Quantifying rapid spatial and temporal variations of CO$_2$ fluxes from small, lowland freshwater ponds

Peter J. Gilbert · David A. Cooke · Michael Deary · Scott Taylor · Michael J. Jeffries

Received: 22 December 2015 / Revised: 31 May 2016 / Accepted: 1 June 2016
© The Author(s) 2016. This article is published with open access at Springerlink.com

Abstract Small ponds comprise a substantial portion of the total area of the Earth’s inland waters. They can be powerful carbon sinks or sources, potentially significant processors of organic carbon. Our understanding of their role is constrained by the absence of information regarding their CO$_2$ fluxes ($F_{CO_2}$) and how these change with wet or dry phases and across distinct pond plant communities. We monitored the $F_{CO_2}$ from 26 neighbouring small ponds over a 2-week drying period in late summer in 2014. The mean $F_{CO_2}$ on day 1 ($-641 \pm 1490$ mg m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$) represented a net intake across the site. As ponds dried they switched to becoming CO$_2$ sources resulting in a net site emission of CO$_2$ by day 12 ($3792 \pm 2755$ mg m$^{-2}$ day$^{-1}$) although flux rates did not vary systematically between plant communities. Significant variability in the $F_{CO_2}$ was observed amongst adjacent ponds on individual sampling days, resulting in marked spatial heterogeneity in CO$_2$ processing. This large degree of temporal and spatial heterogeneity across short time periods and small distances highlights the variability in the $F_{CO_2}$ from temporary systems, making it hard to generalize their role in carbon cycle models.

Keywords Carbon flux · Temporary pond · Small wetland

Introduction

In recent years, the role that small ponds play in global geochemical processes has received increasing interest (Cole et al., 2007; Battin et al., 2009; Downing, 2010). Estimations of their cumulative global coverage have suggested that they are comparable in area to the Earth’s largest lakes (Downing et al., 2006), although more recent estimates have been more conservative (Seekell & Pace, 2011; Verpoorter et al., 2014). Equally these systems support disproportionately intense processes for their size, when compared to larger water bodies (Torgersen & Branco, 2008; Downing, 2010; Catalán et al., 2014). This makes them ideal cyclers of atmospheric carbon (here after $C$), accounting for a substantial portion of the missing $C$ budget from which small ponds and wetlands are frequently omitted.

The absence of small ponds from $C$ budgets is in part due to a lack of robust data quantifying their rates and processes. Biogeochemical processing in ponds remained relatively understudied until the late twentieth century as limnological research focused on
larger lakes and river systems, where it was assumed that the dominant inland aquatic processing of C occurred (Downing, 2010). However, just as ponds were once overlooked as wildlife habitats but are now known to be disproportionately rich in species and rarities compared to streams, rivers and lakes (Williams et al., 2004; Davies et al., 2008), their potential significance for ecosystem services, such as C sequestration, is being increasingly recognized (Cole et al., 2007; Tranvik et al., 2009; Downing, 2010; Cereghino et al., 2014; Gilbert et al., 2014). The number of studies on C cycling within ponds is rapidly increasing (Downing, 2010; Boix et al., 2012; Ewald et al., 2012). Within this overall biome of ponds, temporary systems are receiving increasing interest (Torgersen & Branco, 2008; Fromin et al., 2010; Catalán et al., 2014; von Schiller et al., 2014).

Temporary ponds are known by a range of diverse regional names or technical definitions: e.g. seasonal, ephemeral, playa or vernal (Keeley & Zedler, 1998). Recognized as ecologically valuable they support a specialist flora and fauna, which adds a significant contribution to biodiversity on the landscape scale, that is able to withstand drought through resistant propagules or by rapid re-colonization (Collinson et al., 1995; Jeffries, 1998, 2010). They are internationally important terrestrial habitats, ubiquitous in all climatic zones across the globe including extreme desert and polar environments, including thaw ponds in Arctic Tundra (Gallagher & Huisssten, 2011), temporal pools in Mediterranean and desert biomes (Catalán et al., 2014), constructed rice paddies in equatorial tropics (Jonai & Takeuchi, 2014), to melt pools in Antarctica (Allende & Mataloni, 2013). They are also typical of temperate biomes such as south American grasslands (e.g. mallines, Kutschker et al., 2014), prairie potholes and woodland vernal ponds in North America (Batzer et al., 2005; Gala & Melesse, 2012), across the riverine plains of Europe (e.g. tributaries of the Danube in Hungary; Boven et al., 2008), through into the Asian steppes (Moizley, 1937; an unusual example of a rare early appreciation of their value). Temporary habitats can also be historically long-lived features in the landscape, for example the pingo ponds of East England (Foster, 1993; Williams et al., 2001), so that their geochemical impact will also play out over many years. However, their presence is frequently overlooked both in natural landscapes such as grassland or temperate forest, and in intensively modified landscapes such as arable or grazing agriculture (Williams et al., 2001).

