



**Report on the Erasmus+ Structured Training Course  
Coastal and National Park Management (Wolin), Poland  
Net 6 Managing our Natural and Cultural Heritage Assets**

A course developed by ARCH and funded through the Erasmus+ programme, hosted by Wolin National Park supported by the Society for the Coast

Guided by Kazimierz Rabski (The Society for the Coast, EUCC) & Wioletta Nawrocka (Wolin National Park)

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**STOWARZYSZENIE  
NA RZECZ WYBRZEŻA**



**NET 6 Managing our Natural and Cultural Assets  
A programme funded by Erasmus+**

**NET is a consortium of 20 Nature Conservation and  
Culture Heritage Organisations in Scotland,  
coordinated by the Firm of ARCH**

## **Introduction**

The group met up at Edinburgh Airport and travelled to Gdansk where we were met by our host, Kazimierz Rabski. We travelled to our first destination, on the edge of Slowinski National Park. Over the first two days of the trip, we met with National Park staff for a presentation, climbed the Czołpino lighthouse, visited the biggest dunes in Europe, and passed through Łeba, a popular coastal destination.

Moving west along the Baltic Coast we visited several examples of beach nourishment, a method of reducing erosion and improving beaches for tourism. The next stop was the Dabkowice Spit, the narrowest spit on the Baltic coast, followed by several stops to look at examples of shore protection to prevent erosion.

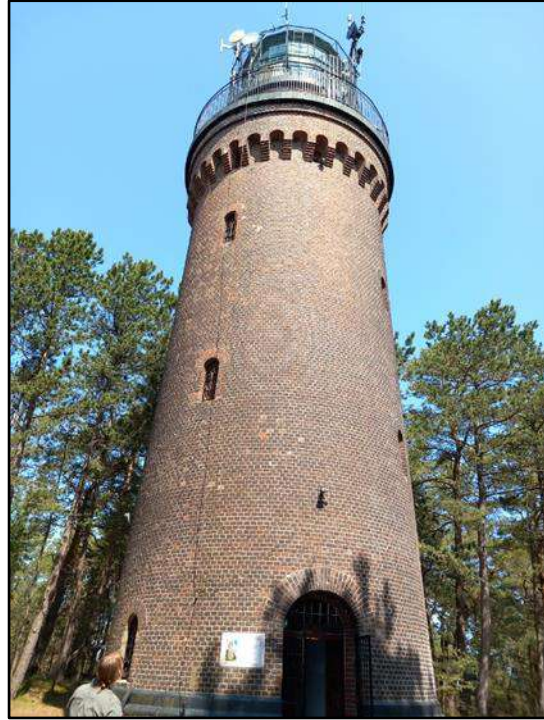
Our final destination was Wolin National Park where we stayed for 4 nights at a field base just outside Międzyzdroje, a coastal town on the edge of the park. We made trips by boat to visit grazed islands and to view the port development at Świnoujście, saw nature in action at a beaver dam, visited the highest sea cliffs in Poland and visited a bison reserve.

The eight participants were from a range of Scottish environmental organisations including the RSPB Scotland, NatureScot, The SCAPE Trust, Solway Firth Partnership and SLR Consulting. A wide range of disciplines / experience within the group allowed them to make comparisons with practices across Scotland and to disseminate learnings widely upon returning home.

We were very lucky that our host was flexible enough to accommodate our requests to visit additional sites such as the Bison reintroduction site within Wolinski National Park!

## **Slowinski National Park – Take away messages**

- Process led rather than maintaining a state – allowing natural processes to go ahead without intervention.
- Species management of ringed plovers – exclosures to prevent trampling from visitors and to exclude predators.
- Zoning of visitors to allow dunes to vegetate naturally – also fencing to prevent trampling.
- Management of the woodlands is mostly natural but some removal of commercially planted species such as pine – trying to return to the natural composition of native woodland of the area.
- The reserve is mostly closed to the public to enhance nature conservation – public access is on 30km of undisturbed trails.
- No dogs allowed on the reserve – fines in place to enforce this law.
- Meadows were managed under agreement with local farmers to ensure appropriate grazing management.
- Steps up to the lighthouse were constructed to avoid erosion of a wider area.
- Under pressure from small scale housing development close to the park – the park has a buffer but its increasingly difficult to maintain no development in bordering areas.



