

Response of mountain vegetation to climate change

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Ongoing climate change gradually transforms mountain plant communities; the more cold-adapted species decline and the more warm-adapted species increase. These results indicate a progressive shrinking of the low-temperature, high-elevation habitats, including parts of the Alps and Mediterranean mountains.

For Europe, approximately 2,500 vascular plant species (or approximately 20% of the continent's native vascular flora) were estimated to be centred in the alpine zone from the tree line ecotone to the highest mountain summits. This zone comprises only 3% of the terrestrial area of Europe and, hence, limited space would be available for future alpine habitats in warmer climates.

Source: Gottfried et al., 2012. Nature Climate Change 2: 111-115.

Photo: Steve Cadman (www.flickr.com)