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## 4 **Are the best dispersers the best colonizers?** 5 **Seed mass, dispersal and establishment in *Carduus* thistles**

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16 **Running title:** Seed mass, dispersal and establishment in *Carduus*

17 **Key words:** colonization; establishment; germination; seed mass; dispersal-establishment  
18 trade-off; wind dispersal

### 19 **Abstract**

20 The negative correlation between dispersal and establishment appears to be well documented  
21 in the plant literature; smaller seeds tend to disperse better but germinate less well, and  
22 produce smaller seedlings. However, because dispersal capacity is often quantified using  
23 proxies, such as the settling velocity of wind-dispersed seeds, little is known about the exact  
24 shape of this negative correlation, and how it is modified by other plant traits and  
25 environmental conditions. We studied the dispersal-establishment correlation in two wind-  
26 dispersed thistles (*Carduus nutans* and *Carduus acanthoides*). We applied a mechanistic wind  
27 dispersal model (WALD) to seeds released under a range of environmental conditions, and  
28 tested germination and seedling growth under standardized conditions in a greenhouse.  
29 Dispersal distance and establishment (germination and seedling growth) were not  
30 significantly correlated, although in both species, smaller seeds dispersed farther, and showed  
31 lower germination and lower seedling growth rates. This apparent paradox can partly be  
32 explained by the significant influence of other factors such as release height and environment  
33 (wind and vegetation), which explained more variation in dispersal than did terminal velocity.  
34 Another potential explanation is the variation in seed traits: germination is strongly positively  
35 related to seed mass, weakly positively related to plume loading, but not significantly related  
36 to terminal velocity. This weakening of the correlation with germination is due to additional  
37 layers of trait (co)variability: for instance, seed mass and pappus size are positively correlated,  
38 and thus big seeds partially compensate for the negative effect of seed mass with larger pappi.  
39 Our mechanistic approach can thus lead to a better understanding of both potentially opposing  
40 selection pressures on traits like seed mass, and diluting effects of other seed, plant and  
41 environmental factors.

### 42 **Introduction**

43 Seed size is one critical factor affecting several aspects of the plant colonization process. This  
44 trait may have either positive or negative effects on two key early steps in colonization,  
45 dispersal and establishment, and thus represents a likely trade-off between different  
46 colonization stages. In wind-dispersed plants seed size, or more specifically, seed mass, may  
47 affect dispersal negatively by increasing the seed settling velocity (Greene and Johnson 1993;  
48 Greene and Quesada 2005). Conversely, it has been demonstrated in many plants (not just  
49 wind-dispersed species), that seed mass tends to positively affect germination ability and

1 seedling growth (Turnbull et al. 1999; Turnbull et al. 2004). Thus, by increasing seed mass,  
2 wind dispersed plants may trade dispersal success for germination and establishment success.  
3 This has been pointed out repeatedly in studies of dispersal and establishment within and  
4 among species (Strykstra et al. 1998; Soons and Heil 2002; Debain et al. 2003; Jakobsson and  
5 Eriksson 2003). In some cases the relationships may be different, e.g. for animal-dispersed  
6 seeds where seed size and dispersal distance is not necessarily negatively related (Coomes  
7 and Grubb 2003), and for secondary wind dispersal where the relationship is unimodal  
8 (Schurr et al. 2005). This may change or eliminate the negative correlation. Moreover, even  
9 when seed mass has significant and opposing effects on dispersal and establishment, they  
10 themselves may not be negatively related (Soons and Heil 2002; Debain et al. 2003). This  
11 may be due to low variability in commonly used dispersal proxies such as terminal velocity  
12 (Soons and Heil 2002; Debain et al. 2003), in which case a negative correlation will not be  
13 detected using a purely empirical approach. Therefore, to understand and resolve this apparent  
14 paradox, a mechanistic analysis of the dispersal-establishment relationship with realistic  
15 variation affecting dispersal and germination is required. This is an important step towards  
16 understanding the implications for evolution of seed size in relation to dispersal and  
17 establishment.

18 In this paper, we start to address this potentially fruitful line of inquiry. Specifically,  
19 we test the conditions for the existence of negative dispersal-establishment correlations using  
20 empirical studies of dispersal, germination and seedling growth for two *Carduus* thistles.  
21 Using mechanistic statistical models for the dispersal of the two species, coupled with  
22 statistical models of germination and establishment, we address the components of the  
23 dispersal-establishment relationship to investigate how the overall putative trade-off is  
24 affected by species traits and the environment.

## 25 **Material and methods**

### 26 *A conceptual model*

27 Our starting point for this analysis is a conceptual model of how plant traits and environment  
28 interact to influence dispersal and establishment (Fig. 1). By “dispersal” we mean the  
29 movement of a seed from its mother plant to its destination location. Thus dispersal is only  
30 the first step of colonization, which also includes establishment, i.e. germination, survival and  
31 plant growth. In this paper we focus on the physical displacement involved in dispersal and  
32 on the germination of dispersed seeds and early seedling survival and growth.

33 In the conceptual model several factors appear as “predictor” and “response” variables  
34 for different relationships. We carried out a set of empirical studies of dispersal, germination  
35 and seedling growth as dependent on seed traits to test these basic relationships and their  
36 effects on dispersal and early establishment for a pair of wind-dispersed thistles, *Carduus*  
37 *nutans* and *C. acanthoides*. We focus mostly on the biological links in the empirical studies,  
38 while the meteorological relationships between environmental variables (wind at  
39 measurement height, vegetation height, release height and wind between release height and  
40 ground) were modelled as described below.

### 41 *The species*

42 Our study species are two economically important invasive weeds: *Carduus nutans* L. and *C.*  
43 *acanthoides* L. (musk and plumeless thistle; Asteraceae). These thistles are originally from  
44 Eurasia, but have spread to most other continents (Holm et al. 1979). The life-history and  
45 demography of the species is well-known from several studies (Desrochers et al. 1988; Shea  
46 and Kelly 1998; Shea et al. 2005; Shea et al. 2006; Jongejans et al. 2007b; Jongejans et al.  
47 2008). Both species are primarily found in pastures and disturbed areas and seem to do  
48 particularly well on fertile soils over limestone (Desrochers et al. 1988). They often establish  
49 after disturbance (Jongejans et al. 2007b) Both species are short-lived monocarpic perennials,  
50 and colonize exclusively by seed. *Carduus nutans* has on average slightly larger seeds (3.0-

1 4.0 mm long) than *C. acanthoides* (2.5-3.5 mm). *Carduus nutans* also often grows taller than  
 2 *C. acanthoides* and produces more seeds per flower head, but fewer flower heads per plant  
 3 (Desrochers et al. 1988; Skarpaas and Shea 2007). In Central Pennsylvania, flowering of *C.*  
 4 *nutans* is usually completed by late June, and the peak dispersal season is in July; for *C.*  
 5 *acanthoides* the peak dispersal season is July-August.

