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## Identifying the environmental drivers of corridors and predicting connectivity between seasonal ranges in multiple populations of Alpine ibex ( *Capra ibex* ) as tools for conserving migration

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1           **Identifying the environmental drivers of corridors and predicting**  
2   **connectivity between seasonal ranges in multiple populations of Alpine ibex**  
3           **(*Capra ibex*) as tools for conserving migration**

4

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56 **ABSTRACT**

57 Seasonal migrations are central ecological processes connecting populations, species and  
58 ecosystems in time and space. Land migrations, such as those of ungulates, are particularly  
59 threatened by habitat transformations and fragmentation, climate change and other  
60 environmental changes caused by anthropogenic activities. Mountain ungulate migrations are  
61 neglected because they are relatively short, although traversing highly heterogeneous altitudinal  
62 gradients particularly exposed to anthropogenic threats. Detecting migration routes of these  
63 species and understanding their drivers is therefore of primary importance to predict  
64 connectivity and preserve ecosystem functions and services. The populations of Alpine ibex  
65 *Capra ibex*, an iconic species endemic to the Alps, have all been reintroduced from the last  
66 remnant source population. Because of their biology and conservation history, Alpine ibex  
67 populations are mostly disconnected. Hence, despite a general increase in abundance and  
68 overall distribution range, their conservation is strictly linked to the interplay between external  
69 threats and related behavioral responses, including space use and migration. By using 337  
70 migratory tracks from 425 GPS-collared individuals from 15 Alpine ibex populations  
71 distributed across their entire range, we (i) identified the environmental drivers of movement  
72 corridors in both spring and autumn and (ii) compared the abilities of three modeling  
73 approaches to predict migratory movements between seasonal ranges of the 15 populations.  
74 Trade-offs between energy expenditure, food, and cover seemed to be the major driver of  
75 migration routes: steep south-facing snow-free slopes were selected while high elevation  
76 changes were avoided. This revealed the importance of favorable resources and an attempt to  
77 limit energy expenditures and perceived predation risk. Based on these findings, we provided  
78 efficient connectivity models to inform conservation of Alpine ibex and its habitats, and a  
79 framework for future research investigating connectivity in migratory species.

80

81 **Keywords:** Movement ecology; mountain ungulate; habitat selection; integrated step selection  
82 analysis; randomized shortest paths; cross validation; corridor mapping; migration conservation

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84

## 85 INTRODUCTION

86 Global human-induced environmental changes are causing severe biodiversity loss, and habitat  
87 destruction and fragmentation are among the main causes of this decline (Newbold et al., 2016;  
88 Díaz et al., 2019). The development of linear infrastructures associated with human activities  
89 also contribute to impede species mobility (Torres et al., 2016). For instance, the extent of  
90 terrestrial mammalian movements was reduced by 50% in areas with a high human footprint  
91 compared with areas undisturbed by human activities (Tucker et al., 2018). By limiting animal  
92 movements between favorable habitats, human activities and infrastructures also reshape  
93 landscape connectivity (Taylor et al., 1993). Yet, connectivity is essential for individual and  
94 gene flows, for the local persistence of populations (Hanski, 1998), and for ecosystem  
95 functioning (Bauer & Hoyer, 2014).

96 In the context of degraded connectivity, seasonal migrations, i.e., movements to track  
97 the spatiotemporal fluctuations in environmental conditions on seasonal ranges (Dingle &  
98 Drake, 2007), are of particular concern (Bolger et al., 2008). Most large herbivores, as primary  
99 consumers, migrate or may show migration propensity in heterogeneous and predictable  
100 habitats (Mueller et al., 2011, Teitelbaum et al., 2015). They are often restricted to well-defined  
101 corridors used by most migrants with low tendency to change migration routes when corridors  
102 are altered (see e.g., Xu et al., 2021). Migration can increase survival and reproduction through  
103 better access to high quality resources and reduced intra- and interspecific competition or  
104 predation risk (Avgar et al., 2014; Eggeman et al., 2016; van Moorter et al., 2021). However,  
105 migratory movements also imply energetic costs, and can be risky, or perceived as such, as  
106 animals may move through unfamiliar areas (Klaassen et al., 2014; Blagdon & Johnson, 2021).  
107 Hence, migration is a behavioral tactic whose fitness returns can vary through space and time,  
108 depending on individual traits, and spatial heterogeneity in occurrence and intensity of  
109 predation, harvesting, or competition in a population's range. Accordingly, migration can be  
110 partial, with some individuals that choose to migrate while others are resident, and with  
111 individual behavior that can change from year to year (Cagnacci et al., 2011). Given that  
112 migration can affect population dynamics and species persistence by shaping their spatio-  
113 temporal distribution, there is a crucial need to increase our understanding of the link between  
114 habitat use and drivers of movement during seasonal migration at a fine spatial scale, the  
115 resulting ecological connectivity of a landscape, and how human activities affect this  
116 connectivity level (Sawyer et al., 2011; Panzacchi et al., 2016).

117 Migration corridors and their environmental characteristics are well-documented in  
118 spectacular collective and long-distance migrations in North American, Scandinavian or  
119 African ungulates (Boone et al., 2006; Merkle et al., 2016; Panzacchi et al., 2016; Joly et al.,  
120 2019) but are poorly known in most species (Kauffman et al., 2021). Recently, the focus has  
121 been put on spring migration revealing how migratory species can surf the green wave by  
122 tracking the green-up which moves like a wave across the landscape (Bischof et al., 2012;  
123 Merkle et al., 2016). Although less spectacular, migrations also occur in mountain ungulate  
124 populations occupying highly heterogeneous and fragmented landscapes (Herfindal et al.,  
125 2019), which are under threats from rapid climate changes and increasing anthropogenic  
126 pressure (Parmesan & Yohe, 2003; Schmeller et al., 2022). In mountain areas, green waves  
127 occur along altitudinal gradients and therefore green wave surfing seems to not always fully  
128 explain the choice of routes traveled between seasonal home ranges (Gaudry et al., 2015;  
129 Herfindal et al., 2019; but see Semenzato et al., 2021 for seasonal tracking of the altitudinal  
130 green and senescence wave). Several other factors can affect migration routes, particularly in  
131 complex topographic landscapes. Indeed, in addition to the diversity of migratory portfolios,  
132 migration is most often partial and takes place among multiple winter and summer ranges  
133 (Crampe et al., 2007; Lowrey et al., 2020; Denryter et al., 2021) and, up to now, little is known  
134 about migration patterns and migration routes for these mountain populations. Yet, this  
135 information is essential to improve the conservation of migratory species (e.g., through the  
136 establishment of protected areas, or to inform landscape planning; Mccollister & Manen, 2010)  
137 and preserve the ecological functions and ecosystem services migratory species support  
138 (Semmens et al., 2011). In this context, the importance of reliable connectivity maps for the  
139 identification of realistic corridors has been stressed (Sawyer et al., 2011; Zeller et al., 2012).  
140 A deeper understanding of the link between fine-grain habitat use and movements has been  
141 particularly invoked and up-to-date algorithms have been developed and used to model  
142 connectivity while accounting from iterative decisions of animals trading off exploration and  
143 optimal use of their environment (Panzacchi et al., 2016; Goicolea et al., 2021). However,  
144 population-specific movement analyses and connectivity predictions may be difficult to  
145 generalize over species and contexts when relying on samples from a single population not  
146 always representative of the species/habitat. Multi-population analyses may be crucial to  
147 extend population-specific knowledge to species conservation, but such comparative analyses  
148 remain particularly scarce (Urbano, Cagnacci & Euromammals consortium, 2021).

