After Life Conservation Plan

Securing Sustainable Farming to Ensure Conservation of Globally Threatened Bird Species in Agrarian Landscape

LIFE09 NAT/LT/000233

Vilnius, 2017

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Introduction

Coordinating beneficiary Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania together with partners Zuvintas Biosphere Reserve Administration, Kretinga State Forest Enterprise, JSC Goldengras and Latvian Fund for Nature implemented a project dedicated for conservation of globally threatened Aquatic warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) in Lithuania and Latvia. The project "Securing Sustainable Farming to Ensure Conservation of Globally Threatened Bird Species in Agrarian Landscape" (LIFE09 NAT/LT/000233) started in 2010 and finished in 2015. **Main objective** of the project was to ensure the favorable conservation status of the globally

threatened species - Aquatic Warbler in targeted region. While specific objectives were following:

1) ensure favorable conservation status of the Aquatic warbler by restoration of unfavorably managed or abandoned habitats in most important known sites in Lithuania and Latvia and forming favorable habitat conditions for species conservation;
2) establish and promote favorable and sustainable conditions for farmers/landowners to implement conservation measures by renewed agro-environmental schemes and supported by alternative economic solutions;
3) define a clear long-term strategy for appropriate Aquatic warbler and other globally threatened birds conservation in Lithuania and Latvia and set up a basis for its implementation by filling capacity gaps, set up needed machinery and infrastructure, demonstrating conservation measures in practice and creating cooperative dialogue with key-stakeholders and society;
4) raise public awareness and acceptance about Aquatic warbler and other globally threatened bird species conservation needs and appreciation for the conservation measures implemented by local communities and nature conservation related authorities.

The project performed habitat restoration in 1400 ha area, restoring abandoned Aquatic warbler breeding grounds. These areas are mostly fenmires, but also annually flooded meadows in the polders of located in western Lithuania. Even most important project target was globally threatened Aquatic warbler conservation, site restoration also contributed to improvement of 6410, 6510, 6450, 7140, 7160 and 7230 habitat types of EU importance located in the area. Conservation activities benefitted also for other protected species, such as Great Snipe, Corncrake, Spotted crake and others. Project also performed demonstration management in more than 100 ha area demonstrating specialized machinery able farming in wet conditions as well as performing more specific restoration – prescribed burning.

Habitat restoration mostly included suppression of reed vegetation and stimulate growth of sedge grass communities by performing intensive mowing of targeted reed beds, preferably two times in a season. Other target of habitat restoration – removal of bushes and other

wooden vegetation aiming to open large-scale fen mire or alluvial meadows landscapes. Project also tested restoration by applying controlled fire.

Working in the area of establishing favorable farming conditions in line with conservation needs of Aquatic warbler, project installed biomass processing facility in Zuvintas Biosphere Reserve producing pellets from late-cut biomass. Other important component for all Aquatic warbler breeding sites – introduction of special agri-environmental measure focussed on Aquatic warbler conservation.

The project also was very active in communication and building cooperative relations with farmers acting in Aquatic warbler breeding grounds.

Most of the restored sites requires recurring management to maintain and further improve habitat quality. Some areas require annual mowing, others – less frequent. In order to ensure species conservation in privately owned areas, maintenance regular dialogue with farmers is also an important follow up activity.

As concerns conservation status of Aquatic warbler population in the Baltic region, most critical conservation activities are successfully implemented by this project. It eventually resulted population increase in the recent years. However, national population remains highly fragmented in the region and in long-term perspective, survival of this species in the region remains at high risk.

This After-LIFE conservation plan reviews current situation of Aquatic warbler and its breeding habitat conservation, foresee further conservation priorities and estimates budget required for it.

More information about the project achievements could seen in the Layman's report available at a separate section of the project website: https://www.meldine.lt/baltic-aquatic-warbler

Assessment of the current situation after project implementation

Assessment of the current situation with the Aquatic warbler conservation and is made based on the SWOT analysis methodology.

