# 5 ATMOSPHERIC DEPOSITION IN EUROPEAN FORESTS IN 2018

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## Summary

Studying the effects of atmospheric pollution to forest ecosystems requires an evaluation of air quality and of the amount of pollutants carried to the forests by atmospheric deposition. Pollutant flux towards ecosystems through deposition mainly follows two pathways: wet deposition of compounds dissolved in rain, snow, sleet or similar, and dry deposition of particulate matter through gravity or adsorption on forest canopy for example.

Pollutant deposition shows a relatively high local variability, related to the distribution of pollutant sources and the local topography, and *in-situ* measurement is needed to obtain accurate evaluations and to validate model estimates.

In 2018, the chemical composition of atmospheric deposition was measured in 293 ICP Forests Level II permanent plots throughout Europe.

In this report, we focus on acidifying, buffering, and eutrophying compounds.

High values of nitrate deposition were mainly found in central Europe (Germany, Denmark, Belgium and eastern Austria), while for ammonium they were also found in northern Italy and Poland. The area of high deposition is smaller for sulphate, including some plots in Germany, Greece and Poland. High sulphate values are also measured in Belgium, but they are partially due to deposition of marine aerosol, and they are less evident after sea-salt correction.

Calcium and magnesium deposition can buffer the acidifying effect of atmospheric deposition. High values of calcium deposition are reported in southern Europe, mainly related to the deposition of Saharan dust, and in eastern Europe. The correction for the marine contribution of calcium matters mainly for sites in central Europe and in Spain. On the contrary, in the case of magnesium, the distribution of the highest values is markedly reduced by the sea salt correction.

## Introduction

The atmosphere contains a large number of substances of natural and anthropogenic origin. A large part of them can settle, or be adsorbed to receptor surfaces, or be included in rain and snow and finally reach land surface as wet and dry deposition.

In the last century human activities led to a dramatic increase in the deposition of nitrogen and sulphur compounds.

Sulphur deposition almost completely occurs in the form of sulphate ($SO_4^{2-}$), derived from marine aerosol and from sulphuric acid formed in the atmosphere by the interaction of gaseous sulphur dioxide ($SO_2$) with water.

$SO_2$ emission derives from coal and fuel combustion, volcanoes, and forest fires and has increased since the 1850s, causing an increase in the deposition of sulphate and in deposition acidity. Acidifying inputs can be partly buffered by the deposition of the base cations calcium ($Ca^{2+}$) and magnesium ($Mg^{2+}$).

Natural sources of nitrogen (N) in the atmosphere are mainly restricted to the emission of $N_2O$ and $N_2$ during denitrification and the decomposition of the nitrogen gas molecule in the air during lightning. However, human activities cause the emission of large amounts of nitrogen oxides ($NO_x$), released during combustions, and of ammonia ($NH_3$) deriving from agriculture and farming. They are found in atmospheric deposition in the form of nitrate ($NO_3^-$) and ammonium ($NH_4^+$).

Nitrogen compounds have two effects on the ecosystems: they are important plant nutrients that can produce ecosystem eutrophication, and both have strong effects on plant metabolism (e.g., Silva et al. 2015), forest ecosystem processes (e.g. Meunier et al. 2016) and biodiversity (e.g., Bobbink et al. 2010), but they can also act as acidifying compounds (Bobbink and Hettelingh 2011).

Emission and deposition of inorganic nitrogen are recently decreasing, but the trend is less evident than for $SO_4^{2-}$ (Waldner et al. 2014; EEA 2016).

## Materials and methods

Atmospheric deposition is collected in the ICP Forests permanent plots under the tree canopy (throughfall samplers, Fig. 5-1 right) and in a nearby clearance (open field samplers, Fig. 5-1 left). Throughfall samples are used to estimate wet deposition, i.e. the amount of pollutants carried out by rain and snow, but they also include dry deposition from particulate matter collected by the canopy. The total deposition to a forest, however, also includes nitrogen taken up by leaves directly or organic nitrogen compounds. It can be estimated by applying canopy exchange models.

It is important to note the different behaviour of individual ions when they interact with the canopy: in the case of sulphate, calcium and magnesium, the interaction is almost negligible and

it can be assumed that throughfall deposition includes the sum of wet and dry deposition.

This is not the case for other ions, such as ammonium: tree canopy and the associated microbial communities strongly interact with them, for example tree leaves can uptake ammonium ions and release potassium ions and organic compounds, affecting the composition of throughfall deposition.

Sampling, analysis and quality control procedures are harmonized on the basis of the ICP Forests Manual (Clarke et al. 2016). Quality control and assurance include laboratory ring-tests, use of control chart and performing conductivity and ion balance checks on all samples (König et al. 2010). In calculating ion balance, the charge of organic compounds was considered proportional to the dissolved organic carbon (DOC) content following Mosello et al. (2005, 2008).

In this report, we consider the 2018 yearly throughfall deposition, collected in 293 permanent plots and following the ICP Forests Manual, in both the European ICP Forests network and in the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network (SWETHRO).

Thirteen plots were excluded because the duration of sampling covered less than 90% (329 days) of the year, and 63 other plots were marked as "not validated" because the conductivity check was passed for less than 30% of the analysis of the year. Two plots were also marked as the laboratory did not participate in the mandatory Working Ring Test.

Finally, ammonium deposition reported by two laboratories for 11 plots and calcium deposition reported by one laboratory for two plots were not validated as those laboratories did not pass the Working Ring Test minimum quality requirement.

As the deposition of marine aerosol represents an important contribution to the total deposition of sulphate, calcium and magnesium, a sea-salt correction was applied, subtracting from the deposition fluxes the marine contribution, calculated as a fraction of the chloride deposition according to the ICP Integrated Monitoring Manual (FEI 2013).

