

## DATA ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# BioTIME 2.0: Expanding and Improving a Database of Biodiversity Time Series


















Maria Dornelas<sup>1,2</sup>  | Laura H. Antão<sup>3</sup>  | Amanda E. Bates<sup>4</sup>  | Viviana Brambilla<sup>2</sup>  | Jonathan M. Chase<sup>5,6</sup>  | Cher F. Y. Chow<sup>1</sup>  | Ada Fontrodona-Eslava<sup>1</sup>  | Anne E. Magurran<sup>1</sup>  | Inês S. Martins<sup>1,7</sup>  | Faye Moyes<sup>1</sup>  | Alban Sagouis<sup>5,6</sup>  | Samuel Adu-Acheampong<sup>8</sup>  | Daniel Acquah-Lamptey<sup>9</sup>  | Dušan Adam<sup>10</sup>  | Penelope A. Ajani<sup>11</sup>  | Aitor Albaina<sup>12</sup>  | Pablo Almaraz<sup>13</sup>  | Jeongseop An<sup>14</sup>  | Roger Sigmund Anderson<sup>15</sup>  | Madelaine Jean Robertson Anderson<sup>16</sup>  | Aleksander Z. Antunes<sup>17</sup>  | Ivan Arismendi<sup>18</sup>  | Linda Armbrrecht<sup>19</sup>  | Pedro Aros-Mardones<sup>20,21</sup>  | Sreejith Kalpuzha Ashtamoorthy<sup>22</sup>  | Narayanan Ayyappan<sup>23</sup>  | Gal Badihi<sup>24</sup>  | Joseph J. Bailey<sup>25</sup>  | Andrew H. 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Pedro Higuchi<sup>186</sup> | Andrew S. Hoey<sup>26</sup> | Gert Van Hoey<sup>187</sup> | Annika Hofgaard<sup>188</sup> | Kristen T. Holeck<sup>189</sup> | Robert D. Hollister<sup>190</sup> | Richard T. Holmes<sup>191</sup> | Mia Odell Hoogenboom<sup>192</sup> | Joaquín Hortal<sup>193</sup> | Tammy Horton<sup>163</sup> | Chih-hao Hsieh<sup>194</sup> | Christine L. Huffard<sup>195</sup> | Ida-Maria Huikkonen<sup>196</sup> | Allen H. Hurlbert<sup>197,198</sup> | Julian Hynes<sup>199</sup> | Pascal Irz<sup>200</sup> | Natalia Macedo Ivanauskas<sup>201</sup> | Akemi Iwayama<sup>202</sup> | Darren K. James<sup>48</sup> | Ute Jandt<sup>5,65</sup> | Anna M. Jazdzewska<sup>52</sup> | Merlijn Jocque<sup>47,107,203</sup> | Sophie T. Johnston<sup>96</sup> | Samuel E. I. Jones<sup>47,204</sup> | Faith A. M. Jones<sup>205</sup> | Julia A. 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Robert B. Waide<sup>414</sup>  | Paige S. Warren<sup>415</sup>  | Joseph Paul Wayman<sup>260</sup>  | Sara L. Webb<sup>416,417</sup> | Benjamin Weigel<sup>60,418</sup>  | Ellen A. R. Welti<sup>419</sup>  | Fritha West<sup>359,420</sup>  | Fulgor Westermann<sup>421</sup> | Matthew A. Whalen<sup>422</sup>  | Ethan P. White<sup>128</sup>  | Claire E. Widdicombe<sup>423</sup>  | Richard Williams<sup>424</sup> | Mark Williamson<sup>425</sup> | Michael R. Willig<sup>319</sup>  | Sonja Wipf<sup>335</sup>  | Eric J. Woehler<sup>426</sup>  | Alje Woldering<sup>338</sup> | Kerry D. Woods<sup>427,428</sup>  | Wu-Bing Xu<sup>5,6,429</sup>  | Ruthy Yahel<sup>430</sup>  | Zeren Yang<sup>1</sup> | Kyle J. A. Zawada<sup>431</sup>  | Camila Zornosa-Torres<sup>395</sup>  | Assaf Zvuloni<sup>228</sup>

**Correspondence:** BioTIME core Team ([biotimeproj@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:biotimeproj@st-andrews.ac.uk))

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## ABSTRACT

**Motivation:** Here, we make available a second version of the BioTIME database, which compiles records of abundance estimates for species in sample events of ecological assemblages through time. The updated version expands version 1.0 of the database by doubling the number of studies and includes substantial additional curation to the taxonomic accuracy of the records, as well as the metadata. Moreover, we now provide an R package (BioTIMER) to facilitate use of the database.

**Main Types of Variables Included:** The database is composed of one main data table containing the abundance records and 11 metadata tables. The data are organised in a hierarchy of scales where 11,989,233 records are nested in 1,603,067 sample events, from 553,253 sampling locations, which are nested in 708 studies. A study is defined as a sampling methodology applied to an assemblage for a minimum of 2 years.

**Spatial Location and Grain:** Sampling locations in BioTIME are distributed across the planet, including marine, terrestrial and freshwater realms. Spatial grain size and extent vary across studies depending on sampling methodology. We recommend gridding of sampling locations into areas of consistent size.

**Time Period and Grain:** The earliest time series in BioTIME start in 1874, and the most recent records are from 2023. Temporal grain and duration vary across studies. We recommend doing sample-level rarefaction to ensure consistent sampling effort through time before calculating any diversity metric.

**Major Taxa and Level of Measurement:** The database includes any eukaryotic taxa, with a combined total of 56,400 taxa.

**Software Format:** csv and. SQL.

## 1 | Background

The BioTIME database stores a curated collection of observations that can be used to estimate biodiversity metrics through time. Specifically, the database contains a collection of time series of observations of species abundances within biological assemblages that were sampled with consistent methods. With these data, it is possible to estimate temporal change in most metrics of taxonomic diversity (Magurran 2004), including, for example, species richness, evenness, and compositional change and population trends. We have assembled the database with the aim of facilitating synthesis studies and the re-use of these data by providing it in a standardised and curated format.

Since the publication of BioTIME version 1.0 (Dornelas et al. 2018), the database has been used for many different purposes. The first published analysis of the database revealed ubiquitous change in community composition, underpinned by roughly matched gains and losses of species through time (Dornelas et al. 2014). Other examples included the following: quantification of geographical variation in biodiversity change (Blowes et al. 2019; van Klink et al. 2020); estimation of the effects of temperature change (Antão et al. 2020), forest loss (Daskalova et al. 2020) and protected areas (Nowakowski et al. 2023) on biodiversity change; an estimation of the relationship between range shifts and population trends

(Chaikin et al. 2024); and the quantification of change in organisational body size (Terry et al. 2021; Martins et al. 2023). Analysis of the BioTIME database also contributed one indicator to the first global assessment of biodiversity change produced by IPBES (2019).

In parallel with the proliferation of uses of BioTIME, the expansion and improvement of the database have continued. For BioTIME 2.0, additional dataset contributors were recruited, and updates were sourced for existing studies where data collection had continued. User feedback was also critical to flagging and resolving several inconsistencies not detected during the curation process of version 1.0. Moreover, metadata regarding methodology was updated and curation protocols were enhanced. In addition, the accuracy of taxonomic classification was checked and corrected where necessary. Finally, we developed a package in R (R Core Team 2023) to facilitate the usage of the database BioTIMER (Sagouis 2024). We note that other databases have also been published with more focused criteria for inclusion (e.g., RivFishTIME focused on freshwater fish; Comte et al. 2020; InsectChange focused on insects; van Klink et al. 2021) or broader scopes (e.g., BioDeepTime which combines paleo and modern biodiversity time series; Smith et al. 2023). It is worth noting that there is only partial overlap between these databases and BioTIME because inclusion criteria differ across databases. For example, BioDeepTime includes

only BioTIME time series longer than 10 years and combines these with multiple fossil databases. In addition, many studies in InsectChange did not meet BioTIME criteria for taxonomic resolution and/or lack of information on sampling methodology, which needed to be sourced independently. In summary, overlap among databases is nuanced, and care should be taken if combining BioTIME with other databases to avoid duplicate datasets.

Here, we release the updated version of BioTIME version 2.0. Given the twofold increase of studies in the database, the membership of the BioTIME consortium is also appropriately updated, as one of the goals of the database is to give credit to the data collectors.

## 2 | Database Description

Similar to version 1.0, version 2.0 of the BioTIME database is a relational database composed of one main data table and 11 metadata tables. The data contained in the main table have a hierarchical structure (Figure 1): at which the finest scale is a record showing the observed abundance of a species; records are nested into sampling events, that is, a discrete moment in time and space when an assemblage is observed; a site is a location in space where one or more samples occur; multiple sampling events taken over time at the same site make up a time series; and time series are grouped into studies, which are defined by the sampling methodology, for example a specific type of transect with set length and width, or the trawl of a net of specified mesh size over a certain distance or length of time. Depending on the spatial study extent and the user definition of the grain size required for site, a study can have only one or multiple time series (see below in usage notes about the gridding process to define site).

