

¹ Increasing prevalence of plant-fungal symbiosis across two
² centuries of environmental change

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Abstract

13 Species' distributions and abundances are shifting in response to climate change. Most species
14 harbor microbial symbionts that have the potential to influence these responses. Mutualistic mi-
15 crobial symbionts may provide resilience to environmental change by protecting their hosts from
16 increasing stress. However, environmental change that disrupts these interactions may lead to
17 declines in hosts or symbionts. Microbes preserved within herbarium specimens offer a unique
18 opportunity to quantify changes in microbial symbiosis across broad temporal and spatial scales.
19 We asked how the prevalence of seed-transmitted fungal symbionts of grasses (*Epichloë* endo-
20 phytes), which can protect hosts from abiotic stress, have changed over time in response to
21 climate change, and how these changes vary across host species' ranges. Specifically, we ana-
22 lyzed 2,346 herbarium specimens of three grass host species collected over the last two centuries
23 (1824 – 2019) for the presence or absence of endophyte symbiosis, and evaluated spatial and
24 temporal trends in endophyte prevalence. We found that endophytes increased in prevalence
25 over the last two centuries from ca. 25% prevalence to ca. 75% prevalence, on average, across
26 three host species. We also found that changes in prevalence were associated with observed
27 changes in seasonal climate drivers; notably increasing precipitation corresponding to each host
28 species' peak growing season and changes in off-peak season variability in precipitation. Our
29 analysis performed favorably in an out-of-sample predictive test with contemporary data, how-
30 ever we identified greater local-scale variability in endophyte prevalence in contemporary data
31 compared to historic data, suggesting that model fusion may be an important step moving for-
32 ward. Our results provide novel evidence for a cryptic biological response to climate change that
33 may contribute to the resilience of host-microbe symbiosis through context-dependent benefits
34 that confer a fitness advantage to symbiotic hosts under environmental change.

35 Abstract : 287 words

Introduction

37 Understanding how biotic interactions are altered by global change is a major goal of basic and
38 applied ecological research (Blois et al., 2013; Gilman et al., 2010). Documented responses to
39 environmental change, such as shifts in species' distributions (Aitken et al., 2008) and phenology
40 (Piao et al., 2019), are typically blind to concurrent changes in associated biotic interactions.
41 Empirically evaluating these biotic changes – whether interacting species shift in tandem with
42 their partners or not (HilleRisLambers et al., 2013) – is crucial to predicting the reorganization
43 of Earth's biodiversity under global change. Such evaluations have been limited because few
44 datasets on species interactions extend over sufficiently long time scales of contemporary climate
45 change (Poisot et al., 2021).

46 Natural history specimens, which were originally collected to study and preserve taxonomic
47 diversity, present a unique opportunity to explore long-term changes in ecological interactions
48 across broad spatial and temporal scales (Meineke et al., 2018). Natural history collections, built
49 and maintained by the efforts of thousands of scientists, are invaluable time machines, primarily
50 comprised of physical specimens of organisms along with information about the time and place
51 of their collection. These specimens often preserve physical legacies of ecological processes and
52 species' interactions from dynamically changing environments across time and space. For exam-
53 ple, previous researchers have used plant collections (herbaria) to document shifts in phenology
54 (Berg et al., 2019; Park et al., 2019; Willis et al., 2017), pollination (Duan et al., 2019; Pauw and
55 Hawkins, 2011), and herbivory (Meineke et al., 2019) related to anthropogenic climate change.
56 However, few previous studies have leveraged biological collections to examine climate change-
57 related shifts in a particularly common type of interaction: microbial symbiosis.

58 Microbial symbionts are common to all macroscopic organisms and can have important ef-
59 fects on their hosts' survival, growth and reproduction (McFall-Ngai et al., 2013; Rodriguez et al.,
60 2009). Many microbial symbionts act as mutualists, engaging in reciprocally beneficial interac-
61 tions with their hosts that can ameliorate environmental stress. For example, bacterial symbionts

62 of insects, such as *Wolbachia*, can improve their hosts' thermal tolerance (Renoz et al., 2019; Truitt
63 et al., 2019), and arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, documented in 70-90% of families of land plants
64 (Parniske, 2008), allow their hosts to persist through drought conditions by improving water and
65 nutrient uptake (Cheng et al., 2021). On the other hand, changes in the mean and variance of
66 environmental conditions may disrupt microbial mutualisms by changing the costs and bene-
67 fits of the interaction for each partner, leading the interaction to deteriorate (Aslan et al., 2013;
68 Fowler et al., 2024). Coral bleaching (the loss of symbiotic algae) due to temperature stress (Sully
69 et al., 2019) is perhaps the best known example, but this phenomenon is not unique to corals.
70 Lichens exposed to elevated temperatures experienced loss of photosynthetic function along with
71 changes in the composition of their algal symbiont community (Meyer et al., 2022). How com-
72 monly and under what conditions microbial mutualisms deteriorate or strengthen under climate
73 change remain unanswered questions. Previous work suggests that these alternative responses
74 may depend on the intimacy and specialization of the interaction as well as the physiological
75 tolerances of the mutualist partners (Rafferty et al., 2015; Toby Kiers et al., 2010; Warren and
76 Bradford, 2014).

77 Understanding of how microbial symbioses are affected by climate change is additionally
78 complicated by spatial heterogeneity in the direction and magnitude of environmental change
79 (IPCC, 2021). Beneficial symbionts are likely able to shield their hosts from environmental stress
80 in locations that experience a small degree of change, but symbionts in locations that experience
81 changes of large magnitude may be pushed beyond their physiological limits (Webster et al.,
82 2008). Additionally, symbionts are often unevenly distributed across their hosts' distribution.
83 Facultative symbionts may be absent from portions of the host range (Afkhami et al., 2014),
84 and hosts may engage with a diversity of partners (different symbiont species or locally-adapted
85 strains) across their environments (Frade et al., 2008; Rolshausen et al., 2018). Identifying broader
86 spatial trends in symbiont prevalence is therefore an important step in developing predictions
87 for where to expect changes in the symbiosis in future climates.

88 *Epichloë* fungal endophytes are specialized symbionts of cool-season grasses, which have been

89 documented in ~ 30% of cool-season grass species (Leuchtmann, 1992). They are transmitted ver-
90 tically from maternal plants to offspring through seeds. Vertical transmission creates a feedback
91 between the fitness of host and symbiont (Douglas, 1998; Fine, 1975; Rudgers et al., 2009). Over
92 time, endophytes that act as mutualists should rise in prevalence within a host population (Don-
93 ald et al., 2021). *Epichloë* are known to improve their hosts' drought tolerance (Decunta et al.,
94 2021) and protect their hosts against herbivores (Crawford et al., 2010) and pathogens (Xia et al.,
95 2018) likely through the production of a diverse suite of alkaloids and other secondary metabo-
96 lites. The fitness feedback induced by vertical transmission leads to the prediction that endophyte
97 prevalence should be high in populations where these fitness benefits are most important. Pre-
98 vious contemporary survey studies have documented large-scale spatial patterns in endophyte
99 prevalence structured by environmental gradients (Afkhami, 2012; Bazely et al., 2007; Granath
100 et al., 2007; Sneck et al., 2017). We predicted that prevalence should track temporal changes in
101 environmental drivers that elicit these fitness benefits.

102 Early research on *Epichloë* used herbarium specimens to describe the broad taxonomic di-
103 versity of host species that harbor these symbionts (White and Cole, 1985), establishing that
104 endophyte symbiosis could be identified in plant tissue from as early as 1851. However, no
105 subsequent studies, to our knowledge, have used the vast resources of biological collections to
106 quantitatively assess spatio-temporal trends in endophyte prevalence and their environmental
107 correlates. Grasses are commonly collected and identified based on the presence of their re-
108 productive structures, meaning that preserved specimens typically contain seeds, conveniently
109 preserving the fungi along with their host plants on herbarium sheets. This creates the oppor-
110 tunity to leverage the unique spatio-temporal sampling of herbarium collections to examine the
111 response of the symbiosis to historical climate change. Research using historical collections has
112 clearly demonstrated other ecological signatures of a changing climate. However the predictive
113 ability of these historical analyses is rarely tested against contemporary data (Lee et al., 2024).
114 Identifying the ways in which these analyses fall short is a crucial step for the field move from
115 reading signatures in the past to forecasting ecological dynamics into the future.

116 In this study, we assessed the long-term responses of endophyte symbiosis to climate change
117 through the use of herbarium specimens of three North American host grass species (*Agrostis*
118 *hyemalis*, *Agrostis perennans*, and *Elymus virginicus*). We first address questions describing spatial
119 and temporal trends in endophyte prevalence: (i) How has endophyte prevalence changed over
120 the past two centuries? and (ii) How spatially variable are temporal trends in endophyte preva-
121 lence across eastern North America? We then address how climate change may be driving trends
122 in endophyte prevalence by asking: (iii) What is the relationship between variation in temporal
123 trends in endophyte prevalence and changes in climate drivers? We predicted that aggregate en-
124 dophyte prevalence would increase over time in tandem with climate warming, and that hotspots
125 of endophyte change would correspond spatially to hotspots of climate change. Finally, we eval-
126 uated the performance of models built on data from historic specimens with an out-of-sample
127 test, data on endophyte prevalence from contemporary surveys of host populations. To answer
128 these questions we examined a total of 2,346 specimens collected across eastern North America
129 between 1824 and 2019.

130 **Methods**

131 *Focal species*

132 Our surveys focused on three native North American grasses: *Agrostis hyemalis*, *Agrostis peren-*
133 *nans*, and *Elymus virginicus*. Both *Agrostis* species host *Epichloë amarillans* (Craven et al., 2001;
134 Leuchtmann et al., 2014), while *Elymus virginicus* typically hosts *Epichloë elymi* (Clay and Schardl,
135 2002). These C₃ grass species are commonly represented in natural history collections with broad
136 distributions covering much the eastern United States. *A. hyemalis* is a small short-lived perennial
137 species that germinates in the spring and typically flowers between March and July (most com-
138 mon collection month: May). *A. perennans* is of similar stature but is longer lived than *Agrostis*
139 *hyemalis* and flowers in late summer and early autumn (most common collection month: Septem-
140 ber). *A. perennans* is more sparsely distributed, tending to be found in shadier and more moist

¹⁴¹ habitats, while *A. hyemalis* is commonly found in open and recently disturbed ground. Both
¹⁴² *Agrostis* species are recorded from throughout the Eastern US, but *A. perennans* has a slightly
¹⁴³ more northern distribution, whereas *A. hyemalis* is found rarely as far north as Canada and is
¹⁴⁴ listed as a rare plant in Minnesota. *E. virginicus* is a larger and relatively longer-lived species that
¹⁴⁵ is more broadly distributed than the *Agrostis* species. It begins flowering as early as March or
¹⁴⁶ April but continues throughout the summer (most common collection month: July).

¹⁴⁷ *Herbarium surveys*

¹⁴⁸ We visited nine herbaria between 2019 and 2022 (see Table A1 for a summary of specimens in-
¹⁴⁹ cluded from each collection). With permission from herbarium staff, we acquired seed samples
¹⁵⁰ from 1135 *A. hyemalis* specimens collected between 1824 and 2019, 357 *A. perennans* specimens
¹⁵¹ collected between 1863 and 2017, and 854 *E. virginicus* specimens collected between 1839 and
¹⁵² 2019 (Fig. 1, Fig. 2A, Fig. A1). We chose our focal species in part because they are commonly
¹⁵³ represented in herbarium collections, and produce high numbers of seeds, meaning that small
¹⁵⁴ samples would not diminish the value of the specimens for future studies. We collected 5-10
¹⁵⁵ seeds per specimen after examining the herbarium sheet under a dissecting microscope to en-
¹⁵⁶ sure that we collected mature seeds, not florets or unfilled seeds, fit for our purpose of identifying
¹⁵⁷ fungal endophytes with microscopy. We excluded specimens for which information about the
¹⁵⁸ collection location and date were unavailable. Each specimen was assigned geographic coor-
¹⁵⁹ dinates based on collection information recorded on the herbarium sheet using the geocoding
¹⁶⁰ functionality of the ggmap R package (Kahle et al., 2019). Many specimens had digitized collec-
¹⁶¹ tion information readily available, but for those that did not, we transcribed information printed
¹⁶² on the herbarium sheet. Collections were geo-referenced to the nearest county centroid, or near-
¹⁶³ est municipality when that information was available. For a few of the oldest specimens, only
¹⁶⁴ information at the state level was available, and so we used the state centroid.

