

PROJECT PROGRESS UPDATE (December 2008)

Demonstration Project: Haapsalu-Noarootsi Bays, Estonia

Prepared by the WOW Project Coordination Unit (PCU)
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Thanks to a comprehensive ecological monitoring plan, which includes detailed surveys of waterbirds, fish, biotopes and benthic zones within 300 km² of protected area in the Haapsalu-Noarootsi Bays, the field team in Estonia now has all the essential elements on hand to compile three management plans. Formal documentation, submitted to the Ministry of Environment in early 2009, is pending approval which will provide the legal basis for the implementation and enforcement of these important documents.

To underpin the implementation of the management plan, an ecological monitoring plan is now in full swing. Preliminary monitoring of migrating and breeding waterbirds has already shown several encouraging signs of good management. In spring 2008 the WOW demonstration area was the main stopover site in Estonia for the globally endangered "Lesser White-fronted Goose" (*Anser erythropus*) and after many years the first pair of "Black-tailed Godwit" (*Limosa limosa*) is breeding again in the Silma Nature Reserve.

The field team is also working towards the sustainable management of these beautiful areas by raising awareness among different stakeholder groups in the project area. To facilitate this and to provide better information to those visiting the Haapsalu-Noarootsi Bays, a small visitor centre is being constructed at the State Nature Conservation Centre's Saunja Office. The information centre will host an interactive multi-media display demonstrating the environmental dynamics of the project area and seasonal information on stop over sites for different species of migratory waterbirds. Printed material will also be disseminated widely providing valuable information on nature reserves and hiking trails of the northern part of the county. New tourist infrastructure has also been constructed, including new recreational hiking trails accompanied by leaflets showing all the hiking routes in the Haapsalu Bay area.

As part of its surveillance programme, people can now even enjoy the incredible wildlife of the Haapsalu-Noarootsi Bays from the comfort of their own home. By simply visiting www.looduskalender.ee, you can be one of the 2000-3000 people a day hoping for a glimpse of the newest Estonian celebrity, the White-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). Every day these magnificent birds visit the designated feeding spot for a couple of minutes, not knowing they are being filmed by a large camera operated by a range of different partners (Internet portal ilm.ee; Eenet, local NGOs such as Läänemaa Bird Club, Silma Märgala, Kotkaklubi and a range of other partners). In November alone, at least 11 different White-tailed Eagles were spotted, including four birds with colour rings from Finland and Estonia.

As part of the demonstration project, swathes of coastal grasslands in the project area have been restored. Farmers that own coastal grassland in the area participated in a practical exchange in Sweden to learn and apply restoration techniques from the existing meadow management plan. These local farmers have already replaced most of their mowing activities with grazing schemes to sustainably manage these coastal ecosystems. To increase the local capacity of stakeholders even further, the WOW project team in Estonia implemented a nature guide training course for the Haapsalu Vocational School students focusing on botany, ornithology, settlement history and heritage of the Osmussaar Island. There are now more than 20 guides on hand to support eco-tourists

visiting the project area. Taken together, these efforts are increasing the local capacity of stakeholders and available infrastructure to enable the implementation of the management plan.

It is clear that, so far, a lot of the hard work at the demonstration site in the Haapsalu-Noarootsi Bays is paying dividends. "These efforts will not stop here", says Marko Valker who manages the demonstration project together with other State Nature Conservation staff. The team is now even helping out their colleagues in other parts of the African-Eurasian region. In early 2009 a visit is planned to the Wetlands International office in West Africa, and to Niimi National Park in The Gambia and Saloum National Park in Senegal to implement training for local staff and to help increase waterbird monitoring capacity. To read more about Estonia, the project inventories, monitoring and management reports please visit the Estonian WOW Demonstration Project website: (<http://www.envir.ee/lk/aewa>).

This report was prepared by the WOW Project Coordination Unit (PCU) and is based on project reporting documentation and personal accounts made during visits to the WOW Demonstration Site.

For more information please visit the Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) Project Website: www.wingsoverwetlands.org

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