Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team

Field Trip 2006 to N-Belarus & W-Russia 28th of May to 6th of June 2006

'Aquatic Warbler count and habitat analysis at Servech (N-Belarus) and search for AW populations in Smolensk, Pskov and Tver Regions (W-Russia)'



Photo: Arnaud Le Nevé

Final Report

written by Martin Flade, chairman Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team

Field Trip 2006 to N-Belarus & European Russia

'Aquatic Warbler count and habitat analysis at Servech (N-Belarus), search for AW populations in Smolensk, Pskov and Tver Regions (W-Russia)'

Objectives of the expedition:

- Visit and discussion (importance, habitat features, monitoring) of the northernmost AW breeding site of Belarus (Servech, discovered in 2004).
- Search for possibly unknown AW breeding sites in adjacent European Russia, which seem to be potentially suitable for AW according to habitat and vegetation descriptions as well as area size.
- Preparation/discussion of the forthcoming meeting of Contracting Parties (COP) of the CMS "Memorandum of Understanding concerning conservation measures for the AW" in late June at Criewen, Germany, including preparation of the scientific symposium previous to the COP Meeting.

Participants:

- 1. Victor Fenchuk
- 2. Martin Flade
- 3. Igor Gorban
- 4. Oskars Keiss
- 5. Mikhail Kalyakin
- 6. Natalya Volkova
- 7. Alexander Kozulin
- 8. Rita Minets
- 9. Arnaud Le Nevé
- 10. Zydrunas Preiksa
- 11. Vitaly (driver)

- Belarus Germanv
- Ukraine
- Latvia
- Russia
- Russia
 - Belarus
 - Belarus
 - France
- Lithuania Belarus
- (driver) Be



Pic.1: The AWCT Field Trip 2006 Team (Smolensk, 6th June 2006), from left: Zydrunas Preiksa, Igor Gorban, Mikhail Kalyakin, Arnaud Le Nevé, Martin Flade, Rita Minets (front), Natasha Volkova, Vitaly, Oskars Keiss (not on the picture: Viktar Fenchuk & Alexander Kozulin). Photo: Arnaud Le Nevé.

Schedule of the AWCT 2006 field trip, May 28 – June 6, 2006

Date	Country	Activities			
28 th May	BY	 Arrival Minsk; shopping, preparations 			
		 Travel to Servech. 			
		 AW evening census of the smaller NE-part = Servech I (50 ha). 			
29 th May	BY	 Morning census Servech II (western bank, 200 ha), northern part 			
		 Discussion of monitoring methods & vegetation description methods 			
		AW sunset count Servech II, southern part.			
30 th May	BY	 Visit of the Yelnia raised bog 			
		 AW sunset count of Servech II, northern part. 			
31 st May	BY	 Travel via Polotsk and Vitebsk to Smolensk 			
	RU	 Overnight stay in a hotel in Smolensk 			
1 st June	RU	 Visit of some mires W Verkhovie, NW Smolensk 			
		 Travel to the NW-corner of Smolensk Oblast; camp near raised bog N 			
		Velizh, SW Lozovo			
2 ^{na} June	RU	 Morning visit of the raised bog SW Lozovo 			
		 Visit of potential AW habitats near Velizh and at Lake Uswjatskoe (Pskov 			
		Oblast)			
		 Travel via Nevel' and Velikie Luki to the southern Tver Oblast, road M 9 			
		to the east, to the Krjukovskoe Mokh raised bog NE Zemtsy (Tver Oblast)			
- rd		 Camp on forest clearing near road, catching of Corncrakes 			
3 ^{°°} June	RU	 Morning visit of Krjukovskoe Mokh raised bog 			
		I ravel south via Nelidovo and Beliy (through raised bog) to the			
		Smolenskie Pooserie Biosphere Reserve (BR) (Smolensk Oblast)			
		 Visit of Yeisha valley in the north-western BR Oversight staying the utiling a Declassicity (Valence Later) 			
4th Louis		Overnight stay in the village Podosinky (Yeisha Lake)			
4 June	RU	 Travel to Prshewalskoe (BR administration & museum) to the S of the BR 			
		 Visit of Lovya river fen mire in the south-western BR Trough SW via Khalm, some poor Detrichtebave 			
5 th lung	ВЦ	Travel SVV Via Knolin, camp hear Petrishtshevo Travel to the Driver river near Velebe (SE Verteeve)			
5 June	RU	 Have to the Dhjept liver hear reicha (SE ransevo) Survey of events forests and codes mostows of the Dhiepr floodsloip 			
		 Survey of swamp forests and sedge meadows of the Dhjept hoodplain near Veleba. 			
		Camp in the Driver floodelain near Titkove (SE Kardymove)			
6 th June	BII	 Visit of the Driepr floodplain at Shitovka 			
5 Julie		 Visit of the Dhjepi hoouplain at Shilovka Travel to Smolensk (train station), departure to Moscow 			
		Travel hack Smolensk - Minsk			
7 th June	BY	Departures from Minsk			

Summary

<u>Servech</u>: Due to long winter, late and cold spring and high flooding the vegetation development was very much in delay. As expected, the AW numbers at Servech were, therefore, unusual low (38 singing males). We did a full AW count and analysed the habitat of this by far northernmost AW breeding site in Belarus. We also tested and discussed the habitat monitoring method developed in course of the Polish-German EU LIFE project and elaborated proposals for improvement.

