Pollinators in food webs: Mutualistic interactions increase diversity, stability, and function in multiplex networks

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ABSTRACT

Ecosystems are composed of complex networks of many species interacting in different

ways. While ecologists have long studied food webs of feeding interactions, recent

studies increasingly focus on mutualistic networks such as those of plants who

exchange food for reproductive services provided by animals such as pollinators. Here,

we synthesize both types of consumer-resource interactions to better understand the

controversial effects of mutualism on complex ecosystems. Contrary to classic theory,

we find that the dynamics of pollination mutualisms can increase the diversity, stability,

and several ecosystem functions of multiplex ecological networks. These effects

strongly increase with floral reward productivity and are qualitatively robust to variation

in the prevalence of mutualism and pollinators feeding upon vegetation and other

species in addition to floral rewards. This work advances the ability of mechanistic

network theory to synthesize different types of ecological interactions and illustrates

how mutualism can enhance the diversity, stability, and function of complex

ecosystems.

INTRODUCTION

As elegantly illustrated by Darwin's "tangled bank," [1] ecosystems are complex, composed of many different types of interactions among many different species. However, theory has classically predicted that complexity in terms of the number and strength of interspecific interactions destabilizes ecological systems [2]. Mutualistic interactions like those between plants and their pollinators are thought to be particularly destabilizing [3,4]. Robert May famously emphasized this point by calling mutualism an "orgy of mutual benefaction" (pg. 95)[5] whose instability due to positive feedback loops helps explain why mutualism is infrequent and unimportant in natural systems.[3] Yet, mutualisms appear to be not only frequent but key to maintaining much of the biodiversity that drives ecosystems [6,7], especially agricultural ecosystems essential to human wellbeing [8,9]. Here, we address such disparities between theory and observation by developing and applying an integrated consumer-resource theory of feeding and reproductive mechanisms. We use our multiplex network model based on this theory to study how mutualism affects the dynamics, stability, and function of complex ecosystems.

The integration pursued here benefits from long but largely separate traditions of research on feeding and mutualistic interactions [8,10]. For example, feeding interactions considered "mutualistic" like pollinators foraging on the nectar of flowering plants are often excluded from food web data (e.g., ref [11]), while feeding interactions considered "antagonistic" like herbivory and predation are excluded from mutualistic networks [12]. Additionally, food web research has focused more on aquatic systems [13,14] where feeding interactions are strongly structured by body mass or gape size, while mutualism research has focused more on terrestrial systems where feeding interactions may be more strongly structured by other organismal traits like chemical defense and shape of

mouth parts [15–17]. Within aquatic ecosystems, the allometric trophic network theory [16,18]

of food webs has leveraged body-size considerations to successfully simulate the

seasonal dynamics of many interacting species [19,20] and predict the quantitative effects

of experimental species manipulations [21–24]. However, the failure of these predictions in

the presence of non-trophic facilitation of mussels by barnacles highlights the need for

food-web theory to better address positive interactions [21]. Mutualistic network theory

has focused on positive interactions in the form of animal-mediated pollination [12,25]

motivated in part by large agricultural and evolutionary significance [9,26,27]. The success

of mutualistic network theory based on consumer-resource mechanisms in predicting

foraging behaviors of pollinators in the field [28] suggests consumer-resource theory can

effectively integrate food webs and positive interactions.

Feeding and mutualistic interactions both typically involve food consumption

while mutualistic interactions often additionally involve reproductive services provided

by consumers such as pollinators, frugivores, and seed dispersers.[25,29,30] Both interaction

types also operate within the same ecosystems and often on the same organisms, jointly

determining much of the stability and function of these systems.[8,10,31–36] For example,

feeding interactions such as parasitism and predation on pollinators, herbivory on

animal-pollinated plants, and feeding by pollinators on animals and plant vegetation in

addition to floral rewards like nectar may profoundly impact the dynamics of

pollination, subsequent crop yields,[37] and long-term sustainability of agroecosystems [38].

An outstanding difficulty with understanding the joint effects of feeding and

mutualistic interactions is the contradictory conclusions of previous theoretical work on

this topic. Classic theory has long held that mutualistic interactions are generally

destabilizing especially at high complexity [3,4]. However, more recent theory finds that

mutualisms *stabilize* ecological systems under conditions such as high levels of

complexity of mutualism relative to antagonism in "merged" plant-pollinator and plant-

herbivore networks [35,39], low levels of complexity in hierarchical networks of all types

of interactions [40], or intermediate levels of mutualism with randomly assigned

mutualistic links when animals have separate effort allocation to feeding and mutualistic

interactions [41–43]. Contradictions within these bodies of theory may arise from

representing interspecific interactions as randomly parameterized or density-

independent *effects* [2,4,35,44] instead of density-dependent *mechanisms* whose effects may

dynamically vary quantitatively and even qualitatively. For example, whether a

"mutualistic" interaction results in net benefit to both partners often depends upon a

threshold past which more reproductive services or food will damage or fail to provide

benefits to satiated consumers of these resources [26,29,30,44]. Additionally, the random

network architectures [4,41] often misrepresent the empirically observed structure of

mutualistic interactions [45]. A broader problem is that narrowly focusing on stability

develops inefficient theory [46] that ignores how mutualisms alter the diversity,

population dynamics, and overall functioning of complex ecosystems.

To help resolve these contradictions and more broadly understand the ecology of

mutualistic interactions, here, we follow repeated calls for synthesizing different types

of interactions within networks [8,10,31–35] by developing and applying mechanistic

consumer-resource theory to "multiplex" ecological networks [34,36]. Our multiplex

networks integrate the structure and dynamics of feeding and reproductive mechanisms

from which a interspecific interactions and subsequent effects emerge including

predation, mutualism, and resource and apparent competition [29,44,47]. Realistically

structured networks were generated by integrating Williams and Martinez' "niche

model" of food webs [14] with Thébault and Fontaine's model of mutualistic networks [45]

(Fig. 1). The dynamics of these networks were simulated by extending Brose et al.'s

allometric trophic network theory [16] to incorporate Valdovinos et al.'s theory of the

exchange of food for reproductive services between plants and their pollinators [28,30].

