

INFLUENCE DU PAYSAGE AGRICOLE SUR LE SUCCES REPRODUCTEUR DE
L'HIRONDELLE BICOLORE (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

Par

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Avec la nécessité de fournir une population humaine sans cesse croissante en nourriture, l'agriculture moderne ne ressemble plus que de très loin à ce qu'elle était voici quelques décennies. Des objectifs de production toujours plus élevés ont ainsi conduit à une intensification drastique des pratiques agricoles, entraînant une modification de la structure du paysage. Cette transformation implique toute une série de conséquences négatives pour les populations d'oiseaux champêtres et principalement une perte d'habitat, une homogénéisation du paysage et une diminution de l'abondance de nourriture. Plusieurs études ont ainsi montré que l'intensification des pratiques agricoles diminue la richesse spécifique et l'abondance des oiseaux et altère leur succès reproducteur. Cependant ces études ont seulement dégagé des tendances populationnelles et aucune n'a quantifié les variations du succès reproducteur au niveau de l'individu en fonction d'un gradient d'intensification agricole sur plusieurs échelles spatiales. Nous avons quantifié différents aspects du succès reproducteur de l'Hirondelle bicolor *Tachycineta bicolor* en fonction d'un gradient d'intensification agricole à sept échelles spatiales (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 et 20 km) sur un territoire de 10,200 km² au Sud du Québec, Canada. Nos résultats montrent que la probabilité d'occupation d'un nichoir par un couple d'hirondelle diminue avec la superficie de cultures intensives (maïs, soya) et que la compétition interspécifique est également un facteur limitant. La reproduction de l'hirondelle dépend aussi de l'intensification de l'agriculture. Ainsi les hirondelles pondent moins d'œufs lorsque la proportion de cultures intensives augmente dans le paysage, probablement à cause de la disponibilité moindre en nourriture. De même 5 oisillons en moyenne s'envolent là où la proportion de cultures extensives (prairies et pâturages) atteint 44% à 5 km alors que seuls 2 oisillons s'envolent là où cette proportion atteint 10%. La probabilité que les oisillons s'envolent dans une couvée augmente aussi avec la proportion de cultures extensives. L'importance de l'effet des cultures extensives sur le nombre d'oisillons envolés et la probabilité d'envol varie avec l'échelle, indiquant que les hirondelles réagissent de manière non-linéaire à un gradient spatial du paysage. Les résultats ont permis d'établir que la structure du paysage agricole influence le succès reproducteur des Hirondelle bicolores.

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INTRODUCTION GÉNÉRALE

Influence des pratiques agricoles sur les populations d'oiseaux champêtres

Ces dernières décennies ont vu se développer un changement profond des pratiques agricoles. Celles-ci se sont grandement intensifiées dans le but d'atteindre des taux de production élevés et constants, que ce soit en Europe (Tscharntke *et al.* 2005) ou en Amérique du Nord (Jobin et Boutin 1996). Autrefois axée sur les cultures fourragères de petite envergure, l'agriculture est aujourd'hui orientée vers les grandes cultures céréalières, comme celle du maïs-grain (Siriwardena *et al.* 2001). Cette intensification implique un changement dramatique du paysage agricole via la conversion d'écosystèmes complexes naturels en écosystèmes agricoles structurellement simplifiés (Tscharntke *et al.* 2005). Au même moment, l'hétérogénéité de l'habitat diminue suite à l'homogénéisation des cultures et à la perte d'habitats adjacents tels que des haies, fossés, boisés ou marais (Jobin et Boutin 1996, Benton *et al.* 2003). L'augmentation de l'utilisation de pesticides et de fertilisants chimiques, associée à une mécanisation accrue du travail agricole, un avancement dans le temps des dates de semis et récoltes, ainsi qu'une réduction, voire une disparition des rotations traditionnelle de cultures, ont entraîné une perte rapide de la biodiversité mondiale. Il est maintenant établi que l'intensification de l'agriculture entraîne des conséquences aussi bien au niveau local (érosion accrue, diminution de la fertilité du sol), qu'au niveau régional (pollution de l'eau, eutrophisation des rivières et des lacs) et au niveau global (impacts négatifs sur l'atmosphère et le climat) (Matson *et al.* 1997, Tilman *et al.* 2002). L'impact négatif de l'agriculture est général et observé sur plusieurs taxons, incluant les mammifères (Flowerdew 1997), les arthropodes et les plantes (Sotherton et Self 2000).

Plusieurs études corrélatives suggèrent que l'intensification des pratiques agricoles affecte les populations d'oiseaux champêtres (Chamberlain et Fuller 2000, Donald *et al.* 2001, Siriwardena *et al.* 2001, Atkinson *et al.* 2005, Wilson *et al.* 2005), dont les effectifs sont en baisse constante depuis quelques décennies (Askins 1993, Peterjohn et Sauer 1999, Vickery et Herkert 2001, Murphy 2003). En effet, Peterjohn et Sauer (1999) rapportent que 12 espèces de passereaux associés aux prairies sur 14 déclinent aux États-

Unis, alors que Fuller et co-auteurs (1995) trouvent que 83% des espèces d'oiseaux champêtres ont décliné en abondance en Europe entre 1970 et 1990. Des analyses récentes des populations d'oiseaux nicheuses d'Amérique du Nord montrent que le déclin des oiseaux champêtres est plus important, plus consistant et plus étendu que pour des groupes d'oiseaux associés à d'autres milieux (Askins 1993). L'hypothèse généralement avancée pour expliquer ce déclin est la destruction, la fragmentation et la dégradation de l'habitat causées par l'intensification des pratiques agricoles.

A ce titre, de nombreux exemples d'effets négatifs de l'intensification des pratiques agricoles sur les populations d'oiseaux existent dans la littérature :

1. Perte d'habitats et homogénéisation du paysage : La généralisation des vastes monocultures et l'abandon des petites exploitations mixtes ont pour conséquence une diminution drastique du nombre de fermes alors que la taille moyenne des fermes a quand à elle doublé sur une période de 30 ans au Québec (Freemark et Boutin 1995). Ainsi, l'abandon de fermes laitières au profit d'autres cultures a une influence négative sur le succès reproducteur, l'abondance et la qualité des oisillons de l'Hirondelle rustique (*Hirundo rustica*) dus à la diminution de la quantité d'insectes entraînée par l'absence du bétail (Møller 2001, Ambrosini *et al.* 2002). Cette homogénéisation des cultures implique aussi la conversion des habitats non cultivés et habitats marginaux (haies, boisés, arbres morts) en cultures. Or, plusieurs études montrent l'importance des habitats marginaux et de la diversité d'habitat pour de nombreuses espèces d'oiseaux (Tella *et al.* 1998, Hinsley et Bellamy 2000, Berg 2002, Evans *et al.* 2003, Woodhouse *et al.* 2005). Différentes études ont ainsi montré une relation entre l'homogénéisation du paysage agricole et la baisse d'abondance des populations d'oiseaux (Wilson *et al.* 2005); entre autre pour le Bruant ortolan (*Emberiza hortulana*) qui voit ses effectifs baisser de 72 % entre 1984 et 2002 en Suisse (Vepsäläinen *et al.* 2005) ou encore une diminution de 51 % du nombre d'Alouettes des champs (*Alauda arvensis*) entre 1968 et 1995 en Angleterre (Wilson *et al.* 1997). Enfin, un des exemples les plus parlants est l'étude de Donald et co-auteurs (2001), qui montre que la quantité de céréales cultivée (en tonnes/ha) explique à elle seule 30 % du déclin de 52 espèces d'oiseaux champêtres Européens.

2. Transformation de l'agriculture traditionnelle : La manière de cultiver les champs a beaucoup changé avec la mécanisation du travail à la ferme et les nouveaux objectifs de production. Une étude de Martin et Forsyth (2003) montre que l'ancienne pratique du sillage minimum, soit le fait de planter les semences directement sans travail de la terre, est bénéfique pour beaucoup d'oiseaux nichant dans les champs. Également, l'avancement de la date de récolte a une influence négative sur le Tarier des prés (*Saxicola rubetra*) (Müller *et al.* 2005) et le Goglu des prés (*Dolichonyx orzivorus*) (Herkert 1997, Perlut *et al.* 2006). Une des raisons avancée est la destruction des nids, œufs, poussins et adultes lors du fauchage (Frawley et Best 1991, Inchausti et Bretagnolle 2005). Une autre conséquence de l'intensification des pratiques agricoles est l'utilisation de pesticides pour le contrôle des ravageurs de cultures, outre les conséquences indirectes sur les oiseaux engendrées par la perte de nourriture, il existe des effets directs sur la physiologie des oiseaux. Bartuszevige et co-auteurs (2002) trouvent que 9 espèces sur 10 ont au moins un composé de pesticides organochlorés au dessus de la limite de détection, les oiseaux insectivores étant les plus touchés. Les composés organochlorés des pesticides sont reconnus comme étant un facteur affectant le succès reproducteur des oiseaux, notamment chez l'Hirondelle bicolor (*Tachycineta bicolor*) (Bishop *et al.* 1998a, Bishop *et al.* 1998b, Bishop *et al.* 1999, Mayne *et al.* 2005).

3. Diminution de l'abondance de nourriture : Plusieurs études associent la perte de nourriture (diminution généralisée de la diversité et de l'abondance d'invertébrés et de plantes) à l'utilisation de pesticides, à la spécialisation des fermes ou encore à la perte d'habitats marginaux, ce qui a un impact négatif indirect sur les populations d'oiseaux champêtres (Wilson *et al.* 1999, Benton *et al.* 2002). Pour plusieurs espèces, la diminution en abondance des invertébrés est reconnue comme étant critique au moment de l'élevage des jeunes. Par exemple, moins de nourriture diminue la survie des oisillons chez le Bruant Jaune (*Emberiza citrinella*) (Morris *et al.* 2005, Hart *et al.* 2006) et la Perdrix grise (*Perdix perdix*) (Rands 1985). Inchausti et Bretagnolle (2005) associent la diminution du nombre d'insectes au déclin de 92 % du nombre de mâles reproducteurs de l'Outarde canepetière (*Tetrax tetrax*) en France depuis 1980.

Il est cependant important de tenir compte du fait que chacun de ces aspects de l'intensification de l'agriculture n'agit pas de manière individuelle sur les populations d'oiseaux, mais bien qu'ils interagissent collectivement (Benton *et al.* 2003).

Ainsi, bon nombre d'études se sont intéressé à l'influence des pratiques agricole sur les populations d'oiseaux en Europe ou en Amérique du Nord (voir Tableau A). Cependant, si on regarde ce tableau d'un peu plus près, il apparait que chacune de ces études est limitée d'une manière ou d'une autre. En particulier, ces études choisissent souvent un rayon d'étude restreint (une ferme). Or, l'intensification de l'agriculture agit à plusieurs échelles spatiales sur les organismes, l'intensification au niveau du paysage s'ajoute à l'effet local de l'intensification des pratiques agricoles (Tschamtkke *et al.* 2005). De plus, l'échelle spatiale à laquelle chaque individu perçoit son environnement et y répond change pendant la saison de reproduction (Kotliar et Wiens 1990, Saab 1999, Kristan 2006). Enfin, aucune étude n'a regardé si les effets observés agissaient de la même façon partout où ces mécanismes peuvent être appliqués (e.g., à travers toute l'aire de répartition d'une espèce, Whittingham *et al.* 2007). Il est donc important de quantifier comment la structure du paysage affecte la réponse des oiseaux à plusieurs échelles spatiales, à différent moment de leur reproduction et sur un gradient étendu de conditions environnementales pour pouvoir relier le succès individuel à la structure de population et à sa dynamique. Une deuxième limitation classique est que ces études quantifient l'influence des pratiques agricoles sur des tendances populationnelles générales (richesse spécifique, abondance) et sur plusieurs espèces à la fois. Quand ces études s'intéressent à des mécanismes plus précis (e.g., succès reproducteur), les auteurs utilisent habituellement des moyennes pour chaque variable réponses, alors que les variables explicatives sont regroupées en classes (e.g, comparaison d'une moyenne d'œufs pondus dans un champ organique et dans un champ intensivement cultivé). Ainsi, la majorité des études sur le sujet se sont contentées de dégager des tendances populationnelles générales ou encore de contraster vivement l'effet d'une pratique donnée.

Tableau A. Revue de la littérature existante des études portant sur les relations entre les pratiques agricoles et les oiseaux champêtres.

