



Rapid Communication

Exposure to moderate concentrations of tropospheric ozone impairs tree stomatal response to carbon dioxide

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 January 2011

Received in revised form

31 May 2011

Accepted 2 June 2011

Keywords:

Betula papyrifera

Carbon dioxide

Ozone

Sap flow

Stomata

Stomatal conductance

ABSTRACT

With rising concentrations of both atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) and tropospheric ozone (O₃), it is important to better understand the interacting effects of these two trace gases on plant physiology affecting land-atmosphere gas exchange. We investigated the effect of growth under elevated CO₂ and O₃, singly and in combination, on the primary short-term stomatal response to CO₂ concentration in paper birch at the Aspen FACE experiment. Leaves from trees grown in elevated CO₂ and/or O₃ exhibited weaker short-term responses of stomatal conductance to both an increase and a decrease in CO₂ concentration from current ambient level. The impairment of the stomatal CO₂ response by O₃ most likely developed progressively over the growing season as assessed by sap flux measurements. Our results suggest that expectations of plant water-savings and reduced stomatal air pollution uptake under rising atmospheric CO₂ may not hold for northern hardwood forests under concurrently rising tropospheric O₃.

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1. Introduction

Plant leaf stomata constitute a crucial interface between terrestrial vegetation and the atmosphere, regulating their exchange of matter and energy. Rising concentrations of both atmospheric carbon dioxide ([CO₂]) and tropospheric ozone ([O₃]; Meehl et al., 2007) are expected to reduce stomatal conductance (g_s), with future atmospheric change thus being projected to reduce plant water use, possibly resulting in increased continental runoff (Betts et al., 2007). Decreased g_s under elevated CO₂ (eCO₂) has also been predicted to have a protective effect by decreasing the flux of O₃ into the plant (Sitch et al., 2007). Reductions in g_s by eCO₂ and elevated O₃ (eO₃) observed in many experiments (Ainsworth and Rogers, 2007; Medlyn et al., 2001; Wittig et al., 2007) are generally attributed to the well-documented primary stomatal closure response to increased intercellular [CO₂] (c_i ; Morison, 1998; Mott, 1988). While eCO₂ directly increases c_i , eO₃ increases c_i through photosynthetic impairment (Wittig et al., 2007). Leaf gas exchange models represent the g_s response to c_i by assuming a tight link between g_s and photosynthesis that acts to maintain an approximately constant intercellular to ambient [CO₂] ratio (Ball et al., 1987; Lening, 1995). These combined stomatal-photosynthesis models are

now frequently employed in ecosystem models (Morales et al., 2005), as well as in Dynamic Global Vegetation Models (DGVM; Prentice et al., 2007) and General Circulation Models (GCM; Pitman, 2003; Sellers et al., 1996) used to predict future climate change.

Ozone may, however, affect stomatal regulation in ways that are independent of the c_i response. Elevated O₃ may directly affect guard cell functioning, leading to stomatal closure in the absence of effects on photosynthesis (Mansfield, 1998; McAinsh et al., 2002). In addition, exposure to eO₃ may disturb stomatal functioning as guard cells and surrounding epidermal cells become damaged (e.g., Mansfield, 1998), causing less sensitive, or 'sluggish' stomatal responses to drought (McAinsh et al., 2002; Pearson and Mansfield, 1993), vapour pressure deficit (VPD; Grulke et al., 2007; Maier-Maercker, 1999; Maier-Maercker and Koch, 1991; Uddling et al., 2009) and light (Barnes and Brown, 1990; Grulke et al., 2007; Reiling and Davison, 1995). In a recent study, Mills et al. (2009) demonstrated that stomatal responsiveness to severe water stress by leaf excision was impaired in two grassland species chronically exposed to eO₃. In the treatment with the highest [O₃], stomata also lost their closure responsiveness to exogenous application of abscisic acid. As signalling in stomatal closure responses to abscisic acid and CO₂ overlap (Ainsworth and Rogers, 2007; Hetherington and Woodward, 2003), there is the possibility that eO₃ may also impair stomatal CO₂ responsiveness. To our knowledge, this hypothesis has not been tested.

