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This Newsletter seeks to be a contact organ to inform the members of the Woodcock and Snipe Specialist Group (WSSG), a research unit of Wetlands International (WI) and of IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The subjects of WSSG are species of the genera *Scolopax*, *Gallinago* and *Lymnocryptes* that in several respects differ remarkably from all other wader species. For this reason a separate research unit was established.

CONTENTS Page

Editorial………………………………………………………………………………...……………………………….. 3

2012 Belarus Woodcock Report……………………………………………………………………………………...4
EDWARD MONGIN, YURI BOGUTSKI & ELENA DAVIDYONOK

Woodcock report from Hungary – Spring 2012……………………………………………………………………...6
GERGELY SCHALLY, LÁSZLÓ SZEMETHY & NORBERT BLEIER

Eurasian Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) monitoring in Buda Mountain (Hungary)…………………………….9
NORBERT BLEIER, ZSOMBOR FÁCZÁNYI & GERGELY SCHALLY

Monitoring of Common Snipe populations in European Russia in 2012…………………………………….....13
YURI BLOKHIN

Incubation of Jack Snipe………………………………………………………………………………………………20
VLADIMIR MOROZOV

Roding and Woodcock hunting in the Vologda region, North Russia……………………………………….....21
YURI BLOKHIN, SERGEI FOKIN & ILYA KAPLIN

2012 European Russia roding census and Woodcock ringing report………………………………………....29
SERGEI FOKIN, YURI BLOKHIN, PETR ZVEREV, YURI ROMANOV & MARINA KOZLOVA

Evaluation of the 2011/12 Woodcock hunting season in France………………………………………………..32
JEAN-PAUL BOIDOT & GERARD AUROUSSEAU

2011-2012 French Woodcock report…………………………………………………………………………………34
FRANÇOIS GOSSMANN, CLAUDINE BASTAT, DAMIEN COREAU & YVES FERRAND

2011-2012 French Snipes report……………………………………………………………………………………37
GILLES LERAY, PATRICE FÉVRIER & YVES FERRAND

2011-2012 Woodcock hunting season in mainland Portugal……………………………………………………47
DAVID GONÇALVÈS, TIAGO RODRIGUES, ANDRÉ VERDE & MANUEL RUSSO

Faeroe snipe (*Gallinago g. faeroeensis*) and Wilson's snipe (*G. delicata*) in mainland Portugal……………51
TIAGO RODRIGUES , ANDRÉ VERDE , JOÃO PEDRO OLIVEIRA & DAVID GONÇALVÈS

Summary report on the 2011 Woodcock hunting season in Switzerland………………………………………..54
PAUL DUCHEIN

Woodcocks and cold wave in Italy in February 2012……………………………………………………………..54
SILVIO SPANÒ

Recent Woodcock and Snipe publications……………………………………………..………………………….55

Editorial

The second IUCN SSC Chair's Meeting was one of the events in 2012 for the WSSG. It was held in February at Abu Dhabi (United Arabian Emirates). This kind of meeting gives the opportunity to meet the Chairs of different Specialist Groups and exchange information. Concerning our species, contacts have been established with colleagues from South America, Madagascar and Indonesia where rare or endangered Woodcock and Snipe species are living. Within the framework of this meeting, a booklet was published to present every IUCN Specialist Group. The WSSG should therefore be more visible for a greater number of scientists and conservationists.

The WSSG always shows a great dynamism. Our colleagues from Eastern Europe are very active, which is important for the monitoring on the breeding grounds. A new project on Common Snipe has been launched in Russia to provide a better estimation of its conservation status. As a game species, and because wetlands are threatened in many countries, a great attention must be paid to the Common Snipe.

One year and a half ago, the 7th WSSG Workshop was held in Saint-Petersburg. At this time, all the papers that were expected to be published have been received and most of them have been revised by David Gonçalvès, Andrew Hoodless and myself. We are in the final step and the Proceedings should be available in the course of the coming three months. I hope that you will be satisfied with the final result which is one of the centerpieces of the WSSG activity.

I wish you a very happy New Year and much success with your scientific work.

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An amazing pair of breeding woodcocks found in Sakhalin (Russia) in spring 2011.

News from……. BELARUS

2012 Belarus Woodcock Report

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Woodcock ringing and study of migration were conducted in the Berezinski Reserve vicinities from the 19th September to the 25th October. It is the ninth ringing season. This autumn was sufficiently warm and rainy. Total rainfall during September – October was close to the last year quantity (92.4/97.1 mm). Light ground frosts occurred only in the second half of October. Heavy snowfall with further temperature reduction occurred on 26th October.

Night ringing trips were carried out 2-4 times per each pentad. High abundance of woodcocks was recorded during these trips in the end of September and the first pentad of October (Figure 1). Passage dynamics of woodcock according to grouped observations by pentads are presented in Figure 2. The peak of migration was recorded in the first pentad of October.

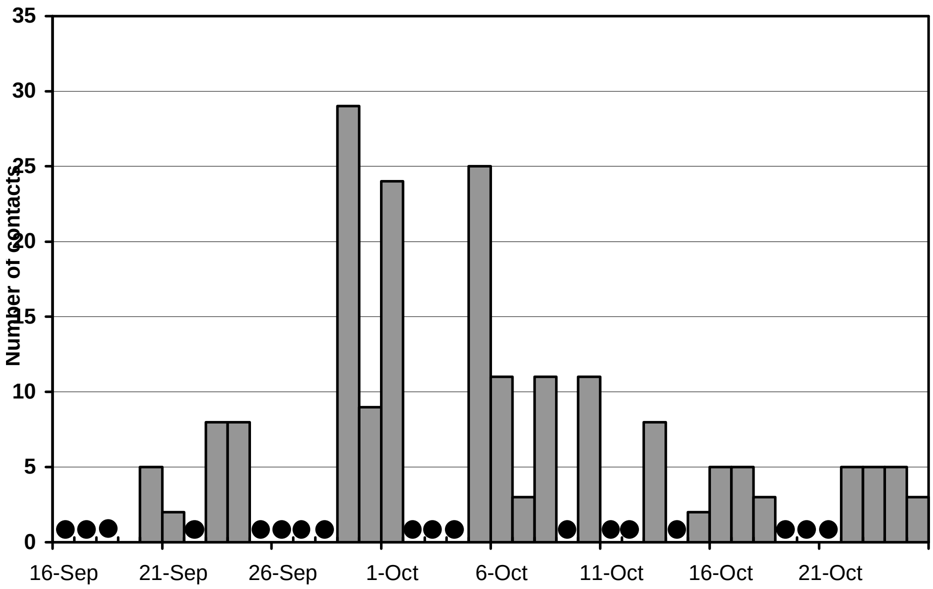

Figure 1. *Passage dynamics of Woodcock according to records of nocturnal contacts in vicinities of the Berezinsky Reserve in 2012. The black dots indicate days without counts on stationary census plots.*

This year, 187 contacts were registered during only 44 hours and 53 birds were caught. The mean number of contacts per hour recorded during the ringing trips was 4.25. It is the highest value for the last 8 years (Figure 3). Proportion of juveniles among caught bids was also very high (85.1%). Juveniles of late broods represented 40% of the total of juveniles. Many contacts during ringing trips and the high value of juveniles probably confirm a good breeding success.

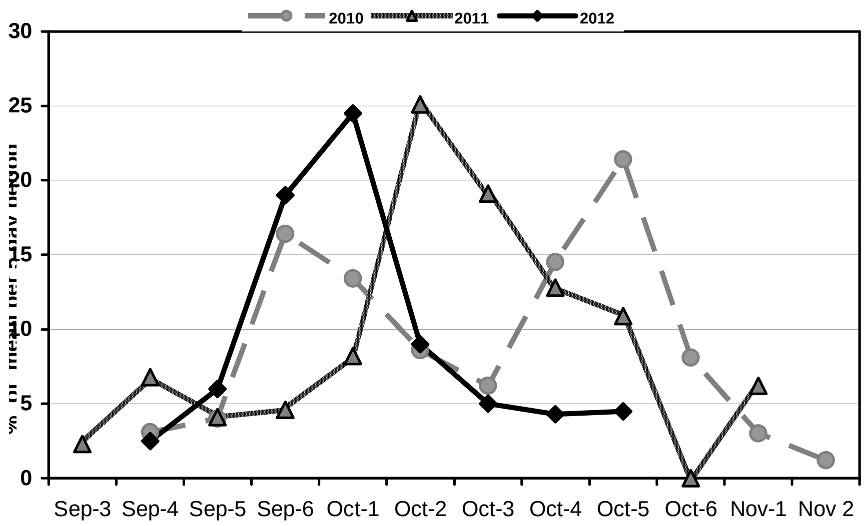

Figure 2. *Passage dynamics of woodcock according to records of nocturnal contacts in 2010 - 2012. Data grouped in five-day periods.*

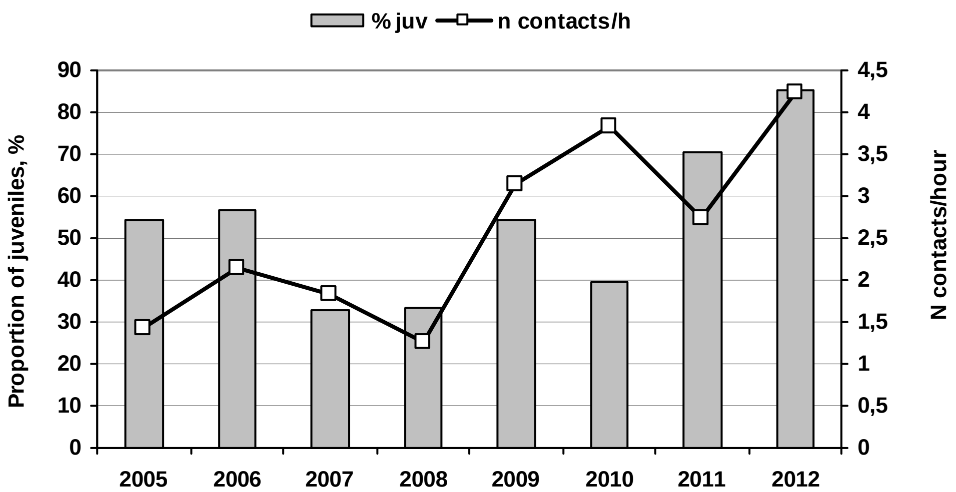

Figure 3. *Annual fluctuations of the number of contacts per hour during ringing trips and proportion of juveniles among caught woodcocks.*

This autumn, we ringed 46 woodcocks and 6 birds ringed this year were retrapped at the same places after 6-29 days. One bird ringed in the last year was also retrapped. The catching success rate was 28.3%, which was rather more than the last year (24.7%). Moonless nights, a lack of strong winds and normal rainfall favoured the captures. In total, 397 woodcocks were ringed during nine years, 2004-2012 (Table 1). Now 39 recoveries of Belarusian rings have been received from France (26), Spain (5), Italy (5), Great Britain (2) and Russia (1).

Year	N ringed birds	N direct retraps	N indirect retraps	N direct recoveries	N indirect recoveries
2004	16	-	-	1	1
2005	33	2	-	1	1
2006	46	-	-	2	-
2007	54	-	1	1	-
2008	40	2	2	4	2
2009	34	1	1	2	2
2010	74	6	2	9	4
2011	54	4	-	2	5
2012	46	6	1	2	-
Total	**397**	**21**	**7**	**24**	**15**

Table1. *Ringing results collected for the 2004-2012 period.*

Woodcock report from Hungary – Spring 2012

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The national woodcock monitoring programme, which was started in 2009 (Schally *et al.*, 2010) continued in 2012. The main goal of the programme is to collect reliable information about the species in order to maintain an adaptive harvesting. We gather information about the migration of woodcocks in our country based on long-term roding survey data. This short report presents the data collected in spring 2012 compared to the results of the first three years of the programme.

Methods

Roding surveys (Ferrand, 1993) were weekly performed by observers. The synchronized censuses took place every Saturday night from 12th February to 30th April in 2012. The total number of observation points was 945 and the total number of surveys was 10319. The locations of the points were chosen by the observers and they are similar from one spring to another. The observers recorded data on standardized forms about the number of contacts (woodcocks seen), and additional information (the estimated size of the visible area, the duration of the observation, weather conditions and the land cover types surrounding the observation point).

In order to describe the characteristics of migration, we used different methods of data analysis:

1. Descriptive statistics were calculated from the number of contacts for each observation week. Their distribution represents the temporal dynamics and intensity of migration.
2. Temporal dynamics of the national occupation rate were calculated for each year. These rates correspond to the % of listening points at which at least one roding male was observed (positive site) (Ferrand *et al.*, 2008) in each week. It can also be used as an index of the spatial pattern of the migration.
3. Temporal dynamics of the rate of high abundance sites were calculated for each year. These rates correspond to the % of positive sites at which at least five roding males were observed in each week. They can also be regarded as a spatial pattern concentrated on preferred areas. Results may differ from Schally & Szemethy (2011) where the numbers of high abundance sites were compared to the total numbers of listening points.

We used Kruskal-Wallis test with Dunn's multiple comparisons test to detect differences among the number of contacts reported at the annual peaks of roding intensity.

Data management and statistical analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel 2003, R (v2.15.0) and GrahPad InStat (v3.05)

Results

The number of contacts in spring 2012 was low compared to the previous years (Schally et al., 2010; Schally & Szemethy, 2011). Their distribution is unimodal like in the previous years (Figure 1) but a significant difference appears in the average number of contacts during the annual peaks (Kruskal-Wallis Statistic KW = 338.95 P <0.0001; Figure 2). In 2012, the peak of roding activity was observed on 24 March and the average number of contacts was the lowest in the last four years.

The highest rate of positive sites was 73.8% (Figure3) and the highest rate of high abundance sites was 8.7% (Figure 4). Their distributions are also unimodal.

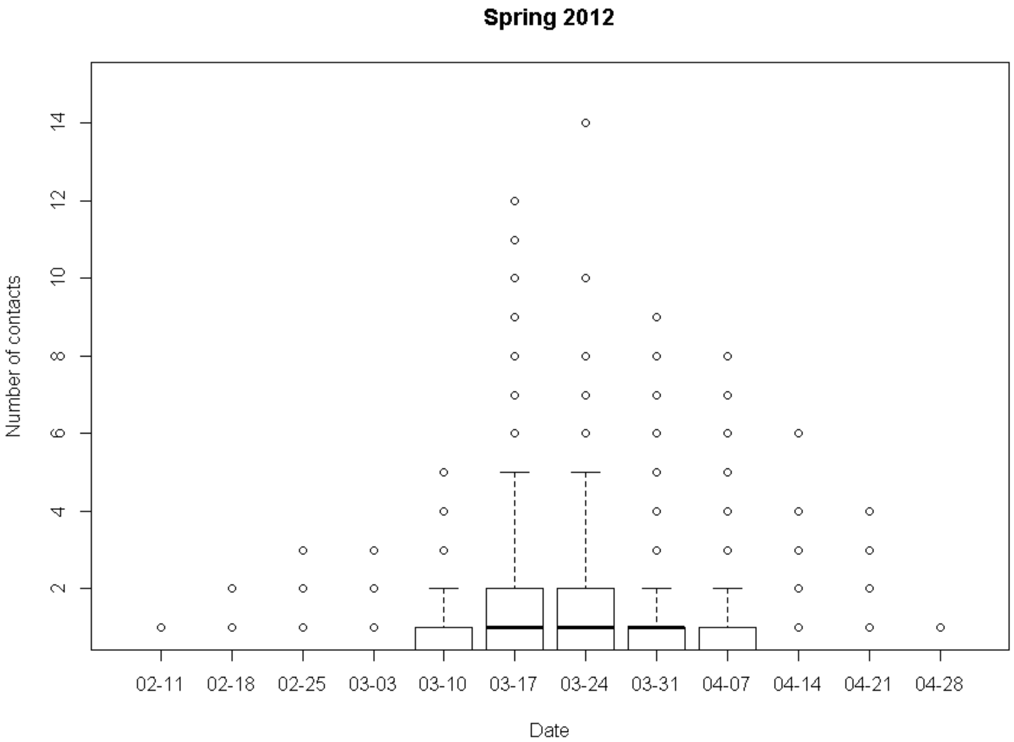

Figure 1. *Intra-annual distribution and statistics for the number of contacts in spring 2012 (empty circles represent outlyer data).*

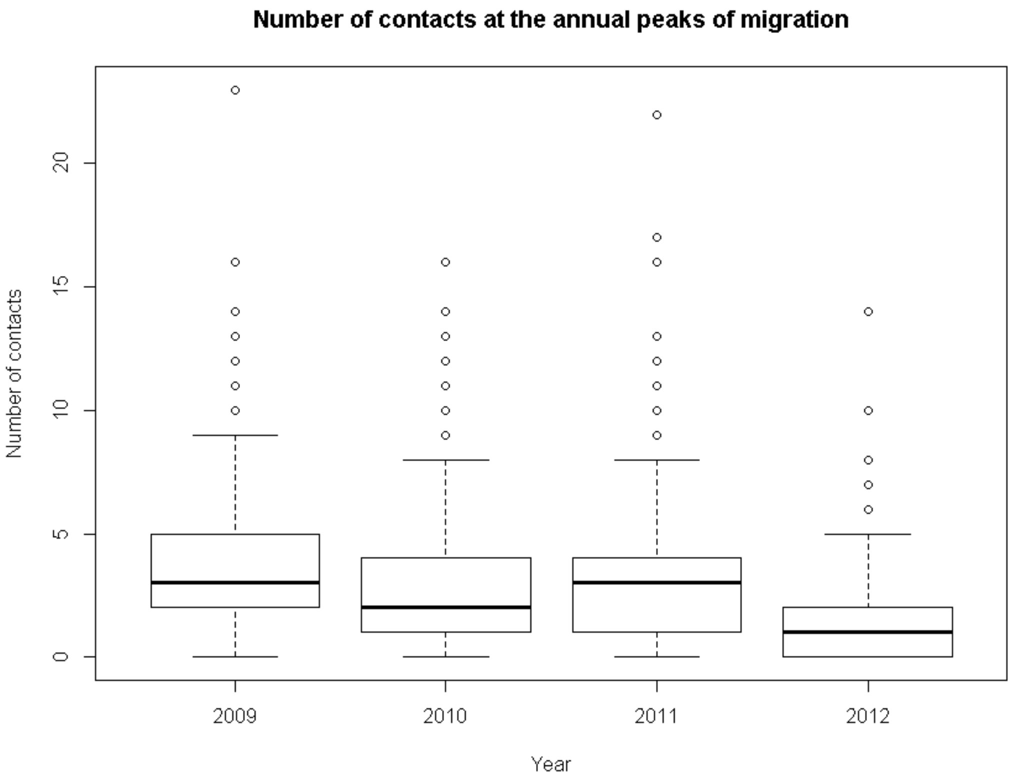

Figure 2. *Statistics of the number of contacts for the annual peaks of roding intensity (empty circles represent outlyer data).*

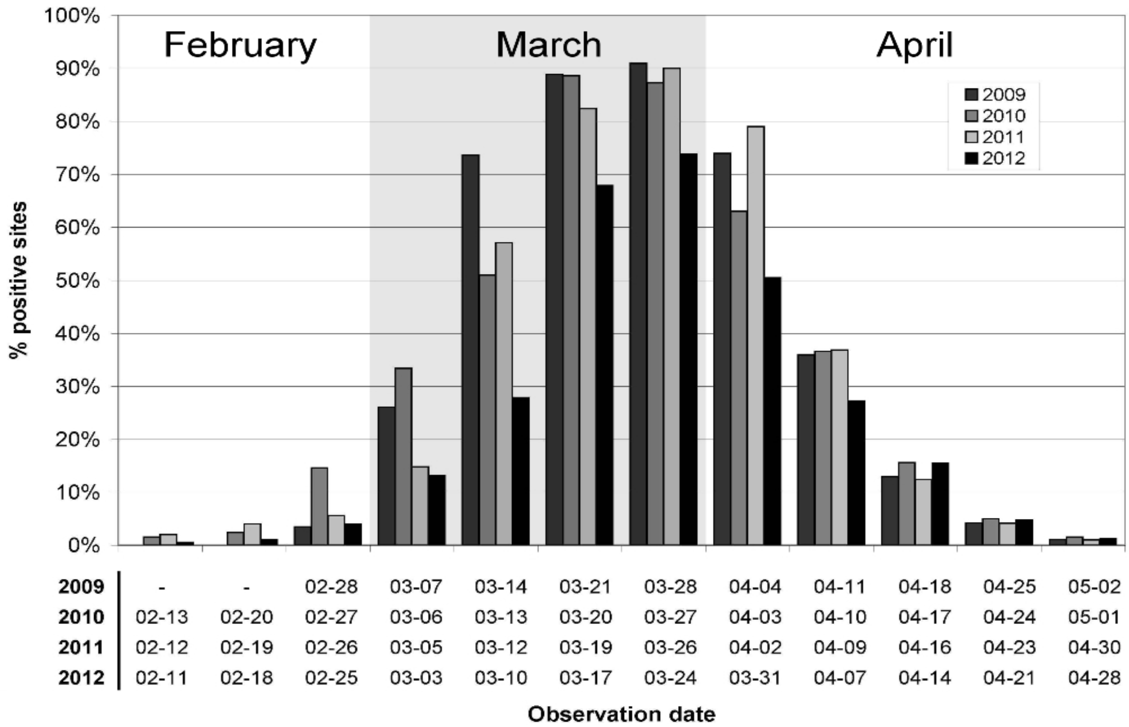

Figure 3. *Proportion of positive sites in spring 2009/2010/2011/2012.*

Discussion

The numbers of contacts reported in spring 2012 were two or even three times lower than in the previous years at the peak of roding intensity. There was also a notable decrease in the national occupation rate. Whilst it reached even 90 % in the previous years (91 % in 2009, 89 % in 2010, 90 % in 2011) it was only 73 % this spring. Moreover, the rate of high abundance sites was also the lowest so far (19 % in 2009, 15 %in 2010, 17 % in 2011 and 9 % in 2012).

According to our results, we conclude that the decrease we registered in the number of contacts could be caused by a temporary, significant decrease in the size of suitable areas for woodcock. Spring 2012 and even winter 2011 were extremely dry, which is known to be unfavourable for earthworm feeders such as the Eurasian woodcock. Due to these conditions, the birds could have avoided or escaped these dry areas along their migration. The population decline as another possible reason can only be excluded when it is not confirmed by population estimates of the main breeding and wintering areas.
It is not clear yet whether it was an extreme case or how often can it occur in the future. However it draws our attention on factors that can dramatically affect the migration of woodcocks and yet that we can hardly influence. The effects of these factors should be identified and estimated as accurately as possible to be able to evaluate our results relative to them.

Acknowledgements

The monitoring programme has been running on a national scale for four years. The first term is planned to continue for five years. Our aim is to continue and improve monitoring the species in the future based on the knowledge gathered along that period. We are grateful to everyone who took sides with the programme, especially the ones who persist in collecting data from the beginning. We are also thankful to the Hungarian National Chamber of Hunters and the Ministry of Rural Development for their help in coordination.

