BIOGEOGRAPHY

Global distribution of earthworm diversity

Helen R. P. Phillips[1,2]*, Carlos A. Guerra[1,3], Marie L. C. Bartz[4], Maria J. I. Briones[5], George Brown[6], Thomas W. Crowther[7], Olga Ferlian[1,2], Konstantin B. Gongalsky[8,9], Johan van den Hoogen[7], Julia Krebs[1,2], Alberto Orgiazzi[10], Devin Routh[7], Benjamin Schwarz[11], Elizabeth M. Bach[12,13], Joanne Bennett[1,3], Ulrich Brose[1,14], Thibaud Decaëns[15], Birgitta König-Ries[1,16], Michel Loreau[17], Jérôme Mathieu[18], Christian Mulder[19], Wim H. van der Putten[20,21], Kelly S. Ramirez[20], Matthias C. Rillig[22,23], David Russell[24], Michiel Rutgers[25], Madhav P. Thakur[20], Franciska T. de Vries[26], Diana H. Wall[12,13], David A. Wardle[27], Miwa Arai[28], Fredrick O. Ayuke[29], Geoff H. Baker[30], Robin Beauséjour[31], José C. Bedano[32], Klaus Birkhofer[33], Eric Blanchart[34], Bernd Blossey[35], Thomas Bolger[36,37], Robert L. Bradley[31], Mac A. Callaham[38], Yvan Capowiez[39], Mark E. Caulfield[40], Amy Choi[41], Felicity V. Crotty[42,43], Andrea Dávalos[35,44], Darío J. Diaz Cosin[45], Anahí Dominguez[32], Andrés Esteban Duhour[46], Nick van Eekeren[47], Christoph Emmerling[48], Liliana B. Falco[49], Rosa Fernández[50], Steven J. Fonte[51], Carlos Fragoso[52], André L. C. Franco[12], Martine Fugère[31], Abegail T. Fusilero[53,54], Shaieste Gholami[55], Michael J. Gundale[56], Mónica Gutiérrez López[45], Davorka K. Hackenberger[57], Luis M. Hernández[58], Takuo Hishi[59], Andrew R. Holdsworth[60], Martin Holmstrup[61], Kristine N. Hopfensperger[62], Esperanza Huerta Lwanga[63,64], Veikko Huhta[65], Tunsisa T. Hurisso[51,66], Basil V. Iannone III[67], Madalina Iordache[68], Monika Joschko[69], Nobuhiro Kaneko[70], Radoslava Kanianska[71], Aidan M. Keith[72], Courtland A. Kelly[51], Maria L. Kernecker[73], Jonatan Klaminder[74], Armand W. Koné[75], Yahya Kooch[76], Sanna T. Kukkonen[77], H. Lalthanzara[78], Daniel R. Lammel[23,79], Iurii M. Lebedev[8,9], Yiqing Li[80], Juan B. Jesus Lidon[45], Noa K. Lincoln[81], Scott R. Loss[82], Raphael Marichal[83], Radim Matula[84], Jan Hendrik Moos[85,86], Gerardo Moreno[87], Alejandro Morón-Ríos[88], Bart Muys[89], Johan Neirynck[90], Lindsey Norgrove[91], Marta Novo[45], Visa Nuutinen[92], Victoria Nuzzo[93], Mujeeb Rahman P[94], Johan Pansu[95,96], Shishir Paudel[82], Guénola Pérès[97], Lorenzo Pérez-Camacho[98], Raúl Piñeiro[99], Jean-François Ponge[100], Muhammad Imtiaz Rashid[101,102], Salvador Rebollo[98], Javier Rodeiro-Iglesias[103], Miguel Á. Rodríguez[104], Alexander M. Roth[105,106], Guillaume X. Rousseau[58,107], Anna Rozen[108], Ehsan Sayad[55], Loes van Schaik[109], Bryant C. Scharenbroch[110], Michael Schirrmann[111], Olaf Schmidt[37,112], Boris Schröder[22,113], Julia Seeber[114,115], Maxim P. Shashkov[116,117], Jaswinder Singh[118], Sandy M. Smith[119], Michael Steinwandter[115], José A. Talavera[120], Dolores Trigo[45], Jiro Tsukamoto[121], Anne W. de Valença[122], Steven J. Vanek[51], Iñigo Virto[123], Adrian A. Wackett[124], Matthew W. Warren[125], Nathaniel H. Wehr[126], Joann K. Whalen[127], Michael B. Wironen[128], Volkmar Wolters[129], Irina V. Zenkova[130], Weixin Zhang[131], Erin K. Cameron[132,133]†, Nico Eisenhauer[1,2]†

Soil organisms, including earthworms, are a key component of terrestrial ecosystems. However, little is known about their diversity, their distribution, and the threats affecting them. We compiled a global dataset of sampled earthworm communities from 6928 sites in 57 countries as a basis for predicting patterns in earthworm diversity, abundance, and biomass. We found that local species richness and abundance typically peaked at higher latitudes, displaying patterns opposite to those observed in aboveground organisms. However, high species dissimilarity across tropical locations may cause diversity across the entirety of the tropics to be higher than elsewhere. Climate variables were found to be more important in shaping earthworm communities than soil properties or habitat cover. These findings suggest that climate change may have serious implications for earthworm communities and for the functions they provide.

