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## Locked up Inside the Vessels: Rare Earth Elements Are Transferred and Stored in the Conductive Tissues of the Accumulating Fern *Dryopteris erythrosora*

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1 **Locked up inside the vessels: Rare earth elements are transferred and stored in the**  
2 **conductive tissues of the accumulating fern *Dryopteris erythrosora***

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22 ABSTRACT

23 Rare earth elements (REEs) are strategic metals strongly involved in low-carbon energy  
24 conversion. However, these emerging contaminants are increasingly disseminated into  
25 ecosystems, raising concern regarding their toxicity. REE-accumulating plants are crucial  
26 subjects to better understand REE transfer to the trophic chain but are also promising  
27 phytoremediation tools. In this analysis, we deciphered REE accumulation sites in the REE-  
28 accumulating fern *Dryopteris erythrosora* by synchrotron X-ray  $\mu$ fluorescence ( $\mu$ XRF). This  
29 technique allows a high-resolution and *in situ* analysis of fresh samples or frozen-hydrated cross  
30 sections of different organs of the plant. In the sporophyte, REEs were translocated from the  
31 roots to the fronds by the xylem sap and were stored within the xylem conductive system. The  
32 comparison of REE distribution and accumulation levels in the healthy and necrotic parts of the  
33 frond shed light on the differential mobility between light and heavy REEs. Furthermore, the  
34 comparison emphasized that necrotized areas were not the main REE-accumulating sites.  
35 Finally, the absence of cell-to-cell mobility of REEs in the gametophyte suggested the absence of  
36 REE-compatible transporters in photosynthetic tissues. These results provide valuable  
37 knowledge on the physiology of REE-accumulating ferns to understand the REE cycle in  
38 biological systems and the expansion of phytotechnologies for REE-enriched or -contaminated  
39 soils.

40

41 KEYWORDS

42 Lanthanides, accumulating ferns, conductive vessels, phytoremediation, X-ray  
43 microfluorescence.

## 44 SYNOPSIS

45 This study reveals the accumulation sites in a model of accumulating ferns for light and heavy  
46 rare earth elements, emerging metal contaminants in the environment.

## 47 INTRODUCTION

48 The high-demand technological elements known as rare earth elements (REEs) include the 15  
49 lanthanides plus yttrium (Y) and scandium (Sc) as defined by the International Union of Pure  
50 and Applied Chemistry<sup>1</sup>. According to their atomic mass, REEs can be split into light REEs  
51 (LREEs from lanthanum (La) to europium (Eu) plus Sc) and heavy REEs (HREEs, from  
52 gadolinium (Gd) to lutetium (Lu) plus Y)<sup>2</sup>. Their physicochemical properties make REEs  
53 essential for numerous and multifaceted domains, such as green energy, industry high  
54 technologies and medicine<sup>3</sup>. REE-containing substrates such as lanthanum-modified bentonite  
55 (LMB) are also used in water eutrophication remediation<sup>4</sup>, even if adverse effects such as a  
56 reduced bioavailable phosphorus and formed anaerobic horizon from LMB may be harmful to  
57 submerged macrophytes<sup>5</sup>. REEs are also used to increase productivity in agriculture and  
58 livestock farming<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, REE mining, intense utilization associated with low  
59 recyclability<sup>7</sup>, is responsible for an ever increasing contamination of the soils and waters. For  
60 instance, hospitals are responsible for high anthropogenic Gd anomalies in rivers and estuarine  
61 waters<sup>8,9</sup>. Additionally, REE concentrations can reach up to 2000-27000 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> in soils from  
62 mining areas<sup>10</sup>, whereas the average worldwide soil concentration ranges from 100 to 200 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>  
63 <sup>11</sup>. The use of REEs as fertilizers to increase yield in Chinese agriculture during the last decades  
64 have also contributed to REE spreading in the soils and surface waters<sup>12</sup>. Although most  
65 countries do not specifically apply REEs to crops, the wide usage of phosphate fertilizers

66 enriched with REEs also represents an unintentional source of REE pollution<sup>10,13</sup>. For instance,  
67 the concentration of REEs in single superphosphate (SSP) varies from 500 to 8,300 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>,  
68 making its use as fertilizer a major REE source of 23,800 tons of REEs spread in Brazil in  
69 2014<sup>10,13</sup>.

70 When applied at low concentrations, REEs trigger hormetic effects in various organisms<sup>14,15</sup>,  
71 thereby justifying their use in agriculture as fertilizers<sup>13,16</sup>. However, the beneficial effects of  
72 low-dose application of cerium to crops is challenged in a recent meta-analysis<sup>17</sup>, questioning the  
73 aim to increase yield at the expense of the ecosystem quality. Nevertheless, their noxiousness at  
74 high concentrations is now well established<sup>11,15,17,18</sup>. The biological effects of REEs are now  
75 considered a major emerging environmental issue, as these elements are taken up by living  
76 organisms in contaminated ecosystems and induce toxic effects, with a higher toxicity for  
77 HREEs over LREEs<sup>11,15,19–22,20,21</sup>.

78 Metal/metalloid accumulating plants are valuable tools to remove metallic pollutants from  
79 contaminated areas. These plants can be used for ecosystem restoration by phytoremediation but  
80 can also be considered a profitable resource for agromining<sup>23,24</sup>. REE-accumulating plants exist  
81 among diverse euphyllophyta groups, with the class polypodiopsida (ferns) being the most  
82 represented<sup>25,26</sup> plus the two mesangiosperm genera *Phytolacca*<sup>27,28</sup> and *Carya*<sup>29</sup>. Interestingly,  
83 ferns preferentially accumulate LREEs, whereas angiosperms store more HREEs<sup>30–32</sup>. This  
84 discrepancy might reflect the onset of distinct REE absorption and transfer strategies throughout  
85 evolution.

86 Unraveling the transfer and storage mechanisms of REEs in these plants is of utmost importance  
87 to understand metal transfer to the biota. Furthermore, this will ensure proper selection of the

88 best candidates for either phytoremediation or agromining, depending on the pollution context.  
89 The distribution of REEs within the accumulating ferns *Dicranopteris linearis*, *Pronephrium*  
90 *simplex* and *Dryopteris erythrosora* was first investigated either by tissue fractionation  
91 techniques or using radioactive tracers, showing that REEs were stored in the chloroplasts for the  
92 three species, in the cell walls for the first two<sup>33–35</sup>, and at the tip of the pinnae with no staining  
93 along the veins for the latter<sup>25</sup>. The experimental biases of this methodology (tissue fractionation,  
94 loss of root integrity during REE radioactive tracer use and indirect REE detection) urged more  
95 accurate, nondestructive and direct detection analysis provided by synchrotron  $\mu$ XRF. Recently,  
96 the *in planta* distribution of REEs has been reported for *D. linearis*<sup>31</sup>. These experiments on fresh  
97 tissues notably showed that most of the REEs detected (mainly La and Ce) were stored in the  
98 epidermis of the fronds and to a lesser extent in the conductive tissues of the fronds. However,  
99 the distribution of HREEs was not determined, likely due to the LREE prevalence in the native  
100 soil where these fronds had grown.

101 If *D. linearis* and *P. simplex* present a high REE accumulation potential, they are subordinate to  
102 very specific climates<sup>35</sup> and are also sensitive to microclimate and soil factors<sup>36</sup>. To our  
103 knowledge, the publications concerning these ferns only mention naturally occurring plants and  
104 never refer to intentional cultivation. These cultivation condition restrictions, notably to sub-  
105 tropical rain forests, may constitute a drawback in the context of phytoremediation or  
106 agromining, if the REE-contaminated site is under a temperate or cold climate, under which  
107 these plants would hardly grow. Therefore, the other REE-accumulating fern, *D. erythrosora*,  
108 first identified on noncontaminated soil<sup>26</sup> represents an interesting alternative due to its easy  
109 cultivability, hardiness (growth under cold climates) and capacity to preferentially accumulate  
110 LREEs<sup>30</sup>, the most widespread REEs<sup>11</sup>. Our main objective was therefore to unravel the precise

111 distribution of LREEs and HREEs in this promising REE-accumulating species. Here, we  
112 present the *in situ*  $\mu$ XRF analysis of frond samples and thin frozen cross sections of the different  
113 organs of *D. erythrosora*. The environmental profile of REEs in soils is usually enriched in  
114 LREEs over HREEs. Given that most environmental studies dealing with REE accumulation in  
115 plants are performed *in situ* with soils harboring a general high natural prevalence of  
116 LREEs<sup>29,31,37</sup>, such systems do not allow adequate comparison of the plants coping with light  
117 *versus* heavy REEs in terms of uptake, fractionation and distribution patterns. To avoid this  
118 drawback, we used plants grown on a soil spiked with equal concentrations of selected REEs to  
119 circumvent a LREE-favored exposure as found in environmental soils. Given the chemical  
120 similarities between LREEs and HREEs, we hypothesized that LREEs and HREEs would be  
121 distributed similarly in fern tissues. We also hypothesized that the distribution pattern of REEs  
122 would differ from that of macronutrients but would remain the same regardless of the  
123 concentration of REEs found in tissues. The comparison of REE cellular localization with  
124 elements that have contrasted redistribution/mobility potentials, such as Ca, Mn and K, provided  
125 insights about the REE mobility in plants. Additionally, the use of different culture conditions  
126 and the investigation of two developmental stages strengthened our findings. This study revealed  
127 that the REE distribution is associated mostly with conductive vessels, a pattern different from  
128 the pattern reported for *D. linearis*, suggesting the existence of different strategies in REE-  
129 accumulating ferns to cope with excess REEs.

## 130 MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 131 **Plant culture and growth conditions**

132 The REE-accumulating fern *Dryopteris erythrosora* was used in the present study. Grown plants  
133 and fern spores were purchased from 'Les Jardins d'écoute s'il pleut', a nursery specializing in  
134 hardy ferns (Saint Michel Le Cloucq, France). Hardy ferns are plant resistant to cold temperatures  
135 (down to -15°C), moderate drought and wind. The two developmental stages (sporophyte and  
136 gametophyte) were studied. Sporophytes (fern plants) werecultivated in soil and hydroponics,  
137 while gametophytes were grown *in vitro*. The gametophyte develops after spore germination, as a  
138 small single-cell-thick blade harboring rhizoids (Figure S11A) and on which the gametes are  
139 produced and the sexual reproduction occurs.

140 For the cultivation of ferns on soil, plants were first cleaned from their growing substrate and  
141 subsequently transferred to an REE-spiked soil consisting of a Neoluvisol (horizon E) collected  
142 in the Forêt de Haye (Vandoeuvre-les-Nancy, France, physicochemical characteristics in Table  
143 S1). Hydrated salts of LaCl<sub>3</sub>, CeCl<sub>3</sub>, SmCl<sub>3</sub>, GdCl<sub>3</sub> and YbCl<sub>3</sub> (Sigma Aldrich, Saint-Quentin-  
144 Fallavier, France) were used to spike the soil with an equivalent quantity (83 or 333 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> dry  
145 weight (DW) of each REE (La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb) as indicated. The experimental strategy  
146 aimed at using only five representatives and comparing light and heavy REEs, added in the  
147 culture growth with equal concentrations. Then, we focused on five REEs, with La, Ce and Sm  
148 representing LREEs and Gd and Yb representing HREEs. These conditions cannot be reached  
149 with natural soils as LREEs commonly dominate the group of REES (about 87%). Chloride salts  
150 were used to enhance the bioavailability of REEs, bioavailability was estimated through CaCl<sub>2</sub>  
151 extraction before REE spiking and at harvest (see supplementary information). The two  
152 concentrations of REEs added in this study will thereafter be referred to as medium (415 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>  
153 REEs added) and high (1665 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> REEs added) REE conditions. An REE solution was  
154 sprayed several times onto thin layers of soil (1 cm), and thorough hand mixing was performed

155 to ensure proper homogenization of the contamination. The REE-spiked soil was finally placed  
156 into 3.4-L plastic pots (20 cm × 15 cm × 15 cm) and watered twice a week with deionized water.  
157 The aboveground biomass was harvested after two months of exposure.

158 Details related to the cultivation of ferns in hydroponics, cultivation of gametophytes, elemental  
159 analyses of fern tissues, and photonic microscopy observations are given in the Supplemental  
160 Text.

161 For both pot and hydroponic cultures, plants were grown under controlled conditions in a growth  
162 chamber (18/23 °C; 8/16 h dark/light cycles; 260  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ ).

### 163 **Preparation of samples for synchrotron measurements**

164 For the preparation of fresh samples, entire plants were brought to synchrotron facilities, and live  
165 samples were prepared on-site immediately prior to scanning to prevent dehydration phenomena.  
166 The samples were hand cut with a stainless-steel razor blade ('dry knife'), immediately placed on  
167 the 3D printed sample holder, and mounted between two layers of Ultralene (SPEX SamplePrep;  
168 4  $\mu\text{m}$ ). Analyses were conducted at room temperature. At least three biological replicates were  
169 analyzed and representative samples are shown in the results and in the supporting information.

170 For the preparation of frozen thin sections, fragments of fern organs were collected from fresh  
171 plants and immediately immersed in a water soluble–embedding compound (OCT from VWR,  
172 Rosny-sous-Bois, France) and frozen in isopentane cooled by liquid  $\text{N}_2$ , as described in Castillo-  
173 Michel et al. (2017)<sup>38</sup>. Transverse sections of roots, rachis and pinnae were cryosectioned at a  
174 thickness of 60  $\mu\text{m}$  using a cryomicrotome (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Illkirch, France) available

175 at the SOLEIL facility. The thin sections were placed between two Ultralene films in a copper  
176 sample holder under freezing conditions at all times.