<u>Search for AW in W-Russia</u> (Smolensk Region and adjacent southern parts of Pskov and Tver Regions): We did not find either Aquatic Warblers or suitable habitats bigger than 15-20 hectares. We thus believe, that a stable AW population does not exist in this part of Russia. Surprisingly big, near-natural and almost untouched raised bogs, which are not suitable for AW, are the dominating mire type in this region. We came to the conclusion, that, in course of the large-scale abandonment of farmland and rural villages after Perestroika, obviously all or nearly all formerly suitable sedge fens in the small river valleys of western European Russia have been abandoned 15-20 years ago and are now overgrown with bushes and reeds, and are also frequently - and useless - burned by local people. Formerly potentially suitable AW habitats have developed to large desolate 'wastescapes' today. This situation is very different to Belarus, were also substantial parts of marginal sites are still in agricultural use, and agriculture

and rural life has not almost collapsed like in Russia. - Potentially suitable parts of the Dnjepr valley turned out to be unsuitable for AW for various reasons (too eutrophic, too high flooding, typical floodplain habitats).

Results

Lake Servech (55.02 N, 27.35 E, SW Glubokoje), 28th – 30th May

Due to long winter, late and cold spring and high flooding the vegetation development was very much in delay in the whole of Belarus, also in this region. It was expected, therefore, that the AW numbers would be clearly below those of the previous years, which turned out to be the case.

Despite of continuous rain in the first evening (28.5.) we visited the smaller sedge fen (Servech I, Section A) at the north-eastern bank. Four (maximum six) AW were actively singing, several (minimum 4 males) Great Snipes were displaying. Common Snipe, Curlew, Savi's Warbler and Great Reed Warbler were also active.

On the next morning (29.5.), we tested the actually (in course of the running Polish-German EU-LIFE project) suggested method of habitat and vegetation monitoring by visiting the larger fen mire tract at the western bank of Lake Servech (Servech II, Section C). Within a sample plot of 1 x 1 km two transects of 1 km each were chosen (250 m apart parallel to the edge of the plot). On these transects, two sub-transects of 100 m (starting at 250 m and 750 m of the main transect) were analysed in more detail. At the sample points (every 50 m) a sample square of 5 x 5 m was described precisely; additionally, complete vegetation relevées (whole vegetation was collected) were taken from 4 frames of 0.5×0.5 m. Points of discussion were especially the mapping/measuring of bushes (what is 1 bush? How to count? etc.), the measuring of the water depth and the tussock height, and the way how to place the small frames for vegetation analyses (and what to do, if there is a bush, for instance). At the end, several modifications of the current method were elaborated and proposed. We found that it is a proper way of sampling to throw the small frames in different directions with eyes closed.



Pic. 2: Servech II fen, western (large) section area (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 3: Servech I fen, north-eastern (small) section area (Photo: A. Le Nevé)

In the evening of 29.5., we walked in western direction around the Servech II fen and made a sunset count of AW and all other birds starting from the south. We used the "Polish" census method, walking in a line of 7 observers (Igor-Zydrunas-Arnaud-Viktar-Rita-Oskars-Martin) at a distance of only 60-70 m (we spread evenly to cover the whole mire), communicating about the

position of single birds with our neighbours to exclude double-counts. We surveyed about two third of the mire tract until darkness (section B). The results are summarised in Table 1.

Altogether, the sedge fen habitat was evaluated as rather poor (mesotrophic) and – in that year – relatively wet. The spatial habitat structure (area and density of bushes) was optimal. Some of the counted bird species were only found in the higher and wet reed stands along the lake shore (Waterrail, Bittern, Little Bittern, Great Reed Warbler). The number of Aquatic Warbler males was estimated at 25-30 for this part (Igor behind-2/right-5; Zydrunas 0/3; Arnaud 0/0; Viktar 1/1; Rita ?/2; Oskars 2/2; Martin 0/9).

In the evening of 30^{th} May those who survived Yelnia surveyed the northern part of Servech II mire (section C) – starting from north-western part and walking for about 1 km south. There were 5 singing males here, although the areas surveyed was almost as large as in the southern part of Servech II mire. One possible explanation of the difference is that the southern part of the mire was completely burned in 2004.

