# Phenology **Climate change is shifting the rhythm of nature**

Author

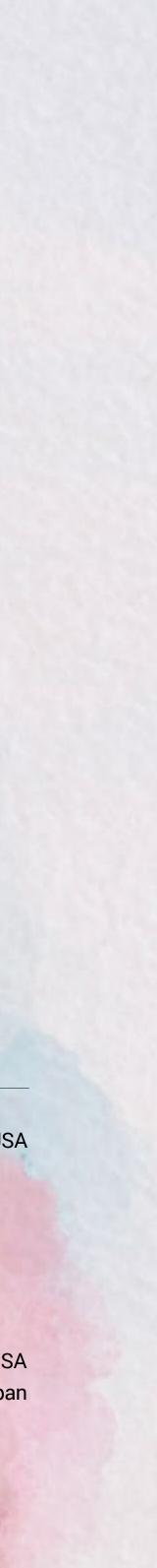
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# Timing is everything for ecosystem harmony

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Timing is critical in the natural world. Birds' chicks must be hatched when there is food to nourish them, pollinators must be active when their host plants flower, and snow hares must change their colour from white to brown as the snow disappears. Phenology examines the timing of recurring life-cycle stages, driven by environmental forces, and how interacting species respond to changes in timing within an ecosystem.<sup>1,2</sup> Plants and animals often use temperature, daylength, the arrival of rains, or other physical changes as cues for the next stage in their seasonal cycle. When spring arrives earlier, many birds react by breeding sooner, matching the advanced emergence of food for their nestlings as temperatures warm. Because temperature is such a strong influence on these cues, phenological shifts over the past decades are among the most visible consequences of global climate change, at least in temperate and polar regions of the world.



Image credit: Meyers Lexicon book from 1908 and Nicku / Shutterstock.com.

# Phenology in the tropics

A key feature of tropical climates is the lack of distinct seasonal temperature variations.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, changes in rainfall and the switch between dry and wet seasons define clearer phases within annual cycles of the tropics.<sup>16,18</sup> The frequency and intensity of rainfall, or its absence, is a crucial driver of phenological changes in tropical plants, as well as sunlight, humidity, and the subtle temperature changes.<sup>16-21</sup> Given the high species diversity in tropical ecosystems, phenological responses to those drivers are various and complex, within species and communities.<sup>19,35</sup>

Rainfall patterns in tropical regions are highly influenced by the El Niño/La Niña Southern Oscillation (ENSO), characterized by its alternating warm and cool phases of sea surface temperature in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.<sup>36</sup> These anomalies occur every 2-7 years and typically last Temperature is not the only environmental variable that affects phenology. At higher latitudes, another critical variable is photoperiod, or daylength, varying at different times of year.<sup>3-5</sup> While photoperiod itself is not affected by climate change, the degree to which temperature affects phenology can depend on it: in some systems, high temperatures will cue the next stage during a long photoperiod, but not during a shorter one.<sup>3,6,7</sup> At higher latitudes, some plants and insects also need a spell of low temperature, called winter chilling, to respond well to warmer temperatures once they arrive.<sup>8-10</sup> Some species depend on fire to cue life-cycle stages, such as fire-stimulated seed release from cones and seed germination.<sup>11,12</sup> An aquatic example is the influence of rain on river discharges that in turn influence the timing and duration of the migration of fishes, along with water temperature and photoperiod factors.<sup>13-15</sup>

