Ongoing and future activities for Aquatic Warbler conservation within its breeding range:

Introduction and first results of the **LIFE4AquaticWarbler** project

Co-funded by the European Union

Aquatic Warbler (Acrocephalus paludicola)
Photo: Z. Morkvenas

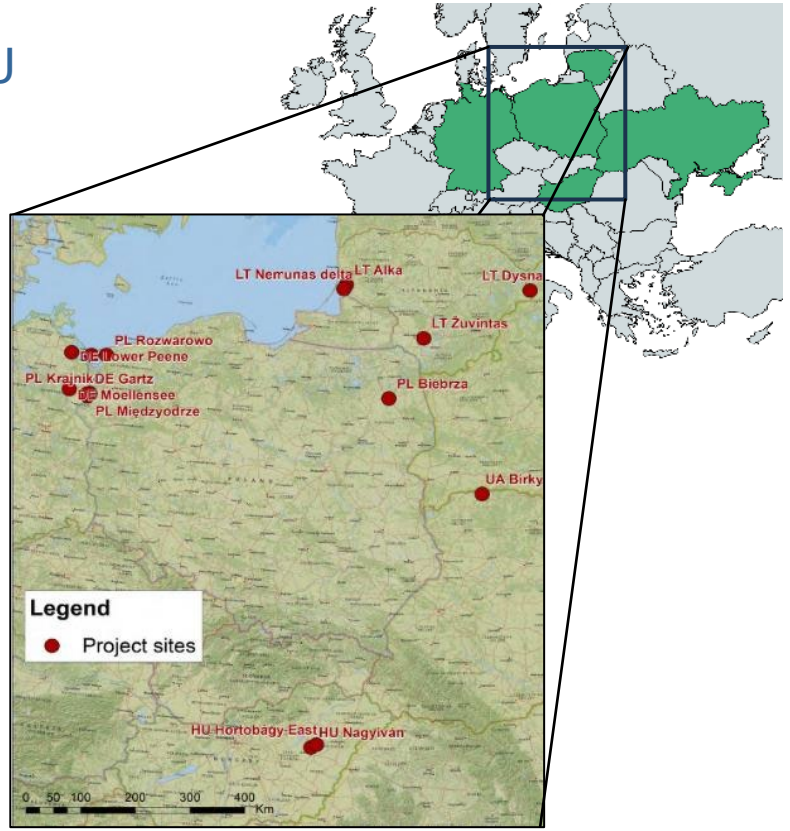
LIFE4AquaticWarbler

Conservation of Europe's Rarest Continental Passerine: A Transboundary Initiative for Aquatic Warbler Population Recovery

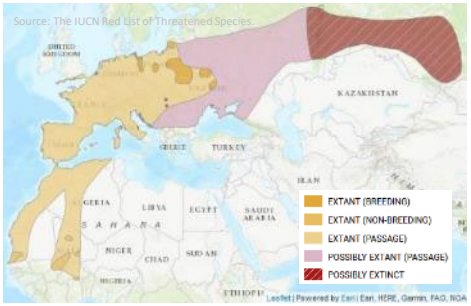
LOCATION:
15 sites in DE (3), PL (5), LT (4), UA (1), HU (2)

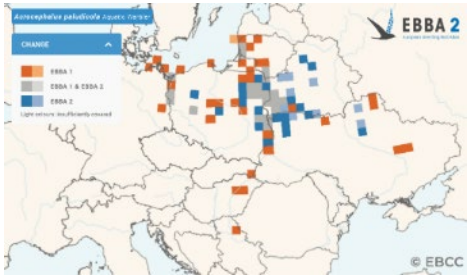
DURATION: 108 months (= 9 years)

PARTNERSHIP:
Coordinator:
Baltic Environmental Forum (BEF Lithuania)
6 Beneficiaries:
FVP, LPV, EuroNatur (all from Germany),
OTOP (Poland),
USPB (Ukraine) and HEA (Hungary).



