European beech reproduction is resilient to drought, including the 2003, 2018, and 2022 extremes

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Abstract

Climate change is intensifying drought stress in temperate forests, but its effects on tree reproduction, central to forest regeneration and migration capability, remain poorly understood. In mast-seeding species such as European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), reproduction is regulated by temperature cues rather than current-year resource availability, raising questions about drought sensitivity once reproduction is triggered. Here, we analyse 221 time series of beech seed production across Europe to test whether drought, after reproduction has been initiated, reduces seed output. We isolate drought exposure during pollination and seed maturation phases, including severe events in 2003, 2018, and 2022. Seed production was not impaired by summer drought, and dry spring conditions were associated with increased output, likely via enhanced pollen dispersal. Thus, once triggered, beech reproduction is not reduced by drought. Considered alongside prior evidence that drought suppresses growth and elevates mortality, these findings indicate that vital rates can respond in opposite directions to the same stressor—reproduction is buffered while growth and survival decline. Such contrasts may sustain short-term regeneration during heat–drought events yet shift demographic balance toward higher mortality and turnover as climatic extremes intensify.

Introduction

Global change is altering average climatic conditions and their variability, leading to more frequent and intense extremes such as heatwaves and severe droughts (IPCC, 2023). Observations across continents reveal consistent trends with increasing rates of forest disturbance, elevated tree mortality, and changing growth dynamics in adult trees and seedlings (Johnstone *et al.*, 2016; McDowell *et al.*, 2020; Hartmann *et al.*, 2022; Klesse *et al.*, 2024; Mantgem *et al.*, 2009). In Europe, recent summer droughts have reached intensities without precedent in the past two millennia (Buras *et al.*, 2020; Büntgen *et al.*, 2021), exerting mounting pressure on forest demography (Senf *et al.*, 2018; McDowell *et al.*, 2020). For instance, tree canopy mortality trends have accelerated in response to prolonged drying (Senf *et al.*, 2020). The 2018–2020 European drought sharply illustrates the magnitude of current climatic pressures: stem growth declined by approximately 40% in German forests (Thom *et al.*, 2023; Sachsenmaier *et al.*, 2024), and widespread dieback and mortality occurred among adult trees and saplings (Schuldt *et al.*, 2020; Beloiu *et al.*, 2022; Knutzen *et al.*, 2025). Yet while there are published data on the demographic consequences of drought through growth and mortality, much less is known about how drought influences reproduction, despite its key importance for long-term forest dynamics (Johnstone *et al.*, 2016; Seidl & Turner, 2022).

The resilience of forests to disturbance, including the potential reorganisation to non-forest, depends on the magnitude and consistency of tree reproduction and subsequent regeneration (Johnstone *et al.*, 2016; Brodribb *et al.*, 2020; Seidl & Turner, 2022; Davis *et al.*, 2023). In forests, tree reproduction is realised through seed production, a multi-stage process from floral initiation through pollination to seed maturation, which ultimately determines the potential for regeneration (Clark *et al.*, 2021; Hanbury-Brown *et al.*, 2022; Bogdziewicz *et al.*, 2025). Despite its central role, our understanding of how climate extremes, particularly drought, affect reproduction remains

fragmentary (McDowell *et al.*, 2020; Seidl & Turner, 2022). In contrast to mortality, where extensive evidence and mechanistic theory link drought to hydraulic failure, carbon starvation, and biotic attack (Hartmann & Trumbore, 2016; McDowell *et al.*, 2022; Netherer *et al.*, 2024; Leuschner, 2020), reports of reproductive responses are sparse (Dohrenbusch *et al.*, 2002; Pérez-Ramos *et al.*, 2010; Zamorano *et al.*, 2018; Wright *et al.*, 2021; Zhang & Brodribb, 2017). Currently, we lack not only a physiological framework for interpretation, but also the basic knowledge of whether drought effects on reproduction are typically positive, negative, or neutral. This uncertainty is consequential: the direction and magnitude of reproductive responses will determine the regeneration potential of forests under drought (Martínez-Vilalta & Lloret, 2016), the capability of trees to track moving climate envelopes (Svenning & Skov, 2007; Nathan *et al.*, 2011), and, through the costs of reproduction, changes in the mortality risk to adult trees (Lauder *et al.*, 2019).