### 6 ***A mechanistic dispersal model***

7 In natural environments, the dispersal distance of a seed depends on environmental factors in  
 8 addition to seed mass and derived traits such as settling velocity, and hence the dispersal-  
 9 establishment relationship may be modified by the environment. Mechanistic models of wind  
 10 dispersal typically include variables such as seed release height, horizontal wind speed and  
 11 various aspects of air instability, in addition to terminal velocity (Kuparinen 2006). Many of  
 12 these models involve complex simulations, but the WALD analytical model of long-distance  
 13 dispersal has been found to predict dispersal well for a number of wind-dispersed species  
 14 (Katul et al. 2005), including the *Carduus* thistles considered here (Skarpaas and Shea 2007).  
 15 This model is derived from Lagrangian fluid mechanics theory and predicts an inverse  
 16 Gaussian (Wald) distribution of dispersal distances  $r$  (Katul et al. 2005, eqn 5b):

$$17 \quad p(r) = \left( \frac{\lambda}{2\pi r^3} \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \exp\left( -\frac{\tau(r-\mu)^2}{2\mu^2 r} \right). \quad (1)$$

18 The location parameter  $\mu$  (the mean) and the scale parameter  $\tau$  are related to species and  
 19 environment characteristics by

$$20 \quad \mu = \frac{HU}{F} \quad (2)$$

$$21 \quad \tau = \left( \frac{H}{\sigma} \right)^2, \quad (3)$$

22 where  $H$  is the seed release height,  $F$  is seed settling velocity,  $U$  is the hourly mean horizontal  
 23 wind velocity between  $H$  and the ground, and  $\sigma$  is a turbulent flow parameter reflecting wind  
 24 variation due to vegetation structure and weather conditions (Katul et al. 2005).  $\sigma$  is derived  
 25 from the horizontal wind speed under the assumptions that the dissipation rate can be  
 26 estimated from surface roughness and friction velocity, and that the friction velocity is  
 27 proportional to the vertical turbulence (see Skarpaas and Shea 2007, Appendix).

28 According to this model, the expected dispersal distance for a single seed is  $\mu$  (the  
 29 mean of the inverse Gaussian distribution; Evans et al. 2000), which is given by the standard  
 30 ballistic equation (equation 2). The variance depends on both  $\mu$  and  $\tau$  (Evans et al. 2000). The  
 31 probability that a seed reaches a certain distance is given by  $1-\text{CDF}(r)$ , where  $\text{CDF}(r)$  is the  
 32 cumulative distribution function of the Wald model, i.e. the integral of the probability density  
 33 function (equation 1). The distribution of dispersal distances of an entire population of seeds  
 34 (the dispersal kernel) also depends on the variability of the parameters underlying  $\mu$  and  $\tau$   
 35 during the release period. To account for variability in terminal velocity, release height and  
 36 wind conditions for extended periods of time (more than one hour), the WALD model can be  
 37 integrated over these variables to obtain the dispersal kernel  $k(r)$  (Skarpaas and Shea 2007):

$$38 \quad k(r) = \iiint p(H)p(U)p(F)p(r)dHdUdF \quad (4)$$

39 where  $p(H)$ ,  $p(U)$  and  $p(F)$  are the probability densities of  $H$ ,  $U$  and  $F$ , respectively, and  $p(r)$   
 40 is the WALD model (equation 3). We used this integrated model to estimate distributions of  
 41 dispersal distances on the basis of independent measurements of environment (wind,  
 42 vegetation height) and plant traits (seed release height, terminal velocity) in the experiments  
 43 described below.

## 1 ***Dispersal experiments***

2 Eight dispersal experiments were carried out in Central Pennsylvania during the dispersal  
3 season (July-October) in 2003 and 2004 (Table 1). Seeds from the dispersal experiments in  
4 2004 were used for seed trait and germination studies (see below). As the experiments  
5 involved the release of seeds of invasive species, the experiments were carried out at sites  
6 where the species already occurred (Allen and Shea 2006). Seeds were drawn from pools of  
7 seeds collected from several plants (> 5) in two populations of each species near the study  
8 sites. *C. nutans* seeds were collected in the Elliotsburg area, Perry County, PA; *C.*  
9 *acanthoides* seeds were collected in the State College area, Centre County, PA. For each  
10 species we selected two sites with different vegetation heights corresponding to the natural  
11 habitats of the species: one site with low vegetation (pasture) and one with high vegetation  
12 (wasteland). Maximum vegetation heights (flowering stalks) were  $0.54 \pm 0.25$  m and  $1.27 \pm$   
13  $0.49$  m at the low and high vegetation sites respectively (mean  $\pm$  SD of measurements at 20  
14 random points at each site). At each site we carried out two dispersal experiments to cover a  
15 range of wind speeds (Table 1). The experiments were all carried out over a period of 2-4  
16 hours in the late morning or early afternoon on sunny days.

17 We measured field wind speed and direction using an automated mobile weather  
18 station with an anemometer mounted at 2 m above the ground. In the two experiments carried  
19 out in 2003, horizontal wind speeds were measured using a Young cup anemometer. For the  
20 six experiments in 2004 we used a 3D ultrasonic anemometer (CSAT3, Campbell Scientific,  
21 Utah, USA) to measure wind speeds in three dimensions (including updrafts). Horizontal  
22 wind speeds for 2004 were calculated as the vector sum of the two horizontal components. In  
23 both years, wind speeds were stored every 10 s using a CR-10X datalogger (Campbell  
24 Scientific). Wind speed and turbulence between the release height and the ground was  
25 estimated using the logarithmic wind profile and a mechanistically based turbulence  
26 approximation involving horizontal wind speed and standard meteorological parameters (the  
27 von Karman and Kolmogorov constants and surface roughness parameters), as described in  
28 the appendix of Skarpaas and Shea (2007).

29 In each experiment we released 40-150 dispersal units (filled achenes with intact  
30 pappi) one at a time. The dispersal units were released at random heights in the range 0.30 –  
31 2.30 m (corresponding roughly to flower head heights on the plants), pre-determined by a  
32 random number generator. Each dispersal unit was released by hand at the beginning of a 10-  
33 second recording interval. As soon as the procedure was completed for one dispersal unit, we  
34 repeated the whole procedure with the next dispersal unit. We followed each dispersal unit  
35 and measured the distance from the release point to the point where it first landed, or, in a few  
36 cases, was lost from sight. Although we recorded the last distance at which the lost dispersal  
37 units were observed, they were not included in any analyses in this study, because  
38 measurements of traits and establishment were carried out on seeds collected from the  
39 dispersal experiments.