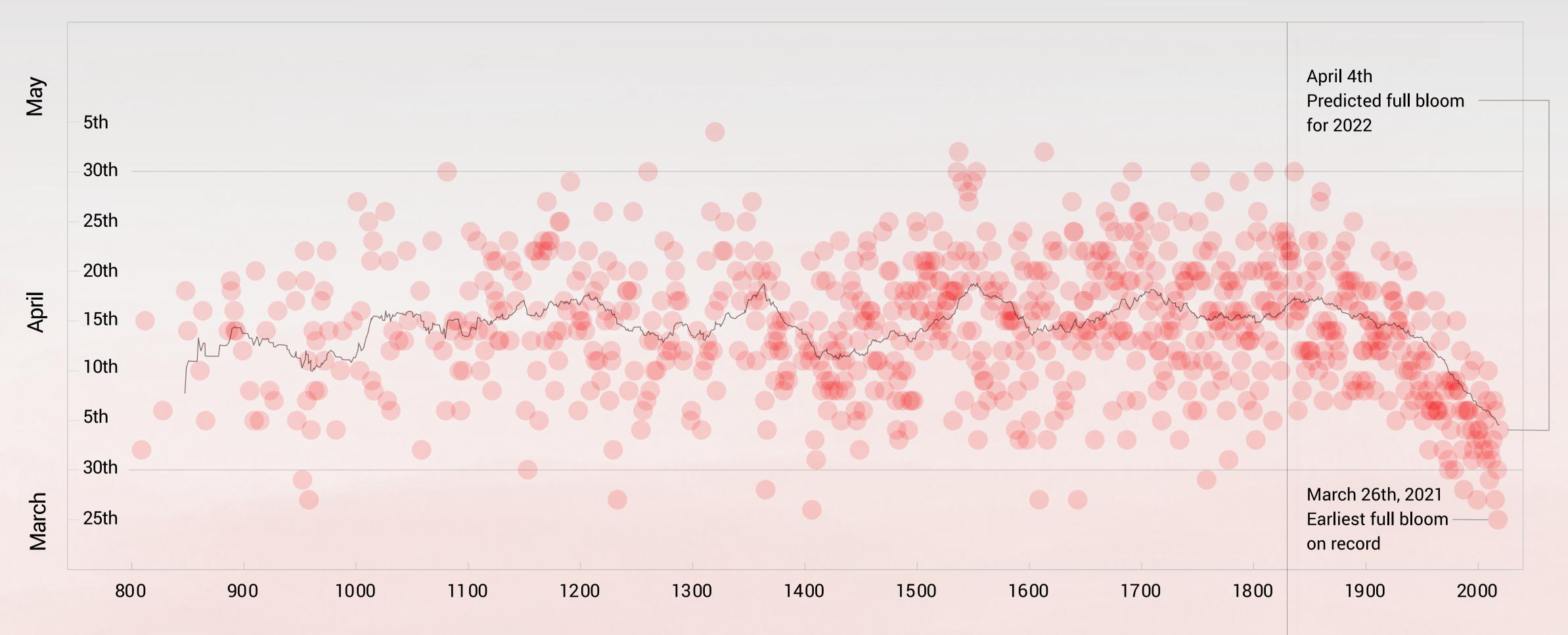
Understanding phenology in tropical regions is more complicated than in regions that have clear annual seasonal cycles, due to less variations in temperature and daylight.<sup>16-18</sup> Tropical species show diverse phenological strategies, individuals within a population may not synchronize, and cycles can be shorter than 12 months. Different factors, including rain, drought, moisture availability and abundant exposure to sunlight, can trigger the next life-cycle stage in tropical regions.<sup>17-21</sup>

A major concern with phenological changes in response to climate change is that not all interdependent species in a particular ecosystem shift in the same direction or at the same rate.<sup>16,22-26</sup> The reason for varying shifts is that each organism is sensitive to different environmental drivers, or shows different levels of sensitivity to a single environmental driver.<sup>5,17,27,28</sup> Within food chains, plants may shift their development more quickly than animals that feed on them, leading to phenological mismatches. Detailed studies on various life-cycle stages across a wide range of plant and animal species have detected significant phenological mismatches.<sup>16,22,30-34</sup> These

for 9-12 months.<sup>36</sup> Tropical plant communities respond to ENSO events, such as El Niño-induced mass flowering or drought-affected fruiting.<sup>17,18,20,37</sup> More frequent and more intense extreme weather events, delivered by ENSO and climate change, are likely to further disrupt the timing of leafing, flowering and fruit production.<sup>17,18</sup> Such phenological changes will have cascading effects on dependent herbivores, nectarivores and frugivores, as well as other functional groups within the ecosystems.<sup>17,19</sup> Long-term observations of phenological change in the tropics are still scarce, and predicting the magnitude of phenological shifts and mismatches remains a challenge.<sup>18</sup>

# **Blooming of cherry blossom over 1,200 years**

Trendline is 50-year moving average



mismatches between predator and food source within a food web will affect individuals' growth, reproduction and survival rates, with eventual repercussions for whole populations and ecosystems.



### Data source:

Historical data courtesy of Dr. Yasuyuki Aono, Osaka Prefecture University, Japan, available at http://atmenv.envi.osakafu-u.ac.jp/ aono/kyophenotemp4/

Data from 1950 courtesy of Japan Meteorological Agency, available at http://www.data.jma.go.jp/sakura/ data/index.html The blooming of cherry blossom (*Prunus jamasakura*) marks the arrival of springtime in Japan and is central to Japanese culture. Celebration of cherry blossom has been traced back to around 712 A.D.<sup>38</sup> Phenological observations in Kyoto have been historically recorded in old diaries and chronicles.<sup>39-41</sup> Researchers have assembled a phenological data series of full-flowering dates of cherry blossom from these documents, dating back as early as 812 A.D.<sup>39-41</sup>

Over 1,200 years, the full-flowering dates started as early as late March and as late as early May.<sup>42</sup>

Blossoming has advanced progressively to earlier dates since 1830s, which also coincided with rising temperatures based on meteorological observations, with the bias effects of urban heat already eliminated.<sup>41,42</sup>

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# 2. Disruption in ecosystem harmony

Shifts in phenology due to climate change have been detected at a variety of stages: reproduction, flowering, leaf-out, onset of larval development, moult, hibernation, migration, and others. Supporting data come from studies comparing phenological shifts among large sets of species – plants, insects, fish, amphibians, birds and mammals, for which phenological events have been recorded over the long term through observations in both hemispheres.<sup>16,23,29-33,43-51</sup> Researchers have also tracked an increasing probability of phenological mismatches across multiple regions, including through 10,000 data sets on plants and animals across the United Kingdom, terrestrial species in the Alps, over 1,200 time series of phenological trends in the southern hemisphere, and marine species across different oceans, among others.<sup>16,19,23,32,43,51</sup>

# Identifying shifts, tracking trends

In the early 2000s, researchers published a few pioneering broadscale assessments of phenological shifts that became models for ongoing work.<sup>22,29,30</sup> A synthesis of those databases indicate that the life stages of 203 plant and animal species advanced by about 2.8 days per decade.<sup>30</sup> Since then, additional ecosystems and biomes

Each circle represents a quantified rate of phenological response of a particular species as it shifts a life-cycle stage to earlier or later by a number of days per decade. Circles appear as overlapping when two or more species in the same taxonomic group shift at similar rates.



