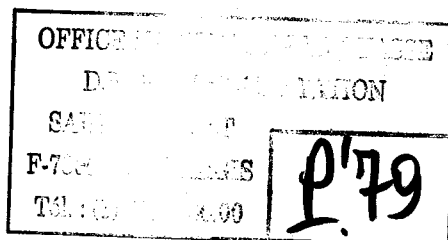


WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL (WI)



Woodcock and Snipe

SPECIALIST GROUP

NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 22

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Woodcock and Snipe Specialist Group

Newsletter No 22

December 1996

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Editorial

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*), Common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), Great snipe (*G. media*) and Jack snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) are markedly different in many respects both from most other migratory birds, and from the wader family they belong to systematically. This was the reason to establish the Woodcock and Snipe Research Group (WSRG) within the RG framework of the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB) in 1974.

From the beginning members and correspondents of the WSRG as well as IWRB-headquarters were informed on research going on and scheduled, preliminary results, short notes and bibliography on these species by the annual Newsletter.

Organisation

During this year the changes decided at the last IWRB board meeting in Malaysia in October 1995 had been realised. Since 1 January 1996 IWRB is acting as a truly global organisation, now called „Wetlands International“ (WI). There are three regional offices operating: WI-Asia Pacific, WI-Africa, Europe, Middle East and WI-The Americas. These offices are coordinated by the WI-International Coordination Unit (ICU, the former IWRB-headquarters), which is at the moment also acting as the office of WI-Africa, Europe, Middle East.

This change to a global organisation of course caused a considerable increase in responsibilities and consequently administration. Thus, the former residence of IWRB-headquarters at Slimbridge, UK, was found to be not sufficient any more under several respects, to satisfy the increasing demands. Therefore, WI took the offer of the Netherlands to host the ICU in Wageningen. The move took place in October 1996.

As announced in Newsletter No. 21 the name „Research Group“ has also been changed into „Specialist Group“. This change was considered necessary by a majority of the board, mainly because of the new role of WI within the World Conservation Organisation (IUCN). WI is now the „Waterbird Specialist Group“ of the IUCN-Species Survival Commission (SSC). In order to fit better into this system the former IWRB Research Groups are now Specialist Groups within the network of the SSC. However, this change in terminology clearly does not entail any change in the functions of the groups. The almost exclusive task, especially of the taxonomic groups is **research** and scientific work. As in IWRB the groups are an important part of WI and IUCN in order to provide both organisations with the data, technical information and scientific understanding necessary for the conservation of waterbirds and their habitats. This means, there will be no change in the research activities of the Woodcock and Snipe Specialist Group (WSRG), outlined in the triannual plan 1995 - 98.

Research

Ringling is one of the most important tools of research, especially in such secretively living species as woodcocks and snipes. The team of the French Office National de la Chasse (ONC) has again been extremely active. An all time record of 2713 woodcocks have been ringed in France during the past season (1995/96). They also initiated and supported ringling teams in Eastern European countries, particularly in Russia. Hence, well over 3000 woodcocks had been ringed in one year. The enormous progress in this field becomes obvious, when compared with the results of the past: during this century, up to the 1970ies not more than about 10.000 woodcocks had been ringed in Europe.

Consequently, recovery rates of ringed woodcocks will also increase. This parameter, together with bag statistics, provide at least an idea of the size of the fall flight of this species that can never be counted by direct observations. The preliminary results of our investigations led already to an update of the figures in the revised edition of „Waterfowl population estimates“ (P. M. Rose and D. A. Scott, in praep.): The autumn population in Europe/Africa is now estimated as more than 15 million woodcocks (only > 1 million in the 1994 - edition).

Bag statistics, recorded at certain areas under more or less constant hunting conditions provide at least indicators of population fluctuations and long-term trends. Several examples on all four species are presented in this issue of the Newsletter. They do not support the assumption of a general decline of the populations.

Publications

Thanks to Dr. J. Shergalin, director of „Merktrans“, Estonia, we have now access to the literature on woodcock and the snipes in the former USSR. Some of the papers translated by Merktrans are published in this issue.

We also appreciate the activities of Mr. Gilles Avot (Paris) for the in the meanwhile incredible amount of scientific literature and quotations concerning woodcocks and snipes in the world he constantly provides to the WSSG. Some of them are reviewed in the „Bibliography“ of this issue.

The Proceedings of the Second and the Fourth Woodcock and Snipe Workshops (Fordingbridge 1982 and Saarbrücken 1992, respectively) are still available, while those of the First and Third Workshop are out of print.

Cooperation with the Wader Study Group

Since 1995 the cooperation with this organisation dealing with closely related species was intensified. The coordinator was again invited to write an article on the activities of the WSSG for the Wader Study Group Bulletin, Vol. 82.

Meetings

During the Conference of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, March 1996 in Brisbane, Janine van Vessem (WI-ICU) called in a meeting of those SG-coordinators participating at this conference. We discussed questions arising from the new structure of WI for the SG's. The necessity to appoint a Specialist Group Liaison Officer to coordinate the WI-SG's was again emphasized.

During the World Conservation Congress of IUCN, October 1996, in Montreal, the coordinator also joined the two days meeting of the Species Survival Commission, in which the WSSG is now integrated.

After more than six years had passed since the last symposium on the American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) the Ninth Woodcock Symposium was announced to be held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in January 1997. Two of the French colleagues (F. Gossmann and Y. Ferrand) will present papers on their studies, and the coordinator will inform the American colleagues on the activities of the WSSG.

More than four years have passed since our last meeting in Saarbrücken, April 1992. Considerable progress in research as well as requests of some WSSG-members suggest to plan the Fifth Woodcock and Snipe Workshop in 1998. As suggested in Saarbrücken, we should now take the opportunity to meet farther east, towards the main breeding range of woodcock and snipes. The coordinator

is therefore in contact with Prof. Fruzinski, Agricultural University of Poznan, Poland, and vice-president of the CIC-Migratory Bird Commission, who is very interested in organizing this workshop (see below) that hopefully also may attract the Eastern European colleagues.

Acknowledgements

In the name of the WSSG the coordinator wants to express sincere thanks to the International Council of Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) for the financial support received through the CIC-German Delegation, to produce and distribute our annual Newsletter and to enable the coordinator to join relevant conferences.

Dr. habil. Herby Kalchreuter (H.K.)
Coordinator
European Wildlife Research Institute (EWI)
Saarland University
D-79848 Bonndorf-Glashütte
Germany
Telefon ++49(0)7653-1891, Fax ++49(0)7653-9269

First Announcement

The Fifth Woodcock and Snipe Workshop of the WI-WSSG is scheduled for the first half of May 1998, most likely in Poland. Members and correspondents interested in presenting papers or just participating are requested to make a note already on this event.

The second announcement will be mailed in June.

Some Observations on woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) migration in Austria and Western Hungary in 1995

Philipp Meran

General remarks: Since 62 years I have observed roding woodcocks during spring and fall migration, and since 40 years I have made notes on woodcock abundance. In all those years I have never seen so many woodcocks as in 1995, though the number of outings was about the same as in previous years. Altogether a total of 143 woodcocks were counted during 41 outings in spring, and 89 during 37 outings in fall. Therefore, the numbers of woodcock passing through this region have certainly not declined, but rather increased during past years.

Spring migration: First woodcocks have been observed at the Drau river, near Szigetvár, in the Mecsek mountains and in parts of the Komitat Somogy as early as mid-February. Most of migration was over by March 10.

The following woodcocks bagged in Hungary mainly during evening flights in spring 1995 were analysed:

| Date | Location | Number seen | Number bagged | Age | Sex | Weight (g.) | Bill length (mm) |
|-------|-------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------|------|-------------|------------------|
| 10.3. | Ujvárfarva | 8 | 2 | juv. | ♂ | 270, 295 | 66, 73 |
| 12.3. | Ujvárfarva | 7 | 2 | juv., ad. | ♂, ♀ | 325, 310 | 77, 72 |
| 14.3. | Ujvárfarva | 7 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 331 | 70 |
| 17.3. | Ujvárfarva | 5 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 305 | 71 |
| 18.3. | Bal. Keresztur | 5 | 2 | juv. | ♂ | 240, 305 | 65, 71 |
| 21.3. | Ujvárfarva | 4 | 1 | juv. | ♂ | 298 | 69 |
| 22.3. | Bal. Keresztur/Fr | 5 | 1 | ad. | ♀ | 263 | 77 |
| 22.3. | Ujvárfarva | 3 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 335 | 79 |
| 24.3. | Ujvárfarva | 14 | 1 | juv. | ♂ | 340 | 68 |
| 25.3. | Bal. Keresztur/Fr | 5 | 1 | juv. | ♂ | 315 | 73 |
| 25.3. | Ujvárfarva | 8 | 2 | juv. | ♂, ♀ | 270, 255 | 63, 62 |
| 28.3. | Ujvárfarva | 9 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 285 | 68 |
| 29.3. | Bal. Keresztur/Fr | 5 | 1 | juv. | ♂ | 255 | 70 |
| 29.3. | Ujvárfarva | 3 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 300 | 72 |

Fall migration: The woodcocks arrived rather late in 1995, and were unusually abundant in the mountains. Up to three birds have been seen flying together in the evening. Migration ended abruptly by mid-November, due to cold spell and snow fall.

The following woodcocks were bagged in Austria (Steiermark) mainly during evening flights in fall 1995.

| Date | Location | Number seen | Number bagged | Age | Sex | Weight (g.) | Bill length (mm) |
|--------|----------------|-------------|---------------|-----------|------|-------------|------------------|
| 16.10. | Reinischkogel | 8 | 1 | ad. | ♀ | 341 | 79 |
| 17.10. | Reinischkogel | 6 | 1 | juv. | ♂ | 298 | 65 |
| 20.10. | Reinischkogel | 6 | 2 | ad. | ♂, ♀ | 290, 309 | 70, 72 |
| 22.10. | Rosenkogel | 4 | 1 | ad. | ♀ | 333 | 68 |
| 24.10. | Reinischkogel | 3 | 1 | juv. | ♀ | 348 | 67 |
| 25.10. | Rosenkogel | 6 | 1 | juv. | ♂ | 318 | 63 |
| 26.10. | Rosenkogel | 4 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 322 | 69 |
| 27.10. | Rosenkogel | 1 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 366 | 71 |
| 30.10. | Gasselsdorf | 5 | 1 | ad. | ♀ | 311 | 72 |
| 31.10. | Rosenkogel | 1 | 1 | ad. | ♂ | 354 | 66 |
| 2.11. | Gasselsdorf | 5 | 2 | ad., juv. | ♂, ♀ | 318, 345 | 74, 62 |
| 8.11. | Gasselsdorf | 4 | 1 | ad. | ♀ | 384 | 74 |
| 12.11. | Neurath/Stainz | 4 | 1 | juv. | ♂ | 356 | 61 |

The "number seen" in both lists concern only observations made at outings when birds were shot.

Author's address:

Elisabethstr. 41
A-8020 Graz, Austria

Wing sampling in Denmark - Season 1995/96

Since 1979 wings of waterfowl, snipes and woodcock bagged by Danish hunters are sampled by the National Environmental Research Institute (NERI), Kalø. The DMU report No. 168, edited by Ib Clausager provides the following results:

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

306 wings had been reported, about half the number of the previous season that had resulted from an extremely high breeding success. 2 juveniles per adult indicated a rather average breeding success in 1995. Migration obviously peaked in the first half of November.

Common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

With 530 wings the number was only slightly lower than in the previous season. But 2.1 juveniles per adult indicated a breeding success in 1995 below average, and considerably lower than the extremely successful breeding season (56%) of the snipes had been harvested in the first half of September, the beginning of the hunting season.

