

# Urban biogeography of fungal endophytes across San Francisco

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## ABSTRACT

In natural and agricultural systems, the plant microbiome—the microbial organisms associated with plant tissues—has been shown to have important effects on host physiology and ecology, yet we know little about how these plant-microbe relationships play out in urban environments. Here we characterize the composition of fungal communities associated with leaves of one of the most common sidewalk trees in the city of San Francisco, California. We focus our efforts on endophytic fungi (asymptomatic microfungi that live inside healthy leaves), which have been shown in other systems to have large ecological effects on the health of their plant hosts. Specifically, we characterized the foliar fungal microbiome of *Metrosideros excelsa* (Myrtaceae) trees growing in a variety of urban environmental conditions. We used high-throughput culturing, PCR, and Sanger sequencing of the ITS nrDNA region to quantify the composition and structure of fungal communities growing within healthy leaves of 30 *M. excelsa* trees from 6 distinct sites, which were selected to capture the range of environmental conditions found within city limits. Sequencing resulted in 854 high-quality ITS sequences. These sequences clustered into 85 Operational Taxonomic Units (97% VSEARCH OTUs). We found that these communities encompass relatively high alpha (within) and beta (between-site) diversity. Because the communities are all from the same host tree species, and located in relatively close geographical proximity to one another, these analyses suggest that urban environmental factors such as heat islands or differences in vegetation or traffic density (and associated air quality) may potentially be influencing the composition of these fungal communities. These biogeographic patterns provide evidence that plant microbiomes in urban environments can be as dynamic and complex as their natural counterparts. As human populations continue to transition out of rural areas and into cities, understanding the factors that shape environmental microbial communities in urban ecosystems stands to become increasingly important.

## INTRODUCTION

Although major cities and urban centers only cover a small portion the Earth's total geographic area, more than 50% of the human population lives in these urban centers, and the impact that these cities have on the environment can be seen worldwide (Schneider, Friedl, and Potere 2009). With increasing urbanization, understanding the ecology of cities and urban settings has become critical to human health and well being. Despite their comparatively small geographic size, the high density of human populations in these environments makes them distinct ecosystems with their own unique dynamics (Sukopp 1998). Urban environments represent the convergence of humans from around the world, any plant or animal species those humans might have brought with them, and infrastructures such as roads, sewers, and tall buildings. Despite the complexity that these ecosystems present, they are often overlooked by ecologists because more traditional ecology has focused on 'natural' systems. In urban systems, however, human influence is a primary ecological factor (McDonnell and Niemelä 2011). In recent years, ecologists have begun studying the urban environment just as they would a natural environment, in order to understand the novel environmental conditions this setting presents to the organisms that live there (Wu 2014).

In this study, we focus on the urban ecology of trees in San Francisco, California. Urban trees can play a major role in shaping the ecosystem of a city. Just as the trees in a forest have a considerable impact on its climate and ecology, trees in cities can have notable effects on a city's environment. For example, plant life in cities can impact temperature, air quality, and other aspects of human health (Willis

and Petrokofsky 2017). The urban heat island effect, which occurs when ‘islands’ of heat form as heat gets trapped between tall buildings, is one of the most well-documented unique urban anthropogenic environmental conditions (Oke 1973). Trees in urban environments have been shown to interact with these city-specific environmental factors (Kong et al. 2014). For example, trees in cities have been shown to improve urban air quality by taking up significant amounts of carbon dioxide from city air (Nowak et al. 2014). As pollution generated in urban centers is one of the major contributing factors to worldwide pollution, trees in urban environments may have a role in managing the environmental impacts of urbanization (Alberti et al. 2003).

Due to their importance, there is growing interest in understanding and maintaining sustainable urban ecologies. One potentially major factor influencing health of plants both in nature and cities is the plant microbiome. As the widespread availability of DNA sequencing has made it possible to characterize microbial communities more easily and comprehensively, the microbiome has become a major area of interest in numerous organisms (Kyrpides, Elie-Fadrosh, and Ivanova 2016). Just as the emerging field of human microbiome study has revealed that symbiotic, non-pathogenic microbes can have major impacts on human health (David et al. 2014), plants also host numerous symbiotic microbes. Similar to the human microbiome, the plant microbiome contains great diversity and is comprised of multiple distinct communities in various tissue systems such as the roots (rhizosphere), leaf surface (phyllosphere), and leaf interior (endosphere) (Turner, James, and Poole 2013). All of these microbiomes can have an impact on their host’s physiology. For instance, bacterial root microbes have been shown to play a role in the growth of various plant species (Gaiero et al. 2013). They can also play a variety of roles in host physiology, depending on their location within the plant (Schlaeppli and Bulgarelli 2015). These communities can be quite dynamic, and vary with factors such as plant age (Cavaglieri, Orlando, and Etcheverry 2009). While each of these sets of interactions is important, here we focus on the microbial ecology of fungal microorganisms living in the leaf endosphere. The endosphere is an ideal system for biogeographic studies, both because it is highly diverse, well replicated, and because it is a major interface between the host plant and its environment (Meyer and Leveau 2012).

Endophytic microbes are naturally found in the interior of leaves, whether introduced by natural wounds or openings in the leaf surface, or through penetrating the plant surface with hydrolytic enzymes (Hallmann et al. 1997). Although some of these microbes may be latent pathogens or decomposers waiting for the leaf to die, others are mutualists that may confer a benefit to their host (Carroll 1988). In wild grasses, symbiotic fungi have been shown to protect their hosts by discouraging herbivory, and can even affect host reproductive viability in those same systems (Clay 1988). In controlled settings, inoculation experiments have shown that specific species of endophytes can have an impact on their host’s overall health, including factors such as resistance and susceptibility to disease (Busby, Ridout, and Newcombe 2016). In nature, the fungal microbial communities can have impacts on their host’s physiology, such as limiting pathogen damage (Arnold et al. 2003).

