



Newsletter

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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 World Conservation Union. The subjects of WSSG are species of the genera *Scolopax*, *Gallinago* and *Limnocryptes* that in several respects differ remarkably from all other wader species. For this reason a separate research unit was established.

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The activity of our Woodcock & Snipe Specialist Group remains very intense. Our colleagues from Russia and Belarus have continued to ring and monitor the Woodcock breeding numbers, those from Portugal have carried on their research on Woodcock genetics, the population trends of the Common Snipe in the Southern part of Finland have been analysed, a study on the Woodcock breeding biology in mountain areas is going on in Switzerland, a special study on the impact of disturbance on Woodcock wintering populations will soon be achieved in France, researches on the Common snipe and Jack snipe distribution and numbers in the European part of Russia were made, research by means of stable isotopes is in project in Great-Britain, France, Spain and Italy, different projects concerning habitat management will be initiated in France and in Russia in 2006,.... Some of the results are presented in this Newsletter.

Thanks to a good cooperation with the Hunter Associations, the monitoring of wintering populations is always efficient in France. Insofar as Woodcock and Snipes are very important game species, such a cooperation has to be sustained. In this aim, your coordinator attends the FANBPO (Federation of European Woodcock Hunter Associations) meeting every year whereby, in 2005, contacts were developed with Welsh and Irish Associations.

In North America, the American Woodcock is always the subject of much research. The Woodcock Task Force is continuing its works to devise a management plan especially centred on habitat management. In October 2006, the 10th American Woodcock Symposium will be held in Michigan. It will be the opportunity to discuss with our American colleagues the best way to monitor the Woodcock populations for a sustainable use.

In spite of this great activity, I would like to convince you to make a special effort in two directions at least: to increase research on Snipe species and develop our work in parts of the World other than Europe and North America. This is very important for the future. Indeed, as you probably know, WSSG is not only linked to Wetlands International but also to the IUCN Species Survival Commission. At the end of 2005 you were invited to serve as a member of the IUCN SSC Woodcock & Snipe Specialist Group. Many thanks to those (most of you) who accepted this proposal which is an important step to promote our group at a high level of decision.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that the Proceedings of the 6th European Woodcock & Snipe Workshop will be available at the very beginning of 2006. I would like to thank Wetlands International and the *Office national de la chasse et de la faune sauvage* for their financial help in publishing this document.

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

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Different methods for the estimation of the woodcock hunting bags in Russia

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The number of migrating populations of birds in spring depends on the breeding success of the previous year, migration and wintering conditions. This leads to fluctuations in numbers and, undoubtedly, affects the dynamics of bird hunting bags the importance of which is difficult to foresee. Besides, our estimations of the hunting bags are based on questionnaires submitted to hunters that may filled out by different methods and thus give unequal results. Nevertheless, it is possible to get an impartial assessment by comparison of the data obtained.

Hunting of roding woodcocks is the most accessible practice and thus especially popular among the other types of spring hunting in Russia. In the Moscow area with many hunters the woodcock hunting bags are the highest of all other regions. *Scolopax rusticola* appears on 80% of all personal licenses (PL) given to hunters of game birds. The woodcock hunting bags make up 60% of all game birds in the Moscow region in spring.

Now there is a data collection system for hunting bags in the hunting economy of Russia, and the results of the estimations appeared more than once in publications, in particular those for the woodcock (Fokin & Blokhin 2000; Blokhin *et al.*, 2002, 2005). However, untill now we only had unchecked data that acted on a chain: the hunter - the hunting territory (economy) - the hunting

society – the regional hunting department – the State service of the account of hunting resources (SSAHR). In the last years the opportunity of such a check was created with the assistance of the regional hunting departments and hunting societies of the Moscow, Vladimir and Ivanovo regions (Oblasts).

Material and methods

In spring 2003 - 2005 the special questionnaire forms («cards of woodcock bags») were distributed before the hunting season among hunters of Vladimir, Ivanovo, Moscow and a few other regions. Each hunter was invited to answer some questions: location of the hunt; number of hunting days, number of woodcocks bagged, number of wounded woodcocks lost, information on roding intensity (better or worse than in the last spring). 196 complete forms were collected in 2003, 483 in 2004 and 41 in 2005. Besides, 1,516 PL from the Ivanovo Oblast were collected after the 2004 spring hunting season and 15,157 PL from the Moscow Oblast in 2005 (table 1). PL contained the following information: location of hunting, days of hunting, number and species of game shot. The specifics of the material received to make summary tables (official materials) and our subsequent calculations were described earlier (Blokhin *et al.*, 2002, 2005).

Table 1: Details of the material used to estimate spring woodcock hunting bag.

Region (Oblast)	Year	Source of information	n	woodcock, %
Vladimir	2004	questionnaire	319	100
Ivanovo	2003	questionnaire	76	100
	2004	questionnaire	147	100
	2004	PL	716	97.3
Moscow	2003	questionnaire	118	100
	2003	PL	219	100
	2005	PL	9,938	79.1

Results

Analysis of data based on the official summary tables.

The data that appear in summary tables are countersigned by officials and implemented by the official channels of SSAHR. According to our calculations, over the last 10 years hunters shot every year a total of 24,000 – 34,000 roding woodcocks in the Vladimir, Ivanovo and Moscow Oblasts (total area 99,437 km², i.e. an area greater than European countries like Austria or Portugal) in each spring season. In each Oblast the hunting bags showed annual fluctuations the amplitude of which increased by 1.6 times in the Vladimir oblasts, 2.3 in the Ivanovo Oblast and 2.1 in the Moscow Oblast.

In the first two regions these fluctuations were synchronous, but asynchronous in the Moscow region. For example, in the Vladimir and Ivanovo regions a small number of bagged woodcocks was registered in 1999, whereas in the Moscow region a high number was noted (table 2). This phenomenon can be explained by the different spring hunting periods in each Oblast.

The individual average hunting bag was calculated from PL data. Inter-annual fluctuations of this parameter also spread over a wide range, with the highest amplitude in the Moscow region: from 0,6 up to 1,5 birds/hunter/season (table 3).

Table 2: Roding Woodcock hunting bags in the springs of 1996 to 2005 from official data (in thousands).

Oblast	Years									
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Vladimir	6.17	6.87	6.57	4.99	6.43	7.06	7.91	6.69	6.77	5.62
Ivanovo	3.47	4.71	4.10	2.21		4.73	5.12	3.12	5.16	
Moscow	23.66	18.71	23.26	23.86			11.34	15.11	18.09	20.58
<i>In total</i>	<i>33.30</i>	<i>30.29</i>	<i>33.93</i>	<i>31.06</i>			<i>24.37</i>	<i>24.92</i>	<i>30.02</i>	

Table 3: Individual average Woodcock hunting bags in the springs of 1996 to 2005.

Oblast	Years									
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Vladimir	1.1	1.3	1.27	0.81	0.96	0.88	0.80	0.64	0.75	0.57
Ivanovo	0.7	1.3	1.03	1.21		1.29	1.00	0.62	0.96	
Moscow	0.9	1.3	1.52	1.51			0.60	0.66	0.69	0.64

Up to 2000, the average Woodcock hunting bags (Figure 1 – estimation for 10 hunters) in the 3 Oblasts were higher than in the next 5 years. At the same time, the total amount of bags for the same period only decreased in the Moscow Oblast and increased in the two others. This can be explained by an increase of interest in roding-bird hunting in the Vladimir and Ivanovo regions (i.e. by an increase in the numbers of roding Woodcock hunters). One question could be, to what degree the inter-annual fluctuations of woodcock bags be caused by objective factors like those mentioned above, or whether they are determined by mainly subjective reasons connected with the method of collection of the initial data for the summary tables at a level of the hunting economy and the regional society of hunters.

Analysis of the sources of primary information

Estimation of individual hunting results

The number of questionnaires (Q) from different regions reflects best the results obtained for a given hunting season and, partly, clears up the question raised above with respect to the quality of a given summary table.

First of all, the similarity of the parameters of the spring hunting campaign collected with the help of PL and Q is marked. It can be illustrated, for example, by the distribution of the individual hunting bags in the Ivanovo Oblast [proportion of hunters (in %), who shot one and more woodcocks/season; Figure 2].

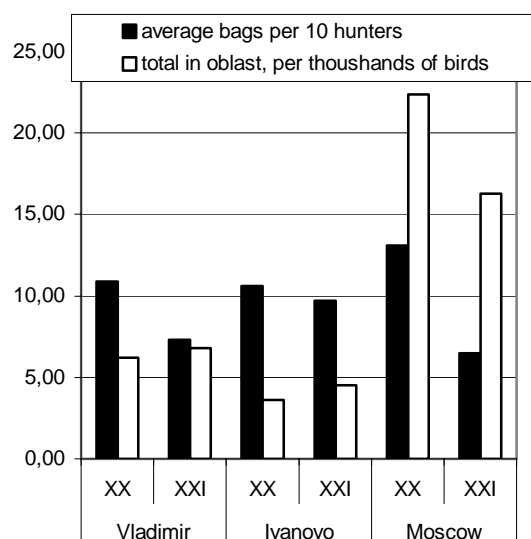


Figure 1: Dynamics of spring Woodcock hunting bags at the end of 90's (XX) – beginning of the 2000's (XXI).

According to the official sources, the individual spring hunting bags are low. That tends to confirm the analysis of the primary data. Many hunters (28-47 % depending on the region; tables 4 and 5) bagged no woodcock during the hunting season. Though there was no limit for the hunting bag, the majority of "successful" hunters shot only on 1-2 birds in the whole season (Figures 2 and 4). So, from PL data, 68% of the hunters shot no more than 2 roding woodcocks in 2005 in the Moscow region and 10% of the hunters bagged 5 or more birds, but their hunting bag represents 34.5 % of the total bag (Figure 3). In spring 2003, according to the questionnaires, 60.3% of the hunters shot no more than 2 birds and 16.2% more than 5 birds. The hunting bag of these last hunters represents 45.5% of all the woodcocks bagged.

The Q analysis shows that many roding birds that are shot are lost (Figure 4, table 5). In the Ivanovo region 21.6-25% of woodcocks shot are lost, 16% in the Vladimir region and 12-

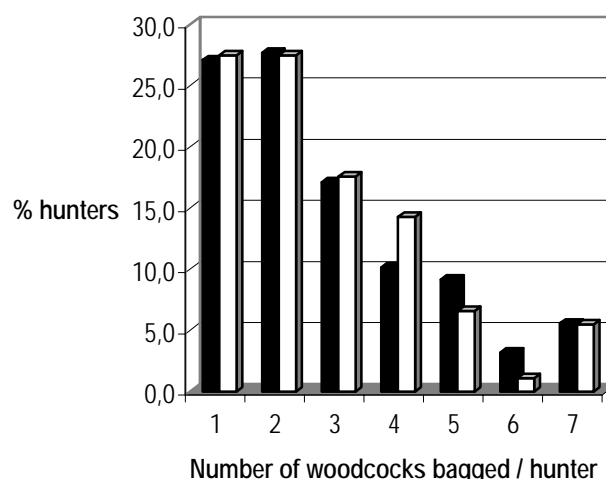


Figure 2: Distribution of individual Woodcock hunting bags in the Ivanovo region in spring 2004 (black: personal licenses; white: questionnaires).

