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BirdLife Cyprus

“Managing Wetlands for Birds” Workshop Report

LIFE10 NAT/CY/716

*As part of the networking actions of the LIFE+ project:
“Restoration and Management of Oroklini Lake SPA in
Larnaca, Cyprus” – www.orokliniproject.org*

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“Managing Wetlands for Birds” Workshop Report

This workshop report was prepared by BirdLife Cyprus as part of the LIFE+ project “Restoration and Management of Oroklini Lake SPA in Larnaca, Cyprus”

The workshop “Managing Wetlands for Birds” was a networking action of the LIFE Oroklini project organised on 31 October and 1 November 2013 in Larnaca, Cyprus.

Acknowledgments to all the participants of the workshop, especially the experts from abroad who contributed greatly to the share of expertise and knowledge on this subject.



With the contribution of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Union

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1. List of Abbreviations

FCS – Favourable Conservation Status
IBA – Important Bird Area
SBA – Sovereign Base Area
SCI – Site of Community Importance
SPA – Special Protection Area
RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

2. Introduction

This workshop was organised as part of the LIFE+ project “*Restoration and Management of Oroklini Lake SPA (CY6000010) in Larnaka, Cyprus*” (LIFE10 NAT/CY/716) as a networking activity. The aim of the workshop was to bring together experts involved in wetland management for the benefit of birds to ensure transfer of know-how, experience and best practice. The workshop included presentations on wetland management and restoration projects, networking space as well as a visit to Oroklini marsh. The two-day workshop was organised by BirdLife Cyprus and was held on 31 October and 1 November 2013 in Larnaca, Cyprus.

The beneficiaries of the LIFE Oroklini project are the Game and Fauna Service (leading partner), BirdLife Cyprus (coordinator), Environment Department, Department of Forests and Voroklini Community Council. The main objective of the project is to bring the Oroklini Lake Special Protection Area (SPA) to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) in relation to the species for which the site was designated. The project is a 3-year project (2012 – 2014) funded by the LIFE financial instrument of the European Union.

3. Brief overview of the workshop

BirdLife Cyprus organised the networking workshop entitled “Managing Wetlands for Birds” with invited experts from five BirdLife International partners (RSPB-BirdLife UK, HOS-BirdLife Greece, DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia, LPO-BirdLife France and SEO-BirdLife Spain), who presented case studies on wetland management from their countries. There are many examples of wetland restoration and management in Europe and all share similar aspects to those faced by the project team at Oroklini and this workshop was all about enhancing the exchange of know-how, experience and best practice between projects and experts. All the

experts based their experience and findings, on current or previous projects funded by LIFE, the EU’s financial instrument for the environment.

In total, around 45 people participated at the workshop, from the Cyprus authorities, such as the Water Development Department, the Town Planning and Housing Department, the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research, LIFE Oroklini project partners (Game and Fauna Service, Environment Department, Department of Forests, Voroklini Community Council), as well as other NGOs (i.e. Terra Cypria), Frederick University, consultants, other LIFE projects implemented in Cyprus, and other stakeholders (i.e. Sovereign Base Area (SBA) Environment Department). Please see Annex 1 for the full list of attendees.

The workshop was opened by BirdLife Cyprus Executive Director and Senior Project Coordinator of the LIFE Oroklini project, Dr. Claire Papazoglou, who also chaired the workshop. Dr Papazoglou welcomed all participants and thanked especially the key speakers who arrived from abroad. A brief introduction about the aim of the workshop and the program then followed.

Presentations were first given by the Project Director, Mr Nikos Kassinis, on Oroklini marsh and the LIFE Oroklini project followed by a presentation on the proposed water management works by the Project Coordinator Mrs Melpo Apostolidou. Presentations were then given by several conservation experts and wetland management experts. A brief overview of each presentation is given below. The workshop agenda may be found in Annex 2.

4. Brief overview of presentations

Presentation 1 – ‘Oroklini marsh and the LIFE Oroklini project’ by Mr Nikos Kassinis, Head of Game and Fauna Service Research Unit and Project Director.

Project Director provided introductory information on Oroklini Lake SPA, the site’s qualifying species (Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* and Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*), the threats Oroklini Lake had been facing and the need for restoration. The threats included disturbance from trespassers and the adjacent highway as well as the spread of invasive species, housing development encroachment and lack of water management. Following that, the speaker presented the LIFE project implemented at Oroklini Lake by giving a brief outline of the project’s overall aim -to bring the SPA to

favourable conservation status- as well as the project’s actions, duration, partners and initial results.

Finally, the speaker highlighted the benefits of the LIFE Oroklini project such as the fact that Oroklini Lake is amidst urbanised areas where there is an active community who support and engage with the ongoing conservation efforts. The importance of this site is increased therefore by its potential to act as a role model for future conservation projects.

Presentation 2 – ‘Water Management Works at Oroklini marsh’ by Melpo Apostolidou, Project Coordinator, BirdLife Cyprus.

The Project Coordinator gave a description of the hydrological features of Oroklini Lake, the historical management of the site and the proposed management works planned to be implemented on site as part of the LIFE Oroklini project. The water management works aim in achieving a more stable hydrological regime to promote more favourable conditions for key species through minimizing periods of complete drying and control high water levels. The proposed water management works include light scraping of reeds where reeds start to expand in open areas, repairing the existing weir and installing an eel pass on the weir wall, construction of a sluice and creating communication between the lake and outlet channel to the sea with culverts, creating better communication between the south compartments of the lake and the main ditch that runs across the lake by installing culverts and finally creating five nesting islets surrounded by ditches with water.

