



2024/05 NEWSLETTER

LIFE IP GRASSBIRD HABITATS

Dear readers,

Spring, and therefore the 2024 breeding season, is at its peak. Most project staff are currently spending a large part of their time working on wet meadows with newly hatched Lapwings, setting up insect traps, ringing Redshanks or equipping Black-tailed Godwits with GPS transmitters in night trapping events. However, a lot has already happened in the LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats since the beginning of the year, even before this busy season.

For example, there was a lively exchange between the German and Dutch partners at our international project meeting in Friesland's small town Workum. At the same place, various project partners had already met a few months earlier to organise a joint workshop on agriculture and meadow bird conservation.

In this newsletter, we also report on some of the diverse measures in the meadow bird areas and the latest transnational publications of the LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats. We would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to our news blog, where we regularly report on the latest activities.

The LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats team wishes you an enjoyable time reading!



International project meeting 2024 of the LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats in Workum, Friesland.
Photo: J. Ahrendt-Hitzegrad

Annual face-to-face meeting held in Workum

Just in time for the start of the breeding season in the Workumerwaard, one of the most important meadow bird areas in Friesland, the annual partner meeting of the project LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats took place just a few hundred metres away.

Organised by the three Frisian project partners Province of Fryslân, Bond Friese VogelWachten and Collectief Súdwestkust, the successes and challenges of the past year

were presented at the three-day event, which also included themed workshops. The diverse agenda encouraged fruitful discussions between the partners and enabled the exchange of knowledge and collaborative planning of future meadow bird conservation measures.

One of the highlights was the excursion to the Workumerwaard, where Lapwings, Black-tailed Godwits and other meadow bird species mated, nested and defended their nests and chicks with their spectacular flights and typical sounds. Following the meeting, the site managers



Field trip to Workumerwaard during the project meeting. Photo: J. Ahrendt-Hitzegrad

took part in an expert visit during which they gained valuable insights into the assessment of meadow bird conservation project sites in the province of Friesland. This expert meeting, which will be repeated over the course of the project, is not only a tool for exchanging experiences on the conservation status and objectives of individual project sites, but also an instrument for assessing the success of the measures implemented as part of the LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats.

Project workshop on agriculture and meadow bird conservation

In order to learn from the respective working practices of the project partners, members of the Lower Saxony Water Management, Coastal and Nature Protection Agency (NLWKN) LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats team visited their project colleagues from Collectief Súdwestkust, Province of Fryslân, University of Groningen and Bond Friese VogelWachten. Jeroen de Vries and Age Flapper warmly hosted this exciting workshop at the headquarters of their agricultural collective in the city of Workum, right at the centre of the “motherland of meadow birds”: Fryslân.

Presentations of each partner aligned with fruitful discussions. Three farms were visited to get a first-hand impression on how the collective – together with the farmers – is developing meadow bird conservation measures that are perfectly tailored to the local situation of the farms and their land.



Farm visit with farmer Ysbrand Galama in Workum during the workshop on agriculture and meadow bird conservation. Photo: H. Lemke

Each farm had at least 75 pairs of Lapwings, Black-tailed Godwits, Redshanks or Oystercatchers within 100 hectares of their (private) farm land. One thing all three farmers had in common was a strong passion for the meadow birds. This motivates them to get involved in species conservation, despite it being economically challenging. It was impressive to see how this cultural link between people and birds appears to have a unique strength in Fryslân.

Still, the biggest drawback for meadow bird-friendly farming practices as presented here is that payments for lower yields are insufficient to compensate for lower financial income. Meadow bird conservation has to be affordable, which is currently not possible for most farms or only feasible for relatively small parts of the land. Current payment schemes appear to pay off the farmers' conservation efforts only on a maximum of roughly 20% of the farm's agricultural land. This is neither sufficient for the meadow birds to find enough suitable areas to breed, nor attractive for the farmers as an economic perspective. For this reason, the LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats staff are working





on developing an improved payment scheme where the value of increased ecosystem services – visible through increasing numbers of meadow birds – is adequately rewarded, and hence financially attractive, so that many more farmers become “bird-hearted”.

In the Netherlands there are about 40 agricultural collectives spread across the country, aiming to implement funding from agri-environmental schemes into farming practices. Hereof the Collectief Súdwestkust is one of the most successful in achieving an increase in meadow bird numbers together with “their” farms. This is largely due to highly committed site managers and motivated farmers active in Fryslân.



