

# CONSERVING AQUATIC WARBLERS

IN POLAND AND GERMANY

Achievements of the Aquatic Warbler LIFE Project





Aquatic Warbler.  
*Photo Andrzej Kościński.*

More information about the Aquatic Warbler LIFE and the Aquatic Warbler and Biomass LIFE+ projects, as well as other activities of OTOP regarding conservation of Aquatic Warblers in Poland, can be found at [www.wodniczka.pl](http://www.wodniczka.pl) (also in English).

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# THE AQUATIC WARBLER LIFE PROJECT



In this report, we are presenting the aims and achievements of the project „Conserving Aquatic Warblers in Poland and Germany”, co-financed by the LIFE Programme, the European Commission’s Financial Instrument for the Environment. This way, we want to inform everybody with an interest in the project about what we set out to do, what we finally achieved and what we can all do together in the future. The LIFE Aquatic Warbler project started in 2005 and ended in November of 2011. Its budget totalled 5.4 million Euro. To date, this is the biggest single species conservation project implemented in Poland.

The main beneficiary, responsible for coordinating the project and implementing a significant part of the project activities in Poland, was Ogólnopolskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Ptaków (OTOP – the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds). The responsibility for the implementation of the project was shared with other project partners. These were: The West-Pomeranian Nature Society (ZTP), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the North-Podlaskan Society for Bird Protection (PTOP), the Biebrza National Park (BPN) and the “Förderverein Naturschutz im Peenetal” from Germany.



The project was dedicated to the conservation of Aquatic Warblers and their habitats in nine project locations: one in Germany, six in Western Pomerania (NW-Poland) and two in the Biebrza River Valley (NE-Poland), covering a total area of 42,000 ha.

Apart from the financial contribution of the European Commission, the project was also supported by additional sponsors. These were: the RSPB, Swarovski Optik and CEMEX Polska Sp. z o.o.



# WHY DO WE PROTECT AQUATIC WARBLERS?

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Aquatic Warblers are Europe's rarest migratory songbird and the only globally threatened passerine bird found in mainland Europe. In the past, it used to occur from France to Siberia and from Italy to Latvia, but currently its range is much more restricted – almost exclusively to Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. During the 20th century the size of its world population decreased by 95%, mainly as a result of destruction of its unique habitat. Currently, the global population of Aquatic Warbler numbers only c 12,000 singing males, and the breeding area actually occupied by this species covers not more than 375 km<sup>2</sup>. Owing to such a limited area of occurrence, Aquatic Warblers have been included on the IUCN Red List of Globally Threatened Species as “vulnerable” (category VU). Poland has an exceptional responsibility to conserve Aquatic Warblers, because c. 25% of the world's population of this species live in Poland. Aquatic Warblers are equally important for Germany, where they had bred numerously in the past, and now, unfortunately, it may soon become the first species since a long time to have become extinct in this country. Protecting Aquatic Warblers means, that at the same time, we are saving its habitats – fen mires, together with their rich and threatened flora and fauna.



Aquatic Warbler male.  
*Photo Grzegorz Kłosowski.*

# MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

In Minsk (Belarus), on 30 April 2003, a Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Conservation Measures for Aquatic Warblers was concluded under the auspices of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). It was later signed also by Poland, Germany and almost all of the other countries within the Aquatic Warbler's breeding range, migration routes and wintering grounds, extending from Belarus to Senegal. It is the only international agreement specific to the conservation of single small bird species.

The signatory countries to the Memorandum are obliged to work together to improve the conservation status of Aquatic Warblers. These countries are supported by two additional signatories: the Secretariat of the Bonn Convention and BirdLife International with its Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team (AWCT), which has an advisory role to the Memorandum.

## The Aquatic Warbler – an umbrella species



White-winged Black Tern.  
*Photo Gerold Dobler.*



Common Snipe.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Black-tailed Godwit.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Orchid.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*

The Aquatic Warbler is a so-called umbrella species, representative for its specific habitat, fen mires and all the other animal and plant species that make up the ecological community of this habitat. Many of these species, similarly as Aquatic Warblers, cannot survive anywhere else than in such wetlands. This means, that protecting Aquatic Warblers means protecting much more than just one species of bird. Aquatic Warbler protection helps many rare plant species and other species of birds, including rare waders.





Aquatic Warbler with food.  
*Photo Zymantas Morkvenas.*



Aquatic Warbler female feeding young.  
*Photo Zydrunas Sinkevicius.*

## HOW DO AQUATIC WARBLERS LIVE?

Aquatic Warblers are small songbirds related to reed warblers. It has a long, pointed bill, typical of insect-eating species. Males and females look alike.

Aquatic Warblers inhabit only fen mires and similar vast, wet peaty meadows covered by sedges with or without scattered bushes. The water level should be above the ground, but ideally not higher than 10-15 cm.