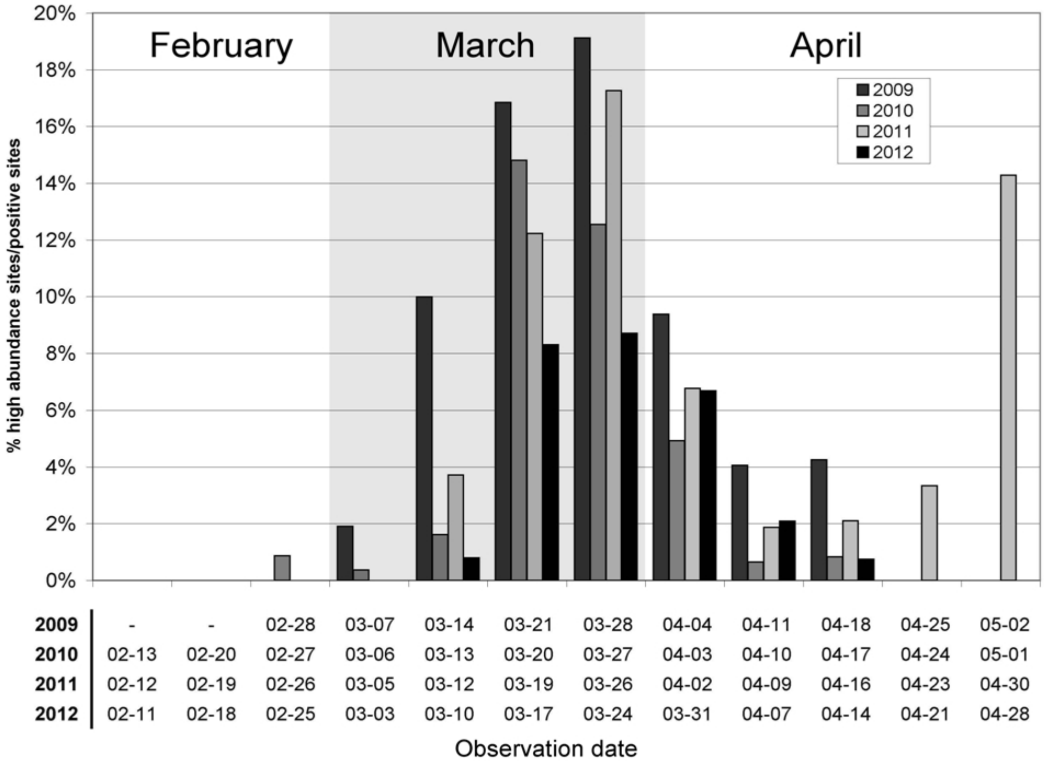

Figure 4. *Proportion of high abundance sites in spring 2009/2010/2011/2012.*

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Schally G. & L. Szemethy. 2011. Woodcock report from Hungary – Spring 2011. WI/IUCN-WSSG Newsletter, 37: 6-9.

Eurasian Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) monitoring in Buda Mountain (Hungary)

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As in the previous years (Bleier & Faczanyi, 2009; Bleier *et al*., 2010) the Fairy bird Woodcock Research Association continued their woodcock surveys in Buda mountain in spring 2011 and 2012. The aim of our studies is to monitor the migration of the Eurasian woodcock in a relatively small region and to describe its basic characteristics using long-term, detailed observation data.

We performed roding surveys each evening and dawn between 1 March and 10 April at three listening points in Julianna-major. We obtained observation data of 161 occasions in 2011 and 178 in 2012 (Table 1).

Period	2011				2012			
	Point 1	Point 2	Point 3	Total	Point 1	Point 2	Point 3	Total
1-5 March	0 (6)	0 (3)	0 (3)	0 (12)	0 (4)	0 (5)	0 (5)	0 (14)
6-10 March	1 (6)	0 (5)	1 (3)	2 (14)	1 (7)	1 (8)	0 (4)	2 (19)
11-15 March	16 (9)	8 (9)	0 (4)	24 (22)	30 (10)	10 (9)	1 (7)	41 (26)
16-20 March	34 (10)	15 (9)	9 (5)	58 (24)	45 (10)	32 (10)	20 (9)	97 (29)
21-25 March	15 (7)	9 (7)	8 (8)	32 (22)	23 (9)	17 (10)	10 (7)	50 (26)
26-30 March	14 (7)	6 (10)	17 (9)	37 (26)	12 (9)	10 (9)	1 (6)	23 (24)
31 March - 4 April	15 (10)	22 (6)	0 (5)	37 (21)	17 (8)	3 (7)	7 (7)	27 (22)
5-10 April	2 (9)	3 (8)	2 (3)	7 (20)	13 (8)	6 (7)	1 (3)	20 (18)
41 days	97 (62)	63 (55)	37 (40)	197(161)	141 (65)	79 (65)	40 (48)	260 (178)

Table 1. *Number of contacts (roding males) and number of observation sequences (in brackets) by five-day period.*

In 2011, we had to wait until 7 March for the first roding male observation, which can be considered late compared to the previous years (1 March in 2009; 3 March in 2010). Very few woodcocks were seen until mid-March, and the peak of contacts came a week later. The number of contacts was the highest on 21 March, and then a rapid decline was observed. However, roding males were observed until the beginning of April. As in the previous years, no contact was registered after 5 April.

In 2010, we have already assumed a late arrival of woodcocks due to unusual cool temperatures and we observed a rapid stop in the increase of the number of contacts. In the first ten days of March 2011, the temperature was around 0°C and started to increase only after then (Figure 1a, 1b). As the temperature started to increase, the number of contacts increased rapidly as well.

In 2012, the first observations occurred on 9 March. The number of contacts increased rapidly up to 59 and 60 in the 6th and 7th 3-day periods and then decreased as quickly as it increased with only 27 contacts in the 8th 3-day period. A smaller peak was observed later, followed by a rapid decrease. However, 7 woodcocks were seen on the last day of survey.

The variations of the number of contacts at the three listening points were similar, in contrast to the diverse patterns of previous years. Another difference is that the number of contacts during the last two 3-day periods was also high and not decreasing as in previous years before, and was moreover even higher in the last period than in the one before. These slight differences cannot be detected in 5-day periods.

According to our results, the following question arises: Do more woodcocks than usual breed south of the main breeding sites in such a situation?

Very few woodcocks were seen in most areas of the country in spring 2012, probably due to the overall drought. However, we detected more birds than one or two years before in the study area.

According to experiences of the first four years, we assume that there is a correlation between the temperature at the beginning of March and the arrival of migrating woodcocks. The weather conditions in Europe have a great influence on the start of migration at the beginning of the season, as assumed by Schenk (1924) nearly a century ago.

The peak in the number of contacts was ten days earlier in spring 2012 compared to the previous two years, but no other remarkable difference was detected (Figure 2)

We have performed our surveys using the same methods for four years now, so the annual data can be compared. In 2009, the absolute number of contacts (324) and the relative number (1.78 contacts/occasion) were the highest compared to the other years. One year later, the relative number of contacts dropped down to 0.89 contact/occasion. In 2011, it increased up to 1.22 and, in 2012, it went up to 1.45.

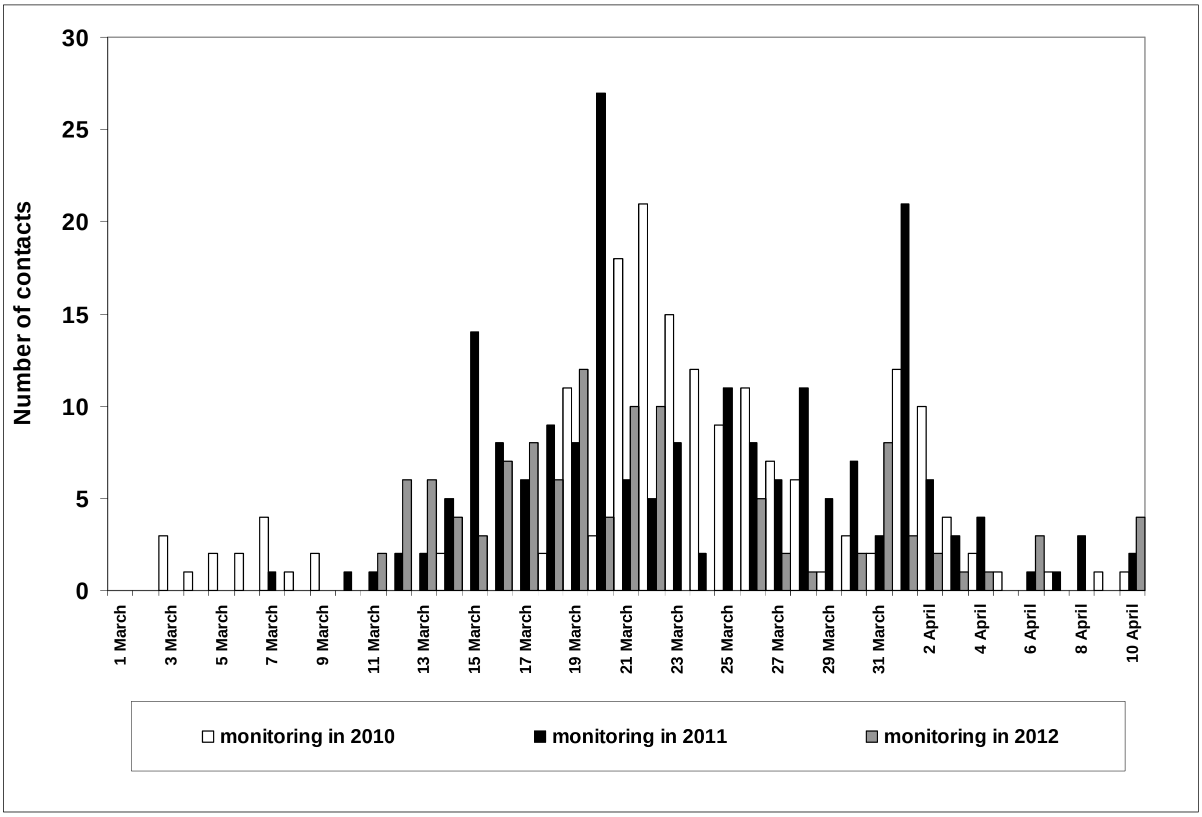

Figure 1a. *Number of contacts (evening only) in 2010, 2011 and 2012.*

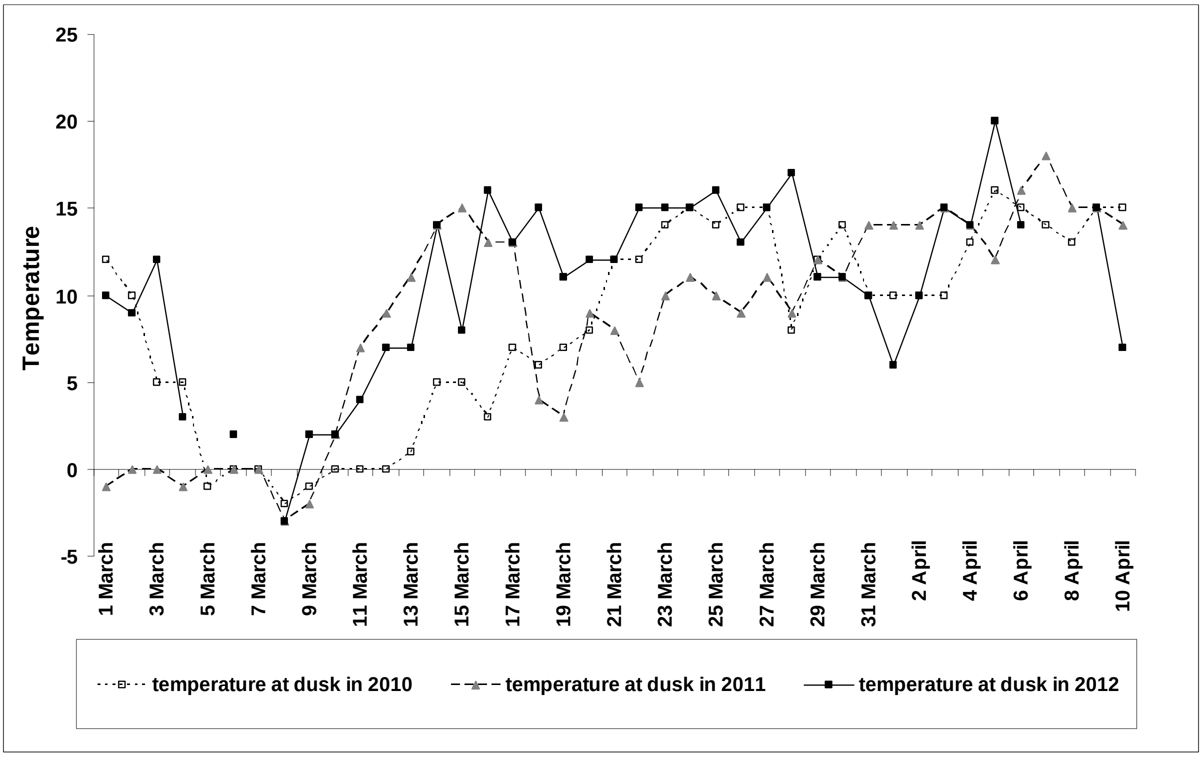

Figure 1b. *Temperature at dusk in 2010, 2011 and 2012.*

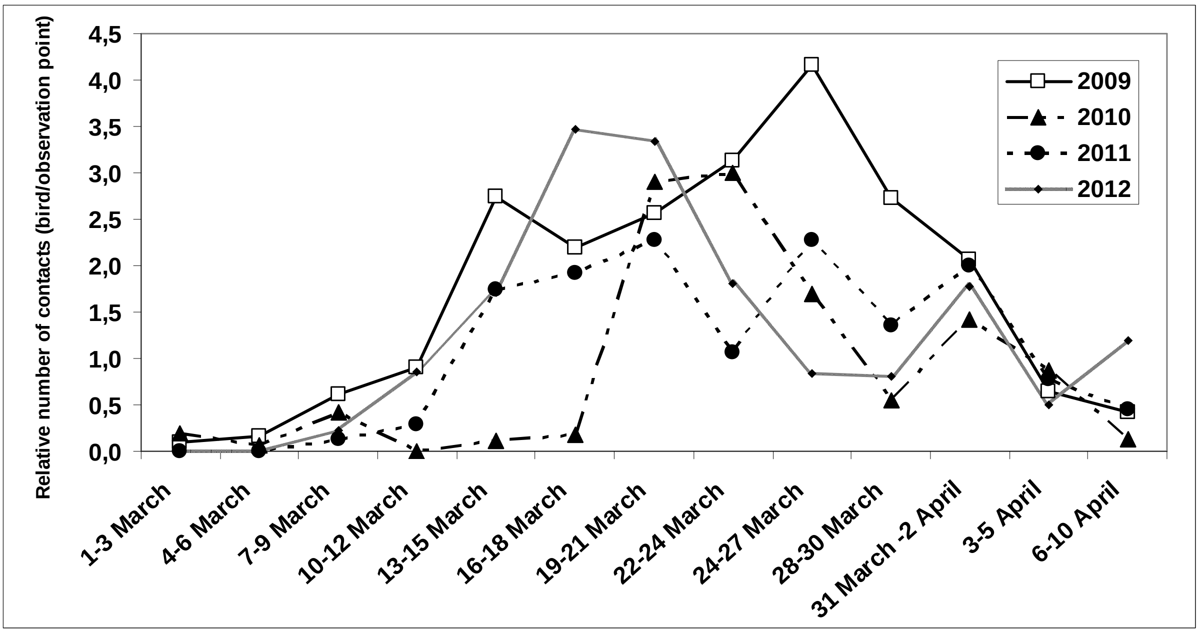

Figure 2. *Number of contacts in three-day periods (birds seen/observation occasions) in 2009/2010/2011/2012.*

In 2011, at least one woodcock was seen each day from the 5th to the 11th 3-day period. This is very similar to the 2009 data; the densities were lower however in 2011. The spring 2010 was abnormal because of the small number of observations until the 6th 3-day period, which could have been caused by the weather conditions. The temperature was mild at the end of February and woodcocks were seen on the first week of March (Figure 1a, 1b), but then observations suddenly stopped. Considering the temperature data, this was caused by a rapid cooling.

April data (from the 11th to the 13th 3-day period) are very similar from year to year: the number of contacts decreased continuously. We conclude that the birds move at a faster, more balanced speed to their breeding sites in this period. This is most likely because the time of arrival at the breeding sites can influence the breeding success.

The number of contacts varies year by year: 324 sightings/182 occasions in 2009, 170 sightings/191 occasions in 2010, 197 sightings/161 occasions in 2011 and 260 sightings/178 occasions in 2012.
These data provide detailed information about the dynamics of migration on a small regional scale, but it is not possible to detect population changes from them. A monitoring program on a larger regional scale (Schally *et al*., 2010) may be able to improve such estimations.

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Schenk J. 1924. Az erdei szalonka vonulása Európában. Aquila, 30-31**,** 26-74, 75-120.

Monitoring of Common Snipe populations in European Russia in 2012

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The beginning of the Russian-French collaboration on the study of the status of Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) populations in Russia dates back to 2003 when the Russian Bird Conservation Union and the Office national de la chasse et de la faune sauvage (ONCFS) concluded an agreement. For 7 years, 44 ornithologists from Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Ivanovo and other regions of the country participated in it. The major result of this collaboration was a growing interest in Snipe in the scientific environment as well as estimation of this species' numbers in the European part of the country (Blokhin, 2010). The global financial crisis has suspended the joint works for two years. In May 2011, the 7th Woodcock and Snipe Workshop of the IUCN/Wetlands International Woodcock and Snipe Specialist Group took place in Saint-Petersburg. In its agenda, a panel discussion was devoted to the problem of monitoring of European Snipe populations. An important decision was taken: to find financing and resume these studies in Russia. Therefore, a new project ("Monitoring of Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) populations in European Russia") started in spring 2012, with the collaboration of the Russian Society for Conservation and Studies of Birds and ONCFS. The name of the project leaves a hope that the monitoring studies are meant for a long-term outlook.

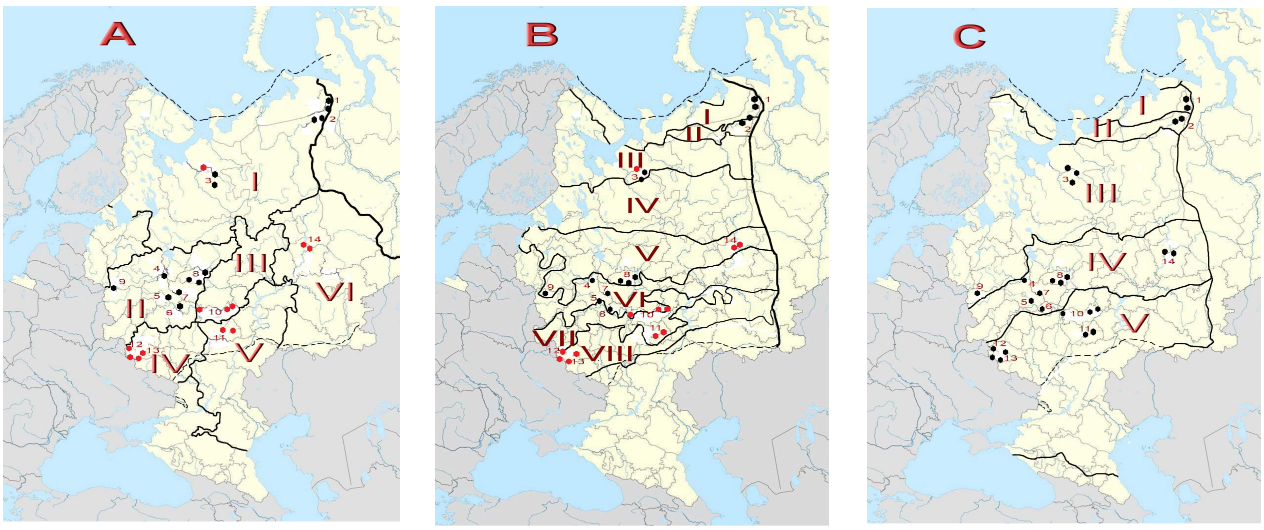

Figure 1. *Location of census works on Common Snipe in 2012 (# in the Table 1).*

Legend: dotted line - north and south borders of the Common Snipe breeding area.
A) Borders of regions: I – North, II – Central, III - Volga-Vyatka, IV - Black Earth, V – Volga, VI - Ural
B) Borders of sub-areas: I - south tundra, II - forest-tundra, III – north taiga, IV – middle taiga, V - south taiga, VI - coniferous-deciduous forests, VII - deciduous forests, VIII - forest-steppe
C) Borders of groups of mire provinces (Kats, 1971): I - provinces with flat-hilly bogs; II - provinces with big-hilly bogs; III - provinces forests and 'distinct' bogs in the mainland and sea coasts of inland seas; IV - provinces eutrophic and oligotrophic pine-sphagnum bogs of Eastern Europe; V - provinces eutrophic bogs of the Russian forest-steppe, steppe and desert.

Zone	Sub-area (census grounds/ ha)	Rivers and their tributaries, reservoirs	Visited Snipe habitats		Republic, provinces *
			Location in relief	Major types	
Tundra	South, or shrubby tundra (4/294)	*Pechora*: Usa	Country between two rivers (interfluves), flood-land	Open flat-hilly peat bogs	Komi (1)
Forest-tundra (6/400)			Flood-land, country between two rivers, low-mountain	Open large hilly bogs, hummocks	Komi (2)
Forest	North taiga (40/2118)	*Severnaya Dvina*: Pinega, Pokshenga	Flood-land, country between two rivers	Open and forest bogs, water-meadows, damp clearings	Arkhangelsk (3)
	South taiga (30/2058)	*Zapadnaya Dvina*: El'sha *Volga*: Kama, Oka, Luh, Klyazma, Nerl', Gor'kovskoe reserve	Flood-land, country between two rivers	Open and forest bogs, water-meadows, damp clearings, peat-hag	Ivanovo (8), Perm (14), Smolensk (9)
	Coniferous-deciduous forests (26/1179)	*Volga*: Dubna, Hotcha, Oka, Klyazma, Moskva,Moksha, Sura, Alatir'	Flood-land, country between two rivers	Open low-lying bogs, meadows, damp clearings, peat pits	Moscow Region (4) , Ryazan'(6), Vladimir (7), Mordovia (10)
	Deciduous forests (9/2188)	*Volga*: Oka, Moskva, Sura Dnepr, Desna, Seim	Flood-land	Open fens, water-meadows	Kursk (12), Moscow Region (5), Penza (11)
Forest-steppe (3/215)		*Dnepr*: Desna, Sev, Psel	Flood-land	Open fens, water-meadows	Kursk (13)

Table 1. *Details of census grounds in different Russian areas in 2012.*
** # in the Figure 1*

Material and methods

In April – July 2012, field works were conducted in 11 entities of the Russian Federation: the Arkhangelsk region and Komi Republic (North region), the Ivanovo, Ryazan', Smolensk, Vladimir regions and the Moscow Region (Central), Mordovia Republic (Volga-Vyatka), Kursk (Central Black Earth), Penza (Volga) and Perm (Ural) (Figure 1). The breeding habitats of Common Snipe in basins of the rivers Dnepr, Pechora, Severnaya Dvina, Zapadnaya Dvina, Volga and their tributaries (Desna, Psel, Pinega, Usa, Oka, Dubna, Hotcha, Sura, Kama) were visited. In total, 118 study plots were established in 2012, for a total area of 89.3 km^2 (Table 1).
As in the previous years, the research covered various zones: sub-areas of the south tundra, forest-tundra, north and south taiga, coniferous-deciduous forests, deciduous forests and forest-steppe (Table 1). Census grounds were located more often in river valleys (in flood-lands and on the floodplain levels) and rarely in areas between two rivers. They commonly included parts of swamps (low-lying and transition) and damp meadows in combination with other, mostly open habitats of Common Snipe. The anthropogenic effects were extremely heterogeneous: from highly transformed in central areas to little transformed in the north. The major form of anthropogenic influence on Common Snipe in explored areas was economic utilization of its habitats, in various intensities: cattle pasture, mowing and exploitation of peat.

Snipe censuses were based on the count of displaying ("drumming") males in the period of their highest activity on breeding grounds (Blokhin *et al.*, 2004). It is conventionally accepted that the number of displaying males approximately positively correlates with the number of females nesting on the same ground. The work involves several stages: describing Snipe habitats at the study plots; determining the optimum periods of the day for census; identifying breeding grounds and conducting a male census.

