

Hunting bags of Woodcock, snipes and other waders in Russia

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According to the Hunting Law of the Russian Federation of July 24, 2009 (N209-FZ), hunting of waders is allowed for 9 species: Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Dotterel (*Eudromias morinellus*), Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*), Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) and Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*), as well as on 5 species groups: godwits (*Limosa sp.*), dowitchers (*Limnodromus sp.*), curlews (*Numenius sp.*), snipes (*Gallinago sp.*) and sandpipers (*Tringa sp.*, *Actitis sp.*, *Heteroscelus sp.*).

These groups represent 18 wader species which can be encountered in Russia and are not protected at national level. Thus, altogether 27 wader species are allowed to be hunted, of which only Woodcock can be hunted in spring. Woodcock, Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), Great Snipe (*G. media*) and Jack Snipe are the most popular species due to a particular interest of hunters who own dogs and, regarding Woodcock, because spring hunting is widely distributed. The other waders are occasionally bagged, although in some regions hunting from a hide exists for different migratory waders as well as hunting of curlews at feeding or migration sites.

Russian legislation requires the collection of hunting bag statistics including data on waders. Over recent years, this topic has been presented in several publications, most of which included Woodcock harvest data, while there was a lack of data about bags of other waders (Blokhin *et al.* 2002, 2005, Blokhin *et al.* 2006).

Materials and Methods

The wader bag estimates for spring and summer-autumn seasons presented below are only based on analysis of reports received from regions through the Russian governmental system of hunting management set up in 2000. The most complete information is presented for 6 years (2003, 2005, 2006 and 2011-2013). Additionally, Woodcock bag data are available for the years 2001, 2002, 2004 and for the 2007 spring season. Data are absent only for autumn from 2007 to 2010, when bag data was not reported to the national authority. Bird hunting bag statistics are based on the hunters' reports attached to hunting licenses. The regional authorities collect these original data and compile the summarized spreadsheets, which are then reported to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation. Afterwards, these data become available for our analysis. Although incomplete, the wader data became available in recent years for a nation-wide analysis, which was not possible before (Fokin & Blokhin 2013).

We made corrections to the data based on the proportion of licenses that were delivered and returned, and on the number of birds reported in returned licenses. Estimations of total bags for each season were made for each administrative region of Russia. When data were not available for some years, these were replaced by the average hunting bag value during several years or even for one year. However there are no data at all for some regions, such as the Altai and Khabarovsk provinces, the Buryat, Dagestan, Ingush and Yakut (Sakha) republics and for Amur, Murmansk and Orenburg regions.

Results and Discussion

Over the last years, collection of reports about harvesting of species allowed to be hunted has been improved. However, the bag data collection is still far from perfect, and data on waders, except Woodcock, are very scarce or even absent from several regions, especially in the Asian part of Russia (Table 1).

Woodcock

Average Woodcock spring hunting bag in Russia was 166 000 birds in 2000 and 213 300 birds in 2010. The bag has increased in Central (CD), Northwestern (NW), Volga (VR) and Ural (UD) federal districts. In the XXIth century, the

average Woodcock spring bag was high in CD (91 100 birds; 48%) and much lower in NW (45 900; 24.2%) and VR (39 900; 21%) (Figure 1).

The share of the other federal districts in the total bag is relatively low. From 2000 to 2013, between 11 000 and 17 000 woodcocks (44.3% of the total bag) were shot in Vologda, Leningrad, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Tver and Yaroslavl regions. Between 6 000 and 9 000 birds (26.1% of the total bag) were bagged in Kaluga, Kostroma, Novgorod, Vladimir, Smolensk, Kirov, and Sakhalin regions. From 3 000 to 5 000 birds (19% of the total bag) were shot in Arkhangelsk, Bryansk, Ivanovo, Penza, Pskov, Ryazan, Sverdlovsk, Tula and Perm Provinces. The other regions reported less than 3 000 bagged woodcocks each.

