

Estimation for the growth rate of benthic biotic communities in Antarctic lakes

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Antarctica is an ice continent. It has one of the most extreme environments for life in the world. There are very little ice-free regions with life in it, so these regions are sometimes called polar oasis within the polar desert. The ice-free regions are scattered along the coastal regions and around mountainous peaks (Nunataks) in continental Antarctica or concentrated in Antarctic Peninsula in maritime Antarctica. The biota is simple due to lack of remarkable organisms at the top of food webs, and primary producers such as cyanobacteria, algae, lichens, mosses, heterotrophic microorganisms and metazoans dominate the sparse communities. A remarkable diversity of lakes exists in Antarctica, ranging from hypersaline with nearly 10 times the conductivity of seawater, to brackish and freshwater, sub-glacial, permanently ice-covered and seasonally ice-covered lakes. These lakes are unproductive with typical photosynthetic levels of 0.5 — 30 $\mu\text{g-C/L/day}$ from phytoplankton. Phytoplankton cannot bloom and hardly survives in the water column during the best light-available summer around the Syowa region. This results from low annual levels of photosynthetically active radiation and ice cover that attenuate light into the water column or photo-inhibit photosynthetic systems due to continuous low temperatures and the lack of any significant input of inorganic nutrients. Despite such severe situations, one of the most productive ecosystems in continental Antarctica is found in freshwater lakes, where benthic microbes form thick mats, and aquatic mosses can flourish on the lakebeds of the Syowa region. These lakes were exposed by glacial retreat after the Last Glacial Maximum. The benthic mats consist of almost organisms, dominantly cyanobacteria, algae, and mosses in the lakes, because there are a little inorganic particles and organic matters inflow to the lakes from the water catchment, and as pointed out above, almost no phytoplankton in the water column. This negligible level of any sedimentation and turbulence situation is specific to Antarctica, which is suitable to estimate the growth rate of benthic biotic communities in fine-scale. We collected sediment cores from 17 freshwater lakes in Sôya Coast on the south area of Syowa station, continental Antarctica during January-February in 2009 — 2010. The core samples were vertically sliced in each 1 cm as soon as possible after sampling in the field hut, and transported to Japan at -20 °C. Then, we analyzed the samples by using an AMS (accelerator mass spectrometry), and estimated the growth rate of the benthic biotic mats in each Antarctic lake.

Keywords: sediment, AMS, lakes, Antarctic, growth rate