

Restoration and management of the Häädemeeste wetland complex

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Beneficiary: Estonian Ornithological Society
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Status of Organisation: NGO

Type of Organisation: NGO–Foundation
Description: The Estonian Ornithological Society – known in Estonia as Eesti Ornitoloogiaühing (EOÜ) – aims to protect and study birds and to spread knowledge of birds and their protection to the general public.

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Project Background

Häädemeeste wetland complex, known also as Luitemaa Nature Reserve, is situated on the southwest coast of Estonia. This valuable area was awarded its protected status in summer 2000. The nature reserve – which consists of raised bogs, bog woodlands, wooded dunes, boreal Baltic coastal meadows, coastal lagoons and large shallow inlets and bays – hosts 30 species listed in the Birds Directive, including *Botaurus stellaris*, *Gallinago media*, *Anas penelope*, *Branta leucopsis*, *Cygnus columbianus*, *Bucephala clangula*, *Castor fiber*, *Lutra lutra* and *Bufo calamita*.

However, this natural treasure faces a number of threats: the lack of an effective conservation strategy, overgrowth of meadows and other coastal habitats, drainage of bogs; habitat loss of stenophilic open sand species; uncontrolled tourism and recreation; and low environmental awareness and unwillingness of the local community to participate in conservation.

Keywords: drainage system	grassland ecosystem	wildlife sanctuary	rural development	coastal management
environmentally responsible behaviour	grazing	site rehabilitation	touristic zone	conflicting use
animal corridor	land use planning	integrated management	land restoration	management contract
environmental impact of agriculture	landscape conservation policy	tourist facility	management plan	recreational area
environmental impact of recreation	migratory species	sustainable development	restoration measure	
environmental impact of tourism	wetlands ecosystem	development planning	water resources management	

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Project Objectives

The general project objective aimed to achieve favourable conservation status for coastal meadows and species. The project proposed to achieve that by restoring the habitats and with a long-term management through mowing and grazing.

Specifically, The LIFE Nature project had six specific objectives:

- Achieving favourable conservation status of the Luitemaa NR, for important habitats, species and landscape values of the area
- Stopping the degradation and loss of seminatural coastal meadows on this site of high importance for fauna and flora
- Neutralizing the negative effect of drainage on Tolkuse bog
- Recovering and increasing the open sand habitats for specific bird and reptile species
- Providing more tourism infrastructure within the reserve in order to control and shape these activities in more sustainable way
- Increasing environmental awareness: winning local acceptance of the nature conservation objectives in the region and raising overall environmental awareness.

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Project Results

The project has met its objectives well. It has been a good example of how to effectively win stakeholder and public support for the active management of a Natura 2000 area.

A management plan has been drawn up for the project area. This is already being implemented, although it still requires official approval by the Ministry of Environment.

By the end of the project, 600 ha of Boreal coastal meadow habitat had been restored, exceeding the original target of 350 ha. The project discovered that coastal meadows in the Nature Reserve feature plant communities that do not exist in other Estonian coastal meadows.

Both breeding and migratory bird populations were closely monitored during the project. Most of the breeding waders' populations were found to have stabilized or increased slightly. Open grassland passerine species have been responding more quickly and breeding numbers of Skylark and Meadow Pipit have increased substantially.

A total of 1 500–1 800 ha of the Tolkuse bog area was restored through the blocking of key ditches. This raised the water level by 180 cm. Overgrowing bushes and trees were removed from a 6 ha area of the abandoned peat extraction fields and a 3 ha area was rewetted by blocking drainage ditches with peat dams. Approximately 100 000 Cranberry shoots were planted in September 2004. Three 10 x 10 m experimental plots were also restored by planting Sphagnum mosses. In spring 2005, an estimated 40% of the planted shoots were growing successfully.

Some 6 ha of open sand habitat was restored in the old sand pit at Sooküla, through the removal of trees and wet habitat vegetation. This site offers an important refuge for spawning natterjack toads. It has also become a breeding site for a second pair of woodlarks, while the ground-dwelling reptile,

the sand lizard, has been observed in one new location.

A nature trail created in 1998 by Häädemeeste Municipality was reconstructed, adding new stairs, benches and information boards. An 18 m high lookout tower was added on the highest dune in the reserve (50 m above sea level in total). Four birdwatching towers and three bird monitoring platforms were built, as well as bonfire and camping sites close to the nature trail.

Dissemination activities were widespread, and included: the erection of 10 large information boards about the LIFE project and nature reserve values, as well as an information centre at Pulgoja coastal meadow; the publication of more than 20 articles about the project in the county newspaper, Pärnu Postimees; of a best practice handbook about coastal meadow management; and of two information leaflets (one in English).

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Project Partners

Häädemeeste Municipality, Estonia

State Forestry Centre–Recreation department of the western and islands region ("Hiist"), Estonia

Pärnumaa Environmental Department, Estonia

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Benefiting Countries and Regions

Estonia Eesti

Associated Estonia

(EE)

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Target Community Legislative Reference

Nature protection and Biodiversity

- COM (2001)162 final – "Biodiversity Action Plan for the conservation of natural resources (vol. I ...
- COM (98) 42 final – "Communication on a European Community Biodiversity Strategy" (05.02.98)
- COM(95) 189 – "Communication on the judicious use and conservation of wetlands" (12.12.95)
- Council Decision 93/626/EEC – "Conclusion of the Convention on Biological Diversity" (25.10.93)
- Directive 92/43/EEC – "Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora" (21.05.92)
- Directive 79/409/EEC – "Conservation of wild birds" (02.04.79)

Land

- Recommendation 2002/413 EC – "Implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Europe" (30 ...

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Name of Target Species

Bufo calamita

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Name of Target Habitat Types

- Active raised bogs
- Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration

- Transition mires and quaking bogs
- Bog woodland
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide
- Coastal lagoons
- Large shallow inlets and bays
- Boreal Baltic coastal meadows
- Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes")
- Wooded dunes of the Atlantic, Continental and Boreal region

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Read More

Internet Site

www.luitemaa.eoy.ee

Brochure

Title

Rannaniidu Minevikus ja olevikus

Year

2003

No of pages

28

Brochure

Title

Rannametsa–Soometsa Looduskaitseala
(project site map)

Year

2001

Cover Photo

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Project Administration

Total Budget:

675,286.00

Life Contribution:

506,465.00

Year of Finance:

2000

Duration:

01–AUG–2001 to 30–APR –2005

Commission

LIFE00 NAT/EE/007082

Reference:

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