

¹ Is there really such a thing as *Tropical Biology*?¹

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¹ Inspired by the provocative title of an essay by M. H. Robinson.

9

Abstract

- 10 Abstract, followed by up to eight keywords separated by a comma. Keywords should be in
11 English (with the exception of taxonomic information) and listed alphabetically.

12 *Keywords:* up to eight

13 Word count: X

¹⁴ 1. INTRODUCTION

¹⁵ “This is an interesting and useful study, but I feel the manuscript is better suited to a
¹⁶ specialized journal focusing on tropical ecosystems.”

¹⁷ Subject Editor (*name and journal redacted*)

¹⁸ This decision regarding my submission to one of our field’s well-known journals is likely
¹⁹ familiar to many members of the Association for Tropical Biology & Conservation (ATBC).
²⁰ All three reviews were positive, with none of the referees identifying significant shortcomings
²¹ or requesting major changes. So why had the manuscript been rejected? My only clue was in
²² the Editor’s conclusion, from which I gathered they felt studies done *in* the tropics were of
²³ limited relevance to researchers working *outside* the tropics. That’s for whom a specialized
²⁴ journal is published, after all – a smaller community of subject-matter experts – and the
²⁵ journal to which we had submitted our study sought to publish “broad conceptual advances”.
²⁶ In short, the Subject Editor was drawing a distinction between *Biology* and *Tropical Biology*,
²⁷ with the latter a specialized subdiscipline of the former.

²⁸ Sixty years on many of us find ourselves similarly frustrated. Field stations in the
²⁹ tropics remain underfunded (Corner 1946, Eppley *et al.* 2024). Financial support for tropical
³⁰ research continues to decline (Chapman *et al.* 1945, Sohmer 1980, Stegmann *et al.* 2024).
³¹ And the study of tropical ecosystems – which comprise the majority of the planet’s
³² biodiversity (Gaston 2000), ~40% of its terrestrial surface area, and half the human
³³ population (Hoornweg & Pope 2017) – continues to be seen by many as a scientific
³⁴ specialization. My objective here is not to review the biological validity (Robinson 1978,
³⁵ Moles & Ollerton 2016) or scientific implications (Zuk 2016) of this generalization, nor to
³⁶ summarize the history, status, and direction of tropical research (Buechner & Fosberg 1967,
³⁷ Janzen 1972, Janzen 1986, Bawa *et al.* 2004, *e.g.*,
³⁸ **chazdonFoundationsTropicalForest2001!**?). Instead, I will try to assess the
³⁹ fundamental assumption : Is there really such a thing as *Tropical Biology*? This limited view

40 of tropical research is not new. In 1963, P. W. Richards felt it necessary to use his
41 Presidential Address to the British Ecological Society to explain “what the Tropics can
42 contribute to ecology”, advocate for the tropics to be studied more intensively, and to
43 encourage students to visit “the most [biologically] exciting part of the world” (Richards
44 1963). His reason for choosing this topic, while self-deprecating, was pointed - he was
45 concerned that a overview of his own research or recent advances in tropical ecology “would
46 probably bore the large part of my audience.” (Richards 1963). That he felt doing so was
47 necessary despite he and others having done so for decades (Huxley 1927, Chapman *et al.*
48 1945, Park 1945, Richards 1946) was surely frustrating.

49 **1. Why the answer is ‘No’:**

50 “*In attempting to study vegetation and to arrive at generalizations... it would be more logical*
51 *to begin with the floristically rich vegetation of the tropics than, as we now do, with the*
52 *impoverished vegetation of northern Europe and North America.*”

53 P. W. Richards (1946)

54 One means of assessing if *Tropical Biology* is a distinct academic discipline is by considering
55 the communities into which scientists self-organize. Scholarly societies are one such
56 community; their establishment requires both an intellectual pursuit with which individuals
57 identify and a critical mass of like-minded individuals in search of community. Some of these
58 communities coalesce around broad conceptual domains (e.g., *Evolutionary Biology*,
59 *Conservation Biology*, *Integrative Biology*; Figure 1A). Still others bring together individuals
60 from different conceptual domains that share an interest in a particular system (e.g., *Avian*
61 *Biology*, *Island Biology*; Figure 1B). Finally, some scholarly societies comprise individuals
62 grounded in a common methodological framework, though they may do so with disparate
63 study systems or to address questions in distinct conceptual domains (e.g., *Molecular*
64 *Biology*, *Mathematical Biology*, *Systematic Biology*; Figure 1C).

65 *Tropical Biology* fails to align with any of these constructs. Its practitioners investigate

66 fundamental questions across conceptual domains with a broad range of methodological
67 approaches and study systems. Even the adjective that would seem be a unifying thread is
68 challenging to operationalize. ‘The Tropics’ are geographically defined as the portion of the
69 Earth’s surface receiving at least one day of direct overhead sunlight per year — a band
70 delineated by the Tropics of Capricorn ($23^{\circ}26'10.4''$ S) and Cancer ($23^{\circ}26'10.4''$ N). However,
71 the ranges of many ‘tropical’ species extend far beyond these boundaries², and a review by
72 Feeley and Stroud (2018) of over 200 scientific articles identified at least eight distinct
73 criteria by which authors defined ‘tropical’ systems. How then is it that *Tropical Biology*
74 come to be seen as a distinct subdiscipline despite the lack the sharp boundaries around
75 which scientific groups typically coalesce?

76 These contemporary perceptions of ‘The Tropics’ as distant and different are the result
77 of centuries of historical and cultural reinforcement (Arnold 1996, Driver & Yeoh 2000,
78 Stepan 2001, Miller & Reill 2011). The first Europeans to visit the tropics returned with
79 vivid, captivating, and frequently pejorative descriptions of the places and people they
80 encountered (Putz & Holbrook 1988). Their stories and images established a series of
81 persistent, often contradictory tropes about tropical regions and people that were then
82 repeated and reinterpreted by subsequent visitors (Smith 1950, Stepan 2001). The historian
83 David Arnold has argued that these narratives of *Tropicality* (*sensu* Gourou 1947), and even
84 referring to this part of the globe as *The Tropics*, allowed Europeans simultaneously define
85 the region as environmentally and culturally distinct while also superimposing a common
86 identity on very distinct parts of the tropical world (Arnold 1996).

