

Preface

Depending on who you believe, interspecific competition is so important in nature that it only occurs transiently and cannot easily be observed—only its effects can—or interspecific competition is ongoing in nature, can be observed, and its existence and importance can therefore be tested experimentally. Since I discovered evidence in the mid-1970s that interspecific competition occurs in tits, I have used long-term experiments in two Belgian locations (Ghent and Antwerp) to explore the existence and effects of interspecific competition in great and blue tits. After my plenary talk at the International Ornithological Congress in Durban in 1998, John Krebs asked me if I had ever considered writing a book about the subject. I answered honestly that I had not, but that if I ever were to write a book, it would be about interspecific competition. During two sabbaticals that I was granted by Cornell University I spent one semester in Fort Collins in 2002, hosted by John Wiens, and a full year in Montpellier, France, hosted by Jean-Dominique Lebreton, Thierry Boulinier, Jacques Blondel, and colleagues at the CEFÉ-CNRS in 2008–09. This gave me the chance to conceive the book, and during the second sabbatical to write most of it. What lies in front of you is the result of these efforts in which I have tried to bring together most of the work on interspecific competition in birds and summarize my own.

I am very grateful to a number of colleagues who were willing to read parts of earlier drafts and comment on them critically and constructively. I am particularly grateful to Ian Newton who read more than 90% of the book manuscript and gave very helpful comments indeed, sometimes even taking my text with him on his travels and returning his comments from exotic places. Ian's comments and insight were extremely helpful. Andy Gosler, Ken Otter, Erik Matthysen, Stefan Hames, Christine Cockle, Peter Grant, and Nick Gotelli commented on one or several chapters of the manuscript. Wesley Hochachka and Richard T. Holmes commented on the section in Chapter 6 that attempted to summarize some of their work. I am very grateful to all for their willingness to read and comment. Their comments have certainly improved the book.

Diane Tessaglia-Hymes and Susan Spear from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology redrew Fig. 7.2 so that I could include it. Christine Cockle, Katie Martin, and Katie Aitken generously provided me with unpublished manuscripts, making it possible to include their important work in my book. Many colleagues provided me with electronic versions of their graphs so that I could alter them to

make the illustrations more homogeneous. I have always admired the drawings of Robert Gilmore. I am, therefore, very grateful to him that he allowed me to reprint one of his drawings from David Lack's 1971 book here as Fig. 1.1.

I am grateful to Helen Eaton at Oxford University Press for her patience and for always answering my queries immediately; to Cornell University for the sabbatical leaves that were essential in giving me the time off to structure my thoughts and write without too many interruptions. Finally I am very grateful to my wife Keila for believing that I would be able to finish this effort and encouraging me.

Ithaca, April 2011.