Within this framework, we evaluate the effect of pollinators and their

interactions on the diversity and dynamics of ecosystems by comparing persistence,

abundance, and dynamics of species, guilds, and whole systems with similar network

architectures subjected to three different treatments. Our Food Web (FW) treatment

includes only feeding interactions while our Rewards Only (RO) and Rewards Plus

(RP) multiplex treatments include both feeding and reproductive interactions. Our RO

treatment adds increasing numbers of pollinators that consume only floral rewards to

food webs. Our RP treatment adds pollinators that may also consume vegetative

biomass and other animals. Thus, pollinators in RO treatments are more purely

mutualistic in that they are restricted to exchanging reproductive services for floral

rewards while herbivorous and omnivorous pollinators in RP treatments may also

engage in the potentially antagonistic interactions of herbivory and carnivory [48,49]. For

comparison purposes, our FW treatments add equivalent numbers of herbivores and

omnivores but linked only by feeding to the same species that the pollinators in the RO

and RP treatments are linked to (Fig. 1). We apply these three treatments to 102 niche-

model food webs with 50 species, exactly 20 of which are plants, by adding 6 to 38

herbivorous or omnivorous consumer (in FW treatment) or pollinator (in RO and RP

treatments) species according to the structure of 238 plant-pollinator networks such that

the initial species diversity of the 24,276 (102 x 238) networks ranges from 56 to 88. As

initial diversity increases, plants with pollinators in the multiplex networks increase

from 3 to 19 of the 20 plant species and mutualistic interactions increase from directly

involving 16% to 65% of species in the networks. Initial herbivory in FW treatments

correspondingly increases from directly involving approximately a half to three quarters

of the species in the networks. We thus assess stability and function in networks of

increasing initial diversity, which corresponds to increasing mutualism in multiplex

networks or increasing herbivory in FW treatments. Within each multiplex network

treatment, we varied the reward productivity of plants with pollinators by a factor of

five between "Low" and "High" productivity. Species within our networks initialized in

this manner persist or go extinct during our simulations lasting 5000 timesteps (Fig. 2).

Following transitory dynamics, our analyses of the final 1000 timesteps find that

mutualistic interactions increase diversity, stability, and ecosystem function of

multiplex networks and that these increases are greatly enhanced by High reward

productivity (Fig. 3-4).

RESULTS

Diversity.

Multiplex treatments with High reward productivity (High RO and High RP) had

remarkably higher diversity (Fig. 3b, 4a), persistence (Fig. 3c), biomass (Fig. 4b),

productivity (Fig. 4c), consumption (Fig. 4d), and stability (Fig. 4e, 4f) than their

counterparts in the FW and Low rewards (Low RO and Low RP) treatments. With only

one exception (RP treatments in Fig. 4e), these differences increased as larger fractions

of the multiplex networks were directly engaged in mutualistic interactions. While all

20 plant species nearly always persisted in all our treatments (Figure S1), final animal

diversity in High RO and High RP treatments was at least twice as high as that in FW,

Low RO, and Low RP treatments (Fig. 3b). This difference is primarily due to the

consistently high persistence of pollinators (~60%) compared to the persistence of

added species in the FW treatments (Fig. 3f, 3g) and the increasing persistence of

omnivores (Fig. 3e) with increasing mutualism in High rewards treatments. Carnivores

made smaller contributions to the elevated diversity of High rewards treatments via

increases in persistence from ~5% to 50% with increasing mutualism (Fig. 3d). In

contrast, FW and Low rewards treatments had much lower persistence of carnivores (2-

3%, Fig. 3d), omnivores (~15-30% Fig. 3e), and pollinators (~15-45%, Fig. 3f, 3g) that,

except for carnivores, decreased with increasing mutualism. In the High RO treatment,

herbivores achieved higher persistence (73%) than in RO FWs (61%), but in the other

multiplex treatments, herbivore persistence was lower (<32%) and declined

dramatically with increasing mutualism (Fig. 3h). Nonetheless, the low initial diversity

of carnivores (~3 species) and herbivores not added by the treatments (~5 species)

resulted in only minor changes to total diversity despite substantial differences in

persistence. Additionally, in all treatments, any decreases in persistence were not strong

enough to prevent overall increased final diversity (Fig. 3b) with increased initial

diversity and mutualism (Fig. 3a).

Function.

Similar to the pattern in final diversity (Fig. 4a), the total biomass (Fig. 4b),

productivity (Fig. 4c), and consumption (Fig. 4d) in all multiplex treatments (High and

Low) were comparatively higher than in FW treatments with a minor exception in the

Low RO treatment. The Low RO treatment had increased biomass (Fig. 4b) but lower

diversity (Fig. 4a), productivity (Fig. 4c), and consumption (Fig. 4d) than the

corresponding (RO) FW treatment. Total biomass (Fig. 4b) and productivity (Fig. 4c)

consistently increased with diversity and mutualism in all treatments, but these

increases were strongest in High rewards treatments. Plant abundance (Fig. 4b)

decreased below carrying capacity in all but Low RO treatments while increases in the

abundance of animals and floral rewards strongly increased and overcompensated for

any decreases in plant abundance. As might be expected, abundance and productivity of

pollinators, plants with pollinators, and rewards increased with increasing mutualism in

multiplex treatments. At the same time, plant productivity increased with increasing

diversity and mutualism in all treatments except in Low RO treatments. Overall,

biomass was up to twice as high while productivity and consumption were up to an

order of magnitude higher in multiplex than in FW treatments. In all treatments, total

consumption (Fig. 4d) very closely matched total production and was distributed

according to the biomass of animals (Fig. 4d).

