

Estuaries and Coasts

Predator-prey interactions of the polyclad, *Euplana gracilis*, and the amphipod, *Apocorophium lacustre*, in the Chesapeake Bay

--Manuscript Draft--

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Corresponding Author:	Dean Janiak Smithsonian Environmental Research Center Edgewater, MD UNITED STATES
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:	
Corresponding Author's Institution:	Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:	
First Author:	Dean Janiak
First Author Secondary Information:	
Order of Authors:	Dean Janiak Julia N Adams Benjamin Rubinoff Richard W Osman
Order of Authors Secondary Information:	
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Abstract:	<p>Predation within the marine environment has been well-studied and shown to be of major importance in shaping patterns of biodiversity. Typically larger predators, such as fishes, are examined because of the ease of manipulation and strong detectable results whereas effects of smaller micro-predators are much more difficult to evaluate. Here, we examined the distribution and prey consumption of the polyclad flatworm, <i>Euplana gracilis</i>, in the Chesapeake Bay. <i>Euplana gracilis</i> is a common, micro-predator but no data exist on its ecological function. Flatworms were found to actively prey upon a single species, the tube-building amphipod <i>Apocorophium lacustre</i>, in lab trials when tested against several other commonly encountered species. To examine natural population densities of flatworms, large-scale field sampling was conducted via benthic grabs and <i>E. gracilis</i> abundances were found to be significantly correlated with <i>A. lacustre</i> particularly in areas close to the shoreline. Some predator-prey interactions were examined including timed observations of consumption, predator size, and tube protection. Flatworm body size was found to correlate strongly with number of prey consumed over time. Tubes constructed by amphipods were examined as a means of refuge when in the presence of <i>E. gracilis</i> but provided very little protection as flatworms could easily penetrate tubes in search of prey. Our results are the first to show predation of an estuarine/marine polyclad flatworm on amphipods as well as provide some insight into the dynamics of this previously unknown predator-prey relationship.</p>

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To the Editor:

Please find the attached final version of our manuscript. All edits were corrected and contribution numbers added in the Acknowledgements section. We would like to thank you as well as the reviewers for the edits/comments that helped make the manuscript better.

Sincerely,
Dean Janiak

Specific Edits/comments:

-“et al.” throughout the text should not be in italics, remove italics

Throughout the text, all italics have been removed.

-where sentences start with *E. gracilis* (e.g., line 65), please write out the genus name

The full genus was written out for all sentences that started with a species name.

-remove title on Fig. 3

Title for Figure 3 was removed.

-Fig. 3 add per grab on axis labels (e.g., *E. gracilis* (average no. ind. per grab or similar) and also use the same format on axes of Fig 4 for consistency.

Both Figure 3 and Figure 4 axis labels changed.

-Font size of numbers on y-axes differ for the two species in Fig 3. Also make sure all fonts (numeric and text) font on all figures 3-5 is consistent

Font size on y-axis was corrected. Font size was checked and fixed when needed in Fig 3-5.

-There seems to be an error in the first sentence of the figure legend 3: “from based on the different shoreline types??”

Sentence was corrected, “based on” was deleted.

-incorrect long dash (sorry this was my copy paste error) please use “–” throughout text for long dash and in the citations

The corrected long dash “–” was replaced throughout the text and references.

–

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3 Chesapeake Bay

4

5 **Authors:**

6 Dean S. Janiak^{1,2}, Julia N. Adams^{1,3}, Benjamin Rubinoff^{1,4}, and Richard W. Osman¹

7

8 **Address:**

9 ¹Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, 647 Contees Wharf Rd., Edgewater, MD. 21037, USA

10 ²Smithsonian Marine Station, 701 Seaway Dr., Ft. Pierce, FL. 34982, USA

11 ³Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, PO Box 0843–03092, Panama, Republic of Panama

12 ⁴The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. 43210, USA

13

14 **Corresponding Author:**

15 janiakd@si.edu

16

17 **Key words:**

18 Chesapeake Bay, *Euplana gracilis*, *Apocorophium lacustre*, predator-prey interactions,

19

20 **Abstract**

21 Predation within the marine environment has been well-studied and shown to be of major importance in
22 shaping patterns of biodiversity. Typically larger predators, such as fishes, are examined because of the ease of
23 manipulation and strong detectable results whereas effects of smaller micro-predators are much more difficult to
24 evaluate. Here, we examined the distribution and prey consumption of the polyclad flatworm, *Euplana gracilis*, in
25 the Chesapeake Bay. *Euplana gracilis* is a common, micro-predator but no data exist on its ecological function.
26 Flatworms were found to actively prey upon a single species, the tube-building amphipod *Apocorophium lacustre*, in
27 lab trials when tested against several other commonly encountered species. To examine natural population densities
28 of flatworms, large-scale field sampling was conducted via benthic grabs and *E. gracilis* abundances were found to

29 be significantly correlated with *A. lacustre* particularly in areas close to the shoreline. Some predator-prey
30 interactions were examined including timed observations of consumption, predator size, and tube protection.
31 Flatworm body size was found to correlate strongly with number of prey consumed over time. Tubes constructed by
32 amphipods were examined as a means of refuge when in the presence of *E. gracilis* but provided very little
33 protection as flatworms could easily penetrate tubes in search of prey. Our results are the first to show predation of
34 an estuarine/marine polyclad flatworm on amphipods as well as provide some insight into the dynamics of this
35 previously unknown predator-prey relationship.

