

1 **Quantifying the benefit of early climate change mitigation in avoiding**
2 **biodiversity loss**

3

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21 **Climate change is expected to have significant influences on terrestrial biodiversity at**
22 **all system levels, including species-level reductions in range size and abundance,**
23 **especially amongst endemic species¹⁻⁶. However, little is known about how mitigation of**
24 **greenhouse gas emissions could reduce biodiversity impacts, particularly amongst**
25 **common and widespread species. Our global analysis of future climatic range change of**
26 **common and widespread species shows that without mitigation, 57±6% of plants and**
27 **34±7% of animals are likely to lose ≥50% of their current climatic range by the 2080s.**
28 **With mitigation, however, losses are reduced by 60% if emissions peak in 2016 or 40%**
29 **if emissions peak in 2030. Thus, our analyses indicate that without mitigation, large**
30 **range contractions can be expected even amongst common and widespread species,**
31 **amounting to a substantial global reduction in biodiversity and ecosystem services by**
32 **the end of this century. Prompt and stringent mitigation, on the other hand, could**
33 **substantially reduce range losses and ‘buy’ up to four decades for climate change**
34 **adaptation.**

35 The IPCC³ estimates that 20-30% of species would be at increasingly high risk of
36 extinction if global temperature rise exceeds 2-3°C above pre-industrial levels. However,
37 since quantitative assessments of the benefits of mitigation in avoiding biodiversity loss are
38 lacking, we know little about how much of the impacts can be offset by reductions in
39 greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, despite the large number of studies addressing
40 extinction risks in particular species groups, we know little about the broader issue of
41 potential range loss in common and widespread species, which is of serious concern as even
42 small declines in such species can significantly disrupt ecosystem structure, function and
43 services⁷.

44 Here we quantify the benefits of mitigation in terms of reduced climatic range losses
45 in common and widespread species, and determine the time early mitigation action can “buy”

46 for adaptation. In particular, we provide (i) a comprehensive analysis of potential climatic
47 range changes for 48,786 animal and plant species across the globe, using the same set of
48 global climate change scenarios for all species; and (ii) a direct comparison of projected
49 levels of potential climate change impacts on the climatic ranges of species in six 21st century
50 mitigation scenarios, including a ‘no policy’ baseline scenario in which emissions continue to
51 rise unabated (Fig. 1, Table 1). To calculate the climatic range changes, we employed
52 MaxEnt, one of the most robust bioclimatic modelling approaches for cases where only
53 presence data (as opposed to presence-absence) are available⁸. MaxEnt models the
54 probability of a species’ presence, conditioned on environment⁸ so that in this paper ‘climatic
55 range change’ specifically refers to the change in the modelled probability of a species’
56 occurrence, conditioned on climatic variables. Eighty percent of the species studied have
57 climatic ranges in excess of 30,000 km², which is the range size used by Bird Life
58 International to delineate ‘restricted range species’, whilst less than 7% have ranges
59 occupying less than 20,000 km² (Supplementary Fig. S1). Our study therefore focuses on
60 quantifying the effects on widespread species, which are in general more common and less
61 likely to become extinct than restricted range species⁹, in contrast to previous studies that
62 have only speculated that there may be effects such species¹⁻⁶. In projecting future
63 distributions, we use three class-specific long-term average ‘dispersal’ scenarios (zero,
64 realistic, and optimistic). These scenarios are based on the available literature and specifically
65 refer to the rates at which species’ ranges, through an average of individual dispersal events
66 (colonization and extirpation), shift over time (Supplementary Table S1, and Supplementary
67 Methods).