The key feature that unifies such systems is that they exhibit seasonal changes in their hydrological regimes resulting in periodic dry phases, exposure of the base substrate and often desiccation of sediment layers. Typically in temperate climates, including the ponds in this study, recharge is rainfall dependent, and as such this change in hydro-period is dependent on the balance between evaporation rates and net rainfall over short periods. In the UK unreliable summer rainfall (Fowler & Kilsby, 2002) often results in several drying and rewetting cycles over short periods of time, with rainfall variations from year to year further complicating the quantification and modelling of their ecosystem processes. This problem is compounded by the likely increase in climate variability caused by climate change. A particular uncertainty arises from new extremes of rainfall or temperature, which will subject ponds and their wildlife, to novel stresses which may alter existing rates of geochemical processing and species’ distributions (Jeffries, 2010; Jones, 2013).

Whilst C burial rates in ponds are amongst the highest of all ecosystems (Downing, 2010), ironically it is the low water volume of temporary ponds that renders them vulnerable to drying and sediment desiccation during periods of low rainfall, greatly impacting sediment C stability. Sediment conditions quickly change from anoxic to oxic, permitting aerobic microbial activity in the surface substrate, resulting in higher mineralization rates of organic matter and subsequent CO2 efflux (Fromin et al., 2010). Furthermore, in exposed sediments, CO2 release is no longer hindered by the water column, through which CO2 will usually diffuse before release to the atmosphere at the surface boundary layer (Catalán et al., 2014). Assessing CO2 effluxes of temporary ponds in response to rapid changes in seasonal drying cycles is crucial to quantifying their role in the global C cycle.

In this study we begin to address this by monitoring the temporal and spatial heterogeneity of CO2 fluxes amongst 26 small experimental ponds in Northeast England in response to desiccation during a summer dry period. The study was intentionally designed to capture changes over relatively fine-grained spatial and temporal scales; ponds just metres apart, and over a period of days within a two-week summer drying phase.
Site description

This study took place on a set of 26 experimental ponds. Constructed in 1994, all ponds are the same age, approximately the same size (1 m² × 30 cm deep) and set out in an array across an area of approximately 30 × 30 m. Their close proximity renders them exposed to the same regional environmental conditions; they are as close to replicate ponds as is possible under natural conditions. The ponds’ 20 years history of hydrological and ecological monitoring provided data on potentially important drivers of variation in gas exchange, e.g. wet and dry phases or vegetation (Bouchard et al., 2007; Fromin et al, 2010; Turetsky et al., 2014; Catalán et al., 2014; Mo et al., 2015. For detailed site description see Jeffries, 2008, 2010). The region in which they are located forms part of the Northumberland Northeast coastal plain in northeast England, a lowland landscape dominated by intensive arable and livestock agriculture. The climate is relatively cool but also dry due to the rain shadow from hills to the west (Lunn, 2004). Despite the relatively low rainfall the area is rich in ponds, especially shallow, temporary habitats associated with sand dunes or land subsidence over old coal mines (Jeffries, 2012).

The ponds are situated within a meadow field (55°19′04.1″N 1°33′22.1″W), owned by Northumberland Wildlife Trust, at the northern end of Druridge Bay, Northumberland, UK. Originally an opencast coal mine which was restored when mining ceased around 50 years ago, the site is now topped with a rough clay lining and approximately 50 cm topsoil. The clay lining is impermeable and, as such, the ponds are dependent on precipitation, subsequent surface run-off and horizontal throughflow in the topsoil layer for recharge. A slight gradient across the site runs northeast to southwest causing subtle hydrological variations amongst the ponds. The southwest portion of the site is typically marshier and dominated by spike rush, Eleocharis palustris (L.) Roem. & Schult., with ponds here being the first to fill during rainfall events, yet also the first to dry during rainfall absence. Contrastingly, the northeast portion of the site is less marshy, dominated by grasses such as marsh foxtail, Alopecurus geniculatus L., and glaucous sedge, Carex glauca Schreb., yet the ponds hold water for longer. Despite their close proximity and superficial similarity, the ponds have developed a diverse set of plant and animal communities and their hydrological patterns are typical of the ponds and wetlands through the region (Jeffries, 2008, 2010).

Methods

Site description

To quantify CO₂ flux rates and how these change (a) on a fine-grained spatial and temporal scale between adjacent ponds over a few days and (b) in response to drying out of ponds, flux rates of CO₂ (F CO₂) were monitored for all 26 ponds over a 2-week period from 24th August to 4th September 2014, monitoring on days 1, 4, 9 and 12.