36

37 **Introduction**

38 Within the marine environment, the role of predation has been well-studied and shown to be an important
39 factor in shaping patterns of biodiversity. Predators can have direct or indirect effects on multiple trophic levels
40 within a community, causing alterations in the interactions among prey and their competitors for resources (Paine,
41 1980; Duffy, 2002; Bruno and O’Conner, 2005; Clemente et al., 2010; Vieira et al., 2012). Most studies have
42 focused on the effects of larger predators on populations or communities (Lubchenco and Menge, 1978; Myers and
43 Worm, 2003; Thrush et al., 2006; McCauley et al., 2012) whereas few studies have documented the effects of micro-
44 predators on their prey (e.g. Newell et al., 2007). What little work has been done shows the importance of these
45 species as predators in different marine habitats (Ambrose, 1991; Osman and Whitlatch, 1992; Newell et al., 2000;
46 Osman and Whitlatch, 2004; Lavender et al., 2014). One typically overlooked though ubiquitous group of small
47 marine predators are the polyclad flatworms.

48 The Polycladida are a diverse order within the phylum Platyhelminthes (Class Rhabditophora) consisting of
49 almost entirely marine, non-parasitic forms. They are globally distributed with an extensive dietary breadth, and
50 found in most habitats as well as in close association with a variety of invertebrates (e.g. crustaceans and
51 echinoderms) (Newman and Cannon, 2003). The majority of species within this group primarily consume sessile
52 prey including bivalves, barnacles, corals, and ascidians (see review by Galleni et al., 1980; Newman et al., 2000;
53 Rawlinson and Stella, 2012). Other than feeding selectivity, little is known about the ecological role polyclad
54 flatworms have in the marine environment. What has been identified comes from a group of studies that has
55 focused primarily on members of the Stylochidae (Galleni et al., 1980; Chintala and Kennedy, 1993; Merory and
56 Newman, 2005; Lee et al., 2006). Members of this family are typically recognized as pests on a variety of

57 commercial aquaculture species including clams, mussels, and oysters (Littlewood and Marsbe, 1990; Newman et
58 al., 1993; Jennings and Newman, 1996; O'Connor and Newman, 2003).

59 The trophic structure within the Chesapeake Bay is fairly well-characterized (Baird and Ulanowicz, 1989;
60 Krause et al., 2003) and an important and well-studied relationship includes the predator-prey interaction between
61 the eastern oyster, *Crassostrea virginica* (Gmelin, 1791) and the polyclad flatworm, *Stylochus ellipticus* (Girard,
62 1850) (Landers and Rhodes, 1970; White and Wilson, 1996; Newell et al., 2000). Oysters provide economic and
63 ecological services vital to the bay and therefore, have received much attention over the years (Newell, 1988;
64 Ulanowicz and Tuttle, 1992; Rodney and Paynter, 2006). Within the bay, a second flatworm, *Euplana gracilis*
65 Girard, 1853, is found in high densities (personal observation) though little is known of its ecological role. *Euplana*
66 *gracilis* is a common inhabitant in the Chesapeake Bay as well as most of the eastern Atlantic coastline from Maine
67 to the Gulf of Mexico (Hyman, 1940). Despite the fairly large distributional range of *E. gracilis*, there exists little
68 knowledge on the species. The aim of the current study was to examine the local distribution and predatory impacts
69 of *E. gracilis* in the upper Chesapeake Bay. To do this, field collections were made and a series of laboratory
70 experiments were conducted to examine the predatory role of *E. gracilis*. Experiments were designed to test prey
71 selectivity as well as examine specific interactions between *E. gracilis* and its prey. Specifically we asked: 1) what
72 is the local distribution of *E. gracilis* within a representative area of the upper Chesapeake Bay, 2) what is the prey
73 selectivity for *E. gracilis* among commonly encountered benthic species, and 3) what are some specific predator-
74 prey interactions between *E. gracilis* and its prey.

75

76 **Materials and Methods**

77 *Study site and field collections*

78 All sampling and species collections were done in the Rhode River (38° 53.03' N, 76° 32.4' W), a
79 subestuary in the northwestern portion of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland, USA (Figure 1). The river covers an
80 area of approximately 4 km², is shallow (2 – 4 m depth), and mesohaline having salinity ranges from 0 to 20 with
81 highest salinities occurring during the drier parts of the year. The mean tidal amplitude is roughly 35 cm though can
82 be influenced by local wind patterns. For laboratory studies, all species were collected from wooden pilings and
83 docks at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center located on the western shore of the Rhode River.
84 Structures were scraped with a paint scrapper and all mobile and sessile animals were brought back to the lab for

85 identification and sorting. Animals were retained in the lab with fresh river water changed often under ambient
86 temperature. Artificial habitats were used to collect live specimens due to practicality and a diverse suite of species
87 found throughout the area. Collections of flatworms and potential prey were made as needed throughout the
88 duration of the project. Once an animal was used in a trial or spent > 3 days in the lab, it was returned to the field
89 and new collections were made. Field collections detailed below were done in natural habitats throughout the
90 entirety of the river.

