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# Increased drying threatens alpine pond biodiversity more than temperature increase in a changing climate

M. Lamouille-Hébert<sup>1,2,4</sup> · F. Arthaud<sup>3,4</sup> · A. Besnard<sup>5</sup> · M. Logez<sup>1</sup> · T. Datry<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Climate change is one of the main drivers of biodiversity decline. Rapidly changing climate in the form of warming, drying, and habitat isolation causes freshwater species to change their spatial extent, as most species have little capacity for in situ responses. However, the relative contribution of these three effects to freshwater species' changing spatial distributions is actively debated. To shed light on this debate, we explored temperature, hydroperiod, and habitat connectivity effects on alpine pond species occupancy probabilities in the northern French Alps. We studied alpine ponds as ideal test systems because they face climate change effects more rapidly, and in more concentrated areas, than any other freshwater ecosystem. We used multispecies occupancy models with three biological groups (amphibians, macrophytes, and Odonata) to examine contrasting responses to climate change. Contrary to expectations, temperature was not the main driver of species occupancy probabilities. Instead, hydroperiod and connectivity were stronger predictors of species occupancy probabilities. Furthermore, temperature increases had the same effect on occupancy probabilities of non-alpine specialist and alpine specialist species. Nonetheless, temperature disproportionately affected a greater number of specialist species compared with non-alpine specialists. We conclude that climate change mitigation will primarily benefit a greater number of alpine specialist species than non-alpine specialists. Finally, we suggest that enhancing our understanding of freshwater hydroperiods will improve our predictions of climate change effects on freshwater species distributions.

**Keywords** Conservation · Freshwater · Distribution · Models · Occupancy · Connectivity

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## Introduction

Climate change is one of the main drivers of biodiversity decline (Butchart et al. 2010; IPBES 2019). Rising global mean temperature is accompanied by greater temperature extremes, as indicated by the increasing frequency and strength of heat waves in many regions (Masson-Delmotte et al. 2018; Mukherji et al. 2023). Precipitation patterns are also changing (Milly et al. 2005; Walther et al. 2002), with increasing frequency and intensity of droughts (Barnett et al. 2005; Woodward et al. 2010) and floods (Donat et al. 2013; Masson-Delmotte et al. 2018).

Species possess intrinsic adaptive capacities to climate change characterized by three key components (Bellard et al. 2012; Swaegers et al. 2024): (1) adaptation, whereby species with very rapid generation times can adapt via evolutionary mechanisms (Hughes 2000; Swaegers et al. 2024); (2) plasticity, as certain species have the capacity to acclimate and modify their physiological traits, including growth, respiration, and tissue composition (Hughes 2000; Lindholm et al.

2015), and additionally, species may adapt their behavior, such as day–night activity rhythm and feeding locations (Dussault et al. 2004; Melin et al. 2014) and can also adapt their phenology, such as reproductive timing and dormancy cessation (Kannan et al. 2009; Roy & Sparks 2000; Walther et al. 2002); (3) dispersion, with certain species having the capacity to disperse quickly within their current habitat, when it has become unsuitable, to more suitable habitat (Dawson et al. 2011; Edelsparre et al. 2024; Swaegers et al. 2024).

One of the most prevalent responses to rapid climate change is for species to modify their geographic distributions, as most species do not exhibit *in situ* adaptation (Baur & Baur 2013). Indeed, species are moving to cooler climates (Freeman et al. 2018) as the global climate warms. The ranges of both flora and nonmigratory fauna are shifting toward higher elevations or/and latitudes, with altitude gains of 20–30 m/decade for flora (Kelly and Goulden 2008; Lenoir et al. 2008; Parolo and Rossi 2008) and 10–60 m/decade for fauna. Likewise, the ranges of many high-latitude fauna are moving northward at 30–70 km/decade (Baur and Baur 2013; Hickling et al. 2006; Roth et al. 2014).

Species are constrained by their thermal tolerances and the connectivity of suitable habitats (Culp et al. 2022; De Frenne et al. 2021; Fazlioglu et al. 2020). Species exhibiting a limited distribution range (e.g., thermal specialists such as cold or hot stenotherms) are more susceptible to the impacts of climate change than those with a wide distribution (e.g., thermal generalists such as eurytherms or ubiquist species) (Lindholm et al. 2015; Pallarés et al. 2020; Rosset and Oertli 2011). Freshwater species additionally are adapted to specific hydroperiods (the frequency, duration, and magnitude of water (Convertino et al. 2013)) to successfully complete their life cycle (Ryan et al. 2014). The escalation in the frequency of heatwaves and the decline in hydroperiods (Carlson et al. 2020; Diamond et al. 2023; Huang et al. 2022) can transform, for different durations, suitable habitat of some species into unsuitable habitat (Carlson et al. 2020; Galatowitsch and McIntosh 2016). Such changes have already led to mass mortality events with occasional species local extinction (e.g., amphibians and plants) and a shift in dominance to species that are tolerant to drier conditions (Carlson et al. 2020; He et al. 2016; Sandvik and Odland 2014). Another consequence of drying is loss of habitat connectivity, as suitable patches become increasingly isolated (Malish et al. 2023). Decreased connectivity among patch habitats reduces species migration success (when possible) as it lengthens travel distances, and recolonization of previously occupied patches becomes dependent on rewetting frequencies (Bogan et al. 2015).

Efforts to understand changing species geographic distributions under drying and warming are abundant and include empirical (Baur and Baur 2013; Kang et al. 2016; Lynch

et al. 2016) and model-based methods (Buisson and Grenouillet 2009; Menéndez et al. 2014; Parmesan et al. 1999). However, for most of these efforts, the estimated shifts are based on global climate parameters, and they rarely integrate landscape structure (Opdam and Wascher 2004). Ignoring landscape and habitat structure is likely a critical omission, as distribution shifts predicted by climatic models are often incorrect (Warren et al. 2001). To overcome these problems, some researchers now integrate the dispersal abilities of species into predictive models (Keith et al. 2008; Vos et al. 2008). Still, the relative contribution of warming, drying, and habitat isolation on species distributions is actively debated and remains unclear.

Mountain ecosystems are warming more rapidly in response to climate change when compared with global averages, in particular for temperature (Gobiet et al. 2014; Thuiller et al. 2005) and heat waves (Huang et al. 2022). They thus provide a highly relevant study area because these climatic modifications are leading to rapid changes in habitat and species distribution (Dial et al. 2007; Gehrig-Fasel et al. 2007; Salerno et al. 2014). Owing to their altitude gradients, mountains also provide optimal environments for observing past and future global changes in biodiversity (Peterson et al. 1997) in what is referred to as the “altitude-for-latitude disparity” (Jump et al. 2009). Indeed, the various vegetation types spanning hundreds of kilometers in longitude or latitude in plains are condensed into just a few vertical kilometers within mountains (Peterson et al. 1997). Likewise, mountainous freshwater ecosystems offer valuable opportunities for studying the effects of climate change on the critical drivers of aquatic biodiversity: water temperature, hydroperiod, and connectivity (Beniston 2006; Lamouille-Hébert et al. 2024; Williamson et al. 2009).

Of the mountainous freshwater ecosystems, alpine ponds are especially susceptible to climatic changes (Beniston 2006). They are warming rapidly (+0.72 °C/decade (O’Reilly et al. 2015)) and drying more regularly (Carlson et al. 2020). At high altitudes, retreating glaciers increase the space for new ponds and glacier meltwater increases pond size (Bosson et al. 2023; Salerno et al. 2014). The rapid changes in the spatial distribution of alpine ponds (Salerno et al. 2014; Seimon et al. 2007) creates opportunities for the colonization of new species (Leibold et al. 2004; Macarthur and Wilson 1967; Redmond 2018). Simultaneously, at lower altitudes, south-facing ponds disappear or are reduced in size because of the increase of pejorative processes (Salerno et al. 2014). These combined changes to alpine pond extent may threaten freshwater stenotherms, endangered and endemic species (Khan and Baig 2017; Yang et al. 2017).