Drought is expected to influence tree seed production through multiple pathways. Drought can directly constrain photosynthesis and water uptake (McDowell *et al.*, 2008; Sevanto *et al.*, 2014), reducing the resources available for reproductive investment. Such resource limitation has been linked to declines in seed production in Scots pine (Vilà-Cabrera *et al.*, 2014), and is well-documented in herbaceous systems (Sage *et al.*, 2024). However, the consequences for seed output depend not only on resource availability, but also on how trees allocate those resources under stress. Reproduction can be prioritised or deprioritised under drought, relative to growth and other functions, including defence (Hacket-Pain *et al.*, 2017; Lauder *et al.*, 2019; Gonzalez *et al.*, 2023). For example, Lauder *et al.* (2019) suggested that trees may respond to drought by either allocating resources toward survival-related functions such as growth and defence, or by maintaining investment in reproduction at the potential cost of reduced survival. In support of the latter, in *Pinus ponderosa*, *Picea abies*, and *Quercus ilex*, drought strengthens the trade-off between investment in reproduction and growth/defence (Bogdziewicz *et al.*, 2020a; Hesse *et al.*, 2021; Gonzalez *et al.*, 2023). Beyond resource effects, drought can directly disrupt reproductive processes, such as reducing pollen viability or fertilisation rates (Tushabe & Rosbakh, 2025). However, not all effects are negative: warm and dry spring conditions may improve pollen dispersal and enhance pollination efficiency (Fleurot *et al.*, 2024), potentially increasing seed set under some circumstances. To improve our understanding of potential drought effects on reproduction, long-term data covering multiple drought events, as well as extensive non-drought periods, are required.

Here, we analyse 221 time series (5362 population-level, annual observations) of European beech reproduction to test whether drought disrupts seed production in this widespread and socio-economically important species. Reproduction in beech varies strongly among years (masting), largely the result of temperature cues which regulate annual flowering effort (Vacchiano *et al.*, 2017; Journé *et al.*, 2024). Thus, we ask whether drought reduces seed output in years when trees are already committed to reproduce. By explicitly modeling the temperature cues that govern annual flowering effort, we separate cue-driven commitment from drought acting as a climatic veto during subsequent reproductive processes. We partitioned drought exposure into two phenological phases: flowering and pollination (April–May) and fruit maturation (June–September). We hypothesised that spring drought

could enhance seed production by promoting pollen dispersal under dry conditions in this wind-pollinated species (Schermer *et al.*, 2020; Fleurot *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, summer drought was expected to reduce seed production if trees allocate limited resources to competing sinks such as stem or root growth or storage under stress (Lauder *et al.*, 2019; Chuste *et al.*, 2020). Alternatively, reproductive output could be maintained despite summer drought if finalising seed maturation under stress is selectively advantageous (Wiley *et al.*, 2017). Two mechanisms could support such selective benefits. First, a form of reproductive persistence, akin to a "flight" strategy, where trees maintain reproduction at the expense of growth and survival-related functions (Lauder *et al.*, 2019). Second, reproduction may be favoured under stress as an adaptive response to environmental signals (Piovesan & Adams, 2005; Ascoli *et al.*, 2020): drought-induced canopy opening or increased fire likelihood may signal favourable conditions for seedling establishment (Ascoli *et al.*, 2013; Maringer *et al.*, 2020), thus favouring investment in current seed maturation. In addition to a gradient-based evaluation of seed production response to drought, we also test whether recent exceptional summer drought events in Europe (in 2003, 2018, and 2022) (Gharun *et al.*, 2024) were associated with declines in seed production, including in sites known to have been strongly impacted by these events.

Results

European beech reproduction proved resilient to seasonal drought during reproduction, with no evidence that spring or summer water deficits suppressed seed production (Fig. 1, Table 1). Once trees were committed to flowering, as indicated by strong responses to the flowering cue (ΔT, i.e., the difference between June-July temperatures one and two years before seedfall, see Methods) (Fig. 1), seed production increased under spring drought (Fig. 1). The effect of spring drought was stronger when the ΔT cue was weaker (Spring CWB and ΔT interaction, Table 1, Fig. 1). Seed production was insensitive to summer drought conditions irrespective of the ΔT cue (Fig. 1). The positive effect of ΔT on seed production was 27 times stronger than the effect of spring drought (climatic water balance, CWB) (ΔT: $\beta \pm$ SE = 4.00 ± 0.50; CWB spring, for average ΔT: -0.15 ± 0.02), underscoring that reproductive output in beech is primarily governed by sensitivity to its masting cue. Residual analyses showed no systematic patterns with summer drought intensity, indicating that no additional effects were overlooked at the extremes (Fig. 1f).

