

1 **How does hunger affect convergence on prey patches in a social forager?**

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23 ABSTRACT

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25 Internal state, in this case hunger, is known to influence both the organisation of animal groups
26 and the social foraging interactions that occur within them. In this study we investigated the
27 effects of hunger upon the time taken to locate and converge upon hidden simulated prey patches
28 in a socially foraging fish, the threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*). We predicted that
29 groups of food-deprived fish would find and recruit to prey patches faster than recently fed
30 groups, reasoning that they might search more rapidly and be more attentive to inadvertent social
31 information produced by other foragers. Instead we saw no difference between the two groups in
32 the time taken to find the patches and found that in fact, once prey patches had been discovered,
33 it was the recently fed fish that converged on them most rapidly. This finding is likely due to the
34 fact that recently fed fish tend to organise themselves into fewer but larger subgroups, which
35 arrived at the food patch together. Hunger has a significant impact upon the social organisation
36 of the fish shoals, and it appears that this has a stronger effect upon the rate at which they
37 converged upon the food patches than does internal state itself.

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40 INTRODUCTION

41

42 Social foragers can both search for food directly and monitor the behaviour of group mates,
43 using social information to identify those that have located resources (Beauchamp 2013). If they
44 can gain a share of the resource from the finder then they are expected to try to join them.

45 Indeed, access to socially transmitted information about the distribution of resources might be
46 one of the key benefits of grouping with others for some species (Krause & Ruxton 2002;
47 Beauchamp 2013; Ward & Webster 2016).

48

49 Factors such as internal state should affect sensitivity to social cues in group foragers. For
50 example, hungry animals might be expected to be more likely to respond to groupmates that have
51 found food. Such an effect has been seen within flocks of house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*),
52 where individuals with lower energy reserves scrounged more during their first feed of the day
53 (Lendvai et al. 2004; 2006). In zebra finches (*Taeniopygia guttata*), individuals with higher basal
54 metabolic rates tended to scrounge more frequently compared to those with lower basal
55 metabolic rates (Mathot et al. 2009). Hunger can also affect the organisation of groups, including
56 overall group size and the spacing and density of individuals with the group. For example,
57 herring (*Clupea havengus*) maintained on lower rations formed less dense and less polarised
58 schools than they did when daily food rations were greater (Robinson & Pitcher 1989). Food-
59 deprived threespine sticklebacks (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*) spent less time shoaling with the
60 larger of two conspecific groups than did recently fed fish (Krause 1993a), while hungry killifish
61 (*Fundulus diaphanous*) spent more time alone compared to recently fed individuals (Hensor et
62 al. 2003). Hansen et al. (2015a) revealed that hungrier rainbowfish (*Melanotaenia duboulayi*)

63 maintained greater shoaling distances from their groupmates when shoaling. Both of these
64 factors (an individual's sensitivity to social cues and the organisation of the group) can
65 potentially combine to affect both how likely an individual is to be exposed to social
66 information, and also how likely they are to respond to it. Given this, we might predict that social
67 foraging dynamics will differ between food-deprived and recently fed groups of foragers.

68
69 In this study we tested this prediction, investigated how hunger affected social foraging
70 behaviour in groups of foraging threespine sticklebacks. Groups of fifteen fish were allowed to
71 explore an arena containing a hidden simulated prey patch. The simulated prey patch was
72 designed so that the fish could not see the prey stimulus until they entered it, but that when a fish
73 that had entered attempted to feed on the prey stimulus its behaviour would be visible to others
74 outside the patch, generating social information that they could detect and respond to. We
75 compared the social organisation and foraging behaviour of groups that had been fed recently
76 and groups that had been deprived of food prior to testing. Based upon previous studies (Hensor
77 et al. 2003; Hansen et al. 2015a) we predicted that in our study food-deprived fish would form
78 smaller units than recently fed fish. We also predicted that the food-deprived fish would locate
79 the hidden food stimulus sooner. This prediction was supported by work showing that hungry
80 fish travel faster, venture further into open areas and explore more widely than do satiated fish
81 (Hansen et al. 2015b). Furthermore, we reasoned that the greater number of separate subunits
82 anticipated in the food-deprived treatment should increase rate at which one or more of the fish
83 encountered the prey patch during the observation period compared to the recently fed treatment,
84 where fewer subunits were expected to form (Pitcher et al. 1982). Finally, we predicted that fish

85 within food-deprived groups, would converge on the food patch more rapidly upon prey patches
86 once they had been discovered.

