

Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler



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Aquatic Warbler Flyway Newsletter

Published biannually by the Secretariat of the Convention on Migrating Species (CMS)
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Publication of the Newsletter is financially supported by:

MICHAEL OTTO
STIFTUNG



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Wandsbeker Strasse 3-7
22179 Hamburg, Germany

<http://www.michaelottostiftung.de>

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with the support from:



Royal Society for the Protection
of Birds (RSPB)

<http://www.rspb.org.uk>



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Photo acknowledgement

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Introduction

One of the key objectives of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) is to promote coordinated conservation actions, through international cooperation, for migratory species travelling across their range. The primary tools for doing this are CMS's suite of instruments: action plans, memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and formal Agreements.

To date, seven MoUs and six Agreements are in place around the world. They are tangible manifestations of the international community's commitment to migratory species' conservation through a migratory range approach.

Traditionally, the membership of CMS MoUs and Agreements has maintained contact through periodic Range State meetings organised by the respective secretariats every few years. While these meetings continue to be a good way to keep a formal Agreement under review, the CMS Secretariat has recognised for many years that other means are needed for our more flexible MoUs in order to maintain the Range States' focus, build a sense of community between the various governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations and individual experts working to conserve the species, promote conservation actions on-the-ground and share information across the species' migratory range.

Through the generosity of the Michael Otto Foundation in Germany, and the work of BirdLife International, CMS has been presented with the unique opportunity to create a strong foundation to implement its latest instrument: the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*). Mr. Viktor Fenchuk was hired in April 2004 by BirdLife International as the BirdLife/CMS International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer, in consultation with the CMS Secretariat and with the financial support of the Michael Otto Foundation.

Mr. Fenchuk will work from his office with the BirdLife Partner APB in Belarus with Mr. Lyle Glowka, the CMS

Agreements Officer, in Bonn, to support the MoU's implementation. I am very pleased to introduce one of Viktor's first projects which is this first edition of the Aquatic Warbler Flyway Newsletter that you are reading.

CMS and BirdLife International believe that the newsletter will help to facilitate information exchange among the Range States and the greater Aquatic Warbler conservation community during the interim period between regular Range State meetings, while it builds awareness that this very small bird moves cyclically along its flyway across a vast migratory range that encompasses parts of Africa and Western, Central and Eastern Europe.

As you will read, the MoU's Signatories, along with a number of organisations and experts, have been working actively across the flyway since the MoU's entry into effect on 30 April 2003. For example, with the financial support of the British Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Darwin Initiative we are moving closer to identifying the Aquatic Warbler's wintering grounds in the Sahelian Zone of Africa - one of the least studied but potentially most critical areas for the species' survival.

The Aquatic Warbler MoU got off to a very strong start in Minsk, Belarus when the competent authorities of nine Range States signed it along with two collaborating organisations.

The CMS Secretariat is very pleased to welcome the Republic of Poland as the latest MoU signatory. It signed the MoU on 13 July 2004. You will read in this edition that important conservation actions at Biebrza in Poland have helped to shore-up the Biebrza population and it is now on the rise.

The MoU remains open for signature. We very much hope that the competent authorities of several Range States – including Belgium, France, Netherlands and the Russian Federation - will sign soon. In the run-up to the CMS Conference of the Parties in November 2005, I would like to invite these countries to indicate to the CMS Secretariat their willingness to sign the MoU so the full complement of Range States is represented.

With the entry on duty of the BirdLife/CMS International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer, and the publication of the first edition of the Aquatic Warbler Flyway Newsletter, 2005 looks to be a bright year for the Aquatic Warbler - Europe's most threatened songbird. Best wishes for many conservation successes.

Robert Hepworth
Acting Executive Secretary
Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)



Signing of the Memorandum

Aquatic Warbler Memorandum of Understanding Signed

An intergovernmental meeting was held in Minsk, Belarus, in April 2003, to negotiate and adopt a “Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan Concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler” under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species.

Conservationists see this as a huge milestone in the protection of this globally threatened bird and its habitat.

Representatives of governments and non-governmental organisations in 13 European and African countries met in Minsk to conceive a conservation strategy for the Aquatic Warbler - a little brown bird, migrating up to twelve thousand kilometres from Eastern Europe to sub-saharan Africa.

