LIFE+ project «Conservation arrangements for Lesser spotted eagle in Latvia»

Jānis Ķuze, Latvian Fund for Nature

01.02.2023

Project structure

Started/ended:
01.08.2016 – 30.09.2021

Partners:
- Latvian Fund for Nature (coordinating beneficiary)
- Latvian Ornithological Society
- Elm media (Rucka art foundation)
- Z/S “Tīravoti”

Financed by:
- ES Life+
- Latvian Environmental Protection Fund
- Project partners

Project context

Latvia hosts 33% of EU population and 20% of global population;

Since the beginning of the 20th century Latvian population has declined by ca 15%;

Main threats are related to the loss of breeding habitats (mostly due to the forestry activities) and feeding habitats (turning of grasslands in to arable lands/ abandoning or afforestation).


Photo by M.Strazds


Photo by R.Sniedze

Population estimate and protection

Estimated breeding population in 2012–2014 was 3700–4000* pairs. *From those*:

- 178-310 (mean 244, 6.3%) were breeding within *Natura2000* sites**
- 261 (7.1%) were protected by the microreserves (as on 26.04.2017)
- 134 (3.5%) were protected by the means of LVM***



* *Bergmanis, U., Auniņš, A., Petriņš, A. Cīrulis, V., Granāts, J., Opermanis, O. & Soms, A. 2015: Population size, dynamics and reproduction success of the lesser spotted eagle (Aquila pomarina) in Latvia. Slovak Raptor Journal 2015, 9: 45–54. DOI: 1 0.1 51 5/srj-201 5-000*

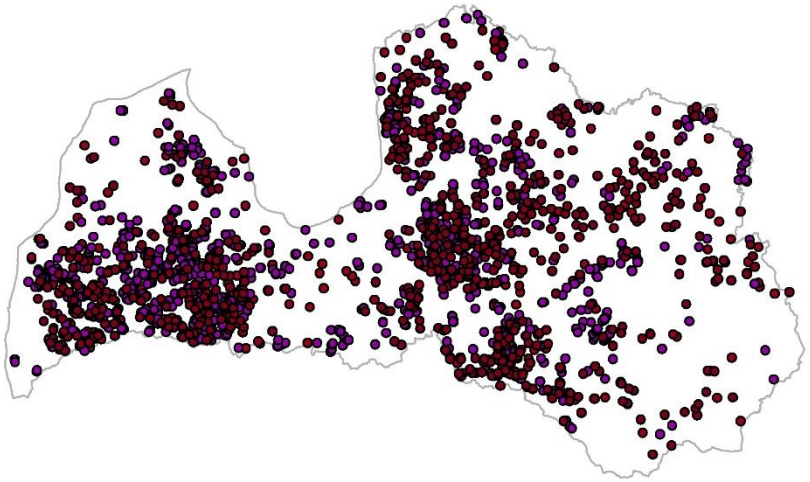
** *Natura 2000 standard data forms, http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/*

*** *Bergmanis, U. 2017. The database systems and site protection measures for large tree nesting bird species in the state forest of Latvia, using lesser spotted eagle as a case study. International Conference on the Conservation of the Lesser Spotted Eagle, 11-14 October 2017, Burgas, Bulgaria*

