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2 Movements and activities of male Black-tailed Gulls in breeding  
3 and sabbatical years

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23

24 Running Title: Year-round movements of sabbatical Black-tailed Gulls

25 **ABSTRACT**

26 Long-lived animals sometimes skip one or more breeding seasons; however, little is  
27 known about their movements and activities during such ‘sabbatical’ periods. Here we  
28 present novel data on year-round movements and activities of two male Black-tailed  
29 Gulls *Larus crassirostris* during a sabbatical year. We compare the data with those in a  
30 year when they bred and with those of two other breeding males. The year-round  
31 migration routes of two sabbatical males were consistent with those of the breeding  
32 males: they returned to the breeding area but did not visit the colony in the sabbatical  
33 year. They landed more frequently on water (a potential index of foraging effort) during  
34 the non-breeding autumn and winter prior to the sabbatical year than before breeding.  
35 Sabbatical gulls may forage more intensively to recover body condition immediately  
36 after breeding.

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38 Key words: breeding decision, geolocator, intermittent breeding, migration, sabbatical

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## INTRODUCTION

44  
45 In long-lived animals, the reproductive effort expended during a breeding attempt may  
46 negatively impact an individual's future reproductive potential or survival (Williams  
47 1966; Stearns 1992). Therefore, individuals may skip breeding during one or more  
48 'sabbatical' seasons under conditions where breeding is likely to have a strong negative  
49 impact upon their future reproductive potential (Stearns 1992). Sabbatical periods have  
50 been observed in many seabird species (e.g., Rice and Kenyon 1962; Calladine and  
51 Harris 1997; Le Bohec et al. 2007). To date, the distributions, movements, or activities  
52 of seabirds during sabbatical years have been little studied, since individuals that skip  
53 breeding usually do not attend nest-sites, and thus it is difficult to monitor their behavior.  
54 However, new Global Location Sensor (GLS) devices are capable of recording  
55 post-breeding migratory routes and activities for over two years, and thus facilitate the  
56 collection of movement and activity data during avian sabbatical years.

57 Many territorial nesting seabird species return to their breeding colony (or the  
58 area around the colony) even in a sabbatical year in order to maintain their breeding  
59 territory (e.g., Calladine and Harris 1997; Danchin and Cam 2002; Phillips et al. 2005).  
60 In such species, the migratory movements of individuals during a sabbatical year might  
61 be expected to follow similar patterns (i.e., routes and timing) to those in breeding years.  
62 However, the foraging activities of individuals in sabbatical years might differ from  
63 those in breeding years. In some seabird species, the energetic or physiological state of  
64 individuals prior to breeding (which may reflect their foraging condition during  
65 post-breeding migration) is higher in breeding years than in sabbatical years (Giudici et  
66 al. 2010; Goutte et al. 2010).

67 In the present study, we investigated the year-round movements and activities

68 of four territorial nesting Black-tailed Gulls *Larus crassirostris* (Kazama et al. 2012)  
69 using GLS during one (two males) or two years (two males). The latter two males  
70 skipped a breeding season, did not return to the nest-site, and so bred intermittently. We  
71 predicted that sabbatical Black-tailed Gulls would show similar migratory movements  
72 to breeding individuals (i.e., summer near the colony), but that they would forage more  
73 intensively in order to improve their body condition during the year prior to breeding  
74 than in the year before a sabbatical.

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## METHODS

77 **Field work** The study was conducted on Rishiri Island (45°14'N, 141°09'E) in the Sea  
78 of Japan 40 km off northern Hokkaido (Fig. 1). We randomly chose eight breeding  
79 males and two partners during the early June incubation period of 2009 (Kazama et al.  
80 2008). The gender of individuals was confirmed following close observation of their  
81 mating behavior. GLS (GLS-Mk5, 19×17×7 mm, 3.7 g, built by the British Antarctic  
82 Survey, UK; Afanasyev 2004) were attached to birds using plastic leg bands. The total  
83 mass of the GLS including the band was 5.6 g (<0.9% of the mean body mass [ $\pm$ SD] of  
84 the 10 captured gulls [ $644.3 \pm 110$  g]).

