

1 **Speed consensus and the “Goldilocks principle” in flocking birds (*Columba livia*)**

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14 **Abstract**

15

16 The evolution of group-living transformed the history of animal life on earth, yielding
17 substantial selective benefits. Yet, without overcoming fundamental challenges such as how to
18 coordinate movements with conspecifics, animals cannot maintain cohesion, and coordination
19 thus forms a prerequisite for the evolution of sociality. Although it has been considered that
20 animal groups must coordinate the *timing*, and *direction* of movements, coordinating *speed* is
21 also essential to prevent the group from splitting. We investigated speed consensus in homing
22 pigeon (*Columba livia*) flocks using high-resolution GPS. Despite observable differences in
23 average solo speed (which was positively correlated with bird mass) compromises of up to 6%
24 from preferred solo speed were made to reach consensus in flocks. These data match theory
25 which suggests that groups fly at an intermediate of solo speeds, which suggests speed-
26 averaging. By virtue of minimising extreme compromises – speed-averaging can maximise
27 selective benefits across the group, suggesting shared consensus for group speed could be
28 ubiquitous across taxa. Nonetheless, despite group-wide advantages, contemporary flight
29 models suggested unequal energetic costs in favour of individuals with intermediate body-
30 mass/preferred-speed (hence the “Goldilocks principle”).

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32 **Keywords:** Collective behaviour, Coordination, Flight dynamics, Movement ecology, Social
33 behaviour, Trade-offs

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Introduction

The evolution of social behaviour was a major step in the evolution of complex animal life on earth (Bourke, 2014; Maynard Smith & Szathmary, 1997; Sumpter, 2010) conferring many selective benefits to animals which achieved sociality (e.g. increased predator avoidance (Handegard et al., 2012; Kenward, 1978; Krause & Ruxton, 2002; Sumpter, 2010); energy conservation (Portugal et al., 2014; Weimerskirch et al., 2001); social information acquisition (Biro et al., 2006; Simons, 2004)). Yet, achieving these advantages brought with it many challenges, such as how to coordinate movements and, therefore, remain spatially cohesive (Conradt & Roper, 2003, 2005, 2009). Coordination is widely discussed in terms of consensus building (Conradt & Roper, 2005; Seeley, 2003; Sumpter, 2010). Whether the group is led by particularly influential individuals (unshared) (King et al., 2008; Nagy et al., 2010), or decision-making is distributed across multiple members (shared) (Gall et al., 2017; Strandburg-Peshkin et al., 2015), groups which achieve coordination essentially make unanimous movement decisions (i.e. they come to a shared/unshared consensus), or risk losing cohesion (Conradt & Roper, 2005; Couzin et al., 2005; Ioannou et al., 2015). The dynamics of shared-unshared consensus have been shown to be impacted by intrinsic physical (Pettit et al., 2015) and behavioural (Sasaki et al., 2018) differences, the presence of uninformed individuals (Couzin et al., 2011), age (Lee & Teichroeb, 2016), dominance (King et al., 2008) and sex (Fischhoff et al., 2007). Nonetheless, despite our increasingly comprehensive understanding of collective decision making, thus far the field has largely focussed on direction (“where to go?”) and timing (“when to leave?”) of movements (Conradt & Roper, 2005; Couzin et al., 2005; Sueur &

Petit, 2008). These components, however, do not cover all scenarios. If groups do not reach a consensus on travelling speed (“how fast to travel?”), the group will split regardless of whether a consensus on direction and timing was reached. Therefore, the dynamics of an integral aspect of coordinating group movements – attaining a consensus speed – are almost entirely unknown (but see: Hedenström & Åkesson, 2017a; Pettit et al., 2015).

Conflicts of interest regarding group travelling speed may arise as a result of heterogeneity in age, sex, experience, and physiological or behavioural phenotypes within groups. Differences in preferred travelling speed will need to be resolved if the group is to remain cohesive (at least at the macroscopic level of the group’s movement; there is always the potential for faster individuals to take more tortuous pathways within the group borders and remain spatially cohesive). These conflict/resolution dynamics have parallels within the current framework of collective decision making. Directional (“where?”) preferences for foraging patches or travelling routes, for example, can often conflict amongst group members (Biro et al., 2006; King et al., 2008). While convergence of preferences can lead to beneficial (accurate) group decisions (Conradt & Roper, 2003; Simons, 2004; Strandburg-Peshkin et al., 2015), decisions are in many cases dictated by particular individuals, such as those more experienced (McComb et al., 2011; Prins, 1996), bolder (Jolles et al., 2017; Sasaki et al., 2018), or more dominant (King et al., 2008). Likewise, concerning decisions to set into motion (“when?”), individuals may differ in their preferred timing of departure, based on phenotypic differences such as physiological need for satiation (Conradt et al., 2009; Fischhoff et al., 2007; Rands et al., 2003), or personality differences (McDonald et al., 2016; Sih et al., 2012). Here, decisions may be governed by

signalling mechanisms which can build a shared consensus for departure time (Ramseyer et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2017), or dictated by movement initiators (Fischhoff et al., 2007; Rands et al., 2003).

The mechanism through which group speed is determined during collective movement is particularly important in bird flocks. Birds must increase their energetic output to fly either faster or slower than their individual optima (i.e. the speed at which work rate per-unit-distance or -time is at its minimum; Fig. 1a) (Hedenström, 2009; Pennycuik, 1968; Tobalske et al., 2003). These optima depend on an individual's unique morphology; heavier and structurally larger birds have been shown to have faster optimum speeds than smaller individuals, both on an intra- and an inter- specific level (Fig. 1a) (McFarlane et al., 2016; Norberg, 1995; Tobalske, 2007; Tobalske et al., 2003; Winter, 1999). Flying faster in active flight necessarily costs more (Hedenström, 2009; Tobalske et al., 2003); increased work-rate of muscles is required to increase flap frequency or wingbeat amplitude to achieve faster speeds (Butler, 2016; Hedenström, 2009). Similarly, flying slower than an individual's optimum speed has also been shown to increase work rate, as the momentum of flight provides lift (Heerenbrink et al., 2015; Johansson et al., 2018). Furthermore, as flying is the most energetically demanding form of aerobic locomotion, any departure from an individual's preferred flight speed – be it faster or slower – may have significant implications for energy expenditure and overall fitness (Hedenström & Ålerstam, 1996; Schmidt-Nielsen, 1972; Tobalske et al., 2003).

Given that *i*) an aligned and coordinated flock can only fly at one speed without fragmenting, and *ii*) flying at any speed other than individually variable energetic optima is costly, conflicts of preference regarding group-speed will likely arise in bird flocks. Presumably, if the costs of resolving the conflicts are too large, this will result in group fission (Fig. 1a). On the other hand, if conflicts are resolved and a consensus is reached, individuals may fare differently energetically (Fig. 1a). These costs of compromise (“consensus costs”) (Conradt & Roper, 2005) will arise in any system when conflicts are resolved – whether in the context of timing, direction or speed – given that no decision outcome can be uniformly optimal for individuals that possess different preferences.

Using a mixed solo ($N = 30$) and group flight ($N = 18$) release plan to measure solo and group speeds, we aimed to investigate 1) the speed of group travel, with respect to the individual preferred speeds, and 2) the consequences of this adopted group-speed on individual flight costs, in a model species in avian navigation and aerodynamics, homing pigeons (*Columba livia*). Pigeons are able to home from release sites either solo or in groups, and have been frequently used in studies of collective behaviour (Biro et al., 2006; Nagy et al., 2010, 2013; Pettit et al., 2015) and aerodynamics, measuring the energetic cost of flight in both free flying conditions (L. A Taylor et al., 2017; Usherwood et al., 2011) and wind tunnels (Butler, 2016; Butler et al., 1977; Butler & Woakes, 1990; Rothe et al., 1987a). The hypotheses tested were, firstly, that body mass predicts solo flight speed in pigeons (Fig. 1b; McFarlane et al., 2016; Norberg, 1995; Tobalske, 2007; Tobalske et al., 2003; Winter, 1999), and secondly that – in group flights – the birds will not split (following: Nagy et al., 2010, 2013; Watts et al., 2016), and compromise on speed. This

second hypothesis actually a set of three alternative hypotheses, depending on which birds compromise the most (see Fig. 1c).

Methods

Subjects and Morphological Measurements

Homing pigeons ($N = 18$), all aged between 1-1.5 years, were used in the experiments. They were housed in two separate groups of nine, in purpose-built lofts (7ft x 6ft) at Royal Holloway, University of London (see Portugal, Ricketts, et al., 2017; Portugal, Sivess, et al., 2017 for further husbandry details). Food (Johnstone & Jeff Four Season Pigeon Corn, Gilberdyke, U.K.), water and grit (Versele-Laga - Colombine Grit and Redstone, Deinze, Belgium) were provided *ad libitum*. Birds were weighed regularly, and their structural size measured (for full details, see *Appendix*).

Biologgers

Each bird was tagged with commercially available GPS loggers (QStarz BT-Q1300ST, Düsseldorf, Germany) which recorded latitude, longitude and time (GMT), five times per second (5Hz). The outer casing was replaced with re-sealable bags and additional clear tape to reduce mass while retaining water proofing. Logger loading totaled 21g which was 4.2-5.6% as a relative value of the pigeon's masses (mean = 4.8%). The loggers were attached by to the bird firstly by trimming feathers on the back of the birds, and attaching Velcro strips to the bird (hook side) using Araldite epoxy glue (Biro et al., 2006; L. A Taylor et al., 2017). Velcro strips (loop side) were also attached to either the loggers or to

the modified casing (for GPS) for easy attachment and removal per flight. The loggers were removed from the birds as soon as they came back into the lofts following an experimental release.

Flight plan

Pigeons were released from a northerly bearing (only group 1; $N = 9$ birds – 5 male and 4 female, randomly chosen) or an easterly bearing (only group 2; $N = 9$ birds – 5 female and 4 male, randomly chosen), from two sites per group away from traffic at 5km and 9km by road (*Appendix*). Sites were named N5, N9, E5 and E9 accordingly, retaining information about flight bearing (e.g. N or E) and distance (e.g. 5km or 9km) (Fig. A1). Each individual flew solo ($N = 15$ flights per site) and in their respective groups ($N = 9$ flights per site) (Table 1).

Solo/group condition was staggered to control for temporal variation in wind speed and direction (Table 1). Additionally, the solo stage was extended for the first set of releases from each site (see Table 1 for full flight order, dates and further site information). This was to ensure the route was learned, so that group flights were not at a navigational familiarity advantage, thus avoiding atypical flight speeds associated with unfamiliarity; a phenomenon found previously in a recent study of pigeon flight speeds (L. A Taylor et al., 2017).

Analyses were run on solo speeds from all available flights, and all group speed data. The results from an alternative analysis, omitting data before the seventh flight from each site (where unfamiliarity could play a larger role) was also conducted (see results in Table A2).

Missing Data

Two birds, both from group 1, a male and a female, did not return home following a scheduled release. Both individuals went missing following releases from site N5. The first individual was lost following its fourth release, and the second individual was lost on its seventh release from this site. Neither individual had participated in any group flights, so both individuals were removed from the data set. For more information on missing data, and data processing see *Appendix*. The final number of flights per individual is documented in Table A1.