87 The view of the tropics as simultaneously ‘exotic’ and ‘other’ was prevalent during the
88 formative years of von Humboldt, Darwin, and Wallace. Those they inspired that went on to
89 formalize the fields of ecology and evolution, almost all of whom were based in Europe or
90 North America, also grew up immersed in stereotypes about the tropics. They were

² Perhaps the most extreme examples are migratory birds such as the northern wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), which fly over 14,000 km from sub-Saharan Africa to their breeding grounds in the Arctic (Bairlein *et al.* 2012)

91 obviously not ignorant about these locations and their biology; many considered a trip to the
92 tropics an essential rite of passage for their students (Webb 1960, Raby 2017). Others went
93 even further — in his 1945 Presidential Address to the Ecological Society of America,
94 Orlando Park impressed upon his audience the importance of the tropics and encouraged
95 ESA to establish a “full scale program in tropical ecology” and consider establishing “a new
96 journal... dealing with tropical biology in its broadest aspects” (Park 1945). But given that
97 many of the scientists that Park and Richards were addressing “have never been to the
98 tropics and never intend to do so” (Richards 1963), the inherent challenges in establishing
99 and maintaining tropical field stations (Raby 2017), and how the biology of the tropics
100 quickly overwhelmed paradigms and theory developed to explain temperate patterns (Corner
101 1946, Richards 1946, 1963, 1964), one can understand how the colonial treatment of the
102 tropics as *culturally* distinct led to the scientific truism that the tropics were *biologically*
103 distinct (Raby 2017).

104 **2. Why the answer is ‘*Maybe*’.**

105 “...to this day ecology is biased by concepts and ideas appropriate mainly to the study of
106 vegetation in temperate climate.”

107 P. W. Richards (1963)

108 Even if ‘The Tropics’ are a historical construct, *Tropical Biology* could still be conceptually
109 distinct field of study if, over time, the scientific community converged on a suite of topics
110 either unique to or best studied in tropical systems. To assess this possibility, I used
111 text-mining tools to compare the content of 11,210 articles reporting research from the
112 tropics with 26,597 studies conducted in other parts of the world. These studies were
113 published from 1990-2022 in N = 10 journals (*Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, *Ecology*,
114 *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Evolution*, *Biotropica*, *Journal of Ecology*, *Tropical Conservation*
115 *Science*, *American Naturalist*, *Tropical Ecology*, *Journal of Tropical Ecology*).

116 A complete description of the methods used to gather and process these data are in the

117 *Supplementary Materials.* Briefly, I began by extracting all keywords, title words (e.g., *seed*,
118 *species*), and title bigrams (i.e., pairs of sequential words, e.g., *seed predation*, *species*
119 *diversity*) from the entire collection of articles; this resulted in N = 62,883 keywords, N =
120 25,207 title words, and N = 98,036 bigrams. I then calculated the percentage of articles in
121 each category using each of those terms. The results below are based on the top N = 50
122 terms in each article category. Two major patterns emerge from this analysis. The first is
123 that 32% of the most frequently used keywords from ‘tropical’ articles reflected geographic
124 locations (e.g., *Costa Rica*, *Amazonia*, *BCI*). In contrast, the overwhelming majority of
125 keywords from non-tropical articles (98%) were conceptual (e.g., *competition*, *ecosystem*
126 *function*, *sexual selection*; Table 1). The second is that after removing the system- and
127 location-specific keywords, there is ample conceptual overlap between tropical and
128 non-tropical studies (Table 2) that is consistent with broader trends in ecological research
129 (Carmel *et al.* 2013, McCallen *et al.* 2019, Anderson *et al.* 2021). That said, the most
130 common research topics within each article category often differ dramatically in their relative
131 rankings (Figure S1), and there are notable areas of topical divergence (Table 2). Similar
132 patterns emerge when comparing individual title words and title word bi-grams (Figure S2,
133 Figure S3).

134 One interpretation of these results is that *Tropical Biology* is indeed a subdiscipline
135 focused on problems and topics unique to or most relevant in tropical locations, and it is
136 undoubtedly true that there are some questions best addressed in or relevant to tropical
137 ecosystems. However, the observed differences could also reflect the historical relegation of
138 certain academic subjects to the tropics, which is then reinforcing by “temperate biases”
139 (*sensu* Zuk 2016) or the overrepresentation of certain research sites (Stocks *et al.* 2008), all
140 of which can shape the development of theory and determine what data are used to test it
141 (Raby 2017). A similar argument has been put forward for the social sciences by Castro
142 Torres and Alburez-Gutierrez (2022), who argue that the far greater prevalence of geographic
143 markers in the titles of articles by authors in the Global South both indicates and

¹⁴⁴ perpetuates “an unwarranted claim on universality” by scholars from North America and
¹⁴⁵ Europe. This parallel evidence from a different field is compelling; nevertheless, the patterns
¹⁴⁶ presented here are insufficient for affirming the intellectual independence of *Tropical Biology*.

¹⁴⁷ **3. Why the answer is ‘Yes’**

¹⁴⁸ “*No education complete without trip to the Tropics.*”

¹⁴⁹ J. E. Webb (1960)

¹⁵⁰ Finally, I believe an argument can be made for treating *Tropical Biology* as a unique
¹⁵¹ discipline, but not one based on the reasons typically put forward by others. What sets
¹⁵² *Tropical Biology* apart is not the biology *per se* (*sensu* Robinson 1978). Rather, what
¹⁵³ Tropical Biologists have in common is the broader context in which their scholarship is
¹⁵⁴ embedded and carried out. Research anywhere is challenging, but for tropical biologists the
¹⁵⁵ precarious infrastructure, economic volatility, limited resources, and political instability can
¹⁵⁶ make the challenges feel insurmountable. These struggles can be compounded by having to
¹⁵⁷ communicate one’s results in a foreign language (Amano *et al.* 2016) to the potentially
¹⁵⁸ biased reviewers and readers (Smith *et al.* 2023) of journals that are increasingly charging
¹⁵⁹ publications fees equivalent to several months salary (Smith *et al.* 2021). When added to the
¹⁶⁰ physical and emotional toll of disease, crime, working in isolation, habitat loss, and the
¹⁶¹ potential for professional retribution or physical violence (Clancy *et al.* 2014, Ellwanger *et al.*
¹⁶² 2020, Palinkas & Wong 2020), tropical biology and conservation can be uniquely dangerous —
¹⁶³ even deadly. Lamentably, this is also true for the heroic conservationists, indigenous leaders,
¹⁶⁴ and journalists with whom we work (Cavalcanti *et al.* 2023).

¹⁶⁵ **4. The Future of (Tropical) Biology**

¹⁶⁶ “*There are few things more presumptuous than a US scientist holding forth on the*
¹⁶⁷ *future of tropical ecology*”

¹⁶⁸ D. H. Janzen (1972)

169 What if the scientific community had paid heed to Richards (1946) and properly centered
170 the tropics when drawing biological generalizations? Perhaps Universities in Europe and
171 North America would offer elective courses in “Temperate Biology”. The instructors of these
172 courses might present their research at the annual meeting of the *Association for Temperate*
173 *Biology & Conservation* (Figure 2) and publish papers in specialized journals, with article
174 titles that — in contrast to the more broadly relevant research from the tropics — emphasize
175 the systems or locations the work was done (Figure 3).