The speaker also referred to the Ichthyological study that started in August 2013 aiming in studying fishes at Oroklini Lake. The aim of the study is to give a better understanding of the lake’s functions and biological features focusing on examining restoration options concerning alien mosquito fish *Gambusia holbrooki* populations and their management, indigenous mosquito fish *Aphanius cf. fasciatus* re-establishment as well as Eel populations *Anguilla anguilla* movement and ecological requirements.

A discussion followed during which the following were clarified:

- The ichthyological study showed that there are no *Aphanius cf. fasciatus* currently in the lake but there is an assumption that it could have been there in the past. Currently the introduced alien species of mosquito fish exists at the site although the Public Health Department said they will not introduce the *Gambusia* Fish again. Andreas Demetropoulos

from Cyprus Wildlife Society suggested conducting an invertebrate study in order to safeguard the eel’s food supply.

- The lake and the area around has been greatly modified and thus the project is not dealing with a natural situation therefore we need to find different solutions and use existing hydrological features. Given the circumstances in which we find ourselves right now this is the best way to deal with the hydrological situation of the site. This has also been the advice of RSPB who has great experience on wetland management for the benefit of birds.

- The aim of the water management works is to avoid complete drying during the breeding season for the key species. The site will still rely on rainfall and the water management works will not foresee adding water. The sluice will enable avoidance of flooding in the spring, as flooding might cause the loss of nesting sites for the key species. But we certainly don’t want to affect the natural situation of the lake greatly.

- The catchment area is an IBA but not an SPA. If the catchment area becomes urbanised the result will be an increased inflow of water in the lake and it will also affect the quality of the water ending up in the lake. In case there are any proposed planning projects, they will have to follow the Appropriate Assessment procedure for plans or projects which could affect Natura 2000 sites. In addition, with increased urbanisation we will observe increased flooding events as the soil which previously held the water in place will be removed and replaced by infrastructures.

- The hydrological study showed that there is no sea intrusion in the lake’s groundwater. The eels migrate from the sea to inland waters as elvers overground when water levels are high.

- Regarding the after LIFE water management of the site, it was clarified that this will be agreed with the Game and Fauna Service and the Environment Department. The management plan of the site will also involve all the competent authorities and the necessary works that need to be done. A Ministerial Decree of what the management of the area should be like, will be ready by 2015 and the authorities which will be responsible for the implementation of the management plan will be defined. Meanwhile, the Game and Fauna Service and BirdLife Cyprus will continue visiting the site often after the project and they will carry out the opening and closing of the sluice when it is required.

*Presentation 3 – ‘Management of coastal lagoons on RSPB nature reserves in the UK’
by Graham White, Senior Wetland Ecologist RSPB.*

The speaker gave an introduction to RSPB’s work to enhance wildlife populations and increase the extent and quality of habitats, to implement recovery programmes for threatened species, to manage nature reserves and encourage the restoration and creation of habitats to achieve landscape-scale conservation. The RSPB’s aim is to conserve threatened and/or internationally important species and their habitats, either by protecting land of high conservation importance, or restoring or creating land of high value from that of low value. RSPB manages 210 reserves that cover 130,000 ha which is 0.54% of the UK’s land surface. The speaker explained the approach to managing habitat, which is led by species needs and leads to targeted habitat design and creation and also to the creation or improvement of facilities for viewing. RSPB manages a mix of fresh, brackish and saline lagoons at 20 sites and is currently involved in the creation of 1,000 ha of coastal lagoon habitat.

Following that, the speaker gave an overview of Minsmere reserve which is a complex of brackish lagoons and reedbed and Bowers marsh which is a new 150 ha wetland complex.

Some key management issues were then presented, like managing salinity and manipulating water levels to make food available, water regimes which include rotational drying, disturbing, vegetating and drying at different times and then re-flooding for autumn passage, invertebrate communities, vegetation control and predation monitoring and control.

Finally, the speaker gave details on the **Alde-Ore Future for Wildlife LIFE project** (www.lifealdeore.org) for the management of Havergate Island. This small island in the River Ore is famous for its breeding avocets and terns, while in autumn and winter, the island provides a haven for large numbers of ducks and wading birds. A main aim of the project is to establish functional, efficient and sustainable systems of water management to maintain and improve the quality of the coastal lagoons and marshes in response to increasingly lower rainfall. The project’s main actions are to replace and refurbish six old sluices, create new tern and Avocet nesting islands (4 ha), re-shaping and lowering islands (6 ha) and move 20K m³ of spoil and also control predators (Brown Rats). The LIFE project has also improved water circulation through the site to maintain water quality.

A discussion followed during which the following were clarified:

- By creating spectacles for visitors it is meant that with proper landscaping and habitat management you attract birds closer to the hide. This is done by maintaining water there when the rest of the lake dries so there are still birds close to where people can see them.
- Because one of the sites has been a rubbish tip before, there has been an issue with the water quality. To address this issue a complex system of capture, a double infiltration system has been created to ensure the quality of the water.
- Regarding vegetation management, the speaker clarified that the reeds will slowly come back and RSPB controls it with maintaining appropriate water levels. In the future, reeds will need to be cut again in order to maintain open areas. The site is vulnerable to sea-level rise, so in the future the aim of managing this site is something that will need to be reconsidered as sustainability is a factor which needs to be taken into account.
- Regarding predation control, the speaker clarified that over a period of two years they used poison for the rats and their population was massively reduced but they don't believe that they will ever get rid of them completely. Poison has been used very carefully within bait boxes as the site is also used by birds of prey which feed on small mammals such as rats. However, currently, foxes are a major problem. Regarding foxes, if there is concrete evidence that the foxes disturb the species then they control the foxes. They prefer to do habitat manipulation to stop foxes from reaching the site through flooding so that they don't have to deal with killing foxes. Electric fence is another way to stop predation by foxes.

