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Published in:
Applied Soil Ecology

DOI:
10.1016/j.apsoil.2015.08.017

Print publication: 01/01/2016

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Link to publication

Citation for pulished version (APA):
Stone, D., Costa, D., Daniell, TJ., Mitchell, SM., Griffiths, BS., & Topp, CFE. (2016). Using nematode communities to test a European scale soil biological monitoring programme for policy development. *Applied Soil Ecology*, *97*, 78-85. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apsoil.2015.08.017

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*Manuscript

Using nematode communities to test a European scale soil biological monitoring programme for policy development

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Abstract

There is a current need to identify European biological indicators of biodiversity and ecosystem function that can be used for soil monitoring, in order to aid policy making. Europe, however, is subdivided into different bio-geographical (climate) zones, containing different soils and varying management practices. This work (as part of the EcoFINDERS project) set out to determine the range of variation in nematode community structure as a potential indicator across European bio-geographical zones, taking into account land use and soil characteristics. Nematodes have been suggested as biological indicators for the monitoring of soil quality due to their involvement in the delivery of functions such as carbon sequestration and recycling of nutrients as well as the provision of habitat for biodiversity. Using a molecular (directed-T-RFLP) approach for rapid nematode community structure assessment and a traditional morphological assessment at a

24 feeding group level, we determined that nematode communities differ between bio-geographical
25 zones and between different land uses within bio-geographical zones. Therefore, at the very large
26 or trans-national level, the presence of any differing bio-geographical zones within the monitored
27 area should be taken into account when sampling and analysing data. Care should be taken when
28 making comparisons across different bio-geographical zones.

29

30 **Keywords:** Nematodes, Nematode communities, large scale sampling campaign, T_RFLP,

31

32 **1 Introduction**

33 Since the development of the Soil Thematic Strategy (EU, 2002) there has been increasing
34 interest in the links between both soil biodiversity and soil ecosystem service provision, and soil
35 quality (Ritz et al., 2009). Subsequent developments in environmental monitoring and risk
36 assessment are moving toward the use of indicators and endpoints that are related to soil
37 functioning and ecosystem services (Faber et al., 2013). Currently there is no comprehensive
38 indicator of soil biodiversity that can combine all the different aspects of soil complexity in a
39 single formula thus allowing accurate comparisons (Turbé et al., 2010). In response to this
40 problem, it has been suggested that a suite of indicators should be used (Faber et al., 2013, Stone
41 et al., 2015). Soil nematodes are recognised as potentially useful indicators due to their high
42 sensitivity to perturbations and disturbances (Chen et al., 2010). Nematodes are present in all
43 trophic levels of soil food webs making them a good indicator for the functions of carbon
44 sequestration and recycling of nutrients as well as involvement in the function of provision of
45 habitat for biodiversity (Ritz and Trudgill, 1999; Chen et al., 2010, Griffiths et al., 2012).

46 Nematodes have been used as biological indicators across individual countries for some time
47 (Faber et al., 2013; Stone et al., 2015). However, a greater level of detail regarding the range of
48 biodiversity present across all European bio-geographical zones, land uses and soil types is
49 needed to aid European policy makers in the development of soil policy. In 2001, the OECD
50 identified that to improve the interpretation of biodiversity indicators there was a need for
51 information on their spatial and temporal coverage, including not only species presence, but also
52 changes in species abundance and their distribution (OECD, 2001). This information should be
53 as overall trends rather than absolute values. Specifically, if baselines could be established for
54 the indicator measured, this could help improve the assessment of progress towards current goals
55 and therefore the establishment of future targets. If nematodes are to be used as an indicator for
56 soil biodiversity and ecosystem function across Europe, nematode communities need to be
57 assessed across a range of European soil, land use and climate characteristics. The sensitivity of
58 nematodes as an indicator should be able to reflect the influence of management and climate on
59 long-term changes in soil quality (Breure, 2004).
60 Molecular methods of identifying soil dwelling nematodes for the purposes of assessing
61 nematode communities are in an exciting period of development. The traditional method of
62 morphological identification to genus or species by microscopic examination of a subset of the
63 extracted community is still used, but there has been a recent increase in the development and
64 use of molecular based approaches as the technology has advanced and become quicker and
65 cheaper to use (Chen et al., 2010, Donn et al., 2012, Porazinska et al., 2012, Yang et al. 2013).
66 To take account of this transition in the use of morphological and molecular methods, both types
67 of analyses were performed on nematodes extracted from the sampled sites of the EcoFINDERS

68 transect (Stone et al, 2015) to provide a pool of nematode community data that could be
69 compared and used interchangeably.
70 Our hypothesis was that there were characteristic nematode communities according to bio-
71 geographical zones, land management schemes and soil types. Such information would be
72 relevant to inform the design of future, European scale, biological monitoring schemes.
73

74 **2 Method**

75 A transect of 81 sites were sampled across European climatic or bio-geographical zones (Figure
76 1). Due to sampling constraints, one composite sample was collected from each site, with no
77 replication A detailed outline of the sample sites is given in Stone et al. (2015). Each site was
78 sampled following a pre-agreed standard operating procedure (SOP) whereby 20 cores of 5 cm
79 diameter and 5 cm depth were collected at random within a 2 m^2 area chosen as typical for each
80 of the 81 sites (Stone et al., 2015). Cores were transported to a central handling facility at 4 ºC
81 where a single, composite sample for each site was prepared from 12 of the 20 cores. The
82 composite sample was broken up by hand and mixed using the cone and quarter method (Massey
83 *et al*., 2014). From this composite sample, 100 g of fresh soil was subsampled for nematode
84 elutriation. At the same time, a second subsample of 30 g was taken for moisture content
85 determination. Nematode extraction with an Oostenbrink elutriator was performed following an
86 adapted version of ISO 23611-4:2007(E) where the suspension of nematodes and small soil
87 particles were passed through four sieves of decreasing mesh width (mesh width: 180 µm, 120
88 µm, 95 µm and 45 µm pore size respectively). The catch was then washed from each sieve onto
89 tissue filters mounted on supporting sieves within Baermann funnels of water and left at room
90 temperature for 48 hours. During this time the nematodes separated themselves from the debris

