Title

Microbial community dynamics and coexistence in a sulfide-driven phototrophic bloom

Authors

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Abstract

Phototrophic microbial mats commonly contain multiple phototrophic lineages that coexist based on their light, oxygen and nutrient preferences. Here we show that similar coexistence patterns and ecological niches can occur in suspended phototrophic blooms of an organic-rich estuary. The water column showed steep gradients of oxygen, pH, sulfate, sulfide, and salinity. The upper part of the bloom was dominated by aerobic phototrophic *Cyanobacteria*, the middle and lower parts were dominated by anoxygenic purple sulfur bacteria (*Chromatiales*) and green sulfur bacteria (*Chlorobiales*), respectively. We found multiple uncultured phototrophic lineages and present metagenome-assembled genomes of two uncultured organisms within the *Chlorobiales*. Apparently, those *Chlorobiales* populations were affected by *Microviridae* viruses. We suggest a cryptic sulfur cycle within the bloom in which elemental sulfur produced by phototrophs is reduced to sulfide by *Desulfuromonas sp*. These findings improve our understanding of the ecology and ecophysiology of phototrophic blooms and their impact on biogeochemical cycles.

Introduction

Estuarine and coastal water bodies are dynamic and ubiquitous ecosystems that are often characterized by the mixing of terrestrial freshwater and ocean saltwater. Brackish habitats can have striking physical and chemical characteristics that differ from both fresh and saltwater ecosystems (McLusky and Elliott, 2004; Moore, 1999). Brackish ecosystems are very diverse and support large microbial and macrobial communities (McLusky and Elliott, 2004). Estuaries also provide crucial ecosystem services, the most salient of which is trapping and filtering terrestrial runoffs and pollutants before they enter the oceans (Jay et al., 2007; Nelson and Zavaleta, 2012; Pant and Reddy, 2001).

Estuaries harbor abundant and diverse microbial communities that participate in the cycling of carbon, nitrogen, sulfur, and phosphorus. These communities fix carbon dioxide through photosynthesis or chemosynthesis (Boschker et al., 2014; Ritchie and Johnson, 2012; Waidner and Kirchman, 2005). Additionally, carbon introduced as

organic matter from the oceans or land can be remineralized by heterotrophic microbial communities (Moran et al., 2000; Peduzzi and Herndl, 1991; Smith and Hollibaugh, 1993). This decomposition can deposit sulfide in sediments (Capone and Kiene, 1988). Further, sulfate brought into estuaries by ocean waters can be utilized by sulfate reducers, which convert sulfate into elemental sulfur or sulfide (Capone and Kiene, 1988; Purdy et al., 2002). The combination of sulfate introduced by ocean water and sulfide released from decomposition in the sediments is part of the chemocline of the brackish water column (Zopfi et al., 2001). Additionally, estuaries and coastal marshes often exhibit a halocline and the depletion of oxygen in the water column can create an oxycline (Lee et al., 2015; Long, 1976). These gradients can produce habitats and niches that influence microbial community structure at different depths and conversely the microbial community can respond to these gradients (Jørgensen and Revsbech, 1983; Møller et al., 1985; Wimpenny et al., 1982).

The physicochemical properties of estuaries fluctuate frequently and rapidly as a result of many factors, for example, tidal cycles, weather patterns, and seasonal cycles (Allen et al., 1980; Badr et al., 2008; Garvine, 1985; Haas, 1977; Maie et al., 2006; Simpson et al., 1990). Such disturbances can bring about noticeable changes in the microbial community structure of the ecosystem, including blooms or declines in the populations of one or more members of the microbial community, as well as changes in the richness and evenness of the community (Bernhard et al., 2005; Henriques et al., 2006; Lv et al., 2016; Muylaert et al., 2000; Zaikova et al., 2010).

Trunk River in Woods Hole, MA is a brackish ecosystem, on the coast of Vineyard Sound (N 41.535236, W -70.641298). Near the mouth, Trunk River forms a shallow lagoon where freshwater mixes with seawater. Storms, tides, and run-off introduce large amounts of biomass to the pond forming thick layers of decaying seagrass and other organic matter. The pond has a distinct sulfidic odor that emanates from the water and gases bubble up from the sediment. Episodically, strikingly yellow microbial blooms can be observed just below the water surface (see Figure 1, S1) that typically disappear again within days to weeks. These transient blooms were observed to occur in natural depressions in the decaying organic matter and anecdotally seemed to be initiated by

physical disturbance events, potentially from storms, tidal extremes, human activity, or animals. Given this visually striking natural ecological progression, we set out to test whether physical disturbance alone could trigger the blooms.

To understand the mechanisms of bloom development, we thus mimicked such disturbances of the brackish ecosystem by creating artificial depressions in the decaying organic matter, and monitored the microbial community response and population dynamics, as well as investigated ecological niches of the key populations. Based on previous observations, we hypothesized that i) the disturbance would cause a sulfide-driven phototrophic bloom ii) due to its rapid development the bloom would be largely dominated by very few populations and iii) sharp photo-/ and physicochemical gradients would establish that cause narrow habitats and niches. We discuss the resulting reproducible ecological succession and provide insights into the habitats, niches, and resilience of such widespread ecosystems. Our findings contribute to the understanding of the ecological processes and dynamics that shape phototrophic blooms, which are a naturally occurring phenomenon in many ecosystems.

Results

Visual Observations

At the first sampling time point (2 days post-disturbance), no difference was observed in the water column or in the samples collected from different depths. Two days later (time point 2, 4 days post-disturbance), a faint pink layer was observed in the water column, and faint shades of yellow in samples from the 25 cm depth (Figure S2). At the next sampling time point (time point 3; 5 days post-disturbance), we observed a bright yellow suspension below the water surface (Figure 1). Of the samples collected at this time point, the samples from 25 cm depth were most distinctly yellow (Figure S2). The yellow color of the suspension intensified by time point 4 (7 days post-disturbance). No remarkable visual changes in the system were observed for the subsequent three time points (time points 5, 6, and 7). During these three time points, the yellow suspension only slightly changed. At time point 8 (16 days post-disturbance), the holes had partially collapsed, the water was much clearer and the 25-cm samples showed a reduction in

the intensity of the yellow color (Figure S2). We found a green layer at the bottom of each hole, seemingly from sedimented GSB. It has to be noted that the opacity of the samples was higher at the first two timepoints than at the following timepoints. Especially at timepoint 1 the suspension was beige and very opaque, while later on the suspension became more yellow, but also more translucent (Figure S2).

