



# Statistical analysis of mineral diversity and distribution: Earth's mineralogy is unique



Grethe Hystad<sup>a</sup>, Robert T. Downs<sup>b</sup>, Edward S. Grew<sup>c</sup>, Robert M. Hazen<sup>d,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Mathematics, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721-0089, USA

<sup>b</sup> Department of Geosciences, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721-0077, USA

<sup>c</sup> School of Earth and Climate Sciences, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469, USA

<sup>d</sup> Geophysical Laboratory and Deep Carbon Observatory, Carnegie Institution of Washington, 5251 Broad Branch Road NW, Washington, DC 20015, USA

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## ABSTRACT

Earth's mineralogical diversity arises from both deterministic processes and frozen accidents. We apply statistical methods and comprehensive mineralogical databases to investigate chance versus necessity in mineral diversity-distribution relationships. Hundreds of mineral species, including most common rock-forming minerals, distinguish an "Earth-like" planet from other terrestrial bodies. However, most of Earth's ~5000 mineral species are rare, known from only a few localities. We demonstrate that, in spite of deterministic physical, chemical, and biological factors that control most of our planet's mineral diversity, Earth's mineralogy is unique in the cosmos.

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## 1. Introduction

What constitutes an "Earth-like" planet? In the search for exoplanets, mass and radius (and thus density) constitute first-order astronomical determinants of Earth-like worlds. However, many terrestrial planets will not possess key traits of Earth, such as a hydrosphere and plate tectonics. Consequently, a compelling definition of Earth-like planets remains elusive (Brownlee and Ward, 2004; Segura et al., 2005; Sotin et al., 2007; Svedhem et al., 2007; Kaltenecker and Traub, 2009). We suggest that mineralogical criteria—specifically the diversity and distribution of near-surface mineral species—provide robust indicators of geochemical and tectonic environments that influence the evolution of a terrestrial planet, including its oceans, atmosphere, and life.

Complex systems such as minerals, organic molecules, and life evolve in both deterministic and stochastic ways (Monod, 1971; Hazen and Eldredge, 2010; Lecca et al., 2013; Davila and McKay, 2014). Many aspects of these complex systems are inevitable consequences of their initial conditions and the subsequent influence of physical and chemical laws. However, complex systems also display frozen accidents that are integral to evolutionary pathways. A tension thus exists between chance and necessity—a tension

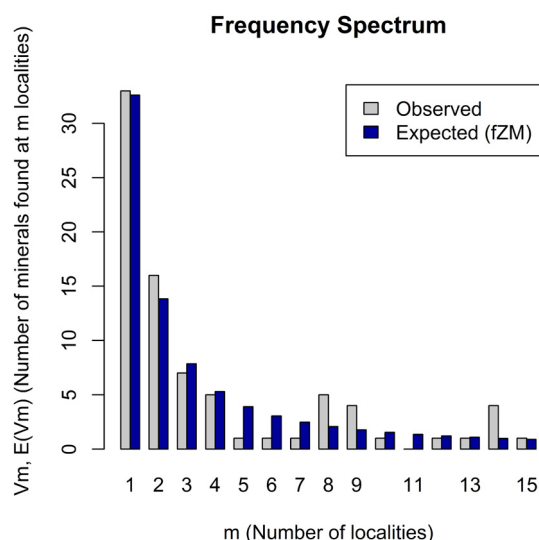
that is heightened because in most natural systems no quantitatively rigorous methods exist to determine which is which. In such cases, distinguishing chance from necessity becomes more a philosophical debate than a scientific pursuit (Gould, 2002; Conway-Morris, 2003; Pearce, 2010).