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Another poorly understood aspect of stomatal regulation under atmospheric change is whether or not the primary stomatal response to CO₂ acclimates to prevailing growth [CO₂]. It has been suggested that the stomatal CO₂ response may acclimate to maintain its most sensitive range just below growth [CO₂] (Morison, 1998; i.e. within the normally encountered range of *c*_i). If so, this suggests that stomatal responses to CO₂ serve to reinforce stomatal opening and closing at dawn and dusk rather than to adjust the magnitude of *g*_s to varying atmospheric [CO₂]. Stomatal CO₂ responsiveness may also be partially lost in plants grown in eCO₂, as observed in a free-air CO₂ enrichment (FACE) experiment with scrub oak (*Quercus myrtifolia* Willd.; Lodge et al., 2001).

The Aspen FACE experiment (Dickson et al., 2000; Karnosky et al., 2003) with northern hardwood tree communities provides a unique opportunity to study the interacting effects of 40–50% elevation in [CO₂] and [O₃] on forest functioning under ecologically realistic conditions. By investigating the short-term response of *g*_s to altered [CO₂] (540 and 280 μmol mol⁻¹ vs. 380 μmol mol⁻¹) in individual leaves of paper birch (*Betula papyrifera* Marsh.) under controlled environmental conditions, the present study aims to answer the following two questions: (1) Is the primary stomatal response to [CO₂] impaired by chronic exposure to eO₃? (2) Is the short-term stomatal CO₂ responsiveness (in the [CO₂] range studied) reduced in leaves developed under eCO₂? To further assess if possible effect of eO₃ developed in a dose-dependent manner, continuous measurements of sap flux were used to investigate seasonal trends in stomatal control of stand tree water use.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Site description

The study of stomatal CO₂ responsiveness was conducted at the factorial CO₂ and O₃ Aspen FACE experiment near Rhinelander, Wisconsin (45.6°N, 89.5°W) in August 2008. The experiment consists of twelve 30 m-diameter circular plots with three control plots and three replicate plots each receiving eCO₂ (+CO₂), eO₃ (+O₃), or both eCO₂ and eO₃ (+CO₂+O₃). The Aspen FACE experiment was situated on an old agricultural field and the soil is classified as an Alfic Haplorthod with sandy loam soil texture (Dickson et al., 2000). The experiment was planted with 3-to-6-month-old plants at 1 m × 1 m spacing in July 1997 and fumigation treatments have been running during the growing seasons 1998–2008. Each plot is divided into three sub-plots with different tree community composition. The present study was conducted on paper birch (*Betula papyrifera* Marsh.) growing in the south-western sub-plot planted in an alternating pattern of birch and trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides* Michx.; clone 216). Trees included in this study grew within the central core area of the plots, which is buffered from edge effects by five rows of trees on the outer edge of the treatment plots.

Mean annual temperature at Rhinelander is 4.9 °C, mean July temperature is 19.7 °C, and mean annual precipitation is 810 mm (Dickson et al., 2000). Fumigation with CO₂ and O₃ aimed at maintaining target concentrations of 560 μmol mol⁻¹ CO₂ and 1.5 × ambient O₃ during hours when sun elevation was ≥6° from the horizon. Ozone enrichment was restricted to dry canopies on days when the maximum temperature was projected to be at least 15 °C. Ambient and elevated mean growing season daytime (7:00–19:00 h) O₃ concentrations in 2008 were 32.9 and 40.9 nmol mol⁻¹, respectively. Corresponding concentrations in 2006 were 37.1 and 44.9 nmol mol⁻¹.

