

Slides are available on my website.
<http://lukaseigentler.github.io>

Delayed loss of stability of periodic travelling waves affects wavelength changes of patterned ecosystems

UK Math Biol Conference 2025

04 September 2025

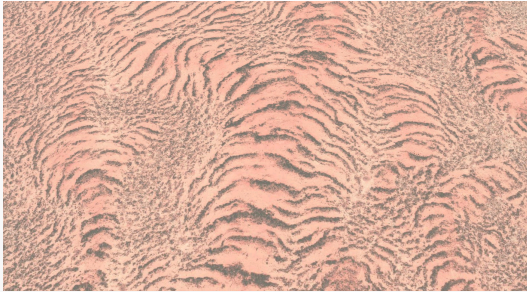
Lukas Eigentler (University of Warwick, UK)

joint work with Mattia Sensi (University of Trento, Italy)

Stripe patterns

Banded vegetation patterns and intertidal mussel beds are classic examples of **self-organisation principles** in ecology.

Vegetation stripes in Ethiopia.



Intertidal mussel beds in the Wadden Sea.



- Parallel to topographic contours and shoreline.
- Caused by a **scale-dependent feedback loop** comprising long-range competition for a limiting resource and short-range facilitation.

Klausmeier model for vegetation patterns

One of the most basic phenomenological models for vegetation patterns is the **extended Klausmeier reaction-advection-diffusion model**.¹

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{\partial u}{\partial t} &= \underbrace{u^2 w}_{\text{plant growth}} - \underbrace{Bu}_{\text{plant loss}} + \underbrace{\frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial x^2}}_{\text{plant dispersal}}, \\ \frac{\partial w}{\partial t} &= \underbrace{A}_{\text{rainfall}} - \underbrace{w}_{\text{evaporation}} - \underbrace{u^2 w}_{\text{water uptake by plants}} + \underbrace{\nu \frac{\partial w}{\partial x}}_{\text{water flow downhill}} + \underbrace{d \frac{\partial^2 w}{\partial x^2}}_{\text{water diffusion}}.\end{aligned}$$

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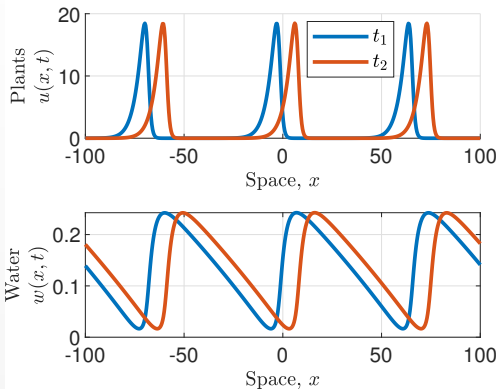
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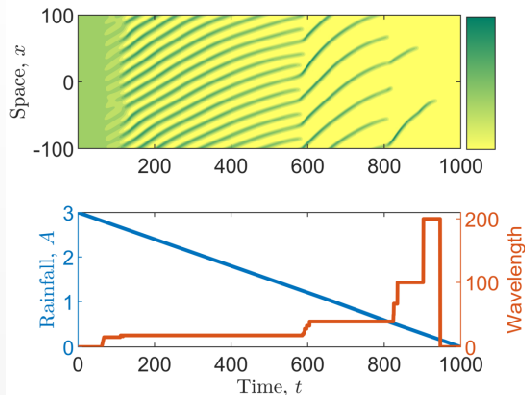
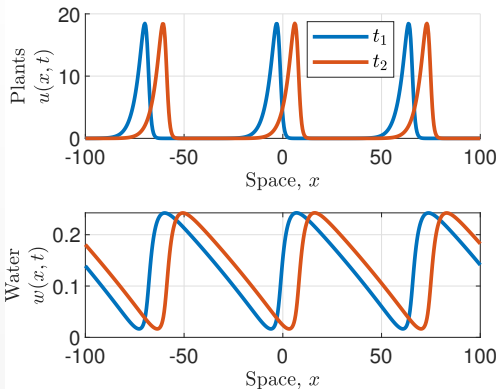
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Periodic travelling waves



- Model represents vegetation patterns as **periodic travelling waves (PTWs)**.