# Hungry birds and early caterpillars

A long-standing, well-known example of phenological mismatch is between the great tit (Parus major) and its caterpillar food.54,55 This small hole-nesting songbird is found across Asia and Europe and produces unusually large broods. The parents must provide large amounts of nourishment for fast-growing nestlings in the 18 days it takes for their full development. Adults may deliver caterpillars at the rate of almost one per minute during that period.<sup>72</sup> To ensure this level of food supply, the birds use temperature as a cue to time their breeding so the nestlings arrive at the peak abundance of caterpillars on oak trees. For similar reasons, the hatching of caterpillar eggs is timed with the emergence of oak trees' young foliage.73

Studies on birds provide ample evidence of mismatches affecting successful breeding. Species such as pied flycatchers (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) and great tits (*Parus major*) need their chicks to hatch when their normal food supply of caterpillars is most abundant.<sup>52-55</sup> This peak food-supply period is short, covering only a few weeks, so the correct timing is crucial. Other birds, like the common murres (*Uria aalge*), need to precisely time their reproduction to the inshore migration of their main prey, small forage fish.<sup>56</sup>

Within the annual cycle, different life stages need to synchronize. For migratory species, annual cycles involve stages of moving to breeding grounds, reproducing, moulting and returning to wintering grounds. Some life-cycle stages, like reproduction, are highly temperature-sensitive. With warming temperatures, reproductive phenology is shifting, while other stages, like moult, are more sensitive to photoperiods, so they are not occurring in synchrony.<sup>57,58</sup>

Phenological responses differ throughout marine ecosystems and seasonal cycles, leading to mismatches between species and among groups in the food web.<sup>31,32,43,59</sup> Research shows that phenological responses to climate change happen faster in marine environments than on land.<sup>31,32</sup> The

Field observations show varying phenological responses in these two interacting species across different sites.<sup>54,55,74,75</sup> The great tit population in the Netherlands has advanced its egg-laying in response to warming trends, but the shift is not enough to match the peak of the caterpillar population.<sup>54,55,74</sup> Forecasts indicate that the caterpillars' phenology will continue to advance faster than the birds' in the coming decades, further increasing the mismatch.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, a 47-year population study in the United Kingdom found that both birds and caterpillars shift their timing at approximately the same rate, keeping the interaction in synchrony.<sup>75</sup> Similar results were found in Belgium and the Czech Republic.<sup>77,78</sup> These findings demonstrate the complexity in phenological responses among species and populations in different environments.<sup>27,80</sup>

different marine groups, from plankton to higher-up predators, all shift their phenology at different rates, indicating that climate change can cause mismatches in whole oceanic communities as well.<sup>31,32,60,61</sup>

Differences in the rates of phenological responses to warming across terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems could ultimately affect species that depend on different ecosystems to host phenological transitions to the next life-cycle stage. Examples include fish that migrate between marine and freshwater ecosystems, and many insects, amphibians and birds whose life-cycle stages depend on both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.<sup>24,62-64</sup> Mismatched phenological shifts could cause widespread food-web disruptions and ecological consequences.<sup>26</sup>

While phenological responses to climate change are well-documented, remaining questions about links to populations and consequences for ecosystems deserve greater attention.<sup>34,51</sup> In the Arctic, after snowmelt, the vegetation that caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) mothers and calves depend on has advanced significantly due to higher temperatures. Now caribou calves are born too late, leading to a 75 per cent decrease in offspring.<sup>65</sup> In roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), the increased mismatch between birth date and food availability also decreases calves' survival chances.<sup>66</sup>

Asynchronous changes in the phenology of a broad range of interacting species have the potential to disrupt the functioning of whole ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem services on which human systems depend.<sup>34,61</sup> Shifts in the phenology of commercially important marine species and their prey have significant consequences for all aspects of fisheries.<sup>47,67-69</sup> Phenological responses in crops to seasonal variations will be challenging food production in the face of climate change. For example, fruit trees that bloom early and then experience late-season frosts result in large economic losses for orchards.<sup>70</sup> Phenological shifts are already complicating climate-smart agricultural adaptation for major crops around the world.<sup>71</sup>