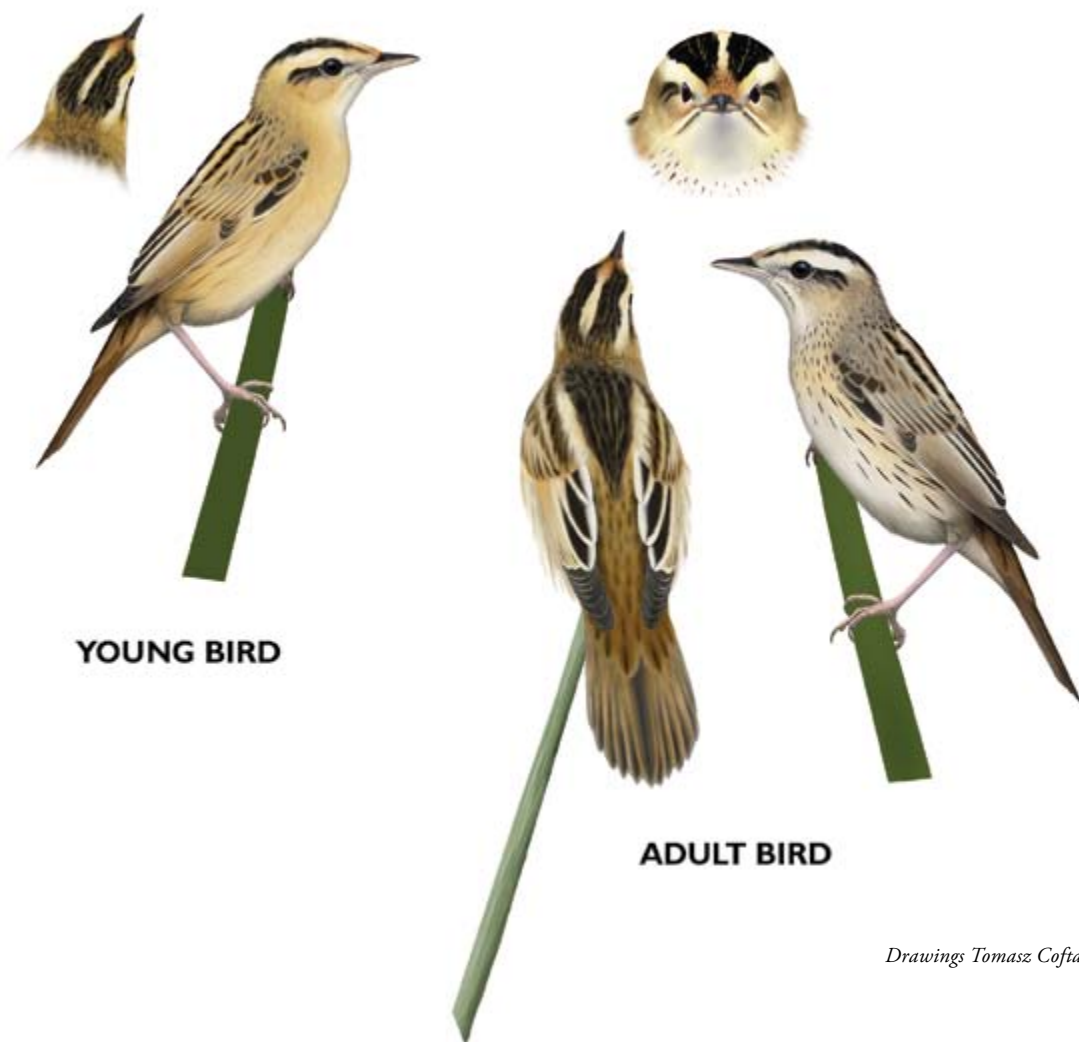
Aquatic Warblers build their nest directly on the ground, in tussocks of sedges or among dry plant material. This is why a stable, high water level is essential for this species – high enough to enable growth of suitable vegetation and stable enough, so that its sudden changes do not result in flooding of the nests.

The Aquatic Warbler mating system is a form of combined polygyny and promiscuity, unique amongst European songbirds. Aquatic Warblers do not form pairs and in fact they meet only during copulation, while both sexes mate with a large number of partners. Therefore, in the majority of cases, offspring within one brood is sired by different, sometimes even by up to five fathers. Males do not participate in rearing the young. They spend the whole breeding season attempting to attract females with their song. Apart from that, Aquatic Warblers are unique as – in contrast to other songbirds – their peak singing activity is reached not in the morning, but around sunset. Males leave the parental duties to females, which build nests and feed their offspring alone. For this reason, the quality of habitat in which Aquatic Warblers lives is so important. It is the exceptional quantity of insects, that the habitat abounds with, on which it depends, whether a female is capable of feeding its young alone.

