

Overall, I thought this was an interesting and well done study showing the importance (or lack of) different types of field margin habitats on wetland, grassland and forest edge bird communities. While a number of studies have looked at the benefits of field margin habitats, this is one of the few to my knowledge that has examined how specific types of field margins benefit or negatively impact different guilds and the results will aid conservation planning for these species in this type of agricultural landscape. The writing was generally clear and succinct and the analyses well done. My suggestions are mostly around a few cases to improve clarity in the messaging and I also had a couple of minor questions on the design and analysis.

Line 49-51: "local conservation priorities" is vague and could refer to a variety of initiatives. The implication based on the previous statements is more that field margins have the potential to be both beneficial or negative depending on the guild and therefore the management actions need to be tailored to whichever guilds are of conservation priority and that it may be difficult to benefit all guilds. You could more directly state it like this.

Line 55: suggest "...have experienced a massive decline worldwide in recent decades..."

Line 59: suggest "not practical" instead of "hopeless"

Line 62: "carrying capacity" sounds a little odd to me here although I know what you mean (usually it's used for single populations however). How about something like "...conservation efforts should also focus on increasing the capacity of agricultural landscapes to support biodiversity through the adoption of biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices and..."

Line 72: An original reference for the habitat compensation hypothesis would be useful here.

Line 73: Is the original hypothesis specific to agriculture? I don't believe so. This could be rephrased as something like "...species may compensate for the loss of their primary habitat by using alternate habitats, such as agriculture, as a substitute."

Line 87: suggest "much less attention". Also, this would read better if broken into two sentences after the Elphick reference.

Line 101-103: This sentence isn't clear, the second part on bird declines doesn't flow naturally from the first part of the sentence on the hydrosaline equilibrium.

Line 107: This would be better stated as "...we evaluated support for the habitat compensation hypothesis in rice paddy landscapes of Camargue by testing whether field margins act as substitute habitats for three ecological bird guilds (reedbed birds, forest edge birds and grassland birds)". Then the next sentence can be shortened to mention of the sample size.

Line 111: Suggest this be "Specifically, we predicted..."

Line 139-140: I don't think you need to have this line about hedge rows being on a different map. If you do include it, it would be good to refer to the map as it wasn't clear to me.

Line 140: It's more typical to say "We checked for correlations..."

Survey design (2.2 and 2.3): If I am understanding the survey design correctly, all variables related to the vegetation and crop covers were measured at 500m from the center of the crop field and then for that

same crop field, bird surveys were done halfway along the edge of that crop field – is that correct? Unless these fields are small such that the center and edges are very close, it seems possible that the cover in a radius of detectability around the bird survey point may not align with the cover being measured from the center of the crop field. Perhaps I'm not visualizing the design properly but either way it would be good to clarify this further as it seems like the vegetation and the bird surveys could be mis-aligned in terms of what's being surveyed.

Line 214-217: Since you are interested in individual species responses and in comparing among guilds, I would treat species as fixed effects in all cases so that you are consistent across the three guilds. Also, with random variables there is a sharing of information and so, especially for the species with less data, there will be an overall influence of the group mean for forest birds on the individual forest species responses (it may be minimal but good to be aware of and aside from that, it would be better to be consistent in how each guild is analyzed). Otherwise, I thought the data analysis looked good and was nicely described.

Line 257: I know that you mention no effect of grass strips on grassland birds on lines 271-273 but I think it should be discussed here instead since it was one of the main objectives in testing field margins as substitute habitats. It seemed strange to have it included at the very end of the Results (fine to leave the influence of crop diversity and field size for the end since these were not a main objective).

Line 267-270: Rather than comparing how one species responses relative to another, where there are so many possible comparisons, it may be better to summarize which species are most contributing to the effects in Figure 4a and 4b. Also, as I noted above, some of the responses for less common species may be influenced by the overall group mean and so it will be interesting to see if there are effects for more of the species if you run all models with species as fixed rather than random effects.

Line 300-301: To be clear, this should read "...substitute habitats for reedbed and forest edge species respectively, in line with...". As stated it sounds like reedbed and forest edge species benefit from both reed strips and hedge rows.

Line 326: Should be "the latter"

Line 329-333: Good acknowledgements here, one other point to note is that we don't lose wetlands under the idea that we can use reedbeds as a substitute. The example with bearded reedling shows that reedbed strips cannot benefit all species but it would also be difficult for reedbeds to match the area loss and heterogeneity in vegetation and other habitats that wetlands provide. The species with sufficient data in your study are capable of using these strips and your study shows that they can be substitute habitats for these species but it would be good to be clear that the results here do not imply that they are substitute habitats for communities (i.e. reed strips do not equal wetlands in general). You start to touch on this in the concluding paragraph but it could be stated more directly.

Table 2 legend: Should state if the confidence intervals are 95% or some other width.