Theoretical Speed Estimates

The library “afpt” (Heerenbrink et al., 2015) was used to estimate the minimum power speed of birds given the morphological metrics that we measured. To compare these theoretical estimates to observed data we converted the data to % values. Unlike in the observed data, where the relative speed was a comparison between solo and group flying speed (given as %), we had to define an appropriate theoretical flock speed $S_{\text{flock theor}}$. (Fig. 2a). For this, we deduced how close (i.e. how many standard deviations) the mean of *observed* solo speeds was to the *observed* group speed (0.18 standard deviations from the mean), and then subtracted this number of standard deviations from the mean of the theoretical estimates (Fig. 2a). Then all theoretical speed estimates were converted into %

values relative to $S_{\text{flock theor.}}$ (Fig. 2b). Minimum power speeds in free-flying pigeons are likely to be much greater than their theoretical equivalents, perhaps due to theoretical work being based on wind-tunnel data (see *Discussion* and Taylor et al., 2017; Usherwood et al., 2011). Therefore, direct comparison of observed/theoretical speeds was not possible. Our assumption when comparing our theoretical speed estimates with observed data was that individuals were flying at the speed of minimum power in solo flights. (See *Discussion* for a break-down of this assumption, and how the interpretation of the results would differ if the birds were flying at different optimal speeds (i.e. maximum range speed)). These theoretical estimates allowed us to make comparisons between data and theory, and estimate the intra-group energetic increase as a result of speed compromise; importantly, theoretical estimated speed was not used in any of the tests of our main hypotheses.

Speed

Ground speed from *solo flights* was calculated using the distance between locations at each GPS time-step (5Hz) using GPS data (*Appendix*). Ground speed of *group flights* was given by the speed between locations of group's centroid (after individuals which split from the group had been removed; see *Appendix*). See Table A2 for the resulting statistics, had we not used the centroid and instead used individual trajectories.

To calculate airspeed, we integrated wind data (provided by a wireless weather station at the home loft) with ground speed from GPS trajectories, following methods detailed in (Safi et al., 2013). From each flight trajectory (both solo and centroid data (i.e. group

flight)), we took a mean of all airspeed data. Airspeed had no obvious deviation either throughout a flight or across all flights (Fig. 3a-f). Means of airspeed per flight were collated, and a median of these airspeeds was used as an individual's preferred speed (Fig. 3e). A mean was used for the intra-flight (per flight) speed data as initial observations of the speed frequency histograms across individual flights yielded both long and short tailed distributions, which mean-averages more accurately estimate (Fay & Gerow, 2013). Capturing long and short-tails is important when estimating energetic costs and speed capability. For example, medians will omit data for extreme bursts of speed which might be characteristic of an individual and which likely have a very high cost (Tobalske et al., 2003); mean averages, on the other hand use all the data in the estimate. We did, however, run all statistical models using medians instead of means (these statistics are reported in Table A2). The median of inter-flight speeds was chosen to remove erroneous airspeeds, for example, a reading of approximately 31.5m/s was observed for each individual in group 2 from their ninth group flight; this is more than twice a normal airspeed estimate for that group (13.9m/s). The weather station may have picked up large gusts and distorted airspeed estimates in some cases. See *Appendix* for additional methods on how airspeed was calculated in solo and group flight contexts.

Despite a staggered group/solo flight protocol as a control, support winds (*Appendix*) were stronger for group flights (Fig. A2a). This further justifies our use of airspeed – a measure which controls for differences in wind parameters – in the final analysis (see further investigation into the impact of these support wind deviations and further information regarding our release protocol in *Appendix*).

Statistics

For our statistical analysis we firstly we needed to account for the differences in airspeed across the two groups (Fig. 3e; Fig. A3), likely caused by the differences in support-wind commensurate with each release direction (see discussion in *Appendix*). Our questions were not related to actual flight speeds, only relative to the group speed. At first, both groups were treated individually to test for outliers which may skew the results. Individual “P” (see Fig. 3e) held significant influence over the direction of the predicted linear model: Cook’s-D = 1.11, which is over the generally accepted thresholds *i*) $3 * \text{mean of Cook’s-D}$: 0.38, and *ii*) a score of over 1.00 (Kim & Storer, 1996). Following the removal of this individual, we found no difference between the gradient of the two groups’ slopes for individual speed (ANCOVA; $N = 2$, $F_1 = 0.07$, $P = 0.80$); as expected significant differences were found between the intercepts (ANOVA; $N = 2$, $F_1 = 491.5$, $P < 0.001$). Had this individual not been removed from the data, the direction or significance values of the ANOVA slope and intercept did not change (see: Table A2 for the summary statistics from each model where this individual was not removed). Therefore, both groups were included together in our models to test our two key questions, *1*) whether body mass predicts preferred solo flight speed, and *2*) how divergence from mean body mass (mass residual) impacts speed compromise within groups (see Fig 1.).

First, whether mass predicts speed was run both as a linear model (on median of airspeeds for each individual) ($N = 16$ individuals) but also as a mixed model including a data point for each flight ($N = 299$ flight trajectories). In this latter model we used ground speed as the dependent variable; bird mass, support-wind component and cross-wind component,

flight order and sex as fixed factors; and group ID and pigeon ID as random factors. Ground speed, and not airspeed, was used because support wind and crosswind – both used in the airspeed calculation – are present in the model. The resulting model had normally distributed residuals (Fig. A4).

To test the second set of predictions (see Fig. 1c; i.e. identifying which individuals compromise least to fly as a flock), we ran a comparison of a linear fit of absolute speed compromise against mass (relative to mean mass), with a linear model with an anchor at zero (mean mass; Fig 1C). If a linear fit predicts speed compromise, this will suggest that heavy or light individuals were compromising the least (if the slope of the model is negative or positive respectively; Fig. 1c). If, however, a linear model does not explain the relationship, whereas the model with an anchor does, then we have evidence that birds closer to the mean mass compromise less on speed in flock flight (Fig. 1c). This conclusion can only be reached if the two slopes on the anchor model are negative and positive respectively, forming a “V” shape (Fig 1c); showing that greater deviance from mean mass necessitates larger compromises to remain cohesive. We also ran a linear model on speed compromise against absolute divergence from mean mass, post-hoc, as this may be more intuitive given our eventual findings (see *Results*). Linear mixed models could not be run on these data, as the hypothesis requires that data are transformed to absolute values. This would require transforming some of the data, but not others, which violates the requirements of the mixed models. This is an interesting challenge for statistics, specifically using mixed models on absolute data.

We were also able to estimate the increased work rate from flying in a flock compared with flying solo. Using the intercept of our constructed power curves with theoretical flock speed $S_{\text{flock theor.}}$ for each individual, we then fitted a second order polynomial of work-rate as a function of mass to these data, to examine whether deviations in mass could have superlinear impact on work-rate in our flocks. Statistics, as well as all data manipulation processes were conducted in R version 3.4.3 (R Core Team., 2017). All statistical test values reported are from two-tailed tests.

Ethical note

Experimental protocols were approved by Royal Holloway University of London Ethical Review Board.

Results

The observed relationship between individual body mass and preferred solo speed was positive and linear (Fig. 4a-d; model 1: per individual – airspeed – LM: $N = 15$, $t_{13} = 5.28$, $R^2 = 0.68$, $P < 0.001$; model 2: per flight – ground speed with wind covariates – LMM: $N = 299$, $t = 3.25$, $CI = [0.006, 0.024]$), which is consistent with our predictions (Fig 1b), and follows the same pattern predicted by our theoretical estimates (Heerenbrink et al., 2015) (Fig. 2b; LM; $N = 15$, $t_{13} = 5.46$, $P < 0.001$). Support wind, and flight order were also significant predictors of flight speed (LMM: $N = 299$, support wind: $t = 2.58$, $CI = [0.023,$

0.160], flight order: $t = 3.00$, $CI = [0.024, 0.117]$), This was unlike morphometrics (Alerstam et al., 2007), and cross winds which had no significant predictive power of the birds' flight speeds (tarsus length, LM: $N = 15$, $t_{13} = 1.61$, $P = 0.13$; wing area, LM: $N = 15$, $t_{13} = -0.05$, $P = 0.96$; cross winds, LMM: $N = 299$, $t = -0.67$, $CI = [-0.147, 0.072]$).

Heavier individuals (~500g) slowed down by as much as 1.4m/s compared to their preferred solo flight speed; from 15.5m/s to 14.1m/s. Similarly, lighter individuals (~380g) sped up to maintain group cohesion, with a maximum flight speed increase of 1.5m/s from their preferred solo speed (see Fig. 3e for full range of flying speeds). The closer an individual pigeon was to the mean body mass of the group, the closer they flew to their usual preferred solo speed (Fig. 5a; LM: $N = 15$, $f_{2, 12} = 13.49$; $R^2 = 0.64$, $P < 0.001$; see Table A2 for output statistics with modified analysis methods). The slope of the model for values below the mean mass was negative ($t = -5.09$, $p < 0.001$), and was positive for values above the mean mass ($t = 4.959$, $p < 0.001$), which creates the characteristic “V” shape (Fig. 5a). This matches the prediction that intermediate individuals compromise on speed the least (Fig. 1c). Table A3 shows that under each change to the analysis methods, the “V” shape persists. The overall relationship held when considering just females (LM: $N = 8$, $F_{2, 5} = 16.34$, $R^2 = 0.81$, $P < 0.01$) but was not statistically significant for just males (LM: $N = 7$, $F_{2, 4} = 5.85$, $R^2 = 0.62$, $P = 0.06$).

Heavier individuals, although faster in solo flights, were not faster in a group flight context (LMM: $N = 267$, $t = 0.029$, $CI = [-0.060, 0.062]$). Individual distance in-front/behind the

flock (relative to the centre of mass of the flock; *Appendix*) could not be predicted from individual solo speed or body mass (speed, LM: $N = 16$, $t_{14} = -0.31$, $P = 0.76$; mass, LM: $N = 16$, $t_{14} = 0.35$, $P = 0.73$).

Our estimates of theoretical work-rate show a significant minimum work rate for birds which weigh at around 430g (Fig. 4c; second order polynomial regression; $N = 15$, $t_{12} = 6.93$, $P < 0.001$). Birds which are heavier or lighter than this minimum are thus likely to expend more energy per unit time at the group's observed speeds.

Discussion

To maintain group cohesion, heavier individuals slowed down, lighter individuals sped up, and intermediate mass individuals flew closer to their usual and presumably optimal flight speeds (Alerstam et al., 2007; Hedenström & Alerstam, 1996). Speed compromise for birds in-between these extremes could be predicted by a linear relationship (see *Results*). The “Goldilocks principle” (named after Robert Southey’s classic fairy tale in which the protagonist – Goldilocks – finds a group of bear character’s food and sleeping arrangements to be “just right” at intermediate and not extreme ends of a spectrum (Zalasiewicz & Williams, 2012)) has been used as an analogy in various fields of science to highlight the benefits of intermediate qualities (Kagan, 1990; Zalasiewicz & Williams, 2012). For example, in astrophysics, it is used to quantify habitable areas that are neither too far from and nor too close to the sun to support life (Zalasiewicz & Williams, 2012); in developmental psychology, rate of learning is thought to be maximized by educational

material that is neither too difficult nor too easy (Kagan, 1990). Here, we adopt the term for use in collective animal movement, where the consensus outcome is favourable for intermediate individuals across any continuum of phenotypic measurement. For example body mass, but equally, potentially other behavioural (Sasaki et al., 2018), morphological (King et al., 2008), or physiological (Fischhoff et al., 2007) traits.

An averaging of speed preferences will minimise extreme speed compromises, and hence large increases in work rate associated with large speed adjustments (Fig. 1, 4c). This strategy may, therefore, reduce the likelihood of group fission (particularly by individuals with extreme values for preferred speed who might otherwise be unable or too fatigued to remain cohesive). Reduced group fission will result in larger group sizes, believed to help maximize selective benefits such as protection from predators (Conradt & Roper, 2003) and homing accuracy (Biro et al., 2006; Dell'Arciccia et al., 2008), though interestingly not the costs of locomotion in pigeons (Usherwood et al., 2011). Therefore, travelling at potentially compromised speeds with the group – rather than risking flying solo at a different, but energetically favourable speed – could maximize the benefits for each individual in the collective (Conradt & Roper, 2003, 2009).

