

# STRUCTURAL CONTROLABILITY OF POLLINATION NETWORKS

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## Introduction

*Tentative spiel for the first paragraph:* We need to manage ecological communities because of ecosystem services and biodiversity maintenance. We would like to control communities in the sense of conserving and restoring them. However to control them (in that sense) we need to understand how species affect each other and potentially the whole system when they are faced by perturbations or management interventions. But we cannot do that yet because we lack a theoretical framework that link the dynamics of the community to management. Control theory might provide this link.

Seminal work on control theory has established a strong link between the structure of complex networks and its controlability and that in principle it is possible to alter any ecological community's composition, by modifying the abundances of just some key species (Liu, Slotine, and Barabási 2011; Cornelius, Kath, and Motter 2013). Based on this work and using a small number of binary food-webs (only presence or absence of interactions), it has been suggested that the degree distribution of ecological networks makes them inherently difficult to control (Liu, Slotine, and Barabási 2011; Ruths and Ruths 2014). This theoretical result is in agreement with many cases in which the management of ecological communities is more challenging than anticipated. In contrast with other types of complex systems like neural, intra-organizational, or trust networks, ecological networks do not have a hierarchical or distributed structure but rather tend to be closed systems in which resources recirculate. As such, ecosystems contain multiple feedbacks that allow them to self-regulate and, therefore, function relatively independent from external stimulation. Although these conceptual advances on control theory have provided an initial link between the structure of ecological communities and our ability to manage them, this relationship is still ambiguous. Ultimately, the challenge of ecological networks is represented by the variability of their structure and interaction strengths—which can vary by several orders of magnitude.

For instance, biotic invasions, as other major drivers of global change, can induce dramatic changes on the patterns of interactions that determine the structure of ecological networks (Baxter et al. 2004; Tylianakis et al. 2008; Ehrenfeld 2010). These changes can be particularly pronounced in mutualistic networks of

plants and pollinators where biotic invasions have been shown to modify the strength of species interactions and the degree of network nestedness and connectivity (Olesen, Eklundsen, and Venkatasamy 2002; Aizen, Morales, and Morales 2008; Bartomeus, Vilà, and Santamaría 2008; Vilà et al. 2009; Traveset et al. 2013). Moreover, as evidenced by the limited amount of success of restoration projects (Smith et al. 2016), returning invaded communities to a predisturbance state is quite a difficult endeavour (Suding, Gross, and Houseman 2004; Rodewald et al. 2015). Understanding how invasion-induced differences in network structure impact our ability to manage them, can provide useful lessons to conservation science. What is more, there are also ecological insights to be had: by explicitly taking into account the extent to which changes in the abundances of one species may ripple through the community, applying control theory to ecological networks can provide an indication of which species are important from a dynamic perspective, and therefore crucial when attempting to alter (or maintain) the ecosystem state.

Isbell and Loreau (2013) used a control theoretic approach to find the minimum subset of species necessary to maintain network structure in six marine food webs. They found that humans affect a larger proportion of this subset of species than, for instance, apex predators. They argue that this disproportionate influence could translate into unintentional restructuring of food webs. Although insightful, the scope and applicability of Isbell and Loreau (2013) can be extended in numerous ways. First, although they find the size of this minimum set, they disregard the fact that the set species composition is not unique and thus not all species that might be included are equally important for the community population dynamics. Second, their methods were naive to differences on the strength of interspecific effects. And third, their approach was conceptually limited to trophic interactions.

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Here, we expand previous theory of the control of complex systems and use a set of paired invaded and uninvaded plant-pollinator communities to investigate the link between network structure and our ability to manage them. Plant-pollinator networks provide an ideal framework to answer these questions. On one hand, community networks that quantify relative levels of interaction are readily available. On the other, the bipartite nature of pollination networks makes it is possible to simplify assumptions of how these interactions translate into interspecific effects. Our theoretical extension of network control, allow us to ask the question of whether biotic invasions as drivers of change in network structure increases or decreases the manageability of communities as well as the relative importance of species at driving the population dynamics of other species in the community. .

