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The importance of land-use-mediated bottom-up ecological effects and eco-evolutionary dynamics

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Conservation biological control in agricultural landscapes at the interface between ecology and evolution

The importance of land-use-mediated bottom-up ecological effects and eco-evolutionary dynamics

PEDRO ROSERO CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE SCIENCE | LUND UNIVERSITY



List of Papers

- Paper I Rosero, P., Smith, H. G., & Pontarp, M. (2024). Impacts of landscape heterogeneity on bottom-up effects affecting biological control. *Biological Control*, 188, 105401.
- Paper II Rosero, P., Smith, H. G., & Pontarp, M. Herbivore evolution and land-use change – consequences on biological pest control. *Manuscript*.
- Paper III Rosero, P., Smith, H. G., & Pontarp, M. Natural enemy and herbivore co-evolution in agricultural landscapes consequences for biological control. *Manuscript*.
- Paper IV Scale matters for biological pest control: effects of co-evolving herbivore and natural enemy communities in agricultural landscapes. *Manuscript*.



Faculty of Science Centre for Environmental and Climate Science



Oh, hi there, welcome to this thesis.

Conservation biological control in agricultural landscapes at the interface between ecology and evolution

The importance of land-use-mediated bottom-up ecological effects and eco-evolutionary dynamics

Pedro Rosero



DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Doctoral dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the Faculty of Science at Lund University. To be publicly defended on the 14th of June 2024 at 09.30 a.m. in Blå Hallen, Department of Biology, Ecology Building, Sölvegatan 37

> *Faculty opponent* Dr. Örjan Östman Department of Aquatic Resources, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

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Abstract:

Conservation biological control in agricultural landscapes aims to promote natural enemy populations to mitigate short and long-term pest damage on crops. However, natural enemy populations in agricultural landscapes typically rely on crop pests and non-pest prev populations resulting in complex traitdependent ecological interactions. Such communities, of pests, non-pest prev, and natural enemies are affected by landscape heterogeneity depending on the dispersal capacity of the interacting organisms. For instance, changes in land use resulting in changes in the landscape-scale plant composition can result in bottom-up effects on herbivore communities and subsequently natural enemies affecting their ability to provide biological control. Such ecological time scale expectations do. however, not account for the possibility of adaptive niche shifts in both prey and natural enemies, making long-term predictions of biological control challenging. In this thesis, I acknowledge that natural enemies and their herbivore prey can adapt their niches in response to changes in land use. I analyse trait- and niche-based ecoevolutionary landscape models of land-use-mediated adaptive niche responses of interacting natural enemies and prey. I induce modifications in landscape heterogeneity through land-use change and (1) assess how biological control efficiency is affected for natural enemies with different dispersal capacities; (2) assess the effect of herbivore evolution on ecological interactions and, thus, biological control efficiency at ecological and eco-evolutionary timescales; (3) assess how herbivore and natural enemy co-evolution affects biological control; and (4) re-assess herbivore and natural enemy co-evolutionary effects on biological control in communities having different dispersal properties. I outline here the key findings of my thesis. (1) Variations in plant resource availability result in mismatches in functional traits between plants and herbivores, mismatches that lead to negative bottom-up effects on biological control. (2) Plant and herbivore trait mismatches also trigger herbivore evolution. Herbivore evolution in response to land-use change results in lowered herbivore efficiency on damaging the crop but at the cost of decreased biological control efficiency. (3) If natural enemies are allowed to co-evolve with herbivores, my results suggest that effects on biological control depend on which habitat is modified combined with which habitat the natural enemy is specialised towards. Whether evolution promotes or hinders biological control is thus highly dependent on the ecological characteristics (i.e. degree of specialization) of the natural enemy. (4) Furthermore, evolutionary effects on biological control are also highly dependent on organismal dispersal propensity. For example, only high-dispersing natural enemies can promote biological control regardless of specialisation whereas for low-dispersing ones biological control relies on their specialisation. These results highlight a novel evolutionary perspective on biological control and ultimately promote much-needed knowledge for long-term biological control sustainability in agricultural landscapes.

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A mis abuelitos, tanto los que están como los que partieron, que siempre me inspiraron y lo siguen haciendo. Y a mis taitas, que siempre me han apoyado en todo lo que he hecho. Gracias.

Table of Contents

Abstract	10
Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning	11
Popular science summary	12
Resumen de divulgación científica	13
List of Papers	14
Author's contribution to the papers	15
Introduction	16
Biological control: what is it and why is it important?	16
Direct and indirect trophic interactions on biological control	17
Functional traits and the strength of interactions in biological control	19
Landscape heterogeneity effects on biological control	20
Eco-evolutionary dynamics on biological control	20
Aim of the thesis	23
Q1: How does modification in landscape heterogeneity affect biological control induced by direct and indirect interactions for natural enemies with different dispersal capacities?	23
Q2: What are the consequences of land-use change on biological control if we consider the evolutionary potential of herbivores?	24
Q3: How is biological control affected by the co-evolution of herbivores and natural enemies in response to the homogenization of agricultural landscapes?	24
Q4: What is the role of dispersal in herbivores and natural enemy co-evolution in response to homogenization of agricultural landscapes?	25

Methods	
Ecological interactions in agricultural landscapes	26
Trait-based ecological interactions	28
Dispersal scenarios	30
Biological control and mechanisms underlying biological control	31
Modifications in the landscape	31
Organisms' evolution: eco-evolutionary framework based on adaptive dynamics	32
Main Results	35
Paper I: Impacts of landscape heterogeneity on bottom-up effects affecting biological control	35
Paper II: Herbivore Evolution and land-use Change – consequences on Biological Pest Control	37
Paper III: Natural enemy evolution in agricultural landscapes - consequences for biological control	39
Paper IV: Scale matters for biological pest control: effects of co-evolving herbivore and natural enemy communities in agricultural landscapes	g 43
Discussion, conclusion and outlook	46
Acknowledgements	50
References	60

Abstract

Conservation biological control in agricultural landscapes aims to promote natural enemy populations to mitigate short and long-term pest damage on crops. However, natural enemy populations in agricultural landscapes typically rely on crop pests and non-pest prey populations resulting in complex trait-dependent ecological interactions. Such communities, of pests, non-pest prey, and natural enemies are affected by landscape heterogeneity depending on the dispersal capacity of the interacting organisms. For instance, changes in land use resulting in changes in the landscape-scale plant composition can result in bottom-up effects on herbivore communities and subsequently natural enemies affecting their ability to provide biological control. Such ecological time scale expectations do, however, not account for the possibility of adaptive niche shifts in both prey and natural enemies, making long-term predictions of biological control challenging. In this thesis, I acknowledge that natural enemies and their herbivore prev can adapt their niches in response to changes in land use. I analyse trait- and niche-based eco-evolutionary landscape models of land-use-mediated adaptive niche responses of interacting natural enemies and prey. I induce modifications in landscape heterogeneity through land-use change and (1) assess how biological control efficiency is affected for natural enemies with different dispersal capacities; (2) assess the effect of herbivore evolution on ecological interactions and, thus, biological control efficiency at ecological and eco-evolutionary timescales; (3) assess how herbivore and natural enemy co-evolution affects biological control; and (4) re-assess herbivore and natural enemy co-evolutionary effects on biological control in communities having different dispersal properties. I outline here the key findings of my thesis. (1) Variations in plant resource availability result in mismatches in functional traits between plants and herbivores, mismatches that lead to negative bottom-up effects on biological control. (2) Plant and herbivore trait mismatches also trigger herbivore evolution. Herbivore evolution in response to land-use change results in lowered herbivore efficiency on damaging the crop but at the cost of decreased biological control efficiency. (3) If natural enemies are allowed to co-evolve with herbivores, my results suggest that effects on biological control depend on which habitat is modified combined with which habitat the natural enemy is specialised towards. Whether evolution promotes or hinders biological control is thus highly dependent on the ecological characteristics (i.e. degree of specialization) of the natural enemy. (4) Furthermore, evolutionary effects on biological control are also highly dependent on organismal dispersal propensity. For example, only high-dispersing natural enemies can promote biological control regardless of specialisation whereas for low-dispersing ones biological control relies on their specialisation. These results highlight a novel evolutionary perspective on biological control and

ultimately promote much-needed knowledge for long-term biological control sustainability in agricultural landscapes.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

Att främja en miljövänlig matproduktion inom jordbruket kan vara en utmaning. Bekämpningsmedel som används för att minska skadorna från skadedjur, ofta insekter, är farliga för hälsan och för miljön. Vad som är ännu värre är att skadeinsekterna kan utveckla resistens mot bekämpningsmedel över tid, vilket gör medlen ineffektiva. Ett alternativ till att använda bekämpningsmedel är att i stället främja predatorer som äter skadeinsekterna, och på så sätt minska skadorna. Detta kallas för biologisk bekämpning. Men biologisk bekämpning är ofta en svår process att förstå på grund av de många faktorer som påverkar hur effektiva predatorerna är på att attackera skadeinsekterna. Till exempel så kan predatorerna också leva på andra bytesdjur än skadeinsekterna.

De alternativa bytesdjuren lever ofta i halvnaturliga habitat kring jordbruksfälten. Därför är tillgången och närheten till dessa halvnaturliga habitat viktiga för predatorerna, och deras förmåga att bekämpa skadedjur. Men ofta så försvinner de halvnaturliga habitaten till förmån för mer jordbruksmark, för att öka matproduktionen. Och man har nyligen sett att insekter kan utvecklas och anpassa sig till förändringar i markanvändning och förlust av halvnaturliga habitat, precis som de kan för bekämpningsmedel.