91 *Predation on local species*

92 To examine prey selectivity of *Euplana gracilis*, experiments were conducted with potential prey species
93 commonly encountered and found in close proximity to flatworms in the Rhode River. The prey species used in
94 each of the trials were 1) the tube-building amphipod *Apocorophium lacustre* (Vanhöffen, 1911), 2) the free-
95 swimming amphipod *Gammarus mucronatus* Say, 1818, 3) the barnacle *Amphibalanus improvisus* (Darwin, 1854),
96 4) the tube-building spionid polychaete *Polydora cornuta* Bosc, 1802, 5) the nudibranch *Cratena pilata* (Gould,
97 1870), 6) the ctenostome bryozoan *Victorella pavidata* Saville-Kent, 1870, 7) the nereid polychaete *Alitta succinea*
98 (Leuckart, 1847), and 8) *Tanytus* sp. larvae (Insecta: Chironomidae). All experiments were run as paired trials, 10
99 replicates with and 10 replicates without a single individual exposed to a flatworm. For the colonial species *V.*
100 *pavidata*, clumps consisting of 6 actively feeding zooids were used for each replicate. All experiments were done in
101 square 250 mL containers with newly-collected river water and allowed to run for 24 h. All species were collected
102 within 48 h of the start and held in separate containers without food. All trials were monitored to note any particular
103 interactions that occurred. After the allotted time, all prey species were counted as either dead or alive. A Fisher's
104 exact test was used to compare the survivorship (nominal variables "dead" or "alive") of potential prey with the null
105 hypothesis that the proportion of prey alive is the same when exposed or not exposed to a potential predator.

106 *Distribution and abundance*

107 As part of a separate monitoring project to examine the distribution and abundance of infaunal
108 communities, 151 benthic grab samples were collected throughout the entirety of the Rhode River (Figure 1) in June
109 2014. Approximately half of the samples were collected at nearshore sites (0 – 3 m from shoreline) and the other
110 half collected at offshore sites (> 3 m from shoreline). Environmental data collected for each site included depth,
111 temperature, dissolved oxygen, salinity, and sediment type (visually assessed as fine sand, coarse sand, mud, and
112 mix). Furthermore, samples collected at nearshore sites were classified by their shoreline type (forest, marsh, beach,

113 bulkhead, riprap, and offshore). Samples were collected using a Petite Ponar benthic grab (WILDCO®). This
114 particular grab can sample a variety of benthic substrate types and samples approximately an area of 15.2 cm² (2.4 L
115 of sediment). Samples were sieved at 500 µm, fixed in 10 % formalin for one week, and transferred to 70 % ethanol
116 for sorting and enumeration. For the purposes of this study, only *E. gracilis* and *A. lacustre* abundances were used
117 in the data analysis. Data were analyzed using a distance-based analysis of a linear model (DistLM; *PRIMER v7*)
118 (Clarke and Gorley, 2015) to examine species abundance in relation to environmental factors. Abundance data were
119 square-root transformed and a resemblance matrix was constructed using Bray-Curtis similarities. Environmental
120 data was normalized and a resemblance matrix was constructed using Euclidean distances. Selection of
121 environmental factors was step-wise and AICc was used as the selection criterion to choose the best-fit
122 environmental parameters explaining species distribution. A Two-Way ANOVA was run on abundances of both *A.*
123 *lacustre* and *E. gracilis* using the fixed, categorical factors shoreline type and sediment type. The interaction
124 between the two factors was not included because sediment type within and between shoreline type strongly varied.
125 In both ANOVAs, Student-Newman-Keuls pairwise comparisons test within factors was used. Abundances of
126 flatworms and amphipods were also compared using linear regression to test for any pattern in natural abundances
127 between the two species.

128 *Timed Observations*

129 A series of trials were run to examine the length of time it took for *E. gracilis* to attack and consume *A.*
130 *lacustre* as well as if that same individual would consume a second amphipod after 24 h. Twenty-seven adult
131 flatworms of a similar size were randomly chosen and placed in separate containers (250 mL) along with a single
132 adult amphipod in each. All flatworms and amphipods were collected within 48 h and starved during that time.
133 Amphipods that were chosen were all of a similar size. The time it took for an initial attack was recorded as well as
134 how long it took for amphipods to become immobilized and fully consumed. After the first amphipod was
135 consumed, a second was added and the amount of time it took the same flatworm to prey upon the second amphipod
136 was recorded.

