sPlot open - An environmentally-balanced, open-access, global dataset of vegetation plots

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Abstract

Vegetation provides the foundation of life on Earth. Assessing biodiversity status and trends in plant communities is therefore critical to understand, quantify and predict the effects of global change on ecosystems. Here, we present the largest dataset of vegetation plots (i.e. plant species co-occurrence or community composition data) ever released in open access. It contains information on 91,031 vegetation plots recording the cover or abundance of each vascular plant species that occurs in a plot of a given surface area at the date of the inventory. Plots were derived from 103 local to regional datasets. To improve the representation of Earth's environmental conditions, plots were resampled from a larger pool of vegetation plots using an environmentally stratified sampling design. Each vegetation plot comes basic environmental information as well as plant functional trait data. Our open-access dataset can be used to explore global patterns of diversity at the plant community level, as ground truthing data in remote sensing applications or as a baseline for biodiversity monitoring.

Background & Summary

Biodiversity is facing a global crisis. As many as 1 million species are estimated to be already facing extinction, the far majority due to anthropogenic impacts, land-use and climate change (1). In addition, the rates of biodiversity redistribution and homogenization are accelerating (2, 3; 4). Biological assemblages are becoming progressively more similar to each other globally, as local biodiversity and endemic species go extinct and are replaced by more widespread and competitive native or alien species (1; 4). This has profound potential impacts on human and ecosystem health (5; 6). For instance, many terrestrial and marine species are shifting their geographical distribution as a response to climate change (3), including animals hosting pathogens transmissible to humans (7; 8; 9).

Plant communities are no exception to this biodiversity crisis (10; 11; 4). This is worrisome since terrestrial vegetation accounts for 80% (450 Gt C) of the living biomass on Earth (12). Given the central role of vegetation in ecosystem productivity, stability and functioning (11), assessing biodiversity status and trends in plant communities is paramount for other life compartments and human societies alike.

Monitoring trends in plant biodiversity requires adequate data across a range of spatiotemporal scales (13, 14). Large independent collections of plant occurrence data do exist at the global or continental extent via the Botanical Information and Ecology Network (BIEN) (15), the Global Inventory of Floras and Traits (GIFT) (16) or the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) (https://www.gbif.org/). However, all these presence-only databases either neglect how individual plant species co-occur and interact locally to form plant communities, or are collected at spatial resolutions which are too coarse to assess biodiversity trends (e.g., one-degree grid cells) at the scale of local plant assemblages (17).

Yet, there is a long-lasting tradition among botanists to record the cover or abundance of each plant species that occurs in a vegetation plot of a given size (i.e. surface area) at a given time (e.g. 18). Compared to presence-only data, vegetation plot data (presence-absence) present many advantages. First, they contain information on which plant species co-occur together in the same locality at a given moment in time (19). This is a necessary prerequisite for testing hypotheses related to biotic interactions among plant species (i.e. interspecific plant interactions). Vegetation plot data also provide crucial information on where and when a species is absent, therefore improving current species distribution models (20). Being spatially explicit, vegetation plots can be resurveyed through time to assess potential changes in plant species composition relative to a baseline (21; 22, 4). As they normally contain information on the relative cover or abundance of each species, vegetation plots are also more adequate to detect biodiversity changes, compared to data representing the occurrence of individual species only (23).

Vegetation-plot data are very fragmented, though, as they typically stem from a myriad of local research projects (24). Consequently, these data often have either fine-grain spatial resolutions but small spatial extents, or vice versa (25). Furthermore, with their disparate sampling protocols, standards and taxonomic resolutions, aggregating and harmonizing vegetation plot data proves extremely challenging (26). It is not surprising, therefore, that these data are rarely used in global-scale biodiversity research (27; 28; 29).

The sPlot initiative tries to close this data gap. It leverages numerous local-to-regional vegetation-plot datasets to create a harmonized and comprehensive global database of georeferenced terrestrial plant species assemblages (24). Established in 2013, sPlot currently contains more than 1.9 million vegetation plots, and is fully integrated with the TRY database (30), from which it derives information on plant functional traits. The sPlot database is increasingly being used to study continental-to-global scale vegetation patterns, such as the relative contribution of regional vs. local factors on the global patterns of fern richness (31), the mechanisms underlying the spread and abundance of native vs. invasive tree species (32), and worldwide trait–environment relationships in plant communities (26).

Here, we provide an open-access data set composed of 91,031 vegetation plots, representative of the environmental space covered by the sPlot database. The selected vegetation plots stem from 103 databases and span across 115 countries (Figure 1). This resampled dataset (sPlot Open - hereafter) is composed of: (1) plot-level information, including metadata and basic vegetation structure descriptors; (2) the vascular plant species composition of each vegetation plot, including species cover or abundance information when available; and (3) community-level functional information derived from the TRY database (30).

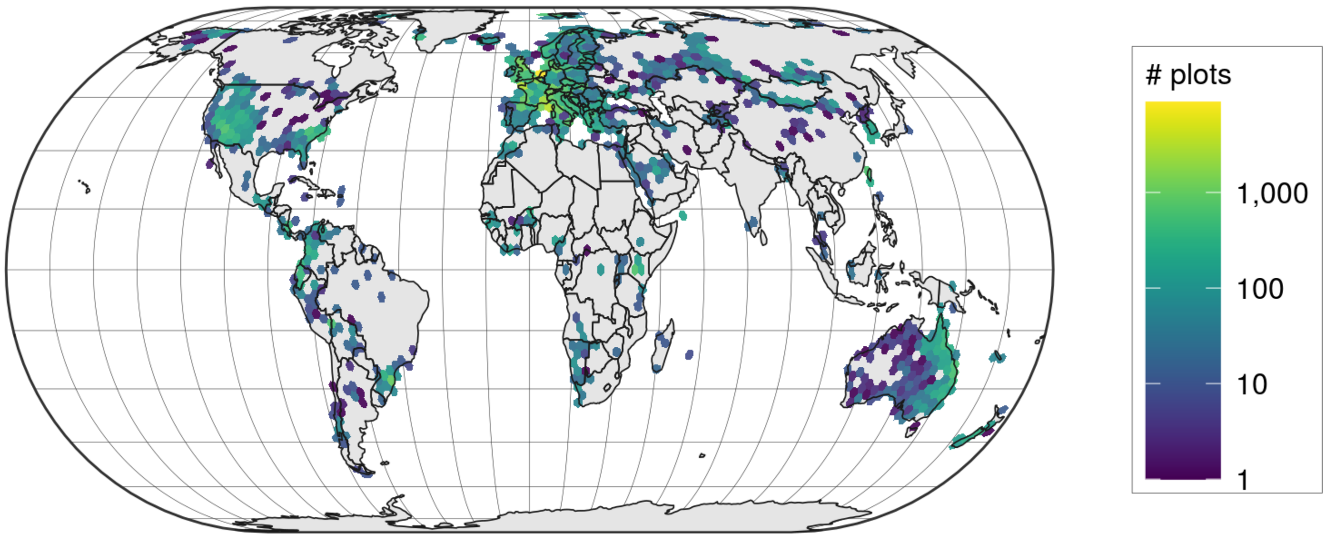

Figure 1: Global map of sPlot Open (n = 91,031) and spatial distribution of vegetation plot density per hexagonal cell with a spatial resolution of approximately 70.000 km². Map projection is Eckert IV.

