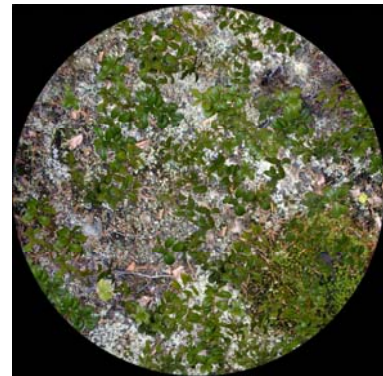




# Design and evaluation of a computer aided calibration program for visual estimation of vegetation cover

Åsa Gallegos



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SVERIGES LANTBRUKSUNIVERSITET  
Institutionen för skoglig resurshushållning  
och geomatik  
S-901 83 UMEÅ  
Tfn: 090-786 86 34

Fax: 090-77 81 16

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## ABSTRACT

Compared to the number of field inventory programs that monitor change in vegetation with visual cover estimations, very few studies have been conducted to show how accurate this type of data is. In addition, no previous studies have determined whether efficient calibration of field observers can improve such data. This study concerns the design and evaluation of a computer program consisting of images of vegetation on which the true cover of vegetation has been digitally calculated. The calibration consists of estimation with immediate feedback of the true cover. The results show that even a short time of calibration greatly improves the estimations and can also drastically reduce the influence of different backgrounds, aggregation patterns and personnel experience.

## INTRODUCTION

When working in the field with an inventory program regarding monitoring of vegetation, the field observers will inevitably be requested to perform some type of vegetation coverage estimation. This can be achieved in several different ways, but probably the most common in Europe is the visual estimation where an observer assesses the coverage percentage of a group of plant species in a plot with a predetermined size (Økland, 1990, Johansson and Moen, 2003). This is a method which has been frequently questioned for its result dependability (e.g. Tonteri, 1990, Kennedy and Addison, 1987, Floyd and Anderson, 1987), but since it is considerably more time-efficient than, for instance, the arguably more reliable point-frequency method (Johansson and Moen, 2003, Vanha-Majamaa et al, 2000, Benediktson, 2004), it is nonetheless used ubiquitously. It is a method that can be executed efficiently in the field, it requires no equipment and it seems to be quite easy to learn as well as to teach. The disadvantage is that the results depend on the observer and there is no way of knowing the “right” answer. Thus, the most common criticism of this method lies in it being subjective (van Hees and Mead, 2000, Tonteri, 1990) as opposed to the point-frequency method, which focuses on objectivity but takes more time in the field. The point-frequency method also requires equipment, usually in the form of a frame with a grid. In each of the nodes in this grid, the observer detects if the relevant species is present.

However, some studies, such as Dethier *et al.* (1993), conclude that visual estimations may be just as reliable as the objective point-frequency methods – or even more so. They found that the point-frequency method often missed species with a cover of less than 2% since it is highly unlikely that a species of low occurrence will come in contact with one of the nodes in the grid. On the other hand, if a rare species was observed at a node, it usually resulted in overestimation. Although visual estimation also sometimes resulted in overestimation of rare species, it never failed to notice a rare species occurrence. They also found that the repeatability between observers was higher with the visual estimations than with the point-frequency method.

But how closely can a person in the field estimate the actual vegetation cover? Kennedy and Addison (1987) determined that the estimation error in visual cover assessment was around 10% (20% when including between-year variation), while Tonteri (1990) found an inter-observer variance of 15-40% in her study. Van Hees and Mead (2000) found no increase in accuracy after three separate measurements even though the observers conversed after each measurement and compared methods and approaches to visual estimation. However, in these studies there was no feedback for the observers, they had no way of knowing who had the best results. In this study I will investigate if observers can improve their accuracy and become more proficient with increased learning time and rapid feedback of correct results.

In most cases, the visual estimation method requires the observer to mentally project the significant layer of vegetation vertically to the ground and from this “two-dimensional” image, as closely as possible, estimate the percentage of the area that is covered with vegetation. In field inventory programs the estimation area can vary from several hundred square meters down to a quarter of a square meter. This variation depends essentially on the aim of the study. The results from the large areas can be used to monitor the decline or the increase of different species or groups of species, but just as significant is species occurrence of rare species in particular. The smaller areas will mostly be used for monitoring detailed

change in species coverage and occurrence of common species since it is very unlikely that rare species will be detected in these areas. (Esseen *et al.*, 2004)

### **Calibration of Visual Estimation**

All inventory studies which require results of this type provide training in coverage estimation for their employees. These training sessions most frequently comprise some form of calibration between all observers in order to reduce the random errors between different observers. The most common ways to calibrate a group of observers are either to compare estimations within the group and nominating the group mean value as the “correct” result, or to compare the group with a reference value estimated by an experienced observer. These calibrations are very useful in the field, but are somewhat unreliable since there is no way to determine the correct answer. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to design and test a calibration program that can be used before as well as during the field season to ensure more reliable results.

### **Limitations for This Study**

This project was running the risk of becoming too extensive if all variable aspects of field inventory were to be considered. There are endless variables to consider in the field, overlapping foliage, indistinguishable species, light, weather, season – and the ever-annoying mosquitoes. According to Dethier *et al.* (1993) however, some of the most important sources of error in field inventory of plants are leaf morphology, color/contrast, aggregation and species identification. In this test, species identification is not relevant and we therefore concentrate on the other aspects. The difference in leaf morphology will be tested by using a whole leaf (lingonberry shoots) and a narrow leaf (blades of grass).

Five variables will be tested for both lingonberry and grass:

- **Learning Time:** No previous studies have determined how long it takes for an observer to become proficient in visual estimations and produce reliable results. This study will show if and how the test subjects increase their abilities over time.
- **Personnel experience:** Although some studies have determined that the levels of experience of the observers might be important for accurate estimations (Dethier *et al.*, 1993), others have concluded that this is not a relevant factor (Floyd and Anderson, 1987). However, in inventory programs where staff turnover is high, it would be highly important to ascertain the variability in estimation between experienced and inexperienced observers. This study will show if there is a difference in estimation error between three groups of differently experienced test personnel.
- **Quantity:** Previous studies differ in their conclusion as to how the quantity of cover affects the estimation error. This study will show if there is any difference in difficulty over a continuing spectrum of true cover.
- **Aggregation:** Several studies agree that the patterns of plant aggregation influence the ability to estimate the coverage accurately (e.g. Dethier *et al.*, 1993). Two types of aggregation will be studied; scattered and clustered.
- **Background:** The fact that the background is a major influence on the cover estimations in the field is commonly known. A light background might make the plants seem smaller and vice versa. Moreover, a messy background can be quite

confusing while a homogenous background makes estimation easier. Three different backgrounds will be used in this study; white, dark semi-homogenous photo of a forest floor, and a light heterogeneous photo of a forest floor.

By testing these variables, I will be able to determine which of these factors are the most critical in vegetation cover estimation and if observers are able to improve their skills by practicing with this type of equipment.

## METHODS

Lingonberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*) shoots were collected and fastened semi-upright in bouquets of various sizes on white paper with Bluetack. Digital photos were taken of the shoots with a Nikon Coolpix 4500 camera with flash and macro from a height of 40 cm. The background was digitally removed from the photographs with Adobe Photoshop (Ver. 7.0). New images (1477x1477 pixels) were constructed using copy-and-paste techniques in Adobe Photoshop. A black circle frame covered each image and defined the estimation area as a circle with a diameter of approximately 1475 pixels.

Different species of grasses were also photographed, but presented too great a problem for cutting out digitally. Grass images were instead produced digitally with the *dune grass brush* (400-425 pixels) in Adobe Photoshop.

