



LIFE Nature project “Marine Protected Areas in the Eastern Baltic Sea”,
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Report on “ Russian partner capacity building”

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Preface

Russian Nature Conservation legislation suggests that only terrestrial and coastal PA could be designated and organized on a regional level (level of the subject of Russian Federation, such as Leningrad region). All marine waters, and purely marine PAs could only be organized on a federal level, as all marine waters are the federal property. Such situation creates problems for regional authorities in use and management of waters of the Gulf of Finland.

Lessons learned:

A1, Training activities.

Alexander Kondratyev and Maria Gavrilov participated in the Training courses for ship-based bird surveys, held in Riga, Latvia in November 21-25 2005. Both methodological meeting and practical training on the ship were extremely useful and let all participants to get acquainted with principles of transect ship-based counts. The most important practical issues were the possibility of get trained in distance measure, practice in bird counts and get trained in doing a team work. The methods of ship-based bird surveys in transects were slightly modified in compare to what was previously used in Russia, so it was important to get practical experience in doing counts in 3 different corridors and also use water counts and aerial snapshots on different time intervals.

The methods we trained were then several times used in Russian waters during ship-based bird counts in the Gulf of Finland.

Valery Buzun and Maria Gavrilov participated in the training course for aerial bird surveys, held in Parnu, Estonia in May 3-5 2006. These training courses also consisted from the methodological discussion, devoted to transect design, and practical training for bird identification from airplane Cessna within the limited width transect. These methods were also not new for Russian participants, though bird identification practice and team work labour division is never enough on the way to achieve better results.

Study visit to Russia was organized and conducted by BFN (Roustam Sagitov, Alexander Kondratyev, Vera Ovcharenko, Valery Buzun, Nikolai Kovalchouk, Sergei Titov, Mikhail Verevkin, Elena Glazkova) on Beryozovye islands (Gulf of Finland) and Nizhnesvirsky State Nature Reserve (Lake Ladoga) for 9 participants from Baltic countries from 20 to 24 May 2008. Natural values of Russian marine protected areas were discussed.

A4 – Bird surveys

Detailed acquaintance with bird survey methods was implemented during study tours of Valery Buzun to Estonia and Lithuania in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Summer breeding bird counts on Estonian marine islands were fulfilled in June 2006 (11-17.06) using the methods of complete nest search, which is also very common for the works in Russian waters. Specific methods only appear when dense bird aggregations are met, so acquaintance with these methods was extremely useful, as it might be also applied during future surveys in Russian waters. Allover, the general survey methodology was very much comparable with what was generally used by Russian partner, and the important practical outcome was mainly connected with method adjustment in some specific conditions bring some challenges (too dense vegetation, too high breeding density etc.).

Autumn sea and coastal bird counts and organizing of public events for amateur birdwatching was the principal idea of training in Lithuania (held 19-21.10.2007). The lessons learned from that training was mainly in the ideas of popularization of bird counts among local school teachers and other volunteers.

Sector-based complete coastal winter counts was the method used by Estonian colleagues , where Valery Buzun participated 15-17.01.2008. This was somewhat new and therefore very useful for the Russian partner, especially in organizational aspects of these researches with many participants. Implementation of these research in Russian waters meets some challenges, connected with transport and coast-access problems in Russian coasts, but principally could be organized and fulfilled, and will bring new set of data, previously lacking for Russian waters. So, the learned lesson from the project was that Russian partner's methods of bird surveys are quite comparable with what was used by our Baltic partners. 10-16.06.2009 Alexander Kondratyev and Valery Buzun participated in coastal bird counts in the Curonian Lagoon and Curonian Spit.

A2. Habitat surveys

Nickolai Kovalchuk participated in 2 seminar of the project habitat group (9-16.11.2006 and 13-16.05.2007) held in Klaipeda, Lithuania. These seminar were devoted inter calibration of underwater habitat sampling and habitat description methodology. Therefore they were extremely useful for Russian partners, because there are very many different methods (that also depend much on the equipment used by the scientists). The set of necessary equipment was also discussed and generalized.

Russian partner also participated in underwater habitat sampling in Estonian marine waters, conducted on Saaremaa in August of 2006-2009 (9-13.08.2006, 2-9.08.2007, 5 – 24.06.2009). The learned methods was not much new for the Russian partner in principle, but some specific detailed of their application in the field were new and very much interesting to know and learn.

All practical experience, received during these travels, were extremely helpful and then they were all implemented in Russian waters of the Gulf of Finland during complementary studies in Russian MPAs.

