



Interdisciplinary analysis of larval dispersal for a coral reef fish: opening the black box

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ABSTRACT: Many marine animals have a biphasic life cycle in which demersal adults spawn pelagic larvae with high dispersal potential. An understanding of the spatial and temporal patterns of larval dispersal is critical for describing connectivity and local retention. Existing tools in oceanography, genetics, and ecology can each reveal only part of the overall pattern of larval dispersal. We combined insights from a coupled physical–biological model, parentage analyses, and field surveys to span larval dispersal pathways, endpoints, and recruitment of the convict surgeonfish *Acanthurus triostegus*. Our primary study region was the windward coast of O'ahu, Hawai'i. A high abundance of juvenile *A. triostegus* occurred along the windward coast, with the highest abundance inside Kāne'ohe Bay. The output from our numerical model showed that larval release location accounted for most of the variation in simulated settlement. Seasonal variation in settlement probability was apparent, and patterns observed in model simulations aligned with *in situ* observations of recruitment. The bay acted as a partial retention zone, with larvae that were released within or entering the bay having a much higher probability of settlement. Genetic parentage analyses aligned with larval transport modeling results, indicating self-recruitment of *A. triostegus* within the bay as well as recruitment into the bay from sites outside. We conclude that Kāne'ohe Bay retains reef fish larvae and promotes settlement based on concordant results from numerical models, parentage analyses, and field observations. Such interdisciplinary approaches provide details of larval dispersal and recruitment heretofore only partially revealed.

KEY WORDS: Larval dispersal · Self-recruitment · Coral reef · Coupled physical–biological modeling · Reef fish surveys · Parentage analysis · Connectivity · *Acanthurus triostegus*

1. INTRODUCTION

Many coastal fish species have complex life cycles wherein reef-associated adults produce pelagic larvae that are dispersed by oceanographic processes (Leis & McCormick 2002) before returning to near-

shore habitats (Paris & Cowen 2004). For many coral-reef fishes, larval dispersal is the predominant source of population connectivity between sites, given that juvenile and adult reef fish generally have restricted home ranges (Gaines et al. 2007, Green et al. 2015). For these species, distribution of adult populations

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Publisher: Inter-Research · www.int-res.com

and connectivity between local populations are governed by the interplay of oceanographic dynamics, geographic features, larval behavior, and life history traits that influence patterns of larval dispersal (e.g. Hjort 1914, Caley et al. 1996, Schweigert et al. 2010, Peck et al. 2012). Depending on the species and environment, larval dispersal distances range anywhere from self-recruitment back to the same reef where spawned (Schultz & Cowen 1994, Taylor & Hellberg 2003, Jones et al. 2005, Cowen et al. 2006, Gerlach et al. 2007, Almany et al. 2017) to 100s of km (Kinlan & Gaines 2003, Christie et al. 2010), with combinations of patterns also observed (Williamson et al. 2016, Johnson et al. 2018). Some of this variation in distance traveled is a result of temporal variability in the pelagic larval stage (Selkoe & Toonen 2011), with pelagic larval duration (PLD) ranging from 7–94 d across reef fish species and intraspecific variability in PLD ranging from 3–56 d (Green et al. 2015). Thus, understanding spatial and temporal patterns in larval dispersal is key for understanding recruitment to local populations and subsequently informing spatial management strategies (Green et al. 2015). The complexity of relevant environmental and biological parameters, coupled with the small size of marine larvae, have historically obscured patterns in larval dispersal and population connectivity (Caley et al. 1996, Cowen et al. 2006, 2007, Botsford et al. 2009). Larval movement has long been regarded as one of the great ‘black boxes’ in marine ecology (Caley et al. 1996, Grosberg & Levitan 1992), yet multidisciplinary approaches hold great promise for illuminating this enigmatic part of the marine life cycle (Petitgas et al. 2012, Williamson et al. 2016, Johnson et al. 2018, Hixon et al. 2022).

Oceanographic models can simulate virtual larvae through their pelagic journey and provide spatially and temporally extensive estimates of larval dispersal pathways and recruitment patterns (Cowen et al. 2006, North et al. 2009). Model simulations can explore a variety of conditions and depict the sensitivity of larval dispersal patterns to various oceanographic conditions. Critical to the success of predicting larval dispersal via oceanographic models is biological realism in the simulations of larval behavior combined with biologically appropriate scales for modeling water movement and physical attributes inclusive of near-shore regions (Metaxas & Saunders 2009). Modeling larval dispersal provides predictions of how settlement patterns vary over time, including connectivity between sites and self-recruitment (Cowen & Sponaugle 2009, Leis 2021). These predictions can be confirmed through ecological surveys of

fish recruitment and genetic parentage analysis (Bode et al. 2019).

Genetic parentage analyses can be used to validate patterns of larval dispersal predicted by oceanographic models by directly identifying paired spawning and settlement locations (e.g. Planes et al. 2009, Christie et al. 2010, Almany et al. 2017). Genetic parentage analyses compare DNA between adults and new recruits, thereby connecting parent–offspring pairs (Christie et al. 2017, Coleman 2019). While single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP)-based parentage analyses have become more accessible and cost-effective in recent years (Kraft et al. 2020), these analyses are still constrained by the need to collect tissue specimens from large numbers of individuals. This can make interannual variation hard to quantify, in part because of the extensive effort required to collect a large number of tissue samples, and in part because destructive sampling methods remove possible future adults from the population (however, see Catalano et al. 2021 for a 7 yr parentage study of an anemonefish). Further, post-settlement mortality, movement of recruits post-settlement, and movement of adults post-spawning—all factors that can vary by location or season—can bias the population subset that is available to be sampled for parentage analysis.

Ecological surveys that provide *in situ* observations of juveniles can inform the relative distribution of fish recruits across reefs and regions. Since the planktonic larval phase is difficult to observe and track directly, visual surveys of small juvenile reef fish have been used to document presumed temporal and spatial variability in settlement patterns (e.g. Booth 1992, Doherty 2002, Fox et al. 2012). This approach can reveal the seasonality of recruitment events (Doherty 1991) as well as recruitment habitat characteristics (Randall 1961). Observed spatial and temporal variation in reef fish recruitment can be used to infer larval supply but can be confounded by post-settlement mortality and movement (Almany & Webster 2006, Hixon et al. 2012). Despite these limitations, ecological investigations of life history strategies and behaviors are essential for documenting and predicting larval dispersal patterns (Pfeiffer-Herbert et al. 2007, North et al. 2008, McManus & Woodson 2012, Faillettaz et al. 2018). The respective limitations and complementary strengths of oceanographic numerical models, ecological field surveys, and genetic parentage analyses are such that the integration of these approaches provides the best possible understanding of larval dispersal and population connectivity patterns (Petitgas et al. 2012, Williamson et al. 2016, Johnson et al. 2018, Hixon et al. 2022).

