

RAINDROP SIZE DISTRIBUTION RETRIEVALS IN THE  
TROPICS AND MID LATITUDES

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Dedicated to all students who paid the ultimate sacrifice in times of war, and never returned to complete their studies.



*In their sacrifice was our shelter*

# Contents

Abstract	v
Statement of Originality	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
List of Figures	xvii
List of Tables	xxiii
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Early Studies . . . . .	2
1.2 Functional Forms of the DSD . . . . .	3
1.3 Ground-based DSD Measurement Instruments . . . . .	7
1.4 Radars . . . . .	9
1.5 Scope of Thesis . . . . .	12
<b>2 Radars</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Profilers . . . . .	13
2.1.1 Profiler Frequency . . . . .	14
2.1.2 Adelaide Profiler . . . . .	16
2.1.3 Darwin Profiler . . . . .	19
2.2 Scanning Radars . . . . .	20
2.2.1 Displays . . . . .	21
2.2.2 Weather Watch . . . . .	23
2.2.3 CPOL . . . . .	24
2.3 Profiler Calibration . . . . .	26
2.4 Empirical Relationships . . . . .	29
2.4.1 $Z - R$ Relationships . . . . .	29
2.4.2 $D_0 - Z_{DR}$ Relationships . . . . .	31
2.5 Conclusion . . . . .	32

<b>3</b>	<b>Dropsize Distribution Retrievals</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1	Retrieval Technique . . . . .	33
3.1.1	Finding the Divide . . . . .	35
3.1.2	Clear-Air Peak . . . . .	38
3.1.3	Interference Effects . . . . .	41
3.1.4	Precipitation Peak . . . . .	43
3.1.5	Deconvolution . . . . .	45
3.1.6	Small-Drop Regime . . . . .	47
3.2	Code automation . . . . .	54
3.3	Calculations from the Retrieval . . . . .	55
3.3.1	Rainrate . . . . .	55
3.3.2	Liquid Water Content . . . . .	56
3.3.3	Median Drop Diameter . . . . .	56
3.3.4	Heating Rates . . . . .	57
3.4	Conclusion . . . . .	58
<b>4</b>	<b>Quality Control</b>	<b>59</b>
4.1	Introduction . . . . .	59
4.2	DSD Procedure . . . . .	60
4.2.1	DSD Procedural Problems . . . . .	61
4.3	Manual Quality Control . . . . .	70
4.4	Quality Control Routine . . . . .	72
4.4.1	Threshold procedure . . . . .	75
4.4.2	Threshold Failure . . . . .	76
4.4.3	Quality Control of the Vertical Velocity . . . . .	79
4.5	Quality Control in Practice . . . . .	80
4.6	Real-Time Analysis . . . . .	82
4.7	Conclusion . . . . .	83
<b>5</b>	<b>Results from Darwin</b>	<b>85</b>
5.1	Monsoon Case Study . . . . .	88
5.1.1	Microphysics . . . . .	96
5.2	Monsoon Rainfall . . . . .	115
5.3	Break Case Study . . . . .	121
5.3.1	Microphysics . . . . .	124
5.4	Break Rainfall . . . . .	136
5.5	Conclusion . . . . .	139

<b>6</b>	<b>Rain Events in Adelaide</b>	<b>141</b>
6.1	South Australian Drought . . . . .	142
6.2	12 June 2008 . . . . .	144
6.3	21 September 2009 . . . . .	154
6.4	Overview . . . . .	174
6.5	Conclusion . . . . .	177
<b>7</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>179</b>
7.1	Microphysics . . . . .	179
7.1.1	Median Drop Diameter . . . . .	181
7.1.2	Equilibrium Distributions . . . . .	186
7.2	Bright Band $D_0$ . . . . .	195
7.3	Empirical Relationships . . . . .	200
7.3.1	$Z$ - $R$ Relationships . . . . .	200
7.3.2	$D_0$ - $Z_{dr}$ Relationships . . . . .	205
7.4	Conclusion . . . . .	207
<b>8</b>	<b>Conclusions and Future Work</b>	<b>209</b>
8.1	Future Work . . . . .	211
<b>A</b>	<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>Precipitation Microphysics</b>	<b>215</b>
B.1	Introduction . . . . .	215
B.2	Cloud Formation . . . . .	216
B.3	Precipitating Clouds . . . . .	218
B.3.1	Rainfall . . . . .	219
B.3.2	Convective Precipitation . . . . .	219
B.3.3	Stratiform Precipitation . . . . .	221
B.4	Mesoscale Convective Systems . . . . .	225
B.5	Middle Latitudes . . . . .	229
B.6	Conclusion . . . . .	230
<b>C</b>	<b>Equilibrium Distributions</b>	<b>233</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>236</b>