In this study, we explored the relationships between climate change effects (temperature, hydroperiod, and connectivity) and Odonata, Amphibia, and macrophytes occupancy probabilities in 73 ponds in the northern French Alps.

We specifically tested three predictions: (1) summer water warming leads to an increase in species occupancy probabilities for non-alpine specialist species and to a decrease for alpine specialist species, (2) increased drying leads to a decrease in species occupancy probabilities for all species, and (3) the more geographically isolated the alpine pond is, the lower the probability of occupancy by alpine pond species.

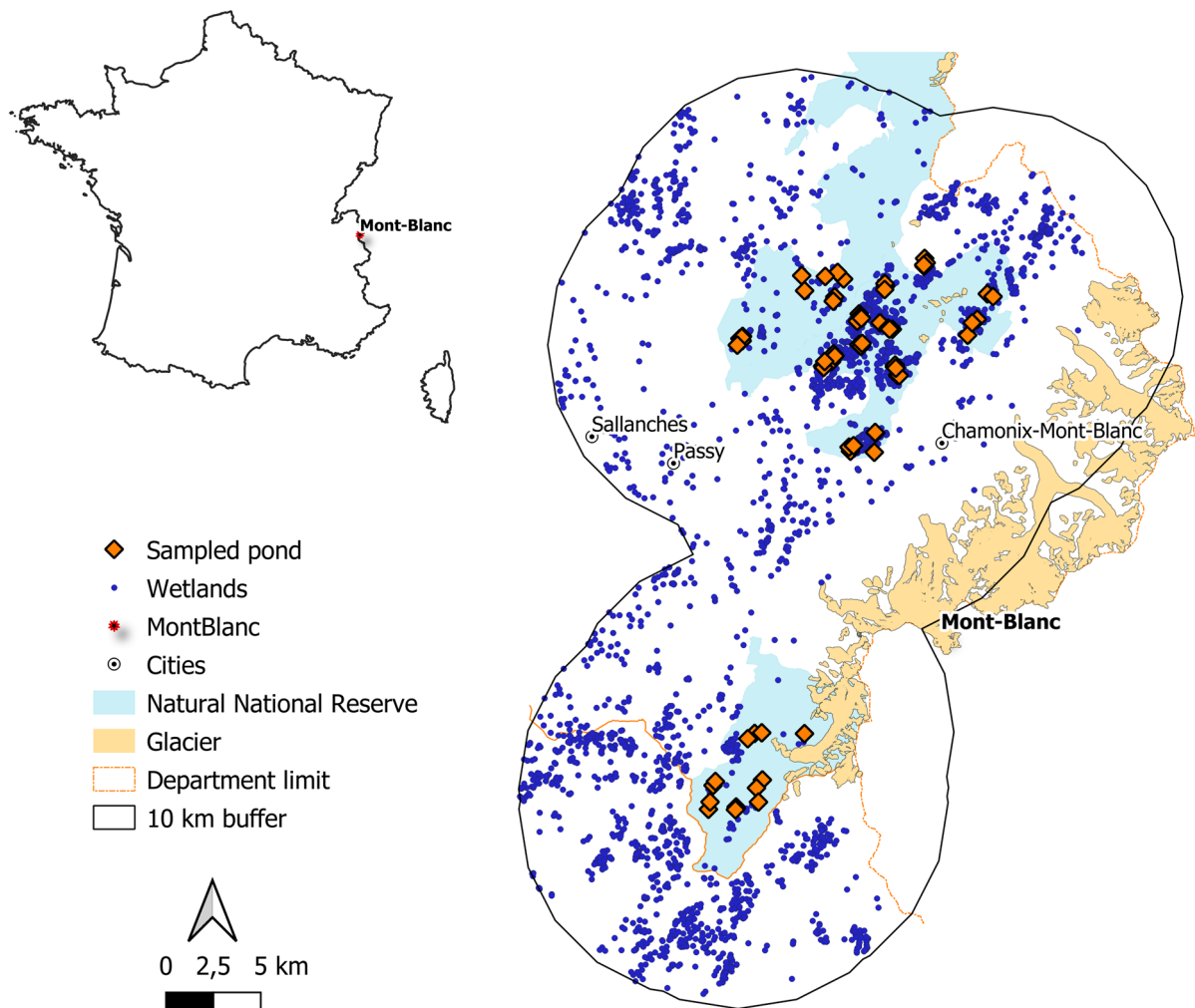
## Materials and methods

### Sampling design

The study area was in the Aiguille Rouges and Mont Blanc mountain ranges, in the Haute-Savoie Alpine National

Natural Reserve (Fig. 1). The alpine ponds studied were situated above the treeline. With the assistance of reserve guards, we identified accessible sectors where ponds were present. In each sector, we selected sampling sites in the field to represent alpine pond biodiversity, and spatial and altitude gradients (orange diamonds in Fig. 1).

A single trained observer (M.L.-H.), legally authorized to work in the studied National Natural Reserve and to handle the studied protected species, conducted the field survey between 15 July 2021 and 12 October 2023. The survey included 73 alpine ponds, natural or human-made, ranging from 1750 to 2335 m (median 2064 m) above sea level (Fig. 1). Among the ponds sampled, some were dry at each visit (so the maximum open-water area and maximum depth of the pond may be 0). The maximum open-water area varied between 0 and 3500 m<sup>2</sup> (median 28.5 m<sup>2</sup>), and



**Fig. 1** The study was conducted in Haute-Savoie alpine National Natural Reserves, located in the northern French Alps near Mont Blanc. Seventy-three ponds were sampled in this area (orange diamonds). To explore the pond network, we built a 10-km buffer and made a dataset

of all wetlands known in the French part (Haute-Savoie and Savoie departments) of this buffer (blue smaller dots). The department boundary is an administrative boundary (like a region or a country). This figure was made with Quantum GIS (version 3.16.3-Hannover)

their maximum depth ranged between 0 and 1.10 m (median 0.25 m). Four field visits were carried out to record the presence and absence of water in the ponds. Half of the ponds were visited two times in summer 2021 (between 15 July and 15 August with an interval of almost 2 weeks) and one time per summer in 2022 (between 18 August and 26 September) and in 2023 (between 2 July and 12 October 2023). The other ponds were visited one time in 2021 (between 6 September and 3 October), two times in 2022 (between 15 July and 15 August with an interval of almost 2 weeks), and one time in 2023 (between 2 July and 12 October). The 2023 survey was only designed to assess the presence or absence of water in the ponds.

### Species sampling methods

To describe species and to improve the detectability of rare species, all sites were visited twice in the same year (2021 or 2022) for more than 30 min (sampling effort for all groups was proportional to sampled pond size: 46 min on average, minimum 30 min and maximum 2 h 35 min). Half of the sites were sampled in 2021, and half in 2022. We worked with three biological groups (amphibians, macrophytes, and Odonata) that (1) are good indicators of pond biodiversity (Oertli et al. 2005), (2) present a wide range of dispersal ability (Halliday 1999; Knaus and Wildermuth 2002), and (3) are known to show contrasting responses to climate change (Carlson et al. 2020; Grand and Boudot 2006; Heidemann & Seidenbusch 2002). All individuals were determined in situ. We counted the number of individuals of all detected species.