The general period of Snipe's display extends from late March to late July for the whole country. However, the maximum drumming activity of males is at the beginning of the breeding season. Snipe starts breeding at various time periods according to latitude. Consequently, the breeding Snipe census was adapted to the situation. Census in the forest zone (except for the northern taiga) was carried out from late April to the first half of May, from the second decade of May to the beginning of June in the north taiga and in June in forest-tundra and tundra. In order to ensure a complete census of territorial males, a twofold census was performed with an interval of a few days.

The potential Snipe habitats were firstly defined on a map and then explored. The Snipe censuses were carried out approximately during 2 - 4 h in the morning and in the evening. The visited area was usually between 30 and 100 ha.

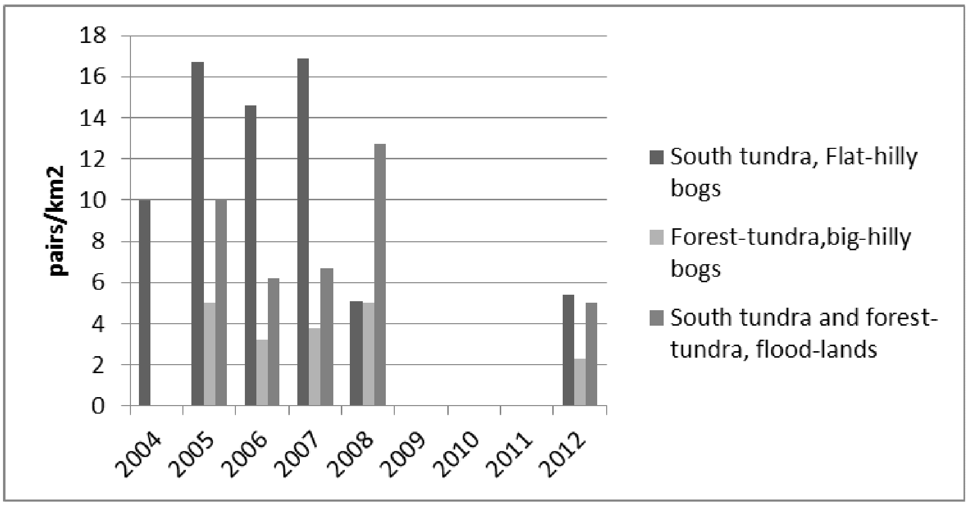

Figure 2. *Breeding density of Common Snipe in swampy habitats of south tundra and forest-tundra.*

Weather conditions in 2012 and their effect on Common Snipe

North region: south tundra, forest-tundra
Spring was early and warm. The spring flood was early and low. In general, the weather was warm and dry in the Snipe breeding period, which was favourable for a safe breeding.

North region: north taiga
After a severe winter but with little snow, spring was dry which resulted in a drop of water level to the minimum, and many plots dried out. It started raining from 25 May, and it rained almost every day. The year turned out to be unfavourable for Snipe breeding.

Ural region: south taiga
The river spring flood was high. May and June were accompanied by frequent thunderstorms, heavy showers and wind squalls. As a result of the rains, the water level of rivers remained almost the same as in spring.

Central region: south taiga, coniferous-deciduous forests (mixed, or coniferous-broad leaved forests) and deciduous forests (broad leaved forests)
Spring came late, but turned out to be very warm. As a result of a late and rich melting of snow, moistness was sufficient in the Snipe breeding period. A high and prolonged flood took place, which had not occurred since a long time. Water meadows and riverside woods were flooded from mid-April to early

May. It constantly rained from early June and the bogs became saturated with water. The water level increased again in rivers and lakes. As a result of a prolonged flooding of meadow habitats, the nests were probably also flooded, and spring 2012 turned out to be not the most favourable for Snipe breeding in river valleys. At the same time, the floods and precipitation ensured prolonged maintenance of dampened Snipe breeding habitats.

Central Black Earth region: deciduous forest and forest-steppe
Positive temperatures settled in the second half of March. The opening of rivers was recorded in early April. The spring flood passed quietly, and the rise of water was lower than average. But, as a result of active melting of snow, stable warm weather and rains, a new water rise occurred in some rivers.

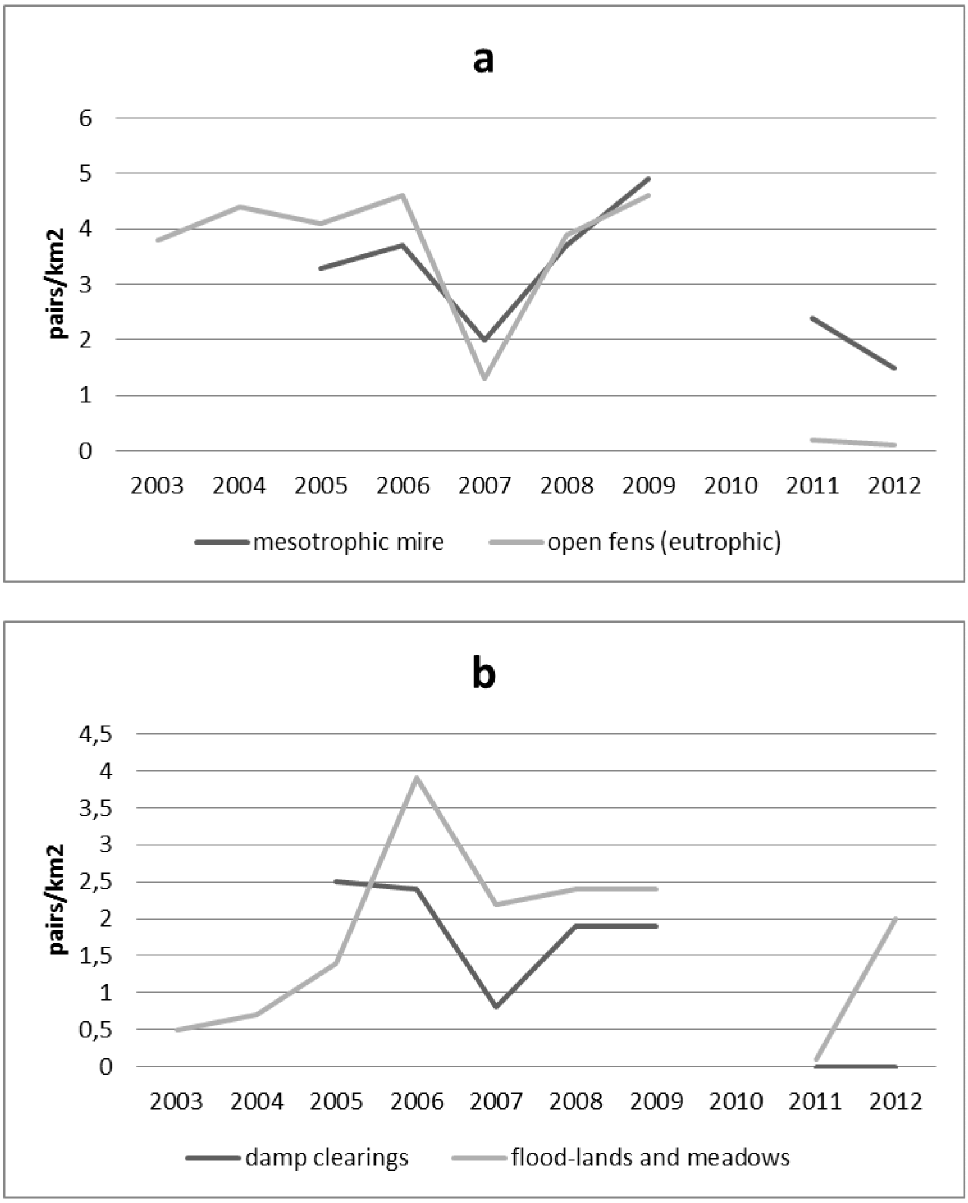

Figure 3. *Breeding density of Common Snipe in swampy habitats of north taiga.*

Results

Common Snipe densities in different regions

South tundra

In the basin of Pechora river in the north-east of Bolshezemelskaya tundra (Komi Republic), Snipe were observed in flat-hilly peat bogs with bushes and open fens in flood-lands at densities of 5.4 pairs/km^2 and 3.3 pairs/km^2, respectively.

Forest-tundra

In the south-east of Bolshezemelskaya tundra (Komi Republic) Snipe was less common in large hilly bogs on watersheds than in valleys and river flood-lands (resp. 2.3 pairs/km^2 and 5.8 pairs/km^2).

North taiga

In the basin of Severnaya Dvina river *(*Arkhangelsk region*)* no Snipe was registered in clearings (including up to 30-40% fen bogs with sedge). On low-lying bogs, 0.1 pairs/km^2 were counted and 1.5 pairs/km^2 on transitional (mesotrophic) mires. The density on damp meadows in flood-plains and on meadows in combination with low-lying bogs (eutrophic) was estimated at 2.0 pairs/km^2.

South taiga

In the basin of Zapadnaya Dvina river (Smolensk region), the counts revealed a relatively high number of territorial males at damp near uninhabited villages and in wet spots in farmlands (3.6 pairs/km^2). Snipe prefers tussocky boggy locations along shores of lakes (7.4) and river flood-lands where it breeds on flood plain grass and tussocky meadows (4.4 pairs/km^2). Snipe inhabits edges of high (raised) sphagnum bogs (2.1 pairs/km^2) and mesotrophic mires (4.2 pairs/km^2), but its density reaches a maximum on burnt high (raised) bogs (11.7 pairs/km^2).

In the basin of upper Volga river (Ivanovo region) the density ranged from 2.5 to 4.6 pairs/km^2 in burnt-out forests. On raised bogs, with separate low small pines and plots with high pines on ridges, all territorial males were found closer to bog edges, and were absent in their central part (8.5 -20 pairs/km^2). On peat opencast mines with willow bushes and ponds, clear or totally covered with floating mat, the Snipe density was 8.4 pairs/km^2. On damp water meadows, the Snipe density ranged from 7.1 to 23.8 pairs/km^2 (10.6 pairs/km^2 on average). On open fens formed on the river flood-lands, the Snipe density reached 20.8 pairs/km^2.

In the basin of Kama river (Perm region) the Snipe density was the highest in an open fen at the upper part of a pond, and raised to13.3 pairs/km^2. In a fen bog, formed in the place of an old peat exploitation, the density was 4.0 pairs/km^2. In a damp herb meadow, at the place of a drained fen bog and on a damp meadow (former pasture) it was 3.4-3.5 pairs/km^2.

Coniferous-broad-leaved forests

In the basin of upper Volga river (Moscow, Ryazan', Vladimir regions**)** 4.0-8.4 pairs/km^2 were registered in the valleys with water-meadows interspersed with low-lying sedge bogs, 17.0 pairs/km^2 in the river watersheds, 4.4 pairs/km^2 in meadow areas adjoining bogged depressions. In the mesotrophic mires and waterlogged forests, the densities were 5.7 pairs/km^2 and 2.0 pairs/km^2, respectively.

In the basin of middle Volga (Mordoviya), Snipe bred in mesotrophic mires (17.3 pairs/km^2), river valleys in open fens (19.1) and forest fens (8.9), peat pits (14.3), damp flood meadows (13.2) and sphagnum raised bogs (2.7).

Broad-leaved forests

In the basin of Volga river (Moscow and Penza regions) and the basin of Dnepr river (Kursk region), the densities were 3.9 - 5.5 pairs/km^2 in floodplain lowland sedge bog patches combined with wet meadows. The Snipe density reached 1.3 pairs/km^2 in open fen watersheds on former peat pits.

Forest-steppe

In the flood-lands of rivers of the Dnepr basin (Kursk region) the density of Snipe on damp water meadows in combination with fen bogs ranged from 3.0 to 7.1, with an average of 5.5 pairs/km^2.

In summary, in 2012, the Common Snipe densities during the breeding period were the lowest in flood-lands and in interfluves in the north taiga (2.0 and 1.0-2.4 pairs/km^2, resp.) and in fen bogs out of flood-lands in the broad leaved forest sub-zone of the south taiga (0.7). The densities were the highest in fen bogs out of flood-lands in south taiga (20.8).

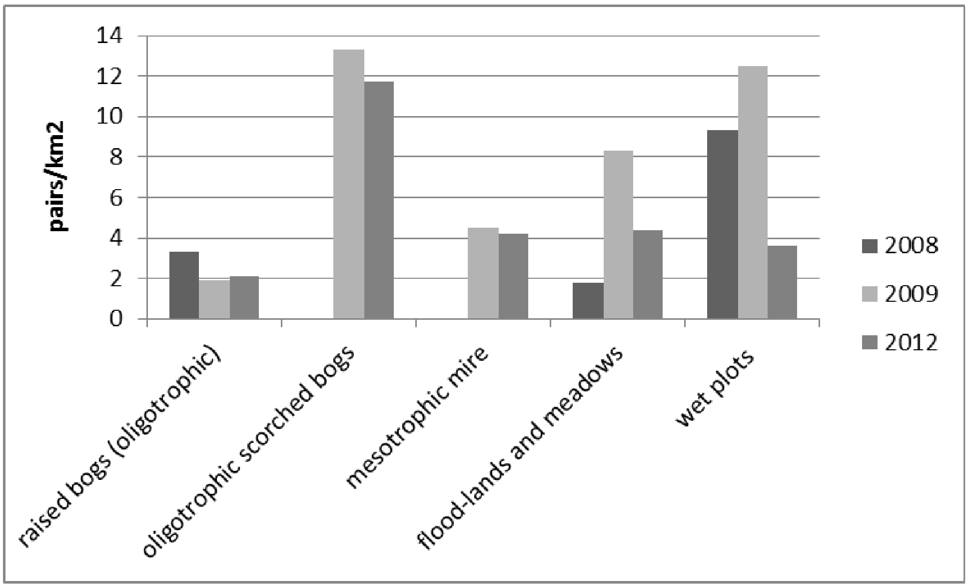

Figure 4. *Breeding density of Common Snipe in swampy habitats of south taiga.*

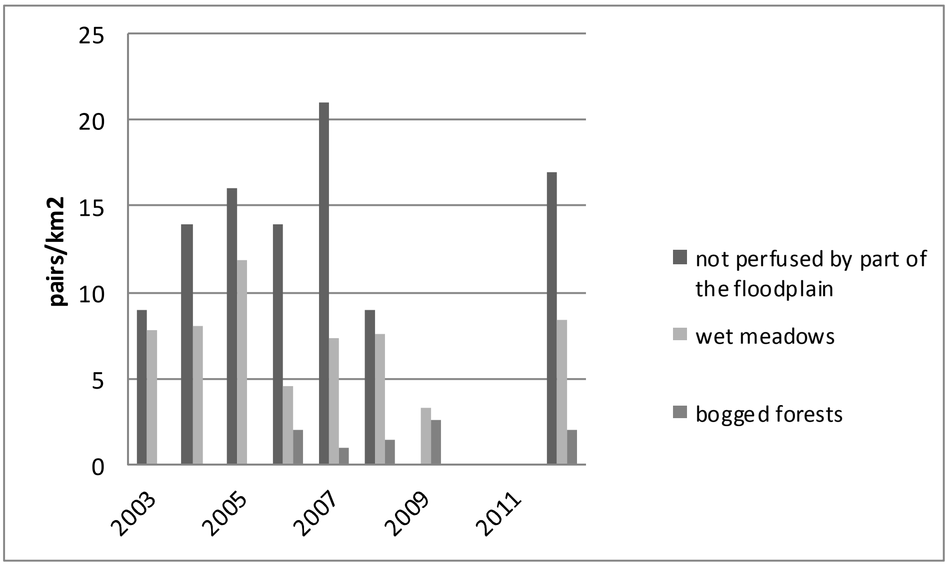

Figure 5. *Breeding density of Common Snipe in swampy habitats of coniferous-broad leaved forest.*

Inter-annual fluctuations of the Common Snipe density

South tundra and forest-tundra

In spite of good weather conditions in the south tundra and forest-tundra, Common Snipe numbers were lower in control sites (basin of Pechora and Usa rivers) in 2012 than in the previous years. This decline was especially noticeable in flat-hilly bogs and in river valleys and flood-lands (Figure 2).

North taiga

The density of Snipe on control sites (basin of Severnaya and Pokshen'ga rivers) turned out to be lower in 2012 than in the previous years in mesotrophic (excluding 2003: 1.0 pairs/km^2) and eutrophic bogs, and no Snipe was found in clearings (Figure 3). In flood meadows, the density of Snipe turned out to be in the average, but above the 2011 value. The reasons for this decline could be heavy rains and cold weather in end of May and June.

South taiga
At the boundary of south taiga and mixed coniferous-broad leaved forest (basin of Zapadnaya and El'sha rivers), the density of Common Snipe drumming males dropped in 2012 in wet spots in farmlands and uninhabited villages and in wet meadows. In the other habitats (oligotrophic bogs, oligotrophic scorched bogs, mesotrophic bogs) the densities turned out to be similar in 2009 and 2012 (Figure 4).

Coniferous-broad leaved forest
In the 2012 breeding season, which was characterized by high moisture, the density of Common Snipe was in the average in watersheds (Taldom elevation) and non-flooded flood-land areas (Volga basin and Dubna river). In flooded areas (Volga basin, Klyazma river), the density turned out to be higher than in the previous years (Figure 5).

Broad-leaved forests
The flood-lands of Central Russia rivers were flooded for a long time in the 2012 season (Figure 6). The high numbers of Snipe (Volga basin, Moskva river; higher than in 2003-2009) seemed to be linked to the combination of a long-term and progressive water logging and very favourable weather conditions for Snipe breeding in spring and in the first half of summer.

In spite of their small areas compared with the Russian Plain, an incomplete coverage of important habitats of the species and biases linked to drumming male censuses, we consider that the control sites could be representative of the Snipe situation. Under this hypothesis, the 2012 censuses showed low numbers of Common Snipe in tundra, forest-tundra and north taiga compared with the previous years. A significant decrease was also registered in the south taiga. However, the numbers remained in the average in the coniferous-broad leaved forest sub-zone. Finally, the densities were high in the broad-leaved forest sub-area.

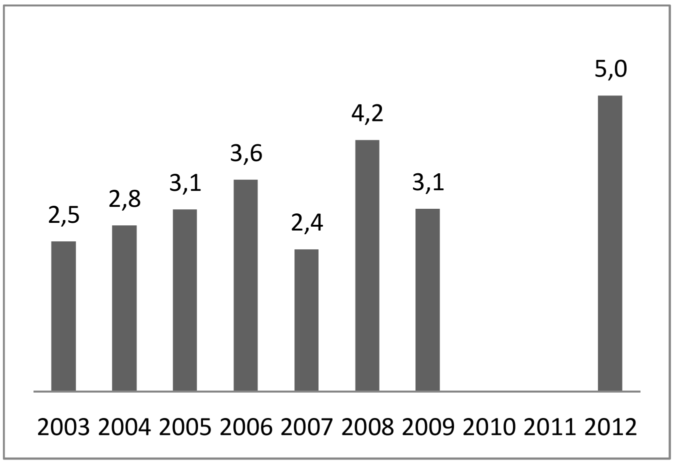

Figure 6. *Breeding density of Common Snipe in flood-lands of broad-leaved forests (pairs/km²).*

Conclusion

Estimations of Common Snipe drumming males in as large a number of control sites as possible appears to be a necessary condition for getting reliable data on this resource in extensive territories. Our results showed that the Common Snipe numbers fluctuate substantially from one year to another. Thanks to previous studies carried out in 2003-2009, we were able to carefully evaluate the fluctuations of breeding Common Snipe numbers in different geographical regions of European Russia.
A monitoring of Common Snipe started on control sites in 2012. Taking into account the great importance of European Russia for the Common Snipe resources in Eurasia, this monitoring should be continued as long as possible, with attention and support of ONCFS and the contribution to these studies of a large group of Russian ornithologists.

Acknowledgments

We express our thanks to the project coordinator in France, Dr. Yves Ferrand, and all participants of the census: Dr. Dr. S. Yu. Fokin, Dr. S.V. Korkina, M. V. Kozlova, Dr. V. N. Mel'nikov, Dr. A. L. Mischenko, V. V. Morozov, Yu. M. Romanov, Dr. O. V. Sukhanova, Dr. M.V. Sidenko, Dr. S.N. Spiridonov, Dr. T.V. Sviridova, S.V. Jerdeva, Prof. A. I. Shepel',with the participation of Dr. D. E. Chudnenko, Dr. V. V. Frolov, A. A. Esergepov, D. B. Koltsov, A. P. Mezhnev, G. P. Shmeleva, Dr. A. V. Sharikov, who have worked on implementation of the Snipe project in the regions.

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Incubation of Jack Snipe

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The Jack Snipe is one of the least studied snipe species. There is no exact data on incubation of the species. According to some published information, incubation lasts "at least 24 days" (Cramp, Simmons, 1983). In the last monograph on Jack Snipe published by G.N. Olivier (2007) the same information is cited.

In 2001-2002, I carried out surveys of Jack Snipe in the eastern Bolshezemelskaya tundra in Vorkuta districts of Komi Republic (Russia) within the framework of the Research Agreement N° 2002/91 between ONCFS (France) and «CENTROKHOTCONTROL» (Russia). Seven nests of Jack Snipe were found. Incubation of one clutch with 4 eggs lasted at least 25 days. One of the nests contained an incomplete clutch of 3 eggs and the incubation period of this clutch was defined exactly. It was 30.3 days (Morozov, 2006). I have explained such a long incubation period as the result of unfavourable weather conditions in the summer 2002 which was cold and very wet. The maximum day temperatures reached no more than + 14-15ºC. It rained nearly every day for many hours, corresponding to heavy northern and northwestern winds.

After 2003, special Jack Snipe surveys in the eastern European Russian tundra were not carried out. However, during Common Snipe surveys financed by ONCFS as well in 2003-2007 in the same area, I found a Jack Snipe's nest with an incomplete clutch of 2 eggs on June 18, 2007 at 14.00. The clutch was completed on June 20, 2007 at noon. It contained 4 eggs. Later, I checked the nest only twice to mitigate disturbance. The first time I checked the nest on July 7 when the female was caught and ringed. I checked the nest for a second time on July 15 at 19.00. That day the clutch contained 4 eggs, each with a small hole that was indicative of soon hatching. Downy young were hatched at night and in the early morning on July 16. They were in the nest at 06.00, three of them were already dry and one was trying to break free from the eggshell. So, 25 full days and 16 hours passed between the checking of the clutch on June 20 and July 16 and incubation of this clutch lasted 25.5–26 days for different eggs. It is important to note that the weather conditions during incubation were warm and sunny without night frosts. This means that the female incubated the clutch in comfortable conditions and eggs did not get too cold during its absence from the nest.

Hence, one can conclude that normal incubation of Jack Snipe lasted 25-26 days.

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Roding and Woodcock hunting in the Vologda region, North Russia

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The Vologda region is located in the north of the Russian plain. Its area is about 145 000 km² (more than Greece). It is a low plain with a hilly relief, many bogs and reservoirs. Middle taiga and South taiga occupy about 75 % of its territory (80 % in the northwest and southeast, up to 50 % in the central part). More than half of coniferous forests are firs. However, the forests form a mosaic with 42 % of deciduous, therefore suitable habitats for nesting woodcocks can be found everywhere.
The population density is 8.8/km² (8.4 in the whole Russia). There are 37 000 hunters in the Vologda region and their density is 3.9/km² on hunting lands (0.2 in the whole Russia). Woodcock is a favorite and accessible game bird in this region. Taking into account the social importance of this species, the Department on protection, control and regulation of hunting of the Vologda region together with the Scientific Woodcock group and a department of hunting ornithology of the State informational-analytical center of game animals and environment carried out a Woodcock monitoring in the last years.