## 40 ***Seed traits***

41 The dispersal units from the dispersal field experiments carried out in 2004 were collected  
42 and stored individually in vials to preserve the pappi for measurements in the lab. The  
43 maximum diameter of the pappus, and the maximum width and length of the achene ('seed'  
44 hereafter) were measured using a digital micrometer. Settling velocity (terminal velocity) was  
45 measured by dropping each intact dispersal unit through an air-tight tube and timing the  
46 descent through 1.16 m using a stopwatch. To minimize bias from acceleration, the dispersal  
47 units were allowed to accelerate for 7 cm. To minimize measurement error, five replicate  
48 measurements for each dispersal unit were averaged. Finally, the mass of each seed with the  
49 pappus removed was measured using an electronic balance.

50

## 1 **Germination and seedling establishment**

2 After lab measurements were completed for all seeds, a seed germination trial was conducted  
3 between October 20 and November 28, 2004, using all the seeds from dispersal studies 2, 4, 6  
4 and 7 (Table 1): 110 seeds of *Carduus nutans*; 170 of *C. acanthoides*; 280 in total. Each seed  
5 was randomly assigned a position on one of six trays in the greenhouse. The seeds were  
6 planted in bare soil, 0.5 cm below the surface, which has been shown to be optimal for these  
7 species (McCarty et al. 1969). The six trays were placed in a greenhouse with a temperature  
8 range of 18-27°C, artificial light 12 hrs/per day (7:00am—7:00pm) and 30-80% air humidity.  
9 The trays were watered regularly. The planted seeds were checked daily and the date of each  
10 germination was recorded, as well as the survival of germinated seedlings. Once a week (from  
11 November 7 until November 28, 2004), we recorded the maximum diameter of the rosette and  
12 the length of the longest leaf for each seedling.

## 13 **Analysis**

14 We tested the relationships among species characteristics (seed mass, pappus diameter, plume  
15 loading, release height, settling velocity), environmental variables (vegetation height and  
16 wind speeds) and dispersal and establishment (germination and early plant growth) using  
17 generalized linear regression models (GLM). In the figures we present results for the four  
18 studies where we have data on dispersal, seed traits and establishment (studies 2, 4, 6 and 7 in  
19 Table 1), but include additional analyses in the text for the full dispersal data set (all studies in  
20 Table 1) where only dispersal-related variables are involved. Settling velocity  $F$  has been  
21 found to be linearly related to the square root of plume loading  $L$  (Andersen 1993; Meyer and  
22 Carlson 2001):

$$23 \quad F = \alpha\sqrt{L}. \quad (5)$$

24  $\alpha$  is a constant and the plume loading  $L$  is given by (Greene and Johnson 1990):

$$25 \quad L = \frac{M}{A}, \quad (6)$$

26 where  $M$  is seed mass (mg) and  $A$  is pappus area (mm<sup>2</sup>) assuming a circular plume (Matlack  
27 1987). On a logarithmic scale, dispersal distance, seed settling velocity and seed mass should  
28 be linearly related (eqs. 2, 5 and 6). Thus, in the statistical analysis these variables were log  
29 transformed. Plume loading was square root transformed when used as a predictor for settling  
30 velocity (eq. 5). For the WALD model parameters we obtained independent estimates (not  
31 fitted to dispersal distances). The relationship between germination and seed mass were  
32 analyzed using logistic regression. All analyses were carried out in R (R Development Core  
33 Team 2009).

## 34 **Results**

35 Large (heavy) seeds had bigger pappi in both species (Fig. 2A; linear regression,  $P < 0.001$ ).  
36 However, an increase in pappus area was not sufficient to compensate for the increased mass  
37 of the seed: plume loading increased linearly with seed mass in both species (Fig. 2B; linear  
38 regression,  $P < 0.001$ ). *Carduus nutans* had significantly heavier seeds (Table 2), larger pappi  
39 than *C. acanthoides* (Fig. 2A, linear regression,  $P < 0.001$ ), but lower plume loadings (Fig.  
40 2B, linear regression,  $P < 0.001$ ). Terminal velocity, the main dispersal trait of the achene-  
41 pappus unit, increased linearly with the square root of plume loading in both species (Fig. 2C;  
42 linear regression,  $P < 0.001$ ). Terminal velocity was lower in *C. nutans*, but not significantly  
43 so (Table 2).

44 Dispersal distances were strongly affected by plant traits and environmental factors,  
45 but there was no significant difference between the species (Fig 3; linear regression,  $P >$   
46  $0.195$ ). Seeds with higher terminal velocities dispersed shorter distances (Fig. 3A; linear  
47 regression,  $P < 0.001$ ). Seed release height (plant height), on the other hand, affected dispersal  
48 distances positively (Fig. 3B; linear regression,  $P < 0.001$ ). This was also true for the full

1 dispersal data set including all 8 experiments listed in Table 1 (linear regression,  $P < 0.001$ ).  
2 As expected, dispersal distances also increased with the ambient wind speed (Fig 3C, linear  
3 regression,  $P < 0.001$ ; full dispersal data set:  $P < 0.001$ ). Of the factors that explained a  
4 significant proportion of the variation in dispersal distance (ANOVA,  $P < 0.05$ ; for the seeds  
5 where all measurements were available) wind speed explained the most (45%), followed by  
6 terminal velocity (16%), vegetation height (7%) and seed release height (2%).

7 The wind speed experienced by each individual dispersal unit varied considerably  
8 between dispersal experiments in high and low vegetation (see also Marchetto et al. 2010b).  
9 The resulting distributions of dispersal distances were significantly skewed towards shorter  
10 distances in high vegetation for both species (Fig. 4; Kolmogorov-Smirnov one-sided tests,  $P$   
11  $< 0.001$ ). The WALD model predicted the dispersal distance distributions extremely well for  
12 *Carduus nutans* in low vegetation, where there was no significant difference among the  
13 observed and predicted distributions (Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sided test,  $P = 0.653$ ). In the  
14 three other cases the model predictions deviated slightly from the observations at intermediate  
15 distances (Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sided tests,  $P < 0.034$ ), but the model nevertheless  
16 predicted the distributions well in both low and high vegetation considering that predictions  
17 were made on the basis of independent measurements of the predictors.

18 While seed mass affected dispersal negatively (Fig 5A), it affected establishment  
19 positively. The probability of germination increased significantly with seed mass (Fig. 5B;  
20 logistic regression,  $P < 0.001$ ). Of the 110 *Carduus nutans* seeds 15 germinated (13.6%),  
21 while 25 of the 170 *C. acanthoides* seeds germinated (14.7%). There was no significant  
22 difference between the species in germination (logistic regression,  $P = 0.164$ ). Although some  
23 large seeds germinated earlier than small seeds, seed mass did not significantly affect  
24 germination time in any of the species (linear regression,  $P > 0.100$ ). Nor did it affect seedling  
25 survival; all seedlings survived until the end of the experiment. However, seed mass did affect  
26 early seedling growth in both species positively, both in terms of leaf growth (Fig. 5C) and  
27 rosette growth (data not shown, but similar pattern as leaf growth; linear regression,  $P <$   
28  $0.001$ ). By both growth measures, *C. acanthoides* seedlings grew significantly faster than *C.*  
29 *nutans* seedlings for comparable seed masses (Fig. 5C; linear regression,  $P < 0.001$ ).

