Photosynthetic acclimation through the lens of optimality

Nick Smith

Texas Tech University

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Lizz Waring
TTU

Helen Scott
TTU

Trevor Keenan
Berkeley Lab

Wang Han
Tsinghua U.

Colin Prentice
Imperial College

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Photosynthesis is important!

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

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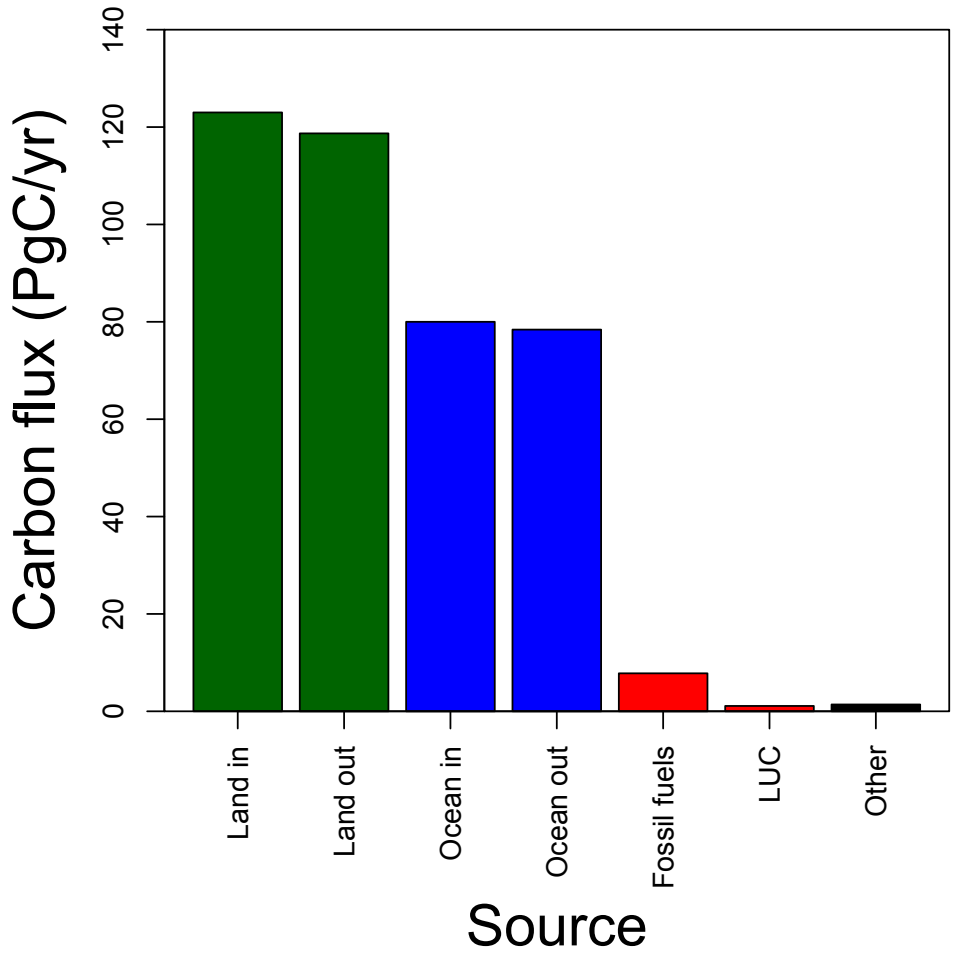
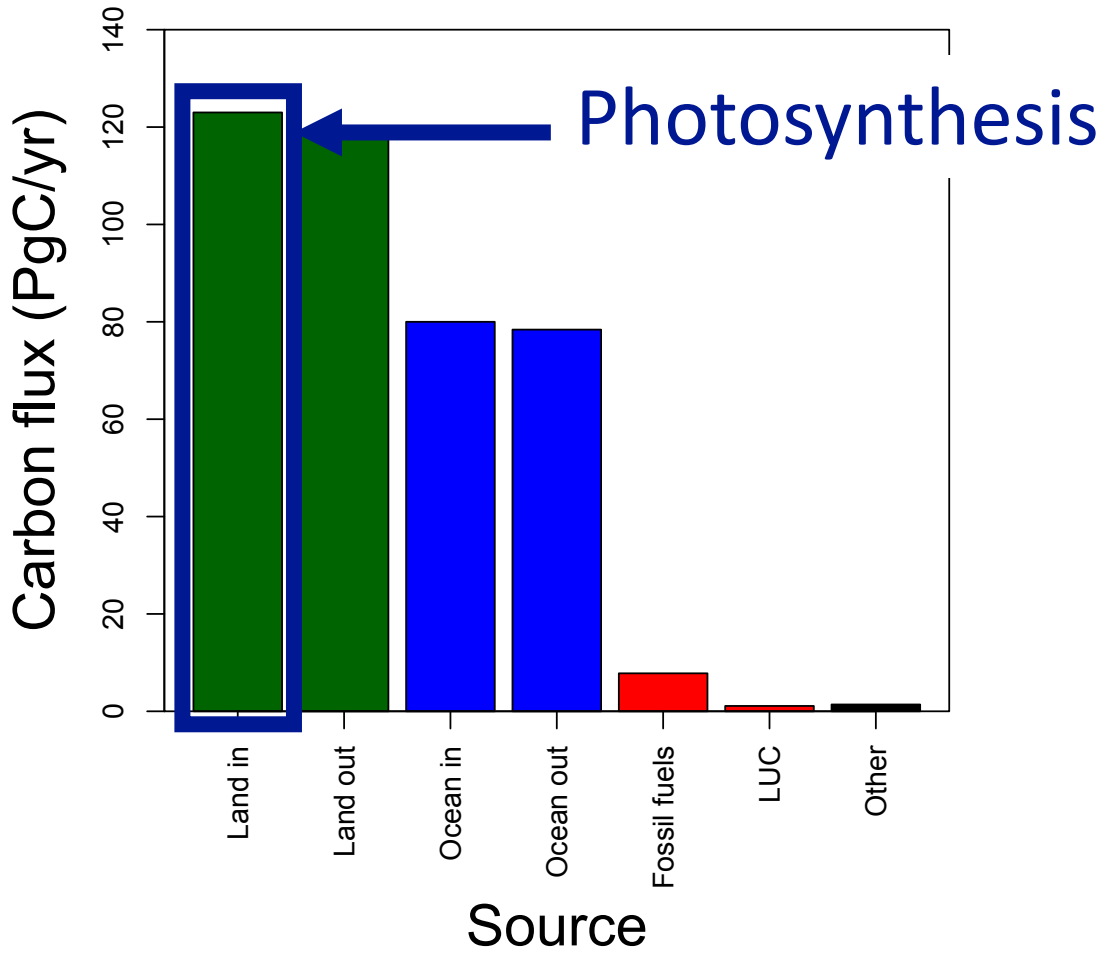


Data from IPCC (2013)

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Photosynthesis is important!



Data from IPCC (2013)

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Theoretical models for photosynthesis exist

Planta 149, 78–90 (1980)

Planta

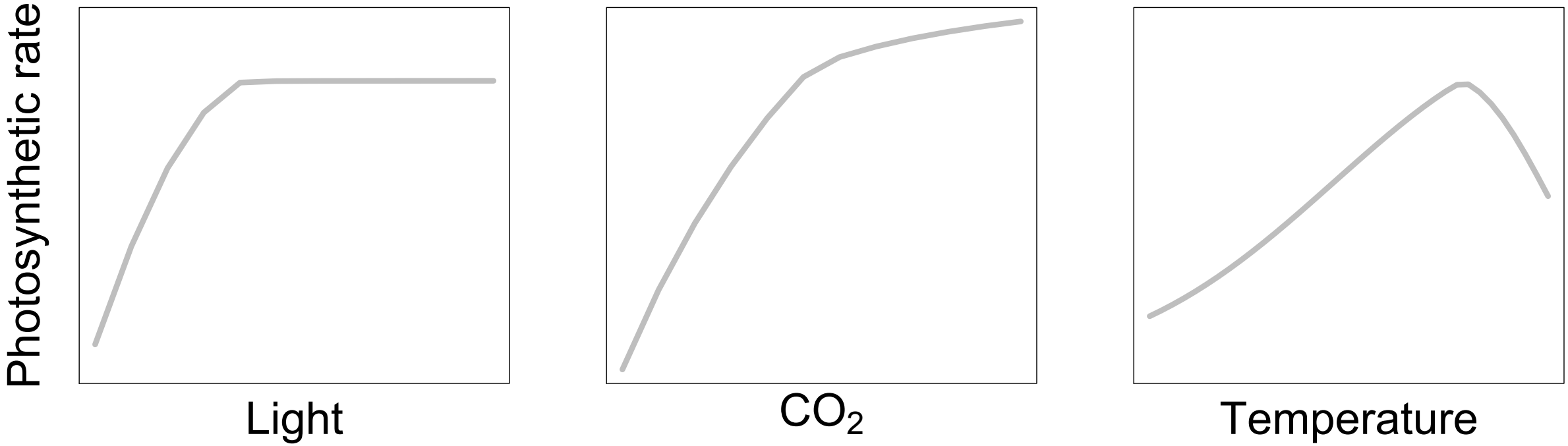
A Biochemical Model of Photosynthetic CO_2 Assimilation in Leaves of C_3 Species

G.D. Farquhar[1], S. von Caemmerer[1], and J.A. Berry[2]

[1] Department of Environmental Biology, Research School of Biological Sciences, Australian National University, P.O. Box 475, Canberra City ACT 2601, Australia and
[2] Carnegie Institution of Washington, Department of Plant Biology, Stanford, Cal. 94305, USA

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

And short-term responses are well known!