Over half of the world population of this species is breeding and spending part of the year in the marshes and fen mires of Belarus. The Aquatic Warbler is also an important component of global biological diversity which is, and will remain, the living basis for humans. It is an alarming indicator for the state of the environment of a vast area covering two continents, since the number of birds and their habitats have been shrinking in recent decades.

The meeting was hosted and chaired by the Belarussian Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Leonty I. Khoruzhik, in cooperation with the CMS Secretariat, BirdLife International, Akhova Ptushak Belarusi (APB – the BirdLife

International Partner in Belarus), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK) and the United Nations Development Programme. The meeting finalised a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which was signed by delegates on Wednesday, 30 April.

The MoU expresses countries’ intentions to identify, protect and manage sites where Aquatic Warblers breed (central Europe and Western Siberia), rest while migrating (western Europe) or spend the winter (central west Africa). Annexed to the Memorandum is a detailed Action Plan which summarises the distribution, biology and threat status of the Aquatic Warbler, and describes precise actions to be taken by relevant countries.

What Does It Mean to Have Signed the MoU?

The Memorandum of Understanding is not considered a legally binding agreement, although some of the Range States represented expressed their preference for this. It is concluded as an agreement under CMS Article IV, paragraph 4, which encourages Parties to conclude agreements – including legally non-binding administrative agreements – in respect of any population of migratory species.

Acknowledging their shared responsibility for the conservation of this endangered species and deciding to work together to improve the conservation status of the Aquatic Warbler throughout its breeding, migrating and wintering range, the signatory States, in a spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation, will individually or collectively strive to:

- Provide strict protection for the Aquatic Warbler, identify and conserve the wetland habitats essential for its survival;
- Appoint national contact points to facilitate contacts with other signatory States and the MoU secretariat;
- Facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical and legal information
- Develop conservation and research projects; and
- Implement in their respective countries the provisions of the Action Plan annexed to the MoU as a basis for conserving all populations of the species.

The Memorandum of Understanding came into effect immediately on 30 April 2004 after nine signatures were received. It will remain open for signature indefinitely subject to the right of any signatory to terminate its participation by providing a written notice to all of the other signatories.

MoU List of Signatory States

(as of January 15, 2005)

Range State	MoU signed	National contact point	Postal Address	Contact telephone and email
Belarus	30.04.2003	Mr. Vitaly Korenchuk	Reserves Department Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus 10 Kollektornaja str., Minsk 220048 Belarus	Tel. [+ 375 17] 2206420 Fax [+ 375 17] 2204771 Email: vkorenchuk@tut.by
Belgium				
Bulgaria	30.04.2003	Dr. Pavel Hristov Zehtinjiev	Biological Station Kalimok Institute of Zoology Bulgarian Academy of Sciences 1, Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd Sofia 1000 Bulgaria	Tel. [+ 369 2] 9885115 Fax. n/a Email: kalimok@einet.bg
France				
Germany	30.04.2003	Dr. Torsten Langgemach	Staatliche Vogelschutzwarte Buckow Landesumweltamt Brandenburg Dorfstrasse 34 17415 Buckow Germany	Tel. [+ 49] 33878 60257 Fax. [+49] 33878 60600 Email: torsten.langgemach@lua.brandenburg.de
Hungary	30.04.2003	Mr. András Schmidt	Department for Nature Conservation Ministry of the Environment Költő u. 21 1121 Budapest Hungary	Tel. [+ 36 1] 3911749 Fax. [+ 36 1] 3911785 Email: schmidt@mail.kvvm.hu
Latvia	30.04.2003	Mr. Martins Kalnins	Species and Habitat Division Nature Protection Board Eksporta Str. 5 Riga, LV-1010 Latvia	Tel. [+ 371] 7509764 Fax. [+ 371] 7509544 Email: schmidt@mail.kvvm.hu
Lithuania	30.04.2003			
The Netherlands				
Poland	13.07.2004			
Russian Federation				
Senegal	30.04.2003			
Spain	30.04.2003	Mr. Juan Jose Areces Maqueda	Subdirección de Vida Silvestre. Dirección General para la Biodiversidad Ministerio de Medio Ambiente Gran Vía de San Francisco 4 28005 Madrid Spain	Tel. [+34 91] 5964933 Fax. [+34 91] 5964809 Email: jareces@mma.es
Ukraine	25.05.2003			
United Kingdom	30.04.2003			

Dr. Alexander Kozulin Receives Prestigious Marsh Award

Dr. Alexander Kozulin, scientific director of APB, the BirdLife partner in Belarus, has been awarded the Marsh Trust accolade for his work to save the fen mires of Belarus, home to the core mainland European population of the Aquatic Warbler.

