



Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process

NETWORKING EVENT REPORT

Migratory seabirds-friendly management of marine and/or coastal protected areas in the Baltic Sea Region

Hosted online by OTOP on 15th May 2023



Greater scaup (Paul Goriup, NatureBureau)



OGÓLNOPOLSKIE
TOWARZYSTWO
OCHRONY PTAKÓW



Executive summary

At least thirty-five participants from both the Baltic littoral countries and from outside of the region have attended the Networking Event “Migratory seabirds-friendly management of marine and/or coastal protected areas in the Baltic Sea Region” held online on 15th May 2023 under auspices of the EU Biogeographical Process. An overview was provided by the experts of issues affecting seabirds in the Baltic, covering a wide range of impacts, both indirect (such as disturbance and noise) to direct (especially from by-catch), with staggering numbers of birds affected. New offshore wind farms (OWF) were reported as posing a threat in future. Data availability, collection, verification, and assessment was highlighted, with new technologies demonstrated that reveal deeper insights about the population trends and situation of different species, and increasingly in real time.

A lot of existing laws and policies could help address problems identified, but conservation objectives and management measures are generally lacking. This leads to poor law enforcement and policy implementation. However, it seems particularly difficult to move from strategies and action plans to specific interventions in the marine space. Among the ideas suggested were to have more coordinated pan-Baltic surveys, to extend existing Natura 2000 sites, establish marine national parks and other types of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) including areas with other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM), implement environmentally friendly fishing practices that fully engage and compensate the fishers, and incorporate sensitivity maps regarding OWFs within maritime spatial planning.

Regarding Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Natura 2000 sites, there is a problem of the 1% population criterion when considering breeding populations, which were not particularly discussed here. It is better to focus on achieving favourable reference values (FRVs) of a breeding population.

Introduction

The populations of many seabird species that breed in Northern Europe and migrate through the East Atlantic Flyway (EAF) to spend winter in the Baltic Sea region are currently experiencing a negative trend and declining annually. As migratory seabird populations cross national and exclusive economic zone borders, their good status is an international concern. Therefore, the system of marine and coastal protected areas, including marine Natura 2000 sites, is an ideal way to implement international marine biodiversity conservation measures for species that are themselves international.

The East Atlantic Flyway Initiative (EAFI) has been established by BirdLife International with 32 participatory organisations stretching from the far North of Europe (Greenland, Iceland, Svalbard) to the far south of Africa (South Africa, Angola via the west African countries) to try and better manage the hotspots that are essential for migratory birds, seabirds included. The Flyway crosses the Baltic region and the birds that use this route rely on the Baltic Sea along the way. The Baltic Sea is also a destination as a wintering site for some species of birds. It is the largest wintering site for seabirds in Europe.

This Networking Event aimed to gather biodiversity management experts and specialists from the Baltic littoral countries and elsewhere, to review current management approaches in marine biodiversity/seabirds, identify the exact gaps and needs for migratory seabirds (in terms of ecosystem structures and functions), and elaborate management practices that can be introduced into the marine and/or coastal protected areas management. This was not exclusive to the Baltic Sea region, but applied to the entire length of the Flyway.

The event was intended to devise appropriate management practices which will supplement the existing management practices in the Baltic Sea region, aimed specifically at migratory seabird populations that use the Baltic Sea in their migration. Scientifically, it was expected to focus on the exact habitat requirements of different species of migratory seabirds and existing threats thereto (e.g., bycatch, trawling damage to seafloor and food, offshore wind farms, navigation, oil spills, watersports, hunting, and recreation disturbance).

The event elaborated on the experience of previous biogeographical seminars and events, which are as follows:

- Biogeographical Seminar for the Baltic sea area, Poland, 23-25 November 2009
- A Seminar for Marine Regions (Atlantic, Baltic, Black Sea, Macaronesian and Mediterranean), St. Malo, France 5-7 May 2015
- Networking Event: Baltic Natura 2000 Sites as Migration Hotspots, Gdańsk, 19-20 November 2020
- Networking Event: Atlantic and Continental Natura 2000 Sites as Migration Hotspots, Dublin, 7-8 October 2021
- Mediterranean and Macaronesia Natura 2000 Sites as Bird Migration Hotspots, Madrid, 10-11 October 2022

The EU Biogeographical Process, with regard to seabirds, was supposed to produce a set of management guidelines for MPAs of eight EU countries of the Baltic Sea region, for use alongside existing management practices which are targeted at conserving and maintaining habitat features essential to migratory seabirds. The elaborated management guidelines would also be applicable to

the marine and/or coastal protected areas located in the adjacent maritime non-EU countries belonging to the EAF.

