The state of the Aquatic Warbler population in Lithuania and effects of translocation project

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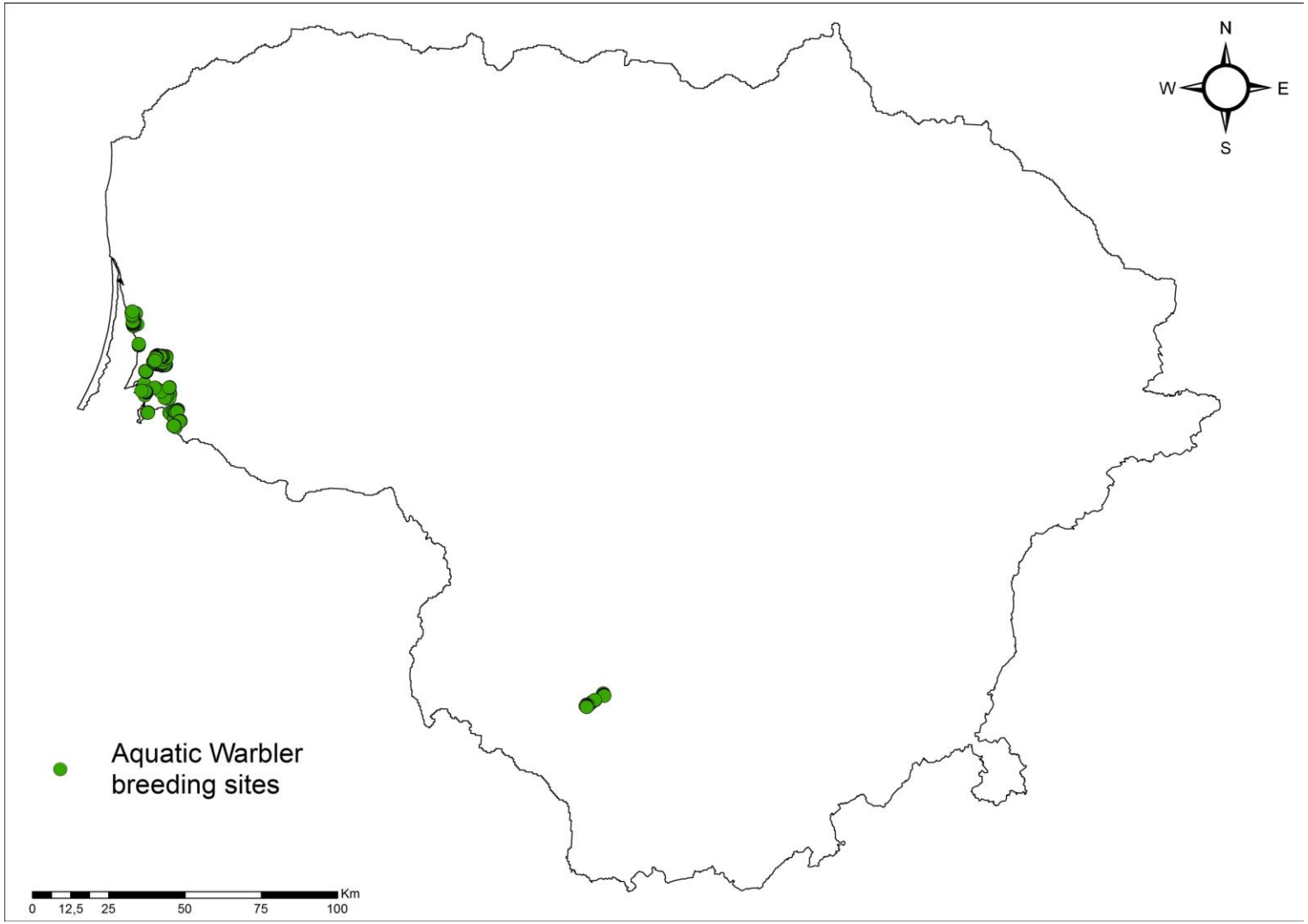
Current aquatic warbler distribution in Lithuania