Auteur	Source	Où	Espèces	Variable réponse	Succès reproducteur	Variables explicatives	Variables explicatives regroupées en classes	Rayon d'étude
Ambrosini <i>et al.</i> 2002	Journal of Applied Ecology	Italie	Hirondelle des Granges	Abondance	—	Pourcentage de recouvrement / Bétail	non	0.4 km
Atkinson <i>et al.</i> 2005	Journal of Applied Ecology	Angleterre	28	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion / Nourriture / Structure de la végétation	oui	< 1 km (1 champ)
Bartuszevige <i>et al.</i> 2002	Environmental Pollution	Amérique du Nord	10	Niveau de contamination aux pesticides	—	Concentration de pesticides dans les tissus	non	< 1 km (1 champ)
Basore <i>et al.</i> 1986	Journal of Wildlife Management	Iowa	12	Succès reproducteur (0 ou 1)	—	Gestion / Structure de la végétation	oui	< 1 km (1 champ)
Beintema et Müskens 1987	Journal of Applied Ecology	Hollande	17	Succès reproducteur (Taux de survie journalier)	—	Prédation des nids	non	< 1 km (1 champ)
Benton <i>et al.</i> 2002	Journal of Applied Ecology	Angleterre	15	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion / Pourcentage de recouvrement / Nourriture / Météo	oui	< 1 km (1 champ)
Best <i>et al.</i> 1997	Wildlife Society Bulletin	Midwest États-Unis	33	Abondance / Succès reproducteur (0 ou 1)	—	Gestion / Structure de la végétation	oui	0.1 km
Bollinger 1995	The Auk	New York	10	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Structure de la végétation	oui	0.1 km

Auteur	Source	Ou	Espèces	Variable réponse	Succès reproducteur	Variables explicatives	Variables explicatives regroupées en classes	Rayon d'étude
Boutin <i>et al.</i> 1999	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Ontario	25	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Concentration de pesticides dans le milieu	non	< 1 km (1 champ)
Bradbury <i>et al.</i> 2000	Journal of Applied Ecology	Angleterre	Bruant jaune	Abondance	Nombre d'œufs moyens / Nombre d'oisillons à l'envol moyen	Gestion	oui	< 1 km (1 champ)
Brickle <i>et al.</i> 2000	Journal of Applied Ecology	Angleterre	Bruant ortolan	Succès reproducteur (Taux de survie journalier)	Nombre d'œufs moyens / Nombre d'oisillons à l'envol moyen	Nourriture / Concentration de pesticides dans le milieu	non	0.5 km
Brown <i>et al.</i> 2002	The Auk	Nebraska	Hirondelle des Rivages	Occupation / Taille de la colonie	—	Pourcentage de recouvrement	non	2 km
Bruun et Smith 2002	Biological Conservation	Suède	Étourneau	Abondance	—	Gestion / Nourriture / Structure de la végétation	oui	0.5 km
Chamberlain <i>et al.</i> 2000	Journal of Applied Ecology	Angleterre	29	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion / Pourcentage de recouvrement	non	< 1 km (1 champ)
Chamberlain <i>et al.</i> 1999	Biological Conservation	Angleterre	18	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion	oui	< 1 km (1 champ)
Chamberlain et Fuller 2000	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Angleterre	21	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Pourcentage de recouvrement	non	10 km

Auteur	Source	Ou	Espèces	Variable réponse	Succès reproducteur	Variables explicatives	Variables explicatives regroupées en classes	Rayon d'étude
Chamberlain et Wilson 1995	British Ornithologists' Union	Angleterre	19	Abondance	—	Gestion / Structure des Haies	oui	<1km (1 champ)
Davis 2005	The Condor	Saskatchewan	5	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Structure de la végétation	oui	0.3 km
Deschênes <i>et al.</i> 2003	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Québec	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Structure de bandes riveraines	oui	0.5 km
Devereux <i>et al.</i> 2004	Ibis	Angleterre	Etourneau	Comportement de recherche de nourriture	—	Drainage	oui	< 1 km (1 champ)
Donald <i>et al.</i> 2001	Proceedings of the Royal Society of London	Europe	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Indices d'intensification (Tonne/ha de céréales, l de production laitière)	non	Un pays
Donazar <i>et al.</i> 1993	Journal of Applied Ecology	Espagne	Faucon crécerelle	Sélection d'habitat pour se nourrir	—	Gestion / Nourriture	oui	0.5 km
Dunford et Freemark 2005	Landscape Ecology	Ontario	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Pourcentage de recouvrement	oui	5 km
Eybert <i>et al.</i> 1995	Biological Conservation	France	Linotte mélodieuse	Abondance / Succès reproducteur	Nombre d'œufs moyens / Nombre d'oisillons à l'envol	Gestion	oui	1.2 km

Auteur	Source	Ou	Espèces	Variable réponse	Succès reproducteur	Variables explicatives	Variables explicatives regroupées en classes	Rayon d'étude
Fletcher et Koford 2003	The Auk	Iowa	Goglu des prés	Abondance	—	Distance à la bordure / Structure de la bordure	oui	<1km (1 champ)
Frawley et Best 1991	Wildlife Society Bulletin	Iowa	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Fauchage	non	0.3 km
Freemark et Kirk 2001	Biological Conservation	Ontario	43	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion	oui	0.2 km
Fuller et al. 1995	Conservation Biology	Angleterre	18	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion	non	10 km
Fuller et Gough 1999	Biological Conservation	Angleterre	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Grazing	non	>20km (un comté)
Gibson et al. 1993	Journal of Applied Ecology	Kansas	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique	—	Gestion / Fauchage	oui	0.2 km
Giuliano et Daves 2002	Biological Conservation	Pennsylvanie	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance / Succès reproducteur (0 ou 1)	Proportion d'oisillons envolés moyen	Gestion	oui	<1km (1 champ)
Heikkinen et al. 2004	Journal of Applied Ecology	Finlande	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Pourcentage de recouvrement	non	0.5 km

Auteur	Source	Ou	Espèces	Variable réponse	Succès reproducteur	Variables explicatives	Variables explicatives regroupées en classes	Rayon d'étude
Herkert 1997	Biological Conservation	Midwestern USA	Goglu des prés	Abondance	—	Gestion / Fauchage	oui	NA
Jobin et Boutin 1996	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Québec	28	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Structure de la végétation	oui	0.4 km
Jobin <i>et al.</i> 2001	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Québec	42	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Structure de la bordure	oui	0.6 km
Kujawa 2002	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Pologne	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Structure de la végétation	oui	5 km
Martin et Forsyth 2003	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Alberta	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Labourage	oui	0.8 km
Müller <i>et al.</i> 2005	Journal of Ornithology	Suisse	Tarif des prés	Succès reproducteur	Nombre d'œufs moyens / Nombre d'oisillons à l'envol moyen	Météo / Date de moisson	non	0.6 km
Olsson <i>et al.</i> 2002	Ecography	Suède	Etourneau	Succès de recherche de nourriture	—	Gestion	oui	<1km (1 champ)
Perlut <i>et al.</i> 2006	Ecological Applications	Vermont	Goglu des prés, Bruant des prés	Construction du nid / Succès reproducteur (taux de survie journalier)	Nombre d'œufs pondus moyen / Nombre d'oisillons envolés moyen	Gestion	oui	<1km (1 champ)

Auteur	Source	Ou	Espèces	Variable réponse	Succès reproducteur	Variables explicatives	Variables explicatives regroupées en classes	Rayon d'étude
Robinson <i>et al.</i> 2003	Bird Study	Angleterre	Hirondelle des Granges	Abondance	—	Gestion / Bétail	oui	1 km
Ryan <i>et al.</i> 1998	The American Midland Naturalist	Missouri	Tétras des prairies	Abondance / Succès reproducteur (0 ou 1 / Taux de survie journalier)	—	Gestion	oui	<1km (1 champ)
Shutler <i>et al.</i> 2000	Conservation Biology	Saskatchewan	37	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion	oui	<1km (1 champ)
Sirwardena <i>et al.</i> 2001	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Europe	Multi-sp	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Gestion	non	Un pays
Smith <i>et Bruun</i> 2002	Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment	Suède	Etourneau	Succès reproducteur / Abondance	Date de ponte / Nbre et prop. d'œufs pondus / Nbre et prop. d'oisillons envolés	Pourcentage de recouvrement	non	0.5 km
Söderstrom <i>et Part</i> 2000	Conservation Biology	Suède	23	Richesse spécifique / Abondance	—	Structure de la végétation	oui	1 km
Thomson <i>et Cotton</i> 1995	British Ornithologists' Union	Angleterre	Bruant proyer	Abondance	—	Gestion	oui	0.2 km
Utsua <i>et al.</i> 2005	Biological Conservation	Espagne	Faucon crécerellette	Abondance / Sélection d'habitat	—	Gestion	oui	<1km (1 champ)

Auteur	Source	Ou	Espèces	Variable réponse	Succès reproducteur	Variables explicatives	Variables explicatives regroupées en classes	Rayon d'étude
Vepsäläinen et al. 2005	Annals of Zoological Fennici	Finlande	Bruant ortolan	Abondance	—	Gestion	oui	0.4 km
Wilson et al. 1997	Journal of Applied Ecology	Angleterre	Alouette des champs	Succès reproducteur (0 ou 1)	—	Gestion	oui	<1km (1 champ)

Revue de la littérature existante des études publiées après 1986 portant sur les relations entre les pratiques agricoles et les oiseaux champêtres. Cette revue a été effectuée à l'aide du moteur de recherche *Web of Science* avec les mots clés *agricultural intensification* et *bird*. Dans la colonne *Nombre d'espèces*, Multi-sp est utilisé lorsque le nombre d'espèces n'est pas spécifié. Le succès reproducteur se trouve dans la colonne *Variable réponse* quand les variables utilisées pour définir le succès reproducteur sont différentes de celles utilisées lors de notre étude. Lorsque celles-ci sont identiques, elles sont détaillées dans la colonne *Succès reproducteur*. La colonne *Variables explicatives* indique quelles variables du paysage ont été utilisées (Type de culture : organique/inorganique, intensif/extensif, maïs/maraîcher/prairies etc.). La colonne suivante indique si les variables explicatives ont été regroupées en classes sommaires (oui) ou si elles constituent un gradient (non). La colonne *Rayon d'étude* fait référence au rayon auxquelles les variables du paysage sont prises à partir du point de prise de données.

Les Hirondelles

L'Hirondelle bicolore est une espèce migratrice qui se reproduit communément en Amérique du Nord. Elle se nourrit principalement d'insectes volants et chasse en vol. Son habitat est constitué de milieux ouverts et milieux humides tels que les marais, les bords de lacs, les champs et les prairies. Elle niche dans des nichoirs ou des cavités déjà creusées par des pics (Robertson *et al.* 1992). L'Hirondelle bicolore est un oiseau dont l'écologie est probablement fortement influencée par l'intensification des pratiques agricoles. Plusieurs aspects spécifiques de cette intensification sont d'ailleurs connus comme influençant leur succès reproducteur. On a déjà mentionné que l'application de pesticides avait des conséquences sur leur physiologie (Bishop *et al.* 1998a, Bishop *et al.* 1998b, Bishop *et al.* 1999, Mayne *et al.* 2005). De plus, la quantité de nourriture est certainement un facteur très important susceptible de varier en fonction des pratiques agricoles. Des études de Quinney *et al.* (1986), McCarty et Winkler (1999), Nooker *et al.* (2005) montrent clairement qu'une augmentation de la quantité d'insectes est associée à une meilleure croissance et survie des oisillons de l'Hirondelle bicolore. Un autre facteur important agissant parallèlement à l'intensification est la météo, car une météo froide et humide entraîne une diminution de la quantité d'invertébrés disponibles (McCarty et Winkler 1999, Nooker *et al.* 2005). Finalement, la disparition des fermes laitières est importante chez l'Hirondelle rustique (Møller 2001, Ambrosini *et al.* 2002) et pourrait tout aussi bien affecter les Hirondelle bicolore.

