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Contact CEH NORA team at
noraceh@ceh.ac.uk

ELEVATED ATMOSPHERIC CO₂ IMPAIRS APHID ESCAPE RESPONSES TO PREDATORS AND CONSPECIFIC ALARM SIGNALS

William T. Hentley^{1,2,3*}, Adam J. Vanbergen⁴, Rosemary S. Hails², T.
Hefin Jones¹ & Scott N. Johnson⁵

¹Cardiff School of Biosciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff, U.K., ²Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), Crowmarsh Gifford, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, U.K., ³The James Hutton Institute, Dundee, U.K. ⁴CEH, Bush Estate, Penicuik, Midlothian, U.K. ⁵Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment, University of Western Sydney, Australia

*Corresponding author.

E-mail: wihen@ceh.ac.uk;

Tel: +44 (0)1491 838800; Fax: +44 (0)1491 692424

ABSTRACT – Research into the impacts of atmospheric change on predator-prey interactions has mainly focused on density dependent responses and trophic linkages. As yet, the chemical ecology underpinning predator-prey interactions has received little attention in environmental change research. Group living animals have evolved behavioural mechanisms to escape predation, including chemical alarm signalling. Chemical alarm signalling between conspecific prey could be susceptible to environmental change if the physiology and behaviour of these organisms are affected by changes in dietary quality resulting from environmental change. Using *Rubus idaeus* plants, we show that elevated concentrations of atmospheric CO₂ (eCO₂) severely impaired escape responses of the aphid *Amphorophora idaei* to predation by ladybird larvae (*Harmonia axyridis*). Escape responses to ladybirds was reduced by >50% after aphids had been reared on plants grown under eCO₂. This behavioural response was rapidly induced, occurring within 24h of being transferred to plants grown at eCO₂ and, once induced, persisted even after aphids were transferred to plants grown at ambient CO₂. Escape responses were impaired due to reduced sensitivity to aphid alarm pheromone, (*E*)-β-farnesene, via an undefined plant-mediated mechanism. Aphid abundance often increases under eCO₂, however, reduced efficacy of conspecific signalling may increase aphid vulnerability to predation, highlighting the need to study the chemical ecology of predator-prey interactions under environmental change.

Key Words – Aphid, chemical signals, climate change, tri-trophic interactions, pheromones

INTRODUCTION

Animals that live in groups have evolved numerous behavioural mechanisms for escaping predation, ranging from aggregation for protection (e.g. the 'selfish herd' hypothesis (Hamilton, 1971)) to more 'altruistic' alarm signalling to conspecifics (Zuberbuehler, 2009). The latter has evolved in many different invertebrate and vertebrate taxa, employing a variety of acoustic, visual and chemical cues to warn conspecifics of a predation risk (Ruxton et al., 2004). Alarm signalling between individuals via pheromones is particularly prevalent amongst insects (Blum, 1969).

Predicting how ecosystems will respond to climate change requires greater understanding of the impacts on community processes, like herbivore prey-predator interactions (Jamieson et al., 2012; Facey et al., 2014). Atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) has reached 400ppm and is predicted to increase to 421-936 ppm by 2100 (IPCC, 2013). This may have profound consequences for predator-prey interactions (Robinson et al., 2012; Facey et al., 2014).

Experimental studies have hitherto focussed on density dependent population responses and trophic interactions (e.g. Chen et al., 2005; Hentley et al., 2014). Elevated atmospheric CO₂ (eCO₂) could, however, also alter behavioural aspects of predator-prey interactions, such as how prey respond to conspecific chemical signals (e.g. pheromones) to avoid predators. Such communication could be indirectly altered by eCO₂ affecting the physiology of herbivorous prey via changes to their plant resources (Zavala et al., 2013).

