

2016 Central Russia Woodcock Report

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Spring migration and breeding conditions

Winter 2015-2016 began late enough.

The snow cover was established only in January which was also frosty (on average: 3.2° C below normal in Vladimir, 4.2 ° C in Tver, and 3.5° C in the Kostroma provinces). Snow melted out at the usual period. In Vladimir province, a record amount of precipitation (86 mm; 215% more than normal) was registered and snow depth in forests was 40 - 45 cm by the end of January. In the Tver province, precipitation was 141% above normal, and 164 % in Kostroma province. In February, precipitation was also above normal (187%, 136% and 170% in Vladimir, Tver and Kostroma provinces, respectively) and snow and rain alternated. Average temperatures were warmer than usual (6.6, 6.5 and 6.9 ° C, respectively). As a result, the ground was very wet in spring but snow depth decreased to 30-35 cm.

In March, strong freeze was registered at night but in the afternoon the temperatures were near 0-3° C, around normal. As a result, thick ice crust was formed. Precipitation was 92 % of the average in Vladimir province, 147% in Tver province, and only 76% in Kostroma province. The air temperature was everywhere within the usual limits. In Vladimir province, the first patches of ground appeared on 27 March in meadows, on 30 March in light birch forest and on 6 April in mixed forest.

Thawed patches appeared more and more frequently in woodlands at the beginning of April, but snow depth was still 10-20 cm. April was warmer than usual (1.6°C, 1.3°C and 1.0° C,

in the 3 provinces, respectively), precipitation was above normal in Vladimir province (182%), below normal in Tver province (55%), and around normal in Kostroma province (106%).

Spring arrived at the average timing. For example, in Vladimir province, migratory birds species arrived at their long-term average dates: gulls, cranes, starlings on 30 March, lapwings on 31 March, snipes, curlews on 5 April, robins, *Turdus iliacus*, on 6 April, *Turdus viscivorus* on 8 April, *Phylloscopus trochilis* on 15 April, *Anthus trivialis* on 18 April, but others earlier than usual: *Turdus philomelos*, larks on 31 March, white wagtails on 1st April, *Luscinia svecica* on 16 April, *Porzana porzana* on 19 April. Cuckoo arrived on 18 April, i.e. 10 days before the average long-term date.

First roding woodcock were observed on 2 April, 6 days earlier than the average long-term date (8 April) and woodcocks were observed only in young forest regrowth, fragmented fields and clear woodlands, where there were "spots" of thawed earth. Roding was observed in the old forests only from 8 April. The roding male numbers remained weak in this period. The temperature reached 18°C on 8 April. From this date, numerous roding males were observed everywhere in Central Russia.

Roding males' hunting was open from 16 to 25 April in most Central regions of Russia. In Kostroma provinces it was open from 30 April to 9 May. The mean number of contacts per evening was 4.6 in Vladimir province, 5.5 in Moscow, 3.7 in Yaroslavl, and 8.7 in Kostroma.