Methods

Vegetation plot data sources

We started from the sPlot database v2.1 (created October 2016), which contains 1,121,244 vegetation plots and 23,586,216 species records stemming from 110 different vegetation-plot datasets of regional, national or continental extent. Some of the 110 datasets stem from regional or continental initiatives (see 24 for more information). For instance: 48 vegetation-plot datasets derive from the European Vegetation Archive (EVA) (19); three major African datasets derive from the Tropical African Vegetation Archive (TAVA); and multiple vegetation datasets in the USA derive from the VegBank archive (33; 34). Data from other continents (South America, Asia) or countries were contributed as separate standalone datasets. The metadata of each individual vegetation-plot dataset stored in sPlot are managed through the Global Index of Vegetation-Plot Databases GIVD (35), using the GIVD identifier as the unique dataset identifier.

Resampling method

Data in the sPlot database are unevenly distributed across continents and biomes (see 26). Mid-latitude regions in developed countries (mostly Europe, the USA and Australia) are overrepresented, while regions in the tropics and subtropics are underrepresented, which is a typical geographical bias in biodiversity data (e.g., 36; 3). To reduce this imbalance to the extent possible, we performed a stratified resampling approach, using several environmental variables available at global extent as sampling strata. We considered 30 climatic and soil variables. For climate, we complemented the 19 bioclimatic variables from CHELSA (37), as well as two variables reflecting growing-season warmth (growing degree days above 1 °C - GDD1 - and 5 °C - GDD5), which we calculated based on CHELSA bioclimatic variables. In addition, we considered an index of aridity (AR) and a model for Potential Evapotranspiration (PET - 38). For soil, we extracted seven variables from the SOILGRIDS database (39), namely: soil organic carbon content in the fine earth fraction, cation exchange capacity, pH, as well as the fractions of coarse fragments, sand, silt and clay.

We stratified our sampling effort based on the following procedure. First, we ran a global principal component analysis (PCA) of the 30 above-mentioned environmental variables. We considered the full environmental space of all terrestrial habitats on Earth at a spatial resolution of 2.5 arcmin, totaling 8,384,404 terrestrial grid cells, irrespective of whether a grid cell hosted vegetation plots from the sPlot database v2.1 or not. We then subdivided the environmental space represented by the first two principal components (PC1–PC2), accounting for 47% and 23% of the total variation in PC1 and PC2, respectively, into a 100 × 100 grid. This PC1-PC2 bidimensional space was subsequently used to balance our sampling effort across all PC1-PC2 grid cells for which vegetation plots are available. Before projecting vegetation plots from the sPlot database v2.1 onto this PC1-PC2 environmental space, we removed vegetation plots: from wetlands; from anthropogenic vegetation types; without geographical coordinates; and with a location uncertainty higher than 3 km for those having geographical coordinates. This led to a total of 799,400 out of the initial set of 1,121,244 vegetation plots. When projecting the 799,400 vegetation plots in the PC1-PC2 grid, we calculated how many vegetation plots occurred in each PC1-PC2 grid cell. For those grid cells with more than 50 vegetation plots (n = 858), we randomly selected up to 50 vegetation plots using the heterogeneity-constrained random resampling algorithm from Lengyel et al. (2011) [40]. This approach optimizes the selection of a random subset of vegetation plots that encompasses the highest variability in species composition while avoiding peculiar and rare communities, which may represent outliers. We based the quantification of variability in plant species composition among the 50 randomly selected vegetation plots by computing the mean and the variance of the Jaccard's dissimilarity index (41) between all possible pairs of vegetation plots for a given random selection of 50 vegetation plots (n = 1225). More precisely, for a given PC1-PC2 grid cell containing more than 50 vegetation plots, we generated 1,000 random selections of 50 vegetation plots and ranked them according to the mean (ascending order) and variance (descending order) value. Ranks from both sortings were summed for each random selection, and the selection with the lowest summed rank was considered the most representative of the focal grid cell. In case a grid cell contained fewer than 50 plots, we retained all of them. In this way, we reduced the imbalance towards over-sampled climate types while ensuring that the resampled dataset represents the entire environmental gradient covered by the sPlot database. We repeated the resampling procedure three times to get three different possibilities of a random selection of 50 vegetation plots per PC1-PC2 grid cell with, initially, more than 50 vegetation plots. Vegetation plots selected during the first iteration were our first choice, while we considered the vegetation plots additionally selected in the second and third iteration as reserves when asking for permission to release the data as open access to each dataset's contributor(s).

Permission to release the data as open access

The resampling procedure resulted in a preliminary potential selection of 98,383 vegetation plots (first choice) and 51,634 vegetation plots flagged as reserves (second or third choice for the subset of PC1-PC2 grid cells with more than 50 vegetation plots available). Being, the sPlot database, a consortium of independent datasets, whose copyright belongs to the data contributor, we used this preliminary potential selection to ask each dataset's custodian (i.e., either the owner of a dataset or its authorized representative in case of a collective dataset) for permission to release the data of each selected vegetation plot as open access. For 8,070 vegetation plots, permission could not be granted because, for instance, the data are unpublished, confidential or sensitive. For these vegetation plots, we used the reserve pool to randomly select replacements, for which such permission could be granted. We imposed the constraint that each vegetation plot in the reserve should belong to the same environmental stratum, i.e., the same PC1-PC2 grid cell, of the confidential vegetation plot. Note that 2,380 PC1-PC2 grid cells (11.7% of total) had one or more confidential vegetation plot (median = 1, mean = 3.4, max = 171) that could not be replaced from the reserve pool.

Trait information

For each vegetation plot for which open access has been granted, we computed the community weighted means for eighteen plant functional traits derived from the TRY database v3.0 (30). These traits were selected among those traits that describe the leaf, wood and seed economics spectra (42; 43), and are known to either affect different key ecosystem processes or respond to macroclimatic drivers, or both (24). The eighteen plant functional traits were: (1) leaf area [mm^2]; (2) stem specific density [$g\ cm^{-3}$]; (3) specific leaf area [$m^2 kg^{-1}$]; (4) leaf carbon concentration [$mg\ g^{-1}$]; (5) leaf nitrogen concentration [$mg\ g^{-1}$]; (6) leaf phosphorus concentration [$mg\ g^{-1}$]; (7) plant height [m]; (8) seed mass [mg]; (9) seed length [mm]; (10) leaf dry matter content [$g\ g^{-1}$]; (11) leaf nitrogen per area [$g\ m^{-2}$]; (12) leaf N:P ratio [$g\ g^{-1}$]; (13) leaf $\delta^{15}N$ [per million]; (14) seed number per reproductive unit; (15) leaf fresh mass [g]; (16) stem conduit density [mm^{-2}]; (17) dispersal unit length [mm]; and (18) conduit element length [μm].