#### Odonata

To maximize the detection probability of adults of Odonata, the sampling was conducted between 15 July and 15 August. Sampling was conducted when the weather conditions were optimal for Odonata activity, i.e., no rain during 2 days before fieldwork, low to moderate wind speed (<5 on the Beaufort scale), few clouds (cloud cover <75%), and temperature above 17 °C. The maturation time from immature to mature (reproductive) adult Odonata is 2–3 weeks for the studied species (Grand and Boudot 2006; Wildermuth 2013). Usually, during the maturation phase, immature individuals move several hundred meters away (Khelifa 2017; Kirkton and Schultz 2001) from the pond where they emerged before returning to their natal pond as mature adults. Thus, to detect non-adults (emergent, larvae, and exuviae, i.e., the exoskeleton of emerging individuals) and adults, we set the second sampling 2 or 3 weeks after the first. The first visit was between 15 and 31 July, and the second between 1 and 15 August.

At each visit, we used different methods to detect non-adults (larvae, exuviae, and emergents) and adults of Odonata. In addition to visual species detection without collection, we used an Odonata net for flying adults (a brown 40-cm-diameter 90-cm-deep net), and when the pond was not dried-up, a specific water net (Surber net) for Odonata aquatic larvae. Exuviae were searched for within a minimum 2 m width buffer around the banks of the ponds, and were found close to the banks within 73 sites. All individuals were identified using a hand lens when necessary. We based the identification of the species on existing keys (larvae and exuviae (Doucet 2016), adults (Boudot et al. 2014; Dijkstra 2007)) and a key made exclusively for French alpine species (Lamouille-Hébert 2021). We counted only one individual when it emerged from its exuvia.

#### Amphibians

We used two methods to detect adults and non-adults of Amphibia: (1) visual detection without collection, and (2) Amphibia water net (Surber net) for adults and non-adults when water was present.

#### Macrophytes

Plants present in open-water were identified from different randomly located littoral quadrats (2 m × 2 m). In case of low visibility (i.e., when the bottom of the ponds in the quadrat could not be seen through the water), we used a grappling hook beyond each quadrat to explore the diversity at the bottom of the pond. This approach was necessary in one of the two visits to 12 ponds (8% of the 146 samples). We sampled flora on 1 to 20 quadrats per pond, depending on pond area: <20 m<sup>2</sup>, 1 or 2 quadrats; <100 m<sup>2</sup>, 2 to 9 quadrats; <1500 m<sup>2</sup>, 10 quadrats; <3500 m<sup>2</sup>, 15 quadrats; <5000 m<sup>2</sup>, 20 quadrats. Quadrats were distributed at equal distance all around the open water of the pond. Each visit had different quadrat distributions: the first quadrat at each visit was placed where open water was nearest to the observed site entry point, to maximize species detectability.

#### Species classification

To investigate the relationship between the main drivers of climate change and species that are alpine specialists or not, we categorized each species detected as either an alpine specialist or a non-alpine specialist. We used different datasets (Oertli, 2010; SINP AURA, 2023) that provide data on the distribution of species at different altitudes (1000–1500; 1500–2000) and allow us to categorize each species (SM. S1). If main localization data were situated above 1500 m, the species was considered to be an alpine specialist species;



if not, it was considered to be a non-alpine specialist species (Table 1).

## Environmental covariates

### Summer water temperature

We installed a temperature logger at the bottom of the pond at the first visit to each site to study the effect of water temperature on alpine pond biodiversity (HOBO, TidbiT-MXTemps400). Temperature was sampled every 30 min between 24 September 2021 and 31 July 2022. Water temperatures had risen above 0 °C for all ponds by 31 May 2022. Thus, we used data collected after water temperatures had risen above 0 °C (1 June 2022 and 31

July 2022) to calculate summer water temperature metrics. Because some loggers did not work during this period, we calculated four temperature metrics (°C) in only 58 alpine ponds:

- Cumulative growth-degree-days (GDD), i.e., the sum of daily temperature means
- Minimum temperature: the 5th quantile of minimum daily temperature
- Maximum temperature: the 95th quantile of maximum daily temperature
- Median temperature range: the median of daily difference between the maximum and the minimum temperature

**Table 1** Occupancy and design sampling detection probabilities of Amphibia, macrophytes, and Odonata species at our study sites (31 species)

		Occupancy	<i>p</i> (detection) (95% CI)
Amphibia	<i>Bufo bufo</i>	0.02	0.85(0.40–0.99)
	<i>Ichthyosaura alpestris</i>	0.24	0.98 (0.91–1.00)
	<i>Rana temporaria</i>	0.15	0.93 (0.79–0.99)
Macrophytes	<i>Briophytes</i> sp.	0.26	0.99 (0.95–1.00)
	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	0.02	0.88 (0.49–0.99)
	<i>Carex canescens curta</i>	0.02	0.72 (0.28–0.97)
	<i>Carex echinata</i>	0.08	0.62 (0.34–0.86)
	<i>Carex nigra</i>	0.26	1.00 (0.98–1.00)
	<i>Carex rostrata</i>	0.06	0.97 (0.81–1.00)
	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	0.07	0.94 (0.75–0.99)
	<i>Eriophorum latifolium</i>	0.01	0.93 (0.47–1.00)
	<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	0.02	0.92 (0.54–1.00)
	<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	0.00	0.79 (0.23–0.99)
	<i>Callitriche palustris</i> *	0.03	0.70 (0.30–0.95)
	<i>Carex foetida</i> *	0.01	0.83 (0.36–0.99)
	<i>Carex pauciflora</i> *	0.02	0.66 (0.24–0.95)
	<i>Carex paupercula magellanica</i> *	0.03	0.75 (0.34–0.96)
	<i>Equisetum variegatum</i> *	0.01	0.96 (0.61–1.00)
	<i>Eriophorum scheuchzeri</i> *	0.05	0.99 (0.88–1.00)
	<i>Juncus arcticus</i> *	0.01	0.87 (0.39–1.00)
<i>Juncus filiformis</i> *	0.06	0.75 (0.42–0.94)	
<i>Sparganium angustifolium</i> *	0.02	0.92 (0.53–1.00)	
<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i> *	0.10	0.99 (0.91–1.00)	
Odonata	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	0.02	0.78 (0.32–0.98)
	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	0.01	0.73 (0.21–0.98)
	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	0.01	0.93 (0.48–1.00)
	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	0.02	0.93 (0.56–1.00)
	<i>Coenagrion hastulatum</i>	0.01	0.92 (0.46–1.00)
	<i>Aeshna juncea</i> *	0.28	0.93 (0.83–0.98)
	<i>Leucorrhinia dubia</i> *	0.07	0.94 (0.74–1.00)
<i>Somatochlora alpestris</i> *	0.12	0.90 (0.70–0.98)	

To calculate these values based on the 73 sampling sites, we use the MSOM accounting for imperfect detection ((det.formula=factor(stade)\*factor(session)); with “stade” as species stages: non-adult or adult) and any occurrence covariate. \*Alpine specialist species. Species have probabilities of detection between 0.617 (CI 0.342–0.856) and 0.997 (CI 0.981–1.000)

## Hydroperiod

All alpine ponds studied were shallow (depth 0–1.10 m). Pond water can be completely iced in winter or dried in summer. We could defined the winter period for 59 ponds as being between 1 November 2021 and 31 May 2022. We calculated two hydroperiod metrics respectively in 73 and 59 alpine ponds:

- Summer drying gradient: frequency of observed absence of water for each pond based on the four visits (from zero to four times): 59% of the sampled alpine ponds always had water (43), and 41% were observed without water at least once: 19% once (14), 11% twice (8), 5.5% three times (4), and 5.5% four times (4).
- Winter ice-stage duration: the number of days where maximum temperature was  $\leq 0$  °C