Periodic travelling waves

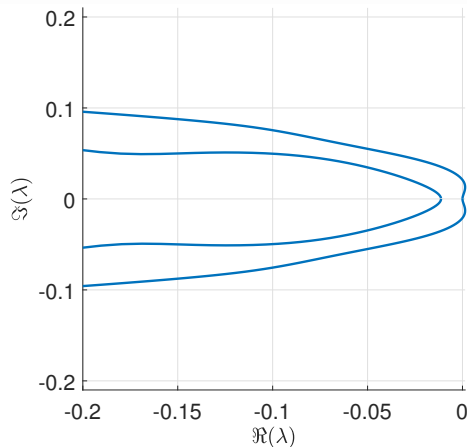


- Model represents vegetation patterns as **periodic travelling waves (PTWs)**.
- Along rainfall gradient, transition from uniform vegetation to desert occurs via several pattern transitions.

Wavelength changes

- State-of-the-art: predict wavelength changes through PTW stability properties.
- PTW linear stability is determined by their **essential spectra**.
- Calculated using numerical continuation.^a

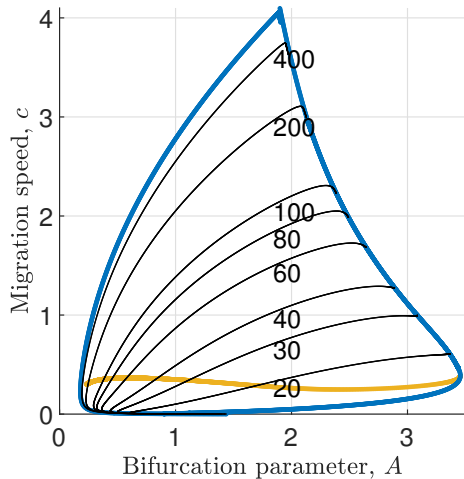
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Wavelength changes

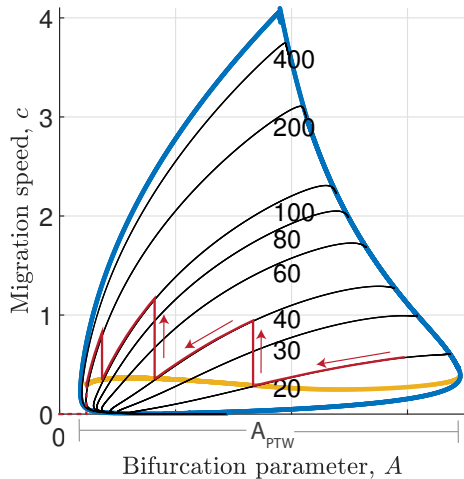
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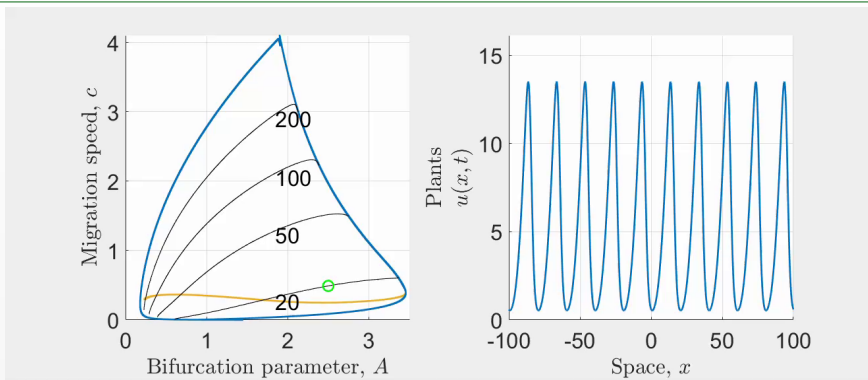


Wavelength changes

- Wavelengths changes are typically predicted through the *Busse balloon*: parameter space of stable PTWs.
- Wavelengths are preserved, provided they remain stable.
- Upon destabilisation a wavelength change occurs.