Aphids emit the alarm pheromone (*E*)- β -farnesene (*E* β F) to alert conspecifics of imminent attack (Bowers et al., 1972). This pheromone facilitates a variety of evasive tactics used by aphids, including cessation of feeding, walking from the signal source or dropping from the plant (Pickett et al., 1992; Vandermoten et al., 2012). Reduced evasion responses of aphids when physically disturbed by the experimenter have been shown under eCO₂ (e.g. squeezing with forceps, Awmack et al., 1997 or prodding the thorax, Mondor et al., 2004). While these studies did not explicitly link this to *E* β F, a subsequent study that subjected wheat aphids

(*Sitobium avenae*) to periodic release of $E\beta F$ showed population declines at ambient atmospheric CO_2 (aCO_2), but no change at eCO_2 (Sun et al., 2010). They suggested that this was due to aphids becoming insensitive to $E\beta F$ under eCO_2 (Sun et al., 2010). To date, however, the behavioural response of aphids to both $E\beta F$ and predators when feeding on intact plants under eCO_2 has not been investigated; previous studies have used excised leaves (Awmack et al., 1997; Mondor et al., 2004) or focused solely on the response to $E\beta F$ (Sun et al., 2010).

We used the large raspberry aphid (*Amphorophora idaei*) feeding on red raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) as a model system. Densities of *A. idaei* increase in response to eCO_2 on some *R. idaeus* genotypes (Martin and Johnson, 2011), but predation at eCO_2 can negate this increase (Hentley et al., 2014) potentially due to increased susceptibility of aphid prey. We therefore hypothesised that aphids have diminished escape responses to predator attack under eCO_2 , compared to aCO_2 , which will be underpinned by reduced sensitivity to $E\beta F$.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Insects, plants and environmental chamber conditions

The large raspberry aphid (*Amphorophora idaei*) population was initiated from field aphids and then maintained in the laboratory for multiple generations. Cultures were maintained at $18 \pm 1^\circ C$ with a 16 h photoperiod. The predatory harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*) cultures were first collected from lime trees (*Tilia* spp.) in Oxfordshire, UK. The population was then maintained in the same environment as the aphid cultures (full details of collection and maintenance given in Hentley et al., 2014). Prior to the experiment, insect cultures were reared for at least four generations at aCO_2 ($390 \pm 50 \mu mol/mol$) and eCO_2 ($650 \pm 50 \mu mol/mol$) conditions in four environmentally controlled chambers (two per CO_2 regime, all at $20 \pm 4^\circ C$, 50-70% relative humidity and 16h photoperiod). These chambers (full details in Hentley et al., 2014) were also used for growing plants. Forty *Rubus idaeus* (cv. Glen Clova) were grown from rootstock; at approximately 6 weeks old (1 cm height) plants were transferred to 3L pots, and

randomly assigned to the four chambers. To minimize chamber effects, plants were moved between corresponding treatment chambers once a week for five weeks prior to assays (*sensu* Bezemer et al., 1998; Johnson and McNicol, 2010).

Behavioural assays

Behavioural assays used intact plants exposed to the different CO₂ treatments for five weeks. Fully-crossed combinations (Fig. 1) of aphids and plants maintained under the two CO₂ regimes were tested in response to stimuli from the presence of (i) ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*) predators, (ii) 200 ng of EβF in 5μl hexane solvent and (iii) control of 5μl hexane (both analytical standard, Sigma-Aldrich, UK). For each assay, a leaf was randomly selected and 50 mixed-age, apterous aphids were confined to the underside of the leaf with a 20mm diameter clip-cage for 24h. The cage was then removed and the number of aphids feeding counted, aphids not feeding were removed prior to the onset of the assay. Assays proceeded as follows: (i) a single fourth instar ladybird larva, starved for 24h, was introduced onto the leaf c. 2 cm from the aphids and observed for 5 mins. The ladybird was replaced if it did not attack aphids after 5 mins. For the assays with (ii) EβF and (iii) the control hexane only, 5μl of the solution was placed on the underside of the leaf surface, c. 2 cm from the aphid colony and, again, observed for 5 mins for escape responses. For each assay, the proportion of aphids that stopped feeding and showed predator avoidance behaviour (e.g. walking away, dropping) in response to stimuli (i-iii) was quantified. Each assay was repeated 10 times.

