The Storm of the Century! (Statistics of Extremes)

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Background: Statistics of extremes

So many areas of Statistics are interested in what happens **on average**: Mean, median, mode...

One area that is different is the field of **extreme value theory**.

Why might we be interested in **extremes**, rather than averages?

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Earth Scientists – for example, **meteorologists**, **seismologists**, **hydrologists** and **oceanographers** – predict and assess the likelihood of storms, earthquakes, volcanoes and changes in sea level.

We can usually deal with averages here – it is the **extremes** that cause devastation!

Such scientists require the expertise of **mathematicians** to help with **predictions** and **calculations**.

In this talk I will focus on how maths/statistics can be used to help oceanographers and civil engineers to predict extreme **sea–surges**.

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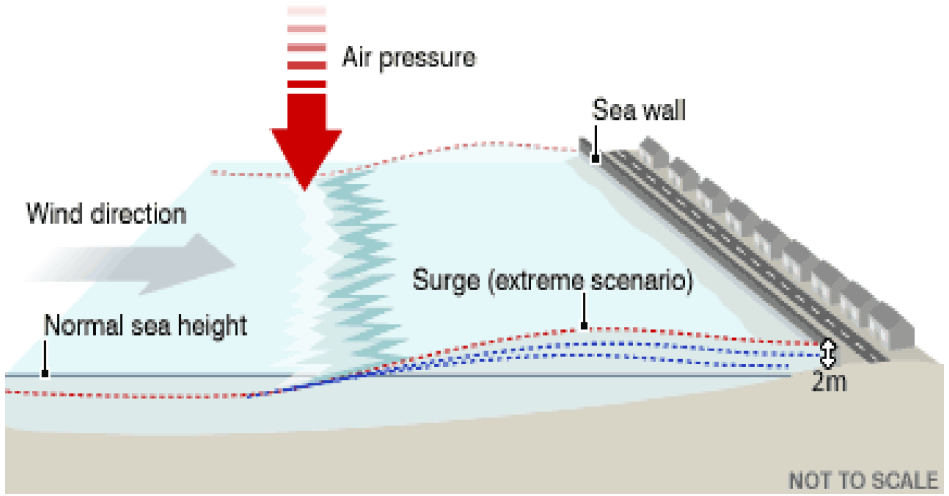
Sea–surge


Air pressure
Sea wall
Wind direction
Surge (extreme scenario)
Normal sea height
2m
NOT TO SCALE

Earthquakes/sea–surge: Japan, 2011

Hurricane Sandy: USA, 2012

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Hurricane ????: USA, 2019?

Sea–surge: The Great North Sea Flood, 1953

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- Estimated as the "**Storm of the Century**"
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Stormy weather in the UK!

- 5 December 2015: **Storm Desmond** – more than a month's rain in parts of Cumbria, flooding in Carlisle
- 22 December 2015: Further flooding in Cumbria
- Christmas Day: **Storm Eva** – 106 flood alerts in UK
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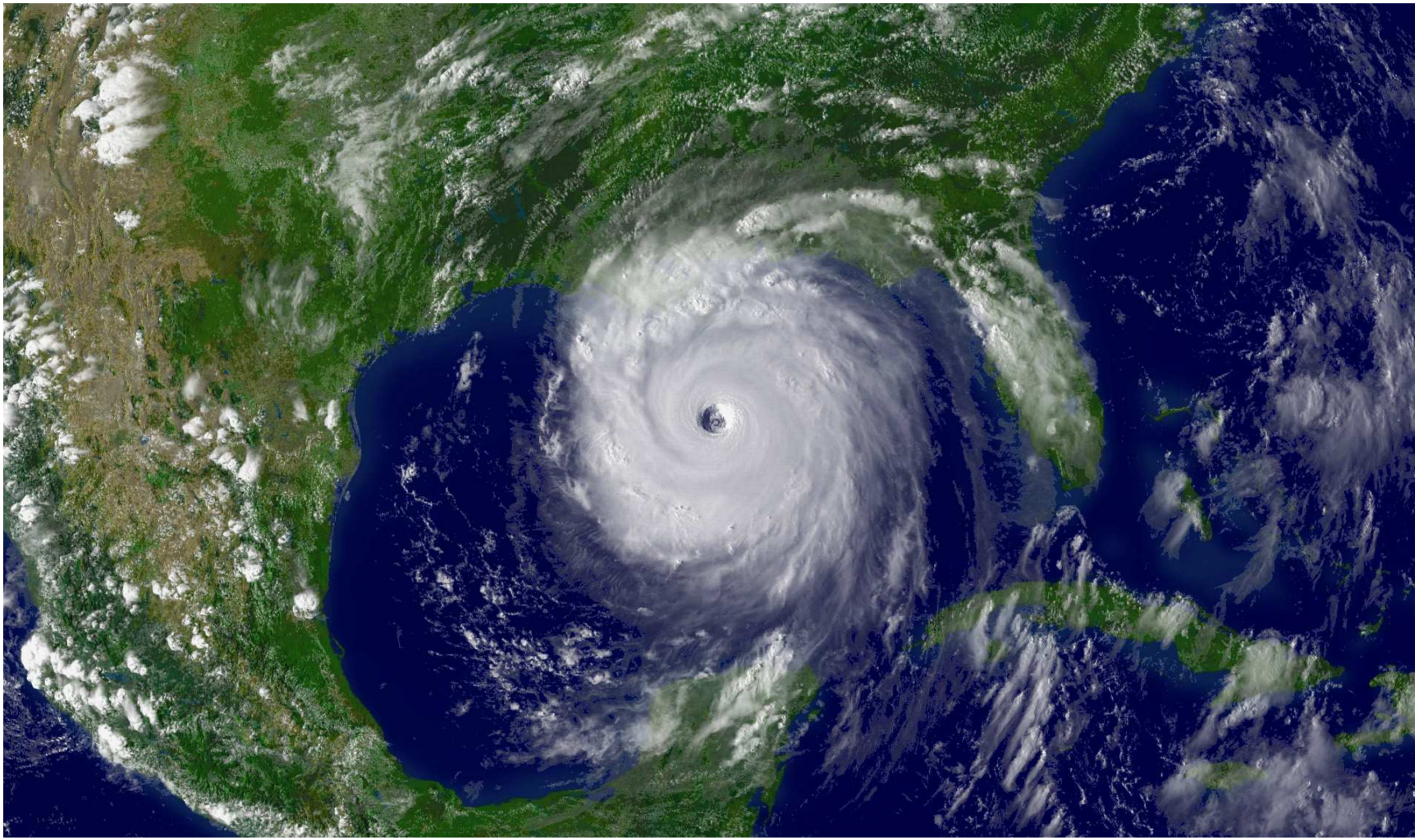
Hurricane Katrina: New Orleans, August 2005



Hurricane Katrina: New Orleans, August 2005

Some facts

- Category 5 Hurricane (Category 3 when it made landfall)
- Killed 1833 people
- Caused $108 bn worth of damage
- Most damage/loss of life caused by **storm surge**
- Storm surge reached 14.4 feet above sea level
- Lowest air pressure 902 mb
- Political controversy
- Billed as the “storm of the century”

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Data application: Sea surges at New Orleans

Below are the annual maximum sea–surge levels observed at New Orleans over a 50 year period *before Hurricane Katrina*:

8.5	8.9	9.1	8.9	8.4	9.7	9.1	9.6	8.7	9.3
9.6	9.3	8.7	9.0	8.8	8.9	8.9	12.2	7.8	7.7
8.3	8.1	7.3	6.8	6.7	7.3	7.6	8.2	8.6	9.8
9.5	7.4	7.3	10.2	10.3	10.4	8.8	9.7	10.0	10.8
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Suppose you are the mathematician on the team of scientists working on a new section of flood defence system in New Orleans.

One of the civil engineers asks you to work out some exceedance probabilities for her.

In particular, she wants to know the probability that, this year, the annual maximum sea surge at New Orleans will

1. exceed **8.75 feet**;
2. exceed **11.25 feet**;
3. exceed **14 feet**.

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Part A: The relative frequency approach

You will have used this approach to probability in your maths at School.

It helps if the data are re–written in ascending order:

6.7	6.8	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.4	7.6	7.7	7.8	8.1
8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5	8.6	8.7	8.7	8.8	8.8	8.9
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Then,

$$\boldsymbol{P}(\text{sea–surge exceeds 8.75 feet}) =$$

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Then,

$$\boldsymbol{P}(\text{sea–surge exceeds 8.75 feet}) = \frac{33}{50} = \frac{66}{100} = 0.66.$$

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Using the relative frequency approach, work out the other two exceedance probabilities:

- $\boldsymbol{P}$(sea–surge exceeds 11.25 feet)
- $\boldsymbol{P}$(sea–surge exceeds 14 feet)

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$\boldsymbol{P}$(sea–surge exceeds 11.25 feet) =

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$\boldsymbol{P}(\text{sea–surge exceeds 11.25 feet}) =$

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$$\boldsymbol{P}(\text{sea–surge exceeds 11.25 feet}) = \frac{6}{50} = 0.12$$

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6.7	6.8	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.4	7.6	7.7	7.8	8.1
8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5	8.6	8.7	8.7	8.8	8.8	8.9
8.9	8.9	8.9	9.0	9.1	9.1	9.3	9.3	9.4	9.5
9.6	9.6	9.7	9.7	9.8	10.0	10.0	10.2	10.3	10.4
10.5	10.5	10.8	11.1	**11.5**	**11.8**	**12.2**	**12.6**	**12.7**	**13.0**

$$\boldsymbol{P}(\text{sea–surge exceeds 11.25 feet}) = \frac{\mathbf{6}}{50} = 0.12$$

Part A: The relative frequency approach

6.7	6.8	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.4	7.6	7.7	7.8	8.1
8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5	8.6	8.7	8.7	8.8	8.8	8.9
8.9	8.9	8.9	9.0	9.1	9.1	9.3	9.3	9.4	9.5
9.6	9.6	9.7	9.7	9.8	10.0	10.0	10.2	10.3	10.4
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$$\boldsymbol{P}(\text{sea–surge exceeds 14 feet}) =$$

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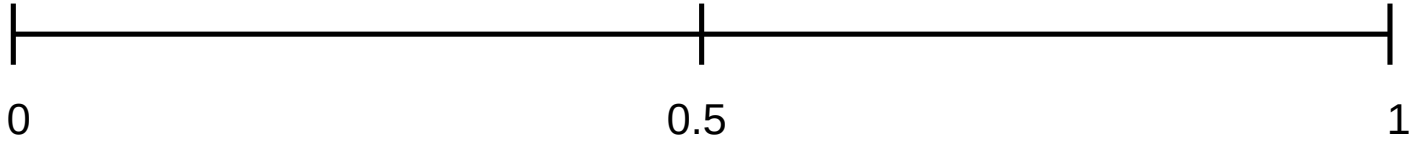

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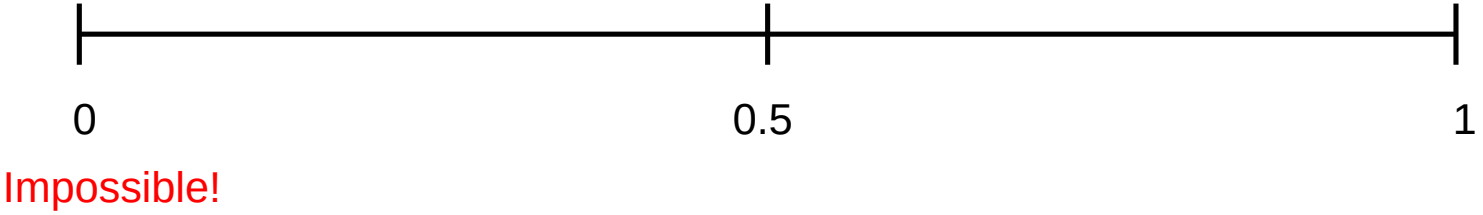

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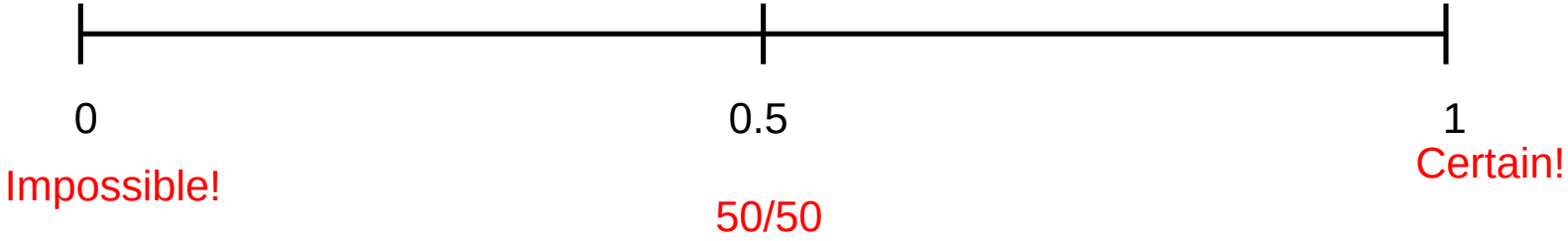

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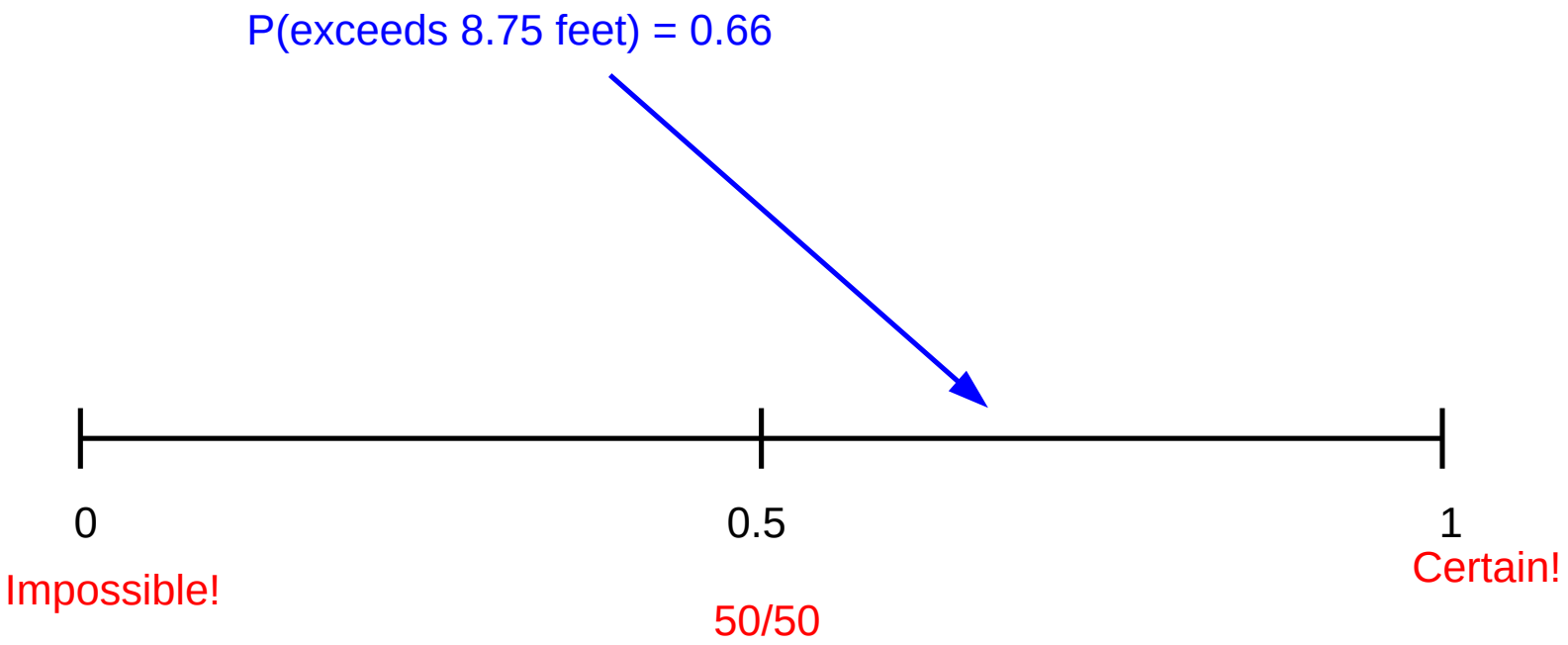

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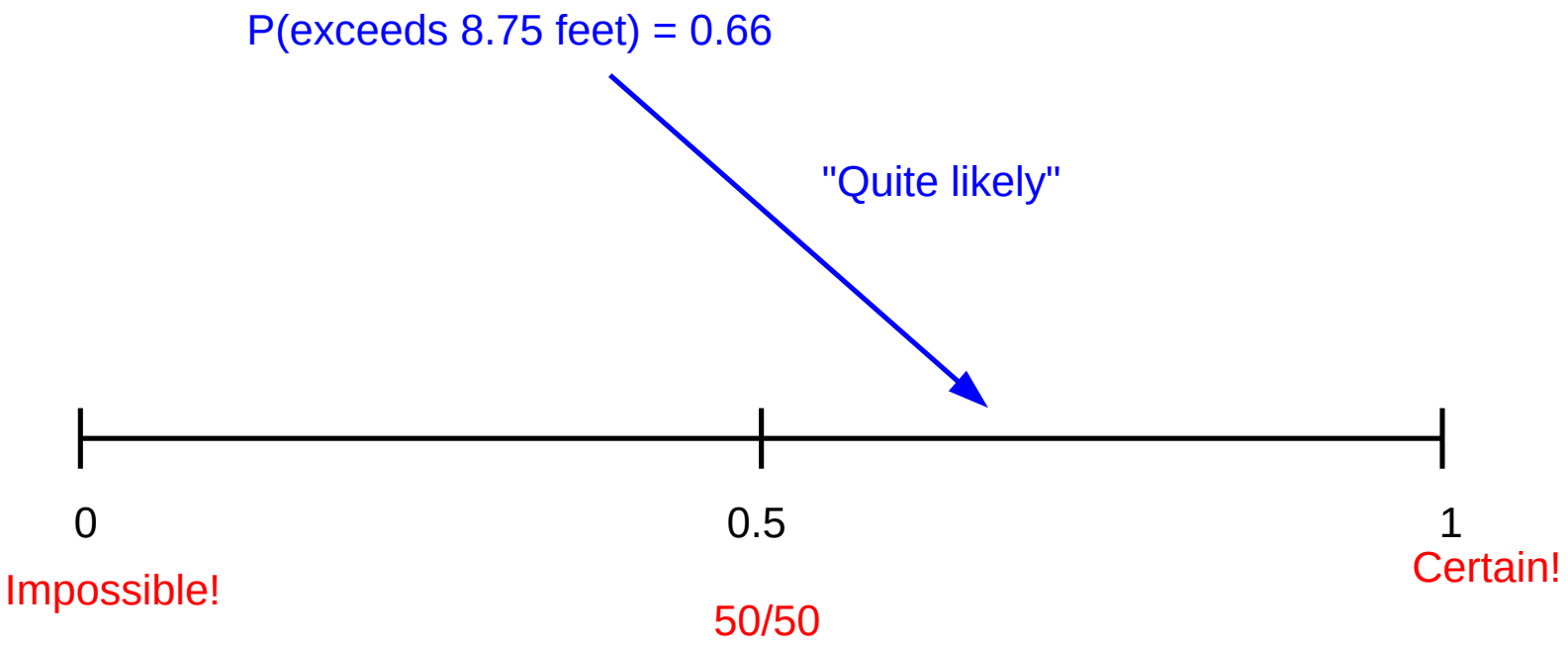

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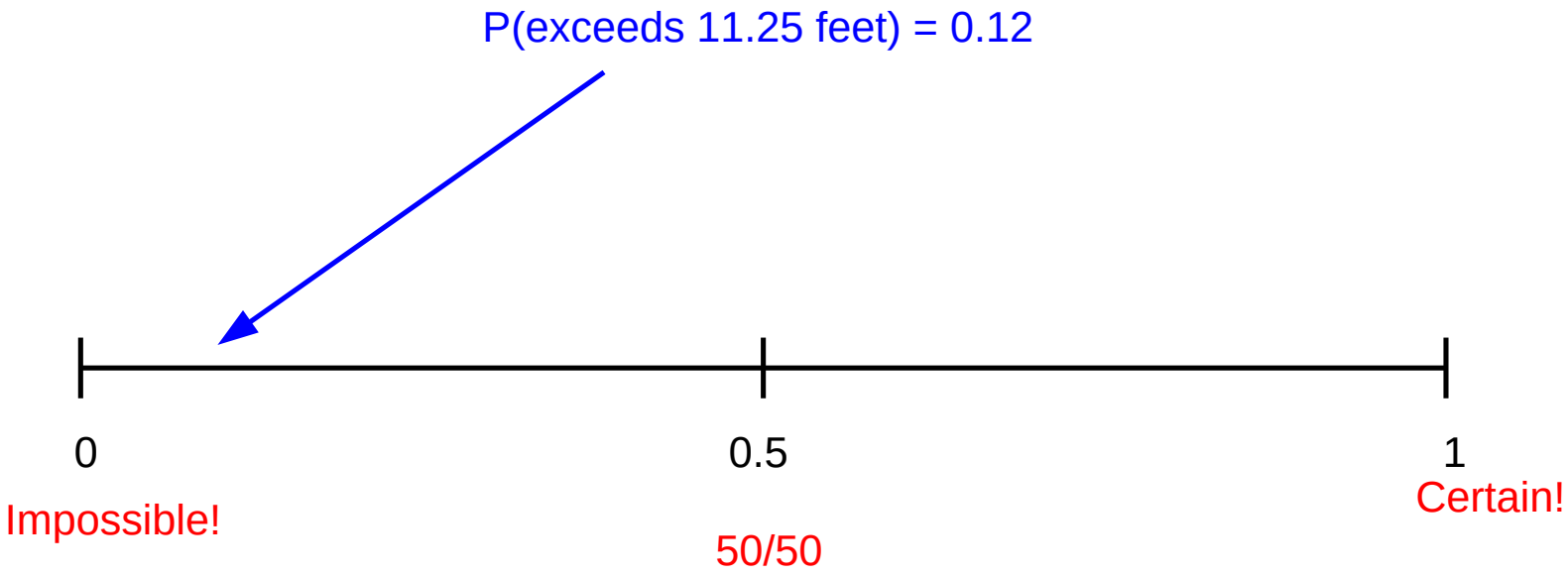

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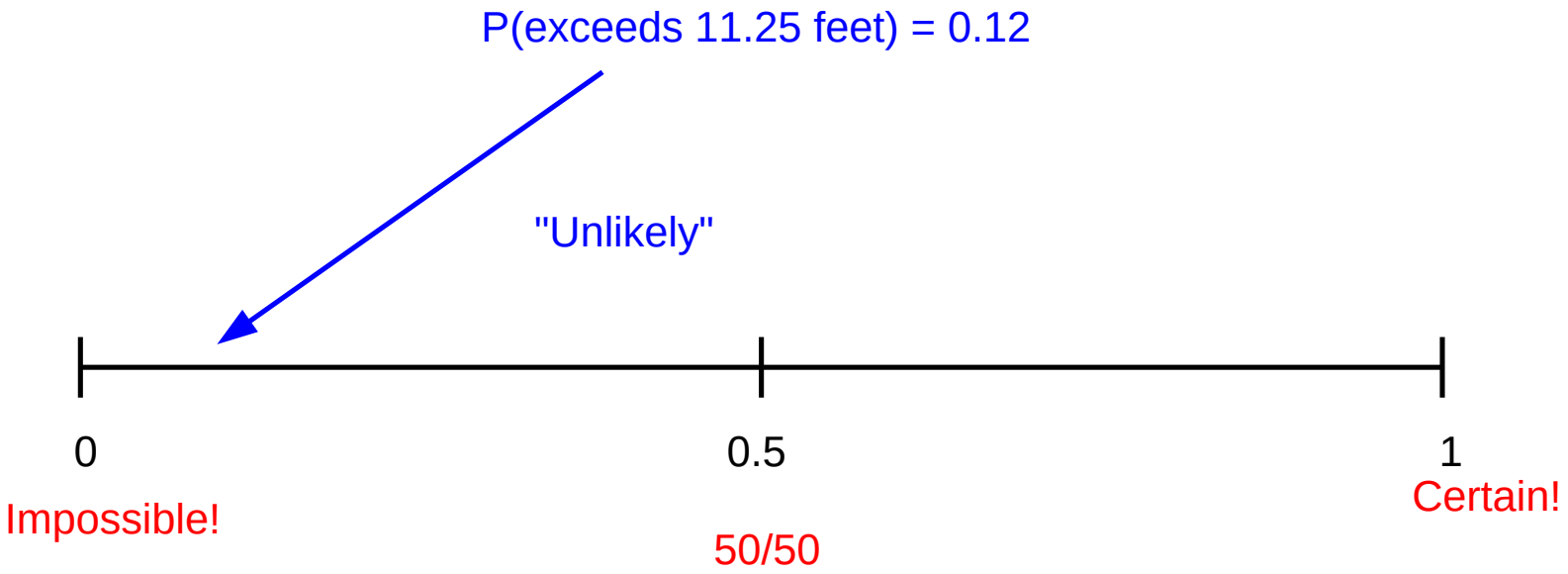

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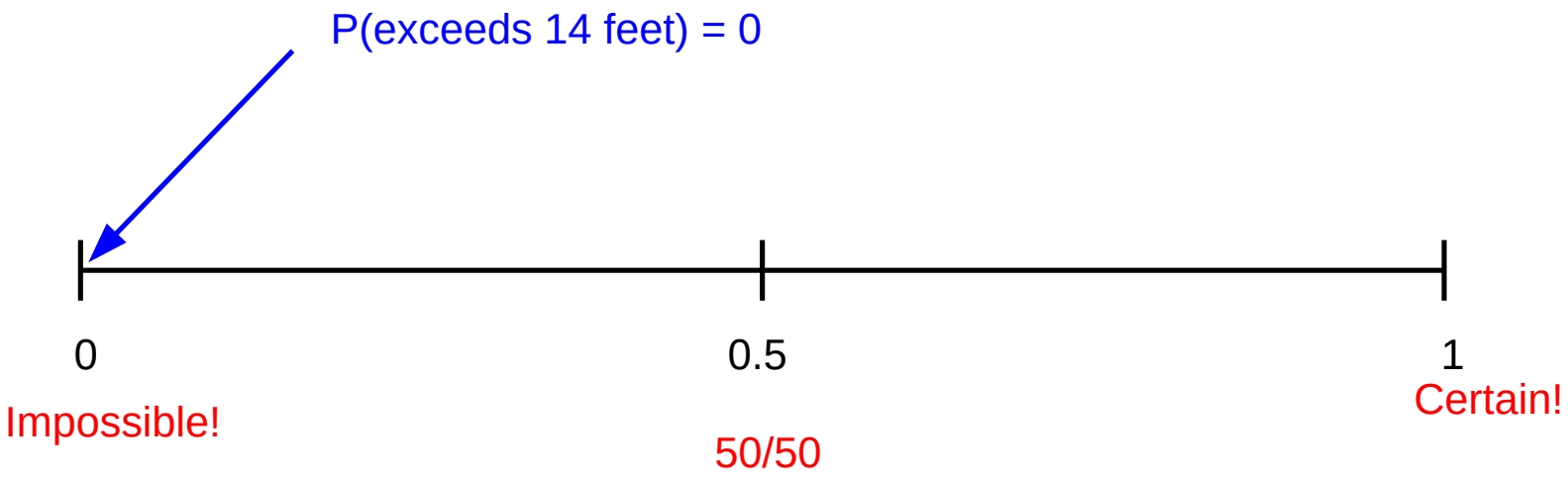

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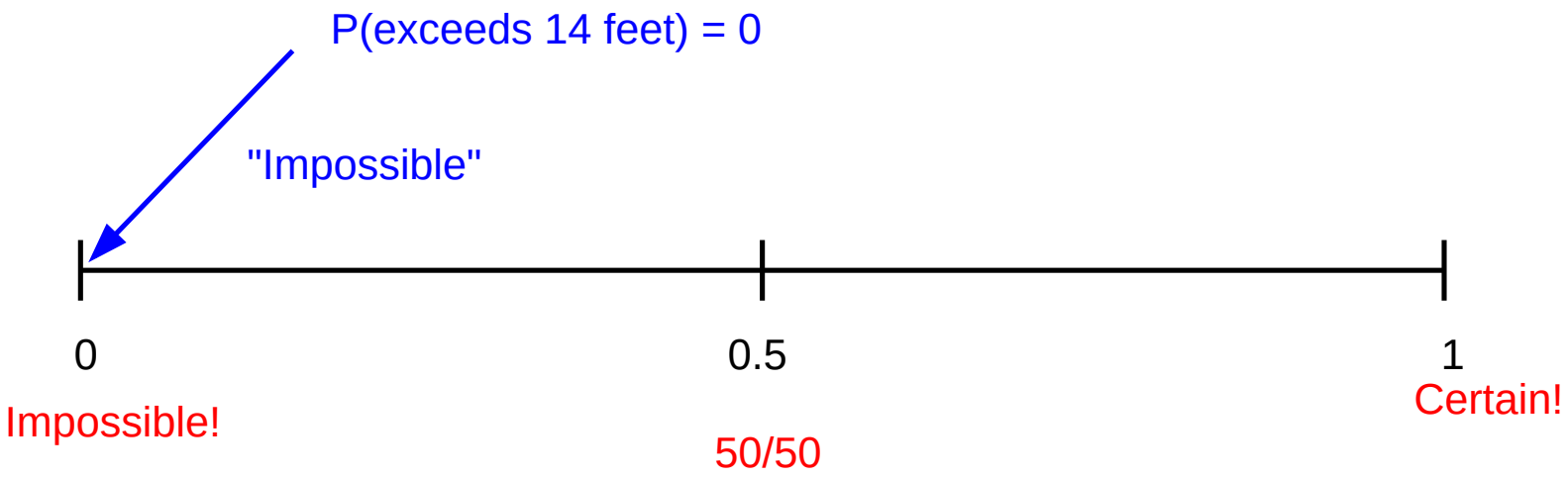

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What is wrong with the exceedance probability associated with a sea–surge of 14 feet?

Our answer suggests a sea–surge of more than 14 feet is impossible – however, this *did* happen during Hurricane Katrina (sea–surges reached 14.4 feet!).

Probability models provide a way forward here.