91 on the filter through active downward movement and were captured in water in 50 ml centrifuge
92 tubes. Nematodes were allowed to settle for 24 hours at 4 ºC and the supernatant then removed
93 by careful pipetting to leave 4 ml of nematode sample.
94 Extracted nematodes were sub-divided into two samples (A and B) in separate micro-centrifuge
95 tubes. Nematodes were once again allowed to settle for 6 hours at 4°C and the supernatant then
96 removed by careful pipetting to leave 0.5 ml of nematode sample in each tube. Nematodes in
97 sample A were frozen and stored for DNA extraction and terminal restriction fragment length
98 polymorphism (T-RFLP) analysis. Nematodes in sample B were fixed in DESS, following the
99 method of Yoder et al. (2006), for counting and morphological identification to trophic group
100 level.
101 Genomic DNA was extracted from sample A using a Purelink® Genomic DNA Kit (Invitrogen)
102 according to the manufacturer's protocol for Mammalian Tissue and Mouse/Rat Tail Lysate.
103 DNA was eluted in 50 µl Tris Buffer (10 mM Tris-HCL pH 8.0) and then stored at –20 ºC until
104 used as a PCR template for directed-TRFLP as described by Donn et al. (2012).
105 DNA (18S rDNA) was selected for amplification using the primers: Nem_SSU_F74
106 (AARCYGCGWAHRGCTCRKTA) (Donn et al., 2011) and fluorescently labelled FAM-
107 Nem_18S_R (GGGCGGTATCTRATCGCC) (Floyd et al 2005) (Eurofins MWG Operon,
108 Ebersberg, Germany). PCR amplifications of 1.2 µl genomic DNA template were performed in
109 15 µl final volume reactions containing 1.5 µl of x10 PCR buffer (Bioline, London, UK) with 2
110 mM $MgCl_2$ (0.6 µl 50 mM $MgCl_2$), 0.3 µl each of 10 mM dNTP mix and BSA, 0.45 µl of each
111 primer (10 pmol/µl) and 0.12 µl of *Taq* polymerase (0.6 units). The volume of template DNA
112 was as used by Wiesel et al. (2015) and yielded robust PCR amplification. All PCRs were
113 performed on a G-STORM Thermal Cycler (Gene Technologies Ltd., Braintree, Essex, UK).

114 The thermal cycling involved one initial denaturation cycle at 94 ºC for 2 minutes, followed by
115 35 cycles of denaturation at 94 ºC for 30 seconds, annealing at 51 ºC for 30 s, and extension at 68
116 ºC for 30 seconds. A final elongation step was performed at 68 ºC for 10 minutes. Positive
117 (DNA extracted from mixed nematodes, confirmed by preliminary study) and negative (distilled
118 water) controls were included for each amplification series.
119 The amplified DNA then underwent T-RFLP analysis in a dual enzyme sequential digest. Firstly
120 a PleI enzyme mix, made up of 1 x NEBuffer4 (20 mM Tris-acetate, 10 mM magnesium acetate,
121 50 mM potassium acetate, 1 mM dithiothreitol (pH 7.9)), 100 µg ml^{-1} BSA (supplied with the
122 enzyme) and 2 units PleI per µl (all reagents from New England Biolabs, Hitchin, UK), was
123 added to 10 µl PCR products which were digested at 37°C for 60 min, followed by 65°C for 20
124 min, to denature the enzyme. Digested products were then digested in a BtsCI enzyme mix,
125 made up of 1 x NEBuffer4 (as above), 100 µg ml^{-1} BSA (supplied with the enzyme) and 2 units
126 BtsCI per µl, with incubation at 50°C for a further 1 h. Products were then frozen at -20 ºC to
127 inactivate the BtsCI enzyme and transported to the James Hutton Institute, Dundee, UK in dry
128 ice. Digest products were diluted 1 in 10 and subsequently 1 µl of this dilution was mixed with 9
129 µl Hi-Di™ Formamide and 0.05 µl ROX labelled MapMarker 1000 (BioVentures, Murfreesboro,
130 Tennessee, USA). Fragments were then analysed on an ABI 3730 capillary sequencer (Applied
131 Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA). Output was processed using a genemapper (Applied
132 Biosystems), followed by calculation of relative abundance and removal of peaks representing
133 less than 1% abundance within any sample as described in Donn et al., (2012).
134 Nematode community data translated from T-RFLP peaks, previously identified as representing
135 nematode taxa isolated from UK soils at the family level (Donn et al., 2012), were assigned to

