

1 **Accuracy and precision of dolphin group size estimates**

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12 Abstract: Estimating the number of dolphins in a group is a challenging task. To assess the
13 accuracy and precision of dolphin group size estimates, observer estimates were compared to
14 counts from large-format vertical aerial photographs. During 11 research cruises, a total of 2,435
15 size estimates of 434 groups were made by 59 observers. Observer estimates were modeled as a
16 function of the photo count in a hierarchical Bayesian framework. Accuracy varied widely
17 among observers, and somewhat less widely among dolphin species. Most observers tended to
18 underestimate, and the tendency increased with group size. Groups of 25, 50, 100, and 500 were
19 underestimated by <1%, 16%, 27%, and 47%, respectively, on average. Precision of group size
20 estimates was low, and estimates were highly variable among observers for the same group.
21 Predicted true group size, given an observer estimate, was larger than the observer estimate for
22 groups of more than about 25 dolphins. Predicted group size had low precision, with coefficients
23 of variation ranging from 0.7 to 1.9. Studies which depend on group size estimates will be
24 improved if the tendency to underestimate group size and the high uncertainty of group size
25 estimates are included in the analysis.

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28 Keywords: group size estimation, abundance estimation, aerial photography, Bayesian
29 hierarchical model, random-effects model, reverse jump MCMC

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Introduction

32 Estimation of group size is an important component of ecological and behavioral studies
33 of animals which occur in groups. However, estimation of group size in wildlife studies can be
34 difficult. Replicate counts of birds showed high variation (Ryan and Cooper 1989), the number
35 of birds was undercounted in aerial surveys (Bayliss and Yeomans 1990), and known group sizes
36 of elk were underestimated from a helicopter (Cogan and Diefenbach 1998). Even counting the
37 number of birds in photographs had a negative bias (Erwin 1982). Experiments in visual
38 perception have shown a tendency to underestimate the size of large groups of objects (Krueger
39 1972), apparently related to distortions produced by saccadic (“jerky”) eye movements (Binda *et al.*
40 2011). Determining the size of a group of cetaceans is particularly challenging because of
41 several characteristics that make group size estimation difficult: (1) the animals are moving; (2)
42 an unknown fraction of the group is underwater at any moment; (3) the fraction underwater
43 changes with behavior; (4) groups can be large; and (5) the distribution of group sizes is usually
44 skewed, with a few groups much larger than the mean.

45 Accurate estimation of group size is necessary for unbiased estimation of abundance. In
46 standard distance sampling (*e.g.*, line transects), the density of groups is estimated and then
47 multiplied by an estimate of expected group size (Buckland *et al.* 2001). Alternatively, group
48 size may be a covariate of the detection process and expected group size is not estimated
49 explicitly (Borchers and Burnham 2004). In either case it is assumed that group sizes are
50 measured accurately. Using earlier subsets of the photographic calibration data presented here,
51 some line-transect analyses have used group size estimates corrected by observer-specific
52 calibration factors (Gerrodette and Forcada 2005, Barlow and Forney 2007). In most studies,
53 however, correction factors for group size estimation are not available.

76 were collected with the same camera systems mounted in a NOAA Twin Otter fixed wing
77 aircraft. Under conditions of sun angle (generally mid-morning and mid-afternoon) and sea state
78 (generally Beaufort 0-4) that allowed dolphins to be clearly visible from above, vertical
79 photographs of dolphin groups were taken from an altitude of 200-300m (Gilpatrick 1993). The
80 camera recorded images on 114mm negatives, and had a motion-compensation system that
81 moved the film at the same speed that the image was moving within the camera, thus eliminating
82 blurring due to the forward motion of the aircraft. The cycle rate of the camera was adjusted to
83 achieve 80% overlap between adjacent frames during a photographic pass over a dolphin group.
84 The number of photographic passes of each dolphin group varied with group size, configuration
85 and behavior.

86 After a group of dolphins had been photographed, the group was approached by the ship
87 in a way to give the marine mammal observers on the ship the best possible view of the whole
88 group, considering wind, swell, and sun angle. All observers who had adequate views of the
89 group, usually all six observers on the ship, made their best estimates of group size. We refer to
90 these estimates as the “observer estimates.” Observers usually first detected dolphins with 25X
91 binoculars, but switched to 7X binoculars and then to naked eye as the ship approached the
92 group. The minimum approach distance varied with group size and behavior, but typically was
93 10-50m. Observers made group size estimates independently and did not discuss their estimates
94 with each other, either during the sighting or afterward. Independence in this context refers to
95 the behavioral independence of the observers, not to the statistical independence of their
96 estimates. All observers had previous experience in cetacean field work. Before each cruise,
97 observers were given training on group size estimation, including tests with known numbers of

98 static objects, computer simulations of moving, intermittently visible objects, and instruction on
99 counting by subgroups (*e.g.*, by tens or fifties) for more consistent estimation.

100 *Laboratory methods*

101 The aerial photographs of dolphin groups were reviewed on light tables equipped with
102 dissection microscopes (Gilpatrick 1993). Photographs were compared with notes recorded
103 during the photographic passes to ensure that the entire group was captured within the series of
104 images that made up a photograph pass. For groups that were successfully photographed, the
105 best pass was selected, and three readers independently counted the number of dolphins in the
106 group from the series of images. If the CV among counts was > 0.1 , or if notes by aerial and
107 shipboard observers indicated that there was confusion over the identity of the group, the group
108 was not included in the data analyzed here (Gilpatrick 1993).

109 To qualify as a “calibration school” for this analysis, the whole group had to be
110 photographed from the air with a series of overlapping photographs, the photo counts of the three
111 independent readers had to agree closely, and the shipboard observers had to view the whole
112 group for a sufficient time to make good estimates. Calibration schools were thus not a random
113 sample of all dolphin groups, but rather a selected set for which we were confident that true
114 group size could be accurately determined. We omitted as outliers eight cases for which there
115 was a large (greater than a factor of four) discrepancy between mean photo count and mean
116 observer estimate, probably a result of undetected splitting or coalescence of groups after
117 photography but before observer estimates. A total of 434 groups met these criteria as
118 calibration schools, with 2,435 estimates of group size by 59 observers.

119 *Statistical model*

120 To evaluate observer estimates of group size, we used the mean of the counts by the three
 121 photograph readers for each calibration school, and refer to this as the “photo count.” This
 122 measure of true group size had some error (variation among the three readers), but this variation
 123 (mean photo count CV over all groups = 0.047) was much smaller than the variation among
 124 observer estimates of the same groups (mean CV = 0.42). Preliminary exploration of the data
 125 suggested that, on a log-log scale, observer estimates could be linearly related to photo counts
 126 and that variance was approximately constant over a large range of group sizes (Fig. 1A). In
 127 addition, observers varied widely in the accuracy of their group size estimates (Fig. 1B). We
 128 evaluated a variety of linear and nonlinear models in a frequentist setting, with both fixed and
 129 random effects, with R function *lmer*, and used likelihood ratio tests, information criteria such as
 130 AIC and DIC, and visual examinations of residual and q-q plots to identify a reasonable set of
 131 candidate models. We found that dolphin species and Beaufort sea state could possibly affect the
 132 accuracy of group size estimates, and that a linear model of the logarithm of photo counts
 133 provided a more parsimonious fit to the data than a quadratic model.

134 Let y_{ij} be the observer estimate of the size of group i by observer j , and let x_i be the photo
 135 count of group i . We modeled differences among observers as random effects, and dolphin
 136 species and wind conditions as fixed additional effects that might affect group size estimates.
 137 The full hierarchical model may be written as

$$\begin{aligned}
 \log(y_{ij}) &= \alpha_{0j} + (\alpha_{1j} + \beta_1) \log(x_i) + \sum_{k=2}^7 \beta_k S_{ik} + \beta_8 B_i + \varepsilon_{ij} \\
 \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{0j} \\ \alpha_{1j} \end{pmatrix} &\sim N \left(\begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} \sigma_{\alpha 0}^2 & \rho \sigma_{\alpha 0} \sigma_{\alpha 1} \\ \rho \sigma_{\alpha 0} \sigma_{\alpha 1} & \sigma_{\alpha 1}^2 \end{pmatrix} \right) \\
 \varepsilon_{ij} &\sim N(0, \sigma_{\varepsilon}^2),
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

139 where β_1 was the coefficient associated with the log of the photo counts, β_k were coefficients
140 associated with six species S_{ik} , $k=2, \dots, 7$, and β_8 was the coefficient associated with Beaufort sea
141 state B_i . Two random effects, α_{0j} and α_{1j} , allowed the relationship between $\log(y_{ij})$ and $\log(x_i)$
142 to vary among observers, α_{0j} in terms of the intercept and α_{1j} in terms of the slope coefficient
143 β_1 . The two sets of random-effects coefficients had means of zero, variances $\sigma_{\alpha_0}^2$ and $\sigma_{\alpha_1}^2$, and
144 correlation ρ . The assumption was that the 59 observers were a random selection from a larger
145 pool of possible observers whose group size estimation tendencies were normally distributed.

146 Species S_{ik} entered the model as an indicator variable, with a value of 1 if group i was
147 species k and 0 otherwise. Species were recorded in the field at the lowest possible taxonomic
148 level, including subspecies. We combined the field identifications into six species categories:
149 pantropical spotted dolphins (*Stenella attenuata*, 51 groups), spinner dolphins (*S. longirostris*, 40
150 groups), mixed spotted-spinner dolphin groups (78 groups), striped dolphins (*S. coeruleoalba*,
151 114 groups), common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis* and *D. capensis*, 87 groups) and other (64
152 groups). “Other” was a heterogeneous category including Risso’s dolphins (*Grampus griseus*),
153 common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), rough-toothed dolphins (*Steno bredanensis*),
154 short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephalus macrorhynchus*), and other groups which did not fit
155 into the previous categories, such as mixed common-striped dolphin groups. In the eastern
156 tropical Pacific Ocean, mixed spotted-spinner dolphin groups are common, so we included these
157 as a distinct category. Sea state B was recorded on the Beaufort scale as an integer from 0 to 5;
158 however, only one of the 434 calibration schools occurred in Beaufort 5 conditions, so the
159 effective range of the model was Beaufort 0-4. Because the Beaufort scale is ordered, we
160 modeled sea state as a continuous variable with a single linear coefficient. Models with sea state

161 as a categorical variable are addressed in the Discussion. S_i and B_i were the same for all
162 observers for a given group i , so we omitted subscript j for these covariates in Eq. 1.

163 We considered four variants of Eq. 1 as candidate models: model 1, without species or
164 sea-state effects ($\beta_k=0$ and $\beta_s=0$); model 2, with species but without sea-state effects ($\beta_s=0$);
165 model 3, with sea-state but without species effects ($\beta_k=0$); and model 4, the full model with both
166 species and sea-state effects. All four models included observers as a random effect.