Thus, the total number of Aquatic Warbler vocalising males for the whole mire is estimated at 34-41 vocalizing males (4-6+5+25-30).



Fig. 1: Lake Servech and surrounding fen mires; the capital letters A, B and C show the investigated section areas (see text).



Pic. 4: Pedicularis palustris in the Servech fen (photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 5: Menyanthes trifoliata in the Servech fen (photo: A. Le Nevé)

Species	Total number counted	Males/bp per km²	Transect Martin	Heard/seen outside the transect stripes
Acrocephalus paludicola	27	54	9	
A. schoenobaenus	26	52	20	
Botaurus stellaris				3
Ixobrychus minutus				1 (river bank)
Circus pygargus	1		1	
Grus grus	1 (nest)			
Rallus aquaticus				>=3
Porzana porzana			8	
Gallinago gallinago			1	
Locustella luscinioides			5	2
Acrocephalus scirpaceus			1	
Acrocephalus arundinaceus				3
Carpodacus erythrinus				
Emberiza schoeniclus			1	2

 Table 1: Bird community of Servech II fen mire (ca. 50 ha, transect length c. 1 km)

Yelnia raised bog (55.34 N, 27.55 E, SE Miory), 30th May

We visited Yelnia, because it is one of the largest (23,200 ha) and most valuable raised bogs of Belarus, and some important restoration measures have been realised here, funded by the German Michael Otto Foundation. Conservation and management problems occurred here in previous years, because marginal parts of the bog have been drained (drainage channels) and subsequently long-lasting peat fires occurred. Through closing of the channels this development was stopped.

We had a long guided walk through different zones of the bog. Starting in the *Ledum palustre* – Pine forests and semi-open parts with scattered pines and birches to rather open parts with shallow water systems, relatively small parts of open bog and finally the central bigger lakes (Lake Yelnia being the largest) with surrounding pine forest belts. In the central parts, plant species like *Chamaedaphne culyculata, Andromeda polifolia, Drosera spec., Rubus chamaemorus, Oxycoccus palustris, Betula nana* etc. were common. Substantial areas of the bog were burned during the past years, and extensive areas with dead (burned) pine trees are typical for the outer parts of the bog.

Observed birds (incomplete, only some characteristic species mentioned here):

Gavia artica – 1 pair on a central lake

Falco columbarius – our guide Valery installed three artificial nests during our walk (Pic. 8, 9). We discovered a breeding pair on a natural nest only 5 m high in a pine tree (pine forest belt at the shore of a small lake; Pic. 10); adults flew alarming around us.

Pluvialis apricaria – at two places (open and wet habitat patches of the central bog) calling.

Numenius arquata – rather common in the whole bog.

Tringa totanus – several pairs alarming.

- *Tringa glareola* several alarming pairs in the central, wet part of the bog with scattered pine trees.
- Larus canus, Larus argentatus a small colony in the central part on islands in rather small and shallow lakes.
- Motacilla citreola at least 3 breeding pairs (together with Motacilla flava) in the area of the gull colony.

Lanius collurio – rather high density in the central part. We found a nest with eggs near the ground in a high tuft of grass.

Lanius excubitor - at least one territorial bird.



Pic. 6: Yelnia raised bog, recently burned area with dead pines (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 7: AWCT members in Yelnia: Zydrunas, Martin, Rita, Oskars (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 8: Artificial nest platform for Merlin (filled with peat) (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 9: Valery, our local guide in Yelnia, installs an artificial nest platform for Merlin on a pine tree (Photo: Z. Preiksa)



Pic. 10: Occupied natural nest of Merlin, 5 m high in a pine tree in Yelnia (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 11: Black-throated Divers on a lake in the inner Yelnia raised bog (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 12: Yelnia, open wet part in the centre (Photo: A. Le Nevé)

'Wastescapes' - fen mires W Verkhovie (54.53 N, 31.33 E), 1st June

We visited wetland tracts that looked promising at the map: wide, marshy valleys of small rivers with large areas indicated as 'open wetland' without forests. All these areas turned out to be overgrown with shrubs and reeds, some areas even with young birch forests. Although we found small patches with a suitable vegetation type (with *Menyanthes trifoliata, Comarum palustre, Lysimachia thyrsiflora, Carex elata, Carex cespitosa, Carex rostrata* etc.) there were no bigger open sedge fens. Despite out of use, large parts of the former fens are still drained (active drainage channels etc.) and huge areas have been recently burned.

We called these desolate, abandoned, drained and burned areas 'wastescapes'.

We think, that much of these areas might have been quite suitable Aquatic Warbler habitats about 20 years ago, but are now abandoned since 15 or more years. We believe that this large-scale abandonment was most likely a 'Perestroika effect', because agriculture collapsed in Russia at that time and all marginal agricultural lands (too wet, too dry, too hard accessible, exhausted peat soils etc.) were completely abandoned – in contrast to Belarus, were parts of such marginal lands are still in use until today.

