Aquatic Warbler Conservation in Eastern Poland

INTRODUCTION



Dariusz Gatkowski

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The next year of implementation of Aquatic Warbler programme of Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP) brought many novelties. On November 2011 the "Conserving Acrocephalus paludicola in Poland and Germany" project was completed. Seven years of project implementation was a huge organizational and financial effort for Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP) which turn into big success. Now, thanks to the project we know what Aquatic Warblers need and how they react to different management measures, the special machinery was developed, 4,000 ha habitat was improved and more than 10,000 ha are now under regular management and the continuation of active conservation work in all project locations was ensured

OTOP continue conservation actions for Aquatic Warbler, the scale of works is not smaller than in previous years. Next challenges to preserve habitats in good condition were undertaken in a new enterprise called "Biomass use for Aquatic Warblers". This project focuses on habitats where there is 98% Polish and about 24% of the world's population of Aquatic Warbler. This is an enormous challenge and responsibility. We believe that we will succeed and in a few years we will be happy say that the Aquatic Warblers population and area of its habitats increased.

In the newsletter we show OTOPs plans of further implementation of the Aquatic Warbler programme. We describe a lot of news: a new project, a new region of our actions (Lublin), new areas and recently discovered Aquatic Warbler habitats. The reader will have closer look on the equipment used for mowing on the difficult marshy terrain and its evolution and on the OTOPs base, where line for the production of pellets will be set up. In order to not describe only Polish issues, we invite you to read about ACROLA actions in France.

Enjoy the reading!



Biomass use for Aquatic Warblers

The next step in Aquatic Warbler, fen mires and peat meadows conservation

Dariusz Gatkowski



The next step towards conservation and upgrade of fen mires and wet peat meadows is the project "Facilitating Aquatic Warbler (Acrocephalus paludicola) habitat management through sustainable systems of biomass use", financed by LIFE programme (LIFE09 NAT/PL/000260), National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management and Cemex company. The enterprise "Biomass use for Aquatic Warblers" started in October 2010 and bases on the experience of the implementation of "Conserving Acrocephalus paludicola in Poland and Germany" project. To ensure the managements plans of protected biomass compaction under very high pressure, The actions of biomass project are implemented areas are adequate and show optimum use of these products differ from each other mainly in in six Natura 2000 areas (shown on the map).

we cooperate with state Regional Directorates engaged in agricultural activities in areas of high

improve quality of area of suitable habitat for the Aquatic Warbler in Eastern Poland. The degraded problem of biomass (sedge, reed, grass). Due to habitats will be restored and their quality improved by conservation measures - shrub removal used for agriculture. For this reason, a very imporand the first mowing. That measures will cover c. 1,400 ha of field works. Finally, these areas and test innovative systems of Aquatic Warbler will be used in order with the Aquatic Warbler, habitat biomass use. Already now, thanks to and other species protected in Natura 2000 sites the "Aquatic Warbler and Biomass" project, we (other animals, plants), requirements.

Areas where the active conservation measures of the project were performed, and areas where habitat conditions are suitable for Aquatic ducing hav pellets and / or briggettes. Pellet and Warbler should be properly managed and used. the Aquatic Warbler habitat, OTOP will prepare

me, which would include also implementation 5,000 hectares of fen mires.

Aquatic Warbler habitats is no solution to the late mowing and poor crop quality it can't be tant task that we are facing is to create, improve know that the biomass produced in the Chelm Calcareous Marshes can be successfully used for firing cement kilns in Chelm. On other project areas it is planned to test the possibilities of probriquette are fuel material formed as a result of dimensions. This means that something which is



population.

of Aquatic Warbler in Poland and c. 24% of world ding the Aquatic Warbler habitat management. people managing meadows, thanks to Aquatic In addition, we actively participate in drafting Warbler protection programme will become the new agri-environmental scheme, OTOP has a valuable source of renewable energy, without

The diversity is our power. The "Biomass use collected data on the impact of current packages causing additional CO, emissions. Moreover the for Aquatic Warblers" project is linking nature on the habitats of birds and intends to use this income from the use of biomass will provide

Our actions cover areas with 98% of population recommendations to those documents regar- now considered to be waste and hassle for many

continuity of management on most of the project priority areas.

"Aquatic Warbler and Biomass" Project is a very big challenge focusing on habitats of 24% of the global Aquatic Warbler population. The project works not only on the improvement and /or restoration of Aquatic Warbler habitats and other species inhabiting fens and other swamp meadows. The goal of the project is also to

ensure sustainable and appropriate management plans on project priority areas. This objective will be obtained by taking part in drafting the management plans, work on the preparation of a new agri-environmental scheme, and ensuring the profits from processing of biomass for alternative and climate neutral fuel.

Is it possible to protect Aquatic Warbler from extinction? Yes! We strongly believe in achieving

Photos

The Aquatic

- 1. Sawsedge rushes J. Krogulec
- 2. Aquatic Warbler in its natural habitat Z. Morkvenas 5. Black tailed Goodwit J. Krogulec
- 3. Dusky Large Blue C. J. Krogulec

4. Crane – J. Krogulec





this goal. All of our actions will be monitored and measured in the developed monitoring system, including effects of the management on vegetation, Aquatic Warbler counts, characteristics of collected biomass and economic feasibility of biomass processing systems, the results will be annually announced on the project website.