167 *Bayesian inference*

168 To include model selection in a Bayesian framework, we fitted the models in R using
169 reversible jump Markov Chain Monte Carlo (RJMCMC) methods (King *et al.* 2009, Oedekoven
170 *et al.* 2014). In this approach, the model itself was treated as an additional parameter to be
171 estimated, and the joint posterior distribution included both parameters and models (Appendix
172 1). A uniform discrete prior was specified for the four models, and uniform continuous priors
173 were specified for all coefficients β and standard deviations σ in Eq. 1. Model probabilities
174 were calculated as the fraction of iterations of the RJMCMC chain in each model after burn-in
175 (Appendix 1).

176 The four models were also fitted in the BUGS language (Lunn *et al.* 2000) and compared
177 with the Watanabe-Akaike (or Widely Applicable) Information Criterion (WAIC) (Watanabe
178 2010). WAIC can be viewed as an improvement to the Deviance Information Criterion (DIC)
179 (Spiegelhalter *et al.* 2002), which has some shortcomings for hierarchical models (Plummer
180 2008, Millar 2009, Lunn *et al.* 2013). WAIC was calculated using pointwise predictive density
181 at the observer level from the MCMC posterior samples for each model (Gelman *et al.* 2014,
182 Vehtari *et al.* 2016). We used standard procedures to assess burn-in, autocorrelation, and

205 Group sizes of calibration schools ranged from 5 to 6,012 (Fig. 1). The set of 434
206 calibration schools represented about 8% of dolphin groups of the same species detected during
207 the 11 surveys. On average, calibration schools were larger in size (because we did not
208 photograph groups containing only a few dolphins) and were photographed in lower Beaufort sea
209 states (because it was harder to obtain clear images in windy conditions) than for all dolphin
210 groups. Importantly, the variation among independent observer estimates for a dolphin group
211 was similar for calibration schools (mean CV 0.42, interquartile range 0.29-0.50) and all detected
212 groups (mean CV 0.39, interquartile range 0.24-0.51). The number of calibration schools per
213 observer ranged from 6 to 159, with a median of 33 and a mean of 41.3.

214 *Observer estimates of dolphin group size*

215 The raw data indicated that observers generally tended to underestimate dolphin group
216 size; 69% of observer estimates were less than the photo count (Fig. 1). Both model selection
217 methods indicated that the accuracy of observer estimates was affected by the species of the
218 group but less so by Beaufort sea state. Posterior model probabilities indicated by the RJMCMC
219 chain were 0.0, 0.984, 0.0, and 0.016 for models 1-4, respectively (Fig. 2). With proper selection
220 of proposal distributions, models 2 and 4 had stationary distributions throughout the history of
221 the chain (Fig. A1 in Appendix 1). WAIC scores showed a similar pattern favoring model 2 but
222 with some support for model 4, with values of 3766.0, 3596.0, 3769.3, and 3598.5 for models 1-
223 4, respectively.

224 Marginal posterior distributions of parameters for models 2 and 4 were similar (Table 1).
225 For model 4, the sea-state coefficient β_8 was small in absolute value and the 95% credibility
226 interval included 0, further indications that wind conditions in the range Beaufort 0-4 had little

227 effect on the accuracy of group size estimation. The coefficient for log(photo count), β_1 , was
228 <1.0 (mean 0.80, 95% credibility interval 0.76 to 0.83 for model 2), which meant that the
229 tendency to underestimate increased with group size. Species coefficients decreased in the order
230 mixed spotted-spinner, common, spotted, spinner, striped, and other (Fig. 3A). However, the
231 posterior distributions of species coefficients overlapped (Table 1), indicating that the differences
232 among species were modest. The random-effects coefficients were negatively correlated (mean
233 $\rho = -0.79$, 95% credibility interval -0.59 to -0.91).

234 Observers differed in accuracy of group size estimation (Fig. 3B). Among the 59
235 observers, some tended to underestimate and others tended to overestimate. For spotted dolphin
236 groups of 25, 50, 100, and 500 animals, the observers with the lowest estimation tendency had
237 mean posterior estimates of 18, 29, 45 and 132, respectively, while the observers with the highest
238 estimation tendency had mean posteriors of 42, 72, 125, and 585 (Table 2). The “average
239 observer” (actually four different observers, one for each of the four group sizes in Table 2) had
240 estimates of 25, 44, 78, and 290 for spotted dolphin groups of 25, 50, 100, and 500, respectively.
241 Thus, over all observers, groups of 25 spotted dolphins were estimated accurately on average,
242 but the range among observers was from underestimation by 29% to overestimation by 66%
243 (Table 2). There were similarly large ranges in accuracy among observers for larger groups: for
244 groups of 50, -43% to +45%; for groups of 100, -55% to +25%; and for groups of 500, -74% to
245 +17%. The “average observer” underestimated spotted dolphin groups of 50, 100, and 500
246 animals by 11%, 22%, and 42%, respectively. We chose spotted dolphins for these numerical
247 comparisons because spotted dolphins were near the middle of the species effect (Table 1).
248 There would be less underestimation of group size for common dolphins and mixed groups of
249 spotted-spinner dolphins, and more underestimation of group size for spinner, striped, and other

250 dolphins. Averaged over all species, the mean figures of underestimation were <1%, 16%, 27%,
251 and 47% for groups of 25, 50, 100, and 500 animals.

252 The random-effects model allowed intercept and slope parameters to be estimated for
253 each observer (Fig. 4), constrained by the hierarchical assumptions of normal distributions and
254 correlation between slope and intercept. Visually, the greater importance of the observer effect
255 relative to the species effect can be judged by comparing Fig. 3B with Fig. 3A. Numerically, the
256 range of plausible values for observer intercepts ($1.5 \approx \pm 2 \sigma_{\alpha 0}$) was greater than the range of
257 species effects (≈ 0.4), based on the mean posterior values in Table 1.

258 Accuracy decreased with group size (Fig. 5). Groups of 25 spotted dolphins were slightly
259 underestimated, but groups of 500 were severely underestimated. For groups of 25, 50, 100, and
260 500 dolphins, posterior means for an out-of-sample observer (gray lines in Fig. 5) were 24.2,
261 42.2, 73.1, and 264.4, respectively. To show conditional estimates, we used observer #53 as an
262 example. The black lines in Fig. 5 for observer #53 were slightly to the left of the gray lines
263 unconditioned on observer, indicating that this observer tended to underestimate more than the
264 average over all observers.

265 The posterior distributions of observer estimates were approximately normal on a natural
266 logarithmic scale (Fig. 5). The distributions were quite wide, illustrating the high uncertainty (or
267 low precision) in observer estimates of group size. Conditional estimates had higher precision
268 than unconditional estimates. Estimates made by a particular observer (observer #53) for a
269 particular species (spotted dolphins) had slightly higher precision (less uncertainty) than
270 estimates by the same observer for an unknown species (compare thin dashed with thick solid
271 black lines in Fig. 5). Unconditional estimates for any observer or species had the least precision

272 (thick gray lines in Fig. 5). The differences between conditional and unconditional estimates
273 were small, however, in the context of the overall high variability of group size estimates.

274 *Predictions of dolphin group size from observer estimates*

275 Conversely, given an observer estimate, predicted true group size was usually larger than
276 the estimate, especially for larger groups (Fig. 6). For observer estimates of 25, 50, 100, and 500
277 dolphins, posterior means were 26.0, 63.5, 154.0, and 1,194.5, respectively, for an out-of-sample
278 observer (gray lines in Fig. 6). As with posterior distributions of observer estimates given group
279 size, predicted group sizes conditional on observer and species had higher precision than
280 unconditional estimates (compare black and gray lines in Fig. 6). Because observer #53 tended
281 to underestimate more than average, predicted group size was larger for this observer than for the
282 average over all observers.

283 Dolphin group size predicted from an observer estimate had high uncertainty.
284 Coefficients of variation for predicted group size conditional on species ranged from
285 approximately 0.7 to 0.9 (Table 3). Coefficients of variation for unconditional predictions were
286 even larger, ranging from 0.9 to 1.9, due to the additional uncertainty of predicting group size for
287 an unknown species. Given an observer estimate of 100 dolphins, the 95% credibility interval
288 for the true size of the group ranged from 43 to 621 for a group of spotted dolphins, and from 37
289 to 776 for a group unconditional on species. Posterior distributions accurately captured the
290 uncertainty in predicting dolphin group size from an observer estimate (Appendix 5, Fig. A4).

291 The degree to which an observer estimate was increased to estimate true group size
292 depended on species. For an observer estimate of 25 dolphins, for example, the median
293 predicted group size was smaller than 25 for mixed spotted-spinner and common groups, and

294 larger than 25 for spotted, spinner, striped, and other groups (Table 3). Because the
295 exponentiated posterior distributions were lognormal, means were larger than medians.
296 Therefore, we used the median (50% quantile) as the best measure of central tendency for these
297 distributions, because there was equal probability of a value being higher or lower than the
298 median. Integrated over species and observer effects, estimates of 25, 50, 100, and 500 were
299 increased by 4%, 24%, 47%, and 122%, respectively, to obtain the medians of the posterior
300 distributions of predicted group size (Table 3). In other words, given an observer estimate of 500
301 dolphins, the most probable true size of the group would be more than twice that number.

302

303 Discussion

304 *Accuracy and precision*

305 The discrepancy between an observer estimate of dolphin group size and the true number
306 can be discussed in terms of two components: accuracy and precision. Accuracy is measured by
307 the difference between the true number and the mean of repeated observations. Inaccurate
308 measurement of group size leads to biased results. Precision is assessed by the random error
309 among repeated observations. Random error will be positive for some observations and negative
310 for others, but with a mean of zero. Low precision means high variance and greater uncertainty
311 in results.

312 We found that accuracy of dolphin group size estimates depended on group size,
313 observer, and species. Within the Beaufort 0-4 range of the calibration schools, Beaufort sea
314 state had less effect on accuracy, once group size and observer effects had been accounted for.

315 There was a general tendency to underestimate dolphin group size, and this tendency
316 increased with group size. The coefficient of the log of photo count (β_1 , Table 1) was < 1.0 ,
317 which meant that large groups were underestimated more than small groups. Observer estimates
318 were accurate (on average) for dolphin groups of 25 animals, but were too low by 16% for
319 groups of 50, too low by 27% for groups of 100, and too low by 47% for groups of 500 (Fig. 5).
320 These estimates of accuracy averaged over all observers do not measure the accuracy of a
321 particular observer, nor the discrepancy between an observer estimate and true group size for a
322 particular group. Accuracy of dolphin group size estimation in this study applies within the
323 range of calibration school sizes with a reasonable number of samples, roughly between 10 and
324 1000 animals (Fig. 3).