Parts of oblast	Municipal districts (numbers of districts on a map
Southeast	Babushkinsky (24), K-Gorodetsky(26), Nikolsky (25), Siamzhensky (22), Totemsky (23)
Northeast	Velikoustugsky (21), Verkhovazhsky (18), Vozhegodsky (17), Nuksensky (20), Tarnogsky (19)
Northwest	Belozersky (8), Vashkinsky (9), Vytegorsky (7), Kirillovsky (10)
Southwest	Babaevsky(3), Kaduisky (4), Ustuzhensky (2), Chagodashensky (1), Cherepovetsky (5), Sheksninsky (6)
South and Center	Vologda (11), Griazovetsky (15), Mezhdurechensky (16), Sokolsky (14), Ust-Kubensky (12), Kharovsky (13)

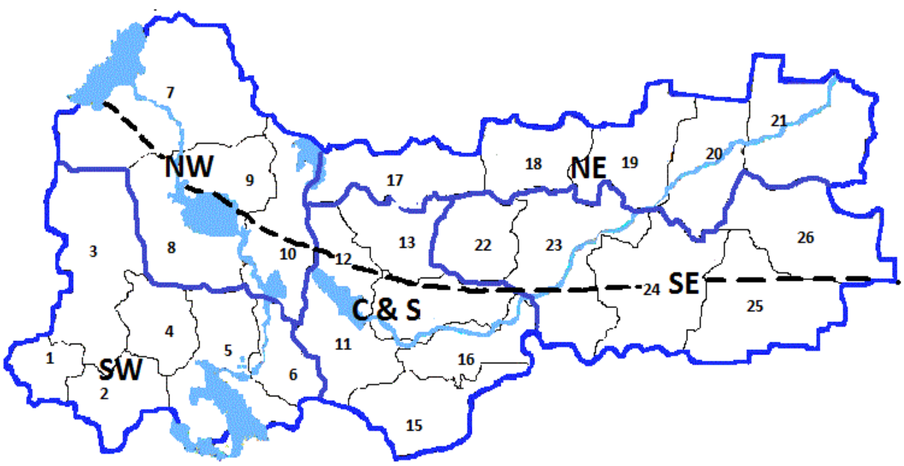

***Table 1.** Territorial division of the Vologda region. The dotted line shows the border of the Middle and South taigas.*

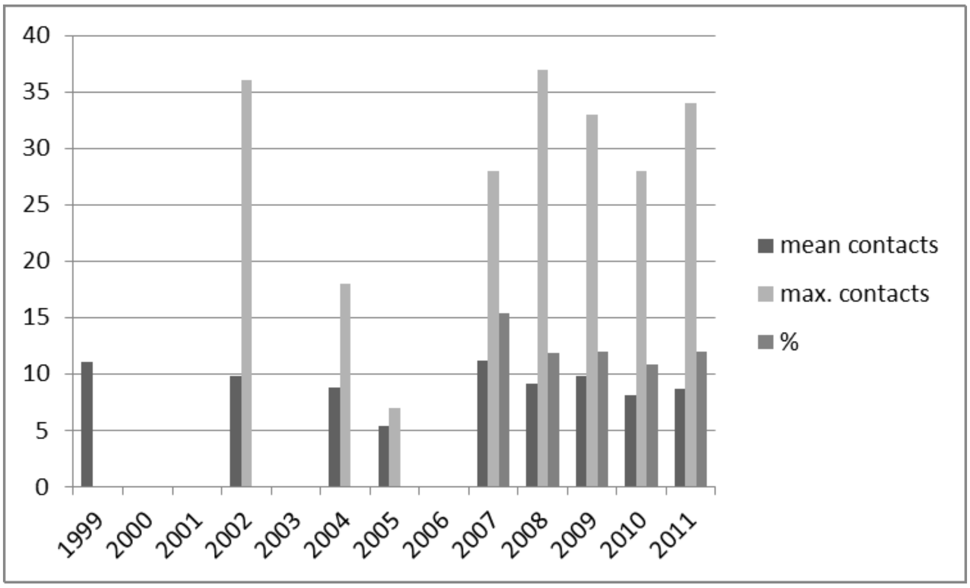

Figure 1. *Details of roding intensity during the National Woodcock Roding Census in the Vologda region (contacts and % "males flying together").*

Methods

Since 1999, a roding census is performed in the Vologda region at the end of May within the framework of the National Woodcock Roding Census (NWRC). However, these censuses are carried out on an annual basis only since 2007 (Figure 1). Besides this, spring migration is monitored on a weekly basis (on Wednesdays) since 2008 in all districts of the region from the third decade of April to the end of May through roding censuses. These censuses cover all the spring hunting season and days before and after the season. Protocol and questionnaire use for the regional census fully comply with those of the NWRC (Blokhin & Fokin, 2006). Each questionnaire corresponds to one listening point. All of them are strictly selected before analysis. After selection, 1 344 questionnaires were collected in the Vologda region through the NWRC and 1712 through the regional census. In total, 38 885 Woodcock contacts were registered. For convenience, we used an indice of roding intensity according to the following classification: "weak" roding (< 5.1 contacts for 2 hour-census), "average" roding (5.1-10), "good" roding (> 10).

Information on found Woodcock nests was included in the questionnaire from 2008 and we obtained data for 6.

In 2008-2010, an individual card of spring woodcock shooting, already used in the past (Blokhin & Fokin, 2009) was distributed to the Vologda region hunters. During these 3 years, the hunters returned about 2000 cards of which 1360 were used for analysis. A total of 3 949 shot woodcocks was registered and 711 birds wounded and lost.

In the 2010 spring hunting, woodcocks bagged by hunters were collected from 25 April to 24 May. A total of 249 birds were received from 25 districts (6 to 15 per district). The name of the hunter, the shooting place, the date and the exact shooting time were noted for every bird. Age of 214 individuals was determined by examination of wing plumage (Ferrand & Gossmann, 1995).

The collected material was distributed in 5 sub-regions and 2 types of habitat (Middle and South taiga) according to the shooting location (Table 1).

Table 2. *Maximal values registered during the roding censuses at listening points in the Vologda region.*

Municipal district (a site in oblast)	Village	Number		Year
		Contacts	Birds	
Vologda (the center, a southern taiga)	Mynchakovo	37	41	2008
Verkhovazhsky (northeast, an middle taiga)	Olushino	36	38	2002
Cherepovetsky (a southwest, a southern taiga)	Chikeevo	34	38	2008
Siamzhensky (a southeast, a southern and middle taiga)	Zhitievo	34	36	2011
Velikoustugsky (northeast, an middle taiga)	Poltarsa	33	35	2009
Mezhdurechensky (the center, a southern taiga)	Shichenga	32	35	2008

Results and discussion

Roding census

During the last 5 years, no more than one listening point without contact was registered within the framework of the NWRC in the Vologda region. Some researchers consider the region as an optimum for Woodcock breeding and have described high densities (Kuzyakin, 1999). However, after 8 years of implementation of the NWRC, the average roding intensity in the Vologda region is 9.17 ± 0.47 contacts, i.e. in the "average" class. This region occupies only the 13th place among 42 regions in the European part of Russia. The lowest season was 2005 (5.4) and the highest (11.2) in 2007 (Figure 1). If we take into account only the last 4 years during which the report rate of questionnaires was higher, the lowest roding intensity was registered in 2010 (8.1) and the highest in 2009 (9.8).

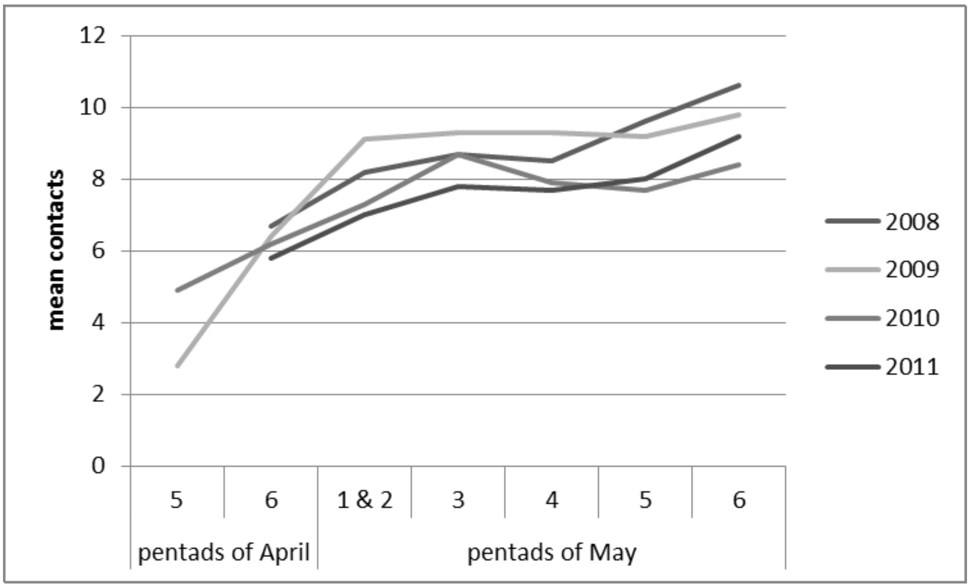

Figure 2. *Intra-annual fluctuations of the mean number of contacts in the Vologda region during the period 2008-2011.*

Another indicator is the feeling of hunters when comparing a season to the previous one. In general, a majority of hunters considered that the season was worse than the previous one. This proportion ranged from 47.1 % in 2008 to 52.9 % in 2010. A smaller proportion considered that the season was better (from 31.0 % in 2008 to 39.0 % in 2009). The rest considered the season as similar (range: 11.4 % - 21.9 %).

These hunters' feelings agree more or less with the roding censuses. For example, roding intensity was better in 2009 than in 2008. But in 2010, roding intensity was really worse than in 2009 according to the censuses. However, in 2010, the average and maximal hunting bags

were above those of the last years, and the numbers of hunters with 0 or 1 bagged woodcock were below.
For the study period, more than 30 contacts for one listening point were registered at only 9 points in the Vologda region(6 in 2008), always at the end of May. The maximal number of contacts (37) was noted in 2008 (Table 2). The observation of males flying together (2, 3, 4 males) ranged on average from 10.8 % to 12.1 % each year. However, in theTotemsky district (southeast of the region) this proportion ranged from 21.5 to 28.7 % without relevant explanation. Every year, no more than 1 - 2 contacts with four birds are registered in the Vologda region.
In average, the number of contacts increased from the end of April to the end of May (Figure 2). Despite hunting in the first half of May, an increase of roding intensity is observed every year. For the last 4 years, the best roding intensity was observed in the southeast of the Vologda region: 13.8 contacts on average in 2008, 13.5 in 2009. This area is characterized by large forests (up to 80 % of the land area).

Part of region	2008		2009		2010	
	Average	n	Average	n	Average	n
Northeast	3.37 ± 0.32	46	2.22 ± 0.12	184	3.56 ± 0.27	70
Northwest	2.27 ± 0.16	106	2.90 ± 0.18	132	3.35 ± 0.40	43
Total northern group	2.61 ± 0.15	152	2.45 ± 0.10	308	3.48 ± 0.22	113
Southwest	3.09 ± 0.18	118	2.99 ± 0.18	167	3.90 ± 0.21	129
South and Center	1.95 ± 0.16	37	3.06 ± 0.15	173	2.81 ± 0.25	57
Southeast	1.66 ± 0.15	88	2.79 ± 0.26	71	3.10 ± 0.28	48
Total southern group	2.40 ± 0.11	242	2.99 ± 0.11	411	3.47 ± 0.15	234
Total	**2.48 ± 0.09**	**394**	**2.76 ± 0.08**	**719**	**3.47 ± 0.12**	**347**

Table 3. *Individual Woodcock hunting bags (per hunter) for a spring season in different parts of the Vologda region (number of birds).*

Hunting

In the Vologda region, the Woodcock hunting season usually opens at the end of April - beginning of May. Till 2008, its duration was 10 days. Since 2009, it has been extended to 16 days. As the Vologda region area is very large, the hunting season is stretched. The analysis of the official data showed that about 10 000 woodcocks are bagged in spring in the Vologda region and near 3 800 in autumn.
For the 2000’s, the Woodcock hunting bag in spring in the Vologda region is at the level of the Leningrad, Nizhniy Novgorod and Tver regions but below those of the Moscow and Yaroslavl regions. The autumn hunting bag is at the level of the Nizhniy Novgorod and Krasnodar regions but below that of the Stavropol one.
The fluctuations of the Woodcock hunting bags for the last 15 years are presented in Figure 3. An increase appears at the beginning of the 2000’s probably in relation with changes in the form of the hunting licenses and an improvement in reporting of hunting results. A better recovery rate of individual licenses since 2001 provided more complete information on Woodcock bags in comparison with the previous years. The level of spring bags is much higher than the autumn level (5.5 times in 2010) which is typical in northern and central regions of European Russia. During the last two years, the hunters of the Vologda region shot 80 - 85 % woodcocks on roding in spring and 15 - 20 % in autumn with pointing dogs. Woodcock spring hunting appears more popular than Woodcock autumn hunting. On one hand, the hunters prefer to hunt the larger species of game birds in autumn and, on the other hand, a small number of them use pointing dogs in the Vologda region. According to the Department of hunting dog breeding of the Russian Hunting Association “Rosohotrybolovsoyuz”, 9 604 pointing dogs and 4 151 spaniels were registered at the end of 2011 in the whole Russia. In the Vologda region, only 20 pointing dogs and 51 spaniels are listed. At the same time, the Woodcock hunters with pointing dogs inhabiting Moscow city and the Moscow region (where 1 445 pointing dogs and 375 spaniels are known) regularly come to the Vologda region. Quite often, hunters from other regions of Russia also come to Vologda.

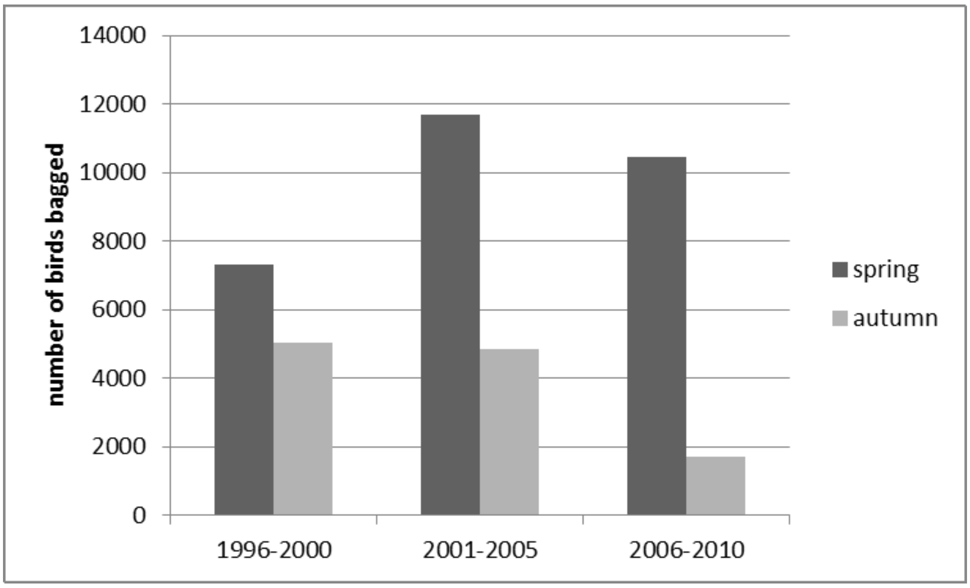

Figure 3. *Woodcock hunting bags in the Vologda region from1996 to 2010 (mean for 5 year-periods).*

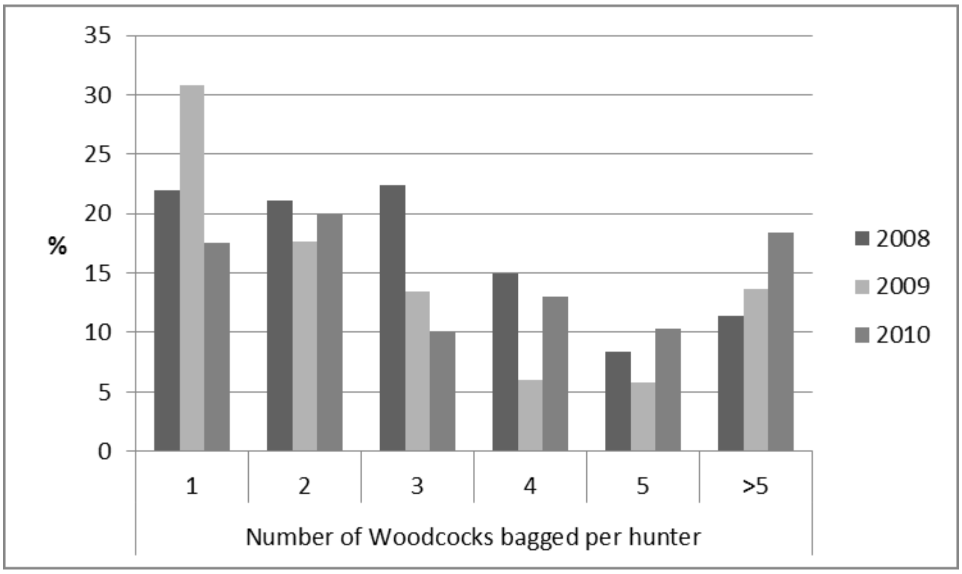

Figure 4. *Distribution of hunters according to their spring Woodcock hunting bag (n. woodcocks ≥ 1) in 2008-2010.*

Official data do not allow knowing how many hunters who bought a license for shooting birds really hunted Woodcock (Blokhin & Fokin, 2009). For the 1998-2005 period, the estimations based on the official data gave an average Woodcock annual bag ranging from 0.44 to 0.73 in spring and from 0.19 to 0.27 in autumn, in the Vologda region.

From 10.7 % to 16.5 % of hunters did not bag any woodcock in spring during the study period. From 17.6 % to 30.8 % shot only 1 bird and from 11.4 % to 18.4 % more than 5 birds (Figure 4). The mean Woodcock individual bag was maximal in 2010 (3.47 ± 0.12 birds) and minimal in 2008 (2.48 ± 0.09; Table 3). Wounded and lost birds for a season ranged from 0.46 ± 0.03 to 0.8 ± 0.05 per hunter. In total, wounded and lost birds represented from 15.6 % (2009) to 22.1 % (2010) of the total bag.

The rather low success of hunters in 2008 was undoubtedly linked to the smaller duration of the hunting season. On average, the individual spring hunting duration (= number of roding hunting trips) was 2.36 ± 0.10 days in 2008, 3.57 ± 0.09 in 2009 and 3.82 ± 0.13 in 2010. The increase of the duration of the hunting season from 10 to 16 days led to a significant increase in the average number of hunting trips. In 2008, 53.5 % of hunters hunted 1 to 9 days and 5.6 % hunted every 10 days. In 2009-2010, 23.0% and 28.1 % hunted 1 to 15 days, 2.9% and 3.9 % hunted every 16 days, respectively.

The individual hunting success on roding increased from 2008 to 2010 (Table 3). The highest value was noted in the southwest of the Vologda region in 2010 (3.90 ± 0.21) and the lowest in the southeast in 2008 (1.66 ± 0.15). No differences are observed between northern and southern districts.

The proportion of hunters with at least one shot woodcock varied from 83.5 % (2008) to 89.3 % (2010). The maximal bags for one hunter was 15 birds in 2008, 22 in 2009 (Vytegorsky district, northwest) and 31 in 2010 (Cherepovetsky district, southwest).

Results provided by the analysis of questionnaires are clearly biased in so far as hunters who did not bag any woodcock tend to not declare their null bag. Therefore it is impossible to precisely estimate the bag on the basis of these data. At the same time, these data are useful as a reference point in the estimation of bags for the successful hunters (bagging at least one woodcock per season), in the estimation of additional losses linked to gun use (wounded and lost birds) and in the estimation of hunting time duration per season for the most active hunters.

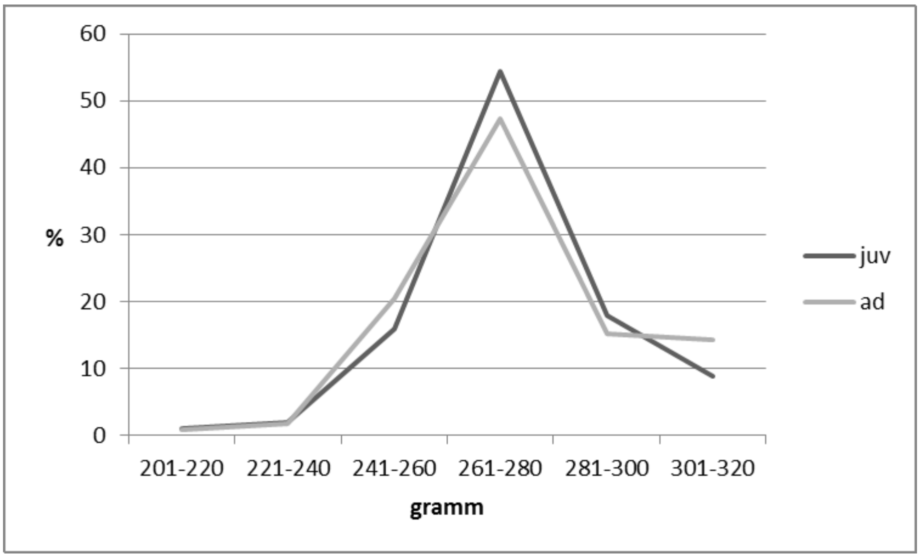

Figure 5. *Distribution of Woodcock male weights for juvenile and adult birds (n=213).*

Analysis of bagged woodcocks

As one would expect, all woodcocks bagged on roding (n = 249) were males. Juveniles represented 47.7 % and adults (more than 1 year old) 52.3 % (n = 213). Once again, examination of birds confirms achievement of sexual maturity of birds born in the previous spring. The weight of adults males ranged from 202 to 376g, (276.13 ± 1,47g on average; n = 112) and the weight of juveniles from 215 to 325g (274.07 ± 1.29 on average; n = 101) (Figure 5).

The data showed that adult males are slightly more numerous within the first hour of roding and juveniles in the second part (Figure 6). A peak in the hunting bag is observed around 21:30 and concerns adults and juveniles as well.

In the beginning of the spring hunting season (1-4 May) adults males appeared slightly more numerous than juveniles. At the very end of hunting (15-16 May) it is the opposite (Figure 7).

In 2010, two nests (complete brood) were found on 21 and 23 April in the southwest of the Vologda region (Cherepovetsky district). Hence, eggs were laid around mid-April.

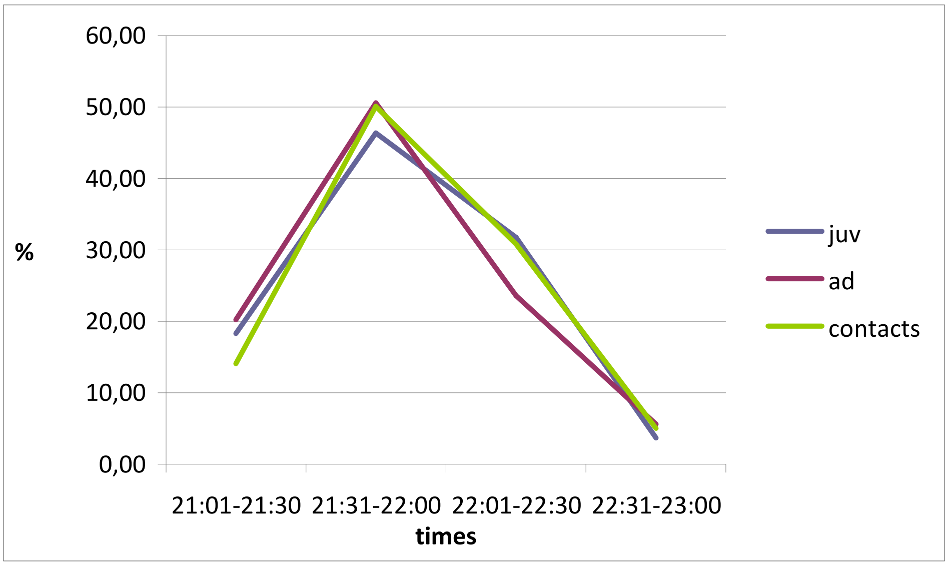

Figure 6. *Proportion of juvenile and adult Woodcock males in hunting bags (season 2010) according to the shooting time and proportion of contacts according to the roding time (period of censuses: 2003-2010).*

Ringing results

In total, 43 ringed woodcocks were recovered in the Vologda region. Forty were ringed in wintering sites in France, 2 in Great-Britain and 1 in Russia. Forty one ringed woodcock were shot on roding in spring and only 2 in autumn. On average, these woodcocks were recovered 578.4 days after ringing. The fastest recovery duration was 36 days for a bird ringed on 26 March 2004 in Haute-Savoie (France) and shot on 1st May 2004 in the Sokolsky district after a flight of 2 690 km. The slowest recovery duration was 2 257 days (6 years and 2 months) for a bird ringed on 4 March 2005 in Finistère (France) and bagged on roding in the Verkhovazhsky district on 9 May 2011.