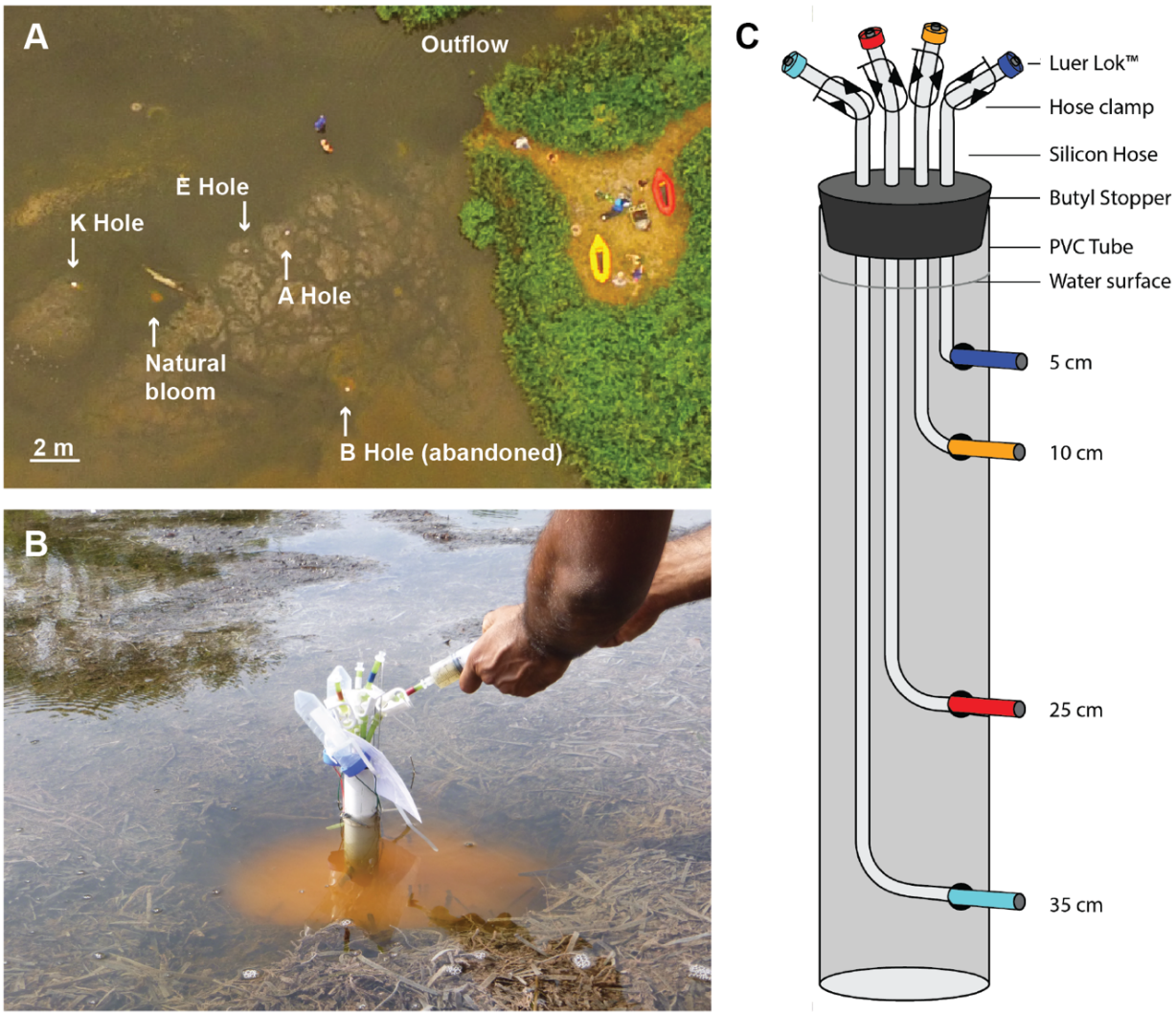

Figure 1: Sampling sites. A. Aerial view of experimental sites (A, E, and K) in the Trunk river lagoon. The water enters the lagoon from the right and exits to the sea through a channel marked outlet. **B.** View of a **LEMON** (**L**ong-term **E**nvironmental **MON**itoring) sampling device during sample collection on time point 3; 5 days post-disturbance. **C.** Schematic of the LEMON.

Physicochemistry of the water column

Within the first three days the pH decreased between one and two units in all layers, with lowest values present in the deepest layer (Figure 2). Over the 15-day sampling period, pH showed more variation in the two upper layers than in the two deeper layers were it was very constant at values between 6 and 6.3. Throughout the experiment the water column in all three experiments showed a stable halocline with brackish water (5 ‰ salinity) at the water surface and saltwater (30 ‰) at 35 cm depth (Figure 2). Salinity increased with depth and was 12 ‰ and 23 ‰ at 10 cm and 25 cm, respectively. Major ions also reflect this trend (e.g. calcium, potassium in Figure S5). The dissolved oxygen (DO) concentrations showed a stable oxycline between 10 and 25 cm. Above 10 cm, DO was always higher than 20 % (36±17 %) and below that DO was always below 20 % (9±9 %). The oxygen concentration slowly decreased in the upper two layers during the first half of the experiment, but recovered again to the original values towards the end of the experiment. At 5 and 10 cm, DO was approximately 41 % and 30 %, respectively (Figure 2). At 25 and 35 cm, the average DO measurements were ≈ 12 % and 5%, respectively. The sulfate concentrations in the water column decreased along the depth gradient, with the highest sulfate concentration at 5 cm (≈ 2 mM) and the lowest at 25 cm (≈ 0.2 mM) (Figure 2). In contrast, the sulfide concentrations were lowest at 5 cm (Figure 2F). Interestingly, the greatest sulfide concentration was measured at 10 cm depth peaking at over 1 mM towards the end of the experiment. Below 10 cm, sulfide concentration was still high, but declined to 0.75 mM ± 0.22 at 25 cm and 0.5 mM ± 0.17 at 35 cm. The normalized biomass measured for the 5 cm samples throughout the sampling period was nearly zero (Figure 2). At 10 cm, 25 cm, and 35 cm, the normalized biomass measured was approximately, 0.2 mg/mL, 0.3 mg/mL, and 0.2 mg/mL, respectively. For details concerning iron (Fe(II), Fe(III), total Fe), nitrate, calcium, potassium, ammonium and acetate refer to Supplementary Results and Figure S5.

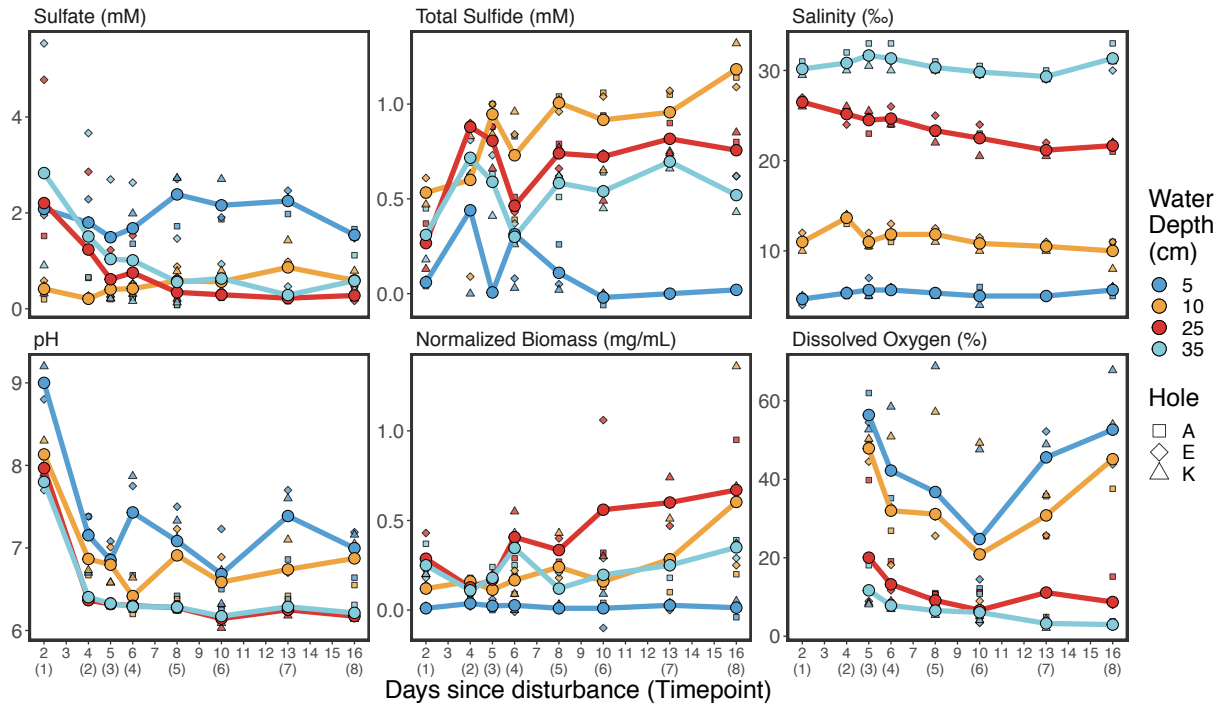

Figure 2: **Physicochemistry**. The physicochemical measurements of the sampling sites. Salinity (parts per thousand). The x-axis shows days since disturbance and the y-axis the respective units. For further parameters (Fe (II); Fe (III); Total Fe, nitrate) refer to SI.