Presentation 4 – ‘Habitat Restoration of Skocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve – The most important Slovenian brackish wetland’ by Natasa Salaja, Financial and Reserve Manager, DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia.

This presentation gave an introduction to the Skocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve and the situation for wetland conservation in Slovenia focusing on the success of restoring the most important Slovenian brackish wetland.

Skocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve is a Mediterranean wetland covering an area of 122 ha. It is the largest brackish wetland in Slovenia, well-known for its rich fauna and flora and consists of two parts:

- a brackish lagoon with breeding islets, saltmarshes and mudflats overgrown with a variety of halophytic plants, and

- a freshwater marsh with wet meadows, open water areas surrounded by reedbeds and thermophile shrubs.

The principal objective of the project **LIFE00NAT/SLO/7226** - Restoring and conserving habitats and birds in Škocjanski zatok NR - was to restore and manage habitats of Škocjanski zatok Nature Reserve after industrial degradation in the 1980s in order to work towards a Favourable Conservation Status of species and their habitats. The project was a continuation of a 15 years struggle to protect and conserve habitats and birds in the area and at the same time the first example of conservation efforts being able to stop the degradation and afterwards start to improve the habitat. It's also the first example in Slovenia of an NGO managing a protected area. The high costs of the reserve restoration point out the importance of environmental impact assessment in order to avoid degradation of natural environments (preventive approach) in the first place.

The restoration actions included improving of fresh and sea-water inflow to the lagoon with cleaning of the water inflow channels and mounting of the sluices at the sea channel, extraction of approximately 185,000 m³ mud from the lagoon, improving the habitats along the lagoon borders, mainly mudflats and nesting islets, creation of a freshwater marsh and activities for preventing human disturbance with establishment of the warden service and construction of the visitor trail with screening embankments.

The Reserve Management Plan (covering the period 2007-11) has been the most crucial document for the future of the reserve, as it guarantees sustainability and continuation of this project. The plan was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in a form of a legal act (Decree on Program of conservation and development of Škocjanski zatok Nature Reserve).

The success of the project has been obvious from the presence of breeding species, ecological conditions were improved and environmental awareness increased. The successful collaboration between DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia and the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning played a key role for the project's success.

The reserve is becoming a new destination of quickly developing nature tourism. It will surely attract sustainably-minded and environmentally responsible visitors and help extend the region's tourist season.

After the presentation, a discussion followed during which the following were clarified:

- Regarding the cooperation of DOPPS with government authorities Mrs Salaja explained that the cooperation started before the designation of the site and it started on a contract

basis from a tender. DOPPS produces an annual work programme that is submitted to the government and which needs to be in line with the management plan through indicators.

- Regarding the ownership of the reserve it was explained that 95% of it, is state owned land. Under Yugoslavia it was ‘socially-owned’ land, and there was a law that all protected areas which were under ‘socially-owned’ land should become state-owned land. The procedures of this conversion were very long so there was a long delay affecting the restoration timing before the site became state-owned. The rest is privately owned but the owners are not interested in the land. Approximately 10% of Natura 2000 sites are state protected areas and are being managed by the government.

- Regarding the funding for the visitor facilities, it was explained that the visitor facilities are going to be financed by Regional Funds. The decision was taken upon the agreement between the Minister of Economy and the Ministry of the Environment.

- Regarding public concern on mosquito the speaker explained that there is a mosquito problem sometimes and that they have the mosquito fish in the wetlands, and they are explaining the importance of the wetland to the people to address complaints from the public.

Presentation 5 – ‘Case studies of wetland management in Greece’ by Manolia Vougioukalou, Safeguard Lesser White Fronted Geese LIFE Project Manager, Hellenic Ornithological Society – BirdLife Greece.

During the last presentation of the workshop’s first day, the speaker presented some case studies of wetland management in Greece starting with the LIFE project “Safeguarding the Lesser White fronted Goose Fennoscandian population in key wintering and staging sites within the European flyway”. The 5 year project involves 11 organisations from five countries with a budget of €2,279,485. Details on the population size, major threats to wintering and staging sites of the Lesser White fronted Goose were then presented.

The presentation continued focusing on Kerkini Lake, a wetland of international importance. Lake Kerkini is one of the 10 Greek wetlands of international importance, also known as the Ramsar wetlands. It is also characterised as in IBA, a Wildlife Refuge, an SPA and a SCI. It is a reservoir whose construction began in 1932 with the construction of a dam on Strymonas river. The primary reason for the creation of the reservoir was to provide water for the arable land and also to protect the villages in the valley from seasonal floods.

The Lesser White fronted Geese arrive first at Kerkini Lake around the middle of October and stay until December-January. Lake Kerkini is an important site for breeding waterfowl and other birds while it hosts rich biodiversity. In 1982 the need for additional water for the arable fields, led to the construction of a second dam that contributed to an increase of the water level of the lake. At the time such constructions in Greece were not planned with wildlife in mind. As a result the water level now can vary up to 5 meters, and hence the lake surface can change from 50,000 ha to 70,000 ha. As a result shallow areas have decreased dramatically, and potential nesting areas such as the reedbeds, islets, wet grassland where fish would breed have been inundated with water and therefore have disappeared. The river forest has also deteriorated. The dam had adverse effects to the supported wildlife of the area. Kerkini is famous for its water buffalos that are kept as livestock in the area. Although the buffalo is adapted to live and feed in water, a substantial increase on the numbers of the animals (in the past 8 years the number of buffaloes has increased from 500 to at least 2,000) because of the popularity of buffalo meat, as well as a government program that provided subsidies for rare breeds of livestock has resulted in an increased number of buffalo that can hinder the natural regeneration of the riparian forest as well as endanger nesting habitat by trampling. However the biodiversity of Lake Kerkini is still impressive and it is closely monitored by Lake Kerkini Management Authority that is responsible for the Management of the National Park since 2002.

