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1 **Acoustic detection of radiotracked foraging bats in** 2 **temperate lowland forests**

3
4 Laurent TILLON^a, Michel BARATAUD^b, Sylvie GIOSA^b & Stéphane AULAGNIER^c

5
6 a- ONF Réseau mammifères, Direction des Forêts et des Risques Naturels, 2 avenue de Saint-
7 Mandé, 75570 Paris cedex 12, France, laurent.tillon@onf.fr

8 b- SFEPM, Colombeix, 23400 Saint-Amand-Jartoudeix, France, michel.barataud1@orange.fr

9 c- Comportement et Ecologie de la Faune Sauvage, INRA, Université de Toulouse, CS
10 52627, 31326 Castanet Tolosan cedex, France, Stephane.Aulagnier@inra.fr (corresponding
11 author)

12 13 **Abstract**

14 During the recent years studies of bat activity are predominantly based on ultrasound
15 detection. However this method suffers from several biases such as different species call
16 ranges, temporal and habitat-related variability. In order to test the bias linked to the detection
17 of whispering gleaning bats in temperate lowland forests, we equipped several individuals of
18 *Myotis bechsteinii* and *Plecotus auritus* with transmitters and followed them on their foraging
19 grounds where we simultaneously recorded echolocation calls. Our results highlight the very
20 low detectability of these species whose presence was ascertained at the recording station. On
21 the other hand, we detected the presence of many other species. We suggest methodological
22 recommendations for ultrasound detection whenever gleaning bat species are concerned.

23
24 **Keywords:** Acoustic; Detection; Habitat; *Myotis bechsteinii*; *Plecotus auritus*.

25

26 Most inventories or monitoring to identify habitat selection by species are based on presence /
27 absence data. Yet it is often difficult to associate the absence of data with the absence of the
28 target taxon (Brotons *et al.*, 2004; Mackenzie, 2005; Royle, Nichols & Kery, 2005). A gap in
29 a set of presence-absence data may have important implications for the production of high-
30 quality analysis, and thus for understanding ecological phenomena, or even for implementing
31 conservation strategies. Such analysis can have various biases that depend on the method
32 used, the observers, the environment in which the observations take place, the viewing
33 conditions (such as the weather), the detectability of species, the behaviour of animals at
34 specific and/or individual levels, or the modelling approach (Nichols *et al.*, 2000; Kéry &
35 Schmid, 2004; Pellet & Schmidt, 2005; Gooch *et al.*, 2006). The identification of the most
36 appropriate method to answer questions relating to the distribution of a taxon, or the selection
37 of habitats by that taxon, is a priority before beginning a study (Tyre *et al.*, 2003; Mackenzie,
38 2005; Mackenzie & Royle, 2005; Lobo *et al.*, 2010; Tanadini & Schmidt, 2011).

39 For bats most recent studies use ultrasonic detection, a method which overcomes the ethics of
40 capturing protected species and has the advantage of recording all bat species emitting a
41 signal likely to be caught by a suitable device (Parsons & Szewczak, 2009; Britzke, Gillam, &
42 Murray, 2013; Fenton, 2013). In addition, this method can be implemented by an observer or
43 by passive recording (Adams *et al.*, 2012, Skalak, Sherwin & Brigham, 2012; Stahlschmidt &
44 Brühl, 2012; Froidevaux *et al.*, 2014; Kubista and Bruckner, 2017). However, studies based
45 on ultrasonic detection have many methodological biases due to the equipment, the sampling
46 effort, the acoustic identification and the measurement of activity, which amplify observer
47 effects (Archaux *et al.*, 2013), making it difficult to compare results (Britzke *et al.*, 2013). In
48 addition, the probability of detection may be relatively low and very different from one
49 species to another (Barataud, 2012). For example, specific detection probabilities obtained
50 over large areas by combining capture and ultrasonic detection, from the historical data of

