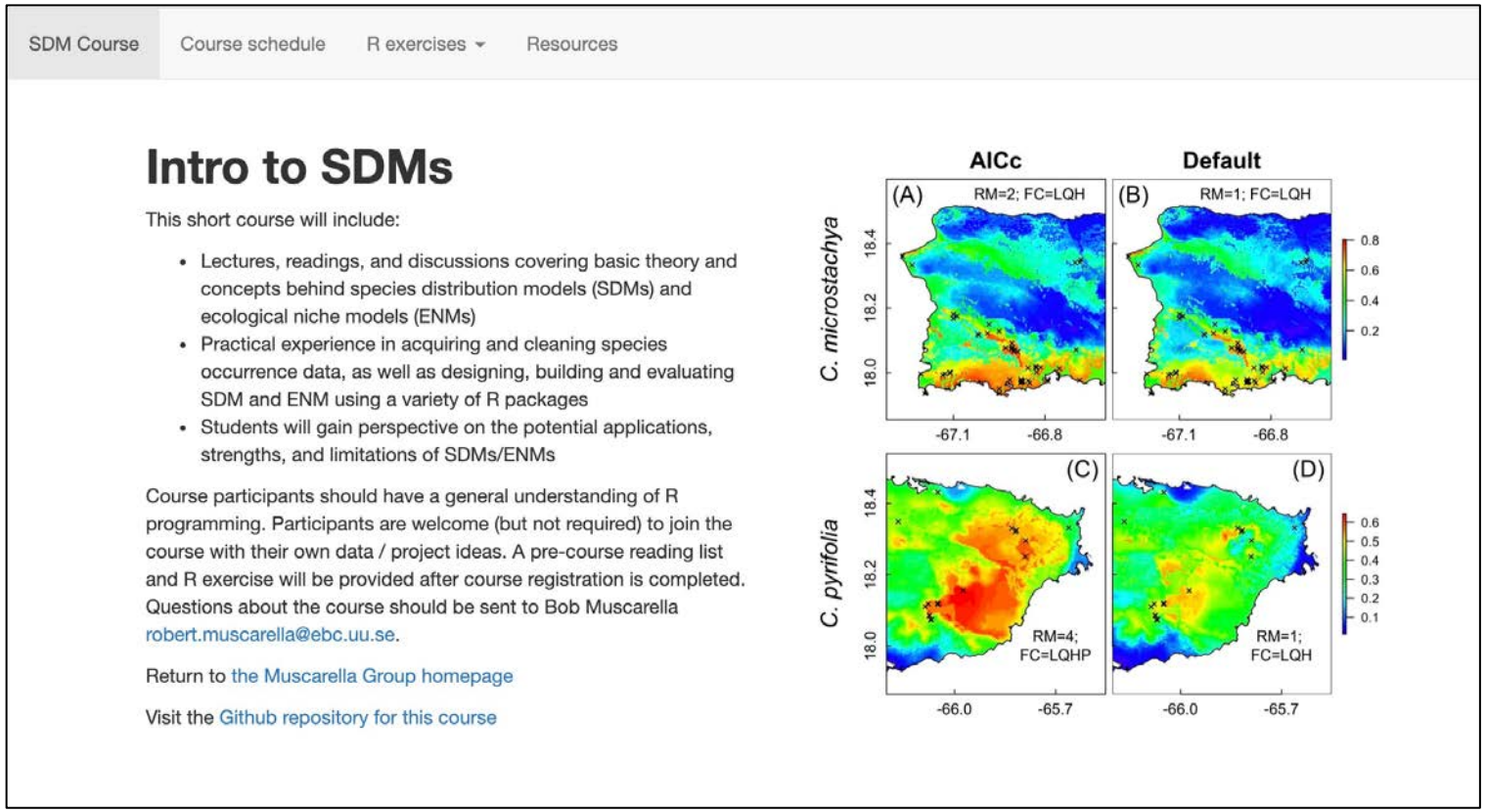
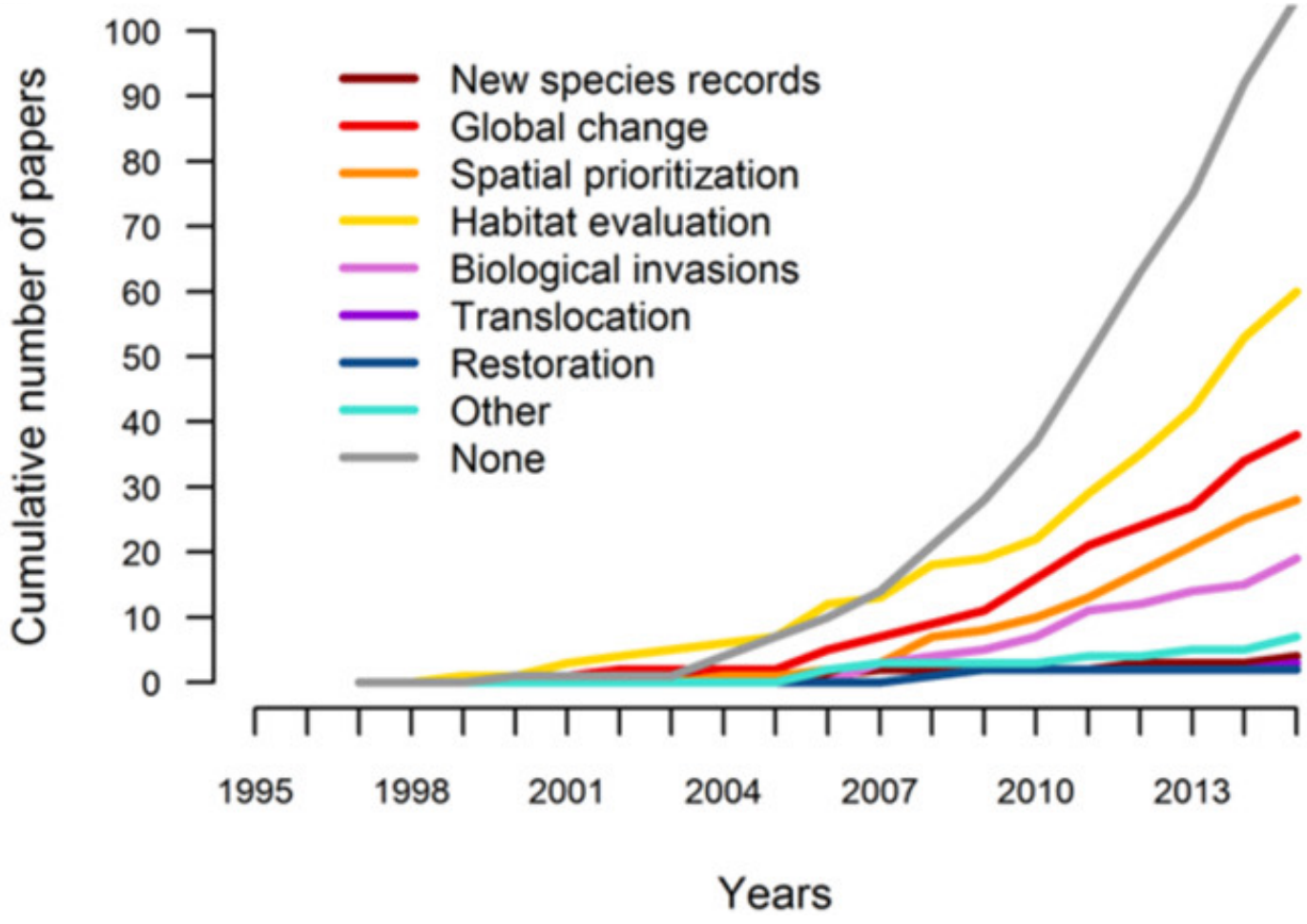
Potentials and Pitfalls