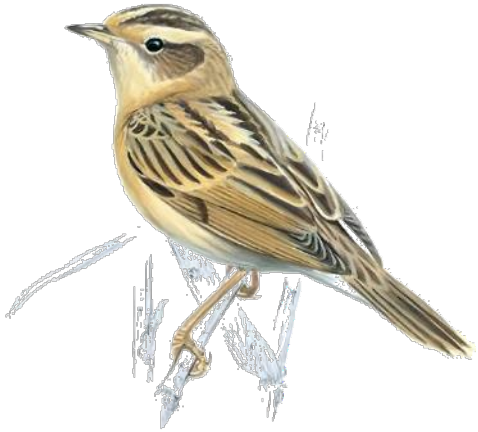
THE THREATS …AND OPPORTUNITIES



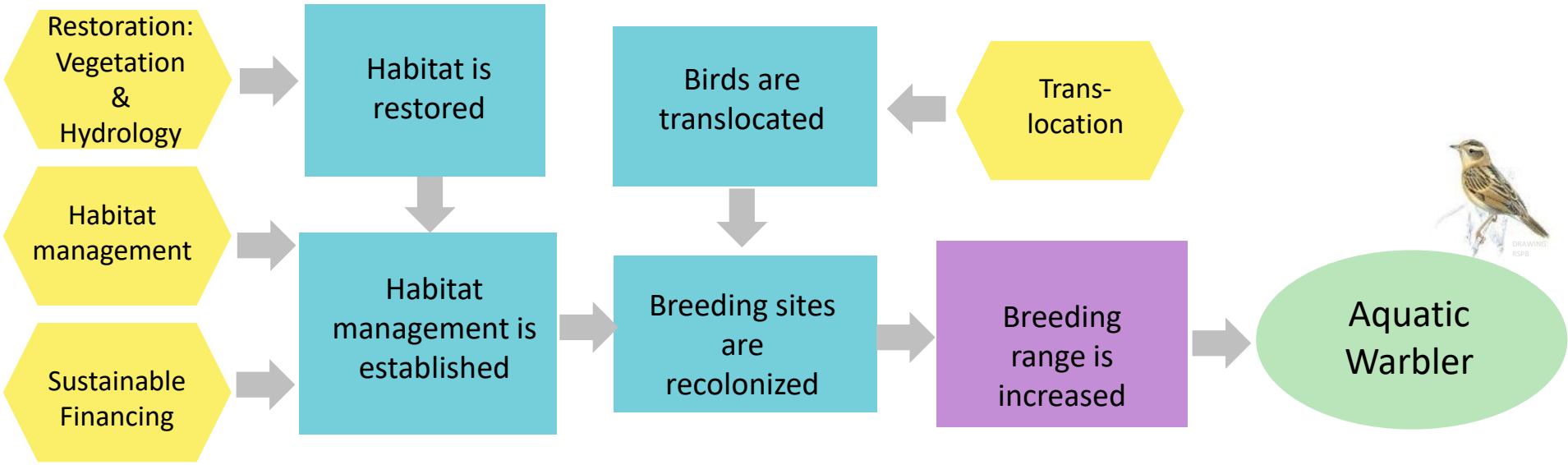


Overall Project Goal

The **overall project goal** is to halt the ongoing range contraction of the AW by stopping the declining trend of the subpopulations covered by the project in LT, PL, and UA, and to restore the AW's breeding range to an area larger than 1,500 km² by facilitating the reoccupation of at least 6 former breeding sites, including in DE and HU.