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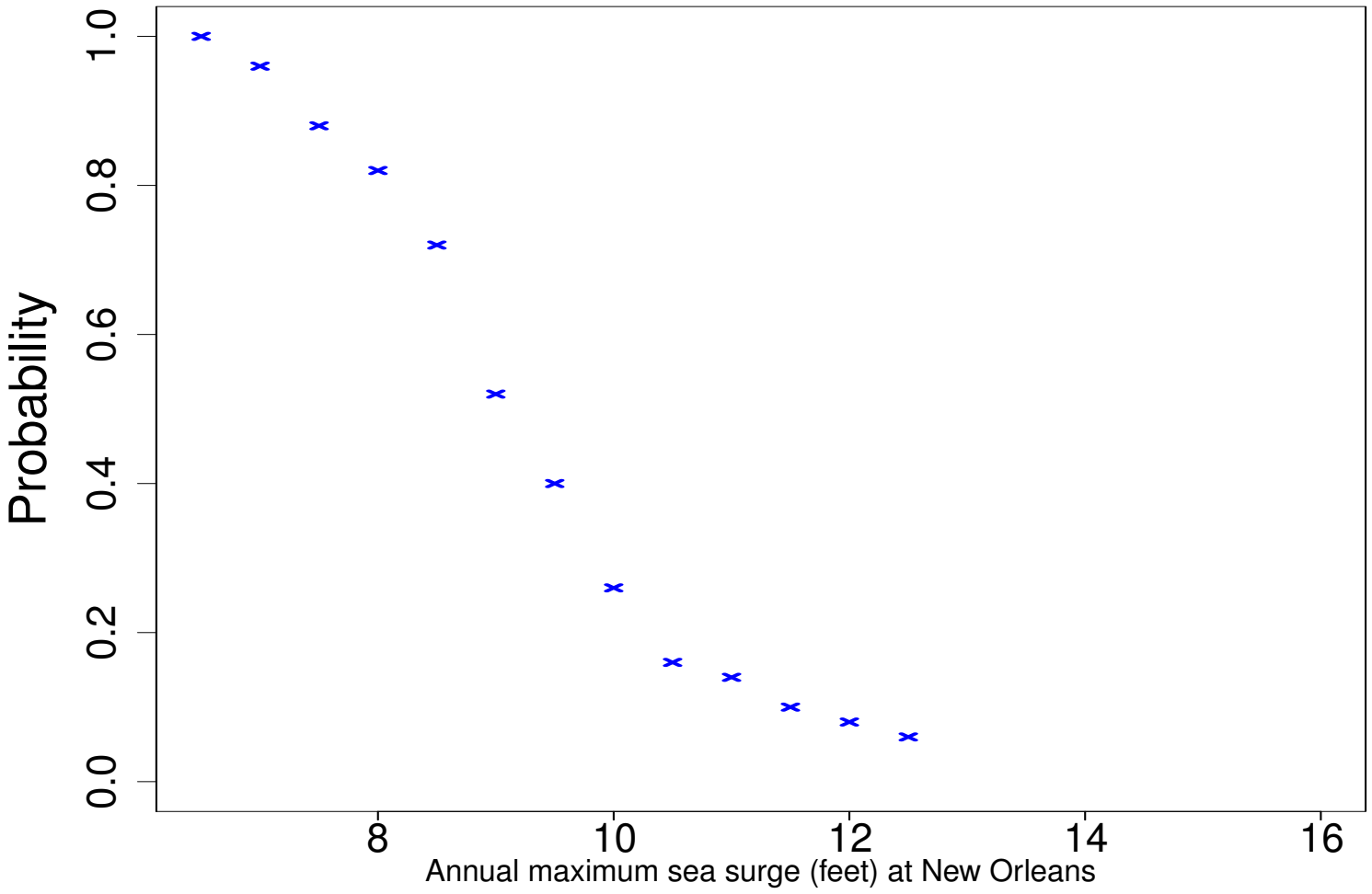
Part B: A probability model for extremes

Before we thing about **probability models**, first of all let's consider exceedance probabilities for a range of values:

Sea–surge	No. of exceedances	Exceedance probability
6.5	50	$50/50 =$ **1.00**
7.0	48	$48/50 =$ **0.96**
7.5	44	$44/50 =$ **0.88**
8.0	41	$41/50 =$ **0.82**
8.5	36	$36/50 =$ **0.72**
9.0	26	$26/50 =$ **0.52**
9.5	20	$20/50 =$ **0.40**
10.0	13	$13/50 =$ **0.26**
10.5	8	$8/50 =$ **0.16**
11.0	7	$7/50 =$ **0.14**
11.5	5	$5/50 =$ **0.10**
12.0	4	$4/50 =$ **0.08**
12.5	3	$3/50 =$ **0.06**

Part B: A probability model for extremes



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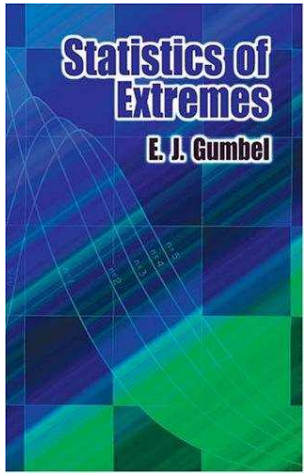
Between 1920 and the mid–1950s, some eminent mathematicians developed probability models for extremes.

The aim was to provide a **mathematical formula** that could "predict" the exceedance probabilities of real–life extremes, as in the table we've just drawn up for the New Orleans data.

One of these mathematicians was **Emil Julius Gumbel**.



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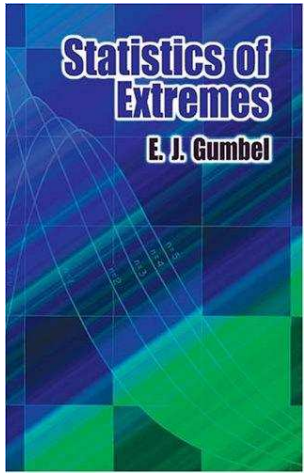

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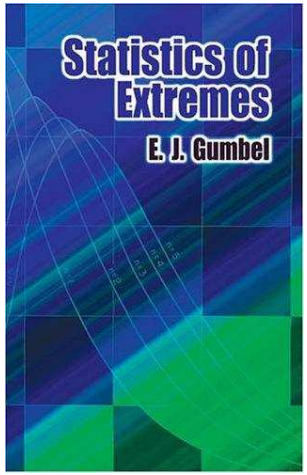

Part B: A probability model for extremes

The so–called **Gumbel model** for the exceedance probabilities of extremes is given by the following formula:

$$P(X > x) = 1 - \exp\left[-\exp\left\{-\left(\frac{x-\mu}{\sigma}\right)\right\}\right],$$

where

- μ is the "**location**" parameter
- σ is the "**scale**" parameter
- X is our "**variable**"
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Using techniques students learn about at University, we can use the data to estimate the values of the location and scale parameters.

Doing so, gives

$$\mu = 8.536 \qquad \text{and} \qquad \sigma = 1.2$$

for our dataset. Plugging these into Gumbel's formula gives

$$\boldsymbol{P}(X > x) = 1 - \exp\left[-\exp\left\{-\left(\frac{x - 8.536}{1.2}\right)\right\}\right].$$

Then we can work out the exceedance probabilities for particular values x. For example, for $x = 7.5$, we get:

$$\boldsymbol{P}(X > \mathbf{7.5}) = 1 - \exp\left[-\exp\left\{-\left(\frac{\mathbf{7.5} - 8.536}{1.2}\right)\right\}\right] = \mathbf{0.907}.$$

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We could use Gumbel's formula for lots of different values of x and then plot them on the same graph as the real data.

What do you notice when we do this?

The **Gumbel** model is not the only model to choose from:

- The **Fréchet** model
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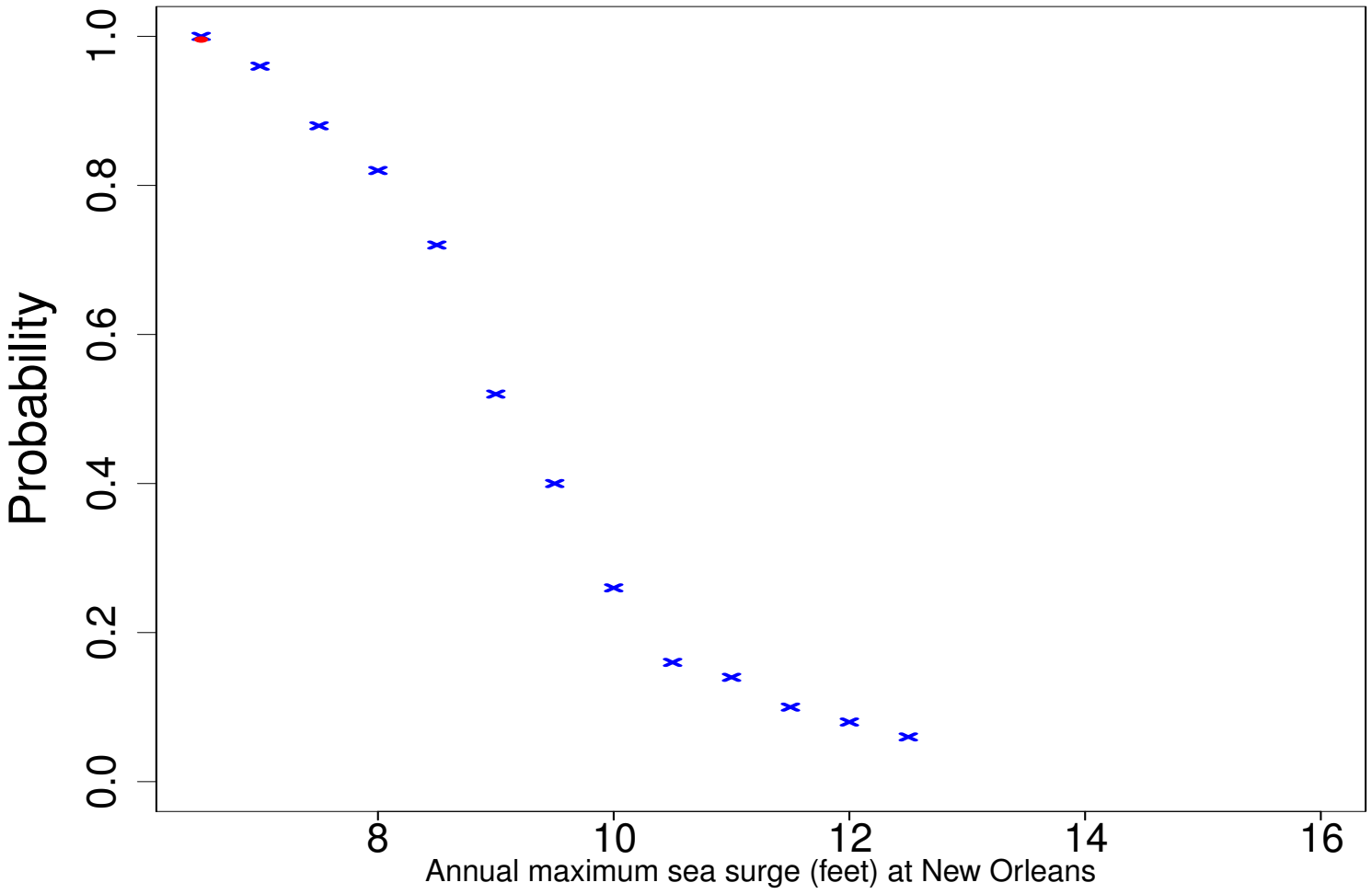

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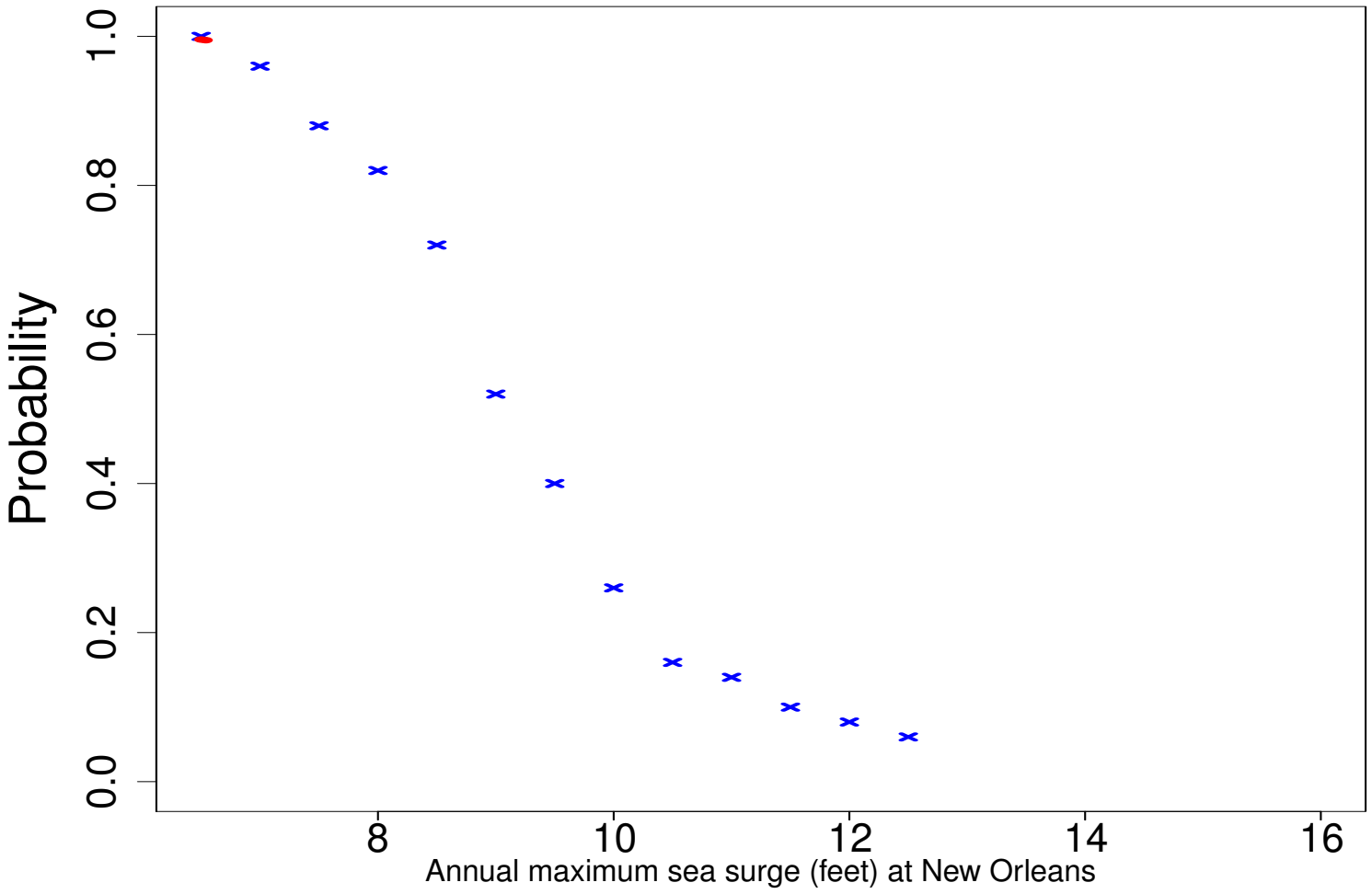

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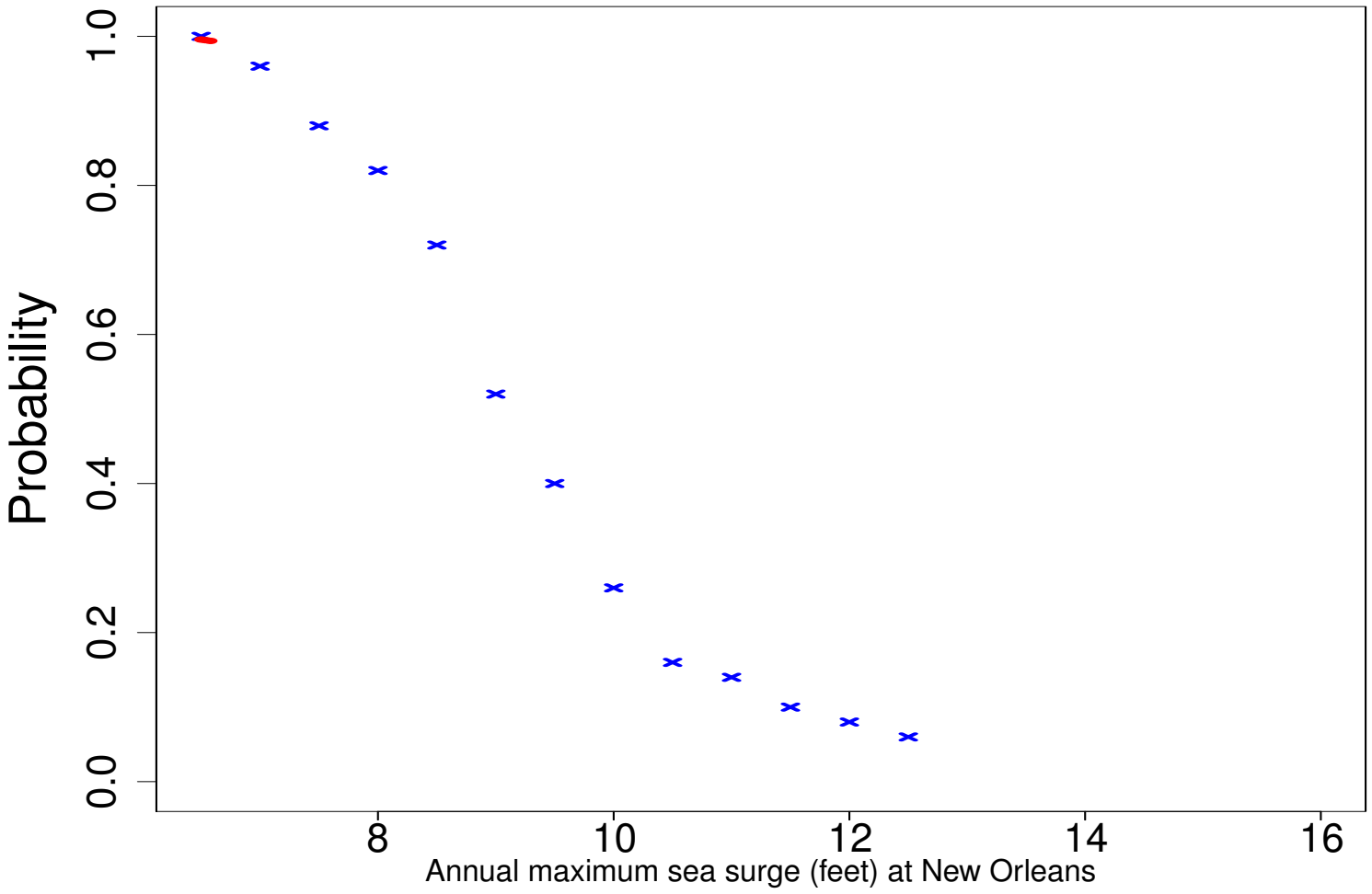

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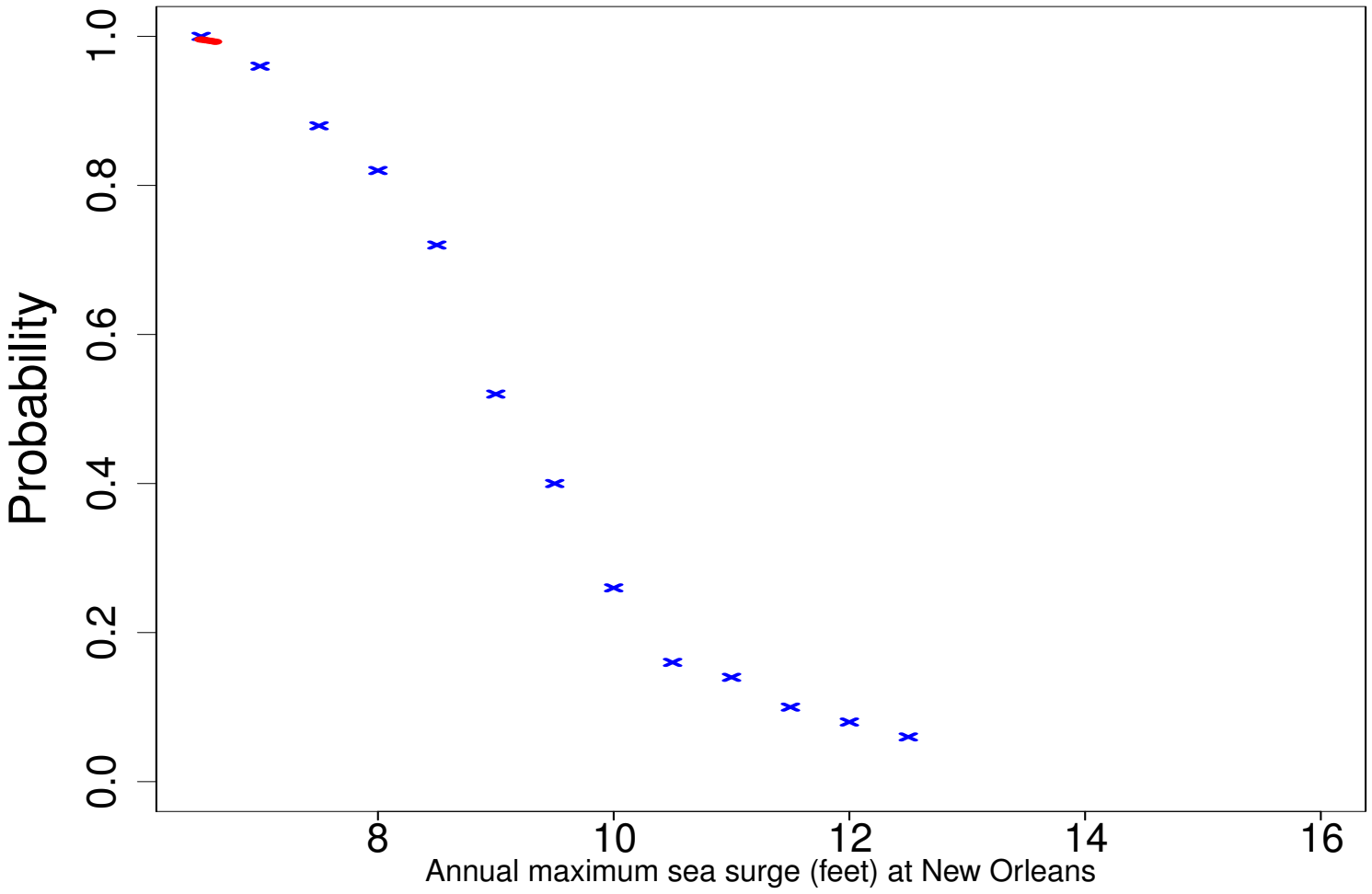

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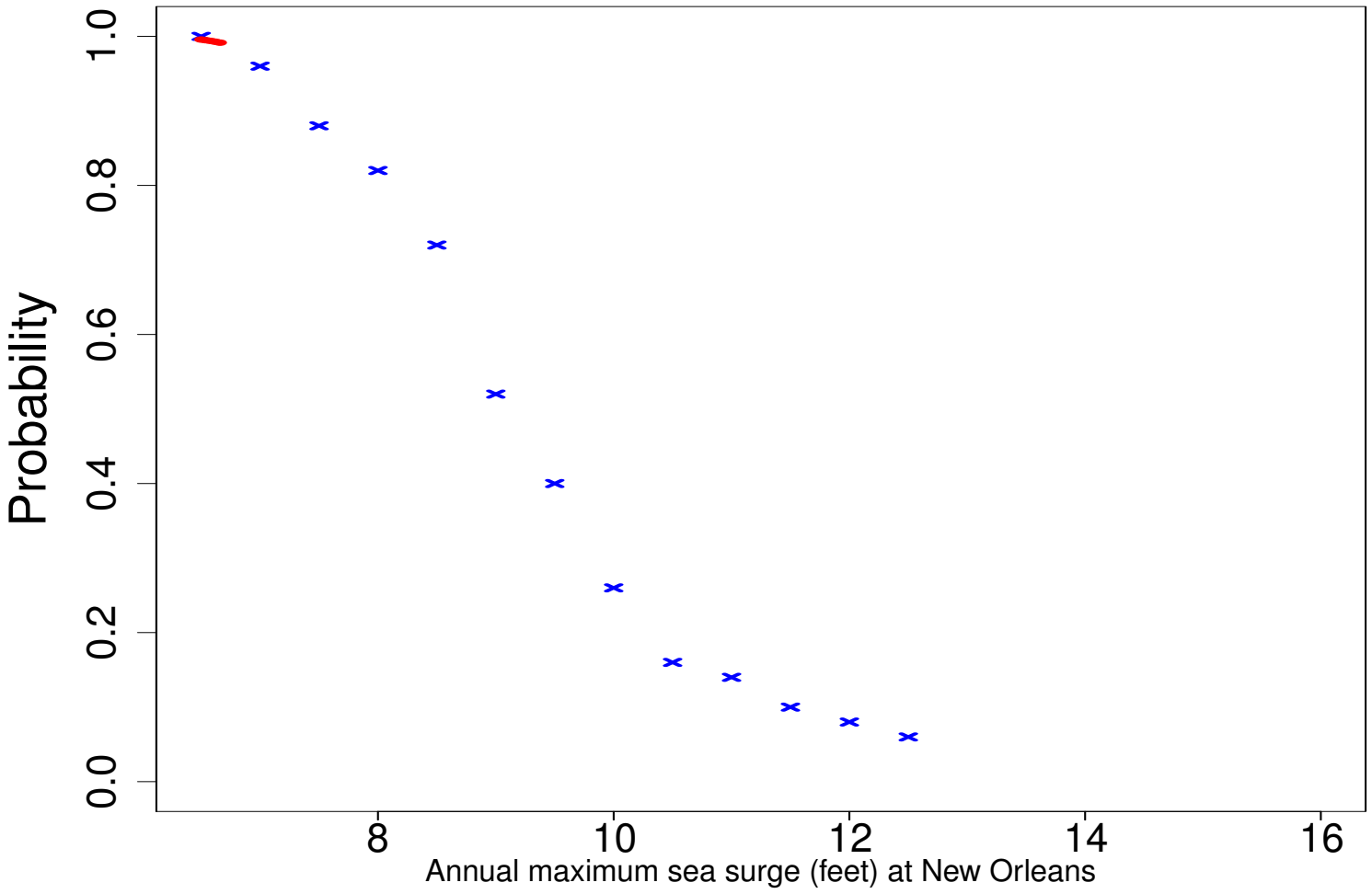

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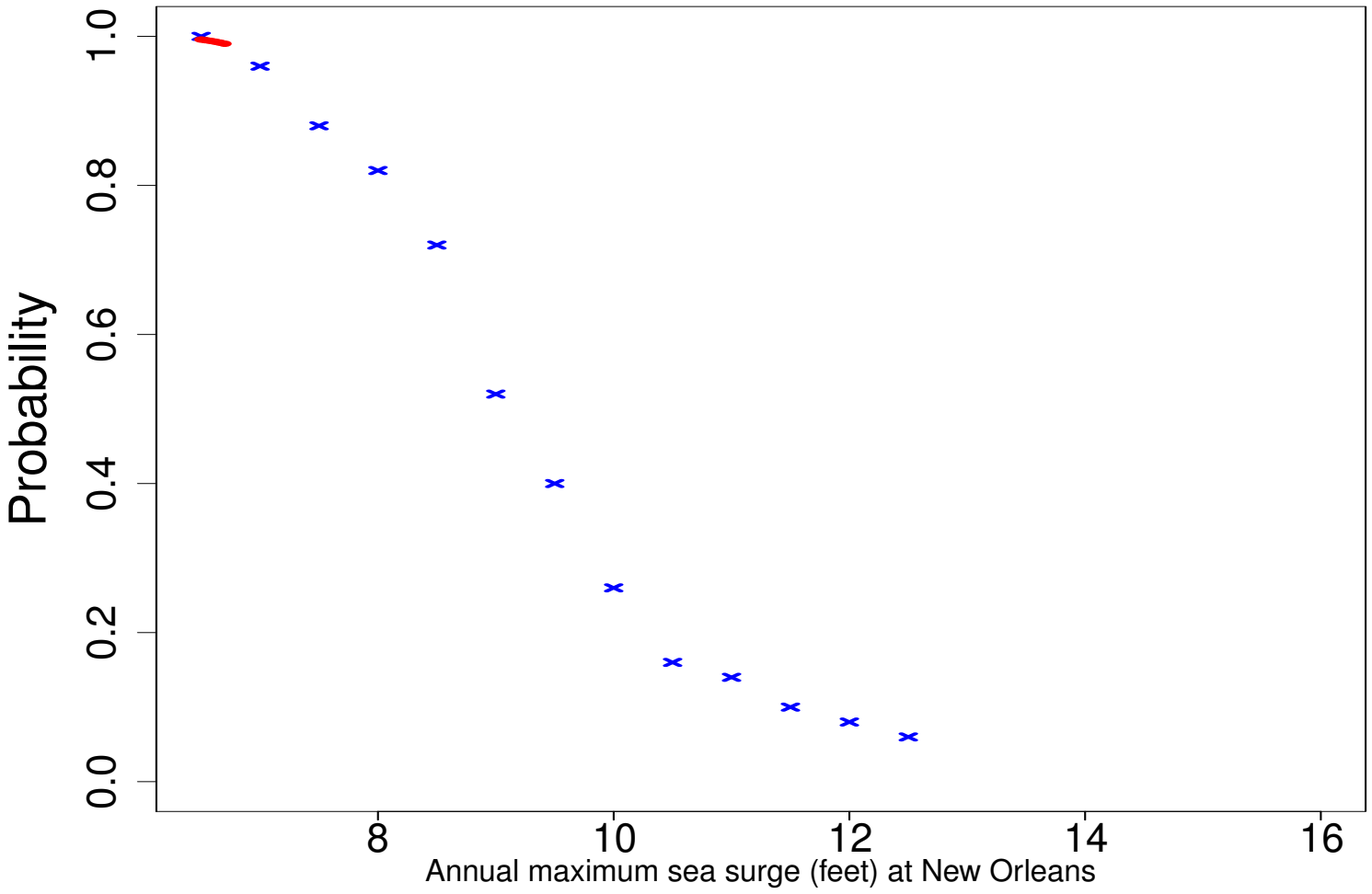

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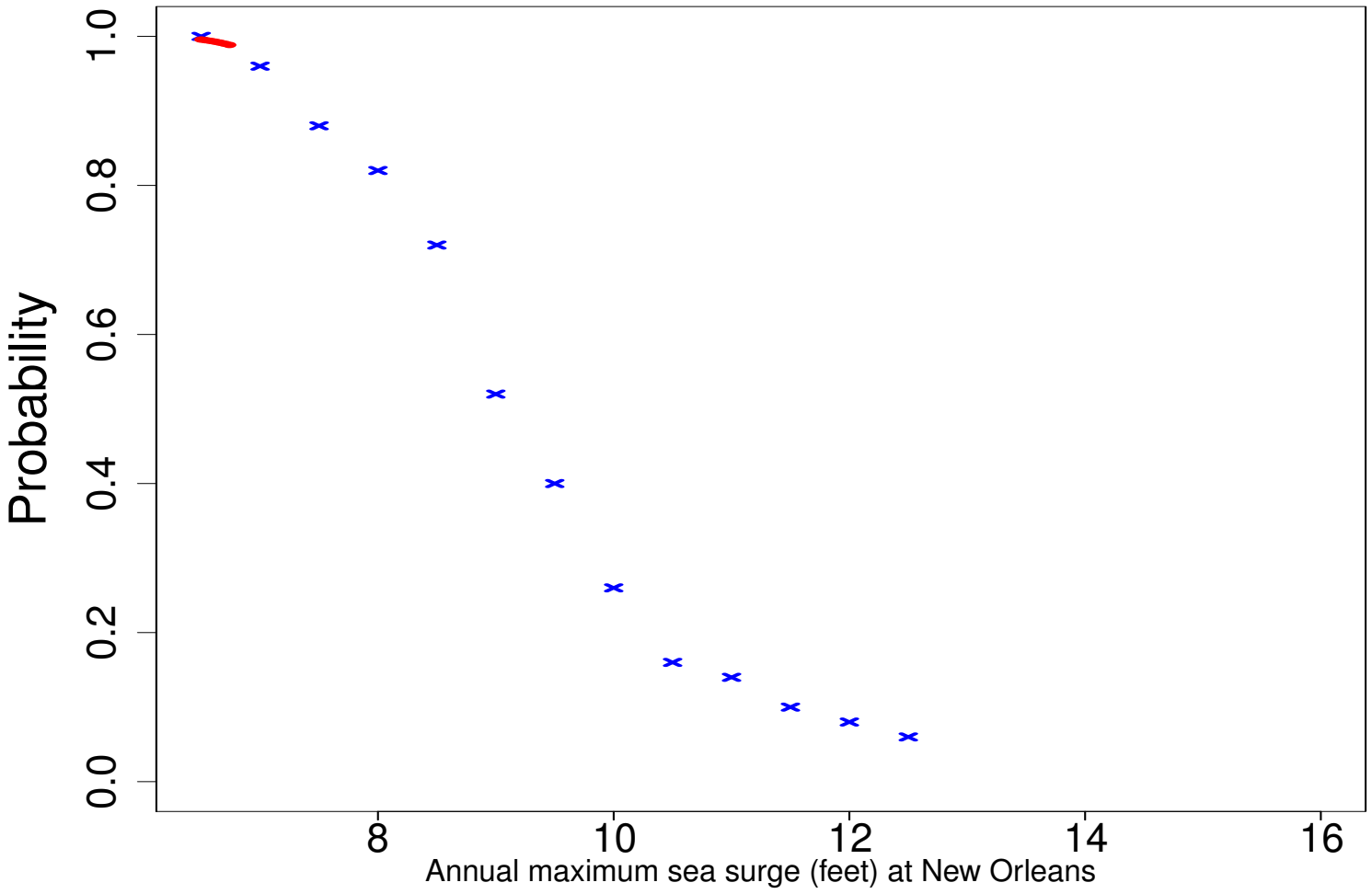

