

# Spatial and temporal shifts in photoperiod with climate change

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**Running head** Shifts in photoperiod with climate change

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## **1 Abstract**

2 Climate change causes both temporal (e.g., advancing spring phenology) and geographic (e.g., range ex-  
3 pansion poleward) species shifts, which affect the photoperiod experienced at critical developmental stages  
4 ('experienced photoperiod'). As photoperiod is a common trigger of seasonal biological responses—affecting  
5 woody plant spring phenology in 87% of reviewed studies that manipulated photoperiod—shifts in expe-  
6 rienced photoperiod may have important implications for future plant distributions and fitness. However,  
7 photoperiod has not been a focus of climate change forecasting to date, especially for early-season ('spring')  
8 events, often assumed to be driven by temperature. Synthesizing published studies, we find that impacts on  
9 experienced photoperiod from temporal shifts could be orders of magnitude larger than from spatial shifts (1.6  
10 hours of change for expected temporal versus one minute for latitudinal shifts). Incorporating these effects  
11 into forecasts is possible by leveraging existing experimental data; we show that results from growth chamber  
12 experiments on woody plants often have data relevant for climate change impacts, and suggest that shifts  
13 in experienced photoperiod may increasingly constrain responses to additional warming. Further, combining  
14 modeling approaches and empirical work on when, where, and how much photoperiod affects phenology could  
15 rapidly advance our understanding and predictions of future spatio-temporal shifts from climate change.

## <sup>16</sup> Introduction

<sup>17</sup> Shifts in phenology—i.e., the timing of biological events, including budburst, leafout, and flowering in plants,  
<sup>18</sup> as well as bird arrival, egg hatching and myriad other biological activities—are some of the most widely  
<sup>19</sup> documented signals of climate change. Spring phenology in particular has shifted, occurring earlier as tem-  
<sup>20</sup> peratures warm, with average shifts of 1.2 to 5.1 days earlier per decade (Bradley et al., 1999; Parmesan  
<sup>21</sup> and Yohe, 2003; Poloczanska et al., 2013; Root et al., 2003) or 1.3 to 5.6 days earlier per °C of warming  
<sup>22</sup> (Polgar et al., 2013; Wolkovich et al., 2012). These changes are some of the largest climate change-induced  
<sup>23</sup> shifts observed, with early spring phenology shifting more rapidly than later season phenology in most cases  
<sup>24</sup> (Bradley et al., 1999; Menzel et al., 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Phenology is not controlled solely by temperature, however. Photoperiod is also a critical cue, signaling  
<sup>26</sup> changes in growth and reproduction across diverse species (e.g., Flynn and Wolkovich, 2018; Lagercrantz,  
<sup>27</sup> 2009; Bradshaw and Holzapfel, 2007; Howe et al., 1996; Solbakken et al., 1994). Even spring phenology, which  
<sup>28</sup> is highly temperature-sensitive, is thought to be determined interactively by photoperiod and temperature  
<sup>29</sup> (Fu et al., 2019, see also Box 1). Photoperiod is a useful cue to synchronize activities with seasonal climatic  
<sup>30</sup> changes (e.g., Singh et al., 2017; Basler and Körner, 2012; Hsu et al., 2011) because it is consistent across  
<sup>31</sup> years, especially compared to other cues such as temperature and precipitation (Saikkonen et al., 2012).  
<sup>32</sup> For example, relying on a threshold photoperiod (see Table 1), rather than temperature alone, may prevent  
<sup>33</sup> woody plants from leafing out during ‘false spring’ events (unusually warm periods during winter and early  
<sup>34</sup> spring that are followed by a return to cold temperatures, Gu et al., 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Recent studies suggest that photoperiod cues may eventually restrict phenology in a warmer world. With  
<sup>36</sup> additional climate change, photoperiod may limit phenological shifts of certain species such that they will  
<sup>37</sup> not track rising temperatures (Fu et al., 2015; Way and Montgomery, 2015; Basler and Körner, 2012; Körner  
<sup>38</sup> and Basler, 2010a). The idea of photoperiod constraints is controversial, however, as other studies suggest  
<sup>39</sup> that photoperiod will not slow responses to warming for most species (Chuine et al., 2010; Zohner et al.,  
<sup>40</sup> 2016). Resolving this debate requires a greater understanding of the extent to which daylength constrains  
<sup>41</sup> phenology and how rapidly photoperiod responses can acclimate or adapt to new environmental conditions  
<sup>42</sup> (Grevstad and Coop, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Perhaps because of these variable and uncertain responses, photoperiod is often not included in forecasts of  
<sup>44</sup> biological responses to climate change, especially in the spring, even though it is known to be an important  
<sup>45</sup> cue for biological activity (but see Duputié et al., 2015; Grevstad and Coop, 2015; Caffarra et al., 2011a).

<sup>46</sup> The exclusion of photoperiod may be problematic: although photoperiod itself is stable over time, the  
<sup>47</sup> photoperiod that species *experience* at critical developmental stages (henceforth, ‘experienced photoperiod’),  
<sup>48</sup> as they undergo climate change-induced shifts in space and time, is likely to be much less stable (Fig. 1).  
<sup>49</sup> This shift in experienced photoperiod extends to distributional shifts due to climate change, as many species’  
<sup>50</sup> distributions have moved poleward and upward in elevation (i.e., range shifts, Chen et al., 2011; Harsch et al.,  
<sup>51</sup> 2009; Parmesan, 2006; Peñuelas and Boada, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> The implications of potential climate change-induced shifts in experienced photoperiod are unclear, as the  
<sup>53</sup> magnitudes of potential shifts have not been described. Effects of photoperiod shifts may be relatively  
<sup>54</sup> minor, especially compared to the substantial year-to-year variation in experienced photoperiod (Fig. 2).  
<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, photoperiod may begin to constrain species’ responses to climate change (Huffeldt, 2020; Fu  
<sup>56</sup> et al., 2015; Way and Montgomery, 2015; Basler and Körner, 2012; Körner and Basler, 2010a).

<sup>57</sup> Here, we ask:

- <sup>58</sup> 1. How will climate change alter experienced photoperiod for plants?
- <sup>59</sup> 2. What are the implications of altered experienced photoperiods for plant responses to climate change?
- <sup>60</sup> 3. Can researchers apply data from experiments that alter photoperiod to improve forecasts of biological  
<sup>61</sup> implications of climate change?

<sup>62</sup> Our questions are broadly relevant for diverse species and seasonal events. We use a case study of spring  
<sup>63</sup> woody plant phenology to illustrate several of our points (Boxes 1 & 2). We focus on spring events, as  
<sup>64</sup> phenology during this time is one of the most widely observed and rapidly changing biological responses to  
<sup>65</sup> climate change (Parmesan, 2006). In addition, the role of photoperiod is less understood in spring phenology  
<sup>66</sup> compared with autumn phenophases (reviewed in, e.g., Azeez and Sane, 2015; Gallinat et al., 2015; Gill  
<sup>67</sup> et al., 2015; Lagercrantz, 2009; Allona et al., 2008), but recent studies showing declines in responses of spring  
<sup>68</sup> budburst to warming (e.g., Fu et al., 2019; Güsewell et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2010) suggest that photoperiod  
<sup>69</sup> constraints may be imminent.