Spectral Absorbance of Phototrophic Community

We measured absorbance spectra from filters of samples from A, E and K experiments (Figure S3) and compared the spectra to those of representative cultured species of the most abundant phototrophic genera from the literature (Borrego et al., 1999; Caumette et al., 1997; Oren, 2011; Srinivas et al., 2009; Stomp et al., 2008). All absorbance spectra were normalized to the respective highest peak (Figure 3). Our results show that pigments belonging to PSB were prominent in the upper layer of the bloom (orange spectra), while GSB pigments dominated the lower layer of the bloom (red line). Pigments characteristic for *Cyanobacteria* were less abundant at peak bloom and increased relatively at the end of the experiment. Pigments of all major phototrophs were detected throughout the experiment. The spectral results suggest the coexistence of multiple phototrophs over the entire duration of the experiment.

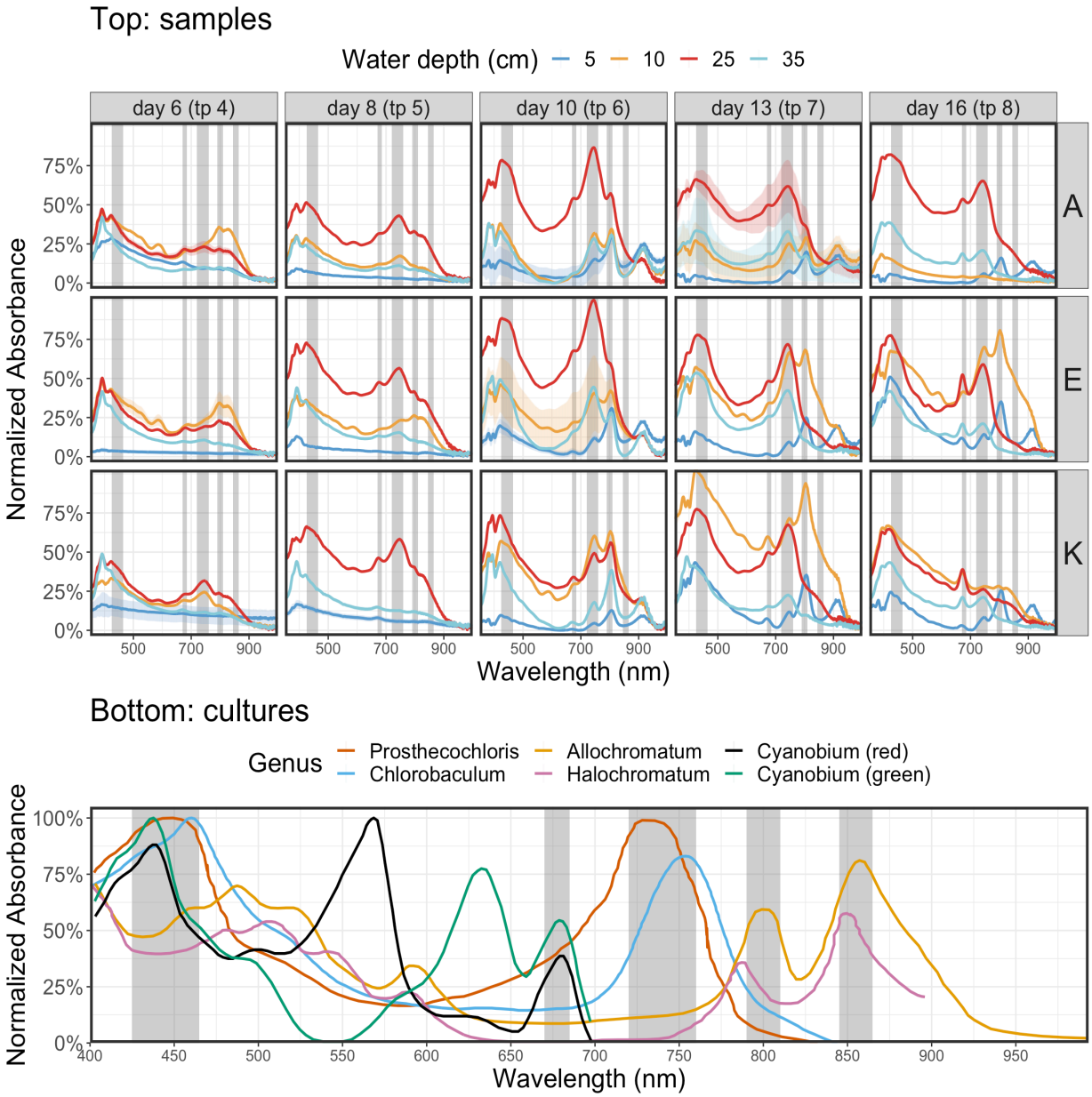

Figure 3: **Spectral Absorbance**. Sample spectra show averages of at least three replicates per sample. Color bands in the sample data indicate one standard deviation (bands are mostly smaller than center line). Gray vertical bands indicate major absorbance peaks of the *Prosthecochloris* and *Chlorobaculum* group (720-760 nm) and the *Allochromatium* and *Halochromatium* group (790-810 nm and 845-865 nm) highlighting the transient appearance and likely dominance of these phototrophs over the course of the experiments. Also indicated is the general phototroph absorbance band in the 425-465 nm window. Cyanobacterial groups (red and green) have distinct absorbance peaks in the 500-700 nm range that are not prominent in the sample spectra except for the characteristic 670-685 nm peak (also highlighted in gray) reflecting the presence but likely smaller role of these taxa during the experiment.

Microbial Community Structure and Taxonomic Composition

At the beginning of the experiment, the microbial diversity was high in all four water depths and very similar across replicate ecosystems. Alpha diversity rapidly decreased with the onset of the bloom, and within two days the communities in the four depth layers substantially changed (Figure 4, 5, S6, S7). The number of observed amplicon sequence variants (ASV), as well as estimated richness, Shannon entropy, and Inverse Simpson diversity significantly decreased between the surface water and the water at a depth of 10 cm and 25 cm (Figure 4; p=0.001). This change is most striking in the case of Inverse Simpson diversity, a measure for evenness. In just one day, evenness dropped in both 10 cm and 25 cm water depth by over one order of magnitude to low single digit values (Figure 4; Table S1). This means the community was extremely dominated by one ASV (a pure culture has an Inverse Simpson diversity of 1).

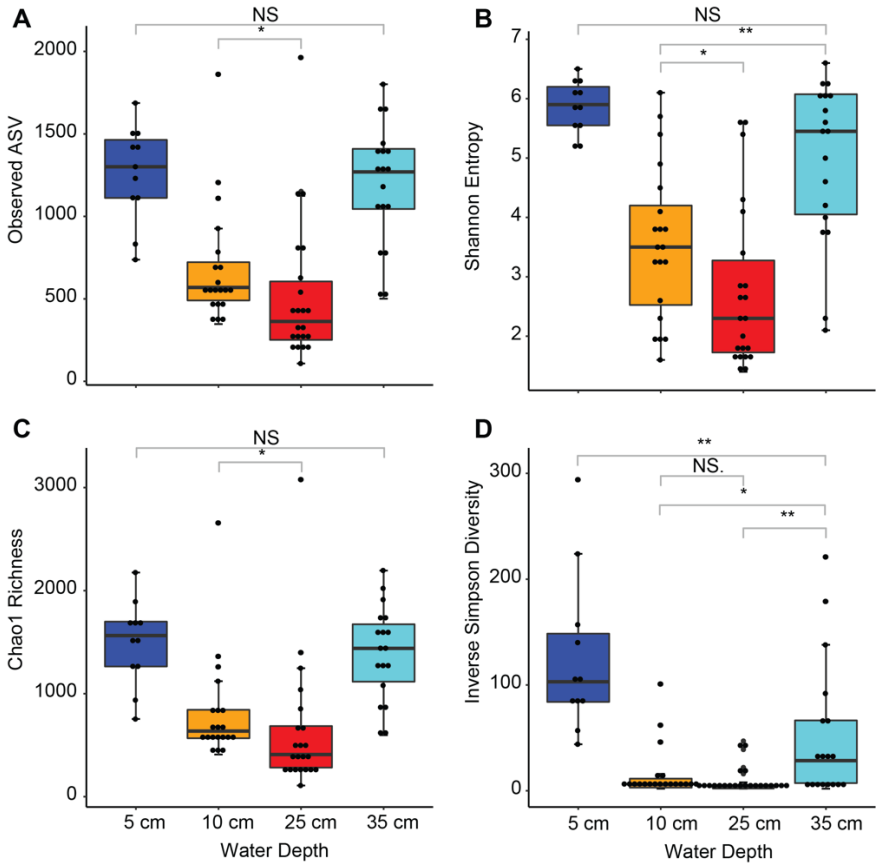

Figure 4: Alpha diversity. Diversity Indices of all samples grouped by depth. Pairwise comparisons with low significance levels are shown (NS, *: p<0.1, **: p<0.01). All pairwise comparisons that are not shown were highly significant (***: p<0.001), e.g. panel A 5 cm vs 10 cm.