325 These results were broadly consistent with previous studies which showed that humans
326 tend to underestimate group sizes in wildlife studies (Caughley 1974, Bayliss and Yeomans
327 1990, Cogan and Diefenbach 1998). The rate of decline in accuracy with group size ($\beta_1 = 0.80$,
328 Table 1) falls in the range of perceptual experiments measuring underestimation of the number of
329 dots on paper (Krueger 1972). Underestimation of large groups may have a physiological basis
330 related to eye movement; estimation of small groups (about 10 or fewer objects) does not have
331 this negative bias and seems to involve a different perceptual mechanism (Binda *et al.* 2011).

332 The degree of underestimation also varied by species. For the six species categories in
333 this study, dolphin group size estimates were lower in the order: mixed spotted-spinner,
334 common, spotted, spinner, striped, and other (Table 1, Fig. 3A). This order of species
335 coefficients corresponded roughly to mean group size among the six species groups, with mixed
336 spotted-spinner and common dolphin groups being largest, and striped and other dolphin groups

337 smallest. This correspondence suggests that the effects of group size and species were somewhat
338 confounded.

339 Accuracy varied among the 59 observers. While there was an overall tendency to
340 underestimate dolphin group size, some observers had a stronger tendency to underestimate,
341 while others had a tendency to overestimate (Table 2). The random-effects model allowed the
342 estimation of separate effects for each observer (Fig. 3B), but connected the observers as a group
343 and allowed the tendency of all observers together to support estimation for each single observer
344 (Fig. 4). A random-effects model is often understood in terms of “partial pooling.” It represents
345 an intermediate approach between complete pooling (treating all observers as a single group, Fig.
346 1A) and no pooling (treating each observer independently, Fig. 1B). The random-effects
347 approach spans a range of models between these extremes, and includes complete pooling and
348 complete separation as special cases at the limits (Gelman and Hill 2007). The degree of pooling
349 is related to the amount of shrinkage of individual effects toward the mean (Gelman and Pardoe
350 2006).

351 Precision of observer estimates of dolphin group size was strikingly low (Fig. 5). For a
352 group of 100 dolphins, for example, estimates could range from about 30 to 200 with 95%
353 probability. Regardless of an observer’s accuracy, it was common for the observer to estimate
354 50% high for one group and 50% low for the next. As a consequence, there was high variability
355 among the independent observer estimates of group size, both for calibration schools as well as
356 for non-calibration dolphin groups. The mean CV among observer estimates was 0.4 across a
357 wide range of group sizes. Clearly, estimating the size of a dolphin group is a challenging task.

358 *Statistical issues*

359 As a measure of true group size, we used the mean of photo counts by three independent
360 readers. A binomial moment estimator has been proposed for repeated counts with imperfect
361 detection, *i.e.*, false negatives (DasGupta and Rubin 2005, Walsh *et al.* 2009), but in our study
362 variation among counts of the three readers was also due to false positives. Large tuna, which
363 frequently accompany dolphin groups in the eastern tropical Pacific, can be mistaken for a
364 submerged dolphin in the photographs. Splashes and reflections might also be counted as a
365 partially hidden dolphin.

366 RJMCMC and WAIC are two fully Bayesian approaches to model selection (Hooten and
367 Hobbs 2015). RJMCMC treats the model itself as an additional unknown parameter to be
368 estimated, while WAIC is a score function based on the predictive ability of the model. Both
369 indicated that the accuracy of dolphin group size estimates varied by observer and species
370 (model 2). There was little posterior support for model 4, which included Beaufort sea state
371 (Fig. 2). The posterior odds of models 2 and 4 (the Bayes factor, Kass and Raftery 1995) was
372 60.6, indicating strong support for model 2 over model 4. The WAIC difference of 2.5 also
373 indicated support of model 2 over model 4. If sea state was modeled as a categorical variable,
374 model 4 had a posterior probability of zero (it was never selected in the RJMCMC algorithm),
375 but if sea state was modeled as a continuous variable, model 4 was selected 2% of the time (Fig.
376 2, Fig. A1 in Appendix 1). Thus, it appeared that modeling sea state as a continuous variable
377 rather than as separate factor variables was a more parsimonious approach. As there was little
378 support for model 4, and because parameter estimates were similar for models 2 and 4 (Table 1),
379 we focused on model 2 for inference and did not use model-averaged estimates.

380 Because Bayesian inference is based on conditional probabilities, it was possible to make
381 inference regardless of observer and/or species, by integrating over observer and species effects.

382 The estimation tendency of a new, out-of-sample observer included the uncertainty of not
383 knowing which observer, out of the “universe” of possible observers with different estimation
384 tendencies, might be chosen. Such estimates unconditional for observer and species are shown
385 as gray lines in Figs. 5 and 6. The greater uncertainty of the unconditional estimates is indicated
386 by the wider probability distributions in those figures, relative to the conditional estimates shown
387 with black lines.

388 *Application of results*

389 To obtain the best estimates of group size, we can use the estimation tendencies revealed
390 in this study to adjust observer estimates of dolphin group size. We wish to predict true group
391 size, given an observer estimate. The Bayesian approach allowed us to solve this inverse
392 problem with proper accounting of uncertainty. Since, for groups larger than about 25 dolphins,
393 there was a tendency to underestimate group size, predictions of true group size tended to be
394 larger than the estimate (Fig. 6). Because the degree of underestimation depended on group size,
395 species, and observer, the amount that a group size estimate had to be increased to predict true
396 group size also depended on group size, species, and observer (Table 3). The amount that an
397 estimate had to be increased could be substantial. For example, a group size estimate of 100
398 dolphins had to be increased by 47% to obtain the unconditional best (median) estimate of true
399 group size.

400 Because an estimate of group size had low precision, predicted group size based on an
401 estimate also had low precision. Posterior distributions had CVs of approximately 0.7 to 0.9 for
402 groups of known species, and 0.9 to 1.9 for groups of any species (Table 3). For an out-of-
403 sample observer estimate of 25 dolphins, for example, median predicted true group size was 25.9

404 animals (accuracy was good), but the 50% credibility interval extended from 16 to 42 dolphins,
405 and the 95% credibility interval from 6 to 111 dolphins (Table 3). This source of uncertainty is
406 usually ignored in distance sampling analyses, although Gerrodette and Forcada (2005) included
407 uncertainty in group size through a bootstrap procedure. Most line-transect analyses compute the
408 variance in expected group size from the sizes of the observed groups.

409 On cetacean line-transect surveys conducted by the Southwest Fisheries Science Center,
410 three independent estimates of group size are recorded for each sighting. For the best estimate of
411 group size, Gerrodette and Forcada (2005) used an average of the three calibration-adjusted
412 observer estimates, weighted by the inverse of the group size estimation variance of each
413 observer. The value of making several independent estimates of group size will be examined in
414 a future paper.

415 Given our findings of inaccuracy for groups larger than 25 dolphins and low precision for
416 groups of all sizes, it is worth noting that the estimates of group size in this study were a selected
417 set of estimates made in optimal circumstances. Each group was approached with the specific
418 objective of obtaining group size estimates, the observers had good views of the entire group,
419 and the ship remained with the group until the observers had made their best possible estimates.
420 Almost certainly the behavior of dolphin groups affects the accuracy and precision of group size
421 estimates, but our set of calibration schools consisted of well-behaved groups that could be
422 observed and photographed in their entirety.

423 Accuracy and precision may be lower for groups estimated in less optimal conditions.
424 Schwarz *et al.* (2010) found that estimates of delphinid group sizes were 58% lower when the
425 ship did not approach groups (passing mode) than when it did (closing mode). Barlow *et al.*

426 (1997) also found that group size estimates were smaller in passing mode. Barlow and Taylor
427 (2005) found that an extended 90-min period of observation improved group size estimates of
428 asynchronously diving sperm whales (*Physeter microcephalus*). The position of the observer
429 may also matter. The estimates of group size in this study were made from a platform
430 approximately 10 m above the water. The estimation tendencies reported here may not apply to
431 other situations, such as estimates made from higher or lower platforms on a ship, or estimates
432 made from land at various elevations and distances to sightings. Caughley *et al.* (1976) found
433 that the accuracy of aerial counts varied with aircraft speed, height, and observer.

434 We conclude with two recommendations for studies that depend on estimates of cetacean
435 group size. First, we recommend training to improve group size estimation. Although we were
436 not able to measure how our pre-cruise training affected observers' estimates, we believe that the
437 training had a positive effect. Training may include displays of groups of objects of known size,
438 and instructions on estimating group size by counting subgroups of multiple animals. Second,
439 we recommend assessment of accuracy and precision of group size estimation under the
440 particular conditions of a study. The large budget of this study is unlikely to be replicated, but
441 digital photography by drones is a more economical and much safer option today. Laake *et al.*
442 (2012) used two observer teams to assess the accuracy of pod size estimates for migrating gray
443 whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*). Although pod size was usually only one or two animals,
444 correcting pod size estimates had an important effect on abundance estimates and inferred
445 population trajectory.

446 If a study is unable to assess accuracy of group size estimates, the results of this study can
447 be applied with appropriate caution. We have noted that biases might be different for group size
448 estimates made under other conditions, such as greater distances. One of our central results was

449 that people varied widely in their group size estimation tendencies; therefore, the ideal is to
450 calibrate particular individual observers. However, the random-effects model for the observer
451 effect allowed inference for observers outside this study. Table 3 and Figures 5 and 6 show
452 posterior distributions for a new, out-of-sample observer – that is, accuracy and precision of
453 group size estimates which include the uncertainty of not knowing which observer, out of the
454 large number of possible observers with different estimation tendencies, might have been chosen.
455 Unless more specific information can be obtained, it would be reasonable to assume that the
456 estimation tendencies of the 59 observers in this study are representative of all observers.

457

Acknowledgments

458 We thank all the marine mammal observers who made the group size estimates, the aerial
459 photographers and NOAA helicopter pilots, the captains and crews of the NOAA research
460 vessels, the support staff at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center, and the Government of
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463 comments by Jim Gilpatrick, Jeffrey Moore, and two anonymous reviewers.

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546 information criterion in singular learning theory. *Journal of Machine Learning Research*
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549

550 Table 1. Marginal posterior distributions of parameters for the two models with posterior
 551 support. Distributions are summarized by means, standard deviations (SD) and three quantiles.
 552 All parameters had uniform prior distributions. RE = random effects for observers. See Eq. 1
 553 for definitions of parameters.