In total, a batch of 180 images were constructed, 90 grass and 90 lingonberry. Since aggregation was one of the main variables, two separate sets of images were constructed; scattered and clustered. For each species, 45 images had clustered vegetation and 45 images had scattered. These four categories had an even distribution of vegetation cover as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Distribution of images in the batch.

|             |           |                    |
|-------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Lingonberry | Clustered | 15 images (1-33%)  |
|             |           | 15 images (34-66%) |
|             |           | 15 images (67-99%) |
|             | Scattered | 15 images (1-33%)  |
|             |           | 15 images (34-66%) |
|             |           | 15 images (67-99%) |
| Grass       | Clustered | 15 images (1-33%)  |
|             |           | 15 images (34-66%) |
|             |           | 15 images (67-99%) |
|             | Scattered | 15 images (1-33%)  |
|             |           | 15 images (34-66%) |
|             |           | 15 images (67-99%) |

In order to establish the correct cover percentage of the constructed images, a 3-class unsupervised classification was performed with ERDAS Imagine (Ver. 8.7) on single-layer tiff-images with white background constructed in Adobe Photoshop. The cover of greens (plants) in the image was calculated by dividing the amount of green pixels with the amount of green + white pixels.

Three different backgrounds were used in this experiment, one completely white (referred to as B-white), one with scattered dark wooden twigs and a few green shoots of wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) (B-dark) and one with lichens (*Cladina sp.*) and a clump of moss (*Polytrichum sp.*) (B-light).

The test personnel consisted of 15 individuals selected on basis of their previous experience with visual cover estimations. They were evenly split into three categories;

1. Group N (Novices, no previous experience)
2. Group S (Semi-experienced, minimum one week, maximum 2 seasons field work)
3. Group E (Experts, minimum 3 seasons field work or similar)

The test persons are hereafter referred to individually as N1, N2 ... E5. The test persons were of mixed ages, genders and occupations. Each test person received written instructions and a CD-ROM with the experiment and proceeded to complete the assignment on their own.

### The Layout of the Experiment

The experiment encompassed four proficiency tests (PTs), where the subject estimated the coverage of several images without finding out the correct result, and three practice sessions, where the subject would immediately find out the correct result after estimating. Each practice session consisted of 36 images equally combining all the aforementioned variables. The maximum practice time was 15 minutes/session to ensure a level of uniformity in the experiment. However, if the subject finished the 36 images before the time was up, they would still proceed to the next stage. The entire experiment was laid out as in table 2.

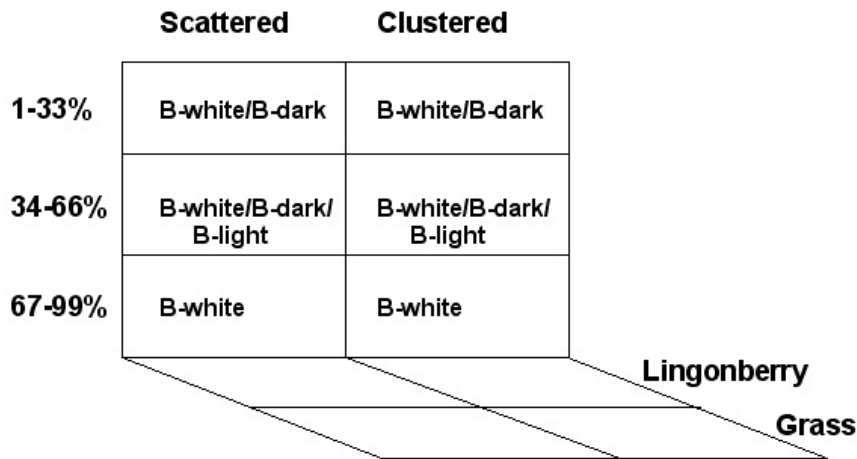
**Table 2.** The layout of the experiment.

|         |                    |                  |
|---------|--------------------|------------------|
| Stage 1 | Proficiency Test 1 | 48 images        |
| Stage 2 | Practice 1         | 15 min/36 images |
| Stage 3 | Proficiency Test 2 | 24 images        |
| Stage 4 | Practice 2         | 15 min/36 images |
| Stage 5 | Proficiency Test 3 | 24 images        |
| Stage 6 | Practice 3         | 15 min/36 images |
| Stage 7 | Proficiency Test 4 | 48 images        |

### Image Selection

For each stage, the number of images of every type that were required was determined as shown in figure 1. The right type of image was then randomly selected from the entire batch.

PTs 1 and 4 consisted of the exact same images (presented in separate orders) to facilitate a comparison of “before-and-after” results. These PTs consisted of all three backgrounds; B-white being the most frequent (24 images) with some B-dark (16) and some B-light (8) images. In contrast, PT sessions 2 and 3 only consisted of B-white images (for time limiting purposes). For statistical reasons, two images of each type were used in the proficiency tests. Each practice session had an equal amount of B-white, B-dark and B-light images; in essence, the practice sessions consisted of one of each type of picture combining species, background, aggregation and quantity-class (the quantity classes were used purely for organizational purposes when constructing the images, PTs and practice sessions).

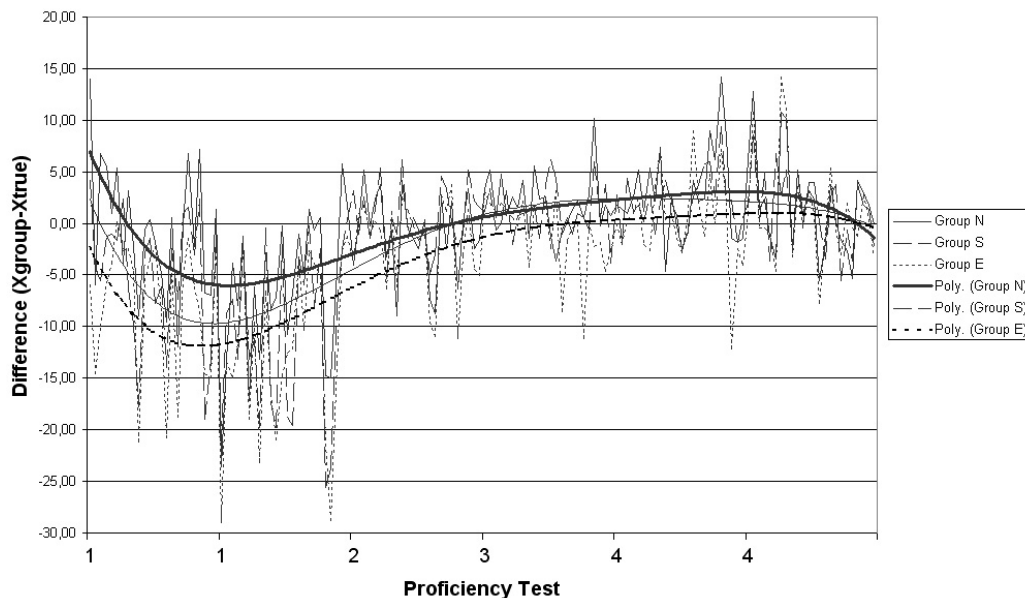


**Fig. 1.** The layout of images in PTs 1 and 4 (with B-dark and B-light) and PTs 2 and 3 (with only white background, B-white).