Les Hirondelle bicolore doivent faire face à plusieurs contraintes lors de la reproduction. Tout d'abord, comme elles nichent dans des nichoirs ou dans des cavités excavées par des pics, la disponibilité en sites de nidification est limitée et elles doivent faire face à une forte compétition intra- et inter-spécifique. Un deuxième élément contraignant est qu'elles se nourrissent presque exclusivement d'insectes volants, alors que la disponibilité de ceux-ci varie fortement en fonction de l'habitat, mais aussi à travers la saison de reproduction (Wilson *et al.* 1999, Wickramasinghe *et al.* 2004). Ces deux contraintes combinées font que les hirondelles risquent de dépendre de la structure du paysage non seulement lors du choix du site de nidification, mais aussi de manière différente lors des diverses étapes de la reproduction. Les contraintes liées à l'élevage des

oisillons ne sont pas les mêmes que lors de la ponte des œufs: le temps passé au nichoir lors de la ponte est beaucoup plus faible que lors de l'incubation et l'élevage des jeunes, laissant plus de temps libre pour la recherche de nourriture. Ainsi, le paysage est probablement une cause de variation majeure dans les différences observées lors de la reproduction. Or, il s'agit d'un point que peu d'études ont exploré en profondeur; celles qui ont étudié le succès reproducteur de l'Hirondelle bicolore ont mis en évidence des mécanismes liés à la disponibilité en nourriture (McCarty and Winkler 1999, Nooker *et al.* 2005), à la condition et l'âge des oiseaux (Robertson et Rendell 2001), au taux de parasitisme ou à l'influence du système immunitaire (Shutler *et al.* 2004, Ardia 2005) sans jamais prendre en compte (ou très partiellement) d'éventuelles variations de ces patrons en fonction du paysage (voir Tableau A).

Objectifs du mémoire

Le but de la recherche est de quantifier l'effet de la structure du paysage agricole sur la reproduction de l'Hirondelle bicolore, un oiseau résidant des milieux agricoles. Pour ce faire je décomposerai les différentes étapes de la reproduction de l'Hirondelle bicolore, que j'analyserai ensuite à la lumière du paysage agricole. L'objectif est d'établir si je peux mettre en évidence une variation du succès reproducteur le long d'un gradient d'intensification de pratiques agricoles et pour différentes échelles d'étude, et en particulier si des variations de ce succès reproducteur peuvent être prédites par des variations du paysage agricole à une échelle spatiale donnée. L'hypothèse est que le succès reproducteur est plus faible dans les habitats fortement modifiés à cause de l'intensification des pratiques agricoles.

Les objectifs spécifiques seront de regarder l'influence des pratiques agricoles et du paysage et de déterminer l'échelle spatiale à laquelle ceux-ci agissent sur:

1. La probabilité qu'un nichoir soit occupé
2. Le nombre d'œufs pondus par couvée
3. La probabilité que les œufs éclosent
4. Le nombre de jeunes à l'envol

5. La probabilité que les jeunes s'envolent

CHAPITRE 1

NESTBOX OCCUPANCY AND BREEDING SUCCESS OF TREE SWALLOWS ALONG A GRADIENT OF AGRICULTURAL INTENSIFICATION

MISE EN CONTEXTE

La présente étude porte sur l'intensification des pratiques agricoles sur la reproduction de l'Hirondelle bicoloré. Les auteurs de cette étude sont : Arnaud Ghilain et Marc Bélisle. Le premier auteur est celui ayant apporté la plus grande contribution à l'étude. Il a contribué à élaborer et à appliquer le protocole d'échantillonnage sur le terrain, a procédé aux principales analyses statistiques, interprété les résultats et a rédigé le présent article. Cet article est l'objet principal de ce mémoire et sera soumis à une revue scientifique de calibre international, *Ecological Applications*.

ABSTRACT

The intensification of agricultural practices has been identified as the main cause of population decline in farmland birds over the last 50 years in both Europe and North America. Although the link between species richness or abundance and various components of agricultural intensification are well established, the mechanisms underlying these trends have rarely been addressed empirically along a gradient of agricultural intensification or have been quantified at only one spatial scale. Here we quantified the influence of landscape structure on the nestbox occupancy pattern and breeding success of Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) at 7 spatial scales (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 20-km radii) over a 10,200-km² gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada. Our study was based on a network of 400 nestboxes distributed among 40 farms, which were visited every 2 days over 3 breeding seasons, 2004-2006. Nestbox occupancy decreased with the proportion of intensive cultures (maize, cereals, and soybeans) in the landscape, especially when manure heaps and tanks were abundant, and was also determined by local variables (i.e., nestbox clearance, interspecific competition) and by previous year fledging success. Clutch size decreased with breeding time and with the proportion of intensive cultures in the landscape, with no consistent variation across spatial scales. Hatching success was not related to any landscape variables but increased with clutch size. Both the number of fledglings and fledging probability increased with the proportion of extensive cultures (hayfields, pastures, and fallows) in the landscape. These effects increased with spatial scale and reached a plateau at the 5-km radius – the maximum distance from the nest reached by foraging swallows. Our results can likely be attributed to lower food availability in intensive cultures compared to extensive ones. This study suggests that several components of breeding that impact on population structure and dynamics of insectivorous birds will be negatively affected by agricultural intensification.

Key words: agricultural intensification, breeding success, brood size, clutch size, competition, fledging success, landscape structure, hierarchical spatial scales, nestbox occupancy, Tree Swallow.

INTRODUCTION

Farmland bird populations are declining at a faster rate than most other groups of birds in both Europe and North America (Askins 1999, Vickery and Herkert 2001, Murphy 2003, Donald *et al.* 2006). Much of this decline has been attributed to habitat destruction, fragmentation, and degradation caused by changes in agricultural practices over the last 50 years (Peterjohn and Sauer 1999, Chamberlain *et al.* 2000, Donald *et al.* 2001). These changes include an intensification of resource use and a shift from diverse mixed-farming (e.g., livestock pasture and arable) or dairy-farming systems to large scale, intensive arable, mainly for the production of cereals and other rowcrops. This shift led to a decrease in habitat heterogeneity because of lower crop diversity, and also because marginal habitats, such as hedgerows, woodlots, and wetlands, were converted to croplands (Bélanger and Grenier 2002, Robinson and Sutherland 2002, Benton *et al.* 2003, Tscharntke *et al.* 2005). The structure and dynamics of agricultural landscapes have also been modified through rising use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, together with increasing mechanization, earlier planting and harvesting, and the simplification and loss of traditional crop rotations (Robinson and Sutherland 2002, Benton *et al.* 2003, Tscharntke *et al.* 2005). These modifications which contribute to make farmlands structurally simplified ecosystems (Matson *et al.* 1997, Tscharntke *et al.* 2005), have all been held responsible to some level, independently or collectively, for the decline of many populations of farmland birds (Donald *et al.* 2001, Wilson *et al.* 2005, Donald *et al.* 2006).

Many studies have quantified the influence of agricultural intensification and related environmental variables (e.g., insect abundance) on species richness and abundance of farmland birds (Fuller *et al.* 1995, Benton *et al.* 2002, Bruun and Smith 2002), but very few have empirically assessed the mechanisms through which agriculture may affect individual fitness and life history components, and in turn, population structure and dynamics. The potential paths investigated so far include the foraging and breeding behavior of birds across fields subjected to different management regimes. For instance, foraging birds have been found to select fields under particular management (e.g., organic

vs. inorganic) and to experience differential success that depended upon such management (Donazar 1993, Olsson *et al.* 2002, Devereux *et al.* 2004). Similarly, some components of breeding success were found to depend on the management of the field within which birds nested (Bradbury *et al.* 2000, Smith and Bruun 2002, Perlut *et al.* 2006). Because most studies compared the breeding success of birds within fields cultivated under different management regimes (e.g., organic vs inorganic farming, Bradbury *et al.* 2000; various harvesting schedules, Perlut *et al.* 2006), responses were usually quantified at only one spatial scale. Hence, no study has so far assessed 'mechanistic' relationships at multiple spatial scales along a gradient of agricultural intensification. Yet, quantifying how landscape structure may affect the response of birds at multiple spatial scales in different periods of their breeding phenology is crucial for relating individual behavior and success to population structure and dynamics. Indeed, individuals perceive and respond to their surroundings at hierarchical scales that depend on their ecological needs and vary during the course of breeding (e.g., nest site selection and brood feeding; Kotliar and Wiens 1990, Saab 1999, Kristan 2006).

Here we quantify the influence of landscape structure on the nestbox occupancy pattern and breeding success of Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) at seven spatial scales along a gradient of agricultural intensification covering 10,200 km² in southern Québec, Canada. Tree Swallows are typically found in meadows and wetland habitats and show, yet to a lower extent than Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), declining populations in Ontario (period: 1995-2004) and Québec (period: 1980-2005), Canada (Bird Studies Canada and Étude des populations d'oiseaux du Québec unpubl. data). Given the habitat and food requirements of Barn and Tree Swallows, these population declines are likely to result, at least partly, from environmental transformations stemming from agricultural intensification (Møller 2001, Ambrosini *et al.* 2002). To address this possibility for Tree Swallows, we measured the influence of surrounding crop types and other agricultural landscape characteristics on (1) nest-box occupancy, (2) clutch size, (3) the proportion of eggs that hatched, (4) the number of fledglings, and (5) the proportion of chicks that fledged. The effects of agricultural landscape characteristics were modeled while

controlling for variables pertaining to clutches or broods (e.g., clutch initiation date), nestboxes (e.g., clearance), and meteorological conditions (e.g., temperature).

METHODS

Model species

The Tree Swallow is a 20-g passerine whose breeding home range can span >60 km² before incubation starts and 2-5 km² afterwards (Robertson *et al.* 1992). Such large and variable home ranges may result from its need to combine specific breeding and foraging habits. Indeed, Tree Swallows are obligate, secondary cavity-nesters that feed mostly on flying insects, particularly those emerging from wetlands (Quinney 1985, Robertson *et al.* 1992). Meeting those two needs within the context of a low availability of nesting cavities and of an ephemeral and patchily distributed food resource, is likely to require traveling over large distances. High mobility makes the Tree swallow a particularly interesting model for measuring hierarchical and large-scale influences of landscape structure on a species' ecology (Kotliar and Wiens 1990, Kristan 2006). Another characteristic of interest of Tree Swallows is that they bioaccumulate pesticide derivatives which may affect their physiology and reduce their breeding success (Bishop *et al.* 2000, Smits *et al.* 2005). Other advantages of working with Tree Swallows are that their biology is very well known, they are easy to catch and manipulate, and they readily accept to breed in nest boxes and to be disturbed on a regular basis without abandoning their progeny (Jones 2003).

Study area and nestbox network

We monitored the breeding activities of Tree Swallows using a 400 nestbox network distributed among 40 farms (10 boxes/farm) within a ca. 10,200-km² area in southern Québec, Canada, (Figure 1). The area is characterized by an east-west gradient of agricultural intensification where dairy farming and small-scale, familial farms are replaced by large-scale, continuous rowcropping with full mechanization and high input of pesticides as well as of organic and chemical fertilizers (Jobin *et al.* 2005; Figure 1). This gradient from extensive (hayfields and pastures) to intensive (maize, cereals, and

soybean) cultures is also characterized by a gradually smaller and more fragmented forest cover, by an increase in the drainage of wetlands, and canalization of streams (Bélanger and Grenier 2002; Figure 1). The 40 farms that composed the network were located at least 3 km apart (mean nearest-neighbor distance ± 1 SD = 7.28 ± 0.57 km). Together, they covered a large portion of the potential range of combinations between the relative amount of extensive and of intensive cultures that could be found within a 1-km radius around a given farm (Figure 2). Nest boxes were built according to North American Bluebird Society's specifications (i.e., Eastern/Western Bluebird model) and were installed during winter 2004. Hence, swallows were not aware of the boxes' presence before they returned from their wintering sites in spring 2005. Boxes were put up 50 m apart along drainage ditches or fence lines that bordered agricultural fields or pastures. The distance to the nearest building thus varied substantially among boxes (mean ± 1 SD = 119 ± 93 m, $n = 400$). All boxes were mounted on a metal post 1.5 m above ground and with the opening facing South-East (Ardia 2006). Neither the boxes nor the posts were fitted with antipredator devices. Nest material from the previous breeding season was removed every year during the winter.