The long-term wetland management goals are to lowering the water levels during spring, which will enable plants like the water lilies to survive and keep providing nesting habitat for both fish and birds such as terns and lower the difference between the water level in autumn and spring in order to give the vegetation such as the reedbeds a chance to adapt and survive, and to provide larger surface of marshland for wading birds. The short term goals have so far included re vegetating the riparian forest and also creating artificial nesting platforms for birds. Artificial platforms were created for the breeding of the Dalmatian pelican -a flagship species of the area – which has been breeding successfully on the platforms since 2003. Rafts were also created for the breeding of terns.

Another issue that wetland management will be challenged to address is that of the big amounts of rubbish that are brought into the lake through the Strymonas river, which flows from FYROM as well as Bulgaria.

The last part of the presentation included some brief information about the completed LIFE project for the restoration of the Drana Lagoon in Evros Delta (**LIFE 00NAT/GR/7198**). The Evros Delta is one of the 10 Greek wetlands of international importance, also known as the Ramsar wetlands. It is also designated as in IBA, a Wildlife Refuge, an SPA and a SCI. The Evros River is the biggest river in the Balkan peninsula, with total length of 528 km, 310 of which belong to Bulgaria, and 218 of which form a natural border between Greece and Turkey. The LIFE project «Restoration and Conservation Management of Drana lagoon in Evros Delta» had a budget of €2,086,533 and was implemented between 01/06/01 and 30/06/2005. In 1946, Drana lagoon formed a natural “fish farm”. Rich in nutrients, the lagoon hosted very large amounts of fish. After 1987 the site was drained as the communication with the sea had stopped, and fresh water influx had been drastically reduced resulting in a dried up lagoon, with adverse effects in the local and migratory wildlife. The aims of the LIFE project were to restore the Drana Lagoon as a priority habitat and to restore the wet grassland that surrounded the area. This was achieved through dyke reinforcement, constructing a sluice and reopening the water flow from the sea.

Both aforementioned wetlands (Kerkini Lake and Evros Delta) are habitats used by the Lesser White fronted Goose. The Safeguard Lesser White Fronted Geese LIFE project also examined the diet of the species to identify habitat requirements and the next step was to elaborate a habitat management and restoration plan for key Lesser White fronted Geese feeding and roosting sites at Evros Delta. Finally, in terms of habitat management the project foresees the creation of suitable habitat management at key feeding and roosting sites in Evros Delta inside the protected area of the SPA through vegetation cutting, seeding of grasses and grazing control.

A discussion followed during which the following were clarified:

- Regarding Lesser White fronted Geese diet and population decline, the speaker explained that it is very difficult to prove that geese don't have enough to eat. But what they are sure of is that the percentage of the grass is low and that there is a competition with the cows. An issue that the Forestry Institute will investigate this year is if it would be better to swap the cows with sheep which eat mostly other vegetation and which leave the grass for the geese. Also, there have been increased predations on the nests of the geese in Norway but the current regulations allow for a slight increase of the geese. One of the actions of the project which happens in Greece as well as in Hungary is the analysis of the diet and this action is not yet over so they hope that the percentage of unidentified parts of the diet will decrease.

- Regarding the presence of the geese in other areas in Greece, apart from Kerkini Lake and Evros Delta, the speaker clarified that the species is found elsewhere, but for the past ten years there have been no sightings although the sites are often monitored.
- Regarding reintroduction projects the speaker mentioned that there is such a programme in Sweden, however its value in the conservation of the LWfG is controversial amongst the LWfG scientific community as re introduced birds have shown to cause gene introgression from other goose species.
- Regarding the possibility of attaching transmitters on the geese the speaker said that the practice is very successful; however the Fennoscandian LWfG population is so small that the project has chosen not to induce this stressful activity to the LWfG.

Presentation 6 – ‘Management and conservation of dyked wetlands on French Atlantic Coast: Case study of LPO properties in Rochefort Marshes’ by Remi Chalmel, Assistant Conservation Officer, LPO - BirdLife France

The speaker first gave some introduction information on LPO’s work in France. The organisation has 46000 members, 5000 volunteers and works in 21 regions across France. LPO manages more than 170 sites covering an area of 23000 hectares. The talk continued with information on the management of Rochefort Marshes that cover an area of approximately 13000 ha. Rochefort Marshes used to be a large gulf (10000 years BP), between 12-16th centuries the marshes became brackish abandoned by man, between 17-19th centuries it was converted to grazing pastures while in recent years (1970 – 1980) the site was threatened by intensive farming. Regarding its legal status the site is not an official reserve, it is included in the Natura 2000 network and it is owned by LPO.

The management of the marshes is implemented through water control, vegetation management, eradication of Invasive Alien Species and minimising disturbance. The aim of the management is to conserve or increase breeding waterbird populations and their habitats. For twenty years, several programs (LIFE projects too) were carried out to restore hydrological functionalities and improve habitats for some species (Black tern, Lapwing and others breeding waders and ducks, also Bittern).

The water management included a hydrological study, cleaning out ditches, constructing an earth dyke and installing a sluice gate. Grazing animals were also used for habitat management and to control grazing LPO used fences and barriers to keep animals in different areas. During spring cattle are used at a minimum level and a maximum of 1,5 cow

is used per hectare, the site is grazed between March and October while no fertilisers and no pesticides are used. Some species require less grazed habitats so this is something that is taken into account in managing the site with grazing animals.

The speaker then gave information on managing an area for the benefit of the Black Tern. Management actions included the creation of floating platforms for nesting, managing water levels, protecting the areas from cattle and also monitoring the species’ population.

