
Forest plant community as a driver of soil biodiversity: experimental evidence from collembolan assemblages through large-scale and long-term manipulation of tree canopy opening

Ludovic Henneron^{*1,2}, Michaël Aubert², Frédéric Archaux³, Fabrice Bureau², Yann Dumas³, François Ningre⁴, Claudine Richter⁵, Philippe Balandier³, and Matthieu Chauvat^{†2}

¹Unité de Recherche sur l'Ecosystème Prairial (INRA UREP) – Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique - INRA (FRANCE) – UREP - INRA, Site de Crouël, 5, Chemin de Beaulieu 63039 CLERMONT FERRAND cedex 2, France

²Etude et compréhension de la biodiversité (ECODIV URA/EA-1293) – Université de Rouen, Institut national de recherche en sciences et technologies pour l'environnement et l'agriculture - IRSTEA (FRANCE) – Ecodiv URA/EA-1293, Normandie Université, Université de Rouen, IRSTEA, FR CNRS 3730 Scale, UFR Sciences et Techniques, Mont Saint Aignan Cedex, 76821, France, France

³Ecosystèmes forestiers (UR EFNO) – Irstea – Domaine des Barres, F-45290 Nogent-sur-Vernisson, France

⁴Laboratoire d'Etudes des Ressources Forêt-Bois (LERFoB) – AgroParisTech, Institut national de la recherche agronomique (INRA) : UMR1092 – F-54280 Champenoux, France

⁵Office National des Forêts - ONF (FRANCE) – Office National des Forêts - ONF (FRANCE) – Boulevard de Constance, 77300 Fontainebleau, France, France

Abstract

Plant-soil interactions are increasingly recognized to play a major role in terrestrial ecosystems functioning. However, few studies to date have focused on slow dynamic ecosystems such as forests. As they are vertically stratified by multiple vegetation strata, tree removal could alter forest plant community through tree canopy opening. Very little is known about cascading effect on soil biodiversity.

We conducted a large-scale, multi-site assessment of collembolan assemblage response to long-term experimental manipulation of tree canopy opening in oak temperate forests. A total of 33 experimental plots were studied covering a large gradient of tree canopy basal area, stand age and local abiotic contexts.

Collembolan abundance strongly declined with tree canopy opening in early forest successional stage and this was mediated by a shift in understory plant community composition. Collembolan functional groups had contrasting response patterns, which were mediated by different ecological factors. Epedaphic abundance and species richness increased with tree

*Speaker

†Corresponding author: matthieu.chauvat@univ-rouen.fr

canopy opening in relation with the increase in understory plant species richness. In contrast, euedaphic abundance and species richness declined in early forest successional stage in relation with changes in understory plant community composition and species richness, as well as microclimatic conditions.

Overall, our study provides experimental evidence that forest plant community can be a strong driver of collembolan assemblages. It also emphasizes the role of trees as foundation species of forest ecosystems that can shape soil biodiversity through their regulation of understory plant community and ecosystem abiotic conditions.

Keywords: foundation species, functional groups, confirmatory path analysis, plant diversity, plant soil (below, ground) interactions, removal experiment, temperate deciduous forest, springtails, soil fauna, understory vegetation