

## VELIKI ŠKURH V SLOVENIJI, DANES IN NIKDAR VEČ?

### Curlew in Slovenia, today and never again?



Članek Katarine Denac o velikem škurhu *Numenius arquata* v tej številki Acrocephalusa razkriva varljivo stanje. Podroben popis v letih 2011 in 2012 na Ljubljanskem barju je pokazal, da je škurhov še celo nekaj več, kot smo menili doslej. Avtorica sicer ocenjuje, da je nekaj večja ocena posledica natančnejše metode in da je populacija v zadnjih letih stabilna. A nad škurhom se zgrinjajo črni oblaki.

Veliki škurh za gnezdenje potrebuje ekstenzivne vlažne travnike, teh pa je v Sloveniji vse manj. Brez pretiravanja lahko zapišemo, da so ekstenzivno gojeni travniki pri nas ogroženi. Samo na Barju se je njihova površina med letoma 1999 in 2011 zmanjšala za 15 km<sup>2</sup> (KPLB 2013). Vendar ne gre nič boljše tudi drugim vrstam travnikov. V obdobju 2004–2012 so se na primer različni tipi travniških habitatov na Goričkem zmanjšali za osupljivih 29–50 % (TRČAK *et al.* 2012). Pred našimi očmi travniki izginjajo drug za drugim. Na Barju in na Goričkem jih požirajo koruzne in žitne njive. Na Breginjskem Stolu, na Krasu in še marsikje, tudi ponekod na Goričkem, jih zarašča grmovje, ki postopoma prerašča v gozd. Tisti travniki, ki ostajajo, pa se iz izjemno pestrega življenjskega prostora spreminjajo v intenzivne, močno gnojene in večkrat na leto košene travnike. Včasih tudi dosejevane, malodane že kar prave njive s travo. Takšni travniki dobrih življenjskih razmer travniškim gnezdilkam seveda ne omogočajo. Nasprotno, pogosto učinkujejo kot ekološke pasti za že tako ogrožene vrst ptic.

Dramatično slabšanje stanja travnikov seveda ne more biti in ni brez posledic za stanje populacij travniških gnezdil. Monitoring splošno razširjenih vrst ptic za določitev slovenskega indeksa ptic kmetijske krajine razkriva, da so populacije travniških vrst v Sloveniji med letoma 2008 in 2013 upadle za skoraj 33 % (KMECL & FIGELJ 2013). V petih letih za tretjino! Dve obsežni raziskavi ptic v Kozjanskem parku v letih 1999 in 2010 sta razkrili, da so po enajstih letih travniške ptice v parku dobesedno zdesetkane: populacije so upadle za 91 % (KMECL *et al.* 2010). Tudi koscu *Crex crex*, specialistu ekstenzivnih travnikov, gre slabo. Populacija na slovenskih območjih Natura 2000 upada že daljši čas, od leta 1999 v povprečju za 4,5 % na leto. Na najpomembnejšem območju za kosca v državi, na Ljubljanskem barju, je populacija med letoma 1999 in 2013 upadla za skoraj 60 % (DENAC *et al.* 2013).

Skupni imenovalec problemov, ki jih imajo travniške ptice, je neustrezna kmetijska politika. Na eni strani zato, ker ni poiskala učinkovitega mehanizma za preprečitev zaraščanja biodiverzitetno najdragocenejših travnikov. Po drugi strani pa zato, ker s subvencijami kmete usmerja v preoravanje travnikov. Ponujena plačila za njive so pač neprimerno višja kot za travnike. Zato kmetom ne smemo očitati, da ponujena plačila sprejmejo in travnike preorjejo. Živijo pač od sredstev, ki jih z zemljišči prigospodarijo, in ne samo od ljubezni do narave. V sklopu kmetijsko okoljskih ukrepov je država sicer ponudila nekaj ukrepov, ki bi naj zagotavljali ugodne razmere za travniške vrste, a kaj ko so ponujena plačila tako nizka, da so za kmete nezanimiva.

Stanje travniških habitatov in populacij travniških ptic v Sloveniji je torej alarmantno. Še bolj pa zbuja skrb, da je stanje slabo tudi znotraj območij Natura 2000, ki so namenjena prav varovanju teh vrst. V skladu s Ptičjo direktivo je slovenska država dolžna zagotavljati ugodno stanje varovanih vrst v Natura-območjih. Pri varovanju travniških ptic pa očitno ni bila uspešna.

Ali je problem sploh rešljiv? Tehnično pravzaprav precej enostavno. Kakšne so habitatne zahteve travniških vrst, je bolj ali manj znano, a če poenostavim, sta to ekstenzivno gospodarjenje in pozna košnja. Ker za kmete takšno gospodarjenje ekonomsko ni zanimivo, jih je treba podpreti s subvencijami. Mehanizmi za to so vzpostavljeni in denar je na voljo. Le preusmeriti ga je treba od ravnanj, ki so za travniške vrste uničujoča, k tistim, ki jih ohranjajo. Rešitve so na dlani, a žal le tehnično.

V resnici imamo opraviti s klobčičem interesov, težko preglednim in rešljivim gordijskim vozlom. Saj kaj pa bi sploh lahko pričakovali drugega od mehanizma, kjer se režejo in delijo stomilijonske javnofinančne pogače? V divjem prerivanju za čimvečji kos pač kratko potegnejo lastniki ekstenzivnih travnikov, ki so večinoma mali kmetje, brez dobrih zvez s centri moči.

