Resource-dependent dispersal and the irrelevance of extra-patch information for *Daphnia carinata*

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Abstract

Dispersal is fundamental to population dynamics and it is increasingly apparent that most organisms make dispersal decisions based upon information gathered from the environment. Ideally, organisms would make fully informed decisions, with knowledge of both intra-patch conditions (conditions in their current location) and extra-patch conditions (conditions in alternative locations). Acquiring information is costly, however, and extra-patch information will typically be costlier to obtain than intra-patch information. As a consequence, theory suggests that organisms will often make partially informed dispersal decisions, utilising intra-patch information only. We test this proposition in an experimental two-patch system using populations of the aquatic crustacean, *Daphnia carinata*. We manipulated conditions (food availability) in the population's home patch, and in its alternative patch. We found that *D. carinata* made use of intra-patch information (resource limitation in the home patch induced a ten-fold increase in dispersal probability) but made no use of extra-patch information (resource limitation in the alternative patch did not affect dispersal probability). Our work highlights both the very large influence that information can have on dispersal probability, but also that dispersal decisions will often be made in only a partially informed manner.

Keywords: resource-dependent dispersal, information use, *Daphnia carinata*, biological invasion

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Introduction

It is increasingly appreciated that dispersal is, like survival and reproduction, a fundamental facet of life history (Bonte and Dahirel 2017). Dispersal behaviours can have profound consequences for individual fitness, and the variety of dispersal behaviours in a population not only influences local population dynamics, but also metapopulation and evolutionary dynamics across a species range (Clobert et al. 2001). For reasons of simplicity, the vast majority of ecological and evolutionary models that incorporate dispersal assume that the decision to disperse is uninformed; that individuals decide to move, or decide how far to move, in an information vacuum (*e.g.*, models utilising reaction-diffusion or integrodifference equations; Fisher 1937; Skellam 1951; Kot et al. 1996; but see Fronhofer et al. 2016). There is now considerable evidence, however, that dispersal decisions are typically informed by aspects of the environment (Clobert et al. 2009), and such information use can be expected to have non-negligible effects on ensuing population and evolutionary dynamics (Delgado et al. 2014; Ponchon et al. 2015; Urban et al. 2016).

The most common form of informed (or condition-dependent) dispersal is density-dependent dispersal (Bowler and Benton 2005). Here, individuals acquire information about population density, and, if conditions more favourable to survival and reproduction are likely to be found elsewhere, make the decision to disperse. When all else is equal, high density – with greater competition for resources, greater rates of disease transmission and so on – will be associated with poorer conditions (Bowler and Benton 2005). It has been repeatedly demonstrated that individuals acquire information on density and act upon it (*e.g.*, De Meester and Bonte 2010; Fellous et al. 2012; Martorell and Martínez-López 2014; Fronhofer et al. 2017a). In many species, this information is acquired through food limitation (Fronhofer et al. 2017b): when nutrition is limited, particularly in juvenile stages, individuals tend to be more dispersive. Information on the relative merits of different alternative locations can also be acquired in numerous ways, including prospecting (actively moving through, and assessing, new locations, *e.g.*, Pärt and Doligez 2003) and by observing immigrating conspecifics (*e.g.*, Cote and Clobert 2007).

Several evolutionary models have now been constructed to examine the evolution of informed dispersal (*e.g.*, Bocedi et al. 2012; Delgado et al. 2014), and while these models are in general agreement that informed dispersal will often evolve, much hinges on the ease with which information is acquired, and the value of that information (Poethke et al. 2016). The models raise intriguing questions about investment in information gathering: if an organism only assesses local, intra-patch, conditions, how can it be sure that another location is better? When should an individual invest in acquiring information beyond its home patch? Ideally, of course, individuals would have both intra- and extra-patch information to make an informed decision, but acquiring such information will almost always entail a cost (time, energy, survival; Bonte et al. 2012). Thus, it may often be the case that individuals act on the limited information that is most easily acquired: intra-patch information.

Here, we examine dispersal between patches in experimental populations of the aquatic crustacean, *Daphnia carinata*. In *Daphnia* generally, dispersal has been shown to promote population stability in pond metacommunities and fluctuating environments (Howeth and

Leibold 2010; Steiner et al. 2016), and has also been used to highlight colonisation processes after glaciation events (Weider and Hobæk 1997). Moreover, it may likewise have importance for informing the management of zooplankton invasions, such as that of the spread of *Daphnia lumholtzi* across North America (Dzialowski et al. 2000; Havel et al. 2002). Although dispersal in *Daphnia* is usually characterised as being driven by the passive transport of ephippia (long-lived resting eggs) by water fowl or other vectors (Allen 2007; Frisch et al. 2007; Van de Meutter et al. 2008), individuals can also actively disperse between permanently or temporarily interconnected water bodies (Michels et al. 2001; Cottenie et al. 2003). Since *Daphnia* have been shown to physiologically adapt aspects of their life history – such as reproduction, growth, and immune investment – to suit local conspecific population densities (Goser and Ratte 1994; Burns 2000; Lürling et al. 2003; Michel et al. 2016), it appears probable that they may likewise adjust their rates of active dispersal in response to local conditions. Although it has been demonstrated that *Daphnia* do increase ephippia production at high population densities (Carvalho and Hughes 1983; Hobaek Anders and Larsson Peter 1990), presumably boosting passive dispersal opportunities, the effects of information use, density, and resource limitation on their active dispersal have not been explored.