The rapid and profound change of community structure is corroborated by a high turnover of ASV between the layers and timepoints, as shown by non-metric multidimensional scaling (Figure 5, S7). The top layer is well separated from the deeper layers. The communities at 25 cm water depth experienced the largest turnover, i.e. change in community structure, as shown in the ordination (Figure 5). The more distant two points are on the ordination plot the less similar are the underlying communities. Interestingly, the communities of all three deep layers (15 – 35 cm) had a similar community structure at the beginning of the experiment and then seemed to converge again at the end, yet at a different part of the ordination plot. This pattern on the ordination plot indicates that the bloom shifted the microbial communities to an alternative stable state.

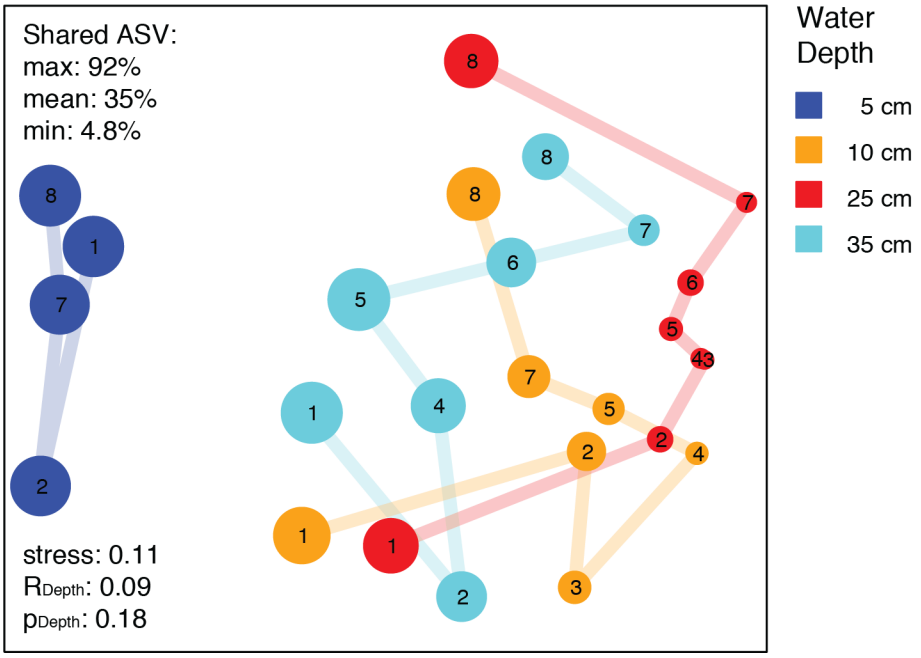

Figure 5: Microbial Community Turnover. Circle size represents average Shannon Diversity across three replicate holes. Sampling time points are indicated as numbers. The ordination shows that communities in 15-35 cm water depth are very different from those in the top layer. The trajectories indicate that layer 2 and 3 underwent the most substantial changes in community structure. The community at 25 cm depth had a striking loss in diversity during the experiment, yet seemed to have recovered at the last time point. Holes were very similar (see SI Figure S4) and were averaged for clarity. ASV: Amplicon Sequence Variant. Depth is not a significant indicator for community structure using replicate averages, however in each hole the communities in the different layers are overlapping but different (see Figure S4).

223 The taxonomic composition was assessed at all phylogenetic levels (Figure 6, S8). We
224 observed a total of 73 bacterial phyla. The surface community (5 cm) remained
225 relatively unchanged throughout the experiment and was dominated by *Proteobacteria*,
226 *Chlorobi*, *Cyanobacteria* and *Actinobacteria*. The communities in the deeper layers were
227 more dynamic, being dominated by *Bacteroidetes*, *Proteobacteria*, *Firmicutes*, and
228 *Chloroflexi*. In general, taxonomic diversity was highest in the deepest layer (35 cm).
229 The profound change in diversity was accompanied by a change in composition. Within
230 a few days, there was a substantial increase in the abundance of *Chlorobi*, which
231 comprised more than 75% of the community at that time. This increase persisted for
232 nine days, but levelled off at the end of the experiment. The datasets of all layers and
233 timepoints were dominated by ASVs affiliating with phototrophic organisms, as shown
234 by relative sequence abundances on genus level (Figure 6A). Some phototrophs
235 occurred in all layers at similar relative sequence abundances, such as *Halochromatium*
236 and "*Candidatus* Chloroploca". The stable surface layer harbored *Cyanobium* and
237 "*Candidatus* Aquiluna", which decreased in the deeper layers. The upper layer of the
238 bloom showed an increased relative sequence abundance of *Allochromatium,* the lower
239 bloom layer was dominated by *Prosthecochloris* and *Chlorobaculum* (Figure S10).
240 Interestingly, almost all *Prosthecochloris* affiliated reads belonged to a single sequence
241 variant, while ASV diversity affiliated with the closely related *Chlorobaculum* increased
242 over time (Figure 6B, S9).

243 The relative sequence abundance of *Chlorobiales* noticeably changed at 25 cm depth,
244 where the yellow microbial bloom was visually observed. *Chlorobiales* ASVs accounted
245 for >25 % of reads in our dataset. To identify the phylogeny of ASV affiliating with
246 *Chlorobiales*, we placed the representative sequence of each ASV on a reference tree
247 of known *Chlorobiales*. The most abundant *Chlorobiales* ASV (ASV_1) affiliated with the
248 genus *Prosthecochloris*, and specifically in the monophyletic clade of *Prosthecochloris*
249 *vibrioformis* (Figure S11), followed by an ASV (ASV_2) affiliating with *Chlorobaculum*.
250 Together, these two ASVs account for >97 % of the *Chlorobiales* reads. In general, we
251 found a high number of unclassified lineages. The 20 most abundant ASV accounted for
252 about 50 % of all sequences, twelve of those belonged to unclassified genera or

253 families (Figure S8B). The novelty was especially high within the *Chromatiaceae* five of
254 the eight ASV that ranked among the "top 20" belonged to an unclassified genus.

