



SHELTER COMPETITION BETWEEN TWO INVASIVE CRAYFISH SPECIES: A LABORATORY STUDY

Alien crayfishes represent a common threat to aquatic ecosystems. Their spread in Europe is leading to more frequent contacts between different invasive species populations. Shelter can be an important factor in the resulting interactions. A laboratory experiment was designed to analyse the competition for shelter in similarly sized males of two species that show an invasive behaviour in Spain, *Pacifastacus leniusculus* and *Procambarus clarkii*. We carried out 24 heterospecific, six-hour trials, with 30 min behavioural observations per hour. Most often, red swamp crayfish were both the first (70.8%) and the long-term winner (62.5%). Usually, the long-term winner was the first winner. Whenever shelter was occupied, a passive behaviour by unsheltered individuals was more frequent in signal crayfish than in red swamp crayfish. When both were unsheltered, signal crayfish displayed more often a passive behaviour. Although the observed behaviour might be explained as the result of dominance by the red swamp crayfish over the signal crayfish, shelter availability and class, as well as different growth patterns and population size structures, could change the intensity and the outcome of the encounters in the wild, where signal crayfish usually reach larger sizes than red swamp crayfish.

Auteurs du document : F. ALONSO, R. MARTÍNEZ

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