

## Variation in growth and defence traits among plant populations at different elevations: implications for adaptation to climate change

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### Word counts

Abstract = 345; Total (main text) = 7653

*Introduction* = 1310

*Methods* = 2547

*Results* = 1806

*Discussion/Conclusion* = 1992

1 **ABSTRACT**

2 1. Alpine plants occurring at high elevation are vulnerable to ongoing climate change,  
3 yet relatively little is known about the potential for high-elevation species to adapt to  
4 changing environmental conditions. In particular, the extent to which high-elevation plants  
5 will be able to resist predicted increases in the intensity of biotic interactions, such as  
6 herbivory, remains unclear.

7 2. Species distributed across broad elevational ranges provide an opportunity to  
8 investigate evolutionary mechanisms and traits involved in adaptation to varying abiotic  
9 and biotic environments. This study focused on the perennial alpine plant *Arabis alpina* and  
10 combined field surveys and climate-chamber experiments to test for intraspecific genetic  
11 divergence in traits related to growth and defence against herbivores. We screened multiple  
12 populations from low, intermediate and high elevations across a broad geographic area,  
13 characterising differences in growth form, leaf structural traits, palatability for herbivores  
14 and defensive chemistry. We then quantified the proportion of variation explained by  
15 elevation and population-level effects.

16 3. Our results document within-species genetic divergence in multiple traits relevant  
17 for adaptation to the different abiotic and biotic pressures experienced at low and high  
18 elevations. Rates of herbivore damage declined with increasing elevation in the field, but  
19 plants from high- and intermediate-elevation populations were generally more palatable for  
20 specialist herbivores than those from low-elevation populations in feeding assays.  
21 Elevational clines were also observed in several glucosinolate defence compounds, and leaf  
22 herbivory more strongly induced glucosinolates in plants from high-elevation populations  
23 than in those from low-elevation populations. Leaf trichome density and growth form also  
24 diverged among populations contributing to growth-defence phenotypes associated with  
25 different elevations.

26 4. However, populations from similar elevations often differed significantly in both  
27 growth and defence-related traits, with trait variation often better explained by population-  
28 level effects than by elevation alone.

29 5. Synthesis: *Arabis alpina* exhibits patterns of genetic variation in growth and  
30 defence traits consistent with adaptation to different elevations. However, populations from  
31 similar elevations also diverged in many of these ecologically relevant traits. Together, the  
32 extent of the observed trait variation suggests that this alpine species has considerable  
33 potential to adapt to a changing biotic environment.

34

### 35 **KEYWORDS**

36 herbivore, alpine, environmental change, elevation, defense, growth, glucosinolate, *Arabis*  
37 *alpina*

38

39

### 40 **INTRODUCTION**

41 Despite increasing evidence that climate change is affecting the composition of local  
42 communities and altering interactions between species (e.g. Walther, Post et al. 2002, Pauli,  
43 Gottfried et al. 2012, Rasmann and Pellissier 2015), our understanding of the capacity for  
44 species to adapt to resulting changes in the frequency or intensity of biotic interactions  
45 remains limited (Lavergne, Mouquet et al. 2010, Hoffmann and Sgro 2011, Urban, Bocedi  
46 et al. 2016). One well-established approach to investigating species' adaptive potential  
47 entails studying populations distributed along spatial environmental gradients (De Frenne,  
48 Graae et al. 2013, Urban, Bocedi et al. 2016). Furthermore, because the intensity of biotic  
49 interactions is predicted to decline with increasing elevation (Körner 2007, Rasmann,  
50 Pellissier et al. 2014), as well as latitude (Schemske, Mittelbach et al. 2009, De Frenne,  
51 Graae et al. 2013, Anstett, Nunes et al. 2016), species distributed along such gradients

52 provide promising systems for studying adaptation to varying biotic pressures (De Frenne,  
53 Graae et al. 2013, Helsen, Acharya et al. 2017). To date, however, the extent to which  
54 variation in traits relevant for adaptive responses to novel or changing biotic interactions is  
55 predictably distributed along such gradients remains unclear.

56 Alpine environments hold particular promise for exploring such questions, as they are  
57 characterised by large changes in elevation and associated environmental conditions over  
58 relatively short geographic distances (Rasmann, Pellissier et al. 2014, Moreira, Petry et al.  
59 2018). In addition, high-elevation plant communities are thought to be particularly  
60 vulnerable to biotic challenges associated with climatic change (Walther, Post et al. 2002,  
61 Körner 2003), including increasing competition due to upward shifts of previously low-  
62 elevation species (Pauli, Gottfried et al. 2012, Alexander, Diez et al. 2015, Rumpf, Hulber  
63 et al. 2018) and more frequent or novel interactions with invertebrate herbivores (Rasmann  
64 and Pellissier 2015). Because high-elevation species are often unable to disperse to more  
65 suitable (i.e., even higher elevation) environments, they often must adapt to such changes *in*  
66 *situ* or suffer significant population declines (e.g. Cotto, Wessely et al. 2017). However, we  
67 currently have limited empirical data regarding the potential for high-elevation plants to  
68 adapt to the predicted biotic challenges.

69 Invertebrate herbivores represent an important and well-studied class of biotic plant  
70 antagonists, and a growing number of studies have examined variation in plant-herbivore  
71 interactions along elevation gradients (Rasmann, Pellissier et al. 2014). Most such studies  
72 have reported decreasing rates of herbivory with increasing elevation, giving rise to the  
73 prediction of corresponding elevational trends in plant defence investment (Rasmann,  
74 Pellissier et al. 2014, Moreira, Petry et al. 2018). Consistent with this prediction, several  
75 studies have found that plants from higher elevations are more palatable to generalist  
76 herbivores than those from lower elevations (Ereli, Ayres et al. 1998, Pellissier, Fiedler et  
77 al. 2012, Callis-Duehl, Vittoz et al. 2016, Descombes, Marchon et al. 2017). Moreover,

78 constitutive chemical and morphological defences have been observed to decline with  
79 increasing elevation (Løe, Toräng et al. 2007, Pellissier, Roger et al. 2014, Rasmann, Buri  
80 et al. 2014, Zhang, Tonsor et al. 2015). However, a recent review by Moreira *et al.* (2018)  
81 highlighted a significant number of studies showing increasing defence investment with  
82 elevation (Koptur 1985, Rasmann, Pellissier et al. 2014, Abdala-Roberts, Rasmann et al.  
83 2016, De Long, Sundqvist et al. 2016, Buckley, Pashalidou et al. 2019), as well as other  
84 studies reporting no or non-linear associations with elevation (Louda and Rodman 1983,  
85 Rasmann, Pellissier et al. 2014, Dostalek, Rokaya et al. 2016). Furthermore, several recent  
86 studies have shown that different defensive strategies, including tolerance and constitutive  
87 and induced defences, can exhibit contrasting elevational gradients (Abdala-Roberts,  
88 Rasmann et al. 2016, Dostalek, Rokaya et al. 2016, Pellissier, Moreira et al. 2016,  
89 Defosse, Pellissier et al. 2018). Such contrasting elevational trends in defence traits may  
90 partly reflect variation in herbivore pressure among species and populations that is itself  
91 independent of elevation (Moreira, Petry et al. 2018), but also suggest that herbivore  
92 pressure alone is often insufficient to explain variation in defence investment. Instead,  
93 adaptation to varying intensities of abiotic factors along elevation gradients may give rise to  
94 variation in plant defence investment that is independent of, or oppositional to, trends  
95 predicted by elevation alone (e.g. Abdala-Roberts, Rasmann et al. 2016, Pellissier, Moreira  
96 et al. 2016, Galmán, Abdala-Roberts et al. 2018). It is therefore important to consider both  
97 the biotic and abiotic selective forces that can shape patterns of defence investment along  
98 elevation gradients.

99         Adaptive traits that help plants cope with harsh abiotic conditions at high elevations  
100 may also indirectly influence their ability to defend themselves against herbivores. For  
101 example, higher leaf trichome densities can increase plant resistance to UV-B radiation or  
102 arid conditions (Kessler, Siorak et al. 2007, Yan, Pan et al. 2012), which may be adaptive at  
103 high elevations, but could negatively impact herbivore feeding. On the other hand, plants at

104 higher elevations tend to exhibit reduced size and lower specific leaf area than those at  
105 lower elevations, which might facilitate survival under harsh abiotic conditions (Körner,  
106 Neumayer et al. 1989, Byars, Papst et al. 2007, Bello, Lavorel et al. 2013, Read, Moorhead  
107 et al. 2014, Halbritter, Fior et al. 2018), but in this case the effects on herbivores is not  
108 clear. Furthermore, declining resource availability with increasing elevation may impose  
109 more stringent trade-offs between investment in growth and defence (Coley, Bryant et al.  
110 1985, Herms and Mattson 1992, Hahn and Maron 2016). The interacting effects of these  
111 and other abiotic and biotic selective pressures across different elevations (Kergunteuil,  
112 Descombes et al. 2018) may explain the existence of growth-defence “syndromes”  
113 characteristic of species occurring at similar elevations (Defosse, Pellissier et al. 2018,  
114 Kergunteuil, Descombes et al. 2018, Moreira, Petry et al. 2018). Consequently, to  
115 understand the complex selective factors shaping elevational variation in defence  
116 investment, it is necessary to assess variation in multiple growth and defence traits along  
117 broad elevational gradients.