# **Incredible journeys:** The challenge of mistimed migration

Migration is a behavioural adaptation to seasonality.<sup>81</sup> Periodic movements of animals between habitats allows them to optimize resources in multiple locations at different times of year. Migration is also necessary when seasonal air or water temperatures become unfavourable for breeding or rearing offspring. Most migratory species are therefore from highlatitude regions where changes in season and available resources are most marked.<sup>81</sup> Diverse species of insects, crustaceans, reptiles, fish and mammals migrate, and many cover remarkable distances. Some avian migrants nest in the high Arctic and escape its winter to lower latitudes; cetaceans migrate between the equator and polar feeding grounds; and migrating herbivorous mammals follow seasonal changes in vegetation across continents.<sup>81,82</sup>

Long-distance migrants are particularly vulnerable to phenological change caused by climate warming effects, which are not uniform across regions. Local climatic cues that normally trigger migration may no longer accurately predict conditions at both destination and stopover sites along the route. The challenge is even greater for migrants returning to polar regions where the speed and magnitude of climate change are greatest.<sup>83,84</sup> Consequently, many migratory species struggle to arrive when quality food is still abundant, weather is suitable for specific life-cycle stages, predation or competition pressure is lower, or parasites and pathogens are fewer.<sup>34,81,85,86</sup> Advancing spring phenology in high latitudes has caused increasing degrees of ecological mismatch for migratory species, with potential demographic consequences.<sup>81,86,87</sup>

Species have demonstrated the ability to modify their migratory behaviour, from adjusting the timing to changing routes and locations.<sup>81,85,88,89</sup> But their adaptive capacity in response to climate change is already compromised by other ongoing threats. Ecological degradation, fragmentation and loss of feeding, breeding and resting habitats, hunting, pollution, plus other hazards on long journeys, are threatening migratory species with increasing pressure to adapt to rapid environmental changes.<sup>88,90</sup>

Provisions to maximize adaptive potential and build resilience in species populations require a reduction in conventional threats and modification of existing conservation policies and strategies in light of climate change.<sup>81,91</sup>

# **European migratory birds**

Analysis of spring arrival times of 117 European migratory bird species over 5 decades suggests increasing levels of phenological mismatch to spring events. This has contributed to population decline in some migrants, particularly those wintering in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>87</sup>

# White stork (Ciconia ciconia)

The white stork is a long-lived migratory bird that overwinters throughout Africa.<sup>93</sup> They adapt their migratory timing to advance arrival at breeding grounds in different parts of Europe and nest early to avoid mismatch with food supply.

Early breeding exposes hatchlings to unfavourable conditions, such as strong wind and heavy rainfall. With extreme weather events expected to become more frequent under changing climate, white stork hatchling mortality may increase in the future.<sup>94,95</sup>



An extensive network of diverse critical sites and protected habitats could maximize the adaptation potential of migratory species.<sup>88</sup> It is also imperative to ensure and enhance the connectivity of land and marine habitats critical for dispersal, now and in the future.<sup>88,92</sup> Increasing habitat connectivity will help maintain adaptive genetic variation and population viability needed for species survival.

# Monarch butterfly (Danaus plexippus)

The North American monarch butterfly is renowned for its 4,300 km journey between summer breeding grounds across southern Canada and northern United States, and overwintering sites in central Mexico.<sup>96</sup>

Shortened daylength and lower temperatures in autumn usually prompt them to fly south. Analysis over 29 years shows that they have delayed migration by 6 days/decade due to warmer-than-normal temperatures. Late-season migrants appear less likely to reach overwintering sites than those migrating earlier in the season, possibly from encountering mismatches in food availability along the way.<sup>97</sup>

# Barnacle geese (Branta leucopsis)

Flocks of barnacle geese usually migrate from their wintering ground on North Sea coastlines to spring breeding grounds in northern Russia and Svalbard. Adjusting for climate changes, they have begun migrating earlier to avoid mismatches with food at destination, and to accelerate the journey, they tend to skip stopover feeding sites along the Baltic Sea.<sup>98</sup> Despite arriving early, they cannot lay until they have built sufficient reserves for egg production. Consequently, their goslings hatch late and often do not survive.

# Sea turtles

A range of migratory sea turtles have responded to rising seawater temperatures by shifting their timing of nesting. Loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) are found to nest earlier, while leatherback sea turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) have delayed nesting.<sup>99-102</sup>

However, the observed shifts in nesting phenology are likely insufficient to track optimal environmental conditions.<sup>101-103</sup> Beach temperatures

during incubation influence hatching success and directly determine the sex of hatchling – females are produced in higher temperatures. In a rapidly changing climate, hatching success and biased sex ratio will have implications for sea turtle populations.

