

# Aquatic warbler conservation & habitat restoration in cooperation with farmers



Žymantas Morkvėnas, Baltic environmental forum    Landcare Europe Workshop, Klaipėda 2023

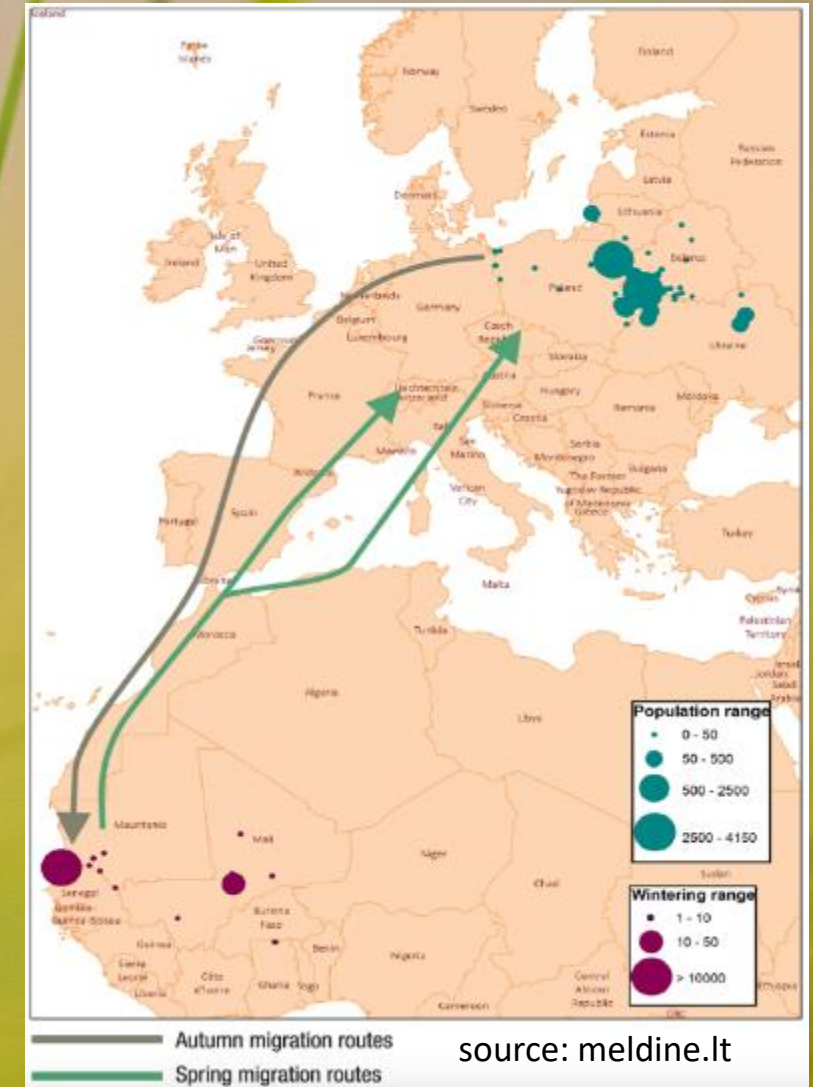


# Aquatic warbler – the Europe's rarest songbird, long distant migrant

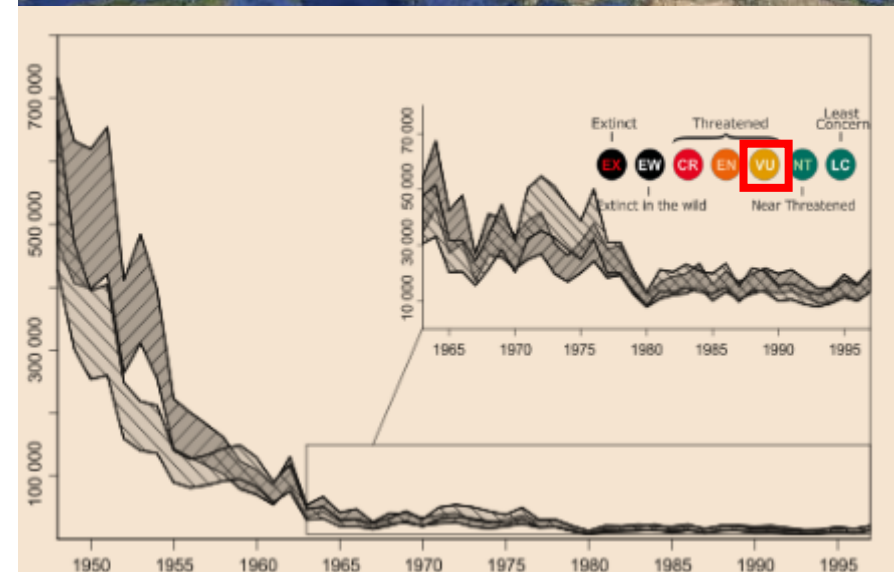
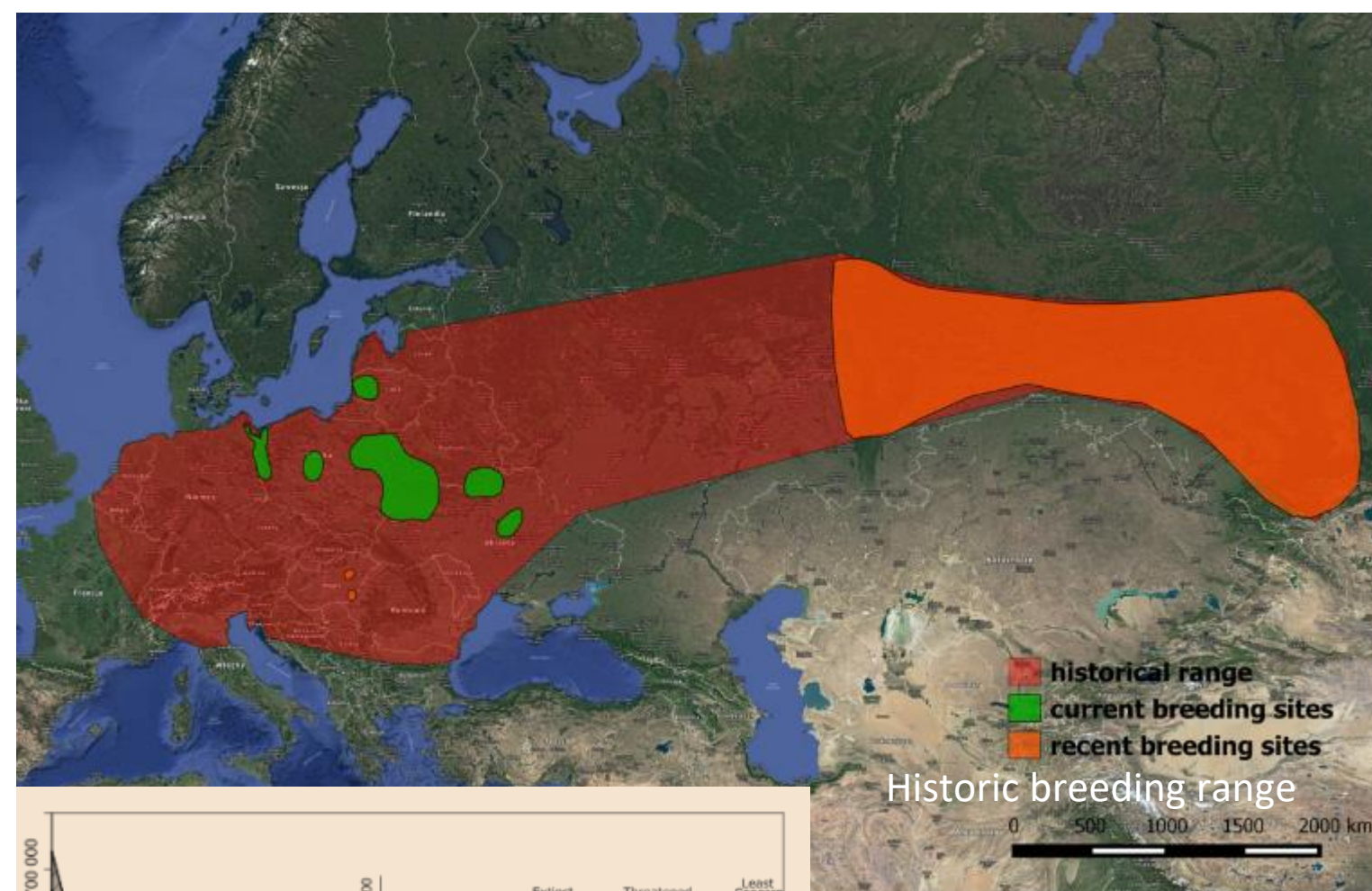
Migration route



