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Induction of silicon defences in wheat landraces is local not systemic and driven by mobilisation of soluble silicon to damaged leaves

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1 **1. Highlight**

2 Silicon is an important defence in crops. Here, a new mechanism involving the movement of
3 soluble silicon in the phloem is proposed to explain localised induction of silicon defences.

4 **2. Abstract**

- 5 • In response to herbivory, many grasses, including crops such as wheat, accumulate
6 significant levels of silicon (Si) as an antiherbivore defence. Damage-induced increases in
7 Si can be localised in damaged leaves or more systemic, but the mechanisms leading to
8 these differences in Si distribution remain untested.
- 9 • Ten genetically diverse wheat landraces (*Triticum aestivum*) were used to assess
10 genotypic variation in Si induction in response to mechanical damage and how this was
11 affected by exogenous Si supply. Total and soluble Si levels were measured in damaged
12 and undamaged leaves, as were Si levels in the phloem, to test how Si was allocated to
13 different parts of the plant after damage.
- 14 • Localised, but not systemic, induction of Si defences occurred, more pronounced when
15 plants had supplemental Si. Damaged plants had significant increases in Si concentration
16 in their damaged leaves, while the Si concentration in undamaged leaves decreased,
17 such that there was no difference in the average Si concentration of damaged and
18 undamaged plants.
- 19 • The increased Si in damaged leaves was due to the redirection of soluble Si, present in
20 the phloem, from undamaged to damaged plant parts, potentially a more cost-effective
21 defence mechanism for plants than increased Si uptake.

22 **Keywords:** damage, genotypic variation, localised response, phloem, reallocation, silicon, wheat
23 (*Triticum aestivum*)

24 **3. Introduction**

25 Plants have many different types of defences against herbivores, including both physical and
26 chemical defences (Howe and Jander, 2007). Particularly in grasses, which include many cereal
27 crops, high silicon (Si) accumulation is an effective antiherbivore defence (Massey *et al.*, 2009; Han
28 *et al.*, 2015; Singh *et al.*, 2020; Waterman *et al.*, 2021). Grasses deposit Si in structures such as
29 phytoliths and silicified spines (Hartley *et al.*, 2015). Phytoliths increase leaf abrasiveness making
30 tissues less palatable (Hall *et al.*, 2020), which deters both insect and mammalian herbivores.
31 Furthermore, phytoliths can reduce herbivore digestive efficiencies and hence limit their growth and
32 development (Massey and Hartley, 2006, 2009; Massey *et al.*, 2008, 2009). In addition, Si deposited

33 in the apoplast may act as a physical barrier, potentially preventing the release of insect oral
34 secretions and oviposition fluids, known as effectors, which are used by herbivores to recognise
35 compatible host plants (Coskun *et al.*, 2019; Singh *et al.*, 2020).

36 At least in grasses, Si is an inducible defence (Massey *et al.*, 2007): in response to herbivory, overall
37 Si accumulation increases, and this is correlated with reduced herbivory (Reynolds *et al.*, 2012;
38 Hartley *et al.*, 2015; Hall *et al.*, 2020). However, the Si response to herbivory varies significantly
39 between both plant species and genotypes (Hartley and DeGabriel, 2016). For example, different
40 patterns of Si accumulation and deposition were found in three species of *Festuca* in response to
41 artificial damage and Si supply (Hartley *et al.*, 2015), and similar genotypic variation in Si uptake and
42 deposition have been found in wheat (*Triticum aestivum*; Thorne *et al.*, 2021) and rice (Talukdar *et al.*,
43 2019). Soininen *et al.* (2013) reported both within and between species variation in Si
44 accumulation among grasses in response to damage.

45 Plants accumulate Si in the form of silicic acid from the soil using a pathway that is relatively well
46 characterised in rice. Si is transported through the roots by the serial action of two transporters, Lsi1
47 and Lsi2 (Ma and Yamaji, 2015). Silicic acid is then loaded into the xylem by the action of a third
48 transporter, Lsi3 (Huang *et al.*, 2022). Subsequently, Si is translocated to the shoots *via* the
49 transpiration stream (Ma and Yamaji, 2015). A fourth transporter, Lsi6, is required for xylem
50 unloading of silicic acid (Yamaji *et al.*, 2008). Lsi6, Lsi3, and Lsi2 are also highly expressed in the node
51 where they are involved in intervascular transfer to direct Si distribution within the plant (Yamaji *et al.*,
52 2015). High levels of silicic acid result in its autopolymerisation into immobile silica, which is the
53 predominant form of Si in plants (Yoshida *et al.*, 1962). Thus, plant Si accumulation is affected by
54 both the transpiration rate and the activity of Si transporters. Genotypic variation in Si accumulation
55 has been linked to both differences in transpiration (McLarnon *et al.*, 2017) and differences in the
56 abundance of Si transporters (Ma *et al.*, 2007b). However, a range of biotic and abiotic factors have
57 been shown to influence genotypic variation in Si accumulation including damage (Soininen *et al.*,
58 2013), nitrogen availability and plant competition (de Tombeur *et al.*, 2022), and climatic factors
59 (Johnson *et al.*, 2023).

60 Although damage-induced localised increases in tissue Si have been reported in several grasses
61 (Hartley *et al.*, 2015; McLarnon *et al.*, 2017) and in cucumber (Islam *et al.*, 2020), the mechanism
62 underpinning this localised increase in Si remains to be determined. One hypothesis is that the
63 uptake of Si from the soil increases, and this additional Si is then directed specifically to damaged
64 tissue. It is unlikely that differences in transpiration rate explain increased Si accumulation in

65 damaged leaves, as a localised damage response can be observed even in plants where transpiration
66 rates were greatly reduced (McLarnon *et al.*, 2017). Instead, changes in Si transporter abundance
67 and activity may be responsible, as has been suggested for rice (Ye *et al.*, 2013), though other
68 studies have not found evidence for this mechanism (McLarnon *et al.*, 2017).

69 A second hypothesis proposes that part or all the “extra” Si gets relocated from undamaged tissue to
70 damaged tissue. Si accumulation is an active process which involves significant energetic costs (de
71 Tombeur *et al.*, 2023) and thus the mobilisation of the Si already present in the plant towards the
72 sites where it is most needed to repel attack may be a more beneficial strategy than increased
73 uptake from the soil. However, once Si is deposited, it cannot be remobilised (Samuels *et al.*, 1991),
74 and thus this hypothesis could only pertain to the soluble Si fraction in plants. It has not yet been
75 experimentally tested, nor has the interaction between genetic variation in patterns of Si
76 accumulation, damage, and Si supply.

77 Here, the effect of mechanical damage on Si accumulation in a number of genetically diverse
78 landraces of wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) was investigated and the following questions were
79 addressed:

- 80 1. Is the induction of silicon-based defences in wheat a localised or systemic response, and
81 how is the magnitude and pattern of induction affected by Si supply?
- 82 2. If the response is localised, by what mechanism is this achieved? Is the source of the
83 increased Si in damaged leaves due to *de novo* uptake, or to reallocation of Si, in soluble
84 form, to damaged leaves from other parts of the plant?

85

86 **4. Methods**

87 **4.1. Genotype selection, growth conditions, and experimental treatments**

88 To investigate whether there is genotypic variation in the effect of damage on Si accumulation, ten
89 wheat landraces that differed significantly in their Si accumulation were selected: five high and five
90 low Si-accumulating landraces (Thorne *et al.*, 2021, Supplementary Table S1). A balanced factorial
91 experimental design was used with three plants per landrace per damage versus undamaged
92 treatment. Two seeds were planted in 1 L pots filled with a 2:1 mix of sand and terragreen. One
93 week after germination, seedlings were thinned to one plant per pot. After thinning, all plants were
94 fed twice weekly with 200 mL half-strength Hoagland’s solution supplemented with 1.8 mM
95 dissolved sodium metasilicate ($\text{Na}_2\text{SiO}_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$). Plants were watered as required.

96 Two of the high and two of the low Si-accumulating landraces were then selected to examine the
97 effect of Si availability on Si accumulation in response to damage. To control Si supply effectively,
98 plants were grown hydroponically. Seeds were germinated in sand for 10-11 days, and then
99 seedlings were transferred to 9 L plastic hydroponics boxes, filled with half-strength Hoagland's
100 solution. The pH was adjusted to 5.6-6.0 using 1 M HCl or 0.1 M KOH. The nutrient solution was
101 changed every 3-4 days. The hydroponics solutions were aerated throughout the experiment. A
102 balanced factorial experimental design was used with plants either damaged or not and
103 supplemented with Si (+Si) or not (- Si). Plants supplemented with Si received Hoagland's solution
104 containing 1.8 mM Si. Sodium chloride (NaCl) was used to balance sodium levels for plants not
105 supplemented with Si. Three plants per landrace, per Si fertilisation level, and per damage treatment
106 were used.

