C.W. Hunt (Referee)
chunt@unh.edu Received and published: 18 August 2014
Review of Abril et al. "Technical Note: Large overestimation of pCO2 calculated from pH and alkalinity in acidic, organic-rich freshwaters."

Comment 1 - “GENERAL COMMENTS
I read this manuscript with great interest, as it addresses a topic my colleagues and I have been considering for quite a while, with large implications for the current understanding of freshwater air-water CO2 fluxes. The featured dataset of concurrent ph/TA/pCO2 measurements represents a valuable first step in examining potential errors in large-scale pCO2 flux estimates based on TA and pH measurements, and the decision to structure the manuscript as a technical note seems sound. However, the data also present an opportunity to explore possible ways to refine or even correct estimates of pCO2 from the TA/pH pairing. While such refinements or corrections would most likely be variable and site-dependent, they offer a chance to substantially improve current regional or global CO2 flux estimates.
The scientific quality of this paper is high. The authors employed well-documented methods for field and laboratory measurements, and a reasonable approach to derive pCO2 from TA/pH. Except for some suggestions to improve language usage listed in under Technical Corrections, the authors do a fine job presenting their data and findings.”

Reply 1 – We thank C.W. Hunt for his very positive overall evaluation of our MS. Indeed, one crucial question raised by the three referees can be summarized as: “Is it possible to correct the bias in calculated pCO2 data?”. In fact, we tested several methods to derive empirical relationships that could be used to correct the pCO2 calculated from pH and TA. Unfortunately, we found no reliable consistent quantitative relationships to allow correcting for the bias in pCO2 when values are derived from pH, DOC, and TA.

The first approach consisted in calculating organic alkalinity from pH and DOC using the models of Driscoll et al (1989) –which assumes a single apparent pK value for organic acids- and the model of Hruska et al. (2003) – a triprotic model which assumes three apparent pK values-. These two organic acid models applied to our data led to very similar organic alkalinity values (See attached figure 1A). The organic alkalinity was then subtracted from the TA and the pCO2 was re-calculated from the measured pH and the TA value corrected from organic acids. pCO2 values corrected that way were, however, still very different from those measured in the field (See figure 1B), being sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the measured values.

The second approach consisted in subtracting from the measured TA, the alkalinity calculated with the CO2sys program using as input parameters the measured pH and pCO2, in order to derive a non-carbonate alkalinity (NCA). Besides the fact that NCA derived that way was often negative (probably due to large sensitivity of calculation from the pCO2/pH pairing), it was neither (or weakly) correlated with DOC, nor with pH (See Figure 2). Consequently, we could not derive any empirical relationship useful to correct for the bias in pCO2 calculation.

Change 1 – In the revised version of our MS, we include a description of these attempts to correct calculated pCO2 from the available parameter (pH, TA, DOC and measured pCO2).

Comment 2 - “SPECIFIC COMMENTS
P11708 L22: Some discussion of the effect of filtering TA samples would be helpful. The one study I am aware of which discusses the filtration effect on freshwater alkalinity is Williams et al. (2009), who did not observe a significant difference between filtered and unfiltered alkalinities. However, that study examined low-DOC waters, which may differ from the waters in this study. Technically you measured dissolved alkalinity (DA), not total alkalinity (TA). They are probably functionally equivalent, but it is a point worth mentioning. Chanson and Millero (2007) discuss the

filtration question with regard to open-ocean samples, and found no difference between filtered and unfiltered alkalinity. However, the particulate loads in your sampled rivers are probably much larger than open ocean waters.

Reply 2 – All our TA measurements were made on filtered samples. We agree with the referee that filtering is crucial in freshwaters. However, we made no comparison between filtered and unfiltered samples, so we cannot improve any understanding on this aspect. However, we expect that in white water rivers, with high TSM values, there could be an effect of dissolution of $CaCO_3$ particles during titration that should affect the TA values. If we refer to definition of total alkalinity of Dickson (1981) it refers to the total sum of bases in one kilogram of sample for a $pH > 4.5$. Hence, TA should by definition relate solely to solutes and exclude particles.

Dickson, AG. 1981. An exact definition of total alkalinity and a procedure for the estimation of alkalinity and total inorganic carbon from titration data. Deep-Sea Research Part a-Oceanographic Research Papers. 28:609-623.

Change 2 – In the absence of comparative data, we avoided a long discussion on TA titration on unfiltered samples. Nevertheless, we mentioned in the revised MS that TA measurements should be done on filtered samples, otherwise some additional bias would appear in turbid samples.

Comment 3 – “P11710 L14-28 This section provides some very valuable insights, and I especially appreciate the ranking of sites in Table 2 by pH and TA to illustrate the trends in pCO_2 overestimation, but I urge the authors to explore the interactions between pCO_2 over- estimation and pH and DOC further. I point this out because although the pairing of TA and pH to estimate pCO_2 is problematic, as well illustrated in this work, it is also potentially extremely valuable, as there is a wealth of TA and pH data worldwide stretching back many decades. In our Hunt et al. (2011) paper we observed a relatively robust linear relationship between pH and the percentage of TA comprised of NCA, especially at $pH<7$. Subsequent unpublished data has shown the same trend, albeit with a somewhat different slope of the linear regression. It seems that the authors could attempt a similar regression, which may offer a simple pH-based correction factor, either gross or site-specific, which could be applied to the calculated pCO_2 values. I wonder if such a correction factor could yield ’good enough’ corrected calculated pCO_2 to make the use of TA and pH on broad regional or global scales possible. Additionally, we have seen promise in power relationships between DOC concentration and non-carbonate alkalinity concentration, which could potentially also be used to derive a correction factor for use with the TA-pH pairing.”

Reply 3 – Refer also to reply 1. We fully agree it would be useful to provide such empirical correction factor. The referee refers to a method he used to estimate non carbonate alkalinity (NCA), based on the comparison of measured TA with that calculated from pH and DIC. Our dataset concerns pCO_2, pH, TA, Temperature and DOC only. So we could calculate TA from the pH/pCO_2 pairing, which is relatively uncertain in comparison with calculation from the pH/DIC pairing, owing to the strong correlation between these two parameters (pCO_2 and pH, see also comment 5). As can be seen in Figure B, we found no correlation between NCA (or the proportion of NCA in TA) and pH or DOC.

Change 3 – In table 2, we added a ranking of our dataset by DOC concentration. This ranking confirmed the general interpretation on the role of DOC on pCO_2 overestimation.

Comment 4 – “Further, it seems that the authors have all the data to test a multivariate regression of pCO_2 overestimation against a combination of DOC and pH, which may be even more robust. Any insights the authors could provide to improve the use of TA and pH to calculate pCO_2 would be of great value.”

Reply 4 – A multivariable regression against DOC and pH is inappropriate as these two variables are not independent, since DOC contributes to acidity and is thus correlated with pH. Indeed, any insight to improve the use of TA and pH to calculated would be of great value. However, we found no evidence for the feasibility of a generally valid approach to correct for the bias, and until further studies provide more insights, our conclusion remains that pH/TA pairing should be abandoned in acidic waters.

Change 4 – No change related to this specific comment (multivariable analysis)

Comment 5 – P11711 L18-23: This is interesting! There is evidence in the coastal ocean literature as well that pairing pCO2 and pH to derive TA and DIC produces problematic results (Cullison Gray et al. 2011). The authors of this coastal paper also conclude that the pH- pCO2 pairing are particularly sensitive to measurement error, but did not address how precise pH and pCO2 measurements would need to be in order to accurately retrieve DIC and TA. Mention of this topic is useful in the current manuscript, but perhaps deserves further exploration. It is clear that this manuscript focuses on the derivation of pCO2 from pH and TA, but the authors have all the data needed to perform a very nice sensitivity analysis on the pH-pCO2 pairing. While this may deviate from the central question of the manuscript, I would be very interested in the results of such an analysis.

Reply 5 – Indeed, this deviates from the central question of the MS. Nevertheless, we stress in our MS the difficulty to calculate TA from the pH/pCO2 pairing, as these variables are generally well correlated.

Change 5 – we cite Cullison Gray et al. (2011) in our revised MS to strengthen our argumentation.

TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS
Comment 6 - General: Would it make sense to present alkalinity in µmol L-1 instead of mmol L-1?
Reply/Change 6 – We now use µmol L-1 throughout the manuscript.

Comment 7 – General: I suggest defining shorthand terms: perhaps pCO2calc (calculated pCO2) and pCO2obs (measured pCO2).
Reply 7 – If these expressions are correct, we find it easier, more confortable, and clearer to repeat “calculated pCO2” and “measured pCO2” throughout the ms.

Comment 8 – P11702 L5: I would recommend avoiding ’Nowadays’. For this line perhaps substitute ’Currently’
P11702 L6: add comma: ’freshwaters, and. . .’ P11702 L20-23: awkward sentence
P11703 L28: I would recommend avoiding ’Nowadays’. For this line perhaps substitute ’Presently’
Change 8 – Modified in the revised MS, as suggested

Comment 9 – P11703 L29 and throughout: Change ’water’ to ’aquatic’
Reply 9 – “water pCO2” is widely used by opposition to air pCO$_2$, and may have a different meaning from “aquatic pCO2”

Comment 10 – P11704 L1-2: Some citations here comparing usage of direct and indirect pCO2 observations may be needed
Reply 10 – it is difficult to provide a reference list, as it will never be exhaustive or quantitative (how many papers using calculated versus measured ? how many measured versus calculated pCO2 data in each paper ?, etc…). We have chosen two significant references at the global scale (Cole et al 1994, Raymond et al. 2013).

