

**NATIONAL REPORT
FOR THE AQUATIC WARBLER MOU AND ACTION PLAN**

BELARUS

This reporting format is designed to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan associated with the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*. Reporting on the Action Plan's implementation will support information exchange throughout the range and assist the identification of necessary future actions by the Signatories. The questions presented here go beyond the scope of information already requested from CMS Contracting Parties for national reports to the CMS Conference of the Parties.

GENERAL INFORMATION

<p>Which agency or institution has been primarily responsible for the preparation of this report? Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection 10, Kollektornaya St. 220048 Minsk Belarus</p>
<p>List any other agencies, institutions, or NGOs that have provided input: APB-BirdLife Belarus</p>
<p>Reports submitted to date:</p>
<p>Period covered by this report: from _____ to <u>31/12/2005</u> (dd/mm/yyyy) (dd/mm/yyyy)</p>
<p>Memorandum in effect in Signatory State since (dd/mm/yyyy):</p>
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OBJECTIVES

1.0 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE

1.1. *To promote national and international broad policies and legislation which favour the conservation of the Aquatic Warbler and its habitat*

1.1.1. *Promote the full protection of the Aquatic Warbler and its habitats through national and international legislation*

- a) Is the Aquatic Warbler protected under national legislation in your country?
- Yes, the species is protected and protection level is sufficient
 - Yes, the species is protected, but protection level is not sufficient
 - No, the species is not protected
- b) If Yes, please describe the state of protection and limitations and conservation responsibilities this protection status imposes on the state, conservationists and land-users.

In the new 2004 edition of the Red Data Book of the Republic of Belarus, the Aquatic Warbler has the status of a rare, locally distributed species. It is listed as Endangered (EN) species in the Category II. This means an increase in protection status comparatively to the previous 1994 edition of the Red Data Book of the Republic of Belarus, where it was listed in Category IV as a data deficient and insufficiently known species. This level of protection is sufficient to ensure adequate protection of the species and its breeding sites.

- c) If the Aquatic Warbler is not protected or protection level is not sufficient, please describe what your country is planning to do to ensure highest possible protection of the species.
- d) Is there national legislation in place in your country that ensures effective protection of Aquatic Warbler habitat (breeding, stop-over and wintering sites), including prevention of potentially detrimental activities (drainage, mineral extraction, industry, etc.).

Yes No

- e) If Yes, please provide details.

The "Law on protected territories" envisage compulsory development of special "protection certificates" which must analyse and provide recommendations regarding possible detrimental developments for the biological diversity of a protected area (PA) in question.

Amendments to the "Law on animal world" that have been developed and will shortly be proposed for approval, envisage development of similar "protection obligations" for territories which do not qualify for PA but support valuable biological diversity. These obligations will contain a set of rules regulating use and management of the territory.

- f) If No, please describe measures taken to ensure protection of Aquatic Warbler breeding habitats.

1.1.2. *Seek national or international policy incentives to maintain suitable farming practices at breeding sites which are impacted by drainage or threatened by succession*

Are there any national or international policy incentives to maintain suitable farming practices at breeding sites in your country (agro-environmental schemes, etc.)?

Yes No Country is outside of breeding range

If yes, please describe briefly the nature of the incentives and whether they are effectively applied or used by farmers and land-managers.

If no, please describe what measures are being taken to ensure availability of such incentives.

No relevant national or international legislation is currently in place.

2.0 SPECIES AND HABITAT PROTECTION

2.1. *To promote adequate protection of the breeding sites and remove key factors adversely affecting the breeding habitat*

2.1.1. *Seek designation as protected areas of all sites regularly holding breeding Aquatic Warblers.*

- a) In the table attached (Annex I), please provide details for all regularly occupied Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in your country and indicate their protection status (*please expand the table if necessary*).
- b) If Aquatic Warbler breeding sites currently are not fully protected or protection level is not sufficient, please provide information about constraints and what your country is planning to do to ensure full and adequate protection of these sites.

All known sites regularly holding the Aquatic Warbler and not currently protected have been included into the perspective scheme of protected areas of the Republic of Belarus and will be officially designated as protected areas by 2010.

For sites that do not correspond to criterias of protected areas but are still important for the Aquatic Warbler (e.g. irregularly occupied territories) development of "protection obligations" for land-users is envisaged in the amendments to the "Law on animal world".

- c) If Site Management Plans have not been developed for all Aquatic Warbler breeding sites, please describe what hampers development of Management Plans and what your country is doing to ensure development, approval and implementation of Site Management Plans for regular Aquatic Warbler breeding sites.

Site Management Plans for 3 more Aquatic Warbler breeding sites – Prastyr, Yaselda mouth and Styr mouth will be elaborated in 2006-2010 in frames of GEF-UNDP Belarus project on Palessie implemented by the Ministry of the Environment. Development of Site Management Plans for other Aquatic Warbler breeding sites is funding dependent.

A set of amendments to the existing "Law on protected territories" has been developed in order to give legislative power to Site Management Plans and ensure development of such Plans for all territories of international significance. These amendments will also envisage development of similar "protection obligations" – simplified forms of Management Plans – for territories which do not qualify for PA but support valuable biological diversity.

- d) Please advise what assistance you would require to complete or improve existing Site Management Plans.