## RESULTS

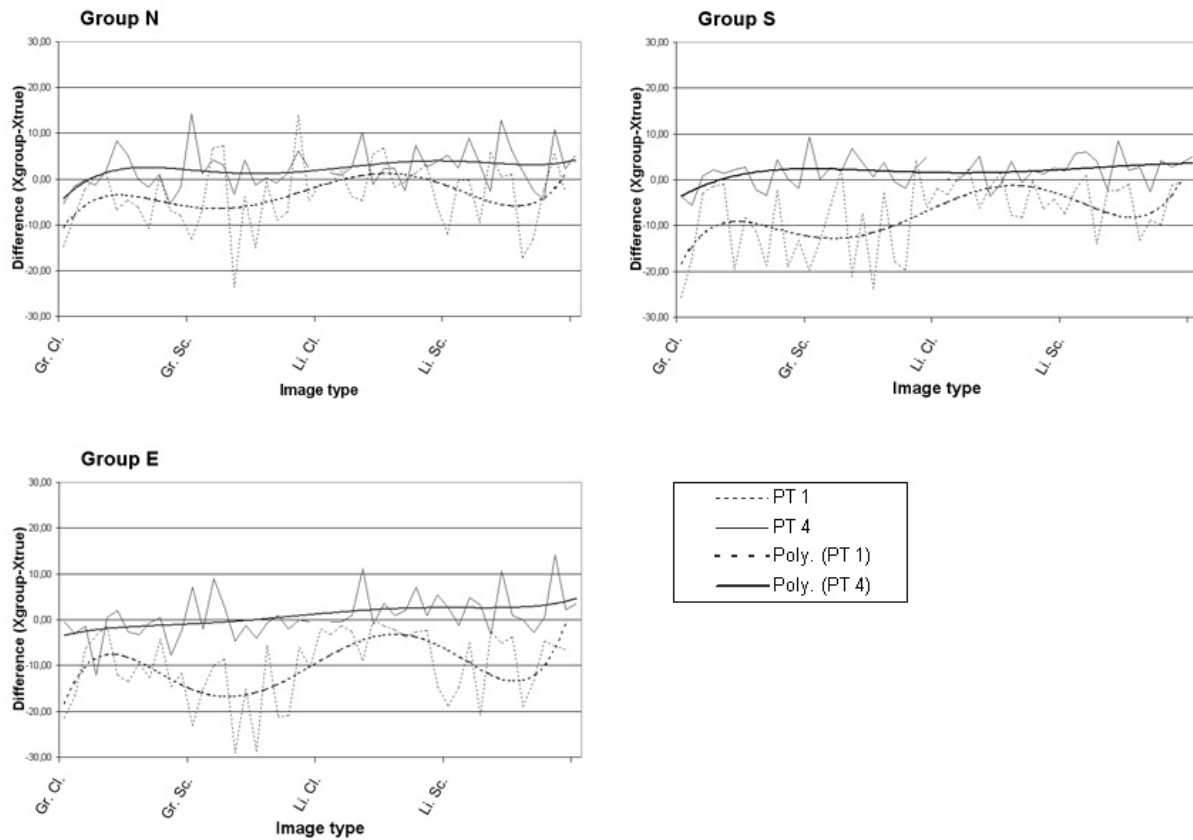
There was a substantial difference in total learning time between the different observers. For the five observers in Group N, the times were 24, 27, 29, 14 and 21 minutes, for Group S; 38, 29, 28, 44 and 25, and for Group E; 36, 36, 27, 41 and 7 minutes. This means that the mean practice time per group was 23, 33 and 29 minutes respectively.

Each test group underestimated the cover of both grass and lingonberry during PT 1. However, the novice observers (Group N) had the least amount of underestimation while the experienced observers (Group E) underestimated the most (figure 2). After the first calibration session however, all groups show a clearly distinguishable decrease in variation.



**Fig. 2.** The difference between the true cover and the estimations of the three observer groups (negative difference indicates underestimation). PT 1 shows most underestimation in all groups.

Figure 3 shows the difference between the estimations in PT 1 and PT 4 for each test group. These PTs comprised the exact same images and are therefore readily comparable. All three groups show an improvement in estimation in PT 4 compared to PT 1.



**Fig. 3.** The difference between the group mean cover and the true cover of PT 1 and PT 4. All groups showed significance in a GLM-ANOVA ( $P=0,000$ ).

During the whole experiment, group E and Group S (semi-experienced observers) showed a statistically significant systematical error for underestimation ( $S; Sd = 1.64 \pm 1.10$ ,  $E; Sd = 3.55 \pm 1.22$ ,  $P = 0.000$ , see Appendix A). During PT 1 (before the first calibration), only N3 showed no systematical error in estimation. 13 of the test persons systematically underestimated the cover and only one overestimated (as seen in Table 3). In PT 4, 11 people overestimated the cover, but the discrepancies were much less than in the beginning (i.e. only five showed systematical error).

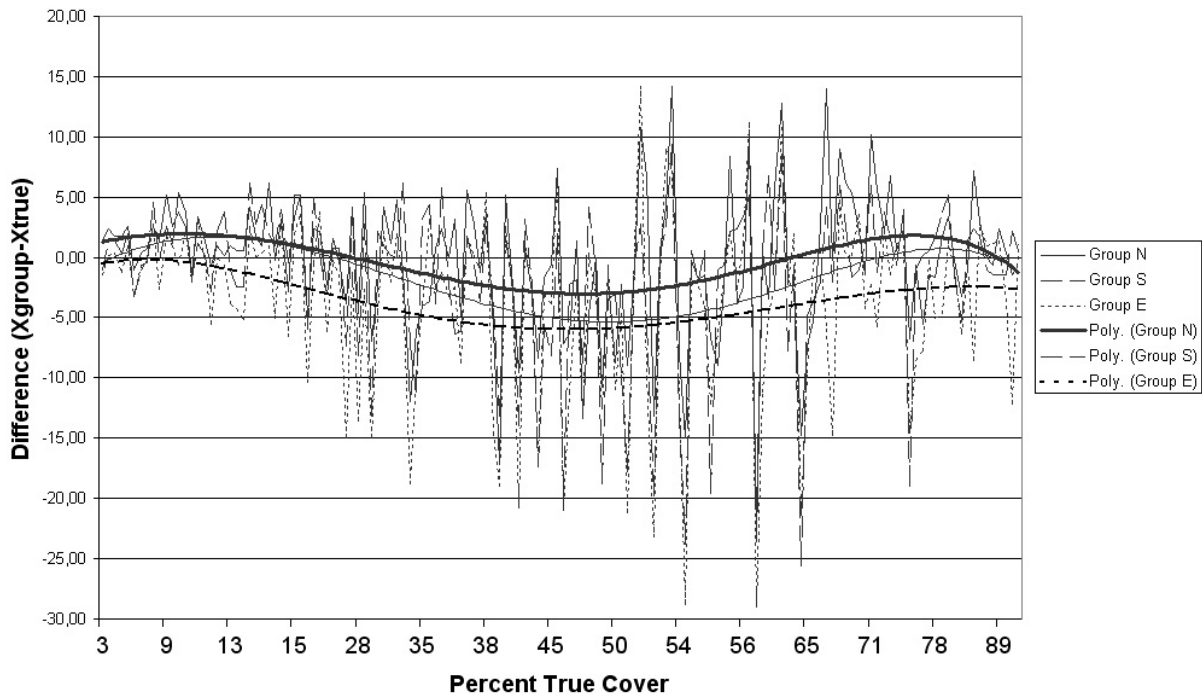
**Table 3.** The distribution of test personnel over- or underestimating in the different proficiency tests. The number in parentheses shows how many in each category had a systematical error.

|                           | <b>Underestimation</b> | <b>Overestimation</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Proficiency Test 1</b> | 14 (13)                | 1 (1)                 |
| <b>Proficiency Test 2</b> | 9 (4)                  | 6 (2)                 |
| <b>Proficiency Test 3</b> | 6 (5)                  | 9 (4)                 |
| <b>Proficiency Test 4</b> | 3 (2)                  | 11 (5)                |
| <b>All PTs</b>            | 10 (9)                 | 5 (1)                 |
| <b>PTs 2-4</b>            | 5 (4)                  | 10 (6)                |



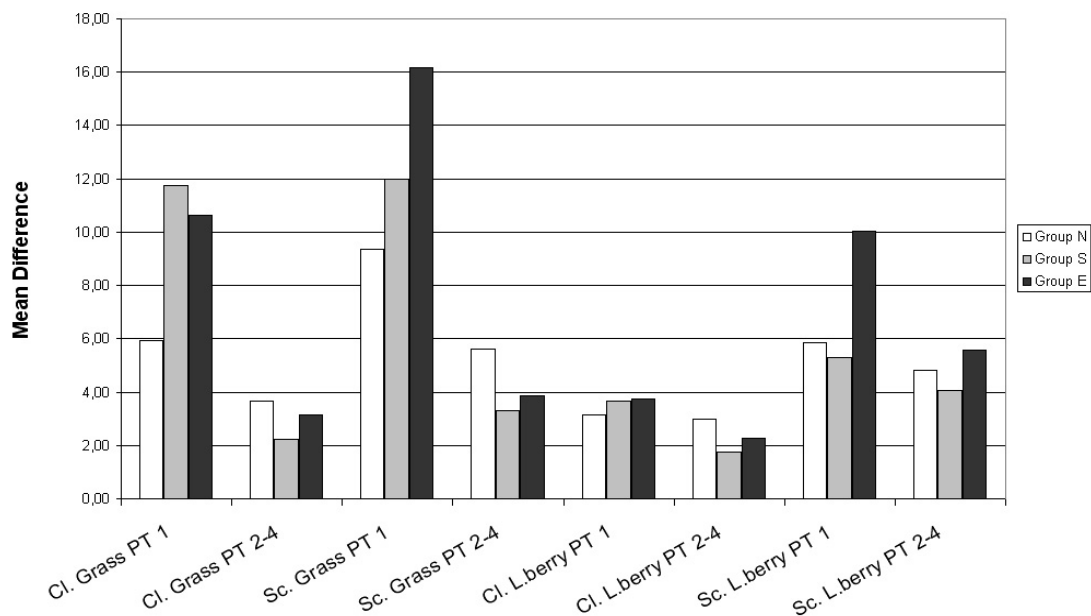
Furthermore, in PT 4, seven individuals showed a systematical error in estimation (*i.e.* N1, N3, N4, S5, E2, E4 and E5) and five of these were now overestimating. Only E3, E4 and E5 were underestimating during all proficiency tests.

