

ROUNDTABLE SESSION 2B: NATIONAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN NON-INDIGENOUS AND INDIGENOUS CRAYFISH SPECIES



The main object of the present essay is to summarise some aspects underlying the interactions between non-indigenous (NICS) and indigenous (ICS) crayfish species. The discussion has been also extended to the effects exercised by NICS on the natural habitats they occupy. While doing research on the dyads NICS/ICS, one starting point is to extrapolate common traits that make NICS good invaders from the analysis of their biology, ecology and ethology and the comparison with indigenous species. A subsequent step is to switch attention to the understanding of the characteristics that make ecosystems less vulnerable to invasions and then to analyse both the complex interactions of invaders and target communities and the negative and positive impacts exerted by NICS on the occupied habitats. Examples from Sweden, Britain, and Italy have shown that NICS can replace the native species by a combination of several interacting mechanisms. Besides the transmission of the crayfish plague fungus, mechanisms into action include mostly competitive interference, but also diverse life history traits, recruitment failure, differential susceptibility to predation, and reproductive interference. It has been claimed that invasion theory is full of rules of thumb that, having no precise predictive powers, are thus useless to guide reliable public policy. The solution of the prediction problem requires an in-depth study of every potential invader and target community, trespassing the boundaries among disciplines and having a look at crayfish as a whole and not a single entity. The expectation is thus the return to precise and clear empirical generalisations that can be most useful to develop management strategies.

Auteurs du document : F. GHERARDI, P. SMETANA, P. LAURENT

Obtenir le document : EDP Sciences

Thème (issu du Text Mining) : MILIEU NATUREL, INFORMATION - INFORMATIQUE

Date : 2008-05-01

Format : text/xml

Source : <https://doi.org/10.1051/kmae:2002074>

Langue : Anglais

Télécharger les documents : <https://www.kmae-journal.org/10.1051/kmae:2002074/pdf>

Permalien : <https://www.documentation.eauetbiodiversite.fr/notice/roundtable-session-2b-national-interactions-between-non-indigenous-and-indigenous-crayfish-species0>

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