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Authors	de la Hera, Iván;Fontanilles, Philippe;Delalande, Lucas;Glad, Anouk;Sarraude, Tom
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University College Cork, Ireland Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

## HETEROSPECIFIC ATTRACTION BY BLUETHROAT *LUSCINIA SVECICA* SONG PLAYBACKS DURING AUTUMN MIGRATION: AN EXPERIMENTAL TEST USING BIRD-RINGING DATA

## ATRACCIÓN DE HETEROSPECÍFICOS POR REPRODUCCIONES DEL CANTO DEL PECHIAZUL *LUSCINIA SVECICA* DURANTE LA MIGRACIÓN OTOÑAL: UN TEST EXPERIMENTAL EMPLEANDO DATOS DE ANILLAMIENTO

Iván de la Hera<sup>1,2,\*</sup>, Philippe Fontanilles<sup>1,3</sup>, Lucas Delalande<sup>1</sup>, Anouk Glad<sup>1</sup> and Tom Sarraude<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Observatoire d'Intérêt Scientifique Ornithologique (OISO), Cami deth Sailhetou, 65400 Lau Balagnas, France (<u>http://observatoire-oiso.blogspot.fr/</u>).

<sup>2</sup> School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University College Cork,

Cork, Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Réseau Français d'Ornithologie (RFO), BP 10008, 17120 Cozes, France \*Author for correspondence. Email: <u>ivan.delahera@ucc.ie</u>

Short title: Heterospecific attraction by Bluethroat playbacksKey words: Adour, conspecific attraction, Ime4, tape-lure, Turdidae.

1 SUMMARY.- Playback use of a particular avian species is well-known to have the potential to bias the composition of conspecifics (with regard to sex, age or body 2 condition) that can be captured during mist-netting sessions. However, the possibility 3 that playbacks affect heterospecific captures has been less explored and lacks solid 4 experimental evidence. In this study, we explicitly tested through an experimental 5 approach whether the use of a Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* playback altered the overall 6 7 number of heterospecifics captured during autumn migration in a wetland located in southwestern France. We found that playback use increased the capture rates of species 8 9 that were not the direct target of the playback. This heterospecific attraction effect 10 should be assessed and carefully considered when designing any avian monitoring program. 11

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13 RESUMEN.- El uso de reproducciones sonoras de una especie de ave concreta es bien conocido que tiene el potencial de sesgar la composición de conespecíficos (con 14 15 relación al sexo, edad o condición corporal) que pueden ser capturados durante las sesiones de anillamiento con redes japonesas. Sin embargo, la posibilidad de que los 16 17 reclamos sonoros afecten a las capturas de heterospecíficos ha sido menos explorada y 18 carece de evidencias experimentales sólidas. En este estudio testamos explícitamente si el uso de reclamos de Pechiazul Luscinia svecica alteraba el número total de 19 20 heterospecíficos capturados durante la migración otoñal en una zona húmeda localizada en el suroeste de Francia. Nuestros resultados muestran que el uso de reproductores 21 sonoros incrementa las tasas de capturas de especies que no fueron el objetivo directo 22 del reproductor. Este efecto de atracción por heterospecíficos debería ser evaluado y 23 considerado cuidadosamente a la hora de diseñar cualquier programa de seguimiento de 24 25 aves.

Animals make use of different sensorial (e.g. acoustic, visual) stimuli coming from 27 28 other individuals to take behavioural decisions (Maynard-Smith & Harper, 2003). In birds, the existence of conspecific and heterospecific acoustic interactions is well known 29 and is an important research area within social information theory (Nocera et al., 2006; 30 Valone, 2007; Magrath et al., 2009). Interestingly, avian bioacoustics also has a large 31 potential in practical applications, such as promoting the settlement of birds in particular 32 areas (Ward & Schlossberg, 2004; De Jong et al., 2015), deterring species that are 33 conflictive for human activities (Ribot et al., 2011) or increasing capture rates of rare 34 species in monitoring programs (Julliard et al., 2006; Jiguet et al., 2011). However, our 35 36 knowledge of how birds respond to different artificial aural attractants is still very sparse and biased towards particular avian groups (e.g. colonial seabirds) and mostly 37 during reproduction (Ahlering et al., 2010). 38 39 Playback use is a common practice in scientific mist-netting (Redfern & Clark, 2001). It is often accepted that this method increases the number of captures of target 40 41 species (conspecific attraction), although sound experimental studies are still scarce 42 (e.g. Mukhin et al., 2008; Arizaga et al., 2015). Much less understood, and often overlooked, is the potential impact of playbacks on capture rates of non-target species 43 44 through heterospecific attraction. The possibility that this effect occurs during migration 45 has been raised by several authors (Herremans, 1990; Wojczulanis-Jakubas et al., 2016). However, it has not been explicitly tested experimentally, let alone using a 46 design that accounts for the spatial and temporal variation in bird abundance and 47 48 capture rates. Thus, most relevant studies on this matter have been carried out without alternating treatments between study plots (i.e. overlooking spatial variation, e.g. 49 50 Mukhin *et al.*, 2008) or without overlapping in time treatment and control captures (i.e. ignoring temporal variation; e.g. Wojczulanis-Jakubas et al., 2016). Formally, the 51

