

Anthropogenic climate change drives shift and shuffle in North Atlantic phytoplankton communities

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Anthropogenic climate change has shifted the biogeography and phenology of many terrestrial and marine species. Marine phytoplankton communities appear sensitive to climate change, yet understanding of how individual species may respond to anthropogenic climate change remains limited. Here, using historical environmental and phytoplankton observations, we characterize the realized ecological niches for 87 North Atlantic diatom and dinoflagellate taxa and project changes in species biogeography between mean historical (1951–2000) and future (2051–2100) ocean conditions. We find that the central positions of the core range of 74% of taxa shift poleward at a median rate of 12.9 km per decade ($\text{km}\cdot\text{dec}^{-1}$), and 90% of taxa shift eastward at a median rate of $42.7 \text{ km}\cdot\text{dec}^{-1}$. The poleward shift is faster than previously reported for marine taxa, and the predominance of longitudinal shifts is driven by dynamic changes in multiple environmental drivers, rather than a strictly poleward, temperature-driven redistribution of ocean habitats. A century of climate change significantly shuffles community composition by a basin-wide median value of 16%, compared with seasonal variations of 46%. The North Atlantic phytoplankton community appears poised for marked shift and shuffle, which may have broad effects on food webs and biogeochemical cycles.

phytoplankton | climate change | North Atlantic | diatom | dinoflagellate

Earth system models (ESMs) generally indicate that greenhouse gas emissions may, over the coming century, lead to further acidification and warming of the ocean surface, increased surface stratification and decreased mixing depths, and weaker seasonal entrainment of deep nutrients essential for phytoplankton growth (1, 2). These global trends are seen in the North Atlantic, although regional variations are apparent (Fig. S1). Many models project that waters southeast of Greenland will become cooler, more stratified, and consequently nutrient-poor (1–3). Here, strong salinity-driven surface stratification arising from ice melt and enhanced precipitation over evaporation may weaken meridional overturning (4). The cooling here is associated with weaker transport of heat into the surface laterally and from below by convection but is also because stratified surface waters are exposed to the relatively cold atmosphere for a longer duration (5). Projected basin-scale changes in clouds and sea ice cover may also drive changes in light entering the ocean surface.

These environmental changes may lead to pronounced regional changes in phytoplankton communities, overlying a global trend of decreasing primary production, weaker sinking flux of particulate carbon, and decreased energy flows between phytoplankton and fish (1, 2, 6). Although it is widely believed that marine organisms and ecosystems are sensitive to climate change (7–11), the climate response and drivers of change for individual phytoplankton species are not well known. The goal of this study is to estimate how anthropogenic climate change in the coming century may alter the biogeographies of many phytoplankton species commonly sampled in the subpolar and subtropical North Atlantic, a region projected to have pronounced regional climate changes and with importance to global biogeochemical cycles and fisheries.

We used the bioclimate envelope approach (12), in which we quantified the realized ecological niche for each species from

historical observations and applied this species distribution model (SDM) to map and compare species biogeographies in modeled historical (1951–2000) and projected future (2051–2100) ocean conditions (*Methods* and *Supporting Information*). The SDM for each species was constructed with the MaxEnt modeling method (13–17) by pairing 60 y of Continuous Plankton Recorder (CPR; *SI Text*) (18) presence-only data with repeating annual cycles for observed environmental predictor variables generally found to affect phytoplankton abundance and community composition: sea surface temperature (SST); sea surface salinity (SSS); mixed layer depth (MLD); photosynthetically active radiation (PAR); and the surface concentrations of nitrate, phosphate, and silicate. We used species abundance data for 1947–2006 in 41 standard survey areas across the North Atlantic (19) and converted abundance to presence-only data because it is difficult to confirm the absence of rare species present in low concentrations. Data for the seven environmental drivers were spatially averaged to match the CPR data. To make biogeographic projections for modeled historical and future periods, data for the same seven environmental predictors were taken from the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory's Earth System Model (20, 21) (GFDL ESM2G, 1° horizontal resolution; *SI Text*), forced by the Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5 (RCP8.5) emissions scenario (Fig. S1). We present results only for a relatively robust set of CPR taxa having greater than 15 presence observations (22) and comparatively high SDM skill, defined here as having an area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC) greater than 0.7 (*Supporting Information*). We then performed a visual inspection of predicted ranges against CPR presence observations on a season by season basis to assess the robustness of these thresholds (Fig. S2). The resulting 87 taxa (Table S1) represent a diverse subset of commonly sampled North Atlantic diatoms and dinoflagellates, which are