Another challenge of the site management has been the eradication of Invasive Alien Species (IAS). IAS on site include the Water Primrose (*Ludwigia sp.*), Louisiana Crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*), Eastern Baccharis or Saltbush (*Baccharis halimifolia*), Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*) and Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*).

Concerning visitor management on site, entry to the site is prohibited between mid-April and mid-July while there is a birdwatching platform and also thematic visits are organised.

Closing the presentation, the speaker gave some budget figures and funding sources for the management of the site and briefly presented some opportunities for future management work.

A discussion followed during which the following were clarified:

- The predator of the invasive alien crayfish is the eel while no other crayfish species existed on site before the Louisiana Crayfish was introduced.
- The speaker presented population trends for some species in Rochefort marshes. The Garganey shows a big decline in the last five years and it is believed that the reason for this decline is its late breeding.

Presentation 7 – ‘Creating and managing saline lagoons for wildlife with visitors in mind’ by John Badley, Senior Sites Manager, RSPB Frampton Marsh & Freiston Shore nature reserves, RSPB - BirdLife UK.

The presentation started with a brief introduction to the Lincolnshire Wash Reserves focusing on the creation of the Freiston saline lagoon. The site was managed to cover both the needs of birds as well as people.

The 15 ha saline lagoon is on RSPB Freiston Shore nature reserve on the edge of the Wash in Lincolnshire, in eastern England. It was created in 2002 as the result of a flood defence project. RSPB had a great opportunity to build in features of interest for visitors because the reserve is on the edge of the Wash, one of the most important wetland sites in Europe, which attracts up to 400,000 birds in winter. However, it has relatively few safe nesting places for birds attracted by the abundant feeding opportunities here.

There was also good potential for visitors due to the location being near the town of Boston (40,000 inhabitants) and not too far from major roads connecting parts of the UK.

From the outset the lagoon was designed to provide a series of ‘shingle’ islands (small rounded stones with cockle shells mixed in). This was to mimic natural conditions that many birds like Common Terns and Avocets like to nest on. Shallow edges to the islands and lagoon banks along with shallow water meant they would be able to find food in the lagoon’s water.

The works were instantly successful with Avocets and Ringed Plovers colonising in the first year, quickly followed by Common Terns and gulls. In 2013 the lagoon was home to 1401 pairs of Black-headed Gulls, 119 pairs of Common Terns, 19 pairs of Avocet and 9 pairs of Oystercatchers making it one of the most important breeding sites in The Wash.

In winter the grassy topped islands are up to several thousand with Wigeon, Brent geese and about a hundred Black-tailed Godwits feeding there creating a real spectacle for visitors.

Disturbance from visitors was initially high because the lagoon is small, but because the RSPB installed fencing to keep people and importantly dogs away from the core lagoon area and paradoxically because visitor numbers were high this led birds to become habituated as they got used to the regular visitor flow. The result was the birds came closer to people which enhanced the visitor experience. The lagoon has various vantage points and visitor facilities such as a bird hide and raised viewing areas so visitors can see onto the lagoon to view the birds.

The lagoon islands need to be managed or they become unsuitable for nesting birds. This is done by a combination of hand weeding/cutting and flooding with salt water which kills most of the plants. Having a good water level control is therefore critical to the success of the lagoon. As well as raising the water levels in winter to help with controlling island vegetation we lower the water levels in autumn to provide more shallow water to benefit feeding waders. This is very popular with visiting bird watchers.

A survey and monitoring programme is important so we can see how the lagoon is performing to inform our management, we monitor water levels and quality, salinity, grazing levels, breeding birds, breeding bird productivity, wintering birds, mud and water living invertebrates and bank erosion.

Livestock are also important to keep the vegetation low around the lagoon, the short vegetation is favoured by all the species for feeding or nesting. RSPB uses sheep because they create a short grass sward favoured by the geese and wigeon, but they also have to cut thistles and ragwort which can take over.

Other enhancements to consider RSPB has included for visitors at Freiston Shore or elsewhere include artificial nesting banks for sand martins, fixed and temporary interpretation, staff or volunteers to talk to visitors about the site, an events programme, sculptures and art around the site.

A discussion followed during which the following were clarified:

- With regards to regulating hunting around the marsh area the speaker explained that hunting has been a very traditional activity in the area and hunters were there before the area was managed by RSPB. RSPB has changed approach with the hunters during the last 20 years, so that hunters come closer to conservation and the RSPB comes closer to the hunters. When RSPB first started managing the wetland they tried to stop hunting all together and this caused a big reaction in the hunting society. To improve the relations with the hunters, the RSPB offered them longer license, they changed from 1 year agreement to 10 year agreement so that hunters don't feel threatened that next year the hunting would stop. Also, hunters do their own policing in the area, so that they feel responsible for the site.

- With regards to deciding the design, location, functionality of the visitor facilities (information centres and birdwatching hides) the speaker explained that RSPB hasn't perfected the facilities but they have carried out surveys to see what the public would like. RSPB came up with two priority groups, in order to avoid doing all suggestions and try to please everyone which would be impossible. The two priorities are: 1. Create birdwatching hides, passes etc. for the traditional birdwatchers within a 2-hour drive, and 2. Interpretation centres, activities for kids to be self-guided through activity backpacks, benches, paths etc. for active nature enthusiast families who are people who like the countryside and who might be members of the RSPB. RSPB also offers guided events and also share information between the wetlands.

- With regards to the reaction of the traditional audiences to the activities aiming to attract the new members the speaker explained that the traditional audience was supportive. The reserve is designed in a way that the family zone, where all the activities are located close to the information centre is segregated from the rest of the area; the further you go in, the more wildlife exists and more facilities for the birdwatchers. Families won't walk to the facilities further away -around 1 km further of the visitor centre where all the family facilities are and the traditional birdwatchers seemed to accept this quite well.