30 Despite the fact that seed mass affected dispersal negatively and establishment  
31 positively, there was no statistically significant negative relationship between dispersal and  
32 establishment in our data. The probability of germination was predicted well by seed mass  
33 (see above), but increasingly worse by plume loading (logistic regression coefficient  $c =$   
34  $0.138$ ,  $P = 0.058$ ), terminal velocity ( $c = 3.07$ ,  $P = 0.215$ ) and dispersal distance ( $\log r$ ;  $c = -$   
35  $0.041$ ,  $P = 0.739$ ; Fig. 6A). Controlling for wind speed ( $\log U$ ) and release height ( $\log H$ )  
36 made the relationship between dispersal and germination stronger but still not statistically  
37 significant (logistic regression coefficient  $c = -0.236$ ,  $P = 0.191$ ). Similarly, seedling leaf and  
38 rosette growth were not significantly related to the observed dispersal distance (linear  
39 regression coefficients  $0.016$  and  $0.004$  respectively;  $P = 0.851$  and  $0.933$ ; Fig. 6B and C).

40 Even though dispersal distance and germination were not significantly negatively  
41 related, there may still be opposing selection pressures on seed mass since seed mass affected  
42 dispersal distance negatively and establishment positively. Under the assumption that these  
43 separate and opposing effects could cause a negative correlation between the ability to arrive  
44 and the ability to establish in a new location, we explored the predicted optimal seed mass in  
45 either species (Fig. 7). Note that this hypothetical picture assumes that there is no interaction  
46 effect of seed mass and vegetation height on the probability of establishment (i.e. that small  
47 and large seeds are affected similarly by vegetation height). The predicted seed mass, where  
48 effects on dispersal and germination are optimally balanced, is strongly modified by  
49 environmental conditions. For example, the optimal seed mass for colonizing safe sites more  
50 than 2 m away from the mother plant is drastically reduced by high vegetation, which

1 effectively lowers the wind speed experienced by the seed. The reduction in the optimal seed  
2 mass is stronger for *C. acanthoides* than for *C. nutans* under comparable conditions.

### 3 **Discussion**

4 In a direct comparison of dispersal and germination we found no statistical support for a  
5 negative relationship between dispersal and establishment in our data. However, at the same  
6 time our results suggest evolutionarily relevant opposing effects of seed mass on dispersal and  
7 establishment for both *Carduus nutans* and *C. acanthoides*. This has also been demonstrated  
8 for many other species (Strykstra et al. 1998; Soons and Heil 2002; Debain et al. 2003;  
9 Jakobsson and Eriksson 2003). This apparent paradox, which has also been observed in some  
10 other studies (e.g. Soons and Heil 2002; Debain et al. 2003), can be explained by low  
11 variability in commonly used dispersal proxies such as terminal velocity. Our study also  
12 raises other likely explanations. One possible explanation is the significant influence of other  
13 factors such as release height and environment (wind and vegetation) on dispersal. In our  
14 study these factors explained more of the variability in dispersal distance than did terminal  
15 velocity. Similarly, strong effects of the environment were reported by Nathan et al. (2002)  
16 who found that relatively heavy seeds were uplifted above the canopy (i.e. likely to be long-  
17 distance dispersed). Another possible explanation for the lack of a clear negative relationship  
18 between dispersal and establishment is the variation in seed traits and their measurement:  
19 germination is strongly positively related to seed mass, less clearly but still positively related  
20 to plume loading, but not significantly related to terminal velocity and dispersal distance. This  
21 dilution of effects of seed traits on germination is partly because additional layers of  
22 variability in traits and measurements reduce our ability to see a relationship with a limited  
23 sample size, and partly because of trait co-variability. For instance, seed mass is positively  
24 correlated with pappus size. As pointed out by e.g. Sakai et al. (1998), heavy seeds are not  
25 poor colonizers if the weight is compensated for by bigger dispersal structures such as wings  
26 or plumes. For the *Carduus* thistles tested here, heavier seeds had larger pappi, but not  
27 sufficiently large to compensate for the increase in plume loading and terminal velocity.

28 In our analyses, all the relationships in the pathways from seed mass to dispersal and  
29 to establishment are statistically significant and the seed mass-mediated effects are  
30 sufficiently large to cause more than five-fold differences in the probability of dispersal  
31 beyond the mean dispersal distance (approximately 2 m) and in the probability of germination  
32 (Fig. 7). This suggests that there is a mechanistic basis for a negative dispersal-establishment  
33 relationship for both *Carduus* species; the best dispersers may not be the best colonizers, even  
34 though the direct correlation between dispersal and establishment appears to be overwhelmed  
35 by variability in environmental factors in the particular context of our studies. In more  
36 constant environments (predictable winds, small range of release heights, etc.), seed mass-  
37 mediated effects will likely be relatively more important.

38 The mechanisms involved, and the shape of the dispersal-establishment relationship,  
39 seem to be somewhat different in the two species. *C. acanthoides* had higher terminal  
40 velocities than *C. nutans* for any given seed mass. This is mostly due to higher plume  
41 loadings in *C. acanthoides*, but other factors, such as lower plume density may also affect  
42 terminal velocity (Greene and Johnson 1990; Marchetto et al. 2010a). Regardless of the  
43 underlying cause, the predicted optimal seed mass for colonization was larger for *C. nutans*  
44 than for *C. acanthoides* in similar environments (Fig. 7). Interestingly, observed seed mass is  
45 even smaller than predicted by our models for both species in low vegetation and for *C.*  
46 *nutans* in high vegetation, which suggests that the ruderal existence and long-distance  
47 dispersal may be very important for these species.

48 The environment strongly influenced the dispersal-establishment relationship for both  
49 species in our study. As expected, wind had a strong positive effect on dispersal distances.  
50 Vegetation height reduces wind speed at dispersal height, and thereby reduces dispersal

1 distances. Seeds were also sometimes intercepted by vegetation in the high-vegetation  
2 experiments (low outliers in Fig 3). For both species the loss of dispersal capacity is dramatic  
3 in high vegetation / low wind, which in turn affects the hypothesized optimal seed mass for  
4 colonization (Fig 7). This general conclusion can be (and has been) drawn on the basis of seed  
5 characteristics only (terminal velocity and germination), as the expected dispersal distance in  
6 the common ballistic equation (equation 2; also the mean of the WALD model) is inversely  
7 related to terminal velocity. However, estimating the exact shape of the relationship under  
8 varying environmental conditions requires a probability distribution of dispersal distances,  
9 provided by the mechanistic dispersal model (WALD) in this study. Using this model we can  
10 estimate the shape of the dispersal-establishment relationship for any of the seed traits and  
11 environmental variables included in the model.