Parameter	Model 2					Model 4				
	Mean	SD	2.5%	50%	97.5%	Mean	SD	2.5%	50%	97.5%
Log(photo count), β_1	0.796	0.018	0.761	0.796	0.832	0.797	0.018	0.760	0.798	0.831
Sp: spotted-spinner, β_2	0.805	0.087	0.635	0.803	0.974	0.818	0.087	0.653	0.816	0.995
Sp: common, β_3	0.757	0.084	0.592	0.755	0.926	0.776	0.087	0.613	0.774	0.951
Sp: spotted, β_4	0.656	0.082	0.497	0.654	0.816	0.674	0.083	0.521	0.672	0.843
Sp: spinner, β_5	0.603	0.088	0.433	0.604	0.778	0.620	0.091	0.448	0.618	0.806
Sp: striped, β_6	0.513	0.075	0.370	0.511	0.660	0.531	0.078	0.386	0.530	0.687
Sp: other, β_7	0.423	0.076	0.273	0.424	0.576	0.442	0.079	0.291	0.440	0.601
Beaufort sea state, β_8	na	na	na	na	na	-0.010	0.010	-0.030	-0.010	0.010
SD intercept RE, $\sigma_{\alpha 0}$	0.382	0.073	0.245	0.377	0.534	0.385	0.073	0.252	0.381	0.540
SD slope RE, $\sigma_{\alpha 1}$	0.104	0.017	0.073	0.102	0.138	0.104	0.017	0.073	0.103	0.139
Correlation RE, ρ	-0.792	0.085	-0.912	-0.808	-0.586	-0.792	0.088	-0.912	-0.809	-0.578
SD model, σ_{ϵ}	0.497	0.008	0.482	0.497	0.512	0.497	0.007	0.482	0.497	0.511

554

555

556 Table 2. Summary of estimation tendencies among observers. For each group size, the entries in
 557 the table show the distribution of the means of the posteriors of the 59 observers for estimates of
 558 a group of spotted dolphins. “Mean diff.,” “Min diff.” and “Max diff.” are the differences
 559 between the mean (or minimum or maximum) of the mean observer estimates and true group
 560 size, expressed as percentages of group size.

Group size	Distribution of means of observer estimates						Mean diff.	Min diff.	Max diff.
	Mean	Min	25%	50%	75%	Max			
25	25.4	17.7	21.2	25.9	28.7	41.5	2%	-29%	66%
50	44.4	28.5	35.5	45.0	51.1	72.4	-11%	-43%	45%
100	77.7	44.9	60.3	78.3	89.1	124.6	-22%	-55%	25%
500	289.7	131.7	201.8	293.0	355	585.3	-42%	-74%	17%

561

562 Table 3. Predicted dolphin group sizes given observer estimates of 25, 50, 100, and 500 animals
563 by a new (out-of-sample) observer, for six dolphin species and integrated over species (“any
564 species”). Posterior distributions have been exponentiated to show values on the scale of the
565 number of dolphins. Distributions of predicted group size are approximately lognormal, and are
566 summarized by means, standard deviations (SD), coefficients of variation (CV) and five
567 quantiles. “Difference” is the difference between the median (the 50% quantile) of predicted
568 group size and observer estimate, expressed as a percentage of the observer estimate.

569

Observer estimate	Dolphin species	Predicted group size								Difference
		Mean	SD	CV	2.5%	25%	50%	75%	97.5%	
25	spotted-spinner	26.4	19.6	0.74	5.3	13.3	21.2	33.3	78.2	-15%
	common	28.2	21.1	0.75	5.5	14.3	22.6	35.8	83.4	-10%
	spotted	32.3	24.4	0.76	6.6	16.3	25.9	40.8	95.7	4%
	spinner	34.6	26.3	0.76	6.9	17.4	27.7	43.6	103.6	11%
	striped	39.0	29.1	0.75	7.9	19.9	31.4	49.3	113.9	26%
	other	43.8	33.3	0.76	8.8	22.1	35.2	55.3	130.3	41%
	any species	34.1	30.0	0.88	6.2	16.1	25.9	42.0	110.6	4%
50	spotted-spinner	66.6	50.4	0.76	13.9	33.8	53.5	83.6	196.6	7%
	common	70.7	53.2	0.75	14.7	36.1	56.7	88.7	209.9	13%
	spotted	81.1	61.6	0.76	17.0	41.2	65.1	101.4	239.7	30%
	spinner	87.3	66.7	0.76	18.1	44.3	70.3	110.1	256.5	41%
	striped	98.6	75.2	0.76	20.2	49.9	78.6	123.9	294.5	57%
	other	110.6	84.1	0.76	23.1	56.1	88.8	138.8	325.8	78%
	any species	84.5	79.6	0.94	15.7	38.8	62.1	102.6	286.9	24%
100	spotted-spinner	167.2	128.0	0.77	34.7	84.6	133.2	208.8	502.4	33%
	common	179.5	137.4	0.77	37.7	90.9	143.3	224.6	538.7	43%
	spotted	206.2	160.0	0.78	43.4	103.9	163.4	257.5	620.8	63%
	spinner	222.2	175.1	0.79	46.7	111.4	175.4	276.6	680.3	75%
	striped	247.3	191.0	0.77	52.7	124.6	195.8	308.9	748.2	96%
	other	281.7	219.6	0.78	59.4	142.1	223.3	349.7	847.5	123%
	any species	211.2	241.4	1.14	37.4	90.2	147.4	248.5	776.3	47%
500	spotted-spinner	1466.7	1215.5	0.83	305.0	723.5	1137.9	1810.4	4557.1	128%
	common	1581.4	1335.3	0.84	326.1	766.7	1218.6	1956.9	4981.8	144%
	spotted	1801.7	1518.8	0.84	367.9	876.1	1386.9	2227.2	5629.0	177%
	spinner	1941.8	1651.7	0.85	400.7	938.3	1490.8	2399.8	6192.8	198%
	striped	2181.9	1972.4	0.90	447.1	1057.2	1674.9	2689.5	6898.4	235%
	other	2483.6	2145.0	0.86	498.4	1190.7	1892.8	3053.4	7876.5	279%
	any species	1944.2	3600.3	1.85	250.6	626.9	1108.2	2103.6	8468.8	122%

Figure captions

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575 Fig. 1: Dolphin group size calibration data plotted on logarithmic scales. (A) Photo counts and
576 observer estimates of group size for 434 calibration schools. The size of each group was
577 estimated independently by multiple (usually 6) shipboard observers. The dashed line is a
578 regression of $\log(\text{observer estimate})$ on $\log(\text{photo count})$, while the solid gray line is a 1:1
579 relationship. (B) Regressions of $\log(\text{observer estimate})$ on $\log(\text{photo count})$ for each of the 59
580 observers.

581 Fig. 2. Prior and posterior probabilities of four models of dolphin group size estimation based on
582 RJMCMC. Differences among observers were modeled as random effects (RE) in all four
583 models; species and sea state were fixed effects.

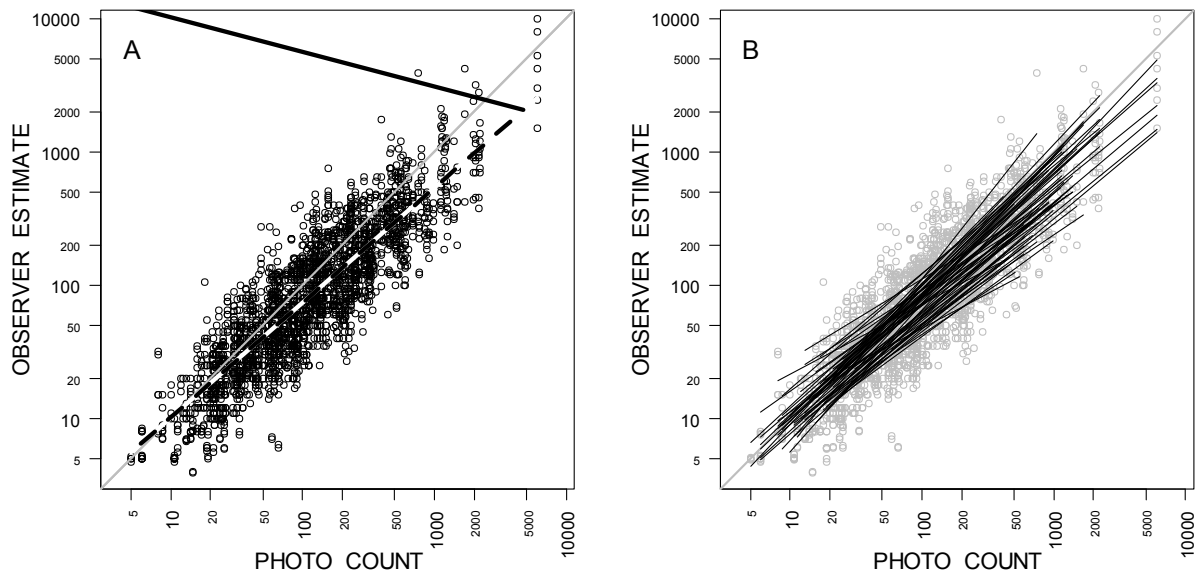
584 Fig. 3. Estimates of (A) species and (B) observer effects on dolphin group size estimation.
585 Regression lines are based on means of posterior distributions.

586 Fig. 4. Posterior distributions of random effects for each observer for (A) intercept α_0 and (B)
587 slope α_1 (see Eq. 1). Points are means and lines are central 95% credibility intervals.

588 Fig. 5. Posterior distributions of observer estimates for dolphin groups of 25, 50, 100, and 500
589 animals. Thin dashed lines are the distributions of estimates for a given observer (#53) whose
590 tendencies were estimated in this study, for a given species (spotted dolphins). Thick black lines
591 are the distributions for the same observer for any species (integrated over species). Thick gray
592 lines are the distributions for a new, out-of-sample observer with unknown tendencies, for any
593 species (integrated over observers and species). The probability densities (vertical scale) of all
594 distributions are scaled relative to the maximum value.

595 Fig. 6. Predicted dolphin group sizes given observer estimates of 25, 50, 100, and 500 animals.
596 Thin dashed lines are the distributions of group size for a given observer (#53) whose tendencies
597 were estimated in this study, for a given species (spotted dolphins). Thick black lines are the
598 distributions for the same observer for any species (integrated over species). Thick gray lines are
599 the distributions for a new, out-of-sample observer with unknown tendencies, for any species
600 (integrated over observers and species). The probability densities (vertical scale) of all
601 distributions are scaled relative to the maximum density value.

