

Results

Variation in hunting mode: Repeatability of hunting behaviour

As predicted, we found moderate among-individual differences in average travel speed (ICC_{id} , average speed [95% CI] = 0.280 [0.254, 0.304]) and average proportion of time spent in ambush position (ICC_{id} , time in ambush [95% CI] = 0.322 [0.301, 0.342]), while individuals differed weakly in their time before the first capture (ICC_{id} , time 1st capture [95% CI] = 0.102 [0.091, 0.114]) (Fig. 2A, diagonal). Individual predators differed weakly in their average rate of space covered (ICC_{id} , space covered [95% CI] = 0.051 [0.044, 0.057]) (Fig. 2A, diagonal).

Contrary to our predictions, predators did not differ in their average travel speed (ICC_{env} , average speed [95% CI] = 0.002 [0.001, 0.003]), nor in their proportion of time spent in ambushing (ICC_{env} , time in ambush [95% CI] = 0.002 [0.001, 0.003]) in different game environments. However, we detected small differences among the game environments in the average rate of space covered and time before the first capture (ICC_{env} , space covered [95% CI] = 0.065 [0.036, 0.097]) (ICC_{env} , time 1st capture [95% CI] = 0.055 [0.029, 0.082]) (Fig. 2B, diagonal). Finally, predators displayed weak among-avatar differences for the four hunting behaviours (ICC_{avatar} , average speed [95% CI] = 0.091 [0.042, 0.153], ICC_{avatar} , space covered [95% CI] = 0.025 [0.010, 0.046], ICC_{avatar} , time in ambush [95% CI] = 0.034 [0.012, 0.064], ICC_{avatar} , time 1st capture [95% CI] = 0.021 [0.008, 0.039]) (Fig. SX in Supplementary material).

Variation in hunting mode: Correlations between hunting behaviours

As we expected, the predators' average travel speed and proportion of time spent ambushing were negatively correlated ($r_{id_0,y1id_0,y3}$ [95% CI] = -0.635 [-0.671, -0.597]). Thus, faster predators spent less time ambushing prey (Fig. 2A, lower off-diagonal). Faster individuals covered space at a faster rate ($r_{id_0,y1id_0,y2}$ [95% CI] = 0.363 [0.297, 0.434]), and individuals who were faster or covered space at a faster rate also took less time to capture their first prey ($r_{id_0,y1id_0,y4}$ [95% CI] = -0.412 [-0.470,

