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# High-frequency logging technologies reveal state-dependent hyporheic process dynamics: implications for hydroecological studies

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## Abstract

This paper presents a novel method for assessing hyporheic water quality dynamics using advances in sensor technology. High-resolution (15 min) dissolved oxygen (DO) and hydraulic head data were combined to assess groundwater–surface water (GW–SW) interactions in the hyporheic zone. DO concentrations varied at fine temporal and spatial scales, depending on the relative contributions of GW and SW. The effect of sample frequency on observed patterns of variability was assessed with reference to studies of the ecology of salmon spawning habitat. Conventional approaches fail to capture the full range of temporal variability in hyporheic water quality and demonstrate the need to reassess the interpretations of previous studies of the hyporheic zone. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

**Key Words** hydrology; hyporheic; oxygen; ecology; salmon; redd; chemistry

## Introduction

In recent years there has been increased recognition of the importance of the hyporheic zone to the hydroecological functioning of river systems (Hancock *et al.*, 2005). Associated with this has been an increase in hyporheic zone research and consideration of its importance in legislation such as the Water Framework Directive of the European Union. It is now clear that the physical and chemical characteristics of the hyporheic zone can affect a wide range of hydroecological processes, including nutrient processing (McKnight *et al.*, 2004), microbial (Findlay *et al.*, 2003) and invertebrate communities (Storey and Williams, 2004).

One area of particular interest in hyporheic research has been the influence of hyporheic processes on the reproductive success of gravel spawning fish (Malcolm *et al.*, 2003a, 2004; Groves and Chandler, 2005). Salmonids deposit their eggs in open gravel structures (known as redds) to depths of up to 300 mm in the hyporheic zone. Embryo survival and performance between spawning and emergence, a period that may be in excess of 5 months, is strongly influenced by the delivery of sufficient oxygen to meet the requirements of developing embryos (Malcolm *et al.*, 2003b). Historically, fisheries scientists have viewed the streambed (i.e. the hyporheic zone) in overly simplistic terms, often assuming the stream itself to be the only source of water to the redd. This led research to focus primarily on the role of fine sediment in determining

1 hyporheic oxygen supply, and thus embryo survival.  
 2 However, a number of field-based studies have now  
 3 demonstrated that the link between sediment size  
 4 characteristics, streambed oxygen and embryo sur-  
 5 vival is not clear (Sowden and Power, 1985; Peter-  
 6 son and Quinn, 1996), and there is increasing real-  
 7 ization of the importance of groundwater–surface  
 8 water (GW–SW) interactions in determining  
 9 hyporheic water quality (Groves and Chandler, 2005).

10 In particular, recent studies have shown that the dis-  
 11 charge of chemically reduced (low dissolved oxygen  
 12 (DO)) groundwater may adversely affect embryo per-  
 13 formance in the hyporheic zone (Youngson *et al.*,  
 14 2005) and that GW–SW interactions can be highly  
 15 dynamic, changing rapidly over the period of a single  
 16 hydrological event (Malcolm *et al.*, 2004).

17 Although hydrologists have inferred the nature of  
 18 GW–SW interactions from fine-resolution monitor-  
 19 ing of hillslope flowpaths (Haria and Shand, 2004;  
 20 Vidon and Hill, 2004), there have been few studies  
 21 using similar resolution hydrometric data to assess  
 22 exchange processes directly in the hyporheic zone  
 23 (Geist, 2000; Malcolm *et al.*, 2004). Even rarer are  
 24 investigations combining high-resolution hydrochem-  
 25 ical and hydrometric data to characterize GW–SW  
 26 interactions in the hyporheic zone. Kirchner *et al.*  
 27 (2004) highlighted the potential of high-frequency  
 28 water quality monitoring for understanding the links  
 29 between hydrology and stream chemistry, noting that  
 30 most hydrochemical studies are based on data col-  
 31 lected at weekly or monthly intervals, sometimes with  
 32 more frequent sampling during individual hydrologi-  
 33 cal events. Such approaches miss much of the vari-  
 34 ability observed with continuous water quality mon-  
 35 itoring and fail to identify temporally variable event  
 36 responses that result from rapidly changing hydro-  
 37 logical conditions. These problems are exacerbated  
 38 in hyporheic studies, where it is necessary for equip-  
 39 ment to remain buried in the streambed for prolonged  
 40 periods without maintenance or recalibration, where  
 41 water velocities are generally low and where physical  
 42 access during hydrological events is often danger-  
 43 ous or impossible. These constraints have dictated  
 44 that, to date, very little high-resolution hydrochem-  
 45 ical data have been collected in hyporheic studies,  
 46 despite awareness that a number of key water qual-  
 47 ity parameters (which have a demonstrable effect  
 48 on hyporheic ecology) vary dynamically over time  
 49 and space. Within the last year, new technology has

50 allowed high-resolution hyporheic oxygen measure-  
 51 ments to be made *in situ* using optical probes that  
 52 exhibit long-term stability, do not consume oxygen  
 53 during measurement and do not require a flow of  
 54 water past the sensor to obtain accurate readings.