This Networking Event was to establish a concise agreed framework list of management guidelines for specific species or groups of species and their habitat requirements for specific activities. The international focal point experts' network was supposed to be established to ensure proper implementation of the adopted management guidelines. The focal point experts (one in every EAF country) will be responsible for:

- Implementation of the guidelines at site and country level;
- Monitoring of the marine and/or coastal protected areas' performance as stopovers for the birds migrating along the EAF;
- Making suggestions for actualisation and improvement of the guidelines;
- International coordination of the appropriate activities alongside the EAF.

Event description and content outline

A number of professionals involved in the management of marine protected sites from eight Baltic littoral countries (i.e., Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden) took part in the Networking Event, together with experts in bird populations and migration strategies from national BirdLife International organisations. Additionally, experts from Iceland, Norway, and the United Kingdom were invited to participate in the event, to enable prospective accession of the coordinated EAFI activities, to cover the full stretch of the EAF. The networking event has been directly applicable to the marine and/or coastal protected areas in the Baltic Sea region and then extrapolated to other similar sites along the EAF in Europe – namely to Belgium, France, Ireland, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. It has also been extrapolated to some non-EU EAF maritime countries covering the marine and/or coastal protected areas along the entire EAF - namely to north Africa, west Africa and South Africa.

The Networking Event was divided into the three thematic sections, comprising the presentations as follows:

Early Morning session

- Biogeographical Process: Protected Areas and Status Improvement Target. Luna Milatović, Aleksandra Khirv, CEEweb for Biodiversity;
- EC Perspective Regarding Conservation of Migratory Seabirds. Jeremy Crespin, European Commission;
- Conservation Status of European Seabirds and Main Policies to Protect Them. Antonio Vulcano, BirdLife ECA, Marine Officer;
- Moderated discussion on seeking solutions to the 30% marine and/or coastal protected areas and the 10% strictly protected (identifying and designating areas; formulating the criteria for what is strictly protected). Moderator: Dominik Marchowski, Ornithological Station, Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Science, Gdańsk, Poland.

Late Morning session

- Key Anthropogenic Threats in the Western Baltic and North Sea. Kai Borkenhagen, Volker Dierschke, Nele Markones, (Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten e.V., Germany);
- By-catch as a Threat for Seabirds in Europe. Daniel Mitchell (BirdLife ECA, European Marine Coordinator);
- By-catch Mitigation Measures based on Experience of LT and other Baltic Countries. Julius Morkunas (Lithuanian Ornithological Society);
- Moderated Discussion on Specific Issues/Threats (e.g., gill net fisheries and bird by-catch). Moderator: Włodzimierz Meissner (University of Gdańsk).

Afternoon session

- Status and Protection of the Key Wintering Population of Migratory Seabirds in the Baltic Sea. Dominik Marchowski (Ornithological Station, Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Science, Gdańsk, Poland);
- Monitoring of Seabirds in the Polish Baltic Sea Exclusive Economic Zone Włodzimierz Meissner (University of Gdańsk);
- Moderated Discussion on Conservation and Monitoring for Specific Species (e.g., wintering sea ducks). Moderator: Jarosław Krogulec, OTOP Head of Conservation.

Results

The EU Biogeographical Process cycle of seminars and networking events amidst the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 was addressed, aimed at (1) supporting the marine pledge and review process; (2) supporting the marine Natura 2000 networking programme; (3) Providing web-based resources and communication. The six pledge seminars in the marine bioregions were announced, including the seminar for the Baltic Sea on 8-10 November 2023 in Latvia.