87

88 METHODS

89

90 Sticklebacks were collected from the Kinnessburn, St Andrews, UK (56.349°N, 2.7885°S) in
91 October and November 2015 using hand nets. All fish were non-reproductive young-of-the-year,
92 and measured 28-32 mm in body length. They were not sexed. They were kept in groups of 25-
93 35 in 90l tanks at a temperature of 8°C. The tanks contained external filters, sand substrate and
94 artificial plants. The fish were fed frozen bloodworm daily at 4pm, prior to being tested. The
95 light: dark regime was 12: 12 hours. Fish were held under these conditions for 4 weeks.

96

97 In total, 450 fish were tested, in 30 groups of 15. Of these, 20 groups were used in the main
98 experiment, 10 in each treatment, and a further 10 groups were used in a control condition,
99 described below, with five groups in each treatment. Seven days before being tested, each group
100 of 15 was taken from one of the holding tanks and placed within its own 45l aquarium. Holding
101 conditions were otherwise as described above. Half of the fish were tested in the food-deprived
102 treatment, and were not fed for 72h immediately prior to testing. The other half were tested in the
103 recently-fed treatment. These were fed 24h prior to the trial. Within groups fish were drawn from
104 the same holding tank in order to standardise familiarity, which has been shown to affect social
105 foraging in this species (Atton et al. 2014), but were otherwise randomly allocated to groups.
106 After testing, the fish were placed in different stock tanks and played no further part in this
107 study.

108

109 Testing arena and procedure

110

111 Experiments took place in a white plastic arena (70x70cm) with 45° sloping sides to minimise
112 wall-following (top of arena: 82 x 82cm, base of arena: 70 x 70cm). The water depth and
113 temperature in the arena were 4.5cm and 8°C. The arena was held within a larger pool (145cm
114 diameter, 30cm tall). In the centre of the arena floor was a square ‘prey patch’ (outer edge:
115 13x13cm, inner edge: 7.5x7.5cm, 1cm tall) made out of white stone tiles. A red laser pointer
116 (Zeadio ZLR-BO3) attached to a tripod and held 90cm above the right side of the arena was used
117 to provide a prey stimulus, a red dot of light, in the centre of the prey patch. Sticklebacks readily
118 attack red objects and stimuli (Smith et al. 2004). The enclosure-like structure of the prey patch
119 prevented fish from seeing the red laser point until they had entered it. Fish that were outside it
120 however were able to see others as they attacked it (Webster & Laland 2012). Another tripod
121 held a Canon HG10 camera centred 145cm directly above the arena. The whole experimental
122 arena was held within a white plastic shelter measuring 2x2.5m and 1.8m tall which served both
123 to minimise variation illumination and prevent external disturbance. On each wall of the shelter,
124 four lights (linkable LED strip lights, 605lm and 55cm long) were held in pairs 35cm and 75cm
125 above the arena on the walls of the enclosure that surrounded arena. The laser control was
126 accessible via a hatch on the side of the wall and the camera was activated by remote control.

127

128 Trials lasted 90min. Each replicate group of 15 fish was placed within the experimental arena
129 and were allowed to acclimate and move freely for 30min. Following this the camera was
130 activated and the fish were filmed for another 30min period. Next, for 20 of the 30 groups (10

131 recently fed and 10 food-deprived), the laser was switched on, providing the prey stimulus and
132 the trial was filmed for a third 30min period. For the remaining 10 groups (five recently fed and
133 five food-deprived) the laser was left switched off. These trials acted as controls, allowing us to
134 test whether foraging-like behaviour directed towards the laser was indeed the stimulus to which
135 others in the group were attracted.