I denna avhandling försöker jag förstå hur skadedjursinsekterna, deras insektspredatorer och alternativa bytesdjur utvecklas som ett resultat av förändrad markanvändning, och hur denna utveckling i sin tur påverkar den biologiska bekämpningen. Sammanfattningsvis så visar jag att effekten av markanvändning på den biologisk bekämpningen beror på flera faktorer. (1) om studier undersöker effekter innan eller efter att insekterna har utvecklats; (2) om skadedjuren och de alternativa bytena kan utvecklas snabbare än predatorerna och (3) om predatorerna, skadedjuren och de alternativa bytena utvecklas i samma takt. Denna avhandling är viktig för vårt mål att utveckla miljövänligt jordbruk eftersom jag framhåller viktig kunskap för att främja biologisk bekämpning på lång sikt.

Popular science summary

Promoting food production in agriculture in an environmentally friendly way can be challenging. The pesticides used to reduce the damage of insect pests on crops are often toxic to our health and the environment. What is worse is that these same insect pests can evolve and develop resistance to these pesticides over generations. An alternative to pesticide use is promoting insect predators that feed on insect pests. The attack of these insect predators (among other insects attacking pests) is known as biological pest control. Biological control is often difficult to study because of many factors that affect the efficiency of insect predators in attacking insect pests. For example, predators can feed on insect prey other than the pest (non-pest prey) and benefit from it.

Non-pest insect prey are often present in semi-natural habitats surrounding crop fields. Therefore, the presence of semi-natural habitats and their proximity to crop fields is important for predators to feed on insect non-pest prey. The management of land use often results in a reduction of semi-natural habitats in favour of crop fields. Some recent studies in the past decades have identified that insects can evolve and adapt to changes in land use just as they can to pesticides.

In this PhD thesis, I try to understand how insect pests, non-pest prey and predators evolve in response to changes in land use and how their evolution affects biological control. In summary, the effect of changes in land use on biological control will depend on different factors to consider. (1) whether insects can evolve or not to changes in land use; (2) whether pests and non-pest prey can evolve faster than predators; (3) whether predators, pests and non-pest prey evolve at a similar speed. This thesis is important in our objective to improve environmentally friendly agriculture as I provide useful knowledge to promote biological control in the long term.

Resumen de divulgación científica

Promover una agricultura respetuosa del medio ambiente puede ser desafiante. El uso de pesticidas para reducir el ataque de insectos plagas en cultivos es a menudo tóxico para nuestra salud y la del medio ambiente. Peor aún, estos insectos plagas pueden evolucionar y desarrollar resistencias a las pesticidas a través de varias generaciones. Una alternative respetuosa del medio ambiente es el uso de insectos depredadores de estos insectos plagas. El ataque de estos insectos depredadores (entre otros insectos que atacan a las plagas) se conoce comúnmente como control biológico de plagas. El control biológico es a menudo difícil de estudiar a causa de varios factores que pueden afectar la eficiencia de los depredadores en atacar a las plagas. Por ejemplo, estos depredadores pueden también alimentarse de otros insectos diferentes de las plagas, conocidos como insectos presa alternativos y beneficiarse de ello.

Los insectos presa alternativos se encuentran comúnmente en hábitats seminaturales que rodean los cultivos. En consecuencia, la presencia hábitats seminaturales en paisajes agrícolas es importante para que los depredadores puedan beneficiarse de estos insectos presa alternativos. La gestión de los suelos conlleva a menudo una reducción o alteración de hábitats seminaturales. Estudios en décadas recientes han propuesto igualmente que los insectos pueden evolucionar y adaptarse a cambios en gestión de suelos de la misma manera que pueden adaptarse a las pesticidas.

En esta tesis de doctorado busco entender como los insectos plagas, presas alternativas y sus depredadores evolucionan en respuesta a cambios en el uso de los suelos y como esto afecta al control biológico. En resumen, los efectos de cambios en el uso de los suelos dependen de diferentes factores. (1) si los estudios son realizados antes o después de que los insectos puedan evolucionar en respuesta a la gestión de suelos; (2) si los insectos plagas y presas alternativos pueden evolucionar más rápido que los depredadores y (3) si los depredadores, plagas y presas alternativos evolucionan a la misma velocidad. Esta tesis es importante en nuestra lucha en promover una agricultura respetuosa del medio ambiente. Esta tesis prove conocimiento útil para promover la lucha biológica de plagas a largo plazo.

List of Papers

Paper I

Rosero, P., Smith, H. G., & Pontarp, M. (2024). Impacts of landscape heterogeneity on bottom-up effects affecting biological control. *Biological Control*, 188, 105401.

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Paper IV

Scale matters for biological pest control: effects of co-evolving herbivore and natural enemy communities in agricultural landscapes. *Manuscript*.

Author's contribution to the papers

The following authors contributed in the same way for each paper of this thesis:

Pedro Rosero: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization.

Henrik Smith: Conceptualization, Writing – Review and Editing, Supervision, Funding Acquisition.

Mikael Pontarp: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Review and Editing, Supervision, Project Administration, Funding Acquisition.

Introduction

Biological control: what is it and why is it important?

Agricultural landscapes cover approximately 38% of the global terrestrial surface (FAO, 2020), and are important for society as they provide ecosystem services such as food provisions. The services of food production are important to feed a population in expansion, projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050 (UN, 2022). In addition, there is increasing pressure to enhance agricultural productivity to meet the growing demand not only for food but also for feed and fibre (Zhang *et al.*, 2007). The increase in agricultural productivity is nonetheless challenging as agriculture often drives environmental degradation through different agricultural practices (DeClerck *et al.*, 2016). For example, the application of pesticides is used to reduce pest damage on crops but such practices also come with many negative effects (Gould *et al.*, 2018).

Pesticides, including insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides, are substances used to prevent, kill, or control pests or diseases that can damage crops. While pesticides are used to increase crop yields, there is a global movement toward reducing pesticide usage due to significant adverse effects. Among these effects we can identify negative effects on human health, the environment, and non-target species (EFSA, 2013), therefore making them an unsustainable practice (Popp et al., 2013; Stenberg, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2019; Dent, 2020). However, the intensive application of pesticides has driven insect pests to develop resistance to pesticides over time, reducing the effectiveness of pesticide applications (Mallet, 1989; Whalon *et al.*, 2008). In consequence, lower pesticide effectiveness often leads farmers to apply higher doses of pesticides or switch to different, potentially more toxic pesticides (Pimentel, 2005; Oerke, 2006; Heap, 2014; Baker *et al.*, 2020).

In the short term, exposure to pesticides promotes the survival of insect pest individuals who present stronger tolerance towards the used pesticide. In the long term, the survival of resistant individuals favours their reproduction in the population, where their offspring often inherit their tolerance towards pesticides. This process occurs over generations and ultimately a pest population can evolve resistance to pesticides. Thus, to avoid the negative effects of pesticide use, more sustainable practices are promoted within the integrative pest management (IPM) framework. The IPM framework aims to reduce the use of chemical pesticides and instead reduce pest damage on crops in favour of more environmentally friendly methods (see Peterson, Higley, & Pedigo, 2018). A key component of the IPM framework is biological pest control.

Biological pest control aims to reduce pest damage on crops by promoting natural enemies (e.g. predators) that attack pest insects (Heimpel and Mills, 2017). Biological control is often categorised into two types: classical biological control and conservation biological control. Classical biological control is commonly defined as the release of exotic natural enemies to control pest populations in crop fields (Lockwood, 1993). Conservation biological control, on the other hand, seeks to promote local naturally occurring natural enemies to control pest populations (Heimpel and Mills, 2017). Classical biological control presents drawbacks as the released exotic natural enemies can also become invasive species with negative consequences in the environments where they are released (Howarth, 1991). Conservation biological control is thus often favoured over classical biological control as a more sustainable approach to pest management by using naturally occurring natural enemies. Promoting conservation biological control, however, requires that we understand how it works. To understand mechanistically how natural enemies can reduce pest populations, it is important to understand the ecological interactions that underpin pest and natural enemies interactions. Understanding how insects evolve and adapt, similar to the evolution of pesticide resistance, in the IPM context is also imperative.

Direct and indirect trophic interactions on biological control

Ecological interactions play a major role in understanding the functionality and efficiency of biological pest control. In the simplest case, a population of natural enemies interacts with herbivore pest populations by attacking them and reducing their number, ultimately lowering pest damage on crops. Such interactions between natural enemies and pests are known as direct trophic interactions where the natural enemy benefits from the interaction while the pest experiences negative effects (Fig. 1a). Predation and parasitoidism are the main direct interactions that promote biological control services, where predation (the focus of this thesis) refers to the direct attack and consumption of prey by a predator. Examples of predators are predatory arthropods (Symondson *et al.*, 2002) including coccinellids feeding on aphid pests. Parasitoidism, on the other hand, is enabled by adult insect females that deposit one or more eggs in a host individual. As the eggs hatch, parasitoid larvae then develop and consume the parasitised host, eventually killing it in this process (Godfray 1994; Quicke 1997). Examples of parasitoidism include parasitic wasps that parasitise and insect pest larvae that feed on crops.

The direct interactions presented above are most often combined with indirect ecological interactions. Indirect interactions are enabled by the presence of non-pest prey on which the natural enemy feeds which increases the natural enemy population size (Wootton, 1994). Such an increase in natural enemy population size results in so-called apparent competition effects, i.e. the non-pest prey has an indirect negative effect on pest (Holt, 1977) (Fig. 1b). In agricultural landscapes, non-crop habitats such as semi-natural habitats often harbour plant communities that promote the presence of non-pest prey (Landis *et al.*, 2000), making the combined effect of direct and indirect ecological interactions and landscape components important for biological control.