14.8% in the Moscow region. These losses added to the hunting bags represent the overall number of killed Woodcocks. Unfortunately, PLs do not provide information on lost birds, which leads to an underestimation of the true numbers of killed woodcocks.

Data on the average and maximal hunting bags of an average hunter are given in tables 4 and 5. To compare the results with the official data, average indices have been designed for all hunters, who were successful or not during the hunting season. They not only confirm low individual spring hunting bags but also show that these are higher than the official data. On average, only a little more than 2 woodcocks/season/hunters are bagged in the Vladimir and Ivanovo regions (hunting season 2004). A higher individual hunting bag for 10 hunting days is registered in the Moscow region in spring 2005 (27 birds) and in the Vladimir region in spring 2004 (20 birds) (tables 4 and 5).

Table 4: Individual average and maximal roding woodcock hunting bags and total bags, after personal licenses data (PL).

Oblast, year	Average bags (\pm c. i.)	Maximal bag / season	Unsuccessful hunters (%)	PL (n)	Estimation of hunting bag
Ivanovo, 2004.	2,09 \pm 0,06	15	28	697	10,964
Moscow, 2003.	1,78 \pm 0,13	11	17.3	219	36,766
Moscow, 2005.	1,25 \pm 0,01	27	47.2	7860	32,898

Table 5: Individual average and maximal roding woodcock hunting bags and total bags from questionnaires (Q).

Oblast, year	Average (\pm c.i.)		Maximal bag / season	Unsuccessful hunters (%)	Q (n)	Estimation of hunting bag
	Birds bagged	Birds lost				
Vladimir, 2004.	2.26 \pm 0.11	0.39 \pm 0.03	20	30.6	314	23,421
Ivanovo, 2003.	0.95 \pm 0.09	0.24 \pm 0.04	5	42.1	76	5,994
Ivanovo, 2004.	1.82 \pm 0.14	0.44 \pm 0.05	14	38.1	147	11,872
Ivanovo, 2005.	1.80 \pm 0.39	0.79 \pm 0.20	7	33.3	15	
Moscow, 2003.	1.79 \pm 0.16	0.23 \pm 0.04	18	41.9	117	41,723
Moscow, 2005.	1.69 \pm 0.11	0.25 \pm 0.02	7	50.0	16	

General estimation of bags

To estimate the total hunting bags in an Oblast, extrapolation appears to be possible with the PL data, even we know that some data may concern other game birds than Woodcock.

In the Ivanovo region 98% of the PL were collected for the spring hunting season of 2004. This represent 5,360 hunters, 5,253 of whom were interested in roding woodcocks. 5,246 hunters actually hunted. By extrapolation from questionnaire data, the hunting bag can be estimated at 11,872 roding woodcocks in spring 2004 when the lost birds are taken into account. By extrapolation from PL data, for which lost birds are usually not marked, the estimation is 10,964 woodcocks. These values are 2.1-2.3 times higher than the official ones (5,164 birds). A similar result appeared in the spring of 2003: official data are underestimated by 1.9 times.

In the Moscow region, 25,536 PL (79.7% of the 32,040 PL analyzed) mentioned woodcock hunting in the spring of 2005. An insignificant part (0.9%) of the woodcock hunters did not hunt (9.5% in 2003) The hunting bag of roding birds is estimated at 32,898 woodcocks. This value is 1.6 times higher than the official one (20,576 birds). Similarly, estimations for the spring of 2003 are 2.4 times (from PL) or 2.8 times (from Q) higher than the official estimations.

The estimation for the Vladimir Oblast in the spring of 2004 had to be carried out only from Q because of the absence of PL data. 1.6 % of the hunters (n=8,982) did not hunt. The hunting bag of the other 8,838 hunters was estimated at 23,421 roding woodcocks, including lost birds. This is 3.5 times higher than the official estimations (6,766 birds).

Thus, in all cases, the bag estimations from PL and Q are 1.6-3.5 times higher than the official data for these 3 Oblasts.

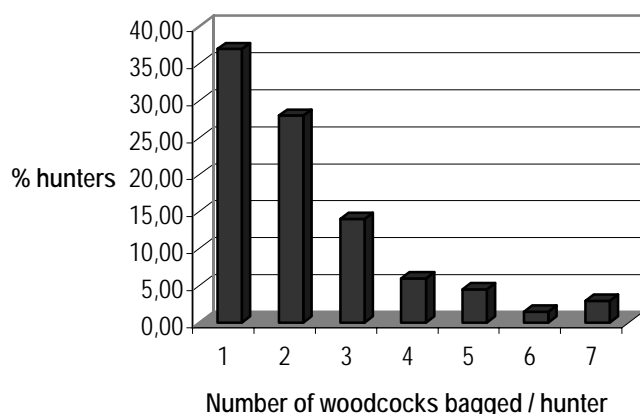


Figure 3 : Distribution of individual Woodcock hunting bags in the Moscow region in spring 2005.

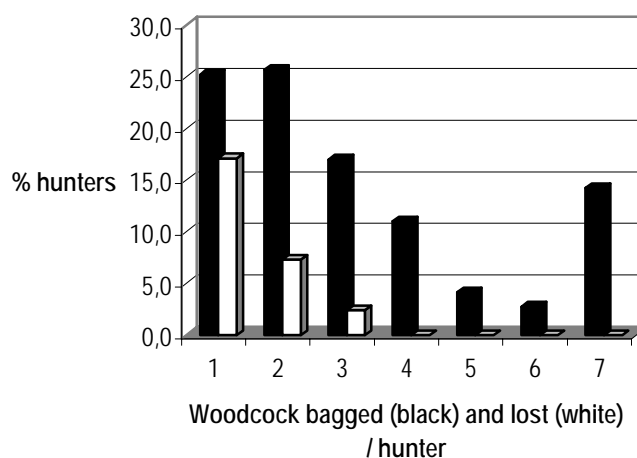


Figure 4: Distribution of individual Woodcock hunting bags(black) and woodcocks lost / hunter (white) in the Vladimir region in spring 2004.

Discussion

Characteristics of the initial data

The official information on woodcock hunting bags was forwarded by the regions for further processing as summary tables by SSAHR. In these, the number of PL distributed before and returned after a hunting season, and also the hunting bag sizes in every hunting territory (economy) and the districts were presented. For a long time the question of reliability of these summary tables remained (Blokhin & Mezhnev, 2002). It was initially supposed that the number of PL received, would correspond to the number of hunters for a given game species, for one season. The number of returned PL testifies to the hunters' discipline, since the Russian hunting rules oblige to return the PL to its place of delivery. The same figure should correspond to the sample size for further calculations of the parameters for a hunting season: the size of individual hunting bags for a season, the size of the total bags in a hunting territory (economy), in administrative areas and in the Russian Federation.

The implementation of the official information as summarized in the tables did not allow to clarify the latent sides of the organization of the primary data collection and their primary procession at a level of distinct hunting economies and administrative areas, since the withdrawals of game interfered with any impartial assessment. It became only probable after a check of the official data given for the woodcock hunting bags, by a total calculation of the number of PL, and their comparison to the data analyses of the questionnaires, that had been carried out in different central regions of Russia.

Research shows that in the Russian hunting economy there is a steady uncontrollable practice of understating the true hunting data. Frequently it occurs that the estimation of the hunting bags in hunting areas only takes the PL data into account that have actually been handed over by hunters, whereby the significant part of PL that are neither returned nor unfilled out is not taken into consideration. In addition, unfilled PL that are subject to rejection, are considered to be equal to "zero" when calculations are made. Such an approach leads to the estimate of an average individual woodcock hunting bag and, hence, the global hunting bag. The practice that consists to

deliver one PL form for two or more game species (woodcock, geese, drakes) is prevalent. When the calculations are made this is not taken into account. In such a situation a significant number of PL is sometimes used in further calculations of parameters of woodcock hunting bags even though this species is not of concern. As a result of this, the average individual woodcock hunting bag is reduced, which leads to an underestimation of the total hunting bags in a given region.

Everything described above may be found in the regional summary tables. In many respects, it is caused by the absence of necessary instructions for those who are working in the hunting territories (economy), that would be clearly indicate how to carry out primary sorting and calculation of a PL for each type of game. This problem, undoubtedly, rests with SSAHR - the central organization that generalizes the information on hunting.

Characteristics of the methods applied

In the Ivanovo and Moscow regions, the ratio of the PL concerned by spring hunting of various groups of game birds was established by an analysis of the total number of collected PL. It was possible to calculate the actual number of licenses received by hunters for each type or group of game birds. Now it is possible to judge more objectively the popularity of hunting of a given game bird in a given season, and also to calculate an average individual hunting bag and the total number of hunting bags in a region.

In many respects, the analysis of these questionnaires have confirmed those of the PL. The true sizes of the seasonal woodcock hunting bags and the average individual hunting bags appeared to be 1,5-3,5 times higher than those found in the official summary tables. Now we also have information about the woodcock losses during roding (wounded birds and those that were never found). These data are impossible to find in PL records and official tables.

Conclusion

The information given above showed that to increase their accuracy, the estimations of hunting bags should be made in various ways.

Questionnaires (“Card of the numbers of bagged woodcocks”) as well as personal licenses are filled in by hunters and without preliminary analysis included in a table for researchers. These questionnaires contain more information than a PL and specifically more than the official summary of hunting bag tables. However, a large and regular distribution of questionnaires is known to be difficult and, consequently, will be limited in its application. So, the PL will probably remain the most massive and regular source of information from the Russian hunters. As in

summary tables, the primary information from hunters is deformed because of the incorrect processing of PL by those working in the hunting territories (economies) and the societies in the regions. It is necessary to develop and give them brief instructions on the collection and primary data processing of PL. It is also necessary that the randomized representative PL data be collected on a regular basis and returned by the hunters at the level of a few regions. Moreover, the annual choice of these areas in the European part of Russia should be made at random.

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Gonad size and age of roding male woodcocks

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The first woodcocks arrive in Central European Russia at the beginning of April. Usually, roding began at the same day of the birds' arrival. So, roding males are already ready to breed. According to our observations, the first nest may be found 3-5 days after roding starts (for example in Vladimir region at least as of 8 April). As a rule, all the first birds to take part in roding are adults (more than one year old). Close to the end of April more and more young males take part in roding. This is confirmed by an analysis of shot birds.

The aim of this work was to compare the gonads sizes (testicles) of adults and young woodcock males (*Scolopax rusticola*) breeding in Russia.

Material and methods

The characteristics of 162 woodcocks bagged by hunters in different regions of European Russia have been collected in 2002-2005, mainly in the spring months: April – June. However, not all birds were taken into account in this study. Five females (n=5) and 49 males for which no data on testicle size was available were rejected. We also rejected 2 young males not shot while roding and one individual bagged in the Moscow region on 17 June. Indeed, this date strongly differed from all other data basically collected in April. However, data collected in June in the Arkhangelsk region were accepted because of phenological distinctions between this area and the other one. In total, 115 data were analyzed (table 1).

Table 1: Sites of material collection and data set (2000- 2005).