STRENGTHS

1) **Most important existing (in Lithuania) and potential Aquatic warbler breeding habitats are restored to the condition of being suitable for Aquatic warbler breeding and can be further maintained by regular recurring management practice**. Performed habitat restoration currently allows to enter the sites and perform regular mowing (however still in wet conditions in some cases) in the sites – big amount of redundant biomass is removed as well as bushes, trees, potholes and other obstacles.

2) **In Lithuania introduced special agri-environmental measure focused on Aquatic warbler conservation**. The measure provides compensations for habitat maintenance according Aquatic warbler conservation needs, as well as providing opportunity to get a one-time investment for habitat restoration (as part of separate measure non-productive investment). The measure is applicable in predefined geographic area (existing and potential breeding habitats for Aquatic warbler) covering nearly 6700 ha. In 2017, uptake of the measure was app. 40 % of eligible area. The text box 1 (next page) presents description of major requirements within the measures.

3) **Established relationships with farmers and good knowledge on the land-use in privately owned areas**. The project managed to establish a good contact with local farmers acting in Aquatic warbler breeding grounds. Maintaining regular dialogue, it developed into relationships of mutual trust and understanding. Based on this relationship, farmers have agreed to postpone mowing in the spots where Aquatic warbler singing males were observed. Established mutual trust and cooperation is an important "investment" in the way towards negotiating conditions favourable for Aquatic warbler conservation.

4) **Gained knowledge on Aquatic warbler conservation needs and possible techniques of habitat restoration**. During project implementation, a lot of practical experience has been gathered on various technical and scientific aspects of habitat restoration. This knowledge, combined with experience gained in other similar projects in Poland, Belarus and Germany creates a solid experience based know-how on fulfilling conservation needs of globally threatened Aquatic warbler. It could be applied in restoration of other areas within breeding range nationally or elsewhere in Europe.

5) **Baseline data on hydrological level and vegetation structure in the breeding habitats.** Gathered baseline data allows to analyze habitat change dynamics and learn more about Aquatic warbler behavior where still a lot of questions remain unclear.

Text box: 1 Conservation measures designed within action A2, integrated into Lithuanian RDP (period:

Key features of the agri-environmental measures designed for the conservation of Aquatic warbler in Lithuania (included in the national RDP for the period 2014-2020)

Set of designed measures determined following conservation measures: a) restoration of currently abandoned habitats; b) aquatic warbler conservation in the natural and semi-natural (alluvial) meadows habitats; c) aquatic warbler conservation in the fen-mire habitats. Measures can only be applied in the predetermined territories (under special GIS layer in the declaration system) selected by the experts based on the field evaluation and historic data (as aquatic warblers are highly specialized species to the habitat requirements). Total area where designed measures could be applied covers app. 6700 hectares.

Key-features for **restoration of currently abandoned habitats** included under sub-measure "*4.4 support for non-productive investments linked to the achievement of agri-environmental objectives*":

- Measure provides compensation for one-time habitat restoration action, which may include removal of bushes, mowing of reeds and/or redundant biomass;
- Applicants who successfully implemented restoration action must continue habitat maintenance by participating in the relevant agri-environmental measures for AW conservation.

Key-features for measure "**Maintenance of aquatic warbler habitats in natural and semi-natural meadows**" (measure 10.1.1.4 under "Landscape stewardship scheme"):

- Mowing of the areas where AW singing males observed must be mowed after August 15. Mapping of the AW singing males is performed in the first decade of June by specialists authorised by the Ministry of Environment. By June 15 farmers receive information about determined breeding sites where late mowing should be performed.
- Other sites where AW singing males are not observer, shall me mowed from July 1st until July 30th (this allows removal of nutrients from the nutrient-rich alluvial habitat).
- Animal grazing allowed only in mowed areas.