## 70 How will climate change alter experienced photoperiod for plants?

71 Species experience different photoperiod regimes depending on their location on Earth, the seasonal timing  
72 of their activity, and inter-annual variation in climate (Fig. 1). Consider, as an example, the daylength  
73 experienced by plants on the date that spring ‘green-up’ occurs. We use green-up date as an example because  
74 it represents an important spring event, signaling the start of the growing season, and global estimates are  
75 available. Photoperiod on green-up date varies with latitude (Fig. 2A), in part because latitudinal variation  
76 in green-up date, which occurs earlier toward the equator and later toward the poles, is strongly driven by  
77 climatic differences that affect phenology, and in part because of latitudinal variation in photoperiod (e.g., at  
78 the poles, the daylength at the summer solstice is 24 hours; see also Fig. 1). (See “Quantifying and mapping  
79 differences in green-up across the United States and Europe” in the *Methods S1* for additional details of this  
80 analysis.)

81 Some consistent patterns in experienced photoperiod are apparent at a broad scale. Across years, photoperiod  
82 at green-up is longer toward the poles (i.e., on the day of year when green-up occurs close to the north pole,  
83 daylength approaches 24 hours in both an average year, Fig. 2A, and in an early year, Fig. 2B). In addition,  
84 green-up does not appear to occur at daylengths less than 10 hours across North America and Europe.

85 Despite these consistent broad-scale patterns, there is also strong spatiotemporal variation in experienced  
86 photoperiod across years. Comparing the photoperiod at green-up in an ‘early’ versus an ‘average’ year (Fig.  
87 2A,B) shows that experienced photoperiod at green-up can vary by two to three hours from one year to the  
88 next in the same location (Fig. 2C).

89 Against this existing background variation, climate change will cause shifts in experienced photoperiod as  
90 species respond to warming temperatures. Spatial shifts in species’ ranges and temporal shifts in phenology  
91 will alter the photoperiods experienced by organisms with future climate change. The magnitude of these  
92 alterations will vary depending on the organism’s location and the type of shift(s) it undergoes. For example,  
93 poleward shifts in species’ ranges cause plants to experience a wider range of daylength throughout the year  
94 (Fig. 1), which may pose challenges to organisms undergoing temperature-induced poleward range shifts  
95 (Huffeldt, 2020). Elevational shifts, in contrast, cause minimal change to the range of daylength throughout  
96 the year.

<sup>97</sup> To date, most focus on shifts in photoperiod with climate change has centered on how spatial range shifts  
<sup>98</sup> will affect photoperiod (e.g., Huffeldt, 2020; Way and Montgomery, 2015; Saikkonen et al., 2012). How-  
<sup>99</sup> ever, shifting phenology—especially the large changes seen in spring phenology—will also alter experienced  
<sup>100</sup> photoperiod, because of the seasonal patterns of daylength (Fig. 1).

<sup>101</sup> Current data suggest that temporal shifts will yield much larger changes in experienced photoperiod than  
<sup>102</sup> latitudinal shifts (Fig. 1). Consider a tree species that bursts its buds at latitude  $45^{\circ}$ , on average around  
<sup>103</sup> day of year 91 (April 2), when daylength is 12.8 hours. If the species' phenology shifts 30 days earlier over  
<sup>104</sup> the next century (i.e., a rate of 3 days per decade, as has been observed, Parmesan and Yohe, 2003), it will  
<sup>105</sup> experience a daylength that is 1.6 hours shorter. This 1.6 hour decrease in daylength is equivalent to moving  
<sup>106</sup> up  $28.5^{\circ}$  in latitude on this day of year. However, if the same species shifts its range up in latitude  $0.5^{\circ}$  (i.e.,  
<sup>107</sup> 60 km over the next century, comparable to observed rates, Chen et al., 2011; Parmesan and Yohe, 2003), it  
<sup>108</sup> will experience a daylength that differs by less than a minute on the same day of year.

<sup>109</sup> Temporal shifts in temperate areas are likely to yield larger changes in experienced photoperiod for autumn  
<sup>110</sup> phenology, as well. Consider again the tree at latitude  $45^{\circ}$ , which may senescence on day of year 300 (October  
<sup>111</sup> 27), on average (Gill et al., 2015), when daylength is 10.5 hours. If senescence shifts 33 days later over the  
<sup>112</sup> next century (i.e., a rate of 3.3 days per decade, as has been observed, Gill et al., 2015), it will experience,  
<sup>113</sup> at the end of the growing season, a daylength that is 1.3 hours shorter. This is equivalent to moving up  $16^{\circ}$   
<sup>114</sup> in latitude on this day of year.

## <sup>115</sup> **What are the implications of altered photoperiods for plant re- 116 responses to climate change?**

<sup>117</sup> Climate change alters the experienced photoperiod, but the implications of this change for plants are currently  
<sup>118</sup> unclear, in part, because phenology both affects and is affected by experienced photoperiod: climate change-  
<sup>119</sup> induced shifts in phenology alter experienced photoperiod, which in turn affects phenology. Daylength,  
<sup>120</sup> often in combination with temperature, can play a role in controlling critical biological functions, including  
<sup>121</sup> vegetative growth, cell elongation, budburst, and flowering in plants (Fu et al., 2019; Heide and Sønsteby,

<sup>122</sup> 2012; Heide, 2011; Hsu et al., 2011; Sidaway-Lee et al., 2010; Mimura and Aitken, 2007; Linkosalo and  
<sup>123</sup> Lechowicz, 2006; Erwin, 1998; Ashby, 1962). Climate change-induced shifts in photoperiod are therefore  
<sup>124</sup> likely to alter these functions.

<sup>125</sup> Growth chamber studies show that the magnitude of daylength shifts expected with climate change (i.e., 1-2  
<sup>126</sup> hours of difference in daylength with temporal shifts over the next century) are substantial enough to affect  
<sup>127</sup> spring phenology in trees (Table S1). The direction and magnitude of responses will vary, however, because  
<sup>128</sup> of variation in photoperiod sensitivity, and because photoperiod often interacts with other environmental  
<sup>129</sup> drivers, such as temperature, to affect phenology (Box 1).

<sup>130</sup> The climate change-induced trend toward ever-earlier springs means that experienced photoperiod may in-  
<sup>131</sup> creasingly approach threshold photoperiods (see Table 1) for many species, potentially constraining their  
<sup>132</sup> ability to respond to additional warming (Fu et al., 2019; Vitasse and Basler, 2013; Körner and Basler,  
<sup>133</sup> 2010a; Morin et al., 2010; Nienstaedt, 1966). Interactions between photoperiod and temperature may there-  
<sup>134</sup> fore result in muted phenological shifts, compared to what would be expected based on temperature change  
<sup>135</sup> alone (Körner and Basler, 2010a; Mimura and Aitken, 2007; Wareing, 1956). This has been a topic of much  
<sup>136</sup> interest in the climate change literature because it predicts that as photoperiod becomes limiting, average  
<sup>137</sup> trends of earlier spring phenology (Polgar et al., 2013; Peñuelas et al., 2002; Menzel, 2000) and later autumn  
<sup>138</sup> senescence (Gill et al., 2015; Richardson et al., 2018) with warming may stop.