Using *D. carinata* then, we conduct a simple experiment to determine whether, like many other species, individual *D. carinata* respond to resource limitation by increasing their rates of active dispersal. We also ask whether this response is contingent upon extra-patch information; the presence or absence of ad libitum food in the neighbouring patch.

Methods

Laboratory population of *D. carinata*

All *D. carinata* used were genetically identical members of a single clone line. The founding member of this lineage was collected at 38°10'34.3"S, 144°21'14.1"E (a lake in Geelong, Victoria, Australia) in October 2016. Its offspring were used to establish laboratory stock cultures, which were housed in glass jars containing 300 ml of ADaM zooplankton medium and kept within growth chambers maintained at 22° C on a 12.30 light:11.30 dark photoperiod (Klüttgen et al. 1994; as modified by Ebert 2013). Stocks were fed the green algae *Scenedesmus*. In order to reduce any potential impact of maternal effects, all individuals used in the experiment were taken from stocks that were maintained under these conditions for at least two generations.

Experimental materials and conditions

We set up two-patch microcosms with which to measure dispersal of *Daphnia*. Each patch was a 950 ml plastic Cryovac XOP-0980 container filled with 600 ml of ADaM and kept on bench tops in an open air laboratory. The laboratory was maintained at 22° C and each container was covered with a transparent plastic sheet that was only removed during feeding

and data collection. From their base, each container's dimensions were 90 mm x 75 mm x 110 mm, and they possessed a gradual taper from top to bottom, such that the opening at the top of the container (100 mm x 90 mm) was larger than the base of the container. A circular hole with a diameter of 15 mm was centrally located 35 mm above the base on one of the long sides of each container. This was connected to plastic PVC piping of an identical internal diameter that linked one container to the next, acting as a tunnel through which *D. carinata* could disperse between the two patches. At the commencement of the experimental trials, dispersal between containers was prevented by inserting cotton balls into the openings of the connecting tunnel.

Food availability experiment

Within this two-patch system, we examined the effect of intra- and extra-patch food availability on the dispersal rate of *D. carinata*. We seeded one half of each two-patch system with 10 adult females taken from stock cultures, and allowed this population to grow for 9 days in the experimental system while dispersal was blocked. This resulted in an average of 122 individuals across a variety of age and size classes in each population. On the 10th day we then opened the dispersal tunnels and 96 hours later censused the population in both patches to determine the number of individuals that had dispersed into the newly available patch. As individuals born during the dispersal period could not be distinguished from those present at its beginning, all individuals in the final census were treated as though they had been present in patch 1 at the start of the 96 hours.

Our patch pairs were allocated to four treatment combinations (n = 5 per combination) according to a two factor crossed design in which we independently modified food availability in the two patches. Factor 1 was intra-patch food availability: once the dispersal tunnel was opened, half of the populations no longer received food in their starting patch. Factor 2 was extra-patch food availability: here we either daily added food to the second patch (commencing three days before dispersal was allowed) or withheld food from this patch. This meant that half of the populations were dispersing into patches containing no food at all, and the other half into patches with an abundance of food. Food in this case was a daily fed mixture of 8 million *Scenedesmus* sp. cells (an unidentified Australian *Scenedesmus*) and 12 million *Scendesmus obliquus* cells.

The probability of individuals dispersing was compared between treatment combinations using a generalised linear model with binomial errors and a logit link, with each individual in each population being characterised as a trial in which either success (dispersing into patch 2) or failure (remaining in patch 1) resulted. All statistical tests were performed in R version 3.4.1 (R Core Team 2016).

Results

There was no significant interaction between intra- and extra-patch feeding treatments ($z = 0.375$, $P = 0.283$; Table 1), and likewise no significant effect of food availability in patch 2 ($z = 1.12$, $P = 0.262$; Table 1). There was, however, a significant effect of food availability in patch 1 ($z = 10.94$, $P < 0.001$; Table 1), with intra-patch food deprivation resulting in an approximately ten-fold higher probability of dispersing (food-deprived, mean = 0.259, SE = 0.026; normally-fed, mean = 0.022, SE = 0.005; Figure 1).