Because missing values were particularly widespread in the species-trait matrix, we employed a gap-filling procedure based on hierarchical Bayesian modeling (R package 'BHPMF', 44; 45). Gap-filling was performed at the level of individual observations. We then transformed to the natural logarithm all gap-filled trait values and averaged each trait by taxon (i.e., at species, or genus level). Additional information on the gap-filling procedure is available in [24].

Community-weighted means (CWM) and variances (CWV) were calculated for every plant functional trait j and every vegetation plot k as follows (46):

$$CWM_{j,k} = \sum_{i}^{n_k} p_{i,k} t_{i,j} \quad (1)$$

$$CWV_{j,k} = \sum_{i}^{n_k} p_{i,k} (t_{i,j} - CWM_{j,k})^2 \quad (2)$$

where n_k is the number of species with trait information in vegetation plot k, $p_{i,k}$ is the relative abundance of species i in vegetation plot k calculated as the species' fraction in cover or abundance of total cover or abundance, and $t_{i,j}$ is the mean value of species i for trait j.

Data Records

sPlot Open contains 91,031 vegetation plots from 115 countries and all continents except Antarctica (Figure 1). This randomized selection comes from 103 constitutive datasets (Table 1). It only contains the species composition of vascular plants, while information on the composition of bryophytes and lichens was discarded since it was only available for a minority of plots (n = 4,963 and n = 3,045, respectively). Information on the size (surface area) of the vegetation survey is available for 61,898 vegetation plots, and ranges between 0.01 and 40,000 m^2 (mean = 270 m^2; median = 78.5 m^2). The average number of vascular plant species per vegetation plot ranges between 1 (i.e. monospecific stands) and 270 species (mean = 17.6; median = 13).

By capping the number of vegetation plots in overrepresented environmental conditions, the resampling procedure described above strongly reduced the bias in the distribution of vegetation plots within the environmental niche space. Yet, due to the lack or scarcity of data from some geographical regions, like the tropics, the spatial distribution of vegetation plots remains unbalanced across geographical regions (Figure 1). This is evident when comparing the number of plots across continents or biomes. Europe is by far the best represented continent, with 53,884 vegetation plots. In contrast, in Africa and South America the remaining plots after data edition and selectionwere 4,507 and 5,515 vegetation plots, respectively. The representation of biomes is also unbalanced. The biomes 'Temperate mid-latitudes' and 'Subtropics with winter rain' have 37,507 and 16,510 vegetation plots, respectively, while none of the other biomes have more than 10,000 vegetation plots (Figure 2). Yet, all Whittaker biomes are covered by sPlot Open.

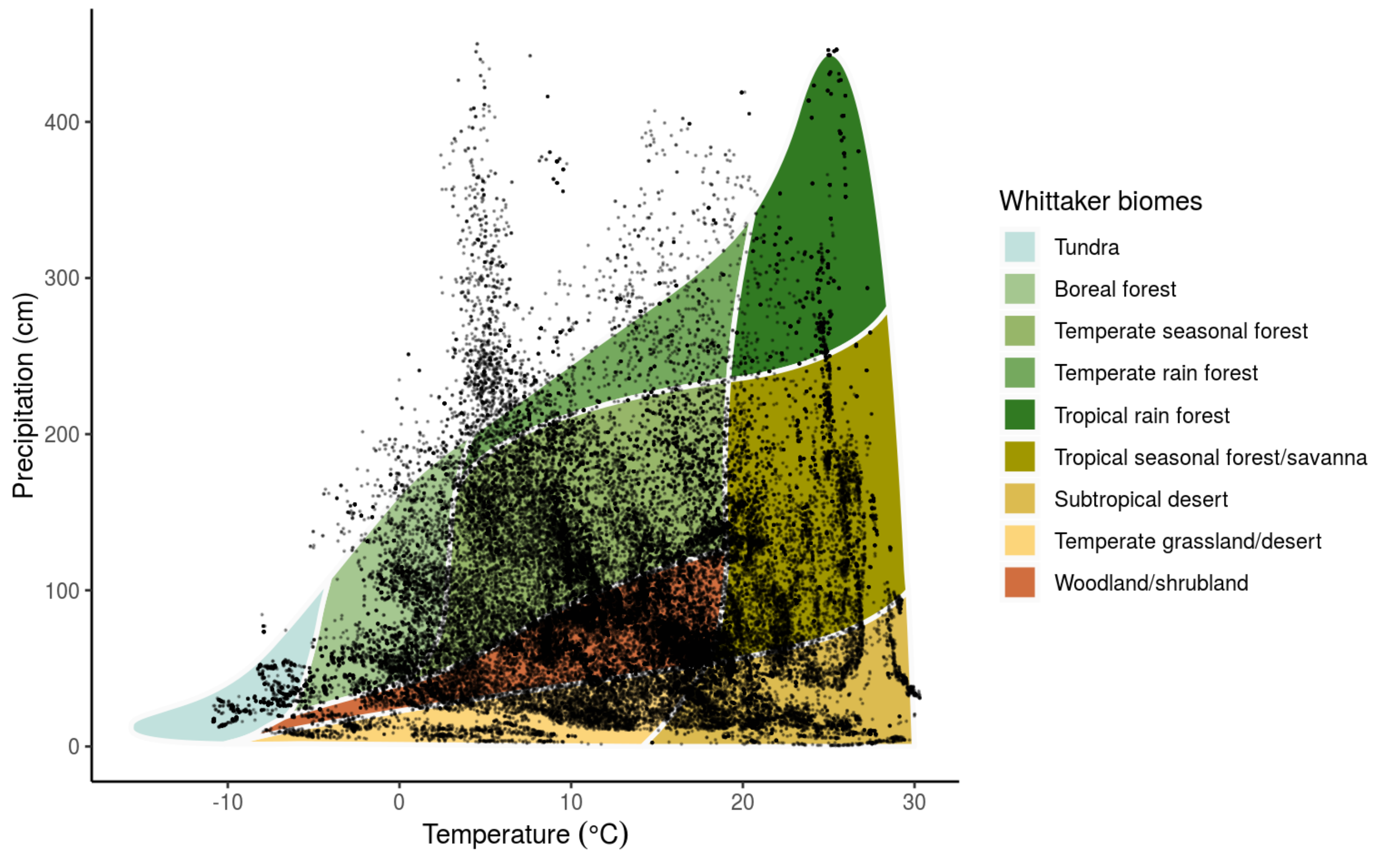

Figure 2: Distribution of all the vegetation plots provided by sPlot Open (n = 91,031) in the bi-dimentional climatic space represented by mean annual temperature and mean annual precipitation superimposed onto Whittaker biomes (47)

Finally, sPlot Open contains a relatively balanced number of forest (n = 25,832) vs. non forest (n = 38,203) vegetation plots, with a minor proportion of plots remaining unassigned (n = 10,050). The assignment of plots to forests and non-forests is based on multiple lines of evidence, including the plot-level information on the cover of the tree layer, as well as traits of species composing a plot, such as growth form and height. In short, a plot record was considered a forest if the cover of the tree layer, or alternatively, the sum of the relative cover of all tree taxa (normalized to 100%), was greater than 25%. It was instead considered a non-forest record if the sum of relative cover of low-stature, non-tree and non-shrub taxa was greater than 90%. For an extensive explanation of this classification scheme, we refer the reader to Bruelheide et al. (2019) [24]. Even if the proportion of forest vs. non-forest vegetation plots is relatively well-balanced, the geographical distribution of vegetation plots belonging to different vegetation types is likely not balanced in the geographical space, as it depends on the idiosyncrasies of the constitutive datasets composing the sPlot database. For instance, the data from New Zealand only include plots collected in non-forest ecosystems, while data from Chile only refer to forests. We urge potential users to carefully read the description of each individual dataset in GIVD, or to contact the custodians of each dataset before using sPlot Open.