<sup>139</sup> A challenge in predicting if or when the trends of shifting phenology with warming may slow or stop abruptly  
<sup>140</sup> is the wide range of observed photoperiod sensitivity (see Table 1) across events (e.g., spring versus fall events  
<sup>141</sup> Mimura and Aitken, 2010), species (Flynn and Wolkovich, 2018; Zohner et al., 2016; Sanz-Perez et al., 2009),  
<sup>142</sup> latitudes (Ettinger et al., 2020; Partanen et al., 2005; Johnsen and Seiler, 1996), populations (Gauzere et al.,  
<sup>143</sup> 2017; Saikkonen et al., 2012; Caffarra et al., 2011b; Bradshaw and Holzapfel, 2007; Viherä-Aarnio et al., 2006),  
<sup>144</sup> and ecotypes (Howe et al., 1995). How much genotype versus environment explain this variation is an active  
<sup>145</sup> area of research (e.g., Fréjaville et al., 2019; Franks et al., 2014; Gould et al., 2010; Mimura and Aitken, 2010).  
<sup>146</sup> Environmental conditions clearly play a role: different combinations of ambient temperature and photoperiod  
<sup>147</sup> may explain some of this variation, and temperature cues can override photoperiod requirements under certain  
<sup>148</sup> conditions (e.g., Tanino et al., 2010). In such cases, future climate change-induced phenological shifts may  
<sup>149</sup> occur at different rates than past shifts with warming. On the other hand, some of this variation may be

150 due to underlying genetic differences driven by local adaptation, because photoperiod responses can be under  
151 strong genetic control (Keller et al., 2011; Weih, 2004; Bradshaw and Stettler, 1995, see also Boxes 1, 2).  
152 Differences in genetic control of photoperiod may be pronounced across spring versus fall events, as research  
153 suggests stronger local adaptation in photoperiod cues for budset than budburst (Mimura and Aitken, 2010),  
154 though to date much research focuses on spring or fall events separately, making a robust comparison difficult.  
155 Valuable advances to the field may be achieved by increased efforts to compare controls on phenological events  
156 across the growing season and how they may be connected, through carbon dynamics or other factors (Zani  
157 et al., 2020; Ettinger et al., 2018). Further teasing out the relative roles of genetics versus environmental  
158 conditions on phenology will be critical to accurate forecasts under climate change (Pau et al., 2011).

159 Species- and population-level variation in photoperiod sensitivity may scale up to alter communities as climate  
160 change progresses. For example, a species or population that is relatively insensitive to photoperiod can  
161 take advantage of warmer springs by having an earlier start to its growing season. Indeed, phenological  
162 tracking of temperature (e.g., earlier flowering, leafout or migration with warming) has been linked with  
163 higher performance in plants and animals (Cleland et al., 2012; Muir et al., 1994; Willis et al., 2010). Species  
164 or populations that are sensitive to temperature but relatively insensitive to photoperiod may therefore  
165 outcompete slower-growing or later-emerging ones that are limited by photoperiod and thus cannot take  
166 advantage of longer growing season conditions. Not all studies, however, find links between performance and  
167 high sensitivity to temperature (e.g., Block et al., 2020), and early-season species in most temperate zones risk  
168 losing tissue to frost (Sakai and Larcher, 1987). Thus, the advantages of tracking warming may depend on how  
169 quickly mean temperatures versus last frost dates shift (e.g., Inouye et al., 2002), such that in some systems  
170 photoperiod cues could prevent species from starting growth or reproduction too early (when they risk losing  
171 their investments in new tissue). To identify where, when, and how communities may be altered therefore  
172 requires quantifying species- and potentially population-specific temperature and photoperiod sensitivities,  
173 and developing methods that incorporate both photoperiod and environmental events that impact fitness  
174 (such as frosts).

<sub>175</sub> Future directions: outstanding questions and incorporating photoperiod into forecasting

<sub>177</sub> The complexity of photoperiod effects on phenology and how warming alters experienced photoperiod highlights that future rates of phenological shifts are unlikely to be straightforward extrapolations from past and current rates. Statistical and process-based models—the two broad categories of forecasting approaches—both acknowledge this difficulty, but differ importantly in how they relate phenology to climate change. Statistical models relating phenology to climate change typically assume linear relationships between species' responses and environmental variables (e.g., Flynn and Wolkovich, 2018; Ibáñez et al., 2010), whereas process-based models often incorporate nonlinear threshold relationships (e.g. Chuine and Beaubien, 2001; Morin and Thuiller, 2009). Further, statistical models of phenology under climate change often ignore photoperiod, focusing instead on seasonal or annual temperature (e.g. Diez et al., 2012; Ibáñez et al., 2010, but see Richardson et al. (2013)), whereas process-based models of phenology more frequently incorporate photoperiod, along with temperature (Lundell et al., 2020; Duputié et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2013; Morin and Thuiller, 2009). Process-based models may thus seem superior for integrating photoperiod, but they can be challenging to develop, requiring detailed data that are often not readily available (e.g., daily climate data, nonlinear biological responses to fine-scale changes in temperature). Perhaps because of this, statistical models remain more commonly used in climate change forecasts of biological responses (e.g., García-Valdés and Morales-Castilla, 2016; Basler and Körner, 2012; Diez et al., 2012; Zhu et al., 2012; Ibáñez et al., 2010).

<sub>193</sub> Future modelling of spring plant phenology can incorporate photoperiod by leveraging the large amount of experimental data on photoperiod responses (e.g., for woody plants, see Fig. 3, Table S1, Box 1), especially when process-based approaches are used. Researchers can use these data to first learn whether the study species (or a phylogenetically closely related species) shows a photoperiod effect and, ideally, identify its threshold photoperiod and how it varies by population, ecotype, or other factors (Tobin et al., 2008; Bradshaw and Holzapfel, 2006). If there is evidence of a photoperiod response (e.g., *Fagus grandifolia*, or *Tilia americana* with low chilling, shown in Fig. Box 1-1), daylength should be added to forecasting models. We suggest initial models could use a threshold photoperiod to define short-day and long-day conditions (Fig. 4, Box 1), then test how much the addition alters forecasts. Given the large change in experienced photoperiod with

202 temporal shifts (Fig. 1), this may be particularly important for phenological forecasting. Since spatial shifts  
203 are associated with smaller changes in experienced photoperiod, it may be less important for distribution  
204 forecasts. Many species, however, may shift in *both* space and time simultaneously. Thus, even though  
205 experienced photoperiod changes little as species distributions shift in space, phenology may be altered  
206 significantly if the newly expanded portions of the range contain novel environmental conditions (e.g., Martin  
207 et al., 2014).