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Long-term responses can differ from short-term responses due to acclimation

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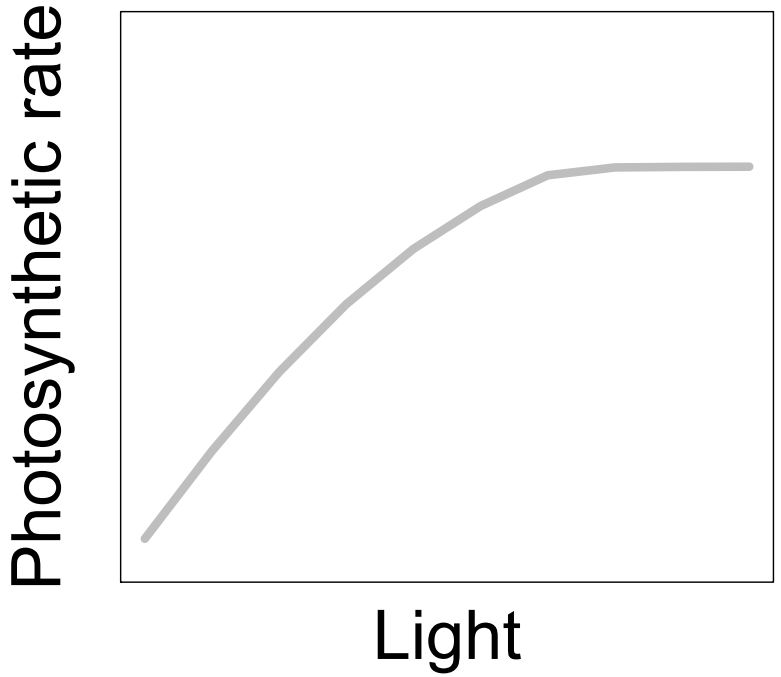
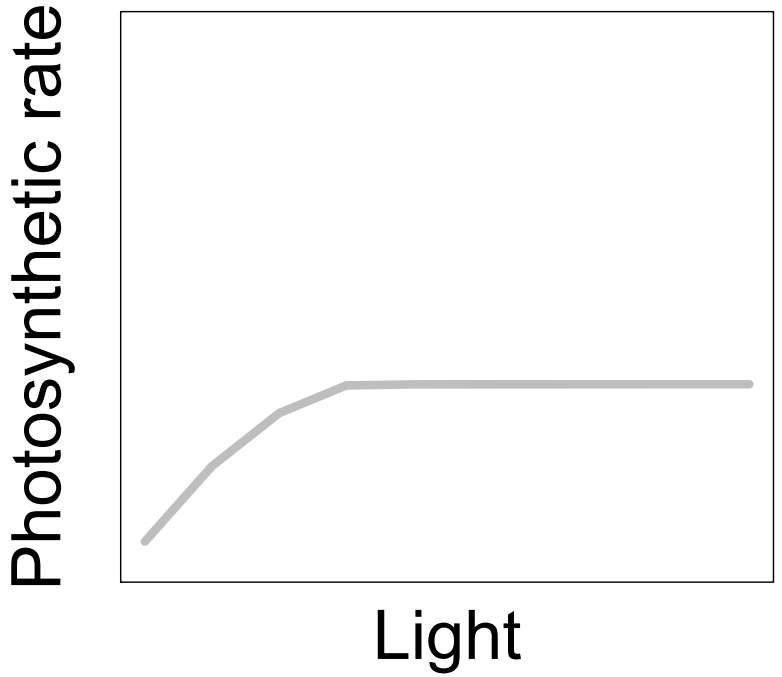
Long-term responses can differ from short-term responses due to acclimation

Acclimated to high light



Acclimated to low light



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Acclimation is ubiquitous and well known…

CO_2: Bazzaz (1990)

Annu. Rev. Ecol. Syst. 1990. 21:167–96

THE RESPONSE OF NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS TO THE RISING GLOBAL CO_2 LEVELS

F. A. Bazzaz

Light: Boardman (1977)

Ann. Rev. Plant Physiol. 1977. 28:355–77

COMPARATIVE PHOTOSYNTHESIS OF SUN AND SHADE PLANTS

N. K. Boardman
Division of Plant Industry, CSIRO, Canberra City, A.C.T. 2601, Australia

Temperature: Berry & Björkman (1980)

Ann. Rev. Plant Physiol. 1980. 31:491–543

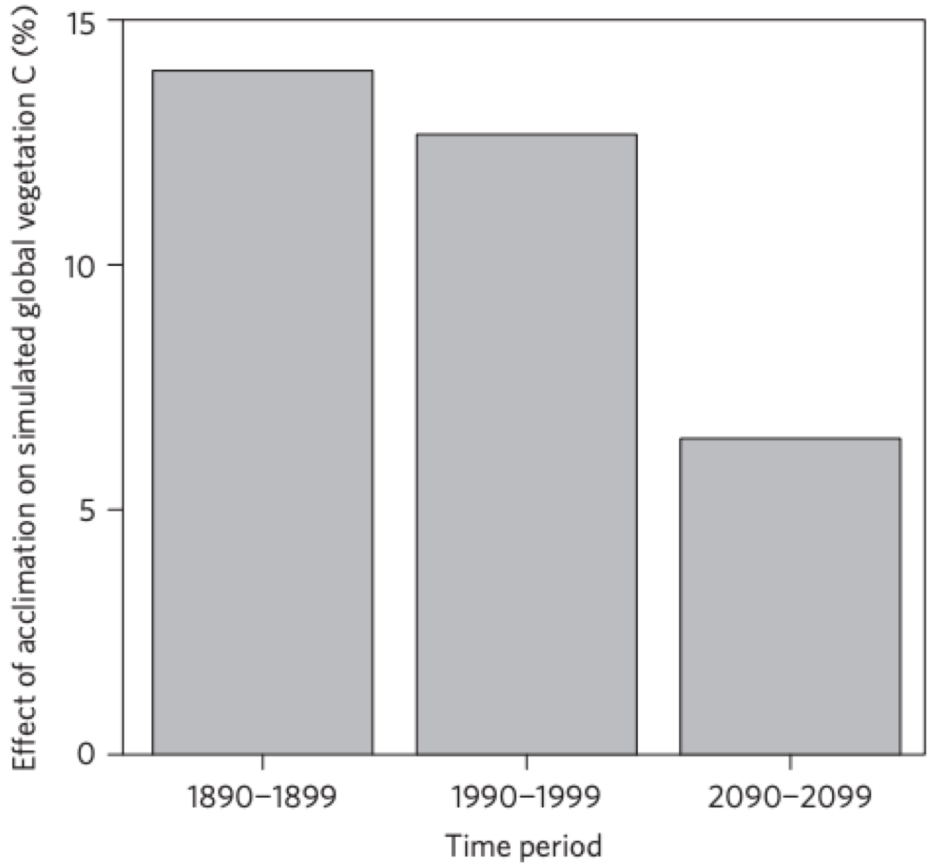
PHOTOSYNTHETIC RESPONSE AND ADAPTATION TO TEMPERATURE IN HIGHER PLANTS

Joseph Berry and Olle Björkman[1]

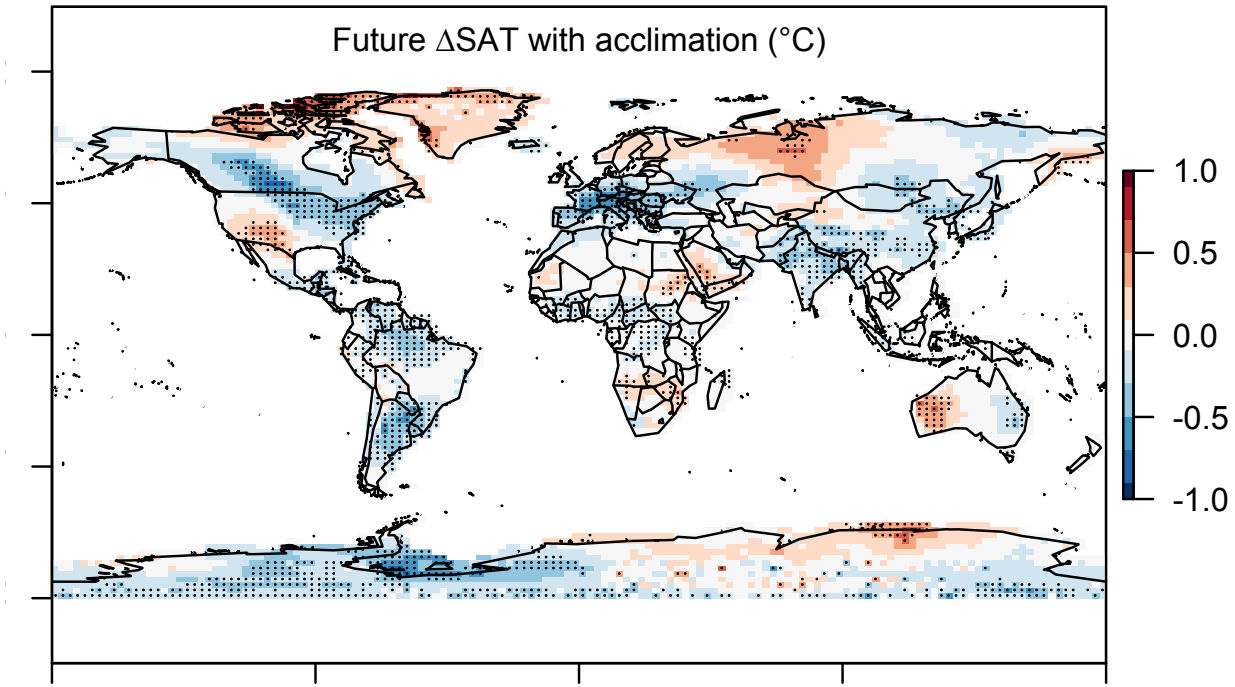
nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

…and can impact carbon cycling and climate…

Acclimation increase future C storage by ~6%



Acclimation alters future temperature by >1°C



Smith et al. (2017) *Nature Climate Change*

Smith et al. (2017) *JAMES*

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

…but the mechanisms underlying photosynthetic acclimation are not well known

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Problem: the mechanisms underlying photosynthetic acclimation are not well known

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Solution: A testable, theoretical model!

