

Breeding waterbird conservation in the Medoc Peninsula, France

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Introduction & Objectives

Troughout coastal areas of the world, numerous wetland environments have been reclaimed, which eliminates valuable habitats for many waterbirds. Rare studies have examined habitat requirements by breeding waterbirds. So, breeding waterbird populations were censused in northern Medoc peninsula, in order to evaluate bird distributions in relation to habitat characteristics.

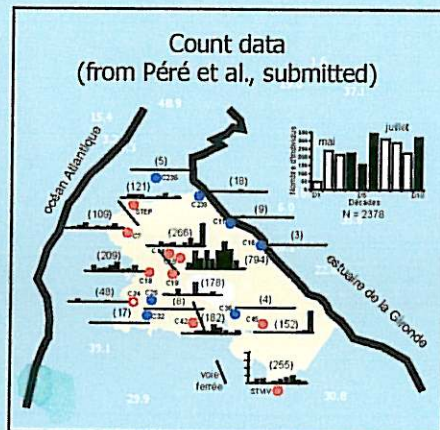
Sampling sites and methods

We surveyed waterbirds in 17 wetlands located between the Gironde estuary and the Atlantic coast in south-western France. Formerly this area was estuarine and salt marshes, but human activities converted much of these habitats into wetlands and pasturelands currently grazed year-round by cattle (horses and cows). From 1 May to 8 August 2007, one or two observers censused waterbirds (waterfowl, waders, shorebirds, gulls and grebes) using 8 x 32 mm binoculars and 20-60 x 72 spotting scopes once a 10-day period during daylight hours (n = 170 surveys), during 15 minutes.



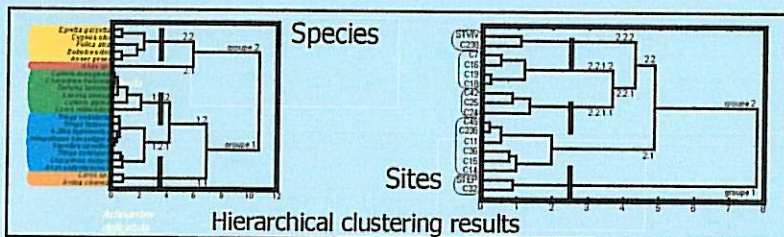
Main results

We observed 27 waterbird species and 2378 birds using the 17 wetlands. Shorebirds and waterfowl comprised most (56.7% and 30.9%, respectively) observations, with gulls (6.4%), wading birds (5.8%), and grebes (0.2%) present in lower abundances. Diversity and bird density in wetlands ranged from 0 to 9 species and 0 to 29 birds ha⁻¹, respectively. The composition of waterbird communities changed seasonally. Bird abundance and communities varied greatly among wetlands. Results indicated strong separation of all shorebirds from all other waterbirds.



Discussion

Wetlands adjacent to the Gironde estuary are used by large numbers of waterbirds during the breeding season. Most birds foraged in very shallow water depths, in mudflats or in surrounding short-grass pastures. Waterbird communities' use of wetlands varied greatly in association with habitat characteristics. Shorebirds and gulls (66% of observations) predominated in mudflats and pastures with short vegetation, wading birds (5.5% of observations) frequented wetlands with tall vegetation, and waterfowl (28.5% of observations) mostly used flooded environments. The species richness is generally similar to other sites such as the Charente Maritime wetlands, north of Medoc Peninsula. The overall density is generally higher than in most other areas during the breeding season.



Conclusion

From a conservation perspective our putative findings were (1) an inverse relationship between waterbird diversity and densities and vegetation height, which resulted from livestock grazing; and (2) waterbird use and densities increased in pastures actively grazed by livestock. These observations indicate that waterbird communities are probably influenced by the presence of livestock, as well as indirectly affected by the grazing regimes that influence vegetation.



Species list: commonest taxa

<i>Cygnus olor</i>	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
<i>Anser anser</i>	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
<i>Anas sp.</i>	
<i>Aythya ferina</i>	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>
	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
<i>Ardea (Egretta) alba</i>	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
<i>Ardea (Bubulcus) ibis</i>	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
<i>Fulica atra</i>	
<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
	<i>Larus sp.</i>

Bibliography

Péré C. et al. (submitted). Breeding waterbird communities in wetlands of northern Medoc Peninsula, France. *Comptes Rendus Biologies*.

Acknowledgements

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