Federal Districts	Number of regions	Proportion (%) of regions which reported data on the species				
		Common Snipe	Great Snipe	Jack Snipe	Woodcock	Waders sp.
Central (CD)	17*	94.1	82.4	35.3	100	52.9
Northwestern (NW)	10**	70.0	50.0	10.0	90	70
Volga Region (VR)	14	85.7	64.3	21.4	92.9	71.4
Southern (SD)	6	33.3	33.3	16.7	100	83.3
North Caucasus (NC)	7	0	0	0	71.4	14.3
Ural (UD)	6	33.3	33.3	0	66.7	83.3
Siberian (SbD)	12	58.3	25.0	0	58.3	58.3
Far Eastern (FE)	9	22.2	0	0	60***	55.6
Total/ Average in Russia	81*	59.3	43.2	13.6	88.3***	59.3

* without Moscow

** without Saint Petersburg

***without Kamchatka Province, Magadan Region, Yakut Republic and Chukotka Area, where Woodcock is absent or very rare

Table 1. Distribution of available harvest data on wader hunting bags across federal districts.

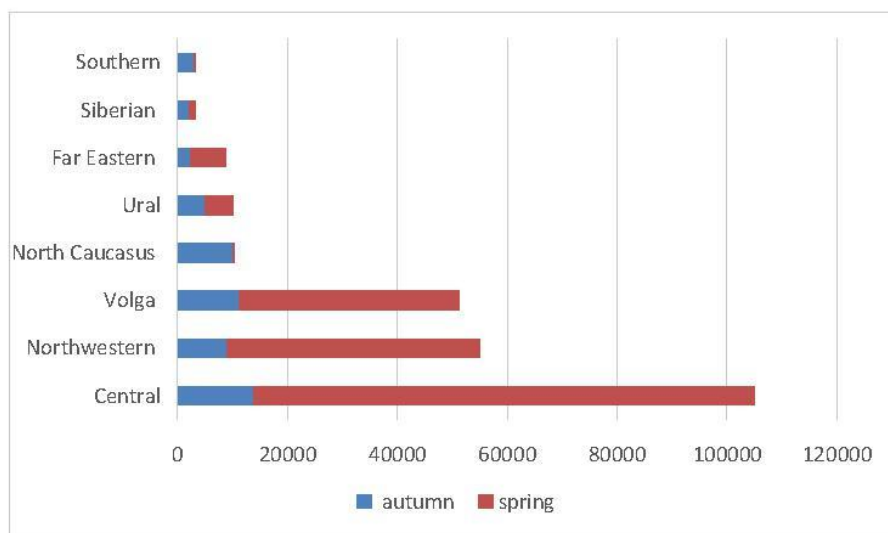


Figure 1. Woodcock spring and autumn hunting bag in Russian federal districts in the XXIth century (mean/year).

Average Woodcock autumn bag was 59 400 birds in the first decade, and 50 500 birds in the second decade of the XXIth century. The CD, NW and VR federal districts reported a higher harvest in 2010 than in 2000 and, on the contrary, the NC, UD, SD, SbD (cf. to Table 1) federal districts reported a lower bag in 2010 than in 2000. During the 2000-2013 period, high woodcock hunting bags were reported in CD (average 14 000 birds; 25.5%), VR (11 500; 20.9%), NC (9 200; 16.8%) and NW (9 200 birds; 16.7%) (Figure 1). Among administrative regions of Russia, the Stavropol Province reported high bags (average 8 000 birds) while a

number of regions (Nizhny Novgorod, Vologda, Leningrad, Sakhalin, Sverdlov, Yaroslavl, Chelyabinsk, Perm and Krasnodar) reported each from 2 000 to 4 000 woodcocks. These 10 regions represented 58.3 % of the total Woodcock autumn bag in Russia.

Together with the spring bag, the woodcock proportion in the total woodcock-snipe bag reaches 92%. Yearly (spring and autumn) on average, 248 100 woodcocks were hunted, of which 42.2% in CD, 22.2% in NW, 20.4% in VR, and 15.2% in the other regions.