136 major trophic groups characterized by feeding habits: bacterial-feeders, fungal-feeders, plant-
137 feeders, omnivores and predators.
138 For morphological analysis of sample B, the nematode samples were shaken to homogenise the
139 content and a 200 µl subsample was placed in a Doncaster counting plate (Doncaster 1962). The
140 nematodes were counted and identified at the trophic level (bacterial-feeders, fungal-feeders,
141 plant–feeders, omnivores and predators) by observing the head/ mouth structures under an
142 inverted microscope (100x and 200x magnification). The 200 µl subsample contained an
143 average of 480 nematodes (range 40 – 1600), with either all the nematodes or a maximum of 200
144 being identified as appropriate. Results were converted to the total volume of sample and then
145 soil moisture content values were used to report numbers per gram of dry soil.
146 Due to the sampling constraints that dictated that each site could only be sampled once with no
147 on-site replication, sites were grouped by biogeographic region, land use, and pre-set ranges of
148 soil texture, pH and organic matter content. Replicates within groups were compared.
149 Multivariate analysis (Principal Component Analysis, PCA, using Genstat version 16) was
150 performed on the nematode community structure as reported from both the T-RFLP and
151 morphological identification. Factor scores from the PCA analysis of both T-RFLP and
152 morphological identification were run through analysis of variance (ANOVA) by soil type,
153 biogeographic region and land use. Tukey multiple comparison tests were carried out on means
154 indicated to be significantly different by ANOVA. A multivariate analysis of variance approach
155 for unbalanced designs (RMULTIVARIATE, Genstat 16) and multivariate linear mixed models
156 (MLMM) were used to compare the effect of the biogeographical zone, land use, soil texture,
157 soil carbon and pH on the nematode communities as reported by both the T-RFLP score and the
158 morphological identification. In both cases, only three-way interactions were included in the

159 analysis and combination of variables that had no effect on the significance were excluded in a
160 step-wise manner. Results were considered statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. A linear
161 regression model was used to assess the effects of biogeographical zone, land use, soil texture,
162 soil carbon and pH on nematode abundance in the soil. In order to meet the assumptions of the
163 analysis, the square transformation was applied to the data. Results were considered statistically
164 significant at $p < 0.05$.
165

166 **3 Results**

167 The 81 sites sampled provided a range of bio-geographical zones, land uses and soil types (Table
168 1) representative of the European situation (Figure 1, and see Stone et al., 2015 for more in-depth
169 analysis).
170 Nematode community structure differed between bio-geographical zones and between land use
171 within bio-geographical zone (Figure 2 and 3). Variation around means was high, but significant
172 differences between nematode communities were found using both T-RFLP and morphological
173 assessment at a ($P<0.01$). Data from T-RFLP showed that nematode community structure
174 differed between Boreal and all other bio-geographical zones ($P<0.01$), while data from
175 morphological assessment showed that the nematode communities from Boreal, Continental and
176 Mediterranean were separated from all other bio-geographical zones, with the Atlantic and
177 Alpine communities being similar (Figure 2)
178 Grouping sites into combinations of bio-geographical zone and land use produced tighter clusters
179 (significantly different means at $p<0.05$ from both T-RFLP and morphological assessment)
180 (Figure 3).
181

182 Nematode community structure differed between soils of varying organic carbon content, pH and
183 texture by both methods of assessment (Figure 2). However, there were differences between the
184 methods as to which soil parameters were correlated with changes in nematode community
185 structure. The T-RFLP method showed differences between soils of different organic carbon
186 content and pH, though no differences in community were seen in soils of varying texture.
187 However, the morphological assessment did show differences in the structure of nematode
188 communities in soils of differing texture, with medium textured soils separating out from the
189 other sites.
190
191 For nematode feeding types identified morphologically, the RMULTIVARIATE model
192 accounted for 31% of the variance for plant feeding nematodes, 31% for omnivores, 44% for
193 bacteriovores and 11% for predators. For fungal feeders the residual variance was greater than
194 the variance of the response variate. Both RMULTIVARIATE and MLMM analyses revealed
195 significant effects of biogeographical zone, texture and soil organic carbon on nematode
196 community structure (Table 2). The only significant interaction was between soil organic carbon,
197 texture and pH. For nematode feeding types identified from T-RFLP, the model accounted for
198 2% of the variance for plant feeding nematodes, 37% for omnivores, 30% for bacteriovores and
199 11% for fungal feeders, with no predators being identified. Biogeographical zone was identified
200 as significantly affecting nematode community structure (Table 3), with an interaction between
201 biogeographical zone and soil texture being identified by MLMM and between texture, pH and
202 soil organic carbon by RMULTIVARIATE. Total nematode abundance showed significant
203 interactions between land use and soil texture. Thus, land use (forestry) / texture (organic) P =

204 0.037; land use (grassland) / texture (medium) P = 0.011 and land use (grassland) / texture
205 (medium fine/fine/very fine) P = 0.007.
206

207 **4 Discussion**

208 The European sampling campaign was designed to allow an assessment of nematode community
209 structure as an indicator for soil monitoring through an investigation of the range of nematode
210 community structure types across different biogeographic region, under different land uses and
211 in soils of different characteristics.
212 The differences seen in nematode community structure across Europe strongly support the use of
213 bio-geographical zones to rationalise samples within a monitoring scheme at this scale. The
214 indicator schemes identified in the introduction (Faber et al., 2013, Griffiths et al., 2012) were
215 based at the national level, and are fit for purpose at that scale. However, Europe can be sub-
216 divided in many ways into different zones, based on climate, vegetation, and other factors
217 (Römbke and Breure, 2005). This makes it important when monitoring at the trans-national or
218 European level to take differences between bio-geographical zones into account, as normal
219 ranges of diversity in nematode community structure may create differences between zones.
220 These differences may mask changes in indicator values in response to stresses or perturbations
221 without proper calibration. Detailed analysis of nematode communities across different
222 European grassland types (Ekschmitt et al., 2001) suggests that discriminating different land-
223 uses as a factor within bio-geographical zones produces a greater level of accuracy for
224 monitoring nematode community structure. Our analysis, at the trophic group level, actually
225 showed no interactions between bio-geographical zone and land use. Thus the effects of land use
226 were consistent across the five bio-geographical zones studied. The only significant interaction,