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



WHAT WE EXPECT TO ACHIEVE

Restoration: Vegetation & Hydrology

Habitat management

Sustainable Financing

3,910 ha of breeding habitat are restored

12 management plans are adopted + implemented

760 birds are translocated

Trans-location

6 breeding sites are re-occupied

Area of occupancy is increased by **3,910 ha**

Aquatic Warbler

Population increase by **>843** males across **15** sites

8 Work Packages

WP1 Project management

WP2: Pre-operational studies and activities

WP3: Concrete conservation actions

WP4: Socio-economic project strategy

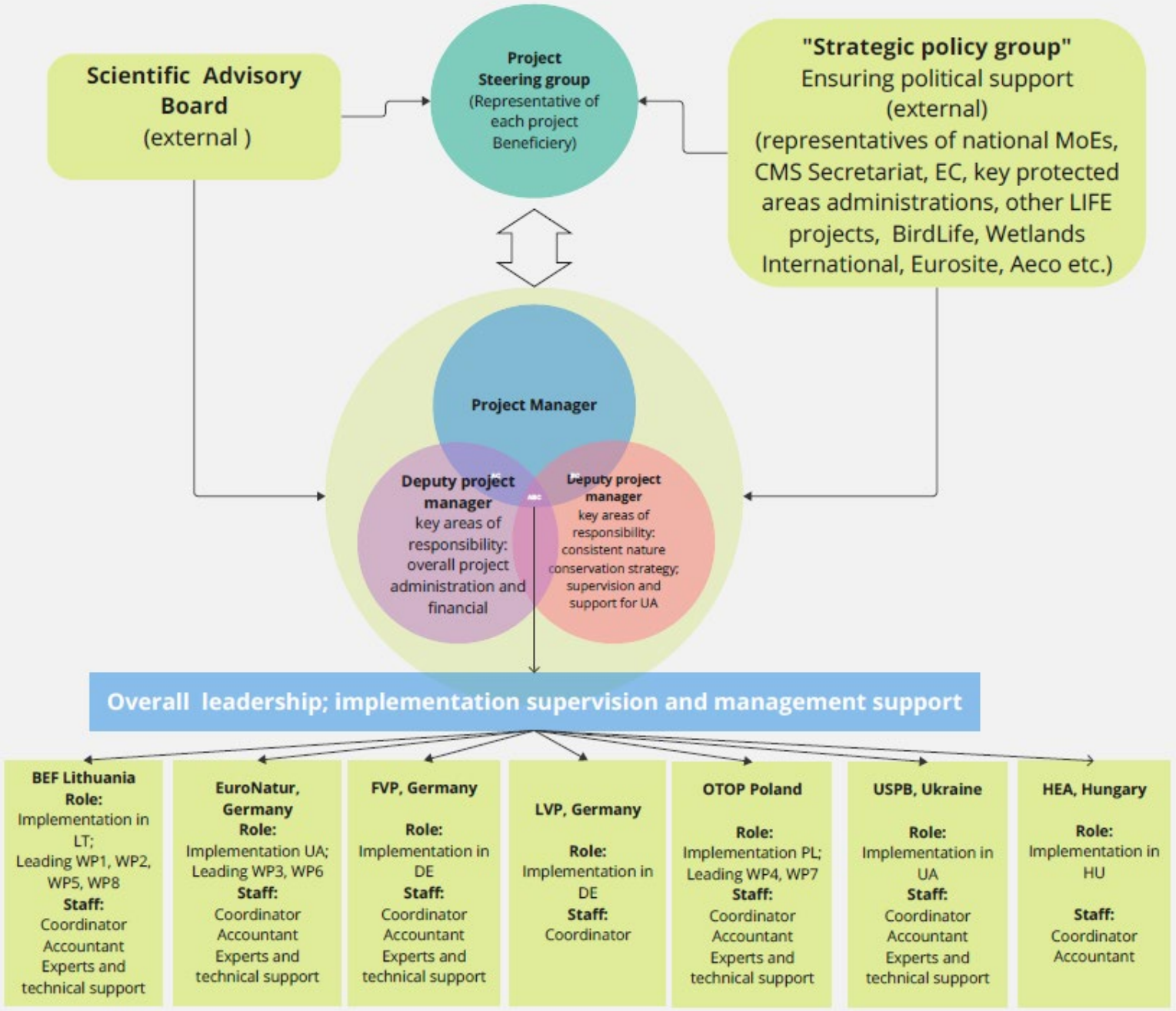
WP5: Dissemination and communication

WP6: Monitoring and evaluation

WP7: Replication, sustainability and exploitation

WP8: Land purchase and N2k site designation

Project management structure of LIFE4AquaticWarbler



WP1: Project management

Feasibility studies and permission obtaining for AW translocations

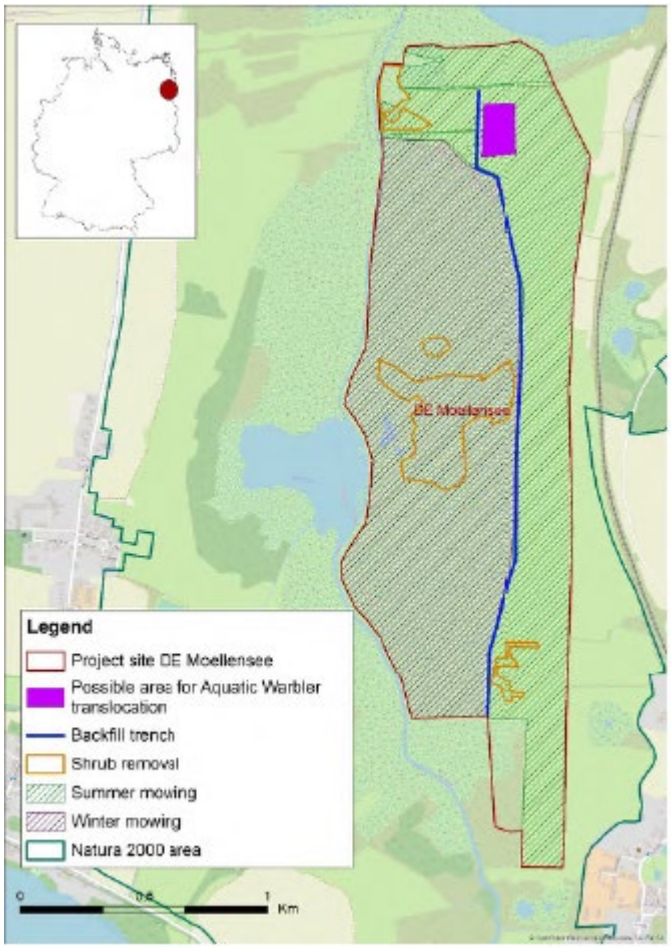
- **Feasibility studies for all target sites**
  - DE (D2.1, FVP, 03/25)
  - PL (D2.2, OTOP, 03/25)
  - LT (D2.3, BEF, 03/26)
  - HU (D2.5, HEA, 09/29)
- **Content**
  - Habitat suitability, Food availability (inv. biomass), Threat assessment, Habitat management, Source sites, etc.
- Involve scientific adv. board, external experts, authorities, PA administration
- **Permissions**
  - i) Collecting chicks in source sites, ii) transport & border crossing of chicks, iii) release of chicks in target sites
    - D2.4 Permits for DE+PL+LT (BEF, 03/26)
  - Relevant institutions (depending on national regulations)
    - Ministries of Environment
    - General and Regional Environmental Protection Directorates
    - Local protected areas administration
    - Veterinary services
    - Border control (in case of using UA as source country)
    - Other institutions following the national regulations

Feasibility studies and permission obtaining for the biomass use

- Feasibility studies basis for WP4 in:
  - UA Birky (D2.8, USPB, 12/25): fuel briquettes
  - LT Dysna (D2.7, BEF, 12/25): heating material or compost
  - DE Moellensee (D2.9, LPV, 12/25): packaging, fodder, roofs
- Potential content (by external experts)
  - Market research: needs and risk analysis
  - Overview of similar biomass processing best practice experiences in EU countries
    - M5 Study visits to biomass processing facilities implemented (BEF, 20, 05/26)
  - Suitability (physical, chemical composition) and properties of local vegetation to produce desired products
  - Technical requirements and terms of references for the biomass processing solutions
  - Business and marketing plans
- Permits for the setup and operation of a biomass processing facility