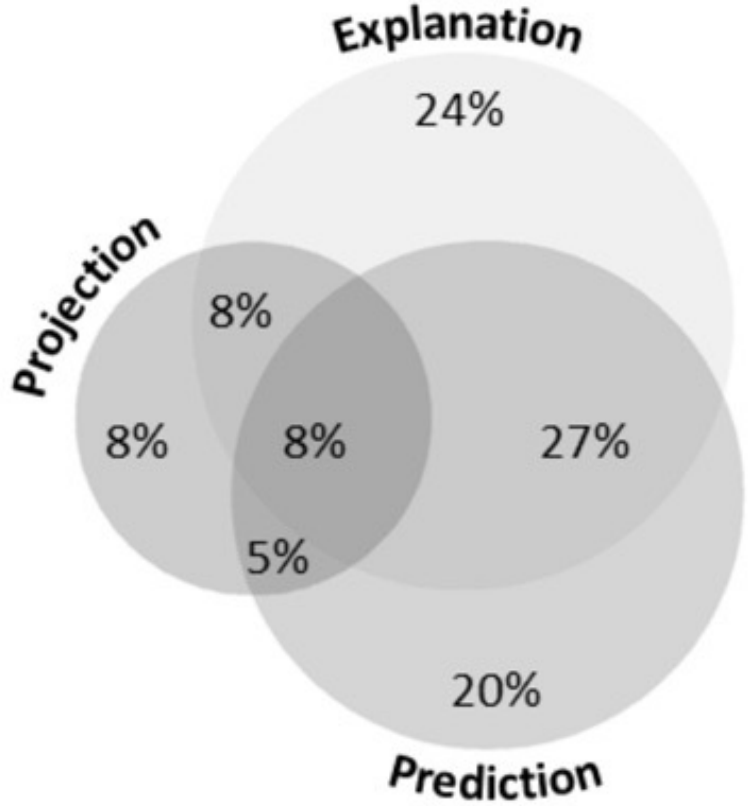
Bob Muscarella
Sapienza University, Roma
June 9-11



Course website: https://bobmuscarella.github.io/SDM-course/index.html

Applications of SDMs





Araújo et al. (2019) Standards for distribution models in biodiversity assessments. *Science Advances*

(Some) Potential applications of SDMs/ENMs

- Niche structure and limits
- Discovery of species and populations
- Consequences of climate change
- Reconstructing past distributions
- Invasive species applications
- Systematic conservation planning
- Large-scale conservation/restoration projects
- Public health

Niche structure and limits

Abundance-Center Hypothesis:
Species are more abundance towards the geographic center of the range.

Vol. 124, No. 2 The American Naturalist August 1984

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABUNDANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF SPECIES

JAMES H. BROWN

Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721

Submitted July 8, 1983; Accepted February 27, 1984

Niche structure and limits

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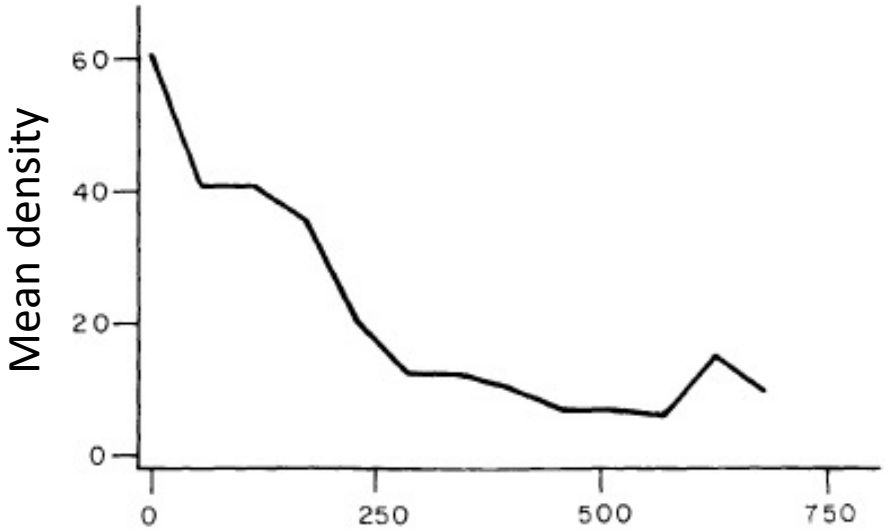

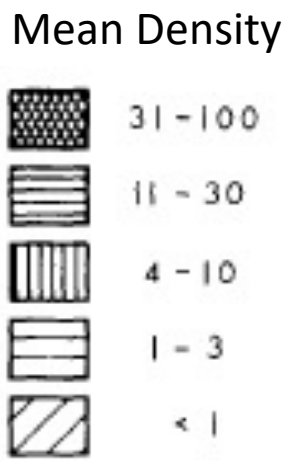

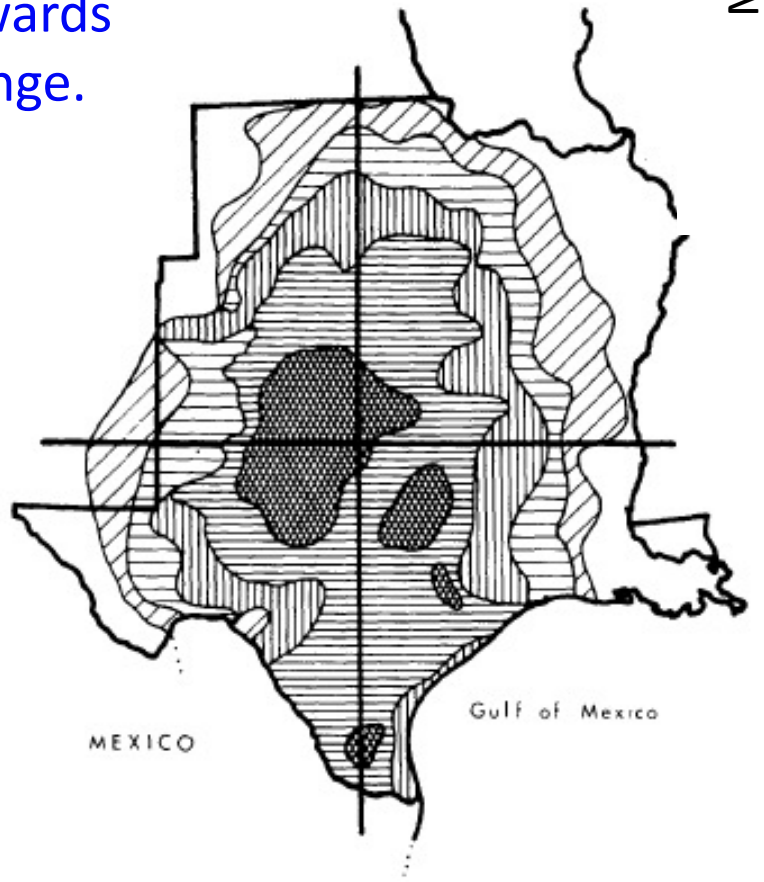

Brown (1984) On the Relationship between Abundance and Distribution of Species. *The American Naturalist.* 124(2) 255-279.