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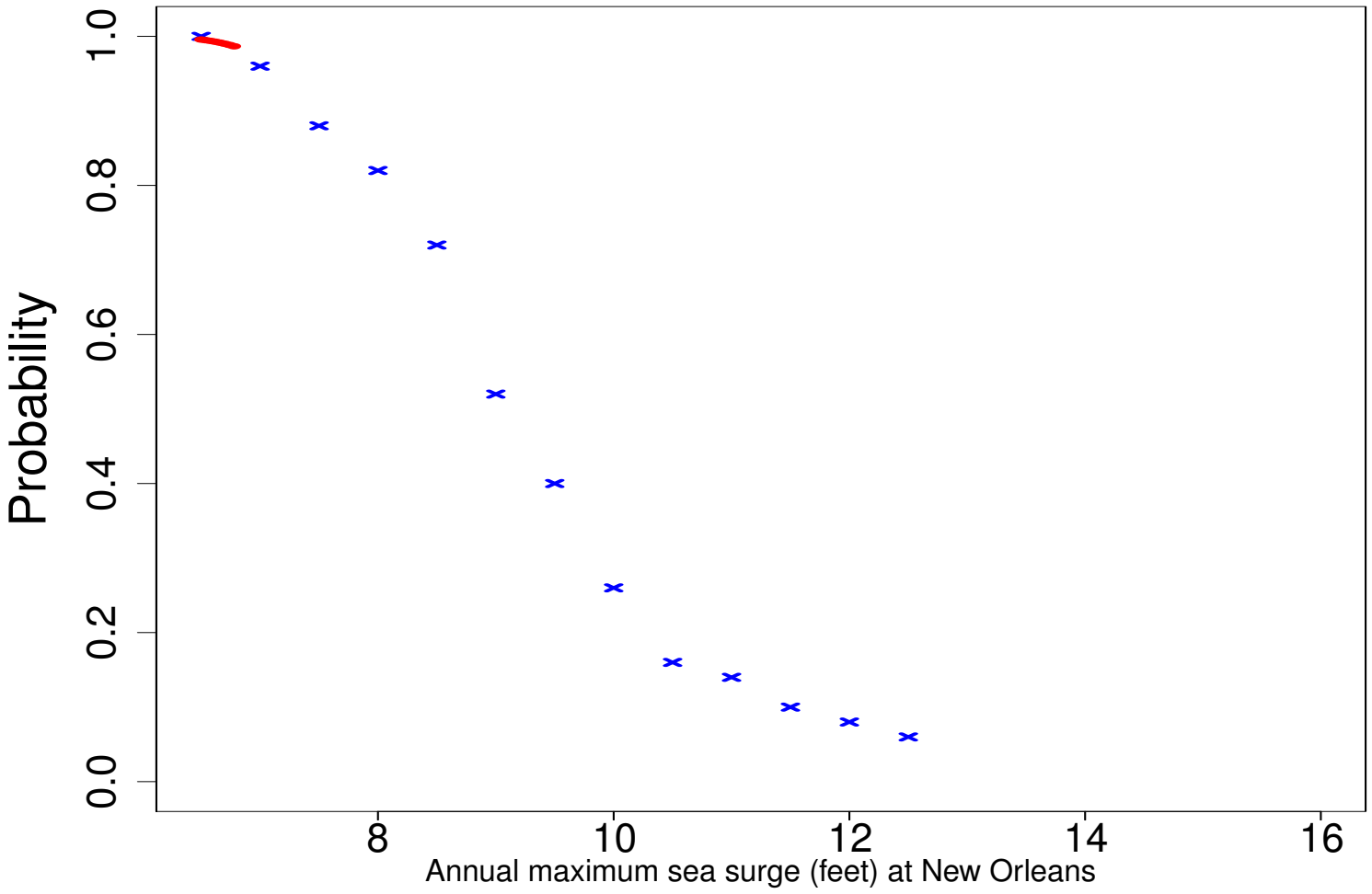

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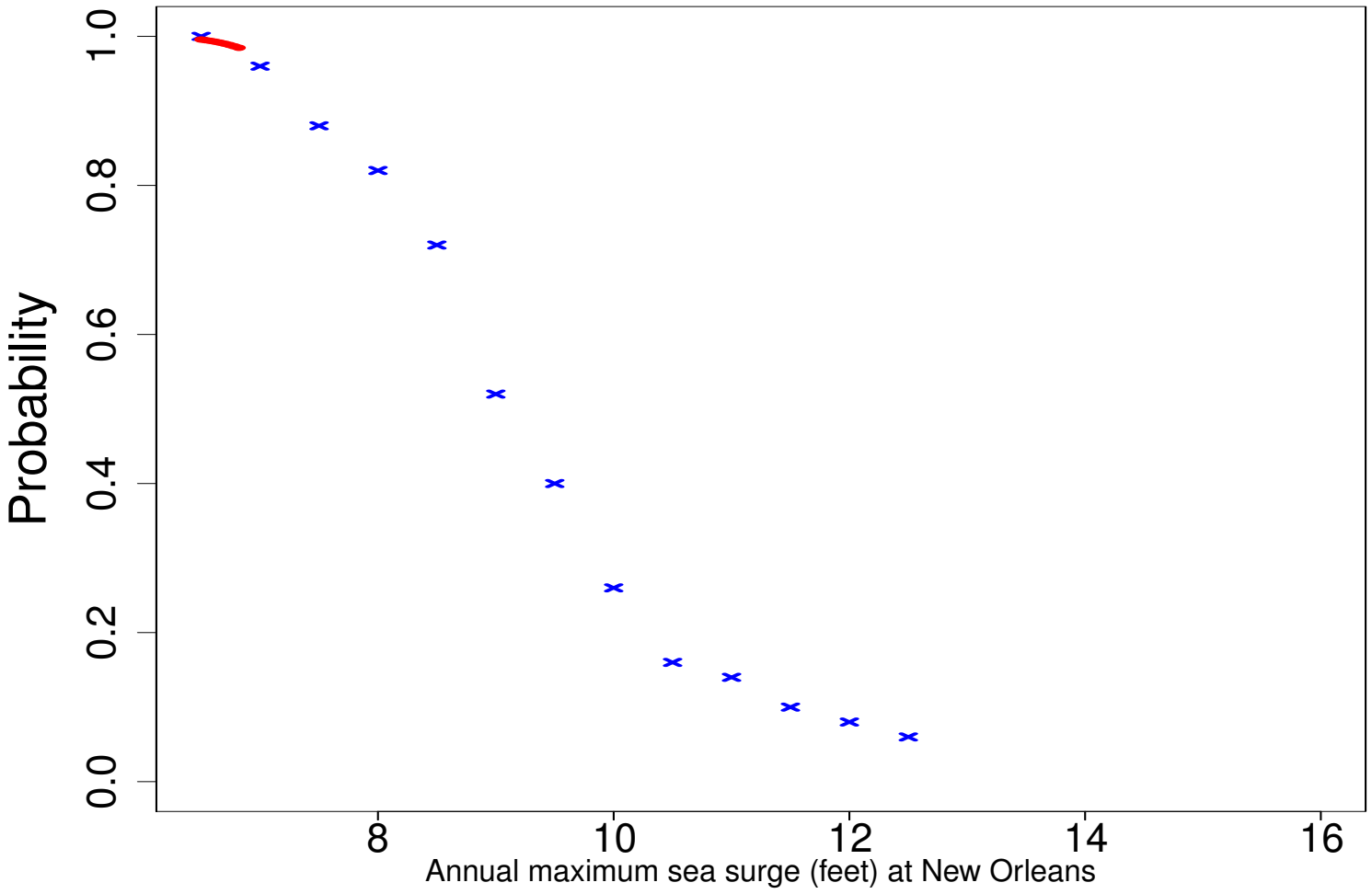

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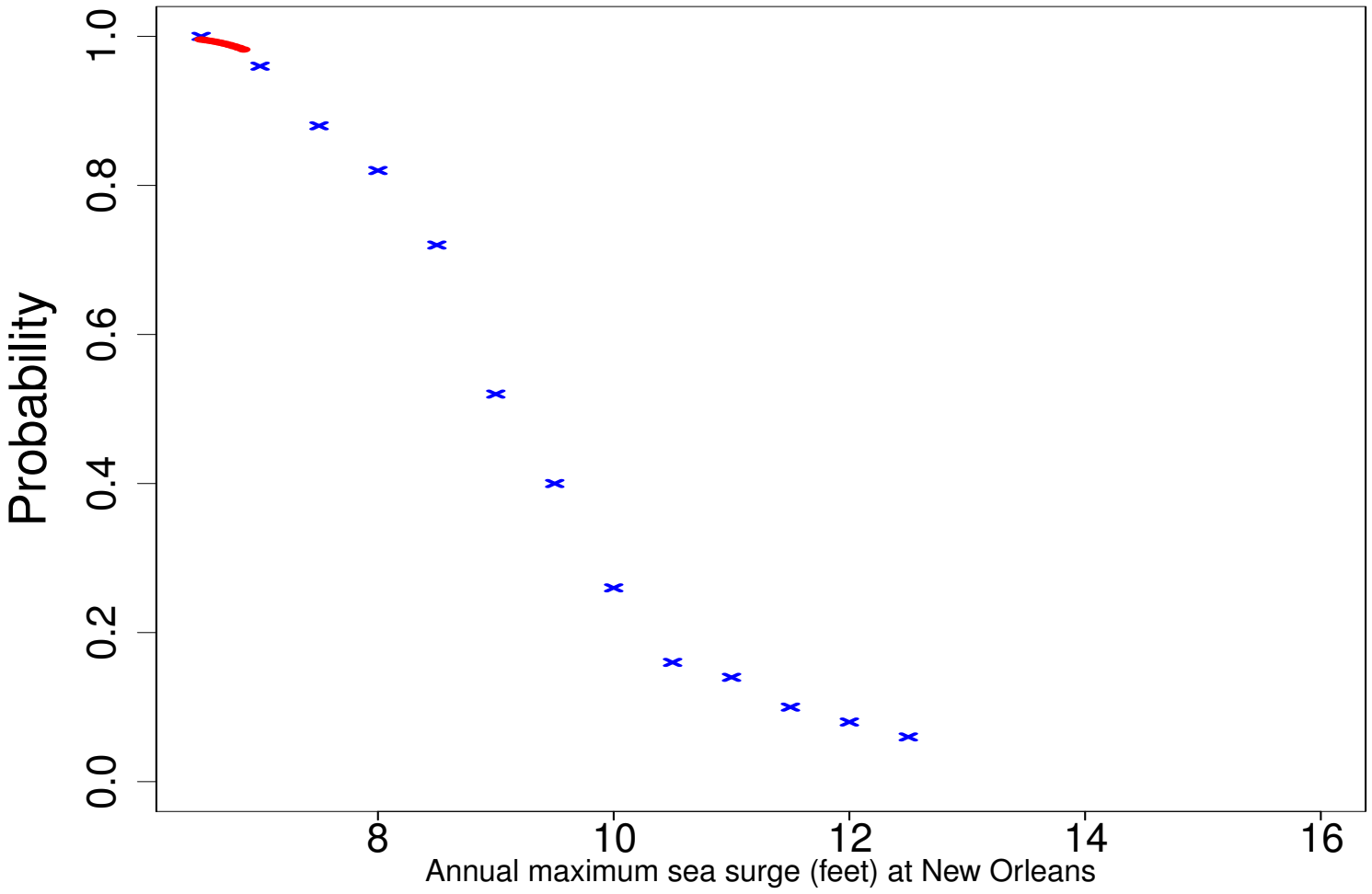

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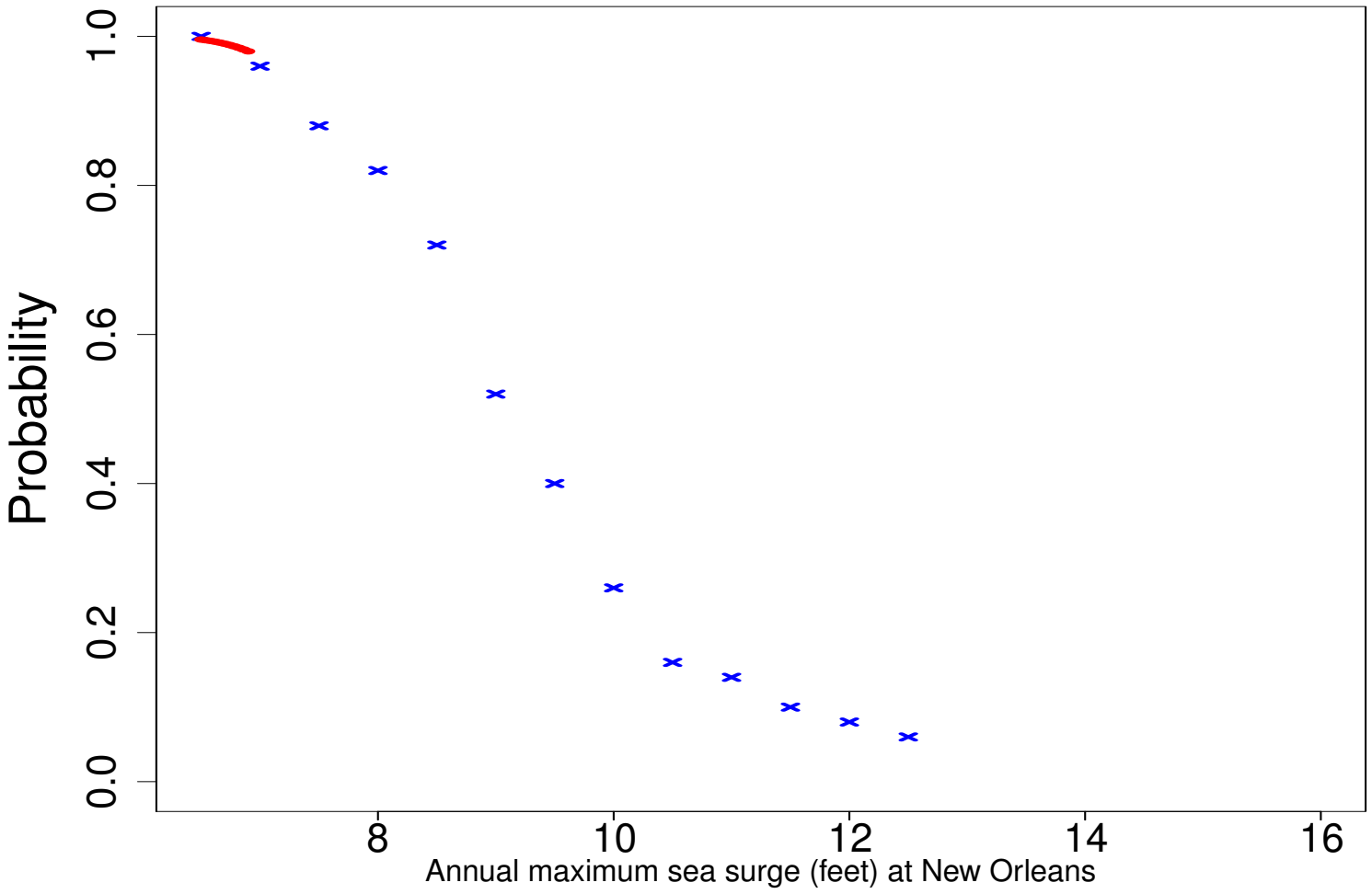

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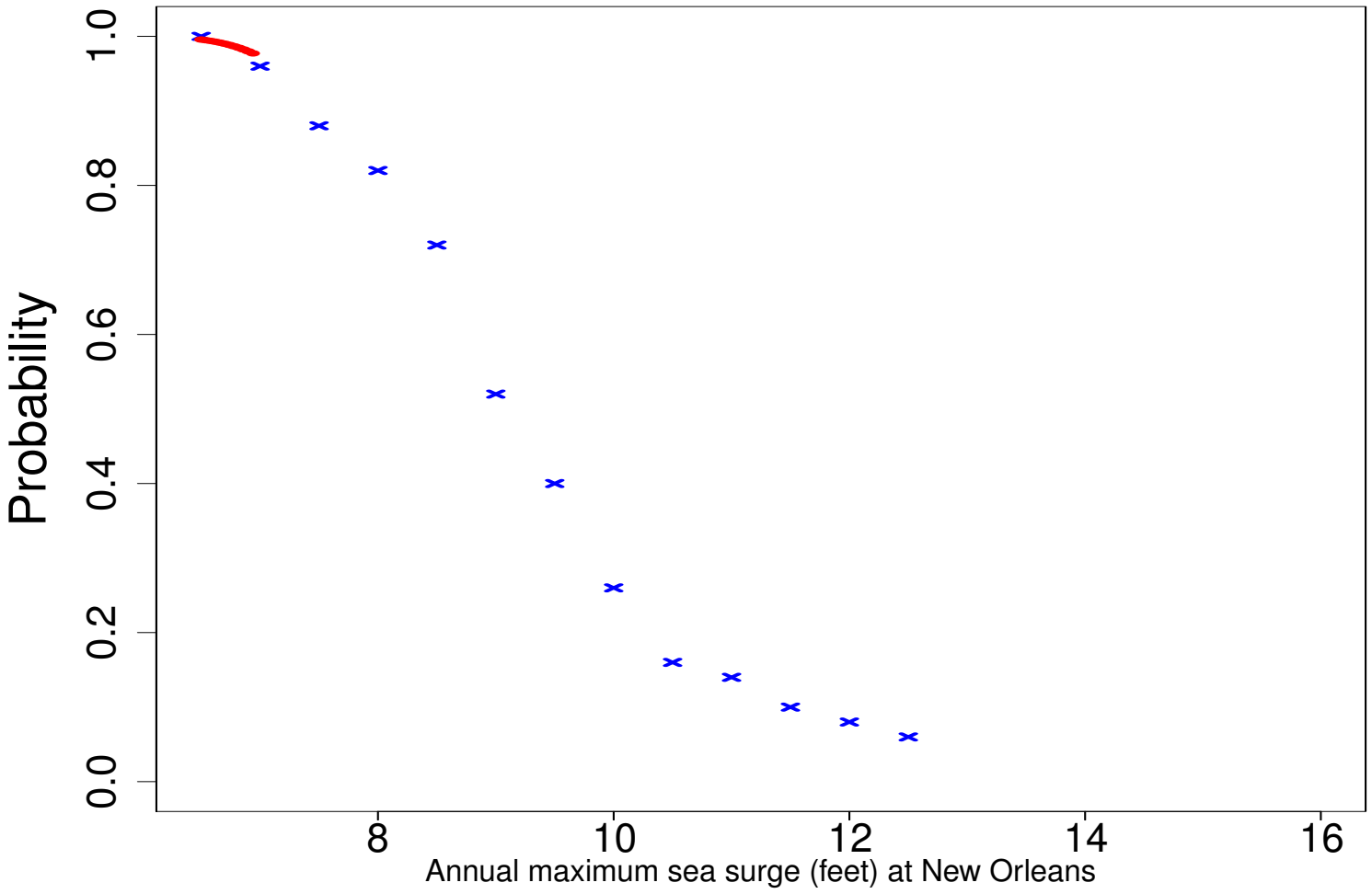

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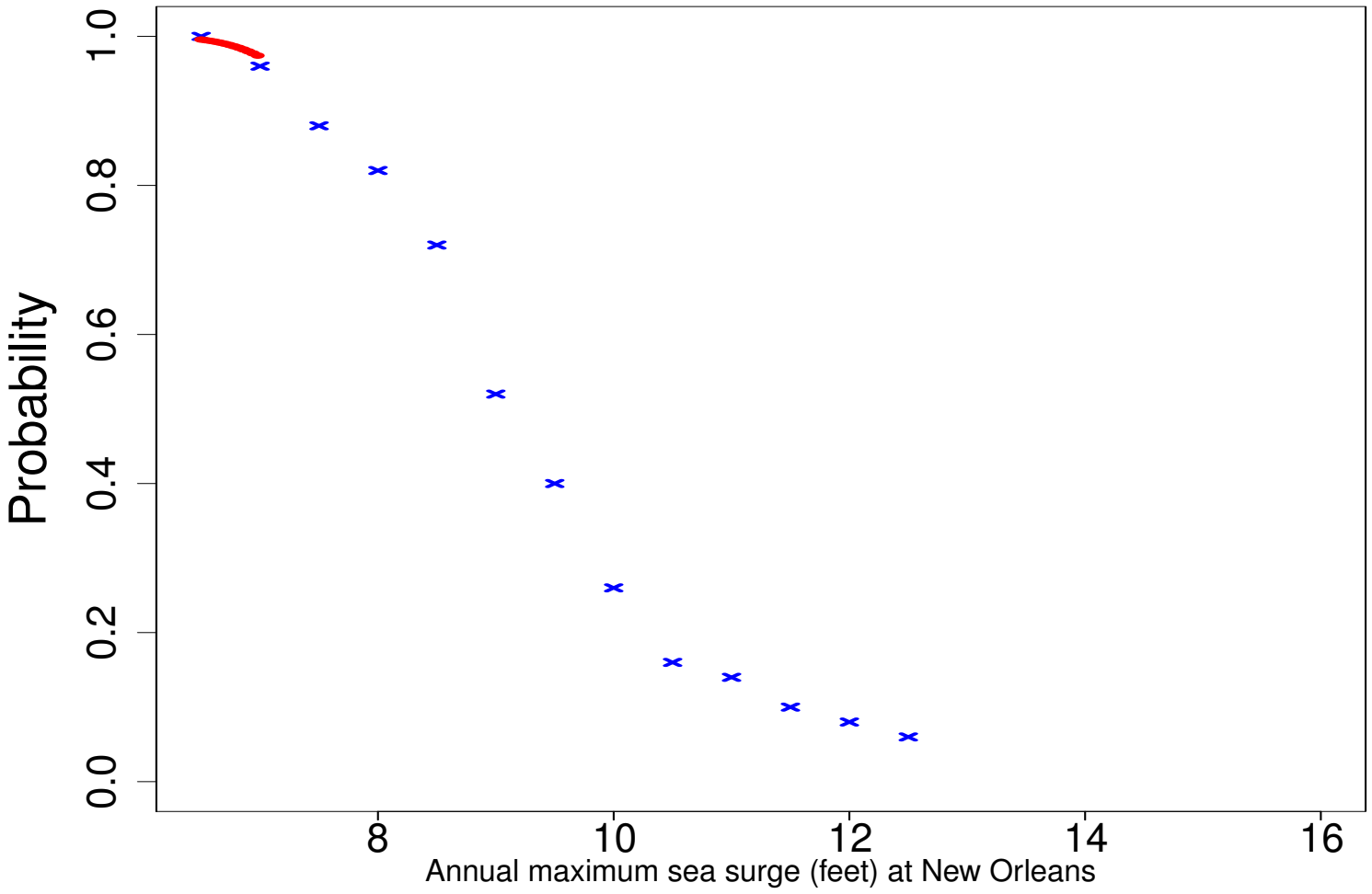

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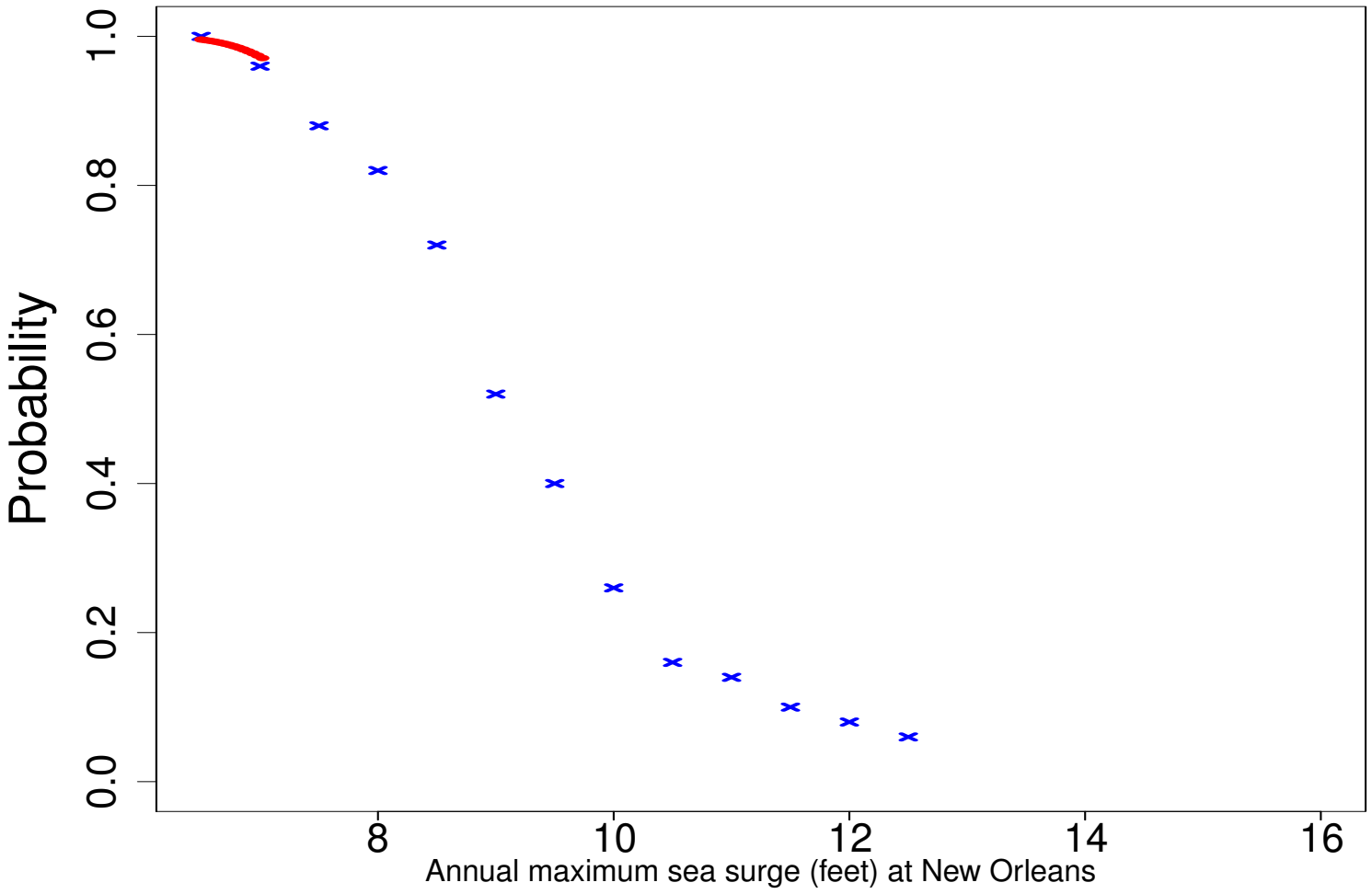

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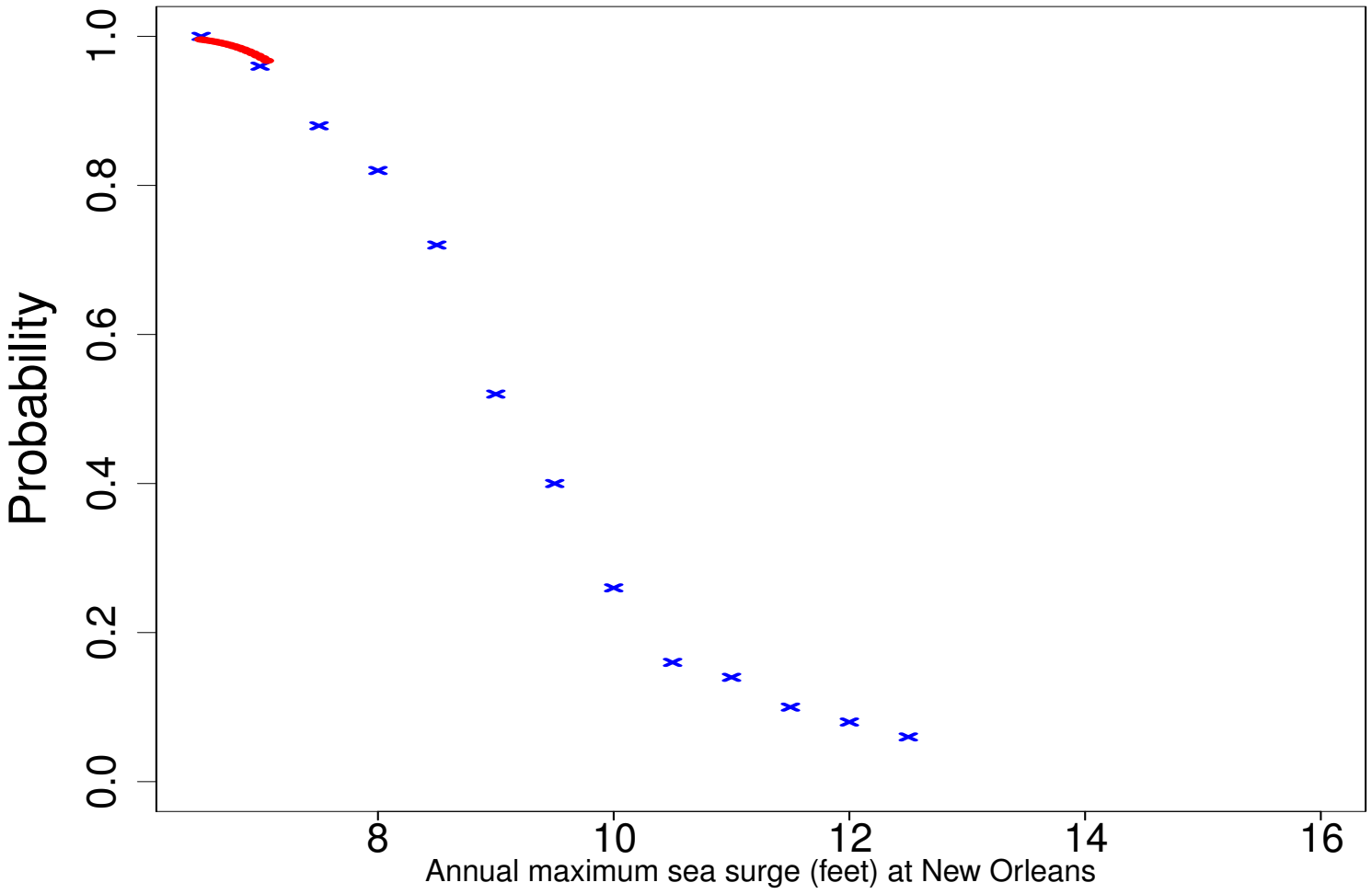

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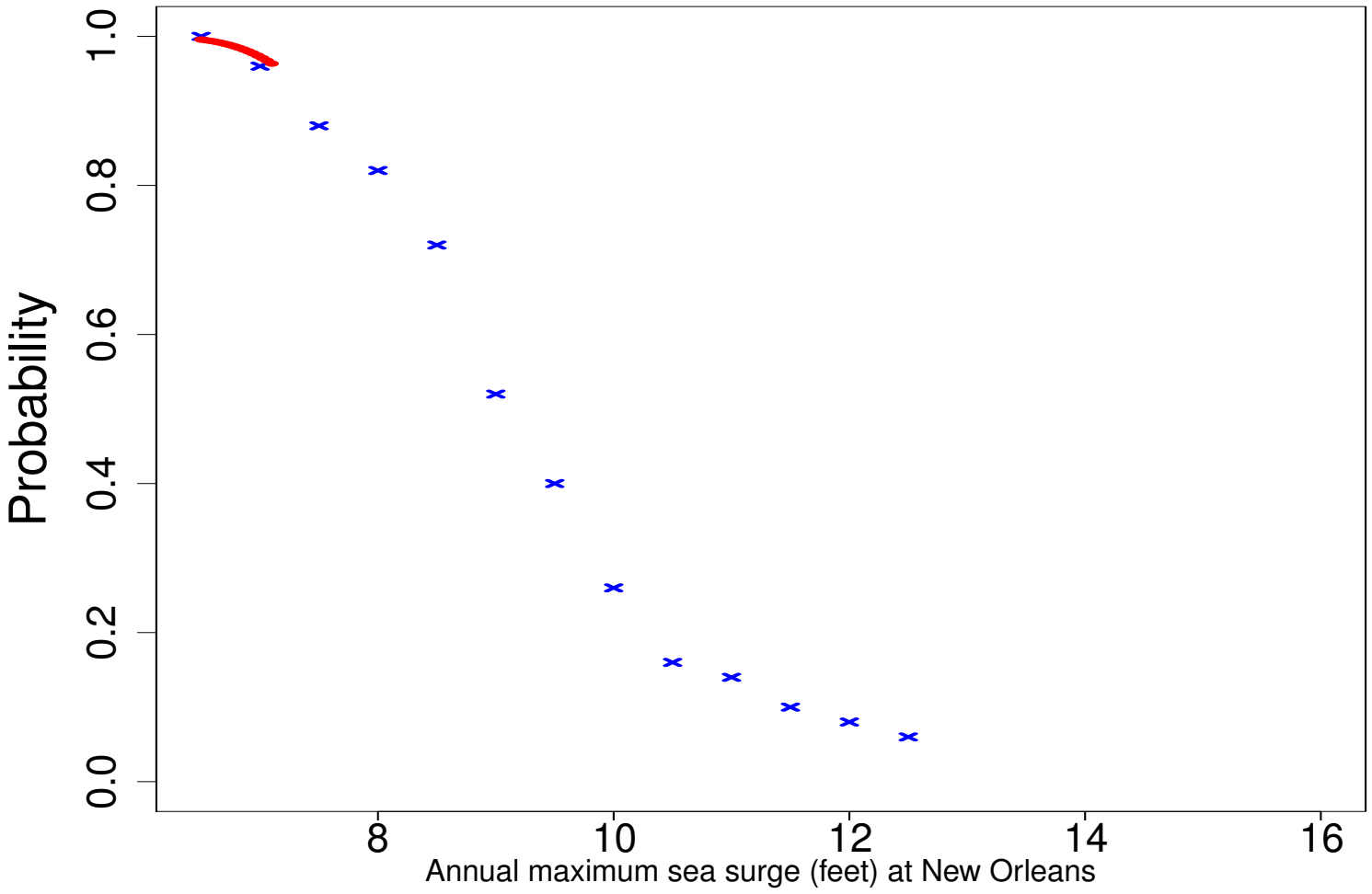