# HOW DO AQUATIC WARBLERS LOOK LIKE?

Aquatic Warblers are brownish above, with well visible black and pale stripes on the back, and dark streaks on the rump. There is a pale supercilium above the eye. The most characteristic identification feature of the species is the distinctive pale central crown-stripe, the best feature to distinguish this species from its closest relative – the much more common Sedge Warbler, which lacks such a stripe.

Aquatic Warblers are small birds, that reach c. 13 cm in length and weighs approximately 12 g. Their size is comparable to that of a sparrow or tit.



*Drawings Tomasz Cofia*

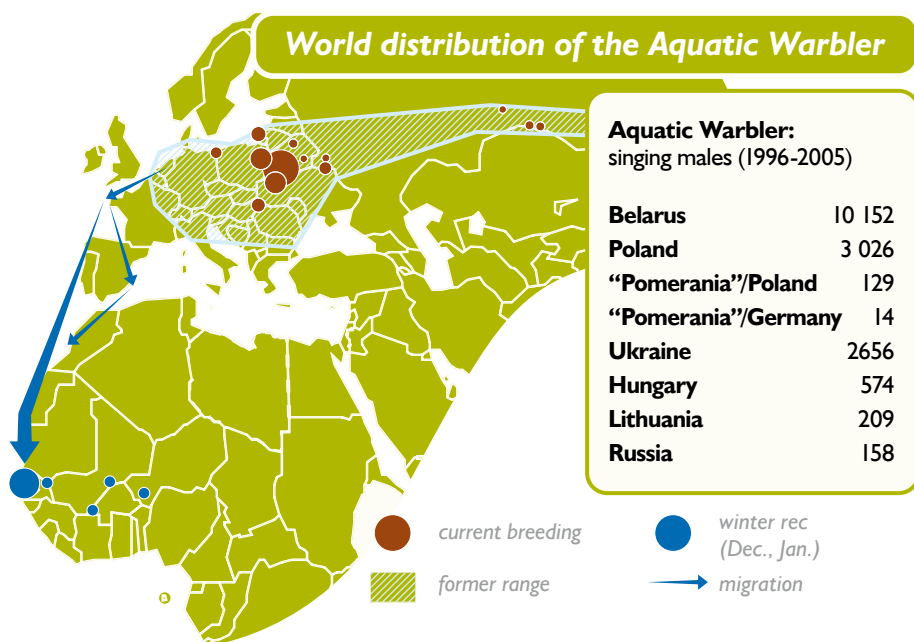


Aquatic Warbler.  
Photo Zymantas Morkvenas.

## WHERE DO AQUATIC WARBLERS OCCUR?

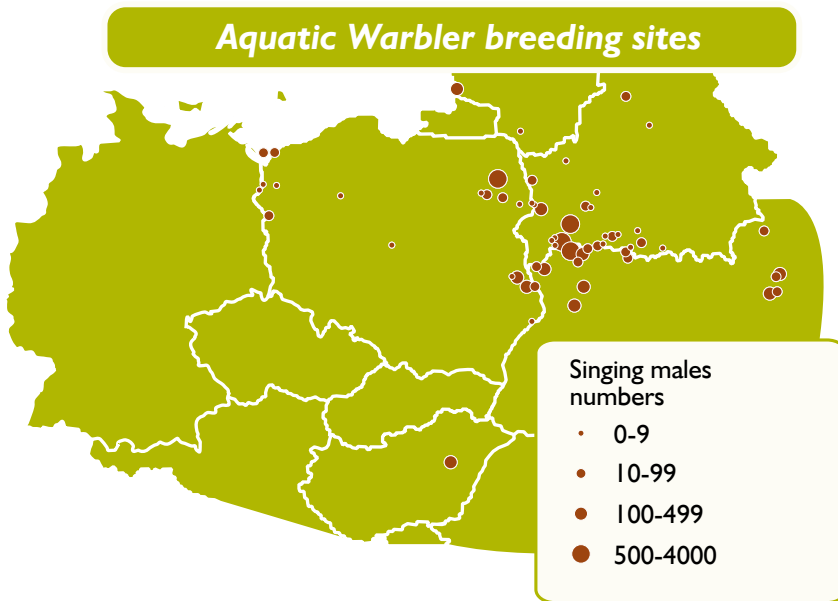
At the end of the 19th century, the breeding range of Aquatic Warblers covered a significant part of Europe, extending to France in the west, to Italy and Bulgaria to the south, to Latvia in the north and to Western Siberia in the east. Currently, however, Aquatic Warblers nest at only c. 60 breeding sites, mainly in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, which cover less than 375 km<sup>2</sup> altogether.

### Global range of the Aquatic Warbler.





## Current Aquatic Warbler breeding sites.



Three main breeding populations of Aquatic Warblers can be distinguished in Poland and Germany:

1. the Podlasie population
2. the Lublin area population
3. the Pomeranian population, which includes the last sites of occurrence of Aquatic Warblers in Germany

Aquatic Warblers winter in West-Africa, hence they have to master huge distances during migration.