### 177 **MicroXRF analyses**

178 The X-ray fluorescence microscopy experiments on fresh samples were undertaken at beamline  
179 P06 at PETRA III at DESY (Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany)<sup>39</sup>. The  
180 undulator beam was monochromatized with a cryogenically cooled Si(111) channel-cut  
181 monochromator to an energy of 11 keV with an X-ray flux on the order of  $10^{10}$  photons  $s^{-1}$ <sup>40</sup>. A  
182 Kirkpatrick-Baez mirror pair was used to focus the incident beam to 700 nm \* 530 nm (h \* v).  
183 X-ray detection was performed using the Maia detector of the P06 beamline<sup>41,42</sup>, which uses a  
184 large detector array to maximize the detected signal and count rates. A quick ‘survey scan-  
185 overview scan’ (50-100  $\mu\text{m}$  with a dwell time of 1-2 ms, taking 5-10 min in total) was first  
186 conducted to select the precise area to be scanned. Then, a ‘high resolution scan’ was conducted  
187 (resolution of 2-10  $\mu\text{m}$  and a dwell time of 8-20 ms). Considering that radiation damage might  
188 occur above X-ray dose limits of 4.1 kGy<sup>43,44</sup> we used fast scanning (per-pixel dwell time  
189 ranging between 1 and 20 ms).

190 Cryogenic microXRF analyses on thin sections were conducted on the LUCIA beamline<sup>45,46</sup> at  
191 SOLEIL synchrotron (Gif-sur-Yvette, France)<sup>46</sup> using the water-cooled fixed exit double-crystal  
192 Si(111) monochromator. Micro-XRF elemental maps were collected at 7,300 eV with a beam  
193 focused to 3.5 \* 3.0 (v \* h)  $\mu\text{m}^2$  by means of a Kirkpatrick-Baez mirror arrangement. The XRF  
194 signal was collected using a 60 mm<sup>2</sup> silicon drift diode Bruker detector. The pixel size was 15 \*  
195 15  $\mu\text{m}^2$  for the low spatial resolution maps and 3 \* 3  $\mu\text{m}^2$  for the high spatial resolution maps  
196 with integration times of 100 and 500 ms per pixel, respectively. The experimental chamber was

197 operated under vacuum to minimize absorption and scattering by air, and a liquid N<sub>2</sub> cryostat  
198 was used. The thin sections were transferred under N<sub>2</sub> vapor into the experimental chamber to  
199 maintain the cold chain. Frozen hydrated sections from three to six biological replicates were  
200 analyzed, representative samples are shown in the results and the supporting informations.

## 201 **XRF data treatment**

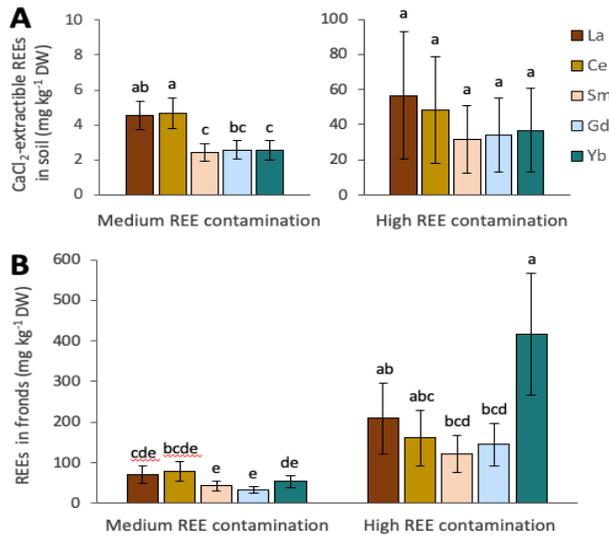
202 P06 data – The XRF event stream was analyzed using the DynamicAnalysis method<sup>47,48</sup>, as  
203 implemented in GeoPIXE<sup>49,50</sup>. GeoPIXE provides quantitative first-order self-absorption  
204 corrected maps of projected areal elemental density – maps of elemental content (in % or mg kg<sup>-1</sup>).  
205 Conversion of X-ray counts to concentration was performed through analysis of reference foil  
206 scans. The samples were each considered to have a uniform thickness (300 μm). The matrix file  
207 used for the spectral fitting was an assumed composition of C<sub>7.3</sub>O<sub>33</sub>H<sub>59</sub>N<sub>0.7</sub>S<sub>0.8</sub> with a density of  
208 0.90 g cm<sup>-3</sup> and considering two layers of Ultralene (4 μm) (Figure S1).

209  
210 LUCIA data – To optimize the discrimination of the various XRF line contributions, the XRF  
211 signal of each element was extracted by batch fitting the XRF spectrum in each pixel of the map  
212 using PyMCA software<sup>51</sup> (Figure S2). The count number for the XRF signal was normalized by  
213 the count number of the incoming beam signal and corrected by the XRF detector deadtime.  
214 Three color RGB (red–green–blue) maps were generated to display spatial correlation using Fiji  
215 software<sup>52</sup>.

## 216 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### 217 **Accumulation levels of rare earth elements in fronds of *Dryopteris erythrosora***

218 The total REE concentration of the natural soil used in this study before REE addition (Table S1)  
219 was 217.4 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, with >86% LREEs, >7% Sc and Y and <6% HREEs. Ce, La, Nd and Y were  
220 the four most represented REEs, constituting >87% of REEs. We further focused on five REEs,  
221 with La, Ce and Sm representing LREEs and Gd and Yb representing HREEs. Among these  
222 REEs, although La and Ce were the two most abundant (33.5 and 115 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, respectively),  
223 their CaCl<sub>2</sub> extractability was low (0.112 and 0.302 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, representing each 0.3%,  
224 respectively). Samarium and Gd were less abundant but showed a comparable extractability  
225 (5.13 and 5.41 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> in total with 0.4 and 0.5% extractability, respectively), while Yb was less  
226 abundant (1.02 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) but exhibited a higher extractability (1.6%). Plants grown in this soil  
227 accumulated LREEs moderately and HREEs very faintly in their fronds (Table S2). Thus, the  
228 discrepancy in LREE and HREE content and availability of the soil impedes their homogeneous  
229 accumulation in the fronds and might prevent the detection of low-concentration REEs *in planta*.  
230 To increase the total REE content of this soil and to reduce the content gap between LREEs and  
231 HREEs, we spiked this natural soil with equivalent amounts of the five REEs selected, namely,  
232 medium and high REE contamination (see the Materials and Methods section for details) and  
233 transferred *D. erythrosora* plants to these conditions for two months. The REE concentrations  
234 used were chosen to reflect a high level of contamination, as can be found in situ<sup>10</sup>, and in  
235 accordance with previously published work, in which *D. erythrosora* was shown to accumulate  
236 more REEs than the other ferns. The CaCl<sub>2</sub>-extractible fraction of REEs was analyzed under the  
237 two conditions (Figure 1A) and revealed an overall increase in the CaCl<sub>2</sub> extractible REEs  
238 (Figure 1A) under the two conditions. The CaCl<sub>2</sub> extractible concentrations of both the selected  
239 LREEs and HREEs were in a much closer range than in the natural soil (2-4.81 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> for  
240 medium contamination and 34-56.2 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> for high contamination), thereby fulfilling our goal.



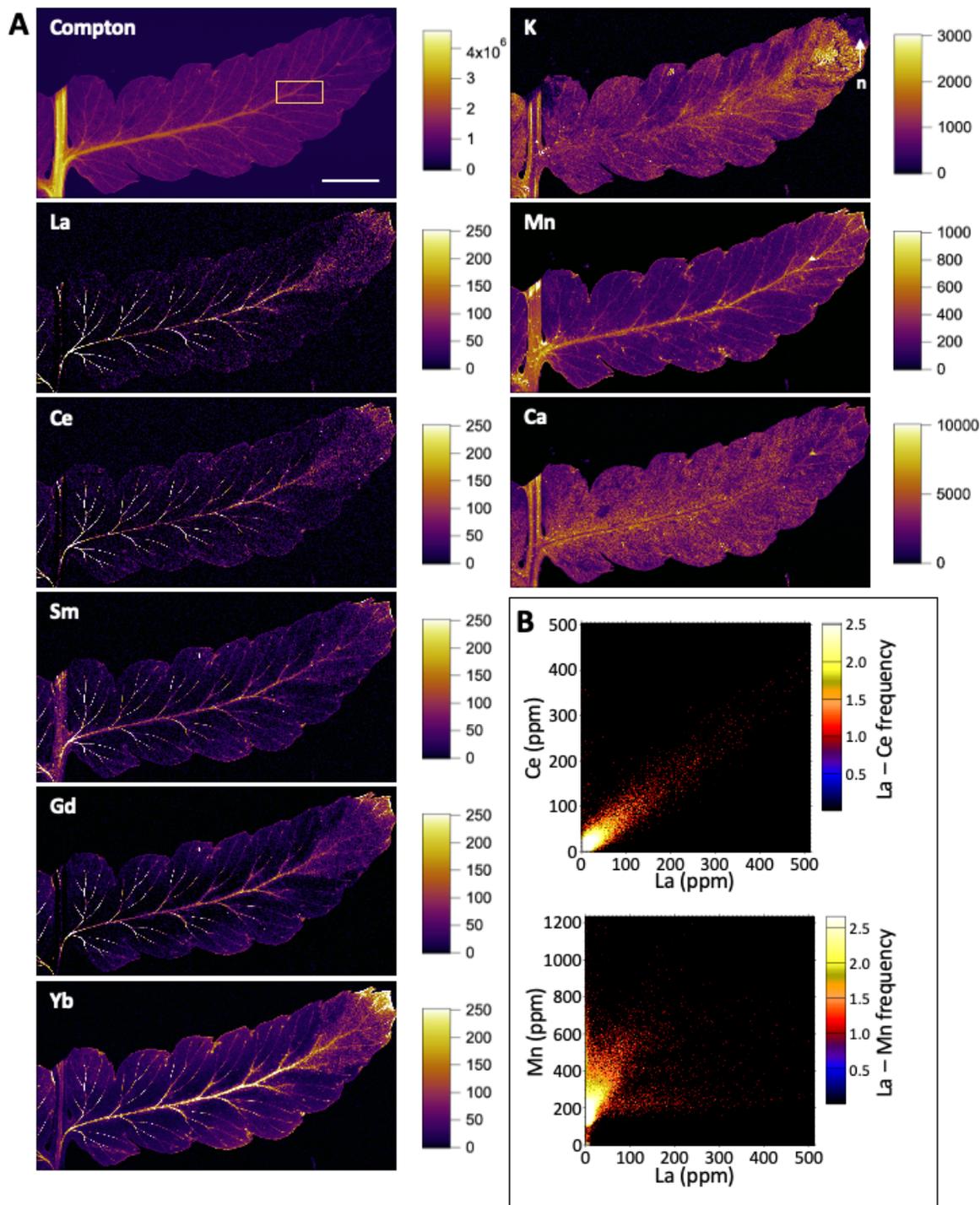
**Figure 1.** REE concentrations in the CaCl<sub>2</sub> extractable fraction of the contaminated soil and in fronds of *Dryopteris erythrosora*. (A) CaCl<sub>2</sub>-extractable fraction of the five REEs under the two conditions. (B) Concentrations in plants grown on a soil spiked with a medium (83 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> DW each) or a high level (333 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> DW each) equimolar mix of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. For A and B, n=3, mean ± standard deviation (SD). Different letters denote significant differences (P< 0.05, analysis of variance (ANOVA)).

241 Then, the accumulation of the five selected REEs was measured by inductively coupled plasma  
 242 mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) in fronds of *D. erythrosora*. For the medium contamination  
 243 condition, a total of 279 mg REEs kg<sup>-1</sup> DW was found in the fronds (Figure 1B). The five REEs  
 244 were found at a similar order of magnitude, with 33.2 to 79.1 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> each, with Sm and Gd  
 245 slightly less accumulated (Figure 1B). For the high contamination condition, the five REEs were  
 246 overall 3.8 times more accumulated (1,052 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) in the fronds in comparison to the medium  
 247 contamination (279 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>). Again, the five REEs in the fronds of this high contamination  
 248 condition were accumulated at a similar order of magnitude (200-400 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>). This finding  
 249 reflects the higher available pool of REEs in the soil solution under high REE conditions.  
 250 However, the increase in REE accumulation in fronds obtained under the highest REE exposure

251 (3.8 times) does not follow the increase in the  $\text{CaCl}_2$ -extractible fraction in soils (12 times). The  
252 discrepancies observed might result from a limited root-to-shoot transfer; therefore, the  
253 accumulation in fronds would not fully represent the available fraction of REEs. It is also  
254 possible that  $\text{CaCl}_2$  extraction does not entirely represent the total available pool of these metals  
255 in this type of soil. Despite this, the comparable concentrations of LREEs and HREEs in the  
256 fronds measured here were a prerequisite to enable the comparative distribution of the two  
257 groups of REEs, as presented thereafter.

