

# LegacyPollen 1.0: A taxonomically harmonized global 1Late Quaternary pollen dataset of 2831 records with standardized chronologies

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**Abstract.** Here we describe the LegacyPollen 1.0, a dataset of 2831 fossil pollen records with metadata, harmonized taxonomy, and standardized chronologies. A total of 1032 records originate from North America, 1075 from Europe, 488 from Asia, 150 from Latin America, 54 from Africa, and 32 from the Indo-Pacific. The pollen data cover the Late Quaternary (mostly the Holocene). The original 10,110

26 pollen taxa names (including variations in the notations) were harmonized to 1002 [terrestrial taxa](#)  
 27 [\(including Cyperaceae\) taxa](#), with woody taxa and major herbaceous taxa to genus level and other  
 28 herbaceous taxa to family level. The dataset is valuable for synthesis studies such as taxa areal  
 29 changes, vegetation dynamics, human impact (e.g., deforestation), and climate change at global or  
 30 continental scales. The harmonized pollen and metadata as well as the harmonization table are  
 31 available from PANGAEA (<https://doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.929773>; Herzschuh et al.,  
 32 2021a). R code for the harmonization is provided at Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5910972>;  
 33 Herzschuh et al., 2022) so that datasets at a customized harmonization level can be easily established.

34

## 35 1 Introduction

36 ~~Large~~[Broad-scale palaeo-proxy databases provide important opportunities for making comparisons of](#)  
 37 ~~palaeoenvironmental synthesis studies~~ [comparison](#) ~~and for palaeodata-model validation, where~~  
 38 ~~harmonized data processing is the foundation~~[Global and regional palaeo-proxy databases and](#)  
 39 ~~repositories are fundamental to palaeoclimatological and palaeoenvironmental synthesis studies and~~  
 40 ~~Earth system model validation~~ (Gaillard et al., 2010; [Cao et al., 2013](#); Trondman et al., 2015). Several  
 41 continental fossil pollen databases have been successfully established (Gajewski, 2008), for example,  
 42 the European Pollen Database (EPD; <http://www.europeanpollendatabase.net/index.php>, last access:  
 43 [1 July 2020](#)), the North American Pollen Database (NAPD; ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~;  
 44 <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/products/paleoclimatology>, last access: [1 July](#)  
 45 <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/paleo/napd.html>) ~~or~~ [and](#) the Latin American Pollen Database (LAPD;  
 46 <http://www.latinamericapollendb.com/>, last access: [1 July 2020](#) ~~http://www.latinamericapollendb.com~~).  
 47 In recent years, efforts have been made to integrate such databases into the Neotoma Paleoecology  
 48 Database (<https://www.neotomadb.org/>, last access: [1 April 2021](#) ~~https://www.neotomadb.org/~~; Williams  
 49 et al., 2018), which provides a global collection of pollen data among other palaeoenvironmental proxy  
 50 data. Furthermore, fossil pollen datasets for China and Mongolia (Cao et al., 2013; Herzschuh et al.,  
 51 2019) and Siberia (Cao et al., 2020) have been compiled.

52 The numerous pollen records available in open databases, however, are not yet consistent concerning  
 53 data type (e.g., pollen counts or percentages), pollen taxonomy, and nomenclature (Fyfe et al., 2009;  
 54 Cao et al., 2013) and neither ~~were~~ [are](#) their metadata approved and harmonized. For example,

55 palynologists identify pollen taxa to different taxonomic levels ranging from (sub-)species to order,  
56 depending on the purpose of their study and the differentiability and preservation of the pollen grains.  
57 Accordingly, some efforts have been made to harmonize taxonomies of pollen taxa in the databases  
58 (Fyfe et al., 2009; Giesecke et al., 2019; ~~Githumbi et al., 2021~~; Mottl et al., 2021; ~~Githumbi et al., 2022~~),  
59 However, a general framework is needed that can be applied to existing and newly published records.  
60 Here we present LegacyPollen 1.0, a global taxonomically harmonized pollen dataset along with  
61 standardized metadata from 2831 sites for which recent chronologies have also been established (Li et  
62 al., 2022). This dataset is based on a general framework and implemented in R, which allows  
63 customized datasets to be built as well as the inclusion of new pollen records. The LegacyPollen 1.0  
64 dataset is available at PANGAEA (<https://doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.929773>; Herzschuh et  
65 al., 2021a) and provides both count and percentage pollen data. We also provide the R code and the  
66 taxa harmonization table at Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5910972>; Herzschuh et al., 2022).  
67

## 68 2. Methods

### 69 2.1 Data sources

70 We initially downloaded 3147 late Quaternary fossil pollen records (including dating) from the Neotoma  
71 Paleocology Database (Neotoma hereafter; ~~last access: April 2024~~) using the *Neotoma* package in R  
72 (Goring et al., 2019; R Core Team, 2020). As the spatial coverage of Neotoma records in certain regions  
73 is poor, for example, in China and Siberia, these records were supplemented by 324 records compiled  
74 by Herzschuh et al. (2019) and Cao et al. (2013, 2020) and our own data (AWI, Alfred Wegener Institute)  
75 ~~a few new records (AWI)~~. Out of this pool, we selected 2831 records, including both raw (94.2%) and  
76 digitized (5.8%) data, for which standardized chronologies could be established (Li et al., 2022).

### 77 2.2 Metadata processing

78 After checking the metadata of all records from the Neotoma and Asian datasets, we implemented the  
79 following modifications: 1) we evaluated the units of the provided depth information (~~meter/millimeter~~  
80 ~~to centimeter~~) of all records and contacted Neotoma to correct the depth information of one record  
81 (Dataset-ID 27027); 2) we checked each record's archive type (e.g., peat, lake) based on its site

82 description from Neotoma or original publication; and 3) we integrated two records (Dataset-ID 835,  
83 3127) into a combined record (Dataset-ID 70001).

84 We collected the sample ages from the chronologies provided by Li et al. (2022), which were newly  
85 established for all 2831 records using a standardized approach. Li et al. (2022) present estimated ages  
86 for each centimeter~~tree~~. For those records with sample depth at a sub-centimeter~~tree~~ scale, we applied a  
87 linear interpolation to assign ages for each sample, performed in R (R Core Team, 2020).

## 88 2.3 Pollen data processing

### 89 2.3.1 Pollen taxa harmonization

90 Only terrestrial pollen taxa (including ~~Cyperaceae~~Cyperaceae) were taken into account, ~~whilst~~  
91 excluding aquatic pollen taxa as well as spores from mosses, ferns, fungi, and algae. First, we  
92 standardized the taxon nomenclature. ~~For doing~~To do so, we~~We~~ set up a master table containing all  
93 pollen taxa names from the 2831 records and made names consistent (e.g., 'betula' to 'Betula'), italics  
94 for all taxa under family level (e.g., 'Artemisia' to 'Artemisia'), abbreviation (e.g., 'P. pumila' to 'Pinus  
95 pumila'), synonym (e.g., 'Gramineae' to 'Poaceae'), wrong spelling (e.g., 'Aluns' to 'Alnus'). This master  
96 table is published in a machine-readable data format on PANGAEA  
97 (<https://doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.929773>); in the "Further details" section; Herzschuh et al.,  
98 2021a). Second, we harmonized the pollen taxa according to the classification of the *Angiosperm*  
99 *Phylogeny Group IV* system ([APG IV; The Angiosperm Phylogeny Group et al., 2016](#)) and the  
100 [Gymnosperm Database \(https://www.conifers.org/\)](#), ~~a modern molecular-based flowering plant~~  
101 ~~taxonomy system (The Angiosperm Phylogeny Group et al., 2016)~~. Woody taxa were harmonized to  
102 genus level as well as some very common herbaceous taxa such as *Artemisia*, *Thalictrum*, and *Rumex*.  
103 All other herbaceous taxa were harmonized to the family level. The various pollen taxa of heather plants  
104 were summarized at the order level as Ericales.