Therefore the time they spend in Poland and Germany each year is quite short.

## Calendar of occurrence of Aquatic Warblers on their breeding grounds.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Arrival												
Broods												
Departure												

best time to observe Aquatic Warbler

Aquatic Warblers have very specific habitat requirements. They occur only on fen mires or on wet meadows on peaty soil with a similar vegetation structure. They need a high groundwater level, preferably up to 10 cm above the soil surface during the breeding season.

The breeding sites of Aquatic Warblers in Poland and Germany are located mainly on mires covered by sedges with scattered reeds, in the Lublin area also on calcareous marshes with predominant Saw Sedge (*Cladium mariscus*). Smaller sites are located on marshes in river floodplains and on brackish meadows and pastures on the Baltic coast.

# WHY DO AQUATIC WARBLERS DECLINE?

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Traditionally mown Aquatic Warbler habitat.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Overgrowing Aquatic Warbler habitat.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*

The main threat which Aquatic Warblers face, is the loss of their habitat. They have been drained on a large scale during the last century, with the aim to excavate peat or to obtain new grounds for agriculture. Only a few percent of fen mires have escaped such a fate, although even those areas have been negatively affected by drainage in their surroundings. Despite of this, in some cases favourable conditions for Aquatic Warblers were maintained in those areas, thanks to the implementation of traditional, extensive farming, based on hand-mowing and cattle grazing. As long as these activities were carried out, Aquatic Warblers could inhabit even slightly drained sites. However, cessation of extensive land use, which took place during the last decades, lead to overgrowing of marshes with dense reeds or bushes and trees, which in turn results in a continuous loss of Aquatic Warbler habitat.

In some areas, there is the opposite problem – deterioration of habitats due to intensification of farming in marshlands through further draining, too frequent or too early mowing, or too intense grazing. During early mowing or intensive grazing in the breeding period, the birds are scared away and their nests are destroyed.

Another problem is the loss of habitats in area, where the birds rest during migration and on wintering grounds, in Western Europe and in Africa.

# WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

The most important step towards the protection of Aquatic Warblers is to identify sites which are important for this species and to ascertain which problems occur there. The next step is to choose the most appropriate habitat management measure for those sites.

In some areas, the first step is to restore the natural water level, through closing of ditches, building of sluices and adjusting the activity of water pumps. High water levels also help prevent marshes from becoming overgrown with trees and bushes.

The second step is to introduce activities, which imitate traditional, but unfortunately already ceased farming practices – mowing or grazing – to eliminate reed or bushes, and maintain an appropriate vegetation structure. In areas where Aquatic Warblers occur at present, mowing has to be postponed and cannot be carried out during the breeding period of this species. When conducting grazing, in turn, care should be taken that it is not too intense.



Grazing cattle at Biebrza.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Grazing of Polish Konik horses on Karsiborska Kępa.  
*Photo Maja Piasecka.*



Mechanical bush removal at Biebrza.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*

# THE AQUATIC WARBLER LIFE PROJECT – WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

## We have learnt about the exact habitat requirements of Aquatic Warblers and how to protect the species

Every nature conservation project needs to be underpinned by sound science, in order to make sure that we can choose the right active measures, and that they really achieve, what they are designed to do.

This is why throughout the project we collected data on the number and distribution of Aquatic Warblers on all nine project sites. At these sites, we also systematically monitored changes in the key factors influencing the quality of Aquatic Warbler habitat:

- composition and structure of vegetation, where the birds feed and build their nests
- number and composition of insect and invertebrates, on which the birds feed
- water levels, which importantly influence vegetation and food availability as well as possible nest locations.

Additionally, we implemented several targeted studies, like a full inventory of all Aquatic Warbler sites in Poland in 2009 and studies to identify the exact parameters of an “ideal habitat”, which we could then apply to our project sites. Very important was also a study on nesting productivity in relation to vegetation management.

Analyzing all these data, we learned that every Aquatic Warbler site is different, and that there cannot be one type of management that fits all sites. Especially differences in water conditions and nutrient availability decide, whether an area should be mown in summer or in winter, every year, every second year or maybe only once every 5-10 years.

All this knowledge we used to adjust the management we do on the sites and to develop management plans for each site. It also fed into new official Aquatic Warbler Species Action Plans for Poland and the German region of Brandenburg.





## Introduction of new management technology



Sweep-netting during monitoring of invertebrates.  
*Photo Susanne Bärtsch.*



Taking water measurements at Aquatic Warbler sites.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Mowing using a ratrak-harvester.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*

Thousands of hectares of delicate peat meadows need to be managed for the Aquatic Warbler each year in order to keep them open. Local farmers, who traditionally used to do this by hand, stopped doing this around the 70ies of the last century, when it became economically unattractive. Since then, these fen mires started to grow over with reeds or trees and bushes.