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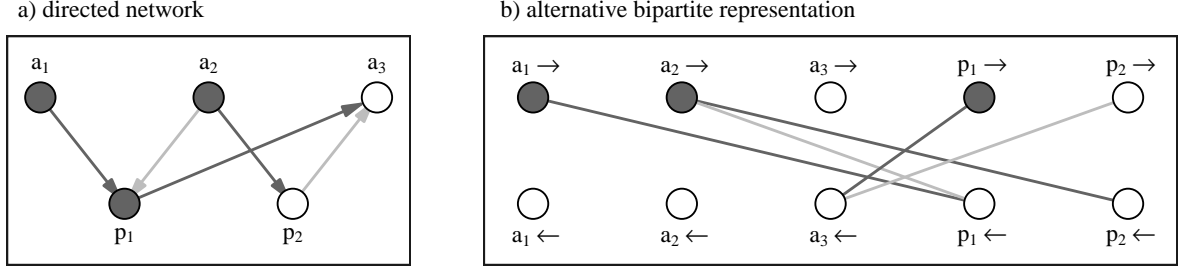


Figure 1: One of the possible maximum matchings of a network (dark grey links) defines a set matched ( $p_1$ ,  $p_2$ , and  $a_3$ ) and unmatched nodes ( $a_1$  and  $a_2$ ). The minimum number of species necessary to control this network equates to the number of unmatched nodes  $n_d = 2$ . Superior nodes (dark grey circles) drive the dynamics of other species and are therefore important for the controllability of the network because they either require external input or because they are part of the chain that transmit the external inputs to other species.

## Methods

### Theory of network manageability

#### Maximum matching

The number of nodes necessary to fully control a complex network can be calculated by counting the number of unmatched nodes in the network's maximum matching (Liu, Slotine, and Barabási 2011). In a directed network a matching is a subset of links in which no two links share a common starting node or a common ending node; a node is matched if it is the ending node of one of the links in the matching (Figure 1a). A matching is then maximum if (i) the number of matched links—also known as matching size—is maximal and (ii) the sum of the weights of the matched links—known as matching weight—is the largest possible among all possible matchings (West 2001). To find the maximum matching we used an alternative bipartite representation of the network in which the two levels indicate the outgoing and incoming links to each node (Figure 1b). Finding a matching in this alternative representation is equivalent to finding the set of links such that each node on the top level is matched to at most one node on the bottom level, and vice versa (West 2001; Csardi and Nepusz 2006).

To find the maximum matching in a pollination network we used an alternative bipartite representation of the network (Figure 1b) in which the levels indicate the outgoing and incoming links to each node. Finding a matching in this alternative representation is equivalent to finding the set of links such that each node on the top level is matched to at most one node on the bottom level and vice versa (West 2001; Csardi and Nepusz 2006).

The link between network controllability and the maximum matching also has an intuitive basis. In control theory, a network is fully controllable when each node in the network has a "superior", or input that drives its dynamics. Matched nodes can be controlled within the network by the node pointing to it—its

superior. However, unmatched nodes have no superior in the network and must be directly controlled by external inputs (Liu, Slotine, and Barabási 2011), what we refer to as management interventions .

## Manageability

Systems that require a large number of inputs are more difficult to control. The *manageability* of a community is therefore determined by the minimum number of species on which we would need to apply management interventions if we were to gain full control of the abundances of all species in the ecological community ( $n_d$ , Equation 1).

$$m = 1 - \frac{n_d}{s} \quad (1)$$

We quantified the manageability of ten paired plant-pollinator communities. Each pair was composed by a community invaded by a plant and a community effectively free of the invasive species (Table S1). The networks were constructed from previously published visitation data collected from pollination communities in Bristol, UK (Lopezaraiza-Mikel et al. 2007) and Cap de Creus National Park, Spain (Bartomeus, Vilà, and Santamaría 2008). In the four British uninvaded communities the non-invaded plots were obtained by experimentally removing all the flowers of invasive species *Impatiens grandulifera*. In contrast, the Spanish uninvaded communities were obtained from plots that had not yet been colonised by the invasive species *Carpobrotus affine acinaciformis* or *Opuntia stricta*.