Statistical analysis

The proportion of aphids responding to stimuli was modelled with generalised linear mixed effect models fitting a binomial error distribution (GLIMMIX, SAS Institute). The random effect was environmental chamber nested within date of bioassay. Mean temperature was fitted as a fixed effect to account for spatial (between chambers) and temporal (between days) variation during the experiment (Table 1-f). A minimum adequate model was obtained with forward stepwise selection of fixed effects. F-ratio and p-values presented are adjusted for other

significant fitted terms (SAS type III), two-way interactions are only reported where $p < 0.05$.

Degrees of freedom were estimated with Satterthwaite's approximation.

RESULTS

Compared to aphids and plants under aCO_2 (Fig. 2-I), aphid escape responses to ladybirds were significantly reduced when they had been reared under eCO_2 (Fig. 2-II & IV, Table 1-b & c), even when transferred to plants grown under aCO_2 (Fig. 2-II). Moreover, aphids reared under aCO_2 , but subsequently transferred to plants grown under eCO_2 for < 24 h, showed the same reduction in escape responses (Fig. 2-III, Table 1-d) as seen in aphids reared under eCO_2 (Fig. 2-II & IV).

Over twice as many aphids initiated escape responses when they fed under aCO_2 conditions (Fig. 2a-I). Aphids exposed to their alarm pheromone $E\beta F$, exhibited a reduction in escape behaviour, similar to when being attacked by the predator (Fig. 3a, Table 1-a & e). Aphids showed no behavioural response to the control solvent hexane (Fig. 3b).

DISCUSSION

Aphid escape responses to predator presence or exposure to the aphid alarm pheromone $E\beta F$ were rapidly (within 24h) and significantly ($> 50\%$) impaired when feeding on a plant reared in eCO_2 , which persisted individual aphids reared in eCO_2 fed on plants grown at aCO_2 .

Aphid behaviour often differs when feeding on experimentally excised leaves compared with intact plants, because phloem hydraulics and chemistry are altered by excision (Van Emden and Bashford, 1976; Douglas, 1993). This study, using whole plants, an insect predator, and a controlled dose of alarm pheromone $E\beta F$ - rather than a mechanical disturbance of aphids to stimulate its release (as performed by Awmack et al., 1997; Mondor et al., 2004), - in a reciprocal experimental design permitted us to conduct a more realistic test of eCO_2 impacts on this tri-trophic interaction.

Impairment of aphid escape responses by eCO₂ is likely to have been mediated via changes in the plant quality which in turn impacted aphids, this is because the impairment always occurred when aphids had been, or were, feeding on plants grown at eCO₂. At least two possible mechanisms may underpin reduced escape responses. Firstly, aphids may 'hold their ground' rather than escape if feeding on a good quality host. In particular, *Amphorophora idaei* performance is known to be enhanced by eCO₂ induced changes in plant suitability (Martin and Johnson, 2011) and these species is known to continue feeding, even under threat, if the host plant is of good quality (Mitchell et al., 2010). Alternatively, if eCO₂ reduces host plant quality, then aphids can engage in more intense and sustained feeding activity (Sun and Ge, 2011; Guo et al., 2013a; Guo et al., 2013b), akin to the compensatory feeding responses of chewing insect herbivores (e.g. Docherty et al., 1996; Johnson et al., 2014a). Ingesting more phloem will inevitably be energetically costly and may require deeper penetration of plant tissues, and possibly the manipulation of the plants metabolism (Guo et al., 2013b). This investment may result in aphids being either physiologically less able, or behaviourally less inclined, to abandon a host plant. Either way, it is feasible that enhancement or deterioration in the nutritional quality of plants grown under eCO₂ is enough to make aphids to continue feeding, even under risk of predation.