Metadata are stored in tables for: taxonomy (one table with taxonomy as provided and one table with standardised taxonomy), abundance type, biomass type, sample, study, methods, citation, contacts and curation. Only minor updates were done to the structure of the database relative to version 1.0, to accommodate additional taxonomic information (see below under Data

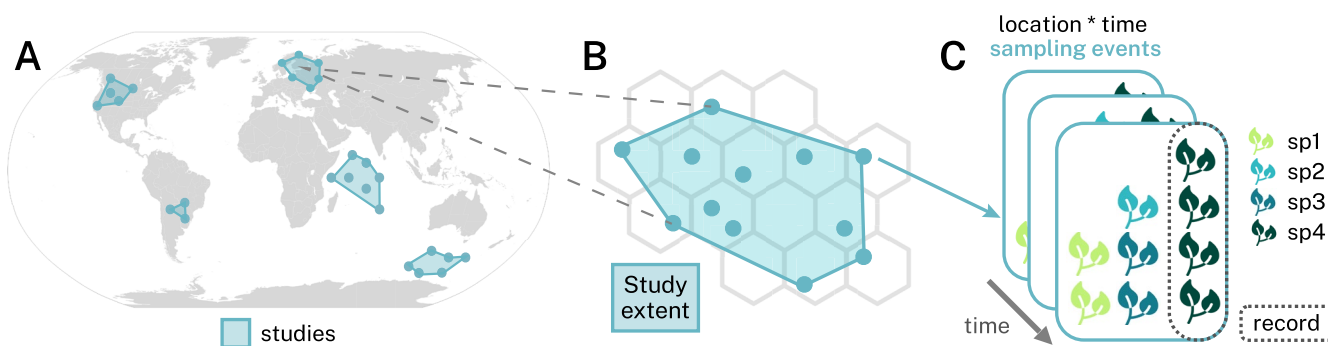
curation and quality control and File S1 for a database schema which includes a description of the tables' fields).

## 3 | Data Acquisition and Curation

New dataset acquisition for BioTIME 2.0 followed multiple approaches: active recruitment of data contributors in seminars, conferences and social media, searches for papers and within databases (e.g., OBIS [2024], GBIF [2024]), contributor volunteering, and through the collaboration networks of current data contributors. Once a candidate study was identified, it underwent checks against inclusion criteria and a curation process. For inclusion in BioTIME, studies must meet four criteria: (1) sampling methods are constant over time; (2) sampled for a minimum of two years, not necessarily consecutive; (3) samples take place at the assemblage scale rather than population; and (4) taxonomic resolution is mostly at the species level. We define a study as a single set of sampling or surveying methodology. If there are changes in methodology over time, candidate studies are split into multiple studies to reflect these changes, and split studies must independently fulfil BioTIME study criteria.

Once a candidate study was identified, available metadata and methodology information were used to build the metadata records (see protocol in File S2). Metadata records consist of information relating to temporal, spatial and taxonomic scope, habitat, methodology, protected area status, data originators and data sources. Where manipulation treatments were applied to some of the data, these were assessed as to whether the treatments were purely experimental manipulations (e.g., the artificial warming of a section), in which case only control samples were retained. If treatments were part of normal phenomena for the ecosystem (e.g., grazing), all samples were retained. Differences in ecological management practices were also recorded in the site metadata table to account for any differences in human activity/interactions.

Prior to inclusion in the database, data were standardised in our curation process. Quality control checks included checking for appropriate data types (e.g., numeric for abundance, string for species), realistic maximum and minimum values for fields, such

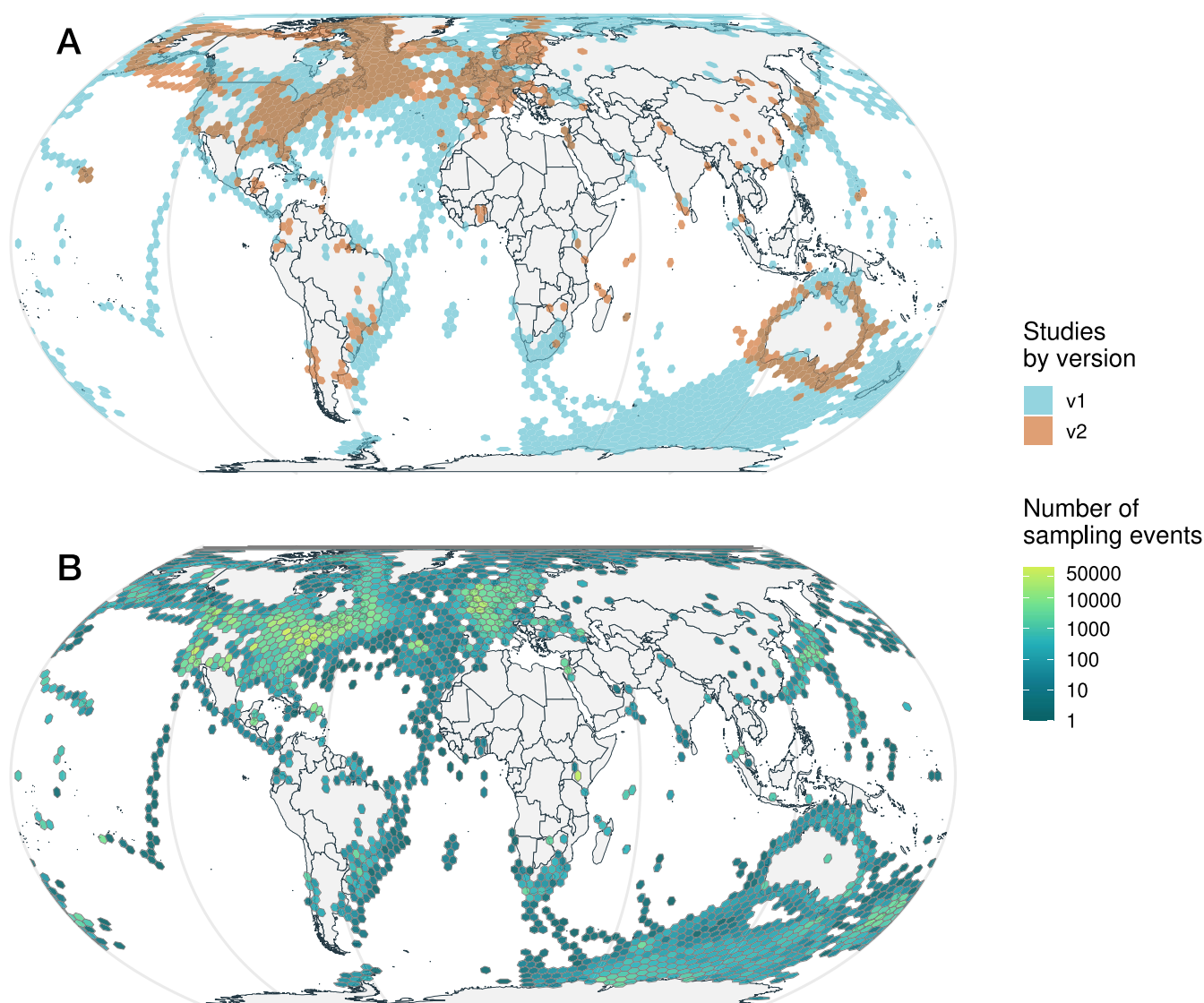


**FIGURE 1** | Hierarchical structure of the BioTIME database. (A) Studies are defined by a sampling methodology which is constant over time, and have a minimum of one site and two sampling events in different years, with at least one sampling location each. (B) Study spatial extent was determined by the convex hull of the coordinates of all samples in the study. To facilitate comparisons across studies, we recommend standardising extent of the time series by gridding the data into constant area polygons. (C) Records are nested within sampling events, which are nested within locations. A sampling event is a time when sampling took place. The number of samples may change through time, and we recommend sampling effort standardisation, in addition to spatial scale standardisation prior to analysis.

as date and coordinates, removal of non-organismal records and correction of taxonomic misspellings, as per the taxonomic standardisation procedure described below. To store data in long format, records of null, blank or zeroes for abundances were removed; however, given the criterion that all species in the sample are recorded, absences can be interpreted as a species not being detected, and these can be reconstructed for each species in each time series.

Data standardisation also involved the construction of sampling event identifiers ('SAMPLE\_DESC' in the raw data table). These are concatenated strings based on the provided study methods and data fields to accurately represent survey designs across space and time, such as sampling frequency and grouped observations (e.g., year\_month\_site\_quadrat). The construction of these identifiers is reported in the metadata Sample table ('SAMPLE\_DESC\_NAME'). The wide variety of sampling methods across the studies included in BioTIME is reflected in this field, with combinations of latitude, longitude, depth/elevation, date, transect, quadrat or trawl ID being common identifiers used. For some methods, for example,

research cruise trawls, pitfall traps or camera traps, sampling was somewhat continuous. To represent the assemblage-level observations for these types of methods, samples were defined as constant time intervals (e.g., 1 week or 3 days depending on the nature of the data, but consistent within the time series). In the previous version of the database, we included a field to reflect whether observations took place in exactly the same location through time (e.g., in permanent plots), which has been deleted in this version of the database because of the difficulty in applying the concept consistently across taxa and methods (e.g., sessile vs. mobile taxa and destructive vs. observational data). Observation records are aggregated so that each sampling event contains only one abundance and/or biomass record per taxon, without any distinctions between life stage or sex, to ensure consistency across all datasets, and given that this was the resolution provided by the overwhelming majority of the studies. For studies added in BioTIME 2.0 where abundances and biomass are recorded at the individual level, records are not aggregated (i.e., abundance must be calculated by adding records of each species, and individual level sizes are kept within the database).