176 I prefer instead to consider what the ambiguity of my conclusions implies for how we
177 should move forward. I suggest that the future of lies in neither dropping the adjective that
178 motivates so many of us, nor keeping it and accepting status as as specialization. Instead, I
179 call on ATBC members to ***reclaim and reshape the Tropical Narrative:*** to continue
180 taking pride and elevating what makes biology in the tropics distinct and important — the
181 places and context in which we work — while also working to properly recenter tropical
182 ecosystems as the foundation of Biology and focus of conceptual attention. Below are six
183 actions with which I propose anyone can contribute to this movement.

184 ***Cite with purpose.*** Citation is a powerful and political act; it conveys legitimacy on
185 the scholarship in the article being cited as well as its author, helps elevate the profile of the
186 author and study system, and those reading your work will cite these articles when writing
187 their own. For many scientists it also plays an important role in their professional
188 advancement. Be mindful of this impact and the opportunity it presents when choosing
189 whom to cite. Cite scientists whose work or approach you feel is undervalued or overlooked.
190 Cite scientists from countries or institutions that have been ignored by the broader scientific
191 community. Cite scientists whose approach to research you feel others should emulate. Cite
192 studies conducted in the tropics.

193 ***Teach with Purpose.*** All tropical biologists are teachers, whether it be in a
194 classroom or in a meeting with policy makers, and teaching also provides an opportunity to
195 elevate the scholarship of others. Be mindful of whose papers are assigned as readings, the

196 studies and systems used to illustrate concepts, and the scientists highlighted in
197 presentations. Use your syllabus as a tool to recast the narrative about the tropics and the
198 scientific community that studies them. Train students in the skills needed when working in
199 tropical systems — collaboration, facilitation, conflict resolution, and communication to
200 diverse audiences (Kainer *et al.* 2006, Duchelle *et al.* 2009). Teach collaboratively and
201 cross-nationally (Russell *et al.* 2022).

202 ***Collaborate with Purpose.*** International collaboration can be challenging, but
203 personally and professionally rewarding (Smith *et al.* 2014). Be mindful of global scientific
204 inequities, laws, and ‘parachute science’ (Gómez-Pompa 2004, Asase *et al.* 2022,
205 Ramírez-Castañeda *et al.* 2022). Allow community members to guide the development of
206 research priorities and questions (Kainer *et al.* 2009). Push for organizations to strengthen
207 collaborations with — and especially within — the Global South (Ocampo-Ariza *et al.*
208 2023). Partner with communities to identify research questions and return the results of
209 research (Kainer *et al.* 2006). Treat the parataxonomists, field technicians, and station staff
210 that make our work possible with the respect they deserve (Basset *et al.* 2004). Publish in
211 national journals (Bruna *et al.* 2004).

212 ***Engage the Public.*** Public fascination with the tropics and their charismatic species
213 (Albert *et al.* 2018) provides unparalleled opportunities for outreach and education (Moreira
214 & Robles 2017). Take advantage of global sporting events (Melo *et al.* 2014), teams with
215 tropical species as mascots (Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough 2019), movies set in the tropics
216 (Yong *et al.* 2011), tropical images in fashion (Kutesko 2014), or other connections between
217 people’s interests and tropical biodiversity. Leverage this universal appeal into support for
218 tropical research and conservation, but beware of doing so in ways that perpetuate
219 stereotypes.

220 ***Get in the Game.*** Help make the process of publishing more fair by serving as a
221 review or subject editor for *Biotropica*. Contribute to capacity building efforts by reviewing
222 student seed grants proposals or serving as a judge for student presentations at the annual

223 meeting. Join an ATBC committee or chapter and organize a webinar, workshop, hackathon,
224 or reading group. What should the Association be doing differently? Communicate your
225 ideas to the ATBC leadership or stand for election and push for change as a Councillor.

226 ***Support and celebrate one another.*** Finally, remember that the work done by
227 tropical biologists addresses the “neglected problems that afflict most of the world’s people”
228 (Annan 2003). Conducting research — regardless of the subject — advances the
229 socioeconomic condition of the country in which it’s conducted. It is difficult, frustrating,
230 and not without risk. Take a moment to thank, congratulate, and support each other
231 (Rudzki *et al.* 2022, Nordseth *et al.* 2023) for your contributions and the effort and resilience
232 that they required — you are making the world a better place.

Table 1

Top keywords in tropical articles, non-tropical articles, and keywords that the categories have in common. Keywords in bold refer to species, geographic locations, or systems.

| Tropical: Unique Top Keywords (rank) | Non-Tropical: Unique Top Keywords (rank) | Shared Top Keywords (rank in Tropical, Non-Tropical) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| tropical forest (1) seed dispersal (3) | sexual selection (1) phenotypic plasticity (4) | diversity (2, 6) herbivory (5, 11) |
| tropical rainforest (4) costa rica (7) brazil (8) conservation (11) rainforest (12) panama (13) mexico (16) savanna (17) frugivory (19) seed predation (22) neotropic (23) | tradeoff (9) adaptation (10) natural selection (12) population dynamic (13) density dependence (15) fitness (16) coevolution (17) body size (18) evolution (19) local adaptation (20) gene flow (21) phylogeny (22) | fragmentation (6, 42) disturbance (9, 27) climate change (10, 3) species richness (14, 24) competition (15, 2) speciation (18, 5) predation (20, 14) phenology (21, 46) pollination (24, 48) dispersal (26, 7) nitrogen (28, 44) mutualism (33, 34) lifehistory (37, 8) temperature (49, 37) |
| tropical dryforest (25) seed germination (27) amazon (29) atlantic forest (30) functional trait (31) seasonality (32) phosphorus (34) fire (35) succession (36) bird (38) biogeography (39) biomass (40) bci (41) tropic (42) cerrado (43) regeneration (44) amazonia (45) africa (46) species diversity (47) puerto rico (48) decomposition (50) | quantitative genetic (23) food web (25) heritability (26) coexistence (28) hybridization (29) experimental evolution (30) selection (31) reproductive isolation (32) demography (33) survival (35) facilitation (36) maternal effect (38) metapopulation (39) usa (40) extinction (41) mate choice (43) sperm competition (45) ecosystem function (47) sexual conflict (49) mating system (50) | |

Table 2

Top keywords from tropical and non-tropical articles that are unique to each category once system-specific keywords have been excluded, followed by the top keywords from each category that they have in common. Keywords in bold refer to species, geographic locations, or systems.