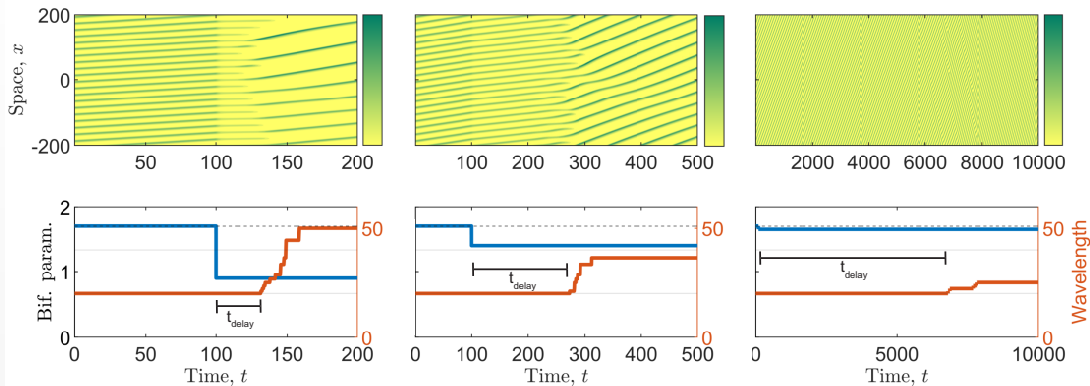
Wavelength changes



[alternative video link.](#)

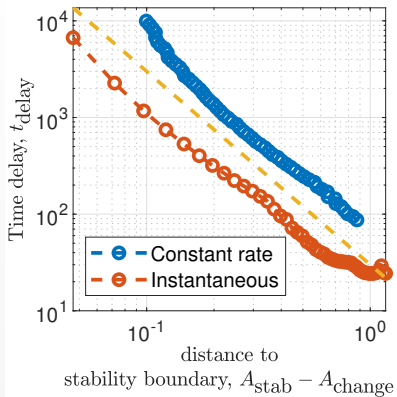
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Delays to wavelength changes



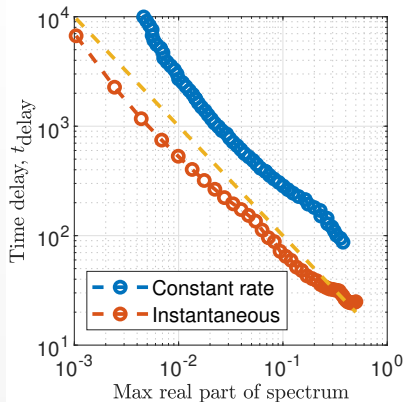
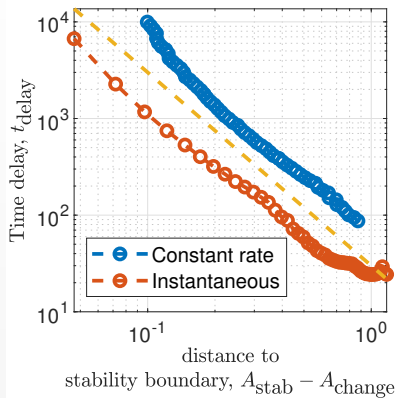
- Significant delays between crossing a stability boundary and observing wavelength changes occur.
- **Order of magnitude differences** in delay depending on parameter values.

Predicting delays



There are clear trends between delay and bifurcation parameter

Predicting delays



There are clear trends between delay and bifurcation parameter and delay and max real part of the spectrum. **no predictive power**

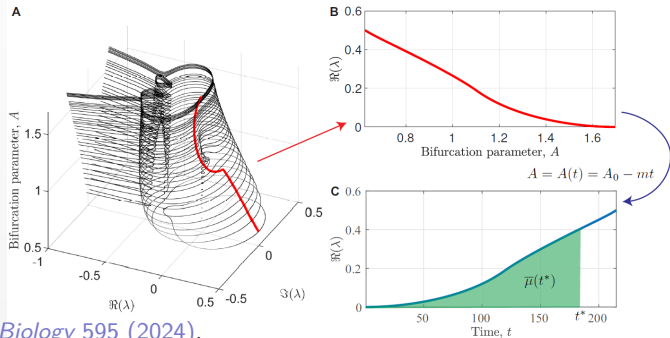
Predicting delays

Can predict the **order of magnitude of the delay** through the **accumulated maximal instability**³

$$\bar{\mu}(A(t)) = \int_{t_{\text{stab}}}^t \mu(\tau) d\tau, \quad t \geq t_{\text{stab}}.$$

t_{stab} is the time of the last crossing of the stability boundary.

$\mu(t)$ is the max real part of the spectrum at time t .