Province	Points	Total		Mean		Max		“no roding” points (%)
		contacts	birds	contacts	birds	contacts	birds	
Arkhangelsk	23	172	200	7.48 ± 0.76	8.70 ± 0.84	17	20	0
Vologda	197	1 793	2020	9.10 ± 0.29	10.25 ± 0.33	29	30	0
Karelia	28	210	229	7.50 ± 0.62	8.18 ± 0.65	15	15	0
Komi	54	304	330	5.63 ± 0.29	6.11 ± 0.3	20	21	0
Leningrad	117	1 085	1243	9.27 ± 0.35	10.62 ± 0.4	27	28	0
Novgorod	209	1 933	2156	9.25 ± 0.26	10.32 ± 0.28	32	36	0
Pskov	13	135	173	10.38 ± 0.8	13.31 ± 1.19	20	25	0
Bryansk	29	308	377	10.62 ± 0.69	13.00 ± 0.77	24	31	0
Vladimir	17	182	205	10.71 ± 1.01	12.06 ± 1.13	28	28	0
Ivanovo	37	330	363	8.92 ± 0.9	9.81 ± 0.99	28	29	0
Kaluga	1	18	18	18.00	18.00	18	18	0
Kostroma	90	956	1053	10.62 ± 0.4	11.70 ± 0.45	27	29	0
Moscow Region	10	51	57	5.10 ± 1.43	5.70 ± 1.4	13	14	10.0
Orel	23	93	99	4.04 ± 0.32	4.30 ± 0.37	9	9	0
Ryazan	5	44	44	8.80 ± 2.58	8.80 ± 2.58	22	22	0
Smolensk	1	5	5	5.00	5.00	5	5	0
Tver	94	779	871	8.29 ± 0.36	9.27 ± 0.38	22	27	0
Tula	177	758	815	4.28 ± 0.23	4.60 ± 0.25	28	28	6.8
Yaroslavl	115	784	869	6.82 ± 0.3	7.56 ± 0.34	19	21	0
Belgorod	11	30	35	2.73 ± 0.4	3.18 ± 0.51	6	7	0
Voronej	67	175	208	2.61 ± 0.24	3.10 ± 0.29	9	13	22.4
Lipetsk	15	67	79	4.47 ± 0.49	5.27 ± 0.64	15	19	0
Tambov	117	517	529	4.42 ± 0.22	4.52 ± 0.23	14	15	1.7
Nyjny-Novgorod	7	25	34	3.57 ± 0.46	4.86 ± 0.69	5	8	0
Kirov	12	102	110	8.50 ± 0.96	9.17 ± 0.93	17	17	0
Mariy El	1	11	11	11.00	11.00	11	11	0
Mordovya	51	277	305	5.43 ± 0.31	5.98 ± 0.37	14	17	0
Chuvashya	61	258	284	4.23 ± 0.28	4.66 ± 0.33	12	14	6.6
Penza	20	116	132	5.80 ± 0.83	6.60 ± 0.85	19	19	5.0
Saratov	23	61	72	2.65 ± 0.47	3.13 ± 0.58	8	12	26.1
Tatarstan	62	415	462	6.69 ± 0.53	7.45 ± 0.58	52	56	9.7
Ulyanovsk	69	462	537	6.70 ± 0.46	7.78 ± 0.54	18	22	0
Bashkortostan	4	27	27	6.75 ± 2.56	6.75 ± 2.56	17	17	0
Perm	36	162	175	4.50 ± 0.43	4.86 ± 0.47	19	19	8.3
Sverdlovsk	81	661	785	8.16 ± 0.34	9.69 ± 0.41	23	23	0.0
Chelyabinsk	124	936	1153	7.55 ± 0.26	9.30 ± 0.32	24	25	0.0
TOTAL/mean	2 001	14 242	16 065	7.12 ± 0.08	8.03 ± 0.1	52	56	2.5

Table 1. Results of the 18th National Woodcock Roding Census in Russia in 2016.

The main woodcock migration ended before the opening of the hunting period. According to our observations, the main part of Woodcock migration in 2016 took place from April 8 to April 14.

Weather conditions were favorable for roding and the beginning of the breeding period. May was also warm, in the range of the normal temperatures. During the hatching period, strong rains were registered: 6 - 9 June and 11 - 13 June in the Vladimir province, 4 - 6 and 11 - 13 June in the Tver province, and 4 - 9 June in the Kostroma province. They probably slightly negatively affected the Woodcock breeding success. No cold period was observed.

Summer was warm and rainy enough to favor growth and survival of chicks.

Results of the 18th National Woodcock roding census

The 18th National roding census was organized by the State Information-Analytical Center of Game Animals and Habitats, the “Woodcock” group, the “Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz” Association, several hunting offices, and the “Russian hunter newspaper”. It was carried out on 28 May 2016.

