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Title: Water levels primarily drive variation in photosynthesis and nutrient use of scrub

Red Mangroves in the southeastern Florida Everglades

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authors have contributed to the final version of the manuscript and have approved its

submission to the journal.

29 **Running head:** mangrove photosynthesis varies with island-habitat

ABSTRACT

We investigated how mangrove-island micro-elevation (i.e., habitat: center vs. edge) affects tree physiology in a scrub mangrove forest of the southeastern Everglades. We measured leaf gas exchange rates of scrub *Rhizophora mangle* L. trees monthly during 2019, hypothesizing that CO_2 assimilation (A_{net}) and stomatal conductance (g_{sw}) would decline with increasing water levels and salinity, expecting more-considerable differences at mangrove-island edges than centers, where physiological stress is greatest. Water levels varied between 0 and 60 cm from the soil surface, rising during the wet season (May-October) relative to the dry season (November-April). Porewater salinity ranged from 15 to 30 ppt, being higher at mangrove-island edges than centers. A_{net} maximized at 15.1 µmol m^{-2} s$^{-1,}$ and g_{sw} was typically <0.2 mol m^{-2} s^{-1}, both of which were greater in the dry than the wet season and greater at island centers than edges, with seasonal variability being roughly equal to variation between habitats. After accounting for season and habitat, water level positively affected A_{net} in both seasons but did not affect g_{sw}. Our findings suggest that inundation stress (i.e., water level) is the primary driver of variation in leaf gas exchange rates of scrub mangroves in the Florida Everglades, while also constraining A_{net} more than g_{sw}. The interaction between inundation stress due to permanent flooding and habitat varies with season as physiological stress is alleviated at higher-elevation mangrove-island center habitats during the dry season. Freshwater inflows during the wet season, increase water levels and inundation stress at higher-elevation mangrove-island centers, but also potentially alleviate salt and sulfide stress in soils. Thus, habitat heterogeneity leads to differences in nutrient and water acquisition and use between trees growing in island centers versus edges, creating distinct physiological controls on photosynthesis, which likely affect carbon flux dynamics of scrub mangroves in the Everglades.

Keywords: Scrub mangroves, Florida Coastal Everglades, photosynthesis, porewater salinity, water levels, inundation, *Rhizophora mangle*.

INTRODUCTION

Global climate change is affecting coastal mangrove ecosystems unprecedentedly, principally through increased flooding and saltwater intrusion (Pezeshki et al. 1990a, Yu et al. 2019). Increases in flooding severity and salinity due to sea-level rise (SLR) have the potential to push ecosystems to degraded alternative stable states, where biogeochemical cycles (e.g., carbon sequestration and storage potential) are impaired (Neubauer et al. 2013, Tully et al. 2019, Yu et al. 2019). Mangrove wetlands are particularly susceptible to SLR because of their position between terrestrial and marine ecosystems (Field 1995, Ellison and Farnsworth 1997). Mangrove species have developed considerable variation in crucial life-history traits, such as rates of photosynthesis, water- and nutrient-use efficiencies, growth rates, and biomass allocation ratios in response to the interactions among resources (e.g., light and nutrients), regulators (e.g., salinity, sulfides), and inundation – Twilley and Rivera-Monroy 2005, Alongi 2008, Twilley and Rivera-Monroy 2009, Castañeda-Moya et al. 2013). Due to such physiological flexibility and the significant carbon sequestration and storage capacity of mangroves across a variety of geomorphic settings (e.g., karstic vs. deltaic; Mcleod et al. 2011, Murdiyarso et al. 2015, Lovelock et al. 2017, Rovai et al. 2018), there is an increasing need to strengthen our understanding of the effects of SLR and saltwater intrusion on mangrove tree physiology to assess trajectories of ecosystem structure and function in response to global change drivers.

Scrub mangrove forests, dominated by *Rhizophora mangle* L.*,* are typical in Caribbean karstic environments (Cintron et al. 1978, Lugo and Snedaker 1974). The stunted physiognomy (i.e., reduced growth and development) of scrub mangroves results from severe nutrient (e.g., phosphorus, P) limitation, prolonged or permanent inundation with little tidal influence, and seasonal water stress (Feller 1995, Koch and Snedaker 1997, Cheeseman and Lovelock 2004, Medina et al. 2010). Scrub mangrove forests develop distinct landscape patterning, forming mangrove-island clusters with higher-elevations than their surrounding shallow open-water ponds and channels (Figure 1A). Soil elevation gradients result from differences in root biomass stocks and production, leaf litter accretion, and wood deposition (McKee et al. 2007, McKee 2011, Krauss et al. 2014). For example, in scrub mangrove-islands of the southeastern Florida Everglades, island center habitats have 66% more root biomass and 52% more root production than island edges (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2011), which leads to spatial differences in soil elevation among island habitats. These differences in soil elevation interact with environmental gradients (e.g., hydroperiod, salinity) along the intertidal zone in complex ways to

affect mangrove physiology (e.g., rates of net CO_2 assimilation – A_{net}, growth rates, or sap flux)

at variable scales (Medina and Francisco 1997, Twilley et al. 1998, Medina et al. 2010, Twilley

et al. 2017).

Hydrological dynamics (e.g., depth and duration of inundation) can cause mangrove

physiological stress, which cascades to affect carbon cycle dynamics and other biogeochemical

processes across spatial and temporal scales (Medina 1999, Castañeda-Moya et al. 2013,

Twilley et al. 2017, 2019). Although mangrove species can tolerate flooded conditions, they are

still susceptible to damage if plants become entirely submerged for days to weeks (Wanless

1998, Mendelssohn and McKee 2000, McKee 2011). Inundation stress typically decreases

rates of leaf gas exchange (e.g., A_{net}, transpiration) and tree growth in mangroves (He et al.

2007, Cardona-Olarte et al. 2013). For example, greenhouse studies have revealed a 20%

reduction in maximum A_{net} when mangrove seedlings and saplings were subjected to short-term

intermittent seawater flooding (6 to 22 days, Krauss et al. 2006). Mangrove leaf gas exchange

is further affected by how seawater flooding interacts with fresh water and nutrient inputs

(Wolanski 1992). For instance, a significant reduction in stomatal conductance (g_{sw}) and leaf

water potential in *Bruguiera gymnorrhiza* (L.) Lam. seedlings occurred when exposed to

prolonged flooding for up to 80 days with 33% seawater compared to the control plants;

however, seedlings flooded with fresh water for 80 days showed an increase in both parameters

(Naidoo 1983). In contrast, seedlings of *Avicennia germinans* (L.) L. and *Laguncularia*

racemosa (L.) C.F.Gaertn. exposed to permanent flooding with 23% seawater showed no

change in g_{sw}, A_{net}, or intrinsic water use efficiency (*wue*) but had reduced leaf area (Krauss et

al. 2006). Hydrologic conditions can further negatively influence mangrove physiology through

the interaction with soil phytotoxins (i.e., sulfides), produced as by-products of low oxygen

availability and soil redox conditions due to permanent flooding, which can potentially depress

water and nutrient uptake and affect rates of leaf gas exchange (Nickerson and Thibodeau 1985,

McKee 1993, Ball 1996, Pezeshki and DeLaune 2012, Lamers et al. 2013). Regarding

permanently inundated scrub mangroves, such as those in the southeastern Florida Everglades,

how seasonal dynamics interact with inundation levels to influence leaf and forest carbon

uptake dynamics is not entirely understood.

Mangroves are highly adapted to tolerate salt stress, yet salinity has the most significant

impact on forest productivity, tree growth rates, and rates of leaf gas exchange. The adverse

effects of increasing salinity are most evident along steep salinity gradients (i.e., those >30 ppt),

particularly in dry environments (Lugo and Snedaker 1974, Cintron et al. 1978, Medina and

Francisco 1997, Reef and Lovelock 2015). Salt stress variably affects mangrove tree

physiology, depending on species-specific salt tolerance levels and mechanisms for processing

salt (Parida and Jha 2010, Reef and Lovelock 2015). For example, *R. mangle* naturally inhabits

Neotropical environments with salinities from near zero to around 35 ppt but may also be found

in dry coastal environments with salinities up to 50-60 ppt (Cintron et al. 1978, Cardona-Olarte

et al. 2006). All mangroves can exclude salt through the roots; however, *R. mangle* is a highly

efficient salt excluder because its roots essentially prevent salt from entering the plant.

Additionally, *R. mangle* lacks the excretory glands that other mangrove species (e.g., *L.*

racemosa) use to excrete salt once it has entered the plant. As such, the xylem of *R. mangle* is

100 times less saline than seawater (Scholander et al. 1962, Scholander 1968, Medina and

Francisco 1997, Tomlinson 2016) because of the Casparian strip (Lawton et al. 1981) and

ultrafiltration by cell membranes in the thick aerenchyma and cortical layers of its root tissues

(Field 1984, Werner and Stelzer 1990). However, some salt still enters the plant through the

roots, which has a deleterious effect on the physiology of *Rhizophora* trees, causing decreases

in growth and A_{net} rates, and water and nutrient use efficiencies (Ball 1988, Clough and Sim

1989, Lugo et al. 2007, Medina et al. 2010, Cardona-Olarte et al. 2013).