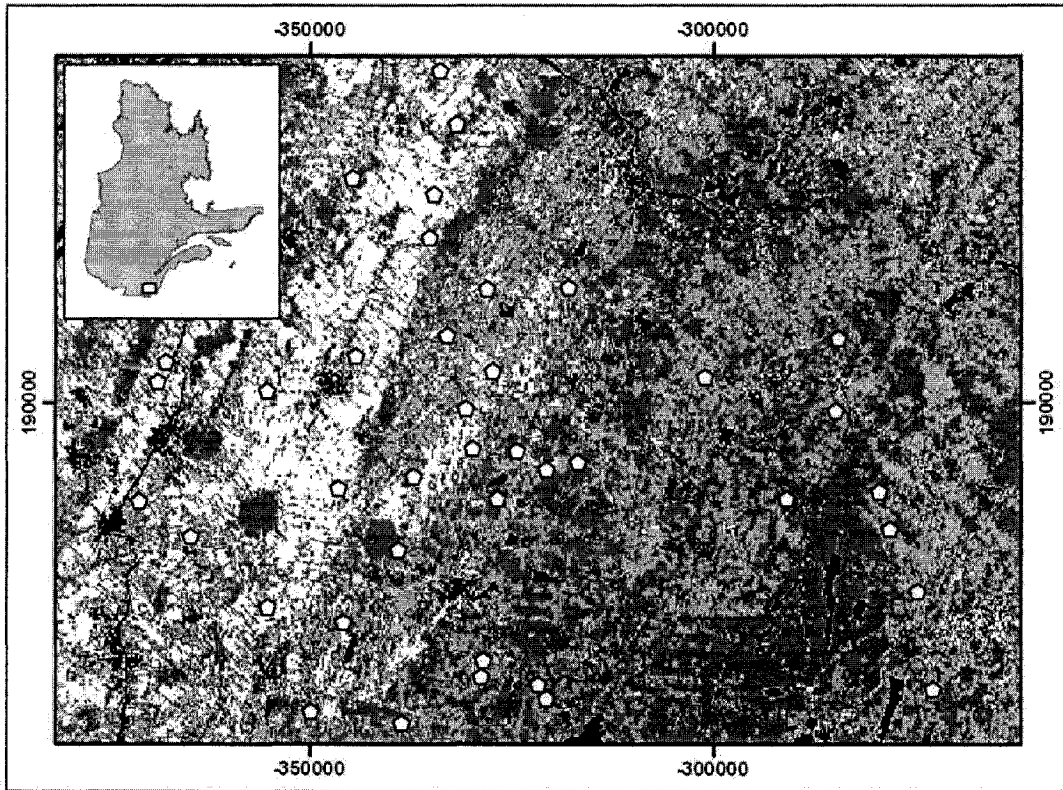


Figure 1. Distribution of the 40 farms used to study nestbox occupancy and breeding success of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006. Land cover types are based on a mosaic of classified LANDSAT-TM satellite images (Canadian Wildlife Service 2004) and include water (black), urban (dark gray), forest (mid-tone gray), extensive cultures (e.g., hayfields and pastures) (light gray), intensive cultures (e.g., maize, cereals, and soybean) (white). Pentagons indicate farm locations. Coordinates are Lambert Conic Conform.

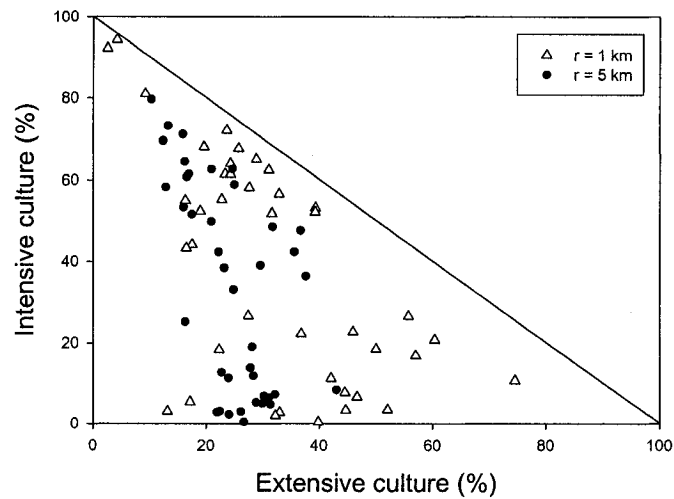


Figure 2. Combinations of intensive and extensive cultures found around the 40 farms used to study nestbox occupancy and breeding success of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006. Relative amounts of cover were measured within radii of 1 and 5 km centered on each farm.

Nestbox monitoring

We monitored the breeding attempts and success of Tree Swallows during each breeding season (early May to mid-July) between 2004 and 2006. Each year, all nestboxes were visited every two days to determine occupancy (i.e., nest building and laying of ≥ 1 egg), laying date of first egg, clutch size, brood size at hatching, and number of chicks fledged. We considered a nest box occupied when it contained at least one egg. We opted for this conservative operational definition of occupancy because of the difficulty in differentiating between two consecutive breeding attempts where the first one had been abandoned at the nest building stage. We determined the laying date of the first egg based on the assumption that swallows lay one egg per day until clutch completion (Robertson *et al.* 1992).

We captured breeding females on the nest 8-10 days after the onset of incubation. Once fitted with an official aluminum band, we measured body mass with an electronic scale (± 0.1 g) and right wing chord with a ruler (± 1 mm). Sex was confirmed based on the presence of a brood patch. Female birds were aged as second year (SY, experiencing their first breeding season), after second year (ASY), or after hatching year (AHY) based on plumage characteristics, following Hussell (1983) and Pyle (1997), and recaptures of previously banded birds. We banded and weighed nestlings as above when approximately 10 days old.

Landscape characterization

Agricultural intensification is reflected by landscape composition, especially by culture diversity and the relative area covered by extensive and intensive cultures (e.g., Roschewitz *et al.* 2005). In our study area, extensive cultures mostly include habitats related to dairy and beef cattle farming, such as hayfields, pastures, and fallows. These extensive cultures are also surrounded by marginal habitats like hedgerows, forest patches, and wetlands that vary in both amount and diversity. Intensive cultures, on the other hand, are largely composed of vast monocultures of annual rowcrops, such as maize, cereals and soybean (Bélanger and Grenier 2002, Jobin *et al.* 2005). The nature and management of extensive cultures, as well as their proximity to natural habitats, are

likely to provide a more abundant and diversified insect food supply to swallows compared to intensive cultures (Wilson *et al.* 1999, Di Giulio *et al.* 2001, Benton *et al.* 2002, Wickramasinghe *et al.* 2004). Hence, for each nest box, we measured the relative cover of extensive and intensive cultures within radii of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 20 km. Relative cover was estimated based on a mosaic of georeferenced and classified Landsat-7 satellite images taken between August 1999 and May 2003 (pixel resolution = 25 m x 25 m; Canadian Wildlife Service 2004). Measurements were obtained with ArcView GIS Spatial Analyst 2.0a (ESRI 2005). Because Tree Swallows often forage above open water and wetlands (Robertson *et al.* 1992), we also quantified the combined relative cover occupied by those two habitats within the same radii as above. Since the conclusions of our analyses were concordant across scales, we present results for the 5-km radius, which approximates the maximum distance traveled by Tree Swallows when collecting food for their young. We determined this maximum distance by multiplying the maximum flight speed of swallows (Robertson *et al.* 1992) by half the maximum time spent out of the nest by adults during brood raising in our study area (observations made on 1394 nest visits to 58 nest; B. Gendreau and M. Bélisle unpubl. data).

Lastly, we measured two variables that may affect the availability of food resources around a given farm, and thus the breeding success of swallows, namely the number of grazing farm animals (i.e., cattle and horses) and the number of manure heaps and tanks within 500 m of the center point of each group of nest boxes (Møller 2001, Ambrosini *et al.* 2002). The former was quantified on each farm visit and the latter once at the end of the breeding season. Counts were performed using a laser rangefinder (Bushnell Yardage Pro®).

Statistical analyses

Because of our hierarchical sampling design (nestboxes nested within farms), we modeled response variables using mixed models with farm ID as random factor. Nestbox occupancy was modeled with generalized linear mixed models using a logit link function and a binomial error distribution. Other response variables were modeled with linear mixed models (McCulloch and Searle 2001). Proportions were arcsine-transformed to

meet normality requirements (Zar 1984). Generalized linear mixed models and linear mixed models were respectively fitted with the `lmer` (package `lme4` v.0.9975-3) and `lme` (package `nlme` v.3.1-77) function run in the R statistical environment (v. 2.4.0, R Development Core Team 2006).

We built a series of models for each response variable based on combinations of groups of variables that characterized the surrounding landscape, the clutch or brood, the nestbox, and the meteorological conditions that prevailed during incubation or brooding. The composition and justification of these groups of variables are found in Table 1 and the list of models considered are included in Appendix A and B. Explanatory variables included in a given model were never strongly correlated ($0.01 \leq r \leq 0.46$). Competing models for a given response variable were then fitted at each of the seven spatial scales at which landscape composition was quantified (i.e., for radii of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 20 km). We contrasted models within each spatial scale based on the (marginal) Akaike information criterion with finite-sample correction ($mAIC_c$) following Vaida and Blanchard (2005). We then computed the weight of evidence of each model (w_i) within each spatial scale – the likelihood that a model was the best ranking one within the set of competing models, given the data (Burnham and Anderson, 2002: 74-77). Because the weight of evidence of the best models was usually quite strong, we decided to focus only on the models showing the highest w_i . We report coefficients and standard errors estimated by maximum likelihood using a multivariate Laplace approximation for nestbox occupancy and residual (restricted) maximum likelihood for the remaining response variables because of the coefficients' improved properties that result from these methods (Raudenbush *et al.* 2000, McCulloch and Searle 2001). Confidence intervals (95%) were calculated with the `mcmcSamp` (50000 replications, package `matrix` v.0.9975-3) and `intervals` (package `nlme` v.3.1-77) function run in the R statistical environment (v. 2.4.0, R Development Core Team 2006).

TABLE.1. Definition and justification of explanatory variables used to quantify the influence of landscape structure on nestbox occupancy and breeding success of Tree swallows. Model refers to the type of model in which the variable is included (See Appendix A and B). Idem indicates that the justification to include an explanatory variable is the same as that for the closest response variable on the left.

Variable	Definition (units)	Model	Occupancy	Clutch size	Hatching probability	Number of fledglings	Fledging probability
Year		In all models	Interannual variation	Clutch size	idem	idem	idem
Clutch initiation date	Julian date	In all models	-	Clutch size decreases throughout season (1, 2)	idem	idem	idem
Competition	Proportion of nestboxes occupied by a competitive species on a given farm (%)	Nestbox	Swallows compete with other secondary cavity-nesting birds (3)	-	idem	idem	idem
Clearance	Percentage of open area one meter around nest box (%/Nestbox)	Nestbox	Swallows avoid nesting near wooded field margins (3)	-	-	-	-
Previous year occupancy	Nestbox occupancy by Tree Swallows (≥ 1 egg laid) in the previous year (0/1)	Nestbox	Swallows sample nests post breeding season (3, 4)	-	-	-	-
Previous year fledging success	Number of chicks fledged / number of chicks born (%)	Nestbox	Swallows sample nests post breeding season (3,4)	-	-	-	-
Intensive culture	Relative amount of cover within a given radius around a nestbox (%)	Intensive	Reproductive success may vary with type of cultures (see introduction)	idem	idem	idem	idem
Manure tanks	Number of manure tanks and heaps in a 500-m radius around a farm	Intensive	Habitat of potential preys for swallows (5)	idem	idem	idem	idem
Water	Relative amount of cover within a given radius around a nestbox (%)	Intensive/Extensive	Tree swallows forage over water (3)	idem	idem	idem	idem
Extensive culture	Relative amount of cover within a given radius around a nestbox (%)	Extensive	Reproductive success may vary with type of cultures (see introduction)	idem	idem	idem	idem
Cattle	Cattle number in a 500-m radius around a farm	Extensive	Prey availability increases with cattle (5)	idem	idem	idem	idem
Temperature	Mean daily temperature averaged over the first ten days of incubation or chick rearing (°C)	Weather	-	-	Hatching probability increases with temperature (6). Low temperatures reduce insect activity	Nesting survival increases with temperature (7,8,9,10). Low temperatures reduce insect activity	Idem
Precipitation	Mean daily precipitation averaged over the first ten days of incubation or chick rearing (mm)	Weather	-	-	Rain reduces insect activity	idem	idem
Eggs layed	Number of eggs layed	Clutch	-	-	Adult stress, brooding time, and parasite load increase with clutch size (11,12)	-	-
Chicks hatched	Number of chicks born	Brood	-	-	-	-	Food/nesting ratio, thermoregulation capacity, and brooding time vary with brood size (9, 12)