Aquatic warbler breeding habitats in Lithuania

High productivity alluvial sedge meadows

- High farming interest

Low productivity marshes

- Low farming interest

Active conservation efforts

“Securing Sustainable Farming to Ensure Conservation of Globally Threatened Bird Species in Agrarian Landscape (Baltic Aquatic Warbler, LIFE09 NAT/LT/000233)”

https://meldine.lt/en/baltic-aquatic-warbler/

- 2009-2015
- Habitat restoration in Lithuania and Latvia (1300 ha);
- Design of special agri-environmental measure;

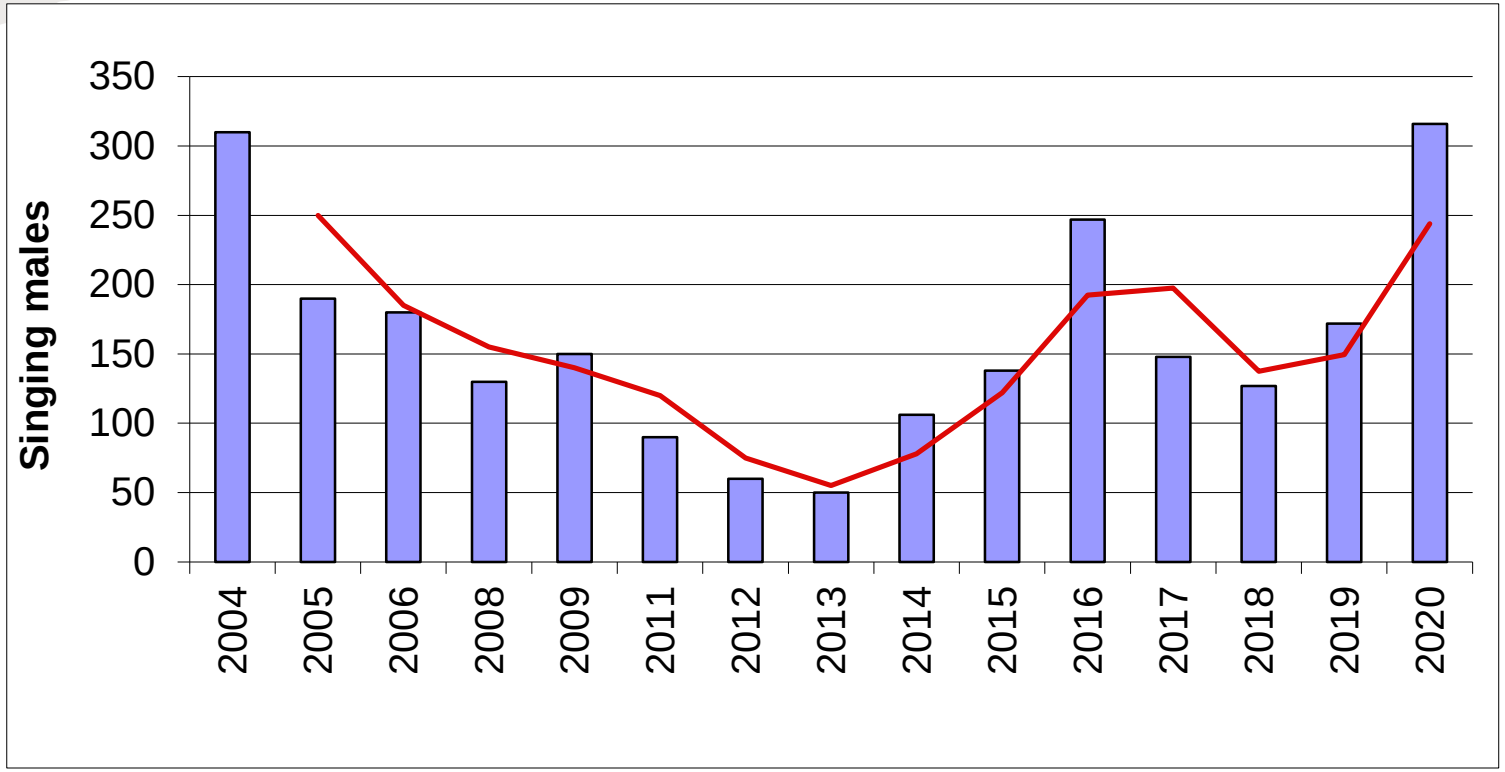
Stepping stones towards ensuring long-term favorable conservation status of Aquatic warbler in Lithuania” (LIFE MagniDucatusAcrola LIFE15 NAT/LT/001024**)**