While an averaging of speed may represent a parsimonious overall strategy for all group members, intermediate group flight speeds are intrinsically likely to best suit individuals of an intermediate body mass (Fig. 5a). Thus, although speed compromise increases linearly for larger/smaller individuals (Fig. 5a), the energetic cost of compromise may follow a superlinear pattern (Fig. 4c). The predicted difference in work rate in our flock

was just under 0.02 J/s for both the largest and smallest individuals in the group. Over the course of a long duration flight, particularly for species which migrate in groups, this could have significant impacts on the costs of flight, and the fitness of the individuals which pay this cost of compromise (Flack et al., 2018; Hedenström & Åkesson, 2017a).

The models which predict U-shaped power curves, while the best supported (Heerenbrink et al., 2015; Pennycuick, 1968; Tobalske et al., 2003), are contested by some findings (e.g. Johansson et al., 2018; Torre-Bueno & Larochelle, 1978). These latter studies suggest – at least in some species – that for intermediate flight speeds, flight costs remain relatively stable (Johansson et al., 2018; Torre-Bueno & Larochelle, 1978). Nevertheless, most studies demonstrating flat power output only measure a speed range of ~5m/s, and increases in energetic costs would still be likely for extreme speed changes (Engel et al., 2010). If the hypothesis that energetic costs are relatively flat at intermediate speeds is correct (and assuming all adult members of the same species fly within these bounds), this would still not rule out the potential usefulness of the present work in predicting the composition of mixed-species, or mixed-age flocks. In the sea, fish are often found to be cohesive with others which are orders of magnitude larger (e.g. some species of shark and pilot fish travel together for mutual benefit (Magnuson & Gooding, 1971), and this is not found in birds, which could be due to differences in speed optima (which are largely governed by mass (Alerstam et al., 2007)). Altogether, the most up-to-date evidence suggests there is *i*) likely an energetic cost (albeit potentially small) to pigeons which compromise on speed to fly in a flock, and *ii*) that despite the contention between

competing flight-cost hypotheses, our conceptual advance remains potentially powerful as a tool to help explain group composition.

There is strong evidence, given the number of solo flights ($N = 299$) in our multi-variate model, that female pigeons were not slower than the males, despite having significantly lower body mass (sexual dimorphism). Both sexes were still estimated to compromise more at greater deviances from the mean mass of the group, although not significantly in the case of males. With only eight males and eight females in our study, this latter result would require further testing to come to any strong conclusions. Given no observable sex differences in solo speed, an argument for speed compromise as a mechanism to remain cohesive with the opposite-sex seems unlikely at this stage.

The predicted increase in power output for birds of different body masses is only valid if the assumption – that pigeons were flying at the speed of minimum power (V_{mp}) when flying solo – is correct. Theoretical estimates of V_{mp} (Heerenbrink et al., 2015) range from 10.0 to 11.0m/s (Fig. 2a), which are similar to estimates from multiple wind tunnel experiments (approximately 11m/s) (reviewed in Butler, 2016). However, two field studies which measured energetic proxies in free-flying pigeons showed a minima in a work-rate proxy (flap frequency) close to 14.5m/s (Usherwood et al., 2011) and 21.5m/s (L. A Taylor et al., 2017) respectively, which strongly suggests optimum speeds (e.g. V_{mp}) will be at greater values than those predicted by the models. Our observed airspeeds – which varied from 8.4 to 23.9m/s (mean = 15.8; data from all solo flights) – are more consistent with these latter, field studies. While these findings make our assumptions broadly applicable,

there is insufficient evidence of whether the birds are flying at either V_{mp} or V_{mr} (maximum range speed). Further investigation into the aerodynamics of free flying birds is necessary to elucidate the costs of flight in free-flying conditions, as well as any differences between a solo and group flying context (but see 50). Despite the paucity of current knowledge in a free-flying context, we have noteworthy evidence that intermediates have reduced energetic cost when flying in average-speed flocks. If pigeons were flying at their maximum range speed (V_{mr}), intermediates would still benefit from the Goldilocks principle, albeit in terms of optimizing their distance per unit energy, rather than energy per unit time (Hedenström & Ålerstam, 1996).

To further consider how group speed is governed and maintained, i.e. whether the consensus is shared or unshared, it is worth noting that unshared consensus – dictated by intermediates – while potentially less intuitive than a shared consensus, cannot be ruled out in the present study. In migrating birds, greater group speeds were found in larger groups in three species of migrating birds (Eurasian oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus*, red knots, *Calidris canutus*, and dunlin, *Calidris alpina*) (Hedenström & Åkesson, 2017a). This suggests that in these species, larger and/or heavier (and therefore possibly faster) individuals were setting the pace (Hedenström & Åkesson, 2017b). Disproportionate influence has also been found in pigeons regarding flight direction consensus; here, faster homing pigeons were shown to have a greater impact on group navigational decisions, suggesting an unshared consensus system (Pettit et al., 2015). To determine whether each individual contributes to flock speed, or whether the decision is under majority control (Strandburg-Peshkin et al., 2015), future work should focus on manipulations of the group

phenotypic composition, specifically modifying the group's mass/speed distribution. Moving forward, teasing apart whether apparently "shared" decisions actually reflect "leadership" from intermediates will be a challenging but insightful avenue for further research across all modes of collective decision making (i.e. speed, direction and timing). Testing predictions from evolutionary collective decision-making models (e.g. Conradt & Roper, 2010) may aid future research on this topic.

Local "interaction rules" which are commonplace in the collective behaviour literature could account for average speeds. Here, animals are hypothesised to respond to neighbours according to their absolute or relative distance by either *i*) moving closer to (at further distances), *ii*) moving away from (at close distances), or *iii*) aligning with (at intermediate distances) them (Couzin et al., 2002). Potentially, slower individuals will not fall out behind (unless they cannot physically keep up), as they will be attracted back towards the flock by these social forces, despite the increased energetic cost (Herbert-Read et al., 2011; Jolles et al., 2017; Katz et al., 2011). Likewise, for faster individuals, as their distance in front of the flock starts to increase, interaction rules may govern a deceleration response which keeps the individual close to the group (Jolles et al., 2017). Indeed, agent based models, which replicate flocking behaviour by incorporating these rules, already implicitly assume a sharing of speed preferences – "agents" average the movement vector (direction/speed) of their neighbours (Couzin et al., 2002; Jolles et al., 2017). Using this logic, we expected to find heavier and/or faster individuals clustered at the front of the flock (as was found in modelling studies: Couzin et al., 2002; Jolles et al., 2017). However

this this was not the case in our empirical data, which implies that model assumptions in this area may need to be tested and updated, at least in the case of flocking birds.

Using pairs of pigeons, Pettit *et al.* (2013) found interaction rules were mediated by turning responses, not acceleration/deceleration. This suggests a scenario whereby all individuals could fly at their preferred speeds – with faster individuals taking more tortuous trajectories – and the group remaining cohesive regardless. However, if this were the case, heavier individuals should have faster speeds from flights in a group context too, which was not observed. The exact mechanism governing speed averaging, therefore, remains elusive. Nevertheless, given the success of simulations based on interaction rules to predict the qualitative (Couzin *et al.*, 2002; Sumpter *et al.*, 2012) and quantitative (Herbert-Read *et al.*, 2011; Katz *et al.*, 2011) aspects of other components of collective movement, more rigorous testing of this hypothesis would be beneficial.

Several questions emerge from our arguments. Firstly, we know from previous work that pigeons pay an extra energetic cost when flying in a flock above the cost of flying solo (Lucy A Taylor *et al.*, 2019). Unlike in V-formation flocks – where aerodynamic up-wash from neighboring birds can be utilized via effective positioning and flap phasing to save energy (Portugal *et al.*, 2014) – cluster flocking birds like pigeons are thought to either experience more unpredictable air environments (Usherwood *et al.*, 2011), or need greater control to avoid collisions and stay cohesive (Lucy A Taylor *et al.*, 2019; Usherwood *et al.*, 2011). It seems likely that the effects of speed compromise and flying in a flock are additive, i.e. compromising comes at a cost, as does flying in a flock, and these costs are

summed. Nonetheless, there could also be an interaction, whereby some individuals can offset some of the cost through behavioural adjustments. Flying at the front of the flock, for example, has been shown to offset energetic costs (Usherwood et al., 2011). A second question which has arisen is how speed compromise plays out on a moment-to-moment basis. Our work looks at the average speed of individuals and groups, which gives us a broad understanding of the overall costs speed consensus, though the phenomenon is dynamic. It is actually possible for individuals to have the same average speed but nevertheless split due to individual differences in intra-flight speed distributions. Both these questions are logical starting points for future investigation into speed consensus.

The present study represents a foundation for the investigation of individual- and group-level mechanisms which influence the determinants and consequences of group-speed, applicable not only to birds but also, more broadly, to comparisons of animal groups across taxa. Terrestrial animals, which are not in persistent motion when travelling – and for which locomotion is less costly (Schmidt-Nielsen, 1972) – may make trade-offs in terms of minimising overall time to reach a given destination rather than moment-by-moment optimisation of energy expenditure. The problem of “how fast to travel?” is likely to generate conflicts of interest in any given animal group, owing to the intrinsic heterogeneity of group living animals across multiple taxa (e.g. Johnston, 1990; McFarlane et al., 2016; Pruitt & Riechert, 2011). Questions such as, 1) how different species solve this problem, 2) whether inter or intra-specific differences in preferred speeds play a role in the composition or spatial distribution of groups, and 3) at what levels of conflict compromise

becomes unattainable (resulting in group fission), provide exciting novel avenues for further research.

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Appendix

Morphological Measurements

Body mass measurements (total = 12 per bird) were taken biweekly throughout the study period (three months – June-August 2017), using scales (CoffeeHit: Coffee Gear Digital Bench Scale – 2kg/0.1g limit/accuracy). A mean of all body mass measurements were used for analysis. Mean body mass (g) was likely a reliable indicator of body mass overall, as mass was significantly repeatable ($r = 0.76$, 95% CI = [0.54, 0.85], $P < 0.001$). We used likelihood ratio tests with 10 000 parametric bootstraps to estimate 95% confidence intervals for repeatability. The repeatability was even more pronounced when individual bird mass was compared with the mean mass of the group on a given weighing session (i.e. removing temporal fluctuations; $r = 0.863$, CI = [0.72, 0.92], $P < 0.001$). Altogether, this indicates a high consistency in body mass differences across a group. A measurement of the tarso-metatarsus, and all subsequent morphological measures were taken on the 22nd of August 2017. A permanent marker was used to draw a dot at the intertarsal joint and the top of the metatarsal pad. Then, using flexible tape measure, the length between the two dots was measured. Using A4 graph paper (0.5cm squares), the outline of the right wing of each was drawn with pencil. The squares were counted and converted into cm² which gave an approximation of the area of one wing (following (Pennycuick, 1969). Additionally, to calculate the body area, the width of the bird's body was measured, and multiplied by the root chord (the width at the base of the measured wing). Twice the area of the right wing, plus the body area was given as an estimate for each bird's wing area (Pennycuick, 1989). Two separate measurements of the birds' wing lengths were taken. First, using a flexible

tape measure, we measured from the glenoid fossa to the end of the furthest reaching primary feather. Additionally, we measured wing length from our outline sketch of each wing (above). A mean average of the two measurements was used in analyses.

Additional release protocol information

The birds were transported (usually in transit for less than 20 minutes) in a wicker pigeon racing box (80cm x 40 cm x 22cm). Upon returning to the loft, the loggers were retrieved from the birds, and data inspected via Google Earth™ to check for any logger malfunctions. No releases were conducted in rainy conditions, when cloud cover was over 50%, or at wind speeds of over 7 m/s. Nonetheless, despite this latter criterion, some greater wind speeds were recorded (see Airspeed) if the wind increased after the start of the experiment (after leaving the home loft). Birds were released as early as 6:00AM and as late as 2 hours before sunset (date-dependent). The maximum number of releases per day was three from 5km sites, and two from 9km sites.