¹⁶⁵ After collecting seed samples, we quantified the presence or absence of *Epichloë* fungal hy-
¹⁶⁶ phae, which grow intercellularly, in each specimen using microscopy. We first softened seeds

167 with a 10% NaOH solution, then stained the seeds with aniline blue-lactic acid stain and squashed
168 them under a microscope cover slip. We examined the squashed seeds for the presence of fungal
169 hyphae at 200-400X magnification (Bacon and White, 2018). In some cases, the tissues examined
170 during microscopy came from flowers or otherwise non-viable seeds, which were excluded for
171 that specimen. On average we scored 4.7 seeds per specimen of *A. hyemalis*, 4.2 seeds per speci-
172 men of *A. perennans*, and 3.8 seeds per specimen of *E. virginicus*; we scored 10,342 seeds in total. .
173 Due to imperfect vertical transmission (Afkhami and Rudgers, 2008), it is possible that symbiotic
174 host-plants produce a mixture of symbiotic and non-symbiotic seeds. We therefore designated a
175 specimen as endophyte-symbiotic if *Epichloë* hyphae were observed in one or more of its seeds,
176 or non-symbiotic if hyphae were observed in none of its seeds. To capture uncertainty in the
177 endophyte scoring process, we recorded both a "liberal" and a "conservative" endophyte status
178 for each plant specimen. When we identified potential endophytes with unusual morphology,
179 low uptake of stain, or a small amount of fungal hyphae across the scored seeds, we recorded a
180 positive liberal status (more likely to be endophyte-positive) and a negative conservative status
181 (less likely to be endophyte-positive). 89% of scored plants had matching liberal and conservative
182 scores, reflecting high confidence in endophyte status. The following analyses in the main text
183 used the liberal status, but we repeated all analyses with the conservative status which yielded
184 qualitatively similar results (Fig. ??)

185 *Modeling spatial and temporal changes in endophyte prevalence*

186 We assessed spatial and temporal changes in endophyte prevalence across each host distribution,
187 quantifying the "global" temporal trends, aggregating across space, and then examining spatial
188 heterogeneity in the direction and magnitude of endophyte change (hotspots and coldspots)
189 across the spatial extent of each host's distribution. To account for the spatial non-independence
190 of geo-referenced occurrences, we used an approximate Bayesian method, Integrated Nested
191 Laplace Approximation (INLA), to construct spatio-temporal models of endophyte prevalence.
192 INLA provides a computationally efficient method of ascertaining parameter posterior distribu-

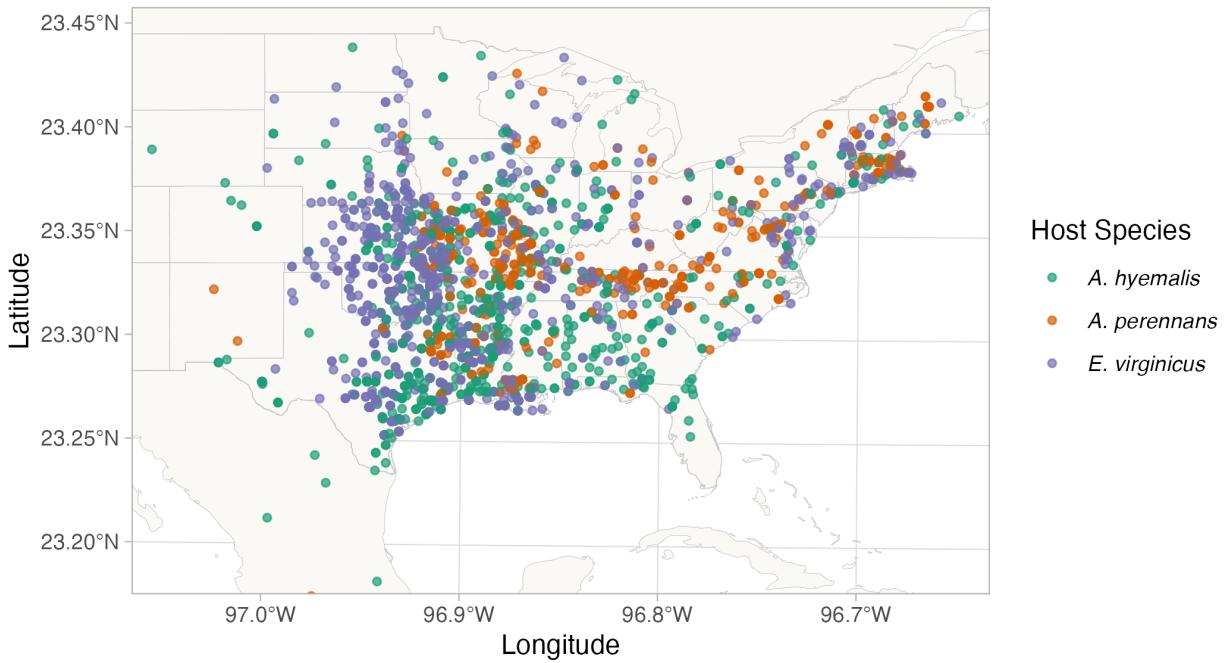


Figure 1: Collection locations of herbarium specimens of three grass host species across eastern North America that were sampled for *Epichloë* endophyte presence or absence.

193 tions for certain models that can be formulated as latent Gaussian Models (Rue et al., 2009). Many
 194 common statistical models, including structured and unstructured mixed-effects models, can be
 195 represented as latent Gaussian Models. We incorporated spatial heterogeneity into this analy-
 196 sis using spatially-structured intercept and slope parameters implemented as stochastic partial
 197 differential equations (SPDE) to approximate a continuous spatial Gaussian process. This SPDE
 198 approach is a flexible method of smoothing across space while explicitly accounting for spatial
 199 dependence between data-points (Bakka et al., 2018; Lindgren et al., 2011). Fitting models with
 200 structured spatial effects is possible with MCMC sampling but can require long computation
 201 times, making INLA an effective alternative, which has been used to model spatial patterns in
 202 flowering phenology (Willems et al., 2022), the abundance of bird species (Meehan et al., 2019)
 203 and butterflies (Crossley et al., 2022), the distribution of temperate trees (Engel et al., 2022) as well
 204 as the population dynamics of endangered amphibians (Knapp et al., 2016) and other ecological

205 processes (Beguin et al., 2012).

206 We estimated global and spatially-varying trends in endophyte prevalence using a joint-
207 likelihood model. For each host species h , endophyte presence/absence of the i^{th} specimen ($P_{[h]i}$)
208 was modeled as a Bernoulli response variable with expected probability of endophyte occurrence
209 $\hat{P}_{[h]i}$. We modeled $\hat{P}_{[h]i}$ as a linear function of intercept $A_{[h]i}$ and slope $T_{[h]}$ defining the global trend
210 in endophyte prevalence specific to each host species as well as with spatially-varying intercepts
211 $\alpha_{[h_1]l[i]}$ and slopes $\tau_{[h_1]l[i]}$ associated with location ($l[i]$, a unique latitude-longitude combination).
212 The joint-model structure allowed us to share variance terms across focal species to account for
213 dependence associated with the collection of specimens and identification of endophytes. Shared
214 variance terms included the spatially-dependent random effect $\delta_{l[i]}$, intended to account for resid-
215 ual spatial variation, and $\chi_{c[i]}$ and $\omega_{s[i]}$ i.i.d.-random effects indexed for each collector identity
216 ($c[i]$), and scorer identity ($s[i]$) of the i^{th} specimen.

$$\text{logit}(\hat{P}_{[h_1]i}) = A_{[h_1]i} + T_{[h_1]} * \text{year}_i + \alpha_{[h_1]l[i]} + \tau_{[h_1]l[i]} * \text{year}_i + \delta_{l[i]} + \chi_{c[i]} + \omega_{s[i]} \quad (1a)$$

$$\text{logit}(\hat{P}_{[h_2]i}) = A_{[h_2]i} + T_{[h_2]} * \text{year}_i + \alpha_{[h_2]l[i]} + \tau_{[h_2]l[i]} * \text{year}_i + \delta_{l[i]} + \chi_{c[i]} + \omega_{s[i]} \quad (1b)$$

$$\text{logit}(\hat{P}_{[h_3]i}) = A_{[h_3]i} + T_{[h_3]} * \text{year}_i + \alpha_{[h_3]l[i]} + \tau_{[h_3]l[i]} * \text{year}_i + \delta_{l[i]} + \chi_{c[i]} + \omega_{s[i]} \quad (1c)$$

217 Previous work suggests that behavior of historical botanists and uneven sampling may intro-
218 duce biases into ecological inferences made from historic collections (Kozlov et al., 2020). Prolific
219 collectors who contribute thousands of specimens may be more or less likely to collect certain
220 species, or specimens with certain traits (Daru et al., 2018). Similarly, the process of scoring seeds
221 for hyphae involved several student researchers who, even with standardized training, may vary
222 in their likelihood of positively identifying *Epichloë* hyphae. By including a random effect for
223 collectors and for scorers, we attempted to account for variance across individual researchers
224 that may bias our predictions of changes in endophyte prevalence.

225 We performed model fitting using the inlabru R package (Bachl et al., 2019). Global intercept
226 and slope parameters A , and T , were given vague priors. Scorer and collector random effects,

²²⁷ χ and ω , were given penalized complexity priors, with distributions approximating a Normal
²²⁸ distribution with standard deviation of 5. Each spatially-structured parameter depended on a
²²⁹ covariance matrix according to the proximity of each collection location (Bakka et al., 2018; Lind-
²³⁰ gren et al., 2011). The covariance matrix was approximated using a Matérn covariance function,
²³¹ with each data point assigned a location according to the nodes of a mesh of non-overlapping
²³² triangles encompassing the study area (Fig. A2). Priors, termed "range" and "variance", define
²³³ the distance of spatial decay described by the Matérn covariance function. Priors for results
²³⁴ presented in the main text reflect a range of 342 kilometers. We found that model results were
²³⁵ sensitive to this choice, and so tested a range of priors (from 68 kilometers to 2160 kilometers)
²³⁶ and meshes (Supplemental Material), finding that model results were qualitatively similar, i.e.
²³⁷ the same direction of effects across space, but that the magnitude and uncertainty varied.

²³⁸ *Validating model performance with in-sample and out-of-sample tests*

²³⁹ We evaluated the predictive ability of the model using both in-sample training data from the
²⁴⁰ herbarium surveys, and with out-of-sample test data from contemporary endophyte surveys, an
²⁴¹ important but rarely used strategy in ecological studies (Lee et al., 2024; Tredennick et al., 2021).
²⁴² We used data from contemporary surveys of endophyte prevalence in *A. hyemalis* and *E. virginici-
243* *cus* in Texas and the southern US. Surveys of *E. virginicus* were conducted in 2013 as described
²⁴⁴ in Sneck et al. (2017), and surveys of *A. hyemalis* took place between 2015 and 2020¹. Popula-
²⁴⁵ tion surveys of *A. hyemalis* were initially designed to cover longitudinal variation in endophyte
²⁴⁶ prevalence towards its range edge, while surveys of *E. virginicus* were designed to cover latitu-
²⁴⁷ dinal variation along its range edge. In total, we visited 43 populations of *A. hyemalis* and 20
²⁴⁸ populations of *E. virginicus* across the south-central US, with emphasis on Texas and neighboring
²⁴⁹ states (Fig A11). During surveys, we collected seeds from up to 30 individuals per location (av-
²⁵⁰ erage number of plants sampled: 22.9). We quantified the endophyte status of each individual

¹ *We have added more recent AGHY survey data. I am not sure if you have access to this but you should definitely use it. Karl or I can point you to the right file.*

251 with staining microscopy as described for the herbarium surveys (with 5-10 seeds scored per
252 individual), and calculated the prevalence of endophytes within the population (proportion of
253 symbiotic plants divided by the number of sampled plants). For each population, we compared
254 the observed fraction of endophyte-symbiotic hosts to the predicted probability of endophyte
255 occurrence \hat{P} derived from the model based on location and year. The contemporary survey
256 period (2013-2020) is at the most recent edge of the time period encompassed by the historical
257 observations used for model fitting. We compared the model's prediction for these locations to
258 the observed population prevalence.

259 *Assessing the role of climate drivers*

260 We assessed how the magnitude of climate change may have driven changes in endophyte preva-
261 lence by assessing correlations between changes in climate and changes in endophyte prevalence
262 predicted from our spatial model at evenly spaced pixels across the study area. We first down-
263 loaded monthly temperature and precipitation rasters from the PRISM climate group (Daly and
264 Bryant, 2013) covering the time period between 1895 and 2020 using the 'prism' R package (Hart
265 and Bell, 2015). Prism provides reconstructions of historic climate variables across the United
266 States by spatially-interpolating weather station data (Di Luzio et al., 2008). We calculated 30-
267 year climate normals for seasonal mean temperature and cumulative precipitation for the recent
268 (1990 to 2020) and historic (1895 to 1925) periods. We used three four-month seasons within
269 the year (Spring: January, February, March, April; Summer: May, June, July, August; Autumn:
270 September, October, November, December). This division of seasons allowed us to quantify dif-
271 ferences in climate associated with the two "cool" seasons, when we expected our focal species
272 to be most biologically active (*A. hyemalis* flowering phenology: spring; *E. virginicus*: spring and
273 summer; *A. perennans*: autumn). In addition to mean climate conditions, environmental vari-
274 ability itself can influence population dynamics (Tuljapurkar, 1982) and changes in variability
275 are a key prediction of climate change models (IPCC, 2021; Stocker et al., 2013). Therefore, we
276 calculated the standard deviation for each annual and seasonal climate driver across each 30-

277 year period. We then took the difference between recent and historic periods for the mean and
278 standard deviation for each climate driver (Figs. A12-A14). All together, we assessed twelve
279 potential climate drivers: the mean and standard deviation of spring, summer, and autumn temper-
280 ature, as well as the mean and standard deviation of spring, summer, and autumn cumulative
281 precipitation, cumulative precipitation, and cumulative precipitation.

