

Passive Radiative Cooling (PRC)

To achieve sub-ambient temperatures, the surface must emit more energy through infrared (IR) radiation than it receives from the sun. This requires a **high reflectance** between 0.3-3 μm (visible light to Near-IR) and **high emittance** between 8-11 μm (Mid-IR), where the **atmospheric window** is located. This window of transparency in the atmosphere allows for energy to be radiated directly into cold space.

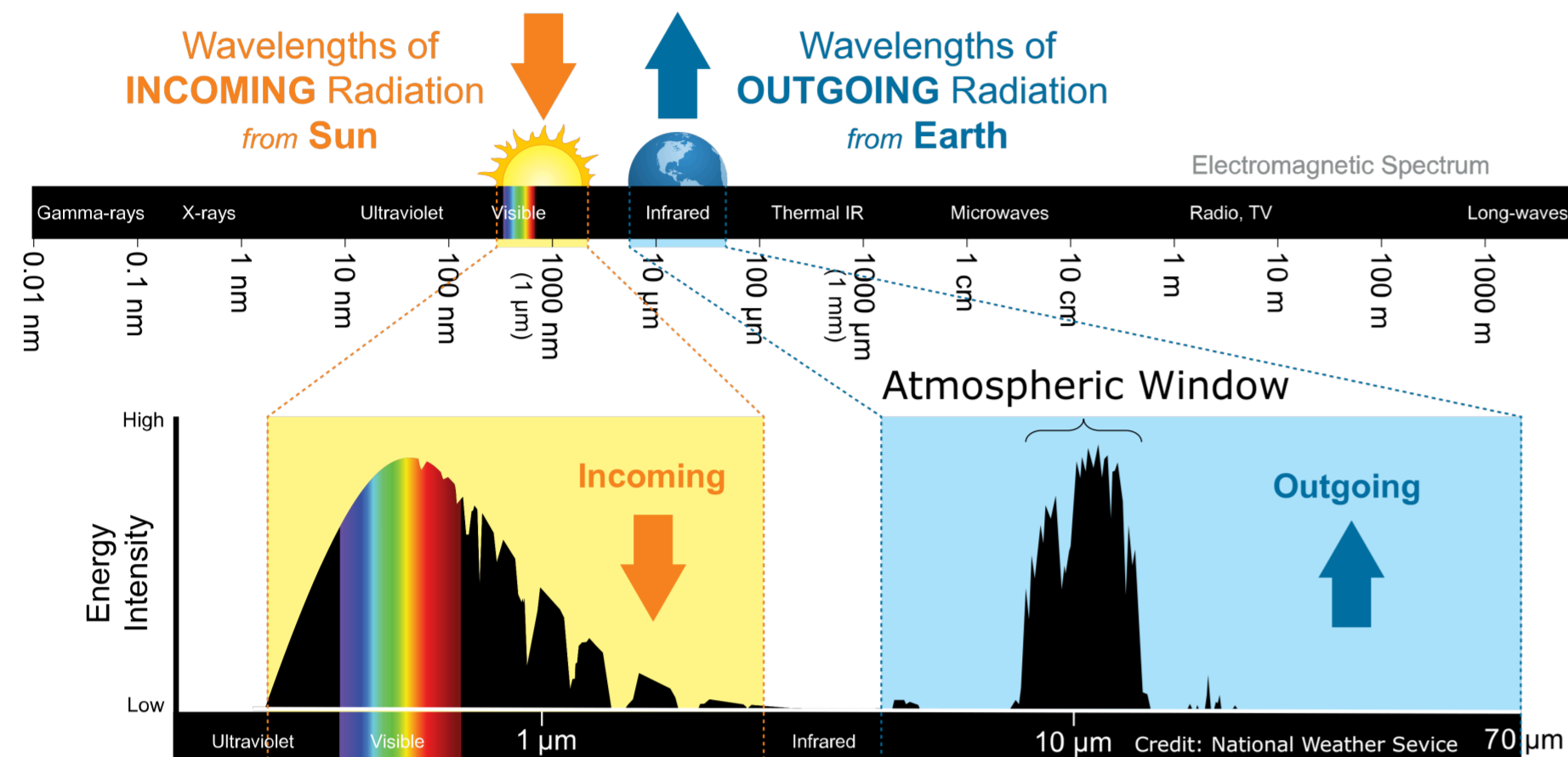


Fig. 1: Incoming and outgoing radiation across the EM-spectrum

Saharan Silver Ants

Saharan Silver Ants (*Cataglyphis bombycina*) have developed special hairs that induce passive radiative cooling. Figure 2a displays a SEM image of a hair with its characteristic indentations and its triangular cross-section (2b). The triangular shape enables **total reflection** on the bottom side over a wide incidence angle of sunlight, but also acts as a gradient refractive index, which suppresses reflectance of IR radiation and enables high emittance. The small indentations are of a comparable size to the wavelength of visible light, which results in **Mie-Scattering**. The cooling effect was shown by Shi et al. (2015) [1]