2.2. Measurements and data analyses

The short-term stomatal response to CO₂ was studied in leaves from 12 excised shoots (one per plot) during 12 days during the period 8 August to 25 August, 2008. Shoots of about 50 cm, taken from current-year shoot growth in the upper fourth of the canopy (but avoiding the top shoot), were excised under water early in the morning when leaves were still wet from dew. They were immediately transported to the on-site laboratory, where one leaf with healthy appearance and insertion number 4–6 from the shoot tip was selected and enclosed in the leaf chamber of a gas exchange system with climate and CO₂ control (LI6400, LI-COR inc., Lincoln, NE, USA). The cut end of the stem was kept under water at all times. Measurements on excised shoots in the laboratory were preferred over field measurements on attached shoots, to avoid confounding influences of diurnal changes in, or treatment effects on, environmental conditions and whole-tree water relations on the leaf-level response studied. The influence from transpiration of the neighboring leaves on the shoot was probably minimal, as their *g*_s was low (data not shown), probably in response to low photosynthetic photon flux density (PPFD) inside the laboratory.

During the entire gas exchange measurements, leaf chamber conditions were set to saturating PPFD (1800 μmol m⁻² s⁻¹), 25 °C leaf temperature, and 1 kPa leaf-to-air vapor pressure deficit. Vapor pressure deficit varied very little during the measurement of a leaf (on average by 0.03 kPa and never by > 0.10 kPa). Preliminary studies (data not shown) indicated that *g*_s remained stable for a few hours under these conditions. After an initial 20 min acclimation period to leaf chamber conditions ([CO₂] = 380 μmol mol⁻¹), a photosynthetic response measurement to varying *c*_i (a so-called A_c curve) was conducted. After the A_c curve, acclimated (i.e. steady-state) *g*_s was measured at leaf chamber [CO₂]s in the following order: 380, 540, 380, 280 and 380 μmol mol⁻¹. In this stomatal CO₂ response measurement, the leaf chamber [CO₂] was changed after *g*_s had reached a steady state with ≤1% change during the preceding 5 min. A minimum acclimation period of at least 30 min was given at each new [CO₂]. The average time between the first and third steady-state measurement at 380 μmol mol⁻¹ was 3 h and the average time inside the leaf chamber was four and a half hours. The mean and minimum *g*_s at the first stomatal response measurement at 380 μmol mol⁻¹ were 0.242 and 0.090 mol m⁻² s⁻¹, respectively. The mean change in *g*_s between the first and second and between the second and third steady-state *g*_s measurements at 380 μmol mol⁻¹ were -9% (standard deviation ± 15%) and +2% (standard deviation ± 19%), respectively. To account for these changes in *g*_s at similar conditions, a baseline of *g*_s at 380 μmol mol⁻¹ was estimated by assuming a linear change in *g*_s over time between the steady-state *g*_s measurements at 380 μmol mol⁻¹. The relative *g*_s at increased or decreased CO₂ was calculated by dividing the steady-state *g*_s measurement at 540 or 280 μmol mol⁻¹ with the estimated 380 μmol mol⁻¹ baseline *g*_s at the time of the 540 or 280 μmol mol⁻¹ steady-state *g*_s measurement (Fig. 1).

Sap flux data for mixed aspen-birch stands in 2006 presented in this study was measured and scaled to the stand level as described by Uddling et al. (2008, 2009). Birch dominated over aspen with respect to biomass and sap flux in control as well as treatment plots (Kubiske et al., 2007; Uddling et al., 2008; unpublished data for 2006).

After initial assurance of lack of significant heterogeneity of variances among treatments according to Cochran's test (Underwood, 1997), data were statistically tested for effects of CO₂ and O₃ and their interaction using two-way analysis of variance. Post-hoc comparison of each individual treatment with control was made using one-tailed (to test if treatments cause weaker response) Student's *t*-test assuming equal variances. Time was included as an additional factor (repeated measures) for sap flux data. Effects were regarded as significant at *P* ≤ 0.10. All tests were performed using SAS Proc GLM, version 9.3.1 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA).