227 from either the morphological or T-RFLP data, was between soil organic carbon, texture and pH.
228 Given that texture and pH had no significant effects on their own, we interpret this as indicating
229 the effects of soil organic carbon on nematode community structure are modified by texture and
230 pH.
231 The methods used in this study are designed for the rapid screening of a large number of samples
232 and are therefore rather coarse tools with which to investigate the structure of the nematode
233 communities present. Variation in species diversity between sites is not explicitly captured by
234 either method, both of which operate at a higher taxonomic level consistent with feeding group.
235 Thus there may well be differences in species composition that are not detected at the feeding
236 group level. In spite of this, the trends of clustering seen in the PCA data within bio-
237 geographical zone, land use and soil characteristics indicate where the differences in nematode
238 community structure within these groupings occur. These rapid screening methods therefore
239 allow a large number of samples to be quickly investigated, and indicate which samples should
240 be selected for intensive analysis at a later time with a method capturing species diversity
241 (Griffiths et al., 2012) (either morphological identification to species, or species identification by
242 sequencing of nematode DNA) or a method of assessment at family/order taxonomic levels as
243 opposed to feeding groups.
244 The directed-T-RFLP method used (Donn et al., 2012) was originally developed to assess UK
245 soil nematode assemblages. Though it has been shown to work in this instance at the European
246 scale, additional data from other European nematodes would increase the taxonomic resolution.
247 This would allow the examination of nematode community structure at the family or genera
248 level, whilst retaining the rapidity and large volume of samples intrinsic to the method. The
249 additional level of taxonomic resolution would be a major factor in the applicability of this

method to assess nematode community structure as an indicator for soil monitoring. A study by Wiesel et al. (2015) showed that the size of the soil sample used for the initial nematode extraction prior to T-RFLP needs to be in the order of 100g to ensure a representative sample. The time and expertise needed to carry out the morphological identification of samples to high taxonomic resolution is a constraint in many cases. Improvements in the application and throughput of molecular techniques would allow for larger scale monitoring (Thompson & Newmaster, 2014).

5 Conclusion

Nematode community structure varies between European bio-geographical zones, land-use and soil organic carbon categories., This should be taken into account when planning any trans-national or European soil monitoring scheme using nematodes as an indicator. The rapid morphological and molecular methods tested are an acceptable proxy screening for nematode community structure as they are sensitive to bio-geographical zone, land use and some soil characteristics. The rapid molecular directed- T-RFLP method has a greater ability to handle the large sample volumes needed for rapid sample screening. A more in-depth follow-up method is required for both methods, to provide the greater taxonomic resolution needed to compare species diversity and functional attributes.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the European Union within the project EcoFINDERS (FP7-264465). The James Hutton Institute and SRUC were partly funded by the Rural and

272 Environment Science and Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government. The authors
273 thank the anonymous referees for comments.
274

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358 Poiras, L., and De Ley, P., 2006. DESS: a versatile solution for preserving morphology and
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361 Table 1. Nematode abundance (no g^{-1} dry soil with standard deviation) of the 81 sites sampled,
362 by biogeographical zone, land use and soil parameter. *Organic Carbon Content was not
363 determined for site POR_01 as there was not enough sample to allow this test.

Category	Number of sites	Nematode Abundance (per gram dry soil)	Std Dev
Bio-geographical Zone			
Alpine	12	25.8	8.1
Atlantic	33	24.1	18.5
Boreal	4	27.7	9.4
Continental	27	23.0	15.9
Mediterranean	5	8.3	6.7
Landuse			
Arable	27	13.8	15.2
Forestry	19	25.6	13.5
Grassland	35	29.2	14.2
Soil pH			
Acidic (<pH 5)	12	27.7	8.3
Neutral (pH 5-7)	41	23.3	16.9
Alkaline (>pH 7)	28	20.0	15.8
Soil Organic Carbon Content *			
< 2 % (Mineral Soils)	22	12.5	6.7
2 % - 15 % (Organo-mineral soils)	51	26.6	16.9
> 15 % (Organic soils)	7	31.3	12.1
Soil Texture			
Coarse	15	24.3	20.6
Medium	26	23.1	16.4
Medium Fine /Fine/Very Fine	32	21.0	13.2
Organic	7	31.2	12.2

364

365 Table 2. Degrees (df) and numerated degrees of freedom (n.df), and the significance value (P)
366 from regression analysis using a multivariate analysis of variance approach for unbalanced
367 designs (RMULTIVARIATE) and multivariate linear mixed models (MLMM) of nematode
368 feeding groups identified morphologically against the categories outlined in Table 1
369 (biogeographical zone (Zone), land use, soil texture, soil pH and soil organic carbon content
370 (orgC)). Only combinations of categories that had a significant bearing on the regression
371 outcome are presented, combinations with no significant bearing are not presented or labelled as
372 n/a (not applicable).