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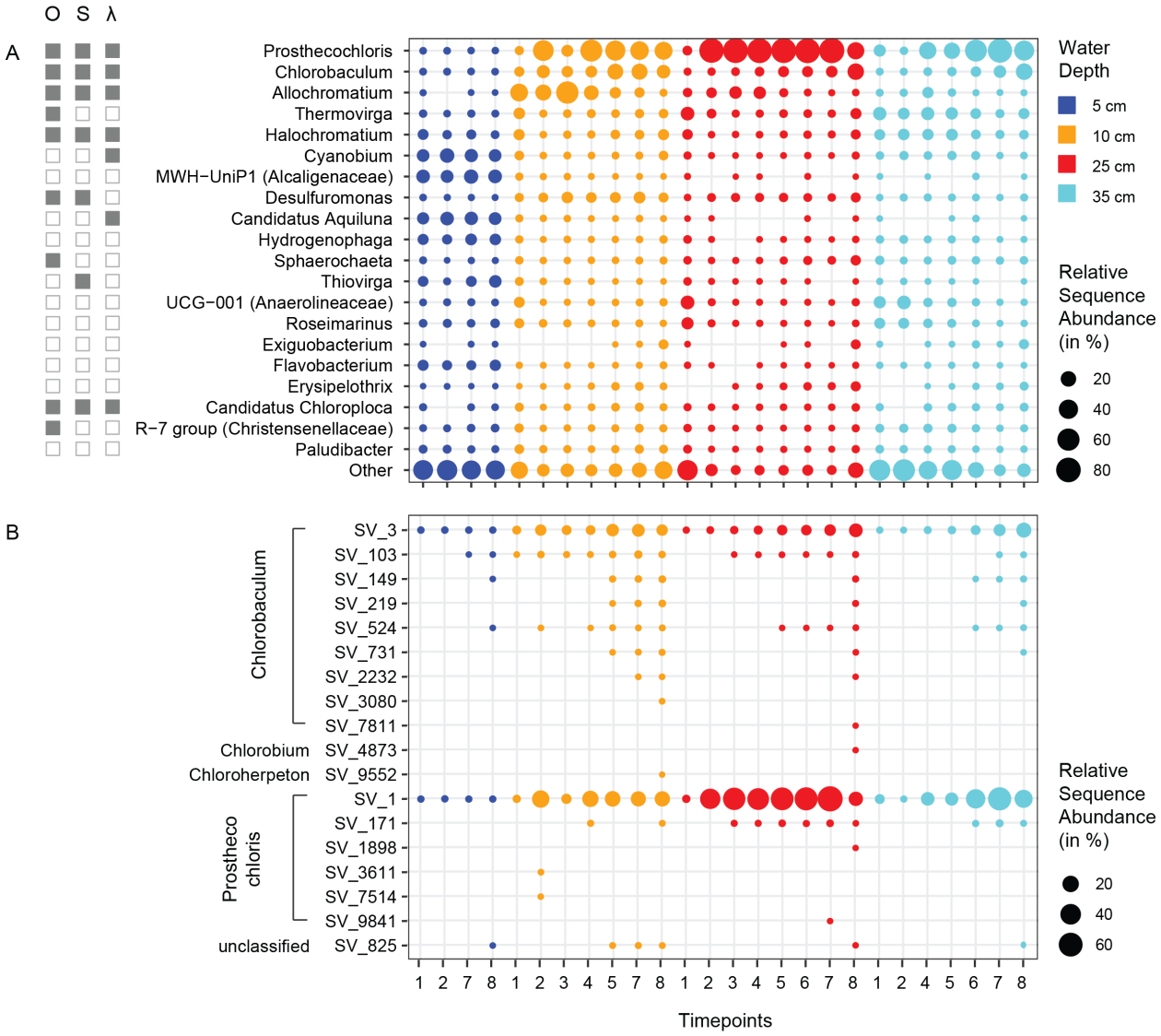

256

257 **Figure 6: Microbial community composition on genus level. A**: Relative sequence
258 abundance of genera found in different depths (colors) and timepoints (x-axis). Relative
259 sequence abundances were averaged across triplicates, due to the high similarity of all three
260 experiments. Clades that are anaerobic (O), involved in the sulfur cycle (S), or phototrophic (λ)
261 are indicated by full squares. **B**: Relative sequence abundance of amplicon sequence variants
262 (ASV) within the order *Chlorobiales*. The graph shows average values of the three replicate
263 experiments for clarity. The replicate experiments were very similar (see SI Figure S5 and S6).

264

265 *Chlorobiales*-affiliated metagenome-assembled genomes

266 We calculated the index of replication (iRep) (Brown et al., 2016) of the *Prostheco-*
267 *chloris* and *Chlorobaculum* populations based on the metagenome-assembled genomes
268 (MAGs) that were recovered from the community metagenomes of two replicate
269 experiments (Replicates A, E) and the enrichment culture (SK) at timepoint 7. Both
270 populations were replicating rapidly. *Prosthecochloris* (bin10) had an iRep value of 3.7
271 (r^2=0.90, sample 7A3), which indicates that on average every cell had 2.5 replication
272 events at the time of sampling. *Chlorobaculum* (bin 6) had iRep values of 2.5 (r^2=0.95,
273 sample 7E3) and 2.8 (r^2=0.95, sample 7K3), indicating that on average every cell had
274 ~1.5 replication events. Bin 6 (*Chlorobaculum sp.)* and Bin 10 (*Prosthecochloris sp.*)
275 contain CRISPR arrays denoted as either type I (*cas3*) or III (*cas10*) CRISPR systems
276 (Makarova et al., 2015) (Figure S16, S17). CRISPR predictions revealed 3 direct repeat
277 sequences in both MAGs of 30 and 35 (2) bp in length for Bin 6 and 37, 32, and 33 for
278 the Bin 10 (Table S4). None of the spacers were shared by the closest reference and
279 representative genomes or matched sequences in the CRISPR database (Grissa et al.,
280 2007). However, a highly similar CRISPR array and direct repeat sequence were found
281 between our Bin 6 and *Chlorobaculum parvum* NCBI8327 with 60% *cas* genes similarity
282 (Figure S16). The metagenomes of all experiments, as well as of the GSB enrichment
283 culture contained high relative sequence abundances of viruses affiliating with
284 *Microviridae* (Figure S18).

285 **Discussion**

286 In this study, we mimicked naturally-occurring disturbances in the decaying seagrass
287 bed of Trunk River to study microbial community succession. We performed triplicate
288 experiments that showed very similar physicochemical gradients and patterns of
289 community structure. The observed slight variations between replicate sites were likely
290 due to differences in the organic matter composition and distance to the lagoon access,
291 or due to ripples and disturbances caused by weather, animals, and sampling scientists.
292 The replicated disturbances of the organic matter layers (A-hole, E-hole, and K-hole)
293 released trapped sulfide and caused the rapid establishment of steep physicochemical
294 gradients as well as the development of a bloom of sulfide-oxidizing phototrophs. We

monitored the community assembly and succession and highlight the ecological niches of key populations and their possible mechanisms of coexistence.

Biogeochemistry of the water column

The Trunk River lagoon is a brackish estuary approximately on sea level and characterized by shallow, warm water. It has one small freshwater inlet, and one small outlet to the sea, resulting in a long residence time and low flow velocity of the water. The freshwater overlays a saltwater lens creating very a stable salinity gradient from brackish water at the surface to basically seawater at the sediment surface in 40 cm water depth (Figure 2), typical of brackish water estuaries (Levinton, 1995). Before the experiment the pH decreased from mildly basic near the surface (~ pH 9) to around seawater near the sediments (~ pH 8). After the disturbance the salinity gradient remained stable over the 15-day sampling period, pH however decreased drastically in all layers to as low as ~ 6.25 in the bottom layers (Figure 2). This pH decrease is likely due to hydrogen sulfide and its dissociation from H_2S to HS^-. The dissolved oxygen (DO) concentration also decreased with water depth (Figure 2) being below 20 % saturation in the bottom layers throughout most of the experiment, thus the bottom layer being *de facto* anoxic. In addition, DO decreased substantially even in the top layers in the first half of the experiment, recovering in parallel to the slow collapse of the bloom. The larger variations in pH and DO at 5 cm and 10 cm as compared to 25 cm and 35 cm indicate that the top layers were the more dynamic part of the water column. Together, the observations – that were very similar in the replicate experiments - show that after the system settled from the initial perturbations, it reached a stable state with stable physicochemical gradients in the stratified water column.

Indications for a cryptic sulfur cycle in the water column

Sulfate concentrations in the bottom layers decreased substantially within the first days, and were lowest in the bloom layer at 25 cm depth, where sulfate was almost entirely depleted. We found sulfate-reducers affiliating with *Desulfobacteraceae* and *Desulfobulbaceae* in the hypoxic layers of the bloom (Figure S8) likely producing sulfide using either hydrogen or organic acids released from fermented organic matter layers.

