

## Site 04: Bågø

### 4.1 Change of the site by project activities:

Bågø is an island in Lillebælt with several coastal lagoons along the south, west and north coasts surrounded by Atlantic salt meadow and with grey dunes bordering some of the lagoons. During the last decades, large parts of the meadows were being overgrown due to cessation of grazing and haymaking. Three large coastal lagoons (EU priority habitat 1150) are found in the project site covering approximately 4-6 ha in total. The salt meadows, grasslands and the coastal lagoons are all depending on grazing and sometimes additional mowing in order to keep a favourable conservation condition.

On Bågø dwells one of the biggest natterjack island populations present in Funen. Therefore the island has a great potential to support a viable natterjack population. Since 2004 no successful breeding of the natterjack toad has been recorded on Bågø.

The breeding conditions for *Bufo calamita* and *Bufo viridis* were very poor. The ponds were overgrown with tall vegetation, drained, too salty and/or polluted. The natural depressions were drained and partly filled, which limits the breeding of *Bufo calamita* and feeding of redshank *Tringa totanus* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. At the beginning of the project, grazing had been abandoned on the whole southern and on parts of the western area. Therefore these locations were included in the project by an additional clause. Further visible threats was a total lack of grazed upper coastal meadows and shallow water-bodies with freshwater (the still existing lagoons and natural wet depressions had a too high salinity). Other water-bodies were ploughed or not grazed.

Because of that, one of the first actions was to convince the local stakeholders that freshwater-bodies were needed both for amphibians and for chicks of wader birds. In a second step a total of 6 natural depressions (from 2005-2010) were restored by blocking ditches and carefully deepening the natural depressions situated on the upper coastal meadow zone.

The northern and western areas (which have been added by the additional clause) were fenced soon after the start of the project and a grazing scheme was implemented. This action focused upper coastal meadows as well as natural, but overgrown depressions.

A first positive effect on wader birds was observed in 2009, when both redshanks and lapwings bred at the location with several pairs. Ole Thorup is convinced that the site is now also a potential nesting site for dunlin.

*Bufo calamita* was able to re-colonize and successfully breed in 2 freshwater depressions (formerly overgrown with *Scirpus maritimus*), thus halting the negative trend for the species during the previous years.

On the south-western site - where grazing was going on before the project - the grazing scheme could be improved. A further 3 natural depressions were restored.

In 2009 the southern area was fenced and a mixed grazing with horses, cattle and sheep was initialized in 2010. The positive effects are already visible in 2011 (shorter vegetation). 1 natural depression was restored.

In 2010 and 2011 more natural depression were restored and in 2012 it could be counted a big raise in the *Bufo calamita* populations. More than 1000 individuals were counted on the island and with many of them in the restored natural depressions. Avocets were breeding on the project site in 2012.

#### **4.2 Remaining challenges and actions:**

Further natural depressions are to be restored. For this, negotiations with the new landowners are currently ongoing.

Robust cattle or horses are needed for grazing the southern area. For this, negotiations with the landowners of the relevant sites are going on. We hope to reach a breakthrough in 2012.

#### **4.3 Public perception:**

When the project was signed, local landowners were open towards implementation of grazing activities in their area but they did not support the idea of actions aiming on the improvement of the habitat for *Bufo calamita*. Concerning the restoration of the natural depressions, the necessity for doing actions to help the natterjack at all was questioned. Because of this situation, only grazing actions were started on a larger scale; the restoration of the natural depressions was only realized where the landowners were – for one reason or the other – open towards that idea.

Nevertheless, many coffee table meetings with the land-owners as well as joint field visits were carried out during the project in order to still convince the remaining stakeholders to agree on the restoration of their natural depressions.

The situation did not change before the first natural depressions had been restored. Then the still hesitant landowners could see for themselves that birds – wader birds, ducks, geese and gulls - from the whole surrounding started to use the spots as resting and drinking place. It was then that they became aware that by draining the fields intensively they had also destroyed all freshwater ponds; the only remaining water-bodies were too salty to be used by birds and amphibians.

Being hunters and closely following the development of the restored sites, they saw the benefit of the actions. Even depressions with only 30-40cm of water, holding it no longer than July but being filled now and then by heavy summer rains, were suddenly considered to be a real asset for the island's ecology.

Our impression is that people on the island are now open and willing towards extensive restoration of natural depressions, also outside the LIFE-areas, as the benefit for wildlife in general could be proven by the project's actions. It is now generally accepted that the

measures carried out in 2004 and 2005 for saving the natterjack were realized just in time.