107 To identify the source of the additional Si leading to the localised induction in damaged leaves, one
108 landrace (L1) was selected. A balanced factorial experimental design was used with plants either
109 damaged or not. All plants were grown hydroponically with 1.8 mM Si for the first three weeks.
110 Immediately prior to damage, half the plants were moved to a medium without Si supplementation
111 (+/- Si) while the remaining plants continued to be grown with Si supplementation (+/+ Si). Plants
112 were harvested three days after the first, second, and fourth damage. Three plants per treatment
113 were used.

114 All plants were grown under controlled glasshouse conditions (16 h daylight; 20 °C /15 °C day/night).
115 At harvest, roots were washed in deionised water and excess water was removed. Leaf, stem, and
116 root fresh weight was recorded. Plants were oven-dried at 70 °C until constant mass was achieved,
117 then dry weight was recorded.

118 **4.2. Damage Treatment**

119 A damage treatment was started four weeks after germination and continued for three weeks. In
120 the case of the ten landraces grown in soil, plants were damaged three times a week, whereas plants
121 grown hydroponically were damaged twice weekly. A damage treatment involved removing
122 approximately half of a newly produced leaf along the midrib. Plants were harvested one day after
123 the final damage event, seven weeks after germination unless otherwise stated. Plants that were not
124 mechanically damaged were labelled as undamaged plants. The weight and Si concentration of
125 damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants were analysed separately.

126

127 **4.3. Si Measurements**

128 Portable X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (P-XRF) was used to measure the leaf Si concentration of
129 all plants and the root Si concentration of plants grown hydroponically (Reidinger *et al.*, 2012). Dried
130 leaf material was ball-milled (Retsch MM400 Mixer mill, Haan, Germany) and ground material was
131 pressed at 10 tons into pellets using a manual hydraulic press with a 13 mm die (Specac, Orpington,
132 UK). Si analysis (% Si dry weight) was performed using a commercial P-XRF instrument (Nitron
133 XL3t900 GOLDD analyser: Thermo Scientific Winchester, UK) held in a test stand (SmartStand,
134 Thermo Scientific, Winchester, UK). The P-XRF machine was calibrated using Si-spiked synthetic
135 methyl cellulose (Sigma-Aldrich, product no. 274429) and validated using Certified Reference
136 Materials of NCS DC73349 'Bush branches and leaves' obtained from China National Analysis Center
137 for Iron and Steel. To avoid signal loss by air absorption, the analyses were performed under a
138 helium atmosphere (Reidinger *et al.*, 2012). A reading of each side of the pellet was taken,
139 approximately one hour apart, to account for *u*-drift in the instrument (i.e. variation in readings
140 between consecutive runs using identical parameters; Johnson, 2014). The two readings were
141 averaged to obtain the Si concentration (%). The Si concentration of damaged and undamaged
142 leaves of damaged plants was analysed separately. Si content (mg) was calculated as:

143
$$Si\ content\ (mg) = \frac{Si\ concentration\ (\%)}{100} \times dry\ weight\ (mg)$$

144 **4.4. Measuring soluble Si**

145 To measure the amount of soluble Si present in the leaves, one landrace (L1) was grown
146 hydroponically with 1.8 mM Si for seven weeks. Four leaves were damaged simultaneously (~17 % of
147 the leaves) and plants were harvested five days after the damage. The soluble Si concentration was
148 measured for ten damaged plants and six undamaged plants. Damaged and undamaged leaves of
149 damaged plants were analysed separately.

150 Leaf soluble Si was measured using an adapted version of the molybdenum method of measuring
151 plant available Si in the soil (Sauer *et al.*, 2006). Briefly, samples were oven-dried at 70 °C and ground
152 in a ball mill. A total of 2 g of sample was added to a 50 mL polyethylene tube with 20 mL 0.01 M
153 CaCl₂. Samples were shaken slowly at 30 rpm for 16 h then centrifuged at 2000 rpm for 10 min. The
154 supernatant was passed through filter paper and the resulting sample was used for Si determination
155 by the molybdenum assay. For the assay, 1 mL sample, 30 mL 20 % acetic acid, and 10 mL
156 ammonium molybdate (54 g L⁻¹) were mixed in a 50 mL polyethylene tube. Samples were mixed and
157 then left to stand for 5 minutes. 5 mL 20 % (w/v) tartaric acid and 1 mL of reducing solution were

158 added. The reducing solution comprised 8 g L⁻¹ Na₂SO₃, 1.6 g L⁻¹ 1-amino-2-naphthol-4-sulfonic acid,
159 and 100 g L⁻¹ NaHSO₃ dissolved in deionised water. A final volume of 50 mL was made using 20 %
160 acetic acid. Samples were left at room temperature for 30 min for colour development then the
161 absorbance at 810 nm was measured. A standard curve was created using 0, 0.1, 0.5, 1, 5, and 10 µg
162 Si mL⁻¹ to determine the Si concentration of the samples. The amount of soluble Si measured using
163 the molybdenum assay was compared to the total Si concentration measured using XRF to estimate
164 the total soluble Si present.

165 **4.5. Measuring soluble Si in phloem exudate**

166 Phloem exudate was collected using the EDTA-mediated method as described in Xu *et al.* (2019)
167 using plants grown hydroponically with 1.8 mM supplementary Si for three weeks. Three leaves per
168 plant were damaged, then half the plants were moved to medium without supplementary Si.
169 Phloem exudate was collected 24 h later using three leaves per plant. Phloem exudate was collected
170 separately for damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants, and for undamaged plants. As a
171 negative control, phloem exudate was collected in water (no EDTA) from undamaged plants. Three
172 plants per treatment were used. The Si concentration of the phloem exudate was then analysed
173 using the molybdenum method as described above.

174 **4.6. Measuring expression of Si transporters**

175 To investigate whether damage affected Si transporter gene expression, the expression levels of the
176 Si transporters *Lsi3* and *Lsi6* were determined using reverse transcriptase quantitative polymerase
177 chain reaction (RT-qPCR). These transporters were chosen as they are known to be expressed in the
178 shoots, whereas the other Si transporters, *Lsi1* and *Lsi2*, are expressed predominantly in the roots
179 (Yamaji *et al.*, 2015). Initial experiments on the leaves of wheat landraces confirmed this with only
180 very low levels of expression of *Lsi1* and *Lsi2*, but significant expression of *Lsi3* and *Lsi6*, found. Plants
181 of the landrace L1 were grown hydroponically with 1.8 mM Si for four weeks. Plants were then
182 moved to – Si medium immediately prior to the first damage event and then subject to either one or
183 two damage events (with the second damage event occurring 24 hours after the first damage
184 event). Leaf samples were taken from the middle of the newest expanded leaf 4, 24, and 48 h after
185 one or two damages. Initially two samples were analysed for each time point and subsequently up to
186 five biological replicates from a given timepoint were analysed once the most relevant timepoints
187 had been identified.

188 Primers were designed to match all homoeologs, based on existing wheat sequences where
189 available, or on homology to the barley sequence (Supplementary Table 2). Leaf tissue was collected

190 and ground under liquid nitrogen using a mortar and pestle and RNA extracted using a RNeasy kit
191 with DNase treatment (Qiagen), according to the manufacturer's instructions. cDNA synthesis was
192 performed using Reverse Transcriptase Superscript II M-MLV (Invitrogen) on 500 ng RNA. RT-qPCR
193 was performed using a QuantiNova SYBR green PCR kit (Qiagen) with 2 μ L cDNA (diluted 1:10) and
194 700 nM primer on a Rotor-Gene Q PCR machine (Qiagen). Amplification was performed as follows:
195 95 °C for 2 min; 40 cycles of 95 °C 5 s and 60 °C for 10 s; determination of melt curve. *Actin* and *TEF1*
196 were used as reference genes. The qPCR results were analysed using a variation of the 2^{DDCt} method
197 as described in Muller *et al.* (2002) and an adapted version of the Q-gene excel software (Simon,
198 2003).

199 **4.7. Statistical Analysis**

200 All statistical analyses were performed using R software (version 4.2.0, R Core Team, 2022).
201 Summary statistics were calculated using the Rmisc package (Hope, 2013) and graphs were
202 produced using the ggplot2 package (Wickham, 2016). Two-way and three-way analyses of variance
203 (ANOVA) were used to test the effect of Si supply, damage, number of damage events, and landrace
204 on Si concentration, as relevant to each experiment. Due to the lack of independence between
205 damaged and undamaged leaves from damaged plants, ANOVAs were performed separately
206 comparing undamaged plants to either damaged or undamaged leaves of damaged plants.
207 Additionally, the average leaf Si concentration of damaged plants was calculated by averaging the Si
208 concentration of damaged and undamaged leaves, accounting for differences in the proportion of
209 the leaves that were damaged or undamaged. ANOVA was then used to compare the average leaf Si
210 concentration of damaged plants to undamaged plants.

211 Data normality was checked using Shapiro tests and homogeneity of variance was tested using
212 Levene's tests. To satisfy the test assumptions, Si concentration was logit transformed and Si content
213 was log transformed. No transformation was applied to gene expression or soluble Si data. Paired *t*-
214 tests were used to test for localised induction of Si defences between damaged and undamaged
215 leaves of damaged plants. A significance level of $P < 0.05$ was used for all analyses. Significant results
216 were analysed by performing Tukey's Honest Significance Difference (HSD) *post-hoc* tests using the
217 emmeans package (Lenth, 2021).