55 In this paper we present data collected using this  
 56 new technology to assess the variability of dissolved  
 57 oxygen at fine temporal scales in the hyporheic zone  
 58 of salmon spawning gravels in an upland stream. Our  
 59 specific objectives are to: (i) characterize the temporal  
 60 and spatial variability of DO concentrations in an  
 61 artificial salmon redd; (ii) assess the influence of  
 62 GW–SW interactions in determining this variability;  
 63 (iii) evaluate the contribution that continuous water  
 64 quality data can make in improving our understanding  
 65 of hyporheic dynamics and ecological response.

## 66 Site Description

67 Detailed descriptions of the field site are avail-  
 68 able elsewhere (Malcolm *et al.*, 2004). Briefly, Glen  
 69 Girnock is a semi-natural upland catchment in Scot-  
 70 land (Figure 1). It ranges in altitude from ~230 to  
 71 862 m, and drains 30.3 km<sup>2</sup>. The geology is domi-  
 72 nated by igneous rocks (granite) with metamorphosed  
 73 rocks, including calcareous schists and serpentinite  
 74 elsewhere (Soulsby *et al.*, 2005). The solid geology  
 75 is overlain by a variety of glacial sediments that form  
 76 the parent material for soils, which include peats, pod-  
 77 zols, gleys and brown forest soils. Land use is domi-  
 78 nated by heather (*Calluna*) moorland. The Girnock  
 79 receives approximately 1100 mm of precipitation and  
 80 a gauging station provides 15 min resolution dis-  
 81 charge data at Littlemill (Figure 1). The burn has  
 82 a mean discharge of ~0.5 m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, varying between  
 83 <0.01 m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in the summer and >23 m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> dur-  
 84 ing floods. FRS Freshwater Laboratory has monitored  
 85 Atlantic salmon populations since 1966 and produce  
 86 redd maps (<1 m resolution) to identify spawning  
 87 distributions. Spawning gravels are characterized by  
 88 a geometric mean diameter (dg) of 9.98 mm and  
 89 are strongly coarse-skewed, with a low fines con-  
 90 tent (<2 mm), contributing 12% to the sediment mass  
 91 (Moir *et al.*, 2002). The area chosen for the study is  
 92 one of three main spawning areas in the catchment,  
 93 accounting for ~22% of total spawning activity in  
 94 the Girnock Burn between 1986 and 1988 (Gibbins  
 95 *et al.*, 2002). Previous work at this site identified tem-  
 96 porally variable GW–SW interactions using logging  
 97  
 98

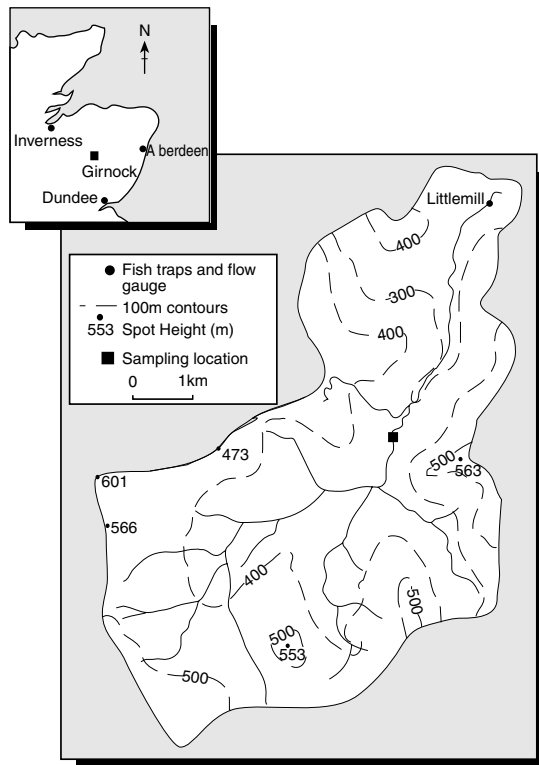


Figure 1. Topographic map of the Girnock Burn catchment showing the location of the sampling site, SEPA flow gauge and FRS fish traps

piezometers combined with traditional hydrochemical sampling methods (Malcolm *et al.*, 2004).