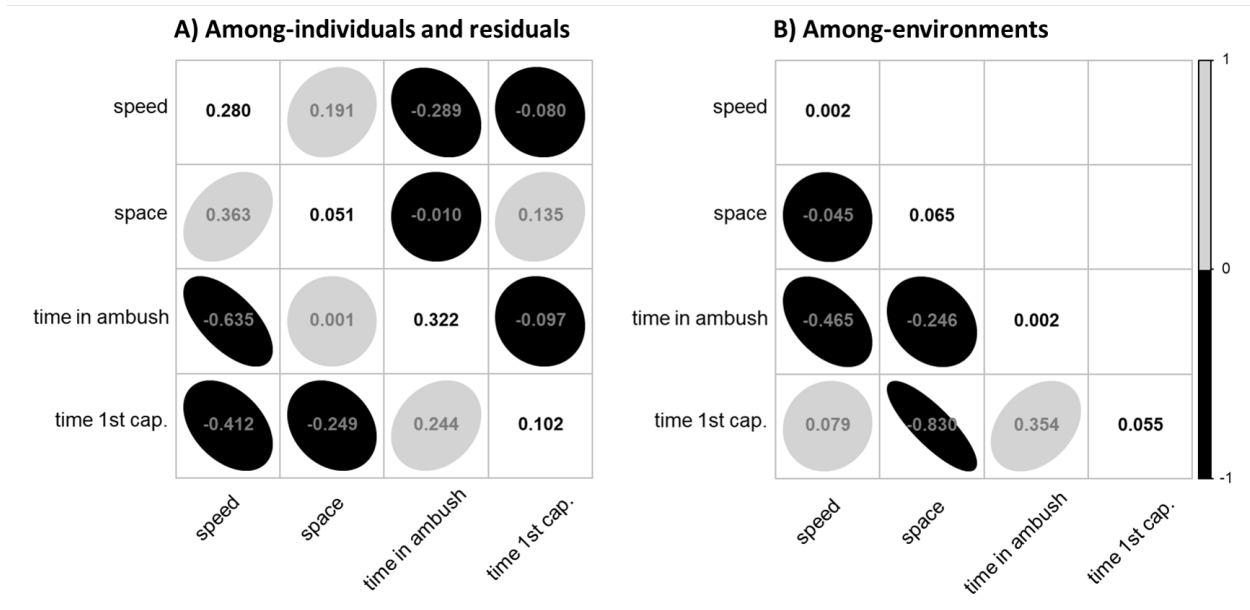


Figure 2: Correlations between combinations of hunting behaviours and their ICCs. The multivariate model was run on a sample of 70 831 matches played by 2 171 individuals across 27 different game environments, and who used up to 15 avatars. The sample size of each parameter's posterior distribution is 4000. Each correlation is computed using the BLUPs of the random effect of interest. For each panel, the ICC of the trait is displayed on the diagonal. Black and gray circles are negative and positive correlations respectively. **A)** Among-individual behavioural correlations on the lower off-diagonal, and residual within-individual behavioural correlations on the upper off-diagonal. **B)** Among-environment behavioural correlations on the lower off-diagonal. Behaviour names were shortened to simplify the plot.

267 $-0.350]$, r_{id_0,y_2id_0,y_4} [95% CI] = -0.249 $[-0.331, -0.163]$) (Fig. 2A, lower off-diagonal). There was no
 268 relationship between space covered and time spent ambushing (r_{id_0,y_2id_0,y_3} [95% CI] = 0.001 $[-0.075,$
 269 $0.079]$), but ambush hunters required more time to capture their first prey (r_{id_0,y_3id_0,y_4} [95% CI] =
 270 0.244 $[0.177, 0.310]$) (Fig. 2A, lower off-diagonal).

271 At the residual within-individual level, we detected a weak positive correlation between travel speed
 272 and the rate of space covered (r_{e_0,y_1e_0,y_2} [95% CI] = 0.191 $[0.184, 0.198]$) and a negative correlation
 273 between travel speed and the proportion of time spent ambushing prey (r_{e_0,y_1e_0,y_3} [95% CI] = -0.289
 274 $[-0.296, -0.282]$) (Fig. 2A, upper off-diagonal). Hence, matches in which a predator was faster
 275 (relative to its average) were also matches in which it covered space at a faster rate, while spending
 276 less time ambushing prey, suggesting individual flexibility in hunting mode. Predators who covered
 277 space at a faster rate also took more time before capturing their first prey (r_{e_0,y_2e_0,y_4} [95% CI] =
 278 0.135 $[0.127, 0.142]$). We did not detect large correlations between travel speed or time ambushing
 279 and the time before the first capture (r_{e_0,y_1e_0,y_4} [95% CI] = -0.080 $[-0.088, -0.073]$, r_{e_0,y_3e_0,y_4} [95%
 280 CI] = -0.097 $[-0.105, -0.090]$).

281 At the environment-level, predators who were faster in certain environments spent less time
 282 ambushing their prey (r_{env_0,y_1env_0,y_3} [95% CI] = -0.465 $[-0.767, -0.143]$) (Fig. 2B, lower off-diagonal).
 283 This suggests that the environment could determine whether predators employ a cursorial or ambush
 284 tactic. We detected a similar relationship for space coverage and time ambushing, although it was
 285 not statistically significant as the credibility interval overlapped zero (r_{env_0,y_2env_0,y_3} [95% CI] =
 286 -0.246 $[-0.582, 0.071]$). Predators who covered space at a high rate in certain environments required
 287 less time to capture their first prey (r_{env_0,y_2env_0,y_4} [95% CI] = -0.830 $[-0.937, -0.702]$), while those who
 288 used ambushes required more time to capture their first prey (r_{env_0,y_3env_0,y_4} [95% CI] = 0.354 $[0.025,$
 289 $0.650]$) (Fig. 2B, lower off-diagonal). Lastly, we did not detect among-environment correlations
 290 between travel speed and space coverage, or between travel speed and the time before capturing a
 291 first prey (r_{env_0,y_1env_0,y_2} [95% CI] = -0.045 $[-0.404, 0.291]$, (r_{env_0,y_1env_0,y_4} [95% CI] = 0.079 $[-0.273,$
 292 $0.419]$) (Fig. 2B, lower off-diagonal).