In the wild, endophytic communities display species diversity comparable to that of any macroscopic community, even among individual trees from the same species (Gazis, Rehner, and Chaverri 2011). However, determining the factors that influence this diversity across disparate environments remains an area of active research. The biodiversity of these communities can be quite high, especially in areas like tropical forests (Arnold and Lutzoni 2007). In such natural settings, plant-associated microbial community compositions can show clear biogeographic structure (Andrews and Harris 2000). The urban setting, however, may be distinct, because factors such as rainfall and elevation will likely be less apparent over a smaller geographic area, even as new factors such as proximity to roads and tall buildings may introduce effects of their own. Studies of suburban forests in Japan have indicated that an urban setting has a notable impact on endophytic diversity (Matsumura and Fukuda 2013). However, the full impact of urban environmental factors on endophytic communities has yet to be completely understood.

In this study, we used culturing and barcode gene sequencing to identify the species makeup of endophytic communities in the New Zealand Christmas Tree (Māori: pōhutukawa), *Metrosideros excelsa* (Myrtaceae), throughout San Francisco, CA, to quantify the diversity and biogeographic patterns of foliar fungal communities in this urban environment. Based on studies in natural systems, we expected to find high community diversity both within and between sites, as well as a degree of biogeographic structure to these community compositions. We also anticipated that urban environmental factors might play a role in shaping the biogeography in these endophytic communities. We found that leaves from trees sampled at different sites across the city did indeed harbor distinct communities, and also that culture-based fungal

isolation frequencies differed among sites as well.

## METHODS

### Host Selection

We chose to focus on *Metrosideros excelsa* as a focal host tree. *Metrosideros excelsa* is widely planted throughout San Francisco and as such we were able to obtain samples from a large number of trees in a variety of locations throughout the city. Although *M. excelsa*'s endophytic communities have been characterized in its native range (New Zealand), there have been few studies about these communities outside of its native environment or in an urban setting (McKenzie, Buchanan, and Johnston 1999). In a Hawaiian endemic congener, *Metrosideros polymorpha*, the species makeup of foliar fungal endophyte communities has been shown to vary greatly across gradients of environmental factors such as elevation and rainfall (Zimmerman and Vitousek 2012).

### Site Selection

We selected six sites across the city for leaf sample collection (Fig. 1). When selecting sites, we took factors such as traffic levels, estimated temperature, proximity to tall buildings, elevation, and proximity to the ocean and San Francisco Bay into account. In selecting the sites, we wanted to capture the wide range of potential urban climates. We used street tree location data available from the City of San Francisco (permalink: <https://data.sfgov.org/City-Infrastructure/Street-Tree-List/tkzw-k3nq>), which documents the location and species of every tree in San Francisco, to choose unique locations around the city with sufficient densities of *Metrosideros excelsa* individuals (Fig. 1).

### Sample Collection

We collected small branches from 5 trees in each of these sites using a clipper pole, collecting at least 3 sun-exposed outer branches from each tree. Because *M. excelsa* is an evergreen tree and the newer leaves are likely to contain fewer fungi, we controlled for leaf age by only collecting branches which contained dark green leaves that appeared to be at least one year old. We collected all samples on the same day, August 26, 2017, to ensure that daily weather patterns and seasonal effects would not have an impact on the microbial community composition. Once collected, leaves were stored in labeled plastic bags and stored at 4°C until culturing. All leaves were processed within 48 hours of collection. Permission to sample leaves was granted by the San Francisco Bureau of Urban Forestry.

### Culturing Methods

From each sample, we selected a subset of dark green asymptomatic leaves for culturing. We surface-sterilized the leaves by first rinsing them with distilled water, then immersing them in a sterile petri dish with 95% ethanol for 10 seconds, 0.5% NaOCl for 2 minutes, then 70% ethanol for another 2 minutes following Arnold et al. (2007). We emptied the dish between rinses and left it closed until inside a sterile biosafety cabinet after the last rinse. We then cut the leaves into small (2mm x 2mm) pieces with flame-sterilized scissors and placed them into 1.5 mL microcentrifuge slant tubes partially filled with 2% VWR-brand malt extract agar (MEA). For each tree, we prepared 6 leaves and made 100 tubes, except for the trees from the downtown site. For the trees at this site, we prepared 140 tubes per tree because we found that they had low isolation frequencies in a preliminary sampling bout. All leaves were prepared this way within 48 hours of the initial leaf sampling, to prevent death of the leaf tissue from altering the fungal community composition.

After two weeks, we evaluated the tubes for fungal growth and subcultured the emergent fungi from tubes with growth onto 35mm plates with 2% MEA in order to better evaluate their morphotypes and accumulate sufficient tissue for future barcode gene sequencing and water voucher preparation. We re-evaluated and subcultured these tubes in the following months to capture any late-growing fungi. Each pure culture was vouchered in sterile dI water and stored in a living culture collection in the Zimmerman Lab at the University of San Francisco.

### Molecular Methods

We extracted DNA from fungal mycelium using the Sigma RED Extract 'n Amp DNA extraction kit and following previously published protocols (U'Ren et al. 2012). First, we added fungal tissue to sterile

tubes filled with 1 mm zirconium oxide beads, then added 100  $\mu$ L of Extract 'n' Amp DNA extraction solution. Next, we put the tubes in a bead-beater (Mini-Beadbeater-96, Bio Spec Products Inc.) for one minute. The samples were then placed on a heat block at 95°C for 10 minutes. After the heating step, we added a dilution buffer to each tube and stored them at 4°C until PCR.

We performed PCR using fungal-specific primers for the Internal Transcribed Spacer region, a commonly-accepted fungal barcode locus (Schoch et al. 2012), using the ITS1F forward primer (5'-CTT GGT CAT TTA GAG GAA GTA A-3') and ITS4 reverse primer (5'-TCC TCC GCT TAT TGA TAT GC-3'). For each PCR reaction, we used 1  $\mu$ L of template DNA, 10  $\mu$ L Extract 'n' Amp Taq polymerase, 6.4  $\mu$ L PCR-grade water, 1  $\mu$ L bovine serum albumin, 0.8  $\mu$ L ITS1F forward primer, and 0.8  $\mu$ L ITS4 reverse primer (U'Ren et al. 2012). For the PCR reaction, we used a BioRAD T100 thermal cycler with the following cycles: 95°C for 3 minutes; 35 cycles of 95°C for 30 seconds, 54°C for 30 seconds, 72°C for 30 seconds; then 72°C for 10 minutes. To ensure that the fungal DNA successfully amplified, and that the master mix was not contaminated, we ran 5  $\mu$ L of each sample and a negative PCR control on a 1% agarose gel with 1X Tris-acetate-EDTA (TAE) buffer and SYBR Safe. We ran the gel at 120 volts for 20 minutes and visualized bands using UV transillumination. Successful PCR samples with clean negative controls were kept at 4°C until sequencing preparation.