Mangrove A_{net} varies widely with the environment (e.g., water and salinity levels) and

nutrient availability. A_{net} for *R. mangle* maximizes around 20 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} (Golley et al. 1962,

Bjorkman et al. 1988, Lin and Sternberg 1992, Lovelock and Feller 2003, Lugo et al. 2007, Ball

2009); however, A_{net} for scrub mangroves is lower, generally ranging from <5 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1}

(Golley et al. 1962, Cheeseman et al. 1997, Cheeseman and Lovelock 2004) to roughly 13 µmol

m^{-2} s^{-1} (Lugo et al. 2007, Barr et al. 2009). A field study from Jobos Bay in southern Puerto Rico

demonstrated a significant decrease in *R. mangle* A_{net} (from 12.7 to 7.9 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) and g_{sw}

(from 0.28 to 0.19 mol m^{-2} s^{-1}) when comparing fringe habitats at 35 ppt salinity to inland salt flat

habitats at 80 ppt (Lugo et al. 2007). Reductions in A_{net} and g_{sw} were accompanied by changes

in leaf morphology (i.e., smaller specific leaf area, SLA), reduced nutrient-use efficiency, and

increased nutrient resorption, demonstrating how environmental effects on mangrove

physiology can have consequences for within plant nutrient dynamics, and thus ecosystem

functioning. Therefore, increasing salinity decreases A_{net} and g_{sw} and increases intrinsic water

use efficiency (*wue*, defined as A_{net}/g_{sw}) in mangroves, with *Rhizophora* species exemplifying

these trends (Ball 2009, Clough and Sim 1989). Moreover, the high salt tolerance of mangrove

species leads to strong stomatal control, which creates dynamics between A_{net} and water use

which depend on relative reduction in transpiration rates versus the degree to which leaves are

biochemically limited to fix carbon (e.g., via RUBISCO carboxylation efficiency versus RUBP

regeneration) at low stomatal conductance (Sobrado 2000, Lovelock and Feller 2003, Ball 2009).

For instance, *R. mangle* has succulent leaves with lower *wue* than more salt-tolerant species

(i.e., *A. germinans* or *L. racemosa*); however, *R. mangle* has greater water transport efficiency

in stems than more salt-tolerant species (Sobrado 2000). Thus, when considering the effects of

salinity on leaf gas exchange rates, plant water use must be considered in concert because

both A_{net} and g_{sw} decline similarly with increasing salinity, effectively creating co-limitation of

photosynthesis at moderate to high salinities (Ball 2009).

In mangrove wetlands of the Florida Everglades, variation in environmental gradients,

including hydroperiod (e.g., duration of inundation) and soil P availability, control mangrove

forest structure and function (e.g., biomass and litterfall production) across the coastal

landscape (Chen and Twilley 1999; Castañeda-Moya et al. 2011, 2013). Yet, how the

interaction between water level dynamics and salinity affects mangrove leaf gas exchange rates

in situ is not entirely understood. Experimental evidence using *R. mangle* seedlings from south

Florida showed that inundation created a greater degree of physiological stress than salinity

levels; however, salinity accelerated the adverse effects of inundation stress on leaf function

over time (Cardona-Olarte et al. 2013). In contrast, other studies have reported no apparent

effect of water levels or flooding duration on rates of mangrove gas exchange, although

inundation duration decreased variability in leaf gas exchange measurements (Hoppe-Speer et

al. 2011). Using Florida mangroves, Krauss et al. (2006) found that short-term intermittent

flooding decreased rates of leaf gas exchange relative to unflooded or permanently flooded

greenhouse-grown seedlings, but that for *in situ* established *R. mangle* saplings growing along a

natural tidal inundation gradient along Shark River in the southwestern Everglades, flooding led

to increases in A_{net} and *wue*. Permanent flooding leads to decreases in A_{net} and g_{sw} rates in

most wetland plants (Kozlowski 1997); however, how inundation dynamics interact with salinity

along the intertidal zone to influence mangrove physiology at different spatial and temporal

scales in south Florida mangroves remains largely unknown. Further, global change-driven

SLR and saltwater intrusion in South Florida coupled to large-scale freshwater diversion have

accelerated mangrove encroachment into inland freshwater wetlands over the past 60 years

(Ross et al. 2000). As SLR continues, it is imperative to quantify the relative effects of

inundation and salinity on mangrove physiology and subsequent ecosystem functioning (e.g.,

carbon flux) in the region.

Here, we present a comprehensive, one-year analysis of the seasonal effects of salinity

(surface and porewater) and water levels on leaf gas exchange rates of *R. mangle* scrub

mangroves in southeastern Florida Everglades. We focused our sampling on mangrove-islands

with noticeable micro-elevational differences to understand the magnitude of influence of water

levels and salinity on *R. mangle* tree physiology between mangrove-island center and edge

habitats. We addressed the following questions: (1) how do rates of leaf gas exchange (e.g.,

A_{net}, g_{sw}) vary with mangrove-island micro-elevation (center vs. edge habitats)? (2) how does

leaf gas exchange respond to seasonal changes in salinity and water levels? (3) how do water-

and nutrient-use efficiencies of *R. mangle* leaves vary between mangrove-island center and

edge habitats? We hypothesized that A_{net} would be greater for *R. mangle* leaves in higher-

elevation center habitats than lower-elevation edges. We also expected that A_{net} should vary

little with season and that seasonal variation in g_{sw} would be less than variation in A_{net}, relative

to the range of variability among leaves because of strong control on g_{sw} and potential for

decoupling to some degree between g_{sw} and A_{net}. Moreover, given that scrub mangroves in

Taylor River basin are strongly limited by phosphorus (i.e., soil N:P = 102-109 – Castañeda-

Moya et al. 2013), *R. mangle* plants should have high rates of P resorption. Finally, we

predicted that trees within mangrove-island centers function at a higher physiological level (i.e.,

with greater rates of A_{net} and less of a relative reduction in g_{sw}) due to lower levels of inundation

and salt stress, and should, therefore, have greater *wue* (Ball 2009) and higher relative rates of

nutrient resorption (Lugo et al. 2007, Medina et al. 2010) than trees at island edges. However,

the magnitude of the reduction in g_{sw} relative to A_{net}, because of inundation stress at mangrove-

island edge habitats, should drive patters in *wue.*

METHODS

Study site

This study was conducted in the southeastern region of Everglades National Park in a

mangrove site known as Taylor Slough/Panhandle-7 (TS/Ph-7: 25.197°N, 80.642°W, Figure 1B),

one of the six mangrove sites established in 2000 as part of the Florida Coastal Everglades

Long-Term Ecological Research (FCE-LTER) program (Childers 2006; http://fcelter.fiu.edu).

TS/Ph-7 is located approximately 1.5 km inland from Florida Bay in the downstream section of

the Taylor River. Mangroves zones at TS/Ph-7 are dominated by scrub *R. mangle* L. trees, with

clusters of *L. racemosa* L. and *Conocarpus erectus* L. – a mangrove associate, intermixed with

low densities of freshwater grasses *Cladium jamaicense* (Crantz) Kük and *Eleocharis cellulosa*

Torr. (Loveless 1959). Mangrove tree heights reach 1.5 to 2 m (Ewe et al. 2006, Figure 1A).

The substrate at this site is organic mangrove peat soil (~1 m depth) overlying the karstic

bedrock (depth ~1.5-2 m, Table 1; Castañeda-Moya et al. 2011, Ewe et al. 2006). Surface (0-

45 cm depth) soils at TS/Ph-7 have high organic matter content (71%), low bulk density (0.16 g

cm^{-3}), low total nitrogen (TN, 2.5 mg cm^{-3}), and low total phosphorus (TP, 0.06 mg cm^{-3})

concentrations, resulting in a highly P-limited environment with soil N:P ratios of about 102

(Castañeda-Moya et al. 2013). Mangrove zones in Taylor River are permanently flooded for

most of the year, with an annual flooding duration averaging 360 d yr^{-1} from 2001 to 2005. The

permanent flooding results in anoxic soil conditions and buildup of porewater sulfide (range: 0.5-

2 mM) throughout the year that constrains mangrove growth (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2011,

2013). The tidal effect is negligible in Taylor River, and water flow and hydrology are

determined by seasonal precipitation, upland runoff, and wind (Michot et al. 2011, Sutula et al.

2001). The interaction between low P fertility and permanent flooding conditions results in the

formation of scrub forests with restricted tree height and low aboveground productivity, high root

biomass allocation and high root: shoot ratios compared with riverine mangrove forests along

Shark River estuary in southwestern FCE (Ewe et al. 2006, Castañeda-Moya et al. 2011, 2013).

South Florida has a subtropical savanna climate per the Köppen climate classification,

where the average air temperature is between 20 and 30°C and relative humidity is high (70-

80%). Rainfall and evapotranspiration vary interannually and average 1500 and 1300 mm year^{-1}

, respectively (Abiy et al. 2019). In the Everglades, 60% of the precipitation occurs during the

wet season, and only 25% during the dry season (Duever et al. 1994). Analysis of long-term

(110-year) rainfall trends for South Florida has shown that the annual hydrologic regime can be

divided into two seasons: a wet season from May to October and a dry season from November

to April (Abiy et al. 2019). For the 2019 calendar year, temperature and relative humidity data

were collected from an eddy covariance flux tower installed at TS/Ph-7. Rainfall data were

collected from a nearby meteorological station (station name: "Taylor_River_at_mouth")

managed by the US Geological Survey as a part of the Everglades Depth Estimation Network

(https://sofia.usgs.gov/eden).