293 *Effect of predator and prey behaviour on hunting success: Linear relationships*

294 Predator behaviour alone explained 12.7% of the variation in prey capture ($R^2_{\text{marginal}} = 0.127$).

Travel speed and time spent ambushing were positively related to prey capture (Table I), suggesting that faster predators and ambush predators captured more prey (Fig. 3A, C). Predators who covered space at a faster rate captured fewer prey (Table I) (Fig. 3B). Predators that required more time to capture their first prey had a lower probability of capturing all four prey (Table I) (Fig. 4D). The probability of capturing all prey barely varied among game environments (ICC_{env0} [95% CI] = 0.005 [0.002, 0.008]). Differences among individuals were low (ICC_{id0} [95% CI] = 0.067 [0.060, 0.074]).

By adding prey behaviour, the model explained 18.1% of the variation in prey capture ($R^2_{marginal}$ = 0.181). Predators who competed against prey that were cursorial had a significantly lower probability of capturing all prey (Table I). Prey who were faster at covering space in the environment significantly reduced the predators' probability of capturing all prey (Table I).

Effect of predator and prey behaviour on hunting success: Quadratic relationships

The model that included quadratic and interaction terms for predator behaviour did not significantly increase explained variance in prey capture ($R^2_{marginal}$ = 0.149). However, we observed significant concave relationships for travel speed and time spent ambushing (Table I), suggesting that hunting success was low at extreme behavioural values (Fig. 3E, G). There was a significant convex relationship between prey capture and space coverage (Table I) (Fig. 3F), and the shape of the quadratic function relating prey capture to time before the first prey is captured was almost the same as the linear function (Fig. 3H). The probability of capturing all prey was still similar among game environments (ICC_{env0} [95% CI] = 0.010 [0.005, 0.016]), and varied slightly among individual players (ICC_{id0} [95% CI] = 0.072 [0.064, 0.079]).

The model that included quadratic and interaction terms for predator and prey behaviour had the highest explanatory power ($R^2_{marginal}$ = 0.212). Prey capture by predators as a function of prey speed and prey rate of space covered was described by concave relationships (Table I), thus, predators had a higher probability of capturing all prey during a match when they competed against prey who expressed average population values of these traits.

Effect of predator and prey behaviour on hunting success: predator and prey behavioural interaction

According to our predictions, faster predators were more successful when they competed against