## Results

The uneven distribution of emission sources and receptors and the complex orography of part of Europe results in a marked spatial variability of atmospheric deposition. However, on a broader scale, regional patterns in deposition arise. In the case of nitrate, high and moderate throughfall deposition was mainly found in central Europe, including Germany, Czechia, Poland, Austria, Italy, Slovenia and Belgium, but single plots with high deposition values are also reported in other countries (Fig. 5-3).

The central European area of high and moderate ammonium throughfall deposition is larger than for nitrate, with higher throughfall deposition values particularly in southern Germany and northern Italy, western Slovakia and Poland (Fig. 5-4).

It is generally considered that negative effects of nitrogen deposition on forests become evident when inorganic nitrogen deposition (i.e. the sum of nitrate and ammonium deposition) is higher than a specific threshold, known as the critical load. Critical loads can be evaluated for each site by modeling, but more generic critical loads (empirical critical loads) are also being evaluated, ranging between 10 and 25 kg $ha^{-1}$ $y^{-1}$ (Bobbink and Hettelingh, 2011). In 2018, throughfall inorganic nitrogen deposition higher than 10 kg $ha^{-1}$ $y^{-1}$ were mainly measured in central Europe, including Germany, Belgium, northern Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and Czechia) (Fig. 5.5).



**Figure 5-1: Open field (left) and throughfall (right) collectors at an ICP Forests Level II site in Slovenia (Images: Iztok Sinjur and Lado Kutnar, SFI)**

The area with high and moderate throughfall deposition of sulphate is smaller than for the nitrogen compounds (Fig. 5-6): it includes Belgium, Italy, Slovenia and an area between Germany, Czechia, Slovakia and Poland. Further plots with high sulphate throughfall deposition were found in proximity of large point sources and harbors in Spain, Greece, France and Austria.

The influence of marine aerosol was relevant at sites with intermediate sulphate throughfall deposition in coastal areas, where the correction for sea-salt contribution led to low throughfall deposition values, without relevant alterations in the pattern described above (Fig. 5-7).

Calcium and magnesium are also analysed in the ICP Forests deposition monitoring network, as their deposition can buffer the acidifying effect of atmospheric deposition, protecting soil from acidification. High values of calcium throughfall deposition are mostly reported in central and southern Europe (Fig. 5-8).

The correction for the marine contribution was more relevant for sites in central Europe with intermediate calcium deposition (Fig. 5-9): high sea-salt corrected calcium deposition is mainly found in southern Europe (Spain, Italy and Greece) and the Alps (Austria and Switzerland) were the influence of wind-blown Saharan dust is remarkable.

On the contrary, in the case of magnesium, the distribution of the highest values, including a large portion of southern and central Europe (Fig. 5-10), is markedly reduced by the sea salt correction (Fig. 5-11).

Within the ICP Forests programme, deposition monitoring is running continuously since 1997 in 64 permanent Level II plots.

During this period, the application of the protocol of the Air Convention and economic transformation led to a marked decrease of $SO_2$ emission in Europe (EEA 2016). As a consequence, sea-salt corrected sulphate throughfall deposition dramatically decreased in the considered period (Fig. 5-2), reaching values as low as 30% of those found in the late 1990s, and causing a similar decrease of deposition acidity (Waldner et al. 2014). In the case of the nitrogen compounds, the average reduction in throughfall deposition was also present, but less marked. Note that total deposition of nitrogen typically is a factor 1 to 2 higher than throughfall deposition, due to uptake in the canopy.

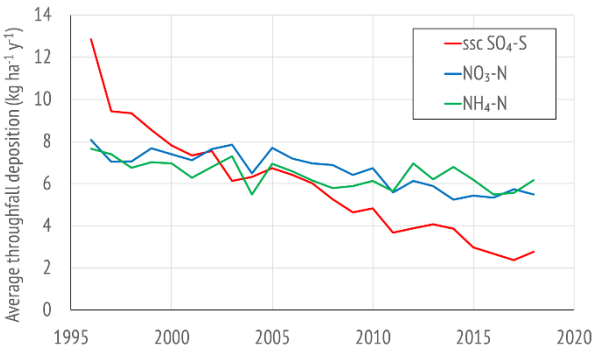


**Figure 5-2: Trend in throughfall deposition of nitrate-nitrogen ($NO_3^-$-N), ammonium-nitrogen ($NH_4^+$-N) and sea-salt corrected sulphate-sulphur ($SO_4^{2-}$-S) (kg $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured between 1997 and 2018 in 64 ICP Forests Level II plots with continuous data** (22 plots in DEU, 13 plots in FRA, 12 plots in AUT, 2 plots in GBR, 1 plot in DNK).