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Least cost theory

Maintain fastest rate of photosynthesis at the lowest cost (water and nutrient use)

Wright et al. (2003) *American Naturalist*

Biochemistry optimization: Coordination hypothesis

Photosynthesis may be limited by **Rubisco carboxylation rate** or **electron transport rate to regenerate Rubisco**

Optimally, plants will coordinate their biochemistry to be equally limited by both rates

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Coordination of photosynthesis

Optimally…

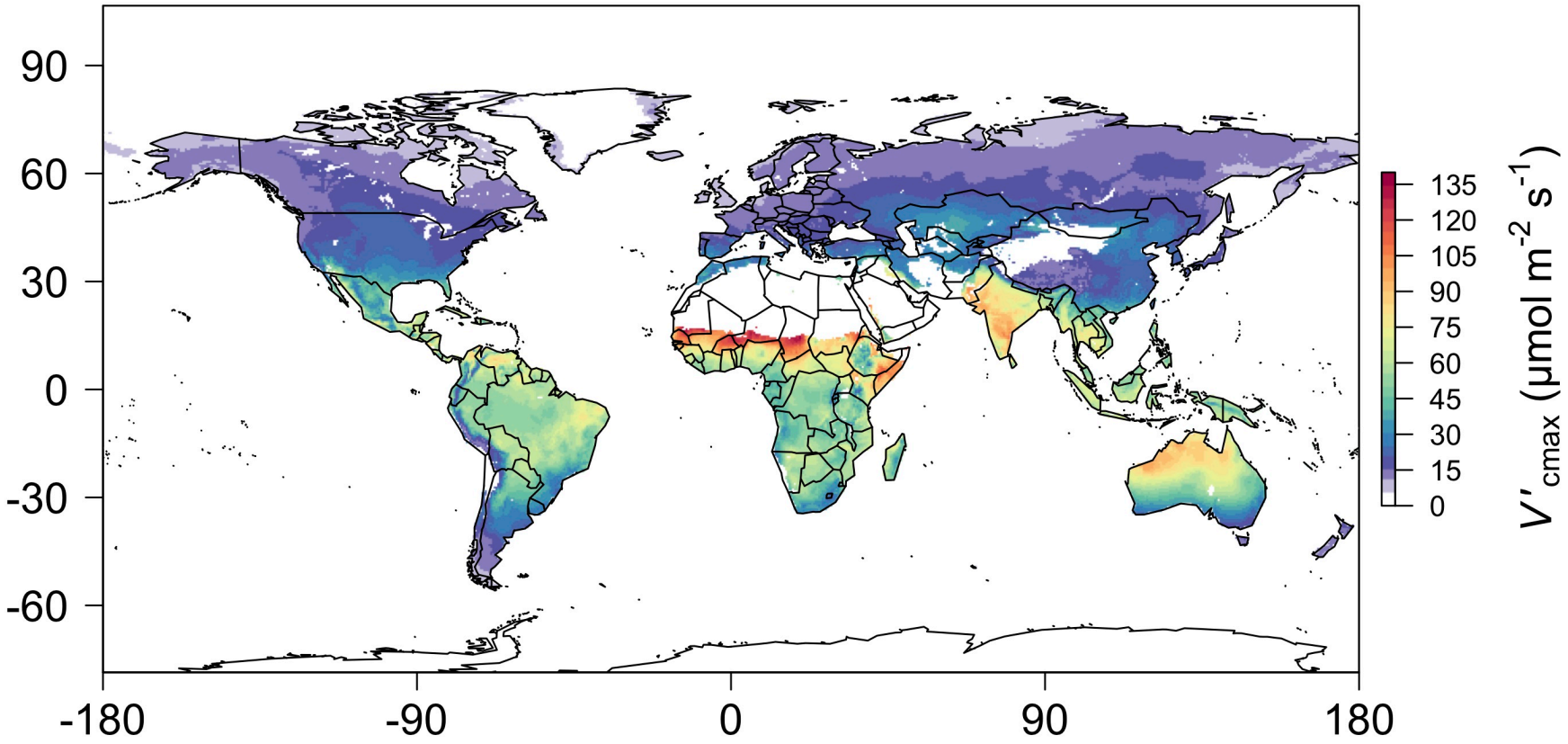
$$A_c = A_j$$

Carboxylation-limited photosynthesis

Electron transport-limited photosynthesis

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

We can predict optimal traits in different envionrments



Smith et al. (2019) *Ecology Letters*

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Ok, great, but now what?

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

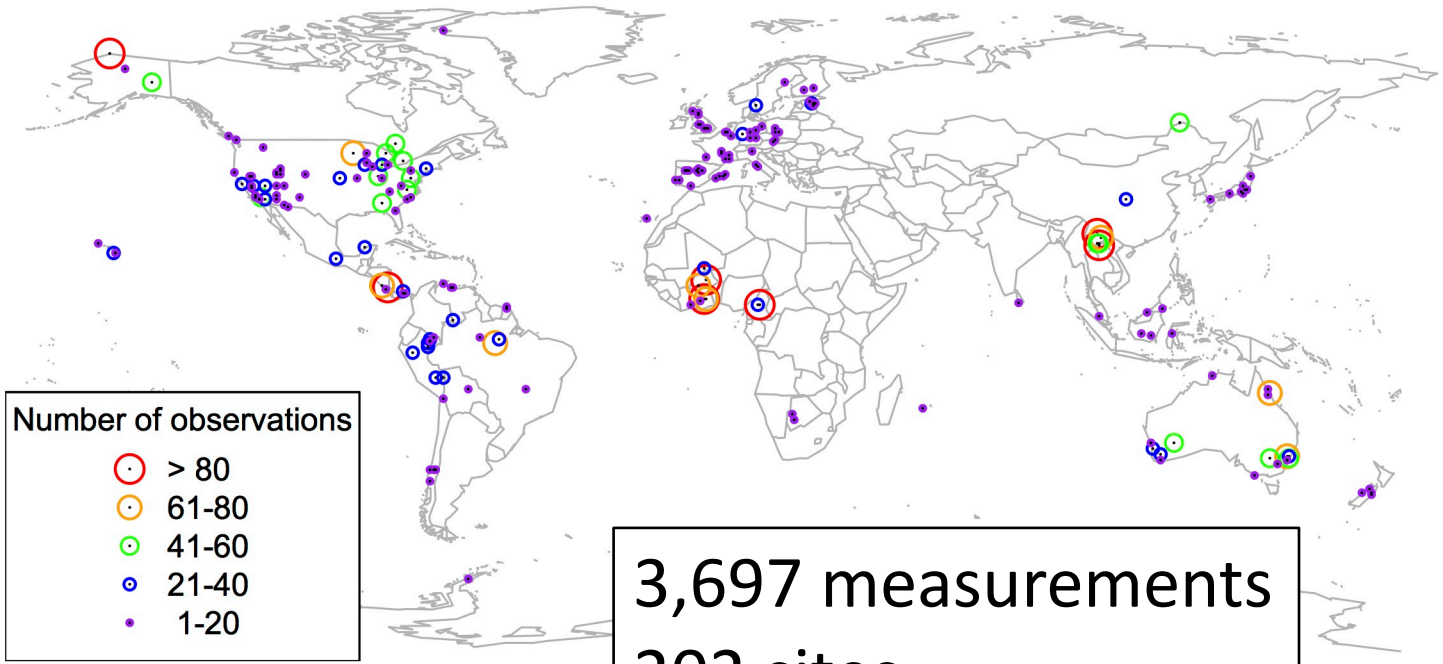
Let’s tackle some big questions in plant ecophysiology!