Fluxes of CO₂ were measured using a floating chamber method. Our chamber consisted of an upturned 7252 cm³ container (length = 37 cm; width = 24.5 cm; height = 8 cm) with attached floatation device around the base of the chamber which assured that the volume of the chamber was above the water’s surface. The chamber was placed gently on the surface of the water in each pond to avoid disturbance and the inflow and outflow tubes which connected the chamber to the flux metre tethered the chamber in position. The small area of the ponds combined with water levels considerably below the top of the ponds’ edges created a sheltered environment. Headspace volume did not change because of varying water level or being lifted by vegetation. For systems that had dried out the chamber was placed directly on vegetation within the centre of the pond and sealed by placing plastic sheeting around the base of the chamber to assure minimal interaction with the atmosphere. It should be noted that the chamber was transparent and allowed for photosynthesis, and as such, fluxes represent the respiration rate of the system as a whole.

Inflow and outflow tubes connected the chamber to an in situ FT-IR (Fourier Transform-Infra Red) analyser pumping at a rate of 2 l per min to allow continual circulation from and back to the chamber. Gas concentrations within the chamber were recorded repeatedly at 20 s intervals over a 5 min period, which was found to be the optimum time to achieve a reliable r² (>0.8) yet not too long so that pressure changes would affect flux rates. In between each flux measurement, the chamber was flushed until readings returned to atmospheric concentrations. Note that the volume of the air space within the FT-IR analyser and
tubing was also accounted for in calculations of headspace volume and changes in CO₂ concentrations. Every 6th pond was measured in triplicate to assess the precision of the analysis. Monitoring of flux rates for all ponds took approximately 6 h, from 10 am to 4 pm, with each pond sampled in the same order and at roughly the same time on each of the survey days to focus on how the fluxes changed from individual ponds across the sample period. Whilst fluxes from systems are known to vary throughout the day it is this central period at which flux rates are most stable (Chanda et al., 2013).

Flux rates were calculated from the linear regression of the change in concentration over the 5 min period, aiming for \( r^2 = 0.8 \), and all flux rates were corrected for temperature and atmospheric pressure. Negative values reported herein represent an intake of CO₂ from the atmosphere by the system whilst positive values represent an emission. It should be noted that in several instances changes in concentration within the chamber were lower than the accuracy of the FT-IR analyser (1 ppm), resulting in a poor \( r^2 \) (<0.8). However, in this situation values reported are negligible in comparison to high flux rates from active ponds. When referring to the averages across all ponds the term ecosystem flux rate \((E-F CO₂)\) is used to refer to the ponds as a collective.

Hydrological classification

The hydrological condition of each pond was characterized by personal observation during each site visit, grouping each pond into one of three categories:

1. Aquatic Phase—Ponds contained standing water that covered the base, though with occasional emergent vegetation.
2. Transitional Phase—Ponds contained no standing water with base layer exposed. However, the sediment and vegetative layer were still saturated and moist to touch.
3. Dry Phase—Ponds contained no standing water with sediment and vegetation now dry to touch.

Vegetation classification

Macrophyte vegetation of each pond was surveyed during spring/summer 2014 using a 1 m² quadrat grid with cross wires every 10 cm. The plant species under each intersection of the cross wires was recorded, to give a % cover for each species (for details on plant survey methods see Jeffries, 2008). TWINSPAN analysis was used to classify the ponds by the plant data, resulting in 4 distinct plant communities. TWINSPAN was run on CAP 3.1.

Data analysis

To assess the changes in CO₂ flux rates over the sampling period a mixed model Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed. Flux rates from the four sampling days were considered as within-subject variables, factoring in each pond as the subjects of the repeated measurements across the four sampling days. The four types of ponds differing in vegetation classification as defined by the TWINSPAN analysis were used as between-subject factors, to assess any variations in flux rates between broad vegetation types. All statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

Results

Flux rates of CO₂ amongst ponds varied markedly over the four sampling days (Fig. 1), with mean (± standard deviation, SD) \( E-F CO₂ \) switching from a net intake on Day 1 of \(-641 ± 1490\) mg m\(^{-2}\) day\(^{-1}\), to a net emission of \(190 ± 1286\) mg m\(^{-2}\) day\(^{-1}\) by Day 4, \(1354 ± 1805\) mg m\(^{-2}\) day\(^{-1}\) by Day 9, and \(3792 ± 2755\) mg m\(^{-2}\) day\(^{-1}\) by Day 12. The precision of triplicate measurements were mostly <20% relative standard deviation (RSD) with the exception of three triplicate sets (35, 38 and 49% RSD) suggesting occasional quick variations in flux rates.