**FIGURE 2** | Map showing BioTIME sampling locations. Each grid cell is approximately 75,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Panel A shows the geographic distribution of studies added to BioTIME version 2.0. Panel B shows the spatial density of sampling events in version 2.0 of the database.

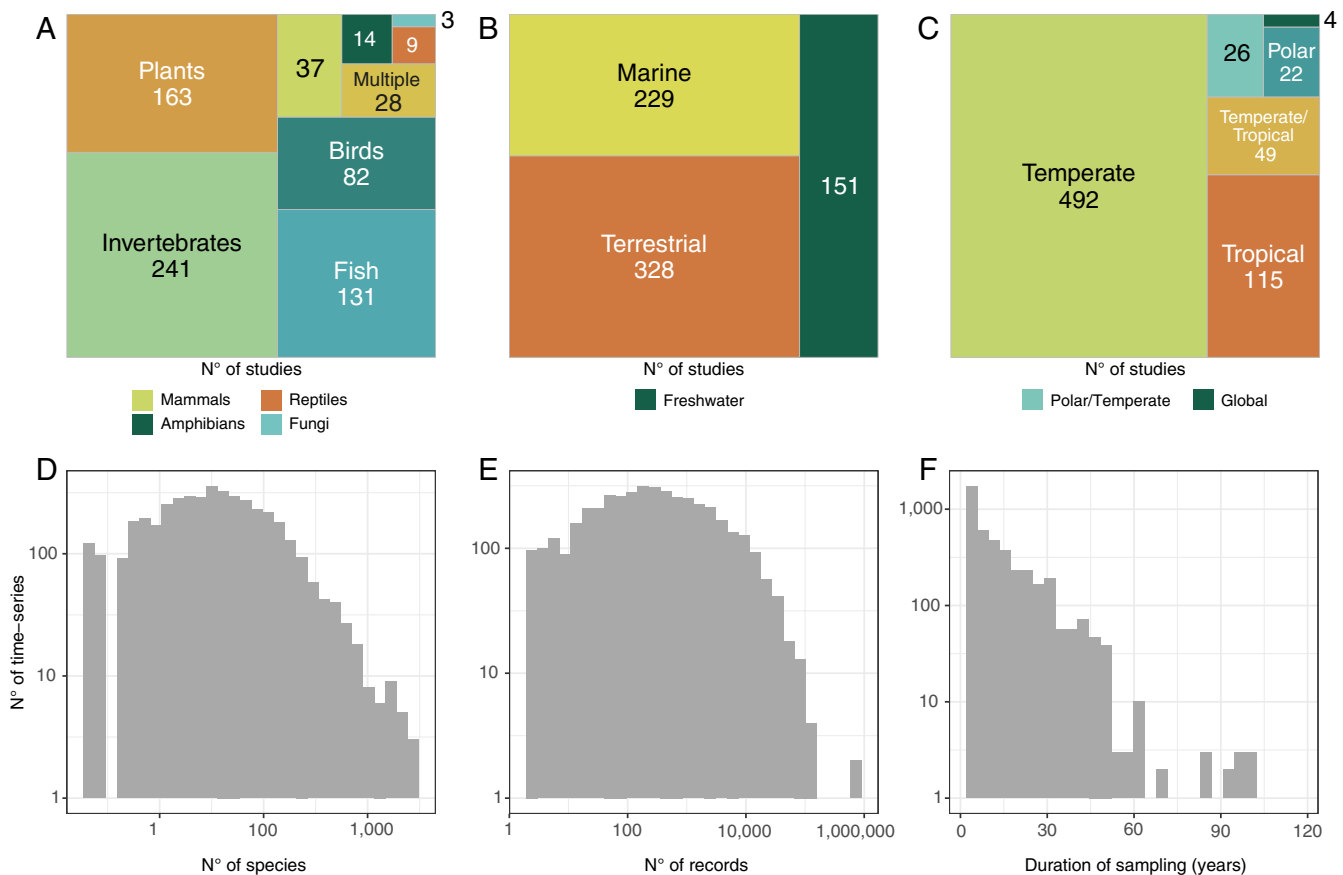
For version 2.0 of the database, records underwent a more rigorous standardisation of taxonomic classification. Specifically, all taxonomic records in the entire database were validated with either the *taxize* (Chamberlain and Szöcs 2013) or the *worms* R packages (Chamberlain and Vanhoorne 2024). When using the *taxize* package, we used the `classification()` function and chose the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) database as the first option to update the taxonomy, with the Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS) as a second option should no matches be found. To ensure better representation of known marine species, we used the `wm_records_names()` function from the *worms* package. We checked first for matches at the species level, then genus and, finally, family. If no valid names were found, we performed manual checks to the lowest resolution possible. Where species were identified as common names, we first ran them through the `comm2Sci()` function in *taxize*, before completing the checks as described above. BioTIME 2.0 contains two species tables: one which contains species as provided in the original data, and one with the standardised taxonomic classification, including species, genus, family, order, class, phylum and kingdom. Including the two tables ensures standardisation can be reproduced as taxonomy is updated. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that while lumping species that are synonymised is possible, splitting species beyond the data originally recorded is not.

BioTIME is designed to facilitate biodiversity analyses at the assemblage level, and hence any unidentified taxonomic records

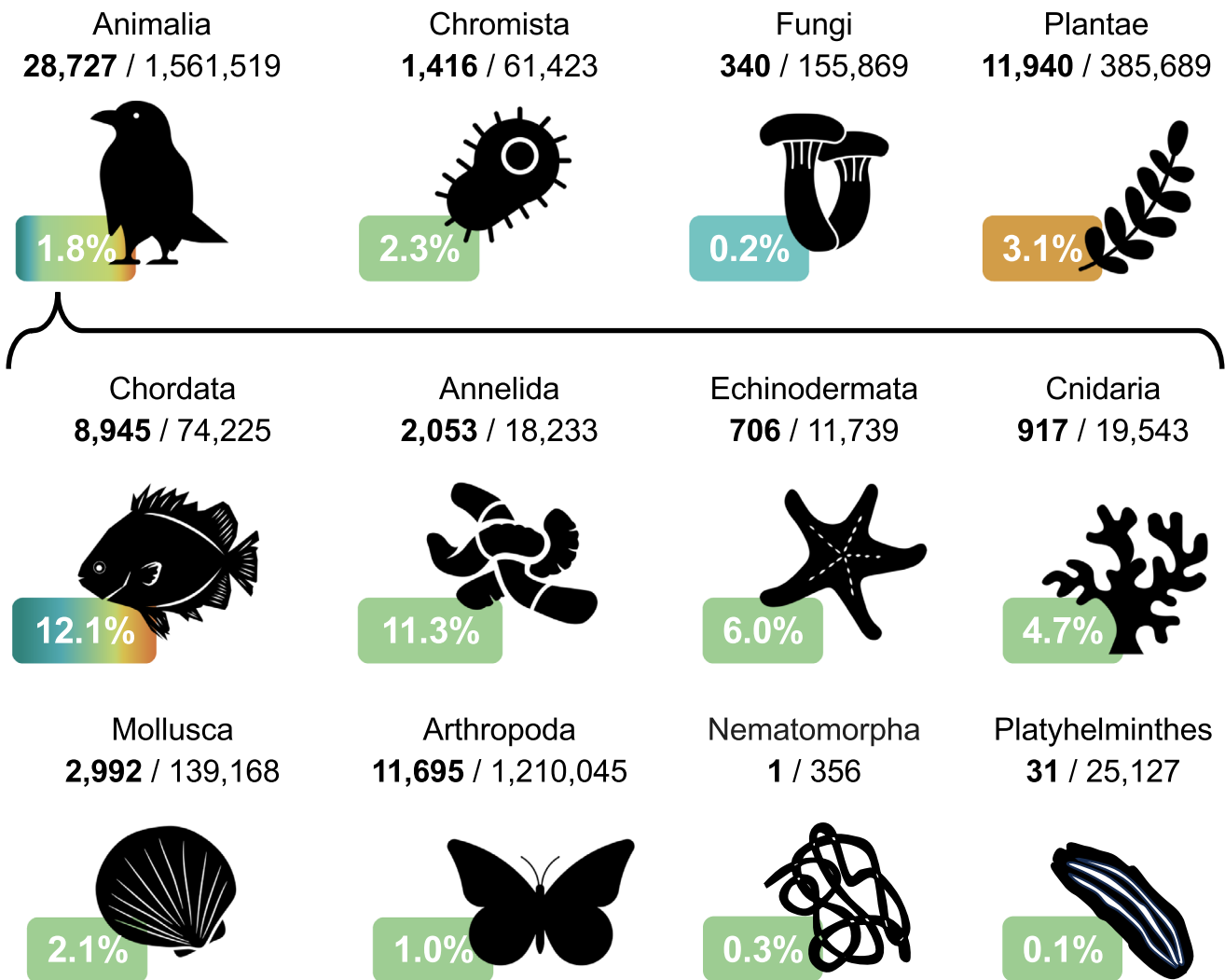
were kept to the lowest taxonomic resolution reported in the raw data. Records of unidentified taxa that were distinguished by the data collectors were kept separate (e.g., unknown beetle sp1, unknown beetle sp2) and are consistent within studies; therefore, these records can be used to estimate diversity metrics within the study, but cannot contribute to population assessments across studies (i.e., there is no way to determine whether populations of the same species appear in other studies). The standardised version of the database has 97% of the taxa identified to at least family and 74% to species level.