Niche structure and limits

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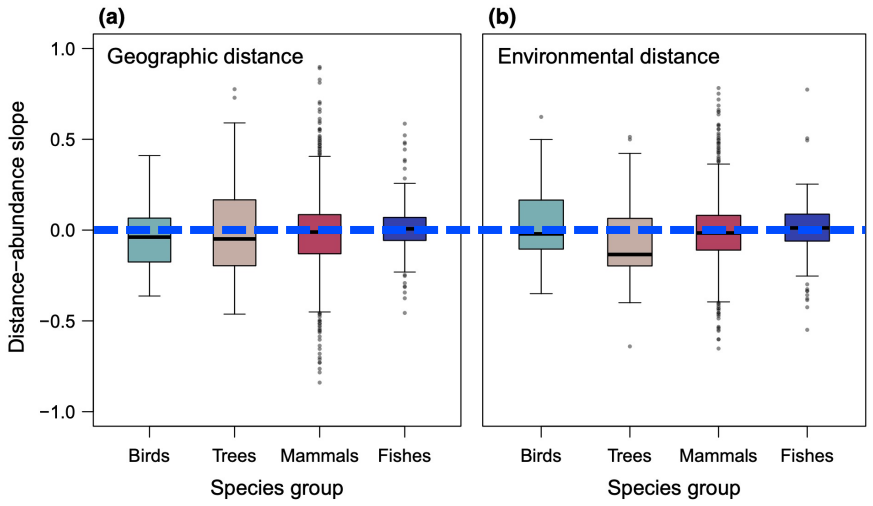
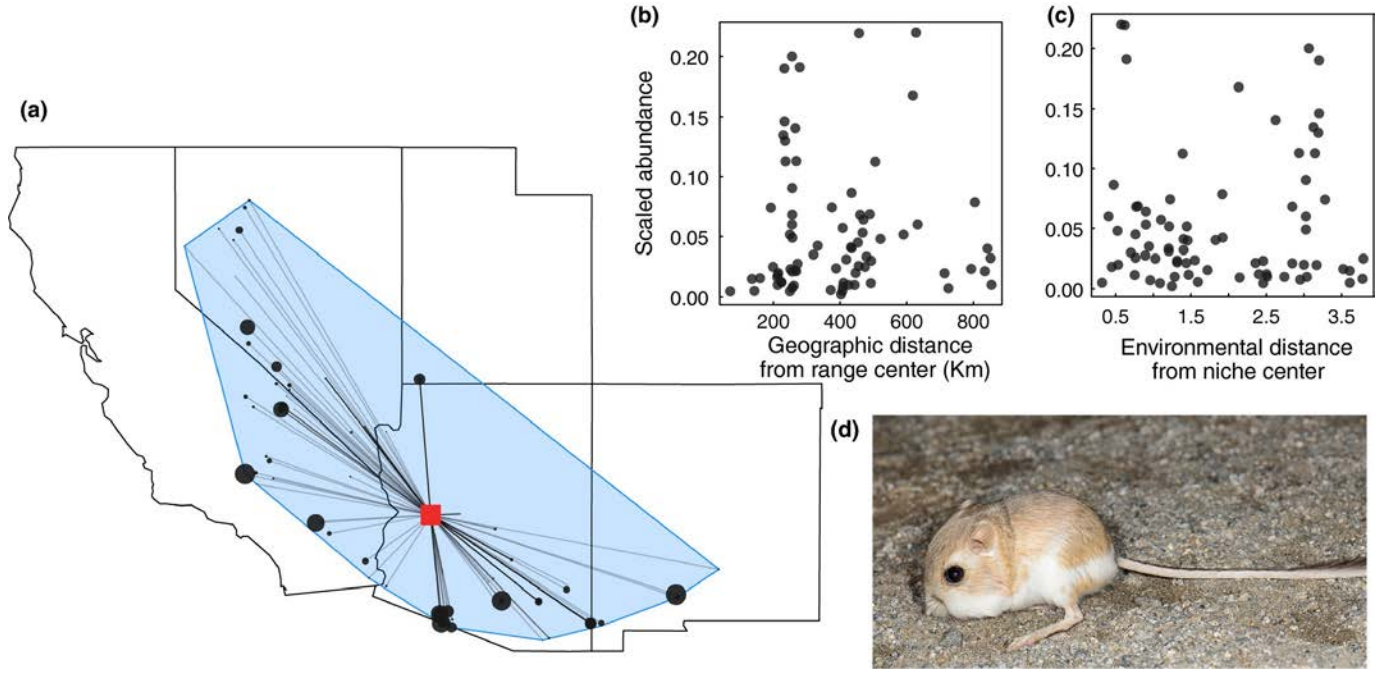


For >1,400 species of birds, trees, mammals, fishes:



Dallas et al. (2017) Species are not most abundant in the centre of their geographic range or climatic niche. *Ecology Letters*. 10.1111/ele.12860

Niche structure and limits

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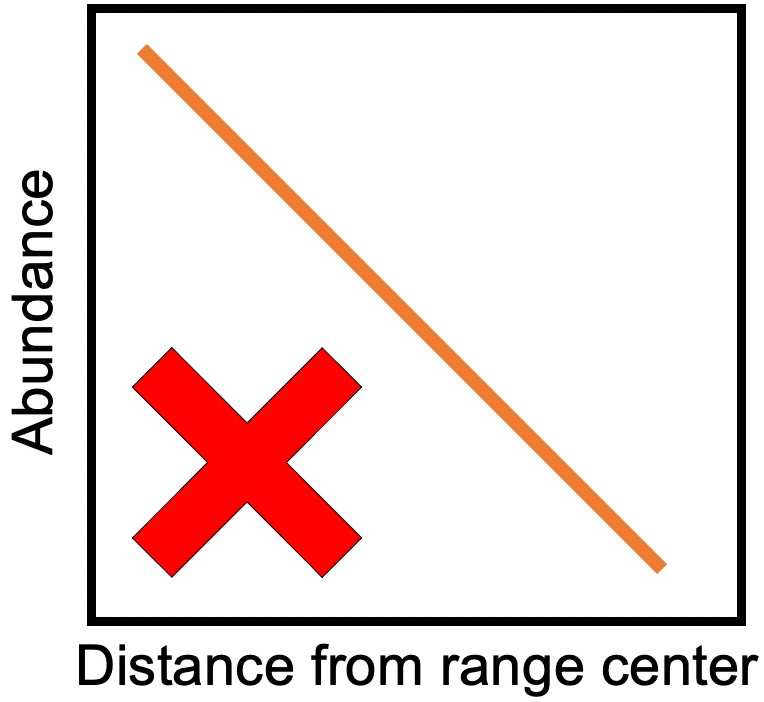

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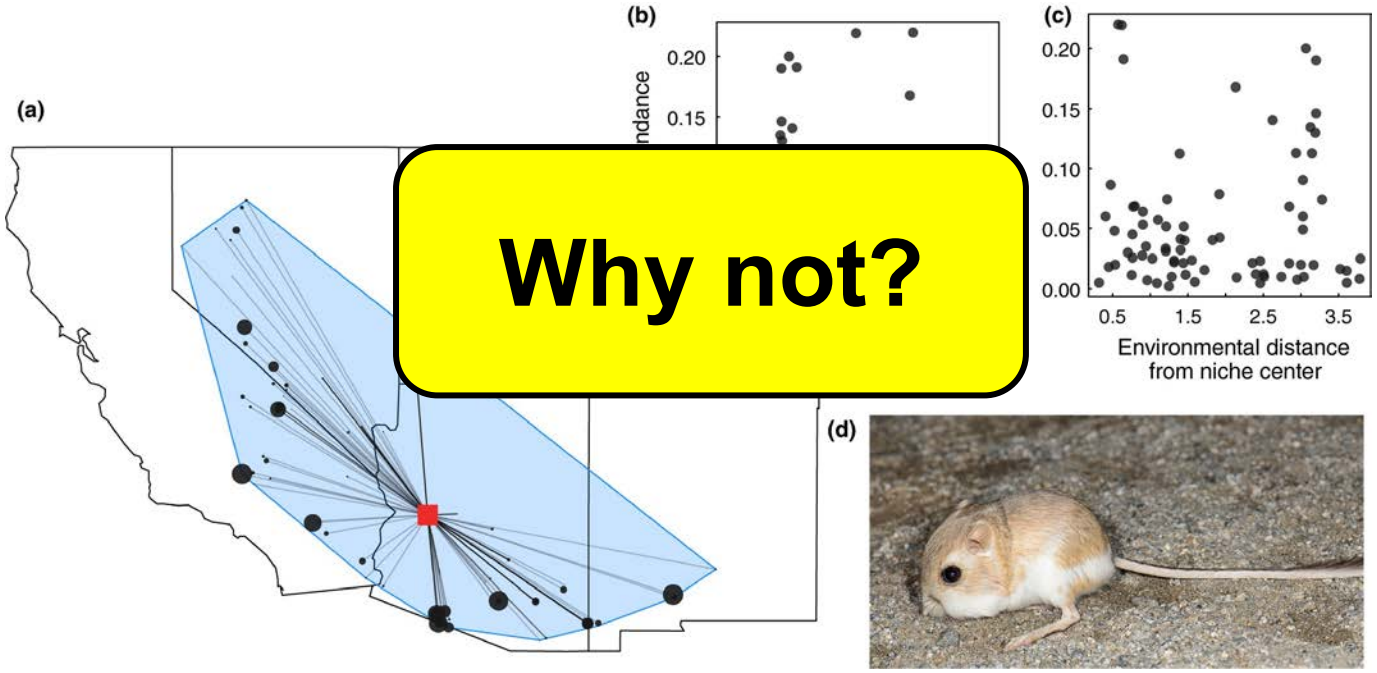