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

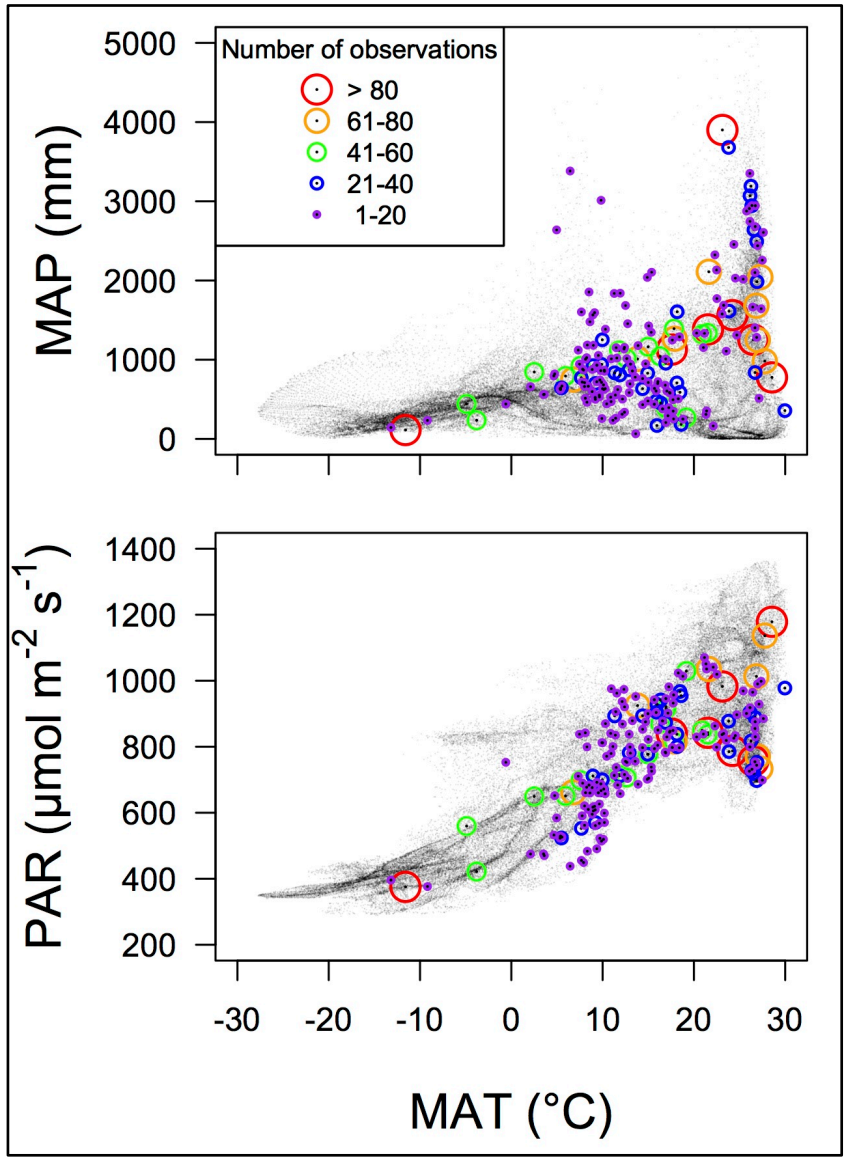
Question 1: Is photosynthesis optimized to the environment?

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Global V_{cmax} dataset



3,697 measurements
202 sites
> 600 genera



Smith et al. (2019) *Ecology Letters*

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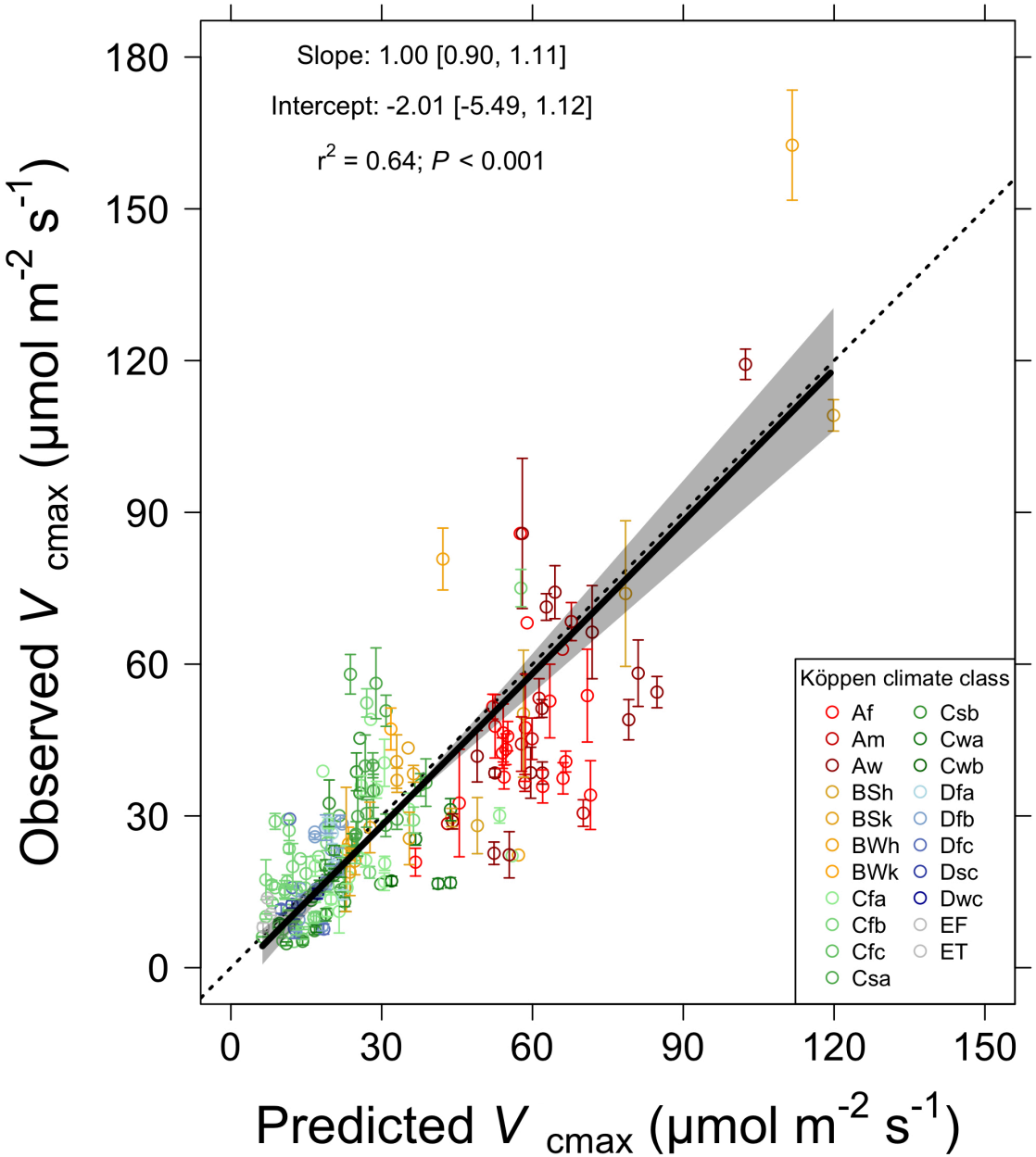


Smith et al. (2019) *Ecology Letters*

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Question 1: Is photosynthesis optimized to the environment?

YES! Photosynthesis acclimates spatially as expected from optimization

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Question 2: How will photosynthesis acclimate to future conditions?

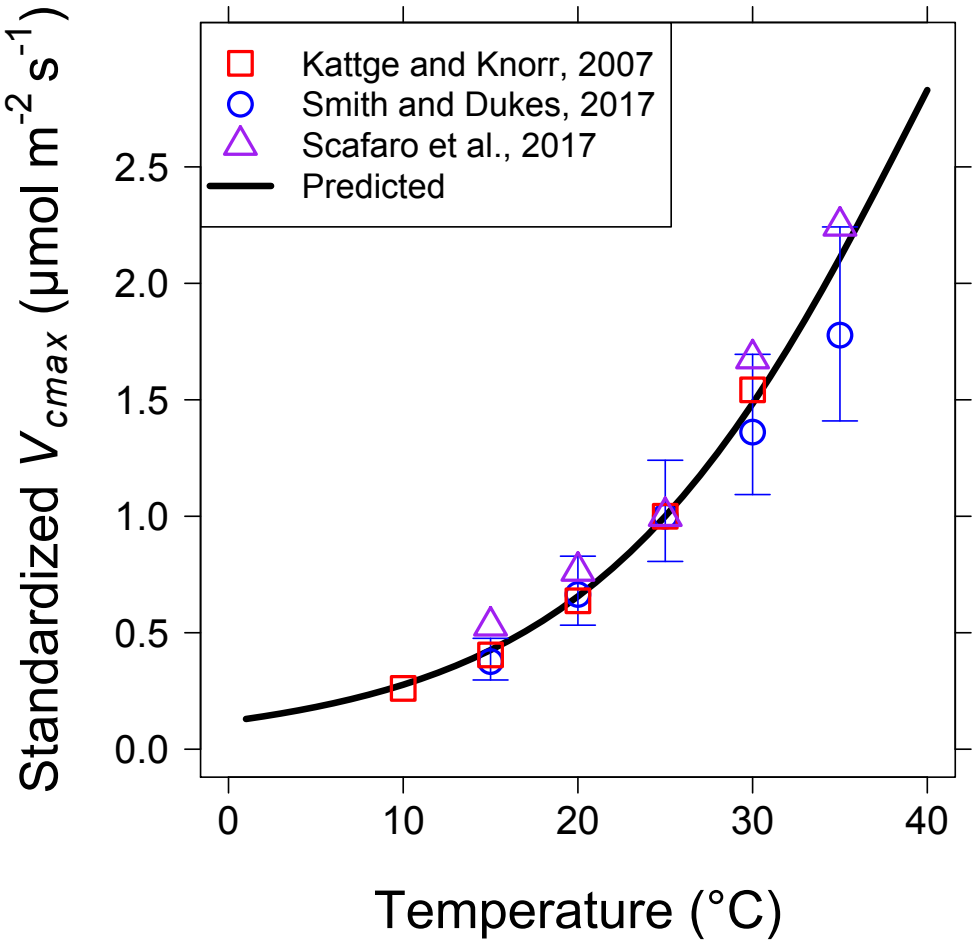
nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Photosynthetic traits change with temperature and CO_2 in ways expected from optimization

Smith and Keenan (in prep)

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Photosynthetic traits change with temperature and CO_2 in ways expected from optimization



← Fully acclimated response

Smith and Keenan (in prep)