3. Results

The response of *g*_s to a short-term increase in [CO₂] (540 vs. 380 μmol mol⁻¹) was significantly (*P* = 0.033–0.073) stronger in leaves from control plots (-13%) than in leaves from trees exposed to eCO₂ and/or O₃ (-1% to -3%; Fig. 2a), resulting in a significant interaction between CO₂ and O₃ treatment (*P* = 0.090). Excluding the one, two, three or four leaves with the largest changes in *g*_s between the first and second steady-state *g*_s measurements at

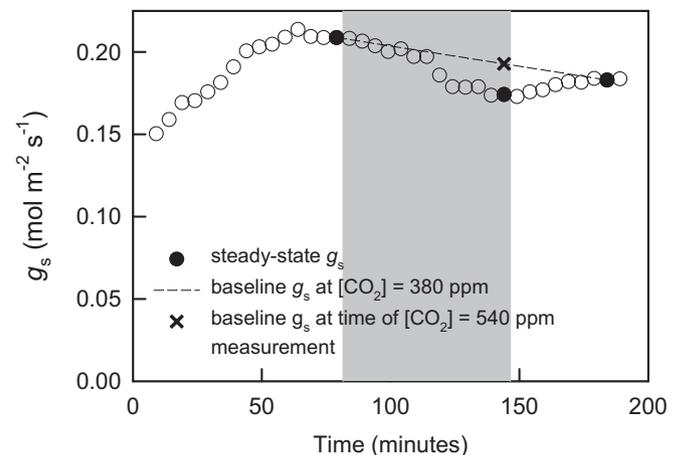


Fig. 1. Measurement of stomatal response to a short-term increase in [CO₂], with illustration of how this response was estimated accounting for a change in steady-state stomatal conductance (*g*_s) at [CO₂] = 380 ppm before and after the measurement of steady-state *g*_s at [CO₂] = 540 ppm. The response to increased [CO₂] was calculated from the steady-state measurement of *g*_s at 540 ppm compared to the estimated baseline *g*_s at 380 ppm at the time of the 540 ppm measurement. Data points are 5 min binned averages. The grey area indicates the period with [CO₂] = 540 ppm.

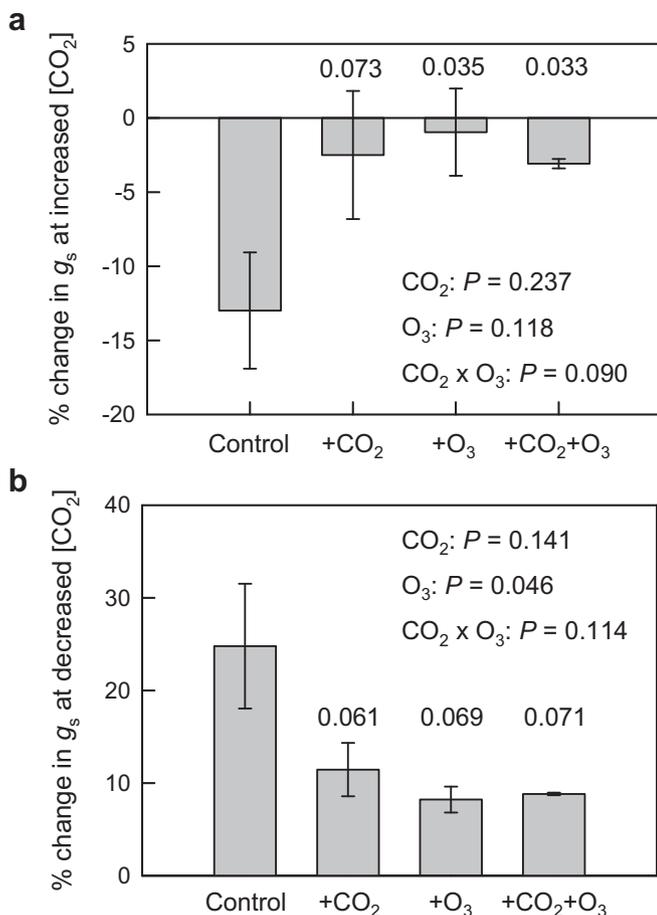


Fig. 2. Percent change (\pm standard error) in stomatal conductance (g_s) to a short-term (a) increase (540 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$) and (b) decrease (280 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$) in $[CO_2]$ compared to g_s at 380 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ $[CO_2]$ in birch grown in ambient air (Control), elevated CO₂ (+CO₂), elevated O₃ (+O₃) or both elevated CO₂ and O₃ (+CO₂+O₃) in the Aspen FACE experiment. Measurements were made on individual leaves under controlled environmental conditions (see text). P values shown are for main effects of CO₂ and O₃ treatment and their interaction (two-way ANOVA) as well as for comparisons of each individual treatment with control (Student's t -test).