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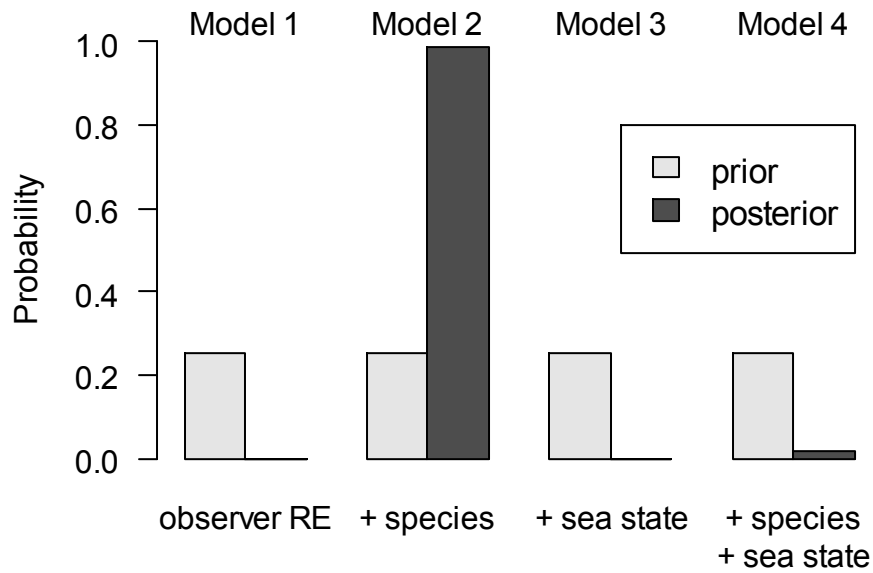


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604 Fig. 1

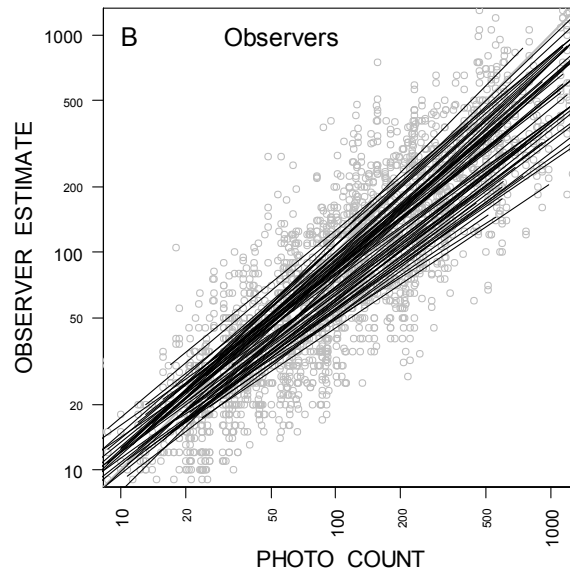
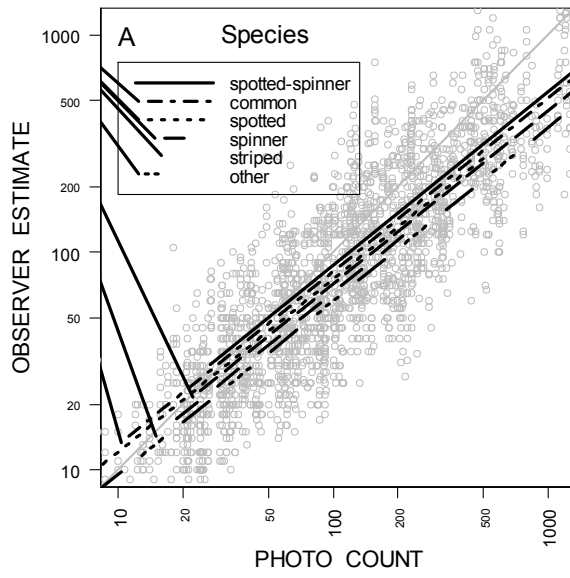
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608 Fig. 2



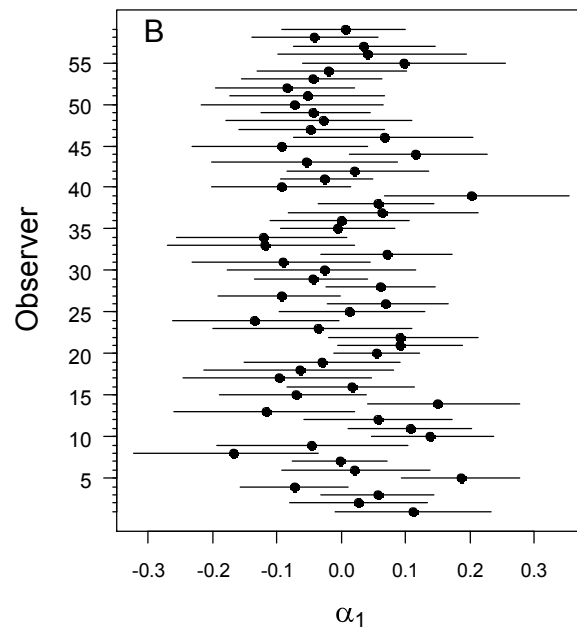
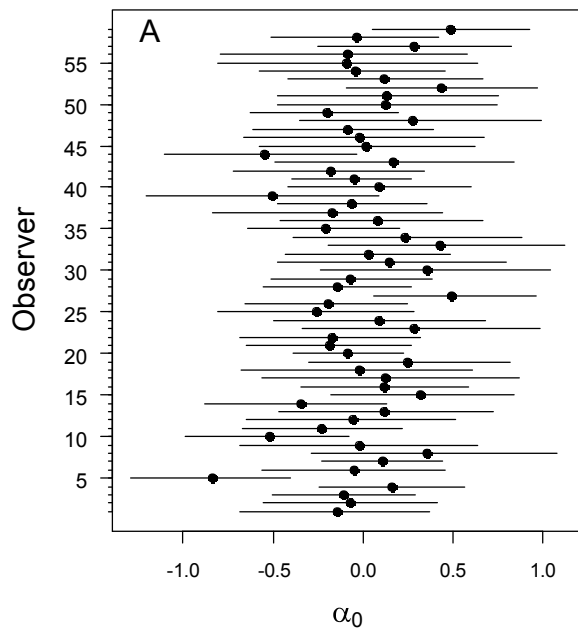
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610 Fig. 3

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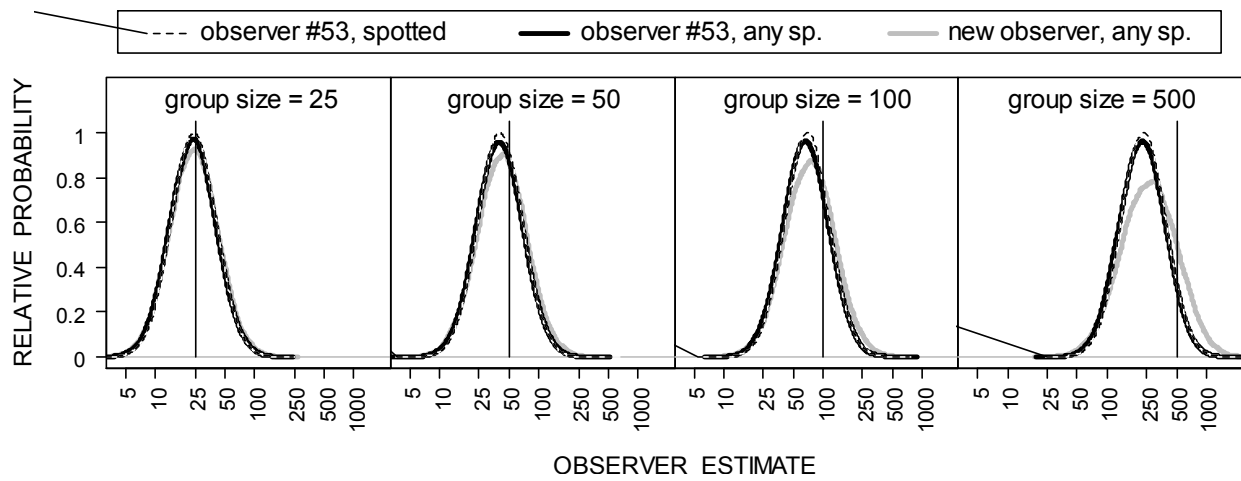


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615 Fig. 4

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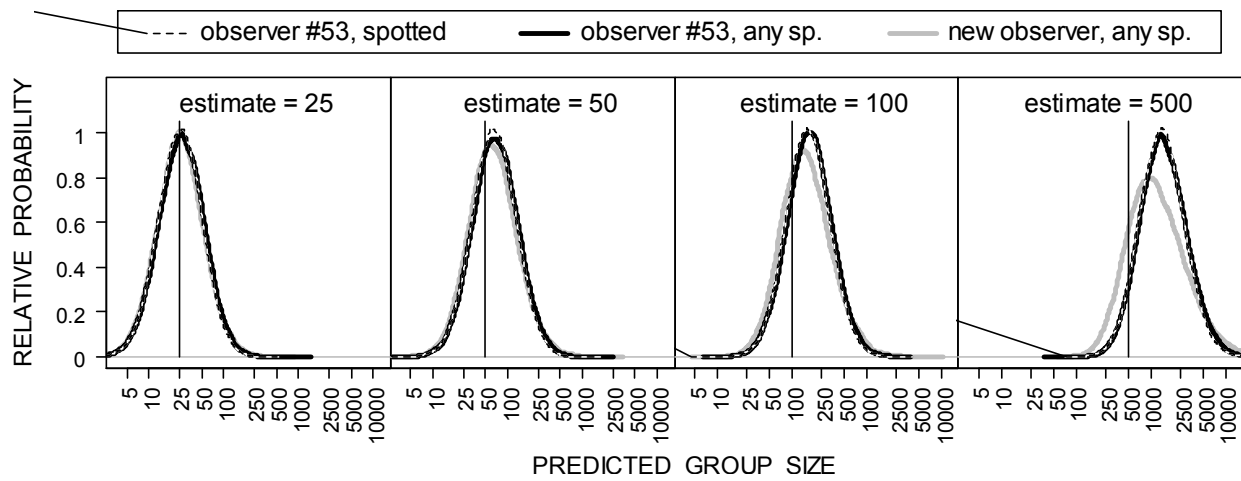
619 Fig. 5

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625 Fig. 6

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627 Appendix 1. Reverse Jump Markov Chain Monte Carlo (RJMCMC)

628 Random-effects models such as Eq. (1) can be implemented in a Bayesian framework
629 using hierarchical models where each parameter, including the random-effects standard
630 deviations, are assumed to have a distribution. Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulation
631 can be used to obtain summary statistics of the posterior distributions of the parameters given the
632 data. To include model selection in our analysis, we treated the model itself as a parameter and
633 formed the joint posterior distribution of both parameters and models. An RJMCMC algorithm
634 (Green 1995) explored this posterior distribution. The RJMCMC algorithm represented a
635 random walk, where each iteration consisted of two steps: (1) the reversible jump (RJ) step
636 where we proposed to move to a different model (the between-model move), and (2) the
637 Metropolis-Hastings (MH) step where we updated the parameters from the current model (the
638 within-model move). We placed uniform priors on all parameters with an upper bound of 1, and
639 a lower bound of -1 for coefficients and a lower bound of 0 for standard deviations.

