



Birds, Flowers and Farmers

Changing floodplain meadows

Blooming floodplain meadows are a true feast for our eyes, but also an important habitat for various endangered species. These particularly diverse meadows only develop in large river floodplains where they are maintained by mowing and grazing.

Where meadows are only mown or grazed from late summer onwards, or not at all, grasses and sedges will soon grow much taller and denser. Eventually, they will overgrow most less competitive flowering plants, and birds such as Aquatic Warbler and Corncrake will abandon these sites.

Prior to the introduction of modern machinery only a limited proportion of the meadows could be mown early in summer. The resulting mosaic of early, late and unmown sites changed annually and offered habitat for various species. Today we need to prescribe suitable mowing dates and protected areas for nests and threatened plant species, with the help of modern technology such as GPS and payments from agri-environmental schemes.

Top: Mouse Garlic
Floodplain meadows need mowing



A Testing and

Development Project

Habitat Conservation and Restoration for the Globally Threatened Aquatic Warbler using Novel Approaches in Wet Grassland Management in the Lower Oder Valley National Park

Project management: NABU Brandenburg
Partners: Lower Oder Valley National Park, Naturwacht Brandenburg, Wasser- und Bodenverband „Welse“
Research and monitoring: Greifswald University, Institute of Botany and Landscape Ecology

Supported by
Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) with funds of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Foundation NaturSchutzFonds Brandenburg, Land Brandenburg



Stiftung
NaturSchutzFonds
Brandenburg

Nationalpark
Unteres Odertal

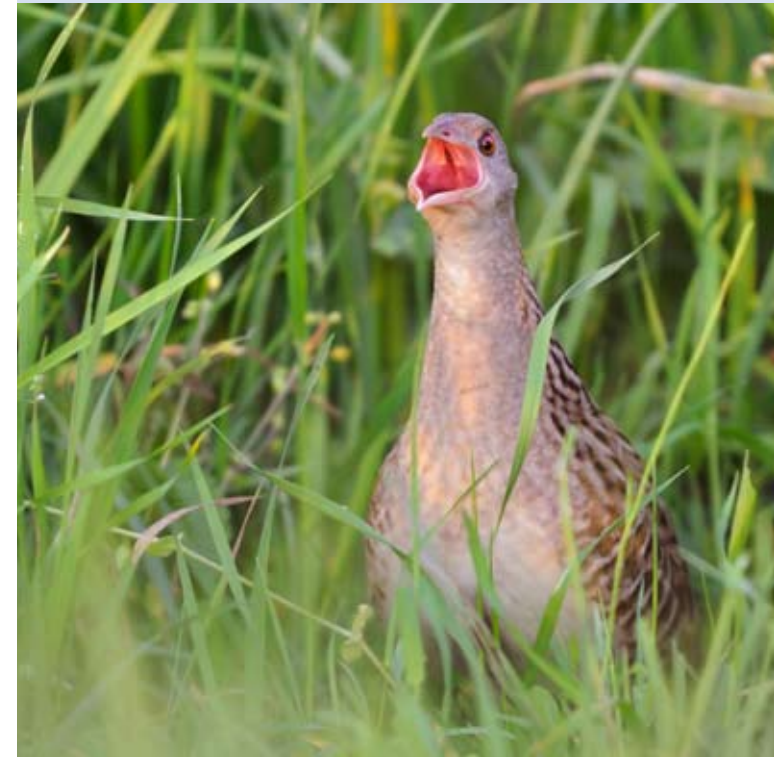
Top: British Yellowhead

Contact
NABU Brandenburg
c/o Internationalpark gGmbH
Park 3
D - 16303 Schwedt/Oder OT Criewen
bellebaum@nabu-brandenburg.de
www.nabu-brandenburg.de/projekte/auenwiesen

Text:
J. Bellebaum

Pictures:
J. Bellebaum, G. Dobler,
S. Sczepanski, WBV „Welse“

Conserving Species and Habitats on Floodplain Meadows





Aquatic Warbler

The Aquatic Warbler inhabits sedge-dominated wet meadows. It is a cryptic bird but its song flights before sunset are conspicuous. They arrive usually in May, coming from their African wintering areas. Because of the late breeding season their nests and chicks need protection from early mowing or grazing.

The Lower Oder Valley National Park is the last German breeding sites of the species. From 2012 onwards we create at least 200 ha of new habitat in the park's largest fen peatland near Gartz. Newly developed sluices allow to retain water where the birds actually need it during the breeding season. After the breeding season, the water tables can be lowered for mowing, but they will always be kept as high as possible to protect the peat against drying out. The new habitat is situated close to another breeding site in Poland, east of the Oder/Odra river.



New sluice under construction



Alluvial meadows

of the *Cnidium dubium*

A variety of flowering plants are characteristic for alluvial meadows. Many of them, such as *Cnidium dubium* (the flower these meadows are named after), the British Yellowhead *Inula britannica*, the Mouse Garlic *Allium angulosum*, *Pseudolysimachion longifolium*, and *Achillea salicifolia*, are so-called river corridor plants. They grow mainly or exclusively in the valleys of rivers like Elbe and Oder. These meadows are threatened by physical destruction of their habitat and increased farming intensity.

In order to conserve them we need adjusted farming techniques, especially mowing dates allowing the plants to grow and to flower. We help to develop financing instruments to cover the costs of a long-term management.



Flowers of *Cnidium dubium*



Corncrake

Water retreats late in spring from the floodplain meadows, and many animals do not settle there before May. Then the Corncrake returns from Africa, too. The birds usually hide in the tall grass and we only hear their fascinating loud calls at night. Even from big mowing machines they try to hide on the ground instead of flying away. This is why mowing is such a threat for the birds and their broods.

We help and encourage farmers to take care of breeding Corncrakes with the aid of bird-friendly mowing regimes, modern GPS technology and agri-environmental schemes.



Unmown, 10 m wide refuge strips help Corncrakes to survive mowing