Oblast	District	Number of birds analysed
Arkhangelsk	Pinezhsky	5
Vladimir	Petushinsky	87
Moscow	Sergiev-Posadsky, Leninsky	11
Tver	Kashinsky	8
Yaroslavl	Bolsheselsky	4
<i>Total</i>		<i>115</i>

The age of the birds was determined by plumage analysis (Ferrand & Gossmann, 1995). This technique allows to define three age groups: adults (a), young from early (1) and late (2) broods. Some young were not defined as early or late broods but gathered in a separate group (young sp).

The volume of the testicles (mm³) was defined by Shenvetter's formula:

$G = G1 + G2$; $G1 = 0.5 (B2A)$, where: $G1$ = volume of left testicle, $G2$ = volume of right testicle, A = long and B = short length of testicle.

Table 2: Average testicle volumes (mm³) according to age in woodcock males bagged in the spring of 2000-2005 in Arkhangelsk, Vladimir, Moscow, Tver and Yaroslavl regions.

Age group	N	Average volume	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Frequency distributions
Young 2	21	2272.5	175.5	1215.0	4698.0	Not normal
Young 1	28	2531.0	126.4	1512.5	4536.0	Normal
Young SP	8	1888.0	177.3	1174.5	2548.0	Normal
<i>All young</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>2345.5</i>	<i>96.2</i>	<i>1175.4</i>	<i>4698.0</i>	<i>Normal</i>
Adults	58	2876.2	172.7	864.0	10080.0	Not normal
<i>Total</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>2613.2</i>	<i>101.9</i>	<i>864.0</i>	<i>10080.0</i>	<i>Not normal</i>

Results

The correlation between the testicles size and age of the males are shown in table 2. « All young » corresponds to the sum of 3 categories: early broods, late broods, and young sp..

When the frequency distribution of an investigated attribute was described in conformity with the law of normal distribution, the distinctions between age groups were estimated by a Student t-test, and otherwise by a Wilxon test:

Young 2 / Young 1: $t = 1.228$; $p = 0.228$
Young 2 / Adults: $Z = -1.334$; $p = \mathbf{0.052}$
Young 1 / Adults: $Z = -1.307$; $p = 0.195$
All young / Adults: $Z = -2.673$; $p = \mathbf{0.009}$

Statistical differences only appear between two groups: **adults and all young birds**. At the 90% level, the differences between young of late broods (« young 2 ») and adults are also marked.

Acknowledgements

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On the transportation of young by Eurasian Woodcock

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The transportation of young by Eurasian Woodcock, *Scolopax rusticola* L., is one of the scarcely-studied behaviors and at times an ambiguous phenomenon. In this paper our aim is not to pursue the discussion on the theoretical aspect of this process but merely to describe several known facts related to the mechanism of transportation of young woodcocks.

On May 29, 2004 in the Zhikovskiy County, Kaluzhskiy District, 4 km from the village of Tarutino (N 55°05'; E 36°53'), we observed an Eurasian Woodcock that was taking off from the ground. The forest in this location was a mixture of young underwood (10-15 m high) and large aspens (20-25 m high), with dominance of sedge on the ground. The bird we observed took off at the edge of a depression with a small reed bed near an old rural road on which the observer was walking. The narrow dell (about 5-m wide) in front of which the bird was taking off, joined a wet-forest opening covered by tall sedge. The bird's flight was heavy and slow, almost vertical. Its legs were clearly visible under the body; a big young bird (size: one-third to one-half of the size of an adult) was between them. The bird reached an elevation of 2-3 m and after flying 15-20 m away from the observer, "dropped" in grass (sedge and small reed). Several seconds later from the same place (within 3-5 m) two young birds took off simultaneously, flew 10 m perpendicularly to the direction of flight of the adult, and landed in the wetland.

On May 23, 2004 an Eurasian Woodcock was observed in birch-willow growth near the forest edge within the protected area of the

"Kaluzhskie Zaseki" Natural Reserve (Kaluzhskiy Distr., N 53°34'; E 35°44'). The bird took off from the ground within 4-5 m from the observer, reached the top of the trees (3-4 m high), and after flying 10-15 m fell down on the ground. A young bird covered with down was clearly visible between the tarsuses of the adult.

On July 3, 2005 in the same Natural Reserve (N 53°33'; E 35°42'), the transportation of a young Woodcock was observed one more time. The bird was taking off from the forest road in a deciduous forest with many alder and aisle-weed grass on the ground. The woodcock took off within 1.5 m from the observer and flew 0.5 m away above the grass. The young bird was kept by adult at the level of lower part of tarsus or even fingers; the legs of the young bird hang down in the continuation of the legs of the adult. After a flight of 10-12 m, the woodcock landed in short grass. After that, the bird walked in the same place while producing a chirping sound similar to the one produced by young starlings when fed by its parents. Its flashing wings were lifted vertically above its head. The bird took off and after flying 10 m deeper into the forest, landed again. The same stepping movements, flashing of wings, and sounds were made for several seconds, and after that bird finally took off and flew away 1 meter above the ground.

We believe that such kind of landings and the related behavior are caused by the fact that while taking off in an emergency, the female cannot carry the young in an optimal way. When trying to do so, the adult bird was treading in place, and only succeeded at the third attempt.

A few results of the Woodcock research program in Belarus

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This year the APB-Birdlife Belarus (NGO Akhova Ptushak Belarusi) and the Institute of Zoology undertook a survey of woodcock on the territory of Belarus with following aims: (1) to start a monitoring program for Belarus, (2) to produce baseline population index figures for breeding woodcock populations and (3) to carry out woodcock ringing during the autumn migration. The survey was financed by the *Office national de la chasse et de la faune sauvage* (ONCFS) - France.

Methods

A survey method was applied based on the counts of roding males, as developed in France (Ferrand, 1993). Counts were made at 60 listening points located in 10 (12x12 km) squares. Observers counted the roding birds in May and June. The censuses were made for 120 minutes at dusk.

Results

During the breeding season the roding males were recorded in all listening points. In total 696 contacts with roding males were registered at 60 census points. The average number of woodcocks was 11.6 per 2 hours. Maximum contacts at one point were 30. The occupation rates of the high ($n.contacts > 10$) and low abundance ($n.contacts \leq 10$) sites were 0.867 and 0.133.

Woodcock ringing and the study of migration were carried out in the Berezinsky Reserve and its vicinities. The study period was 24 September - 14 November. Autumn 2005 was very dry and few feeding birds were observed during night trips. The duration of a night trip was about 2 hours. Only 120 feeding birds were recorded during 42 night trips, and 33 woodcocks were caught and ringed. Passage dynamics according to records of nocturnal contacts is given in Figure 1.

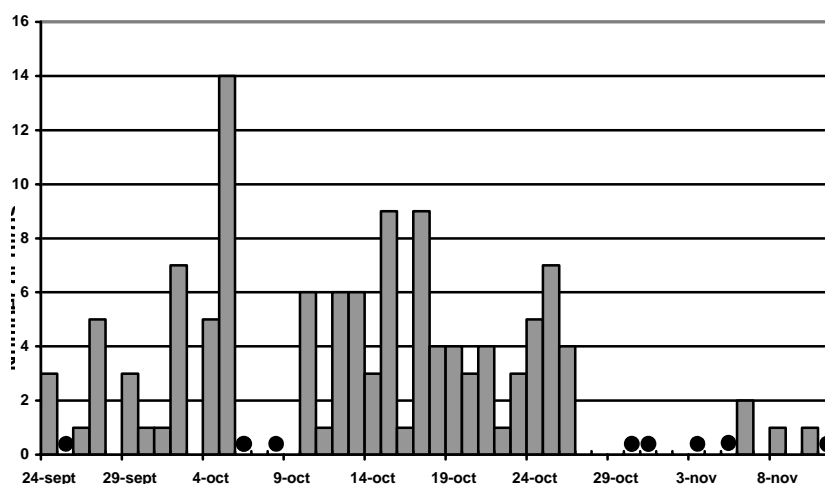


Figure 1: Passage dynamics of Woodcock according to records of nocturnal contacts in the Berezinsky Reserve. The black dots indicate days without counts.

Maximum numbers of feeding woodcocks were registered in the first pentad of October and mid-October. It is interesting to note that the last migratory woodcocks were even seen in the second pentad of November, after severe frosts. During this period the soil was frozen up to 10-15 cm deep.

Age ratio (juv/ad) among the captured woodcocks was 1.2. Thus 54.5% of the caught birds were juveniles. There were 2 recaptures of juvenile birds in the same place. They were recaptured after 10 and 12 days. The body

mass of the juveniles had increased by 26 and 7.5 g respectively.

The mean weight and its changes over time in juvenile and adult birds caught during their migration are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3. The rate of increase in weight in adult birds was faster than in juveniles. This is probably connected with migration strategy.

There are 2 recoveries of woodcocks that had been ringed in Belarus in 2004. The birds were shot in France, 58 and 385 days after ringing.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Oleg Ostrovsky, Nikolay Cherkas, Marina Dmitrenok, and all the volunteers who participated in the survey. We also thank Alexander Kashtalian, Elena Davidyonk and other persons who assisted us in our work. We are grateful to the *Office national de la chasse et de la faune sauvage* (France) for funding the survey.

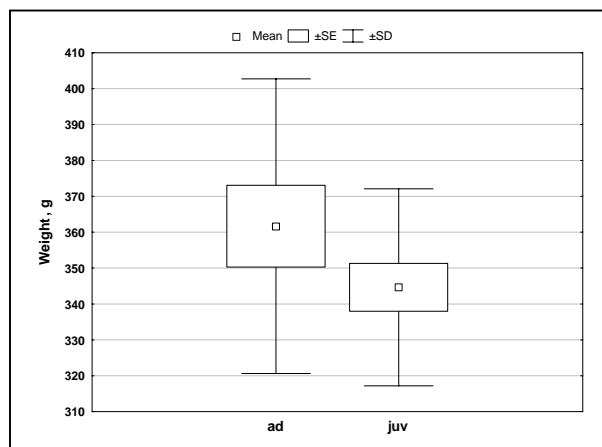


Figure 2: Mean weight of adult and juvenile woodcocks caught in autumn 2005.

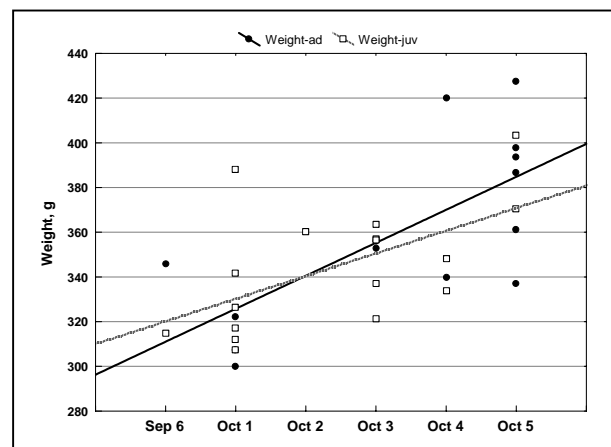


Figure 3: Weight changes in migratory adult and juvenile woodcocks. Data grouped by five-day periods.