### 105 2.3.2 Pollen data type standardization

106 Although most pollen records contain the count data (~~in the following named the~~'raw' data ~~hereafter~~),  
107 the 'pollen counts' for those without raw pollen counts were back-calculated using the pollen  
108 percentages and assuming a terrestrial pollen sum of 300 pollen grains, as most of the publications do  
109 not provide a pollen sum. ~~Alternatively, the back-calculation of the pollen sum could be based on more~~

110 ~~elaborated methods (e.g., the `countSum` R-function (<https://github.com/richarditelford/countSum>)).~~We  
 111 replaced the original taxon name with its harmonized name and summed up all counts of the  
 112 harmonized taxa for each sample. As we only consider terrestrial plant taxa, some samples in records  
 113 may contain no pollen counts, and those samples were excluded from the harmonized dataset. We then  
 114 recalculated the terrestrial pollen percentages for each sample based on their total sum.

115

### 116 3. Structure of the LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset

#### 117 3.1. Structure of site metadata

118 ~~The metadata for each site in the LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset includes the following: The LegacyPollen~~  
 119 ~~1.0 metadata of 2831 records are provided for each pollen sample. These include the dataset identifier~~  
 120 ~~(ID) (LegacyPollen 1.0), event name (mostly equivalent to the Neotoma or sample name codes), if~~  
 121 ~~available, site ID (in the source datasets), data source, site name, geographical coordinates, site~~  
 122 ~~description (from original publication/Neotoma), archive type (e.g., peat, lake sediment core), source of~~  
 123 ~~data, and pollen data type (raw counts/percentages). Event (PANGAEA dataset identifier), Data Source,~~  
 124 ~~Data Type (raw or digitized), Site ID (in the source datasets), Dataset ID (in the LegacyPollen 1.0~~  
 125 ~~dataset), Site Name, Location (longitude, latitude, elevation, and continent), Archive Type (e.g., peat,~~  
 126 ~~lake sediment core), Site Description (from original publication/Neotoma), and Reference. All site-~~  
 127 ~~specific metadata are available at PANGAEA (<https://doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.929773>;~~  
 128 ~~Herzschuh et al., 2021a) in the "Further details" section ("[Site metadata of LegacyPollen 1.0](#)~~  
 129 ~~[dataset.csv](#)Description of sampling sites"). Sample-specific metadata including depth, sample age~~  
 130 ~~(according to Li et al., 2022; minimum age, maximum age, mean age, median age) are provided in the~~  
 131 ~~pollen data files at PANGAEA.~~

#### 132 3.2 Structure of pollen data

133 ~~Sample-specific pollen metadata for the 2831 sites include depth, age (according to Li et al., 2022;~~  
 134 ~~minimum age, maximum age, mean age, median age), and harmonized taxon names with count and~~  
 135 ~~percentage data. The LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset contains one pollen sample in a row and 1002~~  
 136 ~~harmonized taxon names in columns.~~To ease data handling, data files were separated for pollen count  
 137 data and pollen percentages and files for each region (Western North America, Eastern North America,

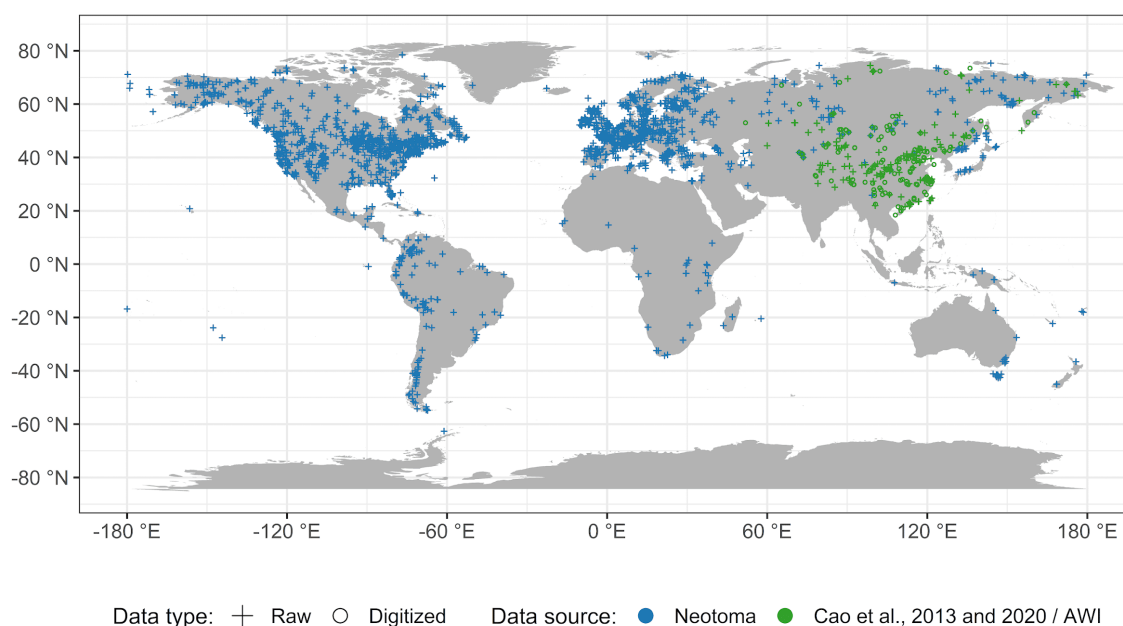
138 Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Indo-Pacific) are provided separately in both -CSV and TXT  
 139 format. In total, 28 pollen data files are published at PANGAEA  
 140 (<https://doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.929773>, in the *'Other version'* section; Herzschuh et al.,  
 141 2021a) and can be joined by the dataset ID with other data products. Furthermore, we also provide the  
 142 taxa harmonization table at PANGAEA (<https://doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.929773>, in the  
 143 *"Further details"* section; Herzschuh et al., 2021).