- 6. Fire- bellied Toad J. Krogulec
- 7. Large Copper J. Krogulec



Aquatic Warbler



Mowing by piste bashe



LIFE+ actions in Lublin Region



Lublin Region was in focus of Aquatic Warbler protection since very similar activities in Bagno Bubnow - Aquatic Warbler site within Poleski beginning of OTOP. In 1992 our organization decided to take care of four National Park. OTOP signed an agreement with PPN which established most important bird areas in Poland. One of them was Chelm Calcareous how LIFE+ actions will be included into conservation plan prepared by Marshes – newly discovered (in 1984) Polish Aquatic Warbler breeding site. Park for 2012. As a first step (in 1993) threat analysis and action plan for this area were prepared. Following to this (in 1994) joint project of OTOP, IUCN Poland However some activities started in Poleski NP already in 2011. It was of (as leading partner) and Chelm Province Nature Conservation Officer has been started. Project conservation actions includes: damming of drainage canals, preventing uncontrolled burning, scrub and tree removal and ecological education. In effect, some marshes in Chelm complex were restored (Blota Serebryskie), every year burning was stopped, the most overgrown marshes were cleared (Brzezno) and educational trials and education centre was set up in Brzezno village. The actions were successfully continued by local nature conservation administration – mainly by Chelm Landscape Park. OTOP continued only regular Aquatic Warbler monitoring in Chelm Marshes, Bagno Bubnow (part of Poleski National Park) and Ciesacin Mire. Recently also (2009) OTOP coordinated preparation of Natura 2000 Management Plan for Special Protection Area "Chelm Calcareous Marshes".

Since 2010 a new LIFE+ project held by OTOP started with new conservation activities on all Aquatic Warbler sites in Lublin Region. Concrete conservation actions began there in autumn 2010 on Ciesacin Mire where our project partner FUT Zelent removed 10 ha of bushes, stopping the succession and reducing fragmentation of this small but highly valuable fen. As this area is owned by two private farmers and one plot belongs to Lublin Ornithological Society they already started introducing there agroenvironmental programmes. Therefore they have mown in late summer 2010 half of the plots according to 5.1 Aquatic Warbler package, first time ever using ratrak in Lublin Region marshes. In effect Ciesacin Mire became

course monitoring of Aquatic Warbler. Regional census of Aquatic Warbler is a guite big undertaking. It takes more than one month to cover all four AW sites and to monitor them during first and second brood period. We have started monitoring in Lublin Region beginning with end of May on Chelm Marshes and then Bagno Bubnow and repeating during second brood counts till early July. During consecutive evenings teams of c. 10 persons wearing waders, breast-boots (very high water level this year) and using GPS swept the fens, plot after plot, to obtain detailed picture of number and distribution of Aquatic Warbler. In total more than 30 persons - volunteers and OTOP staff members were involved. Many thanks to them for the effort!

After the monitoring, as we possessed information on number distribution and habitat condition of Aquatic Warbler, we were able to focus our current year actions in right places. In August OTOP together with staff of Chelm Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection visited Chelm Marshes and agreed on mowing of some areas. It was quite a challenge as this year water level in all mires in Poland was exceptionally high (mainly due to heavy rainfall in summer). Additionally nobody have ever mown Cladium mariscus rushes with any machines. So we - or rather our project partner Andrzej Kaliszuk - were pioneers of this venture. In late August first ratrak started to mow Blota Serebryskie and eastern part of Brzezno marsh - all plots belonging to Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection and



But the choice of the sites based not only on protection status. During Other part were transported to pelleting factory of BIOMASS Company Aquatic Warbler monitoring we have established that in some areas located in Sielec near Chelm. There Cladium biomass will be for the first of very dense, multiyear litter cover of Cladium rushes were practically time ever processed into pellet. At the stage of writing of this note we are devoid by singing males. It was visible on Brzezno and especially on Blota still waiting on results and hope that in future Cladium pellets can be one Serebryskie where southern part contain no males and first singing birds of form of sustainable use of biomass from Chelm Marshes. were observed further north were Cladium rushes were younger and less dense. The highest densities were on most northern parts of this marsh where plots belong to private persons and were mown according to agroenvironmental schemes. Besides Blota Serebryskie and Brzezno ratraks were used this year to mow Cladium mires on private parcels on Roskosz Marsh where farmers introduced agro-environmental schemes.

After one month drying on the meadow (we had very good, sunny weather in September this year) mown biomass was baled and then collected in heaps on the edge of the marsh. In effect we have collected 560 bales (112 tons of biomass) from Blota Serebryskie and 200 bales (40 tons) from Brzezno. Part of the biomass was transported to operate by Cemex Chelm Cement Plant. There, biomass was used as alternative fuel for the cement burning klin.

Photos

- 1. Ciesacin Mire after mowing and scrub removal (picture from May 2011) – J. Kroguled
- 2. Volunteers getting ready to monitor of Aquatic Warbler at Roskosz Mire (near Chełm).
- 3. Ratrak mowing Cladium rushes on Chełm Marshes.



of this in early May 2011 OTOP invited Scientific Advisory Board of Poleski National Park (PPN) to visit this site and to assess ecological effect of conservation actions. Positive opinion of this body gives us green light to plan Next year, supplied with know-how we can enter also protected areas.

demonstration site of restoring fen mire bird habitats. Taking advantage not being protected as a nature reserve. We decided to make our first pilot mowing out of nature reserves to get an experience and to avoid any potential mistakes working with machines on this fragile fen mire habitat.





- 4. Bales of Cladium mown on Błota Serebryskie.
- 5. Dry biomass stored and ready for transport
- 6. Shredding of biomass before burning it in kiln of cement plant.



Short history of ratrak in swamps

Łukasz Mucha

New sites of Aquatic Warbler in Lublin Province

Jarosław Krogulec

First idea of using the ratrak to mowing wet break the snow banks was remade to become Ratrak in this version doesn't have to have risen mowing wet swampy areas he draw a machine, which could be usable on the mires. He was ski jumping to see on slope a machine really similar to that one he draw. The machine was skiing routes (Pic.1).