### 258 **REEs are essentially accumulated in the conductive tissues of fronds**

259 To investigate the overall distribution and storage sites of the different REEs, we first performed  
260 a  $\mu\text{XRF}$  analysis of the whole surface of fresh pinnae (Figure S3) from plants grown under high-  
261 REE conditions. As shown in Figure 2A, the distribution of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb overlapped  
262 mainly with the vascular pattern of the pinna, and the necrotic tip of the pinna is further  
263 described in a dedicated section below. This REE distribution is peculiar when compared to  
264 other elements, such as Mn, Ca and K, that are more widely distributed throughout the limb. The  
265 distribution pattern of REEs is further illustrated by a good correlation between REEs, e.g., La  
266 and Ce distribution over the pinna (Figure 2B), but a weaker correlation between La and Mn.  
267 The limited correlation between REEs and Mn could be explained by the presence of Mn-  
268 enriched spots in the limb in addition to the veins, while REEs are restricted mostly to the latter.  
269 Given the similar ionic radii and affinity to protein binding sites between REEs and  $\text{Ca}^{53,54}$ , it has  
270 been long hypothesized that these elements could share common transport pathways. However,  
271 REEs display a distribution very distinct from that of Ca, suggesting that REEs cannot be  
272 redistributed to the limb, either due the absence of REE unloading systems or REE complexation  
273 in the vasculature.

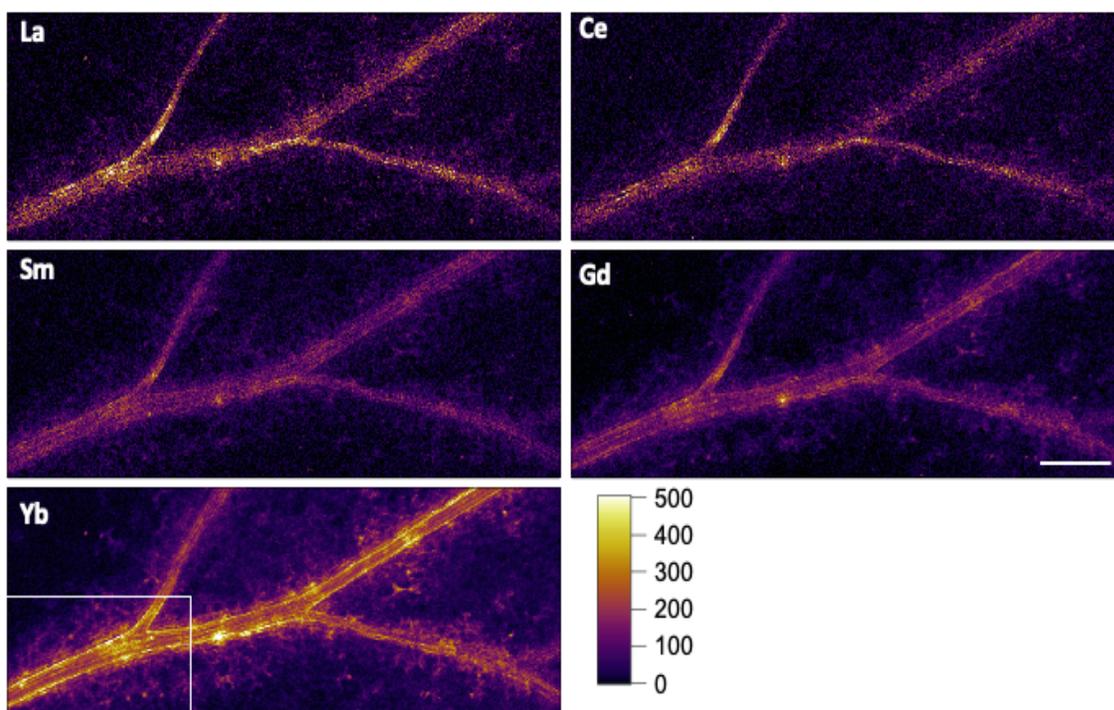


**Figure 2.** REE distribution in pinnules of *Dryopteris erythrosora*. (A) Synchrotron-based X-ray fluorescence Compton and elemental maps of a fresh *D. erythrosora* pinnule grown on a soil supplemented with equal amounts ( $333 \text{ mg kg}^{-1} \text{ DW}$  each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. The images of this representative sample were acquired with a step size of  $50 \mu\text{m}$  and a dwell time of  $12 \text{ ms}$  per pixel. The squared area on the Compton map corresponds to the high-resolution maps shown in Figure 3. The scale bar represents  $3 \text{ mm}$ . n: necrotic area. The color scale is a quantitative scale in  $\text{mg/kg}$  except for Compton (number of counts). (B) Correlation charts comparing distributions of La with Ce or Mn. The color scale of correlation graphs reports the frequency of the values on the whole image.

274 To probe the different REE concentration ranges found in the aboveground biomass of various  
275 plants grown worldwide in REE-contaminated soils or REE natural background<sup>11,55-58</sup>, we  
276 analyzed the REE accumulation sites between plants grown under different conditions.  
277 Contrasted REE plant concentrations were measured under these different conditions, namely,  
278 medium (279 mg REE kg<sup>-1</sup> DW in fronds, Figure S4B) and high REE (1,052 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> in fronds,  
279 Figure 2). In parallel, plants with lower amounts of La and Yb in their fronds were obtained  
280 through hydroponic cultures (20.1 and 8.02 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> in fronds of La and Yb, respectively, data not  
281 shown). This culture system ensures high REE availability to the roots, while short-term  
282 exposure allowed low REE content in the fronds.  $\mu$ XRF analyses revealed a similar pattern of  
283 REE localization in the veins of fronds regardless of the accumulation and growing conditions  
284 (Figure 2, Figure S4A, B). This finding demonstrates that REE localization in the vasculature of  
285 this fern species does not depend on the concentration of REEs in fronds or on the culture system  
286 used. Therefore, the hypothesis of the REE restricted mobility is favored, unlike other elements  
287 that localize differently depending on the concentration. For instance, Cd and Zn localize to the  
288 trichomes of *Arabidopsis halleri* under moderate concentrations and spread to mesophyll cells  
289 under high exposure<sup>59</sup>.

290 A high-resolution map (Figure 3) of the squared area in Figure 2A revealed subtle differences  
291 between REEs. LREEs showed a rather homogeneous layout at the veins, while HREEs were  
292 more unevenly distributed, with a more intense signal at the periphery of the veins. The  
293 correlation charts focusing on the squared area in Figure 3 (Figure S5) further strengthened these  
294 observations. There was a high correlation between the distribution of REEs of similar ionic radii  
295 (e.g., for the two LREEs La-Ce or the two HREEs Yb-Gd) and a lower correlation for REEs with  
296 contrasting ionic radii (e.g., LREE vs HREE such as La-Gd or La-Yb), especially for the higher

297 concentrations. Thus, LREEs and HREEs appear to share an overall vascular distribution, with  
298 subtle differences supporting dissimilar interactions with plant tissues and/or transporters  
299 depending on the REE group. Additionally, our results suggest that although a common mode of  
300 transport could be shared among REEs and some macronutrients from the soil solution to the  
301 aboveground parts of the plant, REEs could not, or could hardly, be unloaded from the  
302 vasculature.

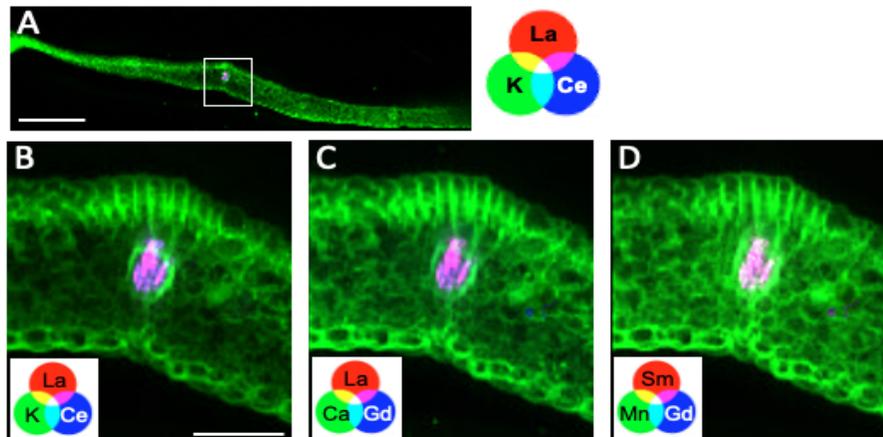


**Figure 3.** Focus on REE distribution in the vasculature of a pinnule of *Dryopteris erythrosora*. X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from the zoomed area shown in Figure 2. Same legend as in Figure 2, except that the images of this representative sample were acquired with a step size of 5 μm and a dwell time of 5 ms per pixel. The scale bar represents 300 μm. The color scale is a quantitative scale in mg kg<sup>-1</sup>. All the maps were uniformly scaled from 0 to 500 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> as a maximum. The two-element correlation plots are presented in Figure S5.

303

304 **REEs are locked inside the vessels of the aboveground parts of the sporophyte**

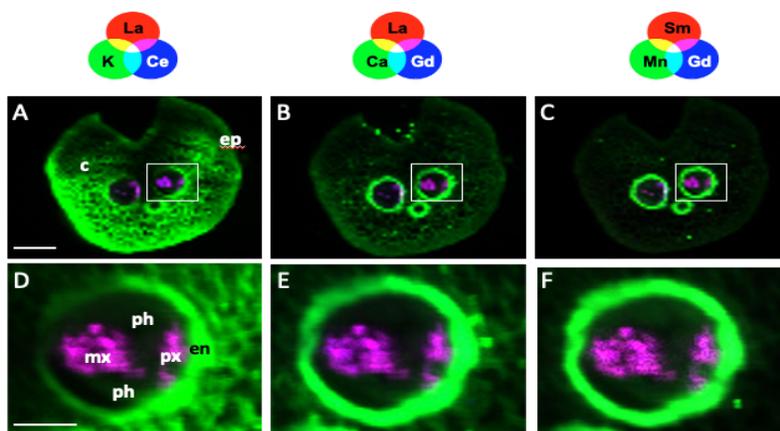
305 The accumulation of REEs in the vasculature prompted us to investigate in more detail the REE  
306 distribution inside the frond tissue. To do so, we performed elemental  $\mu$ XRF mapping on thin  
307 cryosections of pinnules and rachis. The use of cryosections avoids freeze-drying of the samples  
308 and preserves tissue and cell integrity, maintaining the actual elemental distribution during the  
309 analysis<sup>60</sup>. Due to the specifications of the LUCIA beamline, the incident energy is limited to 8.2  
310 keV, and the Yb distribution could not be analyzed.



**Figure 4.** REE distribution inside the vessels of pinnules of *Dryopteris erythrosora*. La-K-Ce (left), La-Ca-Gd (middle) and Sm-Mn-Gd (right) X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from frozen hydrated cross sections of pinnules of ferns grown on soil supplemented with equal amounts ( $333 \text{ kg}^{-1}$  DW each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. The images were acquired with a step size of  $10 \mu\text{m}$  (A) or  $3 \mu\text{m}$  (B-D), a dwell time of  $100 \text{ ms}$  (A) or  $500 \text{ ms}$  (B-D) per pixel, and the energy of the incident beam was set at  $7.3 \text{ keV}$ . The central vein of (A) is magnified in B-D. The scale bar represents  $300 \mu\text{m}$  (A) or  $100 \mu\text{m}$  (B-D). The color scale is the same for a given element for all the maps.

311 The XRF maps of frozen-hydrated cross sections of pinnules evidenced the presence of REEs  
312 inside the main vein rather than in the surrounding cells of the bundle sheath (Figure 4, Figure

313 S6), which could not be inferred from Figures 2 and 3. This observation remained valid for all  
 314 the REEs detected (La, Ce, Sm, Gd) that colocalized inside the veins (Figure 4, Figure S6).  
 315 Although the specific cell type was not achieved due to the spatial resolution limitation, the  
 316 central position of the REE signal in the vein is evocative of a xylem distribution<sup>61</sup>. The high-  
 317 resolution maps in Figure S6 show replicates of pinnule cross sections from high-REE-exposed  
 318 plants, revealing that although REEs are observed only in the vessels (Figure S6), their  
 319 distribution is not fully homogeneous, with cross sections from the same exposure conditions  
 320 showing a variable REE content between cross sections. This result is in accordance with the  
 321 relatively uneven REE distribution observed in Figure 3.



**Figure 5.** REE distribution inside the rachis of *Dryopteris erythrosora*. La-K-Ce (left panels), La-Ca-Gd (middle panels), and Sm-Mn-Gd (right panels) X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from frozen hydrated cross sections of rachis of ferns grown on soil supplemented with equal amounts ( $333 \text{ mg kg}^{-1} \text{ DW}$  each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. The images were acquired with a step size of  $20 \mu\text{m}$  (A-C) or  $3 \mu\text{m}$  (D-F), a dwell time of  $100 \text{ ms}$  (A-C) or  $500 \text{ ms}$  (D-F) per pixel, and the energy of the incident beam was set at  $7.3 \text{ keV}$ . A vascular bundle of (A-C) is magnified in D-F. The scale bar represents  $250 \mu\text{m}$  (A-C) or  $50 \mu\text{m}$  (D-F). The color scale is the same for a given element for all the samples. c: cortex, en: endodermis, ep: epidermis, mx: metaxylem, ph: phloem, px: protoxylem.

322 In the rachis of the frond, REEs were also found inside the conductive tissues (Figure 5, Figure  
 323 S7), as shown by the detection of La, Ce, Gd and Sm inside the vascular bundles. The rachis

324 cross section replicates obtained from different plants showed the same REE distribution in cells  
325 inside the veins but not in the cortex or epidermis (Figure 5A-F), thereby strengthening our  
326 observations. Furthermore, as confirmed by the carmino-green staining shown in Figure S8 and  
327 according to the literature<sup>62</sup>, these specific cells were identified as xylem vessels. Even at this  
328 scale, REE localization was distinct from the localization of nutrients such as K and Ca (Figure  
329 5, Figure S7), which are present mainly in the endodermis, cortex and epidermis. The apparent  
330 superimposition of REEs and Mn patterns in the stele shown in Figure 2 is therefore reassessed  
331 by the acquisitions done with cross sections in Figure 5F and Figure S7, since Mn was  
332 predominantly detected in the endodermis rather than inside the vascular bundles.

