ENCONTROS SCIENTIA

Managed landscapes as spatially structured environments favouring mesocarnivore coexistence

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Successful conservation and management efforts require the understanding of mechanisms underlying species coexistence and assemblage organisation. Coexistence of ecologically similar species can be achieved through segregation of ecological spaces, i.e. niche partitioning; apparent in most mammalian carnivore guilds. Nevertheless, few niche studies focused on carnivore assemblages exposed to anthropogenic pressures within a context of humanized landscapes. In the biodiverse agroforestry cork oak landscapes of Iberia (Montado), management practices promote intricate landscape mosaicism, shaping the volume of available ecological spaces. Most studies investigated the relation between managed landscapes heterogeneity and carnivore diversity patterns, while the mechanisms influencing intra-guild niche relationships remain unclear. We argue that disturbance-induced environmental contrasts in agro-silvo-pastoral managed landscapes favour interspecific relationships amongst generalist mesocarnivores species through the creation of additional ecological spaces, acting as sources of niche differentiation. Understanding niche relationships as a function of management actions contributes to support informed management decisions reconciling exploitation of natural resources with conservation principles.

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