The EC perspective regarding the conservation of migratory seabirds was presented including the aspects arising from the Bird Directive, i.e. obligation to maintain and reestablish seabirds habitats, establishing conservation measures in the Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) and for other migratory seabirds, introducing strict protection to prohibit intentional killing and disturbance. Criteria and guidance for protected area designation under the EU Biodiversity Strategy have been developed to protect at least 30% of the EU seas (including 10% under strict protection) whereas the marine Natura 2000 network is incomplete and SPAs are still needed for seabirds. The effective management of all MPAs includes defining clear conservation objectives and measures, appropriate monitoring, and site-specific conservation objectives with quantified targets.

According to the EC assessment of measures established in SPAs and their effectiveness in FI, LV, and PL, only 15% of the PA are covered by the monitoring of efficacy of conservation measures by responsible entity, whereas 43% are not covered at all. In accordance with the EU Nature Restoration Law, by 2030, restoration measures will cover 20% of EU land and seas, whereas by 2050, measures are to be taken for all ecosystems requiring restoration. EU action plan for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries stipulates improvement of gear selectivity and addressing bycatch of sensitive species, protection of the seabed, implementation of transition and knowledge as well as governance. Infringements have been detected regarding Natura 2000 sites designation, absence of site-specific conservation measures, and bycatch. OWFs are of overriding public interest, which does not change provisions of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Birds Directive. For

occasional killing or disturbance, no derogations would be required if appropriate mitigation measures are adopted during construction and operation, proper monitoring to assess effectiveness is carried out, and further measures are taken as required.

For instance, within the German waters, ca 17 species of seabirds are regularly occurring in the Baltic Sea (ca 19 species in the North Sea) – including divers, grebes, seaducks, gulls, terns, fulmar and other taxa. The existing German seabird monitoring system includes ship-based and aerial (observer and digital) surveys. The main activities and pressures acting on seabirds in German marine waters are as follows:

Ship traffic – through visual disturbance, underwater noise, oil spills and chronic pollution. Oil spills are currently a minor problem for Germany, but they are particularly detrimental for seaducks spending most of their time in contact with water. Their dense aggregations (especially wintering flocks of several 10,000 – 100,000 individuals) are especially threatened as their spatial distribution to great extent overlaps with the Locations of confirmed oil spills 1998 - 2012 in central Baltic Sea. Visual disturbance provokes escape flights and dives, entailing increased energy consumption, reduced feeding time, and displacement from feeding sites. The most vulnerable species are common scoter, red-breasted merganser, red-throated diver, black-throated diver, velvet scoter, black guillemot, razorbill, long-tailed duck, Slavonian and great crested grebes. Suggested mitigation measures include imposing speed limits and concentrating offshore service traffic.

Fisheries – through bottom and pelagic trawling, and gillnet fishery. Bottom trawling entails physical disturbance of seafloor and long-lasting deteriorating food supply affecting mostly benthic feeders (e.g., seaducks) and sandeel specialists (e.g., kittiwake or auks). Suggested mitigation measures include ecosystem-compatible management of fisheries along the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and temporal ban of bottom-trawling, to be aligned to CFP being in force in the North Sea SPAs west of Sylt since March 2023. Pelagic trawling affects fish feeding seabirds (incl. auks, divers, gulls, gannet) via reduction of food supply, including small-sized fish. Suggested mitigation measures include ecosystem-compatible management of fisheries along CFP. Gillnet fishery entails phenomenon of bycatch, i.e. extraction of individuals of non-target species, including all diving seabirds (e.g., seaducks, divers, grebes, cormorants, auks – especially long-tailed duck, great cormorant, common scoter, red-throated diver, red-necked grebe). Suggested mitigation measures comprise ecosystem-compatible management of fisheries along CFP, temporal ban of gillnets, to be aligned to CFP being in force in North Sea SPA west of Sylt since March 2023, and development of alternative fishing methods.

OWFs are threatening seabirds through creating barrier effects, collision, visual disturbance, underwater noise (of unknown impacts on birds), and changes in ocean dynamics. Barrier effect during migration affects migratory species' and colony breeders' energy budget through modification of migration corridors and detouring while foraging. Suggested mitigation measures concentrate on maintaining corridors. Collision effects through physical extraction of individuals of great cormorant, black-headed gull, common and great black-backed gulls, and many nocturnal migrants. Suggested mitigation measures concentrate on maintaining corridors and/or possible temporal shutdown of windpower turbines. Visual disturbance affects seaducks, auks, gannet, fulmar and kittiwake through the chain of avoidance – displacement – habitat loss. Suggested mitigation measures include ensuring the connectivity of SPAs with functional areas for protected species (e.g., permeable corridors) and establishment of protected areas. OWF-induced changes in ocean dynamics and hydrological conditions might lead to reduced /altered food supply relevant for all seabird species with no particular suggested mitigation measures.

