



Institute of Avian Research

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Wilhelmshaven



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Ihr Zeichen und Tag

Unser Zeichen

Datum

July 11, 2018

Re.: Endorsement of the Aquatic Warbler translocation program from Belarus to Lithuania

The Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) is one of the most threatened bird species of Europe with very restricted and partly isolated breeding in only four eastern European countries. At all of the more western breeding sites the species already went extinct. Consequently, the species is very vulnerable to extinction, in particular if breeding habitat degradation and fragmentation continue.

Habitat preservation and restoration are the ultimate issues of Aquatic Warbler conservation. As to my knowledge, several *LIFE*-projects are in practice to preserve and to restore habitats for the Aquatic Warbler. However, spontaneous recolonization of these newly restored habitats is uncertain due to their partly isolated and fragmented locations as compared to the remaining core areas of breeding, because of the limited population size and likely significant breeding site philopatry and thus limited dispersal capabilities as shown in many similar species. Consequently, spontaneous “natural” recolonization probability might be rather limited.

However, there is a way out of this temporary bottle-neck: translocation of juvenile birds.

Literature on natal site habitat imprinting in songbirds reveals a sensitive period soon after fledging. Consequently, translocation of nestling birds and imprinting onto the new area is a very straightforward approach, in particular as hand-rearing of nestling songbirds and in particular warbler species is a common, very successfully and widely used practice in research.

Consequently, translocation is a very appropriate and feasible approach.

I have received and became familiar with the Aquatic Warbler translocation program prepared by group of experts under the project LIFE MagniDucatusAcrola managed by Baltic environmental forum.

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The recent translocation of juvenile Aquatic Warblers from Belarus to Žuvintas biosphere reserve in Lithuania proved very successful. With all except one out of 50 translocated nestlings surviving to release, the team achieved outstanding performance. With natal site fidelity in warblers of 5-10 % of fledged young, the likelihood of successful returns is high.

Consequently, this translocation can be seen as very successful so far, proving that the applied methodology and protocol work very well with Aquatic Warblers. Therefore, there is neither need nor justification to “test” translocation capabilities with another species.

Rather, translocation of Aquatic Warblers should be continued for at least another year and with at least another 50 nestlings, if not even more, irrespective whether there will be a successful return of the current translocation or not. It is known from warblers and other songbirds that juveniles may not return to the natal/release site to the end of their first year of life rather in a subsequent year. Therefore, missing returns in the first year are not necessarily due to a failure of the translocation, rather it is a natural habit.

In summary, in my opinion, the Aquatic Warbler translocation program transporting juveniles from Zvanec fen mire in Belarus as source area to the release site in Žuvintas biosphere reserve in Lithuania is well prepared and can be positively endorsed.

Sincerely yours,



Prof. Dr. Franz Bairlein
Director Institute of Avian Research
President European Union for Bird Ringing
Immed. Past-President International Ornithologists' Union