The unique “Russian” woodcock was ringed in autumn at a "Fringilla" ringing station in the Kaliningrad region (northwest of Russia) and bagged on roding in the Cherepovets region 3 years later. For all the study period only one woodcock was ringed casually in the Vologda region near Cherepovets on 28 September 1996 and was found dead (frozen) in Serine (Spain) on 9 January 1997.

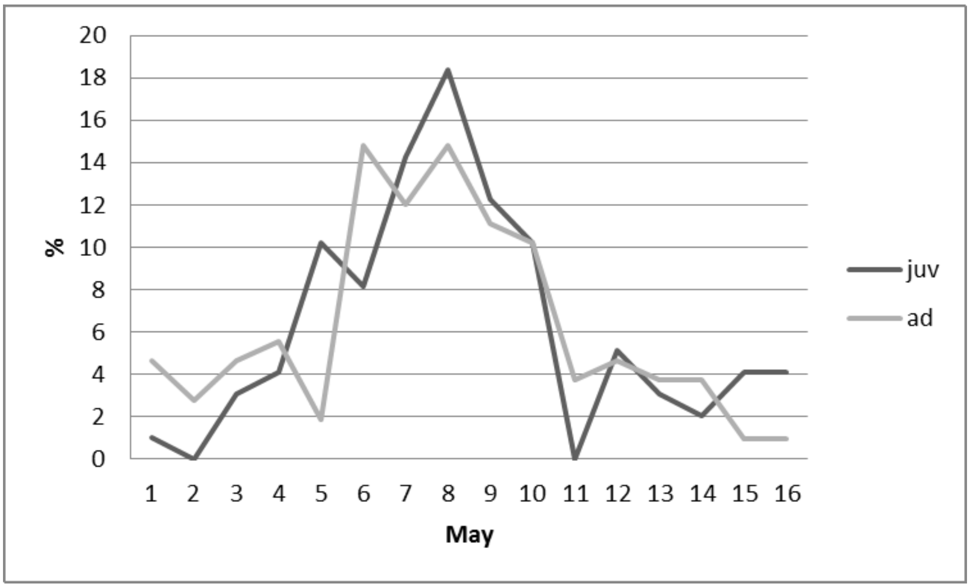

Figure 7. *Proportion of juvenile and adult Woodcock males bagged in May 2010 in the Vologda region (n = 216).*

Conclusions

The studies on Woodcock carried out in the Vologda region are unique in Russia. They included a monitoring at a regional level, information on hunting practices and hunting bags. In the last years, some problems linked to the census organization were solved, however controls must always be performed. The roding census should be continued, and then it will be possible to really estimate long-term dynamics of woodcock migration in the region.
Census results show that roding is rather stable in May, and the greatest intensity is reached at the end of this month. Such a pattern is not only characteristic of the Vologda region, but also of other regions in the European Russia. This explains why the NWRC is carried out at the end of May. Spring hunting appeared the most intense in the first half of May.
Almost 14 000 woodcocks are bagged every year in the Vologda region, of which 75% - 80 % in spring. About 1 - 2 % of hunters have a high success. However, a sampling bias was identified in so far as the proportion of hunters who do not shoot any woodcock or do not hunt at all is insufficiently known. Nevertheless, estimations on Woodcock hunting bags including wounded and lost birds can be provided and compared from one hunting season to another.
The analysis of shot woodcocks revealed or confirmed some aspects of the Woodcock biology, for example the exclusive participation of males in roding, the very low weight of males in the spring hunting period, the participation of juveniles in roding, an age-balanced ratio in roding.
Finally, the major part of the woodcock population nesting in the Vologda region probably winters in France.

Acknowledgements

This work was in part supported by an annual grant from ONCFS (France). We are very grateful to Andrei Filatov, the head of Department on protection, control and regulation of hunting of the Vologda region and all the hunters of the Vologda region who sent to us woodcocks and questionnaires.

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2012 European Russia roding census and Woodcock ringing report

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This work was conducted in 2012 within the framework of a scientific agreement between ONCFS and BirdsRussia. Two main activities were carried out: a National Woodcock Roding Census and ringing in summer and autumn.

The 14th National Woodcock Roding Census

The 14-th National Woodcock Roding Census was organized by the Moscow Woodcock research group, the Association *Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz*, several hunting offices and the "Russian hunter" newspaper. It was carried out on May 26, 2012.

In total 2 600 forms were sent to 35 provinces of the European part of Russia and Ural through the system of hunter societies of *Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz*. One issue of the "Russian hunter" newspaper presented the census form and the census methods, so that every reader was able to send a press-cutting with his own census results. The total number of forms distributed in Russia in 2012 was similar to that of the previous years. The form and the census methods remained exactly the same.

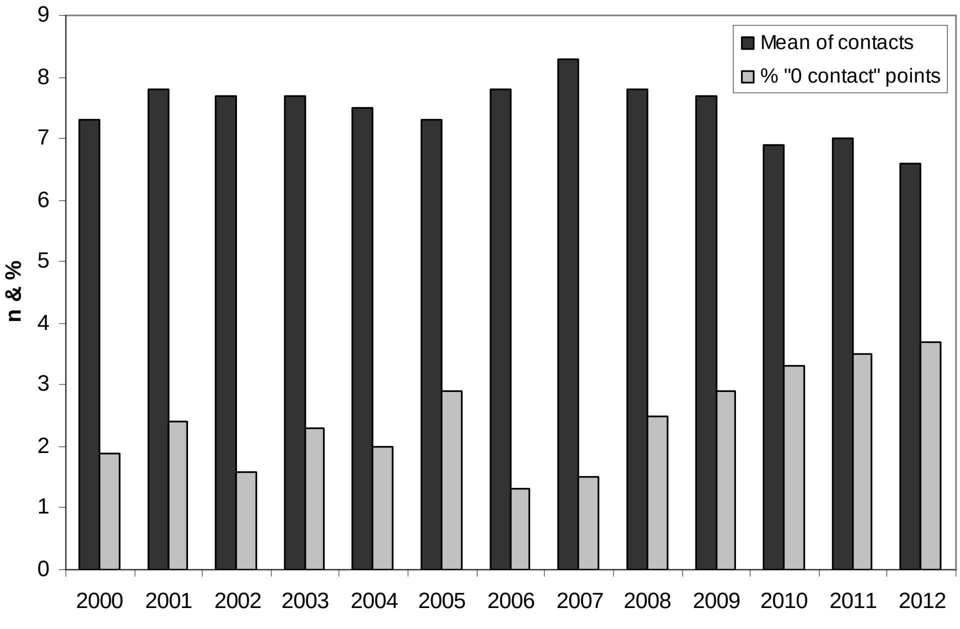

***Figure 1.** Results of the National Woodcock Roding Census in Russia from 2000 to 2012.*

By 2012, 1 977 forms (= points) were collected from 32 provinces of the European part of Russia. Five hundred sixty two forms (28.4%) were rejected. All the regions were more or less represented in the data set selected for analysis, but the Central and Ural regions gathered most of the data (Table 1). One hundred forty one forms came from the Sverdlovsk region, 134 from Ulyanovsk, 115 from Yaroslavl, 107 from Leningrad and 104 from Ivanovo. Several tens of forms were sent from many other regions and 1-2 forms were sent from the Arkhangelsk, Novgorod, Vologda regions and the republics of Bashkortostan and Karelia.
In total, 10 728 birds (9 309 contacts; 1.2 birds/contact) were registered at 1 415 census points. No woodcocks were seen at 52 points (3.7 %) in 11 different regions. The highest number of contacts and birds were registered

in the Leningrad region (36 contacts/38 birds), Lipetsk (29/34), Tver' (29/31) and Sverdlovsk regions (25/28).

For the whole Russia, 6.6 contacts (7.6 birds) per roding were registered on average in 2012.

A "weak" roding intensity (2.2-5.0 contacts per 2 hours of observation) was observed in 7 regions: Belgorod, Voronezh, Orel, Ryazan, Tambov, Tula, Moscow and in the Komi Republic.

An "average" roding intensity (5.1-10.0 contacts) was recorded in 13 regions: Bryansk, Chelyabinsk, Ivanovo, Kostroma, Kursk, Leningrad, Lipetsk, Penza, Sverdlovsk, Tver, Ulyanovsk, Yaroslavl, Vladimir, Perm and in 3 republics: Chuvashya, Mordovya and Tatarstan.

Finally, a "good" roding intensity (10.4-15.2 contacts) was registered in the Kirov and Pskov regions.

The roding activity (mean number of contacts, % of "0 contact" points) recorded in 2012 was the lowest in the 14 years of the National Roding Censuses in Russia (Figure 1). In addition, the proportion of regions with a "good" roding intensity (7.4 %) and those with a "weak" roding intensity (29.6 %) were respectively the lowest and the highest (except 2010) of the last 14 years.

		Total		Mean		Maximum		
Regions	**Number of points**	**Contacts**	**Birds**	**Contacts**	**Birds**	**Contacts**	**Birds**	**% « 0 contact » points**
Arkhangelsk	1	24	28	24.00	28.00	24	28	0
Vologda	1	8	8	8.00	8.00	8	8	0
Karelia	1	23	23	23.00	23.00	23	23	0
Komi	99	481	537	4.86	5.42	17	19	0
Leningrad	107	981	1122	9.17	10.49	36	38	0
Novgorod	1	10	10	10.00	10.00	10	10	0
Pskov	13	198	222	15.23	17.08	22	27	0
Bryansk	45	365	439	8.11	9.76	16	18	0
Vladimir	5	42	43	8.40	8.60	15	16	20.0
Ivanovo	104	663	738	6.38	7.10	17	21	0
Kostroma	53	506	577	9.55	10.89	21	26	0
Moscow	5	23	26	4.60	5.20	11	11	20.0
Orel	22	86	105	3.91	4.77	13	16	9.1
Ryazan	70	326	366	4.66	5.23	10	13	2.9
Tver	26	191	199	7.35	7.65	29	31	0
Tula	77	377	464	4.90	6.03	16	23	1.3
Yaroslavl	115	825	946	7.17	8.23	19	21	0
Belgorod	25	26	34	1.04	1.36	5	9	68.0
Voronej	41	91	104	2.22	2.54	6	7	19.5
Kursk	20	144	190	7.20	9.50	18	21	0
Lipetsk	44	310	380	7.05	8.64	29	34	0
Tambov	48	215	254	4.48	5.29	13	14	10.4
Kirov	24	241	264	10.04	11.00	21	24	0
Mordovya	35	214	229	6.11	6.54	15	16	0
Chuvashya	13	67	77	5.15	5.92	10	12	0
Penza	23	124	147	5.39	6.39	13	14	0
Tatarstan	21	117	133	5.57	6.33	14	14	23.8
Ulyanovsk	134	784	912	5.85	6.81	17	23	5.2
Bashkortostan	1	3	3	3.00	3.00	3	3	0
Perm	16	105	129	6.56	8.06	13	15	0
Sverdlovsk	141	1077	1245	7.64	8.83	25	28	1.4
Chelyabinsk	61	476	564	7.80	9.25	17	19	0
Total/mean	**1415**	**9309**	**10728**	**6.58**	**7.58**	**36**	**38**	**3.7**

Table 1. *Results of the 14th National Woodcock Roding Census in Russia in 2012.*

Ringing results

In autumn 2012, 5 teams of ringers worked in 5 Russian regions: Moscow, Vladimir, Tver, Kostroma and Ivanovo. Two woodcocks were ringed in July at Nizhny Novgorod during a Russian-French expedition. In total 131 woodcocks were ringed in 2012.

Conclusion

The data showed that the number of birds on autumn migration was low compared with the previous years. One reason could be a low density of the breeding population after the harsh weather conditions during winter 2011/2012 in south-west Europe.

The data of the National Woodcock Roding Census seems to confirm this phenomenon. Some ringing sites that were good spots for migrating birds in the previous seasons were empty this autumn. In spite of this, the breeding success in 2012 appeared good (89.3% juveniles).

<u>2012 ringing season in numbers</u>

N. regions: 6
N. sites: 18
N. ringers: 12
N. nights: 98
N. contacts: 444
N. ringed woodcock: 131
N. direct retraps: 6
Success rate: 29.5 %
Proportion of juveniles: 89.3 %
Proportion of “early broods” among juveniles: 65.8%
Proportion of “late broods” among juveniles: 34.2%
Mean body mass of adults (n= 9): 385.6 g
Mean body mass of juveniles (n= 82): 352.0 g

Woodcock chick ringed in Vladimir region (Russia).

Evaluation of the 2011/12 Woodcock hunting season in France

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This report is the 18th to be published by the *Club national des bécassiers* (CNB; a French Woodcock Hunter Association). It is based on the same protocol as in the previous years.

In 2011/12, 1,232 CNB members sent information on their hunting trips and 1,339 participated in the wing collection. In total, 10,333 wings were analysed. 9,101 birds were weighed and 1,663 were sexed. The data were collected in the major part of the Woodcock wintering area in France (Figure 1).

Hunting index of abundance (ICA)

The hunting index of abundance (ICA) used by CNB has been defined as the number of different woodcocks seen during a hunting trip, the standardized duration of which was 3.5 hours (Cau & Boidot, 2005)

In 2011/12, ICA was estimated from 31,538 hunting trips. Its national annual value is 1.74.

This value is higher than in 2010/11 (1.49). The monthly variations of ICA show high values in November, December and January (1.82, 1.76 and 1.68, resp.; Figure 2).

In 2011/12, a "mean" French Woodcock hunter made 26 hunting trips, saw 45 woodcocks and shot 10 of them.

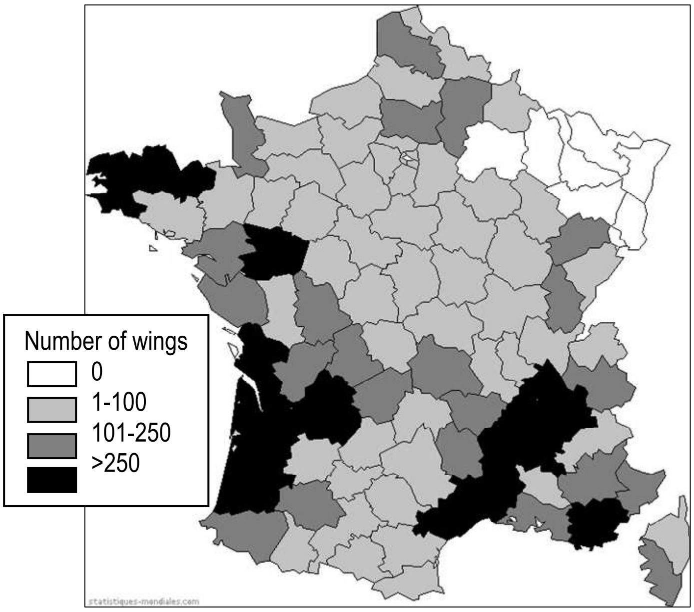

***Figure 1.** Distribution of the number of Woodcock wings collected in every French* département *during the 2011/12 survey*.

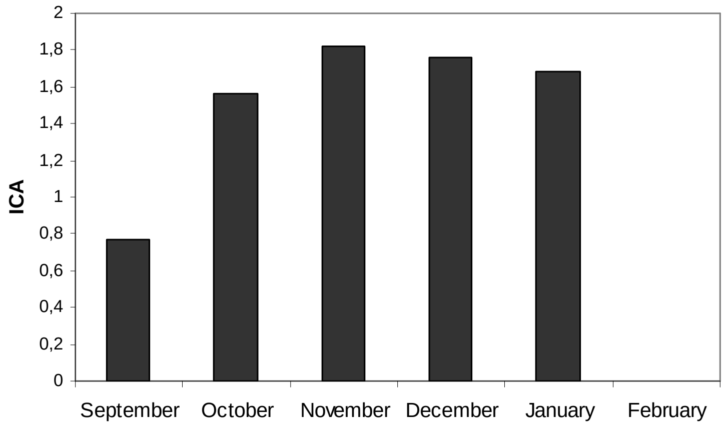

Figure 2. *ICA monthly variation in France for the 2011/12 hunting season.*

Juvenile/adult ratio

For 2011/12, the proportion of juveniles in the French Woodcock hunting bags is estimated at 72.0 %, i.e. 14 points above that of 2010/11 (the third highest for the 18 last seasons). This high value is probably linked to high breeding success in spring 2012.

Male/female ratio

In 2011/12, the proportion of Woodcock males in the CNB members' hunting bags was 38 %. This value is exactly the same as in 2010/11 and shows a remarkable stability from one year to another.

Variations in weight

The mean weight of a woodcock shot in 2011/12 was 313g (316g in 2010/11). As usual, the weight of adults was slightly higher than that of juveniles (315g *vs* 312g).

Adult females were the heaviest, 321g in average. The mean weight of juvenile females and adult males was 312g and 311g, respectively. The mean weight of juvenile males reached 310g. These are usual values.

Conclusion

The 2011/12 season was good and firstly characterized by an early arrival of birds in the north and east of France. In the course of winter, the "gravity center" of the wintering area moved from the northern half to the southern half. High age-ratio and ICA values also characterized the 2011/12 season.

After very mild December and January, a cold wave reached France in early February and remained till 12 February which led to a ban on Woodcock hunting in the great majority of French *départements*. Many dead woodcocks were found because of the late arrival of the cold wave and the faithfulness of birds to their wintering grounds at this time of the season.

Migrating and wintering woodcocks in France appear to have a good conservation status. However, this should be checked in every country of the Western Palearctic to be sure it can be assigned to the European Woodcock population as a whole.

Acknowledgements

We thank all volunteers who contributed to help us in the wing analysis and also the members of CNB scientific and technical commissions or report writers: J.C. Blanchard, P. Launay, J.M. Desbieys, J.F. Cau, N. Lefeuvre, J.P. Lepetit and J.L. Cazenave.

2011-2012 French Woodcock report

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From a meteorological point of view, the 2011/12 season was very mixed. Autumn was mild and wet from mid-November and the woodcocks found suitable conditions to winter everywhere in France. Inside the country, the numbers were high till January. But, at the beginning of February, a cold wave suddenly appeared. This event occurred late in the season and a rather high proportion of birds "chose" to not move to the coastal regions but stayed in their wintering site. Consequently, a high mortality was registered: about 300 dead woodcocks were collected in different French regions. However, the effect of these harsh conditions on the Woodcock populations remains difficult to estimate. As usual in such a situation, the ONCFS/FNC/FDC Woodcock network activated the "Cold spell protocol" and Woodcock hunting was definitely closed everywhere in France, except in 3 *départements* in the south-eastern part.

Apart from this climate event, we must underline the setting of a Woodcock bag limit at a national scale which aims first to control and adjust the bag to the demographic trend. But thanks to a compulsory filling in of a bag notebook, this new regulation should also provide an estimation of the number of woodcocks bagged every season.

2011-2012 ringing season in numbers

N. *départements*:	91
N. ringing sites:	1 620
N. ringers:	387
N. nocturnal trips (hours):	3 243 (6 580)
N. contacts:	25 940
N. ringed woodcocks:	6 618
Success rate:	27 %
N. direct retraps:	137
N. indirect retraps:	184
N. direct recoveries:	327
N. indirect recoveries:	556
Annual direct recovery rate:	4.9 %

Ringing results

Quantitative ringing results

With 6 618 ringed woodcocks, the 2011/12 season was one of the best of these last seasons. This can be explained by a homogeneous distribution of birds during 3 months in the national territory and relatively high densities. Moreover, the cold spell encouraged a part of the woodcocks to move to Atlantic regions where many birds were ringed. In total, 25 940 woodcocks were found by the ringers and a high success rate (≈ 27 %) was registered. The monthly distribution of captures was very similar to the 2010/11 season with a third of birds ringed in December and a quarter in November.

Proportion of juveniles

The proportion of juveniles among ringed birds was 66.7 %. It is the highest among the last 10 seasons. This value and a high abundance of wintering numbers argue for a good breeding success in spring 2011.

Monitoring of abundance during the migratory and wintering period

Two indices allow the monitoring of woodcock migratory and wintering numbers in France: the mean number of contacts/hour (IAN) registered during ringing trips and a hunting index [ICA: number of seen woodcocks / standardized hunting trip (duration = 3.5 hours)] collected by the *Club national des bécassiers.*

In 2011/12, IAN raised to 3.99 (Figure 1). It is the second highest value in the 16 last seasons. ICA estimated from a sample of 1 232 hunters and 31 538 hunting trips amounted to 1.74 which is also a high value. The statistical tests always show an increase trend for ICA since 1996/97 ($r = 0.75$; $p = 0.0006$) and for ICA and IAN since 2002/03 (resp. $r = 0.88$, $p = 0.0008$ and $r = 0.84$, $p = 0.0018$).

The IAN values of October and November were similar to the previous seasons, then a plateau was observed in December and January probably due to mildness of temperatures (Figure 2). The sudden cold spell in February led to an increase of the values because of the importance taken by the sites dedicated to the “Cold spell protocol”.

As in the last 9 seasons, a monitoring “in real time” was carried out in the course of the 2011/12 season. Now the data collected regularly every 10 days give a good estimation in so far as 84 % of the whole information is available.