2.1.2. *Prevent habitat alteration, habitat fragmentation, pollution and other factors that could be detrimental to the Aquatic Warbler in its breeding sites*

- a) Are new *development* projects that could potentially have a detrimental effect on current or potential Aquatic Warbler breeding sites (such as drainage, peat extraction, construction of highways, etc.) subject to environmental impact assessment in your country?

Yes No Country is outside of breeding range

- b) Have there been any potentially detrimental projects *implemented* in any Aquatic Warbler habitat in your country since signing this Memorandum of Understanding?

Yes No

- c) If yes, indicate sites involved, give details and describe the outcome of impact monitoring if available.

- d) Has implementation of any potentially detrimental project in any Aquatic Warbler habitat in your country been *halted* since signing this Memorandum of Understanding?

Yes No

- e) If Yes, please give details.

2.2. ***To manage the breeding habitat to increase numbers, productivity and distribution***

2.2.1. *Regulate water levels and restore natural water conditions*

- a) Has water management been implemented at Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in your country?

Yes No Country is outside of breeding range

- b) If Yes, please describe actions taken, sites involved and effects expected/achieved.

Following development of Site management plans, engineering projects on optimization of hydrological regime of Zvanets, Dzikaje and Sporava reserves were developed and are being realized within Darwin Initiative (UK) funded "**Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus**" project implemented by APB-BirdLife Belarus in partnership with UNDP Belarus and Belarus Ministry for the Environment. In frames of project implementation, at Zvanets 8 water retaining devices were constructed on the main drainage canals located in and around the mire in order to keep the water at the optimal level. In Sporovo, construction of water dam at Yaselda river to enable water management at Sporovo mire has been completed. Maintenance and repair works of the shuttles at the main water locks of the **Selefs** water complex are under way (financed by the state budget). At Dzikaje, 5 dams have been constructed.

Construction of water retention facilities enabled carrying out active water management at Zvanets and created preconditions for active water management at Dzikaje. Implementation of active water management at Zvanets helped maintain optimal water level and ensure successful breeding of the Aquatic Warbler in 2005 despite extremely adverse climatic conditions (flooding of the mire because of heavy rains).

- c) What constraints are limiting implementation of these activities at other sites in need of effective water management?

Detailed site management plans need to be elaborated prior to any active water management at other sites.

2.2.2. *Prevent natural succession of the vegetation by undertaking management where necessary*

- a) Has vegetation management been undertaken at Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in your country to prevent natural succession?

Yes No Country is outside of breeding range

- b) If Yes, please describe actions taken (mowing, bush-removing, etc), what equipment was used for vegetation management and how efficient it was. Please refer to reports if available and comparative analysis of different types of equipment if it was conducted.

- c) If No, what constraints are limiting vegetation management at other sites where it is needed and what is your country doing to ensure proper vegetation management at Aquatic Warbler breeding sites?

Vegetation management will be conducted in 2006 and onwards as the second stage of Site management plans implementation at 2 key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites: Sporava and Zvanets. Two projects which are already approved – **GEF-UNDP project on Palessie** implemented by the Ministry of the Environment and GEF SGP project “**Conserving unique biological diversity of lowland mires through their sustainable use**” implemented by APB-BirdLife Belarus envisage mowing and bush-removing at these mires of international significance.

Testing of other extensive habitat management techniques (grazing, burning, hand-scything), as well mowing are planned for implementation at Zvanets in frames of “**Application of practical rural development instruments for the long term sustainable development of Belarus mires**” project currently submitted to Darwin Initiative (UK) by RSPB in partnership with APB-BirdLife Belarus, UNDP Belarus and Ministry for the Environment.

2.2.3. *Hand-scything and mowing*

- a) If historical information is available, please describe to which extent current Aquatic Warbler breeding sites were hand scythed and mown.

According to historical information available, all key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites have been almost 100% hand-mown. This tradition has stopped now due to large-scale de-population of rural areas and decrease of privately own cattle, availability of easily accessible hayfields at polders surrounding the mires and intensification of agriculture.

- b) Are hand-scything and mowing being applied for habitat conservation for the Aquatic Warbler in your country?

Yes No Country is outside of breeding range

- c) If Yes, please describe how this was approached, which sites were involved and the area covered. Please provide details if conservation effect of hand-scything and mowing has been evaluated. Please refer to published materials if available.

Hand-scything and mowing is planned for implementation at Zvanets mire in frames of “**Application of practical rural development instruments for the long term sustainable development of Belarus mires**” project currently submitted to Darwin Initiative (UK) by RSPB in partnership with APB-BirdLife Belarus, UNDP Belarus and Ministry for the Environment.

Hand-scything seem to be especially valuable for fighting overgrowth of the mire by reeds. It has been found out, that successful elimination of reeds requires double mowing of the site during vegetation period – early in spring and after the breeding season. In this case, hand mowing is a preferred option for the first mowing that need to be implemented in spring. Hand mowing of the mire will allow to minimize adverse impact on ecosystems by mowing extensively and high from the ground.

- d) What constraints are limiting hand-scything and mowing at sites where extensive habitat management is needed?

Hand scything and mowing is extremely labour-intensive and time-consuming. Taking into account the size of Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in Belarus and the acuteness of the problem with overgrowth of the mires, it can only be regarded as a supplementary habitat management technique at the moment.

2.2.4. *Controlled burning*

- a) Is controlled burning a legal habitat management tool in your country?