Mean daily flux rates between the four sampling days varied significantly \( (F = 41.94, \text{ df } 3, 69, P = <0.00) \). NB all tests included interactions terms and ponds as random subjects which reduces the error dfs slightly whilst we only report the results for the main factors) with flux rates being statistically different between days 1–9 \( (P = <0.00) \) and 1–12 \( (P = <0.00) \), days 4–9 \( (P = 0.04) \) and 4–12 \( (P < 0.00) \), and days 9–12 \( (P < 0.00) \). Only flux rates on days 1 and 4 were not significantly different \( (P > 0.05) \).

Note that in the Repeated Measures ANOVA used to compare mean daily flux rates over the sampling
period, Mauchly’s test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2 = 12.85$, df 5, $P = 0.05$), i.e. there was a degree of non-independence of data from individual ponds. Therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Huynh–Feldt estimates of sphericity. This is not merely a necessary statistical adjustment but also reveals an important outcome, indicating a significant degree of variability within the data associated with the individual pond being monitored.

There were no major weather variations over the sampling period, with wind speed and atmospheric temperature remaining relatively constant (Fig. 2). The only notable aspect of the weather over the period was the absence of precipitation. The total rainfall in the 3 weeks preceding sampling was 39.37 mm with the last substantial rainfall (6.10 mm) being 11 days prior to sampling on Day 1. With <5 mm rainfall during the middle of the sampling period the ponds quickly dried up, with the softer vegetation in many of the ponds wilting by the end of the sampling period.

Figures 3 and 4 show the $F_{\text{CO}_2}$ on the four sampling days for each of the ponds characterized by their hydrology at the time of sampling. Flux rates were markedly higher in ponds that were dry, and as ponds dried out over the survey period, their flux rates shifted from intake to emission. Not only did the fluxes shift from an intake to emission but the flux also continued to increase with increasing absence of rainfall.

Subtle variations in the hydrology of the site have led to marked differences in the vegetation between the ponds. Figure 5 shows the location of each pond grouped by the four divisions of the TWINSPLAN analysis and their mean daily $E$–$F$ CO$_2$ is shown in Fig. 6. Thirty-six species of macrophytes were recorded. Differences between the four groups are subtle with many species found in most ponds, in particular amphibious grasses e.g. Agrostis stolonifera L., the rush Juncus articulatus L. and the moss Leptodictyum riparium (Hedw.) Warnst. Differences between groups resulted from the dominance of particular species. Group 1 was dominated by Glyceria fluitans (L.) R. Br. and Carex otrubae Podp. and Group 2 characterized by dense Eleocharis palustris (L.) Roem. & Schult. Group 3 was a slightly wetter set of pools with E. palustris and the filamentous algae Spirogyra sp., whilst Group 4 lacked the E. palustris. No significant differences were found between the $F_{\text{CO}_2}$ for the four groups characterized by their plant community communities ($F = 2.24$, df 3, 66, $P = 0.05$). However, the overall design is very unbalanced with the majority of ponds in just one plant community group which may explain the lack of differences between the four communities.
Discussion

The objective of this study was to quantify the changes in the \( F_{CO_2} \) for small temporary ponds: the data provide evidence of very fine-grained spatial and temporal heterogeneity of \( CO_2 \) fluxes from these habitats.

Temporal heterogeneity

The \( E-F \) \( CO_2 \) for all the ponds during the survey period indicates that these small ponds act as a net source of \( CO_2 \) to the atmosphere during prolonged absence of rainfall during summer months. This behaviour has been frequently reported for similar temporary aquatic systems during drying periods i.e. ponds, river courses, wetland and tidal regions (Fromin et al., 2010; von Schiller et al., 2014; Catalán et al., 2014).

However, daily means varied significantly. Whilst the cluster of ponds acted as a net sink on Day 1, this had shifted to a net source of \( CO_2 \) only 3 days later, and reached a 9-fold increase in \( CO_2 \) efflux within 2 weeks. Consequently \( CO_2 \) at the beginning and
end of the sampling period were comparable to both the lower and upper end of effluxes previously reported for freshwater ecosystems, respectively (Raymond et al., 2013).

Similarly, during the drying phase of a temporary pond in southeastern France, Fromin et al. (2010) observed a peak in $F \text{CO}_2$ at the beginning of the drying processes with substrate-induced respiration from microbial activity peaking after 3 weeks. Beyond 3 weeks the $F \text{CO}_2$ emissions continued to decrease throughout the drought period. Whilst it is likely that $F \text{CO}_2$ beyond our survey period may decrease when all ponds enter a stable drought phase, our study highlights the severity of $F \text{CO}_2$ emissions during the initial drying phase. For temperate ponds...
that undergo several wetting and drying cycles during summer months this poses complications for management practices intended to enhance C capture and storage.