282 To evaluate whether areas that have experienced the greatest changes in endophyte preva-
283 lence (hotspots of endophyte change) are associated with high degrees of change in climate
284 (hotspots of climate change), we modeled spatially varying slopes of endophyte change through
285 time ($\tau_{[h]l}$) as a linear function of environmental covariates, with a Gaussian error distribution.
286 Data from each host species was analyzed separately. Fitting regressions to many pixels across
287 the study region risks artificially inflating confidence in our results due to large sample sizes, and
288 so we performed this analysis using only a random subsample of 250 pixels across the study
289 region, which provided results qualitatively similar to analysis of the full set of pixels.

290 *Modeling distributions of host species*

291 We modeled the distribution of each host species to generate maps on which we predicted the
292 dynamics of *Epichloë* symbionts. We followed the ODMAP (overview, data, model, assessment,
293 prediction) protocol (Crossley et al., 2022). A full description of the ODMAP can be found in the
294 (Supplementary Method ??). In short, we used presence-only observations of the host species
295 from Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) between 1990 to 2020. To reduce the po-
296 tential influence of sampling bias and spatial autocorrelation, we thinned the occurrences to the
297 spatial scale of our selected climatic predictors. We selected climate variables that aligned with
298 our analysis of climatic influences on trends in endophyte prevalence described above. We cal-
299 culated the mean and standard deviation of seasonal temperature and precipitation across 1990
300 to 2020. Among this suite of variables, we chose to include, which were uncorrelated (Variance
301 Inflation Factor > 0.7) and allowed us to predict the occurrence probability of each host species in
302 space and time. These climatic variables are: the mean and standard deviation of spring, summer,

and autumn temperature, as well as the mean and standard deviation of spring, summer, and autumn cumulative precipitation, cumulative precipitation, and cumulative precipitation. We fit maximum entropy (MaxEnt) models using the maxent function in the package dismo (Hijmans et al., 2017). We generated 10,000 pseudo-absences as background points, and split the occurrence data into 75% for model training and 25% for model testing. The performance of models was evaluated with AUC (Jiménez-Valverde, 2012). We found AUC = 0.862, AUC = 0.838, AUC = 0.821 respectively for *Agrostis hyemalis*, *Agrostis perennans*, and *Elymus virginicus*. To convert the continuous predicted probabilities into binary presence - absence maps, we used the training sensitivity (true positive rate) and specificity threshold (true negative rate) (Liu et al., 2005). These binary maps serve as boundaries in presented maps of change in endophyte prevalence, and outline the set of pixels used in our analysis of climate correlates with trends in endophyte prevalence

Results

How has endophyte prevalence changed over time?

We found that endophyte prevalence increased within the examined specimens over the last two centuries for all three host species (Fig. 2). On average, modeling indicated that endophytes of *A. perennans* and *E. virginicus* increased from ~ 40 % to 70% prevalence across the study region, and that of *A. hyemalis* increased from ~ 25% to over 50% prevalence. Our model indicates a high certainty that overall temporal trends are positive across species (99% probability of a positive overall year slope in *A. hyemalis*, 92% probability of a positive overall year slope in *A. perennans*, and 91% probability of a positive overall year slope in *E. virginicus*) (Fig. A6)

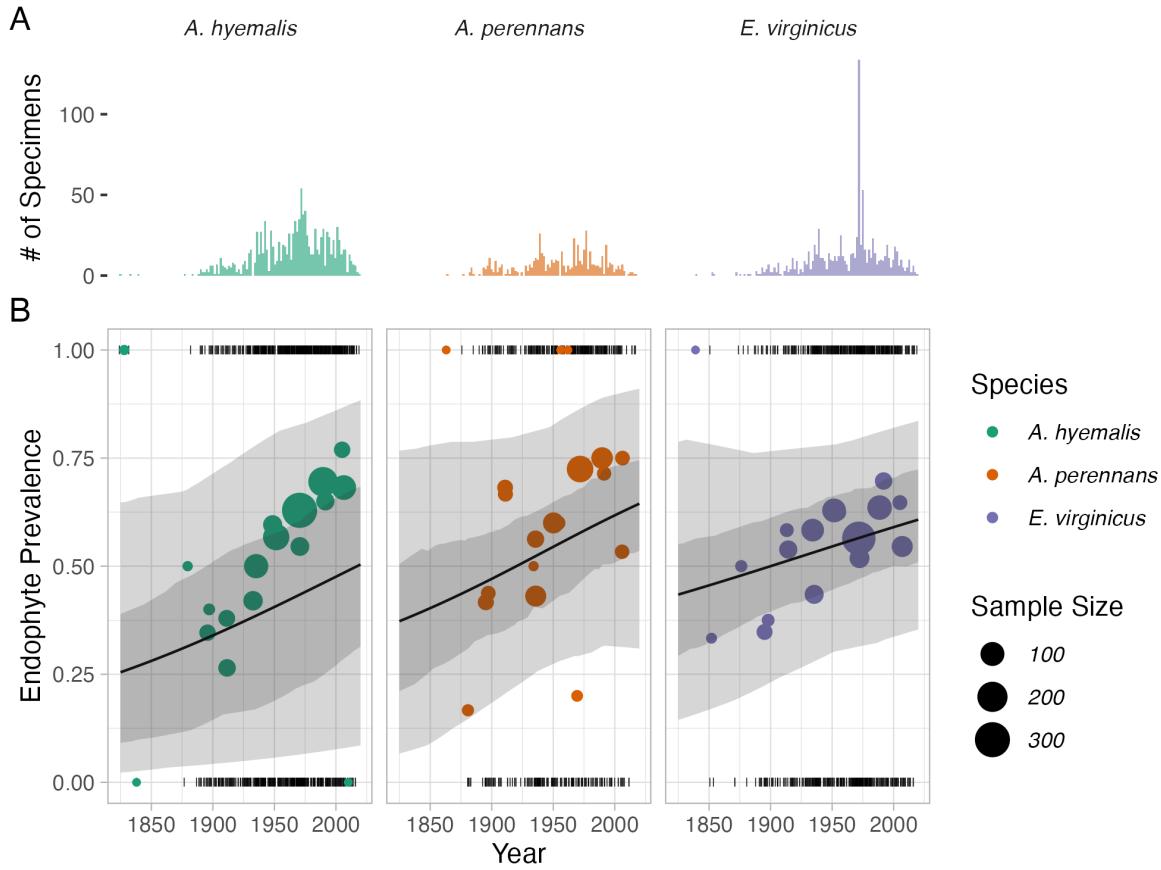


Figure 2: Temporal trends in endophyte prevalence. (A) Histograms show the frequency of scored specimens through time for each host species. (B) Lines show predicted mean endophyte prevalence over the study period along with the 50% and 95% CI bands incorporating uncertainty associated with collector and scorer random effects. Colored points are binned means of the observed endophyte presence/absence data (black dashes). Colors represent each host species and point size represents the number of specimens.

How spatially variable are temporal trends in endophyte prevalence?

Our model revealed hotspots of change in endophyte prevalence. While there was an overall increase in endophyte prevalence, these changes varied across the host species' ranges (Fig. 3). In some regions, posterior estimates of spatially varying temporal trends, τ , indicate that *A.*

328 *A. hyemalis* and *A. perennans* experienced increases in percent prevalence by as much as 2% per
 329 year over the study period, while *E. virginicus* experienced increases up to around 1% per year.
 330 Compared to *E. virginicus*, which had a weaker overall increase in endophytes and less spatial
 331 variability, maps of both *Agrostis* species show areas of strong increase and areas of declining
 332 prevalence. Notably, endophytes increased towards the western range edge of *A. hyemalis* (Fig.
 333 3A) and across the northeastern US for *A. perennans* (Fig. 3B). Posterior estimates of uncertainty
 334 in spatially varying slopes indicate that these hotspots of change may have experienced increases
 335 of up to 5% per year while declines in prevalence may be as great as 4% per year for *A. hyemalis*
 336 and *A. perennans*. For *E. virginicus*, uncertainty ranges between 3.5% increases and 2.5% decreases
 337 (Fig. A7).

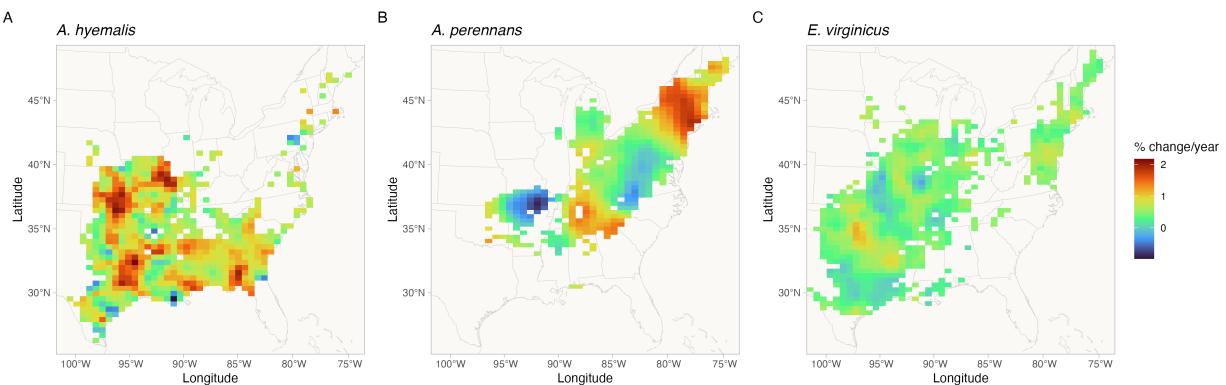


Figure 3: Predicted posterior mean of spatially-varying slopes representing change in endophyte prevalence for each host species. Color indicates the relative change in predicted endophyte prevalence.

338 *What is the relationship between variation in temporal trends in endophyte
 339 prevalence and changes in climate drivers?*

340 We found that trends in endophyte prevalence were strongly associated with seasonal climate
 341 change drivers (Fig. 4). For the majority of the study region, the climate has become wetter and

342 cooler over the last century (Fig. A12-A14), a consequence of regional variation in global climate
343 change (IPCC, 2021). Within the study region, spatial variation in climate trends were predic-
344 tive of trends in endophyte prevalence. For example, strong increases in prevalence within *A.*
345 *perennans* were most associated with autumn climate drivers that coincide with its Aug-Sep active
346 growing season. For this species, warmer and wetter autumn climates showed particularly strong
347 relationships, however other seasonal drivers may also contribute to increasing endophyte preva-
348 lence (drier springs and cooler summers). Trends in endophyte prevalence for *A. hyemalis* were
349 most strongly associated with changes in precipitation variability were the strongest predictors.
350 Endophyte prevalence increased the most in regions that experienced greater spring precipita-
351 tion along with increasing variability in summer and autumn precipitation. While this species
352 actively grows and reproduces in the late spring and early summer, climate effects outside of the
353 growing season may indicate that endophytes play a role in persistence during dormant periods
354 through summer droughts or contribute to the ability to successfully germinate. Prevalence of
355 endophytes of *E. virginicus* were least influenced by climate, but decreasing autumn temperature
356 variability and less precipitation in autumn were the strongest predictors.

357 Correlations assessed using all pixels across each species distribution were qualitatively sim-
358 ilar to these results (Fig. A11).