Soon after that, first ratrak has been taken to Biebrza. However, it was a machine built to form the skiing routes not to mow wet meadows. Before ratrak could have become a giant mower, it must have been adjusted a bit. First adaptation process lasted several months. Ratrak as a machine built to work in winter, could get overheated while mowing during August. It was essential to install additional coolant for the engine. It was also necessary to case the main frame of ratrak, so that peat, mud and wood chips didn't One of the last modification, which is at the

meadows appeared about four years ago in mind a mower, which was able not only to mow grass frame, because the biomass is put aside the of one of the local businessman. Thinking about and sedges, but also to cut willow, alder and machine, where it is later on baled or pick up. birch shrubs.

through further modifications, new versions of tant - they drive on wide tracks, which spread the machine occurred. To the mower made from the weight on bigger surface. Thanks to that of course snow ratrak used to form and harden the snow bit a pipe and blower were added to they are perfect for difficult mowing conditions. remove cut biomass (Pic. 2), Thanks to that cut Ratraks during last few year gained popularity biomass can be immediately blown to the trailer and at the moment are being used not only pulled by ratrak (which is also driving on tracks). in Poland, but also in Germany and Belarus.

> Another version of ratrak has instead of mower, are also ratraks, which are equipped with disk mowers. Thanks to significant rise of the frame maintaining conservation measures. they can mow and put the biomass under the machine without smashing it into peat. To be able to collect mown biomass baling press were adapted, by equipping them with tracks instead of wheels and changing the drive from mechanic to hydraulic (Pic. 3). Those machines are pulled behind the ratrak and their form from the biomass big bales, which are then taking from the sites on trailers on tracks.

Also the tracks have been modified. Sharp, good for snowy slopes were removed and replaced with wider, more plain and better for driving on delicate peatland to ensure that the vegetation will not be destroyed (Pic. 4).

get to the engine room and pumps driving the moment tested by OTOP is a disk mower with machine. After that the bit which was used to a device to rake the biomass aside (Pic. 5). Photos. Ratraks cutting reeds and bushes - OTOP

At the moment ratraks have strong engines, solid really surprised while watching Adam's Małysz From then on ratraks mowing wetlands went construction, hydraulic drive and what's impor-It is expected that the machines will be further modified. Still we are all looking for new optimal a header from combine harvester, which cuts solutions, testing and checking their suitability biomass and leaves it between tracks. There and trying to find a compromise between best technical solutions and least invasive methods of



One of the specific adaptation of Aquatic Warbler to changes in habitat quality and supply is its ability to breed in new emerging areas in some Commune - 12th July 2010). But in 2009 on south of this sites small breyears and reappearance after long periods of inappropriate conditions. eding population of 48 singing males was formed (see: www.otop.org. So beside of stable breeding sites in core areas of species distribution, pl/obserwacje/wodniczka/english-version/news/2009/06/17/100-a-new-Aquatic Warbler use to breed in smaller numbers on peripheral sites and aw-breeding-site-discovered-in-lublin-area/). This year habitat conditions sometimes to appear on suitable habitats in new areas, not recorded (water level and vegetation cover) were adequate for this species but the before. This year such new potential site was discovered on large wet flonext year (2010) due to very high flood water, there were no any records odplain meadows between Skladow (Baranow Commune) and Jeziorzany more. Nor in 2011. (Jeziorzany Commune) in IBA Lower Wieprz River Valley (Lublin Province). Birds were recorded on patches of flooded sedge meadows situated Any potential Aquatic Warbler sites should be monitored and protected among large stands of Glyceria rushes. In the evening of 17th May between - regardless they are currently used or no. Such areas are important at least 19.00 and 21.00 four singing males were recorded by Jarosław Krogulec on as migration stopover sites and this is enough to care for such place if we meadows near Skladow. Providing that males were recorded in optimal want to save the species during all stages of lifecycle. But as we discovered, Aquatic Warbler habitat, there was a hope that new breeding site in Poland such places can be often also a satellite small breeding sites. We should has been discovered. Unfortunately it was not confirmed. Future visits a week later by OTOP IBA caretaker – Paweł Kołodziejczyk and two weeks later by Janusz Kloskowski give no records of this species.

Looking for any potential Aquatic Warbler sites Jarosław Krogulec has also visited partly drained fen mires surrounding Zelizna Reservoir (Komarowka Podlaska Commune). In this area single singing males of Aquatic Warbler were recorded in previous years by Zbigniew Jaszcz and Janusz Wojciak from Lublin Ornithological Society (LTO). At evening of 26th May one singing male was heard on fen mire SE of the reservoir - on the place pointed by colleagues from LTO. Two weeks later during subsequent visit this observation was however not confirmed. But a month later Zbigniew and Janusz recorded two singing males on the fens on western bank of the reservoir.

Summarizing – Aquatic Warbler beside core area of distribution can be found on several, not stable, potential sites with small areas of suitable habitat. This areas can be regarded sometimes only as a migration stopover sites, but in some years a small breeding population can be formed. One of such example can be IBA Middle Bug River Valley were last year single Aquatic Warbler males were recorded by Jarosław Krogulec during spring (one male near Jableczna - Slawatycze Commune - observed on 3rd May 2010) Photos. New sites of Aquatic Warbler - J. Kroqulec











regard such places as potential sites for habitat restoration where, sometimes after small improvements on the sites, providing positive population development on managed core sites, we can obtain new stable breeding sites in the future.