$[CO_2]$ of 380 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ resulted in either similar significant CO₂ × O₃ interactions or simple main effects of eO₃. In all cases, leaves grown in eO₃ exhibited significantly smaller responses to increased $[CO_2]$ compared to control leaves, while the response value of the +CO₂ treatment was strongly dependent on the inclusion/exclusion of one leaf with 6% stomatal opening response to increased $[CO_2]$. This implies that the estimated effect of eCO₂ on the stomatal closure response to increased CO₂ was sensitive to the potential problem of g_s changing over time (Fig. 1), but not the finding that this response was impaired by eO₃.

Similarly, the response of g_s to a short-term decrease in $[CO_2]$ (280 vs. 380 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$) was significantly ($P = 0.061$ – 0.071) stronger in leaves from control plots (+25%) than in leaves from trees exposed to elevated CO₂ and/or O₃ (+8% to +11%; Fig. 2b). The main effect of elevated O₃ on the response was statistically significant ($P = 0.046$), while the CO₂ × O₃ interaction was not ($P = 0.114$). For three of the twelve leaves, steady-state g_s data to estimate the stomatal response to a short-term decrease in CO₂ concentration were not available. Excluding the measurement with the largest change in g_s between the second and third steady-state g_s measurements at 380 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ did not qualitatively affect the results.

There was a progressive increase in elevated to ambient O₃ stand-level sap flux ratio from mid June until early September in 2006 (Fig. 3). The O₃ × Time interaction on stand sap flux was highly significant ($P = 0.006$). There was also a highly significant CO₂ × Time interaction on stand sap flux ($P < 0.001$), reflecting an increase in elevated to ambient CO₂ stand sap flux ratio during a very dry period in July (data not shown). The O₃ × Time interaction, however, mostly developed when soil water content was comparatively high during August. In August 2006, volumetric soil water content at 0–20 cm soil depth was $\geq 9\%$ (data not shown), which was the threshold for negative effects of low soil water on stand sap flux in 2004–2005 (Uddling et al., 2010). There was no significant CO₂ × O₃ × Time interaction on stand sap flux ($P = 0.81$). By restricting this analysis to the period of the growing season when canopy leaf area index was at its peak and before the onset of O₃-induced effects on leaf shedding (Karnosky et al., 2005), temporal trends of elevated O₃ on sap flux could be attributed to changes in g_s rather than changes in leaf area index.

There were no significant treatment effects on net photosynthesis at common c_i (266 or 378 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$) or on nitrogen content on a leaf area basis ($P \geq 0.40$; data not shown).

4. Discussion

Results presented here suggest that stomatal responsiveness to CO₂ is reduced by growth in eCO₂ and is impaired by chronic exposure to moderately elevated $[O_3]$ (Fig. 2). Sap flux data indicate that the effect of O₃ is dose-dependent, with stomatal control over transpiration gradually being lost during the growing season (Fig. 3). While previous research has demonstrated that elevated O₃ may cause less sensitive ('sluggish') stomatal responses to drought (McAinsh et al., 2002; Pearson and Mansfield, 1993), VPD (Grulke et al., 2007; Maier-Maercker and Koch, 1991; Uddling et al., 2009), abscisic acid (Mills et al., 2009) and light (Barnes and Brown, 1990; Grulke et al., 2007; Reiling and Davison, 1995), the present study is the first to reveal that elevated O₃ may also impair stomatal responsiveness to CO₂. Although underlying mechanisms were not investigated in this admittedly small study, it is tempting to hypothesize that the observed effect of eO₃ on stomatal CO₂ responsiveness resulted from a general impairment of stomatal