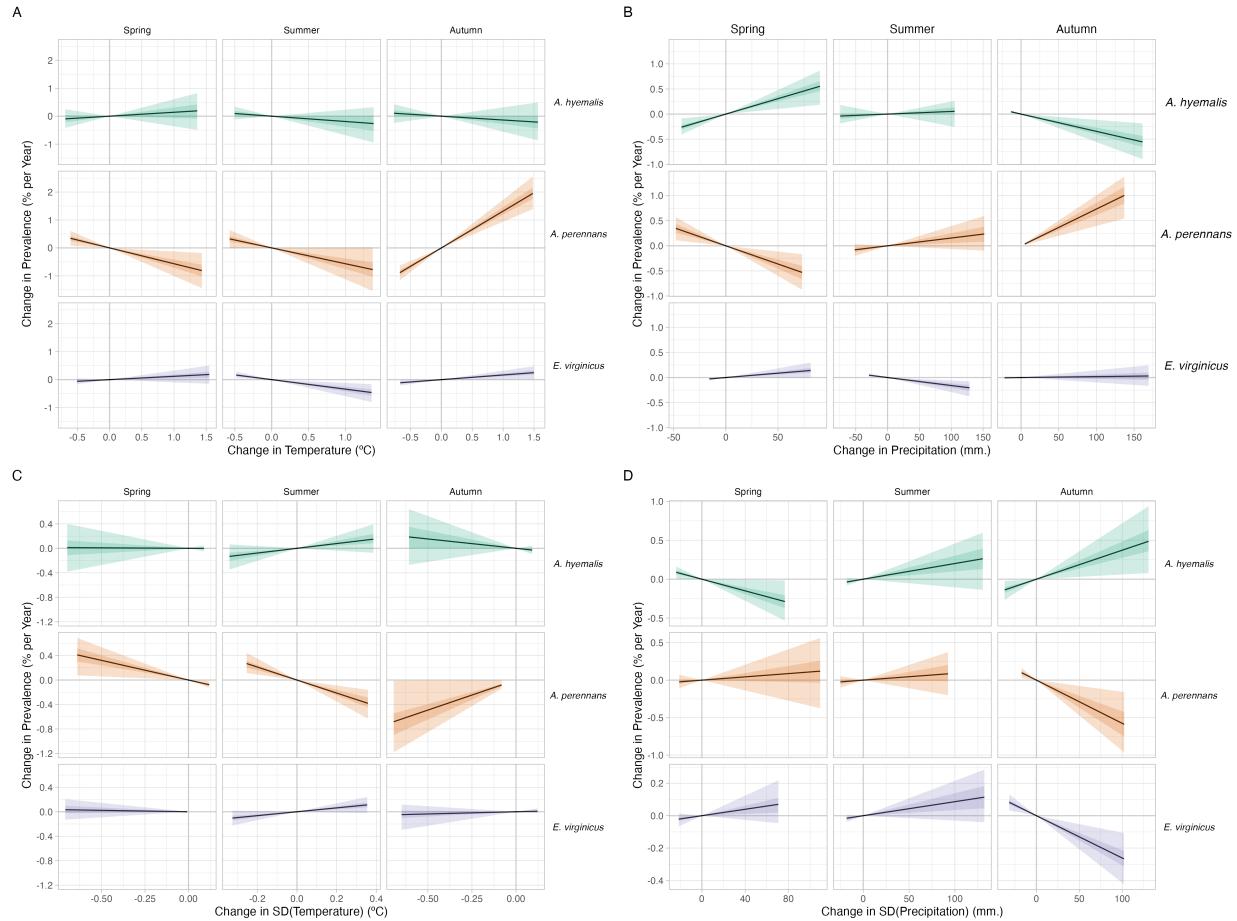


Figure 4: Relationships between changes in seasonal climate drivers and predicted marginal trends in endophyte prevalence. Lines show relationships between seasonal climate (A: mean temperature, B: cumulative precipitation, C: standard deviation in temperature, D: standard deviation in precipitation) and spatially-varying trends in endophyte prevalence for each host species, along with 50 and 95% CI.

359 *Performance on test data*

360 We found that model performance, as judged by AUC, was similar between historic herbarium
 361 specimens used as training data and the out-of-sample test data from contemporary surveys (0.79
 362 and 0.77 respectively; Fig. A5-A4). The model successfully captured broader regional trends
 363 in endophyte prevalence present in the contemporary survey data, such as decline endophyte

³⁶⁴ prevalence towards western longitudes in *A. hyemalis* (Fig. 5A). However, the contemporary
³⁶⁵ data contains additional variability at smaller scales not captured by our sampling of herbarium
³⁶⁶ specimens. We interpreted this to mean that the model captured regional spatial dynamics, but
³⁶⁷ underpredicts local scale dynamics. We discuss potential model improvements in the Discussion.

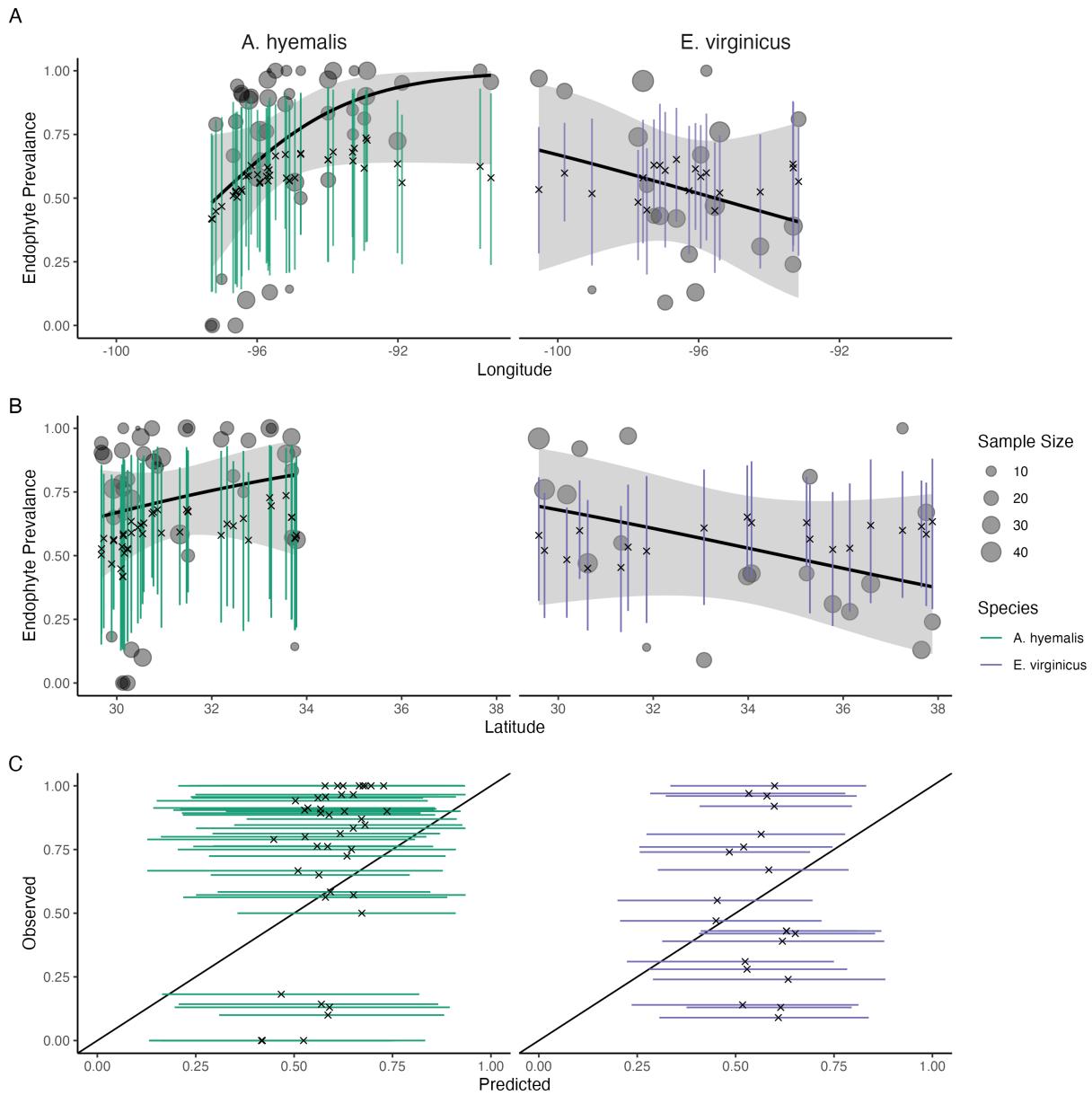


Figure 5: Predicted vs observed endophyte prevalence for contemporary test data. (A) The model, trained on historic herbarium collection data, performed modestly at predicting contemporary endophyte prevalence in *A. hyemalis*, as indicated by some overlap of predicted 95% CI with the 1:1 line, however contemporary test data generally had more variance between populations than model predictions. The model did recapitulate broader regional trends across (B) longitude and (C) latitude. Point size in panels B and C reflect sample sizes of contemporary endophyte population surveys.

368 *Assessing collector and scorer influences on predicted endophyte prevalence*

369 Our modeling effort quantified temporal and spatial trends in endophyte prevalence while ac-
370 counting for potential biases introduced by collectors and by individual scorers who quantified
371 endophyte presence/absence within specimens with the use of random effects. We found no
372 evidence that collector biases influenced our results. Collector random effects were consistently
373 small (Fig. A9), and models fit with and without this random effect provide qualitatively simi-
374 lar results. The identity of individual scorers did contribute to observed patterns in endophyte
375 prevalence. For example, 3 of the 25 scorers were more consistently likely than average to assign
376 positive endophyte status, as indicated by 95% credible intervals greater than zero) (Fig. A10).
377 This may have been driven by differences in scorers biases during the seed scoring process or
378 by unintended spatial clustering of the specimens scored by each scorer (Clayton et al., 1993;
379 Urdangarin et al., 2023). Interpreting our models with the inclusion of variance associated with
380 the scorer effect thus provides conservative estimates of the absolute magnitude of changes in
381 endophyte prevalence.

382 **Discussion**

383 Our examination of historic plant specimens revealed a cryptic biotic reponse to climate change.
384 For the three host species we examined, there have been clear increases in fungal endophyte
385 prevalence over the last two centuries. Increases in prevalence of *Epichloë*, which are vertically
386 transmitted, can potentially be interpreted as adaptive changes that improve the fitness of their
387 hosts under stressful conditions. This interpretation is in line with theory predicting that the
388 positive fitness feedback caused by vertical transmission leads beneficial symbionts to rise in
389 prevalence within a population (Fine, 1975). We found that trends in endophyte prevalence var-
390 ied across the distribution of each species in association with observed changes in climate drivers,
391 suggesting that the endophytes have contributed to host resilience under environmental change.
392 Taken together, this suggests a strengthening of the mutualism over the last two centuries.

393 Differences between the responses of each host species underscore that while all of these
394 C_3 grasses share similar broad-scale distributions, each engages in unique biotic interactions
395 and has unique niche requirements. We identified hotspots of change for *A. perennans*, which
396 experienced the strongest absolute changes in endophyte prevalence (Fig. 3). Declines in the
397 southern portion of its range and increases in the north suggest a potential poleward range shift
398 of endophytic plants. Based on previous work demonstrating that endophytes can shield their
399 hosts from drought stress (Decunta et al., 2021), we generally predicted that drought conditions
400 could be a driver of increasing endophyte prevalence. In contrast to this expectation, increasing
401 prevalence for this species was associated with increasing autumn temperature and precipitation
402 (Fig. 4). To our knowledge, the response of the symbiosis in *A. perennans* to drought has not been
403 examined experimentally, but in a greenhouse experiment, endophytes had a positive effect on
404 host reproduction under shaded, low-light conditions (Davitt et al., 2010). Our results also hint
405 that it may be useful to investigate whether lagged climate effects are important predictors of
406 host fitness in this system (Evers et al., 2021). Endophyte prevalence of the spring-flowering *A.*
407 *hyemalis* was most strongly linked to increasing variability in precipitation across summer and
408 autumn. Endophytes could be playing a role helping hosts weather autumn-season droughts
409 while the species is dormant. Previous work has demonstrated drought benefits in a greenhouse
410 manipulation with this species (Davitt et al., 2011), and early life stages may be particularly
411 vulnerable to prolonged droughts. For *E. virginicus*, which experienced the most modest changes
412 in endophyte prevalence overall, we only modest associations with changes in climate drivers.
413 Surveys by Sneck et al. (2017), used as part of the test data in this study, identified a drought index
414 (SPEI) that integrates precipitation with estimated evapotranspiration as an important predictor
415 of endophyte prevalence. *Epichloë* endophytes have also been connected to a suite of non-drought
416 related fitness benefits including herbivore protection (Brem and Leuchtmann, 2001), salinity
417 resistance (Wang et al., 2020), and mediation of the soil microbiome (Roberts and Ferraro, 2015)
418 These effects are potentially mediated by the diverse bioactive alkaloids and other signaling
419 compounds they produce (Saikonen et al., 2013). Increases in symbionts could be explained, at

420 least in part, by these diverse benefits that may help hosts weather a world made increasingly
421 stressful by changes in climate and other anthropogenically introduced stressors. While we show
422 consistent increasing trends in prevalence between the three species, the mechanisms that explain
423 these changes may be diverse and idiosyncratic.