Permanent monitoring pots

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the Biebrza Valley.

mowing thousands of hectares of mires was environment: conventional tractors, due to their by tall sedges (e.g. Carex appropringuata, Carex the main conservation problem in the Biebrza high pressure on ground unit, were drowning elata) that usually make tall tussocks on con-National Park since it was established, i.e. for at in peat or at least produced deep tracks, dama- trol plots. Their position is taken by big perenleast 18 years. Big number of workshops and seminars was dedicated to the question of what the distribution of weight on the large surface tion (Menyantes trifoliata, Telypteris palustris, should replace the old scythe, several prototypes of caterpillars seemed free of this drawback. of mire mowing machines were tested, while scientists were busy counting biodiversity losses on fens overgrowing with birches, willows and reed. The change came in 2007. The first pisten-bullies in the Biebrza Valley were subjects to jokes, but soon it became clear these machines were causing a revolution in conservation management in the Biebrza Valley. Thanks to the aquatic warbler conservation project, as well as the land leasing policy of the Biebrza National Park and attractive agri-environmental subsidies, thousands of hectares of mires are now mown again, though not with a scythe as 30-40 years ago but with help of those heavy caterpillar- Task Plan for both Biebrza Natura 2000 sites. driven vehicles. But revolutions can easily run out of control. The ecological monitoring carried A competent assessment should be based on submergence. out as part of the aquatic warbler project does a long-term monitoring that would compare not provide enough knowledge about the actual ecological impact of the new management, moreover the answer to the guestion from the as a joint initiative of the Biebrza National Park, on mire vegetation. On one hand, the increased title of this essay is not simple, at least if it comes OTOP and the Department of Plant Ecology saturation of peat with water is a good state to the direct impact of the two mentioned tools and Environmental Conservation, University of for peatlands, while t development of hollow on the mire ecosystem.

The major aim of mowing mires is to suppress succession, which imposes a threat to plants and animals typical of open wetlands. On peatlands that have been to some extent modified by man (thus also those in the Biebrza Valley), succession progresses faster than on entirely natural mires and management becomes necessary to and an unmown parcel, we established also an of rare species within mown plots. Rare and prevent expansion of trees. There is, however, more to mowing than just mechanical cutting of plant tops, disabling them to grow upwards. Other important side-effects include change of light conditions on the sward (thus enabling Totally, 14 such groups of phytosociological rele- usually occupy higher positions within sedge

the and the Pisten-Bully? Research on ase of productivity due to nutrient export with 500 to 1200m. The plots that will be excluded the effects of mechanized mowing on hay and, particularly relevant when comparing from management, were permanently marked mire vegetation has been initiated in a scythe with the pisten-bully, pressing of the by high polls. ground surface. The latter aspect has actually

Finding a practical solution for the need of nerv that would be manageable in the mire stically significant decrease of the area covered ging peatland surface. A pisten-bully, thanks to nial plants connected to sedge-moss vegetata-Nonetheless, field observations indicated that vegetation (Ranunculus lingua, Lysimachia thyrvegetation structure clearly changed after applying pisten-bullies. A question emerged about the water inhabited by mosses tolerant to submerimportance of these, yet only visually described gence (Caliergon iganteum, Caliergon cordifochanges, on the mire ecosystem. The urgency lium, Hamatocaulis vernicosus) and bladderto reply to this question was stressed, among worts (Utricularia intermedia, Utricularia minor). others, by the Scientific Board of the Biebrza Such a direction of vegetation changes is related National Park similar worries were also expressed to the impact of mowing with pisten-bullies on by the Scientific Board of the neighboring Narew sward structure and the upper peat layer. Clearly, National Park. An assessment of the ecological next teh removal of biomass, this measure results effects of mowing with pisten-bullies is also necessary for future planning of the aquatic warbler conservation, as well as for the Management and hummocks, hence bringing mire surface

> mown and unmown areas. Permanent plots for At the moment, we can not give an ultimate such a monitoring were established in July 2011, assessment of the impact pf observed changes Warsaw, When completing the first series of mosses can indicate favorable conditions for phytosociological research we obtained the first peat formation. On the other hand, along with information about the effects of mowing. This the increase of relative groundwater level and became possible by localizing paired plots along prolonged flooding, vegetation may gradually existing borders of mown and unmown areas. loose the character of protected habitat "alkaline In addition, we used several unmown patches fens 7230", while shifting towards tall helophyte left as a control within parcels recently-leased communities. One should especially worry about by BNP. At each localization, next to a mown the significant, though still not drastic, decrease additional plot that has been mown at least threatened plant species occurring in the Lawki once within last years and will be excluded from Mire (species connected to alkaline fens, e.g. further management, in order to test for the Parnassia palustris, Carex chordorhiza, Carex dioduration of single application of the measure. ica, Tomentypnum nitens, Helodium blandowii)

What's the difference between the scy- persistence of lesser-competitive species), decre- vés were established, separated by a distance of

been a key-issue in the search for mowing machi-Results of the initial research revealed a stati-Comarum palustre) and / or typical of tall sedge siflora, Cicuta virosa) as well as patches of open also in pressing the surface of the peatland, in particular – flatening the surface down tussocks closer to groundwater. This results in higher relative groundwater levels and longer periods of

tussocks, which are pressed into peat by the caterpillars of mowers. It is probably here, where mowing by pisten-bullies differs most from that done by a scythe. A walking reaper increases the local habitat heterogeneity, whereas the pistenbully lowers it.