Figure 1: Direct (a) and indirect (b) ecological interactions

The combination of direct and indirect interactions as mechanisms underlying biological pest control has received increased attention in recent years (Chailleux *et al.*, 2014; Kaser and Ode, 2016). This interest stems from a broader recognition of the intricate relationships within ecosystems involving pests, non-pest prey, and natural enemies, and their impact on pest populations. However, understanding these direct and indirect interactions can be challenging and can significantly influence our understanding direct and indirect interactions is by studying them from a bottom-up effect perspective. Bottom-up effects refer to the influence of lower trophic levels, such as primary producers, on higher trophic levels, such as herbivores, predators and parasitoids (Leroux and Loreau, 2015). In agricultural landscapes, changes in plant resource availability can affect herbivore population abundances. These changes in population abundances, can in turn influence natural

enemy populations and, consequently, impact the efficiency of biological control (Han *et al.*, 2019; 2022). Herbivore populations affected by bottom-up effects can include pests and non-pest prey which can, in turn, alter direct and indirect interactions. I contend that to understand how direct and indirect interactions affect conservation biological control, we need to study conservation biological control from a bottom-up perspective.

Functional traits and the strength of interactions in biological control

Functional traits are a useful concept that allows us to study the strength of direct and indirect ecological interactions including predation and apparent competition (Wootton and Emerson, 2005). Functional traits are specific characteristics that individuals possess that dictate how they interact with their environment or other organisms (Violle et al., 2007). Functional traits of relevance for biological control include body size, feeding morphology, feeding specialisation, phenology and dispersal capacity (Wootton et al., 2023; Alexandridis et al., 2021, 2022; Burkle et al., 2013; Shipley et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2014). Specifically, body size and feeding morphology can affect which prey a given natural enemy can consume (Wootton et al., 2021; Pontarp and Petchey, 2018). Feeding specialisation, on the other hand, dictates the variety of prey that a natural enemy can attack and consume (Loeuille et al., 2006). Phenology is related to the temporal co-occurrence between organisms (Lieth, 1974). Natural enemies can only interact with pests if they occur at the same time in the season. Finally, dispersal capacity is of particular importance in agricultural landscapes as it allows natural enemies to access different prey present in different habitats (Smith et al., 2014). For example, high-dispersing natural enemies can disperse across habitat boundaries in agricultural landscapes and thus also interact across such boundaries.

I use a functional trait-based view in this thesis to understand biological control patterns in agricultural landscapes (Alexandridis et al., 2021, 2022). One, of many, benefit of trait-based approaches is the improved prediction of biological control patterns in empirical systems (Alexandridis *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, trait-based approaches can facilitate an improved understanding of the link between trophic interactions and important life-history traits, providing a better connection between organism characteristics and biological control mechanisms (Wootton *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, a trait-based approach can offer a mechanistic understanding of how modified agricultural landscapes can impact biological control. This approach thus underscores the importance and possibility of considering the strength of interactions among organisms for a comprehensive understanding of conservation biological control in agricultural landscapes.

Landscape heterogeneity effects on biological control

Agricultural landscapes are often composed of a variety of different habitats, such as cultivated crop habitats and semi-natural habitats. Cultivated crop habitats tend to be homogeneous, dominated by a single crop species and supporting a limited range of insects including pests. In contrast, semi-natural habitats are often heterogeneous, hosting a diverse set of plants and insects. This diversity often includes a range of potential non-pest prey for natural enemies to feed on (Bianchi *et al.*, 2006; Tscharntke *et al.*, 2005; Rusch *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, variety in habitat types in agricultural landscapes is expected to influence the abundance and composition of herbivores and by extension, natural enemies (Bátary *et al.*, 2020). Ultimately, the abundance and composition of natural enemies can dictate biological control efficiency.

In landscapes with varying heterogeneity, it is possible to find different compositions of pest and non-pest prey within different habitats and across habitat boundaries in the landscape (i.e. landscape scale). In homogeneous landscapes, we can expect a predominance of herbivore pests that feed on crops direct pest-natural enemy interactions are expected to dominate. In heterogeneous landscapes, we can expect pests to be present in the crop while non-pest prey is expected in semi-natural habitats. Such non-pest prey can also enable biological control through direct and indirect interactions (Bianchi et al., 2006). High-dispersing generalist natural enemies can benefit from non-pest prey present in semi-natural habitats and simultaneously provide biological control services in cultivated crop habitats (Smith et al., 2014). This is because generalist high-dispersing natural enemies can feed on multiple prey and access both habitats where pest and non-pest prey inhabit through their high dispersal capacity (Kisdi, 2002). The accessibility of different habitats in the landscape is determined by how habitats are configured (Bátary et al., 2020). Therefore, both the composition and configuration of the landscape are important for biological control as they dictate the presence and accessibility of non-pest prey. This said, both the composition and configuration of a landscape can be altered through land use practices, potentially altering the abundance and accessibility of beneficial non-pest prey and thus also biological control efficiency in the landscape.

Eco-evolutionary dynamics on biological control

Changes in landscape heterogeneity can induce selection pressures on functional traits, leading to evolutionary changes. Pest populations are often crop specialists as they become adapted to the high abundance of plant resources that crop fields harbour (Loeuille *et al.*, 2013). Evolution can, in turn, alter how the functional traits of herbivores match with plant resource availability and therefore affect ecological

direct and indirect interactions of relevance for biological control. While traditionally believed to occur over long time scales evidence now suggests rapid evolution on ecological time scales (Ellner, Geber & Hairston, 2011). Ecological and evolutionary processes may thus overlap, resulting in so-called eco-evolutionary feedback loops (Dieckmann and Ferrière, 2004; Fig 2). For instance, insect pests can rapidly develop resistance to pesticides (Mallet, 1989; Whalon et al., 2008) but other selection pressures induced by, for example, land use may also induce rapid adaptation in insects with short generation times and high population abundances (Carrière et al., 2010; Loeuille et al., 2013).



Figure 2: Eco-evolutionary feedback loop. An alteration (such as land use change) in a given environment (for example an agricultural landscape) triggers ecological responses in a community by altering ecological interactions. Modified ecological interactions trigger evolutionary responses where the traits of the populations evolve resulting in better-adapted phenotypes. The new phenotypes have modified ecological interactions between them, triggering new evolutionary responses. When no further ecological interaction is altered, the system reaches an evolutionary stable strategy (i.e. ESS, see Geritz et al., 1998).

Alterations in land use can trigger modifications in ecological interactions with potential evolutionary consequences (Garnas, 2018; Pontarp *et al.*, 2023). In agricultural landscapes, the cultivation of different varieties of crops (e.g. cultivar mixing or intercropping) can exert selective pressures on pests (Karasov *et al.*, 2018; Zhan *et al.*, 2014). These responses can lead to bottom-up eco-evolutionary effects, where the evolution of pests and non-pest prey, subsequently influences the co-evolution of natural enemies (Brodersen *et al.*, 2018; Pontarp, 2020). Understanding the functional traits under selection and alterations in ecological interactions because of land-use change is key to assessing these eco-evolutionary bottom-up effects.

Functional traits, such as feeding morphology, specialisation, and body size directly influence an organism's growth, i.e. fitness (Metz et al., 1992). For example, a highdispersing generalist natural enemy will have an advantage (high fitness) over lowdispersing natural enemies in a fragmented landscape (Smith *et al.*, 2014). In this example, there may thus be selection for high dispersing natural enemies. More generally, a population with a specific trait that dominates a given landscape can be considered the resident phenotype. This resident population give birth to individuals mainly with the same trait as the resident but mutant phenotypes (i.e. phenotypes different from that of the resident) may also be introduced. If the phenotype of the mutant provides an advantage over the phenotype of the resident, the mutant can then invade and establish itself over time in the landscape, becoming the new resident (Geritz et al., 1998; Brännström et al., 2013). As the successfully invading mutant presents a new phenotype this can result in an alteration of ecological interactions. This alteration in ecological interactions can, in turn, trigger evolutionary responses, that can further promote the evolution of new mutant phenotypes. If this process is repeated progressively over generations, it may result in phenotype evolution in a given population in a given landscape (see ecoevolutionary feedback loop; Fig. 2). For example, in a population of dispersing natural enemies in an agricultural landscape, a mutant can be born with a higher dispersal capacity than that of the resident. If the increase in dispersal of the mutant is advantageous, the mutant with higher dispersal capacity can invade, and become the resident. In consequence, the initial population will evolve to have a higher dispersal capacity over time. When no new mutant phenotype can provide an advantage over the resident's phenotype, evolution reaches an evolutionary endpoint for that specific evolving trait (i.e., evolutionary stable strategy (ESS); Geritz et al., 1998; Fig. 2).

In the case of landscape modifications, plant communities are commonly altered, which may result in functional mismatches between the plants and the herbivores that feed on them (Rosero *et al.*, 2024). Herbivores may thus adapt to the new plant landscape by shifting their functional traits according to the sequence of events presented above (Karasov *et al.*, 2018; Zhan *et al.*, 2014). Such evolution of herbivore prey may in turn result in altered ecological interactions with natural enemies. In consequence, alteration of herbivore-natural enemy interaction can trigger adaptive responses in natural enemies, and thus, land-use change can promote the co-evolution between herbivores and natural enemies (Brodersen *et al.*, 2018).

Aim of the thesis

This thesis aims to demonstrate the importance of an evolutionary perspective on conservation biological control in heterogeneous agricultural landscapes. I focus on the impact of modifications in landscape heterogeneity on biological control efficiency. I study how changes in the landscape can result in trait-dependent bottom-up effects triggering evolutionary responses in herbivores and thereafter natural enemies. I first study how changes in land use affecting plant resource availability can alter plant-herbivore interactions resulting in modified population abundances and also triggering evolutionary responses of herbivores. Modifications in population abundance can then propagate to natural enemies, with consequences on biological control mediated by direct and indirect interactions (Paper I). Herbivores should be able to evolve in response to changes in the landscape and adapt to the modified landscapes, ultimately propagating to natural enemy population abundances and biological control (Paper II). The evolution of herbivores can also trigger evolutionary effects of natural enemies that should coevolve along with herbivores altering biological control efficiency (Paper III). All the previous evolutionary effects are expected to be reliant on the dispersal capacities of herbivores and natural enemies as their co-evolution should depend on how each trophic level is capable of dispersing (Paper IV).

Q1: How does modification in landscape heterogeneity affect biological control induced by direct and indirect interactions for natural enemies with different dispersal capacities?