## Methods

In November 2004 (spawning time), an artificial redd incorporating two Aanderaa™ DO optodes was constructed in a location used by spawning salmon in previous years. Aanderaa™ 3830 optodes with analogue converters (0–5 V) were connected to a Campbell™ CR23X datalogger and programmed to sample DO (per cent saturation) and temperature at 1 min intervals, recording instantaneous and average measurements every 15 min from surface water and 150 and 300 mm depths in the hyporheic zone (i.e. in the artificial redd). Prior to deployment, DO optodes were cross-calibrated over a 3 week period in the laboratory at a range of oxygen concentrations and temperatures and showed excellent agreement between sensors (within 1% oxygen saturation and 0.1 °C). The manufacturers report that the typical time required

between sensor calibrations is approximately 1 year and, therefore, in excess of the duration of the study.

The nature of local GW–SW at the site was assessed using hydraulic head data measured at depths of 38 and 70 cm using piezometers containing Eijkelkamp™ Diver pressure transducers with integrated loggers and thermistors, as described by Malcolm *et al.* (2004). The direction of water movement is inferred using the difference in head between the two piezometers, with positive values indicating a streamward hydraulic gradient and negative values a gradient towards the bed. Owing to technical difficulties, head data were only available for the period 16 November 2004–19 January 2005.

## Results and Discussion

Figure 2 shows the temporal variability in stream and hyporheic DO (150 and 300 mm) plotted relative to discharge for the period between spawning and egg hatch. Throughout this period the DO saturation in stream and shallow hyporheic water (150 mm) remained high; typically, this was between 90 and 100%, varying in response to diurnal shifts in the balance between respiration and photosynthesis. DO at 300 mm initially exhibited similar patterns; but, in early January, the DO response became more dynamic in association with a series of hydrological events. Low DO periods were associated with increased catchment wetness in mid January, and between mid February and mid March. These periods were characterized by highly variable conditions, with DO typically falling below 40% saturation on the recession limb of individual hydrographs. Prolonged base flow periods between late January and early February, then again in late March were associated with the re-establishment of high DO levels, comparable to those found in surface water.

Figure 3 focuses on the period between early December and mid January, when reductions in DO at 300 mm were first observed as the catchment responded to a prolonged period of increased precipitation. Changes in DO are plotted relative to discharge and differences in hydraulic head between depths of 38 and 70 cm in the hyporheic zone. Hydraulic gradient data indicate increasingly positive streamward hydraulic gradients as the frequency and magnitude of hydrological events increased. This is consistent

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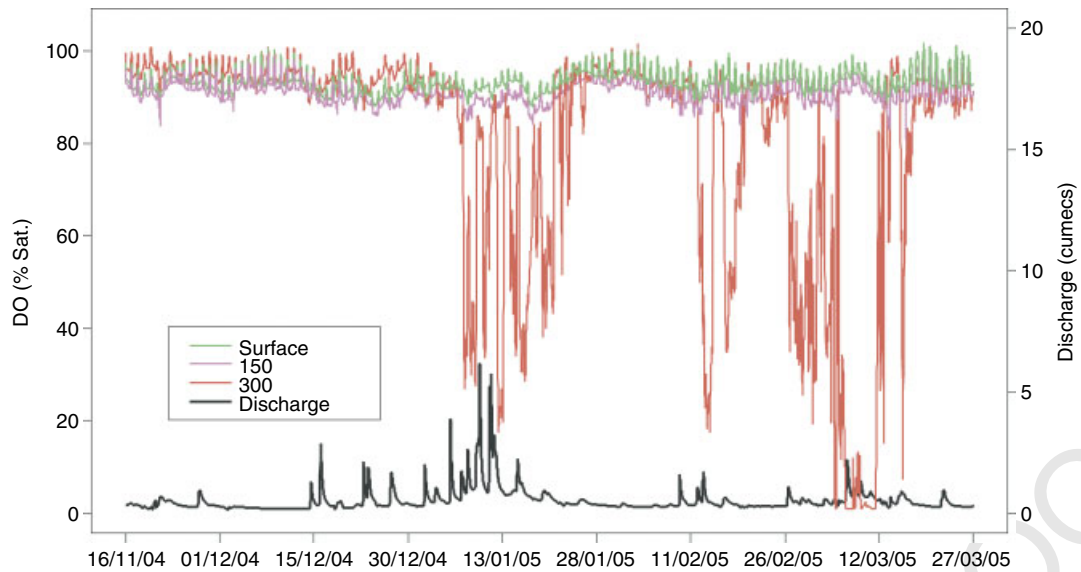


