Study of Drifting behaviour of aquatic mites in the snow fed river Alaknanda from Garhwal Himalaya: Density, Diversity and Diel Pattern

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Received: 18.05.2022, Revised: 12.06.2022, Accepted: 17.06.2022
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Abstract: Hydrachnida or water mites are most diverse group amongst Acari and they play an important role as bio-indicator for their adjoining habitat. In the present study data for drift density, diversity and diel drift pattern was recorded from January 2018 to December 2018. Total 743 individuals belonging to 25 species were noted. Species Atractides panesari, Feltria gereckei, Feltria rubra and Lebertia glabra displayed nocturnal drift and species Torrenticola turkestanica, Monatractides garhwalensis, Sperchon indicus and Sperchon garhwalensis displayed both diurnal and nocturnal drift. Maximum 17 species exhibited diurnal drift throughout the course of the study. Presence of Hygrobates fluviatilis, a pollution tolerant species reflected the polluted condition of water.

Key words: Water mites, Drift, Snow fed river Alaknanda, Garhwal Himalaya

Introduction

Drifting refers to the downstream movement of water mites and other invertebrates along the stream current, and the record of their 24 hours movement is known as diel drift pattern. Water mites are powerful fauna of freshwater resources with bio indicator properties and also act as bio-control agent for aquatic insect pests (Namdari et. al., 2014). They are highly diverse, colorful arachnids that can be observed globally in most of the freshwater habitats. Water mites as bio-indicators were also studied by Kowalik and Biesiadka (1981), Biesiadka and Kowalik (1991), Ciccolani and Di Sabatino (1991), Zawal (1992, 2003), Martin and Brinkmann (2003) and Martin and Brunke (2012). Though the water mites are an important meiofaunal group, however due to difficulties related to morphological analysis there are still many species yet to be discovered. On first encounter they seem like small water spiders but when deeply observed they are differently identified as aquatic mites. Hydrachnida distributed globally and creates the higher complexity of trophic networks as they act as both predator and parasite to many of aquatic invertebrates; but till date only over 6000 species were identified worldwide. As they are carnivorous in food habit, they are abundant in water bodies, those are rich in vegetation composition as well as having diverse animal life. Usually they are observed throughout all seasons in variable water temperature but there are some specific species which are found only in snow fed or spring fed river according to their suitability against ecological and habitat preferences. They are polyphyletic in origin as wide variation is noticed in larval stage (Woccott, 1905). They are
brilliantly colored; some common colors are red, brown, yellow, scarlet and orange.

Water mites play an important role in regulating the population of other invertebrates and through this way play significant role in maintaining food chain. Pioneer work involving analysis of density, diversity, population structure and drifting patterns of aquatic mites from Randi Gad spring fed streams was carried out by Bahuguna et al. (2019), Bahuguna & Dobriyal (2020) and Negi et.al., (2021a,b) . Density and diversity of aquatic mites in a glacier-fed River Alaknanda from Garhwal Central Himalaya were also carried out by Bahuguna et al. (2020).

The objective of this study was to observe and assess the occurrence of aquatic mites in river Alaknanda and their distributional pattern.

Materials And Methods

Study Area

The present study was conducted on Alaknanda River which rises in the southern Himalayas and originates from the Satapanth Glacier. Two different locations were identified for sampling on Alaknanda River located between latitude 30° 22’ 45” to 30° 23’ 38” N and longitude 78° 78’ 36” to 78° 72’ 35” E at ITI Srinagar (A) and Maletha (B) (Fig 1).

Figure 1: Location of sampling sites

Sampling Design and Analysis

Drifting sample of water mites were collected by using 1 m² diel drift net on substratum for repeated two-hours periods over 24 hours at each sampling site. All collected aquatic mites were preserved in 70% ethanol in the field and later on were transferred to Koenike’s fluid and dissected. Species identification was done with the help of various keys (Cook, 1967, 1974; Prasad, 1974; Gerecke, 2003; Kumar et.al., 2006, 2007; Pesic and Panesar, 2008; Pesic et.al., 2007a,b; 2019a,b; 2020a,b).

Result

Data related to the drifting density and diversity is presented in Table 1. Altogether 743 water mite individuals belonging to 25 species were
collected during the study. These 25 species belonged to 9 families (Torrenticolidae, Sperchontidae, Hygrobatidae, Aturidae, Arrenuridae, Feltriidae, Lebertiidae, Limnesiidae and Unionicolidae). It was found that drift density and diversity of aquatic mites were recorded highest during the month of February (130) and lowest during August (06). The maximum drift individual number were recorded 90 of *Hygrobates fluviatilis* and minimum of *Feltria rubra* with only 05 individuals.