# Abstract

Weather radar capabilities have improved dramatically over the last 50 years. Following World War II, surplus military radars were turned to the study of weather. Since then, they have evolved to the modern standard of rainfall estimations available to the general public in real time. Forecasters rely on weather radars not only for routine forecasting, but also for tracking rapidly evolving, potentially hazardous, severe weather events. These storms have the potential to cause flash floods and hence loss of crops, livestock, and human life.

Most weather radars estimate rainfall by converting the measured reflectivity to a rainrate via an empirical relationship (Z-R relationship). There are limitations in the accuracy of the rainfall estimates derived from these scanning radars. Variations in the raindrop size distribution (DSD), that is, the spread of sizes of raindrops falling at a given location, affect the measured reflectivity, and thus the rain rate estimate. The DSD can vary both temporally and spatially, and also with latitude. Investigation of the DSD and its evolution can be used to investigate the effectiveness of Z-R relationships in varied meteorological conditions and locations.

Well-established techniques exist for retrieving the DSD using vertically pointing VHF Doppler radars. These radars can simultaneously detect a clear-air echo due to fluctuations in temperature and humidity, and a precipitation echo. Mean vertical air motion and spectral width are estimated from the clear air spectrum, and used to correct the precipitation spectrum through a deconvolution procedure. The corrected precipitation spectrum is then converted to a size spectrum, and the DSD calculated. The DSD and associated integral parameters such as rainrate and liquid water content can then be used to infer the microphysical processes dominating the cloud and precipitation structure. This knowledge can then be used to investigate various Z-R relationships.

This thesis presents DSD retrievals from VHF profilers located in Adelaide and Darwin. Each profiler is installed within the footprint of a scanning weather radar, allowing direct comparison of the same air space. These radars provide a unique

opportunity to study the evolution of the DSD with the profiler, and use this to investigate variations in time and height of the Z-R relationship. The locations of the radars also permits investigation of the differing nature of DSD evolution in the tropics compared to the mid-latitudes.

The TWP-ICE field campaign was conducted in Darwin and surrounding areas in January and February 2006. The campaign involved many instruments, both in-situ and remote sensing, including a fleet of aircraft and ship. The University of Adelaide Atmospheric Physics Group installed a VHF wind profiler operating at 54.1 MHz near Darwin airport for the experiment. This radar sampled the same air space as a C-band polarimetric scanning radar (CPol), which performed horizontal scans at increasing elevations, along with vertical scans over the profiler site every 10 minutes. Results from 8 events, differing in age, type, dominant microphysical process and seasonal regime are presented in this thesis.

A VHF profiler permanently located near Adelaide airport provides an observational capability similar to Darwin, but in the mid-latitudes where the processes dictating rainfall are vastly different. This radar also operates at 54.1 MHz, and is installed within the footprint of an operational weather watch radar. Pseudo vertical scans can be constructed from the successive horizontal scans allowing direct comparisons. This profiler is the first generation of the profiler in Darwin. It is not as powerful and cannot detect low intensity rainfall. Due to this and the drought South Australia experienced between 2006 and 2008, data from Adelaide are limited. Two events are presented.

Seasonal trends in the tropics, that is break conditions as opposed to the monsoon, are compared and contrasted. These trends are then compared to the limited Adelaide data. By analysing the evolution in both time and height of the DSD, and the dependence on season and latitudinal location, this thesis leads to a better understanding of the microphysical processes dictating rainfall in the tropics and mid-latitudes.

# Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Bronwyn K. Dolman and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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# Acknowledgements

*In any undertaking of this magnitude, there will be many people who have contributed in some way, either directly or indirectly, towards the ultimate realisation of the original goal. Practical limitations dictate that everyone can not be mentioned here but the contribution of those omitted is gratefully acknowledged.*

Firstly, I need to thank my Dad, for albeit unknowingly, allowing me to plagiarise the opening paragraph of his own PhD thesis acknowledgements! Since the time I understood what that blue bound tome that sits amongst the photo albums on the bookshelf meant, it has been my ambition to do the same. It is a somewhat surreal feeling to be so close to achieving what feels like a life long goal. While the language of the opening statement is not what I would choose, the sentiment rings true, I would not have reached this final stage of writing the acknowledgements without the support of some wonderful people. This is my opportunity to thank those people.

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# List of Figures

1.1	Marshall-Palmer distribution for 3 different rainrates. . . . .	4
1.2	Gamma distribution with 3 different shape parameters. . . . .	5
2.1	Layout of the Adelaide and Darwin wind profiler antennas. . . . .	17
2.2	Profiler at Adelaide airport. . . . .	18
2.3	Profiler at Darwin airport. . . . .	19
2.4	PPI example from TWP-ICE. . . . .	22
2.5	RHI example from TWP-ICE. . . . .	23
2.6	Australian Weather Watch radar network. . . . .	24
2.7	Scatter plot showing calibration of the Adelaide profiler. . . . .	27
2.8	Scatter plot showing calibration of the Darwin profiler. . . . .	28
2.9	$Z$ - $R$ relationships with varied values of $A$ and $b$ . . . . .	30
3.1	VHF wind profiler simulated spectrum in precipitation conditions. . .	34
3.2	Twice smoothed simulated spectra, and twice smoothed first derivative.	37
3.3	Examples of the clear-air Gaussian fitting routine. . . . .	39
3.4	Simulated clear-air fit. . . . .	40
3.5	An example of real spectra containing interference from Darwin. . . .	42
3.6	Simulated spectrum with the clear-air peak removed, and an exponential tail added. . . . .	44
3.7	Example DSD retrieval. . . . .	48
3.8	$D_0$ calculated from a gamma fit compared to that from the profiler retrieval. . . . .	49
3.9	Difference in $D_0$ and average spectral width. . . . .	50
3.10	$D_0$ correction mapping function. . . . .	53
3.11	Profiler $D_0$ corrected via the mapping function. . . . .	54
4.1	Time-height cross-section of profiler reflectivity with no quality-control.	60
4.2	Example spectrum with a spike near the centre of the clear-air peak, and the resulting bad fit . . . . .	63

4.3	An example of a broad spectrum, and the resulting wide fit to the “clear-air” . . . . .	64
4.4	Example of a rectangular shaped spectrum, and the resulting wide fit. . . . .	65
4.5	Two examples of poor divide selection. . . . .	66
4.6	Doubly smoothed spectrum and its doubly smoothed derivative in a situation where the divide was poorly selected. . . . .	67
4.7	Example spectra where an interference peak effectively masks automatic precipitation detection. . . . .	68
4.8	Example spectrum showing a random fluctuation misinterpreted as a precipitation echo. . . . .	69
4.9	Example spectrum where no retrieval is possible due to the clear-air and precipitation peaks merging. . . . .	69
4.10	Example spectrum with a spike near the centre of the clear-air peak with a more accurate fit. . . . .	70
4.11	Example broad spectrum with a more accurate clear-air fit. . . . .	71
4.12	Schematic demonstrating QCR comparison pixels. . . . .	73
4.13	Schematic flow chart of the QCR zero value procedure. . . . .	74
4.14	Example plot showing the QCR commonly identified flagged retrievals. . . . .	77
4.15	Comparison of retrieved reflectivity, manual correction and the QCR correction. . . . .	78
4.16	Example contour plot, used for vertical velocity quality control. . . . .	79
4.17	QCR processed result for the data seen in Figure 4.1. . . . .	81
4.18	Manually processed result for the data seen in Figure 4.1. . . . .	81
5.1	TWP-ICE accumulated rainfall over Darwin airport. . . . .	87
5.2	MSLP analysis 22 January 2006. . . . .	89
5.3	CPOL PPI scans, 22 January 2006. . . . .	90
5.4	Reflectivity cross-sections, 22 January 2006. . . . .	92
5.5	CPOL differential reflectivity, 22 January 2006. . . . .	93
5.6	Profiler-retrieved cross-sections, 22 January 2006. . . . .	94
5.7	Profiler-retrieved cross-sections, 22 January 2006. . . . .	95
5.8	Averaged vertical velocity through the second and third rainbands, 22 January 2006. . . . .	97
5.9	Heating rate through the second and third rainbands, 22 January 2006. . . . .	98
5.10	Averaged reflectivities through the second and third rainbands, 22 January 2006. . . . .	99
5.11	Averaged rainrates through the second and third rainbands, 22 January 2006. . . . .	100