144

## 145 4. Dataset assessment

### 146 4.1 Spatial and temporal coverage of the dataset

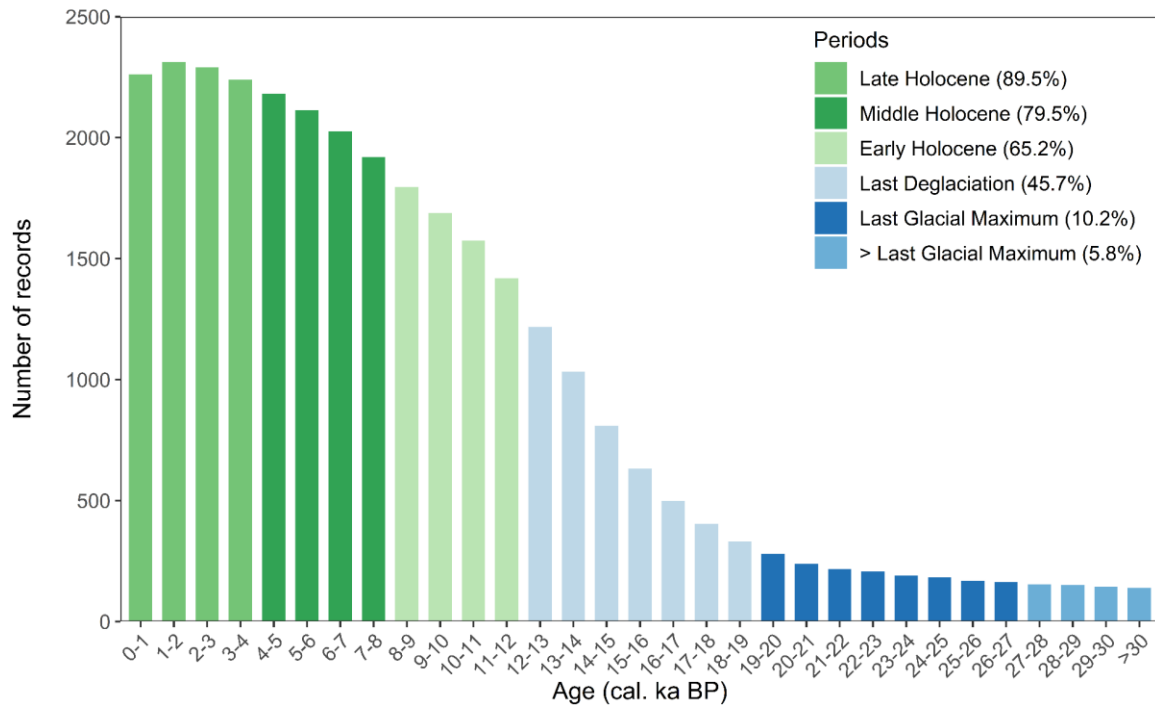
147 Of the 2831 records included in LegacyPollen 1.0, 670 records originate from Eastern North America  
 148 (<105°W; Williams et al., 2000), 362 from Western North America, 1075 from Europe, 488 from Asia,  
 149 150 from Latin America, 54 from Africa, and 32 from the Indo-Pacific (Fig. 1). Most records (2659  
 150 records, 93.9%) are in the Northern Hemisphere, where the main vegetation and climate zones are  
 151 covered.



152

153 **Figure 1.** Map of the 2831 records for which standardized chronologies were established by source  
 154 and data type.

155 As shown in Fig. 2, only 5.8% of the records are available from periods before the Last Glacial  
 156 Maximum (>26.5 cal ka BP), 10.2% cover part of the Last Glacial Maximum (26.5–19.0 cal ka BP;  
 157 Clark et al., 2009), and 45.7% cover part of the Last Deglaciation (ca. 19.0–11.7 cal. ka BP; Clark et  
 158 al., 2012). Almost all records (97.8%) cover part of the Holocene, among them, 65.2, 79.5, and 89.5%  
 159 cover the early Holocene (11.7–8.2 cal. ka BP), middle Holocene (8.2–4.2 cal. ka BP), and late  
 160 Holocene (4.2–0 cal. ka BP), respectively.



161

162 **Figure 2.** Histogram showing the number of available records in distinct time slices.

## 163 4.2 Harmonized taxonomy

164 A total of 10,110 terrestrial pollen taxa or taxa notations were obtained from the 2831 records, which  
 165 we condensed to 1002 families or genera through taxonomic harmonization (Fig. 3; Appendix Fig. 1).

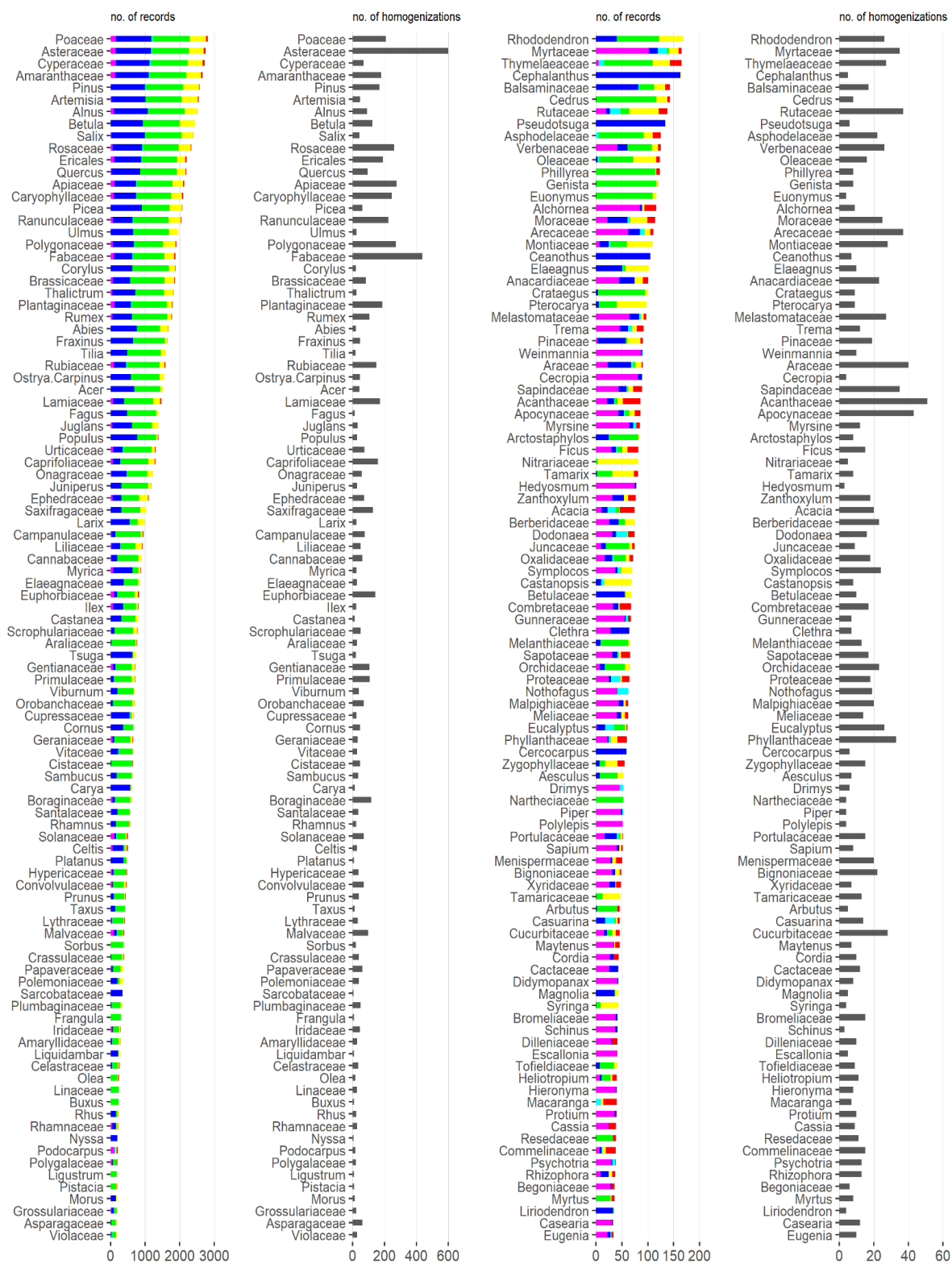
166 On average, 10.8 original taxa or taxa notations are covered by one harmonized pollen taxon, ranging  
 167 from 1 to 599 (median: 2). Overall, Asteraceae (599), Fabaceae (437), and Apiaceae (276) are the  
 168 pollen taxa with most variants.