Comment 11 –
P11704 L3: change to ’carbonic acid (which are a function of temperature)
P11704 L16: change to ’adapted to the variability of pCO2 found in freshwaters.’
P11704 L17: change ’and’ to ’to’ P11704 L18: change ’First works consisted in’ to ’Earlier examples provided a’ P11704 L22: change to ’showed a variability of +/-500’

Reply/ Change 11 – modified in the revised MS as suggested

Comment 12 – P11704 L26: Is 7% agreement excellent? This level might be better described as a 'good' agreement. I suspect pairing TA with a pCO2 +/- 7%, or even +/- 5%, would yield extremely variable calculated pH DIC values, for example.
Reply/ Change 12 – changed to "good agreement"

Comment 13 – P11704 L27: change to 'or underestimated, but'
P11704 L27-29: In this case, I don't think 'we' refers to all the authors of this manuscript. Consider rewriting this sentence to avoid the 'we' pronoun: 'Concurrent measurements of...performed in 2003 in acidic, humic-rich...showed that pCO2 calculation. . .'
P11705 L7: change to 'organic acid anions'
P11705 L15: 'exponentially' is a really quantitative term. Consider substituting 'dramatically'
Reply/ Change 13 – modified in the revised MS as suggested

Comment 14 – P11706 L4-12: A map of sampling locations, perhaps with unique markers corresponding to the various publications referenced, would be very helpful
Reply 14 – A world map showing the 12 sampling sites is provided in the revised MS

Comment 15 – P11708 L12-13: awkward sentence
P11708 L16: Separate into two sentences, suggest changing to 'In addition to the IR analysers generally used in this work, in the Sinnamary River pCO2 was also. . .'
P11708 L29: change to 'capped'
P11709 L1: change to 'Shimadzu'
P11709 L17-18: awkward sentence
P11709 L24-25: awkward sentence
P11710 L7: change to 'more than 10%'
P11710 L12: change to 'The largest overestimation of pCO2calc occurred in the most. . .'
P11710 L14 Should this refer to Fig 3b, instead of Fig. 2b?
P11711 L3: the phrase 'calculated pCO2 overestimation' is awkward
P11711 L6: the rivers in Hunt et al. 2011 were located in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Maine (USA) and New Brunswick (Canada). Perhaps just say 'New England (USA) and New Brunswick (CA) rivers'
Reply / change 15 – modified in the revised MS as suggested.

Comment 16 – P11711 L9-10: In our Hunt et al. 2011 paper we made some important assumptions about non-carbonate inorganic contributions to alkalinity, but did not test these assumptions experimentally. We did not have concurrent nutrient measurements, so our N, P and Si values were taken from other work in the Oyster River. For other rivers described in that paper we did not have any N,P or Si data to examine their effects upon alkalinity. From the pKa values of nitrate, phosphate and silicate it is probably safe to assume that they do not contribute to alkalinity at the observed river pH. We also assumed that aluminum species did not contribute, which may or not be true.
Reply / change 16 – We changed the sentence "in addition, the contribution of inorganic species other than carbonate was negligible and most of the NCA could be attributed to organic acid anions" to "in addition, the contribution of inorganic species other than carbonate was assumed negligible and most of the NCA was attributed to organic acid anions".

Comment 17 – P11711 L16-18 Awkward sentence, suggest 'evidencing the predominant role of organic acids in DIC speciation and pH in such acidic systems. Because we did not directly measure DIC. . .'
P11712 L3 Suggest change 'far from' to 'not only' P11712 L23 Suggest changing 'above' to 'requiring'
P11714 L1 'World' does not need to be capitalized P11714 L6 Suggest removing 'ones'.

P11714 L5-10 This is a very long sentence. Suggest separating into two or three shorter sentences.

P117714 L25 Suggest removing 'as such'

Reply / change 17 – modified in the revised MS as suggested.

Comment 18 – REFERENCES

Chanson, M. and F.J. Millero. 2007. Effect of filtration on the total alkalinity of open- ocean seawater. Limnol. and Oceanogr.: Methods 5: 292-295.

Cullison Gray, S.E., DeGranpre, M.E., Moore, T.S., Martz, T.R., Friedrich, G.E. and K.S. Johnson. 2011. Applications of in situ pH measurements for inorganic carbon calculations. Marine Chemistry 125: 82-90.

Williams, A.J., Andersen, C.B. and G.P. Lewis. 2009. Evaluating the effects of sample processing treatments on alkalinity measurements. Journal of Hydrology 377: 455- 464.

Reply / change 18 We cite the Cullison Gray paper in order to strengthen the sensitivity to analytical errors in TA calculated from pH and pCO2.

Anonymous Referee #2

Comments to the manuscript by Abril et al. bg-2014-341, Technical note: "Large over- estimation of pCO2 calculated from pH and alkalinity in acidic, organic-rich freshwaters".

Comment 1 – Overview :

The study presents a technical note where directly determined pCO2 (equilibrator or headspace techniques) and indirectly calculated pCO2 (from total alkalinity, pH and temperature) were compared across a wide range of freshwater systems. The authors found a large deviation between the two methods where the indirect determination generally overestimate the pCO2. They further found that this overestimation was highest in low carbonate alkalinity, low pH and high DOC waters (> 100% in the 25% most organic-rich and acidic samples). They explain the large deviation by the influence of organic acids on the total alkalinity determination but also that the lower buffering capacity of the carbonate system at low pH increases the sensitivity of the calculated pCO2. The main message of the study is consequently that large scale studies of pCO2 should not solely use indirect determination, this is especially true for low pH and organic-rich waters. Based on this the authors further suggest that recent large scale studies on CO2 emissions from inland waters might have overestimated the flux due to being based on potentially biased data.

The manuscript focus on an important methodological topic that is very suitable for publication in Biogeosciences I believe. The amount of published papers dealing with inland freshwater CO2 emissions at various scales is rapidly increasing. Many of these are based on such indirect methods without or with little validation of the results. In the race of getting these global/regional estimates and due to the lack of directly determined pCO2, general chemistry data bases are often used but without considering the limitations of the data nor the methods used. Although the knowledge about weaknesses in the indirect determination of pCO2 is not totally new, there is a need for bringing the discussion to light, something that I think this manuscript really does.

Reply 1 – We thank the referee for his/her very positive overall evaluation of our MS.

Comment 2 – General comments:

With this background the manuscript is an important contribution to the research field. The authors present an impressive data set covering a wide geochemical and geographical range. Even not directly important for the comparison I especially appreciate the African contribution since this part of the world often is underrepresented in related studies. The manuscript is well written, includes solid data derived from standard and clear methodology and should be publishable after rather minor clarifications/additions. However, I find it a bit strange that the authors do not present ways to compensate for the influence of organic acids on the total alkalinity determination. This would be of great interest and use for future pCO2 estimates based on standard water chemistry data. Methods to do that are there in the literature (see detailed comments below) and with the great data set that the authors present this would really lift the story and the overall impact.

Reply 2 – Indeed, one crucial question raised by the three referees can be summarized as: “Is it possible to correct the bias in calculated pCO2 data?”. In fact, we tested several methods to derive empirical relationships that could be used to correct the pCO2 calculated from pH and TA. Unfortunately, we found no reliable consistent quantitative relationships to allow correcting for the bias in pCO2 when values are derived from pH, DOC, and TA.

The first approach consisted in calculating organic alkalinity from pH and DOC using the models of Driscoll et al (1989) –which assumes a single apparent pK value for organic acids- and the model of Hruska et al. (2003) – a triprotic model which assumes three apparent pK values-. These two organic acid models applied to our data led to very similar organic alkalinity values (See attached figure 1A). The organic alkalinity was then subtracted from the TA and the pCO2 was re-calculated from the measured pH and the TA value corrected from organic acids. pCO2 values corrected that way were, however, still very different from those measured in the field (See figure 1B), being sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the measured values.

The second approach consisted in subtracting from the measured TA, the alkalinity calculated with the CO2sys program using as input parameters the measured pH and pCO2, in order to derive a non-carbonate alkalinity (NCA). Besides the fact that NCA derived that way was often negative (probably due to large sensitivity of calculation from the pCO2/pH pairing), it was neither (or poorly) correlated with DOC, nor with pH (See Figure 2). Consequently, we could not derive any empirical relationship useful to correct for the bias in pCO2 calculation.

Change 2 – In the revised version of our MS, we include a description of these attempts to correct calculated pCO2 from the available parameter (pH, TA, DOC and measured pCO2).

Comment 3 – Detailed comments:
Ln 5 p.11702. Replace “Nowadays” with “Still” for example.
Ln 15-17 p. 11703. I suggest to rephrase this sentence. In non-carbonate and organic- rich soils I would say that DOC commonly exceeds the DIC. Of course it is tricky to write about general global patterns. But I suggest to formulate it differently.
Reply / Change 3 – Modified in the revised MS, as suggested

Comment 4 – Ln 24-27 p.11703. It is not totally clear to me what variability the authors refer to when they mention that pCO2 can vary more than 4 orders of magnitude. Spatially, temporally or maybe spatiotemporally? Could be clarified.
Reply / Change 4. In the revised MS, we specify that this refers to spatiotemporal variations.

Comment 5 – Ln 28 p. 11703. Again replace “Nowadays” with something more suitable Ln 3 p. 11704. Should be “carbonic acid” not “carbon acid” Ln 16 p. 11705. Include “pCO2” before “values”
Reply / Change 5 – Modified in the revised MS, as suggested

Comment 6 – Ln 23- p. 11706-11707. The whole section about the pH determination sounds a bit vague (see below) and since pH is such a critical parameter in the calculations I think it needs to be improved. “Water temperature and pH were measured in the field with different probes depending on the origin of the dataset”. To measure pH is not easy, this is especially true for waters with low-ionic strength. In such waters specific electrodes are needed in order to receive a stable and accurate pH reading. It is not easy to judge how well this is considered or if it is a potential problem in the included systems from the existing pH description in the manuscript. From my own experience I often find field based pH meters more unreliable (even if well-calibrated) than lab based ones, however bringing the water to lab is associated with other uncertainty as the authors also mention.

Reply 6 – We totally agree that it is not easy to judge how well pH is measured in general. If this is true for our own dataset, it may be even more critical for pH data obtained by environmental agencies. Comments by the referee were based on his/her own experience, as in fact, no quantitative study that compares pH-meters, electrodes, field and lab measurements, storage impact, etc…, are available in the literature. In the discussion of the first version of our MS we wrote "Thus, one factor of variability throughout the dataset as well as in literature data is the accuracy of pH measurements – despite the care taken (e.g, calibrations with NBS buffers for each day of measurements), we cannot rule out that drift or malfunction of pH electrodes contribute to the observed variability, constituting an additional disadvantage compared to direct pCO2 measurements with very stable gas analysers".

Change 6 – in the revised MS, we stress more the difficulties of pH measuring, also in the method section of the paper, following the suggestions of the reviewer.

Comment 7 – Ln 6 p. 11707. I suggest to move the date to after "Rivers" Ln 16 p. 11707. What kind of IR gas analyser? Ln 21 p. 11708. Add "determination" after GC.
Reply/change 7 Modified in the revised MS as suggested.