118         In addition, assessing the potential for evolutionary change in these traits requires  
119 determining whether observed phenotypic variation has a genetic basis. Genetic  
120 contributions can be quantified via common-garden experiments, either in the greenhouse  
121 or field, and studies employing this approach have documented within-species genetic  
122 variation in defence traits distributed along elevation gradients (Garibaldi, Kitzberger et al.  
123 2011, Anderson, Perera et al. 2015, Pellissier, Moreira et al. 2016, Rokaya, Dostálek et al.  
124 2016). However, these studies have typically compared plants from pooled sets of high-  
125 and low-elevation populations, making it impossible to assess genetic variation among  
126 populations from similar elevations. Meanwhile, a handful of common-garden studies have  
127 screened population-level variation in chemical defence expression along elevation  
128 gradients (Dostalek, Rokaya et al. 2016, Rokaya, Dostálek et al. 2016), but these did not  
129 explicitly quantify the amounts of trait variation explained by population-level and

130 elevational effects. Indeed, while both elevation-driven and population-level effects on trait  
131 variation are important for understanding potential adaptive responses to biotic change, we  
132 are unaware of any previous study that estimated the relative contribution of each to  
133 variation in defence traits.

134 In the current study, we sampled populations across the elevational range of the  
135 short-lived perennial alpine plant *Arabis alpina* (Brassicaceae) in Switzerland and tested for  
136 genetic variation in several traits related to leaf structure, growth and defence, which were  
137 selected because of their potential importance for resisting or tolerating herbivory. After  
138 assessing elevational trends in rates of herbivore damage in the field, we grew plants from  
139 different populations in a common garden to test for genetic variation in our selected traits.  
140 Specifically, we tested whether specialist invertebrate herbivores performed better on high-  
141 elevation populations than on low-elevation populations, and whether growth and defensive  
142 traits differ among populations from different elevations under controlled growth chamber  
143 conditions. We then quantified the relative effects of elevation and population on variation  
144 in these different growth and defence traits. In addition, we used these data to explore  
145 whether high-elevation *A. alpina* populations exhibit consistent trait combinations that may  
146 influence their potential to adapt to increasing rates of herbivory predicted with ongoing  
147 climate warming.

148

## 149 **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### 150 **Study system background: *Arabis alpina* (Brassicaceae)**

151 *Arabis alpina* is a short-lived perennial species with a wide geographic distribution  
152 in alpine environments across Europe, having colonised the Alps from multiple  
153 Mediterranean refugia following the last glacial period (Koch, Kiefer et al. 2006, Ansell,  
154 Stenoien et al. 2011, Rogivue, Graf et al. 2017). Despite its emergence as a model perennial  
155 species for studying the genetic basis of variation in flowering time and the transition to

156 selfing (Bergonzi, Albani et al. 2013, Tedder, Carleial et al. 2015), relatively little is known  
157 about its interactions with natural herbivores and traits involved in adaptation to different  
158 elevations. Long-range reciprocal transplant experiments between Sweden and Spain have  
159 shown differential survival and reproductive effort consistent with local adaptation  
160 (Törang, Wunder et al. 2015). More recent studies involving transplants across different  
161 elevations at a finer spatial scale also found evidence for local adaptation, as well as strong  
162 plasticity in reproductive and growth traits (de Villemereuil, Mouterde et al. 2018).

163

#### 164 **Field surveys of plant growth form and herbivore damage**

165 In the Summer of 2016, *Arabis alpina* populations at 19 field sites distributed across  
166 the Swiss Alps were surveyed for variation in leaf damage by herbivores (Table S1; Fig  
167 1a). Visits were timed to coincide with the ripening of fruits, in order to simultaneously  
168 collect data on cumulative leaf damage and collect seeds for use in subsequent experiments  
169 (numbers sampled given in Table S2). The field sites were distributed from 797m to 2866m  
170 above sea level and were visited between 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 and 4<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016.

171 *A. alpina* populations at these field sites exist as a set of fragmented patches of  
172 plants. To avoid sampling related plants, we ran a transect through multiple patches per  
173 population, with a minimum distance of 2m between surveyed plants in a patch and a  
174 greater distance (tens of metres) between patches. Dispersal distances of up to 1km have  
175 been estimated for *A. alpina* using genetic markers, although just over a third of offspring  
176 were recorded less than 5m from a parental plant (Buehler, Graf et al. 2012). It is therefore  
177 possible some related plants have been sampled in the current study, but by sampling  
178 broadly across sites we minimised our sampling of related individuals. A small quadrat (18  
179 x 18cm) was placed over each surveyed plant, and the surface area occupied by *A. alpina*  
180 was recorded (a measure of plant size). Depending on local population size and plant  
181 accessibility, 7-27 plants per population (in total 316 plants; Table S2) were haphazardly



182 chosen along the transect for assessment of leaf herbivore damage. The total number of  
183 leaves and the number of damaged leaves were recorded. We based our damage estimates  
184 on the number of leaves damaged rather than percentage leaf area removed, as the compact  
185 rosettes and numerous small leaves of *A. alpina* made it challenging to accurately assess the  
186 latter metric in the field. Additionally, we noted the presence of different types of leaf  
187 damage on a patch (leaf holes, chewed edges, larval trails and pale spots; see Figure 1a and  
188 Figure S1 for photos). Finally, ripe fruits were collected in small paper envelopes and  
189 stored at room temperature in the dark until seeds were used in germination experiments.

190 Plants derived from one maternal plant in the field are hereafter referred to as a maternal  
191 family. For populations AalN2 and Aal20, fruits collected from the field in 2015 were used.

192 We tested the effects of population and elevation (metres above sea-level) on the  
193 different response variables in separate statistical models. Variation in number of leaves per  
194 plant and in leaf size was analysed using Generalised Linear Models (GLMs), with poisson  
195 and normal error distributions respectively, using R statistical software (R Development  
196 Core Team 2012). The proportion of damaged leaves and the presence or absence of the  
197 four different types of damage were analysed using binomial GLMs. The significance of  
198 population and elevation effects was tested by removing each factor from its respective  
199 model and assessing the significance of the change in model explanatory power using  
200 likelihood ratio tests. For each model, we estimated the proportion of variance explained by  
201 either population or elevation in the model.

202 To explore whether geographic or climatic factors might explain elevational trends  
203 in the average proportion of leaves damaged (following arc-sine transformation), we  
204 conducted a linear regression using four explanatory factors: decimal degrees latitude,  
205 decimal degrees longitude, average annual temperature (1961-1990) and the average sum  
206 of annual precipitation (1961-1990). Data for the two climatic factors were estimated at a  
207 25m resolution for each population (Zimmermann and Kienast 1999). If a significant

208 elevation effect disappears when controlling for climatic variables, it suggests that those  
209 variables, rather than elevation *per se*, explains variation in rates of herbivory (Abdala-  
210 Roberts, Rasmann et al. 2016, Galmán, Abdala-Roberts et al. 2018).

211

212 **Assessment of variation in growth-related traits, leaf structural traits and plant**  
213 **defensive traits in a common environment**

214 ***Experiment 1: Assessing variation in growth-related traits and herbivore performance***

215 Ripe seeds from 8 maternal families from each of the 16 study populations  
216 (representing 123 families in total) were germinated in 54-cell trays filled with pre-watered  
217 low nutrient soil (Alpine wildflower soil mix, see Supplementary Information for  
218 composition). Five seeds per family were placed 2-3mm below the soil surface in a cell,  
219 and families and populations were randomised across trays. The trays were stratified for 8  
220 days at 4°C (8hrs:16hrs, light: dark) to synchronise germination, before being moved to a  
221 climate chamber set to 23°C: 17°C, 12hr light (15kLux): 12hr dark (0kLux). After most  
222 seeds had germinated, temperatures were reduced to 18°C (light) and 15°C (dark) for the  
223 remainder of the experiment. After 3 weeks, one seedling per maternal family was  
224 individually transferred to a 5cm pot filled with the same soil mix. Pots were randomly  
225 positioned in the growth chamber and watered 3 times per week by hand. Seedlings  
226 remaining in the tray were thinned to leave one seedling per cell. These remaining  
227 seedlings were harvested to measure dry aboveground mass approximately 42 days after  
228 seeds were moved to germination conditions. The aboveground parts were dried at 65 °C  
229 for 2 days and then weighed on a balance to the nearest 0.001g (Mettler AE240, Mettler  
230 Toledo, Greifensee, Switzerland). The length of the longest leaf of the remaining plants  
231 was measured to the nearest millimetre about 49 days after seeds were moved to  
232 germination conditions. Maximum leaf length was used as a proxy for rosette diameter,

233 which is difficult to measure in a standardised manner beyond the earliest growth stages in  
234 this species.