Yes No

- b) If Yes, is burning used as a habitat management tool for Aquatic Warbler? Please describe actions taken, sites involved and effects achieved or expected. Please refer to published materials if information regarding the effects of controlled burning has been summarized and published.

Local population regularly sets uncontrolled fires on most Aquatic Warbler breeding sites – Zvanets, Sporava, etc. Despite its sometimes extremely adverse impact on ecosystems, undoubtedly, this is one of the key factors preventing complete overgrowth of these mires following cessation of mowing. That is why controlled burning is regarded as a very efficient method of habitat management.

Appropriate amendments to the “Law on protected areas” and “Law on animal world” have been proposed (question of approval by relevant legislating bodies) to legalize burning as habitat management tool for certain territories.

- c) If No, then what actions are being undertaken to legalize controlled burning?

Controlled burning is planned for implementation on an experimental basis at Zvanets mire in frames of “**Application of practical rural development instruments for the long term sustainable development of Belarus mires**” project currently submitted to Darwin Initiative (UK) by RSPB in partnership with APB-BirdLife Belarus, UNDP Belarus and Ministry for the Environment.

2.2.5. *Grazing*

- a) Has grazing been used for habitat management at Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in your country?
 Yes No Country is outside of breeding range
- b) If yes, please describe which animals are used, which sites are involved and what effects are expected/achieved. Please give reference to published materials if information regarding the effects of grazing has been summarized and published.

2.2.6. Disseminate habitat management recommendations to land managers

- a) Are Aquatic Warbler habitat management recommendations being disseminated to land managers and other interested parties in your country?
 Yes No Country is outside of breeding range
- b) If Yes, please describe ways of dissemination of habitat management recommendations to land managers used: events, publications, etc. Please give reference to published materials.

Site Management Plans (SMP) that have been developed for 3 key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in Belarus – Zvanets, Sporava and Dzikaje mires – contain guidelines and recommendations regarding habitat management at these sites. As part of SMP approval process, the SMPs have been reviewed by all land-users and land-managers as well as by authorities of different levels.

- c) If No, then what constraints are limiting dissemination of habitat management recommendations and what should be done to overcome these constraints?

Development and dissemination of habitat management recommendations for other accrual or potential Aquatic Warbler breeding sites will be specifically targeted in frames of “**Conserving unique biological diversity of lowland mires through their sustainable use**” project. The project will be implemented in 2006-2007 by APB-BirdLife Belarus and funded by GEF Small Grants Programme.

- d) Please advise if there is successful experience other Range States can draw on and what assistance your country would require to help share this information.

Examples of such recommendations that have already been developed in other countries and for other sites would be extremely helpful, as well as participation of belarusian specialists on mire conservation and site-managers in practical workshops. Belarus is especially interested in building experience on sustainable use of biomass from the mire.

2.3. To protect the Aquatic Warbler and its habitat in the winter quarters and along the migration route

2.3.1. Promote the protection and appropriate management of wintering and passage sites

- a) In the table attached (Annex I), please provide details about major Aquatic Warbler passage and wintering sites in your country (*please expand the table if necessary*)
- b) Are primary Aquatic Warbler passage/wintering sites appropriately managed in your country?
 Fully Partially No

- c) Please list on-going and implemented projects and provide brief information about results achieved.

No special search for passage sites has so far been conducted. Passage and post-breeding congregation areas located at the territories occupied by the Aquatic Warbler (Zvanets, Sporava, Dzikaje, etc) are protected and managed as part of the programme on protection and management of Aquatic Warbler breeding sites.

- d) What are the remaining gaps and what is your country planning to do to ensure sufficient protection and management of primary passage/wintering sites?

2.4. To restore habitats for the Aquatic Warbler

2.4.1. Undertake the ecological restoration of potential breeding sites

- a) Have potential or irregularly occupied Aquatic Warbler breeding sites in your country been evaluated?
- Fully Partially No Country is outside of breeding range
- b) If Yes, what initiatives aimed at ecological restoration of potential breeding sites have been undertaken in your country? Which sites are involved and what effects are expected/achieved?

Restoration and ecological rehabilitation of several currently abandoned Aquatic Warbler breeding sites will be approached in 2006-2010 in frames of GEF-UNDP project “Renaturalization of degraded peatlands” implemented by Ministry of Forestry.

Census of all known irregularly occupied sites will be implemented in 2006 by ABP-BirdLife Belarus using funding from Otto foundation (Germany) and with support from UNDP Belarus. The results of the census will form the basis for further development of projects on restoration/rehabilitation of abandoned and irregularly occupied Aquatic Warbler breeding sites.

- c) If No, what are the constraints and which actions should be taken in order to overcome these constraints?

3.0 MONITORING AND RESEARCH

3.1. To develop and implement a monitoring programme enabling population trends to be tracked

3.1.1. Distribution of a methodology for counting Aquatic Warblers

- a) Is the methodology adopted for counting Aquatic Warblers used on the national level *different* to what is advised in the Aquatic Warbler Species Action Plan?
- Yes No No methodology is adapted
- b) If Yes, please describe briefly possible differences and amendments.
- c) Does your country have experience applying this methodology and what can be learned from this experience?

The counting methodology advised by the Aquatic Warbler Species Action Plan is the main Aquatic Warbler counting method used in Belarus

- d) What does your country do to distribute and familiarize relevant institutions/specialists with this methodology?

