

Preface

Since I have never grasped the distinction between a “preface” and an “introduction”, and since I explain the origin and structure of the book in the introductory chapter, I’ll follow the example of Professor Dumbledore in his start-of-year feasts, and keep this preface short. The book in your hands was written for an audience of advanced undergraduate or graduate students and researchers in plant ecology. Despite this, I hope that others will find something of use as well. Animal ecologists should find plenty of ideas in common and I dearly hope that some of you will apply these ideas to your subject area. Mathematical ecologists should also find things to think about; explicitly mathematical developments have been separated from the main text by placing them inside boxes. Finally, even philosophers of science might find some parts of the book interesting although I am no philosopher and the philosophical ideas will be found (if at all) between the lines.

The subject contains both empirical and theoretical components but I have written the book assuming that you have no understanding of anything statistical or mathematical beyond an introductory course. Although not a user’s manual, you should find enough practical information (including some code in the R language) to be able to apply the ideas of this book to real field data.

I am sometimes surprised to come across an idea that I though was my own in the precedential writings of people who have influenced me. Properly chastened, such surprises remind me of how much I owe to others. I have tried to properly credit such ideas but, just to be sure, I want to acknowledge my debt

to the following people who have each influenced my thoughts on the subject:

Robert van Hulst, Paul Keddy, Rob Peters, Martin Lechowicz, Len Lefkovitch and Éric Garnier. Grégory Sonnier (a current PhD student) has been working hard to find new ways of empirically testing many of the ideas in this book. Some of his interesting results have not been included in this book since they have not yet been published, but they have undoubtedly influenced me as well. If anyone notices that I have not properly acknowledged the ideas of others I can only ask that they let me know so that I can properly pay my debts.

Bernard Colin, Robert van Hulst, Martin Lechowicz, Dany Garant, Roderick Dewar, Bruce Glymour and Grégory Sonnier have read and commented on some of the chapters. Thanks to you all.