136

137 From each trial we extracted data on shoaling during the middle 30 minute block of the trial, and
138 discovery and recruitment to the prey patch during the final 30 minute block. A prey patch
139 discovery occurred when a fish first entered the prey patch after the laser stimulus has been
140 switched on and began attacking the red point of light. Typically after this occurred, other fish
141 orientated towards and then approached and entered the prey patch too. We refer to these
142 recruitment events as waves. All groups registered at least one wave of recruitment, and the
143 majority registered three. Some groups registered more than this but because sample sizes were
144 low we restrict our analyses to a maximum of three waves per group. If, after all the fish had left
145 the patch following a wave, a fish entered the prey patch again and was joined by others we
146 considered this a new wave. Data were extracted and analysed as follows.

147

148 Group size

149

150 Group size was recorded at one minute intervals for 30mins after the initial 30min settling phase
151 and prior to the laser stimulus being switched on. All fish within 2 body lengths (approximately
152 6cm) of one another were deemed to be shoaling (Atton et al. 2012; 2014; Webster et al. 2013).
153 We recorded the number of fish in the largest subgroup and the total number of separate

154 elements (subgroups or lone individuals that were isolated from other fish by more than two
155 body lengths). Provisional inspection of these data when plotted revealed no trends towards
156 changes in group size or number over time (largest subgroup: $R^2=0.05$ and 0.04 and number of
157 elements= 0.03 and 0.02 for the 10 recently fed and 10 food-deprived groups respectively in the
158 experimental treatment). We therefore reduced the data by calculating rolling averages of the
159 largest subgroup size and the total number of separate elements for every five minute block.
160 These were each analysed using a repeated measures GLM with treatment (food-deprived or
161 recently fed) as a categorical covariate.

162

163 Time to first locate prey patch

164

165 For each of the first three recruitment waves we recorded the absolute time at which the first fish
166 entered the patch and attacked the stimulus after the laser stimulus was switched on. Discovery
167 times were compared between food-deprived and recently fed treatment groups using Cox
168 regressions. A separate regression was performed for each recruitment wave.

169

170 Recruitment waves

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172 For each of the first three recruitment waves we compared the number of fish that recruited to
173 the patch using a repeated measures GLM with treatment (food-deprived or recently fed) as a
174 categorical covariate.

175

176 We also recorded the rate at which recruitment occurred. For each group we subtracted the
177 arrival time of each subsequent fish to recruit from that of the first fish to enter the patch. These
178 data were then compared using Cox regressions, with one regression performed for each wave.

179

180 RESULTS

181

182 Overview

183

184 In the control groups, although some individual fish did enter the prey patch, they performed no
185 foraging-like behaviours and we saw no recruitment waves to the patch at all. Based on this we
186 concluded that the foraging behaviour of the fish directed towards the laser in the experimental
187 groups was indeed the stimulus to which fish were responding when recruiting. Data from these
188 control trials was not used in the analyses presented below. In the experimental treatment groups
189 we recorded at least one recruitment wave in each group, two waves in nine of the recently fed
190 and seven of the food-deprived groups and three waves in seven groups from each treatment.
191 Prior to the laser being switch on there were no recruitment waves to the prey patch in either
192 treatment among the experimental groups.

193

194 Group sizes

195

196 The size of the largest subgroup did not change over time (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.55$, $F_{(5, 14)} = 2.29$, $P = 0.11$),
197 but was larger for fish in the recently fed treatment than it was in the food-deprived treatment
198 ($F_{(1, 18)} = 40.82$, $P < 0.001$, Figure 1a). There was no interaction effect between time and treatment

199 (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.93$, $F_{(5, 14)} = 0.19$, $P = 0.96$). While the number of separate elements did not change
200 over time (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.66$, $F_{(5, 14)} = 1.43$, $P = 0.27$), fewer were seen in the recently fed compared
201 the food-deprived treatment groups ($F_{(1, 18)} = 51.83$, $P < 0.001$, Figure 1b). Again, no interaction
202 effect was seen (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.88$, $F_{(5, 14)} = 0.36$, $P = 0.86$).