A complementary analysis of extreme drought years in 2003, 2018, and 2022 corroborated these findings (Fig. 2). These three droughts are the most severe European events of recent decades, and possibly of the last two millennia (Gharun *et al.*, 2024; Büntgen *et al.*, 2021; Buras *et al.*, 2018; Schuldt *et al.*, 2020). Across our network of sites, sites experiencing the most severe drought conditions in these years did not have lower than expected seed production, based on the ΔT weather cue. Indeed, in 2018 and 2022, seed production was lower than expected in the wettest sites, rather than the driest (negative residuals at wet sites, Fig. 2). In other words, sites that experienced the most severe conditions in these exceptional European summer droughts did not have lower-than-predicted seed

Table 1: Results of the Generalised Linear Mixed model testing for the effects of seasonal drought on European beech reproduction. Drought in spring had a positive effect, while drought in summer had no effect. The model included seed production (scaled between 0 and 1 at the site level) as a response, while masting cue (ΔT, i.e., the difference between summer temperatures two and one year before flowering), spring (April-May) and summer (June-September) climatic water balance (CWB, negative values indicate water deficit), and previous year seed production (seeds T-1), were fixed effects. The model included siteID as a random intercept and was fitted with a Tweedie error distribution and logit link function. Predictor variables were fitted as cubic splines to allow for non-linear relationships.

Term	Estimate	SE	z	p
Intercept	-1.71	0.26	-6.62	**<0.001**
ΔT	4.00	0.50	7.94	**<0.001**
Spring CWB	-2.63	0.63	-4.16	**<0.001**
Summer CWB	0.08	0.15	0.53	0.599
Seeds T-1	-4.25	0.16	-26.52	**<0.001**
Spring CWB * ΔT	3.00	1.29	2.33	**0.019**

production, relative to sites in Europe that did not experience drought in those years.

Our network included sites within the Swiss Intercantonal Forest Observation network, where predicted seed production was also unaffected by the 2018 drought event. The 2018 drought triggered dramatic declines in wider beech vitality in Switzerland, with step-changes in crown defoliation, radial growth, and mortality (Braun *et al.*, 2025). For example, the annual mortality rate of beech increased four-fold in the period 2019-2024, relative to the 1984-2018 baseline, with similar magnitude increases in crown defoliation and leaf discolouration (Braun *et al.*, 2025). Despite these dramatic effects, beech reproduction was resilient to the 2018 drought, and large seed crops were subsequently recorded in 2020 and 2023.

Discussion

Our findings demonstrate that once European beech trees are committed to reproduction, following favourable masting cues, drought does not impair the quantity of seeds produced, even under extreme conditions. Across 221 time series, we found no evidence that drought during fruit maturation reduced seed output. Instead, seed production was maintained or slightly increased, including in years of severe summer drought such as 2003, 2018 and 2022. These patterns indicate that, once floral initiation has occurred, beech reproduction continues even at drought intensities that simultaneously suppress growth, trigger crown dieback, and elevate mortality (Buras *et al.*, 2020; Brun *et al.*, 2020; Schuldt *et al.*, 2020; Braun *et al.*, 2025), including at our study sites.

Our results suggest that drought has neutral or even positive effects on seed production in European beech. The positive association between dry spring conditions and seed production is likely explained by enhanced pollen dispersal and improved pollination efficiency under low humidity, as previously observed in oak populations, where airborne pollen concentrations increased during dry conditions (Schermer *et al.*, 2020; Fleurot *et al.*, 2024). This effect is strongest when the weather cues of masting are weaker. We interpret this effect as representing greater benefits of weather-enhanced pollen dispersal in years when conspecific flowering effort is lower, and