# **Baleen whales**

Most baleen whales migrate seasonally between low-latitude calving grounds and higher-latitude feeding grounds, where they prey on dense concentrations of krill or forage fishes.<sup>85,104,105</sup>

Many baleen species are known to shift migratory timings, depending on prey availability. In the past 27 years, fin and humpback whales have advanced their arrival by 1 day/year at the Gulf of St. Lawrence feeding grounds off eastern Canada. This is likely due to earlier ice break-up and rising sea surface temperature, which triggers earlier plankton bloom and influences prey abundance.<sup>85</sup> Shorter-distance migrants like fin whales may reduce migration due to temperature changes and less winter sea ice, but it is harder for long-distance migrants like humpback whales to correctly time their arrival for abundant prey.<sup>85</sup>

Colombia's Gorgona National Natural Park is an important breeding and calving ground for Eastern South Pacific humpback whales. Their arrival has shifted up to 1 month earlier over the last 3 decades. This is likely due to changes in sea ice formation in Antarctic feeding grounds affecting krill availability, and less prey being a cue to return to tropical waters.<sup>105</sup> Eastern North Pacific blue whales are also known to alter migration, arriving at their feeding grounds off California approximately 42 days earlier than 10 years ago. This shift was associated with at least a 2°C increase in sea surface temperature, and the resultant krill abundance.<sup>106</sup>

Although phenotypic plasticity – the ability to adapt in response to changing environmental signals – allows these species to adjust migratory timings, modifying the timing of a life stage can negatively affect another within the annual life cycle. Remaining longer on feeding grounds can cut reproduction time, and vice versa.<sup>106</sup> Adaptation in human activities, including fisheries, maritime traffic, and exploratory seismic testing, is also needed to accommodate whales' changing sojourns within and outside protected areas.<sup>105</sup>

# 3. Evolving toward new synchronies

Climate change attribution for observed mismatches depends upon long-term research on the phenology of interacting species within an ecosystem. Long-term studies are essential, but the major challenge is proving causality. Climate change may influence temperatures and rainfall, but other factors may simultaneously influence species responses, such as land-use change, resource overexploitation, invasive species, and other ecological stressors. Uncertainty around causality can be partly addressed by minimizing variables: observing responses either in different locations, comparing populations in areas with a lot of warming to those with a little, or in different time periods, comparing populations in years with rapidly increasing temperatures to years with slower increases.<sup>76,107</sup> These approaches allow a better estimate of the specific effect of temperature increase on species' phenology, although they do not solve issues involving other environmental factors influenced by temperature. For instance, in many regions, precipitation patterns change dramatically with varying climatic conditions, altering the timing, frequency and intensity of rainy seasons.<sup>108,109</sup> As data accumulate, researchers realize that combinations of phenological mechanisms – temperature, photoperiod and precipitation, for instance – may need to align for the phenological cue to take effect.

A strong phenological shift in a population in response to environmental change indicates a large proportion of the individuals have the ability to change timing in the same direction, known as phenological plasticity.<sup>110</sup> Empirical evidence suggests that this plasticity is the main source of

observed climate-related phenological shifts.<sup>111</sup> But individual or population plasticity may not be able to keep up with the rapid environmental changes we are experiencing.<sup>112</sup> Species also require genetic change to adapt successfully, which is more likely in species with short generation time, like insects, than in trees that regenerate over decades.<sup>113</sup> There are a handful of examples where genetic change, as a response to climate change, can be recognized as microevolution, mainly in insects and some birds.<sup>114,115</sup> Overall, genetic changes are happening at a much slower rate than the climate is changing.

Phenological microevolution, the process of natural selection where genetic changes shift the phenology of species to better fit the changed climate, most likely played an important role in species and ecosystem adaptation to past warming periods.<sup>113</sup> Still, as the rate of warming is much faster now – perhaps by as much as a factor of 100 – even microevolution will likely emerge too slowly for current rates of climate change.<sup>116</sup>

In practice, conservation and ecosystem management measures could be taken to encourage favourable conditions for microevolution.<sup>117</sup> One measure is to support and nurture the genetic diversity of populations, as this is the crucial prerequisite for microevolution and natural selection. Increasing ecological connectivity through habitat corridors would enable plant colonization and movement of animal species with novel genetic material within a particular ecosystem, promoting genetic diversity and increasing the chances of successful adaptation.<sup>118</sup>

# **Out of reach**

The red knot (*Calidris canutus*) is a medium-sized shorebird in the sandpiper family. The global population is in decline and considered Near Threatened. The 6 subspecies of red knot migrate remarkably long



distances from the high Arctic breeding grounds to wintering grounds across different continents.<sup>119</sup>

A subspecies, *Calidris canutus canutus*, breeds in central and northern Siberia, and migrates to warmer areas along the coast of Mauritania, notably Banc d'Arguin National Park. As the snow starts to melt, they mate and lay eggs. Red knot chicks feed on insects that seasonally emerge from thawing tundra permafrost, in preparation for the long voyage to Africa.<sup>120</sup> In the last 3 decades, snowmelt duration in the high Arctic has progressively advanced by 0.5 days/year, resulting in the early emergence and abundance of insects. This shift in insect phenology causes a series of consequences for the red knots in later life stages.<sup>120,121</sup> Since the birds have not adjusted their breeding phenology, offspring miss the peak of their food abundance. Poor food resources mean poor growth. Juvenile red knots become smaller and have shorter bills during summers with early snowmelt.<sup>120</sup>

Once in West Africa, their main food source changes to mollusc buried in intertidal sediments. These shorter-billed birds have less access to highly abundant bivalve species (*Loripes lucinalis*) buried deeper in the sediments. Instead, they can only consume shallowly buried rhizomes of seagrass (*Zostera noltii*) and rare species of bivalve (*Dosinia isocardia*).