Discussion

The fitness benefit flowing to a dispersing individual depends on both the quality of the home patch, as well as the quality of the new patch. As a consequence, in an ideal world, we would expect dispersal decisions to be made on a balance of 'push' factors, such as local patch conditions, and 'pull' factors, such as the quality of other patches. The quality of the new patch should be high enough (relative to the home patch) that it offsets the fitness costs of moving. But organisms do not live in an ideal world: information can be costly to acquire, and there is a likely asymmetry of cost such that information about alternative patches is harder to obtain than information about an individual's home patch. Because of this, we might expect pull factors – requiring costly information gathering – to be less important in dispersal decisions than push factors. Our results support this expectation. In our system, there was a significant increase in inter-patch dispersal when *D. carinata* were deprived of food (Figure 1), so it is clear that *D. carinata* exploited intra-patch information to inform their dispersal decisions. By contrast, extra-patch conditions (food either abundant or entirely absent) had no effect on dispersal rates. Thus it also appears that *D. carinata* either did not use, or were incapable of using, extra-patch information to inform their dispersal decisions.

Our first result – that animals increase dispersal propensity under conditions of resource shortage – has been well established empirically. Studies on taxa ranging from plants to invertebrates and vertebrates either imply, or experimentally demonstrate, that resource shortage is a powerful piece of information motivating dispersal (*e.g.*, Bowler and Benton 2005; Martorell and Martínez-López 2014; Fronhofer et al. 2017b). Our study adds *Daphnia carinata* to the long list of organisms that exploit this piece of intra-patch information. It also demonstrates, however, that the effects of resource deprivation on dispersal may be extremely pronounced, with 25.9% of individuals dispersing when food deprived as opposed to only 2.2% of individuals when better fed (Figure 1). This suggests that ecological models may benefit substantially from accounting for factors like resource availability that can have a very large effect on dispersal behaviour.

Our second result – that the presence or absence of food in the second patch had no effect on dispersal – highlights the relative importance of push versus pull factors in driving a populations movement. In the present case, to obtain information that would draw *Daphnia* into the second patch, individuals either had to engage in prospecting within the inter-patch

tunnel and the second patch, or to sense extra-patch conditions remotely. We found no evidence to suggest that either source of information was exploited (Figure 1). In natural populations, extra-patch information gathering behaviours like prospecting are predicted to be costly due to the threat of predation that comes from moving into novel environments (Bonnet et al. 1999; Hiddink et al. 2002; Bonte et al. 2012), or the simple energetic cost of having to move to assess new patches (Delgado et al. 2014). Here, the dominance of resource limitation in pushing dispersal from the local patch indicates that the pull to move into new patches was relatively weak in comparison, either because obtaining more information was costly, or because that information was in some way imperceptible.

Although this finding supports the prediction that potentially expensive extra-patch information will not be sought out compared to relatively inexpensive intra-patch information, it remains possible that *D. carinata* would ordinarily exploit other forms of extra-patch information were it more readily available to them than in this experimental context. For instance, a lack of migrants moving back from patch 2 to patch 1 may have made it impossible for *D. carinata* to encounter migrating conspecifics, a relatively cheaply-acquired form of extra-patch information that has been shown to inform dispersal decisions in other taxa. In lizards, for example, residents may recognise immigrants and assess their condition and number to make inferences about extra-patch conditions (Cote and Clobert 2007). The same phenomenon has also been shown in simpler organisms, such as ciliates (Jacob et al. 2015). In our system however, individuals that reached patch 2 in treatments where it was well resourced, and so capable of producing migrants that could signal that fact, would have had no incentive to return to patch 1. Moreover, that the population size of patch 2 was invariably smaller than patch 1 meant that there would have been a lower absolute number of individuals capable of dispersing from there, regardless of conditions.

In conclusion, our results add to the growing body of evidence that condition-dependent dispersal is the norm amongst taxa, and that it is moreover capable of generating substantial differences in dispersal behaviour (*e.g.*, Legrand et al. 2015; Fronhofer et al. 2017b). This growing empirical consensus warns against the simplifying assumption – used in the majority of ecological and evolutionary models – that dispersal rate is constant with respect to conditions. Relaxing that assumption is now well justified on empirical grounds, and the magnitude of shift in dispersal resulting from condition dependence suggests that it will have non-trivial effects when incorporated into mechanistic models of evolution, population dynamics, invasion spread, and so on (*e.g.*, Armsworth 2008; Armsworth and Roughgarden 2008). In this light, the relative use of extra- vs intra-patch information is important because when we move to a conditional dispersal model, the obvious simplifying assumption is that organisms exploit only intra-patch information. Our results suggest that intra-patch information is dominant in *Daphnia carinata*, but the degree to which this is true generally will determine how complex our models of dispersal really need to be.

