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UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL PAULISTA
"JÚLIO DE MESQUITA FILHO"

Sean Keuroghlian-Eaton

How do different fire regimes affect anuran taxonomic and functional diversity in the Pantanal?

São José do Rio Preto
2023

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Resumo

O fogo representa uma perturbação frequente em muitos ecossistemas, e o maior fator na modificação de habitats afeta as espécies de maneiras diferentes. Neste estudo, temos como objetivo desvendar quais são os impactos de diferentes tratamentos de incêndio na diversidade de anuros no Pantanal brasileiro, e se os traços da diversidade são afetados de maneira diferente pelos tratamentos de incêndio. Armadilhas de queda foram instaladas para amostrar populações de anuros em locais onde incêndios controlados foram realizados, juntamente com um número igual de locais de controle não queimados. Os incêndios foram divididos em dois tipos: incêndio na metade da estação seca (a partir de agora conhecido como modal-MDS) e incêndio no final da estação seca (a partir de agora conhecido como tratamento tardio-LDS). Não houve diferença estatisticamente significativa entre o controle, o incêndio modal e o incêndio tardio em relação à diversidade ou abundância de anuros. No entanto, a diversidade funcional mostrou que o controle era o mais diverso, com o incêndio tardio apresentando maior diversidade quando comparado ao incêndio modal. Diferentes tratamentos de incêndio afetam os anuros de forma negativa em diferentes níveis em sua diversidade funcional, ao observar o tamanho, massa, deposição de ovos e uso do habitat dos anuros. Entre os dois tratamentos de incêndio, o incêndio tardio teve um impacto significativamente menor em sua diversidade funcional quando comparado ao incêndio modal. Nossa pesquisa sugere que o uso da diversidade funcional pode ser uma abordagem mais eficaz para avaliar os impactos da escala do fogo sobre os anuros em comparação com a diversidade taxonômica. Essas descobertas podem potencialmente informar futuras estratégias de queimadas controladas, recomendando queimadas no final da estação seca para mitigar o impacto de incêndios futuros.

Palavras-Chave: Fogo. Ecologia. Anura. Diversidade. Funcionalidade. Escala. Pantanal.

Abstract

Fire represents a frequent disturbance in many ecosystems, and the biggest factor in habitat conversion affects species in different ways. In this study we aim to disentangle what impacts different fire regimes have on anuran diversity in the Brazilian Pantanal, and if diversity facets are affected differently by the fire regimes. Pitfall traps were installed to sample anurans at sites where controlled fires were set at, along with an equal number of unburned control sites. The fires were divided into two types: middle dry season fire (from here on known as MDS), and late dry season fire (from here on known as LDS). There was no statistically significant difference between the control, MDS and LDS fire for anuran diversity or abundance. Functional diversity on the other hand showed that the control was the healthiest collection site with LDS fire having higher diversity when compared to MDS fire. Different regimes of fire affect anurans negatively at different levels in their functional diversity, when looking at size, mass, egg deposition, and habitat use of anurans. Among the two fire regimes LDS fire had a significantly lessened impact on their functional diversity when compared to MDS fire. Our research suggests that using functional diversity may be a more effective approach for assessing the impacts of fire scale on anurans compared to taxonomic diversity. These findings could potentially inform future controlled burn strategies, recommending late dry season burns to mitigate the impact of future fires.

Key Words: Fire. Ecology. Anuran. Diversity. Functionality. Scale. Pantanal.

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LISTA DE ABREVIATURAS E SIGLAS

MDS – middle of dry season fire

LDS – late dry season fire

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1. Introduction

Fire represents a frequent disturbance in many ecosystems and is the primary factor in habitat conversion, impacting various species interactions around the world (Peralta et al., 2017). Fire disturbances harbor the potential to diminish both the taxonomic and functional diversity within neotropical seasonal flooded forests (Meza et al., 2023). Taxonomic diversity observes the abundance and quantity of species in a community (Moore, 2013), while functional diversity pertains to the distribution of species within a functional space, where the axes represent the functional traits of species in their environment (Rosenfeld, 2002; Hutchinson, 1957). Impacts such as fire can lead to a prevalence of fire-resistant species and homogenizing the animal-plant dispersion, as well as the plant and soil characteristics (Da Silva, 2008)). In ecosystems, fire exerts a significant influence on the species composition, biodiversity, and operation by profoundly altering their physical, chemical, and biological characteristics (Buscardo et al., 2015). The effect of fire can be beneficial or detrimental depending on the organism (Bixby et al., 2015). For instance, the carandá palm (*Copernicia alba*), indigenous to the Pantanal, exhibits improved seed germination in response to fire (Fabri, 2018). This is why when discussing ecosystems impacted by fire, functional diversity should be assessed by examining the traits that assist species in surviving either during or after a fire (Pausas, 2019). In Brazil, biomes such as the Amazon, Cerrado and the Pantanal are under great threat of intensive agriculture, which regularly uses illegal fire to clear native habitat (de Oliveira, 2021).