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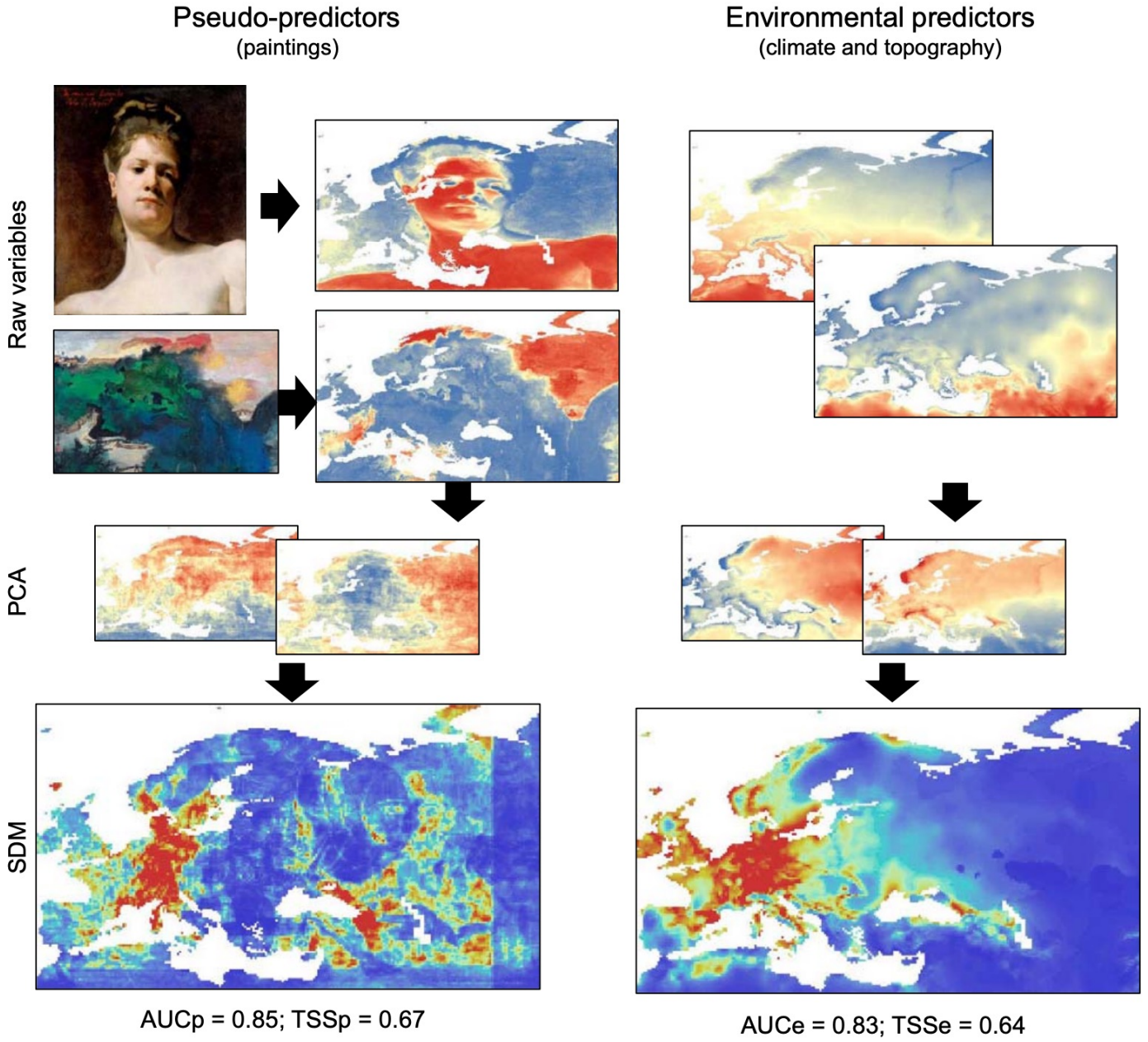
Pitfalls

- Other (unmeasured) variables may be most important determinants of a species distribution

- “Environmental” variables derived from paintings did as good (or better) at predicting species distributions as commonly used bioclimatic variables.
- Metrics of “model performance” do not assess the *biological significance* of SDMs.
- Variable selection *needs* to be hypothesis-driven, connected to the ecology of the study species.



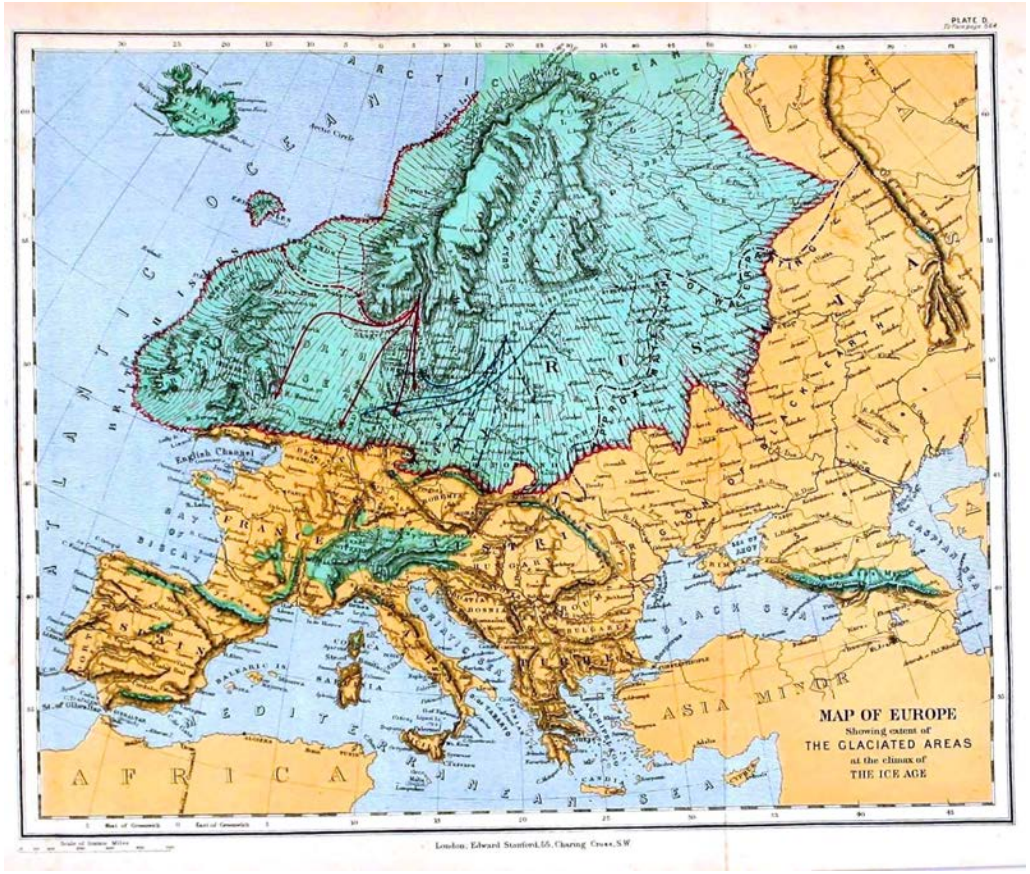
Fourcade *et al.* (2018) *Global Ecology and Biogeography,* **27,** 245-256.