137 *Size versus consumption*

138 A series of trials were run to examine if the size of individual *E. gracilis* was a significant factor in the
139 number of amphipods consumed over a given time period. Flatworms ($n = 45$) of various sizes were randomly
140 chosen and each was placed in a drop of water on top of a ruler and photographed at least 3 times when fully

141 extended. The area (mm²) of each flatworm was measured using ImageJ (Abramoff et al., 2004), and the average
142 area from the separate photographs was used to indicate each individual's size. This was necessary as flatworms
143 were quite active and a single measurement could be misleading. Sizes of flatworms used were found to range from
144 0.8 mm² to 9 mm². After photographs were taken, each flatworm was put into a separate square 500 mL container
145 with new river water. In each container, 4 randomly chosen, adult amphipods of a similar size were added. The
146 prey density was kept constant at 4 and dead amphipods were noted every few hours and replaced with lives ones
147 over the duration of the experiment. The experiment was allowed to run for 120 h (5 days) and at the end of each
148 day, water in each container was carefully siphoned out and exchanged with new river water. After the allotted
149 time, all amphipods left were marked as either dead or alive. A control with 45 amphipods in a separate container
150 without flatworms was run simultaneously to monitor the health of amphipods over the duration of the experiment.
151 The number of amphipods consumed was compared against the size of each individual *E. gracilis* (mm²) via linear
152 regression.

153 *Amphipod tubes and protection*

154 Three separate trials were run in which amphipods were allowed to build tubes prior to predator exposure.
155 Both trials 1 and 2 contained 5 replicates and trial 3 contained 12 replicates. Trial 3 had increased replication to
156 ensure results were consistent. Each pair of replicates consisted of a single adult amphipod all of a similar size,
157 either with a tube or without a tube exposed to a single flatworm. In each trial, half of the amphipods were placed in
158 separate square 250 mL containers with defaunated sediment and new river water and allowed to build a tube
159 whereas the other half were placed in containers without sediment. After amphipods in all replicates had built tubes
160 (approximately 24 h), a single flatworm was randomly picked and added to each of the containers and the
161 experiment was allowed to run for 120 min. Once time had expired, all amphipods were counted as dead or alive.
162 Fisher's exact test was used to compare the survivorship of amphipods either with or without tubes using the
163 nominal variables "dead" or "alive".

164

165 **Results**

166 *Predation on local species*

167 Out of all potential prey species tested, only *Apocorophium lacustre* was significantly consumed by *Euplana*
168 *gracilis* (Table 1). Predation on *A. lacustre* was rapid and in all trials happened within 30 min. There was a 90 %

169 and 80 % survival rate of *Gammarus mucronatus* and *Amphibalanus improvisus* and based on personal observations,
170 mortality resulted from damage during collection rather than predation. One *Polydora cornuta* was found dead and
171 after the experiment ended, a flatworm was found on the worm but it was unclear whether or not the worm was
172 being preyed upon by the flatworm. The last 4 species, *Cratena pilata*, *Victorella pavidata*, *Alitta succinea*, and
173 *Tanypus* sp., were all alive by the end of the trials. In all trials with flatworms absent, all species were accounted for
174 and alive.

175 *Distribution and abundance*

176 A total of 151 benthic ponar grabs were taken throughout the majority of the Rhode River (Figure 1).
177 *Apocorophium lacustre* was found in 93 samples (62 % of total) and *E. gracilis* was found in 51 samples (34 % of
178 total). Based on the DistLM analysis, the environmental parameters temperature ($p = 0.001$), depth ($p = 0.008$), and
179 salinity ($p = 0.085$) were the best predictors of abundances for the two species (Figure 2) though only explained 20
180 % of the variation in the data ($r^2 = 0.202$). Both *A. lacustre* and *E. gracilis* were found to be more abundant at
181 nearshore sites (collectively for all shoreline types, 78.36 ± 18.41 S.E.) as compared to offshore sites (10.04 ± 3.78
182 S.E.). In separate Two-Way ANOVAs, there was a significant effect of shoreline type found for both *E. gracilis* (p
183 $= 0.028$) and *A. lacustre* ($p < 0.001$) however no effect was found for substrate type. In both cases, the shoreline
184 type forest had the highest abundances (Figure 3). There was a strong positive relationship ($r^2 = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$)
185 between the abundance of *A. lacustre* and the abundance of *E. gracilis* (Figure 4). Out of all samples containing *A.*
186 *lacustre*, 55 % had flatworms present and there was roughly a 10:1 ratio of amphipods to flatworms. Of those
187 without flatworms, amphipod densities were quite low (1 – 10 per benthic grab) and no samples were collected that
188 contained only flatworms with no amphipods.

189 *Timed Observations*

190 In all trials, predation occurred at a rapid rate and all initial *A. lacustre* were consumed by *E. gracilis*. The
191 initial attack took on average 14 min (± 18 S.D.) from when the two species were added together. When an
192 amphipod was added, the flatworm would increase its speed of movement in search of the prey and once
193 encountered, would swiftly attack the ventral portion between two pereopods, injecting its pharynx into the tissue.
194 The flatworm then moved to the dorsal side of the amphipod and in many cases with the pharynx removed, while the
195 amphipod was still mobile. After approximately 3 min (± 1 S.D.), the amphipod was fully immobilized and the
196 flatworm moved back to the ventral side and began to actively digest the internal tissues. Flatworms fed on average

197 65 min (\pm 28 S.D.) prior to abandoning the carcass and after, went into a short “resting” phase whereby movement
198 was limited. In 85 % of trials, flatworms had already consumed the second amphipod within 24 h.