Notes: 1: Winkler and Allen 1996, 2: Adia and Clotfelter 2007, 3: Robertson et al. 1992, 4: Pärt and Doligez 2003, 5: Ambrosini et al. 2002, 6: Saino et al. 2004, 7: Nooker et al. 2005, 8: Dawson and Lawrie 2005, 9: Chaplin et al. 2002, 10: McCarty and Winkler 1999a, 11: Shuttler et al. 2004, 12: Shuttler et al. 2006

RESULTS

Nestbox occupancy

The proportion of nestboxes occupied by Tree Swallows was 54.5% in 2004, 72.3% in 2005, and 74.5% in 2006 ($n = 400$ in each year). Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) and House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) were the two main competitors of Tree Swallows for nestboxes with 1.8-3.3% and 6.3-17.8% of occupancy across years, respectively. Two models stood out of the set of competing models at all spatial scales ($\Sigma w_i > 0.99$), namely the Nestbox model (w_i : 0.36-0.82) and Nestbox + Intensive Culture model (w_i : 0.17-0.62) (Appendix A). Landscape features associated to extensive cultures thus did not influence occupancy. Whereas the Nestbox model performed best at spatial scales of 1, 2, 3, 5 and 20 km, the Nestbox + Intensive Culture model did better at spatial scales of 4 and 10 km (Appendix A). In both models, occupancy increased with the amount of open space within one meter of the nestbox (clearance) and the nestbox fledging success in the previous year, and obviously decreased with the proportion of nestboxes occupied by other species on the farm independently of spatial scale (Table 2). The occupancy in the previous year and the amount of water in the landscape had no effect on the likelihood that swallows occupy a nestbox in all models (Table 2; results not shown for water). The Nestbox + Intensive Culture model indicated, however, that occupancy decreased with the amount of intensive cultures in the landscape when the number of manure heaps and tanks within 500 m of the nestbox was > 1 (Figure 3). This effect, which was significant at all spatial scales except for radii of 2 and 3 km, increased with the number of manure heaps and tanks within 500 m of the nestbox (Figure 3).

TABLE 2. Parameters of the most parsimonious model explaining nestbox occupancy by Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, 2005-2006 (see Nestbox model in Appendix A). Estimates pertain to a generalized linear mixed model with a logit link function and a binomial error distribution with farm ID as random factor ($n = 800$). See Table 1 for variable definition and justification.

Parameter	Estimate	SE	CI (95%)
Intercept	0.536	0.509	$-0.454 \leq \beta \leq 1.525$
Year	0.222	0.195	$-0.165 \leq \beta \leq 0.601$
Competition	-0.046	0.005	$-0.056 \leq \beta \leq -0.036$
Clearance	0.011	0.006	$0.000 \leq \beta \leq 0.022$
Previous year occupancy	0.169	0.250	$-0.280 \leq \beta \leq 0.698$
Previous year fledging success	0.020	0.011	$0.003 \leq \beta \leq 0.053$
Previous year occupancy \times success	-0.012	0.012	$-0.046 \leq \beta \leq 0.006$

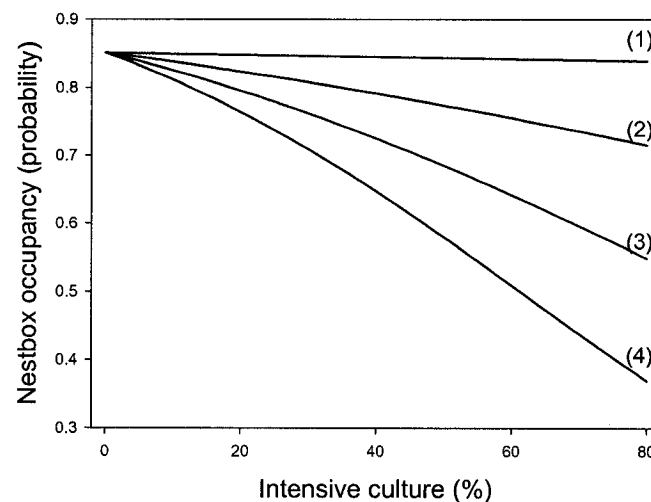


Figure 3. Influence of landscape composition and number of manure heaps and tanks on nestbox occupancy by Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2005-2006 (see 5-km scale, Nestbox + Intensive model in Appendix A). Lines depict predicted values of a generalized linear mixed model with a logit link function and a binomial error distribution for 2006 with farm ID as random factor and covariates fixed at their mean value ($n = 800$). Relative amount of intensive culture cover was measured within 5 km of nestboxes. Numbers at the end of lines indicate the number of manure heaps and tanks within 500 m of nestboxes.

Clutch size

Over the 3 years, clutch size averaged 5.2 ± 1.2 eggs (\pm SD, range = 1-9, $n = 912$) and was best explained by the Intensive Culture model at all spatial scales (w_i : 0.74-0.98) (Appendix B). According to this model, clutch size decreased as the amount of intensive

cultures increased in the landscape (Table 3; Figure 4). This reduction in clutch size was relatively constant across spatial scales (Figure 5) and corresponded to an average decrease of 0.8 eggs over the range of intensive culture cover measured at the 5-km scale (i.e., 0-80%; Figure 4). As for occupancy, landscape features characteristic of extensive cultures had no influence. Tree Swallows laid fewer eggs as the breeding season progressed (Table 3), for an average difference of 1.7-2.1 eggs between the first and last clutch, depending on season length (46-57 days).

TABLE 3. Parameters of the most parsimonious model for inferring clutch size of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, 2004-2006 (see 5-km scale, Intensive model in Appendix B). Estimates pertain to a linear mixed model with farm ID as random factor ($n = 912$) and relative amount of intensive culture cover measured within 5 km of the nestbox. See Table 1 for variable definition and justification.

Parameter	Estimate	SE	CI (95%)	
Intercept	10.839	0.569	9.722	$\leq \beta \leq$ 11.957
Water	-0.051	0.029	-0.108	$\leq \beta \leq$ 0.006
Intensive culture	-0.010	0.003	-0.016	$\leq \beta \leq$ -0.004
Manure tanks	-0.093	0.079	-0.248	$\leq \beta \leq$ 0.062
Year 2	0.223	0.094	0.038	$\leq \beta \leq$ 0.407
Year 3	0.126	0.093	-0.058	$\leq \beta \leq$ 0.309
Clutch initiation date	-0.038	0.004	-0.045	$\leq \beta \leq$ -0.030
Intensive culture \times Manure tanks	0.002	0.002	-0.002	$\leq \beta \leq$ 0.005

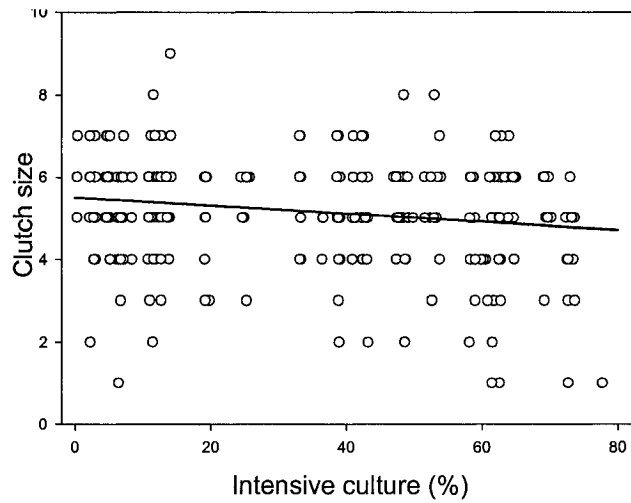


Figure 4. Influence of landscape composition on clutch sizes of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006 (see 5-km scale, Intensive model in Appendix B; $n = 912$). The line depicts predicted values of a linear mixed model for 2006 with farm ID as random factor and covariates fixed at their mean value. Relative amount of intensive culture cover was measured within 5 km of nestboxes.

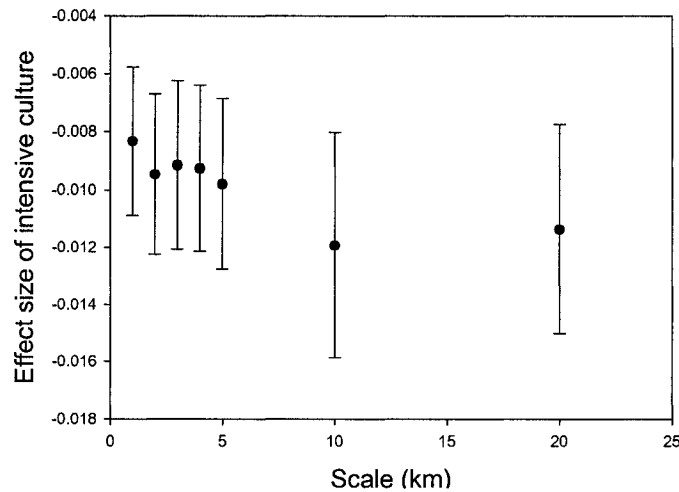


Figure 5. Effect of spatial scale on the influence of intensive culture cover on the clutch size of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006. Parameter estimates pertain to the Intensive model (see Appendix B; $n = 912$).

Hatching probability

Overall, within-clutch hatching probability averaged 0.67 ± 0.39 (\pm SD, $n = 912$ clutches). Yet, this probability increased to 0.86 ± 0.19 in clutches for which ≥ 1 egg hatched ($n = 715$). The proportion of clutches for which none of the eggs hatched was

21.6%. Nest failures resulted from a diversity of causes, including abandon, nest predation, and nest eviction by conspecifics and House Sparrows.

Hatching probability was best described by the Clutch model for spatial scales ranging from 2 to 20 km (w_i : 0.51-0.61) (Appendix B). Following this model, hatching probability increased substantially with clutch size but only marginally as the breeding season progressed (Table 4). For instance, mid-season hatching probability increased on average from 8.7% for 1-egg clutches to 73.2% and 96.8% for 5-egg and 7-egg clutches in 2004, respectively. At the 1-km scale, the model that included characteristics pertaining to the clutch as well as to landscape features associated to intensive cultures (i.e., Clutch + Intensive) performed best with $w_i = 0.63$ (Appendix B). Yet, none of the landscape variables of this model had a significant effect on hatching probability. The potential influence of intensive agricultural practices will nevertheless be worth to investigate in future studies as the parameter associated to the amount of intensive cultures was marginally significant (5-km scale, 95%CI: $-0.0042 \leq \beta \leq 0.0001$).

TABLE 4. Parameters of the most parsimonious model for inferring within-clutch hatching probability of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, 2004-2006 (see Clutch model in Appendix B). Estimates pertain to a linear mixed model with farm ID as random factor ($n = 912$). See Table 1 for variable definition and justification.

Parameter	Estimate	SE	CI (95%)		
Intercept	-0.451	0.335	-1.108	$\leq \beta \leq$	0.205
Eggs laid	0.182	0.017	0.149	$\leq \beta \leq$	0.214
Clutch initiation date	0.004	0.002	0.000	$\leq \beta \leq$	0.008
Year 2	0.039	0.048	-0.056	$\leq \beta \leq$	0.134
Year 3	-0.117	0.048	-0.211	$\leq \beta \leq$	-0.023

Number of fledglings

The number of fledglings averaged 3.3 ± 2.1 over the course of the study (\pm SD, $n = 715$ broods). This number increased to 4.0 ± 1.5 for broods that produced ≥ 1 young that left the nest ($n = 597$). Fledgling number was best explained by the Extensive Culture model at all spatial scales (w_i : 0.42-0.84) (Appendix B). Based on this model, the number of fledglings increased with the amount of extensive cultures in the landscape. As an

example, fledgling number increased on average from 2.2 to 4.8 across the range of extensive cultures measured at the 5-km scale (i.e., 10.4-43.3%; Figure 6). This effect of extensive cultures increased with spatial scale and appeared to reach a plateau at a radius of ca. 5 km (Figure 7). None of the other landscape variables had an effect on fledgling number, except for water at the 20-km scale (Table 5). At this regional scale, the number of fledged young increased with the amount of water in the landscape (95%CI: $0.025 \leq \beta \leq 0.208$). Given the small amount of water bodies in the study area, this translated into a mean difference of 1.4 fledglings across the range of water cover values (range: 0.5-12.5%). As for clutch size, the number of fledged young decreased as the breeding season progressed – a mean difference of 2.0-2.5 fledglings between the first and last clutch of a season, depending on season length (46-57 days) (Table 5).