We realised that it is not possible to re-introduce hand-scything on such a large scale, because of the forbidding costs and the fact that it would be impossible to find more than a handful of people still ready to do this hard work. At the same time, extensive grazing with cattle or horses can also be a solution only for smaller areas.

Therefore, within the project, we introduced a purpose-built prototype mowing machine. The machine is an adapted alpine piste-basher on caterpillar tracks – called “ratrak”, with very low ground pressure and fast working speeds (mowing 5-10 hectares per day, including removal of the vegetation mown). It also removes bushes and can be used during periods of high water and does not destroy the delicate peat soil and vegetation.

This solution was so successful, that ratraks are now used on all larger Aquatic Warbler sites in Poland. The idea is already being copied in Germany, Belarus and Lithuania.

## Active conservation work



Mechanical bush removal in the Biebrza National Park.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Manual bush clearing.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*

Most of the project sites still feature an almost natural water regime, suitable for Aquatic Warblers. But on our Peene Valley site in Germany we had to block a ditch to increase water levels. In OTOP's Karsiborska Kepa reserve near Swinoujście, we built a complete water management system that now allows us to let water into the site, when it gets too dry and to pump it out, when it gets too wet.

The main focus of active conservation work was vegetation management, in order to stop them from overgrowing with reeds, bushes or trees. Altogether, during seven seasons since 2005, about 4,000 ha were treated within the project itself, of these 1,100 ha in the seven project sites covering the Pomeranian population of Aquatic Warblers.

On about 800 ha we first had to remove trees and bushes, before we could start regular mowing. On 400 ha in the Swina Delta in Northwest-Poland we introduced extensive grazing. For this, we first had to remove dense old vegetation and build the necessary shelters and fences for the grazing animals. Normally, cattle do a good grazing job, but in Karsiborska Kepa we decided to introduce a small herd of Polish Konik horses, a hardy traditional breed, that can stay outside all year round.

All the rest of the area was subject to regular mowing, sometimes every year, sometimes only once or twice within the project – depending on site requirements. Never before in modern times, such a large area of peat meadows had been returned to good habitat quality.

## Arranging for financial support

One of the key challenges of the LIFE Project was to make sure that solutions tested within the project on the project sites can be rolled out to all other Aquatic Warbler sites that need management, and that this management can be sustained beyond the end of the project.

In the short term, this is only possible through public financial support for extensive farming techniques suitable for Aquatic Warblers habitats. After Poland's accession to the European Union, this support became possible in the form of so-called agri-environment schemes paid out of the EU's agriculture budget. Our project team worked with the Polish government to ensure that from 2009 onwards a special Aquatic Warbler package together with a small range of packages suitable for potential Aquatic Warbler habitats was made available to Polish farmers. Under these attractive schemes farmers are paid to resume extensive management on areas they had previously given up, or to reduce the intensity of land use, where they had previously tried to increase production.

OTOP and all project partners intensively promoted these schemes on all project sites. Thanks to this, we could ensure that the management measures started within the project will be continued beyond the project on all project sites for at least as long as this support will be available.

Currently, we are working with the European Commission and the Polish government to further improve these schemes for the period from 2014 onwards.



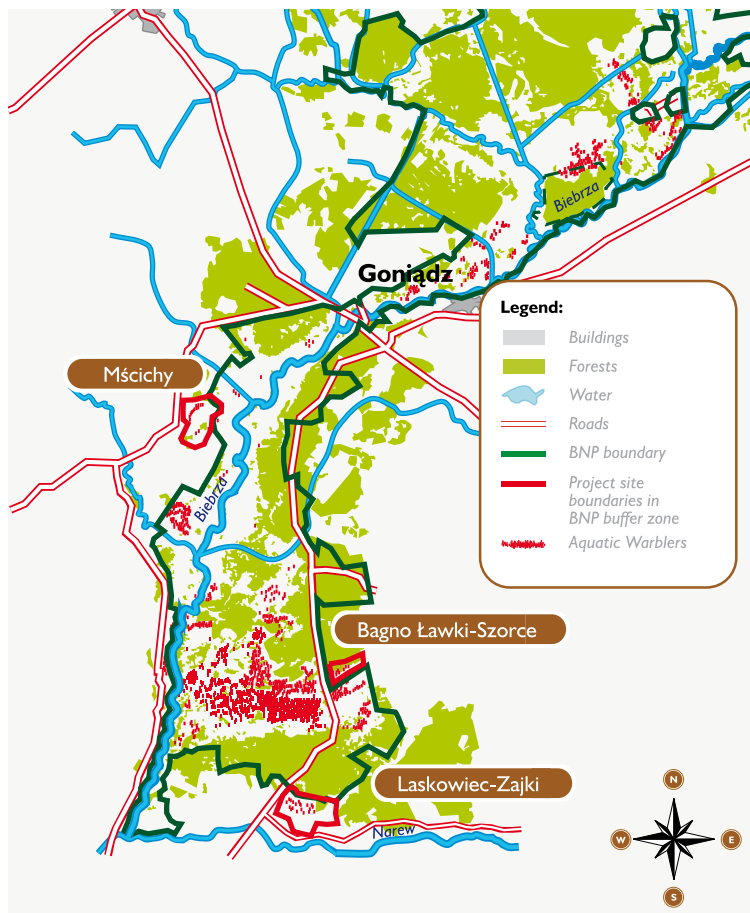
Leaflet promoting the agri-environmental package for Aquatic Warbler.