| Tropical: Unique Top Keywords (rank) | Non-Tropical: Unique Top Keywords (rank) | Shared Top Keywords (rank in Tropical, Non-Tropical) |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| seed dispersal (2) | tradeoff (2) | diversity (1,6) |
| conservation (7) | natural selection (7) | herbivory (3,11) |
| rainforest (8) | fitness (8) | fragmentation (4,41) |
| savanna (11) | coevolution (11) | disturbance (5,27) |
| frugivory (13) | evolution (13) | climate change (6,3) |
| seed predation (16) | local adaptation (16) | species richness (9,24) |
| seed germination (18) | gene flow (18) | competition (10,2) |
| functional trait (21) | quantitative genetic (21) | speciation (12,5) |
| seasonality (22) | food web (22) | predation (14,14) |
| phosphorus (24) | heritability (24) | phenology (15,45) |
| fire (25) | coexistence (25) | pollination (17,47) |
| succession (26) | hybridization (26) | dispersal (19,7) |
| biogeography (28) | experimental evolution (28) | nitrogen (20,43) |
| bird (29) | selection (29) | mutualism (23,34) |
| biomass (30) | reproductive isolation (30) | lifehistory (27,8) |
| regeneration (31) | survival (31) | temperature (33,37) |
| species diversity (32) | facilitation (32) | density dependence (36,15) |
| decomposition (34) | maternal effect (34) | sexual selection (37,1) |
| litter (35) | metapopulation (35) | phylogeny (38,22) |
| beta diversity (39) | extinction (39) | adaptation (40,10) |
| mortality (42) | mate choice (42) | demography (41,33) |
| recruitment (43) | sperm competition (43) | body size (45,18) |
| drought (44) | ecosystem function (44) | population dynamic (46,13) |
| secondary forest (48) | sexual conflict (48) | phenotypic plasticity (47,4) |
| community structure (49) | mating system (49) | |
| mammal (50) | migration (50) | |

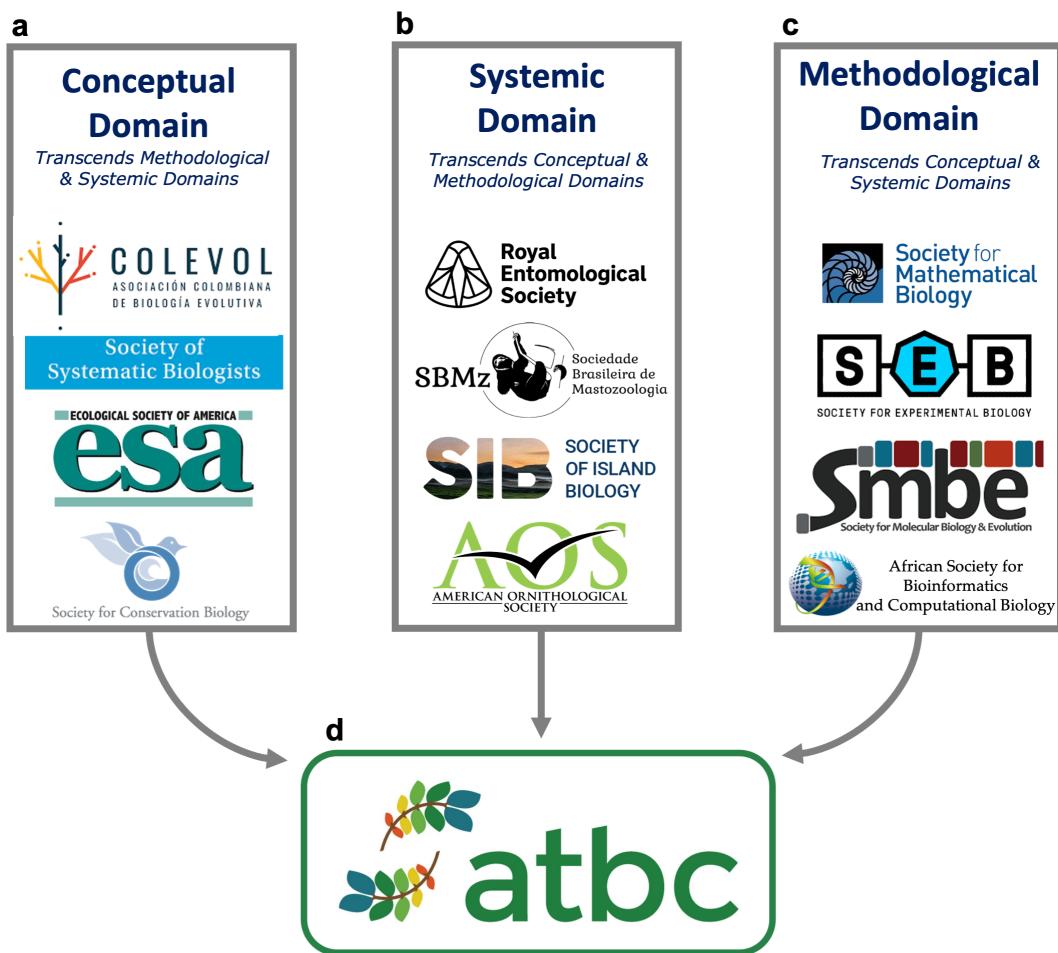


Figure 1. Alternative ways in which researchers self-organize in scholarly societies: (a) Conceptual Domain, (b) Systemic Domain, or (c) Methodological Domain. The Association for Tropical Biology & Conservation (i.e., ATBC) is unique in that transcends the three domains: its members use a broad diversity of species, ecosystems, and methods to address questions grounded in – or even transcending – multiple distinct conceptual domains.



Figure 2. The logo for a proposed new scholarly society for researchers specializing on temperate ecosystems and species.

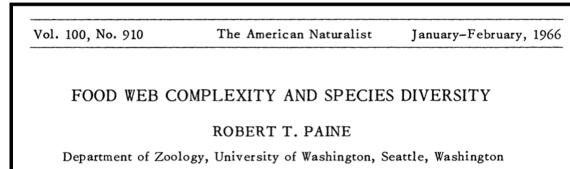
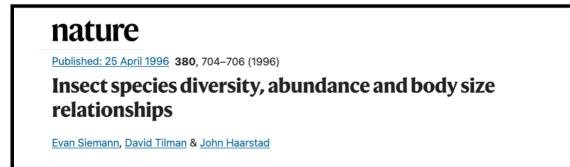
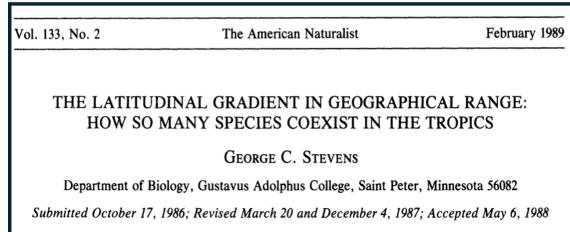
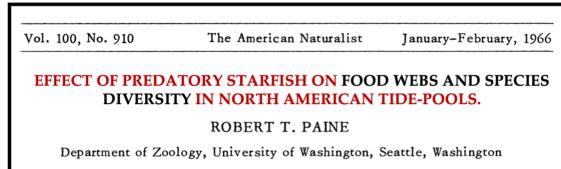
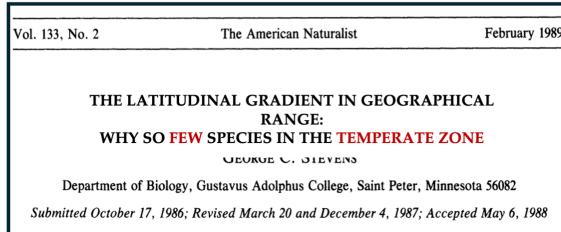
a. Original title**b. Reimagined title**