## Connectivity

We calculated several connectivity metrics among alpine ponds in the study area. We used a known distribution of wetlands because the distribution of alpine ponds is currently largely unknown. We compiled two datasets: (1) the departmental inventory of wetlands made in 2021 by Haute-Savoie territorial department directory (DDT74) and the local conservatory (Asters-CEN74) and (2) the alpine ponds detailed by M.L.-H. during field campaigns (2017–2019, and for this study in 2021 and 2022). We calculated four groups of connectivity metrics within a 10-km buffer around sampled ponds (Fig. 1) using RStudio version 2023.5.0.335 (Posit team 2023) and R version 4.2.0 (R Core Team 2022):

- Topographical minimum distance between a pond and the nearest potential pond (m): in altitude, with reliefs and valleys, the Euclidean distance, which considers points on the same level, is not sufficient to understand the distance between alpine ponds. We a digital elevation model (DEM) information to integrate the elevation distance and calculate topographical distance between ponds. Topographical distance gives distances that are closer to what an individual would have to cross than Euclidean distance. The DEM raster was downloaded from the French national geographic institute (IGN). We utilized the RGE Alti@ dataset at 5-m sampling (<https://geoservices.ign.fr/documentation/donnees/alti/rgealti>) that we resampled to Sentinel-2 spatial sampling, at 10 m. To calculate this metric, we used the TopoDistance package with the function `topoDist` (Wang 2020).
- Number and area of wetlands in different buffers around sampled ponds: we calculated these two metrics for each sampled pond in different buffers (100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000, 5000, 7500, and 10,000 m,

using Euclidean distance to get areas of comparable surfaces around the sampled ponds). This metric was calculated up to a 10,000-m buffer because wind dispersers (adult Odonata or macrophytes) should be able to disperse over long distances (Knaus & Wildermuth 2002).

- Land cover in different buffers around the sampled pond: with the Python package `beemap` (Wu 2020); we used the Google Earth engine (Gorelick et al. 2017) with 38 images with less than 30% cloud extracted from Sentinel-2 spatial sampling (10 m) (Copernicus Sentinel data of Sentinel-2) to calculate the maximum of the median normalized difference vegetation index (i.e., NDVI, which is an indicator of the catchment productivity of terrestrial vegetation whose growth period is noticeable until September in the alpine belt) of 2022 (between 1 June and 1 September) in different buffers (100, 200, 300, 400, 500, and 1000 m Euclidean distance to get areas of comparable surfaces around the sampled ponds). This metric was calculated in a 1000-m buffer because terrestrial dispersers (non-adult Odonata and Amphibia) should be able to disperse over short distances across land cover (Halliday 1999).

- Number of tributaries in different buffers around sampled ponds and length of total tributaries: we calculated these two metrics for each sampled pond in different buffers (100, 200, 300, 400, 500, and 1000 m Euclidean distance to get areas of comparable surfaces around the sampled ponds) based on the river cartography made in 2019 by DDT74 (GéoCatalogue 2023). This metric was calculated in a 1000-m buffer as above.

## Statistical methods

We tested whether correlations between summer water temperature, hydroperiod, connectivity, and alpine pond species occupancy probabilities were significant or not at the 5% threshold. We modeled the detection–nondetection data of the replicates per sampling site (i.e., 2 temporal replicates  $\times$  2 sampling stages (non-adults and adults)) using multispecies occupancy models (MSOMs) (Devarajan et al. 2020; Dorazio and Royle 2005; Zipkin et al. 2023). MSOMs rely on repeated sampling of a biological community at multiple spatial locations to estimate the number and composition of species in the community (Dorazio and Royle 2005; MacKenzie et al. 2002). This allows for imperfect detection of species to be taken into account (Devarajan et al. 2020). They can simultaneously model the effects of covariates at the species and community levels, using information from the most frequent species to improve the accuracy of estimates, particularly for the rarest species (Dorazio and Royle 2005; Mourguiart et al. 2021; Zipkin et al. 2023). We used the library `spOccupancy` (Doser et al. 2022) with RStudio version 2023.5.0.335 (Posit team 2023) and R version 4.2.0

(R Core Team 2022). We used the function `sfMsPGOcc` to account for spatial autocorrelation, and correlations between species. Imperfect detection was integrated in all our models, considering the interaction between temporal replicates and sampling stages. We fit 104 models (SM.S2) to analyze the simple and quadratic relationship between each scaled covariate and species occupancy probabilities. This relationship was considered significant when 95% credibility intervals (CIs) of the slope did not overlap with zero. When the quadratic coefficient between each scaled covariate and species occupancy probabilities was significant, we chose the quadratic model. Otherwise, the linear model or null model was selected, depending on the significance of the linear coefficient. The classification as alpine specialist or non-alpine specialist was a post-analysis interpretation and does not influence the analysis results. We fit a supplemental model without covariates and with sampling potential bias (stage  $\times$  session) to determine the percent of sites where species are present (occurrence) and estimated our sampling design probability to detect these species when they are present (detection probabilities). The script can be found in SM.S3 with the data in the Data INRAE repository (<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.57745/YFE6IJ>) to follow the findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability (FAIR) guiding principles for managing scientific data (Wilkinson et al. 2016).

## Results

### Biological communities

We detected 31 species: 3 species of amphibian, 20 of macrophytes, and 8 of Odonata (Table 1). Specialist species represented 0% of Amphibia, 50% of Odonata (4 species), and 50% of macrophytes (10 species). Species had occurrences ranging between 0.00 and 0.28 (Table 1). They were detected with a detection probability depending on the species, ranging between 0.62 (CI 0.34–0.86) and 1.00 (CI 0.98–1.00) (Table 1).

We detected Odonata at 60% of the sampled alpine ponds (44 sites), representing 1108 individuals (841 non-adults and 149 adults of alpine specialist species; 14 non-adults and 104 adults of non-alpine specialist species). Per site, we detected between zero and five Odonata species from the eight present in our study. Amphibia were detected at 78% of the sampled ponds (57 sites), representing 1437 individuals (1099 non-adults and 338 adults). Per site, we counted zero to three Amphibia species from the three present. Macrophytes were recorded at 84% of the sampled alpine ponds (61 sites). Per site, we counted 0 to 11 macrophytes species from the 20 present.