149 Here, we investigated migration routes in several populations of Alpine ibex *Capra ibex*  
150 across the Alps in order to model and predict connectivity between summer and winter ranges.  
151 This mountain species of high patrimonial value went almost extinct during the XX<sup>th</sup> century  
152 and recovered a large distribution thanks to intensive reintroduction programs (>55 000  
153 individuals distributed across 178 populations; Brambilla et al., 2020). Even though most  
154 populations stem from individuals that were naive to the areas they were introduced into,  
155 seasonal migrations seem to occur in most populations. These migrations appear short in  
156 distance between a low altitude wintering area and a higher summer range. Yet, populations are  
157 still poorly connected, and drastic bottlenecks and founder effects have resulted in a very low  
158 level of genetic diversity (Biebach & Keller, 2009). Thus, effective conservation of this species  
159 and its habitats would highly benefit from better knowledge of the landscape characteristics  
160 used by ibex during migration, and from an assessment of the connectivity offered by available  
161 habitats. Owing to a unique GPS telemetry dataset from 425 ibex and 15 populations across the  
162 entire distribution range of the species, we first aimed at determining the environmental drivers  
163 of migratory tracks accounting for the many factors likely at play in an individual's choice of  
164 routes. We specifically tested whether individuals (i) minimized energy expenditures and  
165 difficulties to travel by avoiding elevation changes, rugged terrain and snowy areas as traveling  
166 costs are paramount in all optimality models aiming at understanding the costs and benefits of  
167 migration tactics (Holt & Fryxell, 2011), (ii) selected habitats offering food resources and  
168 refuge from perceived predation risk, (iii) used visual landmarks (linear features such as ridges,  
169 tree lines and valley bottoms) as "compasses" (Alerstam & Bäckman, 2018), and (iv) avoided  
170 proximity to anthropogenic infrastructures (roads and ski areas; Table 1) during migration.  
171 Then, we took advantage of the 15 populations monitored to compare connectivity assessments  
172 when using either population-specific habitat selection criteria or criteria averaged over all  
173 populations; and to perform external validation of the ability of our model to accurately predict  
174 ibex migratory connectivity in the absence of any data on ibex locations, a crucial step to  
175 provide reliable information for species migration conservation across its native range.

176

## 177 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### 178 Study areas and GPS data

179 We relied on a GPS dataset collected on 425 individual Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*; 41% females  
180 and 59% males; 77% being adults >4 years-old) from 15 reintroduced populations. Those

181 populations were distributed across the whole Alps (10 in France, 2 in Italy, 1 in Switzerland,  
182 and 2 in Austria; Figure 1; latitudinal gradient: 44-47°N, longitudinal gradient: 6°-13°E and  
183 altitudinal gradient: 1700-2700m). Alpine ibex can share habitats with northern chamois  
184 (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), less frequently with red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and roe deer (*Capreolus*  
185 *capreolus*), and with livestock during summer (sheep, goats and cows). Grey wolf (*Canis lupus*)  
186 is present in most of ibex distribution range, but predation occurs rarely on ibex.

187 Sample sizes varied between populations (minimum: 7 individuals in Hohe Tauern National  
188 Park; maximum: 117 in the Bargy massif). Several types of collars were used (Vectronic: GPS  
189 Plus, Vertex Plus, or Vertex Lite models; Lotek: 3300S or Litetrack models; Followit: Tellus  
190 model). All models weighted <3% of individual body weight. They were programmed to record  
191 ibex locations at variable frequencies and during variable periods (from 1 location per hour  
192 during one year to 1 location per 6 hours during 2-3 years, Appendix S1), resulting in 1 068  
193 seasonal tracks (an individual monitored during 1 year resulted in 2 potential migratory tracks).

#### 194 Determining migratory status and migration tracks

195 The migratory status of each ibex (migrant or resident) and migration tracks (for migrants) were  
196 visually determined using the application Migration Mapper™ (version 2.3, Merkle et al., 2022;  
197 see Appendix S2 for the parameters used). This application provides tools to visually identify  
198 migrants, migration periods and tracks using the Net Squared Displacement (NSD; squared  
199 Euclidean distance between the first locations of the GPS trajectory and the following one;  
200 Börger & Fryxell, 2012; Appendix S3). Spring and fall migration periods and migratory tracks  
201 started at the last location preceding the increase/decrease in the NSD and ended at the first  
202 location when the NSD stabilized. Migratory movements were identified irrespective of  
203 distance separating seasonal ranges as ibex exhibited several forms of migratory movements  
204 within populations (short-altitudinal movements or long-distance movements). However, only  
205 neat migrations (i.e., two movements between distinct seasonal ranges) were selected to reduce  
206 uncertainty in the displayed behavior (see Appendix S4 for details on distance and altitudinal  
207 interval between seasonal ranges of migrant and resident individuals).

#### 208 Assessing environmental drivers of ibex migratory movements

##### 209 *Environmental variables*

210 We investigated the influence of 11 environmental variables (see Appendix S5) that could affect  
211 movement choices during migration (Table 1). We considered the total elevation change (sum



212 of changes in elevation values along a step), the ruggedness (Vector Ruggedness Measure;  
213 Sappington et al., 2007) and a snow cover index (calculated as the total annual number of days  
214 a pixel was covered by snow) as metrics reflecting the energetic costs and difficulties to travel  
215 during migration. We used the northness (cosine of aspect derived from the same DEM) and  
216 the snow cover index to reflect the accessibility and the quality of vegetation resources and the  
217 presence of snow cover, as well as the availability of thermal shelters. Contrary to what is  
218 commonly done in studies on migratory ungulates, we did not use vegetation variables or  
219 derived metrics (NDVI, Instantaneous Rate of Green-Up; e.g. Bischof et al., 2012) as we judged  
220 the information given by the northness and snow cover more relevant considering the short  
221 duration and distance of ibex migrations (see results). As ibex mostly use open areas (Parrini et  
222 al., 2009) and often steep slopes as refuge from perceived predation risk and human disturbance,  
223 we expected forests to be avoided and proximity to slopes  $>40^\circ$  to be selected during migration  
224 (Grignolio et al., 2007; Iribarren & Kotler, 2012). We considered ridges, valleys and tree lines  
225 as potential visual landmarks used for navigation (Alerstam & Bäckman, 2018). Finally, we  
226 hypothesized that the proximity to roads and ski areas (i.e., human infrastructures that  
227 occasionally occurred in the surrounding of ibex population ranges) would be avoided as both  
228 can constitute barriers - physical barriers such as roads - or perceived as such because associated  
229 with humans for both roads and ski areas.

### 230 *Habitat selection analyses during migration*

231 We used integrated Step Selection Analyses (iSSA; Avgar et al., 2016) to assess the  
232 environmental drivers of ibex migratory movements. The habitat variables along (total  
233 elevation change) or at the end (all other habitat variables) of each used movement step  
234 (considered as the straight lines between recorded ibex locations) traveled by one individual  
235 ibex during migration were compared with the habitat characteristics along/at the end of 15  
236 available steps it could have traveled, using conditional logistic regressions (Fortin et al., 2005;  
237 Thurfjell et al., 2014). We generated those available steps by sampling step lengths (corrected  
238 to get three dimensional lengths using a DEM at a resolution of 25m, which are particularly  
239 relevant in mountainous landscapes) and turning angles in parametric distributions (gamma  
240 distribution for the step length and Von Mises distribution for the turning angles; Duchesne et  
241 al., 2015) derived from the observed step length and turning angle distributions of the used  
242 steps. We accounted for the variable step duration in our dataset by deriving specific  
243 distributions for each step duration and checked if habitat selection was similar for the different  
244 timesteps by using the method of Used Calibration Plots (see Appendix S6).

245 We scaled habitat variables across all populations (i.e., variables were centered and divided by  
246 their standard deviation) to make their effect size comparable in iSSA outputs and we checked  
247 for potential correlations between our variables using a Pearson correlation. Correlation  
248 coefficients were  $> 0.3$  for the variables forest and proximity to forest ( $\rho = 0.5$ ) and for the  
249 variables step length,  $\log(\text{step length})$  and total elevation change ( $\rho = 0.6$  step length/ $\log(\text{step}$   
250 length),  $\rho = 0.6$  total elevation change/ $\log(\text{step length})$ ,  $\rho = 0.9$  step length/total elevation  
251 change).