Comment 8 – A general concern in the method section is the lack of info about the basic chemistry of the carbonate system. Below pH 5.4-5.6 there should in theory be no carbonate alkalinity. These limits (or similar) are also often used in studies where pCO2 is calculated from alkalinity
Reply 8 – Alkalinity is operationally defined (in our case the GRAN function between pH 4 and 3, but also in the case of end-point titrations used in environmental agencies, titration can still be performed at pH of less than 5 (the pK of HCO3-/CO2 being around 4.5). In addition, as stated in our submitted MS, we used to aerate our sample before titration in order to remove a fraction of dissolved CO2 before HCO3- titration. This aeration increases the pH at the start of the titration and improves the quality (repeatability) of the alkalinity titration, even at pH around 5. Typical TA values in these cases are generally below 100 µmol L-1.
Change 8 – We provide more details on our TA protocol and mention these pH limits as suggested by the reviewer.

Comment 9 – Ln 2-4 p. 11710. The sentence that starts with "Our dataset. . .." Do not belong in the results as I see it. This is a reflection that is suitable for the discussion.
Reply / Change 9 – Sentence has been moved to discussion.

Comment 10 – Ln 1- p. 11711-. Here comes my main concern directly in the discussion. The influence of organic acids on the total alkalinity is not a new finding and there are ways to quantify and eventually compensate for the influence. In earlier acidification related research, for example Hruska et al. (2003) determined the organic acid concentration just by using pH and DOC as input parameters. This could then be removed from the total alkalinity (similar to the NCA derived from titration) in order to get a more reliable calculated pCO2. This procedure has also been used in earlier studies (see Humborg et al. 2010; Wallin et al. 2014). In addition, Wallin et al. (2014) presented a similar comparison as conducted in this manuscript where alkalinity based pCO2 and pCO2 derived from DIC measurements were compared. Despite considering the organic acids the comparison still showed rather large deviation in the low alkaline waters (highlighting the sensitivity of the carbonate system at low pH). Of course there might be problematic to use such a universal organic acid model over the wide range of included systems as in this study. But to not even mention this opening in the paper feels strange. I think this manuscript really quantify the problems but also has the potential to suggest solutions. I definitely agree though that an increased use of methods focusing on CO2 determination are needed in the future with standardized protocol to follow.
Reply/changes 10 – see also reply 2 and the additional figure A
As in Wallin et al. 2014, we have used the tri-protic model for organic acids of Hruska et al. (2003) in order to estimate the alkalinity of organic acids. We subtracted this organic alkalinity to our measured TA and we re-calculated the pCO2 from the pH and the corrected alkalinity. Water

pCO2 corrected that way were not better correlated to the measured pCO2. To the contrary, some highly negative pCO2 values appeared in the corrected dataset (Figure 1). In our revised MS, we describe these calculations in more details.

Comment 11 – Ln 26-28 p. 11714. An evaluation of a pCO2 method based on calculation from direct DIC determination was recently published this year (Åberg and Wallin, 2014). In this study the method was also compared to a direct headspace technique with good result.
Reply/change 11 – we mention and refer to the results of the paper of Åberg and Wallin, 2014 in the revised MS, as suggested. However, we continue recommending in our MS field direct pCO2 determination, as this is very precise, cheap and easy, and it does depends on the quality of pH measurements.

Comment 12 – References :
Hruska, J., S. Köhler, H. Laudon, and K. Bishop (2003), Is a universal model of or- ganic acidity possible: Comparison of the acid/base properties of dissolved organic carbon in the boreal and temperate zones, Environ. Sci. Technol., 37(9), 1726-1730, doi:10.1021/es0201552
Humborg, C., C. M. Mörth, M. Sundbom, H. Borg, T. Blenckner, R. Giesler, and V. Ittekkot (2010), CO2 supersaturation along the aquatic conduit in Swedish watersheds as constrained by terrestrial respiration, aquatic respiration and weathering, Glob. Change Biol., 16(7), 1966-1978, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2486.2009.02092.x
Wallin, M. B., S. Löfgren, M. Erlandsson, and K. Bishop (2014), Representative regional sampling of carbon dioxide and methane concentrations in hemiboreal headwa- ter streams reveal underestimates in less systematic approaches, Glob. Biogeochem. Cycles, 28(4), 465-479, doi:10.1002/2013gb004715
Åberg, J., and M. B. Wallin (2014), Evaluating a fast headspace method for measuring DIC and subsequent calculation of pCO2 in freshwater systems, Inland Wat., 4(2), 157-166, doi:10.5268/IW-4.2.694

Reply/change 12
We cited Wallin et al (2014), in the submitted MS
We added Hruska et al (2003), and Åberg, and Wallin (2014), and Humborg et al (2010) in the revised MS

Anonymous Referee #3
Received and published: 27 August 2014
Comment 1 – I believe this is a well written and well structured manuscript on a topic of current and relevant interest to a wide community. The subject of methodological bias in calculated pCO2 values is extremely important as more and more people are beginning to utilise large datasets to estimate GHG contributions from inland water systems. Whilst the concept of overestimation is not new, particularly in relation to DOC rich systems, this study presents a very nice dataset with which to test the hypotheses and explore links to other water characteristics. My comments below, which are few, are aimed primarily at improving what I believe is a very good manuscript in its current format.
Reply 1 – We thank the referee for his/her very positive overall evaluation of our MS.

Comment 2 – Introduction: whilst I realise there are practical limitations to the use of high temporal resolution sensors for in-situ CO2 monitoring and therefore the number of studies are so far limited, it may be worth highlighting submerged NDIR sensors as an alternative direct method to measure pCO2.
Reply/change 2. We mention this membrane technique in our revised MS and cite the paper “Direct and continuous measurement of dissolved carbon dioxide in freshwater aquatic systems—method and applications by Johnson et al. (2010) in ECOHYDROLOGY.

Comment 3 – Methods: I am generally happy with the methods section, I felt it was well written and sufficiently detailed using standard and reliable methods. Results section 3.2: I think more

could be made of the correlations that are described but not statistically modelled. Correlation statistics are not shown despite significant correlations being described.
Reply/change 3 – correlation statistics (p values of linear regressions) are now provided in the revised MS, as suggested.

Comment 4 – General Comment: Could simple empirical modelling be used to attempt a correction for the bias? Whilst this may not work across all systems it would be very interesting to try. The authors have shown an important overestimation in studies which utilise large datasets of water quality to indirectly calculate pCO2 and subsequent evasion, they have not however attempted to produce a solution. If an additional calculation step, e.g. including a DOC correlation value, would allow better pCO2 estimates from the available data that would be extremely useful and significantly improve the science. This may not be possible but I would like to see evidence it had been attempted.

Reply 4 - Indeed, one crucial question raised by the three referees can be summarized as: “Is it possible to correct the bias in calculated pCO2 data?”. In fact, we tested several methods to derive empirical relationships that could be used to correct the pCO2 calculated from pH and TA. Unfortunately, we found no reliable consistent quantitative relationships to allow correcting for the bias in pCO2 when values are derived from pH, DOC, and TA.

The first approach consisted in calculating organic alkalinity from pH and DOC using the models of Driscoll et al (1989) –which assumes a single apparent pK value for organic acids- and the model of Hruska et al. (2003) – a triprotic model which assumes three apparent pK values-. These two organic acid models applied to our data led to very similar organic alkalinity values (See attached figure 1A). The organic alkalinity was then subtracted from the TA and the pCO2 was re-calculated from the measured pH and the TA value corrected from organic acids. pCO2 values corrected that way were, however, still very different from those measured in the field (See figure 1B), being sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the measured values.

The second approach consisted in subtracting from the measured TA, the alkalinity calculated with the CO2sys program using as input parameters the measured pH and pCO2, in order to derive a non-carbonate alkalinity (NCA). Besides the fact that NCA derived that way was often negative (probably due to large sensitivity of calculation from the pCO2/pH pairing), it was neither correlated with DOC, nor with pH (See Figure 2). Consequently, we could not derive any empirical relationship useful to correct for the bias in pCO2 calculation.

Change 4 – In the revised version of our MS, we include a description of these attempts to correct calculated pCO2 from the available parameter (pH, TA, DOC and measured pCO2).

additional figure Captions

Figure 1
A: comparison organic alkalinity calculated from pH and DOC using the models of Driscoll et al (1989) –which assumes a single apparent pK value for organic acids- and the triprotic model of Hruska et al. (2003) – which assumes three apparent pK values-. These two organic acid models applied to our data leaded to very similar organic alkalinity values (A).
B: this calculated organic alkalinity was then subtracted from the measured TA. Then the pCO2 was re-calculated from the measured pH and the TA corrected from organic acids. pCO2 values corrected that way were still very different from those measured in the field (B), although being sometime higher and sometimes lower than the measured values.

Figure 2

Non carbonate alkalinity (NCA), as the difference between the alkalinity calculated with the CO2sys program using pH and pCO2 as input parameters, and the measured TA. NCA derived that way, expressed either in concentration (A,C) or as percentage of TA (B,D) was often negative and was neither (or weakly when expressed as % of TA) correlated with DOC, nor with pH. No quantitative empirical relationship could be deduced from these plots.

Figure 1

A: comparison organic alkalinity calculated from pH and DOC using the models of Driscoll et al (1989) –which assumes a single apparent pK value for organic acids- and the triprotic model of Hruska et al. (2003) – which assumes three apparent pK values-. These two organic acid models applied to our data leaded to very similar organic alkalinity values (A).

B: this calculated organic alkalinity was then subtracted from the measured TA. Then the pCO2 was re-calculated from the measured pH and the TA corrected from organic acids. pCO2 values corrected that way were still very different from those measured in the field (B), although being sometime higher and sometimes lower than the measured values.