12 This being said, one must keep in mind that any model is a simplification of nature.  
13 This goes for the WALD model as well as for the conceptual model (Fig. 1) in this study.  
14 Although the WALD model has proved to be a good model for several species at the scales at  
15 which we can measure (Katul et al. 2005; Skarpaas and Shea 2007), it may not be able to  
16 represent extreme long-distance dispersal (Katul et al. 2005). This will affect our ability to  
17 represent the dispersal-establishment relationship correctly if suitable habitat and safe sites  
18 are far apart. In nature, there are also additional possible connections among the variables that  
19 we ignore in our analysis because of the experimental design. For instance, in our dispersal  
20 experiments seeds were released at random with respect to wind speeds, but natural seed  
21 release is strongly affected by wind, humidity and other environmental conditions (Skarpaas  
22 et al. 2006; Jongejans et al. 2007a). Moreover, vegetation height and seed release height (a  
23 function of plant height) are probably positively correlated in many natural settings (except  
24 for e.g. pastures in which cattle graze around thistles), but in our experiments seeds were  
25 released at random heights independently of vegetation height. Finally, vegetation structure,  
26 including vegetation height, will also most likely affect germination and seedling survival and  
27 growth through its effect on light and water availability. In our experiments, germination and  
28 seedling growth tests were carried out under standardized favourable conditions in a  
29 greenhouse. This allows the direct analysis of the dispersal-establishment relationship on the  
30 same seeds, while also increasing the statistical power in comparison to realistic conditions  
31 (where a worst-case scenario would be no germination at all). This means that our exploration  
32 of consequences for the dispersal-establishment relationship does not include effects of  
33 vegetation on germination and seedling growth. There is some evidence that establishment  
34 and seedling growth are reduced in dense and tall vegetation, suggesting better recruitment in  
35 open microsites (Jongejans et al. 2007; Shea unpublished data), but we do not know how this  
36 relates to seed size. If tall vegetation reduces germination in all seeds, the optimum in Figure  
37 7 would be the same, but if small seeds are affected disproportionately (see e.g. Coomes and  
38 Grubb 2003), the optimum seed mass would be higher.

39 The evolutionary outcome in any particular case may deviate from the relationship  
40 depicted in Figure 7 for a variety of reasons. Even if there is a negative correlation between  
41 dispersal and establishment, this is not sufficient to imply causality or the existence of a trade-  
42 off (Knops et al. 2007). We did not control for genetic effects (and have no information about  
43 seed masses of parents), so here we are dealing with correlations of phenotypic traits for  
44 which the genetic basis is unknown. As far as we know, the heritability of seed size in  
45 *Carduus* has not been investigated, but studies of a range of other plant species suggest that  
46 seed size may be affected by parental genes as well as parental environments (e.g. Stratton  
47 1989; Mazer and Wolfe 1992; Wheelwright 1993). Furthermore, the seed mass predictions in  
48 this study are made on the level of individual seeds and not on the level of mother plants: the  
49 fitness of mother plants, i.e. the relative number of expected offspring over a lifetime, also  
50 depends on other trade-offs such as growth vs. reproduction (Metcalf et al. 2008) and seed



1 number vs. seed size (Jakobsson and Eriksson 2003), in addition to environmental factors  
2 such as post-dispersal seed predation (Jongejans et al. in prep.) and the availability of safe  
3 sites (Geritz et al. 1984; Bullock et al. 1995; Bullock 2000). The panels in Figure 7 apply  
4 within homogeneous patches of high or low vegetation. Widely dispersed seeds may  
5 encounter different conditions for establishment: if they are better than in the source patch  
6 (e.g. less competitive), any negative dispersal-establishment relationship may be cancelled  
7 out; if they are worse, it may be even stronger. Moreover, the dispersal-establishment  
8 correlation may also be modified by processes at later stages in the life cycle: for instance, the  
9 disadvantage of *C. acanthoides* in the initial colonization by seed (dispersal and germination)  
10 may be countered by faster seedling growth (Fig 5C).

11 Thus a number of factors, both species-specific and environmental in origin, will  
12 introduce variability that will affect the evolutionary outcome in any particular case.  
13 Simplifications are necessary to separate the essence from the noise, and a mechanistic  
14 modelling approach has the potential to include, and integrate over, relevant sources of  
15 variability. A complete mechanistic analysis of all of the relevant factors is beyond the scope  
16 of this paper, but we consider this a useful first step. A mechanistic approach will help to  
17 understand the seed mass-dispersal-establishment paradox, and also to study more complex  
18 relationships than just positive, negative or non-existent correlations between dispersal and  
19 establishment. This makes it possible to go beyond simple detection and description of the  
20 dispersal-establishment relationship and has allowed us to explore its mechanistic dependence  
21 on species traits and environmental conditions in detail. Such a mechanistic approach will  
22 lead to a better understanding and quantification of potentially opposing selection pressures  
23 on traits like seed mass, as well as of the diluting effects of other seed, plant and  
24 environmental factors.

