

Editors' Choice

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ECOLOGY

Just a Few Make a Big Impact

[Andrew M. Sugden](#)

Mutualism is the mutually beneficial ecological interaction between species. Traditionally, the biology of mutualisms has been studied in the context of two interacting species—plants and their pollinators being a prime example. Recently, attention has focused on wider networks of mutualists; for example, some pollinators are generalists that visit a wide range of plant species, and some plants attract a wide range of pollinators. Research on the ecology and evolution of these more complex systems has been facilitated by the recent explosion of interest in network theory. Guimaraes *et al.* studied patterns of coevolution in such networks, exploring in particular the evolutionary influence of supergeneralists that provide mutualistic services to many other species in the ecological community. They find that supergeneralists play key roles in the evolution of their mutualistic partner species, particularly leading to the convergence of traits associated with the mutualism. Thus, the gain or loss of supergeneralists, as can occur when humans introduce species such as honeybees or cause the extinction of large seed dispersers, is likely to have important and in some cases rapid evolutionary consequences for their mutualistic partners.

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