2,800 forms were sent to 35 provinces of the European part of Russia and Ural through the system of hunter societies of Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz. Besides, the Vologda, Karelia, Novgorod, Tula, and Chuvashia

Hunting departments carried out this work themselves and sent us information per district. One of the “Russian hunter newspaper” issues presented the census form and the census methods, so that every reader was able to send a press-cutting from these periodicals with his own census results. Thus, the total quantity of forms distributed in Russia was similar to the previous years. The form itself and the census methods remained exactly the same. The results are presented in Table 1.

By 2016, 3,599 forms were collected from 36 regions of the European part of Russia. 1,598 forms (44.4%) were rejected. Every region was more or less represented in the total of forms selected for the analysis, but Central and North regions made up the main part. 209 forms came from Novgorod province, 197 from Vologda, 177 from Tula, 124 from Chelyabinsk, 117 from Leningrad and Tambov, 115 from Yaroslavl. Several tens of forms were sent from many other provinces: 1-4 forms from Bashkortostan and Mari-El republics, Kaluga and Smolensk oblasts. The general results are presented in Table 1.

In total, 14 242 contacts were registered. They represented 16 065 birds (1.13 individuals/contact). No roding male was observed at 50 points (2.5 %) in 9 provinces. The highest numbers of contacts were registered at census points in Tatarstan (52 contacts; 56 individuals), Novgorod (32/36) and Vologda (29/30).

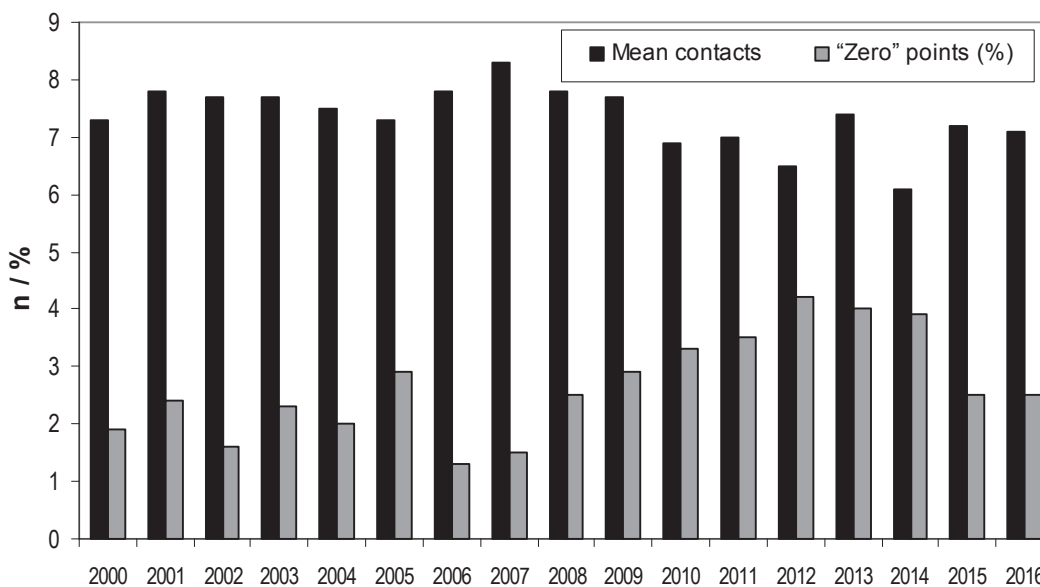


Figure 1. Inter-annual variations of the mean number of contacts and the proportion of “Zero” points (no roding) from 2000 to 2016 according to the National Roding Census.

The average roding intensity during the 2016 census was as follows:

Poor roding (2.6 – 5.0 contacts per 2 hours of roding) was recorded in 8 provinces: Belgorod, Voronej, Lipetsk, Nijny Novgorod, Orel, Saratov, Tambov, Tula, Perm, and in Chuvashia republic.