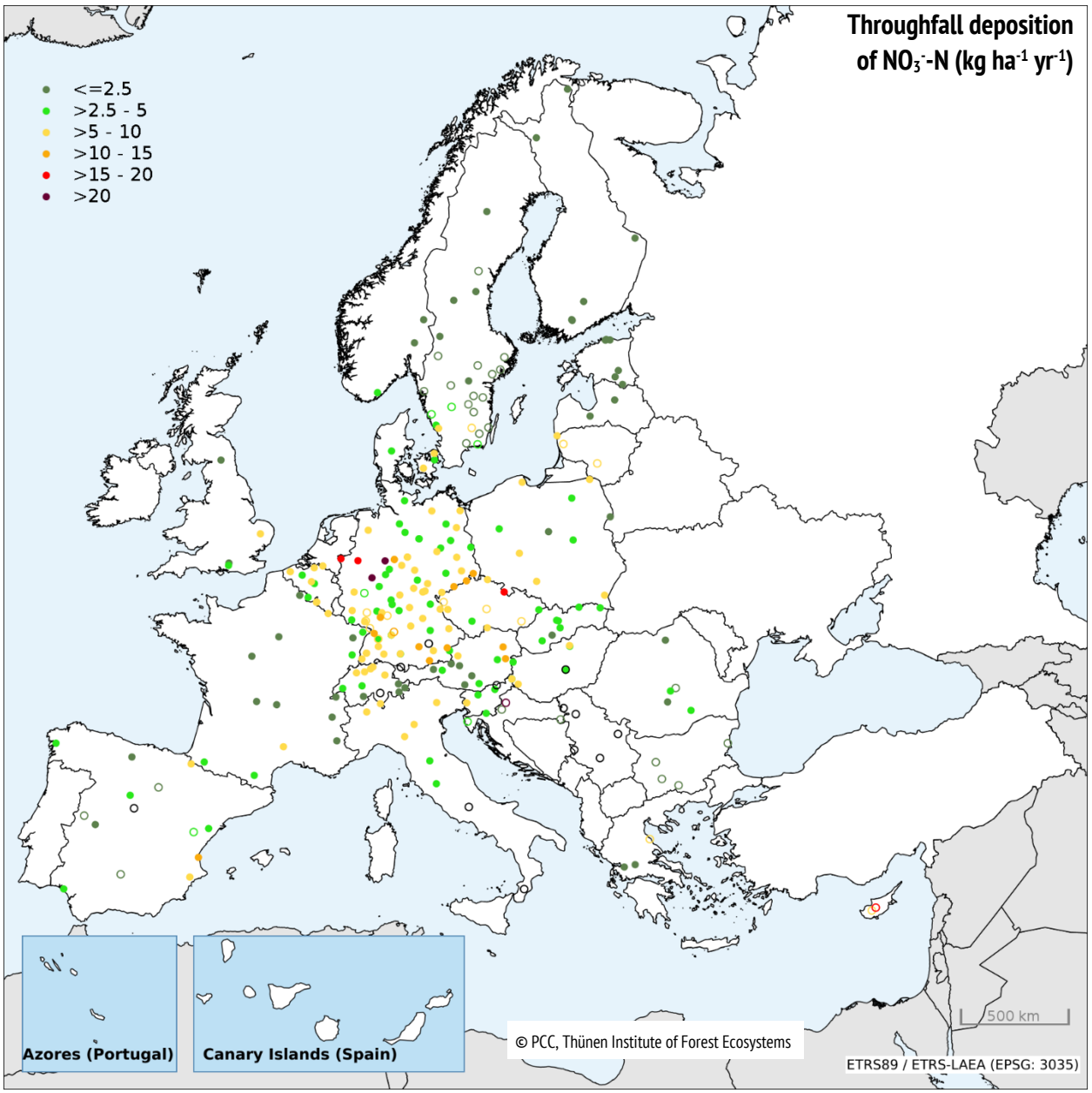


**Figure 5-3: Throughfall deposition of nitrate-nitrogen (kg $NO_3^-$-N $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days.

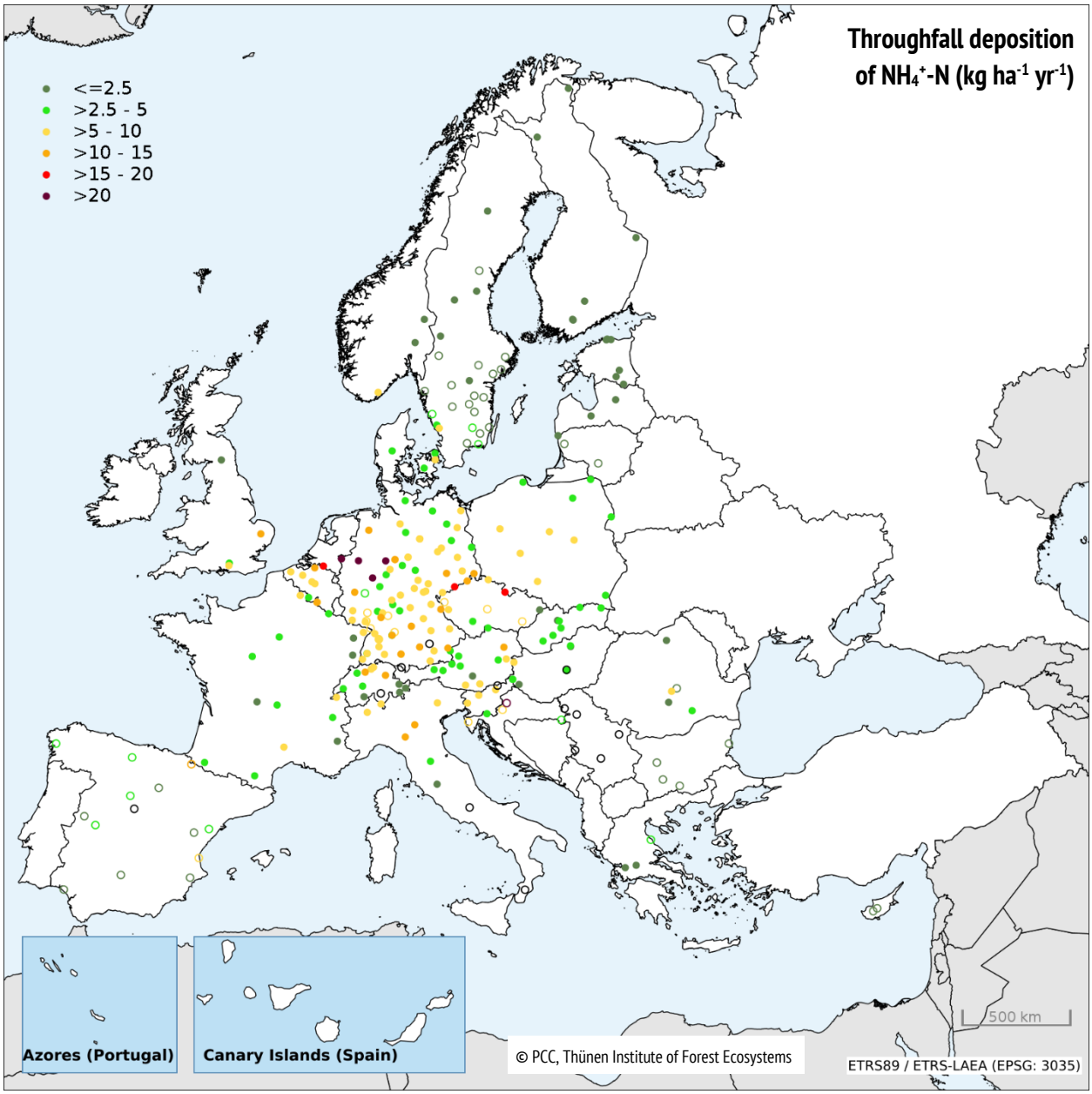


**Figure 5-4: Throughfall deposition of ammonium-nitrogen (kg $NH_4^+$-N $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days.