Category	**RMULTIVARIATE**		**MLMM**	
	df	**P**	**n.df**	**P**
All terms	45	0.009	33	<0.001
Zone	4	0.013	20	0.008
Land Use	2	0.021	10	0.016
Texture	3	0.438	15	0.372
pH	2	0.339	10	0.285
orgC	1	0.000	5	<0.001
Zone/Land Use	6	0.160	30	0.109
Zone/Texture	7	0.644	n/a	n/a
Zone/pH	3	0.142	20	0.242
Zone/orgC	n/a	n/a	20	0.827
Land Use/Texture	5	0.379	25	0.372
Land Use/pH	3	0.089	15	0.142
Texture/pH	4	0.252	20	0.172
Texture/orgC	2	0.943	10	0.889
pH/orgC	1	0.439	5	0.382
Zone/Land Use/Texture	1	0.050	n/a	n/a
Zone/Land Use/pH	n/a	n/a	5	0.11
Texture/pH/orgC	1	0.025	5	<0.001

373
374

375 Table 3. Degrees (df) and numerated degrees of freedom (n.df), and the significance value (P)
376 from regression analysis using a multivariate analysis of variance approach for unbalanced
377 designs (RMULTIVARIATE) and multivariate linear mixed models (MLMM) of nematode
378 feeding groups identified by directed-T-RFLP against the categories outlined in Table 1
379 (biogeographical zone (Zone), land use, soil texture, soil pH and soil organic carbon content
380 (orgC)). Only combinations of categories that had a significant bearing on the regression
381 outcome are presented, combinations with no significant bearing are not presented or labelled as
382 n/a (not applicable).

383

Category	RMULTIVARIATE		MLMM	
	df	P	n.df	P
All terms	46	0.010	54	<0.001
Zone	4	0.000	16	<0.001
Land Use	2	0.059	8	0.082
Texture	3	0.582	12	0.599
pH	2	0.184	n/a	n/a
orgC	1	0.260	n/a	n/a
Zone/Land Use	6	0.143	24	0.115
Zone/Texture	7	0.053	28	0.041
Zone/pH	3	0.549	n/a	n/a
Zone/orgC	1	0.157	n/a	n/a
Land Use/Texture	5	0.068	n/a	n/a
Land Use/pH	3	0.403	n/a	n/a
Land Use/orgC	1	0.191	n/a	n/a
Texture/pH	4	0.597	n/a	n/a
Texture/orgC	2	0.750	n/a	n/a
pH/orgC	1	0.643	n/a	n/a
Texture/pH/orgC	1	0.048	n/a	n/a

384
385

386 Figure 1. Distribution of the 81 sites sampled across Europe

387

388 Figure 2 PCA plots of nematode community structure differences based on nematode feeding
389 groups (group means and SEM) identified by: a) nematode trophic group data from T-RFLP
390 peaks, b) nematode trophic group data from morphological identification. i) within bio-
391 geographical zones, ii) within land use categories, iii) within soil texture categories, iv) within
392 soil pH categories, v) within soil organic carbon categories, vi) loadings

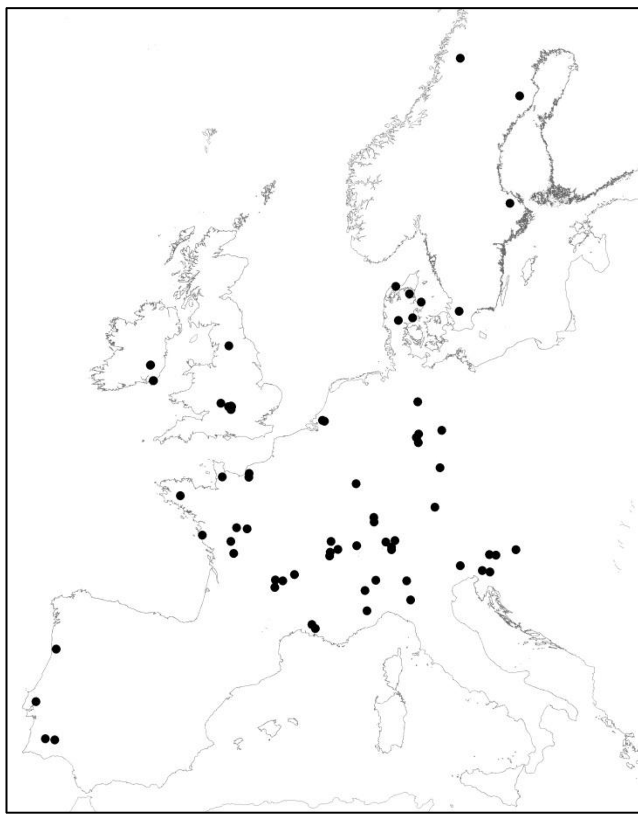
393

394 Figure 3. PCA plots of nematode community structure differences based on nematode feeding
395 groups (group means and SEM) identified by: a) nematode trophic group data from T-RFLP
396 peaks, b) nematode trophic group data from morphological identification. i) Bio-geographical
397 zones within Arable land use, ii) Bio-geographical zones within Forestry land use, iii) Bio-
398 geographical zones within Grassland land use.

399

400

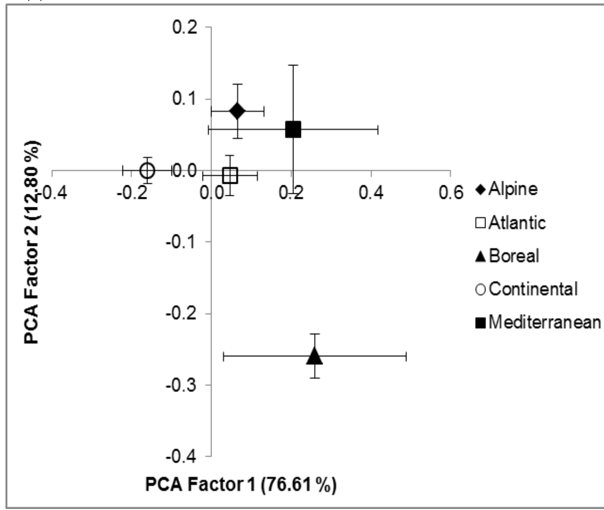
401 Figure 1.