Soils harbor high biodiversity and are responsible for a wide range of ecosystem functions and services upon which terrestrial life depends (*1*). Despite calls for large-scale biogeographic studies of soil organisms (*2*), global biodiversity patterns remain relatively unknown, with most efforts focused on soil microbes (*3–5*). Consequently, the drivers of soil biodiversity, particularly soil fauna, remain unknown at the global scale.

Furthermore, our ecological understanding of global biodiversity patterns [e.g., latitudinal diversity gradients (*6*)] is largely based on the distribution of aboveground taxa. Yet many soil organisms have shown global diversity patterns that differ from above-ground organisms (*3*, *7–9*), although the patterns often depend on the size of the soil organism (*10*).

Here, we analyzed global patterns in earthworm diversity, total abundance, and total biomass (hereafter "community metrics"). Earthworms are considered ecosystem engineers (*11*) in many habitats and also provide a variety of vital ecosystem functions and services (*12*). The provisioning of ecosystem functions by earthworms likely depends on the abundance, biomass, and ecological group of the earthworm species (*13*, *14*). Consequently, understanding global patterns in community metrics for earthworms is critical for predicting how changes in their communities may alter ecosystem functioning.

Small-scale field studies have shown that soil properties such as pH and soil carbon influence earthworm diversity (*11*, *15*, *16*). For example, lower pH values constrain the diversity of earthworms by reducing calcium availability (*17*), and soil carbon provides resources that sustain earthworm diversity and population sizes (*11*). Alongside many interacting soil properties (*15*), a variety of other drivers can shape earthworm diversity, such as climate and habitat cover (*11*, *18*, *19*). However, to date, no framework has integrated a comprehensive set of environmental drivers of earthworm communities to identify the most important ones at a global scale.

Previous reviews suggested that earthworms may have high diversity across the tropics as a result of high endemism (*10*). However, this high regional diversity may not be captured by local-scale metrics. Alternatively, in the temperate region, local diversity may be higher (*20*) but may include fewer endemic species (*10*). We anticipate that earthworm community metrics (particularly diversity) will not follow global patterns seen aboveground, and instead, as seen across Europe (*15*), will increase with latitude. This finding would be consistent with previous studies at regional scales, which showed that the species richness of earthworms increases with latitude (*19*). Because of the relationship among earthworm communities, habitat cover, and soil properties on local scales, we expect soil properties (e.g., pH and soil organic carbon) to be key environmental drivers of earthworm communities.

Here, we present global maps predicting local diversity (number of species), abundance, and biomass. (We use "local" in the sense of site-level: a location of one or more samples that adequately captured the earthworm community.) We collated 180 datasets from the literature and unpublished field studies (164 and 16, respectively) to create a dataset spanning 57 countries (all continents except Antarctica) and 6928 sites (Fig. 1A). We explored spatial patterns of earthworm communities and determined the environmental drivers that shape earthworm biodiversity. We then used the relationships between earthworm community metrics and environmental drivers (table S1) to predict local earthworm communities across the globe.

Three generalized linear mixed-effects models were constructed, one for each of the three community metrics: species richness (calculated within a site), abundance per m^2, and biomass per m^2. Each model contained 12 environmental variables as main effects (table S2), which were grouped into six themes; "soil," "precipitation," "temperature," "water retention," "habitat cover," and "elevation" [habitat cover and some soil variables were measured in the field; the remaining variables were extracted from global data layers

based on the geographic coordinates of the sites (14)]. Within each theme, each model contained interactions between the variables. After model simplification, all models retained most of the original variables, but some interactions were removed (table S3).

Consistent with previous results (20), local earthworm diversity predictions based on global environmental data layers resulted in estimates of one to four species per site across most of the terrestrial surface (Fig. 1B) (mean, 2.42 species; SD, 2.19). Most of the boreal and

subarctic regions were predicted to have low values of species richness, which is in line with aboveground biodiversity patterns (21, 22). However, low local diversity also occurred in subtropical and tropical areas, such as Brazil, India, and Indonesia, in contrast to commonly