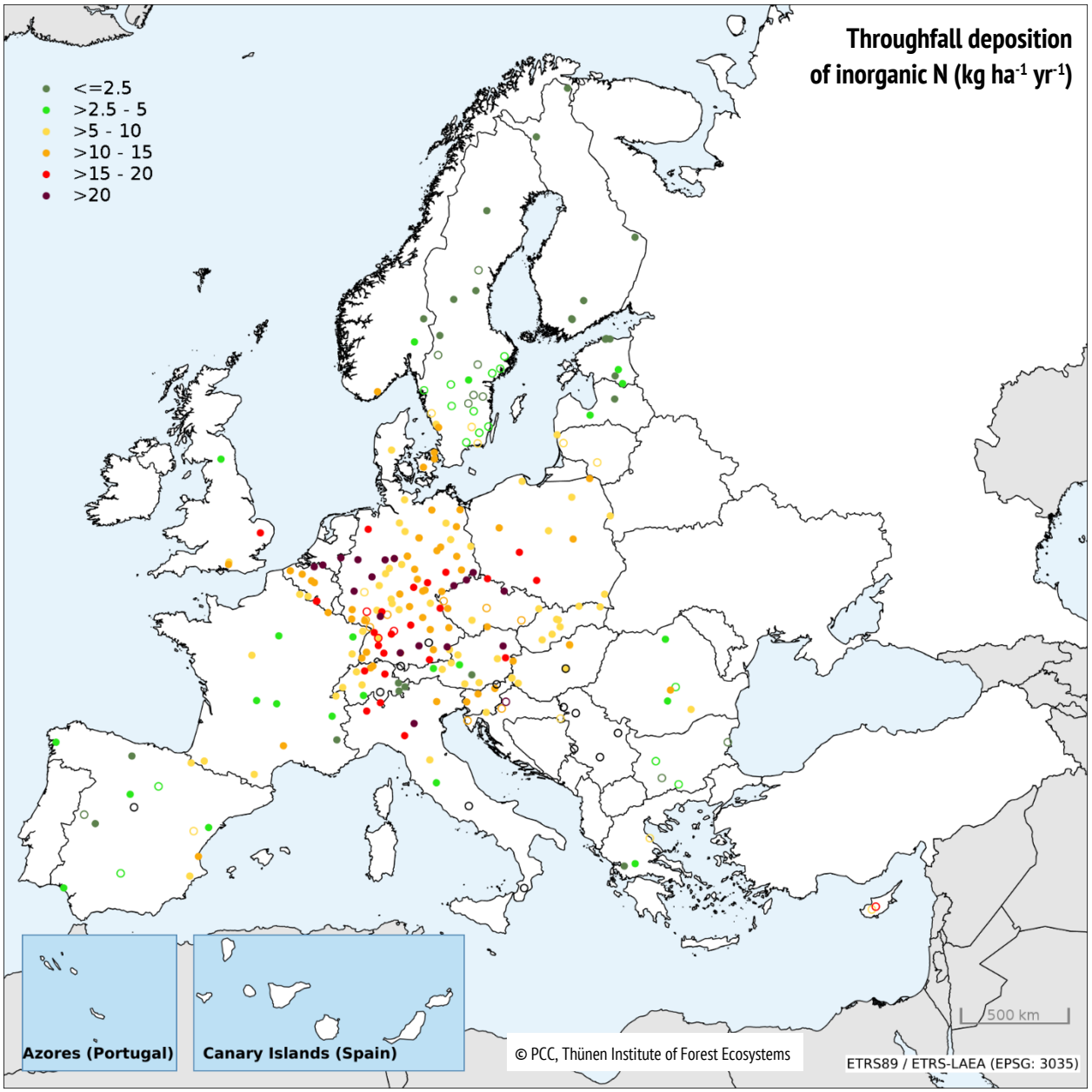


**Figure 5-5: Throughfall deposition of inorganic nitrogen ($NO_3^-$-N + $NH_4^+$-N) (kg N $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days.