At the release site, the birds were released in the order they were randomly selected from the box. A minimum seven-minute interval between solo releases was used to reduce the chance of birds pairing up. This period was extended if the previously released bird was still in sight. During group releases, the side hatch to the wicker box was opened, allowing all birds to fly out at once.

Ground speed calculation

The equation used to calculate instantaneous ground speed (S m/s) for each timestamp (t Hz) is as follows:

$$a = \sin\left(\frac{(x_2-x_1) \times \frac{\pi}{180}}{2}\right)^2 + \cos(y_2) + \cos(y_1) + \sin\left(\frac{(y_2-y_1) \times \frac{\pi}{180}}{2}\right)^2 \quad (1)$$

$$S_{t1} \left(\frac{m}{s}\right) = Hz(1/s) \times R(m) \times 2 \times \text{atan2}(\sqrt{a}, \sqrt{1-a}) \quad (2)$$

Where x_2 is longitude at $t=1$; x_1 is longitude at $t=-1$; y_2 is latitude at $t=1$; y_1 is latitude at $t=-1$; R is the estimated radius of the earth in metres: 63710000 (Bullard, 1948) and Hz is number of GPS fixes per second. We verified the equations by estimating the distance between one of the release sites in the study (N5), and the home loft (= 4.54 km) and comparing with an estimate from Google Maps© (= 4.44 km). The difference between these estimates was small (2.2%).

Wind Data

For the calculation of airspeed, wind data was recorded using an Aercus Instruments WS2083 Pro Wireless Weather Station (Greenfrog Scientific, Doncaster, U.K.). The device was positioned at the university building next to the home loft (Longitude = -0.5726, Latitude = 51.4154; height = 7.84 metres from the ground) provided a reading of wind bearing (± 22.5 degrees), and wind speed (accuracy ± 0.1 m/s) every half an hour during the study period. For each flight, the first reading of the individual's timestamp from the GPS (after the first 1000 m from the release site had been removed from the trajectory) was chosen as the time point to integrate with wind data.

Airspeed

Airspeed was calculated using the following steps: Firstly, the difference between *i*) the wind direction (above) and *ii*) the heading from the bird's track (Nagy et al., 2010) was calculated. Then, by integrating wind speed, a cross-wind, and support-wind could be estimated for each time-step. Finally, combining estimates for cross-wind and support-wind with ground speed (for ground speed see Eq.1 and 2 in *Appendix*) at each time-step provided an estimate of how much of the observed ground speed was due to wind, and how much was the flight of the bird (airspeed).

For each bird on each flight, a mean of airspeed (for air speeds of over 4.5 m/s – the chosen parameter for identifying stationary birds) was recorded. Airspeeds of less than 4.5 m/s were considered stationary as this was the midpoint between a fast on-the-ground pace (1 m/s) (Fujita, 2002) and the lowest horizontal flapping flight airspeeds recorded from two wind tunnel experiments (8 m/s) (38, 71, also see 43 for a synthesis of these earlier works and others).

Group Airspeed

Centroid ground speed was converted to airspeed, as in the previous section, but gave qualitatively similar estimates to a simple median of all individual's airspeeds from a group flight context (data in Fig. 3c). For group 1 and 2 respectively, the median of centroid airspeeds were 13.91 m/s (SD = 4.66) and 17.56 m/s (SD = 3.35) ($N = 16$ and $N = 16$) and the median from all individual flights in a group context were 13.90 m/s (SD = 3.10) and

17.74 m/s (SD = 1.92) ($N=117$ and $N = 150$; Fig. 3c). The similarity of these values is compatible with the finding that fission was rare (fission % per flight: median = 0%, mean = 7%; across all individuals/flights; *Appendix*).

Data Drop-Out

The first four releases were not recorded with GPS. Instead, dummy loggers were attached to habituate the birds to the increased mass load ($N = 64$ flights; 4 flights x 16 birds). This was due to an increased risk of losing birds in the first few releases. Other GPS data were lost due to logger failure ($N = 35$), and 10 flights were lost as two pigeons developed symptoms of canker (watery eyes and raspy breathing) and thus were quarantined and treated (five flights of data were missing per affected bird). Once symptoms were absent, and birds were flying circles around the home loft, they were re-introduced back into the group, and the study. In the case of solo flights, data were removed from further analysis if individuals paired up and flew together despite the interval of time left between releases ($N = 85$; 13.8% of all solo flights). The criterion for exclusion was that birds flew together (distance <50m) (Pettit et al., 2015) for more than 5% of the homing flight. Other files were lost if the battery ran out before the pigeon returned home ($N = 8$). The total flights ($N = 768$) minus the missing flights ($64 + 45 + 85 + 8$) left 566 flights in total: 299 solo and 267 group flights, respectively. The final number of flights per individual is documented in Table A1.

There was also the drop out of GPS data from individual timestamps, rather than a whole corrupt file. In these cases, rather than interpolate from data before and after the missing

rows due to possible measurement error, we left such rows blank. Other data processing included trimming the data from the start and end of each trajectory at distances 1000m from release site and from the home loft. This process removes unwanted speeds from both climbing and descent at the start and end of the flight respectively (following Taylor et al., 2017).

Release Site Distance

Release sites at two different distances (5km and 9km) were chosen to investigate any potential impact of site distance on flight speed, and to avoid over-familiarising birds to one site (which can have an impact on airspeed; Taylor et al., 2017). There was a small decrease in airspeed with increasing distance (from a mean of 16.20m/s from 5km release sites to 15.7m/s from 9km sites), though this result was not statistically significant (t -test; $N = 566$; $t = 1.69$, $df = 559.61$, $P = 0.09$). As the flight release treatment was the same across both groups (Table 1), we included airspeeds from both release distances as equal in our results statistics.

Support-wind Deviations in Solo/Group Flights

Despite our efforts to control for potential temporal differences in wind speed and direction (Table 1) there was a statistically significant deviation in the support-wind component (for calculation and methods. See *Airspeed* in main text) between solo and group flights (solo $N = 267$, group $N = 384$, $t = 3.38$, $df = 443.43$, $P < 0.001$; Fig. A2a), with groups, on average, experiencing a greater support wind (median = 0.23m/s) than solo individuals (median = -0.29m/s; negative support winds are head winds). As airspeed and support

winds were strongly negatively correlated (LM; $N = 566$, $t = -17.42$, $df = 531$, $P < 0.001$; Fig. A2b), we took the median value of support-wind for each condition (i.e. group or solo) and used the linear model to interpret what the extent of this deviation in support-wind would be, in terms of m/s (0.344m/s; Fig. A2b). We added this value to all solo flight speeds and re-performed the main analysis. As the effect size of the deviation in wind-support component was small, the resulting re-analysis of speed compromise and mass deviation (from Fig. 2d) was similar (LM; $N = 15$, $t = 2.68$, $df = 13$, $P = 0.019$). Therefore, we have not included this speed modification in our final regression. See Table A2 for all resulting statistics if we has not.

Centroid and Fission analysis

Fission. In order to identify fission events, the centroid of the group was identified through a multi-step process Firstly, the mean of each individual's longitude and latitude was taken as a preliminary centroid, then if any individuals were outside a radius of 50m to the centroid, the furthest individual was removed for that time-step. The centroid was then recalculated and the process repeated. The reason one individual needed to be removed at a time was owing to the case of fission, whereby the centroid of the initial "group", could actually lie outside of the group itself. For example, if one individual in a group of five splits from the group and was 1km away at a given time step, the identified "centroid" would be placed 200m away from the actual group. Subsequently, all individuals would meet the threshold for having undergone fission. Therefore, it is important, if using this method, to remove one individual (the furthest individual) at a time and re-calculate the centroid, in a jack-knife fashion (Portugal et al., 2014). Fission was comparatively rare

(median proportion of time split from the group per flight was 0% and the mean was 7% across all individuals). An ANOVA of fission data revealed no inter-individual consistent differences in fission propensity (group 1: $N = 118$, $df = 115$; $F = 2.08$; $P = 0.15$; group 2: $N = 145$, $df = 142$, $F = 0.39$, $P = 0.53$).

Distance in front/behind centroid. To attain each bird's relative distance in front/behind the group, with respect to the centroid, individual heading, relative to group heading, was attained (following Nagy et al., 2010). Then using a cosine of the individual relative heading multiplied by the distance to the centroid, we calculated relative position on a front/back (cranio-caudal) axis for each pigeon at each time step (5Hz).

Intergroup differences in airspeed

For our statistics, we needed to account for the intergroup difference in airspeeds (t -test; $t = 10.53$, $df = 507.39$, $P < 0.001$). We reason this may have been due to a prevailing easterly wind direction (circular mean = 1.02 rad; observed from our weather station) in Surrey and west London (also documented in Lee, 1977). The extent of which, may not have been fully captured by our weather station (and hence airspeed). Group 2, flying against the prevailing wind direction (group 2 sites: E5 = 0.79 rad and E9 = 0.87 rad), had lower overall airspeeds than group 1 (group 1 sites: N5 = -0.14 rad and N9 = -0.07 rad) when comparing all observed flights (Fig. 3c; t -test, group 1: $N = 276$; group 2: $N = 257$; $t = 10.53$, $df = 507.39$, $P < 0.001$).

Additional models

Our per-individual model of how divergence from mean mass of the group affects the compromise our birds made to fly in a flock was treated in three ways. Firstly, using all individuals, but also using just lighter individuals (LM: $N = 9$, $df = 7$, $t = 4.10$, $R^2 = 0.66$, $P < 0.01$) and just heavier individuals (LM: $N = 6$, $df = 4$, $t = 6.75$, $R^2 = 0.90$, $P < 0.01$) as confirmatory analyses.

We treated the other morphological covariates (tarso-metatarsus, length and wing span) in the same fashion and found no interaction with group number (ANCOVA; tarso-metatarsus length: $F = 0.84$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.38$; wing span: $F = 0.46$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.51$). Thus, intergroup comparison was also possible with these morphological covariates.

Tables

Table 1. Release order, and number of flights from each of the homing pigeon release sites.

Site	Condition	No. flights	Dates
N5/E5	Solo	12	1 Jun 2017– 30 Jun 2017
N5/E5	Group	6	1 Jul 2017 – 7 Jul 2017
N9/E9	Solo	12	7 Jul 2017 – 17 Jul 2017
N9/E9	Group	6	17 Jul 2017 – 25 Jul 2017
N5/E5	Solo	3	11 Aug 2017 – 13 Aug 2017
N5/E5	Group	3	14 Aug 2017 – 17 Aug 2017
N9/E9	Solo	3	18 Aug 2017 – 20 Aug 2017

Group 1 were consistently released from a northerly bearing (sites N5 and N9), and group 2 were released from easterly sites (E5 and E9). The numerical value in the site names represents approximate distance; actual distances were N5 = 4.54km, N9 = 8.90km, E5 = 5, and E9 = 9.10km. The alphabetic character of site names represents bearing; actual site bearings were N5 = -0.14 rad, N9 = -0.07 rad, E5 = 0.79 rad, and E9 = 0.87 rad. Condition – either solo or group – refers to whether the birds were released alone or in their respective groups. Dates of each phase of the study are provided also.

Table A1. Total usable flights for solo flights and group flights per individual.