[1]German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig, 04103 Leipzig, Germany. [2]Institute of Biology, Leipzig University, 04103 Leipzig, Germany. [3]Institute of Biology, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, 06108 Halle (Saale), Germany. [4]Universidade Positivo, Curitiba, PR 81280-330, Brazil. [5]Departamento de Ecología y Biología Animal, Universidad de Vigo, 36310 Vigo, Spain. [6]Embrapa Forestry, Colombo, PR 83411-000, Brazil. [7]Crowther Lab, Department of Environmental Systems Science, Institute of Integrative Biology, ETH Zürich, 8092 Zürich, Switzerland. [8]A. N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow 119071, Russia. [9]M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow 119991, Russia. [10]European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Ispra, Italy. [11]Biometry and Environmental System Analysis, University of Freiburg, 79106 Freiburg, Germany. [12]Department of Biology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA. [13]Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative and School of Global Environmental Sustainability, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA. [14]Institute of Biodiversity, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, 07743 Jena, Germany. [15]CEFE, UMR 5175, CNRS–Univ Montpellier–Univ Paul–Valéry–EPHE–SupAgro Montpellier–INRA–IRD, 34293 Montpellier Cedex 5, France. [16]Institute of Computer Science, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, 07743 Jena, Germany. [17]Centre for Biodiversity Theory and Modeling, Theoretical and Experimental Ecology Station, CNRS, 09200 Moulis, France. [18]Sorbonne Université, CNRS, UPEC, Paris 7, INRA, IRD, Institut d'Ecologie et des Sciences de l'Environnement de Paris, F-75005 Paris, France. [19]Department of Biological, Geological and Environmental Sciences, University of Catania, 95124 Catania, Italy. [20]Department of Terrestrial Ecology, Netherlands Institute of Ecology (NIOO-KNAW), 6700 AB Wageningen, Netherlands. [21]Laboratory of Nematology, Department of Plant Sciences, Wageningen University and Research, 6708 PB Wageningen, Netherlands. [22]Berlin-Brandenburg Institute of Advanced Biodiversity Research (BBIB), 14195 Berlin, Germany. [23]Institute of Biology, Freie Universität Berlin, 14195 Berlin, Germany. [24]Department of Soil Zoology, Senckenberg Museum for Natural History Görlitz, 02826 Görlitz, Germany. [25]National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Bilthoven, Netherlands. [26]Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics, University of Amsterdam, 1012 WX Amsterdam, Netherlands. [27]Asian School of the Environment, Nanyang Technological University, 639798 Singapore. [28]Institute for Agro-Environmental Sciences, National Agriculture and Food Research Organization, Tsukuba 305-8604, Japan. [29]Department of Land Resource Management and Agricultural Technology (LARMAT), College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, University of Nairobi, Nairobi 00625, Kenya. [30]CSIRO Health and Biosecurity, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia. [31]Département de Biologie, Université de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke J1K 2R1, Canada. [32]Geology Department, FCEFQyN, ICBIA-CONICET (National Scientific and Technical Research Council), National University of Río Cuarto, X5804 BYA Río Cuarto, Argentina. [33]Department of Ecology, Brandenburg University of Technology, 03046 Cottbus, Germany. [34]Eco&Sols, University of Montpellier, IRD, CIRAD, INRA, Montpellier SupAgro, 34060 Montpellier, France. [35]Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA. [36]School of Biology and Environmental Science, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland. [37]UCD Earth Institute, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland. [38]USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, Athens, GA 30602, USA. [39]UMR 1114 "EMMAH," INRA, Site Agroparc, 84914 Avignon, France. [40]Farming Systems Ecology, Wageningen University and Research, 6700 AK Wageningen, Netherlands. [41]Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON M5S 3B3, Canada. [42]Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth SY23 3EE, UK. [43]School of Agriculture, Food and Environment, Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester GL7 6JS, UK. [44]Department of Biological Sciences, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY 13045, USA. [45]Biodiversity, Ecology and Evolution, Faculty of Biology, Complutense University of Madrid, 28040 Madrid, Spain. [46]Laboratorio de Ecología, Instituto de Ecología y Desarrollo Sustentable, Universidad Nacional de Luján, 6700 Luján, Argentina. [47]Louis Bolk Institute, 3981 AJ Bunnik, Netherlands. [48]Department of Soil Science, Faculty of Regional and Environmental Sciences, University of Trier, Campus II, 54286 Trier, Germany. [49]Ciencias Básicas, Instituto de Ecología y Desarrollo Sustentable–INEDES, Universidad Nacional de Luján, 6700 Luján, Argentina. [50]Institute of Evolutionary Biology (CSIC–Universitat Pompeu Fabra), 08003 Barcelona, Spain. [51]Department of Soil and Crop Sciences, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA. [52]Biodiversity and Systematic Network, Instituto de Ecología A.C., Xalapa 91070, Mexico. [53]Department of Biological Science and Environmental Studies, University of the Philippines–Mindanao, Barangay Mintal, 8000 Davao City, Philippines. [54]Laboratory of Environmental Toxicology and Aquatic Ecology, Environmental Toxicology Unit (GhEnToxLab), Ghent University (UGent), Campus Coupure, Ghent, Belgium. [55]Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. [56]Forest Ecology and Management, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 90183 Umeå, Sweden. [57]Department of Biology, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, 31000 Osijek, Croatia. [58]Agricultural Engineering, Postgraduate Program in Agroecology, Maranhão State University, 65055-310 São Luís, Brazil. [59]Faculty of Agriculture, Kyushu University, 949 Ohkawauchi, Shiiba 883-0402, Japan. [60]Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, St. Paul, MN 55155, USA. [61]Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University, 8600 Silkeborg, Denmark. [62]Biological Sciences, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY 41099, USA. [63]Agricultura Sociedad y Ambiente, Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Ciudad Industrial, Lerma, Campeche 24500, Mexico. [64]Soil Physics and Land Management Degradation, Wageningen University and Research, 6708 PB Wageningen, Netherlands. [65]Department of Biological and Environmental Science, University of Jyväskylä, 40014 Jyväskylä, Finland. [66]College of Agriculture, Environmental and Human Sciences, Lincoln University of Missouri, Jefferson City, MO 65101, USA. [67]School of Forest Resources and Conservation, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA. [68]Sustainable Development and