333 These results clearly illustrate that REEs are transferred to the aerial parts of *D. erythrosora*  
334 through the xylem sap and strengthen the hypothesis of REE sequestration inside the vessels.  
335 The strategy of accumulating toxic metals in nonphotosynthetic cells is widespread among  
336 metal-accumulating plants but more often concerns compartments such as leaf epidermis (e.g.,  
337 Zn in *Thlaspi caerulescens*<sup>63</sup>, Ni and Co in *Glochidion sc. Sericeum*<sup>64</sup>) or trichomes<sup>65,66</sup>.

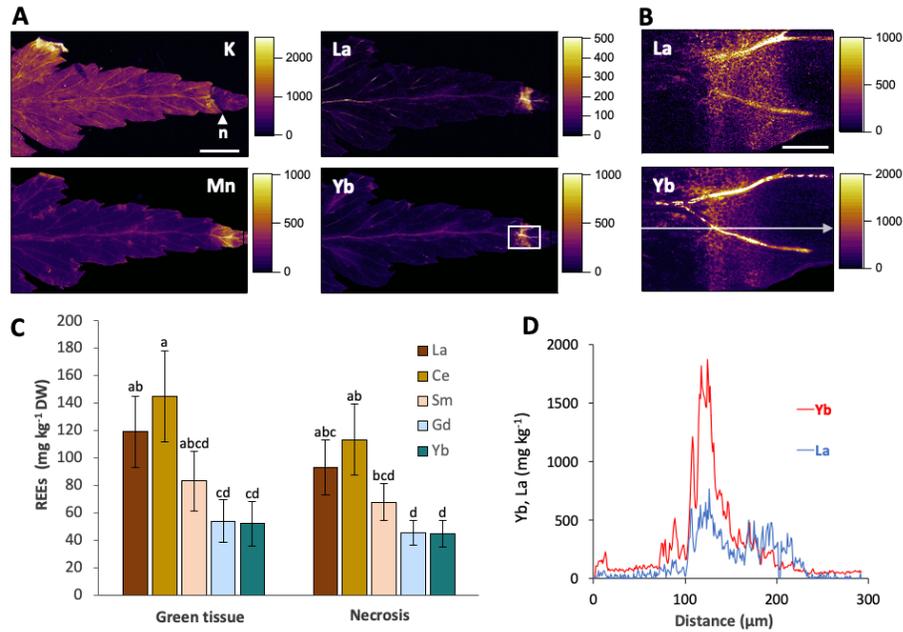
338 The REE storage inside the vessels could reflect strong molecular interactions between REEs  
339 and xylem sap compounds or cell wall components. Only a few studies have investigated REE  
340 interactions in plants, with two main findings: (i) In the REE-hyperaccumulating fern *D. linearis*,  
341 codeposits of silicon and LREEs were evidenced<sup>67</sup>, leading the authors to hypothesize that these  
342 mineral complexes could be involved in REE detoxification. However, these deposits were not  
343 detected specifically in the vessels, and HREEs were not analyzed in this plant given the absence  
344 of HREE contamination; and (ii) in leaf extracts of *D. linearis*<sup>68</sup>, a putative LREE-binding  
345 molecule, a 2.2-kD peptide has also been identified and evidenced after leaf grinding, a step  
346 prone to artifacts. Assuming that this LREE-peptide complex was present in the vessels and

347 could prevent the transfer of LREEs out of the vessels (which point was not addressed in the  
348 article), a significant proportion of LREEs was recovered in the epidermis of *D. linearis*. The  
349 very scarce literature on REE interactions in plants does not allow the drawing of clear  
350 conclusions regarding REE ligands or sequestration processes. However, the different  
351 distribution of REEs between *D. erythrosora* and *D. linearis* supports the hypothesis that the  
352 sequestration pattern of REEs in the vessels of *D. erythrosora* is unlikely to follow the same  
353 pathway as *D. linearis*. Furthermore, investigations are needed to compare both fern models with  
354 respect to chelators present in the xylem sap as well as putative molecular mechanisms of REE  
355 unloading and redistribution in adjacent tissues.

356 **Necrotic tissues are not storage sites for REEs but reveal differential mobility of LREEs vs**  
357 **HREEs**

358 Several fronds of *D. erythrosora* displayed necrotic tissues in restrained zones. This phenomenon  
359 was abundant in the fronds of *D. linearis* exposed to a high REE-contaminated soil<sup>31</sup>, which was  
360 hypothesized to be a detoxification mechanism. Therefore, we analyzed the REE content and  
361 distribution in necrotic areas of *D. erythrosora*. The necrotic tips of either the pinnule or the  
362 frond of plants grown in high REE contamination (Figure 2, Figure S4A, Figure 6) presented a  
363 noticeable REE signal relative to the limb, which was the least REE-concentrated part of the  
364 pinna. The necrotic pinna tip was depleted of K, unlike Mn (Figure 6A) and Ca (Figure S9),  
365 reflecting the differential remobilization potential of these nutrients and the similar behavior of  
366 REEs in contrasting exposure contexts. As a major component of cell ionic strength, K is more  
367 abundant in biologically active cells and is mobile, whereas Ca is less mobile due to its  
368 contribution to cell walls<sup>69</sup>. Conversely, Mn follows the transpiration flux but is poorly  
369 redistributed through the phloem sap<sup>70</sup>. Therefore, REEs likely reach the pinna tip *via*

370 transpiration-driven xylem flux and are subsequently blocked in the vessels of necrotic tissues,  
 371 unlike mobile elements such as K.



**Figure 6.** REE distribution and concentrations in the necrotic regions of fronds of *Dryopteris erythrosora*. (A) X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from frond tips of ferns grown on soil supplemented with equal amounts (333 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> DW each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. n: necrotic area. (B) is a high-resolution scan of the area selected in (A). The images of this representative sample were acquired with a step size of 20 μm (A) or 5 μm (B) and a dwell time of 20 ms (A) or 5 ms (B) per pixel. The scale bar represents 250 μm (A) or 70 μm (B). (C) REE concentrations in the green and necrotic tissues of the fronds, mean of 3 replicates ± SD. Different letters denote significant differences between REEs (P<0.05, analysis of variance (ANOVA)). (D) REE concentrations along the arrow drawn on the Yb map (B).

372 Despite the more intense REE signal in necrotic parts, REE concentrations measured by ICP-MS  
 373 in healthy and necrotic tissues of the pinna were similar (Figure 6C), suggesting that necrotic  
 374 tissues are not the main accumulation sites for REEs in this species, at least for this range of REE  
 375 concentrations, unlike the observations for the REE-accumulating fern *Dicranopteris linearis*<sup>31</sup>  
 376 or other elements such as As in the As-accumulating fern *Pteris vittata*<sup>71</sup>.

377 The REE diffusion outside the veins observed in the necrosis (Figure 2 and Figure 6A, B) could  
378 be due to the loss of vascular tissue integrity leading to sap leakage, which would indicate that  
379 although REEs could be locked up within the vessels, a significant proportion would remain  
380 mobile in xylem vessels. La and Yb distributions were further analyzed through an elemental  
381 profile in the necrotic area (cf. white arrow in Figure 6B, profile in Figure 6D). Along this profile  
382 a living area (rich in K), a vein and a necrotic zone, the REEs did not show an identical  
383 distribution. On the one hand, the living area (left side of the vein) had a low REE relative  
384 content, which increased in the vein for both La and Yb. This observation is consistent with the  
385 vascular distribution of the REEs previously described. On the other hand, in the necrotic part,  
386 on the right of the vein, the La content was of the same order of magnitude as the order of  
387 magnitude found in the vein, whereas the Yb concentration decreased strongly. Such a different  
388 behavior between these contrasted REEs (La as an LREE and Yb as an HREE) could depict a  
389 higher mobility of La or a stronger binding of Yb in this necrosis.

390 **REEs are not stored in the root vessels of the sporophyte but are immobilized in the**  
391 **rhizoids of the gametophyte**

392 MicroXRF mapping performed on thin cryosections of *D. erythrosora* roots showed an REE  
393 tissue distribution in contrast to the tissue distribution of the aboveground parts. Indeed, in  
394 Figure S10, the REEs are present in the root rhizodermis and in cell layers surrounding the  
395 central cylinder instead of sap-conducting cells. The rhizodermal relative REE enrichment likely  
396 reflects apoplastic REE uptake from the growing substrate. REEs were detected in the cortex  
397 cells surrounding the endodermis and the endodermis itself, while the central cylinder apparently  
398 contains fewer REEs. In contrast to the fronds, REEs were not stored in the root veins but rather  
399 detected in the central cylinder only in one single root cross section (Figure S10). The same trend

400 was observed for young and old roots, as shown in Figure S10. Further investigations would be  
401 advisable, notably cross sections obtained at different distances from the root tip, to better  
402 describe and understand the REE loading into the vessels. However, transfer into the xylem of  
403 aboveground parts seems to be a deadlock for REEs unless vessel integrity is impaired, as  
404 illustrated by the necrosis REE leakage described above. It could possibly be due to a transporter  
405 with a root-specific expression pattern, which therefore would only allow REE loading into the  
406 xylem, whereas no export system would permit REE unloading from the xylem to the  
407 surrounding parenchyma cells of the fronds. A second hypothesis would involve a change in  
408 REE speciation during sap transport (e.g. REE precipitation or binding), that would no longer  
409 allow REEs to be unloaded from the veins. Therefore, further studies aiming at elucidating the  
410 solubility of REEs and at identifying REE ligands in the xylem sap or on vessel cell walls are  
411 crucial to unravel this vascular storage of REEs.

412 REE accumulation sites have also been investigated by  $\mu$ XRF in the gametophyte stage of the  
413 fern grown *in vitro* and exposed to a mix of the five REEs. The gametophyte corresponds to the  
414 haploid developmental stage of the *D. erythrosora* lifecycle and consists of a photosynthetic  
415 blade with thin single-cell rhizoids involved in anchoring as well as water and nutrient  
416 absorption<sup>72</sup> (Figure S11A). Only the rhizoids contained REEs, and colocalization of the  
417 different REEs was observed (Figure S11). The K content of the photosynthetic tissue proves the  
418 biologically active state of these cells, and once more, the Ca and Mn distributions differed from  
419 the distributions of La and Gd (Figure S11). Due to insufficient spatial resolution, it was not  
420 possible to decipher whether the REEs accumulated in the intracellular or apoplastic  
421 compartment of the rhizoids; however, no REE transfer to the photosynthetic part was detected,  
422 suggesting that REEs are transferred to photosynthetic organs solely in the vascularized

423 sporophyte following xylem flux and that no cell-to-cell mobility is allowed for REEs in the  
424 vein-lacking gametophyte.

425 Altogether, the results of the present study and the literature showed that, even if REE  
426 accumulation is a conserved trait among ferns<sup>25,30</sup>, REE distribution has common features but  
427 also peculiarities across fern phylogeny. The main characteristic of *D. erythrosora* is the storage  
428 of REEs in xylem vessels only (not encountered in *D. linearis*), which could be the result of REE  
429 accumulation mechanisms having evolved differently between these fern genera (different  
430 transport systems and/or various REE ligands produced by the plants). Further comparative  
431 genomic, transcriptomic and metabolic analyses between these REE accumulating ferns are the  
432 next step towards identifying the mechanisms underlying the specificities of accumulation we  
433 highlighted. To conclude, our results set a new basis for a better understanding of REE transfer  
434 and accumulation in plants, which is still in its infancy.

#### 435 **AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIEL**

436 The authors declare that all data related to the findings of this study are available within the  
437 article and supplementary information or are available from the corresponding author upon  
438 reasonable request.

439

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464

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743

### Cultivation of ferns hydroponically

For the cultivation of ferns in hydroponics, roots of plants precultivated on loam were first carefully washed before transfer to the hydroponic solution made of a modified quarter-strength Hoagland medium (2 mM  $\text{NH}_4\text{NO}_3$ , 3 mM  $\text{KNO}_3$ , 2 mM  $\text{KCl}$ , 2 mM  $\text{Ca}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 2 mM  $\text{MgSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 1.5 mM  $\text{NaCl}$ , 600  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4$ , 100  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CaCl}_2$ , 50  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{NaFe}(\text{III})\text{-EDTA}$ , 50  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{H}_3\text{BO}_3$ , 5  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{MnCl}_2 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 10  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{ZnSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 0.5  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 0.1  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{Na}_2\text{MoO}_3$ , pH 5.6) under constant aeration. Ferns were grown for four weeks in the control nutritive medium and subsequently transferred for three weeks to the same solution containing 10  $\mu\text{M}$  of both La and Yb and lacking  $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4$  to avoid REE precipitation with phosphates. After three weeks of exposure to REEs, plants were harvested, and a subset of plants was reintroduced to the noncontaminated solution for two extra weeks and further harvested and analyzed identically.