robustness of this type of experimental designs would be compromised since observed patterns can be alternatively explained by, for example, differences between plots in habitat features or by temporal differences in the influx of migrants stopping over at the study site.

The Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) is a migratory species whose stopover ecology has recently attracted much attention in North Western Europe (Arizaga *et al.*, 2013; 2015). Thus, some ringing stations use audio-players of this species to maximize its captures during migration, but the consequences of this methodology on the catchability of other species remains unknown. In order to clarify this issue, we performed a playback experiment in a wetland located in southwestern France, where studies on the stopover ecology of Bluethroats and other species are carried out using aural attractants.

This study took place in Villefrangue, Quartier-bas (43°27'N, 01°28'W, France), a 63 64 locality situated in the lower basin of Nive river, near the Adour mouth in Bayonne city. The study site is a wetland dominated by reed bed (*Phragmites australis*) and other less 65 common plants associated with damp meadows, and scattered by some native (mostly 66 Willows Salix spp.) and exotic trees (mainly Elder Acer negundo) (see Fontanilles et al., 67 2014). We placed three triplets of mist-nets (triplet A, B and C) in the area, separated 68 each other by more than 70 m. Each triplet consisted of three 12-m mist-nets positioned 69 70 in straight line (36 m of overall length per triplet) and always in the same fixed positions. We made 21 ringing sessions (i.e. 21 ringing days) between August 18<sup>th</sup> and 71 72 October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, when migrating Bluethroats stopover in this region during their post-73 breeding migratory period. During each session, we used two playbacks, each one placed in two of the three triplets, while the triplet without playback was used as a 74 75 control. Both playbacks had the same characteristics and consisted in an mp3 (Intenso 76 music walker) containing a male Bluethroat song connected to an amplifier (18W Kemo

#M033) and a speaker (DB Sonic 6010). The playback installed in one triplet rarely 77 78 could be heard from the other triplets. We used exactly the same commercial male song used in the ringing campaigns performed in our study site and other areas (Arizaga et 79 al., 2015), which was extracted from Roché (2009). This song recording was played 80 repeatedly from approximately 30 minutes before dawn (when mist-nets were open) 81 82 until the end of the ringing session (when mist-nets were furled). Playbacks were 83 located at the midpoint of the corresponding 36-m mist-net line at volume 28 out of the 32 levels of the mp3. Whether the control triplet was on triplet A, B or C (see Fig. 1) 84 was selected randomly when possible, but it was conditional on two requirements. First, 85 86 each one of the three triplets was the control once every three ringing sessions and, second, we avoided that the same triplet was used as control in two consecutive 87 sessions. This decision was taken in order to have each experimental set-up 88 89 homogeneously distributed over time. According to this, each triplet was the control triplet seven days throughout the study period. 90 91 Our study was performed within a radio-tracking-based project studying the spatial 92 ecology of Bluethroats stopping over in the area during their autumn migration, so that the ringing dates selected to perform the experiment and the duration of each ringing 93 94 session was constrained by the monitoring necessities of this more general and priority 95 project. Thus, the number of days elapsed between consecutive ringing sessions (range: 1-11 days) and the duration of each ringing session differed (range: 150-360 min). 96

However, the opening and closing time of each triplet was virtually the same within
each day, so that differences in the patterns of captures observed in this study cannot be
attributed to methodological biases.

Each bird captured during a ringing session was ringed, and its species, age and sex
were determined based on available literature (Svensson, 1992; Jenni & Winkler, 1994).