Consultation with land owners.  
Photo Geoff Welch.



## Making land available for conservation work



Distribution of Aquatic Warblers in the southern basin of the Biebrza Valley and location of private nature reserves managed by OTOP and private farmers.

The necessary conservation knowledge, mowing techniques and funding are not sufficient to ensure suitable habitat management, if the owners of the land are not interested in this work. Therefore, it was important to make land with current or potential Aquatic Warbler habitat available for conservation work.

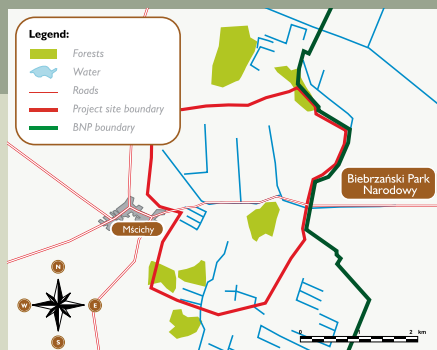
The first step was to encourage the owners to take up the new agri-environment packages and to manage the land themselves according to the needs of the species and its habitat. Where this failed, we offered to buy the land from private owners in order to manage it ourselves. This way, 1,000 ha in about 500 parcels have been purchased within the project: 650 ha by the Biebrza National

Park administration within the park itself, and 350 ha by OTOP just outside the park's boundaries. Here, three new private nature reserves, managed by OTOP and local farmers were created near to the national park: Ławki-Szorce, Mścichy and Laskowiec-Zajki.

At the same time, national parks did not have the capacity to manage the large areas of fen mires on state-owned land within their borders. Encouraged by the LIFE Project, they therefore decided to lease out valuable nature areas to private farmers and enterprises under agreements that guarantee the benefit for all the rare species on the site, so that these farmers were able to manage this land with agri-environment support. This solution has been applied on over 10,000 ha in the Biebrza National Park and on 400 ha in the Wolin National Park.



## Mscichy nature reserve



Mscichy reserve map.

Mscichy is an area of over 400 ha of wet meadows at the western bank of the Biebrza River, and is located between Mscichy village and a viewing tower at the river itself. It consists of hay meadows and grazed pastures. Many parcels used to be abandoned due to difficult mowing conditions and the low quality of hay. Therefore they have been purchased by OTOP, and thanks to that could be managed again.

In 2011, 128 singing Aquatic Warblers were counted there, after just 25 at the beginning of the project.

The best way to see the birds at this reserve is from the track in the middle of the site, leading from the village to the river. While looking out for Aquatic Warblers, you may also spot Citrine Wagtails, Black-tailed Godwits or even Great Snipes.

## Ensuring ongoing management in the long term

In the medium term, suitable agri-environment schemes will be able to ensure the continuation of fen mire habitat management started within this project. But we want to look further ahead, being aware that these schemes may not always exist in their current form. We need land use systems that are economically attractive, or at least require only small funds to create incentives or cover costs.

We have therefore reviewed the option of controlled vegetation burning as a traditional cheap management tool to keep fen habitats open. While uncontrolled fires burning at the wrong time or unsuitable conditions can cause havoc to a site and its breeding birds and even burn the peat layer, controlled fires set in late autumn or winter over a layer of water, snow or ice can be very beneficial. However, especially in nutrient-rich sites it will not be sufficient as the only management tool, as burning encourages vigorous re-growth.

In Poland, this form of management is currently illegal, while in other countries, like Germany, it is possible after obtaining a special permission. For the time, when agri-environment support diminishes, we therefore encourage the Polish government to allow for controlled burning as a cost-effective tool in special cases, without lifting the overall ban for uncontrolled burning.

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Mscichy.  
Photo Lars Lachmann.



Controlled burning.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Biomass briquettes.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Briquetting facility.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*

Another, even more interesting approach is to look for alternative economic uses for the large amounts of low-quality hay, that are arising from mowing management on Aquatic Warbler habitats, which initially was only seen as a waste product incurring additional costs. The traditional use as fodder and bedding for cattle has become obsolete with overall decreasing numbers of cattle and the general switch from hardy breeds to high-productive ones that would not take this hay any more.