Diel drift pattern of aquatic mites from January 2018 to December 2018 are presented in the Table 2. The observed pattern of diel periodicity of several aquatic mite species (*Torrenticola tetraporella*, *Torrenticola semisuta*, *Monatractides oxystomus*, *Monatractides tuzovskyi*, *Sperchon clupeifer*, *Atractides nodipalpis*, *Atractides indicus*, *Atractides garhwali*, *Hygrobates gangeticus*, *Hygrobates fluviatilis*, *Kongsbergia indica*, *Kongsbergia rucira*, *Aturus fontinalis*, *Arrenurus kurtvietsi*, *Arrenurus fontinalis*, *Limnesia lembangensis* and *Unionicola affinis*) drifts were during day time, few species (*Atractides panesari*, *Feltria gereckei*, *Feltria rubra* and *Lebertia glabra*) during night and some species (*Torrenticola turkestanica*, *Monatractides garhwalensis*, *Sperchon indicus* and *Sperchon garhwalensis*) recorded a mixed drift pattern.

**Discussion**

During the course of whole study, a total number of 25 species were recorded. The maximum density of drifting mite individuals were noticed in February (130) and the lowest drift was observed in July (06) in the snow fed river Alaknanda. Graesser (1988) also reported decreasing drift densities with increasing discharge in flood-prone streams in south Westland, New Zealand. Chaston (1968), noticed maximum drift density in summer due to insect emergence as most life cycle stages can be found in the drift. Chaston (1968) has opined that correlations of feeding and drift may be due to the fish foraging. The drift periodicity differs among sites that varied in Ichthyofaunal composition (Elliott, 1970). Bahuguna et.al. (2019) also reported fish predation and invertebrate drift relation in the Kyunja Gad stream.
Table 1: Drifting Density and diversity of aquatic mites in snow fed river Alaknanda during January 2018 to December 2018