Here, we combined methods and data from oceanography, genetics, and ecology to illuminate patterns of larval dispersal for an endemic Hawaiian reef fish, the convict surgeonfish *Acanthurus triostegus sandvicensis*. Locally known as manini, this species is an important food fish, selected for this study in consultation with Hawaiian fishers and cultural practitioners. We focused on the windward coast of O'ahu, Hawai'i, to examine the role of a large semi-enclosed embayment, Kāne'ohe Bay, for its potential as a source of larvae for the open coast, as a settlement location for larvae spawned outside the bay, and/or as a location of retention and self-recruitment of larvae spawned within the bay. To evaluate the relative importance of biological and physical drivers on larval settlement of *A. triostegus*, we used a high-resolution oceanographic model of nearshore physical dynamics and the Connectivity Modeling System (CMS) as a Lagrangian particle dispersal model. We included known life history characteristics of *A. triostegus* in these models, enabling us to predict biologically realistic patterns of larval dispersal and settlement through space and time. To validate the connectivity projected by these simulations of virtual larvae, we incorporated parentage analyses of *A. triostegus* around O'ahu including focused efforts on the windward coast and within Kāne'ohe Bay (Coleman 2019). To assess the local distribution and dynamics of *A. triostegus*, we analyzed spatial patterns in size structure from diver surveys around O'ahu. To identify temporal patterns in recruitment, we conducted periodic field surveys within Kāne'ohe Bay. By combining oceanographic, genetic, and ecological techniques, this study provides complementary insights into the spatial and temporal dynamics of larval dispersal and recruitment patterns.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Study site

The island of O'ahu, Hawai'i, can be divided into 5 coastal regions based on prevailing weather patterns and currents (Fig. 1a). A central focus for our study, the windward eastern coast, is dominated by northeasterly trade winds (speeds typically 5–10 m s⁻¹) nearly year-round (Fig. 1c). A dominant feature of the windward coast is Kāne'ohe Bay (21.46°N, 157.81°W), the largest sheltered body of water in the Hawaiian Islands (Lowe et al. 2009) at 52 km² (along-shore length: ~13 km; cross-shore width:

~4 km; Fig. 1d). Kāne'ohe Bay is bordered by a shallow (mean depth: 3–5 m) fringing reef that extends over 12 km². Beyond the fringing reef, the water depth drops sharply to >20 m. The sheltered part of Kāne'ohe Bay is 10–15 m depth with the exception of >50 coral patch reefs, which rise to within <1 m of the surface. Water enters and exits Kāne'ohe Bay primarily through 2 main channels: a shipping channel (mean depth: 12 m) in the north of the bay and a second small-craft channel (mean depth: 6 m) in the south of the bay (Lowe et al. 2009). The southernmost region of Kāne'ohe Bay is a semi-enclosed area that functions as a bay within a bay (Fig. 1d).

2.2. Study species

Acanthurus triostegus is a common surgeonfish throughout the Indo-Pacific and the eastern tropical Pacific, adults of which are associated with hard substrate in lagoon and reef habitats (Randall 1961, 1986). The Hawaiian population was designated a distinct subspecies, *A. t. sandvicensis*, based on morphology and coloration (Randall 1956), a designation recently supported with genetic studies (Otwoma et al. 2018). While reproductive life history traits of *A. triostegus* can vary by location in the Hawaiian Islands, *A. triostegus* likely reaches sexual maturity in its first year. The average sizes of 1 and 2 yr old individuals are 16 and 20 cm total length (TL), respectively (Longenecker & Langston 2008), and a population on the southeast coast of O'ahu showed 50% of 13 cm TL individuals were sexually mature (Schemmel & Friedlander 2017). The smallest sexually mature individual was ~10 cm TL (Schemmel & Friedlander 2017).

Spawning aggregations of 25–800 individuals have been observed in Hawai'i and follow a semilunar spawning periodicity, e.g. spawning within 4 d of new and full moons (Schemmel & Friedlander 2017). Spawning effort varies across seasons and years, with windows of high spawning observed from December to August (Randall 1961, Schemmel & Friedlander 2017). Resident spawning aggregations with home ranges of an estimated <2 km of coastline (Robertson 1983) have been observed on the south shore of O'ahu at a depth of 7–10 m in an area with strong tidal flow (Schemmel & Friedlander 2017). Spawning occurs during ebb tides between midday and dusk, with subgroups of the aggregation displaying synchronized rapid bursts of vertical swimming in which gametes are released within 1 m of the surface (Robertson 1983, Domeier & Colin 1997).

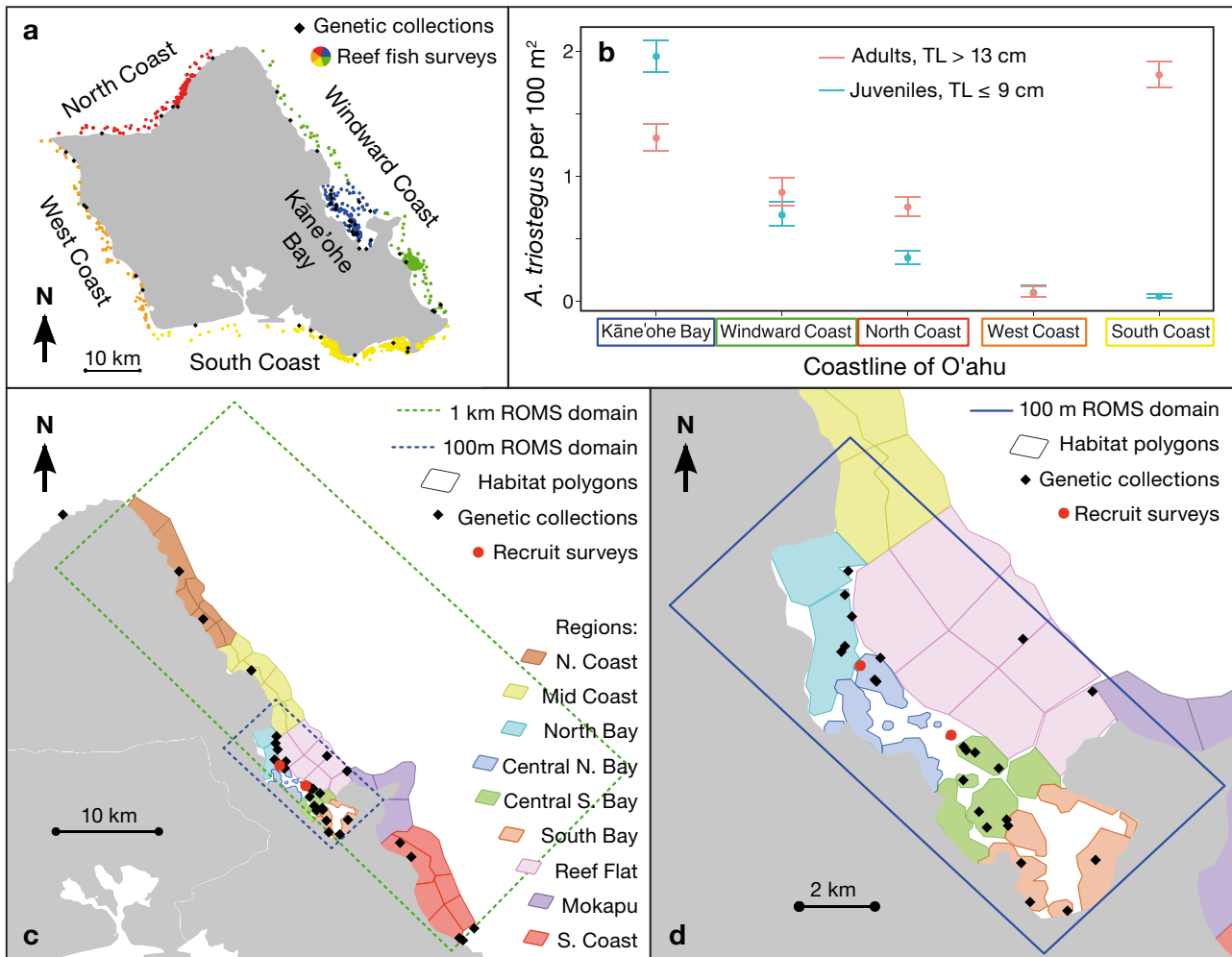


Fig. 1. (a) O'ahu, Hawai'i, divided into coastlines by colored dots for reef fish surveys accessed from a statewide database. Black diamonds: collection sites for genetic samples. (b) *Acanthurus triostegus* density by life stage and coastline, with colors on x-axis matching colors from (a). Points represent the mean density model estimate $\pm 95\%$ CI for adult and juvenile fish. (c) Windward eastern coast of O'ahu with the numerical model domains of nested Regional Ocean Modeling System (ROMS) overlaid (green and blue dashed lines). Habitat polygons ($n = 53$) are depicted and colored by habitat region ($n = 9$). Black diamonds: collection sites for genetic samples; red dots: 2 patch reefs in Kāne'ohe Bay at which recruit surveys were conducted. (d) Kāne'ohe Bay; black diamonds: collection sites for genetic samples; red dots: 2 patch reefs at which recruit surveys were conducted