- 200 times more rare than African elephant
- Global population less than 16 000 birds
- Breeds only in 4 countries: Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus;

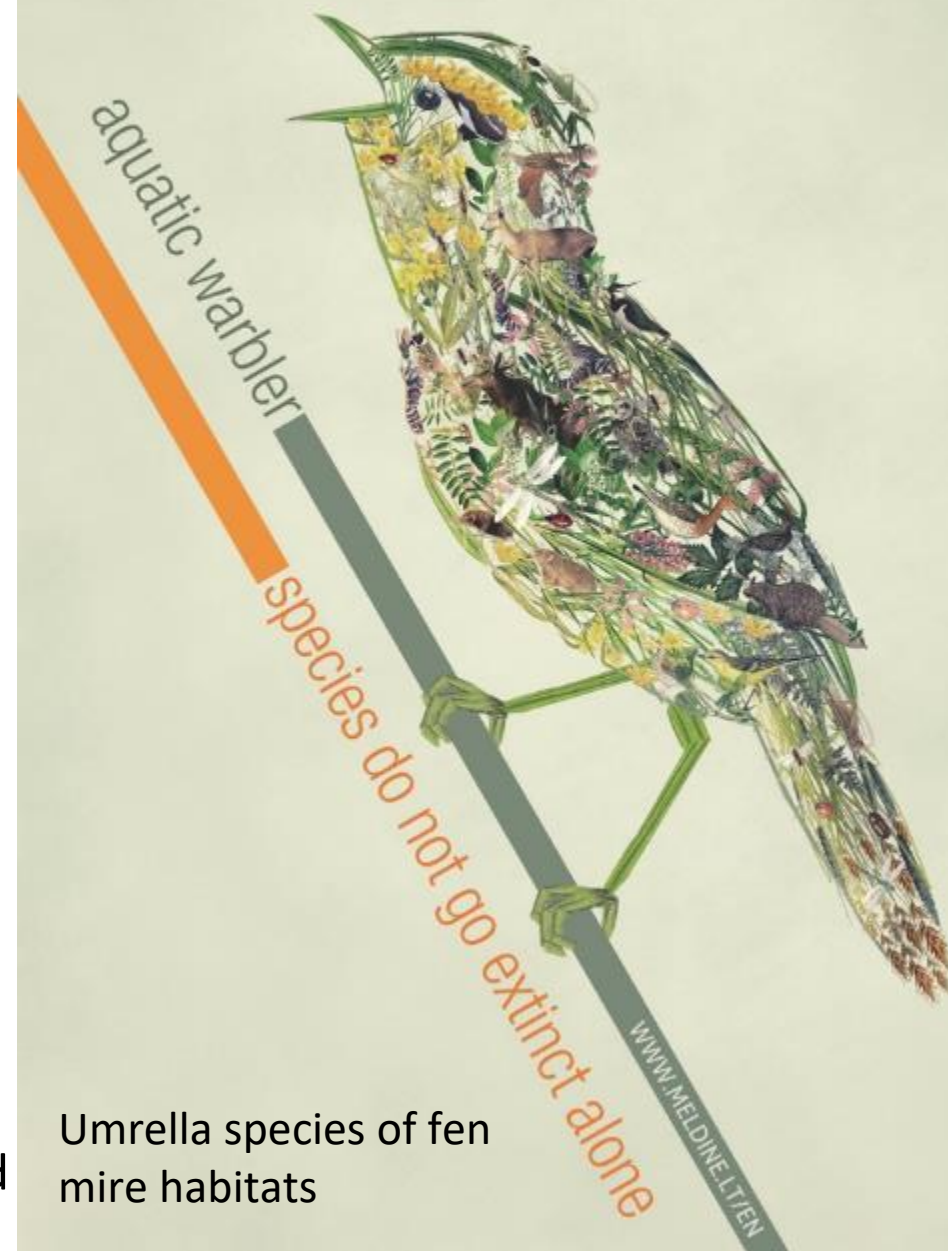






↑ Historic and current breeding range

← Global population trend



Umbrella species of fen mire habitats



