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Geological and hydrochemical prerequisites of unexpectedly high biodiversity in spring ecosystems at the landscape level

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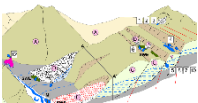
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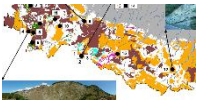
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Graphical Abstract



Hydrogeological characterization



Geodiversity

Ecomorphological diversity



Extensive physical and chemical gradients

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| 13 $\mu\text{S cm}^{-1}$ | Conductivity | 11560 $\mu\text{S cm}^{-1}$ |
| 1 | Shading | 5 |
| 0.2 mg L^{-1} | Nitrates | 48 mg L^{-1} |
| 0 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ | Chromium | 705 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ |

Impacts:

Water diversion, Intensive agriculture and industry in the plains.



High γ biodiversity

- ▶ Study region: High geodiversity with diverse lithotypes and aquifer structures.
- ▶ Consequence: Wide variation in ecomorphological types and hydrochemistry.
- ▶ Effect: High landscape-level (γ) biodiversity.
- ▶ Conservation: Protection of representative and proportional regional groups of springs.
- ▶ Springs: Ideal systems in which to investigate geo-biodiversity relationships.

1 **Geological and hydrochemical prerequisites of unexpectedly high**
2 **biodiversity in spring ecosystems at the landscape level**

3 Marco Cantonati ^{a,*}, Stefano Segadelli ^b, Daniel Spitale ^a, Jacopo Gabrieli ^c, Reinhard Gerecke ^d,
4 Nicola Angeli ^a, Maria Teresa De Nardo ^b, Kei Ogata ^e, John D. Wehr ^f

5

6 ^a *MUSE – Museo delle Scienze, Limnology & Phycology Section, Corso del Lavoro e della Scienza 3,*
7 *I-38123 Trento, Italy*

8 ^b *Emilia-Romagna Region, Geological, Seismic & Soil Survey, Viale della Fiera, 8, 40127 Bologna,*
9 *Italy*

10 ^c *University Ca' Foscari of Venice, IDPA-CNR, Calle Larga Santa Marta 2137, 30123 Venice, Italy*

11 ^d *University of Tübingen, Department of Evolution and Ecology, Auf der Morgenstelle 28E,*
12 *D-72076 Tübingen, Germany*

13 ^e *Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra, dell'Ambiente e*
14 *delle Risorse (DiSTAR), via vicinale cupa Cintia 21, Complesso Universitario di Monte S. Angelo,*
15 *Edificio L 80126 Napoli*

16 ^f *Fordham University, Louis Calder Center - Biological Field Station, 31 Whipoorwill Road, PO Box*
17 *887, Armonk, NY 10504 USA*

18 ^{*} Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* marco.cantonati@muse.it (M. Cantonati).

19

20

21

22 ABSTRACT

23 This study explores the factors affecting the biodiversity of diatoms, vegetation with focus on
24 bryophytes, and invertebrates with focus on water mites, in a series of 16 spring-habitats. The
25 springs are located primarily from the mountainous part of the Emilia-Romagna Region (Northern
26 Apennines, Italy), and two pool-springs from agricultural and industrial lowland locations. Overall,
27 data indicate that biological diversity (Shannon-Wiener, α -diversity) within individual springs was
28 relatively low, e.g.: $S_{diatoms} = 0-46$, $S_{water-mites} = 0-11$. However, when examined at the regional scale,
29 they hosted a very high total number of taxa (γ -diversity; $S_{diatoms} = 285$, $S_{water-mites} = 40$), including
30 several new or putatively-new species, and many Red-List taxa. This pattern suggested there is
31 high species turnover among springs, as well as high distinctiveness of individual spring systems. A
32 key goal was to assess the hydrogeological and hydrochemical conditions associated with this high
33 regional-pool species richness, and to provide a guide to future conservation strategies. There was
34 a striking variety of geological conditions (geodiversity, captured mainly with lithotype and aquifer
35 structure) across the study region, which led to wide variation in the hydrosphere, especially in
36 conductivity and pH. Agriculture and industrial activities (anthroposphere) in the lowlands resulted
37 in nutrient enrichment and other forms of pollution. Across all 16 spring-systems, several
38 hydrogeological conditions most strongly influenced the presence or absence of particular biota
39 and were determinants of species importance: spring-head morphology, hydroperiod, discharge,
40 current velocity, and elemental concentration. These findings have important practical
41 consequences for conservation strategies. Our data show that it is imperative to protect entire
42 regional groups of springs, including representatives of the different ecomorphological spring
43 types, lithologies, and degrees of human influence. These findings suggest that springs, when
44 studied from an ecohydrogeological perspective, are excellent systems in which to further
45 investigate and understand geo-biodiversity relationships.

46

47 *Keywords:* Springs, Diatoms, Bryophytes, Zoobenthos, Water mites, Geodiversity

48

49 **1. Introduction**

50 Spring habitats possess remarkably distinctive ecological features and hold great importance for
51 biodiversity conservation; however, they are fragile ecosystems affected by many human impacts,
52 particularly water diversion and habitat destruction (e.g., Glazier, 2014). Springs in natural or near-natural
53 conditions have often been described as biodiversity hotspots (e.g., Cantonati et al., 2012a), but the type of
54 diversity and key factors have rarely been specified (but see e.g. Nascimbene et al., 2011; Pascual et al.,
55 2020). Among the reasons often mentioned for spring habitat uniqueness and biodiversity are the marked
56 heterogeneity of water characteristics, their complex microhabitat mosaic structure, and their
57 characteristic ecotonal environment. Springs typically transition from groundwater to surface water, and
58 intergrade between aquatic and terrestrial habitats, leading to localized spatial heterogeneity (Cantonati et
59 al., 2012a).

60 The heterogeneous nature of spring habitats has been classified in a variety of ways (e.g., Glazier, 2014;
61 Cantonati et al., 2020). Seepages are known as the spring type richest in diatom and meiofauna species
62 (Cantonati et al., 2012a). Low-conductivity springs on siliceous (e.g., granitic) substratum, when not
63 affected by acidification or other types of contamination, host very species-rich and distinct diatom
64 assemblages (e.g., Cantonati et al., 2009). Flowing springs are those most similar to streams, and indeed
65 often the transition from springhead to spring-fed streams is seamless, but nevertheless there are diatom
66 species with a marked preference for the uppermost section of the running-water system, but not in lower
67 reaches (e.g., Cantonati et al., 2012b). Limestone Precipitating Springs (LPS) or petrifying springs are one of
68 the few spring types indicated as priority habitat by the European Union Habitat Directive (EU-HD, 1992;
69 Cantonati et al., 2016), and shelter biota highly-adapted to this this special, limestone-precipitating
70 hydrochemical microhabitat. Biota in these systems include specific algae (in particular the bio-calcifying
71 desmid alga *Oocardium stratum*; Linhart and Schagerl, 2015). Inland-saline (mineral) springs are potentially
72 of high evolutionary significance as putative stepping-stone habits that facilitated the radiation in inland
73 waters of algal taxa of marine origin (e.g., Cantonati et al., 2019b).

74 Species composition and spatial distribution in springs is mainly determined by ion content, particle-
75 sizes of major substrata (determined by current velocity), shading, nutrients, and dissolved metals
76 (Bonettini and Cantonati, 1996; Cantonati et al., 2012b). Disturbances markedly alter spring-habitats and
77 can result in clearly-detectable changes in diatom assemblages, in particular by alterations to the physical
78 structure of springs and contamination with nitrates (e.g., Angeli et al., 2010). Diatom Red List species
79 (percentage of species in threat categories) were shown to react sensitively to habitat alteration and
80 destruction (e.g., water capturing), as well as to nitrate pollution (Cantonati et al., 2012a). The recent
81 (Hofmann et al., 2018) publication of an updated and expanded version of the diatom Red List for Central
82 Europe (first edition: Lange-Bertalot, 1996) allows for an even more effective use of this tool for spring-
83 habitat integrity evaluation in this geographic region.

84 Spring-ecosystem hydrochemistry is influenced by a variety of pre- and post-emergence factors affecting
85 the aquifer, including geology (e.g., Cantonati et al., 2020), climate, vegetation, and land-use (Merk et al.,
86 2020). The close relationship between spring-dwelling communities and geological formations of the
87 aquifers has been clearly demonstrated for diatom assemblages (Werum and Lange-Bertalot 2004). In
88 some cases, the occurrence of individual diatom species appears to be correlated with the dominant
89 lithotype in the drainage basin, such as dolomite or granite. The occurrence of some diatom species in
90 spring ecosystems has been studied in detail and their ecological characterization often shows that their
91 distribution is driven by a complex combination of hydrogeological and chemical factors. For instance,
92 *Achnantheidium dolomiticum* (Cantonati and Lange-Bertalot, 2006), as the specific epithet suggests, is found
93 on dolomite $[\text{CaMg}(\text{CO}_3)_2]$ substrata. However, Cantonati et al. (2012b) found that this species is
94 characteristic of karstic springs with strongly fluctuating discharge. Recently, *A. dolomiticum* was also found
95 in springs emerging on other rock types, but were nonetheless influenced by groundwater enriched in
96 magnesium (Cantonati et al., 2017).

97 Bryophytes in spring habitats, like diatoms and other photoautotrophs, are strongly influenced by the
98 geological characteristics of the substratum (e.g., Nascimbene et al., 2011). Among invertebrates, water
99 mites are apparently a group with among the greatest number of spring-dependent species; this points to a

100 particularly strong relationship between this group and conditions in the spring environment (e.g., Gerecke
101 et al., 2018).

102 Despite these patterns in individual studies, few papers have addressed the broader relationship
103 between biota and spring hydrogeology (e.g., Van der Kamp, 1995; Cantonati et al., 2020). The link
104 between geological diversity, or “geodiversity” (e.g., Gray et al., 2013) and biodiversity is increasingly
105 gaining interest, but far more studies are needed to provide empirical evidence for this connection
106 (Alahuhta et al., 2020). The role of geodiversity in positively influencing biodiversity has been recognized
107 for terrestrial ecosystems (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017), but studies on freshwater habitats are still rare (e.g.,
108 Kärnä et al., 2019, who worked on streams). The Northern Apennines (Italy) are renowned as a highly
109 complex geoscape and area of high geological diversity (e.g., Castellarin, 2001; Boccaletti et al., 2004;
110 Marroni et al., 2010). Therefore, we focused this study specifically in the Emilia-Romagna Region for a
111 deeper understanding of spring-habitat biodiversity and a better understanding of their ecological and
112 geological drivers.

113 We examined the hydrogeological and hydrochemical conditions associated with high regional-
114 pool species richness and landscape-level (γ) biodiversity with the goal to show how high
115 lithological and aquifer-structure diversity generate a multiplicity of ecomorphological and
116 hydrochemical environmental settings, and how this translates into high γ diversity. We focused
117 our studies primarily on two groups of organisms, diatoms and water mites, which have
118 contrasting ecological roles within the spring ecosystem. The consequences of our findings for
119 spring-habitat conservation strategies are highlighted.

120

121

122 **2. Methods**

123 We examined sixteen springs: Names and codes (with explanations) are listed in Table 1, and will be
124 used throughout the paper. Data from these springs are listed by increasing mineral content, from lowest
125 to highest conductivity.

126 Springs were selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) location in different types of nature
127 reserves; (2) representativeness of the diverse ecomorphological and hydrochemical spring types, and of
128 the main lithotypes occurring in the study area; (3) availability of medium-term data series; (4) location
129 within the main northern Apennine aquifer types; (5) location in the different altitudinal belts; (6) presence
130 of a permanent hydraulic regime; and (7) in natural or near-natural conditions. Seventy separate
131 morphological, physical, and chemical variables (Supplementary Material Table 1) and variables were
132 determined for each of 16 selected springs.

133

134 *2.1. Sampling surveys*

135 Field work was carried out in the summers of 2011 and 2012 (hydrochemistry and biota).
136 Hydrogeological observations and monitoring of selected springs were performed continuously within a 6-
137 year timeframe, from 2007-2013. The position of the springs was recorded by measuring the geographic
138 coordinates with a GPS (Garmin eTrex 10; Garmin Ltd., Olathe, KS, USA). Geomorphology (configuration)
139 was assessed recording the main characteristics on sampling forms and drawing sketches. Current-velocity
140 was assessed using the five-point scale reported in Cantonati et al. (2012b). Canopy cover (as a measure of
141 shading) was assessed with a hemispherical densiometer.