### Relationships between covariates and species occupancy probabilities

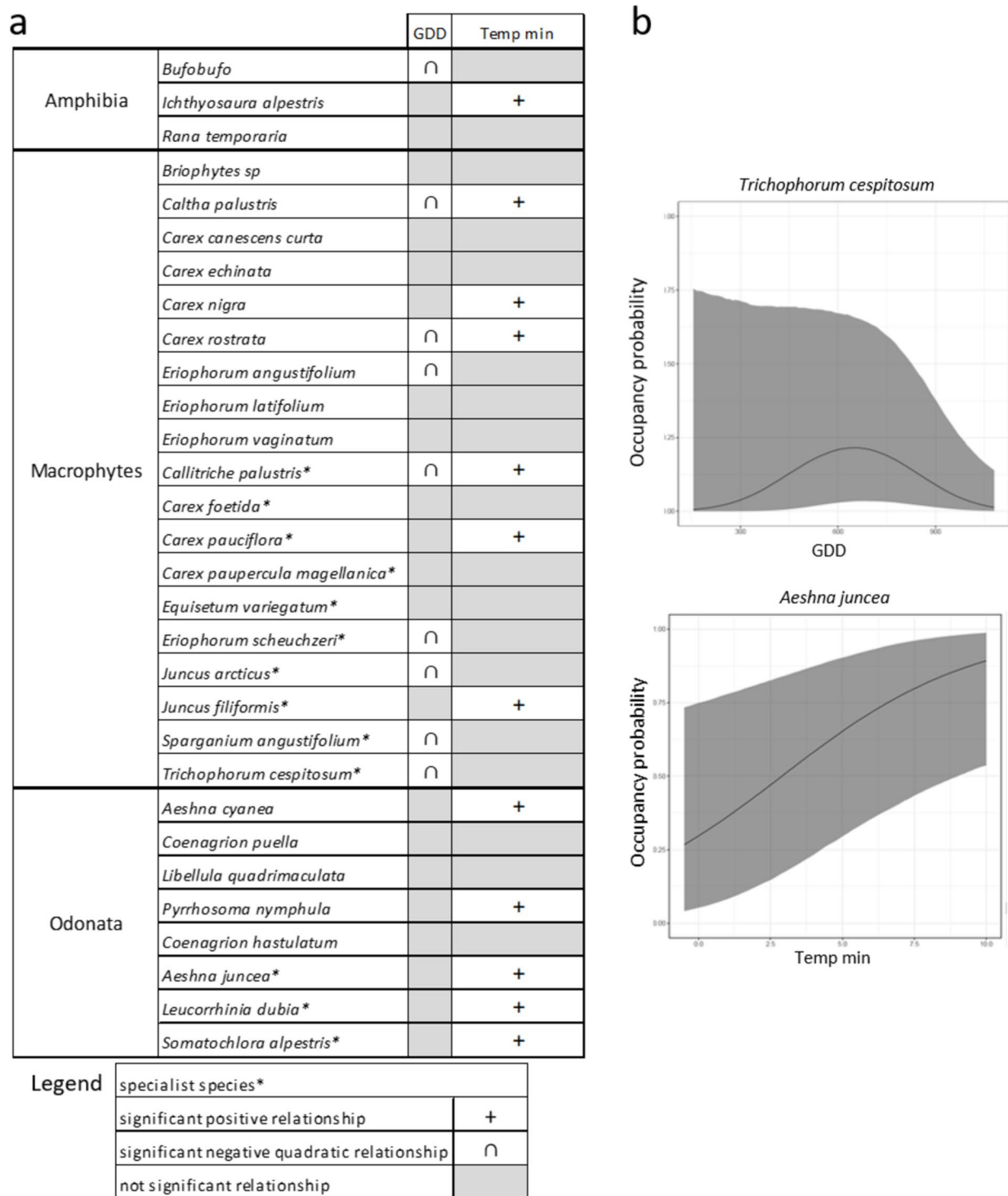
Sixty percent of species (71% of alpine specialists and 50% of non-alpine specialists) occupancy probabilities had a significant relationship with summer temperature. These species had a significant relationship with GDD, with summer minimum temperature, or with both metrics. Thirty percent of species had a significant quadratic relationship with GDD (whether or not they also had a relationship with summer minimum temperature) and 40% had a significant positive relationship with summer minimum temperature (whether or not they also had a relationship with GDD) (Fig. 2). Odonata species occupancy probabilities had no significant relationship with GDD. Amphibia (*Bufo bufo*) and macrophytes (50% of alpine specialist species and 30% of non-alpine specialists) species occupancy probabilities had a significant relationship with GDD (Fig. 2a).

This relationship had the same form with the same slope directions for Amphibia and macrophyte alpine specialist and non-alpine specialist species. The probability of all species occupancy was highest at intermediate values of GDD, from 636 to 671 °C (Fig. 2b). Amphibia (*Ichtyosaura alpestris*), macrophytes (30% of alpine specialist species and 30% of non-alpine specialists), and Odonata (75% of alpine specialist species and 50% of non-alpine specialists) species occupancy probabilities increased when the summer minimum temperature increased (Fig. 2a, b). Alpine species occupancy probabilities were marginally related to the increase of summer maximum temperature and summer median temperature (SM.S4). For *Bufo bufo*, a non-alpine specialist species, the occupancy probability increased with increasing maximum water temperature (when Temp max > 30 °C). On the contrary, the occupancy probability of *Aeshna juncea*, an alpine specialist species, decreased when the maximum water temperature exceeded 21 °C.

Ninety-three percent of species (92% of alpine specialists and 94% of non-alpine specialists) occupancy probabilities were correlated with one or two covariates describing hydroperiod (Fig. 3). These species had a significant relationship with summer drying gradient, with the length of winter ice stage, or with both metrics.. Only one amphibian species (*Bufo bufo*) and two macrophyte species (*Eriophorum angustifolium* and *Juncus articus*) were not correlated to the increase in summer drying gradient (whether or not they also had a relationship with the length of winter ice stage) (Fig. 3a). Odonata, Amphibia, and most macrophyte (except *Carex nigra* and *Bryophytes* sp.) probabilities of occupancy were almost zero when alpine ponds had been observed dried at each visit (Fig. 3b).

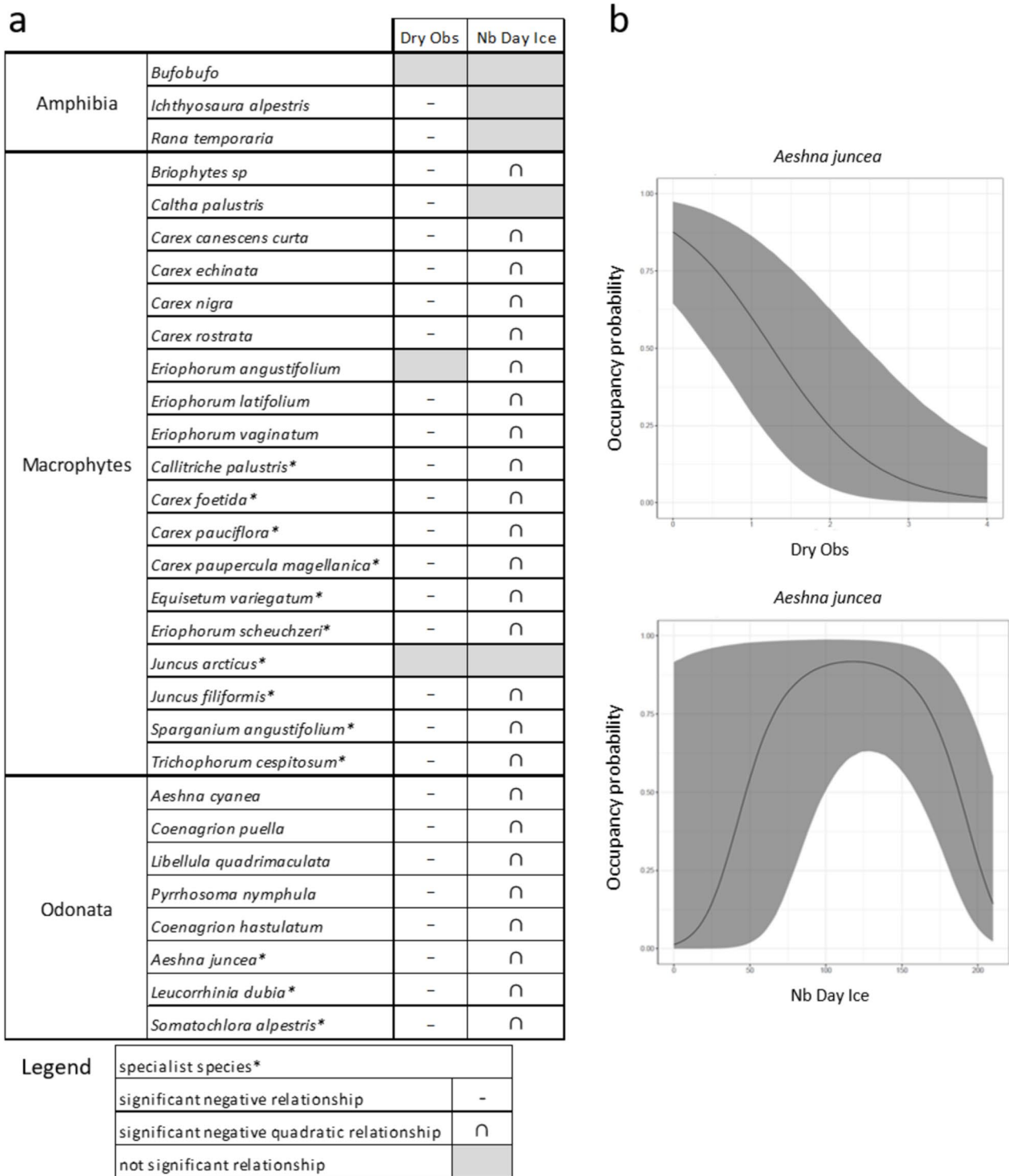
Amphibia species occupancy probabilities were not related to the length of the winter ice stage. Macrophytes (90% of non-alpine specialist and alpine-specialist species)