Age Flapper presenting information during one of the farm visits. Photo: K. Obracay

However, in order to get more farmers on board to re-establish meadow bird-friendly habitats on the population level scale, there must be better financial solutions for the broader farming community. The project partners are tackling this challenge together and work hand in hand with farmers on enhanced payment schemes for the future.

Team growth in the project

Corinna Langebrake, our newest team member, started working at the Lower Saxony Wadden Sea National Park Administration (NLPV) in February. Her main responsibility will be the protection and optimisation of breeding habitats of grassland birds, specifically on the East Frisian Islands. In addition, she will be developing strategies to protect different characteristic species.



Theoretical input and discussions at the project workshop to develop a business model for “meadow bird farming”. Photo: J. de Vries

Corinna Langebrake studied biology in Greifswald with an ornithological focus. Between her Bachelor’s and Master’s degree she joined a research project on hummingbirds in the Andes of Colombia. After her studies



Portrait of the new team member. Photo: C. Langebrake

she proceeded with a PhD at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology and the Institute of Avian Research in Wilhelmshaven. Her focus were the evolution and genomics of avian migration, with a specific interest in orientation and magnetoreception.

Dutch Blog “Weidevogelman” for meadow bird awareness

Since the beginning of 2022, a team of Collectief Súdwestkust is working with a local journalist to publish a column called “Weidevogelman”. With this column, LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats tries to pay attention to meadow birds and their protection. The column is distributed via social media, websites and newsletters of collectives and agricultural parties all over the Netherlands.

“Let me introduce myself: Meadow Bird Man is my name and I love meadow birds. I have been observing them all my life and I am full of knowledge about these fascinating animals. I would like to share this with you as a farmer, with practical tips and facts that help you see the meadow birds as part of your business operations. I looked at my uncle ‘De Weideman’ with admiration. How he helped dairy farmers with his knowledge and skills to improve grazing. I also have that ambition for meadow bird management... There is still so much knowledge from practice and science that remains untapped!”



The “Meadow Bird Man” publishes a column every month. You can register for this column via the Dutch [WeideWinst website](#). An archive with past articles can be found there as well.

The latest achievement is that in the future, the column will additionally be printed in the Dutch magazine *Onze Weidevogels*.

New wood maintenance measures around Lake Dümmer

Last year, more than 200 breeding pairs of the rare Black-tailed Godwit nested in the Dümmer marsh, and the species is still present in the Boller Moor. Project manager Heinrich Belting from the Nature Conservation Station Dümmer reports about the success of nature conservation projects in the region, “Populations of numerous highly endangered grassland bird species have developed very positively in the last decades.”

What are we doing to sustain this positive trend? At the beginning of this year, dis-



Ochsenmoor before measures.



Ochsenmoor after measures. Wood maintenance measures created around 80 hectares usable habitat for meadow birds in the protected area.

Photos: T. Obracay

ruptive trees and shrubs around Lower Saxony’s project areas Ochsenmoor, Western Dümmer Marsh, Boller Moor and Lange Lohe were pruned to optimise the breeding habitats. Pruning trees for conservation might seem paradoxical at first glance, but our project’s NLWKN site manager Thorsten Obracay understands that not all bird species prefer lofty heights for nesting and living: “Redshanks, Lapwings, and Black-tailed

LIFE IP Godwit „JD” and “Miss Merkel”

This year’s third week of February marked an early surprise as the first Black-tailed Godwit reached Lake Dümmer after spending the last few months in its wintering grounds.

Meanwhile, our fastest GPS-tagged Black-tailed Godwit named “JD” reached the Osterfeiner Moor near Lake Dümmer in mid-March. After leaving West Africa and a pitstop in the Doñana region “JD” flew over West France and the Netherlands before arriving in Germany.

“Miss Merkel”, a female Black-tailed Godwit tagged by the project team made an exciting looping migration. While her fall migration last year took her from the Dümmer via the Netherlands and Spain to Mali, this year she chose a completely different route. Her spring migration went via Greece, Hungary and Poland until she finally returned to the Dümmer to spend the summer months here.

In the meantime, our project staff are preparing to equip more Black-tailed Godwits with GPS transmitters in the coming season.



Godwits – these grassland birds feel at home in open and moist landscapes. Trees, on the other hand, attract birds of prey, as well as foxes and martens.” Our ground-nesting birds such as Black-tailed Godwit, Snipe and Lapwing rely on disturbance-free, extensive habitats for their successful breeding.