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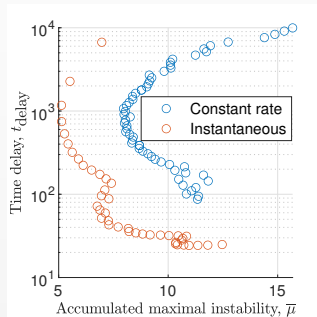
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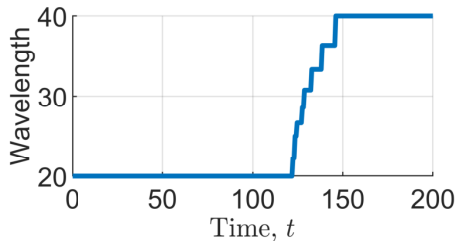
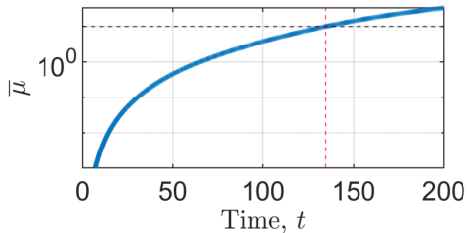
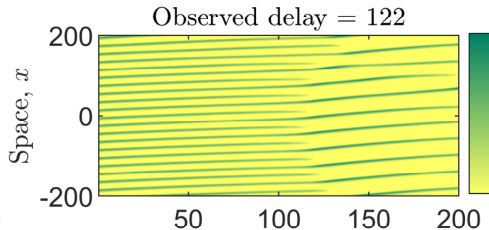
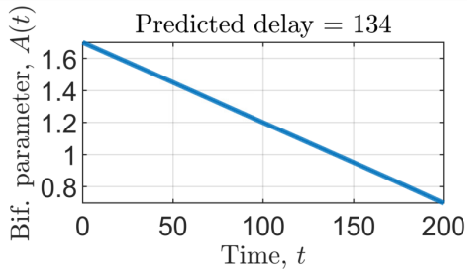
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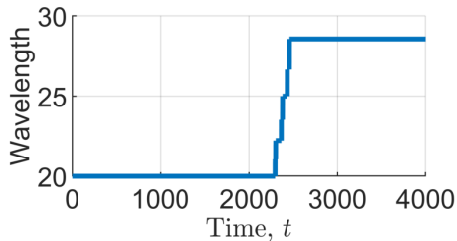
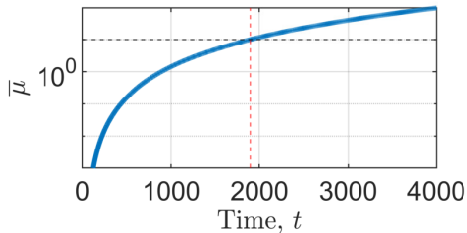
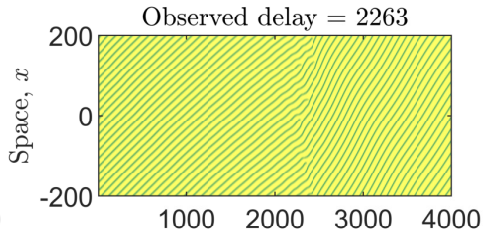
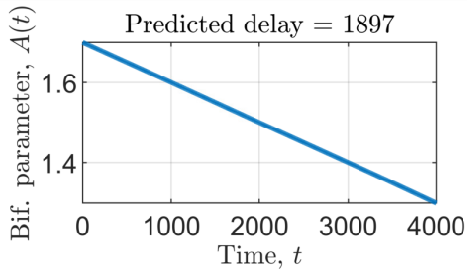
Wavelength change occurs when $\bar{\mu} \approx 10$

³EL and Sensi, M.: *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 595 (2024).