**Fig. 2** Relationship between summer water warming and occupancy probabilities of alpine pond species (Amphibia, macrophytes, and Odonata). **a** Relationships were tested with different temperature metrics and with different MSOMs. For each species (listed by group: Amphibia, macrophytes, and Odonata), we report here the significant relationship between the metric (simple metric or with its quadratic effect) and their occupancy probability. \*Alpine specialist species. **b**

Relationships between the metrics and occupancy probability of two specialist species (*Trichophorum cespitosum* and *Aeshna juncea*): species occupancy probability by median (black curve) (in grey, CI 0.025–0.975). GDD is growth-degree-days (i.e., the summer accumulated warm); Temp min is the fifth quantile of the summer daily temperature



**Fig. 3** Relationship between absence of liquid water and alpine pond species (Amphibia, macrophytes, and Odonata) occupancy probabilities. **a** Relationships were tested with different drying metrics and with different MSOMs. For each species (listed by group: Amphibia, macrophytes, and Odonata), we report here the significant relationship between the metric (simple metric or with its quadratic effect)

and their occupancy probability. \*Alpine specialist species. **b** Relationship between the metrics and occupancy probability of a specialist species (*Aeshna juncea*): species occupancy probability by median (black curve) (in grey, CI 0.025–0.975). Dry Obs is the summer drying gradient; Nb Day Ice is the length of the winter ice stage

and all Odonata species occupancy probabilities had a significant quadratic relationship with this covariate (whether or not they also had a relationship with summer drying gradient) (Fig. 3a). This relationship had the same form with the same sign on the slope for both macrophyte and Odonata alpine specialist and non-alpine specialist species. The probability of all species occupancy was highest at intermediate values of winter ice stage duration between 83 and 121 days (Fig. 3b). The macrophyte threshold was 83–121 days when for Odonata it was 110–118 days.

Eighty-three percent of species (92% of alpine specialists and 76% of non-alpine specialists) occupancy probabilities had a significant quadratic relationship with topographical minimum distance between a pond and the nearest one (Fig. 4). These species were amphibians (*Ichtyosaura alpestris* and *Rana temporaria*), all macrophytes, 67% of Odonata alpine specialist species, and 40% of Odonata non-alpine specialists (Fig. 4a).

The relationship had the same form with the same slope directions for alpine specialist and non-alpine specialist species from the three groups. The probability of all species occupancy was highest at intermediate values of topographical minimum distance between a pond and the nearest pond between 117 and 208 m (Fig. 4b). The amphibian threshold was 132–181 m, while it was 117–208 m for macrophytes and 126–162 m for Odonata.

Among the four non-alpine specialist species whose occupancy probabilities were not correlated to topographical minimum distance between a pond and the nearest pond, *Aeshna cyanea* and *Libellula quadrimaculata* occupancy probabilities were not correlated with any connectivity covariates. *Bufo bufo* and *Pyrrosoma nymphula* occupancy probabilities were negatively correlated with the number of wetlands and positively (after reaching a threshold) with the number of tributaries on the 100-m buffer (SM.S5). Furthermore, occupancy probabilities of *Aeshna juncea*, the only specialist not influenced by topographical minimum distance between a pond and the nearest pond, decreased with increasing number and area of wetlands in the 3000- and 4000-m buffers. Nevertheless, increasing area of wetlands on the 10,000-m buffer increased its occupancy probability.

## Discussion

Our findings suggest that, contrary to what we expected, the significant effect of increased water summer temperature was limited to a few species only and with the same significant relationship for non-alpine specialist and alpine specialist species occupancy probabilities. We also found that the predicted decreasing hydroperiod and connectivity, especially considering topographic distance between ponds, resulted in reduced occupancy probabilities of species. This

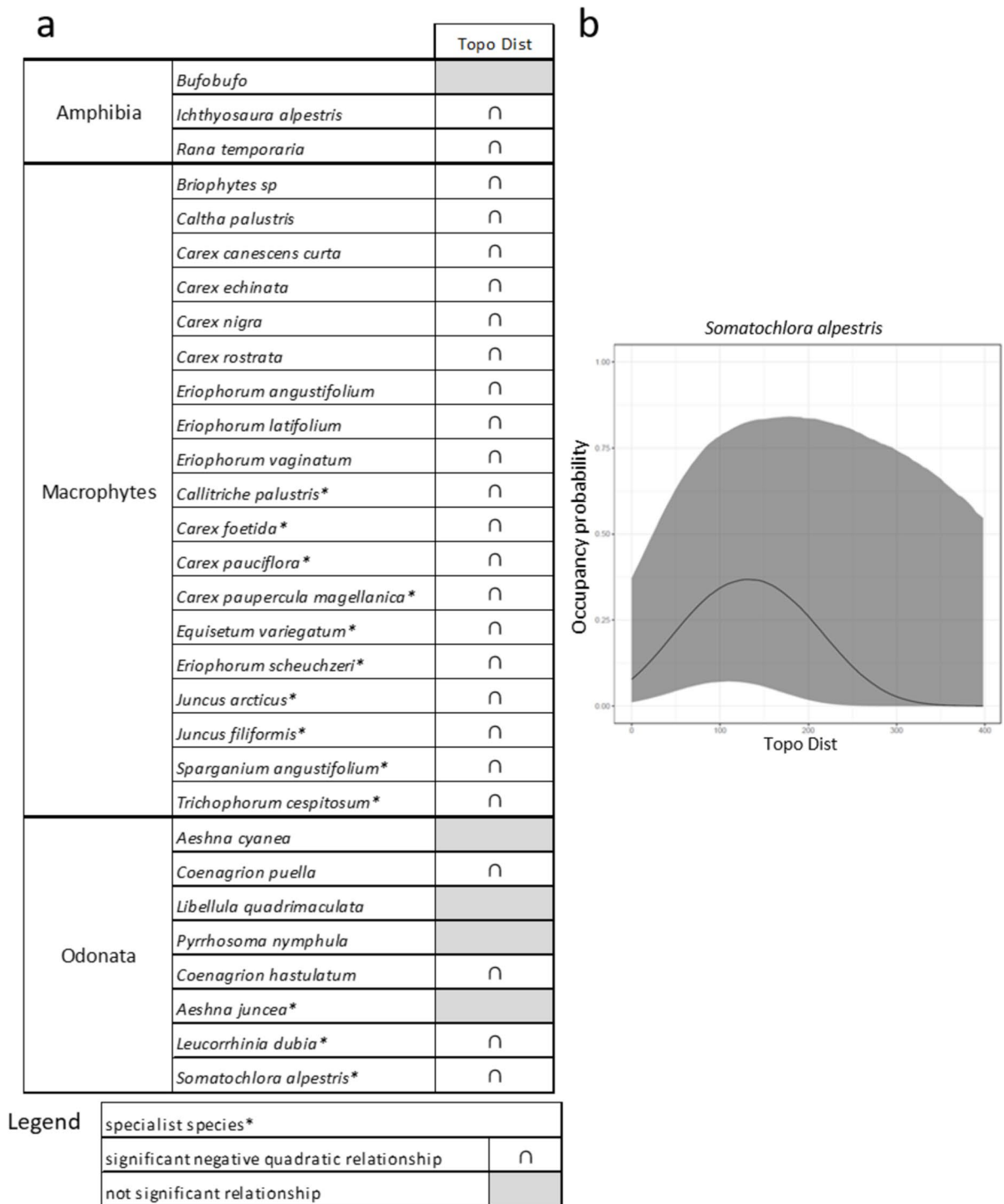
relationship influenced a greater number of studied species than the increased summer water temperatures. Therefore, species distribution models that are primarily based on temperature may underestimate the effects of climate change on species occupancy probabilities.