Figure 2. DO concentrations in surface water and at depths of 150 and 300 mm in the hyporheic zone between spawning and hatch. Discharge is shown on the secondary y axis

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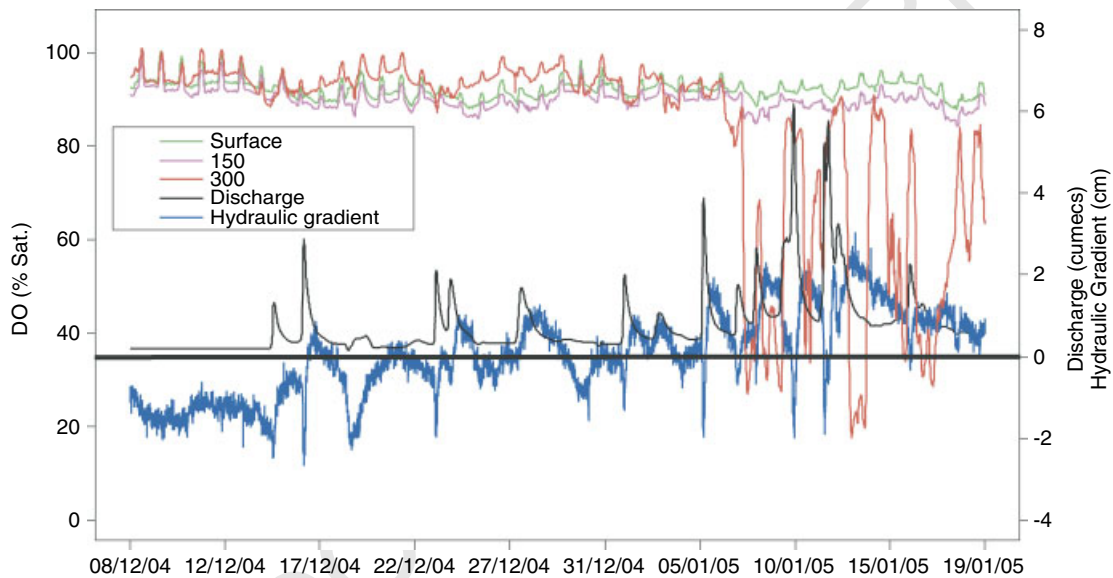


Figure 3. DO concentrations in stream and hyporheic water (150 and 300 mm), relative to discharge and hydraulic gradient. Streamward gradients are indicated where the difference in head between 70 and 38 cm exceeds unity, as indicated by the solid horizontal line

1 with increased water table elevation in response to  
2 groundwater recharge.

3 response to increased stream stage relative to riparian  
4 water table elevation resulting in a stream water  
5 flux into the bed. On the recession limb, increas-  
6 ingly positive hydraulic gradients were established,  
7 which were assumed to result from increasing riparian  
8 groundwater levels and reductions in stream  
9  
10  
11  
12

AQ1

3 In general, the event-scale changes in hydraulic  
4 gradient followed a consistent pattern (cf. Malcolm  
5 *et al.*, 2004). At the event peak, the hydraulic gra-  
6 dient became increasingly negative, presumably in