252 The logistic regressions included the 11 environmental variables, step length,  $\log$  of step  
253 length and cosine of turning angles (Avgar et al., 2016). We chose to include the step length  
254 and turning angles in iSSA without interactions with habitat variables to simplify our models,  
255 except for the interaction between step length and elevation change. We fitted one model for  
256 each season (i.e., spring or autumn migration) and each of the 15 populations. For 6 populations  
257 in spring and 5 in autumn, the variables “forest” and “proximity to ski areas” were excluded  
258 from models as forest or ski areas were rare or absent in the distributional range of those  
259 populations. We chose to fit models at population scale because we were more interested in  
260 modeling migratory movements at the population scale. Accounting for sex-specific differences  
261 can be important for a species like Alpine ibex knowing to exhibit different patterns of  
262 movements between sexes (Herfindal et al., 2019). However, numbers of migrant females (or  
263 even migrant animals) were too small in several populations to test sex-specific differences (see  
264 Appendix S7). We investigated if habitat selection results differed between sexes in Appendix  
265 S8. We fitted models using the *clogit* function from the package *survival* in R V. 4.2.2  
266 (Therneau, 2022, R Core Team, 2022). We conducted a model selection based on AICc with  
267 the *dredge* function in package *MuMIn* (Bartoń, 2022). The coefficients from the best models,  
268 i.e., models with an  $\Delta\text{AICc} < 2$ , were averaged using the *model.avg* function in the package  
269 *MuMIn*. We did not include “individual” as a random effect as the models did not converge  
270 correctly when doing so. We finally produced Used Habitat Calibration plots (UHC plots;  
271 Fieberg et al., 2018) using mixed-effect Poisson models (Appendix S9) to check for the  
272 agreement between model predictions and values of our covariates observed at or along used  
273 steps (Appendix S6).

#### 274 Building and validating models of migratory connectivity in ibex

275 We proceeded in four steps (see below and step III of Figure 2) to build and validate  
276 connectivity models based on the 15 populations to perform three different validation

277 procedures (i.e., using three different pairs of training/validation datasets; Figure 2) designed  
278 to understand how our models could inform different management measures. The first  
279 procedure (“leave 10% of whole data out”) seeks to understand if based on all information we  
280 have on ibex habitat selection we can predict migratory movements of non-marked individuals  
281 in monitored populations. We used the second procedure (“leave 10% of population data out”) to  
282 assess if based on data from a limited number of animals in a population we can predict  
283 where other animals should migrate. Finally, the third procedure (“leave one population out”) evaluates  
284 if based on all information we have we can predict migratory movements in  
285 populations without monitoring.

286 For each seasonal migration (i.e., spring or fall), we first selected habitat variables  
287 previously identified as having a significant effect in at least 8/15 populations. To assess if  
288 variables had a significant effect, we computed the 95% confidence intervals (CI) for selection  
289 coefficients resulting from the model averaging. A coefficient was significant if its CI non-  
290 overlapped with 0. We included these variables to fit average seasonal iSSA models on three  
291 different training datasets. Second, we used those averaged seasonal iSSA models to build three  
292 different resistance maps for each population. Third, we modeled connectivity between winter  
293 and summer ranges using the Randomized Shortest Path algorithm on each resistance map  
294 (Panzacchi et al., 2016). Finally, we used 2 different methods to evaluate the performance of  
295 our three connectivity models by comparing their predictions to the different validation datasets  
296 previously set aside.

### 297 *1. Sampling training and validation datasets*

298 We built three different combinations of training/validation datasets, which were then used to  
299 build resistance maps and model three corresponding connectivity maps. Specifically, we first  
300 fitted two seasonal iSSA using 90% of the whole dataset (Figure 2; ‘leave 10% of whole data  
301 out’ approach), and second, we fitted population-specific seasonal iSSA models with 90% of  
302 the population-specific dataset as a training dataset (‘leave 10% of population data out’  
303 approach). For those two approaches, the remaining 10% of migratory tracks served as  
304 validation datasets and the 90%/10% sampling procedure was repeated 250 times to assess  
305 uncertainty around connectivity predictions. Third, we fitted iSSA with data from all  
306 populations but one, and used data from the discarded population for validation, and repeated  
307 this for the 15 populations (‘leave one population out’ approach).

308        2. *Building resistance maps*

309        We then used the different iSSA models to compute seasonal resistance maps that display the  
310        relative avoidance of each pixel by an ibex migrating through the landscape. To do so, we  
311        multiplied each raster of environmental variables by the corresponding coefficient provided by  
312        the iSSA model fitted with a given data source. Then, we summed those rasters and applied the  
313        inverse logit function to get habitat selection maps representing the relative probability that an  
314        ibex selected a pixel during migration. The RSP algorithm uses a resistance map to model the  
315        connectivity, to obtain resistance maps, we applied the inverse function to those habitat  
316        selection maps considering that the cost of movement is higher in avoided habitats (Keeley et  
317        al., 2016; Zeller et al., 2018).

318        3. *Modeling connectivity between summer and winter ranges*

319        We defined seasonal ranges as 95% kernel areas derived from the corresponding seasonal  
320        locations (Worton, 1989), using *kernelUD* function from *adehabitatHR* package (h parameter  
321        was set to 400; Calenge, 2022). We restricted our analyses to seasonal ranges connected by  
322        migratory tracks to limit our connectivity predictions to the areas actually used by GPS-collared  
323        migrant ibex. We used the Randomized Shortest Paths approach to model connectivity (RSP;  
324        Saerens et al., 2009; Panzacchi et al., 2016; implemented in the *passage* function from R  
325        package *gdistance*; van Etten, 2022) between 10 points randomly sampled within each pair of  
326        summer and winter ranges. This algorithm estimates the number of times an ibex would cross  
327        each pixel of the resistance map during migration. As in other algorithms relying on the graph  
328        theory (e.g., least-cost path and circuit theory), the resistance map is represented as a graph with  
329        individuals moving from nodes to nodes (i.e., the center of the pixels) along links/edges with  
330        variable costs depending on the values of the resistance map. The RSP computes the least-cost  
331        path, the path which minimizes the distance and costs accumulated along a trajectory joining a  
332        source and a destination. The RSP algorithm also integrates a stochasticity parameter  $\theta$  which  
333        allows measuring the degree of departure from two extreme strategies, i.e., random-walk (full  
334        exploration of neighboring nodes), when  $\theta = 0$ , or least-cost path (i.e., optimal exploitation of  
335        the landscape by minimizing total costs) for the highest value of  $\theta$  (see Appendix S10). This  
336        allows accounting for intermediate strategies between the two most commonly used methods  
337        to model movements in connectivity analyses. We obtained two connectivity maps (one per  
338        season) for each training dataset using an optimized stochasticity parameter  $\theta$  (Appendix S10).

339 We finally obtained three unique connectivity maps (one per training dataset) by averaging the  
340 two seasonal connectivity maps for each training dataset.