51 presence and pseudo-absence varied from 0.239 for *Myotis evotis* to 0.532 for *M. californicus*
52 (Weller, 2008). Detectability is even more different among groups of species (e.g.
53 *Eptesicus/Nyctalus*, *Pipistrellus* and *Myotis*, Barataud, 2012; Archaux *et al.*, 2013;
54 Froidevaux *et al.*, 2016), especially in forests where the signals are generally low due to
55 attenuation by the foliage, so detection is better in open stands than in dense stands (Patriquin
56 *et al.*, 2003; Barataud, 2012). Given the different ecology of taxa and their foraging behaviour
57 which are closely linked to their echolocation strategies (e.g. Aldridge and Rautenbach, 1987;
58 Barataud, 2012; Müller *et al.*, 2012), we can assume that the ultrasound detection of each bat
59 will depend on the species, the habitat where the study takes place and the animals' activity
60 (related to the season and the weather). Moreover, the information is limited to the number of
61 contacts per species at each recording station, and does not provide any estimate of the actual
62 number of individuals (Barataud, 2012). Therefore ultrasonic detection requires an evaluation
63 of the probability of species detection to assess its usefulness as a survey method for
64 investigating habitat selection (Gorresen *et al.*, 2008; Weller, 2008; Hayes, Ober & Sherwin,
65 2009; Archaux *et al.*, 2013; Pauli *et al.*, 2017).

66 **Therefore**, we investigated the probability of detecting echolocation calls of two whispering
67 bats (emitting weak echolocation calls detected at 5-20 m according to Barataud, 2012 and
68 Skiba, 2009) in forest whilst being sure of their presence **by radio telemetry**. **We detected**
69 simultaneously other species or other individuals of the same species for **checking** the
70 efficiency of the bat detector.

71

72 Recording stations were located in the forest of Tronçais (Auvergne, France; 46°39'N,
73 02°41'E). This forest is dominated by sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*), which is regularly
74 accompanied by beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). The understory is dominated by oak (*Quercus*
75 *petraea*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), more rarely by hornbeam

76 (*Carpinus betulus*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Forest stands can reach more than 40m high,
77 a height which can therefore limit the detection of bats from the ground when they are hunting
78 in the canopy. The canopy is closed, and scattered bushes cover between 20% and 50% of the
79 understory.

80

81 We were able to capture three adult females of *M. bechsteinii* (8.5, 9.1 and 11.5 g), and six
82 adult females of *P. auritus* (7.9 ± 0.3 g) using mist nets across pathways and streams in July
83 2008 (good weather conditions, temperatures more than 10°C). Following Aldridge &
84 Brigham (1988), we equipped them with BD2N transmitters (0.43 g, manufactured by Holohil
85 Systems Ltd., Carp, Ontario, Canada for a total weight, including surgical glue, less than 6%
86 of each bat weight). This study is part of a broader project licensed by the Ministry of
87 Environment. These bats were then monitored by radio telemetry (using a Regall 2000
88 receiver and a three element Yagi antenna manufactured by Titley Inc., Australia), and
89 located using the “homing in” technique, a close approach method (see Amelon *et al.*, 2009).
90 When the animal’s position was ascertained, a second grounded operator stood underneath the
91 foraging animal recorded all bat activity at this station for ten minutes using a Pettersson
92 D1000x bat detector. Bats were identified using both heterodyne and time expansion (with
93 Batsound 3.3 software) proposed by Barataud (2012). For *M. bechsteinii* identification was
94 ascertained by the context of sequences following Barataud (2005). One contact was counted
95 every five seconds for all bat species (maximum 120 contacts). Two individuals of one
96 species recorded at the same time were therefore counted as two contacts.

97 Using a binomial distribution [B (N, 0.5), where N is the number of radiotracked individuals]
98 we calculated the probability of acoustic detection of both species $p(x \leq n)$, where n is the
99 number of times the species should be detected given that at least one individual with a

100 transmitter was present at the recording station (number of possible contacts) and x the
101 number of times it was detected (number of recorded contacts).

102

103 *M. bechsteinii* was recorded during 10 minutes at 25 different stations (8.3 ± 4.7 per
104 individual), four in young plots (trees under 12m), 17 in old-growth plots and four at a border
105 of old-growth plots. *P. auritus* was recorded at 35 stations (5.8 ± 1.6 per individual), all in
106 old-growth plots.