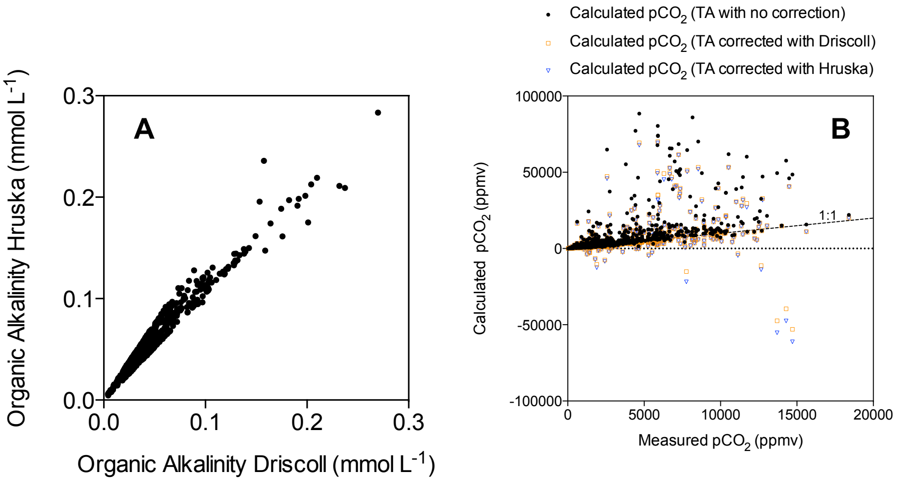
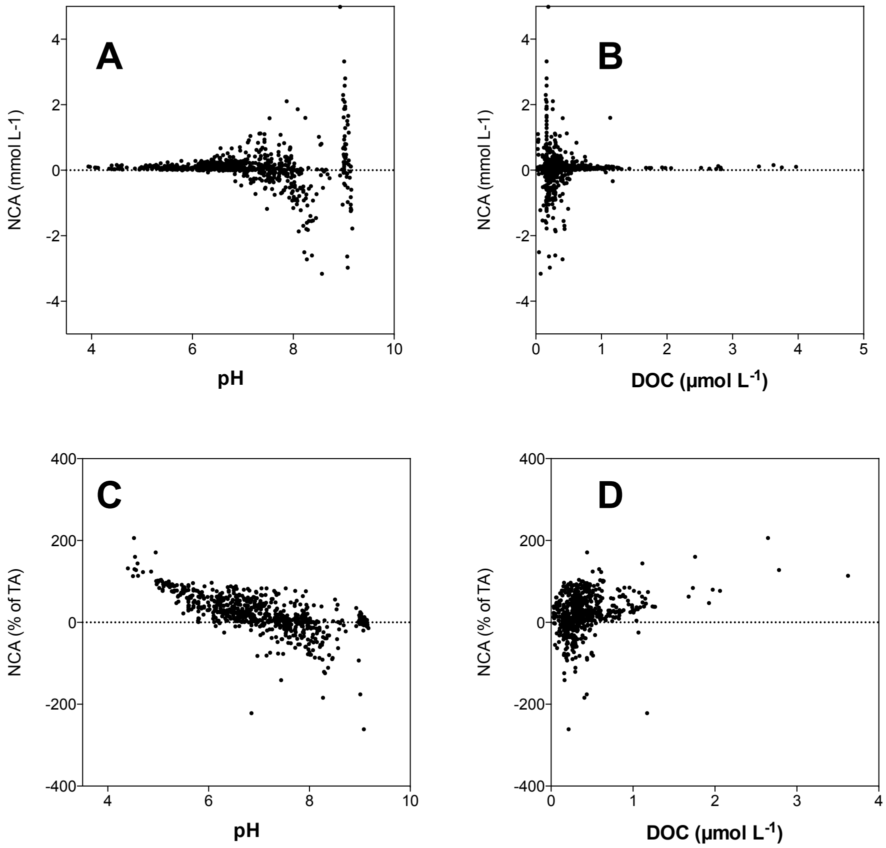


Figure 2

Non carbonate alkalinity (NCA), as the difference between the alkalinity calculated with the CO2sys program using pH and pCO2 as input parameters, and the measured TA. NCA derived that way, expressed either in concentration (A,C) or as percentage of TA (B,D) was often negative and was neither (or weakly when expressed as % of TA) correlated with DOC, nor with pH. No quantitative empirical relationship could be deduced from these plots.



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Technical Note: Large overestimation of pCO_2 calculated from pH and alkalinity in acidic, organic-rich freshwaters

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Abstract

Inland waters have been recognized as a significant source of carbon dioxide (CO_2) to the atmosphere at the global scale. Fluxes of CO_2 between aquatic systems and the atmosphere are calculated from the gas transfer velocity and the water-air gradient of the partial pressure of CO_2 (pCO_2). Currently, direct measurements of water pCO_2 remain scarce in freshwaters, and most published pCO_2 data are calculated from temperature, pH and total alkalinity (TA). Here, we compare calculated (pH and TA) and measured (equilibrator and headspace) water pCO_2 in a large array of temperate and tropical freshwaters. The 761 data points cover a wide range of values for TA (0 to 14200 µmol L^{-1}), pH (3.94 to 9.17), measured pCO_2 (36 to 23000 ppmv), and dissolved organic carbon (DOC) (29 to 3970 µmol L^{-1}). Calculated pCO_2 were >10% higher than measured pCO_2 in 60% of the samples (with a median overestimation of calculated pCO_2 compared to measured pCO_2 of 2560 ppmv) and were >100% higher in the 25% most organic-rich and acidic samples (with a median overestimation of 9080 ppmv). We suggest these large overestimations of calculated pCO_2 with respect to measured pCO_2 are due to the combination of two cumulative effects: (1) a more significant contribution of organic acids anions to TA in waters with low carbonate alkalinity and high DOC concentrations; (2) a lower buffering capacity of the carbonate system at low pH, that increases the sensitivity of calculated pCO_2 to TA in acidic and organic-rich waters. No empirical relationship could be derived from our dataset in order to correct calculated pCO_2 for this bias. Owing to the widespread distribution of acidic, organic-rich freshwaters, we conclude that regional and global estimates of CO_2 outgassing from freshwaters based on pH and TA data only are most likely overestimated, although the magnitude of the overestimation needs further quantitative analysis. Direct measurements of pCO_2 are recommended in inland waters in general, and in particular in acidic, poorly buffered, freshwaters.

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1 Introduction

Inland waters (streams, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, wetlands) receive carbon from terrestrial landscapes, usually have a net heterotrophic metabolism, and emit significant amounts of CO_2 to the atmosphere (Kempe 1984; Cole et al. 1994; Raymond et al. 2013). This terrestrial-aquatic-atmosphere link in the global carbon cycle is controlled by complex biogeographical drivers that generate strong spatial and temporal variations in the chemical composition of freshwaters and the intensity of CO_2 outgassing at the water-air interface (e.g. Tamooh et al. 2013; Dinsmore et al. 2013; Abril et al. 2014; Borges et al. 2014). Hence, large datasets are necessary in order to describe the environmental factors controlling these CO_2 emissions and to quantify global CO_2 fluxes from inland waters (Sobek et al. 2005; Barros et al. 2011; Raymond et al. 2013). Dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC) concentration and speciation in freshwaters greatly depend on the lithological nature of watersheds (Meybeck 1987). For instance, rivers draining watersheds rich in carbonate rocks have a high DIC concentration, generally well above 1000 µmol L^{-1}. Bicarbonate ions contribute to the majority of the total alkalinity (TA) in these waters, which have high conductivities and high pH. In these hard waters, dissolved CO_2 represents a minor fraction (5-15%) of the DIC compared to bicarbonates. In rivers draining organic-rich soils and non-carbonate rocks, DIC concentrations are lower (typically a few hundred µmol L^{-1}) but dissolved organic carbon (DOC) concentrations are higher, and commonly exceed the DIC concentrations. Organic acid anions significantly contribute to TA of these soft waters (Driscoll et al. 1989; Hemond 1990), which have low conductivities and low pH. Dissolved CO_2 represents a large, generally dominant, fraction of DIC in these acidic, organic-rich waters.

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Fluxes of CO_2 between aquatic systems and the atmosphere can be computed from the water-air gradient of the concentration of CO_2 and the gas transfer velocity (Liss and Slater 1974) at local (e.g. Raymond et al. 1997), regional (e.g. Teodoru et al. 2009), and global scales (e.g.

Cole et al. 1994; Raymond et al. 2013). The partial pressure of CO_2 (pCO_2) is relatively constant in the atmosphere compared to surface freshwaters pCO_2 that can vary by more than 4 orders of magnitude spatially and temporally (Sobek et al. 2005; Abril et al. 2014). Consequently, water pCO_2 controls the intensity of the air-water flux, together with the gas transfer velocity. Presently, both measured and calculated water pCO_2 data are used to compute CO_2 fluxes from freshwater systems, although calculated pCO_2 is overwhelmingly more abundant than directly measured pCO_2 (*e.g.* Cole et al. 1994; Raymond et al. 2013). pCO_2 can be calculated from the dissociation constants of carbonic acid (which are a function of temperature) and any of the following couples of measured variables: pH/TA, pH/DIC, DIC/TA (Park 1969). In a majority of cases, calculated pCO_2 is based on the measurements of pH/TA and water temperature. These three parameters are routinely measured by many environmental agencies, and constitute a very large database available for the scientific community. Calculation of pCO_2 from pH and TA has been initiated in World Rivers in the 1970's (Kempe 1984) and relies on the dissociation constants of carbonic acid, and the solubility of CO_2, all of which are temperature-dependent (Harned and Scholes 1941; Harned and Davis 1943; Millero 1979; Stumm and Morgan 1996). Measured pCO_2 is based on water-air phase equilibration either on discrete samples (headspace technique, e.g. Weiss 1981) or continuously (equilibrator technique, e.g. Frankignoulle et al. 2001) using various systems and devices, followed by direct, generally infrared (IR), detection of CO_2 in the equilibrated gas. Commercial IR gas analysers are becoming cheaper and more accurate, stable and compact, and provide a large range of linear response well adapted to variability of pCO_2 found in freshwaters.

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Only a limited number of studies have compared directly measured pCO_2 to computed pCO_2. Earlier examples provided a comparison between pCO_2 measured by headspace equilibration coupled to gas chromatography (GC), and pCO_2 calculated from pH and DIC (Kratz et al.

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1997; Raymond et al. 1997). Reports by these authors in Wisconsin lakes and the Hudson River show that the pCO_2 values were linearly correlated but showed a variability of ±500 ppmv around the 1:1 line, over a range of measured pCO_2 from 300 to 4000 ppmv. Later, Frankignoulle and Borges (2001) reported the first comparison of pCO_2 calculated from pH and TA and pCO_2 measured by equilibration coupled to an IR analyzer in an estuary in Belgium. In this high TA (2500-4800 µmol L^{-1}) and high pH (>7.4) system, they found a good agreement between both approaches, calculated pCO_2 being either overestimated or underestimated, but always by less than 7%. In 2003, concomitant measurements of pH, TA and pCO_2 were performed in acidic, humic-rich (“black” type) waters of the Sinnamary River in French Guiana (Abril et al. 2005; 2006). Calculation of pCO_2 from pH (~5) and TA (~200 µmol L^{-1}) gave unrealistically high values compared to those measured directly with a headspace technique (typically 30000 ppmv versus 5000 ppmv). Direct measurements of CO_2 and CH_4 outgassing fluxes with floating chambers and the computation of the respective gas transfer velocities of these two gases (Guérin et al. 2007) confirmed that pCO_2 values calculated from pH and TA were overestimated compared to direct measurements in the Sinnamary River. More recently, Hunt et al. (2011) and Wang et al. (2013) provided evidence that organic acid anions in DOC may significantly contribute to TA in some rivers and generate an overestimation of calculated pCO_2. Butman and Raymond (2011) reported higher calculated than measured pCO_2 in some US streams and rivers, but no information was available on the potential role of organic acids on this overestimation. These authors concluded that the low number of samples in their study reflected the need for more research on this topic.