Figure 3. The (a) original and (b) reimagined titles of four high-profile research articles. Comparing these emphasizes how the original titles reflect and reinforce the idea that 'reference' or 'default' ecosystems are found in the Temperate Zone.

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238 DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

239 The complete data set used in this article is available in Dryad at <*DOI added upon*
240 *acceptance*>. The version of the code used to review, correct, and prepare this archive
241 (version 1.0.0) is available at Zenodo at <*DOI added upon acceptance*>. The code used to
242 prepare this publication, including statistical summaries reported in the text, tables, and
243 figures, is available at Zenodo at <*DOI added upon acceptance*>.

244 DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

245 The author confirms that there have been no involvements that might raise the
246 question of bias in the work reported or in the conclusions, implications, or opinions stated.

247 AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

248 E.M.B conceived the study and is responsible for the methodology, data collection,
249 data curation, formal analysis, validation, visualization, software, and writing.

250

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS**METHODS**

1. Bibliometric analysis. To identify the conceptual domains studied by researchers working in ‘Tropical’ and “non-Tropical” locations, I used information extracted from the bibliographic records of articles published These studies were published from 1990-2022 in N = 10 journals (*Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, *Ecology*, *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Evolution*, *Biotropica*, *Journal of Ecology*, *Tropical Conservation Science*, *American Naturalist*, *Tropical Ecology*, *Journal of Tropical Ecology*). Specifically, I compared (1) article keywords, (2) individual words in article titles (e.g., *seed*, *species*), and (3) title bigrams (i.e., pairs of sequential words in titles, e.g., *seed predation*, *species diversity*). Below I describe how the article records were identified, downloaded, processed, and assigned to the ‘Tropical’ and “non-Tropical” categories using code written in the R statistical programming language (R Core Team 2023) and available at Github (https://github.com/BrunaLab/atbc2022_plenary_talk).

On 8 February 2023, I downloaded all bibliographic data available in SCOPUS and the Web of Science ‘Core Collection’ for all articles published in the focal journals; both SCOPUS and the Web of Science were queried because they differ in the years indexed for each journal. I then used the `refsplitr` package to process the records and remove any duplicates. After removing all stopwords from article titles (Benoit *et al.* 2021) and keywords, I spell-checked, stemmed, and lemmatized all of the keywords and title words. I also extracted bigrams from titles with the `tidytext` library (Silge & Robinson 2016). Finally, I identified each article as either ‘Tropical’ or ‘non-Tropical’; all articles published in (*Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, *Ecology*, *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Evolution*, *Biotropica*, *Journal of Ecology*, *Tropical Conservation Science*, *American Naturalist*, *Tropical Ecology*, *Journal of Tropical Ecology*) were assigned to the ‘Tropical’ category, while articles published in the other journals were assigned to one of these categories based on a search of the titles, keywords, or abstracts for a list of domain-specific terms (e.g., tropical: *amazon*, *andes*, *congo*, *bci*, *chamela*;

448 non-tropical: *finland, boreal, eastern decid, arctic, polar*). These procedures resulted in N =
449 37,807 total articles published, of which N = 11,210 reported research conducted in the
450 tropics and N = 26,597 were based on work conducted in other locations. Collectively, these
451 articles used N = 62,883, N = 25,207 unique title words, and N = 98,036 title bigrams.

452 **2. Visualization.** The number of articles varies widely between journals, as does the
453 number of keywords per article. Comparing counts of keyword frequency in tropical and
454 non-tropical articles could therefore bias results towards the content published a small
455 number of journals. To correct for this, I calculated the percentage of articles in each
456 geographic category that using each keyword, title word, or bigram. I then selected the N =
457 50 most frequently used terms in each geographic category, and identified (a) any terms that
458 ‘tropical’ and ‘non-tropical’ articles had in common, and (b) any terms that were unique to
459 each article category.

460 **3. Data and Code.** Questions regarding the data set or code should be posted as
461 Issues on the project’s Github Repository (<https://github.com/BrunaLab/----/issues>) or
462 referred to E. M. Bruna. Summaries of any post-publication updates will be posted to the
463 NEWS.md file of the Github Repository (<https://github.com/BrunaLab/--->).