### Cultivation of gametophytes *in vitro*

Gametophyte cultures were performed from spores of *D. erythrosora*. Spores were surface sterilized first with 70% ethanol for one min and then with 10% bleach for 20 min, rinsed three times in sterile water and sown on agar plates containing half-strength MS medium without phosphate to avoid REEs precipitation (10.3 mM  $\text{NH}_4\text{NO}_3$ , 9.4 mM  $\text{KNO}_3$ , 1.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ , 0.625 mM, 0.75 mM  $\text{MgSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 50  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{NaFe}(\text{III})\text{-EDTA}$ , 50  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{H}_3\text{BO}_3$ , 50  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{MnCl}_2 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 15  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{ZnSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 2.5  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{KI}$ , 0.5  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , 0.5  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{Na}_2\text{MoO}_3$ , 0.05  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CoCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$  pH 5.7, with the addition of 10  $\text{g}\cdot\text{L}^{-1}$  sucrose and 8  $\text{g}\cdot\text{L}^{-1}$  purified agar). The gametophytes were grown for 4 weeks before transfer to the same medium contaminated with 50  $\mu\text{M}$  of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. At transfer time, the gametophytes were placed on a cellophane membrane to avoid unintentional REE contamination of the gametophyte blade by the agar medium (only roots were in direct contact with the cellophane membrane). The gametophytes were grown under controlled conditions in a phytotronic chamber (18/23 °C; 8/16 h dark/light cycles; 300  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ ).

## **Elemental analysis**

*For the soil CaCl<sub>2</sub> extractable fraction*, 3 grams of the 2-mm-sieved substrate was dried at 60 °C for 48 h and incubated with 50 mL of 10 mmol L<sup>-1</sup> calcium chloride under agitation (40 rpm) for 2 h at room temperature. The mixture was first filtered with ash-free filters, subsequently filtered at 0.45 μm and acidified with HNO<sub>3</sub> before inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) analysis as previously described in Grosjean et al. (2020)<sup>26</sup> using three replicates. A surface water-trace metal standard (SPS-SW1, LGC Prochem standards, United Kingdom) was used as a certified reference material.

*For plant sample analysis*, fronds were sampled and dried at 60 °C for two days. The ICP-MS quantification of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb was performed from 250 mg of dried powder as previously described in Grosjean et al. (2020)<sup>26</sup> using three biological replicates. Oriental basma tobacco leaves (INCT-OBTL-5, LGC Promochem, Molsheim, France) were used as certified reference material.

Quantification limits (μg. L<sup>-1</sup>) for the different REEs were: 0.0001 for Pr, Sm, Tb, Tm & Lu; 0.0002 for Ho & Yb; 0.0003 for Sc, Eu, Gd & Er; 0.0004 for Dy; 0.0006 for La, Nd & Y; 0.0008 for Ce.

## **Photonic microscopy observations**

Carmino-green staining was used to identify the vascular tissues in the rachis section. Razor blade cross-sections of approximately 0.5 mm thickness were treated with 12% sodium hypochlorite for 10 min, followed by one wash in water and a second wash in 10% acetic acid. After incubation in the dyeing mixture (Carmin Vert de Mirande 20180, Sordalab, Etampes, France) for 10 min, sections were thoroughly rinsed in distilled water and observed with a digital light microscope (Keyence - VHX 6000, Bois-Colombes, France). Xylem cells were identified by greenish staining of their lignified walls, whereas cellulosic cell walls, including phloem, were stained pink.

## **Statistical analysis**

ICP-MS data were analyzed statistically by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Normality and homoscedasticity of the data were evaluated and confirmed by Shapiro-Wilks test and Levene's test, respectively. The rejection level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in all analyses.

Multiple (pair-wise) comparisons between means ( $n=3$ ) were performed using Tukey's HSD post-hoc test to determine statistical differences. Compact letter display was used as symbolic visualization of significant pairwise comparisons (false discovery rate adjusted p-value (FDR) at the threshold  $\leq 0.05$ ).

**Table S1. Physico-chemical characteristics of the soil.**

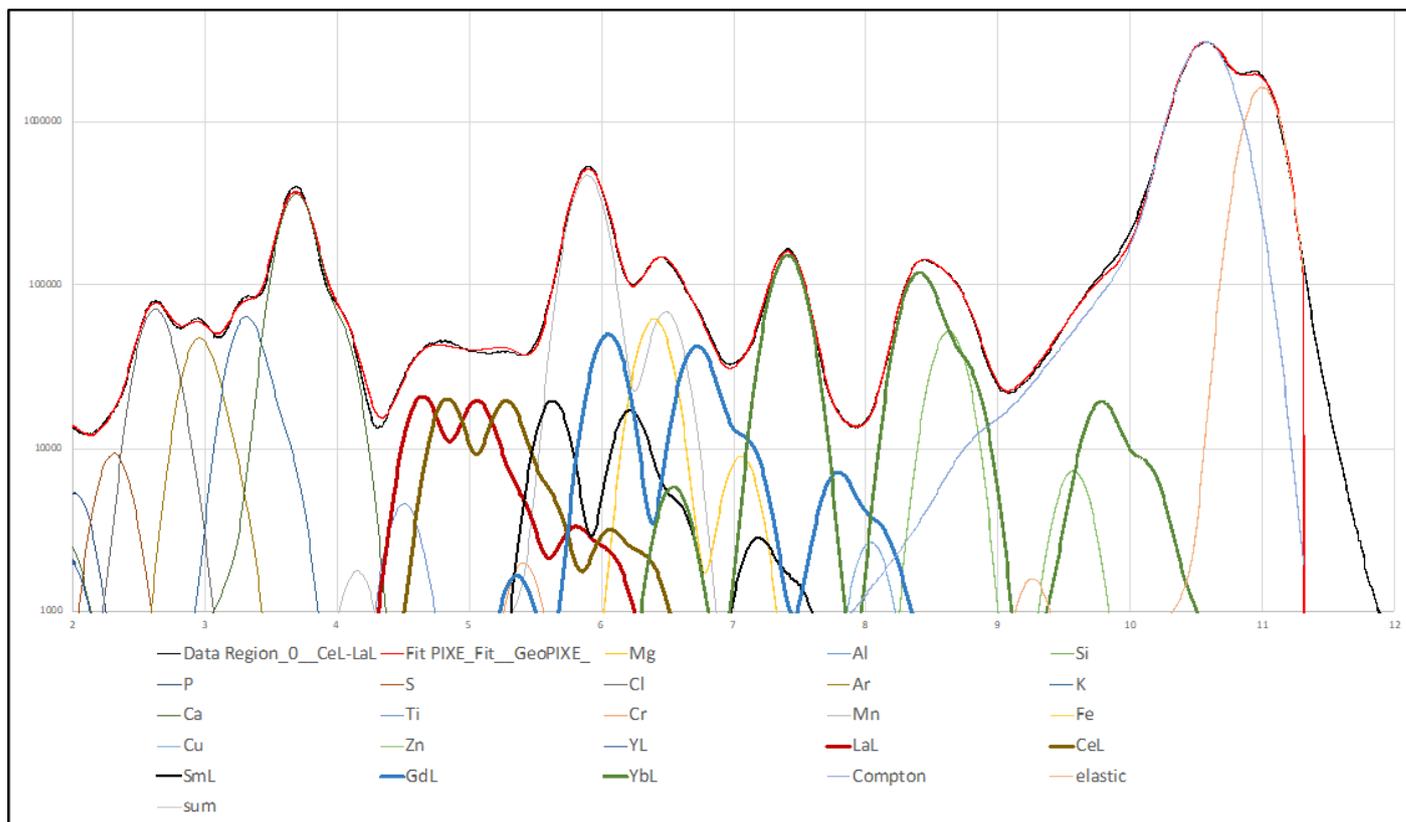
Parameter (unit)	Norm	Value
pH <sub>H2O</sub>	NF ISO 10390	5.6
CEC <sub>Metson</sub> (cmol <sup>+</sup> /kg)	NF X 31-130	139
Total N (g/kg)	NF ISO 13878	5.64
Organic matter (g/kg)	NF ISO 14235	237
Total organic C (g/kg)	NF ISO 14235	137
C/N		24.2
P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub> (Dyer) (g/kg)	NF X 31-160	0.061
K <sub>2</sub> O (g/kg)	NF X 31-108	0.390
MgO (g/kg)	NF X 31-108	0.392
CaO (g/kg)	NF X 31-108	8.30
Na <sub>2</sub> O (g/kg)	NF X 31-108	0.040
<i>Fractions (%)</i>	NF31-107	
Clay		46.4
Silt		40.2
Sand		13.4
<i>Rare earth elements</i>	NF X 31-147	
Sum REEs (mg/kg)		217±6
Sc (mg/kg)		3.12±0.10
Y (mg/kg)		13.2±0.6
La (mg/kg)		33.5±1.1
Ce (mg/kg)		115±3
Pr (mg/kg)		7.42±0.21
Nd (mg/kg)		27.4±1.0
Sm (mg/kg)		5.13±0.2
Eu (mg/kg)		0.811±0.03
Gd (mg/kg)		5.43±0.2
Tb (mg/kg)		0.613±0.031
Dy (mg/kg)		2.72±0.11
Ho (mg/kg)		0.505±0.031
Er (mg/kg)		1.32±0.01
Tm (mg/kg)		0.214±0.012
Yb (mg/kg)		1.01±0.04
Ho (mg/kg)		0.101±0.012
<i>Elements (CaCl<sub>2</sub> extractible fraction, mg/kg)</i>		
La		0.116±0.024 (0.34% of total La)
Ce		0.349±0.062 (0.3% of total Ce)
Sm		0.022±0.010 (0.43% of total Sm)
Gd		0.026±0.010 (0.48% of total Gd)
Yb		0.0160± 0.008 (1.6 % of total Yb)
Mg		60.6±29.4
Mn		223±85
Na		119±43.1
S		54.6±5.9
Zn		2.07±2.03

Elements concentration values are means ± SE (n=3).

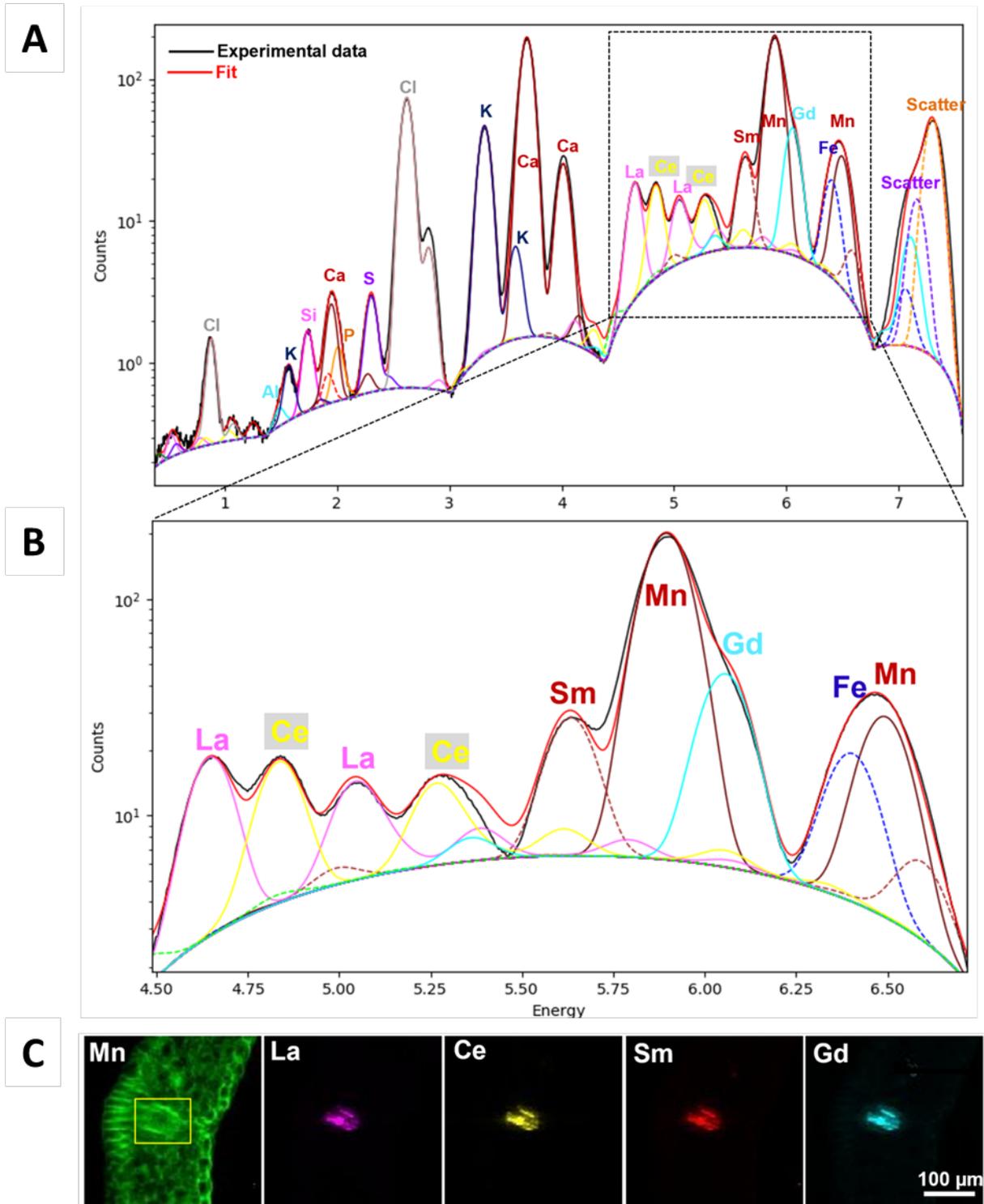
**Table S2. REE concentrations in fronds of *Dryopteris erythrosora* grown for 2 months on soils with no REEs added.**