In 2005 Belarus co-hosted the field meeting of BirdLife International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team (AWCT), which unites leading Aquatic Warbler specialists from across the species range. The meeting took place at Zvanets mire and was also attended by non-AWCT members working at important sites for the Aquatic Warbler. Participants of the meetings were introduced to methods of counting of the Aquatic Warbler adopted in Belarus and participated in the counts.

3.1.2. Undertake national surveys to estimate breeding populations

- a) Have national (all-country) surveys of Aquatic Warbler breeding population been undertaken in your country?

- Yes (give years) __1997__
 No
 Country is outside of breeding range

- b) If Yes, what methodology is used (full counts, transect counts, etc.) and what organization was coordinating the survey?

Full counts for small sites, transect counts for large sites. The survey was coordinated by APB-BirdLife Belarus (?).

- c) What is the size and trend of the national breeding population (vocalizing males)? Please refer to published materials if applicable.

Year of survey: 2003	Year of survey: 2004	Year of survey: 2005
Population size: 11317	Population size: 10781	Population size: 10585

- d) If Yes, to which extent was the territory of your country covered by the survey:

- Fully (> 90 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 High (60-90 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 Medium (30-60 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 Low (< 30 % of suitable habitats surveyed)

- e) When is the next national (all-country) survey of the Aquatic Warbler planned in your country?

The national survey of the Aquatic Warbler in Belarus will be implemented in 2006 and coordinated by APB-BirdLife Belarus.

- f) If no national surveys have been conducted, please indicate existing constraints and what you country going to do to ensure that national surveys of the Aquatic Warbler are conducted?

3.1.3. Collect data at the major known passage sites and identify further resting sites

- a) Have studies at known Aquatic Warbler passage sites been conducted in your country?
 Yes No
- b) If Yes, please describe briefly, which major passage sites are being monitored, what monitoring is being conducted (Aquatic Warbler population, habitat parameters, impact assessment, migration strategy, etc) and which organizations are involved?
- c) What are the main findings and what conservation implications do they have?
- d) If Yes, to what extent are major known Aquatic Warbler passage sites are being monitored in your country?
 Fully (> 90% of known sites)
 High (60-90 % of known sites)
 Medium (30-60 % of known sites)
 Low (< 30 % of known sites)
 No monitoring is conducted
- f) To what extent have major Aquatic Warbler passage sites been identified in your country?
 Fully (> 90 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 High (60-90 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 Medium (30-60 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 Low (< 30 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
- g) What are the gaps and what is your country doing to address them?

Currently, research on migration of the Aquatic Warbler is done on a by-side principle while conducting monitoring of breeding population or implementing conservation action at key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites. Due to limited resources, the issue will be appropriately addressed once the outstanding issues with research and conservation of breeding sites have been tackled.

3.1.4. Identify major wintering areas

- a) Have studies aimed at identifying Aquatic Warbler wintering areas have been conducted in your country?
 Yes No Country is outside of wintering range
- b) If Yes, what are the main findings and conservation implications? If available, please refer to published reports.
- c) If Yes, To what extent was the territory of your country covered by the survey of wintering areas?
 Fully (> 90 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 High (60-90 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 Medium (30-60 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
 Low (< 30 % of suitable habitats surveyed)
- d) If wintering sites have been identified, to what extend are these sites being monitored

during migration?

- Fully (> 90% of known sites)
- High (60-90 % of known sites)
- Medium (30-60 % of known sites)
- Low (< 30 % of known sites)
- No monitoring is conducted

- e) If your country is outside of Aquatic Warbler wintering range, which international initiatives aimed at identification of Aquatic Warbler wintering grounds has your country been involved in? What are the main findings?

As part of the activities of BirdLife International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team (AWCT), Belarus participated in the project on stable isotope sampling of winter moult feathers of the Aquatic Warblers in order to narrow down potential wintering range of the species. The main findings of this work can be found in relevant publications.

- f) What are the gaps and what needs to be done to help address them?

3.1.5. *Research into habitat characteristics at migration and wintering sites*

- a) Has research into habitat characteristics at migration and/or wintering sites been conducted in your country?

Yes No

- b) If Yes, please provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published.

- c) What are the main findings and conservation implications?

- d) What are the remaining gaps and what needs to be done to address them?

Currently, research on habitat parameters at migration sites of the Aquatic Warbler is done on a by-side principle while conducting monitoring of breeding population or implementing conservation action at key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites. Due to limited resources, the issue will be appropriately addressed once the outstanding issues with research and conservation of breeding sites have been tackled.

3.1.6. *Research on movements during the breeding season / exchange of subpopulations*

Has research on Aquatic Warbler movements during breeding season/exchange of subpopulations been conducted in your country?

Yes No Country is outside of breeding range

If Yes, please describe which territories were covered, what methods were used (colour ringing, radio-tagging, etc.) and what were the main findings. Please give reference to published materials if available.

Pilot research on Aquatic Warbler movements during the breeding season was implemented in 1999-2000 by colour-marking birds, although the scale of it was not sufficient to yield significant results. The research is planned to be continued in 2006.

Analysis of fluctuation of density of the Aquatic Warbler throughout the breeding season showed significant movement of birds within breeding sites.