Aquatic warbler habitat











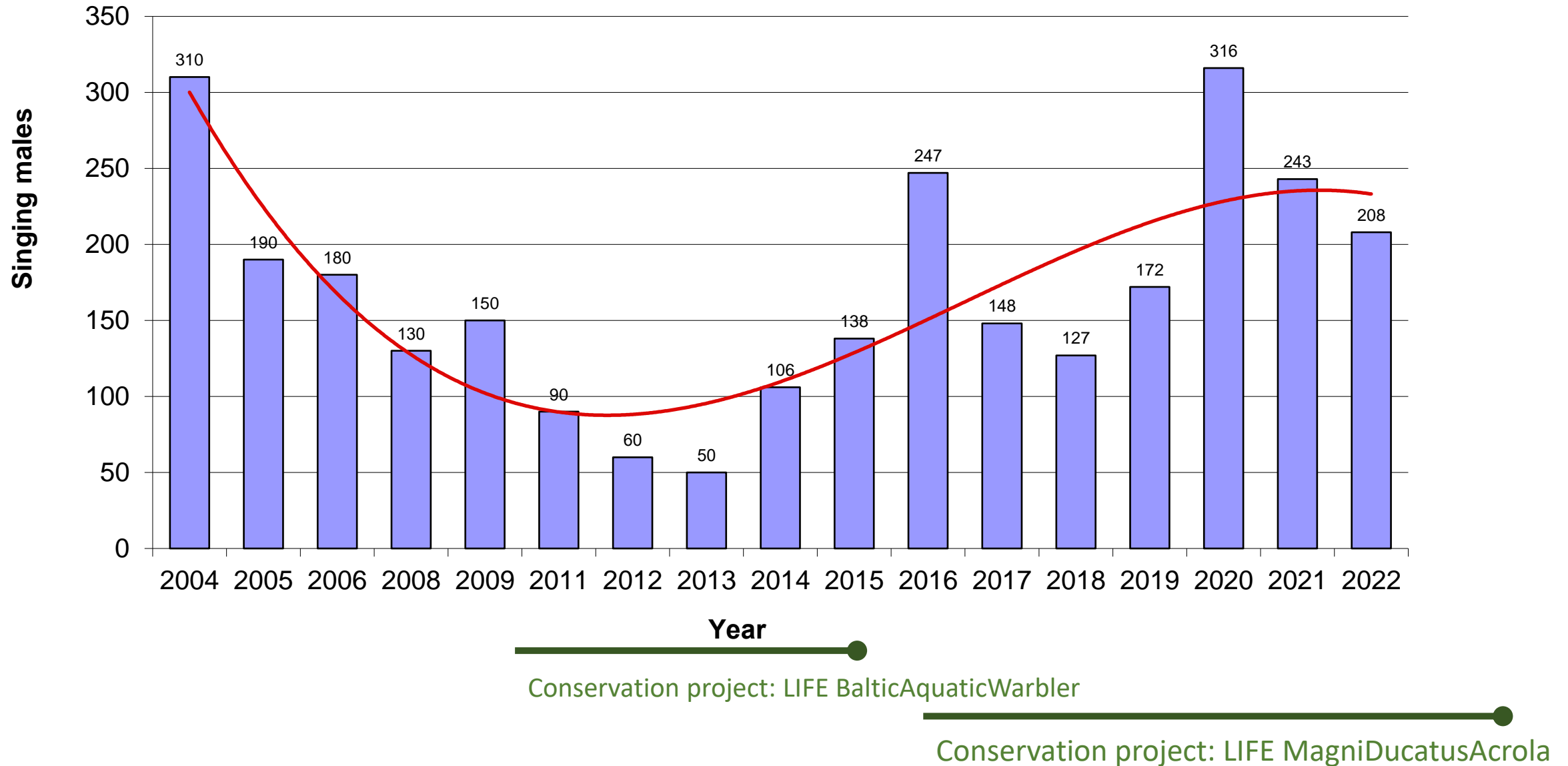




The start of our conservation adventure



# Aquatic warbler population dynamics in Lithuania



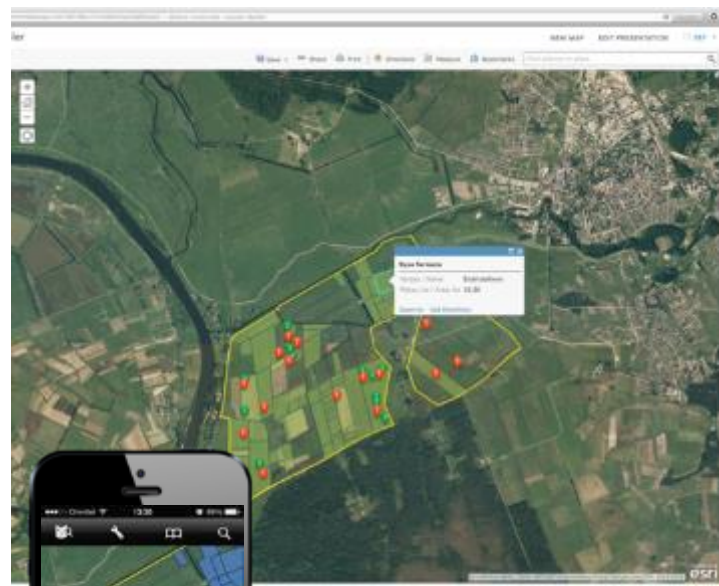


Farmers involvement





# Protecting every nest to ensure good breeding success