For spatial information, latitudes and longitudes of each study were mapped to check they matched location descriptions. Spatial extent was estimated as the area of the convex hull encompassing all the spatial coordinates (Figure 1) and grain size from the reported methods for each study. Changes made during the curation process were recorded in the curation table and confirmed with the data providers. For all studies revised or added to this database version, code used in data curation is available from the BioTIME Github repository (<https://github.com/bioTIMEHub/BioTIME>). The curated version of the data was shared with the data providers who agreed to the changes made.

In this version, 16 studies previously included in BioTIME v1.0 were removed, as additional information revealed they did not meet some of the criteria for inclusion in the database (File S4). Additionally, 49 studies included in BioTIME v1.0 were



**FIGURE 3** | Plots illustrating the proportion of studies that fall into the different classifications of: (A) Taxa, (B) Realm and (C) Climate. (D) species richness, (E) total number of records and (E) duration of sampling across time series. Note that time series were defined using the BioTIMER package, where functions are now available to help users identify, separate and standardise BioTIME data based on location (latitude/longitude); here, we implemented a grain of 75,000 km<sup>2</sup>.



**FIGURE 4** | Proportional representation of different taxonomic units in BioTIME 2.0. For each taxon, we provide the number of species included in the database relative to the number of species known to science according to the Catalogue of Life (Bánki et al. 2024) accessed on 17 December 2024. Note how coverage is much higher in some groups (e.g., sharks 37.2%) than others (e.g., insects 0.92%).

recurred as more metadata or new data became available—all these changes are reported in File S4.

The contact table includes publicly available contact information for data contributors (name and/or email) to allow users to reach out to the original contributors with any queries regarding data usage. These data were processed in compliance with both UK and EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). A data protection statement explaining the lawful basis for the use and processing of these data is now available on the database website: <https://biotime.st-andrews.ac.uk/usageGuidelines.php>.

#### 4 | Description of Data

BioTIME 2.0 includes 708 studies distributed across 553,253 locations, with almost twice as many studies and 11.3% more locations relative to the previous version (Figure 2). The database now includes 11,989,233 records from 56,400 taxa

(36.7% and 26.7% increase from version 1.0, respectively) from across the tree of life, collected over 1,603,067 sampling events across the marine, freshwater and terrestrial realms (Figure 3). Temporally, the database spans 1874 to 2023, with median time series length being 7 years. With a grid resolution of 75,000 km<sup>2</sup>, the database currently includes 4,301 time series in total, of which, 2390 have durations longer than 5 years, 1,745 longer than 10, 893 longer than 20, and 37 longer than 50 years (Figure 3). Despite efforts to improve representation, both spatial and taxonomic biases persist (Figures 2 and 4, File S5). Spatial biases persist in the database and are especially evident in the terrestrial realm, despite targeted searches having improved spatial representation. The marine realm has better representation, both spatial (in terms of latitudes and longitudes) and regarding global change space (Daskalova et al. 2020). However, as inherently more three-dimensional and given the features of sampling in marine habitats, it is likely that a smaller proportion of the marine realm is represented in our database compared with the terrestrial realm.

## 5 | Usage Notes

This version of the database is made publicly available in a SQL version and as a .csv query through Zenodo ([10.5281/zenodo.10932823](https://zenodo.10932823)) and BioTIME's website (<https://biotime.st-andrews.ac.uk>) under a CC-BY licence (<https://creativecommons.org/>). The data are, hence, free to use with attribution via citation of this paper. In addition, each study has a licence associated with a spectrum of governmental, Creative Commons and Data Commons licences. The database is also GDPR compliant. Citations for data sources of individual studies are provided in the metadata table citation and are also listed in File S3.

To facilitate comparisons across studies, we recommend standardising the spatial extent of the time series by gridding the data into constant area polygons prior to analysis. In addition, as the number of samples may change through time, we recommend sampling effort standardisation. To facilitate the use of the database, the release of BioTIME 2.0 is accompanied by an R package, BioTIMEr (Sagouis 2024). The package provides functions to deal with these spatial and temporal issues—namely to spatially grid the studies into constant extent cells and subsample time-series so that sampling effort (specifically number of samples) is constant through time. In addition, the package includes functions to calculate several metrics of alpha diversity and compositional change over time. A vignette is supplied to illustrate the use of each function.

The extended efforts in data standardisation aimed to facilitate integration with other databases. For example, the taxonomic standardisation should streamline integration with trait or phylogenetic data, and for this purpose, the standardised species name is preferable. In contrast, to reflect the species names as recognised by the observers at the time of observation, or to update as taxonomy changes, the original species names are preferable.

### Affiliations

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Biological Diversity, School of Biology, University of St Andrews, Fife, UK | <sup>2</sup>MARE—Centro de Ciências do Mar e do Ambiente, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal | <sup>3</sup>Research Centre for Ecological Change, Organismal and Evolutionary Biology Research Programme, Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland | <sup>4</sup>Department of Biology, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada | <sup>5</sup>German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany | <sup>6</sup>Department of Computer Science, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Halle (Saale), Germany | <sup>7</sup>Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity, Department of Biology, University of York, York, UK | <sup>8</sup>Department of Animal Biology and Conservation Science, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana | <sup>9</sup>Philipps Universität Marburg, Marburg, Germany | <sup>10</sup>Department of Forest Ecology, Silva Tarouca Research Institute, Brno, Czech Republic | <sup>11</sup>School of Life Sciences, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia | <sup>12</sup>Zoology and Animal Cell Biology Department, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Leioa, Spain | <sup>13</sup>Grupo de Oceanografía de Ecosistemas, Instituto de Ciencias Marinas de Andalucía, CSIC, Campus Universitario de Puerto Real, Puerto Real, Spain | <sup>14</sup>National Institute of Ecology, Seocheon, Republic of Korea | <sup>15</sup>African Regional Postgraduate Programme in Insect Science, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana | <sup>16</sup>Département de

Biologie, Université de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada | <sup>17</sup>Núcleo de Conservação da Biodiversidade, Instituto de Pesquisas Ambientais, Secretaria de Meio Ambiente, Infraestrutura e Logística do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>18</sup>Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, USA | <sup>19</sup>Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, Ecology & Biodiversity Centre, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>20</sup>Graduate Program in Oceanography, Department of Oceanography, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Oceanography, University of Concepción, Concepción, Chile | <sup>21</sup>Millennium Institute of Oceanography (IMO), Concepción, Chile | <sup>22</sup>Forest Ecology Department, KSCSTE-Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi, Kerala, India | <sup>23</sup>Department of Ecology, French Institute of Pondicherry, Pondicherry, India | <sup>24</sup>School of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of St Andrews, Fife, UK | <sup>25</sup>School of Life Sciences, Faculty of Science & Engineering, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK | <sup>26</sup>College of Science and Engineering, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia | <sup>27</sup>CSIRO Environment, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>28</sup>Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi, Kerala, India | <sup>29</sup>Operarion Wallacea—Wallace House, Lincolnshire, UK | <sup>30</sup>Sharks in Israel, NGO, Israel | <sup>31</sup>The Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel | <sup>32</sup>Department of Biology, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal | <sup>33</sup>Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK | <sup>34</sup>Ecology of Fungi, Bayreuth Center of Ecology and Environmental Research (BayCEER), University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany | <sup>35</sup>Bavarian Forest National Park, Grafenau, Germany | <sup>36</sup>Environnement et Changement Climatique Canada, Quebec, Québec, Canada | <sup>37</sup>Centre for Environmental Sciences, Hasselt University, Hasselt, Belgium | <sup>38</sup>Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil | <sup>39</sup>Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia e Monitoramento Ambiental, Departamento de Engenharia e Meio Ambiente, Centro de Ciências Aplicadas e Educação, Universidade Federal da Paraíba—Campus IV, Rio Tinto, Paraíba, Brazil | <sup>40</sup>Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia e Evolução, Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana, Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil | <sup>41</sup>Estación Costera de Investigaciones Marinas, Facultad de Ciencias Biológicas, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile | <sup>42</sup>USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Oregon, USA | <sup>43</sup>School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Deakin Marine Research and Innovation Centre, Deakin University, Warrnambool, Victoria, Australia | <sup>44</sup>School of Zoology, George S. Wise Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel | <sup>45</sup>Department of Biology, University of Pisa, URL CoNISMa, Pisa, Italy | <sup>46</sup>Department of Biochemistry, Max Planck Institute for Chemical Ecology, Jena, Germany | <sup>47</sup>Operation Wallacea, Wallace House, Spilsby, UK | <sup>48</sup>USDA-ARS Range Management Research Unit, Jornada Experimental Range, Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA | <sup>49</sup>Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, USA | <sup>50</sup>Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden | <sup>51</sup>Gothenburg Global Biodiversity Centre, Gothenburg, Sweden | <sup>52</sup>Faculty of Biology and Environmental Protection, Department of Invertebrate Zoology and Hydrobiology, University of Lodz, Lodz, Poland | <sup>53</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts, USA | <sup>54</sup>Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO-CSIC), Centro Oceanográfico de A Coruña, A Coruña, Spain | <sup>55</sup>Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil | <sup>56</sup>Universidade Do Estado de Mato Grosso, Cáceres, Brazil | <sup>57</sup>School of Biology and Environmental Science, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland | <sup>58</sup>Earth Institute, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland | <sup>59</sup>School of Biological Sciences, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China | <sup>60</sup>Environmental and Marine Biology, Faculty of Science and Engineering, Åbo Akademi University, Åbo, Finland | <sup>61</sup>Institute for Alpine Environment, EURAC Research, Bozen, Italy | <sup>62</sup>Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, Australian Antarctic Partnership Program, Australian Antarctic Division, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>63</sup>The James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen, UK | <sup>64</sup>Coastal Research Center, Marine Science Institute, University of California,

