

INFORMATION SHEET ON RAMSAR WETLANDS LITHUANIA / NEMUNO DELTA - 3LT005

1. Country: Lithuania

2. Date:

3. Ref: 3LT005

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5. Name of wetlands: Nemuno Delta (Delta of the Nemunas river)

6. Date of Ramsar designation: 04/10/1994

7. Geographical coordinates: 55° 18' N, 21° 20' E

8. General location: In Šilute district, approximately 9 km west of the town Šilute

9. Area: (in hectares) 23950 ha

10. Wetland type: L, M, S, O, U, T, U, X.

11. Altitude: Average height above sea level is 0.6-1.2 m, max 4.8 m

12. Overview:

The Nemunas River, the major river in Lithuania, falls into the Kuršiu Marios (Curonian Lagoon), forming a delta. The site is located in the Lithuanian part of the delta and it is the only wetland of its kind in Lithuania. Such a great variety of habitats (marshes, bogs, flooded forests and flooded meadows) create favourable conditions for numerous waterfowl and other fauna. It is the main area in our country for waterfowl and other migratory birds as a breeding and passage site on the East Atlantic Fly Way.

13. Physical features:

The Nemunas River, with a total length of 937 km of which 475 km are in Lithuania, falls into Curonian Lagoon forming a delta. Its catchment area in Lithuania covers 46000 sq km or 72% of the country's territory. The annual waterflow is 610 cubic m/s or 21 cubic km. The Nemuno Delta is intersected by many streams, channels and river branches. Spring floodings last from 57 to 62 days, water level rising up to 2-3 m, and 5-20 t/ha of deposits accumulate during this period, thus, fertile alluvial soils prevail. The Delta surface is flat, in average 2 m above the level of Curonian lagoon. The annual rainfall in the basin is 615 mm.

14. Ecological features:

The vegetation of reed marshes and flooded meadows prevail. Three raised bogs, Aukštumale, Medziokle and Rupkalviai, with ridge-pools complexes and a lagoon lake Krokų Lanka are included into the site. Some islands of the Delta (Briedzių island and others) are covered by flooded forests consisting of black alder and willows. Surface of water in many cases is covered by limneids (*Nuphar lutea*, *Nymphaea candida*, *Potamogeton* sp.). Submerged and water-fringed vegetation is very abundant, reed and rush marshes form 100-200 m wide zones.

15. Land tenure/ownership of:

(a) site: Mainly state owned, with some agricultural lands as private property.

(b) surrounding area: Surrounding agricultural lands (mainly cultivated meadows) are state owned, but

in the nearest future it will be private ownership.

16. Conservation measures taken:

Managed nature reserve (botanical-zoological, established in 1975) covers 13760 ha. Since 1992 it became a regional park (23950 ha)

17. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

The project of the Regional Park structure and management is under preparation.

18. Current land use:

(a) site: Hay and hay powder production, dairy farming, non-commercial fishing, peat production, small scale recreation and tourism.

(b) surroundings/catchment: Agricultural activity on a large scale, forestry, commercial fishing in Curonian lagoon.

19. Disturbances/threats, including changes in land use and major development projects:

(a) at the site: Extension of the polder system is adversely affecting the hydrological and hydrochemical regime. Most of natural flooded meadows have been transformed into cultivated meadows.

(b) in the surroundings/catchment: Extension of the polder system is adversely affecting the hydrological and hydrochemical regime. Recently polders covered about 360 sq km. The main threat is the pollution of the Nemunas River by wastewater and agricultural runoff. Soon tourism is likely to become a threat.

20. Hydrological and physical values:

It is the only one landscape of its type in Lithuania. It determines the hydrological regime of the Lower Nemunas and Curonian lagoon.

21. Social and cultural values:

Important site for nature conservation, agriculture and fishery, science and education, a unique ethnocultural district, Aukštumale bog is one of the first bogs studied in detail in the world.

22. Noteworthy fauna:

It was investigated 285 birds species (91.3% of all Lithuanian birds) in this region, among them 180 species nests in Delta. There are habitats of 40 bird species listed in the Red Data Book of Lithuania. *Botaurus stelaris* (11-12 breeding pairs), *Anser anser* (8-10 couples) *Tadorna tadorna*, *Anas acuta*, *Milvus migrans* (2-4 pairs), *Haliaetus albicilla* (2-3 pairs), *Circus pygargus* (3-4 couples), *Gallinago gallinago* (7-10), *Haematopus ostralegus*, *Tringa totanus*, *Philomachus pugnax*, *Limosa limosa* (50 couples), *Crex crex* (about 100 couples) *Sterna albifrons*, *Acrocephalus paludicola*, *Luscinia svecica*, *Panurus biarmicus* (50 pairs), *Bubo bubo* nest and feed there. The Delta is an important site for mammals as well as passing- by fishes (*Petromyzon marinus*, *Alosa fallax*, *Salmo salar*, *Salmo trutta* *trutta*). More than 50000 geese and 2-3 thousands of *Cygnus cygnus*, a large number of waders, mainly *Calidris alpina* occur during spring migration, whereas during autumn migration there are about 30-40 thousand geese, 20-30 thousand ducks and coots. Also it is an important breeding site for waterfowl - Mallards and other ducks, Divers, Coots. In mild winters, when the Delta region is free from ice, large flocks of birds winter there, among them, about 2000-3000 Mallards, Goosanders, Goldeneyes.

23. Noteworthy flora:

Natural flooded meadows are extremely rich in plant species. There are more than 430 vascular plant species. Raised bog communities with *Baeothryon caespitosum* are characteristic only for coastal lowland bogs. Localities of endangered water plant *Nymphoides peltata* are concentrated in this region.

24. Current scientific research and facilities:

Since 1929, birds' ringing station at Ventes Ragas cape exists, more than 60-70 thousand migratory birds are ringed annually. Hydrological and ichthyological studies are carried out, too.

25. Current conservation education:

Visiting center in the birds' ringing station is one of most popular places in Lithuania. Classes are given to students and school - children interested in ornithology.

26. Current recreation and tourism:
Mainly non-commercial fishing and hunting.

27. Management authority:
Council of Šilute District.

28. Jurisdiction:

29. Bibliographical references:

1. Weber C.A. 1902. Über die Vegetation und Entstehung d. Hochmoors von Augstamal im Memeldelta.
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3. Kuršiu Marios/Kompleksinio tyrinejimo rezultatai. - Vilnius, 1959. (Kurisches Haft/Ergebnisse der komplexen Untersuchungen).
4. Nemunas/Istorija, hidrologija, ukine reikšme. - T. 1. - v., Mokslas, 1977. - 124 p.
5. Jusys V., Mecionis R., Maciulis M. 1992. Rare breeding birds in the Nemuno Delta botanical-zoological Reserve and surrounding areas. Manuscript. (in Lithuanian)

30. Reasons for inclusion: 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3b.