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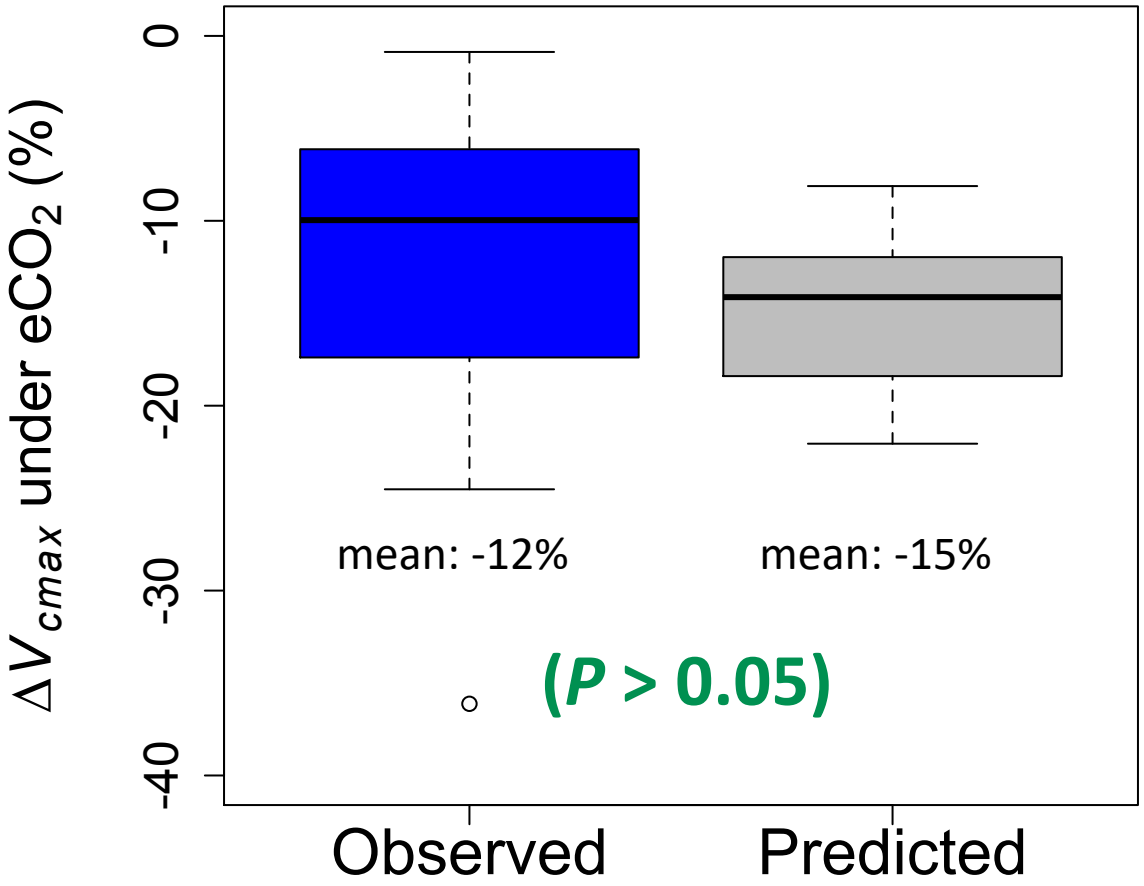
Photosynthetic traits change with temperature and CO_2 in ways expected from optimization



Smith and Keenan (in prep)

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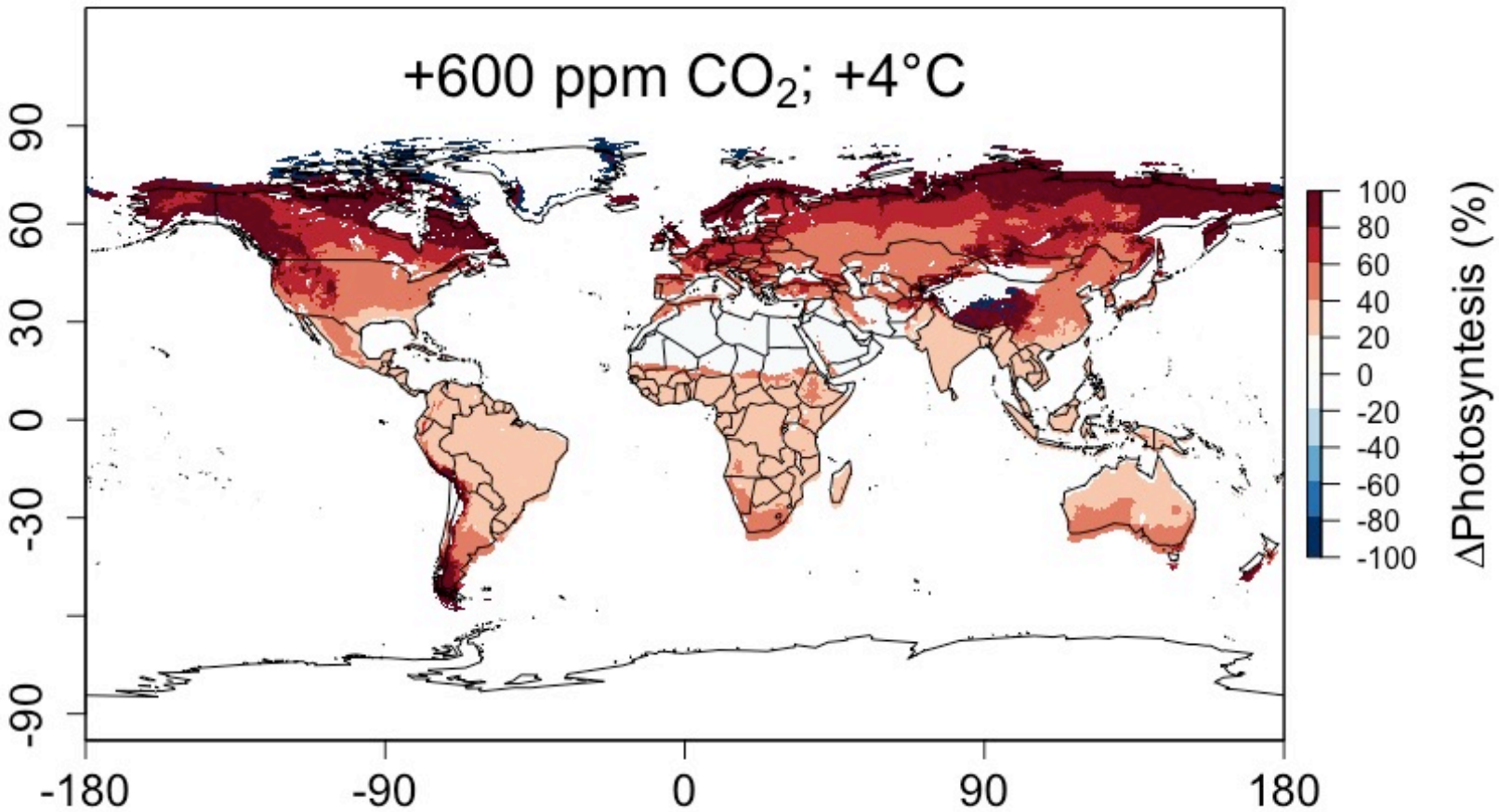
Higher CO_2 and increased temperatures increase future photosynthesis



Smith and Keenan (in prep)

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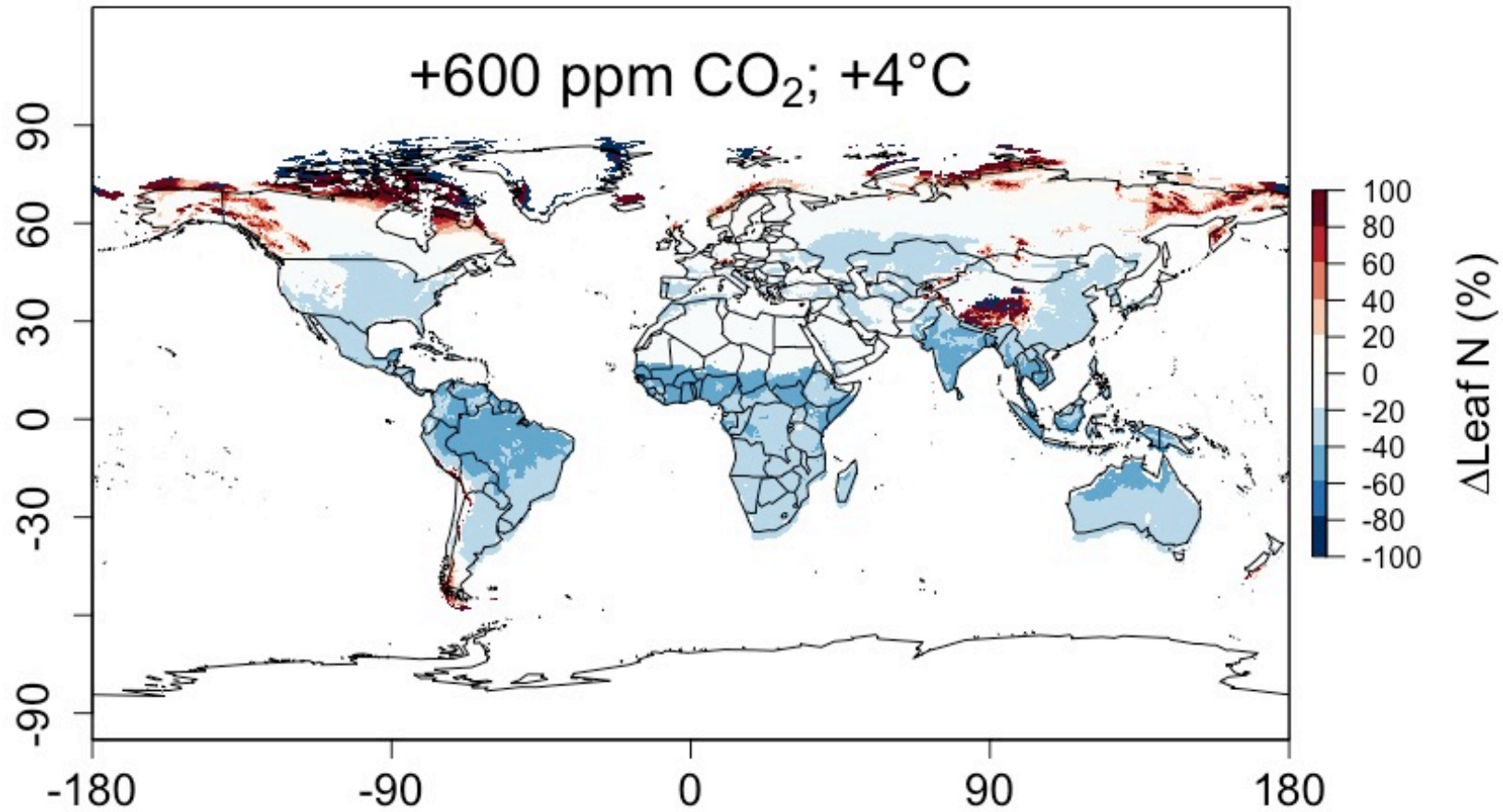
Higher CO_2 and increased temperatures increase future photosynthesis (at lower nutrient use)



