

The Condor
Volume 109, Number 3
August 2007 C.E.
Abstracts

SPECIAL SECTION: CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES OF AVIAN HABITAT SELECTION

WHAT IS A WINTER FLOATER? CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR HABITAT SELECTION

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Manuscript received 23 March 2006; accepted 29 March 2007.

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Abstract. In migrant birds, winter social systems reflect strategies of habitat use. The best-studied strategy is that of a fixed home range or territory. Alternative strategies to holding a territory, such as floating and flocking behaviors, suggest different processes of habitat selection. Whereas flocking, like territoriality, is a well-studied social strategy, solitary nonterritorial (floater) behavior is difficult to study and is thus poorly understood in terms of its causes, consequences, and implications for habitat selection. Floaters are individuals of a primarily stationary population which move over large areas compared to the average home range size. We review evidence of the causes, consequences, and frequency of winter floating behavior, focusing primarily on migrant songbirds. We also address the endocrine basis of alternative behavioral strategies by presenting results from aviary-based dominance trials with Hermit Thrushes (*Catharus guttatus*). Results from this study and others suggest that the adrenocortical response to social stress plays a key role in both the proximate and ultimate causes of floating behavior. Because winter floating behavior exists in many migrant songbird species, better understanding of winter floaters may be important for population modeling and conservation planning.

Key words: alternative behaviors, corticosterone, floaters, habitat selection, social systems, territoriality, winter.