85 Two males (id 9090 and 9091) returned to the colony and bred in 2010, while  
86 the other two males (id 9083 and 9087) were not found in the breeding area in 2010,  
87 despite an extensive search. We considered that they were therefore taking a sabbatical  
88 as they returned to the colony and bred in 2011. These four males were recaptured when  
89 they were incubating. The other six individuals were not recaptured; one male returned,  
90 but did not breed, while the others did not return to the colony.

91

92 **Positioning** The GLS records time, light intensity, immersion in seawater and water  
93 temperature (see details in Takahashi et al. 2008). Light data were analyzed with the  
94 ‘TransEdit’ and ‘BirdTracker’ software developed by the British Antarctic Survey.  
95 Sunset and sunrise times were estimated from thresholds in the light curves; latitude  
96 was derived from day length, and longitude from the time of local midday with respect  
97 to Greenwich Mean Time and Julian day, providing two locations per day (Phillips et al.  
98 2004).

99 Light records with obvious interruptions around sunset and sunrise, or during the  
100 night were identified and removed. Furthermore, location errors were minimized by  
101 comparing the water temperature experienced by birds and remotely sensed 8-day  
102 composite sea surface temperature data from satellites (Aqua-MODIS, Moderate  
103 Resolution Images Spectroradiometer), following Yamamoto et al. (2010). Locations  
104 that required unrealistic flight speeds,  $>35 \text{ km h}^{-1}$  (mean flight speed for medium sized  
105 gulls; Spear and Ainley 1997), were excluded. Location data during breeding (early  
106 March to late June) were excluded from the statistical analysis since light-based  
107 geolocation can be unreliable for birds incubating or brooding chicks. When birds  
108 incubate or brood, light levels decrease/increase outside the periods of sunset/sunrise  
109 and dark periods occur while the birds are on the nest when the GLS is sometimes in  
110 darkness under the bird. Direct observation confirmed that the GLS data included  
111 intermittent periods (several hours) of darkness during daylight hours when gulls were  
112 at their nests (K. Kazama personal observation). The data for birds 9083 and 9087 did  
113 not show these characteristic patterns, further confirming that they did not breed in  
114 2010.

115           The spatial errors inherent in GLS tracking is around 186 km (Phillips et al.  
116 2004). So we visualized the overall movement patterns using half-monthly (15 or 16  
117 days) spatial medians of the valid daily latitude and longitude following Guilford et al.  
118 (2011). Migration maps for the gulls were created with Arc View ver. 9.1 (ESRI, Inc.).

119

120 **Activities** The number of times gulls landed on water per day was calculated using the  
121 GLS wet/dry immersion data (Yamamoto et al. 2008) and used as an index of foraging  
122 activity. Black-tailed Gulls continuously make aerial plunge dives over fish schools  
123 (Watanuki 1987) as do other gull species (Burger 1988; Coulson 2011). Therefore, we  
124 identified such feeding bouts (intermittent wet and dry) which continued for at least 10  
125 min, following McKnight et al. (2011). Although such records probably include  
126 non-foraging behaviors (e.g., preening, intensive scratching, or stretching), we believe  
127 that water landings are probably a reasonable indicator of foraging activity for gulls  
128 when compared between years (i.e., breeding versus sabbatical).

129           Gull species show considerable nocturnal foraging behavior (Burger and Staine  
130 1993; Garthe and Hüppop 1996). Four males from this study also showed foraging  
131 activity during the nighttime, with an average 20.4 landings per night compared to an  
132 average of 22.7 landings per day. Therefore, activity data collected during both day and  
133 night were used in our analyses.