Jack snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)

62 wings had been reported, 18 less than in the extremely good previous season. Since there are no distinct age criteria known so far, no age-ratios could be calculated. The seasonal distribution of the wings point to a peak of migration in the second half of October, thus considerably later than the Common snipe.

Author's address:

National Environmental Research Institute
Grenåvej 12
DK - 8410 Rønne
Denmark

Trend of Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) bags in Northern Germany

Rolf Kröger

Since 26 years bags of small game obtained in the hunting district of Kuhstedt (near Hamburg, Germany) are recorded. Of the total area of 2400 ha only about 1000 ha are driven for woodcocks, hares, pheasants, partridges and rabbits on one day per year, namely the second Saturday in November. According to experience this is the peak of woodcock migration in this region.

Bags taken in this way, with a more or less constant number of hunters are an indicator of the trend of game abundance over time in this area. The slightly increasing trend since the mid-1970ies, obvious from Figure 1, is in line with other observations in Northern Germany and Denmark. There is also a breeding population in this area that may have also increased, according to more frequent observations of roding woodcocks in spring and summer.

number
shot

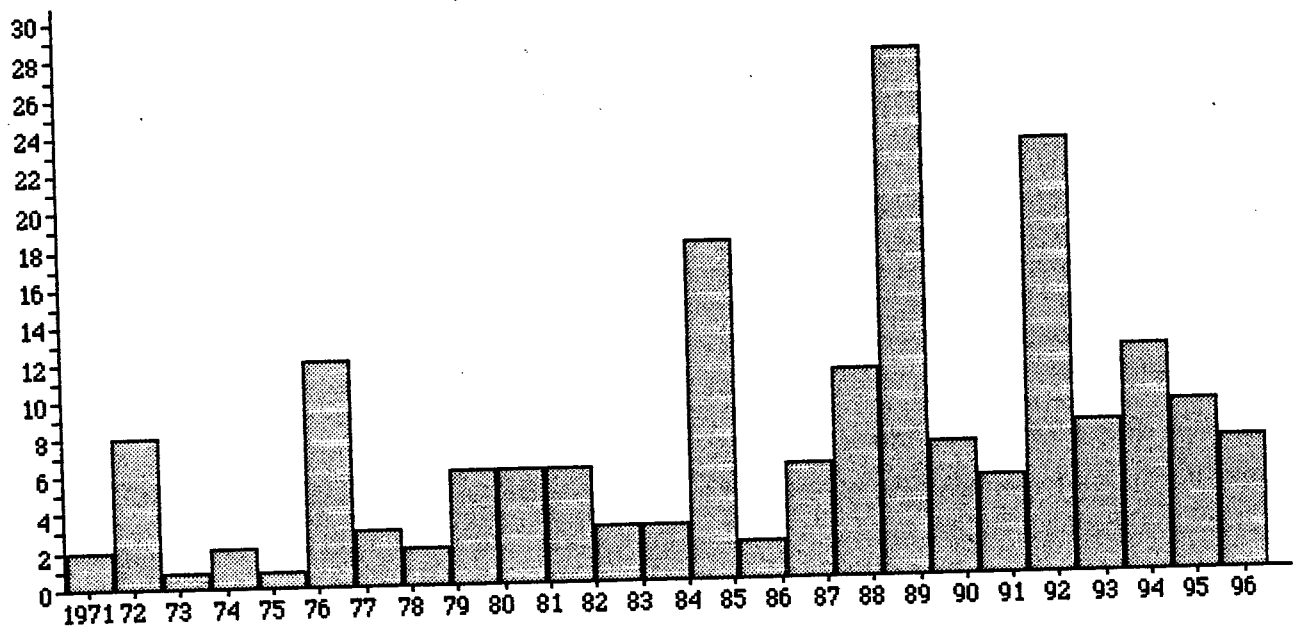


Figure 1: Woodcocks bagged on 1000 ha drive hunt

Author's address:

Redaktion „Wild und Hund“
Postfach 102209
D-20015 Hamburg, Germany

La Becasse de Bois (*Scolopax rusticola*) rapport baguage - Saison 1995/96

Francois Gossmann et Claudine Bastat-Lequerré

Au cours de la saison 1995-1996, 2713 bécasses ont été baguées, ce qui constitue un excellent résultat. Le nombre de départements où des captures ont été réalisées est stable, ainsi que le taux moyen de réussite. L'augmentation forte du nombre d'oiseaux capturés est liée à de bonnes densités en bécasses sur les sites de baguage, le nombre moyen de bécasses vues par sortie s'élevant pour cette saison à 9,9 oiseaux pour un échantillon de 17 départements retenus depuis 1989-1990.

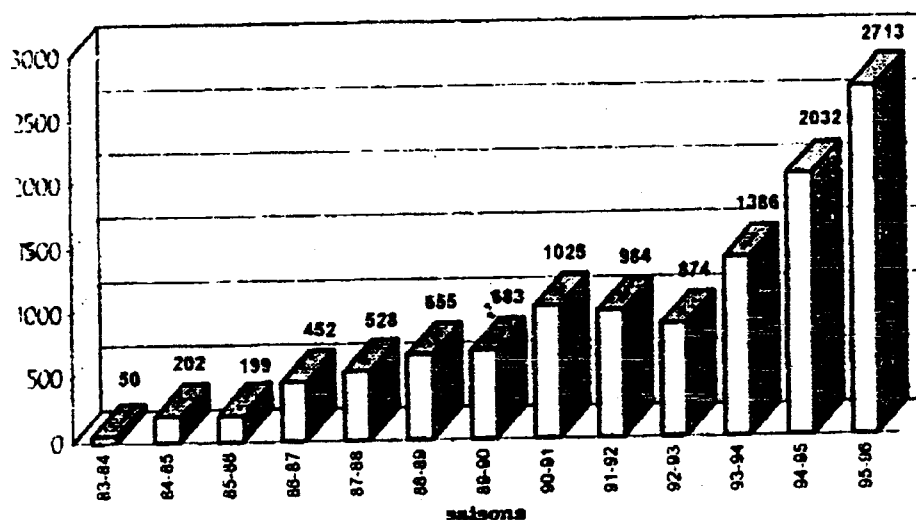


Figure 1: Evolution interannuelle des résultats de baguage
(Source: ONC - Réseau de correspondants „Becasse“)

La saison de baguage en chiffres:

Nombre de départements: **61**

Nombre de sites de baguage: **404**

Nombre de bagueurs: **240**

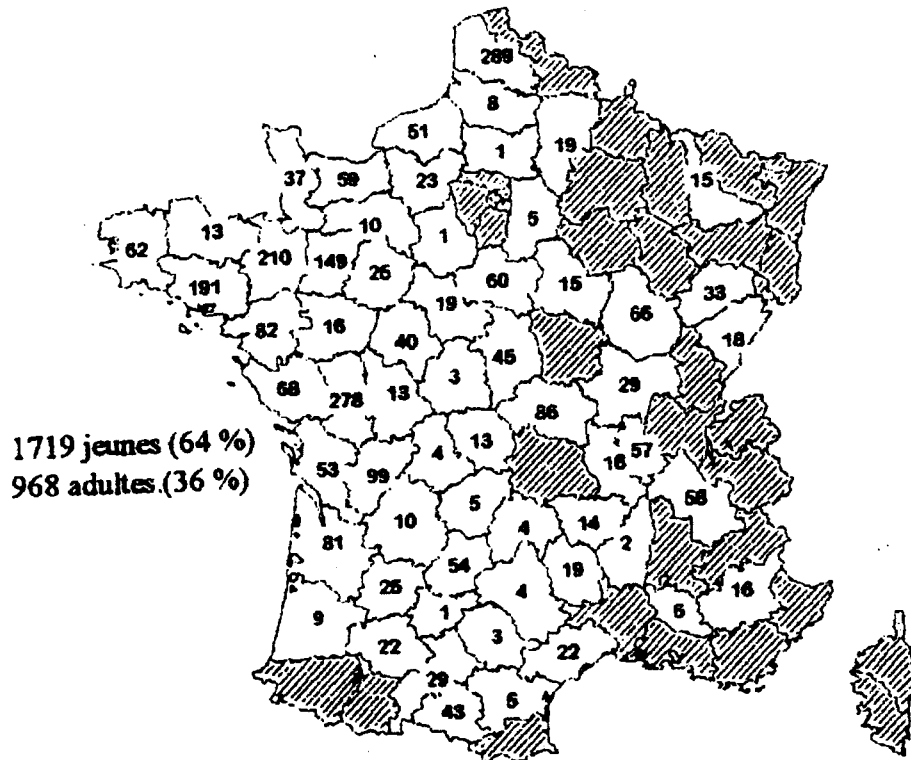
Nombre de sorties :nocturnes: **136**

Nombre de contacts : **10225**

Nombre de bécasses baguées: **2713**

Nombre de contrôles: **223**

Taux de réussite: **29 %**



Carte 1: Répartition des 2713 bagues posées en 1995 - 1996

L'effectif hivernant en France a été beaucoup plus élevé cette dernière saison et réparti de façon plus homogène sur le territoire français. S'il y a toujours de bons résultats dans certains départements près de la Manche et de l'Atlantique (Pas-de-Calais et Deux-Sèvres, près de 300 oiseaux marqués), on constate que les effectifs de bécasses baguées sont davantage répartis en France: dans le Centre, dans l'Est et aussi dans le Sud-Ouest, où les captures ont été plus nombreuses que les années précédentes.

Selon le schéma le plus courant, ce sont mois de novembre et décembre qui totalisent près de 60 % des captures de la saison 1995-1996.

Deux cent vingt trois contrôles ont été réalisés en 95-96 dont **134 contrôles directs** sur des oiseaux bagués dans la saison et **89 contrôles indirects** sur des oiseaux bagués les saisons précédentes. Un certain nombre d'entre eux ont eu lieu sur des territoires où la pression de baguage est élevée. Ainsi, on observé 75 contrôles autour de la forêt de Chizé dans les Deux-Sèvres dont un sur une bécasse baguée en Russie à l'automne 1995.

Parmi les oiseaux bagués, 64 % sont des jeunes de l'année. La décroissance de ce ratio ces dernières années s'explique principalement par l'augmentation du nombre d'oiseaux bagués dans des départements plus intérieurs où la proportion d'adultes est plus forte. La proportion plus faible de jeunes dans les régions intérieures se traduit également dans les tableaux de chasse.

Le **nombre de reprises** de bagues enregistrées en 1995-1996 s'élève à 502 : 289 reprises directes et 213 reprises indirectes. Le **taux des reprises directes** est de **10,7 %**, très proche donc de ceux obtenus ces dernières années.

Le délai moyen des reprises directes pour les oiseaux repris à moins de 20 km du lieu de baguage est de 28 jours.