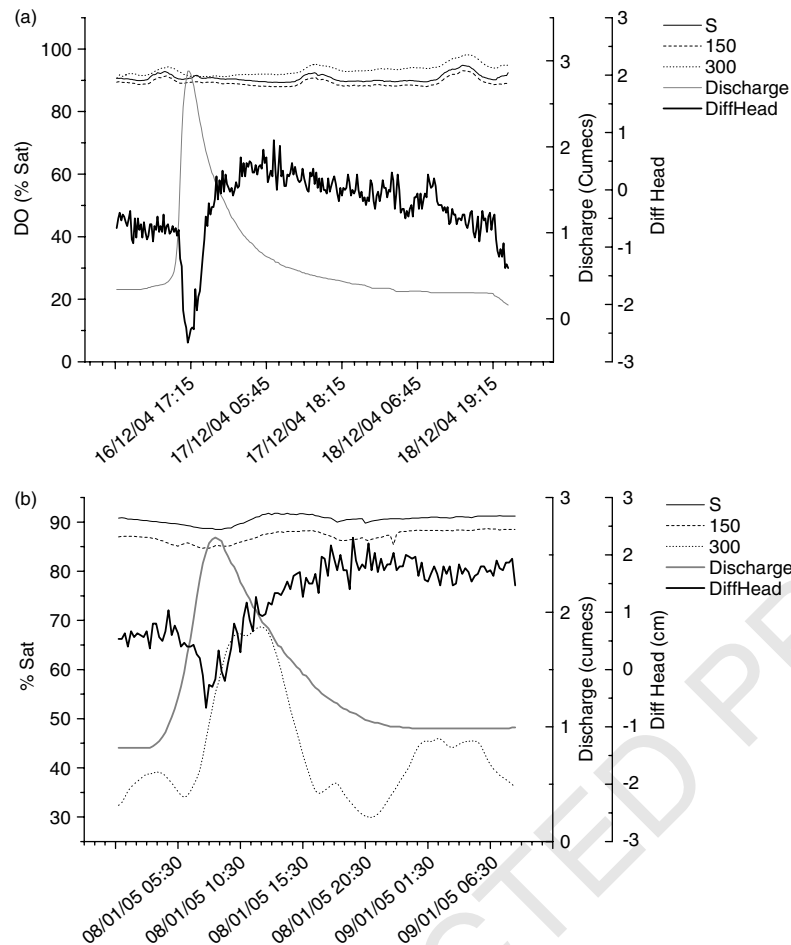


Figure 4. Event-based variability in DO concentration relative to discharge and hydraulic gradient as indicated by the difference in hydraulic head between 38 and 70 cm piezometers. Events of similar magnitude are shown (a) before and (b) after catchment rewetting

1 stage (Malcolm *et al.*, 2004). Although patterns of  
 2 hydraulic flux were consistent between events, the  
 3 magnitude of gradients and changes in hyporheic  
 4 water quality were variable. Prior to 6 January, small  
 5 event-based occurrences of positive hydraulic gradi-  
 6 ent were not associated with changes in hyporheic  
 7 DO levels, as shown in Figure 4a. However, fol-  
 8 lowing catchment rewetting and the establishment  
 9 of increasingly positive hydraulic gradients, events  
 10 of similar magnitude were associated with rapidly  
 11 changing hyporheic DO concentrations. This is shown  
 12 in Figure 4b, where low DO concentrations associ-  
 13 ated with the recession limb of a previous event in-  
 14 creased rapidly in response to increasing stream stage  
 15 and negative hydraulic gradients, before declining on  
 16

the recession limb as positive gradients were re- 17  
 established. 18

Owing to the difficulties associated with hyporheic 19  
 sampling (as outlined above), previous hydroecolo- 20  
 gical studies have failed to identify the nature 21  
 and significance of the frequency and magnitude of 22  
 changes in hyporheic processes, including changes 23  
 in GW–SW interactions and water quality. This has 24  
 resulted in widely varying sampling strategies that 25  
 are generally of much lower resolution than is required 26  
 to characterize the hyporheic environment. For exam- 27  
 ple, the focus of many investigations has been the influ- 28  
 ence of hyporheic DO levels on exposed organisms 29  
 such as salmonid embryos (Table I). In such stud- 30  
 ies, hyporheic sampling frequencies typically include 31  
 32



Table I. Frequency of hyporheic oxygen sampling for studies of salmonid spawning habitat. Where sampling frequency has not been stated explicitly, it has been derived from figures or numbers of samples in a specified period

Study	Sampling frequency
Youngson <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Fortnightly
Groves and Chandler (2005)	Monthly
Malcolm <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Weekly
Bowen and Nelson (2003)	1–3 monthly (three occasions over 5 months)
Malcolm <i>et al.</i> (2003a)	Weekly (with more frequent event-based monitoring)
Niepagenkemper and Meyer (2002)	Monthly/bi-monthly
Ingendahl (2001)	Fortnightly
Peterson and Quinn (1996)	Weekly–fortnightly
Rubin and Glimsater (1996)	Approximately fortnightly
Curry and Noakes (1995)	Single sample, 24 h after samplers deployed
Curry <i>et al.</i> (1995)	Monthly–bi-monthly (strategic to developmental stage of embryos)
Sowden and Power (1985)	Approximately monthly