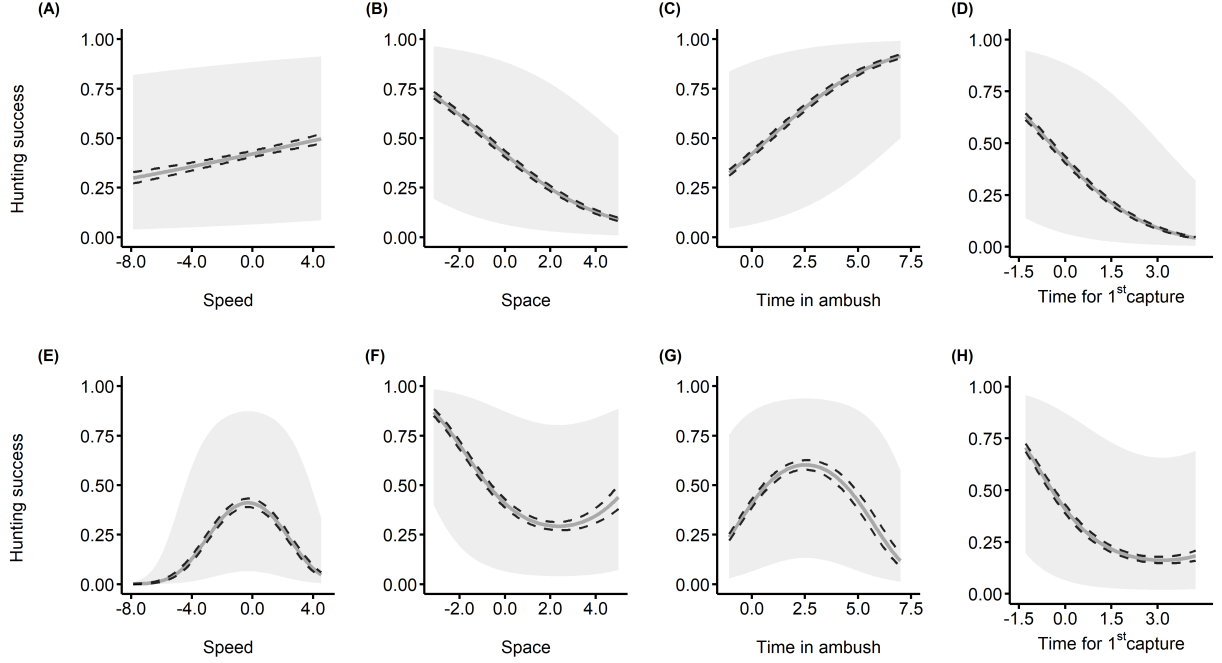


Figure 3: Effect of predator hunting behaviour on prey capture. Hunting success (i.e. the probability of capturing four prey) is on the y axis for all panels, and the standardised hunting behaviour is on the x axis. The black dashed lines represent the 95% credibility intervals for the predicted values, and the gray band represents the 95% prediction intervals (variance in fixed effects + variance in random effects). Both models were run on the same sample of 70 831 matches played by 2 171 players across 27 different game environments. The sample size of each parameter's posterior distribution is 6000 for the base model, and 4000 for the quadratic model. (A), (B), (C) Linear functions. (D), (E), (F) Quadratic functions.

323 sedentary prey (Fig. 4A). Predators had higher hunting success for the whole range of values of space
 324 covered when they competed against slower-moving prey (Fig. 4C). Contrary to our expectations,
 325 the most successful predators where those who covered space at a slow rate when they competed
 326 against prey that were slower at covering space in the environment (Fig. 4D). However, those
 327 who covered space at the fastest rate where more successful against prey that were the slowest at
 328 covering space (Fig. 4D). There were no significant interactions between predator and prey travel
 329 speed (Fig. 4B). Lastly, for the whole range of time spent ambushing prey, predators had generally
 330 higher success against slower moving prey and prey that covered less space in the environment (Fig
 331 4E-F), although the interaction with prey space covered was not significant (Table I).