208 For some species, experimental data can be immediately used in forecasting because experiments manipulate  
209 photoperiod at relevant scales (e.g., Heide and Sonsteb, 2015; Basler and Körner, 2014, Fig. 3, Box 1,  
210 Table S1). For example, photoperiod treatments from growth chamber experiments with *Fagus sylvatica*  
211 span the variation in both current and expected future ranges (Box 1, Duputié et al., 2015), and may allow  
212 identification of threshold photoperiods (Fig. 4). In other cases, attempting to incorporate photoperiod  
213 into forecasts of future phenology will reveal gaps in our understanding of many aspects of photoperiod  
214 responses. For example, photoperiod treatments from existing experiments of *Quercus robur* do not accurately  
215 represent experienced photoperiods from current or future estimates (Box 1), making fine-scale projections  
216 difficult, even for this relatively well-studied species. This gap extends to many species, as most experiments  
217 manipulate photoperiod much more dramatically than will occur with climate change (Fig. 3, Box 1).  
218 Although these studies can be useful for a mechanistic understanding of photoperiod responses, extrapolating  
219 them to climate change models may not be reasonable.

220 Photoperiod is not fully integrated into most forecasts of biological responses to climate change (but see  
221 Tobin et al., 2008, for an example in insects), an omission that could affect forecast accuracy. Photoperiod  
222 is incorporated into some ecosystem models (e.g., the Ecosystem Demography model Jolly et al., 2005;  
223 Medvigy et al., 2013) used for forecasting but not others (e.g., Richardson et al., 2012), and is rarely included  
224 in species distribution models (e.g., Morin and Thuiller, 2009; Zhu et al., 2012). The sensitivity of model  
225 outcomes to assumptions made about experienced photoperiod and threshold responses to photoperiod needs  
226 further study, including understanding how variation in photoperiod responses across ecosystems, species,  
227 populations, and life stages impacts forecasts. We have focused here on spring phenology, but future work  
228 could also address the sensitivity of model outcomes to shifts in experienced photoperiod at the end of the  
229 growing season (e.g., leaf senescence and onset of dormancy). Autumn photoperiod affects photosynthesis,

<sup>230</sup> growth, and budset in woody plant species, and photoperiod-induced declines in photosynthetic capacity may  
<sup>231</sup> constrain carbon sequestration even if warming prolongs leaf senescence (Howe et al., 1996; Bauerle et al.,  
<sup>232</sup> 2012; Stinziano and Way, 2017).

<sup>233</sup> As researchers more fully integrate experienced photoperiod into forecasting, a critical area of further study  
<sup>234</sup> is understanding *how* photoperiod acts as a cue. For some species, photoperiod responses are qualitative  
<sup>235</sup> (that is, there is a threshold photoperiod with long-day responses differing from short-day responses; see  
<sup>236</sup> Table 1), whereas other species appear to exhibit quantitative responses to photoperiod (Wareing, 1956).  
<sup>237</sup> Photoperiod seems to interact with temperature to affect phenology (e.g., Zydlewski et al., 2014); this would  
<sup>238</sup> explain the divergent effects of photoperiod observed across studies in woody plants (Box 1). However,  
<sup>239</sup> exactly how it interacts with temperature is not well-defined for most taxa. For many species, additional  
<sup>240</sup> experimental and physiological research is necessary, since the dormancy-breaking processes that photoperiod  
<sup>241</sup> affect require detailed physiological approaches to observe. Though the main ecophysiological processes  
<sup>242</sup> involved in regulating phenology of woody plants are relatively well-documented, a mechanistic understanding  
<sup>243</sup> of the physiological, molecular, and genetic bases of dormancy is lacking (Box 2, Hänninen et al., 2019; Chuine  
<sup>244</sup> et al., 2016). In addition, photoperiod and temperature cues can differentially affect the phenology of distinct  
<sup>245</sup> physiological processes in woody species, decoupling, for example, responses of growth or leaf development and  
<sup>246</sup> carbon uptake to warming (Stinziano and Way, 2017; Bauerle et al., 2012). Accounting for ecophysiological  
<sup>247</sup> effects of photoperiod can result in quantifiable declines on modeled global gross primary production (Bauerle  
<sup>248</sup> et al., 2012), suggesting that including temporal and spatial shifts in experienced photoperiod with climate  
<sup>249</sup> change may also alter global model estimates.

<sup>250</sup> Understanding the drivers, as well as the consequences, of variation in photoperiod responses within and across  
<sup>251</sup> individuals, populations, and species will be critical for forecasting. Incorporating trait and/or phylogenetic  
<sup>252</sup> frameworks may provide useful avenues for improving forecasts (Buckley and Kingsolver, 2012). For example,  
<sup>253</sup> what traits are associated with photoperiod sensitivity and does variation in photoperiod sensitivity or related  
<sup>254</sup> traits have a strong genetic component? If so, are species or populations from some locations or lineages  
<sup>255</sup> more likely than others to be constrained by photoperiod in their responses to climate change? More accurate  
<sup>256</sup> forecasts will facilitate improved understanding of the implications of shifts in experienced photoperiod for  
<sup>257</sup> carbon sequestration under climate change at a global scale.

258 **Conclusions**

259 Organisms may undergo large changes to the photoperiod they experience with climate change, even if they  
260 do not shift their ranges spatially. Here we have highlighted that these altered photoperiods may stall  
261 phenological shifts with future warming (e.g., Table S1, Fu et al., 2019; Güsewell et al., 2017; Yu et al.,  
262 2010), with cascading effects on growth, fitness, and community composition due to the large variation in  
263 photoperiod responses across species and populations (Box 1). We have focused on woody plant phenology,  
264 but shifts in photoperiod with climate change have implications for a variety of plant and animal responses,  
265 as daylength affects critical activities for species from insects (Bradshaw and Holzapfel, 2006) and salmon  
266 (Taranger et al., 2003) to birds (Dawson et al., 2001) and marsupials (McAllan et al., 2006). Given what we  
267 know, incorporating photoperiod into forecasting of climate change responses should improve model accuracy  
268 (Fig. 4), and will illuminate additional experiments that could improve our mechanistic understanding of  
269 photoperiod as a critical cue for diverse biological responses.

270 **Table 1. Glossary**

- 271 • budburst: one or more leaf buds have visible green tips.
- 272 • chilling: the intensity and duration of winter temperature, often a certain sum of chilling (e.g., amount  
273 of hours or days of cold temperatures, defined by a specific critical temperature or range of temperatures,  
274 such as between 0 and 7.2 °C, Richardson, 1974) that is required to initiate budburst.
- 275 • daylength: the period of time during a 24-hour period during which an organism receives light.
- 276 • dormancy: halted or reduced growth or activity.
- 277 • forcing: warm spring temperatures, often a certain sum of forcing (e.g., amount of hours or days above  
278 a specific temperature) that is required before budburst can occur.
- 279 • green-up: the beginning of a new cycle of plant growth, usually evaluated at the landscape scale.
- 280 • phenology: the timing of life cycle events in organisms.