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nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Question 2: How will photosynthesis acclimate to future conditions?

Photosynthesis will increase and per-leaf-area nutrient use will decrease

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Question 3: Does photosynthesis respond to nutrient addition?

Lizz Waring
TTU

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

From the least cost hypothesis…

Added nutrients will not increase photosynthesis because light limitation will kick in

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

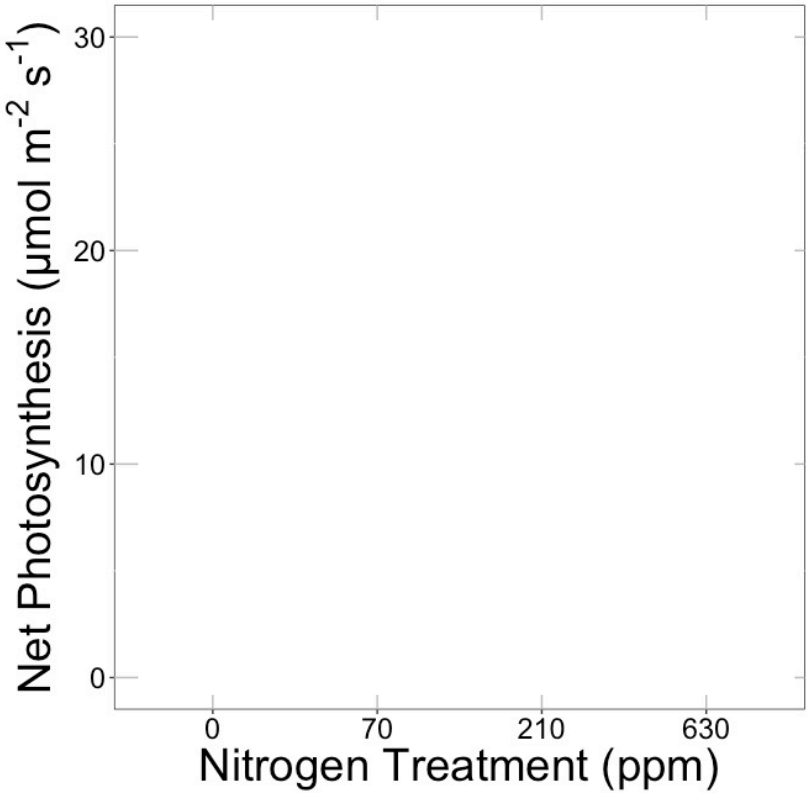
From the least cost hypothesis…

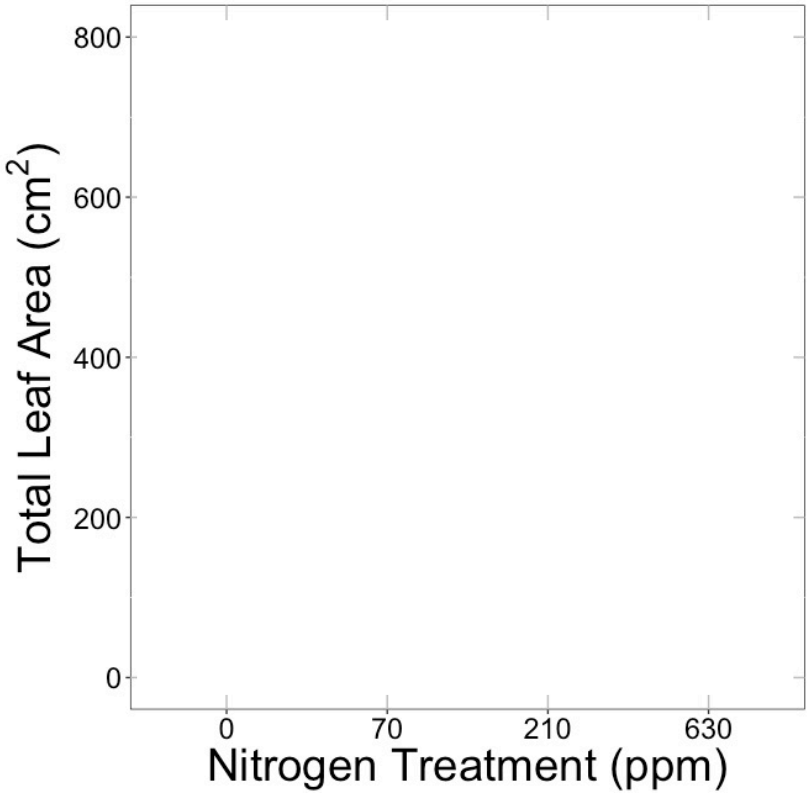
Added nutrients will not increase photosynthesis because light limitation will kick in

Optimal response would be to increase leaf area

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Leaf area, but not photosynthesis increases with N addition





Waring and Smith (in prep)

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

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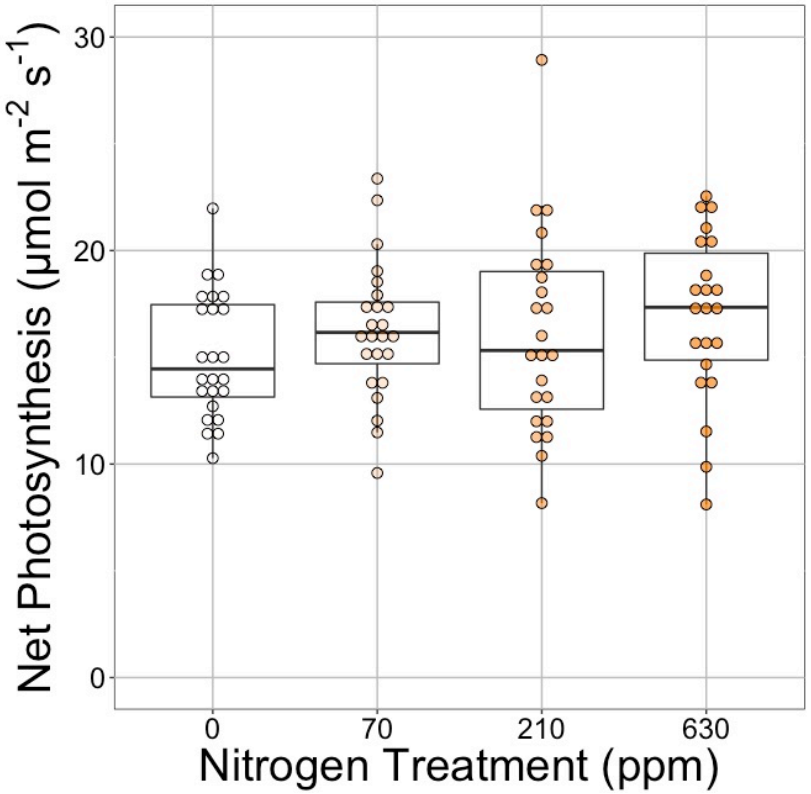

