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Habitat fragmentation determines diversity of annual plant communities at landscape and fine spatial scales

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to disentangle the effects of landscape configuration (i.e., fragment area, connectivity, and proximity to a busy highway) on the assembly of annual plant communities at different spatial scales. Our main hypothesis was that larger and more connected fragments would have higher species densities per plot and this may result in differences in turnover and nestedness patterns at the fine spatial scales where plants interact. Specifically, since Mediterranean annuals are known to form strong competitive hierarchies, we expected to find a nested pattern of beta diversity due to sequential species loss. The study area was a fragmented gypsum habitat in central Spain with a semiarid climate where two fragmentation drivers coexist: agricultural practices and a roadway. Larger fragments had higher species densities per plot (20×20 m). Nevertheless, we detected no effect on the species assembly at fine spatial scales ($30 \times$

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