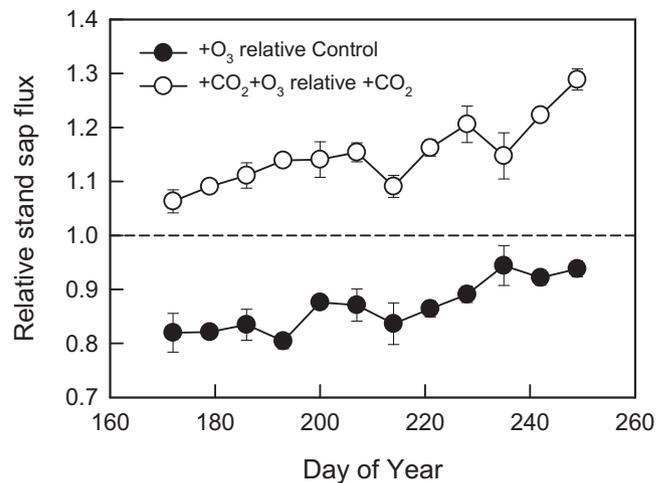


Fig. 3. The effect of elevated O₃ on stand sap flux of mixed aspen-birch communities in the Aspen FACE experiment. Elevated O₃ stands (+O₃) are compared to Control stands, while the combined elevated CO₂ and O₃ treatment (+CO₂+O₃) is compared to the elevated CO₂ (+CO₂) treatment. Standard error bars represent the standard error among days within binned 7-day periods, to illustrate the significance of temporal changes in O₃ effects rather than of treatment effects.

responsiveness by eO_3 (i.e., also responses to drought, VPD and light). Indeed, progressive loss of stomatal control over transpiration during the growing season was observed not only under eCO_2 ($+CO_2+O_3$ vs $+CO_2$), but to a similar extent under ambient CO_2 ($+O_3$ vs. Control; Fig. 3). Furthermore, the stomatal closure response to increasing VPD was less sensitive in pure aspen stands growing under eO_3 in the Aspen FACE experiment (Uddling et al., 2009).

Impairment of stomatal responsiveness to CO_2 in the absence of negative effects on photosynthesis suggests that stomatal functioning is very sensitive to chronic O_3 exposure and is likely already impaired over large areas of industrialized regions where ambient $[O_3]$ equals or exceeds those in eO_3 treatment at in the Aspen FACE experiment (Dentener et al., 2006; Karnosky et al., 2003; Uddling et al., 2008). Loss of stomatal responsiveness may reduce growth and fitness, particularly under conditions of limited water availability. There are two current hypotheses regarding drought by O_3 interactions on plant growth. Either, drought may ameliorate negative effects of O_3 on growth as a consequence of reduced stomatal O_3 uptake under dry conditions, or elevated O_3 may predispose plants to more severe drought stress through loss of stomatal control over transpiration. The first type of interaction, observed for beech productivity in a free-air O_3 enrichment experiment in mature mixed beech-spruce forest (Matyssek et al., 2010), is potentially accounted for in O_3 risk assessments based on stomatal O_3 flux. Flux-based O_3 indices have been shown to perform better than O_3 indices based on external exposure in metaanalyses of experiments with both crops (Pleijel et al., 2007) and forest trees (Karlsson et al., 2007; Uddling et al., 2004). The second type of interaction was observed in the Aspen FACE experiment, where reduced stomatal sensitivity to VPD coincided with more severe drought in pure aspen stands exposed to eO_3 during the dry summer of 2005 (Uddling et al., 2008, 2009). Incorporation of this type of interaction in O_3 risk assessment requires not only additional parameters/functions to represent effects of elevated O_3 on stomatal responses to other environmental variables, but also improved ecosystem representation in O_3 flux modelling to account for coupled soil-plant-atmosphere interactions.