Key-features for measure "**Maintenance of aquatic warbler habitats in wetlands**" (measure 10.1.1.5 under "Landscape stewardship scheme")

- Declared territory should be fully mowed once in two year period (mowing 50% of the site each year);
- Mowing start should be after August 1st , mowed biomass must be removed until 1st of March next year;
- Maximum grazing intensity allowed – 1 SLU/ha.

6) **Each targeted project area has its manager equipped with necessary machinery to perform management**. After completion of the project, each targeted area had its owners or land managers who being able to perform recurring management of the area. Missing or bad quality road infrastructure was repaired, managers of the key areas (LT01-Tyrai and LT04-Zuvintas) are equipped with efficient machinery, which is able to perform mowing and biomass removal from the site.

7) **Good awareness about Aquatic warbler in targeted regions as well as on national level**. The project communication strategy was to make Aquatic warbler a famous species. By doing so, it was achieved a high awareness and interest about this species. Its breeding sites received additional importance as well as its farmers acting in the area. Being well known species, it is easier to get media and decision-makers attention to the issues related to Aquatic warbler.

WEAKNESSES

1) **Bad condition of dykes in the Tulkiarage polder (LT02 project area)**. Even repair of polder dykes was performed during project implementation, it occurred that their condition is worse than initially thought. Holes in the dykes appeared again, which does not allow to optimize water management in the polder. It creates more difficult conditions to perform mowing and increase risk of summer flooding due to western winds, which might cause destruction of broods for birds nesting on the ground.

2) **Remaining reed vegetation at the restored project areas**. Even reed beds were well suppressed during intensive habitat restoration process, still reed vegetation occur in the sites and can come back to the unfavourable condition for Aquatic warbler breeding is the areas would be abandoned for few years. Elimination of reeds from the project areas by performing of mowing, requires more years than project duration. Therefore, it is important in such location to continue regular mowing balancing reed suppression by intensive mowing with breeding of already inhabited Aquatic warblers.

3) **Late-cut biomass processing opportunities in western Lithuania and in Latvia are still too little to process full potential supply**. Around Aquatic warbler breeding habitats in western Lithuania, there is relatively little amount of biomass processing facilities, which would be willing to accept late-cut grass biomass for processing into e.g. pellets or burning bales in the heating boilers. Existing facilities to a large extend are filled with more preferred straw material. Therefore, farmers performing late mowing have difficulties to utilize their biomass as it is not suitable as feed material, too little amount of local animals to use it as bedding material (and such bedding is not of a good quality). In areas around project sites in Latvia, special biomass processing facilities does not occur at all.

OPPORTUNITIES

1) **Available funding for Aquatic warbler conservation in Lithuanian Rural Development Program**. As special agri-environmental measure for Aquatic warbler conservation has been introduced in Lithuanian Rural Development Plan for period 2014-2020, app. 13 mln. Euro has been allocated to its implementation (10 mln. euro for habitat maintenance under landscape stewardship scheme and app. 3 mln. euro for habitat restoration as non-productive investment measure). It provides an essential opportunity to maintain Aquatic warbler habitats and even restore new areas within given period.

2) **Developing potential of late-cut biomass use**. Use of late-cut biomass is still finding its way and likely in future more use opportunities will appear along the value optimization in the biomass added-value pyramid. Currently existing heating boilers, which consumes whole bales in the burning oven, could be promoted for local small town or public houses heating facilities. Currently existing town heating facilities (e.g. in Silute) use wood pellets, which are also possible to transform to consume grass pellets. New technologies are currently developing, which could lead to production of even higher value material – e.g. production of building material, cardboard or packaging from grass fibers.

3) **Nature tourism destination development – charismatic species could serve as income for locals.** Aquatic warbler is globally threatened species, which is a highlight for nature tourists, especially birdwatchers. Therefore, this species can be a flagship for promoting region as tourism destination area. Well-developed tourism industry in the region could be serious component of regional development (especially in Nemunas delta region due to its high concentration of natural and cultural heritage) generating substantial income to the region. In this context, being Aquatic warbler one of the region's highlights, creates a good precondition to appreciate existence of this species and therefore care-taking to fulfil its conservation needs.