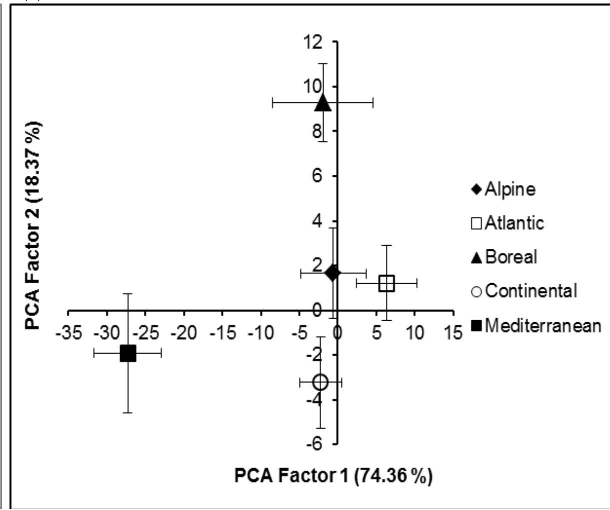


402
403

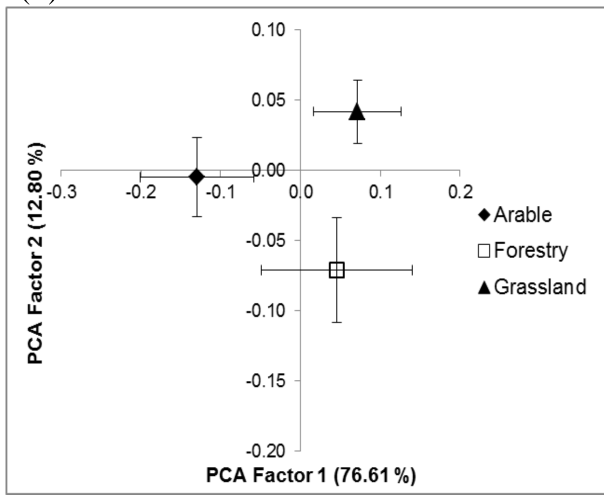
404 Figure 2

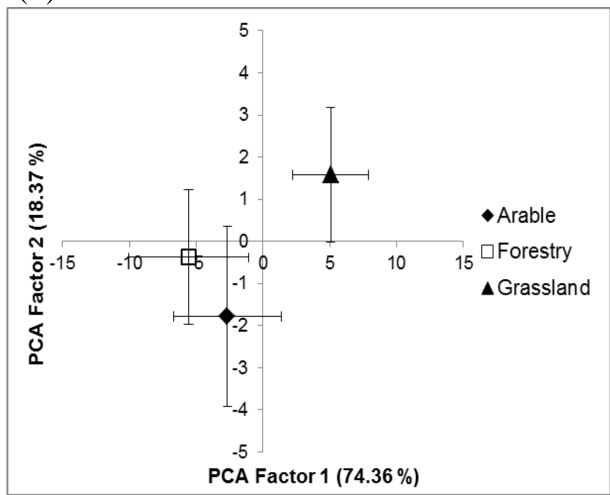
405 a(i) b(i)





406
407
408 a(ii) b(ii)





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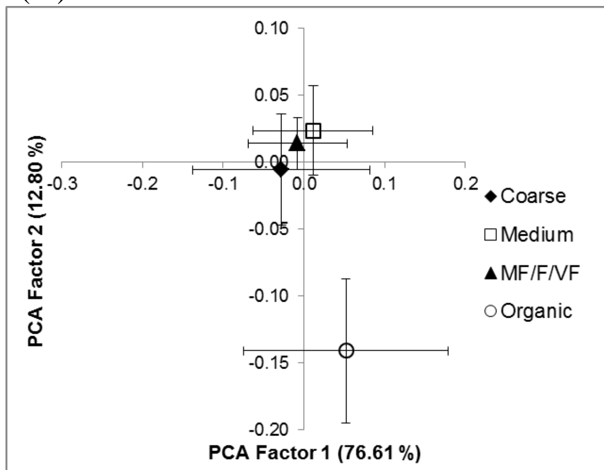
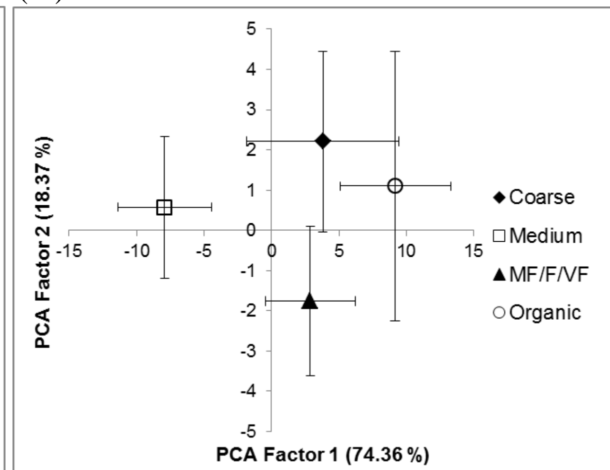
410
411 a(iii) b(iii)