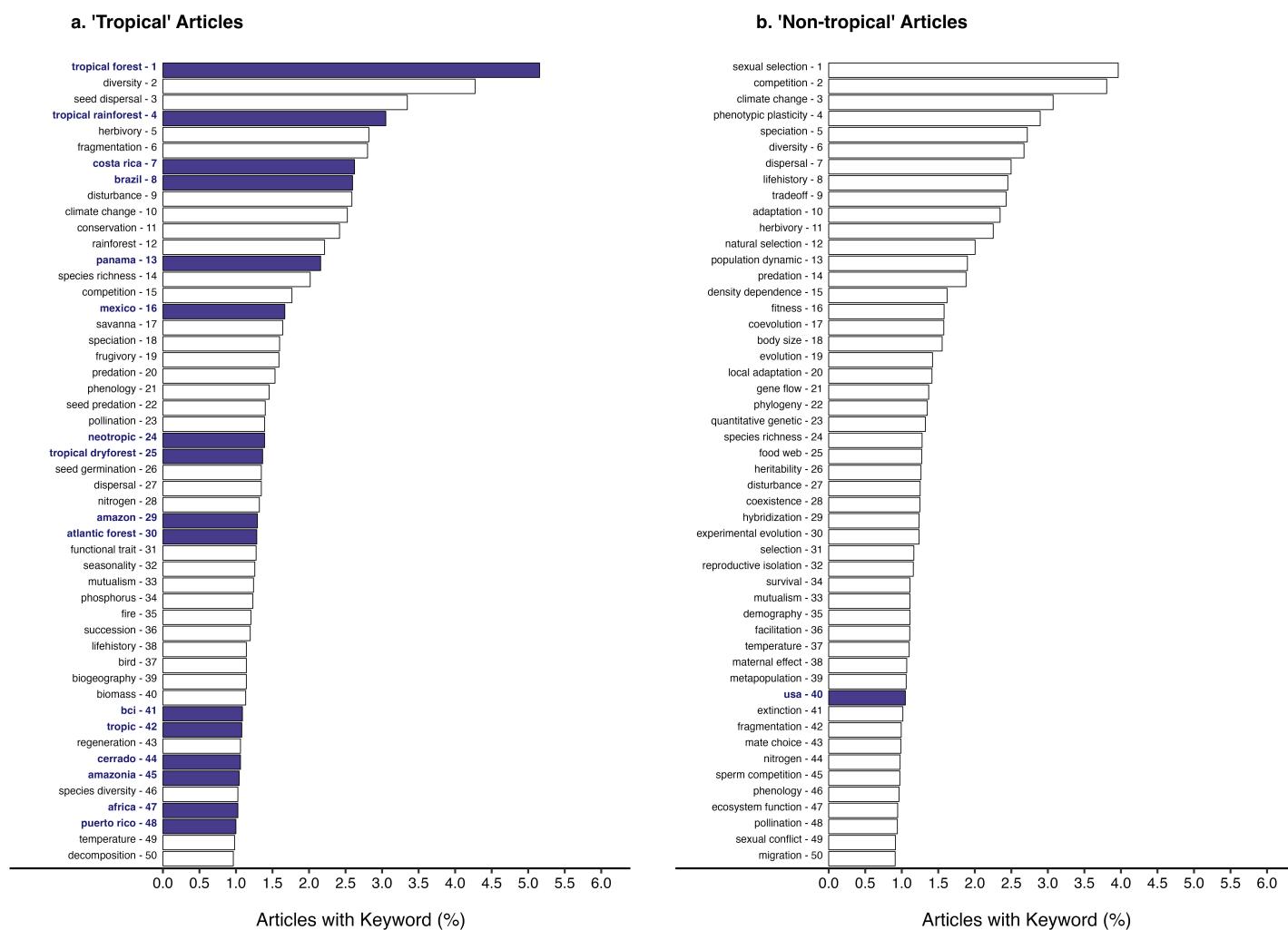


Figure S1. The most common keywords from articles based on research conducted in (a) the tropics and (b) non-tropical regions. The rank of these words is based on the percentage of articles in each category that included them. Terms reflecting geography (e.g., *tropics*, *Peru*, *Southern*) are indicated in bold and with filled bars.

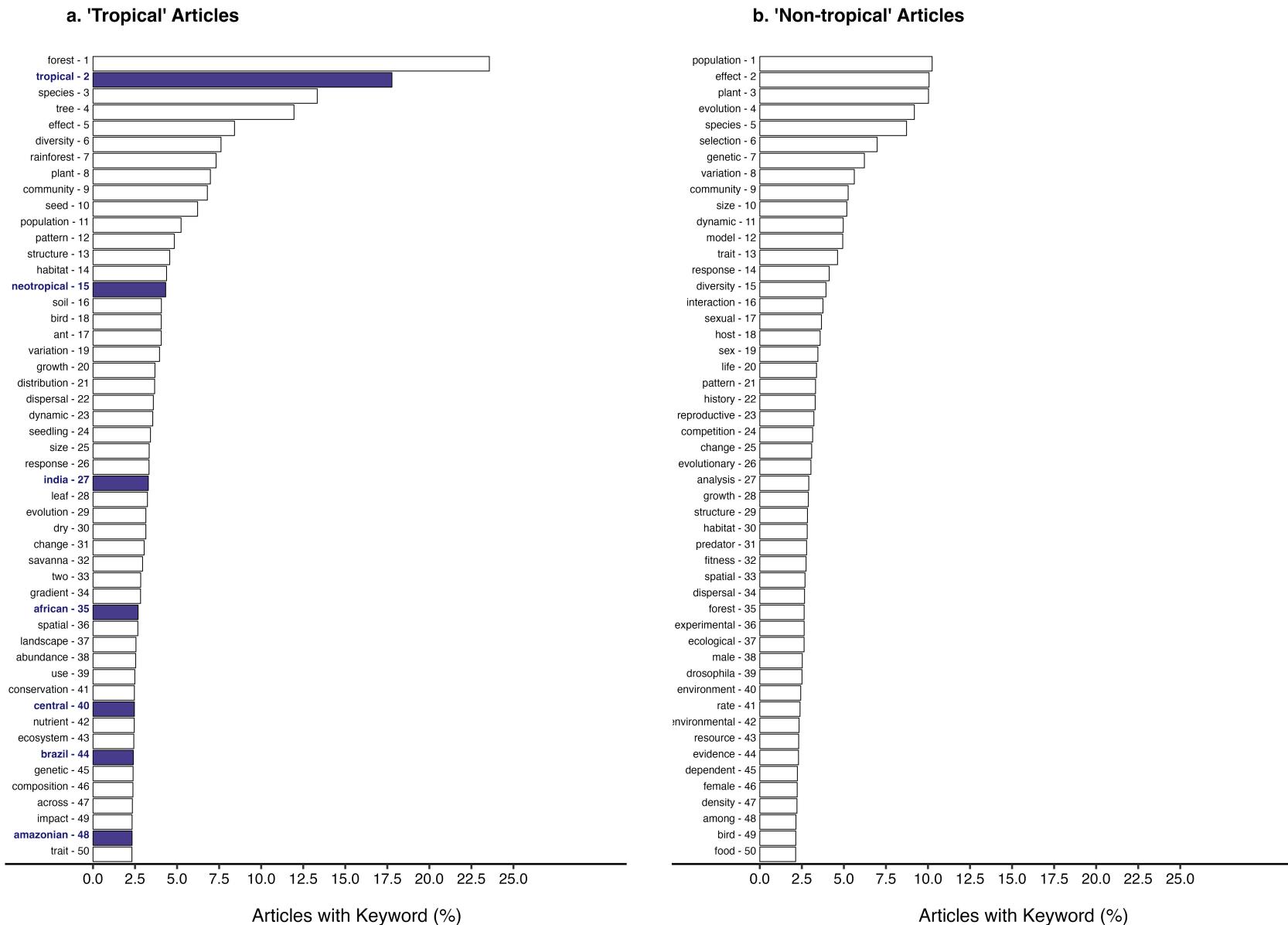


Figure S2. The most common words in the titles of articles based on research conducted in (a) the tropics and (b) non-tropical regions. The rank of these words is based on the percentage of article titles in each category that included those words. Terms reflecting geography (e.g., *tropics*, *Peru*, *Southern*) are indicated in bold and with filled bars.