The higher biomass of multiplex compared to FW treatments (Fig. 4b) was

primarily due to increases in animal abundance while productivity differences (Fig. 4c)

were primarily due to strong increases in rewards combined with smaller increases in

animals. These differences emerge primarily due to the interactive dynamics of rewards

whose growth potential, contrary to all other stocks of biomass, depends not on its own

abundance but on the abundance of another component i.e., the vegetative biomass of

plants with pollinators. This allows rewards to be highly productive even when very

rare whereas other network components may simply go extinct. Excluding rewards and

moderate decreases of plant abundance in the most diverse FW networks, plant

abundance was relatively similar among treatments while vegetative productivity

strongly increased in FW treatments but only weakly increased in multiplex treatments

as diversity and mutualism increased (Fig. 4b). In FW treatments, the weak increases in

biomass (Fig. 4b) and strong increases in productivity (Fig. 4c) emerge from increases

in herbivore biomass that reduce plant abundance below their carrying capacity, freeing

plants from competition (Fig. 4b). This increases plant productivity (Fig. 4c) and animal

abundance enough to lead to a net increase in total biomass (Fig. 4b). Multiplex

treatments experience similar decreases of plant abundance and corresponding increases

of plant productivity but productivity of rewards dramatically increased as did animal

abundance. These increases in reward productivity and animal abundance are mostly

due to increases in pollinator abundance that stimulate reward productivity by depleting

rewards below their self-limitation threshold. Animal biomass and productivity is

further enhanced by increases in the omnivores and carnivores that feed on the

increasingly abundant pollinators. These patterns in production, consumption, and

increased animal abundance are greatly enhanced in High rewards treatments.

Stability.

We evaluated the stability of our networks by analyzing coefficients of variation

(CV = mean / standard deviation) of abundance during the final 1000 timesteps of our

simulations at the species (Fig. 4e), guild (Fig. 4f), and whole community levels. At the

community level, all treatments were exceedingly stable ($CV < 0.001$). In contrast,

species on average were much more variable ($0.01 \leq CV \leq 0.03$), especially in Low

rewards treatments where plants with pollinators and their rewards contributed large

amounts of variability (Fig. 4e). Large variability in plant and reward abundance in both

multiplex treatments was caused by very low abundance of a few species of plants with

pollinators whose abundance decreased throughout the end of the simulations (e.g. Fig.

2). This low and decreasing abundance yields large CVs at the species level but

contributes very little to guild-level variation (Fig. 4f) due to the tiny fraction of their

guild's biomass comprised by these very rare species. In FW treatments, where

extinctions occur relatively early, species-level and guild-level variation are

comparable. In contrast, average guild-level variation is only a fraction of the species-

level variation in multiplex treatments. In all treatments, variation at both the species

and guild levels decrease with increasing diversity and mutualism except for species-

level variation in High RP networks (Fig. 4e-f). Overall, mutualism stabilizes

population dynamics in multiplex treatments compared to FWs especially as diversity

and mutualism increase, with the minor exception of the High RP treatment. The High

RP networks are by far the most stable at the guild level. However, at the species level,

rare plants with pollinators dominate variability leading to an increase in species

variability with increasing mutualism.

Mutualistic feedbacks.

242   To disentangle the influences of rewards and mutualism on our results, we

controlled for key influences of mutualism by severing the dynamic dependence of plant

productivity on reproductive services while maintaining the overall productivity rates of

plant biomass. We did this by forcing the total biomass produced as vegetation and

rewards during the last 1000 timesteps of the original simulations to be produced only

as vegetation and transforming pollination links into herbivorous links. We initialized

these control simulations with the biomass distributions from timestep 4000 of the

original simulations and ran them for 1000 timesteps so that we could compare control

to original simulations at 5000 timesteps. The control represents the hypothesis that the

effects of pollinators on our systems are solely due to the total productivity of resources

at the base of the food web that emerged due to pollination services during the original

simulations. Our results contradict this hypothesis in important ways. On average,

community species persistence decreased by ~5-6% in RO and ~6-7% in RP treatments

(two-tailed $P < 0.0001$), while total community biomass decreased by ~10% in High

rewards treatments and ~6% in Low RP treatments (two-tailed $P < 0.0001$), but was

unchanged in Low reward RO treatments ($P = 0.49$, Table 1). The magnitude of these

reductions became larger as mutualism and diversity increased, with the minor

exception of total biomass in Low RO treatments. Compared to the original simulations,

total biomass in Low RO controls increased with initial increases of mutualism and

diversity but then decreased precipitously with further increases, leading to no

substantial change overall. More dramatically, large mean squared deviations in

abundances of species between the control and original simulations indicate large

differences between which species were abundant (Table 1). Former pollinators

decreased in abundance despite access to up to twice the biomass previously available

as rewards. In contrast, original herbivores increased in abundance in response to the

increased vegetative biomass in the controls. These changes combined with changes in

consumers of species feeding on plants greatly change which species were more and

less abundant in the controls while changing total community biomass relatively little.

Thus, the dynamic feedbacks of mutualistic interactions, rather than solely increasing

productivity at the base of the food web, increase persistence and biomass and

substantially alter species abundance distributions in multiplex simulations.

Additionally, these differences are exacerbated at higher levels of mutualism and

diversity. See Methods S1 for sensitivity analyses that further corroborate the roles of

mutualism and rewards as outlined above.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigated whether and how mutualisms between plants and

their pollinators affect ecosystem structure and function. Our results indicate that high

productivity of mutualistic rewards within multiplex networks of reproductive and

feeding interactions increase diversity (Fig 2b), persistence (Fig. 2c), biomass (Fig. 3b),

productivity (Fig 3c), consumption (Fig 3d), and stability (Fig 3f) over that of

corresponding networks containing only feeding interactions (FW) or mutualistic plants

with low rewards productivity. With a few minor exceptions, these differences

increased as larger fractions of the multiplex networks were directly engaged in

mutualistic interactions. We observed the only broadly positive diversity-persistence

relationship (Fig. 2c) in the High Rewards Only (RO) treatment. Within this treatment,

networks that contain the highest fraction of mutualistic interactions also exhibited the

highest diversity, persistence, abundance, and stability. Interestingly, all treatments

exhibit positive diversity-stability relationships at the species (Fig. 3e) and guild levels

(Fig. 3f) excepting the slightly negative relationship at the species-level in the High

Rewards Plus (RP) treatment (Fig 3d). High RO and RP networks with the most

mutualistic interactions exhibit the highest productivity (Fig. 3c). Multiplex networks

(RO and RP) with the most mutualistic interactions have higher abundance (Fig. 3b),

productivity (Fig. 3c), and guild-level stability (Fig. 3d) than their corresponding FW

networks except for productivity in Low RO networks.