199 *Size versus consumption*

200 There was a significant positive linear relationship between the size of *E. gracilis* and the number of
201 amphipods consumed in 120 h ($r^2 = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$, Figure 5). Flatworms in the smaller size classes exhibited
202 increased handling time and some variation in prey consumption but still consumed at least 3 amphipods in the
203 allotted amount of time. Observations suggest that all amphipod mortality was due to predation by flatworms. In
204 the control container, with no flatworms added, all amphipods were accounted for and alive.

205 *Amphipod tubes and protection*

206 In all 3 trials, there was no significant difference between amphipods with tubes present and those without
207 tubes (Fishers exact test, $p > 0.05$). In the first and second trial, 4 of 5 amphipods having tubes were consumed
208 whereas all 5 were consumed without tubes and in the third trial, 10 of 12 amphipods with tubes were consumed
209 whereas all 12 were consumed without tubes. During the trials with tubes present, prey attack and consumption
210 occurred both in and out of tubes. Flatworms were attracted to tubes that contained amphipods and either entered
211 the tube or attacked the amphipod from the outside.

212

213 **Discussion**

214 The flatworm, *Euplana gracilis*, was found to consume a single species when tested against several
215 common species in the Rhode River. Flatworms readily consumed the corophoid, *Apocorophium lacustre*, but prior
216 to our study, consumption of amphipods in an estuarine or marine setting has only been reported once as anecdotal
217 observations (Jennings, 1957). Our study is the first to present and quantify any ecological data for *E. gracilis*,
218 including its natural distribution and predator-prey interactions. Polyclad flatworms are generally highly selective in
219 their prey choice (Galleni et al., 1980 and references within) and it is therefore not surprising that *E. gracilis* was
220 found to consume one species throughout the study. Both *E. gracilis* and *A. lacustre* are found throughout the
221 eastern Atlantic coastline though *A. lacustre* is restricted to brackish waters (Bousfield, 1973) whereas *E. gracilis*
222 has been found in salinities ranging from 0 – 37 (personal observation). We included in our laboratory trials a free-
223 swimming amphipod (*Gammarus mucronatus*) though this species was found to easily avoid any encounters when
224 flatworms were in search of food. It is possible that flatworms could be more general in prey choice though the

225 escape behavior of non-tube building amphipods could separate them as prey. In contrast, *A. lacustre* tended to be a
226 very poor swimmer and was easily captured. It is feasible that *E. gracilis* can consume other species, possibly other
227 tube-building amphipods, within its range though this needs further study.

228 An extensive survey of the benthic habitat within the Rhode River showed a significant relationship
229 between *E. gracilis* and *A. lacustre*. Flatworms were only found in samples that contained *A. lacustre* and increases
230 in flatworms were concomitant with prey density. Both flatworm and amphipod densities were highest in nearshore
231 habitats as compared to offshore though it is unknown why *A. lacustre* was more abundant along the coast as the
232 majority of the river is soft, unsorted mud. Krause et al. (2003) developed an empirical food web model for the
233 Chesapeake Bay which included several fish species (i.e. spot, catfish, and hogchoker) as the main predators of *A.*
234 *lacustre* so increased predation may occur away from the shoreline. Sites with a forested shoreline also had the
235 highest abundances though this type of shoreline made up the majority of the sampling sites and therefore could be
236 an artifact of site selection.

237 Our study investigated some specific predator-prey interactions between *E. gracilis* and *A. lacustre*. Timed
238 observations of feeding were relatively consistent with predation occurring within 15 min of adding prey and took
239 roughly 65 min for consumption. Predator size was also a significant factor in consumption rates and as size
240 increased, there was a steady positive increase in the number of amphipods a single individual could consume.
241 Interestingly, the smallest flatworms used (0.8 – 2 mm²) were found to easily capture and consume an average-sized
242 amphipod, though with increased handling time.

243 Corophioid amphipods are a common tube-building group found throughout much of the world. Tubes are
244 thought to have several uses including feeding, acting as a storage deposit for food, and facilitating mating
245 efficiency by limiting search time (Shillaker and Moore, 1987; Borowsky, 1991; Dixon and Moore, 1997). The
246 majority of studies have examined tubes in relation to feeding and it is generally thought that *Corophium* spp. are
247 primarily filter feeders (Foster-Smith and Shillaker, 1977; Gerdol and Hughes, 1994), and use their tubes to filter
248 water through to capture particles (Dixon and Moore, 1997). The tubes themselves have never been tested as a
249 means of refuge from predators. Our results suggest that tubes provided very little protection from flatworms.
250 Collectively in all 3 trials, approximately 80 % of amphipods were consumed with tubes as compared to 100 %
251 without tubes. Although with or without tubes was not found to be statistically different, some amphipods did
252 survive and therefore tubes could be somewhat useful. However, increasing the allotted time during the experiment

253 could have increased the consumption rate to 100 %. Flatworms were attracted to occupied tubes and would
254 actively examine the tube either attempting to enter or attacking the amphipod from the outside. In rare cases,
255 amphipods would leave tubes in an attempt to crawl away though with little success. Throughout the trials, *E.*
256 *gracilis* was also found to deposit eggs on the inside surface of tubes. The successful development and release of
257 larvae was not followed but other species of polyclad flatworms are known to deposit eggs within shells of their
258 prey after consumption (Hurley, 1976; Galleni et al., 1980; Lee et al., 2006).