Environment Engineering, Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael the 1st of Romania," 300645 Timisoara, Romania. [69]Experimental Infrastructure Platform, Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), 15374 Müncheberg, Germany. [70]Faculty of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Fukushima University, Kanayagawa 1, Fukushima City, Japan. [71]Department of Environmental Management, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. [72]Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4AP, UK. [73]Land Use and Governance, Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), 15374 Müncheberg, Germany. [74]Department of Ecology and Environmental Science, Climate Impacts Research Centre, Umeå University, 90187 Umeå, Sweden. [75]UR Gestion Durable des Sols, UFR Sciences de la Nature, Université Nangui Abrogoua, 02 BP 801 Abidjan 02, Côte d'Ivoire. [76]Faculty of Natural Resources and Marine Sciences, Tarbiat Modares University, 46417-76489, Noor, Mazandaran, Iran. [77]Production Systems, Horticulture Technologies, Natural Resources Institute Finland, 40500 Jyväskylä, Finland. [78]Department of Zoology, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl 796001, India. [79]Soil Science, ESALQ-USP, Universidade de São Paulo, Piracicaba 13418, Brazil. [80]College of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resource Management, University of Hawai'i, Hilo, HI 96720, USA. [81]Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA. [82]Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, USA. [83]UR Systèmes de pérennes, CIRAD, Univ Montpellier, 34398 Montpellier, France. [84]Department of Forest Ecology, Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, 165 21 Prague, Czech Republic. [85]Department of Soil and Environment, Forest Research Institute of Baden-Wuerttemberg, 79100 Freiburg, Germany. [86]Thuenen-Institute of Organic Farming, 23847 Westerau, Germany. [87]Forestry School–INDEHESA, University of Extremadura, 10600 Plasencia, Spain. [88]Conservación de la Biodiversidad, El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, 24500 Campeche, Mexico. [89]Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, KU Leuven, 3001 Leuven, Belgium. [90]Research Institute for Nature and Forest, 9500 Geraardsbergen, Belgium. [91]School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences, Bern University of Applied Sciences, 3052 Zollikofen, Switzerland. [92]Soil Ecosystems, Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), 31600 Jokioinen, Finland. [93]Natural Area Consultants, 1 West Hill School Road, Richford, NY 13835, USA. [94]Department of Zoology, Pocker Sahib Memorial Orphanage College, Tirurangadi, Malappuram, Kerala, India. [95]CSIRO Ocean and Atmosphere, Lucas Heights, NSW 2234, Australia. [96]UMR7144 Adaptation et Diversité en Milieu Marin, Station Biologique de Roscoff, CNRS-Sorbonne Université, 29688 Roscoff, France. [97]UMR SAS, INRA, Agrocampus Ouest, 35000 Rennes, France. [98]Ecology and Forest Restoration Group, Department of Life Sciences, University of Alcalá, 28801 Alcalá De Henares, Spain. [99]Computing, ESEI, Vigo, Edf. Politécnico–Campus As Lagoas, 32004 Ourense, Spain. [100]Adaptations du Vivant, CNRS UMR 7179, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 91800 Brunoy, France. [101]Centre of Excellence in Environmental Studies, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah 21589, Saudi Arabia. [102]Environmental Sciences, COMSATS University Islamabad, Sub-campus Vehari, Vehari 61100, Pakistan. [103]Departamento de Informática, Escuela Superior de Ingeniería Informática, Universidad de Vigo, 36310 Vigo, Spain. [104]Group of Global Change Ecology and Evolution (GloCEE), Department of Life Sciences, University of Alcalá, 28805 Alcalá de Henares, Spain. [105]Department of Forest Resources, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55101, USA. [106]Friends of the Mississippi River, 101 East Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55108, USA. [107]Postgraduate Program in Biodiversity and Conservation, Federal University of Maranhão, 65080-805 São Luís, Brazil. [108]Institute of Environmental Sciences, Jagiellonian University, 30-087 Kraków, Poland. [109]Institute of Ecology, Technical University of Berlin, 10587 Berlin, Germany. [110]College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, WI 54481, USA. [111]Engineering for Crop Production, Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Engineering and Bioeconomy (ATB), 14469 Potsdam, Germany. [112]UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science, University College Dublin, Belfield, Ireland. [113]Landscape Ecology and Environmental Systems Analysis, Institute of Geoecology, Technische Universität Braunschweig, 38106 Braunschweig, Germany. [114]Department of Ecology, University of Innsbruck, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria. [115]Institute for Alpine Environment, Eurac Research, 39100 Bozen/Bolzano, Italy. [116]Laboratory of Ecosystem Modeling, Institute of Physicochemical and Biological Problems in Soil Sciences, Russian Academy of Science, Pushchino 142290, Russia. [117]Laboratory of Computational Ecology, Institute of Mathematical Problems of Biology–Branch of Keldysh Institute of Applied Mathematics of Russian Academy of Sciences, Pushchino 142290, Russia. [118]Post Graduate Department of Zoology, Khalsa College Amritsar, Amritsar 143002, India. [119]John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON M5S 3B3, Canada. [120]Department of Animal Biology, University of La Laguna, 38200 La Laguna, Spain. [121]Faculty of Agriculture, Kochi University, Monobe Otsu 200, Nankoku 783-8502, Japan. [122]Food and Agriculture, WWF-Netherlands, 3708 JB Zeist, Netherlands. [123]Dpto. Ciencias, IS-FOOD, Universidad Pública de Navarra, Edificio Olivos–Campus Arrosadia, 31006 Pamplona, Spain. [124]Soil, Water and Climate, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, USA. [125]Earth Innovation Institute, 98 Battery Street, San Francisco, CA 94111, USA. [126]Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Management, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA. [127]Natural Resource Sciences, McGill University, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue H9X 3V9, Canada. [128]The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA 22203, USA. [129]Department of Animal Ecology, Justus Liebig University, 35392 Giessen, Germany. [130]Laboratory of Terrestrial Ecosystems, Kola Science Centre, Institute of the North Industrial Ecology Problems, Apatity 184211, Russia. [131]Key Laboratory of Geospatial Technology for the Middle and Lower Yellow River Regions (Henan University), Ministry of Education, College of Environment and Planning, Henan University, Kaifeng 475004, China. [132]Department of Environmental Science, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. [133]Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Helsinki, FI 00014 Helsinki, Finland.