Raised bog SW Lozovo (55.42 N, 30.56 E), 1st /2nd June

We visited this mire, because, according to information on vegetation types obtained by Mikhail Kalyakin, at least parts of them are described as sedge fen. We built our camp in a very beautiful, park-like landscape SW of Lozovo, with short, hilly grassland interspersed with small forests and bush groups.

Besides singing Thrush Nightingales *Luscinia luscinia*, Redwings *Turdus iliacus* and Barred Warblers *Sylvia nisoria*, many Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio*, displaying Woodcocks *Scolopax rusticola* and 2 + 1 soaring Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, there was quite a big number of waders flying over from and towards the nearby mire: Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and several Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria*. These species already represented the type of the adjacent mire, which we visited in the early morning. Oskars also captured 2 Corncrakes *Crex crex*, a third was singing.

We experienced an impressing, intact and beautiful mire landscape. The bog was surrounded by a 200-300 m wide, near-natural and wild, species-rich deciduous forest belt with *Quercus robur, Tilia cordata, Carpinus betulus, Corylus avellana, Ulmus laevis* and/or *Ulmus minor*. The next zone (c. 200 m) consisted of a very wet alder carr with surprisingly deep water, large sedge species, *Iris pseudacorus* etc. Towards the inner mire followed a 300-400 m wide belt of *Sphagnum*-Pine forest with *Ledum palustre*. Towards the core area of the bog the landscape structure became more and more open, the scattered pines growing not more than 1-2 m high. In the semi-open and open mire centre we observed an impressing complete set of bird species typical for raised bogs:

- Tetrao tetrix (males) displaying on the top of small pine trees;
- Tringa nebularia and Tringa glareola displaying and alarming;
- at least 3 pairs of *Pluvialis apricaria* calling, alarming and in display flight;
- Numenius arquata, Limosa limosa and Tringa totanus calling and alarming;
- Grus grus 2 pairs calling in the background;
- Sterna hirundo 2 birds (pair?)
- Larus canus 5 birds, flying nearby;
- Lanius excubitor on a perch;
- Alauda arvensis 2 singing males;
- *Motacilla citreola* (several territorial pairs).

During the early morning, the melodious voices of the numerous waders, singing Black Grouses and calls of Cranes formed a most impressive concert, featuring an almost intact, natural raised bog.

There was no indication of occurrence of any fen mire in and around the whole mire tract. Local people who we asked about open fen vegetation said, that they know large open mire tracts around. We got the idea to ask about cranberries *Oxycoccus palustris*, which are intensively collected by local people. They confirmed, that in all large open mires they know there are growing plenty of cranberries. We concluded, that there are no fen mires in this region, since cranberries are only growing in raised bogs and transitory mires.

Lake Uswjatskoe (55.42 N, 30.16 E), 2nd June

We visited the southern and southeastern bank of Lake Uswjatskoe. This part of the Lake is very shallow, with several islands, some with forest, others occur only as stands of *Schoenoplectus lacustris*.

At the mouth of a small tributary was a sedge-horsetail fen of about 15 ha size, the sedge stands consisting mainly of *Carex cespitosa*, mixed with *Equisetum fluviatile*, and parts dominated of very strong and high-growing *Comarum palusre*. It was obvious that the water table is strongly fluctuating, and that the water level has been much higher (0.5-1.0 m) only a few days ago. Because of the relatively small size and the high water table dynamics it was unlikely to find any AW at this place. In the outer, dryer parts of the sedge swamp there was a meadow that was previously burned (burned shrubs) with *Caltha palustris* high grasses, especially 'Zhubrovka' *Hierochloe odorata*.

Observed bird species:

- In the 'Zhubrovka' meadow: Saxicola rubetra, nest with 7 eggs found;
- Nest of *Emberiza schoeniclus* with 5 eggs:
- Sedge horsetail swamp: Acrocephalus schoenobaenus at low density;
- On the small river and the shallow lake: *Podiceps cristatus, Cygnus olor* (2 birds), *Anas crecca, A. platyrhynchos* (15 ind.), *A. querquedula, Anas clypeata, Aythya ferina, A. fuligula, Bucephala clangula*;
- Foraging over the water surface: Sterna hirundo, Chlidonias niger, Chlidonias leucopterus;
- at a forested island: 2 Falco vespertinus (foraging), 2 Haliaeetis albicilla.



