

## Site 13: Ulvshale

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

The two most important breeding sites for the threatened species of wading birds in eastern Denmark are the two islands Saltholm and Nyord. Nyord is not included in the Baltcoast project, but the western tip of the nearby peninsula Ulvshale is included. The threatened species of wading birds have for many years been absent from Ulvshale, partially because the coastal meadows there were growing in with reeds, and partially because the meadows are situated close to summer cottage areas with many foxes and crows.

At the basis of the Ulvshale peninsula, there used to be a large shallow lagoon lake, called Vedelen. This was a fine breeding locality for wading birds and ducks like *Anas acuta*. However, it was reclaimed and dried out in the 1970s, and a part of the low-lying land was used for summer cottages. In an attempt to compensate for this loss, the county created a new lake of about 1.1 ha called Gåsesøen. This was made nearer the tip of the peninsula and dug out about 1993. This lake had no shallow banks, however, and was of no use for wading birds.

The overall strategy for the Baltcoast site Ulvshale is to improve parts of the peninsula in such a way that wading birds may extend their populations from Nyord and settle on Ulvshale. This is done by improving the south western part of the Peninsula, called Horsnæs, and the area around Gåsesøen. The distance from Nyord to the west tip of Horsnæs is about 400 m, and from the easternmost grazed part of Horsnæs to Gåsesøen about 600 m. If this works, then the population size of wading birds in the combined area Nyord-Horsnæs-Gåsesøen will increase, which will hopefully stabilise the situation for the birds. Unfortunately, the wading bird populations on Nyord are already declining, and there may be a lack of offspring that can colonize neighbouring areas.

In 2008, a digging project was made at the lake Gåsesøen to produce gently sloping sides which extend to the west of the lake and gradually merge into shallow temporary water. Also, there arose a low island surrounded by shallow water, which has turned out to be very attractive to the birds. Most trees within 100 m distance from the lake have been removed. There are now breeding pairs of *Tringa totanus* and *Vanellus vanellus*, and probably several pairs of *Anas querquedula*.

At Horsnæs, the grazing pressure and the area grazed has gradually increased during the project period. In the most important areas, all trees and bushes have been cut in order to reduce predation from crows that perch in the tree tops. The cattle fence has been placed as close as possible to the shore, but only in very few places is it possible to extend the grazing right to the seashore. In 2009, two major changes were made: 1) many water bodies – small and somewhat larger – were excavated to create more permanent water bodies. 2) The whole area was surrounded by a 'fox fence' in the hope to keep out foxes.

Most water bodies are placed on coarse sandy bottom, and they are filled with salty ground water. Only one water body could be made with clay bottom, and the water here is slightly more fresh (c. 6 per mille).



*The only water body with clay bottom. Photo Kåre Fog*

In 2011, the fox fence was improved in various ways. Gates for pedestrians were made higher so that foxes cannot jump over them. At the north and south end of the fence, the part extending into the sea was replaced by the same system of tall sloping metal fence that has been set up at Hyllekrog (project site no. 14).

A special purpose has been to re-establish breeding possibilities for brackish water pike, which used to have large populations in the seas around Ulvshale. At one place at the coast, a connection from a shallow water body to the sea has been dug; the connection has been given such a shape that accumulating seaweeds will probably not clog the entrance.

The vegetation at Horsnæs has changed so that the grass is now shorter, with a rather varied flora, and considerable areas of reeds have been transformed into grassland. The results of this, of the excavated water bodies, and of the fox fence, have been positive so far. In the spring of 2011, more birds have rested there than previously, especially more geese. There are relatively many pairs of *Vanellus vanellus* and *Tringa totanus*; *Recurvirostra avosetta* and *Anas querquedula* may be breeding there now. Rare visitors like *Egretta alba* have been seen foraging.



*The fox fence. Photo Kåre Fog*

### **13.2 Remaining challenges and actions:**

The fox fence still needs to be improved in certain small details.

### **13.3 Public perception:**

Cooperation with the main cattle holder at Horsnæs has been very positive, but apart from that, the contact to local people has been quite cumbersome. Those who rent the hunting rights at Horsnæs want that hunting of roe deer should not be stopped by the fox fence keeping the deer out. Therefore, the fence had to be made lower (1.15 m) than what is optimal. And even so, it seems that roe deer do keep away from the meadows, which at the same time have got shorter grass and less cover. There are roe deer in those parts of the fenced area that are ungrazed reed beds, so the missing deer on the meadows are probably due to the grazing rather than the fence.

The owners of all summer cottages that border on the Horsnæs area have been against the fox fence, and there has been no basis for agreements with them.

Negotiations with one landowner to include his lot in the grazing pen in order to obtain an optimal placement of the fox fence have been extremely difficult, but in the end the negotiations were successful.

The project at Gåsesøen was described in a fine local newspaper article. But attempts to have a journalist describe the project at Horsnæs failed, and local ornithologists were not aware of the project. An ornithologist who saw the digging work wrote on the internet that the area was being vandalized. This got much attention from many naturalists, and some of these refused to believe that this was done to improve the bird life, and remained outraged at what was done there. The attitude may be changing now when ornithologists observe that the bird life on Horsnæs has become richer than before, and when the exposed bare sand from the digging has rapidly grown over with grass.