With the growing interest on pCO_2 determination in freshwaters globally, and given the apparent simplicity and low cost of pH and TA measurements, the number of publications that report calculated pCO_2 in freshwaters has increased dramatically in the last decade. Some

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of these publications report extremely high and potentially biased pCO_2 values in low-alkalinity and high DOC systems. It has thus become necessary to pay attention to this issue and investigate the occurrence of such potential bias and its magnitude in the different types of freshwaters. Here, we present a large dataset of concomitant measurements of temperature, pH, TA, pCO_2, and DOC in freshwaters. This is the first comprehensive dataset to investigate the magnitude of the bias between calculated and measured pCO_2, as it covers the entire range of variation of most parameters of the carbonate system in freshwaters. The objective of this paper is to alert the scientific community to the occurrence of a bias in pCO_2 calculation from pH and TA in acidic, poorly buffered and organic-rich freshwaters, to briefly discuss its origin in terms of water chemistry, and to provide the range of pH, TA and DOC values where pCO_2 calculation should be abandoned and the range where it still gives relatively accurate results.

2 Material and Methods

2.1 Sample collection

Our dataset consists of 761 concomitant measurements of temperature, pH, TA, water pCO_2, and DOC in 12 contrasting tropical and temperate systems in Europe, Amazonia and Africa (Fig. 1; Table 1). These samples were obtained in the Central Amazon River and floodplains system in Brazil, the Athi-Galana-Sabaki River in Kenya, the Tana River (Kenya), small rivers draining the Shimba Hills in southeastern Kenya, the Congo River and tributaries in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lake Kivu in Rwanda and DRC, the Leyre River and tributaries in France, the Loire River in France, the Meuse River in Belgium, the Rianila and Betsiboka Rivers in Madagascar, the Sinnamary River downstream of the Petit Saut Reservoir in French Guiana, and the Zambezi River in Zambia and Mozambique (Fig. 1). Details on some of the sampling sites can be found in Abril et al. (2005; 2014), Borges et al. (2012 ; 2014), Marwick et al. (2014a,b), Polsenaere et al. (2013), Tamooh et al. (2013), Teodoru et al. (2014). These watersheds span a range of climates and are occupied by different types of land cover, which include tropical rainforest (Amazon, Congo, Rianila), dry savannah (Tana, Athi-Galana-Sabaki, Betsiboka, Zambezi), temperate pine forest growing on podzols (Leyre), mixed temperate forest, grassland and cropland (Meuse) and cropland (Loire). Lithology is also extremely contrasted as it includes for instance carbonate-rocks dominated watershed as for the Meuse, sandstone dominated silicates (Leyre), and precambrian crystalline magmatic and metamorphic rocks with a small proportion of carbonate and evaporite rocks for the Congo river.

2.2 Field and laboratory measurements

Although pH measurements might seem almost trivial, highly accurate and precise pH data are in fact not easy to obtain, especially in low-ionic strength waters, where electrode readings are generally less stable. Even though pH measurements in the laboratory might be more accurate, it is crucial to measure pH *in situ* or immediately after sampling, as pH determination several hours or days after sampling will be affected by CO_2 degassing and/or microbial respiration (Frankignoulle and Borges 2001). In this work, water temperature and pH were measured in the field with different probes depending on the origin of the dataset. However, all the pH data were obtained with glass electrodes and rely on daily calibration with two-point United States National Bureau of Standards (NBS) standards (4 and 7). Measurements were performed directly in the surface water, or in collected water immediately after sampling.

Several techniques were used to measure water pCO_2. Water-gas equilibration was performed with a marbles type equilibrator (Frankignoulle et al. 2001) for the Amazon, Loire, Leyre, Sinnamary and Congo Rivers (December 2013) as well for Lake Kivu, or with a Liqui-Cel MiniModule membrane contactor equilibrator (see Teodoru et al. 2009; 2014) for the Zambezi and some sites within the Congo basin (December 2012): water was pumped either

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continuously from a ship, or on an ad hoc basis from the bank of the rivers after waiting ~15 minutes for complete equilibration; air was continuously pumped from the equilibrator to the gas analyser (see *e.g.* Abril et al. 2014 for a more detailed description of the system). A syringe-headspace technique (Kratz et al. 1997; Teodoru et al. 2009) was used in the field in all African rivers and in the Meuse River: 30 mL volume of atmospheric air was equilibrated with 30 mL volume of river water by vigorously shaking during 5-10 min in four replicate gas-tight syringes. The four replicates 30 mL of equilibrated gas and a sample of atmospheric air were injected in an IR gas analyser (Li-Cor® models 820 or 840, or PP systems® model EGM-4); the first gas injection served as a purge for the air circuit and cell and the three other injections were used as triplicate pCO_2 determination (average repeatability of ±1%). The pCO_2 in the river water was deduced from that measured in the headspace accounting for the initial pCO_2 in the air used for equilibration, water temperature in the river and in the water at equilibrium in the syringe, and based on Henry's law. Comparison between syringe-headspace and marbles or membrane equilibrator was made during two cruises on the Congo River and three cruises in the Zambezi basin and gave very consistent results, deviation from the 1:1 line being always less than 15% (see Fig. 2). This highlights the consistency of the present data-set of direct pCO_2 measurements although different techniques were used. A serum bottle-headspace technique (Hope et al. 1995) was also used on the Sinnamary River; surface water was sampled in 120 mL serum bottles that were poisoned with $HgCl_2$ and sealed excluding air bubbles. Back in the laboratory, a 40 mL headspace was created with pure N_2 (Abril et al. 2005). The CO_2 concentration of equilibrated gas in the headspace was analysed by injecting small volumes (0.5 mL) of gas in a GC calibrated with certified gas mixtures.

Immediately after water-gas phase equilibration, CO_2 was detected and quantified in most samples with non-dispersive IR gas analysers (Frankignoulle et al. 2001; Abril et al. 2014).

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The gas analysers were calibrated before each field cruise, with air circulating through soda lime or pure N_2 for zero and with a certified gas standard for the span. Depending on the cruises and expected pCO_2 ranges, we used gas standard concentration of 1000 - 2000 ppmv, or a set of calibration gases at 400, 800, 4000 and 8000 ppmv. Stability of the instrument was checked after the cruise, and deviation of the signal was always less than 5%. These instruments offer a large range of linear response, depending on manufacturers and model: 0-20000 ppmv or 0-60000 ppmv. The linearity of a Li-COR® Li-820 gas analyser was verified by connecting it to a closed circuit of gas equipped with a rubber septum to allow injection of pure CO_2 with a syringe. Linearity was check by injecting increasing volumes of CO_2 in order to cover the whole range of measurement and was excellent between zero and ~20000 ppmv. In addition to the IR analysers generally used in this work, in the Sinnamary River, pCO_2 was also measured with an INNOVA® 1312 optical filter IR photoacoustic gas analyser (range 0 – 25000 ppmv) connected to an equilibrator and with a Hewlett Packard® 5890 GC equipped with a thermal conductivity detector (TCD); both analysers were calibrated with a gas mixture of 5000 ppmv of CO_2. Both methods gave results consistent at ± 15% in the 0 – 13000 ppmv range (Abril et al. 2006). Sinnamary data reported here are from headspace and GC determination.

TA was analysed by automated electro-titration on 50 ml filtered samples with 0.1N HCl as titrant. Equivalence point was determined with a Gran method from pH between 4 and 3 (Gran 1952). Precision based on replicate analyses was better than ±5 µmol L^{-1}. TA measurements should be done on filtered samples; otherwise some overestimation would occur in turbid samples, which may content significant amount of acid-neutralizing particles (*e.g.* calcium carbonate). In contrast to TA measurements based on titration to an endpoint of 5.6 (*e.g.* Wallin et al. 2014), the Gran titration method allows the determination of TA values in samples with situ pH down to ~4.5, *i.e.* very close to the dissociation constant of HCO_3^-

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/H_2CO_3. In most acidic samples with low TA, reproducibility was improved by slightly increasing the pH by up to 0.2 units by vigorously stirring during ~15min in order to degas as much CO_2 as possible before starting the titration. DOC was measured on samples filtered through pre-combusted (490°C) glass fibre filter with a porosity of 0.7 µm and stored acidified with ultrapure H_3PO_4 in borosilicate vials capped with polytetrafluoroethylene stoppers. Analysis was performed with a Shimadzu TOC5000 analyser based on high temperature catalytic oxidation, after removal of dissolved CO_2 for samples from Amazon, Loire, Leyre, and Sinnamary Rivers. DOC concentrations were measured with a customized wet oxidation TOC analyzer (Thermo HiperTOC, or IO Analytical Aurora 1030W) coupled to a Delta+XL or Delta V IRMS.

2.3 pCO_2 calculation from pH and TA

We calculated pCO_2 from TA, pH and temperature measurements using carbonic acid dissociation constants of Millero (1979) (based on those of Harned and Scholes (1941) and Harned and Davis (1943)) and the CO_2 solubility from Weiss (1974) as implemented in the CO2SYS program. Hunt et al. (2011) reported discrepancy lower than 2% for pCO_2 computed this way with those obtained with the PHREEQC program (Parkhurst and Appelo, 1999). Differences in software or dissociation constants cannot account for the large bias in calculated pCO_2 compared to measured pCO_2 we report in this paper.

3 Results

3.1 Data ranges and patterns in the entire dataset

Measured pCO_2 varied between 36 ppmv in a floodplain of the Amazon River and 23000 ppmv in a first order stream of the Leyre River (Table 1). Minimum values of pH and TA occurred in the Congo River (pH = 3.94 and TA = 0) and maximum values in Lake Kivu (pH = 9.16 and TA = 14200 µmol L^{-1}). Highest DOC concentrations (>3000 µmol L^{-1}) were

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observed in small streams in the Congo basin and in first order streams draining podzolized soils in the Leyre basin. Lowest DOC concentrations (<40 µmol L^{-1}) occurred in some tributaries of the Athi-Galana-Sabaki, in the Rianila and Betsiboka Rivers, and in the Shimba Hills streams. When considering the whole dataset, measured pCO$_2$ and DOC were negatively correlated with pH, whereas TA was positively correlated with pH (Fig. 3, $p < 0.0001$ for the three variables). This illustrates the large contrast in acid-base properties between acidic, organic-rich and poorly buffered samples on the one hand, and basic, carbonate-buffered samples on the other hand.