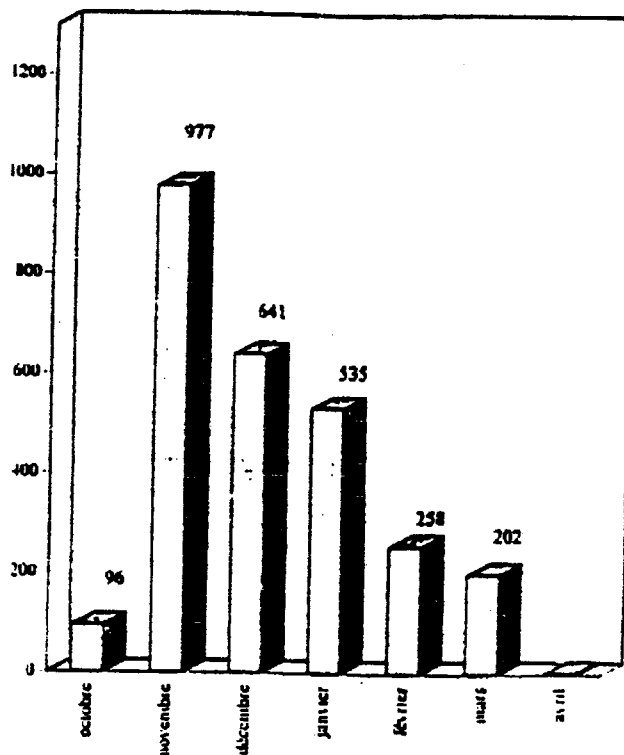


Figure 2: Évolution mensuelle des captures
(Source: ONC - Réseau de correspondants „Becasse“)

Les reprises de bagues françaises à l'étranger

Les oiseaux bagués en France grâce aux efforts des bagueurs du réseau ont permis d'obtenir, de fin 95 à mi 96, de nouvelles informations par le biais des reprises à l'étranger. Les 26 nouvelles reprises enregistrées se décomposent de la façon suivante:

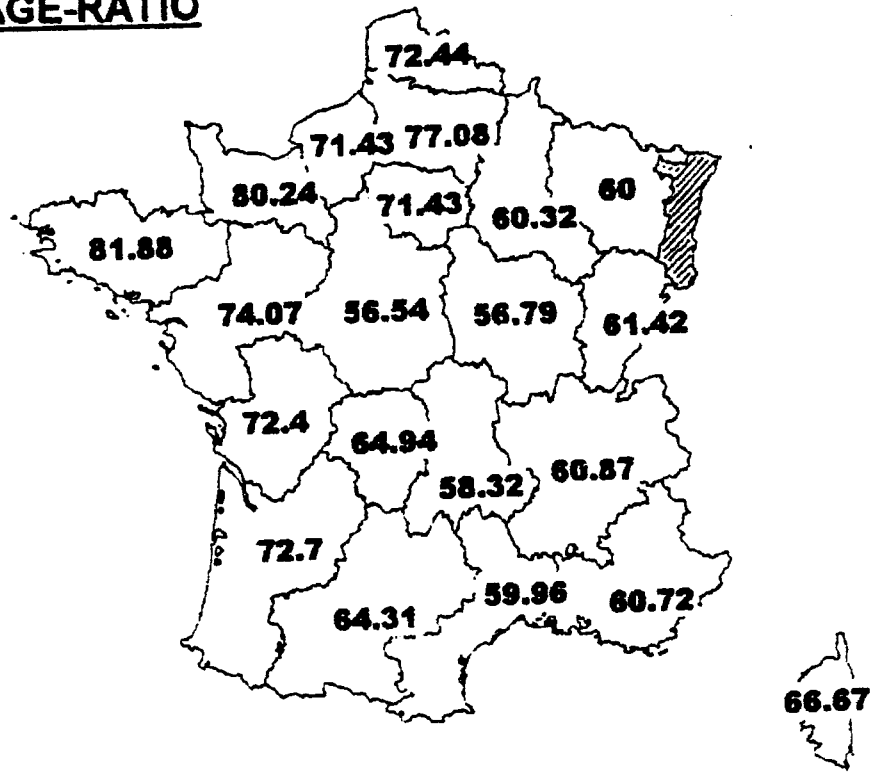
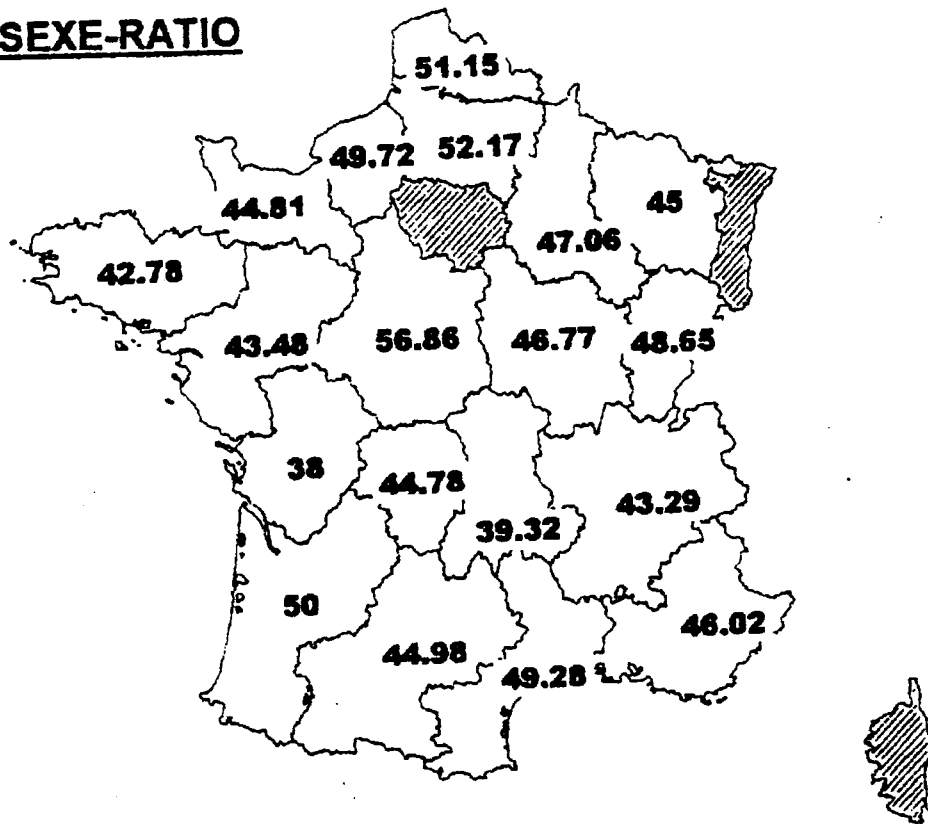
- 4 oiseaux repris en automne-hiver dont 2 en Grande-Bretagne, 1 en Espagne et 1 en Turquie
- 19 oiseaux repris en période de croule, de mars à mai, dont 12 en Russie, 2 en Pologne, 2 en Hongrie, 1 en Estonie, 1 en Biélorussie et 1 en Autriche
- 3 reprises particulièrement remarquables en Finlande compte-tenu des conditions de récupération des bagues: 2 oiseaux ont été tués lors de collisions avec des véhicules en mai et juin et un troisième oiseau bagué a été retrouvé dans une aire d'Autour des Palombes.

A ce jour, aucune reprise par la chasse n'est connue en Finlande.

L'ANALYSE DES TABLEAUX DE CHASSE

Une vague de froid a touché le Nord et l'Est de l'Europe, particulièrement à partir de mi-décembre, certainement la période la plus froide depuis ces six dernières années avec des températures de -25°C enregistrées sur les rivages de la Baltique. Cette vague de froid, qui n'a pas atteint la France, a sans doute contribué à pousser davantage d'oiseaux vers les extrémités de l'aire d'hivernage.

En France, les conditions d'hivernage ont permis une répartition des oiseaux sur l'ensemble du territoire avec bien sûr les zones "fortes" habituelles dans les départements littoraux ou proches du littoral. La saison de chasse 95-96 a été faste dans la majeure partie du pays.

AGE-RATIO**SEXE-RATIO**

Carte 2: Les résultats de l'analyse des tableaux de Chasse (Source: ONC - Réseau de correspondants „Bécasse“)

Échantillon analysé

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Nombre de sorties de chasse : | 14736 |
| Nombre de relevés fournis : | 488 |
| Nombre d'ailes analysées | |
| Nombre d'oiseaux sexes : | 2883 |

Résultats

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| ICA : | 0,22 |
| Age-ratio : | 67,5% |
| Sexe-ratio : | 44,4% |

En 1995-1996, les chasseurs du réseau de correspondants ont prélevé en moyenne 17 bécasses en 30 sorties dont 12 sorties positives.

Avenir de l'enquête

Le Club National des Bécassiers, sur les mêmes bases d'enquête, a procédé cette saison à l'analyse de 5545 ailes. Les différences notées au niveau de l'âge-ratio moyen des échantillons analysés (67,5 % pour le réseau et 72 % pour le CNB) mettent en évidence la nécessité de refondre le protocole de collecte des ailes afin de mieux interpréter les variations inter-annuelles.

Une réflexion sur le sujet a donc été menée au sein du réseau puis avec le Club National des Bécassiers. Elle a débouché sur la mise en place, à titre expérimental pour la saison 96-97, d'un nouveau type d'enquête.

Trois Fédérations de l'Ouest, la Vendée, la Loire-Atlantique et le Morbihan testeront une nouvelle enquête auprès de deux populations de chasseurs:

- pour le réseau Bécasse, un échantillon de chasseurs tirés au hasard dans le listing des chasseurs départementaux fournira relevés de sorties de chasse et ailes des bécasses prélevées
- pour le CNB, les chasseurs échantillonnés sont choisis au hasard dans les listes départementales de chasseurs spécialistes adhérant du Club. Ils fourniront également relevés de sorties et ailes.

Le taux de réponse à ces enquêtes sera mesuré et les résultats étudiés pour juger de l'opportunité d'étendre ce protocole à l'échelon national à partir de 1997-1998.

SUMMARY**Woodcock ringing report 1995/96**

At 404 sites in 61 French departments a network of 240 ringers, organized by the ONC, have caught and ringed a total of 2713 woodcocks by using nets and spotlights. During 1368 nocturnal outings altogether 10225 woodcocks have been contacted. As evident from Fig. 1 this was the most successful period so far.

Fig. 2 shows the chronological distribution. Again, most woodcocks have been caught in November.

The overall age-ratio was 64% juveniles and 36% adults. Towards the Atlantic coast this ratio was

skewed in favour of the juveniles, while in the interior departments the portion of adults was higher. This phenomenon was in line with the age-ratios derived from wing sampling of shot birds (a total of 6921 wings, 67% juveniles).

223 woodcocks had been recaptured, 134 of them having been ringed during this, and 89 during previous seasons.

During this period a total of 502 ringed woodcocks were reported by hunters, 289 direct recoveries (ringed this season) and 213 indirect recoveries (ringed in previous seasons). The recovery rate (direct) was 10.7%, thus similar as in previous years. They were shot on average after 28 days after ringing, on average 20 km from the ringing place.

Recently, 26 more recoveries of birds ringed in France have been reported from abroad. Of them 4 were shot during fall and winter in the UK (2), Spain (1) and Turkey (1), while 19 were shot while roding in March to May in Russia (12), Poland (2), Hungary (2), Estonia (1), Belorussia (1) and Austria (1). 3 were victims of accidents in May and June in Finland.

Again during 1996 the ONC had cooperated with scientific institutions in Russia (Moscow and St. Petersbourg) which resulted in ringing of almost 300 woodcocks before their migration. Due to a drought the portion of juveniles had been smaller than in previous years.

H.K.

Adresse des auteurs:

Office National de la Chasse
Station des Pays de Loire
53, rue de Russeil
F-44000 Nantes, France

Rapport becasse (*Scolopax rusticola*) - Croule 1996

Yves Ferrand

Depuis neuf années, déjà, des observations de croule se déroulent en France selon un protocole standardisé. L'aire de nidification française de la bécasse est désormais en quasitotalité sous surveillance. L'évolution des effectifs nicheurs dans notre pays, objectif principal de l'enquête, est suivie avec un excellent degré de fiabilité. Environ 1000 points d'écoute sont visités annuellement. Une telle pression d'observation nous assure une détection aussi rapide que possible de la tendance démographique des populations de bécasses autochtones. Ces informations essentielles dans la gestion des populations s'inscrivent dans l'ensemble de celles récoltées par le Réseau Bécasse. Nos remerciements, et nos encouragements, vont à tous les observateurs du réseau pour leur collaboration efficace.