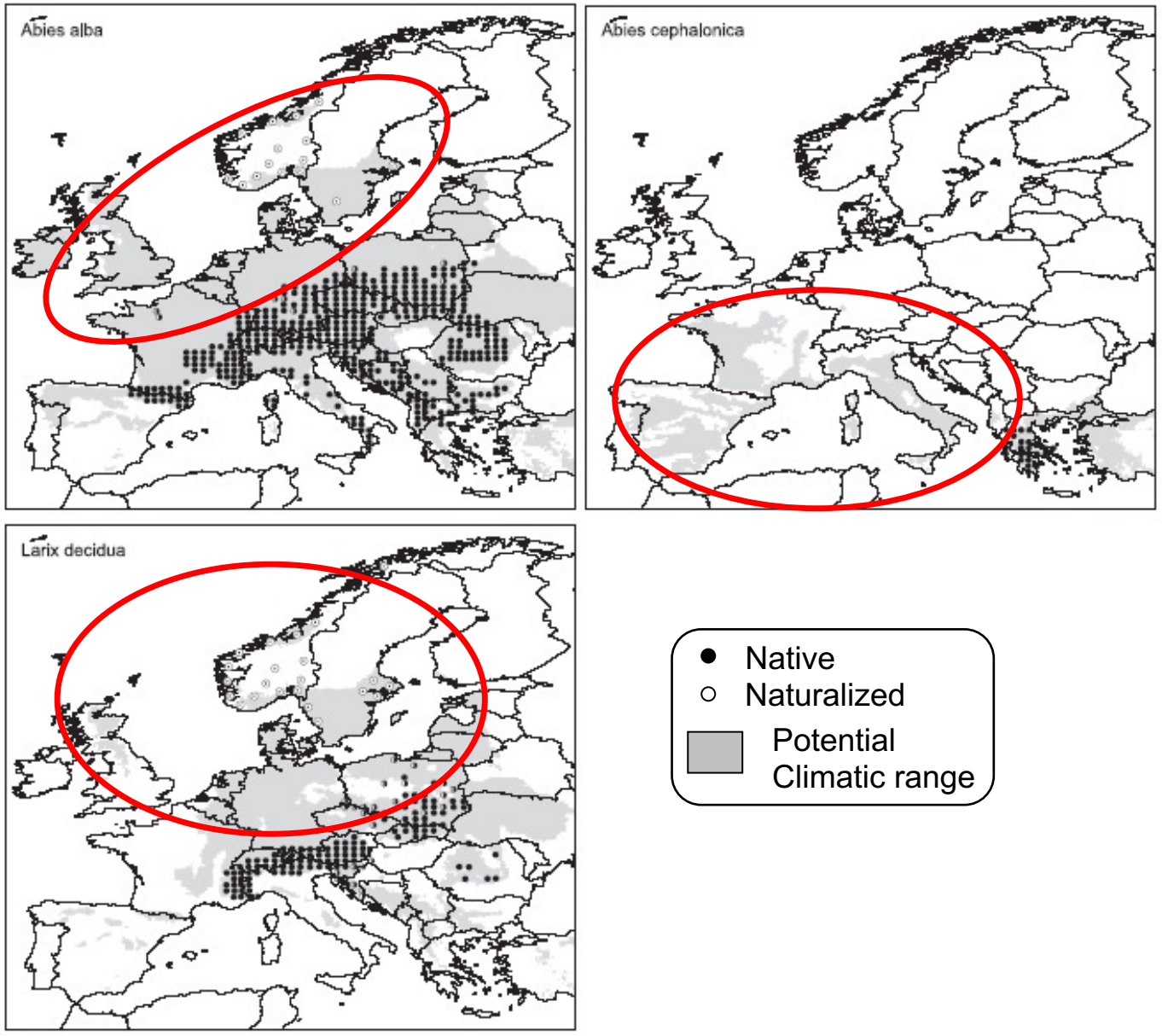
Pitfalls

- Other (unmeasured) variables may be most important determinants of a species distribution

- A species may not be in *equilibrium* with the environment
  - Abundance (presence) is not highest where fitness is highest

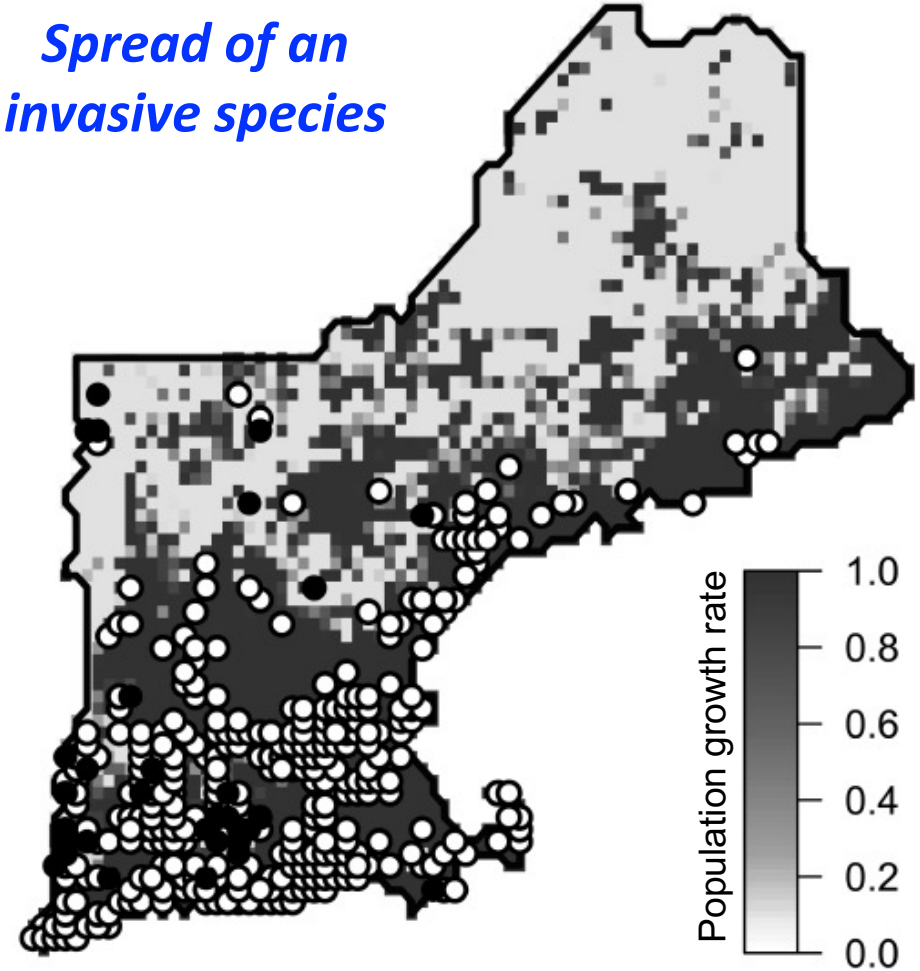
Limited filling of the potential range in European tree species





Svenning & Skov (2004) *Ecology Letters.* Limited filling of the potential range in European tree species