https://meldine.lt/en/

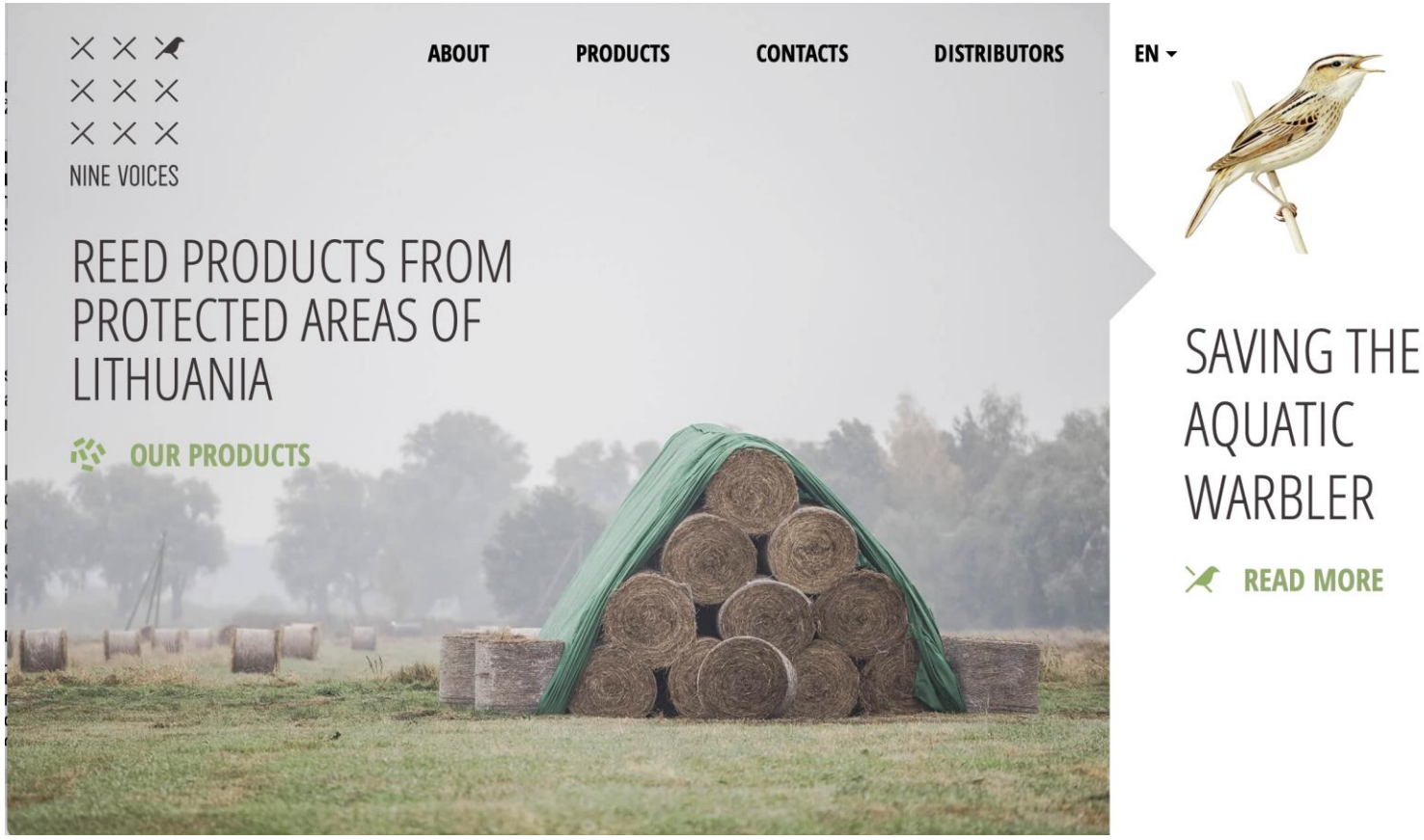
- 2016-2023
- Habitat restoration (mostly hydrology management) in Lithuania and Belarus (project areas 20 000 ha);
- Developing and implementing pilot conservation translocation
- Late-cut biomass processing