RESULTATS

1 - Taux de réalisation

Au total 63 départements ont participé aux observations. Trois départements bretons (Finistère, Ille et Vilaine et Morbihan) se sont associés à l'enquête cette année. Ces observations ont pour but de déte-

cter un éventuel accroissement de l'aire de nidification dans une zone typique d'hivernage. Ces opérations devraient être renouvelées tous les deux ans. D'autres départements rentrent dans ce cadre, soit en raison de leur position géographique (Eure, Mayenne, Vendée, Manche), soit à cause d'une très longue série de résultats négatifs (Aveyron, Dordogne).

Deux nouveaux départements nous ont rejoint cette année: le Lot-et-Garonne et l'Eure. Plus d'un millier (1078) de sites ont été visités en 1996.

2 - Taux d'occupation national

Rappelons que ce taux correspond au pourcentage de points d'observations sur lesquels la présence de bécasses à la croule est notée.

- Pour l'année 1996, le taux d'occupation global (Tg) s'élève à **0,237**.

Cette valeur est l'une des plus faible des 9 dernières années. Elle ne dépasse que de 0,01 point celle de 1991.

| Années | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Tg | 0,259 | 0,247 | 0,281 | 0,236 | 0,27 | 0,255 | 0,241 | 0,276 | 0,237 |

Il est probable que la prise en compte des départements bretons cette saison, ait fait baisser la valeur de Tg. En effet, en 1994, également saison d'observations en Bretagne, nous observions déjà une baisse du taux d'occupation vers une valeur proche de celle de cette année. En excluant la Bretagne du calcul nous gagnerions environ 2 points sur le Tg, ce qui le mettrait à une valeur sensiblement égale à la moyenne observée sur 8 années.

Il est plus intéressant, et plus près de la réalité, de comparer les résultats obtenus pendant plusieurs années sur les mêmes départements. Cette analyse est présentée en 4.

- Le taux d'occupation des sites à fortes abondance (nombre d'observations ≥ 5) s'élève à **0,072**.
- Le taux d'occupation des sites à faible abondance (nombre d'observations compris entre 1 et 4) est égal à: **0,165**.

3 - Taux d'occupation régional

Nous avons distingué huit régions pour lesquelles les résultats sont présentés dans le tableau ci-dessous (Table 1).

| Régions (Nombre de départements pris en compte) | Taux d'occupation |
|---|-------------------|
| Lorraine (4) | 0,591 |
| Alsace (2) | 0,468 |
| Franche-Comté (3) | 0,245 |
| Massif-Central (13) | 0,238 |
| Bassin Parisien (18) | 0,234 |
| Pyrénées- Languedoc- Roussillon (6) | 0,135 |
| Alpes (7) | |
| Bourgogne (3) | 0,014 |

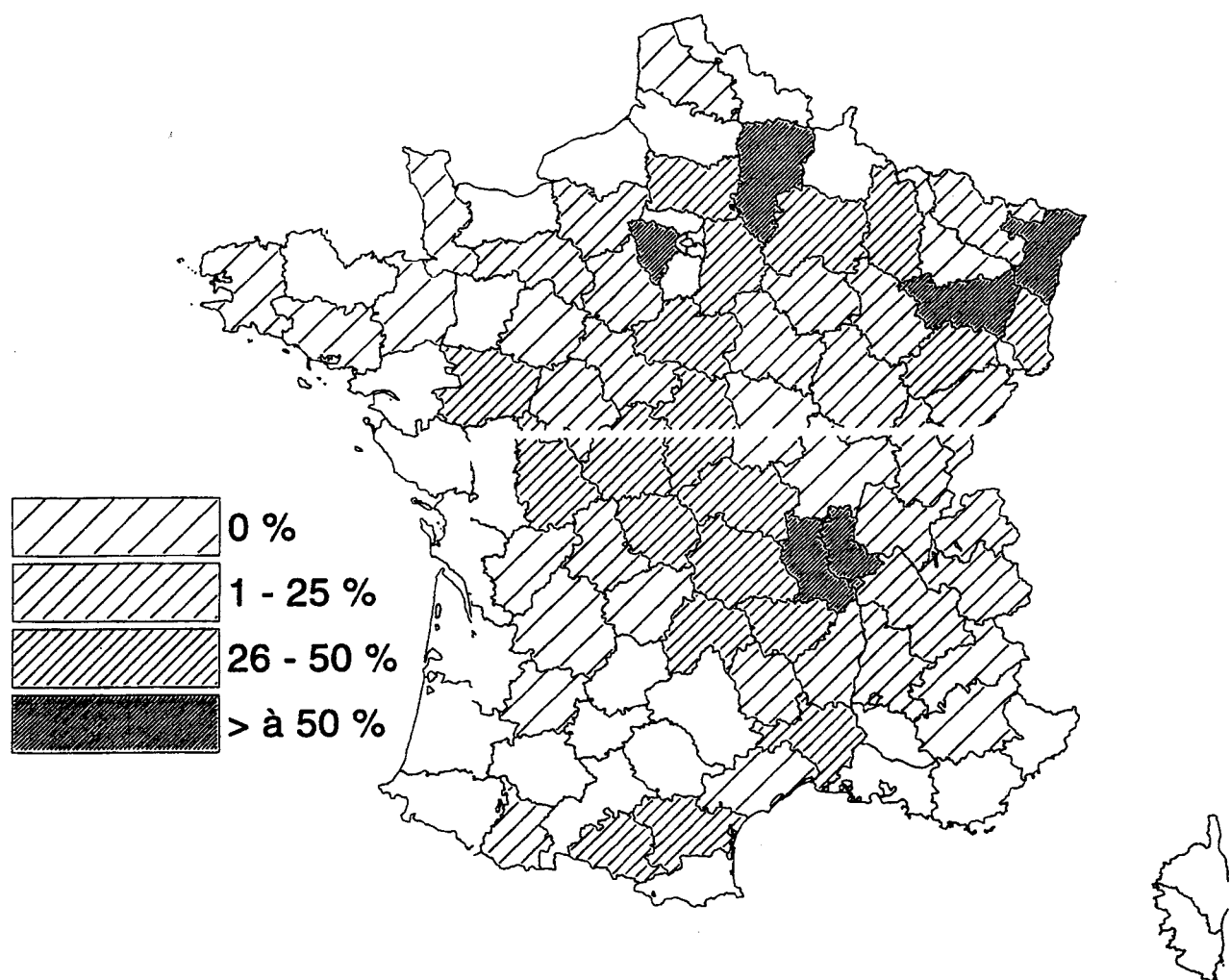


Figure 1: Localisation des départements qui ont participé au suivi en 1996 et taux d'occupation pour chacun d'eux. (source: Réseau "Becasse")

Les régions Alsace et Lorraine arrivent toujours au premier rang avec des valeurs de taux d'occupation qui oscillent autour de 0,5. Vient ensuite un groupe qui se situe dans la moyenne nationale et qui rassemble le Centre de la France. Enfin, les régions montagneuses et la Bourgogne se placent, comme les autres années, nettement en dessous des valeurs moyennes.

Les résultats régionaux de cette saison 1996 présentent globalement la même configuration que les saisons passées. Il faut cependant noter les très faibles valeurs recueillies en zone de montagne et en Bourgogne,... sans d'ailleurs pouvoir les expliquer.

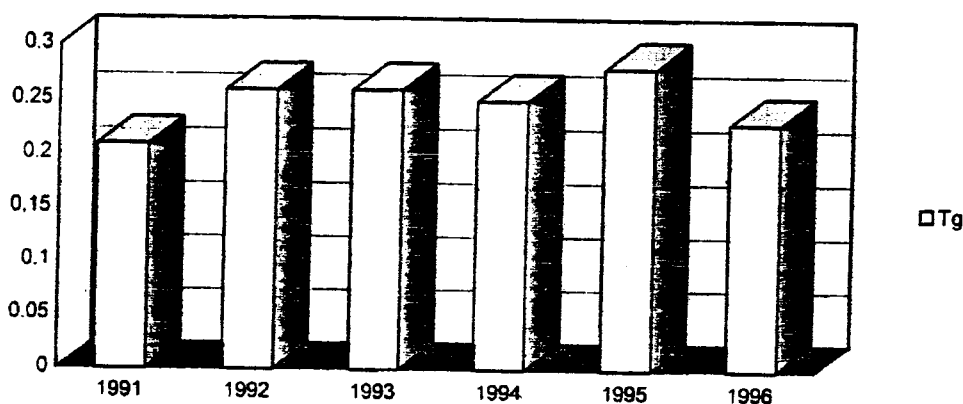
4 - Tendence démographique

Pour approcher au plus près la réalité nous avons restreint notre analyse aux 6 dernières années. C'est en effet à partir de 1991 que la couverture géographique de l'enquête est réellement satisfaisante compte tenu de l'aire de nidification française de l'espèce. L'analyse (Table 2) concerne donc 45 dé-

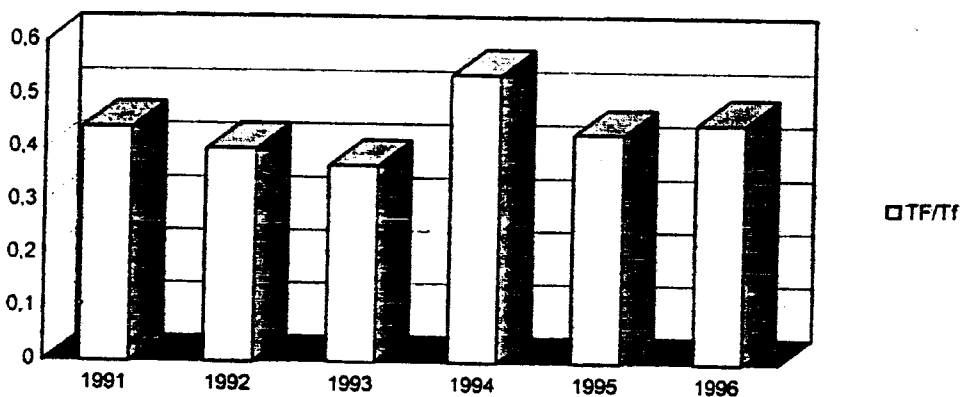
partements présentés dans la carte (Figure 1).

| Année | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Nombre de points d'écoute | 705 | 706 | 716 | 721 | 757 |
| Nombre de points positifs | 148 | 182 | 189 | 180 | 210 |
| Nombre de points à faible abondance | 103 | 130 | 138 | 117 | 147 |
| Nombre de points à forte abondance | 45 | 52 | 51 | 63 | 63 |

L'hétérogénéité mise en évidence l'an passé dans les variations du taux d'occupation globale de 1991 à 1995 est confirmée sur cette série incluant 1996 [$c^2 = 12,15 > 11,07$ ($\alpha = 0,05$)]. La légère tendance à la hausse persiste donc. Toutefois le rapport des faibles aux fortes abondances demeure d'une bonne stabilité [$(c^2 = 3,17 < 11,07$ ($\alpha = 0,06$)]



Variations inter-annuelles de Tg



Variations inter-Annuelles de TF/Tf

5- Nidification

Plusieurs cas de nidification nous ont été signalés cette année:

- En Côte d'Or, une nichée de 3 poussins en forêt communale de Potailleur-sur-Saône le 5/5/96.
- Dans la Drome, une nichée de 4 poussins (agés d' environ 8 jours) sur la commune de Marsanne, le 26/4/96.
- En Haute-Loire, 3 cas de nidification ont été recensés:
 - 1 nid sur la commune de Riotord
 - 1 nid sur la commune de Chanaleilles

- 1 nid sur la commune de Pinols
- Dans le Morbihan, un nid de 4 oeufs sur la commune de Guegon le 28/3/96.
- Dans l'Orne, 2 nids en forêt d'Ecouvès. Les 2 nids étaient situés à 50 mètres l'un de l'autre. Le premier fut découvert le 26/5/96 et contenait 4 oeufs.
- Dans le Rhône, un nid de 4 oeufs découvert le 25/6/96 à Beaujeu Probablement abandonné.
- En Haute-Saône, 6 cas de nidification ont été recensés:
 - 1 nichée de 4 poussins, le 4/5/96 au Haut-du-Them
 - 1 nichée de 2 poussins, le 6/5/96 à Dampierre-sur-Linotte. Les 2 jeunes ont été bagués.
 - 1 nid de 4 oeufs, le 12/5/96 au Haut-du-Them. Le nid fut abandonné en raison de travaux forestiers.
 - 1 jeune volant observé le 29/5/96 à Noroy-le-Bourg
 - 1 nichée de 4 poussins, le 30/5/96 à La Rosières. Trois jeunes sont malheureusement morts par la suite.
 - 1 adulte avec 2 jeunes volants le 27/6/96 à Beulotte-Saint-Laurent.