In the 20th Century, most wetlands with breeding Aquatic Warblers were drained, causing significant problems for the species. However, recent conservation work, led by Dr Kozulin, offers a brighter future thanks to successful and ongoing efforts to save the fen mires of Belarus that they rely on.

The RSPB has instigated and funded much of the current research and conservation work for the Aquatic Warbler. RSPB's Alistair Gammell sees the RSPB as part of the future for Aquatic Warblers: "The RSPB has been working with many partners, including the Darwin Initiative, to support the work of Dr Kozulin. As well as supporting this vital work in Belarus, we will be funding and carrying out projects that aim to discover more about the wintering sites of these elusive birds".

Dr. Kozulin remains focused and optimistic: "The story of the Aquatic Warbler is a nice example of how



Aleksander Kozulin (right) receives the award from Brian Marsh

much can be achieved when people from different countries and organisations join together with one noble goal: to protect nature".

Based on: www.rspb.org.uk

International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer Appointed

Following efforts of RSPB, the BirdLife partner in the UK, the Otto Foundation has supported the position of International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer. The new position will be based with APB – the BirdLife partner in Belarus and also supported locally by UNDP Belarus.

The main task of the newly appointed officer is to work on behalf of the CMS Secretariat to bring life to the "Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of the Aquatic Warbler", under the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

The International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer will function on behalf of the CMS Secretariat with regard to a number of tasks including the coordination of activities to support the implementation of the Aquatic Warbler MoU. Examples of these activities include corresponding

with all signatory Range States regarding implementation of the international action plan for the conservation of the species, national reporting, fundraising for and organising international conferences and support to develop national and international projects to conserve the Aquatic Warbler.

On April 1, 2004, Viktor Fenchuk from Belarus was appointed to the position of the International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer and can be contacted at the following addresses:

Viktor Fenchuk
BirdLife/CMS International Aquatic Warbler
Conservation Officer
Akhova Ptushak Belarusi (APB-BirdLife Belarus)
P.O.Box 306, Minsk, 220050 BELARUS
Tel + 375 17 2808093
Email: fenchuk@tut.by

Aquatic Warbler Website Launched

Monitoring Aquatic Warbler has become much easier with the launch of the Aquatic Warbler website www.aquaticwarbler.net. The site is supported by RSPB, the BirdLife partner in the UK and maintained by the Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team (AWCT).

The website presents a wide range of information and highlights main aspects of ecology, distribution and research of this endangered species. It is designed as a two-level resource centre providing both general information for a broad range of interested people as well as specialized materials for professional ornithologists.

Furthermore, the site acts as the resource page for AWCT members. Detailed AWCT Site Data Sheets provide updated information about all the Aquatic Warbler breeding sites across Europe and contain extensive data on habitat and bird community with several years of Aquatic Warbler monitoring results at each of the sites. The website also hosts an extensive



library of Aquatic Warbler documentation: official reports of previously implemented projects, list of currently running activities, contact list of AWCT members.

Aquatic Warbler Conservation Projects

DNA and Feather Sampling of the Hungarian Aquatic Warbler Population

From 15 – 20 May 2004 the AWCT held its annual field meeting in Hungary. The meeting was targeted to study Aquatic Warbler habitats in the Hortobágy Puszta (Hortobágy National Park), the only breeding site of the Aquatic Warbler in Hungary.

The most important task of the field meeting was to collect feather samples for DNA and stable isotope analyses. Since the previous AWCT meeting in Lithuania in June 2003, when samples from the Lithuanian population were taken, today the Hungarian population was the very last remaining sub-population which is not sampled yet, and for which there is no clear picture about relationships to other populations, migration routes and wintering grounds.

In order to protect the species and save its full genetic variability as well as its wintering grounds, it is of essential importance to know which other population the Hungarian population is related to, where the migration routes are and where it is wintering. This could be clarified by taking feather samples from 10-15 birds. Since it is satisfactory to take samples only from adult males, there was no danger to disturb or threaten any nests or broods.

The stable isotope analysis will be performed by Debbie Pain (RSPB, UK), the DNA analysis will be done by Benedikt Giessing (Germany).