259 Studies on polyclad flatworms have generally shown that they can have a strong negative effect on
260 populations, particularly those with long generation times such as corals (Rawlinson et al., 2011; Rawlinson and
261 Stella, 2012), barnacles (Hurley, 1975; Branscomb, 1976) and bivalves (Pearse and Wharton, 1938; Loosanoff,
262 1956; Littlewood and Marshe, 1990). Corophioids have short generation times (1 – 4 cohorts per year), with direct
263 development leading to high local abundances (Fish and Mills 1979; Moore 1981; Peer et al., 1986; Cunha et al.,
264 2000; Pérez et al., 2007). Several studies have examined the population dynamics of *Corophium volutator* (Pallas,
265 1766) and have shown negative effects of larger predators including shorebirds (Hicklin and Smith, 1984) and fish
266 (McCurdy et al., 2005). Our results demonstrate that *E. gracilis* is a predator on *A. lacustre*, but it is unclear
267 whether or not there is any top-down control on populations given their high recruitment throughout the year. Data
268 from field collections did show that flatworms were positively correlated with amphipod abundances and only found
269 in samples that contained amphipods, however, this correlation does suggest that flatworms do not limit populations
270 of amphipods.

271 The ecological role of micro-predators within the marine environment is poorly understood particularly
272 because of the challenges in constructing manipulative experiments. Despite this, these predators are typically
273 thought of as abundant and important components within the habitats that they are found. Traditionally, micro-
274 predators have been associated with newly settled or juvenile prey altering the composition of communities over
275 succession (e.g. Osman et al., 1992). *Euplana gracilis* preys upon adult corophioids and is an example of a micro-
276 predator that could potentially have a large effect on amphipod populations given their rapid rates of consumption as
277 well as observed field densities found throughout the study site. Despite the fact that this species is fairly ubiquitous
278 throughout the eastern Atlantic coastline, this is the first study to acknowledge its ecological importance and
279 therefore, this is significant for future considerations of the trophic structure within the Chesapeake Bay as well as
280 within the distributional range of *E. gracilis*.

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489 Figure 1. Map of the Rhode River. Star indicates the location of the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
490 where live collections were made for experimental trials. Grey shading indicates water and the river empties to the
491 south-east into the mainstem of the Chesapeake Bay. Black circles indicate field sampling sites used for benthic
492 ponar grabs ($n = 151$).
493

494 Figure 2. Distance-based linear model (DistLM) plot based on step-wise selection of environmental parameters
495 fitted to abundances for *E. gracilis* and *A. lacustre* taken from benthic grabs. Vectors indicate the direction of effect
496 for environmental parameters in the plot. Split-plot bubbles represent the number of individuals of each of the two
497 species found at each site.
498

499
500 Figure 3. Average *A. lacustre* and *E. gracilis* abundances (\pm S.E.) per benthic grab (approximate area = 15.2 cm²)
501 from the different shoreline types. Offshore indicates all samples that were taken roughly 3m or more from the
502 shoreline. Note the difference in scale on the left and right y-axis.
503

504 Figure 4. Linear regression for the relationship between amphipod (x-axis) and flatworm (y-axis) abundances per
505 benthic grab ($n = 151$) collected during field sampling.
506

507 Figure 5. Linear regression for the relationship of *E. gracilis* ($n = 45$) size to the amount of *A. lacustre* consumed
508 over 120 h.
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Fig. 1

