Optic flow and energy invariants combined may explain gulls’ altitude profiles during offshore takeoff
Julien Serres, Thomas Evans, Susanne Åkesson, Olivier Duriez, Judy Shamoun-Baranes, Franck Ruffier, Anders Hedenström

To cite this version:
Julien Serres, Thomas Evans, Susanne Åkesson, Olivier Duriez, Judy Shamoun-Baranes, et al.. Optic flow and energy invariants combined may explain gulls’ altitude profiles during offshore takeoff. The 6th International Bio-logging Science Symposium (BLS6), Sep 2017, Lake Constance, Germany. hal-02078084

HAL Id: hal-02078084
https://hal-amu.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02078084
Submitted on 25 Mar 2019

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Results: Altitude Control Model parameterized using individual bird metrics (mass, wingspan, …)

- We used high time resolution (10-15sec) GPS tracking of lesser black backed gull from off-shore takeoff towards their breeding colony.
- The altitude control model is based on (i) the bird elevation dynamics and (ii) the “constant optic flow” hypothesis using individual bird metrics.

Conclusion

- A linear 1st order parametric model on gulls’ data (18 trajectories) gives a fit factor value of 37.6% on average (range: 10 – 80%).
- By introducing a ceiling in the climbing rate according to Hedenström et al., 2003, In: Avian Migration (prediction 10), the non-linear parametric model on 18 trajectories gives a fit factor value of 57.1% on average (range 15 – 80%).
- For GPS-tracked offshore takeoffs by gulls, the normalized altitude computed with the mathematical model using GPS derived horizontal groundspeed data predicts altitudes close to actual GPS recorded altitude, thus suggesting gulls use an optic flow-based system for control of takeoff flight.