| S.no | Name of species | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Total No. of individuals |
|------|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------------------|
| 1.   | Family – Torrenticolidae Piersig, 1904 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |                         |
|      | Genus - Torrenticola Piersig, 1904 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |                         |
| a    | Torrenticola turkestanica | 06  | 06  | 04  | 01  | 01  | 03  | 00  | 01  | 01  | 06  | 04  | 06  | 39                        |
| b    | Torrenticola tetraporella | 01  | 06  | 05  | 04  | 01  | 01  | 01  | 00  | 01  | 03  | 01  | 01  | 25                        |
| c    | Torrenticola semiseta | 05  | 05  | 06  | 04  | 04  | 05  | 00  | 01  | 01  | 04  | 04  | 06  | 45                        |
|      | Total | 12  | 17  | 15  | 09  | 06  | 09  | 01  | 02  | 03  | 13  | 09  | 13  | 109                       |
| 2.   | Family – Sperchontidae Thor, 1900 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |                         |
| g    | Sperchon indicus | 05  | 08  | 04  | 06  | 04  | 06  | 01  | 00  | 04  | 06  | 05  | 06  | 55                        |
| h    | Sperchon clupeifer | 01  | 07  | 04  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 00  | 01  | 19                        |
| i    | Sperchon garhwalensis | 04  | 06  | 04  | 01  | 01  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 01  | 00  | 04  | 22                        |
|      | Total | 10  | 21  | 12  | 07  | 05  | 07  | 01  | 00  | 06  | 07  | 06  | 16  | 96                        |
| 3.   | Family - Hygrobatidae Koch, 1842 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |                         |
| j    | Atractides nodipalpis | 08  | 07  | 03  | 07  | 06  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 02  | 03  | 04  | 41                        |
| k    | Atractides indicus | 04  | 02  | 01  | 00  | 02  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 01  | 04  | 15                        |
| l    | Atractides garhwal | 06  | 04  | 01  | 01  | 01  | 01  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 04  | 01  | 04  | 25                        |
| m    | Atractides panesari | 02  | 04  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 00  | 00  | 09                        |
|      | Total | 20  | 17  | 05  | 08  | 10  | 01  | 02  | 00  | 02  | 08  | 05  | 12  | 90                        |
| n    | Hygrobatas gangeticus | 04  | 04  | 04  | 01  | 00  | 01  | 01  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 00  | 16                        |
| o    | Hygrobatas fluviatilis | 10  | 14  | 08  | 12  | 08  | 06  | 05  | 01  | 04  | 06  | 07  | 09  | 90                        |
|      | Total | 14  | 18  | 12  | 13  | 08  | 07  | 06  | 01  | 04  | 06  | 08  | 09  | 106                       |
| 4.   | Family - Aturidae Thor, 1900 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |                         |
| p    | Kongsbergia indica | 04  | 06  | 04  | 04  | 06  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 01  | 04  | 30                        |
| q    | Kongsbergia racira | 01  | 04  | 00  | 01  | 04  | 01  | 01  | 00  | 01  | 04  | 06  | 04  | 27                        |
|      | Total | 05  | 10  | 04  | 05  | 10  | 01  | 01  | 00  | 01  | 05  | 07  | 08  | 57                        |
| r    | Aturus Kramer, 1875 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |                         |
|      | Aturus fontinalis | 02  | 03  | 01  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 00  | 01  | 01  | 07                        |
| 5.   | Family - Arrenuridae Thor, 1900 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |                         |
| Family | Genus | Species | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |
|--------|-------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.     |       | Genus   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        |       | - Arrenurus Dugès, 1834 | 04 | 05 | 04 | 06 | 01 | 04 | 01 | 00 | 01 | 04 | 01 | 04 | 35 |
|        | s     | Arrenurus kurtvietsi  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        | t     | Arrenurus fontinalis   | 04 | 01 | 01 | 04 | 01 | 06 | 01 | 00 | 00 | 01 | 04 | 01 | 24 |
|        |       | Total             | 08 | 06 | 05 | 10 | 02 | 10 | 02 | 00 | 01 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 59 |
| 6.     |       | Family - Feltriidae K.Viets, 1926 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        |       | Genus - Feltria Koenike, 1892 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        | u     | Feltria gereckei    | 02 | 01 | 00 | 02 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 19 |
|        | v     | Feltria rubra       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        |       | Total             | 06 | 04 | 01 | 04 | 01 | 01 | 01 | 00 | 00 | 04 | 01 | 01 | 24 |
| 7.     |       | Family - Lebertiidae Thor, 1900 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        |       | Genus - Lebertia Neuman, 1880 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        | w     | Lebertia glabra    | 06 | 01 | 04 | 04 | 04 | 04 | 06 | 00 | 06 | 04 | 01 | 04 | 44 |
| 8.     |       | Family - Limnesiidae Thor, 1900 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        |       | Genus - Limnesia Koch, 1836 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        | x     | Limnesia lembangensis | 04 | 06 | 01 | 01 | 01 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 01 | 01 | 15 |
| 9.     |       | Family - Unionicolidae Oudemans, 1909 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|        | y     | Unionicolola affinis | 01 | 04 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 01 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 01 | 01 | 07 |
|        |       | Total no of individual species | 107 | 130 | 77 | 70 | 55 | 49 | 22 | 06 | 29 | 58 | 55 | 85 | 743 |
### Table 2: Diel Drift pattern of aquatic mites in snow fed river Alaknanda