4) **Raising interest of farmers and society members about Aquatic warbler**. Along with higher awareness raising about this globally threatened species, there are more opportunities to appear of farmers who are willing to contribute to the conservation by postponing mowing, as well as volunteers, who could provide help performing monitoring, advising farmers, etc.

5) **Developing machinery and technology to enter into wet conditions**. Currently, machinery available to perform biomass harvesting in the fenmires without harming habitat structure still remains bottle-neck. However, a number of different prototypes are developed as well as new machine modification enter into a market. Development trend lead towards higher efficiency in machinery as well as creating less soil pressure. This, will create more possibilities of machinery combination and eventually reduce costs for managing the areas.

6) Lithuania is currently facing **restructuration of network of protected areas administrations as well as forestry sector**. Depending on the outcomes of the restructuration process, it can lead to increasing competencies and capacities as well as additional funding opportunities to finance management of important areas for conservation.

7) **Implementation of follow up LIFE project "Stepping stones towards ensuring long-term favorable conservation status of Aquatic warbler in Lithuania" (LIFE NAT/LT/001024).** Since 2016 a new 7 yearlong project implementation started. It addresses major actual threats and fills existing gaps in Aquatic warbler conservation work in Lithuania as well as extends its conservation work to Belarus. The project will deliver following:
   - Create strategy for building network of stepping stone habitats for Aquatic warbler breeding in order to reduce population fragmentation in a long-term perspective. Habitat restoration will be performed in some, already defined areas.
   - Update Aquatic warbler conservation action plans in Lithuania and Belarus
   - Develop and test pilot conservation translocation of Aquatic warbler as new conservation approach, which might be necessary to ensure survival of the species and restoring former breeding grounds.
   - Open biomass processing facility near Aquatic warbler breeding habitats in western Lithuania.
   - Optimize water level management in some key breeding sites
   - Create group of volunteers who will contribute to Aquatic warbler conservation work in the breeding sites of Nemunas river delta.

THREATS

1) **Aquatic warbler population in Baltic region is still highly fragmented and isolated**. This creates a high instability and extinction risk due to loss of genetic diversity and recovery potential in case of severe circumstances leading to significant decrease of breeding success or unsuccessful wintering migration (e.g. unfavorable conditions at its wintering sites).

2) **Low capacity of protected areas administration or other public body stakeholders** in western Lithuania to perform habitat management, communication work with farmers, species monitoring and steering mowing timing. Currently, protected areas administration in the region has too little staff to perform activities necessary for Aquatic warbler conservation. There is also lack of specific skills and competencies e.g. perform monitoring of singing males, work with GIS, negotiation skills.

3) Lithuania is currently facing **restructuration of network of protected areas administrations as well as forestry sector**. Being it as opportunity, at the same time it is also a potential threat. Depending on the outcomes of the restructuration process (e.g. in case of reduced staff in the region), it can lead to even higher decrease of capacities to perform necessary conservation, monitoring and control work.
4) **Unfavourable water level dynamics in the polders of Nemunas river delta**. Water level at the polders at Nemunas river delta are managed artificially and water dynamic is a key factor influencing Aquatic warbler breeding success, its food basis supply and changes in vegetation structure. Currently use of polders does not have a clear priority setting determining, which water level dynamics shall be maintained. Lack of such clear priority setting might cause that water level is drained too quickly (to achieve so-called "agronomic norm") or too slow (in order to allow fish spawning in the flooded areas). Such circumstances might be very negative to the breeding success of Aquatic warblers.

5) **Declining status of Aquatic warbler population in its key sites on global level and potential threats at its wintering sites**. As Aquatic warblers feature metapopulational dynamics, its global numbers highly depends on the conservation status at its key habitats, which generate highest population potential. Despite key habitat areas in Poland (e.g. Biebza marshes), other locations of such sites are in Belarus and Ukraine, where is totally different circumstances to maintain the habitat. Due to unfavorable socio-economic conditions, these areas are still degrading, which can be observed also in declining numbers of Aquatic warbler population. If such decline will continue – there is a high risk of population decline at the periphery of the range (including Baltic region). Knowledge on Aquatic warbler wintering grounds is still very limited (due to lack of knowledge on species migration as well as limited access to the known areas due to its safety). Potentially, due to lack of conservation efforts at wintering grounds, it might cause serious negative implications to population dynamics.