Hydrological studies, technical projects and permissions for habitat rewetting

- For each site (as needed):
  - Hydrological plan & technical project documentation for rewetting
  - Permit
- Basis for T3.1 implementation on 6 sites (see separate slides):
  - LT Zuvintas (Amalvas polder) (D2.9, BEF, 04/26)
  - LT Dysna (no deliverable)
  - LT Nemunas delta (Minija meadows, simpler version) (D2.13, BEF, 04/26)
  - DE Moellensee (D2.10, LPV, 04/26)
  - PL Krajnik (D2.11, OTOP, 04/26)
  - UA Birky (D2.12, USPB, 12/27)
  - D2.14 Permits for rewetting & related infrastructure construction in DE, UA, PL, LT (BEF, 12/27)



Management and action plans for AW conservation

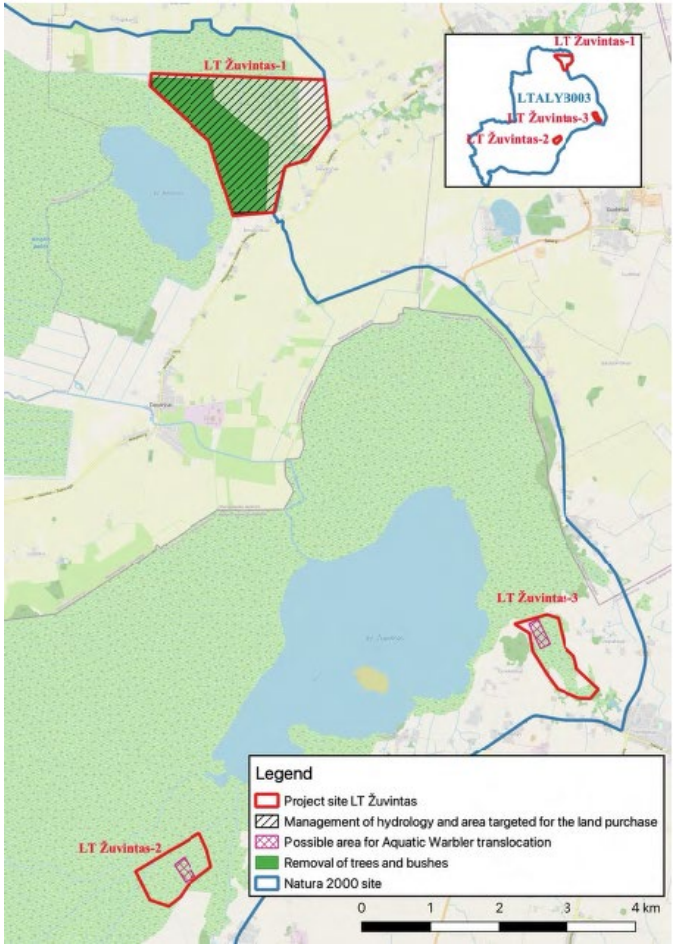
Site-specific action plans:

- basis to get permits for habitat restoration (each site under WP3)
- details on how, when, what and where to undertake concrete conservation actions during the project
- after-LIFE management suggestions
- Prepared during m1-12 in coop. with landowners, tenants, authorities

✓ – M6 Format and methodology for specific action plans for each project sites agreed among the partners (EuroNatur, 4, 01/25)

✓ – D2.15 A set of specific action plans for all project sites (EuroNatur, 07/25)

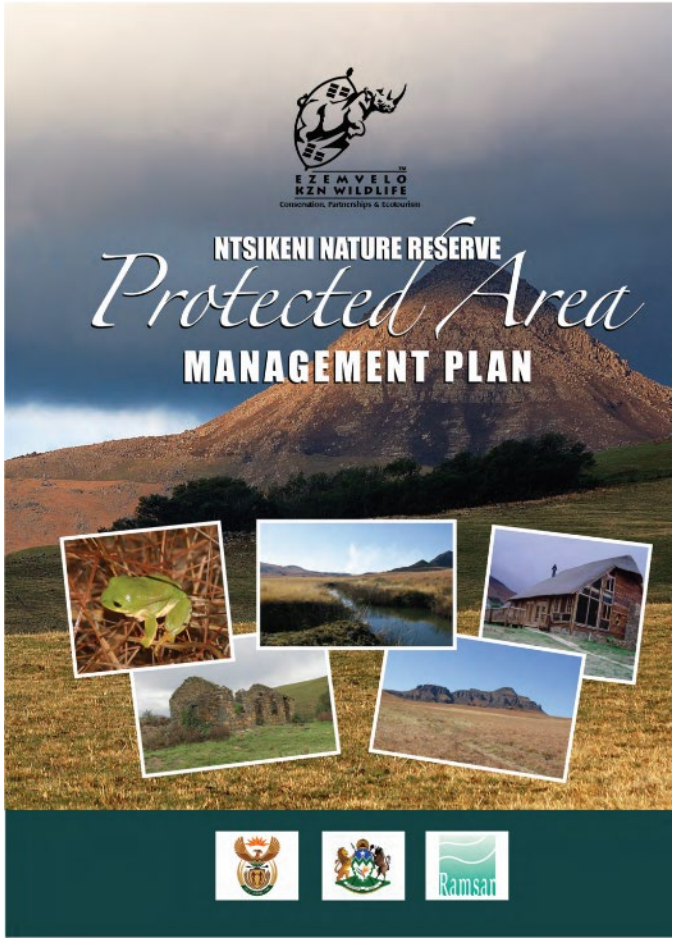
✓ – M9 Specific action plans discussed and agreed with competent authorities and administrations of the protected areas (EuroNatur, 9, 06/25)



