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ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

Growth delay by winter precipitation could hinder *Juniperus sabina* persistence under increasing summer drought

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Abstract

Plants in Mediterranean mountains are particularly vulnerable to climatic change. In these environments, low temperature is combined with water shortage during summer, and as a result, the positive effect of global warming theoretically expanding the growing season length may be counterbalanced by rising drought stress. These circumstances may be exacerbated in the rear edge of species distribution, where warmer conditions occur. Here, we examined the climate-growth relationships of *Juniperus sabina*, a major prostrate shrub above the treeline in Mediterranean mountains, to investigate climate sensitivity and long-term signals stability in four rear-edge populations from southern Spain. We demonstrate that, over recent decades, local climatic conditions have modulated the response of *J. sabina* secondary growth to the ongoing climate change. We observed a negative effect of winter-spring moisture on secondary growth that suggests a limitation for earlier growth activity at higher elevation, potentially hindering the ability of *J. sabina* to compensate forthcoming increases in summer drought. At the driest site, we also detected a positive effect of October precipitation, suggesting a second growth pulse by early autumn. Our results

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