Population trends of the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* on the southwestern Finnish island of Aasla

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The population trends of the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* have been studied on the south western Finnish island of Aasla (60°17'N / 21°57'E) in 1975 – 2004 with, a few scattered data from earlier years. The study area and the study methods in general were described by Saari (2002, 2003) and the study area in detail based on aerial photographs from the 1940s onwards by Häkkilä (2004). In this report, that is intended to be a preliminary one, I treat a few phenological data as well as different data on population trends of the local Common Snipes.

The phenological data include arrival and departure dates as well as the first and last drumming dates of the species. The distribution of records by pentads is also given. The population trends are studied in 1976-2004

by the number of pairs recorded along the annual total of 17.3 km line transects, by the annual maximum number of territories recorded during the night bird censuses in 1979-2004, the number of territories are mapped annually in 1975-2004, and the total number of Common Snipe recorded annually in 1975-2004.

Results

The annual arrival and departure dates as well as the start and end of drumming in the local Common Snipe population is given in Table 1.

Table 1 : Dates of arrival, departure and drumming of Common Snipe at Aasla.

Year	Arrival	Departure	First drumming	Last drumming	Year	Arrival	Departure	First drumming	Last drumming
1967	13.4.	..	..	..	1986	18.4.	30.10.	22.4.	27.6.
1968	12.4.	..	..	..	1987	05.4.	26.10.	25.4.	08.7.
1969	21.4.	..	..	..	1988	20.4.	15.10.	20.4.	23.6.
1970	29.4.	..	..	..	1989	08.4.	02.11.	14.4.	17.6.
1971	10.4.	..	..	..	1990	02.4.	11.10.	11.4.	07.7.
1972	20.4.	..	..	..	1991	04.4.	17.11.	04.4.	26.6.
1973	16.4.	..	..	..	1992	05.4.	19.09.	26.4.	05.7.
1974	09.4.	17.11.	..	..	1993	06.4.	23.10.	19.4.	(26.5.)
1975	09.4.	31.10.	21.4.	18.6.	1994	16.4.	26.09.	21.4.	(21.4.)
1976	09.4.	01.01.	16.4.	06.7.	1995	16.4.	10.11.	21.4.	18.6.
1977	18.4.	29.10.	20.4.	13.7.	1996	03.4.	22.10.	05.4.	08.6.
1978	11.4.	22.10.	22.4.	05.7.	1997	07.4.	10.10.	27.4.	03.6.
1979	12.4.	01.11.	01.5.	21.6.	1998	16.4.	07.11.	18.4.	06.7.
1980	07.4.	12.10.	16.4.	30.6.	1999	31.3.	01.11.	31.3.	25.6.
1981	08.4.	08.11.	18.4.	07.7.	2000	02.4.	02.10.	19.4.	(29.5.)
1982	31.3.	31.10.	12.4.	05.7.	2001	09.4.	31.10.	17.4.	05.7.
1983	08.4.	03.11.	08.4.	07.7.	2002	27.3.	16.10.	12.4.	(28.4.)
1984	10.4.	10.11.	10.4.	03.7.	2003	14.4.	08.10.	(18.6.)	19.6.
1985	16.4.	10.11.	17.4.	08.7.	2004	12.4.	16.11.	12.4.	(14.4.)

The arrival dates are for the years 1967-2004, the departure dates for the years 1974-2004, and the drumming dates for the years 1975-2004.

The mean arrival date for the period 1975-2004 was 9.0 April (SD 6.0 days; n=31); for the period 1967-2004 11.5 April (SD 6.8 days; n=38). The range was 27 March-29 April. The median for the period 1975-2004 was also 9 April.

The mean departure date for 1975-2004 was 27.4 October (SD 19.2 days; n=30), the median 30/31 October (for 1974-2004: 28.1 October, SD 19.3 days, n=31; median 31 October). The range was 19 September-1 January.

Drumming started between 31 March and 1 May (excluding the year 2003 when drumming was heard only on 18 and 19 June), mean 16.7 April (SD 7.1 days, n=29), median 18 April both including and excluding the year 2003. In addition to the data of 2003, in the year 2001 also a late arrival in the territory in question was recorded: first record in this territory was made on 15 June and the species was recorded there almost daily until 5 July, when it was still drumming. In both 2001 and 2003, the first observation of Common Snipe on Aasla was made on 1 May.

Drumming stopped between 3 June and 13 July (excluding five dates in April-May), mean 28.4 June (SD 10.3 days; n=25), median 26/27 June (including all years) or 3 July (excluding five years with an early end of drumming).

The distribution of Snipe records per pentad in 1975-2004 is shown in Figure 1 (n=5180). The birds will usually start arriving in the first half of April, the highest totals being recorded in the last part of that month. Some migration may still be going on during the first pentad in May. The number of birds recorded is quite similar until midsummer, after which a sharp drop is recorded. This seems to be connected with a decrease in drumming activity. After about 10 July, very little drumming is heard and another sharp decline in the numbers recorded is observed. During the rest of July the numbers remain low. Fall migration seems to start in August with a small peak around 20 August. Another small peak takes place presumably of juveniles, around 10 October, and from early November onwards Common Snipes are scarce. The observations of Common Snipes in late December-early January are due to an individual that tried to overwinter in 1976-77. In table 2, the number of individuals recorded each month is summarized.

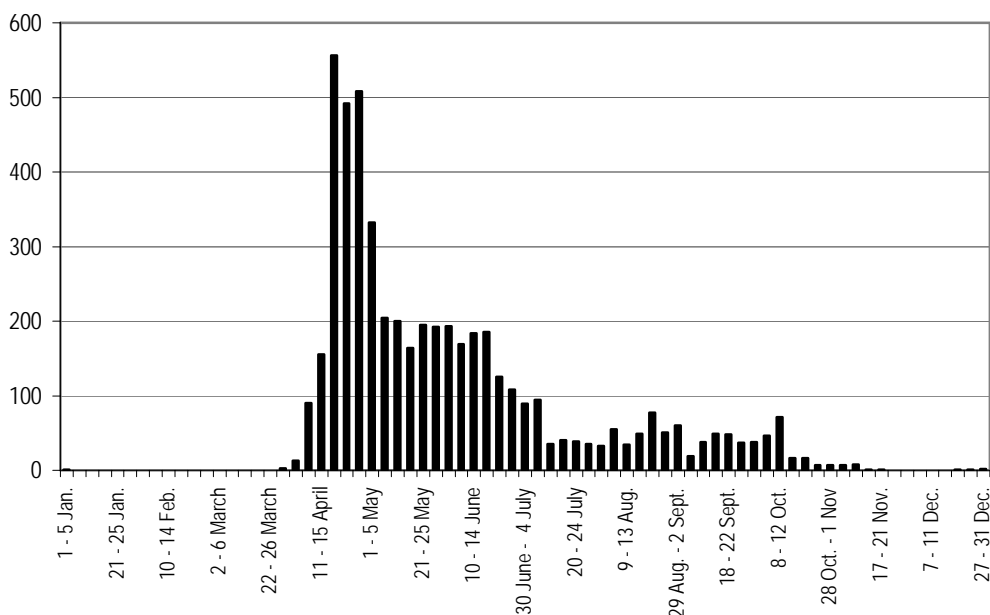


Figure 1:
Distribution of Snipe records per pentad from 1975 to 2004.

Table 2: Number of Snipe recorded each month from 1975 to 2004.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	Total
1975	0	0	0	151	65	28	4	8	8	3	0	0	267
76	0	0	0	136	31	56	11	2	4	4	0	4	248
77	1	0	0	56	71	66	42	24	13	7	0	0	280
78	0	0	0	65	60	61	14	3	4	25	0	0	232
79	0	0	0	27	114	52	28	68	20	3	2	0	314
80	0	0	0	82	101	50	10	8	32	20	0	0	303
81	0	0	0	192	77	68	54	98	33	17	6	0	545
82	0	0	1	229	135	87	38	21	15	9	0	0	535
83	0	0	0	84	103	58	28	2	24	7	1	0	307
84	0	0	0	88	63	44	12	5	9	16	3	0	240
85	0	0	0	56	90	103	22	4	4	5	1	0	285
86	0	0	0	36	119	51	2	10	11	6	0	0	235
87	0	0	0	35	26	42	14	2	3	3	0	0	125
88	0	0	0	27	34	12	0	4	1	9	0	0	87
89	0	0	0	40	32	23	5	4	6	3	1	0	114
90	0	0	0	57	22	19	10	1	7	4	0	0	120
91	0	0	0	29	45	17	4	2	4	6	2	0	109
92	0	0	0	46	31	17	1	2	1	0	0	0	98
93	0	0	0	52	5	2	1	3	5	3	0	0	71
94	0	0	0	10	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	15
95	0	0	0	21	16	3	0	1	1	0	1	0	43
96	0	0	0	72	23	4	0	4	0	4	0	0	107
97	0	0	0	38	21	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	65
98	0	0	0	54	6	13	3	3	0	3	1	0	83
99	0	0	1	67	25	38	3	9	1	3	1	0	148
2000	0	0	0	22	9	11	2	0	3	1	0	0	48
2001	0	0	0	19	2	9	6	13	29	8	0	0	86
2002	0	0	1	10	3	0	1	6	3	12	0	0	36
2003	0	0	0	12	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	18
2004	0	0	0	5	1	2	1	6	7	2	1	0	25
Total	1	0	3	1818	1332	942	317	315	251	186	20	4	5189

The number of Common Snipe pairs recorded by the mapping method is shown in Figure 2. The sites occupied in May – June are considered. There was a general increase in the number of territories mapped between 1975 and 1982 (when the number of territories was 46 on about 16 km²), a moderate decrease between 1983 and 1991, and a crash from 1992 onwards. The lowest figure was obtained in 1994 with no territories at all (the only individual recorded that year in May-June was seen in migratory flight). A count of the number of territories in six five year periods gave the means of 27.8, 35.6, 27.0, 9.6, 7.6, and 3.2, respectively. Thus only about 12% of

the territories were occupied in 2000 – 2004 compared with those in 1975 – 1979. A comparison of the last period with the peak period (1980 – 1984) indicated that only about 9% of the territories remained occupied.

Line-transects gave similar results (Figure 3). The maximum number was recorded in 1982 (13) and Common Snipes were absent in 1993-1994, 1996, and 2000-2004. In periods of five (in 1976-1979 four) years the average numbers of recorded pairs were 10.0, 9.6, 5.5, 1.6, 1.0, and 0, respectively. According to this data set Common Snipes have locally gone extinct.