Pic. 13: Shallow south-eastern part of Lake Uswjatskoe (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 14: AWCT members checking a potential Aquatic Warbler habitat at Lake Uswjatskoe (Photo: A. Le Néve)

Small river 10-15 km E Uswjaty, Pskov Oblast (55.44 N, 30.52 E), 2nd June

On the way to the northwest (to Nevel') we observed the mires and wetlands along the road. Mostly only raised bogs occurred. But we found a small, marshy river valley with an area of c. 20 ha of open sedge fen along the road. The marginal parts were already overgrown with willow bushes. The sedge fen was dominated by *Carex elata* of medium height and was rather wet. The habitat quality for AW was evaluated as sub-optimal; there are such habitats occupied by AW along the upper Pripyat (e.g. Shtshedrogir), but in context with bigger AW populations nearby. We checked a big part of the open sedge area thoroughly without finding AW.

In the moist meadows between road and sedge fen we found 2 pairs of Lapwing Vanellus vanellus alarming, 6 Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* (resting) and a flock of 8 Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* (resting). We also observed a Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* (foraging flight), a soaring Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina,* a male Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and two Snipes *Gallinago gallinago*.



Pic. 15: Probably illegal selling of wild animal skins at the Motorway M 9: Igor showing Lynx skins (Photo: A. Le Nevé)

Krjukovskoe Mokh NE Zemtsy (56.17 N, 32.27 E), 2nd / 3rd June

We visited this mire tract, because we had the information that in the marginal parts of the mire would be a true sedge fen. We already realised from the road that there was not any indication of green moss fen – only Pine-*Sphagnum* forests and raised bog.

We stayed with our camp on an abandoned forest clearing (abandoned farmland of a former home-stead farm) with 4 singing Corncrakes *Crex crex* (all caught by Oskars for ringing and blood-sampling), displaying Woodcocks *Scolopax rusticola*, singing River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis* (Martin found a nest) and Elk *Alces alces* tracks.

The mire itself was again a wonderful raised bog with a narrow alder carr margin, a wide *Sphagnum*-Pine forest belt with Common Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra*, Crested Tit *Parus cristatus* and Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, and a semi-open core area. Besides Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* and the typical wader species – *Tringa ochropus* along the margin (alder carrs), *Pluvialis apricaria, Tringa nebularia, Tringa glareola* etc. in the centre, there were several pairs of Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* in the semi-open part.



Pic. 16: Camp on the abandoned forest clearing at Krjukovskoe Mokh (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 17: Oskars with one of his Corncrakes at Krjukovskoe Mokh (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 18: Sphagnum-pine forest belt (burned area) of Krjukovskoe Mokh (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 19: Open core area of Krjukovskoe Mokh, with Golden Plover, Greenshank and Whimbrel (Photo: A. Le Nevé)

Yelsha valley near Podosinky, Smolenskie Pooserie BR (55.40 N, 32.06 E), 3rd June

Since all available information on potential fen mires in that region of Russia that we checked in the field turned out to be not true, we decided to visit the Smolenskie Pooserie in the northern Smolensk Oblast and to ask the Biosphere Reserve administration at Prshewalskoe for advice. They directed us to a small river valley in the Northwest of the BR (Yelsha river) and suggested also to visit their biologist Marina Sidenko, who lives there in the village Podosinky.

The floodplain sedge meadows along the Yelsha river north of Yelsha lake turned out to be quite suitable for AW, but again not large enough. There was an area of c. 15 ha wet *Carex elata* fen along the river, which resembled similar habitats along the upper Pripyat that are occupied by AW – but not that isolated. We performed a sunset visit at different parts of the Yelsha floodplain mire.

Observations around Podosinky:

In the sedge fen along the Yelsha river:

- Tetrao tetrix 1-2 calling males,
- Rallus aquaticus (5 pairs along the river bank),
- >=5 singing Crex crex (1 captured),
- Gallinago gallinago displaying,
- Gallinago media 2 birds and a lek (meadow near the river N of Podosinky),
- 3 singing Locustella fluviatilis,
- 5 singing Acrocephalus schoenobaenus
- 1 singing *Luscinia svecica*.

In the northern part of Lake Yelsha:

- Podiceps cristatus;
- Aythya ferina, Aythya fuligula;
- Botaurus stellaris booming;
- several nests of Larus ridibundus (incubating);
- Sterna hirundo (1 p. incubating on a small floating mud island in a water lily field!)
- >40 pairs Chlidonias leucopterus;
- >80 pairs Chlidonias niger.

In the nearby forest :

- A chick of *Tetrastes bonasia* killed by a dog (Pic. 21);
- *Ficedula parva* 1 singing male;
- Nucifraga caryocatactes.

In the village:

- Sylvia curruca 3 singing males;
- Acrocephalus dumetorum singing, around midnight.

We stayed with our camp in the garden of Marina Sidenko and her family. She is from Rostov/Don and came to the BR administration through a published advertisement of a vacancy as biologist. She told us, that there exist several records of AW in the BR from foreign bird watchers, but these observations are not confirmed and are mostly from the migration period. She herself does not know the species yet.