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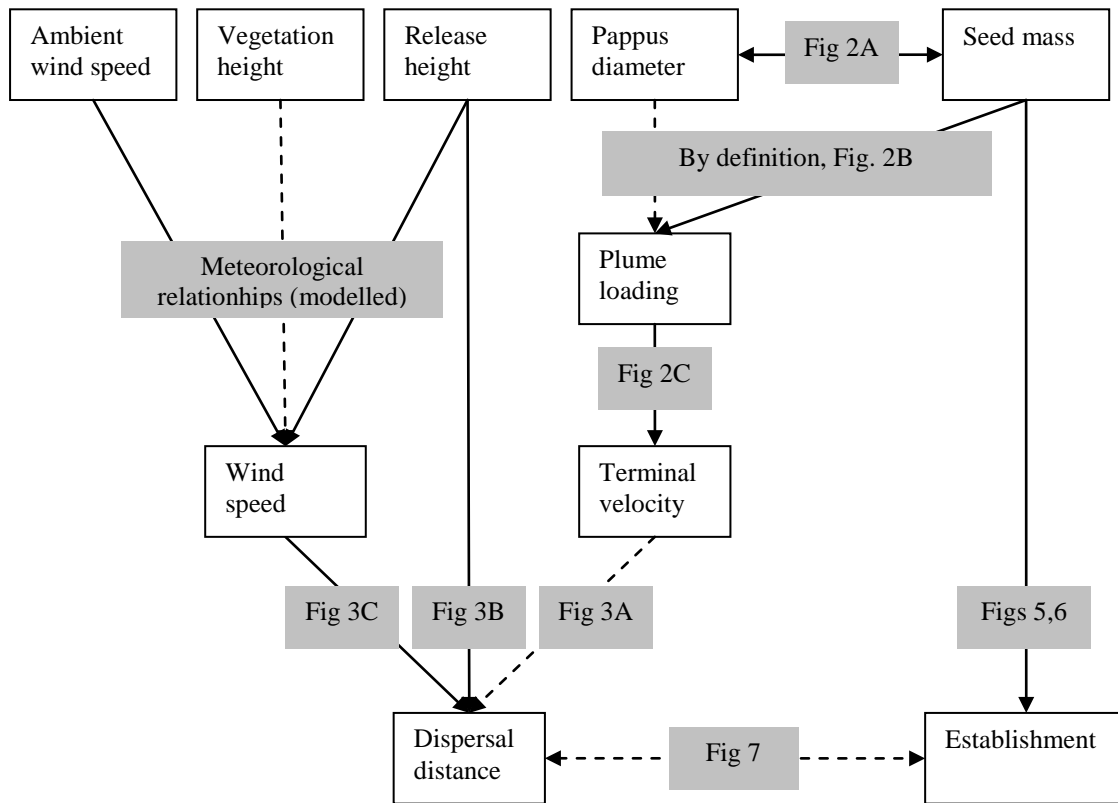
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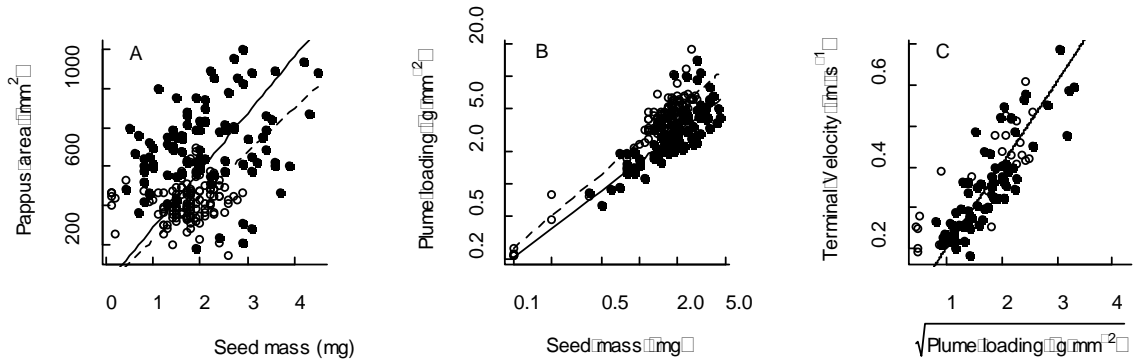
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32

# 1 Figures



2  
 3 Figure 1. Conceptual model of modeled and hypothetical relationships among plant traits,  
 4 environment, dispersal and establishment. Solid lines indicate positive relationships; dashed  
 5 lines indicate negative relationships. Gray boxes refer to figures illustrating results for each  
 6 connection, except for the meteorological relationships, which are not tested in this study, but  
 7 modelled using standard methods (see Methods). ‘Ambient wind speed’ is the horizontal wind  
 8 speed at measurement height (2 m); ‘Wind speed’ is the wind speed as perceived by the  
 9 dispersal unit, estimated as the average horizontal wind speed between release height and the  
 10 ground. As measures of ‘Establishment’ we use germination or seedling growth, as specified  
 11 for each analysis.  
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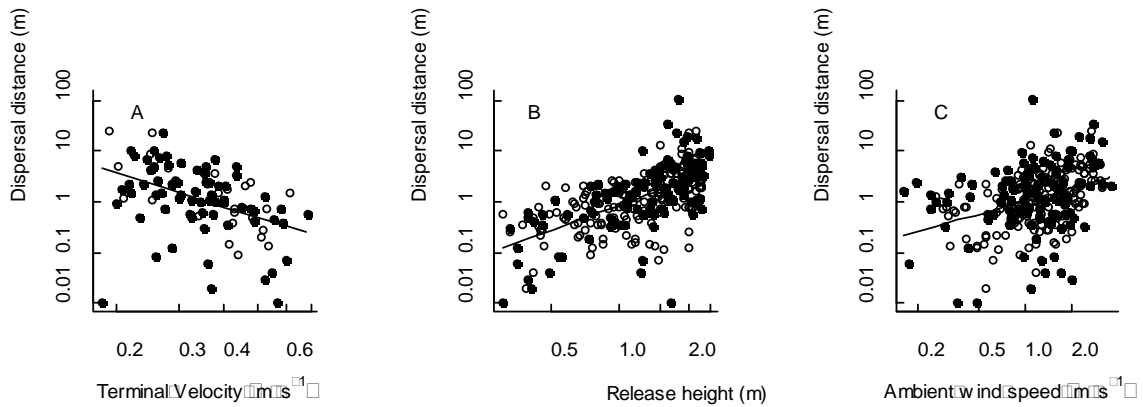
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3 Figure 2. Relationships among dispersal-related seed traits in *Carduus*. Observations and  
 4 fitted regression models for *Carduus nutans* (filled circles; solid lines) and *C. acanthoides*  
 5 (open circles; dashed lines). In C the single regression line applies to both species; they were  
 6 not significantly different.  $R^2$  values: (A) 0.83, (B) 0.96, (C) 0.96.