*Corresponding author. Email: helen.phillips@idiv.de †These authors contributed equally to this work.

Fig. 1. Global distribution of earthworm diversity. (**A**) Black dots represent the center of a "study" used in at least one of the three models (species richness, total abundance, and total biomass). The size of the dot corresponds to the number of sites within the study. Opaqueness is for visualization purposes only. (**B** to **D**) The globally predicted values of (B) species richness (within site), (C) total abundance, and (D) total biomass. Yellow indicates high diversity; dark purple, low diversity. Gray areas are habitat cover categories that lacked samples.
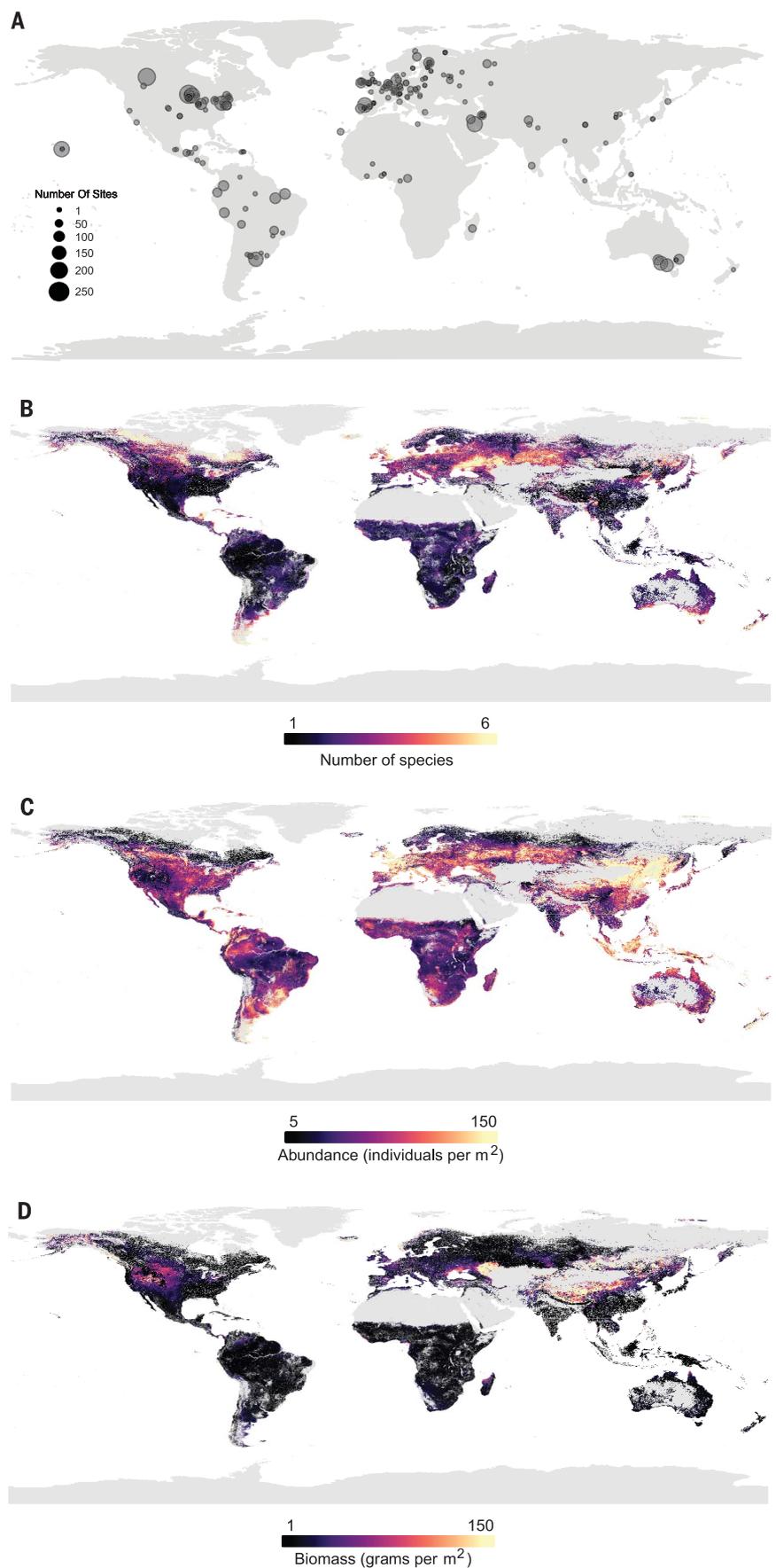
observed aboveground patterns, such as the latitudinal gradient in plant diversity (22). This pattern could be due to different relationships with climate variables. For example, although plant diversity increases with potential evapotranspiration (PET) (22), earthworm diversity tended to decrease with increasing PET (table S3). In addition, soil properties, which are typically not included in models of aboveground diversity, can play a role in determining earthworm communities (11, 15, 23). For instance, litter availability and soil nutrient content are important regulators of earthworm diversity, with oligotrophic forest soils having more epigeic species and eutrophic soils more endogeics (23). Furthermore, tropical regions
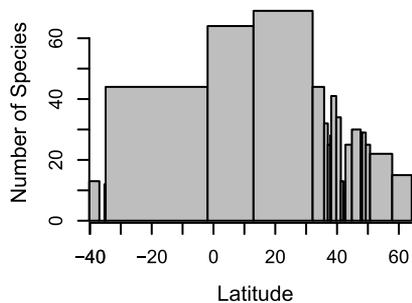
Fig. 2. The number of unique species within each latitudinal zone, when the number of sites within each zone is comparable. The width of the bar shows the latitude range of the sites/zones.

