

LITHUANIA

Biodiversity restoration, preservation & enhancement

Location

Aleknoniai

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P4 – Ecosystems
management

Measure

M4 – Investments in physical
assets

Funding (EUR)

RDP support 29 254

Project duration

2017 – 2018

Project promoter

Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve
Directorate

Contact

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Website

www.zuvintas.lt

Maintaining natural and semi-natural meadows and wetlands to ensure suitable nesting conditions for an endangered bird species: the Aquatic Warbler.

Summary

The Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve is an important habitat for the Aquatic Warbler. The species is facing extinction due to an increase in abandoned farmland and the transformation of meadows into grazing land. As this was also the case at the reserve, an intervention was required to restore the bird's preferred habitats. Support from the RDP was used to cut the grass and remove trees and shrubs from an area of 26.5 ha of natural and semi-natural meadows and extensively used wetlands.



Results

The conditions on the reserve for the Aquatic Warbler improved.

In addition to the Aquatic Warbler, other protected species of birds settled in the territory, e.g. Common Redshanks, Black-tailed Godwits and migrating Cranes.

The conditions became favourable for rare protected plant species.

During the project period, two jobs were created and after the project is completed, one permanent job will remain.

Lessons & Recommendations

- When planning landscape interventions such as large-scale grass cutting, it is important to take meteorological conditions into account and select the most appropriate periods, and suitable technical equipment, for carrying out the work.

Context

The Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) is the only globally threatened passerine bird found in mainland Europe. Lithuania and Latvia are currently among only eight countries worldwide with suitable breeding habitats for this rare species. Today, the species is facing extinction due to an increase in abandoned farmland and the transformation of meadows into grazing land. Therefore its conservation is closely linked to sustainable farming practices.

The Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve was becoming a threatened habitat for the bird as there were many unnecessary shrubs and other herbaceous vegetation that prevented the birds from successful breeding. Therefore, the second stage of the project sought to establish 8.72 hectares of land with suitable conditions for the Aquatic Warbler.

Objectives

The aim of the project was to improve breeding conditions for the Aquatic Warbler on the Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve.

Activities

The project activities included cutting and removing the grass and shrubs from the area of the Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve that was identified as being suitable breeding ground for the birds: a protected botanical reserve marshland area where sedges grow. In order to preserve the protected plants - which are highly susceptible to mechanical damage - it was essential to carry out the work at the time when the water level is at its lowest, or during the winter when the marsh is frozen. It was also necessary to use technical equipment that is adapted for high humidity conditions, e.g. a tractor with widened and twinned wheels.

Initially, the cutting of the open sedge areas was planned for the autumn. However, due to the high levels of precipitation and high water level in the marsh in the

autumn of 2017, the grass cutting could only be carried out after the marsh had frozen over. All of the woody vegetation - trees and shrubs - were cut by brush cutters and saw blades and removed from the marsh. Later, all of the remaining stumps were crushed using a tractor mill. Removing the stumps was very important in order to successfully carry out the project commitment to cut the sedge meadows. In addition to all of this, the meadows on the edges of the marsh were cut and the collected biomass was used for the production of fuel pellets.

Main results

Following the completion of the project, conditions for the Aquatic Warbler are improving: with flora starting to change and woody vegetation now more easily controlled. The requirements for achieving favourable preservation status are expected to be met within two years. In addition to the Aquatic Warbler, other protected species of birds have settled in the territory, such as Common Redshanks, Black-tailed Godwits, and migrating Cranes.

Conditions have also improved for rare protected plant species, with the conservation status of the Natura 2000 habitat (alkaline marshland type) now considered to be favourable.

Two job positions were created during the project period and, on completion, one permanent position will remain.

Key lessons

When planning landscape interventions such as large-scale grass cutting, it is important to take meteorological conditions into account and select the most appropriate periods, and suitable technical equipment, for carrying out the work.



Additional sources of information

n/a