SpeedyWeather.jl: Reinventing atmospheric general circulation models towards interactivity and extensibility

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Summary

SpeedyWeather.jl is a library to simulate and analyze the global atmospheric circulation on the sphere. It implements several 2D and 3D models which solve different sets of equations:

- the primitive equations with and without humidity ([Figure 1](link)),
- the shallow water equations ([Figure 2](link)), and
- the barotropic vorticity equation.

The primitive equation model in SpeedyWeather.jl is an atmospheric general circulation model ([Kucharski et al., 2013](link)) with simple parameterizations for unresolved physical processes including precipitation or boundary layer mixing. It can be thought of as a conceptual reinvention of the Fortran SPEEDY model ([Molteni, 2003](link)) in the Julia programming language ([Bezanson et al., 2017](link)). However, all models here are written in a modular way to make its components easily extensible. For example, a new parameterization can be externally defined and passed as an argument to the model constructor. Operators used inside SpeedyWeather.jl are exposed to the user, facilitating analysis of the simulation data. SpeedyWeather.jl is therefore, beyond its main purpose of simulating atmospheric motion, also a library for the analysis of gridded data on the sphere. Running and analyzing simulations can be interactively combined, enhancing user experience and productivity.

The user interface of SpeedyWeather.jl is heavily influenced by the Julia ocean model Oceananigans.jl ([Ramadhan et al., 2020](link)). A monolithic interface based on parameter files is avoided in favor of a library-style interface. A model is constructed bottom-up by first defining the discretization and any non-default model components with their respective parameters. All components are then collected into a single model object which, once initialized, returns a simulation object. A simulation contains everything, the model with all parameters as constructed before but also all prognostic and diagnostic variables. Such a simulation can then be run, but also accessed before and after to analyze or visualize the current variables, or individual terms of the equations. One can also adjust some parameters before resuming the simulation. While these steps can be written into a script for reproducibility, the same steps can be executed and interacted with one-by-one in Julia's read-evaluate-print loop (REPL) or in a Jupyter or Pluto notebook. We thereby achieve an interactivity of a simulation and its various model components far beyond the options provided in a monolithic interface. At the

43 same time, defaults, set to well-established test cases, enable even inexperienced users to run
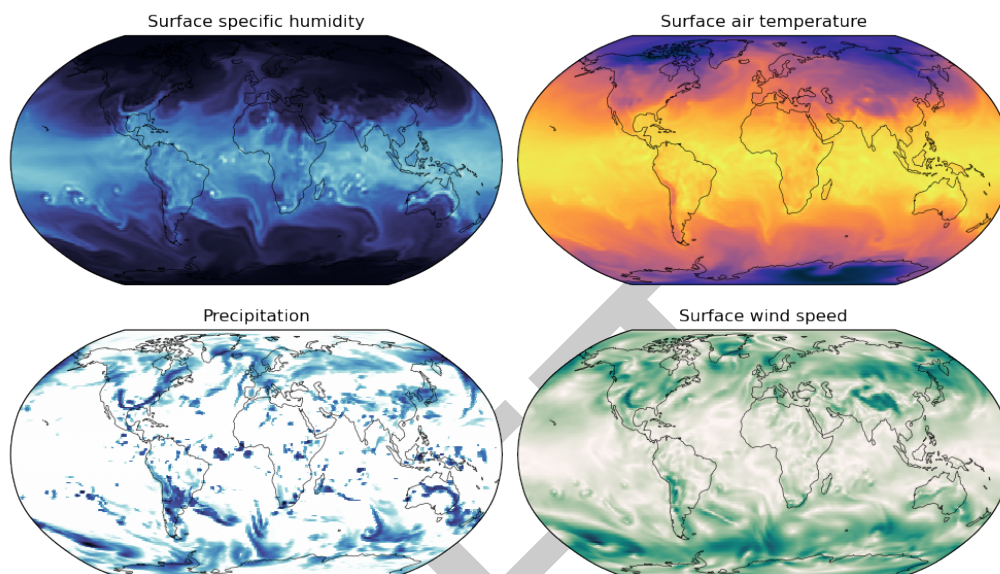44 simulations in just a few lines of code.

Surface specific humidity

Surface air temperature

Precipitation

Surface wind speed

Figure 1: Surface humidity, air temperature, wind speed and precipitation simulated with the primitive equation model in SpeedyWeather.jl. Spectral resolution is T127 (about 100km) on an octahedral Gaussian grid (Malardel et al., 2016) with simple physics to represent unresolved processes such as surface fluxes including evaporation, and precipitation due to large-scale condensation and convection.

45 SpeedyWeather.jl relies on Julia's multiple dispatch programming paradigm (Bezanson et al.,
46 2017) to be extensible with new components including parameterizations, forcings, drag, or
47 even the grid. All such supported model components define an abstract type that can be
48 subtyped to introduce, for example, a new parameterization. To define precipitation due to
49 the physical process of large-scale condensation, one would define `MyCondensation` as a new
50 subtype of `AbstractCondensation`. One then only needs to extend the `initialize!` and
51 `condensation!` functions for this new type. Passing on `condensation = MyCondensation()`
52 to the model constructor then implements this new model component without the need to
53 branch off or overwrite existing model components. Conceptually similar scientific modelling
54 paradigms have been very successful in the Python-based generic partial differential equation
55 solver Dedalus (Burns et al., 2020), the process-oriented climate model CLIMLAB (Rose,
56 2018), and the Julia ocean model Oceananigans.jl (Ramadhan et al., 2020).