This knock-on effect leads to increased mortality of the short-billed red knots, which demonstrates the complex implications of a mismatch in one location and one part of the life cycle with another part that takes place halfway across the globe.<sup>120</sup>

Dosinia isocardia

Loripes lucinalis

# 4. Bridges to new harmonies

Phenological shifts can only be determined from long-term records. Data collection is conducted by scientific institutions, universities, governments, and NGOs. Initiatives such as the African Phenology Network, Australia's TERN project, India's SeasonWatch, the UK Nature's Calendar, and the USA National Phenology Network include observations by citizens to track plants, insects, birds and mammals. These comprehensive data sets allow scientists to single out species and locations most at risk. They also provide data for IPCC estimates of tolerable warming rates for ecosystems, underpinning governmental objectives to reduce global warming to limits set by the Paris Agreement.<sup>122</sup>

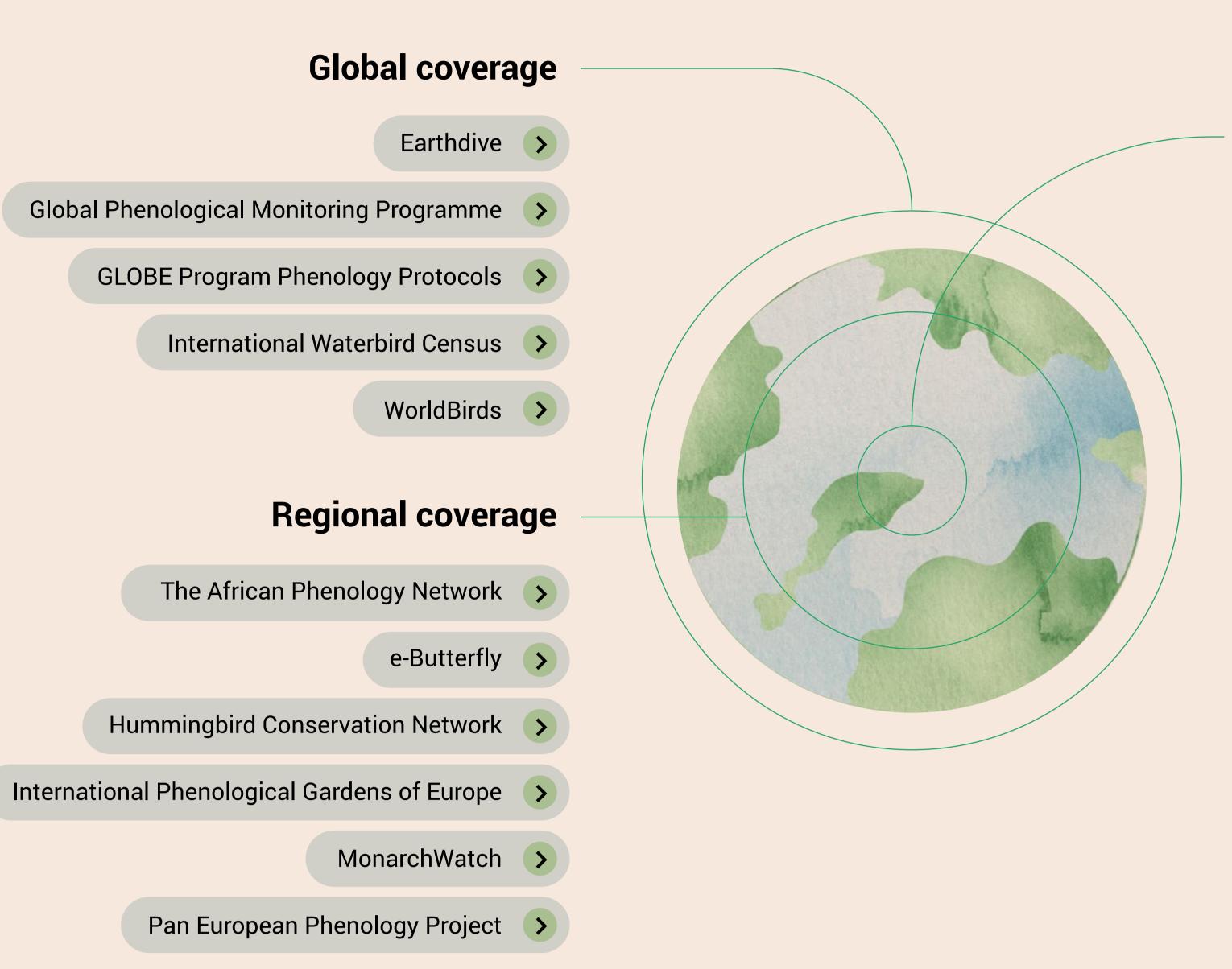
# Phenological monitoring and citizen science

Farmers, gardeners and nature-lovers have been applying their understanding of phenological stages all around the world, for centuries. Regional and local networks allow participants to exchange knowledge and advice on diverse environments and ecosystems. With modern communication tools, identifying and tracking the development of plants and animals has become a common pastime in many countries.<sup>123</sup>