# Change of perception towards the farmer

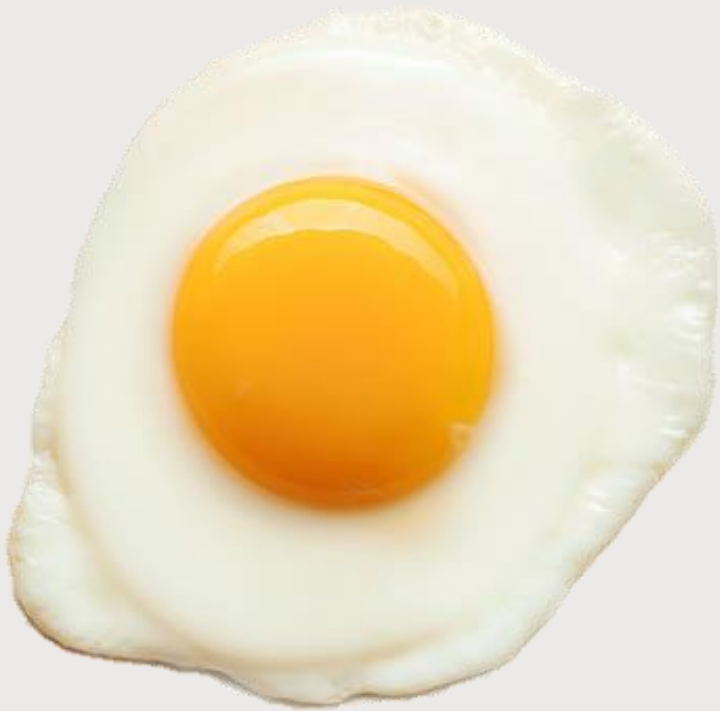
From favourable conservation status of the bird species to favourable conservation status of a farmer



Farmer – not as conservation tool but as an important driver for disturbance of ecosystem succession (and degradation)