Within the project we commissioned a study to review several types of alternative biomass uses, like production of compost for gardening or production of biogas or solid fuels for energetic purposes. The production of pellets or briquettes as carbon-neutral and climate-friendly heating fuels turned out to be the most suitable use for our biomass from late mowing of wet sites. It also has the advantage that the technique of briquetting is well developed and only needs to be brought to the Aquatic Warbler sites. Depending on overall economic conditions, the production and sale of such biomass products will not only contribute to climate protection, but also to a part or all the costs of habitat management.

OTOP is currently implementing this approach within a follow-up project, and other land users are testing similar alternative biomass uses to ensure sustainable habitat management in the future.

Volunteers counting Aquatic Warblers.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



## SHOWING THAT IT WORKS

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Implementing conservation work on such a large scale, we need to make sure that the solutions employed do indeed achieve their aim, i.e. to an increase in good fen mire habitat and therefore in the population of Aquatic Warblers and the species that go with it.

When comparing the habitat quality before and after the project of the areas we have managed during the project with the models of ideal habitat that we created both for the Pomeranian Aquatic Warbler population and for the eastern Polish population, we can state that the very large majority of areas has improved considerably. Dense reed stands have become weaker and lower, bush overgrowth and thick litter layers of dead material have disappeared.

However, such a clear trend can not yet be made out in the overall Aquatic Warbler population figures. With the available monitoring techniques it is impossible to detect a statistically significant increase within just a few years from starting the management. We are waiting for the coming years to get a clear answer to this question.

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The Polish population seems stable between 3,200 and 3,600 singing males, of these about 2,500 in the Biebrza Valley. Unfortunately, the situation looks still very worrying for the isolated Pomeranian population: Here numbers have continued to decline – albeit slower - during the project period, from around 80 in 2003 to just around 55 singing males in 2011, with the species disappearing from its last site in Germany. There may just not be enough birds left to make use of the large areas of improved habitat in this area.

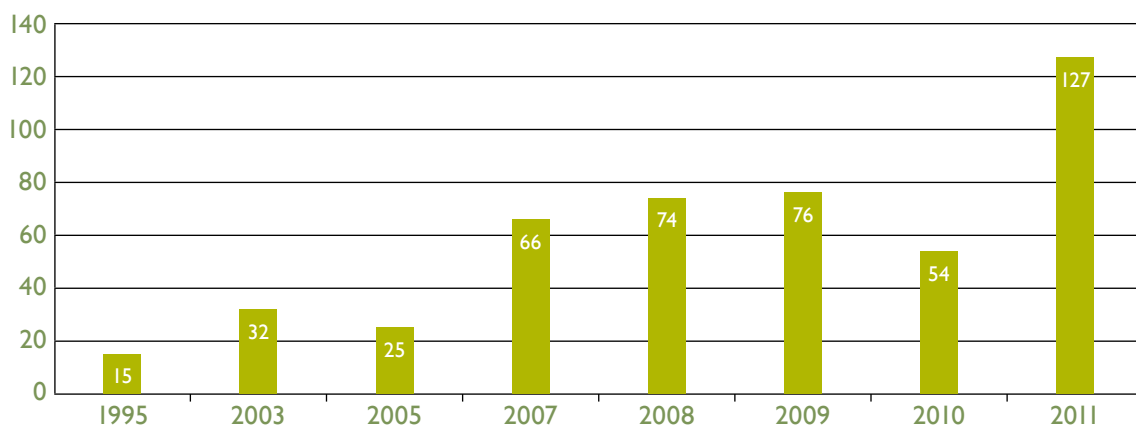


Aquatic Warbler distribution at Bagno Lawki fen mire.

Things look much clearer if concentrating only on the areas managed within the project: In the so-called Bagno Lawki mire, the core area within the Biebrza Valley, Aquatic Warblers numbers have increased by 20% (almost 200 singing males) between 2005 and 2010 where management has been implemented, but stayed stable, where nothing was done. Altogether 336 ha of restored habitat has been re-occupied by the species at this site.

Numbers are also very promising for the new OTOP reserves in the buffer zone of the Biebrza National Park. Between 2005 and 2011, numbers of singing males increased from 5 to 21 in Lawki-Szorce and from 25 to 128 in Mscichy.

#### Development of Aquatic Warbler numbers at Mscichy.



Besides Aquatic Warblers, the most notable effect of the large-scale management was the return of large numbers of meadow-breeding waders to the mown areas, especially in the Biebrza National Park. Here, it was even possible to record the first breeding occurrences in Poland since 10 years for Wood Sandpipers and Jack Snipes.



# EXPLAINING WHY



Pupils during a lesson on Aquatic Warblers.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*



Award-winning entry of  
a school art contest.