- 281 • photoperiod: the daily duration of light (daylength) and dark to which an organism is exposed; often  
282 used synonymously with daylength.
- 283 • photoperiod sensitivity: the degree to which phenology is controlled by daylength; may be a nonlinear,  
284 or ‘threshold’, response in plants (Box 2).
- 285 • photoperiodism: the ability of an organism to assess or respond to length of day or night in its behavior,  
286 physiology, growth, development, or reproduction.
- 287 • threshold photoperiod: length of day that causes an organism to switch from a short- to a long-day  
288 response (or vice versa). For example, in European larch (*Larix decidua*), budburst development may  
289 be constrained under short-day conditions, when daylengths are less than a threshold photoperiod of  
290 10-11 hours (Migliavacca et al., 2008). Above this threshold photoperiod, the long-day response of  
291 unconstrained budburst development can occur.

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608 **Supporting Information**

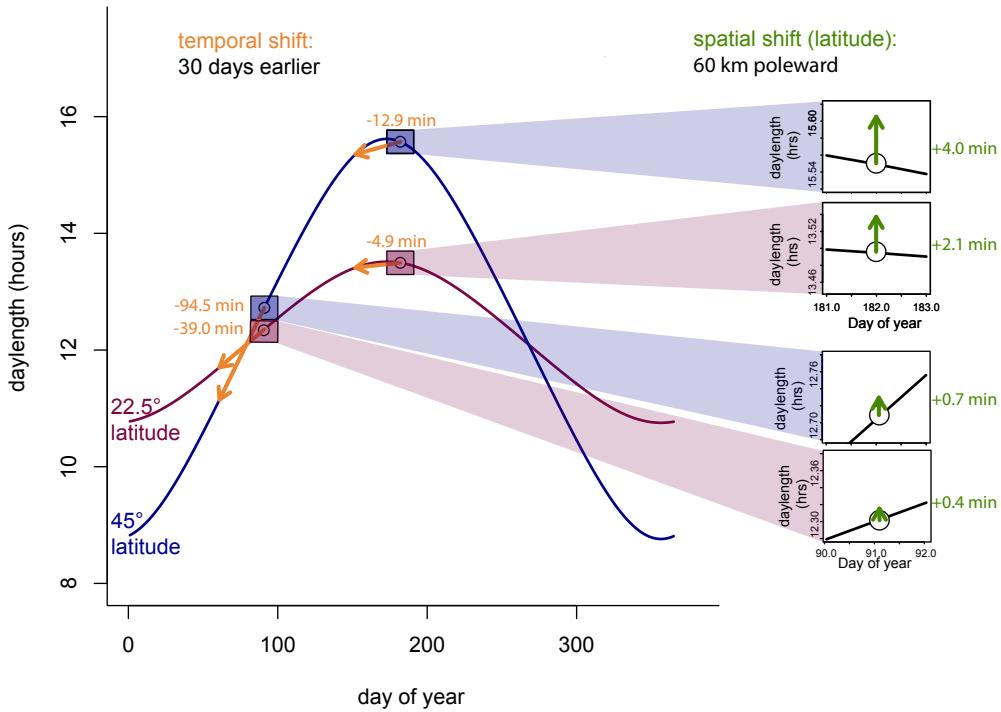
609 :

610 Methods S1 includes additional details of the database and analyses performed.

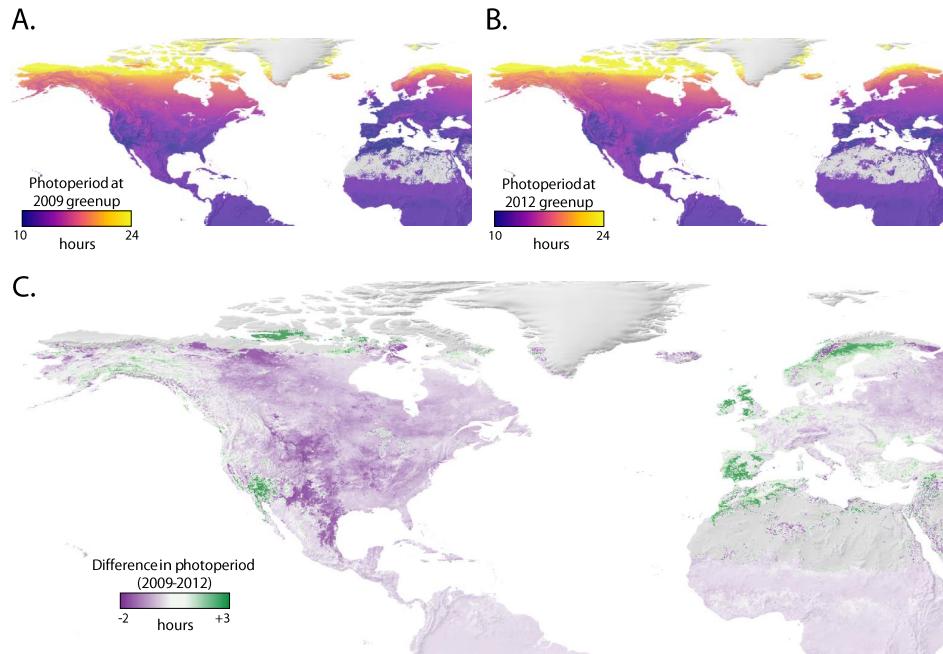
611 Table S1 includes locations, photoperiod treatments, and whether or not photoperiod had an effect on bud-

612 burst for studies in Wolkovich et al. (2019) with atleast two photoperiod treatments.

613 **Figures**



**Figure 1: Temporal (i.e., phenological) shifts in activity yield larger changes in experienced photoperiod compared to spatial (i.e., latitudinal) shifts on the same day of year, due to patterns in photoperiod variation with latitude and by day of year. Here, we show this variation at two latitudes ( $22.5^\circ$ ,  $45^\circ$ ), using hypothetical spatial and temporal shifts. These shifts are based on observed rates with recent global warming: for spatial shifts, 6–17 kilometers per decade, or approximately  $0.5\text{--}1.5^\circ$  in 100 years (Parmesan and Yohe, 2003; Parmesan, 2006); for temporal shifts, 3 days per decade, or 30 days in 100 years (Parmesan, 2006; Chen et al., 2011). These potential, plausible shifts highlight the greater magnitude in daylength changes from temporal shifts in the early spring, close to the vernal equinox (e.g., day of year 91), versus close to the summer solstice (e.g., day of year 182) at temperate latitudes. It is also apparent that early spring temporal shifts at high latitudes result in more extreme changes in daylength than shifts at lower latitudes (e.g., a temporal shift 30 days earlier results in a reduction in daylength of 94.5 minutes at  $45^\circ$  versus 39.5 minutes at  $22.5^\circ$ ).**



**Figure 2: Photoperiod on ‘green-up’ date varies over space and between years.** ‘Green-up’ date is the beginning of seasonal greening, identified by satellite remote sensing measurements, taken regularly throughout the year, of concentrations of green leaf vegetation. Hours of daylight are shown on the date of spring green-up (here from MODIS satellite data) across North America and Europe for an average (2009, A) and early (2012, B) North American start of spring. The differences between the years (in hours of daylength) are shown in (C). A negative difference signifies earlier green-up in 2012 versus 2009; a positive difference is the result of later green-up in 2012 compared with 2009. See “Quantifying and mapping differences in green-up across the United States and Europe” in Methods S1 of the *Supporting Information* for additional details.

