

Reporting Summary

Nature Research wishes to improve the reproducibility of the work that we publish. This form provides structure for consistency and transparency in reporting. For further information on Nature Research policies, see our [Editorial Policies](#) and the [Editorial Policy Checklist](#).

Statistics

For all statistical analyses, confirm that the following items are present in the figure legend, table legend, main text, or Methods section.

n/a Confirmed

- The exact sample size (n) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement
- A statement on whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
- The statistical test(s) used AND whether they are one- or two-sided
Only common tests should be described solely by name; describe more complex techniques in the Methods section.
- A description of all covariates tested
- A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as tests of normality and adjustment for multiple comparisons
- A full description of the statistical parameters including central tendency (e.g. means) or other basic estimates (e.g. regression coefficient) AND variation (e.g. standard deviation) or associated estimates of uncertainty (e.g. confidence intervals)
- For null hypothesis testing, the test statistic (e.g. F , t , r) with confidence intervals, effect sizes, degrees of freedom and P value noted
Give P values as exact values whenever suitable.
- For Bayesian analysis, information on the choice of priors and Markov chain Monte Carlo settings
- For hierarchical and complex designs, identification of the appropriate level for tests and full reporting of outcomes
- Estimates of effect sizes (e.g. Cohen's d , Pearson's r), indicating how they were calculated

Our web collection on [statistics for biologists](#) contains articles on many of the points above.

Software and code

Policy information about [availability of computer code](#)

Data collection The code for the kinetic Monte Carlo simulations is available from <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo3240428> under the GNU/GPL-3.0 license. Density functional theory (DFT) calculations were performed using CASTEP.

Data analysis Mathworks MATLAB R2018a was used for the data analysis, including fitting of the data and plotting.

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors and reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Research [guidelines for submitting code & software](#) for further information.

Data

Policy information about [availability of data](#)

All manuscripts must include a [data availability statement](#). This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A list of figures that have associated raw data
- A description of any restrictions on data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.55076>

Field-specific reporting

Life sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Sample size	<i>Describe how sample size was determined, detailing any statistical methods used to predetermine sample size OR if no sample-size calculation was performed, describe how sample sizes were chosen and provide a rationale for why these sample sizes are sufficient.</i>
Data exclusions	<i>Describe any data exclusions. If no data were excluded from the analyses, state so OR if data were excluded, describe the exclusions and the rationale behind them, indicating whether exclusion criteria were pre-established.</i>
Replication	<i>Describe the measures taken to verify the reproducibility of the experimental findings. If all attempts at replication were successful, confirm this OR if there are any findings that were not replicated or cannot be reproduced, note this and describe why.</i>
Randomization	<i>Describe how samples/organisms/participants were allocated into experimental groups. If allocation was not random, describe how covariates were controlled OR if this is not relevant to your study, explain why.</i>
Blinding	<i>Describe whether the investigators were blinded to group allocation during data collection and/or analysis. If blinding was not possible, describe why OR explain why blinding was not relevant to your study.</i>

Behavioural & social sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Study description	<i>Briefly describe the study type including whether data are quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods (e.g. qualitative cross-sectional, quantitative experimental, mixed-methods case study).</i>
Research sample	<i>State the research sample (e.g. Harvard university undergraduates, villagers in rural India) and provide relevant demographic information (e.g. age, sex) and indicate whether the sample is representative. Provide a rationale for the study sample chosen. For studies involving existing datasets, please describe the dataset and source.</i>
Sampling strategy	<i>Describe the sampling procedure (e.g. random, snowball, stratified, convenience). Describe the statistical methods that were used to predetermine sample size OR if no sample-size calculation was performed, describe how sample sizes were chosen and provide a rationale for why these sample sizes are sufficient. For qualitative data, please indicate whether data saturation was considered, and what criteria were used to decide that no further sampling was needed.</i>
Data collection	<i>Provide details about the data collection procedure, including the instruments or devices used to record the data (e.g. pen and paper, computer, eye tracker, video or audio equipment) whether anyone was present besides the participant(s) and the researcher, and whether the researcher was blind to experimental condition and/or the study hypothesis during data collection.</i>
Timing	<i>Indicate the start and stop dates of data collection. If there is a gap between collection periods, state the dates for each sample cohort.</i>
Data exclusions	<i>If no data were excluded from the analyses, state so OR if data were excluded, provide the exact number of exclusions and the rationale behind them, indicating whether exclusion criteria were pre-established.</i>
Non-participation	<i>State how many participants dropped out/declined participation and the reason(s) given OR provide response rate OR state that no participants dropped out/declined participation.</i>
Randomization	<i>If participants were not allocated into experimental groups, state so OR describe how participants were allocated to groups, and if allocation was not random, describe how covariates were controlled.</i>

Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Study description	<i>Briefly describe the study. For quantitative data include treatment factors and interactions, design structure (e.g. factorial, nested, hierarchical), nature and number of experimental units and replicates.</i>
Research sample	<i>Describe the research sample (e.g. a group of tagged <i>Passer domesticus</i>, all <i>Stenocereus thurberi</i> within Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument), and provide a rationale for the sample choice. When relevant, describe the organism taxa, source, sex, age range and any manipulations. State what population the sample is meant to represent when applicable. For studies involving existing datasets, describe the data and its source.</i>
Sampling strategy	<i>Note the sampling procedure. Describe the statistical methods that were used to predetermine sample size OR if no sample-size calculation was performed, describe how sample sizes were chosen and provide a rationale for why these sample sizes are sufficient.</i>
Data collection	<i>Describe the data collection procedure, including who recorded the data and how.</i>

Timing and spatial scale *Indicate the start and stop dates of data collection, noting the frequency and periodicity of sampling and providing a rationale for these choices. If there is a gap between collection periods, state the dates for each sample cohort. Specify the spatial scale from which the data are taken*

Data exclusions *If no data were excluded from the analyses, state so OR if data were excluded, describe the exclusions and the rationale behind them, indicating whether exclusion criteria were pre-established.*

Reproducibility *Describe the measures taken to verify the reproducibility of experimental findings. For each experiment, note whether any attempts to repeat the experiment failed OR state that all attempts to repeat the experiment were successful.*

Randomization *Describe how samples/organisms/participants were allocated into groups. If allocation was not random, describe how covariates were controlled. If this is not relevant to your study, explain why.*

Blinding *Describe the extent of blinding used during data acquisition and analysis. If blinding was not possible, describe why OR explain why blinding was not relevant to your study.*

Did the study involve field work? Yes No

Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

Materials & experimental systems

n/a	Involvement in the study
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Antibodies
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Eukaryotic cell lines
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Palaeontology and archaeology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Animals and other organisms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Human research participants
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Clinical data
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Dual use research of concern

Methods

n/a	Involvement in the study
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ChIP-seq
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Flow cytometry
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MRI-based neuroimaging