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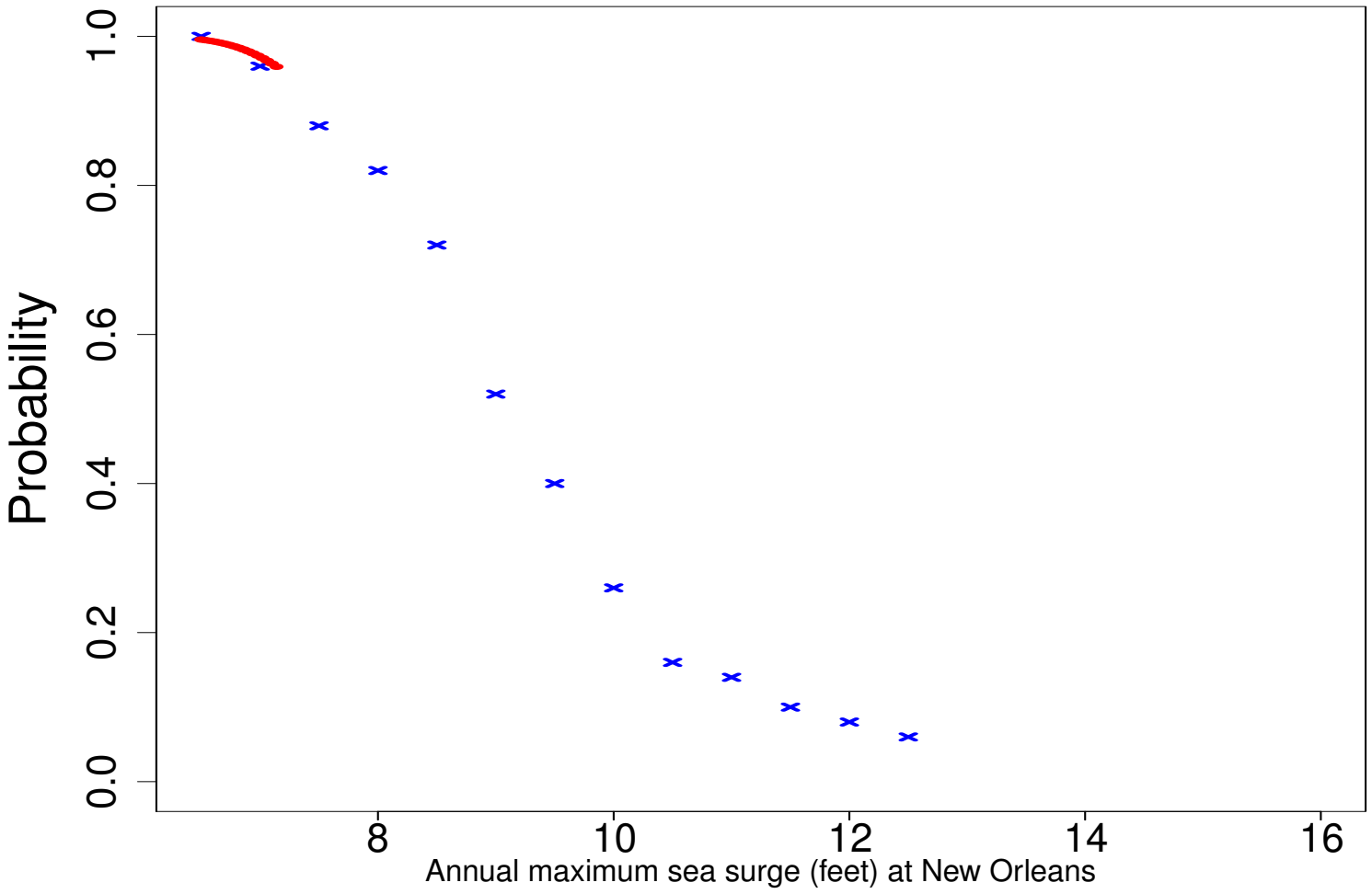

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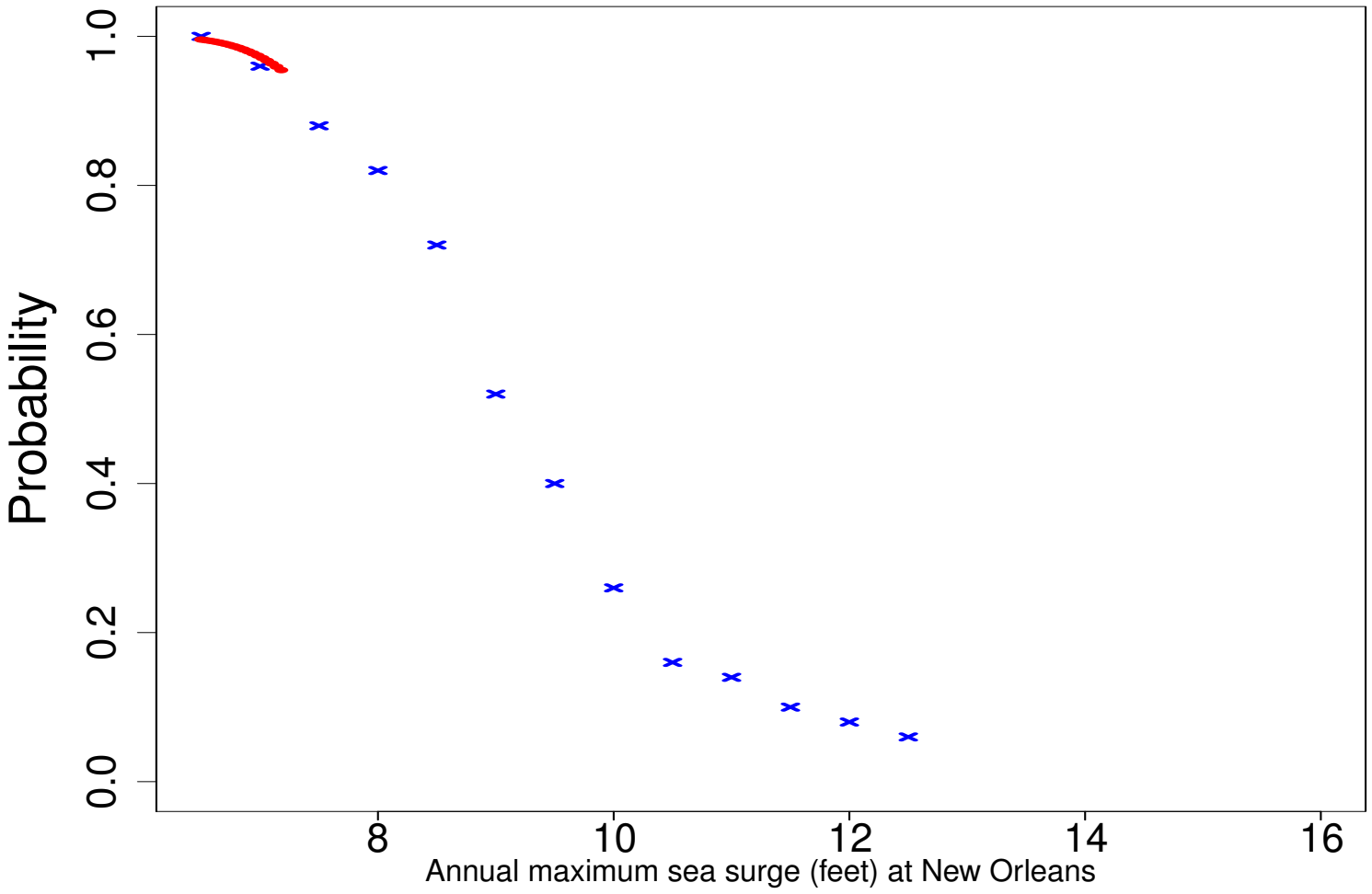

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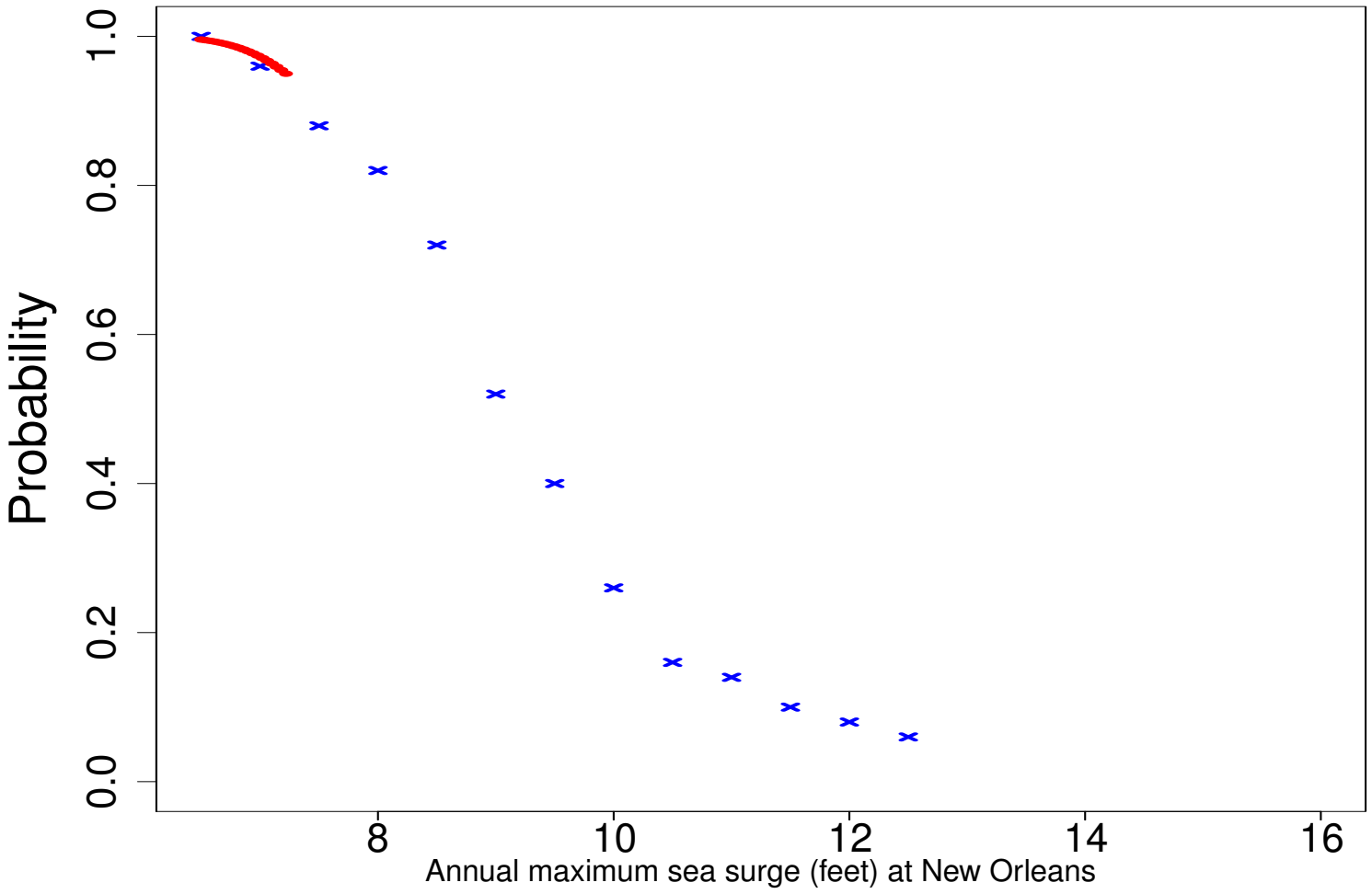

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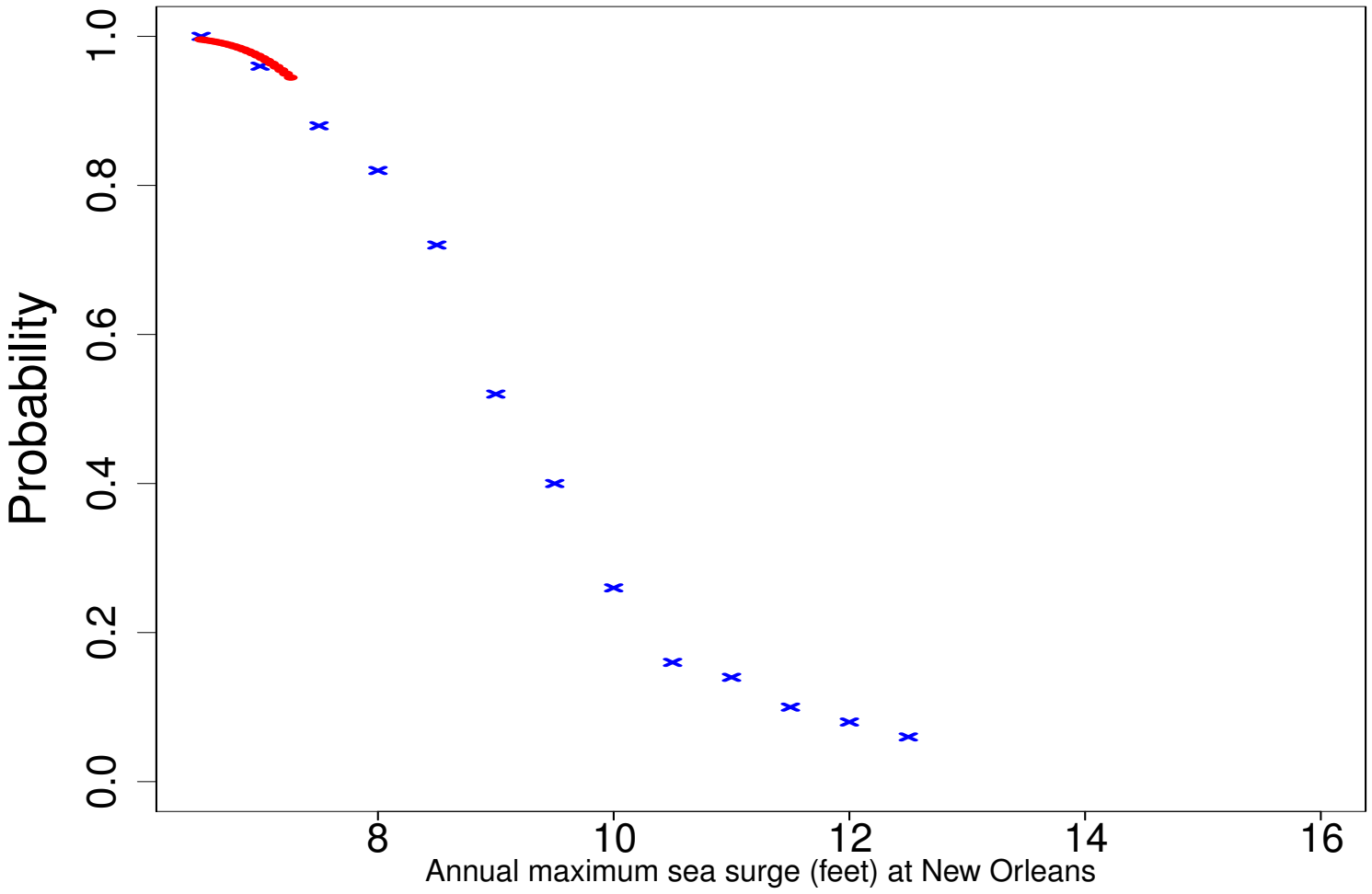

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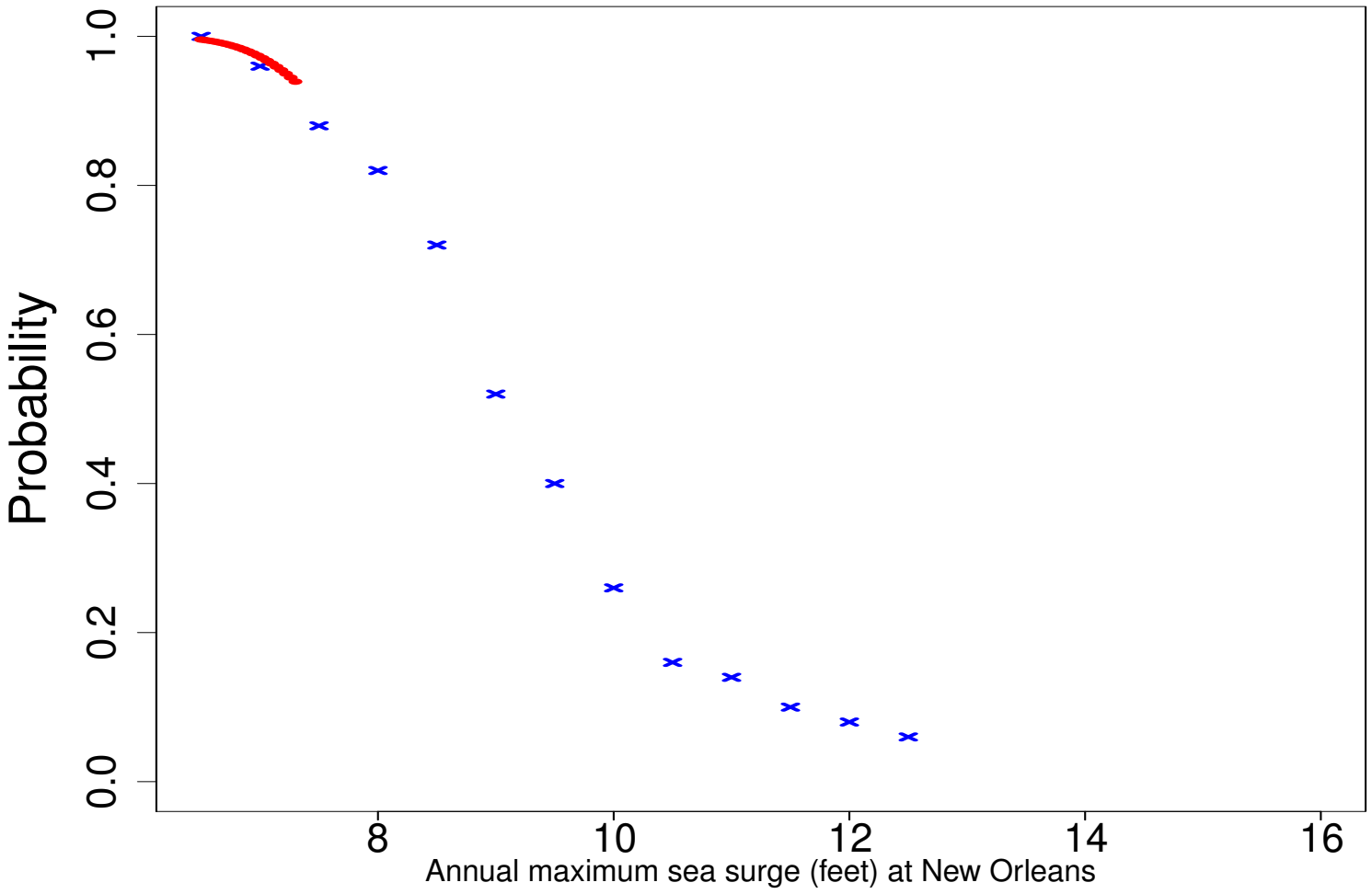

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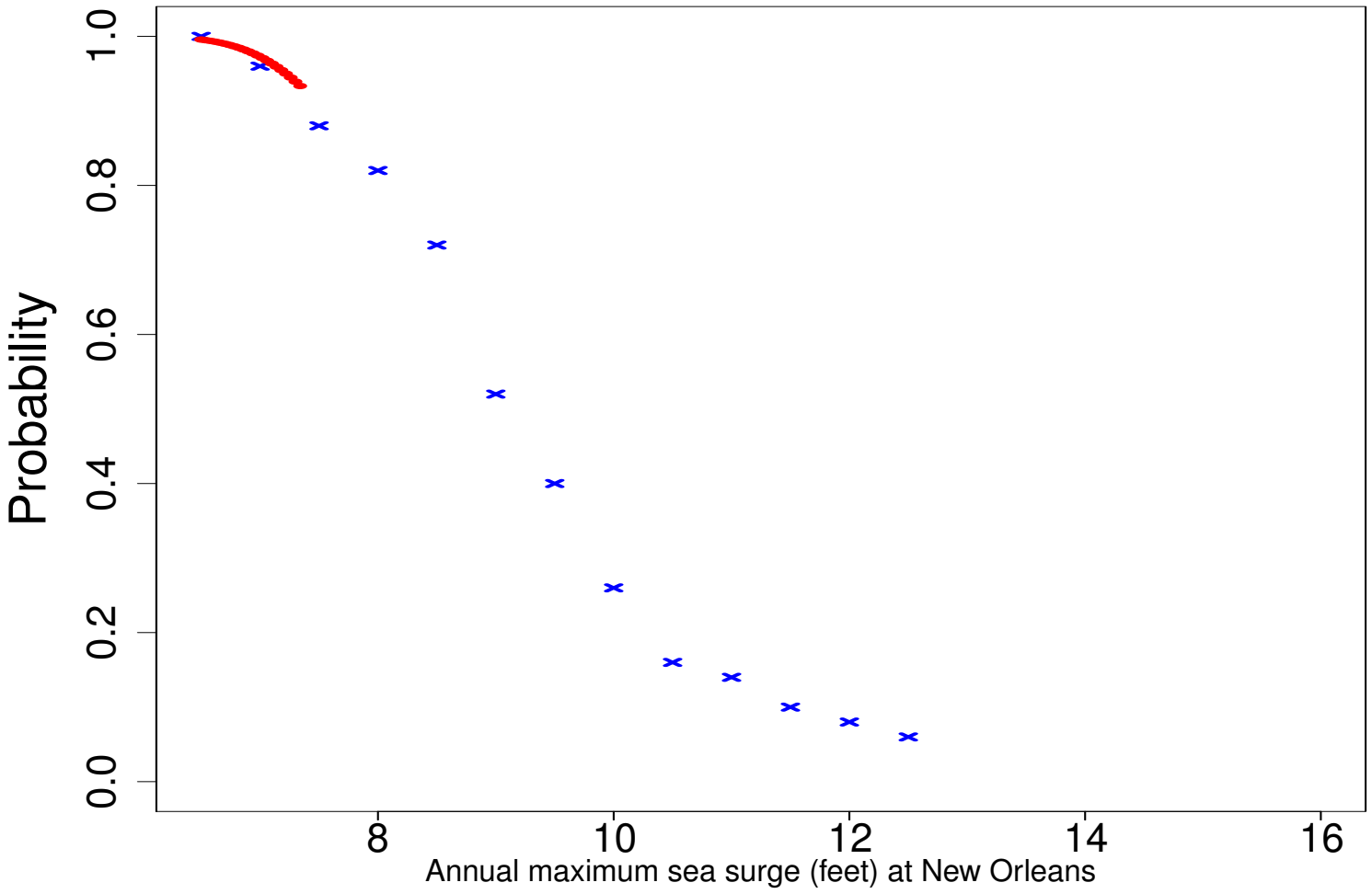

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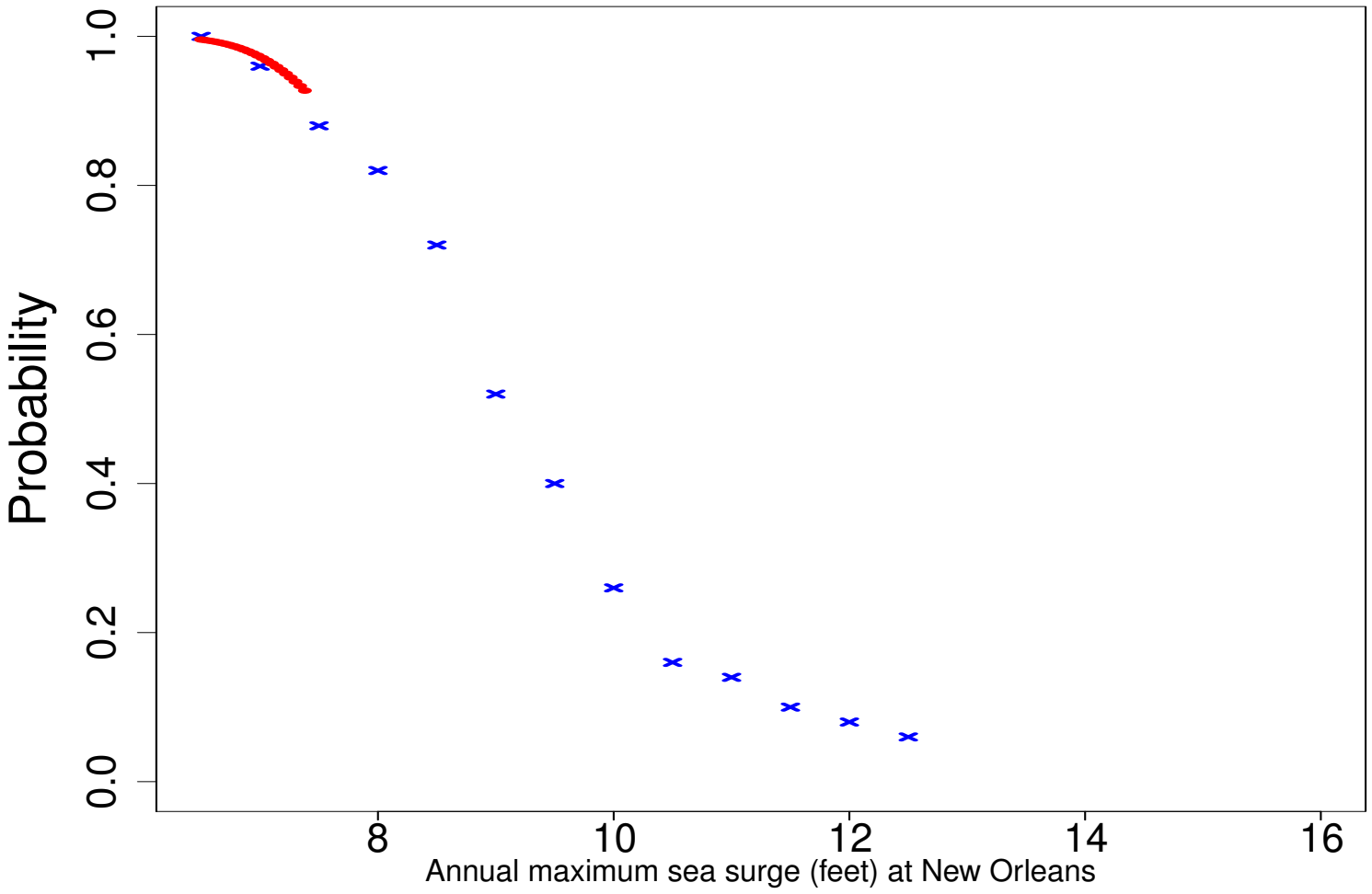

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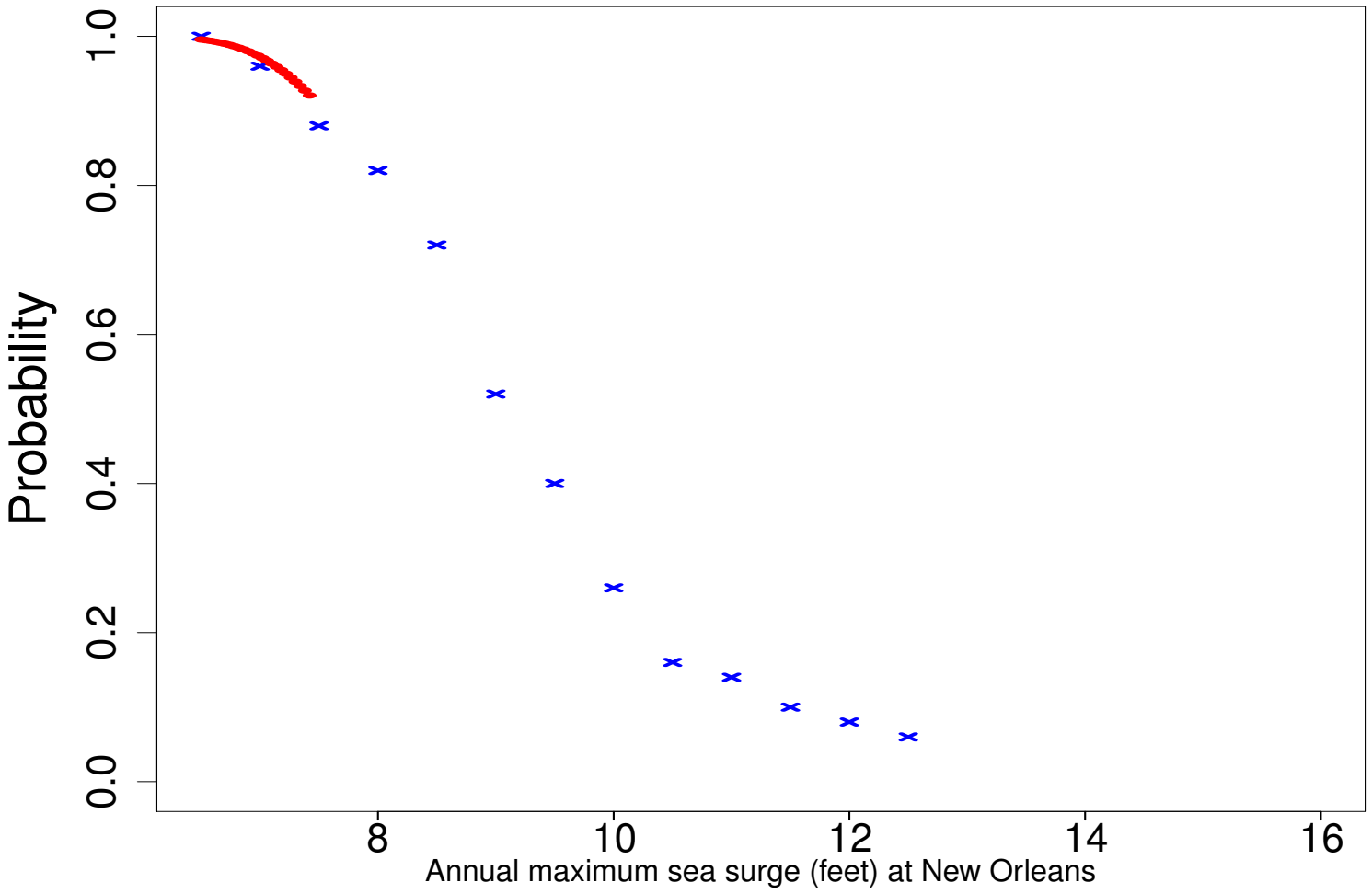

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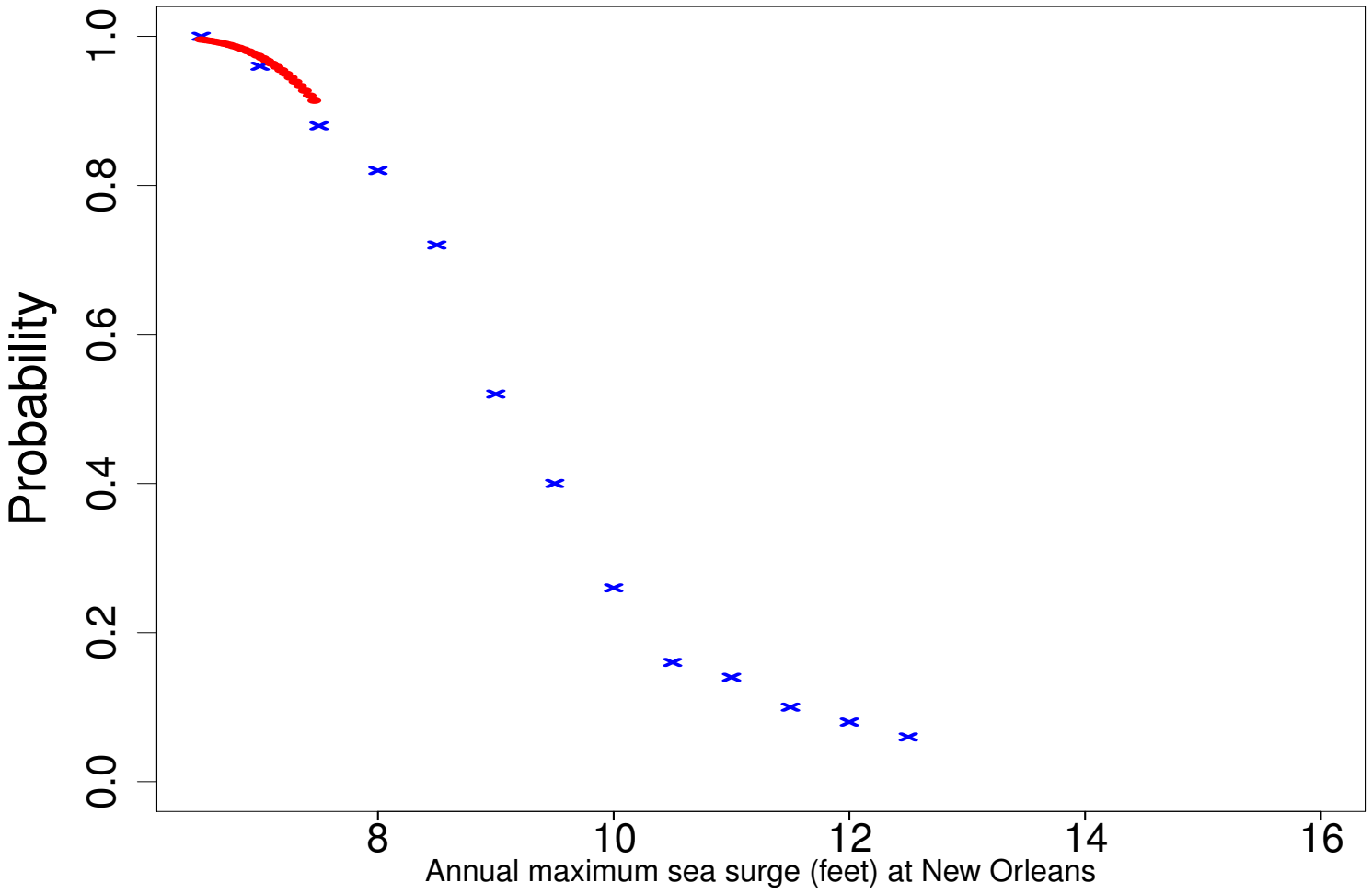