Another factor which might have exacerbated CO₂ emissions between Day 4 and Days 9 and 12 was the slight precipitation on Days 6 and 8. Whilst only small and not enough to fully rehydrate the ponds, rewetting of sediments or soils after dry periods is known to increase C lability and microbial activity resulting in rapid release of CO₂ (Fromin et al., 2010; von Schiller et al., 2014). Equally the resulting water stress on the macrophytes is likely to have reduced photosynthetic activity limiting the intake of atmospheric CO₂, which would counter balance the release of CO₂ during hydrated periods. This may be one factor contributing to the continued increase in CO₂ flux rates over the sampling period as the swards of grasses and moss overlying the bottom of the ponds continued to dry out during the switch from transitional phase to dry phase. Interestingly, the thick vegetation held in moisture, slowing the processes of sediment desiccation compared to ponds with a looser vegetation profile. Whilst no statistical relationship was found between vegetation type and CO₂ flux rates over this two-week study, during periods when rehydration occurs before complete desiccation, these mats might act as a ‘buffer’ preventing complete sediment desiccation and extensive CO₂ release. The sediments underneath the vegetation were conspicuously darker, damper and apparently anoxic compared to the few ponds lacking extensive vegetation cover.

The organic C content of sediments from other ponds in the area is high compared to adjacent non-wetland habitat indicating a net accumulation of C within temporal aquatic systems (Gilbert et al., 2014). Yet the data presented here highlight the interaction of C fluxes with the atmosphere. Taken together, the sediment storage and flux rates suggest that these ecosystems have the potential to be highly active sequesters of atmospheric C when hydrated during summer months as illustrated by the net intake of CO₂ on Day 1. However, this high degree of temporal variability in the F CO₂ over such a short period of time poses serious complications for extrapolations of measurements to seasonal averages from singular measurements alone and highlights the need for more comprehensive surveys when trying to extrapolate results.

Spatial heterogeneity

Whilst the temporal variability of the F CO₂ over several days poses complications for the infrequent measurement of temporal systems, the variability in F CO₂ amongst superficially similar ponds on the same day is equally variable (Figs. 2, 3). Flux rates amongst all ponds resulted in % RSDs of 232, 1320, 144 and 81 on Days 1, 4, 6 and 9, respectively, indicating high variability in the F CO₂ amongst individual ponds. This was supported by the outcome of the repeated measure ANOVA too, showing that the individual ponds behaved differently, and it matters which pond was being measured. On Day 1 there was a rough divide across the middle of the site between those ponds emitting and those taking in CO₂ (Fig. 3), which typically marks the marsh line as described in “Site description” section. However as the survey period progressed and more ponds began to enter the transitional or dry phase of their hydrological cycle, fluxes of CO₂ amongst ponds became more uniform.

No statistical variation was found in flux rates between vegetation types as characterized by the TWINSPAN analysis indicating that hydrology rather than vegetation is the dominant driver in CO₂ release. However several limitations exist. Firstly this study only represents a 2-week snap shot of the flux rates from these ponds in their life cycle. Vegetation communities in temporary systems change regularly depending on annual climate variations (Jeffries, 2008) and as such plant species that have greater impact on F CO₂ may have been missed in this study. Equally it may be that the previous macrophyte communities, which now form the sediment layer result in differences in the lability of organic matter, and subsequently may be more important than the growth of current plant communities.

This large degree of spatial variability poses complications for accurately quantifying the F CO₂ on a landscape scale if too few ponds or an unrepresentative group is chosen. The use of eddy covariance for monitoring terrestrial net ecosystem exchange over comparably large areas (100 m²) provides a useful comparison to the flux from individual ponds (Abnizova et al., 2012) or for monitoring F CO₂ from ponds with a larger surface area (Fromin et al., 2010). However the use of eddy covariance on a landscape scale can easily overlook the influence of individual ponds, especially during wet and dry cycles. More
effort is needed to underpin the constraints of hydrology on the frequency of drying and rewetting cycles and their impact on $F\text{CO}_2$ amongst ponds across the landscape if accurate regional extrapolations of these small systems are to be acquired.

These results also suggest important practical outcomes, notably the potential of small ponds as CO$_2$ sinks, if the frequency of inundation periods is managed. Ponds and small wetlands are relatively easy to create and constructed wetlands have been widely used for the containment and treatment of a diversity of contaminated effluent (Vymazal, 2014). Typical uses include amelioration of acid mine water discharge (e.g. Shoeran & Sheoran, 2006), excess agricultural nutrients (Fink & Mitsch, 2004), road run-off (Gill et al., 2014) and nutrient-enriched river water (Tang et al., 2013). Small ponds are natural features of intensively used lowland landscapes throughout the world and can bring additional benefits to wildlife, although some studies of constructed wetlands built for controlling contamination show that the optimum designs for effluent reduction may be less suitable for maximizing benefits to wildlife (Hansson et al., 2005) or that the contamination is associated with degraded biodiversity compared to pristine wetlands (Batty et al., 2005). The potential of ponds as C sinks is clear, especially in the longer term when sequestration of CO$_2$ outweighs methane emissions (Mitsch et al., 2013). Creating ponds as part of our attempts to mitigate against C emissions looks to be both a practical and beneficial strategy. However, the few studies of C fluxes from exiting constructed wetlands, constructed for other purposes, shows they can also be net sources (e.g. Liikanen et al., 2006) and that the plants present can be important drivers of CO$_2$ emissions but precise outcomes can vary with plant species, e.g. Ström et al. (2005). More encouragingly Teiter & Mander (2005) explored using the example of domestic water treatment wetlands and estimated their C emissions would not be significant globally; a key management outcome from our study is the need to get the design of wetlands right to maximize their effectiveness in the face of natural climate variations and the threat of greater climate variation.