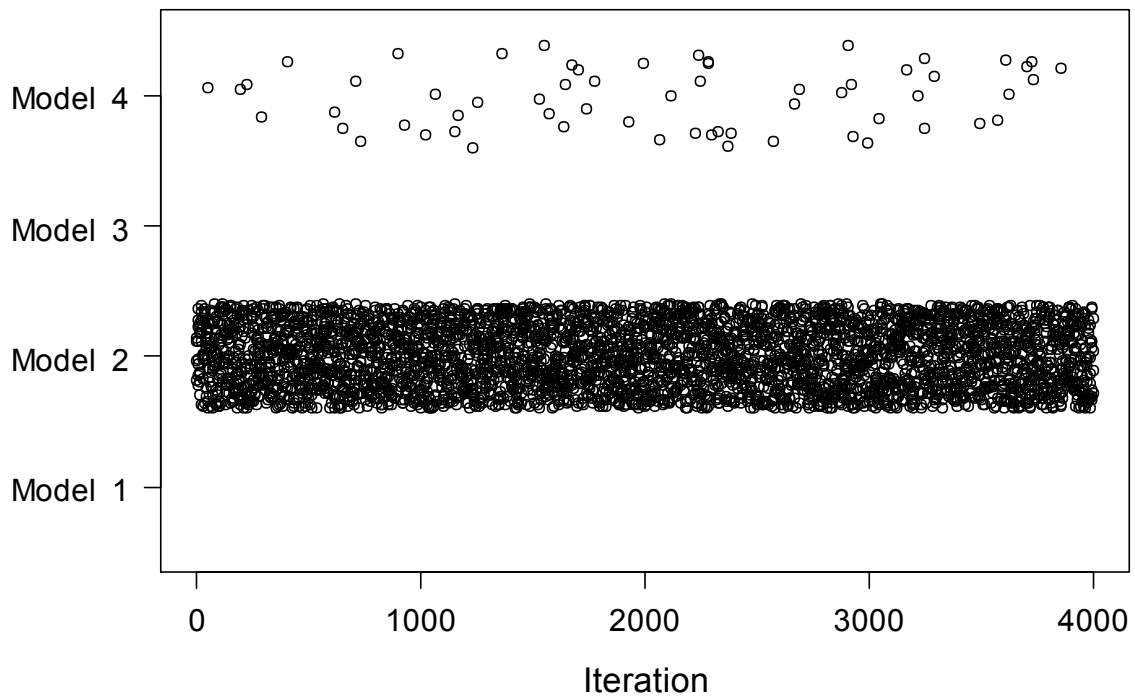
640 All models included in the analysis contained the intercept and the log of the photo
641 counts as well as their corresponding random-effects coefficients (Eq. 1). Hence, the RJ step at
642 each iteration consisted of proposing to add or delete each of the two remaining covariates (*sea-*
643 *state* and *species*) in turn, depending on whether the covariate was in the current model or not.
644 Four different models were possible that differed only in the inclusion or exclusion of species
645 (β_k , with $k = 2, \dots, 7$) and sea state (β_8) coefficients in Eq.(1): for model 1, $\beta_k=0$ and $\beta_8=0$; for
646 model 2, $\beta_8=0$; for model 3, $\beta_k=0$; and for model 4, both species and sea-state coefficients were
647 non-zero (full model) . A proposal to add a covariate to the model involved drawing random
648 samples from the respective proposal distributions for the parameters and accepting this proposal
649 based on the calculated acceptance probability (see, e.g., King *et al.* 2009 on how to obtain the

650 acceptance probability). A proposal to delete a covariate from a model involved setting its
651 coefficients to zero and accepting this proposal based on the calculated acceptance probability.
652 The four models were considered equally likely a priori.

653 The MH step at each iteration consisted of updating the parameters that were currently in
654 the model using an MH update (Metropolis *et al.* 1953, Hastings 1970). This included the
655 coefficient associated with the log of the photo counts, the standard deviations associated with
656 the random effects and model errors as well as the coefficients for *species* and *sea-state* if these
657 covariates were in the current model. Furthermore, all random-effects coefficients were updated
658 during each iteration. In particular, this update involved a random walk single-update with
659 normal proposal distributions, where the mean was equal to the current value of the parameter
660 (or random-effects coefficient) and the standard deviations were fine-tuned during pilot tuning to
661 achieve appropriate acceptance rates (Gelman *et al.* 1996).

662 The chain was started with the full model and completed 210,000 iterations. We
663 discarded the first 10,000 as burn-in and thinned the chain by retaining every 50th value, thus
664 obtaining a posterior sample of 4000 values. Posterior model probabilities were the fraction of
665 iterations that the chain spent in the respective model. Models 1 and 3 were never selected;
666 model 4 was selected 1.6% of the time consistently through the history of the chain (Fig. A1).
667 Similar results were obtained regardless of which model was used to initiate the chain.

668



669

670 Fig. A1. Sequence of RJMCMC jumps among models after burn-in. Results were similar
671 regardless of which model was chosen to initiate the chain. To show separate points, random
672 values have been added to each point (jittering).

673

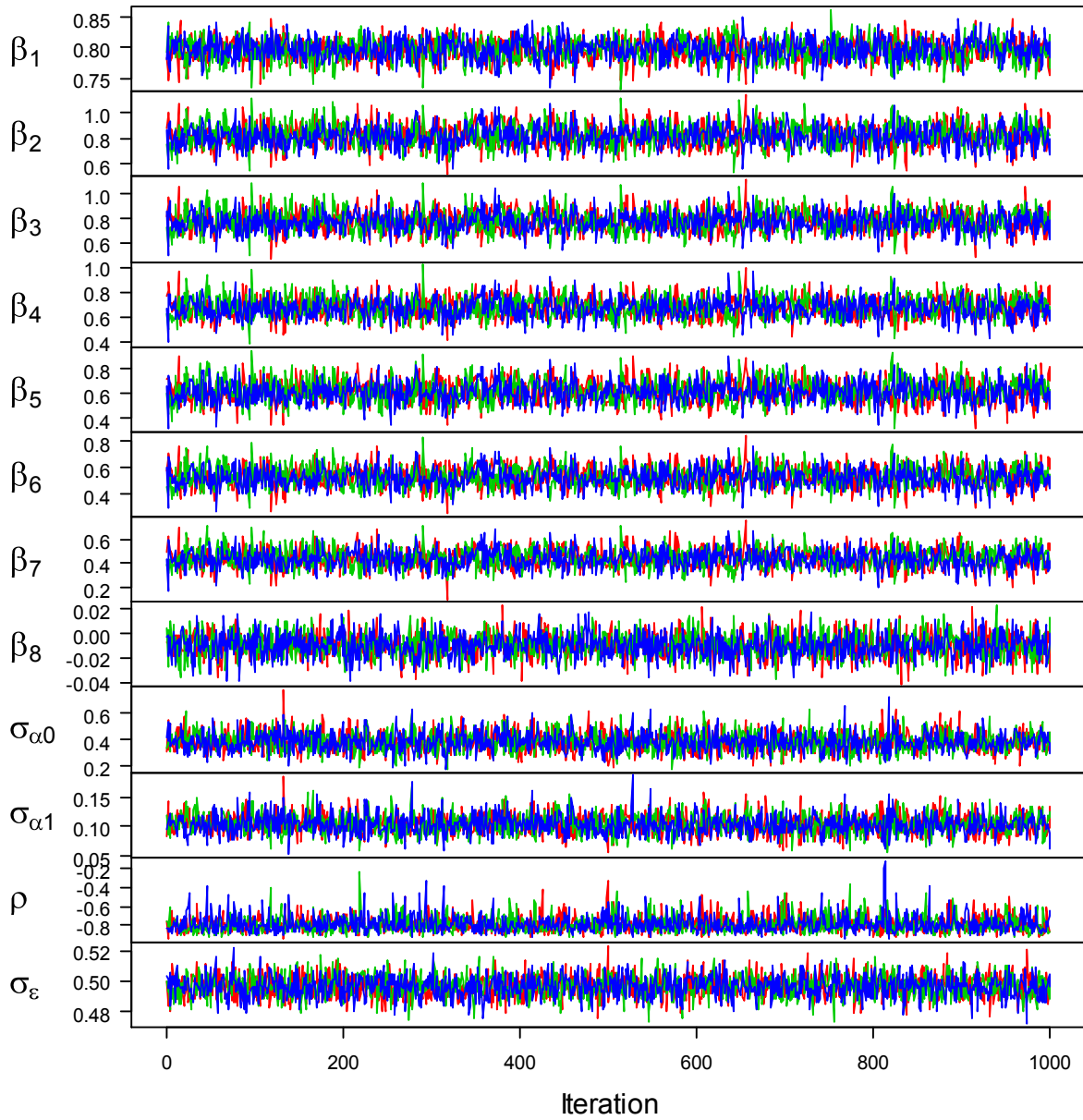
674 Appendix 2. BUGS models and diagnostics for MCMC sampling

675 Each of the four variants of Eq. 1 was implemented in the BUGS language. Uniform
676 priors were specified for all parameters except the random-effects coefficients, which were
677 latent. Due to the large amount of data, specification of other priors, such as normal distributions
678 (lognormal distributions for variance parameters) with means far from values supported by the
679 data, had no effect on posterior distributions. For each model, we ran three chains of 120,000
680 iterations each, discarding the first 20,000 as burn-in from different random initial starting
681 values. For the remaining 100,000 iterations, we retained every 100th value (thinning) to reduce
682 autocorrelation. Thus the final sample consisted of 1000 values for each of three chains. The
683 effective sample size for each parameter, calculated with R package coda, was near 1000,
684 indicating that autocorrelation was low. The chains were well-mixed for all parameters (Fig.
685 A2), and converged to similar values (Fig. A3).