#### 341 4. *Validating connectivity maps*

342 We used two different methods to evaluate the accuracy of our connectivity predictions. First,  
343 we ranked each used step traveled by ibex during migration versus the 15 associated available  
344 steps they could have travelled (already sampled for iSSA analyses; see section *Habitat*  
345 *selection analyses during migration*) based on connectivity values at the end of each step and  
346 assigned them a value between 1 (lowest connectivity) and 16 (highest connectivity; ranking  
347 method; McClure et al., 2016; Goicolea et al., 2021). If accurately predicted, the average rank  
348 of used steps should be higher than those of available steps. Second, we converted connectivity  
349 values to percentile connectivity values (e.g., the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile corresponds to the 5% highest  
350 values of the connectivity map) and delineated five connectivity corridors as the 80<sup>th</sup>, 85<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup>,  
351 95<sup>th</sup>, and 99<sup>th</sup> connectivity percentiles. We then calculated the percentage of ibex locations  
352 collected during migration included in each connectivity corridor as a metric of predictive  
353 performance of our connectivity models (representation in corridors; Poor et al., 2012; Zeller  
354 et al., 2018; Goicolea et al., 2021). As the percentage of ibex locations during migration that  
355 fall within a given corridor is strongly dependent on the area of this corridor, we also computed  
356 the proportion of locations in the corridor divided by the corridor surface to get an index of  
357 accuracy of connectivity predictions (Appendix S11). We applied both validation methods  
358 (ranking and representation in corridors) on the three validation datasets we set aside previously  
359 to validate our three approaches to compute connectivity maps.

## 360 **RESULTS**

### 361 Identification of migrant ibex

362 Among the 1068 seasonal tracks available in our GPS dataset, we identified 337 migratory  
363 tracks (169 in spring, 168 in autumn), distributed between multiple winter and summer ranges  
364 within each population. On average, the proportion of seasonal tracks identified as migration  
365 was 45% (SD 22.5) over the 15 populations, confirming partial migration. However, it varied  
366 greatly between populations, from 13% to 75% in the Bargy and Champsaur populations,  
367 respectively (considering populations with enough animals to estimate this proportion). On  
368 average, migrant ibex traveled 12 km (SD 8) of topographic distance, with population means  
369 that varied from 6 to 22 km and an individual maximum of 62 km. In spring, those migratory

370 tracks lasted 3.5 days (SD 3.6) on average and occurred around May 27 (SD 27 days), while in  
371 autumn they lasted 6.3 days (SD 6.3) on average and occurred around October 30 (SD 29 days).

### 372 Habitat selection during migration

373 In both spring and autumn, ibex traveled in areas with less total elevation change (192.4 m on  
374 average for 6 hours) than if they had moved randomly (207.1 m, 7% less; significant in 11/15  
375 populations in spring and 13/15 in autumn; Figure 3). They also selected for proximity to  
376 refuges from perceived predation risk (slopes  $> 40^\circ$ ; 11/15 populations in spring and 10/15 in  
377 autumn) and avoided north-oriented areas (10/15 populations in both seasons). During autumn  
378 migration only, they also avoided areas expected to be the first covered by snow and where  
379 snow may accumulate (snow cover index; 7/15). By contrast, neither anthropogenic  
380 infrastructures (proximity to ski resorts and roads) nor linear structures considered as potential  
381 landmarks (proximity to ridges, valley bottoms and tree lines) influenced ibex migratory tracks  
382 during either season.

### 383 Connectivity modeling

384 The three modeling methods performed relatively well and produced similar predictions of ibex  
385 migratory corridors. About half of the migratory tracks were in areas with high connectivity,  
386 falling in the 95th connectivity percentile corridor (50.4% (SD 14.7) for “leave one population  
387 out”; 51.9% (SD 11.8) for “leave 10% of population data out” and 53.1% (SD 13.7) for “leave  
388 10% of whole data out”; Figure 4). The percentage of tracks included in the predicted corridor  
389 increased rapidly for lower values of the predicted connectivity corridor, as more than 90% of  
390 the tracks were included in the 80th connectivity percentile. The best stochasticity value  $\theta$  in  
391 the Randomized Shortest Path algorithm was equal to 0.1 (Appendix S10). This intermediate  
392 value largely outperformed the lower ( $\theta=0$ ; totally random movements) and upper limits ( $\theta=3$ ;  
393 deterministic movements) resulting in intermediate connectivity patterns between the diffuse  
394 connectivity corridors obtained with the circuit theory approach and the narrow and simple  
395 least-cost path that prevented from alternative routes (Figure 5).

396 According to the ranking validation method, the three connectivity modeling approaches tested  
397 (i.e., ‘leave 10% of whole data out’, ‘leave 10% of population data out’ and ‘leave one  
398 population out’) provided connectivity maps that predicted ibex migratory movements better  
399 than random surfaces (see Figure 5 for examples, and Appendix S12). The mean and median  
400 ranks of used steps in the three validation datasets were all  $> 8$ , with values from 9 to 11  
401 depending on the population, although variability was important (1<sup>st</sup> quartile and 3<sup>rd</sup> quartile

402 ranging from 5 to 14 depending on populations; Appendix S13). However, within populations  
403 results were similar whatever the training dataset used.

404 Comparable proportions of locations of migratory tracks were included in connectivity  
405 corridors for the three modeling approaches: between 93.7 – 94.0% of locations in the 80th  
406 connectivity percentile corridors and between 14.9 – 15.7% in the 99th connectivity percentile  
407 corridors (Figure 4, Appendix S14). There was heterogeneity between populations in the  
408 accuracy of the predictive models of connectivity, but within the same population, the three  
409 connectivity models gave similar results (Appendix S14). The ratio of the proportion of  
410 locations included in the corridor over the corridor surface was superior for the 95th and 99th  
411 percentile corridors. Therefore, these connectivity corridors captured on average the highest  
412 proportion of ibex locations within the smallest surface but the variability in this ratio over the  
413 15 populations was high (Appendix S11).

## 414 **DISCUSSION**

415 Relying on a dataset assembling 337 migratory tracks collected in 15 Alpine ibex populations  
416 distributed across the Alps, we identified the environmental predictors of corridors in this  
417 endemic and emblematic short-distance and altitudinal migrant species. While consistently  
418 limiting energetically-costly elevation change, ibex migrated mostly in south-facing snow-free  
419 slopes and close to steep areas providing refuges from perceived predation risk. By contrast,  
420 neither the landmarks (ridges, tree lines, valley bottoms) hypothesized as visual cues for ibex  
421 navigation, nor human infrastructures (ski areas and roads, when present) affected ibex  
422 migratory movements. The randomized shortest path algorithm revealed an intermediate  
423 movement strategy in Alpine ibex, trading off optimization and exploration during migratory  
424 movements. The abilities of the three modeling methods we compared to predict migratory  
425 connectivity from the results of those movement analyses, relying either on population-specific  
426 or multipopulational approaches, were comparable. They provided efficient connectivity  
427 models to inform conservation of Alpine ibex and its habitats, and a framework for future  
428 research investigating connectivity in migratory species from multi-populational datasets.

429 In addition to spring green wave tracking, evidenced in commonly-studied long-distance  
430 migrations from North American, Scandinavian and African ungulates, we revealed other  
431 predictors, more scarcely investigated, may also drive Alpine ibex during both spring and  
432 autumn migration. By focusing on south-facing snow-free slopes, they may partly benefit from

433 emerging vegetation during spring migration (although we did not fully investigate the green  
434 wave hypothesis, see Methods; but see Semenzato et al., 2021), while limiting energetically-  
435 costly movements in snow-covered areas. Limiting energy expenditures seemed particularly  
436 important in Alpine ibex that also strongly avoided high elevation changes during migration,  
437 yet relatively short in distance and duration. This behavior may be adaptive in the steep and  
438 rugged terrain in which ibex migration occurs (see Passoni et al., 2021 for another example in  
439 roe deer *Capreolus capreolus*). Indeed, when traveling through unfamiliar areas for migration,  
440 Alpine ibex selected for proximity to steep slopes, i.e. habitats generally used by mountain  
441 ungulates to limit perceived predation risk (Grignolio et al., 2007, see also Marchand et al.,  
442 2015 for Mediterranean mouflon *Ovis gmelini musimon* × *Ovis* sp.; Baruzzi et al., 2017 in  
443 chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*). Altogether, these results suggest the persistence of the energy-  
444 food-cover trade-off, i.e. the most important predictor of ungulate habitat selection all year  
445 round (Lima & Dill, 1990; Houston et al., 1993; Mysterud & Østbye, 1999), as a major driver  
446 of Alpine ibex migration routes. This trade-off may also explain the intermediate movement  
447 strategy of migrant ibex trading off optimization and exploration during migratory movements,  
448 as revealed by the randomized shortest paths algorithm. By contrast, none of the landmarks  
449 tested seemed to be used by migrant ibex as compass for navigation during migration. Yet,  
450 recent studies revealed how natural landscape features can be used by mountain ungulates,  
451 including Alpine ibex, to delimit their seasonal home ranges and constitute cognitive maps to  
452 gather and memorize spatially explicit information for navigation (Seigle-Ferrand et al., 2022).  
453 Further research is hence needed to investigate the importance of other navigation  
454 cues/mechanisms, and more generally other drivers of migration corridors identified in other  
455 contexts/species (e.g., memory; Bracis & Mueller, 2017, Merkle et al., 2019; social learning  
456 and cultural transmission; Jesmer et al., 2018) that were not investigated here in absence of data  
457 to do so.

