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Workshop D

**Focusing on important transboundary wetlands shared by
Lithuania-Belarus and Lithuania-Russia**

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Several wetlands meeting the criteria for the identification of sites of international importance are located on the border of Lithuania-Belarus and Lithuania-Russia (Kaliningrad). Up to now there was a lack of detailed information about most of important wetlands, shared by these countries. Certain particularly important wetlands are protected only partly, by one of the neighbouring countries and threatened by new developments and changes in land use practices.

It was necessary to urgently perform inventories of all important transboundary wetlands and to develop international cooperation activities aimed to conservation and management of these key territories. These tasks were necessary for realization of international obligations of the countries concerned, incurred at the signature of the Convention on Wetlands and other international Agreements.

The non-governmental environmental association “Migratory Birds of the Western Palearctic” (“OMPO”) took up the challenge set out by the Convention on Wetlands and initiated the programme “Important Transboundary Wetlands Shared by Lithuania-Belarus and Lithuania-Russia” in 2001. OMPO is an international NGO aiming to conservation and wise management of African-Eurasian migratory birds. In this frame, OMPO, among other activities, develops programs to conserve important habitats in Europe and Africa, particularly the Ramsar sites. The program, implemented in 2001-2004, was coordinated and funded by OMPO with additional support from the Ramsar Small Grants Fund.

The main goal was to perform inventories of important wetlands, shared by Lithuania-Russia and Lithuania-Belarus, and to develop their joint conservation and management plans. Inventories of nine important wetlands (their total area – about 170,000 ha) were performed in 2001-2002. The Ramsar methodology was used. Participants of the program were local communities, local and regional decision-makers, NGOs, research organizations, Governments of the countries concerned and international organizations.

Inventories of 9 important transboundary wetlands (existing and potential Ramsar sites) were implemented. Detailed maps of important sites were prepared. Records of rare species of flora and fauna were plotted on maps and distributed among local and regional authorities responsible for wetlands management. The key guidelines for joint management plans of shared wetlands were elaborated. Close links and collaboration between decision-makers responsible for management of important shared sites was established.

New protected territories and the first in this part of Europe cross-border Cepkeliai/Kotra Ramsar site (shared by Lithuania and Belarus) were established as result of this program. The results were compiled in the publication “Important transboundary Belarusian-Lithuanian and Lithuanian-Russian wetlands”.

This international programme would never have been implemented without joint efforts of Lithuania, Belarus and Russia. It is expected that the results of this project will stimulate further joint management and conservation programs of important transboundary wetlands, located on the new border of the European Union.