Santa Barbara, California, USA | <sup>65</sup>Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Institute of Biology/Geobotany and Botanical Garden, Halle (Saale), Germany | <sup>66</sup>ESALQ University of São Paulo, LERF (Laboratório de Ecologia e Restauração Florestal), Piracicaba, Brazil | <sup>67</sup>Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France | <sup>68</sup>CNAM Intechmer, LUSAC, Tourlaville, France | <sup>69</sup>Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia e Recursos Naturais—UFScar, São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>70</sup>Department of Biology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK | <sup>71</sup>Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Biologia, Laboratório de Ecologia de Peixes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | <sup>72</sup>ASTRE, CIRAD, INRA, MUSE, University of Montpellier, Montpellier, France, Forêts et Sociétés, Univ Montpellier, CIRAD, Montpellier, France | <sup>73</sup>Department of Biology, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada | <sup>74</sup>Department of Environmental and Prevention Sciences, University of Ferrara, Ferrara, Italy | <sup>75</sup>Institute of Environment, Florida International University, Miami, Florida, USA | <sup>76</sup>Santa Catarina State University—UDESC, Florianópolis, Brazil | <sup>77</sup>Programa de Pós Graduação em Biodiversidade Animal: Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Santa Maria, Brazil | <sup>78</sup>Biogeography and Global Change Department, National Museum of Natural Sciences, CSIC, Madrid, Spain | <sup>79</sup>Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi, Kerala, India | <sup>80</sup>Department of Environmental Studies and Sciences, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, USA | <sup>81</sup>Biodiversity Research Center, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan | <sup>82</sup>Instituto Tabuleiro, Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil | <sup>83</sup>Mokpo National University, Muan, Jeonnam, South Korea | <sup>84</sup>New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA | <sup>85</sup>USDA-ARS-Jornada Experimental Range, Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA | <sup>86</sup>U.S. Geological Survey, Fort Collins Science Center, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA | <sup>87</sup>Department of Environmental Sciences, Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Sorocaba, Brazil | <sup>88</sup>St. Andrews Biological Station, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada | <sup>89</sup>Hornsby Shire Council, Hornsby, New South Wales, Australia | <sup>90</sup>Marine Biology Research Group, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium | <sup>91</sup>Conservation Science Partners, Truckee, California, USA | <sup>92</sup>Department of Arctic and Marine Biology, UiT-The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway | <sup>93</sup>Systems Ecology, A-LIFE, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the Netherlands | <sup>94</sup>Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB), DSUED, France | <sup>95</sup>AZTI Marine Research Division, Basque Research and Technology Alliance (BRTA), Sukarrieta, Spain | <sup>96</sup>Unaffiliated | <sup>97</sup>National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA), Auckland, New Zealand | <sup>98</sup>Oceans Institute, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia, Australia | <sup>99</sup>Universidade Estadual Paulista (Unesp), Instituto de Biociências, Rio Claro, Brazil | <sup>100</sup>Department of Conservation Biology, University of Goettingen, Goettingen, Germany | <sup>101</sup>School of Science, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Western Australia, Australia | <sup>102</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, USA | <sup>103</sup>Asociación Bogotana de Ornitología, Colombia | <sup>104</sup>Department of Life Sciences, The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago | <sup>105</sup>Department of Biogeography and Global Change, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (MNCN-CSIC), Madrid, Spain | <sup>106</sup>Departamento de Zoología, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad de Granada, Granada, Spain | <sup>107</sup>Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS), Brussels, Belgium | <sup>108</sup>Semillero de Investigación en Ecofisiología y Biogeografía de Vertebrados, Grupo de investigación en Biodiversidad y Desarrollo Amazónico (BYDA), Centro de Investigaciones Amazónicas Macaigual—César Augusto Estrada González, Universidad de la Amazonia, Florencia, Caquetá, Colombia | <sup>109</sup>Departamento de Ecologia, Instituto de Biociências, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>110</sup>School of Life and Environmental Sciences, The University of Sydney, Darlington, New South Wales, Australia | <sup>111</sup>Department of Biology, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland | <sup>112</sup>Cetacean Research & Rescue Unit, Banff, UK | <sup>113</sup>Centre for Ecology & Conservation, University of Exeter, Cornwall, UK | <sup>114</sup>Smithsonian MarineGEO, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, Edgewater, Maryland, USA | <sup>115</sup>Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Aberdeen, UK | <sup>116</sup>Instituto de Pesquisas Ambientais, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil | <sup>117</sup>Centre for Environmental and Climate Science, Lund University, Lund, Sweden | <sup>118</sup>Arizona State University, Central Arizona-Phoenix Long-Term Ecological Research, Tempe, Arizona, USA | <sup>119</sup>Ruppim Academic Center, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel | <sup>120</sup>Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>121</sup>Geography and Environment, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK | <sup>122</sup>National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, Muskegon, Michigan, USA | <sup>123</sup>Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA), Tromsø, Norway | <sup>124</sup>Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA | <sup>125</sup>Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA | <sup>126</sup>Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), Battery Point, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>127</sup>Australian Antarctic Program Partnership (AAPP), Hobart, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>128</sup>Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA | <sup>129</sup>Instituto Milenio de Oceanografía, Departamento de Oceanografía, Universidad de Concepción, Concepción, Chile | <sup>130</sup>Universität Hamburg Fachbereich Biologie Institut für Zell- und Systembiologie der Tiere Martin-Luther-King-Platz, Hamburg, Germany | <sup>131</sup>Migratory Bird Center, Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Institute, Washington, DC, USA | <sup>132</sup>CSIRO Environment, Queensland Biosciences Precinct, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia | <sup>133</sup>Centre for Marine Science and Innovation, School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia | <sup>134</sup>School of Environment, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia | <sup>135</sup>Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria | <sup>136</sup>Terrestrial Ecology Research Group, Department of Life Science Systems, School of Life Sciences, Technical University of Munich, Freising, Germany | <sup>137</sup>Instituto Ambiental Brüderthal, Brusque, Brazil | <sup>138</sup>Re.Green, Piracicaba, Brazil | <sup>139</sup>Center of Biological Sciences, Department of Animal and Plant Biology, State University of Londrina, Londrina, Brazil | <sup>140</sup>Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project, National Institute for Amazonian Research and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Manaus, Brazil | <sup>141</sup>Instituto de Ecología, A.C., Red de Ecoetología, Mexico | <sup>142</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada | <sup>143</sup>School of Ocean and Earth Science, National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK | <sup>144</sup>CIBIO-InBIO, Research Centre in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources, University of Porto, Vairão, Portugal | <sup>145</sup>BIOPOLIS Program in Genomics, Biodiversity and Land Planning, CIBIO, Vairão, Portugal | <sup>146</sup>Instituto Argentino de Oceanografía (IADO-CONICET), Universidad Nacional del Sur (UNS), Bahía Blanca, Argentina | <sup>147</sup>Treswell Wood Integrated Population Monitoring Group (TWIG), Retford, United Kingdom | <sup>148</sup>Lab of Vegetation Ecology, Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Instituto de Biociências, Rio Claro, Brazil | <sup>149</sup>Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canada | <sup>150</sup>SUMATRA Inteligência Ambiental, Lages, Brazil | <sup>151</sup>Departamento de Entomologia e Acarologia, Escola Superior de Agricultura Luiz de Queiroz, Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Piracicaba, Brazil | <sup>152</sup>Liverpool John Moores University, School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Liverpool, UK | <sup>153</sup>Department of Plant Protection, UNESP, Ilha Solteira, Brazil | <sup>154</sup>Polar Oceans Research Group, Sheridan, Montana, USA | <sup>155</sup>BiBio Research Group, Natural Sciences Museum of Granollers, Granollers, Spain | <sup>156</sup>Department of Integrative Biology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada | <sup>157</sup>Channel Islands National Park, Ventura, California, USA | <sup>158</sup>School of Geosciences, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK | <sup>159</sup>Natural History Museum, London, UK | <sup>160</sup>GRECO, Institute of Aquatic Ecology, University of Girona, Girona, Spain | <sup>161</sup>Institut de Ciències del Mar-CSIC, Barcelona, Spain | <sup>162</sup>CNRS, IRD, MIO, Université de Toulon, Aix Marseille Univ, Marseille, France | <sup>163</sup>National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, UK | <sup>164</sup>Department of Biological, Geological, and Environmental Sciences (BiGeA), University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy | <sup>165</sup>Université