To prepare successfully amplified samples for Sanger sequencing, we first cleaned each sample with 1  $\mu$ L Thermo Fisher Shrimp Alkaline Phosphatase Exonuclease (ExoSAP-IT). To clean the samples, we used the following cycle on a BioRAD T100 thermal cycler: 37°C for 15 minutes, 80°C for 15 minutes, then hold at 4°C. After cleaning, samples were kept at 4°C until they were ready to be sent for sequencing. Directly before being sent for sequencing, cleaned samples that showed bright bands on their gels were diluted with an additional 15  $\mu$ L PCR water, although a small number of samples that had faint bands on the gels were not diluted. Cleaned samples were sent to MCLabs (South San Francisco, CA) for Sanger sequencing.

## Computational and Statistical Methods

We used Geneious 11.1 to manually clean and trim the Sanger sequencing data, and to identify and remove failed and low-quality sequences (Kearse et al. 2012). Sequences that appeared to have multiple strong signals at a given position were discarded because they may have originated from from a mixed culture. Usable sequences were cleaned by trimming the ends of low-quality nucleotides, clarifying any ambiguity codes, and resolving incorrect base assignment due to dye blobs. Cleaned sequences are available on GenBank (finalized genbank IDs to go here following acceptance).

After processing the cleaned sequences to add relevant metadata, we used mothur version 1.39.5 to determine Operational Taxonomic Units (OTUs), based on 97% ITS sequence similarity and abundance-based greedy clustering (Schloss et al. 2009). Next, we used R 4.1.1 (R Core Team 2021) to analyze the resulting OTU table. We used vegan (Oksanen et al. 2018) to calculate species accumulation curves to determine species richness from the OTU data, calculate Bray-Curtis distances between communities, and create a Non-Metric Multidimensional Scaling (NMDS) ordination, and perform a PERMANOVA to assess differences in communities between sites (Anderson 2001). We used the Tree-Based Alignment Selector (TBAS) toolkit to assign taxonomic context to each ITS sequence (Carbone et al. 2017). This toolkit matches unknown ITS sequences to the most similar ITS sequences in a large multi-gene phylogeny of confidently-assigned taxa. We used the simple features (Pebesma 2018) and ggmap (Kahle and Wickham 2013) R packages to produce maps of study sites.

Significant differences in fungal leaf isolation frequency and tree diameter were determined using a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis one-way test of variance and Dunn's Test for multiple comparisons with Holm's correction for multiple hypothesis testing. All analyses, figures, and the final manuscript were generated using a makefile, bash scripts, and R and Rmarkdown. All relevant metadata, as well as analysis and manuscript code, are available on GitHub: <https://github.com/ZimmermanLab/SF-metrosideros-endophytes/> and archived at (Zenodo doi here following acceptance). The complete computational environment for the analyses is documented in a Dockerfile based on rocker containers (Boettiger 2014) and a renv.lock (Ushey 2021) file in that same repository.

## Methods for Comparing Fungi in San Francisco Trees to New Zealand Trees

In order to compare the foliar microbial populations found in *M. excelsa* throughout San Francisco to those in the tree's native range (New Zealand), we surveyed public GenBank records and performed a literature search. First, we searched Google Scholar on July 7th, 2021, for papers mentioning any

207 of the following sets of search terms: “*metrosideros* endophytes,” “*metrosideros excelsa* endophytes,”  
208 “*metrosideros excelsa* foliage fungus,” “*metrosideros excelsa* endophytes.” After this search, we looked  
209 through the papers cited by those we originally found in order to find any additional studies.

210 Then, we searched GenBank for fungal ITS sequences that had *M. excelsa* listed as their host organism.  
211 We performed this search using the parameters “host=“*Metrosideros excelsa*”, organism=fungi”, in order  
212 to limit our results to fungal sequences. This search yielded several new sequences that weren’t included  
213 in the previous search because they were unpublished. Using both of these methods, we were able to find  
214 about 30 taxa to include as a point of comparison, although many of these were described as pathogenic  
215 instead of endophytic.

## 216 RESULTS

217 Overall, we found high diversity in these urban endophytic communities. From 30 different host trees,  
218 we successfully cultured and sequenced 854 fungal isolates, which made up 85 distinct 97% ITS OTUs.  
219 Some communities encompassed a low number of fungal isolates; species richness analyses showed that  
220 in nearly all of the trees analyzed, our sampling did not encompass the complete microbial diversity  
221 (Fig. 3). While we found species diversity within some sites that exceeds 20 distinct fungal OTUs, there  
222 appears to be greater species diversity in these fungal endophytic communities than this study was able to  
223 document.

### 224 Isolation Frequency and Host Tree Diameter at Breast Height

225 The isolation frequency, or the percentage of leaf pieces that yielded fungal isolates, varied significantly  
226 between sites (Kruskal Wallis  $p < 0.01$ , Fig. 2A). In most sites, the isolation frequency also varied  
227 between trees, especially in the Bay site. The diameter at breast height (DBH) of trees we sampled from  
228 differed significantly as well (Kruskal Wallis  $p < 0.01$ ; Fig. 2B). Trees within the Bay site also show  
229 the greatest variation in this measure. However, there was not an overall significant linear relationship  
230 between tree DBH and measured isolation frequency (regression  $p = 0.076$ ). The only site that shows  
231 consistently low variation in isolation frequency is the Downtown site, which is also the site with the  
232 lowest isolation frequencies overall.