The above conclusions have yet only an indicative character of the direction of changes but should not be ignored. We can already recommend to think of lowering the frequency of mowing. Even if one assumes that plant communities dominated by Menyantes trifoliata, Comarum palustre, Telypteris palustris and hollow mosses are targets of conservation, it is clear that the sward made by these species is much softer and sensitive to mechanical disturbance than the previously mown sward made by tussock sedges – Carex elata and C. appropinguata. Repeated mowing of such vegetation (a) is not necessary within the next few years, because of low productivity of this plant community and

Polish Aquatic Warbler **Species Action Plan**

Magdalena Zadrąg

Understanding Concerning Conservation draft version of the plan. Measures for the Aquatic Warbler has been signed, which aims to protect the species in its breeding areas, as well as during their migration and in the wintering areas. Poland joined the group of signatories in 2004, which means that Poland is now obliged to implement the International Aquatic Warbler Species Action Plan. Last year in General Directorate for the Environmental Protection (GDOŚ) a Secretariat of the Memorandum has been established.

One of the most important tasks that Poland has to manage is preparation and publication on National Aquatic Warbler Species Action Plan. This should be a national document, in which all existing data on population of the species in Poland will be revealed and actions for coming doctor Franziska Tanneberger, who worked on years will be planned. The document should consist information on threats that Aquatic Warbler faces in Poland and on possible measures of protection of the species The plan should also specify a target of Aquatic Warbler conservation and indicators, that would allow to assess whether the plan actually worked or not.

plan OTOP together with GDOS organized in by GDOS. November 2010 workshops, during which stake holders could read the plan and discuss its cor- Publication of the National Species Action Plan rectness. Stakeholders assessed also whether the indicators and aims of the Action Plan are possible to receive and actions possible to implement.

At the workshops met representatives of GDOŚ, interested Regional Directorates for Environmental Protection, which work on areas where Aquatic Warbler breeds and employees of Biebrza, Polesie and Warta Mouth National Parks. Additionally doctor Janusz Kloskowski, a scientific advisor of the LIFE Project and preparation of Aquatic Warbler Action Plan for Brandenburg, were invited.

After consideration of all remarks and supplementation of additional elements of the plan OTOP will soon give the Polish Species Action Plan to GDOS

Publication of the Species Action Plan is also one Before it will become a document it will need to of the tasks of the Aquatic Warbler LIFE Project, go through consults between other ministries Photo. Workshops on National Species Action Plan, GDOS that will end in November 2011. In October last and public consults. Project of the document - P. Stawiarz



(b) could destroy the new vegetation layer of floating plants, that potentially initiate pea forming processes. Frequent mowing (once a year or once in two years) should be used only in sites, where open mires quickly overgrow with trees, shrubs or reeds.

Photo. New monitoring pots in Biebrza Valley – Ł. Mucha



In 2003, an International Memorandum of year OTOP started to work with GDOS to prepare will be available on web pages of Ministry of Environment, GDOŚ and OTOP so that all stakeholders will have chance to read it. After final After preparation of the draft version of the consults with other ministries it will be approved

> gives opportunity to protect the species in Poland. Acceptance of specific actions within the plan will ease OTOP finding the funds on its implementation from national or European foundations



New Aquatic Warbler monitoring scheme in Poland

Magdalena Zadrąg

toring in last few years was financed, approaches to the end. Thanks to the project Poland possess at the moment the best data on abundance every two years, if possible every year. of Aquatic Warbler population from all the countries where the species breeds. Still, current methods based on full counts on all Polish sites are Larger sites however will be counted using a set of 1km-transects selected not ideal to answer all the questions that need to be answered and are from within all potential Aquatic Warbler area at these sites. The potential too work-intensive for a long-term monitoring programme, once specific project funding runs out.

Due to this experts from OTOP and other Aquatic Warbler experts have singing males on each site. invented new easier monitoring scheme, that will at the same time allow continuing the use of old data collected to date.

auestions.

- Estimate the trend of the national population of the species,
- Give an estimate of the actual size of the national population,
- Give information on the actual number and location of occupied breeding sites in the country,
- Give information on the actual area of occupancy of the species.

The Aquatic Warbler LIFE Project, during which the Aquatic Warbler moni- and 2009, next full count is due at the latest in 2015. Beside this all smaller sites with up to 50 singing males will be covered by full counts at least

> area, from which transects are selected has to include also those that could with reasonable effort, e.g. through the removal of bushes, be restored as suitable habitat. It will be necessary to have one transect for every c. 30

During the monitoring volunteers will count all the Aquatic Warbler seen or heard in one of three distance bands (0-25 m, 25-100 m, >100 m). Counts The monitoring programme needs to be able to answer the following will replicate three times during the breeding season from 20 May to 10 June

> During 2011-2014 OTOP will implement Aquatic Warbler counts on every Aquatic Warbler site both full and sample counts. Thanks to that it will be possible to calibrate both methods.



on transects) and full counts (in which we count birds on whole potential those will be soon available on: Aquatic Warbler breeding area).

In order to provide all this information, a combination of sample (counts Already this year, first trial sample counts were organized. The results of

Every six years, a full national count will be organized, covering all known and potential Aquatic Warbler sites. With the last full counts done in 2003

www.wodniczka.pl	(
www.wodniczka.pl	

Photos

1. Every year the Aquatic Warbler monitoring is implemented thanks to help of volunteers – P. Stawiarz

2. Methodology explanation before going in the field – P. Stawiarz

GDEP comments on the project

Patrycja Stawiarz

Management on the Aquatic Warbler sites and agri-environ- the Szczecin Lagoon and the Baltic Sea. That makes difficulties in access to mental schemes many sites before the advent of frost. Traditionally farmers at these areas were mowing during the winter (from November to January/February), Protection of Aquatic Warbler in Poland, thanks to the work of the Polish but after joining the agri-environmental schemes, in accordance with the Society for Protection of Birds, gave rise to the conduct of large-scale regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development dated management actions in habitats unique in Europe. It also contributed 26th February 2009 on detailed conditions and procedures for the granting to the cooperation for the development of sustainable farming systems. of financial assistance under the measure "Agri-environmental program" under the Rural Development Programme for 2007-2013 (OJ No. 33, item. In ongoing projects for the protection of Aquatic Warbler, which are carried out with Life and Life+ funds, the Society organizes meetings important for 262, as amended.), farmers have to switch mowing dates for the late sumbetter projects' management, including Steering Group and Technical Task mer months (August - September).