134           We employed a Generalized Linear Mixed Model (GLMM) with Poisson error  
135 distributions including the number of landings on the water per day as a dependent  
136 variable. First, to examine the general seasonal variation in foraging activities during the  
137 post-breeding period, we included the period (autumn migration, wintering, spring  
138 migration) in the model as a categorical fixed effect. Then, to test our hypothesis that

139 individuals forage more intensively in the year prior to breeding than before a sabbatical,  
140 we also included whether the individual skipped a breeding in the next breeding season  
141 (i.e., data from id 9083 and 9087 in 2009-2010) or not, and included an interaction term  
142 of the period and the year (before sabbatical or breeding) in the model as fixed effects.  
143 We included individual identity as a random effect. Data from the sabbatical summer  
144 was not included in this analysis. The analysis was conducted using R ver. 2.12.1 (R  
145 Development Core Team 2010). Activity data for id 9087 were unavailable for 42 days  
146 in 2011 due to occasional corruption in the logger memory.

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## RESULTS

149 **Migration** Migration routes and wintering areas differed among the four males (Fig. 1).  
150 Three males moved southward along the west coast of Hokkaido after breeding, but bird  
151 9083 moved around the east coast. During autumn three birds spent approximately two  
152 months in eastern Hokkaido, but bird 9090 stayed on the western coast of Hokkaido  
153 (Fig. 1e). All moved southward through the Sea of Japan and rapidly reached their  
154 wintering areas (west of 135°E, Fig. 1a-f). Bird 9083 wintered west of Kyushu, while  
155 the others wintered in areas in the southwestern part of the Sea of Japan.

156         After wintering, birds 9090 and 9091 moved northward through the Sea of  
157 Japan during March, and returned to their breeding colony in late April and bred again  
158 in 2010 (Fig. 1e and f). Birds 9083 and 9087 also moved northward in March, reached  
159 the breeding area in April and stayed around the colony during May and June, but did  
160 not breed in 2010 (Fig. 1a and c). They showed similar migration routes and reached the  
161 same wintering areas as in the previous year, and returned to the colony where they bred  
162 in 2011 (Fig.1a-d).

163 We defined the period when gulls stayed west of 135°E as ‘wintering’, and the  
164 period during early May to late June (the normal breeding period on Rishiri island;  
165 Kazama et al. 2008) for 9083 and 9087 in 2010 as a ‘sabbatical summer’. We also  
166 defined the period before wintering as the ‘autumn migration’ and the period after  
167 wintering as the ‘spring migration’.

168

169 **Activities** According to the overall GLMM model foraging activity showed statistically  
170 significant variation depending on period ( $Z=22.54$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), type of year (before  
171 sabbatical or before breeding;  $Z=-5.67$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) as well as on the interaction between  
172 period and type of year ( $Z=-20.42$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). With regards to general seasonal variation  
173 in foraging activities, all individuals made significantly more landings on water per day  
174 during the winter ( $Z=25.26$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Fig. 2b) and during spring migration ( $Z=18.23$ ,  
175  $p<0.001$ , Fig. 2c), compared with the autumn migration (Fig. 2a). In relation to our  
176 hypothesis concerning differences in foraging activities prior to a breeding season or  
177 prior to a sabbatical season, individuals in the year prior to a sabbatical (i.e., birds 9083  
178 and 9087 in 2009-2010) landed on water significantly more frequently each day than in  
179 the year before breeding during both the autumn migration ( $Z=5.31$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Fig. 2a)  
180 and the winter ( $Z=4.92$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Fig. 2b), but did not do so during the spring migration  
181 ( $Z=-0.65$ ,  $p=0.52$ , Fig. 2c).