In my first chapter, I study the effects of reduced landscape heterogeneity on biological control efficiency mediated by direct and indirect interactions for different natural enemy dispersal levels at ecological timescales. More specifically, I aim to investigate the bottom-up effects induced by modifications of plant resources available in a semi-natural habitat. I expect to confirm previous results where reduced landscape heterogeneity reduces biological control services (Tscharntke *et al.*, 2012). To explain such reduction in biological control, I expect to find functional mismatching at the plant-herbivore level when modifying plant

resources, resulting in altered ecological interactions at higher trophic levels (herbivores-natural enemies). Ultimately, the alteration of ecological interactions should affect the strength of predation and apparent competition promoting biological control services. Nonetheless, I expect natural enemies with different dispersal capacities to be affected differently by the reduction in landscape heterogeneity.

Q2: What are the consequences of land-use change on biological control if we consider the evolutionary potential of herbivores?

In my second chapter, I study how herbivore prey evolve in response to reduced diversity in semi-natural habitats and how this propagates to higher trophic levels, altering biological control efficiency. Here, I assume that natural enemy evolution is slower than herbivores and therefore I neglect the evolutionary potential of natural enemies. This chapter is a natural extension of the previous chapter because I expect the plant-herbivore functional mismatches found in my first chapter to trigger evolutionary responses of herbivores. I expect herbivores to adapt to the modified landscape with positive bottom-up effects that can benefit biological control services altered by reduced landscape heterogeneity.

Q3: How is biological control affected by the coevolution of herbivores and natural enemies in response to the homogenization of agricultural landscapes?

In my third chapter, I now assume that herbivores and natural enemies evolve at a similar speed as opposed to my second chapter. Thereafter, I study how landscape homogenization results in herbivore prey and natural enemy co-evolution with ultimate responses in short- and long-term biological control efficiency. More specifically, I first test what evolutionary stable strategies (ESS) of pests, non-pest prey and natural enemies are possible in a heterogeneous landscape composed of a crop and a semi-natural habitat. From these ESSs, I then analyse how the homogenization of said landscape (by modifying either the crop habitat or the semi-natural habitat) affects biological control for each ESS found. I then allow herbivores and natural enemies to co-evolve in response to landscape homogenization for each ESS and scenario of homogenization. Finally, after co-evolution reaches a new ESS, i.e. after herbivores and natural enemies are adapted

to the new landscape, I then reassess biological control efficiency. I thus study longterm evolutionary biological control resulting from landscape homogenization.

Q4: What is the role of dispersal in herbivores and natural enemy co-evolution in response to homogenization of agricultural landscapes?

In my second and third chapters, I assume that herbivores and natural enemies have a high enough dispersal capacity to act at a landscape scale across habitat boundaries. Therefore, in my fourth chapter, I zoom away from this assumption and study how biological control is affected by the co-evolution of herbivores and natural enemies with different dispersal capacities in response to landscape homogenization. I attempt to confirm previous results where high-dispersing natural enemies should evolve generalist strategies that promote biological control services, and that low-dispersing natural enemies should evolve specialist strategies. Ultimately, I aim to prove that communities of herbivores and natural enemies with different dispersal capacities evolve differently the ones from the others when the landscape is homogenized. Finally, this chapter allows me to put all the evolutionary responses found in my second and third chapters in a broader context where two words resume a key message of this thesis: dispersal matters.

Methods

Ecological interactions in agricultural landscapes

This thesis focuses on biological pest control by natural enemies in agricultural landscapes. More specifically I aim at understanding how changes in the landscape may alter biological control efficiency. I study the effects of land-use change on biological control at short ecological timescales (Paper I) and longer-term ecoevolutionary timescales (Paper II, III, IV). Short-term effects include the alteration of ecological interactions because of land-use change. Long-term effects include alterations of ecological interactions after organisms evolve and adapt in response to land use change. I approach these aims using mathematical modelling. The baseline ecological model used in the chapters of this thesis is the same. The model consists of an initial landscape of a crop habitat and a semi-natural habitat. The resources of both habitats are represented by unique resource distributions in trait space (see also Dieckmann & Doebeli, 1999; Loeuille et al., 2006; 2010; Pontarp & Petchey, 2018). More specifically, I model the crop habitat as a narrow resource distribution representing a highly abundant and dominating crop resource (lightgreen distribution, Fig. 1a). I model the semi-natural habitat as a wide resource distribution representing a highly diverse habitat with a lower abundance of the dominant resource than in the crop habitat (dark-green distribution, Fig. 1a). In this landscape I model herbivory of a pest and a non-pest prey through their carrying capacity in each habitat. The carrying capacity of herbivores in each habitat is traitdependent and modelled through the overlap of the distribution of resources available in the habitat and the niche of the herbivore (Fig. 3b). Similarly, competition between herbivores is dictated by the overlap between herbivore niches (Fig. 3b). The idea of using distribution overlaps to model ecological interactions comes from classic niche theory (MacArthur, 1972) and is inspired by previous models (Ackermann, 2004; Sjödin et al., 2018). Finally, the natural enemy attack on the pest and non-pest prey herbivores is also trait-dependent. I calculate the natural enemy attack rate on herbivores in two ways. The attack rate can be calculated as the matching between the niche of the natural enemy and the trait value of the herbivore (i.e. the niche position), following previous models (e.g. Pontarp et al., 2016; 2018) (Paper I, II, Fig. 3c). Alternatively, the attack rate is computed by the overlap between herbivores and natural enemy niches (**Paper III, IV**, Fig. 3b). All organisms disperse passively across habitat boundaries.



Figure 3: Examples of a) Modelled landscape including a crop (light-green distribution) and a seminatural habitat (dark-green distribution). b) Overlap between normal distributions (for example the niches of two herbivores such as a pest in black and the non-pest prey in red). The dashed area represents which distribution is contributing to the overlap between them. c) Natural enemy attack rate given by the matching of the natural enemy niche with the herbivore trait value. Note that the distributions provided in b) and c) are illustrative examples and not the actual distributions of the modelled organisms.

The model described above is formalized by equations of population abundances in the two-habitat landscape:

$$\frac{dP_{T_1}}{P_{T_1}dt} = r - r \frac{\alpha(p,p)P_{T_1}}{K(T_1,p)} - r \frac{\alpha(p,np)NP_{T_1}}{K(T_1,p)} - \alpha(p,ne)NE_{T_1} + m_P \left(\frac{P_{T_2}}{P_{T_1}} - 1\right) (1)$$

$$\frac{dNP_{T_1}}{NP_{T_1}dt} = r - r \frac{\alpha(np,np)NP_{T_1}}{K(T_1,np)} - r \frac{\alpha(np,p)P_{T_1}}{K(T_1,np)} - \alpha(np,ne)NE_{T_1} + m_{NP}\left(\frac{NP_{T_2}}{NP_{T_1}} - 1\right)$$
(2)

$$\frac{dNE_{T_1}}{NE_{T_1}dt} = -d + ca(p, ne)P_{T_1} + ca(np, ne)NP_{T_1} + m_{NE}\left(\frac{NE_{T_2}}{NE_{T_1}} - 1\right)$$
(3)

$$\frac{dP_{T_2}}{P_{T_2}dt} = r - r \frac{\alpha(p,p)P_{T_2}}{K(T_2,p)} - r \frac{\alpha(p,np)NP_{T_2}}{K(T_2,p)} - a(p,ne)NE_{T_2} + m_P \left(\frac{P_{T_1}}{P_{T_2}} - 1\right) (4)$$

$$\frac{dNP_{T_2}}{NP_{T_2}dt} = r - r \frac{\alpha(np,np)NP_{T_2}}{\kappa(T_1,np)} - r \frac{\alpha(np,p)P_{T_2}}{\kappa(T_2,np)} - \alpha(np,ne)NE_{T_2} + m_{NP} \left(\frac{NP_{T_1}}{NP_{T_2}} - 1\right)$$
(5)

$$\frac{dNE_{T_2}}{NE_{T_2}dt} = -d + ca(p, ne)P_{T_2} + ca(np, ne)NP_{T_2} + m_{NE}\left(\frac{NE_{T_1}}{NE_{T_2}} - 1\right)$$
(6)

where T_1 denotes the crop habitat, T_2 denotes the semi-natural habitat, P denotes the pest, NP denotes the non-pest prey and NE denotes the natural enemy. The population dynamics are governed by the intrinsic growth rate r of herbivores and intrinsic death rate d for the natural enemies. Herbivores and natural enemies disperse passively between habitats through coefficients m_H and m_{NE} respectively. Natural enemies convert consumed herbivores through a conversion coefficient c. As stated above, herbivore carrying capacity K, competition between herbivores a and natural enemy attack on herbivores a are all trait-dependent functions in one-dimensional trait space that I denote as x. The notations p, np and ne denote which organisms the trait-dependent functions are related to in trait space x. In my case, p corresponds to the pest, np corresponds to the non-pest prey and ne corresponds to the natural enemy. All trait-dependent functions are calculated by using combinations of the niches of my organisms or the plant resource distributions of both habitats.

Trait-based ecological interactions.