Building  
relationship  
instead of just  
doing business







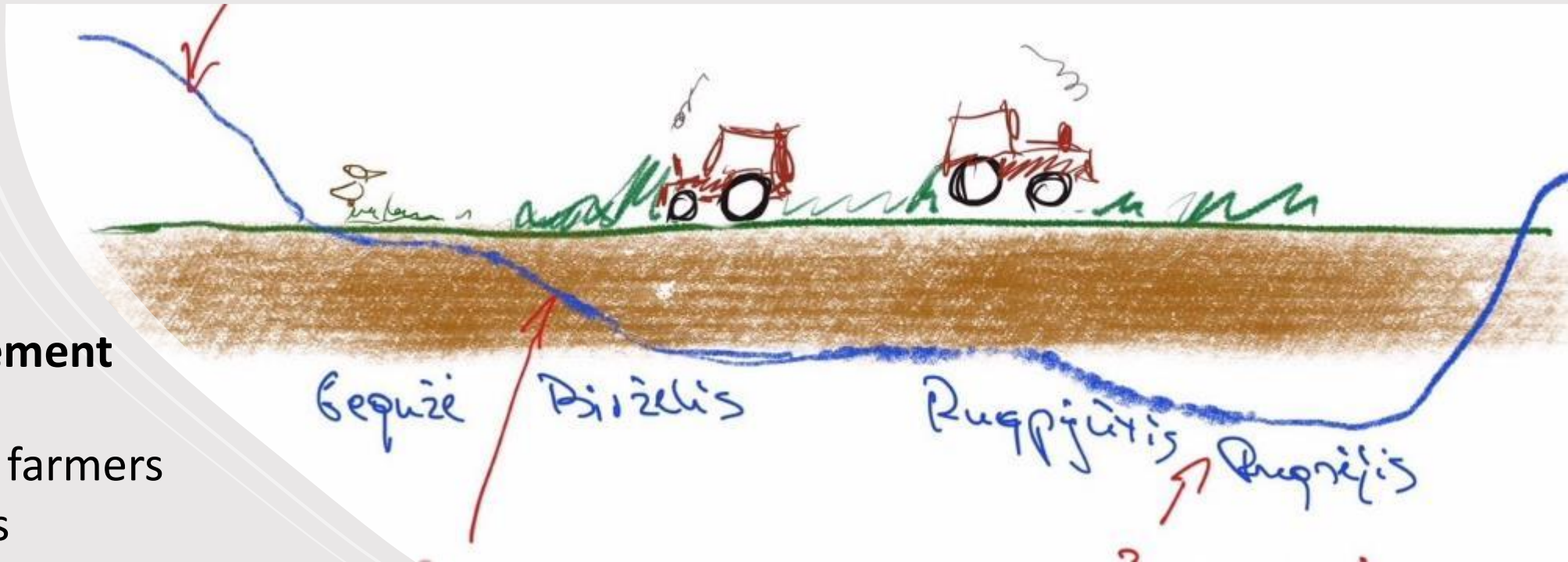
Farmers engagement











## Water level management

Meeting interests of farmers  
and aquatic warblers



# Challenge of farming and conservation

**Late mowing of fields  
create economic losses  
for farmers**



**AW breeds in a habitat  
used for farming  
business**



**Late-cut biomass is  
a problematic waste**





# Special agri-environmental measure under landscape stewardship programme

## Aquatic warbler conservation in natural and semi-natural meadows

AW singing male counts performed first decade of June. Plots observed with singing males extracted for late mowing.

- For plots where AW singing males observed - mowing after August 15;
- For plots where AW singing males NOT observed – half of area mowing in July;
- For all area – mowing shall be completed by October 1<sup>st</sup>. Baled or stacked biomass may be left for winter, but should be removed from the field until March 1<sup>st</sup> next year;
- Extensive grazing (1 SLU/ha) allowed until October 15.

Payment: **291** eur/ha (+ others possible: direct, Natura 2000, LFA)

## Aquatic warbler conservation in wetlands

- Full mowing of the area shall be done within 2 years (50% each year);
- Start of mowing allowed from August 1<sup>st</sup>;
- Mowing shall be finished until October 1<sup>st</sup>, stacked or baled biomass can be removed from field by March 1<sup>st</sup> next year;
- Maximum grazing density allowed 1 SLU/ha;

Payment: **160** eur/ha (+ others possible: direct, Natura 2000, LFA)



## Targeted agri-environmental scheme for aquatic warbler conservation proved to be very succesful



Alka polder (2021)

App. 79% of aquatic warbler singing males in Lithuania observed (2021) in plots declared for special agri-environmental scheme