Hazen and coworkers have demonstrated that the diversity and distribution of minerals on Earth have evolved over more than 4.5 billion years through a combination of physical, chemical, and biological processes (Hazen et al., 2008, 2011; Grew and Hazen, 2014), and they have explored quantitatively the roles played by both chance and necessity in observed mineral diversity/distribution systematics (Hazen et al., in press (a)). In contrast to many other complex natural evolving systems, minerals are documented with comprehensive species/locality data, notably the official International Mineralogical Association compilation of 4831 approved mineral species, [ruff.info/ima](http://ruff.info/ima) (as of 1 February 2014; Downs, 2006), and 652,865 unique data of a mineral species at a specific locality (hereafter referred to as "species/locality data") recorded by the crowd-sourced website [mindat.org](http://mindat.org) (also as of 1 February 2014). Hystad et al. (in press) demonstrated that these data conform to Large Number of Rare Events (LNRE) frequency distribution functions, which permit evaluation of probabilities for the occurrence of mineral species on other Earth-like planets, or if a hypothetical "tape of Earth history" were replayed.

In order to evaluate deterministic versus stochastic aspects of Earth's near-surface mineralogical environment, we focus on

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 202 478 8962; fax: +1 202 478 8901.

E-mail address: [rhazen@ciw.edu](mailto:rhazen@ciw.edu) (R.M. Hazen).

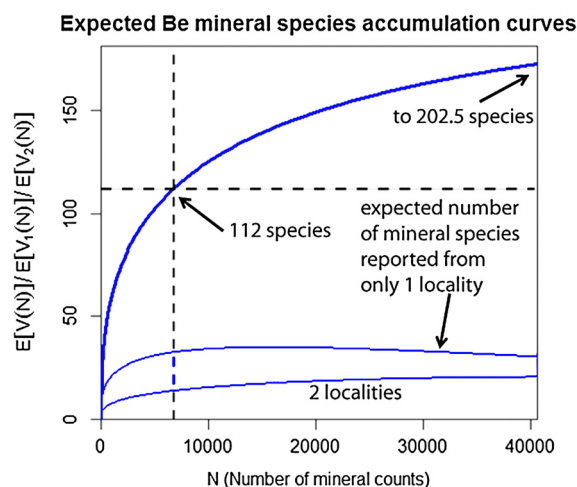


**Fig. 1.** The number of Be mineral species ( $y$  axis) versus the number of reported localities ( $m = 1$  to 15 localities, based on data in [mindat.org](http://mindat.org) as of 1 February 2014). The observed (light) and modeled (dark) frequency spectrum of Be minerals fits a finite Zipf–Mandelbrot ( $fZM$ ) Large Number of Rare Events (LNRE) distribution. Thus, half (56) of the 112 known Be mineral species ([ruff.info/ima](http://ruff.info/ima) as of 1 February 2014) are known from 3 or fewer localities, whereas only 10 species are known from more than 100 localities.

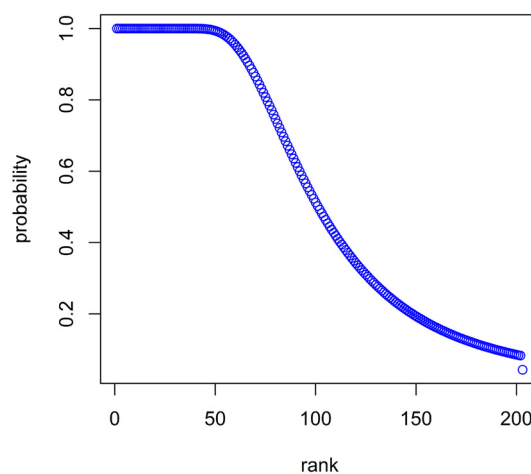
the tractable case of the 112 approved mineral species in which the rare element Be is essential ([ruff.info/ima](http://ruff.info/ima); [Grew and Hazen, 2014](#)), as documented from 6778 Be species/locality data ([mindat.org](http://mindat.org)). This well-documented subset of the 4831 mineral species approved by the International Mineralogical Association lends itself to quantitative statistical analysis because Be minerals display an LNRE frequency distribution similar to that observed for all mineral species ([Hystad et al., in press](#)). More than 50% of all recorded species/locality data are associated with the commonest species, beryl (ideally  $\text{Be}_3\text{Al}_2\text{Si}_3\text{O}_{12}$ , with 3415 reported localities), whereas half of all Be species are rare (i.e., 56 species have been reported from three or fewer localities). Such LNRE frequency distributions are also characteristic of biomass in a forest ecosystem or words in a book ([Baayen, 2001](#); [Evert and Baron, 2008](#)). In particular, Be mineral frequency distribution follows a finite Zipf–Mandelbrot LNRE distribution or finite Zipf–Mandelbrot model formulated as an LNRE model ( $fZM$ ), as illustrated in [Fig. 1](#) ([Evert, 2004](#); [Hystad et al., in press](#)). We fit the  $fZM$  LNRE model's 3 parameters to the beryllium mineral frequency spectrum using the R-package, `zipfR` ([Evert and Baroni, 2007](#); [Hazen et al., in press \(b\)](#)). We estimated parameters by minimization through a custom estimation procedure, the simplified version of the multivariate chi-squared test for goodness-of-fit using the first 10 spectrum elements.