424 Our spatially-explicit model predicted regions of both high and low endophyte prevalence,
425 suggesting that symbiotic and non-symbiotic host plants have overlapping, but non-identical
426 niche requirements. Endophytes fitness benefits potentially explain the spatial distribution of
427 prevalence by allowing their hosts to persist in environments where they otherwise could not
428 (Afkhami et al., 2014; Kazenel et al., 2015). For example, fitness benefits of the symbiosis could
429 explain historically low prevalence in *A. hyemalis* towards its western range edge coinciding with
430 a strong aridity gradient. Previous population surveys for endophytes, which were used as
431 test data for our model, found similar regional trends in prevalence for endophyte host species
432 (Rudgers and Swafford, 2009; Sneck et al., 2017). While the model recreated these large-scale
433 spatial trends, test data contained more population-to-population variability in prevalence. Val-
434 idating our model predictions in this way allows us to evaluate places to improve the model's
435 out-of-sample predictive ability, which will be particularly important for predicting host and
436 symbiont niche-shifts under future climate change. Lack of information on local variability may
437 simply be a feature of data derived from herbarium specimens. They are samples from local pop-
438 ulations, but they are single specimens that are aggregated over in broad-scale model estimates.
439 Poor predictive ability at local scales in this grass-endophyte system is not surprising, as previ-
440 ous studies have found that local variation, even to the scale of hundreds of meters can structure
441 endophyte-host niches (Kazenel et al., 2015). Other studies have found factors including land-
442 use history (Vikuk et al., 2019) and the biotic environment, including herbivory (Rudgers et al.,
443 2016), and host genotype Sneck et al. (2017), to be important predictors of endophyte ecology.
444 Incorporating available climatic and soil layers as covariates is an obvious first step that could
445 improve predictions. Another important step would be integrating data from local and regional
446 scales through modeling to constrain estimates of local and regional variation. These steps will

bridge gaps that often exist between large but broad bioclimatic and biodiversity data and small but local data on biotic interactions, and move towards the goal of predicting the dynamics of microbial symbioses under climate change (Isaac et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2019).

Our analysis advances the use of herbarium specimens in global change biology in two ways. First and foremost, this is the first study to link long-term changes in microbial symbioses to changes in climate using specimens from natural history collections. The responses of microbial symbioses are a rich target for future studies within museum specimens, particularly those that take advantage of advances in sequencing technology. While we used relatively coarse presence/absence data based on fungal morphology, other studies have examined historic plant microbiomes using molecular sequencing and sophisticated bioinformatics techniques, but these studies have so far been limited to relatively few specimens at limited spatial extents (Bieker et al., 2020; Bradshaw et al., 2021; Gross et al., 2021; Heberling and Burke, 2019; Yoshida et al., 2015). Continued advances in capturing historic DNA and in filtering out potential contamination during specimen storage (Bakker et al., 2020; Daru et al., 2019; Raxworthy and Smith, 2021) will be imperative in the effort to scale up these efforts. This scaling up will be essential to be able to quantify changes not just in the prevalence of symbionts, but also in symbionts' intraspecific variation and evolutionary responses to climate change, as well as in changes in the wider microbial community. Answering these questions as well as the unknown questions that future researchers may ask also reiterates the value in capturing meta-information during ongoing digitization efforts at herbaria around the world and during the accession of newly collected specimens (Edwards et al.; Lendemer et al., 2020). Second, we accounted for several potential biases in the data observation process that may be common to many collections-based research questions by using a spatially-explicit random effects model. Spatial autocorrelation (Willems et al., 2022), potential biases introduced by the sampling habits of collectors (Daru et al., 2018), and variation between contemporary researchers during the collection of trait data, if not corrected for could lead to over-confident inference about the strength and direction of historic change. Previous studies that have quantified the effects of collector biases typically find them

474 to be small (Davis et al., 2015; Meineke et al., 2019), and we similarly did not find that collector
475 has a strong effect on the results of our analysis.

476 Ultimately, a central goal of global change biology is to generate predictive insights into the
477 future of natural systems. While this survey of historic endophyte prevalence is necessarily cor-
478 relative, it serves as a foundation to develop better predictive models of the response of microbial
479 symbioses to climate change. Combining the insights from this type of regional-scale survey with
480 field experiments and physiological data could be invaluable. While we found that climate is
481 strongly correlated with endophytes' temporal responses, we do not know why trends in preva-
482 lence were weak in some areas or how endophytes would respond to more extreme changes in
483 climate. For example, transplanting symbiotic and non-symbiotic plants beyond the range edge
484 of *A. hyemalis* could tell us whether persistent low endophyte prevalence in that area is a result of
485 environmental conditions that lead the symbiosis to negative fitness consequences, or is a result
486 of some historical contingency or dispersal limitation that has thus far limited the presence of
487 symbiotic hosts from a region where they would otherwise flourish and provide resilience. While
488 we observed evidence of mutualism resilience, more extreme environmental changes than those
489 observed in our study could potentially push one or both partners beyond their physiological
490 limit, leading to the collapse of the mutualism. Our analysis thus far is agnostic to changes in the
491 distributions of hosts. Mechanistic models could connect the responses of both host and sym-
492 bionts to abiotic climate drivers integrating dispersal processes. Beyond host-microbe symbioses,
493 building these types of models would work towards quantitatively attributing biotic responses
494 to anthropogenically driven climate change, similar to methods in climate science and economics
495 (Carleton and Hsiang, 2016; Stott et al., 2010).

496

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505 **Statement of Authorship**

506 J.C.F. contributed to research conception, data collection, data analysis, and led manuscript draft-
507 ing. J.M. contributed to data analysis and manuscript revisions. T.E.X.M. contributed
508 to research conception, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript revisions.

509 **Data and Code Availability**

510 Data from this publication will be made publically available at the time of publication and upon
511 request. Code for analyses can be found through: <https://github.com/joshuacfowler/EndoHerbarium>

Appendix A

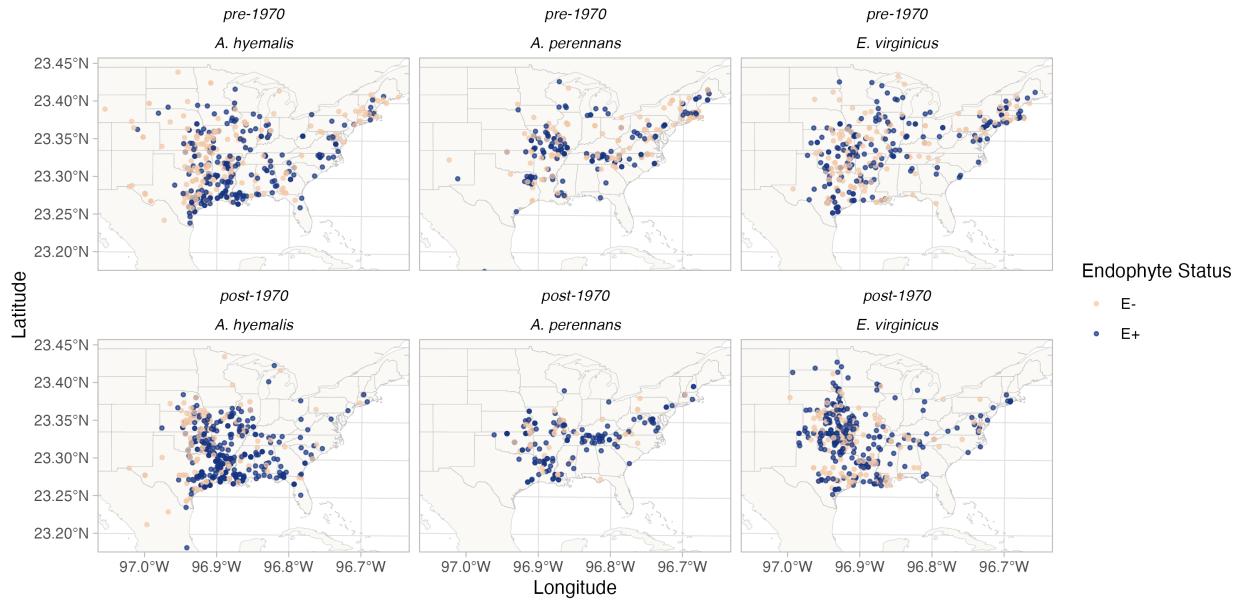


Figure A1: Endophyte presence/absence in specimens of each host species. Points show collection locations colored according to whether the specimen contained endophytes (E+; blue points) or did not contain endophytes (E-, tan points) and are faceted based on collection period.

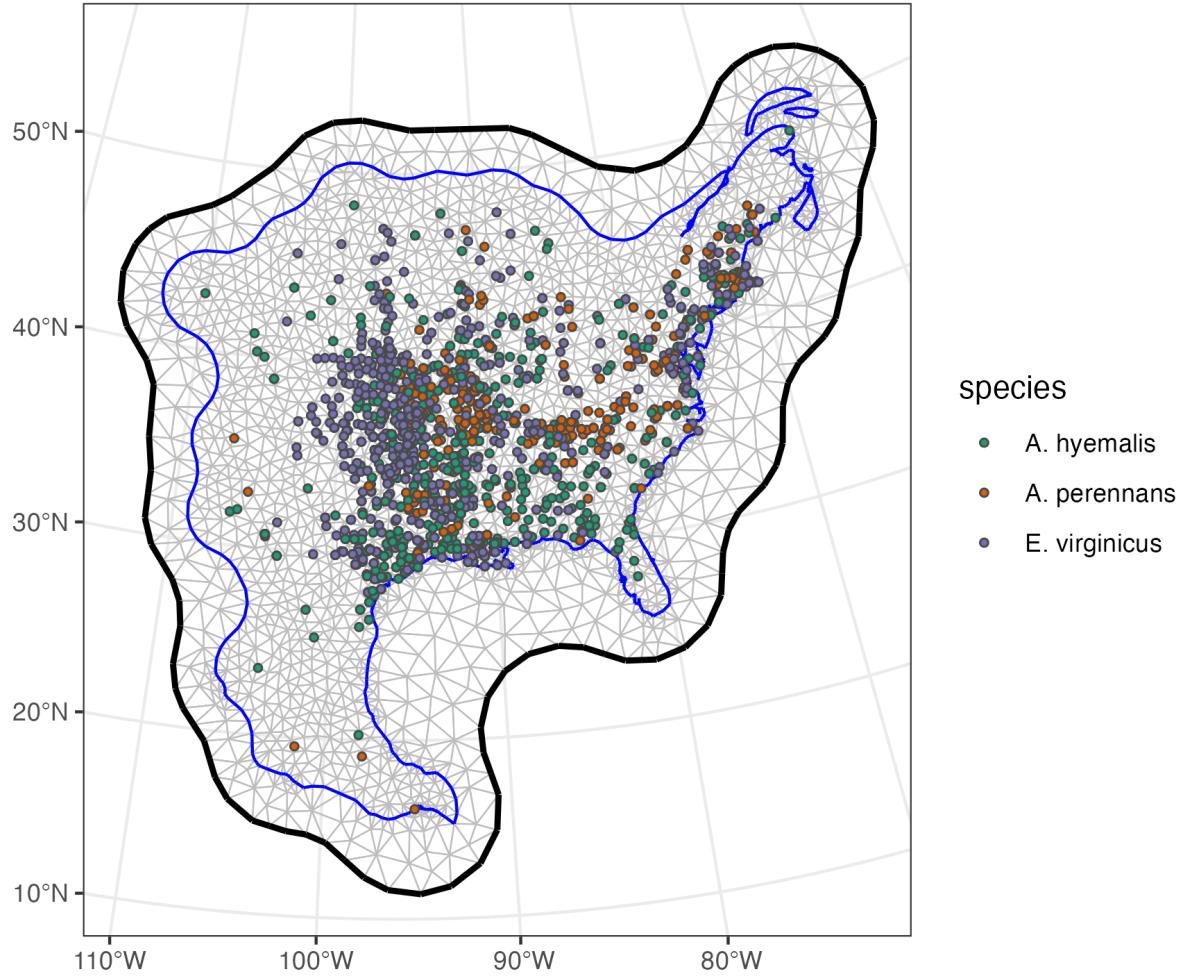


Figure A2: Triangulation mesh used to estimate spatial dependence between data points. Grey lines indicate edges of triangles used to define distances between observations. Colored points indicate locations of sampled herbarium specimens for each host species, and the blue line shows the convex hull and coastline used to define the edge of the mesh around the data points. The thick black line shows the convex hull defining a buffer space around the edge of the mesh to reduce the influence of edge effects on model estimates.