# Dealing with the late-cut biomass

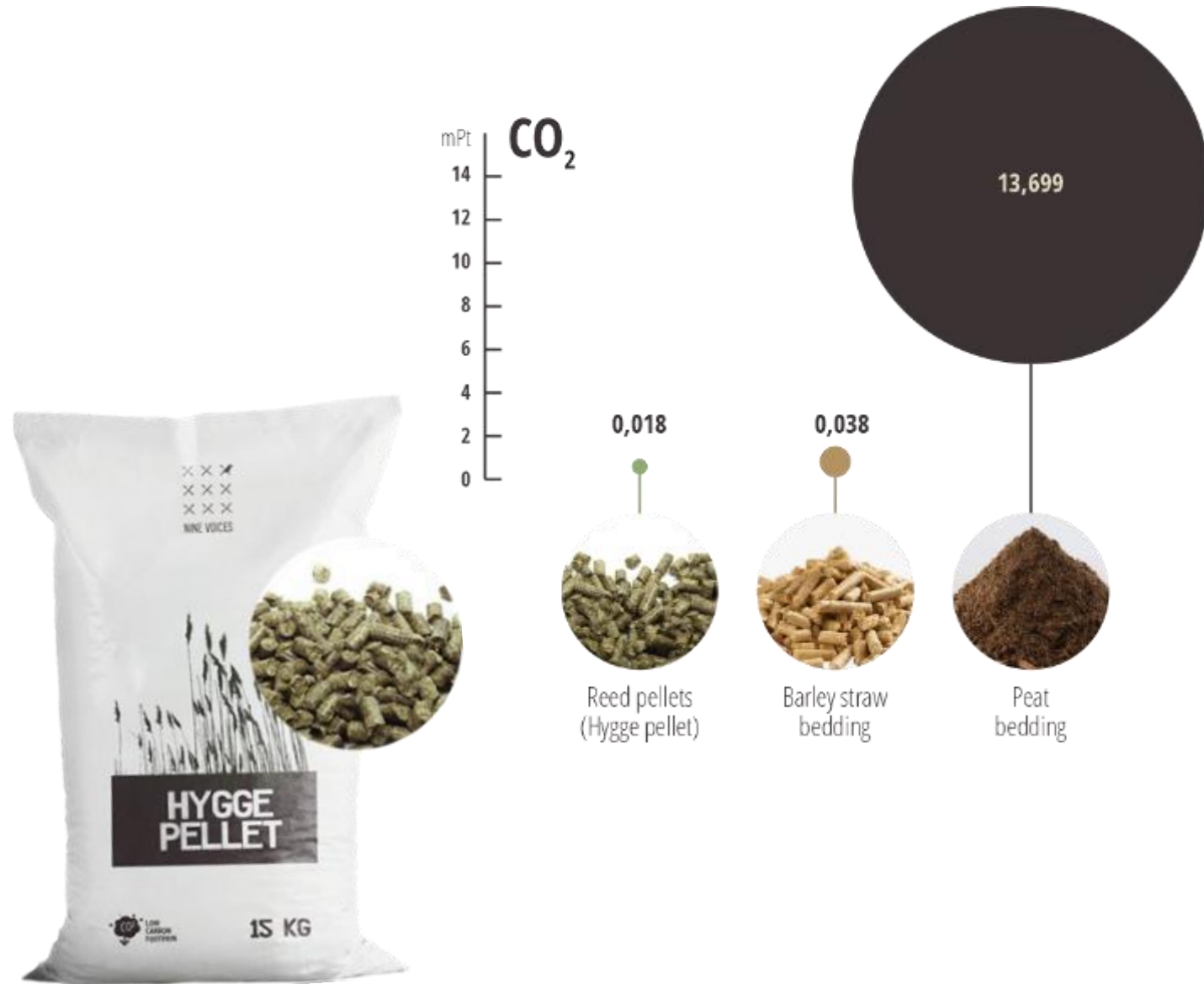




# Grass pellets – farming product from Aquatic warbler breeding habitat

## Climate friendly equine bedding

- Saves aquatic warbler
- Climate friendly alternative to the peat bedding;
- No need for artificial monoculture crop fields, watering or fertilization;
- Easy to use: quick spreading, even distribution, remove wet spots only, light packaging;
- Does not cause allergies (little dust, high temperature treated);
- Biodegradable – good fertilizer for the fields





Farming in peatlands - need for changing perception how we understand farming







**Special  
compensation  
scheme for  
farmers for late  
mowing**



**Late-cut biomass  
a problematic  
waste**

**Grass pellets –  
farming product**



**Water level  
management to  
meet interests of  
farmers and birds**



**Relationship  
building between  
farmers and  
conservationists**