







Parasites through time. Museum collections as a tool for parasite conservation and ecosystem health monitoring

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Biodiversity & global change

free-living

Global change affects plants and animals

- Distribution shifts
- Population declines
- Extinctions
- Few invasions

(metazoan) parasites?

Expected to be affected, but direction of change has not been tested



Why bother about parasite destiny?

Ecosystem with many parasites → healthy!

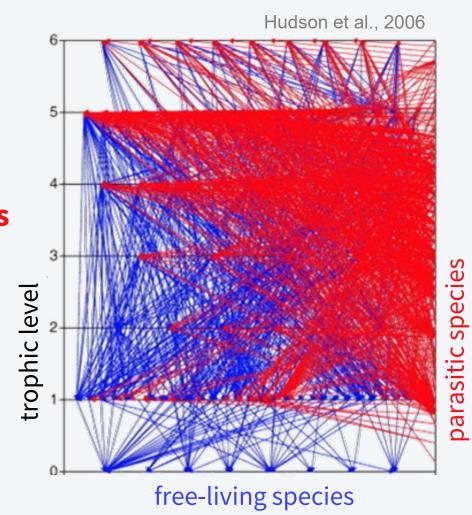
Health ecosystem ← contribution of parasites

Biodiversity (within ecosystem types)

Predictability

Resistance to perturbations

Resilience



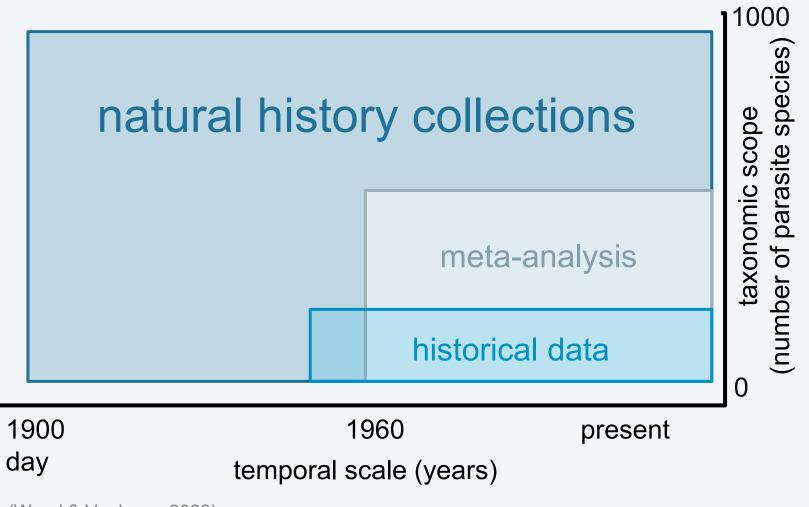
Parasites and global change

How is global change affecting parasites?

- 1. The Lake Victoria case: changes in parasite communities of cichlid fish
- 2. Conservation status of parasites

→ Test for temporal changes in parasitism

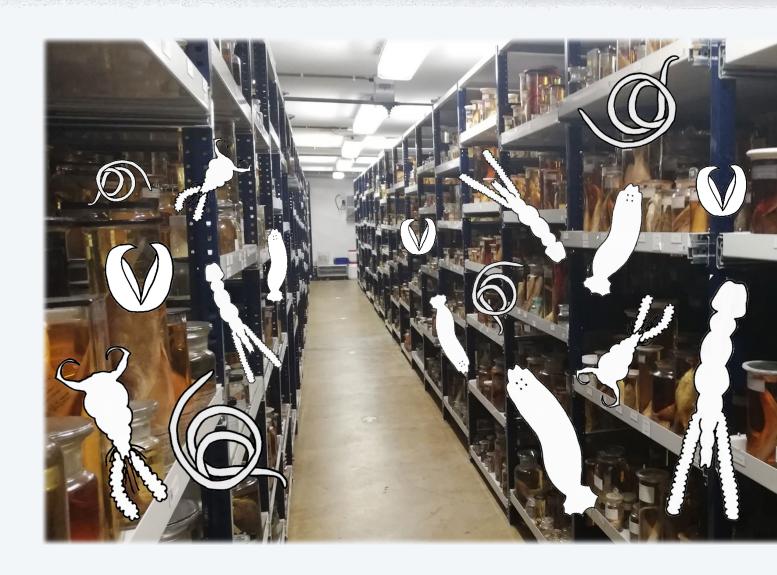
Need for long-term data



(Wood & Vanhove, 2022)

Natural history collections

Natural history collections have a "secret " treasure: parasite collections hidden inside host collections





Lake Victoria

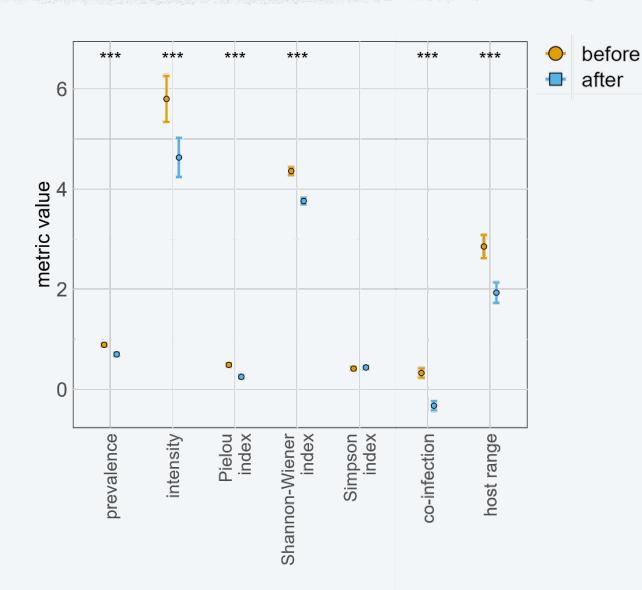
- Biodiversity hotspot (especially cichlid fish)
- Drastic anthropogenic changes since 1980s:



Lake Victoria

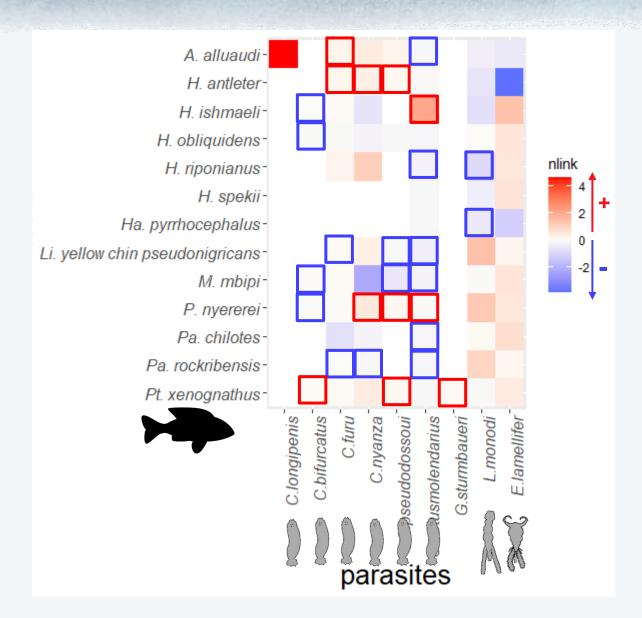
- Biodiversity hotspot (especially cichlid fish)
- Drastic anthropogenic changes since 1980s:
 - eutrophication
 - multiple invasions (incl. Nile perch)
 - overfishing
 - pollution





Decline in many metrics:

- infection prevalence
- infection intensity
- biodiversity indexes
- occurrence of co-infections
- host range
- → need of parasite conservation!



Changes in host-parasite network

- old combinations
- new combinations

2. Parasite conservation

IUCN Red List aims to assess the conservation status of species, ideally before they become extinct in order to call for action

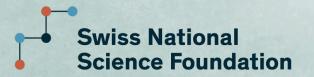
Currently, only half of animal diversity is targeted for conservation assessments

Parasites were not considered so far...

















Thank you

Ichthyo-parasitological team @ Hasselt University (B)

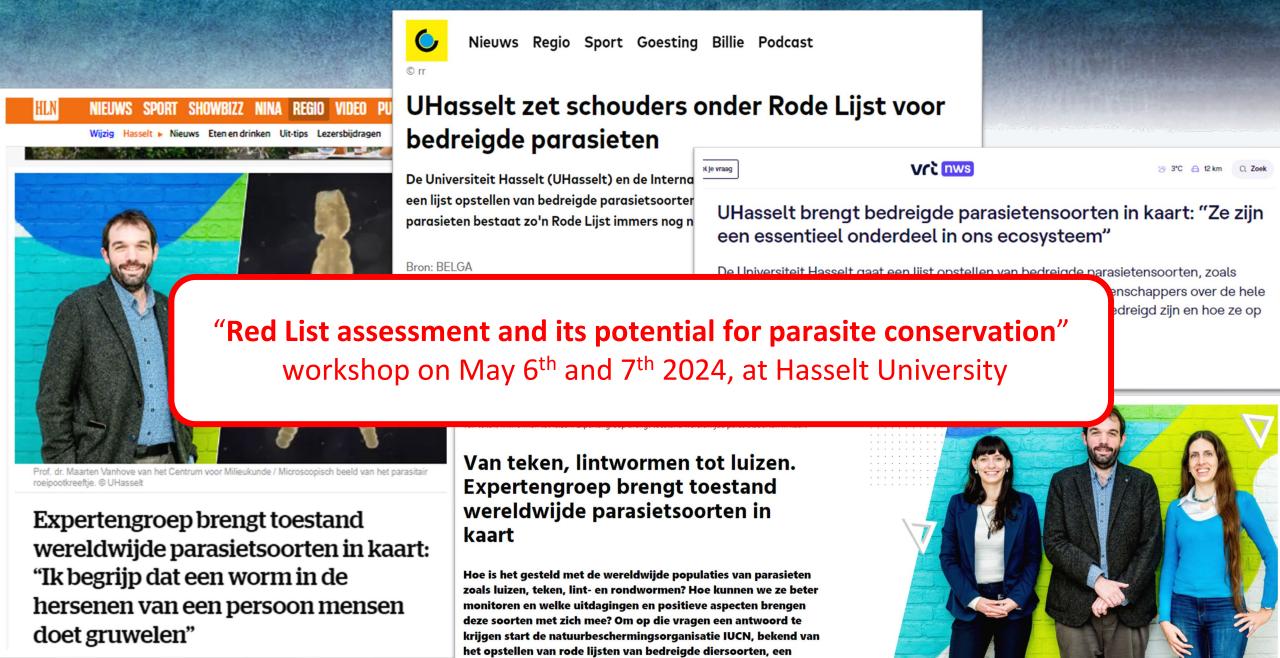
Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (B)

Royal Museum for Central Africa (B)

Naturalis Biodiversity Center (NL)

EAWAG, Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (CH)

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