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## DISCUSSION

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We present the first records of year-round movements and activities of Black-tailed Gulls during both breeding and sabbatical years. In support of our hypothesis, sabbatical males migrated and returned to the area around of their colony in a similar manner to



187 their behavior in a breeding year, even though their movements were not constrained by  
188 breeding duties. Social factors may explain why sabbatical gulls return and remain  
189 around the breeding colony even though they do not breed. It has been shown for  
190 several bird species that individuals are more likely to lose their breeding site, territory,  
191 or mate, after skipping a breeding season (Mougin et al. 1997; Pyle et al. 2001;  
192 Bruinzeel 2007). Nevertheless, two sabbatical gulls nested at the same nest-site in both  
193 the 2009 and 2011 breeding seasons. Thus, they may have returned to the area around  
194 the colony in order to interact with other conspecifics so as to maintain their breeding  
195 territories (mate fidelity was not known). Alternatively, sabbatical gulls may have  
196 visited the area around the colony in order to forage more effectively since the northern  
197 part of the Sea of Japan supports higher primary productivity than the southern part  
198 during late spring and early summer (Yamada et al. 2004).

199 All individuals showed similar seasonal patterns of foraging activity;  
200 individuals foraged more actively during winter and spring migration compared with the  
201 autumn migration. Such general seasonal foraging patterns of migratory seabirds may  
202 be affected by seasonal differences in prey availability or the physiological condition of  
203 individuals (Green et al. 2005; Grémillet et al. 2005). Our results indicate that those  
204 environmental or physiological factors could constrain seasonal foraging patterns during  
205 the post-breeding season of all individuals, regardless of whether it was a breeding or a  
206 sabbatical year.

207 Contrary to our prediction, individuals in the year before breeding foraged less  
208 intensively during the autumn migration and wintering periods than before a sabbatical  
209 (Fig. 2). Among seabirds, individuals are more likely to skip subsequent breeding when  
210 they invest more energy in previous breeding attempts (Le Bohec et al. 2007). Our

211 results may indicate that sabbatical gulls attempt to forage more intensively, in order to  
212 recover body condition immediately after the breeding season, until the following  
213 wintering period. Conversely, during spring migration individuals showed similar  
214 foraging frequencies in both sabbatical and breeding years. The reasons for this are  
215 unclear. All individuals, regardless of breeding or sabbatical state, may increase their  
216 foraging effort during the spring migration period in order to enhance their body  
217 condition in preparation for the following breeding attempt, and thus the differences in  
218 foraging activity between breeding and sabbatical birds might disappear.

219         A bird's decision to breed may depend on a range of physiological factors, such  
220 as fat accumulation or immunological condition, immediately prior to the breeding  
221 season (Giudici et al. 2010; Goutte et al. 2010). Sabbatical gulls may not be able to  
222 recover their body condition, despite foraging intensively during autumn and winter.  
223 The lack of plasticity in migratory routes and timing (Pulido 2007) could be among the  
224 causes of this paradoxical relationship between foraging effort during the post-breeding  
225 season and subsequent breeding. Two sabbatical male Black-tailed Gulls showed  
226 consistent migratory timing, routes, and wintering areas in two years, as has been shown  
227 in other seabird species (Weimerskirch and Wilson 2000; Phillips et al. 2005; Guilford  
228 et al. 2011; but see Dias et al. 2011). Furthermore, individuals did not alter their  
229 seasonal patterns of foraging activities. If individual gulls need to follow the same route,  
230 timing, and seasonal foraging patterns due to migratory constraints such as navigation  
231 (Newton 2010) or because of environmental or physiological constraints (Berthold  
232 1996), they may fail to match their foraging effort with local resource availability (Both  
233 and Visser 2001; Durant et al. 2007; Dias et al. 2011). Such failure to match effort to  
234 resource availability may lead to skipped breeding.

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236

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352 Figure legends

353 **Fig. 1** Migratory tracks of four male Black-tailed Gulls breeding on Rishiri Island,  
354 northernmost Japan, during one (e, f) or two successive years (a-b and c-d). Position  
355 estimates are given every half-month (15 or 16 days) as spatial medians of available  
356 daily data. Months are indicated by numbers within circles (January = 1). Breeding  
357 season data (May to June) are excluded, except for the sabbatical year (for ID 9083 (b)  
358 and 9087 (d) in 2010). Colony locations are indicated by a C within a star. Lines join  
359 each individual gull's successive positions, but do not indicate the path travelled.  
360 'Wintering' is defined as the period when the estimated half-monthly positions of gulls  
361 were located west of 135°E (dashed line).