As seen in figure 4, every test group shows the largest estimation discrepancy where there is an intermediate amount of true cover.



**Fig. 4.** Difference in cover estimation over a continuing spectrum of true cover (ranging from 3% - 93%)

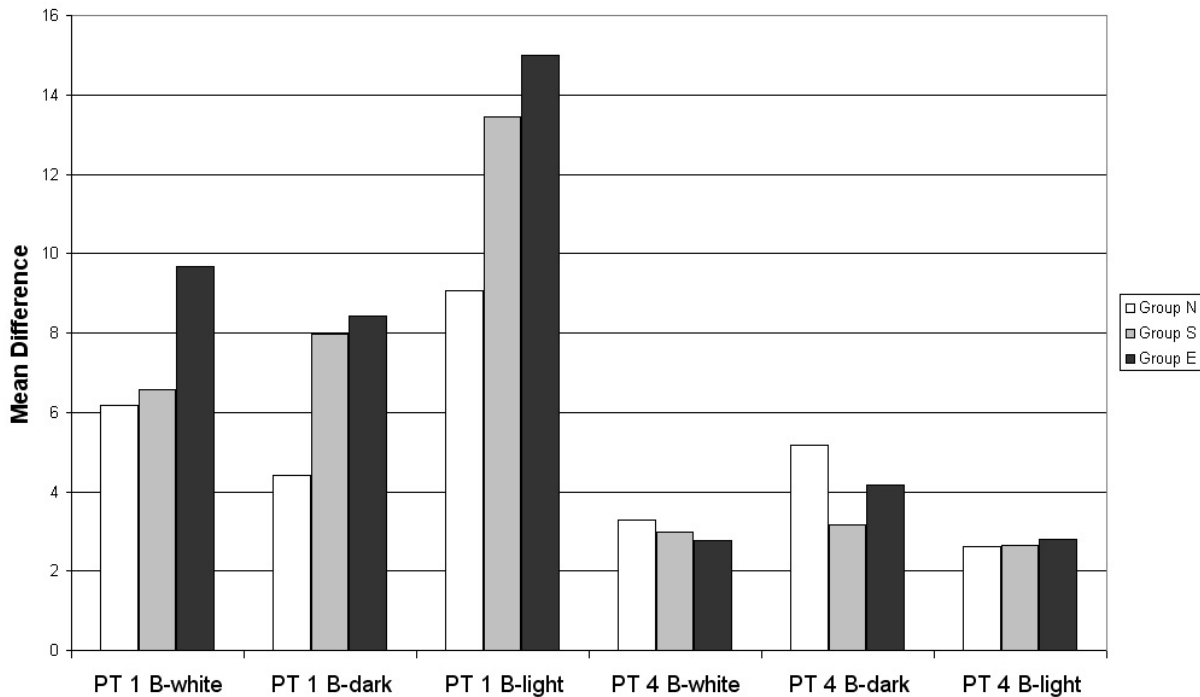
The results show that grass is more difficult to estimate than lingonberry and that this is true for both scattered and clustered images (figure 5). Scattered images are more difficult to



**Fig. 5.** The difference in estimation between clustered and scattered images of grass and lingonberry for the three test groups. The group mean difference shows the square root of the squared means.

estimate both for lingonberry and grass. Clustered lingonberry was the easiest group overall to estimate. However, after calibration every test group had dramatically decreased their estimation errors in all species- and aggregation categories.

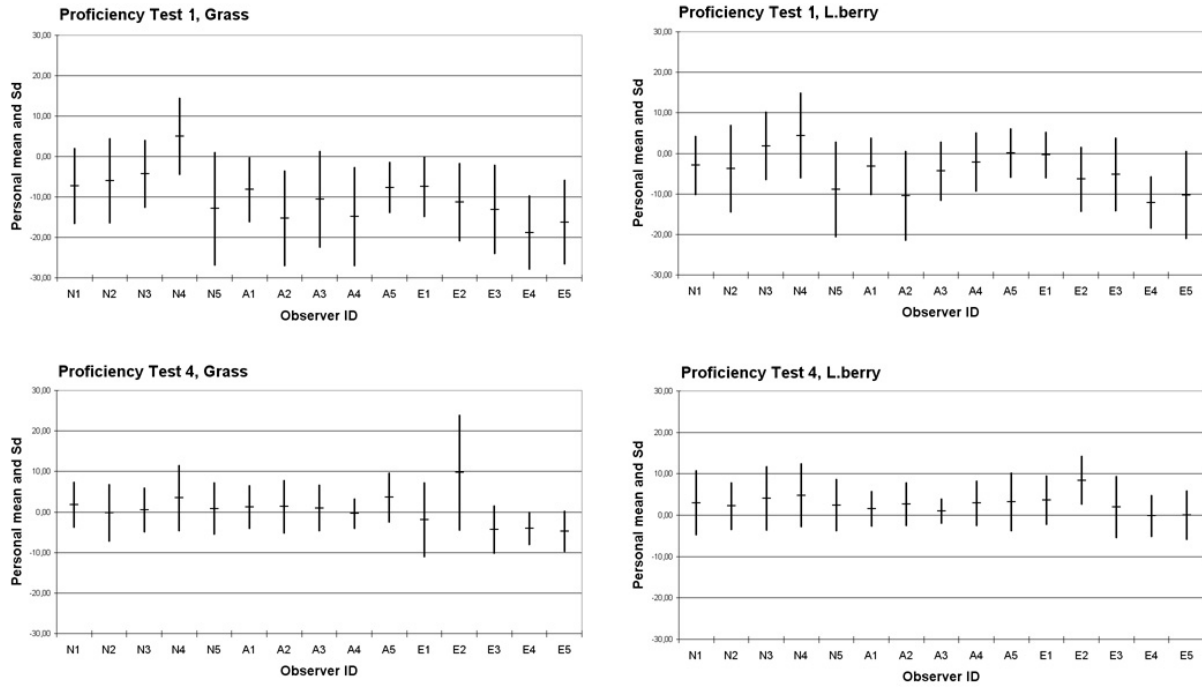
Initially, the heterogeneous background of B-light seems to have made estimation more difficult for all the test groups (figure 6). However, after calibration there seems to be no substantial difference between the three backgrounds. And consistent with other results, each group decreases their estimation error after calibration. In fact, figure 6 shows that after calibration, the background does not seem to affect the estimation.