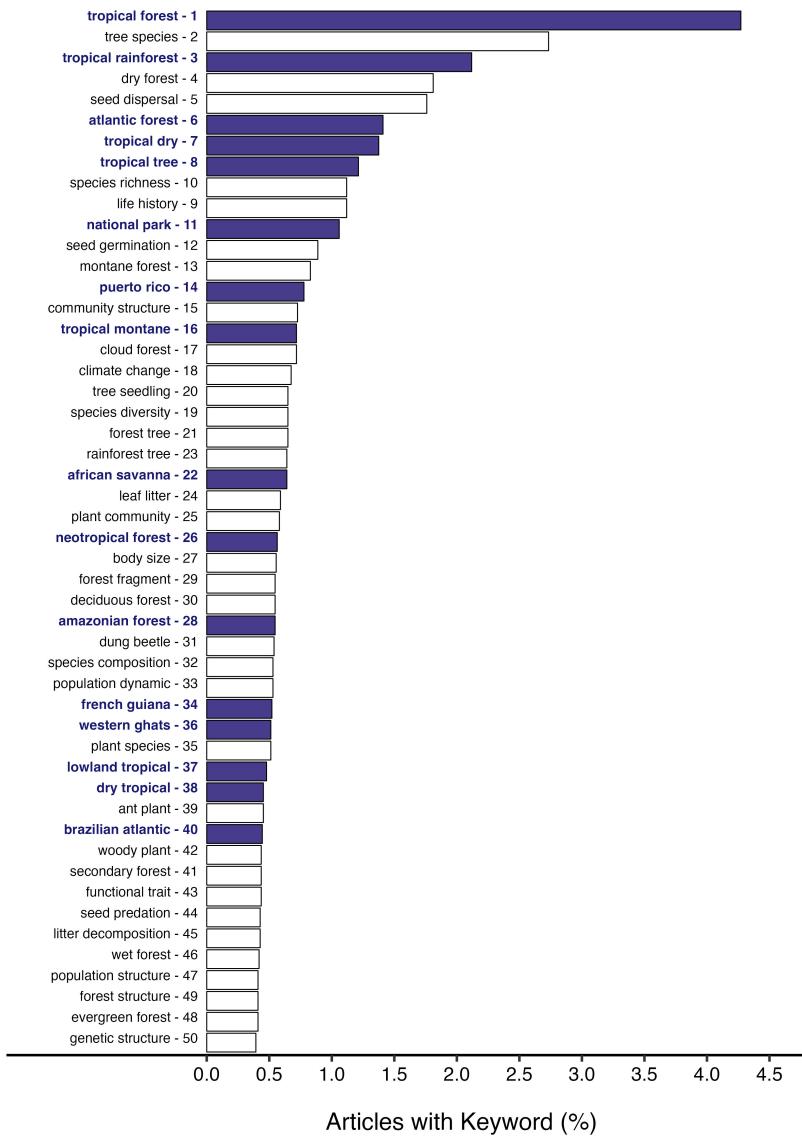
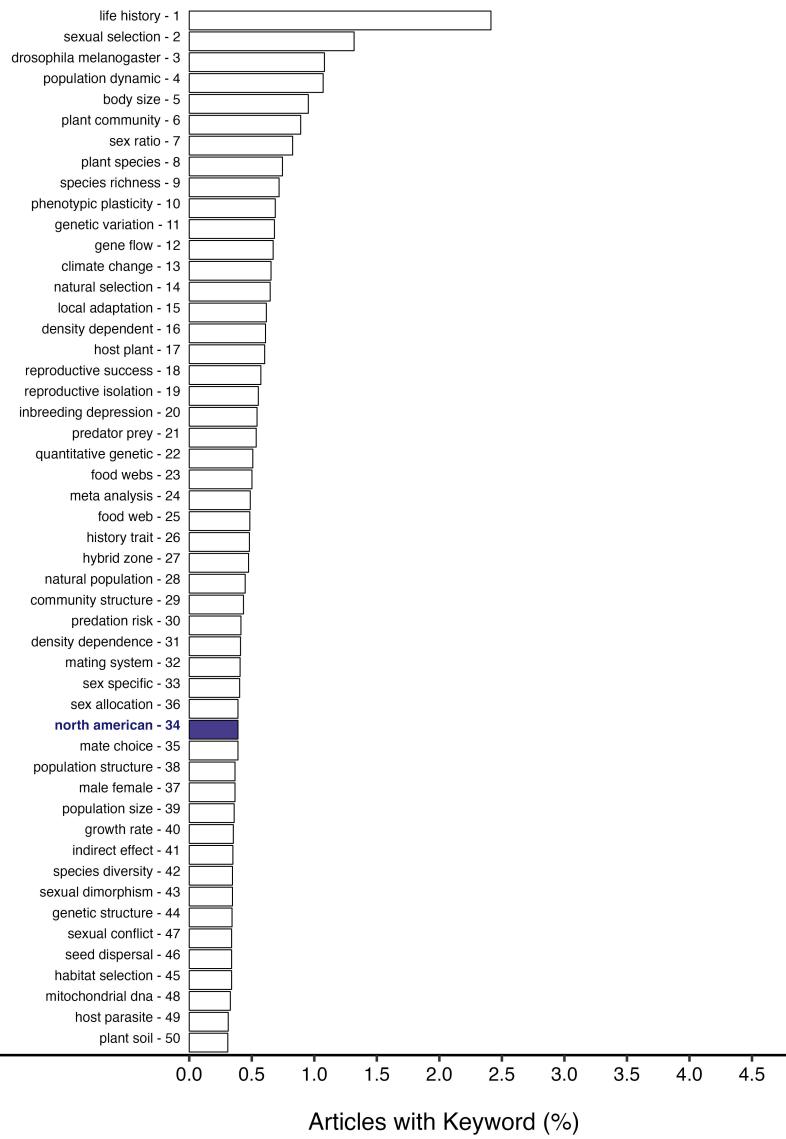
a. 'Tropical' Articles**b. 'Non-tropical' Articles**

Figure S3. The most bigrams in titles of articles based on research conducted in (a) the tropics and (b) non-tropical regions. The rank of these words is based on the percentage of article titles in each category that included those words. Bigrams reflecting geography (e.g., *tropics*, *Peru*, *Atlantic Forest*) are indicated in bold and with filled bars.