169 The biggest difference in taxa names and notations before and after harmonization can be found in  
 170 Europe with a mean of 42 variants per harmonized taxon and in Eastern and Western North America  
 171 (average of 22) with both [continents-regions](#) also exhibiting the highest record density (Fig. 4). A high  
 172 amount of tropical and subtropical tree and shrub taxa can be found in the Southern Hemisphere, which

173 are harmonized to genus level and therefore subsume to fewer harmonized taxa, and overall have a  
174 higher taxa diversity than the Northern Hemisphere continents. In the Southern Hemisphere, the most  
175 taxa and variants are harmonized for Fabaceae as this is the most common family found in tropical  
176 rainforests and dry forests of Latin America and Africa.

177 Europe has the most harmonizations of herbaceous taxa from open landscapes: e.g., Asteraceae,  
178 Apiaceae, or Caryophyllaceae. In North America and Asia, several species or species groups of major  
179 woody taxa are harmonized to their respective genus level, e.g., *Alnus* and *Acer* in North America, or  
180 *Betula* and *Quercus* in Asia. The *Pinus Haploxylon* and *Diploxylon* subgenera are subsumed into the  
181 genus level *Pinus*, as the differentiation to subgenera level is not provided consistently.



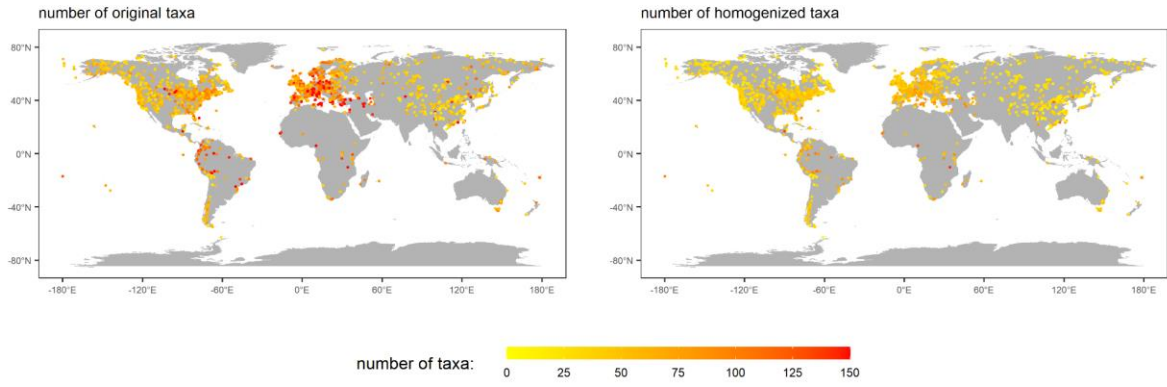


182

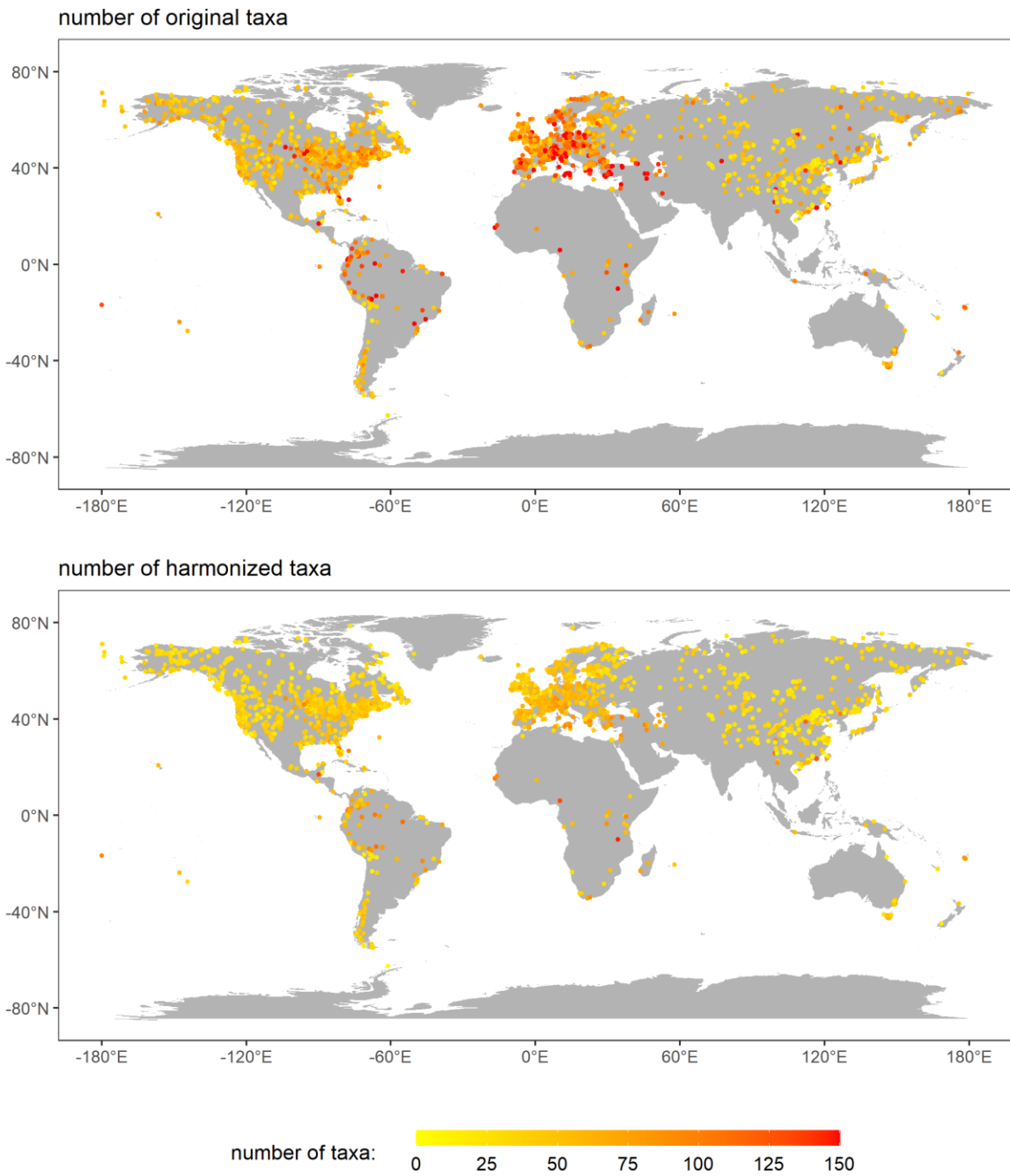
183 **Figure 3.** Number of records with taxa occurrences (per continent) and number of subsumed variants

184 per harmonized taxon. The figure shows the top 200 taxa with the highest number of records in the

185 dataset. A full overview of all taxa is given in Appendix Fig. 1.



