

NUTRIENT AVAILABILITY COULD CONSTRAINT FOREST ECOSYSTEM RESPONSE TO GLOBAL CHANGE IN EUROPE

Mathieu Jonard¹, Alfred Fürst², Arne Verstraeten³, Anne Thimonier⁴, Volkmar Timmermann⁵, Nenad Potočić⁶, Peter Waldner⁴, Sue Benham⁷, Karin Hansen⁸, Päivi Merilä⁹, Quentin Ponette¹, Ana C de la Cruz¹⁰, Peter Roskams³, Manuel Nicolas¹¹, Luc Croisé¹¹, Morten Ingerslev¹², Giorgio Matteucci¹³, Bruno Decinti¹⁴, Marco Bascietto¹⁴ and Pasi Rautio⁹.

¹UCL-ELI, Université catholique de Louvain, Earth and Life Institute, Croix du Sud 2, L7.05.09, BE-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, mathieu.jonard@uclouvain.be

²BFW, Federal Research Centre for Forests, A-1131 Vienna, Austria
(alfred.fuerst@bfw.gv.at)

³Research Institute for Nature and Forest, Gaverstraat 35, B-9500 Geraardsbergen, Belgium
(Arne.VERSTRAETEN@inbo.be, Peter.ROSKAMS@inbo.be)

⁴WSL, Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research, CH-8903 Birmensdorf, Switzerland (anne.thimonier@wsl.ch, peter.waldner@wsl.ch)

⁵Norwegian Forest and Landscape Institute, Pb 115, NO-1431 Aas, Norway
(volkmar.timmermann@skogoglandskap.no)

⁶Croatian Forest Research Institute, Department of Ecology, Cvjetno naselje 41, HR-10450 Jastrebarsko, Croatia (nenadp@sumins.hr)

⁷Forest Research, Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham, UK-Surrey GU10 4LH, United Kingdom (Sue.Benham@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

⁸IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute, SE-100 31 Stockholm, Sweden
(karin.hansen@ivl.se)

⁹METLA, Finnish Forest Research Institute, PL 18, FI-01301 Vantaa, Finland
(paivi.merila@metla.fi, pasi.rautio@metla.fi)

¹⁰INIA, Centro de Investigación Forestal, Ctra. de la Coruña km. 7,5 ES-28040 Madrid, Spain
(calleja@inia.es)

¹¹ONF, Office National des Forêts, Département Recherche et Développement, Bâtiment B, Boulevard de Constance, F-77300 Fontainebleau, France (manuel.nicolas@onf.fr, luc.croise@onf.fr)

¹²University of Copenhagen, Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, Rolighedsvej 23, DK-1958 Frederiksberg, Denmark (moi@ign.ku.dk)

¹³Istituto per i Sistemi Agricoli e Forestali del Mediterraneo - U.O.S. Rende, Via Cavour 4-6, I-87030 Rende, Italy (giorgio.matteucci@isafom.cnr.it)

¹⁴CNR, Istituto di Biologia Agroambientale e Forestale - U.O.S. Montelibretti, Via Salaria km 29.300, I-00016 Monterotondo Scalo, Italy (bruno.decinti@ibaf.cnr.it, marco.bascietto@ibaf.cnr.it)

Abstract

In Europe, the combined effects of the global enrichment in atmospheric CO₂ and the high atmospheric nitrogen (N) deposition have increased forest productivity during the last decades. Since N deposition is still high in many European regions and atmospheric CO₂ is still rising, forest productivity in Europe could continue to increase. However, if nutrient availability becomes a limiting factor, forest productivity will not continue its increase, which will inevitably decrease the carbon sequestering capacity of European forests.

The objectives of this study were to describe the nutritional status of the main European tree species, to identify growth limiting nutrients and to assess changes in tree nutrition during the past two decades. We analysed the foliar nutrition data collected during 1992-2009 on the intensive forest monitoring plots of the ICP Forests programme. This dataset is unique in its scope and size, and has the further advantage of being harmonized among all participating countries. Of the 22 significant temporal trends that were observed in foliar nutrient concentrations, 20 were decreasing and 2 were increasing. Altogether our results show a clear deterioration in P nutrition during the past two decades in some of the main tree species. Our study also highlights some downward trends that should be monitored closely in the future since they could become alarming: e.g. decrease in foliar S concentration in *P. abies* and *P. sylvestris*, in foliar Mg concentration in *F. sylvatica*, in foliar K concentration in *Q. petraea* and *P. abies* and in foliar Ca concentration in *F. sylvatica* and *Q. petraea*. Increased tree productivity, possibly resulting from high N deposition and from the global increase in atmospheric CO₂, has led to higher nutrient demand by trees. Soil nutrient supply was however not always sufficient to meet the demand of faster growing trees. As tree nutrient status exerts a tight control on net ecosystem productivity, this deterioration in tree nutrition could have a strong impact on the response of forest ecosystems to climate change. Nutrient availability and tree nutrition should therefore be accounted for in global carbon cycle to allow climate models to better predict C sequestration capacity of forests and avoid overestimations. Our findings are totally in line with several recent global studies showing that the unbalanced inputs of C and N relative to P induced significant changes in organism stoichiometry resulting in profound and uncertain consequences on the structure, functioning and diversity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

Key Words (up to five)

forest monitoring, trend analysis, foliar chemistry, mineral nutrition, forest ecosystem

Abstract for an oral presentation

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Abstract for a poster

Conference theme (up to two)

Coupled human and natural systems (CHANS)

Global change ecology

Remote sensing of global change

Ecosystem modeling and management

Green infrastructure and biodiversity

Ecosystem services evaluation and policy making

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