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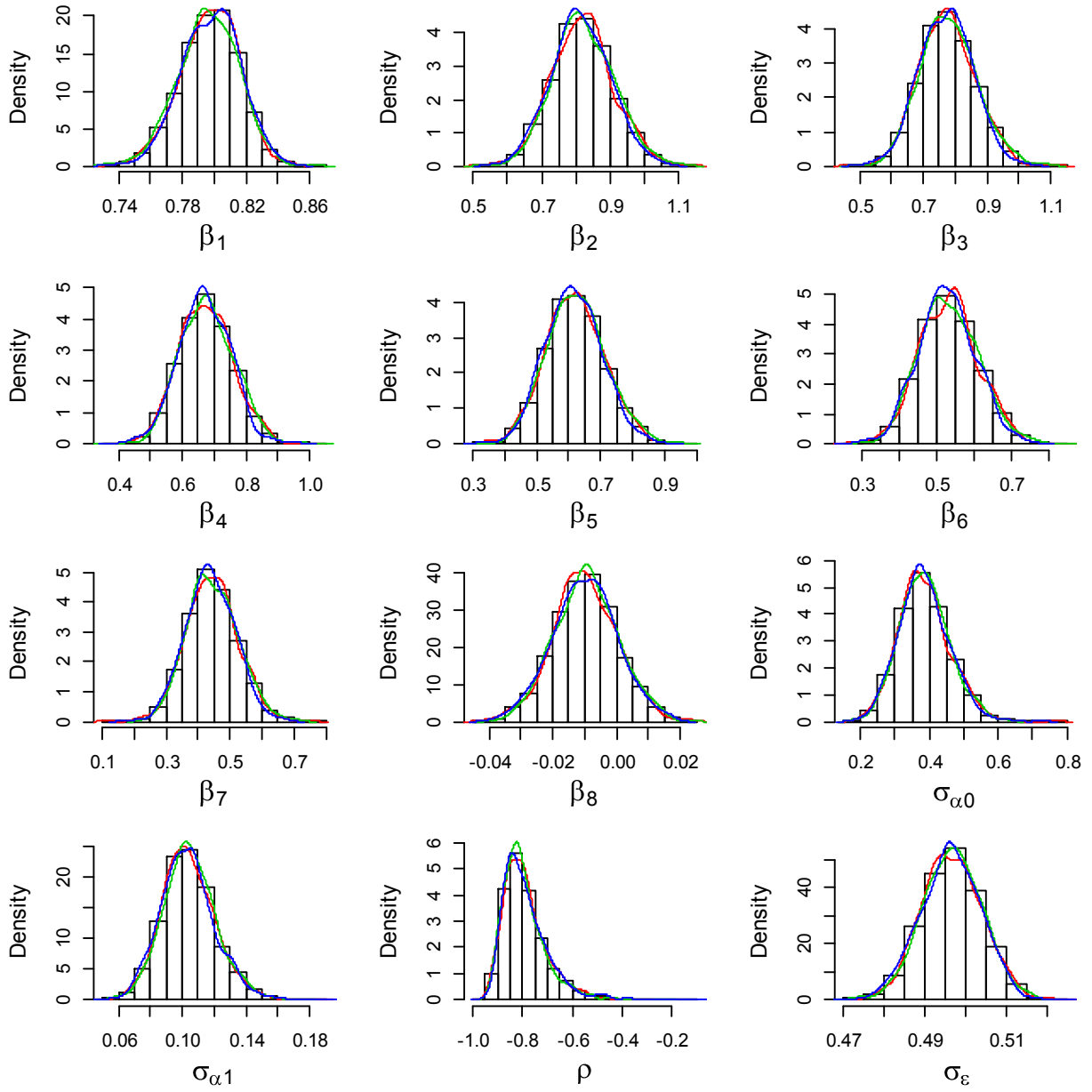


689

690 Fig. A2. Traces of posterior samples. Green, red and blue lines show three independent MCMC

691 chains of 1000 iterations each, with different initial values. See Eq. 1 and Table 1 for definitions

692 of parameters.



693

694 Fig. A3. Marginal posterior probability density distributions for parameters. Green, red and blue

695 lines show three independent MCMC chains with different initial values. The histogram is the

696 total sample of all three chains. See Eq. 1 and Table 1 for definitions of parameters.

697

698

```

699 Appendix 3. BUGS code
700 BUGS.model <- function() {
701   for (i in 1:n) {
702     y[i] ~ dnorm(y.hat[i],tau.model)
703     y.hat[i] <- a0[obs[i]] + a1[obs[i]]*x[i] + b.sp[sp[i]]           # model 2
704 # y.hat[i] <- a0[obs[i]] + a1[obs[i]]*x[i] + b.sp[sp[i]] + b.bf*bf[i] # model 4
705   }
706   tau.model <- pow(sigma.model,-2)
707   sigma.model ~ dunif(sigma.min,sigma.max) # prior
708   for (i in 1:6) {b.sp[i] ~ dunif(b.min,b.max)} # 6 species factor levels
709 # b.bf ~ dunif(b.min,b.max)           # sea state
710   for (j in 1:n.obs) {
711     a0[j] <- A[j,1]
712     a1[j] <- A[j,2]
713     A[j,1:2] ~ dmnorm(A.hat[j,],Tau.A[,])
714     A.hat[j,1] <- 0 # mean of intercept random effects
715     A.hat[j,2] <- b1 # mean of slope random effects
716   }
717   b1 ~ dunif(b.min,b.max) # prior
718   Tau.A[1:2,1:2] <- inverse(Sigma.A[,])
719   Sigma.A[1,1] <- pow(sigma.a0,2)
720   Sigma.A[2,2] <- pow(sigma.a1,2)
721   Sigma.A[1,2] <- rho*sigma.a0*sigma.a1
722   Sigma.A[2,1] <- Sigma.A[1,2]
723   sigma.a0 ~ dunif(sigma.min,sigma.max) # prior
724   sigma.a1 ~ dunif(sigma.min,sigma.max) # prior
725   rho ~ dunif(-1,1) # prior
726 }
727

```

```

728 Appendix 4. R code for RJMCMC analysis
729 # RJMCMC calibration analysis for ETP dolphin school size estimation
730 #
731 library(tcltk2) # for progress bar
732 ## Proposal distributions for parameters for RJ step
733 rjprop.mean.sp <- rep(0,5)
734 rjprop.mean.bft <- 0
735 rjprop.sd.bft <- 0.1
736 rjprop.sd.sp <- rep(0.3,5)
737 ## Proposal distributions for parameters for MH step
738 mhprop.sd.int <- 0.035
739 mhprop.sd.ph <- 0.007
740 mhprop.sd.sp <- rep(0.04,5)
741 mhprop.sd.bft <- 0.005
742 mhprop.sd.sd.model <- 0.01
743 mhprop.sd.sd.obs.int = 0.01
744 mhprop.sd.sd.obs.ph = 0.01
745 mhprop.sd.params <- c(mhprop.sd.int, mhprop.sd.ph, mhprop.sd.sp, mhprop.sd.bft,
746 mhprop.sd.sd.model, mhprop.sd.sd.obs.int, mhprop.sd.sd.obs.ph)
747 names(mhprop.sd.params) <- c('sd.int','sd.ph',rep('sd.sp',5),'sd.bft',
748 'sd.sd.model','sd.sd.obs.int','sd.sd.obs.ph')
749
750 ##### model set-up #####
751 ## Starting values for the parameters
752 # fixed effects
753 int.0 <- 0.7 # intercept
754 ph.0 <- 0.8 # slope for photo
755 sp.0 <- rjprop.mean.sp # factor covariate with 6 levels (first level absorbed in the intercept)
756 bft.0 <- rjprop.mean.bft # beaufort coefficient
757 sd.model.0 <- 0.5 # standard deviation of model errors
758 # random effects for observers
759 sd.obs.int.0 <- 0.2 # intercept for regression
760 re.obs.int <- rnorm(n.obs,0,sd.obs.int.0)
761 names(re.obs.int) <- sort(unique(observers))
762 sd.obs.ph.0 <- 0.05
763 re.obs.ph <- rnorm(n.obs,0,sd.obs.ph.0)
764 names(re.obs.ph) <- sort(unique(observers))
765 params <- c(int.0,ph.0,sp.0,bft.0,sd.model.0,sd.obs.int.0,sd.obs.ph.0)
766 names(params) <-
767 c('int','ph',paste("sp",levels(species)[2:6],sep="."),'bft','sd.model','sd.obs.int','sd.obs.ph')
768 param.list <- matrix(0,4,8)
769 param.list[1,c(1,2)] <- 1
770 param.list[2,c(1:7)] <- 1

```

```

771 param.list[3,c(1,2,8)] <- 1
772 param.list[4,1:8] <- 1
773
774 # choose the model
775 cur.mod <- 1
776 # which parameters are switched on
777 cur.p <- param.list[cur.mod,]
778 params[1:8] <- params[1:8]*cur.p
779
780 ## Prior limits for parameters
781 prior.params.lo <- -1
782 prior.params.hi <- 1
783 prior.sd.lo <- 0
784 prior.sd.hi <- 1
785
786 # number of iterations, about 3000 per hour
787 n.iter <- 3000*70      # total number of iterations
788 n.thin <- 10         # thinning; number of posterior samples will be floor(n.iter/n.thin) + 1
789
790 # setting up matrices that will store the posterior samples
791 nr <- round(n.iter/n.thin,0)+1 # number of rows is thinned no. of updates + starting value
792 params.mat <- matrix(NA,nr,length(params))
793 colnames(params.mat) <- names(params)
794 params.mat[1,] <- params
795 re.obs.int.mat <- matrix(NA,nr,n.obs)
796 colnames(re.obs.int.mat) <- paste("obs",levels(observers),".int",sep="")
797 re.obs.int.mat[1,] <- re.obs.int
798 re.obs.ph.mat <- matrix(NA,nr,n.obs)
799 colnames(re.obs.ph.mat) <- paste("obs",levels(observers),".ph",sep="")
800 re.obs.ph.mat[1,] <- re.obs.ph
801
802 # vector for storing model choices
803 model <- array(NA,nr)
804 # the predictor
805 x <- l.photo
806 # the response
807 y <- l.best
808
809 ##### the likelihood equations
810 log.lik <- function(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph){
811   sp.params<-params[3:7]   # these will be zero if beaufort is not included in the model
812   bft.params<-params[8]   # these will be zero if species is not included in the model
813   mu <- params['int'] + re.obs.int[observers] + (params['ph'] + re.obs.ph[observers]) * x +
814   c(0,sp.params)[match(species,levels(species))] + bft.params[1]*beaufort

```

```

815   log.lik <- sum(log(dnorm(y,mu,params['sd.model']))) +
816   sum(log(dnorm(re.obs.ph,0,params['sd.obs.ph']))) +
817   sum(log(dnorm(re.obs.int,0,params['sd.obs.int'])),na.rm=T)
818   log.lik
819 }
820
821 # test
822 log.lik(y = l.best, x = l.photo, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
823
824 #####
825 # progress bar
826 pb <- tkProgressBar(title = "progress bar", min = 0,max = n.iter, width = 200)
827
828 # the RJMCMC algorithm
829 isave <- 1      # set the counter; first value is starting value
830 for (b in 2:n.iter){
831   newparams <- params
832
833 ##### the RJ step
834   if(cur.p[3]==0){ # if species is currently not in the model, propose to add it
835     newparams[3:7] <- rnorm(5,rjprop.mean.sp,rjprop.sd.sp) ##### changed from
836     1 to 5
837     new.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = newparams, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph =
838     re.obs.ph)
839     cur.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params =  params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
840     num <- new.lik + sum(log(dunif(newparams[3:7],prior.params.lo,prior.params.hi))) # add
841     priors for new parameters
842     den <- cur.lik + sum(log(dnorm(newparams[3:7],rjprop.mean.sp,rjprop.sd.sp))) # add
843     proposal densities for new parameters
844     A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
845     V<-runif(1)
846     ifelse(V<=A,{params[3:7]<-newparams[3:7];cur.p[3:7]<-1},{newparams[3:7]<-params[3:7]})
847   }
848   else{ # if species is currently in the model, propose to delete it
849     newparams[3:7] <- 0
850     new.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = newparams, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph =
851     re.obs.ph)
852     cur.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params =  params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
853     num <- new.lik + sum(log(dnorm(params[3:7],rjprop.mean.sp,rjprop.sd.sp))) # add proposal
854     densities for current parameters
855     den <- cur.lik + sum(log(dunif(params[3:7],prior.params.lo,prior.params.hi))) # add priors for
856     current parameters
857     A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
858     V<-runif(1)