Force (TTF). The governmental authorities were also invited to participate in those meetings. Since 2010, the cooperation of the government is conti-

However, it appears that the monitoring of Aquatic Warbler conducted in nued by the Secretariat of the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the relevant area over the 2008 - 2011 have registered more birds in areas Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler (Acrocephalus paludicola) mown during winter. Areas mowed during summer months, probably due which was established in the General Directorate for Environmental to a slower rate of plant regrowth, a lack of litter from the remains of plants Protection. needed to hide a nest and fewer insects occurring, even in second breeding season in a row after the mowing, were less preferred by the aquatic In July 2011, the Secretariat, within the TTF, participated in visiting the warbler. In this case, even leaving 50% of the area not mown in accordance Aquatic Warbler habitat managed by the Society, Wolin National Park and with the provisions of the Regulation, does not guarantee the effectiveness private landowners in the West Pomeranian region. Visiting areas occupied of protective measures for this species.



by Aquatic Warbler can gather information about the effectiveness of This implies the conclusion that due to the nature of hydrology and vegeexisting activities, refer to the difficulties encountered by the landlords and tation in this area, narrow habitat requirements of the Aquatic Warbler take initiatives to improve methods which have been used for the protec- and the need to reconcile the economic use of land with nature consetion of aquatic warbler. rvation objectives, in case of mowing as well as mowing-grazing usage of grasslands which are home to the aquatic warbler, in both Package One of the issues which were raised by the landlords farming on aquatic 4 and 5 agri-environmental program it is recommended to extend mowing deadlines to winter months. This will enable reconcile better protection of areas included in the agri-environmental programme for the protection Aquatic Warbler with the economic interests of farmers and allow planning of endangered bird species and natural habitats on Natura 2000 sites of sustainable operations over the years.

warbler sites in western Poland is a question of carrying out activities on (Package 5). Habitats which occur over there are fertile bogs in flooded river valleys, wetlands covered by sedges and reed beds, flooded wet meadows, included in the Natura 2000 network under the Birds Directive (PLB 320001 "Rozwarowskie Marsh"). Much of the area is used for reed growing, harvesting of which is economically more justified in the win- Photos: ter months because of the difficulties faced by landowners in summer. 1. Miedwie Lake Reserve visit - D. Gatkowski A climate dynamics during summer months, exacerbated over the last 2. Plan of project localization on Schadefähre island – D. Gatkowski years, causes a rapid rise in water levels due to heavy rains and eddy from 3. Schadefähre island visit – D. Gatkowski



1st "Ratrak" meeting in Biebrza National Park

Berenika Dabrowska

National Park, an important meeting, called "ratrak meeting" took place. The active protection of Biebrza Marshes was discussed for the first time in history on initiative of Polish Society for the Protection of Birds. There were many guests invited.

Almost 20 people attended the meeting, among others the representatives of Biebrza National Park. The General Directorate for Environmental Protection, scientists from both, Warsaw and Nature University of Lublin and the employees of nonprofit organizations, tour guides and lessees as well. The first spokesman was Lars Lachmann – the Project Manager of "Conserving Aquatic Warbler in Poland and Germany" project. He considered in his speech the influence of mowing with the use of ratraks on the nature virtues of Biebrza Valley. Lars Lachmann presented the monitoring methodology of habitat of aquatic warbler and the results of searching the population of this species. He followed that, on those places, where no mechanical mowing took place – no changes in population were observed. Nevertheless on the area, where a tractor was used to mow, the population of aquatic warbler slightly decreased. But in those places, where it was mown by a ratrak, the increase was 0,8%. In 2010 a 20% increase of aquatic warbler population was observed on mown areas and on a 1% decrease of the population on unmown areas. The overall population increase was appointments for the next meetings. 10%. Most of the changes were observed in such places, where mowing was conducted in an area of high priority, it means overgrown with reed and birches. There were no changes on the territories with low priority.

On 27th May 2011 in Osowiec Twierdza, on the premises of Biebrza It indicates that mowing is necessary only on chosen territories, not on all

The second lecture, entitled "Mechanical mowing of open marsh spaces: the perspective of greater spotted eagle protection" was held by Przemysław Nawrocki from the Polish Birds Society (Ptaki Polskie). Mowing is necessary for both species, but with different necessary modifications. It's better for predatory eagle to leave high tufts and disperse bushes. Other demands of both species coincide each other – they need the same mowing level and the beginning of conservation works. After the presentation it was discussed about the right method of spotted eagle and aquatic warbler protection carried on the same area.

The subject of securing mowers entrance on the protected areas was also discussed on the meeting. There was also discussion about the way of supervision of field works. The common settlements were to designate proper control plots in order to know the influence of mowing on the vegetation habitats and insects. On Lawki Marsh control plots of 10x10 meters will be designated . The research will be conducted by Bialystok University of Technology and the University of Bialystok. The lessees are ready to financially participate in this research. The participants have made

The new field-base of OTOP

Berenika Dąbrowska

Preparing the project "Aquatic Warbler and Biomass", OTOP wanted simul-The works have been conducted outside and inside the buildings simultaneously to secure the interests of local communities. The organization taneously. In the social rooms we have removed the plaster falling off planned actions that would solve the problem of management of the crop the walls, we have also demolished the bathhouses and removed the old of grass gained in the course of the conservation actions at the marshes hydraulic system. We have got rid of mouldered windows, which opened (i.e. mowing) in a way profitable for the land's users. The biomass from the rooms and increased the air circulation. From the external elevation Biebrza Marshes may be processed under high pressure to produce pellet, we have removed the parts of walls and plasters which were falling off, we which can be burned in heating stoves in order to heat buildings. Selling have also drained the foundations. In the main hall we have fixed all winpellet may cover the costs of mowing and removing the biomass from the dows and exchanged broken glass. The whole area surrounding the base Marshes, which creates a- at least in a large part - self-financing system. has been put in order. We regularly mow the grass and cut off the growing suckers of trees and bushes.