Database Organization

sPlot Open is organized into three main matrices, relationally linked through the key column *'PlotObservationID'*.

The **'header'** matrix contains plot-level information for the 91,031 vegetation plots provided in sPlot Open, including: metadata (e.g., plot ID, ownership, sampling date, geographical location, positional accuracy); sampling design information (e.g., the total surface area used during the vegetation survey); and a plot-level description of vegetation structure (e.g., vegetation type, percentage cover of each vegetation layer) and vegetation type. Plots in Europe are also classified according to the EUNIS habitat classification (column *'ESY'*), based on the habitat classification expert system described in Chytrý et al. (2020) (48). For each vegetation plot, we further provide information on the dataset it originates from, based on the IDs used in GIVD. A brief description of all the 43 variables in the header matrix is provided in Table 2.

The **'DT'** matrix contains data on the species composition of each plot. It is structured in a long format and contains 1,608,610 records from 39,997 vascular plant taxa, mostly resolved at the species level. For each record, we report both the taxon name as originally contributed by the data custodian (column *'Original_species'*), and the taxon name after taxonomic standardization (column *'Species'*). For each record, we report the species cover/abundance values. These follow different standards across the datasets constituting the sPlot database. We, therefore, provide both the cover//abundance value as reported in the original data (column *'Original_abundance'*), together with the abundance scale that was originally used (column *'Abundance_scale'*). This can take seven values: 'CoverPerc' = percentage cover, 'pa' = presence-absence, 'x_BA' = basal area (m^2/ha, only for woody species), 'x_IC' = individual count, i.e., number of individuals in plot, 'x_SC' = stem count, i.e., number of stems in plot, 'x_IV' = importance value index, 'x_PF' = presence frequency. The great majority of entries, however, use the percentage cover scale (n= 1,397,109). Finally, for each entry, we calculated a *'Relative_cover'*, i.e., the cover/abundance of a given taxon divided by the total cover/abundance of all taxa in that vegetation plot.

The **'CWM_CWV'** matrix contains the community-weighted means and variances calculated for each of the 18 functional traits mentioned above. It also contains three additional columns. The column *'Species_richness'* returns the number of species recorded in each plot. The columns *'Trait_coverage_cover'* and *'Trait_coverage_pa'* return, respectively, the proportion of total cover and species in a plot for which functional trait information was available. Functional trait information was available for 20,932 species. The average proportion of species in each plot for which we have functional trait information is 0.88 (median = 1). For 47,177 plots, the coverage is complete, while only in one plot we have no functional trait information for any of the occurring species. When considering relative cover, the average trait coverage is 0.89. As many as 68,234 and 74,388 plots have functional trait information for more than 80% of the species or 80% of relative cover, respectively.

sPlot Open contains two additional objects. The **'metadata'** matrix contains plot-level metadata, which provide information on the origin of each individual vegetation plot. This object contains 15 columns, with information on the dataset of origin (column *'GIVD_ID'* - 35), author or surveyor names (columns *'Releve_author'* and *'Releve_coauthor'*), bibliographic references both at the dataset (column *'DB_BIBTEXKEY'*) and plot level (*'Plot_Biblioreference'* and *'BIBTEXKEY'*), when available. Similarly, the column *'Project_name'* provides information on the project in which a vegetation plot was collected. When available, we also provide information on the numbering of the plots in the publication where they originally appeared (columns *'Nr_table_in_publ'*, *'Nr_releve_in_table'*), or in the dataset where they were initially stored (*'Original_nr_in_database'*). In case of nested plots (n = 1,786), we also provide the original plot and subplot IDs (columns: *'Original_plotID'*, *'Original_subplotID'*). The last two columns report plot-level *'Remarks'*, and the unique identifier produced by Turboveg when the vegetation plot was first stored (*'GUID'*).

Finally, the object **'references'**, contains all the bibliographic references formatted according to a BibTex standard. Each reference is tagged with a key corresponding to the fields *'DB_BIBTEXKEY'* and *'BIBTEXKEY'* in the metadata. We further provide an R function (*'sPlotOpen_citation'*) to create reference lists, based on a selection of plots and\or datasets.

Except for the 'reference' file (format .bib), all objects/matrices are provided in tab-delimited .txt files. All objects, including the 'sPlotOpen_citation' function, are also compiled inside an .RData object.

Technical Validation

The original sPlot database has a nested structure and is composed of several individual datasets, each validated and maintained by its respective dataset custodian. In some cases, individual datasets are also collections whose vegetation plots were provided by their respective owners (the person who performed the actual vegetation survey) or by someone who digitized the original data from the scientific or grey literature. We obviously have no direct control over the individual vegetation plots that we provide here in sPlot Open. Yet, each of these vegetation plots stem from trained professional botanists, or published scientific work, and are accompanied by detailed information on the sampling protocols used, thus ensuring data quality and reliability.

Before integration into the sPlot database, each dataset was further checked for consistency and, if having a different format, was converted to a Turboveg 2 database (49). During this conversion, we checked that all datasets contained the required metadata information, and cross-checked that each plot was located within the geographic scopes of its respective dataset. Finally, we harmonized all the taxonomic names from all datasets, based on the sPlot's taxonomic backbone (50). This backbone matched all the taxonomic names (without nomenclatural authors) from all datasets in sPlot 2.1 and TRY v3.0 (30) to their resolved version based on the Taxonomic Name Resolution Service web application (TNRS version 4.0; 51; iPlant Collaborative, 2015). This allowed to (1) harmonize all datasets to a common nomenclature, and (2) link the sPlot database to the TRY database (30). All taxa originally denoted at taxonomic ranks lower than species were aggregated at species level. Additional detail on the taxonomic resolution is reported in Bruelheide et al. (2019) [24], while a description of the workflow, including R-code, is available in Purschke (2017) [50].

Usage Notes

The sPlot Open database can be downloaded from https://www.idiv.de (link to PlantHub). Users are urged to cite the original sources when using sPlot Open. For two datasets (e.g., AF-00-009, AF-CD-001), the identification of taxa at species level is still in progress. As a rule, sPlot Open users should get in touch with the custodian(s) of the data they are planning to use (custodian names are reported in https://www.idiv.de/sPlot). The use of data contained in BioTIME (52) should cite original data citations in addition to the present paper. The data included in the present paper represent the subset of sPlot for which we were able to secure permission for making these data open. The additional data in sPlot are available under sPlot's Governance and Data Property Rules (www.idiv.de/sPlot).