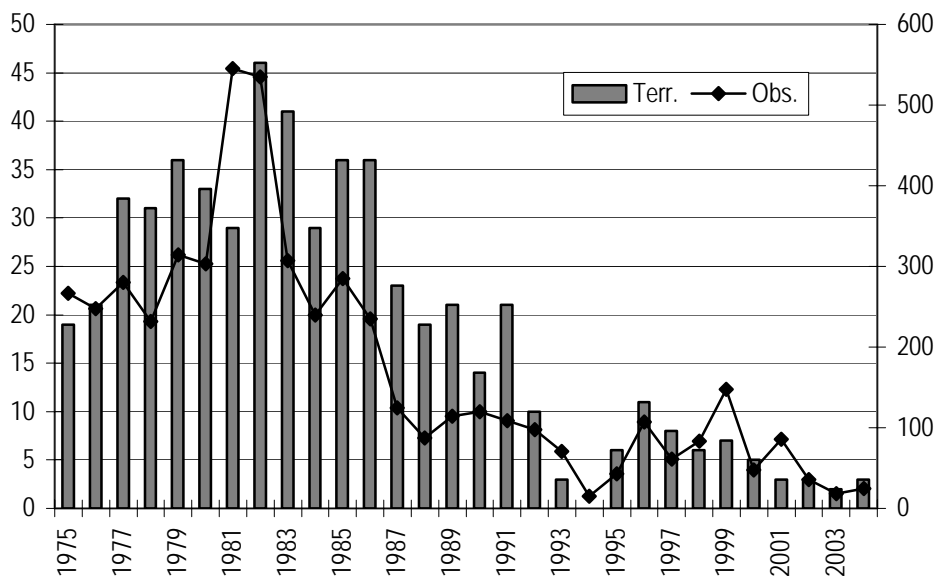


Figure 2: Number of Common Snipe observations and territories recorded every year (1975-2004) by the mapping method in Aasla.

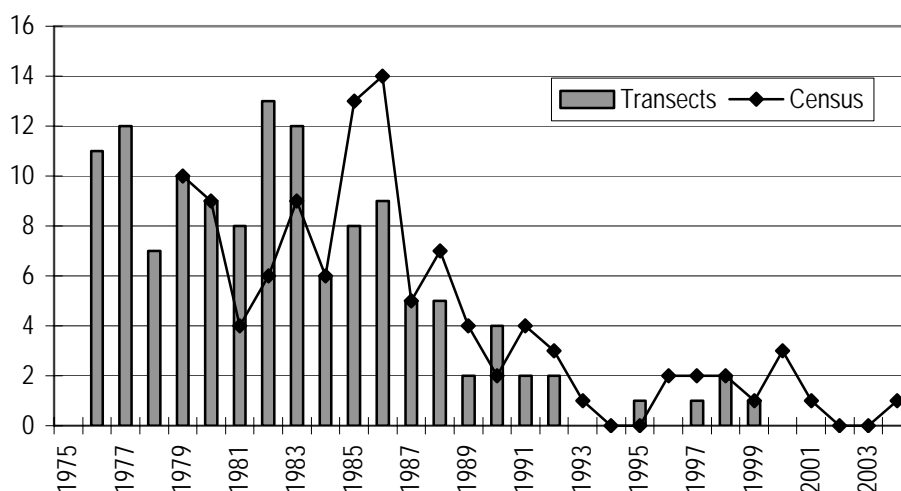


Figure 3: Number of Common Snipe observations based on line-transects and night censuses from 1976 to 2004 at Aasla.

For bird night censuses the means were 7.3 (for 1979-1984), 8.6, 2.0, 1.4, and 1.0 (for 2000 – 2004) (Figure 3). For bird night censuses the peak occurred in 1986 (14 territories).

Finally, the average annual totals of Common Snipes were on average 268.2, 386.0, 169.2, 82.4, 88.4, and 42.4. The best years were 1981 and 1982 (545 and 535 individuals, respectively). The lowest numbers were recorded in 1994 (15) and 2003 (18). In the last period the numbers were ca. 16% of those recorded in the first period, and ca. 11% of those recorded in the peak period (1980-1984).

Discussion

All the available data show a serious decline in the numbers of Common Snipe. The peaks in most of the data sets took place in the first part of the 1980s. The most plausible explanation to this is the virtual cessation of cattle grazing on the local shore meadows in 1975-1979, with very few cows remaining in the next five-year period. The peak numbers in the early 1980s were probably due to the optimal conditions in the meadows shortly after the disappearance of cattle. As time went on, the shore meadows became overgrown either by reeds from the shores or bushes from the dry land whereby

very little snipe habitat was left. There is not much certainty how many of the snipes recorded in about 2000-2004 were actually breeding, the few observations in May – June may indicate that some of the birds were actually on their migratory or summer vagrants, flushed from the ground in former territories. The data from the years 2001 and 2003 may indicate, that birds that had bred earlier somewhere else arrived in the area around mid-June.

The preliminary data of 2005 indicate that grazing is very important for the Common

Snipe (L. Saari, unpubl.). Grazing on the shore meadows in Aasla was resumed in July 2005 by about 30 cows and more than 20 calves, for the first time in about 25 years at this site. The counts gave the highest daily totals ever for this species in the months of August and September while the highest September total had already been recorded in the first half of the month. It indicates that in this case deliberate overgrazing (to restore the meadow habitat in this Natura 2000 site) is the main factor responsible. The future development of the local snipe population will be very interesting to see.

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2004-2005 French Woodcock report

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Ringling results

Quantitative ringing results

Exactly 5,000 woodcocks were ringed in France during the 2004-05 wintering season (Figure 1). This very good result is linked in part to a high number of migratory and wintering birds due to a good reproduction success in the main European breeding area. The high number of Woodcock ringers spread over France also contributes to this result. The catching success rate was 25% like in the last year. The best results were obtained in the Channel and Atlantic coastal regions. However, many woodcocks were also ringed in Central and East France thanks to a good migratory flow.

2004-2005 ringing season in numbers

N. départements :	86
N. ringing sites :	1,386
N. ringers :	337
N. nocturnal trips :	2,812
N. contacts :	21,516
N. ringed woodcocks :	5,000*
Success rate :	25%
N. direct retraps :	133
N. indirect retraps :	138
N. direct recoveries :	353
N. indirect recoveries:	460
Annual direct recovery rate:	7%
Length of ring wearing time:	28 days (25 days for direct recoveries <20 km; n=294)
* +14 birds ringed in May, June and July	

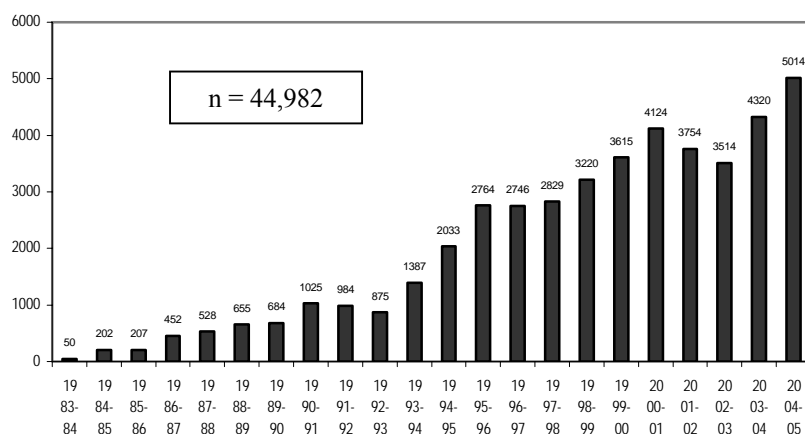


Figure 1: Inter-annual fluctuations of ringing results.

Phenology of migration

Like in 2003-04, the monthly fluctuation of catchings followed a classic pattern: a peak in November then a constant decrease till March (Figure 2). Arrivals of woodcocks correspond

to a late cold spell in mid-November and December in the North and East of Europe with temperatures close to -15°C . These weather conditions probably contributed to force woodcocks to migrate quickly.

In France, the 2004-05 winter was rather mild. However, a cold spell was registered from February to mid-March with heavy snow falls in many regions. This delayed the spring migration. No large movements to coastal regions were observed. It seems that the woodcocks preferred to stay in their wintering sites and wait for better weather conditions to migrate. They were probably using their energetic reserve during this period, but it is difficult to assess the impact of this on the spring migration process. In Russia, spring was delayed and the first woodcocks were observed 2 weeks later than usual.

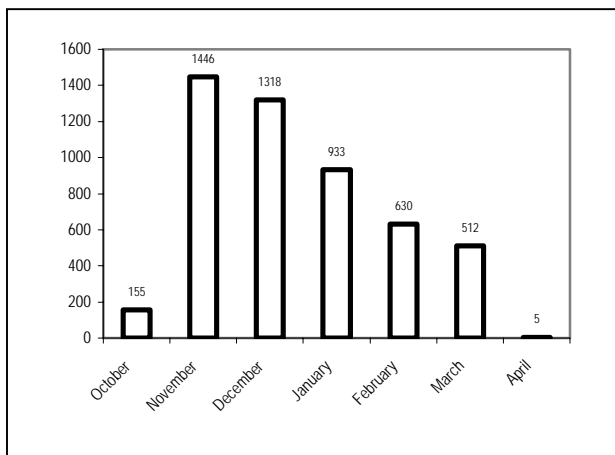


Figure 2: Monthly fluctuations of catchings during the 2004-05 season.

Ring recoveries

In 2004-05, 37 French Woodcock rings were recovered in foreign countries:

- direct recoveries: 8 in Russia, 5 in Spain and 1 in Hungary
- indirect recoveries: 17 in Russia, 2 in Spain, 2 in Portugal, 1 in Hungary and 1 in Italy.

As usual, Russia represents the major part of recoveries (67.5% in 2004-05; 66.5% in 2003-04). The closing of roding hunting in Sweden has probably lead to a decrease in recovery probability in this country.

Proportion of juveniles

First-year woodcocks represented 65.2% of all ringed birds. This value is the highest recorded in the last 10 years (Figure 3). This has probably been linked to a good breeding success in the core of the European breeding area.

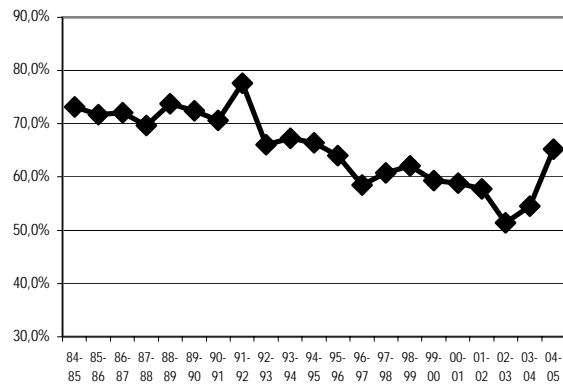


Figure 3: Inter-annual variations of the proportion of juveniles among ringed woodcocks.

Monitoring of abundance in migratory and wintering periods

Two indices allow to monitor Woodcock migratory and wintering numbers in France: the mean number of contacts/hour (IAN) registered during ringing trips and a hunting index (ICA) collected by *Club national des bécassiers* (cf. this issue, p.23-27). In 2004-05, IAN was estimated from 21,500 contacts noted for 6,500 hours. For this season, IAN amounts to 3.39 (Figure 4). This is the highest value ever registered since the beginning of this survey. In comparison to previous years, the ICA value also appears very high, which confirms the high densities of migratory and wintering woodcocks during the 2004-05 season.

The IAN and ICA trends show a significant increase for IAN ($Z=17.23$; $p<0.0001$; non-parametric Jonckheere-Terpstra test) but stability for ICA ($p=0.3718$). This could be due to the ringers' will to catch a maximum of birds (catching is the priority) and consequently to select only the best ringing sites. This is reinforced by the fact that for many teams the available ringing time decreased in the 2-3 last years. At the opposite, hunting activity is more stable over time and in space insofar as the majority of hunters do not change their hunting territories every year.