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Tables

Table 1: Statistical test results for differences in *D. carinata* dispersal depending on food availability in patch 1 and food availability in patch 2. A generalised linear model was used with parameter estimates on the logit scale and binomial errors. Model variance was checked for overdispersion and did not violate standard GLM assumptions.

Parameter	Estimate (SE)	z stat	P value
Intercept	-3.455 (0.199)	17.34	<0.001
Food not available in patch 1	2.497 (0.228)	10.94	<0.001
Food not available in patch 2	-0.354 (0.316)	1.12	0.262
Food not available in patch 1 × *Food not available in patch 2*	0.375 (0.350)	1.07	0.283

Figures

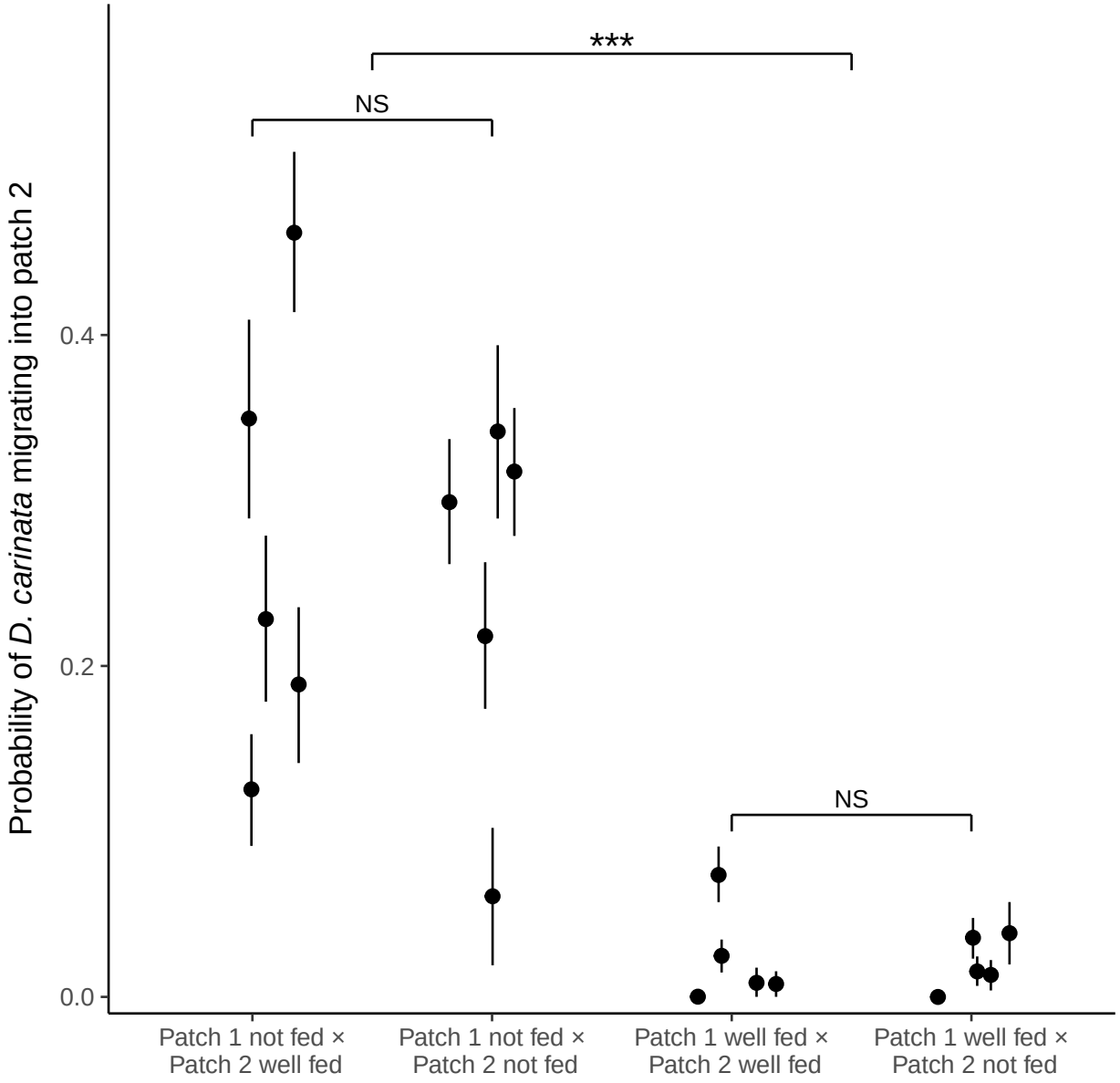

Figure 1: The effect of 96 hours of food deprivation on the probability of individual *D. carinata* dispersing, both with and without food available in patch 2 (n = 5 container pairs per treatment combination). Each point and line is given by the mean number of *D. carinata* individuals in patch 2 as a proportion of the total population size between the two patches ± SE. Food availability in patch 1 alone was found to have a significant effect on the probability of an individual dispersing.