3.2 Comparison between measured and calculated pCO$_2$

Calculated pCO$_2$ was more than 10% lower than measured pCO$_2$ in 16% of the samples; both methods were consistent at ±10% in 24% of the samples; calculated pCO$_2$ was more than 10% higher than measured pCO$_2$ in 60% of the samples and more than 100% higher in 26% of the samples. Absolute values, as expressed in ppmv, were largely shifted toward overestimation, calculated *versus* measured pCO$_2$ data being well above the 1:1 line, and calculated minus measured pCO$_2$ values ranging between -6180 ppmv and +882022 ppmv (Fig. 4). The largest overestimation of calculated pCO$_2$ occurred in the most acidic samples, whereas underestimations of calculated pCO$_2$ occurred in neutral or slightly basic samples (Fig. 4b). Ranking the data according to the pH, TA and DOC reveal that overestimation of calculated pCO$_2$ compared to measured pCO$_2$ increased in acidic, poorly buffered waters in parallel with an increase in the DOC concentration (Table 2). Discrepancies between calculated and measured pCO$_2$ were very different from one system to another, depending on the chemical status of the waters. On average at each sampled site, the relative overestimation of calculated pCO$_2$ decreased with pH and TA and increased with DOC (Fig. 5). Overestimation of calculated pCO$_2$ was on average <10% in the Kivu Lake, and the Meuse, Loire, Shimba Hills and Tana Rivers, which all have neutral or basic pH, TA > 1000 µmol L^{-1}

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and low to moderate DOC concentrations (< 400 µmol L^{-1}) (Fig. 5). In contrast, calculated pCO$_2$ was overestimated by >200% on average in the Congo, Leyre, Sinnamary and Amazon Rivers, which have acidic pH, TA <500 µmol L^{-1} and highest DOC concentration, reaching 1000 µmol L^{-1} on average in the Congo. The cases of Athi-Galana-Sabaki, Rianila, Betsiboka, and Zambezi Rivers were intermediate in pH, TA and DOC, and with average overestimations of calculated pCO$_2$ of 50-90% (Fig. 5).

4 Discussion

4.1 Origin of overestimation of calculated pCO$_2$

Our dataset (Fig. 3; Table 1) probably covers the full range of conditions of carbon speciation that can be encountered in continental surface waters. A pCO$_2$ overestimation negatively correlated with pH ($p = 0.001$) and TA ($p = 0.005$) and positively correlated with DOC ($p < 0.001$) (Fig. 5) is consistent with the observations of Cai et al. (1998) in the freshwater end-members of some estuaries in Georgia, USA, and of Hunt et al. (2011) in rivers in New England (USA) and New Brunswick (CA). These authors performed NaOH back-titration in order to measure non-carbonate alkalinity (NCA). They found that NCA accounted for a large fraction (in some cases the majority) of TA; in addition, the contribution of inorganic species other than carbonate was assumed negligible and most of the NCA was attributed to organic acid anions. Hunt et al. (2011) also showed that in the absence of direct titration of NCA, which is labour-intensive and whose precision may be poor, this parameter could be calculated as the difference between the measured TA and the alkalinity calculated from measurements of pH and DIC and the dissociation constants of carbonic acid. Using the latter approach, Wang et al. (2013) obtained a positive correlation between NCA and DOC concentrations in the Congo River, evidencing the predominant role of organic acids in DIC speciation and pH in such acidic system. Because we did not directly measure DIC in this study, we could not calculate NCA with the same procedure as these studies. We attempted to

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calculate TA from our measured pH and pCO_2 with the CO2SYS program. However, TA values calculated this way were inconsistent with other measured variables (with sometimes negative values). Indeed, because pH and pCO_2 are too interdependent in the carbonate system, very small analytical errors on these variables lead to large uncertainties in the calculated TA (Cullison Gray et al. 2011). A second attempt to correct our TA data from NCA consisted in calculating organic alkalinity using pH and DOC as input parameters. We compared the model of Driscoll et al. (1989), which assumes a single pK value for all organic acids, and the triprotic model of Hruska et al. (2003), which assumes three apparent pK values for organic acids. These two models applied to our pH and DOC gave very similar organic alkalinity values, which could be subtracted from the measured TA. In the most acidic samples (*e.g.* some sites from the Congo basin), modelled organic alkalinities were larger than measured TA and the difference was thus negative. Nevertheless, we then recalculated pCO_2 from the measured pH and the TA corrected from organic alkalinity. Calculated pCO_2 corrected with that method were, however, still very different from those measured in the field, being sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the measured pCO_2, without any meaningful pattern (indeed, corrected pCO_2 was negatively correlated ($p < 0.001$) with measured pCO_2). Consequently, we were unable to derive any empirical relationship to correct for the bias in pCO_2 calculation from pH and TA. Nevertheless, the negative correlation between pH and DOC and positive correlation between pH and TA (Fig. 3) confirm a strong control of organic acids on pH and DIC speciation across the entire dataset.

As discussed by Hunt et al. (2011), a significant contribution of organic acids to TA leads to an overestimation of calculated pCO_2 with the CO2SYS program, or with any program that accounts only for the inorganic species that contribute to TA. It is thus obvious that the observed increase in pCO_2 overestimation when pH decreases (Fig. 4b & 5; Table 2) is due to an increasing contribution of organic acid anions to TA. However, this effect is not the only

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driver of the observed overestimation of pCO_2, which is also due to a decrease in the buffering capacity of the carbonate system at acidic pH. To investigate the magnitude of this second effect, we calculated the factor $dpCO_2/dTA$ (in ppmv mol^{-1}), which describes the change in calculated pCO_2 induced by a change in TA. This factor, which is the opposite of a buffer factor as it reflects the sensitivity of pCO_2 calculation to the TA, increases exponentially when pH decreases (Fig. 6a), i.e. it is proportional to the H^+ concentration. To go further in this theoretical analysis, we computed the difference between the pCO_2 calculated at a given TA value and the one calculated at a slightly higher TA value (TA+ X µmol L^{-1}). These calculations reveal an extreme sensitivity of calculated pCO_2 to TA at acidic pH (Figure 5b). For instance, increasing TA by 5 µmol L^{-1} (a value close to the precision of TA titrations) increases the calculated pCO_2 by 31 ppmv at pH 7, by 307 ppmv at pH 6 and by 3070 at pH 5. Increasing TA by 100 µmol L^{-1} (a typical value of NCA found in freshwaters, Driscoll et al. 1994; Cai et al. 1998; Hunt et al. 2011), increases the calculated pCO_2 by 615 ppmv at pH 7, by 6156 ppmv at pH 6 and by 61560 ppmv at pH 5. Note that this increase in calculated pCO_2 is independent of the chosen initial TA value. The difference between calculated and measured pCO_2 from our data-set, shows that a NCA contribution around 100 µmol L^{-1} is sufficient to explain the overestimation of calculated pCO_2 of most samples at pH<6, whereas a NCA contribution higher than 500 µmol L^{-1} would be necessary for several samples at circumneutral and slightly basic pH (Fig. 5b). Samples requiring this high NCA contribution are from the Athi-Galana-Sabaki and Zambezi watersheds, and correspond to TA values well above 1000 µmol L^{-1}. A NCA value of 500 µmol L^{-1} in these samples is thus plausible.

We have no definitive explanation for lower calculated than measured pCO_2, which is observed mainly at neutral to slightly basic pH, e.g., in the Zambezi River (Fig. 4). In most of these samples, owing to the relatively high TA value, an overestimation of pH of less than 0.2

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units is sufficient to account for the low calculated pCO_2 compared to measured values. In general, it is not easy to judge how accurate are pH measurements, and even less when data come from environmental agencies. Thus, one factor of variability throughout the dataset as well as in literature data is the accuracy of pH measurements – despite the care taken (e.g, calibrations with NBS buffers for each day of measurements), we cannot rule out that drift or malfunction of pH electrodes contribute to the observed variability, constituting an additional disadvantage compared to direct pCO_2 measurements with very stable gas analysers.

4.2 Impact on estimates of CO_2 emissions from freshwaters

According to our analysis, overestimation of calculated pCO_2 is largest in acidic, poorly buffered and organic-rich waters. Consequently, the overestimation of regional and global CO_2 emissions computed from calculated pCO_2 depends on the relative contribution of these types of waters worldwide. In their analysis, Raymond et al. (2013) have discarded all calculated pCO_2 values with a pH value of less than 5.4, as well as all pCO_2 values above 100000 ppmv. These criteria would exclude only 8% of samples from our dataset. Indeed, from our analysis, it appears that overestimation of calculated pCO_2 occurs at pH much higher than 5.4 (Fig. 4,5&6; Table 2). Both techniques were consistent at ±10% on average in only five of the twelve studied systems, which combine a circumneutral to basic pH with a TA concentration well above 1000 µmol L^{-1} (Fig. 5). Although it would not be sufficient for the cases of the Zambezi and Athi-Galana-Sabaki Rivers where overestimation is still significant, a TA value above 1000 µmol L^{-1} appears as a more robust criteria, rather than a pH threshold, to separate calculated pCO_2 affected by bias from those consistent with measured pCO_2 (Table 2). In fact, pCO_2 calculation from pH and TA in freshwaters historically relies on theoretical background and validation data in high alkalinity waters (Neal et al. 1998), including karstic waters (Kempe 1975). At the global scale, high TA typically occurs in rivers draining watersheds with a significant proportion of carbonate rocks, typically >30% of their

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surface area if the criteria of TA > 1000 µmol L^{-1} is chosen and the normalized weathering rates of Meybeck (1987) are applied. According to Meybeck (1987), the average and discharge-weighted TA is around 900 µmol L^{-1} for world rivers and around 600 µmol L^{-1} for tropical rivers. Among the 25 largest rivers in the world, 15 have a TA > 1000 µmol L^{-1} according to Cai et al. (2008). The two largest rivers in the world in terms of discharge, the Amazon and the Congo, are also well below this limit of 1000 µmol L^{-1} and have large overestimation in calculated pCO_2 (on average 200% and 360%, respectively). Very low TA and pH and high DOC values have also been reported in boreal streams and rivers (Humborg et al. 2010; Dinsmore et al. 2012; Wallin et al. 2014).