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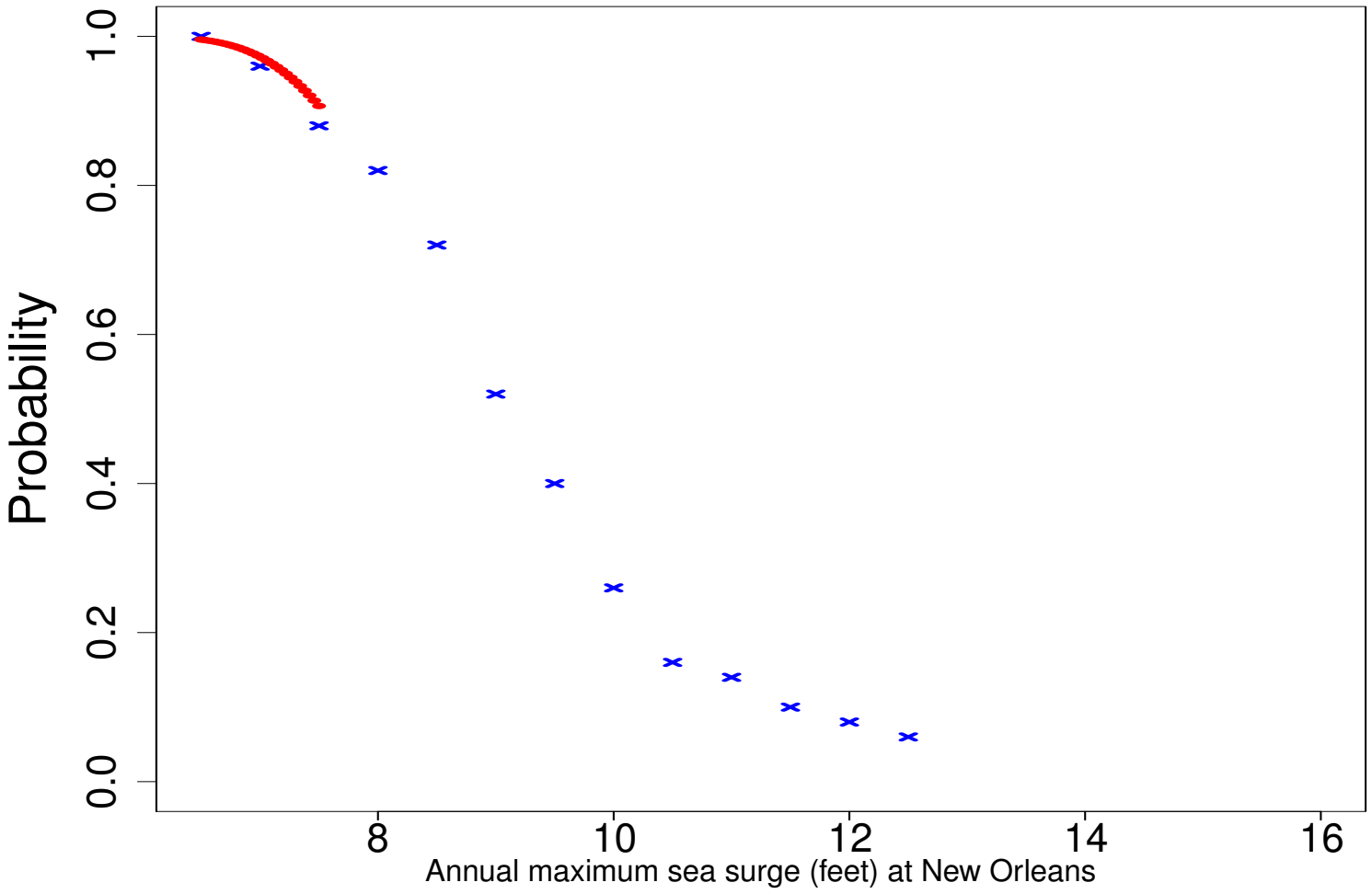

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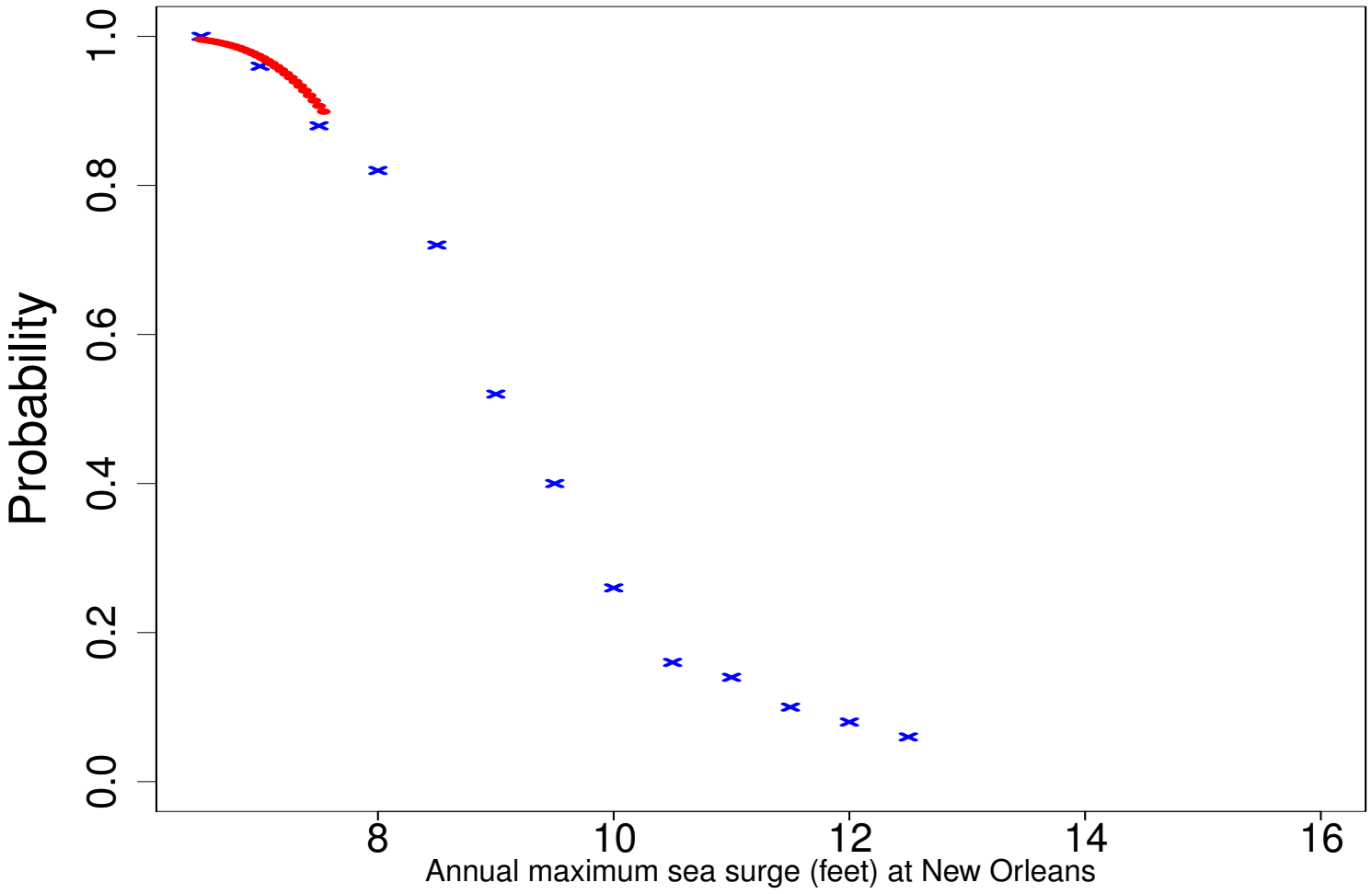

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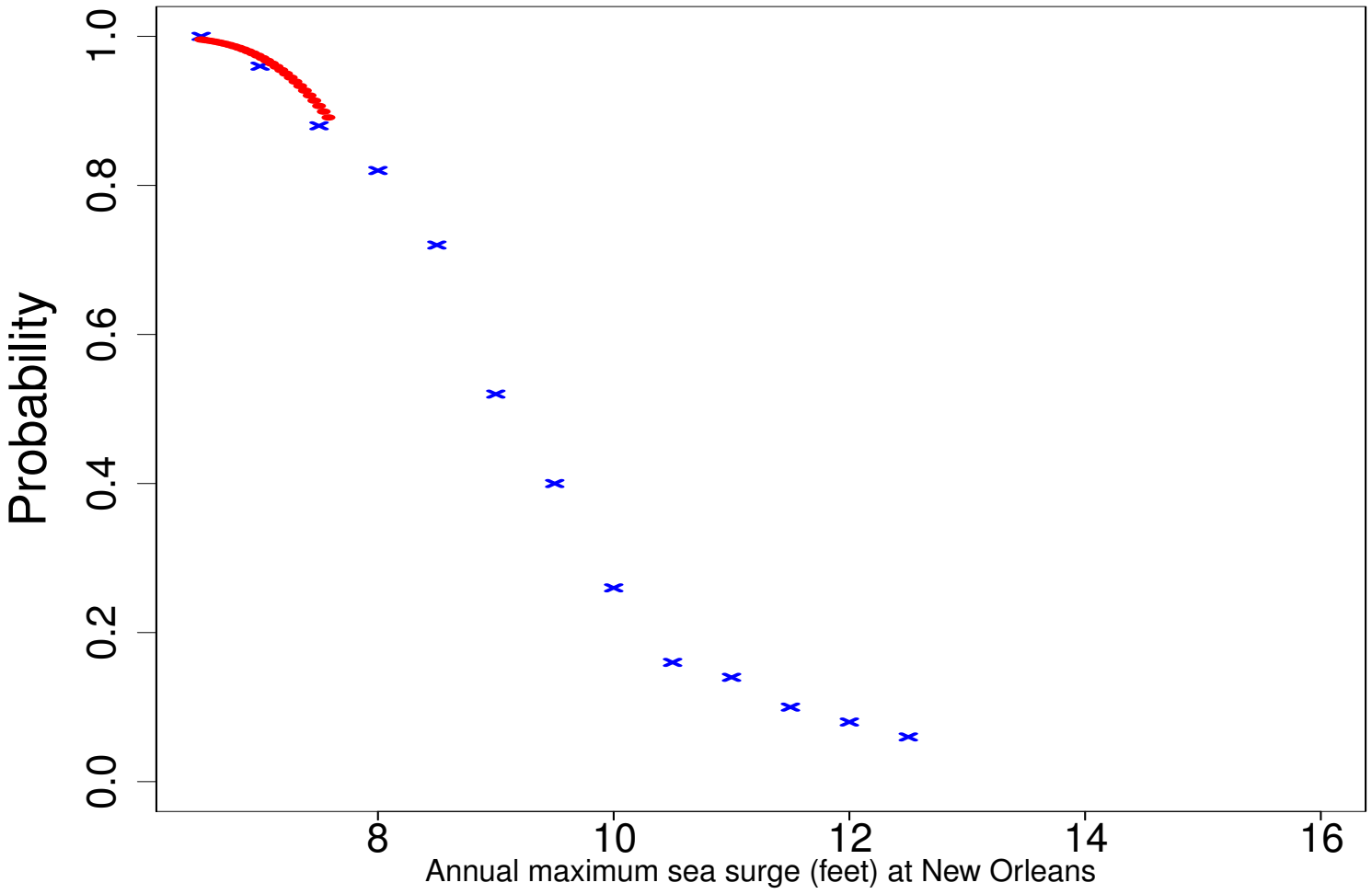

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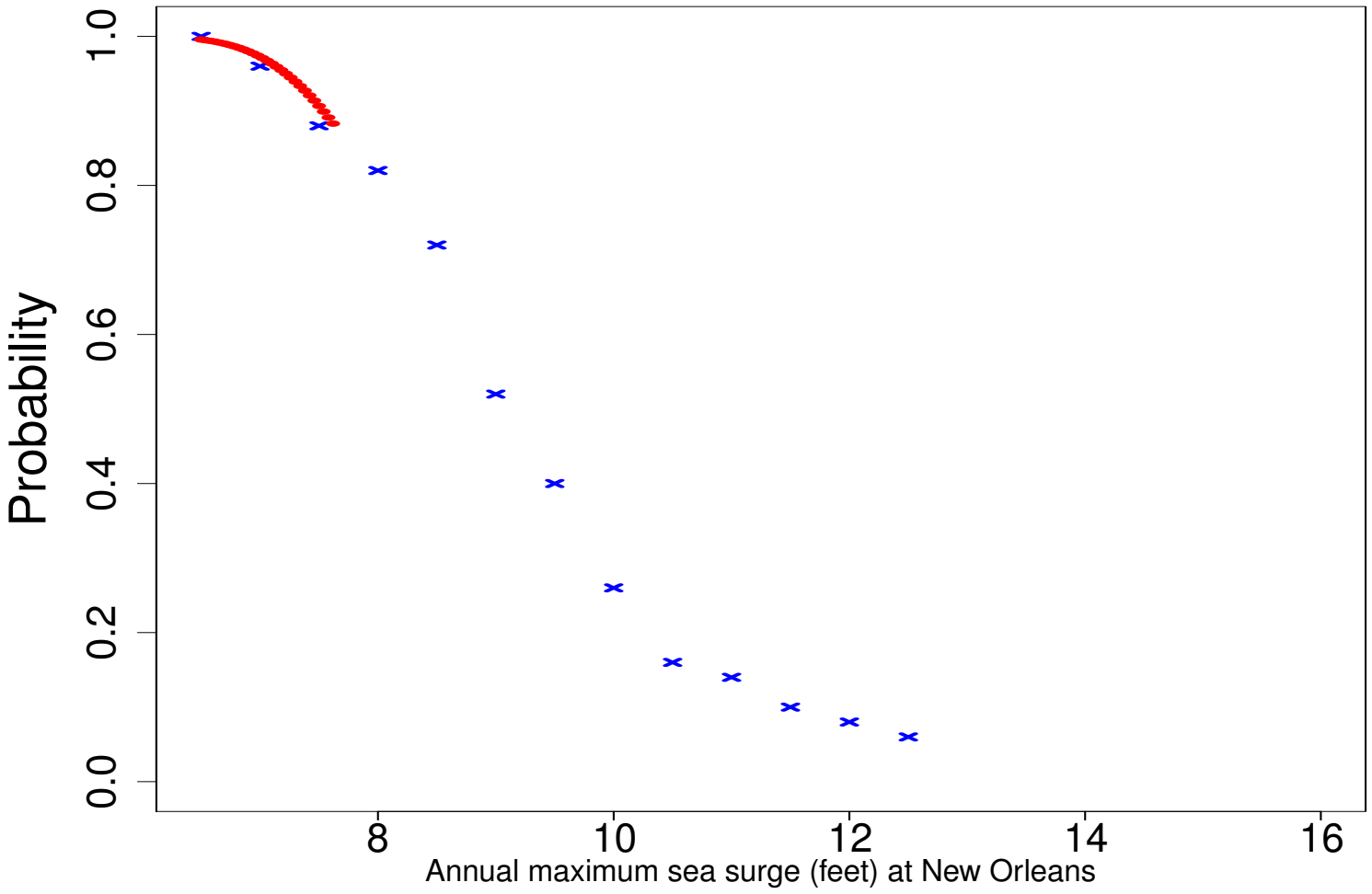

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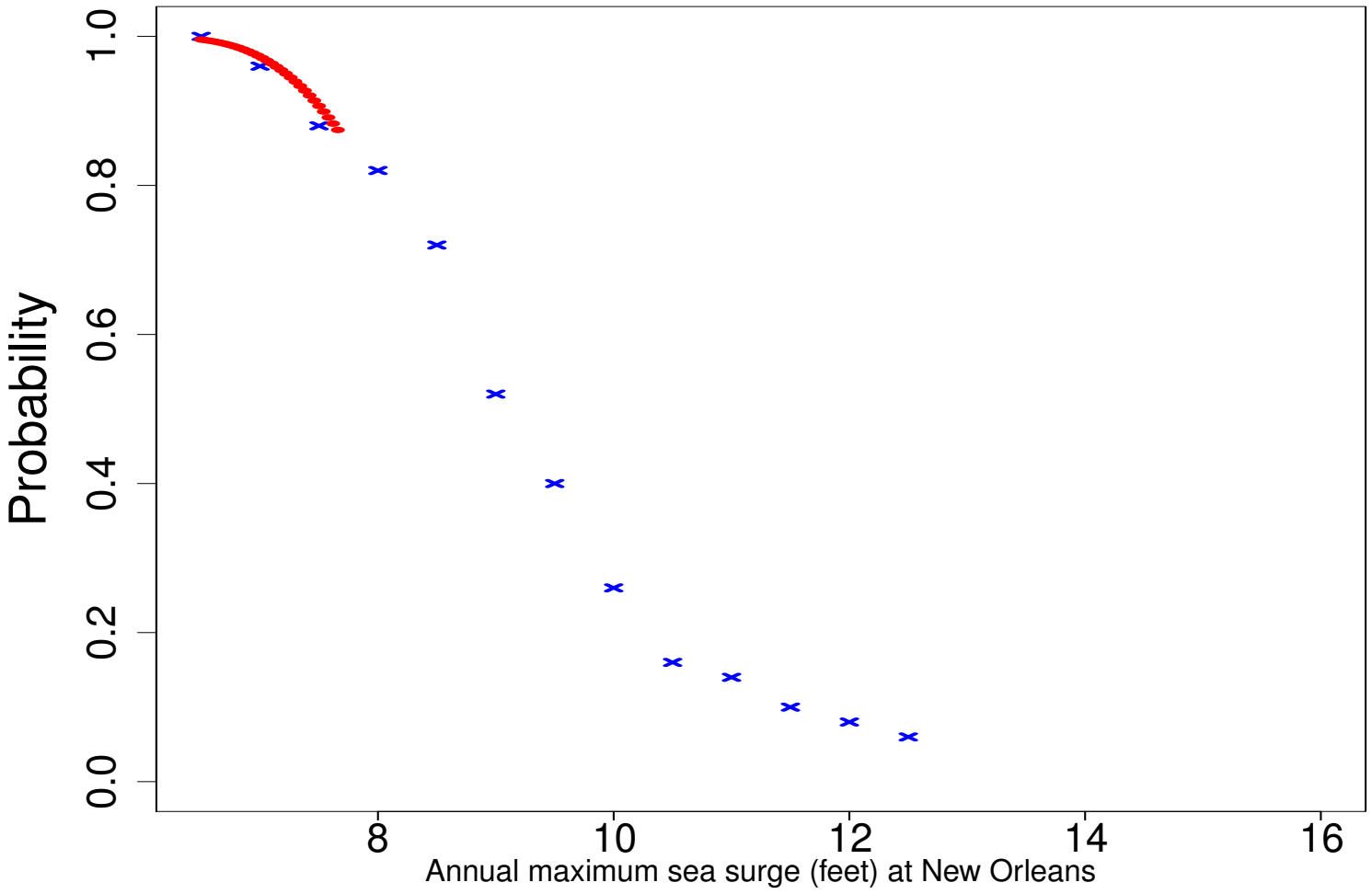

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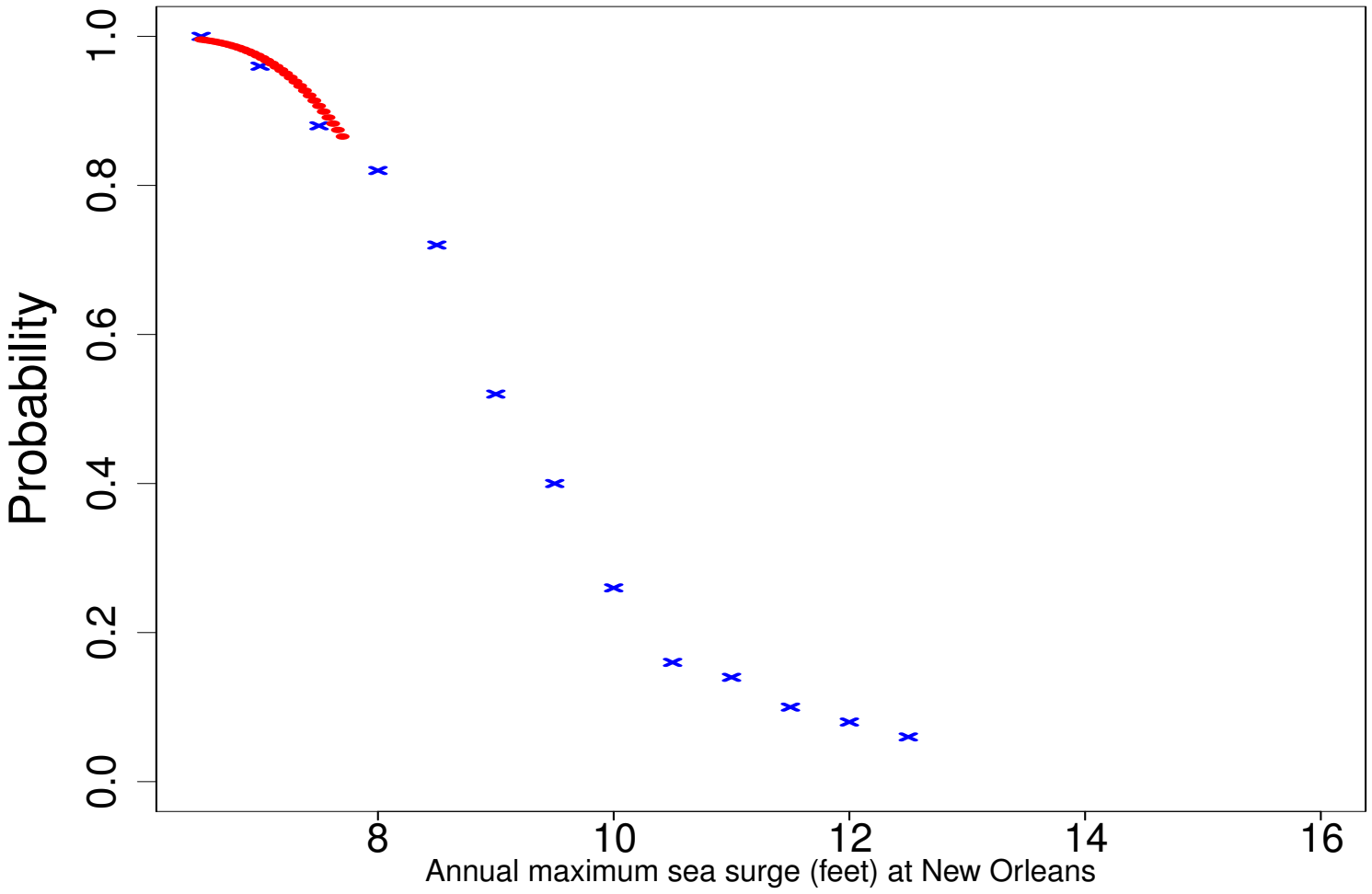

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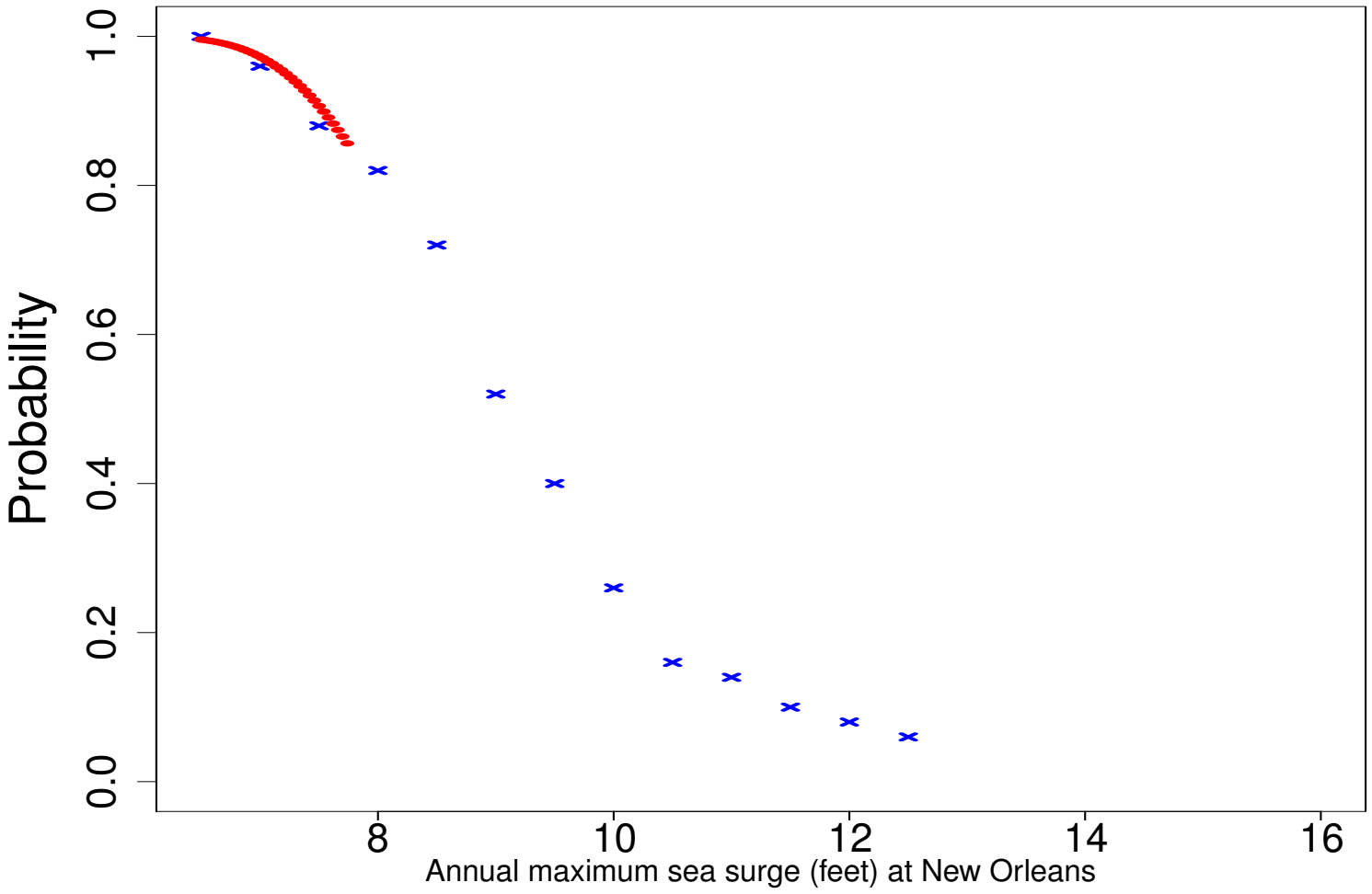

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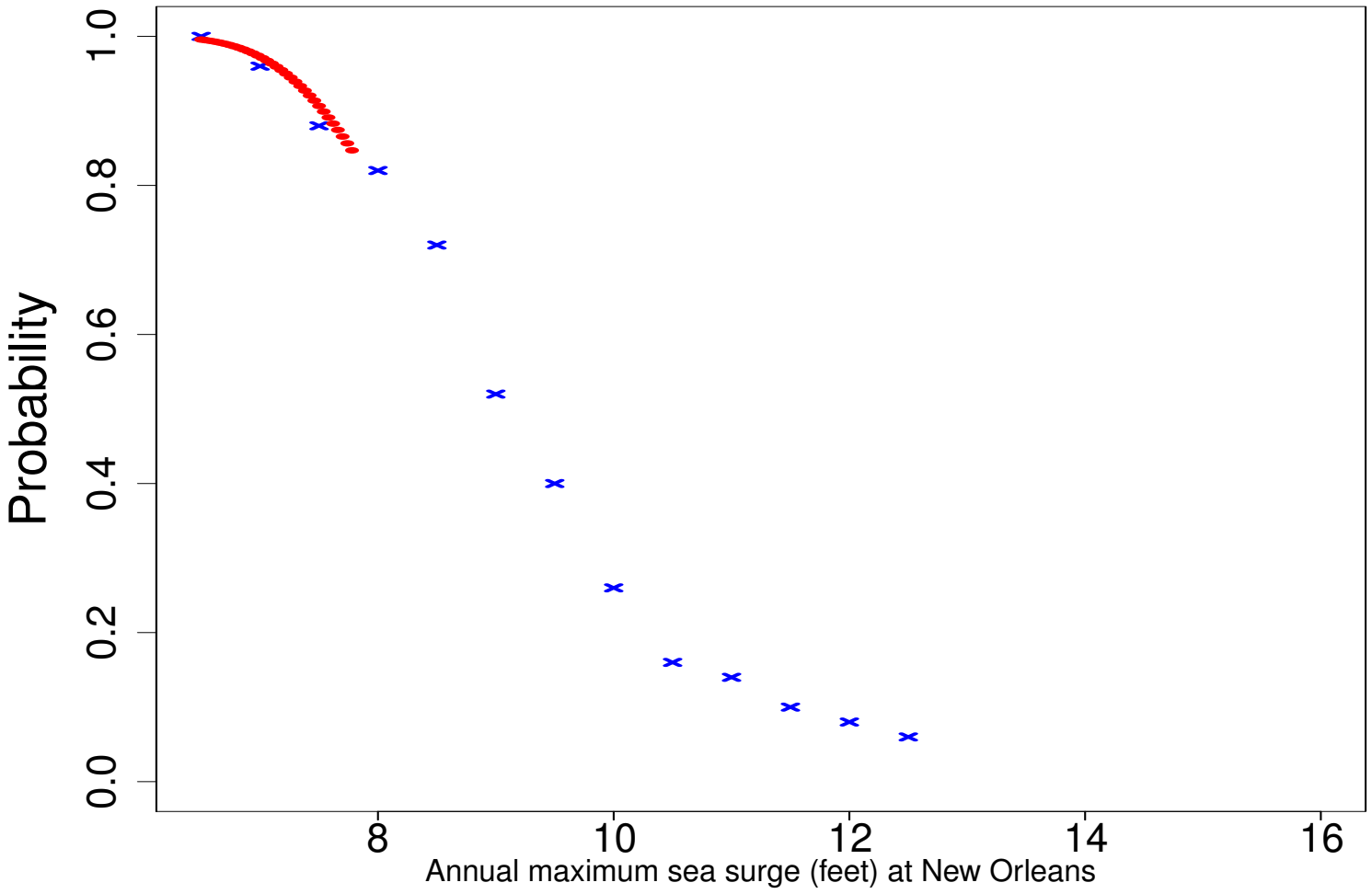