102 We decided to not consider the re-traps of individuals previously captured within the 103 same day in order to avoid pseudo-replication. Playbacks might affect each species 104 differently depending on their phylogenetic or trophic similarity to the Bluethroat 105 (DeJong et al., 2015). Likewise, playbacks might affect the proportion of age and sex groups captured for a particular species (Arizaga et al., 2015). Our sample size was too 106 107 small to test all these specific effects reliably. Consequently, we opted for restricting our 108 analyses to: the overall number of captures (excluding Bluethroats), the number of 109 captures of species not included in *Muscicapidae* (the family the Bluethroat belongs to) and the closely-related family Turdidae (see Gill & Donsker, 2016), and specific 110 111 analyses for Bluethroats and for the most commonly trapped species in this study (the Reed Warbler Acrocephalus scirpaceus). 112

113 We used Generalized Linear Mixed models (GLMM) with Poisson error distribution 114 to test the hypothesis that the overall number of captures per triplet per day (either, 115 among and within triplets) would be larger when using the aural attractant. In this 116 analysis, we included the overall number of captures (excluding captures of Bluethroats) 117 per triplet as dependent variable, triplet (three levels: A, B and C), playback (whether a particular triplet had playback on a particular day or not) and their interaction as fixed 118 119 effects. The day was included as a random factor, since the number of captures can 120 greatly vary between days depending on the prevailing meteorological conditions and other factors that affect landing decisions of migrating birds. We performed the same 121 model using the number of captures of species not belonging to the families Turdidae or 122 123 Muscicapidae (see Table 1 to identify these species) and the captures of the Reed Warbler as dependent variables. Finally, a similar model with binomial error 124 125 distribution was performed for the capture or not of at least one Bluethroat in each 126 particular triplet per day, with the purpose of exploring the existence of conspecific

127 attraction in this species. All statistical tests were performed using the *R* package *lme4* 

128 (Bates & Maechler, 2010) and considering a threshold of P = 0.05.

We made a total of 574 captures from 21 different avian species during our 21 129 130 ringing sessions (Table 1). The Reed Warbler was by far the most commonly mistnetted species, followed in numbers by the Cetti's Warbler and the Sedge Warbler. All 131 132 other species, including the Bluethroat, accounted for less than 5% of the overall 133 number of captures (Table 1). Mean number of captures per day excluding the 134 Bluethroats was 26.6 birds (range = 8-144;  $\pm 6.4$  se). We detected a significant effect of the Bluethroat playback on the number of heterospecifics captured (Table 2), as it can 135 136 also be noted in Figure 1, where –for illustrative purposes– the percentage of captures made in each triplet per day was represented under the three different experimental set-137 ups (note also that the experimental set-up was not an effect to be estimated in the 138 139 statistical tests; see Table 2). The effect of the playback did not differ between triplets as it can be deduced from the lack of statistically significant interactions between the terms 140 141 'playback' and 'triplet' (see Table 2). Results were qualitatively the same when only 142 captures of individuals belonging to species not included within the families *Turdidae* or *Muscicapidae* were analysed ('playback' effects: Estimate =  $0.64 \pm 0.19$  se, Z-value 143 144 = 3.33, P < 0.001). Additionally, this pattern does not seem to be only mediated by the 145 most commonly trapped species, since the effect of the playback on the number of Reed Warblers trapped was marginally non-significant ('playback' effects: Estimate =  $0.46 \pm$ 146 0.25 se, *Z*-value = 1.82, *P* = 0.069). 147

We captured more Bluethroats in triplets with (n = 14) than in triplets without playback (n = 2), but this difference was not significant when tested by a GLMM with binomial error distribution ('playback' effects: Estimate =  $0.7 \pm 1.49$  se, *Z-value* = 0.47, P = 0.638).

Our study shows luring effects of Bluethroat song playbacks on other avian species, 152 153 which increased the overall number of birds trapped during bird-ringing sessions at 154 mist-nets fitted with a playback. Interestingly, observed patterns cannot be explained 155 only by the attraction of individuals phylogenetically more closely related to the Bluethroat, since results did not change qualitatively when captures of birds belonging 156 to the families *Turdidae* and *Muscicapidae* were not considered in the analyses. Thus, 157 158 our experimental study demonstrates with a proper spatial and temporal control that a 159 specific playback can increase the captures of heterospecific (non-phylogeneticallyrelated) birds. 160