Management and action plans for AW conservation

Nature management plans

- Following national rules
  - e.g. required by national legislation for setting conservation objectives)
  - legitimise planned management activities
  - set measures to ensure long-term maintenance of favourable conservation status at the site
- Supported by external consultants
- Adoption by authorities
  - D2.16 LT Alka polder + Minija meadows (BEF, 12/29)
  - D2.17 Amalvas polder, LT Zuvintas (BEF, 12/27)
  - D2.18 LT Dysna meadows (BEF, 12/27)
  - D2.19 DE Moellensee (LPV, 12/29)
  - D2.20 Lower Oder floodplain South of DE Gartz (FVP, 12/29)
  - D2.21 DE Lower Peene mire (FVP, 12/29)
  - D2.22 Swina Delta – PL Karsiborska Kępa (OTOP, 12/25)
  - D2.23 Lower Oder floodplain near PL Krajnik (OTOP, 12/25)
  - D2.24 Lower Oder floodplain West of Gryfino „PL Międzyodrze“ (OTOP, 12/25)
  - D2.25 PL Rozwarowo Marshes (OTOP, 12/25)
  - D2.26 Pripyat-Tsyr mires near UA Birky (USPB, 12/25)
  - D2.27 Eastern Hortobágy Puszta NP and „Kunkápolnás“ (HEA, 12/29)
- M8 Submission for approval to competent authorities for all target sites (BEF, 63, 12/29)



Management and action plans for AW conservation

AW species conservation action plan(s):

- Create / update action plans & get adoption by authorities for
  - HU, new plan (D2.28, HEA, 06/28)
  - PL, update (D2.29, OTOP, 06/27)
  - DE, update (D2.30, FVP, 06/27)
  - UA, update (D2.31, USPB, 06/27)
  - LT, update (D2.32, BEF, 12/28)
- Plans to be adopted at CMS AW MoU conference (T5.3)
- Update International AW Species Action Plan (together with LIFE AWOM)
  - D2.33 Updated International AW conservation species action plan adopted by the competent authority (BEF, 12/28)
- M7 Drafted AW species action plans discussed in the conference of CMS MoU Signatory parties (BEF, 39, 12/27)
- Involve Scientific advisory board & Strategic policy group

Management and action plans for AW conservation

AW stepping-stone habitat network scenario study

- Annex to international SAP (to be adopted in 12/28)
  - D2.34 Stepping-stone habitat network scenario study for the AW breeding range (BEF 12/28)
- Analyse
  - Historic records on AW occurrence
  - Location of potentially suitable peatlands
  - Modelling connectivity potential between the sites
  - Analysing current use of pre-selected candidate sites in socio-economic context.
- Design possible future scenarios of (restored) peatlands network
- Involve Scientific Advisory Board & Strategic Policy Group

T.3.1 Primary habitat restoration by hydrological measures

Sites, approaches, time plans, deliverables/milestones:

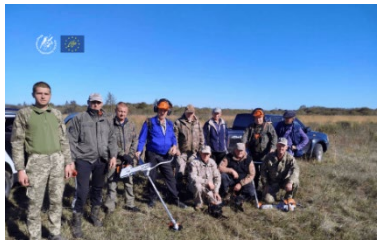
1. UA Birky: 300 ha, water management
2. LT Dysna: 360 ha, sluices installation to hold back flood water
3. LT Žuvintas: 314 ha, hydrological restoration
4. LT Nemunas delta: 130 ha, supervision of hydrological regime
5. DE Moellensee: 246 ha, closing drainage channel
6. PL Krajnik: 165 ha, sluice construction + hydrological management (incl. measurements);


Photo: Z. Morkvenas

T.3.2 Primary habitat restoration by vegetation measures

Sites, approaches, time plans, deliverables/milestones:

1. UA Birky: 1500 ha, bush removal + first time mowing, biomass harvesting
2. DE Moellensee, 125 ha, shrub removal (25 ha) + mulching (100 ha), biomass harvesting
3. LT Žuvintas: 70 ha, bush removal + first time mowing
4. LT Alka: 50 ha, vegetation management
5. LT Nemunas: 130 ha, bush removal + first time mowing
6. HU Nagyiván: 805 ha, grazing and mowing
7. HU Hortobágy East: 140 ha, grazing
8. PL Międzyodrze: 200 ha, first time mowing