**Lighthouse and stepped walkway to protect dunes**

- The view from the lighthouse is starting to be obstructed by trees but they will not be cut down – consistent management.
- 35% funding comes from the government which covers staff costs and the staff have to find the rest for projects and management. Other funding sources come from parking fees, lighthouse / museum tickets / grants.
- Kluki, a traditional village has been restored and preserved and is now a museum. It was good to see an example of the local vernacular.
- Great bird life and a good variety of other species. Very impressive that wolves and beaver are present along with a lynx in a relatively small national park. Great example of apex predators rather than human intervention.
- Amazing big dunes. Very unusual to see small wet patches of saltmarsh in the dunes. Fencing was very effective at channelling human activity and allowing regeneration.



**Visitor demarcation working well in action**



- The lack of rain has had an impact on the site including low water levels making life difficult for beavers and increasing fires on site.
- We learned that mistletoe grows in large balls in trees that are in decline. Again, the lack of water has been an issue, stressing trees, allowing the mistletoe to establish.
- Lake Lebsko at Leba is particularly dangerous due to the big waves (due to a large fetch across expansive lagoon lake) and although shallow has a very soft sediment bottom. There is a lack of resources to manage visitors kayaking here resulting in several drownings – difficult issue of establishing a kayak trail but would require stand-by safety boat whilst in use.
- We decided that we would all like Magda's job!



**Sand lizard and sun halo**

### **Sites between the two National Parks – Take away messages**

- Dąbkowice Spit – the sea is almost connected to the lagoon across the Dąbkowice Spit by a narrow channel but the intervention to avoid permanent sea infiltration and erosion of the spit looks as though it may fail in the near future. Natural protection by placing dead trees along the dune edge has been employed to try and reduce erosion.



**Lagoon meets the Baltic**

- Trzęsacz - a spectacular example of erosion where most of a church has fallen down the cliff but a remnant of it has been preserved as an example of hard engineering on the coast. We felt the viewing platform / steps down to the beach was over

engineered and out of character with the surrounding landscape. It looks as though the erosion may be accelerated by the hard engineered structure.



**Church – high intensity erosion now a visitor hot spot complete with pier and steps**

- Jarosławiec – we visited a town where tourism development was taking place with several big hotels dominating including the 6<sup>th</sup> largest in the world (once complete). The coast is home to an artificial beach and high concentrations of hard engineering including groynes and barriers composed of concrete tetrapod blocks. Although this was presented as being contrary to the natural character of the Polish coast ("Polish Dubai") we felt that it was quite a good idea to keep development to this small area, allow a 'honey pot' and leave the rest of the coast less developed.



**Hard coastal defences protecting the sandy beaches at Jarosławiec**

- Ustka – a tourist destination we visited to look at the method of beach recharge. Sand was piped in a solution from the harbour mouth to the back of the beach, thereby improving the beaches for tourism.



## Wolinski National Park – Take away messages



**The large scale of Szczecin lagoon and associated delta and islands**

- Leaving dead wood on site is key. There were an additional 200+ species due to allowing the dead wood to lie. This is a recent policy shift and establishing deadwood on a comparable scale to a primary forestry will take centuries.
- Islands in the lagoon are grazed by cattle, which are transported by boat, to maintain a favourable habitat condition for native plants and nesting birds. By grazing the reeds, the cows help keep the habitats open. High grazing densities (higher than we would normally recommend in Scotland) were required to manage the vegetation appropriately. The risk of nest trampling is managed, by restricting cattle to certain areas during the breeding season using fencing. Research was being undertaken regarding the grazing management, this included monitoring of breeding birds. Some of the cows had broken into a temporary exclusion area, interfering with the scientific work, but they appeared to be operating as distinct herds so were not moved back.



**Island shed importance for cattle protection from sun in summer**

- It was very interesting that local farmers were willing to graze the islands, despite the challenging environment and logistical issues. The incentive for grazing the islands, appeared to be that the rent was much lower than elsewhere, and the farmers received an agri-environment payment. There were frustrations expressed however,

that the agri-environment payment area did not include the many seasonal pools, despite the fact that they vegetated later in the spring/summer.

- Invasive plant species are an issue on the grazed islands – a recent colonist from South Africa (*Cotula coronopifolia*) is changing the vegetation composition/structure. It was introduced via seeds/vegetative bits contained in shipping bilge water. This is crowding out and impacting on rare halophytes found in the wet marsh / grassland with potential knock-on conservation impacts for suitability of the brackish ecosystem to support endemic establish wildlife.