Multi-trophic interactions must be accounted for to accurately predict the net effect of eCO₂ on plants (Harrington et al., 1999; Robinson et al., 2012; Facey et al., 2014). Crops may become more susceptible to insect pests, including aphids (Martin and Johnson, 2011; Johnson et al., 2014b), in an eCO₂ environment. Top-down control of aphids by natural enemies is a major factor in regulation of aphid populations (Dixon, 2000). Here we demonstrate that atmospheric change modified the behavioural response of a herbivore when a conspecific is being attacked by a natural enemy, which could increase the net impact of the predator. The lack of behavioural response from conspecifics will increase prey availability for the natural enemy, but also limit beneficial, non-consumptive effects, such as the herbivore dropping from the plant. Such

modified predator-prey interactions clearly have implications for crop security in a changing world.

Together with previous evidence using other aphid species (Awmack et al., 1997; Mondor et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2010), it seems that the interference effect of eCO₂ on aphid escape responses is a general, and possibly widespread, reaction. However, further work is needed to establish the mechanistic basis of how atmospheric change mediates the chemical ecology of predator-prey interactions. Moreover, whether aphid populations will adapt to such atmospheric changes over time to re-establish responsiveness to predator-related conspecific alarm signals remains an unanswered question.

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269 **Figure Legends**

270 Figure 1 Schematic of behavioural assays using reciprocal treatments of aphids and plants
271 maintained under aCO₂ and eCO₂

272

273 Figure 2 Mean (\pm S.E.) percentage of aphids reared at aCO₂ (grey bars) or eCO₂ (white bars)
274 showing escape responses to ladybird larva (*Harmonia axyridis*). Roman numerals refer to
275 treatment combinations (see Fig. 1)

276

277 Figure 3 Mean (\pm S.E.) percentage of aphids reared at aCO₂ (grey bars) or eCO₂ (white bars)
278 showing escape responses to a) E β F mixed with hexane solvent, and b) hexane alone. Roman
279 numerals refer to treatment combinations (see Fig. 1).

280 Table 1. Final GLMM results summary for aphid escape response to predator/ $E\beta F$ stimulus and
281 CO_2 regimes.

Response variable	Explanatory variables	Estimate	$F_{(ndf,ddf)}$	p
% aphids per plant showing escape behaviours	a) Stimulus <i>Hexane/Ladybird/ $E\beta F$</i>	<i>2.17 / 3.54 / 2.68</i>	6.46 _(2,6)	0.0031
	b) Plant growing environment <i>aCO₂/eCO₂</i>	<i>2.74/2.68</i>	15.28 _(1,6)	0.0089
	c) Aphid rearing environment <i>aCO₂/eCO₂</i>	<i>3.29/2.68</i>	21.43 _(1,145)	<0.0001
	d) Plant growing * aphid rearing environment <i>aCO₂ plant * aCO₂ aphid / eCO₂ plant * aCO₂ aphid</i> <i>aCO₂ plant * eCO₂ aphid / eCO₂ plant * eCO₂ aphid</i>	<i>4.04 / 2.68</i> <i>2.68 / 2.68</i>	38.40 _(1,38)	<0.0001
	e) Aphid rearing environment * stimulus <i>aCO₂ * Hexane / aCO₂ * Ladybird / aCO₂ * $E\beta F$</i> <i>eCO₂ * Hexane / eCO₂ * Ladybird / eCO₂ * $E\beta F$</i>	<i>1.30 / 2.16 / 2.68</i> <i>2.68 / 2.68 / 2.68</i>	6.02 _(2,145)	0.0031
	f) Mean temperature	-0.275	5.41 _(1,5)	0.0544

Random effect estimate = 0.07 ± 0.07

CO₂ conditions

Ambient CO₂
390 μmol/mol



Combination

aCO₂ aphid
- aCO₂ plant

eCO₂ aphid
- aCO₂ plant

Elevated CO₂
650 μmol/mol



aCO₂ aphid
- eCO₂ plant

eCO₂ aphid
- eCO₂ plant

Figure Label

I

II

III

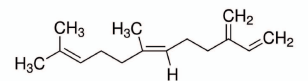
IV

Behavioural assays

(i) Ladybird larva



(ii) *E*-β-Farnesene
(dissolved in hexane)



(iii) Control (hexane)