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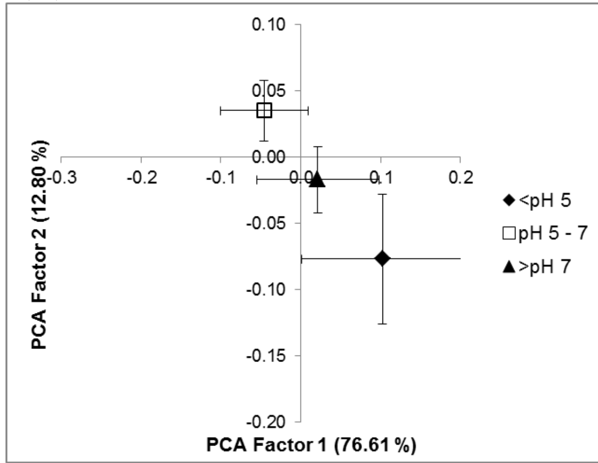
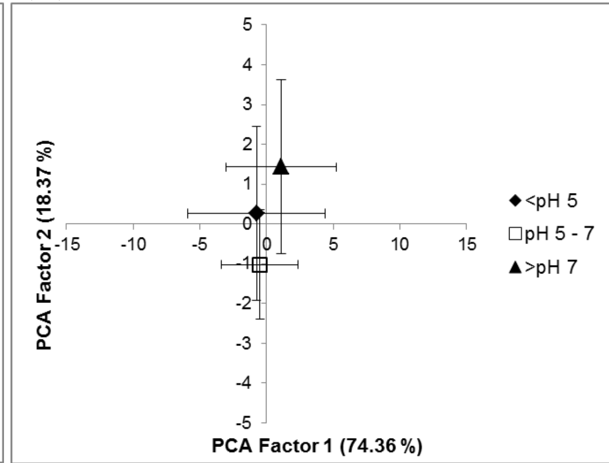
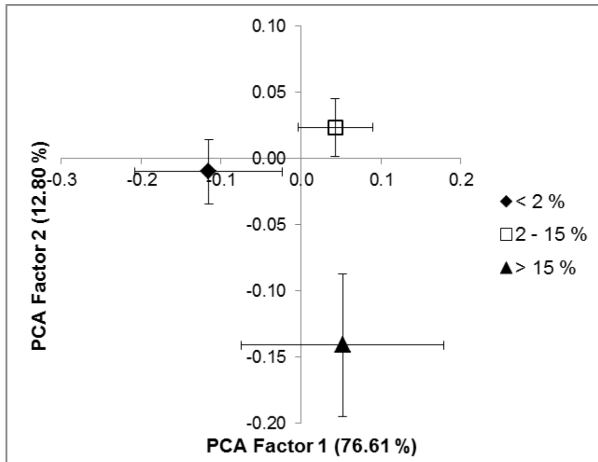
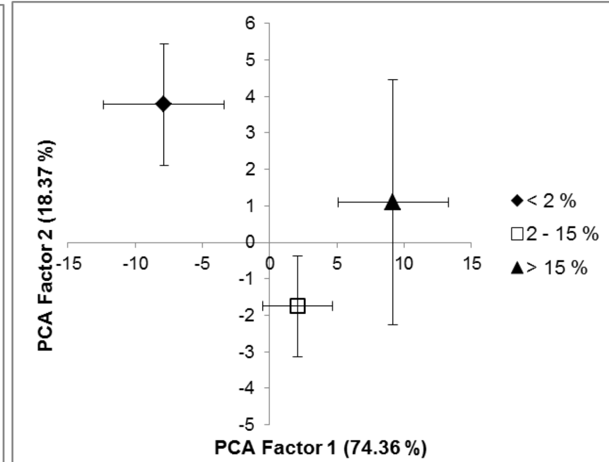
413
414 a(iv) b(iv)



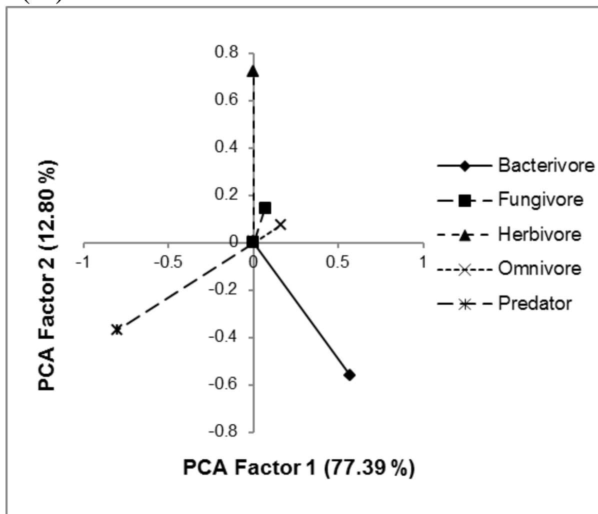


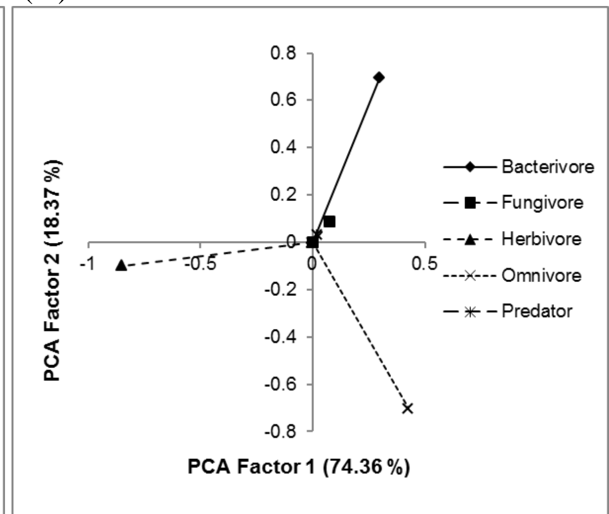
415
416
417 a(v) b(v)





418
419
420 a(vi) b(vi)