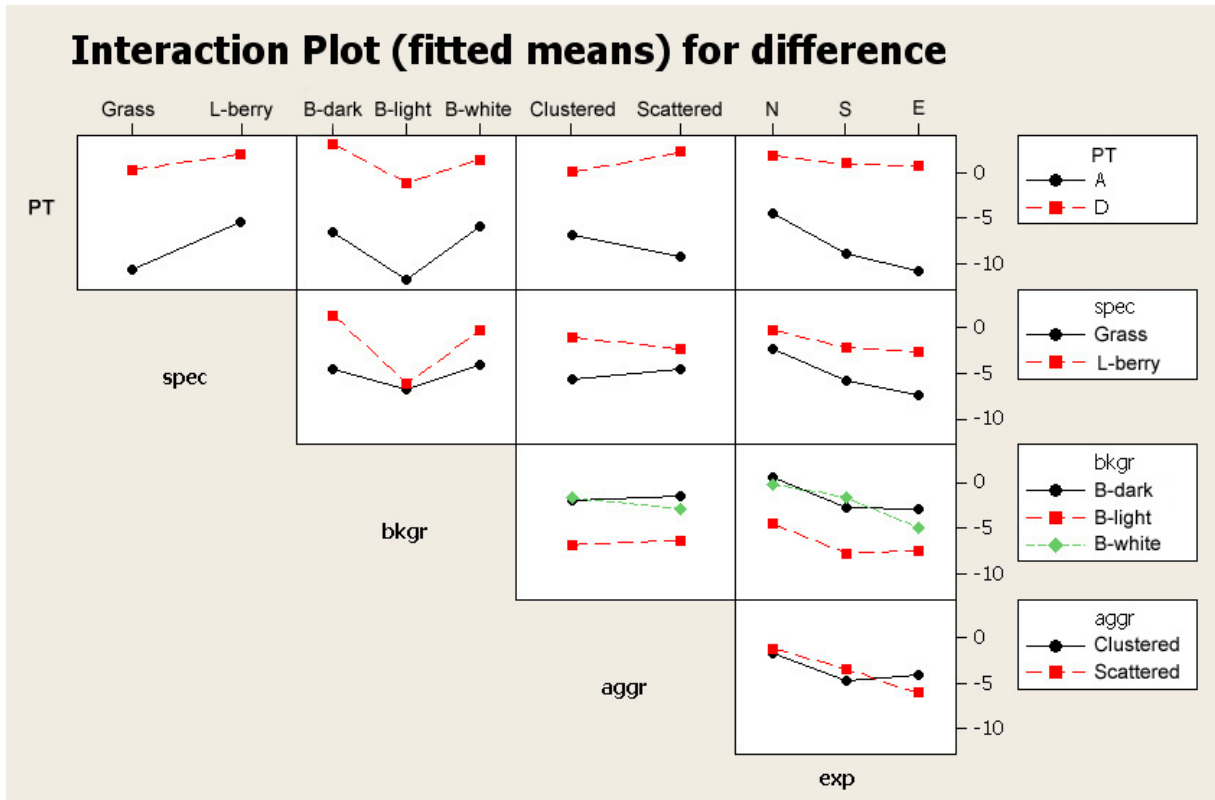
**Fig. 6.** The difference in estimation between different background images in PTs 1 and 4. The group mean difference shows the square root of the squared means.

Figure 7 shows a comparison between all test personnel for grass and lingonberry before and after calibration. There is a substantial decrease in both inter-observer variation and standard deviation after calibration.

Finally, figure 8 shows an interaction plot constructed in Minitab (Release 14.13) for five variables; PT, species, background, aggregation and experience. Of these, nine show significance in a GLM-ANOVA (i.e. PT vs. species/aggregation/experience ( $P=0.000$ ), PT vs. background ( $P=0.005$ ), species vs. background ( $P=0.000$ ), species vs. aggregation ( $P=0.005$ ), background vs. experience ( $P=0.033$ ) and aggregation vs. experience ( $P=0.008$ ). See Appendix A).



**Fig. 7.** Inter-observer variation for all test personnel, before and after calibration for both species. The graph shows individual mean and standard deviations (see Appendix A).



**Fig. 8.** A Minitab interaction plot for difference ( $X_{person} - X_{true}$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

The results undoubtedly show that even a relatively short calibration time reduces the errors in estimation. From PT 1 to PT 4 each group shows an impressive decrease in average estimation error (Group N: 37%, Group S: 63% and Group E: 68%). Initially, the difference in estimation between the true cover and the group mean is 6 – 10 percentage points, and after calibration the same images have an estimation difference of 3 – 3,5 percentage points. Kennedy and Addison (1987), as well as Sykes et al. (1983), determined that the sequential measurement error in visual cover assessment was around 10%, which is in accordance with the initial results of this study. Van Hees and Mead (2000) found no increase in accuracy after three separate measurements even though the observers conversed after each measurement and compared methods and approaches to visual estimation. The test personnel in the other studies had no immediate feedback and did not know the true cover, whereas this study shows a dramatic decrease in estimation error after calibration. However, the studies mentioned above took place in the field and comprised many more variables that are difficult to account for. Although this study is not readily comparable to field studies or field work, we can still assume that calibration with rapid feedback of true cover is an efficient method of reducing the estimation error.

### **Learning Time**

Discrepancies in practice time were reduced by limiting it to 3 x 15 minutes, but most test persons seldom used the full 15 minutes. The fastest used only 7 minutes in total practice time, which is approximately a sixth of the maximum time of 45 minutes. However, each test person practiced on the same number of images and practice time might not be the most important factor. It would probably have been worse to limit the time and let the test personnel practice on as many images as the time allowed. In that case, the fastest individuals would have had time to practice on six times as many images and that would probably result in a greater source of error.

After the first calibration session (lasting from 2-15 minutes depending on the observer), the decrease in estimation error is clearly noticeable (figure 2). During the rest of the experiment, the estimation error remained more or less constant.

The results show that every group underestimates the cover in the beginning of the experiment and that groups N and S overestimate at the end (figure 2). The change from underestimation in PT 1 to overestimation in PT 4 might be explained by an oscillating calibration curve. If the entire experiment would have been longer, maybe the results would have evened out. Group E's results had improved for PT 4, but three of five test persons in this group were still underestimating, whereas everyone in groups N and S were overestimating by this point. This leads to a better mean value for Group E. The reason for the slower oscillation in Group E might be a result of the greater underestimation that Group E had from the beginning and the fact that the experienced personnel have ingrained routines that are hard to change over this limited time frame.

### **Personnel Experience**

The results clearly stipulate that, at least in PT 1-3, experienced observers are responsible for the largest estimation errors (figure 2 and 5). All three groups show significantly better results at the end of the experiment and Group E is, not surprisingly, attributed to having the most substantial improvement.

One possible explanation for these results could be that unsubstantiated methods of visual estimation might be imprinted in experienced field observers. This is true especially for species that are difficult to estimate. In field training, observers are constantly reminded that grass, for instance, even if it seems to be covering a large area, consists of very narrow leaves with very low total coverage. Thus, field observers tend to estimate cover for grass and then reduce their initial estimation. Consequently, experienced observers might estimate grass lower to be on the safe side. Inexperienced observers have no prejudice as to how different species might be interpreted in an estimation situation. Therefore they estimate the cover without adding into the equation this type of subconscious knowledge. Since they have never performed this type of estimation before, they might also be more prone to careful consideration of every image, whereas experienced observers might glance at the image and settle with the first impression they get. Of course, this greatly depends on the individual observer as seen in the results. Several inexperienced observers went through the practice images very fast while some experienced observers used almost the full practice time of 45 minutes. In effect, Group N had the shortest mean practice time while Group S had the longest.

Inter-observer variation is an important factor in this type of study. Dethier et al. (1993) showed that variability between observers was greater than within-observer variance, even though inexperienced observers did not produce results of significantly lower quality than experienced observers. Sykes et al. (1983) showed that differences between observers were always significant. This study found that the inter-observer variance, as well as the intra-observer variance, decreased substantially after calibration (figure 7).

Encouragingly, this study shows that even though personnel might be inexperienced in cover estimation, this particular skill is definitely one that can be acquired to a satisfying degree in a short time.

### **Quantity**

As seen in figure 4, the highest discrepancy in estimation occurs where there is intermediate cover, especially between 40 – 65% true cover. This result is consistent with the results of Sykes et al. (1983) who estimated that the most extensive discrepancies would occur in the 50% region and be less at the two extremes. In this intermediate region, the observer has an equal chance to overestimate or underestimate the cover which leads to a larger estimation error. Also, the trendlines in figure 4 are consistent with the results of Jukola-Sulonen and Salemaa (1985), who found that observers tend to overestimate low cover and underestimate high cover. The most obvious explanation being that the estimable cover has very tangible limits at 0% and 100%. This severely reduces the margin of error for high and low amounts of true cover and produces a bias for errors in the opposite direction.

The findings of this study contradict Tonteri (1990) and Kennedy and Addison (1987). They found that the species with the lowest cover showed the largest errors. It seems, however, that these studies have calculated the estimation errors based on various types of comparisons between the estimated values and the mean values, which inevitably lead to higher errors where there is low mean cover. In this study, the error has been calculated as the difference between the estimated cover and the true cover, which negates this bias. This is of course impossible to do in a study where the true cover is unknown, as with Tonteri (1990) and Kennedy and Addison (1987).