Pelagic eggs hatch into pelagic larvae within ~26 h (Randall 1956), with oriented swimming and feeding behaviors observed after 5 d (Longenecker & Langston 2008). The PLD of *A. triostegus* ranges from 44–74 d, with post-larval stage juveniles arriving in intertidal habitats at a size of 2–3 cm TL (Randall 1961, McCormick 1999, Frédérick et al. 2012). As individuals grow, they migrate to slightly deeper lagoon, reef crest, and upper reef slope habitats (Sale 1968, Robertson 1983, Frédérick et al. 2012).

This ecological information on spawning time, spawning depth, PLD, and known habitat use for *A. triostegus* was used to parameterize our biophysical model.

2.3. Oceanographic model

2.3.1. Regional Ocean Modeling System

Ocean conditions were simulated for 2014 and 2015 using the Regional Ocean Modeling System (ROMS) with atmospheric forcing, tidal forcing, stream discharge, and bottom topography (Table 1, see Supplement at www.int-res.com/articles/suppl/m684p117_supp.pdf). The model domain covered an area of 1404 km² (Fig. 1c) along the windward coast of O'ahu. The ROMS for Kāne'ohe Bay had a 100 m resolution with 12 vertical layers (Fig. 1d), while the ROMS model for the windward coast had a 1 km resolution with 20 vertical layers.

Table 1. Simulated reef fish larvae were modeled using a coupled physical–biological model. Model parameterizations are provided for the set of nested Regional Ocean Modeling Systems (ROMS; Shchepetkin & McWilliams 2005) and a Connectivity Modeling System (CMS) that were used in model simulations of larval movement. SSH: sea surface height; SST: sea surface temperature

Module	Parameter	Input
ROMS, Hawaiian Islands	Grid resolution	4 km, Hawaiian Islands (Matthews et al. 2012)
	Data availability	3 h
	Physical data	Satellites (SSH, SST, and surface currents), Argo floats and gliders, high-frequency radar
	Atmospheric forcing	Weather Research and Forecasting Model (Michalakes et al. 2001)
	Bottom topography	Hawai'i Mapping Research Group of the Hawai'i Institute of Geophysics and Planetology at the University of Hawai'i
ROMS, Windward Coast	Grid resolution	1 km, windward coast of O'ahu (54 × 26 km)
	Vertical layers	20 vertical layers of current velocities
	Data availability	1 h
	Atmospheric forcing	Weather Research and Forecasting Model (Michalakes et al. 2001)
	Bottom topography	Hawai'i Mapping Research Group of the Hawai'i Institute of Geophysics and Planetology at the University of Hawai'i
ROMS, Kāne'ohe Bay	Grid resolution	0.1 km, Kāne'ohe Bay (14 × 6.9 km)
	Vertical layers	12 vertical layers of current velocities
	Data availability	30 min
	Atmospheric forcing	Weather Research and Forecasting Model, local configuration (Zhou & Chen 2014)
	Tidal forcing	The OSU TOPEX/Poseidon Global Inverse Solution TPXO (Egbert et al. 1994)
	Stream discharge	Stream gauge data from the US Geological Survey were obtained from: https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/inventory/?site_no=ID , where ID is: 16275000 for He'eia; 16294100 for Waiāhole; 16284200 for Waihe'e; and 16294900 for Waikāne.
	Bottom topography	Blended data from the Pacific Islands Benthic Habitat Mapping Center (https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/pibhmc/cms/) and the National Coastal Mapping Program (2013 USACE NCMP Topobathy Lidar, https://inport.nmfs.noaa.gov/inport/item/49755)
CMS	Model boundary	ROMS Windward Coast and ROMS Kāne'ohe Bay
	Land boundary	'avoidcoast' model setting
	Surface boundary	'upperlevelsurface' model setting
	Vertical layers	41 fixed depth levels: 0.5 m intervals from 0–10 m, 1 m intervals from 10–20 m, 5 m intervals from 20–30 m, 10 m intervals from 30–50 m, 25 m intervals from 50–200 m
	Turbulence	Horizontal dispersion coefficient of $0.2 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ (Lowe et al. 2009) for ROMS Kāne'ohe Bay and $2 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ for ROMS Windward Coast Vertical dispersion coefficient of $0.001 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ (Durski et al. 2004)
	Time step	300 s
	Release habitat sites	Reef habitat polygons (n = 53) based on NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science benthic habitat maps
	Release timing	Egg release dates (n = 32) based on afternoon ebb tides in Hawai'i (03:00 h UTC, 17:00 h HST –1 d) for new and full moons between Jan–Jul 2014 and Dec 2014–July 2015 (Randall 1961, Schemmel & Friedlander 2017)
	Release depth	1.5 m for sites ≤3 m deep, 3 m for all other sites (Robertson 1983, Domeier & Colin 1997, Schemmel & Friedlander 2017)
	Release magnitude	100 particles per each habitat site (5300 per release date)
	Competence	55, 65, and 75 d pelagic larval durations (Randall 1961, Longenecker & Langston 2008)

2.3.2. Connectivity Modeling System

Particle motion was evaluated using CMS, a Lagrangian particle-tracking model that employs a 4th order Runge-Kutta scheme to transport virtual larvae through a set of velocity fields with the ability to incorporate biological parameterization using an individual-based model (Paris et al. 2013). Larvae were set to be neutrally buoyant and passively advected throughout each model simulation (see Text S1). Pilot simulations were run in which larvae drifted for 65 d without any turbulent velocity to verify that the model was capturing expected regional oceanographic features. After this confirmation, the CMS turbulence module was used to provide randomness to larval trajectories and simulate motion on scales smaller than the grid resolution. Each virtual larva was perturbed in a random direction every 300 s at a velocity proportional to a specified dispersion constant (Table 1). To prevent larvae from becoming stranded on land, those that crossed shoreline boundaries were returned to their previous location and moved with reduced velocities or held in place to keep them in the water (*avoidcoast* model setting; Paris et al. 2013). When larvae crossed an open ocean boundary from the model domain (Fig. 1c), they were considered 'lost' from the simulation.

2.3.3. Model simulations

Areas of hard bottom habitat comparable to sites where juvenile and adult *A. triostegus* have been observed were defined using QGIS, based on the benthic habitat maps created by NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (Fig. 1c). The Seascape module within CMS was used to designate these habitat polygons ($n = 53$) as release and settlement locations for *A. triostegus*. To increase the interpretability of spatial patterns, these habitat polygons were grouped into 9 regions based on circulation patterns (Bathen 1968, Lowe et al. 2009; Fig. 1c,d). Following the observed semi-lunar spawning behavior of *A. triostegus* in Hawai'i, spawning events were simulated on afternoon ebb tides in Hawai'i (03:00 h UTC, 17:00 h HST – 1 d) for new and full moons from January to July 2014 and from December 2014 to July 2015. For each model simulation (32 release dates), 100 eggs were released at the centroid of each habitat polygon (53 release locations) at a depth of 1.5–3 m (Table 1). To test the effect of variation in PLD on the settlement success of *A. triostegus*, simulations were run for 3 PLDs: 55, 65, and 75 d (based

on Randall 1961, Frédérich et al. 2012). Each model included a 10 d settlement window, such that after the designated PLD had elapsed, competent larvae that were not already within a habitat polygon had 10 additional days to enter a polygon. In total, 96 simulations were run with 5300 larvae in each model. For the 508 800 virtual larvae released, 'successful settlement' refers to larvae that were within a habitat polygon at the end of the simulation.