68 With no mitigation, the median global annual mean temperature change reaches 4°C
69 above pre-industrial levels by 2100 (Fig1, Table 1, A1B baseline scenario). Even with
70 realistic dispersal rates, 34±7% of the animals, and 57±6% of the plants lose 50% or more of

71 their climatic range by the 2080s (Table 1, Fig. 2). Here, the standard deviation arises from
72 the use of different GCM patterns for downscaling (see Methods). With no long-term
73 dispersal (also reflecting the potential for barriers to inhibit realistic dispersal), $42\pm 7\%$ of the
74 animals lose 50% or more of their climatic range, whilst the figures for plants remain
75 unchanged owing to their lower dispersal rates (Table 1). The projected climatic range losses
76 under these realistic long-term dispersal assumptions demonstrate clearly that climate change
77 would have an impact even on more widespread species in addition to the species with
78 restricted ranges that have been the main focus of previous studies^{3,10}. These projected losses
79 are not offset by the very small percentage of species projected to gain more than 50% of
80 their climatic range with realistic dispersal rates (4% of the animals and none of the plants)
81 (Supplementary Table S3) indicating that on balance the projected impacts of climate change
82 overwhelmingly result in a sizable reduction of climatically suitable ranges for a large
83 number of species.

84 With mitigation (i.e., global emissions peak in 2016-2030 and are subsequently
85 reduced by 2-5% annually; Fig. 1, Table 1), median global annual mean temperature rise is
86 limited to 2.0-2.8°C with a 7-45% likelihood that it will be constrained to 2°C above pre-
87 industrial levels. The highest emission reduction rates considered in most integrated
88 modelling studies which attempt to minimise mitigation cost is typically between 3 and 4%¹¹,
89 whilst other studies highlight that for an additional cost slightly higher rates of up to 5% may
90 be achievable¹². Hence the most stringent mitigation scenario considered here allows global
91 emissions to peak in 2016 and to be subsequently reduced by 5% annually (Fig. 1, Table 1).
92 In this scenario, with realistic dispersal rates, the proportion of species losing at least half
93 their climatic range by the 2080s falls from $34\pm 7\%$ to $13\pm 3\%$ in animals, and from $57\pm 6\%$ to
94 $23\pm 4\%$ in plants (Table 1), thus avoiding ~60% of the potential impacts with smaller benefits
95 accruing by the 2050s (Fig. 2). If mitigation is delayed (i.e., global emissions peak in 2030)

96 and are then reduced at 5% annually, cumulative emissions during the 21st century rise
97 correspondingly. In this case, substantially fewer climatic range contractions are avoided
98 (Table 1, Fig. 2). With these mitigation delays, the proportion of animals losing at least half
99 their climatic range rises from 13±3% to 20±6%, and the proportion of plants rises from
100 23±4% to 35±6% with realistic dispersal (Table 1, Fig. 2), thus reducing climatic range losses
101 by only ~40% relative to the baseline.

102 These patterns and trends are also observed in the individual animal taxa (Fig. 2),
103 under all dispersal scenarios (Supplementary Fig. S2a-f), as well as in the proportions of
104 species losing ≥70%, ≥90% or ≥99% of their climatic ranges (Supplementary Table S4a-
105 c). Plants, amphibians and reptiles would be expected to be more at risk from climate change
106 due to their lower long-term dispersal rates relative to the velocity of climate change¹³.
107 Consistent with Lawler *et al.*¹³, our projections suggest that amphibians are most at risk from
108 climate change, with 50±7% of species losing over 50% of their climatic range under a
109 realistic dispersal scenario, dropping to 28±7% with stringent mitigation. Our analysis
110 revealed that in all taxa, distributions were on average more strongly driven by temperature
111 than by precipitation, although many species are more strongly affected by precipitation
112 (Supplementary Table S2a-c).

113 Corresponding, but smaller, increases in the proportions of species losing larger
114 percentages of their climatic range were also seen. Our estimates of the proportion of species
115 losing more than 90% of their climatic ranges (for example 2-6% of animals with realistic
116 dispersal rates; Supplementary Fig. S2, Supplementary Table S4b) largely omit more
117 restricted-range species that have previously been shown to be highly vulnerable to climate
118 change. Our focus on widespread species makes our figures much lower, and not comparable
119 to, previous estimates of climate-change induced commitment to extinction^{3,14}. However, all
120 mitigation scenarios examined deliver substantial reductions of (at least) 40-60% in the

121 number of species incurring these large climatic range losses (Supplementary Table S4a-c),
122 for all categories (ranging from $\geq 50\%$ to $\geq 99\%$ loss), for all long-term dispersal scenarios,
123 and for all taxa.