203

204 Time to first locate patch

205

206 Absolute times to first locate the patch (first wave) and times of the onset second and third waves
207 of patch visits did not vary between the two treatments (Wald $X^2 = 1.82$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.17$; Wald $X^2 =$
208 0.05 , $df = 1$, $P = 0.81$ and Wald $X^2 = 0.04$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.84$, Figure 2).

209

210 Recruitment waves

211 In each of the three waves we saw variation between groups in the time taken to recruit to the
212 patch. In the first two waves, but not the third, we also saw an effect of treatment, with fish in the
213 recently fed treatment groups recruiting faster (first wave: treatment, Wald $X^2 = 5.42$, $df = 1$,
214 $P = 0.002$, group, Wald $X^2 = 133.63$, $df = 18$, $P < 0.001$; second wave: treatment, Wald $X^2 = 7.76$,
215 $df = 1$, $P = 0.005$, group, Wald $X^2 = 46.21$, $df = 3$, $P < 0.001$; third wave: treatment, Wald $X^2 = 0.74$,
216 $df = 1$, $P = 0.39$, group, Wald $X^2 = 65.52$, $df = 1$, $P < 0.001$, Figure 3).

217

218 The numbers of fish in each wave fell from first to third (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.36$, $F_{(2, 11)} = 15.19$, $P < 0.001$,
219 Figure 4). While we saw no difference between the two treatments ($F_{(1, 18)} = 2.10$, $P = 0.16$), there
220 was an interaction effect between time and treatment, with fewer food-deprived fish recruiting in
221 the second wave (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.71$, $F_{(2, 11)} = 3.45$, $P = 0.05$).

222

223 DISCUSSION

224

225 In both treatments, fish recruited rapidly to the prey patch after one of their group had entered it
226 and begun to attack the prey stimulus, with the majority of the group typically arriving within 30
227 seconds of the first fish beginning to perform feeding-like behaviour. In the control treatment, in
228 which the prey stimulus was absent, fish that entered the prey patch did not perform feeding
229 behaviour, and no recruitment of other fish was observed. Feeding behaviour has been shown to
230 be attractive to conspecifics in other socially foraging species, such as spice finches (*Lonchura*
231 *punctulata*) (Coolen et al. 2001). These cues are mostly likely an unintended by-product of
232 foraging behaviour, rather than an active signal (Dall et al. 2005).

233

234 Contrary to our predictions, we saw no difference in the time taken for the fish in the food-
235 deprived and recently fed groups to locate the simulated prey patch. Furthermore, when it came
236 to recruiting to the patch after one group member had entered it and begun attacking the prey
237 stimulus it was members of the recently fed, and not the food deprived groups that converged
238 most rapidly. This was the case for the first two recruitment waves, but not for the third, where
239 no difference between treatments was apparent. This unexpected finding might be explained by
240 the sizes of shoals formed by the fish- recently fed fish consistently formed fewer, larger
241 subunits compared to those seen in the food-deprived groups. The greater number of recruits to
242 the prey patch by fish in the recently fed treatment groups might therefore result from the
243 tendency of fish that are already grouping to follow one another arrive at the patch together. This
244 effect can be seen in the survival plots in Figure 3, which show distinctly staggered arrival times

245 for fish in the food-deprived treatment groups compared to the recently fed groups. Such a
246 pattern was seen in an earlier study of social foraging behaviour by Atton et al. (2012), who
247 dubbed it an ‘untransmitted social effect’. An experimental design in which the hunger levels of
248 the group members can be varied but group size held constant is needed to fully understand this
249 process. It is not clear how this might be achieved, but training the animals to expect a particular
250 food distribution, discussed below, might be effective. Holding animals at high densities or
251 testing them under heightened predation risk (which promotes grouping in many species) could
252 also achieve this effect.