Pigeon	Group Number	number of usable Solo flights	number of usable Group flights
32	1	23	18
39	1	22	15
55	1	24	14
56	1	22	17
58	1	21	18
59	1	23	17
81	1	24	18
46	2	21	17
47	2	13	17
53	2	16	18
67	2	17	11
69	2	18	17
74	2	23	18
76	2	7	18
78	2	10	16
95	2	15	18

Total number of flights was 30 solo and 18 group, though data are missing due to any of the following reasons: 1) First flights not recorded with biologgers, 2) logger failure, 3) temporary disease, 4) paired flight, 5) flight took longer than battery length.

Table A2. Statistics: different outcomes for each model under a range of changes to the analytical methods.

	Standard methods			Individual speeds			Remove individuals using Cook's distance			Remove first six flights			Add solo-group differences in wind support			Median instead of mean		
	R ²	T or (F)	P-value [or CI]	R ²	T or (F)	P-value [or CI]	R ²	T or (F)	P-value [or CI]	R ²	T or (F)	P-value [or CI]	R ²	T or (F)	P-value [or CI]	R ²	T or (F)	P-value [or CI]
Slope ANO	0.147	(0.269)	0.614	0.147	(0.269)	0.614	0.147	(0.498)	0.494	0.139	(0.065)	0.803	0.147	(0.269)	0.614	0.117	(0.25)	0.627
Int. ANO	0.147	(287.42)	<0.001	0.147	(287.42)	<0.001	0.147	(178.365)	<0.001	0.139	(491.5)	<0.001	0.147	(287.42)	<0.001	0.117	(740.812)	<0.001
lm: sp. vs mass	0.682	5.284	<0.001	0.64	4.81	<0.001	0.585	4.446	0.001	0.744	6.15	<0.001	0.694	5.433	<0.001	0.605	4.459	0.001
lm: sp. comp. vs mass. resid	0.674	5.179	<0.001	0.569	4.142	0.001	0.313	2.525	0.024	0.466	3.371	0.005	0.357	2.684	0.019	0.303	2.376	0.034
2nd order poly. work vs mass	0.827	7.409	<0.001	0.827	7.409	<0.001	0.363	2.38	0.033	0.827	7.409	<0.001	0.827	7.409	<0.001	0.827	7.409	<0.001
lmm: sp. vs mass	0.744	4.274	[0.008 0.023]	0.744	4.274	[0.008 0.023]	0.745	4.568	[0.009 0.023]	0.744	4.274	[0.008 0.023]	0.744	4.274	[0.008 0.023]	0.744	4.274	[0.008 0.023]
Anchor model	0.692	(13.489)	0.001	0.748	(17.801)	<0.001	0.313	(2.961)	0.087	0.457	(5.052)	0.026	0.646	(10.97)	0.002	0.555	(7.487)	0.008
Linear model	0.061	-0.921	0.374	0.189	-1.739	0.106	0.001	0.134	0.895	0.018	0.495	0.629	0.287	-2.287	0.04	0.217	-1.897	0.08

R², T values (or F values if given in brackets) and *p*-values [or CI if given in square brackets] are given for each model, and for each iteration of the main methodology as follows (from left to right). “Standard methods” is the base methodology, as justified in *Materials and Methods*. “Individual speeds”, gives group speed as calculated from each individual trajectory instead of from the centroid speed. “Remove individuals using Cook’s distance” refers to removing those which exceed the chosen parameter – 3 * mean Cook’s distance. Note here that this is one of the only two methodological changes which changed the significance of any model (here the Anchor model), where the *p*-value rises to *p*=0.082. “Remove first six flights” takes data from only after the sixth flight from each

site (to help control for familiarity). “Add solo-group differences in wind support” accounts for the observed variation in wind condition between release conditions (not used in the standard methods because using airspeed – as opposed to ground speed - already accounts for much of this variation. Additionally, airspeed uses wind parameters in the calculation. This pseudo-replication is why a change in one summary statistic (for Linear model), is not interpreted further. Finally “median instead of mean” uses median values of speed per flight trajectory rather than mean values. Statistics are provided for the following models: 1) Slope of ANOVA (Slope ANOVA); 2) Intercept of ANOVA (Int. ANOVA); 3) Linear model: speed vs mass (lm: sp. vs mass); 4) Linear model: speed compromise vs mass residual (lm: sp. comp. vs mass resid.); 5) 2nd order polynomial – work-rate vs mass (2nd order poly. work vs mass); 6) Linear mixed model: speed vs mass (lmm: sp. vs mass). Linear model between speed compromise and mass residual are given in 7) Anchor model – where an anchor was specified at $x = 0$ (mean mass), and 8) Linear model of the same data (see Fig 5A and Fig 5B respectively). For all models See *Methods*. . *P*-values and confidence intervals (CI) that are significant to 95% confidence are given in **bold**.

1 **Table A3. Anchor model output.**

2

		Estimate	Std.Error	T value	P value
Standard methods	intercept	1.03	0.85	2.64	0.02
	x.minus	-0.08	0.03	-5.09	0.00
	x.plus	0.16	0.05	4.96	0.00
Individual speeds	intercept	0.92	0.80	1.15	0.27
	x.minus	-0.10	0.03	-3.25	0.01
	x.plus	0.17	0.05	3.47	0.00
Remove individuals using Cook's distance	intercept	1.43	1.35	1.06	0.31
	x.minus	-0.06	0.05	-1.29	0.22
	x.plus	0.17	0.08	2.06	0.06
Remove first six flights	intercept	1.44	0.54	1.22	0.25
	x.minus	-0.10	0.02	-2.42	0.03
	x.plus	0.17	0.03	3.11	0.01
Add solo-group differences in wind support	intercept	0.52	0.71	0.73	0.48
	x.minus	-0.14	0.03	-5.25	0.00
	x.plus	0.20	0.04	4.54	0.00
Median instead of mean	intercept	1.57	0.80	1.97	0.07
	x.minus	-0.11	0.03	-3.81	0.00
	x.plus	0.15	0.05	3.02	0.01

3

4

5 Linear model output from each change to the analysis methods (see Figure 5A) All slopes for
6 mass values below the mean have negative slopes; all slopes for values above the mean have
7 positive slopes, indicating that each model shows a characteristic “V” shape as seen in Fig. 1
8 (main text). All significant *P*-values are **highlighted in bold**, the only *P*-values which did not
9 reach significance were for when the individual was not removed due to the extreme Cook’s
10 distance (see Fig. A5).

11

12

13 **Figure legends**

14 **Figure 1. Concept and hypotheses. (a)** Larger, heavier birds (yellow, through green to purple
15 indicates birds with larger mass and/or structural size; colour scale from Garnier, 2017) are
16 known to have energetic optima at faster speeds than relatively smaller or lighter birds (grey
17 segmented lines from right to left of the x axis – speed) (Tobalske et al., 2003). Birds could
18 split (fission; upper component of figure), and fly solo at energetically optimal (low on
19 energetic costs scale) but opposing speeds. Alternatively, the birds could come to a consensus
20 on travelling speed (consensus; bottom component of panel), and benefit from decreased risk
21 of predation and enhanced navigational efficiency associated with grouping (Krause & Ruxton,
22 2002). Within a consensus context, we provide scenarios where the group travels at preferred
23 speed of the small, the medium and the large bird (from left to right respectively). Energetic
24 cost increases as the deviation from an individual's optimum speed increases, whether flying
25 faster or slower (Hedenström, 2009; Tobalske et al., 2003). Therefore, both large and small
26 individuals would likely pay a large cost to fly at one another's preferred speed (coloured deep
27 red for energetic costs), Flying at preferred speed of medium birds – which is also the result of
28 an averaging of preferences – reduces overall compromise (there are no birds high/red on the
29 energetic costs scale at this intermediate speed). If adopted group-wide, this strategy could
30 reduce the probability of group fission, and hence reduce ultimate costs for each flock member.
31 Predictions of our study are given in (b-c), hypothesis lines are coloured on colour scale
32 corresponding to mass (Garnier, 2017) **(b)** We predicted a positive influence of body mass (x-
33 axis) on speed (y-axis) regardless of the group travelling speed (the first hypothesis; see
34 *Introduction*). **(c)** Second, if the birds do not split, and compromise on speed (the second set of
35 hypotheses), they may fly at the preferred speed of the heaviest or lightest, or average sized
36 individuals. These hypotheses are represented as regression lines: either, straight and
37 increasing/decreasing (where light and heavy individuals have the lowest speed compromise

38 respectively), or with an anchor point at zero (where average mass individuals compromise
39 least). This latter scenario indicates that any divergence from mean mass (either greater or
40 lesser) will have a positive impact on speed compromise. Predicted relationships are shown
41 here as lines for simplicity, however note that linearity is not specifically expected on a
42 theoretical basis

43

44 **Figure 2. Theoretical predictions and observed speeds. (a)** Theoretical relative power output
45 (J/m) for each bird based on morphological metrics (R library “afpt” (Heerenbrink et al., 2015))
46 over a range of flight speeds (m/s). Each individual is represented by a curve (coloured
47 according to increasing mass, colour scale from Garnier, 2017). All curves are transposed on
48 the y-axis about the minimum power speed V_{mp} (minima of each curve) so that relative power
49 output – the extra cost of flying at different, non-optimal speeds – is transposed to equal zero
50 at this point. The mean of minimum power speeds (solid vertical line) is given, as is the
51 theoretical flock speed $S_{flock\ theor.}$. This theoretical flock speed was estimated using the
52 difference (in standard deviations) from *observed* flock speed to the mean of the *observed* solo
53 speeds (see *Methods* for further details). **(b)** Each individual’s predicted speed – speed of
54 minimum power (see *Discussion*) – relative to $S_{flock\ theor.}$ is plotted against the bird’s masses (g).

55

56 **Figure 3. Speed data.** Centroid airspeeds (relative to mean value of speed per flight) (m/s) are
57 represented as frequency histograms **(a-b)** and as speed traces for each group flight (up to a
58 maximum of 600s flight durations) **(c-d)** for groups 1 and 2 respectively. **(e)** Individual
59 airspeeds in solo (orange) and group (purple) contexts, given as box and whisker plots for
60 observed airspeed for pigeons A-P in both solo (orange) and group (purple) context. Pigeons
61 A-G were in group 1 and pigeons H-P were in group 2. Panel **(e)** highlights both *i*) the similarity
62 of speeds in a group flight context, (similar box and whiskers in purple), and *ii*) intergroup

63 differences in speed (group 2 have lower speeds than group 1; see *Discussion*). Birds are
64 ordered firstly by group, and second by increasing mass. **(f)** Combined frequency histogram of
65 group airspeed (from centroid) from (a) and (b). **(g)** Combined frequency histogram for solo
66 airspeeds, following methods used to generate (f).

67

68 **Figure 4. The “Goldilocks” principle in pigeon flocks.** All figure panels identify individuals
69 by mass using colour scale (bottom right; colour scale provided by (Garnier, 2017)). Bird
70 images (bottom left) are both coloured and scaled (using bird mass (g) minus 350, divided by
71 150) according to mass. **(a)** Theoretical predictions (solid lines; R package “afpt” (Heerenbrink
72 et al., 2015)) showing predicted relative work rate (Δ J/s) across a range of flight speeds (%) in
73 the heaviest (purple; $N = 23$ flights), the lightest (yellow; $N = 22$ flights) and the closest-to-the-
74 mean body mass (purple/yellow blend; $N = 21$ flights) individuals. Observed solo speeds,
75 relative to observed flock speed (%) are given as dashed lines (data as in (c)). **(b)** Median
76 observed speed in solo flights (for N flights per individual, see Table A1), expressed as relative
77 (%) to the average observed speed of the flock ($S_{\text{flock obs.}}$; segmented black line, $N = 36$ group
78 flights) for each individual bird used in the analysis. **(c)** Theoretical relative power output at
79 S_{flock} (Δ J/s) against body mass (g) for each pigeon ($N = 15$). This is the intersection of curves
80 and $S_{\text{flock theor.}}$ from (a)). The solid black line is a fitted polynomial regression line. The
81 segmented black line is the mean mass of the birds. **(d)** Speed compromise (absolute value of
82 solo speed, relative to group speed %) vs the divergence from mean mass (absolute difference
83 of an individual’s mass from the mean mass of its respective group, g) for each individual (N
84 = 15). The solid black line is a fitted linear model.

