

What are the main threats?

- Disruption of the optimal hydrological regime of the breeding sites.
- Deterioration of suitable habitat by increased growth of reeds and bushes due to abandonment of traditional land use and hydrological changes.
- Low awareness of Aquatic Warbler conservation needs amongst land users.
- Land is not available for conservation management.
- No clarity about long-term management options and their financial feasibility.

How does the project address them?

- We develop targeted Management Plans for all project sites and agree them with land users. The plans will cover 42,000 ha.
- We implement active habitat management on up to 3,000 ha to reduce overgrowth by reeds and bushes (late mowing, extensive grazing, bush removal).
- We build, adjust or plan for structures that influence the hydrology of the sites to ensure optimal water levels throughout the year.
- We purchase land where this is necessary to implement conservation activities.
- We explore new ways of managing the sites cost-effectively in the long-term by testing cheap techniques and the energetic use of biomass from our sites, and by developing special agri-environmental schemes that support suitable management practices in Aquatic Warbler habitats.
- We carefully monitor the birds and their habitat to measure the effect of our conservation work and to adjust plans if needed.

To find out more about the project, visit:

www.wodniczka.pl or www.seggenrohrsaenger.eu

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The Aquatic Warbler LIFE Project
is a project of:

The Polish Society for the Protection of Birds
(OTOP - BirdLife Poland)



In cooperation with:



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



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Conserving Aquatic Warblers

in Poland and Germany
An EU LIFE Nature Project



photo: Alexander Kozulin

What is special about the Aquatic Warbler?

The Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) is Europe's rarest migratory songbird and the only globally threatened species of songbird on the European mainland. The world population is c. 17,000 singing males. It breeds in only around 50 locations in seven countries, covering together not more than 1000 km² (~30x30 km). The numbers of this species have decreased by about 95% during the last century. Most of the remaining population of the species is concentrated in Belarus (60%), Poland and Ukraine (18% each), giving these countries the biggest responsibility to preserve the species for the future.



Where does it live and why is it threatened?

The Aquatic Warbler is a habitat specialist. Over thousands of years it became adapted to breed in mesotrophic fen mires, a special type of groundwater fed peatland rich in sedges, and in similarly structured wetlands, for which it is a flagship species. This type of periodically flooded mire once covered large areas in a belt from the Netherlands through central Europe to western Siberia, but in the last hundred years almost all of these mires have been drained and converted into agricultural land. Only a handful of good-sized fen mires could be saved from destruction. Additionally, the species found refuge in some smaller sites whose habitat quality depends heavily on human activity. Therefore, changes to the traditional land use and original hydrological conditions are now the biggest threat. Having lost most of its original habitat, the Aquatic Warbler has today become a conservation dependent species. Conserving Aquatic Warbler means protecting a whole habitat type with its unique flora and fauna.

Aquatic Warblers in Poland and Germany

The majority of Poland's Aquatic Warblers live in the east around the famous Biebrza Marshes (c. 2700 males). They are in contact with the rest of the core population of the species in Belarus and Ukraine. In the west there is a separate and highly threatened population that Poland shares with Germany; the so-called "Pomeranian population" of now only 80-90 singing males, which is genetically and ecologically distinct from all other populations and probably a remnant of a much larger population centred in northern Germany.

International treaty for a small brown bird

In 2003 a "Memorandum of Understanding concerning conservation measures for the Aquatic Warbler" has been signed and ratified by 12 range states of the species as a sub-agreement to the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species - the first and only international treaty for a "little brown bird". Our project helps to address the obligations of Poland and Germany under this memorandum.



photo: Alexander Kozulin

The Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) - distinguished from its warbler colleagues by its vivid striping on head and back.



photo: Lars Lachmann

Aquatic Warblers live in open fen mires like this in the Biebrza National Park.

The LIFE Project:

OTOP has gathered a partnership of five NGOs and two National Parks from three countries to implement a concise five year project (until 2010) addressing the conservation needs of the Aquatic Warbler at its key sites. 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
- improve and increase suitable habitat in the EU stronghold of the species, the Biebrza Valley

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

The LIFE Project sites:



A. Project sites in Pomerania:

1. Karsiborska Kepa
2. Zajecze Legi
3. Wolin National Park
4. Rozwarowo mires
5. Krajnik
6. Lake Miedwie
7. Lower Peene Valley/Germany

B. Project sites in the Biebrza Valley:

1. Biebrza National Park
2. Biebrza National Park Buffer Zone