Significance

Phytoplankton play essential roles in marine food webs and global biogeochemical cycles, yet the responses of individual species and entire phytoplankton communities to anthropogenic climate change in the coming century remain uncertain. Here we map the biogeographies of commonly observed North Atlantic phytoplankton and compare their historical (1951–2000) and projected future ranges (2051–2100). We find that individual species and entire communities move in space, or shift, and that communities internally reassemble, or shuffle. Over the coming century, most but not all studied species shift northeastward in the basin, moving at a rate faster than previously estimated. These pronounced ecological changes are driven by dynamic changes in ocean circulation and surface conditions, rather than just warming temperatures alone.

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communities and can be compared with projections made with other numerical (1, 2, 10, 39) and statistical models (8, 9), as well as estimates of range shifts gleaned from terrestrial and marine historical data (36, 44).

Anthropogenic climate change over the coming century may drive North Atlantic phytoplankton species ranges and communities to move in space, or shift, and cause communities to internally reassemble, or shuffle. The projected poleward range shifts in this region are larger than previously estimated (36, 44) and may also be accompanied by significant and previously unanticipated longitudinal shifts. When integrated over a century of climate change, these range shifts are similar in size to large marine ecosystems and state exclusive economic zones, suggesting that the projected changes in the phytoplankton community may be of consequence to management of living marine resources (45). Although temperature has in the past been the focus of numerous studies on how anthropogenic climate affects marine ecosystems (9, 46, 47), the profound ecological changes in North Atlantic phytoplankton communities are driven not just by temperature but by dynamic regional changes in ocean circulation and surface conditions that imprint on mixed layer depth, light, salinity, and macronutrients. Thus, we suggest that future studies consider the effect of multiple environmental drivers acting in concert (48), rather than only temperature.

Methods

Species Distribution Models and Validation. Following on Irwin et al. (13), we diagnosed the SDM for each diatom and dinoflagellate in the CPR survey with the MaxEnt modeling method (14–17), which estimates the probability a species is present under any of the observed combinations of environmental conditions. MaxEnt is one of many approaches to species distribution modeling but is particularly well suited to using presence-only CPR data (49). It has been found to perform relatively well compared with other methods in modeling species distributions, particularly for species with small sample sizes (49, 50), and is well vetted and generally accepted by ecologists. For the MaxEnt analysis, we used software version 3.3.3k (www.cs.princeton.edu/~schapire/maxent/) and turned off threshold features in the response functions but allowed linear, quadratic, product, and hinge features. We performed 100 bootstrap resampling runs for each species (observation-based model and projections) and report the mean logistic probability and AUC score for each species (Table S1). As our study considered a large and diverse number of species, we used the default settings for all other tunable parameters in the MaxEnt software (15). We constructed the SDM for all CPR diatom and dinoflagellate taxa identified to species or genus level (~200 taxa), and present results only for the most robustly modeled 87 taxa that have minimum of 15 observations and an AUC score of 0.7 (SI Text). We have experimented extensively with the minimum observation number and AUC thresholds and find the models results are not overly sensitive to these choices.

For each SDM, we used training data from the CPR (SI Text) and climatological observational data describing seven key environmental parameters, averaged over the same standard survey areas: SST [World Ocean Atlas (WOA) 2009; https://www.nodc.noaa.gov/OC5/WOA09/pr_woa09.html] (51); SSS (WOA 2009) (52); MLD (the depth at which the potential density increases by 0.03 kg m⁻³ from the surface; from the de Boyer Montégut climatology; www.ifremer.fr/cerweb/deboyer/mlld/) (53); PAR at the ocean surface, calculated from the surface radiation budget (SRB; gewex-srb.larc.nasa.gov); surface nitrate concentration (WOA 2009) (54); surface phosphate concentration (WOA 2009) (54); and surface silicate concentration (WOA 2009) (54). For MLD, we used the inverse of MLD to lessen the importance of excessively deep MLDs at high latitudes. To estimate PAR, we multiplied the net incoming shortwave radiation (incoming shortwave minus outgoing shortwave) by a standard conversion factor of 0.46 (55). The SRB net shortwave data are comparable to output from the ESM2G model, which outputs the net downward shortwave flux at the seawater surface. We used time-varying CPR but climatological environmental data because quality time-varying data are not available for each environmental driver. This discrepancy may cause some blurring of the modeled phytoplankton niches.