***Cortula* species (Brassbuttons) overtaking dominance from Native Halophytes e.g. *Lysimachia maritima* within native brackish marsh areas.**

- There had been 6 years of dry weather which has affected the water levels in the pools and lakes. Numbers of wading birds and aquatic warblers have been impacted.
- Coastal erosion and slumping of the cliff line was observed. The partially buried gun emplacements of an ex-military site due to wind-blown sand showed the dynamic nature of this coastal system – relatively rare, this process combines layers of soil and sand to form ideal conditions for rare orchid species.



**Cliff top slump and sandy accretion around bunker**

- We were really interested in the European Bison Reserve as an educational centre, raising awareness of the species. There were also examples of other rescued local wildlife including red deer, white-tailed sea eagle and wild boar. The centre has more than 100,000 visitors / year and the day we visited there were several school groups learning more about the wildlife of the National Park.





**A couple of bison relaxing in the sunshine within the Wolin National Park bison reserve**

- It was not possible to reintroduce the bison to this National Park due to its small size and the collision risk on roads.
- We were interested to learn about the wolves, otters and beavers in the park. Otters and beavers coexist in the same lodge, the otters using the lodge as a feeding site. Local wolves predate the beavers having learned to dig them out of lodge tunnels.
- We visited moraine cliffs to view the problem of erosion along the cliff line. We were able to see the different phases of sedimentation and post-glacial deposition within the eroding exposure.



**Moraine cliffs and active erosion – slumping/slippage of cliff top**

- Lots of raptors in this National Park - there are more White-tailed Eagles in this park than in the whole of Scotland!

### **Lessons Learned from the Trip**

- The Polish coast is largely made up of dunes, both those that form active dunes systems moving landward and those that build seaward or along the coast to form sandy barriers creating lagoonal systems between areas of eroding morainic cliffs. This unconsolidated nature has implications for conservation and development.
- We are all worried that Scottish National Parks are not as biodiverse as in Poland. The level of protection and power of the Director is much more than in Scotland for example byelaws to manage camping can only be introduced after a public



consultation and approval from the Scottish Government. Land within the parks is largely state owned which ensures greater protection, including restrictions on access and permitted activities (although issues with compliance were noted!), combined with suitable management and research being guaranteed over a large landscape scale.

- The National Parks in Poland also appear to have greater potential for generating revenue through entrance fees, parking charges and visitor attractions (e.g. bison) – these funds then go directly into park management, including conservation.
- Development of honeypots for visitors through beach replenish schemes help to take pressure off national parks and more naturalised coastal areas. Issue exists with developments not following due planning process – a large hotel development being finished but which didn't have all the required planning permissions.



**The worlds 6<sup>th</sup> largest hotel (if it opens) and tourist honey pot**

- Climate change is impacting Poland: -
  - i) with dry spells of weather impacting on wet coastal marshland making conservation for breeding waders and Aquatic warbler difficult. Currently new management under consideration includes introducing small dam systems to retain water and establishing a more complex reservoir system.
  - ii) climatic changes in direction of storm tracks and established wind patterns along the coast are shifting and changing erosional process along the Polish Baltic coastline – randomness of impacts mean predicted outcomes are difficult to model.



**Wolinski Islands - Dried out marsh during peak breeding season - climate change may further exacerbate impacts and management solutions are being considered**

- Whilst in Scotland we have recently been dealing with the reintroduction of beavers (some planned and others less so) it was interesting to hear about / see / consider issues associated with the reintroduction and favourable conservation status of even larger herbivores (Bison) and predator species (wolf) in a Polish / European mainland context. Issues will in such circumstances always arise but involving and speaking to people and understanding their concerns are key considerations.
- That responsible access rights in Scotland can mean it's difficult to prevent unintended disturbance and impacts from visitors/tourists – its far easier to accomplish when access can be controlled.
- With regards to deer and native woodlands similar issues arise between Poland and Scotland with woodland regeneration being hindered within many areas of woodland due to herbivore pressure. In both areas the interest of hunting is a barrier to more effective control of grazing densities.
- With regards to shore nesting birds that a replenished beach looks much like a natural beach and birds will utilise it even with tourists – the more normalised use of wire frame cages to protect shorebird nests (ringed plovers).
- There are no tides in the Baltic Sea! Storm surges within the UK esp. the North Sea can increase in intensity if combined with a high tide. Along the soft glacial coast of Poland, the major factor in coastal erosion is the severity of and track of a storm (depression) the randomness of where it hits the coast and the wind direction.
- AECS wise – payment is based on income forgone and does not cover positive conservation habitats in Wolinski islands. The areas of seasonally flooded grassland are excluded from payments – in a similar way areas of rocks and associated iris beds are excluded from payments in Scotland.