The IAN monthly fluctuations show that the 2004-05 values are higher than those recorded in the last 5 years between November and March (Figure 5).

Since the 2003-2004 season, the Woodcock migratory and wintering numbers are monitored in the course of the season. Data are

collected every 10 days by electronic mail. The results show that the partial estimates are close to the final values but slightly overestimated. However, the precision is good enough to detect any major problem in Woodcock abundance during the hunting season.

Roding results

In 2005, roding censuses took place in a larger area than in the year before. Indeed, every 4 or 5 years we organise a census there where the breeding numbers are very scarce to test the changes of the French general breeding area. In 2005, 75 *départements* participated in the survey whereby 1,131 listening points were visited.

National occupation rate

This rate corresponds to the % of listening points in which at least one roding male is observed (= positive site). In 2005, the rate is 18.5%. This low value is due to a larger census and cannot be compared to the previous ones. Insofar as no roding male was observed in the 13 *départements* located at the limits of the breeding area we concluded that the breeding area was stable.

Breeding population trend

The last 10-year population trend of the French breeding Woodcock population is analysed every year. 50 *départements*, in total, censused roding woodcocks without interruption from 1996 to 2005. The results are presented in Figure 6. No trend is detected in the proportion of positive sites during the period concerned ($\chi^2_1=0.191$; $p=0.662$; Cochran-Armitage test). Our data can be separated in high (n.contacts ≥ 5) and low (n.contacts <5) abundance sites. The trend in the proportion of high abundance sites in positive sites shows a slight increase ($(\chi^2_1=4.93$; $p=0.0264$; Cochran-Armitage test).

Therefore, we believe that the Woodcock breeding numbers did not change much over the last 10 years. However, a slight increase could be possible.

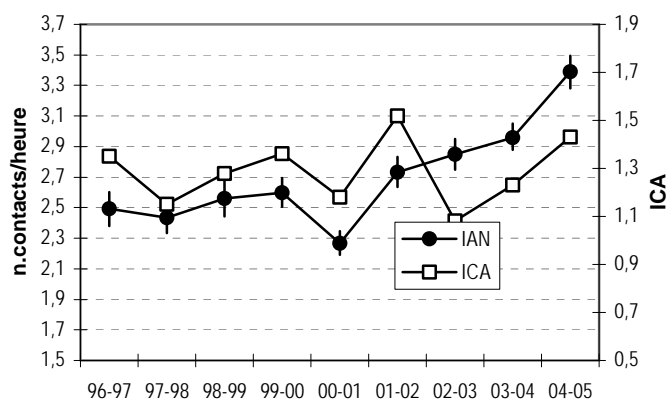


Figure 4: Annual fluctuations of the number of contacts/h during ringing trips (IAN: nocturnal index of abundance) and hunting trips (ICA: hunting index of abundance; Source: Club national des bécassiers).

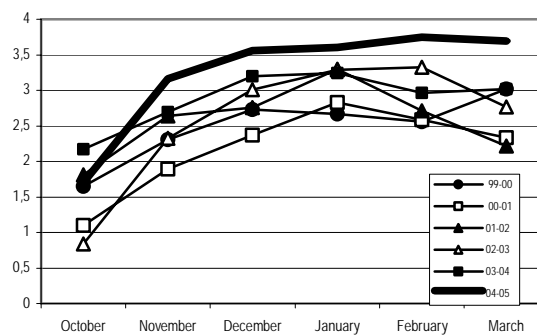


Figure 5: Monthly fluctuations of IAN from 1999-00 to 2004-05.

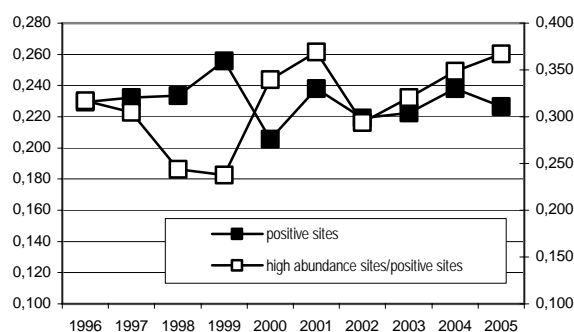


Figure 6: Inter-annual variations of the proportion of positive sites and high abundance sites/positive sites from 1996 to 2005. At the left side, spatial coverage for the study period.



Evaluation of the 2004/05 Woodcock hunting season in France

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The technical objective of the *Club national des bécassiers* (CNB; a French Woodcock Hunter Association) is to collect information on the Woodcock hunting bags in order to participate in the monitoring of the wintering populations. To reach this objective two tools are used: information on hunting trips (date, place, numbers of seen and shot woodcocks) and a wing collection. In addition, part of shot

birds is weighed and sexed. This work started in 1993/94.

In 2004/05, 1,148 CNB members participated in the survey. In total, 9,940 Woodcock wings were collected, 7,736 birds were weighed and 2,106 were sexed. The data were collected in an important part of France, i.e. in about 75 French *departments* (Figure 1).

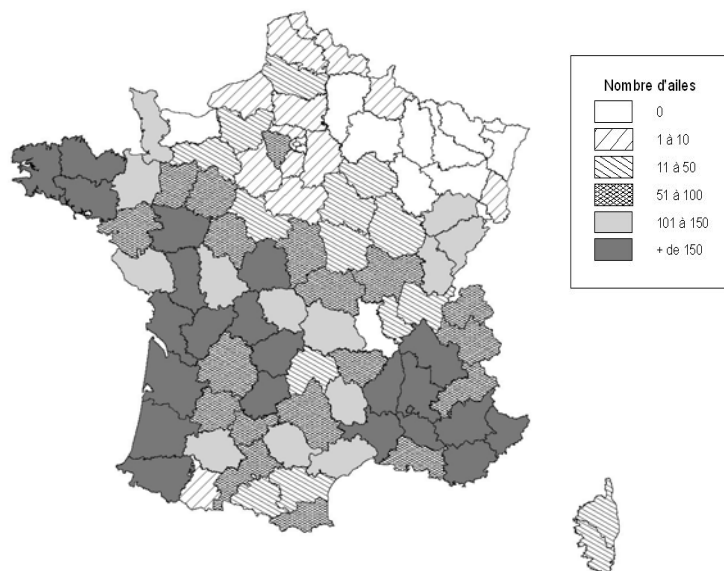


Figure 1: Distribution of the number of Woodcock wings collected in every French département during the 2004/05 survey.

Hunting index of abundance (ICA)

A hunting index of abundance was defined as the number of different Woodcocks seen during a hunting trip, the standardised duration of which was 3.5 hours (Cau & Boidot, 2005). In 2004/05, ICA was estimated from the hunting trips of 1,002 Woodcock hunters. Its national annual value is 1.43 [33,250 trips, 116,376 hours and 47,655 woodcocks seen (12,564 shot)]. This value is the second highest recorded in the last 12 years (Figure 2).

As usual, the 2004/05 Woodcock hunting bags were mainly made in November and December (41% and 29% resp.). The bag taken in January represented 17% of the total. Finally, October and February represented 5% and 8% respectively. ICA monthly values could also be estimated and their variations are presented in Figure 3. In 2004/05, the ICA values from November to February appear to be among the higher ones obtained in the last 9 years.

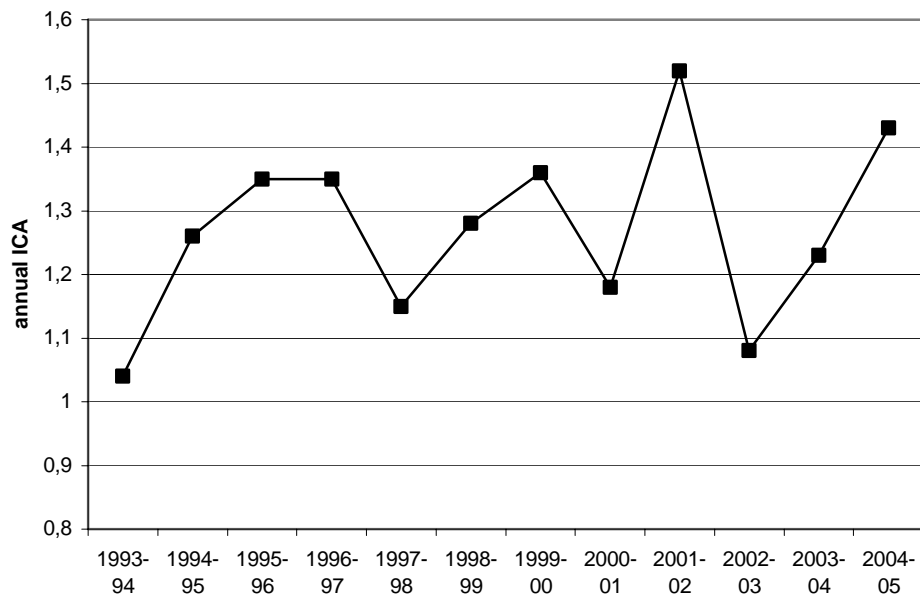


Figure 2: ICA annual variations in France from 1993/94 to 2004/05.

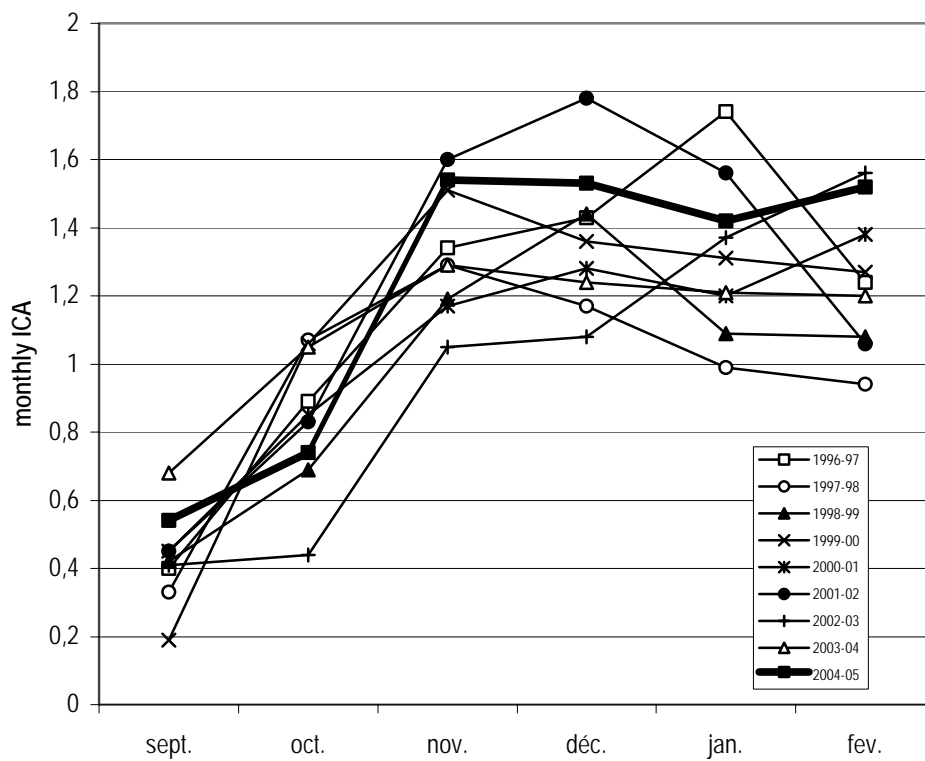


Figure 3: ICA monthly variations in France for the 1996/97 to 2004/05 hunting seasons.