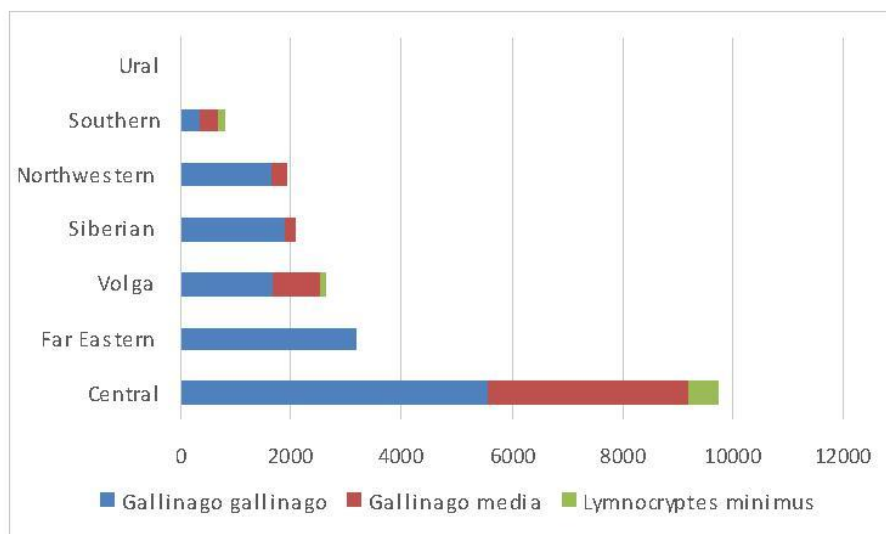


Figure 2. Average hunting bag of the Common Snipe, Great Snipe and Jack Snipe in Russian federal districts in the XXIth century.

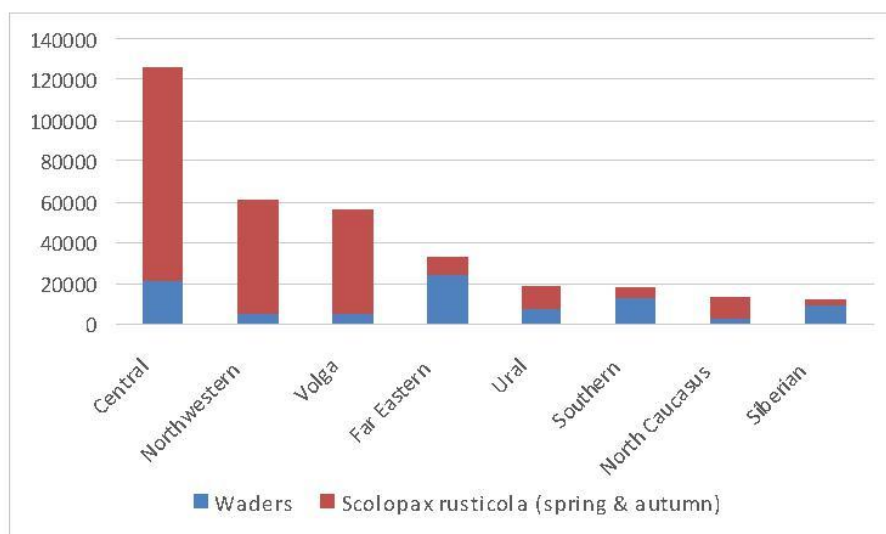


Figure 3. Average hunting bag of Woodcock compared with other waders during the total hunting season in Russian federal districts.

Common Snipe

Incomplete data were collected in previous years. From this data set, we observed that the Common Snipe autumn bag varied from 12 000 (2011) to 18 000 (2003), with 14 100 birds on average. Among federal districts (Figure 2), a high average bag was reported from CD (5 400 birds; 38.1%), while lower Common Snipe bags were observed in FE (3 200; 22.4%), SbA (1 900; 13.3%), VR (1 700; 11.9%) and NW (1 600; 11.6%). In European Russia, 870 Common Snipes were annually shot in average in the Leningrad region, 828 birds in the Tver region, 707 in the Moscow region and 677 in the Kursk region. In Asian Russia, in average 2 000 Common Snipes were bagged in the Sakhalin region, 1 320 in the Omsk region and 1 163 in the Primorsky Province.

The total Common Snipe hunting bag has decreased in all Russia compared to 2000, but especially in CD and VR in the last years while in NW it slightly increased.

