



Nordic-Baltic Wetland Initiative (NorBalWet) meets in Finland

16 December 2009

Networking with Wetland Managers in Nordic-Baltic countries

The 5th seminar of the Nordic-Baltic Wetland Initiative (NorBalWet) focused on networking with wetland managers in Nordic-Baltic countries was held on 25-27 August 2009 in Turku, Finland. Following the tradition of earlier seminars held in 2006 in Sweden, in 2006 in Norway, in 2007 in Estonia and in 2008 in Finland (1), this meeting provided an excellent opportunity for experts to share practical experiences of wetland management, restoration and conservation, as well as to discuss progress since the previous meeting and plans for future work. The seminar brought together 30 Ramsar focal points from administrative authorities, wetland managers, nature conservation and environmental monitoring specialists and others.

The seminar was organized by Finnish Ministry of the Environment and Metsähallitus, Finland, under the perfect coordination by Tiina Niikonen and Liisa Nikula of Metsähallitus. The main themes of the seminar included i) current issues of implementing the Ramsar Convention and cooperation between countries, ii) enhancing cooperation within the NorBalWet region, iii) wetland strategies and iv) wetland restoration and biological diversity. Also wetlands and development aid were concerned.

Among wetland strategies, the Swedish Restoration Programme was presented in detail – a large-scale ongoing programme aimed at restoration first of all of rivers and streams and coordinated by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. Its practical experiences are summarized in the publication “Ecological restoration of watercourses” (by Erik Degerman, Swedish Board of Fisheries, available only in Swedish so far). The forthcoming National Strategy for Wetlands and Waterfowl in Finland, prepared in the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, was also described, as well as background and plans for the Finland’s National Mire and Peatland Strategy to be developed by the working group under the same ministry. Various CEPA approaches being realized in Norway were presented, as well as the National CEPA Action Plan which is currently under preparation. In presentations and discussions, possible links with the work of IUCN WCPA, Nordic Council of Ministers, and EUROPARC were touched upon, and experiences from a number of completed and ongoing wetland projects were shared, as well as plans regarding future activities in Nordic-Baltic countries.

The role that the NorBalWet initiative can play in improving implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015 in the Nordic-Baltic region was discussed at length. The list of possible focal areas included, for example promotion of cross-sectoral recognition of wetland services, involvement of the business sector in the wise use of wetlands and in management of Ramsar sites, support to improving management of Ramsar sites and enhancement of cross-border cooperation through designation and joint management of transboundary and twinned Ramsar sites and Protected Areas with important wetlands, strengthening synergies and partnerships with multilateral environmental agreements and other intergovernmental agencies as well as the International Organization Partners of the Convention, planning and implementing joint CEPA activities, in particular celebration of World Wetland Day. Continuous support for sharing experiences and best practices among wetland experts as well as strengthening cooperation between Nordic-Baltic countries remains the overarching goal.

Another approach discussed was how Nordic and Baltic countries might provide support for implementation of the Ramsar Convention beyond the boundaries of the NorBalWet region, i.e. opportunities for including/strengthening wetland issues within the development aid projects.

During the seminar two field excursions were organised to possible Ramsar sites of Mietoistenlahti Bay and Puurijärvi-Isosuo National Park, which is thus far the biggest bird wetland restoration project in Finland. The Mietoistenlahti Bay is

of national importance as a stopover and breeding site for ducks, geese and waders. After the abandonment of traditional grazing in the 1960s, the vegetation of shores and meadows changed, and that had a dramatic negative impact on the bird diversity and numbers. Starting from the early 1990s the Mietoistenlahti Bay has been managed by cutting, mowing and grazing. Nowadays the management and protection are implemented by Metsähallitus in cooperation with the Ornithological Society of Turku, Southwest Finland regional environment centre, MTT Agrifood research Finland, the Kone foundation and local landowners. The management of the site has also been supported by the EU LIFE-Nature project implemented in 1999-2004. Puurijärvi is one of the most important lakes in Finland for breeding and migrating waterbirds. It is a shallow eutrophic lake threatened by overgrowing wetland vegetation, so that little water areas are left during summer and autumn. As part of the Kokemäenjoki-LIFE project (under implementation in 2006-2011), the lake will be restored by raising the water level and excavating additional open water areas; these measures will help to double the surface of water areas (from 180 to 314 ha) in the driest seasons.

The seminar participants, representing seven countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Norway, Russian Federation, and Sweden), Wetlands International, and the Ramsar Secretariat adopted a number of conclusions and tasks for the coordination group of NorBalWet (2). Finland will chair the NorBalWet Initiative till the end of 2009 and Norway will take over this role in 2010. The tradition of joint meetings supporting cooperation and coordination among Nordic-Baltic countries will be continued in spring 2010, when Norway will host the Nordic Baltic Wetland Conference for the second time, six years after the first remarkable conference held on 4-7 May 2004 in Ørland, which gave a very successful start to the development of the NorBalWet Initiative. It was decided recently that the 2nd Nordic Baltic WetlandConference will be held on 12-16 April 2010, again in Ørland municipality.

Note 1: Topics of earlier seminars included restoration of wet forests and mires at Hindaas, Sweden; restoration of rivers, floodplains, lakes and deltas at Randsfjorden, Norway; monitoring wetlands at Lapanina, Estonia; networking with wetland managers in Nordic-Baltic countries at Kempele, Finland.

Note 2: Conclusions of the seminar as well as presentations and other materials are available at the website of Finland's Environmental Administration (<http://www.ymparisto.fi/default.asp?contentid=331801&lan=FI>)

-- Nadia Alexeeva, Ramsar



Participants discuss wetland management at the Mietoistenlahti Bay



...and enjoy its results watching waterbirds. Tiina Niikonen and Ari Rajasärkkä (Metsähallitus, Finland)



Coastal habitats of the Mietoistenlahti Bay...



...and their makers



Kai Kimmel (Estonian Environmental Board) and Vija Busa (Ministry of Environment, Latvia) share experiences on the coast of Mietoistenlahti Bay.



Puurijärvi seen from the watching tower: during the autumn very little open water areas are left on this shallow lake.



Tapio Lindholm (Finnish Environment Institute) shows the filled in ditch near the Puurijärvi: this measure will help to stop drainage and restore wetland habitats of the lake.

Source URL: <https://www.ramsar.org/news/nordic-baltic-wetland-initiative-norbalwet-meets-in-finland>