Removal of ammunition comprises input of energy/impulsive underwater noise including possible damage/destruction of the hearing, disturbance/masking of acoustic signals from prey, possible disturbance/displacement being relevant for all diving seabird species. Suggested mitigation measures for harbour porpoise comprise mitigation of hazards due to removal of ammunition (e.g. use of bubble curtains, acoustic displacement).

Both effective protection/coherent network of protected areas (i.e., all relevant sites identified, implemented as protection areas, and adequately managed) and avoidance/mitigation of impacts of threats outside protected areas are needed. Coherence of the existing protected areas should be revised at flyway scale, assessing whether all the relevant sites throughout the birds' annual lifecycle are properly identified, implemented, and managed. Season-specific bottlenecks should be identified and mitigated. Spatial planning tools should be employed to avoid the impact of major pressures, including sensitivity mapping and SEA/EIA at the flyway scale. Several initiatives are pending addressing the above issues.

Seabirds constitute one of the most threatened groups of Europe's birds, as >26% of them threatened and >30% encounter population declines. At the same time, a bycatch phenomenon, where non-targeted species are being caught in fishing gear, hooks, and nets is one of the most significant threats. At least 29 species listed in the Birds Directive Annex I are affected as bycatch, totalling over 200,000 individuals across Europe annually. EU Plans of Action to reduce bycatch of seabirds in fishing gears was adopted in 2012 aiming to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the incidental catches of seabirds by EU vessels operating in EU and non-EU waters, as well as by non-EU vessels operating in EU waters. The assessment was published in 2021, showing very little progress – only three actions of thirty have been fully implemented, whereas 19 have not been implemented at all. Breach of Member State's obligations were revealed under: the EU Common Fisheries Policy, the EU Birds Directive, the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the UN Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

In accordance with the BirdLife (2022) EU Progress Report: Bycatch of Sensitive Species, the EU Member States are failing to properly monitor and take measures to tackle bycatch. Weaknesses have been identified in the Article 11 process under the Common Fisheries Policy for establishing Joint Recommendations for fisheries measures. Despite evidence of high levels of bycatch in specific areas, Member States are not forthcoming with Joint Recommendations with appropriate and adequate measures. In many MPAs, management plans and fisheries management are totally lacking or their measures offer little, if any, benefits in terms of bycatch reduction. The EC has been slow and inefficient in reacting to Member States' lack of compliance and hasn't used its powers under the Common Fisheries Policy to establish emergency measures. Bycatch data is often of poor quality with significant gaps and is insufficient to estimate robust confidence intervals around estimates of bycatch rates. Standardised bycatch data collection and monitoring protocols are lacking. BirdLife mitigation measures' recommendations include (1) strict protection of seabirds in line with EU Birds Directive, (2) urgent spatio-temporal closures, (3) education and training for fishers to accurately identify and report seabird bycatch, (4) technologies like Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) to ensure better data collection on seabird bycatch and management of fisheries, and (5) investment in research and development of practical and effective mitigation measures.

Ramirez *et al.* (2022) have developed the first systematic review of seabird bycatch in European waters aiming to (a) review all available published and unpublished data on seabird bycatch in Europe (all gears), (b) compile country level bycatch assessments and compare these with previous estimates (when available), (c) identify blackspots of seabird bycatch in Europe, and (d) highlight data gaps and