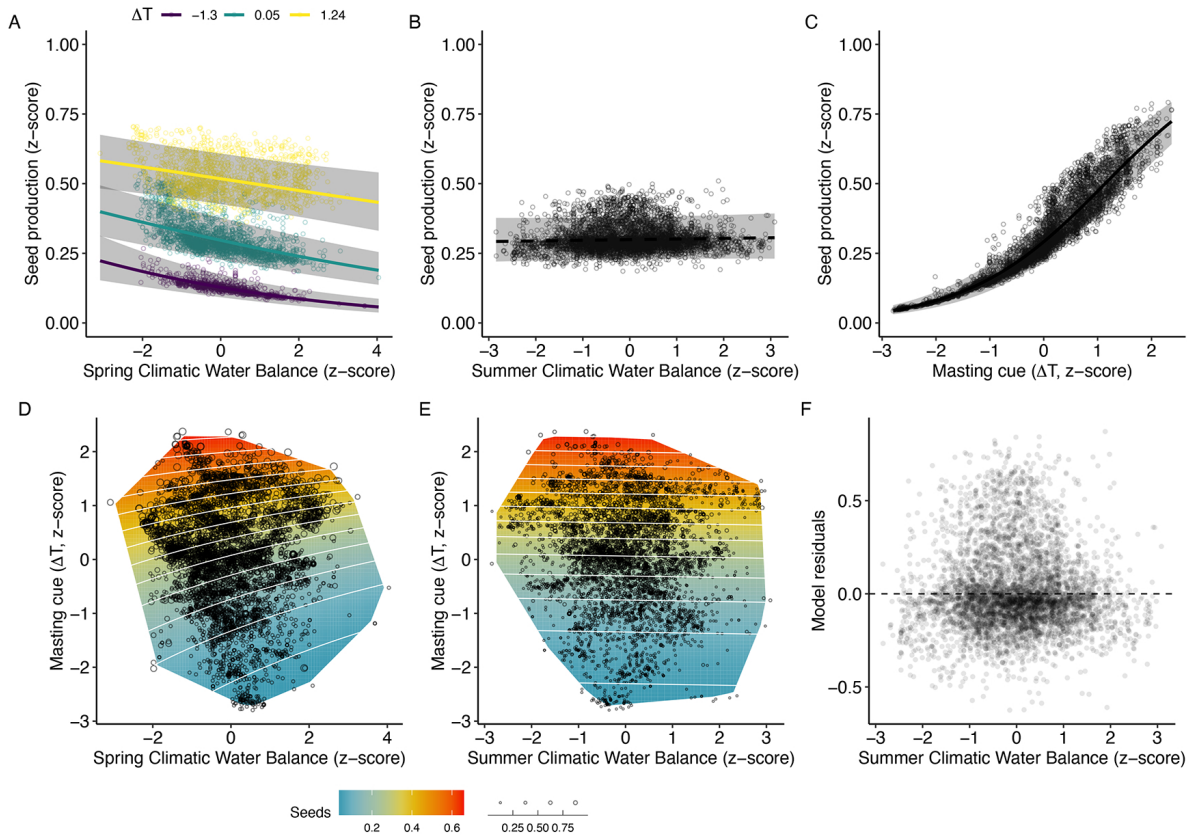

Figure 1: European beech reproduction is resilient to seasonal drought. Estimated effects of A) masting cue (ΔT, i.e., difference between summer temperatures two and one year before flowering, see Methods), B) spring (April-May) climatic water balance (CWB, negative values indicate water deficit), and C) summer (July-September) CWB on population-level seed production in European beech. The dashed line at B) highlights a non-significant effect. Points on A-C show partial residuals of a model including the ΔT masting cue, spring CWB, summer CWB and prior year seed production (see Methods). D) and E) Surface plots show estimated population-level seed production effort across combinations of masting cue and CWB, with the convex hulls (parameter space across which predictions are computed) defined by observations (black circles). Points show population-level annual seed production. Surface plots at D) and E) are shown to highlight the combined effects of masting cue and drought, but the interaction between the two was only significant for spring drought (panel D). F) The model residuals plotted against summer CWB highlight the lack of overlooked effects at extremes. Estimates are derived from a GLMM that included site as a random intercept (N sites = 221, N observations = 5362).

pollen limitation is otherwise greater. In beech, airborne pollen abundance has been shown to correlate with seed production (Bogdziewicz *et al.*, 2017; Nussbaumer *et al.*, 2020), supporting the interpretation that dry springs may facilitate higher reproductive success via improved pollen transfer.

We also found no effect of summer drought on seed production. This result suggests that, once reproduction is initiated by weather cues, trees continue to allocate resources to seeds even under water stress. Understanding how carbon is partitioned among sinks, especially during stress, is an active area of investigation (Dietze *et al.*, 2014; Hartmann & Trumbore, 2016; McDowell *et al.*, 2022). However, several lines of evidence suggest how beech could maintain carbon supply to developing fruits, even under severe drought. Drought limits photosynthesis via stomatal closure, which serves to avoid hydraulic failure, but does not necessarily translate immediately into carbon limitation (McDowell *et al.*, 2008; Leuschner, 2020; Chuste *et al.*, 2020). A delayed onset of carbon