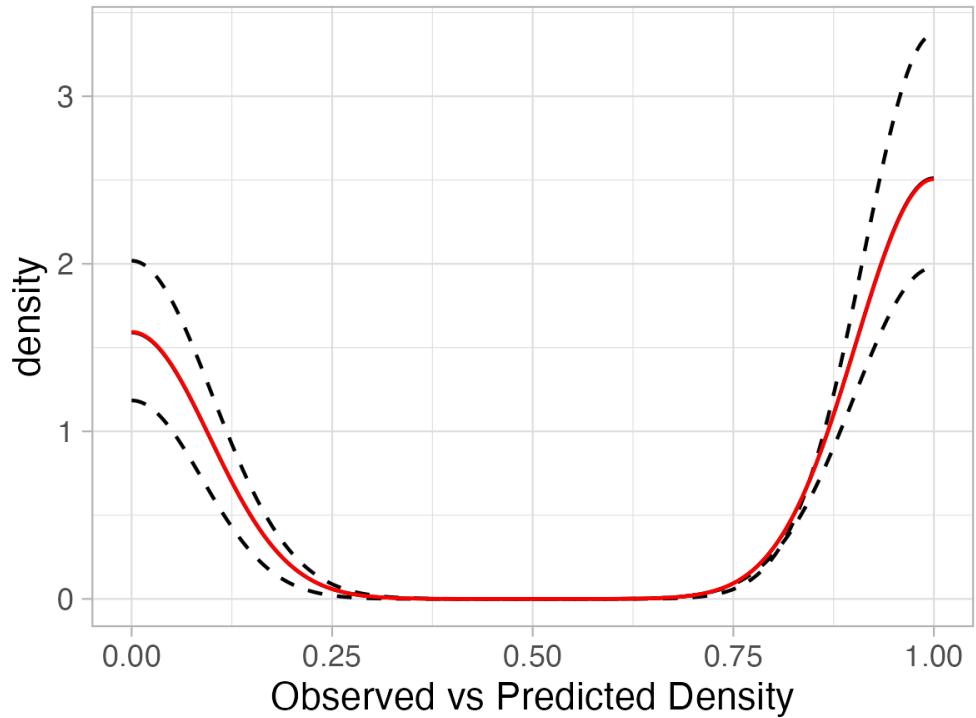


Figure A3: Consistency between real data and simulated values indicate that the fitted model accurately describes the data. Graph shows density curves for the observed data (red) along with the mean(solid) and 95% CI (dashed) of simulated values (black).

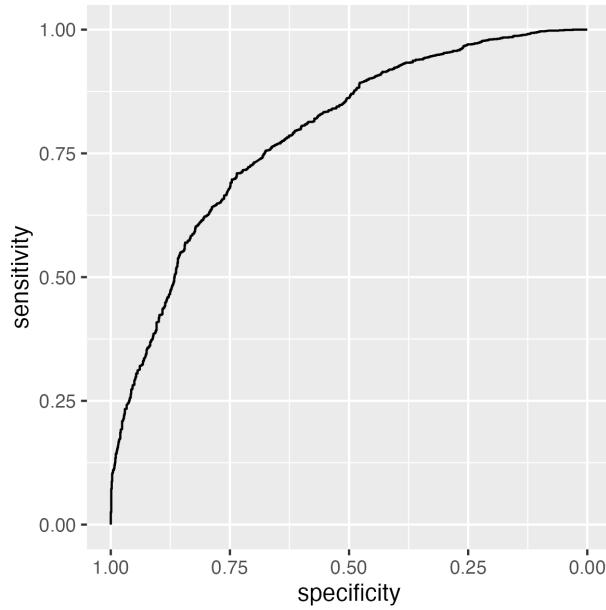


Figure A4: ROC plot showing model performance classifying observations according to endophyte status within the in-sample data. The curves show adequate model performance for observed data. The AUC value is 0.79.

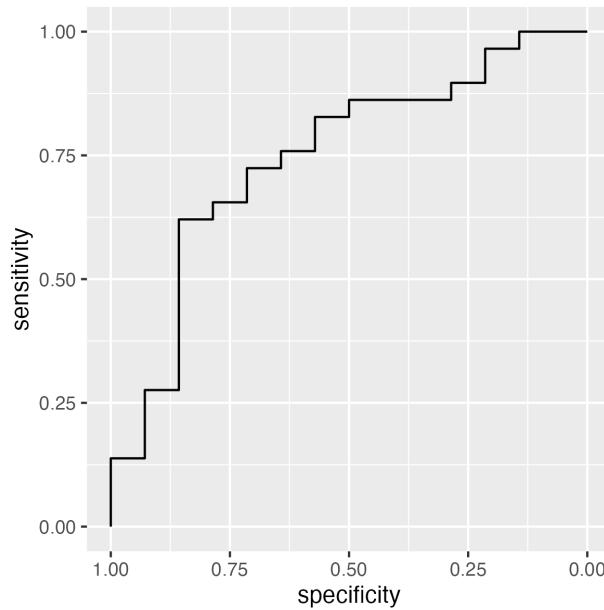


Figure A5: ROC plot showing model performance classifying observations according to endophyte status within the out-of-sample data. The curves show adequate model performance for test data. The AUC value is 0.77.

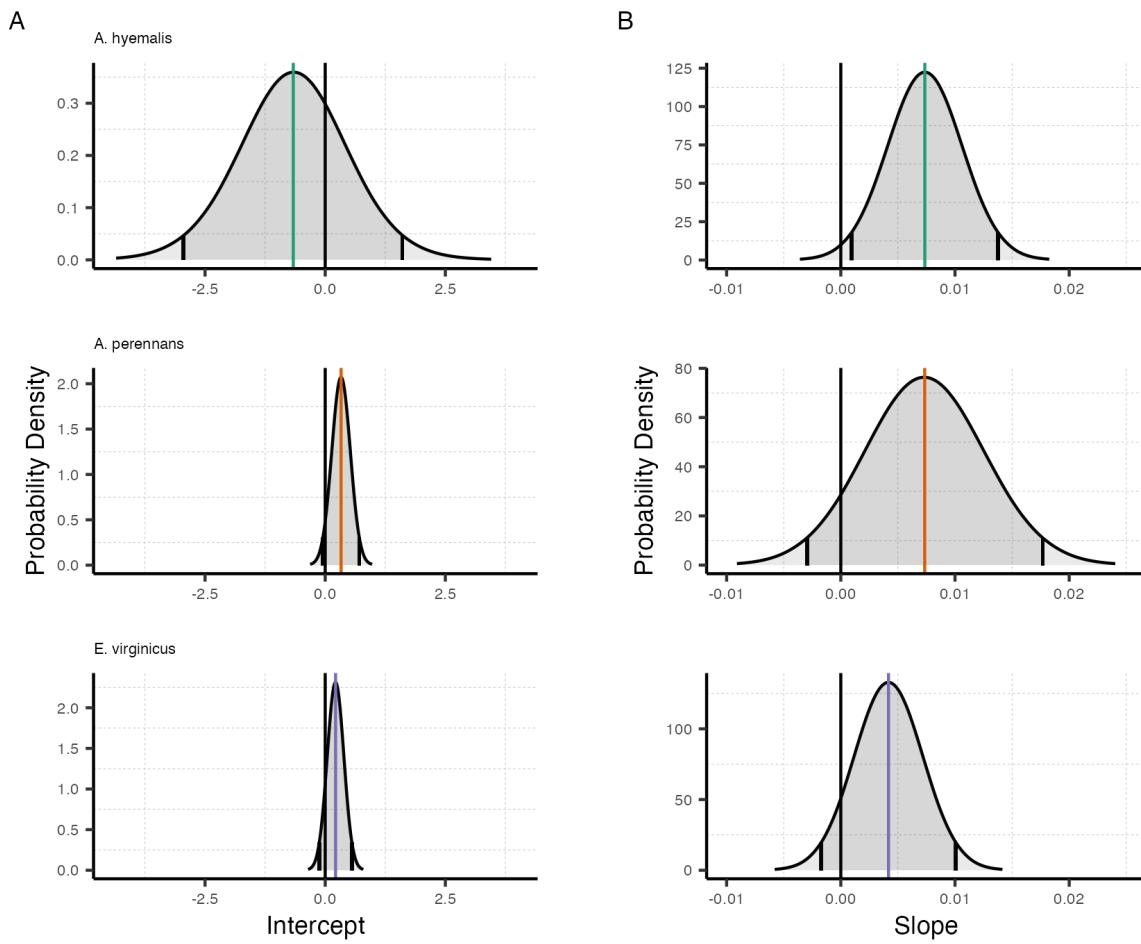


Figure A6: Density curves show the probability density along with mean (colored line) and 95% CI (black lines) for the (A) intercept and (B) slope terms, **A** and **T** respectively. Colors represent each host species

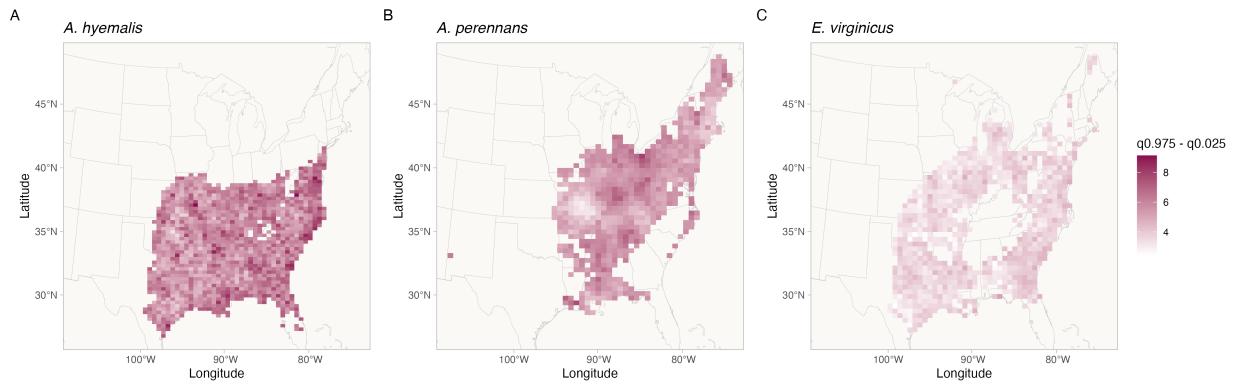


Figure A7: Shading represents the range of the 95% posterior credible interval for spatially varying slopes, τ .

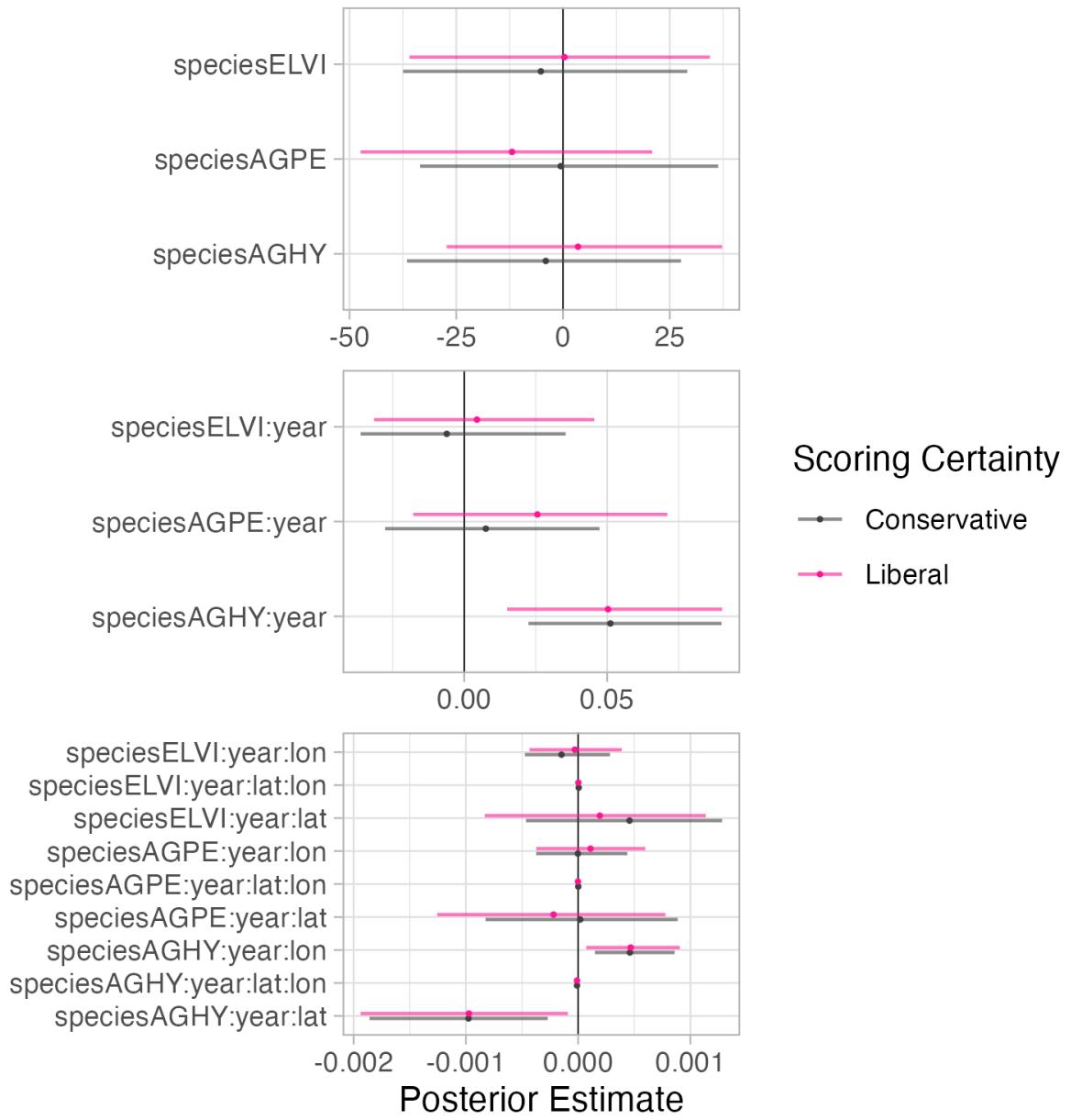


Figure A8: Comparison of posterior estimates of fixed effects when using Liberal or Conservative endophyte scores.