253

254 Earlier studies have also found that food-deprived fish tend to form smaller groups, or that they
255 maintain greater distances between one another when shoaling (e.g. Krause 1993a; Hansen et al.
256 2015a). This may function to minimise competition, allowing individuals enough time to
257 consume an item of food before others are able to join them and attempt to steal it while satiated
258 animals might prioritise safety in numbers over minimising competition (Ward & Webster
259 2016). Interestingly, the group sizes formed by foragers may represent some expectation of the
260 pattern of distribution of the food in the environment. Previous experience of dispersed or
261 clustered food has been shown to affect the grouping and searching behaviour of foragers (Ryer
262 & Olla 1995). Whether or not hunger interacts with previous experience to shape grouping
263 behaviour is unclear and warrants further exploration. It seems plausible that animals
264 experienced in foraging for discreet patches of contestable prey might group with others,
265 allowing them to use social information to find food, and that this effect might be stronger in
266 hunger-motivated than in recently-fed foragers. (Prior to the commencement of our experiments,
267 the fish were fed for several weeks in their stock tanks with food being haphazardly spread

268 throughout their tanks during feeding). On the other hand, if foragers are able to easily detect and
269 rapidly close upon others that have located food then they may not need to group closely in order
270 to obtain these benefits.

271

272 In both treatments we saw that the number of fish that recruited to the prey patch fell between the
273 first and third wave. This may reflect a habituation response, with the lack of reinforcement, in
274 the form of food, leading some fish to become less likely to visit during later waves. This
275 reduction in recruits occurred faster in the food-deprived treatment. Potentially, hungry
276 individuals may invest more time in gathering social information, and perhaps are better able to
277 discriminate between genuine foraging behaviour performed by group mates and behaviour that
278 looks similar but which yields no prey. This is speculative however, and more work is needed to
279 test these ideas.

280

281 Our experiment compared groups where all fish were in a similar state- all hungry or all recently
282 fed. Under natural conditions we might expect to see variation within groups, as well as between
283 them. In mixed state groups, hungry individuals have been shown to move towards the leading
284 edge of the group, where prey encounter rates might be expected to be higher (Krause et al.
285 1992; Krause 1993b), while in other experiments hungrier individuals have been shown to
286 scrounge more (Lendvai et al. 2004; 2006). Studies that take into account the social structure of
287 groups, by quantifying association networks have used this information to capture the rate and
288 order in which information about prey resource distribution spreads between group members
289 (Aplin et al. 2012; Atton et al. 2013; 2014; Webster et al. 2013; Boogert et al. 2014; Hasenjager
290 & Dugatkin 2016). A similar approach could be applied to study the effects of variation in

291 hunger within groups on associations and other interactions the consequences of these for social
292 foraging.

293

294 To summarise, we have shown here that groups of food-deprived sticklebacks did not find
295 hidden (simulated) food patches sooner than recently fed groups, and that once prey patches had
296 been discovered, it was the recently fed fish that converged on the patch most rapidly. This
297 finding is most likely due to the fact that recently fed fish tend to organise themselves into fewer
298 but larger subgroups, which arrive at the food patch together. Internal state affected the social
299 organisation of the fish shoals, and it appears that this had a stronger effect upon recruitment
300 than did hunger itself.

301

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303

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393

394 FIGURE LEGENDS

395

396 **Figure 1.** (a) The number of fish in the largest element (or subgroup) and (b) the number of
397 separate elements (subgroups separated by two or more body lengths) during the second 30
398 minute phase of the trial. Data shows means +/- 95% confidence intervals. The lines show values
399 point sampled at one minute intervals and the points show the rolling averages for each five
400 minute block of the observation period. The rolling averages were used in the statistical analyses
401 presented in the main text. Black points and lines show data for the recently fed treatment and
402 grey points and lines for the food-deprived treatment.

403

404 **Figure 2.** Survival plots from the Cox regression showing the time for the first fish in each
405 replicate group to locate the prey patch in each of three waves. Black lines show data for the
406 recently fed treatment and grey lines for the food-deprived treatment. Sample sizes are first
407 wave, n=10, 10, second wave n= 9, 7 and third wave n=7, 7 for the recently fed and food -
408 deprived treatment respectively.

