


Chair of Global Change Ecology

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I study the interaction of terrestrial ecosystems with the climate system, disturbance and management. My goal is to understand the dynamics of the carbon cycle, plant growth, and to support sustainable management of the global landscape.



My Research

My research is on understanding the terrestrial carbon cycle and its links to global change. The carbon cycle links the biological processes of living things to the physical environment and climate. Carbon, through its links to natural resources such as food and wood, is fundamental to our society and its sustainability. I study carbon cycling of plants and soils, and their interactions, across environmental and biodiversity gradients from the tropics to the arctic, to understand carbon sinks and sources across the globe. I explore feedback processes between soil, vegetation and the atmosphere, over timescales from days to years, to improve modelling of climate change. I use process based modelling and data assimilation methods to extract information from detailed ecosystem measurements. Linking to earth observations, I use models to upscale field measurements and ecological experiments, to investigate landscape processes and predict

their sensitivity to disturbance and climate. I focus particularly on issues relating to the drought sensitivity of forests, the role of disturbance (fire or anthropogenic) on forest biomass, the sensitivity of Arctic ecosystems to warming, and the yield of crops. Understanding and simulating the non-steady state behaviour of ecosystems is a current focal interest.

My Impact

I am seconded into the Scottish Government as their Chief Scientific Advisor for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. My role is to provide advice to ministers, to ensure relevant science is used appropriately in government, and to oversee government research funding in relevant areas. I took on this role to allow science to help shape critical policy areas relating to net zero, biodiversity, climate adaptation and land use. My role spans 5 years from Jan 2022 – Dec 2026.

I provide advice to the European Space Agency on their Biomass mission to measure forests from space.

I chair the International Science Advisory Board for the Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry.

I led an impact case study for the Research Excellence Framework 2021 on Fusing satellite observations with models to guide and influence tropical forest management and policy

Learn more

You can watch my inaugural lecture, April 2012, entitled “Seeing the forest for the trees, a journey from Plant to Planet” [here](#).

You can listen to a podcast by myself and Shaun Quegan, from NERC’s Planet Earth, entitled “Space Mission to measure biomass” [here](#).

You can view my publications [here](#).

You can view my funding sources and project [here](#).

You can learn about the Scottish Observatory for Atmospheric Research [here](#)

Latest blog: February 2019

[Understanding the Amazon rainforest through a UK-Brazil science partnership](#)