107 During the twenty-five recording periods conducted in presence of radiotracked *Myotis*
108 *bechsteinii*, this species was contacted four times for a total of 108 contacts (Poisson
109 distribution mean: 0.036), with 97 contacts in one old-growth plot (Table 1); for the latter we
110 could not discriminate the presence of one or several individuals. During the thirty-five
111 recording periods of *Plecotus auritus* this species was contacted two times with only one
112 contact (Poisson distribution mean: 4.76^{E-4}). These detection scores are very low. The
113 probability that *Myotis bechsteinii* was detected four times is $p(x \leq 4) = 4.55^{E-4}$. The
114 probability that *Plecotus auritus* was detected two times is $p(x \leq 2) = 1.84^{E-8}$. Moreover, we
115 detected bats of these two species but not necessarily the radiotracked individuals and always
116 one animal per contact.

117 At the sixty recording stations we also recorded at least 12 additional bat species and some
118 *Myotis* sp. that were not identified (16 contacts at 8 stations). The most detected species was
119 *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* (595 contacts at 47 stations), followed by *Myotis myotis* (32 contacts
120 at seven stations), and *Nyctalus* sp. (18 contacts at only two stations). *M. nattereri* and *M.*
121 *mystacinus* were detected in ten and nine periods respectively for 14 contacts each. Other taxa
122 were occasionally detected (Table 1).

123

124 Our results show that gleaning bats were only slightly detected in forest whilst they were
125 present. In addition, the number of contacts remained very low, except for one recording
126 station of *Myotis bechsteinii* with ninety-seven contacts in ten minutes, which means almost a
127 permanent detection of the likely radiotracked individual. The ultrasound detection of these
128 gleaner bats is reported to be difficult. Over 38,371 call sequences obtained with ground
129 automatic detectors, Müller *et al.* (2012) recorded *M. bechsteinii* sixty-nine times (for 11530
130 call sequences only identified as medium-sized *Myotis*) and *Plecotus* only three times. Other
131 tests provided similar results on North American gleaning bats (Skalak *et al.*, 2012; Kennedy,
132 Sillett & Szewczak, 2014; Luszczyk *et al.*, 2016). This possibly explains why Kubista and
133 Bruckner (2017) found a perplexingly high variability with batcorders placed ca. 10m apart.
134 Most often we did not detect the target species, even if we detected other taxa, sometimes
135 with a high number of contacts for *P. pipistrellus*, but most of the time with only a small
136 number of contacts, including loud calling species such as *E. serotinus*. Thus, an absence of
137 ultrasonic detection or a very small number of contacts does not necessarily mean the absence
138 or the scarcity of the target species. It is indeed common to confuse the lack of contact with
139 the absence of species (Mackenzie, 2005; Albert & Thuiller, 2008). We know for example
140 that populations are often poorly estimated and are even considered absent when the
141 detectability of species is low, as with some amphibians and birds (Mackenzie & Royle, 2005;
142 Tanadini & Schmidt, 2011). Integrating detection bias is nevertheless an essential component
143 for any ecological study, and generally requires methodological adjustments during field
144 observations (Kéry & Schmid, 2004; Pellet & Schmidt, 2005), in particular for bats (Hayes,
145 2000; Weller, 2008; Barataud, 2012; Archaux *et al.*, 2013).

146 Our results are mainly explained by the echolocation parameters and hunting behaviour of the
147 two studied species. These gleaning bats emit weak echolocation calls and forage in cluttered
148 habitats. *Myotis bechsteinii* and *Plecotus auritus* are two species of forest bats which forage in