The sulfide concentrations were highest at the upper boundary of the bloom at 10 cm water depth after the system stabilized around day 6 (Figure 2). This is unexpected since reduced sulfur species, especially hydrogen sulfide, are the electron donor for the green and purple phototrophs and thus should have been depleted in these layers. At the same time, we found an increased relative abundance of sulfur-reducing *Desulfuromonas sp.* in the bloom layers, peaking at around 15 % relative sequence abundance. *Desulfuromonas sp.* are known to live in freshwater ecosystems and reduce elemental sulfur to sulfide (Finster et al., 1997, 1994; Pfennig and Biebl, 1976), which in turn can be reused by the sulfide-oxidizing phototrophs. This suggests that sulfide was replenished by sulfate reducers from sulfate as well as from sulfur reducers from sulfur produced by the phototrophs indicating a “sulfur loop” in the bloom carried out by multiple species across several phyla (Figure 7). At early timepoints the microbial suspension was beige and milky, indicating the presence of large amounts of elemental sulfur in the sample (Figure S2). Later the samples turned more yellow, due to an increase in phototrophic organisms and their photopigments (Figure 2, 3), but also cleared up and became translucent (Figure S2). Taken together this indicates that *Desulfuromonas sp.* reduced the elemental sulfur that was produced by the anoxygenic phototrophs so quickly that it was not accumulating in the suspension. This suggested sulfur loop - potentially a cryptic sulfur cycle depending on the concentration of the intermediate S^0 - provides a positive feedback that could explain the very rapid development of the bloom. The involved *Chlorobi* and *Deltaproteobacteria* could even form tight aggregates to efficiently use the common intermediate similar to *Chlorochromatium aggregatum* (Wanner et al., 2008), a topic that merits future research.

<u>Assembly and coexistence of phototrophic microorganisms</u>

The yellowish layer in the water column (fondly termed “microbial lemonade”, Figure 1C) formed around two to four days post-disturbance and was fully established by day six. The lemonade layer occurred between 10 – 30 cm water depth (Figure S2) with highest cell numbers and biomass at around 25 cm water depth (Figure 2, S4) in brackish, mildly acidic, and hypoxic waters (Figure 2). The microbial lemonade

represented a multispecies phototrophic bloom, dominated by green and purple sulfur bacteria. Due to the relative influence of green and purple sulfur bacteria and their photopigments, the color of the bloom slightly shifted from yellow-green at early timepoints to orange at mid timepoints back to yellow-green at late timepoints (Figure S2). This is reflected by the pigment spectra collected at the different timepoints (Figure 3).

Interestingly, the sequencing data suggested that especially the lower layer of the bloom was dominated by an apparently clonal population of green sulfur bacteria affiliated with *Prosthecochloris vibrioformis*. The green sulfur bacteria are sulfur-oxidizing, strictly anaerobic, obligate photoautotrophs (Alexander and Imhoff, 2006). Yet, based on our oxygen measurements, the Trunk River GSB population apparently tolerated low oxygen concentrations. The low concentration of dissolved oxygen at 25 cm depth combined with sulfide, salinity, and low light created an optimal habitat for *Prosthecochloris sp*.

Despite the dominance of few populations the disturbance created a habitat with gradients of pH, salinity, light, oxygen, and sulfide that enabled the coexistence of multiple phototrophic clades from at least five different phyla (*Actinobacteria, Chlorobi, Chloroflexi, Cyanobacteria and Gammaproteobacteria*). The coexistence of these high number of organisms competing for the same energy source is due to the different absorption maxima of each clades' photopigments (Figure 3), need for different electron donors, and the varying salinity and oxygen tolerances of each clade. *P. vibrioformis* is absent at 5 cm and present only in low abundance at 10 cm. The surface layer (5 cm depth) is inhabited by oxygenic phototrophic *Cyanobacteria* affiliating with *Cyanobium*, while the upper layer of the bloom (10 cm depth) is dominated by purple sulfur bacteria of the order *Chromatiales* (Figure 6). Because *Prosthecochloris* are adapted to low light conditions (Findlay et al., 2015) and respond to different wavelengths of light than *Cyanobacteria* and photosynthetic *Proteobacteria* (Herbert and Tanner, 1977; Parkin and Brock, 1980), it is reasonable that they thrived at depths of 25 cm, where they can out-compete other phototrophs. *Prosthecochloris* have been previously observed in many marine and saline habitats, such as the Black Sea (Manske et al., 2005), Baltic

384 Sea, Sippewissett Salt Marsh, and Badwater basin (Alexander and Imhoff, 2006). They
385 are considered to belong to a specialized phylogenetic lineage of green sulfur bacteria
386 adapted for marine and salt water ecosystems. Blooms of *P. vibrioformis* have been
387 previously observed in stratified lakes, where they dominate the community at a specific
388 depth (Máthé et al., 2014), sometimes forming clonal blooms (Gregersen et al., 2009).

389 Remarkably, the suspended phototrophic bloom was spatially organized analogous to
390 benthic phototrophic mats in the nearby Sippewissett Salt Marsh (Armitage et al., 2012;
391 Nicholson et al., 1987; Pierson et al., 1987) and elsewhere (Bolhuis et al., 2014; Bolhuis
392 and Stal, 2011). The layers of phototrophic mats are dominated from top, middle to
393 bottom by *Cyanobacteria*, PSB and GSB, respectively, except on a scale of few
394 millimeters to centimeters. Thus, the disturbance experiment that we performed *in situ*
395 created a transient ecosystem with niches resembling those in coastal microbial mats,
396 except across a spatial scale that was one order of magnitude greater. The community
397 slowly collapsed after about two weeks and the water column seemed to return to its
398 original state (Figure 5). We did not observe a shift from phototrophic to chemotrophic
399 sulfur oxidation after the phototrophic bloom (Pjevac et al., 2015).

400 <u>New species of purple and green sulfur bacteria and possible viral predation</u>

401 Due to the findings of a previous study based on 16S rRNA gene libraries, Imhoff and
402 colleagues proposed the existence of several uncultivated GSB species in Sippewissett
403 Salt Marsh and other estuaries (Alexander and Imhoff, 2006). The authors provide
404 evidence that several GSB clades harbor species that have yet escaped isolation,
405 among those are species in the genera *Chlorobaculum* and *Prosthecochloris*. We have
406 strong evidence that we found at least two of these species based on our MAGs of a
407 *Chlorobaculum* species (Bin 6, Figure S12, S14) and a *Prosthecochloris* species (Bin
408 10, Figure S12, S15). Both MAGs cluster sufficiently far away from the closest cultured
409 species (Figure S11, S13) and have average nucleotide identity (ANI) values of <90 to
410 their respective closest cultured isolate. Both MAGs also contain CRISPR-Cas systems
411 that are very different from the cultured isolates (Figure S16, S17). Our CRISPR results
412 show that Trunk River populations may be under predatory stress, affecting the
413 abundance of bacterial blooms, and that host immunity is active in this ecosystem

(Llorens-Marès et al., 2017). The unique CRISPR arrays indicate that closely related species may be infected by different viruses with species specificity (Borton et al., 2018). However, some viral populations have been reported to have broad host ranges (Daly et al., 2019). Divergent evolution or strain level microdiversity may also explain distinct CRISPR-Cas systems (Daly et al., 2016). A lack of public databases containing viral sequences restricts the detection of viral-host interactions (Goodcare et al., 2018). While Llorens-Marès *et al.* (2017) characterized a potential green sulfur bacterial viral infection, to date, phages infecting *Chlorobi* have not been reported. Our analyses suggest that viruses of the family *Microviridae* played a major role in the transient bloom (Figure S17), possibly even for its demise. This interesting finding merits future research on transient phototrophic blooms in estuarine ecosystems.