142 Depending on local conditions, discharge measurements were performed either using the volumetric
143 method (with low flow rates) or using flumes and weirs to convey all the water inside a graduated
144 container. Measures were repeated at least three times at each site. Temperature, specific conductance at
145 25 °C, and pH were measured on-site by means of handheld Eutech temperature-conductivity meter (Cole-
146 Parmer, Vernon Hills, IL, USA) along with each discharge measurement. Finally, at the Poia_MiSp-SC and
147 Laba_LPS-le springs, discharge values were determined with an STS digital pressure transducer (model
148 DL/N-64, STS - Sensor Technik Sirnach, Sirnach, Switzerland), whereas temperature and conductivity were

149 measured with a digital thermometer-conductimeter (Hanna Instruments; Woonsocket, RI, USA). To
150 calculate variability indices, discharge, temperature, and electrical conductivity data collected in the field
151 during the EBERs project have been integrated with own (SS) datasets or available from the literature
152 (Chiesi and Forti, 2009; Filippini, 2009-2010; Gherardi, 2011-2012).

153

154 *2.2. Geology and Hydrogeology*

155 Geological data used for this work was derived from the database of the geological map of the Emilia-
156 Romagna Region, scale 1:10,000 (Geological cartography of Appennines, scale 1:10,000, 2012).

157 A variable termed 'lithology' was defined to express the main geological subdivisions in the Northern
158 Apennines and their influence on the mineral content of the studied spring waters. Lithological classes
159 were ordered on the basis of the degree of solubility of the rock and therefore on the basis of their capacity
160 to condition the chemistry of the waters during flow inside the aquifer. 'Lithology' expressed the range of
161 conditions from poorly-soluble rocks (e.g. siliciclastic arenites and basalts) to karst rocks composed of
162 evaporitic Triassic - Messinian rocks, and classified from 1 to 8, as follows: (1) siliciclastic arenites, (2)
163 ophiolites (basalts), (3) ophiolites (peridotites), (4) ophiolites (serpentinized peridotites), (5) lithic arenites,
164 (6) limestone-marly flyschs and calcarenites, (7) alluvial deposits, and (8) Triassic and Messinian evaporites
165 (details in Table 1).

166 The springs were classified on the basis of variation in discharge through time, and quantified using the
167 variability index (Rv) introduced by Meinzer (1923). This index is a function of the maximum (QM),
168 minimum (Qm), and mean (Qmed) discharge values within the hydrological year: $Rv = ((QM -$
169 $Qm)/Qmed)*100$). Values of $Rv < 25\%$ indicate springs with constant discharge, whereas Rv between 25%
170 and 100% are defined as sub-variable. Higher values ($Rv > 100\%$) identify springs with variable discharge.
171 This index was also implemented for temperature and specific conductance data. For several springs
172 (Helo_LCSe, CaLS_LCFS, GeRi_MiSp-Su, FoVR_PS-Sh, and FoVR_PS-Su), the Rv values had to be estimated.

173

174 *2.3. Hydrochemistry*

175 Sampling was conducted using polyethylene (PE) bottles previously cleaned with ultra-pure HNO₃
176 (Ultrapure grade, Romil, Cambridge, UK), and then rinsed several times with ultra-pure water (Purelab Ultra
177 Analytic, Elga Lab Water, High Wycombe, UK) to minimize the risk of external contaminations. Water
178 samples for major ions and nutrients were kept chilled (ca. 4 °C) in fridges and fridge bags until analysis.
179 Detailed hydrochemical analyses were carried out following standard methodology (APHA, 2000). Ca²⁺,
180 Mg²⁺, Na⁺, K⁺, NH₄⁺, Cl⁻, NO₃⁻, SO₄²⁻, Br⁻, F⁻ were analysed by ion chromatography (ICS 1500 Dionex Corp.,
181 Sunnyvale, CA, USA), and dissolved nutrients (N-NO₂⁻, N-NH₄⁺, P-PO₄³⁻, TP, TN, Si) by standard absorption
182 spectrometry (details in Cantonati et al., 2012b).

183 The bottles of water samples for trace elements were capped after sampling, packed in double LDPE
184 bags, and transported to the IDPA-CNR Laboratories (Milan, Italy), where samples remained frozen until
185 they were analysed. The samples were thawed at room temperature under a class 100 laminar flow clean
186 bench, and 10 mL aliquots were transferred to 12 mL ultra-clean LDPE vials and acidified with ultra-pure
187 HNO₃ to obtain 2% solutions (v/v). Concentrations of 29 elements (Li, Be, Na, Mg, Al, Ti, V, Cr, Mn, Fe, Co,
188 Ni, Cu, Zn, Ga, As, Rb, Sr, Mo, Ag, Cd, Sn, Cs, Sb, Ba, Tl, Pb, Bi, U) were determined by Inductively Coupled
189 Plasma Sector Field Mass Spectrometry (ICP-SFMS; Element2, Thermo-Fisher, Bremen, Germany) equipped
190 with a desolvation system (APEX IR, Elemental Scientific, Omaha, US). The system was calibrated by
191 external calibration using a certified multi-standard solution containing the 29 trace elements (IMS-102,
192 UltraScientific, US). Concentrations in the standard solutions ranged from 0.005 to 50 ng/g for all the
193 elements except Na, Mg, Al, Fe, Mn and Ba which were calibrated at higher concentration values (from 1.0
194 to 1000 ng/g). The accuracy was evaluated (ION 96.2, National Water Research Institute, Canada) and
195 ranged from 76% (Al) to 105% (Sn). Average precision was always better than 12%.

196 In order to evaluate the relative contribution from natural (e.g., rock and soil dust) versus anthropogenic
197 sources, trace element concentrations were expressed in the form of crustal enrichment factors (EF_{Ba}). EF_{Ba}
198 is defined as the concentration ratio of a given element to that of Ba (or any other conservative element
199 which derives mainly from rock and soil dust), normalized to the same concentration ratio characteristic of
200 the upper continental crust (after Wedepohl, 1995). However, given the large variations in the composition

201 of rock and soil, enrichment factors within ± 10 times the mean crustal abundance (i.e. EF_{Ba} values ranging
202 from ~ 0.1 to 10) do not likely demonstrate the input from sources other than rock and soil dust.
203 Conversely, any EF_{Ba} value significantly greater than 10 strongly suggests contributions from other natural
204 sources and/or anthropogenic sources. Elements with EF_{Ba} values between 10 and 100 are considered
205 moderately enriched, indicating one or several other sources in addition to the crustal material. Finally,
206 elements with EF_{Ba} values greater than 100 are considered highly enriched, suggesting a severe
207 anthropogenic contribution (after Veysseyre et al., 2001).

208

209 *2.4. Diatom sampling, identification, and quantification*

210 Diatom assemblages were sampled and treated following the methods described previously for spring
211 habitats by Cantonati et al. (2012b), with specific designation of the spring-head area (= eucrenal, defined
212 here as the submerged portion at the time of sampling and the inner bank clearly influenced by the water
213 during the year), choice of substrata, and sample treatment. Epilithic diatoms were collected by brushing
214 ten stones. For diatoms epiphytic on the dominant bryophyte species, the epibryon were collected from
215 the most frequent and abundant bryophytes in each sample location (see Supplementary Material Table 4).
216 The collected materials, including the bryophytes, were cut into small pieces and were digested using
217 hydrogen peroxide (Cantonati et al., 2012b). The cleaned material was mounted in Naphrax (refractive
218 index of 1.74). For each sample, three cover-slips were prepared on one permanent slide, and a pooled
219 total of about 450 valves were counted. All samples (original samples, suspensions of prepared material,
220 and permanent mounts) have been catalogued and deposited in the collections of the MUSE – Museo delle
221 Scienze (Trento) (access codes: cLIM007 DIAT 1956-2002) along with information about the abundance of
222 the species found and the main environmental variables.

223 Counting was conducted with a Zeiss Axioskop 2 at 1000x magnification (Zeiss, Oberkochen, Germany).
224 The most updated taxonomy and nomenclature available at the time when counts were performed was
225 applied (in particular, Levkov, 2009; Hofmann et al., 2011; Lowe et al., 2014), and other identification
226 reference works followed were as in Cantonati et al. (2012b). Nomenclature and some taxonomic concepts

227 were updated using Cantonati et al. (2017), AlgaeBase (Guiry and Guiry, 2020), DiatomBase (Kociolek et al.,
228 2020), Diatoms of North America (Spaulding et al., 2019), the Freshwater Diatom Flora of Britain and
229 Ireland (Jüttner et al., 2020). To confirm identifications and document taxa with poorly-observed
230 ultrastructure, several taxa were examined with SEM (Zeiss-EVO40XVP, Carl Zeiss SMT Ltd., Cambridge, UK)
231 at the MUSE - Museo delle Scienze (Trento) or at the University of Frankfurt using a Hitachi S-4500 (Hitachi
232 Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) at high vacuum on gold-coated stubs.

233

234 *2.5. Bryophytes and vascular plants*

235 Within the eucrenal, all the bryophytes and vascular plants were identified and assigned a score
236 according to their visually estimated percent cover: 1 = < 5%, 2 = 5-25%; 3= 25-50%; 4 = 50-75%; 5 = 75-100
237 (e.g., Braun-Blanquet, 1964; Tomaselli et al. 2011). Species nomenclature follows Aeschlimann et al. (2004)
238 for vascular plants, Hill et al. (2006) for mosses, and Ros et al. (2007) for liverworts. Specimens of vascular
239 plants were collected as needed to confirm field identifications at a later stage. Bryophytes were
240 systematically collected and will be deposited in the Herbarium of the MUSE – Museo delle Scienze, Trento,
241 Italy (Code = TR).

242

243 *2.6. Zoobenthos*

244 Cumulative sediment samples from all significant substrata were preserved in 70% denaturated ethanol
245 or in 4% formaldehyde; animals from the latter was later transferred to 70% denaturated ethanol. During
246 sorting, water mites were then preserved in Koenike's fluid (glycerol:acidic acid:distilled water 10:3:6).
247 Before sorting, samples were washed and divided into two fractions (>1.000 µm and <1.000 µm). The large-
248 scale fraction was investigated at lower magnification, the fine fraction at high magnification under a Zeiss
249 SV6 stereo microscope. All samples were examined completely; individuals encountered were counted
250 from the whole sample, although not all were directly enumerated. In cases of high densities, a quarter of
251 each dish was counted and the resulting number multiplied by 4. Resulting specimen numbers were
252 rounded and were used for calculating categories of relative density for all taxonomic groups recognized.

253 The material was sorted at the taxonomic level of orders, or, in the case of Diptera, families. As a general
254 rule, for taxa in low densities, all specimens were sorted and enumerated, while for more frequent taxa,
255 only a representative number of specimens was preserved. During treatment, attention was paid to
256 obvious differences in morphology and size classes, trying to sort out different morphotaxa in relation to
257 their relative abundance. In order to get insight into the whole diversity spectrum (often reflected by
258 differences in body weight and consequently in sedimentation rate), specimens of all taxa were selected
259 during the whole sorting process, from the first to the last Petri dish. For each spring, and each
260 order/family, a tube with two labels (taxon name and site abbreviation; information on collecting site and
261 date) was deposited in the collection. A part of the material has been sent to specialists, the rest was
262 deposited in the collections of the MUSE– Museo delle Scienze (Trento) Limnology Section (access codes:
263 cLIM007).

264

265 *2.7. Data processing and statistical analyses*

266 For all diatom species collected in this study, a threat status (a measure of rarity) was assigned,
267 according to current (Hofmann et al., 2018) and previous Red List data (Lange-Bertalot, 1996). For the
268 species present in both lists, a check was made if the conservation status is improving or declining.
269 Hofmann et al. (2018) provide further ecological attributes (trophic and mineralization preferences, aerial
270 species) used in this study (Supplementary Material Table 3).

271 Shannon-Wiener diversity (Shannon, 1948) was calculated using a base-2 logarithm. Canonical
272 Correspondence Analysis (CCA) was calculated with the package *vegan* (Oksanen et al., 2019) in the R
273 statistical environment (R CORE TEAM, 2018). CCA was selected over other ordination techniques, such as
274 redundancy analysis (RDA), after evaluation of the length of the gradient. Model selection was performed
275 with the *orddistep* function of *vegan*, with an automatic, stepwise model with constrained ordination. Only
276 the environmental variables significant in the last step of selection was then used for the final CCA model.
277 Significance of the CCA model, terms, and constrained axes was tested with an ANOVA like permutation
278 test (999 permutations).