To achieve this goal, in December 2010 OTOP purchased in a village Trzcianne a complex of buildings which will serve as a field-base for far-The largest so far investment in the field-base has been installation of ming equipment (tractors, trailers, mowers, ratraks), and a place of storing a new metal roof (in the social rooms' area isolated with mineral wool), and processing the biomass gained from mowing. In the future, we also finishing it with aluminium plate and installing new roof gutters and drains. plan to construct there a pellet production line. The base is located in Roof works started in June this year. Currently, the main task is to close the Trzcianne (powiat Monki, voivodship podlaskie). The location is strategic social rooms before winter. Each week our field base presents itself better for OTOP due to proximity of Biebrza Valley, where the active protection and better, less and less resembling an abandoned sawmill. takes place.

thermal sub-station, as well as social rooms and offices. The buildings required a thorough renovation, and the range of works accomplished since the beginning of 2011 is impressive. They all have been carried out by a twoperson team of our employees: Marcin and Łukasz.



Photos:

1. Lars Lachmann is presenting new results of Aquatic Warbler research – B. Dąbrowska

2. Participants "Ratrak" meeting in Biebrza National Park – D. Gatkowski

Photos

1. At the beginning of the building required a lot of work – K. Górski

2. New roof on the base – Ł. Mucha



In February, the Trzcianne field-base of OTOP has been visited by Angelo The field-base is a former sawmill. The site is about 1 hectare large and Caserta, the Director of BirdLife Europe. Already then he was largely contains a spacious hall, warehouse, workshop, boiler room with a stove, impressed by the involvement of the team responsible and by the work carried out in the base.

3. Our field-base – Ł. Mucha





ACROLA

Joanna Dziarska-Pałac

The association ACROLA - Association pour la Connaissance et la Recherche Ornithologique Loire et Atlantique – was created in France in 2006 and is made up of a dedicated team of bird ringers and amateur ornithologists: numerous volunteers and 2 workers. One of the association's main activities is bird ringing.

In spring young White Storks (Ciconia ciconia) from all around the Loire Atlantique department are ringed. In summer a ringing station studying terrain, providing a solid foundation for the 2010-2011 expedition in Mali migrating birds is organised at Donges on the Loire Estuary. The large and Mauritania. The team was able to find 3 new wintering sites and ring reedbed provides a vital stop-over site for numerous species of warbler including the Aquatic Warbler (Acrocephalus paludicola) for which Donges catching the largest number of birds out of all stations on its global migra- make it possible to achieve the determined goals. tion route.

In winter, for 2 years now, ringing of AW and other warblers in West Africa.

The camp at Donges has been there since 2002. Started by the creators of the association, today, it runs thanks to the tremendous help and involvement of many volunteers. All in all, during 10 camps, 93 784 birds from 69 species have been captured. This year, the all-time record was broken, and his team was retrapped in spring in the Ukraine as part of a geolocawith 19 134 birds having been caught in nets (ringed or controlled)!

Donges 825 AW have been ringed, in 2011 with a record-breaking figure of 179 (134 young and 45 adults), in this 9 controls (5 foreigns and 4 French) Apart from the basic measurements, which apply to all species (winglength, fat, weight), the AW undergo additional biometric measurements (tail length, length of tarsus, and bill and head length) in order to obtaining a better understanding of the species.

This year, at the three of stop-over sites (estuary of the Loire, Gironde and Adour) detailed habitat mapping was carried out along with a programme of radio-tracking. 10 birds at each site were fitted with transmitters which allowed the researchers to follow individual birds and determine their habitat preferences, even down to a micro-habitat level. This knowledge is important in understanding the requirements of the species as it replenishes it's fat reserves at these stop-over sites before continuing its migration and also to help protect these strategic habitats.

At the same time, thanks to the information about the length of stay (up to 15 days!), the value of the reedbed at Donges for this species has been determined. To add to the information about the diet of AW, a few samples of feces have been collected, which will be analyzed for consumed species.

In spring, at the beginning of my internship, I managed to institute a part- www.acrola.fr. nership between ACROLA and the University of Gdańsk. Thanks to the cooperation with the Bird Migration Research Station UG, for the first time in Donges, the orientation test method was used to research the preference of direction of night migrants. During one month, 592 tests were carried out, 104 of which were on AW. Together with the Ecology and Zoology of

Vertebrae Department UG, a genetic research on AW was initiated. A few feather samples were taken from captured birds, from which the DNA will be extracted. The main goal of this endeavor will be to determine the sex of the birds and to analyze the proportions of males to females.

To locate the wintering guarters of AW, a team from ACROLA has travelled twice to West Africa. In 2009-2010 two people thoroughly researched the 15 individuals during 3 months. Another expedition is currently being planned and we are still looking for the funding assistance which would

French ringers have played an important role in capturing of Aquatic Warblers as part of the National Action Plan for the species which runs from 2010 - 2014. In fact 46 different ringing stations succeeded in capturing around 1 000 birds in 2011.