Without complete annual and diurnal flux measurements and C burial rates it would be inappropriate to extrapolate this study to state whether small ponds act as a net sources or net sinks to the atmosphere. Nonetheless, their flux rates are comparable with those of ecosystems with some of the highest rates of CO$_2$ sequestration/emissions on the planet highlighting the possibility that small seasonal aquatic systems are important cyclers of atmospheric C.

This study set out to monitor spatial and temporal changes to CO$_2$ flux rates in small, temporary ponds in a typical lowland European landscape during a summer drying phase. The results show striking temporal change in $E-F\text{CO}_2$ linked to hydrological changes, with ponds at the start of the 2-week study period being net CO$_2$ sinks, and as the site dried out the ponds increasingly became net sources of CO$_2$ to the atmosphere. A 9-fold difference in flux rates from the beginning to end of the study period resulted in $F\text{CO}_2$ comparable to both the lower and upper flux rates reported for aquatic ecosystems (Raymond et al., 2013). There was a broad spatial gradient in the behaviour of ponds across the site as the site dried out. In addition, the repeated measures analysis of the gas fluxes suggested that the behaviour of individual ponds varied but that the precise plant communities did not affect the CO$_2$ flux. Small ponds and wetlands like those in this study are found throughout the Earth’s terrestrial biomes, from tropics to polar regions. Our results show that small-scale spatial and temporal changes can result in large variations in wetland CO$_2$ fluxes to the atmosphere suggesting that these ubiquitous habitats may be an important but overlooked component of global C dynamics.

Acknowledgments We are grateful to the Northumberland Wildlife Trust for permission to work on the Hauxley site and to the organizers of Wetlands 2014 in Huseca and SEFS 2015 Geneva for allowing the opportunity to present the results of this study.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

References

Abnizova, A., J. Siemens, M. Langer & J. Boike, 2012. Small ponds with major impact: the relevance of ponds and lakes in permafrost landscapes to carbon dioxide emissions.
Global Biogeochemical Cycles 26: 2.

Allende, L. & G. Mataloni, 2013. Short term analysis of the phytoplankton structure and dynamics in two ponds with distinct trophic states from Cierva Point (maritime Antarctica). Polar Biology 36: 629–644.

Battin, T. J., S. Luysaert, L. A. Kaplan, A. K. Aufdenkampe, A. Richter & L. J. Tranvik, 2009. The boundless carbon cycle. Nature Geoscience 2: 598–600.

Batty, L. C., L. Aitkin & D. A. C. Manning, 2005. Assessment of the ecological potential of mine-water treatment wetlands using a baseline survey of macroinvertebrate communities. Environmental Pollution 13: 412–419.

Batzer, D. P., S. E. Dietz-Brantley, B. E. Taylor & S. E. DeBiase, 2005. Evaluating regional differences in macroinvertebrate communities from forested depressional wetlands across eastern and central North America. Journal of the North American Benthological Society 24: 403–414.

Boix, D., J. Biggs, R. Cérènghino, A. P. Hull, T. Kalettka & B. Oertli, 2012. Pond research and management in Europe: “small is beautiful”. Hydrobiologia 689: 1–9.

Bouchard, V., S. D. Frey, J. M. Gilbert & S. E. Reed, 2007. Effects of macrophyte functional group richness on emergent freshwater wetland functions. Ecology 88: 2903–2914.

Boven, L., R. Stoks, L. Forró & L. Brendonck, 2008. Seasonal dynamics in water quality and vegetation cover in temporary pools with variable hydroperiods in Kiskunság (Hungary). Wetlands 28: 401–410.

Catalán, N., D. von Schiller, R. Marcé, M. Koschorreck, L. Gomez-Gener & B. Obrador, 2014. Carbon dioxide efflux during the flooding phase of temporary ponds. Limnnetica 33: 349–360.

Cereghino, R., D. Boix, H.-M. Cauchie, K. Marten & B. Oertli, 2014. The ecological role of ponds in a changing world. Hydrobiologia 723: 1–6.