One of the project information boards.  
*Photo Lars Lachmann.*

To achieve sustainable conservation results, it is important to excite people for the conservation of fen mires and their species, to explain why this is necessary and what is in it for themselves.

Excitement comes quickly, once we are able to show the species during visits in the field or on our beautiful project video, or especially, if we get people to become active as volunteers to count the birds or help with the management.

We help people realise, that the decline of Aquatic Warblers is not a product of chance, but a direct result of human action, while it is all in our hands to stop and revert this decline.

We also show up that the conservation of the species and its habitat can be an economic chance for rural areas. Large conservation projects like this LIFE Project bring funds directly into the community, creating local employment. Intact nature, with Aquatic Warblers as one of the most sought-after target species draws large numbers of nature tourists from Poland and abroad. Good that the project has made it so much easier to see them. Managing fen mires for conservation has also turned into a veritable business for a good number of land owners and leaseholders benefiting currently from agri-environment programmes, and experimenting with the development of business based on the biomass harvested from these sites.

With so much to be had from Aquatic Warbler conservation, the parish of Trzcianne, which is home to the majority of Biebrza's Aquatic Warblers, has already declared itself officially the "Land of the Aquatic Warbler".

Find out more about the project on [www.wodniczka.pl](http://www.wodniczka.pl) or watch the project video on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (Polish version only, search for "ochrona wodniczki". To obtain an English or German version, please contact the OTOP office).



Volunteers researching the breeding productivity of Aquatic Warblers.  
*Photo Ulla Kail.*



Female feeding young.  
*Photo Zymantas Morkvenas.*

# MOVING FORWARD

One project alone cannot save a species, but it can make a beginning. Whether we can save the Aquatic Warbler and even increase their numbers, depends on further action and cooperation of local farmers, conservation authorities and private organisations with the support of the wider public that appreciates these efforts.

The Polish and the Brandenburg Aquatic Warbler Species Action Plans and the local site management plans need to be implemented. One element of this is the development of biomass use for energetic purposes that could ensure future financing for ongoing management. OTOP is already implementing another project with this aim. In the mean time, the Polish government needs to ensure the continuation and further improvement of the successful agri-environment schemes that help fen mires.

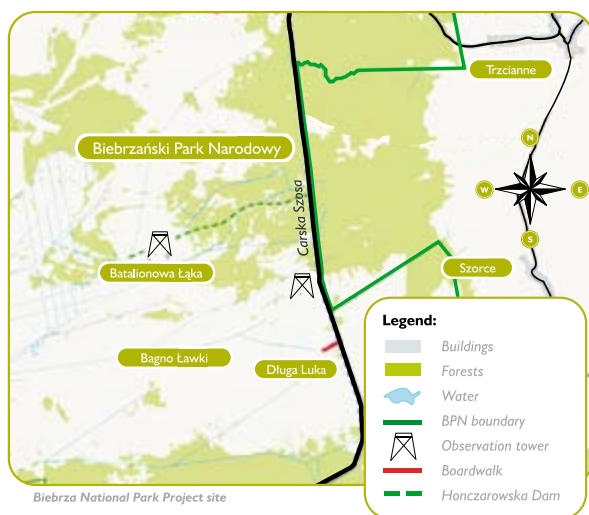
Regular monitoring will be continued to observe the effects of the work on Aquatic Warblers. But in order to significantly increase the population of Aquatic Warblers and to remove the tag “globally threatened” from the species, it will not be enough only to improve existing breeding sites. It is necessary to restore long-lost sites, mires drained for peat extraction or agriculture, which may have now lost the economic importance they had when freshly drained.

We also need to observe the development of the Pomeranian population. Should it continue to decline despite of good habitat available, it might need to be considered to strengthen this population with individuals derived from the stronger eastern population.

# WHERE TO GO TO SEE AQUATIC WARBLERS?



Boardwalk at Długa Luka.  
Photo Lars Lachmann.



How to get to Długa Luka.

Once you are there, why not visit OTOP's new reserves at Laskowiec-Zajki (with a new observation tower and a hide), and at Mscichy.

In Northwest-Poland, your best chance to see the species is a visit to OTOP's Karsiborska Kepa reserve near Swinoujście. A 7 km round tour leads you past the Aquatic Warbler habitats as well as to a hide and an observation tower.

Thanks to the LIFE Project, it has become easy to spot Aquatic Warblers in Poland. Simply take a day off to visit the world's best Aquatic Warbler observation point: the 400 m long "Długa luka" boardwalk into the fen mire of Bagnó Ławki in the Biebrza Valley, built within the project. Here, you are guaranteed to see the species any time between May and July. Best are the evening hours, when you can hear more than 10 singing males at the same time.



LIFE PROJECT  
CONSERVING  
AQUATIC  
WARBLERS  
IN POLAND  
AND GERMANY



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