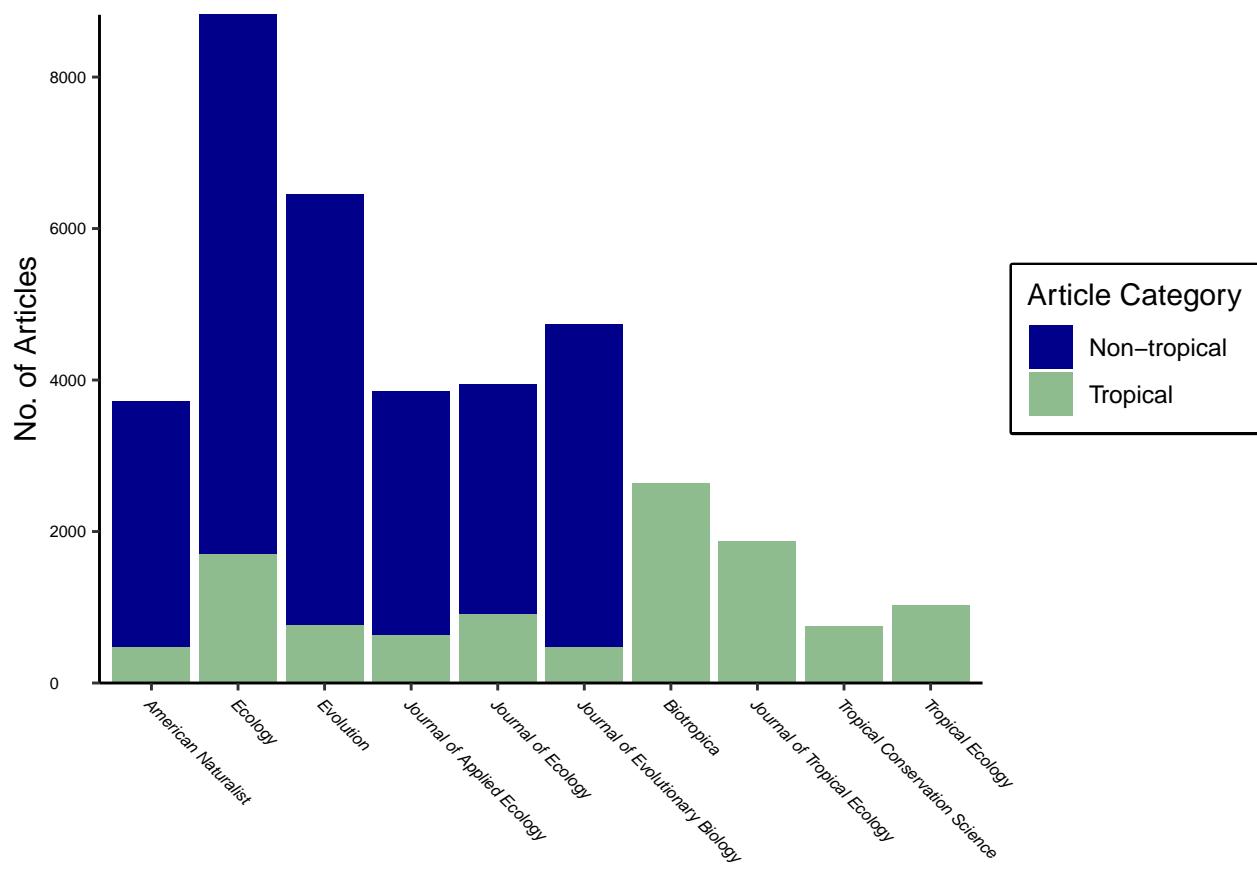


Figure S4. The number of articles from each journal and geographic category that were used in used the analysis of keywords.

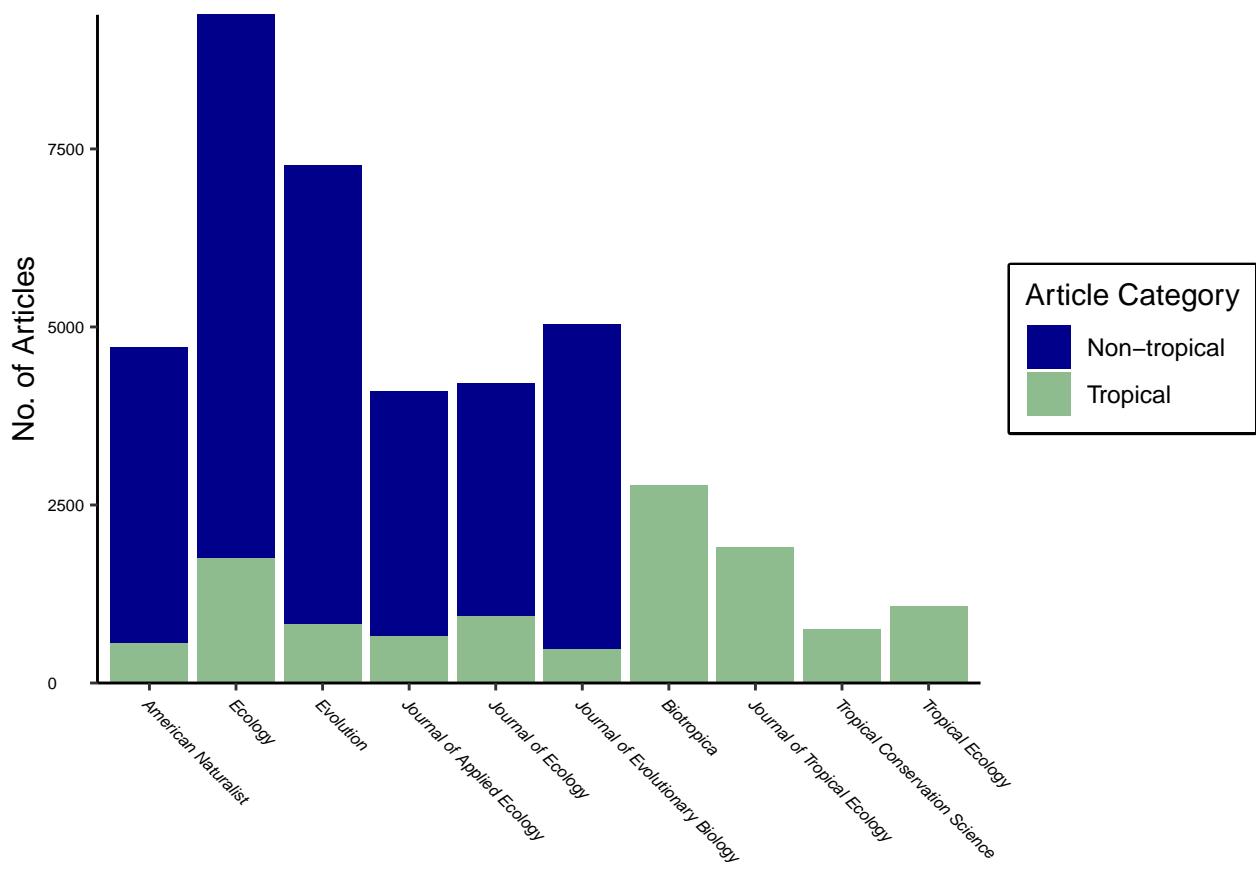


Figure S5. The number of articles from each journal and geographic category that were used in the analysis of title words and title bigrams.