Code Availability

The R code used to produce sPlot Open from the sPlot 2.1 database is contained in the *sPlotOpen_code* GitHub repository: (https://github.com/fmsabatini/sPlotOpen_Code/). This manuscript was produced using the Manubot workflow (53). The code for reproducing this manuscript is stored in the *sPlotOpen_manuscript* GitHub repository: (https://github.com/fmsabatini/sPlotOpen_Manuscript).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to thousands of vegetation scientists who sampled vegetation plots in the field or digitized them into regional, national or international databases. We also appreciate the support of the German Research Foundation for funding sPlot as one of the iDiv (DFG FZT 118, 202548816) research platforms, and the organization of three workshops through the sDiv calls. We acknowledge this support with naming the database “sPlot”, where the “s” refers to the sDiv synthesis workshops.

The study has been supported by the TRY initiative on plant traits (http://www.try-db.org). The TRY initiative and database is hosted, developed and maintained by J. Kattge and G. Bönisch (Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry, Jena, Germany). TRY is currently supported by DIVERSITAS/Future Earth and the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig. Jens Kattge acknowledges support by the Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry (Jena, Germany), Future Earth, the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig and the EU H2020 project BACI, Grant No 640176.

Isabelle Aubin was funded through Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Yves Bergeron was funded through Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. Idoia Biurrun was funded by the Basque Government (IT936-16). Anne Bjorkman thank the Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park management, Catherine Kennedy, Dorothy Cooley, Jill F. Johnstone, Cameron Eckert and Richard Gordon for establishing the ecological monitoring programme. Funding was provided by Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park. Luis Cayuela was supported by project BIOCON08_044 funded by Fundación BBVA. Milan Chytrý, Flavia Landucci, Corrado Marcenò and Tomáš Peterka were supported by the Czech Science Foundation (project no. 19-28491X). Jiri Dolezal would like to acknowledge the financial support from MSMT-INTER-EXCELLENCE project (LTAUSA18007). Brian Enquist thanks the following individuals and institutions for contributing data to sPlot via the SALVIAS database: Mauricio Bonifacino, Saara DeWalt, Timothy Killeen, Susan Letcher, Nigel Pitman, Cam Webb, The Missouri Botanical Garden, RAINFOR and the Amazon Forest Inventory Network. Alvaro G. Gutiérrez acknowledges FONDECYT 11150835, Project FORECOFUN-SSA PIEF-GA-2010–274798), CONICYT-PAI (82130046). Mohamed Z. Hatim thanks Kamal Shaltout and Joop Schaminée for supervision of the MSc thesis, and Joop Schaminée for support and funding from the Prince Bernard Culture Fund Prize for Nature Conservation. Jürgen Homeier received funding from BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Science of Germany) and the German Research Foundation (DFG Ho3296-2, DFG Ho3296-4). Borja Jiménez-Alfaro was funded by the Spanish Research Agency through grant AEI/10.13039/501100011033 Tatiana Lysenko was funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research (grant No. 16-04-00747a). Jérôme Munzinger was supported by the French National Research Agency (ANR) with grants INC (ANR-07-BDIV-0008), BIONEOCAL (ANR-07-BDIV-0006) & ULTRABIO (ANR-07-BDIV-0010), by National Geographic Society (Grant 7579-04), and with fundings and authorizations of North and South Provinces of New Caledonia. Arkadiusz Nowak received support from the National Science Centre, Poland, grant no. 2017/25/B/NZ8/00572. Gerhard E. Overbeck acknowledges support from Brazil’s National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq, grant 310022/2015-0). Robert Peet acknowledges the support from the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, the North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement Program, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. National Science Foundation (DBI-9905838, DBI-0213794). Josep Peñuelas would like to acknowledge the financial support from the European Research Council Synergy grant ERC-SyG-2013-610028 IMBALANCE-P Oliver Phillips was funded by an ERC Advanced Grant (291585, “T-FORCES”) and a Royal Society-Wolfson Research Merit Award. Valério D. Pillar has been supported by the Brazil’s National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq, grant 307689/2014-0). Solvita Rūsiņa was supported by the University of Latvia grant AAP2016/B041//Zd2016/AZ03 within the “Climate change and sustainable use of natural resources”. Franziska Schrodt was supported by a University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment Discovery Grant, a German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig grant (50170649_#7) and a University of Nottingham Anne McLaren Fellowship. Jens Christian Svenning considers this work a contribution to his VILLUM Investigator project “Biodiversity Dynamics in a Changing World” funded by VILLUM FONDEN (grant 16549). Kim André Vanselow would like to thank W. Bernhard Dickoré for the help in the identification of plant species and acknowledge the financial support from the Volkswagen Foundation (AZ I/81 976) and the

German Research Foundation (DFG VA 749/1-1, DFG VA 749/4-1). Evan Weiher was funded by NSF DEB-0415383, UWEC-ORSP, and UWEC-BCDT.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Ching-Feng (Woody) Li.

Author contributions

FMS wrote the first draft of the manuscript, with considerable input from JL and HB. JL and TH wrote the resampling algorithm. FMS set up the GitHub projects, curated the database, and produced the graphs. He also coordinated the sPlot consortium. SMH wrote the Turboveg v3 software, which holds the sPlot database. JK provided the trait data from TRY and FS performed the trait data gap filling. HB secured the funding for sPlot as a strategic project of iDiv. All other authors contributed data. All authors contributed to revising the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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Hongyan Liu, Haiting Cui, Richard Pott, Martin Speier
Journal of Vegetation Science (2000-08) https://doi.org/cxr92b
DOI: 10.2307/3246582

103. **Combined effects of livestock grazing and abiotic environment on vegetation and soils of grasslands across Tibet**
Yun Wang, Gwendolyn Heberling, Eugen Görzen, Georg Miehe, Elke Seeber, Karsten Wesche
Applied Vegetation Science (2017-07) https://doi.org/gbkd6v
DOI: 10.1111/avsc.12312

104. **Community assembly during secondary forest succession in a Chinese subtropical forest**
Helge Bruelheide, Martin Böhnke, Sabine Both, Teng Fang, Thorsten Assmann, Martin Baruffol, Jürgen Bauhus, François Buscot, Xiao-Yong Chen, Bing-Yang Ding, … Bernhard Schmid
Ecological Monographs (2011-02) https://doi.org/dmwpsm
DOI: 10.1890/09-2172.1

105. **Vegetation Database of Sinai in Egypt**
Mohamed Hatim
Biodiversity & Ecology (2012-09-10) https://doi.org/ghgvcr
DOI: 10.7809/b-e.00099

106. **Eurosiberian meadows at their southern edge: patterns and phytogeography in the NW Tien Shan**
Viktoria Wagner
Journal of Vegetation Science (2009-03-25) https://doi.org/ftq2r6
DOI: 10.1111/j.1654-1103.2009.01032.x