The analysed networks were quantified using visitation frequency, which has been shown to be an appropriate surrogate for inter-specific effects in pollination networks (Vázquez, Morris, and Jordano 2005; Bascompte, Jordano, and Oelsen 2006). Nevertheless we evaluated the effect of using pollinator efficiency or importance as measures of species interactions (Ne'Eman et al. 2010; Ballantyne, Baldock, and Willmer 2015) and found consistent results (see Supplementary Information).

## Interspecific effects

Our maximum matching algorithm requires a directed network in which a link between species  $i$  and  $j$  pointing to species  $j$  indicates that the abundance of species  $j$  can be affected by the abundance of species  $i$ . The extent to which a pair of interacting species affect each other—the mutualism strenght—can be quantified by the magnitude of the mutual dependence (Bascompte, Jordano, and Oelsen 2006). Therefore, we initially assumed that a pair of interacting species can affect each other abundances. The effect on each other being inversely proportional to the magnitude of the dependencies. This assumption renders a bipartite network in which interacting pairs are connected by two directed links (Figure 2b).

Nevertheless, mutual dependencies have been shown to be highly assymetric in natural communities

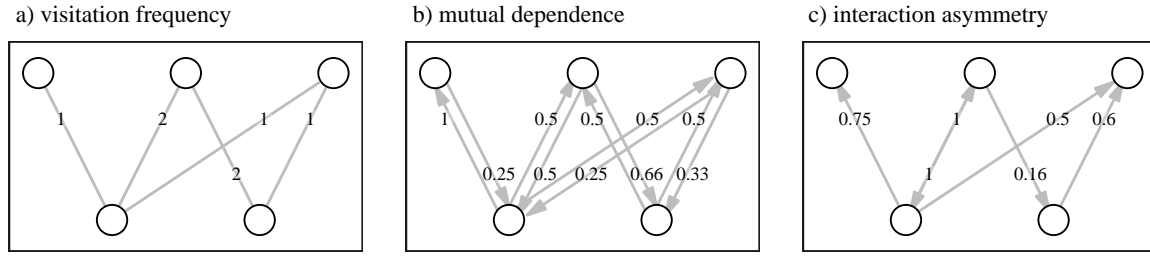


Figure 2: Mutualistic networks are usually described quantitatively by the relative number of visits between each plant and animal species (a). The mutual dependencies between interacting species (b) depend directly on the relative visitation frequency. The dependency of plant  $i$  on pollinator  $j$ ,  $d_{ij}$ , is the proportion of the visits coming from pollinator  $j$  compared to all pollinator visits to plant  $i$ . Likewise, the dependency of pollinator  $j$  on plant  $i$ ,  $d_{ji}$ , is the ratio of the visits by pollinator  $j$  to plant  $i$  and all visits of pollinator  $j$ . Nevertheless, mutual dependencies in pollination networks tend to be highly assymmetric. The relative differences of dependencies (c) then is a good indicator

(Bascompte, Jordano, and Oelsen 2006). In other words, if a plant species is largely dependent on a pollinator species, then the pollinator tends to depend only very weakly on the plant. This suggest that it may be possible to relax our initial assumption and simplify the network such that interacting species are connected by one directed link when mutual dependencies are assymmetric. The direction of this link being consistent with the dominant direction of control in the bidirectional case (Figure 2c). The extent to which a species  $i$  affects species  $j$  relative to the extent to which species  $j$  affects species  $i$  can then be summarised by the interaction asymmetry (Equation 2).

$$a(i, j) = \frac{|d_{ij} - d_{ji}|}{\max(d_{ij}, d_{ji})} \quad (2)$$

We quantified the manageability of the analysed pollination communities by finding the maximum matching of the corresponding pollination network following the method previously explained. If a network had more than one component (two species are in different components if there exist no path between them) we analysed the largest one. We then performed a paired Spearman correlation test to compare the manageability obtained when including bidirectional effects between interacting species, and when simplifying the network to include only the dominant direction of the asymmetry.