362

363 **Fig. 2** The number of landings made on water per day for four male Black-tailed Gulls  
364 during: (a) autumn migration, (b) wintering, and (c) spring migration periods, before a  
365 sabbatical and before breeding, and during (d) the sabbatical summer period. Means  
366  $\pm$ SE are shown. Gray symbols indicate data recorded during 2009-2010 and black  
367 symbols refer to 2010-2011. Data obtained from the same individual in different years  
368 are connected by lines. Numbers to the left or right of the plots indicates sample sizes,  
369 given as days that are categorized into each period for each individual. The GLMM  
370 indicates that the total number of landings made on water is significantly higher  
371 ( $p < 0.001$ ) before a sabbatical (two plots with asterisks) than before breeding (the other  
372 four plots) in the wintering and autumn migration periods.

373



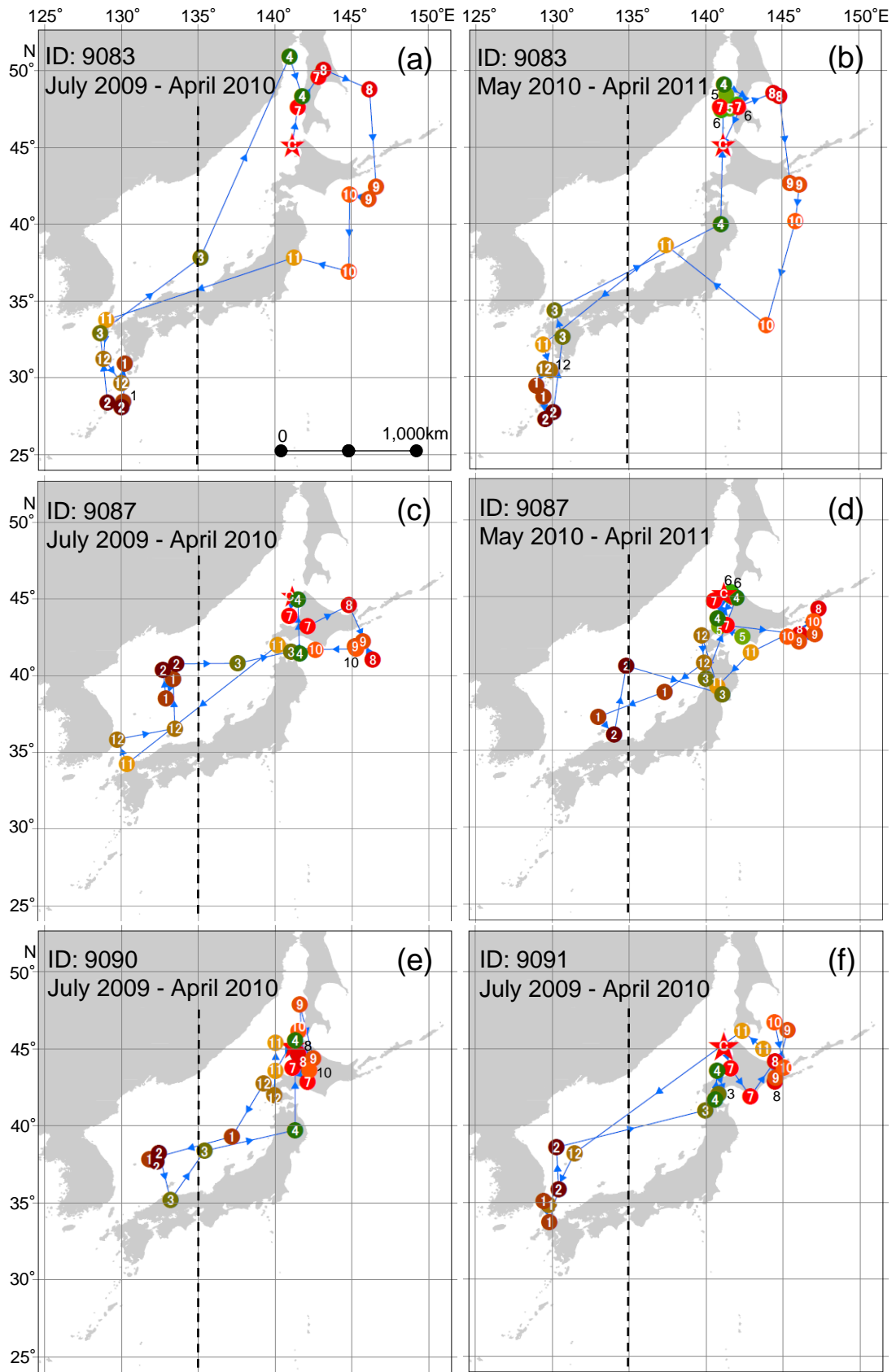


Fig. 1

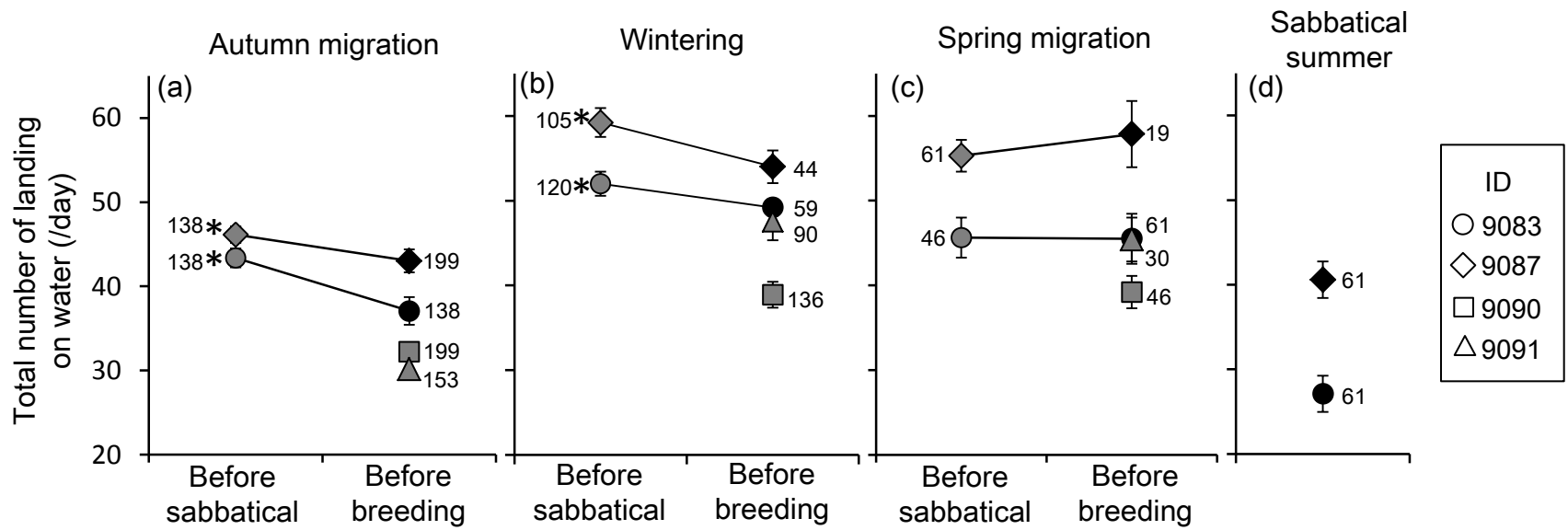


Fig. 2