She also told us, that poaching (e.g. Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallis*, but also Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*, Wolf *Canis lupus*, and deers) is a big problem in the BR. We ourselves heard several shots of illegal hunters during our stay at Marinas place.

We discussed potential AW breeding habitats of AW in the BR and the wider surroundings with Marina, and she recommended to visit the wide marshy valley of a small river (Loviya river) in the south-western BR the next day. Besides this place she did not know about any large sedge fens in the wider surroundings.



Pic. 20: At the camp fire at Podosinky – Oskars, Zydrunas, Martin, Vitaly, and Arnaud, preparing potatoes ... (photo: Rita Minets)



Pic. 21: Chick of Hazel Grouse killed by a dog, near Podosinky (Photo: A. Le Nevé)

During another stay (for shopping etc.) in Prshewalskoe we had a rare observation: Arnaud discovered and we all saw a soaring **Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata* (dark morphe) not far from the BR administration building. This species is rare and irregular in the BR; Marina has not yet seen the species there.

We also visited the interesting small museum on natural history and the life of Prshewalski.

In the village we also heard our first Hoopoe Upupa epops (far north!).



Pic. 22: Nikolaj Prshewalski statue at Prshewalskoe (Photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 23: Head quarter of the Smolenskie Pooserie Biosphere Administration at Prshewalskoe (Photo: A. Le Nevé)

Lovya river fen mire, Smolenskie Pooserie BR (55.27 N, 31.42 E), 4th June

The Loviya river marshes have also most likely been suitable for AW around 15-20 years ago (poor eutrophic – mesotrophic green moss fen), but are now also completely overgrown with bushes and reeds. There was no patch of open sedge fen bigger than 1 ha.

Observations around the small Loviya bridge:

- 4-6 singing Sylvia nisoria and many Lanius collurio;
- 1 nest of Sylvia curruca (2 eggs);
- Jynx torquilla calling;
- Alcedo atthis;
- 3-4 singing Lullula arborea;
- in the overgrown fen: *Circus aeruginosus, Circus pygargus* (1 male), *Pernis apivorus* (displaying), *Rallus aquaticus, Porzana porzana, Gallinago gallinago, Locustella luscinioides, L. naevia, Acrocephalus schoenobaenus.*

We came to the conclusion, that, in course of the large-scale abandonment of farmland and rural villages after Perestroika, obviously all or nearly all former sedge fens in the small river valleys of western European Russia have been abandoned in the last 15 years and are now overgrown with bushes and reeds, and are also frequently, but useless burned ('wastescapes'). We decided that it has not much sense to visit more of these small river valleys, but that we should have a look at the Dnjepr floodplain at such parts that seem to be wide and marshy along a strongly meandering river channel. We identified three such areas on the map: N of Yelcha, SE of Titkovo and E of Shitovka.



Pic. 24: Camp near Petrishtshevo in the early morning fog (Oskars, Igor, Martin, Natasha, Mikhail, Vitaly) (photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 25: Another camp (near Lozovo) early in the morning (photo: A. Le Nevé)

Dnjepr valley near Yeltsha (54.56 N, 33.48 E), 5th June

We tried to go from Yelcha to the north as close to the river as we can. We hat to stop the car at the edge of the true floodplain. We approaches the river in two directions (to the north and to the west). There occurred the following zonation towards the river:

- a) Deciduous and mixed forest at the edge of the floodplain (*Populus tremula, Betula pendula, Picea abies*);
- b) A marshy depression along a small tributary, with a wet fallow (high herbs like *Filipendula ulmaria, Angelica archangelica*) and *Carex* swamp (*Carex paniculata, C. appropinquata*), but very bushy (*Salix cinerea, Salix pentandra*) and many high trees (*Betula* and *Alnus*) (c. 300-400 m wide);
- c) A mineral elevation with old, very wild near-natural mixed forest with *Picea abies, Tilia cordata, Ulmus minor, Carpinus betulus* (c. 500 m wide);
- d) A wet alder carr with *Carex elongata, Carex acutiformis, Iris pseudacorus* (200-300 m);
- e) A very wet, light alder stand with very deep water and floating surface towards the river, with *Equisetum fluviatile, Calla palustris, Iris pseudacorus* (c. 100-200 m wide), with a huge burrow (2 m high) of Beaver *Castor fiber;*
- f) A wet, high growing sedge swamp with *Carex elata, C. appropinquata, Lythrum salicaria, Lysimachia vulgaris, Comarum palustre* and without any green mosses (c. 400-500 m wide).
- g) A gallery forest along the river or a river oxbow (we did not succeed to reach this area due to heavy rain) with high poplar and willow trees.