with higher decomposition rates have fewer soil organic resources and lower local earthworm diversity (Fig. 1B and table S3), dominated by endogeic species, which have specific digestion systems that allow them to feed on low-quality soil organic matter (11, 14, 20).

High local species richness was found at mid-latitudes, such as the southern tip of South America, the southern regions of Australia and New Zealand, Europe (particularly north of the Black Sea), and the northeastern United States. Although this pattern contrasts with latitudinal diversity patterns found in many aboveground organisms (6, 24), it is consistent with patterns found in some belowground organisms [ectomycorrhizal fungi (3), bacteria (5)], but not all [arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (25), oribatid mites (26)]. Such mismatches between above- and belowground biodiversity have been predicted (1, 7) but not shown across the globe for soil fauna at the local scale.

The patterns seen here could in part be a result of glaciation in the last ice age, as well as human activities. Temperate regions (mid- to high latitudes) that were previously glaciated were likely recolonized by earthworm species with high dispersal capabilities and large geographic ranges (19) and through human-mediated dispersal ["anthropochorous" earthworms (16)]. Thus, temperate communities could have high local diversity, as seen here, but those species would be widely dis-

tributed, resulting in lower regional diversity relative to local diversity. In the tropics, which did not experience glaciation, the opposite may be true. Specific locations may have individual species that are highly endemic, but these species are not widely distributed (table S4). This high local endemism would result in low local diversity (as found here) and high regional diversity [as suggested by (10)] relative to that low local diversity. When the numbers of unique species within latitudinal zones that had equal numbers of sites were calculated (i.e., a regional richness that accounted for sampling effort), there appeared to be a regional latitudinal diversity gradient (Fig. 2). Even with a sampling bias (table S4), regional richness in the tropics was greater than in the temperate regions, despite low local diversity. These results should be interpreted with caution, given the latitude span of the tropical zones. However, the underlying data suggest that endemism of earthworms and β-diversity within the tropics (27) may be considerably higher than within the well-sampled temperate region (table S4). Therefore, it is likely that the tropics harbor more species overall.

The predicted total abundance of the local community of earthworms typically ranged between 5 and 150 individuals per m² across the globe, in line with other estimates (28) (Fig. 1C; mean, 77.89 individuals per m²; SD, 98.94). There was a slight tendency for areas of higher total abundance to be in temperate areas, such as Europe (particularly the UK, France, and Italy), New Zealand, and part of the Pampas and surrounding region (South America), rather than the tropics. Lower total abundance occurred in many of the tropical and subtropical regions, such as Brazil, central Africa, and parts of India. Given the positive relationship between total abundance and ecosystem function (29), in regions with lower earthworm abundance, such functions may be reduced or carried out by other soil taxa (1).

The predicted total biomass of the local earthworm community (adults and juveniles) across the globe showed extreme values (>2 kg) in 0.3% of pixels, but biomass typically ranged (97% of pixels) between 1 g and 150 g per m² [Fig. 1D; median, 6.69; mean, 2772.8; SD, 1,312,782; see (14) for additional discussion of extreme values]. The areas of high total biomass were concentrated in the Eurasian Steppe and some regions of North America. The majority of the globe showed low total biomass. In northern North America, where there are no native earthworms (13), high density and, in some regions, higher biomass of earthworms likely reflect the earthworm invasion of these regions. The small invasive European earthworm species encounter an enormous unused resource pool, which leads to high population sizes (30). On the basis of previous suggestions (28), we expected that

Table 1. Model validation results. Cells in boldface show the "best" value when comparing between the main models (a mixture of sampled soil properties and SoilGrids data) and models containing only SoilGrids data. Values shown are mean square error [MSE; calculated for all predicted data ("Total") and for tertiles ("Low," "Mid," "High")] following 10-fold cross-validation of the main models and models containing only SoilGrids data, as well as R^2 of the main models and SoilGrids-only models.