409

410 **Figure 3.** Survival plots from the Cox regression showing the time the time taken for the fish in
411 each replicate group to recruit to the prey patch after the first fish had entered it and begun
412 attacking the prey stimulus in each of three waves. Black lines show data for the recently fed
413 treatment and grey lines for the food-deprived treatment. Sample sizes are first wave, n=10, 10,
414 second wave n= 9, 7 and third wave n=7, 7 for the recently fed and food -deprived treatment
415 respectively.

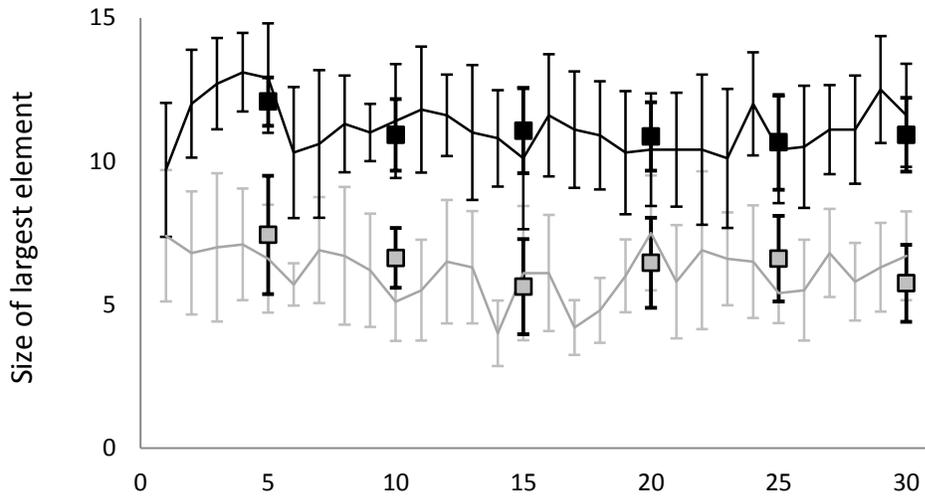
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417 **Figure 4.** The number of fish that recruited to the prey patch in each replicate group (mean +/-
418 95% confidence interval). Black points show data for the recently fed treatment and grey points
419 for the food-deprived treatment. Sample sizes are first wave, n=10, 10, second wave n= 9, 7 and
420 third wave n=7, 7 for the recently fed and food -deprived treatment respectively.

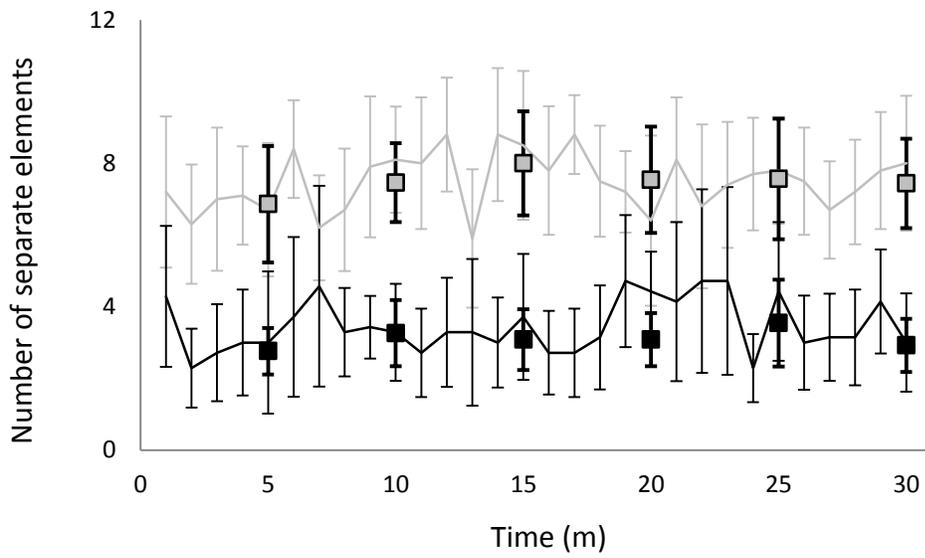
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457 **Figure 1.**
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(a)