### 233 Diversity Patterns

234 We found 85 total 97% nrITS OTUs among the 30 different trees. Both isolation frequency and the  
235 number of fungal species found varied notably between trees. Species accumulation curves showed that  
236 the total amount of fungal diversity was not completely sampled in any of the sites (Fig. 3).

237 The most abundant fungal class that we found in our samples was Dothideomycetes, followed by  
238 Sordariomycetes; each had over 300 sequences assigned to them (Table 1). Dothideomycetes was the  
239 predominant class in most sites except for the Downtown and Bay sites (Fig. 4). In both of these sites,  
240 Sordariomycetes was the most common class. There are several classes that are either absent or present  
241 in small numbers in most sites, but more abundant in one or several sites. For example, Eurotiomycetes  
242 are more common in the Downtown and Freeway sites, and Leotiomycetes are only abundant in the Mt.  
243 Davidson site. Only two sequences were not identified by T-BAS. We queried these two sequences against  
244 the NCBI nt database via BLASTn and found them to match with high confidence to the Pezizomycetes,  
245 based on similarity to a strain recently identified in Australia (Catcheside, Qaraghuli, and Catcheside  
246 2017).

### 247 Biogeographic Patterns

248 While the NMDS ordination group ellipses (standard error around the centroid for each site) suggest that  
249 there are differences in dispersion among sites, the multivariate dispersions of these communities were not  
250 significantly different from one another ( $p = 0.76$ ; Fig. 5). Sites that were closer together geographically  
251 tended to also be closer to one another in ordination space.

## 252 DISCUSSION

253 In this study, we sought to characterize the foliar microbiome of *Metrosideros excelsa* trees across the  
254 city of San Francisco. We found that the microbial composition of these urban trees’ leaves varied in  
255 many aspects, from the isolation frequencies of fungi from their leaves to the taxonomic identities of their

256 fungal isolates. While we did not explicitly quantify environmental variation in this study, the community  
257 variation we observed could be explained by either environmental or host physiological factors.

### 258 Isolation Frequency and Tree size

259 Both isolation frequency and DBH varied among sites. The trees in the Bay site show the greatest range  
260 in both isolation frequency and DBH (Fig. 2). The Mt. Davidson trees have a larger median and range  
261 of DBH than trees at the Balboa site (Fig. 2B), and also have a significantly higher median isolation  
262 frequency than the Downtown site. Just as it shows the greatest range of isolation frequencies and tree  
263 sites, the Bay site also has some of the least similarity between its fungal communities on the NMDS  
264 ordination (Fig. 5). The trees in the Mt. Davidson site, which have some of the most similar communities  
265 (Fig. 5), also have fairly large trees with similar DBH. Although there appears to be a general pattern  
266 with larger trees hosting a greater number of fungal endophytes, this relationship was not significant; thus  
267 DBH cannot explain all of the variation in isolation frequencies.

### 268 Diversity Patterns

269 Endophytic microbiomes in tree leaves are known to be highly diverse in natural systems, and that  
270 also appears to be the case in these urban trees. The species accumulation curves indicate that even  
271 in the most well-represented sites, there are still many potentially undiscovered OTUs within these  
272 endophytic communities (Fig. 3). Additionally, there is a considerable amount of taxonomic variation  
273 between certain sites, in addition to the generally high diversity of each site (Fig. 4). In such cases, it  
274 is likely that environmental factors play a role in shaping the endophytic communities of these trees.  
275 While the impact of environmental factors may be less evident when focusing on fungal endophyte  
276 community richness, it becomes more apparent when looking at the identities of these endophytes. The  
277 composition of these communities can vary greatly among trees with similar isolation frequencies, as  
278 demonstrated by the taxonomic composition of the Mt. Davidson and Bay sites (Fig. 4). It is possible that  
279 prevailing onshore weather dynamics, which generally lead the western part of the city to be colder and  
280 foggy than the eastern portion, explain some of the patterns we observed. In general, there was higher  
281 compositional similarity between trees from the same location than between trees of a similar size (Fig.  
282 @ (fig:nmds-plot)) and Table @ (tab:permanova-table)).

### 283 Biogeographic Patterns

284 There appears to be a degree of biogeographic structure to the endophytic communities within these urban  
285 trees. Communities of trees from the same site generally cluster closer together than trees from different  
286 sites (Fig. 5 and Table 2). Although the Balboa site appears to have a reasonably high isolation frequency  
287 (Fig. 2A), many of the slant tubes that showed fungal growth failed to grow into a larger culture, leading  
288 to a lower number of usable sequences (Fig. 3B). This low number of sequences per tree may indicate  
289 that the divergence in community composition that appears to be present might be due to the low sample  
290 size, rather than actual difference between the microbial communities between the Balboa trees (Fig. 5).

291 However, even sites with low within-site diversity appear to be more similar to other trees from  
292 geographically close sites. For example, the Downtown trees do not cluster with the Mt. Davidson,  
293 Balboa, or Ocean trees in the ordination, indicating that they have fairly different fungal communities  
294 from those sites (Fig. 5). Generally, the westernmost sites (Ocean and Balboa) cluster to one side of the  
295 ordination, while the Easternmost sites (Bay and Downtown) cluster to the other, and the sites closer to  
296 the middle of the city (Mt. Davidson and Freeway) cluster between them (Fig. 5). Notably, the Downtown  
297 and Freeway sites cluster fairly close together (Fig. 5) despite being fairly distant geographically (Fig.  
298 1). In this case, it is possible that there are environmental factors that cause the communities to be more  
299 compositionally similar. One of the most likely environmental similarities between these two sites is that  
300 they are both exposed to high traffic levels, with one site located in a bustling downtown and the other  
301 located near the intersection of two large freeways (280 and 101). Carbon dioxide emissions, particulates,  
302 or both of these pollutants could possibly be having an effect on both these trees and their microbiomes.  
303 Endophytic bacteria have been shown to have a phytoremediating effect (Afzal, Khan, and Sessitsch  
304 2014), so it is possible that endophytic fungi may be playing a similar role in helping these plants persist  
305 in high-traffic and thus lower air quality conditions.