235 Three populations from each of the three elevation classes (low: <1600m above sea  
236 level; intermediate: 1600-2300m; high: >2300-3000m) were then used for larval  
237 performance assays at the temperatures described previously (18°C/15°C). This allowed us  
238 to estimate the variance explained by population and elevation class. Five first-instar *Pieris*  
239 *brassicae* larvae, from a lab colony reared on brussels sprout plants (*Brassica oleracea*),  
240 were added to each plant. The larvae were individually weighed after 8 days to the nearest  
241 0.001mg on a balance (Mettler Toledo MT5). General linear mixed effects models (lme4 R  
242 package; (Bates, Maechler et al. 2014) were constructed using either population or  
243 elevation class as a fixed effect, and a random effect of individual plant. Log  
244 transformations were used, where necessary, to improve model fit based on inspections of  
245 model residuals.

246

247 ***Experiment 2: Assessing variation in growth-related traits, leaf structural traits and***  
248 ***chemical defence induction***

249 We conducted a separate experiment with the same nine populations to explore variation in  
250 a greater number of morphological and growth traits, as well as variation in defence  
251 induction. Due to limited growth-chamber space, plants were grown in a greenhouse under  
252 slightly warmer conditions than those used in the previous experiment (20°C: 17 °C light:  
253 dark regime). Seeds from 10 maternal plants per population were germinated as described  
254 above, with seedlings then transplanted into 7cm clay pots and allowed to grow to two  
255 months of age. To identify traits that might explain variation in herbivore performance  
256 among populations, we added three first-instar *P. brassicae* larvae to each of the plants.  
257 After 6 days of feeding, larvae were weighed to the nearest 0.001mg. Due to space  
258 limitations, plants were divided into two experimental sets (5 genotypes per population per

259 set) for the larval performance assay, and assays on the two sets were conducted one week  
260 apart in the same chamber. After larval weighing, we measured maximum leaf lengths and  
261 the number of leaves greater than 0.5cm length (as a proxy for investment in leaf  
262 production). The number of leaves showing any sign of damage and the number showing  
263 more than 25% leaf area removed were also counted to assess variation in plant palatability.  
264 We also measured specific leaf area (SLA) and trichome density, as these traits may impact  
265 rates of herbivore feeding. Two 6mm diameter leaf discs were cut from each of two fully  
266 expanded leaves per experimental plant, avoiding the main leaf vein. Leaf discs were dried  
267 for 48hrs at 50°C and then weighed to the nearest 0.001mg to estimate specific leaf area  
268 (leaf disc area divided by dry mass). Trichomes were counted, using a cell counter plugin in  
269 the ImageJ software program (Schneider, Rasband et al. 2012), on one lower leaf disc per  
270 plant photographed using a microscope (Leica M420) and camera (Leica MC170 HD,  
271 Leica microsystems, Wetzlar, Germany).

272         Variation among populations in average larval mass per plant (based on those alive  
273 at the end of the experiment) was regressed against variation in SLA, trichome density, leaf  
274 number and length of the longest leaf in a full linear model. The response variable was log-  
275 transformed to improve model fit following inspection of the distribution of residuals.  
276 Experimental set was included as a fixed term in the model, and the effect of each variable  
277 tested sequentially removing non-significant terms from the full model.

278         Separate GLMs with normal error distribution were used to test for effects of  
279 elevation class or population on maximum leaf length and seedling dry mass across all 17  
280 populations in experiment 1 and for maximum leaf length and trichome density in  
281 experiment 2. Log transformations were used, where necessary, to improve model fit based  
282 on inspection of model residuals. In experiment 2, the effect of elevation class and  
283 population on leaf number was analysed using a GLM with quasipoisson error (the model  
284 was overdispersed using just poisson error). Finally, variation in log-transformed SLA was

285 tested using a general linear mixed model with a random effect of plant genotype. The  
286 significance of the effect of elevation class or population was tested by removing the factor  
287 and comparing the change in model likelihood to the null model.

288 To examine whether particular combinations of morphological and growth traits  
289 were associated with different elevations, we also conducted a Principal Components  
290 Analysis using measurements of longest leaf length, leaf number, trichome density and  
291 SLA for each plant in experiment 2. The first two principal components, and the loadings  
292 for each trait, were plotted to visualise trait divergence among plants from low,  
293 intermediate and high elevations.

294 After being weighed, larvae were returned to each plant for 24hrs, and six plant  
295 genotypes from each of six populations (two low, two intermediate, and two high) were  
296 selected for screening of glucosinolate induction. Each genotype was represented by two  
297 individual plants: one used for herbivore induction and one control. Replication was  
298 therefore at the level of genotype for each population. Glucosinolates are expected to be a  
299 key chemical defence in *A. alpina*, as they are for many Brassicaceae species, but to our  
300 knowledge this species has not previously been screened for glucosinolate variation  
301 (Windsor, Reichelt et al. 2005). Two leaves from each induced and control plant were  
302 weighed, immediately frozen in liquid nitrogen and then stored at -80°C. Glucosinolate  
303 extractions were performed as described in a recent HPLC protocol (Grosser and van Dam  
304 2017), but with minor modifications. Columns were prepared using DEAE Sephadex A25  
305 (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, Missouri, US). Leaves were freeze-dried and ground to a fine  
306 powder for 1 min at 1500rpm in a Geno/Grinder 2010 (SPEX sample prep, Metuchen, NJ,  
307 US) with three 0.3mm steel grinding balls. Samples were suspended in 1mL 70% methanol  
308 and heated to 85°C for 15mins to denature the myrosinase enzyme. Following elution of  
309 samples incubated overnight with sulfatase, samples were dried down on a Savant Speed  
310 Vac Concentrator SPP1010 (Thermo Scientific, Reinach, Switzerland) and re-suspended in

311 150 $\mu$ l ultrapure MilliQ water (Merck, Darmstadt, Germany). Samples were run on an  
312 Agilent 6550 iFunnel Q-TOF LC/MS equipped with an Eclipse XDB-C18 column (4.6 x  
313 150mm, 5 $\mu$ m, 80Å) using a water (with 5mM ammonium formate) to acetonitrile gradient.  
314 The mobile phase conditions were as described by Grosser & van Dam (2017) and  
315 consisted of 98% water for 2 minutes, then a gradient to 65% water over 35 minutes,  
316 followed by a rapid gradient to 2% water over 8 minutes. Where possible, desulfo-  
317 glucosinolates were identified using known laboratory standards (progoitrin, gluconapin  
318 and glucobrassicinapin). Alternatively, identification of putative desulfo-glucosinolates was  
319 based on the fragmentation pattern due to the loss of a hexose-derivative from a parent  
320 aglycone, demonstrated by a mass shift of 162 amu, and through formula matches  
321 identified using Agilent MassHunter qualitative software. The integration of the 229 nm  
322 UV spectrum was used for quantification of compounds based on a comparison to a  
323 sinigrin concentration curve and published response factors (again as described in Grosser  
324 & van Dam, 2017). Amounts of desulfo-glucosinolates were then converted to  $\mu$ mol g<sup>-1</sup>  
325 fresh tissue weight (FW).

326         Using GLMs, we first tested whether total glucosinolate concentrations were  
327 significantly induced following the extended period of larval herbivory across all  
328 populations, then tested for the significance of induction within the low-, intermediate- and  
329 high-elevation classes. Next, we tested whether individual glucosinolates showed  
330 significant induction, using individual GLMs and a false discovery rate (FDR) of 10% to  
331 control for effects of multiple testing.

332

### 333 *Variation in constitutive glucosinolate concentrations with increasing elevation*

334         Given the observed decline in herbivore damage with increasing elevation in the  
335 field, we also tested whether constitutive chemical defences declined with increasing  
336 elevation. We germinated seeds from 5 families for each of 16 populations (6 low, 5

337 intermediate and 5 high elevation). Seeds were stratified and then moved to a climate  
338 chamber (19°C day, 14°C night) for 7 days before thinning down to one seedling per cell.  
339 Leaf number and length of the longest leaf were recorded after 5.5 weeks. One fully  
340 expanded leaf per plant was weighed, flash frozen and freeze-dried for glucosinolate  
341 analysis, and the mass of the remaining aboveground fresh plant tissue measured as  
342 described above.