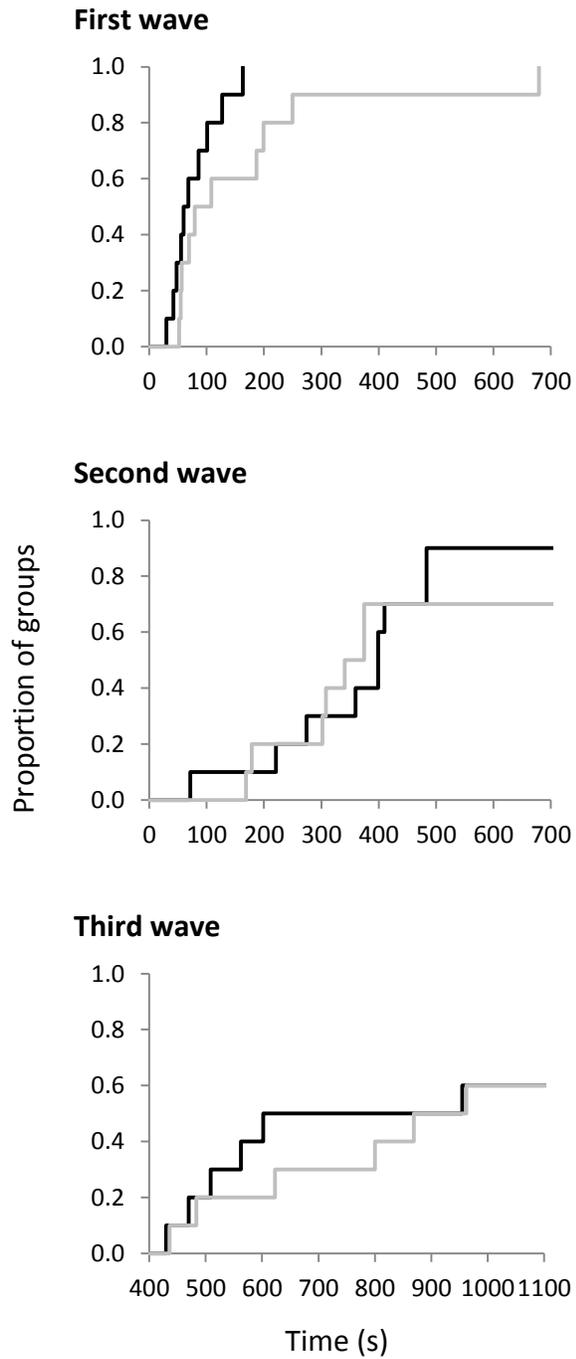


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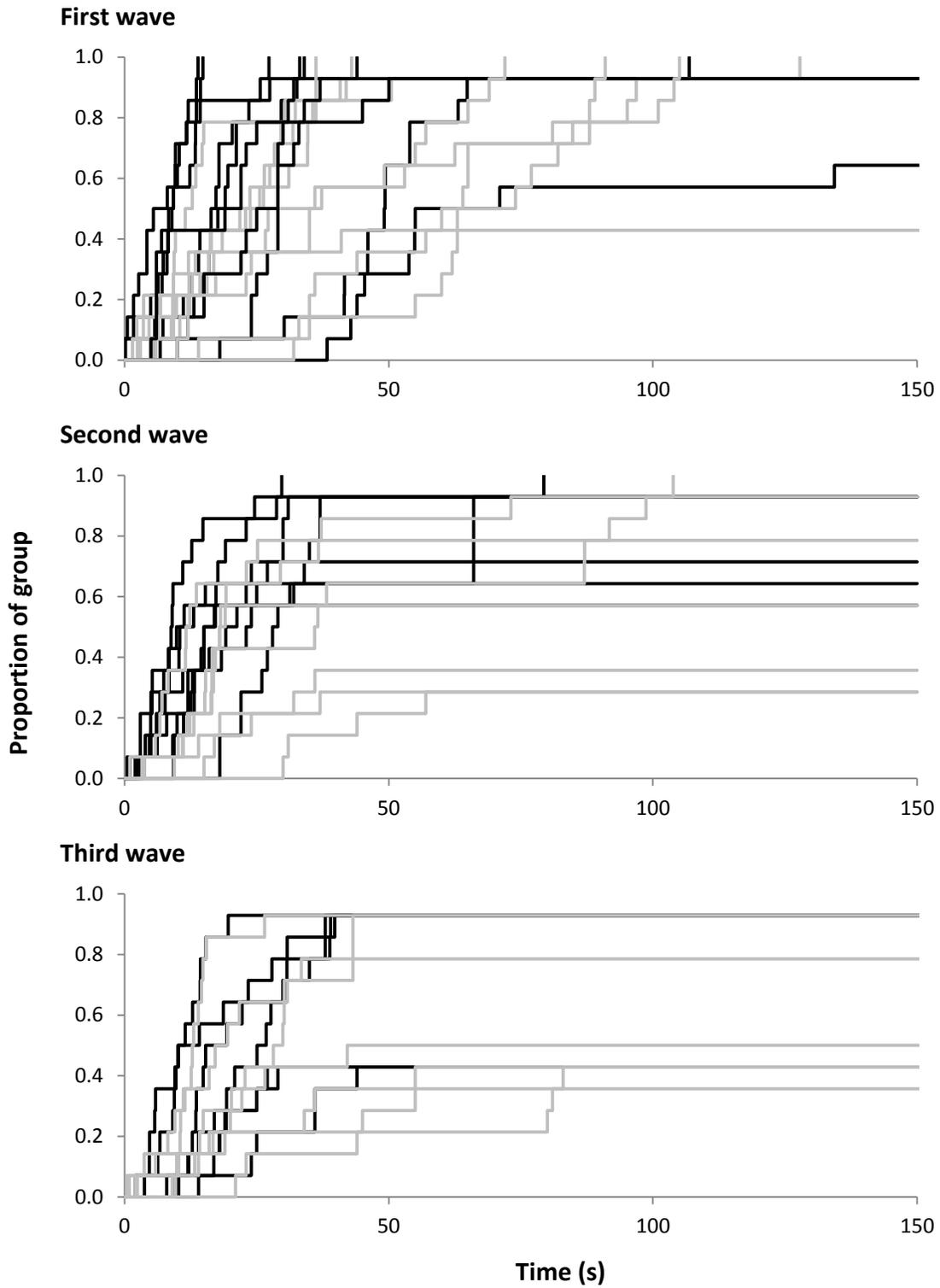
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470 **Figure 2.**
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