279 A Mantel test was used to assess correlation between epibryon and epilithon diatoms and vegetation.
280 The significance of the statistic is evaluated by permuting rows and columns of the first dissimilarity matrix.
281 The function to perform the Mantel test is available in the vegan package. To study α , β , and γ diversity for
282 diatoms, we used an additive diversity partitioning, where the mean values of α diversity at lower levels of
283 a sampling hierarchy are compared to the total diversity in the entire data set (γ diversity, Crist et al.,
284 2003); this function is available in the vegan package.

285

286

287 **3. Results**

288 *3.1. Ecomorphology, Geology and Hydrogeology*

289 The ecomorphological classification of the springs studied here led to the recognition of seven spring-
290 types, listed in order of increasing mineral content of the spring water (Table 1, Fig. 3). The spring codes are
291 explained in Table 1, and include, after the underscore, an abbreviation of the spring type, and, after the
292 hyphen, an abbreviation of the possible sub-category. Within shaded, flowing springs, a subgroup was
293 characterized by the occurrence of the macroscopic crustose red alga *Hildenbrandia rivularis*.

294 The geological (lithological) and hydrogeological classification of the studied springs is provided in Table
295 1. Our study also included two lowland pool springs in alluvial deposits, locally called *fontanili*. Hard Rock
296 Aquifers (HRA) is the best represented group because the ophiolites, and in particular the turbiditic units,
297 both silico-clastic, and calcareous and calcareous-marly, cover very vast and seamless territories (Fig. 1).

298 *3.2. Hydrochemistry*

299 The study revealed several factors that ranged widely among spring-types (Fig. 4, Supplementary
300 Material Table 1, Table 2). The conductivity gradient of the studied springs ($13\text{-}11560\ \mu\text{S cm}^{-1}$) spanned
301 more than three orders of magnitude. In one system, Prin_ShFS-pH, very high pH (11.2) was due to
302 enrichment with sodium and chloride. The two mineral springs (Poia_MiSp-SC, GeRi_MiSp-Su) were
303 characterized by high sodium, chloride, sulphate, and total phosphorus (TP) values. TP enrichment is

304 otherwise rare in most systems, even in the agricultural lowland limnocrenes (*fontanili*) contaminated by
305 nitrate and chloride (Table 2). The MtNe_ShFS-Hi (aquifer: deep-seated gravitational deformations in slopes
306 - DSGSD) and CiLi_HygS springs, both coming to daylight on ophiolitic rocks, were enriched with sodium,
307 magnesium, chromium, nickel, arsenic, uranium, molybdenum, cadmium, antimony, titanium
308 (Supplementary Material Table 2, Table 2).

309

310 3.3. Diatoms

311 In the spring GeRi_MiSp-Su, bryophytes were not found (see below), and diatoms were absent also on
312 lithic material. Diatom analyses of samples from the remaining 15 springs revealed a total species richness
313 of 285 taxa (272 identified to the species -or intraspecific- level) belonging to 63 genera (Supplementary
314 Material Table 3). Red-List threat-category data were available for nearly all the taxa identified to species
315 level: only nine taxa were not listed (Hofmann et al., 2018). A high proportion (60%) of the species for
316 which Red List information was available were found to belong to one of the key threat categories (1, 2, 3,
317 G, R, V, D oligotraphentic) (Supplementary Material Table 3). A selection of frequent and abundant,
318 characteristic, rare, and Red-List species is summarized in Fig. 5.

319 Two of the species identified were listed in the highest threat category, i.e. threat category 1
320 (“threatened with extinction”): *Achnantheidium trinode* (Fig. 5 11b) and *Eunotia cisalpina* (Fig. 5 2b). Several
321 more species in the studied springs are members of threat category 2 (“strongly threatened”), including
322 *Achnantheidium dolomiticum*, *A. rosenstockii*, *Brachysira calcicola*, *B. vitrea*, *Cymbella tridentina* (Fig. 5 12a),
323 *C. tumidula* (Fig. 5 12b), *Cymbopleura austriaca*, *Encyonema hebridicum*, *Encyonopsis lange-bertalotii*,
324 *Eucoconeis flexella*, *Eunotia kruegeri*, *E. nymanniana*, *E. palatina*, *E. sudetica*, *E. tetraodon*, *Kolbesia*
325 *carissima* (Fig. 5 2d), *Navicula angusta* (Fig. 5 1a), *N. dealpina*, *Psammothidium altaicum*, *Rossethidium*
326 *anastasiae*, *R. pusillum*, *Sellaphora stroemii*.

327 On the basis of in-depth studies on LM morphology, plastid shape and arrangement, SEM ultrastructure,
328 ecology and distribution, and extensive literature research, eight species in the genera *Achnantheidium*,

329 *Amphora*, *Delicata*, *Eunotia*, *Fragilaria*, *Halamphora*, *Navicula*, and *Planothidium* were recognized as new
330 to science (Cantonati et al., 2019a;b; MC, Horst Lange-Bertalot, unpublished data).

331 Ecological preferences were assigned (based on Hofmann et al. 2018) for 252 of the 272 taxa identified
332 at least to the species level (Supplementary Material Table 3). Of these only 24 species (= 9.5%) were
333 classified as aerial, and included *Cymbopleura austriaca*, *Delicata minuta*, *Diploneis minuta*, *Encyonema*
334 *alpinum*, *E. bipartitum* (Fig. 5 9f), *Halamphora montana*, *H. normanii*, *Hantzschia amphioxys*, almost all
335 *Humidophila* spp. found (excepting *H. schmassmannii*), *Hygropetra balfouriana*, *Nitzschia harderi*, *Nupela*
336 *lapidosa*, *Pinnularia obscura*, *Simonsenia delognei*, *Surirella terricola*, *Tetracyclus rupestris*, *Tryblionella*
337 *debilis*. Most species were encountered in only one or two springs. Table 3 shows richness (S) and Shannon-
338 Wiener (H') ranges. Species richness in the epilithon ranged from 7 (Poia_MiSp-SC) to 46 (CaLS_LCFS);
339 richness in the epibryon ranged from 5 (Poia_MiSp-SC) to 65 (Helo_LCSe). The variable 'lithology' was
340 correlated significantly with both Shannon-Wiener diversity of epibryon diatoms ($r = -0.74$; $p = 0.003$) and
341 vegetation ($r = -0.78$; $p < 0.001$, Fig. 6).

342 A CCA (Table 4, Fig. 7) indicated that the distribution of the sites and characteristic species was mainly
343 determined by differences in chromium, nitrates, elevation (for epilithon), and by nitrates, magnesium,
344 bicarbonate alkalinity, and elevation (for epibryon). This is confirmed by the placement of typical mountain
345 species (*Psammothidium daonense*, *Achnantheidium trinode* (Fig. 5 11b), *Nupela lapidosa*, *Gomphonema*
346 *tenoccultum* (Fig. 5 11c), *Odontidium neolongissimum*) close to the apex of the elevation vector. The
347 eutraphentic *Fragilaria famelica* is positioned close to the head of the nitrate vector, and indeed this
348 species was abundant in FoVR_PS-Su, where the highest nitrate values were measured (Table 2).

349 The total species richness (γ -diversity) recorded across all springs was partitioned into the average
350 number of species that occur within a sample (α) and the average number of species absent from a sample
351 (β), Table 5. The partition showed that α diversity was on average 23.5 in the epilithon and 28.4 on average
352 in the epibryon, each of which is relatively low, compared to total γ -diversity (199 and 214 species).

353

354 **3.4. Bryophytes and vascular plants**

355 A total of 93 macrophytic plant species were observed across all sites (43 bryophytes, and 49 vascular
356 plants; Supplementary Material Tables 4-5), with an average richness of 9.6 per site. In the spring
357 GeRi_MiSp-Su both bryophytes and vascular plants were absent, whereas the richest spring was Helo_LCSe,
358 with 13 and 15 species respectively for bryophytes and vascular plants. Of note were the bryophytes
359 *Hygrohypnum eugyrium* (the second record in Italy), *Fissidens viridulus*, *Racomitrium aciculare*, and
360 *Southbya tophacea*; taxa that were not recorded after 1950 in the Emilia-Romagna Region. Most species
361 were encountered only once or twice. Species observed more than 5 times are common in many aquatic
362 habitats, such as *Bryum pseudotriquetrum*, *Palustriella commutata*, and *Brachythecium rivulare*. Other less
363 frequent species occurred in particular spring types, including *Didymodon tophaceus* and *Eucladium*
364 *verticillatum* in LPS springs, and *Sphagnum* spp. in seepages. The vegetation composition, designated here
365 as plant and bryophyte assemblages together, was highly correlated with the epibryon diatom assemblages
366 (Mantel statistic $r = 0.95$; $p < 0.001$), and correlated, but less so, with the epilithic diatoms (Mantel statistic
367 $r = 0.30$; $p < 0.011$).

368

369 3.5. Zoobenthos

370 3.5.1. Overview on invertebrates

371 The invertebrate groups encountered and the numbers of specimens counted, are given in
372 Supplementary Material Table 6. The most abundant groups were chironomids, followed by ostracods,
373 mites, and stoneflies. The total specimen number in samples collected during the investigation exceeded
374 ten thousand. A considerable abundance and frequency of groundwater taxa (= stygophilous) were
375 observed. Among these, particularly common were amphipods in the genus *Niphargus*, stygobiont
376 hydrobiid snails, and the mites genera *Stygothrombium* and *Frontipodopsis*, the latter two taxa previously
377 not published from spring sites in Italy. An interesting finding was also a larva of the psephenid beetle
378 genus *Eubria*, a taxon with a very scattered distribution in Europe. The relationship between selected
379 groups of invertebrates and lithology is shown in Fig. 8. Of these, only chironomid species composition was
380 significantly correlated to lithology ($r = -0.65$; $p = 0.006$).

381

382 3.5.2. Water mites

383 Distribution and frequency of mite species are given in Supplementary Material Table 7. A total of 40
384 water-mite taxa were observed, 36 of which are members of the true water mites. With regard to
385 individual numbers, of the globally 827 specimens collected in the frame of this project, only 47 (5%), are
386 representative of terrestrial groups. They represented (specimen numbers in brackets): Trombidiformes
387 (3), Gamasida (4), and Oribatida (40, including 20 Phthiracaridae). True aquatic mites occurred in 14 of the
388 springs studied, but in six of these occurred in low numbers. Terrestrial taxa were recorded only from sites
389 GeRi_MiSp-Su (Gamasida, Oribatida, 10 specimens) and FoVR_PS-Sh (Oribatida, 1). Sites with very low
390 water-mite density were Bari_ShFS-mc (*Partnunia aprutina*, *Protzia squamosa*, each one specimen),
391 Poia_MiSp-SC (*Partnunia aprutina*, one specimen), Laba_LPS-le (*Aturus* cf. *natangensis*, one specimen,
392 *Sperchonopsis verrucosa*, 2 specimens), FoVR_PS-Su (only one undetermined larva), FoVe_LCFS (*Feltria*
393 *setigera*, *Lebertia schechteli*, each 2 specimens), and CaLS_LCFS (*Pseudofeltria aemiliana*, *Protzia eximia* gr.,
394 1 specimen each). Furthermore, also CiLi_HygS (3 water mite taxa, 14 specimens) and Cara_LPS-sn (4 water
395 mite taxa, 5 specimens) had a rather poor fauna. Higher population densities and species richness were
396 observed at sites MtPe_ShFS-Hi, MaPa_ShFS-Hi, Laga_ShFS-Hi, MtNe_ShFS-Hi, Prin_ShFS-pH and
397 Helo_LCSe.

398 *Hygrobates psammocrenicus* occurred in greatest abundance, mostly due to an extreme density of this
399 species at one site: Laga_ShFS-Hi. *Sperchon thienemanni* was the next most common taxon, along with
400 *Feltria setigera* and *Partnunia aprutina*, as frequently recorded species (4 sites). Other species found in
401 higher numbers or more frequently (specimen numbers/frequency in parentheses) are *Lebertia schechteli*
402 (36/3), *Atractides longisetus* (24/2), *Pseudofeltria appenninica* (14/2), *Hydrovolzia placophora* (13/2),
403 *Atractides loricatus* (10/2), *Sperchonopsis verrucosa* (7/3), and *Panisus michaeli* (4/3). The remaining 25
404 species were found at one or two site(s) only and in low numbers, 14 of them as single specimens.

405 In this study, nearly 75% of the water mite species are classified to have a close relationship to spring
406 habitats: crenobionts (= strictly bound to springs): 60%; and crenophiles (= with a preference for springs,

407 but also in other habitats): 14%. Typical crenobionts, some of them with a particular preference for special
408 habitats, are *Paniscus michaeli*, *Protzia squamosa paucipora*, *Sperchon resupinus*, *Bandakia concreta* (all
409 with a known preference for helocrenes), *Hydrovolzia placophora*, *Lebertia cuneifera*, *Lebertia holsatica*
410 (preferably in rheohelocrenes rich in macrophytes and fine detritus), and *Lebertia schechteli*, *Sperchon*
411 *mutilus*, *Sperchon thienemanni* (in all types of springs). Important crenophiles in our study are *Lebertia*
412 *maculosa*, *Sperchon squamosus* and *Atractides loricatus*.