T.3.3 AW population recovery by translocation

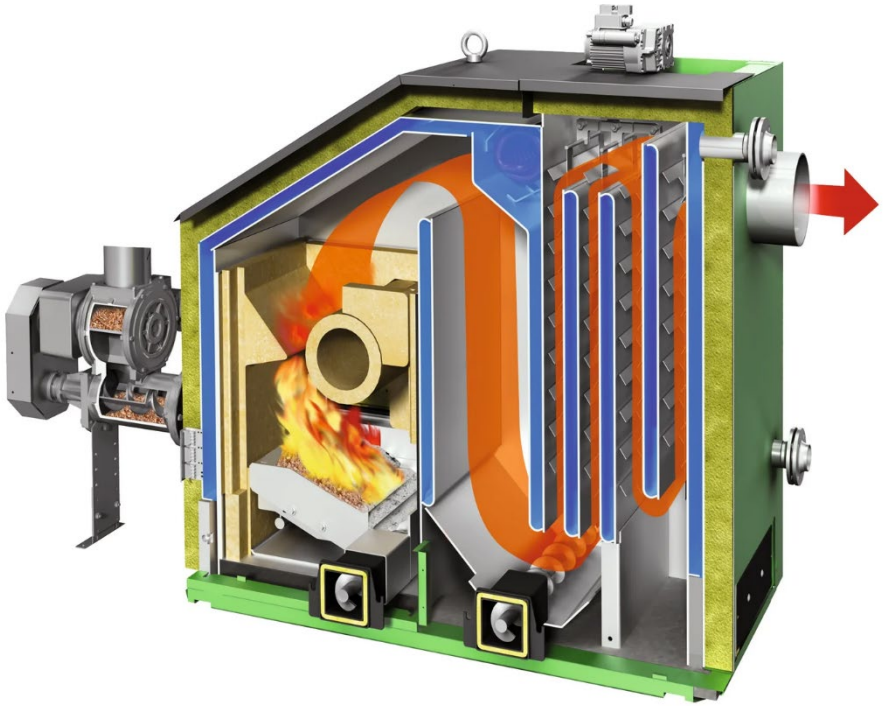
- Based on feasibility studies (T2.1), IUCN guidelines, expert meetings (T5.3), advice by scientific adv. board, project inhouse training
- Source areas:
  - PL Biebrza
  - UA Birky
  - LT Nemunas delta (early mowing areas)
- Basic steps:
  1. Nest search & pick-up
  2. Transport to release site
  3. Growing young AW indoors
  4. Moving AW to aviaries
  5. Soft release
  6. Post release monitoring
- 4-5 translocations / target site (HU only 1)
- 760 chicks in total (incl. data collection: weight, ringing, fitness, DNA, geolocation)
- M23 Translocation: 50% completed (OTOP, 49, 10/28)

Update/develop AEMs in PL, DE, LT, HU

- Develop/update AW-specific national AEMs for the new CAP-cycle (2027 onwards)
- Establish a working group of partners + national authorities
- Crucial for long-term management of translocation target sites (especially for reintroduction of AW to DE+HU, where no AW-specific AEMs exist so far)
- M41 International seminar on effectiveness of AES (OTOP, 15, 12/25)
- D4.1 International Seminar report with complete set of presentations (OTOP, 15, 12/25)
- D4.6 Report on adopted new/updated agri-environmental schemes for LT, PL, DE (OTOP, 40, 01/28)
- M42 Workshop for preparing AWM for new programming period of CAP (OTOP, 58, 07/29)
- D4.2 AWM for a new CAP programming period for Poland (OTOP, 58, 07/29)
- D4.3 AWM for a new CAP programming period for Lithuania (BEF, 58 07/29)
- D4.4 AWM for a new CAP programming period for Germany (FVP, 58, 07/29)
- D4.7 Lease contracts with farmers at the project site that include the adapted management practices for the target species conservation (HEA, 84, 09/31)
- No deliverable for UA, but planned transfer of knowledge to develop AEMs for UA in the light of the country's EU accession >> see T7.2.2

Securing biomass production in LT

- Ensure self-sustaining management of rewetted peatland at LT by use of biomass
- Potential upgrade of the local boiler house supplying heating for Didziasalis local settlement to consume grass biomass (currently woodchips & diesel)
- Based on feasibility study developed under T.2.2
- M47 Construction of biomass processing facility in Lithuania is starting (BEF, 21, 06/26)
- M48 Construction of biomass processing facility is completed (BEF, 25, 10/26)