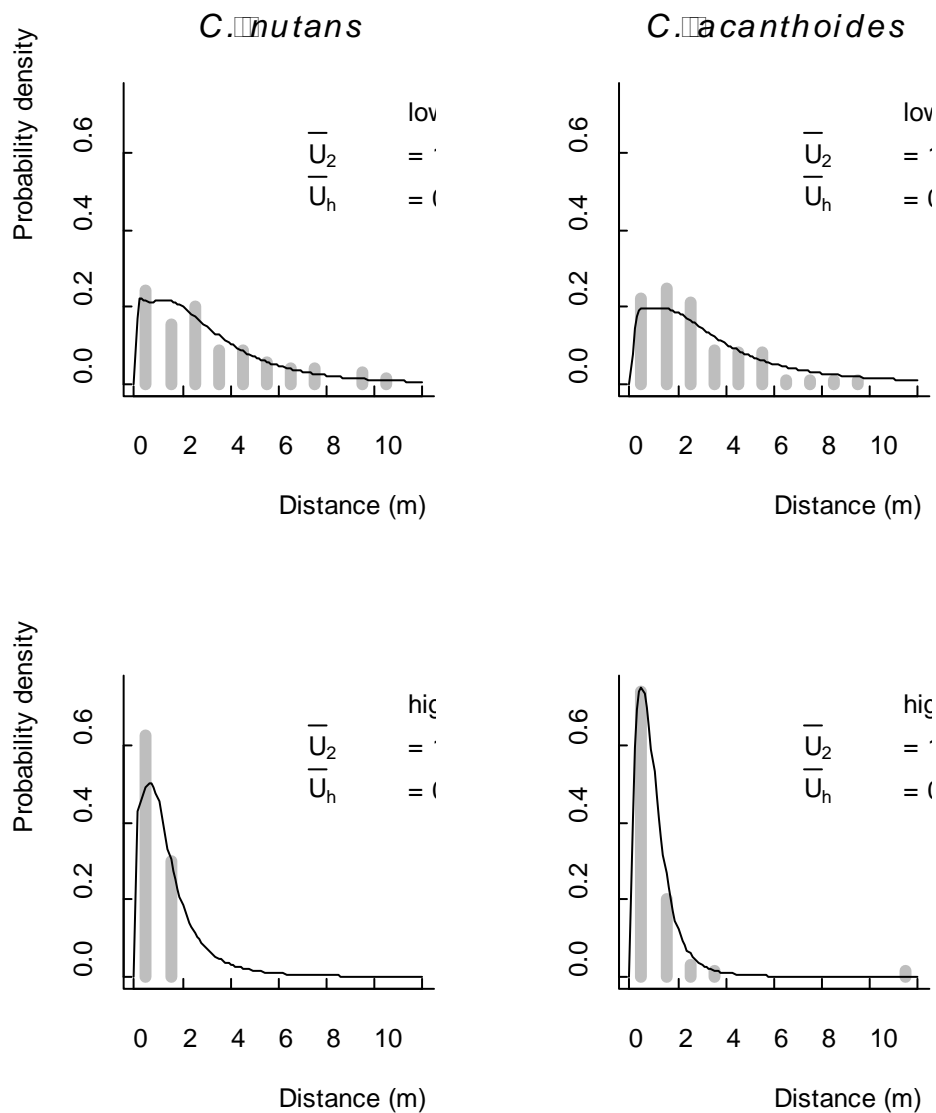
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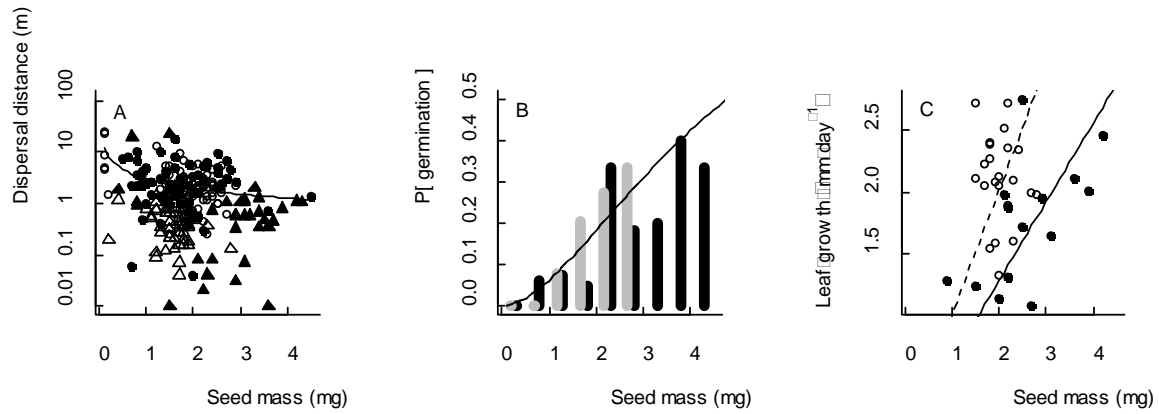
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9 Figure 3. Relationships among *Carduus* seed traits, environmental conditions and dispersal.  
 10 Observations for *Carduus nutans* (filled circles) and *C. acanthoides* (open circles) and  
 11 regression models for both species (lines).  $R^2$  values: (A) 0.18, (B) 0.38, (C) 0.13.

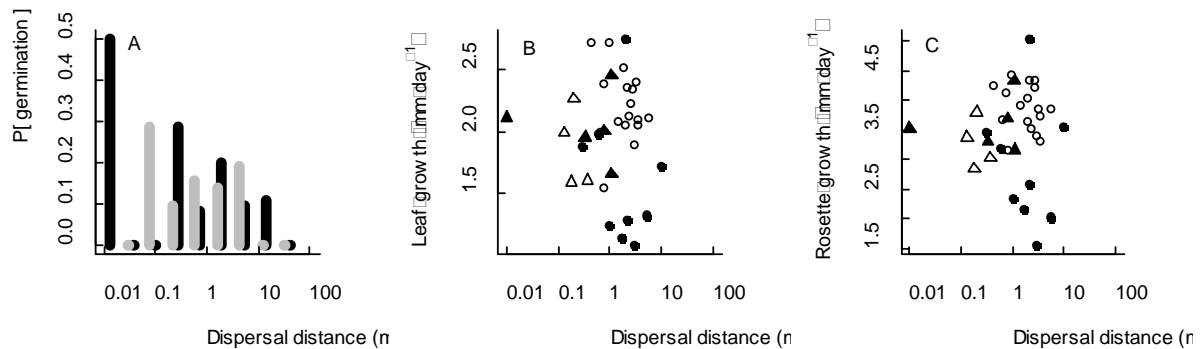
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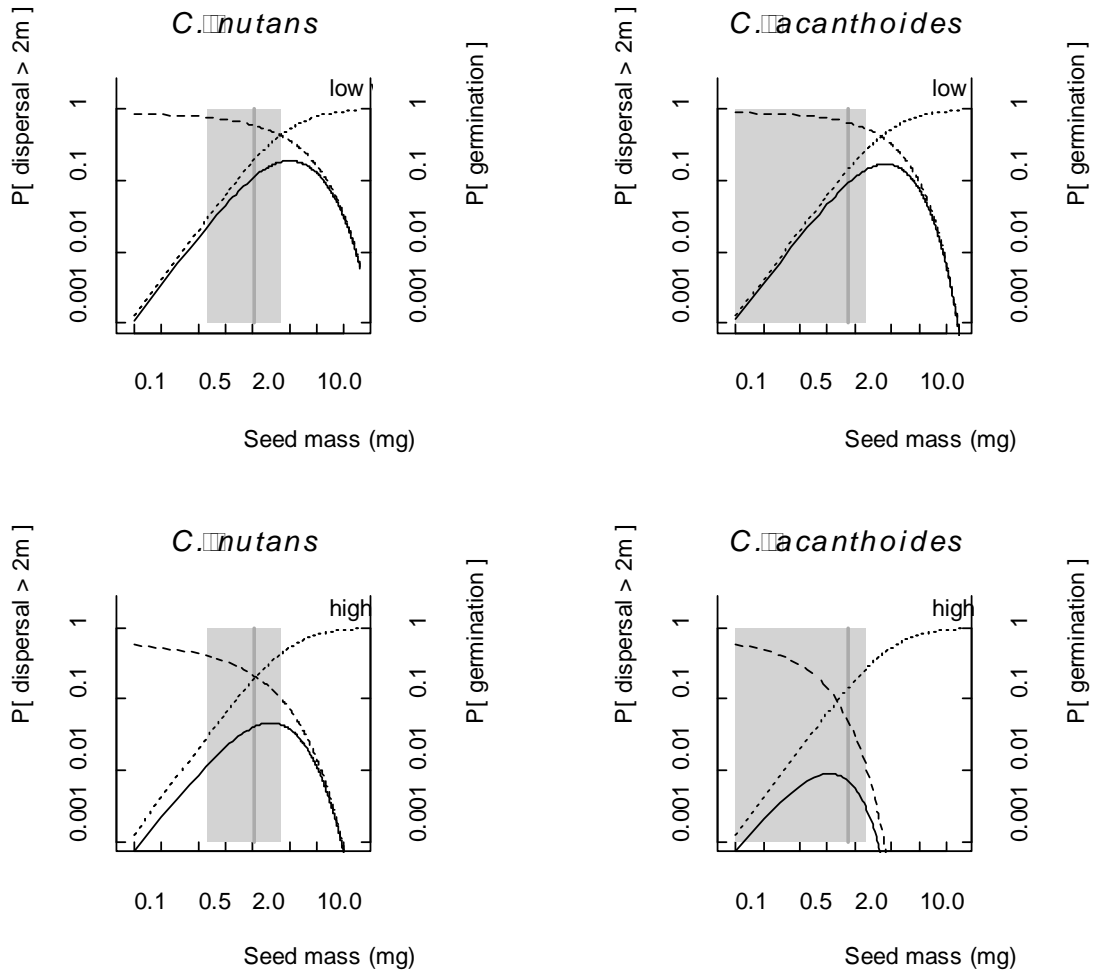
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 2 Figure 4. Observed (bars) and predicted distributions of dispersal distances using the  
 3 integrated WALD model (lines) for *Carduus nutans* and *C. acanthoides* in low and high  
 4 vegetation (a few observations > 12 m are omitted for clarity; see Fig. 3). Mean wind speeds  
 5 are given for each study at measurement height (2 m;  $U_2$ ) and between release height and  
 6 ground ( $U_h$ ).  
 7