If Yes, was the research on movements during the breeding season coordinated with researchers from neighbouring Aquatic Warbler Range States.

Yes No

If the research hasn't been conducted, what is your country planning to do to initiate such cooperation?

3.1.7. *Develop and implement an international monitoring programme*

Is your country participating in development and/or implementation of international Aquatic Warbler monitoring programmes?

Yes No

If Yes, please list on-going and completed projects and indicate which areas they focus on and which other countries are involved. Please provide reference to published results if available.

Belarus is actively participating in the development and implementation of international monitoring programmes by coordinating activities on the national scale with BirdLife Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team. Placement of the position of the CMS/BirdLife International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer in Belarus with BirdLife national partner APB-BirdLife Belarus greatly facilitates such coordination.

Are there areas that haven't been properly addressed, if so, what needs to be done to assist your country in addressing these gaps?

3.2. *To promote research useful for the conservation of the Aquatic Warbler in the future*

3.2.1. *Undertake comparative studies on breeding success and population recruitment in different habitats*

a) Have studies on breeding success and population recruitment in different habitats been conducted in your country?

- Yes, in collaboration with other Range States
- Yes, on the national scale
- No comparative studies have been conducted
- Country is outside of breeding range

b) If available, please list on-going and completed studies and give reference to published reports.

The results of the research on breeding ecology of the Aquatic Warbler in different habitat types has been summarized in the following publication:

VERGEICHNIK L., A. KOZULIN Breeding ecology of Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* in key habitats in Belarus, *in press*

- c) What are the main findings of these studies?

In years with standard nesting conditions breeding success of the Aquatic Warbler at main breeding sites in Belarus varies from 36.3% to 54.07%. In years with water level fluctuations and outbreaks of shrews' populations the breeding success decreases abruptly and varies from 2.89% to 27.68%. Over eight seasons of study, breeding success was normal during five of the seasons and it was minimal during the three others. The main reason for mortality of eggs and nestlings on the Sporovo mire is flooding, and on the two other mires it is predation by small insectivores. The species is well adapted to unstable nesting conditions of fen mires, however, in years with rain floods, high water levels throughout the whole nesting season, disturbances of vegetation structure after spring fires or in years with high density of shrews breeding success decreases till minimal values that can lead to decrease in numbers of the local Aquatic Warbler populations

- d) Are there any future comparative studies your country is able to initiate? What would be needed to do this?
- e) If no comparative studies are being implemented, what is your country planning to do to stimulate this research and what assistance would be required?

3.2.2. *Assess the effect of burning, scything, mowing, grazing and water conditions on breeding populations*

- a) Effect of which of the following factors and potential habitat management techniques on Aquatic Warbler breeding population was assessed in your country?

- Controlled burning
- Scything
- Mowing
- Water conditions
- Other (what): [Predation by shrews](#)
- No assessment has been conducted

The results of the research on the impact different factors (water level, predation by shrews) of the Aquatic Warbler in different habitat types has been summarized in the following publication:

VERGEICHNIK L., A. KOZULIN Breeding ecology of Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* in key habitats in Belarus, *in press*

- b) What are the main findings and conservation implications? If available, please give reference to published reports.

[See above](#)

- c) Are there any gaps? What limits further assessment of this factor's effects?

3.2.3. *Develop collaborative research and monitoring programmes between range-states*

- a) Is your country involved in international collaborative and monitoring programmes on the Aquatic Warbler?

Yes No

- b) If yes, please provide brief details about on-going and completed projects. Which Aquatic Warbler range states are involved? What fields studied?

Cooperation with PhD research on Aquatic Warbler habitat requirements in Pomerania (Germany, Poland) by Franziska Tanneberger (Grietswald University) with the aim to identify limiting parameters and key factors leading to the drastic decline of Pomearanian population of the Aquatic Warbler.

As part of the activities of BirdLife International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team (AWCT), Belarus participated in the project on stable isotope sampling of winter moult feathers of the Aquatic Warblers in order to narrow down potential wintering range of the species. The main findings of this work can be found in relevant publications.

- c) What are the main findings and conservation implications?
- d) What are the gaps and what is needed to address them?

4.0 PUBLIC AWARENESS

4.1. *To ensure development of a strong network of organisations and individuals committed to the conservation of the Aquatic Warbler*

- a) Does a network of organisations/individuals committed to the conservation of the Aquatic Warbler exist in your country?

Yes No

- b) If Yes, how broad is this network and what organizations/individuals are taking the lead in facilitation and coordination of its development?

Creation of a network of people committed to conservation of the Aquatic Warbler and its habitats is done by APB-BirdLife Belarus as part of the programme on IBA inventory and monitoring, where caretaker network is being established.

- c) What actions does your country undertake to broaden the circle of organisations and individuals committed to conservation of Aquatic Warbler?

It is expected also that all-country census of the Aquatic Warbler that is planned for implementation in 2006 will help broaden the circle of individuals involved in conservation/monitoring of the Aquatic Warbler.

- d) What successful experience can other Range States draw on?
- e) What would be needed to establish a network if it does not already exist or to improve an existing one?

4.2. *To use the Aquatic Warbler as a flagship species*

Has the Aquatic Warbler been used as a flagship species in your country for the inventory and protection of wetlands?

Yes No

If Yes, please briefly describe how and provide examples if available.