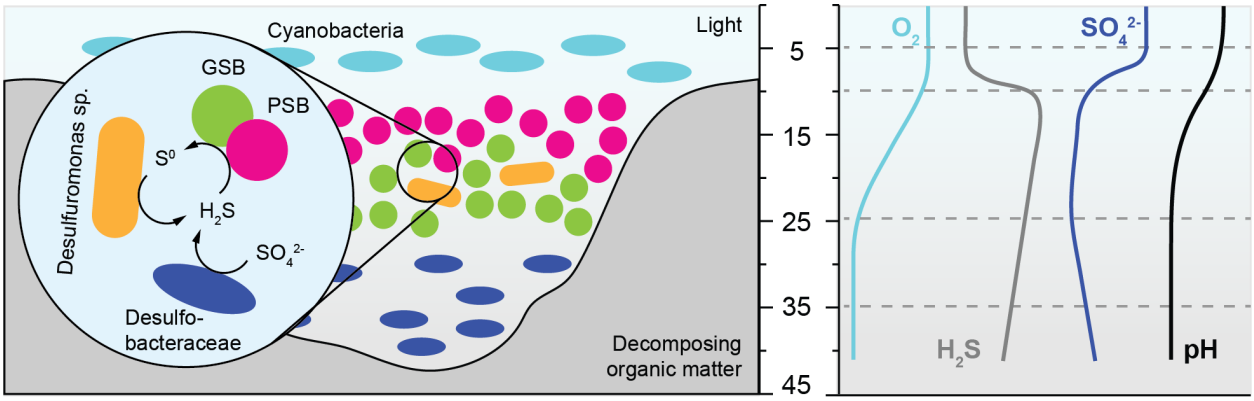

Figure 7: Ecosystem sketch. Schematic overview of the phototrophic bloom showing the main phototrophic populations, sulfur compounds, and chemical gradients.

Conclusions

In this study, we mimicked phototrophic blooms that naturally occur in a brackish estuarine ecosystem to understand the underlying microbial and biogeochemical dynamics. We suggest that phototrophs of different phyla co-exist in a layered bloom based on their different light and oxygen requirements, analogous to the communities in phototrophic microbial mats (Figure 7). Our findings indicate that Chlorobiaceae form a syntrophic relationship with Desulfuromonas sp. with elemental sulfur as intermediate.

437 We reconstructed metagenome assembled genomes of two uncultured green sulfur
438 bacteria, belonging to *Chlorobaculum* and *Prosthecochloris* and show that *Microviridae*
439 viruses played a role in the bloom, potentially infecting species within the *Chlorobiales*.

440

441 **Materials and Methods**

442 Experimental Setup and Sample Collection

443 We used custom-made sampling poles for long-term environmental monitoring of the
444 water column without disturbing the established gradients (LEMON; Figure 1B, C). The
445 sampling poles were placed in three replicate depressions (A-hole, E-hole, and K-hole)
446 that we dug into the thick layers of decaying organic matter (Figure 1A). In each of sites,
447 a sampling pole was placed such that the inlets sampled water at 5 cm, 10 cm, 25 cm,
448 and 35 cm depth below the surface (Figure 1B, C). Sampling poles were set up one day
449 after the holes were dug out and sampling began one day after set up (two days post
450 disturbance), to allow disturbed sediment to settle. Samples were collected over a 15-
451 day period during July-August 2015. For each sample, the first 5 ml were discarded,
452 followed by collection of 100 ml of water in several sterile tubes for further analyses
453 (Figure S2). The tubes were transported on ice to the laboratory and stored at 4˚C. All
454 sample collections were carried out between 4 pm and 6 pm.

455 Enrichment cultures

456 To enrich for GSB we used a defined saltwater medium (400g/l NaCl, 60g/l
457 $MgCl_2$*$6H_2O$, 3g/l CaC_{l2}*$2H_2O$, 10g/l KCl) buffered at pH 7.2 with 5 mM MOPS. The
458 medium contained 5 mM NH_4Cl as N source, 1mM K phosphate (pH 7.2) as P source,
459 70 mM $NaHCO_3$ as C source, 10 mM $Na_2S_2O_3$ as electron donor, 1 mM Na_2S as
460 reductant or electron donor, a multivitamin solution prepared at 1000× in 10 mM MOPS
461 at pH 7.2, and a trace metal solution prepared at 1000× in 20 mM HCl. Saltwater base,
462 MOPS, N- and P-source, and trace metals were autoclaved together in a Widdel
463 sparging flask, cooled under a stream of N_2/CO_2 (80%:20%) gas. C-source, electron
464 donors and vitamins were added from filter-sterilized stock solutions after cooling. The

465 medium was inoculated with biomass removed from *in situ* enrichments of GSB grown
466 on glass slides using a 770 nm monochromatic LED. After inoculation, the bottle was
467 kept in dark for 2-4 hours and then placed 5 cm away from a LED light source with the
468 same specifications. After a visible sign of growth – green coloration – the culture was
469 filtered through 0.2 μm filter and used for DNA extraction, similar to other samples.
470

471 Physicochemical Measurements

472 *In-situ* measurements of pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen, oxidation reduction
473 potential (ORP), and ion selective electrode (ISE) were carried out with a multi-
474 parameter probe equipped with a quarto probe (YSI Professional Series Model Pro).
475 The probe was calibrated for pH with 4, 7, and 10 buffers and for dissolved oxygen
476 using oxygen-saturated water and an anoxic solution of sodium ascorbate and sodium
477 hydroxide. After each sample collection the probe was lowered into the water to each
478 depth per site and after probe readings stabilized, the parameters were recorded.

479 To measure biomass and pigment spectra, up to 10 ml of the collected sample was
480 filtered through a sterile Millipore filter (0.2 μm GTTP, 0.2 μm GNWP, or 0.22 μm GV).
481 Filtrates were washed twice with ammonium acetate solutions with the same ionic
482 strength as each depth. The filters were placed on aluminum foil, dried at 60°C
483 overnight and subsequently weighed (Figure S3). A Spectral Evolution SR1900
484 spectrophotometer was used to measure the spectrum of the dried biomass on each
485 filter with a scanning range of 350-1900 nm. The light source was a Dyonics 60 W lamp.

486 After sterile filtration, the filtrate was used to measure anion, cation, and organic acid
487 concentrations using an ion chromatographer. The ion concentrations of samples were
488 measured by diluting filtrate 1:10 with Millipore water to a total volume of 2 ml. The
489 diluted samples were measured in triplicate using a ThermoFisher/Dionex ICS2100
490 equipped with an AS18 column using a 13 minute, 33 mM NaOH isocratic program to
491 measure anions and a CS12A column using a 13 minute, 25 mM methane sulfonic acid
492 isocratic program to measure cations. Samples for organic acid analysis were filtered
493 through 0.2 μm filters and 900 μL of filtrate was added to 100 uL of 5 M H_2SO4 to

494 precipitate any compounds that might do so on the column. The samples were
495 centrifuged and the upper portion was removed for HPLC analysis. Samples were
496 analyzed on a BioRad Aminex HPX-87H column in isocratic elution mode with 5 mM
497 sulfuric acid.

498 Iron concentration was quantified using the ferrozine assay (Stookey, 1970). 4.5 ml
499 filtrate were added on site to 0.5 ml of 1 M HCl to prevent oxidation of any available
500 Fe(III). For Fe(II), 50 µl filtrate was added to 50 µl of 1M HCl and 100 µl of ferrozine
501 (0.1% [wt/vol] in 50% ammonium acetate) was added. For total iron, 50 µl filtrate was
502 added to 50 µl of 10% hydroxylamine hydrochloride in 1M HCl to reduce Fe(III) to Fe(II).
503 Samples were added to 100 µl of ferrozine. All samples were incubated for 15 min and
504 a filtrates Absorbances were read in triplicate at 560 nm using a Promega plate reader.
505 Ferrous ammonium sulfate was used as standard.

506 Sulfide concentrations were quantified using the Cline assay (Cline, 1969). 1.5 ml filtrate
507 were added on site to 500 µl of zinc acetate solution (91 mM) to prevent oxidation of the
508 sulfide. Cline reagent (N, N-dimethyl-p-phenylenediamine sulfate, H_2SO_4,
509 $NH_4Fe(SO_4)_2 \cdot 12$ H2O) was added, the samples were incubated in the dark for 30
510 minutes and absorbance was read at 665 nm.

