

Preface

An inquiring mind

For 40 years, Dan Cohen has consistently made innovative contributions to the literature of evolutionary ecology. His work has touched many people across a broad spectrum of interests.

His early training in plant physiology provided firm grounding for his remarkably fertile imagination, and allowed Danny to become one of the most original theoretical biologists. Influenced by interactions with brilliant thinkers such as Richard Lewontin and Heinz von Foerster, Danny, as a young man, published influential work on biological formation (Cohen, 1967) and life-history strategies in fluctuating environments (Cohen, 1966; Lewontin and Cohen, 1969). That work is as fresh today as it was when he first created it.

Through the years, Danny's research expanded; but the consistent thread remained understanding evolutionary strategies in variable environments. He recognized early in his career the importance of replacing the classical optimization arguments by game-theoretic ones that took into account the density- and frequency-dependent context of ecological interactions.

Through the force of his ideas, his deep understanding of biology and, most of all, his excitement for learning, he attracted a diverse set of collaborators to work with him. In this volume, we only sample the breadth of those collaborations. When we decided to honour Dan Cohen on the occasion of his retirement, the problem was not how to get people to contribute; rather, it was how to fit into the limited pages of this Special Issue a selection that could represent the diversity of his influence. That having been done, those we invited leaped at the chance to show their admiration for Danny. Danny's insights have stimulated so many, that each of those represented in the collection can trace his influence in their work. Those who have had the pleasure of working collaboratively with Danny would find it hard to identify another driven so simply by a thirst for understanding, and motivated so little by personal aggrandisement. Collaboration with Dan Cohen is a true exercise in sharing of ideas and talents, in which the gain always seems biased in favour of the collaborator.

This Special Issue contains nine papers, selected to represent some of the most important themes Danny has developed so far during his career. The contributors are all people Danny has touched along the way, and all were thrilled at the chance to honour him. Evolutionary ecology is one of the most vibrant areas of theoretical investigation today, and has been since Danny and others like him began placing the hard questions into simple theoretical frameworks. It has always been Danny's unique talent to distil the simple from the complex, and to get to the nub of a difficult issue with stunning clarity. The subject is much better for

his influence, and we all look forward to the new directions in which his rich imagination will take us in the new millennium.

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