### Temperature was not the primary driver of biodiversity distribution

Temperature drives alpine species distribution. Its increase is influencing species densities (Alatalo et al. 2017) and increasing the risk of species local extinction. This last result has been demonstrated in mountain ecosystems for terrestrial (plants) (Jump et al. 2009), stream (Stoneflies, *Lednia*) (Green et al. 2022), and pond (Arctic fairy shrimp, *Branchinecta paludosa*) (Lindholm et al. 2015) species. Therefore, temperature increases are causing continued displacement of communities in mountain terrestrial ecosystems (Lenoir et al. 2008) as well as aquatic environments (Li et al. 2016; Sáinz-Bariáin et al. 2016). Consequently, temperature is the primary driver used to describe the effects of climate change on alpine species distribution (Adhikari et al. 2023; Engler et al. 2011; Tovar et al. 2022).

We observed that increasing summer heat accumulation in the water (GDD) limited the occupancy probabilities of up to 30% of the 30 alpine pond species studied. Summer minimum temperature increases had significant positive effects on the species occupancy of 40% of the alpine pond species studied. Temperature increase had significant effects only in a part of the studied species occupancy probabilities, contrary to our expectations, but in line with the main results of a global meta-analysis including both terrestrial and marine fauna (Parmesan and Yohe 2003).

Although there was a significant effect of temperature on species occupancy, the effects of accumulated summer temperature and minimum temperature variables differed. We found that increasing summer heat accumulation in the water (GDD) decreased amphibian and macrophytes species occupancy probabilities when a threshold was reached but had no effects on Odonata. Amphibia and macrophyte species occupancy probabilities increased when summer heat accumulation in the water was low and increased over the summer. This well-studied stage (Cross and Zuber 1972; Liu et al. 2022; McMaster and Wilhelm 1997) corresponds to the necessary thermal accumulation that triggers their development and growth. Yet, occupancy probabilities of species decreased after heat accumulation in the water reached a certain threshold. This is because their development stops, and if temperature accumulated continues to increase, it can reach their lethal point (Abbasi et al. 2023; Wahid et al. 2007). The unexpected absence of significant effects of summer heat accumulation in the water (GDD) on Odonata species occupancy probabilities could be due to



**Fig. 4** Relationship between topographical minimum distance (Topo Dist: distance between a pond and the nearest pond) and alpine pond species (Amphibia, macrophytes, and Odonata) occupancy probabilities. **a** This relationship was tested with a MSOM. For each species (listed by group: Amphibia, macrophytes, and Odonata), we report

here the significant relationship between this metric and their occupancy probability. \*Alpine specialist species. **b** Relationship between this metric and occupancy probability of a specialist species (*Somatochlora alpestris*): species occupancy probability by median (black curve) (in grey, CI 0.025–0.975)

their thermoregulatory plasticity despite being ectothermic: color change, regulated hemolymph circulation in the thorax and abdomen, or employing “wing-whirring” behavior for

thermoregulation (May 1976; Polcyn 1994; Sternberg 1997). Our results suggest that alpine specialist species of Odonata had the same capacity as other Odonata to colonize a broad

spectrum of thermal habitats along the temperature range in alpine ponds.

We also found that, for some species from the three different studied groups, their occupancy probabilities were increased by summer minimum temperature increase. This is because, in high mountains, low temperature stresses species, reducing their growth and survival (Cabrera 1996; Larcher et al. 2010). Alpine specialist species are adapted to high mountain extreme cold. For example, cold-adapted plants can express some particular forms/transcripts of proteins (e.g., rubisco) to increase their “carbon assimilation rate supporting the photochemical mechanism of photosynthetic acclimation to cold” (Jurczyk et al. 2016). Unexpectedly and contrary to our predictions, studied alpine specialists and non-alpine specialists species (40%) occupancy probabilities both increased with temperature increase. It may be that an increase in the minimum temperatures reduces the stress caused by low temperatures for all species, allowing them to colonize new alpine ponds. As we detected, temperature exerts a notable influence on species distribution, yet it is not the sole determinant of occupancy probabilities for all species in response to climate change.

### Hydroperiod constrained more species occupancy probabilities than temperature

Hydroperiod reduction can be a major disturbance of aquatic communities and biodiversity (Greig et al. 2013; Leigh and Datry 2017; Stubbington et al. 2019). In lotic and lentic communities, absence of water results in a lower number of aquatic taxa at a given site than when water is present (Leigh and Datry 2017; Rosset et al. 2017; Wissinger et al. 2009). The few studies conducted in alpine lentic and lotic freshwaters identified a reduction of the density and diversity of macroinvertebrates, bryophytes, and high-soil-moisture vascular plant species with hydroperiod decrease (Doretto et al. 2020; He et al. 2016; Sandvik and Odland 2014). Hydroperiod decrease can lead to changes in species distribution (Tolonen et al. 2019) and local extinction of species, for example, amphibians, bryophytes, and aquatic vascular plants (Carlson et al. 2020; He et al. 2016; Sandvik and Odland 2014).

Here, we found that most (90%) studied species occupancy probabilities decreased when summer drying increased, corroborating previous studies on fishes and amphibians (Ogston et al. 2016; Walls et al. 2013). This was notably the case for species from the three biological groups we studied. From Odonata, amphibians, and macrophytes, some species are known to be summer drying resistant. For example, larvae of *Coenagrion hastulatum* can resist desiccation and *Somatochlora alpestris* is able to grow without open water, both by burrowing into the mud or damp peat (Heidemann and Seidenbusch 2002; Kury and Wildermuth

2013). In macrophytes, amphiphyte groups with the ability to produce both terrestrial and aquatic forms, or to grow leaves underwater and in air (phenotypic plasticity in heterophylly), may be adapted to avoid short-term drying (De Wilde et al. 2017; Wells and Pigliucci 2000; Zelnik et al. 2021): *Caltha palustris* (Dorotovičová, 2013), *Juncus* sp., and *Carex* sp. (Casanova 1997). However, like all studied species, drying-resistant species occupancy probabilities decreased as summer drying increased. This is probably because thresholds in drying resistance exist, as found in rivers and streams, for example (Stubbington and Datry 2013).

We found here that, as the length of the winter ice stage increased, the occupancy probabilities of most (83%) of the studied species decreased. This was the case for species from two of the biological groups studied (Odonata and macrophytes). The low occupancy probabilities of these species associated with a short length of winter ice stage could be explained by exposure to extreme air temperature, insufficient food resources in winter, low nutrients when the photoperiod is sufficient for species to break diapause, or the energetic cost to adapt to frequent water state changes (Bale and Hayward 2010). In fact, we showed for Odonata and macrophytes that species occupancy probabilities increased with the length of the winter ice stage up to a threshold, aligning with findings from ice enclosure stress-tolerant aquatic invertebrates and vascular plants (Green et al. 2022; McAllen 1997; Renman 1989). In fact, alpine freshwater species are adapted to a water-freezing state (Carbonell et al. 2024; Theissinger et al. 2013). These harsh conditions can help limit colonization by species from warmer habitats, including potential new competitors or predators (Carbonell et al. 2024). Nevertheless, when the threshold was reached, the occupancy probabilities of species decreased because long-term freezing still represents a possible lethal freezing risk for these species (Boudot et al. 2014; Hotaling et al. 2021; Rehm et al. 2021). Amphibians were the sole group examined whose species occupancy probabilities were unaffected by the potential long duration of these stresses, and this is probably because they are adapted to survive long-term freezing, as found in different studies (Costanzo and Lee 2013; Storey 1999; Yokum et al. 2023).