du Québec en Outaouais, Gatineau, Québec, Canada | <sup>166</sup>University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA | <sup>167</sup>Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change, Sackville, Canada | <sup>168</sup>Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (Germany), Müncheberg, Germany | <sup>169</sup>Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i, USA | <sup>170</sup>Departament Evolutionary Biology, Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Universitat de Barcelona (UB), Barcelona, Spain | <sup>171</sup>Institut de Recerca de la Biodiversitat (IRBio), Universitat de Barcelona (UB), Barcelona, Spain | <sup>172</sup>Department of Environment, Yukon Parks, Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada | <sup>173</sup>Sefaz/SP, São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>174</sup>USDA Forest Service Research and Development, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico | <sup>175</sup>MG Consulting, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Canada | <sup>176</sup>Ecology and Zoology Department, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil | <sup>177</sup>School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University, Bangor, UK | <sup>178</sup>Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA | <sup>179</sup>Department of River Ecology and Conservation, Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, Germany | <sup>180</sup>Faculty of Biology, University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany | <sup>181</sup>Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit, Banff, UK | <sup>182</sup>USDA-ARS, Jornada Experimental Range, Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA | <sup>183</sup>Depth of Biology Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada | <sup>184</sup>National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, Christchurch, New Zealand | <sup>185</sup>Departamento de Oceanografía, Instituto Milenio de Oceanografía (IMO), Facultad de Ciencias Naturales y Oceanográficas, Universidad de Concepción, Concepcion, Chile | <sup>186</sup>Universidade Do Estado de Santa Catarina, Lages, Brazil | <sup>187</sup>Department of Aquatic Environment and Quality, Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Oostende, Belgium | <sup>188</sup>Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, Trondheim, Norway | <sup>189</sup>Cornell Biological Field Station, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA | <sup>190</sup>Biology Department, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan, USA | <sup>191</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA | <sup>192</sup>James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia | <sup>193</sup>Department of Biogeography and Global Change, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (MNCN-CSIC), Madrid, Spain | <sup>194</sup>Institute of Oceanography, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan | <sup>195</sup>Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, Moss Landing, California, USA | <sup>196</sup>Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE), Nature Solutions, Helsinki, Finland | <sup>197</sup>Department of Biology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA | <sup>198</sup>Environment, Energy and Ecology Program, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA | <sup>199</sup>University of Ghana, Hynes & Associates International, Western University, London, Canada | <sup>200</sup>Office Français de la Biodiversité, Direction Régionale Bretagne, Cesson-Sévigné, France | <sup>201</sup>Instituto de Pesquisas Ambientais, São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>202</sup>Chiba Prefectural Environmental Research Center, Tokyo Bay, Japan | <sup>203</sup>Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO), Brussels, Belgium | <sup>204</sup>School of Biological Sciences, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia, USA | <sup>205</sup>Department of Wildlife, Fish and Environmental Studies, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Umeå, Sweden | <sup>206</sup>Geography, College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, USA | <sup>207</sup>Institute of Biology, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia | <sup>208</sup>Institute of Biology, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia | <sup>209</sup>Department of Zoology and Animal Ecology, Faculty of Biology, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia | <sup>210</sup>Yokohama National University, Yokohama, Japan | <sup>211</sup>National Science Foundation's McMurdo Dry Valley's Long-Term Ecological Research Project (NSF McMurdo Dry Valley LTER), Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR), College of Engineering, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA | <sup>212</sup>Scottish Oceans Institute, School of Biology, University of St. Andrews, St Andrews, UK | <sup>213</sup>Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG), St Andrews, UK | <sup>214</sup>Faculty of Environmental Sciences and Natural Resource Management, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, Norway | <sup>215</sup>Northwest

German Forest Research Institute, Göttingen, Germany | <sup>216</sup>Department of Community Ecology, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research—UFZ, Halle (Saale), Germany | <sup>217</sup>Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), Oostende, Belgium | <sup>218</sup>Institute of Marine Research, Flødevigen, Norway | <sup>219</sup>Centre for Coastal Research (CCR), Department of Natural Sciences, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway | <sup>220</sup>Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), Helsinki, Finland | <sup>221</sup>Department of Invasion Ecology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Botany, Průhonice, Czech Republic | <sup>222</sup>Field Station Fabrikschleichach, Department of Animal Ecology and Tropical Biology Biocenter, University of Würzburg, Rauhenebrach, Germany | <sup>223</sup>Industry-Academy Cooperation Division, National Museum of Marine Science and Technology, Keelung, Taiwan | <sup>224</sup>Taiwan Association for Marine Environmental Education, Taipei, Taiwan | <sup>225</sup>Channel Islands National Park, National Park Service, Ventura, California, USA | <sup>226</sup>Centre de Formation et de Recherche sur les Environnements Méditerranéens, Université de Perpignan Via Domitia—CNRS, Perpignan, France | <sup>227</sup>University of Aberdeen School of Biological Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK | <sup>228</sup>Israel Nature and Parks Authority, Jerusalem, Israel | <sup>229</sup>Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, USA | <sup>230</sup>California Department of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento, California, USA | <sup>231</sup>University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, Cambridge, Maryland, USA | <sup>232</sup>Plants and Ecosystems, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium | <sup>233</sup>Ecology & Biodiversity, University of Utrecht, Utrecht, the Netherlands | <sup>234</sup>Departamento de Ciências Biológicas, ESALQ, Universidade de São Paulo, Piracicaba, Brazil | <sup>235</sup>Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia, Biology Institute, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | <sup>236</sup>Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Minas Gerais, Brazil | <sup>237</sup>University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, USA | <sup>238</sup>CREAF, Univ Autònoma Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain | <sup>239</sup>Western EcoSystems Technology Inc, Cheyenne, Wyoming, USA | <sup>240</sup>Pós-doutorado do Programa de pós-graduação em Ecologia, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | <sup>241</sup>Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability, Ithaca, New York, USA | <sup>242</sup>Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK | <sup>243</sup>Natural Sciences Museum of Granollers, Granollers, Spain | <sup>244</sup>Departamento de Ecologia e Conservação, Universidade Federal de Lavras, Lavras, Brazil | <sup>245</sup>AZTI, Marine Research, Basque Research and Technology Alliance (BRTA), Pasaia, Spain | <sup>246</sup>NBFC, National Biodiversity Future Center, Palermo, Italy | <sup>247</sup>Department of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning, University of Sassari, Sassari, Italy | <sup>248</sup>Instituto Felinos do Aguai, Siderópolis, Brazil | <sup>249</sup>Department of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada | <sup>250</sup>Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia de Biomas Tropicais, Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, Ouro Preto, Brazil | <sup>251</sup>South African National Biodiversity Institute, Claremont, South Africa | <sup>252</sup>Statistics in Ecology, Environment and Conservation, Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, South Africa | <sup>253</sup>Animal Demography Unit, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, South Africa | <sup>254</sup>BirdLife South Africa, Parklands, South Africa | <sup>255</sup>School of Environmental and Natural Sciences, College of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, Bangor University, Bangor, UK | <sup>256</sup>Botany Department and Biodiversity Research Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada | <sup>257</sup>Instituto de Investigación en Cambio Global (ICG-URJC), Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Móstoles, Spain | <sup>258</sup>Área de Biodiversidad y Conservación, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Móstoles, Spain | <sup>259</sup>Biodiversity Division, National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan | <sup>260</sup>School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK | <sup>261</sup>CE3C—Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes/Azorean Biodiversity Group/CHANGE—Global Change and Sustainability Institute and Universidade dos Açores—Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Environment, Angra do Heroísmo, Portugal | <sup>262</sup>Birmingham Institute of Forest Research, University of Birmingham, Birmingham,