186



187

188 **Figure 4.** Number of taxa before and after harmonization (number of taxa > 150 were all grouped into  
189 the class of 150).

190

## 191 5. Discussion

### 192 5.1 Quality of the LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset

193 To our knowledge, LegacyPollen 1.0 is the largest harmonized fossil pollen dataset including more than  
194 twice the number of records ~~included~~ integrated in previously published datasets (e.g., Fyfe et al. (2009):  
195 1032 records; Trondman et al. (2015): 636 records; Marsicek et al. (2018): 642 records; Giesecke et al.  
196 (2019): 749 records; Mottl et al. (2021): 1181 records; Githumbi et al. (~~2021~~2022): 1128 records).  
197 Several regions have poor pollen-record coverage either because no records are available due to the  
198 scarcity of suitable archives (e.g., continental interiors) or because available records were not compiled  
199 and integrated into Neotoma. Ongoing initiatives on compilation of pollen data from Africa and Latin  
200 America will allow a straightforward extension of the LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset using the provided  
201 framework.

202 Representing a further advantage, the LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset is accompanied by consistent  
203 metadata allowing for subsetting of the dataset. Aside from information about the location and archive  
204 type, the metadata also includes sample ages that were inferred from recently revised chronologies (Li  
205 et al., 2022) along with their age uncertainties (i.e., output from BACON; Blaauw and Christen, 2011)  
206 and the framework and R code also allows a customized reestablishment of the age-depth models.

207 Generally, temporal coverage is good since about 14 cal. ka BP. Rather few records cover the glacial  
208 period, which is mainly due to an absence of archives as many lakes and peatlands were dry, or covered  
209 by ice-sheets. Many Asian records cover the Marine Isotope Stage 3 compared with Europe and North  
210 America.

211 Taxonomic harmonization is required for multi-site synthesis studies (Fyfe et al., 2009; Trondman et  
212 al., 2015; Marsicek et al., 2018; Herzschuh et al., 2019; Routson et al., 2019; ~~Githumbi et al., 2021~~;  
213 Mottl et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021; Githumbi et al., 2022). This is particularly true when numerical  
214 approaches are applied that measure compositional dissimilarity between pollen spectra, for example,  
215 between fossil and modern sites for climate reconstructions using the Modern Analogue Technique or

216 regression methods, or among fossil records for beta-diversity studies (Birks et al., 2012). If taxa are  
217 not harmonized, an inferred high dissimilarity between two spectra may originate just from differences  
218 in taxa nomenclature. On the other hand, if all taxa are harmonized to a too high taxonomic level, the  
219 ecological signal might be lost (Giesecke et al., 2019). We applied an intermediate level of  
220 harmonization taking growth-form (i.e., woody vs. non-woody) as additional guidance. We assume that  
221 our approach best reflects the typical presentation of pollen data which is mainly limited by the pollen  
222 morphological features visible at 400x magnification using light microscopy and the typical precision in  
223 taxa identification of most pollen analysts.

## 224 **5.2 Potential uses of LegacyPollen 1.0**

225 LegacyPollen 1.0 can be used for a variety of palaeoenvironmental synthesis studies including  
226 reconstructions of taxa distributions, climate, and biome change, which can be used for palaeo-model  
227 validation (Gaillard et al., 2010; Cao et al., 2013; Trondman et al., 2015; Cao et al., 2020; Mottl et al.,  
228 2021).

229 Plant taxa distribution changes based on mapping of pollen taxa can yield information about glacial  
230 refugia and past migration patterns, as, for example, previously implemented for *Quercus* (Brewer et  
231 al., 2002), *Picea* (van der Knaap et al., 2005; Zhou and Li, 2012), *Larix* (Cao et al., 2020), east Asian  
232 tree taxa (Cao et al., 2015), and European broad-leaf forest (Woodbridge et al., 2014; Fyfe et al., 2015).  
233 With the establishment of LegacyPollen 1.0, a Northern Hemisphere-wide analysis of past changes in  
234 distributional ranges is now possible, as would help, for example, to better understand the different  
235 post-glacial colonization patterns of *Larix* in Europe, North America, and Siberia (Herzschuh, 2020).  
236 Such understanding of past range changes can underpin conservation management via the use of  
237 species distribution modelling at a broad scale enhanced by the higher spatial resolution and larger  
238 extent of LegacyPollen 1.0.

239 Studies aiming at broad-scale pollen-based vegetation reconstructions can benefit from the  
240 harmonized LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset including via biomization approaches (Prentice et al., 1996),  
241 multi-site ordination or classification approaches (e.g., two-way indicator species analysis; Hill, 1996;  
242 Fletcher and Thomas, 2007; Connor and Kvavadze, 2009), or approaches relating modern to fossil  
243 datasets (e.g., Modern Analogue Technique; Overpeck et al., 1985). Furthermore, quantitative

244 vegetation reconstructions (e.g., Regional Estimates of Vegetation Abundance from Large Sites  
245 (REVEALS) model; Sugita, 2007) can be easily implemented, as a synthesis of relative pollen  
246 productivity estimates is already available for the Northern Hemisphere (Wieczorek and Herzschuh,  
247 2020). Such quantitative information about taxa covers changes that can be directly compared to  
248 vegetation model outputs (Dallmeyer et al., 2021) at regional to continental scales, which is a potentially  
249 more accurate approach than translating pollen and model outputs first [to](#) biomes (Cao et al., 2019).

250 Pollen-based climate reconstructions are the backbone of palaeoclimate synthesis studies for the  
251 continents (Marcott et al., 2013; Marsicek et al., 2018; Routson et al., 2019; Kaufman et al., 2020a, b).  
252 The reconstruction of mean annual temperature ( $T_{\text{ann}}$ ), mean annual precipitation ( $P_{\text{ann}}$ ), and mean  
253 temperature of July ( $T_{\text{July}}$ ) using LegacyPollen 1.0 as input is an ongoing [LegacyClimate 1.0](#) project  
254 [\(Herzschuh et al., 2021b\)](#). This will substantially increase the number of records and close data gaps  
255 in the global temperature datasets and thus enable the evaluation of climate simulations at a  
256 hemispheric scale (Wu et al., 2013; Hao et al., 2019). It will contribute to the “Holocene conundrum”  
257 debate (Liu et al., 2014) and to the discussion of the relationship between temperature and precipitation  
258 change (Trenberth, 2011; Routson et al., 2019).

