

Dear Dr. Hetherington,

Please consider this manuscript “Ecological drivers of ﬂower-leaf sequences: aridity and pollination success select for ﬂowering-ﬁrst in insect-pollinated temperate trees” as a “Full paper” in *New Phytologist*.

Many tree and shrub species in temperate forests produce ﬂowers before their leaves emerge each season. This ﬂower-leaf sequence, known as hysteranthy, proteranthy or precocious ﬂowering is generally described as an adaptation to facilitate wind-pollination (Rathcke & Lacey, 1985). However, this explanation does not address the widespread prevalence of hysteranthy in biotically-pollinated taxa, which comprise a substantial portion of the hysteranthous species in some temperate forests (Buonaiuto *et al.*, 2021).

*What hypotheses or questions does this work address?*

In biotically-pollinated species, ﬂower-ﬁrst may be an adaptation for reducing water stress (**Water limitation hypothesis**; Gougherty & Gougherty, 2018; Buonaiuto *et al.*, 2021), or pollinator attraction (**Insect visibil- ity hypothesis**; Janzen, 1967). We quantiﬁed ﬂower-leaf sequence variation in a clade of insect-pollinated trees, using herbaria specimens and Bayesian hierarchical modeling to test these hypotheses by modeling the associations between hysteranthy and environmental or biological traits.

*How does this work advance our current understanding of plant science?*

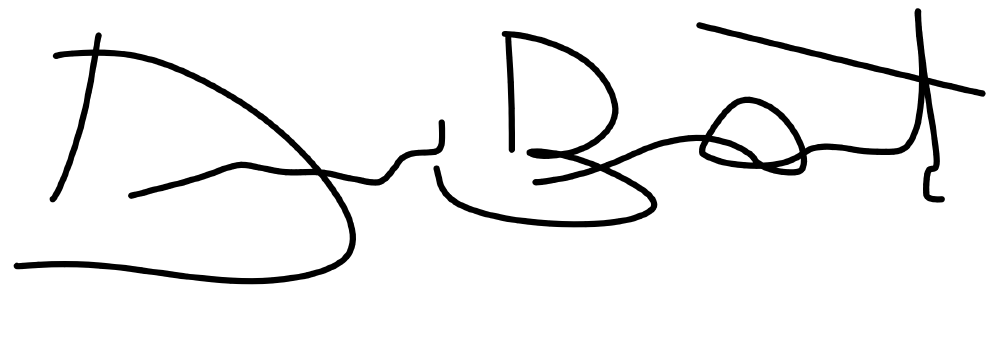
We show that ﬂowering-ﬁrst is associated with aridity and reduced ﬂower size as predicted by the water limitation and insect visibility hypotheses. We present a novel modeling approach to quantify phenologi- cal variation that can be implemented in both experimental and observational studies to better integrate observations of broad ecological patterns with targeted experiments in the future.

*Why is this work important and timely?*

Climate change is already altering the ﬂower-leaf sequences of woody plants (Ma *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2022). Our ﬁnding that ﬂower-leaf sequences may be important adaptations for environmental tolerance and pollination success suggest that they are critical to forecasting the demography and performance of forest communities in an era of global climate change.

The main text of this manuscript is 3829 words in length, it contains 4 ﬁgures. It is co-authored by T.J. Davies, S. Collins and E.M. Wolkovich and is not under consideration elsewhere. We hope that you will ﬁnd it suitable for publication in *New Phytologist*, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Daniel Buonaiuto

**References**

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**Ma Q, Huang JG, H¨anninen H, Li X , Berninger F. 2021**. Climate warming prolongs the time interval between leaf-out and ﬂowering in temperate trees: Eﬀects of chilling, forcing and photoperiod. *Journal of Ecology*, **109**: 1319–1330.

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**Wang S, Wu Z, Gong Y, Wang S, Zhang W, Zhang S, De Boeck HJ , Fu YH. 2022**. Climate warming shifts the time interval between ﬂowering and leaf unfolding depending on the warming period. *Science China Life Sciences*, **65**: 2316–2324.