Chanda, A., A. Akhand, S. Manna, S. Dutta, I. Das, S. Hazra, K. H. Rao & V. K. Dadhwal, 2013. Measuring daytime CO₂ fluxes from the inter-tidal mangrove soils of Indian Sundarbans. Environmental Earth Sciences 72: 417–427.

Cole, J. J., Y. T. Prairie, N. F. Caraco, W. H. McDowell, L. J. Tranvik, R. G. Striegl, C. M. Duarte, P. Kortelainen, J. A. Downing, J. J. Middelburg & J. Melack, 2007. Plumbing the global carbon cycle: integrating inland waters into the terrestrial carbon budget. Ecosystems 10: 172–185.

Collinson, N. H., J. Biggs, A. Cortfield, M. J. Hodson, D. Walker, M. Whitfield & P. Williams, 1995. Temporary and permanent ponds: an assessment of the effects of drying out on the conservation value of aquatic macroinvertebrate communities. Biological Conservation 74: 125–133.

Davies, B., J. Biggs, P. Williams, M. Whitfield, P. Nicolet, D. Scar, S. Bray & S. Maund, 2008. Comparative biodiversity of aquatic habitats in the European agricultural landscape. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment 125: 1–8.

Downing, J. A., 2010. Emerging global role of small lakes and ponds: little things mean a lot. Limnetica 29: 9–24.

Downing, J. A., Y. T. Prairie, J. J. Cole, C. M. Duarte, L. J. Tranvik, R. G. Striegl, W. H. McDowell, P. Kortelainen, N. F. Caraco & J. M. Melack, 2006. The global abundance and size distribution of lakes, ponds, and impoundments. Limnology and Oceanography 51: 2388–2397.

Ewald, N., T. Kalettka & L. Brendonck, 2012. Eyes of the landscape – value, conservation and management of European ponds. Limnologica – Ecology and Management of Inland Waters 42: 251–253.

Fink, D. F. & W. J. Mitsch, 2004. Seasonal and storm event nutrient removal by a created wetland in an agricultural watershed. Ecological Engineering 23: 313–325.

Foster, G., 1993. Pingo fens, water beetles and site evaluation. Antenna 17: 184–195.

Fowler, H. J. & C. G. Kilsby, 2002. Precipitation and the North Atlantic Oscillation: a study of climatic variability in northern England. International Journal of Climatology 22: 843–866.

Fromin, G., N. Pinay, B. Montuelle, D. Landais, J. M. Ourcival, R. Joffre & R. Lensi, 2010. Impact of seasonal sediment desiccation and rewetting on microbial processes involved in greenhouse gas emissions. Ecohydrology 3: 339–348.

Gala, T. S. & A. M. Melesse, 2012. Monitoring prairie wet area with an integrated LANDSAT ETM+, RADARSAT-1 SAR and ancillary data from LIDAR. Catena 95: 12–23.

Gallagher, A. & K. Huisssted, 2011. Increased greenhouse gas emission from thaw ponds in Siberian arctic tundra on continuous permafrost. Geophysical Research Abstracts 13: EGU2011-3830.

Gilbert, P. J., S. E. Taylor, D. A. Cooke, M. Cooke & M. J. Jeffries, 2014. Variations in sediment organic carbon among different types of small natural ponds along Druridge Bay, Northumberland, UK. Inland Waters 4: 57–64.

Gill, L. W., P. Ring, N. M. P. Higgins & P. M. Johnston, 2014. Accumulation of heavy metals in a constructed wetland treating road runoff. Ecological Engineering 70: 133–139.

Hansson, L.-A., C. Brömmark, P. A. Nilsson & K. Åbjörnsson, 2005. Conflicting demands on wetland ecosystem service: nutrient retention, biodiversity or both? Freshwater Biology 50: 705–714.

Jeffries, M. J., 1998. Pond macrophyte assemblages, biodiversity and spatial distribution of ponds in the Northumberland coastal plain, UK. Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems 8: 657–667.

Jeffries, M. J., 2008. The spatial and temporal heterogeneity of macrophyte communities in thirty small, temporary ponds over a period of 10 years. Ecography 31: 765–775.

Jeffries, M. J., 2010. The temporal dynamics of temporary pond macroinvertebrate communities over a 10-year period. Hydrobiologia 661: 391–405.

Jeffries, M. J., 2012. Ponds and the importance of their history: an audit of pond numbers, turnover and the relationship between the origins of ponds and their contemporary plant communities in south-east Northumberland, UK. Hydrobiologia 689: 11–21.

Jonai, H. & W. Takeuchi, 2014. Comparison between global rice paddy field mapping and methane flux data from GOSAT. Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium (IGARSS) 2014: 2098–2101.

Jones, L., 2013. The Impact of Extreme Events on Freshwater Ecosystems. British Ecological Society, London.