This winter one of the AW ringed in Africa in February by Julien Foucher tion study there. For the second time during the history of the research, an AW ringed in Africa was controlled in Europe. Previously, it had been However, the Aquatic Warbler has the most focus on it. Since 2002 at a winter destination-migration connection (Senegal-Donges), while this time it was winter destination - nesting area. Both records are thanks to the involvement of ACROLA in the continuing research on this species. One of the few AW ringed in Poland this year was also retrapped at Massereau, just next to the Donges ringing station.

> It is now the best moment to increase the number of birds ringed on the breeding grounds as the expected recapture rate at the migratory stopover sites and on the wintering grounds has never been higher. ACROLA is also ready to provide technical support to local teams to ring the maximum number of nesting birds next year.

> My six-month internship in ACROLA, under the guidance of Julien Foucher was for me an extremely interesting and important experience. Thanks to working among people with passion, motivation and ideas I saw that even with a small budget we can do great things.

> I hope that the cooperation started this year between the Poland and ACROLA will continue to grow and together we could achieve a lot for the protection of the Aquatic Warbler.

More information about the organisation you can find on the website



as customary, OTOP has prepared their stands both for the "Biebrza Mowing Contest" and for the fair. Apart from the informational and promoother wild birds' habits. Interesting works have been created with a "seeds pasting" technique. The climax of the aquatic warbler stand was a puppet about aquatic warbler protection. Additionally, a model of aquatic warbler children and adults could take pictures with it. A photograph of the OTOP's stand has been put on the Biebrza National Park website. Additionally, during the Biebrza events we have organized an action of signing the petition to the EU Commissioner for the Common Agricultural Policy, we have collected about 80 signatures.

August in Biebrza Marshes is each year the month of several outdoor Participation in local events is for OTOP a very important activity. Therefore, events. One of the most important local events is "Biebrza Mowing Contest". This year it has been held for the tenth time. Traditionally, the competition was attended by farmers, representatives of local authorities tional actions, within the "Aquatic Warbler and Biomass" project we have and NGOs, and visitors from neighboring countries. Each of the partici- prepared - for the very first time - an expanded entertainment program for pants was to mow a hundred meters of marsh grassland, the only tool they children. This was the only activity prepared especially for young visitors could use was a traditional scythe. Although the competition this year took in the Biebrza events. The program included an art workshop, origami, place in very unfavorable weather conditions and the high water level was puzzles and guizzes. Participants had an opportunity to get acquainted an additional hindrance, the competition and the spectacle attracted many with aquatic warbler, and the educational games let them learn about visitors to Biebrza Marshes. The next day, traditionally, the "Biebrza Fair of Handicraft and Disappearing show for children: a theater play titled "Gossips from Biebrza Valley" telling Occupations" took place in the headquarters of the Biebrza National Park. Each year in the fair the regional folk artists, craftsmen and food producers (120 cm x 90 cm of size) has been built especially for the project, so that prepare their own special stands. The event was a unique opportunity to learn about traditional techniques of making tools and jewelry and to taste regional food. In total, approximately 60 exhibitors participated in the fair, the stands were visited by as much as 4,000 people.

Biebrza Outdoor Event









French holidays with Aquatic Warbler

Magda Zadrąg



August, many of Aquatic Warblers already flew away from Biebrza Marshes and started the every year migration. They fly thousands of kilometers to winter in Africa. On their way they stop along the Atlantic coast, mainly in the mouths of big rivers. In the delta of one of them, Loire, works ACROLA (Association pour la Connaissance et la Recherche Ornithologique Loire et Atlantique). It is an organization which does research on birds migrating through the site, among other – Aquatic Warbler. ACROLA studies also Aquatic Warblers in their wintering sites during their expeditions to western parts of Middle Africa.

In August this year the ACROLA Society invited employees of OTOP and Secretariat of Aquatic Warbler Memorandum of Understanding in General Directorate for Environmental Protection (GDOS) (and researchers from Gdansk University). During one-week stay in the ringing station in Donges in Loire mouth, together with Patrycja Stawiarz from GDOS I could see the normal works done every day in the ringing camp. The Society is a small organization and mostly is supported by volunteers, nevertheless it works a lot for Aquatic Warbler conservation.

During this week we've managed to catch in nets 30 Aquatic Warblers. The birds were caught in standard mist nets, ringed and after a series of measurements released.

Additionally, some of the Aquatic Warblers were equipped with telemetry emitters, thank to that they could have been radiotracked using special antennas to see were exactly the bird is staying at the moment. Thanks to finding the most frequently chosen places where birds stay will help to protect the species also during migration. It is important to protect the species not only during the breeding season. Observing the data we can see that birds stay in one place even till 15 days, during this time they cumulate fat to have energy to fly to Africa. This shows how important for the conservation of the species are protection of the stopover sites.

Additionally, some of the birds are being studied through orientation tests thanks to the cooperation with Gdansk University, Bird Migration Research Station. The studies aim to state what is the favorite migration direction. The bird is placed in a cage with walls of soft foil and released after 10 minutes. Then all the signs made by its peak on the foil are counted which allows to state in which direction the bird wanted to escape. Analysis o experiments on a bunch of birds can help in studying the migration route of the species.

Besides the field works I took also part in ACROLA's members meeting with mayorship of Donges commune, which is supporting the society logistically and technically. Among others thanks to this cooperation employees and volunteers living in the camp get fresh water for free and are allowed to use showers at the state camping. The mayorship was really interested in our opinion about the society and was pleased to hear that we are positive about this. During this meeting new ideas for Polish-French cooperation appeared. Employees of ACROLA will probably come to Poland next breeding season to firstly see the Aquatic Warbler in their breeding habitat and secondly – see how the species is being protected in Poland.

Photo. Polish domination over the Donges ringing station - ACROLA





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