priorities for action. The review has currently covered active fisheries located in territorial (including inland) waters and exclusive economic zones of 33 European coastal states divided into four marine regions. Available estimates were used together with extrapolates from available data in some cases in order to assess reliability of the existing scoring system. National and sea basin estimates are provided by summing bycatch estimates derived from non-overlapping studies; the data has been verified with national experts. Overall estimates total 192,000 individuals for European waters (including over 146,000 individuals for the EU waters) with the upper estimate totalling 375,000 individuals. Estimated annual bycatch death toll for Baltic marine region is ca 68,000 individuals with over 21,000 in the Polish waters, over 17,000 in Swedish, over 3,000 in the Danish waters. Set nets are responsible for 104,000 cases, whilst longlines for 77,000. The most suffering taxa are *Anatidae* (over 41,000 individuals), *Alcidae* (over 36,000), and *Procellariidae* (over 28,000). The study has revealed significant data gaps, as the estimates rarely cover a country's entire fishing area. Most estimates are based on fragmentary, non-systematic, and/or self-reporting data collection techniques; no estimates were found for 12 (36%) countries. The overall conclusion is that despite good bycatch legislation (at least in the EU), implementation is lacking.

The data that has been reported by the Lithuanian authorities to the European Commission grossly underrepresents the actual magnitude of seabird bycatch, and our data highlight the inadequacy of Lithuania's current national strategy to report bycatch. The bycatch of 1,500 to 3,000 seabirds each winter in gillnet fisheries along the relatively small coastal waters of Lithuania should be a strong signal to European institutions regarding member countries' compliance with bycatch related regulations. The Lithuanian coastal zone constitutes a small stretch of the Baltic Sea, and even though it is an important wintering area for seabirds, the number of bycaught birds might be small in comparison to the overall Baltic population. However, the same type of fishery is ubiquitous elsewhere in the Baltic and our study in Lithuanian coastal waters might be representative of bird bycatch in gillnets across the entire Baltic Sea.

The Baltic Sea is both a staging area during migration and a wintering habitat for birds nesting in the Arctic. It is globally recognised as one of the most significant wintering sites for waterbirds that breed in the Arctic and other high latitudes. The conservation efforts and ecological changes taking place in this region have a profound impact on the overall global populations and migration routes of various waterbird species.

Research shows that the Baltic Sea serves as a vital wintering ground for a diverse range of waterbirds, with seaducks comprising the largest proportion, accounting for 67% of the total population. Among the various threats faced by these waterbirds, the most significant pressure arises from fisheries. Specifically, the incidental capture of seaducks in gillnet fisheries stands out as the primary anthropogenic factor contributing to their mortality.

Several species belonging to the Passeriformes order migrate through the Baltic Sea. While studying seabirds on research vessels, particularly during the peak migration periods in March or October, one can frequently observe large-scale migrations of species like finches, goldcrests, thrushes, and numerous others. Additionally, waders also utilize the Baltic Sea as a stopover site. During their extensive migrations, which often span the entire length of the EAF, they congregate at specific locations such as the mouth of the Vistula River or the Szczecin Lagoon, to rest and refuel before continuing their journey.

However, the Baltic Sea is particularly renowned for its abundant waterbird populations, particularly diving birds, which can generally be categorised into two groups based on their preferred habitats. The first group includes species that concentrate in the coastal zone, lagoons, and shallow bays. These species include the Goosander, Smew, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Pochard, and Coot. The second group comprises birds that can also be observed in the coastal zone but prefer offshore waters, far from the shore. These species include the Long-tailed Duck, Velvet Scoter, Common Scoter, Eider, Black-throated Diver, Red-throated Diver, and Slavonian Grebe.

Research on seabirds, particularly those found in offshore areas, requires substantial financial resources and coordinated efforts. As a result, such studies are not conducted every year. The first coordinated survey took place during 1992-1993, revealing a wintering population of 9,000,000 waterbirds in the Baltic Sea. Another coordinated survey occurred between 2007 and 2009, indicating a population of 4.5,000,000 birds. This survey highlighted a significant decline in certain species, notably the Long-tailed Duck and Velvet Scoter. Subsequent coordinated studies were conducted in 2016 and 2020-2021, and the analysis of the data from these surveys is still ongoing.