Our parameters are  $\alpha = 0.311$ ,  $A = 1.264 \times 10^{-5}$ , and  $B = 0.217$ ; consequently,  $C = 1.978$ , with  $\chi^2 = 3.05$ ,  $df = 3$ , and  $p$ -value = 0.38 (see Supplementary Materials).

The conformity of Be minerals to a  $fZM$  distribution is convenient because probabilities of mineral occurrence, including prediction of the number of species that exist but have not yet been discovered, can be calculated. [Fig. 2](#) illustrates the Be mineral species accumulation curve—a monotonically increasing relationship between the total number of reported mineral species/locality data for Be minerals ( $x$  axis) and the number of described Be mineral species ( $y$  axis). For example, as of 1 February 2014, 112 Be mineral species had been reported from 6778 localities. Because Be minerals conform to a  $fZM$  distribution, the total number of known Be mineral species should increase at a predictable rate as the reported number of localities for Be minerals increases. Thus,



**Fig. 2.** Expected Be mineral species accumulation curves, extrapolated at 6 times the sample size ( $N = 6778$ ), using Sichel's model. The upper curve indicates the expected number of distinct mineral species,  $E(V(N))$ , versus the sample size,  $N$ . The point at which the vertical dashed line intersects the  $x$ -axis denotes the current value of the sample size  $N = 6778$ , for which the current number of known Be mineral species  $E(V(N)) = 112$ . Extrapolation of the upper accumulation curve suggests that 91 Be minerals have yet to be discovered. The lower two accumulation curves represent the numbers of mineral species found at exactly 1 and 2 localities, respectively.



**Fig. 3.** Rank versus probability that a Be mineral species in the population of 203 Be species will be present at least one time in a sample with  $N = 6778$ , where  $N$  is the number of Be mineral species-locality data (see also Supplementary Table 1).

the  $fZM$  formalism leads to an accumulation curve that predicts the existence of 91 additional beryllium mineral species on Earth that have yet to be documented, in addition to the 112 known species—an estimated total of 203 Be minerals on Earth today. Geochemical and crystal chemical analyses suggest that many of the 91 “missing” Be minerals could be natural analogs of known synthetic compounds or isomorphous compositional variants of known Be minerals ([Grew and Hazen, 2014](#)). Note that similar statistical methods can be applied to other subsets of minerals, as well as to all known species ([Hazen et al., in press \(a\), in press \(b\)](#)).

These statistical data facilitate estimates of the probable mineralogical similarities and differences in two Earth-like planets. Accordingly, we calculated the probabilities of occurrence of 203 beryllium mineral species for Earth ([Fig. 3](#); Supplementary Table 1). We find that 34 mineral species are likely to occur on virtually all Earth-like planets, while an additional 26 mineral species have >95% probability of occurrence. These 60 most common beryllium mineral species—54% of the presently known Be mineral diversity—thus represent the suite of Be minerals that are

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