	Total	Low	Mid	High
MSE: Main models				
Species richness	**1.376**	0.917	0.812	**3.561**
Abundance	**17977.42**	**1720.75**	**2521.25**	**48751.51**
Biomass	3220.29	264.56	**441.25**	8783.77
MSE: SoilGrids models				
Species richness	1.385	**0.887**	**0.793**	3.716
Abundance	18775.81	1735.11	2516.13	51156.76
Biomass	**3068.00**	**199.91**	461.88	**8380.81**
		Marginal		**Conditional**
R^2**: Main models**				
Species richness		0.132		**0.748**
Abundance		0.176		**0.626**
Biomass		0.201		0.612
R^2**: SoilGrids models**				
Species richness		**0.142**		0.745
Abundance		**0.234**		0.643
Biomass		**0.242**		**0.650**
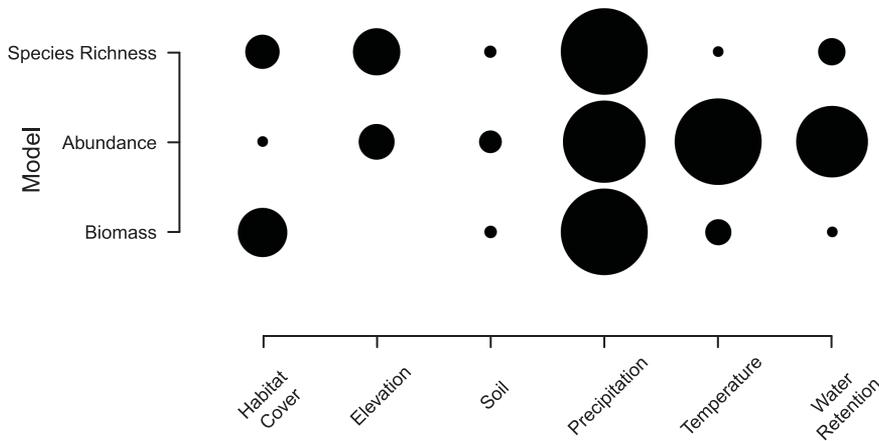
Fig. 3. The importance of the six variable themes from the three biodiversity models. Rows show the results of each model (top, species richness; middle, abundance; bottom, biomass). Columns represent the variable themes that are present in the simplified biodiversity model. The most important variable group has the largest circle. Within each row, the circle size of the other variable themes is proportional to the relative change in importance. The circle size should only be compared within a row.

earthworms would decrease in body size toward the poles, showing low biomass relative to the total abundance in temperate or boreal regions. In contrast, in tropical regions (e.g., Brazil and Indonesia) that are dominated by giant earthworms that normally occur at low densities and low species richness (*31*), we expected high biomass but low abundance. However, these patterns were not found. This could be due to the relatively small number of sample points for the biomass model (*n* = 3296) compared to the diversity (*n* = 5416) and total abundance models (*n* = 6358), reducing the predictive ability of the model (fig. S1C), most notably in large regions of Asia and in areas of Africa, particularly the boundaries of the Sahara Desert and the southern regions (which coincides with sites where samples are lacking). Additionally, the difficulty in consistently capturing such large earthworms in every sample may increase data variability, reducing the ability of the model to predict.

Overall, the three community metric models performed well in cross-validation (figs. S3 and S4) with relatively high R^2 values [Table 1; see (*14*) for further details and caveats]. But given the nature of such analyses, models and maps should only be used to explore broad patterns in earthworm communities and not at the fine scale, especially in relation to conservation practices (*32*).

For all three community metric models, climatic variables were the most important drivers (the "precipitation" theme being the most important for both species richness and total biomass models, and "temperature" for the total abundance model; Fig. 3). The importance of climatic variables in shaping diversity and distribution patterns at large

scales is consistent with many aboveground taxa [e.g., plants (*22*), reptiles, amphibians, and mammals (*32*)] and belowground taxa [bacteria and fungi (*3, 5*), nematodes (*33*)]. This suggests that climate-related methods and data, which are typically used by macroecologists to estimate aboveground biodiversity, may also be suitable for estimating earthworm communities. However, the strong link between climatic variables and earthworm community metrics is cause for concern, as climate will continue to change due to anthropogenic activities over the coming decades (*34*). Our findings further highlight that changes in temperature and precipitation are likely to influence earthworm diversity (*35*) and distributions (*15*), with implications for the functions that they provide (*12*). Shifts in distributions may be particularly problematic in the case of invasive earthworms, such as in areas of North America, where they can considerably change the ecosystem (*13*). However, a change in climate will most likely affect abundance and biomass of the earthworm communities before it affects diversity, as shifts in the latter depend on dispersal capabilities, which are relatively low in earthworms.

We expected that soil properties would be the most important driver of earthworm communities, but this was not the case (Fig. 3), likely because of the scale of the study. First, the importance of drivers could change at different spatial scales. Climate is driving patterns at global scales, but within climatic regions (or at the local scale), other variables may become more important (*36*). Thus, one or more soil properties may be the most important drivers of earthworm communities within each of the primary studies, rather than

across them all. Second, for soil properties, the mismatch in scale between community metrics and the soil properties taken from global layers [for sites where sampled soil properties were missing (*14*)] potentially reduced the apparent importance of the theme. Habitat cover influenced the earthworm community (fig. S5, A and B), especially the composition of the three ecological groups (epigeics, endogeics, and anecics) (fig. S6) (*14*). Across larger scales, climate influences both habitat cover and soil properties, all of which affect earthworm communities. Being able to account for this indirect effect with appropriate methods and data may alter the perceived importance of soil properties and habitat cover [e.g., with pathway analysis (*37*) and standardized data]. However, our habitat cover variable did not directly consider local management (such as land use or intensity).