To ensure the proper allocation of conservation efforts within ecosystems, it is crucial to prioritise endangered species and those with a significant proportion of their population located in a specific area. To aid in this process, a straightforward method called the Value Factor (VF) was introduced, which provides a numerical indication of the importance of a given area for a particular species. The VF is calculated by multiplying the percentage of a species' population by its endangered status, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

According to this methodology, the highest VF is obtained by a species with 100% of its global population confined to a specific area and classified as critically endangered (CE), resulting in a VF of 500. In the case of the entire Baltic Sea, the Long-tailed Duck achieved the highest VF, surpassing 200. Additionally, noteworthy VF values were calculated for the Velvet Scoter (VF=153) and Greater Scaup (VF=89). In the Polish zone of the Baltic Sea, the Velvet Scoter attained the highest VF score of 113, while the Long-tailed Duck also exhibited a substantial VF index of 49.

The author's presentation included a comparison between the network of valuable areas designated by BirdLife International as Important Birds and Biodiversity Areas in the Baltic Sea and the Natura 2000 network. The presentation highlighted the relatively well-planned boundaries of Natura 2000 protected areas in Poland, particularly concerning areas dedicated to the protection of water birds in the Baltic Sea. The management of these protected areas is governed by a legal document called the Management Plan (MP), which outlines the guidelines for their protection.

It was found that the establishment of such plans varies among countries. For instance, Sweden and Denmark have 100% coverage, meaning all Natura areas have an MP. In Finland, the coverage is 83%, while in Estonia it is 78%. Germany has a coverage of 75%, Latvia 40%, and Lithuania 17%. However, no MP has been designated in Poland. This lack of an MP leads to inadequate protection since stakeholders utilising these protected areas do not have detailed guidelines to follow.

Poland plays a crucial role as a significant concentration area for species such as the Long-tailed Duck and Velvet Scoter. In the case of the Velvet Scoter, Polish waters may host even more than 50% of the global population in certain years. However, this region also faces a pressing issue of bycatch in fishing nets. In the 1970s, as many as 47,000 seabirds were accidentally caught annually in the Polish part of the Baltic Sea. While the scale has decreased in recent years, the numbers still remain high, with

approximately 20,000 birds falling victim to bycatch each year. This ongoing problem has contributed to a decline in the population of waterbirds.

Lastly, the author presented a method of protection against bycatch, using the example of the Greater Scaup, a species particularly susceptible to bycatch in the Szczecin Lagoon. This lagoon is home to one of the largest concentrations of Greater Scaup in Europe, while simultaneously experiencing intensive fishing activities. To address this issue, the author demonstrated the use of a spatial modeling tool to visually depict the cumulative spatial distributions and densities of waterbirds in the lagoon. This approach allows for the precise identification of key areas for birds, without necessarily imposing a complete fishing ban. In this way, a targeted conservation strategy can be implemented to protect the most critical habitats for waterbirds, while still allowing fishermen to continue their activities. The spatial modeling tool serves as a valuable tool in achieving a balance between conservation efforts and sustainable fishing practices.

Wintering Sea Bird Surveys in the Polish Baltic Sea Exclusive Economic Zone have been conducted since 2011, being commissioned by the Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection as a component of the State Environmental Monitoring and organised by The Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP). Methodology employs a mid-winter ship survey using the standard ship transect method (the transect layout is the same as in winter 2004/2005). Today the database contains complete data from 13 seasons. Data collected for OWFs will be available in a few years' time. The overall trends for the observation period differ for particular species – from a strong increase for Common Scoter and Red-throated Diver – via stability for Velvet Scoter and Razorbill – to a slight decrease for Long-tailed Duck. Wintering Sea Bird Surveys provide good quality data on the distribution and changes in numbers of seabirds on the most important wintering grounds in the Polish Baltic zone. The knowledge of seabirds in the Polish Baltic zone has been growing rapidly since the introduction of the (currently active) systematic monitoring scheme, enabling to track changes in the number and distribution of different species, providing arguments towards better protection of seabirds.

Conclusions and recommendations

The networking event's results align with the aims of the EU Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process:

- Up-to-date data and information must be presented on threats and conservation needs for species and habitats.
- Input by the participants in respect to characteristics of the marine and/or coastal protected areas important for the EAFI migratory species should be accounted for in the decision-making process.
- Common objectives, priorities and management actions leading towards the network of marine and/or coastal protected areas in the Baltic Sea region optimal to support migration along the EAF must be identified.

In the 17 years since Natura 2000 areas were established, not a single MP has been implemented in the Polish EEZ. This lack of MPs leads to inadequate protection since stakeholders utilising these protected areas do not have detailed guidelines to follow. It is crucial to implement MPs on all the sites being established.