124 The impacts of climate change and benefits of stringent mitigation action are not
125 geographically uniform (Fig. 3a,b). With no mitigation, the climate becomes particularly
126 unsuitable for both plants and animals in Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America, Amazonia,
127 and Australia. Major loss of plant species is also projected for North Africa, Central Asia, and
128 Southeastern Europe. We used the number of species from our study with suitable climate
129 predicted in each grid cell as an indicator of species richness. With stringent mitigation,
130 species richness in many of the affected areas shown in figure 3a,b is less impacted (i.e.,
131 more preserved) (Fig. 3c,d). Benefits (Fig. 3e,f) are particularly strong in Sub-Saharan Africa,
132 Central America, Amazonia, Australia, North Africa, Central Asia, and Southeastern Europe.
133 In areas where species richness is projected to increase, gains are generally below 5%.
134 Corresponding maps for the less stringent mitigation scenarios (i.e., if global emissions peak
135 in 2030) show smaller, but still positive, benefits (Supplementary Fig. S3a-f). In many of
136 these areas, land use changes will be acting synergistically¹⁵ with climate-induced
137 autonomous range shifts.

138 In all cases, stringent early mitigation not only reduces the level of risk to the taxa, it
139 also *postpones* the changes that would otherwise be incurred by the late 2030s to the 2080s,
140 thus '*buying*' approximately four decades of time for autonomous or planned adaptation (Fig.
141 2a, blue dashed arrow). More generally, levels of adaptation required to adapt to a
142 temperature rise of 2°C above pre-industrial levels could be required before 2050 if there is
143 no mitigation (Fig. 1b), whereas with stringent mitigation these levels are not required until
144 the end of the century. Adaptation is further facilitated as the rate of climate change is
145 consistently lower in the mitigation scenarios than in the baseline case, so that adaptation to

146 the higher rates of climate change are no longer required. Thus, this type of analysis can help
147 quantify the trade-offs between varying levels of climate change mitigation and adaptation
148 needs.

149 In the more stringent mitigation scenarios in which global emissions peak in 2016,
150 climate change stops increasing by the end of the century (Fig. 1b). In all cases, earlier
151 mitigation results in greater avoidance of range losses (60%), and buys more time for
152 adaptation. Delay in the date at which global emissions peak causes reduced effectiveness
153 even if higher emission reduction rates are implemented subsequent to the peak. Thus, the
154 date of peak emissions is key to the efficacy of mitigation in avoiding the risks to biodiversity.
155 Fee et al.¹¹ use the same methodology as in this study to show that constraining median
156 global temperature rise to 2 °C if emissions peak in 2016 requires a subsequent emission
157 reduction rate of 3-4%, but if the emission peak is delayed by 5 years, a reduction rate of 6%
158 is required to constrain median temperature rise to 2 °C. Thus, the date of peak emissions is
159 arguably more important than the overall amount in terms of reduced impacts and the
160 adaptation time that can be ‘bought’. Whilst some studies highlight that mitigation rates of up
161 to 5% (as considered here) may be achievable¹⁶, mitigation at faster rates is widely
162 considered to be infeasible, and thus the possibility that widespread climate change impacts
163 on biodiversity can be avoided if mitigation is delayed seems remote.

164 In our analyses, all of the patterns were found to be robust, for all animals combined,
165 in separate analyses of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and plants, and in analyses of
166 individual families. Our method encompassed uncertainties in both climate change
167 projections and in the potential ability of species to disperse to areas that become newly
168 climatically suitable. While some authors caution that these types of studies might
169 overestimate potential impacts^{e.g.,17}, our overall estimates of biodiversity diminution at this
170 scale are likely conservative due to the expected compounding effects of increases in extreme

171 weather events, pests, diseases, and barriers to dispersal, as well as to changes in trophic or
172 mutualistic interactions (see Supplementary Material for discussion). In particular, our
173 estimates for animals will be underestimated due to their dependence on plants. Actual levels
174 of risk in all classes would also be expected to be higher due to the concomitant impacts of
175 other environmental stresses, such as land use change, water and soil contamination, and
176 because extremes associated with increased inter-annual variability³ could constrain rates of
177 dispersal that might otherwise be considered realistic¹⁸. Moreover, the rate at which
178 emissions are currently increasing exceeds that in our baseline scenario for the current
179 decade¹⁹.

