

Origin of wintering populations of the woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* in south-western Europe



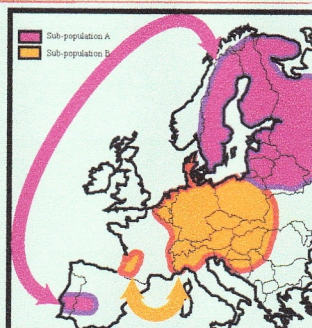
Valérie Cohou, Philippe Mourguiart and the GIFS Members

Fédération départementale des chasseurs des Landes, Domaine du Pignada
111 chemin de l'Herté, 40 465 Pontonx-sur-l'Adour, France
frc.aquitaine@yahoo.fr



Introduction & Objectives

The common woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* is one of the most widely distributed and abundant birds in western Europe. It is also the most important European game bird in terms of numbers harvested. Although some woodpigeon subpopulations are nonmigratory, most migrate to south-west to winter in south-western Europe from France to Portugal and Spain. Despite the economical importance of the woodpigeon hunting, stopover sites and seasonal habitats of migratory and wintering flocks are poorly known. The primary objective of our research was to develop an effective method to fill the gaps in year-round woodpigeon ecology in order to monitor such migratory populations.



Methods

Different methods were used :

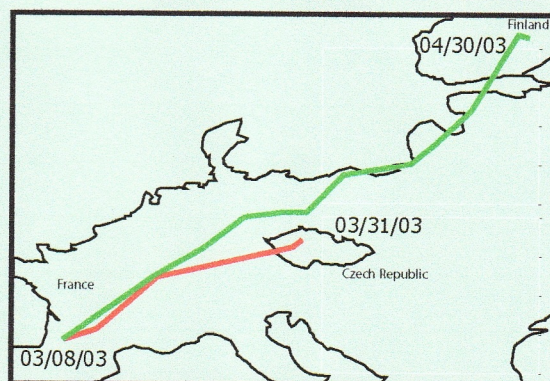
1. Count data during migration;
2. Count data on wintering flocks;
3. Analyses of ringing data;
4. Radio-tracking data;
5. Isotopic data.

The last two methods are presented .

Radio-tracking data

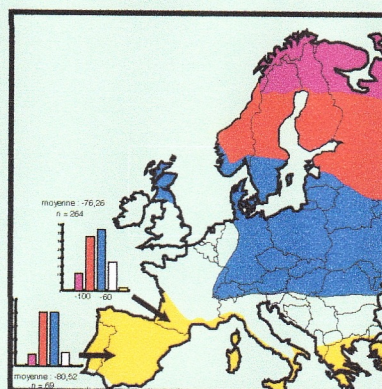


Our objectives were to use radio-telemetry to document habitat use and local movements of woodpigeon in south-western France in mid- to late-winter. Preliminary studies using satellite telemetry are showing patterns of migration from France to central and northern Europe (see Figure).



Isotopic data

We can determine the geographic origin of woodpigeons wintering in France or in the Iberian Peninsula, based on the ratio of deuterium in the bird feathers, combined with knowledge of the spatial pattern of this isotope in precipitation. Birds primarily come from mid-latitudes (see Figure).



Conclusion

Our studies have clearly shown that the largest proportion of woodpigeons hunted in south-western France or in the Iberian Peninsula during winter are medium-distance migrant birds. A majority of these birds come from Deutschland, Poland, the Balt Republics and Fennoscandia. More studies are needed to define the main stopover sites used by the birds during migrations and the precise timing of departures and arrivals.



References

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Cohou V., Lanusse D., Mourguiart P., Recarte J., Veiga J. & Werno J. 2007. Le pigeon ramier et son état de conservation dans le Sud-Ouest de la France : bilan de six années de suivi. Faune Sauvage 276: 10-14.

Acknowledgements

We thank the many hunters and volunteers for their participation and aid in the survey programs.