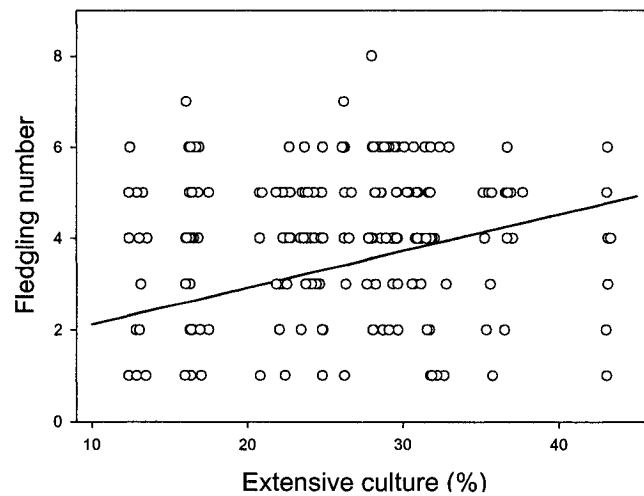


Figure 6. Influence of landscape composition on within-brood fledgling number for Tree Swallows breeding along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006 (see 5-km scale, Extensive model in Appendix B; $n = 715$). The line depicts predicted values of a linear mixed model for 2006 with farm ID as random factor and covariates fixed at their mean value. Relative amount of extensive culture cover was measured within 5 km of nestboxes.

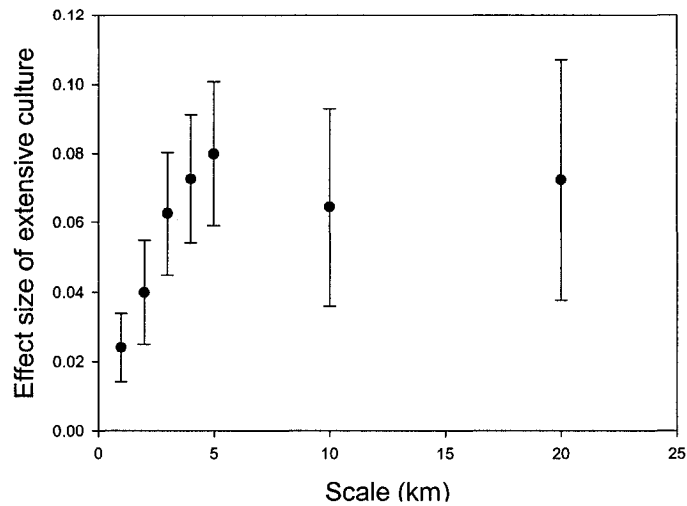


Figure 7. Effect of spatial scale on the influence of extensive culture cover on the within-brood number of fledglings of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006. Parameter estimates pertain to the Extensive model (see Appendix B; $n = 715$).

TABLE 5. Parameters of the most parsimonious model for inferring the within-brood number of Tree Swallow fledglings along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, 2004-2006 (see 5-km scale, Extensive model in Appendix B). Estimates pertain to a linear mixed model with farm ID as random factor and relative amount of extensive culture cover measured within 5 km of the nestbox ($n = 715$). See Table 1 for variable definition and justification.

Parameter	Estimate	SE	CI (95%)	
Intercept	8.212	1.218	5.820	$\leq \beta \leq 10.603$
Water	0.016	0.054	-0.090	$\leq \beta \leq 0.123$
Extensive culture	0.080	0.021	0.039	$\leq \beta \leq 0.121$
Manure tanks	0.375	0.273	-0.162	$\leq \beta \leq 0.912$
Cattle	-0.005	0.022	-0.048	$\leq \beta \leq 0.038$
Year 2	-0.110	0.187	-0.477	$\leq \beta \leq 0.257$
Year 3	-0.406	0.192	-0.783	$\leq \beta \leq -0.030$
Clutch initiation date	-0.044	0.008	-0.060	$\leq \beta \leq -0.028$
Extensive culture \times Manure tanks	-0.018	0.010	-0.038	$\leq \beta \leq 0.002$
Extensive culture \times Cattle	0.000	0.001	-0.002	$\leq \beta \leq 0.001$

Fledging probability

Within-brood fledging probability averaged 0.74 ± 0.38 for the entire study (\pm SD, $n = 715$ broods). Excluding broods that failed to fledge ≥ 1 young (i.e., 16.5% of broods), this probability increased to 0.88 ± 0.21 ($n = 597$). Nest failures at this stage also resulted

from a diversity of causes. As for hatching probability, these comprised abandon, nest predation, and nest eviction by conspecifics and House Sparrows.

The Extensive Culture model was identified as best to infer fledging probability at spatial scales ranging from 2 to 10 km (w_i : 0.48-0.64) (Appendix B). Following this model, fledging probability increased with the amount of extensive cultures in the landscape (Table 6). At the 5-km scale, for example, the probability that a young left the nest increased on average from 71% to 81% across the range of extensive cultures (i.e., 10.4-43.3%; Figure 8). As for the number of fledglings, the effect of extensive cultures increased with spatial scale and leveled off at a radius of ca. 5 km (Figure 9). No other landscape variables had an effect on fledging probability (Table 6). At the 1-km and 20-km scales, fledging probability was best explained by the Brood model (w_i : 0.37-0.48) (Appendix B). Yet, neither the number of nestlings nor the clutch initiation date had an influence on the likelihood that a young left the nest (results not shown).

TABLE 6: Parameters of the most parsimonious model for inferring fledging probability of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, 2004-2006 (see 5-km scale, Extensive model in Appendix B). Estimates pertain to a linear mixed model with farm ID as random factor and relative amount of extensive culture cover measured within 5 km of the nestbox ($n = 715$). See Table 1 for variable definition and justification.

Parameter	Estimate	SE	CI (95%)	
Intercept	1.203	0.364	0.488	$\leq \beta \leq 1.919$
Water	0.012	0.016	-0.019	$\leq \beta \leq 0.044$
Extensive culture	0.018	0.006	0.006	$\leq \beta \leq 0.030$
Manure tanks	0.083	0.080	-0.074	$\leq \beta \leq 0.239$
Cattle	0.002	0.006	-0.011	$\leq \beta \leq 0.015$
Year 2	-0.024	0.056	-0.134	$\leq \beta \leq 0.087$
Year 3	-0.054	0.058	-0.167	$\leq \beta \leq 0.060$
Clutch initiation date	-0.003	0.002	-0.008	$\leq \beta \leq 0.002$
Extensive culture \times Manure tanks	-0.004	0.003	-0.009	$\leq \beta \leq 0.002$
Extensive culture \times Cattle	0.000	0.000	-0.001	$\leq \beta \leq 0.000$

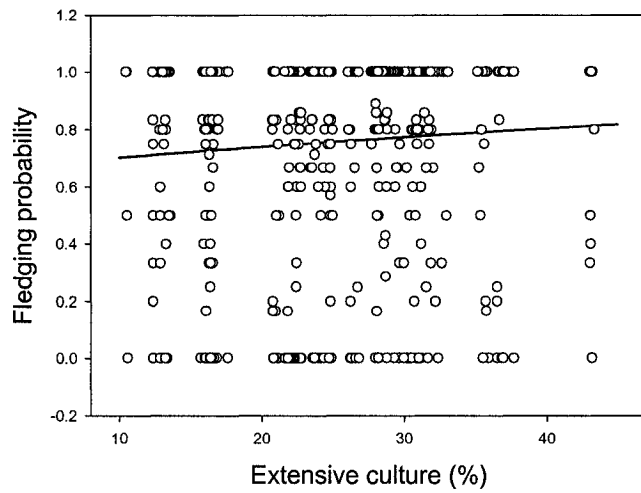


Figure 8. Influence of landscape composition on within-brood fledging probability for Tree Swallows breeding along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006 (see 5-km scale, Extensive model in Appendix B; $n = 715$). The line depicts predicted values of a linear mixed model for 2006 with farm ID as random factor and covariates fixed at their mean value. Relative amount of extensive culture cover was measured within 5 km of nestboxes.

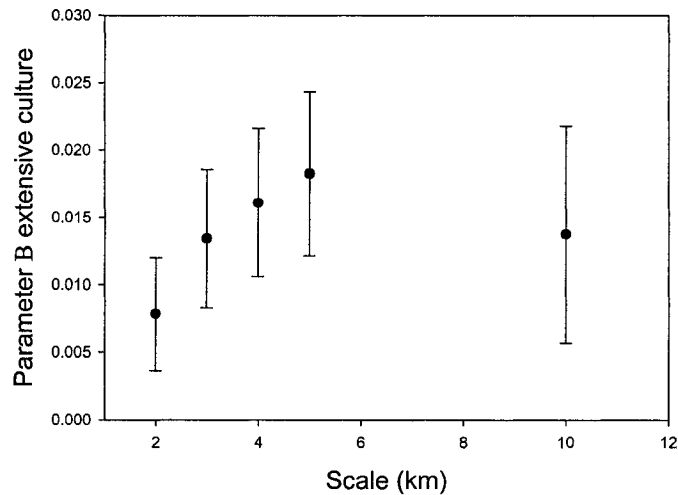


Figure 9. Effect of spatial scale on the influence of extensive culture cover on fledging probability of Tree Swallows along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, Canada, 2004-2006. Parameter estimates pertain to the Intensive model (see Appendix B; $n = 715$). Regression coefficients for the 1 and 20-km scales are not shown as the most parsimonious model for those scales did not contain landscape variables.

DISCUSSION

An agricultural intensification gradient provided an opportunity to quantify the influence of landscape structure on nestbox occupancy and breeding success of Tree Swallows at multiple hierarchical spatial scales. Our results show that both nestbox occupancy and breeding success are influenced by landscape structure. Indeed, the reproductive output of Tree Swallows increased in landscapes where large areas were covered by hayfields and pastures, and thus dedicated to extensive agricultural practices, such as dairy and cattle farming. Furthermore, we found that distinct landscape components affected breeding activities and this to different extents that depended on spatial scale.

Nestbox occupancy

Nestbox occupancy by Tree Swallows depended on landscape variables. Occupancy decreased with the amount of intensive cultures in the landscape, this effect being more pronounced when another index of agricultural intensification, the number of manure heaps and tanks, increased. At least two non-mutually exclusive explanations may underlie this result. First, areas dominated by intensive cultures may support lower densities of Tree Swallows. Yet, these same areas would also be expected to present a lower nest-site availability because of the destruction of marginal habitats, which implies tree removal, and thereby, an increase in competition for nest sites. Second, landscapes with vast intensive cultures are characterized by structurally simplified habitats (Matson *et al.* 1997, Tschamtkke *et al.* 2005) with fewer foraging sites and less abundant and diversified insect food supplies (Wilson *et al.* 1999, Di Giulio *et al.* 2001, Benton *et al.* 2002, Wickramasinghe *et al.* 2004), hence making these habitats a poor choice for breeding swallows. The effect of landscape structure on occupancy was detected from the 1-km through the 20-km scale, suggesting that swallows choose their nest sites in order to meet the requirements of different breeding activities (see below).

Occupancy was also determined by local variables. Because nest-site availability is limited, Tree Swallows compete aggressively for nest sites not only with conspecifics, but also with other secondary cavity-nesting species (Robertson *et al.* 1992). Although

we were not able to estimate intraspecific competition, our results suggest that competition with House Sparrows strongly constrained nest-site selection by Tree Swallows. This is supported by the high level of occupancy within our nestbox network (35.5% of nest boxes were unused in 2004, while only 5.8% remained unoccupied in 2006) and the presence of many non-territorial (“floaters”) Tree Swallows in our study area. Moreover, further analyses showed that nestbox occupancy by Tree Swallows increased with the distance to farm buildings, which provide food, shelter, and nest sites to House Sparrows. We also found that nestbox occupancy was higher when the amount of open space within one meter of the nestbox increased. This result was predictable because Tree Swallows are aerial foragers that nest in open areas and avoid nesting near forest margins to limit competition with House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*) (Robertson *et al.* 1992).