Experimental design

Eight distinct mangrove-islands of similar size (3-5 m in diameter) were selected for

repeated measurements of leaf photosynthesis and physicochemical variables from January to

December 2019. Mangrove-islands were selected within previously-established permanent

vegetation plots (two 20×20 m plots) based on their location relative to the shoreline (i.e., Taylor

River), with four islands located in the fringe mangrove zone (~50-60 m from the edge) and four

islands located in the interior forest (~100-110 m inland; Figure 1B). Mangrove-islands with

distinct micro-elevational gradients were selected, having higher soil elevation center habitats

and lower-elevation edge habitats. Mangrove-islands are surrounded by open water ponds

(Figure 1A) and remain flooded for most of the year, except the center island habitats during the

dry season (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2011, 2013, Figure S1).

Within each mangrove-island, a higher-elevation center and a lower-elevation edge

habitat were each permanently marked with an aluminum rod. At these locations, soil surface

elevation was measured for all mangrove-islands at both habitats, in addition to six

measurements in the adjacent shallow ponds surrounding mangrove-islands. Measurements

were taken using real-time kinematics referenced to the 1988 North American Vertical Datum

(NAVD88) with a Trimble R8 global navigation satellite system receiver (Trimble; Sunnyvale, CA,

USA), which has a horizontal accuracy of ±1 cm and vertical accuracy of ±2 cm.

Water level and salinity measurements

Water levels relative to the soil surface were measured monthly with a meter stick at the

permanent aluminum rods established at all island habitats. Continuous measurements of water

levels relative to the soil surface were recorded for the duration of the 2019 calendar year (see

Figure S2 for details). Continuous data were used to confirm trends in water levels and

porewater salinity measurements made by hand across islands. We use the measurements

taken by hand at each island as the predictors in our models of leaf gas exchange. A porewater

sample was collected at 30 cm depth at each habitat using a 60 ml syringe attached to a

stopcock and a rigid tubing probe (3/16" Ø). Porewater temperature and salinity were measured

using a handheld YSI conductivity-salinity-temperature meter (model Pro 30, YSI Inc., Yellow

Springs, OH, USA). A sample of surface water (when present) was also collected at each

island habitat to measure salinity and temperature.

Leaf gas exchange measurements

Photosynthetic gas exchange measurements of *R. mangle* leaves were conducted once

a month (9:00 AM to 1:00 PM, typically during sunny days) at eight scrub mangrove-islands

from January to December 2019 using a Li-COR Li-6800 portable photosynthesis system (Li-

COR Inc., Lincoln, NE, USA). At each island habitat (center vs. edge), five mature green leaves

were randomly selected from top mangrove branches. Fully developed and healthy (i.e.,

without herbivory) green leaves from the second-most distal pair of leaves were chosen. The

Li-6800 was clamped onto each leaf and held until machine stability was reached (which

typically happened in 2-3 minutes), wherein data points were logged.

The environmental configuration of the Li-6800 was: flow rate of 600 µmol s^{-1}, 50-70%

relative humidity of the incoming air (slightly drier than ambient air to prevent condensation in

the instrument), 400 µmol mol^{-1} CO_2 concentration, and light level of 1000 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1}, which

was determined to be non-limiting and similar to ambient environmental conditions. We used

five stability criteria, which were all assessed over a 15 s interval: the slope of A_{net} being <1

µmol m^{-2} s^{-1}, the slope of the concentration of intracellular CO_2 (c_i, which is a calculated

parameter using the difference in CO_2 concentrations between IRGAs) being <5 µmol mol^{-1}, the

slope of g_{sw} being < 0.5 mol m^{-2} s^{-1}, the slope of the transpiration rate (E) being <1 mol m^{-2} s^{-1},

and the slope of the difference in air-water vapor concentration between the sample and

reference IRGA (ΔH_2O) being <1 mmol mol^{-1}. All five stability criteria were met before logging

data. Air temperature within the leaf chamber was not controlled but allowed to vary with the

ambient conditions at the site, ranging from 26.1 to 32.0°C. Thus, leaf temperatures ranged

from 25.85 - 32.44 °C, averaging 29.41 ± 0.08 °C, in the wet season, and ranged from 25.06 -

28.72 °C, averaging 26.79 ± 0.04 °C, in the dry season. We calculated intrinsic *wue* as the ratio

of leaf net CO_2 uptake to leaf gas exchange (i.e., A_{net}/g_{sw}/1000, where we divide by 1000 to get

wue in mmol mol^{-1}).

Measurement of leaf functional traits, nutrient content, and isotopic signatures

During the monthly photosynthesis measurements in February, May, August, and

November measured mature green leaves (n = 5 per habitat, 40 in total) were collected at half

of the islands (four of the eight islands with two per location) for determination of leaf functional

traits and total carbon (TC), nitrogen (TN), and phosphorus (TP) content. Leaves were

numbered, placed in a sealed, moist bag to prevent water loss, and transported to the

laboratory in a cooler with ice for further analyses. Five senescent (i.e., yellowing) leaves were

also collected from trees in the same islands at the same time to determine carbon and nutrient

content. Leaves were removed from bags, wiped dry, and immediately weighed to obtain leaf

fresh mass at the laboratory. Green leaves were then scanned at high resolution and oven-

dried for at least 72 hours at 60°C to constant weight before recording their dry mass. Leaf area

was measured using ImageJ (Schneider et al. 2012). Leaf dry mass was recorded and used to

calculate leaf dry matter content (LDMC) as the ratio of the dry leaf mass (in mg) to its fresh

mass (in g, mg g^{-1}), percent leaf water content (1000-LDMC; %), and SLA, the ratio of leaf dry

weight to leaf area (cm^2 g^{-1}). These methods followed Cornelissen et al. (2003).

For nutrient analyses, composite leaf samples containing the five leaves from each

island habitat per collection were ground into a fine powder using a vibrating ball mill

(Pulversette 0, Frtisch GmbH, Idar-Oberstein, Germany). Green and senescent leaf samples

were stored in scintillation vials at room temperature and analyzed separately. Leaf TC and TN

content were determined with a Carlo-Erba NA-1500 elemental analyzer (Fisons Instruments

Inc., Danvers, MA, USA). TP was extracted using an acid-digest (HCl) extraction, and

concentrations of soluble reactive P were determined by colorimetric analysis (Methods 365.4

and 365.2, US EPA 1983). Leaf C and N bulk isotopic signatures ($\delta^{13}C$, $\delta^{15}N$) were analyzed on

a Thermo Scientific Delta V Plus CF-IRMS coupled to a Carlo-Erba 1108 elemental analyzer via

a ConFlo IV interface (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA). All C and N analyses

were conducted at the Southeast Environmental Research Center Analysis Laboratory.

Using leaf carbon isotope fractionation values, we calculated the concentration of

intracellular CO_2 and plant water use efficiency integrated over the lifespan of the leaf tissue

samples (i.e., intrinsic water use efficiency, *WUE*) via methods described by O'Leary (1988) and

Marshall et al. (2007) (and outlined in Lambers et al. 2008). We used an ambient concentration

of atmospheric CO_2 of 408 µmol mol^{-1} for our calculations, which is a conservative estimate for

the 2019 calendar year and indicative of the site's atmospheric conditions based on IRGA

measurements from an eddy covariance tower at the site. Thus, the equation used to calculate

c_i and *WUE* from carbon isotope data were: $c_i = ((-8.5 - \delta^{13}C - 4.4) \div 22.6) \times 408)$, and $WUE =$

$(408 \times (1 - c_i \div 408)) \div 1.6$, where c_i is the value derived from the previous equation.

Additionally, the following equation was used to calculate the resorption of N and P using green

(G) and senescent (S) leaf nutrient content: Relative resorption (%) = $((G - S) \div G \times 100)$

(Pugnaire and Chapin 1993).

Statistical analyses

Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for differences in

water level, surface water salinity, and porewater salinity among locations (fringe and interior),

island habitats (center and edge), and season (wet and dry), as well as for the interaction

between these effects and season, which was used as the repeated measure. For the repeated

measures ANOVA, islands were nested within locations and treated as experimental units. All

effects were considered fixed, except for when testing for significant differences in habitat,

which included location as a random effect to account for the nested structure of the sampling

scheme. One-way ANOVAs were used to test for differences in soil surface elevation among

locations and habitats and their interaction. Two-way ANOVAs were carried out for all leaf

functional traits and nutrient concentrations, making comparisons across all habitat and season

combinations. Tukey HSD posthoc tests were used to identify significant pairwise comparisons

when ANOVAs indicated statistical differences. Repeated measures ANOVAs were performed

using PROC MIXED (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA), and the one-way and two-way ANOVAs

were performed in R v3.5.1 (R Core Team 2018).

We constructed linear mixed-effects models (with a Gaussian error distribution and

identity link function) to address our research questions. Island habitat and season were

included as fixed effects in the models to address questions 1 and 2, respectively, with water

levels and porewater salinity being also included as the continuous covariates to parse out their

marginal effects. We couple inference from these models to leaf nutrient analyses and our

measurements of the hydrological environment to inform about nutrient and water use of *R.*

mangle (question 3). Before model fitting, response variables were confirmed to meet the

assumptions of data normality. Four separate models were constructed for each of four gas

exchange variables of interest: A_{net}, g_{sw}, c_i, and *wue*. For each model, fixed effects for season

(wet and dry), habitat (center and edge), porewater salinity, and water level were considered,

including interaction terms for water level and porewater salinity with season. All models

considered random intercept terms for location (i.e., fringe vs. interior), islands, and islands

nested within location. Random slopes were explored but determined not to improve model fits.

