

Report on the implementation of the project
LIFE09 NAT / E / 000253
Protection of the white stork population in the Natura 2000
site Ostoja Warmińska



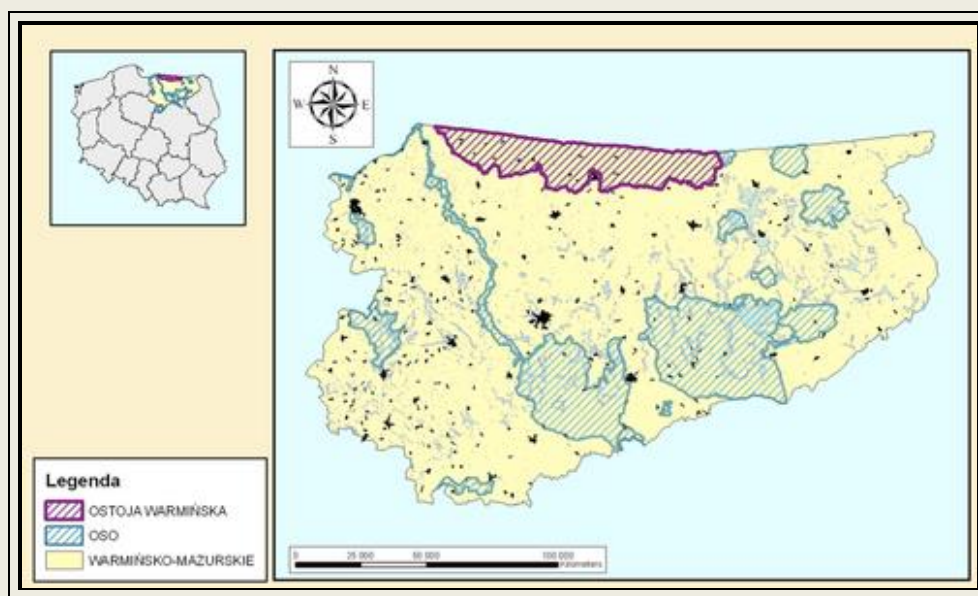
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Description of species and Natura 2000 site - the general background of the project

The white stork is a protected species under the Wildlife Protection Act, the Bonn Convention, Berne, Ramsar, and also cited under the so-called EU Birds Directive. In addition, the white stork has been considered as an umbrella species, because by protecting its foraging and nesting sites other species of birds are protected as well, among others, lapwing, black-tailed godwits, curlew, snipe, and also rare plant species.

In Poland, there are over 50 thousand white storks, more than 20% of the total world population. Most storks inhabit Warmia and Masuria. In the northern part of the Warmia and Mazury province, along the border with Kaliningrad for almost 150 thousand ha extends special protection refuge area for birds, Natura 2000 Ostoja Warmińska PLB280015, which has been established under the Birds Directive to protect, among others, the white stork.



The population of the white stork in the refuge reaches the largest number in the country. According to the Standard Data Form there are 1000 pairs approximately, reaching the highest density rate - 71 pairs per 100 km². It is also very important refuge for many species of birds. There are, as much as 93 species of birds that favor Natura 2000 sites (including 81 breeding species and probably breeding). Among them, 38 species are listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive and 15 species of Polish Red Book of Animals. The species of this area include: the lesser spotted eagle, crane, short-toed eagle, whooper swan, bittern, black stork, white-tailed eagle, Montagu's harrier, Ferruginous Duck, osprey, curlew, black-tailed godwit and corncrake. One of the most frequently inhabited by storks in the area of the refuge is Zywkowo village, with more than 40 occupied nests. Other large stork colonies, located on the Natura 2000 area are colonies in Lwowiec, Szczurkowo, Lejdy, Bobrowo.

The size of the white stork population very well reflects the state of the environment. Therefore, the stork is used as an indicator species. The key importance for the population of storks is the protection of their natural nesting sites and feeding areas, i.e. extensive wet meadows, river valleys, oxbow lakes.



Land use change, forestation, intensification of agriculture through the conversion of meadow land into farmland (mainly into large-scale monocultures), reducing the meadow surface of bird breeding habitats, river valleys natural transformation or disappearance and destruction of ponds, and restricting grazing, contribute to the loss of suitable feeding areas and consequently affect the less successful breeding of these birds. Deterioration of the food base forces adult birds to fly even further in search of suitable feeding grounds and sacrificing more and more time in finding food. As a result, parents can feed less and less chicks. This additional expenditure has negative impact on the health and ultimately the survival of young birds.