Last, we found that nestbox occupancy increased when the fledging success for that same nestbox was high in the previous year. Although successful breeding female birds tend to return to the same breeding site in successive years (Greenwood and Harvey 1982), this result cannot be explained by philopatry alone. Indeed, only 9% of all occupancies in 2005 and 2006 ($n = 587$) were by females returning to the same nestbox in two consecutive years. Moreover, further analyses based on 183 recaptures showed that the likelihood that a female occupy the same nestbox in two consecutive years did not depend on the fledging success of its progeny in the previous year. As for Doligez *et al.* (2003, 2004), this suggests that Tree Swallows use cues of conspecific reproductive performance (i.e., public information) to infer good breeding sites or habitats. Such prospecting for nest sites by juveniles and adults is likely to occur at the end of or just after the breeding season as we removed nest material and dead nestlings, as well as scraped feces from the walls of nestboxes, in the fall that followed each breeding season. Hence, individuals did not have access to this information when choosing their nest site in the spring. It remains that the determinants of dispersal in Tree Swallows have been found to vary among studies and that many factors, such as the density, age, and breeding success of individuals as well as the spatial distribution and availability of nest sites, may interplay (Shutler and Clark 2003, Winkler *et al.* 2004). We expect that the hierarchical

structure of our nestbox network will eventually allow us to untangle the mechanisms underlying dispersal in Tree Swallows as we will be able to assess movement among nestboxes on a given farm as well as movement among farms located in landscapes with contrasting habitat quality.

Breeding success

Earlier studies on farmland birds have found equivocal results with respect to the impact of agricultural practices on breeding metrics (negative impact: Giuliano and Daves 2002, Smith and Bruun 2002, Perlut *et al.* 2006; no impact: Eybert *et al.* 1995, Bradbury *et al.* 2000, Brickle *et al.* 2000). In this study, the breeding success of Tree Swallows was related to the proportion of intensive and extensive cultures in the landscape. Clutch size was negatively affected by the amount of intensive cultures after controlling for the decrease in clutch size within the breeding season. Tree Swallows laid fewer eggs in areas with a high proportion of intensive crops, probably because insect availability is poorer in those areas (Di Giulio *et al.* 2001, Benton *et al.* 2002). Since Tree Swallows are income breeders, food limitation is likely to be the main constraint experienced by egg-laying females for laying large clutches (Winkler and Allen 1996, Nooker *et al.* 2005). The effect across the agricultural gradient was nevertheless marginal, probably because Tree Swallows travel long distances (up to 60 km, Robertson *et al.* 1992) to collect food during the egg-laying period, particularly in periods of bad weather. The fact that the effect of intensive cultures did not vary much across scales (1 to 20 km) suggests that Tree swallows use the landscape rather homogeneously during egg-laying.

Hatching success did not depend on landscape variables, but increased with clutch size. This last result must be interpreted with caution because this relationship might be driven by predation or abandon. Clutches of three eggs or less often correspond to adult death or nest abandon (Shutler *et al.* 2006), and a low hatching success for a clutch size below three eggs does not necessarily depict a lower female quality.

An increased proportion of extensive cultures in the landscape resulted in more fledged young. This result parallels the one of Smith and Bruun (2002) with European Starlings

(*Sturnus vulgaris*) and is likely to be indicative of greater insect prey availability in hayfields and pastures compared to intensively managed croplands. McCarty and Winkler (1999a) found that food availability is a major determinant of Tree Swallows' nestling growth. Since the availability of insects is higher in extensive crops than in intensive crops, adults may be able to bring more food to the nestlings. The number of fledglings was increasingly associated with intensive cultures at radii of 1 to 5 km, which corresponds to the foraging range of Tree Swallows in our study. Unlike for clutch size, the spatial scale was of much importance because at this time of the season, adults spend most of their time near the nest and return frequently to the nest to feed their young (McCarty and Winkler 1999b). As a result they cannot travel far and are much more constrained by spatial scale.

We followed breeding activities for only three years, and therefore had few recaptures and were not able to address the influence that individual quality may have on the patterns and processes involved in our system. Such an influence could be important if, for instance, the age structure of local populations (i.e., within farms) varied with landscape structure. Given the strong competition for nest sites and that experienced individuals return on the breeding grounds earlier than inexperienced ones (Robertson *et al.* 1992), there may be a despotic distribution whereby older individuals restrain younger ones to gain access to the best habitats. Hence, it may be hypothesized that young individuals are restricted, at least partly, to landscapes characterized by a greater proportion of intensive cultures and/or a lower proportion of extensive cultures. A despotic distribution partly based on age may exacerbate the negative influence of breeding in a poor habitat as clutch size, number of fledglings, and fledging success are known to increase until Tree Swallows reach middle-age and decline afterwards (Robertson and Rendell 2001). As we accumulate data, it will thus be interesting to quantify the strength of the paths, including age and other indices of individual quality (e.g., Ardia and Clotfelter 2007), through which agricultural intensification influences nestbox occupancy and breeding success.

Conclusion

Our results complement other studies of the effect of agricultural intensification on farmland birds. Previous studies did find effects of agriculture on abundance and density and equivocal effects on breeding success; here we provide an insight in the mechanistic patterns linking breeding success of farmland birds to agricultural practice. This study shows that agricultural intensification reduces the breeding success of Tree Swallows. The fact that different models stood out at different spatial scales suggest that this organism responds to resources and habitat features at a range of scale and that no single scale is likely to exist for a diversity of landscape metrics. This result suggests that multiple hierarchical-scale studies are necessary to adequately characterize landscape features that affect nest-site occupation and breeding success. Finally, we believe that our results are representative of how agricultural intensification may influence nest-site selection and breeding success of other grassland nesting birds.

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APPENDIX A: Akaike weights of the models explaining nestbox occupancy by Tree Swallows at seven spatial scales along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, 2005-2006. Models are generalized mixed model with logit link and a binomial error distribution with farm ID as random factor ($n = 800$). See Table 1 for variable definition and justification.

Scale (km)	Nestbox	Intensive	Nestbox+Intensive	Extensive	Nestbox + Extensive
1	0.824	0	0.170	0	0.006
2	0.777	0	0.194	0	0.029
3	0.740	0	0.251	0	0.009
4	0.484	0	0.505	0	0.011
5	0.541	0	0.449	0	0.011
10	0.359	0	0.619	0	0.022
20	0.628	0	0.362	0	0.010

Notes: Values are AIC weights, suggesting the relative strength of each model for a given radius. Variables for each model are:

Nestbox = competition + clearance + previous year occupancy × previous year fledging success + year

Intensive = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + year

Nestbox + Intensive = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + competition + clearance + previous year occupancy × previous year fledging success + year

Extensive = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + year

Nestbox + Extensive = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + competition + clearance + previous year occupancy × previous year fledging success + year

APPENDIX B: Akaike weights of the models explaining breeding success by Tree Swallows at seven spatial scales along a gradient of agricultural intensification in southern Québec, 2004-2006. Models are linear mixed models with farm ID as random effect. See Table 1 for variable definition and justification.

Response variable	Scale (km)	Brood or Clutch	Intensive culture	Extensive culture	Weather	Intensive + Weather	Extensive + Weather	Weather + Brood or Clutch	Intensive + Brood or Clutch	Extensive + Brood or Clutch	
Clutch size (n = 912)	1	0.017	0.983	0.001	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	2	0.027	0.972	0.001	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	3	0.043	0.951	0.007	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	4	0.011	0.981	0.008	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	5	0.014	0.980	0.006	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	10	0.025	0.964	0.012	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	20	0.005	0.740	0.256	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	1	0.132	-	-	-	-	-	0.035	0.625	0.208	
	2	0.529	-	-	-	-	-	0.138	0.233	0.100	
	3	0.582	-	-	-	-	-	0.152	0.147	0.120	
Hatching probability (n = 912)	4	0.545	-	-	-	-	-	0.143	0.091	0.222	
	5	0.512	-	-	-	-	-	0.134	0.079	0.276	
	10	0.613	-	-	-	-	-	0.160	0.108	0.118	
	20	0.538	-	-	-	-	-	0.141	0.267	0.055	
	1	0.069	0.041	0.715	0.012	0.008	0.155	-	-	-	
	2	0.019	0.117	0.682	0.003	0.025	0.153	-	-	-	
	3	0.004	0.014	0.808	0.001	0.003	0.171	-	-	-	
	4	0.001	0.001	0.834	0.000	0.000	0.164	-	-	-	
	5	0.002	0.003	0.840	0.000	0.001	0.154	-	-	-	
	10	0.124	0.277	0.424	0.022	0.058	0.096	-	-	-	
Number of fledglings (n = 715)	20	0.009	0.061	0.727	0.002	0.014	0.187	-	-	-	
	1	0.370	0.039	0.241	0.128	0.007	0.033	0.064	0.018	0.100	
	2	0.129	0.038	0.481	0.045	0.006	0.065	0.022	0.016	0.198	
	3	0.063	0.015	0.576	0.022	0.002	0.078	0.011	0.006	0.227	
	4	0.019	0.004	0.636	0.007	0.001	0.086	0.003	0.002	0.243	
	5	0.042	0.006	0.608	0.015	0.001	0.083	0.007	0.002	0.237	
	10	0.019	0.004	0.636	0.007	0.001	0.086	0.003	0.002	0.243	
	20	0.483	0.072	0.100	0.168	0.011	0.015	0.083	0.030	0.040	
	Fledging probability (n = 715)	1	0.063	0.015	0.576	0.022	0.002	0.078	0.011	0.006	0.227
		2	0.129	0.038	0.481	0.045	0.006	0.065	0.022	0.016	0.198
3		0.063	0.015	0.576	0.022	0.002	0.078	0.011	0.006	0.227	
4		0.019	0.004	0.636	0.007	0.001	0.086	0.003	0.002	0.243	
5		0.042	0.006	0.608	0.015	0.001	0.083	0.007	0.002	0.237	
10		0.019	0.004	0.636	0.007	0.001	0.086	0.003	0.002	0.243	
20		0.483	0.072	0.100	0.168	0.011	0.015	0.083	0.030	0.040	

Notes: Values are AIC weights, suggesting the relative strength of each model for a given radius. Variables for each model are:

Clutch size analysis:

Clutch = clutch initiation date + year

Intensive cultures = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive cultures = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + clutch initiation date + year

Hatching probability analysis:

Clutch = eggs laid + clutch initiation date + year

Weather = temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Clutch + Weather = eggs laid + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive + Clutch = eggs laid + water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive + Weather = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive cultures + Clutch = eggs laid + water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive cultures + Weather = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Number of fledglings analysis:

Brood = clutch initiation date + year.

Weather = temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive + Weather = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive + Weather = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Fledging probability analysis:

Brood = chicks born + clutch initiation date + year

Weather = temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Brood + Weather = chicks born + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive + Brood = chicks born + water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + clutch initiation date + year

Intensive + Weather = water + intensive culture + manure tank + intensive culture × manure tank + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive cultures + Brood = chicks born + water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + clutch initiation date + year

Extensive cultures + Weather = water + extensive culture + manure tank + extensive culture × manure tank + cattle + extensive culture × cattle + temperature + precipitations + clutch initiation date + year

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CONCLUSION GENERALE

Cette étude est la première d'un projet à long terme qui a débuté en 2004 et dont le but est de quantifier l'influence du paysage agricole sur les mécanismes influençant la reproduction de l'Hirondelle bicolor. Les résultats de cette étude ont permis d'établir que la structure du paysage agricole influence le succès reproducteur des Hirondelle bicolor.

Occupation

La probabilité d'occupation de nos nichoirs par l'Hirondelle bicolor varie en fonction du paysage. Celle-ci diminue avec la superficie en cultures intensives quand le nombre de réservoirs à purin et à lisier est supérieur à un, alors que la quantité de cultures extensives n'a pas d'influence. Les mécanismes sous-jacents ces résultats ne sont pas évidents, les explications pouvant être nombreuses. Il se peut, par exemple, qu'il y ait moins de sites de nidification disponibles en milieu intensif (moins de nichoirs et les arbres morts sont systématiquement abattus), ou encore que ce type de paysage structurellement simplifié et de moins bonne qualité représente un moins bon choix du point de vue de l'abondance de nourriture lors de la recherche d'un site de nidification.

L'occupation est également fortement influencée par la compétition avec le Moineau domestique (*Passer domesticus*), du fait de la faible disponibilité en sites de nidification. Une manière d'affiner ce résultat serait de quantifier plus précisément notre indice de compétition à l'aide de points d'écoute pour déterminer plus précisément le nombre de moineaux susceptibles d'entrer en compétition pour chacun des sites. Il serait également intéressant de voir si cette compétition varie en fonction du paysage. En effet, des analyses parallèles indiquent que la compétition avec les moineaux est plus importante lorsque proche des bâtiments (le moineau domestique étant fortement associé aux bâtiments).