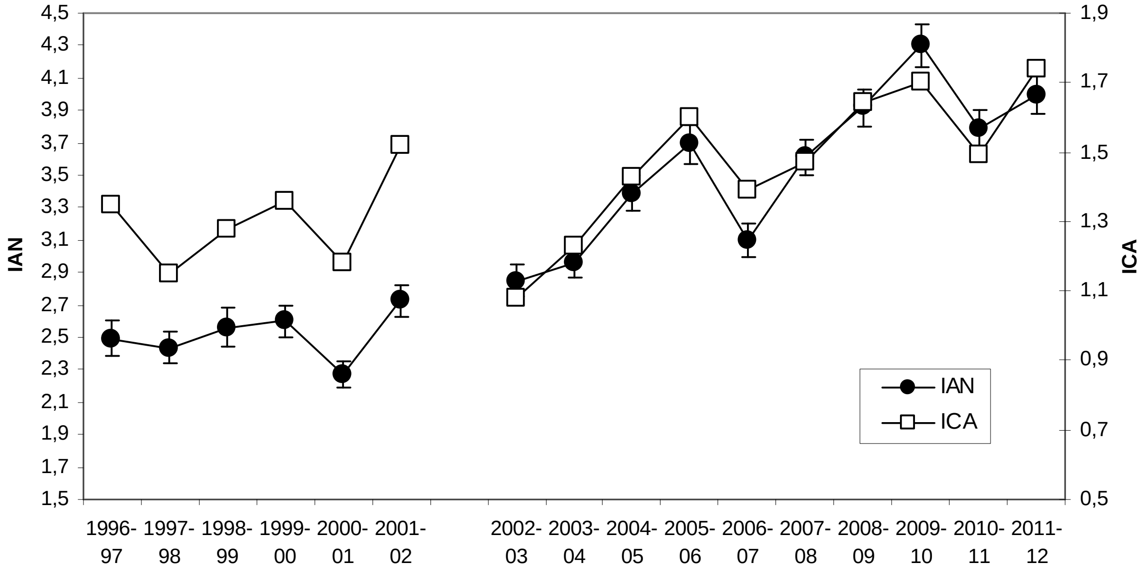

Figure 1. Annual fluctuations of the number of contacts/h during ringing trips (IAN: nocturnal index of abundance) and hunting trips (ICA: hunting index of abundance; Source: Club national des bécassiers*).Data have been divided into two periods due to a change in the method of calculation of IAN in 2002/03(see Newsletter 34).*

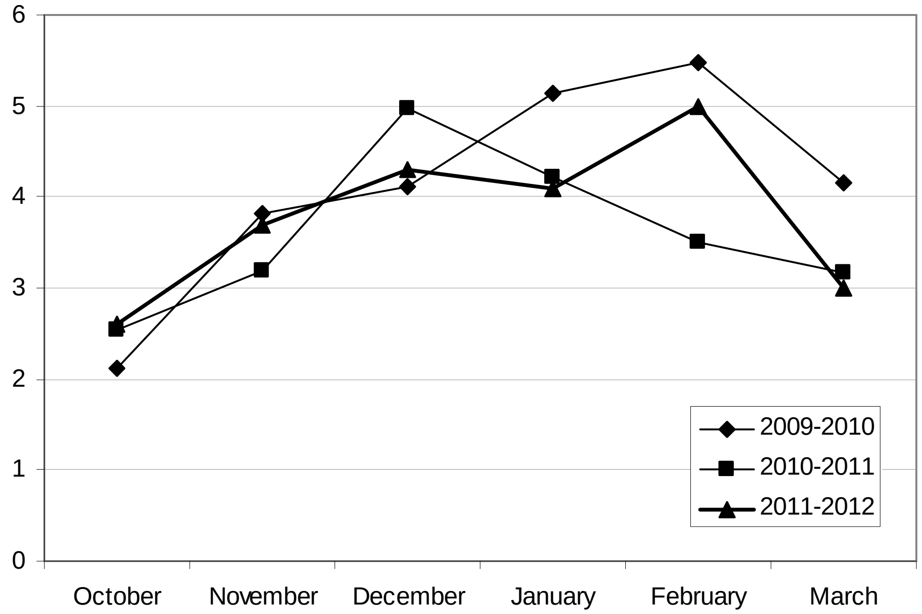

Figure 2. *Monthly fluctuations of IAN in 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12.*

Roding results

In 2012, roding censuses took place in 56 *départements* and 840 listening points were visited.

National occupation rate

This rate corresponds to the % of listening points at which at least one roding male was observed (= positive site). In 2011, the value was 21.6 %. This value is slightly below those of the previous years (22.4 % in 2009, 23.6 % in 2010 and 23.8 % in 2011). This could be in relation with the cold spell in February, the effect of which could have been high for the local birds.

Breeding population trend

The population trend of the French breeding Woodcock population has been again analysed for the last 10-year period. In total, 55 *départements* censused roding woodcocks without interruption from 2003 to 2012.

The proportion of positive and high abundance sites (n. contacts $\geq$ 5) show a great stability during the 2003-2012 period (p = 0.44 and 0.215, resp.; Figure 3). In the whole, the breeding Woodcock population in France appears to be in a good conservation status.

After 20 years of monitoring of the French Woodcock breeding population, we plan to use the collected data to optimize the sampling effort while maintaining a good accuracy. A statistical analysis showed that stratification mainly based on 10 "large ecological regions" could be efficient. These regions have been defined by the French *Inventaire forestier national* on the basis of the quality of soil and forests. Of course, the listening points will always be chosen at random. This new methodology which should reduce by half the sampling effort will be applied in spring 2013.

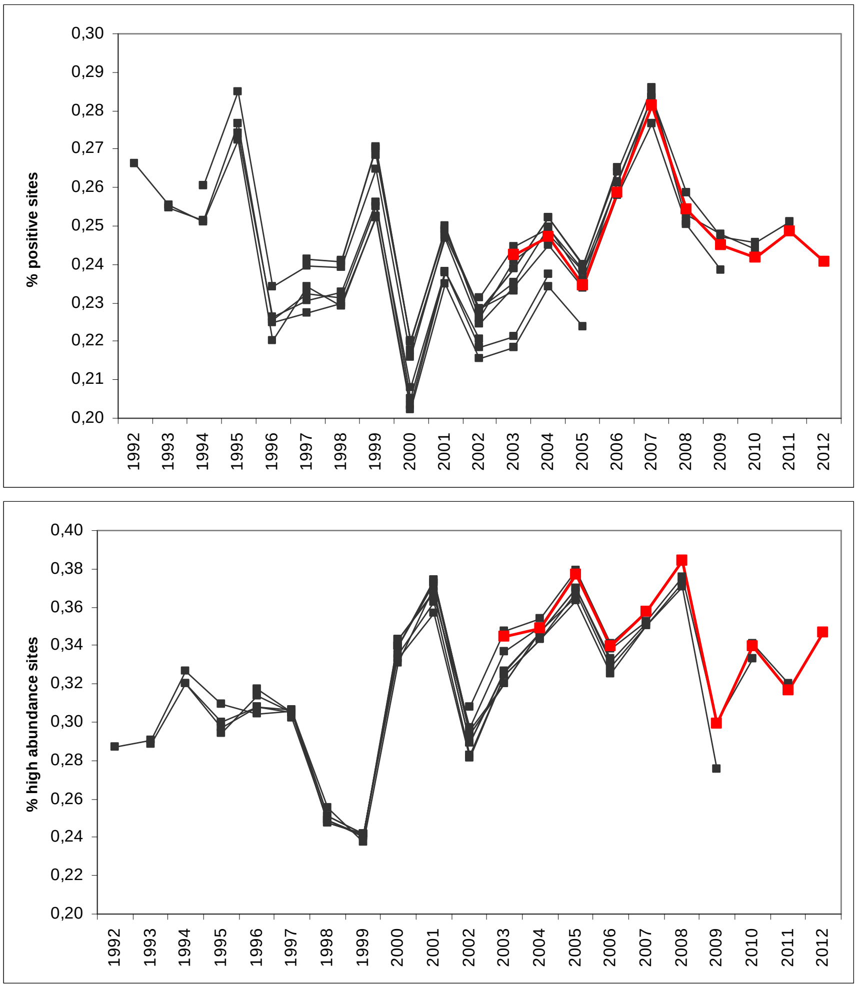

Figure 3. *Inter-annual variations of the proportion of positive sites and high abundance sites/positive sites for the10 available 10 year-periods(in red: the period 2003-2012).*

Conclusion

The 2011/12 season was mainly marked by very harsh weather conditions at the beginning of February. The survival rate in winter was probably lower than usual as evidenced by the number of woodcocks found dead in the field. Even if no deficit of birds was detected in the core of the European breeding area, we must be attentive to the situation. Fortunately, the most part of stakeholders and the Associations of Woodcock hunters aim to keep this game species in a favourable conservation status and they promote any management rules which allow reaching this objective.

Acknowledgements

This report is the result of an important field work carried out by members of the ONCFS/FNC Woodcock network. We thank all of them: professionals of ONCFS, *Fédérations départementales des chasseurs* and volunteers. We also thank the *Club national des bécassiers* for allowing us to use the data collected by Club members.

2011-2012 French Snipes report

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Ringing results

The French Snipes ONCFS/FNC network gathers 132 active snipe ringers spread over 52 French *départements.* All the main regions for migrating and wintering snipes are now covered by the network. In 2011, 1 654 snipes were ringed by the network: 1 407 common snipes (*Gallinago gallinago)* and 247 jack snipes (*Lymnocryptes minimus*). Two great snipes (*Gallinago media*) were also ringed in the *département* of Cantal, in the Centre of France.

Plumage collection

As in the previous years, an analysis of Common Snipe and Jack Snipe plumages (wing and/or tail feathers) collected during the hunting season was carried out in 2011/12.
In total, the plumages of 5 599 common snipes and 1 257 jack snipes were gathered mainly by the CICB (International Club of Snipes Hunters) members and by the *Fédérations départementales des chasseurs* of *Cantal*, *Lozère* and *Gironde*. This collection is the highest one of the last 8 years for both species. This result is remarkable while the numbers of juvenile at the beginning of migration (August-September) was lower than usual. Under the assumption of a positive correlation between the number of collected plumages and snipe abundance, and if catching effort did not vary, this increase probably reflects higher snipe numbers on migration and during wintering than in the previous seasons.

Common Snipe

Geographical distribution of analyzed plumage

The plumages were collected in 47 French *départements*. As in the past, the total sample was divided in two parts (figure 1): one corresponding to the Fennoscandian flyway (n = 2 374), the other to the continental flyway (n = 3 219).

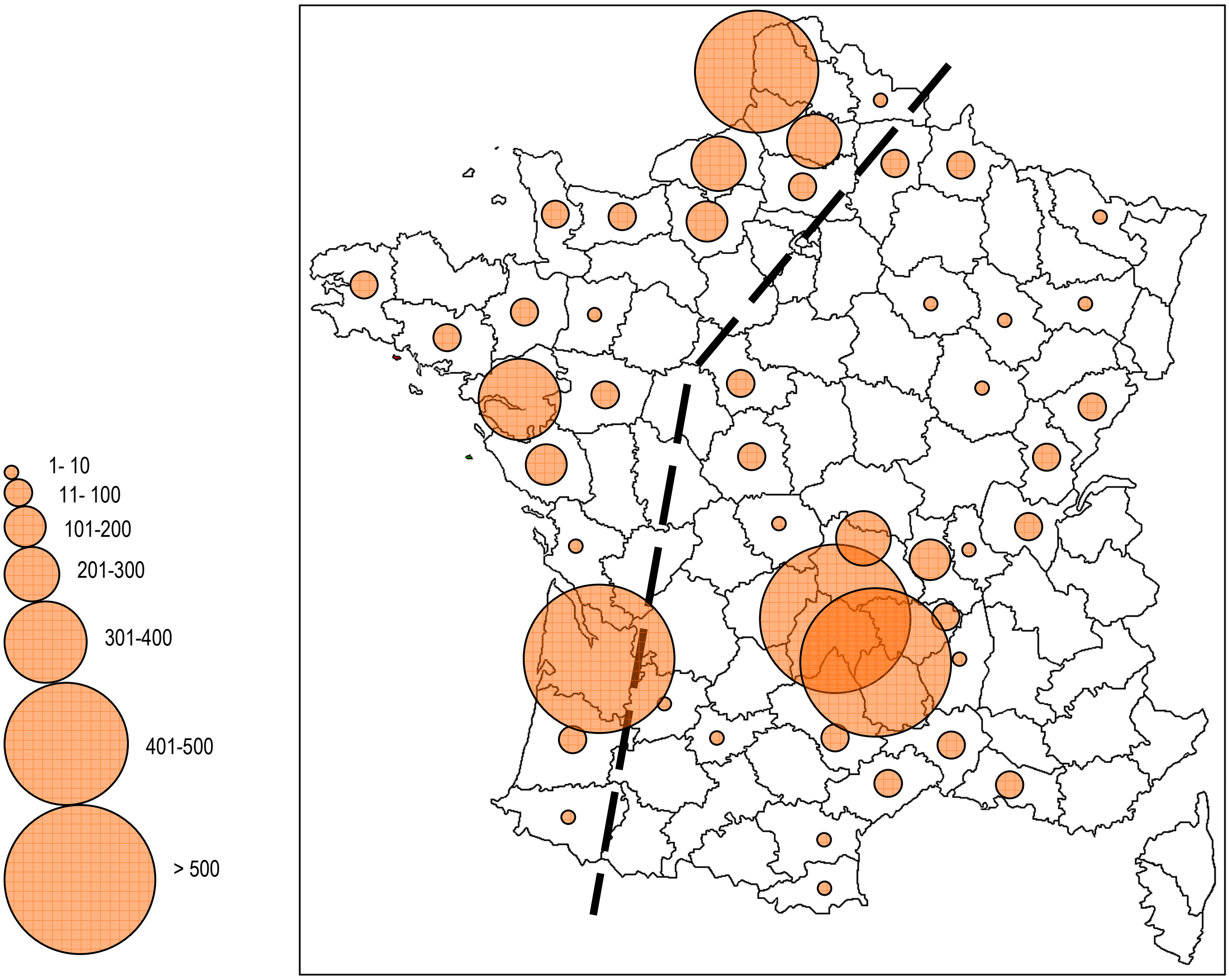


Figure 1. *Geographical distribution of numbers of common snipes whose plumage was collected in 2011/12 and limit between the two sub-samples corresponding to a distinct migratory flyway.*

Temporal distribution of analyzed plumage

Under the same assumption as in the previous reports (i.e. the number of collected plumages (*ncp*) is positively correlated with real numbers), the post-nuptial migration started later than in the previous seasons (figure 2). Till mid-September, the numbers remained low. They reached their usual levels only in the second part of September and the first part of October. However, the number of snipes remained high during two months till the end of November before they collapsed in December. We can conclude to a two weeks delay in migration in autumn 2011. This delay was more marked for the Fennoscandian flyway for which two well marked peaks appeared in the first 15-day period of October and the second 15-day period of November (Figure 3).

The weather conditions could be the main reason for this particular chronology. Everywhere in Europe, the temperatures were very mild from September to mid-December. This probably slowed down the migratory birds.

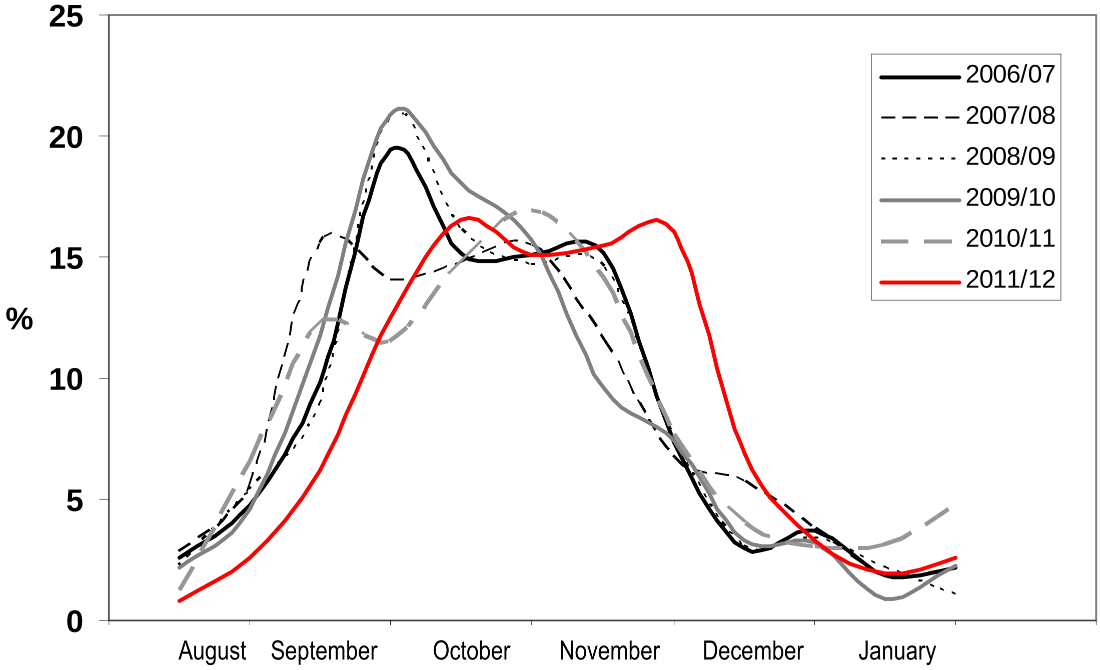


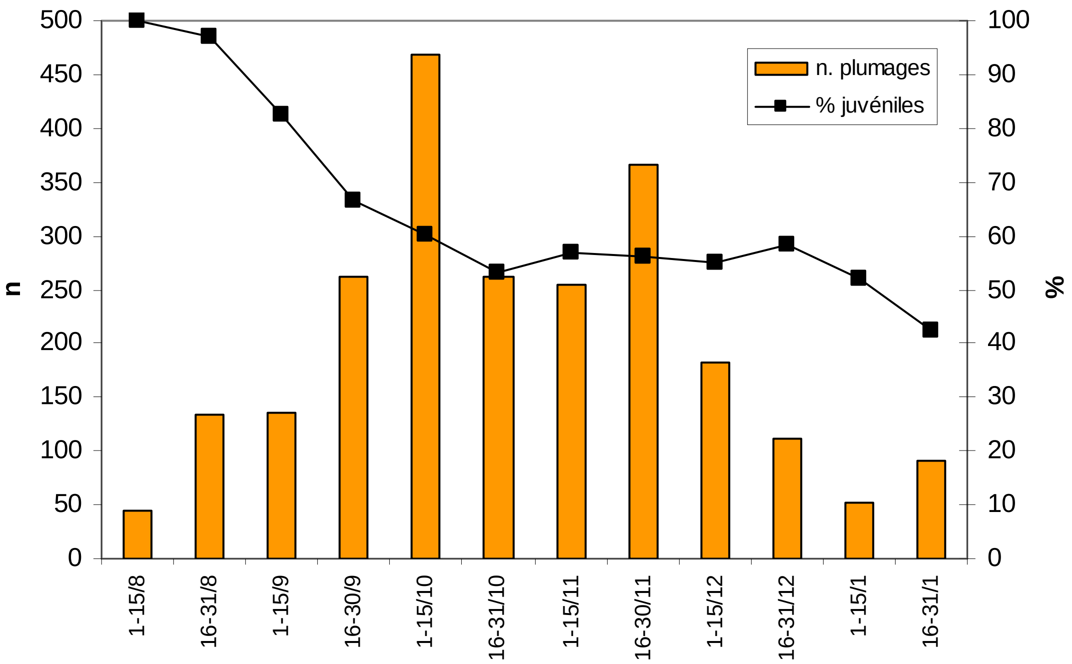
Figure 2. *Intra-annual variations of the proportion of Common Snipe plumages collected in 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11and 2011/12.*

Proportion of juveniles

The proportion of juveniles among the 5 483 analysed plumages was 64.6 % (age-ratio = 1.8). Without the data collected in August for which almost 100 % of birds are juveniles, this proportion is 63.4 %. These values are extremely low, 9 and 8.1 points below the average of the last 25 years, respectively (no data from 1999/00 to 2003/04; figure 4). Only the 2005/06 season (and 1988/89 for the data set without August) is below by about 2 points. Juveniles represent 61.9 % of birds in the Fennoscandian flyway (n = 2 310) and 66.5 % % in the continental flyway (n = 3 173). A statistically significant difference underlines a marked deficit for the Fennoscandian flyway (Fisher exact test; $p = 0.0004$). Without August data, the difference is still clearer (Fisher exact test; $p < 0.0001$).

The intra-seasonal distribution of the proportion of juveniles follows the usual pattern, with a majority of juveniles till mid-September, then a relative stability in the following months with a proportion of juveniles around 60 % (figure 5). This leads to a significant decrease of the proportion of juveniles from August to January (Cochran-Armitage test; $p < 0.0001$). However, the two flyways follow different patterns (figure 3): a well-marked decrease for the Fennoscandian flyway ($p < 0.0001$) and stability for the continental one ($p = 0.494$).
A strong deficit at the end of October – beginning of November characterizes the 2011/12 season (Figure 5) and the values in the average observed in the following weeks do not overcome the deficit in the beginning of the season. These results lead us to consider that a low breeding success in spring 2011 may be due to a severe drought associated with high temperatures in July-August in Central Russia which could have impacted the juvenile survival (S. Fokin, com. pers.).

Fennoscandian flyway



Continental flyway

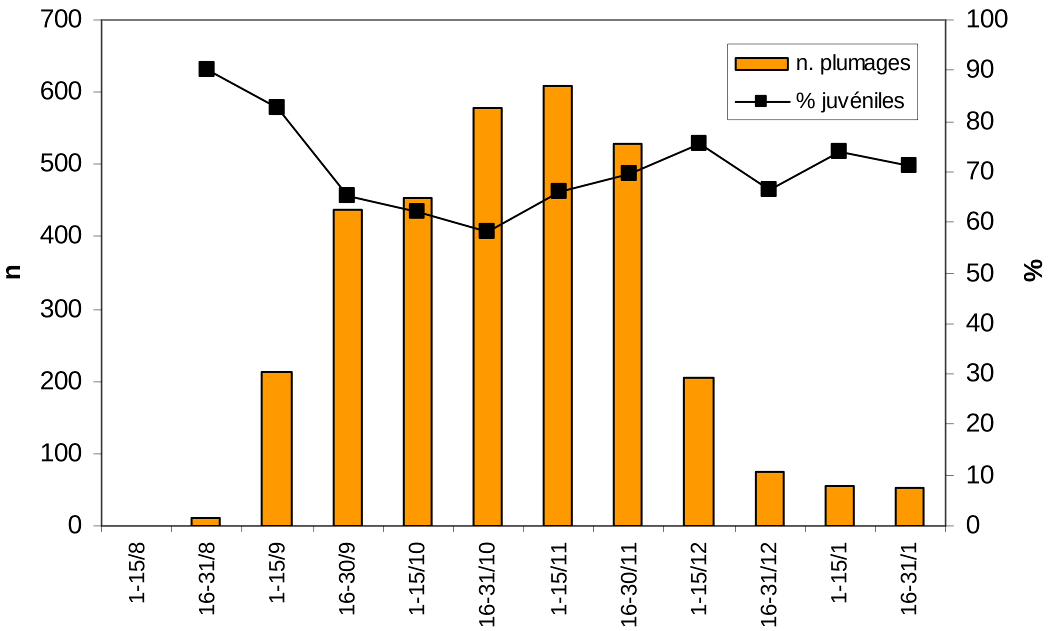


Figure 3. *Temporal distribution (per 15 day-period) of collected plumage and of the proportion of juveniles for Common Snipe in each flyway.*

Proportion of males/females

Sex was defined for 1 791 adult birds and the proportion of males was 37.9 %. If we take into account all birds (juveniles + adults) for which sex determination was possible (n = 5 025), the proportion of males reached 39.2 %. In spite of this, values are higher than those of 2010/11 (5.6 and 2 points, resp.), the deficit in males in hunting bags is again confirmed.

No difference was observed among flyways according to whether or not juveniles were taken into account (Fisher exact test; p = 0.018 and 0.240, resp.).