These increases of stability and function due to increases in diversity and

mutualism are broadly consistent with empirical observations of the effects of increased

pollinator diversity in blueberry, watermelon, and other agroecosystems. [50–53] Though

consistent with empirical observations, our results are largely inconsistent with classic

theory showing that mutualism destabilizes ecological networks [3–5]. While lower

species-level population stability in Low rewards treatments compared to FWs

corroborates classic theory (Fig. 4e), higher species- and guild-level stability in High

rewards treatments and higher guild-level stability in Low RO treatments contradicts

such theory (Fig. 4e-f). More broadly, negative effects of mutualism consistently extend

to none of our six other measures of ecosystem structure and function (diversity,

persistence, abundance, productivity, consumption, guild-level stability) while positive

effects of mutualism apply to all of our High rewards treatments and most of our Low

rewards treatments.

As suggested by Levin's assertion that "The key to prediction and understanding

lies in the elucidation of mechanisms underlying observed patterns" (p.1943) [54], our

theory's ability to reconcile classic theory and broadly predict empirically observed

effects of mutualism on ecological networks appears to emerge from our focus on the

mechanisms that dynamically generate effects of ecological interactions rather than the

more phenomenological approach of focusing on less dynamic, fixed effects [25,44]. Our

focus on the production and consumption of trophic resources and reproductive services

goes beyond the mechanistic details of the dynamics to include realistic architectures of

these interactions at the whole system level. Other research employing more realistic

architectures find results similar to ours. For example, García-Callejas *et al.* [40] find that

mutualism increases or leaves unaffected persistence of ecological networks containing

different types of interactions structured according to realistic species abundance

distributions among different trophic levels. Several studies of near-equilibrium stability

similarly find that destabilizing effects of mutualism may be overstated in models of

fewer species [31] and interaction types [41,42] compared to more empirically realistic

ecological networks. However, unlike the studies that require allocation efforts to be

separated between mutualistic and non-mutualistic interactions [41,42], we find that

mutualism is stabilizing as defined by increased diversity and persistence and decreased

biomass variability when unpartitioned effort is allocated to both types of interactions.

Examining our results in more detail indicates that strong positive effects of

mutualism on ecosystems emerge because mutualistic rewards at low and even more so

at high productivity levels stabilize ecological networks by increasing persistence of

omnivores (Fig. 2e), omnivorous pollinators (Fig. 2f), and carnivores (Fig. 2d) above

that of comparable species in food webs containing only feeding interactions. In

contrast, pollinators that only consume rewards exceed the persistence of comparable

herbivores in FW treatments only at High rewards productivity. These positive effects

of mutualism are not fully reproduced by traditional food web dynamics when

supplementing food webs with plant productivities similar to that in multiplex networks.

The removal of dynamic feedbacks between pollinators and animal-pollinated plants

reduces ecosystem biomass and persistence and alters species composition and

abundance distribution at steady state (Table 1). Thus, the combination of rewards

availability and dynamic feedbacks lead to the increased stability and function of our

multiplex ecological networks.

Our multiplex treatments may bound the diet breadth of pollinators in the field

by providing pollinators unrealistically few resources in RO networks and

unrealistically many resources in RP networks. This suggests results intermediate

between RO and RP networks may best predict empirical observations. For example, in

both RO and RP treatments, High rewards productivity increases the persistence,

biomass, and productivity on average of all consumer guilds over that in low rewards

networks (Fig. 3d-h, Fig. 4b-c) excepting the decrease in herbivore persistence in RP

networks (Fig 3h). This suggests that, in natural systems, we may expect the weakest

increases in persistence, biomass, and productivity due to increased mutualism to occur

among herbivores. The different effects of our treatments on herbivores may be due to

pollinators' additional herbivorous and carnivorous feeding links in RP networks

compared to RO pollinators. These additional links increase competition and predation

pressure on herbivores by pollinators, omnivores, and carnivores. More broadly, our

results suggest that, as pollination mutualisms increase within terrestrial ecosystems, the

diversity and biomass of upper trophic-level consumers will increase while our

predictions for the effects on herbivores are weaker and less certain.

Key limitations of our work concern the match between the network architecture

and the bioenergetic parameters in our models and those in nature. While the multi-

trophic and mutualistic components of our multiplex network structures correspond to

empirical observations, we lack empirical observations of their interconnection into

multiplex networks with which to test against our simulated networks [8,36], though recent

multiplex networks for rocky intertidal systems that include facilitation [55,56] suggest

progress in this direction. Regarding dynamics, the metabolic rates of animals need to

be better related to the intrinsic productivities of plants. Most such estimates come from

aquatic ecosystems that likely differ from those in terrestrial systems [15]. Also, the

cryptic yet critically important rates determining reward availability are only rarely

estimated. For example, Baude *et al.* [57] suggest that nectar productivity of meadows in

the UK can be up to ~5-10% of net primary productivity and Adgabe *et al.* [58] estimate

nearly 1000 kg/ha of floral sugar is produced in a 5-month flowering season by a single

tree species. Pollen production may significantly increase such estimates and accounting

for seasonality of reward production and pollinator activity could greatly decrease

estimates of resource demand needed to sustain pollinators. Bioenergetic costs of

reward production compared to vegetation production should also be considered.