In lakes, the highest pCO_2 values in the literature come from tropical black water lakes and were also calculated rather than directly measured (Sobek et al. 2005). Calculated pCO_2 was 65250 ppmv in Lago Tupé in the Brazilian Amazon, a Ria Lake connected to the Rio Negro, where, according to our own dataset, pH is below 5 and TA is around 70 µmol L^{-1}. It was 18950 ppmv in Kambanain Lake in Papua New Guinea corresponding to a pH value of 6.1 and a TA value of 350 µmol L^{-1} (Vyverman 1994). This suggests a widespread overestimation of calculated pCO_2 that significantly impacts the estimation of global CO_2 emissions from inland waters. However, a precise analysis based on exact quantitative information on the relative contribution of acidic and high and low alkalinity waters to the total surface area of inland waters is necessary in order to evaluate the exact magnitude of the overestimation.

5 Conclusion

From our analysis, it appears that the validity of calculating pCO_2 from pH, TA, and temperature is most robust in freshwaters with circumneutral to basic pH and with TA exceeding 1000 µmol L^{-1}. At lower TA and pH, however, calculated pCO_2 (and hence, CO_2 degassing rates) are overestimated by 50 to 300% relative to direct, *in situ* pCO_2

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measurements. Since a large majority of freshwater systems globally have characteristics outside of the range of applicability of pCO_2 calculation, it appears reasonable to assume that recent estimates of global CO_2 emission from lakes and rivers, which are based exclusively on calculated pCO_2 data, are overestimated. We propose that while TA and pH measurements remain useful to describe the aquatic chemistry, data on pCO_2 should in the future rely on direct measurements of pCO_2. Even if some studies report relatively robust calculation of pCO_2 from pH and DIC measurements (Raymond et al. 1997; Kratz et al. 1997; Aberg and Wallin 2014), direct pCO_2 in the field are stable, precise, and straightforward and do not depend on the quality of pH measurements, which are often uncertain. Further, high-quality DIC measurements are very time consuming, fairly complicated to set-up and do not allow to carry out continuous measurements in a simple and straightforward fashion. Although there are some practical limitations to their use in the field, submerged IR sensors, which allow high temporal resolution, are also promising (Johnson et al. 2010). The long-term instrument stability and accuracy based on newly developed Off-Axis Integrated Cavity Output Spectroscopy and Cavity Ring-Down Spectroscopy technologies seems to improve in comparison to traditional IR instruments, although the latter are more affordable, compact and with lower power requirements. Joint international efforts are necessary to define most appropriate protocols for the measurements of dissolved inorganic carbon parameters in freshwaters.

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Acknowledgements

The dataset used in this study was collected in the framework of projects funded by the Cluster of Excellence COTE at the Université de Bordeaux (ANR-10-LABX-45, CNP-Leyre project), the European Research Council (ERC-StG 240002, AFRIVAL: African river basins: Catchment-scale carbon fluxes and transformations, http://ees.kuleuven.be/project/afrival/),

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the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS, CAKI, 2.4.598.07, TransCongo, 14711103), the French national agency for research (ANR 08-BLAN-0221, CARBAMA project http://carbama.epoc.u-bordeaux1.fr/), the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO-Vlaanderen), the Belgian Federal Science Policy (BELSPO-SSD projects COBAFISH and EAGLES), the Research Council of the KU Leuven, and the Institut de Radioprotection et Sureté Nucléaire, France (FLORE project). We thank the Hydreco Laboratory in French Guiana, and Patrick Albéric (ISTO Orléans) who analysed some of the data reported here, Aurore Beulen (ULg) for collection of Meuse dataset, Marc-Vincent Commarieu (ULg) for analytical support, two anonymous reviewers and C.W. Hunt (reviewer) for constructive comments on the previous version of the paper. AVB is a senior research associate at the FNRS.

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The volume and pages should be available soon (paper is submitted and BGD in production), something to look out for the proofing stage.

Table 1. Summary of the presented dataset. Average, minimum and maximum values of temperature, dissolved organic carbon (DOC), pH (measured on the NBS scale), total alkalinity (TA) and measured partial pressure of CO_2 (pCO_2) in the different freshwater ecosystems.

Country	Watersheds	Temperature (°C)			DOC (μmol L^{-1})			pH (NBS scale)			TA (μmol L^{-1})			Measured pCO_2 (ppmv)			N
		Av.	Min.	Max.	Av.	Min.	Max.	Av.	Min.	Max.	Av.	Min.	Max.	Av.	Min.	Max.	
Brazil	Amazon	30.3	27.4	34.3	352	118	633	6.60	4.53	7.60	385	30	1092	4204	36	18400	155
Kenya	Athi-Galana-Sabaki	25.9	19.8	36.0	307	29	1,133	7.69	6.49	8.57	2290	407	5042	2811	608	10405	44
DRC	Congo	26.3	22.6	28.2	1002	149	3968	6.01	3.94	7.22	212	0	576	6093	1582	15571	97
DRC / Rwanda	Lake Kivu	24.0	23.0	24.7	162	142	201	9.05	8.99	9.17	13037	12802	13338	660	537	772	53
France	Leyre	12.5	7.9	19.2	588	142	3625	6.20	4.40	7.41	280	38	1082	4429	901	23047	92
France	Loire	15.5	8.8	19.3	195	167	233	8.70	8.07	9.14	1768	1579	1886	284	65	717	18
Belgium	Meuse	18.1	13.3	25.9	229	102	404	7.89	6.95	8.59	2769	360	7141	2292	176	10033	50
Madagascar	Rianila and Betsiboka	25.4	20.2	29.5	138	33	361	6.84	5.83	7.62	233	76	961	1701	508	3847	36
Kenya	Shimba Hills	25.1	21.9	31.8	214	36	548	7.37	6.22	8.93	1989	227	14244	2751	546	9497	9
French Guiana	Sinnamary	27.1	24.1	28.7	419	213	596	5.50	5.08	6.30	143	66	290	7770	1358	15622	49
Kenya	Tana	26.6	25.0	27.9	321	193	651	7.65	7.32	8.02	1619	1338	2009	2700	845	6014	51
Zambia / Mozambique	Zambezi	26.9	18.8	31.8	252	103	492	7.59	5.06	9.08	1245	52	3134	2695	151	14004	107
Entire dataset		24.6	7.9	36.0	408	29	3968	7.00	3.94	9.17	1731	0	14244	3707	36	23047	761

Table 2. Median and average values of dissolved organic carbon (DOC), pH (measured on the NBS scale), total alkalinity (TA), and calculated *minus* measured partial pressure of CO$_2$ (pCO$_2$) in the dataset.

	N	% of samples	cal – meas pCO$_2$ (ppmv)		cal – meas pCO$_2$ (% of meas pCO$_2$)		pH		TA (μmol L^{-1})		DOC (μmol L^{-1})	
			Med.	Av.	Med.	Av.	Med.	Av.	Med.	Av.	Med.	Av.
All samples	761	100%	+611	+10692	+23%	+194%	6.94	7.00	467	1731	315	408
Ranked by calculated-measured pCO$_2$ as % of measured pCO$_2$												
< -10%	122	16%	-540	-890	-34%	-36%	7.89	7.85	1269	1766	259	275
± 10%	174	23%	+15	+50	+2%	+1%	7.67	7.78	1576	3735	228	273
> +10%	465	61%	+2430	+17710	+72%	+327%	6.52	6.49	308	972	360	497
> +50%	280	37%	+ 5490	+ 28660	+162%	+526%	6.18	6.14	192	460	375	567
> +100%	199	26%	+ 9080	+39120	+270%	+710%	5.89	5.96	166	364	389	602
Ranked by pH												
pH > 7	368	48%	+1	+82	+1%	+15%	7.82	7.92	1572	3284	231	255
pH < 7	393	52%	+3280	+20630	+71%	+362%	6.30	6.13	232	277	413	558
pH 6-7	256	34%	+1580	+2710	+40%	+96%	6.58	6.55	334	370	350	427
pH < 6	136	18%	+18410	+ 54486	+308%	+864%	5.50	5.35	93	101	487	828
pH < 5	25	3%	+115580	+209910	+1645%	+3180%	4.53	4.53	41	45	1427	1,843
Ranked by TA												
TA > 2000 μmol L^{-1}	110	14%	+20	+340	+2%	+12%	8.58	8.47	7023	8326	163	202
TA 1000-2000 μmol L^{-1}	157	21%	-8	-163	-2%	-9%	7.81	7.83	1566	1534	271	295
TA 500-1000 μmol L^{-1}	99	13%	+1307	+1900	+28%	+72%	6.97	7.11	651	697	304	318
TA < 500 μmol L^{-1}	395	52%	+2070	+20090	+64%	+350%	6.30	6.24	222	232	400	538
TA < 100 μmol L^{-1}	82	11%	+6840	+60560	+230%	+1040%	5.50	5.35	59	56	603	988
Ranked by DOC												
DOC < 200 μmol L^{-1}	179	24%	+40	+776	+5%	+62%	7.89	7.92	1579	4807	163	149
DOC 200-300 μmol L^{-1}	167	22%	+102	+2755	+5%	+69%	7.56	7.37	1132	1259	258	252
DOC 300-400 μmol L^{-1}	165	22%	+887	+4473	+25%	+101%	6.90	6.93	499	866	341	344
DOC > 400 μmol L^{-1}	250	33%	+3070	+27197	+59%	+434%	6.15	6.14	200	415	555	765
DOC > 800 μmol L^{-1}	79	10%	+4995	+62784	+92%	+886%	5.80	5.62	94	180	1099	1438

Figure captions

Figure 1. – Location of the sampling sites in Africa, Amazonia, and Europe.

Figure 2. – Comparison of results of different water-air equilibration designs for direct pCO_2 measurements; pCO_2 measured with a marbles equilibrator (Congo) and with a membrane equilibrator (Congo and Zambezi) are plotted against pCO_2 measured with a syringe headspace technique. Detection was made with an IR gas analyser.

Figure 3. - Plot of carbon variables *versus* pH in the studied freshwater systems. Top panels are shown with a linear scale and bottom panels with a logarithmic scale; (a,b): measured pCO_2; (c,d) Total alkalinity; (e,f) Dissolved organic carbon. Zero TA values are plotted as 0.001 in order to be visible on the log pCO_2 scale. Rianila and Bestiboka are plotted together although they belong to different watersheds in Madagascar.