The finding of reduced stomatal CO_2 responsiveness in plants grown under eCO_2 is in agreement with results from a FACE experiment with scrub oak (Lodge et al., 2001). These results suggest that stomatal CO_2 responsiveness of plants grown in current ambient $[CO_2]$ may have little relevance for the adjustment of g_s to rising atmospheric $[CO_2]$. In the Aspen FACE experiment, loss of stomatal CO_2 responsiveness in birch may be part of the explanation of the lack of significant effects of growth under eCO_2 on g_s in aspen-birch stands (Uddling et al., 2009). It may be difficult, however, to reconcile a hypothesis of loss of stomatal CO_2 responsiveness under growth in eCO_2 with the fact that g_s was reduced in most elevated CO_2 experiments conducted (Curtis and Wang, 1998), albeit mostly not in FACE experiments in closed forest stands (cf. Bernacchi et al., 2003 (pre-coppice canopy closure); Gunderson et al., 2002; Keel et al., 2007; Maier et al., 2008; Schäfer et al., 2002; Uddling et al., 2009). It remains a poorly explored possibility, however, that the effect of growth in eCO_2 on g_s is determined by tree plant hydraulics and water balance (e.g. Domec et al., 2009; Schäfer et al., 2002; Uddling et al., 2009) and/or coordination of adjustments of g_s and photosynthetic capacity rather than by the short-term response of stomatal guard cells to CO_2 . Interestingly, negative effects of elevated CO_2 on leaf nitrogen (N) content, photosynthetic capacity and g_s observed in an earlier stage of the Aspen FACE experiment (Noormets et al., 2001; only aspen studied) did not persist after steady-state leaf area index had been reached (Uddling et al., 2009). Mechanisms evolved to maintain water and C:N balance under changing growth conditions but comparatively stable atmospheric $[CO_2]$ are perhaps more likely than temporal

extrapolation of current stomatal CO_2 responsiveness in determining g_s of plants under rising $[CO_2]$, considering that the current $[CO_2]$ already exceeds values affecting plant evolution during the last 14 million years (Tripathi et al., 2009).

The observed loss of stomatal responsiveness to an increase in $[CO_2]$ from 380 to 540 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ in leaves of trees grown in elevated CO_2 (Fig. 2a) is inconsistent with earlier findings of significantly enhanced elevated CO_2 to ambient CO_2 sap flux ratio in aspen and aspen-birch stands during a fumigation gap in June 2004 (Uddling et al., 2009). Possibly, the fumigation gap effect reported earlier was caused by a $CO_2 \times$ VPD interaction on transpiration, as VPD was higher on the day of the fumigation gap than on the reference days used to estimate the effect. It should also be noted that the 90% confidence interval of the stomatal CO_2 response to 540 vs. 380 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ observed here was comparatively large in the $+CO_2$ treatment (-10% to $+5\%$) and does not exclude the $+10\%$ effect of transient exposure of eCO_2 -grown trees to ambient CO_2 (i.e., 380 vs. 540 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$) on sap flux during the fumigation gap. As the effect of eO_3 on stomatal CO_2 responsiveness probably developed gradually over the growing season, the lack of CO_2 responsiveness in the $+CO_2+O_3$ treatment observed in August 2008 (Fig. 2a) does not contradict the earlier finding of a fumigation gap effect in June 2004.

In conclusion, our results demonstrate that the stomatal responsiveness to CO_2 may be significantly reduced in leaves from trees grown under eCO_2 and/or eO_3 concentrations. Further study of stomatal impairment/acclimation under altered trace gas composition is critically needed, as findings reported here potentially have strong implications for the understanding and prediction of plant functioning and vegetation-atmosphere interactions under atmospheric change.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by Ångpanneföreningens Forskningsstiftelse, The Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in Göteborg (KVVS) and Helge Ax:son Johnssons Stiftelse. Forest water balance and carbon cycling research at Aspen FACE was supported by USDA NRI (now AFRI-NIFA) grants 2001-35107-11262 and 2004-35102-16723 to John S King. The last author was supported by the Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning (Formas) and the strategic research area Biodiversity and Ecosystem services in a Changing Climate (BECC). Technical assistance in the field by Ronald M. Teclaw is gratefully acknowledged. The Aspen FACE Experiment is funded principally by the Office of Science (BER), US Department of Energy, with additional support from the USFS Global Change Program, Michigan Technological University, the Canadian Forest Service and the USFS Northern Research Station.

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