CONCLUSION

Deux informations essentielles se dégagent de ce bilan 1996: de nombreux cas de nidification qui témoignent des capacités d'accueil de notre territoire et la confirmation de la stabilité, voire d'une légère tendance à la hausse des effectifs nicheurs en France. Au vu de ces résultats les populations de becasses autochtones ne semblent donc pas particulièrement menacées.

Yves Ferrand

SUMMARY

Report on the woodcock-roding season 1996

In order to get quantitative data on the woodcock breeding population in France roding birds have been surveyed systematically since 1988. 63 departments have been included in 1996 (Fig. 1), thus almost all suitable habitats are covered, by a total of 1078 observation points. On average, at 24% of the points at least one roding woodcock was observed. These results do not differ significantly from those of previous years, indicating a more or less constant occupation of French forests by breeding woodcocks. The same holds for an analysis of the trends in 45 departments (Tab. 1 and 2). The number of sites with high and low woodcock abundance did not differ significantly over the six years analysed. The regions Lorraine and Alsace exhibited the highest woodcock abundance.

The paper further reports fifteen records of breeding woodcocks (nests or chicks).

H.K.

Author's address:

Office National de la Chasse
 Section Becasse
 5, Rue de St. Thibaut - St. Benoist
 F-78610 Auffargis
 France

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) ringing in Russia - report 1991 - 1993

Vladimir A. Kuzyakin

Introduction The joint Russian-French expeditions ringed a total of 234 woodcocks during autumn migration in 1991 - 1993 in Russia. Most birds were caught in the districts of Pskov (171), Pustoshka (22) and Sebez (12) of the Pskov Oblast. Smaller numbers were ringed in some districts, mainly Petushki, of the Vladimir Oblast (15), around Bezbodovo in the Tver Oblast (8) and some other sites, where single birds were ringed. Until spring of 1995 25 ring recoveries had been reported.

Method We used the capture method which our French colleagues (Gossmann et al. 1988) kindly had taught us. Nets of 1.2 m in diameter were held with sticks 5 or 6 m long. About 29 % of all observed woodcocks were caught.

Migration Period The birds were ringed during the second and the third decade of September and in the first half of October. In spite of constant efforts the number of catches in the Pskov Oblast increased gradually up to 4 - 8 October, obviously the migration peak, irrespective of weather. Afterwards the numbers decreased in steps following cold waves. In the Vladimir Oblast migration peaked 1 or 2 days earlier. On the south-eastern shore of the Baltic Sea the peak of migration was observed during 18 - 22 October (A. P. Shapoval, pers. comm.).

Age Ratios Young birds made up 74.8 % of all ringed woodcocks (Table 1). This high ratio of 3 or, in 1991, even 4.4 young birds per adult may partly be biased by a higher selectivity for young birds in the catching process, of which we however have no proof. Nevertheless, it seems to be a good indicator of the breeding success, since this ratio varied with years and was lowest in 1992, when summer and autumn were very dry. Adult birds were caught more frequently at the beginning and in the end of migration, while young birds were most common during the peaks.

| | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | Total (average) |
|------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| Number of birds ringed | 38 | 104 | 92 | 234 |
| adult | 7 | 34 | 18 | 59 |
| young | 31 | 70 | 74 | 175 |
| adult: young | 1:4.43 | 1:2.06 | 1:4.11 | 1:2.97 |
| Mean weight, (g) | 341.8 | 348.4 | 361.3 | 352.5 |
| adult | 334.2 | 356.9 | 365.3 | 357.1 |
| young | 343.5 | 344.3 | 360.3 | 350.9 |
| Number of recoveries | 7 | 10 | 8 | 25 |
| adult | 1 | 5 | 2 | 8 |
| young | 6 | 5 | 6 | 17 |
| Recovery rate (%) | 18.4 | 9.6 | 8.7 | 10.7 |
| adult | 14.3 | 14.7 | 11.1 | 13.6 |
| young | 19.4 | 7.1 | 8.1 | 9.7 |

Table 1: Results of capture and ringing of woodcocks in Russia in 1991 - 1993.

There was obviously no selectivity for age in the recovered birds, of which the majority was shot, 2 were found injured, 1 dead. The average recovery rate was 10.7 %, 9.7 % for young and 13.6 % for adult birds, with annual variations. Obviously adult woodcocks did not have a greater chance to survive, which is in contrast to the findings in France (Gossmann et al. 1994), the recovery rate of young birds was 16.9 %, that of adults 8.6 %. If this difference is significant, it may be difficult to explain.

Weight The average weight of woodcocks in Russia in autumn was 352.5 gramms. There were no significant differences in the weight of adult and young birds, nor variations with years, mainly because of large weight variations between 270 and 440 gramms.

Migration All recoveries are shown by Figure 1, while Table 2 provides an overview over the recoveries according to countries. Woodcocks nesting in north western regions of Russia or migrating through this area fly mainly to the wintering areas in western Europe from Scotland to Portugal, including western and southern France, and also northern and north-western Spain. These birds only to a small extend reach the countries of southern Europe. For example, only one ringed bird was recovered from Italy in spite of the hunting intensity in this country.

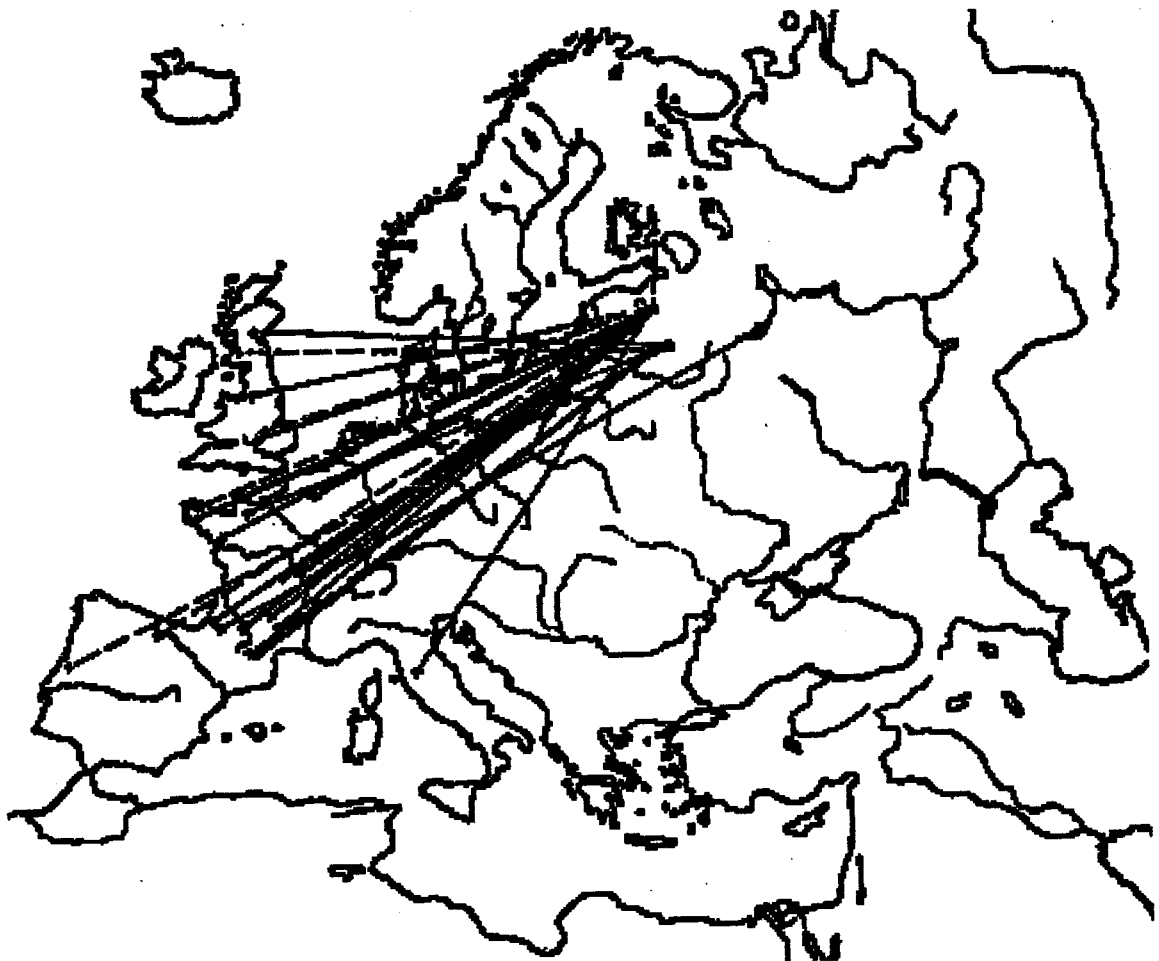


Fig. 1: Recoveries of woodcocks ringed in Russia in 1991 - 1993. Dots: ringing sites, crosses: places of recovery, solid lines: direct recoveries, dashed lines: indirect recoveries.

None of the 15 woodcocks ringed in the Vladimir Oblast was recovered so far. Probably most of the birds from more eastern regions of Russia fly to southern Europe, although we know of some direct recoveries of French rings from the Vladimir Oblast, and also from the Ivanovo, Nizhny Novgorod oblasts, and Vladimir rings from France in subsequent years.

The longest distance covered was from Bezborodovo in the Tver Oblast to the north-western slopes of the Pyrenees, about 3000 km.

Number of Woodcocks Quantitative estimates of woodcock population were based on bag data and recovery rates of ringed birds. About 3.7 million woodcocks are bagged annually in Europe, while the recovery rates vary between 10 and 25 %. The size of the total woodcock population in Europe is therefore estimated to be in the order between 15 and 37 million birds (Hepburn 1983).

Though the number of ringing data is still small I will try this calculation on a regional level. According to our ring recoveries the wintering area of Russian woodcocks encompasses the British Isles (although we have no recoveries from Ireland available, there were many recoveries of Russian rings from this country and the Irish rings from Russia), Atlantic and Mediterranean parts of France, northern and southern slopes of the Pyrenees, north-western Spain and Portugal.

In this area (Table 2), approximately 1.6 million woodcocks are bagged annually (Kalchreuter 1983, Hepburn 1983 etc.). 234 birds ringed provided 17 direct recoveries from these countries. Hence, the portion of ringed birds bagged was $17 : 1,600,000 = 1 / 94,118$.

| Country of recovery | Total number of recoveries | Direct recoveries | Average time lag (days) |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| France | 15 | 14 | 95 |
| British Isles | 5 | 3 | 244 |
| Russia | 2 | (1) | 206 |
| Spain | 1 | - | 436 |
| Portugal | 1 | - | 865 |
| Italy | 1 | 1 | 80 |
| Total (average) | 25 | 19 | 176.2 |

Table 2: Overview on the recoveries of woodcocks ringed in Russia 1991 - 93.

Under the assumption our marked birds intermix with the birds from other breeding areas proportionally, the total number of wintering woodcocks within the outlined territory could be calculated as $234 \times 94118 = 22$ million birds.