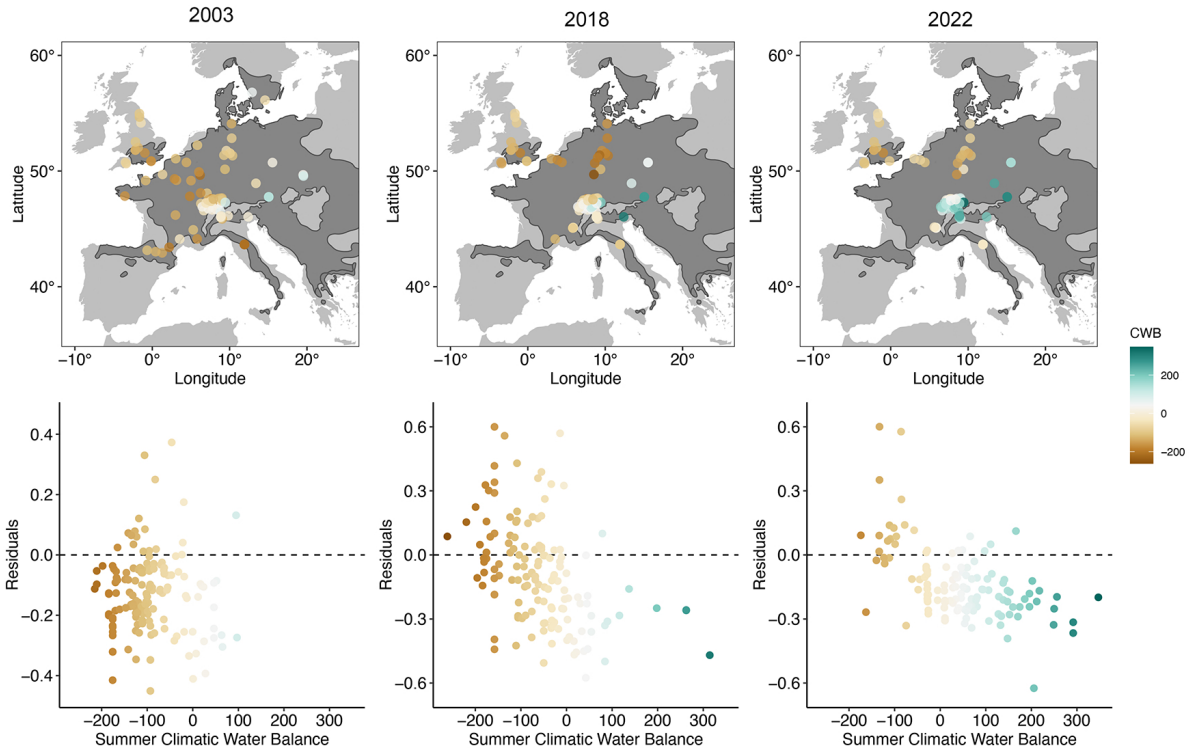

Figure 2: Resilience of seed production to the severe droughts in 2003, 2018, and 2022. Points on top panels show the location of sites available in MASTREE+ and Swiss Intercantonal Forest Observation databases (N = 151 for 2003, N = 143 for 2018, and N = 127 for 2022). Bottom panels show the relationships between the residuals from a GLMM predicting seed production as a function of masting cues and spring drought, but keeping the effect of summer drought fixed at its median value (see Methods, Table 1), versus summer climatic water balance of each site in a given year (CWB). Negative residuals show reproduction was lower than predicted based on cues and spring drought conditions.

limitation may especially be the case in anisohydric species such as beech, as stomata tend to remain open for longer under drought, increasing hydraulic risk, but allowing continued gas exchange under stress (McDowell *et al.*, 2008; Leuschner, 2020). Furthermore, trees possess substantial non-structural carbon reserves (Hoch *et al.*, 2003; Hartmann *et al.*, 2020; Trugman & Anderegg, 2025), and there is little evidence that single-year droughts cause acute carbon limitation (McDowell *et al.*, 2008; Hartmann & Trumbore, 2016; Leuschner, 2020; Chuste *et al.*, 2020; Peltier *et al.*, 2023). Growth reduction under short-term drought is thought to result from low water potential and turgor-driven inhibition of cell expansion, alongside hormonal signalling that suppresses cambial activity—not from a lack of available carbon (Buras *et al.*, 2018; Cabon *et al.*, 2020; Chuste *et al.*, 2020). In fact, increased concentration of secondary metabolites (defences) may follow drought, likely due to decreased growth sink activity (Hartmann & Trumbore, 2016). Under such conditions, trees may draw on stored reserves to sustain seed maturation (Wiley *et al.*, 2017), especially if doing so offers a selective advantage. Continued investment in seeds may thus reflect both the low immediate cost of reproduction under short-term drought and the potential long-term benefit of successful recruitment in drought-disturbed environments (Ascoli *et al.*, 2015; Vacchiano *et al.*, 2021).