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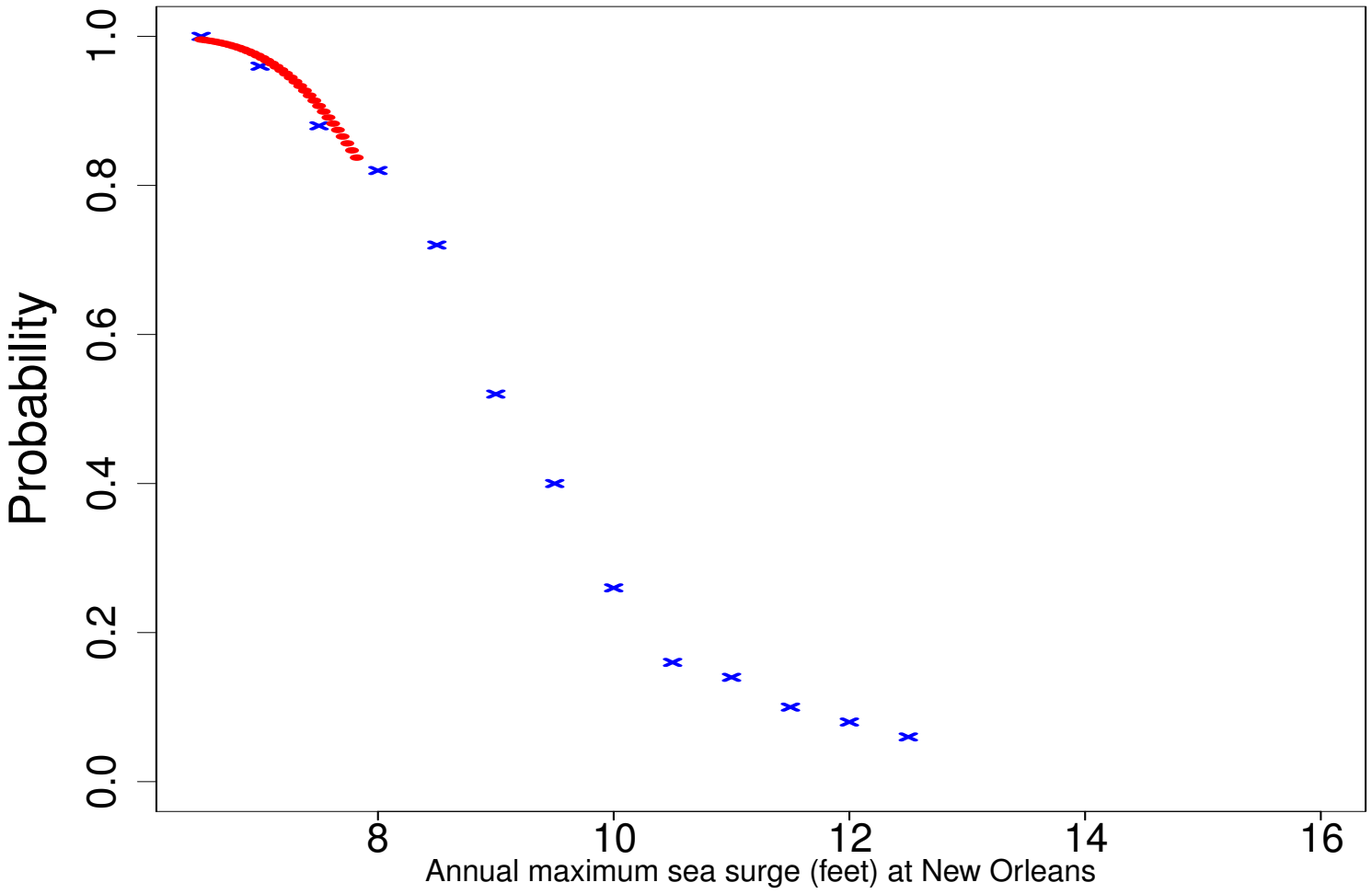

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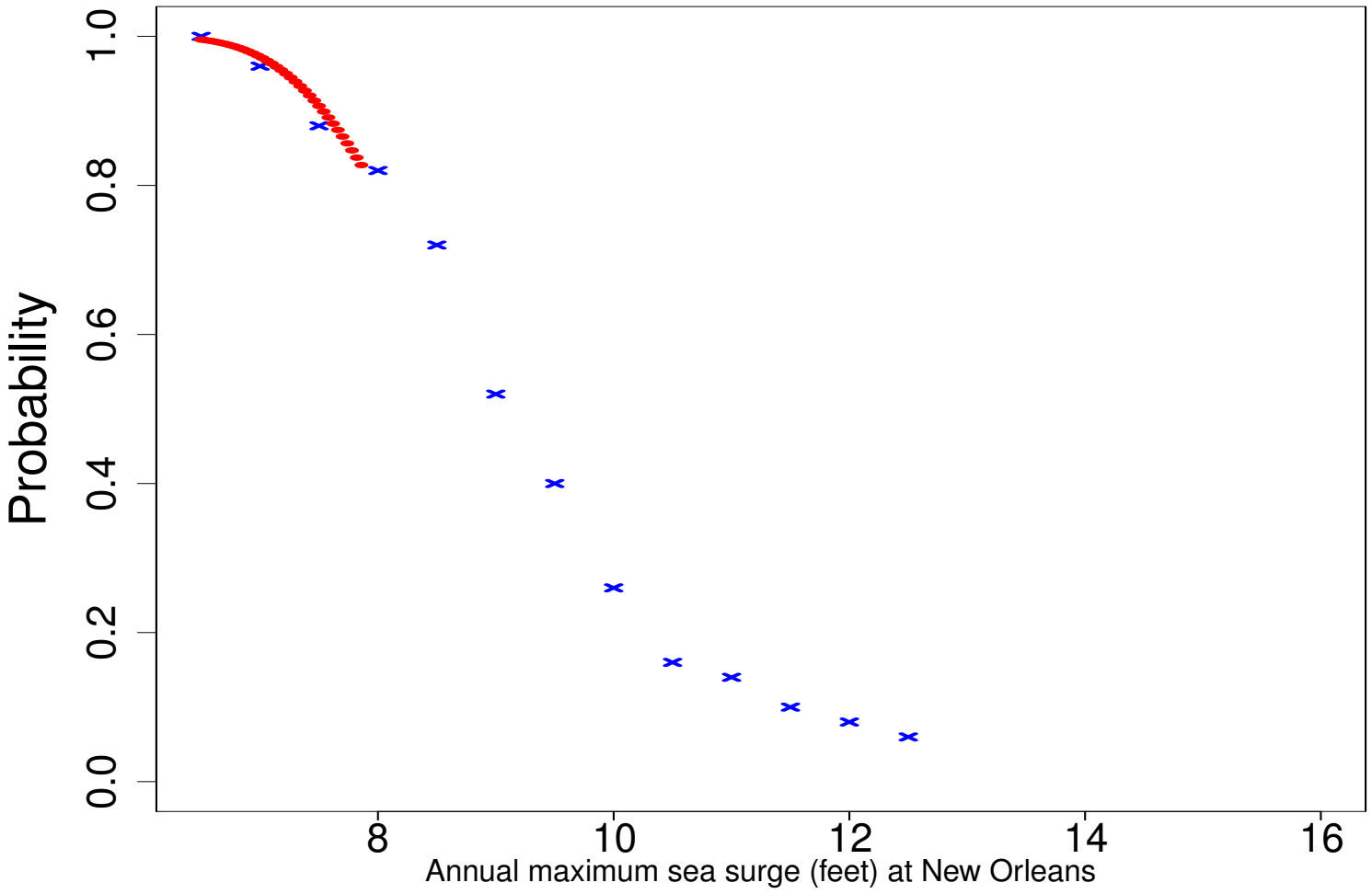

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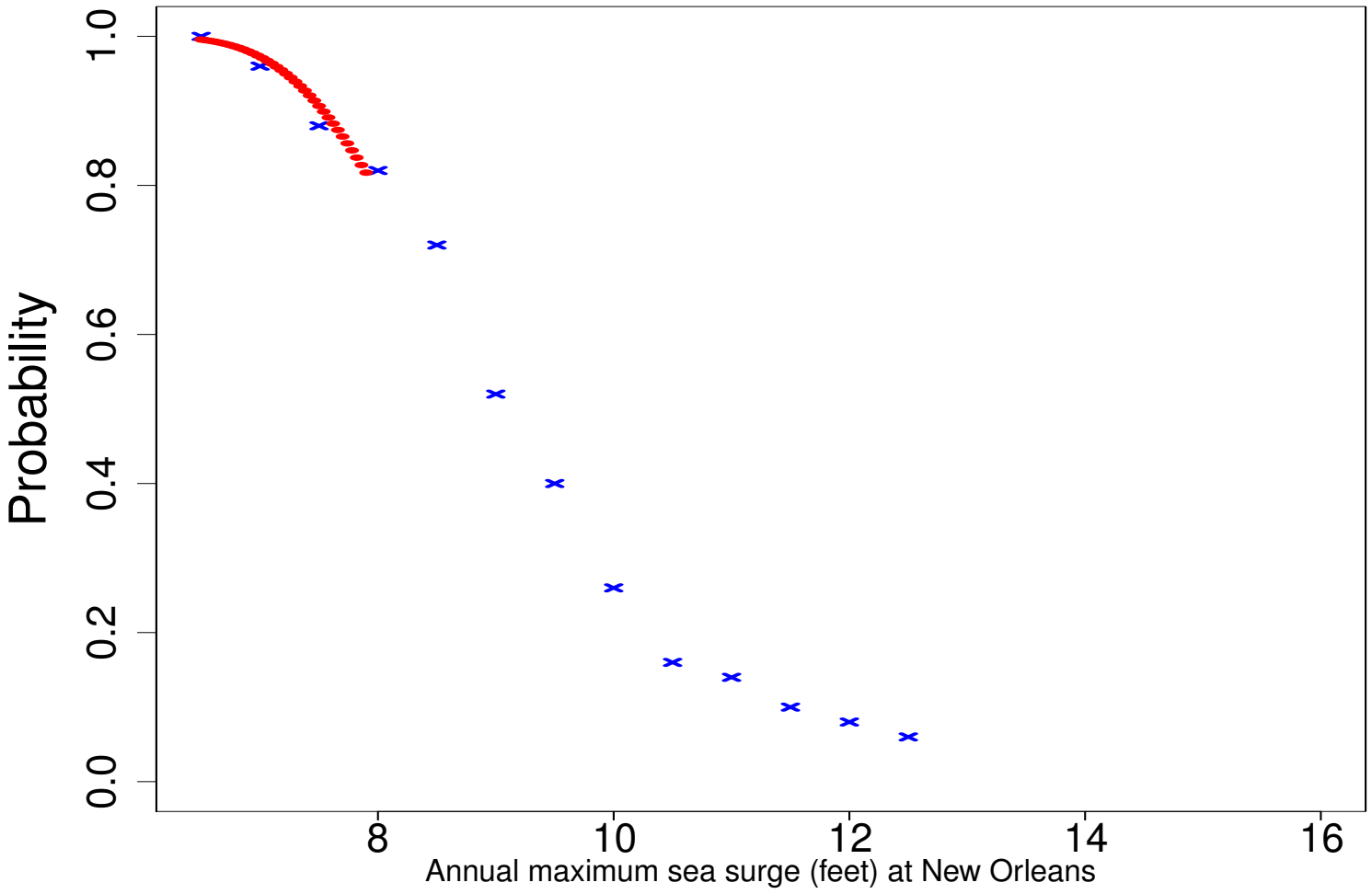

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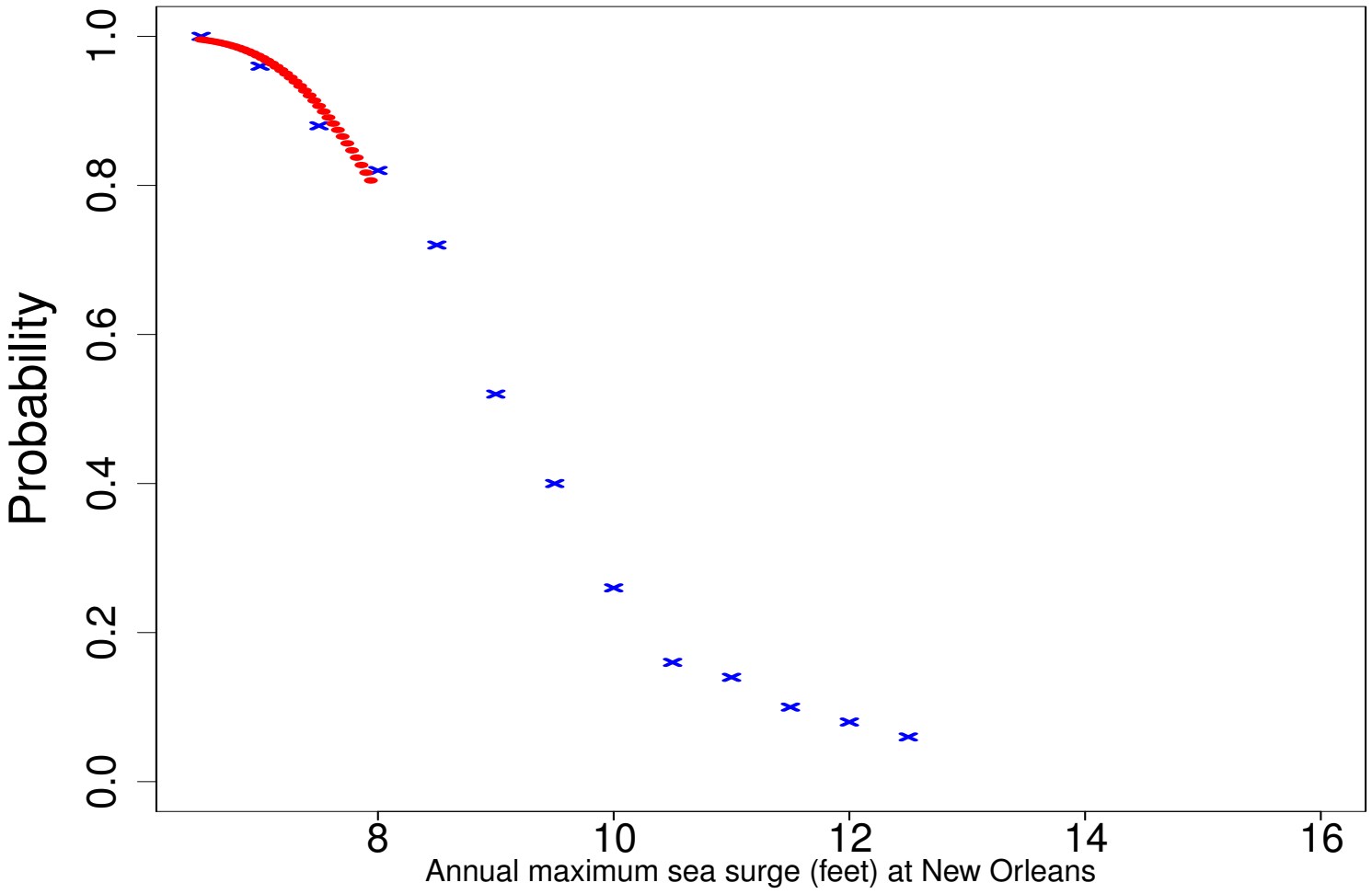

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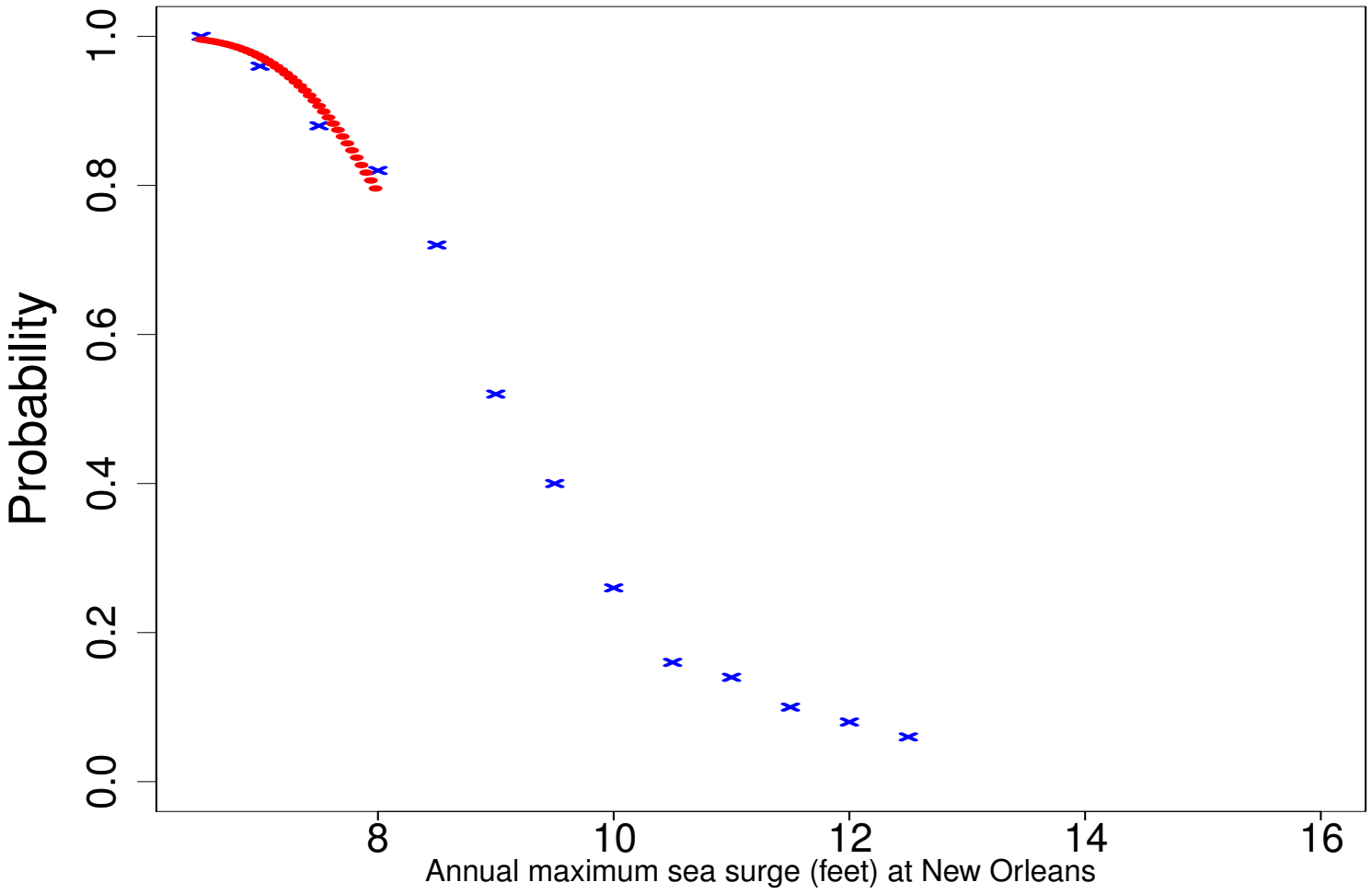

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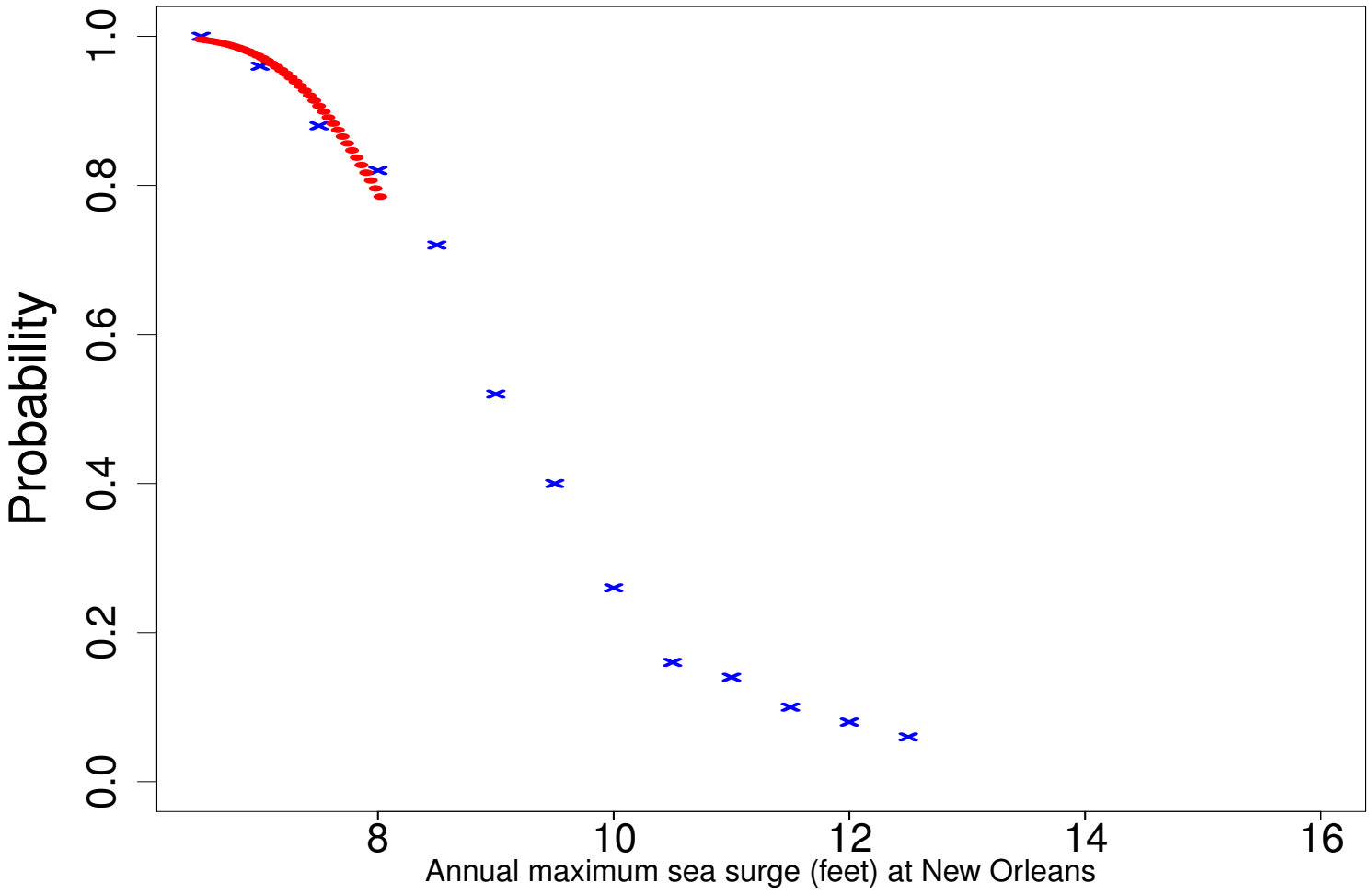

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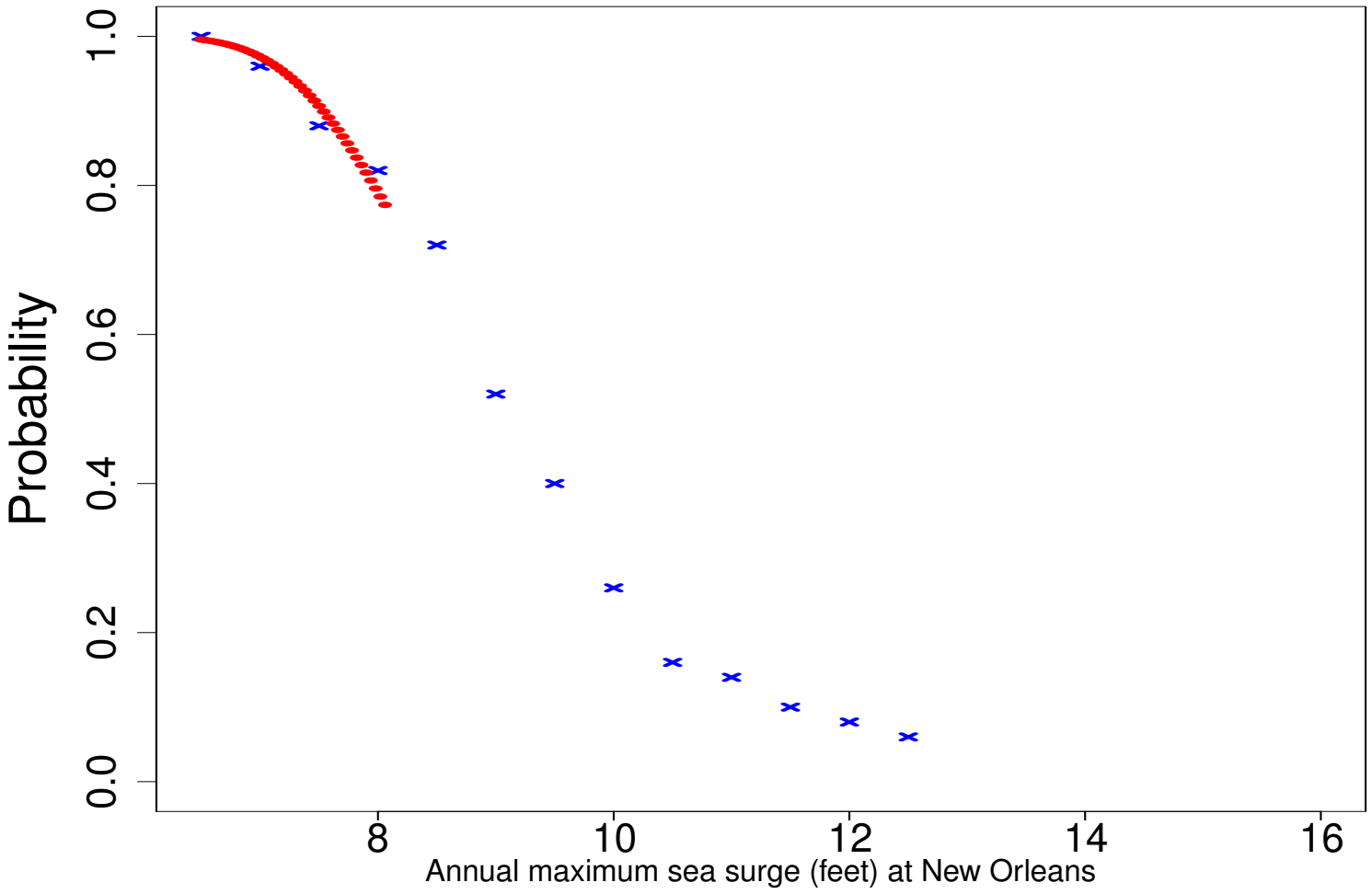

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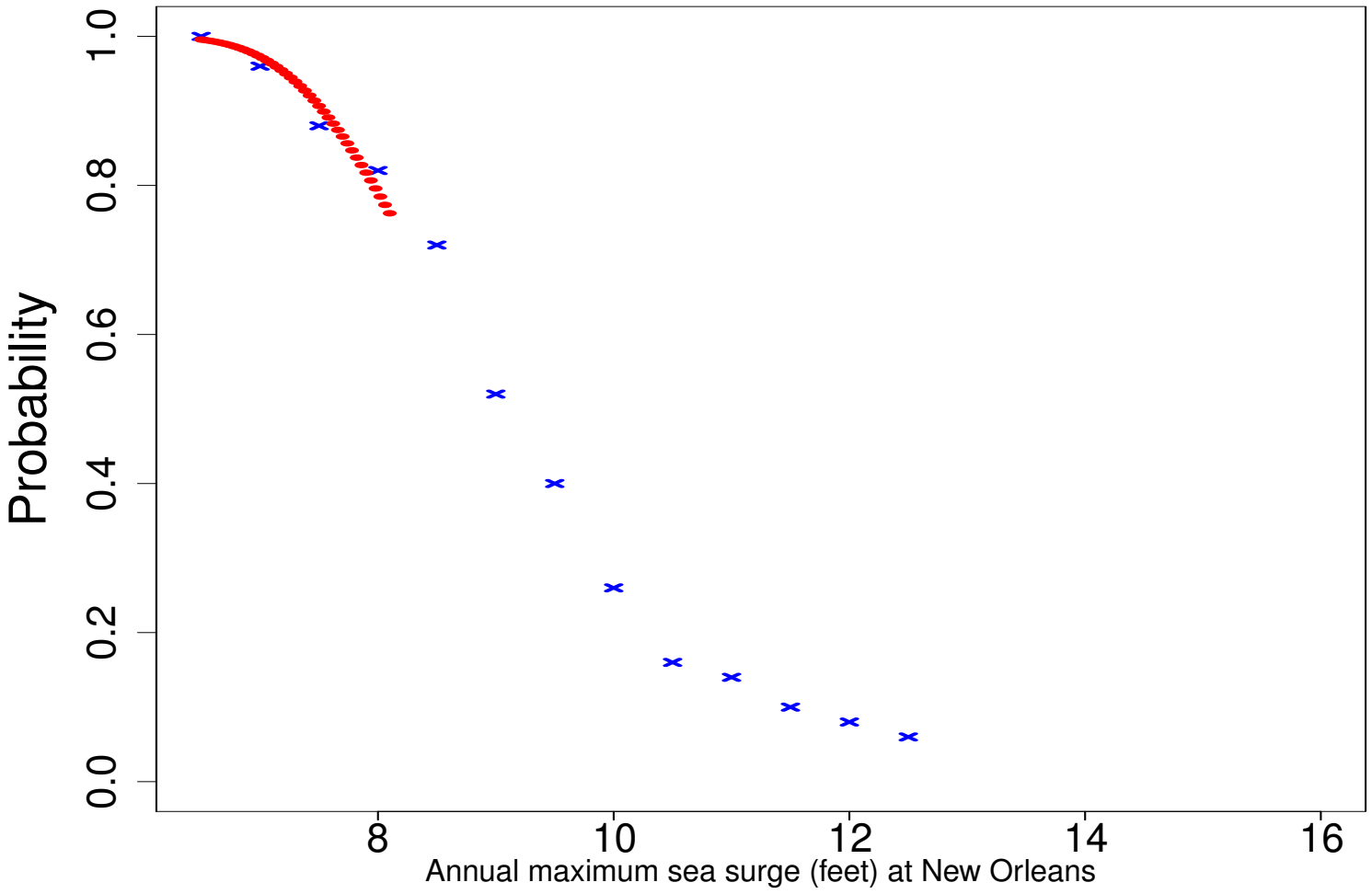

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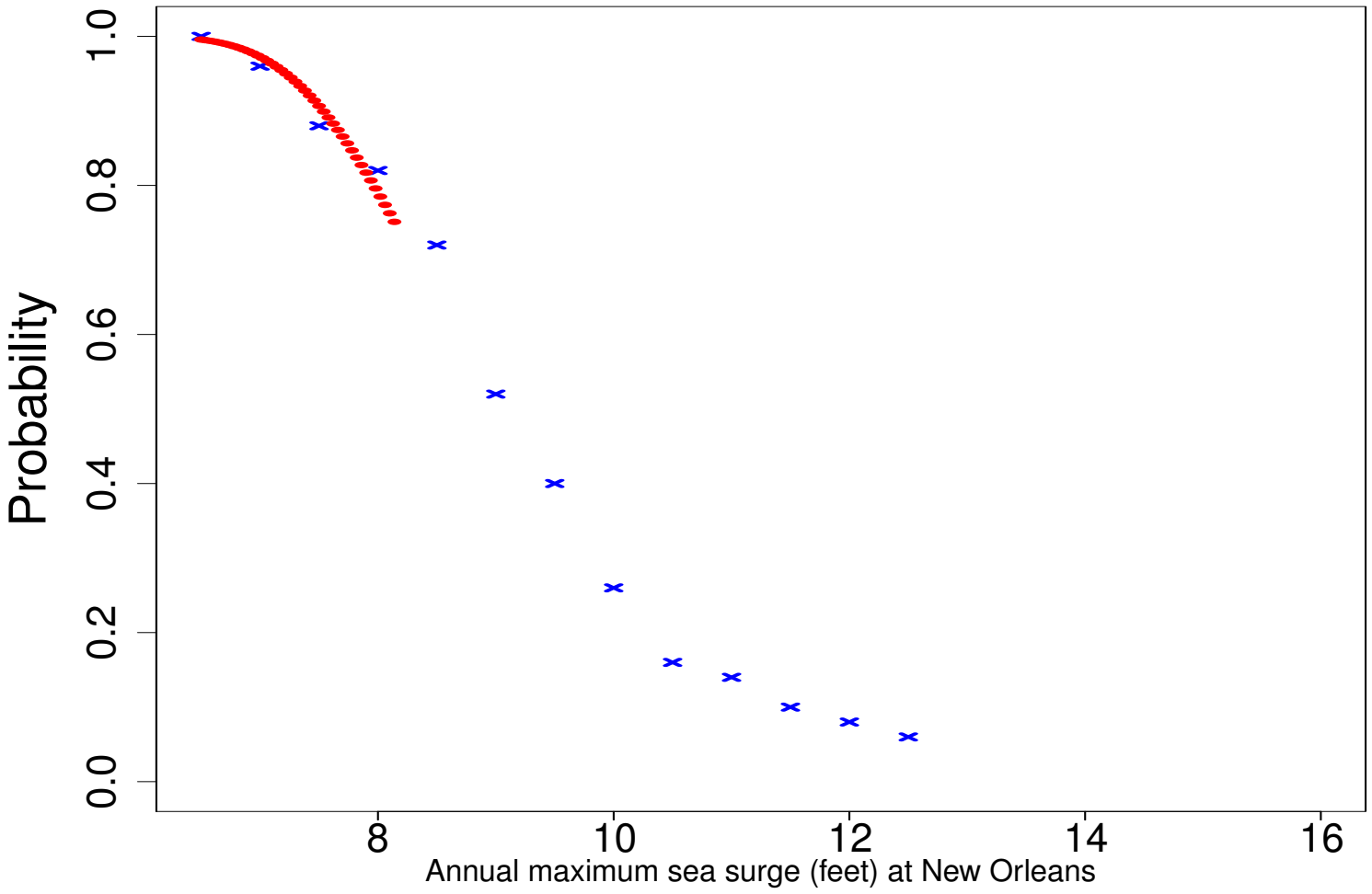