Typical bird species recorded in these zones were:

- b) Wet fallow, bushy swamp: Locustella fluviatilis, Luscinia luscinia.
- c) Wild forest on mineral elevation: *Ficedula parva* (>=2 singing males).
- d) Wet alder carr: Tringa ochropus (alarming pair).
- e) Very wet alder swamp: *Remiz pendulinus, Carpodacus erythrinus*.
- f) Swampy wet sedge meadow: *Crex crex* (>= 4 singing, very wet for this species), *Gallinago gallinago, Acrocephalus schoenobaenus, Emberiza schoeniclus.*

For AW the habitat was too eutrophic, too wet and the vegetation was too dense and high.

'Dammkultur' near Titkovo (Dnjepr; 54.49 N, 33.17 E), 5th June

The 5th of June ended in long-lasting rain. We established our camp near the edge of the Dnjepr floodplain in a very strange landscape, which is called 'Rimpausche Dammkultur' in Germany: At a distance of c. 50 m parallel drainage channels ware build, and the sand under the peat layer was partly taken to cover the stripes ('dams') between the channels. These stripes, however, were still so peaty and wet, that we got in trouble with our bus and had to pull out the first time (see Pc. 26). Along the channels there are hedges of willow bushes and young trees growing.

Bird species around the camp were:

Milvus migrans, Crex crex (>= 3 singing, 2 captured), *Buteo buteo, Porzana porzana* (1 calling), *Scolopax rusticola* (several displaying), *Locustella fluviatilis, L. naevia, Acrocephalus dumetorum.*



Pic. 26: Our bus in trouble near Titkovo (photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 27, 28: Martin & Mikhail as (successful) working horses near Titkovo (photo: Rita Minets)

Dnjepr floodplain near Shitovka (54.40 N, 33.08 E), 6th June

At this place, the Dnjepr already has a highly dynamic floodplain and strong water table fluctuations of at least 3 or 4 m (markings at the steep river banks and gallery forests). This type of floodplain in general is not suitable for AW. There occur no sedge marshes, but *Cnidium dubium* floodplain meadows.

Typical for this type of river are large numbers of Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*. Other bird species observed: *Sterna hirundo; Dencrocopos leucotos* (in the village!); *Oriolus oriolus*.

On the way back to Minsk we stopped at an active gravel pit between Smolensk and the border checkpoint with interesting bird species: *Charadrius dubius, Larus canus, Chlidonia hybrida, Chlidonias leucopterus*.



Pic. 29: Smolensk at the Dnjepr river (photo: A. Le Nevé)



Pic. 30: Good bye, Mikhail – and thank you! At the train station in Smolensk (photo: Rita Minets)

No.	Species
1.	Cygnus olor
2.	C. cygnus
З.	Anas strepera
4.	A. crecca
5.	A. platyrhynchos
6.	A. guerquedula
7.	A. clypeata
8.	Aythya ferina
9.	A. fuligula
10.	Bucephala clangula
11.	Coturnix coturnix
12.	Tetrastes bonasia
13.	Tetrao tetrix
14.	Tachybaptus ruficollis
15.	Podiceps cristatus
16.	P. nigricollis
17.	Gavia arctica
18.	Phalacrocorax carbo
19.	Botaurus stellaris
20.	Ixobrychus minutus
21.	Ardea cinerea
22.	Ciconia ciconia
23.	C. nigra
24.	Pernis apivorus
25.	Circaetus gallicus
26.	Aquila pomarina
27.	Aquila pennata
28.	Circus cyaneus
29.	C. pygargus
30.	C. aeruginosus
31.	Milvus migrans
<i>3</i> ∠.	Hallaeetus albicilla
33.	Euleo Duleo
34.	Faico columbanus
30.	F. vesperunus
27	F. subbuleo
37.	Crus crus
30.	Rallus aquaticus
40	Crex crex
41	Porzana porzana
42	Fulica atra
43	Pluvialis apricaria
44.	Vanellus vanellus
45.	Charadrius dubius
46.	Numenius phaeopus
47.	N. arquata
48.	Limosa limosa
49.	Scolopax rusticola
50.	Gallinago media
51.	G. gallinago
52.	Actitis hypoleucos
53.	Tringa totanus
54.	T. nebularia
55.	T. ochropus
56.	T. alareola