All my trait-based functions are condensed into a one-dimensional trait space denoted as x. I model the plant resource distribution in a habitat as a normal distribution with a mean u_{opt} and variance σ_{Res} . Parameter u_{opt} represents the dominant type of resource and σ_{Res} represents the variety of resource types (i.e. diversity) in the habitat. For example, the crop distribution (T_1) is formalized as:

$$Res(T_1, x) = \frac{1}{\sigma_{Res,T_1}\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{(u_{opt,T_1}-x)^2}{2\sigma_{Res,T_1}^2}}$$
(7)

The same approach is used for herbivore niches. The distributions include mean value u represents the position of the niche and the variance σ represents the degree of specialisation (niche width). For example, the pest's niche is formalized as:

$$Pref(p, x) = \frac{1}{\sigma_p \sqrt{2\pi}} e^{\frac{(up-x)^2}{2\sigma_p^2}}$$
(8)

As noted above, the niche of the natural enemy is modelled in two alternative ways. In **Paper I and II** the niche of the natural enemy is given as a Gaussian distribution. This Gaussian distribution includes an optimum value at the niche position z and a degree of specialization (niche width) σ_{ne} formalized as:

$$Pred(ne, x) = e^{\frac{(z-x)^2}{2\sigma_{ne}^2}}$$
(9)

For **Papers I and II**, I calculate the attack rate of a natural enemy on a pest using the formula in equation 9, representing the natural enemy niche. Thus, I calculate it as the matching between the natural enemy niche *Pred* with the trait value of an herbivore u. The matching of the natural enemy niche and the niche position of the herbivore is then multiplied by b_{max} . With this method, the attack rate decays as the herbivore trait mismatches the natural enemy niche optimum z according to the natural enemy niche width σ_{ne} . Following the method described above, the natural enemy attack rate on the pest formulates as:

$$a(p,ne) = b_{max} e^{-\frac{(u_p - z)^2}{2\sigma_{ne}^2}}$$
(10)

For **Paper III and IV** the niche of the natural enemy is modelled as a normal distribution. This normal distribution retains the same parameters of the niche position z and the degree of specialization σ_{ne} of the natural enemy and is modelled as follows:

$$Pred(ne, x) = \frac{1}{\sigma_{ne}\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{(z-x)^2}{2\sigma_{ne}^2}}$$
(11)

The actual values of ecological interactions (including carrying capacity, competition and predation) are computed through overlaps between the trait-related distributions presented above. As the distributions are normally distributed, the overlap between distributions can only vary in the interval (0, 1]. For each

ecological interaction, I then multiply the overlap between distributions by the maximum value that the ecological interaction can have. For example, carrying capacity is calculated through the overlap between the plant resource distribution of a habitat and the niche of an herbivore. This overlap is then multiplied by K_0 , which is the maximum possible carrying capacity attainable in a habitat. To illustrate this, I give here below the carrying capacity of the pest in the crop habitat:

$$K(T_1, p) = K_{0, T_1} \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} \min(\operatorname{Res}(T_1, x), \operatorname{Pref}(p, x)) dx$$
(12)

Similarly, the competition between herbivores is given by the overlap between herbivore niches with a maximum value of 1. Thus, competition can vary between 0 (no competition) and 1 (intraspecific competition). Here below I provide the competition of a pest with a non-pest prey:

$$\alpha(p,np) = \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} \min(\operatorname{Pref}(p,x), \operatorname{Pref}(np,x)) dx \tag{13}$$

Finally, for the natural enemy of **Paper III and IV**, the attack rate is given through the overlap between the niche of an herbivore and the niche of the natural enemy. This overlap is then multiplied by b_{max} which represents the maximum natural enemy attack rate. Here below I provide the natural enemy attack rate on the pest following the method described above:

$$a(p,ne) = b_{max} \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} min(Pref(p,x), Pred(ne,x)) dx$$
(14)

All model implementations and simulations presented below were done in Matlab (2020c) and all the analysis and plotting were done in R (2022).

Dispersal scenarios

Both herbivores and the natural enemy disperse passively between the crop and semi-natural habitat with some probability m_H and m_{NE} , respectively. In the model presented above, organisms can benefit from multiple resources present in the landscape due to dispersal. Dispersal values equal to 0 mean that organisms are unable to disperse across habitat boundaries. Thus, to study the effect of local processes only I can set dispersal rates of the organisms m_H and m_{NE} to 0. In my thesis, landscape-scale processes are enabled with values of passive dispersal around 0.05 to 0.1 (5-10% passive dispersal), allowing me to enable the organisms to benefit from the resources present in the whole landscape.

Biological control and mechanisms underlying biological control

As biological control is the main theme of this thesis, providing a quantification of this ecosystem service and the mechanisms underlying it is important. To provide such quantifications, I use the models and methods described above. All of my biological control calculations provided are at equilibrium conditions in the system given in equations 1-6. As I am interested in understanding the potential damage to crops by pest herbivores, I focus on biological control only in the crop habitat (T_1) . In **Paper I**, I calculate biological control as a variation in pest population abundance in the crop at equilibrium (Equation 1). This variation in abundance is given when the pest population can grow on its own or in the presence of either the natural enemy alone or the natural enemy and the non-pest prey combined. More details on the implementation of this method can be found in Paper I (Rosero et al., 2024). For the rest of my papers (Paper II, III, and IV) biological control is calculated through the product of the attack rate of natural enemies (Equations 10 and 14) and the natural enemy population abundance at equilibrium in the crop (Equation 3). To elucidate at short and long-term effects of land-use change on biological control (Paper II, III, and IV), I calculate biological control before and after organisms evolve because of land-use change.

The calculation of biological control depends on niche matching (overlap) between herbivores and natural enemies as well as the population abundances of natural enemies. As I aim here to also provide a mechanistic understanding of the biological control patterns found across my papers. Therefore, to better understand biological control I also quantify the overlap between natural enemies and herbivores niches given in Equation 13 and extract population abundances in the landscape at equilibrium (Equations 1-6).

Modifications in the landscape

Throughout the thesis, I model changes in our agricultural landscape as modifications in the plant resources available in either of the habitats. Such change in the landscape can be interpreted as land use change in our agricultural landscape. To do so, I modify the parameter values u_{opt} and σ_{Res} of the plant resource distribution in either habitat (Equation 7). By modifying u_{opt} I change the dominant resource in a given habitat. By modifying σ_{Res} I alter the plant diversity within habitats. I modify either the crop or the semi-natural habitat such that the landscape becomes homogenized, i.e. the characteristics of the crop and semi-natural habitat become increasingly similar. Such changes are ultimately manifested in altered organismal carrying capacity K (Equation 12) with consequential ecological bottom-up effects. Such bottom-up effects can induce potential evolutionary responses in the herbivore niches (**Paper II**). Evolution of the herbivore niches can also trigger an evolutionary response in natural enemy niches (**Paper III and IV**).

Organisms' evolution: eco-evolutionary framework based on adaptive dynamics

In Papers II, III and IV I allow my organisms to adapt and evolve to land use change by evolving their niches. The evolving traits include niche position and niche width. To implement such niche evolution I build on the adaptive dynamics framework (Metz *et al.*, 1992; Geritz *et al.*, 1998; Brännström *et al.*, 2013). The adaptive dynamics framework is based on fitness, referring to the long-term exponential growth rate of a phenotype in a given environment (Metz *et al.*, 1992). A phenotype is given by the traits they possess. For example, in my model, a specific pest population phenotype is given by a unique combination of niche position and width. In my model, the initial parameters set for my modelled herbivores and natural enemies niches provide the phenotype of my so-called initial resident populations. Any population with a different combination of niche position and width will represent a non-resident (i.e. mutant) phenotype.

The per-capita growth of my modelled populations (Equations 1-6) depends on the landscape characteristics and the ecological interactions. This dependency is commonly formulated mathematically for a given population N (in our case N can represent populations P, NP or NE) in a so-called fitness function $w(N) = \frac{dN}{Ndt}$. Note that w(N) represents the fitness of the resident phenotypes modelled in my system. From this fitness function, it is also possible to establish a fitness generating function W(y', y, N) providing the fitness of any possible phenotype (including resident and non-resident phenotypes) for any of our populations. Here, y is a vector with all the trait values (being either niche position or niche width, depending on which one I allow to evolve) of my resident populations. N is a vector representing the population sizes of the different resident populations of my system. y' is the trait value of a specific phenotype (either resident or non-resident). The evolution of a resident's phenotype can be studied by assessing the fitness of a mutant with a phenotype different from the resident's. A mutant phenotype is defined as a population having a phenotype distinct from the resident phenotype but very close to it. I define a mutant under the assumption of small mutations in the traits of my organisms resulting in slow evolution over evolutionary time. The invasion fitness of a rare mutant with trait value y' is given by its per-capita growth when rare in an environment set by the resident at equilibrium $W(y', y^*, N^*)$. Vector N^* represents the population abundance of my residents at ecological equilibrium and vector \mathbf{y}^* the trait values of each of these different populations. A rare mutant with trait value

y' can either invade or not invade the system. In the case of $W(y', y^*, N^*) > 0$ the mutant can invade, otherwise if $W(y', y^*, N^*) < 0$ the mutant can't invade. In my evolutionary analysis, I use invasion fitness to check the evolution of a resident through the directional selection acting on the resident's phenotype. For a resident with trait value y, its selection gradient refers to how invasion fitness of W changes with changes in trait value for a mutant that has a trait value equal to the resident's (i.e. y' = y). In adaptive dynamics, the selection gradient is given by:

$$D(y) = \frac{\partial W(y', y^*, N^*)}{\partial y'}\Big|_{y'=y}$$
(15)

I use the selection gradient as a quantification of the strength and direction of selection resulting in an increase or decrease in trait value. Said strength and direction of selection is known as directional selection. The selection gradient can be used thereafter in the canonical equation of adaptive dynamics that assumes rare and small mutations in trait values of a given phenotype (Dieckamn and Law 1996). The canonical equation allows me to study the evolution of a given trait *y* as follows:

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = \frac{1}{2} \mu \sigma_{\mu}^2 N^* \frac{\partial W(y', y^*, N^*)}{\partial y'} \Big|_{y'=y}$$
(16)

Here, μ denotes a mutation probability of the resident, N^* denotes the equilibrium abundance of the resident's population and σ_{μ}^2 denotes the variance of the size of mutations. Evolution follows the canonical equation until the selection gradient becomes 0 (i.e. $D(u_r) = 0$). Once the selection gradient becomes equal to 0, it is needed to assess whether the population has reached an evolutionarily stable strategy (i.e. ESS, where the resident sits at a fitness maximum; see Geritz *et al*, 1998). To do this, I assess the second derivative of the fitness function by the trait $\frac{\partial^2 W(y',y^*,N^*)}{\partial y'^2}\Big|_{y'=y}$. If $\frac{\partial^2 W(y',y^*,N^*)}{\partial y'^2}\Big|_{y'=y} < 0$ then I have stabilising selection, represented by an ESS, and thus, no mutant can invade the system. Otherwise, if $\frac{\partial^2 W(y',y^*,N^*)}{\partial y'^2}\Big|_{y'=y} > 0$, then I have a disruptive selection represented by a branching point where two different mutants can invade at once, in such cases speciation may occur. For simplicity reasons, I do not include branching and speciation in this thesis.

