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Community-scale trends in leaf traits across ecological succession in three forest types: implications for inferring functional composition of ancient plant communities

Formatted Title:

Community-scale trends in leaf traits across ecological succession in three forest types: implications for inferring functional composition of ancient plant communities

Abstract:

Paleobotanical records provide opportunity to deepen an understanding of plant community ecology by reconstructing the outcome of large-scale ecological ‘experiments’ in Earth’s past. However, limited ability to describe ancient communities via plant functional traits and ecological strategies, rather than (para)taxonomic composition, can hinder the relevance of constructed datasets. Many functional traits are not measurable on fossil leaves and the link between leaf morphology and

ecological strategy are currently unresolved. To help fill this gap, we analyze leaf traits applicable to fossil leaves (i.e., morphology, vein density, leaf mass per area) sampled at the community-scale from modern plots spanning successional gradients, where plant function and ecological strategies are expected to vary, in three different forest types: temperate deciduous forest (North Carolina, USA), tropical rainforest (Malaysian Borneo), and a tropical dry forest (Minas Gerais, Brazil). Preliminary results will be presented to draw empirical links between morphological leaf traits and ecological strategy.

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