85

86 **Figure 5. Matching predictions to data.** **(a)** Absolute speed compromise (%) against body
87 mass (g), relative to the mean mass of the birds’ respective groups (grey points). Following

88 the rejection of the hypotheses that either heavier or lighter individuals were compromising
89 least (LM: $N = 15$, $F_{2, 12} = -0.92$; $R^2 = 0.06$, $P = 0.37$), a linear model with two slopes and one
90 intercept (see Figure 1C and *Methods*) was fitted to the data (LM: $N = 15$, $F_{2, 12} = 13.49$; $R^2 =$
91 0.64 , $P < 0.001$), and is provided here (solid line). **(b)** Solo speed – given as (%) relative to
92 observed group speed against mass (relative to mean mass). Linear model is fitted to data
93 with 95% confidence intervals using ggplot2 (Kahle & Wickham, 2013). The actual statistical
94 test was a linear mixed model (LMM: $N = 299$, $t = 3.25$, $CI = [0.006, 0.024]$). To keep
95 consistency with our predictions (panel Fig. 1b), we have not included individual data points
96 here. Instead, this variation can be found in Fig. 3e.

97
98
99 **Figure A1.** Satellite image depicting the four release sites (N5, N9, E5, and E9) made with
100 GoogleMaps™. Flight bearing is indicated by the letter (N = north; E = east) and the number
101 indicates approximate distance from home loft (i.e. 5, or 9, in km; accurate distances and more
102 information in main text). Red lines are the trajectories of four solo flights from respective
103 locations (examples selected for directness and clarity). Different release bearings were chosen
104 for each group (group 1: north; group 2: east) to reduce confounding impact of terrain; different
105 distances were chosen to investigate possible impact of distance on flight speed.

106
107 **Figure A2. (a)** Box and whisker plot showing the differences in support wind (m/s; recorded
108 via a weather station: Aercus Instruments WS2083 Pro (Greenfrog Scientific, Doncaster,
109 U.K.), at the home loft: Longitude = -0.5726, Latitude = 51.4154; height = 7.84m from the
110 ground) across group and solo flights. Group flights had greater associated support winds,
111 despite attempts to control for seasonal and temporal differences in weather in the methods **(b)**
112 Airspeed (m/s) against support wind. The linear relationship between the variables (black line)

113 allowed us to interpret the difference (red/blue horizontal lines) that greater support winds (for
114 group flights) might have had using median values of group flight (red vertical line) and solo
115 flight (blue vertical line) support wind. This interpreted difference was 0.344m/s which was
116 added to all solo flight speeds and the main analysis was re-conducted, without finding any
117 difference in the main statistics and thus conclusions.

118 **Figure A3.** Speed (m/s) for each bird (points) against body mass (g) – relative to the mean
119 mass (vertical segmented line) of the group. Linear models are fit using ggplot2 (Wickham &
120 Wickham, 2007). Data points and models are colour coded by group (see key). Upper and lower
121 horizontal segmented lines represent average flock speed for group 1 and group 2 respectively.

122
123 **Figure A4. Normal Quantile-Quantile plot for the linear mixed model.** A close match of
124 our residuals to the quantile-quantile line (qq line) reveals that the variation in speed (dependent
125 variable) is normally distributed around the fitted model line ($N = 299$ speed recordings). There
126 is perhaps evidence of a slight heavy tail (points above qq line in the top right), which would
127 suggest some (roughly 6-10 flights) recordings of speed were relatively high. However, this is
128 a minority of data points (*c.* < 2.5% of total flights)

129
130 **Figure A5. Not removing individual due to extreme Cook's distance.** Output statistics show
131 the linear model for speed compromise (%) over body mass (relative to mean mass), here
132 shown as a red line in **(a)** was not significantly different from a null distribution. This was
133 likely due to the extreme solo speed found for the third heaviest bird, as this individual had an
134 extreme Cook's D (1.11), which is over the generally accepted thresholds *i*) $3 * \text{mean of Cook's-}$
135 $D: 0.38$, and *ii*) a value greater than 1.00 (Kim & Storer, 1996). This causes the qq-plot **(b)** to
136 skew, notice arced shape, with few values below the qq-normal line (dotted line). This means

137 that the assumption of normally distributed residuals (an explicit assumption of linear models)

138 has been violated, and therefore is not an accurate representation of the data.

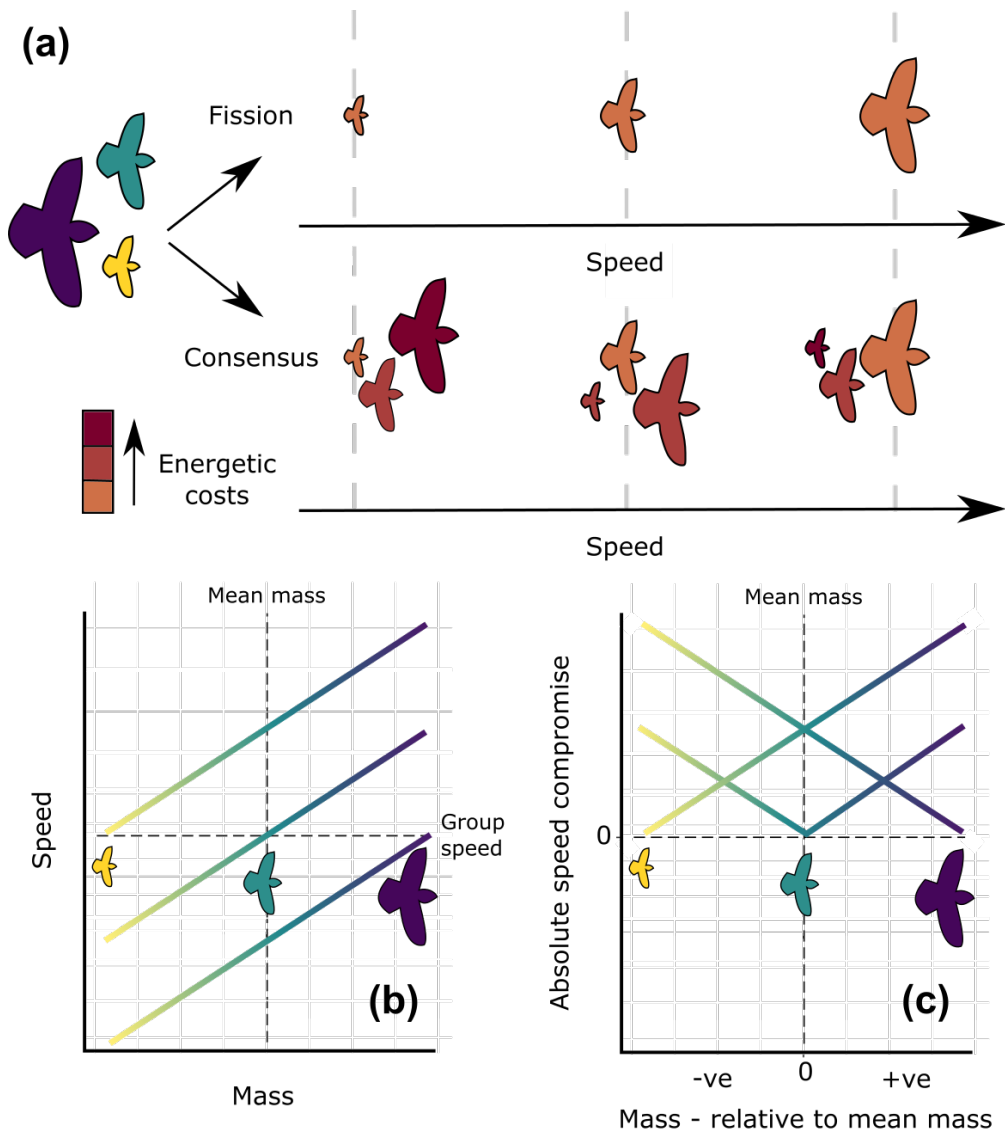
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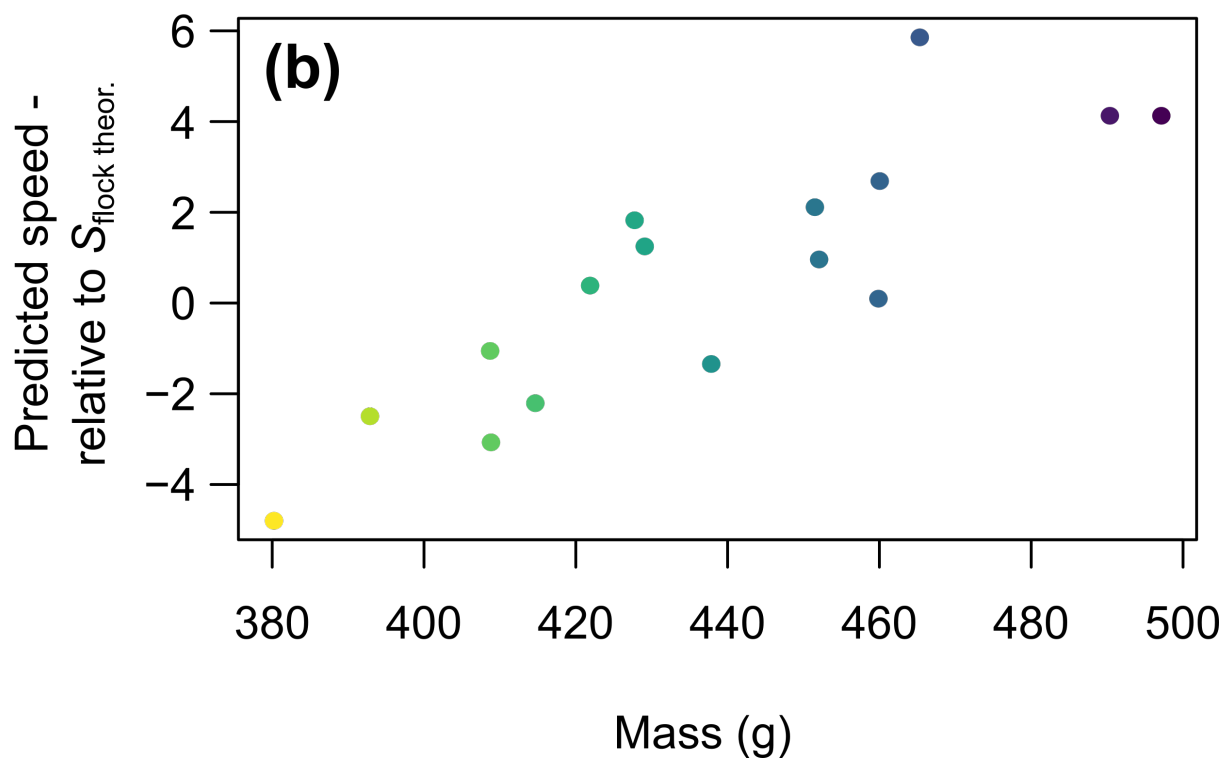
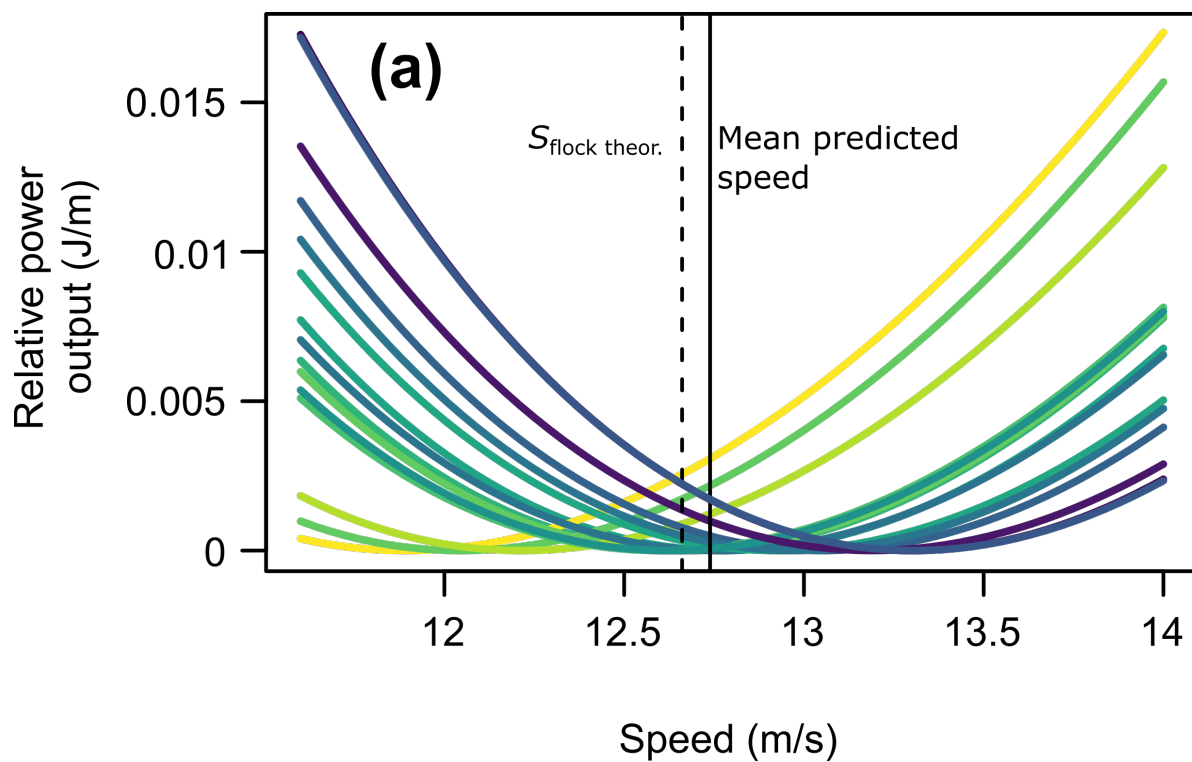
142 **Figures**