180 In conclusion, our projections indicate that without climate change mitigation, large
181 climatic range contractions can be expected, amounting to a substantial global reduction in
182 biodiversity and ecosystem services by the end of this century. However, prompt, stringent
183 mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions has the potential to avoid the risk of systemic
184 biodiversity diminution of common and widespread species, with concomitant declines in
185 ecosystem services, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Amazon, Australia, North Africa,
186 Central Asia and Southeastern Europe. With prompt, stringent mitigation, levels of adaptation
187 that would be required by the late 2030s are not required until the 2080s, whereas if
188 mitigation is delayed such that global emissions do not peak until 2030 then substantially
189 fewer risks to biodiversity can be avoided.

190

191 **Methods**

192 We used greenhouse gas emissions time series, specifically the SRES A1B baseline
193 scenario²⁰ and mitigation scenarios²¹, to drive a global climate change model
194 MAGICC4.1^{22,23} capable of reproducing global mean warming from model complex global

195 circulation models which have yet to be run and analysed for stringent mitigation scenarios.
196 In the mitigation scenarios, emissions follow the baseline before transitioning over seven
197 years so that they peak globally in either 2016 or 2030, and are reduced subsequently at rates
198 of between 2 and 5% annually until reaching a lower limit, representing emissions that might
199 be difficult to eliminate. The resultant projections of global temperature change drove a
200 pattern-scaling module ClimGen^{24,25} in which scaled climate change patterns diagnosed from
201 seven alternative GCM simulations are combined with a baseline climate. Thus we produced
202 42 spatially-explicit time series projections of monthly mean, minimum and maximum
203 temperatures, and total precipitation, downscaled to 0.5°x0.5° and consistent with the IPCC²⁶.
204 This was post-processed to produce 8 bioclimatic indices for our subsequent modelling of
205 species' current and future climate space^{27,28}. Biodiversity records were sourced from the
206 Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF)²⁹ and vetted for locational reliability (see
207 Supplementary Material). We used MaxEnt^{27,28} to create statistical relationships between the
208 vetted species occurrence records and current (1961-1990) climate, and to calculate the
209 current geographic distribution of each species^{27,30}. To eliminate potential omission and
210 commission biases, distributions were then 'clipped' to the bio-geographic zone(s)³¹ from
211 which the species information was derived and to a conservative 2000 km buffer around the
212 species' outermost occurrence records. Next, we used the projected climates and trained
213 models to derive potential future distribution for each species in our future climate scenarios
214 for 30 year periods centered on 2025, 2055 and 2085, applying three class-specific long-term
215 'dispersal' rate scenarios (zero, realistic, and optimistic) that were restricted to contiguous
216 land areas. This enabled us to estimate the proportions of species losing ≥ 50 , ≥ 70 , ≥ 90 or
217 $\geq 99\%$ of their climatically suitable range under the various future climate and dispersal rate
218 scenarios.

219

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281

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293

294 **Author contributions**

295 J.P. assembled the team, coordinated and advised. R.W. generated and provided the climate
296 projections in collaboration with T.O. and J.L. T.R. provided and J.R. cleaned and processed
297 the GBIF data. R.W., J.V., J.P., L.S., A.J. and S.W. designed the model experiments. J.V.
298 performed the model experiments and analysis. R.W., J.W., J.V. and J.P., wrote the paper.
299 I.A. facilitated and advised on computational issues surrounding modelling and data storage.