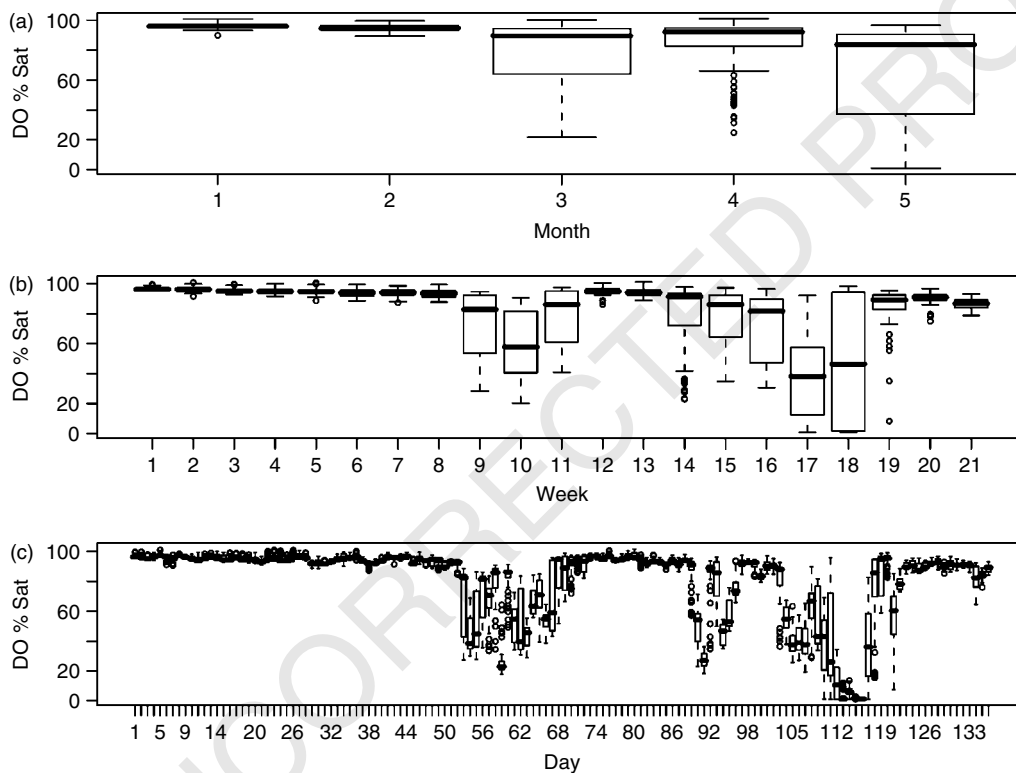


Figure 5. Box plots showing the influence of sample frequency on observed patterns of DO variability based on 100 random samples of continuous DO data at specified intervals: (a) monthly; (b) weekly; (c) daily

1 weekly, fortnightly, monthly or, in some cases, only 5  
 2 single samples. These sampling frequencies are long 6  
 3 in comparison with the hydrochemical response times 7  
 4 identified in the current study and, as such, risk 8  
 missing biologically important low DO episodes.

1 sampling strategies using 100 random repeat samples.  
 2 At monthly sampling intervals, there is a high risk of  
 3 missing most of the variation in hyporheic DO con-  
 4 centrations. At weekly intervals, the general trends  
 5 of longer duration are observed, but extreme values  
 6 are underestimated; with daily sampling, more of the  
 7 variability is observed, but sampling fails to capture  
 8 extreme low values, which prevail for short periods.  
 9 We conclude, therefore, that any biological inferences  
 10 made on the basis of low-resolution sampling have the  
 11 potential to be highly misleading.

### 13 Implications

14 The data presented here show that at the Girnock  
 15 Burn study site hyporheic DO exhibits fine-resolution  
 16 temporal and spatial dynamics, which vary depend-  
 17 ing on the relative contributions of GW and SW.  
 18 GW–SW interactions respond to antecedent hydro-  
 19 logical conditions, prevailing stream stage and water  
 20 table elevation. Thus, hyporheic water quality can  
 21 vary at different time scales ranging from seasonal to  
 22 individual events. Moreover, events of similar mag-  
 23 nitude can produce marked differences in hyporheic  
 24 water quality due to the state dependence associ-  
 25 ated with antecedent conditions. To date, much of  
 26 the variability in hyporheic water quality param-  
 27 eters (in this case DO) has probably been underesti-  
 28 mated owing to technological limitations on the res-  
 29 olution and timing of sampling in hyporheic studies.  
 30 These difficulties have been overcome, and there is  
 31 now a need to reassess the biological interpretations  
 32 of previous water quality studies of the hyporheic  
 33 zone.

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