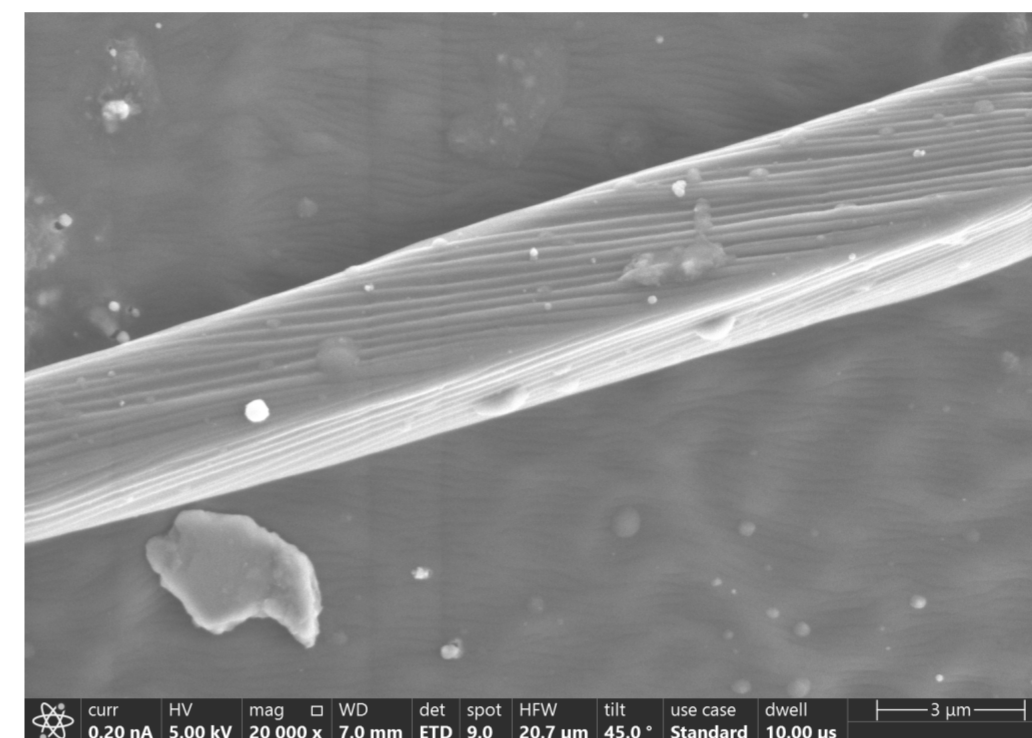


Fig. 2a: Single Hair

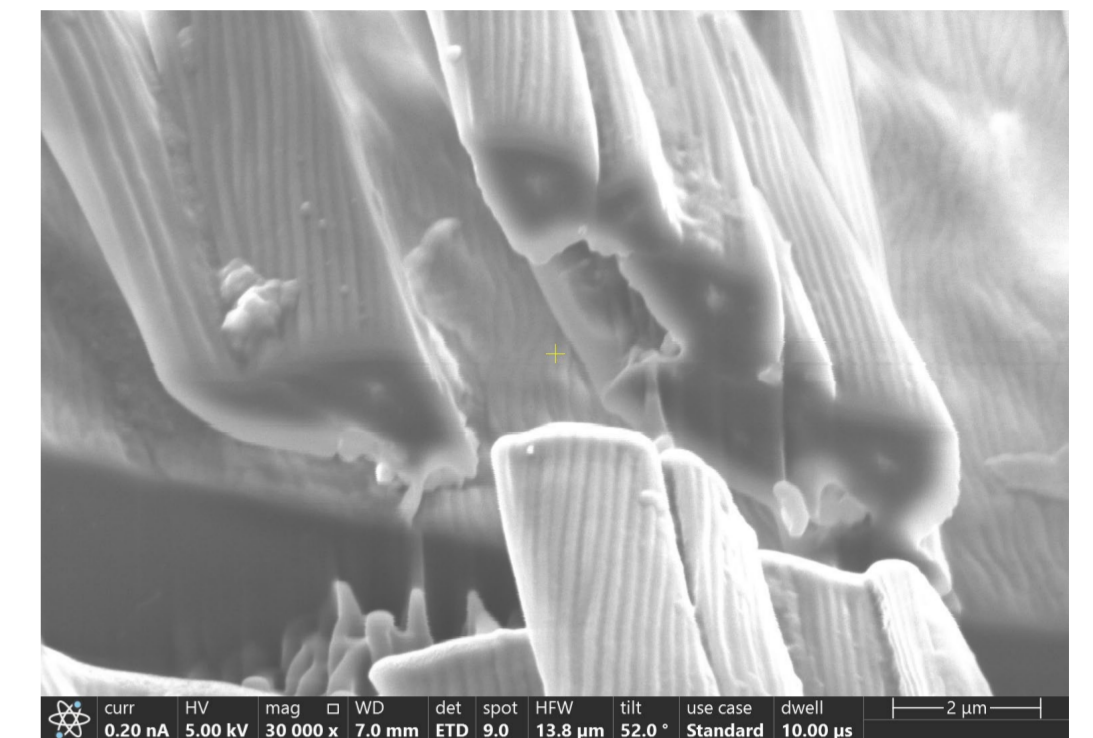


Fig. 2b: Cross-section cut with FIB

Shrimp Shells

Shrimp shells are **biodegradable**, **inexpensive** and composed of **chitin**, the same material as an ant body.

We subjected the modified shells to hot and cold climates in a climate chamber for three weeks. Fig. 3 demonstrates that there were no significant changes in the surface features, indicating good weather resistance. However, shrimp shells have a high scratch and indentation resistance and are therefore not suited to be modified by more sensitive methods.