Funding for these measures comes from the EELA funding scheme (Preservation and Development of Habitats and Species) under the ELER programme for Lower Saxony and Bremen (PFEIL).

Hunting in the french resting areas endangers bird populations

The Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) recently published its 28th Artenschutzbrief, a magazine reporting about up-to-date information on current campaigns and actions for the protection of migratory birds. One of the articles cited our project’s press release about a young Lapwing ringed by project member Christopher Marlow at the Dümmer. The bird fledged in the Ochsenmoor and migrated towards its wintering grounds last summer. However, the Lapwing with the ring number Helgoland 6420421 was legally shot in northern France on 23 September. This is because hunting Lapwings and many other species that are protected in large parts of Europe is still permitted in France.

Concerning this topic, the German ornithologist magazine *DER FALKE* already published an article in 2021, written by project members Johannes Melter, Christopher Marlow, Andreas Barkow, Heinrich Belting and Jürgen Ludwig. This text discussed the decline of the Black-tailed Godwit population in Germany over the past 25 years and the efforts to improve their habitat conditions. Actually, there is a hunting moratorium for Black-tailed Godwits in France. However, it was already known that a resumption of hunting in French stopover areas could jeopardize these efforts. Satellite telemetry data revealed that the birds often use ponds set



Christopher Marlow rings a Lapwing for the State Agency for Bird Conservation of Lower Saxony. Foto: J. Ahrendt-Hitzegrad

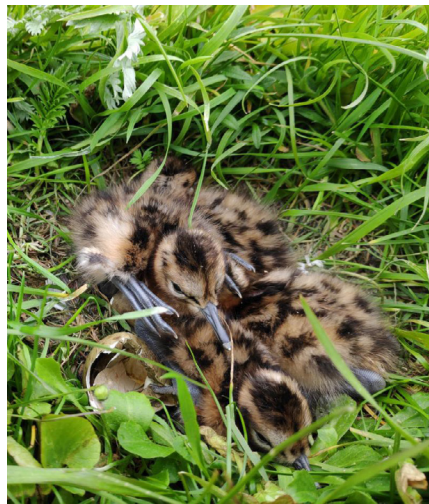
up for hunting during stopovers in French areas. The German breeding population could directly be threatened if hunting resumes in France. Despite conservation efforts in German breeding areas, reversing the negative trend remains challenging due to habitat degradation. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the need to end the meadow bird hunting in France and enforce regulations to protect meadow bird species as non-huntable.

Improving clutch and chick survival through predator control

A project-related study that has been published in *Ardea*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal, investigated the impact of intensified predator control on Black-tailed Godwits in the Dümmer area, revealing increased nest and chick survival. The control of predators therefore contributes to a sustained survival rate of breeding populations. The research was conducted in joint effort by project partners the University of Groningen, BIO-CONSULT OS and NLWKN. LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats team members Nadja Hofmann, Bettina Hönisch, Johannes Melter and Heinrich Belting worked in cooperation with experts Jelle Loonstra (Altenburg and Wymenga Ecological Consultancy), Marcel Holy (Nature

and environmental protection association Dümmer e.V. / NUVD) and Christiaan Both (University of Groningen). While past research mainly emphasized nest survival effects, this study highlights chick survival benefits.

Effective predator management requires continuous and intense efforts. Context-specific approaches are crucial due to predator population variations and ecological factors between areas. In addition, careful



Freshly hatched Black-tailed Godwit chicks at Special Protection Area V65 Butjadingen. Photo: T. Rosskamp

implementation and monitoring of predator control are essential to prevent unintended consequences and population declines of Black-tailed Godwits.

The publication “The effect of different mammalian predator management regimes on the reproductive success of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa limosa*” by Loonstra A.H.J., Hofmann N., Hönisch B., Melter J., Holy M., Both C. & Belting H. (2024) was published in *Ardea* 112: 103–112. doi: 10.5253/arde.2023.a16.

Looking forward: Our steps for meadow bird conservation

As we reflected on last months' efforts in our project, every action, big or small, contributes to the goal of preserving valuable habitats and the birds living there. We continue to make a positive impact on the future of meadow bird conservation. Together we try to achieve our next steps and hope to report about successful events and measures in our next newsletter.

The LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats team would like to say thank you to everyone involved in this endeavour – be it as team members, supporters, partners or interested parties!

