Adaptive Feeding behavior and functional responses in pelagic copepods (24/12/2018)

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Zooplankton may modify their feeding behavior in response to prey availability and presence of predators with implications to populations of both predators and prey. Optimal foraging theory predicts that such responses result in a type II functional response for passive foragers and a type III response for active foragers, with the latter response having a stabilizing effect on prey populations. Here, we test the theoretical predictions and the underlying mechanisms in pelagic copepods that are actively feeding (feeding-current feeders), passively feeding (ambushers), or that can switch between the two feeding modes. In all cases, individual behaviors are consistent with the resulting functional response. Passive ambushing copepods have invariant foraging behavior and a type II functional response, as predicted. When foraging actively, the species with switching capability change its functional response from type II to III and modify its foraging effort in response to prey density and predation risk, also as predicted by theory. The obligate active feeders, however, follow a type II response inconsistent with the theoretical prediction. A survey of the literature similarly finds consistent type II response in ambush feeding copepods, but variable (II or III) responses in active feeders. We examine reasons for why observed behaviors at times deviate from predictions, and discuss the population dynamics and food web implications of the two types of functional responses and their underlying mechanisms

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