The best-fit models were determined via stepwise model comparison using AIC based on

backward selecting random effects then backward selecting fixed effects, as implemented with

the 'lmerStep' function in the lmerTest R package (Kuznetsova et al. 2017). The best fit models

included a random intercept term for islands, which helped remove variability in the data

because of the sampling design. Random effects for location were insignificant, signifying that

most of the random variance in the gas exchange data was among islands, which we consider

as the experimental unit in all mixed-effects models. The mixed-effect models were fit using

restricted maximum likelihood estimates via the lme4 R package (Bates et al. 2015). Models

were evaluated using model predicting, tabling, and plotting functions from the sjPlot R package

(Lüdecke 2018). All analyses were complete in R v3.5.1 (R Core Team 2018).

RESULTS

Mangrove-island micro-elevational differences and ecohydrology

Soil surface elevation (measured in relation to the NAVD88 datum) significantly declined

from mangrove-island center to edge habitats from -0.14 ± 0.1 m at island centers to -0.4 ± 0.02

m at island edges, a mean difference of about 30 cm ($F_{1,20}$ = 108.42, $p < .001$; Table 1). Water

levels relative to the soil surface were significantly higher in edge than in center habitats ($F_{1,178}$ =

178.33, $p < .001$), measuring on average 36.9 ± 1.4 cm in edge habitats, and 12.8 ± 1.2 cm in

mangrove-island centers (Table 2). We recorded water levels of 0 cm (i.e., non-inundated

habitats) in 10% of our measurements, and those were exclusive to mangrove-island centers

during the dry season (Figure S1C). There was a significant effect of season ($F_{1,178}$ = 11.11, p

< .001) on water levels, where they increased from 17.05 ± 1.5 cm in the dry season to 30.4 ±

1.6 cm in the wet season (Table 2, Figure S1C).

Continuous water level data recorded at the fringe and interior mangrove zones

indicated similar flooding trends between locations, with lower water levels during the dry

season and higher water levels in the wet season, up to 40-47 cm above the soil surface in both

locations (Figure S2). Water levels at the interior mangrove forest always remained higher than

those registered in the fringe mangrove zone (Figure S2A). Porewater salinity was significantly

different between habitats ($F_{1,178}$ = 91.45, p < .001) and seasons ($F_{1,178}$ = 17.87, p < .001), with

lower salinity values in the center (21.5 ± 0.3) of the islands relative to the edge (25.1 ± 0.3)

habitats, and slightly lower porewater salinity during the dry season (22.5 ± 0.4) than in the wet

season (24.1 ± 0.3; Table 2, Figure S1D). There was no significant interaction ($F_{1,178}$ = 0.26,

p > .05) between island habitats and seasons, indicating that the variation in porewater salinity

between habitats was independent of seasonality (Table 2). Surface water salinity was not

significantly different among center and edge habitats ($F_{1,163}$ = 2.36, p > .05), but increased

significantly from the dry to the wet season ($F_{1,163}$ = 8.97, p < .01, Table 2). There was also a

Tukey posthoc HSD test indicated that only island center habitats in the dry season differed

from all other pairwise comparisons (Table 2).

Rates of leaf gas exchange and their relationships to the hydrological environment

A_{net} measurements ranged from 0.1 to 15.1 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1}, with 90% of the observations

recorded between 2 and 14 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} (see Figure S3). g_{sw} values were low, ranging from

<0.01 to 0.27 and averaging 0.1 mol m^{-2} s^{-1}(see Figure S3). Associated c_i values ranged from

40 to 377 and averaged 242 µmol mol^{-1}, with 98% of them being greater than 150 µmol mol^{-1}.

Lastly, measured rates of *wue* varied between >0.01 and 0.21 mmol CO_2 mol H_2O^{-1}, being

normally-distributed about a mean value of 0.09 mmol mol^{-1}.

The linear mixed-effects model for A_{net} included fixed effects for island habitat, porewater

salinity, water level, season, and an interaction term for water level with season (Figure S4 &

Table S4). There was substantial variation in A_{net} rates among leaves (σ^2 of about 6 µmol m^{-2} s^{-}

^{1}), and the random variation among islands was about 0.02 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} (see Table S4). All

fixed effects were statistically significant (p < .05), except the interaction term, which was

marginally significant (p = .05) but greatly improved model fit. Mangrove edge habitats reduced

A_{net} by over 2.5 μmol m^{-2} s^{-1} relative to mangrove-island centers (Figure 2). Seasonality had a

comparable negative effect, leading to an average decrease in A_{net} of just over 2 μmol m^{-2} s^{-1} in

the wet season relative to the dry season (Figure 2). After accounting for variation in the data

because of habitat and season, the marginal effects of water level and porewater salinity were

positive, albeit weak, leading to increases in A_{net} of roughly 0.1 μmol m^{-2} s^{-1} per cm increase in

water level (Figure 3) or per ppt increase in porewater salinity (Figure 4). Therefore, A_{net}

increased as water levels increased, with increases consistent across habitats (Figure 3); a

similar pattern was observed concerning soil porewater salinity, although the magnitude of

increase in A_{net} was smaller (Figure 4). These relationships of A_{net} with water level variability

were consistent across seasons, although rates of A_{net} were depressed during the wet season

(Figure 2). The mixed-effects model for A_{net} fit satisfactorily for these types of linear mixed-

effects models modeling leaf-gas exchange data using environmental predictors, explaining 24%

of the variation in the data, 22% of which was explained by ecohydrological data (i.e., fixed

effects) (Table S4).

g_{sw} was modeled using an identical mixed-effects model as was used for A_{net} (Figure S5

& Table S5). Generally, rates of g_{sw} were low, with 98% of g_{sw} measurements being <0.2 mol m^{-}

^{2} s^{-1}. Random variance in g_{sw} among islands was negligible, being <0.01 mol m^{-2} s^{-1}. Leaf g_{sw} in

edge habitats was statistically lower than that of mangrove-island centers ($p < .001$), being

depressed by about 0.02 mol m^{-2} s^{-1} (Figure 2). Water levels did not affect rates of g_{sw} ($p > .05$,

Figure 3, Table S5), and soil porewater salinity had a marginal effect ($p = .07$) on g_{sw}, where

conductance increased slightly at high salinities, after accounting for the effects of other

environmental variables in the model (Figure 4). The effect of season on rates of g_{sw} was

significant in the model, with the wet season leading to a 0.05 mol m^{-2} s^{-1} decrease in

conductance (Figure 2) and the interaction between water levels and season being statistically

significant (Figure 3). Overall, the mixed-effects model for g_{sw} did not fit the data as well as the

model for A_{net}. The model only explained about 12% of the variability in the data, with 9% of its

explanatory power coming from the environmental predictors (Table S5).

Although the model selection approach was the same as the other mixed-effects models,

the best-fit model for c_i differed from the models for A_{net} and g_{sw}. The model did not include a

fixed effect for soil porewater salinity (which dropped out of the model in the model selection

procedure) but included all the same fixed effects as the models for A_{net} and g_{sw}, which were all

statistically significant ($p < .001$), and a random intercept term for islands (Table S6).

Mangrove-island edge habitats had consistently higher c_i values than island centers, being

about 27 µmol mol^{-1} greater (19 to 35 µmol mol^{-1} difference in 95% CI estimates, Figure 2). The

marginal effect of season alone was similar in magnitude to that of habitat; the wet season led

to a decrease in c_i of 24 µmol mol^{-1} (14 to 34 µmol mol^{-1} difference 95% CI estimates) relative to

the dry season (Figure 2, Table S6). Water levels, by themselves (again, the marginal effect),

led to a slight decrease in c_i but had a positive interaction with season, indicating that the

relative decrease in c_i due to increasing water levels was suppressed during the wet season

(Figure 3). The random intercept term in the model (for islands) explained a considerable

amount of variation in the data (σ^2 = 128 µmol mol^{-1}, with τ_{island} = 66 µmol mol^{-1}). The mixed-

effect model for c_i fit the poorest of all four models, explaining just under 12% of the variance in

c_i, about 9% of which was explained by data from the hydrological environment (Table S6).

Lastly, we modeled *wue* using a similar mixed-effects model to that of g_{sw}. In the model

for *wue*, all fixed effects were statistically significant ($p < .001$); however, the fixed effects were

more-subtle in magnitude. Similar to the model for c_i, porewater salinity was not included in the

best-fit model. *wue* values were normally-distributed about a mean value of 0.09 mmol mol^{-1},

with 83% of the data having values between 0.05 and 0.15 mmol mol^{-1}. Mangrove-island edge

habitats had lower *wue* by 0.01 mmol mol^{-1} than island centers (Figure 2). The marginal effect

of water level, although being statistically significant in the model, was negligible; however, the

wet season caused an increase in *wue* by 0.02 mmol mol^{-1} relative to the dry season, with the

interaction between water level and season being slightly negative (Figure 2, Figure 3).

Random variation in *wue* structured across the eight mangrove-islands was minuscule, being <

0.01 mmol mol^{-1}. Thus, the model fit for *wue* was comparable to, and slightly better than, the

model for c_i, with fixed effects explaining just over 12% of the variance in the data, about 9% of

which was explained using the environmental predictors (Table S7).