From the evolutionary analysis described above I allow my organisms to evolve differently depending on the objective of the study. In all papers, both niche position and niche width co-evolve at a similar evolutionary rate. In other words, the values of μ and σ_{μ}^2 for the canonical equation used to represent the evolution of niche position and the ones used for the canonical equation used to represent the evolution

of niche width are the same for a given organism. In **Paper II**, as I focus on the effects of herbivore evolution on biological control, I only allow herbivores to evolve in response to modifications in the landscape. For **Paper III** and **IV**, as my focus is on herbivore and natural enemy co-evolution, I allow them both to co-evolve their niches in response to modifications in the landscape. The differences between **Paper III** and IV lie in the fact that for **Paper III**, I assume high dispersal capacity overall whereas for **Paper IV** I evaluate how different variations in dispersal capacity affect co-evolution. Therefore, it is possible to identify a progression of increased complexity throughout my thesis. First, in **Paper I**, all the studies are carried out at ecological timescales. In **Paper II**, I allow the evolution of only herbivore populations. **Paper III** increases in complexity by allowing herbivore and natural enemy co-evolution and finally, **Paper IV** also allows co-evolution but zooming out on a variety of different dispersing communities.

Main Results

Paper I: Impacts of landscape heterogeneity on bottomup effects affecting biological control

Studies focused on conservation biological control in agricultural landscapes claim that intermediate levels of landscape heterogeneity promote biological control (Tscharntke *et al.*, 2012). This claim is based on the idea that the complementarity of resources coming from semi-natural habitats should enhance high-dispersing natural enemy populations and promote biological control services (Rusch et al. 2010). Knowledge of the importance of apparent competition by complementary resources on biological control, however, remains elusive (Chailleux et al., 2014). In addition, ecological interactions between herbivore prey in crop and semi-natural habitats and natural enemies are known to be trait-dependent (Wootton and Emmerson, 2005) and thus, biological control efficiency is also trait-dependent. Therefore, new perspectives on biological control are improving their efforts to include trait-dependent approaches (Alexandridis et al., 2021; 2022; Wootton et al., 2021). Trait-based approaches should improve knowledge and mechanistic explanations of responses of biological control to landscape heterogeneity that are nowadays inconsistent in the empirical literature (Martin et al., 2016; 2019; Karp et al., 2018). Changes in landscape heterogeneity can be induced by land-use change, and the impact of bottom-up effects from such landscape modifications has also received attention in recent years (Han et al., 2019; 2022).

In this paper, I seek to improve the knowledge of how biological control could be affected by a reduction in landscape heterogeneity given different natural enemy dispersal capacities. More specifically, I induce modifications to a modelled landscape by reducing the diversity of plant resources in a semi-natural habitat adjacent to a crop habitat. We do modifications until both habitats have the same diversity, i.e. until the landscape consists of two crop-like habitats. Thereafter, I further reduce heterogeneity by replacing the semi-natural habitat with crop-like habitats that are increasingly similar to the focal crop. The model represents an agricultural landscape consisting of a crop habitat and a semi-natural habitat. The crop habitat is represented by a low diversity of plant resources where a dominant resource (i.e. the crop) is abundant. The semi-natural habitat harbours more plant diversity at lower abundances. In said landscape, I model a pest specialised to the crop and a non-pest prey specialised to the semi-natural habitat, and in a higher trophic level, a natural enemy feeds on both prey.



Figure 4: (From Fig. 2, Rosero et al., 2024): Potential biocontrol as a function of landscape heterogeneity represented as a) Total biocontrol (not shown here) and the decomposed mechanisms of total biocontrol, including b) Direct-interaction biocontrol and c) Indirect-interaction biocontrol. Three levels of natural enemy dispersal are included through colours where the darkest blue represents the highest dispersal level, the lightest blue represents the lowest dispersal level, and the intermediate blue represents an intermediate dispersal level. Dashed lines represent a transition from semi-natural habitat to crop scenarios. Solid lines represent the dominance shift scenarios. Circles in the plots represent the

My results present a bottom-up mechanistic understanding of how reduced landscape heterogeneity affects biological control for different natural enemy dispersal capacities. High heterogeneity promotes indirect-induced biological control for high-dispersing natural enemies, whereas low heterogeneity promotes direct-induced biological control (Fig. 4; Fig. 2b-c from Rosero *et al.*, 2024). I also find the lowest levels of total biological control (when adding up direct and indirect biological control) for high-dispersing natural enemies at intermediate levels of heterogeneity (See Fig. 2a from Rosero *et al.*, 2024). Interestingly, the shift from direct to indirect biological control and the low levels of total biological control at intermediate heterogeneity are both explained by a modified functional matching between plant resources available in the landscape and herbivore niches as heterogeneity decreases. (Fig. 5; Fig. 4a from Rosero *et al.*, 2024). For more detailed information, refer to **Paper I** of this thesis.



Figure 5: (From Fig. 4, Rosero et al., 2024): a) overlap between herbivores (pest in grey, non-pest prey in black) consumption distribution and semi-natural habitat resource distribution across levels of landscape heterogeneity. Dashed lines represent a transition from semi-natural habitat to crop scenarios. Solid lines represent the dominance shift scenarios. Circles in the plots represent the initial landscape simulated, triangles represent the intersection between trajectories, and squares represent a monoculture

Paper II: Herbivore Evolution and land-use Change – consequences on Biological Pest Control

Working with models that include trait-based approaches provides us with an ecoevolutionary extension of the first paper of this thesis. It is known that alterations of ecological interactions in an ecological system can trigger evolutionary responses in the organisms (Geritz *et al.*, 1998). Recent studies have, for example, highlighted how alterations in plant resources could trigger herbivore evolution, including pests, in agroecosystems (Karasov et al., 2018; Zhan et al., 2014). One of the main results from **Paper I** shows the importance of mismatching functional traits between available plant resources and herbivore niches. Such herbivore-plant mismatches may trigger evolutionary responses in herbivore populations (Thrall *et al.*, 2011; Garnas, 2018; Pontarp *et al.*, 2023).

In this study, I assume that herbivores evolve faster than natural enemies (Loeuille *et al.*, 2013). Thus, I focus on herbivore evolution and ignore natural enemy evolution to study how herbivores evolve in response to land-use change with consequences on biological control. I model the same community used in **Paper I**. I focus specifically on how herbivore prey evolve in response to reduced diversity

in semi-natural habitats and how this propagates to higher trophic level population abundances (i.e. the natural enemy), altering biological control efficiency. I present a mechanistic understanding of how herbivore evolution affects natural enemy populations and, ultimately, biological control services at long-term ecoevolutionary scales.



Figure 6: Post-evolution overlaps of a) pest niche with the crop plant resources available and, b) nonpest prey niche with the crop plant resources available across plant diversity reduction gradient

With reduced plant diversity in the semi-natural habitat, pests evolve their niches and become less efficient at using the resources in the crop habitat, resulting in reduced crop damage (Fig. 6a). This counterintuitive result is caused because the semi-natural habitat becomes an empty niche that dispersing pests can access through their dispersal capacities. Interestingly, non-pest prey populations evolve to become more efficient at feeding on the crop with decreased plant diversity. Nonetheless, such an increase in feeding efficiency is less pronounced than the decrease in pest efficiency at feeding on the crop (compare Fig. 6a and 6b). At the natural enemy level, nevertheless, the evolution of pests and non-pest prey also decreases strongly biological control efficiency with decreased plant diversity eventually driving natural enemies to become extinct (Fig. 7). Thus, the negative impact of plant diversity reduction on biological control is drastically more pronounced after herbivore evolution when compared to effects before herbivore evolution (compare dotted-lines and triangled-lines, Fig. 7). The decline and extinction of natural enemy extinction is driven by bottom-up effects. Decreased plant diversity in the semi-natural habitat results in pest and non-pest prey adopting generalist niches between the habitats in the landscape (see Fig. 4 of Paper II of this thesis). As a result, the population abundance of the herbivores in each habitat decreases and, in consequence, natural enemy populations also decrease. For more information, refer to **Paper II** of this thesis.



Figure 7: Biological control of the natural enemy on pest populations pre-evolution (blue-dotted line) and post-evolution (blue-triangled line) as a function of plant diversity reduction.

Paper III: Natural enemy evolution in agricultural landscapes - consequences for biological control

In **Paper II**, I focus on herbivore evolution alone to understand how their evolution affected biological control under the assumption that natural enemies evolved at a slower rate. Evidence of co-evolving natural enemies and pests has, however, also been documented (Kaiser *et al.*, 2017). Theoretical studies also highlight how evolution on lower trophic levels can result in bottom-up evolutionary effects in higher trophic levels, as herbivore evolution can trigger predator evolution (Brodersen *et al.*, 2018; Pontarp, 2020).

In this study, I acknowledge such complexity by studying herbivores and natural enemy co-evolution in response to land-use change. I model land-use change as either a modification of the crop habitat or a modification of the semi-natural habitat. In both cases, I increase the similarity between habitats, rendering the landscape more homogeneous. From an initial study system similar to the ones in **Paper I**, and **II**, I model two types of communities with two different types of natural enemies: pest specialists and non-pest prey specialists. I then assess how the homogenisation of my modelled landscape affects biological control at ecological and eco-evolutionary timescales for my different modelled communities.