The Aquatic Warbler is currently one of the most well known birds in Belarus. This was achieved thanks to active promotion of the species by APB-BirdLife Belarus and the Ministry of the Environment.

If No, what limits promotion and use of the Aquatic Warbler as a flagship species and how does your country plan to address this?

4.3. To prepare educational materials promoting and giving information

a) Have any educational and promotional materials about Aquatic Warbler been developed in your country?

- Yes, specifically devoted to the Aquatic Warbler.
- Yes, the Aquatic Warbler is included into materials with a broader context.
- No, Aquatic Warbler is not covered in educational and promotional materials.

If Yes, please describe the nature of such materials and how they were disseminated. Please give reference to published materials if available.

Video film "The world of the Aquatic Warbler", made jointly by Belviodecenter and APB-BirdLife Belarus is specifically devoted to the Aquatic Warbler and fen-mires. Also several posters have been published by APB-BirdLife Belarus, Ministry of the Environment and other organizations on conservation of mires and specifically the Aquatic Warbler

These educational and promotional materials are distributed for free among schools and other interested organization/individuals.

If No, please describe what limits development of such materials and give details about what your country is planning to do to promote Aquatic Warbler and its conservation.

PART II. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC ACTIONS

Please report on the implementation of the country-specific actions listed for your country in Part II of the Action Plan and provide information if that is not already covered by your answers under Part I. Please describe not only the measures taken but also their impact on the Aquatic Warbler or its habitat in the context of the objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding and the Action Plan. Where you have already answered on country-specific actions in Part I, please only add a reference to the relevant answer here.

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Annex I

Name of the site, geographical coordinates	Status (B – breeding, W – wintering P – passage)	Aquatic Warbler population supported (vocalizing males (breeding) or individuals (migration or wintering))	Year of survey	Total area of the site (ha)	Area of the site under protection %	Type of protection	Does protection level fully reject possible detrimental developments? [Yes/No]	Site Management Plan (D – developed, A - approved, I – implemented)
Almany mires	B	150-200	2005	94441,1	100	National reserve	Yes	
Babrovichskaye lake	B	0-5	1997	69,4	0			
Byarezina floodplain	B	0-5	2004	93,6	0			
Dzikaje mire	B	1200-1500	2005	13784,3	100	National Park	Yes	D, A, I
Dzitva	B	0-5	2004	171,7	0			
Dzivin-Khabovichy	B	100	1996	814,4	100	Local reserve	No	
Dzivin-Luban	B	3-7	2005	191,8	100	Local reserve	No	
Dzivin-North	B	0-5	2005	252,6	100	Local reserve	No	
Yasel'da mouth	B		1995	1719,8	100	National reserve	Yes	
Lelchitsy	B	0-30	2004	3938,9	0			
Lower Styr	B	0-5	1997	3346,1	100	National reserve	Yes	
Prastyr	B	30-500	2001	2972,2	80	National reserve	Yes	
Servach	B	50-300	2003	213,0	100	National reserve	Yes	
Shchara-2	B	0-5		144,2	0			
Shchara-4	B	1	1999	531,6	0			
Sporava mires	B	690-2120	2005	12406,1	100	National reserve	Yes	D, A, I
Stary Zadzen	B	0-5	2005	19149,8	0			
Svislach	B	0-30	1998	383,6	100	National reserve	Yes	
Zvanets	B	3000-8000	2005	16325,7	70	National reserve	Yes	D, A, I

Table

A) Full description of projects mentioned in the progress report:

- 1) **“Management planning for conservation of fen mire biodiversity in Belarus”** project (1999-2002) was financed by Darwin Initiative and UNDP Belarus and implemented by APB-BirdLife Belarus in cooperation with Ministry for Natural Resources and Protection of the Environment of Republic of Belarus
- 2) **“Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus”** project (started in 2002) is funded by Darwin Initiative, Otto Foundation, RSPB, Ministry for Environment of the Republic of Belarus and implemented by APB – BirdLife Belarus.
- 3) **“Aquatic Warbler monitoring in Belarus “**project (2002) was supported by RSPB and implemented by APB– BirdLife Belarus.

#		Status	Implementing agency	Comments
1.1.1.	Promote the development and implementation of the National Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aquatic Warbler	In progress	MinNat, APB, NAS	<p>National Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aquatic Warbler was developed in 2002 within “Management planning for conservation of fen mire biodiversity in Belarus” project financed by Darwin Initiative and UNDP Belarus with scheduled update every 5 years.</p> <p>At the moment, the Action Plan does not have a legal status within Belarusian environmental legislation. Amendments aimed at making preparation of management plans for globally threatened species compulsory and the management plans legally binding instruments are being proposed for the new edition of the law “On Animal World”.</p> <p>Implementation of most urgent prescriptions of the Action Plan is in progress in frames of UNDP “Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus” project.</p>
1.1.1.	Ensure that the Aquatic Warbler is listed in the new edition of the Red Data Book of Belarus	Done	MinNat, Zoology Institute NAS	In the new 2004 edition of the Red Data Book of the Republic of Belarus, the Aquatic Warbler has the status of a rare, locally distributed species. It will be listed as Endangered (EN) species in the Category II. This means an increase in protection status comparatively to the previous 1994 edition of the Red Data Book of the Republic of Belarus, where it was listed in Category IV as a data deficient and insufficiently known species.

