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Food consumption in ground beetles is limited under hypoxic conditions in response to *ad libitum* feeding, but not restricted feeding

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Abstract

Habitats on land with low oxygen availability provide unique niches inhabited by numerous species. The occupation of such hypoxic niches by animals is hypothesized to come at a cost linked to the limitations of aerobic metabolism and thus energy budget but may also provide benefits through physical protection from predators and parasitoids or reduced competition for food. We investigated the effects of hypoxic conditions on standard metabolic rate (SMR) and specific dynamic action (SDA) in male Carabus nemoralis. SMR and SDA were determined under three manipulated oxygen availabilities: 7, 14 and 21% O₂ and two feeding regimes: limited or ad libitum food consumption. In both hypoxic conditions, C. nemoralis was able to maintain SMR at levels similar to those in normoxia. When the meal size was limited, SDA duration did not differ among the oxygen availability conditions, but SDA was smaller under hypoxic conditions than at normoxic levels. The relative cost of digestion was significantly higher in normoxia than in hypoxia, but it did not affect net energy intake. In contrast, when offered a large meal to simulate ad libitum food conditions, beetles reduced their food consumption and net energy gain by 30% under hypoxia. Oxygen availability may influence the consumed prey size: the hypoxic condition did not limit net energy gain when the beetles fed on a small meal but did when they fed on a large meal. The results indicate that meal size is an important variable in determining differences in physiological costs and whole animal energy budgets at different concentrations of environmental oxygen levels.

Key words: metabolic rate, hypoxia, insects, specific dynamic action, SDA coefficient

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