Aquatic warbler population dynamics in Lithuania and the current state

- Full count monitoring;
- 2020 monitoring: highest number of singing males ever recorded in LT (based on full counts);
- 89,5 % of population is located in western Lithuania (Nemunas delta region)



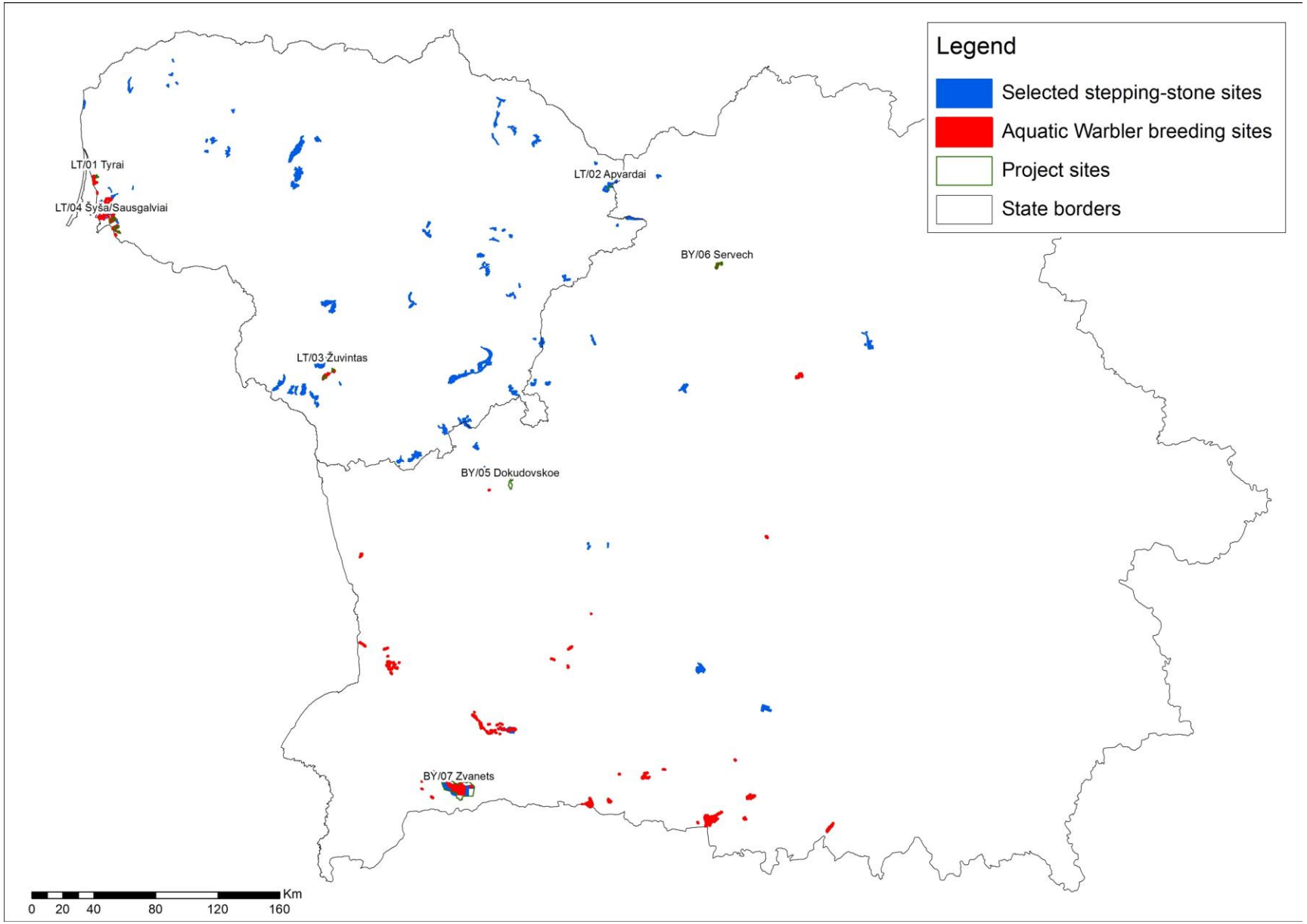
Active conservatio projects
by BEF based on LIFE funding