218 **5. Results**

219 **5.1. Damage results in a localised increase in Si**

220 Averaged across all ten landraces, repeated damage significantly increased Si accumulation in
221 damaged leaves of damaged plants when compared to undamaged plants (Figure 1; $F_{1,40} = 67.9$, $P <$

222 0.001). The biggest percentage increase was 107.6 ± 28.4 % in the L3 landrace, compared to an
223 increase of only 34.2 ± 9.3 % in H5. The localised induction in damaged leaves was significant in all
224 landraces except landraces H5 and L2, though there was still a trend towards significance even in
225 these landraces ($P = 0.055$ and 0.052 respectively). Overall, the interaction between landrace and
226 damage was not significant ($F_{9,40} = 1.5$, $P = 0.171$).

227 Si accumulation was lower in the undamaged leaves of the damaged plants, averaged across all ten
228 landraces, when compared to the levels in undamaged plants (Figure 1; $F_{1,40} = 9.2$, $P = 0.004$).
229 However, post-hoc testing revealed that the decrease in undamaged leaves was specific to the low
230 Si-accumulating landraces L1 ($P = 0.013$) and L5 ($P = 0.026$), with L3 and L4 showing a similar trend
231 albeit marginally non-significant ($P = 0.051$ and 0.054 respectively). The lack of increase in Si in
232 undamaged leaves on damaged plants, or even decreases in some landraces, means there was no
233 overall increase in leaf Si in damaged plants compared to undamaged ones for any landrace
234 (Supplementary Figure 1). Thus, the induction of Si defences occurred only locally and was not
235 systemic.

236 On average, high Si-accumulating landraces had higher shoot Si concentrations compared to low Si
237 accumulating landraces, with an average Si concentration of 2.97 ± 0.17 for undamaged high Si
238 landraces compared to 1.89 ± 0.09 for low Si landraces. There was no significant correlation between
239 leaf Si in undamaged plants and the relative increase in leaf Si due to damage ($r = -0.32$, $P = 0.364$).

240 **5.2. The effect of damage on Si accumulation depends on Si availability**

241 Repeated damage significantly increased the leaf Si accumulation in the damaged leaves of the four
242 landraces tested (Figure 2; $F_{1,47} = 216.0$, $P < 0.001$). This was the case in both the +Si (1.8 mM Si
243 supplied to the hydroponic medium) and -Si (no exogenous Si supply) treatments, although this
244 increase was significantly greater in the +Si treatment (Figure 2; Si availability x damage interaction:
245 $F_{1,47} = 23.1$, $P < 0.001$).

246

247 As with the ten landraces, damage resulted in only a localised induction of Si defences. Damage
248 significantly decreased leaf Si accumulation in the undamaged leaves of damaged plants compared
249 to undamaged plants in the +Si treatment ($F_{1,24} = 18.2$, $P < 0.001$), but this did not occur in the -Si
250 plants, although leaf Si in this treatment was already an order of magnitude lower ($F_{1,23} = 0.5$, $P =$
251 0.503). There was no significant variation in the Si response to damage among landraces in either
252 the -Si or +Si treatments. No significant effect of damage on root Si accumulation was found,

253 although, as in the leaf tissue, there was a positive effect of Si supply on Si concentrations
254 (Supplementary Figure 2).

255

256 **5.3. Si is redirected towards damaged leaves in soluble form**

257 To determine whether the observed increase in Si accumulation in damaged leaves was the result of
258 *de novo* Si uptake or due to reallocation of Si from undamaged leaves, the exogenous Si supply was
259 removed from plants from the L1 landrace prior to a series of damage events. Increasing the number
260 of damage events significantly increased Si accumulation in damaged leaves of damaged plants,
261 although this response was significantly higher in +/+Si (continuous Si supply) plants compared to
262 +/-Si (Si removed before damage) plants (Figure 3; Si x number of damage events interaction: $F_{2,24} =$
263 $21.6, P < 0.001$). For +/+Si plants, a greater number of damage events led to a more pronounced Si
264 increase in damaged leaves. However, in the case of +/-Si plants, the opposite trend occurred: each
265 damage event was associated with a reduced localised induction, possibly because the total Si
266 concentration in these plants was “diluted” down by to continuing growth of plant tissue. Thus, after
267 four damage events, the increase in Si in damaged leaves in +/- Si plants was reduced to 81 % of the
268 increase occurring after a single damage, whereas for +/+ Si plants, the increase in Si after four
269 damage events was over three times as great (302 %) of that after a single damage.

270 The distribution of Si in the root, stem, and leaf tissues of damaged and undamaged plants, after
271 one, two, or four damage treatments, was calculated for both +/+Si and +/-Si plants. The total
272 amount of Si accumulated in the plants did not differ significantly between damaged and
273 undamaged plants (Figure 4; $F_{1,23} = 0.1, P = 0.778$), regardless of the number of damage events or
274 the nature of the Si supply. Si content increased with an increasing number of damage events only
275 for +/+ Si plants, as would be expected in the case of continuous Si supply. There was no significant
276 difference in root or stem Si concentration between damaged and undamaged plants, although Si
277 supply significantly increased both root and stem Si concentration (Supplementary Figure 3). For +/-
278 Si plants, increasing the number of damage events significantly decreased the stem Si concentration
279 ($F_{2,24} = 20.5, P < 0.001$).

280 In the absence of external Si supply (+/- Si plants) and given the similarity of total Si content
281 between damaged and undamaged plants, any increase in Si in damaged leaves most likely
282 originates from the relocation of Si from undamaged leaves. The soluble Si fraction of damaged and
283 undamaged leaves was measured in plants of the landrace L1 grown hydroponically for 7 weeks and
284 damaged once, in order to assess whether it is sufficiently large to account for the extra Si found in
285 damaged leaves, without the need for additional uptake. Undamaged plants had a soluble Si content

286 of $2.2 \pm 0.1 \text{ mg g}^{-1}$, compared to $4.0 \pm 0.1 \text{ mg g}^{-1}$ for damaged leaves and $1.8 \pm 0.1 \text{ mg g}^{-1}$ for
287 undamaged leaves of damaged plants. Based on the difference between undamaged leaves of
288 damaged plants and undamaged plants, this means that on average there will be 0.4 mg g^{-1} soluble
289 Si available to move from undamaged leaves to damaged leaves of damaged plants. The soluble Si
290 from undamaged leaves needs to provide the 1.8 mg g^{-1} increase in soluble Si observed in damaged
291 leaves compared to undamaged plants. Thus, as long as the amount of undamaged leaves is 4.5
292 times as the weight of damaged leaves on a plant, there is sufficient soluble Si to relocate from
293 undamaged to damaged leaves and account for all the localised induction in Si defences observed.

294 It was hypothesised that the redistribution of Si from undamaged to damaged leaves is the result of
295 soluble Si being moved *via* the phloem. Supporting this idea, significant concentrations of soluble Si
296 were measured in the phloem exudate. For +/+ Si plants, soluble Si in the phloem was found to be:
297 $1.9 \pm 0.6 \text{ mM}$ in undamaged plants, $1.1 \pm 0.5 \text{ mM}$ in undamaged leaves of damaged plants, and $1.9 \pm$
298 0.4 mM in damaged leaves. The phloem Si of +/- Si plants was lower at: $1.1 \pm 0.5 \text{ mM}$ in undamaged
299 plants, $0.9 \pm 0.7 \text{ mM}$ in undamaged leaves of damaged plants, and $1.0 \pm 0.4 \text{ mM}$ in damaged leaves.
300 The Si in the phloem of damaged leaves was significantly higher in the +/+ Si plants than in the +/- Si
301 plants ($F_{1,8} = 9.4$, $P = 0.016$) but there was no difference between the phloem Si levels in the
302 undamaged leaves of damaged plants from the Si two treatments ($F_{1,8} = 2.0$, $P = 0.196$). This suggests
303 that soluble Si is being directed from undamaged to damaged leaves, particularly in plants with
304 continuous Si supply, supporting the hypothesis that Si is being mobilised from undamaged to
305 damaged leaves where Si can be deposited as a physical defence.

306 Soluble Si may be loaded into the phloem by the action of Si transporters. Specifically, the activity of
307 *Lsi3* and *Lsi6*, which are known to be expressed in the leaves, may be upregulated in damaged
308 plants. To test this hypothesis, RT-qPCR was applied to determine the expression levels of the *Lsi3*
309 and *Lsi6* genes. However, no consistent significant differences in *Lsi3* or *Lsi6* gene expression
310 between damaged and undamaged plants were found, irrespective of the time point (4, 24, or 48 h)
311 or the number of damage events (one or two; Supplementary Figure 4).