Accounting for such biomass production efficiencies greatly increased the ability of

allometric trophic network theory [16,19,21] to predict realistic stocks and flows of carbon

and energy in a complex food webs. [19,59] Compared to the relatively complex

compounds that comprise vegetative biomass, production efficiencies of synthesizing

simple sugars that provide nearly all the usable energy in nectar may be much higher.

Such efficiencies are suggested by estimates for animals that indicate, for example, the

energetic efficiency of producing milk is almost six times than that of beef [60]. Attending

to these limiting aspects of the structure and function of multiplex networks may

advance research on networks including plants and pollinators as well as those

involving coral, mycorrhizal fungi, frugivores, and other seed eaters that disperse seeds,

all of which involve the exchange of food for increased growth of primary producers.

We have advanced theory on multiplex networks in order to explore the effects

of mutualism on ecological systems. Our focus on reproductive interactions follows

previous extensions of allometric trophic network theory involving plant nutrients [16],

detritus [19], ontogenetic niche shifts [61], environmental stochasticity [62], fishing [61,63], and

economics [63] integrated into food webs comprised of feeding interactions distinguished

by their relative body sizes [16] such as diseases [11], parasites [11,64], parasitoids [11], and

predators [65]. Such integration of multiple interaction types into multiplex networks is

increasingly recognized as an effective means of accommodating different mechanisms

responsible for ecosystem structure and function [8,10,36,66]. Our specific application to

mutualistic mechanisms finds a striking ability of mutualism to enhance ecosystems

including their diversity, stability, and function. Further work incorporating mutualism

into multiplex network theory (e.g., mutualisms between zooxanthellae and coral polyps

and between plants and mycorrhizal fungi) may determine whether mutualisms more

generally enhance other systems. Such research would help compensate for ecologists'

emphasis on competition by better elucidating the much less studied roles of mutualistic

and other facilitative interactions[26,67] in biodiversity maintenance,[6] ecosystem function,[7]

and evolution[27].

METHODS

Network architecture.

We created multiplex networks (Fig. 1) by creating realistic food webs using the

stochastic "niche model" (Fig. 1a) parameterized with 50 species (S_f = 50) and 10%

directed connectance ($C_f = L_f / S_f^2 = 0.1$ where L_f is the number of feeding links.[14] The

niche model assigns each species i three traits: (1) a niche value (n_i) drawn randomly

from a uniform distribution between 0 and 1, (2) a feeding range (r_i) where $r_i = xn_i$ and x

is drawn from randomly from a beta distribution with expected value $2C_f$, and (3) a

feeding centre (c_i) drawn randomly from a uniform distribution between $r_i/2$ and $min(n_i,$

$1 - r_i/2)$. Species i feeds on j if n_j falls within i's feeding interval $[c_i - r_i, c_i + r_i]$. We

selected the first 102 niche model food webs with $0.0976 < C_f < 0.1024$ that were

comprised of 50 species ($S_f = 50$), of which exactly 20 were plants and five were

herbivores that only feed on plants (i.e. have trophic level [TL] = 2). We also generated

238 realistic plant-pollinator networks using a stochastic model [45] with 3 to 19 plant-

with-pollinator species (P) and twice as many animal-pollinator species ($A = 2 * P$),

yielding approximately 16 networks within each of 16 size classes ranging from 9 to 57

species ($S_p = P + A = 9, 12, \ldots, 57$; Fig. 1b, see Methods S2 for more details). We

constrained the number of pollination links (L_p) to ensure that pollination connectance

($C_p = L_p / PA$) broadly decreased as S_p increased in an empirically realistic manner

(Figure S2). We integrated each of the 238 plant-pollinator networks with one of the

102 food webs, yielding $N = 238*102 = 24{,}276$ networks of increasing species diversity

($S = S_f + A = 56, 58, \ldots, 88$). We did this by randomly choosing P of the 20 plant

species already in the food web and assigning the A pollinators to those P plant species

as determined by the plant-pollinator network (Fig. 1c). This leaves $20 - P$ plant species

without pollinators.

We linked pollinators to consumers in the food web in Rewards Only (RO)

treatments by setting each pollinator's n_i to +/− 5% of the n_i of a randomly selected

strict herbivore (TL = 2) from the food web (Fig. 1d). Pollinators' r_i and c_i were set to

zero. This causes pollinators to be preyed upon by predators similar to predators of

herbivores and to consume only floral rewards as determined by the plant-pollinator

network. Our parameterization causes connectance ($C = L/S^2$, where L is the total

number of links) to decrease on average from 0.091 to 0.061 as species diversity (S)

increases from 56 to 88 in RO multiplex networks and corresponding FWs (Figure S3).

In the Rewards Plus (RP) treatments (Fig. 1e), we set each pollinator's n_i, r_i and c_i to +/-

5% of the corresponding n_i, r_i and c_i of a randomly selected herbivore or omnivore that

eats plants ($2 \leq$ TL ≤ 2.3). This allowed average connectance of the networks to stay

constant ($C = 0.102$) with increasing diversity in RP FW treatments (Figure S3). RP

pollinators' ability to feed on both vegetation and floral rewards of the same plant

species allows two links between plants and pollinators. When this occurs, the

corresponding network subjected to the FW treatment has slightly less C than the RP

network because the FW treatment eliminates the link to rewards and maintains only the

herbivory link (Figure S3). We ignore this issue to simplify comparisons between all

treatments.

Network dynamics.

Network dynamics are modeled according to Allometric Trophic Network

(ATN) theory, [16,19,21] developed further here to represent feedbacks between pollinators

feeding on floral rewards (R) and plants consuming reproductive services produced by

plants. Plants benefit from pollinators depending upon on the quantity and quality of

pollinators' visits in terms of rate at which pollinators consume plants' rewards and the

fidelity of pollinators' visits to conspecific plants [28,30]. Pollinators in RP treatments also

feed on species' biomass according to ATN theory.