```

```

859   ifelse(V<=A,{params[3:7]<-newparams[3:7];cur.p[3:7]<-0},{newparams[3:7]<-params[3:7]})
860 }
861 if(cur.p[8]==0){ # if beaufort is currently not in the model, propose to add it
862   newparams[8] <- rnorm(1,rjprop.mean.bft,rjprop.sd.bft)
863   new.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = newparams, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph =
864 re.obs.ph)
865   cur.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
866   num <- new.lik + sum(log(dunif(newparams[8],prior.params.lo,prior.params.hi))) # add priors
867 for new parameters
868   den <- cur.lik + sum(log(dnorm(newparams[8],rjprop.mean.sp,rjprop.sd.sp))) # add
869 proposal densities for new parameters
870   A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
871   V<-runif(1)
872   ifelse(V<=A,{params[8]<-newparams[8];cur.p[8]<-1},{newparams[8]<-params[8]})
873 }
874 else{ # if beaufort is currently in the model, propose to delete it
875   newparams[8] <- 0
876   new.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = newparams, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph =
877 re.obs.ph)
878   cur.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
879   num <- new.lik + sum(log(dnorm(params[8],rjprop.mean.bft,rjprop.sd.bft))) # add proposal
880 densities for current parameters
881   den <- cur.lik + sum(log(dunif(params[8],prior.params.lo,prior.params.hi))) # add priors for
882 current parameters
883   A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
884   V<-runif(1)
885   ifelse(V<=A,{params[8]<-newparams[8];cur.p[8]<-0},{newparams[8]<-params[8]})
886 }
887 # which model did we end up with?
888 cur.mod<-match(sum(cur.p),apply(param.list,1,sum))
889
890 ##### the MH step
891 newparams <- params
892 new.re.obs.int <- re.obs.int
893 new.re.obs.ph <- re.obs.ph
894 # updating the parameters
895 # the first level of species coefficients or beaufort coefficients are always zero, don't need
896 updating
897 for (p in which(cur.p==1)) { # paramters which can be negative
898   u <- rnorm(1,params[p],mhprop.sd.params[p])
899   newparams[p] <- u
900   new.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = newparams, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph =
901 re.obs.ph)
902   cur.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)

```

```

903     num <- new.lik + log(dunif(newparams[p],prior.params.lo,prior.params.hi))
904     den <- cur.lik + log(dunif( params[p],prior.params.lo,prior.params.hi))
905     A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
906     V<-runif(1)
907     ifelse(V<=A,params[p]<-newparams[p],newparams[p]<-params[p])
908   }
909   for (p in 9:11) {           # st dev cannot be negative
910     u <- rnorm(1,params[p],mhprop.sd.params[p])
911     newparams[p] <- u
912     new.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = newparams, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph =
913 re.obs.ph)
914     cur.lik <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params =  params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
915     num <- new.lik + log(dunif(newparams[p],prior.sd.lo,prior.sd.hi))
916     den <- cur.lik + log(dunif( params[p],prior.sd.lo,prior.sd.hi))
917     A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
918     V<-runif(1)
919     ifelse(V<=A,params[p]<-newparams[p],newparams[p]<-params[p])
920   }
921
922 # random effects coefficients - no priors on the coefficients
923 for (r in 1:n.obs){
924   new.re.obs.int[r] <- rnorm(1,re.obs.int[r],mhprop.sd.sd.obs.int)
925   num <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = new.re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
926   den <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
927   A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
928   V<-runif(1)
929   ifelse(V<=A,re.obs.int[r]<-new.re.obs.int[r],new.re.obs.int[r]<-re.obs.int[r])
930 }
931 for (r in 1:n.obs){
932   new.re.obs.ph[r] <- rnorm(1,re.obs.ph[r],mhprop.sd.sd.obs.ph)
933   num <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = new.re.obs.ph)
934   den <- log.lik(y = y, x = x, params = params, re.obs.int = re.obs.int, re.obs.ph = re.obs.ph)
935   A<-min(1,exp(num-den))
936   V<-runif(1)
937   ifelse(V<=A,re.obs.ph[r]<-new.re.obs.ph[r],new.re.obs.ph[r]<-re.obs.ph[r])
938 }
939
940 # each "n.thin-th" iteration, store the parameter values in matrices
941 if (b %% n.thin < 1) {
942   isave <- isave + 1
943   params.mat[isave,] <- params
944   re.obs.int.mat[isave,] <- re.obs.int
945   re.obs.ph.mat[isave,] <- re.obs.ph
946   model[isave] <- cur.mod

```



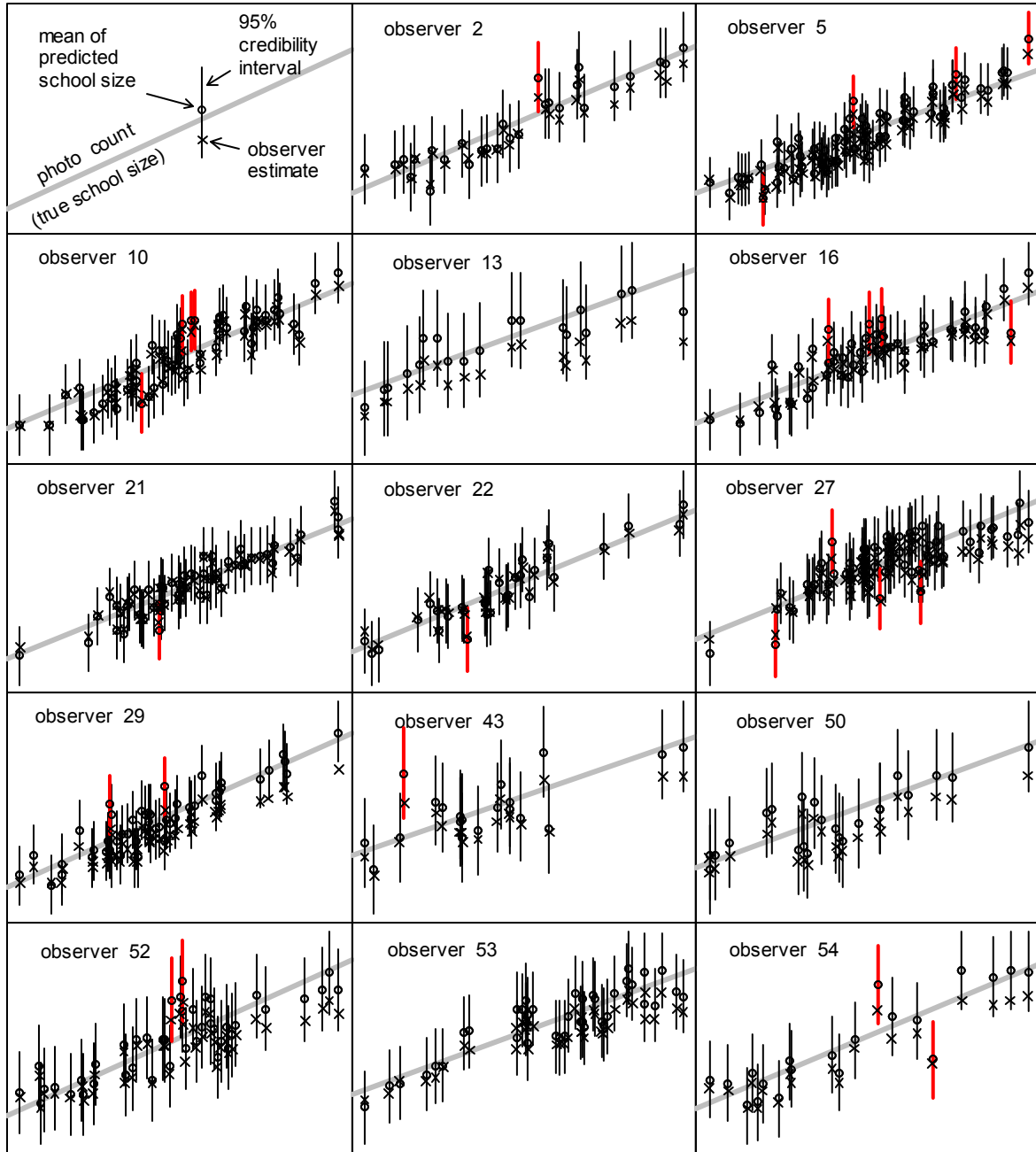
```
947 }
948 # display progress
949 Sys.sleep(1)
950 setTkProgressBar(pb, b, label=paste(round(b/n.iter*100),"% completed",sep=""))
951 }          ### end of iteration loop
952 close(pb); date()
953
954 ##### end of RJMCMC sampling
955 #####
956
```

957

958 Appendix 5. Coverage of predicted group sizes

959 For each group size estimate for each observer, we predicted group size using Eq. 1 and
960 sampling the MCMC chains from model 2 as described in Methods. For each of the 2,435
961 observer estimates, we determined if the 95% credibility interval of predicted size included the
962 photo count (our measure of true group size). Coverage of the 95% interval, measured as the
963 fraction of intervals which included the photo count, was 0.955. We note that this procedure was
964 an inverse prediction – that is, although the model fitted y to x , we predicted x given y . We also
965 note that this procedure was not cross-validation, since the model was not refit for each of the
966 2,435 observer estimates. Therefore, since the value being predicted (photo count) was included
967 in the model fitting, coverage was expected to be positively biased. Given the large sample size,
968 however, we believe the positive bias due to the inclusion of a single datum would be small, as
969 indeed it seemed to be. Fig A4 shows observer estimates and posterior distributions of predicted
970 group size plotted against photo count for a selection of the 59 observers.

971



972

973 Fig. A4. Observer estimates (x), and group sizes predicted from those estimates, plotted relative

974 to photo count (gray line) for selected observers. Circles are the means and vertical line

975 segments the 95% credibility intervals of predicted group sizes. Cases for which the 95%

976 credibility interval did not include the photo count are shown in red.

977