413 The pattern revealed by γ -diversity partitioning (Table 3) parallels the results obtained for diatoms.

414

415

416 **4. Discussion**

417 The regional assemblages of spring organisms examined included a very high total number of species,
418 including several new or putatively-new species, and many Red-List taxa. The γ -diversity partitioning for
419 both diatoms and water mites demonstrated that α -diversity of the individual springs is relatively low, and
420 that the main contribution to γ -diversity was due to β -diversity, that is, a high turnover of species among
421 springs. This pattern and the percentages were very similar for diatoms and water mites.

422 These results are in good agreement with previous studies. Nascimbene et al. (2011) investigated algae,
423 diatoms, lichens, and bryophytes in springs of the southeastern Alps and compared α -, β - and γ -diversity: In
424 individual springs, these photoautotroph groups formed relatively species poor communities with a high
425 species replacement among springs whilst regional species pools were important. Studying
426 macrozoobenthos from 19 mountain springs of the River Sarca catchment in the Adamello-Brenta Nature
427 Park, Bonettini and Cantonati (1996), observed low species numbers in individual biotopes, and a high total
428 number of taxa. This condition demonstrates marked site to site (spatial) differences, which also emerged
429 from the TWINSpan ordination. In the present study, springs with the greatest number of species, and
430 those that may be considered rare in northern Italy, were characterized by low flow variability. Pascual et
431 al. (2020) underline the uniqueness of individual spring communities after studying α -, β - and γ -diversity of

432 macroalgae, diatoms, bryophytes, vascular plants, aquatic invertebrates and vertebrates in Mediterranean
433 springs. Our findings also have important implications for conservation, suggesting that the protection of
434 single sites will not be effective, because a biodiversity conservation plan for spring environments requires
435 a plan developed at the regional level, and include a network of sites representative of the different
436 ecomorphologies, lithologies, and other key ecological factors.

437 These results also reveal the need for a deeper understanding of the causes of high γ -diversity.
438 Specifically, these data demonstrate that high geological diversity (lithotypes, aquifer hydrostructure, etc.),
439 translates into high spring ecomorphological and hydrochemical diversity. Further, these patterns are
440 reflected in high biodiversity. Other factors that may affect high γ -diversity include ecotonal character
441 (aquatic-aerial) of spring habitats, the fact that spring habitats in the study region (Emilia-Romagna) are still
442 relatively unexplored, and a general lack of high spatial resolution and in-depth taxonomic approaches of
443 springs.

444 A large part of the geological framework of the Northern Apennines comprises Cretaceous to Miocene,
445 marine neritic (shallow water) or turbiditic (deep water) deposits (siliciclastic arenites, marly-limestones or
446 arenaceous-pelitic turbidites), as well as scattered outcrops of ophiolites, mostly composed of peridotites,
447 serpentinites, gabbros, and basalts. The latter represent indented remnants of the original oceanic crust of
448 the Ligurian basin, developed in the Middle to Upper Jurassic, which separated the European from the
449 Adriatic plate (Marroni et al., 2010). Each of these geological units are tectonically layered and deformed
450 within the Apennine system, and constitute valuable groundwater reservoirs. In some circumstances, the
451 sedimentary rocks exhibit heterogeneous and anisotropic hydraulic conductivity distributions, similar to
452 those commonly observed for HRA (Gargini et al., 2006; 2008; Vincenzi et al., 2009; Piccinini et al., 2013;
453 Vincenzi et al., 2014; Segadelli et al., 2017b). In particular, Gargini et al. (2014) and Piccinini et al. (2013)
454 consider that the Northern Apennines groundwater reservoirs are all represented either by hard rock
455 aquifers *sensu stricto* (like ophiolites) or by sedimentary units comprising hard rock aquifers as defined
456 above (Fig. 1). These units can be classified as shallow/surficial, recharge-dominated, strongly
457 heterogeneous and anisotropic aquifers. Much less represented are the karstic aquifers, comprising Triassic -

458 Messinian evaporite sequences and Late Jurassic - Paleogene non-metamorphic carbonate successions (Fig.
459 1). The geological, structural and geomorphological survey conducted in part during the EBERs project and
460 in subsequent years (Gargini et al., 2014; Cantonati et al., 2016; Segadelli et al., 2017a;b; Cantonati et al.,
461 2020) highlighted in the study area a variability of hydrogeological situations as described and summarized
462 in the conceptual scheme proposed in Figs 1-2, with particular attention to the HRA group, because it
463 represents, from a geological standpoint, the backbone of the northern Apennines. In one system, very
464 high pH values were associated with low temperature reaction between meteoric water and ultramafic
465 rocks (Neal and Shand, 2002; Boschetti and Toscani, 2008; Boschetti et al., 2013).

466 The percentage of Red List diatom species identified in this study belonging to the most important
467 threat categories (60%) is remarkably high. As a comparison, ~ 50% Red List species belonging to threat
468 categories were previously found in high-integrity springs and high-mountain lakes of the Alps (Cantonati et
469 al., 2012a). It is also important to note that most species belonging to the highest threat categories
470 encountered were collected in low-conductivity and dystrophic mountain springs, habitats that were
471 singled out for their rich and peculiar diatom microflora by previous works (Cantonati et al., 2009; 2011;
472 2019), and, secondarily, in limestone-precipitating springs (LPS), which are as well known as special habitats
473 (Cantonati et al., 2016). The share of Red-List threat categories species was also high likely because in the
474 recently published Red List (Hofmann et al., 2018; summarized in Supplementary Material Table 3), the
475 status of most species changed as a result of the new Red List classifications (Lange-Bertalot, 1996), with
476 many placed in higher threat categories. The relatively low share of aerial diatom species in the present
477 study (less than 10%) is likely due to a focus on stable-discharge springs for this study, as compared to
478 previous investigations in the Alps. Most diatom, bryophyte and vascular-plant species were encountered
479 only once or twice because of the high diversity of spring typologies and the consequent distinctiveness of
480 the individual spring sites.

481 In the zoobenthos, a considerable abundance and frequency of stygophilous taxa were observed, which
482 suggests that the selected sites are probably of considerable biogeographical interest. As confirmed also by
483 this study, in Europe, but probably also on other continents, water mites (Hydrachnidia) are the group of

484 organisms (other than microbes and diatoms) with the greatest number and percentage of species, which
485 in many different genera, independently evolved strong ecological links to spring habitats (Gerecke et al.,
486 2018). Only in Hydrobiid snails, a similarly high share of spring-typical species is reported from western
487 North America, due to a strong radiation of the genus *Pyrgulopsis* (Hershler et al., 2014). As with diatoms
488 (Hofmann et al., 2018), these data offer information useful for a future Red List for European water mites.
489 In the course of the EBERs study, *Pseudofeltria aemiliana* was detected and described as a species new to
490 science (Gerecke, 2014). Unusual in water mites, and particularly surprising in a genus with strong sexual
491 dimorphism, this species is more distinct in females than in males. As with all known species of the genus, it
492 probably is a crenobiont with a preference for weakly seeping helocrenes. It can be considered an endemic
493 species of the Northern Apennines. The material from the study area includes also further interesting
494 records: the species found in highest abundance, *Hygrobates psammocrenicus*, has been described only
495 recently from springs in the Apennines and on Corsica (Gerecke and Di Sabatino, 2013); *Stygothrombium*
496 *chappuisi* is a very rare species reported from Italy only recently (Veneto, Emilia Romagna: Gerecke and Di
497 Sabatino, 2013); and *Partnunia aprutina*, after its first description from Abruzzo (Gerecke, 1993), has been
498 found again recently in several sites of the northern Apennines (Bottazzi et al., 2011). *Lebertia fontana* in
499 Italy was previously known only from two sites in Trentino (Gerecke, 2009), so this is the first record South
500 of the Alps, while *Lebertia mediterranea*, described from several sites in Italy, France (Corsica), Spain and
501 Bulgaria, and later on detected also in the Austrian Alps (Fišer et al., 2012), is a species in need of revision.
502 Specimens of the latter species found in this study differ from the original diagnosis in some morphological
503 details. With reference to species closely linked to groundwater habitats, the most striking result was the
504 finding of a large population of the typical interstitial-dwelling, laterally-compressed water mite
505 *Frontipodopsis reticulatifrons*. This species is normally restricted to interstitial waters, and not found in
506 springheads.

507 The topic of the relationship between biodiversity and geodiversity is now emerging with greater
508 awareness in the international scientific community (Kärnä et al, 2019; Alahuhta et al., 2020). There is a
509 clear need to develop new approaches through which to quantify and allow the comparison between

510 geodiversity and biodiversity in many types of ecosystems. In particular, as is already the case in other
511 ecological questions, the adoption of suitable indices and metrics stimulates and facilitates the comparison
512 between the biotic and abiotic diversity of a given area.

513 Our data suggest that only an integrated hydrogeological-ecological approach (= ecohydrogeological
514 perspective; Cantonati et al., 2020) will permit researchers to accurately define the foundations for
515 conservation actions and for the monitoring of springs. These systems should not be examined as simple
516 points of aquifer-system discharge, but as ecotones with regional patterns that create complex GDEs
517 (groundwater dependent ecosystem, Bertrand et al., 2012). Springs, studied in an ecohydrogeological
518 perspective, are ideal systems in which to investigate and understand the geo-biodiversity relationship.

519

520

521 **5. Conclusions**

522 The main conclusions that can be drawn from our observations are as follows:

- 523 • We confirm for spring habitats that the study region (Emilia-Romagna) is highly complex geoscape
524 and an area of high geodiversity. In relation to inland waters, and spring ecosystems in particular,
525 this is mainly apparent in the occurrence of diverse lithotypes and aquifer structures.
- 526 • Our data demonstrate that the diversity of rock and aquifer types generates a wide variation in
527 ecomorphological types and hydrochemistry.
- 528 • Considering two groups of organisms (diatoms, water mites) with contrasting ecological roles
529 within the spring ecosystem, our study for a deeper understanding of spring-habitat biodiversity
530 and uniqueness and of their determinants shows that the multiplicity of ecomorphological and
531 hydrochemical types translates into high landscape-level (γ) biodiversity, with individual sites
532 typically having relatively low diversity (α diversity) but differing markedly from one another (high
533 individuality).

534 • The main consequence of our findings for spring-ecosystem conservation is that it is imperative to
535 protect representative and proportional groups of springs at the landscape level.

536 We further note that springs, studied from an ecohydrogeological perspective, are ideal systems where
537 to investigate geo-biodiversity relationships.

538

539

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545

546

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750

751 **Figure legends**

752

753 **Fig. 1.** Geological map with the location of the springs studied. The small images exemplify the geodiversity
754 that characterizes the landscape of the Emilia-Romagna Region. (4) The basalts of Mt. Ciapa Liscia, 1658 m
755 a.s.l. (9) The serpentinized peridotites of Mt. Prinzera, 736 m a.s.l. (1) View to the East from the Fugicchia
756 Pass: siliciclastic arenites, 1667 m a.s.l. (12) Parallel-stratified calcarenite deposits, 636 m a.s.l. See Table 1
757 for the meaning of the codes of the 16 springs.

758

759 **Fig. 2.** Hydrogeological block diagram of groundwater flow systems in the main hard rock aquifers
760 outcropping in the study area. Spring numbers are as in Fig. 1.

761

762 **Fig. 3.** Representative images of springs of the different ecomorphological types and subcategories.

763

764 **Fig. 4.** Box plots of the main environmental biota determinants.

