



SYMPOSIUM 'REINTRODUCING MIGRATORY BIRDS'

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First experience and lessons learned from translocation of Aquatic warbler - Europe's rarest passerine and long distant migrant

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Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) is the most threatened passerine bird species of continental Europe. Currently, the world population is considered to be 11 000 singing males. From 2014 it only breeds in 4 countries in the world – in Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. Following main reasons of population decline: a) damaged hydrological regime of habitats, b) abandonment or intensive farming in breeding habitats, c) eutrophication, d) big fragmentation of local populations, e) low breeding success in territories of intensive farming.

Fragmentation of population increases risk of aquatic warbler extinction in highly isolated territories and decreases vitality of population due to the lower genetic diversity. Observations on population dynamics show that aquatic warblers disappeared (so far irreversibly) in highly isolated populations.

To restore extinct populations that cannot recolonize themselves naturally despite of good quality habitats, translocation of individuals from a highly populated habitat to the restored habitat may be implemented. In the case of aquatic warbler (long distant migrant), translocation has never been tested in a full scale previously.

Pilot Aquatic Warbler translocation was implemented in summer 2018 cross-border transfer of 50 birds from Zvanec fen mire in Belarus (source site) to Zuvintas Biosphere Reserve (release site) in Lithuania. Following phases were implemented: a) collecting nests with young aquatic warblers; b) cross-border transport to the release site; c) raising chick in the nest-boxes and cages indoors; d) adaptation in the outdoor aviaries at the fen mire; e) soft-release to the wild. Intensive 6-week lasting process resulted 98% survival rate until birds' release.