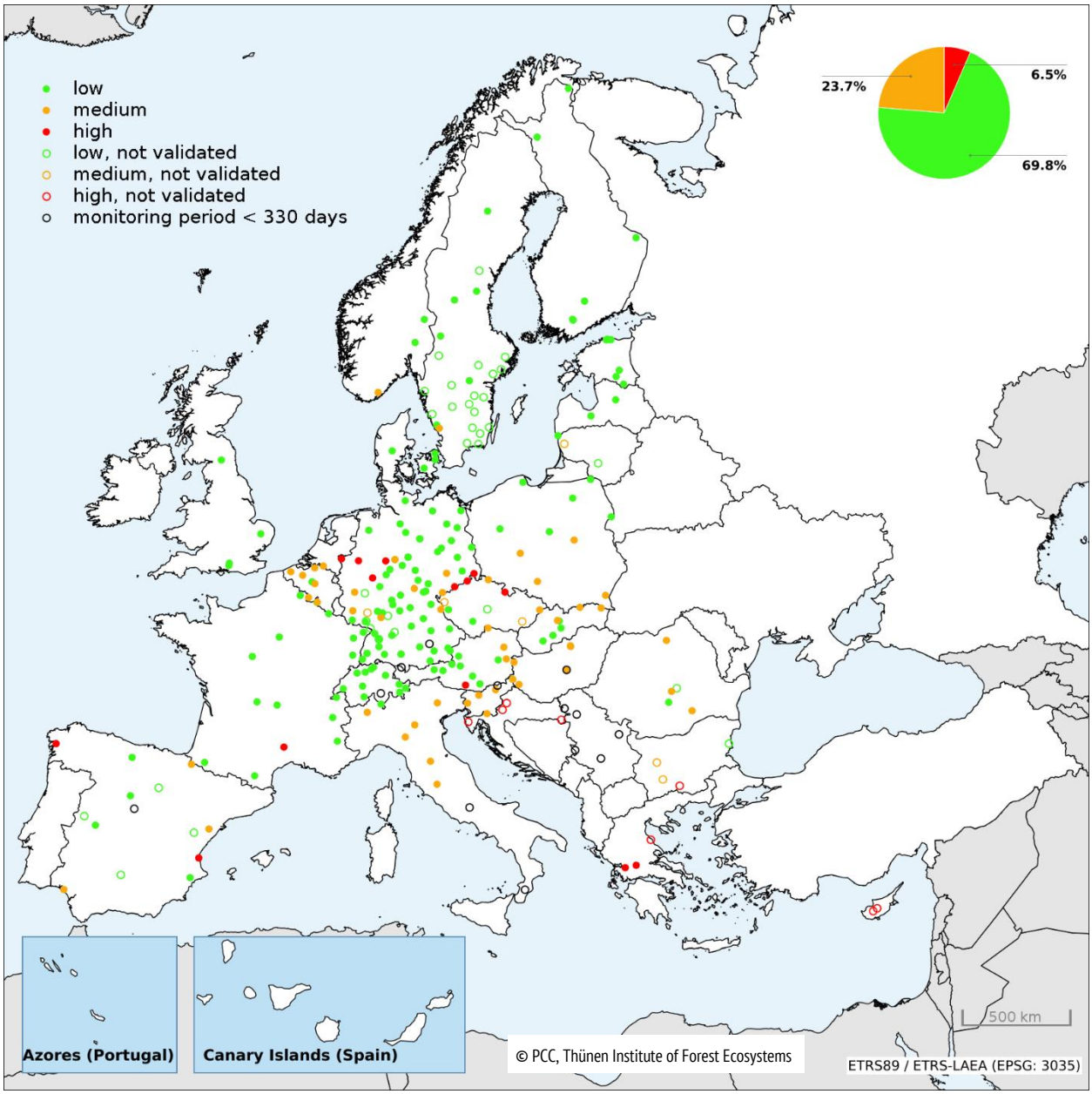


**Figure 5-6: Throughfall deposition of sulphate-sulphur (kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days. Legend: low (0.0–4.0 kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), medium (>4.0–8.0 kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), high (>8.0 kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$).