312 **6. Discussion**

313 **6.1. Is the induction of silicon-based defences a localised or systemic response, and** 314 **how is this affected by Si supply?**

315 Damage resulted in localised, but not systemic, induction of silicon defences. This response was
316 observed across a range of landraces and at different levels of Si availability, although providing
317 supplementary Si significantly increased the magnitude of the response. In contrast to the prevailing

318 hypothesis of Si being immediately deposited and thus rendered immobile, this study provides
319 evidence that soluble Si can be moved from undamaged to damaged leaves to increase Si defences
320 close to the site of wounding, where they are most needed. This appears to be the result of soluble
321 Si being transported in the phloem sap to the stem, where it is then loaded into the xylem and
322 transported to damaged leaves *via* the transpiration stream. However, this study found no evidence
323 to suggest changes in Si transporter gene expression are involved.

324 In this study, artificial damage was used in place of herbivory to separate the effects of damage to
325 tissue caused by the herbivore from the effects of molecules in the saliva and other excretions of the
326 herbivore (Waterman *et al.*, 2019). Damage was found to significantly increase Si accumulation, a
327 conclusion supported by previous studies which have found that mechanical damage is sufficient to
328 significantly increase plant Si-based defences (McNaughton *et al.*, 1985; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Ryalls *et*
329 *al.*, 2018), though it is also clear that actual herbivory can produce greater induction (Massey *et al.*,
330 2007).

331 This study found significant variation in Si accumulation among wheat landraces. Eight out of ten
332 landraces responded to damage by significantly increasing Si accumulation in damaged leaves, and
333 this increase ranged from 34.2 % to 107.6 %. Similar genotypic variation has been found in other
334 species: Bañuelos and Obeso (2000) reported significant genotypic variation in response to damage
335 in the grass species *Agrostis tenuis*. Likewise, França *et al.* (2019) reported genotype-specific effects
336 of Si in rice, such that Si reduced stem damage by stink bugs in only two out of three genotypes
337 investigated. Using six genotypes for each of four grass species, Soininen *et al.* (2013) found
338 significant genotypic variation in Si induction in response to damage in only two of the species
339 examined.

340 This study found only a localised, and not systemic, Si response to damage, with the Si concentration
341 increasing only in the damaged leaves of damaged plants. Few previous studies have made a
342 distinction between the Si concentration of damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants. In
343 agreement with the results of this study, insect herbivory significantly increased Si accumulation in
344 attacked leaves of two genotypes of cucumber (Islam *et al.*, 2020) and damage resulted in localised
345 induction of Si defences in three grass species (Hartley *et al.*, 2015). However, although damaged
346 leaves had higher Si compared to undamaged plants for all genotypes, McLarnon *et al.* (2017) found
347 significantly increased Si in damaged leaves compared to undamaged leaves in only one out of three
348 tall fescue genotypes investigated.

349 **6.2. By what mechanism is localised induction of Si defences achieved?**

350 Overall, the Si concentration of damaged plants was not significantly different to that of undamaged
351 plants. It was hypothesised that this was a result of the redirection of Si into damaged leaves, with
352 the Si content of undamaged leaves of damaged plants being significantly lower than that of
353 undamaged leaves of undamaged plants. To test for this hypothesis, plants were grown with Si and
354 then moved to –Si medium prior to damage. Increased Si accumulation in damaged leaves was still
355 observed in these plants, as well as decreased Si accumulation in undamaged leaves, suggesting that
356 Si redirection had occurred.

357 It has widely been reported in the literature that once deposited as silica, Si cannot be remobilised
358 (Yoshida *et al.*, 1962; Jones and Handreck, 1967; Samuels *et al.*, 1991; Liu *et al.*, 2019; Frick *et al.*,
359 2020). However, it is likely that the Si was redirected into damaged leaves prior to deposition as
360 silica, when it was still in a soluble form. Earlier studies have indicated that there may be relatively
361 high levels of soluble Si present in the cytoplasm (Gartner *et al.*, 1984; Hodson and Evans, 1995),
362 which could be used to increase the levels of Si in damaged leaves even after the removal of Si from
363 the growth medium.

364 To examine whether there was sufficient soluble Si to explain the increased Si localised in damaged
365 leaves, leaf soluble Si was measured. The soluble Si concentration of undamaged plants was taken as
366 a baseline for the amount of soluble Si predicted to be present in plants before damage. The
367 undamaged plants had an average total leaf Si concentration of 1.4 %, of which 15.7 % was soluble
368 Si. Thus, undamaged plants comprised approximately 0.22 % soluble Si. However, this is likely to be
369 an underestimate as the formation of silicomolybdate complexes in the molybdenum-based assay
370 depends on the size of the silicates present. While monomeric and dimeric silicates react quickly,
371 higher oligomers may not have fully reacted over the course of the 30-minute assay (Coradin *et al.*,
372 2004). Despite this, it was calculated that there is sufficient soluble Si present in undamaged leaves
373 to explain the increase in Si in damaged leaves. Thus, it was concluded that the increase in Si in
374 damaged leaves can be explained by the movement of soluble Si from undamaged leaves into
375 damaged leaves of damaged plants (Figure 5).

376 It was hypothesised that the increase in Si in damaged leaves would be the result of differences in Si
377 transporter gene expression. In rice, Si transporters are used to preferentially allocate Si to the
378 panicle and away from the flag leaf (Yamaji and Ma, 2009; Yamaji *et al.*, 2015) and it is possible that
379 a similar mechanism results in the preferential allocation of Si to damaged leaves. To test for this,
380 several time points, after one and two damage events, were used to investigate whether the

381 localised increase in Si in response to damage was the result of changes in Si transporter gene
382 expression. However, no significant differences in Si transporter gene expression were found,
383 despite the numerous timepoints tested meaning that it is unlikely any increase in gene expression
384 was overlooked. Differences in Si transporter gene expression have been found in rice (Ye *et al.*,
385 2013) but not in other species (McLarnon *et al.*, 2017). It remains possible that post-transcriptional
386 processes affect the activity of Si transporters as gene expression is not always indicative of protein
387 activity. Post-translational regulation has been found to be important for aquaporins (Verdoucq *et*
388 *al.*, 2014). Alternatively, yet to be identified Si transporters may be involved, or the activity of
389 transcriptional regulators may be involved, as has been found in rice (Wang *et al.*, 2017).

390 To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have been carried out to directly measure Si in
391 the phloem, and it is generally suggested that Si may not be phloem-mobile (Raven, 1983). However,
392 xylem-to-phloem Si transfer has been suggested to occur during grain filling in rice, though this was
393 not actually tested (Zhou *et al.*, 2021). Likewise, Yang *et al.* (2017) speculated that Si in the phloem
394 may deter aphid feeding in rice but could not rule out the possibility that their results were due to Si
395 affecting phloem sap composition. Both boron and arsenic, which share many chemical similarities
396 to Si, have been observed in the phloem (Carey *et al.*, 2011; Zhao *et al.*, 2012; Umemura and
397 Takenaka, 2014), although previous studies have not investigated whether this is also the case for Si.
398 In the case of boron, it must bind to sugars before being transported in the phloem (Umemura and
399 Takenaka, 2014) and it is possible that a similar mechanism is involved in Si redirection, with *in vitro*
400 studies supporting the idea that various forms of Si can bind to biologically relevant polymers
401 (Annenkov *et al.*, 2017). Our study is the first to report significant levels of soluble Si present in the
402 phloem exudate.

403 The data presented here suggest a model of soluble Si being redirected from undamaged to
404 damaged leaves *via* the phloem. While it is noted that contamination is often an issue associated
405 with EDTA-facilitated phloem exudate collection, alternative methods including aphid stylectomy
406 would not provide sufficient yield for soluble Si analysis (Gaupels *et al.*, 2008). Another issue with
407 EDTA-facilitated phloem exudate collection is that the amount of exudate released is unknown,
408 meaning that quantitative comparisons between samples are not possible. Nevertheless, the
409 presence of Si in the phloem exudate of +/- Si plants which have been grown without exogenous Si
410 for 24 hr strongly supports the hypothesis that Si is being transported in the phloem as the presence
411 of soluble Si in such +/- Si plants cannot be explained by *de novo* uptake from the hydroponic
412 medium. Furthermore, as localised Si induction was observed even nine days after the removal of

413 external Si supply, it is unlikely that there is still enough Si present in the xylem to explain the
414 observed induction of Si.

415 Due to the low levels of plant-available Si found in many soils, it has recently been suggested that
416 there are significant costs associated with high Si accumulation and that these are much higher than
417 previously recognised (de Tombeur *et al.*, 2023). Negative correlations between Si accumulation and
418 biomass have been reported in several grass species, and in a number of studies (Simpson *et al.*,
419 2017; Johnson and Hartley, 2018; de Tombeur *et al.*, 2021), suggesting that there is a trade-off
420 between Si uptake and growth. This could reflect the fact that Si deposition is an active process
421 involving the use of active efflux transporters (Ma *et al.*, 2007a; Ma and Yamaji, 2015), so there may
422 be an energetic cost associated with high Si uptake (Simpson *et al.*, 2017). Thus, redirection of
423 soluble Si from undamaged leaves to sites of damage might be a more energetically favourable way
424 of increasing defences against herbivores than the more costly mechanism of increasing Si uptake.