The test personnel were asked not to round off their estimates but to assess the cover as closely as possible to the nearest percent. Therefore, this study also shows that the use of 1%-classes does not produce larger estimation errors than would be expected with larger quantity classes.

### **Species**

It was assumed from the beginning that grass was going to be more difficult to estimate correctly and the results show no deviation from that hypothesis. Grass shows a high degree of underestimation which may be attributed to reasons discussed above. However, the grass created by the *dune grass brush* in Adobe Photoshop has fairly wide leaves, which at the size used in these images may be compared to species like tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) or timothy (*Phleum pratensis*). It would be reasonable to assume that if an even narrower leaf (such as weavy hair-grass, *Deschampsia flexuosa*) would have been used, the estimation errors would have been even greater.

The lingonberry actually seems to be slightly overestimated over the whole experiment, especially in aggregated images. According to Kennedy and Addison (1987), species which are easily seen and have a limited distribution are the easiest to estimate. The lingonberry clearly falls into this category, whereas grass does not. Lingonberry shoots have clear edges to their whole leaves and occur in clumps, even in scattered images.

Kennedy and Addison (1987) found that when observers increased their familiarity with the vegetation and thus improved their species-identification, the precision of the sampling increased. They also showed that a 1-month break in sampling reduced the accuracy to the initial level. In their study, species identification was an important factor. Many field studies using this type of visual cover estimation are nevertheless more concerned with groups of species than specific species identification, and this study has shown the difference between two large groups of plants. Even so, a well-educated staff is of course important for the correct field results.

### **Aggregation**

Aggregation is known to be a highly important variable in field estimation (e.g. Dethier *et al.*, 1993). Therefore it was surprising that the aggregation did not show any statistical significance in the ANOVA for PT 1 and 4 ( $P = 0.440$ ). However, as figure 5 depicts, there is a significant difference in estimation error between clustered and scattered images in Proficiency Test 1 ( $P = 0.001$ ), at least for groups N and E. This is true for both species. After calibration, the difference between aggregation types seems to have diminished substantially, which may be an explanation as to why aggregation did not show any significance over the entire experiment.

### **Background**

B-light, the heterogeneous photo with lichens and moss, seemed initially to be the most confusing background for all three groups ( $P = 0.000$ ). However, for groups N and E, white background was the second most difficult although this could not be proven statistically ( $P = 0.1702$ ), probably since Group S did not respond in the same way. Both B-light and B-white make the relevant vegetation seem smaller and this inevitably leads to underestimation.

An interesting fact is that after calibration, all three backgrounds show a similar estimation error. This means that this type of calibration can be used to eliminate the effect of background disturbance.

## **Sources of Error and Limitations for This Study**

It is very important in this type of calibration to have confidence in the feedback of true cover during the practice sessions, since a lack of confidence in this feedback will probably make test personnel less susceptible to calibration, and might in this case lead to a poorer result. Several of the experienced test personnel expressed difficulty in trusting some of the correct answers, especially scattered grass images. The observers repeatedly underestimated these images and many were sure that the correct answers were too high. This might be attributed to the constant reminders in field training that grass, even if it seems to be covering a large area, consists of very narrow leaves with very low total coverage.

There were concerns as to how ERDAS Imagine calculated the true cover in the grass images. The digital grass may have had “fuzzy” edges which were included in the calculation of green pixels. However, these fuzzy edges were at the most 3 pixels wide and would probably not have accounted for any significant errors in the final calculation. Regardless of any miscalculations, the results show that this type of calibration is very efficient.

Many field-related variables were too time-consuming or difficult to take into account within this limited time frame. Even though the results from this study are not completely comparable to cover estimation in the field, the test personnel clearly showed an improvement in cover estimation. This improvement is beneficial for field work, as well as analyzing two-dimensional images on a computer screen. The results indicate that calibration is essential and hopefully there will be studies in the future which will consider these variables. Preferably, future studies will be able to calibrate observers in the field and somehow accurately determine the true cover of species in the field. Nevertheless, this type of calibration in combination with field training might, for now, be the best way to calibrate field observers.

This study has concentrated on small areas, basically because large areas would mean that the species in question would only look like green dots on the screen. In order to determine the difference in estimation error between species, they had to be large enough to distinguish clearly. In addition, when a field observer is estimating a large area in the field, they search the area, noticing and estimating species cover when they find a certain species. This is very difficult to simulate on a computer with a simple image. A calibration of this type of area would mean a 3-dimensional computer environment which allows the observer to navigate around the area at their own discretion.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The results from this study show that calibration is important and that it significantly decreases the estimation error of visual cover estimation. It also seems to be working in a short space of time. The test personnel showed a significant decrease in estimation error after the first practice session. This means that this type of calibration can be used frequently during a field season without taking valuable time away from the inventories. In fact, a little time spent at the start of every week in the field might not only produce much better results, but may also generate better confidence in the field personnel. A problem I have often encountered in the field is when the field observers are unsure if the results they produce are correct or not. This can lead to an “it-doesn’t-matter-what-I-write-nobody-knows-if-it’s-right-anyway” type of feeling. This type of calibration gives a very real feedback which the

majority of my test persons have indicated as a good incentive to try and improve their results. The few observers I have watched during practice sessions often felt like they had “won” when the true value was exactly what they had estimated. This type of positive incentive boosts one’s confidence, as well as increases the result reliability during the field season.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**General Linear Model: Diff versus Prof Test; Spec; Backgr; Aggr; Exp**

| Factor    | Type  | Levels | Values                 |
|-----------|-------|--------|------------------------|
| Prof Test | fixed | 2      | 1 4                    |
| Spec      | fixed | 2      | gräs lingon            |
| Backgr    | fixed | 3      | B-dark B-light B-white |
| Aggr      | fixed | 2      | klustrad spridd        |
| Exp       | fixed | 3      | N S E                  |

Analysis of Variance for Diff, using Adjusted SS for Tests

| Source           | DF   | Seq SS   | Adj SS  | Adj MS  | F      | P     |
|------------------|------|----------|---------|---------|--------|-------|
| Mfacit           | 1    | 4852,2   | 1917,3  | 1917,3  | 27,77  | 0,000 |
| Prof Test        | 1    | 27440,1  | 25515,8 | 25515,8 | 369,61 | 0,000 |
| Spec             | 1    | 4795,8   | 2974,7  | 2974,7  | 43,09  | 0,000 |
| Backgr           | 2    | 2224,3   | 2216,9  | 1108,4  | 16,06  | 0,000 |
| Aggr             | 1    | 0,1      | 24,2    | 24,2    | 0,35   | 0,554 |
| Exp              | 2    | 3932,5   | 2884,4  | 1442,2  | 20,89  | 0,000 |
| Prof Test*Spec   | 1    | 1050,6   | 1050,6  | 1050,6  | 15,22  | 0,000 |
| Prof Test*Backgr | 2    | 732,3    | 732,3   | 366,2   | 5,30   | 0,005 |
| Prof Test*Aggr   | 1    | 1932,1   | 1932,1  | 1932,1  | 27,99  | 0,000 |
| Prof Test*Exp    | 2    | 1731,9   | 1731,9  | 865,9   | 12,54  | 0,000 |
| Spec*Backgr      | 2    | 1108,8   | 1108,3  | 554,2   | 8,03   | 0,000 |
| Spec*Aggr        | 1    | 550,0    | 549,9   | 549,9   | 7,97   | 0,005 |
| Spec*Exp         | 2    | 392,4    | 392,4   | 196,2   | 2,84   | 0,059 |
| bakgrund*Aggr    | 2    | 242,4    | 242,4   | 121,2   | 1,76   | 0,173 |
| bakgrund*Exp     | 4    | 727,7    | 727,7   | 181,9   | 2,64   | 0,033 |
| Aggr*Exp         | 2    | 664,3    | 664,3   | 332,2   | 4,81   | 0,008 |
| Error            | 1412 | 97476,9  | 97476,9 | 69,0    |        |       |
| Total            | 1439 | 149854,5 |         |         |        |       |

| Term     | Coef     | SE Coef | T     | P     |
|----------|----------|---------|-------|-------|
| Constant | 4,9352   | 0,3711  | 13,30 | 0,000 |
| Mfacit   | -0,08785 | 0,01667 | -5,27 | 0,000 |