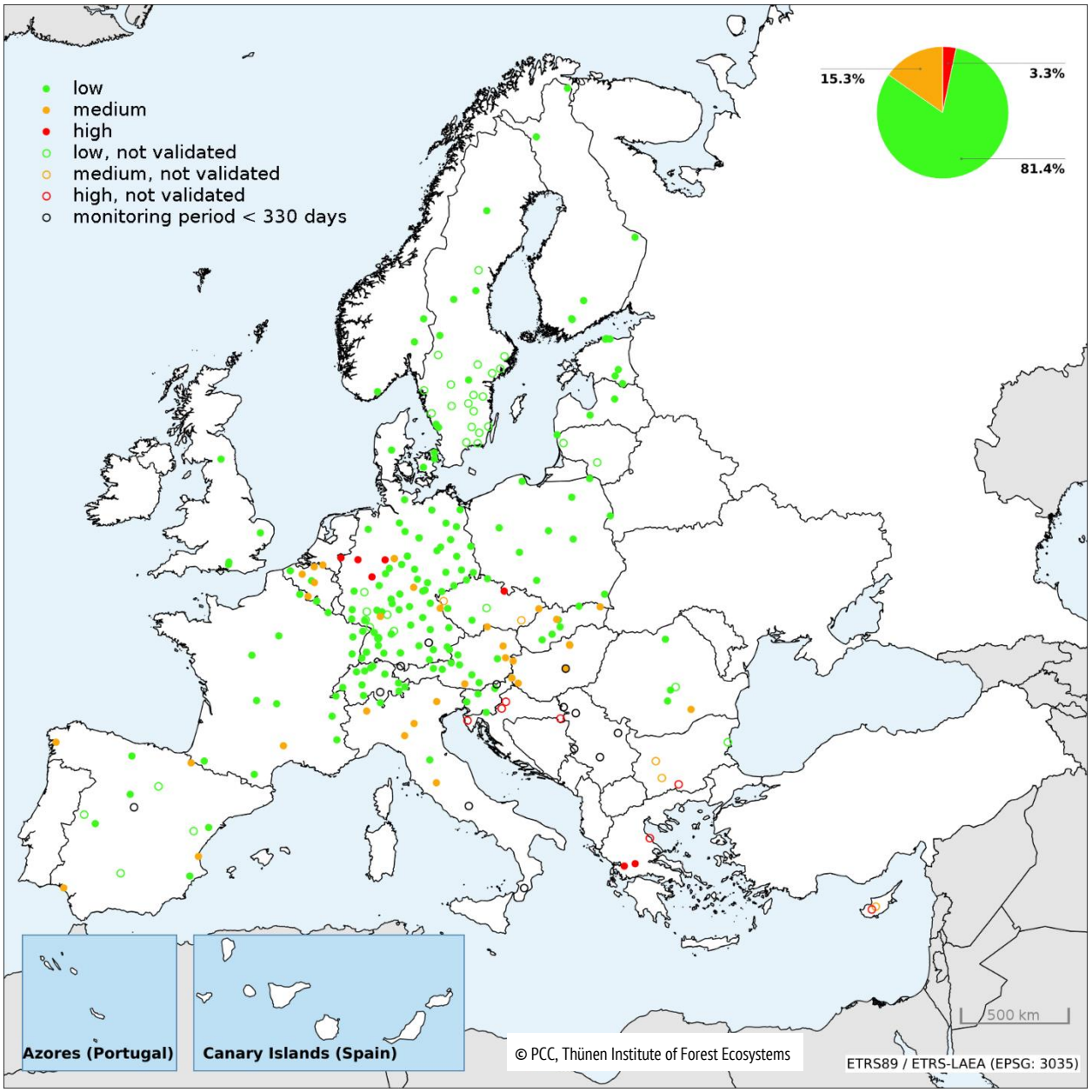


**Figure 5-7: Throughfall deposition of sea-salt corrected sulphate-sulphur (kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days. Legend: low (0.0–4.0 kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), medium (>4.0–8.0 kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), high (>8.0 kg $SO_4^{2-}$-S $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$).

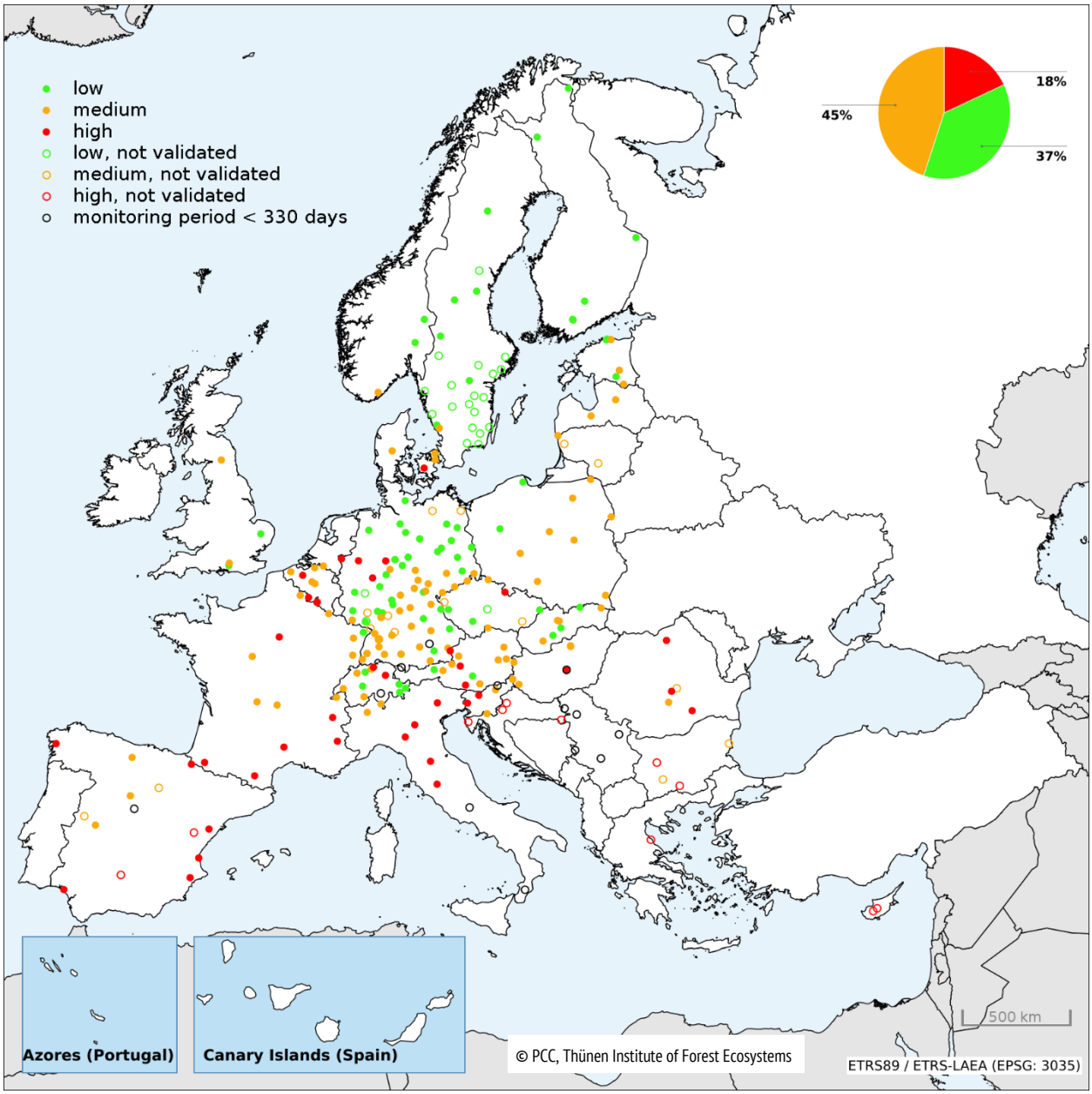


**Figure 5-8: Throughfall deposition of calcium (kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days. Legend: low (0.0–5.0 kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), medium (>5.0–10.0 kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), high (>10.0 kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$).