Naively one might expect to see a negative relationship between diversity and manageability (Menge 1995). We therefore used a set of generalised linear models to investigate the relationship between community manageability and (i) the total number of species, (ii) plant richness, (iii) pollinators richness, and (iv) the ratio of plants to pollinators richness. Because both invaded and British communities tended to be more diverse, we also assesed whether observed differences in manageability were due to these two factors. Competing models were assessed by comparing the Akaike Information Criterion corrected for small sample sizes (AICc).

To quantify the extent to which manageability is characteristic of the network structure, we compared

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the manageability of empirical networks to networks generated by two null models of visitation. One set of random visitation networks was generated by maintaining the species degree (the number of interactions per species) while varying the number of visits per species. A second set of random network maintained the species strength (total sum of visits) while varying the degree of species (Oksanen et al. 2016). We then calculated the mutual dependences and interaction asymmetries of the random networks and calculated the p-value of the manageability of each empirical network and the corresponding manageability of 999 randomisations.

We also quantified the extent to which the relative manageability of a pollination community is given by the dominant direction of control, we maintained the structure of network but randomised the direction of the interaction asymmetries. This is, we first calculated the assymetries for each community and then shuffled the direction of the link between species. Similar as in previours null models, we calculated the p-value of the empirical manageability and that of the randomisations.

## Driver species

The manageability of a community  $m$  provides an indication of the magnitude of  $n_d$  but not the identity of the species that can compose this set. In fact, maximum matchings are often not unique in ecological networks and different sets of species of size  $n_d$  could be used to control the network (Liu, Slotine, and Barabási 2011). Nevertheless, species vary in terms of the frequency with which they are classified as superior nodes (Figure 1). This frequency provides an indication of their relative importance to drive the state of the community. We therefore call *driver species* those that are identified as needing directed interventions in all possible matchings, and consequently likely to have a disproportionate effect on the abundances of other species in the community.

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Unlike unweighted networks, where a maximum matching is defined by its size (the number of matched edges), in weighted networks, a maximum matching is one whose edges have the largest possible total weight among all possible matchings. This means that in weighted networks there is a number of matchings that have maximal size, but are not maximum matchings because its total weight is not maximal too. However the weight of species dependencies is unexact, a reflection of the fact that interaction strengths and sampling methods themselves are stochastic to some extent.

We therefore identified the driver species in each of the networks by computing all possible matchings in the network that have the same size and have a weight above a cut-off of 0.5 times the weight of the maximum matching. To do so, we first generated the network's line graph—an alternative representation in which nodes are the interactions of the original network and links represent common ending points. We then calculated the complement of the line graph—a graph in which nodes are adjacent if and only if they are not adjacent in the line graph. All possible maximum matchings can be found by enumerating all cliques of size

justify

1 –  $n_d$  in the complement graph (West 2001; Csardi and Nepusz 2006). Because of the number of matchings depends on the cut-off and the weighting of the links, we evaluated the effects of i) using a different cut-offs value between 0 and 1 and ii) weighting the links by the number of visits.

Similar as when we compared the manageability obtained when assuming bidirectional links or single links determined by the asymmetry (Figure 2), we compared the relative importance of species under these two assumptions by calculating a paired Spearman correlation test between species' relative importance. Nevertheless because we are more interested on the agreement between highly ranked species we also calculated a weighted correlation coefficient  $r_{w2}$  which gives more weight to higher ranks (??), and the Jaccard similarity of the driver species identified by both methods.

We then tackled the question whether some species level structural properties can predict the relative importance of driver species. Here, we used a Generalised Linear Mixed-Effects model (??) to evaluate the effect on the species' relative importance of measures of centrality (degree, betweenness, and overlap), measures related to network robustness (contribution to nestedness), and measures of strength of association and dependency (visitation and dependency strength) (Dormann, Gruber, and Fründ 2008). The community was included as a random effect. Candidate models were compared using AIC and the relative importance of the explanatory variables was evaluated using the sum of Akaike weights over candidate models that accounted for 95% of the evidence (Burnham and Anderson 2003; Bates et al. 2014; Bartoń 2016).