Similar responses have been documented in other species. In *Quercus ilex*, *Pinus ponderosa*, and *Picea abies*, drought has been shown to intensify trade-offs between growth and reproduction, with reproductive effort maintained despite reductions in growth (Dohrenbusch *et al.*, 2002; Bogdziewicz *et al.*, 2020a; Gonzalez *et al.*, 2023), but see Le Roncé *et al.* (2021). While negative effects of drought on seed production have been reported in several systems (Clark *et al.*, 2011; Rowland *et al.*, 2018), including *Pinus sylvestris* (Vilà-Cabrera *et al.*, 2014), and Mediterranean oaks (Pérez-Ramos *et al.*, 2010; Gavinet *et al.*, 2019), positive or neutral responses have also emerged. For example, Wright *et al.* (2021) found that seed production in fir and pine species in the Sierra Nevada was not negatively affected by drought (*Pinus*), and in some cases even increased (*Abies*). Reduced rainfall was linked to enhanced reproductive output in *Sorbus aucuparia* (Żywiec *et al.*, 2012; Zamorano *et al.*, 2018), and seed production in tropical communities also showed resilience to drought (O'Brien *et al.*, 2018). These findings point to a broader pattern where reproduction may be buffered against short-term drought stress. Future studies combining drought manipulations with carbon budget tracking and reproductive monitoring are needed to clarify the mechanisms (Gavinet *et al.*, 2019; Le Roncé *et al.*, 2021). This will include understanding how the resilience of seed production to drought varies among species, and how this fits within broader physiological and ecological drought strategies (McDowell *et al.*, 2022). Whether reproductive investment remains stable under multi-year droughts also remains unclear, including the potential for chronic drought or more frequent or recurrent climatic extremes to gradually erode internal carbon reserves (Chuste *et al.*, 2020; Peltier *et al.*, 2023).

Although drought does not disrupt seed production once reproductive commitment has occurred, this resilience does not imply that beech reproduction is broadly resistant to climate change. Other pathways threaten reproduction, particularly the increasing frequency of masting cues under warming (Bogdziewicz *et al.*, 2021). Warmer summers induce flowering more often, but frequent reproduction can outpace resource accumulation (Kelly *et al.*, 2025; Hacket-Pain *et al.*, 2025), reducing reproductive efficiency and growth (Bogdziewicz *et al.*, 2020b; Hacket-Pain

et al., 2025). In the UK, the resulting breakdown of masting has lowered flowering synchrony, pollination success, and increased seed predation, cutting viable seed output by over 50% despite mean reproductive effort slightly increasing (Bogdziewicz *et al.*, 2023). Similar declines in variability are emerging elsewhere across the range (Foest *et al.*, 2024). Thus, the absence of further drought effects is encouraging, but does not indicate resilience of seed production to climate change overall.

Moreover, reproductive resilience at the seed production stage does not guarantee successful regeneration (Rodman *et al.*, 2020; Davis *et al.*, 2023). Recruitment processes, including seed viability, seedling establishment and survival, are sensitive to moisture availability and are likely to be strongly affected by climate extremes (Andrus *et al.*, 2018; Conlisk *et al.*, 2018; Davis *et al.*, 2019; Pawłowski *et al.*, 2024). Extreme droughts can eliminate seedling banks, sharply reducing future recruitment potential (Schuldt *et al.*, 2020). Evidence from other forest systems shows that seed availability alone is insufficient to ensure regeneration: when soil moisture falls below critical thresholds, recruitment may fail even if seeds are available (Davis *et al.*, 2019). These effects are species-specific. Experimental heating crossed with watering in North American forests demonstrated strong contrasts: seedling survival of *Picea engelmanii* declined drastically under warming, whereas *Pinus flexilis* showed little response, resulting in simulated rapid range contraction of the former but not the latter (Kueppers *et al.*, 2017; Conlisk *et al.*, 2017). Water additions ameliorated these effects, highlighting the pivotal role of drought. How these dynamics operate in beech and European forests more broadly remains poorly understood, and further work is needed to assess the sensitivity of recruitment to drought (Leuschner, 2020) and the interaction between seed supply and post-dispersal climatic conditions.

Our analysis isolates the response of seed production to summer drought during the seed maturation phase and demonstrates that once flowering has been triggered, European beech maintains reproductive output even under extreme water deficits. While our data prevents analysis of spatial variation in fecundity, differences across moisture regimes may exist and could reflect local adaptation of reproductive strategies to prevailing hydrological conditions (Felton *et al.*, 2022; Stemkovski *et al.*, 2025). Identifying such patterns could help clarify whether reproductive resilience is uniform across the species' range or shaped by long-term environmental constraints, with implications for predicting demographic responses under future climates (Perret *et al.*, 2024; Stemkovski *et al.*, 2025). Likewise, while our study focuses on short-term drought events, understanding how beech reproduction responds to chronic or multi-year water stress remains an important next step. Evidence from other systems indicates that prolonged drought can depress reproductive output over time (Wion *et al.*, 2025). With climate projections indicating increasing frequency and severity of dry periods, assessing reproductive responses to long-term stress should be a research priority (Serra-Maluquer *et al.*, 2025). Notably, our dataset includes well-characterised episodes of extreme drought, including the record European droughts of 2003, 2018, 2022, with summer climatic water balances deficits below –200 mm and abundant evidence of strong effects on tree physiology and forest functioning (Fig. 2) (Buras *et al.*, 2020; Braun *et al.*, 2025; Gharun *et al.*, 2024; Schuldt *et al.*, 2020), ensuring that our results reflect tree responses under genuine drought conditions. In sum, our findings show that European beech reproduction is