107. **Plant communities of the southern Mongolian Gobi**
Henrik von Wehrden, Karsten Wesche, Georg Miehe
Phytocoenologia (2009-10-21) https://doi.org/ddvj9h
DOI: 10.1127/0340-269x/2009/0039-0331

108. **Wetland Vegetation Database of Baikal Siberia (WETBS)**
Victor Chepinoga
Biodiversity & Ecology (2012-09-10) https://doi.org/ghgvcs
DOI: 10.7809/b-e.00107

109. **Eastern Pamirs – A vegetation-plot database for the high mountain pastures of the Pamir Plateau (Tajikistan)**
Kim André Vanselow
Phytocoenologia (2016-06-01) https://doi.org/f952sp
DOI: 10.1127/phyto/2016/0122

110. **Socotra Vegetation Database**
Michele De Sanctis, Fabio Attorre
Biodiversity & Ecology (2012-09-10) https://doi.org/ghgvct
DOI: 10.7809/b-e.00111

111. **Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Infrastructures**
Informa UK Limited
(2017-03-03) https://doi.org/ghgt87
DOI: 10.1201/9781315368252

112. **Structural and floristic diversity of mixed tropical rain forest in New Caledonia: new data from the New Caledonian Plant Inventory and Permanent Plot Network (NC-PIPPN)**
Thomas Ibanez, Jérôme Munzinger, Gilles Dagostini, Vanessa Hequet, Frédéric Rigault, Tanguy Jaffré, Philippe Birnbaum
Applied Vegetation Science (2014-07) https://doi.org/f57bfw
DOI: 10.1111/avsc.12070

113. **Managing biodiversity information: development of New Zealand's National Vegetation Survey databank**
S. K. Wiser, P. J. Bellingham, L. E. Burrows
New Zealand Journal of Ecology (2001)

114. **Species Richness, Forest Structure, and Functional Diversity During Succession in the New Guinea Lowlands**
Timothy J. S. Whitfeld, Jesse R. Lasky, Kipiro Damas, Gibson Sosanika, Kenneth Molem, Rebecca A. Montgomery
Biotropica (2014-09) https://doi.org/f6hf36
DOI: 10.1111/btp.12136

115. **The Tree Biodiversity Network (BIOTREE-NET): prospects for biodiversity research and conservation in the Neotropics**
Luis Cayuela, Lucía Gálvez-Bravo, Ramón Pérez Pérez, Fábio de Albuquerque, Duncan Golicher, Rakan Zahawi, Neptalí Ramírez-Marcial, Cristina Garibaldi, Richard Field, José Rey Benayas, … Regino Zamora
Biodiversity & Ecology (2012-09-10) https://doi.org/ghgvck
DOI: 10.7809/b-e.00078

116. **Timberline meadows along a 1000-km transect in NW North America: species diversity and community patterns**
Viktoria Wagner, Toby Spribille, Stefan Abrahamczyk, Erwin Bergmeier
Applied Vegetation Science (2014-01) https://doi.org/f5mpvm
DOI: 10.1111/avsc.12045

117. **How resilient are northern hardwood forests to human disturbance? An evaluation using a plant functional group approach**
I. Aubin, S. Gachet, C. Messier, A. Bouchard
Ecoscience (2007)

118. **Vegetation and altitudinal zonation in continental West Greenland**
B. Sieg, B. Drees, F. J. A. Daniëls
Meddelelser om Grønland Bioscience (2006)

119. **VegBank – a permanent, open-access archive for vegetation-plot data**
Robert Peet, Michael Lee, Michael Jennings, Don Faber-Langendoen
Biodiversity & Ecology (2012-09-10) https://doi.org/ghgvcm
DOI: 10.7809/b-e.00080

120. **Vegetation-plot database of the Carolina Vegetation Survey**
Robert Peet, Michael Lee, Forbes Boyle, Thomas Wentworth, Michael Schafale, Alan Weakley
Biodiversity & Ecology (2012-09-10) https://doi.org/ghgvcn
DOI: 10.7809/b-e.00081

121. **The Alaska Arctic Vegetation Archive (AVA-AK)**
Donald A. Walker, Amy L. Breen, Lisa A. Druckenmiller, Lisa W. Wirth, Will Fisher, Martha K. Raynolds, Jozef Šibík, Marilyn D. Walker, Stephan Hennekens, Keith Boggs, … Donatella Zona
Phytocoenologia (2016-09-01) https://doi.org/f877ht
DOI: 10.1127/phyto/2016/0128

122. **VegPáramo, a flora and vegetation database for the Andean páramo**
Gwendolyn Peyre, Henrik Balslev, David Martí, Petr Sklenář, Paul Ramsay, Pablo Lozano, Nidia Cuello, Rainer Bussmann, Omar Cabrera, Xavier Font
Phytocoenologia (2015-07-01) https://doi.org/f7m9cj
DOI: 10.1127/phyto/2015/0045

123. **The Floristic and Forest Inventory of Santa Catarina State (IFFSC): methodological and operational aspects**
A. C. Vibrans, L. Sevgnani, D. V. Lingner, A. L. Gasper, S. Sabbagh
Pesquisa Florestal Brasileira (2010)

124. **Plant Invasions in Protected Areas**
Springer Netherlands
(2013) https://doi.org/ghgt8v
DOI: 10.1007/978-94-007-7750-7

Supplementary Material

Table 1: List of databases contributing to the open access dataset extracted from the sPlot database. Databases are ordered based on their ID in the Global Index of Vegetation Databases (GVID ID).

GIVD ID	Dataset name	Custodian	Deputy custodian	Nr. OA plots	Ref
00-00-004	Vegetation Database of Eurasian Tundra	Risto Virtanen		600	
00-RU-003	Database Meadows and Steppes of Southern Ural	Sergey Yamalov	Mariya Lebedeva	99	
00-TR-001	Forest Vegetation Database of Turkey - FVDT	Ali Kavgacı		15	
EU-00-002	Nordic-Baltic Grassland Vegetation Database (NBGVD)	Jürgen Dengler	Łukasz Kozub	931	54
EU-00-011	Vegetation-Plot Database of the University of the Basque Country (BIOVEG)	Idoia Biurrun	Itziar García-Mijangos	1694	55
EU-00-013	Balkan Dry Grasslands Database	Kiril Vassilev	Armin Macanović	224	56
EU-00-016	Mediterranean Ammophiletea Database	Corrado Marcenò	Borja Jiménez-Alfaro	3713	57
EU-00-017	European Coastal Vegetation Database	John Janssen		1369	
EU-00-018	The Nordic Vegetation Database	Jonathan Lenoir	Jens-Christian Svenning	1755	58
EU-00-019	Balkan Vegetation Database	Kiril Vassilev	Hristo Pedashenko	211	59
EU-00-020	WetVegEurope	Flavia Landucci		61	60
EU-00-022	European Mire Vegetation Database	Tomáš Peterka	Martin Jiroušek	1843	61
EU-AL-001	Vegetation Database of Albania	Michele De Sanctis	Giuliano Fanelli	99	62
EU-AT-001	Austrian Vegetation Database	Wolfgang Willner	Christian Berg	950	63
EU-BE-002	INBOVEG	Els De Bie		48	
EU-BG-001	Bulgarian Vegetation Database	Iva Apostolova	Desislava Sopotlieva	74	64
EU-CH-005	Swiss Forest Vegetation Database	Thomas Wohlgemuth		1409	65
EU-CZ-001	Czech National Phytosociological Database	Milan Chytrý	Ilona Knollová	579	66
EU-DE-001	VegMV	Florian Jansen	Christian Berg	5	67
EU-DE-013	VegetWeb Germany	Florian Jansen	Jörg Ewald	199	68
EU-DE-014	German Vegetation Reference Database (GVRD)	Ute Jandt	Helge Bruelheide	286	69
EU-DK-002	National Vegetation Database of Denmark	Jesper Erenskjold Moeslund	Rasmus Ejrnæs	1181	
EU-ES-001	Iberian and Macaronesian Vegetation Information System (SIVIM) - Wetlands	Aaron Pérez-Haase	Xavier Font	292	
EU-FR-003	SOPHY	Emmanuel Garbolino	Patrice De Ruffray	13322	70