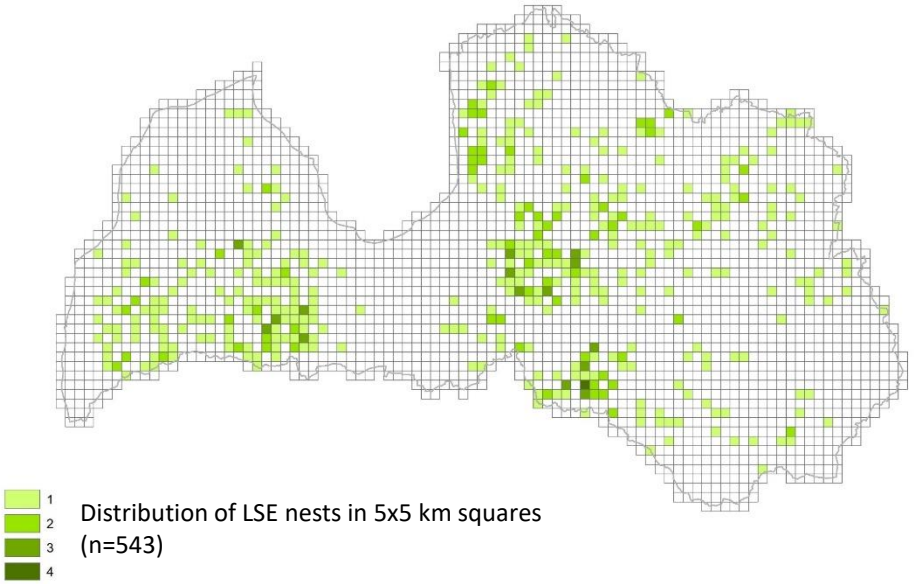
Nest site inventories

In four field work seasons (2017-2020) **543 LSE nests** were found;

Additionally, 1869 nests of unknown or various other (known) ownership were found, mainly Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, but also Black Stork *Ciconia nigra,* Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, Honey buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, White tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla.*



Distribution of all nests, found in 2017-2020 (n=2412)



Distribution of LSE nests in 5x5 km squares (n=543)


Photo by Imants Jakovļevs

Protection of breeding grounds of LSE

Intensive work in autumn 2017 – spring 2021:

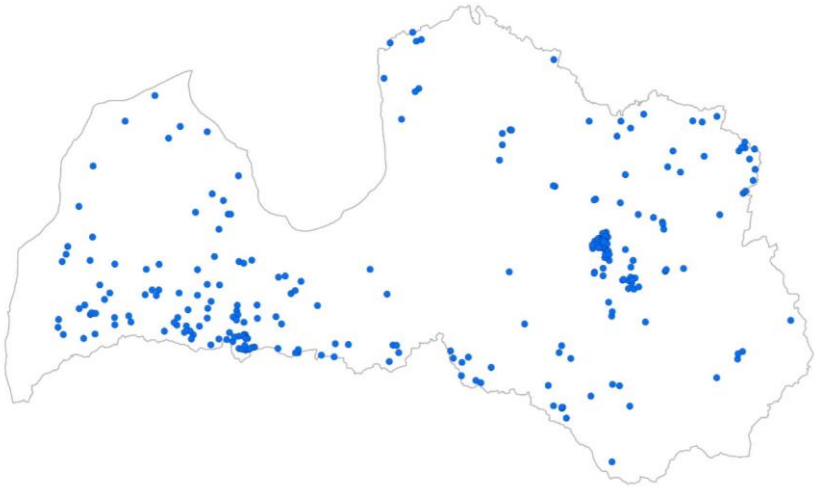
- **526 MR proposals submitted** to SFS or Nature Conservation Agency;
- From those, **470 are approved** (total **MR area 3290,74 ha** and **BUF area 20.617,02 ha**);
- Average approved MR size 7.0 ha ((0) 0,99-51,62 ha), BUF 43,87 ha ((0) 2,75-93,05 ha);
- From those three were later canceled by the central administration of SFS, LFN initiated three court cases in response;
- **48 proposals rejected by SFS**.

- Additionally, 22 MR proposals submitted by LVM with LFN being the second submitter;
- All approved by now with total MR area of 142,52 ha and BUF area 1055,96 ha;
- This makes the total area of MR **3433,26 ha** and area of BUF **21.672,98 ha**.