Average roding (5.1 – 10.0 contacts) was registered in 14 provinces: Arkhangelsk, Ivanovo, Kirov, Leningrad, Novgorod, Penza, Chelyabinsk, Sverdlovsk, Tver', Ulyanovsk, Yaroslavl', Vologda, Ryazan, Moscow, and in 4 republics: Karelia, Komi, Mordovia, and Tatarstan.

Good roding (10.4 – 10.7 contacts) was observed in Bryansk, Kostroma, Pskov, and Vladimir provinces.

On average, 7.1 contacts of 8.0 individuals per roding were registered in 2016 in European Russia. This is close to the 2015 results (Figure 1).

Autumn migration and ringing

In autumn 2016, 7 teams of ringers worked in 6 regions of Russia: two teams in Kostroma province and one in Moscow, Vladimir, Tver' and Pskov provinces. The weather conditions were favorable to ringing. September was warm and damp, close to normal, in Moscow, Vladimir, Tver' and Kostroma provinces, but very dry in Pskov province.

The beginning of October was also favorable for woodcock ringing with warm temperatures and rains till 8-9 October, then increasingly colder and dry. The new moon also favored the captures.

Province	Ringing trip duration (min)	Total number of contacts	Average contacts/hour (IAN)	Number of ringed woodcocks	Number of retrapped woodcocks	Number of night trips	Number of birds ringed in 1 trip average
Moscow	2 340	83	2.13	20	2	18	1.1
Kostroma	4 735	131	1.8	51	1	32	1.6
Vladimir	1 800	72	2.4	19	-	12	1.6
Tver'	4 050	43	0.64	18	-	27	0.7
Pskov	2 645	24	0.54	1	-	26	0.04
Total	15 570	353	1.36	109	3	115	0.9

Table 2. Night censuses of woodcock in autumn 2016.

In total, 353 woodcocks were encountered during 115 night trips (15 570 hours). 109 were ringed and 3 woodcocks were retrapped (direct retraps). The 2016 and 2015 results are the lowest over the last 10 years. One of the reasons is the decrease of the numbers/surface area of typical favorable night feeding sites. Even in Kostroma province, many good pastures are converted into corn fields from year to year. The cows graze in the fields after mowing of clover and corn. These sites are not as attractive for woodcocks as grasslands and permanent pastures. We do not find woodcocks in the tillage.

The general results are given in Table 2.

The numbers of birds found in the Moscow Region, Vladimir and Kostroma provinces were

nearly the same as in the previous years but largely below in Tver' and Pskov provinces. In 2016, the peak of migration was not visible everywhere. In total, the mean number of contacts/hour (IAN) registered during the ringing trips was 1.36. If we take into account only the Moscow Region, Vladimir and Kostroma provinces, IAN amounted to 1.9. In 2016, for the same study areas, IAN was higher than in 2015 in Vladimir province (2.40 vs 1.57), stable in the Moscow Region (2.13 vs 2.19) and considerably less in Kostroma province (1.8 vs 3.6).

The last birds were observed at night on 24-25 October in most of the regions, on 4-5 November in forests and woodlands at daytime. Only in Kostroma province did woodcock disappear 2 week earlier.

2016 ringing season in numbers

Number of regions:	6
Number of sites:	18
Number of ringers:	11
Number of night trips:	115
Number of contacts:	352
Number of ringed woodcock:	109
Number of direct retraps:	3
Number of indirect retraps:	0
Capture success:	31.0%
Proportion of juveniles:	81.6 %
(early broods: 69.6 %, late broods: 30.4 %)	

The proportion of juveniles amounted to 81.6 % which is more than usual and probably related to a good breeding success. The proportion of early broods among the young was also high (69.6 %) in comparison with the previous years. The average weight of juveniles was 336.2 g (n= 89), which is less than in 2015 (352.9 g) and 2013 (340 g) but slightly more than in 2014 (334.7 g).

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About 15 days-old Woodcock chick found in Armenia in summer 2016 (© Alexander Malkhasyan)