161 The heterospecific attraction hypothesis was originally formulated to describe the fact that some migratory bird species use local resident birds from other species as cues 162 163 to make habitat-selection decisions for breeding (Monkkonen et al., 1997; Thomson et 164 al., 2003). However, their basic principles might be extrapolated to other periods of the 165 annual cycle of birds (i.e. migration or wintering), as well as to other zoological groups 166 (e.g. amphibians; Pupin et al., 2007). Our data support the idea that birds also include 167 the acoustic emissions of other bird species in their decision-making process at their stopover sites. In our study area, birds might be using heterospecific cues in order to 168 169 track suitable patches for foraging, since avian songs could indicate areas where 170 individuals are in good nutritional condition (Van Hout et al., 2012). This interpretation would be supported by the fact that the majority of the birds occurring in our study site 171 are likely to be actively migrating birds that stopped over in the area during their post-172 173 breeding migration. This is difficult to elucidate for each particular individual to test this possibility formally, especially for migratory or partial migratory species that show 174 175 some local breeding pairs (e.g. Reed Warbler, European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*). In 176 any case, it is expected that a high percentage of captured birds corresponded to

recently-arrived individuals that were completely unfamiliar with the area and, hence,
would make use of available social information (heterospecific songs) to track food
resources (Wojczulanis-Jakubas *et al.*, 2016).

We acknowledge that our study possesses two limitations that lead us to take our results and interpretations with some caution. First, observed patterns might be mediated by the specific nature of the single male song selected to be broadcasted in Villefranque. And, second, we lacked an additional non-natural noisy control (e.g. classic music) that helped us to rule out the possibility that birds were attracted by any type of playback.

186 We failed to detect a significant conspecific attraction effect of Bluethroat playbacks. This was probably mediated by the relatively low number of Bluethroats captured that 187 year, which only allowed us to perform a less powerful GLMM with binomial error 188 189 distribution to test this hypothesis. However, our rough figures suggest a potential effect 190 since 14 out of the 16 Bluethroats were trapped in triplets with playback (Table 1). If we 191 consider that the null hypothesis would be the capture of twice more Bluethroats in 192 mist-nets with playback (i.e. two triplets with playback versus one triplet without playback each day), we would obtain a marginally non-significant effect using a Chi-193 Square test ( $\gamma_1 = 3.15$ , P = 0.076). A recent study suggests the possibility that Bluethroat 194 195 playbacks would only increase autumn capture rates of conspecifics at particular 196 locations, probably those having also local breeding populations (Arizaga et al., 2015). Breeding Bluethroats have not been recorded in our study site, so individuals of this 197 198 species in Quartier-bas are considered migrating birds. Consequently, the causes determining the among-site differential response of Bluethroats to their own aural 199 200 attractant during autumn migration is still an open question.

201 There is increasing evidence suggesting that the information obtained in bird-ringing 202 monitoring programs can be altered by the use of playbacks and, hence, their use is 203 normally prohibited when birds are more sensitive to them (e.g. breeding period; 204 Redfern & Clark, 2001) or within ringing coordinated programs (DeSante et al., 2015). The most commonly described alterations are related to modifications in the proportions 205 206 of the different population groups (i.e. age, sex or birds with different body condition) that can be captured within the target species (Figuerola & Gustamante, 1995; Brotons, 207 208 2000; Lecoq & Catry, 2003). Although the potential of playbacks to alter heterospecific captures had been timidly suggested in some studies (Mukhin et al., 2008; Wojczulanis-209 210 Jakubas et al., 2016), this has not been broadly acknowledged. Our study provides substantial empirical evidence of the existence of heterospecific attraction during 211 212 autumn migration by using a more robust experimental design. Thus, overall captures in 213 the mist-nets equipped with Bluethroat playbacks in our study site are surely 214 overestimated. An interesting remaining question is to address whether this playback 215 effects are homogeneous across species, which could not be tested in our study due to 216 sample size limitations, but would have important implications for bird community comparisons. If the heterospecific attraction effects we found for the Bluethroat also 217 218 take place with the playbacks of other species, any inference made between sites (or 219 between periods within the same locality) in the capture rates of any species would be 220 compromised if playback protocols are not standardized in time and space. Consequently, the effects of aural attractants on heterospecific captures should be also 221 222 assessed and carefully considered by ornithologists when designing any avian monitoring program. 223 224

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- **Table 1.** Number of captures in control and playback triplets and overall number of
- 314 captures for each of the 21 avian species trapped during the autumn migration period in
- 315 Quartier-bas (Southwestern France). Species belonging to the *Turdidae* or
- 316 *Muscicapidae* families are indicated in the first column by '[TURD.]' or '[MUSC.]',
- 317 respectively. Note that playbacks were used in two out of the three mist-net triplets in
- 318 each ringing session.
- 319 **Tabla 1.** Número de capturas en tripletes control y con reclamo, así como número total
- de capturas para cada una de las 21 especies de aves capturadas durante el periodo de
- 321 migración otoñal en Quartier-bas (Suroeste de Francia). Especies pertenecientes a las
- 322 familias Turdidae y Muscicapidae están indicadas en la primera columna como
- 323 '[TURD.]' o '[MUSC.]' respectivamente. Nótese que los reclamos se emplearon en dos
- de los tres tripletes de redes en cada jornada de anillamiento.

