



media release

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BELARUS SCIENTIST RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AWARD FOR HIS DEDICATION TO BIRD CONSERVATION

The future of mainland Europe's rarest songbird, the aquatic warbler, is looking brighter as a result of the work of a Belarusian scientist who has been awarded the prestigious Marsh Award for Bird Conservation.

The award will be presented to Dr Alexander Kozulin at an award ceremony tomorrow by Brian Marsh of the Marsh Christian Trust. HE Dr Alyksei Mazhukhou, Ambassador of the Republic of Belarus will be attending the presentation which will take place at the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus.

The aquatic warbler is a star species for Belarus. It features on the republic's national postage stamps and is the emblem of APB, the BirdLife International partner for Belarus, which has as one of its priorities furthering the conservation of this little striped brown bird.

In the last century, most wetlands where the aquatic warbler was breeding were drained, and it is now a globally threatened species. However, recent conservation work, led by Dr Kozulin, offers a brighter future as a result of very successful and

ongoing efforts to save the fen mires of Belarus which are the main breeding grounds of the aquatic warbler

The aquatic warbler passes through many countries across Europe and is an occasional visitor to southern England on its way to its wintering grounds in Africa. These countries (including Senegal) are signatories to a Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan setting out an ambitious research and conservation programme for the species. Belarus, for example, is going to restore 40,000 hectares of drained peatland habitat.

Receiving the award, Dr Kozulin said: "The story of the aquatic warbler is a nice example of how much can be achieved when people from different countries and organizations join together with one noble goal: to protect nature." Dr. Kozulin will also be launching the APB book Treasures of Belarusian Nature at the event tomorrow.

Brian Marsh, of the Marsh Christian Trust, said: "The Marsh Christian Trust are delighted that this award is being made in recognition of such outstanding work."

The RSPB has instigated and funded much of the current research and conservation work for the aquatic warbler. Alistair Gammell, Director, International Operations, at the RSPB said, "The RSPB has been working with many partners, including the Darwin Initiative, to support the work of Dr. Kozulin. As well as supporting this vital work in Belarus, we will be funding and carrying out projects that aim to discover more about the wintering sites of these elusive birds."

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For further information and to arrange an interview, please contact:

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Out of hours, please page: 07654 344078

Photographs

A high quality digital image of the aquatic warbler taken by Dr. Alexander Kozulin is available from Melanie Edmunds on request.

Editor's notes

1. Dr. Alexander Kozulin is Conservation Director of APB.
2. The Marsh Christian Trust was established in 1981 with the aim of providing long-term core funding to selected charities and for the last 22 years has been making modest grants to a broad spectrum of registered charities. The Marsh Award Scheme has emanated from the Trust's desire to acknowledge individuals and sometimes groups of people for their dedicated commitment in their chosen field. The Scheme was formed in 1987; there are now 14 Marsh Awards in existence run in association with many partner charities.
3. APB, Achova Ptushak Belarusi, is the Belarussian partner of BirdLife International: a global coalition of bird conservation organisations. APB was founded after the aquatic warbler, previously thought to be extinct in Belarus was rediscovered there in 1995 by a joint Belarussian/German expedition to the Belarussian wetlands. Further research and an ongoing Aquatic Warbler monitoring project (since 2002) revealed details on numbers and biology of the species. About 60% of the now nearly fully known world population lives in Belarus.
4. The RSPB is the UK partner of BirdLife International.
5. The aquatic warbler migrates up to twelve thousand kilometers from Eastern Europe to Sub-Saharan Africa. There are well under 20,000 singing males globally.
6. The Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler has been signed by ten range countries during a workshop in Minsk/Belarus in May 2003. The countries are: Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine and the UK.