765

766 **Fig. 5.** LM and SEM (3a external view; 9e internal view) micrographs of selected frequent and abundant,
767 characteristic, rare and Red List diatom species of the different ecomorphological types. The micrographs
768 (sites) follow the usual order of increasing mineralization. **1a-d, Helo_LCSe**, 1a *Navicula angusta*, 1b
769 *Gomphonema pseudoboheicum*, 1c *Eunotia soleirolii* "dwarf", 1d *Stauroneis smithii*; **2a-d, CaLS_LCFS**, 2a
770 *Encyonema neomesianum*, 2b *Eunotia cisalpina*, 2c *Chamaepinnularia muscicola*, 2d *Kolbesia carissima*; **3a-**
771 **d, FoVe_LCFS**, 3a *Geissleria acceptata*, 3b *Gomphonema sphenovortex*, 3c *Nitzschia dealpina*, 3d
772 *Achnanthidium lineare*; **4a-c, CiLi_HygS**, 4a *Gomphonema minusculum*, 4b *Encyonema ventricosum*, 4c
773 *Amphora micra*; **5a-c, MtNe_ShFS-Hi**, 5a *Encyonema vulgare*, 5b *Encyonema sublangebertalotii*, 5c
774 *Encyonopsis moseri*; **6a, MtPe_ShFS-Hi**, 6a *Brachysira calcicola*; **7a-c, Laga_ShFS-Hi**, 7a *Sellaphora*
775 *atomoides*, 7b *Sellaphora seminulum*, 7c *Gomphosphenia fontinalis* girdle view; **8a-b, MaPa_ShFS-Hi**, 8a

776 *Navicula splendidula*, 8b *Neidiomorpha binodiformis*. **9a-f, Prin_ShFS-pH**, 9a *Gomphonema auritum*, 9b
777 *Navicula veronensis*, 9c-d *Humidophila irata*, 9e *Reimeria uniseriata*, 9f *Encyonema bipartitum*; **10a,**
778 **Bari_ShFS-mc**, 10a *Gomphonema angustum*; **11a-c, Cara_LPS-sn**, 11a *Gomphonema lateripunctatum*, 11b
779 *Achnantheidium trinode*, 11c *Gomphonema tenoccultum*; **12a-d, Laba_LPS-le**, 12a *Cymbella tridentina*, 12b
780 *C. tumidula*, 12c-d *Denticula elegans*: 12c valve view, 12d girdle view; **13a, FoVR_PS-Su**, 13a *Fragilaria*
781 *famelica* low-salinity morphotype; **14a-c, FoVR_PS-Sh**, 14a *Staurophora wislouchii*, 14b-c *Planothidium*
782 *werumianum*: 14b RL valve, 14c raphe valve; **15a-b, Poia_MiSp-SC**, 15a *Nitzschia frustulum*, 15b *Fragilaria*
783 *famelica*.

784

785 **Fig. 6.** Site-environmental variables, and species-environmental variables CCA biplots for the epilithon and
786 the epibryon, respectively. See Table 1 for the meaning of the codes of the 16 springs. Species OMNIDIA
787 acronyms: PDAO = *Psammothidium daonense*, ADOL = *Achnantheidium* sp. aff. *dolomiticum*, ADTR =
788 *Achnantheidium trinode*, NULA = *Nupela lapidosa*, GTNO = *Gomphonema tenoccultum*, ONEO = *Odontidium*
789 *neolongissimum*, GLAT = *Gomphonema lateripunctatum*, PMCR = *Psammothidium microscopicum*, GCUN =
790 *Gomphonema cuneolus*, AINA = *Amphora inariensis*, NEXI = *Navicula exilis*, ADFO_mn = *Achnantheidium*
791 *fontisalinae* sp. nov. mn, AIND = *Amphora indistincta*, CRUM = *Crenotia rumrichorum*, COPL = *Cocconeis*
792 *pseudolineata*, FFAM = *Fragilaria famelica*, PTEN_mn = *Planothidium tenuilanceolatum* sp. nov. mn; ACAF =
793 *Achnantheidium affine*, ENCM = *Encyonopsis microcephala*, DLMI = *Delicata minuta*, GPUM = *Gomphonema*
794 *pumilum*, PGRI = *Psammothidium grischunum*, GACC = *Geissleria acceptata*, HPEP = *Humidophila perpusilla*,
795 HUCO = *Humidophila contenta*, SENI = *Sellaphora nigri*, SSEM = *Sellaphora seminulum*.

796

797 **Fig. 7.** Scatterplots showing the relations between diatom-epibryon Shannon-Wiener diversity (H') and
798 vegetation Shannon-Wiener diversity (H') and lithology. Explanations of the eight values of the variable
799 'lithology' are given in Table 1.

800

801 **Fig. 8.** Scatterplots showing the relations between selected zoobenthos groups (absolute abundances) and
802 lithology. The meaning of the eight values of the variable 'lithology' are explained in Table 1.
803

804 **Supplemental online materials**

805

806

807 **Supplementary material Table 1.** The seventy morphological, physical, and chemical variables and
808 parameters measured in the 16 springs.

809

810 **Supplementary material Table 2.** Enrichment factors for the trace elements and metals measured in the
811 springs studied (2011).

812

813 **Supplementary material Table 3.** List of all diatom species identified in the samples. N. occurrences, min,
814 max relative abundance %); Red-List status, aerial species, and ecology (according to Hofmann et al., 2018).

815

816 **Supplementary material Table 4.** Bryophytes.

817

818 **Supplementary material Table 5.** Vascular plants.

819

820 **Supplementary material Table 6.** Zoobenthos.

821

822 **Supplementary material Table 7.** Water mites.

Table 1. Ecomorphological and hydrogeological classifications of the springs studied and related variables.

| Spring code | Helo_LC Se | CaLS_LCFs | FoVe_LC FS | CiLi_H ygS | MtNe_S hFS-Hi | MtPe_S hFS-Hi | Laga_Sh FS-Hi | MaPa_S hFS-Hi | Prin_Sh FS-pH | Bari_ShFS -mc | Cara_LPS -sn | Laban_LP S-le | FoVR_ PS-Su | FoVR_ PS-Sh | Poia_ MiSp- SC | GeRi_ MiSp- Su | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|-------|--|
| Spring name | Helocrene at Lago Scuro (Helo) | Capanne Lago Scuro (CaLS) | Fontana del Vescovo (FoVe) | Ciapa Liscia (CiLi) | Monte Nero (MtNe) | Monte Penna (MtPe) | Lagacci (Laga) | Mangiapane (MaPa) | Prinzera (Prin) | Barigazzo (Bari) | Carameto (Cara) | Labante (Laba) | Fontanile Valle Re (FoVR) Sun | Fontanile Valle Re (FoVR) Shade | Poiano (Poia) | Gessiriolo (GeRi) | | |
| Ecomorphology | Low Cond. (LC) Seepage (Se) | Low Conductivity (LC) Flowing Springs (FS) | | Hygropetric (Hyg) spring (S) | Shaded (Sh) Flowing Springs (FS) with Hildenbrandia (Hi) | | | ShFS with high pH (pH) | | ShFS with medium cond. (mc) | LPS small near-natural (sn) | LPS large exploited (le) | Pool Spring (PS) Sun (Su) | Pool Spring (PS) Shade (Sh) | Mineral Spr. (MiSp) Sodium Chloride (SC) | Mineral Spr. (MiSp) Sulphates (Su) | | |
| Cond. ($\mu\text{S cm}^{-1}$) | 13 | 27 | 57 | 62 | 56 | 62 | 111 | 265 | 255 | 305 | 462 | 451 | 788 | 815 | 11560 | 2170 | | |
| Shading (%) | 3 | 20 | 3 | 70 | 78 | 69 | 77 | 77 | 78 | 67 | 11 | 8 | 6 | 72 | 80 | 96 | | |
| Discharge (L s^{-1}) | 0,01 | 0,8 | 1 | 1 | 1,2 | 3,5 | 3,5 | 0,9 | 0,03 | 0,4 | 0,07 | 15,5 | 0,5 | 0,5 | 50 | 2,5 | | |
| pH | 7,27 | 6,41 | 7,31 | 7,30 | 7,63 | 6,56 | 7,47 | 7,70 | 11,20 | 7,48 | 7,66 | 8,20 | 7,11 | 7,22 | 7,44 | 7,83 | | |
| Na⁺ (mg L^{-1}) | 1,5 | 1,3 | 1,6 | 1,5 | 0,39 | 1,8 | 1,0 | 2,8 | 33 | 6,7 | 4,4 | 4,8 | 21 | 22 | 2250 | 11,1 | | |
| Cl⁻ (mg L^{-1}) | 1,7 | 1,2 | 1,1 | 1,4 | 0,7 | 1,2 | 1,0 | 1,5 | 24,0 | 2,7 | 2,6 | 7,5 | 41,0 | 41,0 | 4370,0 | 13,6 | | |
| SO₄²⁻ (mg L^{-1}) | 1,7 | 1,5 | 1,8 | 2,8 | 0,81 | 2,5 | 2,2 | 10,7 | 9,7 | 27 | 45 | 27 | 69 | 68 | 2090 | 144 | | |
| Lithology var. (1-8) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | | |
| Lithology | siliciclastic arenites | | | basalts | peridotites | basalts | peridotites | serpentinized peridot. | | lithic arenites | limest. flyschs; calcarenites | | gravel and sand | | gypsum | | | |
| Aquifer | turbidites | | | | | ophiolites | | | | | turbidites | | alluvial deposits | | evaporites | | | |
| Aquifer broad cat. | | | | | | | | | | | | | Hard Rock Aquifers (HRA) | | Porous aquifer | | Karst | |

Table 2. Main morphological, physical, and chemical characteristics as emerging from data processing and statistical analyses.

| Spring code | Helos_ LCSe | CaLS_ LCFS | FoVe_ LCFS | CiLi_ HyGS | MtNe_ ShFS-Hi | MtPe_ ShFS-Hi | Laga_ ShFS-Hi | MaPa_ ShFS-Hi | Prin_ ShFS-pH | Bari_ ShFS-mc | Cara_ LPS-sn | Laba_ LPS-le | FoVR_ PS-Su | FoVR_ PS-Sh | Poia_ MiSp-SC | GeRi_ MiSp-Su |
|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Longitude E | 10°2'56.534" | 10°2'54.256" | 10°2'26.790" | 9°28'2.709" | 9°31'13.674" | 9°30'29.493" | 9°35'41.766" | 9°29'24.606" | 10°4'45.008" | 9°48'37.719" | 9°45'35.165" | 11°2'9.836" | 10°31'22.143" | 10°31'20.988" | 10°26'21.274" | 11°43'50.073" |
| Latitude N | 44°22'41.151" | 44°22'40.381" | 44°22'44.767" | 44°34'14.370" | 44°33'38.595" | 44°29'6.029" | 44°37'53.091" | 44°46'19.328" | 44°38'45.603" | 44°36'44.062" | 44°39'50.840" | 44°15'38.339" | 44°45'53.362" | 44°45'50.898" | 44°23'20.168" | 44°14'8.570" |
| Elevation (m a.s.l.) | 1534 | 1547,5 | 1613 | 1381 | 1509 | 1324 | 926 | 736 | 492 | 880 | 758 | 603 | 31,3 | 32 | 430 | 167,5 |
| Discharge (L s ⁻¹) | 0,01 | 0,8 | 1 | 1 | 1,2 | 3,5 | 3,5 | 0,9 | 0,03 | 0,4 | 0,07 | 15,5 | 0,5 | 0,5 | 50 | 2,5 |
| Variab. Ind. Disch. | 200 | 50 | 269 | 172 | 98 | 70 | 162 | 53 | 95 | 93 | 150 | 233 | 20 | 20 | 129 | 200 |
| T (°C) | 9,8 | 8,8 | 4,7 | 5,4 | 5,8 | 5,3 | 7,7 | 11,1 | 14 | 7,9 | 12,8 | 15,4 | 15 | 13,2 | 9,6 | 11,9 |
| Conduct. (μS cm ⁻¹) | 13 | 27 | 57 | 62 | 56 | 62 | 111 | 265 | 255 | 305 | 462 | 451 | 788 | 815 | 11560 | 2170 |
| pH | 7,27 | 6,41 | 7,31 | 7,3 | 7,63 | 6,56 | 7,47 | 7,7 | 11,2 | 7,48 | 7,66 | 8,2 | 7,11 | 7,22 | 7,44 | 7,83 |
| HCO₃⁻ (mg L ⁻¹) | 14 | 8,2 | 18 | 20 | 20 | 19 | 39 | 93 | 40 | 92 | 145 | 143 | 210 | 208 | 79 | 110 |
| Ca²⁺ (mg L ⁻¹) | 6,9 | 4,2 | 10,7 | 11,5 | 0,77 | 10,3 | 2,4 | 23 | 10,3 | 43 | 88 | 69 | 143 | 142 | 880 | 651 |
| Mg²⁺ (mg L ⁻¹) | 0,63 | 0,42 | 0,53 | 1,7 | 7,3 | 1,5 | 14,7 | 25 | 0,11 | 15 | 15,5 | 23 | 29 | 29 | 4,1 | 39 |
| TP (μg L ⁻¹) | <1 | 4 | 14 | 3 | <1 | 7 | 6 | <1 | 10 | <1 | 6 | 4 | 43 | 3 | 33 | 11 |
| NO₃⁻ (mg L ⁻¹) | 0,17 | 1,1 | 1,1 | 0,43 | 0,46 | 1,2 | 0,64 | 1,1 | <0.05 | 1,1 | 0,12 | 1,9 | 41 | 48 | 0,56 | 14,6 |
| Cr (μg L ⁻¹) | 0,28 | 0,24 | 0,5 | 1,1 | 40 | 0,88 | 16,8 | 15,4 | 0,18 | 0,85 | 0,12 | 0,38 | 1 | 0,29 | 3,4 | 1,06 |
| Ni (μg L ⁻¹) | 0,54 | 0,15 | 0,19 | 0,31 | 2,6 | 0,24 | 4,4 | 10,8 | 0,14 | 0,74 | 0,74 | 1,33 | 3,3 | 1,35 | 3 | 5,4 |
| Cu (μg L ⁻¹) | 1,11 | 0,24 | 0,13 | 0,11 | 0,17 | 0,17 | 0,14 | 0,93 | 0,54 | 0,18 | 0,19 | 0,17 | 1,11 | 0,25 | 7,1 | 0,33 |
| Zn (μg L ⁻¹) | 1,21 | 0,36 | 0,2 | 0,13 | 1,15 | 0,62 | 0,32 | 0,71 | 0,28 | 0,26 | 0,36 | 0,2 | 3 | 0,44 | 0,32 | 0,38 |
| Fe (μg L ⁻¹) | 15 | 9,3 | 18 | 28 | 7,2 | 14 | 13 | 82 | 8,4 | 59 | 58 | 38 | 391 | 93 | 274 | 643 |
| Mn (μg L ⁻¹) | 11,1 | 0,15 | 0,061 | 0,079 | 0,26 | 0,079 | 0,18 | 1,9 | 0,26 | 1,6 | 0,33 | 0,078 | 10,2 | 0,43 | 0,52 | 0,23 |