425 **6.3. Conclusions**

426 By separately measuring Si accumulation in damaged and undamaged leaves, this study has
427 demonstrated that damage results in only a localised, and not systemic, induction of Si defences.
428 This localised induction was observed in multiple landraces, although it varied between them, and
429 the response was stronger when plants were grown at high levels of Si availability. The evidence
430 presented here suggests that this localised induction is the result of the redirection of soluble Si
431 from undamaged to damaged leaves *via* the phloem. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first
432 demonstration of soluble Si being redirected towards the sites of wounding within damaged plants
433 to increase their defences, a mechanism which has implications for the cost-effectiveness of these
434 defences, as well as for wider understanding of the fitness benefits of Si accumulation.

435 **7. Supplementary data**

436 The following supplementary data are available at JXB online.

437 Table S1. List of landraces used for this study.

438 Table S2. List of primers used for this study.

439 Table S3. ANOVA results for the effect of damage and Si supply on Si accumulation.

440 Fig. S1. Average leaf Si concentration for ten wheat landraces.

441 Fig. S2. Root Si concentration for four landraces grown hydroponically with and without Si
442 supplementation and subject to damage.

443 Fig. S3. Stem and root Si concentrations for plants grown without Si supplementation after damage.

444 Fig. S4. Si transporter gene expression after damage.

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448 any Author Accepted Manuscript version arising.

449 **9. Author contributions**

450 Conceptualization, S.J.T., S.E.H. and F.J.M.M.; methodology, S.J.T., S.E.H. and F.J.M.M.; formal
451 analysis, S.J.T.; investigation, S.J.T.; data curation, S.J.T.; writing—original draft preparation, S.J.T.;
452 writing—review and editing, S.E.H. and F.J.M.M.; funding acquisition, S.E.H. and F.J.M.M. All authors
453 have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

454 **10. Conflict of interest**

455 The authors declare no competing interests.

456 **11. Funding statement**

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459 **12. Data availability**

460 All data generated and analysed in this study are available upon request.

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14. Figures

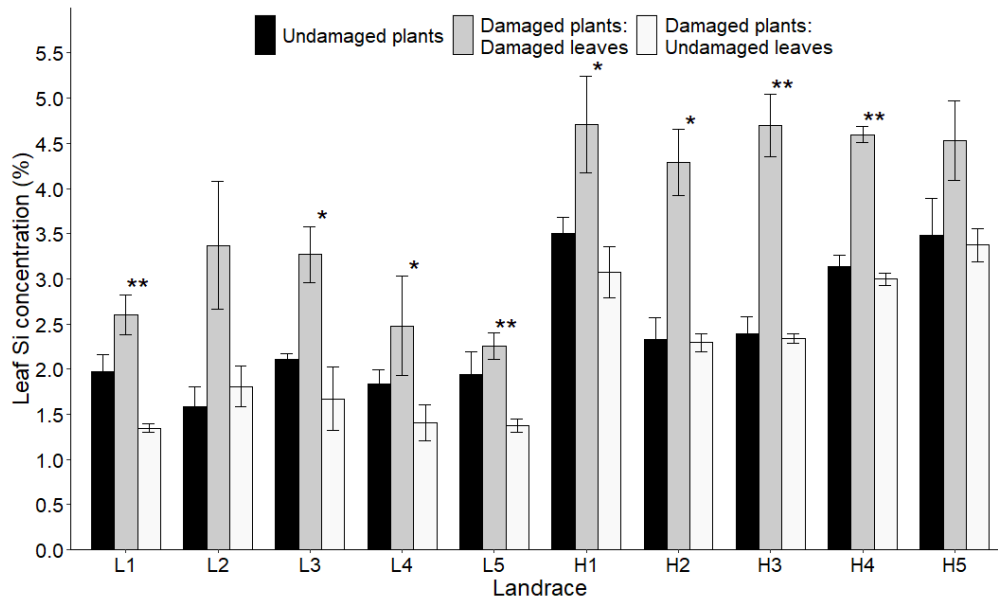


Figure 1: Variation in Si accumulation following damage in ten wheat landraces. Leaf Si concentration for damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants, and undamaged plants. L1-L5 are low Si-accumulating landraces; H1-H5 are high Si-accumulating landraces. Mean values \pm SE are shown. $N = 3$. ANOVA damaged leaves of damaged plants vs undamaged plants: Landrace: $F_{9,40} = 12.0$, $P < 0.001$, Damage treatment: $F_{1,40} = 67.9$, $P < 0.001$. ANOVA undamaged leaves of damaged plants vs undamaged plants: Landrace $F_{9,40} = 19.5$, $P < 0.001$, Damage treatment: $F_{1,40} = 9.2$, $P = 0.004$. Statistically significant differences between damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants, determined by paired t -tests, are indicated: *** $P < 0.001$, ** $P < 0.01$, and * $P < 0.05$.

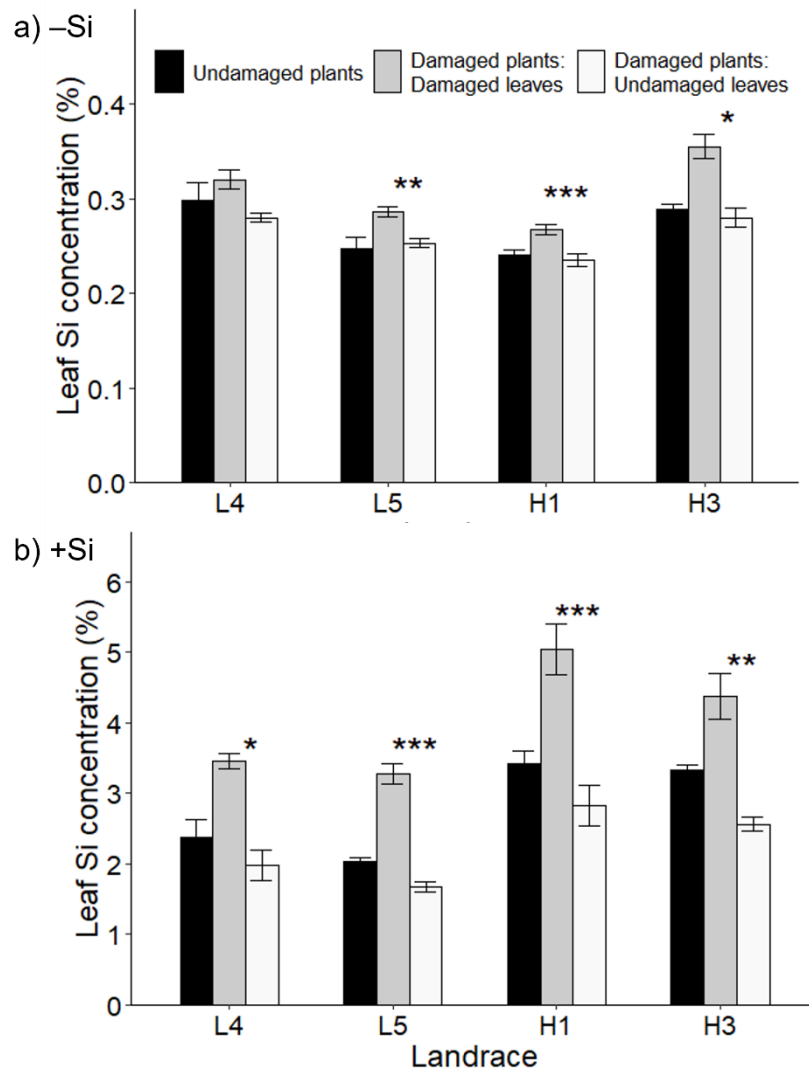
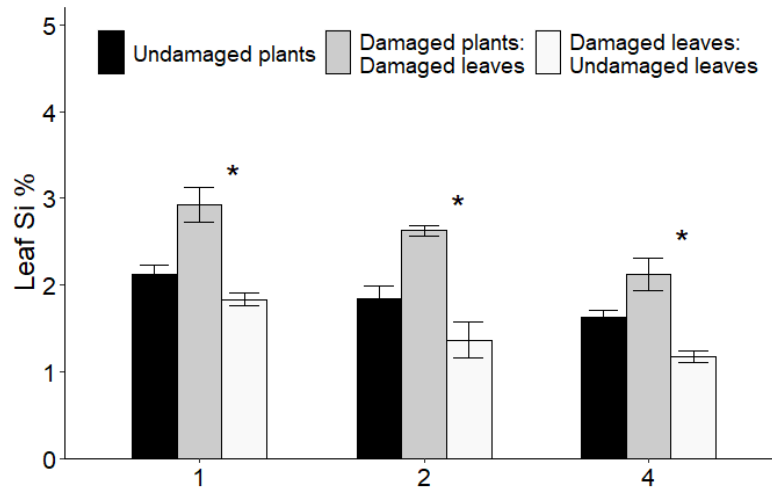


Figure 2: Effect of Si supply and damage on Si accumulation. a) Leaf Si concentration of -Si plants. b) Leaf Si concentration of +Si plants. Note the different scales on the y-axis. Mean values \pm standard error (SE) are shown. $N = 3$. L4 and L5 are low Si-accumulating landrace. H1 and H3 are high Si-accumulating landraces. L indicates a low Si-accumulating landrace. ANOVA for Landrace, Si availability, Landrace x Si availability, and Damage treatment x Si availability at $P < 0.001$ for both damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants vs undamaged plants, see