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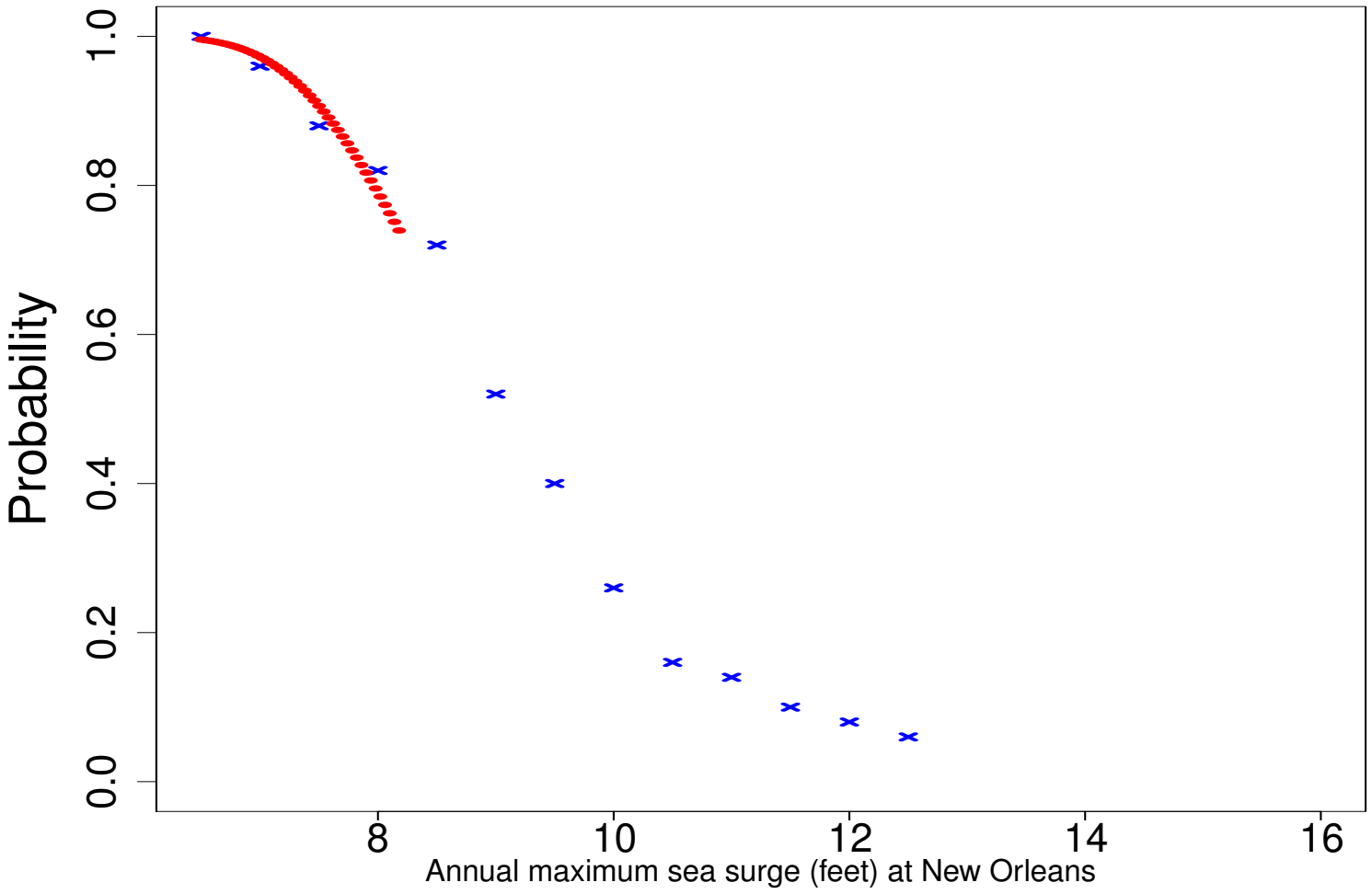

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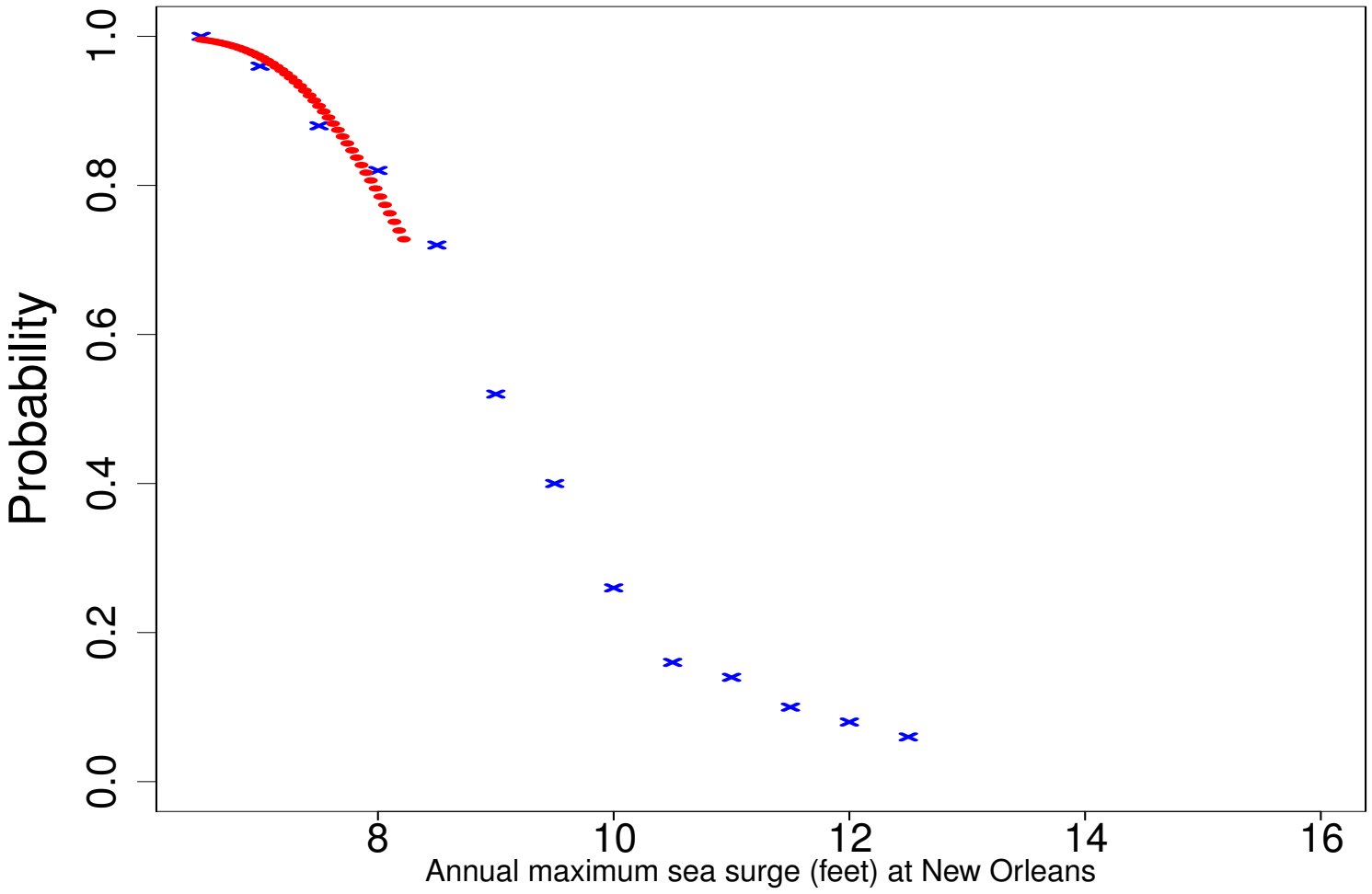

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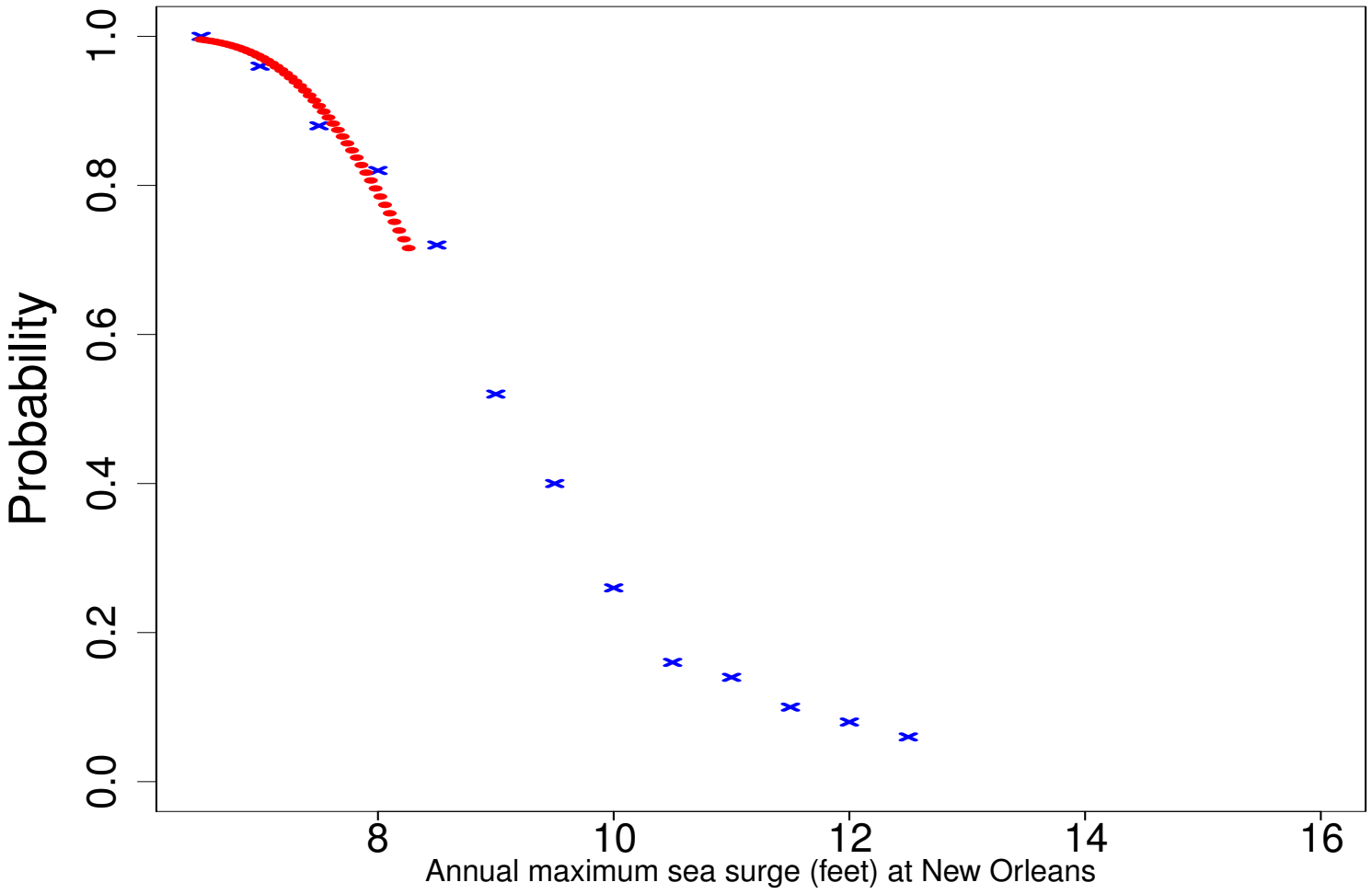

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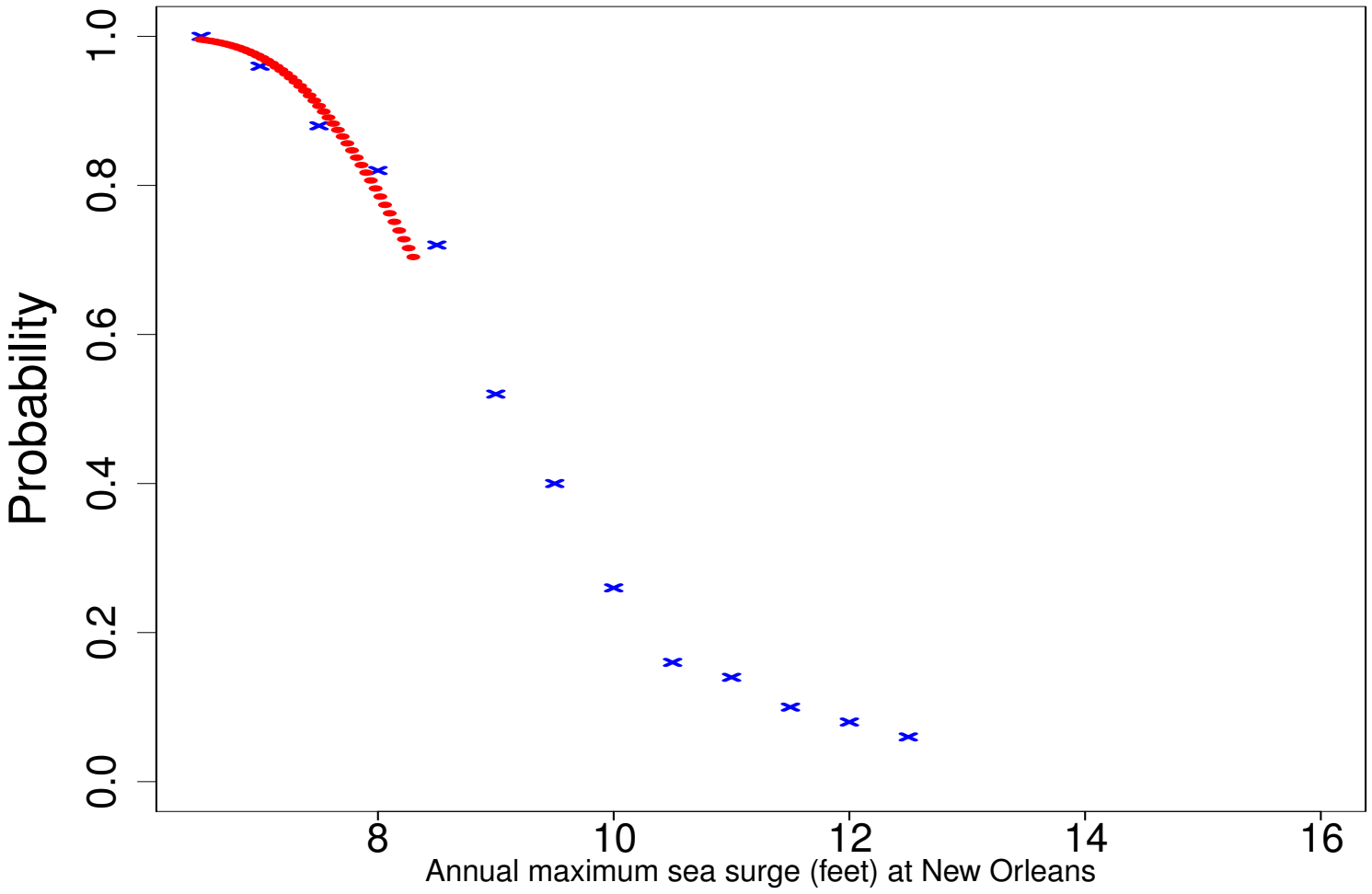

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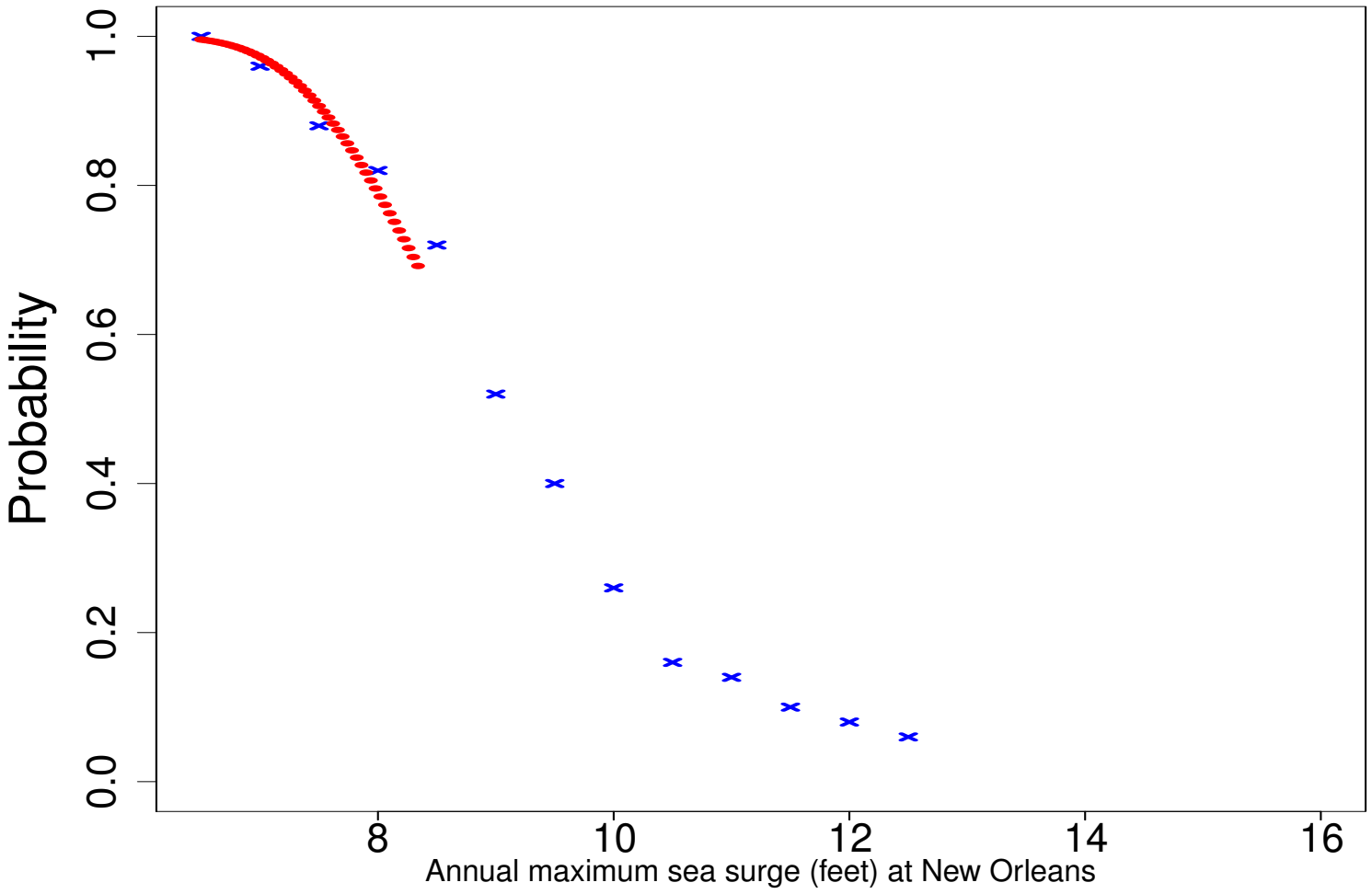

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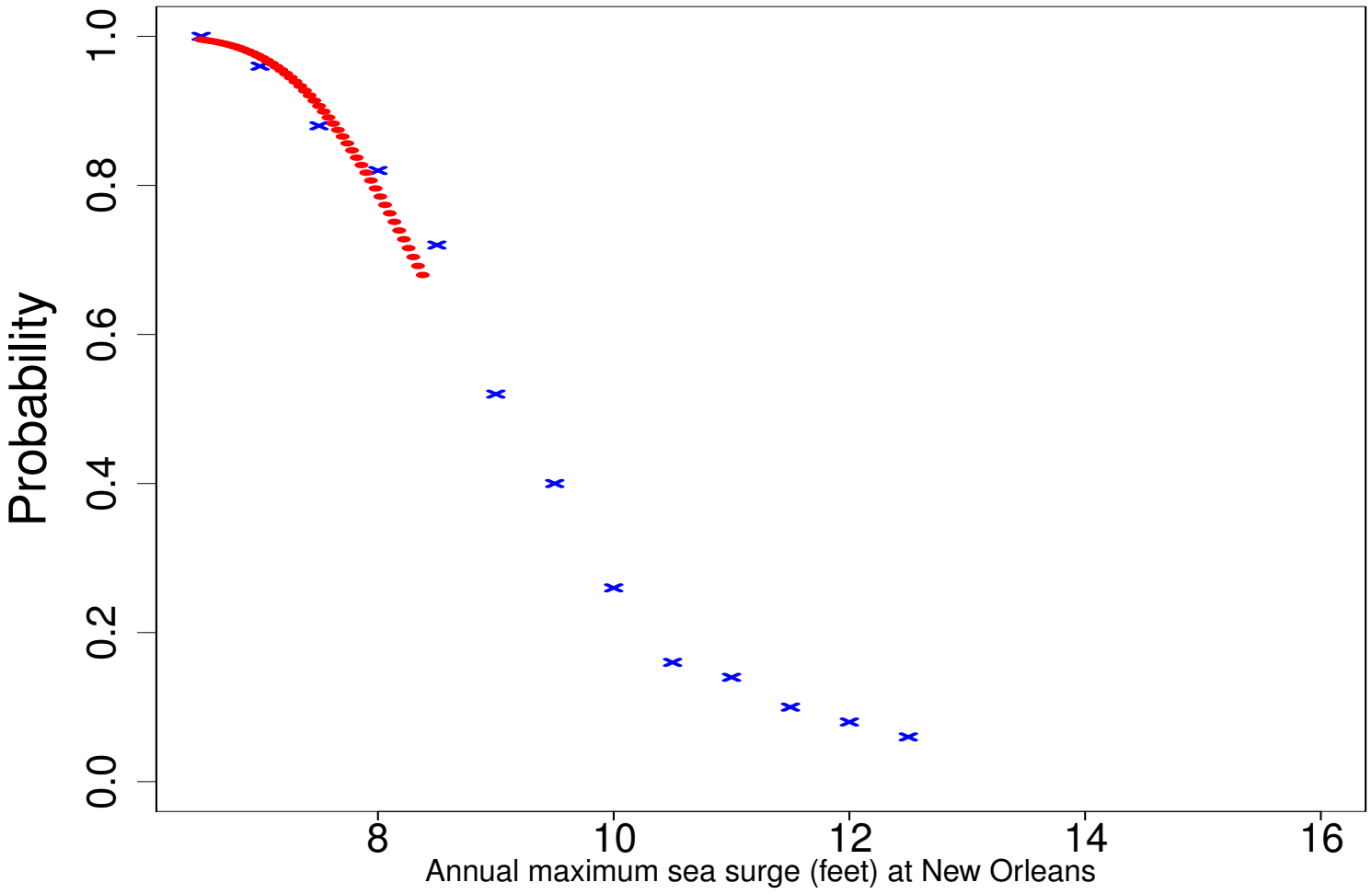

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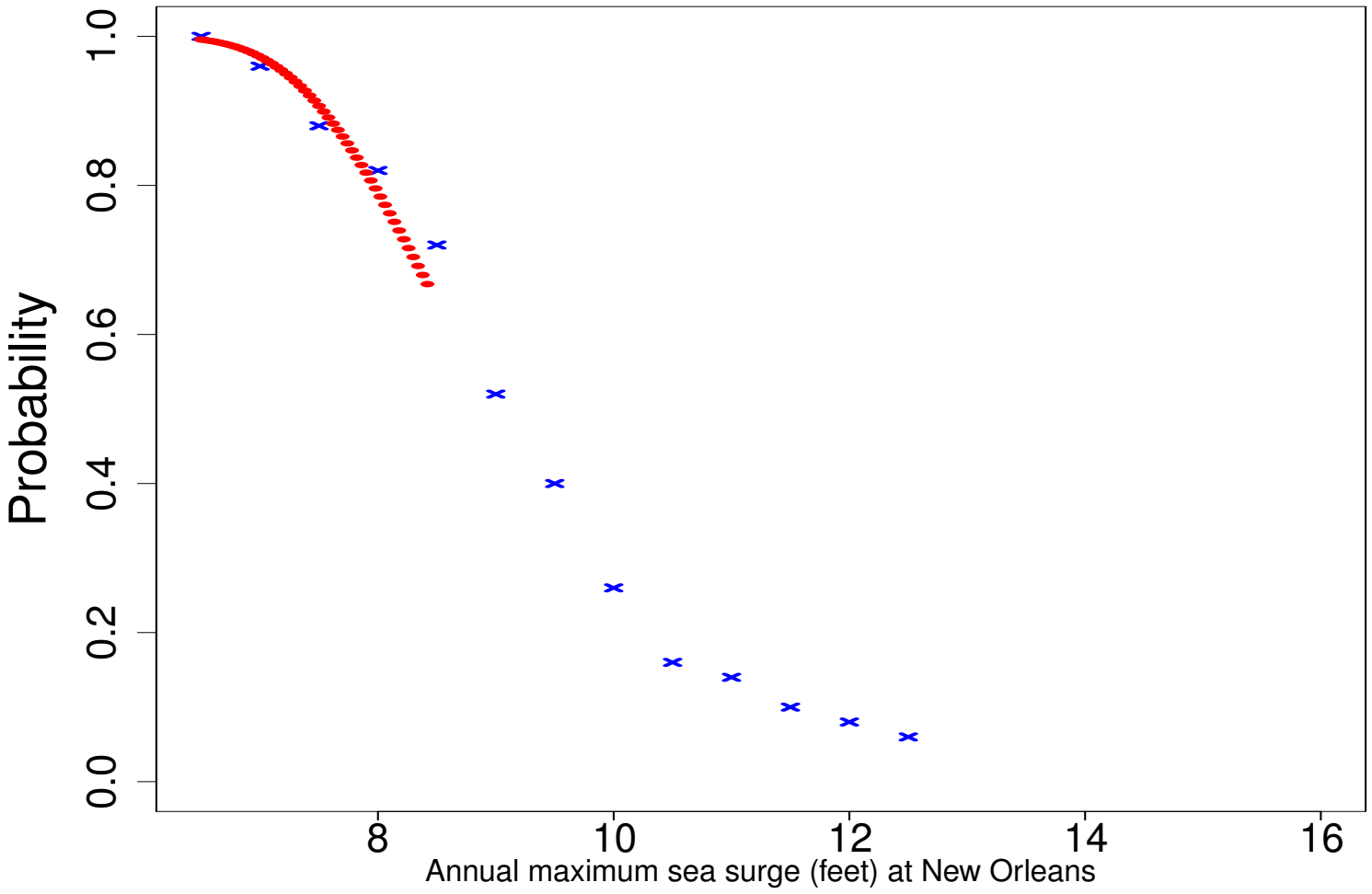

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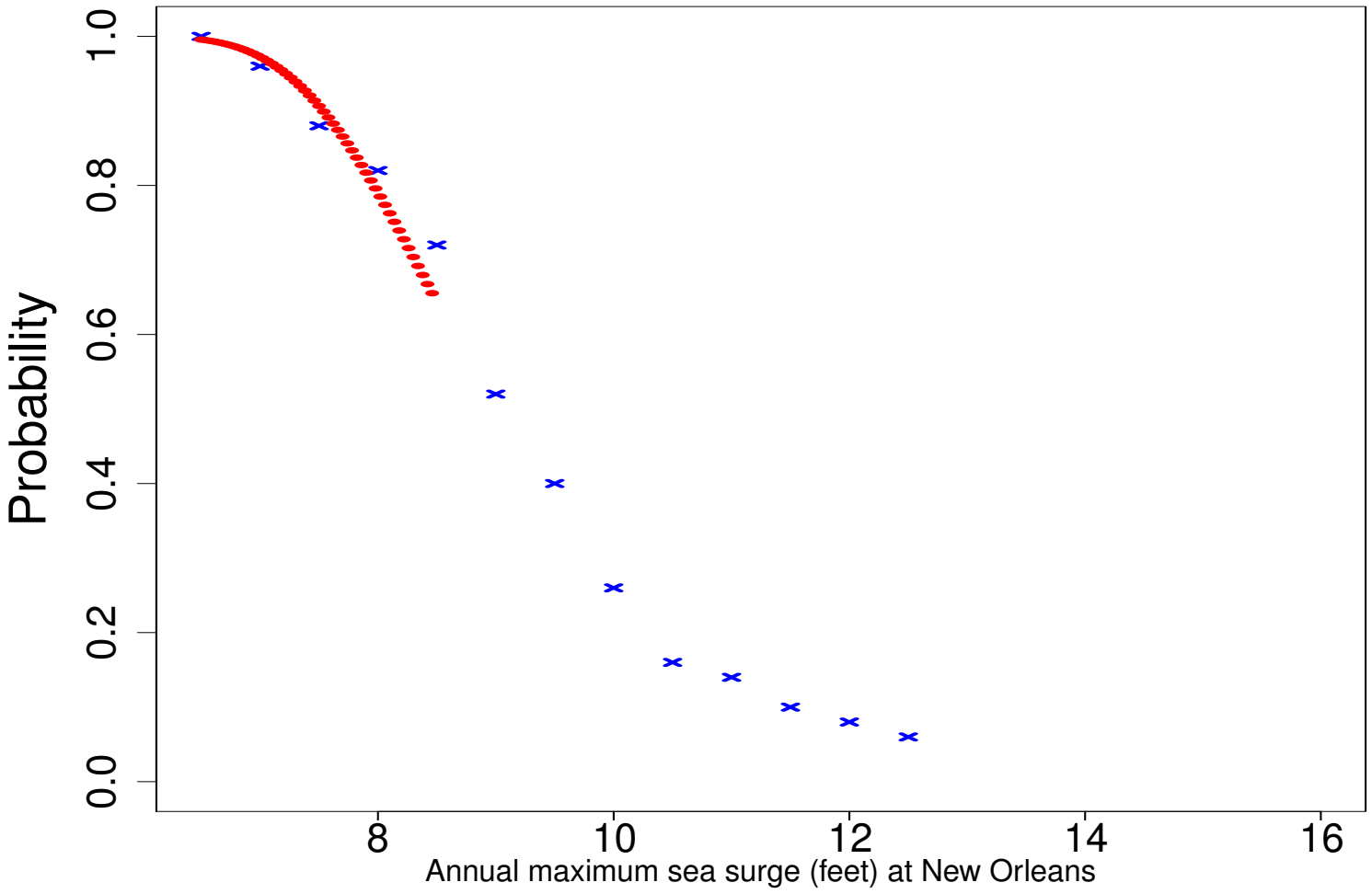