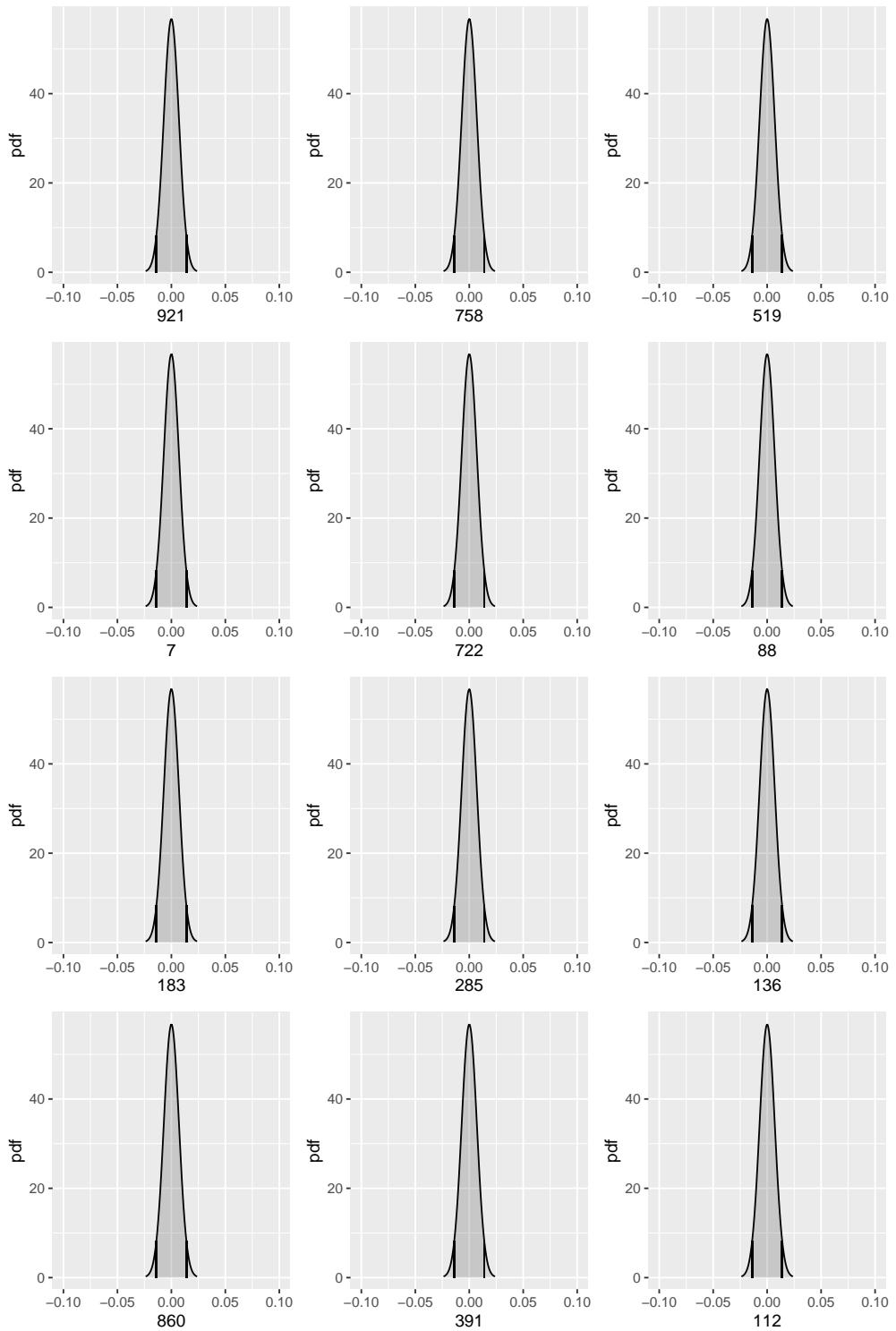


Figure A9: Posterior estimates of collector random effects. Density curves show the posterior estimate along lines indicating the 95% CI for 12 randomly selected collectors.

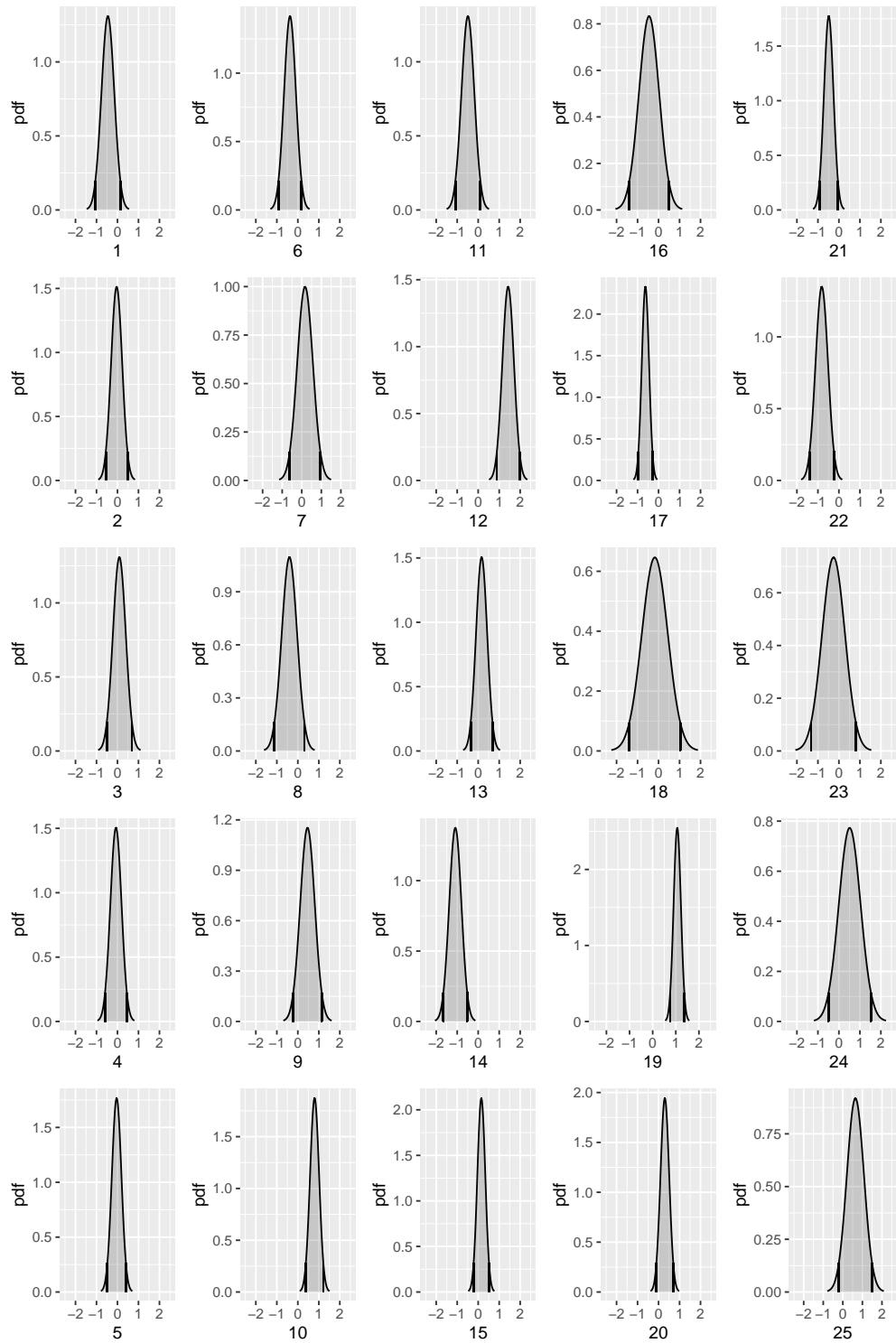


Figure A10: Posterior estimates of scorer random effects. Density curves show the posterior estimate along lines indicating the 95% CI for 25 scorers.

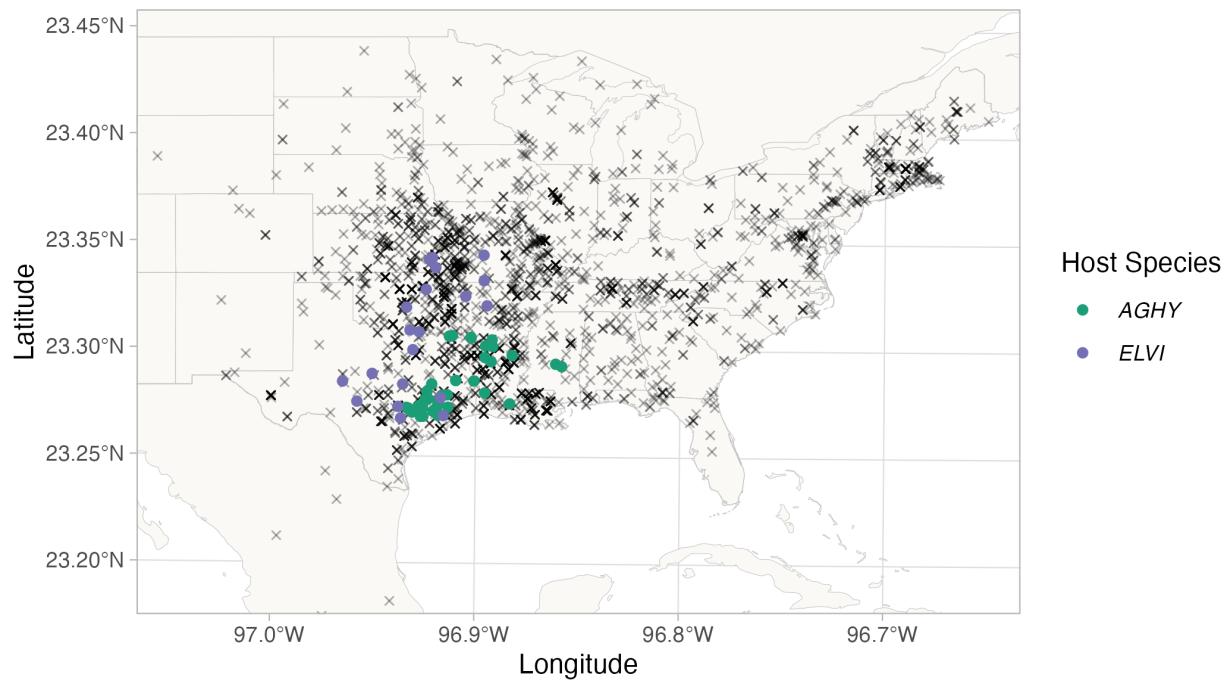


Figure A11: Locations of contemporary surveys of endophytes in *A. hyemalis* used as "test" data (red points), relative to the historical collection data (black crosses).