## Community composition compared to related trees in other locations

In widely-distributed plant species, fungal endophyte composition can differ quite considerably in a species from its native home to the places it has been introduced (Taylor, Hyde, and Jones 1999). *M. excelsa* is native to New Zealand, but it and its close relatives in the *Myrtaceae* family are widespread across the world. Across all locations, the most abundant classes found within these *M. excelsa* fungal communities were Dothideomycetes and Sordariomycetes by a notable margin (Table 1). At broad taxonomic levels such as Class, the endophytes found in this study appear to be similar to those found in other *Myrtaceae* trees elsewhere. For instance, a study of *Myrtaceae* trees in South America, the first and second most common fungal isolates were also identified as Dothideomycetes followed by Sordariomycetes (Vaz et al. 2014). Dothideomycetes and Sordariomycetes are also the first and second most abundant classes in the endophytic communities of *M. excelsa*'s close relative in Hawai'i, *Metrosideros polymorpha*, as well (Zimmerman and Vitousek 2012). This could indicate that these fungal classes are well-adapted to living as endophytes within these trees, but it is also possible that these communities are actually quite different when considered at a finer taxonomic resolution.

## Comparison of trees in San Francisco and New Zealand

When comparing *M. excelsa*'s endophytic taxa found in the literature to those that we collected, we found that the taxa between the regions were somewhat similar on an order level, and even more so on a class level. Only one of the orders that was extremely common in New Zealand (Mycosphaerales) was absent in San Francisco, and only two of the most common orders in San Francisco (Capnodiales and Pezizales) were absent in New Zealand. However, most of the families that are found in New Zealand are absent in San Francisco, and vice versa. We only found four families in common: Mycosphaerellaceae, Glomerellaceae, Nectriaceae, and Helotiaceae. Of these, Mycosphaerellaceae is the only family that is present in New Zealand and was very prevalent (over 50 isolates) in San Francisco. The other families that they had in common were only present in very small numbers in San Francisco, and we were unable to find documentation of three most prevalent families in San Francisco (Xylariaceae, Botryosphaeriaceae, and Cladosporiaceae) being isolated from leaves in New Zealand. Although this could be due to the small sample size, it suggests that *M. excelsa*'s endophytic populations may be influenced primarily by their environment. However, additional research into both the endophytic populations of other trees in San Francisco and *M. excelsa* in its native range would be required to draw further conclusions.

It is important to note the difference in methods between how we collected our samples and how others studying *M. excelsa* in New Zealand collected theirs. Whereas we took care to only collect samples from unfallen, asymptomatic leaves, most of the papers referenced in this comparison use either leaf litter, dead leaves, or obviously symptomatic leaves. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that the data we are comparing our results to is biased towards pathogenic and decomposing fungi, and underrepresents the non-harmful endophytic populations in *M. excelsa*'s native range. Additionally, the number of fungal isolates we were able to find using literature and GenBank searches was much lower than the number of samples we collected ourselves, making quantitative comparison unfeasible. However, we think that such comparisons are still worthwhile as a preliminary look into the extent that *M. excelsa* in San Francisco may maintain its native endophytic microbiome.

## CONCLUSIONS

These findings indicate that the endophytic microbiomes of urban trees are complex and diverse, and may show a degree of biogeographic structure that reflects their natural counterparts. Additionally, it is likely that urban environmental factors play a considerable role in shaping the endophytic communities of these trees. This study has demonstrated that the urban endophytic microbiome is highly diverse and has the potential to be structured by urban environmental factors. Our species accumulation curves indicate that the full diversity of these endophytic communities has yet to be sampled (Fig. 3). Even in the small geographic area of San Francisco, we found notable trends in microbiome composition that may vary with geographic factors, host physical factors such as DBH and age, and uniquely urban environmental factors, such as traffic. A combination of environmental factors and perhaps host physiology therefore appear to be the driving force behind the diversity of these microbiomes. While it is difficult to determine, given the data we have, the exact mechanisms that influencing the composition of these communities, the amount of species diversity and biogeographic structure we present here indicate that the foliar microbiomes of

urban trees may be just as complex and dynamic as those of trees in nature, and are worth of further concerted study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was conducted as an undergraduate Biology honors thesis project by EG under the guidance of NZ. Joshua Copeland and Julian Murdzek assisted with culture processing, vouchering, and DNA extractions. Jeff Oda contributed supplies and equipment expertise.