Formal phenological gardens contain a selected array of plants to monitor their responses to changing local conditions. Scientists working with national botanical gardens and other long-established efforts set up areas within those confines to grow the same selection of plants across different latitudes, longitudes and elevations, and collect data to compare phenological responses over time. These large-scale plant-behaviour observation systems offer data sets for other researchers to establish baselines and track trends for their own work.<sup>124</sup> By studying the phenology and adaptive changes of keystone species, the collected data provide solid biological evidence of climate changes and adaptive responses from living collections that supports long-term monitoring of climate change biology.<sup>125</sup>

Less formal phenological gardens are an important teaching tool about the crucial timing in the life cycles of species, but they too must follow certain protocols for data quality. The Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) Program offers guidelines for thousands of participating schools in 125 countries.<sup>126</sup> After three decades, the GLOBE Program is now expanding its methods, protocols, and databases to also include citizen scientists' observations.<sup>127</sup> Citizen science contributions to phenological knowledge span from noting flowering dates in their gardens to observations of migrating herds for verifying aerial and satellite images.<sup>128</sup> An enduring citizen science project, the Christmas Bird Count initiated by the US National Audubon Society in 1900, covers most of North America and has provided solid data on the decline of bird populations over more than a century.<sup>129</sup>

# A selection of phenology citizen science projects and activities



# **National coverage**

- **<** Centro de Informação en Saúde Silvestre
- Chinese Phenological Observation Network
- ClimateWatch, Australia

Farmers' Wildlife Calendar, Ireland
Nature Today, Netherlands
NatureWatch, Canada
Phaenonet, Switzerland
PhenoRangers, Switzerland
SeasonWatch, India
UK Environmental Change Network
USA National Phenology Network

Phenological shifts and mismatches, attributed to climate change, have been affecting agricultural ecosystem services for decades.<sup>1,71,130-132</sup> To ameliorate problems of advanced growing seasons, growing stages curtailed by heat or drought, and other climate-change repercussions, farmers have been selecting more climate-resilient cultivars.<sup>133</sup> Adopting new techniques, trying new seeds, sharing seed banks, and exploiting extension services are all aspects of climate-smart agriculture, promoted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, many NGOs, and national and sub-national agencies.<sup>134</sup>

Limited research has studied how phenological shifts and mismatches affect natural resource management and biodiversity conservation, with managers often unclear on how to incorporate the data into practice.<sup>135,136</sup> Phenological data could inform climate response, optimize implementation of monitoring, and support climate change vulnerability assessment.<sup>135</sup> This is especially important in less-studied areas, such as many southern hemisphere locations.<sup>18,19</sup> Managers need to consider how phenological changes affect their current strategies. For example, fisheries managers typically survey fish populations annually, targeting dates when populations were most abundant in an area historically. Phenological shifts could result in surveys conducted at the wrong time of the year, which would skew population estimates and catch allowances.<sup>60</sup>

Recent reviews of multiple specific case studies have mapped out examples of phenology, phenological shifts, and phenological mismatches in extended coverage.<sup>27,32,33,49</sup> This wider perspective considering larger numbers of species, ecosystems and regions and diverse phenological mechanisms at work can inform the approaches needed to help human communities and ecosystems adapt to climate-changed conditions.

Larger-scale efforts to strengthen the integrity of biological diversity will build resilience and adaptability throughout ecosystems.<sup>137</sup> Rehabilitating habitats, building habitat corridors to enhance ecological connectivity and genetic diversity, adjusting protected-area boundaries as species' ranges shift, and conserving biodiversity in productive landscapes are all necessary immediate management interventions.<sup>138,139</sup>

In conclusion, anthropogenic climate change leads to phenological shifts in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. These shifts can lead to mismatches, with major consequences for individuals, populations, communities and whole ecosystems. Climate change is accelerating too quickly for many species to adapt through their natural phenological capacity.<sup>140</sup> Preserving the integrity of functioning biological diversity, ending habitat destruction, and pursuing ecosystem restoration will bolster the natural systems upon which we depend. However, without continued efforts to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, these conservation measures will only delay the loss of those essential ecosystem services. For species and ecosystems to match accelerated rhythms set by climate change, time and opportunity to achieve new harmonies will be needed.