Offshore Wind Farms threaten seabirds through creating barrier effects, collision, visual disturbance, underwater noise (of unknown impacts on birds), and changes in ocean dynamics.

Spatial planning tools should be employed to avoid the impact of major pressures, including sensitivity mapping and SEA/EIA at the flyway scale.

Approximately 20,000 birds fall victim to bycatch on Baltic each year. This ongoing problem has contributed to a decline in the population of waterbirds. A targeted conservation strategy should be implemented to protect the most critical habitats for waterbirds, while still allowing fishermen to continue their activities. The spatial modeling tool serves as a valuable tool in achieving a balance between conservation efforts and sustainable fishing practices.

New management insights, cross-border stakeholders' cooperation frameworks and networks of specialists and site managers must be promoted across the Baltic Sea region. This should include the non-EU countries which support their Emerald Networks and national spatial protection forms.

Promoting seabirds' migration-friendly management of the stopover sites for the EAF migratory species must be carried out, integrating socio-economic objectives including in agriculture, forestry, water management and hunting.

By the end of 2023, threshold values should be developed for the maximum allowable mortality rate from incidental catches of the species selected by Member States (birds, mammals, reptiles and non-commercially-exploited species of fish and cephalopods) which are at risk from incidental bycatch according to Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848, Annex, Part II, Criteria and methodological standards, specifications and standardised methods for monitoring and assessment of essential features and characteristics and current environmental status of marine waters as part of the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

The networking event's findings and recommendations should be presented at the national pledge meetings and reflected in the final report for the EC.

Annex 1. Networking Event's Agenda



OGÓLNOPOLSKIE
TOWARZYSTWO
OCHRONY PTAKÓW



ul. Odrowąża 24, 05-270 Marki k. Warszawy, tel.: +48 22 761 82 05, e-mail: biuro@otop.org.pl, www.otop.org.pl

EU Biogeographical Process Networking Event: Migratory seabirds-friendly management of marine and/or coastal protected areas in the Baltic Sea Region

Held online on Monday 15th May 2023
(CEST time, please mind your time zone)

09:30	Welcome Speech	Jarosław Krogulec, OTOP – BirdLife Poland, Head of Conservation
09:40	Biogeographical process: Protected Areas and status improvement target	Luna Milatović, Aleksandra Khirv, CEEweb for Biodiversity
10:00	EC perspective regarding conservation of migratory seabirds.	Jeremy Crispin, European Commission
10:20	Conservation status of European Seabirds and main policies to protect them	Antonio Vulcano, BirdLife ECA, Marine Officer
10:40	Moderated discussion on seeking solutions to the 30% marine and/or coastal protected areas and the 10% strictly protected (identifying and designating areas; formulating the criteria for what is strictly protected)	Moderator: Dominik Marchowski, Ornithological Station, Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Science, Gdańsk, Poland
11:10	Coffee break	
11:30	Key anthropogenic threats in the Western Baltic and North Sea	Kai Borkenhagen, Volker Dierschke, Nele Markones, (Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten e.V., Germany)
12:00	By-catch as a threat for seabirds in Europe	Daniel Mitchell (BirdLife ECA, European Marine Coordinator)
12:30	By-catch mitigation measures based on experience of LT and other Baltic countries	(Lithuanian Ornithological Society)
13:00	Moderated discussion on specific issues/threats (e.g., gill net fisheries and bird by-catch)	Moderator: Włodzimierz Meissner (University of Gdańsk)
13:30	Lunch break	
14:30	Status and protection of the key wintering population of migratory seabirds in the Baltic Sea	Dominik Marchowski (Ornithological Station, Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Science, Gdańsk, Poland)
15:00	Monitoring of seabirds in the Polish Baltic Sea Exclusive Economic Zone	Włodzimierz Meissner (University of Gdańsk)
15:30	Moderated discussion on conservation and monitoring for specific species (e.g., wintering sea ducks).	Moderator: Jarosław Krogulec, OTOP Head of Conservation
16:00	Summary of the Event	Paul Goriup, NatureBureau Ltd., UK

Minor changes in the agenda are still possible.