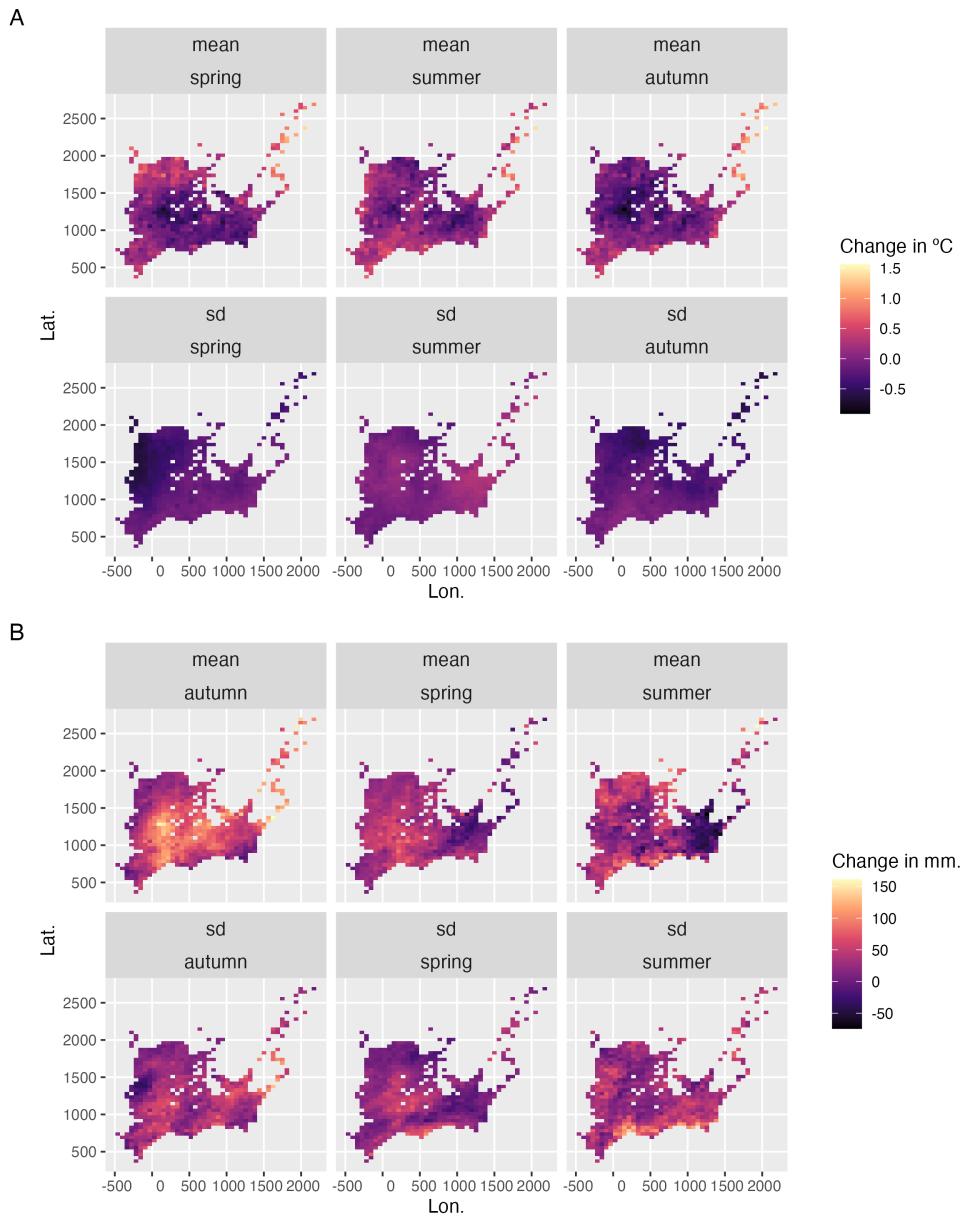


Figure A12: Change in seasonal climate variables between the periods 1895-1925 and 1990-2020. Color represents change in (A) seasonal temperature and (B) seasonal precipitation. Maps show pixels covering the modeled distribution of *A. hyemalis* used in post-hoc climate correlation analysis.

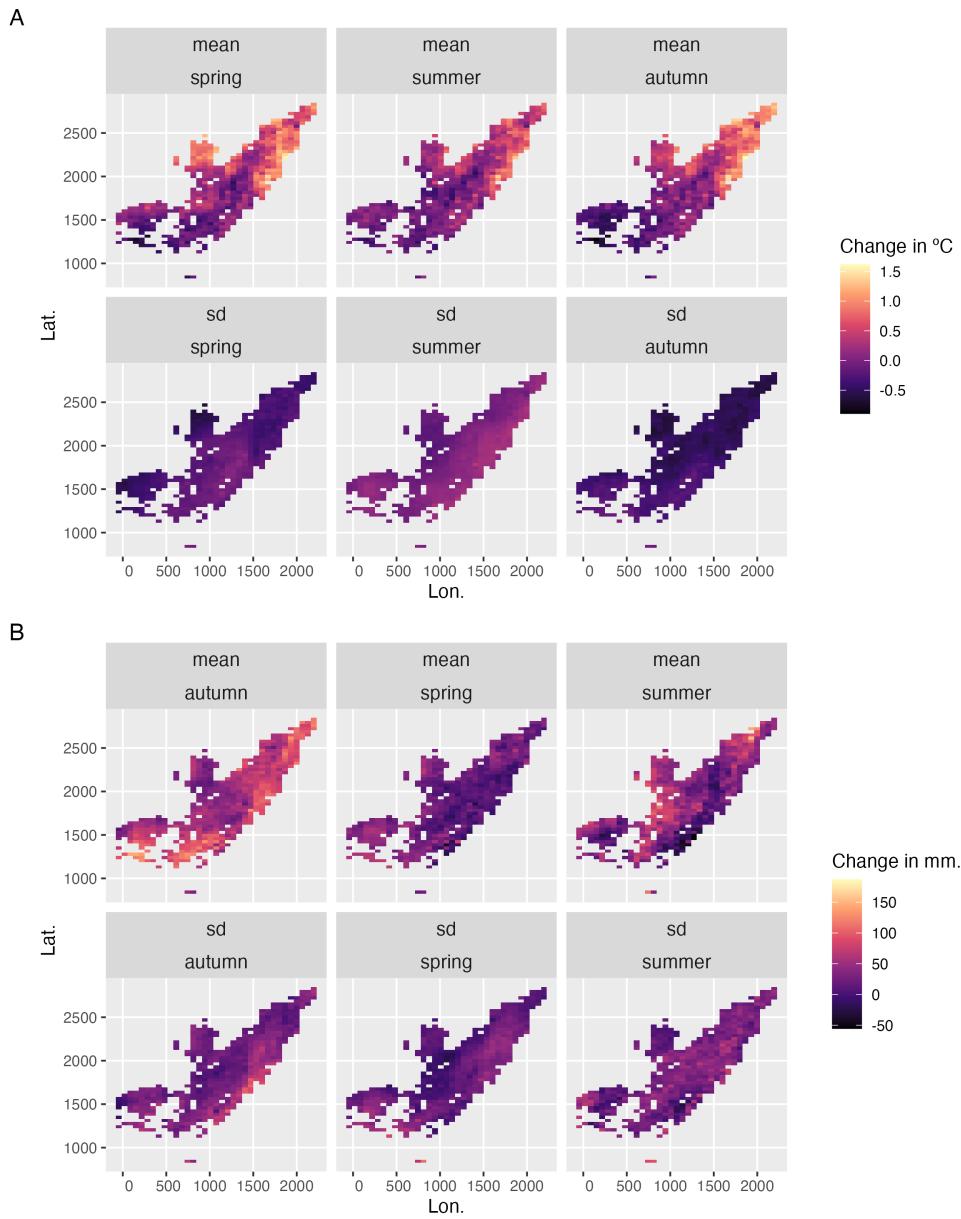


Figure A13: Change in seasonal climate variables between the periods 1895-1925 and 1990-2020.

Color represents change in (A) seasonal temperature and (B) seasonal precipitation. Maps show pixels covering the modeled distribution of *A. perennans* used in post-hoc climate correlation analysis.

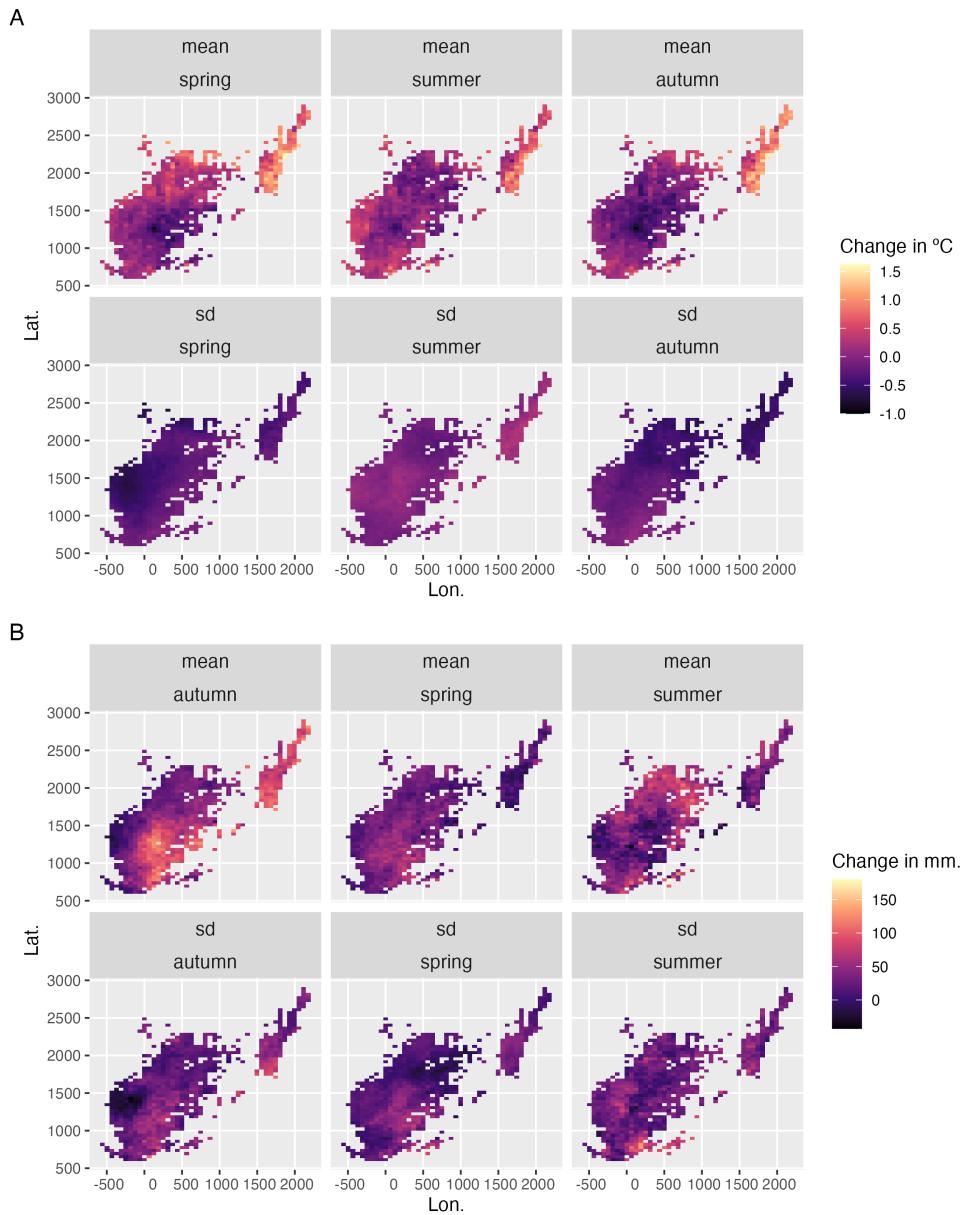


Figure A14: Change in seasonal climate variables between the periods 1895-1925 and 1990-2020. Color represents change in (A) seasonal temperature and (B) seasonal precipitation. Maps show pixels covering the modeled distribution of *E. virginicus* used in post-hoc climate correlation analysis.

Table A1: Summary of herbarium samples across collections

Herbarium Collection	AGHY	AGPE	ELVI
Botanical Research Institute of Texas	341	189	176
Louisiana State University	71	–	61
Mercer Botanic Garden	3	–	6
Missouri Botanic Garden	78	39	31
Texas A&M	73	–	49
University of Kansas	134	–	20
University of Oklahoma	65	30	91
University of Texas & Lundell	169	41	99
Oklahoma State University	30	–	69

513

Supporting Methods

514

ODMAP Protocol

515 **Overview**

516 **Model purpose:** Mapping current distribution of epichloë host species.

517 **Target species:** *Agrostis hyemalis*, *Agrostis perennans*, and *Elymus virginicus*.

518 **Study area:** Eastern North America

519 **Spatial extent:** -125.0208, -66.47917, 24.0625, 49.9375 (xmin, xmax, ymin, ymax).

520 **Spatial resolution:** 0.04166667, 0.04166667 (x, y).

521 **Temporal extent:** 1990 to 2020.

522 **Boundary:** Natural.

523 **Data**

524 **Observation type:** Occurrence records from Global Biodiversity Information Facility and herbar-

525 ium collection across eastern North America. We used 713 occurrences records for *Agrostis hye-*

526 *malis*, 656 occurrence records for *Agrostis perennans* and 2338 for *Elymus virginicus*.

527 **Response data type:** occurrence record, presence-only.

528 **Coordinate reference system:** WGS84 coordinate reference system (EPSG:4326 code)

529 **Climatic data:** raster data extracted from PRISM

530 [Model](#)

531 **Model assumption:** We assumed that the target species are at equilibrium with their environment.

533 **Algorithms:** Maximum entropy (maxent)

534 **Workflow:** We described the workflow in the method section of the manuscript.

535 **Software:** All statistics were performed using Maxent 3.3.4 and R4.3.1 with packages terra, usdm, spThin and dismo.

537 **Code availability:** Will be available upon acceptance

538 **Data availability:** Will be available upon acceptance

539 [Assessment](#)

540 We used AUC to test model performance.

541 [Prediction](#)

542 We predicted the probability of presence of the host species as a binary maps (presence or absence)

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