**Only white background:**

**General Linear Model: Diff versus Prof Test; Spec; Aggr; Exp**

| Factor    | Type  | Levels | Values        |
|-----------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Prof Test | fixed | 4      | 1 2 3 4       |
| Spec      | fixed | 2      | grass l-berry |
| Aggr      | fixed | 2      | clust scatt   |
| Exp       | fixed | 3      | N S E         |

Analysis of Variance for Diff, using Adjusted SS for Tests

| Source         | DF   | Seq SS   | Adj SS  | Adj MS | F     | P     |
|----------------|------|----------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| Mfacit         | 1    | 4706,6   | 4512,0  | 4512,0 | 79,84 | 0,000 |
| Prof Test      | 3    | 12218,2  | 12205,3 | 4068,4 | 72,00 | 0,000 |
| Spec           | 1    | 2143,6   | 2129,7  | 2129,7 | 37,69 | 0,000 |
| Aggr           | 1    | 3,6      | 3,1     | 3,1    | 0,05  | 0,816 |
| Exp            | 2    | 3055,5   | 3055,5  | 1527,7 | 27,03 | 0,000 |
| Prof Test*Spec | 3    | 808,4    | 809,9   | 270,0  | 4,78  | 0,003 |
| Prof Test*Aggr | 3    | 1136,1   | 1133,6  | 377,9  | 6,69  | 0,000 |
| Prof Test*Exp  | 6    | 1681,8   | 1681,8  | 280,3  | 4,96  | 0,000 |
| Spec*Aggr      | 1    | 323,7    | 323,7   | 323,7  | 5,73  | 0,017 |
| Spec*Exp       | 2    | 542,7    | 542,7   | 271,3  | 4,80  | 0,008 |
| Aggr*Exp       | 2    | 907,8    | 907,8   | 453,9  | 8,03  | 0,000 |
| Error          | 1414 | 79904,2  | 79904,2 | 56,5   |       |       |
| Total          | 1439 | 107432,3 |         |        |       |       |

### Tukey Simultaneous Tests

Tukey 95.0% Simultaneous Confidence Intervals  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Backgr

Backgr= B-dark subtracted from:

| Backgr  | Lower   | Center | Upper |
|---------|---------|--------|-------|
| B-light | 2,2676  | 3,8719 | 5,476 |
| B-white | -0,2674 | 0,8866 | 2,041 |

-----+-----+-----+-----+  
 (----\*----) (----\*----)  
 -----+-----+-----+-----+  
 -3,0      0,0      3,0      6,0

Backgr= B-light subtracted from:

| Backgr  | Lower  | Center | Upper  |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| B-white | -4,552 | -2,985 | -1,418 |

-----+-----+-----+-----+  
 (----\*----)  
 -----+-----+-----+-----+  
 -3,0      0,0      3,0      6,0

Tukey Simultaneous Tests  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Backgr

Backgr= B-dark subtracted from:

| Level   | Difference of Means | SE of Difference | T-Value | Adjusted P-Value |
|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------|------------------|
| B-light | 3,8719              | 0,6854           | 5,649   | 0,0000           |
| B-white | 0,8866              | 0,4931           | 1,798   | 0,1702           |

Backgr= B-light subtracted from:

| Level   | Difference of Means | SE of Difference | T-Value | Adjusted P-Value |
|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------|------------------|
| B-white | -2,985              | 0,6694           | -4,459  | 0,0000           |

Tukey 95.0% Simultaneous Confidence Intervals  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Exp

Exp = N subtracted from:

| Exp | Lower | Center | Upper |
|-----|-------|--------|-------|
| S   | 1,262 | 2,650  | 4,038 |
| E   | 2,335 | 3,723  | 5,111 |

---+-----+-----+-----+---  
 (-----\*-----)  
 (-----\*-----)  
 ---+-----+-----+-----+---  
 0,0      1,5      3,0      4,5

Exp = S subtracted from:

| Exp | Lower   | Center | Upper |
|-----|---------|--------|-------|
| E   | -0,3148 | 1,073  | 2,461 |

---+-----+-----+-----+---  
 (-----\*-----)  
 ---+-----+-----+-----+---  
 0,0      1,5      3,0      4,5

Tukey Simultaneous Tests  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Exp

Exp = N subtracted from:

| Level<br>Exp | Difference<br>of Means | SE of<br>Difference | T-Value | Adjusted<br>P-Value |
|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|
| S            | 2,650                  | 0,5929              | 4,469   | 0,0000              |
| E            | 3,723                  | 0,5929              | 6,279   | 0,0000              |

Exp = S subtracted from:

| Level<br>Exp | Difference<br>of Means | SE of<br>Difference | T-Value | Adjusted<br>P-Value |
|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|
| E            | 1,073                  | 0,5929              | 1,810   | 0,1664              |

**Only white background:  
Tukey Simultaneous Tests**

Tukey 95.0% Simultaneous Confidence Intervals  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Prof Test

Prof Test = 1 subtracted from:

| Prof Test | Lower  | Center | Upper  |           |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|
| 2         | -6,117 | -4,674 | -3,232 | (---*---) |
| 3         | -8,337 | -6,897 | -5,458 | (---*---) |
| 4         | -8,785 | -7,347 | -5,909 | (---*---) |

-----+-----+-----+-----  
-6,0      -3,0      0,0

Prof Test = 2 subtracted from:

| Prof Test | Lower  | Center | Upper  |           |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|
| 3         | -3,671 | -2,223 | -0,774 | (---*---) |
| 4         | -4,115 | -2,673 | -1,231 | (---*---) |

-----+-----+-----+-----  
-6,0      -3,0      0,0

Prof Test = 3 subtracted from:

| Prof Test | Lower  | Center  | Upper  |           |
|-----------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|
| 4         | -1,890 | -0,4500 | 0,9896 | (---*---) |

-----+-----+-----+-----  
-6,0      -3,0      0,0

Tukey Simultaneous Tests  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Prof Test

Prof Test = 1 subtracted from:

| Level<br>Prof Test | Difference<br>of Means | SE of<br>Difference | T-Value | Adjusted<br>P-Value |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 2                  | -4,674                 | 0,5619              | -8,32   | 0,0000              |
| 3                  | -6,897                 | 0,5608              | -12,30  | 0,0000              |
| 4                  | -7,347                 | 0,5603              | -13,11  | 0,0000              |

## Appendix A Statistical Results

Prof Test = 2 subtracted from:

| Level     | Difference | SE of      |         | Adjusted |
|-----------|------------|------------|---------|----------|
| Prof Test | of Means   | Difference | T-Value | P-Value  |
| 3         | -2,223     | 0,5643     | -3,939  | 0,0005   |
| 4         | -2,673     | 0,5619     | -4,757  | 0,0000   |

Prof Test = 3 subtracted from:

| Level     | Difference | SE of      |         | Adjusted |
|-----------|------------|------------|---------|----------|
| Prof Test | of Means   | Difference | T-Value | P-Value  |
| 4         | -0,4500    | 0,5608     | -0,8023 | 0,8534   |

Tukey 95.0% Simultaneous Confidence Intervals  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Exp

Exp = N subtracted from:

| Exp | Lower   | Center | Upper |               |
|-----|---------|--------|-------|---------------|
| S   | -0,7607 | 0,3750 | 1,511 | (-----*-----) |
| E   | 2,1247  | 3,2604 | 4,396 | (-----*-----) |

-----+-----+-----+-----+  
0,0            1,5            3,0            4,5

Exp = S subtracted from:

| Exp | Lower | Center | Upper |               |
|-----|-------|--------|-------|---------------|
| E   | 1,750 | 2,885  | 4,021 | (-----*-----) |

-----+-----+-----+-----+  
0,0            1,5            3,0            4,5

Tukey Simultaneous Tests  
Response Variable Diff  
All Pairwise Comparisons among Levels of Exp