- With regards to controlling vegetation on the paths across the reserves the speaker admitted that this is a complicated issue that could cost a lot. RSPB sprays on the paths, or

uses trimmers (brushcutter) on the sides. They also use small stones instead of tarmac on the paths. It is a trade-off between keeping it looking natural and the intensive maintenance required.

- With regards to the reason why the population of Avocets dropped in 2012, the speaker explained that the reason was predation by Black-headed Gulls. Currently, there is a big population of Black-headed Gulls on site and the Avocets are not very protective of their young so they are an easy target. RSPB has recently been trying to create lagoons further away where they manage it and attract the Avocets away from the Black-headed Gulls.

Presentation 8 – ‘Working on wetland restoration: three different study cases in Spain’ by Felipe Gonzalez Sanchez, Cantabria Regional Officer, SEO - BirdLife Spain.

The speaker from SEO (BirdLife Spain) first gave a short introduction on the organisation’s work focusing on the conservation work on wetlands. Then the speaker presented different study cases in three places in Spain.

Two of the areas presented are Mediterranean wetlands and the other is located in the Atlantic coast (North Spain). The common/main objective of the conservation efforts is to restore wetlands that had been heavily modified by industrial or agriculture activities. All projects presented were practical examples to improve water quality, biodiversity, economic and social values. SEO/BirdLife applied different ways to achieve these goals.

Tancat de La Pipa. Natural Wastewater Treatment: The Albufera Lake is a shallow lake (mean depth less than 1 meter) with an extension of almost 3.000 hectares (3 Km²) and a volume of water of 22.5 m³. The Albufera wetland receives water from the Júcar and Turia Rivers. The Tancat (a green filter) is part of the Albufera wetland, whose international importance is recognized through several protection figures (Ramsar, several Natura 2000 sites and Natural Park). The surface of the whole Albufera wetland reaches 20.000 ha where 17.000 are occupied by rice paddies partially flooded depending on the period of the year. A new LIFE project starts on 2013 to encourage these works (LIFE Albufera, <http://www.lifealbufera.org/index.php/en/>). The main goal is to demonstrate how a global integrated management of this wetland can improve the quality of water, the extension of priority habitats and the conservation status of waterfowl.

Ebro Delta Case Study: Research Project (1997-2001) Life-Nature 6/E/512: Improvement of habitat management in the Ebro Delta (SPA). Around 21.000 ha at present (65% of its total surface) are occupied by rice fields. It was introduced in the 19th century, but its extensions mostly occurred in the first half of the 20th century. The hydrological cycle of Ebro Delta was totally altered: currently the hot season is the fresher one. Most of wetlands were destroyed or modified by water and nutrient inputs. Only about 10.000 ha of natural habitats remain. The transformation of wetlands to rice fields mostly caused a loss of ecological integrity but not so much of ecological health. The ecological health was strongly altered with the arrival of intensive methods, i.e. pesticides, inorganic fertilizers, machinery, artificial drainage, etc. The present situation has improved due to the legislation and the implementation of the agri-environmental schemes. Despite the environmental impacts of the rice fields, they play an important role in the conservation of biodiversity in the Ebro Delta. Although rice fields are key habitats for sustainable management of many Mediterranean wetlands, the price of the rice can fall because of the international trade competence and also farmers will not be able to get subsidies for rice production in the future. So there is a risk of substitution of rice by non-flooded crops (or worse) in the near future which can lead to loss of good habitats for aquatic birds and deterioration of aquatic ecosystems (marsh, lagoon, bay).

As part of the Research Project (1997-2001) Life-Nature 6/E/512, SEO/BirdLife Spain managed a total of 35 ha of rice fields divided in three management schemes: Conventional, Agri-environmental and Organic farming (during 3 years). A monitoring programme of environmental, agronomical and economical was carried out during the project during the growing and non-growing season and specifically designed to test differences between three management schemes. Mean values of parameters measured were significantly different between the flooded and non-flooded period, but not between management schemes and years. From the 10 most representative bird species in the study area, three species (*Bubulcus ibis*, *Ardea purpurea* and *Anas platyrhynchos*) presented higher statistical densities in the organic plots. Two species (*Ardea cinerea* and *Egretta garzetta*) showed higher densities in both the organic and agri-environmental plots than in the control while only one species (*Gallinula chloropus*) had higher density in the control plot. Three species (*Ardeola ralloides*, *Chlydonias hybridus* and *Motacilla alba*) presented no significant differences among the plots. Other results of the research project showed that in the organic plots the prey is bigger, the catching effort is lower, the system is more structured and more diverse. Regarding water quality this was better in the organic plots, both in terms of dissolved nutrients and concentration or presence of residual pesticides and also the density of

invertebrate and fish in the organic plots doubled those existing in the agri-environmental and control plots. Nowadays, SEO/BirdLife Spain managed two lands which are one of the eight SEO/BirdLife Spain official Natural Reserves.

Marismas Blancas (Astillero): EcoASTILLERO XXI is a local program developed by Astillero Town Council in collaboration with SEO/BirdLife Spain intended to incorporate the environment into the urban and industrial development process. The main goal is to blend together the growth of the municipality with the conservation of its natural heritage. EcoASTILLERO XXI bases its strategy on the Sustainable Development principle. It is a comprehensive plan that seeks to organise local space through the creation of areas of high environmental quality that are interconnected by means of a perimeter footpath and radial paths that communicate with urban and residential areas. A complex of wetlands has been restored and is managed by SEO/BirdLife to create new public spaces for Astillero people. Project actions included the elimination of invasive plants, designing habitats for birds and creating adequate public use. At the same time, the project showed that it is possible to fit together public use and conservation of biodiversity in urban areas. Nowadays, SEO/BirdLife Spain manages this space as one of the eight SEO/BirdLife Spain official Natural Reserves.