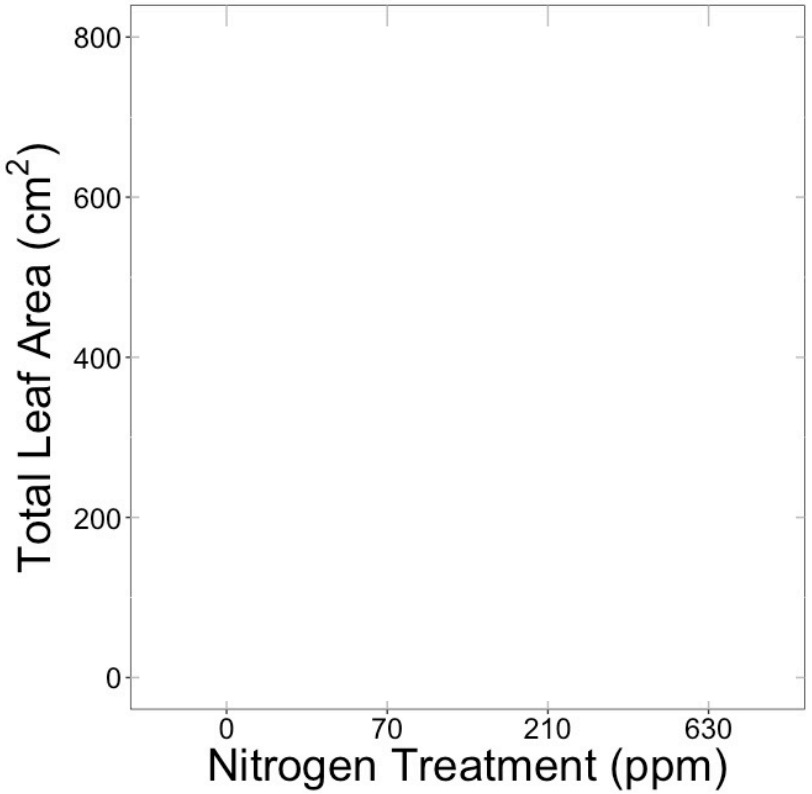

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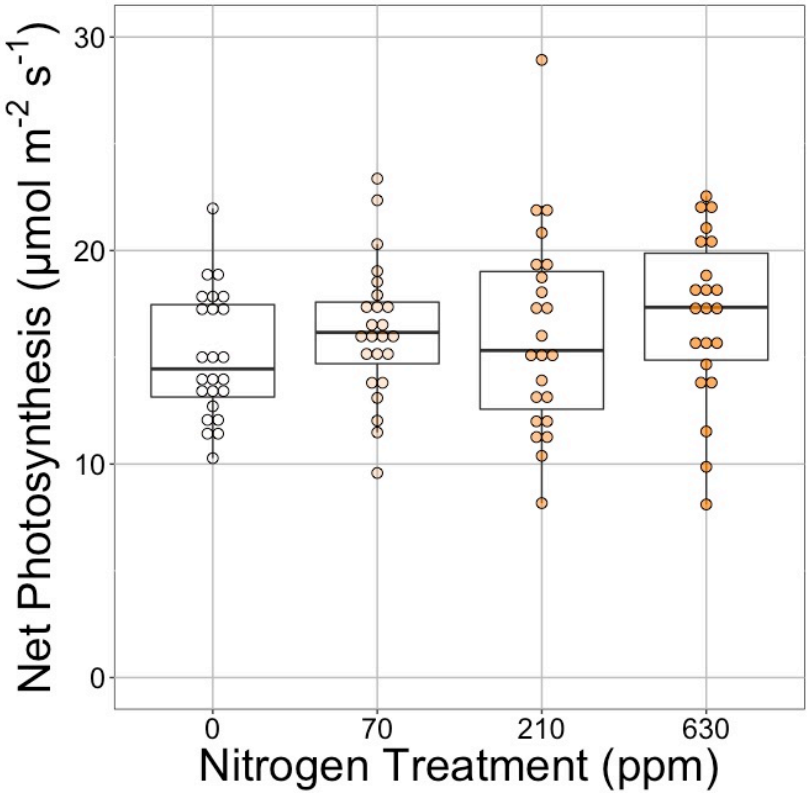
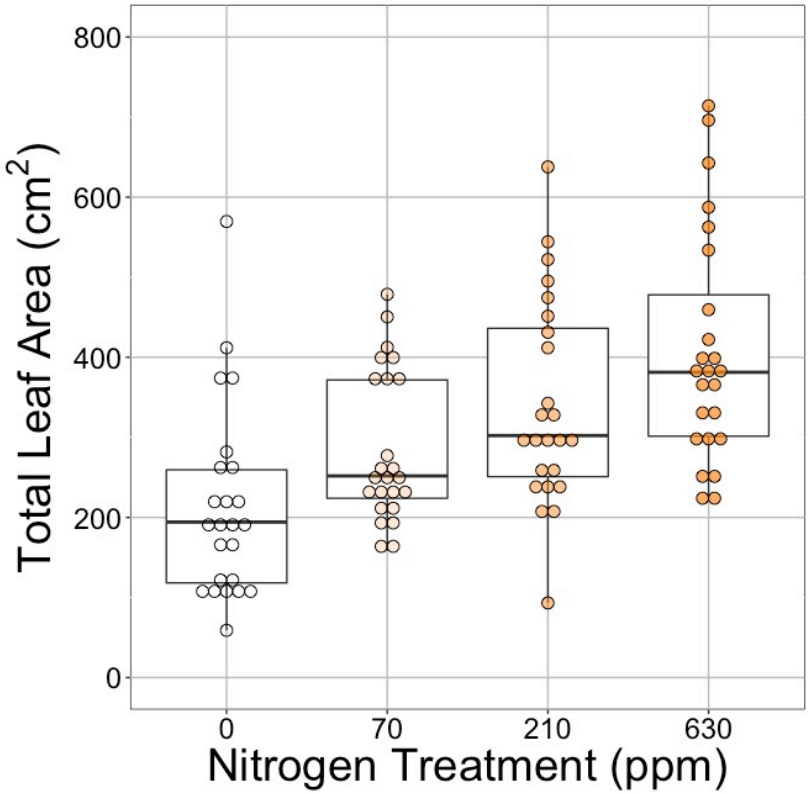




Waring and Smith (in prep)

But do greenhouse experiments translate to the field?

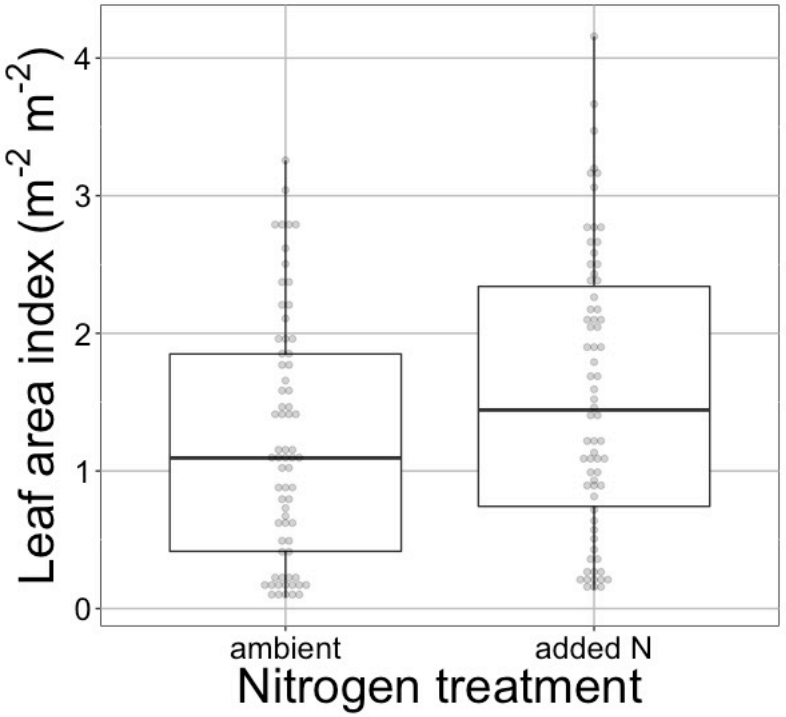
Grassland soil nutrient addition network:

1. Leaf area index
2. Per-leaf-area nitrogen (photosynthetic proxy)

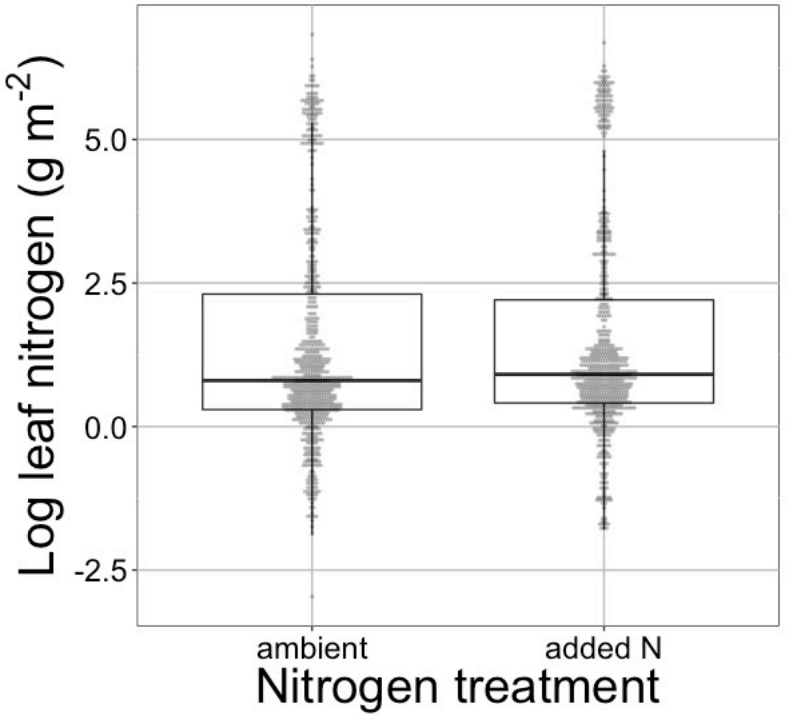
nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Globally, N addition increases leaf area, not leaf N

41% increase (P < 0.05)



No change (P = 0.42)



Waring and Smith (in prep)

nutrient network

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Question 3: Does photosynthesis respond to nitrogen addition?