Situacija je zapletena do skrajnosti. Za povrh pa je tudi nezakonita: s tem ko je Slovenija vlagala kmetijske subvencije v uničevanje travnikov v območjih Natura 2000 in dopustila, da ji izginjajo travniške gnezdilke, je prekršila pravni red Evropske unije. Škurh je imel doslej srečo. Travniki so množično izginjali vsepovsod, le na tistih nekaj sto hektarih, kjer te ptice gnezdujejo, skoraj da ne. A čas se tudi tem izteka. Če ne bomo zelo hitro spremenili uničujočih praks, bo škurh v Sloveniji izumrl. Ali bomo znali klobčič presekat sami, brez pritožbe na Evropsko komisijo in brez sodbe Evropskega sodišča? Upam da, verjamem pa ne.

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The article by Katarina Denac on the Curlew *Numenius arquata* published in this issue reveals a deceptive state of affairs. A detailed inventory carried out at Ljubljansko barje in 2011 and 2012 showed that the area was inhabited by even more Curlews than believed till now. Although the authoress assesses that the slightly higher estimate stems from a more accurate method and that the population has been stable in the last few years, the Curlew is certainly facing hard times.

In order to breed successfully, the Curlew requires extensively farmed wet meadows which, however, are rapidly disappearing in Slovenia. We can say without exaggeration that the extensive farmed meadows are endangered in our country. At the Barje alone, their surface area has shrunk by 15 km<sup>2</sup> (KPLB 2013) in the 1999–2011 period. The situation, however, is no less critical for other meadow types as well. In the 2004–2012 period, for example, different meadow habitat types were reduced by astonishing 29–50% in the area of Goričko (Trčak *et al.* 2012). Meadows are virtually disappearing in front of our very eyes. At Barje and in Goričko, they are being swallowed by cereal fields, while in the areas of Breginjski Stol, the Karst and elsewhere, even in Goričko here and there, they are being overgrown by shrubbery, which is gradually turning into forest. The remaining meadows, on the other hand, are turning from exceptionally diverse habitat into intensive, strongly fertilized

and several times per year mown meadows, occasionally even additionally sown and virtually true fields with grass. Such meadows, of course, do not enable good living conditions for grasslands breeders. On the contrary, they often act as ecological traps for the already endangered bird species.

The meadows' dramatic deterioration of course cannot be, and is not, without serious consequences for the grassland breeding birds populations. Monitoring of common bird species carried out in order to stipulate the Slovenian index of agricultural landscape birds has revealed that the populations of grassland species in Slovenia decreased by almost 33% in the 2008–2013 period (KMECL & FIGELJ 2013). By one third in five years! Two extensive surveys of birds of Kozjansko Park in 1999 and 2010 disclosed that grassland birds were literally decimated in the Park after eleven years, with their populations declining by 91% (KMECL *et al.* 2010). The Corncrake *Crex crex*, this extensively farmed meadow specialist, is in a sorry state as well. Its population in the Slovenian Natura 2000 areas has been decreasing for a fairly long time, from 1999 onwards even by 4.5% on average per year. In the most important area for this species in the country, i.e. at Ljubljansko barje, its population has fallen by almost 60% in the 1999–2013 period (DENAC *et al.* 2013).

The common denominator of the problems faced by grassland birds is the inappropriate agricultural policy, on the one hand as it has not been able to find an effective mechanism to prevent overgrowing of the most precious meadows as far as their biodiversity is concerned, and on the other hand because it stimulates farmers with subsidies to plough up their meadows. The payments offered for fields are, of course, incomparably higher than those for meadows. The farmers thus cannot be reproached with accepting the offered payments and ploughing their meadows, for they subsist on money they make with the aid of their land and not only on love for nature. Although certain measures were adopted by the state within the framework of agricultural-environmental policy that should provide suitable conditions for grassland species, the offered payments are so low that they are simply of no interest to farmers.

In short, the conservation status of grassland habitats and grassland bird species populations is alarming in Slovenia. Even more worrying, however, is the fact that the conditions are also poor within Natura 2000 areas, which are intended for the very protection of these species. In compliance with the Birds Directive, the Slovenian state is obliged to provide for favourable conservation status of protected species within Natura areas. In any case, it has clearly not been successful as far as protection of grassland bird species is concerned.

Is the problem at all solvable? Technically it is, and even in a fairly simple way. What the grasslands species' habitat requirements actually are, is more or less known to us; to put it simply, these are extensive farming and late mowing. But as this kind of management is not economically interesting to farmers, it has to be propped up with subsidies. Mechanisms for it have already been set up and money is available, too, except that it has to be diverted from deeds that are destructive for grassland species to those that sustain them. Solutions are obvious but, unfortunately, only technically.

We are in fact dealing with a tangle of interests, a hardly transparent and unsolvable Gordian knot. But what else could have been expected from the mechanism, where millions of Euros worth public financial cakes are being

cut and shared? In a wild scuffle for the biggest possible piece, the losers are invariably owners of the extensively farmed meadows, who are mostly small farmers without connections with the centres of power.

The situation is complicated to the extreme – and illegal on top of it all. When Slovenia was granting subsidies in destruction of grasslands in Natura 2000 areas and allowing grassland breeders to disappear, it violated the EU legal system. The Curlew has been lucky so far. Meadows have been massively disappearing everywhere, with the exception of those couple of hundred hectares where these birds breed. But the time is running out for them as well. If we do not change the destructive practices very soon, the Curlew will become extinct in Slovenia. Shall we be able to cut the knot by ourselves, without appeal to the European Commission and without the Court's judgment? I hope that we will, but can hardly believe it.

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