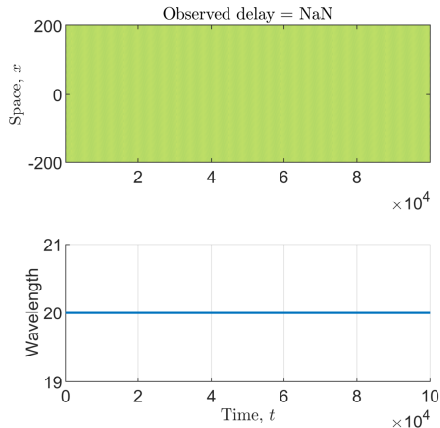
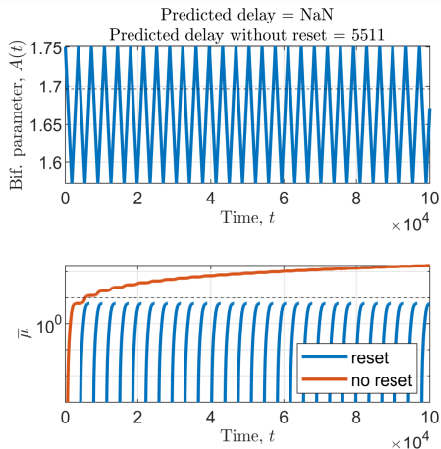
Delay prediction in practice



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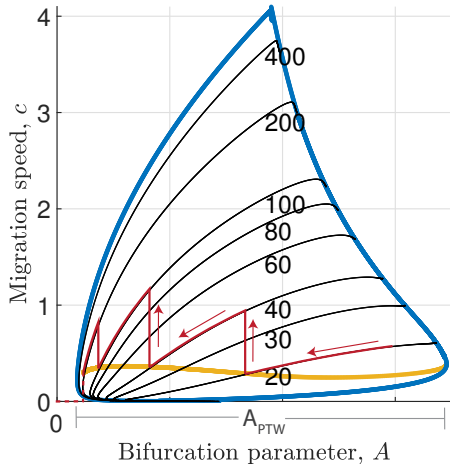


Delay prediction reset in stable regions



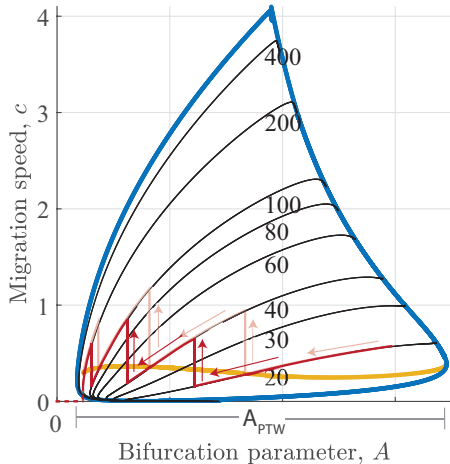
Conclusions

- Wavelength changes that occur after crossing a stability boundary are subject to a delay.



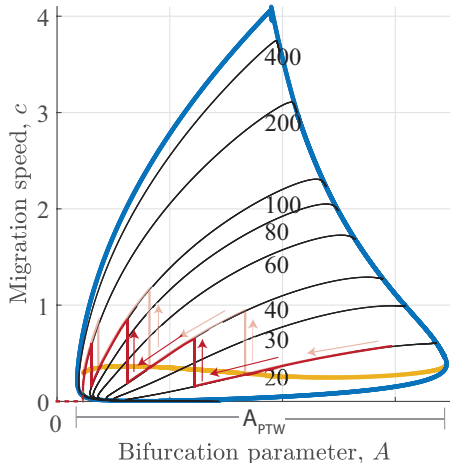
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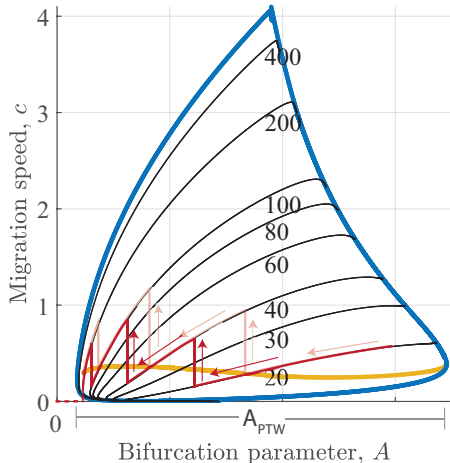
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- Wavelength changes that occur after crossing a stability boundary are subject to a delay.
- Order of magnitude of the delay can be predicted by tracking the maximum real part of the spectrum of the destabilised pattern over time.
- Open question: What new wavelength is chosen?



References

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- [1] [Eigentler, L. and Sensi, M.:](#) 'Delayed loss of stability of periodic travelling waves: insights from the analysis of essential spectra'. *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 595 (2024), p. 111945.