Rhizophora mangle leaf functional traits, nutrient content, and isotopic signatures

Leaf SLA values did not vary significantly between seasons ($F_{1,155} = 0.46$, $p > .05$) and

island habitats ($F_{1,155} = 3.07$, $p > .05$, Table 3), despite having some variation in SLA with

average values ranging from 29 to 40 cm^2 g^{-1}. Similarly, leaf water content was not significantly

different between all season-habitat combinations ($F_{1,155} = 0.32$, $p > .05$), despite a statistically

significant effect of season alone ($F_{1,155} = 9.10$, $p < .01$), where leaf water content was greater in

the dry season (65.6 ± 0.3%) relative to the wet season (63.8 ± 0.4%, Table 3).

Leaf TC content ranged from 400 to 450 mg g^{-1} (Table 3) and was not different between

seasons ($F_{1,12} = 1.10$, $p > .05$), habitats ($F_{1,12} = 0.10$, $p > .05$), or their interaction ($F_{1,12} = 1.77$,

$p > .05$). Leaf TN concentrations were higher in the dry season compared to the wet season

($F_{1,12}$ = 11.95, p < .01) and ranged from 8-10 mg g^{-1} (Table 3). There was neither a significant

difference in leaf TN between habitats ($F_{1,12}$ = 1.86, p > .05), nor a significant interaction

between seasons and habitats ($F_{1,12}$ = 0.11, p > .05, Table 3). Leaf TP content did vary

significantly between seasons ($F_{1,12}$ = 15.05, p < .01) and had marginally-significant difference

between habitats ($F_{1,12}$ = 4.55, p = .054), but the interaction effect was not significant ($F_{1,12}$ =

0.08, p > .05). Overall, mean leaf TP values ranged from 0.42 to 0.55 mg g^{-1} across seasons

and habitats, with higher concentrations during the dry season than in the wet season and

higher leaf tissue TP values in the island center habitats compared to edge habitats (Table 3,

Figure 5). Mean N resorption for *R. mangle* leaves was similar across seasons and habitats

and ranged from 60 to 63% (Table 3, Figure 5). In contrast, P resorption of leaf tissue had a

broad range compared to that of N, ranging from 73.2 ± 6.2% (center, wet season) to 78.6 ± 0.2%

(edge, dry season) across seasons and habitats. Overall, P resorption of *R. mangle* leaves was

higher in the edge habitats relative to the center during both seasons (Table 3).

Patterns in green leaf carbon isotope signatures (δ^{13}C) mirrored those of leaf TN and TP

concentrations. Carbon isotopic fractionation was more negative during the wet season than in

the dry season ($F_{1,12}$ = 18.88, p < .01, Table 3, Figure 5), with no statistical difference between

habitats ($F_{1,12}$ = 1.17, p > .05). Green leaves bulk δ^{13}C values ranged from -25.9 to -25.1‰

across seasons and habitats (Table 3, Figure 5). Physiologically, the differences in carbon

isotopic fractionation were estimated to result in a maximum difference of about 10 µmol mol^{-1} c_i

between the center and edge habitats and a difference of 5 to 15 µmol mol^{-1} c_i within habitats

($F_{1,12}$ = 1.71, p > .05) because of seasonality ($F_{1,12}$ = 18.88, p < .01). These differences resulted

in slightly greater, but not statistically different, c_i values in mangrove-island centers than in

edge habitats in the wet season; however, the opposite pattern was found during the dry season,

with c_i being about 10 µmol mol^{-1} greater in island edge habitats relative to their centers (Table

3). The interaction between season and habitat was marginally significant ($F_{1,12}$ = 4.53, p

= .055). Intrinsic water-use efficiency (*WUE*) was calculated from leaf δ^{13}C values; accordingly,

WUE was greatest in mangrove-island centers during the dry season relative to all habitat-

season combinations. Additionally, *WUE* was significantly lower in the wet season than the dry

season ($F_{1,12}$ = 18.88, p < .01, Table 3). Mean leaf bulk δ^{15}N values were significantly higher

($F_{1,12}$ = 19.66, p < .001) in the center habitats (-0.60 ± 0.66‰) relative to the edge (-4.79 ±

0.66‰), but there was no difference between seasons ($F_{1,12}$ = 0.17, p > .05) and no interaction

between season and island habitat ($F_{1,12}$ = 0.58, p > .05, Table 3, Figure 5A).

DISCUSSION

Our first research question asked how mangrove-island habitat affects rates of leaf gas

exchange. We can confirm our hypothesis that photosynthetic rates and stomatal conductances

are greater at island centers than edges (Figure 2). However, contrary to our expectation,

habitat driven-variation in leaf gas exchange rates was roughly equal to seasonal variation, with

no apparent decoupling between A_{net} and g_{sw} (Figure 2). Our second research question asked

whether water levels or salinity exerted a more-substantial effect on mangrove leaf gas

exchange *in situ*. Porewater salinities at TS/Ph-7 are relatively low (i.e., between 15 and 30 ppt),

compared to the levels of salinity at which leaf gas exchange rates of *R. mangle* are negatively

affected (i.e., salinities > 35 ppt) and did not vary considerably over time (Figures S1 & S2).

Therefore, we conclude that inundation stress is the primary driver of variation in *R. mangle* leaf

gas exchange rates. Lastly, we predicted that general physiological stress would be lower at

island centers than island edge habitats, leading to increased *wue* and higher rates of nutrient

resorption at centers relative to edges. Indeed, intrinsic water-use efficiency was greater at

island centers than edge habitats, with results being consistent across gas exchange-measured

wue and isotope-derived *WUE.* In addition, *w*ater levels modulated leaf intrinsic water use

efficiency (Figure 3, Table 2), especially in the dry season. Patterns of nutrient resorption were

less clear but seemed to indicate differences in leaf N and P concentrations on mangrove-island

centers versus edges, illustrating differences in water and nutrient use of *R. mangle* among

habitats, which likely drive variation in leaf gas exchange rates.

The effect of mangrove-island habitat on leaf gas exchange

Our results showed significant differences in soil elevation of about 30 cm between

mangrove-island habitats (Table 1), which affected *R. mangle* leaf gas exchange rates (Figures

2, 3, 4). The soil elevation gradient at our study site is driven by differences in mangrove root

biomass and productivity between center and edge island habitats, with higher total root

biomass and productivity (top 0-90 cm of soil) observed in center habitats compared to the edge

habitats (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2011). Along this micro-elevation gradient, we measured clear

differences in A_{net} and g_{sw} (Figure 2). A_{net} was nearly 3 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} (or 20%) greater at

mangrove-island centers than edges, and g_{sw} was >0.1 mol m^{-2} s^{-1} (or >37%) higher; these

differences were attributable to mangrove-island habitat alone, after accounting for variation

explained by water level, salinity, or seasonality (i.e., marginal differences). Associated c_i

concentrations were about 30 µmol mol^{-1} (or 12%) lower, and *wue* was >0.01 mmol mol^{-1} (or

about 10%) greater at island centers than at island edges (Figure 3).

Thus, these findings support our first hypothesis about the effect of habitat micro-
elevation (center vs. edge) on A_{net}, with overall greater leaf gas exchange rates at mangrove-
island centers compared to their edges. Interestingly, the effect of habitat on *R. mangle* leaf gas
exchange rates was similar in magnitude to the effect of season (Figure 3). The magnitude of
variation in A_{net} that we report in this study is slightly larger than the magnitude of variation
reported by Lin and Sternberg (1992), who found that A_{net} varied up to 2 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} between
scrub and fringe *R. mangle* trees in the nearby Florida Keys. Furthermore, our A_{net}
measurements with average values between 5.7 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} (edge habitat, wet season) and
10.2 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} (center habitat, dry season, Figure 2), are within the range of values reported
for *R. mangle* interior scrub (5.3 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) and fringe (10 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) mangroves along a
distinct zonation pattern in the intertidal zone at Twin Cays, Belize (Cheeseman and Lovelock
2004). Island center habitats may also support greater access to mixed soil-groundwater
sources in the dry season facilitating higher leaf gas exchange rates because of increased
freshwater availability, or a reduction in the energy demand for processing saline water (Ewe et
al. 2007). Our results demonstrate the effect that higher-elevation center habitats at TS/Ph-7
have on alleviating inundation stress, which pervades scrub mangrove physiology, making trees
growing in center habitats in the dry season physiologically comparable to fringe mangroves.
Certainly, the stress relief is short-lived when water levels rise in the wet season (Table 2,
Figure S1), and leaf gas exchange rates are depressed once more (Figure 2. Figure S3).