343         Glucosinolates were extracted, identified and quantified as described in the previous  
344 section. We tested for variation in total and individual glucosinolate concentrations with  
345 respect to a fixed effect of elevation (controlling for multiple testing using an FDR of  
346 10%), then repeated the analysis using a fixed effect of population (and a FDR 10%). Due  
347 to differences between extraction sets in total glucosinolate amounts, extraction set was  
348 included as a fixed effect in all analyses. Furthermore, to evaluate the prediction that  
349 investment in defence declines with increasing growth rates, we tested for associations  
350 between total glucosinolate production and total aboveground mass, leaf number and  
351 maximum leaf length. Square root transformation of the response variable was used to  
352 improve model fit if inspection of model residuals suggested deviations from expectations  
353 under normality.

354

## 355 **RESULTS**

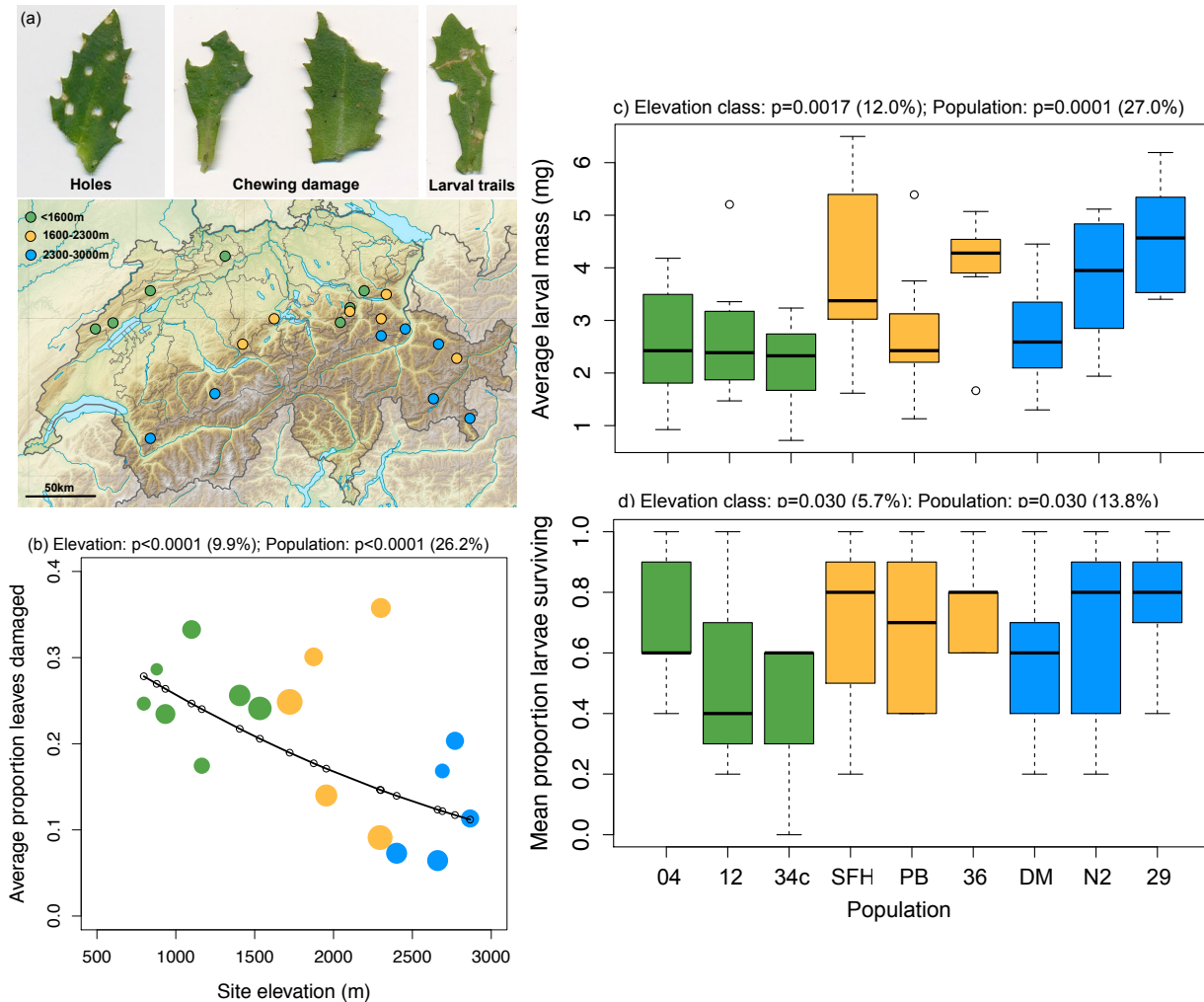
### 356 ***Leaf damage in the field declines with increasing elevation***

357         Across the 16 field populations surveyed, we observed a decline in the proportion of  
358 leaves damaged with increasing elevation (Figure 1b), as well as in the proportion of plants  
359 showing different types of herbivore damage ( $p < 0.001$  for leaf holes, chewed edges and  
360 larval trails; Figure S1a-c). Molluscs and several specialist herbivores of Brassicaceae were  
361 observed feeding on *A. alpina* (see Figure S2). One damage type—pale leaf spots, which  
362 were difficult to attribute to a particular herbivore—displayed a significant increase with

363 increasing elevation (Figure S1d). Population-level effects explained 2.7x more variance in  
364 the proportion leaves damaged than did elevation alone (population = 26.2%; elevation =  
365 9.9%). Similarly, population explained 2.7-4.6x more variation in each damage type than  
366 elevation (Figure S1), suggesting that population-specific genetic and environmental  
367 influences account for the majority of variation in these traits. The average proportion of  
368 damaged leaves per population increased with long-term average yearly temperature ( $R^2$   
369 =0.229;  $F_{1,15} = 5.739$ ,  $p=0.03$ ), although temperature was correlated with elevation and both  
370 factors explained a similar amount of variation (elevation:  $R^2 = 0.25$ , temperature:  $R^2 =$   
371 0.23). This suggests that temperature might be important for explaining the elevational  
372 gradient in herbivory.



**Figure 1:** (a) Photos of the three main types of herbivore-driven damage observed in populations and location of 19 study populations across Switzerland and their classification in to one of three elevation categories; (b) Decline in the average proportion of leaves damaged per population, with points weighted by sample size, a line indicating model fitted values (GLM binomial error) and the significance (and % explained variance) for elevation and population in separate GLMs. (c) Variation in average larval mass per plant (based on five larvae per plant after eight days and (d) proportion larvae surviving on nine populations (three low, three intermediate and three high). In (c) and (d) each population was represented by 8 plants. The base map of Switzerland in (a) was produced by Wikimedia commons users Eric Gaba and NordNordWest.



395 ***Populations from different elevations diverge in morphological and growth traits***

396 Our field surveys showed that elevation had contrasting effects on plant  
397 growth form, and that this variation persisted under a common environment (Figure  
398 S3). In the field, plant leaf number varied significantly among populations,  
399 independent of changes in elevation, with population explaining 28.6% variance in  
400 the number of leaves ( $F = 5.89$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ; Figure S3a). In particular, two  
401 intermediate populations, AalSFH and AalPB, produced particularly high numbers of  
402 leaves. By contrast, there was a decline in plant surface area with elevation ( $F = 70.4$ ,  
403  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ; Figure S3b), consistent with plants having smaller size at high  
404 elevations. Elevation and population explained a similar proportion of variance in  
405 plant size (elevation = 21.3% and population = 30.0%).

406 Experiments in which field-collected seeds from a subset of populations were  
407 grown in a common environment resulted in similar variation in plant growth form to  
408 that observed in the field. The number of leaves varied significantly among the nine  
409 populations ( $F = 16.40$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), but also between elevation classes ( $F =$   
410  $16.42$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), with intermediate-elevation populations (particularly  
411 AalSFH and AalPB) showing significantly higher leaf production (Figure S4a).  
412 Maximum leaf length (a proxy for rosette size) was significantly reduced for  
413 populations from high elevations relative to both the low and intermediate elevation  
414 classes ( $F = 25.54$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ; Figure S4b). For both leaf number and leaf  
415 length, the proportion of variance explained by population alone was greater than that  
416 explained by elevation class (by 1.9x and 1.3x respectively), highlighting the  
417 importance of population-level effects in shaping variation in these traits under  
418 common growing conditions. In a separate experiment using all 17 populations,  
419 aboveground dry mass (at 1 month of age) did not decline with increasing elevation ( $F$   
420  $= 2.03$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.157$ ) or show differences among populations ( $F = 0.85$ ,  $df = 15$ ,

421  $p = 0.619$ ; Figure S3c); however, maximum leaf length clearly declined with  
422 increasing elevation ( $R^2 = 0.36$ ,  $F = 60.52$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ; Figure S3d).