Exp = N subtracted from:

| Level | Difference | SE of      |         | Adjusted |
|-------|------------|------------|---------|----------|
| Exp   | of Means   | Difference | T-Value | P-Value  |
| S     | 0,3750     | 0,4852     | 0,7728  | 0,7197   |
| E     | 3,2604     | 0,4852     | 6,7192  | 0,0000   |

Exp = S subtracted from:

| Level | Difference | SE of      |         | Adjusted |
|-------|------------|------------|---------|----------|
| Exp   | of Means   | Difference | T-Value | P-Value  |
| E     | 2,885      | 0,4852     | 5,946   | 0,0000   |

|               | N1    | N2    | N3    | N4    | N5    | Ngroup | A1    | A2    | A3    | A4    | A5    | Agroun | E1    | E2    | E3    | E4    | E5    | Egroup |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Sd All PTs    | 7,76  | 8,22  | 7,81  | 8,88  | 10,26 | 5,86   | 7,34  | 11,00 | 8,03  | 9,37  | 6,81  | 6,70   | 7,24  | 11,66 | 9,63  | 8,67  | 9,66  | 7,38   |
| CI 95%        | 1,28  | 1,35  | 1,29  | 1,46  | 1,69  | 0,97   | 1,21  | 1,81  | 1,32  | 1,54  | 1,12  | 1,10   | 1,19  | 1,92  | 1,59  | 1,43  | 1,59  | 1,22   |
| Personal mean | 0,16  | 1,47  | -0,79 | -3,05 | 3,64  | 0,29   | 2,61  | 2,34  | 2,23  | 1,52  | -0,51 | 1,64   | 1,24  | -1,38 | 4,76  | 7,22  | 5,92  | 3,55   |
| SE            | 0,65  | 0,69  | 0,65  | 0,74  | 0,85  | 0,49   | 0,61  | 0,92  | 0,67  | 0,78  | 0,57  | 0,56   | 0,60  | 0,97  | 0,80  | 0,72  | 0,80  | 0,61   |
| Sd PT 1       | 9,87  | 11,06 | 9,02  | 10,02 | 14,84 | 7,94   | 8,39  | 15,67 | 11,51 | 13,71 | 8,42  | 9,97   | 7,89  | 13,74 | 11,56 | 11,88 | 13,17 | 10,16  |
| CI 95%        | 2,87  | 3,21  | 2,62  | 2,91  | 4,31  | 2,30   | 2,43  | 4,55  | 3,34  | 3,98  | 2,44  | 2,89   | 2,29  | 3,99  | 3,36  | 3,45  | 3,82  | 2,95   |
| Personal mean | 5,10  | 4,90  | 1,23  | -4,69 | 10,90 | 3,49   | 5,69  | 12,88 | 7,52  | 8,50  | 3,79  | 7,68   | 3,92  | 8,85  | 9,13  | 15,48 | 13,27 | 10,13  |
| SE            | 1,43  | 1,60  | 1,30  | 1,45  | 2,14  | 1,15   | 1,21  | 2,26  | 1,66  | 1,88  | 1,22  | 1,44   | 1,14  | 1,98  | 1,67  | 1,71  | 1,90  | 1,47   |
| Sd PT 2       | 6,60  | 5,18  | 8,75  | 10,72 | 5,09  | 4,05   | 9,35  | 6,72  | 7,09  | 8,09  | 3,67  | 3,85   | 5,37  | 5,80  | 8,16  | 6,78  | 9,26  | 4,64   |
| CI 95%        | 2,78  | 2,18  | 3,69  | 4,52  | 2,15  | 1,71   | 3,94  | 2,83  | 2,99  | 3,41  | 1,55  | 1,62   | 2,26  | 2,44  | 3,44  | 2,86  | 3,90  | 1,96   |
| Personal mean | -3,04 | 2,46  | 0,79  | 3,88  | 1,38  | 1,09   | 6,92  | -1,88 | -2,42 | -4,38 | -1,25 | -0,60  | 2,83  | -0,21 | 2,88  | 4,33  | 0,04  | 1,98   |
| SE            | 1,35  | 1,06  | 1,79  | 2,19  | 1,04  | 0,83   | 1,91  | 1,37  | 1,45  | 1,65  | 0,75  | 0,79   | 1,10  | 1,18  | 1,66  | 1,38  | 1,89  | 0,95   |
| Sd PT 3       | 5,13  | 6,80  | 6,07  | 6,70  | 6,37  | 3,59   | 5,03  | 9,79  | 4,26  | 5,63  | 5,25  | 3,92   | 5,27  | 8,24  | 10,01 | 5,48  | 6,43  | 4,57   |
| CI 95%        | 2,16  | 2,87  | 2,56  | 2,82  | 2,68  | 1,51   | 2,12  | 4,12  | 1,80  | 2,37  | 2,21  | 1,65   | 2,22  | 3,47  | 4,22  | 2,31  | 2,71  | 1,93   |
| Personal mean | -1,46 | -1,46 | -3,54 | -4,54 | 1,92  | -1,82  | 0,08  | -5,88 | 2,67  | -1,00 | -2,63 | -1,35  | -1,63 | -7,63 | 5,04  | 3,83  | 4,21  | 0,77   |
| SE            | 1,05  | 1,39  | 1,24  | 1,37  | 1,30  | 0,73   | 1,03  | 2,00  | 0,87  | 1,15  | 1,07  | 0,80   | 1,08  | 1,68  | 2,04  | 1,12  | 1,31  | 0,93   |
| Sd PT 4       | 7,17  | 6,90  | 6,96  | 7,85  | 8,20  | 5,20   | 6,19  | 7,31  | 5,47  | 5,59  | 7,08  | 4,73   | 8,35  | 13,25 | 8,17  | 7,10  | 6,93  | 6,45   |
| CI 95%        | 2,08  | 2,00  | 2,02  | 2,28  | 2,38  | 1,51   | 1,80  | 2,12  | 1,59  | 1,62  | 2,06  | 1,37   | 2,42  | 3,85  | 2,37  | 2,06  | 2,01  | 1,87   |
| Personal mean | -2,38 | -0,98 | -2,23 | -4,13 | -1,63 | -2,27  | -1,35 | -1,98 | -0,96 | -1,25 | -3,40 | -1,79  | -0,81 | -9,06 | 1,19  | 2,10  | 2,35  | -0,85  |
| SE            | 1,03  | 1,00  | 1,00  | 1,13  | 1,18  | 0,75   | 0,89  | 1,06  | 0,79  | 0,81  | 1,02  | 0,68   | 1,21  | 1,91  | 1,18  | 1,03  | 1,00  | 0,93   |
| Sd PT 2-4     | 6,51  | 6,42  | 7,17  | 8,32  | 7,03  | 4,53   | 6,80  | 7,78  | 5,60  | 6,24  | 5,90  | 4,28   | 6,94  | 10,56 | 8,57  | 6,58  | 7,38  | 5,55   |
| CI 95%        | 1,32  | 1,30  | 1,45  | 1,69  | 1,42  | 0,92   | 1,38  | 1,58  | 1,13  | 1,26  | 1,19  | 0,87   | 1,41  | 2,14  | 1,74  | 1,33  | 1,50  | 1,13   |
| Personal mean | -2,29 | 0,01  | -1,66 | -1,60 | 0,57  | -1,00  | 1,88  | -3,25 | -0,24 | -2,21 | -2,43 | -1,25  | 0,13  | -5,63 | 3,04  | 3,42  | 2,2   | 0,63   |
| SE            | 0,66  | 0,66  | 0,73  | 0,85  | 0,72  | 0,46   | 0,69  | 0,79  | 0,57  | 0,64  | 0,60  | 0,44   | 0,71  | 1,08  | 0,87  | 0,67  | 0,75  | 0,57   |

Standard deviation (Sd) for each test person/group and the corresponding confidence interval (CI) and personal mean difference. Shaded CI-squares have a systematical error. A positive personal mean difference equals underestimation.

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Serien Arbetsrapporter utges i första hand för institutionens eget behov av viss dokumentation. Rapporterna är indelade i följande grupper: Riksskogstaxeringen, Planering och inventering, Biometri, Fjärranalys, Kompendier och undervisningsmaterial, Examensarbeten, Internationellt samt NILS. Författarna svarar själva för rapporternas vetenskapliga innehåll.

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