resilient to even severe summer drought once reproductive development is initiated, highlighting a potential buffer in the reproductive cycle against short-term climate extremes. However, this resilience of reproduction potentially comes at the cost of increased drought-related mortality, if sustained reproduction speeds up carbon depletion (Martínez-Vilalta *et al.*, 2016; Hacket-Pain *et al.*, 2025). Further work is needed to assess responses under chronic drought, variation across moisture regimes, and the demographic consequences of sustained reproduction under stress.

Methods

Data

Seed production Annual observations of European beech seed production were obtained from MASTREE+, an open-access database of annual records of population-level reproductive effort (Hacket-Pain *et al.*, 2022; Foest *et al.*, 2024). We selected European beech because its masting cues are well studied and consistently linked to the summer solstice (Journé *et al.*, 2024), providing a clear temporal reference point that facilitates alignment of reproductive cues with climatic drivers across populations throughout the species' range. Only continuous time series longer than 5 years and beginning in 1952 or later were included, ensuring both sufficient length and overlap with climatic records. Pollen-based, ordinal, and regional-scale records were excluded. For several sites with ongoing monitoring, we supplemented MASTREE+ records with additional observations, extending coverage beyond 2019. Additionally, we added 105 sites from the Swiss Intercantonal Forest Observation network, where annual fruit production is estimated using fruit counts and fruit scars (Braun *et al.*, 2025). Thus, in total, our dataset included 221 series, with an average length of 24 years and a total of 5362 observations (Fig. 3).

Climate We extracted daily climate data for each study site from the corresponding 0.1° grid cell of the E-OBS dataset (Cornes *et al.*, 2018). From these records, we derived daily temperature and precipitation. Climatic water balance (CWB) was calculated as monthly precipitation sum minus potential evapotranspiration, summed for April–May (spring) and June–September (summer). Potential evapotranspiration was estimated using the Thornthwaite method. Vapour pressure deficit (VPD) was calculated from daily mean temperature and relative humidity following Duursma (2015), and aggregated to monthly means for the same seasonal windows.

Analysis To test the effects of drought on annual seed production, we fitted a generalised linear mixed model (GLMM) with a Tweedie distribution and logit link, including site ID as a random intercept. The Tweedie distribution was chosen because it accommodates zero-inflation and overdispersion, both of which are common features of seed production data. The response variable was annual, site-level observations of population seed production. To account for differences in monitoring methods among sites in MASTREE+, seed production values

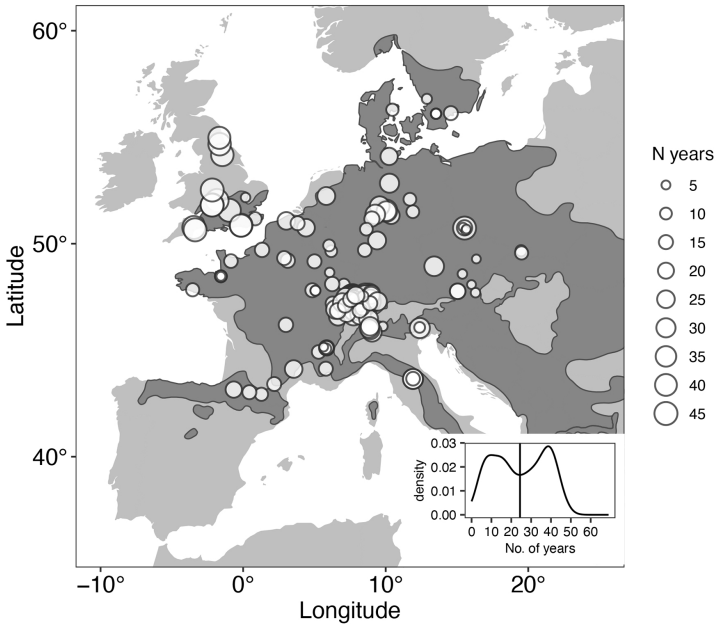

Figure 3: Map of study sites. Locations of the 221 time series of annual seed production of European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) used in this study (N = 5362, average N per site = 24, see the inset plot for how sample size was distributed across sites). Size of points is scaled to the number of observations at the focal site. The shaded area highlights the species range, based on EUFORGEN (Caudullo *et al.*, 2017).

were standardised within each site to range between 0 and 1 (Journé *et al.*, 2024, 2025).