Our findings suggest that climate change might have substantial effects on earthworm communities and the functioning of ecosystems; any climate change–induced alteration in earthworm communities is likely to have cascading effects on other species in these ecosystems (*13, 28*). Despite earthworm communities being controlled by environmental drivers similar to those that affect aboveground communities (*22, 37*), these relationships result in different patterns of diversity. We highlight the need to integrate belowground organisms into biodiversity research, despite differences in the scale of sampling, if we are to fully understand large-scale patterns of biodiversity and their underlying drivers (*7, 8, 38*), especially if processes underlying macroecological patterns differ between aboveground and belowground diversity (*38*). The inclusion of soil taxa may alter the distribution of biodiversity hotspots and conservation priorities. For example, protected areas (*7*) may not be protecting earthworms (*7*), despite their importance as ecosystem function providers (*12*) and soil ecosystem engineers for other organisms (*11*). By modeling both realms, aboveground/belowground comparisons are possible, potentially allowing a clearer view of the biodiversity distribution of whole ecosystems.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

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Science

Global distribution of earthworm diversity

Helen R. P. Phillips, Carlos A. Guerra, Marie L. C. Bartz, Maria J. I. Briones, George Brown, Thomas W. Crowther, Olga Ferlian, Konstantin B. Gongalsky, Johan van den Hoogen, Julia Krebs, Alberto Orgiazzi, Devin Routh, Benjamin Schwarz, Elizabeth M. Bach, Joanne Bennett, Ulrich Brose, Thibaud Decaëns, Birgitta König-Ries, Michel Loreau, Jérôme Mathieu, Christian Mulder, Wim H. van der Putten, Kelly S. Ramirez, Matthias C. Rillig, David Russell, Michiel Rutgers, Madhav P. Thakur, Franciska T. de Vries, Diana H. Wall, David A. Wardle, Miwa Arai, Fredrick O. Ayuke, Geoff H. Baker, Robin Beauséjour, José C. Bedano, Klaus Birkhofer, Eric Blanchart, Bernd Blossey, Thomas Bolger, Robert L. Bradley, Mac A. Callaham, Yvan Capowiez, Mark E. Caulfield, Amy Choi, Felicity V. Crotty, Andrea Dávalos, Darío J. Diaz Cosin, Anahí Dominguez, Andrés Esteban Duhour, Nick van Eekeren, Christoph Emmerling, Liliana B. Falco, Rosa Fernández, Steven J. Fonte, Carlos Fragoso, André L. C. Franco, Martine Fugère, Abegail T. Fusilero, Shaieste Gholami, Michael J. Gundale, Mónica Gutiérrez López, Davorka K. Hackenberger, Luis M. Hernández, Takuo Hishi, Andrew R. Holdsworth, Martin Holmstrup, Kristine N. Hopfensperger, Esperanza Huerta Lwanga, Veikko Huhta, Tunsisa T. Hurisso, Basil V. Iannone III, Madalina Iordache, Monika Joschko, Nobuhiro Kaneko, Radoslava Kanianska, Aidan M. Keith, Courtland A. Kelly, Maria L. Kernecker, Jonatan Klaminder, Armand W. Koné, Yahya Kooch, Sanna T. Kukkonen, H. Lalthanzara, Daniel R. Lammel, Iurii M. Lebedev, Yiqing Li, Juan B. Jesus Lidon, Noa K. Lincoln, Scott R. Loss, Raphael Marichal, Radim Matula, Jan Hendrik Moos, Gerardo Moreno, Alejandro Morón-Ríos, Bart Muys, Johan Neirynck, Lindsey Norgrove, Marta Novo, Visa Nuutinen, Victoria Nuzzo, Mujeeb Rahman P, Johan Pansu, Shishir Paudel, Guénola Pérès, Lorenzo Pérez-Camacho, Raúl Piñeiro, Jean-François Ponge, Muhammad Imtiaz Rashid, Salvador Rebollo, Javier Rodeiro-Iglesias, Miguel Á. Rodríguez, Alexander M. Roth, Guillaume X. Rousseau, Anna Rozen, Ehsan Sayad, Loes van Schaik, Bryant C. Scharenbroch, Michael Schirrmann, Olaf Schmidt, Boris Schröder, Julia Seeber, Maxim P. Shashkov, Jaswinder Singh, Sandy M. Smith, Michael Steinwandter, José A. Talavera, Dolores Trigo, Jiro Tsukamoto, Anne W. de Valença, Steven J. Vanek, Iñigo Virto, Adrian A. Wackett, Matthew W. Warren, Nathaniel H. Wehr, Joann K. Whalen, Michael B. Wironen, Volkmar Wolters, Irina V. Zenkova, Weixin Zhang, Erin K. Cameron and Nico Eisenhauer

Earthworm distribution in global soils

Earthworms are key components of soil ecological communities, performing vital functions in decomposition and nutrient cycling through ecosystems. Using data from more than 7000 sites, Phillips *et al.* developed global maps of the distribution of earthworm diversity, abundance, and biomass (see the Perspective by Fierer). The patterns differ from those typically found in aboveground taxa; there are peaks of diversity and abundance in the mid-latitude regions and peaks of biomass in the tropics. Climate variables strongly influence these patterns, and changes are likely to have cascading effects on other soil organisms and wider ecosystem functions.

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