Table 3. Diatom species richness (S) and Shannon-Wiener diversity (H').

| S | epilithon | epibryon | debris | H' | epilithon | epibryon | debris |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------|--------|-----------------------|-----------|----------|--------|
| min | 7 | 7 | 5 | min | 0,56 | 0,25 | 0,52 |
| max | 46 | 65 | 22 | max | 2,59 | 2,15 | 2,29 |
| mean | 25 | 28 | 16 | mean | 1,74 | 1,57 | 1,41 |
| N | 12 | 14 | 3 | N | 12 | 14 | 2 |

Table 4. Diatom (epilithon and epibryon) Canonical Correspondence Analysis (CCA) data.

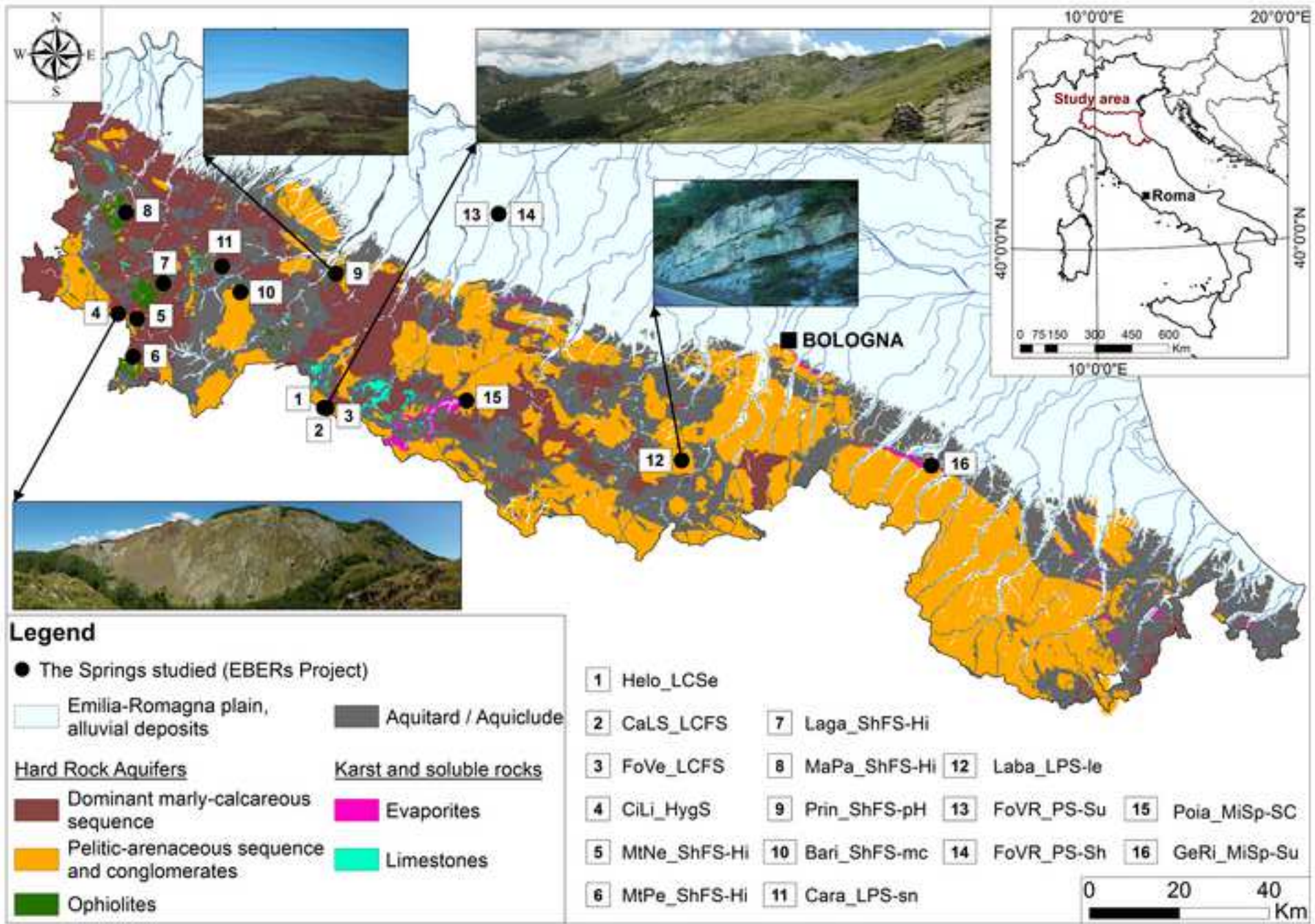
| epilithon | <i>df</i> | <i>Chi2</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>P</i> | epibryon | <i>df</i> | <i>Chi2</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>P</i> |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| elevation | 1 | 0,575 | 1,343 | 0,039 | elevation | 1 | 0,636 | 1,413 | 0,029 |
| logNO3 | 1 | 0,523 | 1,222 | 0,132 | HCO3 | 1 | 0,540 | 1,200 | 0,228 |
| Cr | 1 | 0,657 | 1,535 | 0,038 | Mg | 1 | 0,418 | 0,930 | 0,562 |
| | | | | | logNO3 | 1 | 0,726 | 1,613 | 0,044 |
| Residual | 10 | 4,280 | | | Residual | 9 | 4,050 | | |

Table 5. Landscape-level (γ) diversity partitioning for diatoms and water mites.

| | DIATOMS | | | | | | | | WATER MITES | |
|----------------|-----------|------|-----------|------|----------------|------|-----------|------|-------------|------|
| | Richness | | | | Shannon-Wiener | | | | Richness | |
| | epilithon | | epibryon | | epilithon | | epibryon | | | |
| | statistic | % | statistic | % | statistic | % | statistic | % | statistic | % |
| alpha.1 | 23,5 | 0,12 | 28,4 | 0,13 | 1,69 | 0,51 | 1,57 | 0,50 | 5,07 | 0,13 |
| gamma | 199 | | 214 | | 3,35 | | 3,13 | | 39 | |
| beta.1 | 175,5 | 0,88 | 185,6 | 0,87 | 1,65 | 0,49 | 1,56 | 0,50 | 33,9 | 0,87 |

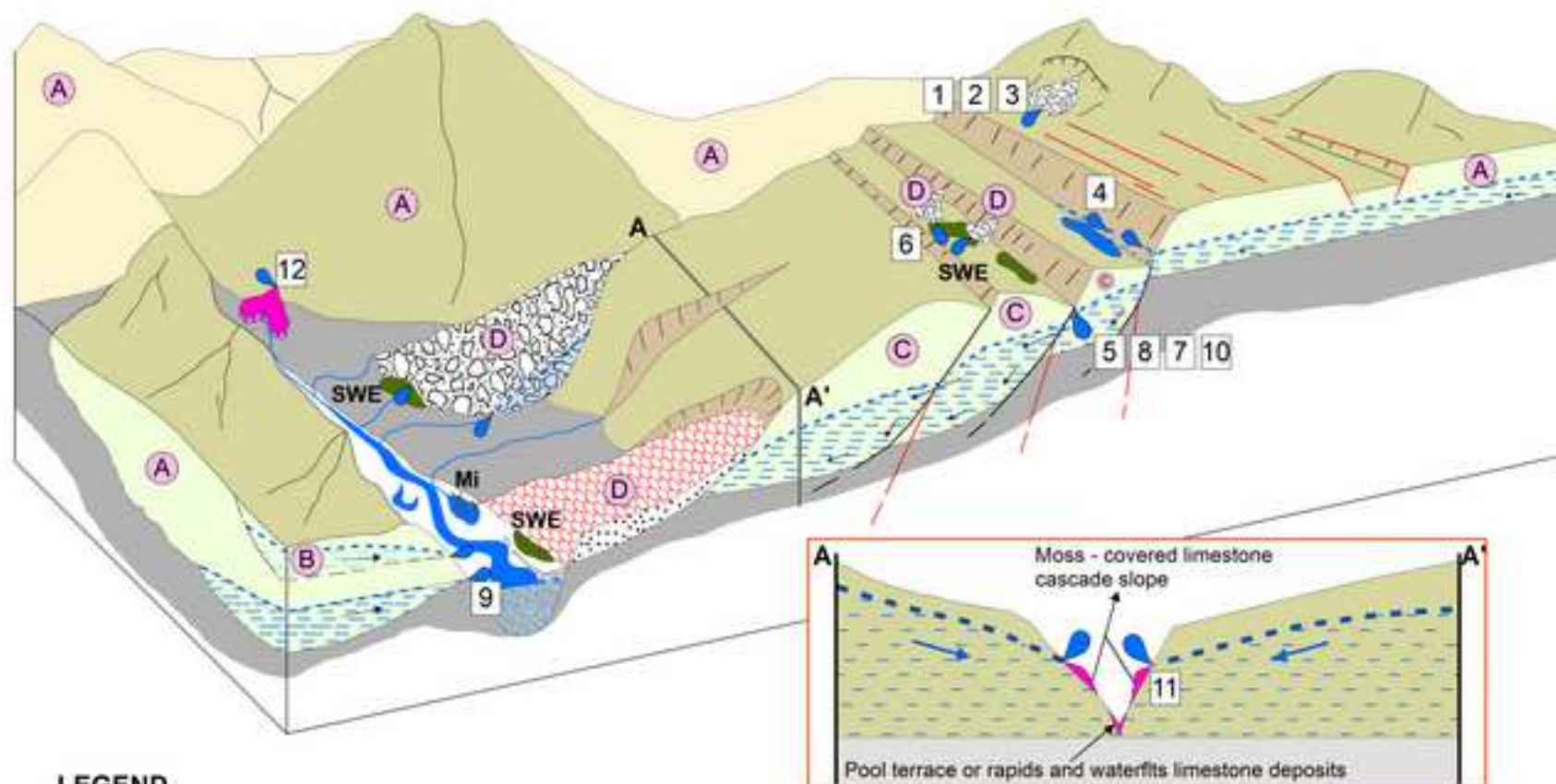
Figure

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Figure

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LEGEND

- | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|------------|--|
| | Tectonic fault: Impermeable core (cross-ft flow barrier) Permeable damage zone (along-ft flow path) | | Aquitard / Aquiclude | | Fractured aquifer |
| | Gravitational fault: (detensioned core and detensioned damage zone) | | Fractured aquifer, saturated zone perched groundwater | | Detensioned: stress release |
| | Landslide deposit | | Fractured aquifer, saturated zone basal groundwater | | Slope affected by block-slide gravitational movement and side-valley unloading |
| | Lake | | Porous aquifer, saturated zone | | Groundwater from landslide or slope debris fan deposits |
| | Limestone Precipitating Springs (L.P.S.) | | Spring studied (EBERs Project) | Mi | Mires |
| | | | Flow in the saturated zone | SWE | Small wetland ecosystems |
| | | | Groundwater-surface | | |