Seasonal signals in R. mangle *physiology with implications for ecosystem functioning*

We found that A_{net} varied over 2.5 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} (17%), and g_{sw} varied about 0.03 mol m^{-2}
s^{-1} (11%) within habitats between the wet and dry seasons (Figure 3). Despite differences in
A_{net} and g_{sw} between seasons, we found no statistical differences in c_i and *wue* between
seasons, although there was some variation (Figure 3). These differences point to habitat-
specific optimization of the diffusion and uptake of CO_2 into (i.e., c_i) and the movement of water
vapor out of (i.e., *wue*) leaves (Cardona-Olarte et al. 2006, Barr et al. 2009, Reef and Lovelock
2015, Lopes et al. 2019). As precipitation and freshwater flow increased during the wet season,
water levels increased, and mangrove-island centers experienced greater inundation levels
(Figures S1 & S2), resulting in decreased A_{net} and g_{sw} (Figure 3). A similar reduction in A_{net} and
g_{sw} was measured in mangrove-island edge habitats during the wet season (Figures 3 & 4).
Although A_{net} was depressed in the wet season, the effect of inundation levels on reducing A_{net}
was consistent across seasons (Figure 4). g_{sw} showed a similar pattern to A_{net}, being highest in
mangrove-island centers during the dry season (Figure 3). However, the effect of water levels

on g_{sw} resulted in increased g_{sw} in the wet season, an effect which was tempered during the dry

season (Figure 4).

In the Florida Everglades, irradiance peaks in April and May (Barr et al. 2009), and

rainfall and temperature reach maxima in June, July, and August (Figure 1 A, B). Thus,

photosynthetic demand for water is likely highest from April to May, at the end of the dry season

and the beginning of the wet season. During this time, we measured lower water levels and

porewater salinities relative to the peak wet season. Barr et al. (2009) recorded earlier diurnal

and more considerable reductions in g_{sw} during late May versus July or August for mangroves at

Key Largo, evidencing the greatest water-limitation on photosynthesis occurs at the end of the

dry season. Additionally, the greatest A_{net} rates for tall fringe mangroves in the southeastern

Everglades occur during the dry season from March to May (Barr et al. 2009). The difference in

surface water and porewater salinity ($\Delta sw\text{-}pw$) can be used as a proxy for tree transpiration

(Reef and Lovelock 2015). Average $\Delta sw\text{-}pw$ measured 10.7 and 8.1 ppt at mangrove-island

edges in the wet and dry seasons, respectively, whereas it measured 7.8 and -0.3 in mangrove-

island centers in the wet and dry seasons, respectively. Indeed, measured transpiration was

highest at the end of the dry season in March and April (Figure S3). Thus, photosynthetic

demand for water is higher in the dry season in mangrove-island centers relative to edges or

either habitat in the wet season. The drying of the soils at slightly higher-elevation island center

habitats in this scrub mangrove forest likely facilitates increases in A_{net}. Therefore, the seasonal

variation in hydrology, mainly reductions in water levels and porewater salinity during the dry

season, albeit coupled with an increase in surface water salinity in this study (Table 2), likely

have critical consequences for mangrove forest carbon fluxes at greater spatial scales.

Potentially drying soils could also lead to an increase in ecosystem respiration (Chambers et al.

2014), or non-stomatal derived CO_2 uptake (Reef and Lovelock 2015). Future research could

look at soil metabolic dynamics (e.g., soil respiration, microbial C and N, or changes in microbial

communities) with hydrology and season, which may show unique responses in this scrub *R.*

mangle forest (Lovelock 2008, Chambers et al. 2014).

The effect of salinity and water level on R. mangle *leaf gas exchange*

During 2019, the hydrological environment (Figure 1C, D) at our study site was

seasonally dynamic (Table 2) and tended to mirror patterns in local rainfall (Figure 1B). Water

levels and porewater salinity both increased during the wet season (Table 2, Figure S1) from

the beginning of the rainy season in May through November. This likely led to increased water

column stratification via a larger freshwater lens (Hughes et al. 1998, Uncles et al. 1992).

Indeed, the difference in surface water and porewater salinity increased in the wet season, with

surface water salinities decreasing, despite a slight increase in porewater salinities (Table 2,

Figure S1). When data were grouped by season, edge habitats were slightly more saline (about

4 ppt on average) than mangrove centers (Table 2), and there were no apparent differences

between fringe and interior scrub mangrove zones (Figures S1 & S2). Comparing these

changes in the hydrological environment with previous years, long-term water level and

porewater salinity data at this site show that water level usually increases and porewater salinity

usually decreases in the wet season relative to the dry season (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2013).

We measured the opposite trend for porewater salinity in 2019 with slight differences between

seasons, likely because it was a wet year. Total rainfall for 2019 (929 mm yr^{-1}; Figure S1) was

10% greater than the total for rainfall 2018 (859 mm yr^{-1}; https://sofia.usgs.gov/eden).

Rates of mangrove leaf gas exchange (i.e., A_{net} and g_{sw}) typically decrease with

porewater salinity, especially along strong salinity gradients in the environment (i.e.,

gradients >30 ppt, Ball 2009, Clough and Sim 1989, Lugo et al. 2007). Porewater salinity was

only included in the linear mixed-effects models for A_{net} and g_{sw}, and its marginal effect was

minimal, slightly increasing A_{net} by about 0.1 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} per ppt increase in porewater salinity.

Like the effect of porewater salinity on A_{net}, the effect of porewater salinity on g_{sw} was small in

magnitude and consistent across seasons and mangrove-island habitats but was not statistically

significant (Figure 4). The minimal influence of porewater salinity on leaf gas exchange is likely

due to the minor seasonal and spatial variation in salinity that we measured during 2019.

Differences were not large, maximizing at 16.4 ppt and averaging 5.2 ppt, especially when

considering that *R. mangle* frequently occupies natural habitats with salinities greater than

seawater (Reef and Lovelock 2015), potentially up to 50-60 ppt (Cintron et al. 1978). At our

study site, variation in porewater salinity from long-term monitoring data (2001-2020) has shown

similar magnitudes of relatively-minor variation in porewater salinity, with overall mean values

ranging from 19-22 and rarely exceeding 30 ppt (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2013). Additionally,

long-term variation in porewater salinity (<30 ppt) across the FCE mangrove sites (Shark and

Taylor River sites) is below the critical value of 65 ppt that influences forest structure and

productivity across the FCE landscape (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2013). Thus, the limited effect

of salinity in our linear mixed-effects models is likely broadly indicative of relatively weak salinity

effects in both scrub and tall *R. mangle*-dominated forests of the Everglades. This is a

significant finding, given that these scrub forests are adapted to relatively low salinities. If

salinity increases greatly due to SLR and saltwater intrusion in the region, they will likely

experience more stressful conditions with could diminish their physiological performance, as
observed in other studies in the neotropics (Lugo et al. 2007).

The effects of inundation on *R. mangle* photosynthesis can be difficult to separate from
the effects of salinity; however, the linear mixed modeling approach we used permitted doing so.
We found that the intermittent flooding conditions of mangrove-island centers that averaged 10-
15 cm above the soil surface allowed greater A_{net} and g_{sw} than permanently flooded mangrove-
island edges, which averaged 30-40 cm water levels. This indicates that the hydrological
regime in center habitats allows mangrove soils to repeatedly flood and desiccate, which may
help the species maintain optimal stem water potentials and g_{sw} (Ball 2009, Reef and Lovelock
2015). In typical greenhouse experiments where mangrove seedlings are grown, inundation
alone has little effect on photosynthetic rates or biomass production (Pezeshki et al. 1990b,
Hoppe-Speer et al. 2011). However, inundation may sometimes lead to increases in leaf gas
exchange rates over the short term and often interacts with salinity over time to reduce A_{net}, g_{sw},
and growth rates (e.g., Cardona-Olarte et al. 2013). Thus, water levels and flooding duration
are key drivers controlling A_{net} in mangroves, and mangroves seem to physiologically\ optimize
photosynthesis to water levels. For instance, findings from a long-term greenhouse inundation
study by Farnsworth and Ellison (1996) exemplify how short-term responses of *R. mangle* to
inundation differ from longer-term responses. Over several years, high inundation levels led to
steady declines in A_{net} of up 25% for a given g_{sw} and decreases in growth rates. Results of the
high-water level (30-40 cm above soil surface) treatment were similar to those of the low water
level (10-15 cm) treatment, suggesting that *R. mangle* physiology is optimized at inundation
levels that reach just a few centimeters above the soil surface at high water level (Ellison and
Farnsworth 1997). Further research could assess the coupled effect of the depth and duration
of flooding with salinity in the FCE by characterizing photosynthetic rates across a landscape-
scale gradient that encompassed multiple sites and a broad range of salinity (or potentially with
an experimental increase of salinity).

Although initial increases in *R. mangle* g_{sw} can result from short term inundation (Krauss
et al. 2006, Hoope-Speer et al. 2011), especially at low salinities (Pezeshki et al. 1990b),
several studies have linked stomatal closure to longer-term inundation (Kozlowski 1997, Ellison
and Farnsworth 1997). We measured depressed g_{sw} during the wet season and in mangrove-
island edge habitats relative to centers; however, this was not attributable to water levels after
accounting for variation in seasonality and habitat, in that g_{sw} increased with increasing water
levels during the wet season. Our measurements of g_{sw} were consistent with those reported in

other studies from across a range of inundation levels (Clough and Sim 1989, Lin and Sternberg

1992, Ellison and Farnsworth 1997, Krauss et al. 2006, Lugo et al. 2007, Barr et al. 2009),

supporting the understanding that *R. mangle* leaves limit g_{sw} in response to flooding. Limits on

g_{sw} seek to optimize c_i for carbon gain without losing unnecessary amounts of water, but our

findings show that g_{sw} can increase with freshwater inputs, resulting in a decrease in c_i as A_{net}

increases (Figure 3), likely because of faster Calvin cycle reactions (see supplemental

information Figure S9). Interestingly, the scrub *R. mangle* leaves of TS/Ph-7 operate with low c_i

concentrations (range = 220-260 µmol mol^{-1}), which suggests pervasive inundation stress.