Once the SDM for each species was constructed from observations, we calculated the logistic probability of occurrence, from 0 to 1, for each location, month of the year, and species in the model historical (1951–2000) and future (2051–2100) periods, using ESM2G model variables corresponding to the SDM predictor variables. Unlike the training data, the model data have 1° horizontal resolution. Our approach maps species biogeographies in historical and future climate states and allows for internally consistent projections of biogeographic change.

We also sought to assess the importance of climate-driven changes in each environmental driver to future phytoplankton biogeographies and communities (Fig. 4). To do so, we recalculated SDMs for each taxa using historical data for all drivers except for driver *k*, for which instead we used future data. The response in the phytoplankton community to the climate changes in the *k*th driver, Δ_k , was defined as the absolute difference in probability (*P*) between future and historical periods, summed over all months (*j*) and species (*i*):

$$\Delta_k = \sum_j \sum_i |P_{ij}^{\text{Future for } k\text{th driver only}} - P_{ij}^{\text{Historical}}|.$$

We normalized Δ_k by the sum of the responses across all seven variables, such that a value greater (less than) than 1/7 implies that change in a given driver has a relatively large (small) effect.

Species Core Range, Core Range Central Position, and Range Shifts. The core range is defined as the geographic area with logistic probabilities greater than 50% of the maximum logistic probability of presence for each species. The focus on core range, defined by species-specific but proportional levels of logistic probability, identifies periods and places where a given taxa is most likely to occur and enables diagnosis of how this range may shift through time. The core range is a relatively narrow description of total species range and acknowledges that the high population sizes and dispersal rates of marine microbes may lead to their being present outside their realized niche (56). Previous studies have found that changes in range central position through time tend to be less dynamic than for range leading edges (36).

The core range central position of each species for each month of the year is calculated by taking the average of all latitude and longitude points within the core range, weighted by the probability of occurrence and grid cell area (km²; the area of grid cells decreases toward to pole). The climate-mediated range shifts for each month of the year are calculated by subtracting the core range central position in 1951–2000 from the core range central position in 2051–2100. We report the annual median range shift (Fig. 2 and in text) and convert to units of km-dec⁻¹. The interquartile range bounds given indicate the range of species responses projected, not uncertainty regarding the climate or species distribution models. The range shifts reported in the text and presented in Fig. 2 are qualitatively similar over a range of percentage cutoff values (40–60%) used to define the core range. Similarly, if instead we define the core range as location with a relatively high fixed probability cutoff (in this case, greater than 0.2), the results in Fig. 2 are broadly conserved.

Bray–Curtis Similarity Index and Community Change. We estimated the similarity between any two phytoplankton communities, community A and community B, with the Bray–Curtis similarity index, or *S* (57):

$$S = 1 - \frac{\sum_i |P_i^A - P_i^B|}{\sum_i |P_i^A + P_i^B|},$$

where P_i^A and P_i^B are the probabilities of species *i* occurring in communities A and B, respectively. In Fig. 2C, we calculated *S* at each point on the map by comparing the historical probabilities at a typical subpolar location (P_i^A) with historical probabilities in each one of the surrounding points (P_i^B). In Fig. 2E, we used historical probabilities at a typical reference point in the subtropical gyre instead. Unsurprisingly, in both cases, *S* generally decreases with increasing distance from the reference location. Fig. 2D and F show a similar calculation, but we instead compared the historical community at the reference location to projected future communities at each point in the domain. This calculation shows that communities move in space relative to their initial positions in the historical period. The two reference locations in Fig. 2 were selected to reflect communities characteristic of the subtropical and subpolar ocean gyres. In Fig. 3A and B, we calculated *S* on a point-by-point basis, comparing annual median future and historical probabilities (Fig. 3A) and February and August probabilities in the historical period (Fig. 3B). We report the percentage change in community structure as 100(1 – *S*).

We also estimated new and extirpated species. New species are species that historically had low probabilities ($P_i^{\text{Historical}} < 0.2$) and significantly increase in the future ($P_i^{\text{Future}} - P_i^{\text{Historical}} > 0.2$); extirpated species are species that historically had high probabilities ($P_i^{\text{Historical}} > 0.2$) and significantly decrease in the future ($P_i^{\text{Future}} - P_i^{\text{Historical}} < -0.2$).

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