2.3.4. Settlement of virtual larvae

To evaluate how much the biological components incorporated in model simulations accounted for variation in settlement, a set of generalized linear models (GLMs) were used (*glm* function in the *stats* package; R Core Team 2019). For each GLM, settlement was the binomial response variable, scored as 0 or 1 for larval absence or presence in habitat polygons at the end of the simulation. A set of single predictor models was used to directly consider the power of each predictor: PLD (Model 1), release date (Model 2; corresponds to spawning date, this variable was treated as a factor), window of release date (Model 3; the first window from January 2014 to July 2014 and the second window from December 2014 to July 2015), release habitat polygon (Model 4), and release habitat region (Model 5; included an offset for the number of polygons in a region). In addition to these GLMs focused on single predictor variables, a full model was fit with PLD, release date, window of release date, release habitat polygon, and release habitat region as predictors. This full model was used to investigate the effect of each predictor accounting for the variation of the other predictors and to work through a comprehensive model selection process (*dredge* function in the *MuMIn* package; Bartoń 2019) to identify the best-fit model (Model 6). To evaluate the significance of each predictor variable, a marginal likelihood ratio test was used (*Anova* function in the *car* package; Fox & Weisberg 2019). Akaike's information criterion (AIC) scores were used to compare model fit across all GLMs. Residuals from each model were confirmed to follow the expected distribution visually using QQ plots and plots of residuals against fitted values.

To evaluate spatial patterns in settlement, the observed distribution of settlers across habitat polygons was compared to a random distribution (scaled to the surface area of each habitat polygon) of settlement across habitat polygons using a Pearson's χ^2 test (*chisq.test* function from the *stats* package; R Core

Team 2019). This analysis was repeated at the regional scale. To visualize population connectivity between habitat polygons and regions, connectivity matrices were created using larval release and settlement location data from the oceanographic models.

2.4. Parentage analyses for *A. triostegus*

To evaluate the population connectivity patterns predicted through simulations, we incorporated data from parentage analyses conducted on *A. triostegus* around O'ahu (see Coleman 2019 for details). To briefly summarize, a genetic parentage analysis based on 399 SNPs was conducted from 1213 *A. triostegus* samples (606 adults, 607 juveniles) collected across 23 sites around O'ahu (Fig. 1a). The sampling effort was focused on the windward coast (Fig. 1c) and included collections from multiple patch reefs within Kāne'ohe Bay (Fig. 1d). Parent–offspring assignments were determined using CERVUS v.3.0.7 (Marshall et al. 1998, Kalinowski et al. 2007). CERVUS calculates the likelihood that each candidate is the parent, taking into account population allele frequencies and genotype errors. Parent–offspring assignments were accepted at a 95% confidence level resulting in 68 assignments (11% assignment rate) with a 2% average chance of being a false assignment. Using the collection sites of adult and juvenile samples from each genetically linked pair, genetically confirmed examples of population connectivity were linked to spawning (parent) and settlement (offspring) habitat polygons (Fig. 1c).

2.5. Spatial and temporal patterns of *A. triostegus* populations

To evaluate spatial patterns in the population size structure of *A. triostegus* around O'ahu, we accessed reef fish survey data from a statewide database. We used data from 1949 reef fish surveys of hard bottom sites conducted by 5 research organizations (i.e. Coral Reef Assessment and Monitoring Program of the University of Hawai'i, NOAA, State of Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources, Fisheries Ecology Research Lab of the University of Hawai'i, and The Nature Conservancy) from 2000–2016. Counts of *A. triostegus* were standardized to number per 100 m² to account for differences in the survey methods. Observed *A. triostegus* were categorized as either juveniles (≤ 9 cm) or adults (> 13 cm). Using a GLM, we analyzed the effect of life stage (*LifeStage*: juve-

nile or adult) and the 5 coastal regions of O'ahu (*Region*) on the density of *A. triostegus* (*Density*) as:

$$\text{Density} \sim \text{Region} + \text{LifeStage} + \text{Region:LifeStage} + \text{Depth} \quad (1)$$

The model included the main effects of *Region* and *LifeStage* as well as an interaction between *Region* and *LifeStage*. Reef depth (*Depth*) was included in the model as a predictive factor to account for variation across survey sites. The model was fit using a negative binomial distribution to account for over-dispersion (glm.nb function in the *Mass* package; Venables & Ripley 2002). Residuals from each model were confirmed to follow the expected distribution visually using QQ plots and plots of residuals against fitted values. A marginal likelihood ratio test was used to evaluate the significance of *Region*, *LifeStage*, and the interaction term (Anova function in the *car* package; Fox & Weisberg 2019).

To measure temporal variability in *A. triostegus* recruitment and to estimate the synchrony of recruitment inside Kāne'ohe Bay, we conducted monthly surveys of *A. triostegus* at 2 representative patch reefs (each reef approximately 45 m in diameter) within Kāne'ohe Bay from March 2015 to March 2016. Surveys were increased to a frequency of twice a month from May 2015 through September 2015 for a total of 18 survey dates. Both patch reefs were in the Central North Bay region of Kāne'ohe Bay (reefs marked by red dots in Fig. 1d), with one at the northern boundary (21.4753° N, 157.8300° W) and the other at the southern boundary (21.4576° N, 157.8069° W). On each patch reef, ten 25 m transects were surveyed: 4 on the reef slope (depth: 4.5 m), 4 on the reef crest (2.1 m), and 2 on the reef top (≤ 1 m). On the outbound swim of each transect, fish > 5 cm TL were surveyed within a 4 m belt; on the return swim, fish ≤ 5 cm TL were surveyed within a 2 m belt. To improve our estimates of the age of recruits, the TL of *A. triostegus* was visually estimated to 0.5 cm for fish < 10 cm TL. At the start of each survey, teams spent 10–30 min estimating the size of model fish to recalibrate their underwater visual size estimation with an emphasis on fish < 10 cm TL.

We used a zero-inflated Poisson model (glmmTMB function in the *glmmTMB* package; Brooks et al. preprint doi:10.1101/132753) to determine whether the number of juveniles (≤ 9 cm; *Juveniles*), when observed, differed between the northern and southern patch reef (*Site*) or across survey month (*Month*):

$$\text{Juveniles} \sim \text{Site} + \text{Month} + (1|\text{ReefDepth}) \quad (2)$$

The model includes main effects of *Site* and *Month*. Reef depth (*ReefDepth*) was included as a random effect given that juvenile *A. triostegus* use shallow reef tops more than other regions of patch reefs. Date of spawning was estimated for all observed juveniles (≤ 9 cm TL) as: $\text{date}_{\text{observation}} - \text{age}_{\text{days}}$. The age in days since spawning was calculated by inputting the observed size of each individual into the growth equation for *A. triostegus* (Longenecker & Langston 2008). A zero-inflated Poisson model was used because *A. triostegus* juveniles were not present for >75% of surveys, and yet, when *A. triostegus* juveniles were present, observations ranged from 1–27 juveniles transect⁻¹. For this 2-stage model, residuals were simulated ('simulateResiduals' function in the *DHARMA* package; Hartig 2021) and then visually inspected using a QQ plot. No deviations from the expected distribution were observed.