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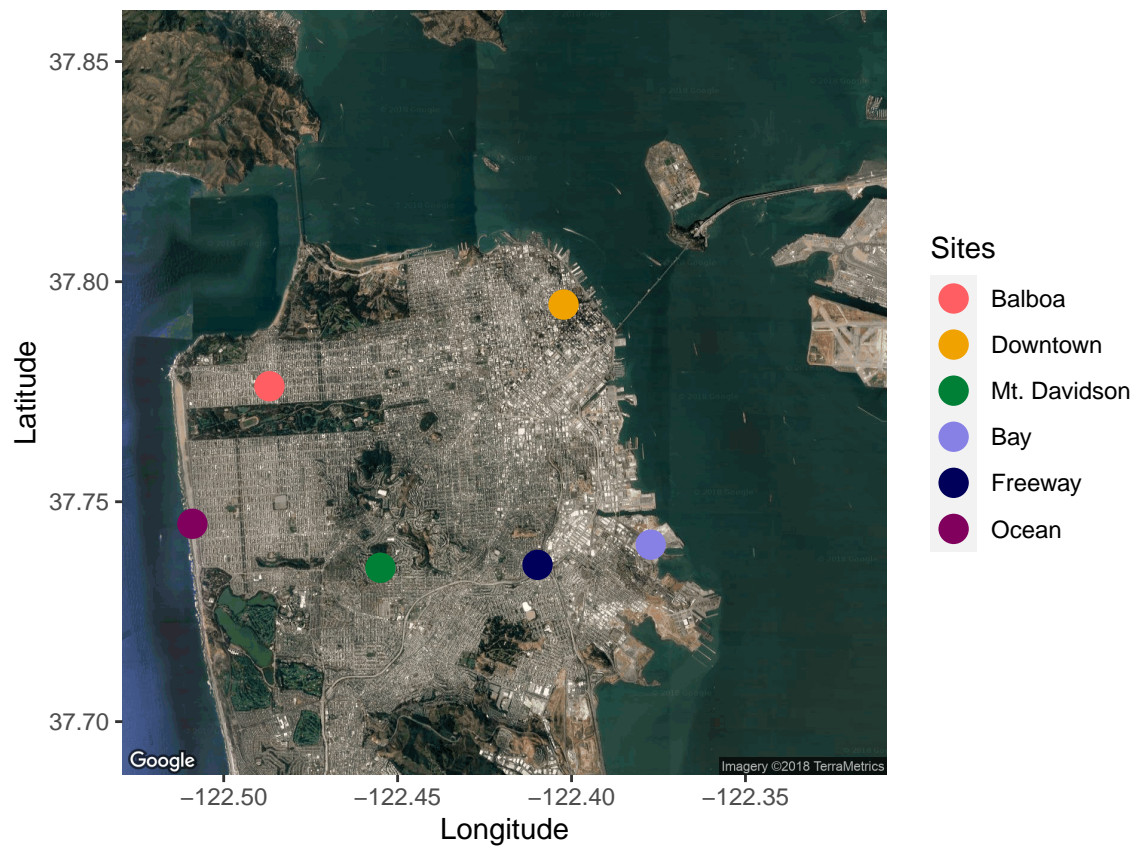
**Table 1.** Overall sequenced fungal isolate counts by Class and Order. All fungi successfully sequenced in this study were placed within the Ascomycota.

Class	Order	Number of sequences
Dothideomycetes	Capnodiales	266
Dothideomycetes	Botryosphaeriales	127
Dothideomycetes	Pleosporales	52
Dothideomycetes	unclassified,Capnodiales	3
Dothideomycetes	Trypetheliales	1
Dothideomycetes	unclassified	1
Eurotiomycetes	Eurotiales	57
Leotiomycetes	Helotiales	19
Pezizomycetes	Pezizales	54
Sordariomycetes	Xylariales	237
Sordariomycetes	Diaporthales	49
Sordariomycetes	Coniochaetales	38
Sordariomycetes	Sordariales	9
Sordariomycetes	Hypocreales	7
Sordariomycetes	Glomerellales	1

**Table 2.** PERMANOVA model output based on Bray-Curtis distance, with permutations stratified by site. Foliar fungal community composition in leaves of *Metrosideros excelsa* across San Francisco is significantly related to both site of sampling and tree diameter at breast height (DBH).

Term	df	Sum of Squares	Mean of Squares	F	R <sup>2</sup>	p-value
trees\$Site.ID	5	3.642	0.728	3.015	0.373	0.022
trees\$DBH.cm	1	0.556	0.556	2.302	0.057	0.022
Residuals	23	5.557	0.242	NA	0.570	NA
Total	29	9.755	NA	NA	1.000	NA



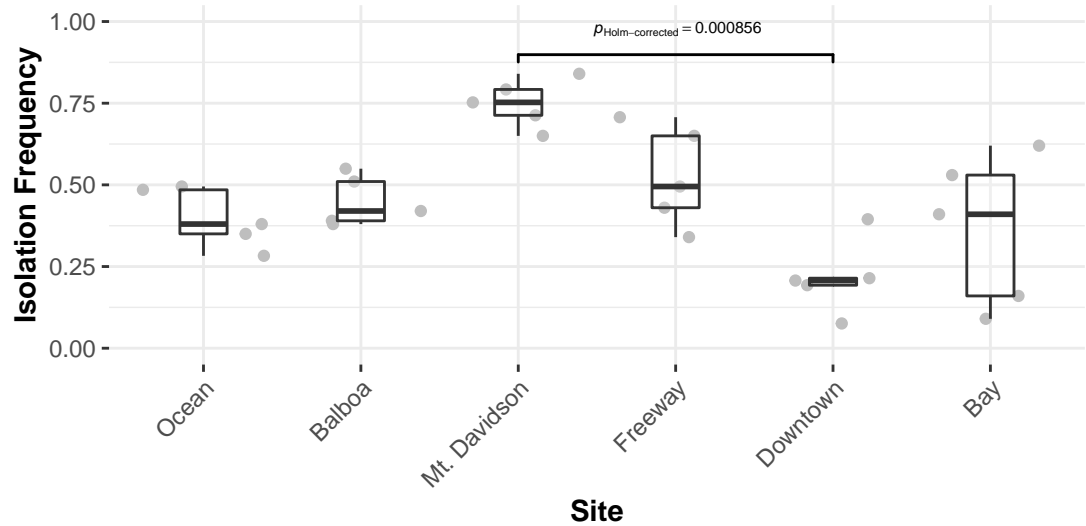


**Figure 1.** A map of the locations sampled across the city of San Francisco, California, USA. Five trees from each site were sampled. Sites were selected to span the range of environmental conditions across the city. Map data © 2021 Google.