*For more information contact: Martin Flade, AWCT
[Martin.Flade@lua.brandenburg.de]*

Siberian Population of the Aquatic Warbler Maybe Going Extinct

Four Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team expeditions to Western Siberia in 1999-2002 could not confirm the existence of a big Western Siberian population of the Aquatic Warbler which was thought to exist earlier. All expeditions were made possible thanks to generous support to Aquatic Warbler conservation initiatives by Michael Otto Foundation.

Despite the availability of large areas of suitable fen mires, there were only a few birds found at three breeding sites. This confirms the theory that a small breeding population of the Aquatic Warbler of nomadic character exists in Western Siberia, which is much smaller than the habitat capacity. The Aquatic Warbler was not the only

species which showed this pattern in the surveyed regions. Also, Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* and Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* occurred with only very few birds in vast areas of suitable habitat.

The total West Siberian population of the Aquatic Warbler is estimated at 50-500 males at maximum, and it is believed that this is the last remnant of a former large population, now going extinct. The population is probably too isolated and small to survive in this region of sub-optimal climate at a great distance from the probable wintering sites.

For more information contact: Martin Flade, AWCT
[Martin.Flade@lua.brandenburg.de]



Participants of the 4th expedition to Siberia before boarding the helicopter. From left to right: Pilot 1 (Irtys Avia Trans, Russia), Eugeny Peshkov (driver, Russia), Pilot 2 (Russia), Kyrill Peshkov (driver, Russia), Pilot 3 (Russia), Mikhail Kalyakin (Russia), Zsolt Vegvary (Hungary), Arkady Skuratovich (Belarus), Susanne Winter (Germany), Martin Flade (Germany), Torsten Ryslavý (Germany, behind Martin), Jaroslav Krogulec (Poland), Hans-Guenther Bauer (Germany, behind Jaroslav), Benedikt Giessing (Germany), Sebastian Koerner (Germany), Janusz Kloskiwski (Poland), Dmitry Dubovik (Belarus), Alexander Kozulin (Belarus).

June 2002.

Aquatic Warbler Conservation Projects

Using Stable Isotopes to Find Aquatic Warbler Wintering Grounds

Despite remarkable progress that has been made over the last decade in both research and conservation of Aquatic Warbler breeding grounds, the wintering territories of the species still remain unknown. This poses a serious threat to the survival of the Aquatic Warbler, as all the measures that are being taken now to conserve the breeding sites and expand breeding population of the Aquatic Warbler may be destroyed by adverse conditions at the species' wintering grounds.

Addressing this issue, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in cooperation with conservation organisations in several West African Countries, including the Ghana Wildlife Society, Naturama in Burkina Faso and AMCFE in Mali have set up a project aiming to narrow down the potential Aquatic Warbler wintering areas in West Africa.

The research project was financially supported by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) of the UK government, which, together with support through Darwin Initiative, has already provided substantial support to a number of Aquatic Warbler conservation initiatives.

The project team is using isotopic analysis of the feathers of a surrogate species, Winding Cisticola. The Winding Cisticola is an African endemic warbler, common and resident throughout many wetlands in sub-Saharan Africa. It occupies wetland habitats and is an

invertebrate feeder, and is similar to Aquatic Warbler in these respects. It is also resident and sedentary, common and widespread.

The research will help identify the likely areas where the Aquatic Warbler winters and allow key areas to be identified so that wintering ground conservation measures can be instituted as necessary as part of the Action Plan annexed to the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Aquatic Warbler.

Stable isotope ratios vary geographically with a range of biogeochemical factors and isotope profiles in organisms reflect those in their food and environment. A preliminary comparison of Aquatic Warbler and Winding Cisticola isotope profiles suggests that Aquatic Warbler feathers may possibly have been grown in the Niger floodplain belt of the Sahelian zone across Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger etc. from about 13-20°N. This result does, however, remain tentative, due to the small number of sites sampled for Winding Cisticola. Additional samples from winding cisticola are required (collected earlier in the season). Samples have already been collected from Nigeria (from another project) are currently being analysed; additional sample collection is planned in Senegal in 2005.

The results of this project will be written up for publication in 2005/2006 when additional results are available.