5.12	Averaged liquid water contents through the second and third rainbands, 22 January 2006. . . . .	101
5.13	Averaged median drop diameters through the second and third rainbands, 22 January 2006. . . . .	102
5.14	$D_0$ PDF through the second rainband, 22 January 2006. . . . .	104
5.15	$D_0$ PDF through the third rainband, 22 January 2006. . . . .	105
5.16	Averaged vertical velocitys through the heavy and moderate regions, 22 January 2006. . . . .	106
5.17	Averaged heating rates through the heavy and moderate regions, 22 January 2006. . . . .	107
5.18	Averaged reflectivitys through the heavy and moderate regions, 22 January 2006. . . . .	109
5.19	Averaged rainrates through the heavy and moderate regions, 22 January 2006. . . . .	110
5.20	Averaged liquid water contents through the heavy and moderate regions, 22 January 2006. . . . .	111
5.21	Averaged median drop diameters through the heavy and moderate regions, 22 January 2006. . . . .	112
5.22	$D_0$ PDF through the heavy region, 22 January 2006. . . . .	113
5.23	$D_0$ PDF through the moderate region, 22 January 2006. . . . .	114
5.24	Build-up $D_0$ comparison. . . . .	119
5.25	Monsoon $D_0$ comparison. . . . .	120
5.26	CPOL PPI 18 February 2006. . . . .	122
5.27	Reflectivity cross-sections, 18 February 2006. . . . .	123
5.28	CPOL differential reflectivity, 18 February 2006. . . . .	124
5.29	Profiler-retrieved cross-sections, 18 February 2006. . . . .	125
5.30	Profiler-retrieved cross-sections, 18 February 2006. . . . .	126
5.31	Averaged vertical velocity in the convective and stratiform regions, 18 February 2006. . . . .	127
5.32	Heating rate in the convective and stratiform regions, 18 February 2006. . . . .	128
5.33	Averaged reflectivity in the convective and stratiform regions, 18 February 2006. . . . .	130
5.34	Averaged rainrate in the convective and stratiform regions, 18 February 2006. . . . .	131
5.35	Averaged liquid water content in the convective and stratiform regions, 18 February 2006. . . . .	132
5.36	Averaged median drop diameter in the convective and stratiform regions, 18 February 2006. . . . .	133

5.37	Convective core median drop diameter PDF, 18 February 2006 . . . .	134
5.38	Convective core median drop diameter PDF, 18 February 2006 . . . .	135
6.1	Rainfall over Adelaide airport from 1956 to 2008 averaged by month.	142
6.2	Yearly rainfall over Adelaide airport from 1956 to 2008. . . . .	143
6.3	MSLP analysis 12 June 2008. . . . .	145
6.4	Weather Watch PPI, Adelaide, 12 June 2008 . . . . .	146
6.5	Radiosonde soundings, Adelaide, 12 June 2008. . . . .	147
6.6	Weather Watch and profiler reflectivities, Adelaide, 12 June 2008 . .	149
6.7	Profiler-retrieved rainrate and liquid water content, Adelaide, June 12 2008 . . . . .	150
6.8	Profiler-retrieved median drop diameter, and time series at 1 km, Adelaide, 12 June 2008 . . . . .	151
6.9	Averaged vertical velocity profiles, 12 June 2008. . . . .	152
6.10	Averaged heating profiles, 12 June 2008. . . . .	153
6.11	Averaged reflectivity profiles, 12 June 2008. . . . .	155
6.12	Averaged rainrate profiles, 12 June 2008. . . . .	156
6.13	Averaged liquid water content profiles, 12 June 2008. . . . .	157
6.14	Averaged median drop diameter profiles profiles, 12 June 2008. . . .	158
6.15	Convective region median drop diameter PDF, Adelaide, 12 June 2008	159
6.16	Stratiform region median drop diameter PDF, Adelaide, 12 June 2008	160
6.17	MSLP analysis, 21 September 2009. . . . .	161
6.18	Weather Watch PPI, 21 September 2009. . . . .	162
6.19	Radiosonde sounding, 00 UTC 21 September 2009. . . . .	163
6.20	Reflectivity cross-sections, 21 September 2009. . . . .	164
6.21	Profiler-retrieved rainrate and liquid water content, Adelaide, 21 Septem- ber 2009 . . . . .	165
6.22	Profiler-retrieved median drop diameter, and time series at 1 km, Adelaide, 21 September 2009 . . . . .	166
6.23	Averaged vertical velocity profile, 21 September 2009. . . . .	167
6.24	Averaged heating profile, 21 September 2009. . . . .	168
6.25	Averaged reflectivity profile, 21 September 2009. . . . .	169
6.26	Averaged rainrate, 21 September 2009. . . . .	170
6.27	Averaged liquid water content, 21 September 2009. . . . .	171
6.28	Averaged median drop diameter, 21 September 2009. . . . .	172
6.29	Median drop diameter PDF, 21 September 2009 . . . . .	173
7.1	Median drop diameters in the active monsoon and break periods. . .	182
7.2	Median drop diameters from TWP-ICE classified by rain type. . . .	183