Such pervasive inundation stress likely leads to water and nutrient (i.e., leaf N and Rubisco)-

stressed photosynthesis, which decreases max A_{net} at mangrove-island edges by reducing

maximum rates of carboxylation, especially in the wet season.

R. mangle nutrient use at TS/Ph-7

We found little variation (60-63%) in N resorption efficiencies for *R. mangle* leaves

across scrub mangrove-island habitats (Figure 5). In contrast, higher overall efficiencies of P

resorption (73-79%) of leaf tissue were measured across habitats, with higher P resorption in

mangrove-island edge habitats relative to centers, suggesting higher P availability in island

centers. Our findings are roughly comparable to N and P resorption efficiencies for *R. mangle*

in the control plots of scrub-dominated forests in Panama (~50%, and 80%, respectively;

Lovelock et al. 2004). Resorption of nutrients from senescent leaves before leaf fall is a within-

stand nutrient recycling mechanism that may reduce nutrient losses via tidal export in coastal

systems (Vitousek 1982, Aerts and Chapin 2002). Like other tropical trees, mangroves exhibit

several physiological mechanisms that reduce nutrient losses via tidal exchange, including

resorption of N and P before leaf abscission, which can lead to increased availability of limiting

nutrients and ultimately change nutrient use and conservation patterns (Twilley et al. 1986,

Alongi et al. 1992, Feller et al. 2003a, 2003b).

Our findings suggest that *R. mangle* conserves P better than N in this P-limited

environment and indicate that canopy N and P resorption efficiency at TS/Ph-7 potentially

results from the differential acquisition of these nutrients from the soil between habitats, and

variation in the use of these nutrients among leaf stages. Mangrove species prioritize resorption

of nutrients that are limited in the soil, and it has been suggested that plants growing in nutrient-

poor environments resorb a higher proportion of nutrients, potentially decreasing nutrient loss by

efficient nutrient recycling (Chapin and Moilanen 1991). At our study site, low soil TP

concentrations probably determine the higher recycling efficiency of P relative to N. Indeed, soil

TP concentrations in the upper 50 cm of soil at TS/Ph-7 (0.06 ± 0.004 mg cm^{-3}) are three times

lower than soils at the mouth of Shark River estuary (SRS-6), which is dominated by fertile well-

developed tall riverine mangroves. Such low TP concentrations result in extreme P limitation at

TS/Ph-7 with average soil N:P ratios of 102 ± 6 (Castañeda-Moya et al. 2013). Therefore, the

heterogeneous distribution of essential nutrients within mangrove habitats creates distinct

nutrient gradients and hot spots along the intertidal zone, influencing the efficiency of internal

nutrient recycling. This is supported by observations that nutrient resorption efficiencies in

mangroves vary with nutrient availability, e.g., via nutrient addition (Feller et al. 1999, Feller et al.

2003b) or along natural fertility gradients (Medina et al. 2010). Such variation in nutrient

availability and resorption efficiencies within mangrove trees likely scales with variation in

photosynthesis and productivity (e.g., growth, litterfall) and carbon residence times (e.g., soil

and biomass dynamics) of mangrove forests.

Foliar δ^{15}N values integrate long-term processes of N sources because isotopic

fractionation against the heavier isotope (i.e., ^{15}N) occurs during N transformations and

interactions between biotic (e.g., mycorrhizal fungi, or bacteria) and biogeochemical (e.g.,

nitrification, denitrification) nutrient cycling processes (Garten 1993). In our study site, patterns

of δ^{15}N in *R. mangle* leaves differed drastically between mangrove habitats, with values around

-4 to -5‰ for mangrove edge habitats and between 0 and -1‰ for island centers, indicating

lower ^{15}N discrimination in island center habitats (Table 3, Figure 5A). These δ^{15}N values are

considerably more depleted than the *R. mangle* leaf δ^{15}N values reported for riverine

mangroves along Shark River estuary (He et al. 2020), where values were negatively correlated

with distance inland from the mouth of the estuary with more enriched leaves occurring near the

mouth of Shark River (4‰) relative to upstream (0.4‰) regions. Reported δ^{15}N values for *R.*

mangle leaves across different ecotypes in the neotropics range from 0 to -11‰, with more

negative values for scrub mangrove forests (-5 to -10‰) than for fringe mangroves (0-7‰; Reis

et al. 2017a). Similarly, Medina et al. (2010) showed that leaves from interior scrub mangrove

communities had more negative δ^{15}N values than tall fringe mangroves in eastern Puerto Rico (-

12‰ vs. 0‰, respectively). Those δ^{15}N values were more negative than those reported for

scrub *R. mangle* forests in Florida (Fry et al. 2000), Belize (McKee et al. 2002, Wooller et al.

2003, Fogel et al. 2008), or Brazil (Reis et al. 2017b).

Patterns of foliar δ^{15}N between mangrove ecotypes can be discerned using *in situ* leaf

nutrient content. For example, a direct relationship between ^{15}N discrimination and leaf N:P

ratios of *R. mangle* leaves previously reported for the six FCE mangrove sites, including our

study site, indicates that leaf N:P ratios accounted for 70% of the variability in ^{15}N discrimination

(Mancera-Pineda et al. 2009). Thus, foliar ^{15}N composition can reflect *in situ* leaf N-status and

differences in plant N-use. Hypoxic conditions in the soil may inhibit denitrification and

ammonia volatilization, two processes that enrich the soil substrate in ^{15}N (Craine et al. 2015).

Therefore, the substrate should be less enriched at mangrove-island edges relative to their

centers, because of interactions with the soil and the open water channels, which can alleviate

hypoxia. Thus, it appears that more negative δ^{15}N values in the edge habitats may be

associated with lower inorganic N (i.e., porewater ammonium) use by edge mangrove trees

compared to those in center island habitats (Fry et al. 2000). However, our results contrast

slightly with those of Mancera-Pineda et al. (2009), who reported mean δ^{15}N values of +3 from

65 mature leaves collected in 2001 at our study site. We posit that differences in δ^{15}N values

between the two studies could be attributed to the location where leaves were collected during

the 2009 study, concluding that it is very likely that Mancera-Pineda et al. only collected leaves

from the center of mangrove-islands, avoiding edge habitats. Taking this into consideration,

mangrove-island centers potentially may have even more-positive δ^{15}N signatures than we

found, illustrating that in the center of mangrove-islands, N is taken up by roots in inorganic

soluble forms (e.g., porewater ammonium, nitrate) and not biotically via root symbionts.

Another potential explanation of why δ^{15}N values were more negative at mangrove-

island edges than in their centers is because lateral surface roots of *R. mangle* can extend into

open water where they associate with symbiotic biofilms (i.e., algae and aquatic bacteria) that

facilitate N acquisition from open water (Potts 1979). A significant source of isotopic

discrimination occurs during N transfer between belowground symbionts (e.g., mycorrhizal fungi

or bacteria) and plant roots during nitrification, denitrification, and ammonia volatilization. The

lighter isotope ^{14}N reacts faster than ^{15}N (i.e., it is preferentially given to the host plant by the

symbiont) so that plant tissues are depleted while substrates are enriched (Högberg 1997,

Robinson 2001). Indeed, at our study site, we observed several long, absorptive, fine lateral

root systems that protruded from the edge of mangrove-islands into the open water ponds,

which were colonized by algal biofilms. Mangrove trees can potentially adapt to nutrient

shortage or localized nutrient deficiencies in the soil by altering patterns of nutrient use. This

plant strategy may maximize the efficiency of capturing limiting resources essential for growth

(e.g., N, P) from soil or surrounding open water areas in nutrient-poor environments such as

Taylor River, as proposed by the optimal plant allocation theory (Chapin et al. 1987, Gleeson

and Tilman 1992). We observed a slight decrease in foliar δ^{15}N during the wet season (Figure

5A, Table 3) as water levels and porewater salinity increased, suggesting that N-acquisition by

R. mangle via algal biofilms may be slightly greater in the dry season than in the wet season.

Lastly, highly depleted (i.e., negative) N-isotope values in leaf tissues are characteristic of

tropical wetlands with P limitation because P limitation increases N fractionation, especially in

flooded wetlands with limited P pedogenesis (McKee et al. 2002, Troxler 2007, Medina et al.

2008). This is likely the case with the scrub *R. mangle* forest at TS/Ph-7, where the main

source of P is brackish groundwater discharge (Price et al. 2006). Soil total P concentrations in

the top 10 cm of the peat soils at this site have measured 0.055 (± 0.01) mg cm^{-3}, with atomic

N:P ratios of roughly 72 (± 2) (Mancera-Pineda et al. 2009), which is considerably lower than

soils of most mangrove forests globally, but consistent with mangrove forests in karstic

environments (Rovai et al. 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

Habitat heterogeneity, resulting from micro-elevational differences in mangrove tree

locations on islands within the open water, mangrove-island forest landscape, drives variation in

scrub *R. mangle* leaf physiological performance. In particular, mangrove-island edge habitats

experience greater and more-prolonged inundation than island centers in a seasonal dynamic,

which leads to reductions in g_{sw}, reduced A_{net}, and slightly lower *wue*. Conversely, mangrove-

island center habitats are alleviated from inundation stress in the dry season, leading to

increases in A_{net} and g_{sw}. Interestingly, c_i levels increase with increasing water levels because

inundation likely slows not only g_{sw}, but the entire biochemical process of CO_2 assimilation,

including mesophyll and lower level (i.e., cell wall, plasma membrane, cytosol) conductance.