458           Combined with the randomized shortest paths algorithm, the results of three modeling  
459 methods relying either on population-specific or multi-population approaches provided reliable  
460 and comparable connectivity maps. Both the “ranking” and “representation in corridors”  
461 validation approaches indicated relatively high levels of agreement between connectivity  
462 corridors and actual migratory tracks, although the dispersion associated with reliability  
463 measurements was high. Indeed, in several populations, some predicted high-use areas were  
464 not used by ibex, or inversely, ibex used areas that were not predicted as providing high



465 connectivity. Thus, factors such local idiosyncrasies in landscape features may be involved at  
466 the population level.

467         Despite obvious topographic, climate and anthropogenic differences in the areas used  
468 by the 15 studied populations across the whole Alps, contributing to the differences in  
469 movement strategies across populations (Figure 3), we chose to fit iSSA with environmental  
470 variables that had significant influence in most populations, and to average the resulting  
471 resistance maps over both seasons (spring and autumn; see Figure 2). This probably contributed  
472 to increasing uncertainty in connectivity predictions as inter-population differences were  
473 ignored. However, when assessed with the same validation approach (here “representation in  
474 corridors”, easily translatable into management/conservation measures; McClure et al., 2016),  
475 the performance of our connectivity models was comparable or better than those reported in  
476 other studies (here, 73-78% locations in the 90th percentile corridor, 68-72% in Poor et al.,  
477 2012 - pronghorn *Antilocapra americana*; 65% in Zeller et al., 2018 - puma *Puma concolor*;  
478 42% in Goicolea et al., 2021 - Iberian lynx *Lynx pardinus*). Besides, those average connectivity  
479 models may be more reliably transferable or generalizable to other populations/contexts over  
480 the species’ distributional range and even in the absence of any data. Therefore, it may  
481 constitute an invaluable tool for the conservation of this endemic and emblematic species and  
482 its habitats.

483         Even though we did not find any major effects of human infrastructures that could  
484 impede ibex migration (i.e. ski areas and roads, probably due to their scarcity in the vicinity of  
485 areas where ibex have been reintroduced), climate warming and the development of human  
486 activities and infrastructures, particularly present in the Alps (Parmesan & Yohe, 2003;  
487 Schmeller et al., 2022), could reshape movement corridors of alpine animals in the near future  
488 (see an example with pronghorn, Zeller et al., 2021). In addition, despite the numerical success  
489 of the species reintroduction programs over the Alps, Alpine ibex still face important  
490 conservation issues (e.g., dramatically low genetic diversity, lack of functional meta-  
491 populations; Biebach & Keller, 2009; Brambilla et al., 2021) and migration corridors remain  
492 poorly protected outside. In this context, preserving and (re-)establishing connectivity within  
493 and between ibex populations will probably be a major conservation issue in the next decades,  
494 and tools such as our connectivity models could be particularly helpful.

495         More generally, our study also provided an original methodological framework for  
496 future research and conservation efforts dedicated to connectivity analysis and predictions of

497 movements other than migration. Here, the three different approaches (i.e., ‘leave 10% of whole  
498 data out’, ‘leave 10% of population dataset out’ and ‘leave one population out’) revealed no  
499 major differences in accuracy of corresponding connectivity predictions. Thus, our models  
500 could be used to predict migratory movements in monitored populations with either enough  
501 data, using population-specific model, or using data from all populations. Moreover, we could  
502 predict movements in populations where no GPS data are available but seasonal range locations  
503 are known or predicted with habitat selection models. With the advent of animal tracking over  
504 the last decades, and the generalization of initiatives aiming at gathering those GPS data in  
505 common databases (e.g. Movebank, Euromammals, Biologging initiative, Global Initiative for  
506 Ungulate Migrations; Kauffman et al., 2021; Urbano, Cagnacci & Euromammals consortium,  
507 2021), multi-population analyses will develop and testing the reliability of population-specific  
508 versus multi-population connectivity predictions is crucial, particularly in a context of demand  
509 and need around conserving and restoring connectivity within species distribution ranges.

510

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534 **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

535 The authors declare no competing interests.

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833 **TABLES**

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835 Table 1: Hypotheses tested in the integrated Step Selection Analyses and their corresponding  
 836 predictions.

<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Covariables</i>	<i>Predictions</i>	<i>References</i>
Ibex minimize energy expenditures and traveling difficulties	Total elevation change	Ibex should perform steps with relatively low total elevation change	Passoni et al., 2021
	Ruggedness	Ibex should avoid rugged terrain which tends to increase movement costs and reduce visibility	Wall et al., 2006; Halsey & White, 2017
	Snow cover index	Ibex should avoid snowy areas which impede ibex movements	Richard et al., 2014; Sheppard et al., 2021
Ibex select areas that can provide forage, security and thermal shelters	Northness	Ibex should prefer south exposed terrain as they present snow-free areas with access to early growing vegetation in spring or thermal shelters in autumn	
	Proximity to refuges (steep slopes)	Ibex should stay close to steep slopes to reduce perceived predation risk	Grignolio et al., 2007; Iribarren & Kotler, 2012
	Forest	Ibex should avoid forests as they prefer open habitats, being primarily grass roughage eaters	Parrini et al., 2009

Ibex use landmarks for orientation	Proximity to ridges	Ibex should select for proximity to ridges and follow ridges during their migration	
	Proximity to valley bottoms	Ibex should avoid to go down to valley bottoms in spring when migrating up the mountain but opposite in autumn	
	Proximity to tree lines	Ibex should use tree lines as a landmark to follow in some populations but not in others	
Ibex avoid human-linear infrastructures	Proximity to roads	Ibex should avoid roads constituting physical barriers or because associated with humans	Seigle-Ferrand et al., 2022
	Proximity to ski areas	Ibex should avoid ski areas because associated with humans	Dickie et al., 2020