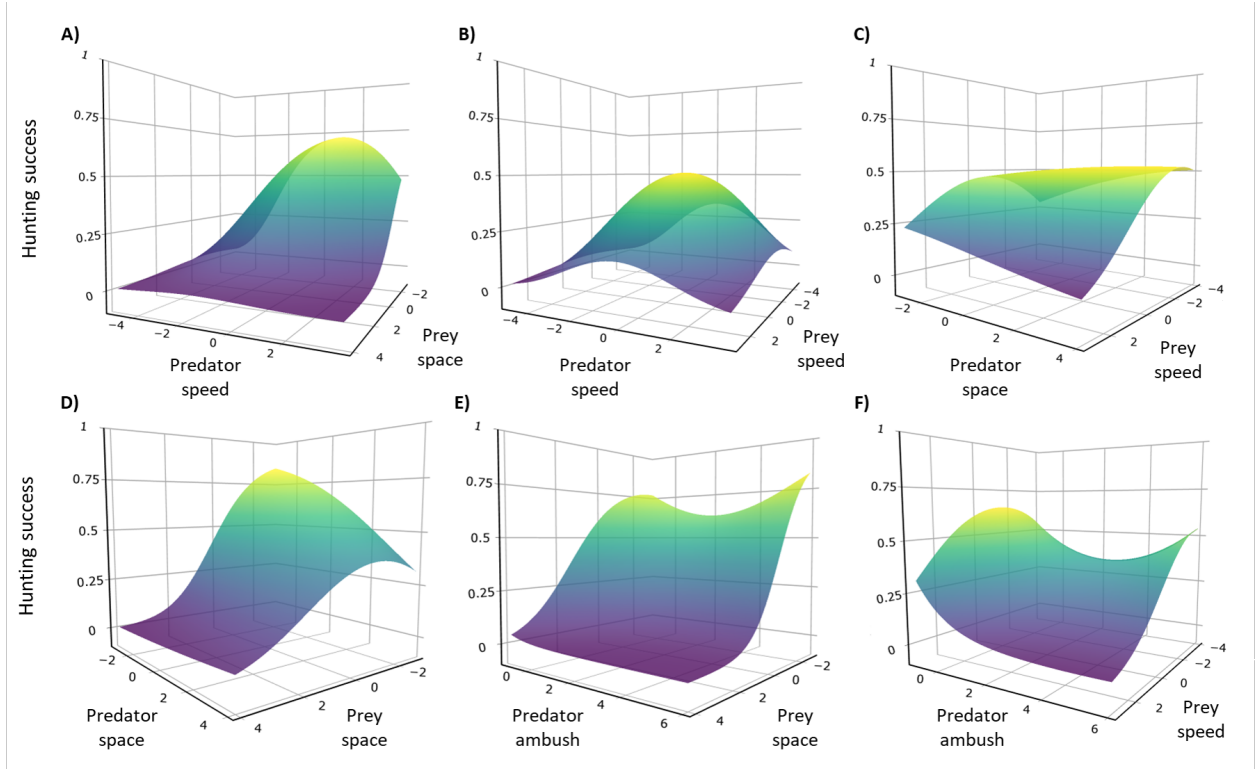


Figure 4: Influence of the predator and prey behavioural interactions on predator hunting success. The plots' 3D surfaces show the relationship between different combinations of predator-prey behaviours and predator hunting success. We fitted the surfaces by predicting the mean probability of capturing four prey based on the best quadratic approximation of the predator and prey interaction terms. **A)** Predator travel speed and prey space coverage. **B)** Predator and prey travel speed. **C)** Predator space coverage and prey travel speed. **D)** Predator and prey space coverage. **E)** Predator time spent ambushing and prey space coverage. **F)** Predator time spent ambushing and prey travel speed.

Discussion

Our study is the first to use an online multiplayer videogame to investigate individual variation in predator foraging mode, and how predator and prey behaviour affect hunting success. We provide evidence that individuals who adopt the predator avatar display individual specialisation and flexibility in competing foraging modes (cursorial vs sit-and-wait). The expression of these foraging modes was consistent with shifts in the expression of other behaviours such as space use and the latency to first prey capture, matching the predictions of the foraging syndrome hypothesis at the individual level. Contrary to our expectations, neither hunting behaviour nor prey capture varied among the game environments. Even if we found the presence of competing foraging modes in the population, the most successful predators were those who hunted at average population values of travel speed, and those who spent an above population-average of their time ambushing prey. Lastly, we indeed found evidence for the locomotor-crossover hypothesis for some predator-prey trait combinations. However, predators were generally less successful when they competed against fast traveling prey and those who covered space faster in the environment.

Our analyses revealed that predators differed in their average travel speed and in their proportion of time spent ambushing prey. These behaviours were negatively correlated at the among-individual level, suggesting that individuals may specialise as either cursorial or ambush predators. Cursorial predators displayed a shorter latency to first prey capture compared to ambush predators. These results are similar to those of McGhee et al. (2013), who found that fast moving northern pike (*Esox lucius*) were quicker to launch their initial attack. Interestingly, we found that hunting success decreased significantly with increasing latency to first capture, but did not strongly interact with time spent ambushing to affect hunting success. Globally, the most successful predators were those who moved at average population values of travel speed, while spending at least an above average of their time ambushing prey.

Since individuals reached similar hunting success across the study period, our observations suggest that ecological mechanisms may favor the coexistence of both foraging strategies within the *DBD* predator population. Indeed, we found that cursorial predators had greater hunting success when they competed against more sedentary prey, which agrees with empirical studies that tested the locomotor crossover hypothesis (Belgrad and Griffen 2016; Donihue 2016; Chang et al. 2017).

However, ambush predators did not fit with prediction as they also displayed higher success against sedentary prey, or prey travelling at approximately average population speed values. In addition, predators reached similar hunting success across the observed range of space coverage and time spent ambushing (Figure 4. C-F). A potential explanation is that by focusing solely on prey speed and space coverage, we failed to capture other important prey strategies involved in the predator-prey interaction. Unpublished results by Santostefano et al. found four prey behavioural profiles in *DBD*, where faster and more exploratory individuals were distinct from bolder individuals that performed more cooperative/altruistic actions with conspecifics, and who were involved in longer chases with the predator.