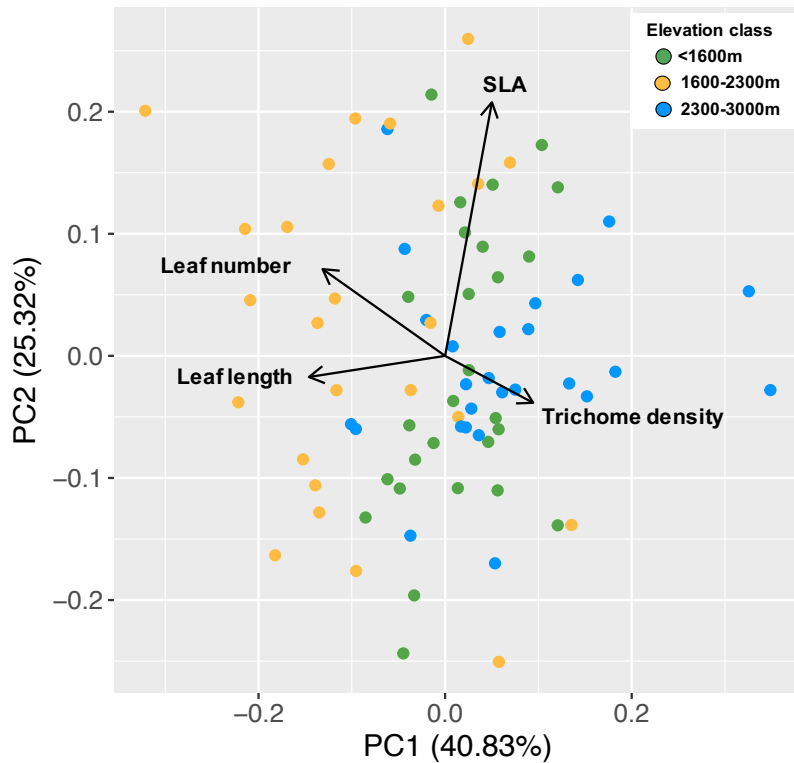
423         When grown in a common environment, SLA (a proxy for leaf density) did  
424 not vary among populations or elevation classes (Figure S4c), although a high  
425 proportion of variance in SLA was associated with individual plants (genotypes)  
426 (population alone:  $R^2 = 0.05$ , with random effect of family:  $R^2 = 0.80$ ). Trichome  
427 density varied significantly across populations ( $F = 16.3$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), but not  
428 among elevation classes ( $X^2 = 5.839$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.054$ ; Figure S4d). Both the highest  
429 mean trichome density (population AalDM = 448.4 trichomes per  $\text{cm}^2$ ) and the lowest  
430 mean density (Aal29 = 164.1 trichomes per  $\text{cm}^2$ ; Figure S4d) were observed in high-  
431 elevation populations.

432         Principal components analysis revealed evidence for genetic divergence  
433 among low-, intermediate- and high-elevation populations along a growth-  
434 morphology spectrum (Figure 2). Principal component loadings for different traits  
435 showed that relative to high-elevation populations plants from intermediate-elevation  
436 populations had larger rosettes, lower trichome densities and higher rates of leaf  
437 production. Conversely, plants from high-elevation populations had smaller rosettes,  
438 variable trichome densities and lower rates of leaf production. Finally, low-elevation  
439 populations exhibited higher trichome densities and lower rates of leaf production  
440 than intermediate-elevation plants, yet larger rosettes than plants from high-elevation  
441 populations (Figure S4).

442

443 **Figure 2.** PCA summarising growth and morphological trait variation among plants  
444 from the different elevation classes. The PCA is based on data on the number of  
445 leaves produced, length of the longest leaf, specific leaf area ( $\text{cm mg}^{-1}$ ) and number of  
446 trichomes on adaxial (lower) surface from the same set of individuals. The arrows

447 represent the coefficients of the four variables (traits) on the two principal  
 448 components (PC1 and PC2), so point in the direction where values of that trait are  
 449 maximised. Points are coloured by elevation class.



450  
 451

452 ***Herbivore performance and survival is reduced on plants from low-elevation***  
 453 ***populations***

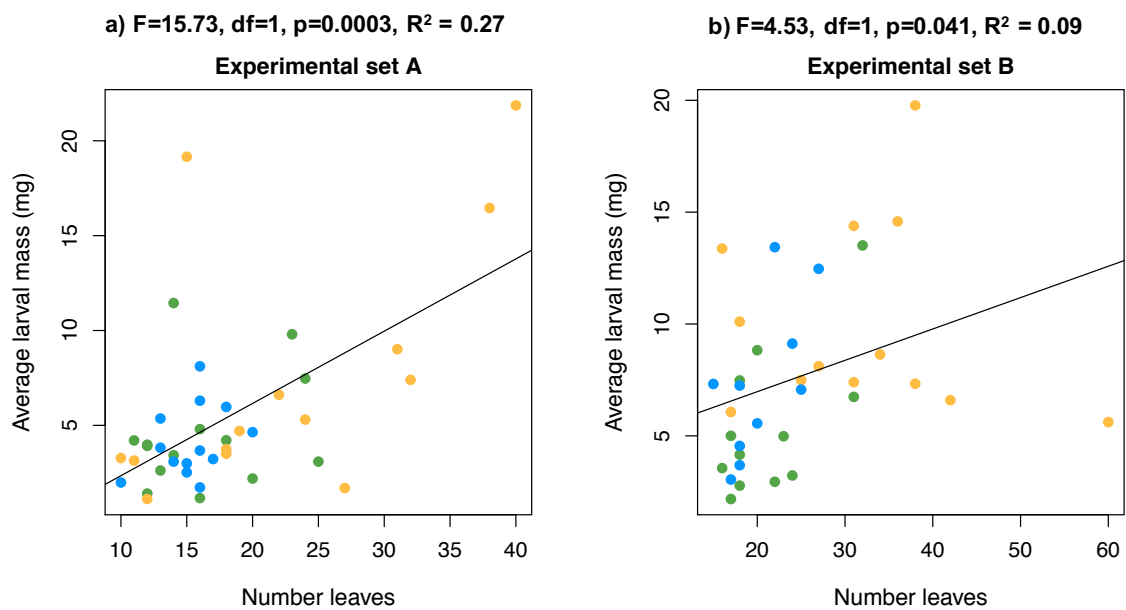
454 Herbivore performance assays with the specialist *Pieris brassicae*, conducted  
 455 on nine populations, revealed a significant effect of elevation ( $R^2 = 0.12$ ,  $X^2 = 12.77$ ,  
 456  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), with larvae showing significantly higher mass after 8 days feeding  
 457 on plants from intermediate- and high-elevation populations than those feeding on  
 458 plants from low-elevation populations (Figure 1c). Nevertheless, the proportion of  
 459 variance in larval mass explained by population effects was 2.25x higher than that  
 460 explained by elevation ( $R^2 = 0.270$ ;  $X^2 = 31.23$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In particular,  
 461 caterpillars feeding on the high-elevation populations Aal29 and AalDM exhibited  
 462 very different mean ( $\pm$  S.E) larval masses (Aal29 = 4.56  $\pm$  0.37mg and AalDM =

463 2.73 +/-0.37mg; Figure 1c). After 8 days on the plants, 64.2% of the larvae had  
464 survived. Survival was significantly lower on low-elevation plants (Binomial GLM:  
465  $\chi^2 = 7.00$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ); however, the amount of variance explained by elevation  
466 was low (5.7%; Figure 1d). Two low-elevation populations had the lowest larval  
467 survival rates (Aal34c = 45% larvae, Aal12 = 50%), while one intermediate- and one  
468 high-elevation population showed the highest rates of survival (Aal36= 75% and  
469 Aal29 = 78%; Figure 1d). These results suggest that high-elevation plants were  
470 generally more favourable hosts than low-elevation plants, despite clear population-  
471 level differences within elevation classes.

472         When elevation was replaced by plant growth and morphological traits in the  
473 model, we found that only total number of leaves had a significant positive effect on  
474 variation in larval performance ( $R^2 = 0.23$ ;  $F = 24.2$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). This effect  
475 was partly due to the second experimental set of plants showing, on average, both  
476 more leaves and heavier larvae (due to space limitations, this set was assayed one  
477 week later than the first experimental set). However, separating the samples by  
478 experimental set confirmed a positive effect of number of leaves on larval mass in  
479 both groups (Figure 3; set A:  $F = 15.7$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.27$ ; set B:  $F = 5.70$ ,  $df$   
480  $= 1$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ,  $R^2 = 0.12$ ). Larvae did not eat all the tissue presented to them: on  
481 average only 18% of leaves had more than a quarter of leaf area removed for set A  
482 (maximum = 82% of leaves) or 12% for set B (maximum = 33% of leaves). However,  
483 there was variation among plants from different populations in the proportion of  
484 leaves showing any signs of damage (Figure S5a), and low-elevation populations  
485 showed a significantly lower proportion of leaves with >25% leaf area removed  
486 (Figure S5b). Together, these data suggest increased leaf production is associated with  
487 increased leaf quality for specialist herbivores.