More ringing data in the future may enable us to more detailed calculations also for certain countries.

In the meanwhile the ringing activities in France provide another base for calculations. During 1983 - 91 3794 woodcocks had been ringed, of which 557 had been recovered directly in France (Goss-mann et al. 1994), thus a recovery rate of 6.8 %. The annual bag is on average 1.3 million woodcocks. Assuming this recovery rate is representative for the harvest rate in the country, the woodcock population wintering in France may be in the order of $1.3 \text{ million} \times 6.8 = 8.84$ million birds.

Time lag between ringing and recovery This parameter averaged 176.2 days, and for direct recoveries 73.2 days. The minimum time lag was 21 days, and another bird lived with the ring for 22 days (Fig. 2). The first one covered a distance of 2,400 km by which it lost 55 gramms, from 385 to 330 g. Both birds were ringed in 1993 in the Sebezhd district and shot in the department Ariège of France. May be, they had travelled together.

By far the most of these ringed birds were harvested in the wintering areas. Only one bird of those 25 was shot in Russia during the spring hunting season. Another one was shot in Russia by French hunters at a distance of 1.5 km from the ringing site and 4 days after ringing. We excluded this recovery from the calculation of the time lag (Table 2).

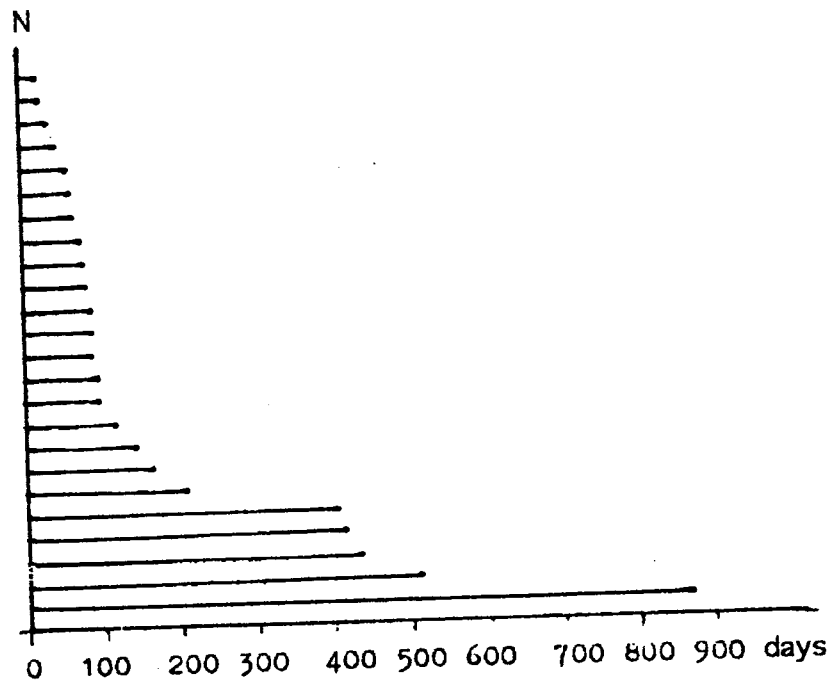


Fig. 2: Time lag between ringing and recovery of 24 woodcocks ringed in Russia.

Acknowledgements I am grateful to all the participants of the expeditions: F. Gossmann, Y. Ferrand, J. Lerray, L. Barbier, Z. Tzedebal, A. Grebenkov, P. Zverev, A. Ochagova, S. Fokin, A. Kormilitsyn, S. Tzarev, S. Fetisov, and many other colleagues assisting us in the organization of the trips. I further want to thank the national ringing centres and all the hunters for reporting woodcock rings.

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Author's address:

Prof. V. A. Kuzyakin
Institute of Animal Ecology, Russian Academy of Science
Leninsky prospect 33,
Moscow V - 17, Russia

On Woodcock and Snipes in the former USSR

Thanks to the political changes we have now access to the colleagues working in the main breeding range of all four species. Most of their publications are in Russian only. But the translation bureau "Merktrans" of J. Shergalin in Estonia provided an extensive list of literature of this century, and also translated the following articles I had selected for this issue. This series will be continued during the next years.

Copies of original Russian publications as well as translations from Russian into English can be ordered by

Dr. J. Shergalin, Merktrans,

Vaike-Ameerika 8

Tallinn

EE 0001 Estonia

Fax: 3722-453956

These publications provide insight in the efforts of our colleagues in Eastern Europe to investigate abundance and breeding biology of woodcocks and snipes in their main breeding range. Due to the vastness of the "study areas" some of the results are of course rather sporadic, but nevertheless add to the mosaic of our knowledge.

Lebed', Ye.A., Merzlikin, I.R., Khomenko, S.V. (1996): O nekotorykh redkikh ptitsakh lesostepnoi chasti Sumskoi oblasti [On some rare birds of the forest-steppe of the Sumy Region, Ukraine]. // Materialy konferentsij [Materials of Conference]. Kyiv. Pp.17-20.

Great Snipe (*Gallinago media*). Rare on spring and autumn migration, but more or less regularly. 7 birds were observed on a wet spot in a meadow near the village Chernetchina on 29 April 1988. At the same place 2 birds were flushed from tussocks on 11 May 1993, and a single bird was recorded in the Seim river flood-bed (Ozarichi village) on 25 April 1992. One bird was seen on a small meadow near Konotop town on 26 April 1992. There are 2 records from the autumn at ponds of the Sumy fishing farm: 9 October 1986 (verb. comm. N.P.Knysh) and 13 September 1991. On 2 May 1990 we discovered 2 nests with complete clutches in a wet meadow with sedge tussocks, south-east of Ozarichi village (Lebid', Knysh, Khomenko, 1992).

We consider the situation of the Great snipe in this region as catastrophic, mainly due to a drastic decline of primordial natural habitats as a result of drainage for melioration and ploughing up. Extremely critical was the degradation of the large areas these birds need as lekking places to conduct their complicated (promiscual) mating activities, and which they had used in large numbers for many years.

Reference:

E.O.Lebed', Knysh, M.P., Khomenko, S.V. (1992): Fauna ta ekologiya kulikov Sums'koi oblasti [Fauna and ecology of waders of the Sumy Region]. // Problemy okhorony i rats. vykoriistannya pryrodnykh resursiv Sumshcyny [Problems of conservation and rational use of natural resources of the Sumy Region]. 36 nauk. prats [36 Scient. Proceed.]. Sumy. P.76-94. In Ukrainian.

Chernichko, I.I., Syroechkovskiy, Ye.Ye. jun., Chernichko, R.N., Volokh, A.M., Andryushchenko, Yu.A. (1994): Materialy po faune i naseleniyu ptits Severo-Vostochnogo Gydana [Contributions to fauna and populations of birds in the North-Eastern Gydan] // Arkticheskie tundry Taimyra ostrovov Karskogo morya: priroda, zhivotnyi mir i ego okhrany [Arctic tundras of Taimyr and Kara Sea Islands: nature, wildlife and problems of its conservation]. Moscow. P.223-260.

Common Snipe (*Gallinagallinago* Linnaeus, 1758). In Gydan this species is nesting in more southern regions near Tadibeyakha and the mouth of the Yuribei river (Zhukov, 1989; Zhukov, Golubev, 1990). We did not find a nest, but observed lekking males twice - 27 June and 12 July - in the same place, in the Mongocheyakh river valley.

Pintail Snipe (*Gallinagostenura* Bonaparte, 1830). In the North-Eastern Gyfan, this species obviously, breeds in more northern areas than the Common Snipe, but it was not seen on the arctic shore. On the Eniseiskoe Lake we observed the intensive lek of innumerable birds from 26 June till 16 July. The habitat is different from that of the Common Snipe: Pintail Snipes were seen more often in bushy shrubs along narrow gullies of dry and small river valleys. Even in the lake depressions this snipe was flushed from plots with shrubs. We could not find nests, but on 27 July one left egg of a Snipe (most likely, Pintail Snipe) was found on old plots of polygonal tundra.

Great Snipe (*Gallinago media* Latham, 1787). Nesting in countless numbers around the Eniseiskoe Lake. All birds, except a flock of 4 birds recorded on 30 June south of the lake, have been accompanied with chicks. We repeatedly saw lekking birds. The largest lek of 10 Great Snipes was observed by us on 27 June in extensive areas overgrown by willow in a stream valley near the lake bank. From 3 to 15 July we saw birds on the nesting territories. As a rule, these were mossy-hummocky spots overgrown by pygmy willow in low lands or basal areas of slopes. On 3 July one nest was found occasionally on the slope of a narrow dry gully with hummocks and knobs, overgrown by sparse willow. The female continued to lay eggs, though nest was located 70 m from the base camp of the expedition. In the evening of 3 July the third egg was laid. Later this nest was trampled by reindeer. Nest diameter: 12 cm, depth: 3,5 cm, hardly any lining. Size of eggs: length 44,2 - 47,3 mm (on average 45,5 mm), width 30,9 - 31,7 mm (on average 31,2 mm), weight 21,3 - 24,5 g (on average 22,8 g). These observations around the Eniseiskoe Lake are probably the first records of nesting Great snipes in the tundra of Gydan. Sightings of nonbreeding birds were recorded in the region of Tadibeyakha (Zhukov, 1989) in western Gydan, and G. L. Rutilevskiy (1977) suggested breeding of single pairs in southern tundras of the Enisei Gulf near the Tanama river mouth. The western border of the breeding range of this species probably consists of sporadic nesting. The species seems to be more abundant near the borders of forest-tundra, in the region of the Enisei river mouth.

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Zhukov, V.S., Golubev, O.D. (1990): Usloviya gnezdovaniya kulikov v tundrakh Sovetskogo Soyuzu v 1989 g. Gydanskiy poluostrov [Conditions of wader breeding in tundras of the Soviet Union in 1989. Gydan Peninsula]. // Informatsiya rabochei gruppy po kulikam [Information of the Working Group on Waders]. Magadan. p.42.

Khokhlov, A.N. (1995): Ornitologicheskie nablyudeniya v Zapadnoi Turkmenii [Ornithological observations in Western Turkmenia]. Stavropol'. 128 p.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*). Migratory species on the Turkmenian shore of the Caspian Sea. On the Osushnye Islands I observed solitary birds from 25 till 30 March 1976. They were feeding during twilights in the lagoon close to the border of the Nature Reserve. Here, at the same place, solitary birds were flushed on 24 April, 19 August and 7 November.

A Jack Snipe trapped on 25 March weighed 38 g. Length of bill was 40,3 mm, wing 110, tarsus 24, and tail 50 mm. The bird was not fat.

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). Three times I observed this species on the Osushnye Islands: 11 November, 15 November and 20 December 1976 (solitary birds in all cases).

Great Snipe (*Gallinago media*). Very rare migratory species at the Turkmenian shore of the Caspian Sea. On 19 May 1938 in the region of Kara-Bogaz-Gol Gulf a Great Snipe was seen in the region of Kara-Bogaz-Gol Gulf by Yu. A. Isakov and K. A. Vorob'yov (1940), and on 1 May 1980 in the lower Atrek river (near Chalayk) by A. A. Karavaev (1991).

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Aivan Leito & Tiit Leito. (1995): Hiiurnaa linnustik. Bird fauna of Hiiurnaa. Käzdlä. 160 p. (Pizrujaak; H.) In Estonian and English.

The mating display of the Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) has been recorded on lake Lehtma on April 30, 1990, and on the north-eastern border of Pihla bog on May 2, 1992 (Leito, Leito, 1993). There are no earlier data. The Snipe is a common and frequent breeder and a passage migrant. On the open and shrubby swamp areas of Pihla bog the population density in May and June in 1992 was 0.8 pairs on 10 ha. There are no confirmed data on breeding of the Great Snipe (*Gallinago media*), some single individuals have been observed during migration. The Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) is a common and frequent breeder. It is also breeding on larger islands.