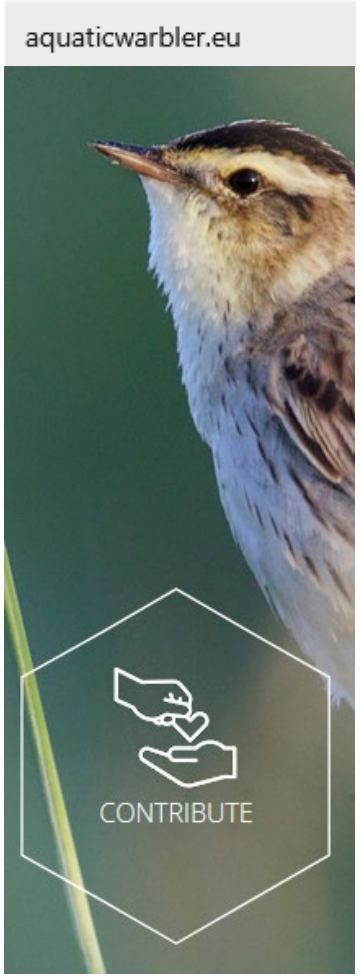
Source: https://www.zerobiomass.co.uk

Securing biomass production in UA

- T3.2.1 covers only first-time mowing and bush-cutting
- Long-term solution: Annual mowing by local farmers coordinated by NP in line with management plan (developed under T2.4)
- Briquetting facility to make the mowing scheme economically self-sustainable, based on study visit + feasibility study + business plan (all under T2.2)
- LATE M43 briquetting facility ready for operation (USPB, 15, 12/25)
- M44 briquetting facility produced the first 400 tons of briquettes (USPB, 22, 07/26)
- M45 briquetting facility sold the first 400 tons of briquettes (USPB, 28, 01/27)
- M46 briquetting facility runs on a self- sustained basis (USPB, 58, 07/29)

Raise **public awareness** and disseminate the project´s results among the **general public**

- Develop & implement a communication campaign for the general public
- ✓ D5.2 Central project webpage + separate national pages within partner websites (BEF, 7, 04/25)
- M49 Communication plan prepared (BEF, 15, 12/25)
- D5.1 Communication plan (BEF, 15, 12/25)
- D5.3 Virtual project leaflets (BEF, 21, 06/26)
- D5.6 Children book released in 6 languages (BEF, 37, 10/27)
- D5.5 Book about AW conservation on international scale (LPV, 51, 12/28)
- D5.7 6 online video lessons (BEF, 51, 12/28)
- D5.4 Documentary film developed (BEF, 85, 10/31)
- D5.8 Layman report (BEF, 104, 05/33)

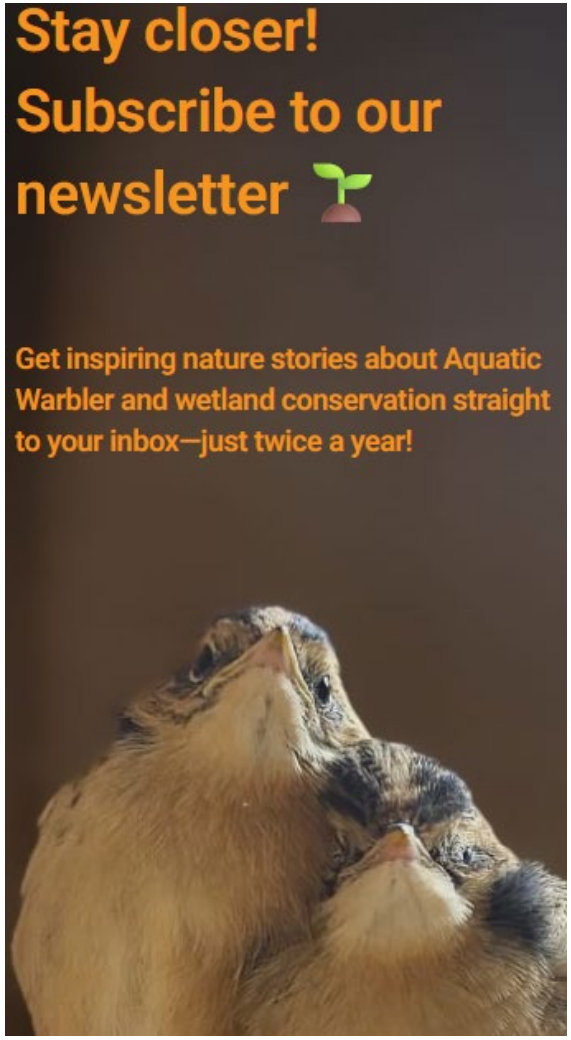


Raise **awareness** and disseminate the project´s results **among local stakeholders**

- Inform local people about project activities in their neighbourhood and introduce the natural values of the project sites to them and to the visitors
- M50 Notice boards set up in all project sites (BEF, 27, 12/26)
- M51 Scythe mowing championships organised in all 5 partner countries (BEF, 49, 10/28)
- D5.9 Interactive online map of project sites (BEF, 25, 10/26)
- D5.10 Brochures about project sites and their natural values (BEF, 37, 10/27)

Raise **engagement of professionals** for bird protection and to encourage **expert networking**

- engage nature conservationists' community and encourage expert networking for the goals of the project
- ✓ M55 First (biannual) project newsletter issued (BEF, 6, 03/25)
- ✓ M54 First (of 11) national expert seminar is implemented (BEF, 6, 03/25)
- ⚙ M52 First (of 2) big international conference organized (BEF, 73, 10/30)
- D5.12 3 videos on project best practices (BEF, 102, 03/33)
- D5.11 5 scientific papers (FVP, 107, 08/33)



Environmental monitoring and evaluation

Deliverables and milestones:

- D6.1 Monitoring strategy (EN, 03/25)
- M56 Monitoring strategy completed (EN, 6, 03/25)
- D6.2 Ex-ante environmental monitoring report (EN, 12/25)
- M57 Environmental baseline assessment completed (EN, 15, 12/25)
- D6.3 Environmental mid-term report (EN, 03/29)
- M58 Environmental mid-term assessment completed (EN, 54, 03/29)
- D6.4 Ex-post environmental monitoring report (EN, 09/33)
- M59 Final environmental assessment completed (EN, 108, 09/33)


Photo: Z. Morkvenas

Environmental monitoring and evaluation

Indicators

1. No. of singing AW males
2. ID of ringed AW (to calculate survival rate of translocated birds)
3. No. of other target bird species (in line with SDFs of N2K sites)
4. Vegetation structure
5. Area of coverage of plant communities
6. Hydrological conditions (water level + nutrient content)
7. Invertebrate diversity + biomass (proxy for AW food availability)

T7.1.1: EN+BEF int., all partners nat.