2.1.1.	Expand the Zvanets zakaznik to match the area of the Important Bird Area (IBA) Zvanets, to ensure the conservation of internationally important biodiversity at the IB and to minimize the anthropogenic impact on the ecosystems.	In progress	MinNat, APB	The project of enlargement of Zvanets zakaznik to match the area of the Important Bird Area (IBA) Zvanets was prepared within “ Management planning for conservation of fen mire biodiversity in Belarus ” project and is being reviewed by relevant authorities.
2.1.1.	Include the entire Dikoe wetland in the National Park Belavezhskaya Pushcha and revise the borders of the NP protected zone, so as to ensure maximal conservation for the internationally significant biodiversity at Dikoe and to minimize the anthropogenic impact on the ecosystem.	In progress	NP “Belavezhskaia Pushcha”	The entire Dikoe wetland has been included in the NP “Belavezhskaya Pushcha”, although the borders of the protected and buffer zones are yet to be revised.
2.1.1.	Substantiate and promote the establishment of management offices for zakazniks Sporovo and Zvanets – key Aquatic Warbler breeding areas and Ramsar sites.	In progress	MinNat, APB, NAS	Zakazniks management offices (ZMS) were established at Zvanets and Sporovo reserves within UNDP project “ Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus ” to ensure better coordination of conservation activities at the local level. At the moment, ZMS do not have a legal status within Belarusian legislation on Specially Protected Areas (SPA) as such administrative structures are not envisaged for zakazniks. Amendments aimed to envisage administrative structures for zakazniks of global conservation importance are being developed for the new edition of the law “On the Nature Protection” and the law “On Specially Protected Areas”.
2.1.1.	Compile and implement management plans for the key breeding sites – zakazniks Dikoe, Sporovo, Zvanets, Mid-Pripiat, Servech, Prostyr and Vygonoshchi.	In progress	MinNat, APB, NAS, NP “Belavezhskaia Pushcha”	Management plans for Dikoe, Sporovo and Zvanets mires have been developed within “ Management planning for conservation of fen mire biodiversity in Belarus ”. Management plans for Mid-Pripiat and Prostyr will be developed within GEF Polesie project. Management Plans for Dikoe, Sporovo and Zvanets mires have been approved by district authorities and MinNat, although as such, they are not a legally binding instrument within current Belarusian legislation. Amendments to the law “On Specially Protected Areas” are being developed to give official power to the Management Plans. Most urgent actions of the Management Plans for Dikoe, Sporovo and Zvanets mires are being implemented within “ Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus ” project.

2.1.2.	Reduce the inflow of pollutants in the Sporovo wetland by repairing the water treatment facilities in Berioza, Beloozersk and local water treatment facilities at factories, as well as elaboration and implementation of a set of water protection measures.	Not approached		Reconstruction of water treatment facilities in Berioza is planned to be financed by State budget
2.2.1.	Ensure management of the hydrological regime at mires Sporovo, Zvanets and Dikoe for sustainable functioning of the wetland ecosystems, conservation of open fen mires and associated biological diversity, to balance the interests of local land users.	In process	MinNat, APB, NAS, NP “Belavezhskaja Pushcha”	<p>Engineering projects on optimization of hydrological regime of Zvanets, Dikoe and Sporovo reserves were developed and are being implemented within “Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus” project.</p> <p>In Zvanets, 7 water retaining devices were constructed on the main drainage canals located in and around the mire in order to keep the water at the optimal level.</p> <p>In Sporovo, construction of water dam at Yaselda river to enable water management at Sporovo mire has been completed (financed by MinNat). Maintenance and repair works of the shuttles at the main water locks of the Selets water complex are under way (financed by the state budget).</p> <p>At Dikoe, 4 dams have been constructed.</p> <p>At Zvanets and Sporovo water level is regularly monitored by project staff. Hydrological monitoring at Dikoje will commence in May 2005.</p> <p>Additional financing is being sought for construction of supplementary water regulating devices at Zvanets.</p>
2.2.1.	Revise the current operational rules of the Selets water complex, to meet the interests of local water users and ensure optimal hydrological regime in the Sporovo zakaznik.	In progress	MinNat, APB	The new operational rules of the Selets water complex were developed in frames of “Management planning for conservation of fen mire biodiversity in Belarus” project and will be introduced after the completion of maintenance works of the shuttles of <i>Selets</i> water complex.
2.2.2.	Work out and implement actions on limiting the overgrowth of mires by willow shrubs and reedbeds (zakazniks Sporovo, Zvanets, Dikoe, Vygonoshchi).	In process	APB	Concrete actions are planned during implementation of stage C of UNDP-GEF Polessie project. Experience of limiting overgrowth of mires in Bierbrza NP and OTOP Krasiborska Kepa Reserve (both in Poland) is being studied to be able to choose the best practice suitable for Belarusian fen mires.