Rare earth elements	Value (mg/kg)
La	11.79 ± 5.009
Ce	39.41 ±16.32
Sm	0.998±0.242
Gd	1.059±0.285
Yb	0,433±0.406

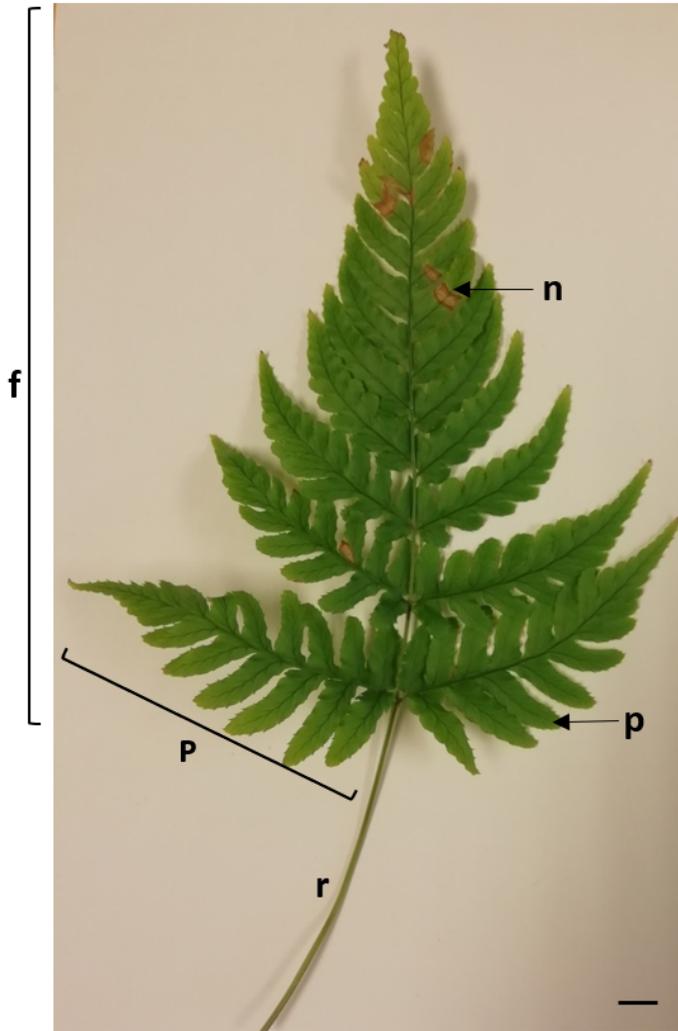
REE concentration values are means ± SE (n=3).



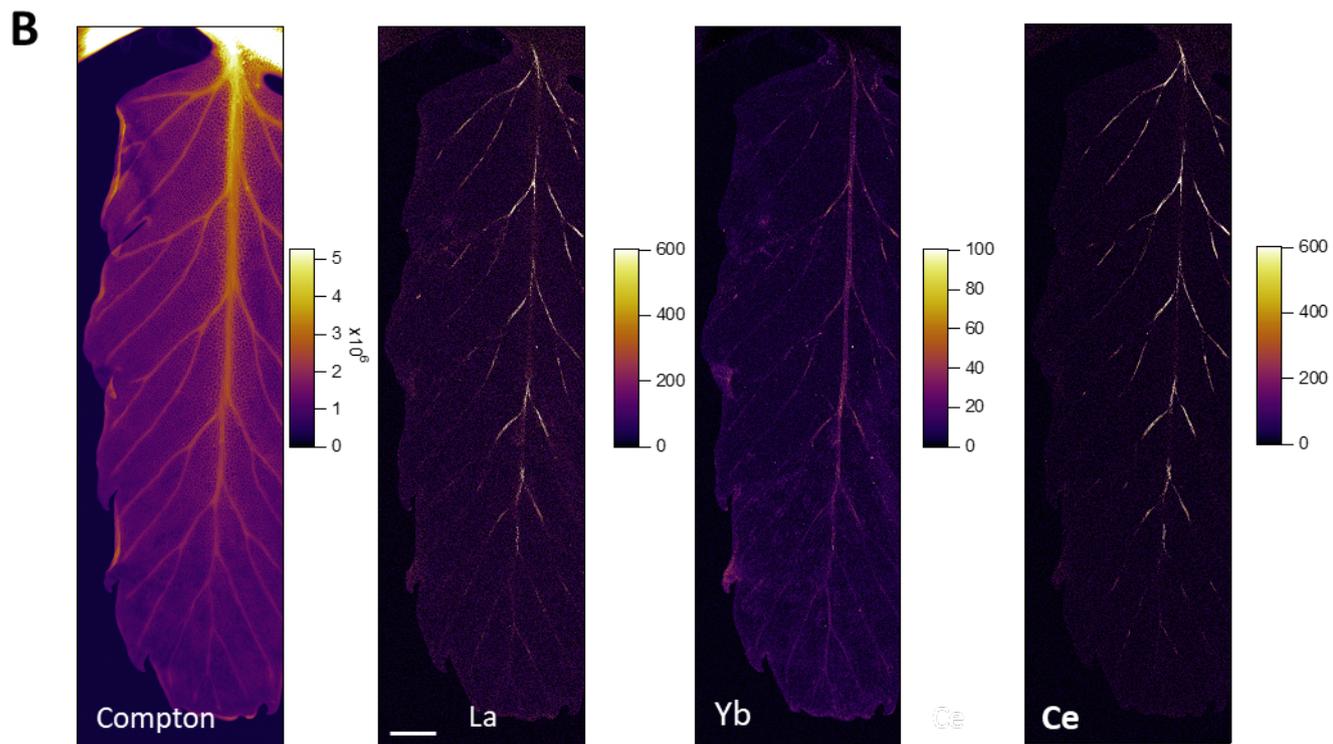
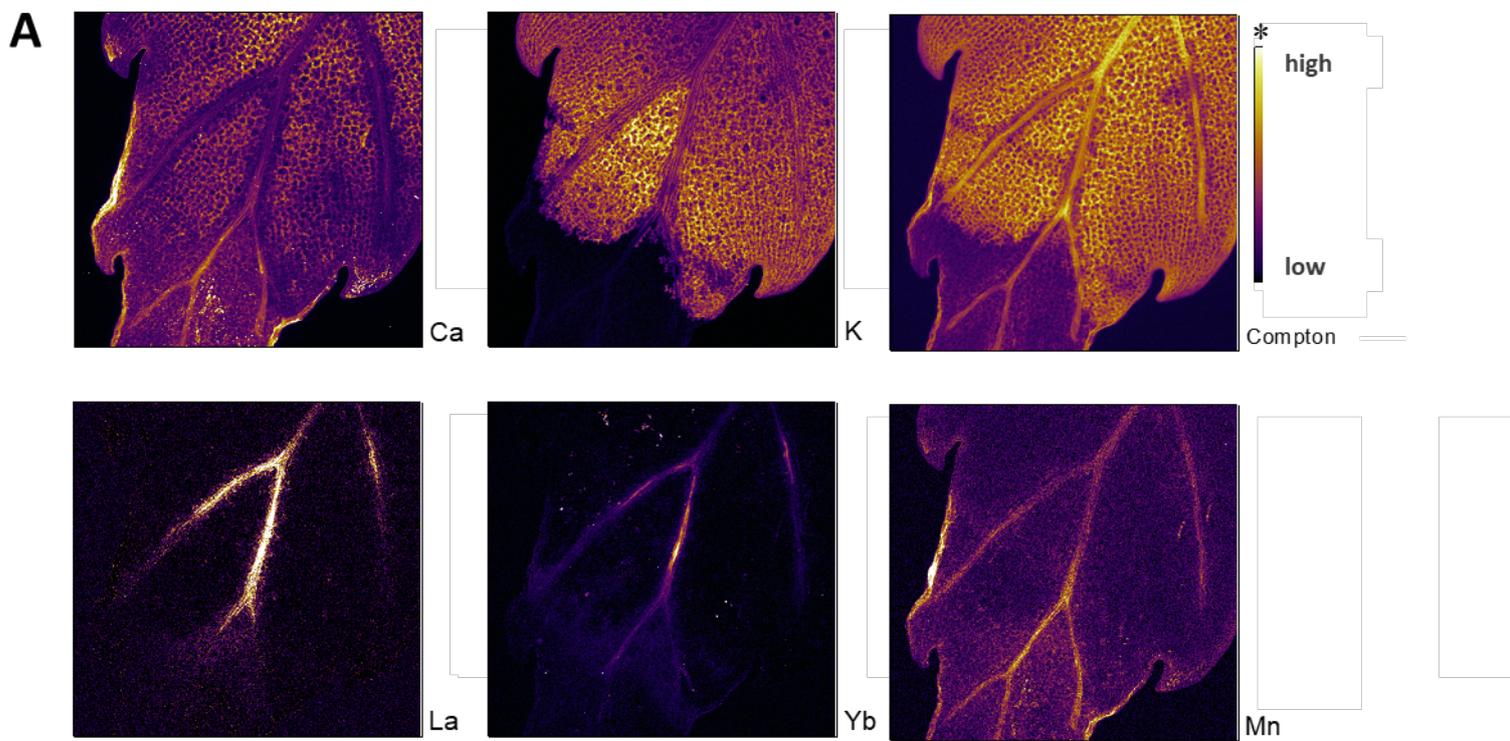
**Figure S1. Representative experimental XRF spectrum, fitted spectrum and peak contributions of a *Dryopteris erythrosa* pinnule, collected at 11 keV at P06 beamline.**



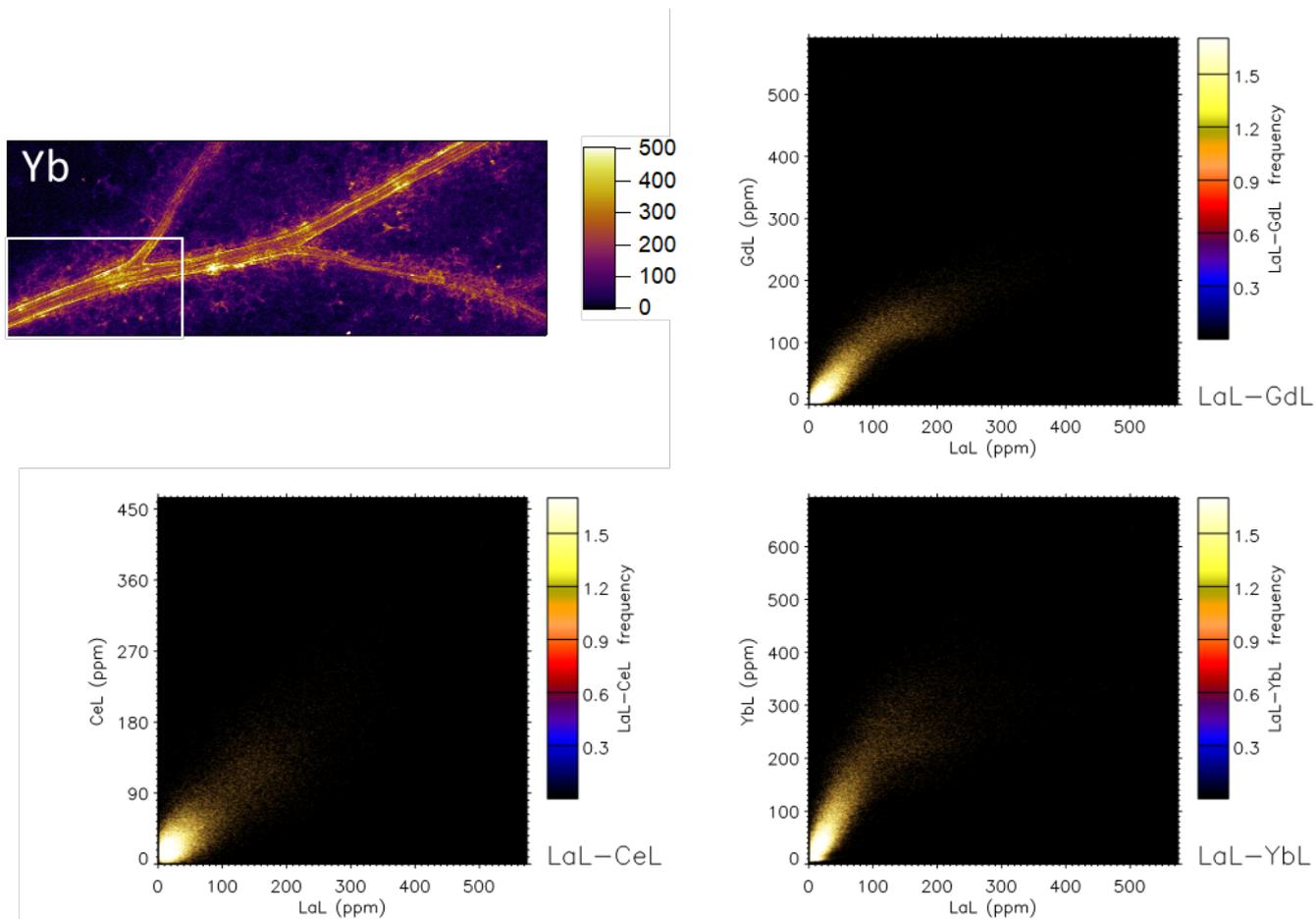
**Figure S2. Representative experimental XRF spectrum, fitted spectrum and peak contributions of a *Dryopteris erythrosa* sample, collected at 7.30 keV at LUCIA beamline. A) Whole spectrum acquired from the selected region indicated in C by a yellow square, B) zoom in the 4.50-6.75 keV region and C) resulting XRF maps of Mn, La, Ce, Sm, and Gd.**