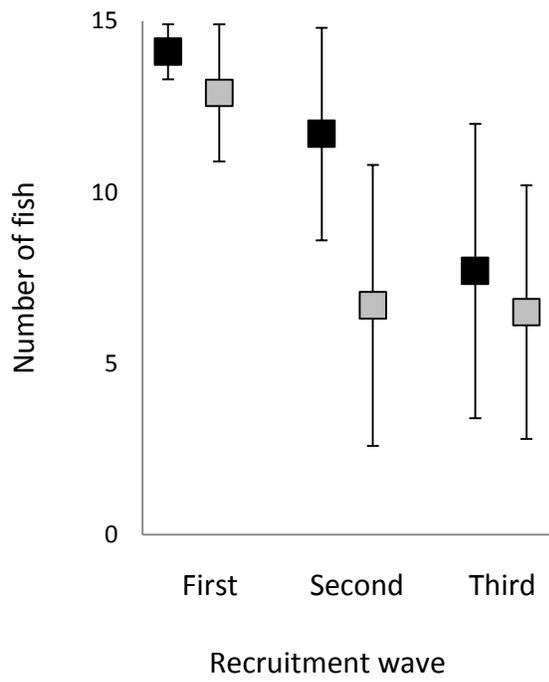
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479 **Figure 3.**
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484 **Figure 4.**
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