Vegetation maps based on remote sensing are informative predictors of habitat selection of grassland birds across a wetness gradient

Submitted by Jose Gentilhomme on Mon, 06/08/2015 - 20:43

Titre	Vegetation maps based on remote sensing are informative predictors of habitat selection of grassland birds across a wetness gradient
Type de publication	Article de revue
Auteur	Besnard, A.G. [1], Davranche, Aurélie [2], Maugenest, S. [3], Bouzillé, J.B. [4], Vian, Alain [5], Secondi, Jean [6]
Pays	Etats-Unis
Editeur	Elsevier
Ville	Amsterdam
Type	Article scientifique dans une revue à comité de lecture
Année	2015
Langue	Anglais
Date	Nov. 2015
Pagination	47-54
Volume	58
Titre de la revue	Ecological Indicators
ISSN	1872-7034
Mots-clés	agri-environmental scheme [7], Corn bunting [8], Corncrake [9], floodpain [10], phytosociology [11], Reed bunting [12], SPOT 5 [13], vegetation mapping [14], Whinchat [15], Yellow wagtail [16]
Résumé en anglais	Vegetation is a major environmental factor influencing habitat selection in bird species. High resolution mapping of vegetation cover is essential to model the distribution of populations and improve the management of breeding habitats. However, the task is challenging for grassland birds because microhabitat variations relevant at the territory scale cannot be measured continuously over large areas to delineate areas of higher suitability. Remote sensing may help to circumvent this problem. We addressed this issue by using two methods. We (i) mapped the continuous Ellenberg index of moisture and (ii) identified 5 vegetation classes distributed accross the wetness gradient. These two methods produced consistent output maps, but they also provided more information about vegetation structure, and possibly trophic resources. In spite of the apprent uniformity of meadows, our data show that birds do not settle randomly along the moisture and vegetation gradients. Overall birds tend to avoid the driest vegetation classes, *i.e.* the highest grounds. Thus, vegetation maps based on remote sensing could be valuable tools to study habitat selection and niche partition in grassland bird communities. It is also a valuable tool for conservation and habitat management.
URL de la notice	http://okina.univ-angers.fr/publications/ua12341 [17]
DOI	10.1016/j.ecolind.2015.05.033 [18]

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[18] http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2015.05.033