

Site 12: Saltholm

12.1 Change of the site by project activities:

Saltholm is the largest continuous area of salt meadows in the Eastern part of Denmark and has international importance as breeding site for waders. Compared to all other islands in Denmark of the same size, Saltholm represents extraordinary unspoiled nature.

The project has combined a whole year robust grazing regime with mowing of selected plots of the salt meadows. At the beginning of the project it was clear that grazing would not be sufficient to keep the core breeding area of *Calidris alpina* properly short grazed. Presence of high perennial vegetation around the fresh-brackish ponds and pools in the centre of the northern half of the island restricts the usable area for *Philomachus pugnax* for nest placement and chick rearing. At the same time it offers good nesting habitat for herring gull – a potentially important *Philomachus pugnax* egg and chick predator.

To counter act overgrowth of breeding sites individual plots of salt meadow have been selected for mowing within the core management area. The underlying presumption is that after mowing the cattle will graze with a higher pressure on neighbouring areas and at the same time the fresh up growth of grass on the mown areas will become more attractive for the cattle, as well as for the many geese.

The model for the management is the long year experience of combined grazing and mowing on Tipperne at the west coast of Jutland. The plots to be mown are selected yearly by an ornithologist with many years of experience from Tipperne of a management of combined mowing and grazing for breeding meadow birds. The mowing is carried out by the tenant in difficult terrain with stones scattered over the salt meadows.



Mown and un mown plots of salt meadow.

At visits during summer 2009 and 2010 it was concluded that the mowing has had the desired effect and that large parts of the core management area have an open and well grazed structure. The vegetation at the edge of pools and gullies was grazed short and most of the

areas that were mown within the last few years were appearing open and attractive to breeding meadow birds. The overall conclusion is that it is vital that mowing is incorporated as a supplementary management tool in to a future strategy for meadow birds on Saltholm.

In July 2011 it concluded that the habitat within the core management area had developed so well through out the whole area that mowing was not needed.



Salt meadow with natural depression with a very large shallow zone for foraging wader birds.

To facilitate grazing infrastructure as shelter, watering pumps and round ups have been installed. Two long and cold winters has recently underlined the importance of the shelter for storing hay for winter food and for giving the cattle good conditions during long periods with frost and strong wind.

In autumn 2011 the vegetation on the island had become so low that the tenant decided to move the cattle away from the island during winter. It is no longer possible to produce significant amounts of hay on Saltholm and importing of hay by ship is very costly.



Shelter with solar cells for watering facility at Eastern part of the island. Summer grazers in round up on harbour.

The population of *Bufo viridis* has got improved breeding habitats by restoring of watering ponds. Also resting sites and hibernation sites for the toads have been improved and created by restoring old stone fences and building frost free cavities filled with stones in connection to the stone fences and under the floor of the new shelter. Saltholm is a very flat island with the highest parts about 2 m above normal sea level. Very few natural hibernation sites are available for the toads and therefore man made constructions become very important as winter shelter. *Bufo viridis* is generally known to hide and forage around buildings stone piles etc.

12.2 Remaining challenges and actions:

A few extra watering ponds might be restored. The mowing of selected plots in the core management area for waders will continue yearly if necessary.

12.3 Public perception:

Saltholm is visited yearly by about 3.000 tourists. The tenant of the major part of the island has informed many of the visitors about the island including the EU- LIFE project. Media as radio and news papers have been very interested in telling stories about the work on Saltholm, especially the “toad hotels” (hibernation sites) under the new shelter have gathered much attention.