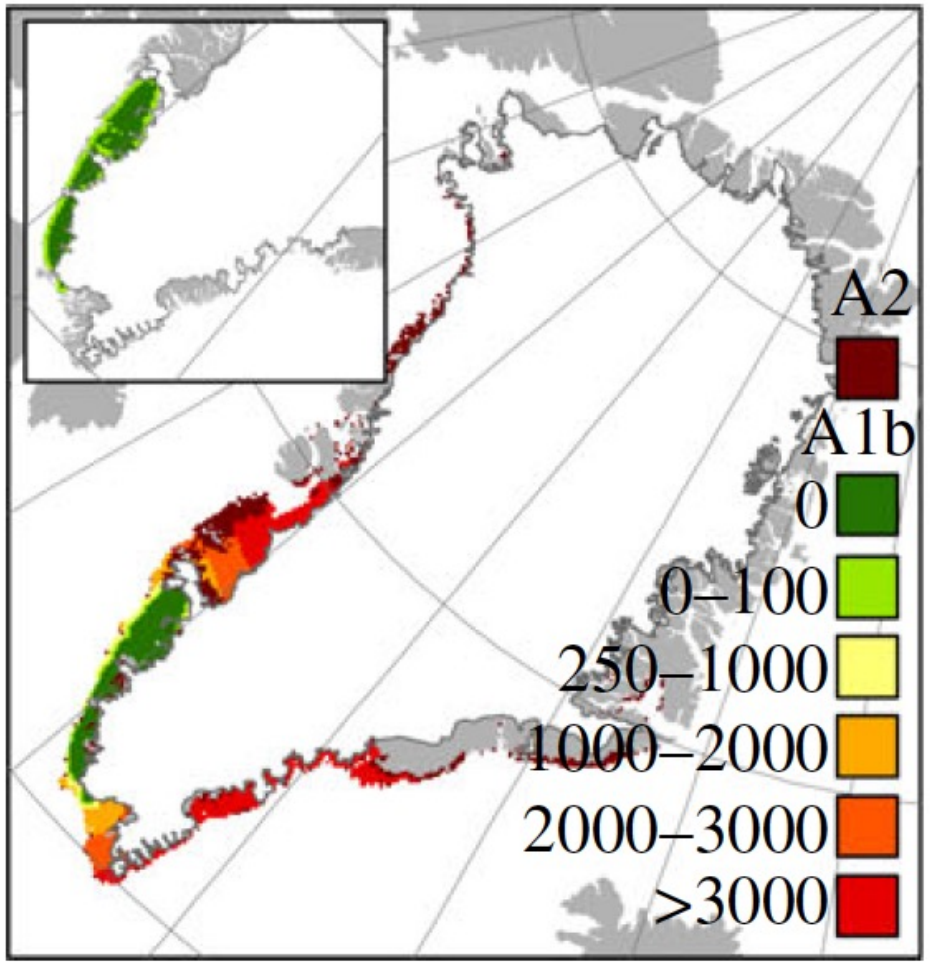
Spread of an invasive species



Celastrus orbiculatus in Maine

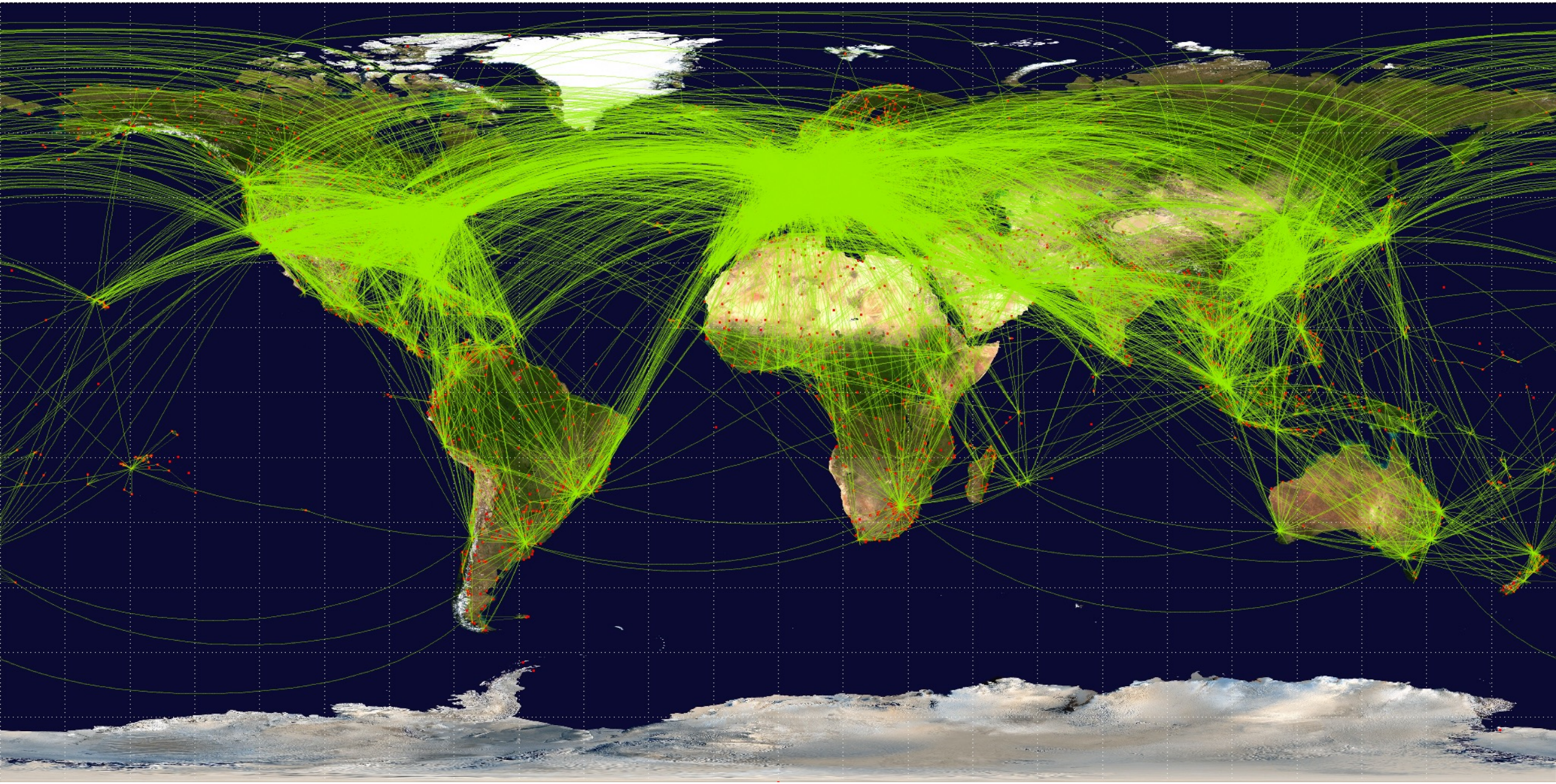
Merow *et al*. 2011 *Am. Nat.*

Predicting suitable areas under climate change



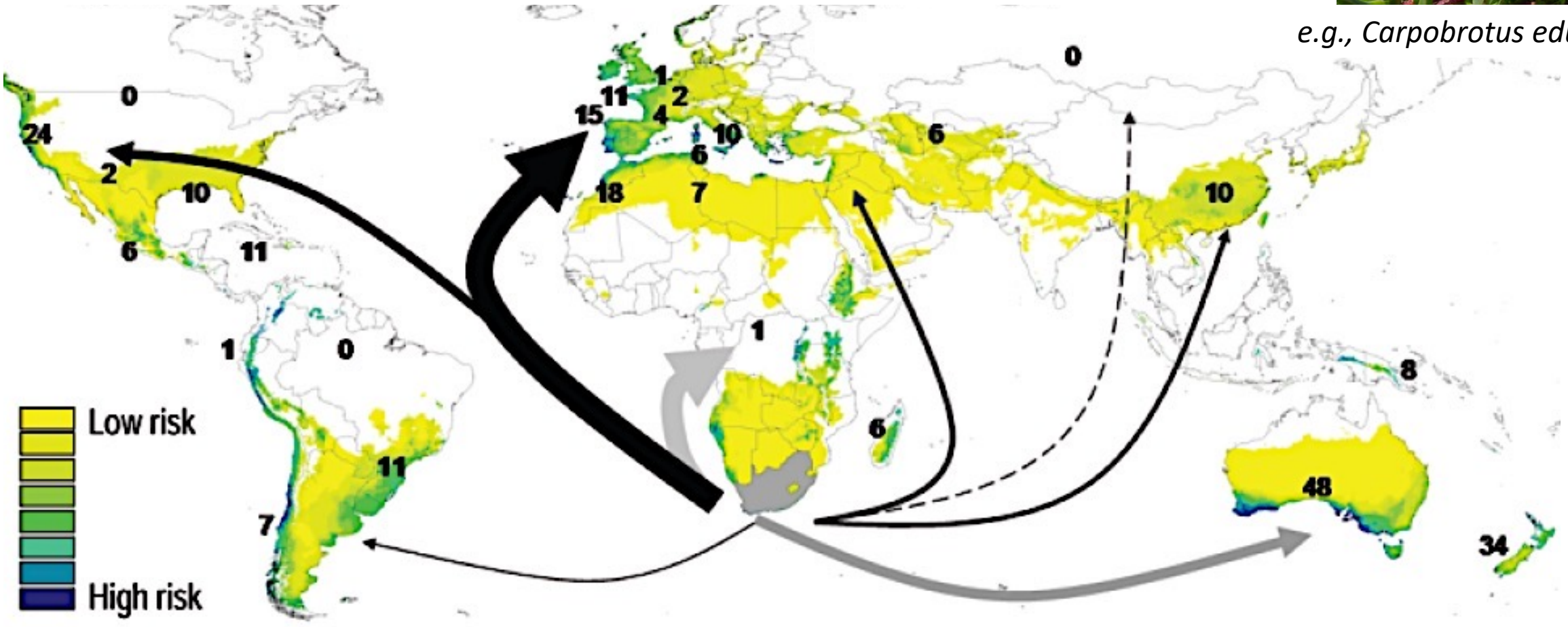
Suitable tree habitat in Greenland

Normand *et al*. 2013 *Phil. Trans. Royal. Soc.*



Suitable habitat for South African ornamental plants predicts invasion success

e.g., Carpobrotus edulis



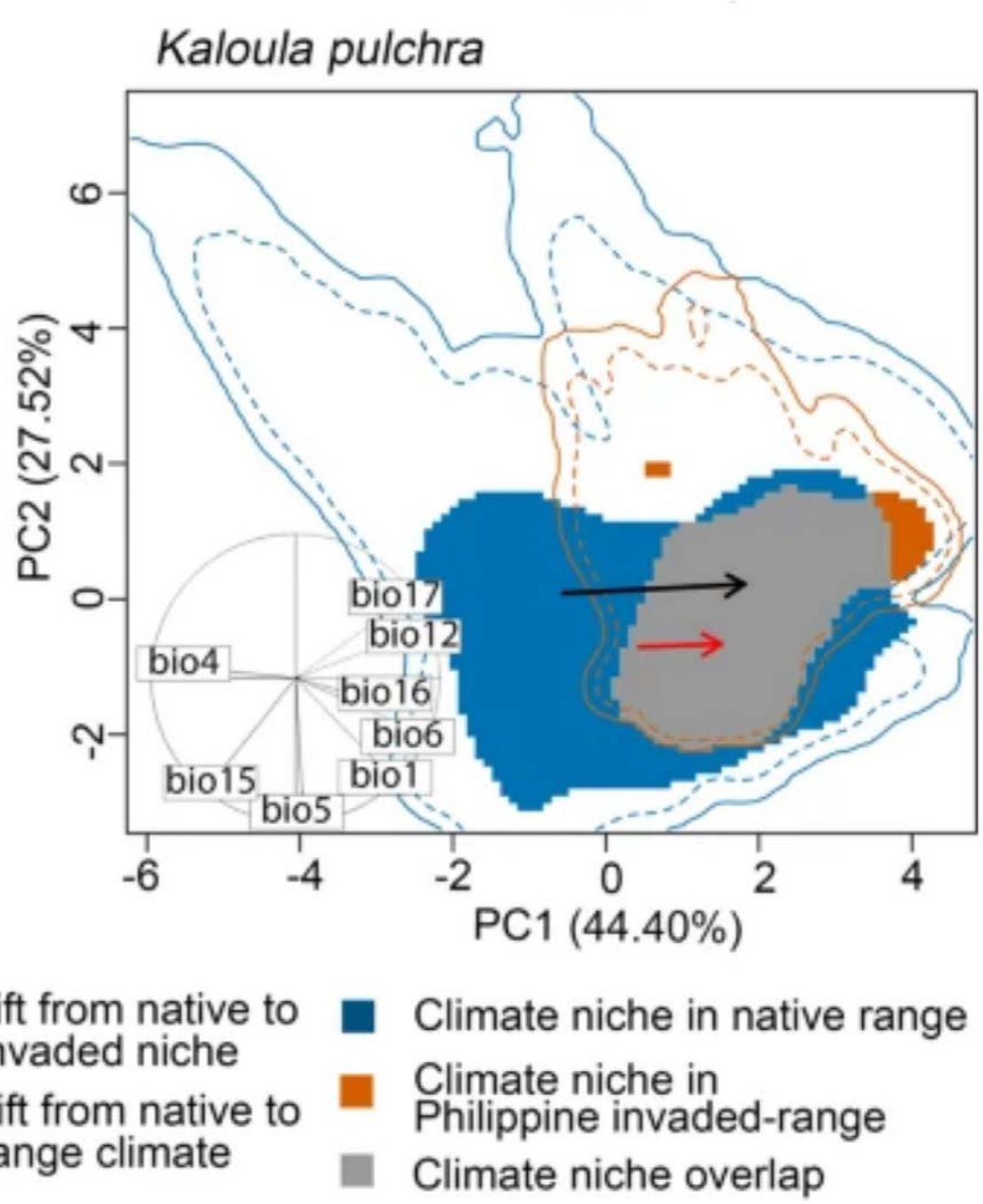
Thuiller *et al*. 2005 *Glob. Change Biol.*

Invasive species

OPEN

Niche shifts and environmental non-equilibrium undermine the usefulness of ecological niche models for invasion risk assessments