57.	Philomachus pugnax
58.	Larus ridibundus
59.	L. canus
60.	L. argentatus
61.	L. cachinnans
62.	Chlidonias hybrida
63.	C. leucopterus
64.	C. niaer
65.	Sterna hirundo
66	Columba livia f domestica
67	Columba oenas
68	C palumbus
69	Streptopelia decaocto
70	S turtur
71	Cuculus canorus
72	
72.	Alcedo atthis
73.	
74.	
75.	Digue conus
70.	Picus Callus Dondrogonos maior
70	Denarocopos major
78. 70	D. mealus
79.	D. leucotos
80.	Dryobates minor
81.	Oriolus oriolus
82.	Lanius collurio
83.	L. excubitor
84.	Pica pica
85.	Garrulus glandarius
86.	Nucifraga caryocatactes
86. 87.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula
86. 87. 88.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula C. frugilegus
86. 87. 88. 89.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula C. frugilegus C. cornix
86. 87. 88. 89. 90.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula C. frugilegus C. cornix C. corax
86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula C. frugilegus C. cornix C. corax Remiz pendulinus
86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula C. frugilegus C. cornix C. corax Remiz pendulinus Parus caeruleus
86. 87. 88. 90. 91. 92. 93.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula C. frugilegus C. cornix C. corax Remiz pendulinus Parus caeruleus P. major
86. 87. 88. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94.	Nucifraga caryocatactes Corvus monedula C. frugilegus C. cornix C. corax Remiz pendulinus Parus caeruleus P. major P. cristatus
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Annex I: List of bird species observed on the AWCT Field Trip 2006

115.	A. arundinaceus
116.	Hippolais icterina
117.	Sylvia atricapilla
118.	S. borin
119.	S. nisoria
120.	S. curruca
121.	S. communis
122.	Regulus regulus
123.	Sitta europaea
124.	Certhia familaris
125.	Troglodytes troglodytes
126.	Sturnus vulgaris
127.	Turdus viscivorus
128.	T. merula
129.	T. pilaris
130.	T. philomelos
131.	T. iliacus
132.	Muscicapa striata
133.	Ficedula parva
134.	F. hypoleuca
135.	Saxicola rubetra
136.	Erithacus rubecula
137.	Luscinia luscinia
138.	L. svecica
139.	Phoenicurus ochruros
140.	P. phoenicurus

141.	Oenanthe oenanthe
142.	Passer domesticus
143.	P. montanus
144.	Anthus trivialis
145.	A. pratensis
146.	Motacilla citreola
147.	M. flava
148.	M. alba
149.	Fringilla coelebs
150.	Coccthraustes coccothraustes
151.	Carpodacus erythrinus
152.	Loxia curvirostra
153.	Carduelis chloris
154.	C. carduelis
155.	C. spinus
156.	C. cannabina
157.	Emberiza citrinella
158.	E. schoeniclus
159.	

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The winner of the big ice-cream was <u>*Rita</u></u> <u><i>Minets*!</u></u>

Annex II: Financial Balance AWCT Activities 2006

1. Travel and visa expenses

Name	country	total travel	date of	comments
		costs spent	payment	
Viktar Fenchuk	Belarus	20.00	31.5.	train tickets for travel back
Alexander Kozulin	Belarus	30.00	29.5.	travel to Servech and back
Arnaud Le Nevé	France	200.00	29.5.	25 % of total travel and hotel (flat
				in Minsk) expenses (= 760 €)
Oskars Keiss	Latvia	186.00	29.5.	bus and train tickets, visa
Zydrunas Preiksa	Lithuania	165.00	29.5.	bus and train tickets, visa
Mikhail Kalyakin	Russia	46.00	6.6.	train tickets for Mikhail + student
Mikhail Kalyakin	Russia	252.00	6.6.	visa invitations for Russia
Igor Gorban	Ukraine	203.82	28.+ 29.5.	travel expenses
Total travel expense		1,102,82		

2. Total budget

Position	date of	in €
	payment	
1. Expenses		
•		
1.1. Belarus/Russia expedition		
Total travel + visa expenses (see separate table above)	28.56.6.	1,102.82
Field equipment, food, medicaments (M. Flade)	26.5.	87.24
Local guide Yelnia (Valery)	30.5.	35.00
Hotel in Smolensk (to M. Kalyakin)	6.6.	125.15
Field accommodation + petrol Belarus (9 people x 3 days x 10 €)	2830.5.	270.00
Field accommodation + petrol Russia (9 people x 7 days x 10 €)	31.56.6.	630.00
Bus rent incl. salary driver (Vitaly), 10 days: 28.56.6.	6.6.	1,000.00
	subtotal	3,250.21
1.2. Lower Oder habitat study		
Habitat study Lower Oder Valley, stay of Rita Minets in Germany	17.7.	958.00
(see separate budget list from Franziska)	(bank transfer)	
1.3. Shatsk National Park survey		
AW survey in Shatsk National Park, Ukraine	29.5.	150.00
(to Igor Gorban, see separate report)		
	subtotal	1,108.00
1.4. Economy		
Surplus, saved for the Sénégal expedition January/February 2007		814.79
(after consulting Lars Lachmann and Norbert Schäffer from RSPB)		
	total expenses	5,173.00
2. Income		
RSPB Small Grant Agreement		5,173.00