After-LIFE objectives and methodology

- Ensure maintenance of already restored habitat respecting Aquatic warbler conservation needs (e.g. performing late mowing, managing water level, etc.) and further improve its habitats;
- Stimulate restoration of more habitat area with long-term goal to create network of suitable habitat and thus reduce fragmentation of Aquatic warbler population;
- Solve late cut biomass use, in order to finalize in practice economically viable farming system respecting Aquatic warbler conservation needs;
- Implement continuous monitoring of Aquatic warbler population.

CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

To ensure the durability of the project results and to achieve or maintain the favourable conservation status for Aquatic warbler and its breeding habitats, following conservation management actions should be implemented during the period of upcoming five years.

1. **Update of Aquatic warbler conservation species action plan in Lithuania.** During last 5 years a lot of new data and knowledge has been gathered related to the Aquatic warbler conservation. Based on the new knowledge it would be important to update species conservation action plan for Lithuania by updating latest data and integrating more concreate conservation measures and its justification utilizing gathered experience.
2. **Maintained and further improve restored Aquatic warbler breeding habitats by performing regular mowing of the areas**. This can be achieved by participating in special agri-environmental scheme for Aquatic warbler conservation. Not all areas require annual mowing. E.g. fenmires in Zuvintas biosphere reserve or marshes of Liepaja lake does not to be mowed annually. This can be achieved by applying different plots for the agri-environmental schemes, which could be shifted to different areas by applying field rotation principle.
3. **Restore more areas of potential breeding habitats**. This can be achieved by making best use of RDP measure 4 – non-productive investments, activity focused on restoration of Aquatic warbler habitats. Other, more complex areas can be restored by initiating other conservation projects.
4. **Create preconditions of using and processing of late-cut biomass harvested from the fields where Aquatic warbler conservation measures have been applied.** This conservation priority, is most important to be applied in Silute-Klaipeda regions having big areas of the habitat, where Aquatic warblers actually breed. It could be achieved by setting a biomass processing facility, which would have conservation priority (not purely business oriented) by initializing EU funding for conservation. For territories in Latvia, due to rather small-scale habitat area, more simple solutions needs to be looked at. E.g. biomass could be potentially used as bedding material for local cattle farmers. Composting biomass could also be a good option. In all areas, it would be beneficial to promote heating, especially public houses ir heating facilities by using boilers adopted for burning grass. Most efficient small to medium size boiler could be the one, with the oven adopted to consume whole bales of the biomass.

5. **Develop and test conservation translocation method for Aquatic warbler**. Developing conservation translocation method, first of all is important as precautionary measure in case Aquatic warbler population would start dramatically decrease and urgent application of such conservation measure would be required. Another argument for using this measure is to restore population in recovered habitat of Zuvintas biosphere reserve marches, where existing population (up to 4 singing males) cannot recover based on own recourses. Restoration performed in the area creates a a good condition of the habitat making it suitable site for conservation translocation.
6. **Establish a group of experts (volunteers)** who would be able to perform advisory, negotiation work with farmers at Nemunas delta in order to achieve late mowing and Aquatic warbler breeding success. Current capacities of protected areas administration are not sufficient to enable proactive dialogue with local farmers, advising them on the conservation measures, negotiating to postpone mowing at the breeding locations. Therefore, it would be important to initiate gathering of group of experts and/or volunteers, which could perform such function. Ideally, such proactive communication approach could be facilitated by an NGO, not bound to a working hours and having strong result-oriented conservation motivation.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK OF CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Summary of After-LIFE conservation actions, implementing institutions, possible funding sources and expected due dates are given in the Table below.