2.2.3.	Maintain extensive use of mires by hand hay-cutting in zakazniks Sporovo, Zvanets, Dikoe, Vygonoshchi.	Not approached		Funding dependent.
2.2.4.	Run controlled burning of vegetation once in 3-5 years in zakazniks Sporovo, Zvanets.	In progress	MinNat, APB, NAS	Amendments to the protection regime regulations of Zvanets and Sporovo zakazniks have been developed to allow controlled burning of vegetation on the territory of these zakazniks and are being reviewed by MinNat.
2.2.6.	Inform the local land users and authorities about the prescriptions of the management plans for zakazniks Sporovo, Zvanets, Dikoe.	Done	MinNat, APB	The Management Plans for zakazniks Sporovo, Zvanets, Dikoe have been reviewed by and agreed upon with all local land users (kolkhozes) and authorities (district and regional) as part of the Management Plan preparation process.
2.4.1.	Within UNDP/GEF project “Renaturalization and sustainable management of peatlands in Belarus to mitigate climate change, combat land degradation, and ensure conservation of globally valuable biodiversity”, some 5-8 drained wetlands (100 km ²) are expected to be renaturalized, thereby providing potential habitat for the Aquatic Warbler.	In progress	Ministry of forests, MinNat, APB, NAS	The medium-sized project proposal to rehabilitate 17 degraded peatlands (40 km ²) has been developed and submitted to GEF. Funding of the project has been confirmed.
3.1.	Arrange monitoring of water levels, flora and vegetation communities, habitats, population of Aquatic Warbler, to evaluate the status of major Aquatic Warbler habitats (mires Zvanets, Sporovo, Dikoe, Servech) and adjust the implementation of the management plans.	In progress	MinNat, APB, NAS	Constant monitoring of water levels, flora and vegetation communities, habitats, population of Aquatic Warbler is conducted as part of “ Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus ” project.
3.1.1.	Disseminate the expertise in monitoring of the Aquatic Warbler.	Constant process	APB, NAS	Dissemination of the experience in monitoring of the Aquatic Warbler is done on a routine basis through involvement of Belarusian specialists in the work of AWCT.
3.1.2.	Run nation-wide surveys to assess the dynamics of the breeding Aquatic Warbler population.	Done	APB	Nation-wide survey of the Aquatic Warbler was conducted in 2002 within the frames of the project “ Aquatic Warbler monitoring in Belarus “. On-going monitoring of Aquatic Warbler population is conducted at 5 key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites (Zvanets, Dikoe, Sporovo, Servech, Prostyr) within “ Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus ” project.

3.1.3.	Promote intensive bird ringing at breeding sites, to detect migration stopovers and wintering sites of the Belarusian population of the Aquatic Warbler.	In progress	APB, NAS	<p>Initiation of a specific ringing project is funding dependent.</p> <p>Ringling of the Aquatic Warbler is done on a regular basis as part of the breeding successes monitoring at 3 key breeding sites in Belarus (Zvanets, Dikoe, Sporovo) within “Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus”.</p> <p>After the Belarusian population of the AW was genetically sampled, registration of birds from Belarusian population on migration can also be tracked by DNA sampling of migrating birds at migration sites (e.g. La Nava, Spain).</p>
3.1.6.	Continue survey of the bird movement during its breeding season (subpopulation exchange) by applying individual colour marks.	In progress	NAS, APB	Colour ringing scheme is operating.
3.2.1.	Continue comparative study of the Aquatic Warbler breeding success in different habitats (mires Dikoe, Sporovo, Zvanets, Servech).	In progress	APB	Breeding successes of Aquatic Warbler is monitored at 3 key breeding sites in Belarus (Zvanets, Dikoe, Sporovo) within “Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus” .
3.2.2.	Continue research into the impact of vegetation burning, peat fires and hydrological regime on the breeding population of the Aquatic Warbler.	In progress	APB	Impact of vegetation burning, peat fires and hydrological regime on the breeding population of the Aquatic Warbler is assessed during the on-going monitoring of Aquatic Warbler population at 5 key Aquatic Warbler breeding sites within “Implementation of urgent recommendations of the management plans for key biodiversity areas in Belarus” project.
3.2.3.	Take part in the elaboration of an international program of joint research and monitoring within the species range.	In progress	APB, NAS	<p>Participation in the elaboration of an international program of joint research is done through involvement of Belarusian specialists in the work of AWCT.</p> <p>Following efforts of RSPB, the Otto Foundation has supported the position of BirdLife/CMS International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer. The new position is based in Belarus with APB and supported locally by UNDP Belarus.</p>
4.1.	Involve APB-BirdLife Belarus in projects on the conservation of the Aquatic Warbler habitats.	In progress	MinNat	APB-BirdLife Belarus is involved as an implementing or expert organization in a number of MinNat projects related to conservation of wetlands and their biodiversity which directly or indirectly involve conservation of the Aquatic Warbler.

4.2.	Use the Aquatic Warbler as a symbol of wetland conservation.	In progress	MinNat, APB	Social advertisements about the need of conservation wetlands and wetland biodiversity with the Aquatic Warbler as a flagship species are shown on central TV several times every day.
4.3.	Promote the species' value and the need for its conservation.	In progress	MinNat, APB	Social advertisements about the need of conservation wetlands and wetland biodiversity with the Aquatic Warbler as a flagship species are shown on central TV several times every day. Several posters and booklets have been published specifically targeting conservation of the Aquatic Warbler.

AWCT – BirdLife International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team
APB – NGO Akhova Ptrushak Belarusi, APB-BirdLife Belarus
NAS – National Academy of Sciences of Belarus
MinNat – Ministry for Natural Resources and Protection of the Environment of Belarus
OTOP – Polish Society for the Protection of Birds, the BirdLife partner in Poland
RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the BirdLife partner in the UK