GIVD ID	Dataset name	Custodian	Deputy custodian	Nr. OA plots	Ref
EU-GB-001	UK National Vegetation Classification Database	John S. Rodwell		5457	
EU-GR-001	KRITI	Erwin Bergmeier		43	
EU-GR-005	Hellenic Natura 2000 Vegetation Database (HelNatVeg)	Panayotis Dimopoulos	Ioannis Tsiripidis	777	71
EU-GR-006	Hellenic Woodland Database	Ioannis Tsiripidis	Georgios Fotiadis	4	72
EU-HR-001	Phytosociological Database of Non-Forest Vegetation in Croatia	Zvjezdana Stančić		213	73
EU-HR-002	Croatian Vegetation Database	Željko Škvorc	Daniel Krstonošić	688	
EU-HU-003	CoenoDat Hungarian Phytosociological Database	János Csiky	Zoltán Botta-Dukát	17	74
EU-IT-001	VegItaly	Roberto Venanzoni	Flavia Landucci	2712	75
EU-IT-010	Italian National Vegetation Database (BVN/ISPRA)	Laura Casella	Pierangela Angelini	155	76
EU-IT-011	Vegetation-Plot Database Sapienza University of Rome (VPD-Sapienza)	Emiliano Agrillo	Fabio Attorre	1003	77
EU-LT-001	Lithuanian Vegetation Database	Valerijus Rašomavičius	Domas Uogintas	119	
EU-LV-001	Semi-natural Grassland Vegetation Database of Latvia	Solvita Rūsiņa		306	78
EU-MK-001	Vegetation Database of the Republic of Macedonia	Renata Ćušterevska		10	
EU-NL-001	Dutch National Vegetation Database	Stephan M. Hennekens	Joop H.J. Schaminée	10223	79
EU-PL-001	Polish Vegetation Database	Zygmunt Kącki	Grzegorz Swacha	464	80
EU-RO-007	Romanian Forest Database	Adrian Indreica	Pavel Dan Turtureanu	60	81
EU-RO-008	Romanian Grassland Database	Eszter Ruprecht	Kiril Vassilev	44	82
EU-RS-002	Vegetation Database Grassland Vegetation of Serbia	Svetlana Aćić	Zora Dajić Stevanović	57	83
EU-RU-002	Lower Volga Valley Phytosociological Database	Valentin Golub	Andrey Chuvashov	149	84
EU-RU-003	Vegetation Database of the Volga and the Ural Rivers Basins	Tatiana Lysenko		96	85
EU-RU-011	Vegetation Database of Tatarstan	Vadim Prokhorov	Maria Kozhevnikova	94	86
EU-SI-001	Vegetation Database of Slovenia	Urban Šilc	Filip Küzmič	435	87
EU-SK-001	Slovak Vegetation Database	Milan Valachovič	Jozef Šibík	893	88
EU-UA-006	Vegetation Database of Ukraine and Adjacent Parts of Russia	Viktor Onyshchenko	Vitaliy Kolomiychuk	479	
AF-00-001	West African Vegetation Database	Marco Schmidt	Georg Zizka	184	89
AF-00-008	PANAF Vegetation Database	Hjalmar Kühl	TeneKwetche Sop	942	

GIVD ID	Dataset name	Custodian	Deputy custodian	Nr. OA plots	Ref
AF-BF-001	Sahel Vegetation Database	Jonas V. Müller	Marco Schmidt	279	90
00-00-001	ForestPlots.net	Oliver L. Phillips	Aurora Levesley	108	91
00-00-003	SALVIAS	Brian Enquist	Brad Boyle	2860	
00-00-005	Tundra Vegetation Plots (TundraPlot)	Anne D. Bjorkman	Sarah Elmendorf	227	92
00-RU-002	Database of Masaryk University`s Vegetation Research in Siberia	Milan Chytrý		128	93
AF-00-003	BIOTA Southern Africa Biodiversity Observatories Vegetation Database	Norbert Jürgens	Ute Schmiedel	562	94
AF-00-006	SWEA-Dataveg	Miguel Alvarez	Michael Curran	1211	
AF-00-009	Vegetation Database of the Okavango Basin	Rasmus Revermann	Manfred Finckh	202	95
AF-CD-001	Forest Database of Central Congo Basin	Kim Sarah Jacobsen	Hans Verbeeck	97	96
AF-ET-001	Vegetation Database of Ethiopia	Desalegn Wana	Anke Jentsch	59	97
AF-MA-001	Vegetation Database of Southern Morocco	Manfred Finckh		266	98
AF-ZW-001	Vegetation Database of Zimbabwe	Cyrus Samimi		17	99
AS-00-001	Korean Forest Database	Tomáš Černý	Jiri Dolezal	766	100
AS-00-003	Vegetation of Middle Asia	Arkadiusz Nowak	Marcin Nobis	128	101
AS-00-004	Rice Field Vegetation Database	Arkadiusz Nowak		31	
AS-BD-001	Tropical Forest Dataset of Bangladesh	Mohammed A.S. Arfin Khan	Fahmida Sultana	82	
AS-CN-001	China Forest-Steppe Ecotone Database	Hongyan Liu	Fengjun Zhao	97	102
AS-CN-002	Tibet-PaDeMoS Grazing Transect	Karsten Wesche		27	103
AS-CN-003	Vegetation Database of the BEF China Project	Helge Bruelheide		18	104
AS-CN-004	Vegetation Database of the Northern Mountains in China	Zhiyao Tang		70	
AS-EG-001	Vegetation Database of Sinai in Egypt	Mohamed Z. Hatim		98	105
AS-ID-001	Sulawesi Vegetation Database	Michael Kessler		24	
AS-IR-001	Vegetation Database of Iran	Jalil Noroozi	Parastoo Mahdavi	105	
AS-KZ-001	Database of Meadow Vegetation in the NW Tien Shan Mountains	Viktoria Wagner		3	106
AS-MN-001	Southern Gobi Protected Areas Database	Henrik von Wehrden	Karsten Wesche	688	107
AS-RU-001	Wetland Vegetation Database of Baikal Siberia (WETBS)	Victor Chepinoga		6	108
AS-RU-002	Database of Siberian Vegetation (DSV)	Andrey Korolyuk	Andrei Zverev	2150	