488

489 **Figure 3:** Regression of variation in larval performance (average mass of three larvae  
 490 after six days feeding on one plant) on variation in the number of leaves per plant for  
 491 (a) experimental set A and (b) experimental set B. Relevant statistics for the effect of  
 492 leaf number on variance in larval mass, including the amount of variance ( $R^2$ )  
 493 explained by number of leaves, are reported above each graph. Colours represent  
 494 different elevation classes (see key in Figure 2).



495

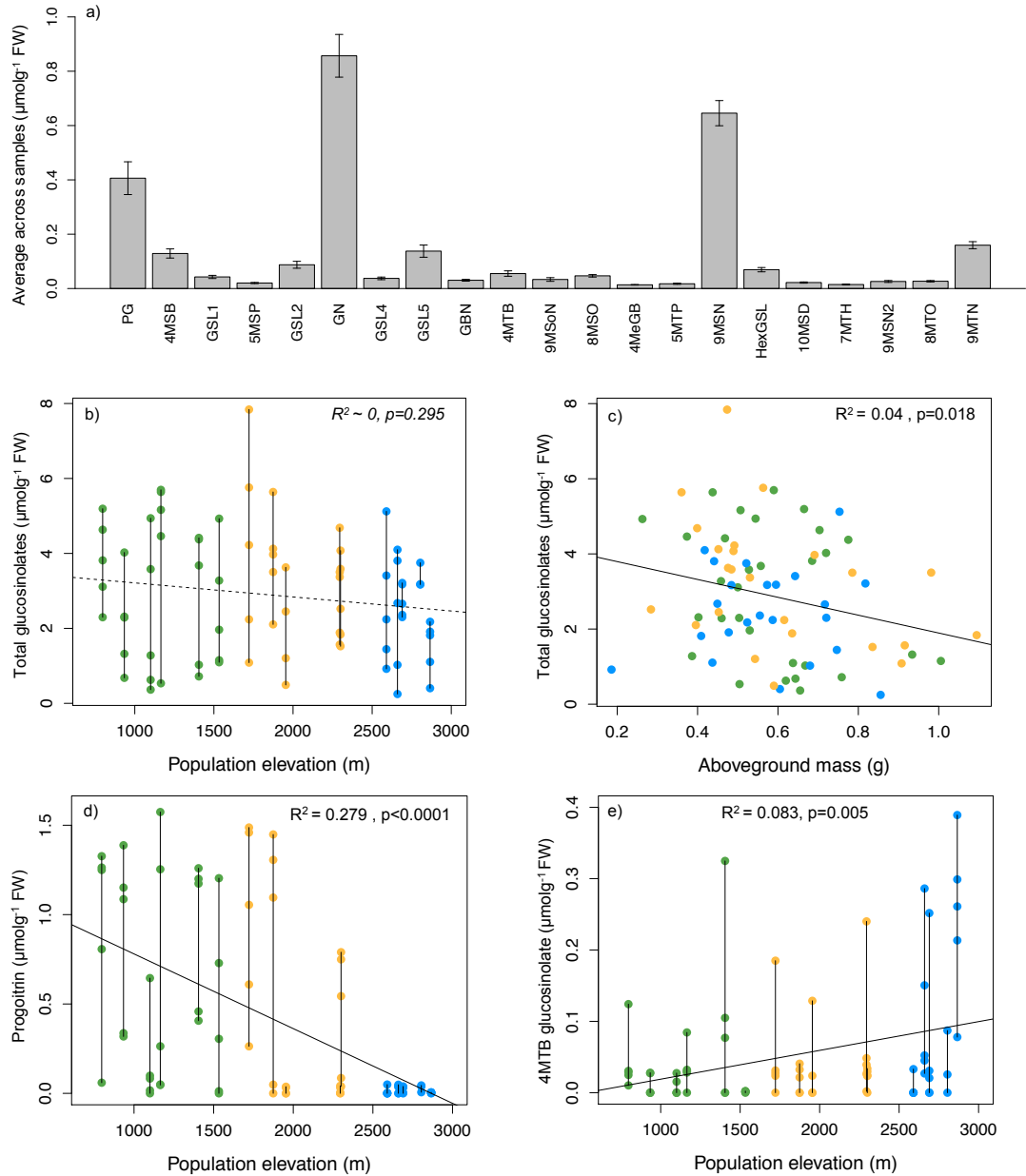
496

#### 497 ***Several glucosinolate compounds exhibit significant trends with elevation***

498 We identified 21 glucosinolates across all populations (Figure 4a, full details  
 499 in Table S3), three of which (gluconapin, progoitrin and glucoarabin) accounted for  
 500 more than 70% of total glucosinolate production (Figure 4a). Total constitutive  
 501 glucosinolate levels showed no trend with increasing elevation ( $F = 1.11$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p =$   
 502  $0.295$ ; Figure 4b), despite a more than 2.9-fold difference in mean total glucosinolate  
 503 production across populations (ranging from  $1.48\mu\text{molg}^{-1}$  FW for the high-elevation  
 504 population Aal29 to  $4.30\mu\text{molg}^{-1}$  FW for the intermediate-elevation population  
 505 AalSFH; average across individuals:  $2.88\mu\text{molg}^{-1}$  FW). Total glucosinolate levels

506 were weakly negatively correlated with aboveground biomass ( $R^2 = 0.038$ ;  $F = 5.90$ ,  
507  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ; Figure 4c), and length of the longest leaf ( $R^2 = 0.03$ ;  $F = 4.32$ ,  $df =$   
508  $1$ ,  $p = 0.041$ ). Leaf number at the time of sampling was not significantly associated  
509 with total glucosinolates ( $F = 1.78$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.186$ ), suggesting no connection  
510 between variation in rates of leaf production and investment in constitutive defences.  
511

512 **Figure 4:** Variation in glucosinolate production across populations of *A. alpina*. (a)  
513 Average amounts across constitutive samples of individual glucosinolates ordered by  
514 increasing retention time (in micromoles per gram of fresh tissue,  $\mu\text{mol g}^{-1}$  FW,  $\pm$  one S.E.);  
515 Regression of variation in: (b) total glucosinolates on elevation; (c) total  
516 glucosinolates on aboveground mass; (d) levels of progoitrin on elevation; (e) levels  
517 of 4-(methylthio)butyl-glucosinolate on elevation. Regression lines are solid if  
518 relationship significant, and the adjusted R-squared and p-value are given. Vertical  
519 black lines connect samples from the same population in plots b, d and e, and  
520 different coloured points represent samples from low, intermediate and high elevation  
521 classes. Shorthand codes for glucosinolates are given in Table S3.



522

523

524

Because total glucosinolate amounts can obscure biologically relevant

525 variation in individual compounds (Poelman, Galiart et al. 2008), we also tested

526 whether individual glucosinolates varied with elevation. This analysis revealed

527 significant trends with elevation for eight of the 21 compounds, with six declining

528 with increasing elevation and two increasing (10% FDR; Table S4). Progoitrin (PG)

529 showed the strongest decline with elevation ( $R^2 = 0.28$ ), being consistently low in

530 high-elevation populations (Figure 4d), whereas 4-(methylthio)butyl glucosinolate



531 (4MTB) showed the strongest positive association ( $R^2 = 0.08$ ; Figure 4e). Despite  
532 screening just five individuals per population, we also observed significant  
533 population-level variation for 13 individual glucosinolates 10% FDR; Table S5), with  
534 a small number of populations driving these effects. For example, one low-elevation  
535 population (Aal04) showed higher levels of 4-(methylsulfinyl)butyl glucosinolate  
536 (4MSB) relative to other populations, while another low-elevation population  
537 (AalCdV) showed elevated levels of three different glucosinolates (5-  
538 (methylthio)pentyl, 10-(methylthio)decyl, and glucobrassicinapin). Additionally, an  
539 intermediate-elevation population (AalSFH) showed elevated levels of two  
540 unidentified glucosinolates (GSL2 and GSL5), and one high-elevation population  
541 (Aal29) also showed an elevated frequency of 4-(methylthio)butyl glucosinolate  
542 (4MTB). These results thus reveal clear effects of elevation and population on  
543 individual glucosinolates, despite no such trends being observed for amounts of total  
544 glucosinolates.