Keeley J. & P. Zedler 1998. Characterization and global distribution of vernal pools. In: Belk, F. R. (ed) Ecological Conservation and Management of Vernal Pool...
Ecosystems. – Proceedings from a 1996 Conference. California Native Plant Society. Sacramento: 1–14.

Kutschker, A. M., L. B. Epele & M. L. Miserendino, 2014. Aquatic plant composition and environmental relationships in grazed Northwest Patagonian wetlands, Argentina. Ecological Engineering 64: 37–48.

Liikanen, A., J. T. Huttunen, S. M. Karjalainen, K. Heikkinen, T. S. Väisänen, H. Nykanen & P. J. Martikainen, 2006. Temporal and seasonal changes in greenhouse gas emissions from a constructed wetland purifying peat mining runoff water. Ecological Engineering 26: 241–251.

Lunn, A., 2004. Northumberland. Harper Collins, London.

Mitsch, W. J., N. Bernal, A. M. Nahlik, U. Mander, L. Zhang, C. J. Anderson, S. E. Jøgensen & H. Brix, 2013. Wetlands, carbon and climate change. Landscape Ecology 28: 583–597.

Mozley, A., 1937. The ponds, lakes and streams of the Kirghiz Steppe. The Scottish Geographical Magazine 53: 1–10.

Mo, Y., Z.-H. Deng, J.-Q. Gao, Y.-X. Gua & F.-H. Yu, 2015. Does richness of emergent plants affect CO2 and CH4 emissions in experimental wetlands? Freshwater Biology 60: 1537–1544.

Raymond, P. A., J. Hartmann, R. Lauerwald, S. Sobek, C. McDonald, M. Hoover, D. Butman, R. Strieg, E. Mayorga, C. Humborg, P. Kortelainen, H. Dürr, M. Meybeck, P. Ciais & P. Guth, 2013. Global carbon dioxide emissions from inland waters. Nature 503: 355–359.

Seekell, D. A. & M. L. Pace, 2011. Does the pareto distribution adequately describe the size-distribution of lake? Limnology and Oceanography 56: 350–356.

Shoeran, A. S. & V. Shoeran, 2006. Heavy metal removal mechanism of acid mine drainage in wetlands: a critical review. Minerals Engineering 19: 105–116.

Ström, L., M. Masteplanov & T. R. Christensen, 2005. Species-specific effects of vascular plants on carbon turnover and methane emissions from wetlands. Biogeochemistry 75: 65–82.

Tang, W., W. Zhang, Y. Zhao, Y. Wang & B. Shan, 2013. Nitrogen removal from polluted river water in a novel ditch-wetland-pond system. Ecological Engineering 60: 135–139.

Teiter, S. & U. Mander, 2005. Emission of N2O, N2, CH4 and CO2 from constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment and from riparian buffer zones. Ecological Engineering 25: 528–541.

Torgersen, T. & B. Branco, 2008. Carbon and oxygen fluxes from a small pond to the atmosphere: temporal variability and the CO2/O2 imbalance. Water Resource Research 44: WO2417. doi:10.1029/2006WR005634.

Tranvik, L., J. A. Downing & J. Cotner, 2009. Lakes and reservoirs as regulators of carbon cycling and climate. Limnology and Oceanography 54: 52–68.

Turetsky, M. R., A. Kotowska, J. Bubier, N. B. Dise, P. Crill, E. R. C. Hornbrook, K. Minkkinene, T. R. Moore, I. H. Myers-Smith, H. Nykänen, D. Olefeldt, J. Rinne, S. Saarnio, N. Shurpali, E.-S. Tuuttila, J. M. Waddington, J. R. White, K. P. Wickland & M. Wilmking, 2014. A synthesis of methane emissions from 71 northern, temperature and subtropical wetlands. Global Change Biology 20: 2183–2197.

Verpoorter, C., T. Kutser, D. A. Seekell & L. J. Tranvik, 2014. A global inventory of lakes based on high-resolution satellite imagery. Geophysical Research Letters 41: 6396–6402.

von Schiller, D., R. Marcé, B. Obrador, L. Gómez-Gener, J. Casas-Ruiz, V. Acuña & M. Koschorreck, 2014. Carbon dioxide emissions from dry watercourses. Inland Waters 4: 377–382.

Vymazal, J., 2014. Constructed wetlands for treatment of industrial wastewaters: a review. Ecological Engineering 73: 724–751.

Williams, P., J. Biggs, G. Fox, P. Nicolet & M. Whitfield, 2001. History origins and importance of temporary ponds. Freshwater Forum 17: 7–15.

Williams, P., M. Whitfield, J. Biggs, S. Bray, G. Fox, P. Nicolet & D. Sear, 2004. Comparative biodiversity of rivers, streams, ditches and ponds in an agricultural landscape in southern England. Biological Conservation 115: 329–341.