

## The LIFE Project:

OTOP has gathered a partnership of seven NGOs and National Parks from three countries to implement a concise five year project (until 2010) addressing the key conservation needs of the Aquatic Warbler at nine key sites in Poland and Germany. The largest part of the funding is contributed by the EU LIFE Nature Fund.

### The LIFE Project aims to:

- prevent the extinction of the remnant Pomeranian Population
- to improve and increase suitable habitat in the EU stronghold of the species, the Biebrza Valley

Thereby, the project is targeting about 75% of all Aquatic Warblers breeding in the European Union.

To find out more about project, visit:

[www.wodniczka.pl](http://www.wodniczka.pl) or [www.seggenrohrsanger.eu](http://www.seggenrohrsanger.eu)



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### Partners:



The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, BirdLife Partner in the UK)



Western Pomeranian Nature Society (ZTP)



Förderverein Naturschutz im Peenetal e.v. (FVP)



North-Podlissian Society for the Protection of Birds (PTOP)



Biebrza National Park (BPN)

### Main Sponsor:



The EU LIFE Nature Fund

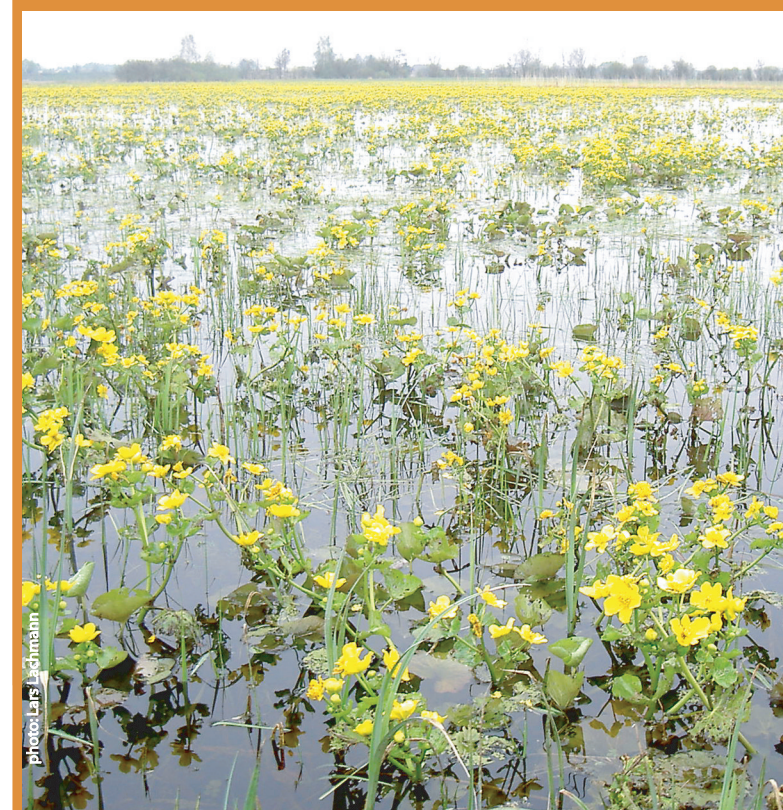
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# Laskowiec Zajki

Project site of the EU LIFE Nature project

Conserving Aquatic Warblers  
in Poland and Germany



## LIFE Project sites in the Biebrza National Park Buffer Zone

The LIFE Project includes three areas in the buffer zone of the Biebrza National Park with a combined area of c. 1,060 ha. These are: Laskowiec-Zajki, Mścichy and Bagno Lawki-Szorce.

The Laskowiec-Zajki site covers about 76 ha and is like the National Park included in the EU Natura 2000 site "Biebrza Valley".

"Natura 2000 - Europe's wildlife for you." This place is a part of Europe's Natura 2000 network, which means, that this area is inhabited by the most endangered species of plants and animals in Europe. 27 EU countries created a joint network of Natura 2000, to protect the most valuable items of the continent's wildlife heritage."

photo: Cezary Pięto



Aquatic Warbler

## Laskowiec-Zajki Project site characteristics:

The site is an area of meadows located between the border of the Biebrza National Park and the road that connects two villages: Laskowiec and Zajki. The western and northern parts are dominated by associations of the sedge *Carex elata*, which however here does not form the tussocks that are characteristic for this species. In the eastern parts of the site the sedge *Carex acutiformis* and reed canary grass *Phalaris arundinacea* are especially prominent amongst other wet meadow plants. Some slightly elevated areas show the vegetation of typical meadows with several cuts a year. Apart from the Aquatic Warbler you can find here such special birds as Great Snipe, Spotted Crane, Corncrake, Garganey, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank and Common Snipe. In wet years, the site is full of White-winged Black Terns.

The site has changed considerably in the 70-ies of the previous century, when an attempt was made to drain the previous pristine sedge fen mire to allow more intensive agricultural use. Today, the site still holds much water during the spring, but is normally dry by the summer. The use of these wet meadows for winter hay has recently become uneconomical. If not mown, the parcels grow over with high and dense vegetation and lose their value for the Aquatic Warbler and many other bird species. On the other hand, a too early mowing date (before August) equally harms the Aquatic Warbler, as it does not allow the species to bring up their broods before the mowing date.

## Why did we choose this site?

Laskowiec-Zajki site is well known amongst local and foreign birdwatchers as one of the most attractive and accessible places for the observation of marshland birds. It is very important for migrating waders, like ruffs, and one of the best breeding sites for increasingly endangered meadow-breeding waders like Black-tailed Godwits. We chose the site because it is one of the two sites with the largest number of Aquatic Warblers in the buffer zone of the Biebrza National Park, but is not covered by any form of formal protection. In the year 2007, the site held 25 singing males, i.e. 0.9% of the Polish Aquatic Warbler population.

During the past century, the global population of this species fell by 95%, mainly due to large-scale drainage of fen mires and wet meadows. But today the biggest threat is the abandonment of extensively used wet meadows, which leads to overgrowth by reeds and bushes. At this project site, both threats are present: too intensive use with early mowing dates, as well as the complete abandonment of parcels. Hence, with the current changes in Polish agriculture in mind, it is necessary to actively protect the Aquatic Warbler and other species at this site.



photo: Małgorzata Górnska

Birdwatching

## Conservation action

The aim of the project at this site is to work together with the local landowners to ensure a reduction of the intensity of land use, where the meadows are mown too early, and to re-establish regular extensive land use where parcels have been abandoned.

A management plan is being developed that recommends wildlife-friendly land use and gives guidance on how to realise this with the help of agri-environmental schemes. Where landowners are not interested in extensive land use, we try to purchase their parcels in order to ensure suitable conditions for breeding Aquatic Warblers.



photo: John Fox

White-winged Black Terns