Activity	Estimated funding	Involved institutions	Due date	Possible funding sources
Update of Aquatic warbler conservation species action plan in Lithuania	15 000 eur	Ministry of Environment, Baltic environmental forum	2018	Ministry of Environment, Project LIFE15 NAT/LT/001024
Maintained and further improve restored Aquatic warbler breeding habitats by performing regular mowing of the areas	10 000 000 eur	Farmers, Baltic environmental forum, Latvian Fund for Nature, Kretinga State Forest enterprice, Zuvintas biopsphere reserve	2020	Rural Debelopment Program, Project LIFE15 NAT/LT/001024
Restore more areas of potential breeding habitats	3 000 000 eur	Farmers, Zuvintas biopsphere reserve, Baltic environmental forum	2020	Rural Debelopment Program, Project LIFE15 NAT/LT/001024
Create preconditions of using and processing of late-cut biomass harvested from the fields where Aquatic warbler conservation measures have been applied	850 000 eur	Baltic environmental forum, private business acting as operator	2019	Project LIFE15 NAT/LT/001024
Develop and test conservation translocation method for Aquatic warbler	200 000 eur	Baltic environmental forum, Zuvintas biosphere reserve	2020	Project LIFE15 NAT/LT/001024
Establish a group of experts (volunteers)	15 000 eur	Baltic environmental forum, Nemunas delta regional park administration	2017	Project LIFE15 NAT/LT/001024 Own funding of Baltic environmental forum and Nemunas delta regional park administration

Ongoing/planned follow up initiatives to address conservation priorities in the specific project areas.

Implemented project achieved stabilization and even increase of Aquatic warbler population in Lithuania along restoration of most important habitats for this species in app. 1500 ha area in Lithuania and Latvia. This sets a crucial precondition for further perspectives of ensuring favourable conservation status of Aquatic warbler in a long run. Still further maintenance of the targeted area is necessary to maintain good habitat quality and further improve it by continuous suppression of reed vegetation. Project managed to achieve that all targeted areas will remain managed also after project implementation. As horizontal stimulus for all sites in Lithuania serves possibility to apply agri-environmental measure focussed on AW conservation promoting late-mowing in the areas to ensure breeding success of two broods. Maintenance of the restored area and performed late mowing shall lead to further increase of Aquatic warbler population in Lithuania, to initial numbers recorded (400 singing males) and above. After key areas (especially LT01 site) will reach optimal density of AW singing males, population should expand further, possibly inhabiting restored sites in Latvia, which are in relatively close distance to LT01 site – a key breeding site in Lithuania. Information below, provides specifics of each targeted project site outlook with regard to its further maintenance.

LT01-Tyrai. The site is managed by non-profit company focussed on biodiversity farming "Pievų paukščiai" (meadow birds), which has signed management agreement with Keretinga State Forest Enterprise having land management rights. The company is planning to apply for agri-environmental measures on Aquatic warbler conservation and process harvested biomass in nearby pelleting facility to be opened by the project LIFE MagniDucatusAcrola (LIFE15 NAT/LT001024).

LT02-Tulkiarage. The site has a ecological priority land plot status in Nemunas Delta Regional park territory. Restored area has been rented for 20 years period to a private farming company, which is currently declaring land plots for the agri-environmental measure for AW conservation and performs mowing according to the restrictions of the measure. Farming company is considering to restore polder dykes in future for better optimisation of farming and managing water level. The site has good perspectives to be maintained as it delivers big amount of biomass and is eligible for the special agri-environmental measure.