1  
 2 Figure 5. Effects of seed mass on (A) dispersal, (B) germination and (C) leaf growth in  
 3 *Carduus nutans* (filled symbols) and *C. acanthoides* (open symbols). In A, observations from  
 4 low-vegetation studies are indicated by circles and high-vegetation studies by triangles. B  
 5 shows the observed (bars) and predicted (line) probability of germination as a function of seed  
 6 mass (logistic regression) for *C. nutans* (black bars) and *C. acanthoides* (gray bars). C shows  
 7 observed and predicted seedling growth as a function of seed mass (linear regression through  
 8 the origin), measured as the average daily growth of the longest leaf (left) for *C. nutans* (filled  
 9 circles, solid lines) and *C. acanthoides* (open circles, dashed lines).  
 10



11  
 12 Figure 6. Relationships between observed dispersal and (A) germination, (B) leaf growth and  
 13 (C) rosette growth in *Carduus nutans* (filled symbols, black bars) and *C. acanthoides* (open  
 14 symbols, gray bars). In B and C observations from low-vegetation studies are indicated by  
 15 circles and high-vegetation studies by triangles.  
 16



1  
 2 Figure 7. Modelled relationship between dispersal and establishment (germination and  
 3 seedling survival), and the effect of the environment, assuming homogeneous effects of  
 4 vegetation height on establishment across seeds of all sizes. Each panel shows the probability  
 5 of dispersing > 2 m (dashed line, predicted by the WALD model; Equation 1), the probability  
 6 of establishment (dotted line, predicted by the logistic regression model; Fig 5) and the  
 7 resulting probability of colonization > 2 m from the mother plant (solid line; product of  
 8 dispersal and establishment probabilities) as a function of seed mass. Means (gray vertical  
 9 line) and ranges (95% confidence intervals; gray shading) of observed seed mass are indicated  
 10 in each case. Note that the evolutionary optimal seed mass may also depend on several other  
 11 factors (see the text for details).



1 Table 1. Dispersal experiments for *Carduus nutans* and *C. acanthoides* at sites with low and high vegetation (pastures and wastelands  
 2 respectively) in Central Pennsylvania 2003 and 2004. Number of seeds released ( $N$ ) and horizontal ( $U_z$ ) and vertical ( $W$ ) wind speeds (means, SD  
 3 in parentheses) at 2 m above ground. Seeds from experiment 2, 4, 6 and 7 were used for seed trait and germination trials.  
 4  
 5

	Date	Site	Species	Vegetation	$N$	$U_2$ (ms <sup>-1</sup> )	$W_2$ (ms <sup>-1</sup> )	
6	1	29 July 2003	Garman farm, Elliptsburg	<i>C. nutans</i>	low	150	1.00 (0.69)	-*
7	2	23 July 2004	Garman farm, Elliptsburg	<i>C. nutans</i>	low	70	1.33 (0.72)	0.01 (0.10)
8	3	1 Sep. 2004	Allen & Commerce, Carlisle	<i>C. nutans</i>	high	70	1.07 (0.51)	-0.10 (0.13)
9	4	22 Sep. 2004	Allen & Commerce, Carlisle	<i>C. nutans</i>	high	40	0.97 (0.50)	-0.10 (0.20)
10	5	16 Sep. 2003	Haller farm, State College	<i>C. acanthoides</i>	low	150	2.99 (0.83)	-*
11	6	17 Aug. 2004	Haller farm, State College	<i>C. acanthoides</i>	low	100	1.66 (0.67)	-0.10 (0.12)
12	7	17 Aug. 2004	Big Hollow, State College	<i>C. acanthoides</i>	high	70	1.03 (0.56)	-0.08 (0.20)
13	8	4 Oct. 2004	Big Hollow, State College	<i>C. acanthoides</i>	high	54	1.21 (0.68)	-0.07 (0.30)

14 \* Vertical wind speeds were not measured in 2003.  
 15

16  
 17  
 18 Table 2. Traits of the achene-pappus dispersal unit (mean and SD) for *Carduus nutans* and *C. acanthoides*, with sample sizes ( $N$ ) and  $P$ -values  
 19 for a two-sided t-test for the difference between them.  
 20

Trait	<i>C. nutans</i>			<i>C. acanthoides</i>		$P$
	Mean (SD)	$N$	Mean (SD)	$N$		
22 Seed mass (mg)	2.1 (1.0)	96	1.7 (0.6)	142	0.001	
23 Plume diameter (mm)	29.6 (4.7)	107	22.9 (2.7)	163	< 0.001	
24 Plume area (mm <sup>2</sup> )	706.9 (212.2)	107	419.3 (96.5)	163	< 0.001	
25 Plume loading (g mm <sup>-2</sup> )	3.26 (2.27)	96	4.27 (1.95)	139	< 0.001	
26 Terminal velocity (m s <sup>-1</sup> )	0.35 (0.11)	68	0.39 (0.12)	25	0.184	