More precise information can be obtained with ICA 10-day period values (figure 4). In 2004/05, ICA increased very quickly at the beginning of November then slightly decreased until February. This very common figure reflects a classic Woodcock migration pattern in the first part of November.

A *départemental* value can be estimated for the *départements* where a sufficient number of data was collected, i.e. at least from 4 hunters or for 30 hunting trips. These values are presented in figure 5. In the major part of France, the 2004/05 values are higher or much higher in comparison to the previous years, except in the South-West, Jura and Alps.

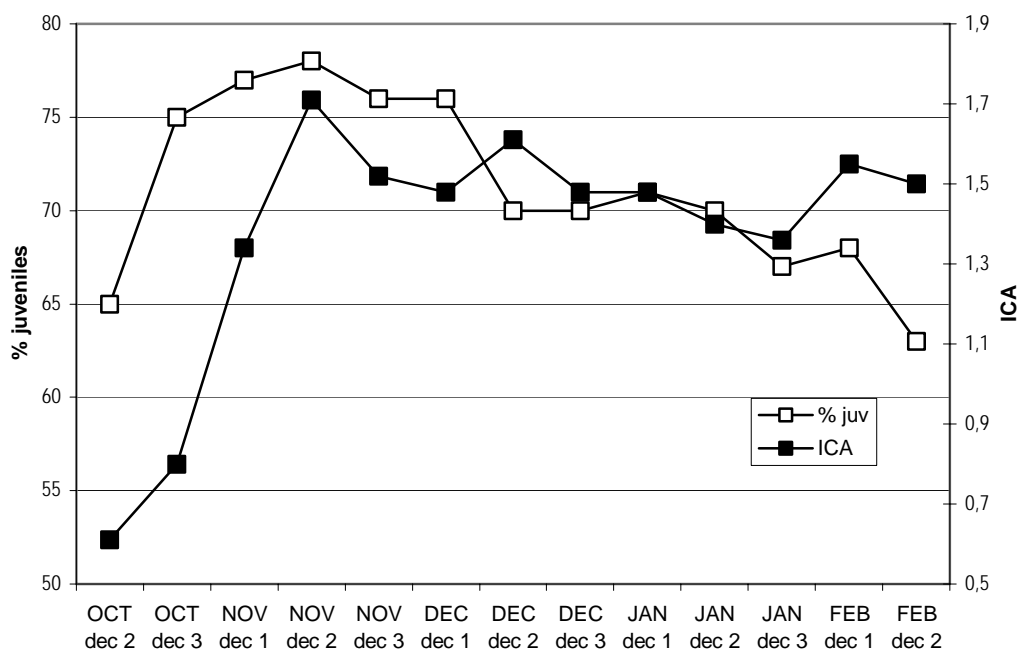


Figure 4 :
Variations in
ICA and
proportion of
juveniles by
10-day periods
in France, in
2004/05.

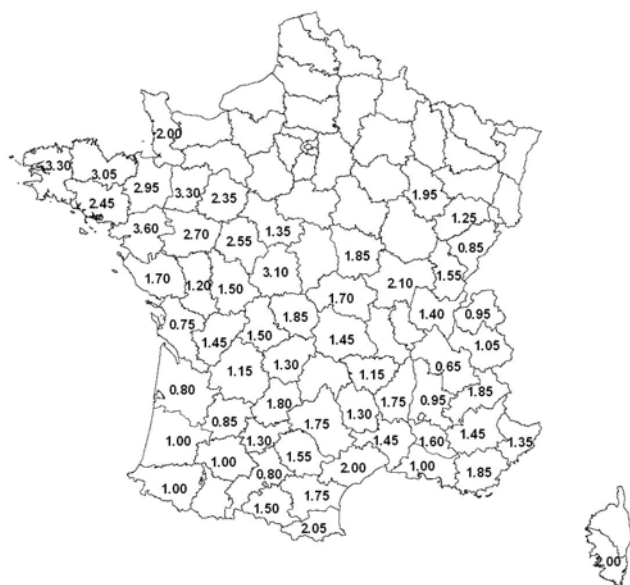


Figure 5:
Distribution of ICAs
in different
départements in
2004/05.

Ratio juvenile/adult

For 2004/05, the proportion of juveniles in the French Woodcock hunting bags is estimated at 73% (n = 9,940). This is the highest value registered in the last 10 years. The proportion of juveniles was at its maximum in November during the peak of migration, and then decreased until February (Figure 4).

The post-juvenile moult may be over or not depending on age and/or climatic conditions.

The proportion of birds that have not finished moulting may give information on the breeding success and/or weather conditions before migration (the moulting process stops as soon as migration starts).

In 2004/05, the proportion of juveniles that had not moulted completely is 17.9% (1297/7256). The post-nuptial moult of adults can also be completed or not. The proportion of adults that have not finished their post-nuptial moult is 41.6% (1116/2684).

Ratio male/female

In 2004/05, the proportion of Woodcock males in the French hunting bags was 39.5% (831/2106). This value remains very stable from one year to another.

Variations in weight

In 2004/05, the mean weight of a shot woodcock was 315.3 g. Females appear to be

somewhat heavier than males in general (317.3g and 312.4 g resp.) and throughout the wintering season (Figure 6). Weights are the lowest in November when the birds just finish their migration. The highest weights are registered at the end of December and the beginning of January, in the middle of the wintering period. A similar evolution can be observed for adults and juveniles (Figure 7).

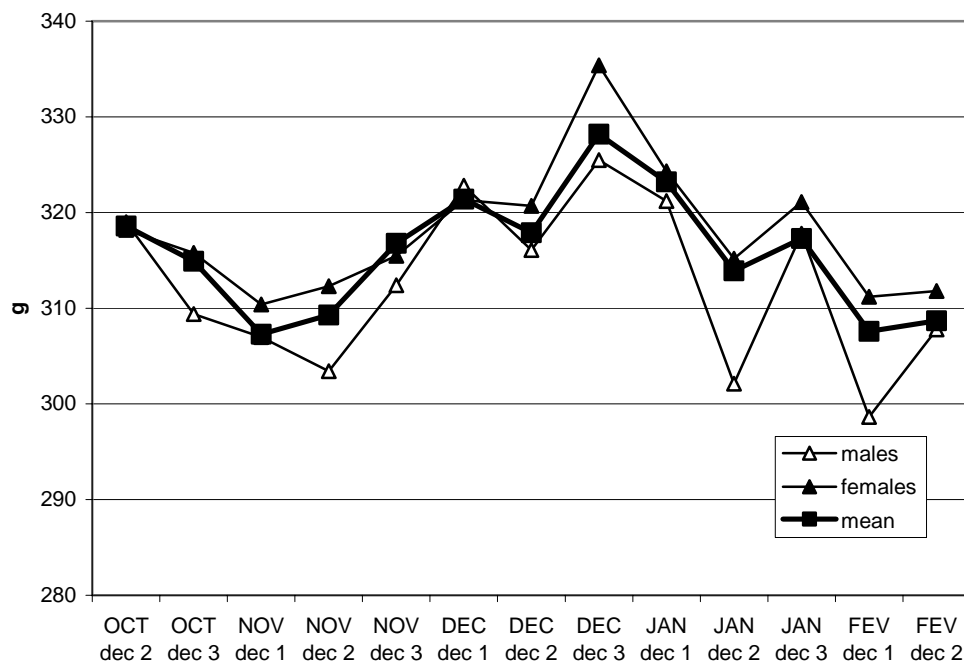


Figure 6: Intra-annual variations in weight of the Woodcock hunting bags in France in 2004/0. Results are expressed for the whole data set and according to sex.

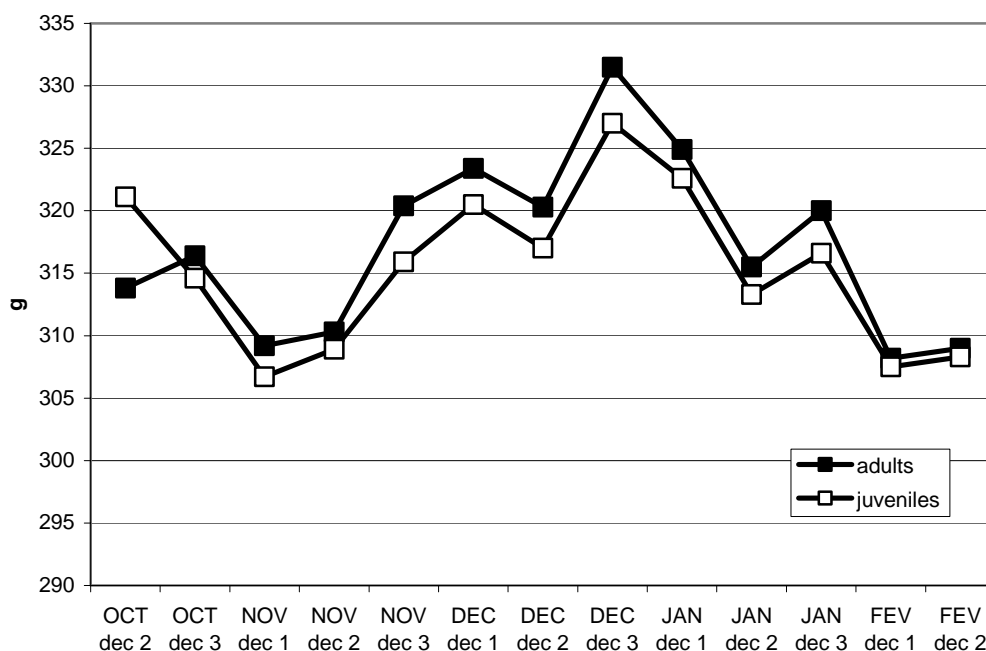


Figure 7: Intra-annual variations in weight of the Woodcock hunting bags in France in 2004/05, according to age.

Conclusion

According to the ICA value, the 2004/05 Woodcock hunting season was one of the best of the last 12 years. Migration was rather insignificant in October but numbers quickly increased to a high level in November. Woodcock abundance stayed at a rather high level throughout the winter until February. In most of the French *départements*, the densities were higher than during the last hunting

season. This should reassure the most pessimistic ones of us. However, we must stay vigilant on the status of our favourite game bird. We think that measures of precaution like daily, weekly and/or annual bag limits associated with a “bag booklet” and a marking system, as well as the hunting bans during cold spells have started to bear fruit. We believe that the future of Woodcock hunting requires hunting bags control and appropriate management measures.

2004-2005 French Snipes report

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A Snipe Group was formed in France in 2002. This Group’s objective is to make a special effort toward the study of survival rates of Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) and Jack Snipe (*Limnospiza minima*) through the development of ringing. Thanks to this tool, more information will also be collected on the origin of wintering snipes, the phenology of migration, fidelity in wintering sites,...