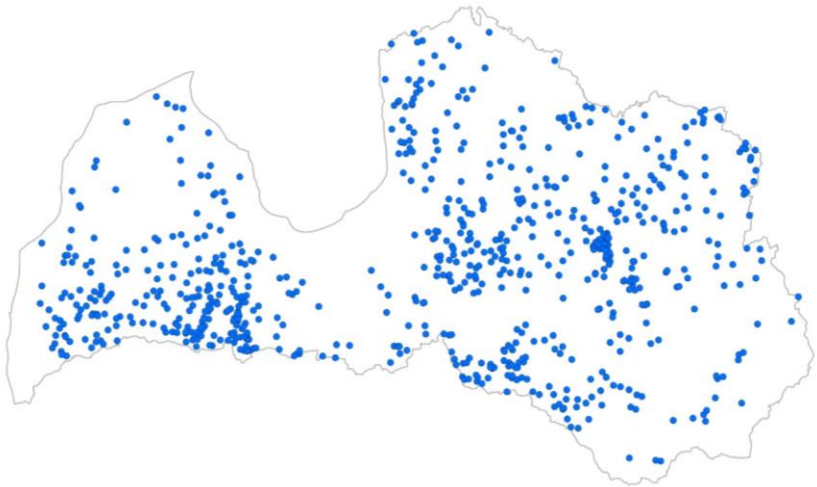
Protection of breeding grounds of LSE - *continued*

As on 30.07.2021, there were **754 MR designated for LSE** in Latvia with total area of **7593 ha**. Additionally, there were bufferzones with total area of **25 351 ha**.

Total number of MR (various species and habitats) in Latvia was 3010 with total area of 47 677 ha (bufferzones not included). Correspondingly, MR's designated for LSE comprised 25% of total number and 16% of total area.



LSE microreserves before the start of AQPOM project (centroides, as on 26.04.2017, n=261)



LSE microreserves (centroides, as on 01.09.2021, n=755)

Areas of habitats of EU importance within established microreserves

Habitat code	Habitat	Area, ha
7220*	Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion)	0.8
9010*	Western Taïga	189.1
9020*	Fennoscandian hemiboreal natural old broad-leaved deciduous forests (Quercus, Tilia, Acer, Fraxinus or Ulmus) rich in epiphytes	121.9
9050	Fennoscandian herb-rich forests with Picea abies	215.8
9080*	Fennoscandian deciduous swamp woods	52.4
9160	Sub-Atlantic and medio-European oak or oak-hornbeam forests of the Carpinion betuli	9.2
9180*	Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines	19.1
91D0*	Bog woodland	24.6
91E0*	Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)	45.1
	Total	678.0

LSE nest destruction: project findings

- In every single field season since 2017, at ca. 10% of found nests inappropriate activities were recorded;

- That includes forest cutting at wrong season, nest trees prepared for logging, too small group of retention trees planned around nest tree, etc.

- **Main problem behind that – lack of proper evaluation of BD values prior to the forestry activities. Only economic value is evaluated during the forest inventory. Shortages of existing compensation scheme.**

LSE protection issues: solved only partly

- LFN has won all three court cases in all instances;
- Exchange of letters with both responsible ministries (Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development/MoEPRD), both respond formally;
- LFN recommends to change the existing scheme of compensations, MoEPRD establishes a working group that comes up with proposals for system improvement;
- State Forest Service changes attitude on designation of microreserves – now it is less likely that they will be rejected if private forest owner objects;
- No changes in the (lack of) evaluation of forest BD values prior to the timber extraction.

Last resort – approaching EC

In spring 2021 LFN has submitted complaint to the EC about incompliance with Bird Directive:

Latvia has failed to fully implement Article 5 (b) and (d) of the Birds Directive by failing to ensure that bird species concerned will not be killed or disturbed during the period of breeding and rearing and that their nests will not be deliberately destroyed, damaged or removed during forestry operations.

National legal system does not provide for effective tools to incorporate these measures in forestry regulations which directly affect bird species related to forests, including Annex I species of the Birds Directive, such as Lesser spotted eagle and other dispersedly nesting bird species.


Thank you
for your attention!