143 Figure 1

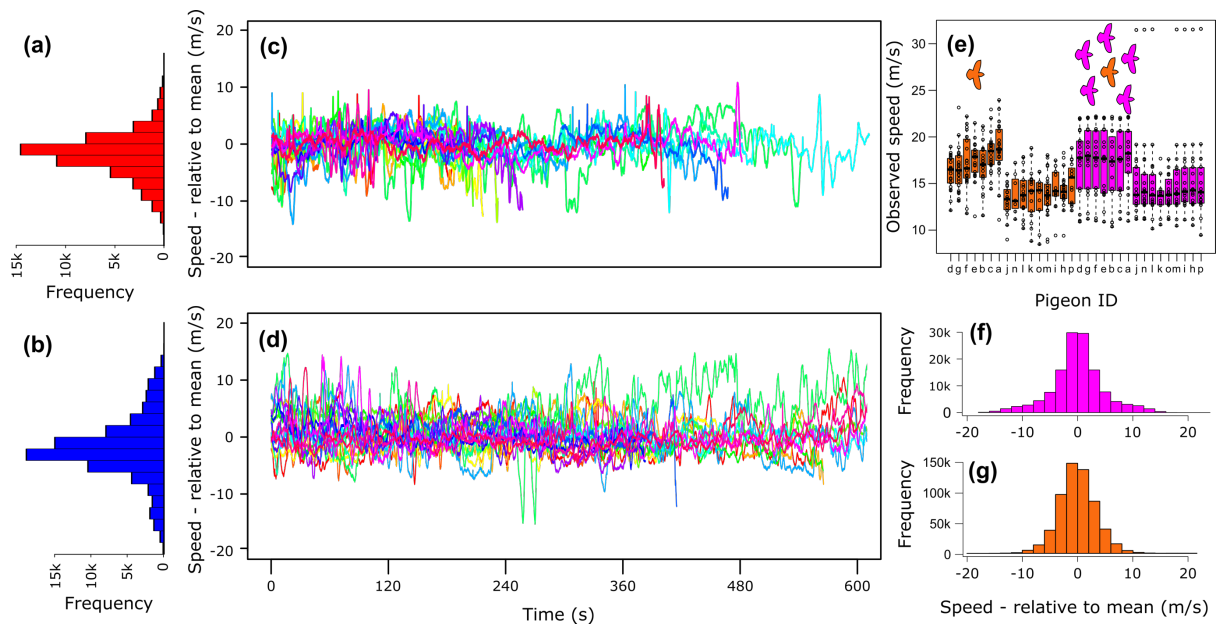


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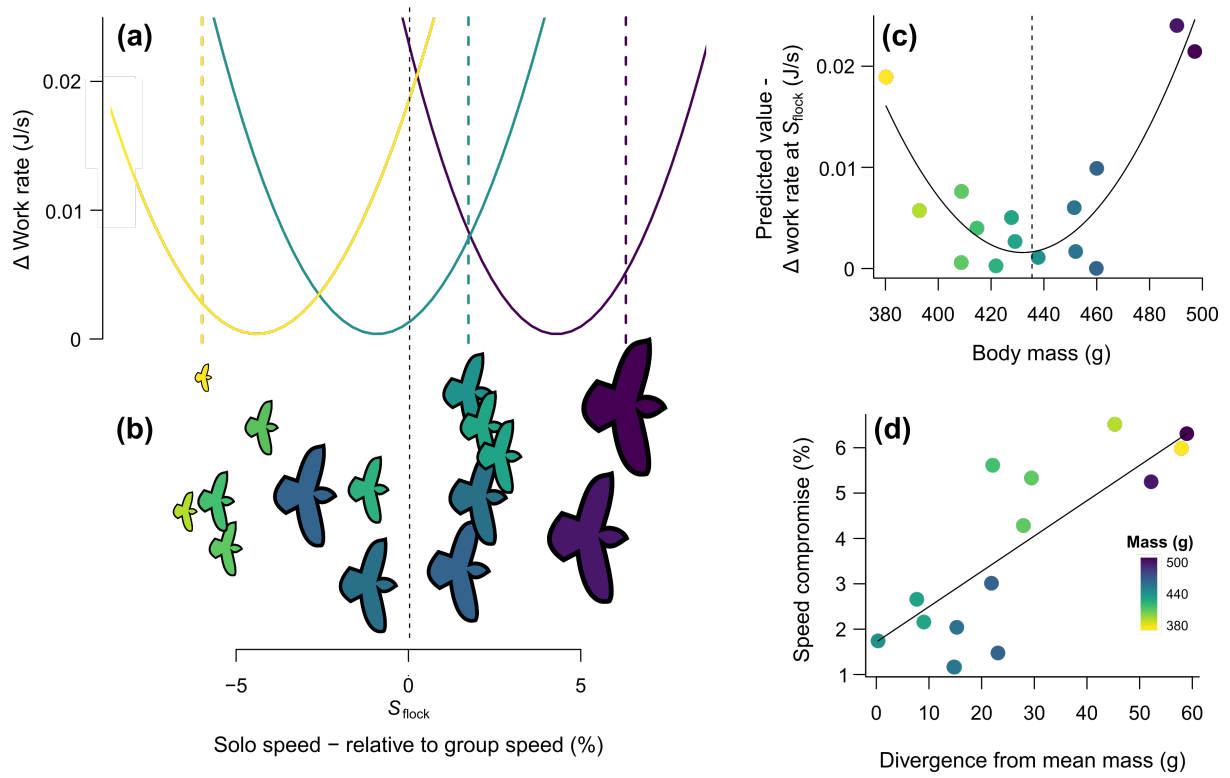


150 **Figure 3**



151

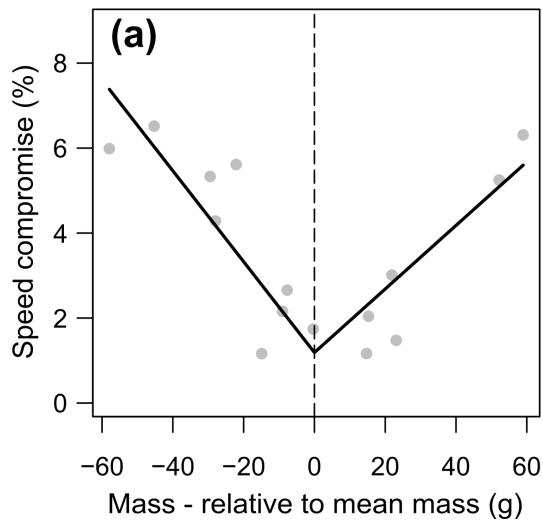
152 **Figure 4**



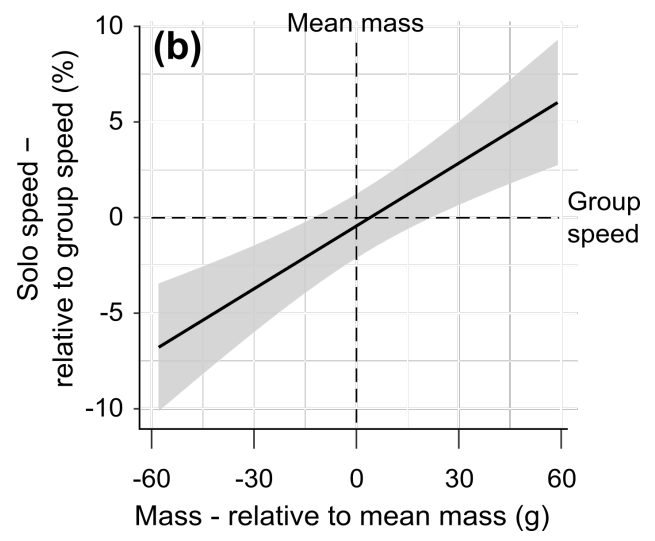
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155 Figure 5



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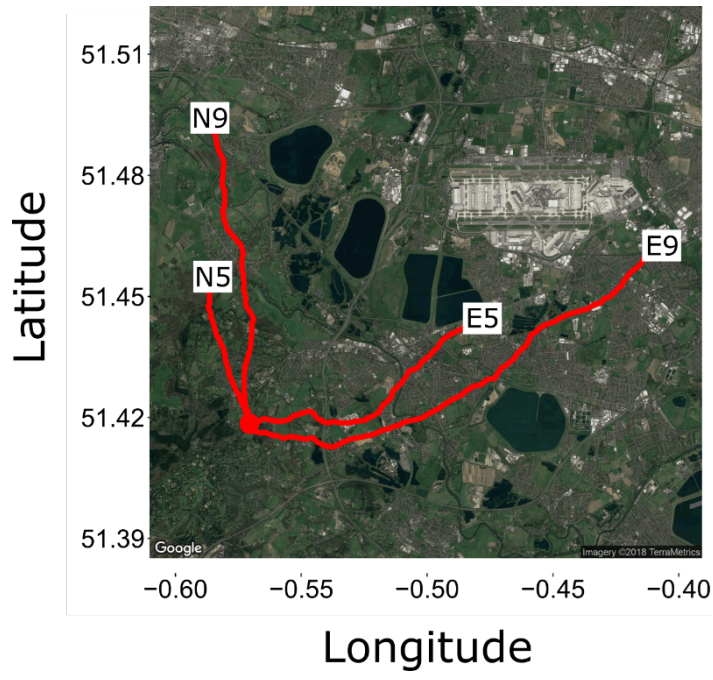


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158 Figure A1.