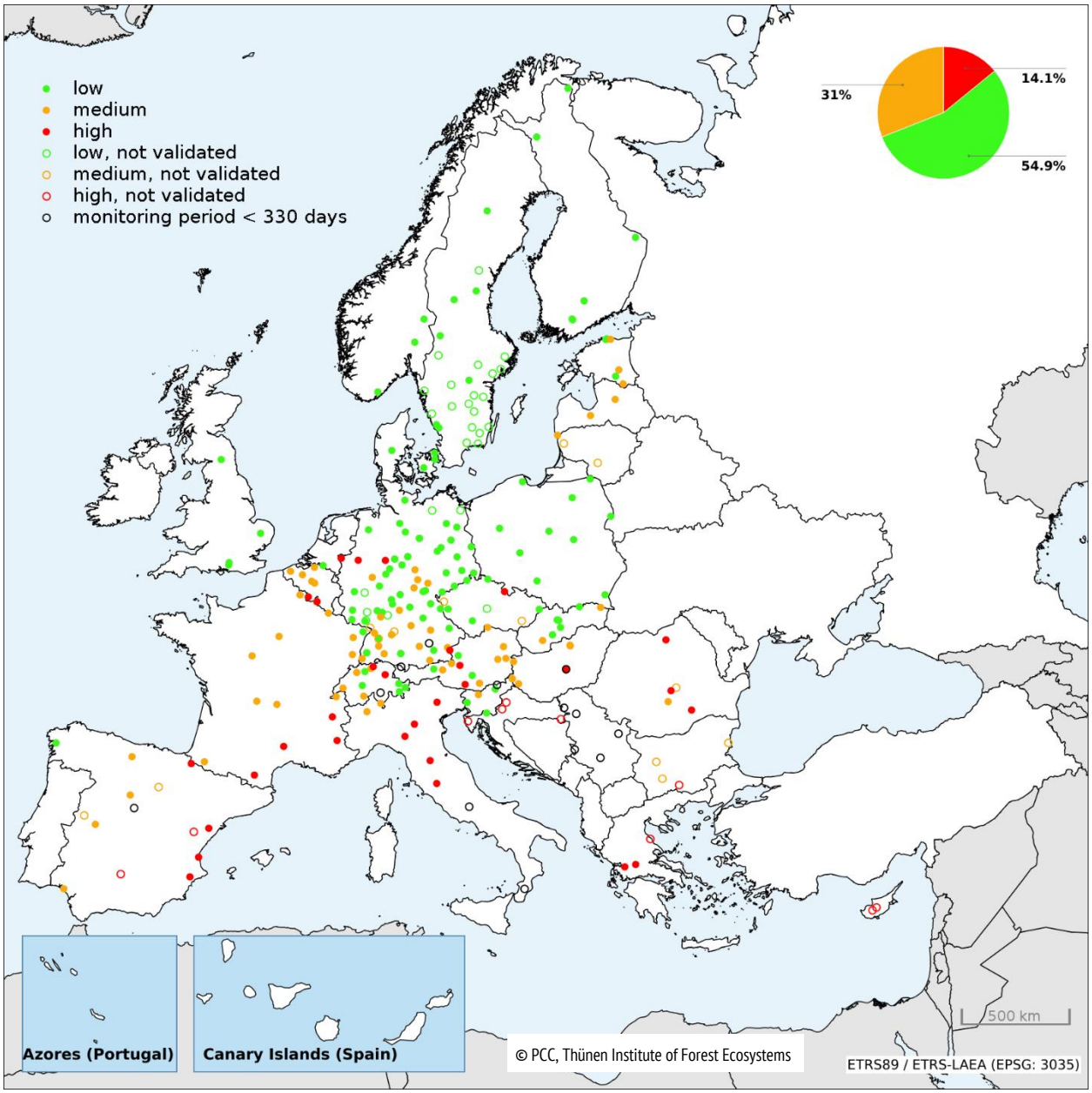


**Figure 5-9: Throughfall deposition of sea-salt corrected calcium (kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days. Legend: low (0.0–5.0 kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), medium (>5.0–10.0 kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), high (>10.0 kg $Ca^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$).