545

546 ***Glucosinolate induction is stronger in high- and intermediate-elevation populations***  
547 ***than in low-elevation populations***

548 Total glucosinolates were significantly induced following feeding (for six  
549 days) by *Pieris* larvae (mean constitutive =  $1.51 \mu\text{mol g}^{-1}$  FW; mean induced =  $2.6$   
550  $\mu\text{mol g}^{-1}$  FW;  $p = 0.004$ ,  $R^2 = 0.11$ ), with 12 of the 18 individual glucosinolates  
551 detected in this experiment showing significant induction (10% FDR; Table S6).  
552 When populations were grouped by elevation class, high- and intermediate-elevation  
553 populations showed significantly stronger total glucosinolate induction than low-  
554 elevation populations (Figure 5), although the variance explained by this interaction  
555 was low ( $F = 3.28$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.045$ ;  $R^2 = 0.06$ ). At the individual glucosinolate level,  
556 four of 18 glucosinolates showed significant elevation-by-induction interactions (10%

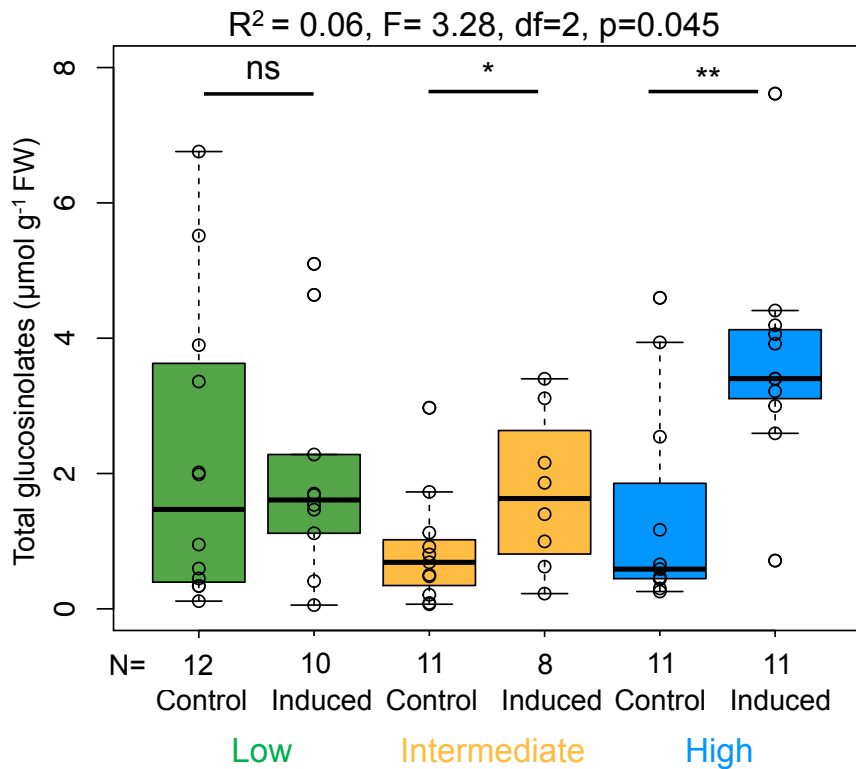
557 FDR; Table S6). On closer inspection, however, some of these differences were  
558 population-specific (e.g. strong induction in population Aal29 for 4MTB; Figure S6a).  
559 Interestingly, the unidentified glucosinolate GSL3 showed clear induction in both  
560 high-elevation populations (AalDM and Aal29; Figure S6b). By contrast, progoitrin  
561 (PG) showed no significant induction in any population (Figure S6c; Table S6)  
562 despite constitutive levels clearly declining in high-elevation populations (Figure 4d).  
563 Of the four individual glucosinolates that showed significant elevation-by-induction  
564 interactions, the two low-elevation populations consistently showed no effects of  
565 induction (e.g. Figure S6a,b). Taken together, these data support the hypothesis that  
566 chemical defence inducibility is stronger in higher elevation populations.

567

568

569 **Figure 5:** Change in total glucosinolates (in micromoles per gram of fresh tissue,  
570  $\mu\text{mol g}^{-1}$  FW,) following herbivory across low-, intermediate- and high-elevation  
571 classes, with individual data points given on the boxplots. Each elevation class  
572 consists of data from two populations. Control treatments and herbivory-induced  
573 treatments are marked, with the significance of the induction effect for each elevation  
574 class given, as analysed with separate linear models (ns =  $p > 0.05$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* =  
575  $p < 0.001$ ).

576



577

578

579

## 580 DISCUSSION

581 Our results provide evidence for considerable genetic divergence in multiple  
 582 growth and defence traits within an alpine plant species across its elevational range.  
 583 Indeed, the patterns of trait variation we observed among *Arabis alpina* populations  
 584 are comparable to divergent growth-defence “syndromes” previously described for  
 585 species that occur at different elevations (Defosse, Pellissier et al. 2018, Kergunteuil,  
 586 Descombes et al. 2018). This suggests that *A. alpina* can adapt to environmental  
 587 conditions that vary with altitude; however, our findings also reveal extensive  
 588 population-level variation in many growth and defence traits that is independent of  
 589 elevation. In particular, our results reveal genetic divergence among high-elevation  
 590 populations in traits associated with herbivore resistance and tolerance, suggesting

591 that this alpine plant might be able to adapt to predicted increases in herbivore  
592 pressure at high elevations due to climate change.

593 Consistent with the findings of many previous studies (e.g. Garibaldi,  
594 Kitzberger et al. 2011, Pellissier, Roger et al. 2014, Rokaya, Dostálek et al. 2016,  
595 Moreira, Petry et al. 2018), we observed reduced rates of herbivore damage at high  
596 elevations. This pattern could be explained by reduced herbivore pressure at these  
597 elevations—which might favour corresponding reductions in defence investment—  
598 but could also arise if high-elevation plants suffer less herbivory because they are  
599 better defended (Rasmann, Pellissier et al. 2014). Larval performance assays in a  
600 common (climate-chamber) environment indicated that our intermediate- and high-  
601 elevation populations were generally more palatable for herbivores than low-elevation  
602 populations, consistent with reduced defence investment in high-elevation  
603 populations. We did not observe a decline in total glucosinolate levels with increasing  
604 elevation, but did find significant elevational trends in several individual  
605 glucosinolate compounds, six of which exhibited significant declines with increasing  
606 elevation, while two exhibited significant increases. This pattern is generally  
607 consistent with an overall reduction in glucosinolate defences at high elevation,  
608 although additional experiments exploring how variation in these individual  
609 glucosinolates affects the performance of specialist and generalist herbivores would  
610 be necessary to confirm this.

611 When the risk of herbivory is unpredictable—as is often the case at high  
612 elevations (Descombes, Marchon et al. 2017)—and the costs of continuously  
613 producing constitutive defences are high (e.g. Zangerl and Rutledge 1996), selection  
614 may favour investment in defences that are inducible upon herbivore attack (Moreira,  
615 Mooney et al. 2014, Pellissier, Roger et al. 2014, Defosse, Pellissier et al. 2018,  
616 Moreira, Petry et al. 2018). Alternatively, the limited resources available at high

617 elevations may favour greater investment in constitutive rather than induced defences  
618 to defend leaves that are costly to replace (Coley, Bryant et al. 1985, Moreira,  
619 Mooney et al. 2014, Pellissier, Moreira et al. 2016). While total constitutive  
620 glucosinolates did not decline with increasing elevation in our study, high-elevation  
621 *A. alpina* populations did show the strongest induction of total glucosinolates  
622 following herbivory. We also observed significant induction of many individual  
623 glucosinolates, yet found little evidence that the significant elevational trends  
624 observed for constitutive levels of individual glucosinolates were associated with  
625 differences in the strength of their inducibility among populations. Our observation of  
626 increased inducibility at high-elevations is consistent with findings from several  
627 recent studies (Rasmann, Buri et al. 2014, Galman, Petry et al. 2018), but notably  
628 differs from the pattern observed in the field among different *Cardamine* species (also  
629 members of the Brassicaceae family), where low-elevation species showed lower  
630 levels of constitutive glucosinolates and greater inducibility relative to high-elevation  
631 species (Pellissier, Moreira et al. 2016). Our glucosinolate data hints at the absence of  
632 a strong trade-off between constitutive and induced chemical defences in *A. alpina*;  
633 however, definitively establishing a trade-off between constitutive and induced  
634 defences would require measuring defence induction in a greater number of  
635 populations than used in the present study.

636         In addition to the observed elevational trends in defence traits, populations at  
637 similar elevations exhibited significant divergence in many of these traits. Previous  
638 studies have also reported trait variation among populations independent of  
639 elevational gradients (Rokaya, Dostálek et al. 2016, Pfennigwerth, Bailey et al. 2017).  
640 However, our study design explicitly included replication at the population level  
641 within elevation classes, allowing us to estimate the relative contributions of  
642 population and elevation to trait variation. We found that population-level effects

643 explained 2.25x more variation in herbivore performance than elevation alone.  
644 Similarly, while total glucosinolate levels did not vary significantly among  
645 populations, variation in many individual glucosinolates was better explained by  
646 population-level effects than by elevation. Differences in local herbivore communities  
647 have previously been linked to among-population variation in glucosinolate defences  
648 over short geographic distances (Gols, Wagenaar et al. 2008, Newton, Bullock et al.  
649 2009), and in our study population effects explained 2.6x more variation in field leaf  
650 herbivore damage than elevation alone, suggesting that local variation in herbivore  
651 pressure, independent of elevation, might drive some of the observed variation in  
652 defence traits. However, to explicitly link population-level variation in defence traits  
653 with geographic variation in herbivore pressure it would be necessary to characterise  
654 herbivore communities and measure climatic variables at finer spatial and temporal  
655 scales than was possible in our study. We should also note that because our assays  
656 employed seeds collected directly from the field, we cannot exclude the possibility  
657 that maternal effects also contribute to the observed population-level variation.