A

### Isolation Frequencies

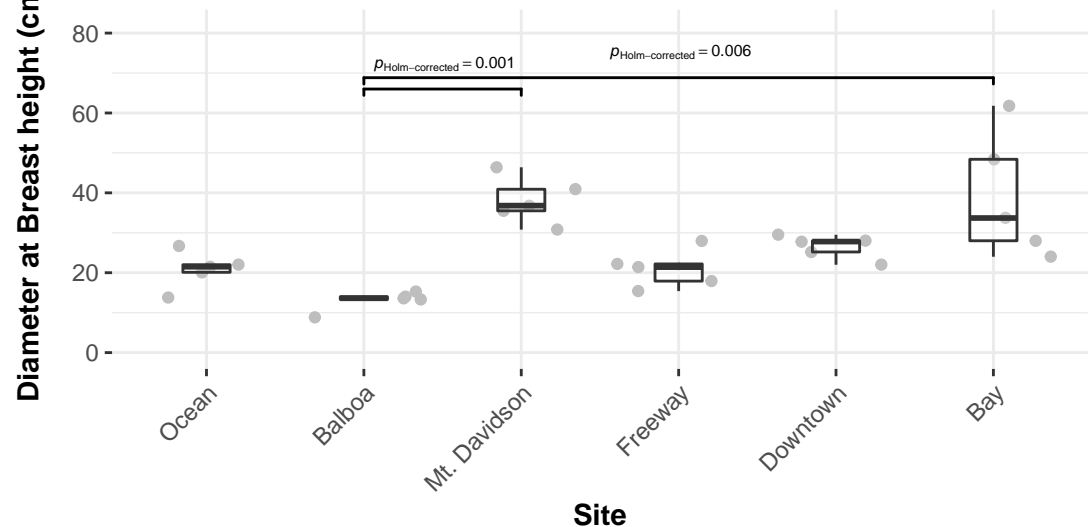
$$\chi^2_{\text{Kruskal-Wallis}}(5) = 18.04, p = 0.003, \hat{\epsilon}^2_{\text{ordinal}} = 0.62, \text{CI}_{95\%} [0.59, 1.00], n_{\text{obs}} = 30$$



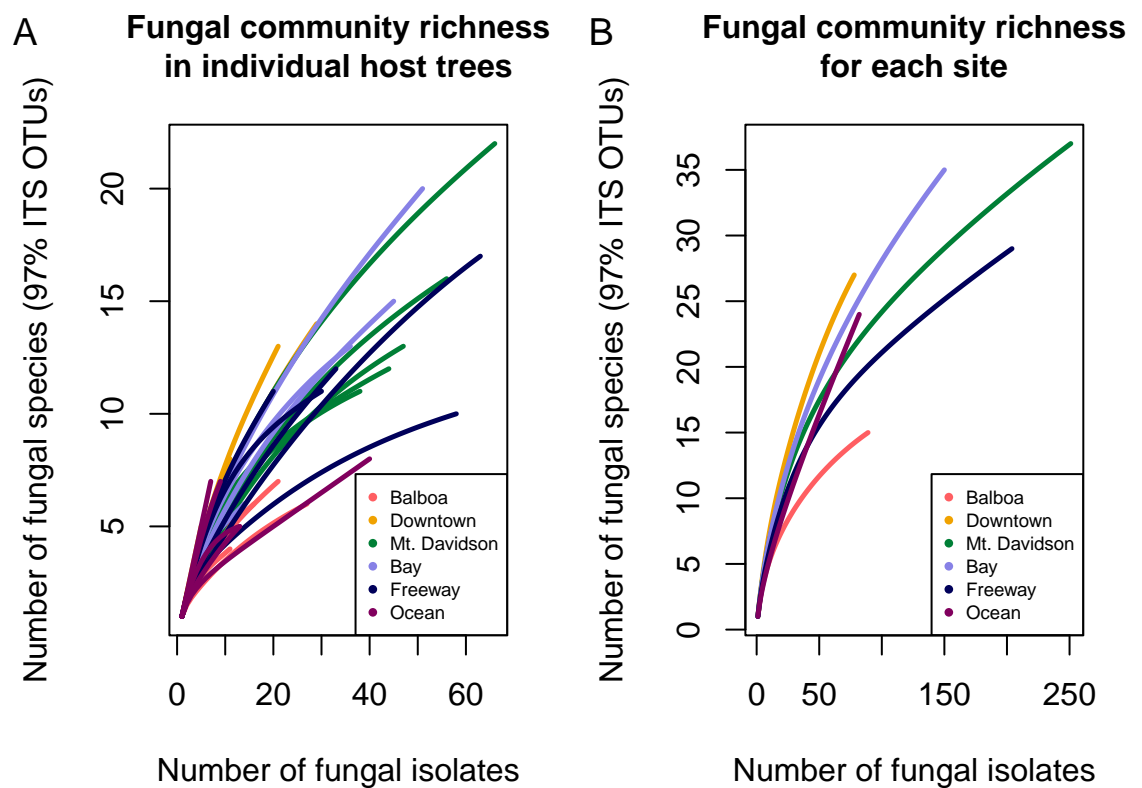
B

### Diameter at Breast Height

$$\chi^2_{\text{Kruskal-Wallis}}(5) = 22.43, p = 4.34\text{e-}04, \hat{\epsilon}^2_{\text{ordinal}} = 0.77, \text{CI}_{95\%} [0.73, 1.00], n_{\text{obs}} = 30$$



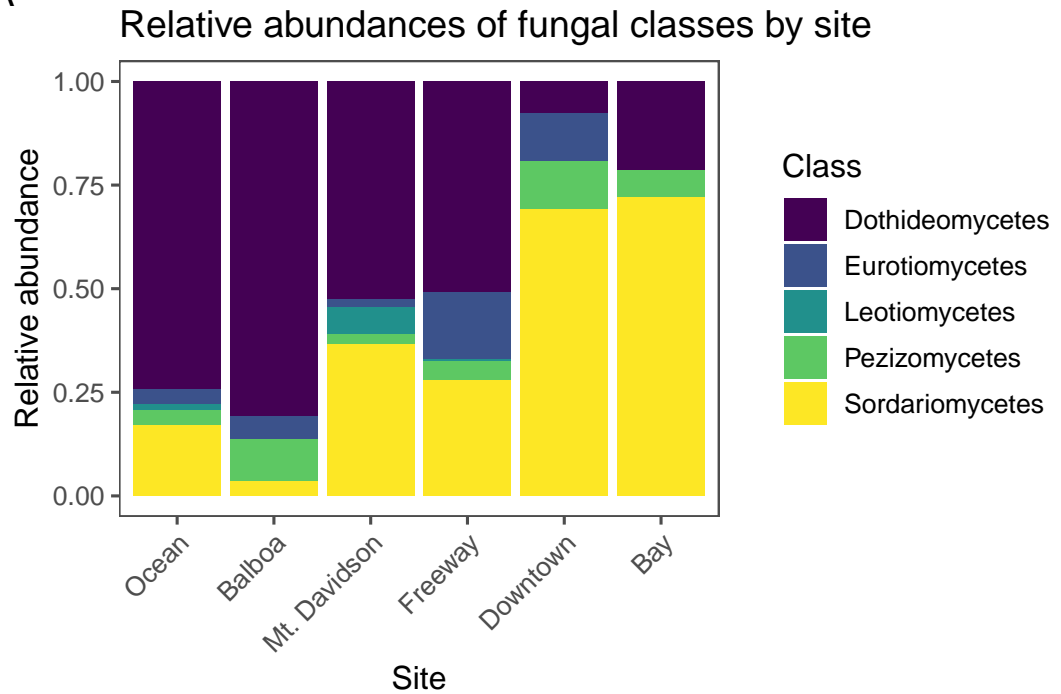
**Figure 2.** Isolation frequencies (A) and tree diameters (B) at each site. Isolation frequency (A) is a measure of how many slant tubes showed signs of fungal growth, out of how many total slant tubes were made. Approximately 100 slant tubes were made for each tree except for the trees in the downtown site, which had 140 slant tubes per tree because they had low isolation frequencies during the initial sampling. Sites along x axis are arranged left to right in order of their geographic location from west (left) to east (right).