Existing support schemes for farmers protecting aquatic warbler

- **Special CAP agri-environmental measures supporting farming targeting aquatic warbler conservation.** Payment level 209 eur/ha for alluvial meadows, 160 eur/ha for marshlands (with 50% mowing intensity) plus additional
- **Special CAP single payment support to farmers for habitat restoration** in the targeted areas via non-productive investment (M04) measure;
- For solving late-cut biomass problem, **established special processing facility aiming on collecting late cut biomass and produce pellets for animal bedding** (more info: www.ninevoices.eu)

Stepping stone habitat potential for Lithuania and Belarus



Pilot conservation translocation initiative

- 2015 endorsed by signatory parties of Memorandum of Understanding for aquatic warbler conservation;
- Implemented in 2018 and 2019 by translocating 100 birds (50 birds each year);
- Main goal – develop and test a method and and support AW population recovery in Zuvintas biosphere reserve;
- Translocation program developed based on IUCN guidelines for conservation translocations;
- Source area - Zvanec (Belarus), Release area: Zuvintas (Lithuania)

Aquatic Warbler translocation programme „EX-SITU"

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Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania
Vilnius, 2018

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(download here)

Overview of the methodology applied

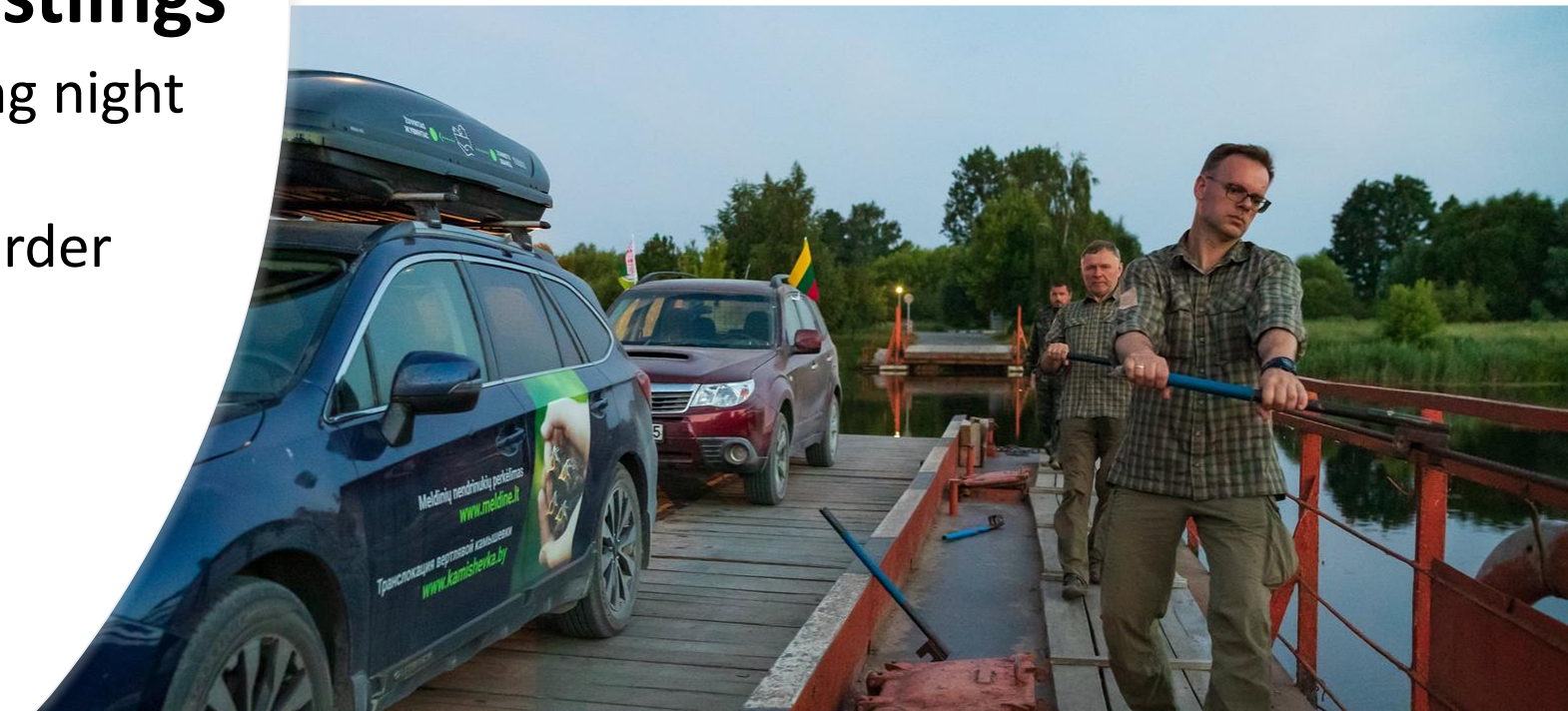
Stage 1: Search of nests and pick up

- Prescribed burning applied to the habitat made searching of nests a lot easier
- Brood pickup at 7-10 days of chick age;
- Feeding interval – 20 min.

Overview of the methodology applied

Stage 2: Transfer of the nestlings

- Transport distance ~500 km during night when birds are asleep.
- Crossing of Belarus-Lithuania boarder required long preparations.