No, plants respond to added nitrogen by increasing leaf area, not photosynthesis

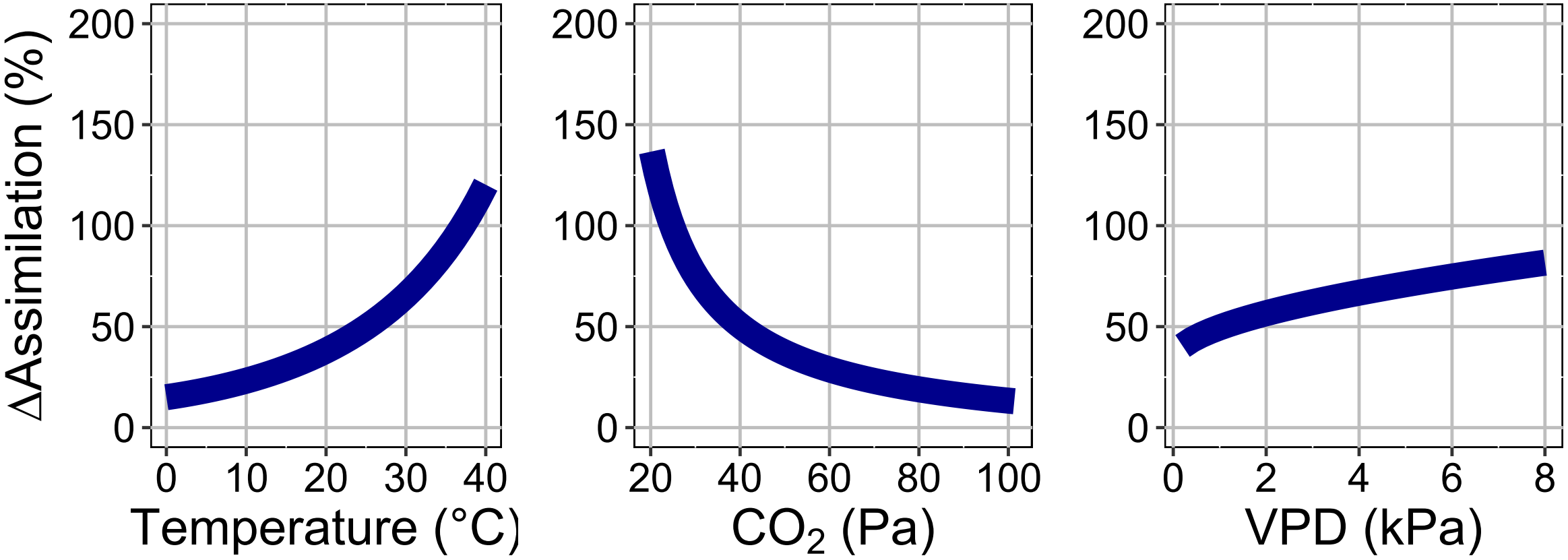
nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Question 4: When is C_4 photosynthesis an advantage over C_3 photosynthesis?

Helen Scott
TTU

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Relative advantage of C_4 physiology



Scott and Smith (in prep)

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith

Question 4: When is C_4 photosynthesis an advantage over C_3 photosynthesis?

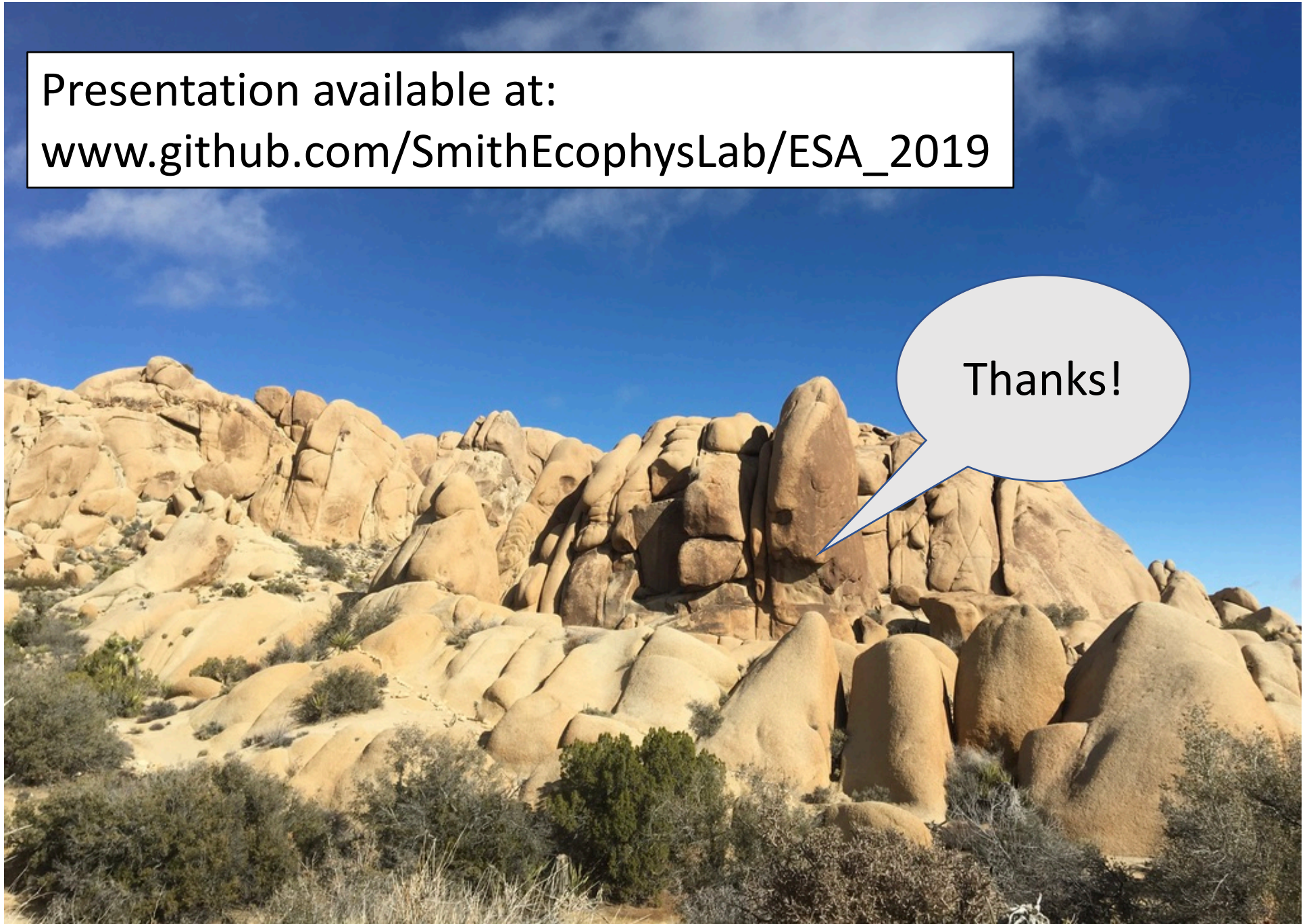
C_4 is better in hot, dry, low CO_2 environments

Conclusions

Theory can be useful!

- Improving the reliability of climate models
- Acting as a null model for understanding mechanisms

nick.smith@ttu.edu; @nick_greg_smith



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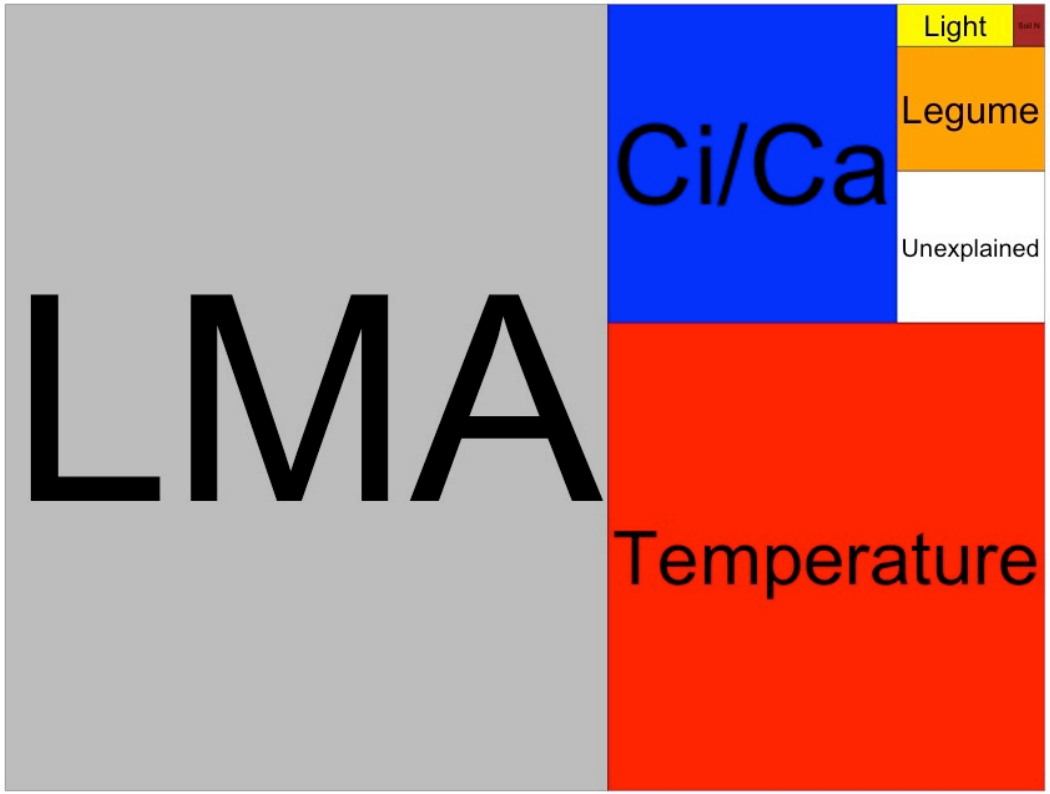
Globally, N addition has no impact on leaf N



Each box is proportional to the variance in leaf N explained by each variable

Waring and Smith (in prep)

nutrient network