Supplementary Table 3 for full results. Statistically significant differences between damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants, determined by paired t -tests, are indicated: *** $P < 0.001$, ** $P < 0.01$, and * $P < 0.05$.

a) Si removed prior to damage (+/- Si)



b) Continuous Si supply (+/+ Si)

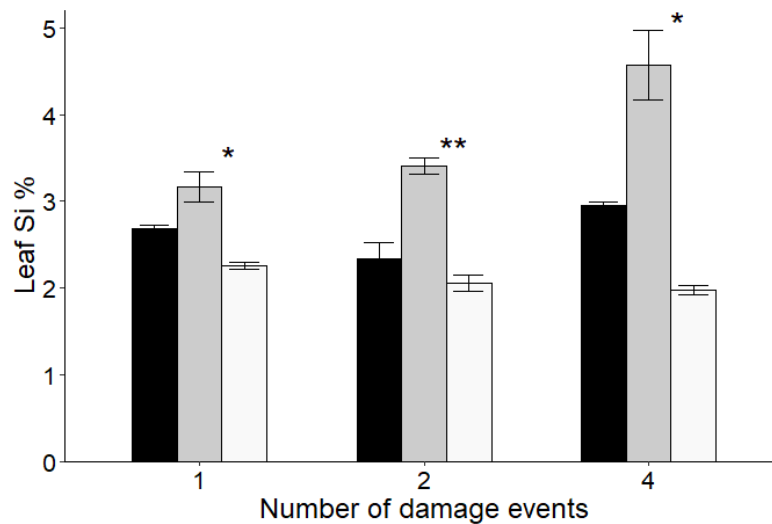


Figure 3: Effect of reducing Si availability on Si accumulation after damage. Leaf Si concentration for damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants, and undamaged plants. a) Plants moved to medium without Si supplementation when damage was started (+/-Si plants). b) Plants grown with continuous Si supplementation (+/+ Si plants). The low Si-accumulating landrace, L1, was used. Mean values \pm SE are shown. N = 3. ANOVA for Si availability, Damage treatment, and Number of damage events x Si availability at $P < 0.01$ for both damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants vs undamaged plants, see

Supplementary Table 3 for full results. Statistically significant differences between damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants, determined by paired *t*-tests, are indicated: *** $P < 0.001$, ** $P < 0.01$, and * $P < 0.05$.

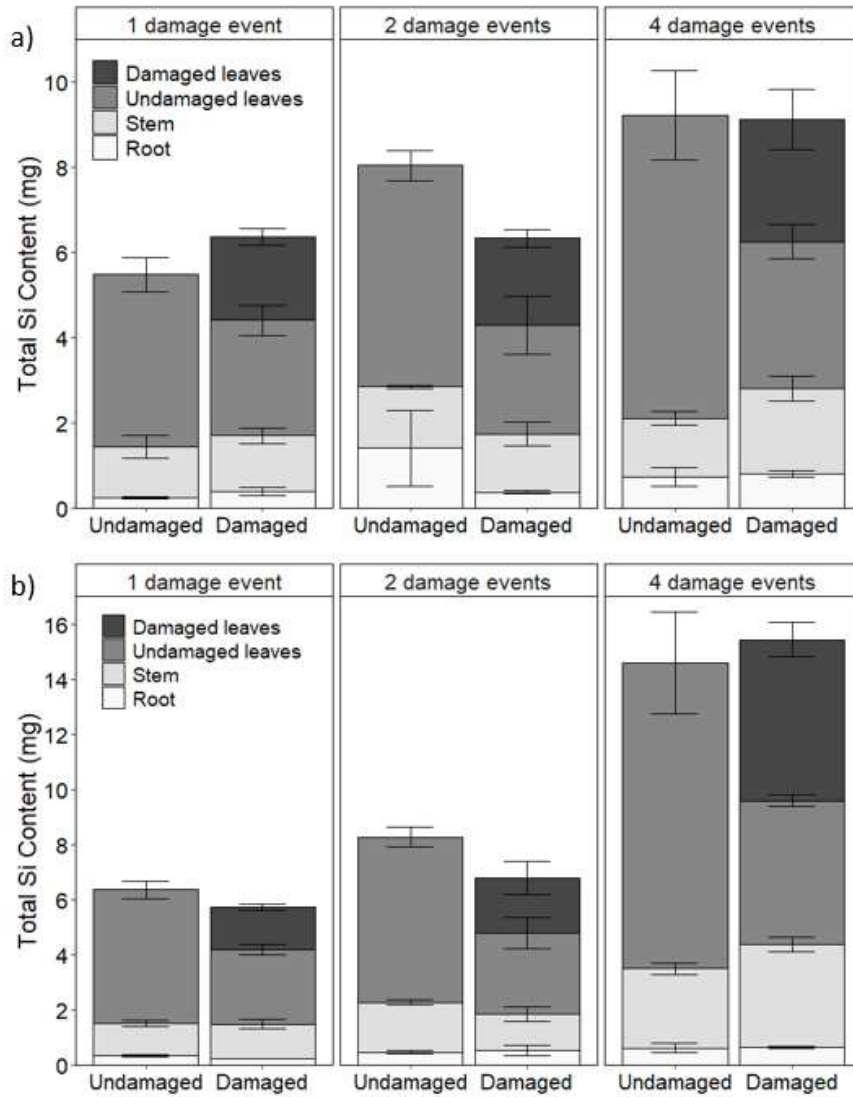


Figure 4: Total leaf Si content was unaffected by damage. Allocation of total Si accumulated to different plant tissues in damaged and undamaged plants after successive damage events. a) +/- Si plants sampled after 1, 2, and 4 damage events. b) ++ Si plants after 1, 2, and 4 damage. Mean values \pm SE are shown. N = 3. Note different scales of y-axis. Significant ANOVA effects: Number of damage events: $F_{2,23} = 36.0$, $P < 0.001$, Si availability $F_{1,23} = 13.8$, $P = 0.001$, Number of damage events x Si availability $F_{2,23} = 8.1$, $P = 0.002$.

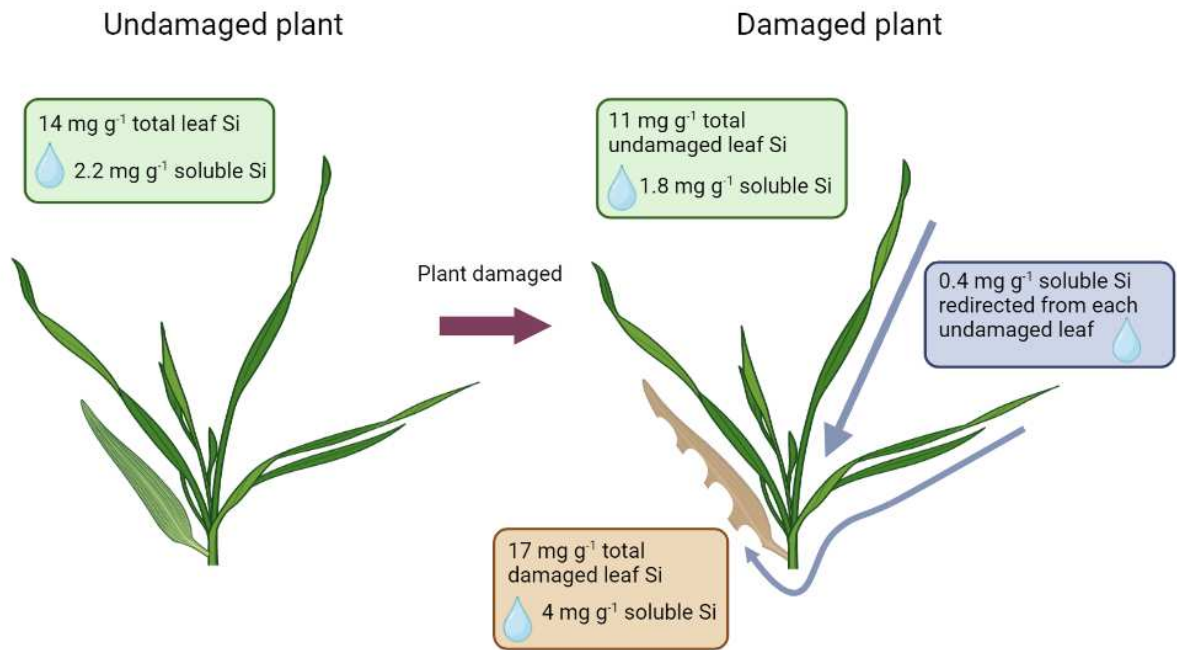


Figure 5: The localised increase in Si in damaged leaves can be explained by the redirection of soluble Si from undamaged leaves of damaged plants. An undamaged plant weighing 1 g DW contains a total of 14 mg Si g⁻¹ leaf on average, of which 2.2 mg g⁻¹ is soluble. After damage, soluble Si is moved from undamaged leaves to damaged leaves. This movement of soluble Si increases the total Si concentration in damaged leaves to 17 mg Si g⁻¹, of which 4 mg g⁻¹ is soluble. Provided the weight of undamaged leaves is at least 4.5 times more than the weight of damaged leaves, the increase in Si in damaged leaves can be explained by the redirection of soluble Si from undamaged to damaged leaves of damaged plants. This was the case for all the experiments presented here.