GIVD ID	Dataset name	Custodian	Deputy custodian	Nr. OA plots	Ref
AS-RU-004	Database of the University of Münster - Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research Group's Vegetation Research in Western Siberia and Kazakhstan	Norbert Hölzel	Wanja Mathar	85	
AS-SA-001	Vegetation Database of Saudi Arabia	Mohamed Abd El-Rouf Mousa El-Sheikh		607	
AS-TJ-001	Eastern Pamirs	Kim André Vanselow		174	109
AS-TW-001	National Vegetation Database of Taiwan	Ching-Feng Li	Chang-Fu Hsieh	897	
AS-YE-001	Socotra Vegetation Database	Michele De Sanctis	Fabio Attorre	190	110
AU-AU-002	AEKOS	Ben Sparrow		7443	111
AU-NC-001	New Caledonian Plant Inventory and Permanent Plot Network (NC-PIPPN)	Jérôme Munzinger	Philippe Birnbaum	98	112
AU-NZ-001	New Zealand National Vegetation Databank	Susan Wiser		983	113
AU-PG-001	Forest Plots from Papua New Guinea	Timothy Whitfeld	George D. Weiblen	53	114
NA-00-002	Tree Biodiversity Network (BIOTREE-NET)	Luis Cayuela		208	115
NA-CA-003	Database of Timberline Vegetation in NW North America	Viktoria Wagner	Toby Spribille	38	116
NA-CA-004	Understory of Sugar Maple Dominated Stands in Quebec and Ontario (Canada)	Isabelle Aubin		9	117
NA-CA-005	Boreal Forest of Canada	Yves Bergeron	Louis De Grandpré	44	
NA-GL-001	Vegetation Database of Greenland	Birgit Jedrzejek	Fred J.A. Daniëls	340	118
NA-US-002	VegBank	Robert K. Peet	Michael T. Lee	6456	119
NA-US-006	Carolina Vegetation Survey Database	Robert K. Peet	Michael T. Lee	2317	120
NA-US-014	Alaska-Arctic Vegetation Archive	Donald A. Walker	Amy Breen	467	121
SA-00-002	VegPáramo	Gwendolyn Peyre	Xavier Font	1591	122
SA-AR-002	Vegetation Database of Central Argentina	Melisa Giorgis	Alicia Acosta	42	
SA-BO-003	Bolivia Forest Plots	Michael Kessler	Sebastian Herzog	18	
SA-BR-002	Forest Inventory, State of Santa Catarina, Brazil (IFFSC Project)	Alexander Christian Vibrans	André Luis de Gasper	1345	123
SA-BR-003	Grasslands of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil	Eduardo Vélez-Martin	Valério De Patta Pillar	271	
SA-BR-004	Grassland Database of Campos Sulinos	Gerhard E. Overbeck	Valério De Patta Pillar	111	
SA-CL-002	SSAForests_Plots_db	Alvaro G. Gutierrez		163	
SA-CL-003	Chilean Park Transects - Fondecyt 1040528	Aníbal Pauchard	Alicia Marticorena	33	124
SA-EC-001	Ecuador Forest Plot Database	Jürgen Homeier		156	

Table 2: Description of the variables contained in the 'header' matrix, together with their range (if numeric) or possible levels (if nominal or binary). Variable types can be n - nominal (i.e., qualitative variable), o - ordinal, q - quantitative, or b - binary (i.e., boolean), or d - date.

Variable	Range/Levels	Unit of Measurement	Nr. Records	Type
GIVD_ID			91031	n
Dataset			91031	n
Continent	Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, Oceania, South America		90729	n
Country			91031	n
Biome	Alpine, Boreal zone, Dry midlatitudes, Dry tropics and subtropics, Polar and subpolar zone, Subtrop. with year-round rain, Subtropics with winter rain, Temperate midlatitudes, Tropics with summer rain, Tropics with year-round rain		91031	n
Date_of_recording	1888-07-05 - 2015-02-03	dd-mm-yyyy	75798	d
Latitude	-54.73863 - 80.149116	° (WGS84)	91031	q
Longitude	-162.741433 - 179.590053	° (WGS84)	91031	q
Location_uncertainty	1 - 2500	m	91002	q
Releve_area	0.01 - 40000	m^2	61898	q
Herbs_identified	FALSE = 4876; TRUE = 6323		11199	b
Plant_recorded	All trees & dominant understory, All vascular plants, All vascular plants and dominant cryptogams, All woody plants, Dominant trees, Only dominant species, Dominant woody plants >= 2.5 cm dbh, Woody plants >= 10 cm dbh, Woody plants >= 1 m height, Woody plants >= 1 cm dbh, Woody plants >= 20 cm dbh, Woody plants >= 2.5 cm dbh, Woody plants >= 5 cm dbh, NA		91015	n
Elevation	-25 - 4819	m a.s.l.	52121	q
Aspect	0 - 360	°	30796	q
Slope	0 - 99	°	37784	q
is_forest	FALSE = 20396; TRUE = 25832		46228	b
is_nonforest	FALSE = 50870; TRUE = 38203		89073	b
ESY			55457	n
Forest	0 - 1		73882	q
Shrubland	0 - 1		73882	q
Grassland	0 - 1		73882	q
Wetland	0 - 1		73882	q
Sparse_vegetation	0 - 1		73882	q
Naturalness	1 = Natural, 2 = Semi-natural, 3 = Anthropogenic		68011	o
Cover_total	1 - 313	%	24712	q
Cover_tree_layer	0.5 - 150	%	7245	q
Cover_shrub_layer	0.5 - 145	%	10197	q
Cover_herb_layer	0.2 - 180	%	26679	q
Cover_moss_layer	1 - 100	%	9643	q

Variable	Range/Levels	Unit of Measurement	Nr. Records	Type
Cover_lichen_layer	1 - 95	%	734	q
Cover_algae_layer	1 - 100	%	221	q
Cover_litter_layer	1 - 100	%	4500	q
Cover_bare_rocks	1 - 100	%	1897	q
Cover_cryptogams	1 - 95	%	593	q
Cover_bare_soil	0.1 - 99	%	1412	q
Height_trees_highest	1 - 99	m	6115	q
Height_trees_lowest	1 - 90	m	221	q
Height_shrubs_highest	0.1 - 9.9	m	2880	q
Height_shrubs_lowest	0.1 - 9	m	328	q
Height_herbs_average	0.1 - 440	cm	10125	q
Height_herbs_lowest	1 - 250	cm	2785	q
Height_herbs_highest	1 - 600	cm	1733	q