149 the foliage (Plank *et al.*, 2012). The range of their echolocation calls is low: ten meters for
150 *Myotis bechsteinii* and five meters for *Plecotus auritus* in forest understory (Barataud, 2012).
151 Moreover, *M. bechsteinii* can hunt insects directly on foliage without emitting ultrasounds
152 (Siemers & Swift, 2006), and could prey on insects in the canopy (Plank *et al.*, 2012),
153 becoming inaudible to a ground observer. *P. auritus* catch **moths** flying or resting in the
154 foliage (Robinson, 1990; Anderson & Racey, 1991; Shiel *et al.*, 1991; Swift, 1998; Ashrafi *et*
155 *al.*, 2011), emitting then ultrasonic signals with very low range (Swift, 1998; Barataud, 2012)
156 or hunt by passive listening (Anderson & Racey, 1993). In most situations, the two studied
157 bats are poorly audible by a ground observer unless one animal flies near the bat detector.
158 Our results demonstrate that it is not possible to use acoustic detection from the ground only
159 to survey and monitor forest bats. The use of automatic detectors could **be** particularly
160 relevant as they afford the installation of microphones in the canopy, as suggested by Rieger
161 & Nagel (2007), Collins & Jones (2009) and Müller *et al.* (2012). However, while automatic
162 recorders offer very long listening periods (Skalak *et al.*, 2012; Stahlschmidt & Brühl, 2012),
163 active detection by an observer can maximize the number of recording stations (Tyre *et al.*,
164 2003). Moreover, the analysis of recorded calls requires differentiating groups of species,
165 between those which emit their signals over long distances and therefore are easily detectable,
166 and those with a very limited signal range (a few meters) (Hayes *et al.*, 2009; Barataud,
167 2012). Some studies only provide generic results **due to the difficulty in obtaining correct**
168 **species identification of several groups of taxa, including medium-sized *Myotis* species**
169 (Rieger & Nagel, 2007; Collins & Jones, 2009, **Barataud 2012**). This has little consequence
170 regarding *Plecotus* whose species share quite similar ecology (Ashrafi *et al.*, 2011; Swift,
171 1998). This is **detrimental** for *Myotis* species which have very different niches and population
172 trends (Meschede & Heller, 2003; Müller *et al.*, 2012).

173 In addition, we can issue two types of recommendations, according to the purpose of the
174 study. For inventories, **as detection rate is locally low for several bat species** we recommend
175 increasing the number of ground recording stations per night in the same forest. For studies of
176 habitat selection, we support using several automatic detectors recording simultaneously bats
177 from the ground to the canopy overnight or, depending on target species, ground observers
178 with microphones also from the ground to the canopy for a long time (one hour or more). **One**
179 **limit then could be the huge amount of files to analyze and timetable and financial trade-offs**
180 **will drive survey protocols depending on the objectives.**

181

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186

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310

311 Table 1: Number of contacts of bat species at recording stations performed in the presence of
 312 *Myotis bechsteinii* (3 adult females, 25 stations, left – 1-4: young plots, 5-21: old-
 313 growth plots, 22-25: border of old-growth plots) and *Plecotus auritus* (6 adult females,
 314 35 stations in old-growth plots, right) in temperate lowland forests.

Station	<i>P. pipistrellus</i>	<i>P. kuhlii</i>	<i>E. serotinus</i>	<i>Plecotus</i> sp.	<i>B. barbastellus</i>	<i>M. bechsteinii</i>	<i>M. emarginatus</i>	<i>M. nattereri</i>	<i>M. mystacinus</i>	<i>M. myotis</i>	<i>Myotis</i> sp.	Station	<i>R. ferrumequinum</i>	<i>P. pipistrellus</i>	<i>P. kuhlii</i>	<i>E. serotinus</i>	<i>Nyctalus</i> sp.	<i>Plecotus</i> sp.	<i>B. barbastellus</i>	<i>M. daubentonii</i>	<i>M. nattereri</i>	<i>M. mystacinus</i>	<i>M. myotis</i>	<i>Myotis</i> sp.
1	1							1				1	5							21				
2	3					5	1			4		2									2			
3	3					1		1	23			3	1									4		4
4		1										4												
5	72							1				5	1						5		1			3
6	4									1	1	6												
7	5											7												1
8	21											8			1							1	2	
9	35	3										9	9									1		
10		1				97						10	6											
11				1							4	11	3	2										
12		1						1				12	6											
13	1							1				13	26				1							
14	1						1		1			14					1							
15	4	1						1	3			15	1									1	1	1
16	37			3								16	1	1										
17												17	23											
18	4	3			1							18	18											
19	4											19										2		
20	9	1				5						20	3								2			
21	7								1			21	19									2		
22	6	1			1							22	8											
23	8			2				3				23	3											
24	31	3	4								1	24	5											
25	7											25	17	4										
a	263	8	11	5	3	108	2	9	1	28	6	26	11	1									1	
b	20	4	6	2	3	4	2	7	1	4	3	27	23											
												28	3			6								1
												29	5											
												30	42									1		
												31	72							2				
												32	16											
												33	2											
												34	3	2										
												35											1	
a	1	332	7	3	18	2	7	23	5	13	4	10	1	332	7	3	18	2	7	23	5	13	4	10
b	1	27	3	2	2	2	2	7	1	4	3	5	1	27	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	8	3	5

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