In addition, a high risk factor for storks are electricity units, above of all, medium and low voltage lines and transformer stations. Unsecured properly are a threat of life loss, especially for young birds that learning to fly and die as a result of collision with power lines. Those accidents more than often result in tragedy for the birds themselves, but they also cause economic loss. Unfortunately, more often lack of suitable nesting sites such as trees, tall chimneys and suitable roofs, forces the white to choose nesting places on power poles. Currently it has been noted that 60% of stork nests are placed on electric poles.

In order to protect the birds, especially the white stork, thanks to which the Natura 2000 Ostoja Warmińska was established, give them the best possible conditions for the establishment of breeding and feed their offspring, the Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection in Olsztyn and the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds have undertaken joint activities within the project LIFE09 NAT / E / 000253 called Protection of the white stork population in the Natura 2000 site Ostoja Warmińska.



This project was carried out with financial support obtained from the European Union LIFE + funds and national funds from the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management.

The objectives and activities of the project

In the project LIFE09 NAT / E / 000253, a series of activities have been undertaken aimed at reducing the mortality of the white stork and increasing its foraging sites. One of the main tasks aimed to contribute to the reduction in mortality of storks was to secure electricity devices through insulating almost 20 km of low and medium voltage line and the exchange for new or renovation of the existing 25 transformer stations. These actions were taken in the largest colonies of the white stork in the refuge. Moreover, the implementation of these activities brings tangible economic benefits to society due to decreased number of failures of electrical equipment involving birds.



In order to increase the food base for the white stork 6 water tanks and 4 impoundments were built that allow reproduction of species particularly amphibians, which are, among others, the white stork food.



Another task that was carried out in order to protect the storks, was mounting in the Natura 2000 site 158 freestanding poles with platforms for white storks nest. This action was performed on farms, where existing nests on roofs had to be removed for safety reasons (too large nest, heavily tilted) or where favorable habitat conditions existed e.g. different types of land, like meadows, pastures, arable land, ponds, necessary for the proper development of those birds .

In order to create the most favorable nesting places for storks, 16 roofs of farm buildings in 10 villages with existing nests were also renovated. The roofs were often damaged or destroyed under the weight of those nests.



Funding also included the purchase of equipment for the volunteer fire brigade units. Therefore, 6 of the units, which are evenly spaced from each other so as to be able to take emergency action as the largest area, have been equipped with aerial platforms, chainsaws and generators. This equipment allows, in a relatively short time, perform interventions reported by the local community, municipalities, etc. It accelerates and facilitates the conduct of fire and rescue operations, which directly translates into benefits for society.

The project also made an inventory of permanent grassland, which provided a lot of information about how the refuge management, and in the future will be a starting point for the planning of further conservation activities for the species of birds and their habitats.

Every year population status and the white stork nests were checked by performing monitoring white stork population.

During the implementation of specific conservation activities, it is important to educate the public on conservation, which has a definite impact on the area of refuge. Therefore, in this project, a series of activities aimed at advancing the knowledge of protected species on Natura 2000 sites, and many other aspects of

nature conservation. One of the main activities of this type was the creation of the Information and Education Centre, which is located in Żywkowo and is intended for wider public education and tourism purpose. In the center meetings are organized for school groups as nature lessons. Moreover, the centre is visited annually by many tourists (approx. 1500 tourists per year). These are both individual tourists but also groups from Poland, Germany, France, UK and even Japan. The vast majority of visitors are adults, families, the elders (pensioners, the third age universities students).

In each of the types of activities for groups the emphasis is put on showing organic farming as a standard type of land use, the white stork friendly. It is about the use of natural fertilizers (manure), customize the way of mowing meadows (from inside to outside), and what is most important for the storks - grazing, which should be maintain at low levels. The emphasis is placed on the role of ponds and swamps as an important food base for storks and the role of water holes, especially in periods of drought. Education will certainly improve the white stork population in the future through education of our successors - people who will join in the fight for the welfare of these birds, both on the smaller scale (in our own backyard), but also on the larger scale in the municipality, county or maybe even in the whole country.



There have been also published brochures and information folders, a documentary film about the white stork, a guidebook of good agricultural practice, and an exhibition. The wooden boards have been installed in the refuge area informing about the qualities of the Natura 2000 and birds species living there. Also, website has been launched, www.ochronabociana.pl, containing all the necessary information about the project.

The project LIFE09 NAT / E / 00253 overlooks the needs. However, there is still much to be done. The reasons for the decline of storks are fairly well understood, which is why it is very important to take measures aimed at the education of the public. In many places, it is difficult to prevent the disappearance of storks, because

it is connected with economic development, but excessive manipulation of nature for the valuable natural areas often contributes to the irretrievable loss of habitat for species of birds and plants.