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Figure 4. - Comparison between measured and calculated pCO_2 for the whole dataset; (a) calculated *versus* measured pCO_2, the line shows when measured pCO_2 equals calculated pCO_2; (b) the difference between calculated and measured pCO_2 as a function of pH; same symbols as in Figure 3.

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Figure 5. - Average percentages of pCO_2 overestimation (calculated as 100 x (calculated pCO_2-measured pCO_2)/measured pCO_2, as a function of (a) pH, (b) TA and (c) DOC, for the 12 studied sites. Error bars indicate the standard deviation from the mean for each freshwater systems.

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Figure 6. - Sensitivity of pCO_2 overestimation to pH; (a) theoretical factor $dpCO_2$ / dTA, which describes the sensitivity of calculated pCO_2 to the TA value; (b) the solid lines show the increase in calculated pCO_2 induced by various increases in TA, as functions of pH; these lines mimic the overestimation of calculated pCO_2 generated by increasing contributions of organic alkalinity to the TA; field data (as calculated – measured pCO_2) have been plotted for

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comparison; same symbols as in Figure 3. Note that negative values do not appear in the logarithmic scale.

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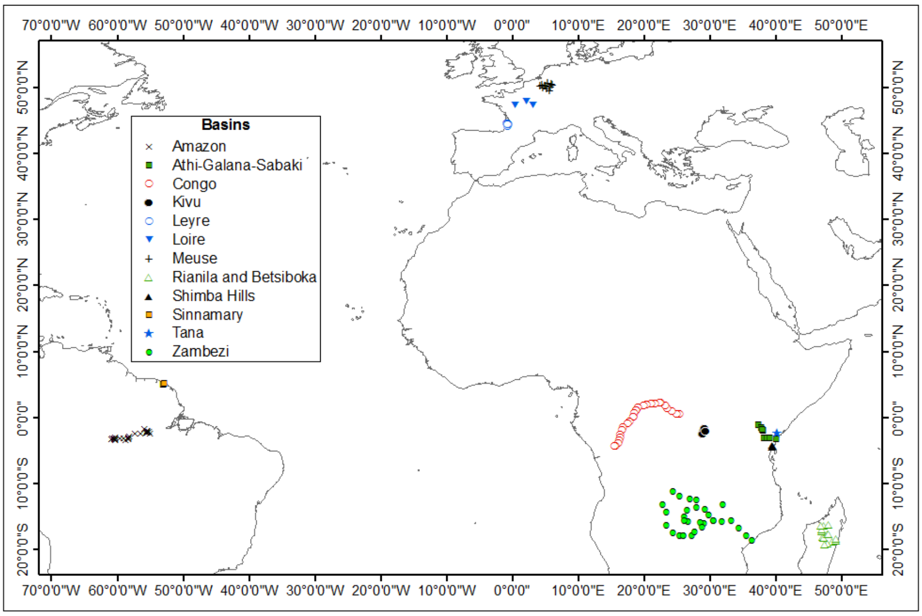
Figure 1. –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× Amazon
■ Athi-Galana-Sabaki
○ Congo
● Kivu
○ Leyre
▼ Loire
+ Meuse
△ Rianila and Betsiboka
▲ Shimba Hills
■ Sinnamary
★ Tana
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Figure ~~2~~. –

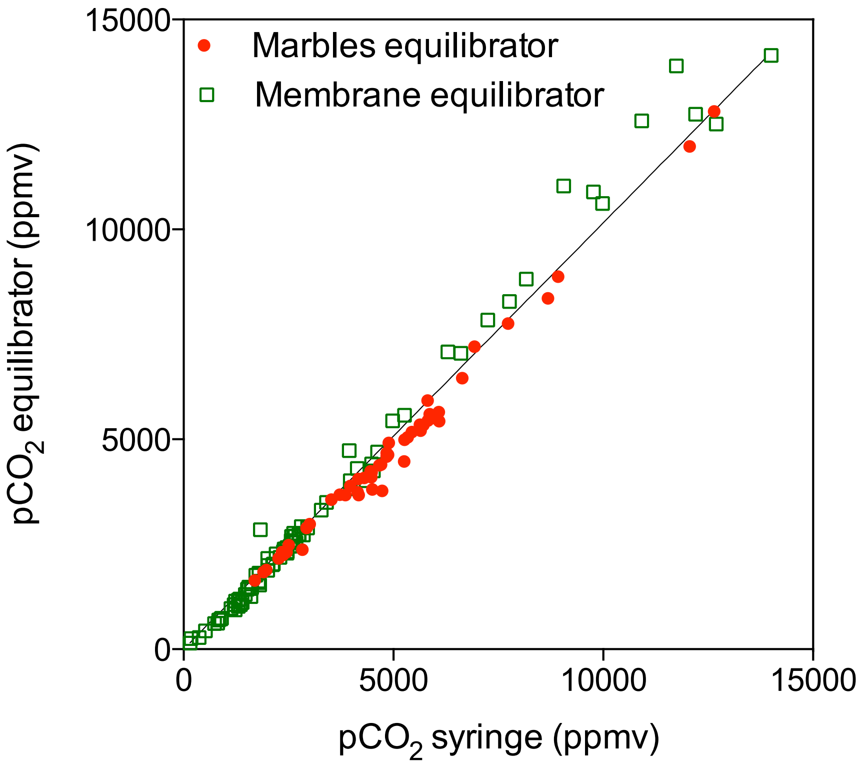

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Figure 3. –

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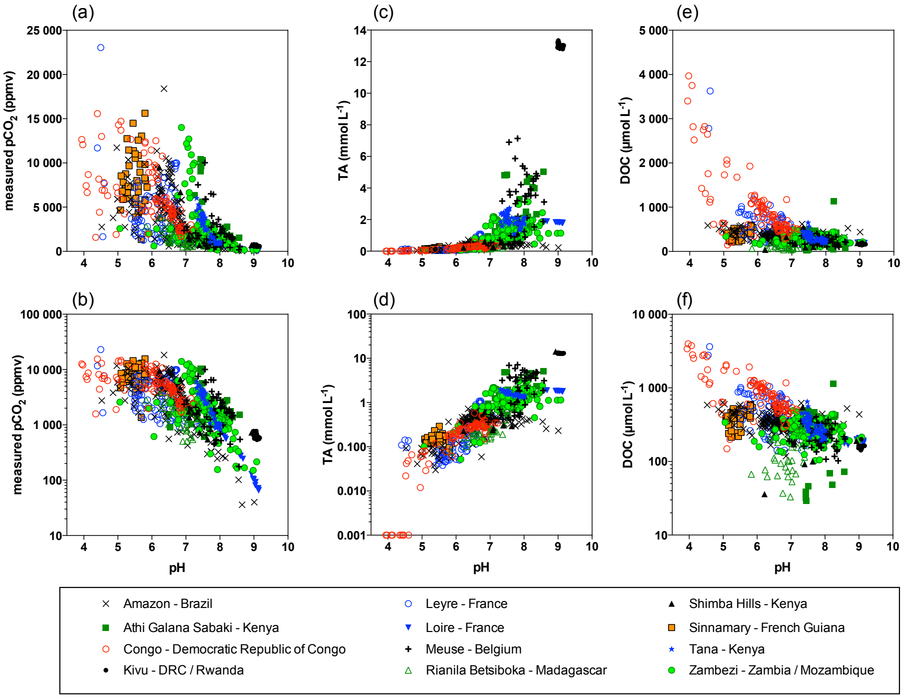

Figure 4. –

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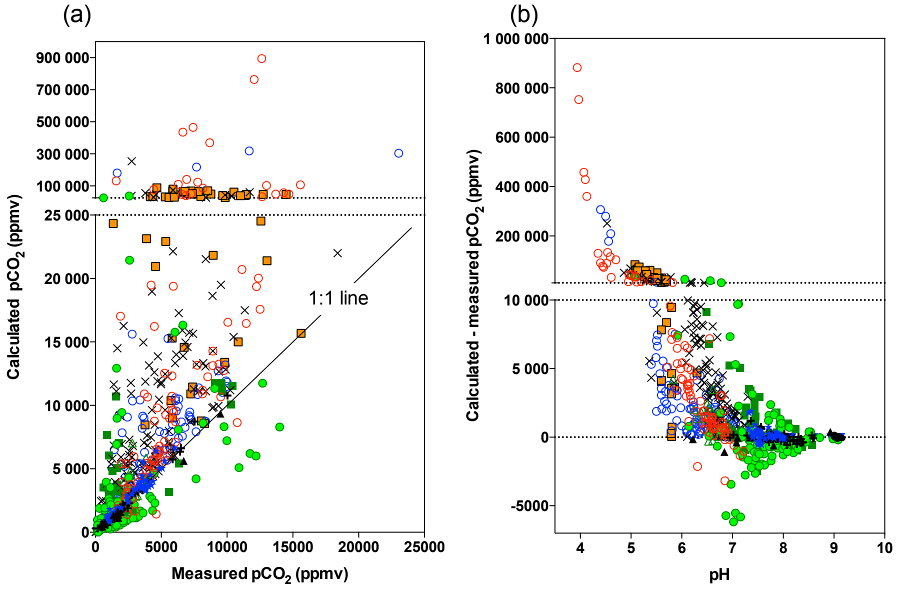

Figure 5. –

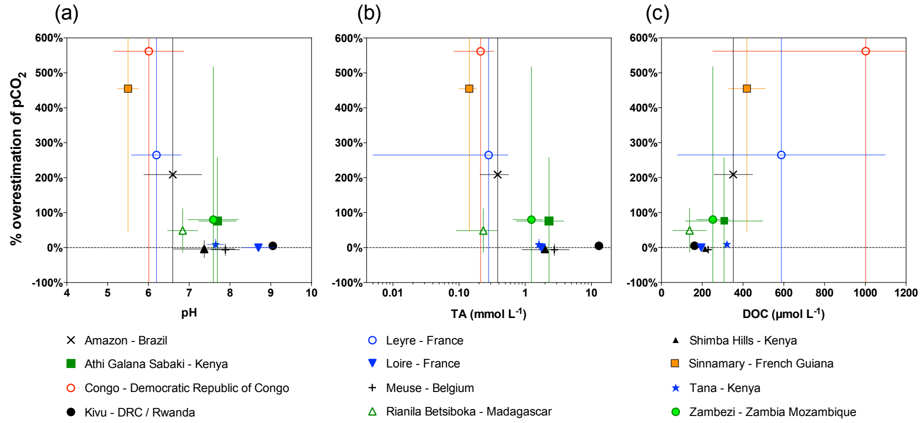

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Figure 6. –

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