| S.N | Name of species                      | Periodicity | Sampling Time | Nocturnal drift | Snow fed Alaknanda River | Diurnal drift | Total no. of ind. mites drift in whole year |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------|
| A   |                                     |             |               |                |                          |               |                                            |
| B   | Sampling Time                       |             |               |                |                          |               |                                            |
|     | 4.15 pm to 6.15 pm                  | 6.30 pm to 8.30 pm | 8.45 pm to 10.45 pm | 11.00 pm to 1.30 am | 1.45 am to 3.45 am | 4.00 am to 6.00 am | 6.15 am to 8.15 am | 8.30 am to 10.30 am | 10.45 am to 12.45 am | 1.00 am to 3.00 pm | 3.15 pm to 4.15 pm |
| C   | Category                            |             |               |                |                          |               |                                            |
| 1   | Torrenticola turkestanica           | Early evening | 3             | 2              | 3                      | 5             | 2                                    | 5                | 6                | 4              | 3              | 4              | 2              | 39                   |
| 2   | Torrenticola tetraporella           | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 2                | 6                | 8              | 4              | 3              | 2              | 25                   |
| 3   | Torrenticola semisita               | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 5                | 7                | 9              | 11             | 9              | 4              | 45                   |
| 4   | Montractides garhwalensis           | Early evening | 4             | 6              | 10                     | 5             | 4                                    | 6                | 5                | 7              | 5              | 6              | 7              | 65                   |
| 5   | Montractides oxystomus              | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 1                | 1                | 6              | 7              | 5              | 4              | 24                   |
| 6   | Montractides tusovskyi              | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 5                | 9                | 11             | 6              | 4              | 5              | 40                   |
| 7   | Sperchon indicus                    | Early evening | 4             | 7              | 6                      | 4             | 5                                    | 2                | 7                | 4              | 10             | 2              | 4              | 55                   |
| 8   | Sperchon clupeifer                  | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 0                | 6                | 10             | 1              | 1              | 1              | 19                   |
| 9   | Sperchon garhwalensis               | Early evening | 1             | 2              | 2                      | 3             | 1                                    | 1                | 2                | 4              | 2              | 3              | 1              | 22                   |
| 10  | Atractides nodipalpis               | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 2                | 6                | 12             | 14             | 5              | 2              | 41                   |
| 11  | Atractides indicus                  | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 0                | 2                | 2              | 2              | 8              | 3              | 15                   |
| 12  | Atractides Garhwali                 | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 3                | 5                | 7              | 9              | 1              | 0              | 25                   |
| 13  | Atractides panesari                 | Early evening | 0             | 1              | 2                      | 4             | 2                                    | 0                | 0                | 0              | 0              | 0              | 0              | 9                    |
| 14  | Hydrobates gangeticus               | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 4                | 5                | 6              | 1              | 0              | 0              | 16                   |
| 15  | Hydrobates flaviatilis              | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 7                | 12               | 21             | 19             | 17             | 14             | 90                   |
| 16  | Kongsbergia indica                  | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 2                | 5                | 3              | 14             | 2              | 4              | 30                   |
| 17  | Kongsbergia racira                  | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 3                | 2                | 13             | 4              | 4              | 3              | 27                   |
| 18  | Aturas fontinalis                   | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 0                | 3                | 2              | 1              | 1              | 0              | 7                    |
| 19  | Arrenurus kurtvietsi                | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 5                | 6                | 11             | 7              | 4              | 2              | 35                   |
| 20  | Arrenurus fontinalis                | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 1                | 5                | 8              | 3              | 4              | 3              | 24                   |
| 21  | Feltria gereckeii                   | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 0                | 0                | 0              | 0              | 0              | 0              | 09                  |
| 22  | Feltria rubra                       | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 0                | 0                | 0              | 0              | 0              | 0              | 5                    |
| 23  | Lebertia glabra                     | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 3                | 5                | 17             | 14             | 5              | 0              | 44                   |
| 24  | Limnesia lembangensis               | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 1                | 2                | 5              | 6              | 1              | 0              | 15                   |
| 25  | Unionicola affinis                  | Early evening | 0             | 0              | 0                      | 0             | 0                                    | 0                | 2                | 2              | 1              | 1              | 1              | 7                    |
| Total|                                    |             |               |                |                          |               |                                            | 743               |
In the present work, diel periodicity of aquatic mites drift showed a distinctive pattern with high drift density values by dawn and decrease in drift through dusk. *Atractides panesari, Feltria gereckeii, Feltria rubra* and *Lebertia glabra* exhibited nocturnal drift while species *Torrenticola turkestanica, Monastractides garhwalensis, Sperchon indicus* and *Sperchon garhwalensis* exhibited both diurnal and nocturnal drift whereas rest of the all species *Torrenticola tetraporella, Torrenticola semisuta, Monastractides oxystomus, Monastractides tuzovskyi, Sperchon clupeifer, Atractides nodipalpis, Atractides indicus, Atractides garwhali, Hygrobates gangeticus, Hygrobates flaviatilis, Kongsbergia indica, Kongsbergia rucira, Aturus fontinalis, Arrenurus kurtvietsi, Arrenurus fontinalis, Limnesia lembangensis* and *Unionicola affinis* exhibited diurnal drift during the course of the study.

This characteristic diel drift pattern had been explained in relation to different ecological conditions like visual predation, mites life histories and physico-chemical responses. It is assumed that it is an adaptation to avoid predation by visual macro predators such as carnivorous fish fries, crabs and macrozoobenthos. Our observations corroborates with similar other studies that have correlated drift with predator presence (Allan, 1978 and Flecker, 1992). The diurnal drift periodicity and high aquatic mites drift density might reflect interspecific relations between invertebrates and macro consumers. According to predation hypothesis by Flecker (1992) and Allan and Castillo (2007), benthic invertebrates would be more active during night hours due to the presence of diurnal predators.

Drift sampling techniques provided important and often complementary information on stream mites diversity. The present work showed distributional as well as drifting pattern of mites in snow fed river Alaknanda. As water mites act as good bio indicators; the appearance of *Hygrobates flaviatilis* stipulated that the water quality was degraded due to pollution or human activity as this species is considered as one of the pollution tolerant species.

Acknowledgements
The First Author (PB) gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance rendered by Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) as a major Project F. No.–ECR/2016/001291.

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