259 Human activities are an important driver of vegetation change in addition to climate and other natural  
260 forces (Ellis and Ramankutty, 2008; Mottl et al., 2021; Pavlik et al., 2021). [Deforestation during the](#)  
261 [Holocene period is](#) ~~At the Holocene time scale, deforestation is~~ of particular relevance which, with the  
262 help of the LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset, can now be investigated at the hemispheric scale. The  
263 harmonized chronologies of the LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset allow for the analysis of similarities and  
264 dissimilarities in the temporal pattern of deforestation between continents.

## 265 **6 Data and code availability**

266 The data are published in the PANGAEA repository under PANGAEA  
267 <https://doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.929773> in the “*Other version*” section ~~;~~ [\(Herzschuh et al.,](#)  
268 [2021a\)](#) in both comma-separated values (.CSV) and tab-delimited text (.TXT) formats for LegacyPollen  
269 1.0 dataset of counts per continent and LegacyPollen 1.0 dataset of percentages per continent. Site  
270 ~~and pollen~~-metadata, as well as a taxa harmonization master table, are provided in the “*Further details*”  
271 section.

272 The R code for taxa harmonization is stored on Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5910972>;  
273 Herzschuh et al., 2022) along with an example dataset. Downloading pollen data from the Neotoma  
274 Paleoecology Database, harmonizing the pollen taxa, and assigning ages to sample depth data to  
275 create customized datasets can thus be easily done.

276

277 **Author contributions:** UH had the idea, set up the implementation plan, led the study and wrote a first  
278 version of the manuscript together with CL and TB. CL, TB, AP implemented the harmonization  
279 supervised by UH and AA. BH and MW supervised the setup of the dataset and its upload to the  
280 repository and documentation. All authors contributed to the final version of the manuscript.

281 **Competing interests.** ~~The contact author has declared that neither they nor their co-authors have any~~  
282 ~~competing interests. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.~~

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286 ~~the palynologists and geologists who, either directly or indirectly, contributed pollen data and~~  
287 ~~chronologies to the dataset. We would like to express our gratitude to all the palynologists and~~  
288 ~~geologists who, either directly or indirectly by providing their work to the Neotoma Paleoecology~~  
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297

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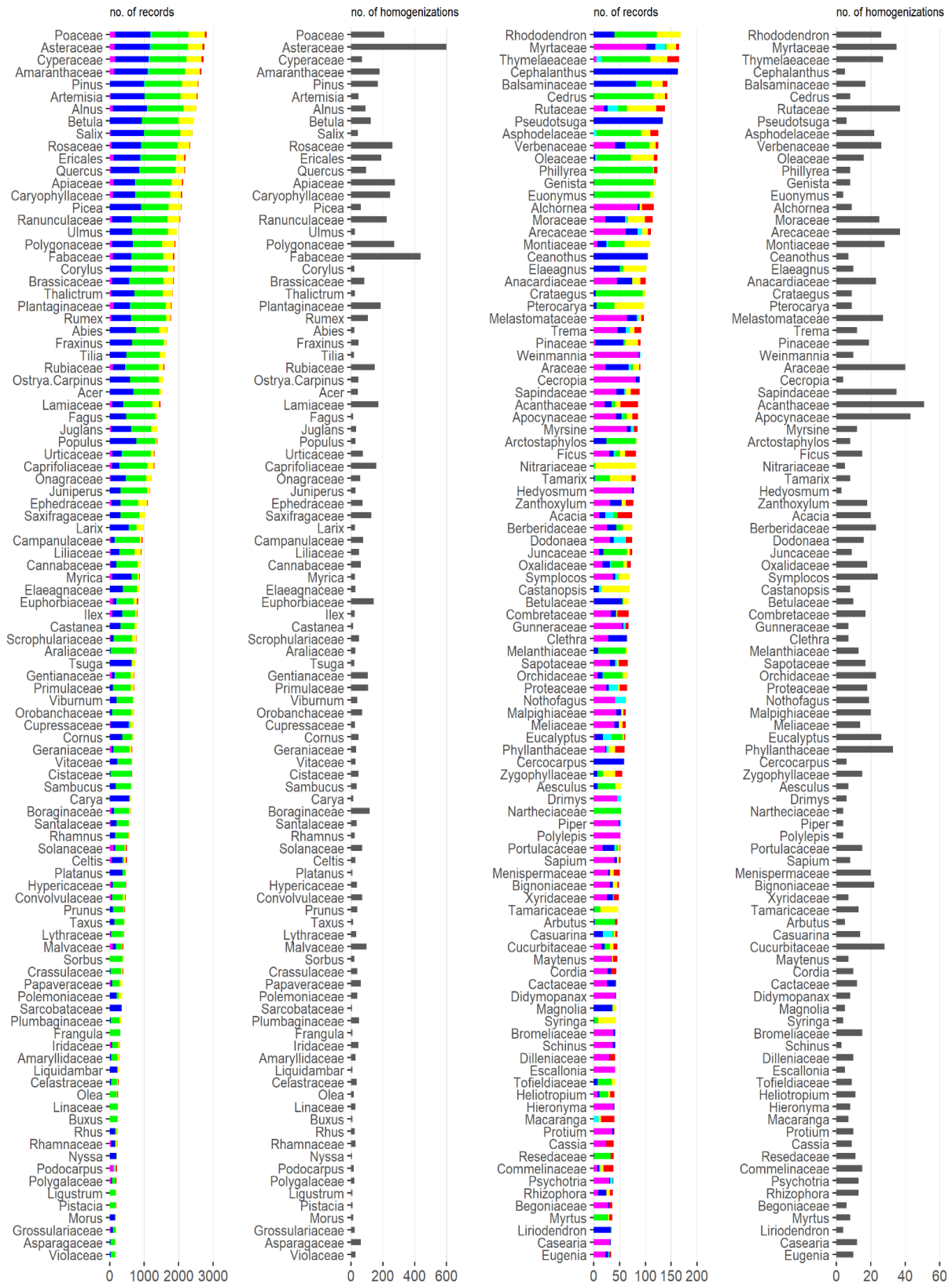
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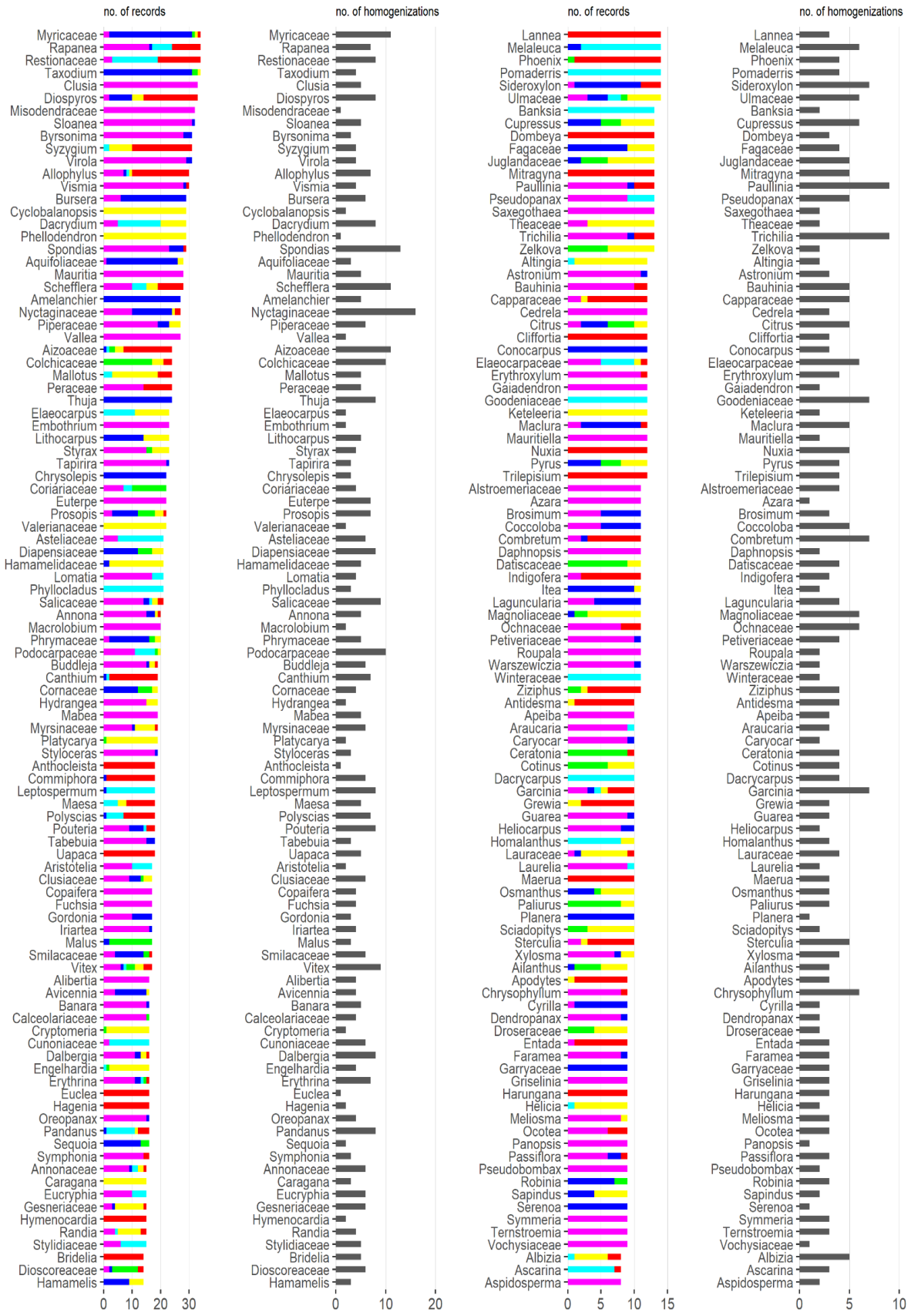
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494 Appendix Figures