Know-how on translocation of long-distance migratory passerine bird species

- Share knowledge and learnings on AW translocation authorities, BL-network, scientists, CMS
  - via their participation in SAB & SPG
  - via scientific papers and networking (WP5)
  - via a dedicated seminar on AW translocation
- M61 Seminar on the translocation and reintroduction of long-distance passerine birds (OTOP, 15, 12/25)
- D7.1 International translocation seminar report with complete set of presentations (BEF, 15, 12/25)

Sharing experience of alternative use of mown biomass

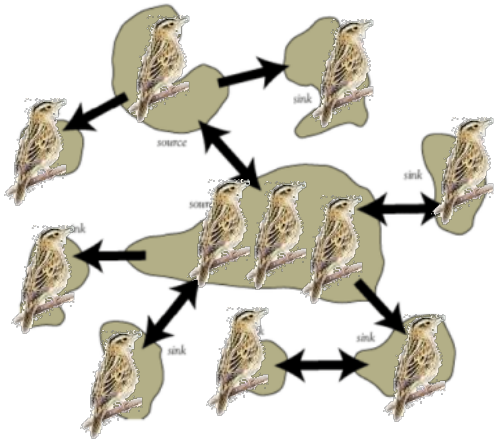
- Meetings to share knowledge on alternative use of biomass (heating: pellet, briquettes, whole bales; also: compost, packaging, insulation), based on experience by partners + feasibility study (T2.2)
  - …in project team
  - …with communities around project sites
  - …with international community
- M63 Meeting on alternative use of biomass (OTOP, 15, 12/25)
- D7.3 Report from the meeting on alternative use of biomass (OTOP, 15, 12/25)

Change of farming system to improve conservation of the most important breeding area in Lithuania

- Land purchase and land management for conservation in LT Alka and LT Zuvintas
- M68a Land purchase agreements with local farmers at LT Alka polder settled (BEF, 36, 09/27)
- D8.1a Land purchase documents for LT Alka polder (BEF, 39, 12/27)
- D8.2 Conservation agreement with farmers (BEF, 42, 03/28)
- M69 Conservation agreements for the land use of purchase land plots is signed with new farmers performing mowing in the area (BEF, 42, 03/28)
- M72 Land purchase agreements with local landowners LT Zuvintas project site settled (BEF, 51, 12/28)
- D8.6 Land purchase documents for land plots at Amalvas polder (LT Zuvintas 1 site) with nature conservation clause assigning it for definitive to nature conservation (BEF, 53, 02/29)


Photo: Z. Morkvenas

OUR LEGACY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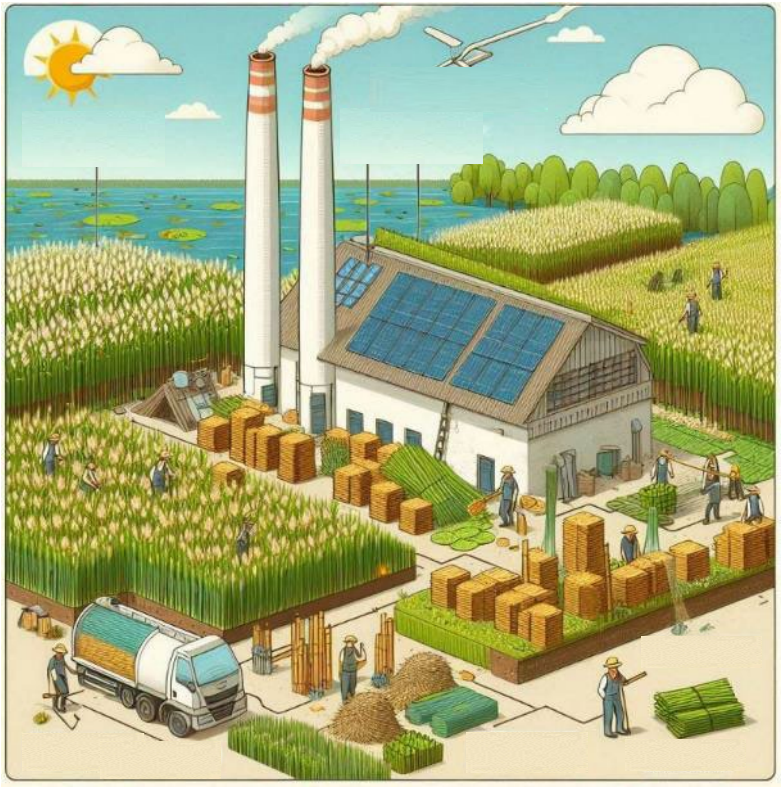


Photo: T. Tanneberger


100% BIODEGRADABLE


CO2

Thank you for your attention!

Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*)
Photo: Z. Morkvenas