We conducted our statistical analyses in R v.3.6.1 (R Core Team 2019).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Modeled predictions of settlement

Of all 508 800 simulated larvae, one-third (33%) settled within the study area. Given the large number of virtual larvae modeled, all predictive factors included in GLMs for the probability of settlement were statistically significant (ANOVA, $p < 0.0001$). The best fit model included release polygon, release date, and PLD (Model 6, $r^2 = 0.44$; Table 2); however, models that included only spatial factors, i.e. release region (Model 5, $r^2 = 0.43$) described nearly the same amount

of variation. Interactions between larval release polygon, release date, and PLD may explain why release date and PLD were retained in the best fit model despite small contributions to the explained variation.

Settlement differed by release polygon (Model 4; Fig. 2a) with clear regional patterns (Model 5). South Bay had the greatest probability of settlement (91%), followed by Central South Bay (75%), North Bay (72%), Central North Bay (51%), and Reef Flat (27%). Larvae released in regions outside of Kāne'ohe Bay had lower probabilities of settlement than larvae released in regions inside the bay: North Coast (2%), Mid Coast (6%), Mokapu (11%), and South Coast (1%). These patterns of settlement across habitat polygons and regions were non-random (χ^2 test, $p < 0.0001$; Fig. 2b).

Release date accounted for <1% of variation (Model 2; Table 2) in settlement. In both years of study, the highest probabilities of settlement were observed in late March and early April (maximum mean estimate was 43.4% for 18 April 2015 release date), and the lowest probabilities of settlement were observed in January and early February (minimum mean estimate was 22.3% for 16 January 2014 release date; Fig. 3). The probability of settlement was higher for larvae released in 2015 (33.5%) than in 2014 (32.1%) (Model 3; Fig. 3), but the difference between 2014 and 2015 release dates (Model 3; Table 2) accounted for <0.1% of variation in settlement. The probability of settlement was higher for larvae with shorter PLDs, ranging from 31.2% for a 75 d PLD to 34.7% for a 55 d PLD (Model 1; Table 2, Fig. 3), but PLD accounted for <0.1% of variation in settlement (Model 1; Table 2).

3.2. Modeled dispersal

A portion of virtual larvae released from every habitat polygon dispersed to outside the model domain. This was the prevailing route for larvae released from the North Coast, Mid Coast, Mokapu, and South Coast, but also included larvae released within Kāne'ohe Bay (Fig. 4). Among larvae that were retained within the model domain, the strongest connectivity signals were for sites within Kāne'ohe Bay (Fig. 4). Larvae released from habitat polygons in the Central North Bay, Central South Bay, and South Bay often

Table 2. GLM output for a set of models with binomial distribution for the probability of settlement as a binary response (pS) for simulated reef fish larvae. The first 5 models are single predictor models for pelagic larval duration (PLD), the date of simulated larvae release (a discrete factor), the time window of the simulated larvae release (a 2-level factor representing each of the 2 yr of study), the specific habitat polygon of simulated larvae release, and a broader metric for the region of simulated larvae release. The final model (6) is the best fit model from a comprehensive model selection process run on a full model with all 5 predictor variables included. R^2 values are calculated as $1 - (\text{residual deviance} / \text{null deviance})$

Model	AIC	Δ AIC	R^2
(1) pS ~ PLD	643907	285792	0.0007
(2) pS ~ release date	638162	280047	0.0097
(3) pS ~ release time window	644269	286154	0.0002
(4) pS ~ release habitat polygon	370896	12781	0.4246
(5) pS ~ release region + offset(N polys)	386678	28563	0.4259
(6) pS ~ PLD + release date + release habitat poly	358115	0	0.4445

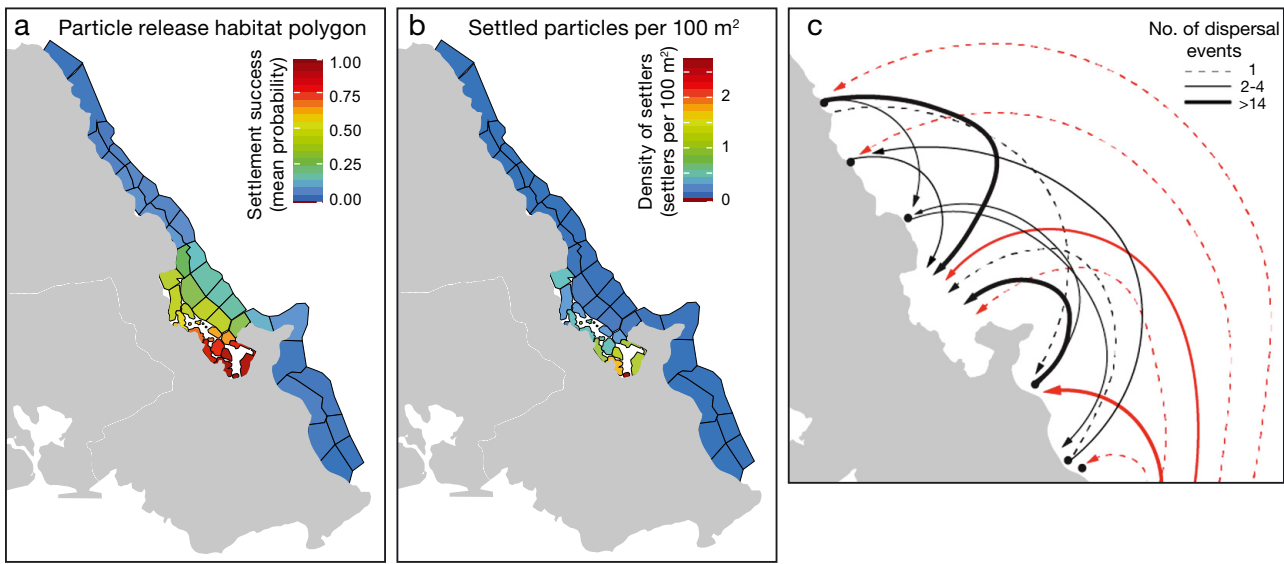


Fig. 2. (a) Simulated reef fish larval settlement by release polygon along the windward coast of O’ahu, in which the color corresponds to the proportion of all particles released at that habitat polygon that were in any of the habitat polygons at the end of the model simulation. (b) Spatial distribution of settlement across habitat polygons in which the color corresponds to the number of particles that settled in that habitat polygon scaled to the area of the habitat polygon. (c) Parentage analysis for *Acanthurus triostegus* on the windward coast of O’ahu. Arrows: directionality of dispersal; red lines: juveniles spawned outside of the windward coast; black lines: juveniles spawned along the windward coast. Line thickness is proportional to the number of recruits connecting the location of origin to final settlement location. Redrawn from Coleman (2019)