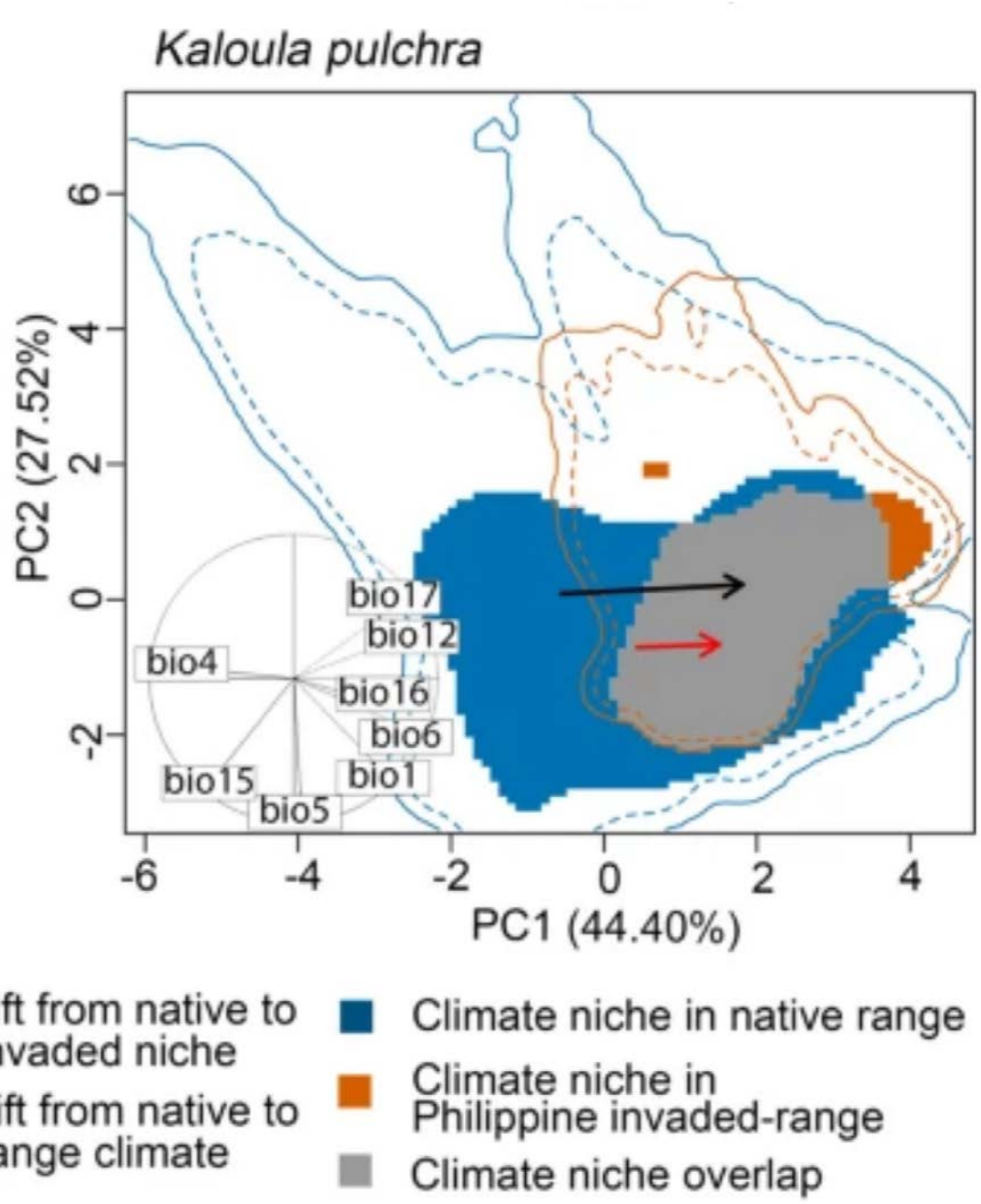
Arman N. Pili[1,2,3]✉, Reid Tingley[3], Emerson Y. Sy[2,4], Mae Lowe L. Diesmos[2,5,6] & Arvin C. Diesmos[1,2,7]



Pili *et* al. (2020) *Scientific Reports*

Invasive species

- Niche changes undermined the reciprocal transferability of ENMs calibrated using native and invaded range data.
- Our paper highlights the difficulty of predicting potential distributions given niche shifts and environmental non-equilibrium.
- We suggest calibrating ENMs with data from species' combined native and invaded ranges, and to regularly reassess niche changes and recalibrate ENMs as species' invasions progress.