Un autre volet lié à l'occupation est la variabilité individuelle dictant le choix du site. On sait en effet que les hirondelles expérimentées arrivent en premier sur le site de

nidification et que les femelles nées l'année précédente arrivent plus tard (Robertson *et al.* 1992). Comme les sites sont limités, il serait intéressant de voir si les structures d'âge sont différentes à travers des milieux de qualité différente. Il est probable que les femelles nées l'année précédente se retrouvent principalement dans des milieux de moindre qualité. Finalement, les nids d'hirondelles sont victimes de prédation par une grande quantité d'organismes et, même s'il est vrai que la prédation est réduite dans des nichoirs par rapport aux milieux naturels (Robertson et Rendell 1990), il n'en reste pas moins que la prédation constitue elle aussi une pression sur la reproduction susceptible de varier en fonction du paysage.

Succès reproducteur

On a pu montrer lors de cette étude que le paysage agricole influence fortement le succès reproducteur. Ainsi, moins d'œufs sont pondus là où on retrouve une plus grande proportion de cultures intensives, alors que la probabilité que les oisillons s'envolent et le nombre d'oisillons envolés sont plus élevés là où il y a une plus grande proportion de cultures extensives. L'hypothèse principale pour expliquer ce patron est la quantité de nourriture disponible. On sait en effet que la taille de ponte est fortement déterminée par la quantité et la qualité des insectes juste avant la ponte, les hirondelles étant des « reproducteurs sur revenu » (*income breeders*) (Winkler et Allen 1996, Nooker *et al.* 2005). Comme la quantité et la qualité de la nourriture varie en fonction du paysage (Di Giulio *et al.* 2001, Benton *et al.* 2002), de la température et des précipitations, mais aussi à travers la saison de reproduction, il serait plus qu'intéressant de quantifier cette source de nourriture à l'aide de pièges à insectes, de la mettre en relation avec le paysage, la météo et le temps et de déterminer comment tout cela influence le nombre d'œufs pondus par l'Hirondelle bicolore. De la même manière, on peut s'attendre à ce que le nombre d'oisillons sortant du nid et la probabilité d'envol réagissent à des patrons similaires, étant donné que la croissance et la survie des oisillons dépendent de la nourriture et de la météo (McCarty et Winkler 1999). A ce sujet, il serait aussi intéressant de regarder comment la croissance des oisillons et l'effort parental (et un éventuel compromis entre ceux-ci) peuvent varier en fonction du paysage, de la nourriture et de la météo.

Il est à noter qu'une des variables qu'on croyait importante (le nombre de vaches par fermes) n'avait d'influence sur aucune mesure du succès reproducteur malgré le fait qu'une étude d'Ambrosini et associés (2002) montrait une forte relation entre le nombre de vaches et l'abondance de l'Hirondelle rustique (*Hirundo rustica*). Il se peut par contre que cette variable ait malgré tout une importance pour l'Hirondelle bicolore, mais que l'absence de relation soit due au niveau spatial plus restreint à laquelle les mesures ont été prises. En effet, cette mesure a seulement été prise dans un rayon de 500m autour de chaque ferme. Il serait intéressant d'obtenir cette information pour les différents rayons auxquels les pourcentages de recouvrement ont été mesurés.

Une autre variable considérée dans plusieurs études comme importante au niveau de la reproduction, mais pour laquelle on n'a trouvé aucun effet, est la température. Celle-ci peut agir de manière directe via un stress hypothermique sur les oisillons ou de manière indirecte sur l'abondance de nourriture (Nooker *et al.* 2005, Ambrosini *et al.* 2006). De fait, l'activité des insectes volants est fortement réduite lors de périodes de températures froides, forçant les adultes à parcourir de plus longues distances pour acquérir une quantité de nourriture donnée. Comme les adultes passent moins de temps dans le nid, les oisillons n'en sont que plus vulnérables (et principalement dans les 5 premiers jours, alors qu'ils ne sont pas encore capables de frissonner pour thermoréguler, Robertson *et al.* 1992). La température la plus basse des 10 premiers jours après la naissance, au lieu de la moyenne, avait été incluse dans les analyses en se basant sur le fait que c'est la température minimale qui impose le stress le plus élevé sur les oisillons. Les résultats obtenus avec cette variable sont très surprenants. Plus la température minimale était élevée (passant de -2 à 20°) moins d'oisillons quittaient le nid. Ce résultat est interpellant car contraire à tous ce que les autres études s'intéressant à l'effet de la température sur la reproduction ont trouvé (Chaplin *et al.* 2002, Dawson et Lawrie 2005). Ces études ont montré qu'une augmentation de température favorise la croissance et la survie des oisillons. Il est à noter par contre que ces études ont toutes utilisé la température moyenne ou maximale. Pour explorer ce résultat, il serait intéressant d'utiliser des analyses de survie qui permettent de modéliser des variables journalièrement (comme la température) et de voir comment celles-ci influencent le taux de survie journalier des oisillons. Une

autre chose à améliorer est la précision des variables météorologiques. Pour cette étude, ces variables provenaient de stations météorologiques d'Environnement Canada qui ne permettent pas de décortiquer les températures en différentes tranches sur 24 heures (on pense que la température sera moins importante la nuit étant donné que la femelle couve ses œufs ou oisillons). Pour pallier ce problème, des thermochrons (senseurs enregistrant la température à un intervalle de temps donné) ont été installés dans chaque ferme en 2006.

Plusieurs études ont soulevé le fait que la taille de ponte varie fortement avec l'âge et la qualité des individus. Les femelles de un an et celles de plus de quatre ans pondent moins d'œufs que les autres (Robertson et Rendell 2001) à cause d'un manque d'expérience d'une part et d'un effet de sénescence d'autre part. Des données de recapture vont permettre dans le futur de regrouper les individus en classes d'âge et d'approfondir ce sujet. De plus, des expériences peuvent être faites pour manipuler la qualité des femelles en diminuant leur capacité à voler (en coupant certaines plumes, e.g, Winkler et Allen 1995). Comme il est probable que l'âge et la qualité des individus affectent le choix du site de nidification, on peut raisonnablement s'attendre à ce qu'il existe une relation entre ceux-ci, la qualité du paysage et le nombre d'œufs pondus.

D'autre part, on a montré que la proportion d'œufs éclos est reliée au nombre d'œufs pondus. Des expériences augmentant artificiellement le nombre d'œufs ou le nombre d'oisillons ont permis de montrer que les Hirondelle bicolore étaient capables d'assumer cette charge supplémentaire, mais cela au détriment de la qualité des oisillons envolés (masse à l'envol diminuée, temps d'incubation et d'élevage des jeunes augmentés) ou encore à l'intégrité immunologique des adultes (Shutler *et al.* 2004, Ardia 2005, Shutler *et al.* 2006). Le fait que les Hirondelle bicolore sont capables de supporter une charge accrue en œufs et en oisillons suggère que le facteur limitant la taille de la couvée est la quantité de nourriture au moment de la ponte, ce qui est en accord avec la théorie des reproducteurs sur revenu.

Une autre chose à prendre en compte est la notion de variabilité dans la qualité individuelle. On a montré que les variations observées tant au niveau de l'occupation d'un nichoir que pour les paramètres du succès reproducteur peuvent être expliquées par le paysage. Cependant, une partie de ces variations peuvent également être le fait de la variabilité individuelle. Dans le cas de l'occupation d'un nichoir, on sait que la probabilité d'occupation diminue avec la superficie de cultures intensives, mais il est fort probable que l'âge des individus, qui est un indice de qualité chez l'Hirondelle bicolore (Robertson et Rendell 2001), influence le choix du site de nidification. On sait que les individus nés l'année précédente arrivent après les individus expérimentés. Il se peut donc que tous les « bons » sites de nidification soient déjà occupés et que les individus inexpérimentés se retrouvent systématiquement dans des « mauvais » sites. En ce qui concerne les paramètres du succès reproducteur, une étude de Robertson et Rendell (2001) montre que les performances reproductives des Hirondelle bicolore augmentent de la première à la quatrième reproduction, puis diminuent ensuite à cause d'un phénomène de sénescence. De plus, une étude de Winkler et Allen (1995) montre que des individus de moindre qualité (e.g, avec une capacité de vol réduite) ont un succès reproducteur plus faible.

Dans cette étude nous avons déterminé l'importance de l'échelle entre les relations paysage et succès reproducteur. En effet, malgré des évidences théoriques et empiriques indiquant que les espèces réagissent de manière non linéaire à un gradient spatial du paysage, la majorité des études ne regardent l'influence du paysage qu'à une seule échelle spatiale (Wiens 1989, Gorresen *et al.* 2005). Que ce soit pour le nombre d'œufs pondus, pour le nombre d'oisillons envolés ou pour la probabilité d'envol (les trois volets dont les modèles les plus probables contiennent des variables du paysage), on a observé des variations des coefficients provenant des modèles définissant les cultures intensives ou extensives à travers l'échelle. On observe qu'au moment de la ponte, le coefficient des cultures intensives varie faiblement (entre - 0.008 à 1 km jusque à -0.012 pour 10 km). Une explication possible de cet effet est qu'au moment de la ponte des œufs, les adultes ne doivent pas retourner régulièrement au nichoir (les femelles peuvent pondre le matin et passer la journée à s'alimenter sans retourner au nichoir) et ont donc la possibilité de

parcourir de longues distances pour se nourrir, rendant l'utilisation du paysage uniforme à travers les échelles. Par contre, au moment de l'élevage des oisillons, le coefficient des cultures extensives varie beaucoup entre les échelles (de 0.02 à 1 km jusqu'à 0.08 à 5 km). A ce moment les adultes doivent retourner régulièrement au nichoir pour prendre soin des oisillons et les nourrir, limitant ainsi leur rayon de recherche de nourriture. Les résultats montrent que c'est à 5 km que le coefficient des cultures extensives est le plus élevé, ce qui concorde avec nos observations sur le terrain qui suggèrent que cela correspond à la distance maximale parcourue pour chercher de la nourriture (temps maximal entre deux visites au nid \times vitesse maximale de vol des hirondelles divisé par 2).

Conclusion

Il est important de se rappeler que le système étudié ici n'est pas naturel, dans le sens où les oiseaux étudiés se reproduisaient dans des nichoirs et non pas des cavités naturelles. Cependant une étude de Robertson et Rendell (1990) a montré que la reproduction de l'Hirondelle bicolore est sensiblement identique en milieu naturel et dans des nichoirs. On peut donc considérer que les résultats que nous avons observés peuvent être transférables en milieu naturel. Les résultats de cette étude suggèrent que la dynamique des populations d'Hirondelle bicolore a été profondément affectée par les changements portés à l'agriculture depuis quelques décennies. Cependant les indices de population disponibles (Bird Studies Canada et Étude des populations d'oiseaux du Québec, données non-publiées) indiquent une diminution des effectifs de population, bien que cette diminution reste modérée. Ceci suggère que malgré le fait que leur habitat ait été profondément modifié, les populations d'Hirondelle bicolore restent relativement stables, indiquant une forte capacité d'adaptation d'une part et suggérant l'importance des nichoirs installés chez les particuliers d'autre part.

Au final, même si pour cette étude l'organisme d'intérêt était l'Hirondelle bicolore, nos conclusions peuvent en toute logique s'étendre à toutes les populations d'oiseaux insectivores spécialistes des milieux champêtres. En effet, les mécanismes que nous avons mis en évidence ne sont pas propres aux hirondelles. Plusieurs études ont en effet

identifié des mécanismes similaires influençant le succès reproducteur d'autres espèces spécialistes des champs (voir Tableau A).

Ainsi notre étude s'inscrit bien dans un contexte d'intensification des pratiques agricoles et de leur influence sur les populations d'oiseaux champêtres. Même si notre étude n'était pas portée sur un changement temporel du paysage, notre gradient d'intensification nous offre des conditions similaires. En effet, les milieux comportant une grande proportion de cultures extensives ressemblent en tout point au paysage qui recouvrait l'ensemble de notre étude voici quelques décennies alors que les milieux comportant une grande proportion de cultures intensives représentent une intensification des pratiques agricoles, à un point tel qu'il est possible que sur le long terme l'ensemble de notre étude sera recouverte en majeure partie par des pratiques agricoles intensives.

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