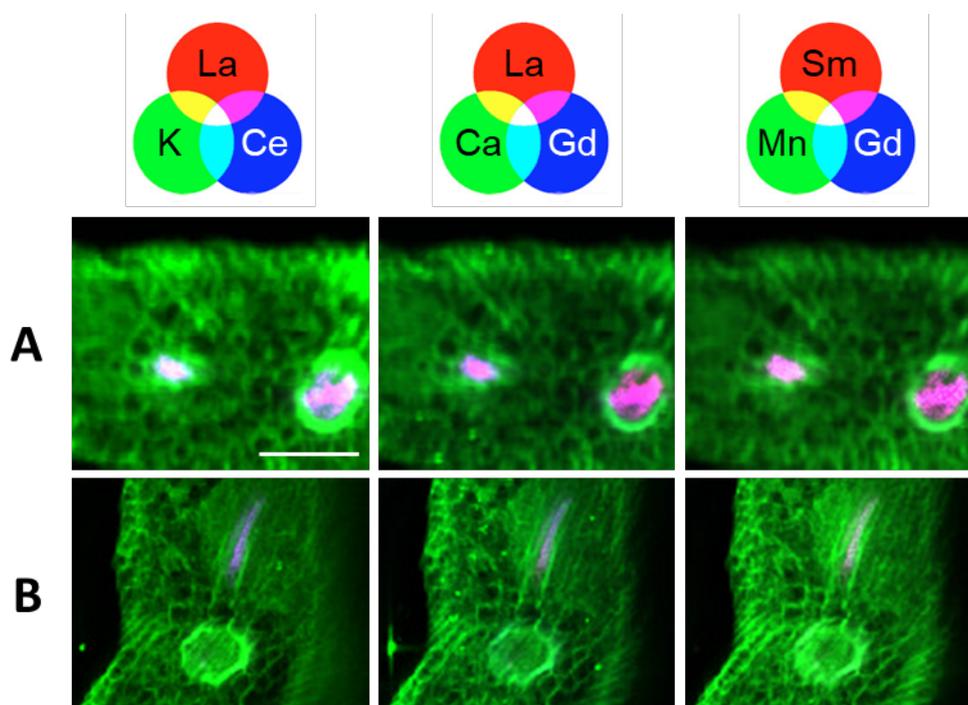
**Figure S3. Representative frond of *D. erythrosora* showing the different parts.** The scale bar represents 1 cm. Rachis (r), pinna (P), pinnule (p), necrosis (n), frond(f), all the pinnae of the frond constitute the limb.



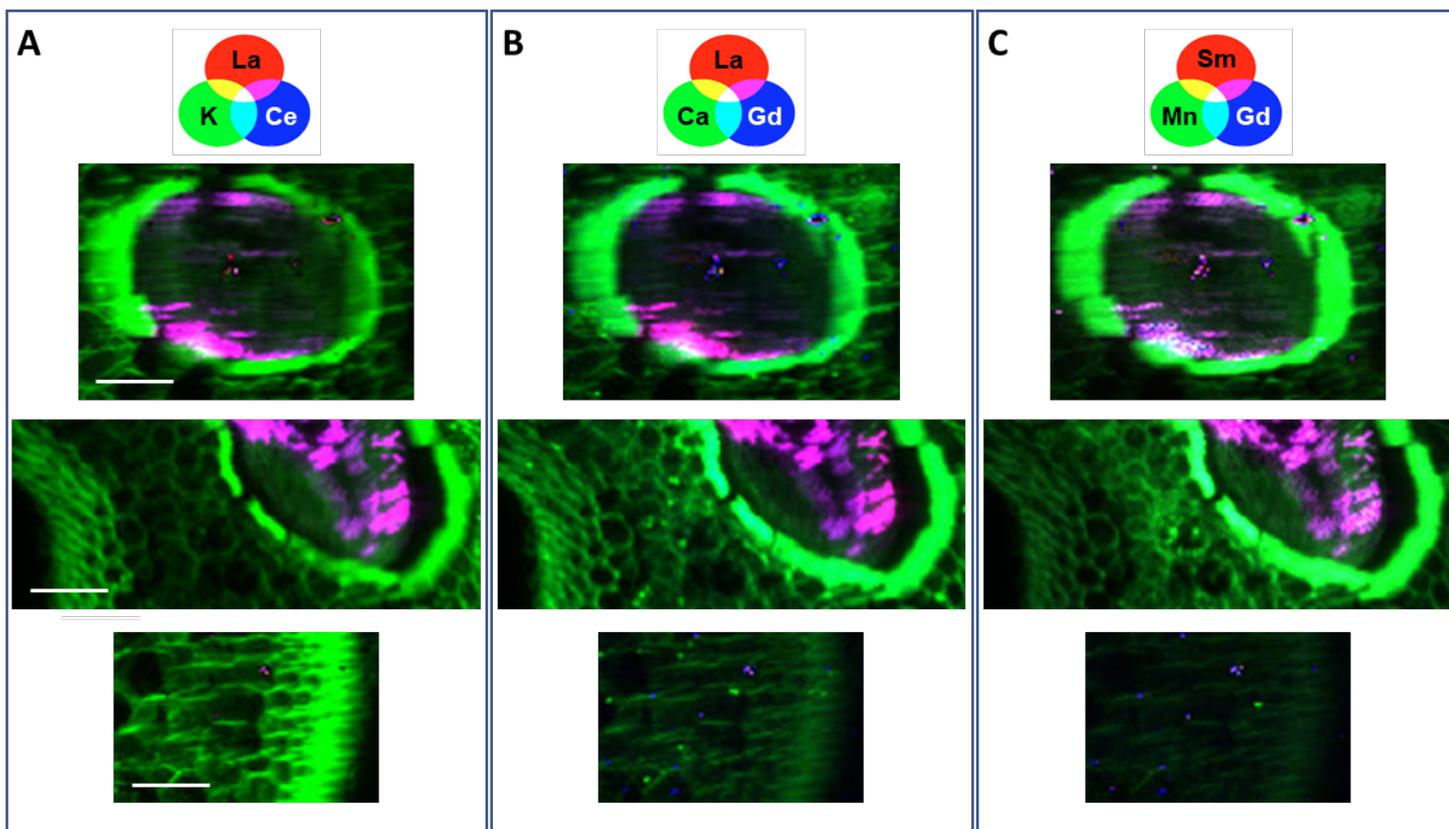
**Figure S4. REE distribution in pinnules of *Dryopteris erythrosora* grown under low REE condition (hydroponics) (A) or under medium REE condition (soil culture) (B).** X-ray fluorescence elemental maps from fresh *D. erythrosora* pinnules grown hydroponically with 30  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{LaCl}_3$  and 30  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{YbCl}_3$  (A) or in a soil spiked with 83  $\text{mg kg}^{-1}$  DW of each REE (B). The images were acquired with a step size of 5  $\mu\text{m}$  (A) or 6  $\mu\text{m}$  (B), with a dwell time of 5 ms (A) or 10 ms (B) per pixel and a 11 keV (A) or 19 keV (B) incident beam. The scale bars represent 30  $\mu\text{m}$  (A) and 800  $\mu\text{m}$ . \*For this scan, the low signal/noise ratio prevented a rigorous quantification of elements, so we preferred using a low/high color scale.



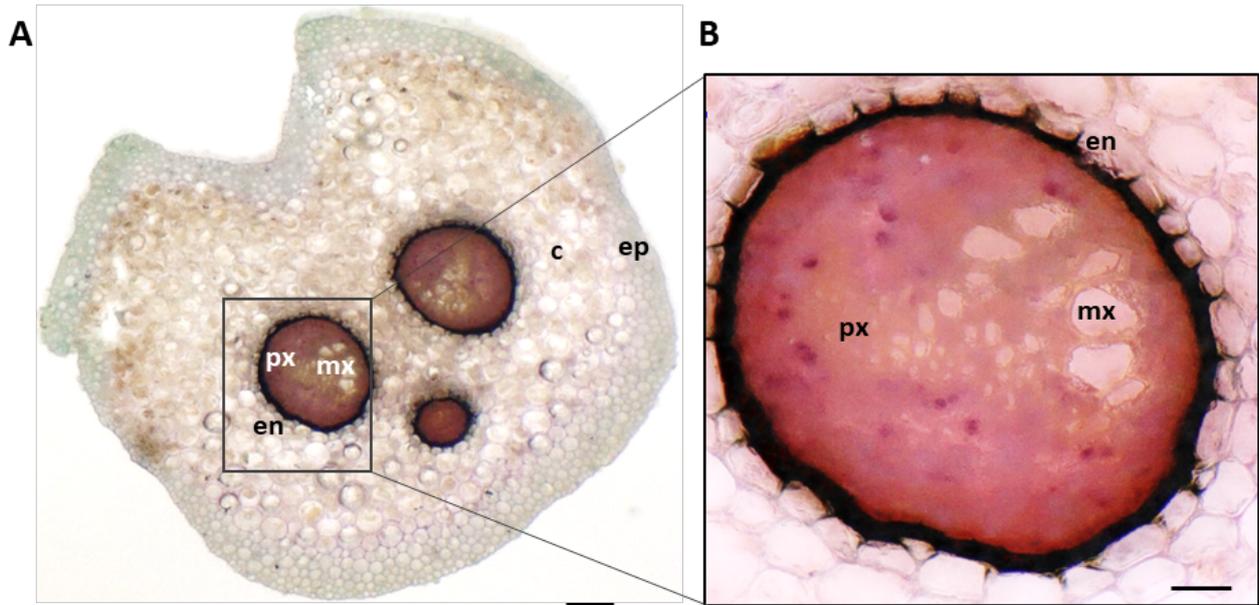
**Figure S5.** Correlation plots comparing the distribution of REEs in the central vein of pinnules of *Dryopteris erythrosora*. The white box on the Yb map represents the area from which the element plots were drawn.



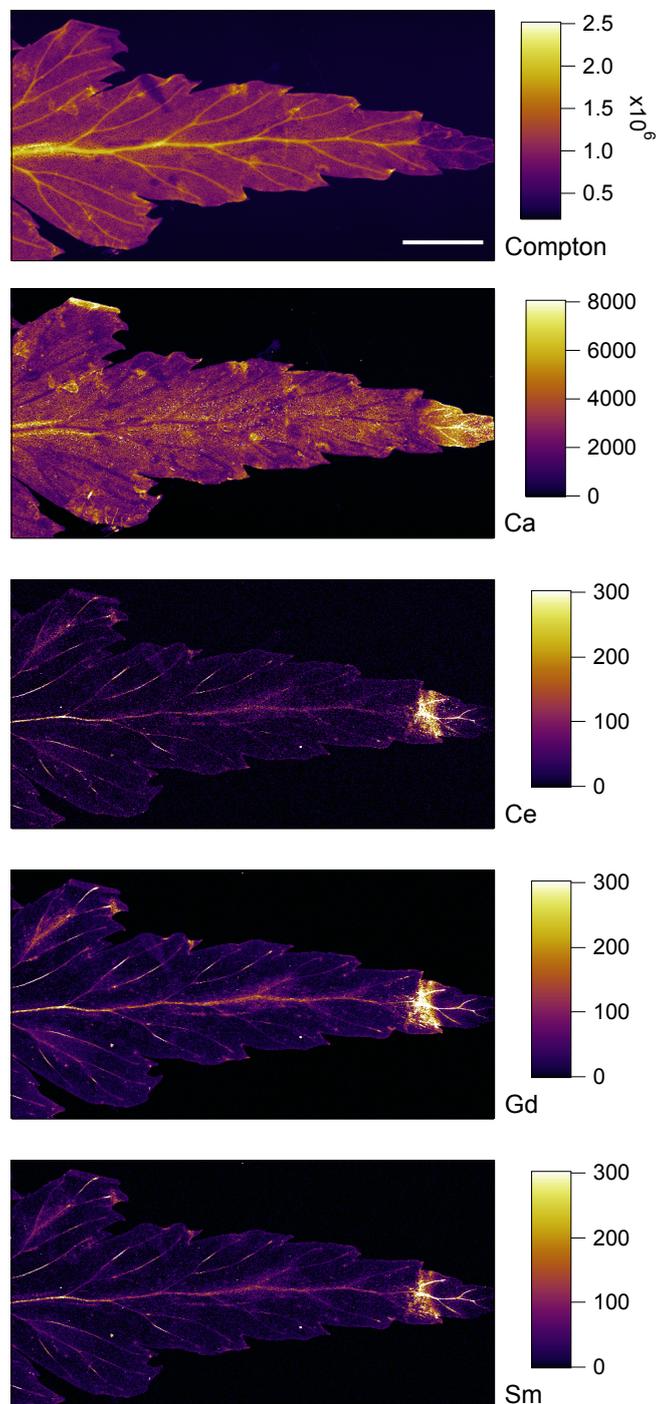
**Figure S6. REE distribution inside the vessels of pinnules of *Dryopteris erythrosora*.** La-K-Ce (left), La-Ca-Gd (middle) and Sm-Mn-Gd (right) X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from frozen hydrated cross sections of pinnules of ferns grown on soil supplemented with equal amounts ( $333 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$  DW each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. The two pinnule sections (A, B) are from independent plants. The images were acquired with a step size of  $3 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ , a dwell time of 500 ms per pixel, and the energy of incident beam was set at 7.3 keV. The scale bar represents  $100 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ . The color scale is the same for a given element for all samples, including the one shown in Figure 4.