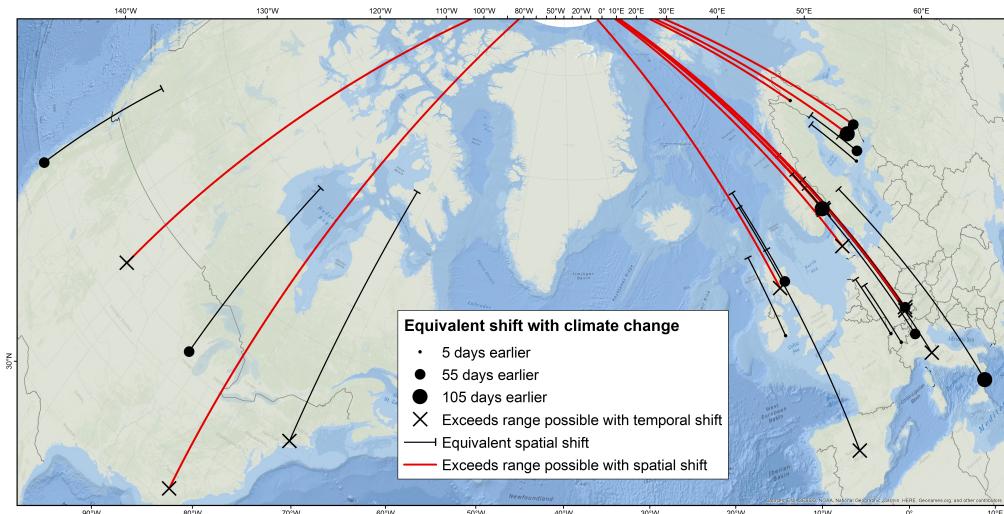


Figure 3: **A map of experimental photoperiod treatments from a meta-analysis of woody plant spring phenology and their equivalent spatial and temporal shifts** demonstrates that many experiments manipulate photoperiod more dramatically than will occur with climate change. Mapped points (circles and Xes) are locations of experiments in Wolkovich et al. (2019) that manipulated photoperiod (30 total experiments; see Box 1). In 11 out of 30 cases, the difference between experimental treatments exceeded the range in photoperiod experienced across the entire year at the study latitude (Xs; circles mark temporal shifts within a possible range). Note that many studies occur at high latitudes, which experience a wide range of photoperiod across the year. In 13 out of 30 cases, the experimental treatment differences exceeded the photoperiod change that would be experienced with a latitudinal shift of up to 40° (red lines; black lines represent spatial shifts within a possible range). See “Mapping temporal and spatial shifts in space and time” in Methods S1 of the *Supporting Information* for additional details.

Accounting for photoperiod to improve forecasts of biological responses to climate change

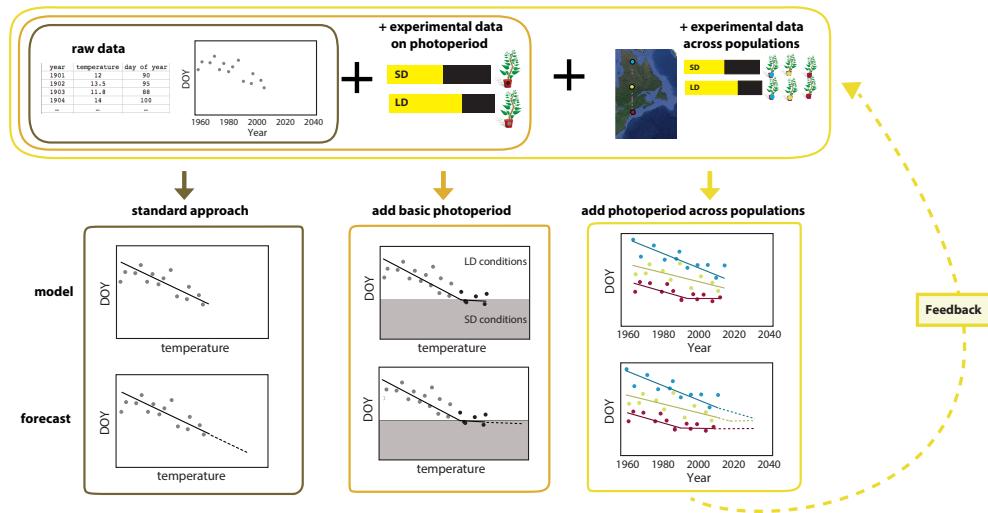


Figure 4: **Conceptual diagram of how to include photoperiod in forecasting biological responses to climate change.** Current approaches for forecasting spring phenology with climate change frequently rely on linear relationships between historical temperature data and observed dates of spring phenology (left panels). Adding responses to photoperiod, which may operate as threshold responses to short days (SD) versus long days (LD, see ‘photoperiod sensitivity’ in Table 1 and Box 2 for details), will alter these forecasts (center panel) in ways that differ across species with divergent threshold photoperiods. Other factors that interact with photoperiod, such as population-level variation in photoperiod responses, can be incorporated into forecasts to further improve their accuracy (right panel).

614 **Box 1. Are photoperiod effects widespread? A case study of woody**

615 **plant spring phenology**

616 Photoperiod responses are well-studied in woody plant phenology, making this a useful case study to con-

617 sider climate change-induced shifts in photoperiod. Spring woody plant phenology in particular has critical

618 implications for global carbon cycling and feedbacks to the climate system (Richardson et al., 2013), and

619 has been at the center of an important and controversial debate on the relative effects of photoperiod versus

620 temperature on phenology (e.g., Fu et al., 2019; Chuine et al., 2010; Körner and Basler, 2010a,b).

621 Experimental growth chamber studies have shown that photoperiod is an important cue for spring budburst

622 phenology in woody plants (e.g., Flynn and Wolkovich, 2018; Basler and Körner, 2014; Heide, 1993b). These

623 experiments often manipulate photoperiod in combination with temperature to address basic questions about

624 how these two environmental conditions act as biological cues. Temperature has a dual role in regulating

625 woody plant phenology: chilling—the prolonged exposure to cold temperatures after growth cessation in the

626 fall—is required to initiate budburst, and forcing—prolonged exposure to warm temperatures—is required

627 for budburst to occur. Different photoperiod treatments are typically applied during the forcing treatment

628 phase in growth chamber experiments (e.g., Laube et al., 2014; Spann et al., 2004; Falusi and Calamassi,

629 1990; Heide, 1977; Campbell and Sugano, 1975).