At ecological timescales, changing the crop reduces the biological control efficiency of pest-specialist natural enemies (Fig. 8a). Conversely, changing the semi-natural habitat is beneficial for pest-specialist natural enemies (Fig. 8b). I also find opposite effects for non-pest prey specialist natural enemies. Modifications of the crop habitat result in increased biological control efficiency of non-pest prey specialists (Fig. 8c). In opposition, modifications of the semi-natural habitat result in decreased biological control efficiency for the same non-pest prey specialist (Fig. 8d). Therefore, at ecological timescales, the modification of the habitat to which the natural enemy is specialised towards is detrimental for biological control (e.g. crop modified for the pest-specialised natural enemy). However, the modification of the habitat that the natural enemy is not specialised towards promotes biological control instead. When allowing for herbivores and natural enemies to co-evolve in response to land-use change, I find an overall positive effect of landscape homogenization on biological control (Fig. 9). Interestingly, I even find a shift in natural enemy prey preference going from non-pest prey when the crop habitat is modified into becoming more similar to the semi-natural habitat (Fig. 9c). Through these results I highlight the importance of considering herbivore and natural enemy co-evolution for long-term evolutionary responses of biological control to land-use change.



Attacked Prey - Non-Pest Prey - Pest

Figure 8: a) Landscape modification scenarios where I run ten different scenarios where I modify the crop so it becomes increasingly similar to the semi-natural habitat (left panel) and where I run ten different scenarios where I modify the semi-natural habitat so it becomes increasingly similar to the crop (right panel). b-e) I then quantify at ecological timescales (before evolution) the initial effects that these changes have on the effective biological control by natural enemies. Four scenarios are represented here: modification of the crop with a natural enemy more specialised towards the pest (b); modification of the semi-natural habitat with a natural enemy more specialised towards the pest (c); modification of the semi-natural habitat with a natural enemy more specialised towards the non-pest prey (d) and modification of the semi-natural habitat with a natural enemy more specialised towards the non-pest prey (e). Each dot represents one of the ten scenarios of the modified landscape. Blue lines represent biological control towards the pest, and red lines biological control towards the non-pest prey.



Attacked Prey - Non-Pest Prey - Pest

Figure 9: Effective biological control at eco-evolutionary timescales (i.e. after allowing evolution in consequence of landscape homogenisation) (a-b). Four scenarios are represented here: modification of the crop with a natural enemy more specialised towards the pest (a); modification of the semi-natural habitat with a natural enemy more specialised towards the pest (b); modification of the crop habitat with a natural enemy more specialised towards the pest (c) and modification of the semi-natural habitat with a natural enemy more specialised towards the non-pest prey (c) and modification of the semi-natural habitat with a natural enemy more specialised towards the non-pest prey (d). Blue lines represent biological control towards the pest, and red lines biological control towards the non-pest prey.

Paper IV: Scale matters for biological pest control: effects of co-evolving herbivore and natural enemy communities in agricultural landscapes.

The previous paper (**Paper III**) is based on the idea that both herbivores and natural enemies disperse such that they can access both habitats in the landscape. The capacity of natural enemies to use resources in different habitats is essential for conservation biological control, as mentioned above in **Paper I**. Nonetheless, it is also known that dispersal itself can dictate how organisms evolve their feeding specialisation between generalist and specialist strategies (Kisdi, 2002).

Here, I study how biological control is affected by the co-evolution of herbivores and natural enemies with different dispersal capacities in response to landscape homogenization. I use the same study system as the previous papers and focus on the homogenization of the landscape by changes in the semi-natural habitat modelled in Paper III. From known literature, high-dispersing herbivores and natural enemies benefit from resources in both habitats, whereas low-dispersing ones operate only within a single habitat (Smith et al., 2014). In my results, I find that high-dispersing natural enemies evolve intermediate strategies between herbivore prey in response to homogenization (Fig. 10). Such evolution of intermediate strategies either promotes or hinders biological control based on the initial prey specialisation promoting or hindering biological control based on initial prey specialization (Fig. 11). For example, pest specialists become more generalists with lowered biological control efficiency whereas non-pest prey specialists increase their biological control efficiency as they become more generalists. Homogenization affects low-dispersing natural enemies less because they operate on local spatial scales. Thus, I confirm here the importance that dispersal has to promote the co-evolution of herbivores and natural enemies in agricultural landscapes.



Figure 10: 3D trait space of a-b) niche positions and c-d) niche widths after co-evolution of the pest, non-pest prey and natural enemy until a new ESS is reached. I highlight in a-b) the niche position of the natural enemy to present how close it is to the initial pest or non-pest prey niche, thus hinting at the natural enemy specialization (blue to pink gradient). I also highlight in c-d) the overlap between pest and natural enemy niches to provide additional information on how specialised the natural enemy is towards the pest (yellow to dark blue gradient). I present three of my dispersal scenarios. Dotted lines represent the scenario where herbivores and natural enemies have both high dispersal capacities. Triangled lines represent the scenario where herbivores have high dispersal capacity and natural enemies have low dispersal capacity. Squared lines represent the scenario where herbivores have high dispersal capacity and natural enemies specialised towards pests (panels a and c) and natural enemies specialised towards non-pest prey (panels b and d). Finally, my initial landscape is represented by an empty black circle, whereas my final landscape is represented by an empty black circle.



Figure 11: Effective biological control of the natural enemy on the pest at ecological timescales (in purple) and eco-evolutionary timescales after allowing co-evolution of the herbivores and natural enemies until a new ESS is reached (in green). I present my eight different initial communities, including a) high dispersing herbivores and natural enemies with natural enemies more specialised towards the pest; b) low dispersing herbivores and natural enemies with natural enemies more specialised towards the pest; c) high dispersing herbivores and natural enemies with natural enemies more specialised towards the non-pest prey; d) low dispersing herbivores and high dispersing herbivores and high dispersing herbivores and low dispersing herbivores and high dispersing herbivores and high dispersing herbivores and high dispersing herbivores and hatural enemies with natural enemies more specialised towards the non-pest prey; e) high dispersing herbivores and low dispersing natural enemies more specialised towards the pest; f) low dispersing herbivores and natural enemies with natural enemies more specialised towards the pest; g) high dispersing herbivores and low dispersing natural enemies more specialised towards the pest; g) high dispersing herbivores and low dispersing natural enemies more specialised towards the post; g) high dispersing herbivores and low dispersing natural enemies more specialised towards the post; g) high dispersing herbivores and low dispersing natural enemies more specialised towards the post; g) high dispersing herbivores and low dispersing natural enemies more specialised towards the post; g) high dispersing herbivores and low

Discussion, conclusion and outlook

This thesis highlights the importance of acknowledging evolution to fully understand patterns of long-term conservation biological control. My entry point for such an evolutionary perspective is based on direct and indirect ecological interactions (Holt, 1977; 2017; Chailleux et al., 2014). More specifically, I acknowledge that the mechanisms relevant to biological control are related to functional traits, as they dictate the strength and occurrence of such direct and indirect ecological interactions (Wootton and Emmerson, 2005; Wootton et al., 2021). I also acknowledge that landscape heterogeneity can alter ecological interactions based on the functional characteristics of interacting organisms (Smith et al., 2014). For example, high-dispersing natural enemies can disperse across habitat boundaries in a landscape. Their high dispersal and generalist strategy allows them to benefit from resources in the landscape coming from crop and semi-natural habitats and promote biological control services (Landis et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2014). I thus contend that a combination of ecological, functional trait, trait evolution and landscape perspectives facilitate an extended eco-evolutionary understanding of long-term conservation biological control.

Landscapes are commonly managed, altering plant resources available in the different habitats of the landscape. I focus specifically on alterations in the landscape mediated by modifications of plant resources available for herbivore prey (i.e. pest and non-pest prey). Alterations of plant resources are known to induce bottom-up effects that can affect ecological interactions at the landscape scale and ultimately alter biological control efficiency (Han et al., 2019; 2022). Plant community alteration also induces potential evolutionary responses in, for example, pests (Karasov et al., 2018; Zhan et al., 2014). Therefore, I acknowledge the evolutionary potential of herbivores in response to land-use change. This said, I also acknowledge that changes in plant communities can trigger eco-evolutionary bottom-up effects that propagate to natural enemies (Brodersen et al., 2018; Pontarp, 2000). Such evolutionary responses in herbivores and natural enemies can alter ecological interactions between and across trophic levels (Pontarp et al., 2018). I expect the evolution of herbivores and the co-evolution of herbivores and natural enemies to alter the efficiency of biological control services. As an extension to the above focus on adaptive responses in herbivores and natural enemies and its effects on ecologically mediated pest control, I also focus on the role of dispersal. Dispersal is known to play a pivotal role in the evolution of trophic interactions (Kisdi, 2002). Thus, the evolution of, for example, feeding strategies of herbivores and natural enemies are expected to be dispersal dependent, an expectation that I study in the context of ecological interactions and biological control efficiency.

With the above in mind, I explore ecological and eco-evolutionary bottom-up consequences of land use change on biological control while at the same time acknowledging the importance of dispersal. I do so by progressively increasing the complexity of the studied system throughout my thesis. Initially, I model a landscape where a pest specialised towards a crop and a non-pest prey specialised towards a semi-natural habitat interact while a natural enemy feeds on them. I induce modifications in landscape heterogeneity, and I assess how biological control efficiency is affected for natural enemies with different dispersal capacities (Paper I). I then increase the complexity by allowing herbivores to evolve in response to land-use change. I assess how ecological interactions and, thus, biological control efficiency are affected at ecological and eco-evolutionary timescales (Paper II). Thereafter, I allow natural enemies to co-evolve with herbivores, and I assess the consequences of land-use change on biological control before and after herbivores and natural enemy co-evolution (Paper III). Finally, I model the co-evolution of communities of herbivores and natural enemies with different dispersal capacities, assessing how biological control is affected by co-evolution in communities having different dispersal properties (Paper IV).