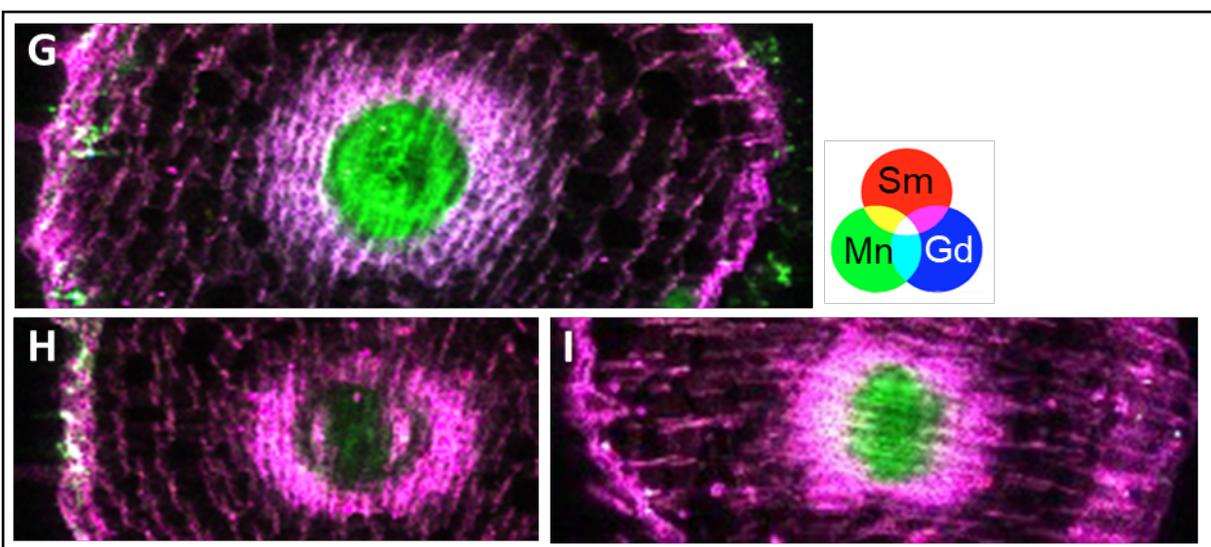
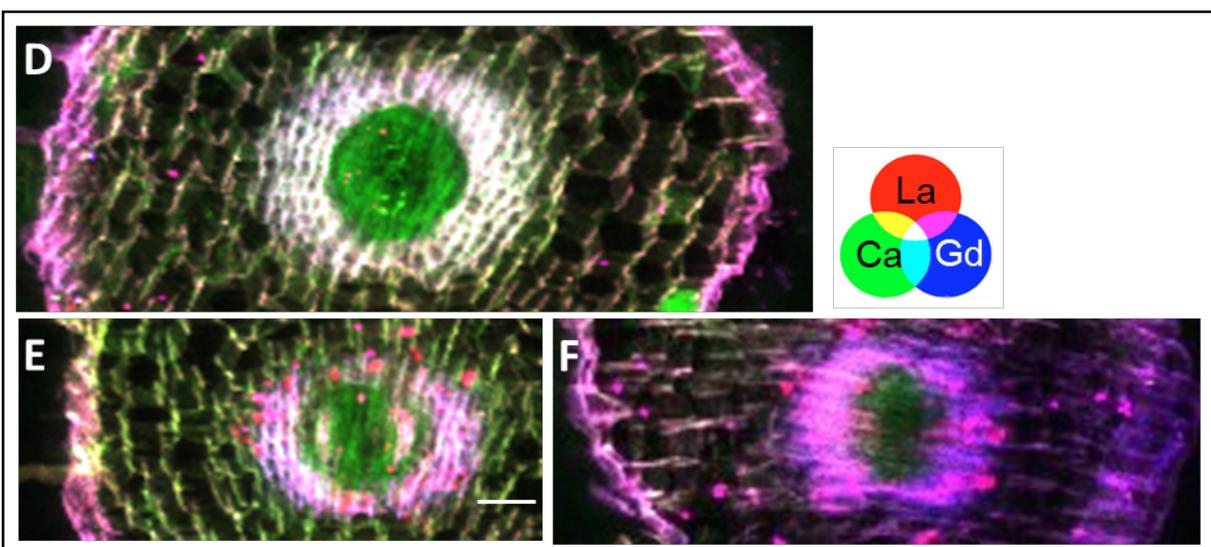
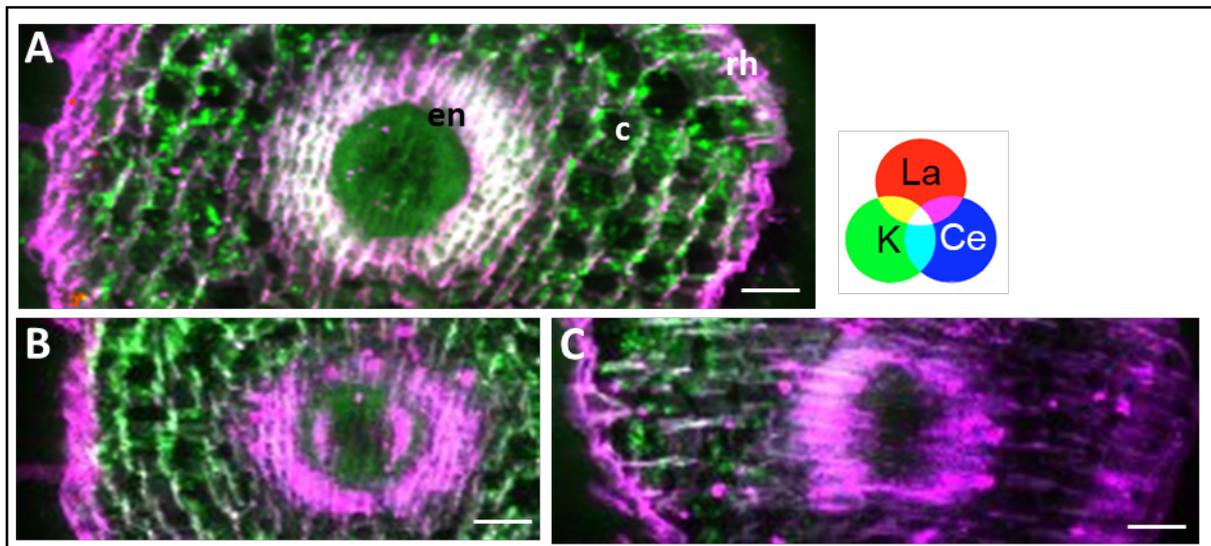
**Figure S7. REE distribution in the rachis of *Dryopteris erythrosora*.** La-K-Ce (A), La-Ca-Gd (B) and Sm-Mn-Gd (C) X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from frozen hydrated cross sections of rachis of ferns grown on soil supplemented with equal amounts (333 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> DW each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. The images were acquired with a step size of 3  $\mu\text{m}$ , a dwell time of 500 ms per pixel, and the energy of incident beam was set at 7.3 keV. Vascular bundles (upper and middle panels) and epidermis + cortex (lower panel). Middle and lower panels come from the same thin section. The scale bar represents 50  $\mu\text{m}$ . The color scale is the same for a given element for all the samples.



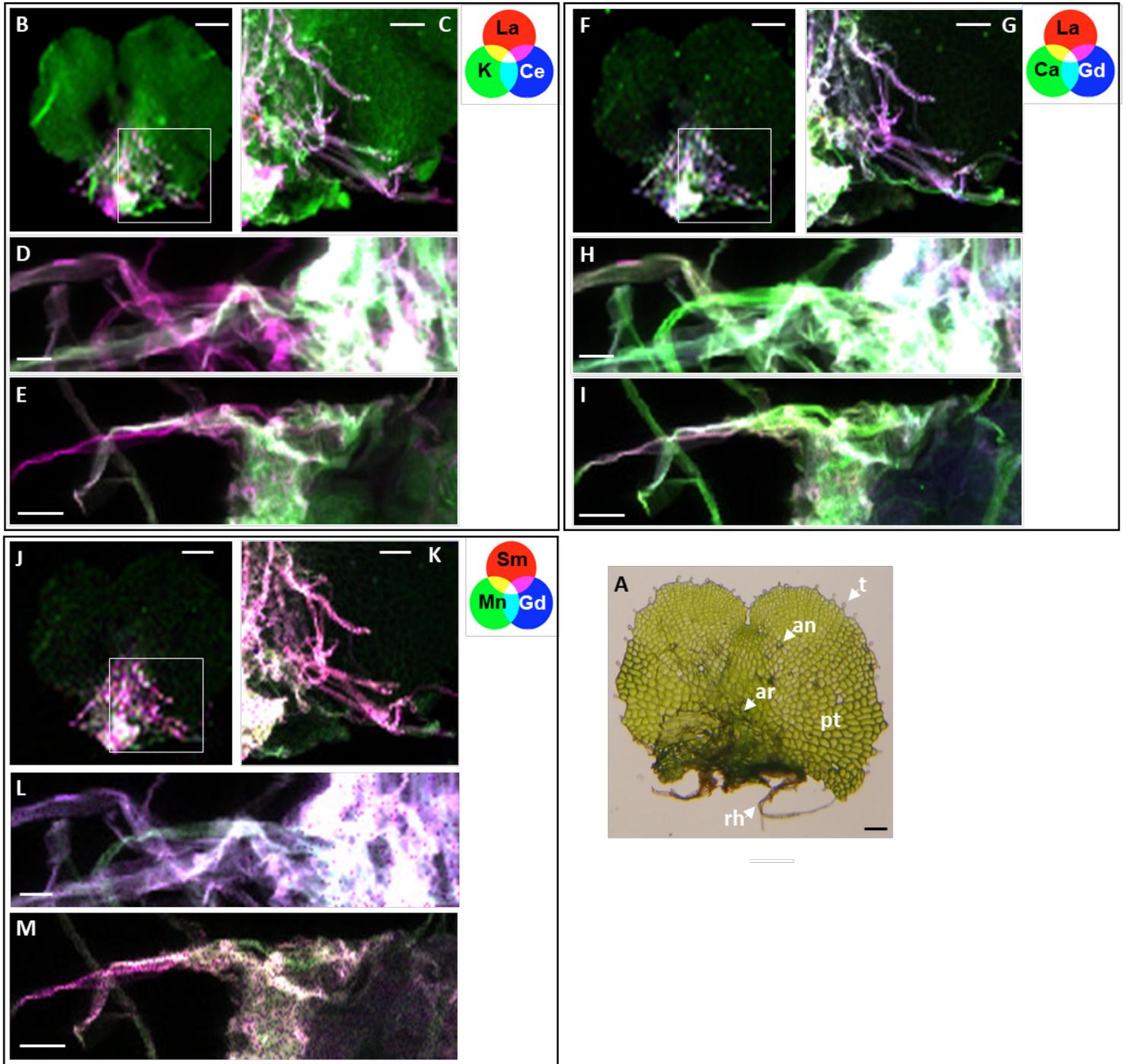
**Figure S8.** Carmino-green staining of a rachis section (A) with a higher magnification of the stele (B). c: cortex, en: endodermis, ep: epidermis, mx: metaxylem, ph: phloem, px: protoxylem. The scale bar represents 100  $\mu\text{m}$  (A) or 25  $\mu\text{m}$  (B). Representative images are given.



**Figure S9. REE distribution and concentrations in the necrotic regions of fronds of *Dryopteris erythrosora*.** X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from fresh pinnae tips of ferns grown on soil supplemented with equal amounts ( $333 \text{ mg kg}^{-1} \text{ DW}$  each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. The scale bar represents  $250 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ .



**Figure S10. REE distribution in roots of *Dryopteris erythrosora*.** X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from frozen hydrated cross sections of roots of plants grown on soil supplemented with equal amounts (333 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> DW each) of La, Ce, Sm, Gd and Yb. (A,D,G) and (B,E,H) are young roots, whereas (C,F,I) is an older root. The images were acquired with a step size of 3  $\mu\text{m}$ , a dwell time of 500 ms per pixel. The scale bar represents 50  $\mu\text{m}$ . Spatial scale and color scale intensity are the same for the three maps. c: cortex, en: endodermis, rh: rhizodermis.



**Figure S11. REE distribution in *Dryopteris erythrosora* at the gametophyte stage.** (A) shows the anatomy of the *D. erythrosora* gametophyte. an: antheridia, ar: archegonia, pt: photosynthetic tissue, rh: rhizoid, t: trichome. The scale bar in (A) represents 1 mm. La-K-Ce (top left), La-Ca-Gd (top right) and Sm-Mn-Gd (bottom left) X-ray fluorescence elemental maps were obtained from frozen hydrated gametophytes grown *in vitro* and supplemented four weeks with an equimolar mix of five REEs. (B,F,J) represents the whole gametophyte and (C,G,K) are higher resolution scans of the area depicted in (B,F,J) which corresponds to the base of the gametophyte with rhizoids. (D,H,L) and (E,I,M) are rhizoids from two other gametophytes. The images were acquired with a step size of 50  $\mu\text{m}$  (B,F,J), 12  $\mu\text{m}$  (C,G,K) or 3  $\mu\text{m}$  (D,H,L and E,I,M) with a dwell time of 100 ms (B,F,J) or 500 ms (other panels) per pixel and the energy of the incident beam was set at 7,3 keV. The scale bars represent 500  $\mu\text{m}$  (B,F,J), 200  $\mu\text{m}$  (C,G,K) or 50  $\mu\text{m}$  (D-E, H-I, L-M). The color scale is the same for a given element for all the samples.