All analysis were performed in R 3.2.2 (R Core Team 2015).

## Results

### Manageability

We found that if we were to control the dynamics of the whole community, we would need to control between 42 and 88% (mean 63%) of the species in the community if we were to harness bidirectional links between species, and between 55 and 92% (mean 76%) if we only take into account the strongest dependence. This corresponds to manageabilities between 0.12 to 0.58 and 0.08 to 0.45 respectively (Table S1). Despite different absolute values of manageability between these assumptions, the relative manageability of different communities was maintained (Spearman rank correlation 0.93,  $p = 1.7 \times 10^{-9}$ ). In addition, the ratio of plant to pollinator species richness is positively correlated with manageability ( $Pr(> \chi^2) = 8.5 \times 10^{-22}$ ). Similarly, invaded communities tend to be more difficult to manage than uninvaded ones ( $Pr(> \chi^2) = 0.036$ ). In contrast, measures of biodiversity (like plant or pollinator richness) or the location of the study did not have a significant effect on the manageability (Figure 3, Table S3).

The manageability of empirical networks varied little when compared to network randomisations that maintained the species strength or species degree. This result is consistent regardless of whether we consider

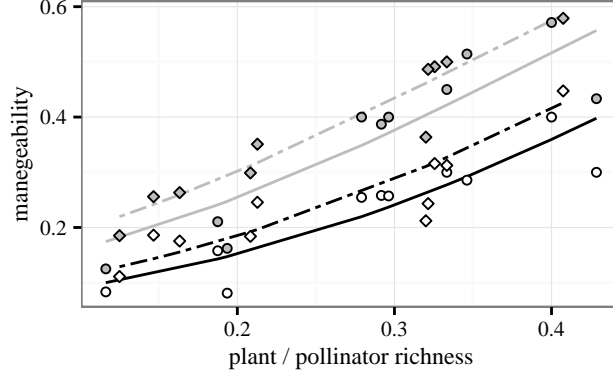


Figure 3: The relative manageability of a plant-pollinator community is largely influenced by the ratio of plant to pollinator species richness and to a smaller extent to the status of invasion. Invaded communities (circles, dashed lines) having larger levels of manageability. White and grey points correspond to manageabilities calculated using mutual dependences and interaction asymmetry respectively.

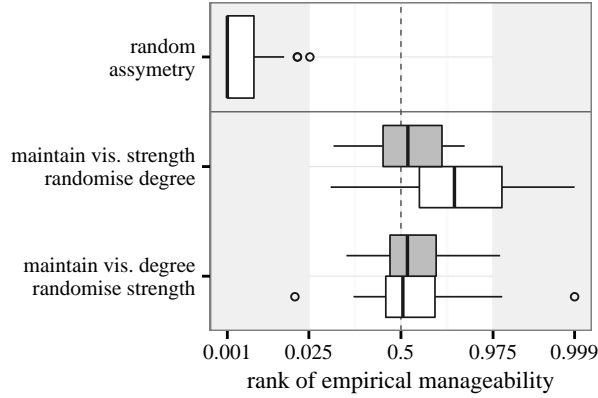


Figure 4: The manageability of empirical networks was compared to network randomisations using a normalised rank. The shaded areas in light grey ( $< 0.025$  and  $> 0.975$ ) suggest a significant difference between the empirical network and its randomisations. The empirical manageability is much smaller than those of randomisations in which the direction of asymmetries has been randomised. In contrast the manageability of network in which the visitation strength or degree was maintained was not different to the manageability of the empirical networks. Dark grey and white boxplots represent manageabilities obtained using mutual dependencies and asymmetries respectively.

mutual dependences or the interaction asymmetry. Contrastingly, empirical networks have smaller manageabilities than network randomisations in which the direction of the dependencies is altered but the structure is maintained.