From 2002 to 2005, 6 training courses were organised by *Office national de la chasse et de la faune sauvage (ONCFS)* and the National Museum of Natural History (MNHN) for Snipe ringers. The biology of snipes and their catching methods are explained to participants. An exam has to be passed to be accredited as Snipe ringer by MNHN. At this time, the group is made up of 86 active ringers. The great majority of them are professionals working for ONCFS and Hunter associations. At least one Snipe ringer is employed in the coastal *départements* along the Channel-Atlantic coast, which is the best area for wintering Snipes in France. Other ringers work mainly in the East and Central part of the country where densities may locally be high.

In 2005, 790 snipes were ringed (681 Common snipes and 109 Jack snipes). The number of ringed snipes increases every year : 294 in 2002, 426 in 2003, 657 in 2004. Two nests were found in Doubs *département* and Cantal *département* in spring 2005, one chick was ringed.

The objectives of the French Snipe Group is to get 100 members and to ring 1,000 snipes every year.



A Wilson's Snipe could have been seen in France in October 2005 at Ouessant Island . However, this information needs to be confirmed by BBRC, in charge of homologation of rare observations.

Wintering Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* monitoring in protected areas in Italy. First results.

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Despite the great interest in the Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* as a game bird in many European countries, little is known about the number of individuals of this species that are wintering in Western Palearctic area.

Only hunting bags are known a few Western European countries, often with no reliable data on the population densities during the hunting season, their local distribution and the pressure of other limiting factors (natural predators, frost, food shortage).

The scarcity of information increases if we consider the growing phenomenon of hunting tourism in many Eastern Countries, the pressure of which on local populations is, at the least, poorly evaluated.

For the Italian wintering Woodcock population BirdLife International (2000) gives an estimate of 50.000-100.000 birds which is quite unrealistic (underestimation for France too: see Fadat, 1999). According to the hunting bag records we may estimate a wintering population ranging at 500,000 to 1,000,000 Woodcocks at least. This number better fits the estimates for France, a country that has a habitat suitability comparable to the Italian one but with a surface that is twice as large. This data shortage incited our team of the University of Genova (Dip.Te.Ris.), supported by *Club della Beccaccia*, to plan a specific monitoring scheme.

This scheme should be applied in protected areas (National and Regional Parks, Natural Reserves and other hunting-free territories) for to evaluate their importance for the conservation of this species.

The choice to monitor such areas preferentially is linked to the following factors:

- the high percentage (10-20% in the Alpine territories, 20-30% in the other ones) of Italian agro-sylvo-pastoral lands in which hunting is forbidden (National Law n. 157/1992): National and Regional Parks, Oasis, Natural Reserves, Z.R.C. (managed areas for game increase and improvement). At present the

total "no hunting area" in Italy covers 6 million ha (nearly 20% of the Italian territory).

- our interest to know the size of the surface of protected areas suitable for wintering Woodcock and the number of birds that choose these areas, to evaluate the importance of protected areas for Woodcock conservation.

- our will to promote a collaboration between hunters and protected-area managers with the purpose of a positive feedback for both.

Monitoring project

Our project could be subdivided in the following main points.

Preparatory phase

- contacts with the Parks' managers.
- advertisement by the *Club della Beccaccia* review and a Web Site to select potential monitoring operators.

Course and exams

- for each Park involved in the project, collaborators must attend a course (submitted to and approved by the *Istituto Nazionale per la Fauna Selvatica*) on Woodcock biology (distribution, ecology, reproduction, wintering, migrations, behaviour), management and monitoring (census methods, ringing). At the end of the course they must pass the respective examinations.

Planning phase

- delimitation inside the Park of potentially suitable areas for wintering Woodcocks.
- selection, at random, of a representative sample of such areas: 100 ha patches that should totalise at least the 10% of them; the aim is to estimate the number of wintering Woodcocks inside the Parks by a statistical way that will allow to compare them.
- delimitation of additional areas known to be "good for Woodcocks" to integrate sample-

patches data and to get a better estimate, at least, of the local Woodcock dispersion.

Monitoring operators

- selection of monitoring operators among qualified people (after a course and an exam). Priority will be given to the residents of the Park and members of the *Club della Beccaccia*.
- pointing dogs that will be used must be "skilled" (at least 3 years old).
- operators must guarantee: to participate in the monitoring effort for 5 seasons, show rightness in data collection and the greatest respect for the environment and local fauna (e.g. using trained dogs that will not pursue wild animals; they should not lift the same Woodcock up twice).
- each Park must guarantee to allow that the people will be hired for monitoring operations for at least five years.
- the monitoring period ranges from December 15 to February 15.

- each sampling area must be inspected twice per month at least and no more than twice a week. Inspections should preferably be made on Tuesday and Friday (no hunting days in all Italian regions).

Census methods (cf. Gilbert *et al.*, 1998)

- diurnal survey of selected sample areas with pointing dogs.
- dusk observation points at woodland edges.
- nocturnal field scanning with a spotlight; ringing sessions (when possible).

First data: wintering seasons 2003/04 and 2004/05

Here after are the data on the Parks collected, during the winters of 2003/04 and the field work carried out in 2004/05 on Woodcock wintering populations (table 1).

Table 1: Name and surface area of the Parks included in the study in 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Park	Park area (ha)	Winter
"Valle del Ticino" Natural Park (Piemonte, NW Italy)	6561	2004/05
"Pineta di Appiano Gentile e Tradate" Regional Park (Lombardia, NW Italy)	4860	2003/04
		2004/05
"Beigua" Regional Park (Liguria, NW Italy)	8715	2004/05
"Macchia di Gattaceca e del Barco" Natural Reserve (Lazio, Central Italy)	1200	2003/04
		2004/05
"Conero" Natural Park (Marche, C Italy)	6011	2004/05
"Monti Sibillini" National Park (Umbria-Marche, Central Italy)	70000	2003/04

The data that were actually collected, allow us to estimate an average winter Woodcock density of 1.29 birds/100ha in suitable

protected areas situated in the North and Central Italy (table 2).

Table 2: Estimation of Woodcock densities in suitable protected areas in Italy.

Part of Italy	Monitored ha	Woodcocks	Woodcocks/100ha
North	13700	178	1.30
Centre	14150	181	1.28
N + C	27850	359	1.29

For a good estimation we hope to be able to collect more data during the next years, whereby other Parks should be involved in our project.

This is just a summary of what emerges at the starting point of our research, while we are aware of the scientific limits of such field work and, first of all, of the impossibility to control and impose a standardised sampling design to our collaborators. Moreover, we must underline that the number - and capability - of the people and dogs employed for each session were different and that a few sampling areas that had preliminary been delimited were prospected many times in subsequent census sessions, while others were censused only once or never. This is why we calculated the totally prospected surface areas as the sum of hectares beaten in each session, independently of how many times the same areas were surveyed. Woodcock densities were calculated for each session (their minimum and maximum values are given in the tables) and an average value (mean) was computed by dividing the total number of woodcocks seen by the hundreds of

prospected hectares. It must be said that each collaborator on average prospected 60-70 ha/session and that all of them participated in two or more census sessions.

At present, we are going to improve our study by acquiring detailed data on habitat, geomorphology and climate to get a better evaluation of the factors that are locally influencing Woodcock abundance and availability. We are also trying to plan the field activities of our collaborators so as to minimize the problems that emerged in these first two seasons, and to make the census methods more homogeneous within and between study areas. However we think that we already obtained a good result since we were able to gather many people (mainly hunters) and involved them in a research activity, only as volunteers. Therefore, looking to perfect our work step by step, we think that it would be useful to summarize here the first results of our census, while considering them to be just an indication of Woodcock abundance in Italy.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our local collaborators and operators in alphabetical order: Giuliano Ballan, Ermes Bighetti, Alberto Brusa, Maurizio Cantagallo, Gianni Castellani, Mario Dari, Alberto Debiaggi, Claudio Di Addezio, Florindo Fabrizi, Giovanni Frangi, Aldo Gismondi, Giambattista Guenzi, Giorgio Leoni, Danilo Manfrin, Angelo Massari, Gabriele Mistò, Ettore Onori, Mario Orsolini, Roberto Pini, Carlo Racchio, Nevio Raineri, Walter Ruggeri, Massimo Stefanelli, David Stocchi, Sandro Torre, Egidio Tosi & Liberto Zaccaretti.

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Dusk observation points

“Macchia di Gattaceca e del Barco” Natural Reserve (Lazio, Central Italy)

Season	Number of sessions	Total number of Woodcocks seen	Maximum number of Woodcocks seen
2003/04	13	71	7 (2nd January)
2004/05	20	62	6 (6th December)

Pointing dog census results

“Valle del Ticino” Natural Park (Piemonte, NW Italy)

Season	Total number of census sessions	Prospected area (ha)	Total number of Woodcocks seen	Woodcocks/100ha			
				Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
2004/05	9	3,620	90	1.43	4.49	2.48	0.43

“Pineta di Appiano Gentile e Tradate” Regional Park (Lombardia, NW Italy)

Season	Total number of census sessions	Prospected area (ha)	Total number of Woodcocks seen	Woodcocks/100ha			
				Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
2003/04	13	3,400	20	0	1.67	0.59	0.61
2004/05	18	2,650	7	0	1.33	0.26	0.47

“Beigua” Regional Park (Liguria, NW Italy)

Season	Total number of census sessions	Prospected area (ha)	Total number of Woodcocks seen	Woodcocks/100ha			
				Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
2004/05	9	4,065	64	0.44	2.81	1.46	0.965

“Macchia di Gattaceca e del Barco” Natural Reserve (Lazio, Central Italy)

Season	Total number of census sessions	Prospected area (ha)	Total number of Woodcocks seen	Woodcocks/100ha			
				Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
2003/04	7	4,030	61	1.29	2.35	1.57	0.36
2004/05	9	5,000	27	0.31	0.89	0.54	0.20

“Conero” Natural Park (Marche, C Italy)

Season	Total number of census sessions	Prospected area (ha)	Total number of Woodcocks seen	Woodcocks/100ha			
				Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
2004/05*	3	720	59	6.88	11.88	8.20	2.74

*Due to administrative problems, the field census started too late: the data were collected after a snowfall on the surrounding peaks, at the end of the wintering season and at beginning of the migratory periods (two sessions after the deadline of February 15).

“Monti Sibillini” National Park (Umbria-Marche, Central Italy)

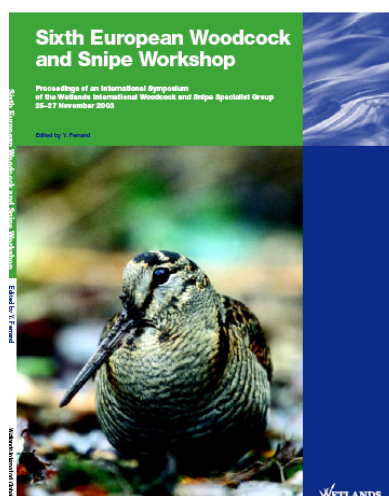
Season	Total number of Census sessions	Prospected area (ha)	Total number of Woodcocks seen	Woodcocks/100ha			
				Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
2003/04	7	4,365	31	0	0.91	0.71	0.33

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