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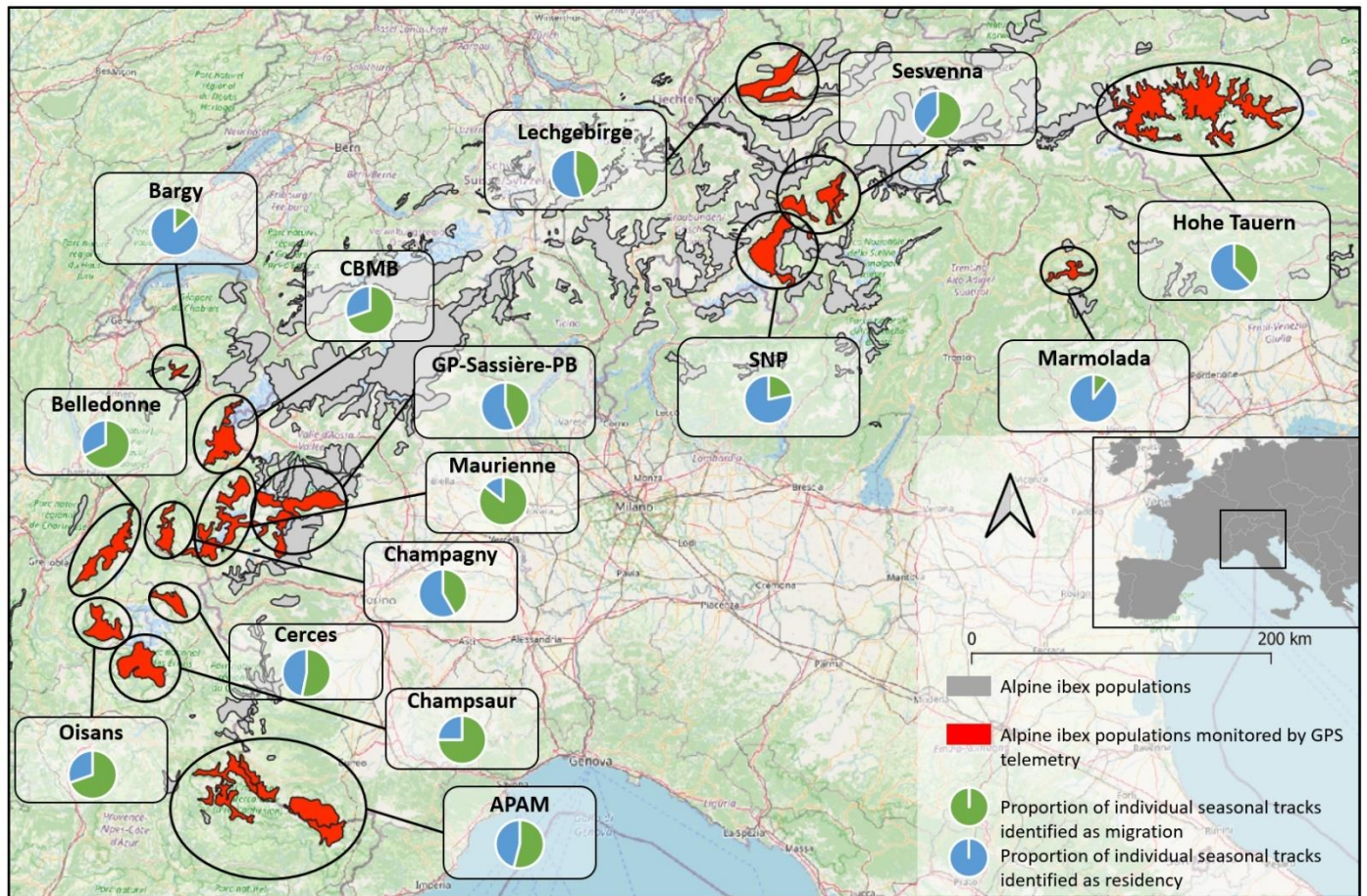
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853 **FIGURES**

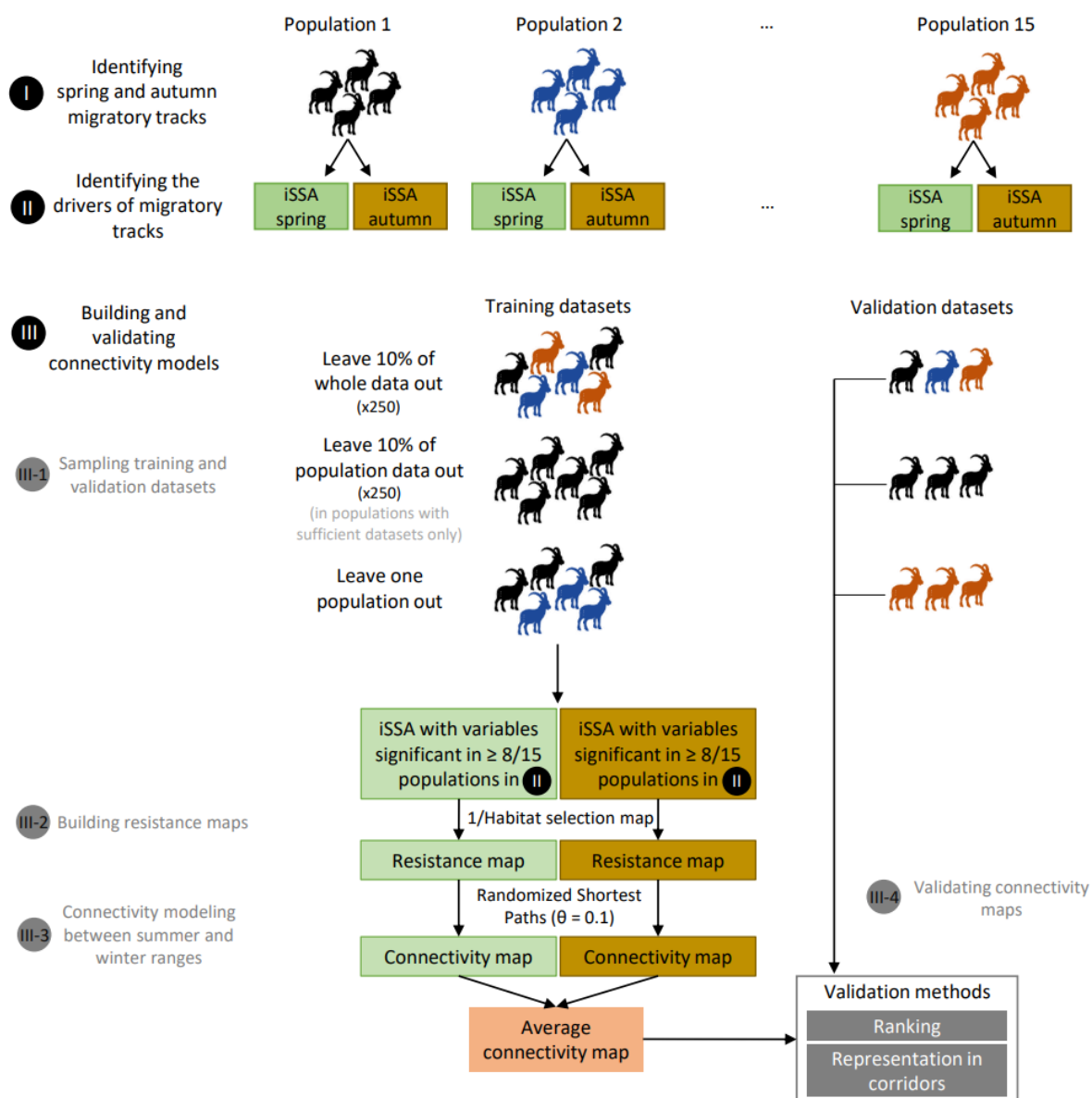
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855 Figure 1: Location of the 15 Alpine ibex *Capra ibex* populations monitored by GPS telemetry  
856 (red) over the distributional range of the species (gray; source: Brambilla et al., 2020); see  
857 Appendix S1 for more details. The pie charts display the proportion of individual seasonal  
858 tracks identified as migration (green) or residency (blue) within each population (see below and  
859 Appendix S3 for details on individual status identification).