After the presentation, a discussion followed during which the following were clarified:

- Regarding the work on Invasive Alien Species (IAS) at Tancat de La Pipa the IAS need to be treated continuously to ensure they are eliminated from the site.
- Regarding the bird species that are attracted at the Astillero wetlands these are all kind of typical wetland birds, like waders, herons and ducks.

Please note that all the presentations are available from BirdLife Cyprus upon request.

Working in groups

During the second half of the second day of the workshop participants were separated in two groups to discuss different problems and their solutions in wetland restoration as well as dealing with issues of project communication. Representatives from each group then presented the summary and results from their group to all workshop participants.

GROUP A DISCUSSION: PROBLEMS OF SETTING UP AND MANAGING A NATURE RESERVE, I.E. OROKLINI LAKE

The group divided the subject in two sections, (a) Technical problems and (b) People oriented problems. However, the group due to limited time only managed to look in detail solutions for the problem of accessibility.

A list of *technical problems* was presented:

- Land Ownership – Managing a site becomes complicated when the land is owned by many owners. An ideal situation is to manage a land you own.
- Contamination
- Permissions/Consents
- Wind farms and Wires
- Water – The availability of water at different times of year, the quality of the water, potential pollution of the site and its viability for managing the wetland for wildlife.
- Management – The number of people required to keep the site in good condition can be underestimated.
- Livestock – Availability of livestock, control of livestock.
- Alien Invasive Species – Some sites have extensive problems with IAS.
- Illegal Developments
- Pesticides – From probably legal activities like farming, pesticides could have an effect on the site if you are trying to manage it for wildlife.

A list of *people oriented problems* was presented:

- Illegal hunting
- Local acceptance – Mosquito problem and flooding problem
- Traditional uses of the site – It might occur that the site was used for generations for one purpose and land use change for wildlife protection could lead to acceptance problems
- Local plans/Urban plans
- Politics
- Noise and Light pollution – There might be issues depending on what you are managing the site for
- Hunters – They might feel threatened by conservation actions

- ‘Sense of ownership’ – Local people might feel that management authorities/agencies impose conservation actions on them if you come from another town and with the money ready to do actions, even if they agree with the actions.

The issue of accessibility was further discussed and analysed within the group and the following were noted:

People often access the sites for a walk or to walk their dogs, with 4x4 vehicles, for motorcycle racing or to dump waste. The disturbance and impact on species is even bigger when people enter sites during breeding season or migration. All of these could affect the species for which the site has been designated.

In terms of solutions to the problem the following were discussed:

Fencing is the highly desirable action but managers realised there are issues with putting up fencing, i.e. it has a high cost and it could cause disconnection between people, in the sense that ‘we don’t want you here’. There are some more aesthetically pleasing fences, like plants (e.g. Hawthorn in the UK which has thorns) which in a way hides the purpose of the fencing. Other ways to limit access is to create wet fences/ditches although these do not always deter dogs. School surveillance has worked in some cases; when children are involved then probably it is less likely to get problems. An example from the UK was when they made posters drawn by children to promote an action. Another way is to use guardians for the site who can be volunteers and with this way you create the feeling of ownership to people. Policing fines could also be a deterrent. It is also recommended to organise guided walks and this way you engage people by allowing them controlled access and at the same time explaining them the sensitivity of the site.

As a general conclusion, Group A, stated that managing authorities/agencies should have as a general policy to allow people to enter the area during the non-sensitive season and organise certain activities to be allowed in certain periods of the year. Often people will accept the fact that they are not allowed within a sensitive area if they understand that the reasons of limited access are reasonable.

GROUP B DISCUSSION: COMMUNICATION ISSUES WHEN IMPLEMENTING A RESTORATION/MANAGEMENT PROJECT IN AN AREA

The second group first identified the issues for which often people complain about. Under each issue, a number of solutions are presented:

- **Mosquitos:** This is usually an issue from people/communities who are located near wetlands. To communicate this issue with the public, managers are advised to produce/disseminate information leaflets that explain that mosquitos are not necessarily linked to the wetland and that mosquitos might come from other sources (like the grass in gardens, pots or other) and that there are ways to avoid them. It is also important to keep the community involved in the project, stress the positive things the project is achieving, conduct studies to identify the problem, check where the problem is arising from and produce mosquito population studies, present other cases that when a wetland is properly managed the mosquito problem is less. In the case of Oroklini Lake it would be good to explain to people that as part of the LIFE Oroklini project a preliminary study on the mosquito fish is being produced and at the same time showing that the project cares about complaints coming from the public.
- **Flooding:** This has been an issue at Oroklini case as well where a group of residents has been complaining about some basements getting flooded. Managers are advised to identify the problem through a hydrological study, collaborate with the House and Planning Authorities to avoid bad development planning in the future and integrate environmental aspects to other policies.
- **Smell:** It is important to explain to people why sometimes wetlands have a bad smell during some periods.
- **Restricted Access:** Often people complain that they cannot enter the site. A solution would be to create separate access for vehicles which can be locked and controlled and have pedestrian sites where only pedestrians can enter. Another good practise is to create zoning to indicate to people where they can go and where not and of course explain the reasons. Also to open and close sites in different sensitivity periods.

As a general remark, Group B, explained that in case a community is involved in a project, like the Oroklini case, the managing authorities/agencies should inform the Community Council so that they know the right answers to the public’s questions. It is also advised to always listen to the public’s complaints.