More specifically, ATN theory models the change in biomass B_i over time t for

consumer i as

$$\frac{dB_i}{dt} = \sum_{j \in resources} C_{ij}(B_j) - x_i B_i - \sum_{j \in consumers} C_{ji}(B_i)/e_{ji} \qquad (1)$$

where x_i is the allometrically-scaled mass-specific metabolic rate of species i and e_{ji} is

the assimilation efficiency of species j eating i. C_{ij} is the rate of species i consuming B_j,

the biomass of species j:

$$C_{ij}(B_j) = x_i y_{ij} B_i F_{ij}(B_j) \qquad (2)$$

where y_{ij} is the allometrically-scaled maximum mass-specific consumption rate. $F_{ij}(B_j)$

is the functional response for i eating j:

$$F_{ij}(B_j) = \frac{\omega_{ij}B_j^h}{B_{0ij}^h + \Sigma_{k \in resources}\,\omega_{ik}B_k^h} \tag{3}$$

where ω_{ij} is i's relative preference for j, h is the Hill coefficient, [68] and B_{0ij} is the "half-

saturation" density of resource j at which i's consumption rate is half y_{ij} [19]. The form of

the preference term, ω_{ij}, determines if a trophic generalist (i) is treated either as a

"strong generalist" ($\omega_{ij} = 1$) or "weak generalist" ($\omega_{ij} = 1/(\#$ of species in i's diet) [69].

Here, we present results only for weak generalists that search for each of their resources

equally even if one or more of their resources are extinct. Eqn. 3 is a Type II functional

response when $h = 1$ and a Type III response when $h = 2$. We use $h = 1.5$ for a

"modified" Type II response [68].

We use ATN theory's logistic growth model [19] to simulate biomass dynamics of

plants without pollinators as:

$$\frac{dB_i}{dt} = \left(1 - \frac{1}{K}\Sigma_{j \in plants}\,B_j\right)r_iB_i - \Sigma_{j \in consumers}\,C_{ji}(B_i)/e_{ji} \tag{4}$$

475 where r_i is the maximum mass-specific growth rate of plant i, and K is the carrying

476 capacity of the plant community. We model the vegetative biomass dynamics of plant

477 species i with pollinators as:

$$\frac{dB_i}{dt} = \left(1 - \frac{1}{K}\Sigma_{j \in plants}\,B_j\right)r_iB_iP(R_i) - \Sigma_{j \in consumers}\,C_{ji}(B_i)/e_{ji} - \kappa_i(\beta_iB_i - s_iR_i) \tag{5}$$

479 and the dynamics of its floral rewards biomass as:

$$\frac{dR_i}{dt} = \beta_iB_i - s_iR_i - \Sigma_{j \in pollinators}\,C_{ji}(R_i)/e_{ji} \tag{6}$$

481   where β_i is the production rate of floral rewards, s_i is the self-limitation rate of floral

482   reward production, and κ_i is the cost of producing rewards in terms of total vegetative

483   growth. $P(R_i)$ is the functional response describing how benefit to i accrues due to

484   reproductive services provided by i's pollinators:

485
$$P(R_i) = f\left(\sum_{j \in pollinators} \overbrace{C_{ji}(R_i)}^{quantity} \underbrace{\frac{C_{ji}(R_i)}{\sum_{k \in resources} C_{jk}(B_k \, or \, R_k)}}_{quality}\right) \qquad (7)$$

where the braces are labeled $reproductive\ services$ over $quantity$ and $quality$.

which is a function of the quantity and quality of pollination provided by pollinator j.

Quantity is j's consumption rate on i's floral rewards. Quality is j's consumption of i's

rewards as compared to j's consumption of all the resources it consumes. Quality is

therefore j's relative consumption rate of i's floral rewards, a measure of j's fidelity that

ensures more specialist pollinators typically provide higher quality services than

generalist pollinators by, for example, depositing higher concentrations of conspecific

pollen [70]. The form of the functional response describing benefit accrual due to

pollination (f) reflects the assertion that reproductive services saturate [71] at 1 according

to: $reproductive\ services$ / ($0.05 + reproductive\ services$). As $P(R_i)$ approaches 1, the

realized growth rate of animal-pollinated plant i's vegetative component approaches r_i,

its maximum growth rate.

Pollinators follow the dynamics typical of ATN consumers (Eqn. 1) with the

exception that they access rewards biomass R_i instead of B_i in RO treatments (Eqn. 1-1)

or in addition to the biomass of other resource species (Eqn. 1-2) in RP treatments:

500
$$\frac{dB_i}{dt} = \sum_{j \in resources} C_{ij}(R_j) - x_i B_i - \sum_{j \in consumers} C_{ji}(B_i)/e_{ji} \qquad (1\text{-}1)$$

501
$$\frac{dB_i}{dt} = \sum_{j \in resources} C_{ij}(R_j \, and \, B_j) - x_i B_i - \sum_{j \in consumers} C_{ji}(B_i)/e_{ji} \qquad (1\text{-}2)$$

Parameterization.

Vital rates for consumers follow previously described allometric scaling for

invertebrates [63]. Specifically, we set plant species' "body mass" to a reference value (m_i

= 1) [16] and calculated consumers' body mass as $m_i = Z_i^{swTL_i - 1}$, where $swTL_i$ is i's short-

weighted trophic level [72] and Z_i is i's average consumer-resource body size ratio

sampled from a lognormal distribution with mean = 10 and standard deviation = 100.

Then, for i eating j, i's mass-specific metabolic rate (x_i) is $0.314m_i^{-0.25}$, its maximum

mass-specific consumption rate (y_{ij}) is 10, and its assimilation efficiency (e_{ij}) is 0.85 if j

is an animal or 0.66 if j is plant vegetation. We set the maximum mass-specific growth

rate (r_i) of plant i to be 0.8 for plants without pollinators or 1.0 for plants with

pollinators, so that in the presence of sufficient reproductive services provisioning by

pollinators, the mass-specific growth rate of plants with pollinators is comparable or can

even exceed that of the plants without pollinators.