630 Woody plant growth chamber studies have been conducted for decades, but have only recently been synthe-

631 sized to show that photoperiod sensitivity is widespread, with large variation across studies and species. These

632 studies were aggregated in Observed Spring Phenology Responses in Experimental Environments (OSPREE),

633 a new database of plant growth chamber studies that manipulate photoperiod and temperature to measure

634 plant phenological responses, such as budburst and flowering (Wolkovich et al., 2019). The database includes

635 studies that manipulate photoperiod (by applying treatments with different daylength durations, applying

636 long-day versus short-day conditions for different lengths of time, and/or applying varying versus constant

637 photoperiods) and temperature (by imposing different chilling and/or forcing treatments). The OSPREE

638 database spans 201 woody plant species; all experiments in the database use dormant plant tissue (grown in

639 greenhouses or taken directly from the field) exposed to experimental conditions for which we could identify

640 forcing, photoperiod, and chilling treatments quantitatively. See Methods S1 of the *Supporting Information*,

641 Ettinger et al. (2020), and Wolkovich et al. (2019) for details.

642 Growth chamber experiments in OSPREE suggest that the dominant photoperiod response in woody plant  
643 species is earlier and more rapid budburst with longer days (e.g., Caffarra and Donnelly, 2011). Thirty of  
644 the 72 studies in the OSPREE database included two or more different photoperiod treatments. Of these,  
645 26 (87%) found significant photoperiod main effects or significant interactive effects with temperature (i.e.,  
646 photoperiod x temperature effects), across 176 species (Table S1). Main effects included responses such as  
647 growth (e.g., higher growth rates with longer days Ashby, 1962) and reproduction (e.g., increased flowering  
648 with longer days Heide and Sønsteby, 2012).

649 Growth chamber experiments highlight that responses to photoperiod vary depending on temperature condi-  
650 tions. For example, an accelerated advance of budburst was observed under long versus short days with low  
651 chilling, relative to budburst with high chilling in *Betula payrifera* (Hawkins and Dhar, 2012, see Fig. Box  
652 1-1). Similarly, across species, as chilling accumulates from winter to spring, sensitivity to both forcing and  
653 photoperiod sensitivity can decrease (Malyshev et al., 2018). Frequently, long photoperiods can compensate  
654 for low amounts of chilling (Caffarra et al., 2011b; Myking and Heide, 1995; Heide, 1993a).

655 Woody plant growth chamber experiments also demonstrate that, though photoperiod responses are common,  
656 they are variable, as shown in Fig. Box 1-1. Responses to photoperiod differ by species (e.g., Flynn and  
657 Wolkovich, 2018; Zohner et al., 2016; Basler and Körner, 2014, 2012; Howe et al., 1996; Heide, 1993b). For  
658 example, with longer chilling treatments some species seem insensitive to daylength (e.g., *Hammamelis* spp.,  
659 *Prunus* spp., Zohner et al., 2016), whereas others seem to be highly sensitive to daylength (e.g. *Fagus*  
660 spp., Fig. Box 1-2A), even with long chilling treatments (Zohner et al., 2016). In addition, some species  
661 demonstrate a response to photoperiod opposite to that typically observed: *Tilia*, for example, showed  
662 delayed budburst with longer daylengths (see Fig. Box 1-1, Ashby, 1962). Photoperiod sensitivity also varies  
663 by population and ecotype (e.g., Fig. Box 1-1). For example, photoperiod effects on budburst were more  
664 significant for lower latitude populations of *Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens* (Partanen et al., 2005).

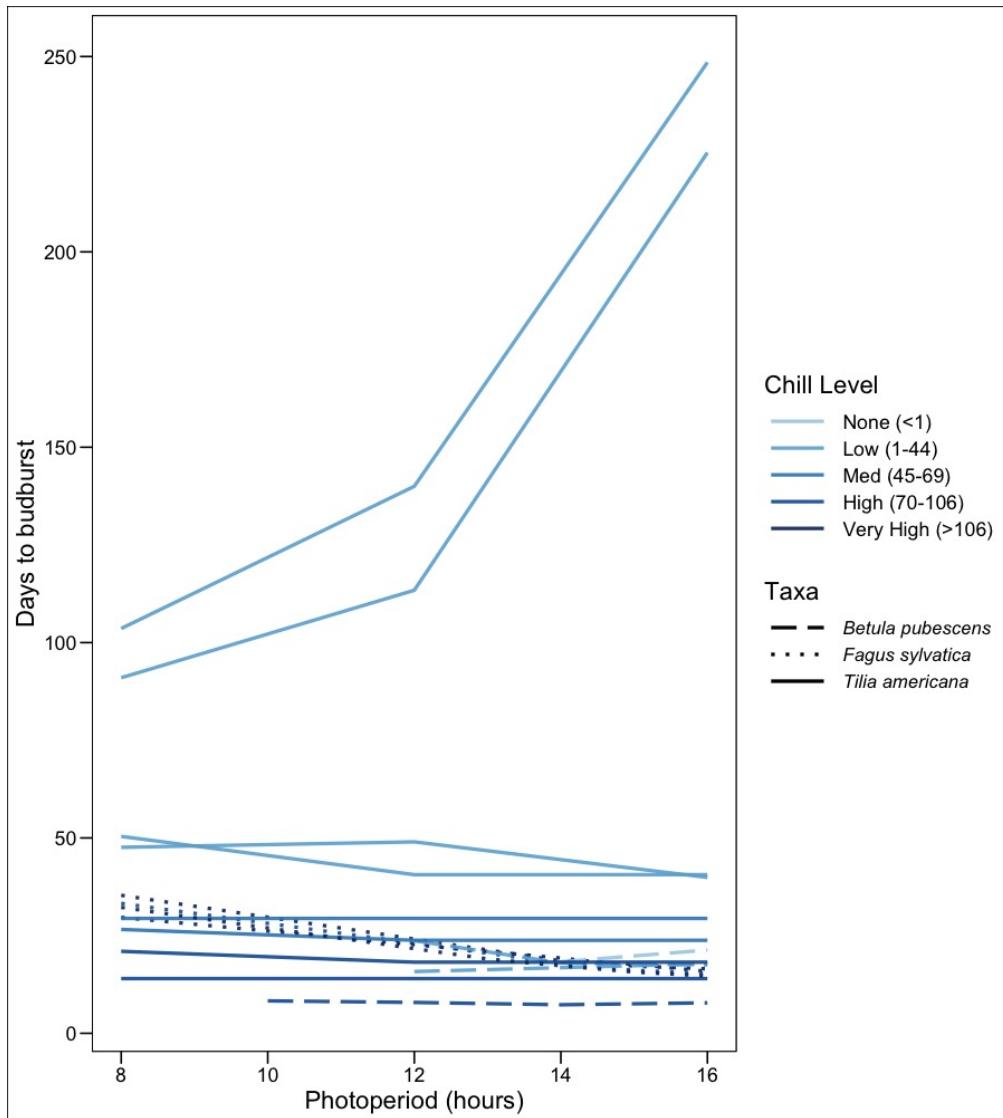


Figure Box 1-1: Nonlinearities in phenological responses to daylength are apparent in spring woody plant phenology experiments. Shown are responses from all experiments from Wolkovich et al. (2019) in which three or more photoperiod treatment levels were applied. The shape of the response curves for *Betula pubescens* (Caffarra et al., 2011b), *Fagus sylvatica* (Heide, 1993b) and *Tilia americana* (Ashby, 1962) differ depending on the amount of winter chilling received (measured in Chill portions, Fishman et al., 1987, with darker blue indicating more chilling). Species and chilling levels with multiple lines represent plant material from different populations. See “Nonlinearities in phenological responses to daylength” in Methods S1 of the *Supporting Information* for additional details.