	Control	Playback	Total
Species (Scientific name)	captures	captures	captures
Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus scirpaceus)	89	233	322
Cetti's Warbler (Cettia cetti)	7	30	37
Sedge Warbler (Acrocephalus schoenobaenus)	5	27	32
European Robin (Erithacus rubecula) [MUSC.]	9	16	25
Common Grasshopper Warbler (Locustella naevia)	3	20	23
Common Whitethroat (Sylvia communis)	2	21	23
Eurasian Blackcap (Sylvia atricapilla)	4	17	21
Eurasian Blue Tit (Cyanistes caeruleus)	3	15	18
Bluethroat (Luscinia svecica) [MUSC.]	2	14	16
Willow Warbler (Phylloscopus trochilus)	3	9	12
European Pied Flycatcher (Ficedula hypoleuca) [MUSC.]	3	7	10
Garden Warbler (Sylvia borin)	1	6	7
Great Tit (Parus major)	3	3	6
Melodious Warbler (Hippolais polyglotta)	4	1	5
Common Blackbird (Turdus merula) [TURD.]	3	2	5
Chiffchaff (Phylloscopus collybita)	0	4	4
Eurasian Wryneck (Jynx torquilla)	0	3	3
Song thrush (Turdus philomelos) [TURD.]	0	2	2
Nightingale (Luscinia megarhynchos) [MUSC.]	0	1	1
Whinchat (Saxicola rubetra) [MUSC.]	0	1	1

Eurasian Wren (Troglodytes troglodytes)	1	0	1	
Total	142	432	574	

- **Table 2.** Results of the GLMM effects model that analysed the number of birds
- 328 captured, excluding Bluethroats.
- **Tabla 2.** Resultados del modelo GLMM que analizó el número de aves capturadas una
- 330 vez se excluyeron las capturas correspondientes al Pechiazul.

Random Effects	Variance ± Std. Dev.			
Day	$0.497 \pm 0.705$ (63 observations, 21 days)			
Fixed effects:	Estimate	Std. Error	Ζ	P-value
			value	
Intercept (Triplet A, Control)	1.67	0.21	7.97	< 0.001
Triplet B	-0.08	0.24	-0.34	0.733
Triplet C	-0.35	0.28	-1.25	0.213
Playback (Playback)	0.61	0.19	3.28	0.001
Triplet $B \times Playback$	-0.16	0.32	-0.50	0.618
Triplet $C \times Playback$	-0.24	0.35	-0.69	0.488

FIGURE LEGENDS 334 335 336 Figure 1. Percentage of birds captured in each triplet over the total number of daily 337 captures for each of the three experimental set-ups that were possible during each 338 ringing day (control in triplet A, B or C). Whether within each set-up the triplet has a playback or not (control) is indicated in the graph by P or C, respectively. Graph shows 339 means and SE. In all cases the sample size for each bar in the graph is the same (n = 7). 340 Note that the percentage of captures was used for illustrative purposes in order to 341 342 account for between-day differences in the number of captures, but raw values of captures were used in the statistical analyses (Table 2). Likewise, the experimental set-343 344 up was not a main effect to be tested in the statistical analyses, but was also used in this 345 graph to better represent the between and within-triplet variation in capture rates. 346 347 Figura 1. Porcentaje de aves capturadas en cada triplete de redes sobre el número total 348 de capturas diarias para cada una de las tres configuraciones experimentales posibles 349 durante cada jornada de anillamiento (control en triplete A, B o C). Si dentro de cada 350 configuración el triplete tenía reclamo sonoro o no (control) se indica en el gráfico 351 como P o C, respectivamente. La gráfica muestra medias y errores estándar. En todos 352 los casos, el tamaño de muestra para cada barra en el gráfico es el mismo (n = 7). Nótese que el porcentaje de capturas sólo se empleó con fines ilustrativos para controlar 353 354 por las diferencias diarias en el número de capturas, pero fueron los valores originales los utilizados en los análisis estadísticos. Igualmente, la configuración experimental no 355 356 fue un efecto a testar en los análisis estadísticos (Tabla 2), sino que también se empleó en la gráfica para representar más adecuadamente la variación entre y dentro de tripletes 357 358 en las tasas de capturas. 359



361 De la Hera et al. Figure 1