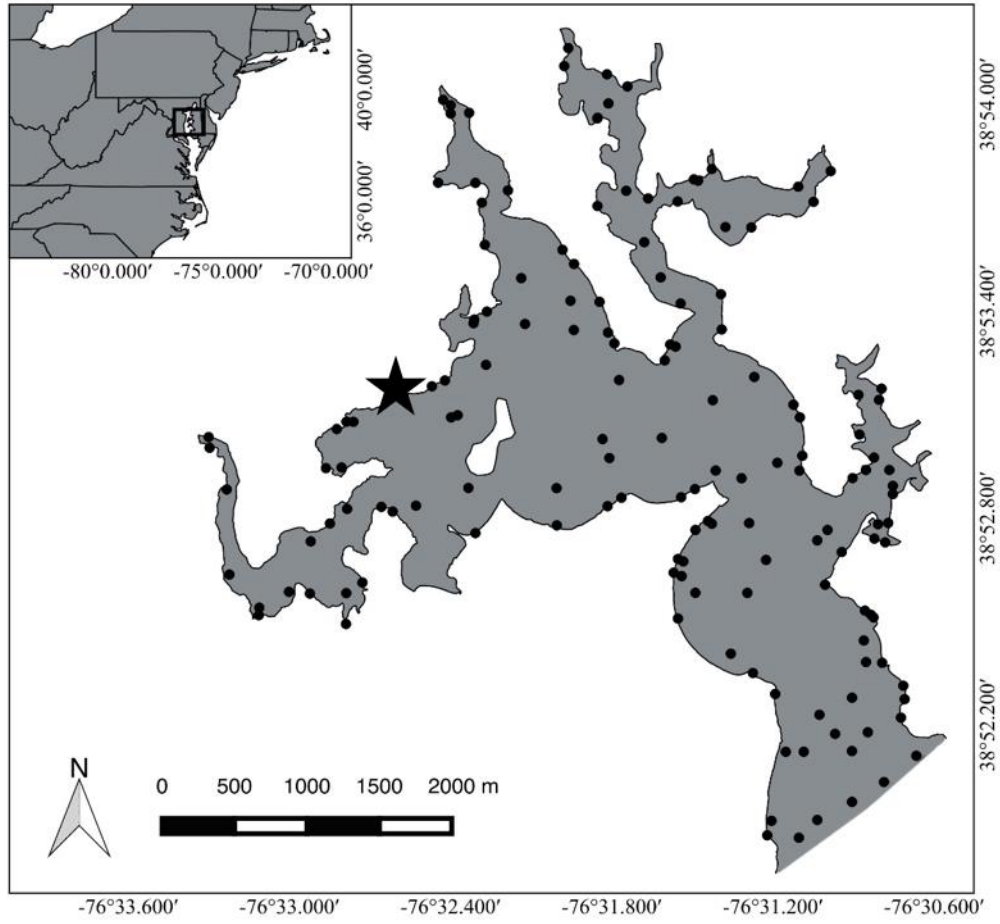


Fig 2.

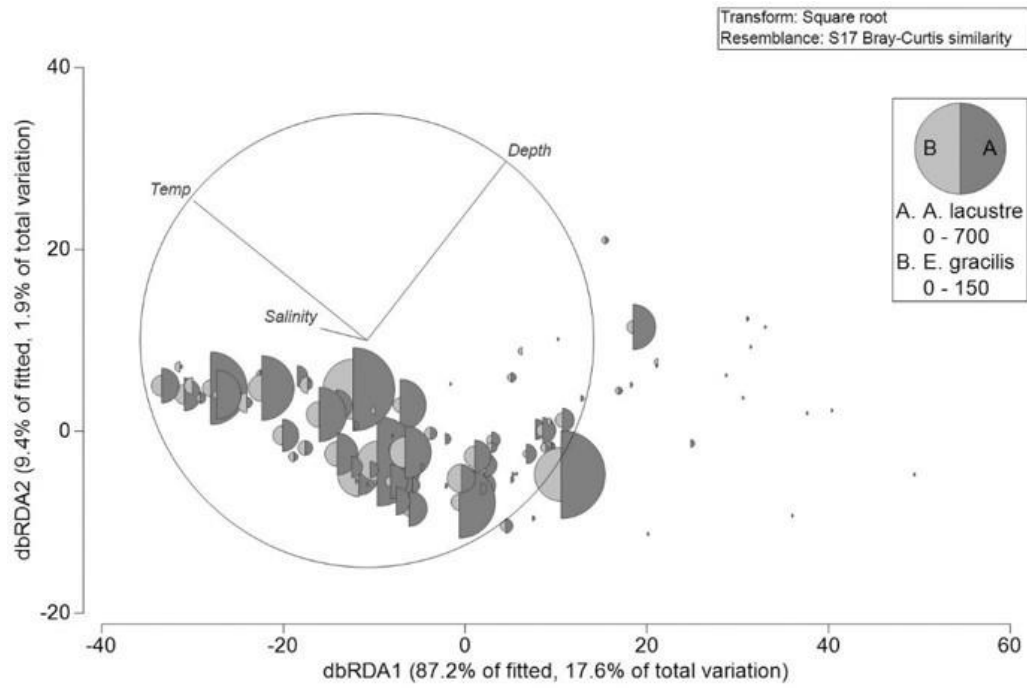


Fig 3.