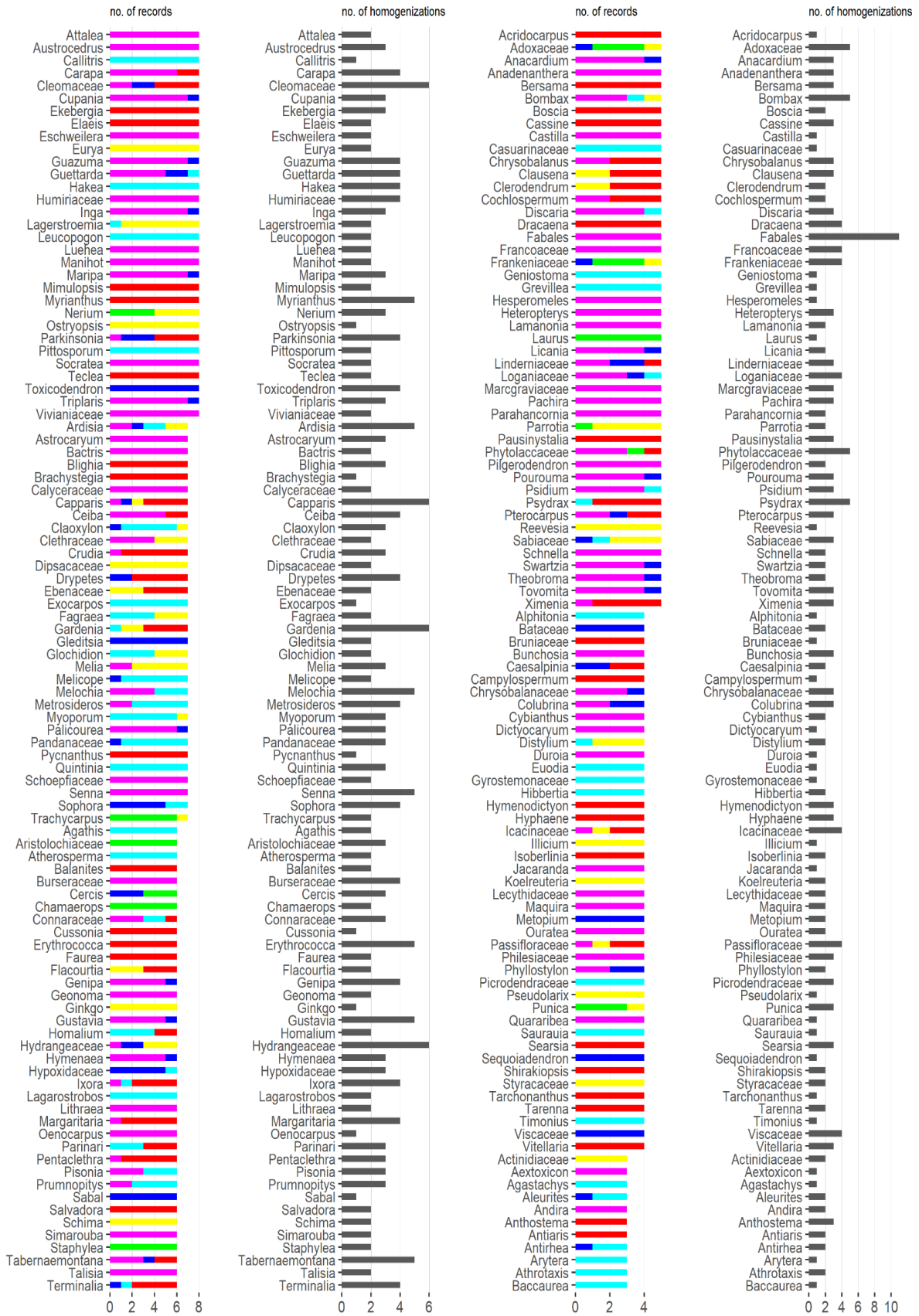


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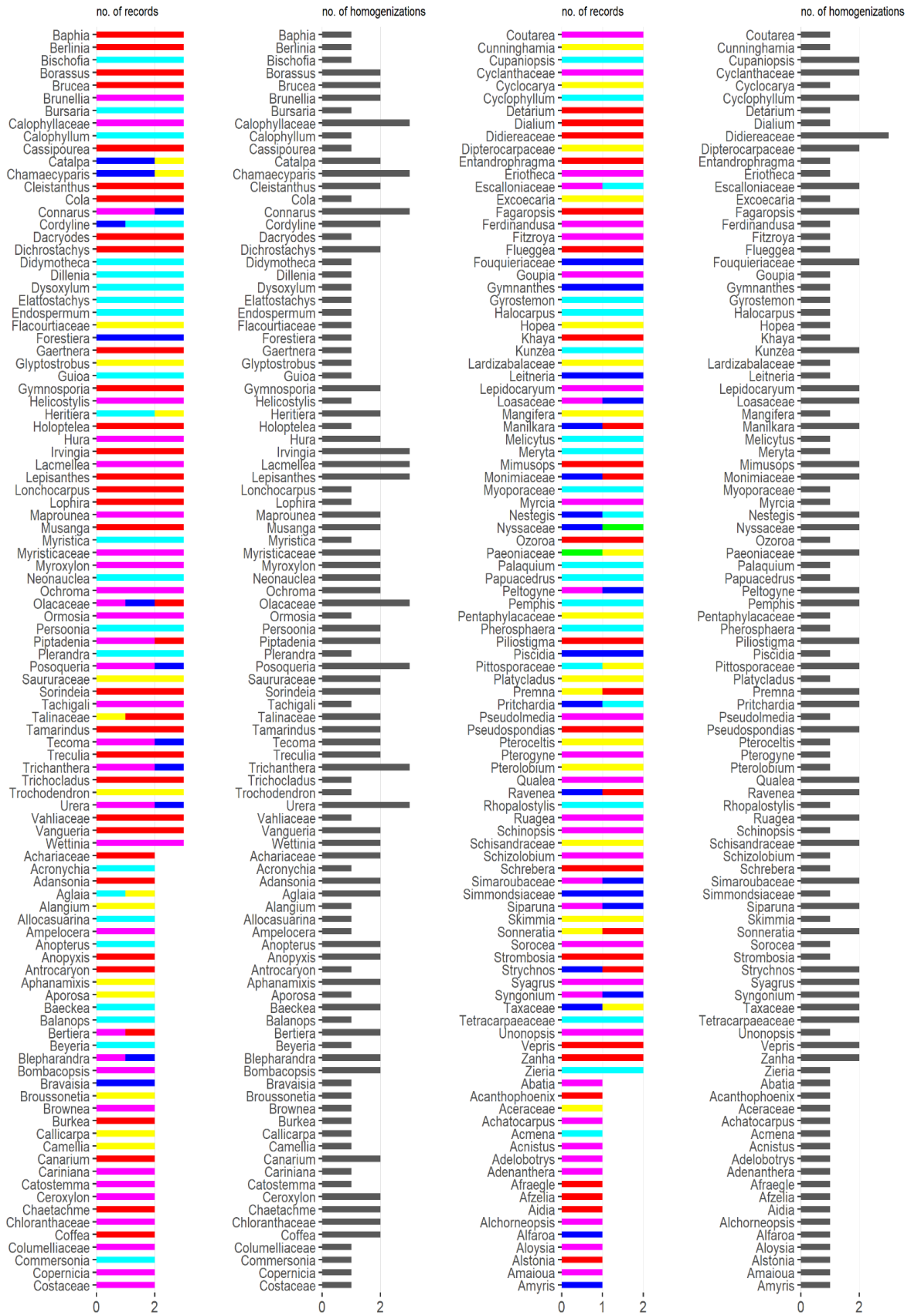


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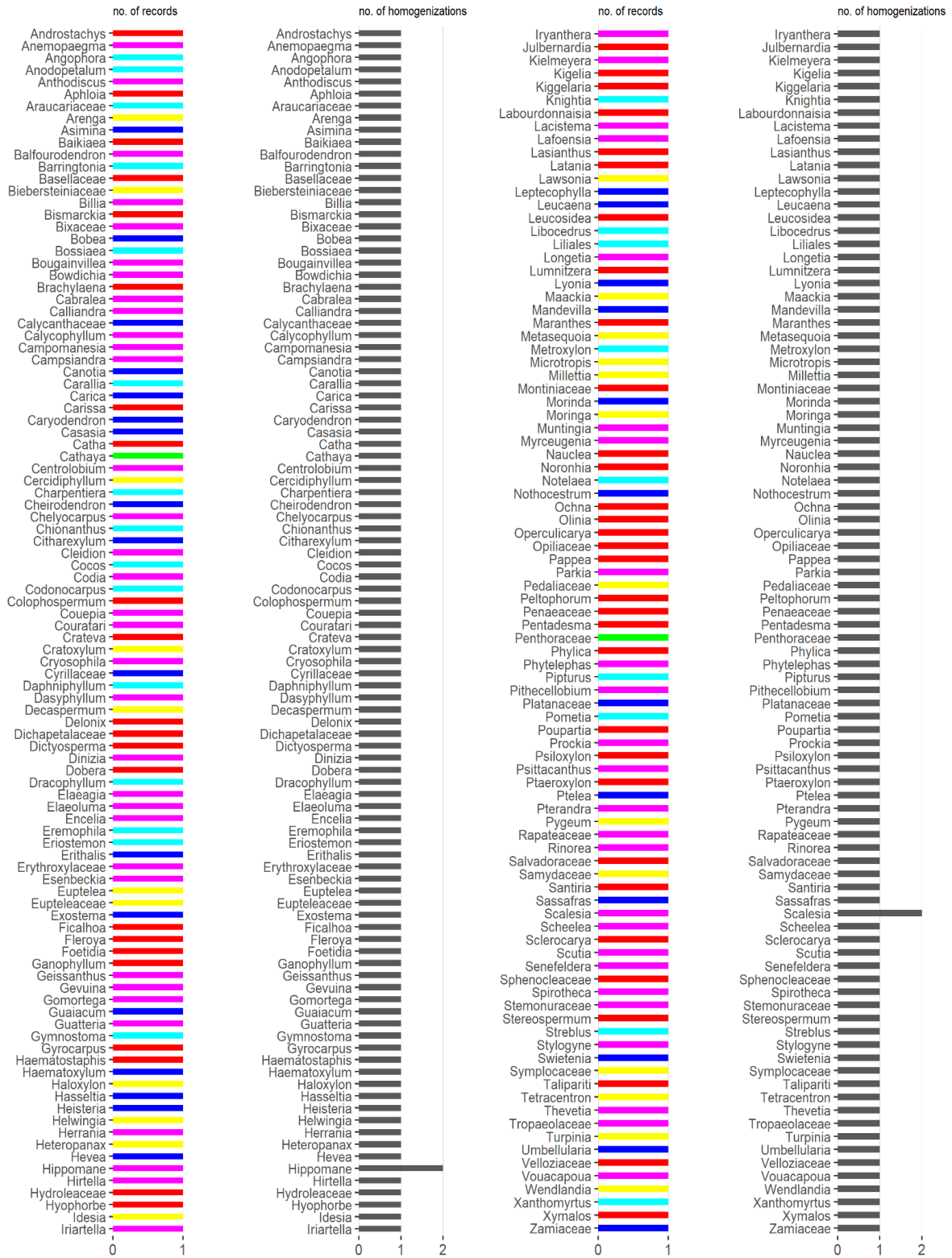




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499

500 **Appendix Figure 1 (complete Figure 3).** Number of records with taxa occurrences (per continent)

501 and number of harmonizations per taxon (full taxon list).