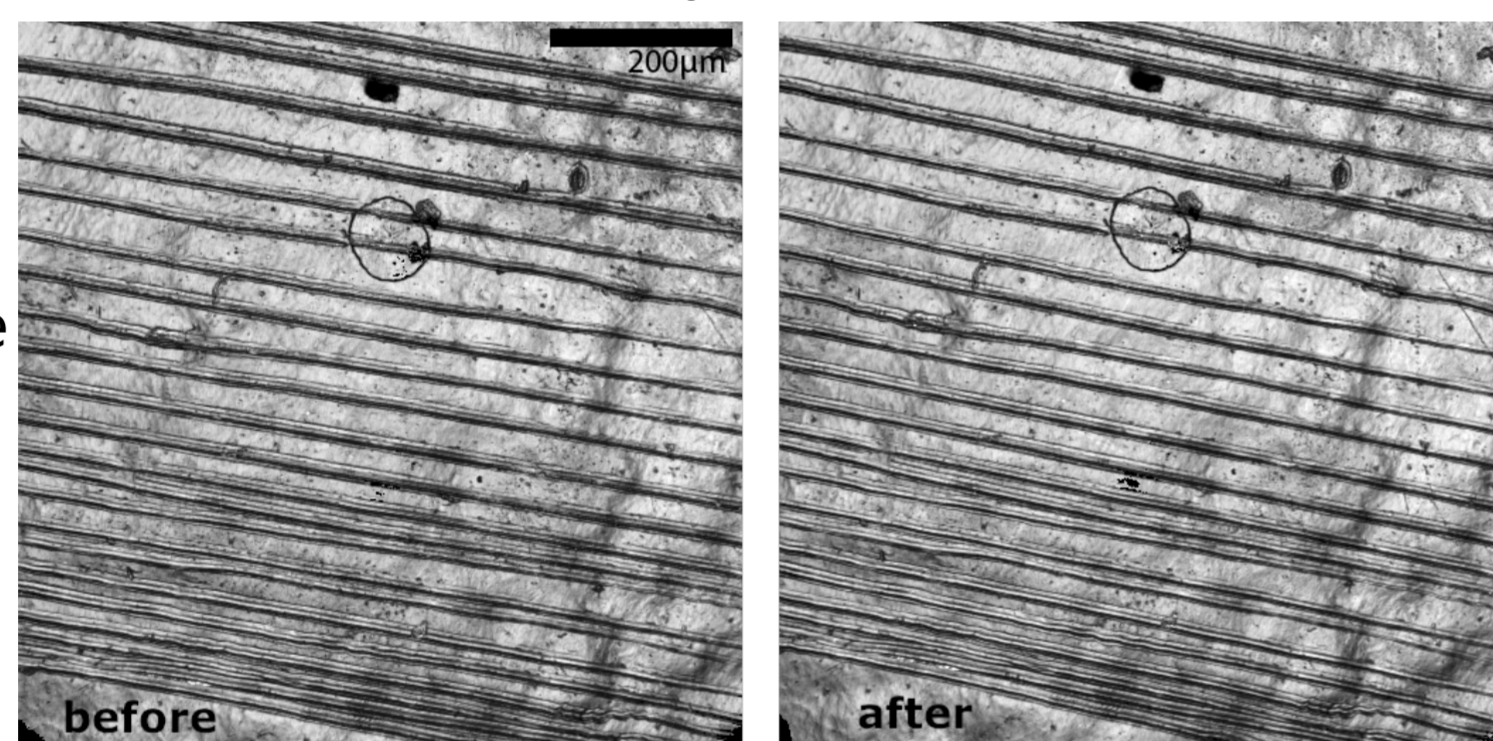


Fig. 3: Scratched shells before and after climate chamber exposure. Confocal Microscope, 20x magnification

Nanostructured Chitosan film

Chitosan films can be produced by following a simple procedure. Chitosan pills, a drug usually marketed as a fat binder, are dissolved in dilute acetic acid (~10 vol.%) under constant stirring and moderate heat (50°C). The resulting viscous liquid is then spread evenly over a target surface and left to dry. By removing the protective silver coating of a CD, the micro-structure responsible for the characteristic **colored reflection** is exposed. This can then be used as target surface. The resulting chitosan film features beautiful reflections, just like a CD.