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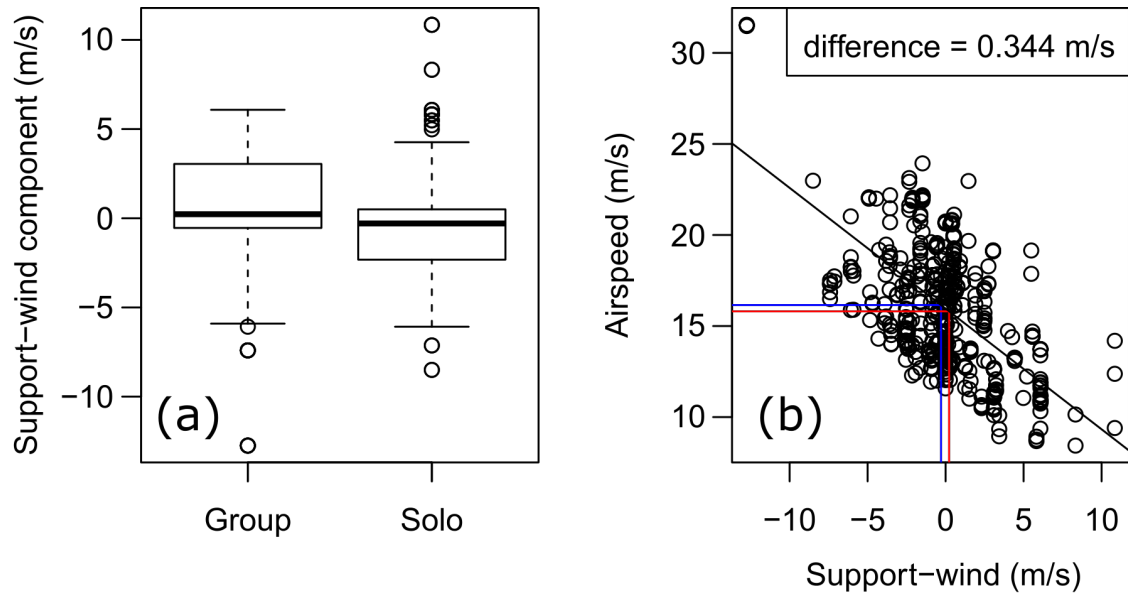


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163 Figure A2

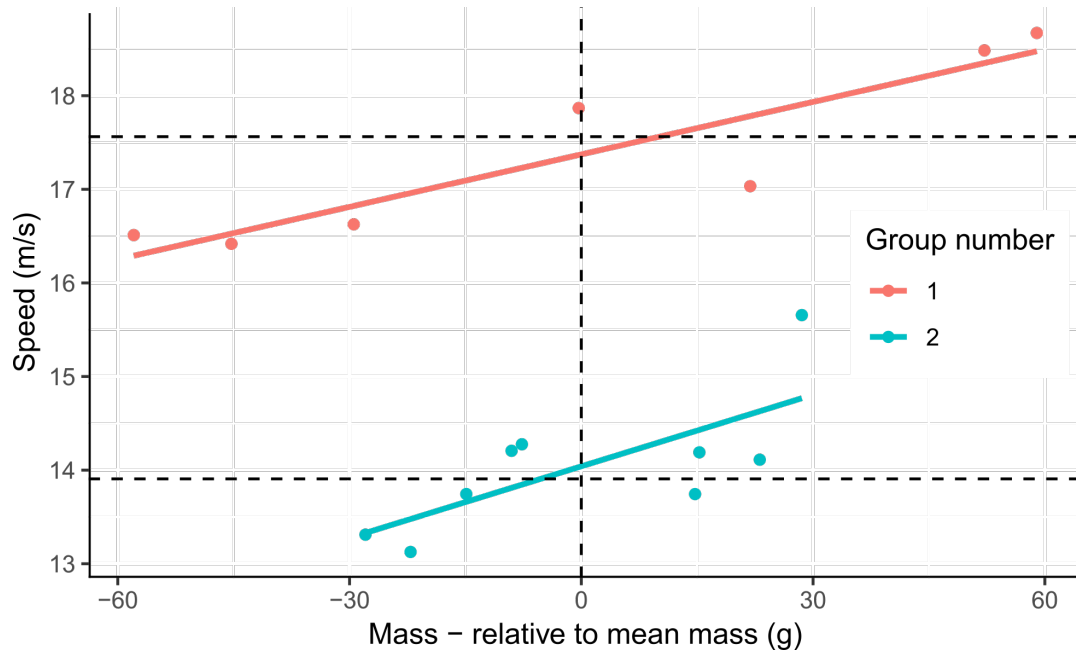
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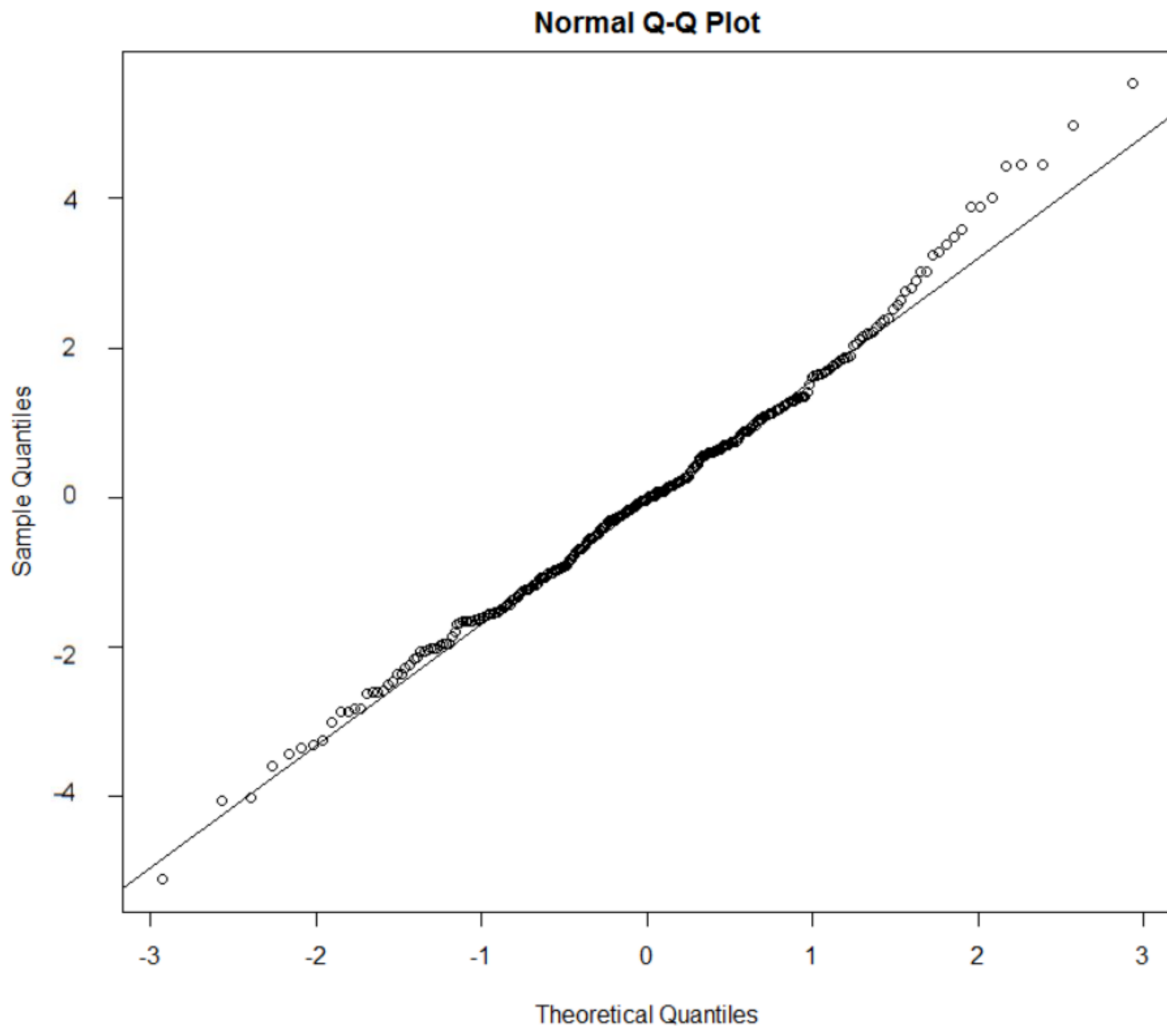
166 Figure A3

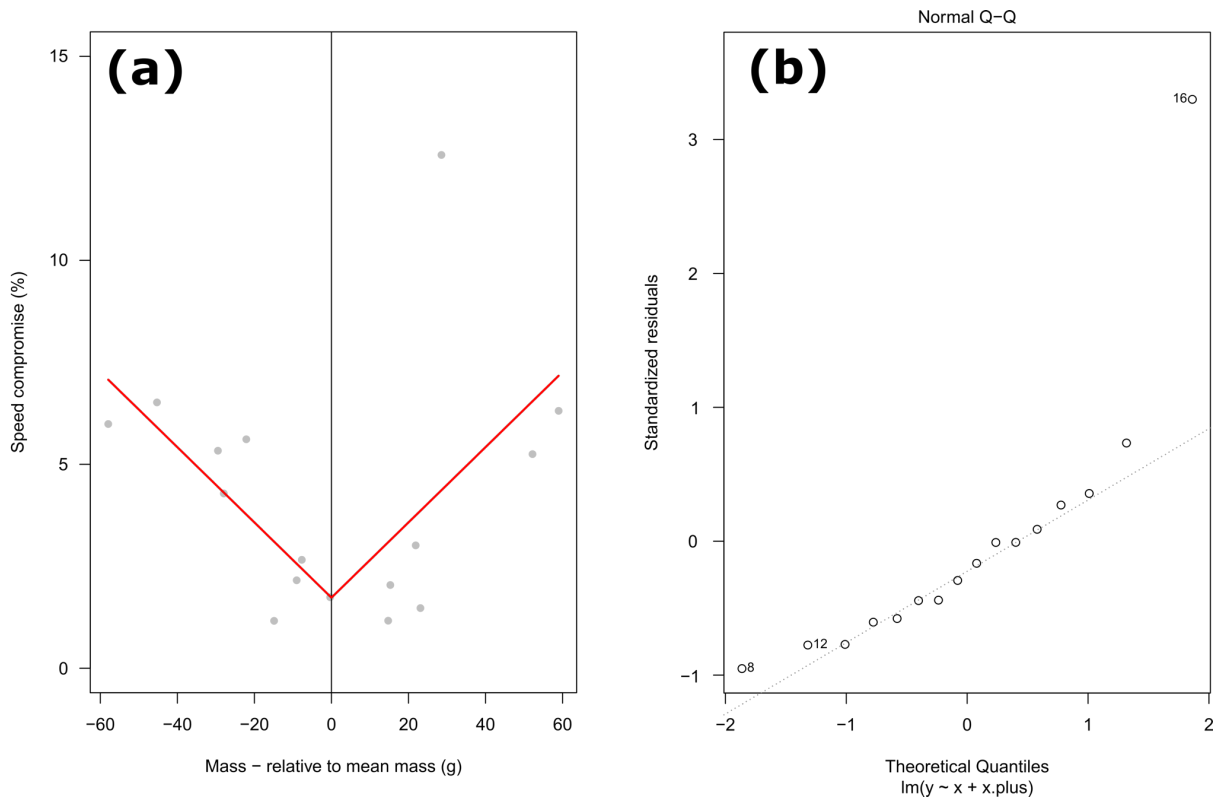
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