

Publication

African fire histories and fire ecologies

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Author(s) Courtney-Mustaphi, Colin; Colombaroli, Daniele; Vannière, Boris; Adolf, Carole; Bremond, Laurent; Aleman, Julie; The Global Paleofire Working Group,

Author(s) at UniBasel [Courtney-Mustaphi, Colin](#) ;

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Patterns of fire are changing across African savannahs, rainforests, fynbos, woodlands, and Afroalpine and montane forests, with direct environmental and socio-ecological consequences. Fire variability has implications for biodiversity (Beale et al. 2018), vegetation patterns, grazing quality, carbon emissions, protected area management, and landscape heterogeneity. Fire is a crucial component of savannah functioning and structure and is essential for maintaining its biodiversity. Long-term records are key to understanding drivers of fire variability and contextualize recent and ongoing land-use changes that altered fire responses to climate and vegetation changes (e.g. Ekblom and Gillson 2010, Colombaroli et al. 2014). As indigenous forest loss continues and modification through selective harvesting and land-use encroachment accelerate forest changes, the importance of historical disturbance regimes is increasingly relevant for assessing past ranges of variability and to define management targets that support more resilient socioecological systems (Whitlock et al. 2018). But how can the research community engage and integrate with land-management practitioners and policy developers? And how can we promote knowledge transfer and collaborative capacity between the international community and the next generation of African scientists?

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