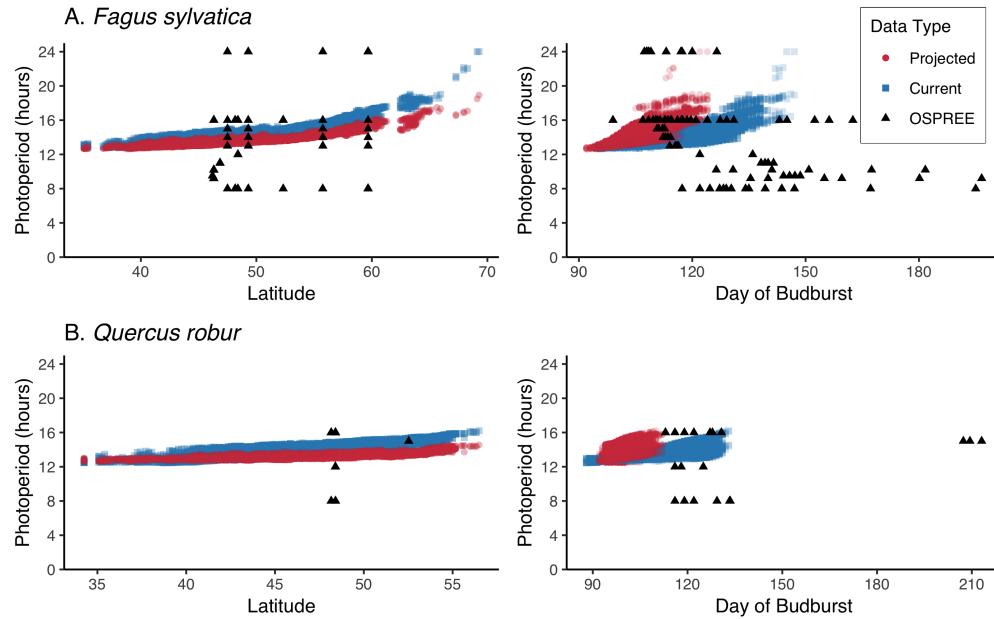


Figure Box 1-2: **Experienced photoperiods in growth chamber experiments differ from those in the natural world**, shown here by latitude (left panels) and by day of budburst (right panels) for *Fagus sylvatica* (A, upper panels) and *Quercus robur* (B, lower panels). Triangles show experimental treatments of photoperiod in Wolkovich et al. (2019). To illuminate potential gaps between experiments and the natural world, we show the photoperiod when budburst occurs in its current (1981–2000) and projected ranges (2081–2100, using the A1Fi Phenofit scenario, see Duputié et al., 2015). We scaled the days to budburst for all data points in Wolkovich et al. (2019) by adding the day of budburst from the first Phenofit observation. See “Comparing shifts in experienced photoperiod in experiments to those in the natural world with climate change” in Methods S1 of the *Supporting Information* and Duputié et al. (2015) for additional details.

665 **Box 2. Dominant models of how photoperiod affects spring woody**

666 **plant phenology**

667 The cues and molecular pathways underlying photoperiod sensitivity are poorly understood for most organ-  
668 isms, even in relatively well-studied phenophases and taxa, such as spring budburst in woody plants (Ding  
669 and Nilsson, 2016). Decades of growth chamber experiments demonstrate that three main cues—chilling,  
670 forcing, and photoperiod—control spring budburst for woody species (Flynn and Wolkovich, 2018; Zohner  
671 et al., 2016; Heide, 2008), with many models suggesting a dominant role of forcing in most natural conditions.  
672 Forcing requirements, however, appear to increase given shorter photoperiods or lower chilling (Caffarra et al.,  
673 2011a; Chuine et al., 2010). Research has yet to fully tease out effects of these three cues, their interactions,  
674 and their prevalence; photoperiod responses appear variable across species and populations, as well as with  
675 different chilling treatments (see Box 1). Not surprisingly, there is currently little agreement on the under-  
676 lying model for how photoperiod affects spring phenology for most species (Chuine et al., 2016; Hänninen  
677 et al., 2019). More physiological research will likely be necessary for major advances, as understanding the  
678 exact cellular pathways through which chilling, forcing, and photoperiod act appears increasingly critical to  
679 accurate modelling (van der Schoot et al., 2014; Hänninen et al., 2019).

680 Additional cellular and molecular studies may quickly advance understanding and scale up to improved  
681 photoperiod models. While our understanding of how plants interpret photoperiod at the molecular-level  
682 comes from few species, largely from studies of flowering in the model plant *Arabidopsis thaliana* (e.g.,  
683 Suárez-López et al., 2001) and fall budset in woody plant species (e.g., Howe et al., 1996), these studies have  
684 proved useful across other species. For example, the ‘external coincidence model’ (where plants sense light  
685 via blue light receptors and phytochromes, then interpret photoperiod through a coordinated response to  
686 light in relation to the time of day, see Lagercrantz, 2009) has been most widely studied in *Arabidopsis*, but  
687 appears to be a relevant mechanism for photoperiod responses in diverse perennial and woody plant species  
688 (Singh et al., 2017; Petterle et al., 2013; Andrés and Coupland, 2012; Kobayashi and Weigel, 2007; Davis,  
689 2002; Bastow and Dean, 2002; Bünning, 1936). The model proposes the existence of a circadian rhythm of  
690 light sensitivity, in which the night-phase is sensitive to light and the day-phase is insensitive to light. As days  
691 get longer in the spring, daylight illuminates the light sensitive phase, triggering a response. This provides a

692 clear mechanistic pathway to build into models (Burghardt et al., 2015).

693 We expect progress on spring phenology will benefit from similar physiological research that spans the molec-  
694 ular to whole-plant levels. To date, little is known about the genetic pathways responsible for the light-sensing  
695 apparatuses involved in spring budburst, and how they may vary across species or populations. Some genes  
696 have been identified that play a role in coordinating budburst in poplar (*Populus* spp.), and may occur in  
697 other woody species as well. Many similarities exist between the proposed regulatory networks of vegetative  
698 growth in *Populus* and those controlling floral initiation in *Arabidopsis*, (Ding and Nilsson, 2016). For exam-  
699 ple, vegetative growth and inhibition of budset are promoted by the FLOWERING LOCUS T2 (FT2) gene, a  
700 homolog of *Arabidopsis thaliana* gene FLOWERING LOCUS (FT). FT2 expression appears to be controlled  
701 by a pathway that is effective in long days and warm temperatures, marking the onset of the growing season  
702 (Hsu et al., 2011). Its loss of expression in autumn, when the days are getting shorter, is associated with the  
703 onset of dormancy (Glover, 2014).

704 Efforts to better map the genetic and cellular pathways of spring phenology combined with common garden  
705 studies can provide a powerful method to test mechanistic understanding and improve models (e.g., Burghardt  
706 et al., 2015; Fournier-Level et al., 2016). Here we have mainly outlined how to combine growth chamber studies  
707 with long-term data to improve models and forecasting; a greater physiological understanding of at least a  
708 few species will likely also be necessary for generating robust predictions with climate change.