511 <u>DNA Extraction, Library Preparations, and Sequencing</u>

512 Within 2 – 6 hours of sample collection, 50 ml sample was filtered using an autoclaved
513 0.2 µm polycarbonate filter (GTTP Millipore) and stored at -20˚C. Each filter was cut
514 with a sterile blade and extracted with the MoBio PowerFecal kit. We followed the
515 protocol, but instead of bead beating, the samples were twice vortexed horizontally with
516 the beads (10 min and 20 min with a 10 min pause). DNA concentration and purity were
517 measured with Nanodrop and Promega Qubit fluorometer and Nanodrop, respectively.

518 We prepared 16S rRNA gene amplicon library using V4-V5 fusion primers as previously
519 described (Morrison et al., 2013). Briefly, the fusion primer contains TruSeq adapter
520 sequences, barcodes, and the forward or reverse 16S rRNA gene primers. The forward
521 and reverse 16S rRNA gene primers were 518F (CCAGCAGCYGCGGTAAN) and 926R
522 (CCGTCAATTCNTTTRAGT). The PCR conditions were as follows: initial denaturation

523 of 94˚C for 3 min, 30 cycles of denaturation at 94˚C for 30 s, annealing at 57˚C for 45 s,
524 extension at 72˚C for 1 min, and final extension at 72˚C for 2 min. The libraries were
525 cleaned using Agencourt Ampure XP beads, quantified using picogreen, pooled in
526 equimolar ratios, and cleaned again using Agencourt Ampure XP beads a second time.
527 The indexed libraries were then sequenced on the Illumina MiSeq PE250 platform.

528 The DNA from the depth of 25 cm from timepoint 7 from the three replicates, as well as
529 from a phototrophic enrichment were used to generate whole-genome shotgun
530 metagenomic library. The DNA was sheered using Covaris sonicator, size selected for
531 500-600bp using Pippin prep, and cleaned using Agencourt Ampure XP clean beads.
532 The cleaned DNA was analyzed using Bioanalyzer DNA1000 chip and amplified using
533 random hexamer primers with KAPA polymerase for 10-12 cycles. Amplified DNA was
534 cleaned using Agencourt Ampure XP clean beads and used to prepare metagenomic
535 library using Nugen Ovation ultralow DR multiplex kit with manufacture supplied
536 protocol. The libraries were then sequenced on Illumina MiSeq PE250 platform. All the
537 sequencing was performed at the Keck facility at the J. Bay Paul Center at the Marine
538 Biological Laboratory, Woods Hole, MA.

539 Amplicon Sequence Data Analyses

540 The amplicon data was demultiplexed in mothur v1.39.5 (Schloss et al., 2009), followed
541 by the trimming of 16S rRNA gene amplification primers using Cutadapt v1.16 (Martin,
542 2011) with default parameters. The primer-trimmed amplicon sequencing data was
543 quality checked using DADA2 v1.9.0 R Package (Callahan et al., 2016). In DADA2, the
544 reads were trimmed at the first instance of quality drop below 8, an expected error rate
545 of 2, followed by trimming to 220bp and 200bp for forward and reverse reads. Any reads
546 that matched PhiX or had an ambiguous base were removed. An error profile for the
547 forward and reverse reads was generated using learnErrors function and then used to
548 merge the forward and reverse reads using the mergePairs function. The merged reads
549 were used to generate the amplicon sequence variants using makeSequenceTable
550 function, which was then filtered for chimeras using removeBimeraDenovo function. The
551 amplicon sequence variants were assigned taxonomy in DADA2 using Silva reference
552 database v132 (Quast et al., 2013). Community analyses were performed using a

553 custom workflow based on R and the packages vegan, labdsv, tidyverse (stringr, dplyr,
554 ggplot2), UpSetR and custom scripts (Conway et al., 2017; Oksanen et al., 2012;
555 Roberts, 2012; Wickham, 2018, 2009; Wickham et al., 2018) for details see. Relative
556 abundance of bacterial ASV (amplicon sequence variants), Bray-Curtis dissimilarities,
557 Nonmetric Multidimensional Scaling as well as analyses determining Singletons and
558 percent shared ASVs are based on the unaltered Sample×ASV table as calculated by
559 DADA2. To compare the diversity between samples using the number of observed
560 species, Shannon index, Inverse Simpson diversity and Chao1 Richness (Hill et al.,
561 2003) the ASV abundance tables were rarefied to account for unequal sampling effort
562 using 31,682 randomly chosen sequences without replacement. For details refer to the
563 R workflow available at the public database PANGAEA
564 (https://issues.pangaea.de/browse/PDI-20394). Note: This link is inactive until the
565 submitted data are processed and public.

566 Metagenomic Sequence Data Analyses

567 Quality control of the raw reads was performed using Preprocessing and Information of
568 SEQuence data (PRINSEQ) to remove sequencing tags and sequences with mean
569 quality score lower than 25, duplicates and N's (Schmieder and Edwards, 2011). All
570 runs combined provided a total of approximately 3.5 million 250 bp read pairs. All
571 forward and reverse reads were placed together in one file and cross co-assembled
572 using SPAdes using the --meta option (Bankevich et al., 2012). Binning was performed
573 using MetaBAT (Kang et al., 2015) and Anvi'o (v5.2) metagenomic workflow
574 (CONCOCT) (Eren et al., 2015). Completeness and contamination of bins was
575 assessed using CheckM (Parks et al., 2015). Assembled genomes that contained more
576 than 90% genome completeness, less than 5% contamination, and sequences mainly
577 from a single genus were further analyzed. This yielded two high quality bacterial
578 metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs): Bin 6 and Bin 10. Taxonomic composition
579 for each bin was predicted using FOCUS (Silva et al., 2014). Phylogenetic analysis
580 including the identification of their closest phylogenetic neighbors was investigated
581 using PATRIC Comprehensive Genome Analysis (Wattam et al., 2017).
582 CRISPRCasFinder (Couvin et al., 2018) and CRISPRone (Zhang and Ye, 2017) were

583 used to identify CRISPR repeat and spacer sequences. The quality checked reads from
584 each sample were mapped to the MAGs, Bin 6 and Bin 10 using bowtie2 (Langmead
585 and Salzberg, 2012). The mapped reads were then analyzed using iRep (Brown et al.,
586 2016) to estimate replication events in Bin 6 and Bin 10. Unassembled sequences were
587 processed on the MG-RAST platform version 4.0.3. Percent abundance of viral
588 sequences was calculated from the RefSeq database using an e-value cutoff of 1e-5, a
589 minimum identity cutoff of 60%, and an alignment length minimum cutoff of 15 (Meyer et
590 al., 2008). For details refer to the metagenome analyses workflow publicly accessible at
591 HackMD (https://hackmd.io/tGZyCM9sSNmuorpHenQVNA).

592 Availability of data and material

593 The genomic datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available on
594 MG-RAST (Project Name: Trunk River, ID: 4837589.3 (sample SK), 4837590.3 (sample
595 7K3), 4837591.3 (sample 7E3), 4837592.3 (sample 7A3)) and metagenome-assembled
596 genomes workflow are available on HackMD
597 (https://hackmd.io/tGZyCM9sSNmuorpHenQVNA). The raw 16S rRNA amplicon data,
598 the shotgun metagenomic data, the 16S rRNA gene clonal sequences, and the
599 metagenome assembled genomes presented in this work are publicly archived in NCBI
600 under Bioproject PRJNA530984 (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/bioproject/530984). The
601 contextual datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are publicly
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608

609 Competing interests

610 The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

611 Authors' contributions

612 SB helped design the study, collected samples, prepared and analyzed sequencing
613 data, wrote manuscript

614 ESC helped design the study, collected samples, prepared and analyzed
615 physicochemical data, wrote manuscript

616 SHK helped design the study and enrichment cultures, analyzed physicochemical data
617 and pigment spectra, wrote manuscript

618 SPC analyzed metagenomic data, wrote manuscript

619 SK obtained enrichment culture, wrote manuscript

620 SD helped design the study, wrote manuscript

621 KH collected samples, prepared and analyzed physicochemical data and pigment
622 spectra, wrote manuscript

623 SER designed the study, analyzed and visualized sequencing and physicochemical
624 data, wrote manuscript with input from all co-authors

625 All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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