Great Snipe

Scarce information was collected on this species. However, based on these data, the Great Snipe

bags in Russia ranged from 4 300 (2011) to 6 700 (2013). In the XXlth century, high bags were reported from CD (3 600 birds; 68.3%), VR (900 birds; 16.2%), SD (340 birds; 6.4%) and NW (270 birds; 5.1%). 700 Great Snipes were annually bagged in average in Moscow and Tver regions and 500 in Nizhny Novgorod region.

The Great Snipe hunting bag did not change significantly in 2010 compared with 2000.

Jack Snipe

Based on scarce data collected in different years in the XXlth century, the hunters shot from 600 (2003) to 800 (2006) Jack Snipes. A high bag was reported from CD (530 birds; 75.4%). The Tver and Belgorod regions were the most successful: on average 220 and 150 birds shot annually, respectively.

Other waders.

Some Russian regions reported low harvests of Lapwings, Sandpipers, Curlews and Black-tailed Godwits. The other waders were not mentioned and in some regions can be included in the category “non identified waders”.

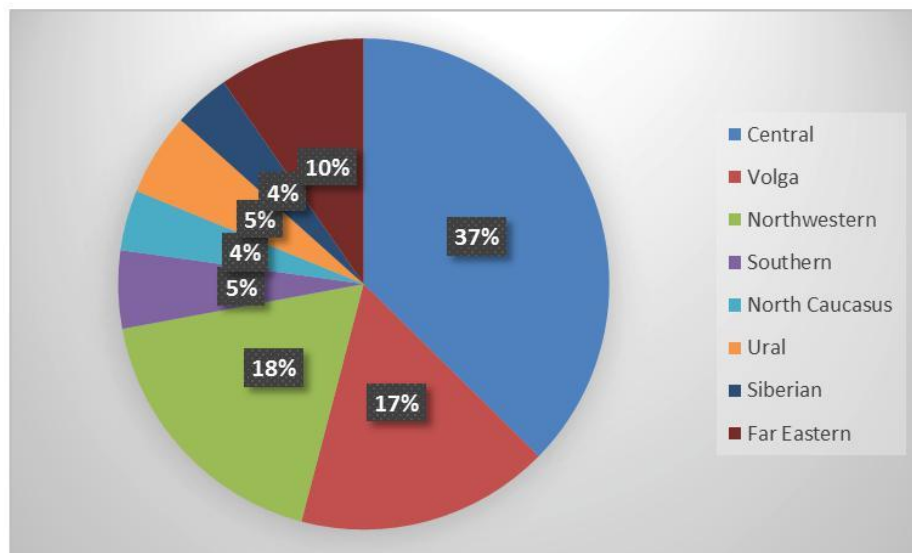


Figure 4. Distribution of hunting bags of Woodcock, Snipes and other waders in Russian federal districts in spring and summer-autumn hunting seasons.

Conclusion

On average, the annual summer-autumn bag for Woodcock and Snipe species was 76 400 birds: 56 300 Woodcocks, 14 100 Common Snipes, 5 300 Great Snipes, and 700 Jack Snipes. Thus Woodcock represented 73.7 % of the total autumn bag, whereas, for example, Jack Snipe represented less than 1%.

The annual summer-autumn bag for all wader species was 145 100 birds, with high bags reported from the Central (34 800 birds) and Far Eastern (26 200 birds) federal districts. These harvest statistics included Woodcock and Snipe species' data as well as data on the "non identified waders" group, which, in turn, is likely to consist of Woodcock and Snipes, as well as Wimbrels in Far East regions (e.g. Kamchatka, Sakhalin).

Over all the hunting period, the average total bag of waders, including Woodcock, was 336 900 birds, of which 56.9% were hunted in spring and 43.1% in autumn. In Central, Volga and Northwestern federal districts, where hunting of roding Woodcocks is popular, the spring bag is several times higher than the autumn bag, whereas other Federal Districts present the opposite situation (Figure 3).

Most of the annual bag of all waders (72.1%) was reported from CD, VR and NW (Figure 4). The highest bags were reported from the Moscow region (20 700 birds), the Leningrad region (19 100 birds), the Nizhny Novgorod region (18 800 birds), the Yaroslavl region (17 300 birds), the Sakhalin region (17 000 birds), the Tver region (16 500 birds), the Vologda region (14 900 birds) and the Stavropol region (10 500 birds).