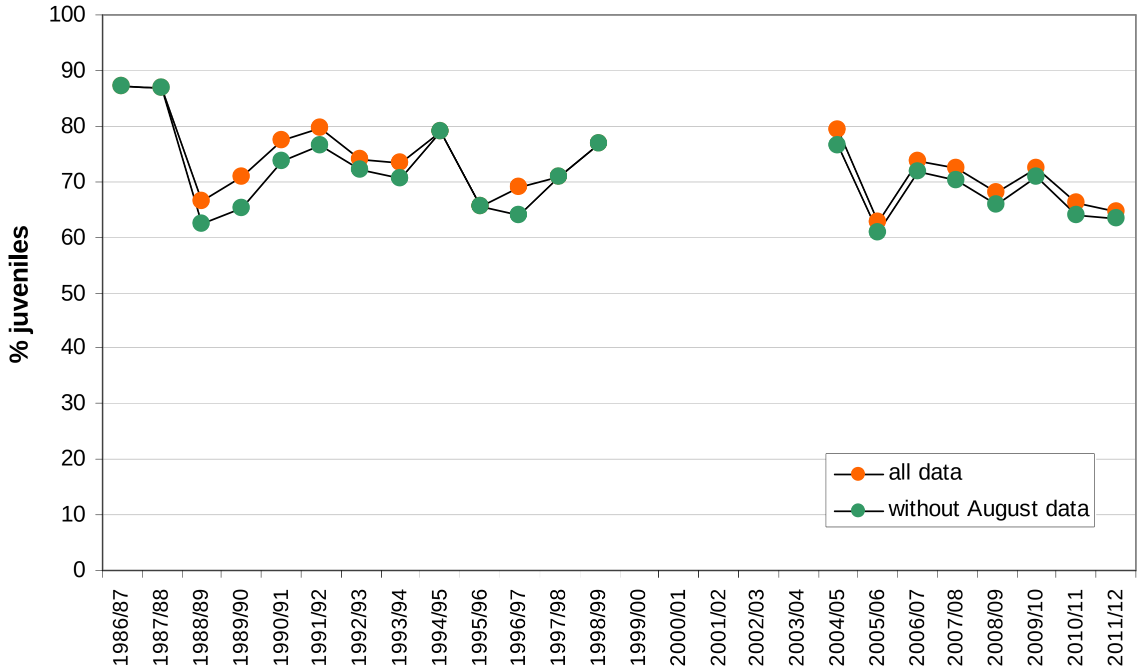


Figure 4. *Inter-annual variations of the proportion of juveniles among Common Snipe plumages collected in the 1986/87 - 2011/12 period for all data and for a sub-sample without August data (No collection in the 1999/00 - 2003/04 period).*

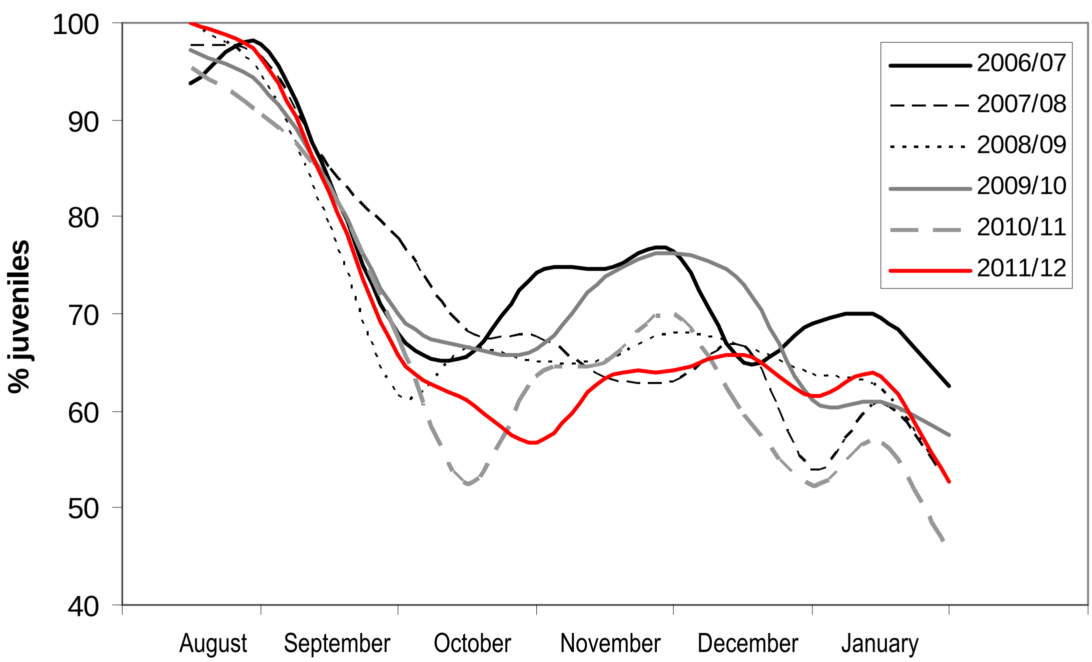


Figure 5. *Intra-annual variations of the proportion of juveniles for the Common Snipe in 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12.*

Jack Snipe

Geographical distribution of analysed plumage

In 2011/12, the Jack Snipe plumages were collected in 42 *départements* (figure 6). As for every season, we defined a "coastal flyway" and an "inland flyway" for which the difference of sample size is marked: 523 plumages for the coastal flyway and 733 for the inland one.

Temporal distribution of analysed plumage

As for Common Snipe, analysis was made under the assumption that the number of plumages is positively correlated to the abundance of birds in the field. In 2011/12, a peak was observed as usual in the second half of October but the snipes seemed to stay in relatively high abundance till the end of November (figure 7) probably because of the very mild weather conditions encountered in this period. For the first time in the last 6 seasons, a second less marked peak appeared at the end of October – beginning of November. This pattern looks like that of the Common Snipe. As expected, the numbers collapsed from December but the level of numbers remained relatively high.

The same temporal distribution was observed in the 2 flyways but the arrival of birds occurred earlier and faster in the coastal flyway for which the numbers were at their maximum in the first half of October (figure 8)

In both cases, the presence of jack snipes in great numbers till the end of November is remarkable.

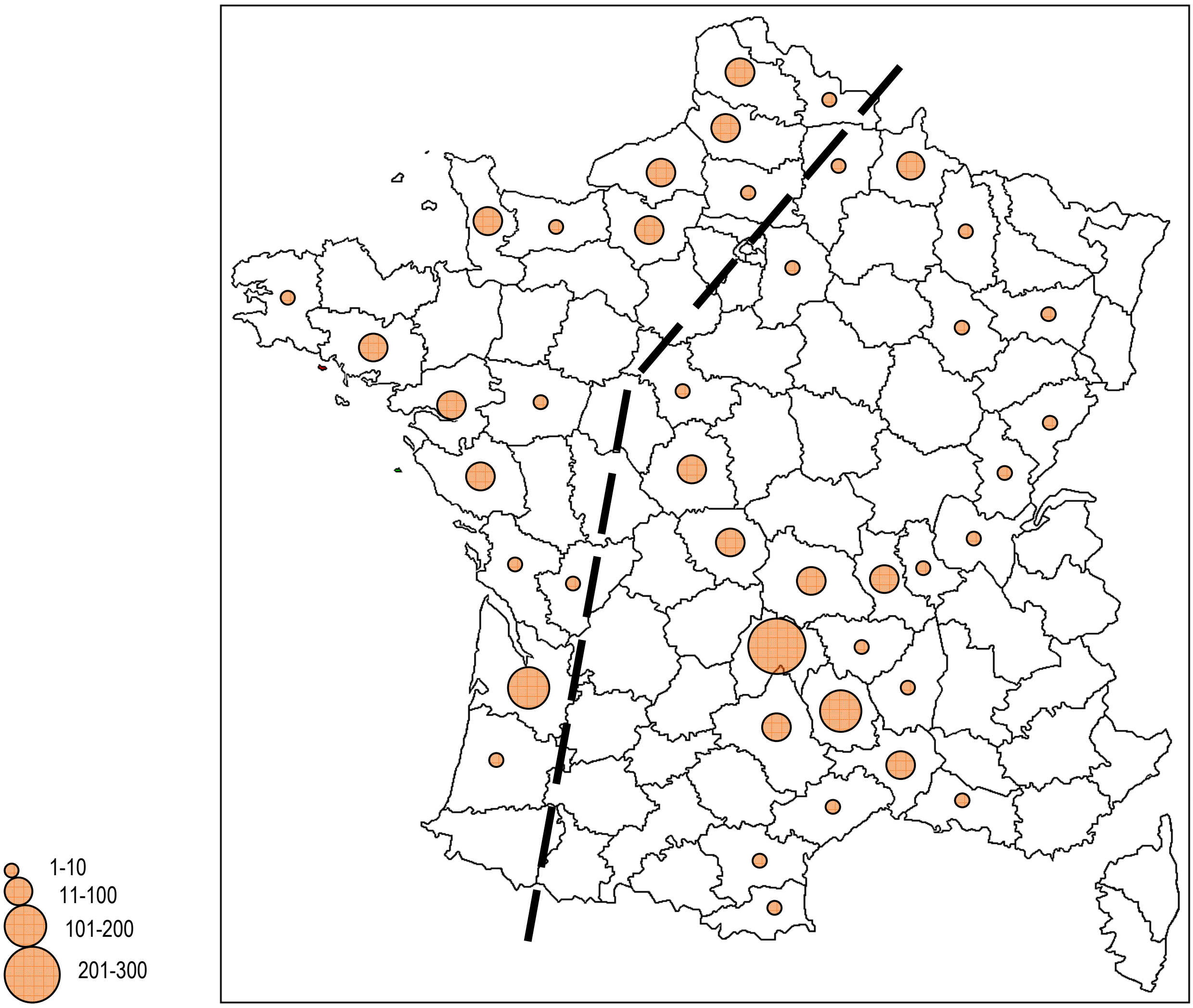


Figure 6. *Geographical distribution of numbers of jack snipes whose plumage was collected in 2011/12 and limit between the two sub-samples.*

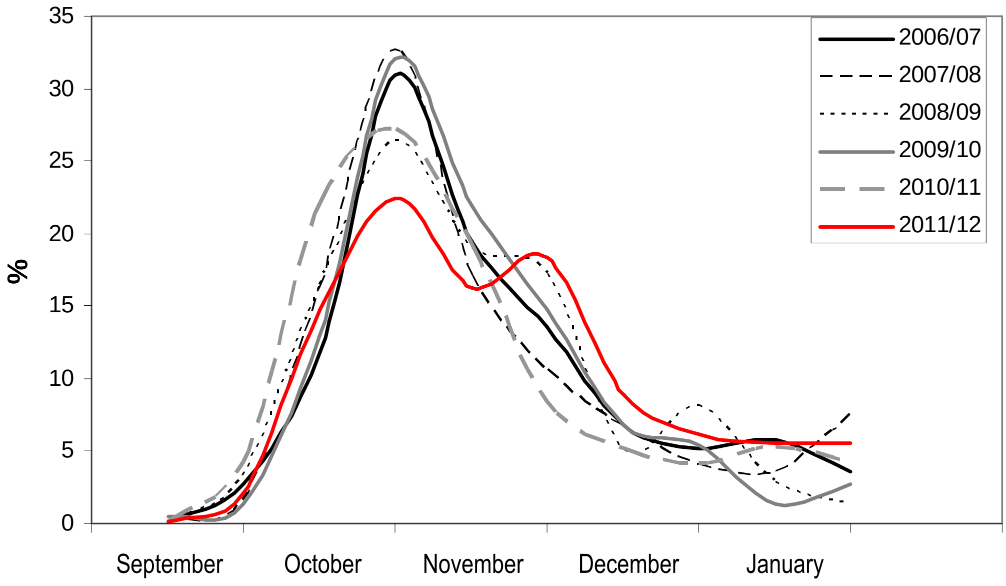


Figure 7. *Intra-annual variations of the proportion of Jack Snipe plumages collected in 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11and 2011/12.*

Proportion of juveniles

The proportion of juveniles (estimated from examination of tail feathers) reached 63.2 %. This value is higher than those of the last 3 seasons but in the average of the last 7 ones. Consequently, we consider that the breeding success in spring 2011 was "normal" for this species. The proportion of juveniles was 59.4 % in the "coastal flyway" and 65.9 % in the "inland flyway". The difference between the two flyways is reversed compared to 2010/11 when juveniles were more numerous in the "coastal flyway". However the difference is not statistically significant [Fisher exact test (p = 0.026)].
The temporal distribution of the proportion of juveniles in the course of the season appeared relatively stable till mid-December (Figure 9). This stability was more marked in the "coastal flyway" than in the "inland flyway" for which strong variations were registered in the second part of wintering (Figure 8).
No significant trend can be detected, neither in the whole data set (Cochran-Armitage test; p = 0.976), nor from one flyway to the other ("inland flyway", p = 0.245; "coastal flyway", p = 0.175)

Again, no rules appear in the migration of juveniles and adults for Jack Snipe.

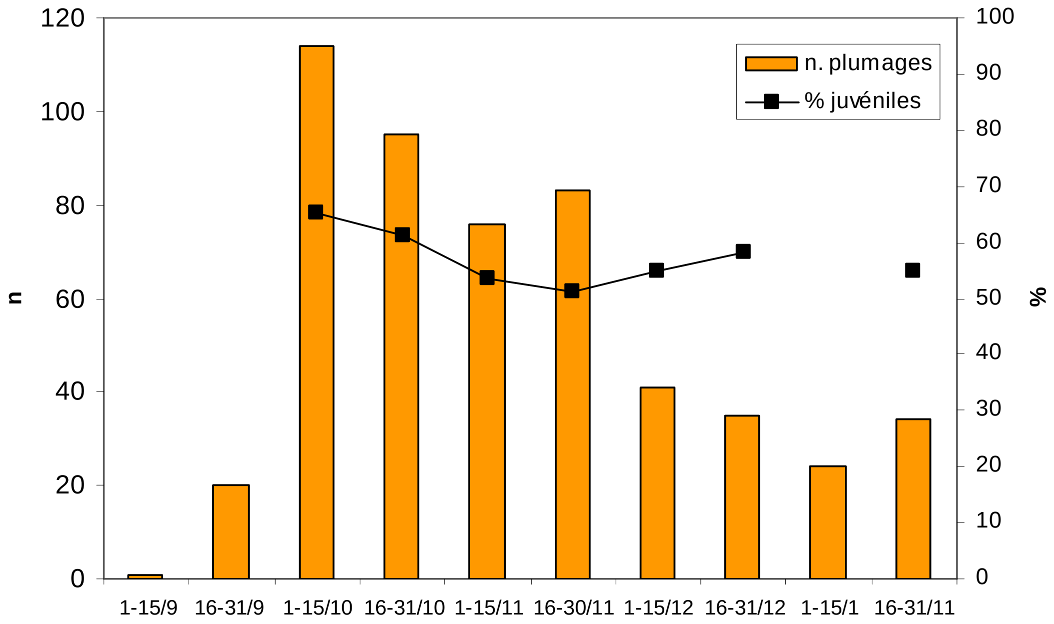
Proportion of males/females

According to criteria used in the past year (wing length < 115 mm = female; wing length > 117 mm = male; correction of 1.7 mm because of wing drying), the proportion of males in the whole sample was 42.9 %.
As for Common Snipe, females were more numerous than males in our sample. A difference of about 10 points was observed between the 2 flyways: 37.1 % of males in the "coastal flyway", 47.3 % in the "inland flyway". The difference is not statistically significant (Fisher exact test; p = 0.026).

Monitoring of hunting bags

At the present time, the inter-annual evolution of hunting bags in reference territories is the only tool for estimating the demographic trend for Common Snipe and Jack Snipe migrating and wintering in France. The assumption is that the hunting bags are directly positively correlated with actual numbers.

« Coastal flyway »



« Inland flyway »

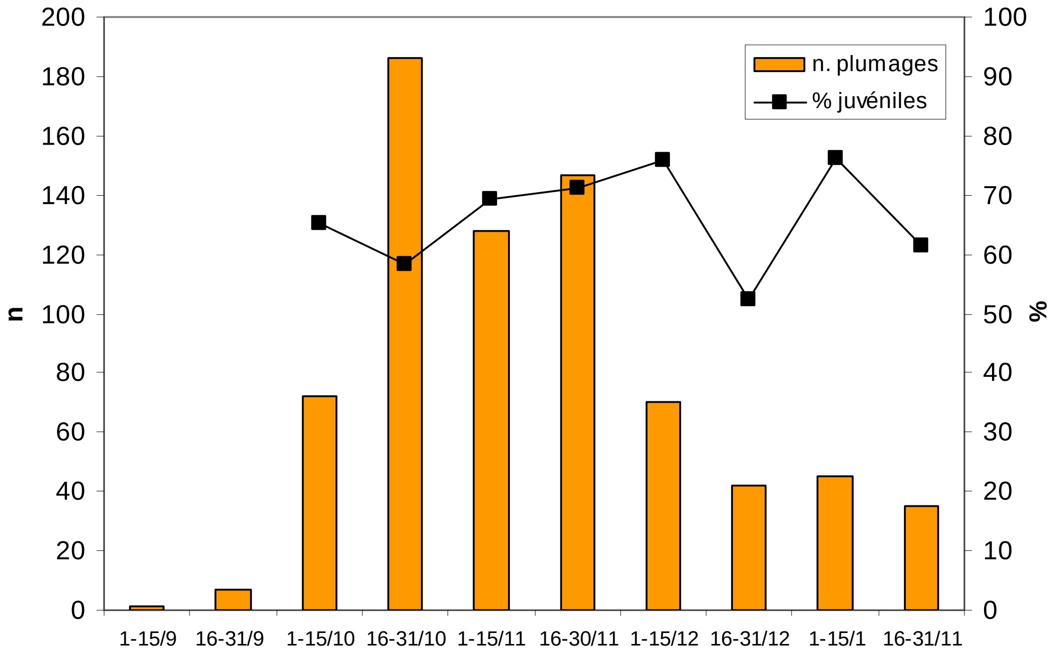


***Figure* 8.** *Temporal distribution (per 15 day-period) of collected plumage and of the proportion of juveniles for Jack Snipe in each "flyway"(for n ≥ 30).*

The network of reference territories relies on the activity of the members of the *Club international des chasseurs de bécassines* (CICB) who, on the one hand, hunt regularly in a large enough or managed territory and, on the other hand, agree to fill in a bag notebook which they provide for this study.

For the 2000/01-2011/12 period, the analysis covers 26 sites. Details of annual hunting bags are shown in Table 1. The annual mean total

hunting bag in the 26 sites is about 4 300 common snipes and 990 jack snipes.
In 2011/12, the bag slightly increased for the two species after a steady decrease from 2006/07 (Figure 10). The mean bag per site was 144.8 for Common Snipe and 32 for Jack Snipe. The increase remains weak but the decreasing periods (7 years for Common Snipe, 9 years for Jack Snipe) seem to have stopped, at least temporarily.

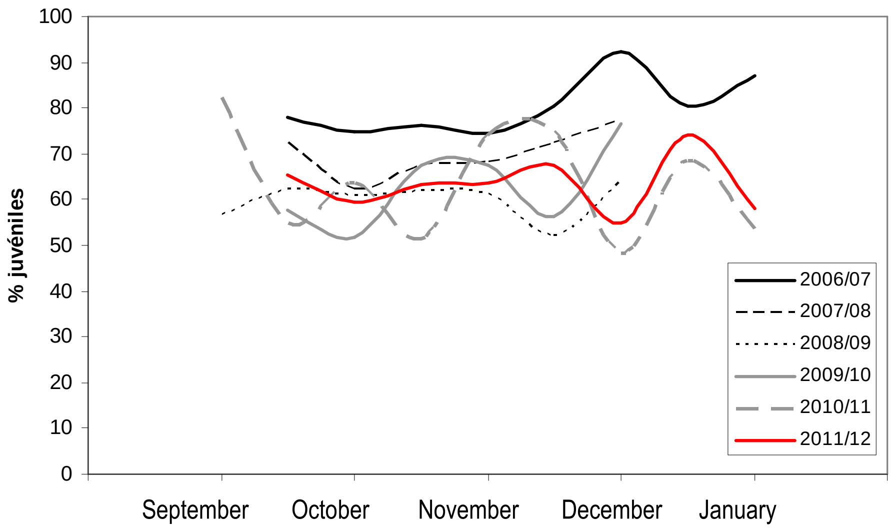


Figure 9. *Intra-annual variations of the proportion of juveniles for the Jack Snipe in 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12.*

Season	*Common Snipe*	*Jack Snipe*	Total
2000/01	3 821	717	4 538
2001/02	3 654	1 301	4 955
2002/03	4 247	1 003	5 250
2003/04	5 114	1 431	6 545
2004/05	5 537	1 180	6 717
2005/06	5 394	1 258	6 652
2006/07	3 990	934	4 924
2007/08	4 408	850	5 258
2008/09	4 211	843	5 054
2009/10	4 066	796	4 862
2010/11	3 496	716	4 212
2011/12	3 765	833	4 598
Mean and total	4 308.6	988.5	63 565

Table 1. *Details of hunting bags per season for 26 reference sites.*

However, the trend tests compel us to be cautious because, on the basis of the 26 reference sites, the decrease in Common Snipe hunting bags now reaches the level of statistical significance (Page test; p = 0.0015) and the Jack Snipe hunting bag maintains a statistically significant decrease since 2000/01 (Page test; p = 0.0008). As usual, the Common Snipe/Jack Snipe ratio is always constant (Figure 11). In 2011/12, the Common Snipe represents 81.9 % of the total Snipe hunting bag. The average for the 2000/01 – 2011/12 period is 81.4 % (73.7 % - 84.2 %).
Many biases are associated with the monitoring of hunting bags in 26 reference sites. Mainly located in the northwest of France, the reference sites do not take in account the continental flyways which provide an important part of migrating and wintering snipes. Because of different weather conditions, availability of hunters or habitat quality, they can be in different situations from one season to another. However, the role of this monitoring as an indicator of the demographic trend of snipes appears not negligible. Even if the slight increase in the Snipe hunting bags can be seen as encouraging, the demographic situation of Snipe populations that migrate or winter in France remains delicate.

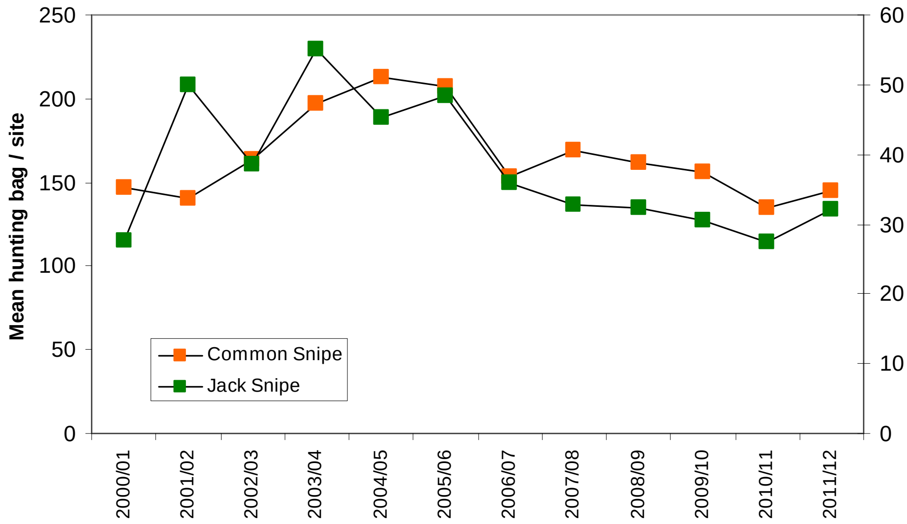


***Figure 10**. Average of Common Snipe and Jack Snipe hunting bags for a reference site for the period 2000/01 - 2011/12.*

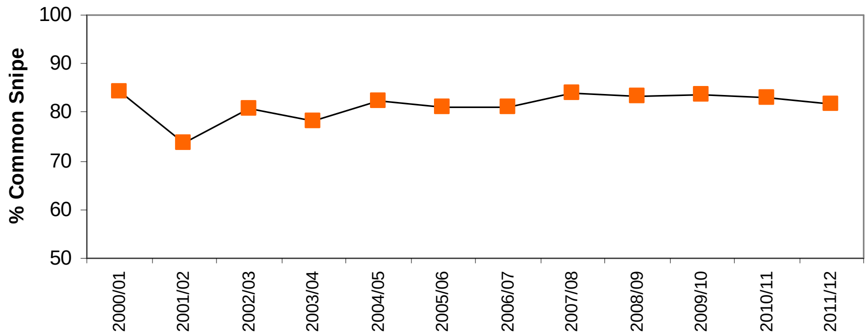


***Figure 11.** Proportion of Common Snipes in the total Snipe hunting bag (Common Snipe + Jack Snipe) collected on 26 reference sites from 2000/01 to 2011/12.*

Conclusion

The main point of the 2011/12 season is the large delay observed in the post-nuptial migration and the long stay of important numbers till the beginning of December. The absence of a juvenile migration wave in August has been finally compensated for later in the season to make it a rather good one. The mildness of the autumn-winter (except a cold wave in February) is probably the main reason for this pattern.

It remains that we must be vigilant because not all indicators are green. The proportion of juveniles for Common Snipe is fairly low and the general demographic trends have not yet shown a significant recovery.

Acknowledgements

This report is the result of an important field work carried out by members of CICB and by the ONCFS/FNC Snipes network. We thank all of them: volunteers, *Fédérations départementales des chasseurs* and professionals of ONCFS.