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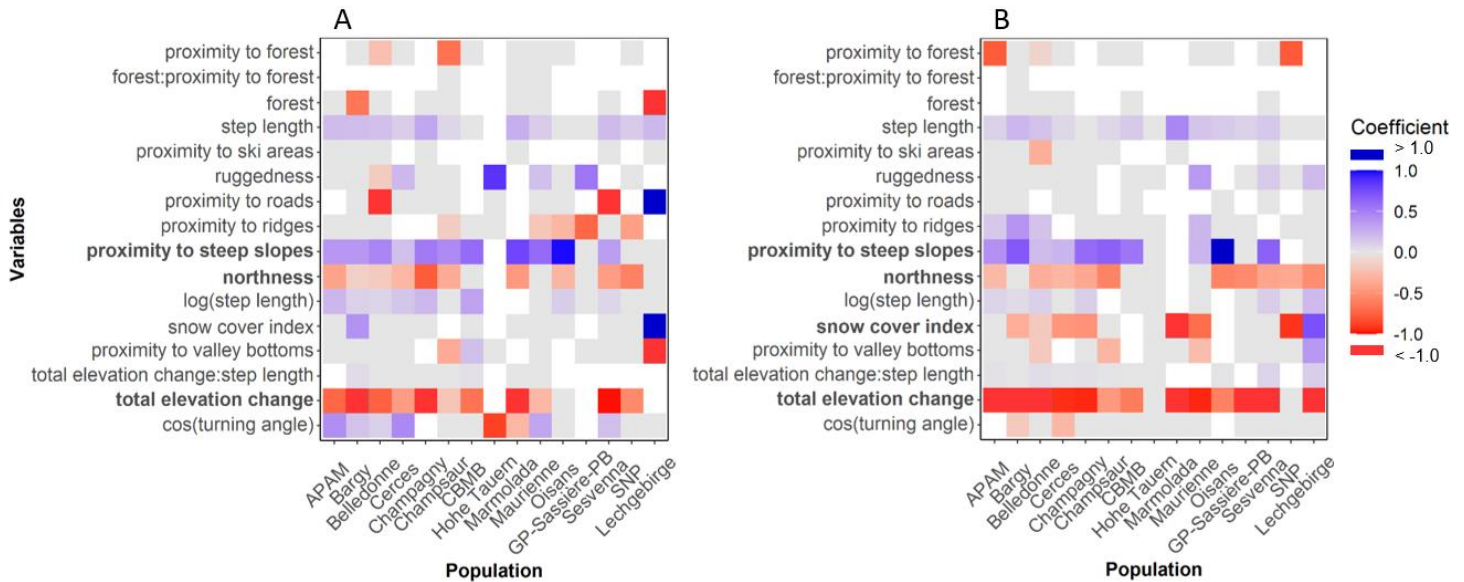


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863 Figure 2: Methodological workflow scheme. First, we identified seasonal migratory tracks.  
 864 Second, we fitted integrated Step Selection Analyses (iSSA) for each population to identify  
 865 environmental drivers of spring and autumn migrations. Third, we sampled three different  
 866 training and validation datasets: leave 10% of whole data out, leave 10% of population data  
 867 out and leave one population out. The three training datasets were used in iSSA with the  
 868 environmental variables identified as significant in at least 8/15 populations. We built three  
 869 (one per training dataset) different resistance maps (250 times for “leave 10% of whole data  
 870 out” and “leave 10% of population data out”) for each population and season and modeled  
 871 connectivity based on these resistance maps using the Randomized Shortest Path algorithm ( $\theta$   
 872 = 0.1; Appendix S10). Finally, for each training dataset, we averaged the two seasonal

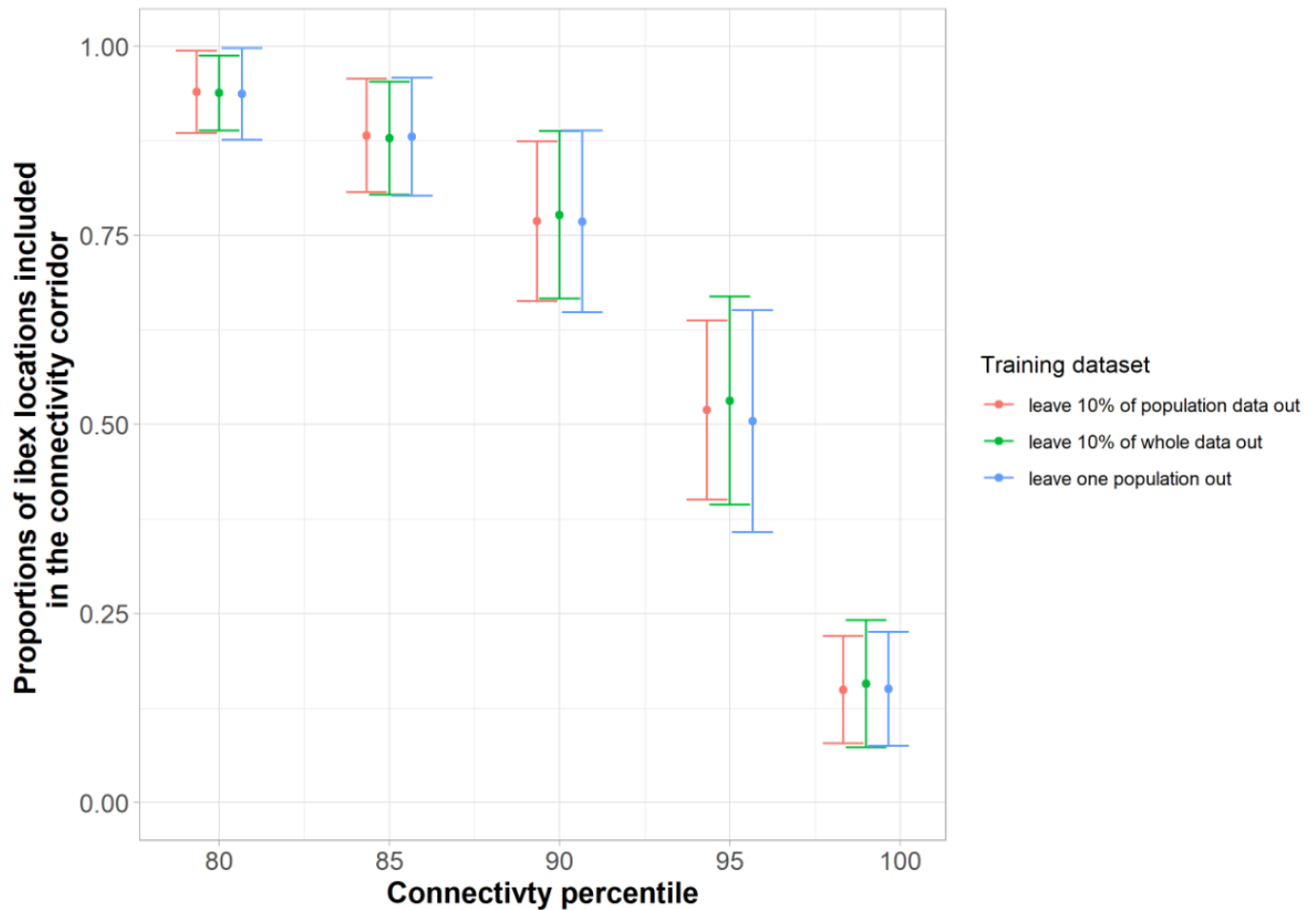
873 connectivity maps and combined this average connectivity map with the corresponding  
 874 validation datasets to perform the ‘ranking’ and ‘representation in corridors’ validation  
 875 methods.

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877 **Figure 3:** Coefficients provided by population-specific model-averaged (models with  $\Delta AICc <$   
 878  $2$ ) integrated Step Selection Analyses investigating the influence of environmental variables on  
 879 movement steps performed by Alpine ibex from 15 populations during spring (A) or autumn  
 880 (B) migration. Blue and red cells represent variables that were selected or avoided for migratory  
 881 movements, respectively. Grey cells represent non-significant coefficients. We calculated the  
 882 95% confidence interval (CI) of coefficients resulting from the model averaging. A coefficient  
 883 was significant if its CI non-overlaps with zero. White cells represent cases for which the  
 884 influence of a focal habitat variable could not be tested (not retained during model selection).  
 885 A variable name is in bold type if its selection coefficient was significant in at least 8/15  
 886 populations.