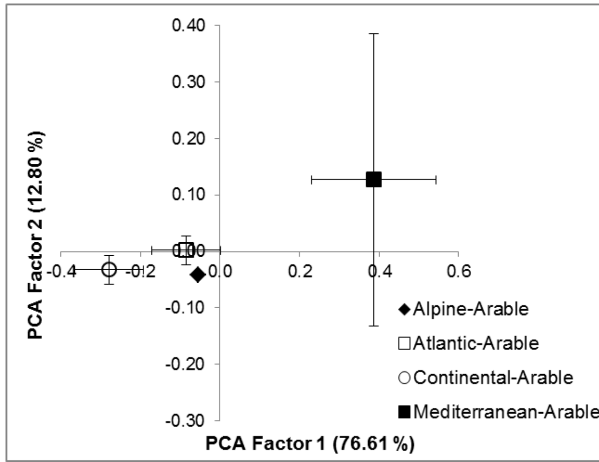


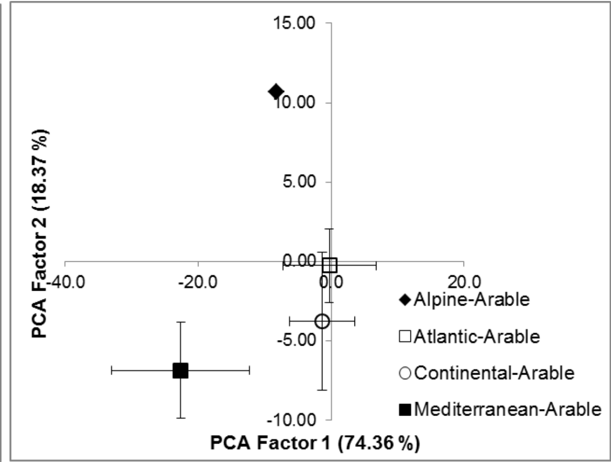


421

422 Figure 3.

423 a(i) b(i)





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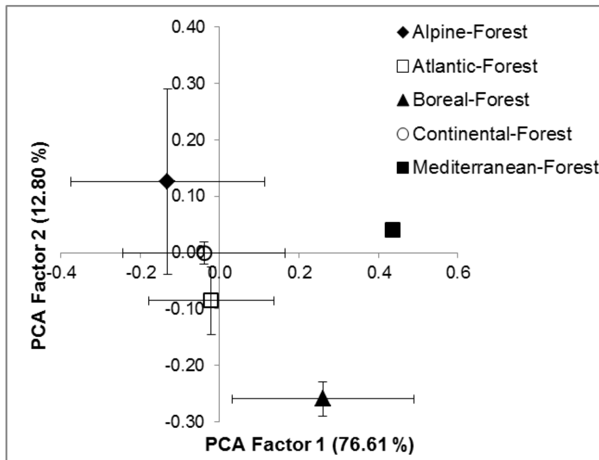
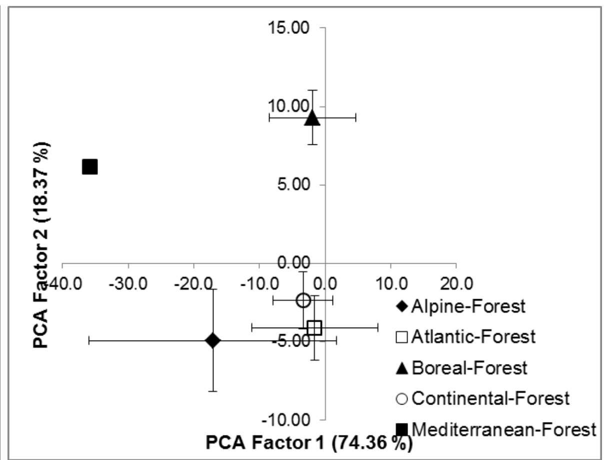
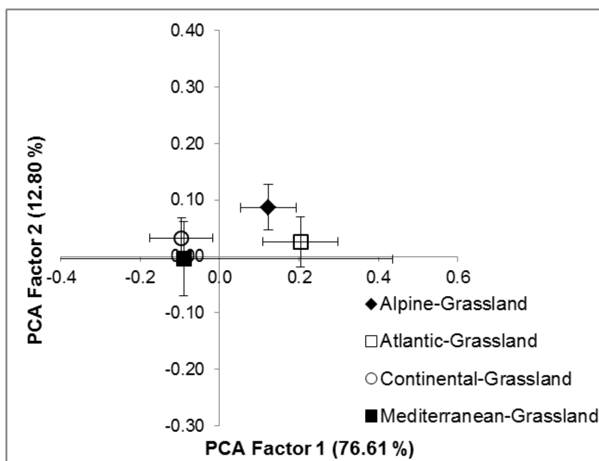
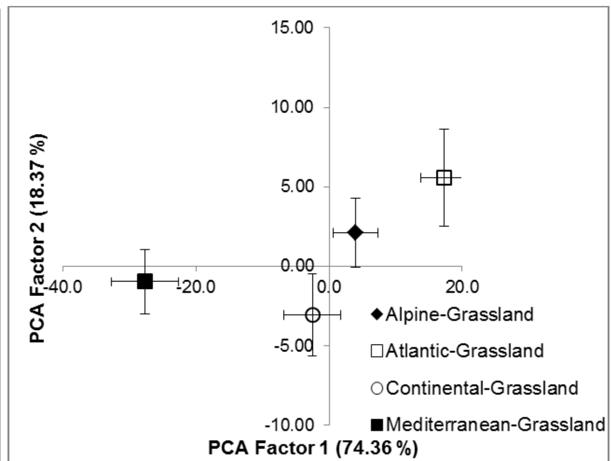
425 a(ii) b(ii)





426
427 a(ii) b(ii)





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