UK | <sup>263</sup>Vermont Center for Ecostudies, Hartford, Vermont, USA | <sup>264</sup>School of Biology and Ecology, University of Maine, Orono, Maine, USA | <sup>265</sup>Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions, University of Maine, Orono, Maine, USA | <sup>266</sup>University of Colorado-Boulder, Boulder, Colorado, USA | <sup>267</sup>Mainspring Conservation Trust, Franklin, North Carolina, USA | <sup>268</sup>Institute of Biology, Faculty of Medicine and Life Sciences, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia | <sup>269</sup>Northern Illinois University, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, USA | <sup>270</sup>School of Science, Engineering and Environment, University of Salford, Manchester, UK | <sup>271</sup>Department of Biology, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen Ø, Denmark | <sup>272</sup>Programa de Pós Graduação em Ecologia e Conservação, Universidade Federal do Paraná, Laboratório de Ecologia e Conservação, Parana, Brazil | <sup>273</sup>Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA), Le Port, France | <sup>274</sup>Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas (IBSS), Russian Academy of Sciences, Sevastopol, Russia | <sup>275</sup>Marine Science Institute, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, USA | <sup>276</sup>Geography and Environment, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, UK | <sup>277</sup>Biology Department, Marine Biology Lab, Ghent University, Gent, Belgium | <sup>278</sup>Universidade Federal do Pará, Belém, Brazil | <sup>279</sup>Aquatic Survey & Monitoring Ltd. (ASML), Durham, UK | <sup>280</sup>Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG), St Andrews, UK | <sup>281</sup>Field Station Fabrikschleichach, Department of Animal Ecology and Tropical Biology, Biocenter, University of Würzburg, Rauhenebrach, Germany | <sup>282</sup>Bavarian Forest National Park, Grafenau, Germany | <sup>283</sup>Biology Department, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA | <sup>284</sup>Wakayama Experimental Forest, Field Science Center for Northern Biosphere, Hokkaido University, Wakayama, Japan | <sup>285</sup>South Australian Research and Development Institute, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia | <sup>286</sup>World Maritime University, Malmo, Sweden | <sup>287</sup>Department of Marine Sciences, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA | <sup>288</sup>Department of Botany and Biodiversity Research, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria | <sup>289</sup>Department of Forest Resources Technology, Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources, Kwame University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana | <sup>290</sup>University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK | <sup>291</sup>Global Ecology Unit, CSIC-CREAF-UAB, Bellaterra, Catalonia, Spain, CREAF, Cerdanyola del Vallès, Catalonia, Spain | <sup>292</sup>Chiba Prefectural Environmental Research Center, Tokyo Bay, Japan | <sup>293</sup>Ocean Integrity Research, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada | <sup>294</sup>School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada | <sup>295</sup>School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA | <sup>296</sup>Lab of Movement and Population Ecology, Biosciences Institute, Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande, Brazil | <sup>297</sup>University Libraries, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA | <sup>298</sup>Moscow Lomonosov State University, Moscow, Russia | <sup>299</sup>Centre d'Estudis Avançats de Blanes (CEAB-CSIC), Blanes, Spain | <sup>300</sup>Sección Ornitología, Museo de La Plata, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, and Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Buenos Aires, Argentina | <sup>301</sup>Centre for Forest Research, Département des Sciences Biologiques, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montreal, Québec, Canada | <sup>302</sup>Wildlife Conservation Society Indonesia Marine Program, Bogor, West Java, Indonesia | <sup>303</sup>UMR AMAP, IRD, CIRAD, CNRS, INRA, Université de Montpellier, Montpellier, France | <sup>304</sup>Ecology Department, French Institute of Pondicherry, CNRS, MEAE, Puducherry, India | <sup>305</sup>University of Houston, Houston, Texas, USA | <sup>306</sup>Centro de Investigación Ecológica y Aplicaciones Forestales, CSIC, Global Ecology Unit, CREAF-CSIC-UAB, Bellaterra 08193, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, Cerdanyola del Vallès 08193, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain | <sup>307</sup>Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia e Evolução, Departamento de Ecologia, Campus Samambaia, Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), Goiânia, Brazil | <sup>308</sup>Instituto de Investigación Marina (INMAR), Departamento de Biología, Universidad de Cádiz, Puerto Real, Spain | <sup>309</sup>Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA), Oslo, Norway | <sup>310</sup>Center for Marine Biology, University of São Paulo, São Sebastião, Brazil | <sup>311</sup>Department of Marine Technology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway | <sup>312</sup>Australian Centre of Field Robotics,

University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia | <sup>313</sup>Università Della Calabria, Dipartimento Biologia Ecologia Scienze Della Terra, Rende, Italy | <sup>314</sup>Department of Aquatic Ecology, Eawag: Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, Dübendorf, Switzerland | <sup>315</sup>Department of Ecology and Conservation, Federal University of Lavras, Lavras, Brazil | <sup>316</sup>Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), UMR ENTROPIE, Perpignan, France | <sup>317</sup>Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology, University of California, Davis, California, USA | <sup>318</sup>Pôle Ecohydraulique, Office Français pour la Biodiversité Institut des Mécaniques des Fluides (OFB-IMFT), Toulouse, France | <sup>319</sup>Institute of the Environment, Center for Environmental Sciences & Engineering, Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, USA | <sup>320</sup>Department of Animal Sciences, Wageningen University, Wageningen, the Netherlands | <sup>321</sup>Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, Oostende, Belgium | <sup>322</sup>School of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA | <sup>323</sup>Arizona Institute for Resilience, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA | <sup>324</sup>BIO5 Institute, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA | <sup>325</sup>Department of Ecology, Faculty of Science, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic | <sup>326</sup>Natural History Museum Vienna, Vienna, Austria | <sup>327</sup>BioScales Lab, Department of Biology, University of Miami, Miami, Florida, USA | <sup>328</sup>Institute for Global Change Biology and School of Environment and Sustainability, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA | <sup>329</sup>Department of Forest Resources, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA | <sup>330</sup>Department of Ocean Sciences, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada | <sup>331</sup>School of the Environment, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia | <sup>332</sup>Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science (CBCS), The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia | <sup>333</sup>Department of Oceanography and Coastal Sciences, College of Coast and Environment, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA | <sup>334</sup>Climate Change, Extremes and Natural Hazards in Alpine Regions Research Centre, CERC, Davos Dorf, Switzerland | <sup>335</sup>WSL Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research SLF, Davos, Switzerland | <sup>336</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, University of São Paulo, Piracicaba, Brazil | <sup>337</sup>Re.Green, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | <sup>338</sup>Willem Beijerinck Biologisch Station (WBBS) Foundation, Loon, the Netherlands | <sup>339</sup>Departamento de Ciências Biológicas, UNESP—São Paulo State University, Campus São José do Rio Preto, Brazil | <sup>340</sup>Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas y Ambientales UDCA, Asociación Bogotana de Ornitología, Provincia de Cartagena, Colombia | <sup>341</sup>Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, Cornell University, New York, New York, USA | <sup>342</sup>Subtidal Ecology Laboratory, Estación Costera de Investigaciones Marinas, Departamento de Ecología, Facultad de Ciencias Biológicas, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile | <sup>343</sup>George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA | <sup>344</sup>Department of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology, University of California Davis, Davis, California, USA | <sup>345</sup>Center for Watershed Sciences, University of California Davis, Davis, California, USA | <sup>346</sup>Environmental Sciences Department, Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>347</sup>Department of Life Sciences, Imperial College London, Berkshire, UK | <sup>348</sup>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Facultad de Estudios Superiores Iztacala, Tlalnepantla, Mexico | <sup>349</sup>Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia, Manaus, Brazil | <sup>350</sup>Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA | <sup>351</sup>Departamento de Biologia Vegetal, UNICAMP, Campinas, Brazil | <sup>352</sup>Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM), Santa Maria, Brazil | <sup>353</sup>Department of Forestry and Environmental Science, School of Agriculture and Mineral Sciences, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh | <sup>354</sup>Biology Department, Utica University, Utica, New York, USA | <sup>355</sup>Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL, Birmensdorf, Switzerland | <sup>356</sup>Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen, Frederiksberg, Denmark | <sup>357</sup>APEM Ltd, Stockport, UK | <sup>358</sup>Australian Antarctic Program Partnership, Hobart, Tasmania,