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888 Figure 4: Results of the second validation method, representation in corridors (Goicolea et al.,  
889 2021). Proportions of ibex locations from migratory tracks included in the different connectivity  
890 corridors defined as the 80th, 85th, 90th, 95th and 99th connectivity percentiles. For the three  
891 modeling processes, the mean proportion calculated over the 15 populations is displayed with  
892 its standard deviation.

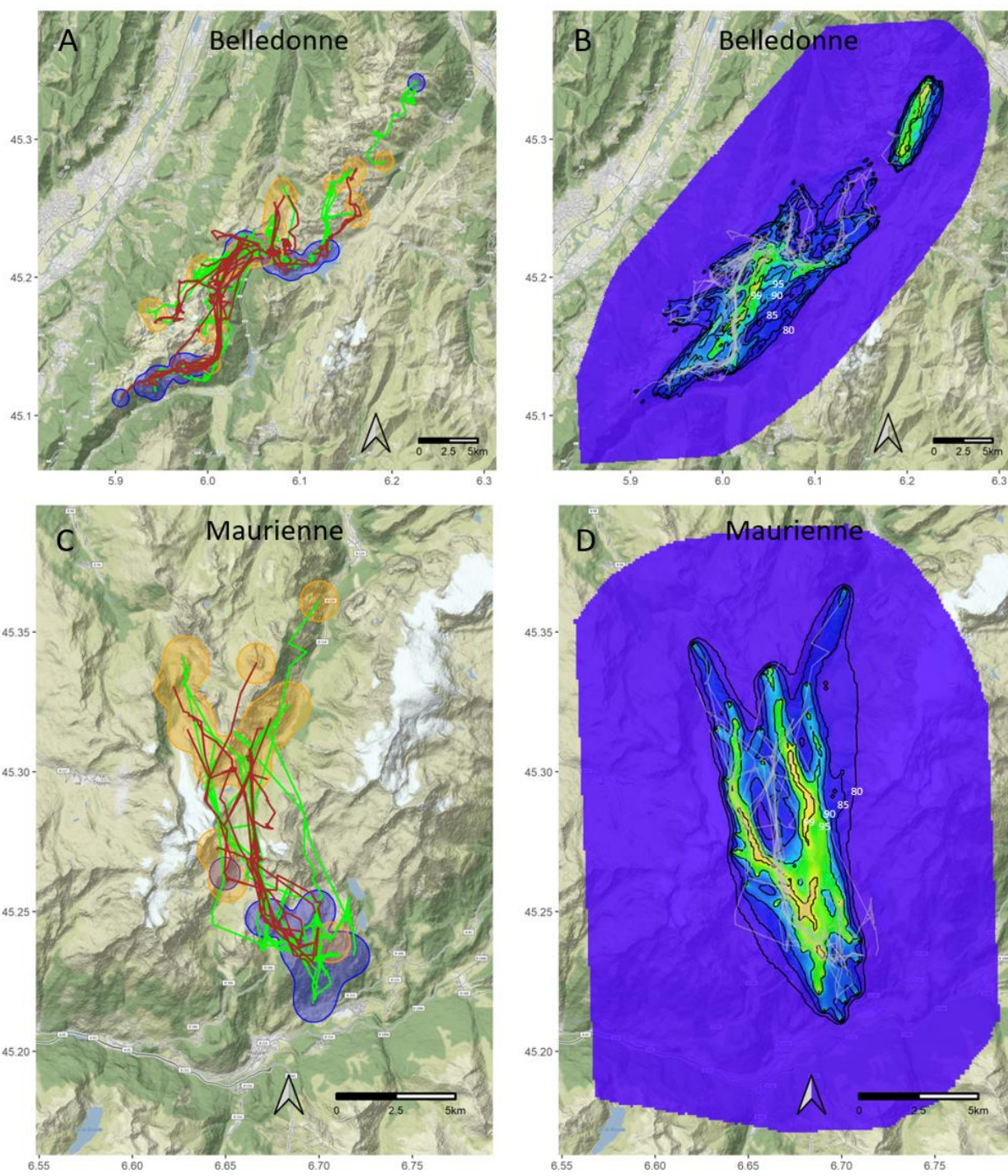
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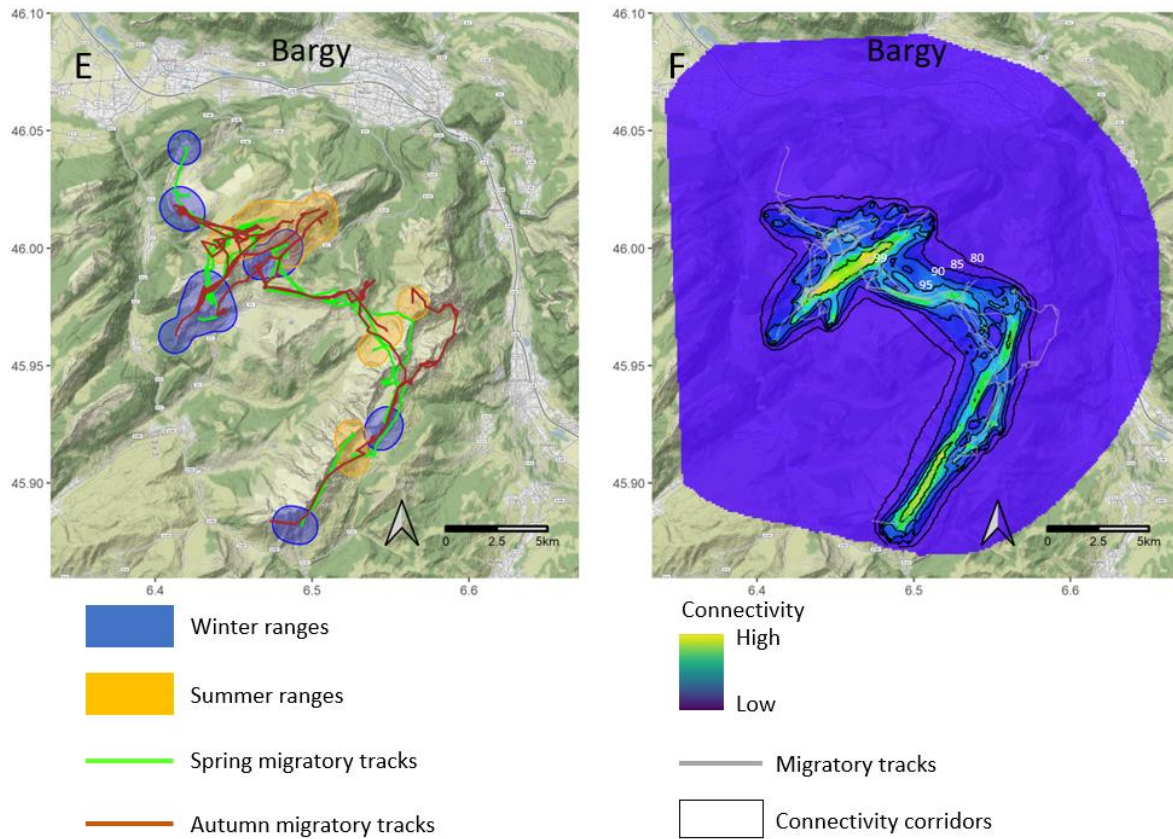
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901 Figure 5: Examples of connectivity modeling. Observed migration routes (spring in green and  
902 autumn in brown) and summer and winter ranges (orange and blue) of Alpine ibex from  
903 Belledonne, Maurienne and Bargy populations (A, C and E). Connectivity maps obtained from  
904 the “leave 10% of whole data out” dataset (B, D and F). The black lines delineate the  
905 connectivity corridors as defined in the ‘representation in corridors’ validation method.

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