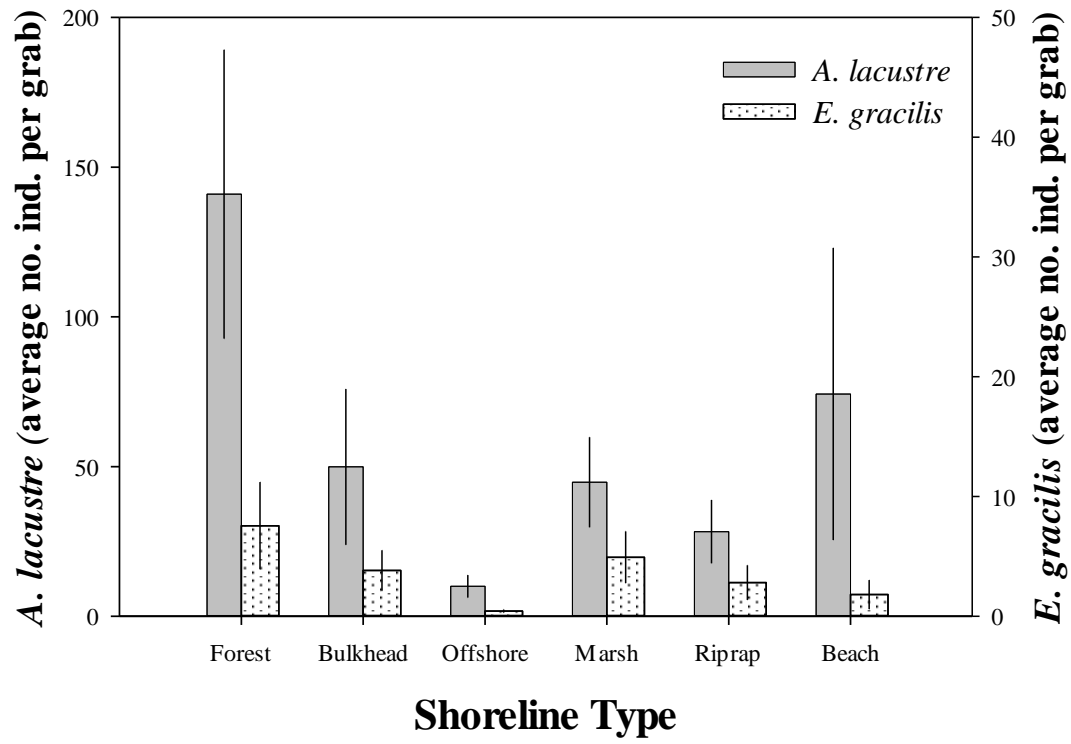


Fig. 4

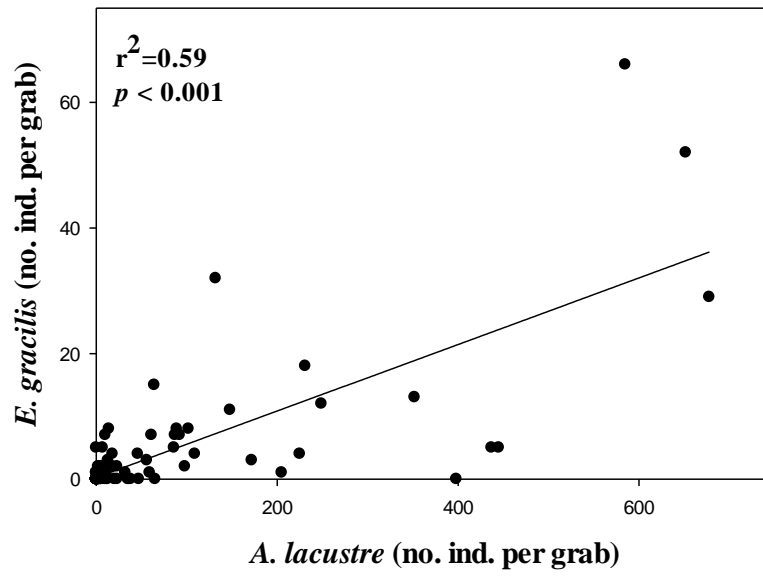


Fig. 5

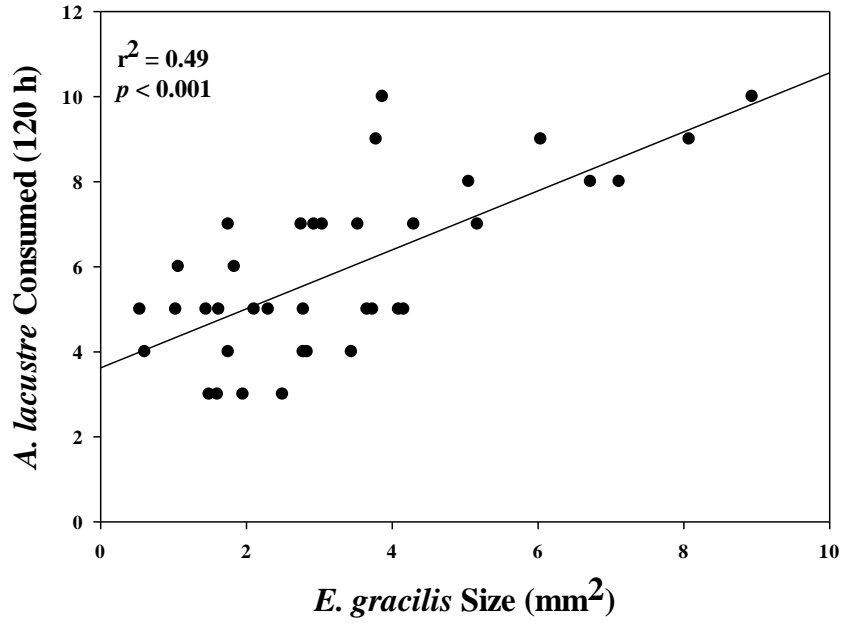


Table 1Common species tested as potential prey of *E. gracilis*.

	Percent Alive	Fisher's exact test
<i>Apocorophium lacustre</i>	0	$p < 0.001$
<i>Gammarus mucronatus</i>	90	NS
<i>Amphibalanus improvisus</i>	80	NS
<i>Polydora cornuta</i>	90	NS
<i>Cratena pilata</i>	100	NS
<i>Victorella pavida</i>	80	NS
<i>Alitta succinea</i>	100	NS
<i>Tanypus</i> sp. larvae	100	NS

Fisher's exact test on survivorship ("dead" or "alive", $n = 10$). NS = not significant.