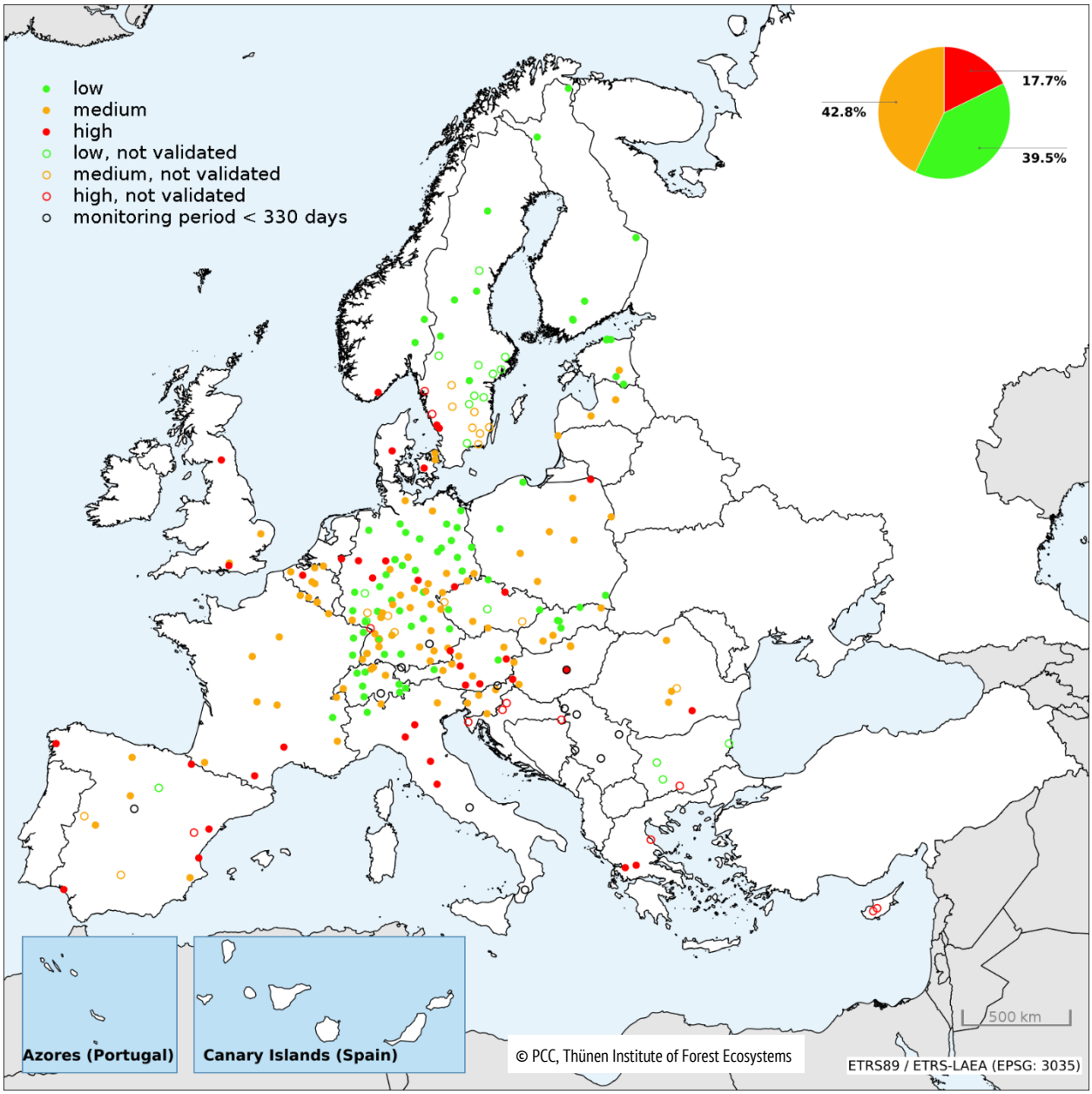


**Figure 5-10: Throughfall deposition of magnesium (kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days. Legend: low (0.0–1.5 kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) , medium (>1.5–3.0 kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), high (>3.0 kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$).

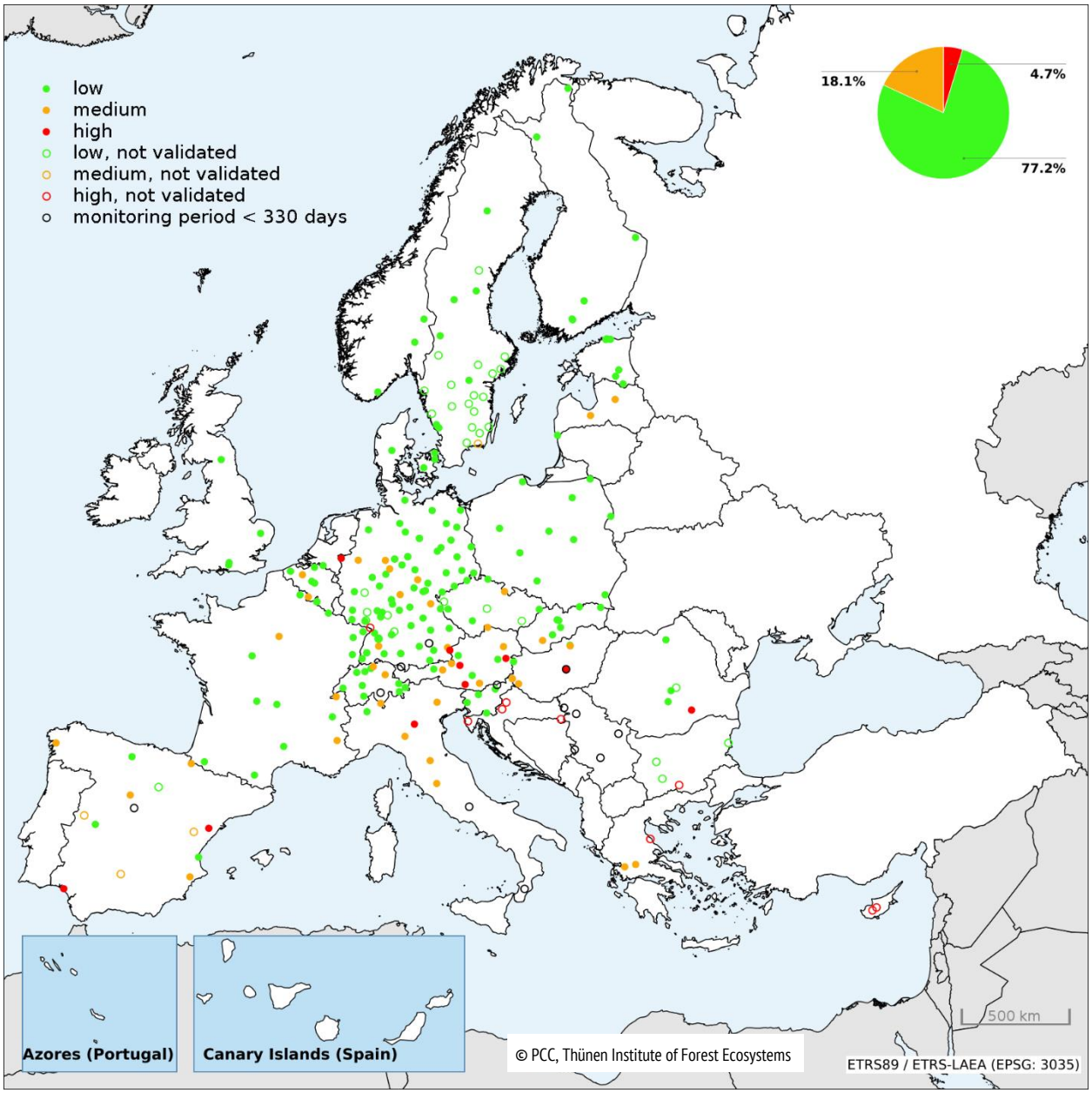


**Figure 5-11: Throughfall deposition of sea-salt corrected magnesium (kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$) measured in 2018 on the ICP Forests Level II plots and the Swedish Throughfall Monitoring Network.** Coloured dots: validated data. Coloured circles: not validated data. Black circles: monitoring period shorter than 330 days. Legend: low (0.0–1.5 kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), medium (>1.5–3.0 kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$), high (>3.0 kg kg $Mg^{2+}$ $ha^{-1}$ $yr^{-1}$).

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