Pili *et* al. (2020) *Scientific Reports*

Pitfalls

- Other (unmeasured) variables may be most important determinants of a species distribution

- A species may not be in *equilibrium* with the environment
  - Abundance (presence) is not highest where fitness is highest

- Are we using best practices?

REVIEW | ECOLOGY

Standards for distribution models in biodiversity assessments

Miguel B. Araújo[1,2,3,*], Robert P. Anderson[4,5,6], A. Márcia Barbosa[3], Colin M. Beale[7], Carsten F. Dormann[8], R...
+ See all authors and affiliations

Science Advances 16 Jan 2019:
Vol. 5, no. 1, eaat4858
DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aat4858

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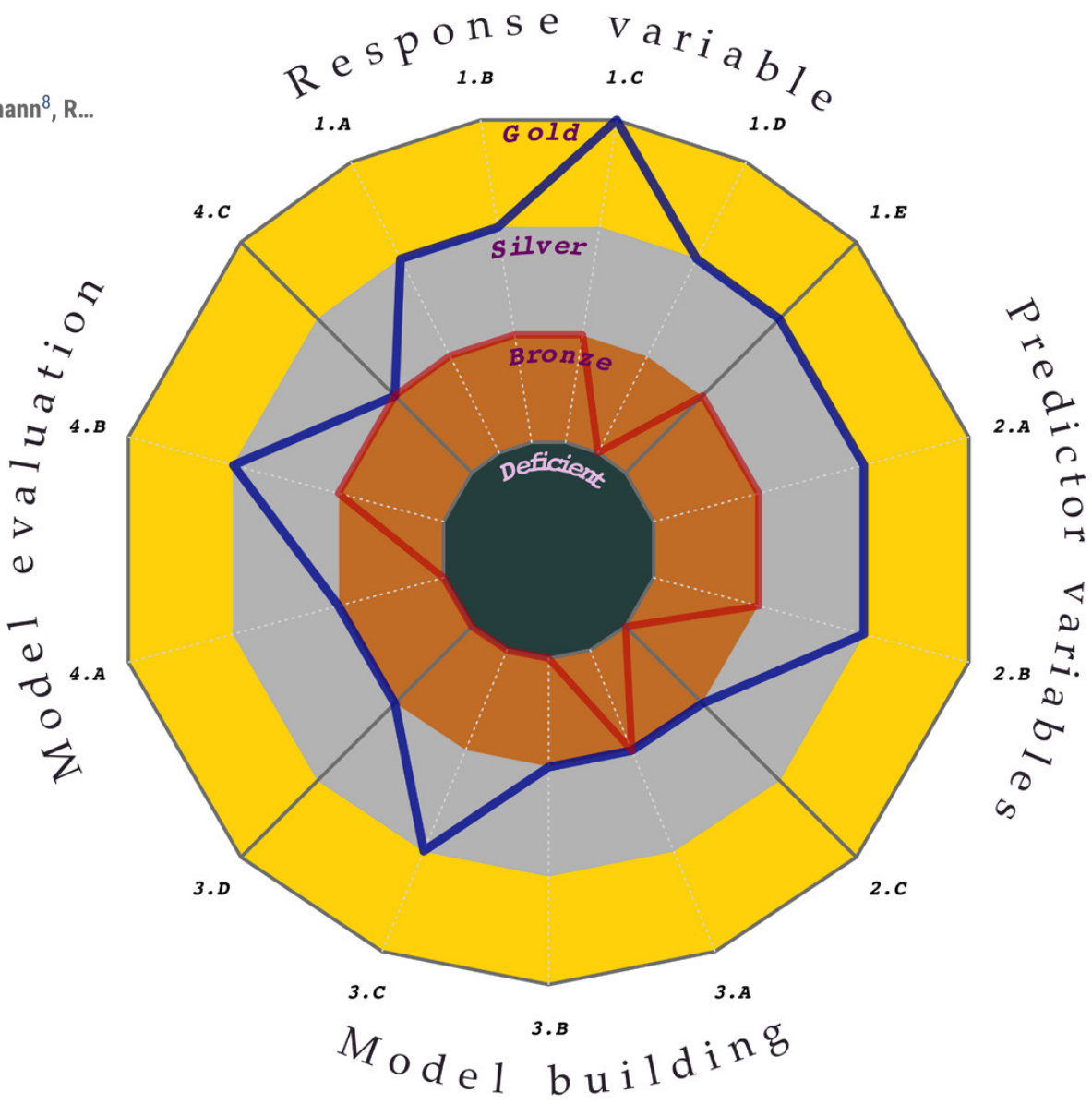

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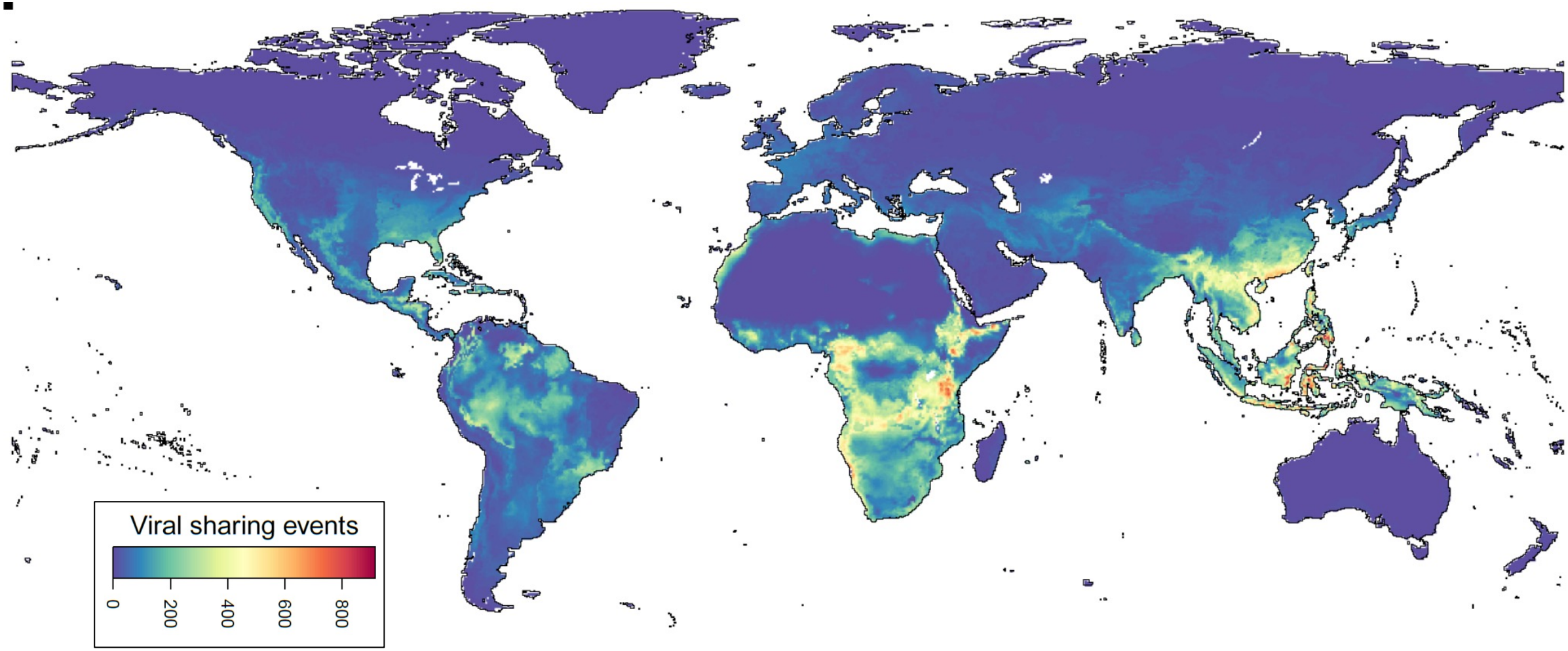
Emerging infectious disease



Carlson *et* al. (2020) Climate change will drive novel cross-species viral transmission. *bioRxiv:2020.2001.2024.918755.*

Summary

- SDMs/ENMs are relevant for an *extremely broad range of applications*
- Some key assumptions are rarely met (e.g., environmental equilibrium)
- Best practices are … not always … used
- Yet, these types of models can be extremely useful (understanding, prediction, *communication*)