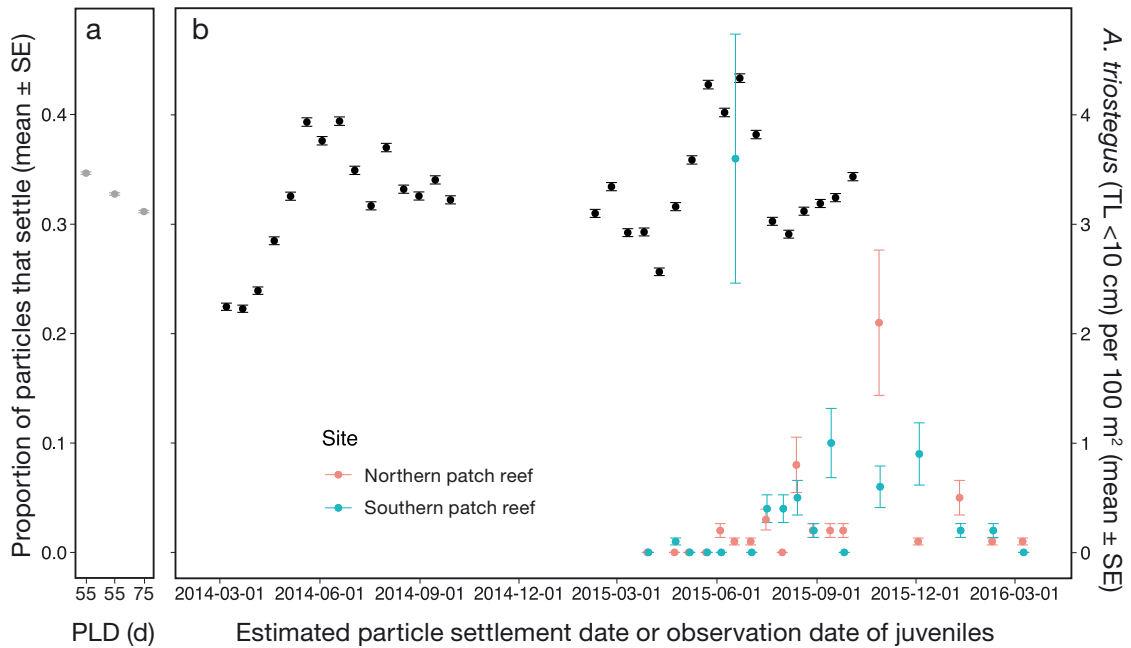


Fig. 3. Proportion (mean \pm SE) of simulated larvae that settled in the study area based on a particle tracking model for *Acanthurus triostegus* by (a) pelagic larval duration (PLD; gray points) and (b) release date (black points). Given the large number of modeled particles, SE bars cannot easily be seen. Release date was converted to an estimated particle settlement date (release date + 65 d, which is the middle point of PLDs used across all model runs). Overlaid on (b) is the *in situ* recruit survey data (colored points) as the mean (\pm SE) number of juveniles per transect by patch reef and survey date (18 survey dates, 2 patch reefs, $n = 10$ transects each). The time periods for field observations and model runs have incomplete overlap. Recruit survey data was collected from March 2015 to March 2016; particle tracking model runs included release dates from January 2014 to July 2015 corresponding to estimated particle settlement dates from March 2014 to October 2015

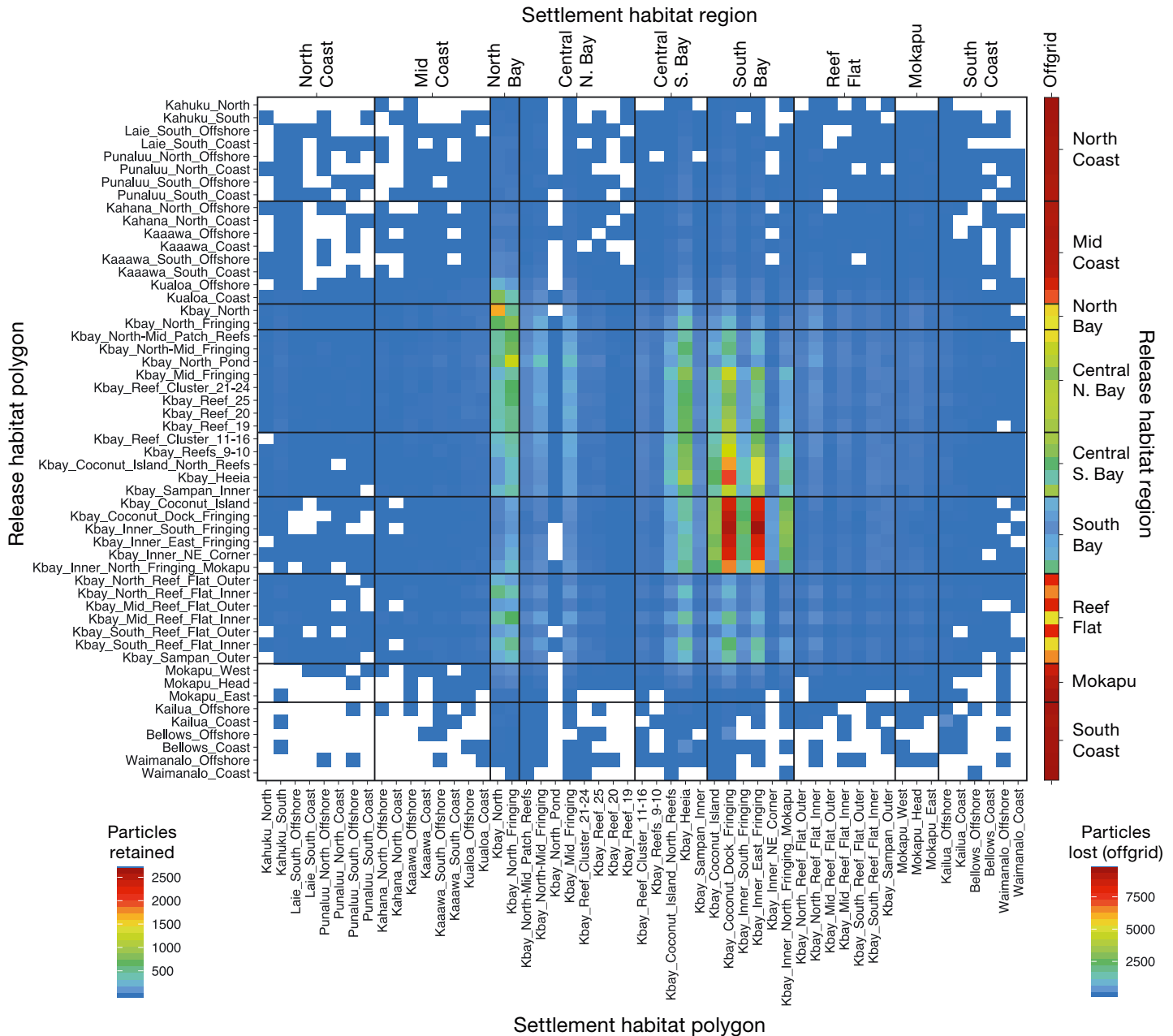


Fig. 4. Connectivity matrix for oceanographic model simulations of reef fish larval dispersal along the windward coast of O’ahu. Color scale for the matrix ranges from 0–2500 particles connecting polygons, with blue for low numbers of particles and red for high numbers of particles. White boxes reflect polygon pairs that did not have any connecting particles. A separate color scale is used to depict particles that moved offgrid and were lost from the model (ranges from 0 to over 8000 particles)

settled within the South Bay or Central South Bay. Larvae released in the North Bay, Central North Bay, and Central South Bay often settled within the North Bay. Larvae released on the Reef Flat along the outside of Kāne’ohe Bay often dispersed to habitat polygons in Kāne’ohe Bay (North Bay, Central South Bay, and South Bay; Fig. 4). Further, larvae released at habitat polygons along the north and south coastal

edges of Kāne’ohe Bay had connectivity to sites within the bay. Larval dispersal patterns from model simulations included self-recruitment, in which virtual larvae settled in the same habitat polygon from which they were released, for 45 of 53 habitat polygons (85%; Fig. 4). Self-recruitment was strongest within Kāne’ohe Bay, particularly within the North Bay and South Bay regions (Fig. 4).