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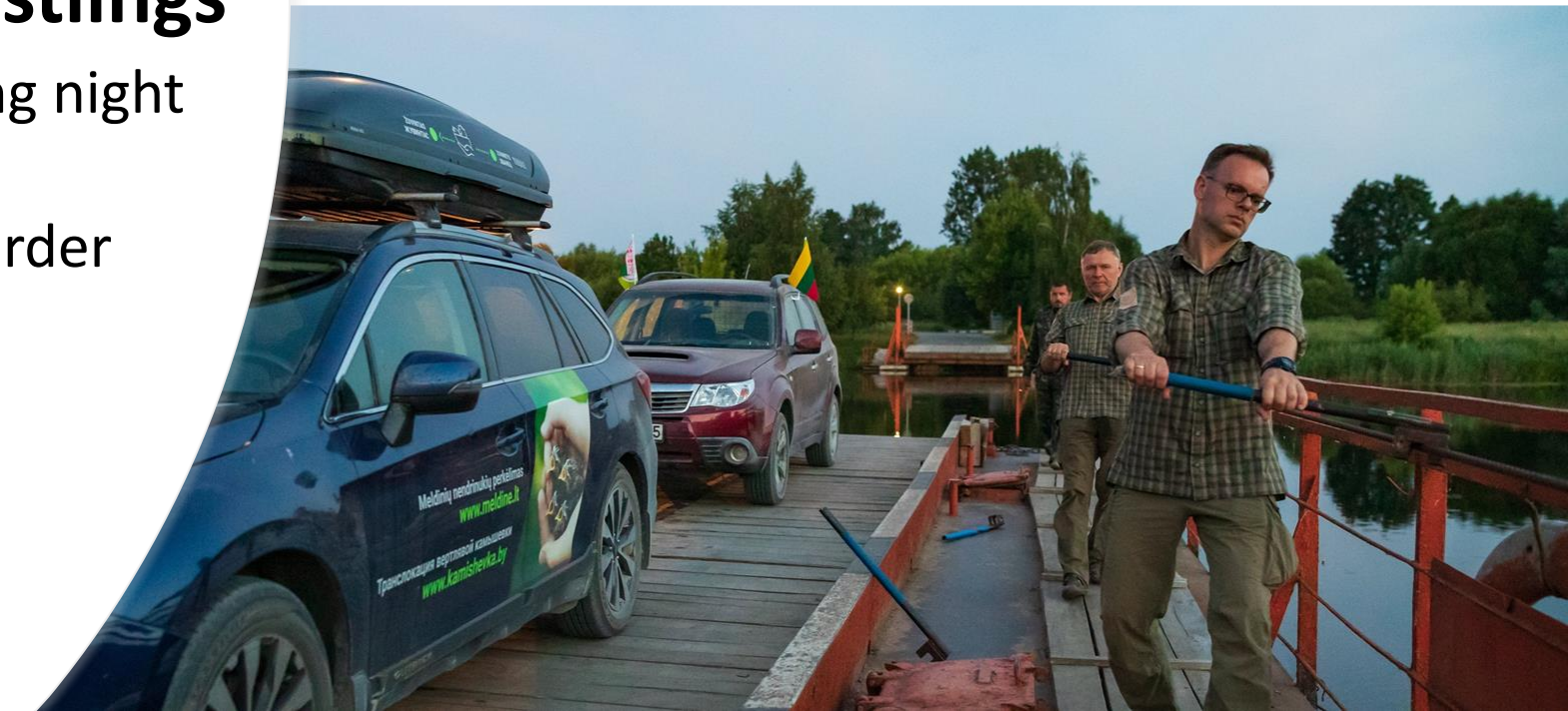


Overview of the methodology applied

Stage 3: Growing the young in cages

- Separate cage for each brood;
- Constant background audio record: sound of the fen mire;
- Regular sound records of singing adults;
- Feeding interval from 20 min. getting longer to 1 hour with chick age;

Overview of the methodology applied

Stage 4: Moving to the field aviary

- Regular feeding maintained;
- Chicks learn to hunt and become familiar with the environment;
- Constant presence of conservation team (predator management, feeding, observation, safety)

Overview of the methodology applied

Stage 5: Soft release and monitoring

- Birds release date defined by the development of the chicks and weather forecast;
- Release takes few hours to several days period;
- Released birds periodically returns to aviary for overnight;
- Continued feeding and monitoring in the aviaries;
- Monitoring stops until no birds observed for several days