Figure created using BioRender (<https://www.biorender.com>).

Supplementary Information

Supplementary Table 1: List of landraces used in this study. H1-H5 are high Si-accumulating landraces while L1-L5 are low Si-accumulating landraces, as characterised in Thorne *et al.* (2021).

| Landrace | Collection | Plant ID | Plant Name | Origin |
|----------|------------|------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| H1 | CIMMYT | CWI 2166 | K7155.41 | Kenya |
| H2 | Watkins | 1190195 | Gahu (Nepali) or Kyo (Sikkimese) | India |
| H3 | CIMMYT | CWI 3909 | OUBAARD | South Africa |
| H4 | Watkins | 1190777 | Finland 3 | Finland |
| H5 | Prague | 01C0201531 | Orchon | Mongolia |
| L1 | Watkins | 1190521 | Dandi | India |
| L2 | Watkins | 1190568 | China 19 | China |
| L3 | Watkins | 1190605 | Karabash | Greece |
| L4 | Watkins | 1190662 | Samanta 1252 | Romania |
| L5 | Watkins | 1190751 | Armavir | USSR |

Supplementary Table 2: List of primers used for RT-qPCR.

| Target Gene | Forward Primer | Reverse Primer | Product size | Ensembl gene name (all homologues) |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------|--|
| <i>Actin</i> | AATGGTCAAGGCTGGTTTCG | ATCACCGACATAGGCATCCTTC | 124 | TraesCS1A02G020500, TraesCS1B02G024500, TraesCS1D02G020000 |
| <i>Tef1</i> | TTGGTGGCATTGGAAGTGTG | TTGACCTCAGTTGTCAGACCAG | 103 | TraesCS5B02G418200 TraesCS5D02G423400 |
| <i>Lsi3</i> | TGTTCAAGTACCTCGGCAAC | TTGAGGATGAACTCGGTGAGG | 144 | TraesCS4A02G412500, TraesCS4B02G312600, TraesCS4D02G310100 |
| <i>Lsi6</i> | TACTCGAACGAGATCCACGAC | TCTCCGATATCACCTTCTTGCC | 132 | TraesCS7A02G187800, TraesCS7B02G092900, TraesCS7D02G188800 |

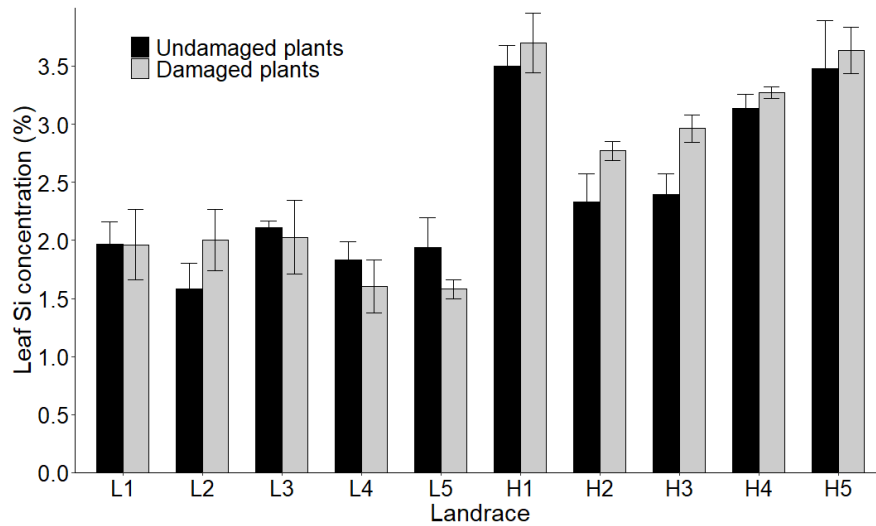
Supplementary Table 3: ANOVA results for Figures 2 and 3. Statistically significant results are highlighted in bold. N = 3 for each factor combination.

a) The effect of landrace, damage, and Si supply on Si concentration in damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants compared to undamaged plants.

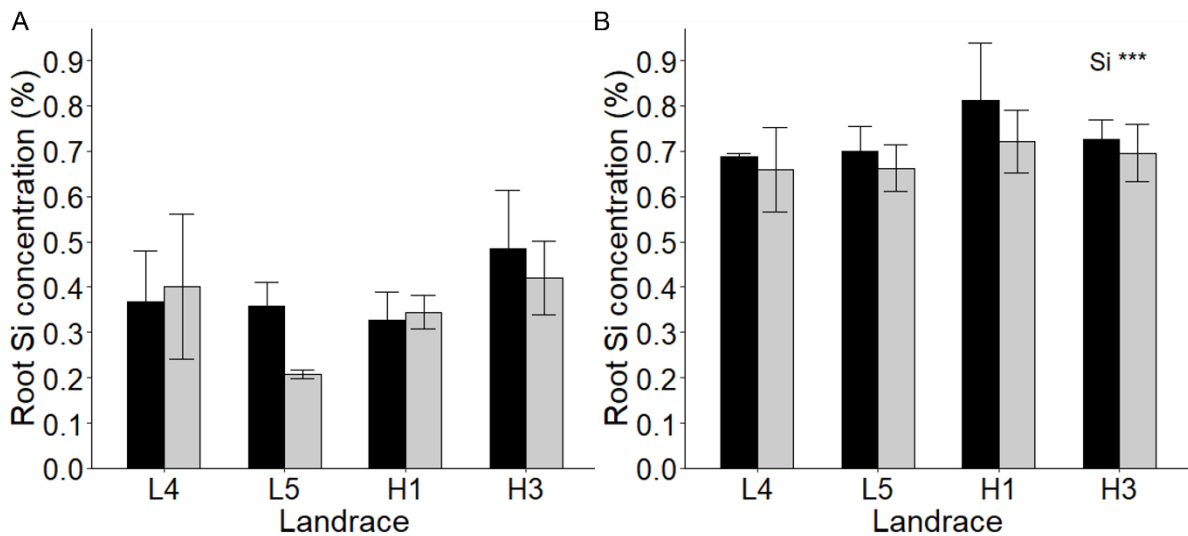
| | Leaf Si (%) | | | | | | Root Si (%) | | |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | Undamaged leaves | | | Damaged leaves | | | df | F | P |
| | df | F | P | df | F | P | | | |
| Landrace | 3 | 22.39 | < 0.001 | 3 | 24.81 | < 0.001 | 3 | 1.71 | 0.179 |
| Damage | 1 | 0.09 | 0.764 | 1 | 215.99 | < 0.001 | 1 | 0.79 | 0.378 |
| Si | 1 | 6188.77 | < 0.001 | 1 | 9076.47 | < 0.001 | 1 | 88.54 | < 0.001 |
| Landrace x Damage | 3 | 0.20 | 0.897 | 3 | 0.54 | 0.66 | 3 | 0.71 | 0.550 |
| Landrace x Si | 3 | 23.73 | < 0.001 | 3 | 27.41 | < 0.001 | 3 | 1.19 | 0.326 |
| Damage x Si | 1 | 12.32 | < 0.001 | 1 | 23.10 | < 0.001 | 1 | 0.16 | 0.691 |
| Landrace x Damage x Si | 3 | 0.16 | 0.923 | 3 | 1.39 | 0.26 | 3 | 0.86 | 0.466 |

b) The effect of damage, Si supply, and number of damage events on total plant Si content and leaf Si concentration in damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants compared to undamaged plants.

