

Preface

In the twentieth century we have witnessed a general movement away from the study of organisms and toward the study of processes. The old faculties of zoology, botany, and microbiology have reorganized themselves into departments of genetics, physiology, molecular biology, and ecology. Without question, there have been some benefits. For example, early in my career I remember my attention being called to a work by Brown and Davidson (1977) showing competition between such disparate groups as ants and rodents for seeds in 'desert systems'. The implication seems to have been that organismal biologists (entomologists, mammalogists, and botanists in this case) might each have missed important aspects of a phenomenon central to the composition of the desert biota. A biologist more broadly trained in ecological processes would seem to be required.

But I feel certain that the authors of that particular work on desert ecology would join ecologists generally in acknowledging the foundation of entomology, mammalogy, and botany upon which their insight stood. Thus the declines we have witnessed in the fortunes of organismal biology in the last decades are ultimately quite troubling.

This work is an unabashed advertisement for the study of organisms. In particular, here I offer the great diversity of freshwater molluscs as an untapped resource for the study of ecological questions of considerable generality and importance. It is my hope that this work will serve to open freshwater malacology to the larger community of ecologists worldwide, reviewing the known, and suggesting some directions for the future. Perhaps I can recruit a few collaborators.

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