A3. Seal surveys

Mikhail Verevkin actively participated in all major work on seal studies conducted in Estonian waters. He visited Grey Seal methodological seminar, held in Tallinn 29-30.01.2007. Also he participated in field work for Grey seal catching and marking in summer 2007 and 2008 (16-16.07.2007, 23.07 – 4.08.2008). Mainly these studies were connected the seals catching and marking by satellite transmitters. All important methodological approaches (weight taking, blood and fat samples, necessary medicine injection, tooth extraction for age identification and satellite transmitter implementation) were practically trained in more than 50 animals. So, Russian partners received all necessary practical experience in doing these kind of research,

which, however, nowadays is far from even being planned in Russian waters because of lack of funding (high price of methods of satellite telemetry). But received experience would let Russian partner participate in any kind of seal research in any place, where these kind of work is planned.

A5. Fish surveys

Sergei Titov, Sergei Mikhalsen and Dmitri Sendek participated in two Coastal Fish Monitoring Training Workshops in Saaremaa, Estonia (24-25.10.2005, 26-29.10.2006, 24 – 30.06.2009). These Workshops and shared field researches were mainly devoted to agreement on main sampling methods to be used in the fish fauna inventory studies in the Baltic region. Three important techniques of fishery (gill net, fykenet and hand seine) were practically trained in different locations of island seashore. The set of necessary equipment with standard for Baltic states mesh sizes, material, length and height was discussed and defined. The practical experiences, which were received during these Workshops, are quite important in nowadays work of Russian partners in Gulf of Finland and some of the fishing gears (namely, hand seine) are a methodology that was exported directly from our Estonian colleagues.

C1. Seal by-catch study

Russian partners Mikhail Verevkin and Irina Trukhanova in 2008 (20-25.03) visited Estonian Marine Institute, where the regular research of seal by catch are organized and fulfilled. The success of this part of the project in a great extent lies within the organizational aspects of commercial fisheries. This makes possible to monitor the statistics of seal by-catch in respect to areas, fishing gear, season etc. Therefore, it made possible to elaborate new seal-proof fishing gear and start practical campaign to advertize and distribute this new seal-resistance fishing gear among fisherman and also to modify those fishing equipment which might be damaging for the seals. In Russian waters this kind of experience is nowadays still far from implementation due to major differences in the organizational part of commercial fisheries. Especially it is connected with lack of statistic of by catch and little documentary of fisherman-seal interactions. Nevertheless the latter study was just started by the Russian partner in the Gulf of Finland. We also hope that in future better organizational practice in commercial fishery will make possible also to implement the received practical and theoretical experience to study, monitor and prevent seal by catch and fishing gear damage by seals in Russian waters.

Overall project coordinating, web-page monitoring, Book and Film preparation.

Russian partners also participated in some extent in all these activities, and their major role for the Russian partner was to show steps how to combine related data from different activities for use them in a comprehensive ecosystem approach, and also how to make steps in management plan creation for MPAs.

E8 – Bird conference

Participation of Alexander Kondratyev in Bird conference “Bird conservation in the marine environment: Identification, designation and protection of marine protected areas for birds in the Baltic Sea and beyond” (4-5 October, 2007, Jūrkalne, Latvia) during the project was extremely useful to exchange knowledge, methodology and conservation approach on a broader European scale, and should be very much appreciated.

Application of learned approaches to MPA delineation and management plans development. Within the results and approaches, received and learned by the Russian partner, there were done several application to finish organization of Ingermanlandsky State Nature Reserve, that will include all major islands and archipelagos of the Eastern part of the Gulf of Finland.

Process of compiling necessary documentation for legal establishment of the reserve now at a final stage and will be finished within year 2009. In order to harmonize system of PAs in the Gulf of Finland Baltic Fund for Nature has recently started a project "Development of the "Ingermanlandsky" Net of Protected Areas". The project got joint financing from Ministry for Natural Resources and Environment of Russia and Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. In addition gained knowledge and experiences make it possible to include Ingermanlandsky as a pilot area for GEF

project "Strengthening the Marine and Coastal Protected Areas of Russia".

Indirect but strong influence project had on development and acceptance in Russia the ideology of European Green Belt. Now Russian-Finnish-Norwegian memorandum on Green Belt is under preparation and to be signed early next year. Marine and coastal areas of the Gulf of Finland – candidates to the areas for Green Belt.

Experiences gained within the project had been used for development of main point for Russian national Baltic Sea Action Plan under HELCOM.

Nevertheless, all the knowledge received by the Russian partner let possible to find a new way to combine existing set of regional and Federal protected areas on the coastline into united network of MPAs.