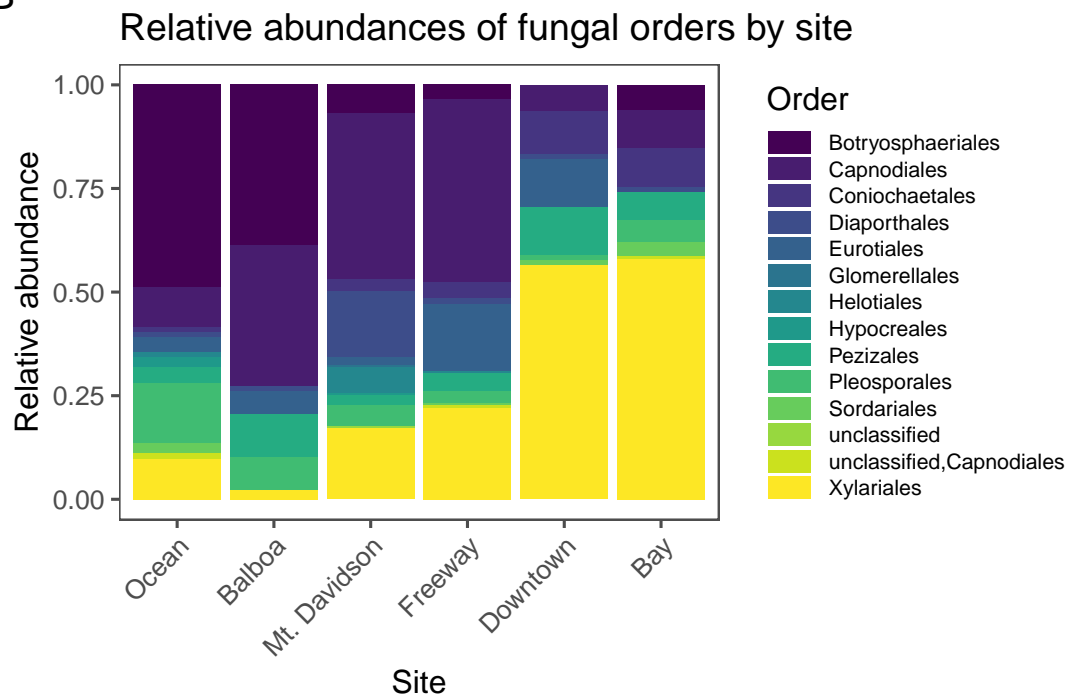
**Figure 3.** Species accumulation curves showing fungal community OTU richness. Each line in A represents the OTU richness for a single host tree. Each line in B represents the combined OTU richness of all trees ( $n = 5$ ) in one site.



A

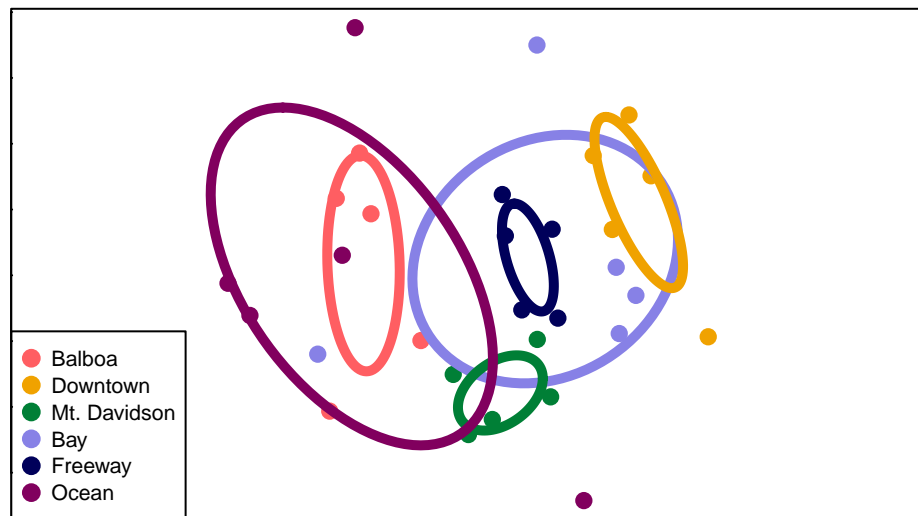


B



**Figure 4.** Normalized relative abundances of taxonomic groupings (Classes in A and Orders in B) in each site. Sites along x axis are arranged left to right in order of their geographic location from west (left) to east (right).

## NMDS ordination of fungal community composition



**Figure 5.** NMDS ordination of community compositions. Each point represents the endophytic community of one tree, and the size of the point corresponds to that tree's DBH, while the color of said point corresponds to the site that tree is from. Points that are closer together indicate that the trees they represent have similar community compositions. The ellipses show the standard error around the centroid of all points within a site, and are also color-coded according to which site they represent.