Figure

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LOW-COND. SEEPAGE



a

LOW-COND. FLOWING SPR.



b

HYGROPETRIC SPRING



c

SHADED FLOWING SPRINGS:

- with *Hildenbrandia*



d

- high pH



e

LPS: - small, near-natural



f

LPS: - large, exploited



g

POOL SPRINGS: - shaded



h

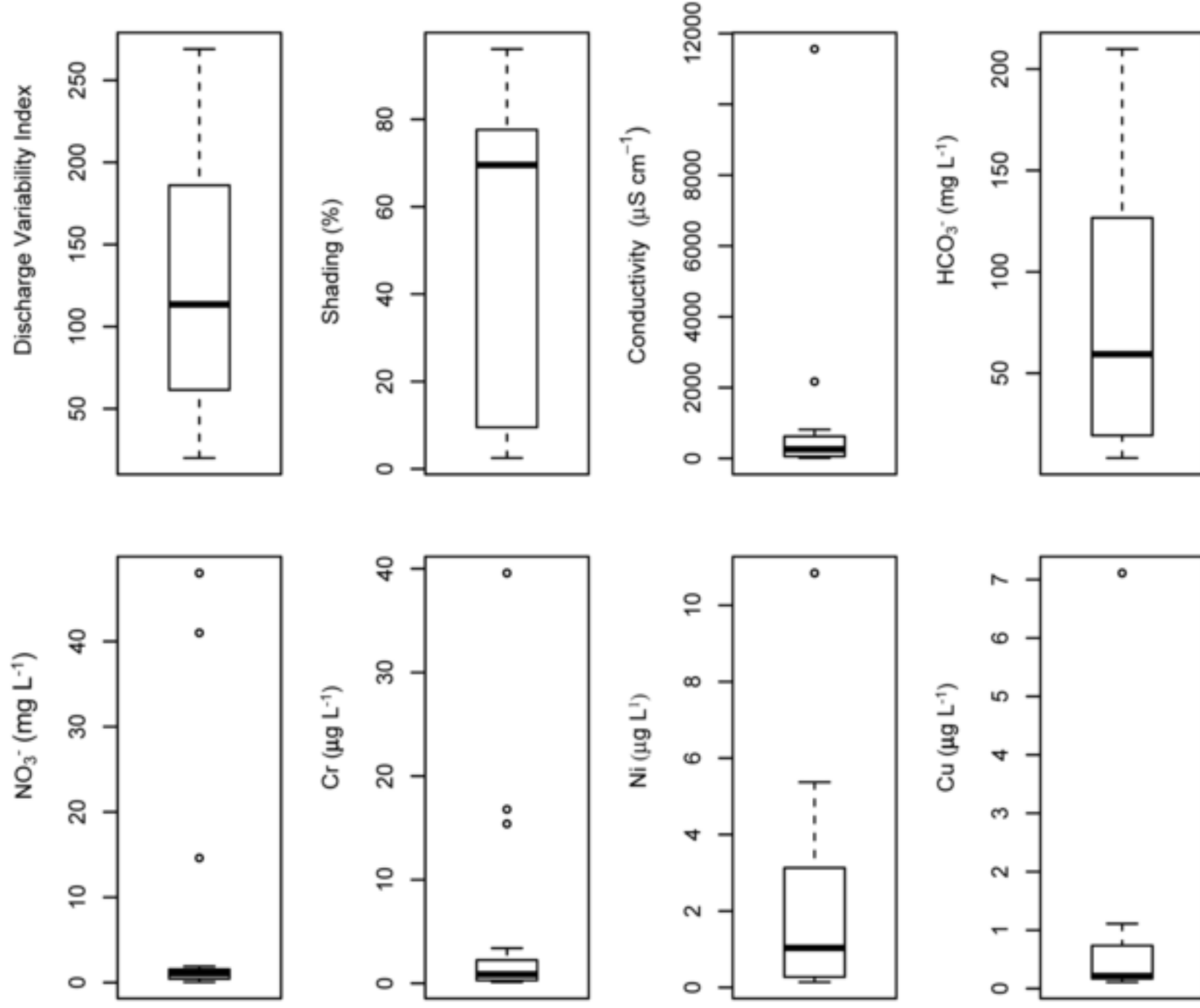
MINERAL SPRINGS: - NaCl



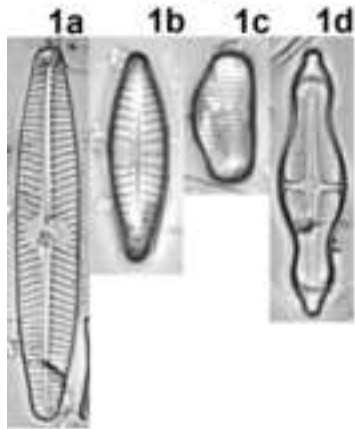
i

Figure

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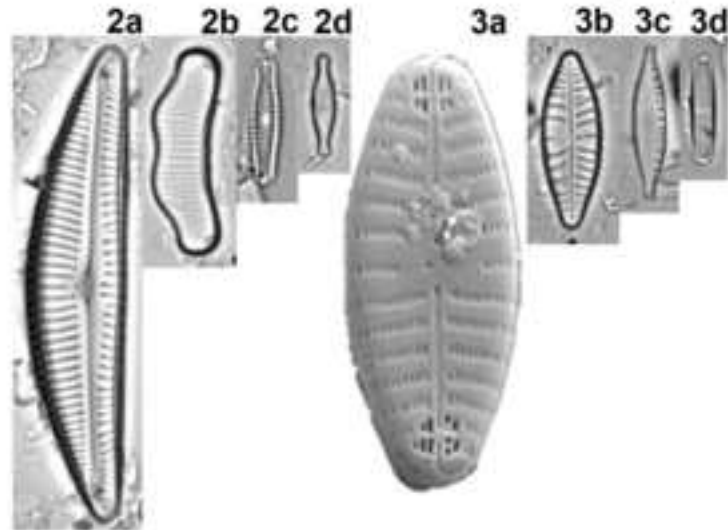


**LOW-CONDUCTIVITY
SEEPAGE (1)**



10 μ m

**LOW CONDUCTIVITY
FLOWING SPRINGS (2-3)**



**HYGROPETRIC
SPRING (4)**

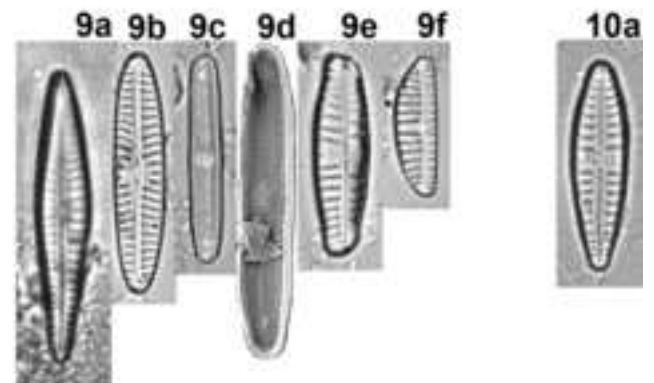
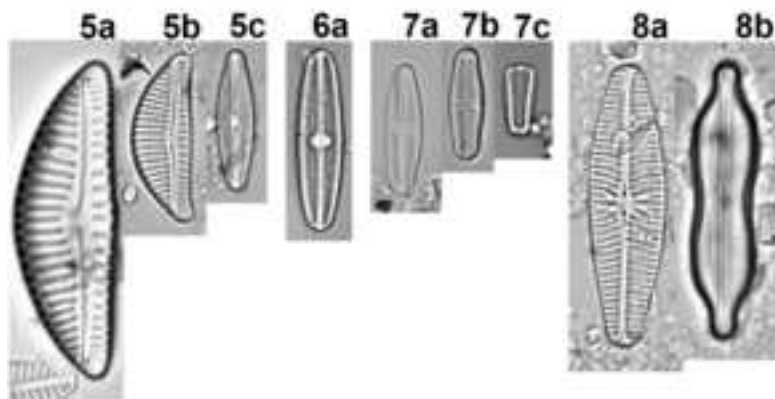


SHADED FLOWING SPRINGS:

- with *Hildenbrandia* (5-8)

- high pH (9)

- medium cond. (10)



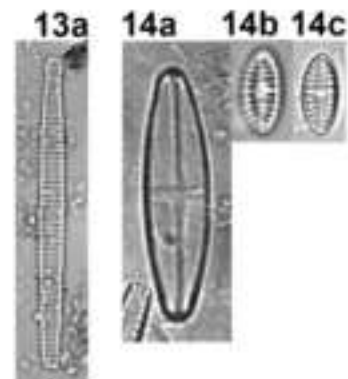
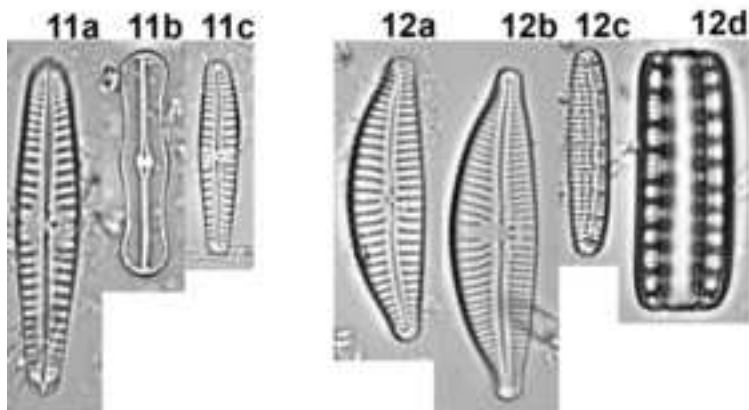
LIMESTONE PRECIPITATING SPRINGS:

- small, near-natural (11) - large exploited (12)

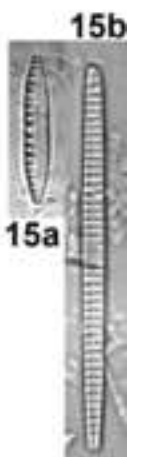
POOL SPRINGS:

- shaded (14)

**MINERAL
SPRINGS: (15)**



- sun
exposed (13)