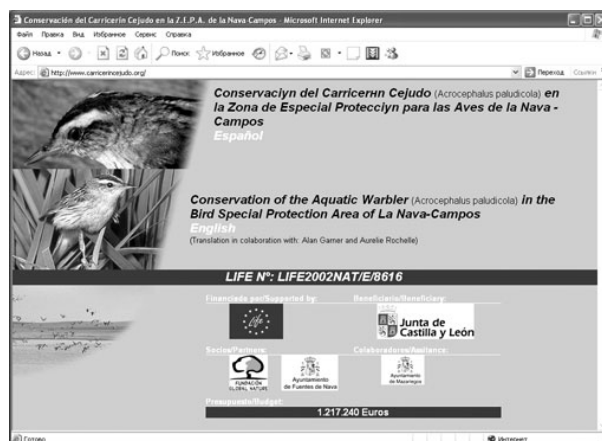
*For more information contact: Lars Lachmann,
RSPB [Lars.Lachmann@rspb.org.uk]*

Aquatic Warbler on the Web

La Nava (Spain) is a site of international importance for supporting migrating Aquatic Warblers. For several years already, a LIFE project on Aquatic Warbler conservation is being implemented at La Nava.

The project web-site provides comprehensive information about conservation significance of the site and site and species related work which is conducted in frames of the LIFE project. The site is located at:

<http://www.carricerincejudo.org>



BELARUS

An engineering project on optimization of hydrological regime of *Zvanets* reserve was developed and implemented in the framework of the project “*Realization of first range activities of management plans of key mires*”. This is a follow up of a three year management plan development project for these sites funded by the Darwin Initiative (1999-2002). The project is implemented by APB, the BirdLife partner in Belarus and supported by the Otto Foundation, Darwin Initiative, UNDP Belarus and Ministry for natural resources and environmental protection of Belarus.

The *Zvanets* mire, the largest Aquatic Warbler breeding site, holds almost 25% of the world population of the species. An unnatural water regime on the mire is stimulating plant successions which result in an increase of projective cover of reeds in flooded areas or advance of bushes and trees on the drained areas, mineral islands and periphery of the mire thus creating unfavourable conditions for the Aquatic Warbler.

As part of the project, 7 dams were constructed on the main melioration canals located in and around the mire in order to keep the water at the optimal level. Also, administration structures were established at *Zvanets* and *Sporava* reserves to ensure better coordination of conservation activities at the local level.

Implementation of the project addresses a number of conservation priorities regarding policy and legislative issues, species and habitat protection, monitoring as well as research and public awareness raising as identified in the Aquatic Warbler Action Plan annexed to the MoU.

On-going monitoring of Aquatic Warbler populations was conducted at 6 key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in Belarus. Breeding successes was monitored at 3 key breeding sites.

For more information contact: Alexander Kozulin, APB [kozulin@biobel.bas-net.by]



One of the dams at *Zvanets*

UKRAINE

Implementation of the project “Monitoring number and main parameters of the Aquatic Warbler key habitats in Ukraine in 2004” (run by USPB, the BirdLife partner in Ukraine and supported by RSPB) provided information on the state of Ukrainian population of the Aquatic Warbler.

Project team led by Dr. Anatoly Poluda continued long-term monitoring of the Aquatic Warbler at 6 main species’ breeding sites in Ukraine covering 2 sites of Desna-Dnieper population and 4 sites of Pripjat population. Also, a number of potential Aquatic Warbler breeding sites were surveyed.

The results of the surveys showed that Ukrainian population of the Aquatic Warbler has restored its numbers following a decline in 2003 due to unfavourable conditions at the Ukraine’s largest breeding sites located in the floodplain of Pripjat river.

A further increase in numbers of the Ukrainian population of the Aquatic Warbler is also expected because of the

discovery of two new breeding sites of the Aquatic Warbler in Pripjat. These sites are to be surveyed thoroughly in 2005.

Based on the results of the monitoring, the total Ukrainian population of the Aquatic Warbler is now estimated at 3105-3550 vocalizing males, with 2230-2710 and 3100-3540 vocalizing males in 2002 and 2003 respectively.

Realization of Aquatic Warbler monitoring work in six key sites and continuation of the national survey to clarify distribution and numbers of the Aquatic Warbler in the regions that have not yet been adequately surveyed are high priority conservation actions recommended for implementation in the Ukraine by the Aquatic Warbler Action Plan annexed to the MoU. This work will establish grounds for further implementation of Aquatic Warbler conservation work in Ukraine.