At ecological timescales, the paradigm states that reduced landscape heterogeneity is detrimental to conservation biological control (Tscharntke et al., 2012). Nonetheless, studies also highlight inconsistencies in how landscape heterogeneity affects biological control (Martin et al., 2016; Karp et al., 2018). My work provides clues to such inconsistencies by providing mechanistic trait-based knowledge on how land-use change in semi-natural habitats affects biological control. The results in my first chapter suggest that changes in land use of semi-natural habitats can induce altered matching between herbivore niches and plant resource availability (Fig. 4a. from Rosero et al., 2024). Such mismatches affect herbivore population abundances and, by extension, natural enemy abundances (Fig. 4b. from Rosero et al., 2024). Interestingly, these results are dependent on dispersal, i.e. only true for high-dispersing natural enemies. I thus confirm the importance of dispersal for biological control services in landscapes (Smith et al., 2014). I, however, also extend our mechanistic understanding by showing that heterogeneous landscapes promote biological control mainly through apparent competition, whereas homogeneous landscapes promote biological control through direct predation (Fig. 2b-c from Rosero et al., 2024). Expanding on such ecological time scale results (e.g. in chapter II), I find that homogenising the landscape has adverse effects of biological control depending on which prey the natural enemy is specialised towards. A natural enemy specialised towards a pest suffers from crop modifications but benefits from semi-natural habitat modifications (Fig. 2, Paper III). The opposite effects are true for natural enemies specialised towards non-pest prey.

Therefore, in this thesis, I put into perspective the current knowledge around landscape homogenisation that may hinder biological control services (Tscharntke *et al.*, 2012). Nonetheless, I acknowledge that my simulated landscapes include permanent crops that are often regarded as disturbed, non-permanent habitats (Smith *et al.*, 2014). Thus, in the case of permanent crops, the effects of landscape homogenisation should be reliant on the specialisation of naturally occurring natural enemies, as shown in the results of my thesis.

At evolutionary time scales, my analyses on herbivore evolution in response to landuse change show that the reduction of plant diversity in semi-natural habitats results in herbivores evolving generalist strategies (Fig. 4, Paper II). The reduction of diversity in the semi-natural habitat leads both types of herbivores to favour a strategy allowing them to use the resources of both crop and semi-natural habitats. Pest populations thus become less efficient at feeding on the crop, but non-pest prey become more efficient (Fig. 3, Paper II). Interestingly, herbivore evolution in response to less heterogeneous landscapes may thus lower the pest damage on the crop. This said, I also find adverse results on biological control after herbivore evolution. As herbivores become more generalist natural enemy populations also decline due to bottom-up ecological effects (Fig. 5, Paper II). Herbivore evolution may even drive the natural enemy to extinction, an extinction that is known as evolutionary murder, where the evolution of a species drives another to extinction (Loeuille, 2019). I thus find an intriguing contrast of crop damage being lowered by herbivore evolution but at the cost of the decline or even extinction of biological control services. These are interesting results indeed, but the question "What if the natural enemy evolves on the same time scale as the herbivores?" remains.

When the natural enemy co-evolves with herbivore prey, then natural enemy extinction is mediated. Instead, natural enemies evolve a more efficient biological control strategy (Fig. 3, **Paper III**). I thus find a stark contrast with the ecological timescale effects presented above. At ecological time scales, landscape homogenisation promotes or hinders biological control depending on which habitat is changed and natural enemy specialisation (Fig. 3, **Paper III**) while at evolutionary time scales, natural enemies become more efficient irrespective of what conditions were modelled. Interestingly, natural enemies can even shift their prey preference from non-pest prey to pest if the crop is modified. Therefore, modifications in the crop to render it more similar to a semi-natural habitat could potentially promote natural enemy evolution to favour biological control services. Such modifications could include the use of banker plants planted around crop fields to promote plant and insect diversity (Blaauw *et al.*, 2015).

Finally, by acknowledging the potential effect of organismal dispersal propensity on the results presented above (Smith *et al.*, 2014) I show that high dispersal capacity promoted generalist strategies. Such results are expected (Kisdi, 2002), but their effects on biological control have rarely been highlighted. In my initial landscape, the habitats are distinct enough that natural enemy generalist strategies are not favourable in my two-prey system. Therefore, I initially find natural enemies with rather specialised strategies towards either the pest or the non-pest prey (Fig. 2, **Paper IV**). Nonetheless, increasing homogenisation of the landscape promotes natural enemy generalist strategies for high-dispersing natural enemies (Fig 3, **Paper IV**). For instance, high-dispersing pest-specialist natural enemies become less efficient after evolution as they become generalists (Figs 3 and 5, **Paper IV**). Non-pest prey specialists instead become more efficient at promoting biological control as they become more generalists (Figs. 3 and 5, **Paper IV**).

In conclusion, this thesis provides an improved understanding of why an evolutionary perspective is important for long-term conservation biological. Recent studies already call for the need for such a perspective (Karlsson Green *et al.*, 2020; Sentis *et al.*, 2022). Here, I answer such calls in the specific context of land-use change. I hope that this thesis will inspire further theoretical studies on biological control effects by other landscape alterations, including changes in landscape configuration (Bátary *et al.*, 2020). I also hope to encourage empirical studies to increase efforts in measuring signals of herbivores and natural enemies' evolution in agricultural landscapes. It would then be possible to compare signals in data with the theoretical expectations presented in this thesis. By doing so, the field of biological control could then be expanded into evolutionary perspectives and thus promote much-needed long-term biological control sustainability in agricultural landscapes on which we rely.

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Now I would like to start my acknowledgements with..., wait a second... what is this? **Evelina**, how dare you be in my acknowledgements? Pfffff I'll have to deal with this later on...

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Josefin (EGON!!!!!) and Melanie, we started this journey together and now we are close to finishing it. I think that I could've not asked for better people to have started a PhD together with. Both of your unique ways of being kind and amazing people with so great values have made me comfortable when I've been around you.

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Melanie, NARANJAS!!!!!!!! We made it!!! We're done with this thing (the written part at least). All these weeks have been so ridiculously intense, I'm happy we could support each other a lot in the end while being half existing. You're a very kind soul,

I appreciated a lot we could share excitement about Cats!! And many other random stuff. Thank you for all the fika breaks, and for hanging out with my unfiltered completely weird self. Coming by to see you in your office just to motivate each other was really helpful in the final weeks. Now let's keep this going and really make it in what is left. Then in whatever comes afterwards, livet är inte roligare än man gör det!

Ciara, I learnt so much from you over these years, you played a major role in a great part of the personal development I've had in the last couple of years. You really emerged in the middle of my PhD as some kind of post-pandemic being that came to teach me to care more about things I did not before, like dressing (this is literally part of what I learnt but absolutely not the most important, perhaps you'll argue against it). Thank you for being my gym buddy, for being someone I could always count on, for shouting PEDRO! whenever I was about to do (or already did) something clumsy or stupid. But mostly thank you for being an extremely sweet, caring and inspiring soul.

Evelina and Jöran, if you're reading this, you're doing something wrong, why aren't you outside instead, making poor life choices on my behalf? Pfff or are you telling me that you're afraid of success? Disappointing. Now jokes aside:

Jöran, thank you for being a great friend whom I could always count on in any possible scenario or situation going from trusting you with anything to any possible party in Malmö or Copenhague. You're always cheerful and with extremely nice energy that vibes very well with my foolishness. I'm glad of all the moments shared and all the fun. I never would've imagined that I would befriend an 80-year-old trapped in a 25-year-old body during the PhD adventure but there you go. Hopefully, if you're sitting while you read this you'll not make the characteristic "my back hurts" noise that you usually make when standing up.

Evelina, I told you I'd deal with this later so how dare you always be promoting poor life choices and fun as well as randomness and stuff. It's as if you didn't know me by now to know that I don't do any of those things. With that aside, thank you for being such an important being during my PhD adventure, for all the fun, and the moments shared, all the randomness and for hosting my birthday where I decapitated a piñata. There's really so much stuff that I could add in here that I am consciously thankful of that it would be too much and exaggerated. So simply, po pirmą and soon enough, pripisam!

I also wanted to take the opportunity to be thankful for all the teaching I did during my PhD. I think that among all the academic activities that we have to carry, this one has to be the one I enjoy the most so far. **Ola, Stefan, Anders, and Mikael**, thank you for allowing me to teach in your courses. But mostly I was very happy to have been allowed to materialize the Open R Sessions initiative along with many other great PhD students that were part of it. Thank you **Jep and Lotta** for believing in this initiative and for all the help and insights you gave us on for it. It was one of the most interesting academic experiences I've had so far. And what is teaching without **all the students** that one has taught? All these curious souls with very different and unique personalities, strengths, and struggles. Thank you all for having been overall great students and helping me realise how much I enjoy this activity!

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To everyone, let's now close all this nonsense or emotional statements or whatever it is you thought about these acknowledgements. Whatever you make of it, I hope you enjoyed it or at least the part where I talked about you (if I didn't, again, I apologise, brain not working correctly). Summer is at hand, so do as I will and give yourself the chance to enjoy yourself outside, or inside, whatever you prefer. If you happen to go by a store today that you're reading this text, why not buy some potatoes (papas in Spanish) and enjoy them! Why would you do that, you ask? Well, I ask back, why not?

Pedro Mauricio, ¿Cómo llegamos a esto? No tengo idea. ¿Qué decisiones tomamos para llegar a este momento? Pues no me acuerdo, y no importa tampoco en verdad. Y pues fuera de no tener la capacidad de sentir o pensar por andar con el cerebruto (cerebro + bruto para el que no cayó en cuenta) bien frito (tan frito que está hecho mapahuira; aquí solo los ecuatorianos entendarán), te quería agradecer (aquí hablo de mi yo del pasado). Te quería agradecer por siempre haber seguido al frente, por siempre haber buscado como mejorar en cualquier manera posible y por siempre

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