7.3	Median drop diameters from all Adelaide results, separated into stratiform and convective rainfall. . . . .	184
7.4	$Z$ vs. $D_0$ for all results. . . . .	185
7.5	DSD shape, 22 January 2006. . . . .	188
7.6	DSD average shape between 2 and 4 mm, 22 January 2006. . . . .	189
7.7	DSD average shape multiplied by diameter cubed, 22 January 2006. . . . .	190
7.8	DSD average shape between 2 and 4 mm, 5 January 2006. . . . .	190
7.9	DSD average shape multiplied by diameter cubed, 5 January 2006. . . . .	191
7.10	DSD shape in the convective region, Adelaide, 12 June 2008 . . . . .	192
7.11	DSD shape in the stratiform region, Adelaide, 12 June 2008 . . . . .	193
7.12	Example of $D_0$ under a bright band. . . . .	195
7.13	Stacked spectra showing a drop in clear-air amplitude. . . . .	197
7.14	3D plot of spectra at 1 time stamp. . . . .	198
7.15	Convective and stratiform rainrate vs. reflectivity, using derived $Z-R$ relationships. . . . .	202
7.16	Example $Z - R$ relationships in convective and stratiform regions. . . . .	204
7.17	CPol $Z_{dr}$ versus profiler $D_0$ in stratiform rain. . . . .	206
7.18	CPol $Z_{dr}$ versus profiler $D_0$ in convective rain. . . . .	207
B.1	Schematic depicting the evolution of a convective cloud. . . . .	220
B.2	Schematic depicting the evolution of a stratiform cloud. . . . .	223
B.3	Schematic PPI showing the formative stage of MCS development. . . . .	225
B.4	Schematic PPI showing the maturing stage of MCS development. . . . .	226
B.5	Schematic depicting a MCS in its mature stage on a RHI display. . . . .	227
B.6	Schematic PPI showing the decaying stage of the MCS. . . . .	228
B.7	Schematic depicting airflow trends in a leading convective line with trailing stratiform precipitation. . . . .	229



# List of Tables

2.1	Adelaide airport profiler operating parameters. . . . .	17
2.2	Darwin airport profiler operating parameters. . . . .	20
5.1	Monsoon storm summary. . . . .	115
5.2	Monsoon dominant microphysical processes. . . . .	116
5.3	Monsoon average storm statistics. . . . .	117
5.4	Monsoon average $D_0$ statistics. . . . .	118
5.5	Break storm summary. . . . .	136
5.6	Break dominant microphysical processes. . . . .	137
5.7	Break average storm statistics. . . . .	138
5.8	Break average $D_0$ statistics. . . . .	139
6.1	Microphysics summary and Z-R relationship coefficients for Adelaide. . . . .	174
6.2	$D_0$ characteristics of Adelaide storms. . . . .	175
6.3	Average statistics for storms passing over the Adelaide profiler. . . . .	176