300

301 **Additional Information**

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305

306 **Competing financial interests**

307 The authors declare no competing financial interests.

308 **Figure Legends**

309

310 **Figure 1** Global greenhouse emissions (**a**) and projected annual global mean near-surface
311 temperature rise in the AVOID scenarios (**b**). Solid lines refer to median temperature rise,
312 whilst shaded bars provide a 10-90% range (see Supplementary Material for details). (Key to
313 mitigation scenario names: A1B- xxxx-y-z where ‘xxxx’ refers to the year during which
314 global greenhouse gas emissions peak, ‘y’ refers to the rate (%/year) at which emissions
315 subsequently decline, and ‘z’ refers to whether the final emissions floor level is set to high
316 (H) or low (L).

317

318 **Figure 2** Proportion of species losing $\geq 50\%$ of their range by the 2080s with realistic
319 dispersal, under the baseline scenario (red), and in the mitigation scenarios with emissions
320 peaking in 2030 (green) or 2016 (blue), respectively, for (**a**) plants (**b**) animals (**c**)
321 amphibians (**d**) birds, (**e**) mammals and (**f**) amphibians. The shaded areas show the
322 uncertainties arising from use of a range of GCM patterns for creating downscaled climate
323 projections, as well as over the use of two (green) or three (blue) different mitigation
324 scenarios. Red lines show trends for emission pathway SRES A1B without mitigation, whilst
325 green and blue pathways show those with mitigation in which global greenhouse gas
326 emissions peak in 2030 and in 2016, respectively. The corresponding green and blue dashed
327 arrows in (a) show the adaptation time ‘bought’ in the AVOID2030 and the AVOID2016
328 scenarios (2038 to 2080 and 2048 to 2080, respectively); the dashed arrows are represented
329 by * and *’ in (b-f).

330

331 **Figure 3** Species richness of animal (**a, c**) and plant (**b, d**) species in the 2080s under realistic
332 dispersal for the stringent mitigation case in which global greenhouse gas emissions peak in
333 2016 and are subsequently reduced at 5% annually (**c, d**) compared with the no mitigation
334 case SRES A1B (**a, b**). Panels (**e, f**) show the species richness change that is avoided by such
335 mitigation. White areas are those where no data exist in the GBIF network. Species richness
336 gains occur only on the edges of these white areas, where it is an artefact of data paucity, and
337 hence is not shown.
338

339 **Table 1** Proportions of plants and animals losing $\geq 50\%$ of their current range due to climate
 340 change alone by the 2080s in the various emissions scenarios under no dispersal (ND),
 341 realistic dispersal (RD), or optimistic dispersal (OD). Ranges show variation arising from use
 342 of seven different GCM patterns for creating downscaled climate projections.

343

	Baseline A1B	Mitigation 2030-2-H	Mitigation 2030-5-L	Mitigation 2016-2-H	Mitigation 2016-4-L	Mitigation 2016-5-L
<i>Most likely global mean temperature rise by 2100 (°C)</i>	4.0	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.0	2.0
<i>Probability of constraining the temperature rise to 2°C above pre-industrial levels</i>	<1%	7%	17%	30%	44%	45%
Proportions of plants and animals losing 50% or more of their current range:						
Animals (ND)	42% (35-49%)	25% (20-30%)	23% (18-28%)	13% (10-16%)	12% (9-15%)	12% (9-15%)
Animals (RD)	34% (27-41%)	21% (17-25%)	18% (14-22%)	15% (12-18%)	13% (10-16%)	13% (10-16%)
Animals (OD)	32% (25-39%)	19% (15-23%)	17% (13-21%)	15% (12-18%)	12% (9-15%)	12% (9-15%)
Plants (ND)	57% (51-63%)	36% (31-41%)	36% (31-41%)	33% (28-38%)	24% (20-28%)	23% (19-27%)
Plants (RD)	57% (51-63%)	36% (31-41%)	36% (31-41%) 33% (28-38%)	33% (28-38%)	24% (20-28%)	23% (19-27%)
Plants (OD)	53% (47-59%)	34% (29-29%)	30% (26-34%)	25% (21-29%)	22% (18-26%)	22% (18-26%)

344