Predators also displayed flexibility in their foraging mode, where individuals switched between a cursorial or ambush strategy from one match to the other. These foraging mode switches were accompanied by shifts in space coverage and the latency before a first capture, suggesting that predators adjusted their behaviour according to the type of prey encountered. Thus, the outcome of the predator-prey interaction might not only be determined by the individual predator's preferred hunting mode, but also by its flexibility from one encounter to the next (McGhee et al. 2013). Although this falls outside the scope of this study, further analyses will need to investigate the dynamics of the predator behaviour within a match to determine if predators switch between sit-and-wait to cursorial strategies as prey density is reduced (Inoue and Marsura 1983). Mode switching is also expected to occur within a foraging bout as predators make behavioural adjustments in response to prey antipredator behaviour (Helfman 1990), and should be favored when prey (encounters, distribution, behaviour) are unpredictable (Woo et al. 2008; Carneiro et al. 2017; Phillips et al. 2017). Comparing prey selection and capture rates between specialist and flexible hunters could provide important insight into the community-consequences of behavioural decisions made by predators.

An unexpected result in our study was that predator hunting mode did not change as a function of the environment. This contrasts with studies showing that predators exploit habitat characteristics such as vegetation density to choose their hunting strategies (James and Heck Jr. 1994; Warfe and Barmuta 2004; Wasiolka et al. 2009). A potential explanation is that habitat structure may have instead affected prey behaviour, for instance, by altering their perception of predation risk or

fear (Heithaus et al. 2009; Gaynor et al. 2019). Features of heterogeneous habitats can sometimes exert stronger predator cues, leading prey to avoid these habitats, or alter their activity to reduce predation risks (Preisser et al. 2007). Prey individuals in *DBD* might differ in the way they respond to these habitat changes, as some could have increased activity in heterogeneous habitats by exploiting refuges, thus, negating the effect of the environment on the predator’s hunting strategy (Savino and Stein 1989; Warfe and Barmuta 2004). This could also explain why hunting success was similar among game environments. Predators can also alter their hunting behaviour at larger scales according to prey behaviour (as we have found), but seek prey accessibility at finer scales by killing them in specific areas in a given habitat (Hopcraft et al. 2005). We will need to investigate kill sites in the environment to see if these habitat scale-dependent effects on hunting behaviour occur in *DBD*. Taken together, our observations emphasize the importance of quantifying the interactions between environmental and individual-level factors of predators and prey to better understand trophic interactions.

We are among the first ecologists (Cere et al. accepted; Barbe et al. 2020) to propose the use of online multiplayer videogames to investigate how ecological mechanisms shape the dynamics of trophic interactions. Although we are persuaded that videogames are poised to play a central role in testing ecological hypotheses, as they reduce financial, statistical or logistical hurdles associated with empirical research while providing complex and ecologically-relevant datasets, they are not a panacea and they come with their own biases. For instance, player behaviour may not properly reflect behavioural decisions made by real-life organisms in the wild, as the player cannot “die” (Oultram 2013). Hence, individuals may take greater risks in a videogame compared to real predators (Lofgren and Fefferman 2007; Oultram 2013). Moreover, while *DBD* provides an interesting system to investigate predator-prey interactions, prey density is fixed at four players, which prevents the modelling of predator functional responses. Lastly, single predator systems such as this game may not reflect natural systems where multiple predator species compete for the same prey. In light of these potential biases, researchers should interpret results from online videogames with care, and should aim to test specific ecological hypotheses when using virtual systems.

To conclude, individual variation in predator (and prey) behaviour is increasingly recognized as a critical factor influencing the outcome of trophic interactions (Pettorelli et al. 2015; Toscano

et al. 2016; Moran et al. 2017). Albeit our study being essentially descriptive, as it is the first to investigate individual variation in foraging behaviour using the *Dead by Daylight* system, we showed that individuals differed in contrasting hunting strategies that align with those used by wild predators. These hunting modes varied among- and within- individuals along correlated behaviours (foraging syndrome hypothesis), and our results suggest that predator-prey locomotor-crossovers may promote the coexistence of different predator and prey behavioural types. We are confident that further studies using online videogames will provide valuable ecological insight for behavioural and community ecologists.

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Author contributions:

MFF and POM conceived the study. MFF collected the data, conducted the analyses, and led the writing of the manuscript. All authors contributed to revisions and gave their final approval for the present manuscript.

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The authors declare no competing interests

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Data availability statement:

We could not openly share the data on open science/data web platforms due to privacy restrictions. However, upon reasonable request, we can provide the data used to conduct our analyses. In addition, the project's R scripts and results are freely available on this GitHub repository: https://github.com/quantitative-ecologist/videogame_hunting_tactics-Rscripts.

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