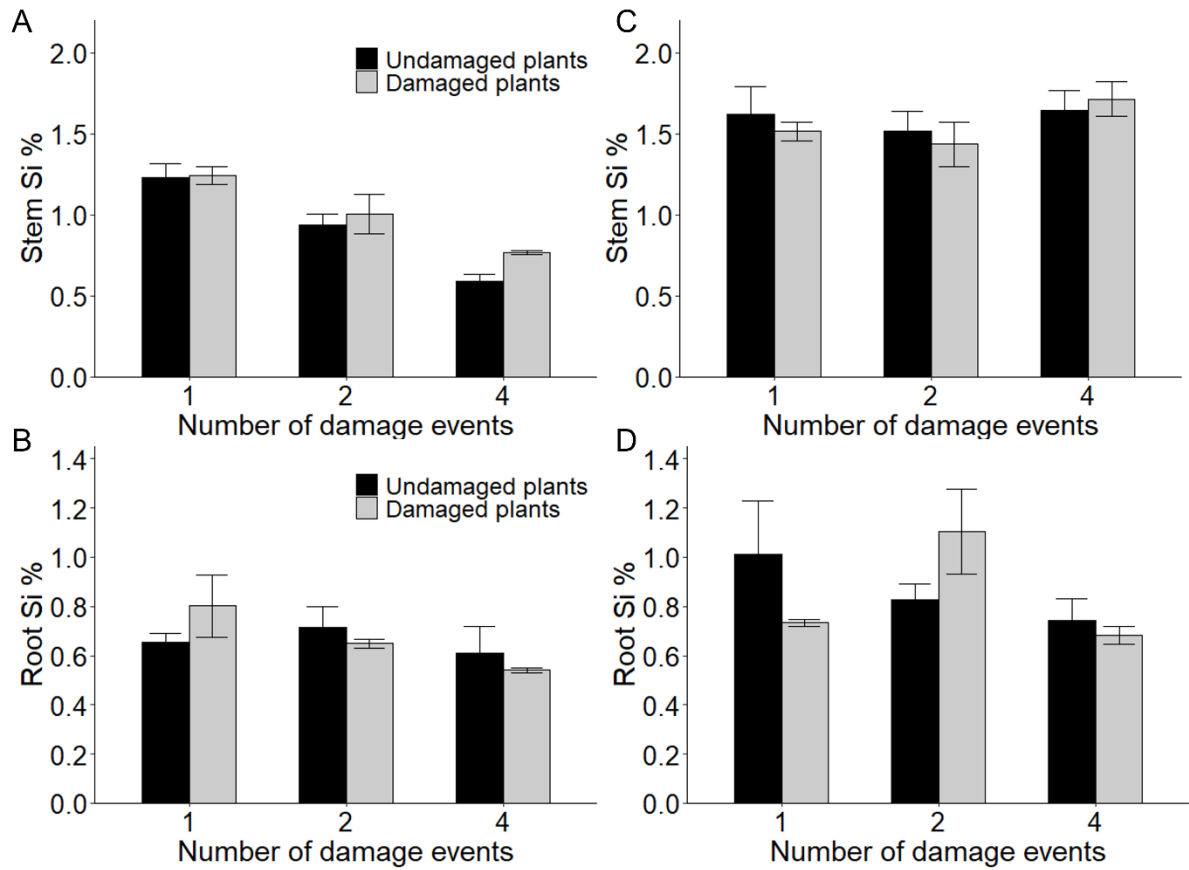
| | Leaf Si (%) | | | | | | Plant Si content (mg) | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | Undamaged leaves | | | Damaged leaves | | | df | F | P |
| | df | F | P | df | F | P | | | |
| Number of damage events | 2 | 10.30 | < 0.001 | 2 | 1.75 | 0.196 | 2 | 36.01 | < 0.001 |
| Damage | 1 | 42.81 | < 0.001 | 1 | 84.23 | < 0.001 | 1 | 0.08 | 0.778 |
| Si | 1 | 95.99 | < 0.001 | 1 | 108.24 | < 0.001 | 1 | 13.80 | 0.001 |
| Number x Damage | 2 | 2.62 | 0.094 | 2 | 1.34 | 0.281 | 2 | 0.37 | 0.698 |
| Number x Si | 2 | 6.79 | 0.005 | 2 | 21.64 | < 0.001 | 2 | 8.11 | 0.002 |
| Damage x Si | 1 | 0.15 | 0.701 | 1 | 0.07 | 0.800 | 1 | 0.16 | 0.694 |
| Number x Damage x Si | 2 | 1.21 | 0.316 | 2 | 1.87 | 0.176 | 2 | 0.35 | 0.709 |



Supplementary Figure 1: Variation in leaf Si accumulation between damaged and undamaged plants for ten wheat landraces. The average leaf Si concentration for damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants was calculated. L1-L5 are low Si-accumulating landraces; H1-H5 are high Si-accumulating landraces. Mean values \pm SE are shown. N = 3. Statistically significant ANOVA effect: Landrace: $F_{9,40} = 18.7$, $P < 0.001$.

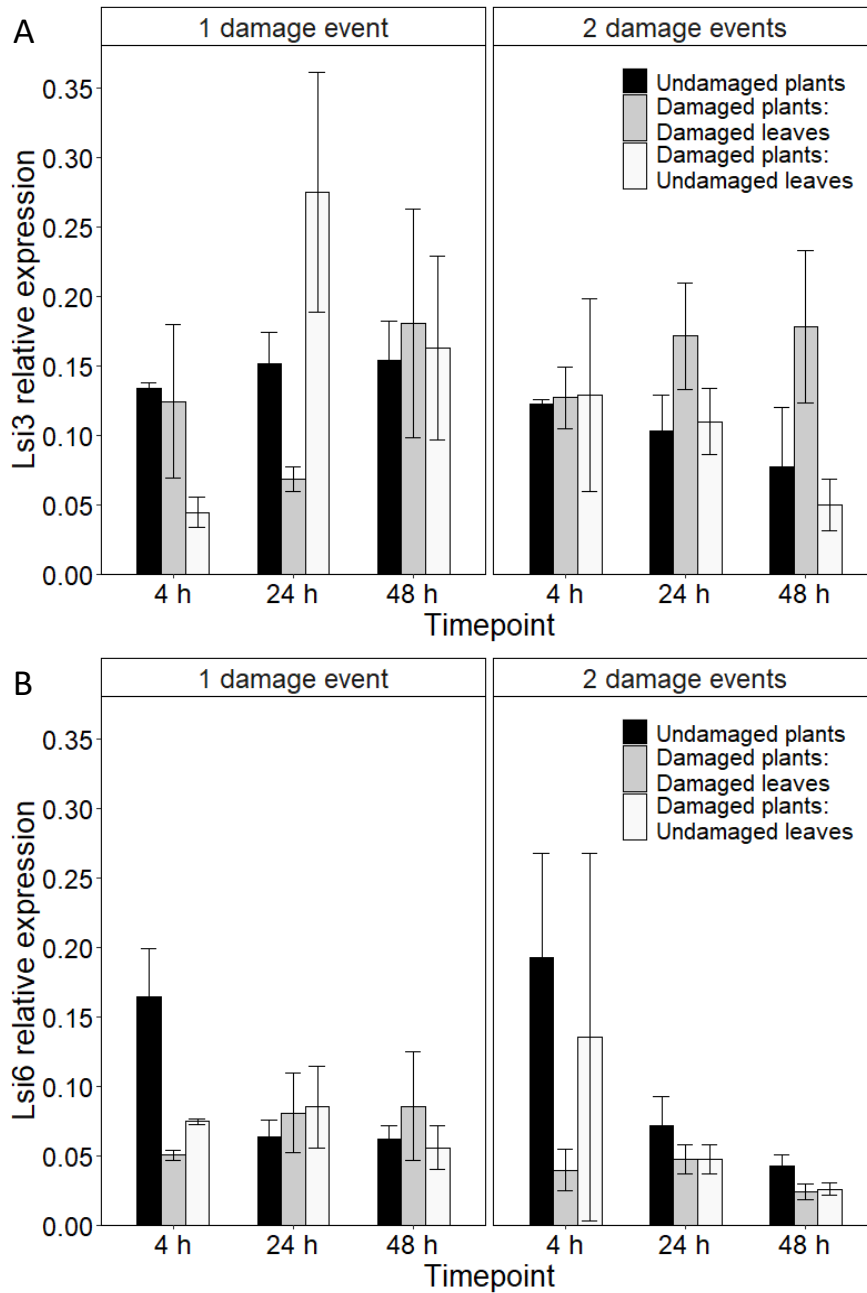


Supplementary Figure 2: Effect of damage and Si supply on root Si accumulation. (A) Root Si of -Si plants. (B) Root Si of +Si plants. L4 and L5 are low Si-accumulating landraces; H1 and H3 are high Si-accumulating landraces. Mean values \pm standard error (SE) are shown. N = 3. Statistically significant ANOVA effect: Si: $F_{1,47} = 88.5$, $P < 0.001$.



Supplementary Figure 3: Effect of reducing Si availability on Si accumulation after damage. (A)

Stem Si concentration for plants moved to medium without Si supplementation when damage was started (+/- Si plants). (B) Stem Si concentration for plants grown continuously with Si supplementation (+/+ Si plants). (C) Root Si concentration for +/- Si plants. (D) Root Si concentration for +/+ Si plants. Mean values \pm SE are shown. N = 3. The low Si accumulating landrace, L1, was used. Significant ANOVA effects for stem Si: Si availability: $F_{1,24} = 138.5$, $P < 0.001$; Number of damage events: $F_{2,24} = 12.2$, $P < 0.001$; Number of damage events x Si availability: $F_{2,24} = 20.5$, $P < 0.001$; for root Si: Si availability: $F_{1,23} = 12.7$, $P = 0.002$; Number of damage events: $F_{2,23} = 5.2$, $P = 0.013$.



Supplementary Figure 4: Si transporter gene expression at different time points. (A) *Lsi3* expression. (B) *Lsi6* expression. The low Si-accumulating landrace, L1, was used. Mean values \pm SE are shown. N = 2-5. Dam: number of damage events. No significant differences between damaged and undamaged plants, and between damaged and undamaged leaves of damaged plants, were found.