# Food production and phenology

All season-dependent activities are inherently risky, from hot spells causing a poor wheat harvest or marine heatwaves affecting local fish stocks, to unseasonal weather impinging on travel and tourism. But food production is the most critical socioeconomic activity affected by phenological shifts as climate change accelerates.<sup>2</sup>

Warming trends have shifted the phenological stages of a variety of staple crops over decades and across continents.<sup>71,141-145</sup> The change in growth stages has consequences on crop yields and quality. <sup>144-147</sup> The shifts have been observed in crops ranging from cereals such as barley, maize, rice, rye, sorghum, soybean and wheat, to cotton, grapevines, and fruit trees such as apple, cherry, pear and mango.<sup>71,143,148-154</sup> At the same time, crop management decisions on sowing date and cultivar choice have direct effects on crop phenology.<sup>71,155</sup> They are often used as adaptation strategies to counteract climate-induced phenological changes.<sup>71</sup> With the constant introduction of new varieties and variations in the sowing calendar, farming practices and climate have a combined influence on diverse changes in crop phenology.<sup>71,151,155-160</sup>

Many highly productive regions suffer more frequent, extreme climate-related events that also interfere with critical growth stages.<sup>161</sup> Climate-scenario crop models project that many global regions will experience reductions in yields, with additional challenges from soil degradation, unsustainable farming, pests, and water scarcity.<sup>162</sup>

Adaptation practices focus on implementing sustainable management, including organic fertilizer use, combining legumes with grasses, optimizing irrigation, breeding plants selectively, and choosing more resilient cultivars.<sup>71</sup> Projections of agricultural productivity often incorporate adaptation to climate change in their predictions, with the call for more observational evidence on the effectiveness of adaptation practices.<sup>161</sup>



# **Fisheries**

Successful growth to maturity and production of fish stocks is strongly affected by any climate-induced changes to the phenology and distribution of both fish and prey.<sup>67</sup> For many marine fish species, spawning phenology is sensitive to temperature cues.<sup>69,163</sup> Spawning time, subsequent transport of fish larvae during the planktonic stage, and abundance of suitable food are critical factors for early development and survival.<sup>43,67,164,165</sup> Reduced survival at early life stages leads to fewer additions to the adult stock.<sup>59</sup> Changes in the timing of reproduction and migration and resulting phenological mismatches with prey availability have been observed in and projected for species that are important to inland and marine fisheries in some regions.<sup>166</sup>

Shifting species' phenologies and environmental conditions under climate change present challenges for fisheries management.<sup>166</sup> With observed shifts in timing of critical life stages and geographic distribution, common practices used by fisheries authorities, such as closed fishing seasons and areas, may not provide adequate protection.<sup>59,163,166</sup> Management measures and restrictions should consider existing and emergent critical habitats, and changes in spawning sites, nursery grounds and migratory corridors. An ecosystem-wide approach that is adaptive to both climate and environmental changes is essential for sustainable fisheries management within resilient ecosystems.<sup>166</sup>



# Inland fisheries

Patterns of rainfall and snowfall altered by climate change affect the availability, quality and flow regime of fresh water. These are important phenological cues for species in freshwater habitats, and modifications in water flow and levels, as well as flood events, affect the timing of migration and spawning.<sup>166-168</sup>

# Marine heatwaves

The 2012 intense marine heatwave warmed north Atlantic waters by 1-3°C, inducing a phenological response in lobsters and majorly affecting fisheries in the Gulf of Maine. Cued by rising temperatures, lobsters migrated inshore earlier, moulted faster, and reached legal fishing size sooner. The longer fishing season, overharvesting, and unmet market demand led to a price collapse.<sup>169</sup>

# **The Sardine Run**

A seasonal mass migration of sardines (*Sardinops sagax*) from the temperate waters of the Agulhas Bank towards the sub-tropical waters off the northern coast of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, occurs annually. From May to July, the phenomenon attracts many opportunistic marine predators, as well as fishing activities and tourism.<sup>170</sup>

Records over 60 years show a progressive delay in arrival of sardines off Durban by 1.3 days/ decade. This delay coincided with a change in the threshold thermal range for sardines as the 21°C isotherm shifted south.<sup>170</sup> If the shifting trends continue, the sardine run may no longer extend as far north, or the run may collapse in the long term, with implications for predators, fisheries and tourism.<sup>170,171</sup>

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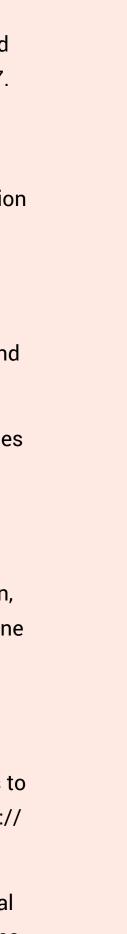
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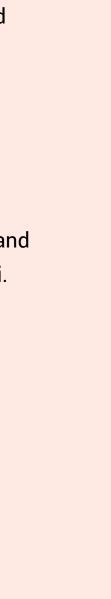


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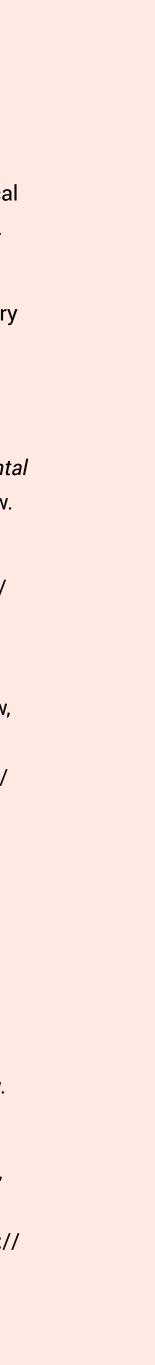
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### Identifying shifts, tracking trends

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