News from……. Portugal

2011-2012 Woodcock hunting season in mainland Portugal

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In this report, we present the results gathered by the *Associação Nacional de Caçadores de Galinholas* (ANCG; National Association of Woodcock's Hunters) during the 2011/2012 Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) hunting season in mainland Portugal. Hunting was allowed from 1 November 2011 to 19 February 2012, on Sundays, Thursdays and national holidays, with a bag limit of three birds/hunter/day. These regulations are the same since the 2009/2010 hunting season, when ANCG started to collect information to evaluate the Woodcock hunting season in mainland Portugal. For comparison, some results obtained in the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 hunting seasons are also shown.

Hunting trips

We received a total of 608 hunting trip reports, performed by 41 different collaborators in 16 districts (Figure 1). These values represent an important increase when compared to those obtained in the 2010/2011 hunting season (273 hunting trip reports, 15 collaborators and 12 districts; Gonçalves *et al.* 2011). The best represented districts in 2011/2012 were Viana do Castelo (n = 242), Évora (n = 91) and Vila Real (n = 79), but other eight districts were represented by more than 10 hunting trips. The mean (± SE) hunting trip duration was 3.7 h ± 0.05 h (n = 553).

The frequency distribution of hunting trips according to the number of participating hunters, for the three hunting seasons, is shown in Figure 2. One may notice some inter-seasonal variability; the hunting trip with only one hunter tends to be the most frequent type, but the percentage of hunting trips with two or more hunters is also large(between 31 % and 54 % for the three hunting seasons).

The estimated hunting index of abundance ("*Indice Cynégétique d'Abondance*", ICA) corresponds to the number of different Woodcock seen, per hunter, during a standard hunting trip of 3.5 hours. The ICA mean value (± SE) for the 2011/2012 season was 1.00 ± 0.05 (Table 1). When comparing the ICA values estimated for the three hunting seasons with available data (Table 1), there is a significant difference (K-W test; $H_{2.943} = 8.7$; $p<0.05$), namely between the 2009/2010 and the 2011/2012 hunting seasons ($z = 2.6$; $p<0.05$), the latter presenting a lower abundance.

Figure 3 shows the variation in the ICA value by decade along the 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 hunting seasons. The variation in this index of abundance must be the result of Woodcock movements/migration. Between seasons, the phenological profile was not similar (Figure 3): in 2010/2011, abundance peaked in the first decade of December, probably due to the occurrence of larger migratory numbers , it subsequently decreased but remained stable until the end of the hunting season; in 2011/2012, after a steady increase along November, the abundance slightly decreased in the beginning of December and fluctuated afterwards, with small peaks at the end of December, mid-January and beginning of February.

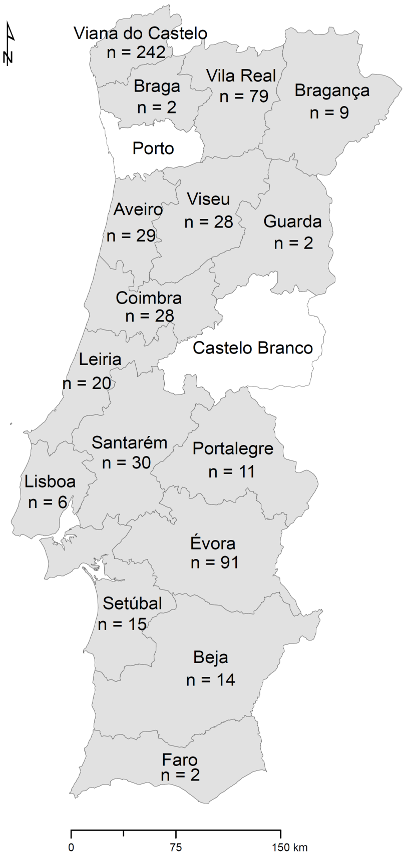

Figure 1. *Distribution of the number of Woodcock hunting trip reports analysed in mainland Portugal districts (in grey), during the 2011/12 hunting season.*

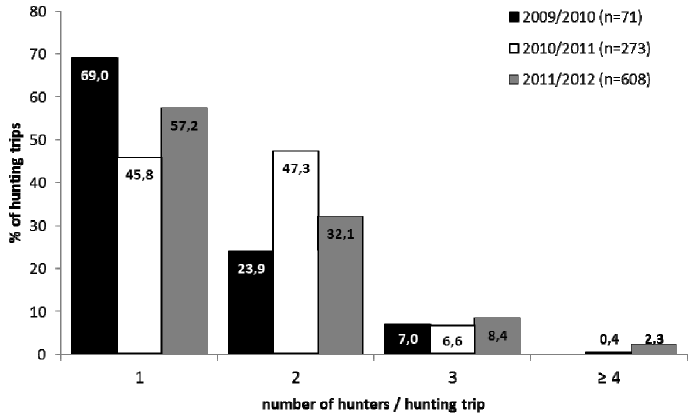

Figure 2*. Frequency distribution of hunting trips according to the number of participating hunters, for the three hunting seasons; n = number of hunting trips analysed.*

	ICA				
	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	SE
2009/2010 (n=71)	1.30	1.00	0.00	5.83	0.15
2010/2011 (n=273)	1.09	0.88	0.00	7.00	0.07
2011/2012 (n=601)	1.00	0.70	0.00	8.17	0.05

Table 1. *Hunting index of abundance (ICA = woodcock seen / hunter / hunting trip) estimated for the three hunting seasons studied (2009/2010 to 2011/2012); n = number of hunting trips analysed.*

Wing collection

We analysed 250 wings, collected in 16 districts (Figure 4) by 29 different collaborators. The age class [young (< 1 year old) or adult (> 1 year old)] was determined by wing examination, according to Ferrand & Gossmann (2009). We asked hunters to determine the sex (by gonad examination) and the weight of the birds; some instructions about the corresponding procedures were sent to hunters.

For three birds, due to the small portion of the wing received, it was not possible to determine the age class (Table 2). The sex was determined in 193 birds (Table 2). The weight was determined for 212 birds (Table 3).

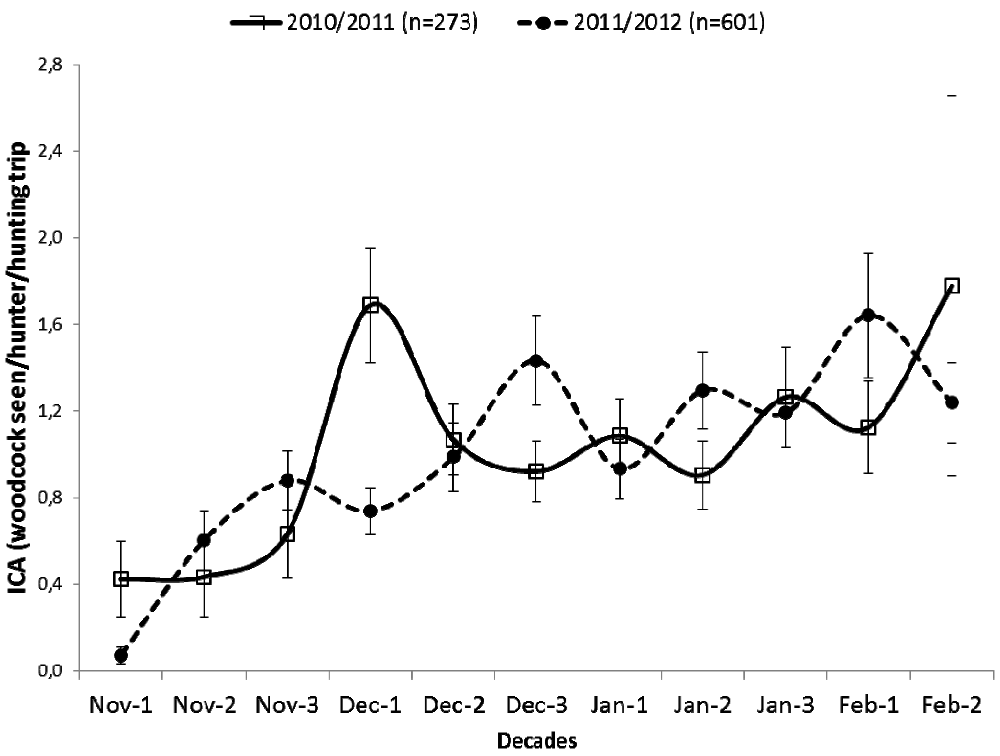

Figure 3. *Variation by decade (10 days period) in the hunting index of abundance (ICA - number of different woodcock seen, per hunter, during a hunting trip) for the 2010/11 and 2011/2012 hunting seasons; n = number of hunting trips analysed.*

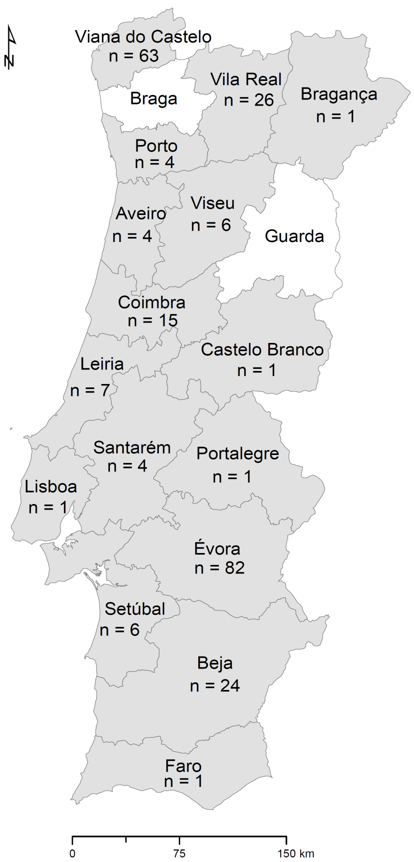

Figure 4. *Distribution of the number of Woodcock wings collected in mainland Portuguese districts (in grey), during the 2011/2012 hunting season.*

		Age			
		Adults	Young	Undetermined	Total
Sex	Females	47	50	2	99
	Males	35	58	1	94
	Undetermined	28	29	0	57
	Total	110	137	3	250

Table 2*. Frequencies of age and sex classes among the Woodcock analysed in the 2011/12 hunting season.*

	Weight (g)				
	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	SE
Adult males (n=34)	297.9	300.0	250.0	370.0	4.3
Young males (n=56)	296.8	299.5	220.0	340.0	3.1
Adult females (n=45)	295.0	299.0	250.0	330.0	3.3
Young females (n=48)	287.2	287.2	220.0	330.0	3.4
Total (n=212)	296.0	297.5	220.0	394.0	1.7

Table 3. *Weight of the Woodcock analysed in the 2010/11 hunting season, by age/sex class.*

The percentage of young birds was 55.5 % and the percentage of males was 48.7 %. These values were similar to those observed in the two previous hunting seasons (Table 4).
The mean body weight of the birds in the 2011/12 hunting season was 296.0g (Table 3). The variation in body weight among sexes and hunting seasons (Figure 5) reveals a significant difference (ANOVA: F = 38.12; p<0.001): the woodcocks analysed in the last season (2011/2012) were lighter, probably as a consequence of the much drier autumn/winter observed in that season and the presumed unusual difficulties faced by the birds to obtain food.

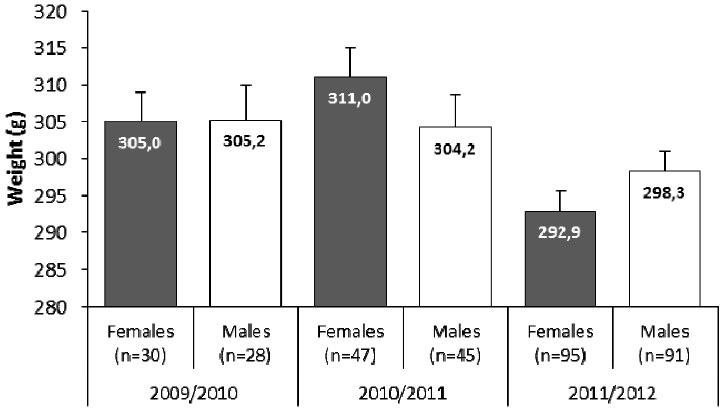

Figure 5. *Body weight variation according to Woodcock sex and hunting season; n = number of weighed woodcocks.*

Hunting season	% of young	% of males
2009/2010 (n=182)	53.33	48.28
2010/2011 (n=195)	53.85	48.42
2011/2012 (n=247)	55.47	48.70

Table 4. *Frequency (percentage) of young and males among the Woodcock analysed (n) in each hunting season studied.*

Conclusions

The 2011/2012 hunting season results seem to confirm that the Portuguese Woodcock hunters tend to hunt without the company of another hunter; still, a significant percentage hunt accompanied by at least one other hunter. The percentage of young birds among bagged woodcock (around 53 %) was not different from the values observed in the previous seasons. The same was observed for the percentage of males (around 48 %).
The global ICA mean value estimated for the 2011/2012 hunting season, 1.00 Woodcock

seen/hunter/hunting trip, was statistically different from that estimated for the 2009/2010 season (1.30), but not from the 2010/2011 season (1.09). In the 2009/2010 season, the number of analysed hunting trip reports was smaller (n = 71), which may have contributed to this difference. The variation in the ICA value, by decade, in the last two hunting seasons, reveals different patterns in the phenology of Woodcock movements, probably as a consequence of different weather conditions in each year, in mainland Portugal and abroad (in the species winter range). The 2011/2012 very dry autumn/winter also seems to have affected the Woodcock physical condition since the birds bagged during that hunting season presented lower body weight values.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank to all the hunters who provided the data used in this study.

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Faeroe snipe (*Gallinago g. faeroeensis*) and Wilson's snipe (*G. delicata*) in mainland Portugal

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A reddish snipe, *Gallinago gallinago* (Figure 1), shot by JPO on 3 December 2009 at Veiga de Carreço (41º44'23"N, 8º52'22"W) in Viana do Castelo (Portugal), was analysed on 26 February 2010. The bird had a juvenile pattern on the upper wing coverts, and a tail with a total of 14 rectrices, also holding juvenile markings (CICB & OMPO 2002). The biometric data of the specimen (obtained according to Svensson 1992 and Baker 1993) were as follows: body mass 118.6 g, body length 291 mm, tail length 58 mm, wing length 140 mm, wing span 450 mm, head and bill 102.8 mm, tarsus length 35.2 mm. After necropsy, the presence of bursa of Fabricius confirmed that the bird was a juvenile, and gonad observation that it was a female. Compared to other *Gallinago gallinago* we analysed (example in Figure 1), this bird was more rufous above, with less contrasting back stripes and tinged rufous on the hindneck. These features, according to the literature (Cramp & Simmons 1983), pointed to a Faeroe snipe (*Gallinago g. faeroeensis*). During the VII Woodcock and Snipe Specialist Workshop held in Saint Petersburg in 2011, we showed pictures of the bird to Gilles Leray (ONCFS) who shares this opinion. Later, we had the opportunity to examine study skins of snipe from the Faeroe Islands at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History (USNM 459558 to 459562) and at the

American Museum of Natural History (AMNH 740694). These specimens have similar rufous coloration and other similar features to those observed in our snipe. We therefore believe that the bird was a young female Faeroe snipe, from 2009. One wing, tail feathers, skeleton and a tissue sample are preserved at CIBIO (TMR248).

On 26 January 2012, we analysed six snipe shot by AV on 4 December 2011, also at Veiga de Carreço. Apparently they were all common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) but among them, one had 16 tail feathers, narrow white tips to secondaries and underwing coverts and heavily barred axillaries, patterns that matched those typically observed on Wilson's snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) (Figure 2). Although we have previously analysed common snipe with 16 rectrices, we have not examined one with such narrow white tips to secondaries. It had a typical adult upperwing covert pattern and also adult rectrices (Pyle, 2008). The biometric data of the bird (obtained according to Svensson 1992 and Baker 1993) were as follows: body mass 94.0 g, body length 272 mm, tail length 57 mm, wing length 136 mm, wing span 442 mm, head and bill 90.9 mm, tarsus length 32.7 mm. After gonad examination, the bird was sexed as a male, the presence/absence of the bursa of Fabricius was not verified. All analysed external characters indicate that the specimen was an adult male Wilson's snipe. One wing, the tail and a tissue sample were preserved (TMR362).

Although these are not the first records of Faeroe snipe and Wilson's snipe in mainland Portugal, owing to their rarity they were submitted for the approval of the Portuguese Rarities Committee. Snipe ringed in Iceland, where the Faeroe snipe breeds (Cramp & Simmons 1983), have already been captured in mainland Portugal (Catry et al. 2010). An observation of a Wilson's snipe, corresponding to a specimen shot on 30 December 2006 near Vila Franca de Xira (Lisbon), has already been approved by the Portuguese Rarities Committee (Jara et al. 2009-2010).

Despite the phenotypic match of these specimens with Faeroe and Wilson' snipe, due to their similarity with common snipe, only a genetic multilocus approach, or perhaps an isotope analysis would probably shed light on their actual origin.

Figure 1. *Common snipe (*Gallinago g. gallinago; *left) and Faeroe snipe (*Gallinago g. faeroeensis; *right) shot in Portugal in December 2009.*

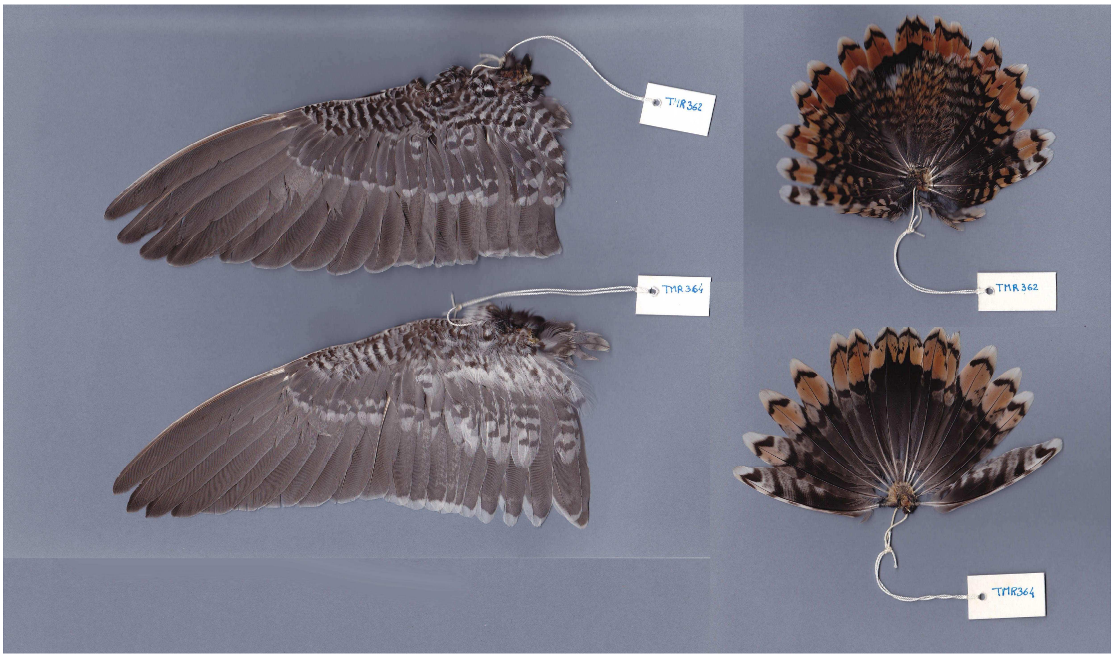

Figure 2. *Underwing and tail of a Wilson's (*Gallinago delicata*; top) and a common snipe (*G. g. gallinago*; bottom) shot in Portugal in December 2011.*

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News from……. Switzerland

Summary report on the 2011 Woodcock hunting season in Switzerland

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In spite of previous fears related to the 2010 cold wave and to the summer drought predicted on the breeding grounds, migration was qualified as "good" (even "excellent") in *Romandie* and "good" in *Tessin*.
The woodcocks were observed from the beginning of October with usual peaks in the 3rd decade of October and the 1st decade of November. During the short hunting season (closing on 15 December; shorter in other Swiss cantons), the weather conditions (temperature and humidity) and a prevailing wind often contrary to the migration direction were favourable to the staying of birds. Short snow falls did not disturb them.
The ICA value in *Romandie* (2.2) was the highest of the last 15 years. In *Tessin*, ICA was 0.86. The great difference in ICA could support the hypothesis of 2 different flyways in Switzerland. The proportion of juveniles was 84 % in *Romandie* and 78 % in *Tessin*. Finally, from 28 analysed birds in *Tessin*, 64 % were females. For more than 70 % of juveniles, the moult of great coverts was ended and about 60 % of adults presented a complete moult of wing feathers. This indicates that moult was performed in good weather conditions with abundant food availability, which allowed migration with a plumage as efficient as possible.
The average weight was 317g which is normal in Switzerland. As usual, the average weight of woodcocks shot in *Tessin* was 10g below that of *Romandie* (314g *vs* 324g).

News from……. Italy

Woodcocks and cold wave in Italy in February 2012

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During the first decade of February 2012, two harsh cold waves (first days and 11-12 February) with lots of snow and ice reached Italy and Balkans, particularly the Centre-North regions and the Adriatic coasts. This had an important effect on the woodcocks that were more ready to come back to their breeding sites than to go towards the south where the weather conditions were milder. Hunting was banned in Italy but not in Balkan countries. Several abnormal observations have been reported. In Liguria (north of Italy), many woodcocks were observed in gardens and parks in Genes during the period of 3-6 February. Many birds were also encountered in olive groves, pine forests and along the rivers of the Riviera, especially in the west (provinces of Imperia and Savona). At Borgio Verezzi (Savona), 30-40 woodcocks were observed at daytime feeding in a permanent meadow. In Lombardy and Piedmont, 9 woodcocks were flushed together near water sources and others were found dead. In Emilia, particularly in the provinces of Ravenna and Rimini, abnormal concentrations were observed as well as birds found starved. Some hunters have plowed sites and distributed worms and larvae. In Marches, after the second cold wave, 35 woodcocks were counted on the beach along the sea, twenty near a cowshed and, in the evening, about 100 birds were observed at dusk close to a river mouth flying to bushes along the shore. In Pouilles (Gargano), an old hunter told us that he had never seen so many woodcocks during his life! In Croatia, Italian hunters stopped hunting when they saw their dogs catch tired woodcocks!
Pictures of terrible hunting bags in Turkey were also published on the Web.

Recent Woodcock and Snipe publications

BELLAMY P., GRANT M., STEPHEN L., PEARCE-HIGGIN J., EATON M. & S. COHEN. 2011. Recent changes in moorland breeding wader populations in the UK. Abstracts of Conference posters, Annual Conference of the IWSG, Strathpeffer, Scotland, 23-26 September 2011. Wader Study Group Bulletin, 118(3), 212. (concerned species: Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*)

CLINE B.B. & S.M. HAIG. 2011. Seasonal movements, residency, and migratory patterns of Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*). Auk 128: 543-555.

DILLON I., WOTTON S., SMART J., GRICE P. & A. DREWITT. 2011. Breeding waders in lowland England: a ray of hope through higher-level agri-environment schemes. Abstracts of Conference talks, Annual Conference of the IWSG, Strathpeffer, Scotland, 23-26 September 2011. Wader Study Group Bulletin, 118(3), 208. (concerned species: Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*)

HILLER B.J. 2011. The occurrence and effects of cadmium uptake American Woodcock, *Scolopax minor*. PhD thesis, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA.

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KRUCKENBERG H., KONDRATYEV A., ZÖCKLER C., ZAYNAGUTDINOVA E. & J.H. MOOIJ. 2012. Breeding waders on Kolguev Island, Barents Sea, N Russia, 2006-2008. Wader Study Group Bulletin, 119(2): 102-113. (concerned species: Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus*)

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SAARI L. 2011. Night bird censuses on an island in the SW Finnish archipelago. Linnut-Vuosikirja 2011. 134-139. In Finnish, summary in English. (concerned species: Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*)