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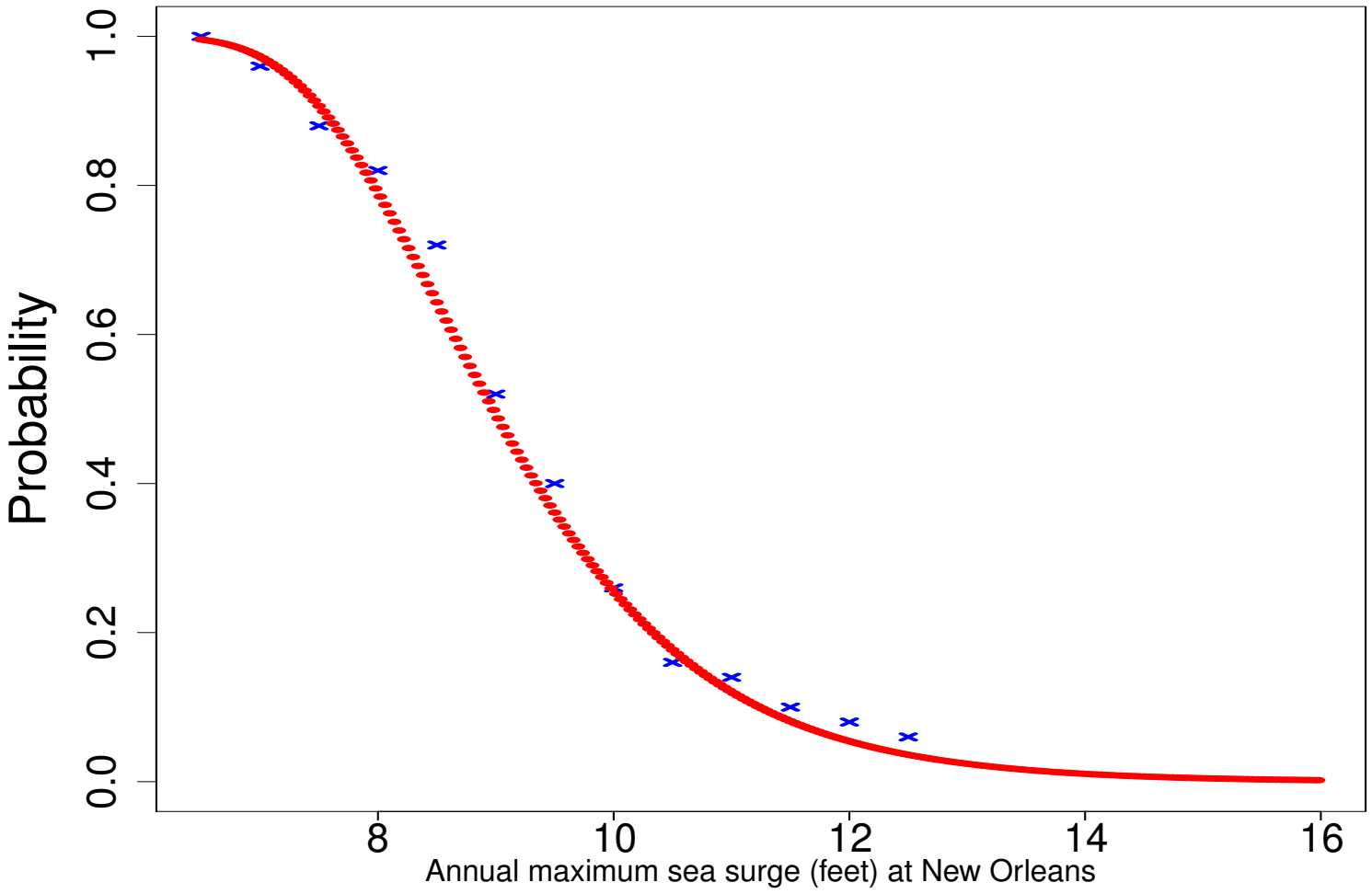

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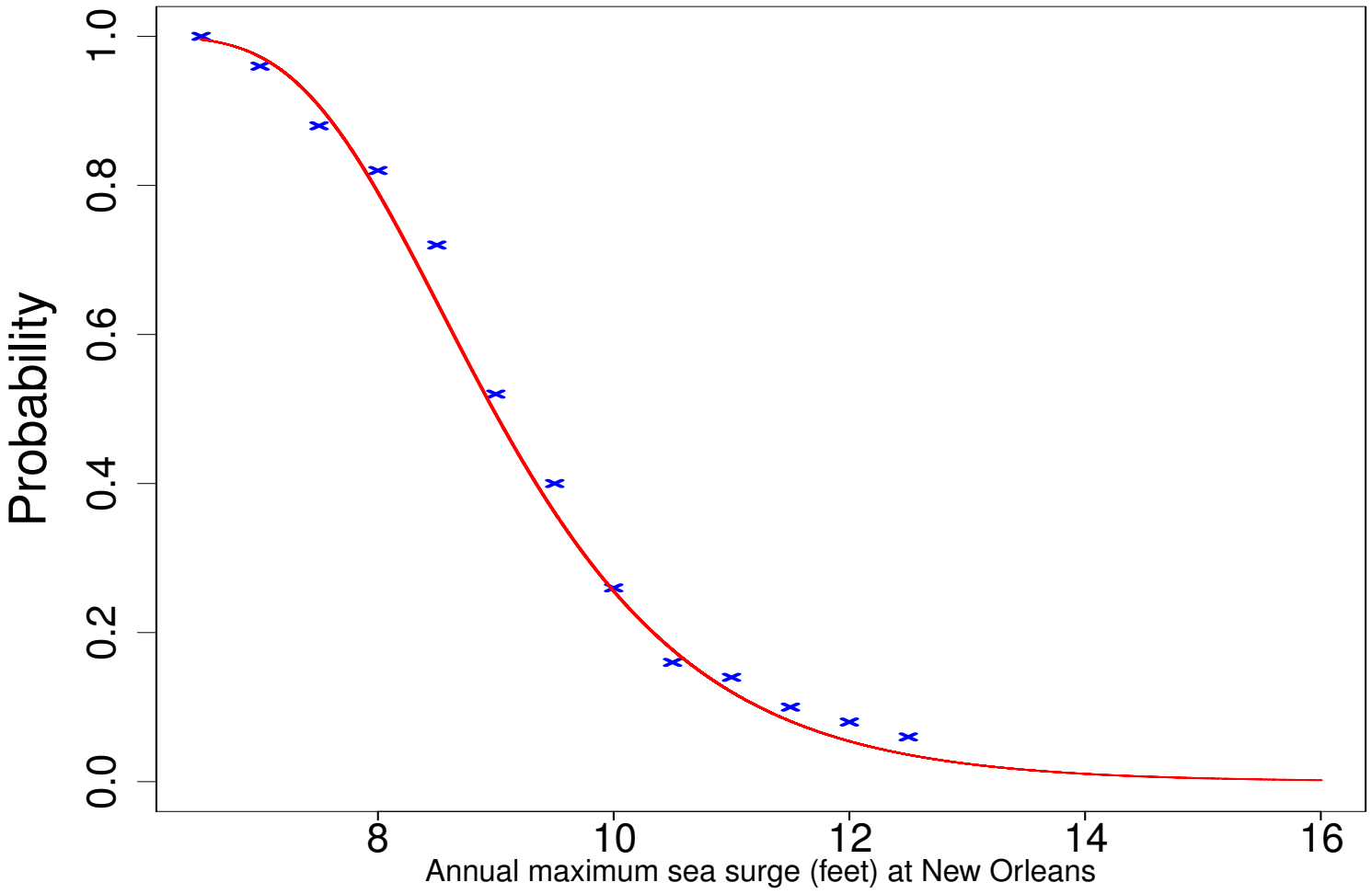

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We can also estimate probabilities of events more extreme than those we have observed via **extrapolation**.

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We can use our graph, or the values calculated using Gumbel's formula, to estimate the probability that, this year, the sea–surge at New Orleans will:

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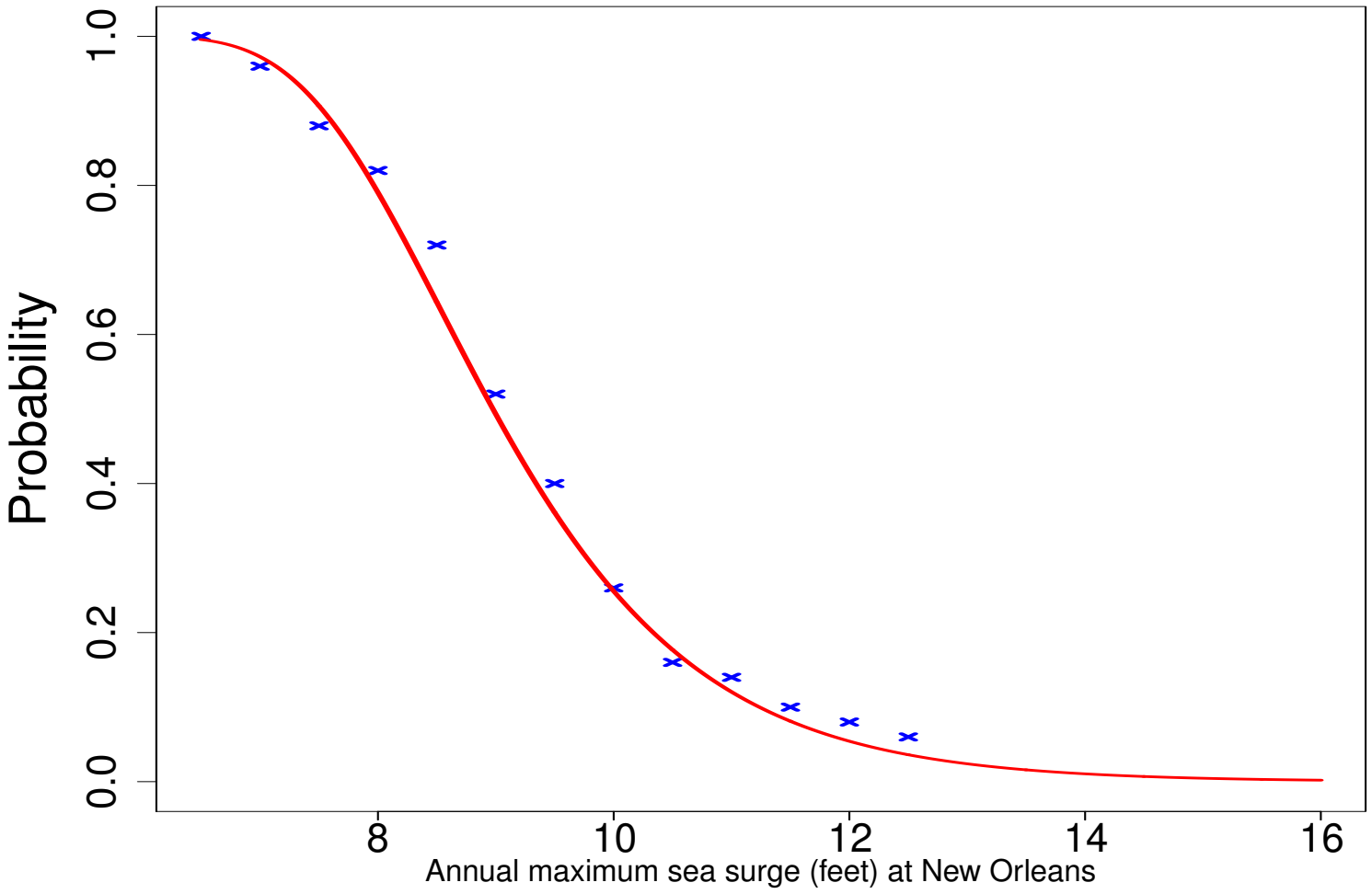

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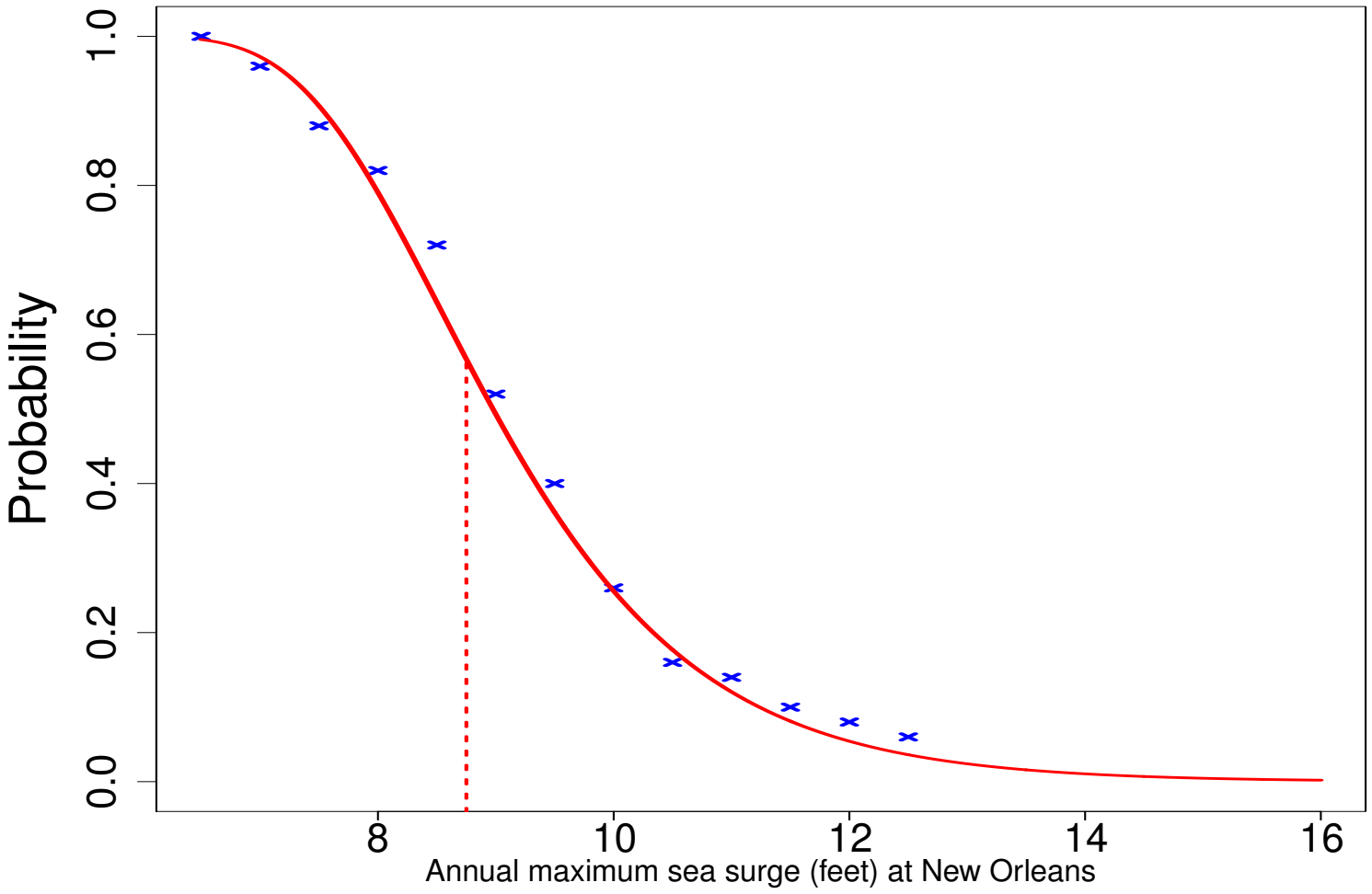

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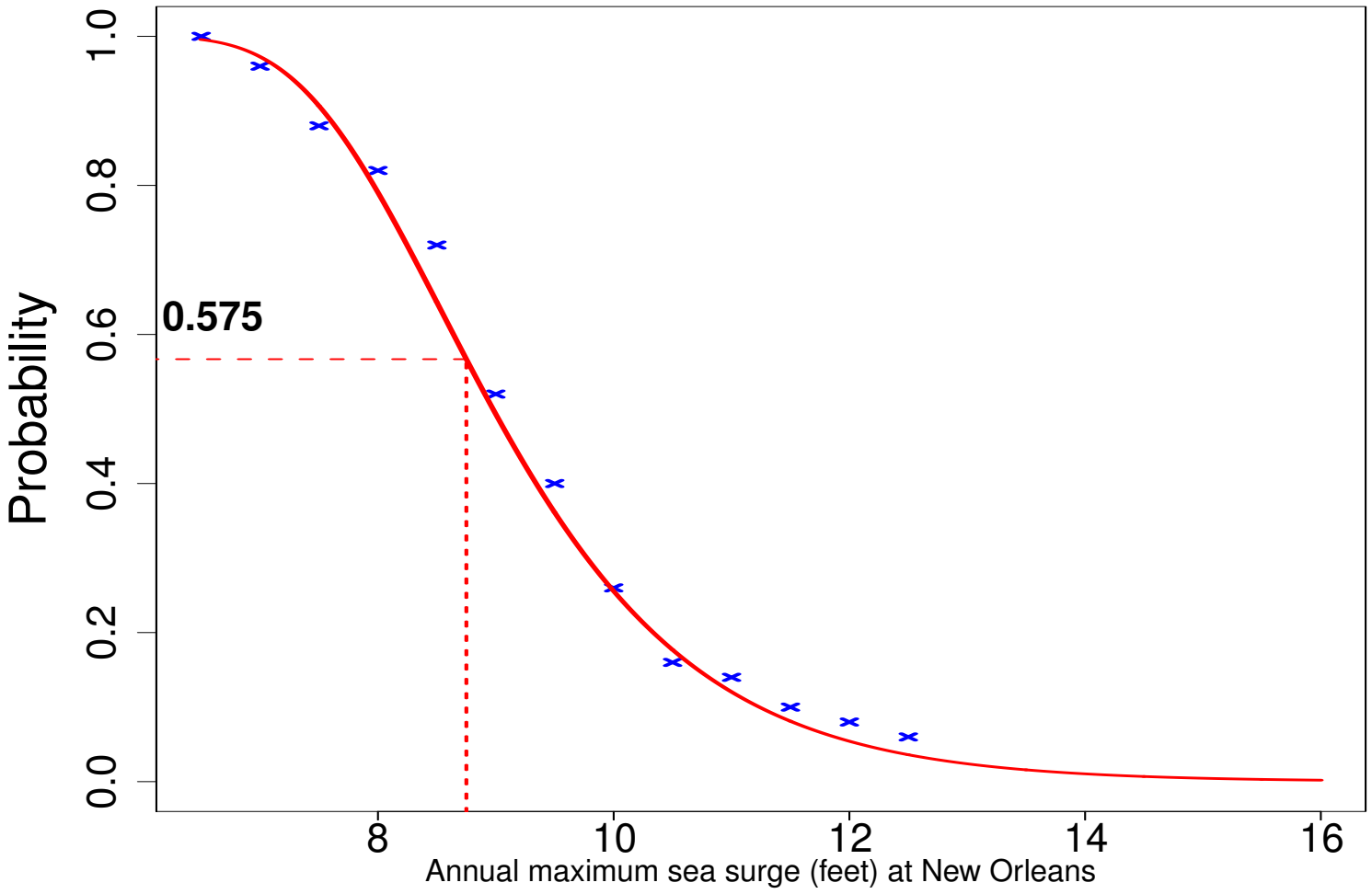

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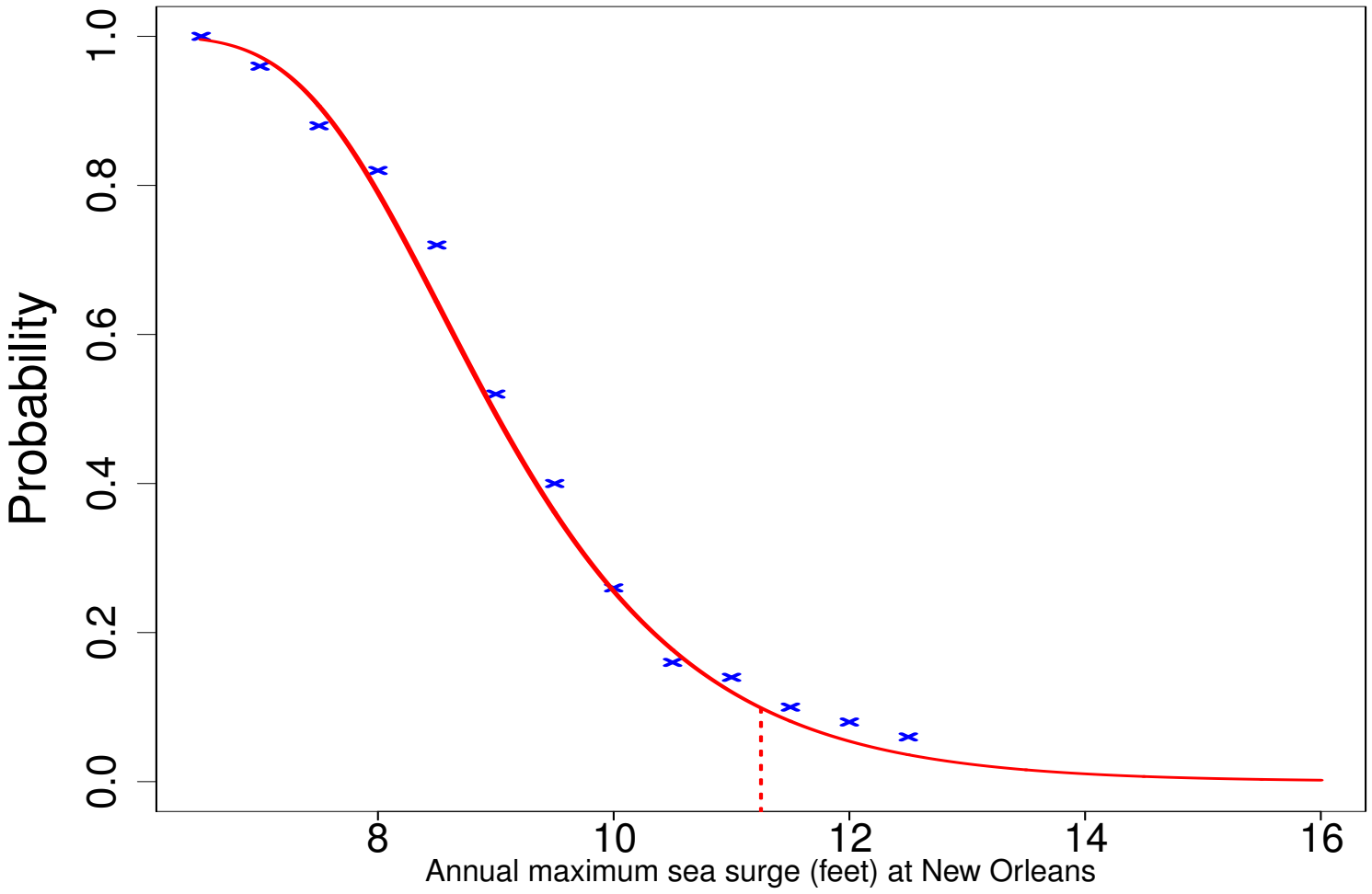

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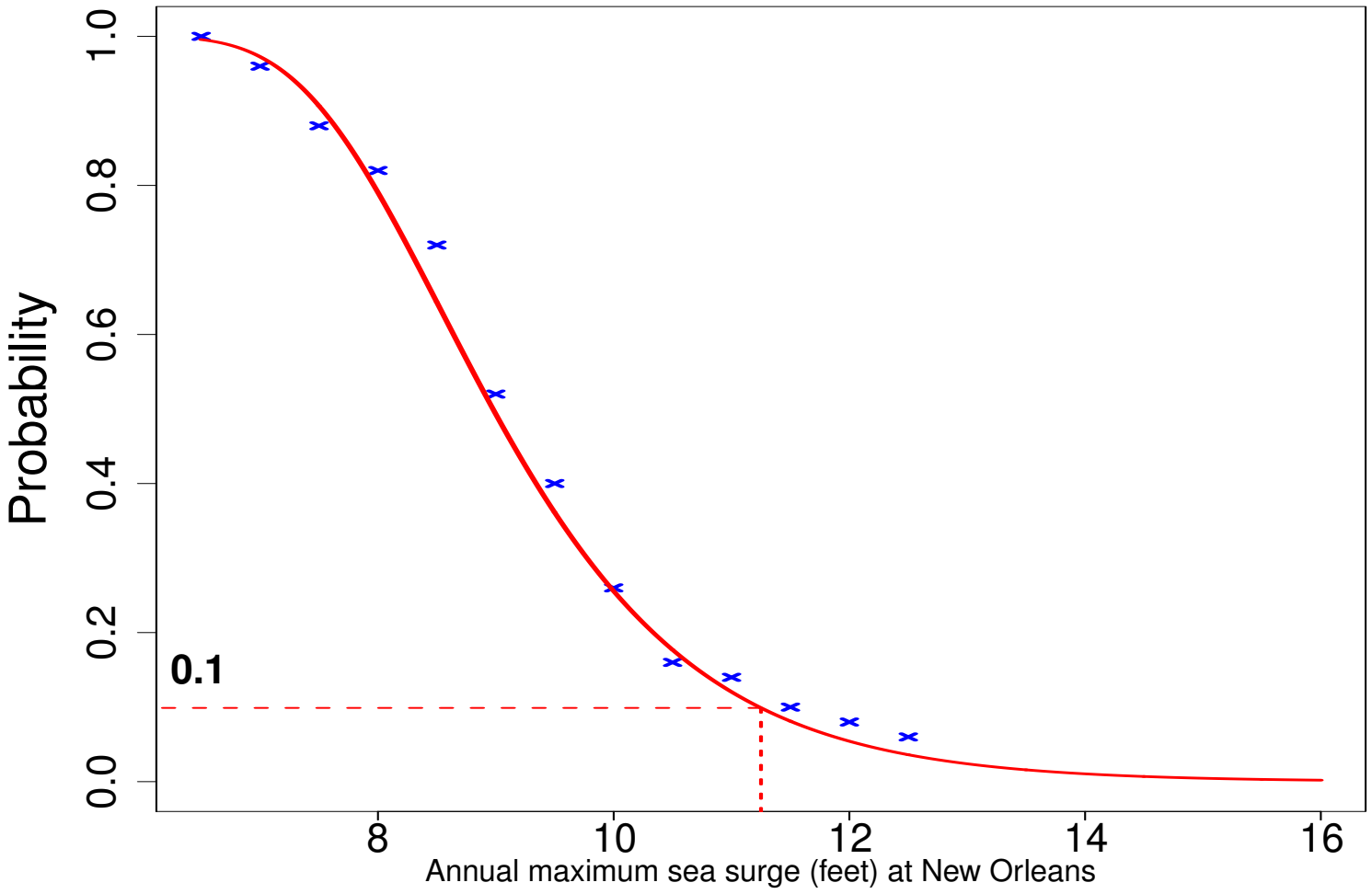

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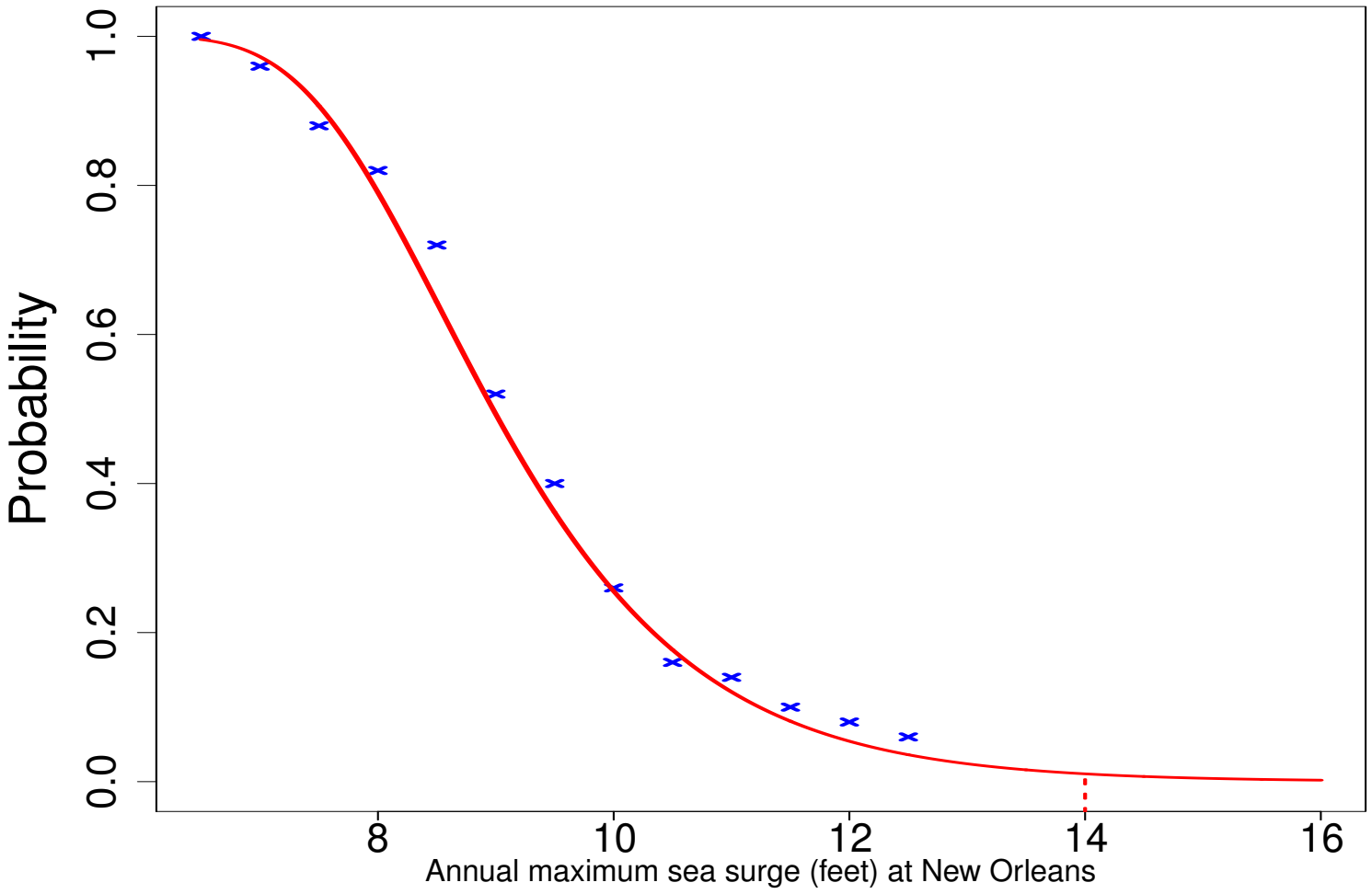

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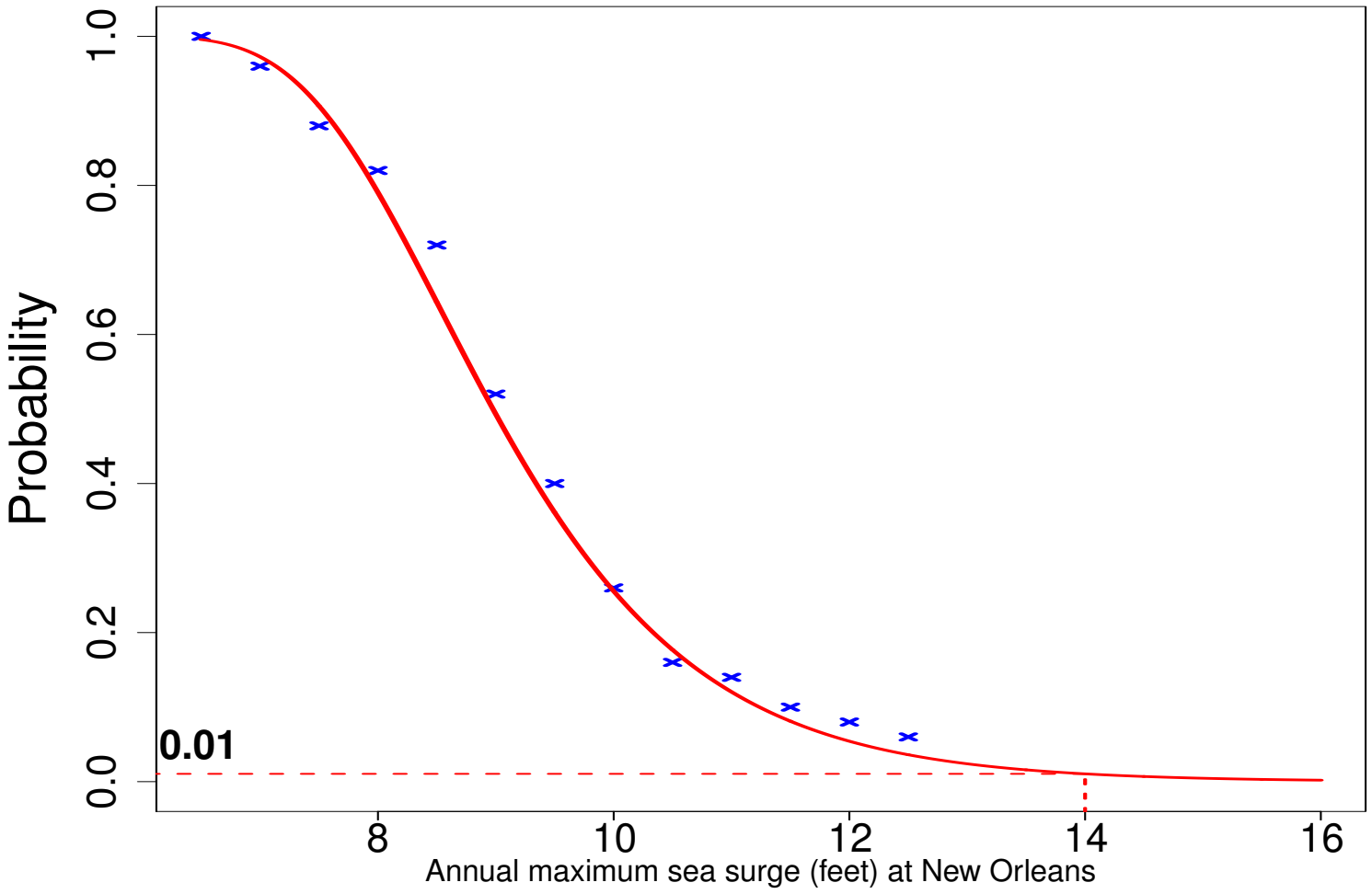

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So we get:

Probabilities	Exceeds		
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Data alone	0.66	0.12	0
Gumbel model	0.575	0.1	0.01

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Can you see why Katrina was billed the "**storm of the century**"?

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