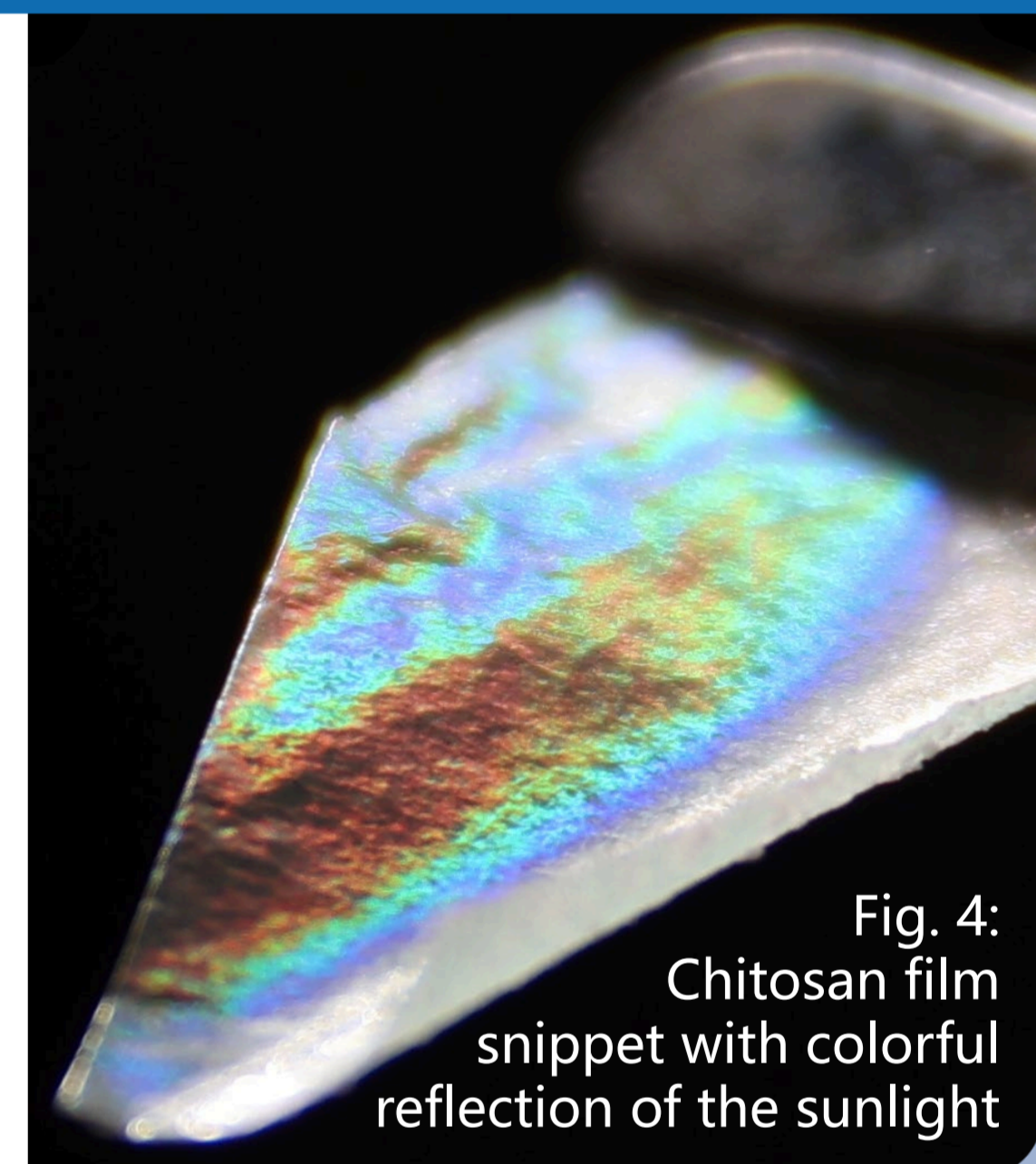