LT03-Sysa. Currently nearly all site is owned by private farmers (app. 100 owners). Around half of the territory is already participating in the targeted agri-environmental measure for AW conservation. Coordinating beneficiary remain in constant contacts with farmers and advising them on areas where late mowing shall be done, encouraging them to enter targeted agri-environmental scheme. Part of farmers do not enter the agri-environmental scheme due to already taken other agri-environmental obligations, but plans to join AW conservation scheme later on. Others, are not interested in agri-environmental practiced as the area is important for them for feed production. However, most of the conventional farmers are also interested to leave parts of the areas unmowed upon advice of coordinating beneficiary, which performs regular AW monitoring at the site. Most important parts of this area is included in the follow up project LIFE15 NAT/LT001024, where it is planned to optimize water level management in the area. It is planned to sign long-term conservation contracts with farmers and setup special water gates within the polder, which would allow individual management of water level, optimized for AW conservation as well as respecting farming interests. The follow up conservation project will be implemented until 2023, which will ensure that conservation actions will be closely followed up by the coordinating beneficiary (BEF LT) of the new project.

LT04-Zuvintas. Currently, part of the area (123 ha) is declared under the AW conservation agri-environmental measure and is continuously mowed. Current habitat condition does not require constant mowing of all area, therefore Zuvintas biosphere reserve administration being manager of the site, has setup the habitat management rotation scheme. After 5 year obligations of the currently declared plots to the Rural Development Program (RDP) will be fulfilled, mowing will be switched to other areas entering into agri-environmental schemes. Such rotation principle will make sure that all area is maintained in good condition and not overused. Harvested biomass will further be used to process pellets for heating the administration and visitor centre building, partly – distributed among local farmers as bedding material for cattle.

Project area is also important in further AW conservation initiative by testing pilot conservation translocation, which will be implemented in 2018-2019 within the project LIFE15 NAT/LT001024. By performing conservation translocation, it is expected to recover AW population in LT04 area.

LT05-Lake Pape. Landowners of the area are either local municipality located which does not perform farming or are in far distance. Latvian Fund for Nature decided to look after the sites and continue the management in the area itself. This decision has been taken, as there was no local farmer who would be interested to take over management of those areas. Associated beneficiary has necessary permissions to perform continuation of

the management. Follow up management by AB LFN was successfully organized for the year 2015. Starting from the year 2016 another environmental NGO, the *Pasaules Dabas Fonds* has been involved in management of Lake Pape site. The *Pasaules Dabas Fonds* manage areas where demonstrational restoration management performed by year-round grazing by using *Konik Polski* horses. Permanent fencing is installed at the site.

LV06-Lake Liepaja. In order to ensure follow up activities in the project area LV06 (at Liepaja lake), Latvian Fund for Nature has signed management continuation agreement with the local farmer. According to this agreement, local farmer shall continue to perform mowing in the area until August 2020. During the year 2016 the AB LFN as environmental NGO participated in elaboration of RDP payment system. As a result the process, RDP payment system had been changed and its current version provides improved opportunities to secure after-LIFE management of project areas. Borders of areas at Lake Liepaja and Pape site where demonstrational restoration management of the wet meadows were performed have been submitted to RDP payment Agency and registered as eligible for payments of highest rate. This is the new approach in improved RDP payment system that all land units are classified and those with most difficult conditions for management are included in category with highest payment rate (as it is in case of Lake Liepaja and Pape). In that way farmer who signed management continuation agreement is able to solve issues related to higher costs for biomass transportation and for working on wet conditions of meadows at Lake Liepaja. The AB LFN still continues to look after how the after-LIFE management goes on. AB LFN is in good contact with the Nature Conservation Agency and if additional solutions for Lake Liepaja site management will be needed they can be negotiated with Agency.

LT07-Kniaupo gulf, LT08-Kroku lanka, LT09-Uostadvaris, LT10-Sausgalviai, LT11-Svencele are project sites included in the project with the 2nd amendment and were included in the project exclusively for implementation of action C7 (testing agri-environmental measures through implementation of one-year conservation agreement). All these sites are included in the area eligible to participate in AW conservation agri-environmental measure and partly involved in its implementation. By performing continuous AW monitoring Baltic environmental forum maintains dialogue with farmers of the area negotiating a possibility to postpone mowing in the sites where AW singing males are located. This initiative will also continue in the years to come.