The Pantanal encompasses over 190,000km² and ranks as the world's largest temporary wetland, extending across Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay (Fraser et al., 2005). The temporary nature of the Pantanal's wetlands imparts distinct wet and dry seasons

experienced annually by species inhabiting the region (Junk et al., 1989; Junk & Wantzen, 2004). The occurrence of fire in the Pantanal predates human habitation (Power et al., 2016; Junk et al., 2006). Naturally ignited fires typically happen in between seasons, such as the beginning or ending of the rainy season, usually caused by lightning strikes on the dry vegetation (Pivello et al., 2021). These fires are rapid, low intensity surface burns that are extinguished by subsequent rainfall, typically occurring every three to six years (Ramos-Neto & Pivello, 2000; Medeiros & Fiedler, 2004). However, recent data reveals that only around 3% of the fires in the Pantanal are non-human-induced (Marengo et al., 2016; Pivello et al., 2021). Alarming statistics further indicate that, throughout the past four decades, the Pantanal has witnessed the highest incidence of wildfires among all Brazilian biomes (MapBiomias, 2022). In the years 2020 and 2021 specifically, fires were record breaking in quantity and intensity (Garcia, 2021; INPE, 2022). These recent fires have directly killed millions of vertebrates, and among one of the most impacted groups was amphibians (Tomas et al., 2021).

Amphibian populations worldwide are declining (Luedke et al. 2023), and current estimates show that 41% of amphibians in the world are endangered (IUCN 2020; Luedke et al. 2023). Climate change, pollution, disease, and habitat loss are the main factors contributing to declining amphibian populations (da Costa Araujo et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018; Luedke et al. 2023). Despite the considerable data on how fire affects climate, vegetation (Veldman et al. 2015), animals (Gibb, 2003), and mutualistic interactions (Peralta et al., 2017), very little is known about how different fire levels affect anuran populations. Depending on the scale, fire can affect amphibians directly (by killing the individuals), or indirectly (by altering their habitats) (Pilliod et al. 2003). The majority of habitat modifications affecting anurans are associated with vegetation and water dynamics (Gonçalves et al., 2015; Gangenova et al., 2018). Amphibians are

particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of habitat alteration because of many characteristics, such as permeable skin, unshelled eggs and limited capacity of dispersal, for example (Green, 2003). On a larger scale, fire can cause the local extinction of amphibian species in isolated bodies of water (Pilliod et al. 2003), these can trigger cascading effects over a broader metapopulation (Marsh & Trenham, 2001). While on a smaller scale, the increase of solar radiation, loss of vegetation, elevated water temperature, altered hydroperiods reduces functional characteristics related to reproduction, increasing tadpole death, and affecting amphibian metamorphosis (Pilliod et al., 2003; Newman, 1998; Häkkinen et al., 2001; Russell et al., 1999).

Functional diversity has long served as an alternative approach for quantifying the level of diversity within a habitat, enabling the examination of the diverse array of functions performed by species within that particular environment (Tilman, 2001). Functional traits that can include habitat preferences (such as fossorial, arboreal, terrestrial or aquatic tendencies (Neves et al., 2020) or egg deposition strategies (such as in water, in a basin, arboreally, on the ground, in burrows or into foam (Neves et al., 2020). These are possible impacts that could emerge from fire and cannot be examined through taxonomic diversity or species richness alone, yet they should be considered when looking at fire impacts on any species (Westgate et al., 2012).

Our objective is to investigate the effects of different fire regimes on anuran diversity. The fire regimes were classified as the middle of dry season fire treatment (MDS) and the late dry season fire treatment (LDS). We hypothesize that the control group will exhibit higher levels of both taxonomic and functional diversity compared to the two fire regimes. We anticipate that the LDS fire treatments will have a lesser impact due to the increased moisture content in the organic material towards the end of

the dry season and the onset of the rainy season, which would more closely mimic natural fires in the Pantanal (Ramos- Neto & Pivello, 2000; Medeiros & Fiedler, 2004). This higher moisture content may result in a less intense fire and subsequently lead to a reduced degree of environment modification.

5. Conclusions

Different controlled fire regimes affect anurans negatively at different levels, but not in the way we initially expected such as species abundance, diversity or richness. It did affect anurans negatively through functional diversity, when looking at size, mass, egg deposition, and preferred habitat use of anurans. Among the two fire regimes LDS fire had a significantly lessened impact on their functional diversity when compared to MDS fire. This may be due to the MDS fire regime having a longer lasting and more intense fire, possibly homogenizing the environment more than the LDS regime, which simulates a more naturally occurring fire in the Pantanal. Results like these can aid fire brigades in setting less impactful controlled burned in floodplains like the Pantanal as well as floodplains in other tropical climates.

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