The remaining parameters are not allometrically constrained. We assigned a

"half-saturation" density for consumers of species' biomass or rewards of B_0 = 60 or 30,

respectively. This reflects the decreased "handling time" for rewards compared to

typically more defended vegetation. We also assigned a Hill coefficient of h = 1.5, a

community-wide carrying capacity for plant vegetative biomass of K = 480, and an

assimilation efficiency of e_{ij} = 1.0 for pollinator species i consuming the floral rewards

of j. For the rewards dynamics of animal-pollinated plants, we used a rewards

production rate of β_i = 0.2 or 1 (Low or High rewards productivity treatments,

respectively), a self-limitation rate of s_i = 0.4, and a vegetative cost of rewards

production of κ_i = 0.1. In FW treatments, rewards are zeroed out (β_i = 0) and all plants

are parameterized so that they behave as plants without pollinators while pollinators are

parameterized as "added-herbivores" that consume vegetation with the associated lower

assimilation efficiency ($e_{ij} = 0.66$) but otherwise have unchanged vital rates. See Table

S4 for a summary of model parameters and values.

Simulations.

We simulated each of our $N = 24{,}276$ networks subjected to each of the two

multiplex treatments (RO & RP) at high ($\beta = 1$) and low ($\beta = 0.2$) rewards productivity

and at zero productivity for the FW treatment for a total of 145,656 simulations. We

used MATLAB's (The MathWorks 2018b) built-in differential equation solvers (ode15s

for the multiplex treatments and ode45 for FWs) to simulate these networks for 5000

timesteps (Figure S4). By 2000 timesteps, the simulations were approximately at

dynamical steady state. We initialized all biomasses (B_i and R_i) to 10 and used an

extinction threshold of $B_i < 10^{-6}$. Statistical analyses were performed in JMP 14 (SAS

Institute 2018). Our results are qualitatively robust to simulation length (Figure S5).

Sensitivity of our results to parameter variation are reported in the Supplementary

Information (Tables S1-S3).

Outputs.

We quantified ecosystem stability and function using species persistence,

biomass, productivity, and variability at or near the end of the simulations. We

calculated these metrics for the whole community and for eight guilds. Two guilds are

self-evidently described species of plants without pollinators and plants with pollinators.

One guild is just the rewards of all plants with pollinators. Herbivores, omnivores, and

carnivores refer only species present in the niche-model food web prior to Step 3 of our

network construction algorithms. These three guilds exclude species added by our

treatments of those food webs. Herbivores eat only vegetative biomass ($TL = 2$).

Omnivores eat vegetation and animals. Carnivores eat only animals. The meaning of the

two remaining guilds depend on the treatment that adds them to the food web. Added

herbivores/pollinators refer to herbivores added by the FW treatments, pollinators added

by the RO or RP treatments that consume only rewards, and pollinators added by the RP

treatments that consume rewards and vegetation. Added omnivores/pollinators refer to

omnivores added by the FW treatments and pollinators added by the RP treatments that

consume rewards, other animals, and potentially vegetation. We calculated species

persistence as the fraction of the initial species that survived to the end of the simulation

(i.e. whose biomass stayed above the extinction threshold).

We calculated all outputs at the end of the simulations except for biomass

variability, which we calculated over the last 1000 timesteps. Species persistence is the

fraction of the initial species whose biomass stayed above the extinction threshold

throughout the simulation. Final biomass is the total biomass for the whole community

and/or each guild of species. Plant productivity is the summed rates of species' biomass

increases due to growth minus losses due to rewards production. Rewards productivity

is the rate at which all rewards were produced by all plants with pollinators.

Consumption is the summed rates of biomass lost by resources due to feeding by

animals. Animal productivity is assimilation minus losses due to metabolic

maintenance. Biomass variability at the species level is the average coefficient of

variation (CV = standard deviation/mean) among surviving species and, at the guild

level, the CV of the summed biomass of all species in each guild. Mean guild CV (μ,

Fig. 4f) was calculated as the average of five guilds (all plants, herbivores, all added

species, omnivores, and carnivores) to standardize the grouping of species into guilds

across treatments.

Dynamical controls.

To disentangle effects of mutualistic feedbacks from effects of floral reward

production, we ran multiplex simulations with mutualism turned off [73]. To do this, we

first recorded average net rewards production $(\overline{\beta_i B_i - s_i R_i})$, vegetative $(\overline{B_i})$ and rewards

biomass $(\overline{R_i})$, and realized growth rate $(\widehat{r_i} = \overline{r_i P(R_i)})$ for each animal-pollinated plant i

during the last 1000 timesteps of our multiplex simulations (Fig. 2). Then at timestep

4000, we set the biomass of each plant i with pollinators to $\widehat{B_i} = B_i + R_i$ and their

dynamics were modified to:

$\frac{d\widehat{B_i}}{dt} = \left(1 - \frac{1}{K}\sum_{j \in plants}(\widehat{B_j} - \overline{R_j})\right)\widehat{r_i}\widehat{B_i} - \sum_{j \in consumers} C_{ji}(\widehat{B_i})/e_{ji} + (1 - \kappa_i)(\overline{\beta_i B_i - s_i R_i})$ (5-1)

Eqn. 5-1 severs the dynamic feedback of mutualistic benefit due to provisioning of

reproductive services to plants ($P(R_i)$ in Eqn. 5) while preserving the total biomass of

each plant (vegetation plus rewards), the realized growth rate of the plant, the total

rewards production rate, and the exclusion of rewards from interspecific competitive

interactions between plants. We then ran the simulation for an additional 1000 timesteps

beginning with the biomass distribution at timestep 4000. As in the FWs, we switched

pollinators' consumption from rewards to consumption of vegetative biomass so that

pollinators' dynamics followed Eqn. 1 instead of 1-1 or 1-2. All other species dynamics

followed their original equations. We compared the results of these simulations with

those of the original multiplex simulations by measuring differences in persistence, total

community biomass, and the mean squared deviation between each species' biomass in

the multiplex and control simulations at timestep 5000.

Data availability.

