



Ecosystem Dynamics of the Boreal Forest: The Kluane Project

From Charles J Krebs Stan Boutin Rudy Boonstra

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The boreal forest is one of the world's great ecosystems, stretching across North America and Eurasia in an unbroken band and containing about 25% of the world's closed canopy forests. The Kluane Boreal Forest Ecosystem Project was a 10-year study by nine of Canada's leading ecologists to unravel the impact of the snowshoe hare cycle on the plants and the other vertebrate species in the boreal forest. In much of the boreal forest, the snowshoe hare acts as a keystone herbivore, fluctuating in 9-10 year cycles, and dragging along secondary cycles in predators such as lynx and great-horned owls. By manipulating the ecosystem on a large scale from the bottom via fertilizer additions and from the top by predator exclosures, they have traced the plant-herbivore relationships and the predator-prey relationships in this ecosystem to try to answer the question of what drives small mammal population cycles. This study is unique in being large scale and experimental on a relatively simple ecosystem, with the overall goal of defining what determines community structure in the boreal forest.

Ecosystem Dynamics of the Boreal Forest: The Kluane Project summarizes these findings, weaving new discoveries of the role of herbivores-turned-predators, compensatory plant growth, and predators-eating-predators with an ecological story rich in details and clear in its findings of a community where predation plays a key role in determining the fate of individuals and populations. The study of the Kluane boreal forest raises key questions about the scale of conservation required for boreal forest communities and the many mammals and birds that live there.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This interesting and well presented study looked at the factors that determine the community structure in the boreal forest. . . . The authors ought to be commended for their painstaking study and effort covering about 25 years of research work that addresses topics of importance to the conservation of boreal forests."--*International Journal of Environmental Studies*

"Just as every picture tells a story, so too does every scientific project. This book is the story of the Kluane Boreal Forest Ecosystem Project, told brilliantly by the researchers who toiled for ten years from 1986 to uncover the drama and complexity of this Canadian ecosystem. ... This type of project is ... exactly what is needed to enable ecologists to help politicians manage the biological diversity of the Earth when faced with a growing population ... Before the Kluane Project we had no role model--now we have one."--*Nature*

About the Author

Charles J. Krebs is at University of British Columbia, Vancouver. Stan Boutin is at University of Alberta, Edmonton.

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