Shkatulova, A.P., Karasev, G.L. (1983): Novye dannye o faune ptits Zabaikal'ya [New data on bird fauna of Trans-Baikalia] // Ptitsy Sibiri [Birds of Siberia. Materials of the 2nd Regional Conf. of Ornith. of Siberia]. Gorno-Altaysk. P.107-108.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) in Trans-Baikalia was not recorded before 1895. We observed this species during spring migration in 1976 and 1978 in the Selenga River valley, 14 - 15 km west of Ulan Ude. First specimens were registered in 1976 (17 May), in 1978 (16 May). In 1976, the Asiatic Dowitcher (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*) and the Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) have appeared simultaneously with the Jack Snipe on migration. In 1978 the beginning of Jack Snipe migration coincided with that of the Ruff and Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temmincki*). Jack Snipes were resting and feeding together with these species, but stayed in separate groups, of 2 - 24 (average 9.5) in 1976 and of 4 - 9 (average 6) in 1978. The birds were found on tussocky, boggy parts of flood-bed, partially using bodies of uncleared domestic waters. Jack Snipes were silent, not shy, allowing to approach them up to a distance of 2 - 15 meters. Jack Snipe numbers during spring migration in the Selenga River valley around Ulan-Ude is not high (May 1976: 1,5; 1978: 1,6 specimens/10 km).

Grachev, Yu.N. (1983): On Woodcock nesting in the middle stream of the Chu River. // Birds of Siberia. Materials of the 2nd Regional Conf. of Ornith. of Siberia. Gorno Altaysk. P.168.

In 1981 in the flood of the middle stream of the Chu river near the „Chernaya Rechka“ village a Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) nest was found on 25th April. It contained 3 eggs, but a fourth egg, laid 50 cm away from the nest, had no shell and almost flowed out contents.

Habitat: plots of flood with rare shrubs of sea backthorn and little swamps. The nest was located 20 cm from the trunk of a burnt shrub of sea-backthorn, among sprouts of climbers. Size of nest: outer diameter: 220, inner: 150, depth: 45 mm. The depression in the ground was lined with pieces of bark (0,75 g), dry twigs (10,2 g), leaves of poplar (2,9 g), grass of previous year (6,5 g) and feathers (0,8 g). Total weight of nest, including vegetative matter: 48,2 g. Size of eggs: 48,7 x 38,0; 46,5 x 36,7; 47,3 x 37,0 mm. Weights: 33,4; 28,9; 29,6 g. The incubating bird sat very tight; it was checked on 26 and 27 April and 1 May, but on 3 May it was destroyed (by a predator?). This record of a woodcock nest in the valley of the middle part of the Chu River proves that it breeds at least sporadically not only in the Tien Shan mountains, but also in the desert foothill zone.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) research update in Britain

Andrew Hoodless

Preliminary work carried out by The Game Conservancy Trust three years ago revealed a steady decline in the annual snipe bag in the United Kingdom. This decline has accelerated since the Second World War. Nevertheless, bag records indicate apparently sustainable numbers of wintering snipe are still seen on shoots where suitable habitat has been maintained.

During 1992, we commissioned the British Trust for Ornithology to conduct an analysis of European common snipe ringing recoveries, with a particular emphasis on 'hunting' rates. A year later their report clearly showed that the proportional 'hunting' rate calculated for snipe had declined since 1950 in all European countries, with the possible exception of France. Shooting had clearly, therefore, not been the cause of the decline in snipe numbers. This important conclusion alone helped keep the snipe on the quarry list. Further research is, however, needed on habitat use and on how to improve existing habitat for snipe in order to restore their numbers.

With this goal clearly in mind we undertook a survey in Cornwall and Somerset during the winter of 1994/95. We plan to continue this study next winter. High on our list of questions to which we seek answers are the time and location of feeding and resting by common snipe as well as the fidelity of individual birds to particular sites. The key to this work is to determine the structure and species composition of the vegetation preferred by snipe and then to compare the benefits of different forms of habitat management. Our initial findings suggest that snipe are dependent on wet pastures for feeding at night and particularly favour fields holding a shallow depth, 5 cm, of water. More surprising, during the day we observed that snipe made use of dry, arable areas, in particular stubble and set-aside fields, far more than was previously realised.

During 1995 we hope to raise sufficient funds to undertake vital research into breeding snipe in the UK. For the first time this work will involve extensive surveys of the productivity of breeding snipe, at sites in the uplands and in the lowlands, comparing locations that undertake predation control with others that do not. Since moors could now be the most important breeding habitat of the species, the aim will be to produce a feasible and practical management plan to help landowners restore breeding snipe and to ensure that policy makers use this blueprint to secure the species' future.

Author's address:

The Game Conservancy
Fordingbridge
Hampshire SP6 IEF
England

Observations of the Great snipe (*Gallinago media*) in northern France.

Guy - Noël Olivier

Concluding from scientific literature, as well as from hunting reports of the end of the last and the beginning of this century (i.e. Brossin de Méré, Duplessis, de la Fuye, Oberthur, Rambaud, Rocher, Valicourt, Vasse, or de Witt) the Great snipe must have been an extremely rare visitor to France. For example, Brossin de Méré had bagged about 4.800 Common snipes (*Gallinago gallinago*) before he met his first Great snipe.

Since the 1970ies, however, this species is observed more frequently in France. For comparison my own data: Since 1975 I flushed on average one Great snipe for every 550 Common snipes shot. Observations of other snipe hunters are similar.

Great snipes are most frequently met in August, but, unlike Common snipes, on dry spots. Harvested grain fields seem to be a preferred habitat during the day, where stubbles provide enough cover. In marshes, as in our snipe study area Picardie in Northern France, Great snipes are always found at the same dry spots, where the vegetation after the first cut is about 30 to 40 cm high. Those places are the same used by woodcocks in October, whenever they visit the marsh.

According to my data Great snipes are always flushed during or after strong storms (force 5 or more) from the East. This situation is not common in summer, but it was pronounced in August 1994 and 1995. The most likely explanation may be, that some birds during southward migration from Russia to their stop-over areas in the Abyssinian and Ethiopian high plateaus are drifted to the west and land in France. The question however remains, why this happens more frequently in recent years.

Author's address:

21 rue du Colonel Moll
F-75017 Paris
France

Unusual Migration behaviour of the Jack snipe (*Lymnocryptes minimus*).

Guy - Noël Olivier

The Jack-snipe is one of the most secretively behaving game birds. It is hardly seen during the day, unless it is flushed, and it is supposed to migrate only at night. These general behaviour patterns described in literature correspond with my own field observations since 1959.

In the afternoon of 18 October 1996, between 2 and 3 p.m. I made quite unusual observations in our 40 hectar experimental area for snipe management in the county of Pas de Calais in Northern France, situated in a valley, 10 kilometers from the coast. This afternoon, with a heavy overcast sky, souther-

ly wind and intermittent rain showers, my attention was first drawn to an exceptional migration of wood pigeons (*Columba palumbus*) passing in flocks of about 50 birds in altitudes of 30 to 40 meters (Usually wood pigeons migrate here very early in the morning, in flocks of several hundreds and about 400 meters high).

At the same time, but much lower, at altitudes of about 10 meters, Jack snipes arrived in flocks of 10 to 15 individuals. After circling quickly over the marsh they landed wherever they found some kind of cover. This spectacle went on for about an hour and was terminated with the onset of heavy rain showers.

In order to exclude any misidentification with the Common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) I walked up a 300 meters path, on which I flushed a total of 42 Jack snipes, in flocks of 5 to 6 birds! From that I assume there were hundreds of this species resting on the 40 ha area. I have never observed such a density of Jack snipes before.

Next morning, with very nice weather, blue sky and no wind, I searched the area with my pointing dog, very experienced with Jack snipes. However, during four hours he flushed only 10 birds. The Jack snipes had obviously continued their migration at night.

Conclusions

These very exceptional observations may be explained by a rather delayed migration pattern. Concluding from my dates of many years Jack snipes arrive in large numbers in the area between October 2 and 9. From October 10 to 20 only half of those densities were recorded, and after October 20 only some single late birds were found. In 1996 the situation was quite different. From October 1 to 17 only few Jack snipes had arrived in the swamp, and the bag during this period was only 50% of that of 1995. Obviously, for whatever reason, migration was delayed for at least 10 days in 1996. Then the birds tried to catch up quickly, no matter of day or night.

Having found no observations of diurnal migration of Jack snipes in literature I would be grateful for any information on that matter by the correspondents of the WSSG.

Long-term trends of Common snipe and Jack snipe in northern France.

Guy - Noël Olivier

All three European snipe species are living very secretively and it is therefore extremely difficult to get an idea of their abundance and population trends. However, bag statistics obtained from certain areas over a longer under more or less constant conditions provide at least some insight into population fluctuations and general trends.

One example is the marsh at Picardie in Northern France, which is successfully managed as snipe habitat for more than 40 years (see my report in WSRG-Newsletter No. 21, p. 9/10, 1995).