Figure

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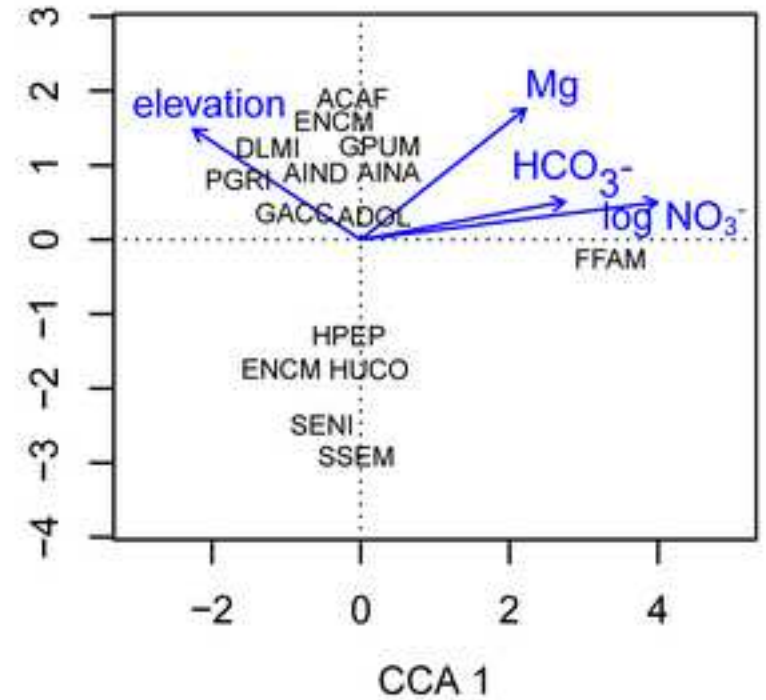
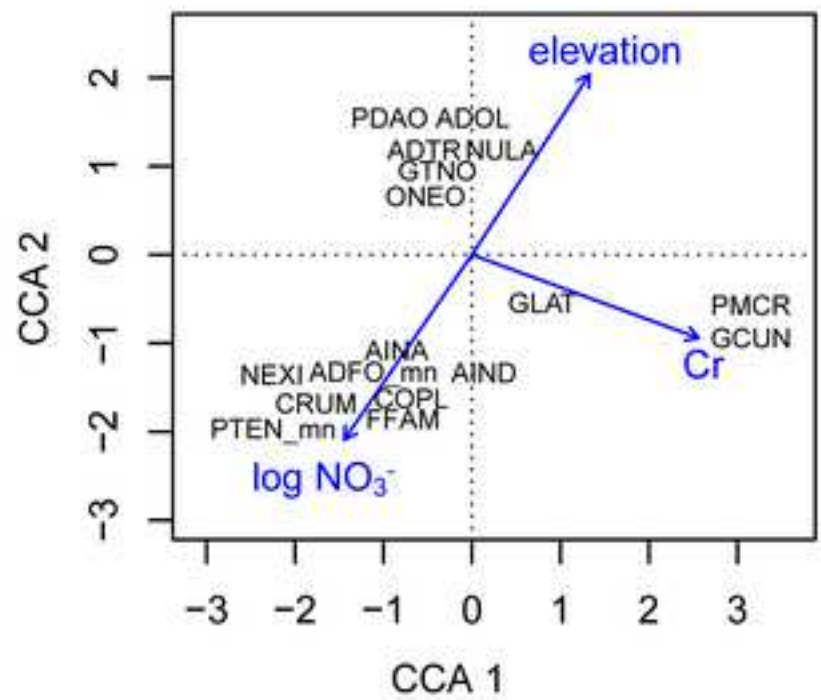
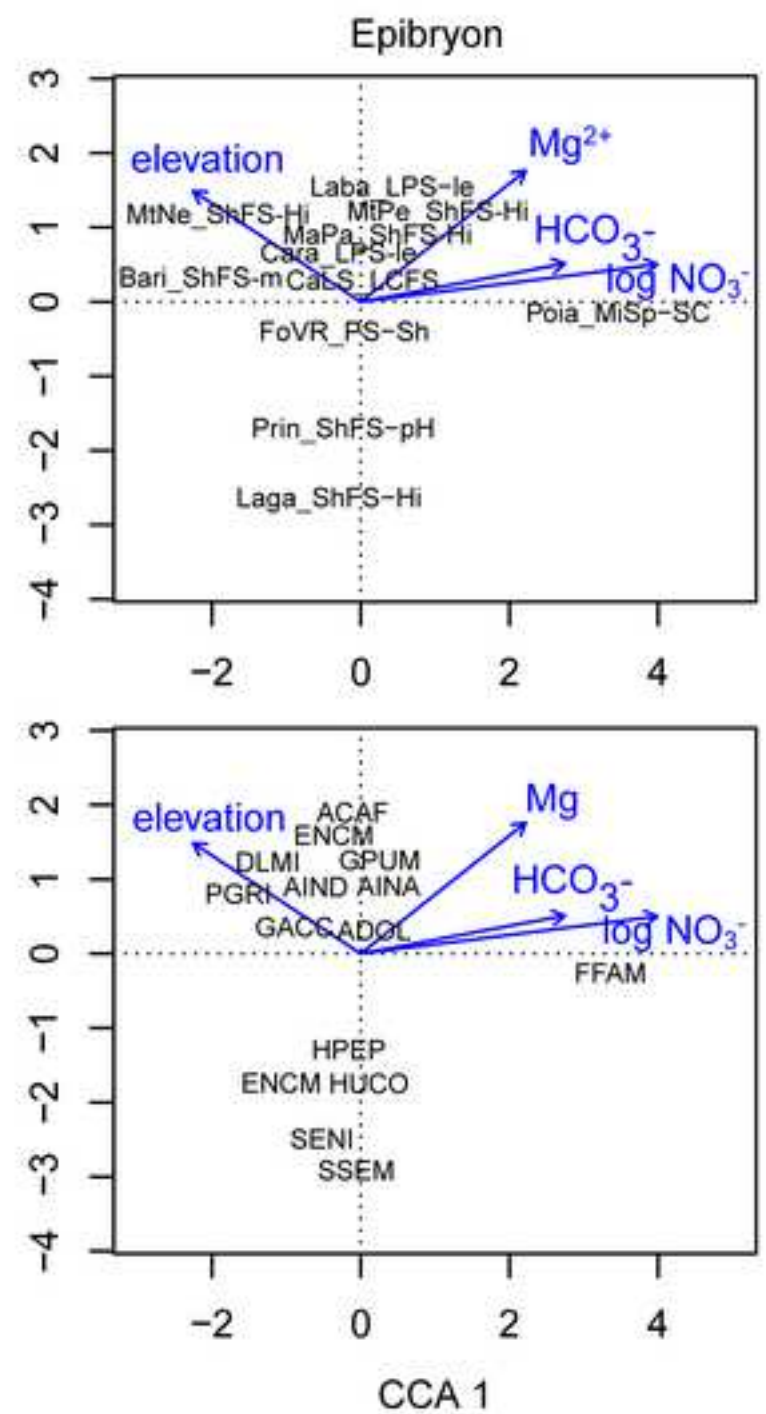
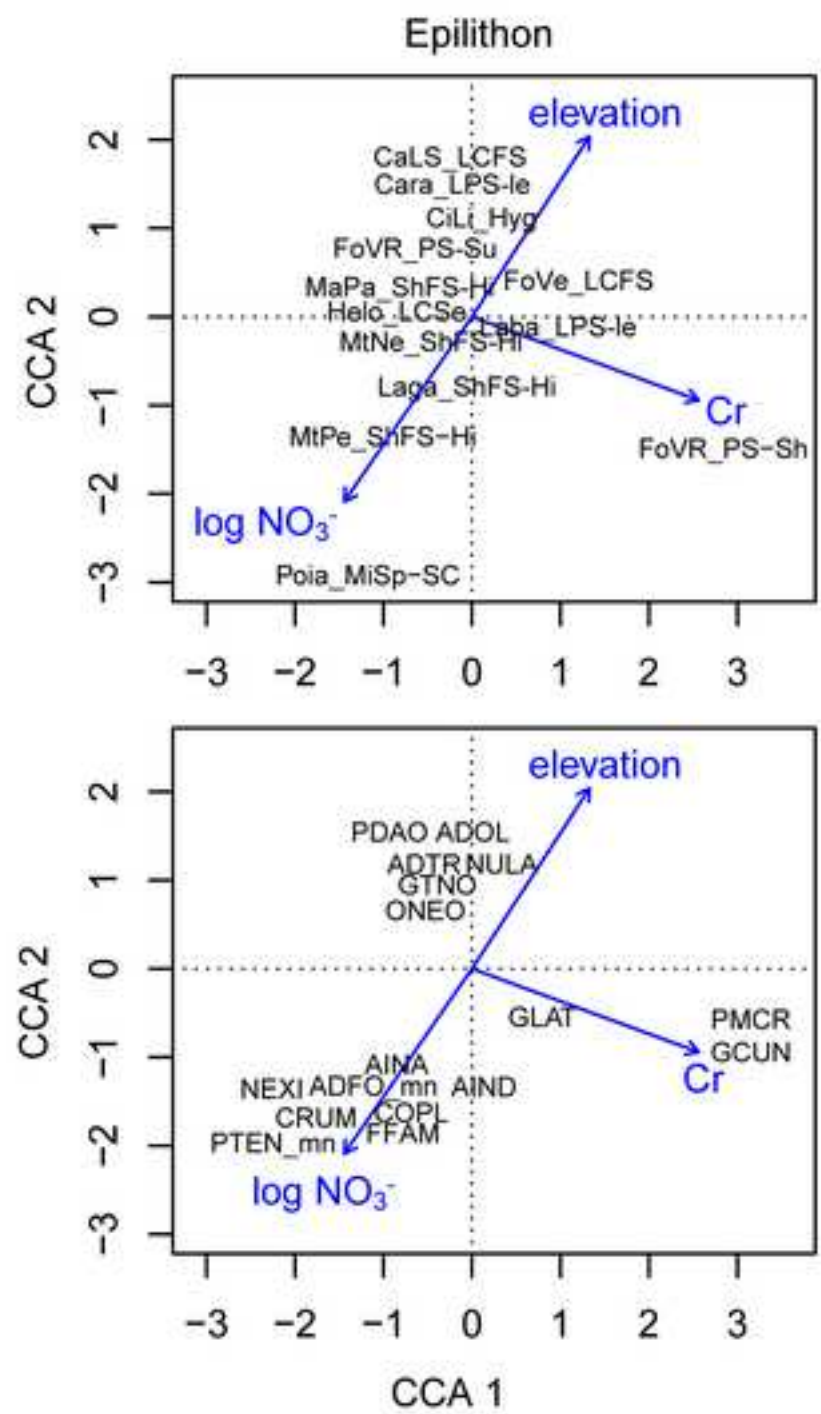


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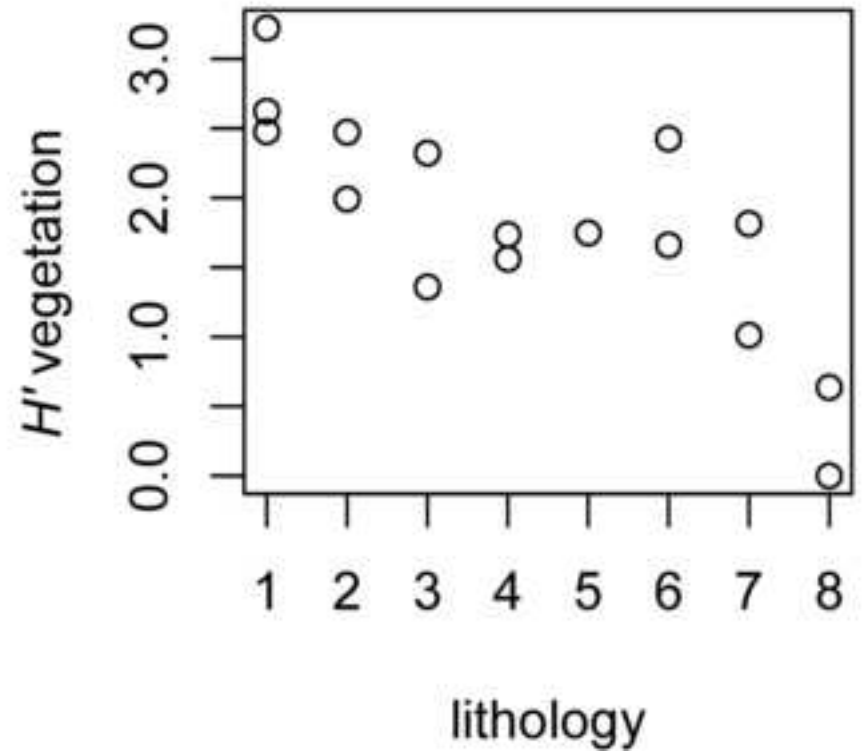
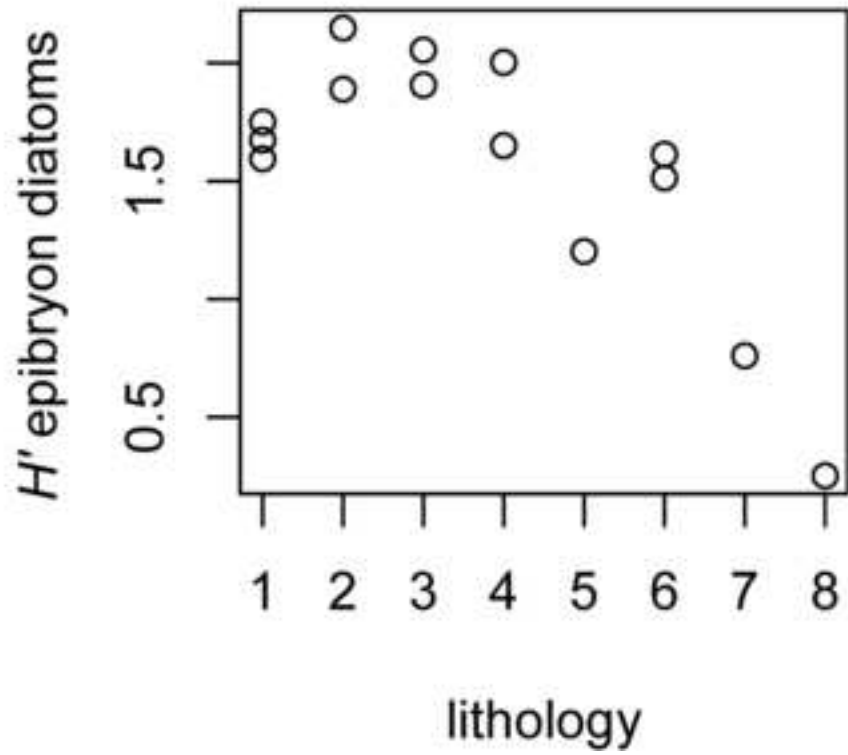


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