3.3. Parentage analyses

From 1213 *Acanthurus triostegus* samples (606 adults, 607 juveniles) collected around O’ahu, 67 parent–offspring assignments were confirmed to have been spawned or settled along the windward coast. Genetic evidence confirmed the dispersal of larvae from the windward coast to areas outside of the windward coast. For 3 adult–juvenile pairs, adults on the windward coast (1 from Mid Coast and 2 from South Coast) were connected to juveniles outside of the windward coast (Figs. 2c & 5). This connectivity pathway ran in both directions. Eight windward coast juveniles (2 on the North Coast, 3 on the South Coast, and 3 within the Central South Bay) were confirmed offspring of adults sampled outside of the windward coast.

Movement of offspring into Kāne’ohe Bay was the strongest connectivity pathway identified with

parentage analyses (42 % of parent–offspring assignments). In total, 28 juveniles found within Kāne’ohe Bay (Central North Bay, Central South Bay, and South Bay) originated from adults found on the windward coast (North Coast, Mid Coast, and South Coast; Figs. 2c & 5). In addition to windward sites feeding into Kāne’ohe Bay, there were 3 examples of adults that were in Kāne’ohe Bay sending larvae to sites outside the bay (from the North Bay to the North Coast; Figs. 2c & 5).

Parentage analyses were consistent with model predictions of larval retention within Kāne’ohe Bay. Six juveniles within Kāne’ohe Bay (Central North Bay, Central South Bay, and South Bay) were connected to adults found within Kāne’ohe Bay (North Bay, Central North Bay, and Central South Bay; Figs. 2c & 5). Self-recruitment of *A. triostegus* was confirmed for 2 habitat regions: the South Coast (1 parent–offspring pair found on the Kailua Coast) and the Central South Bay (2 parent–offspring pairs found in the Kāne’ohe Bay Reef Cluster 11–16).

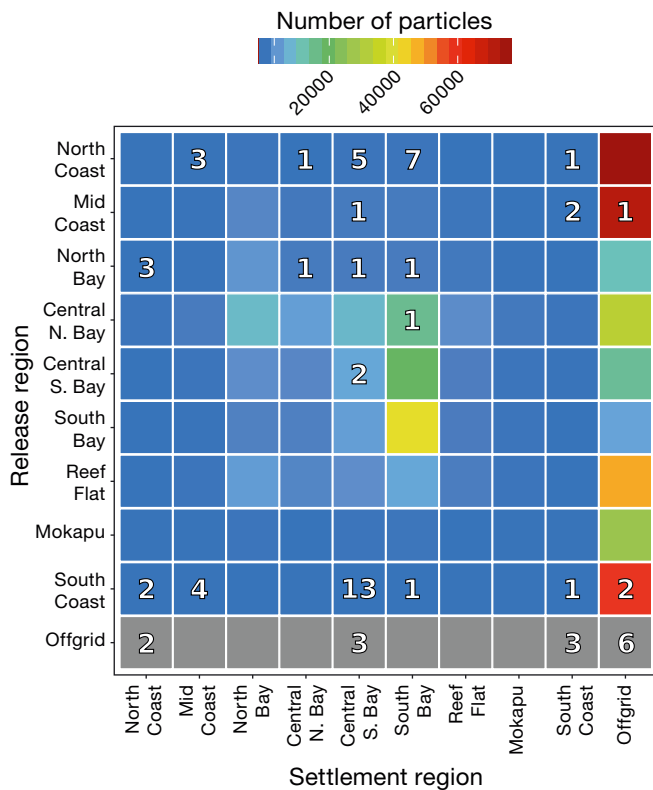


Fig. 5. Connectivity matrix for oceanographic model simulations of reef fish larval dispersal along the windward coast of O’ahu with data aggregated to the region scale. Confirmed numbers of juvenile–adult pairs between regions based on parentage analyses are overlaid (white numerals). The location of each adult is used for the release region, and the location of the juvenile is used for the settlement region. Sampling effort for the parentage analyses was not evenly divided among regions, with intensified efforts in Central S. Bay, which was the most easily accessed

3.4. In situ patterns of *A. triostegus* distribution and abundance

The relative abundance of *A. triostegus* differed among coastal regions of O’ahu ($p < 0.001$) and across depth (ranging from 0.3–29 m), with more *A. triostegus* at shallower depths ($p < 0.001$). More adults than juveniles were observed overall ($p < 0.001$), yet juveniles and adults followed distinct spatial patterns ($p < 0.001$). In Kāne’ohe Bay, abundance of juveniles was higher than adults (2.0 juveniles versus 1.3 adults per 100 m²; Fig. 1b). In contrast, the south coast had the highest abundance of adults and the lowest abundance of juveniles (1.8 adults versus 0.04 juveniles per 100 m²; Fig. 1b).

In surveys at 2 patch reefs within Kāne’ohe Bay, we observed 131 juvenile *A. triostegus* over 18 survey dates from March 2015 to March 2016. When juveniles were observed, the number of juveniles was different between the northern and southern patch reef ($p < 0.001$) and across survey months ($p < 0.0001$). Overall, more juveniles were observed on the southern patch reef than the northern patch reef (Fig. 3). Juveniles were more likely to be observed from June through October than during the rest of the year (Fig. 3). Dates of spawning estimated from the observed sizes of juvenile *A. triostegus* ranged from January 2015 to November 2015. Estimated spawning dates indicate a successful spawning event between January and March 2015 that resulted in

higher settlement on the southern patch reef ($n = 36$) than on the northern patch reef ($n = 2$) in June. There was evidence of a few smaller successful spawning events in May and June 2015 (Fig. 3).

4. DISCUSSION

Oceanographic, genetic, and ecological lines of evidence all indicate that Kāneʻohe Bay serves as an effective retention zone for *Acanthurus triostegus* larvae spawned along the windward coast of Oʻahu. In the biophysical model, larvae released within Kāneʻohe Bay had a much higher chance of settlement than larvae released in other windward coast regions (Fig. 2a), and larval settlement was higher to sites within Kāneʻohe Bay (Fig. 2b). In the parentage analysis, more than half of the genetically linked adult–juvenile pairs showed self-recruitment within the bay (Fig. 5). *In situ* survey data confirmed the highest abundance of juvenile *A. triostegus* within Kāneʻohe Bay compared to other coastal regions of Oʻahu (Fig. 1b). Evidence from these complementary approaches aligns with expectations from coastal dynamics: larval retention along the windward coast of Oʻahu is expected to be strengthened by the trade winds in this region, which move in an on-shore direction with an average annual wind speed around 6 m s^{-1} . Higher retention of larvae within Kāneʻohe Bay aligns with high particle retention times (Lowe et al. 2009). The semi-enclosed nature of Kāneʻohe Bay shelters larvae from along-shore and offshore water movement.

Oceanographic and genetic evidence similarly connect regions within Kāneʻohe Bay to regions outside of the bay. Biophysical model simulations indicated that adults along the windward coast are a source for juveniles within Kāneʻohe Bay (Fig. 4); this pattern was confirmed through multiple adult–juvenile pairs in the genetic data (Fig. 2c). While our results predominately support the importance of Kāneʻohe Bay for retaining *A. triostegus* recruits, our model simulations predicted, and our genetic data confirmed, that adults within Kāneʻohe Bay can be a source, albeit a relatively weak one, of juveniles for sites outside of the bay (Figs. 4 & 5).