5. Conclusions

The presentations given, and the discussion that followed, provided an overview of the various projects that other countries and BirdLife partners are implementing in wetlands across Europe. The workshop proved to be valuable as useful information was exchanged between organisations and people who work in site management. Although managing wetlands for the benefit of birds is quite a specialised subject that deals with diverse issues like Invasive Alien Species control, hydrological issues and water management, fish and invertebrate communities, habitat management, predation control etc. there are many examples of wetland restoration and management and all deal with similar issues.

An important element of conservation efforts is to involve and engage the public. Projects implemented with the support of the communities can be more viable in the long term. Public engagement can be achieved through proper dissemination activities, visitor infrastructure and creating opportunities for public involvement.

Solutions to similar problems often faced by other projects were also discussed and best practises were shared between participants.

This workshop set the foundation for networking and exchanging best practises, experiences and know-how for the future.

BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank all those who attended the workshop for their cooperation and input towards restoring and managing wetlands for the benefit of birds and people. Special thanks go to the experts from abroad who contributed to the share of expertise and knowledge on this subject.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – List of participants

Name	Country/Organisation	Role/title	Email
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Workshop Report – ‘Managing Wetlands for Birds’



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ANNEX 2 – Workshop Agenda

- INVITATION & AGENDA -

Workshop on Managing Wetlands for Birds

as part of the LIFE+ project ‘Restoration and Management of Oroklini Lake SPA in Larnaca, Cyprus’

31 October & 1 November 2013

Cyprus

As part of the LIFE+ project “Restoration and Management of Oroklini Lake SPA in Larnaca, Cyprus” (LIFE10 NAT/CY/716), BirdLife Cyprus -as one of the partners to the project- is inviting you to a two-day workshop that will be held on the **31st of October and 1st of November 2013** in Cyprus, at Lordos Beach Hotel, Larnaca district.

Workshop Objectives

The aim of the workshop is to bring together experts involved in wetland management for the benefit of birds. The aim of this networking activity is to ensure transfer of know-how, experience and best practice between projects and experts. The workshop will include presentations on wetland management and restoration projects, networking space as well as a visit to Oroklini marsh.

Background Information

This workshop will be a networking activity foreseen as part of the LIFE+ project “Restoration and Management of Oroklini Lake SPA in Larnaca, Cyprus”, www.orokliniproject.org.

The main objective of the LIFE Oroklini project is to bring the Oroklini Lake SPA to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) in relation to the species for which the site was selected. The main target species are Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*, both qualifying species for the SPA and the IBA of Oroklini Lake, as well as another four Birds Directive Annex I species that regularly nest or have nested at the site (Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*). The site is also important for 58 Annex I species that stage during spring or autumn migration or spend the winter, and another 36 regularly occurring non-Annex I species most of which we expect will benefit from the actions of the LIFE project.

The beneficiaries of this 3-year LIFE project are the Game and Fauna Service (leader partner), BirdLife Cyprus (coordinator), Environment Department, Department of Forests and Voroklini Community Council.

Working Languages: English

Organisers: BirdLife Cyprus

Participants

Around 35 people. Experts involved in wetland management for birds from BirdLife partners and other organisations, officers from LIFE Oroklini project partners and other LIFE projects implemented in Cyprus, Cyprus National Authorities, SBA Environment Department, other relevant authorities and Cyprus NGOs.

Time & place

Time: Thursday, 31 October & Friday, 1 November 2013

Location: Larnaca district, Lordos Beach Hotel, TRITON HALL

Contact person

Melpo Apostolidou, LIFE Oroklini Project Coordinator, BirdLife Cyprus

Email: melpo.apostolidou@birdlifecyprus.org.cy & Telephone: (00357) 22 455 072

WORKSHOP AGENDA		
‘Managing wetlands for birds’ - 31 October & 1 November 2013		
Cyprus, Lordos Beach Hotel, Larnaca		
Day 1 (Thursday 31 October 2013)		
When	What	Who
8:30 - 9:00	Registration and coffee	
9:00 - 10:30	Introduction	
	Welcome	Clairie Papazoglou BirdLife Cyprus Executive Director & Senior Project Coordinator AND Nikos Kassinis Project Director Game and Fauna Service
	Oroklini marsh and the LIFE Oroklini project	Nikos Kassinis Project Director Game and Fauna Service
	Water Management Works at Oroklini marsh	Melpo Apostolidou Project Coordinator - BirdLife Cyprus
10:30 - 10:45	Coffee break	
10:45 - 13:30	Experience and examples from other countries	
	Management of coastal lagoons on RSPB nature reserves in the UK	Graham White Senior Wetland Ecologist - RSPB
	Habitat Restoration of Škocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve – The most important Slovenian brackish wetland	Natasa Salaja Financial and Reserve Manager DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia
	Case studies of wetland management in Greece	Manolia Vougioukalou Safeguard Lesser White Fronted Goose LIFE Project Manager HOS – BirdLife Greece
	Lunch & Coffee	
	Networking time	
	Field trip – Oroklini marsh visit	
Day 2 (Friday 1 November 2013)		
	Coffee	
9:00 - 11:15	Experience and examples from other countries (cont'd)	
	Management and conservation of dyked wetlands in French Atlantic coast: Case study of LPO properties in Rochefort Marshes	Chalmel Rémi Assistant Conservation Officer LPO – BirdLife France
	Creating and managing saline lagoons for wildlife with visitors in mind	John Badley Senior Sites Manager - RSPB Lincolnshire Wash Reserves
	Working on wetland restoration: three different study cases in Spain	Felipe González Sánchez Cantabria Regional Officer SEO – BirdLife Spain
	Coffee break	
	Dealing with issues of communication of our projects	Work in 2 groups, write down problems and solutions and present them
	Lunch & Coffee	
14:00 – 15:00	Presentation of results from groups	
15:00 – 17:00	Networking time	
17:00	End of workshop	