It should be especially mentioned that the official bag data about birds, as a rule, are strongly underestimated, which becomes clear through the statistic treatment of original data (Blokhin *et al.* 2006, Blokhin 2008 and others.).

Although there are many disadvantages in the bag data collection, especially regarding migratory waterbirds, the situation is gradually improving, due to which this publication became possible. Despite the obvious inaccuracy of our estimations, we assume that we got approximate bag totals at least for the main wader species allowed to be hunted at the level of federal districts and administrative regions (Figure 5).

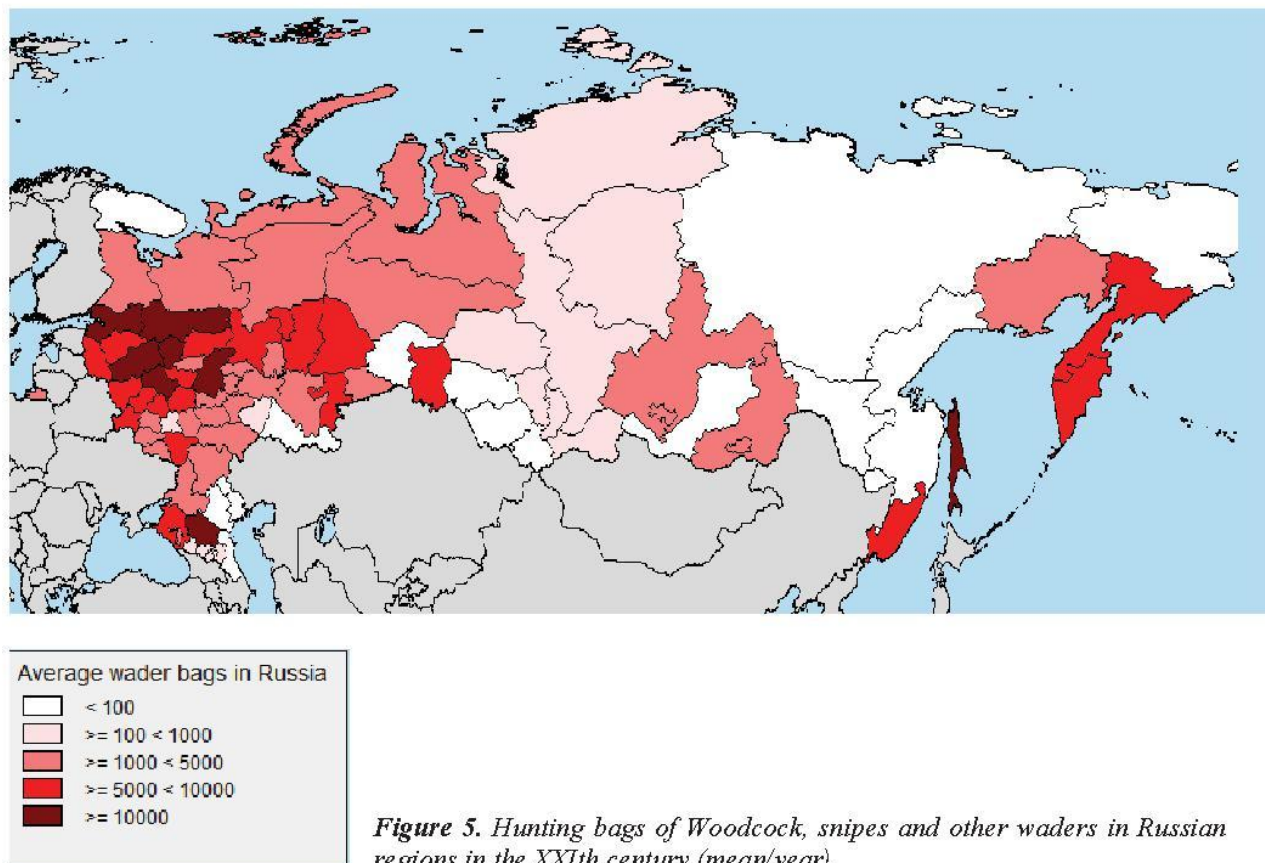


Figure 5. Hunting bags of Woodcock, snipes and other waders in Russian regions in the XXIth century (mean/year).

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