57 The dynamical core of SpeedyWeather.jl uses established numerics (Bourke, 1972; Hoskins
58 & Simmons, 1975; Simmons et al., 1978; Simmons & Burridge, 1981), widely adopted in
59 numerical weather prediction. It is based on the spherical harmonic transform (Reinecke &
60 Seljebotn, 2013; Stompor, 2011) with a leapfrog-based semi-implicit time integration (Hoskins
61 & Simmons, 1975) and a Robert-Asselin-Williams filter (Amezcua et al., 2011; Williams, 2011).
62 The spherical harmonic transform is grid-flexible (Willmert, 2020). Any iso-latitude ring-based
63 grid can be used and new grids can be externally defined and passed in as an argument. Many
64 grids are already implemented: the conventional Gaussian grid, a regular longitude-latitude
65 grid, the octahedral Gaussian grid (Malardel et al., 2016), the octahedral Clenshaw-Curtis grid
66 (Hotta & Ujiie, 2018), and the HEALPix grid (Górski et al., 2005). Both SpeedyWeather.jl and
67 its spherical harmonic transform are also number format-flexible. Single-precision floating-point
68 numbers (Float32) are the default as adopted by other modelling efforts (Nakano et al., 2018;
69 Váňa et al., 2017), but Float64 and other custom number formats can be used with a single
70 code basis (Klöwer et al., 2020; Klöwer et al., 2022). Julia will compile to the choice of number

71 format, the grid, and and other model components just-in-time. A simple parallelization across
72 vertical layers is supported by Julia's multithreading.

73 SpeedyWeather.jl internally uses three sub-modules `RingGrids`, `LowerTriangularMatrices`,
74 and `SpeedyTransforms`. `RingGrids` is a module that discretizes the sphere on iso-latitude
75 rings and implements interpolations between various such grids. `LowerTriangularMatrices`
76 facilitates the implementation of the spherical harmonics by organizing their coefficients in a
77 lower triangular matrix representation. `SpeedyTransforms` implements the spectral transform
78 between the grid-point space as defined by `RingGrids` and the spectral space defined in
79 `LowerTriangularMatrices`. These three modules are independently usable and therefore
80 support SpeedyWeather's library-like user interface. Output is stored as NetCDF files using
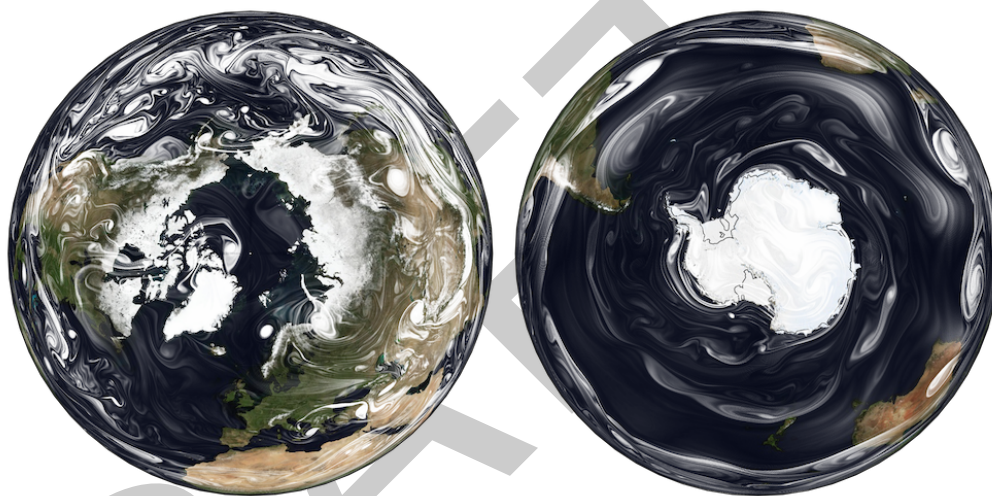81 NCDatasets.jl.

Figure 2: Relative vorticity simulated with the shallow water model in SpeedyWeather.jl. The simulation used a spectral resolution of T1023 (about 20 km) and Float32 arithmetic on an octahedral Clenshaw-Curtis grid (Hotta & Ujiie, 2018). Relative vorticity is visualized with Matplotlib (Hunter, 2007) and Cartopy (Met Office, 2010 - 2015) using a transparent-to-white colormap to mimic the appearance of clouds. Underlaid is NASA's blue marble from June 2004.

Statement of need

83 SpeedyWeather.jl is a fresh approach to atmospheric models that have been very influential in
84 many areas of scientific and high-performance computing as well as climate change mitigation
85 and adaptation. Most weather, ocean and climate models are written in Fortran and have
86 been developed over decades. From this tradition follows a specific programming style and
87 associated user interface. SpeedyWeather.jl aims to overcome the constraints of traditional
88 Fortran-based models. The modern trend sees simulations in Fortran and data analysis in
89 Python, making it virtually impossible to interact with various model components directly. In
90 SpeedyWeather.jl, interfaces to the model components are exposed to the user. Furthermore,
91 data-driven climate modelling (Rasp et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2023), which replaces
92 existing model components with machine learning, is more difficult in Fortran due to the lack
93 of established machine learning frameworks (Meyer et al., 2022). In Julia, Flux.jl is available
94 for machine learning (Innes et al., 2019) as well as automatic differentiation with Enzyme
95 (Moses & Churavy, 2020) for gradients-based optimization.

96 With SpeedyWeather.jl we hope to provide a platform for data-driven atmospheric modelling
97 and in general an interactive model that makes difficult problems easy to simulate. Climate
98 models that are user-friendly, trainable, but also easily extensible will suddenly make many

99 complex research ideas possible.

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