658         To better understand *A. alpina* adaptation to varying herbivore pressures  
659 across elevations, we also documented elevational trends in multiple traits associated  
660 with growth and morphology that might directly or indirectly affect plant interactions  
661 with invertebrate herbivores (Coley, Bryant et al. 1985, Herms and Mattson 1992). A  
662 principal components analysis combining data for two growth traits, trichome density  
663 and SLA, revealed syndromes associated with different elevations: low-elevation  
664 populations were characterised by high trichome densities, large rosette sizes, and low  
665 rates of leaf production compared to populations from other elevations; meanwhile,  
666 high-elevation populations had smaller rosettes than low-elevation populations and  
667 lower rates of leaf production than intermediate-elevation populations, but highly  
668 variable trichome densities; and intermediate-elevation populations were

669 characterised by generally low trichome densities, but larger rosette sizes and higher  
670 rates of leaf production than populations from other elevations. As our measurements  
671 were based on plants grown from seeds in a common environment, these results  
672 indicate a significant genetic contribution to these phenotypic syndromes. These  
673 patterns of trait divergence in *A. alpina* are broadly consistent with the growth-  
674 defence syndromes previously described for *Cardamine* species from different  
675 elevations (Defosse, Pellissier et al. 2018), where smaller size was associated with  
676 high-elevation species, and increased biomass production with low- and intermediate-  
677 elevation species. However, other aspects of these syndromes, including changes in  
678 leaf density and in constitutive chemical defences, were more pronounced in that  
679 system than in the current study, perhaps reflecting greater divergence in functional  
680 traits among vs within species, or the fact that their study sampled traits only under  
681 field conditions, while ours measured traits in a common environment.

682 Under both field and growth-chamber conditions, we found that *A. alpina*  
683 plants from the highest elevations produced smaller rosettes with fewer leaves than  
684 plants from lower elevations, consistent with evidence from a previous common-  
685 garden experiment conducted in the field with French populations of *Arabis alpina*  
686 (de Villemereuil, Mouterde et al. 2018). Growth rates have also been linked to  
687 survival and reproductive effort in field populations of *A. alpina* (Andrello, de  
688 Villemereuil et al. 2016), so together these lines of evidence suggest an adaptive role  
689 of these growth traits in reducing exposure to local abiotic conditions at high  
690 elevations (Körner, Neumayer et al. 1989, Byars, Papst et al. 2007, Körner 2007,  
691 Read, Moorhead et al. 2014). By contrast, our observation of larger rosette sizes in  
692 low- and intermediate-elevation populations could reflect an adaptive response to  
693 increased competition from other plants under better growing conditions (see photos  
694 comparing low and high-elevation habitats in Figure S7). In contrast to low- and high-

695 elevation populations, intermediate-elevation populations showed generally higher  
696 rates of leaf production under both field and common-garden conditions, suggesting a  
697 genetic basis for this trait. Based on similar observations of growth form variation  
698 across species at different elevations, Defosse *et al.* (2018) hypothesized that high  
699 rates of herbivory at intermediate-elevations may select for elevated leaf production  
700 as a form of herbivore-tolerance.

701         The hypothesis that herbivore tolerance is favoured at intermediate-elevations  
702 also fits with our trichome data. We observed significant variation in trichome density  
703 among populations that was largely independent of elevation. However, plants from  
704 low-elevation populations were characterised by consistently high trichome densities,  
705 which could represent an adaptive response to an elevated frequency of encounters  
706 with herbivores (e.g. Løe, Toräng *et al.* 2007) or a response to abiotic factors such as  
707 increasing aridity (e.g. Kessler, Siorak *et al.* 2007). Meanwhile, intermediate-  
708 elevation populations are also exposed to high rates of herbivory in the field, but  
709 showed generally low trichome densities. This low investment in physical defence  
710 combined with elevated levels of leaf production observed in these populations, is  
711 consistent with a strategy of herbivore tolerance.

712         It is notable that many growth and morphological traits exhibited significant  
713 variation across populations even within the three elevation classes (low, intermediate  
714 and high). In particular, trichome density significantly varied among high-elevation  
715 populations, with population AalDM showing much higher trichome densities relative  
716 to the other populations (AalN2 and Aal29). Population-level variation in this putative  
717 defensive trait may partly explain the reduced herbivore performance on plants from  
718 AalDM relative to Aal29, where mean larval mass was 1.7x higher for larvae feeding  
719 on Aal29 than AalDM. Such genetic divergence in plant defences among populations  
720 at high elevations would not have been observed if populations from different



721 elevations were pooled for experimental testing, as has been done in some studies  
722 (e.g. Ereli, Ayres et al. 1998, Pellissier, Roger et al. 2014, Rasmann, Buri et al. 2014).  
723 These results suggest that high-elevation populations may not be consistently  
724 vulnerable to the predicted changes in herbivore pressure with ongoing climate  
725 change.

726         As discussed, selection by abiotic and biotic factors may be responsible for  
727 population-level variation in anti-herbivore defence investment across the elevational  
728 range of this species. However, another potential explanation for the observed  
729 population-level effects in defence and growth/morphological traits is that *A. alpina*  
730 populations sampled from different areas of the Alps may derive from distinct genetic  
731 lineages. After the last glaciation the Alps were colonised by *A. alpina* from multiple  
732 glacial refugia around the Mediterranean (Koch, Kiefer et al. 2006, Rogivue, Graf et  
733 al. 2017), and it is unknown to what extent these distinct postglacial histories (and  
734 associated genetic drift) might have influenced the current composition of traits in this  
735 species. An interesting next step will therefore be to identify patterns of neutral  
736 genetic structure across our *A. alpina* samples to determine the extent to which  
737 divergence in defence, growth and morphological traits are reflected in patterns of  
738 neutral genetic structure.

739

## 740 **CONCLUSIONS**

741         This study documents genetic variation in multiple growth and defence-related  
742 traits that is likely important for adapting to spatially varying biotic conditions across  
743 the elevational range of an alpine plant. Importantly, while many traits showed  
744 significant elevational trends, population-level effects consistently explained more  
745 trait variation than elevation. Although, the precise selective forces driving these  
746 differences remain uncertain, the presence of genetic variation in growth and defence

747 traits across the range of this alpine species may facilitate evolutionary responses of  
748 this species to changes in biotic interactions associated with climate warming. Indeed,  
749 recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that local adaptation can have  
750 implications for the response of species to rapid environmental change (Pelini, Keppel  
751 et al. 2010, Valladares, Matesanz et al. 2014), and understanding the extent of  
752 intraspecific variation in key traits is predicted to be important for accurately  
753 forecasting the response of individual species to such changes (Urban, Bocedi et al.  
754 2016). In particular, our assessment of variation both within and across elevation  
755 classes suggests that high-elevation populations of *A. alpina* are not consistently more  
756 vulnerable to herbivores than intermediate- and low-elevation populations. Future  
757 work should test whether population-level genetic variation in similar sets of traits  
758 exists within species with more restricted elevational distributions, as such species are  
759 predicted to be particularly vulnerable to ongoing environmental change.

760

## 761 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

762 We would like to thank Maja Frei and the other greenhouse staff associated with the  
763 Plant Ecological Genetics group for watering plants. We would also like to thank  
764 Dani Osoko, a local school student, for his help in conducting the second larval  
765 performance experiment, as well as student helpers in the Biocommunication group  
766 for maintaining the *Pieris brassicae* colony. Sergio Rasmann kindly provided  
767 coordinates (downloaded from [www.infoflora.ch](http://www.infoflora.ch)) of field populations of *Arabis*  
768 *alpina*. We are grateful to James Sims for help with the glucosinolate analysis using  
769 LC/MS. We finally thank two reviewers and an associate editor for providing useful  
770 comments that helped significantly improve the manuscript.

771

## 772 **AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS**

773 JB, AW, MCM and CMDM conceived the ideas, designed methodology and wrote  
774 the manuscript; JB collected and analysed the data; All authors contributed critically  
775 to the drafts and gave final approval for publication.

776

#### 777 DATA ACCESSIBILITY

778 Data has been deposited in the Dryad repository:  
779 <http://datadryad.org/resource/doi:10.5061/dryad.ff11k13>

780

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