Additionally, differences in nutrient acquisition and use patterns among scrub *R. mangle* trees

growing at island edges vs. centers affect leaf-nutrient status and photosynthetic potential.

The findings from this study indicate that it is the interaction of inundation stress with

mangrove-island micro-elevational habitat in the flooded scrub mangroves of the southeastern

Florida Everglades that principally alters tree water and nutrient-use dynamics, which appear to

cascade to affect leaf gas exchange rates through their effects on g_{sw}. Reductions in A_{net}

interact with the salinity of the water that inundates scrub *R. mangle* trees, in theory, because

g_{sw} rates are low and primarily respond to water loss from leaves rather than carbon gain (see

supplemental section on *R. mangle* CO_2 assimilation and stomatal behavior). In our field

measurements, however, we found that prolonged inundation more than porewater salinity

drives reduction in A_{net} because the hydrological regime at Taylor River is characterized by long

hydroperiods and minor fluctuations in salinity throughout the year (Figure S2). At the forest

level, such physiological differences in scrub mangrove functioning with habitat and hydrological

environment can help inform ecosystem carbon cycle models and mangrove forest responses to

SLR and saltwater intrusion.

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CONFLICTS OF INTERST

None declared

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 TABLES

 Table 1. Mean (± 1 SE) soil surface elevation, bedrock elevation, and soil depth, for open water,
 mangrove-island edge and center habitats in the fringe and interior scrub mangrove areas at
 TS/Ph-7 in southeastern Florida Coastal Everglades. Elevation measurements are referenced
 to the North American Vertical Datum 1988 (NAVD88). Letters denote statistically different
 groupings via Tukey HSD post-hoc test ($p < .05$).

Mangrove Location	Habitat	Soil Surface Elevation (NAVD88, m)	Bedrock Elevation (NAVD88, m)	Soil depth (m)
Fringe	Open water	-0.63 ± 0.05^C	-1.84 ± 0.05^A	1.22 ± 0.05^C
	Island edge	-0.41 ± 0.03^B	-1.83 ± 0.02^A	1.43 ± 0.05^{BC}
	Island center	-0.14 ± 0.02^A	-1.86 ± 0.06^A	1.72 ± 0.05^A
Interior	Open water	-0.84 ± 0.02^D	-2.01 ± 0.15^A	1.18 ± 0.14^C
	Island edge	-0.49 ± 0.03^B	-1.78 ± 0.04^A	1.39 ± 0.04^C
	Island center	-0.15 ± 0.02^A	-1.77 ± 0.03^A	1.62 ± 0.03^{AB}

1126 **Table 2.** Seasonal variation in water levels, surface water and porewater salinity measured in
1127 mangrove-island habitats at scrub *R. mangle* dominated mangroves at TS/Ph-7 in southeastern
1128 Florida Everglades. Means (± 1 SE) with different letters within each column denoting
1129 significant differences among groups (Tukey HSD post hoc, $p < .05$).

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Season	Habitat	Water level (cm)	Surface water salinity (ppt)	Porewater salinity (ppt)
Dry	Edge	33.5 ± 1.9^A	16.11 ± 1.16^A	24.22 ± 0.44^A
	Center	10.1 ± 1.9^B	21.14 ± 1.51^B	20.83 ± 0.44^B
Wet	Edge	40.2 ± 1.9^C	15.31 ± 1.16^A	26.00 ± 0.44^C
	Center	15.5 ± 1.9^B	14.41 ± 1.47^A	22.22 ± 0.44^D

Table 3. Leaf functional traits, carbon and nutrient contents and N:P ratios, nitrogen and
phosphorus resorption efficiencies, bulk isotopic signatures, intrinsic intracellular CO_2
concentrations (c_i) and intrinsic water use-efficiency (WUE) (calculated from ^{13}C fractionation)
for scrub *R. mangle* leaves collected from mangrove-island habitats at TS/Ph-7 during the dry
and wet seasons of 2019. Means (± 1 SE), with different letters across each row denoting
significantly different groups (Tukey HSD test, $p < .05$).

Leaf Trait	Dry season		Wet season	
	Edge	Center	Edge	Center
Leaf dry mass (g)	0.64 ± 0.02^A	0.65 ± 0.02^A	0.69 ± 0.02^A	0.70 ± 0.02^A
Leaf area (cm^2)	24.9 ± 0.7^A	25.5 ± 0.7^A	26.0 ± 1.4^A	27.3 ± 0.9^A
SLA ($cm^2\ g^{-1}$)	28.97 ± 0.66^A	39.79 ± 0.68^A	37.33 ± 0.40^A	40.04 ± 1.71^A
LWC (%)	65.7 ± 0.4^A	65.4 ± 0.5^A	63.6 ± 0.5^A	64.0 ± 0.8^A
Total C ($mg\ g^{-1}$)	450.9 ± 5.7^A	441.4 ± 1.0^A	428.7 ± 17.7^A	444.0 ± 1.0^A
Total N ($mg\ g^{-1}$)	9.8 ± 0.2^{AB}	10.2 ± 0.3^A	8.4 ± 0.5^B	9.0 ± 0.3^{AB}
Total P ($mg\ g^{-1}$)	0.50 ± 0.01^{AB}	0.55 ± 0.04^A	0.42 ± 0.01^B	0.46 ± 0.02^{AB}
Leaf N_{area} ($mg\ cm^{-2}$)	0.258 ± 0.012	0.264 ± 0.019	0.263 ± 0.035	0.306 ± 0.020
Leaf P_{area} ($mg\ cm^{-2}$)	0.013 ± 0.001	0.014 ± 0.002	0.013 ± 0.001	0.016 ± 0.001
Atomic N:P	41.7 ± 1.9	40.0 ± 0.1	43.5 ± 3.7	42.5 ± 2.1
N resorption (%)	60.0 ± 0.4	62.8 ± 0.5	60.8 ± 2.8	62.9 ± 1.5
P resorption (%)	78.6 ± 0.2	74.3 ± 3.2	75.5 ± 0.4	73.2 ± 6.2
$\delta^{13}C$ (‰)	-25.5 ± 0.1^{AB}	-25.1 ± 0.1^A	-25.8 ± 0.1^B	-25.9 ± 0.2^{AB}
c_i ($\mu mol\ mol^{-1}$)	228.1 ± 2.2^{AB}	219.9 ± 1.8^B	233.3 ± 1.1^A	235.3 ± 3.6^A
WUE ($mmol\ mol^{-1}$)	0.1124 ± 0.0014^{AB}	0.1175 ± 0.0012^B	0.1092 ± 0.0007^A	0.1080 ± 0.0022^A
$\delta^{15}N$ (‰)	-5.3 ± 0.5^B	-0.4 ± 0.4^A	-4.2 ± 1.0^{AB}	-0.8 ± 1.5^A

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 FIGURES LEGENDS

 Figure 1. A) Photograph of TS/Ph-7 shows scrub R. mangle tree islands that characterize the
 study site. Mangrove canopy heights are approximately 1.5-2 m tall, facilitating canopy
 measurements of leaf physiology. Boardwalk (1.3 m height) is pictured for reference. **B)** Aerial
 view (Google Earth) of mangrove-islands measured for this study within TS/Ph-7, near the
 mouth of the Taylor River in southeastern Florida Coastal Everglades, USA. The inset shows
 the location of TS/Ph-7 within the boundary of Everglades National Park. Colors indicate scrub
 mangroves and fringe (white) and interior zones (yellow) relative to Taylor River. Symbols
 denoted paired higher-elevation center and lower-elevation edge habitats for each mangrove-
 island (squares and triangles, respectively).

 Figure 2. Predicted marginal mean (±95% confidence intervals) values of photosynthesis (A_{net}),
 stomatal conductance (g_{sw}), the concentration of intracellular CO_2 (c_i), and intrinsic water use
 efficiency (*wue*) by mangrove-island habitat and season. The dry season is from November to
 April, and the wet season is from May to October. See supplemental material for complete
 model summaries.

 Figure 3. The effect of water level on leaf photosynthesis (A_{net}) and stomatal conductance (g_{sw}),
 the concentration of intracellular CO_2 (c_i), and intrinsic water use efficiency (*wue*) by season.
 Lines are habitat-specific predicted mean marginal mean values (± 95% confidence intervals)
 from linear mixed-effects models.

 Figure 4. The effect of soil porewater salinity on leaf photosynthesis (A_{net}) and stomatal
 conductance (g_{sw}) by season. Porewater salinity was not included in the best-fit models for c_i or
 wue. Lines are predicted mean marginal effects from linear mixed-effects models ± 95%
 confidence intervals (colored by island habitat).

 Figure 5. Mean (± 1 SE) leaf isotopic signatures and nutrient resorption efficiency by island
 habitat and season combination. **A)** the relationship between $\delta^{15}N$ and $\delta^{13}C$ in *R. mangle*
 leaves, **B)** the relationship between N resorption efficiency and $\delta^{13}C$ for *R. mangle* leaves, and
 C) the relationship between P resorption efficiency and $\delta^{13}C$ for R. mangle leaves. Error bars
 colors denote island habitats, while point symbols and colors show seasons.