A shortened hydroperiod lowered the occupancy probabilities of more studied species (summer hydroperiod: 90%; ice-stage duration: 83%) than an increase in summer water temperature (summer temperature warm: 30%; minimum temperature: 40%). However, the main predictions of the effects of climate change on species distributions do not use hydroperiod, as these data are usually not available at a large scale, but are based on temperature and, to a lesser extent, precipitation scenarios (DeWeber and Wagner 2018). Then, main predictions may underestimate the effect of climate change on the distribution of numerous alpine species. It is important to incorporate alpine pond hydroperiod variation



with climate change, considering temperature and precipitation scenarios, into models to predict alpine pond species distribution. Because alpine ponds are understudied (Khan and Baig 2017), their hydroperiod is poorly known, but improving such knowledge is necessary to better understand the effects of climate change on species distributions. Using existing data could lay the foundations to develop a model of alpine pond hydroperiods adapted to different regions. Long-term monitoring of alpine pond hydroperiods could help to improve it.

### Isolation constrains species occupancy probabilities

Theoretical models suggest that limiting connectivity will reduce colonization or recolonization and increase local extinctions in source–sink systems (MacArthur and Wilson 1967). Connectivity decrease should in turn affect metacommunity dynamics (sensu Leibold et al. 2004). Aquatic species are particularly susceptible to these isolation threats, altering their movement and survival (Serrano et al. 2020). In lotic and lentic ecosystems, dried hydrologic connections act as barriers to species displacement, for example, for fish (Baber et al. 2002; Jaeger et al. 2014; Perkin and Gido 2012) or macroinvertebrates (Bae and Park 2016; Gauthier et al. 2021; Sarremejane et al. 2021). In lentic patchy environments, drying impacts suitable habitat (patch) surface and connectivity between them, for example, for turtles (Kindlmann and Burel 2008; Serrano et al. 2020). To recolonize suitable patches, species need to be able to migrate to connected ones (patches not dried) (MacArthur and Wilson 1967). Decreases of connectivity affect persistence and turnover of species and ultimately lead to changes in their occupancy probabilities (Serrano et al. 2020).

As predicted and in coherence with previous investigations, we showed that decrease of connectivity decreased occupancy probabilities of most studied species. To analyze the effects of connectivity on species occupancy probabilities, we used different structural metrics linked with the patch spatial distribution in the landscape (patch number, patch sizes, and interpatch distances) (Tischendorf and Fahrig 2001; With and Crist 1995). We demonstrated that the number and sizes of patches around a studied patch had significant effects on the occupancy probabilities of fewer species than interpatch topographic distance (83%). We reinforced the previous finding that short topographic distances between patches are more important for maintaining most species populations than dense networks, to survive the rapid effects of climate change, such as isolation caused by drying (Hodgson et al. 2012). Interpatch topographic distances had the same effects on all species of all studied groups (Odonata, Amphibia, and macrophytes). One of our results was that the effects of interpatch topographic distance on the occupancy probabilities were also the same

for non-alpine specialist and alpine specialist species, as demonstrated in previous studies (Fahrig 2017). We showed for these three groups that species occupancy probabilities increased with interpatch topographic distance increase, before decreasing when a threshold was reached. These results illustrate the importance of maintaining the spatial heterogeneity of patches (interpatch distance), as demonstrated in previous studies (Gauze 1934; Huffaker 1958). This allows maintaining the persistence of prey and predator systems with separate prey refuges and dividing food resources in different habitats. It also can reduce the predator and parasitoid dispersal efficiency and decrease the covariance of competing species (Roland 1993). In addition, the distance between patches occupied by a matrix of terrestrial habitat is necessary for species (Duelli 1997), for example, for the maturation at different stages of studied species (Odonata and Amphibia). When the topographic interpatch distances increased, a threshold in occupancy probabilities was reached, probably when it exceeded the dispersal ability of species (MacArthur and Wilson 1967; Makoto and Wilson 2019).

The effect of interpatch topographic distance increase was neutral for the occupancy probabilities of few species. Of these, species with longer distance dispersal such as *Aeshna juncea*, *Aeshna cyanea*, and *Libellula quadrimaculata* are less sensitive to structural connectivity (Pearson and Dawson 2005). *Aeshna juncea* was the only alpine specialist species with a neutral effect of interpatch topographic distance on its occupancy probabilities. Nevertheless, we demonstrated that *Aeshna juncea* required high pond area within 10,000-m buffers to increase its occupancy probabilities. This could be due to its strong flight ability that allows it to travel across valleys to find new ponds. Such studies on connectivity for Odonata are rare, however, so additional studies investigating the genetic structure of this species would be useful in better contextualizing these results.

For *Bufo bufo* and *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*, the densities of ponds and tributaries close (100 m buffer) to the occupied pond were important to maintain their persistence. To increase their occupancy probabilities, it appears that these species may need to be isolated from the other ponds but be able to move to tributaries if conditions are unsuitable in their current living patch.

To improve knowledge about the effects of climate change on current and future distribution of species, interpatch topographical distances need to be included in distribution models. One of the future challenges is to enhance the distribution of ponds and their hydroperiod to limit biases. In fact, small decreases in hydroperiods lead to large decreases in connectivity between habitats in freshwater ecosystems (Baber et al. 2002; Malish et al. 2023; Stanley et al. 1997). Our results and future research will enable us to strengthen existing patch connectivity, identify where patch chains need

to be restored or completed, and thereby increase species resilience to ongoing climate change.

### Climate change mitigation may benefit specialist species most

Consistent with prior research, we predicted that temperature increase would increase the occupancy probabilities of non-alpine specialist species, whereas alpine specialist species occupancy probabilities would decrease (Lindholm et al. 2015; Pallarés et al. 2020; Rosset and Oertli 2011). Contrary to what we expected, our results showed that the relationship between temperature and alpine specialist and non-alpine specialist species occupancy probabilities were similar in terms of slope. This was also the case for hydroperiod and connectivity. However, the forms of the relationships were specific to each factor. We found similar results in studies of the effect of climate change on the presence–absence distribution of amphibians and Insects. In fact, Shadle et al. (2023) compared experimental climate change effects on habitat specialist wood frogs (*Lithobates sylvaticus*) and more generalist spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) (Shadle et al. 2023). They demonstrated that warming accelerates the duration to metamorphosis, while drying leads to diminished body size at metamorphosis in both species. Other authors demonstrated that the insects' distribution trends over time were not significantly affected by species range size across Europe (Engelhardt et al. 2022). Finally, we found that the main difference between alpine specialists and non-alpine specialists was not in the form of their relationship with temperature, but rather in the proportion of species from each of these two groups particularly susceptible to the effects of temperature increase. This was also the case for hydroperiod and connectivity. Indeed, the impacts of temperature increase were observed to affect the occupancy probabilities of more alpine specialist species compared with non-alpine specialists (71% versus 50%). We found similar results in connectivity effects (93% versus 75%). Consequently, our results suggest that the mitigation of climate change effects may be beneficial to a greater number of alpine specialist species than non-alpine specialists.

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**Data availability** All data and scripts necessary to reproduce this analysis are freely available for all purposes (and can be copied, modified, and distributed) via the Data INRAE repository: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.57745/YFE6IJ>.

### Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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