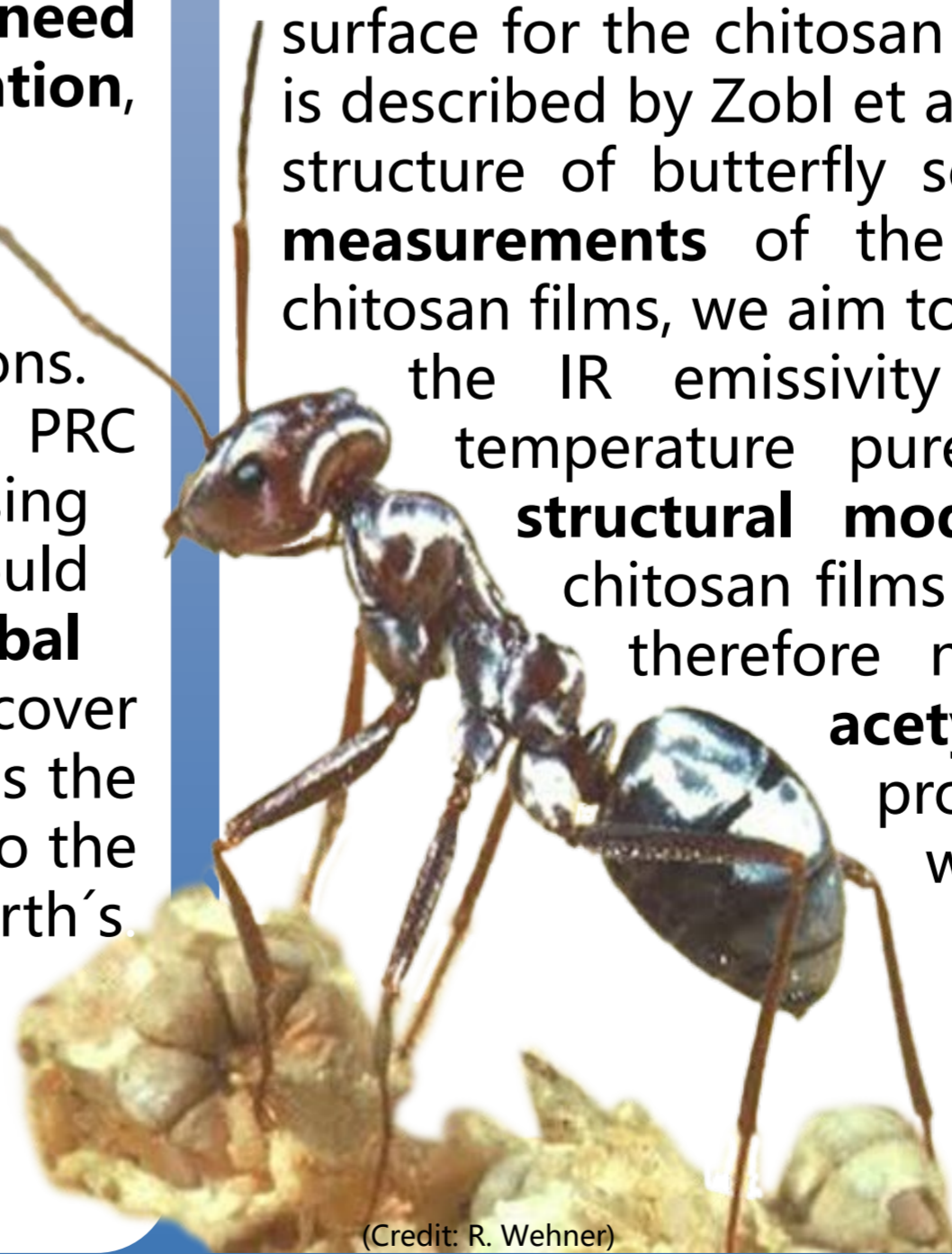