Australia | <sup>359</sup>The Whitelands Project CIC, Hampshire, UK | <sup>360</sup>Professor Emeritus, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA: Visiting Scholar, Department of Biological Sciences, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA | <sup>361</sup>Biodiversity and Biostatistics Department, Institute of Biosciences, Sao Paulo State University (UNESP), Botucatu, Brazil | <sup>362</sup>Laboratório de Ecologia Teórica: Integrando Tempo, Biologia e Espaço (LET.IT.BE), Departamento de Ciências Ambientais, Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Sorocaba, Brazil | <sup>363</sup>Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK | <sup>364</sup>Institute of Biosciences, São Paulo State University (UNESP), São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>365</sup>School of Biological Sciences, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand | <sup>366</sup>Department of Biological Sciences and Centre for Statistics in Ecology, Environment and Conservation, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, Fynbos Node, South African Environmental Observation Network, Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, Cape Town, South Africa | <sup>367</sup>Institute of Environmental Change and Society, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada | <sup>368</sup>Instituto de Pesquisas Ambientais, São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>369</sup>Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia: Teoria, Aplicação e Valores (EcoTAV), Universidade Federal da Bahia, Instituto e Biologia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil | <sup>370</sup>Alberta Forestry and Parks, Forestry Division, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada | <sup>371</sup>College of Marine Science, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, Florida, USA | <sup>372</sup>Executive Environment Agency, Sofia, Bulgaria | <sup>373</sup>Center for Limnology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA | <sup>374</sup>School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada | <sup>375</sup>Ethica Ambiental, Vila Velha, Brazil | <sup>376</sup>Ethica Ambiental, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá DC, Colombia | <sup>377</sup>University of Applied Sciences Trier, Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, Hoppstädten-Weiersbach, Germany | <sup>378</sup>Reef Life Survey Foundation, Battery Point, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>379</sup>Laboratório de Ecologia/CERNA, Universidade Estadual de Mato Grosso do Sul (UEMS), Dourados, Brazil | <sup>380</sup>The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada | <sup>381</sup>Data Analytics Program, Denison University, Granville, Ohio, USA | <sup>382</sup>Natural Resources Institute Finland, Oulu, Finland | <sup>383</sup>University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia | <sup>384</sup>Sydney Institute of Marine Science, Mosman, New South Wales, Australia | <sup>385</sup>Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, Australian Antarctic Program Partnership, Battery Point, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>386</sup>Department of Forest Entomology, Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute, Ibaraki, Japan | <sup>387</sup>Centre de Recherche sur la Biodiversité et l'Environnement (CRBE), Université de Toulouse, CNRS, IRD, Toulouse INP, Université Toulouse 3—Paul Sabatier (UT3), Toulouse, France | <sup>388</sup>Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Station Marine de Dinard, CRESO, Dinard, France | <sup>389</sup>Department of Biology, University of North Carolina Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina, USA | <sup>390</sup>Department of Watershed Sciences, Ecology Center, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, USA | <sup>391</sup>Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL, Birmensdorf, Switzerland | <sup>392</sup>Hessian Agency for Nature Conservation, Environment and Geology, Biodiversity Center, Giessen, Germany | <sup>393</sup>Czech Academy of Sciences, Biology Centre, Institute of Entomology, České Budějovice, Czech Republic | <sup>394</sup>Illinois Natural History Survey, Prairie Research Institute, University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois, USA | <sup>395</sup>Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), Campinas, Brazil | <sup>396</sup>Instituto de Pesquisas Ambientais, São Paulo, Brazil | <sup>397</sup>School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada | <sup>398</sup>Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Research Institute, Hokkaido Research Organization, Eniwa, Japan | <sup>399</sup>Ocea Consult, Saint Pierre, La Réunion, France | <sup>400</sup>Instituto de Ciencias Marinas y Limnológicas, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad Austral de Chile, Valdivia, Chile | <sup>401</sup>Centro FONDAP de Investigación de Dinámicas de Ecosistemas Marinos de Altas Latitudes (IDEAL) Instituto de Ciencias Ambientales y Evolutivas, Universidad Austral de Chile, Valdivia, Chile | <sup>402</sup>Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, Programa de Biología Aplicada, Grupo de Investigación Diversitas, Bogotá, Colombia | <sup>403</sup>Department of Biology, Saint Louis University, Saint

Louis, Missouri, USA | <sup>404</sup>Departamento de Ciências Biológicas, Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Bauru, Brazil | <sup>405</sup>Escola de Agronomia, Universidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, Brazil | <sup>406</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa | <sup>407</sup>Instituto de Biologia, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | <sup>408</sup>Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science, Lowestoft Laboratory, Suffolk, UK | <sup>409</sup>School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK | <sup>410</sup>Centro de Ciências Naturais e Humanas, Universidade Federal Do ABC (UFABC), São Bernardo do Campo, Brazil | <sup>411</sup>Laboratório de Ecologia e Conservação, Setor de Tecnologia, Universidade Federal Do Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil | <sup>412</sup>Vietnam National Museum of Nature, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST), Hanoi, Vietnam | <sup>413</sup>Graduate University of Science and Technology, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST), Hanoi, Vietnam | <sup>414</sup>Department of Biology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA | <sup>415</sup>Department of Environmental Conservation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA | <sup>416</sup>Biology Department, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, USA | <sup>417</sup>Environmental Studies Department, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, USA | <sup>418</sup>INRAE, EABX, Cestas, France | <sup>419</sup>Conservation Ecology Center, Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute, Front Royal, Virginia, USA | <sup>420</sup>School of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, UK | <sup>421</sup>Landesamt für Umwelt Rheinland-Pfalz, Mainz, Germany | <sup>422</sup>Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia, USA | <sup>423</sup>Plymouth Marine Laboratory, Prospect Place, Plymouth, UK | <sup>424</sup>Australian Antarctic Division, Kingston, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>425</sup>Department of Biology, University of York, York, UK | <sup>426</sup>Australasian Seabird Group, BirdLife Australia, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia | <sup>427</sup>Natural Sciences, Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont, USA | <sup>428</sup>Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation, Big Bay, Michigan, USA | <sup>429</sup>State Key Laboratory of Vegetation and Environmental Change, Institute of Botany, Beijing, China | <sup>430</sup>Science Division, Israel Nature and Parks Authority, Yerushalayim, Israel | <sup>431</sup>School of Natural Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

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Candidate, University of British Columbia, with the assistance of the team wrote up the first draft of this README file and did data file curation—including making data summary files and completing data cleaning—as part of a Living Data Project (LDP), Canadian Institute of Ecology and Evolution, data rescue paid internship supported by NSERC CREATE (<https://www.ciee-icee.ca/ldp.html>). In addition to the team, there was cohort support from LDP graduate students and postdocs. See more here about the principles and rationale behind data rescue: Bledsoe, E. K. et al. (2022). Data rescue: saving environmental data from extinction. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 289(1979), 20220938. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2022.0938>. Funding to LTT was provided by two UK Natural Environment Research Council PhD studentships (including through the Quadrat Doctoral Training Program) and a PhD studentship funded by the Saudi Royal Embassy. L.V.V. was supported by the Vietnam Ministry of Science and Technology (ĐTĐL.CN-113/21) and Earthwatch Institute. The dataset by L. Armbrrecht originated from PhD research, which was supervised by Leanne Armand, Moninya Roughan and David Raftos. We thank the NMSC for providing RV Circe and the OEH for enabling the use of RV Bombora. We thank P. Ajani and T. Ingleton for support with phytoplankton identification. Throughout the many field campaigns, we thank T. Ingleton, P. Davies, R. Gardiner, A. Cox, B. Morris, D. Kricke, A. Waite, T. Sullivan, V. Rossi, J. Wood, T. Austin, M. Doblin, C. Robinson, A. Mantovanelli, A. Schaeffer, A. Grobler, W. Godinho, A. Wilkins and S. Milburn for assistance. The field work was partially funded by a grant from the Australian Research Council, DP 1093510 (to MR). L.A. was funded by Macquarie University, the Australian Biological Resources Study, the Australian Marine Sciences Association and the Linnean Society of NSW. IMOS is supported by the Australian Government through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy and the Super Science Initiative. L.B.C. acknowledges the contribution by the European Union's Horizon 2023 Research and Innovation Program under grant agreement no.: 101060072 ACTNOW and grant agreement no.: 101058956 Marine SABRES. RivFishTIME has been developed as part of the international working group sYNGEO—The geography of synchrony in dendritic networks kindly supported by sDiv, the Synthesis Centre of the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig, funded by the German Research Foundation (FZT 118). L. Rosselli and colleagues thank the Asociación Bogotana de Ornitología and all observers that participated in the Sabana de Bogotá Christmas Bird Counts. We also thank landowners and institutions that permitted access to the areas during the decades of CBC. Juanita Niño, Julián Pinzón and Stefany Velásquez-Licona of the UDCA helped with organising the data. For the Chingaza study, we are grateful to the Sistema de Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia for help with logistics and fieldwork and for granting permits. The Empresa de Acueducto de Bogotá helped with logistics in 1991–1992. For companionship and valuable help in the field, we thank P. Camargo, F. Avellaneda, J. Candil, L. G. Linares, N. Moreno, R. Pulido, L. Tellez and the students of the UDCA. C. Garzon-Sanabria helped with data organisation. We thank G. Castañeda for his enthusiastic support in transportation in the field. The Chingaza project was funded by Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas y Ambientales UDCA, Universidad Nacional de Colombia and resources from Patrimonio Autonomo Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento para la Ciencia, la Tecnología y la Innovación, Francisco Jose de Caldas. L. Crevecoeur thanks Marc Janssen. Research Productivity Grant (CNPq) (process #302881/2022-0). Grants and fellowships were provided to L.F.T. by São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP #2022/11096-8) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq #302834/2020-6). We thank ArcticNet, Weston Northern Grants. M. Lazarus and colleagues would like to thank the Israeli Nature and Park Authority and all present and past Belmaker laboratory members who participated in data collection. M. Kagami was funded by JSPS\_KAKEN(16H02943). M. Vianna acknowledges FAPERJ (E26/200.934/2022) and CNPq (302398/2022–8) for financial support. Marcio Martins thanks the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (Fapesp) for research grants (#2015/21259-8, #2018/14091-1 and #2020/12658-4) and Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) for research fellowships

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

A static stable release of BioTIME version 2.0 can be found in Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10932823>). Code used in data curation and standardisation can be found at [github.com/bioTIMEHub/BioTIME](https://github.com/bioTIMEHub/BioTIME). The R package BioTIMER is available in CRAN and can be found at [github.com/bioTIMEHub/BioTIMER](https://github.com/bioTIMEHub/BioTIMER).

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### Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.