On a lighter cultural exchange side of things, we discovered: -

- Polish food that we tried included pierogi- Polish dumplings / potato pancakes / schnitzel / meringue cake / Dino and Tiky Taky sweets.
- Międzyzdroje town loves a flower statue!



**Meringue cake – before and after and Flowerpot Man!**

- Polish people are very generous with food and eat a lot of meat and cheese!
- Polish hosts love a Scottish gift especially NatureScot hats!
- We have discovered that 'Bison under the Apple Tree' is the best vodka drink (Bison grass vodka and apple juice).



- Our favourite restaurant was Carmen in Międzyzdroje. We especially liked the Pina Coladas, Hugo Prosecco cocktails and large Tyskie beers – all relatively cheap and obviously served cold after a long day in the field.
- Take home message - Poland is a friendly country with great biodiversity and would be a great place to visit again.

We all found talking to National Park staff really valuable and are grateful for the time they spent with us; **a special thanks to Magda and Marek for sharing your knowledge and deep love of your respective parks and their wildlife, issues and concerns.**

We would like to thank Erasmus+ for the opportunity to visit Poland and the amazing wildlife in the National Parks. We are grateful to the organising staff Seona and Libby from ARCH for their guidance and perseverance in ensuring that this delayed programme went ahead.



**Kazimierz accepting a gift of Scottish whiskey**

With a final thanks to our expert coastal guide, dedicated host and now our firm friend Kazimierz Rabski who tried his hardest to meet our demands over the week – thanks for all the organising, driving and ensuring things went smoothly and putting up with the sometimes questionable music!

**Report Prepared by Participants:-**

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**The Team**



## Trip Bird List

1. Greylag Goose	56. Coal Tit
2. Mute Swan	57. Marsh Tit
3. Common Shelduck	58. Willow Tit
4. Gadwall	59. Eurasian Blue Tit
5. Mallard	60. Great Tit
6. Eurasian Teal	61. Woodlark
7. Common Pochard	62. Eurasian Skylark
8. Tufted Duck	63. Bearded Tit
9. Common Goldeneye	64. Icterine Warbler
10. Red-breasted Merganser	65. Sedge Warbler
11. Common Pheasant	66. Marsh Warbler
12. Great Crested Grebe	67. Common Reed Warbler
13. Rock Dove	68. Great Reed Warbler
14. Stock Dove	69. Common Grasshopper Warbler
15. Common Woodpigeon	70. Sand Martin
16. Collared Dove	71. Barn Swallow
17. Common Cuckoo	72. Common House Martin
18. Common Swift	73. Wood Warbler
19. Eurasian Coot	74. Willow Warbler
20. Common Crane	75. Common Chiffchaff
21. Eurasian Oystercatcher	76. Eurasian Blackcap
22. Northern Lapwing	77. Garden Warbler
23. Common Ringed Plover	78. Barred Warbler
24. Eurasian Curlew	79. Lesser Whitethroat
25. Eurasian Woodcock	80. Common Whitethroat
26. Black-headed Gull	81. Goldcrest
27. Herring Gull	82. Eurasian Nuthatch
28. Great Black-backed Gull	83. Eurasian Wren
29. Common Tern	84. Common Starling
30. Sandwich Tern	85. Mistle Thrush
31. Black-throated Diver	86. Song Thrush
32. White Stork	87. Eurasian Blackbird
33. Great Cormorant	88. Spotted Flycatcher
34. Grey Heron	89. European Robin
35. Great White Egret	90. Red-breasted Flycatcher
36. Osprey	91. European Pied Flycatcher
37. Western Marsh Harrier	92. Common Redstart
38. Montagu's Harrier	93. Black Redstart
39. Red Kite	94. Whinchat
40. Black Kite	95. House Sparrow
41. White-tailed Eagle	96. Western Yellow Wagtail
42. Common Buzzard	97. White Wagtail
43. Great Spotted Woodpecker	98. Meadow Pipit
44. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	99. Tree Pipit
45. Eurasian Green Woodpecker	100. Common Chaffinch
46. Black Woodpecker	101. Hawfinch
47. Common Kestrel	102. Common Rosefinch
48. Eurasian Hobby	103. European Greenfinch
49. Eurasian Golden Oriole	104. Common Linnet
50. Red-backed Shrike	105. Common Crossbill
51. Eurasian Jay	106. European Goldfinch
52. Common Magpie	107. European Serin
53. Eurasian Jackdaw	108. Corn Bunting
54. Hooded Crow	109. Yellowhammer
55. Common Raven	110. Common Reed Bunting