Network structures and simulation outputs are available in the online repository

at https://github.com/fsvaldovinos/Multiplex_Dynamics.

Code availability.

Simulation and analysis code is available in the online repository at

https://github.com/fsvaldovinos/Multiplex_Dynamics.

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Table 1. Average (SD) effects of severing mutualistic feedbacks on species'

persistence and abundance.

Treatment	Rewards Only (RO)		Rewards Plus (RP)	
Reward Productivity	Low	High	Low	High
Persistence	**–4.8 (6.1)**	**–5.7 (6.3)**	**–8.1 (7.6)**	**–7.1 (6.0)**
Total Biomass	–0.1 (15.9)	**–9.9 (10.0)**	**–5.5 (21.4)**	**–9.8 (14.6)**
Species' Biomass	**13 (12)**	**11 (10)**	**16 (12)**	**17 (18)**

Controls sever mutualistic feedbacks while preserving plant productivity in multiplex

simulations. Mean (Standard Deviation) differences in Persistence and Total Biomass

equal the average percent change in controls compared to the original multiplex

simulations ($N = 24{,}276$ for all treatments). Negative differences indicate that after

starting from the same biomass distributions among species achieved over the first 4000

timesteps of the simulations, on average, properties of the controls decrease below those

of the original simulations over the following 1000 of the simulations' full 5000

timesteps. Bold entries designate mean values significantly different from zero ($P <$

0.0001, $N = 24{,}276$, two-tailed t-tests). Average differences (SD) in Species Biomass at

the end of simulations are quantified by the mean squared deviations (SD) of each

species' abundance between the control and original simulations in units of biomass.

Figure Legends

Figure 1. Network construction steps. Nodes are vertically arranged by trophic level

with plant species at the bottom and carnivores at the top. All (grey, red, orange) links

represent feeding by the consumer above the resource except the bi-directional

pollination links (light blue) representing pollinators consuming plants' floral rewards

(e.g., nectar) and plants consuming pollinators' reproductive services. **a) Step 1:** Food

web generated using the Niche Model with diversity S_f and connectance C_f [14]. **b) Step 2:**

Plant-pollinator network generated using Thébault & Fontaine's [45] algorithm with

diversity S_p and connectance C_p. **c) Step 3:** Plant-pollinator network integrated with the

food web by adding pollinators (yellow nodes) and their links (light blue links) from b)

by randomly assigning plant species in a) to become the animal-pollinated plants in b)

(light blue nodes). **d) Step 4 of Rewards Only (RO) treatments:** stochastically link

predators of herbivores in c) to pollinators to construct the multiplex treatment and then,

for the Food Web (FW) treatment, transform pollinators into herbivores and animal-

pollinated plants into plants without pollinators. **e) Step 4 of Rewards Plus (RP)**

treatments: stochastically link predators of herbivores and diets of herbivores and

herbivorous omnivores in c) to pollinators for the multiplex treatment and then, for the

Food Web (FW) treatment, transform omnivorous and herbivorous pollinators and

animal-pollinated plants into omnivores, herbivores, and plants without pollinators,

respectively. Resulting diversity (S) and connectance (C) is shown under each treatment

(d–e). See Methods.

Figure 2. Timeseries of a 72-species ecological network subjected to several

treatments. This example uses a 50-species niche-model food web integrated with a

33-species plant-pollinator network following the same color scheme as in Fig. 1 (see

Methods). Note that 11 plant species in the food web are chosen to represent the 11

plant species in the plant-pollinator network (light blue). The top row shows the

Rewards Only (RO) Food Web (FW, left) and Multiplex treatments subjected to Low

(center) and High rewards productivity (right). The bottom row shows the Rewards Plus

(RP) Food Web (FW, left) and Multiplex treatments subjected to Low (center) and High

rewards productivity (right). Simulations last 5000 timesteps. Resulting species

persistence is labeled in the upper right corner of each panel. Species that fall below a

biomass of 10^{-4} continue to extinction (10^{-6}). The vast majority of species' abundances

achieve steady state by 2000 timesteps with nearly all animal extinctions occurring

before then, while several low-abundance plants with pollinators (light blue) continue

slow declines well past 2000 timesteps.

Figure 3. Effects of mutualism on diversity and persistence within complex

ecological networks. Column headings label the treatments described in Figures 1-2.

Colors represent guilds of species described in Figures 1-2 and Methods. Initial

diversity (*S*) on the x-axis and in a) describes the initial number of species in food webs

with added herbivores and omnivores in the Food Web (FW) treatment and the

corresponding pollinators added in multiplex networks. Increasing *S* corresponds to

both an increasing fraction of the 20 plants without pollinators (darkest blue) that are

assigned to be plants with pollinators (light blue) and to an increasing number of added

(+) herbivorous, omnivorous, and pollinating consumers. μ is the mean across all $N =$

24,276 simulations in each treatment. Bars show the mean values across networks of a

given initial species diversity in increments of 2 species. Stacked diversity bar graphs

show the mean number of species in each guild (colors) that contribute to initial a) or

final b) community composition. c) Error bars are standard deviations. Persistence, the

fraction of the initial diversity that persists to the end of the simulations, is shown for c)

the entire community and d-h) for each guild of consumers. Plants nearly always persist

in our treatments, so their guild persistence is not shown (but see Figure S1).

Figure 4. Effects of mutualism on diversity, abundance, function and stability in

complex ecological networks. Column headings, stacked bar graphs, and colors follow

Fig. 3 with the addition of floral rewards shown in purple. a) The final diversity from

Fig. 3 is shown again for reference. μ is the mean across all $N = 24{,}276$ simulations in

each treatment for total (summed) b) abundance, c) productivity, and d) consumption or

average variability of e) species or f) guilds, with colors representing the average

variability of the guild (f) or species within the guild (e). b) The community-wide

carrying capacity for plant vegetative biomass (K) is marked on the y-axis; total plant

vegetative biomass (summed vegetation of plants with and without pollinators) does not

exceed this value.

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

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