Spatial variation in larval retention and connectivity was apparent within the bay. Simulations of virtual larvae showed and parentage analyses validated connectivity among sites within Kāneʻohe Bay (Fig. 4), including support for self-recruitment at specific regions within the bay. Patterns of larval dispersal between sites within Kāneʻohe Bay primarily fol-

lowed a north-to-south gradient. Virtual larvae released in northern regions of the bay regularly settled in southern regions of the bay, and parentage analyses validated north-to-south dispersal patterns within Kāneʻohe Bay. In addition to the support for a north-to-south dispersal pattern, *in situ* survey data and particle tracking models both indicated an overall pattern of higher recruitment in the southern region of Kāneʻohe Bay. The southeastern part of the bay has high particle retention times (1–2 mo) and limited water exchange both with other parts of Kāneʻohe Bay and with the coastal ocean (Lowe et al. 2009); hence, high water retention may be a driving factor for high larval retention in the southern part of Kāneʻohe Bay.

Larval dispersal simulations and parentage analyses provided evidence for connectivity along the windward coast and to other coastal regions of Oʻahu. Some simulated larvae connected between windward coast sites, and 19% of genetically confirmed adult–juvenile pairs connected adults with juveniles between sites on the windward coasts. Simulations showed that some larvae were dispersed to outside of the windward coast model domain, and this dispersal to outside of the windward coast was greatest for larvae released from sites outside of Kāneʻohe Bay. Parentage analyses validated along-shore larval movement away from the windward coast through connections between adults on the windward coast and larvae settled elsewhere on Oʻahu. Onshore winds and along-shore currents, including the North Hawaiian Ridge Current, simultaneously act as a barrier to offshore dispersal (Basterretxea et al. 2013) and contribute to the movement of larvae across coastlines.

In addition to the spatial concordances between our oceanographic, genetic, and ecological data, there were temporal alignments as well. Our results indicate that physical dispersal dynamics did not drive large differences in annual recruitment success of reef fishes between 2014 and 2015, though they do help to account for seasonal settlement patterns. Simulations indicated that settlement success occurs across a wide variety of release dates and corresponding oceanographic conditions. *In situ* observations of juveniles in Kāneʻohe Bay confirmed that some settlement occurred throughout the year. Seasonally, the highest probability of settlement was for virtual larvae released in March and April. While our ecological surveys did not have complete temporal overlap with our oceanographic model simulations, *in situ* observations of juveniles in Kāneʻohe Bay confirmed a peak in settlement from June to November (Fig. 3).

Despite advances in oceanographic models and the alignment of our simulations with *in situ* survey data and parentage analyses, there are still limitations to simulating larval dispersal. For example, our model predictions should not be used to estimate actual numbers of settled reef fish. We released 100 eggs per location and date, while in the natural environment an estimated 22 000 to 362 000 pelagic eggs are released per female per spawning event (Longenecker & Langston 2008). Further, our model does not include larval mortality, likely leading to an overestimation of proportional settlement success given the extremely high mortality of marine larvae in the natural environment (Garrido et al. 2015). In contrast, larvae that crossed grid boundaries were lost from the model, corresponding to an underestimation of total successful recruitment. Another model limitation was the exclusion of complex larval reef fish behaviors, such as orientation to light polarization axes (Mouritsen et al. 2013, Berenshtein et al. 2014), swimming towards chemical cues of habitat quality (Gerlach et al. 2007, Dixon et al. 2008, 2014, Lecchini et al. 2013, Paris et al. 2013, Coppock et al. 2020), and swimming towards reef sounds (Simpson et al. 2008, Vermeij et al. 2010). Ontogenetic vertical migration was included in preliminary simulations (Text S1), but many of the larvae became stranded in the shallow areas of Kāne'ohe Bay, negating the value of including this behavior in our model. We examined varying PLDs and found that although PLD accounted for <0.1% of the variation in settlement, shorter PLDs resulted in slightly higher settlement success for *A. triostegus*, aligning with a previous study of PLDs (Sanvicente-Añorve et al. 2018). Intra-specific variation in PLD may be the result of variability in food availability (Dower et al. 2009) or water temperatures (Dekshenieks et al. 1993, McLeod et al. 2013). As particle tracking models continue to advance in their computing capacity and our knowledge of larval behavior increases (Swearer et al. 2019), simulating more nuanced larval behaviors will continue to strengthen the predictive power of biophysical models and narrow the spatial and temporal alignment with ecological and genetic observations.

Understanding larval dispersal patterns is critical to examining geographic aspects of marine population dynamics (Satterthwaite et al. 2021), as larval dispersal is the main connection between locations for many marine species. Unfortunately, understanding population connectivity via larval dispersal has presented a major challenge for marine ecology given the vast potential range of movement and the small size of larvae (Cowen et al. 2006, 2007, Botsford et al. 2009). In this

study, we explored the power of combining oceanographic model simulations with *in situ* ecological survey data and genetic parentage analyses to reveal patterns in settlement success and intergenerational connectivity for a reef fish. Our results highlight spatial patterns and the importance of a large embayment for retaining *A. triostegus* recruits both from adults found within the bay and from adults along the broader windward coast of O'ahu. High settlement success and self-recruitment were observed in the bay, particularly in the semi-enclosed southern part of the bay.

Using a multidisciplinary approach, we demonstrated that a large tropical embayment acted as a population sink and a favorable juvenile growth location for a coral reef fish, and suggest that this conclusion likely applies to many reef fishes with similar life histories. The concordance among 3 disparate approaches reinforces our conclusions and provides greater confidence in finding biologically realistic answers through oceanographic models that incorporate relevant life history. Understanding larval dispersal and the subsequent connectivity among sites is fundamentally important for guiding effective management strategies, including marine protected areas (Pelc et al. 2010) and recovery plans (Gouezo et al. 2021). Broader application of these multipronged methods would enhance fisheries management and the placement of marine protected areas for coral reef fishes.

Acknowledgements. This interdisciplinary work was supported by research labs at the University of Hawai'i led by B.W.B., M.J.D., E.C.F., M.A.H., S. A. Karl, M.A.M., B.S.P., and R.J.T. Additional project support came from E. Firing, C. Jerolmon, E. Schemmel, L. Teneva, L. Veazey, P. Moehlenkamp, and G. Walker. Boat and dive safety guidance came from J. Jones. Contributions to fieldwork were from K. Bahr, E. Barba, G. Burgess, D. Coffey, M. Hoban, G. Holns, C. Jerolmon, M. Kapur, D. Kraft, S. Leitner, C. Lescher, J. Levy, S. Mahaffey, E. Nalley, J. Paillusseau, J. Patterson, M. Russell, S. Tucker, G. Walker, L. Weaver, R. Weible, T. Wester, M. Winston, and J. Zill. Primary funding was provided by the Castle Foundation (Grant No. 3846, M. Hixon PI), University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program (Grant No. NA14OAR4170071, B.W.B. and S. A. Karl PI), and the Office of Naval Research (Award No. N00014-17-1-2206 Subtask 6.2: Ocean Modeling, M.A.M.). C.W.W.C.'s participation in this study was supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (Grant No. 2012103208). R.R.C.'s participation was supported by the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship (Award No. NA15NOS4290067). S.S.L.'s participation was supported by an East–West Center Scholarship. E.C.F.'s participation was supported by NOAA Fisheries award NA15NMF4520361. This is the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa SOEST contribution 11470, HIMB contribution 1875, Hawai'i SeaGrant contribution JC-16-37, and School of Life Sciences contribution 164.

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*Editorial responsibility: Myron Peck,
Den Burg, The Netherlands
Reviewed by: 3 anonymous referees*

*Submitted: April 9, 2021
Accepted: December 1, 2021
Proofs received from author(s): February 12, 2022*