## Driver species

Species vary widely on the degree of their importance for network manageability. Our method to calculate the relative importance of species relies on calculating all possible maximum matchings. The number of matchings increases exponentially with the number of links and nodes in a network. When we use mutual dependencies, there are two links between each interacting species, and we were only able to find the importance of different species in the eleven smallest networks. For the remaining nine networks, the number of maximum matchings is much larger than  $4 \times 10^{10}$  and the computation of the species relative importance



factor	est.	No. mod.	imp.	C.I.
(Intercept)	3.20	3	1.00	2.03
dependency strength	37.25	3	1.00	14.82
contribution to nestedness	1.42	3	1.00	1.01
visitation strength	1.38	3	1.00	1.14
eigen-centrality	-0.07	1	0.29	0.39
guild (pollinator)	0.14	1	0.22	0.94

Table 1: The strength of dependency, contribution to nestedness and visitation strength had a significant effect on all the models that accounted for 95% of the evidence based on AICc. Coefficient estimates were averaged following Buckland, Burnham, and Augustin (1997); confidence intervals were calculated following Lukacs, Burnham, and Anderson (2010).

became unfeasible.

Nevertheless, we were able to find the relative importance of species in the single link version of the networks where links were weighted by the asymmetry. For the networks in which we were able to calculate the importance using mutual dependencies, we found a strong correlation between both approaches (Spearman’s rank correlation ranged between  $\rho = [0.6, 0.78]$ , median  $\tilde{\rho} = 0.69$ ). Indeed, when using the weighted rank correlation coefficient  $r_{w2}$ , we found that the agreement was stronger for highly ranked species than for lowly ranked species ( $r_{w2} = 0.72$  versus  $r_{w2} = 0.59$ ). Moreover both approaches identified a highly similar set of driver species (Jaccard similarity  $J = [0.5, 1]$ ,  $\tilde{J} = 0.67$ )

Although plants showed significantly higher levels of importance for network control than pollinators (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test,  $p < 0.001$ ), this difference can be largely explained by the strength of dependency of the species (the sum of the dependencies for a given species). Indeed, when averaging over the set of GLMMs that accounted at least 95% of the evidence based on AICc, we found that the strength of dependency is the single most important factor determining the relative importance of species for network control (Table 1, Figure 5). Contrastingly, the number of visits a species receives (or performs) and its contribution to nestedness have only a marginal effect on its relative importance for network control. In addition, in the ten communities that were invaded, invasive species were invariably classified as a driver species.

## Discussion

We found that

Therefore, full controllability of ecological networks—being able to steer the ecosystem into any desired ecosystem state—would require a This characteristics render ecological networks unlikely to be able to visit every possible system state other closed systems, ecological networks

The controllability of ecological networks is not a concept limited to control theory. Controllability in the ecological context can be seen as a direct measure of the minimum number of species whose abundance would need to be directly regulated to achieve full network control. While we are far away from

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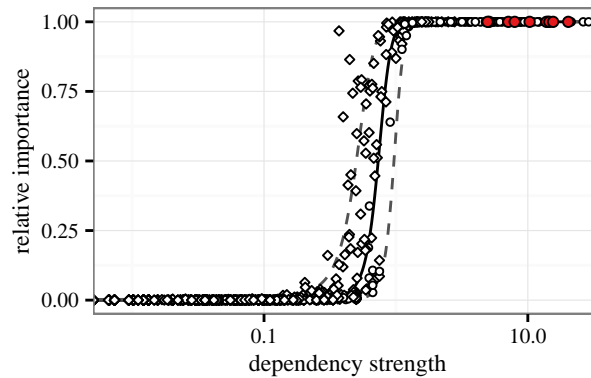


Figure 5: Dependency strength is the single most important factor explaining the importance of species for network control. Visitation levels and contribution to nestedness had a significant albeit small effect on the importance (dashed lines correspond to  $\pm$ one standard deviation on these factors). Invasive species (red) were invariably classified as driver species (those having the maximum importance for network control).

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