Fig. 4: Chitosan film snippet with colorful reflection of the sunlight

Applications

Applying PRC solutions to house facades can **decrease the need for conventional cooling**. On top of the **energy free operation**, PRC has the benefit of not warming the surrounding air and therefore **avoiding heat accumulation** in dense urban areas. Lower than ambient temperatures also lead to dew formation, which can be used for **water harvesting** in dry regions. The global application of low-cost and environmentally sound PRC solutions could significantly slow down global warming. Increasing the Earth's emissivity by approximately **1 W/m²** on average would shift the energy flux enough to slow down or even **stop global warming**. This terraforming approach would require to cover around half of the Saharan desert with PRC material [2], but has the advantage of being **easily reversible**, unlike releasing gases into the atmosphere to reduce the greenhouse effect or increase the Earth's reflectance. We want to provide proof-of-concept for a low-cost, biodegradable and easily scalable PRC solution. This ensures that it can be utilized in poorer countries, which are most affected by climate change.



(Credit: R. Wehner)

Outlook

Our future work involves creating a Polyvinyl siloxane (**PVS**) imprint of the nanostructured ant body. This imprint will serve as target surface for the chitosan film. The process of producing an imprint is described by Zobl et al. (2016)[3], who successfully replicated the structure of butterfly scales. By comparing **FT-IR spectroscopy measurements** of the **emissivity** of flat and nanostructured chitosan films, we aim to demonstrate that it is possible to increase the IR emissivity and therefore decrease the surface temperature purely through functionalities induced via **structural modification**. It is worth noting that the chitosan films we currently use are soluble in water and therefore not suitable for outdoor use. With an **acetylation reaction**, which is the inverse process of obtaining chitosan from chitin, we want to decrease the solubility **while preserving the nanostructure**. Lastly, a rooftop setup shall be designed to directly measure the amount of cooling our solution can provide under outdoor conditions.

References:

[1] Shi, N.N. et al. Keeping cool: Enhanced optical reflection and radiative heat dissipation in Saharan silver ants. *Science* 349, 298-301 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aab3564>

[2] Stephens, G., Li, J., Wild, M. et al. An update on Earth's energy balance in light of the latest global observations. *Nature Geosci* 5, 691-696 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1038/ngeo1580>

[3] Zobl, S. Salvenmoser, W., Schwerte, T., et al. *Morpho peleides* butterfly wing imprints as structural colour stamp. *Bioinspir. Biomim.*, 11 016006 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-3190/11/1/016006>

Acknowledgments:

We want to thank Dr. Dominique Zimmermann from the Natural History Museum Vienna for providing 2 Silver Ant specimen. The SEM measurements were carried out using facilities at the University Service Centre for Transmission Electron Microscopy, Vienna University of Technology, Austria under the supervision of Karin Whitmore.

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