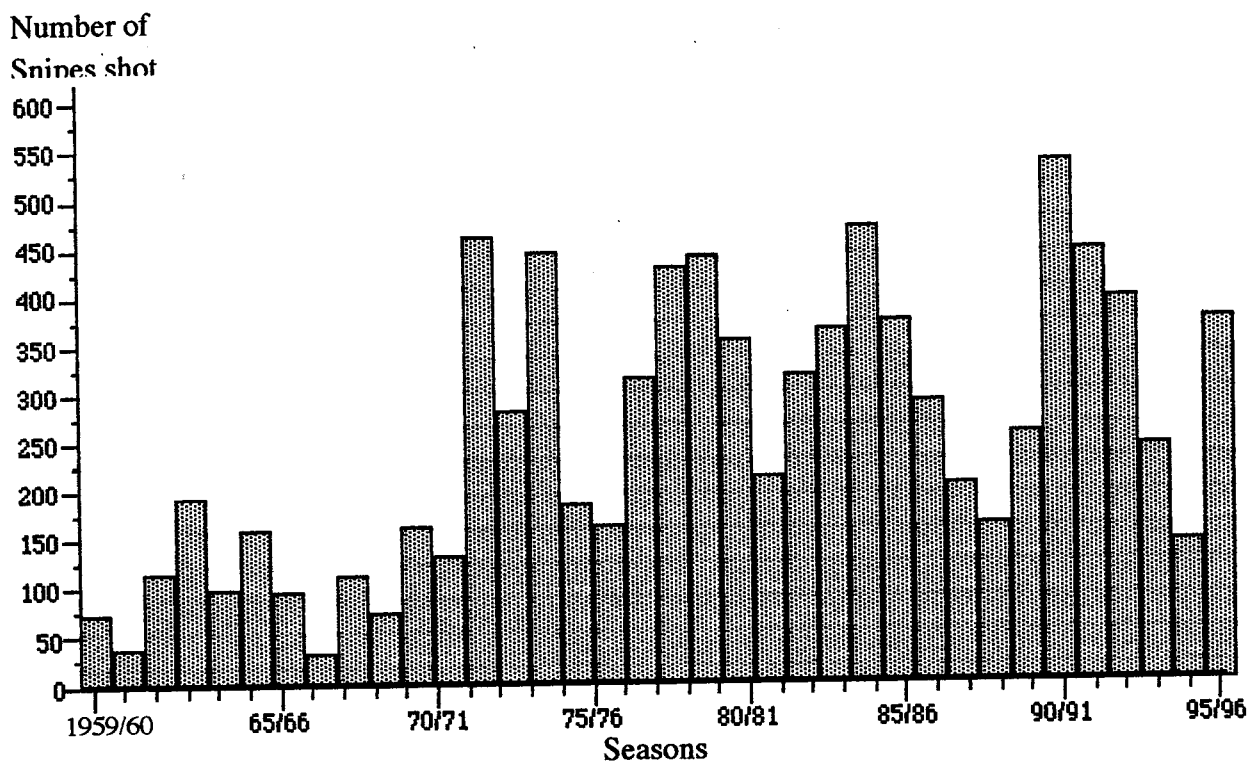


Figure 1: Number of Common snipes bagged on Picardie marsh

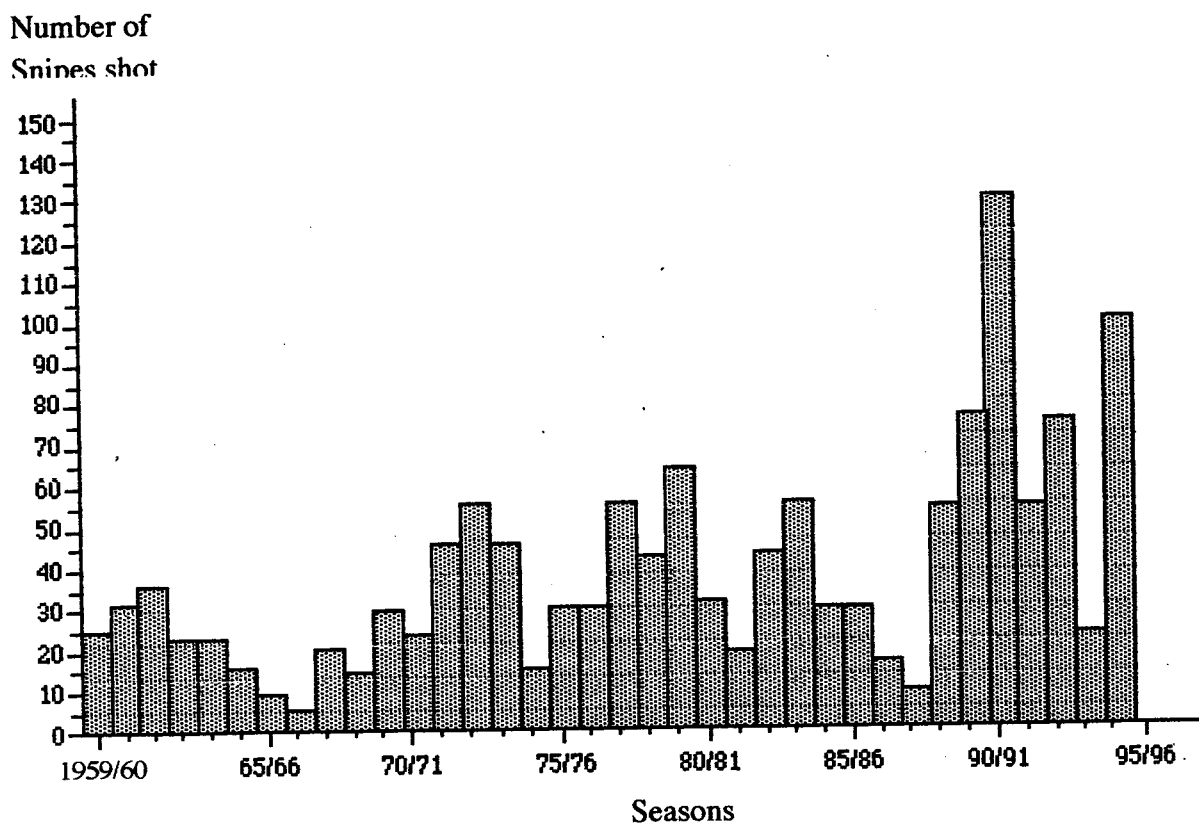


Figure 2: Numbers of Jack snipes bagged on Picardie marsh.

Since 36 years I hunted snipes on that marsh and kept bag records of *Gallinago gallinago* (figure 1) and *Lymnocyptes minimus* (figure 2). Since the number of my outings per year was almost constant over the whole period, the graphs are indicators of the abundance of both species in the marsh. They demonstrate that, in spite of considerable fluctuations from year to year, the long-term trend of both snipes migrating through this area was more or less stable.

Bibliography

Beck, N., Granval, P. & G. N. Olivier (1995): Techniques d'analyse du régime alimentaire animal diurne de Bécassines des marais (*Gallinago gallinago*) du nord-ouest de la France. *Gibier Faune Sauvage*, Vol. 12: 1 - 20.

The diurnal diet of the common snipe wintering in the fresh - to brackish - water marshes of north-western France was studied by analysing the stomach contents of 169 birds collected between 1983 and 1993, using macroscopic and microscopic techniques. The latter revealed earthworms (5 species) occurred in 45 % to 100 % of the samples. Other contents were seeds (68 % to 87 %), *diptera* (4 % - 23 %), *coleoptera* (2 % to 8 %) and *mollusca* (1 % to 5 %). Between August and February the average calculated number of earthworms per stomach varied between 5 and 45 individuals. Energetic value of the food items were calculated. In fresh water habitats earthworms are more important (> 90 % of the caloric value) than in brackish habitats, where worms are probably less abundant.

H.K.

Bontekoe, G. A. (1967): Ringproeven met houtsnippen (*Scolopax rusticola*) in het Rijsterbos. *Va-nellus* 20/5: 101 - 117.

From 1955 until 1966 a total of 287 woodcocks had been caught in mist nets for ringing in fall (mainly mid-October until mid-December) in a forest near the Isselmeer in Holland. Until 1. April of 1967 a total of 42 (14,6 %) of these ringed woodcocks had been reported, primarily (> 90 %) as "shot". Most of the birds (29) were reported from the same winter (direct recoveries), mainly from France, from Spain and from England. Two woodcocks were taken during spring (Germany, Sweden) in later years. The longest time lag between ringing and recovery was 6 years and 5 months.

Catching success was dependent on the weather conditions along the migration route. Most woodcocks (up to 9) were caught during high pressure in northern and eastern Europe. Some recoveries revealed that the birds covered between 40 and 70 km per day (night) when continuing their migration to the winter quarters.

H.K.

Burlando, B., Arillo, A., Spano, S. & M. Machetti (1996): A study of the genetic variability in populations of the European woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) by random amplification of polymorphic DNA. *Ital. J. Zool.* 63: 31 - 36.

Genetic variation in woodcocks collected in Sweden (17), Italy (14) and Turkey (8) were investigated using random amplification of polymorphic DNA (RAPD). The genetic constitution of the Turkish birds was entirely different from that of the Swedish, while the Italian exhibited affinities both to the Turkish and Swedish birds, but were more similar to the latter. These results support our knowledge of migration patterns obtained by ringing. Hence, RAPD markers may provide useful indicators of the origins of migrants and thus may be used for the management of populations.

H.K.

Dwyer, T. J., Coon, R. A. & P. H. Geissler (1978): The technical literature on the American woodcock, 1927 - 1978. *US Fish & Wildl. Serv. Spec. Scient. Rep. - Wildlife No. 213*, 44 pp.

A total of 464 titles of scientific publications on *Scolopax minor* are listed in alphabetical order of the

authors. Numbers in brackets added to each title refer to (22) subject headings of Woodcock biology, ecology and management.

H.K.

Fadat, C. (1995): La Bécasse des Bois en Hiver - Ecologie, Chasse, Gestion. I.S.B.N.: 2-950910-0-4. 325 pp.

After having retired one of the most active researcher on *Scolopax rusticola* published the results of more than three decades of investigations at the French Office National de la Chasse (ONC). The evaluation of ring recoveries, autopsies of shot birds and sampling of thousands of wings, mainly from France, but also from other countries, provided insight into migration patterns, population dynamics, age- and sex-specific ecology of woodcocks wintering in western Europe and North Africa. This book is a classic example for the contribution of hunters to the knowledge of the life history of an extremely secretively living species, that would otherwise be almost unknown. Appendices provide detailed information on sex and age criteria, moult sequences, as well as feeding habits in various wintering habitats.

H.K.

Höglund, J., Kålås, J. A. and Løfaldli, L. (1990): Sexual dimorphism in the lekking Great Snipe. - *Ornis Scand.* 21: 1-6.

Many lek-breeding bird species exhibit extreme sexual size dimorphism and plumage dichromatism which has been taken as evidence of a relationship between the mating system (lek) and sexual selection. We find that lekking Great Snipe *Gallinago media* exhibit no or reversed dimorphism. Data from two different breeding populations and from museum skins show that females are significantly larger than males for body mass and length of tarsus, wing, bill and bill plus head. By using bill length data from museum skins 79.3% of all specimens were classified to the right sex; data for breeding birds separated the sexes even more accurately (99.4%). One character, the amount of white on the tail feathers, differs between the sexes in that males both have more tail feathers with > 50% white and larger areas which are completely white. Discriminant function analyses, based on both morphological measurements and tail coloration of the breeding birds, separated the sexes. Only 1 of 252 birds was classified to the wrong sex by these analyses. We suggest that constraints on sexual selection set by natural selection, phylogenetic effects and sexual selection working on traits other than the ones under study (e.g. acoustic cues) may explain why Great Snipe do not show more striking differences in size and plumage characters.

H.K.

Höglund, J., Kålås, J. A. & P. Fiske (1992): The costs of secondary sexual characters in the lekking great Snipe (*Gallinago media*). *Behav. Ecol. Sociobiol.* 30: 309 - 315.

The mating success of male great snipes increases with the extension of white in their tail feathers. On the other hand, such conspicuous features may make the birds more vulnerable to predation. The results of this study indicated that high energetic demands set the limits to male display performance and that males do not have to trade off the benefit of attracting females by their displays against a cost of attracting predators, since predation was almost absent on the leks.

H.K.

Lucio, A. J., Burnaga, M. S. & F. J. Purroy (1996): Oilagorra - La Becada. Dept. Agricult. Diput. Foral Bizkaia. 29 pp.

A nicely illustrated brochure in Basque and Spanish to inform hunters in northern Spain on woodcock biology and management techniques, in order to initiate and enable their cooperation in the country-wide "Proyec to Becada" (Spanish woodcock project).

H.K.

Rosair, D. & D. Cottridge (1995): Photographic guide to the Waders of the world. Hamlyn Limited (Reed International Books Limited).

40 pages of this marvellous book are devoted to all (5) woodcock and (18) snipe species of the world. Descriptions of plumages, habitats, behaviour and migration in the text are illustrated by impressive photos of each species.

H.K.

Summers, R. & S. Buckland (1996): Numbers of wintering woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* in woodlands in the Highlands of Scotland. Wader Study Group Bull. 80 50 - 52.

During an estimate of the population sizes of key pine wood birds in woodlands in the Moray faunal area in northern Scotland the densities of wintering woodcocks were investigated by transect counts of flushed birds in two consecutive years. The results indicated a total of about 17,000 woodcocks on the 2,000 km² study area (≈ 8.8 birds/km²) in 1993/94 and 1994/95. They were associated mainly with conifer woods and to a lesser extent with birch, but occurred in a wide variety of forest structures. Conifer plantations were preferred to native pine woods. Most birds were flushed as singles (average group size 1.02). Faeces contained earthworm chaetae. Though the woodcock was the most abundant wader wintering in this region, densities are probably higher in southern parts of Britain with less severe climatic conditions.

H.K.

Tacha, T. C.. & C. E. Braun (1995): Migratory shore and upland game bird management in North America. Int. Ass. Fish and Wildl. Agencies, Washington, DC. 20036, 223 pp.

This update of earlier handbooks edited by G. C. Sanderson provides comprehensive summaries of the recent knowledge on the American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) and the Common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), including description, life history, distribution and abundance, harvest, as well as management and research needs.

H.K.