For more information contact: Anatolij Poluda, USPB [utop@iptelecom.net.ua]

POLAND

During spring and summer 2003, OTOPI, the BirdLife partner in Poland, undertook an all-Poland survey on the Aquatic Warbler distribution, habitat conditions and the threats at breeding sites as identified in the Aquatic Warbler Action Plan recommendations for Poland. The survey was generously supported by the RMC group. All known, historical and potential Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in Poland were visited by teams of specialists and experienced volunteers.

Comparison of the results of the survey with the previous all-Poland Aquatic Warbler counts (conducted by OTOPI in 1995-1997) showed a general decline in the number of individuals and habitats occupied at most of the small breeding sites.

The most worrying changes were observed at the isolated population in Western Pomerania, where the population has decreased three times compared to 1995-1997 counts. The Western Pomerania population of the Aquatic Warbler is considered ecologically and genetically isolated from the main breeding population of the Aquatic Warbler and therefore is seen especially valuable for conservation of genetic diversity of the species.

The numbers of singing males in the western population have dropped from about 250 in 1995-1997 to as little as 75 in 2003. Only four Pomeranian sites in Poland remained occupied. German data suggests that in 2003 there was only one breeding female among seven singing males left at the only remaining German site.

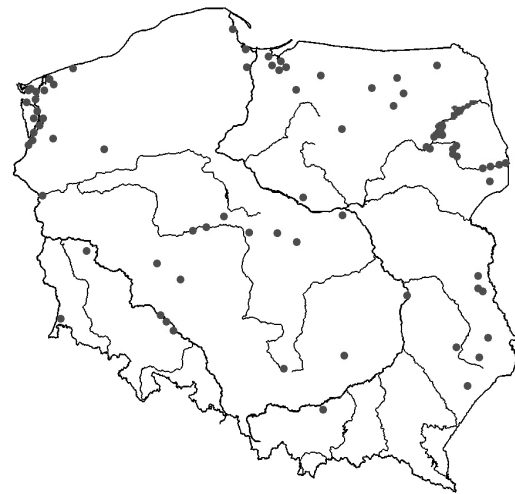
On the other hand, the main Aquatic Warbler population at the core breeding sites at Biebrza marshes and Lublin Polessie showed an increase in numbers, balancing up for the decrease of the Aquatic Warbler population elsewhere in Poland.

On the whole, the total Aquatic Warbler population in Poland was estimated at 3386-3494 vocalizing males which is an increase of 400 males in comparison to 1995-1997 counts.

OTOPI has submitted a LIFE application together with 6 partner organisations in November 2004, that covers all Polish breeding sites in Pomerania, the core of the Biebrza population and a potential/former breeding site in the German Land of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

*For more information contact: Aleksandra
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Aquatic Warbler Distribution in Poland



a) historical sites



b) OTOPI 1997 census



c) OTOPI 2003 census

MoU Implementation Reporting and the First Meeting of the Range States

According to the Provision 6 of the MoU, the Signatory States should report at least every two years, by 31 March of the respective year, on implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding in each of the respective countries. The MoU Secretariat expects to receive the first progress reports of the Signatory States on the state of implementation of the Memorandum by 31 March 2005.

The Minsk Declaration appealed to all Range State authorities and co-operating organisations to take steps to make it possible for the first meeting under the auspices of the Memorandum of Understanding to take place no later than three years after the Memorandum's entry into effect. The First Meeting of MoU Signatories is tentatively planned for 2006. The CMS Secretariat will solicit offers from potential host countries of the First Meeting.

For more information contact: Lyle Glowka, CMS [lglowka@cms.int]

MoU National Contact Point Nomination

Paragraph 5 of the MoU requests signatories to designate a competent authority to serve as a contact point and to communicate without delay the name and contact details of this authority to the CMS Secretariat.

A letter with a nomination form attaches has been sent to the all Aquatic Warbler MoU Signatory States. To date, only 6 Signatory States has nominated their National Contact Points and returned nomination forms to the Secretariat.

The CMS Secretariat would like to ask National Competent Authorities which has not yet nominated MoU National Contact Points to do as soon as possible to ensure efficient coordination of activities for MoU implementation.

BirdLife Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team (AWCT) member-list (2004)

Name, institution	Postal address	Telephone, fax, e-mail
Belarus		
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