



International Symposium on Ecology and Conservation of Steppe-land Birds

Lleida, 3rd - 7th December 2004

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20. The structure of bird communities of chalk steppe in North-eastern and Eastern Ukraine

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In North-eastern and Eastern Ukraine (mainly, Middle Russian Plain region) chalk steppe constitutes distinct and isolated communities which occupy relatively small areas along elevated right banks of rivers of Don and Miuss basins. The structure of bird communities of chalk steppe was studied using the data on breeding densities gathered by transect counts in May-July 2000. The total of 24 sites was surveyed within 7 river valleys in Sumy, Kharkiv, Lugansk and Donetsk regions. The overall density of breeding birds in chalk steppe habitats varied mainly from 300 to 700 ind./ km². The most common dominant species are Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*), Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*), Linnet (*Acanthis cannabina*) and Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*). The very common and characteristic but less abundant species are Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*), Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*), Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), Ortolan Bunting (*Emberiza hortulana*). Some species show clear habitat preferences such as Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*) for gently inclined lower parts of the slope profile or Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*) and European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) for great chalk ravines. The species abundance varied depending on habitat parameters (stratification and mean height of the vegetation cover, vegetation cover percentage, erosion level). Geographical trends in abundance were detected for some species such as Whinchat and Stonechat.