Fixed effects included spring climatic water balance (CWB; April–May), summer CWB (June–September), and the difference in mean maximum summer temperatures between the year one and two years prior to seedfall (ΔT). The latter captures the established cueing system of European beech reproduction: low June–July temperatures two years before seedfall (T2) followed by high temperatures one year before seedfall (T1) (Kelly *et al.*, 2025). Because these cues are anchored to the summer solstice and are consistent across the species' range (Journé *et al.*, 2024), ΔT provides a parsimonious representation of masting drivers, combining T1 and T2 into a single parameter (Szymkowiak *et al.*, 2024). We included previous-year seed production to account for legacy effects associated with resource depletion (Crone *et al.*, 2009). We tested for interactions between ΔT and spring and summer CWB, and removed non-significant interactions final model. All predictors were included as natural cubic splines to allow non-linear effects.

To ensure comparability across sites and to separate within-site temporal variation from among-site spatial differences, all predictors were standardised by subtracting their site-level mean and dividing by the site-level standard deviation (z-transformation) (Buras *et al.*, 2018). Working with anomalies provides the advantage of accounting for local adaptation and acclimation, as site-specific means capture baseline climatic conditions while highlighting deviations relevant to physiological responses. However, using standardised anomalies of CWB risk misclassifying observations from sites that normally experience high water surplus as drought-affected, if anomalies fall below conventional thresholds even while absolute CWB remains positive (Buras *et al.*, 2020). Thus, we additionally tested an alternative approach, in which CWB was entered as observed, and supplemented

with site-level mean CWB to avoid mixing within- and among-site level variation (van de Pol & Wright, 2009). Results were consistent, so we report only the z-transformed models. Models using vapour pressure deficit (VPD) instead of CWB produced qualitatively similar outcomes; we therefore present results based on CWB. Residual spatial autocorrelation was checked and was absent.

In a complementary analysis, we examined the effects of extreme summer droughts (2003, 2018, and 2022) by comparing observed seed production to model predictions holding summer drought at each site's median conditions. We examined how model residuals varied with local summer CWB to test if seed production was overestimated in sites experiencing drought in these years, in comparisons to sites that did not experience drought.

We conducted our analysis in R version 4.2.3 (R Core Team, 2024), using *glmmTMB* package to fit the model (Brooks *et al.*, 2017), *SPEI* package to calculate climatic water balance (Beguería & Vicente-Serrano, 2023), and *plantecophys* package to calculate vapour pressure deficit (Duursma, 2015).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the many colleagues, students, family and friends who have contributed to the English Beech Mast Survey and other long-term monitoring efforts on which this work is based. This study was funded by the European Union (ERC, ForestFuture, 101039066). Views and opinions expressed are however, those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. AHP and JL acknowledge institutional support and funding from The University of Liverpool and Manchester Metropolitan University respectively (2004 to present). JF was supported by the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP). GG and MBP acknowledge support by the projects 'Forest dynamics in old growth spruce-fir-beech forests', P14583. 'Sporadic seed production in mast seeding trees', P30381 of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and 'FORSEE: Seeds for Austria's Climate-Fit Forests' (WF 101656) of the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment, Climate, Regions and Water Management (BMLUK). GK was funded for seed monitoring by REGE-ADAPT of the research program FORESTT through the Agence Nationale de la Recherche under the France 2030 program, grant ANR-24-PEFO-0006. MM knowledges support from the Integrated project CarboEurope-IP, European Commission, Directorate-General Research, Sixth Framework Programme, Priority 1.1.6.3: Global Change and Ecosystem (Contract no. GOCECT-2003-505572); Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry, Germany; German Research Foundation (DFG) (INST 186/1118-1 FUGG); German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF; research infrastructure ICOS); Georg-August-University Göttingen, Germany. As the French part of the ICP Forests intensive (Level II) monitoring programme, the RENECOFOR network has benefited from its scientific framework and shared expertise. We thank Allan Buras for useful discussions during the initiation of this project. The surveys on the Swiss ICP Forests Level II plots (LWF) is financed by WSL and the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), with some financial support from the Canton of St. Gallen and the City of Lausanne.

Author Contributions Statement

AHP conceived the study and AHP, MB, and JS designed the study. JS analysed the data. MB and AHP drafted the manuscript. All authors contributed data and contributed critically to data interpretation and manuscript revisions.

Declaration of interests

No competing interests to declare.

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