Defined success criteria and achieved results

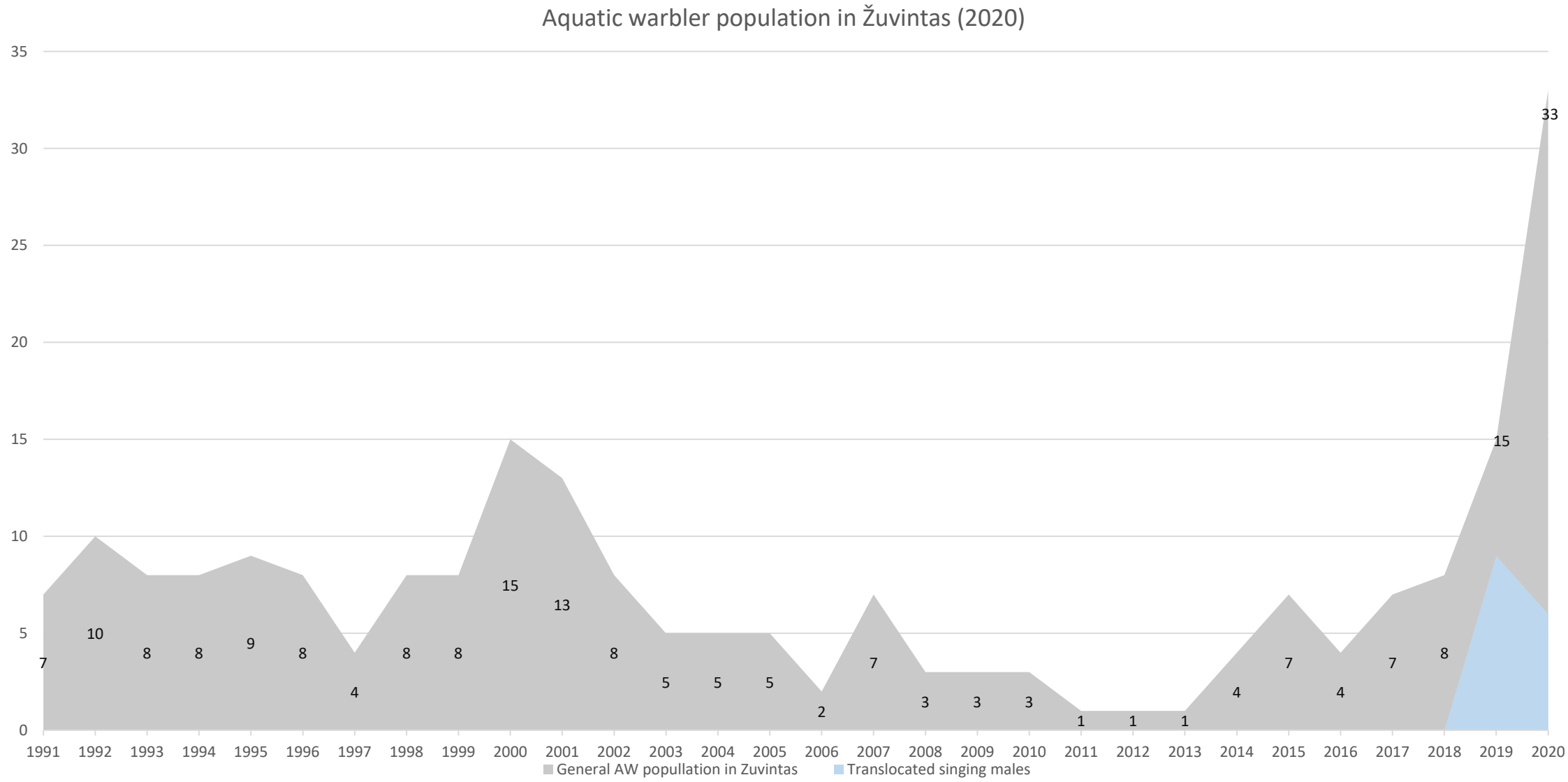
Success criteria:

- Until the time of release chicks survival rate has to be no less than 74 %;
- At least one translocated bird has to come back after wintering to Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve area.

Results

Criteria	2018 (2019)	2019 (2020)
Survival rate	98%	100 %
Returned birds	11	10 (7 first year, 3 – second year)

Population recovery in Zuvintas (singing male counts)



Blue – returned translocated singing males