The Danish IBA Caretakers network

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**Introduction**

Denmark is located in NW Europe at an important crossroad for migratory birds. The country consists of an archipelago of islands and the Jutland peninsula that separate the North from the Baltic Sea. The relief is rather flat and the landscapes are dominated by agricultural land, grasslands and remnant forest patches. In the SW of the country, the Wadensea (shared between Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands) is the largest natural tidal ecosystem in Europe and a check-point for millions of migratory birds on their way from the Arctic to West Africa. It is one of the most important stop-over sites for waterbirds along the northern part of the East Atlantic Flyway. Other wetlands and marine areas contribute to the high abundance of water birds and define special responsibility of Denmark to ensure their survival during migration and staging.

There are 128 IBAs in Denmark which cover 7% of the land mass of the country. Eight Marine IBAs in the Baltic and North Seas and Wadden Sea have also been established on 31,236 km². One hundred and thirteen IBAs in the country have been designated as Special Protected Areas (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive and as such they are integrated into the EU network of protected areas, Natura 2000.

Bird conservation in Denmark has a long history and DOF, the Danish BirdLife Partner, is one of the oldest nature conservation societies in Europe. Presently DOF is a medium-sized membership based NGO (ca. 14,000 members).

5 October 2009: I arrived in Denmark’s capital on a crisp autumn day. DOF’s office is at Vesterbrogade, a street in the extended centre of Copenhagen. By the time I reached it, the office was open and the staff was busy with their daily business. Thomas Vikstrøm, the National Coordinator of the DOF IBA Caretakers and my host for the next few days, was at his desk with a large pot of hot tea.

*Thomas Vikstrøm at his desk in DOF’s office. Photo: Boris Barov*
The Danish IBA Caretaker Project

In 2002 DOF, inspired by similar examples from the BirdLife Partnership, decided to establish a network of volunteers around each of their 128 IBAs. Their aim was to build a locally based network of skilled observers to help them in conserving those sites by delivering monitoring information about the IBAs. A second aim was to attract new volunteers and members to the organization with special attention to young people and women. The volunteers taking part in this network are called by the English term ‘IBA Caretakers’, as no suitable equivalent term was available in Danish.

A special project, the Danish IBA Caretaker Project was launched in 2003 to implement this vision. It was funded by the Danish Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation. The target for the first five years of the project was to reach 500 Caretakers. This target was achieved in the fourth year of the project. After reporting the success of the first five years, the funding contract was extended for another five years until 2013.

### The three main objectives of the Danish Caretaker project are:

1. **Monitoring** of selected bird species in the IBA’s and contribute to BirdLife objectives.

2. Improving the **conservation** of IBA’s in cooperation with landowners and authorities.

3. Raising the **public awareness** about conservation by:
   - Increasing the **number** and **involvement** of volunteers in conservation;
   - **informing** the public about the IBAs through publishing information on web sites, carrying out public excursions, through local newspapers, etc.

DOF did not start the establishment of this network from scratch. Two pillars of the project to build upon were two existing voluntary networks. The first pillar was the Society’s structure of 13 local branches, which later became the primary source of local coordinators for the new network. Each local branch was asked to provide one person to become a local coordinator for the Caretaker network. All but one branch did so. Their key task was to find and attract locally active people. The second pillar was the existing group of participants in the long established project for monitoring of threatened and rare breeding birds, which also comprised of locally active birdwatchers, acting as voluntary researchers and bird monitors. Thus monitoring of birds became the most important task for the IBA Caretakers.

The first stage of the IBA Caretaker project aimed to consolidate and reorganize the two existing networks, which formed the basis for the future national IBA Caretaker network.

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1 For explanations about the structure of the IBA Caretaker network and the different roles of the participating volunteers, refer to Section “Composition and profile of the Danish IBA Caretakers network”
By 2009, 812 volunteers were involved as local IBA Caretakers in the project - a network covering most of the Danish IBAs.

The project mainly focused on IBAs, but due to the favourable availability of local volunteers, it was possible to extend the coverage to a wider range of sites:

- **IBA’s recognized officially** under BirdLife’s internationally recognised criteria. In Denmark, IBAs are designated mainly for breeding and roosting species and very often these are waterbirds.

- **Potential IBA’s**, sites that apparently fulfil the international IBA criteria, but which were only recently recognized as such (mainly because of the improved knowledge provided by the Caretakers themselves). By the end of the project, it will be decided whether these sites should be officially proposed for IBAs.

- **Sites of local ornithological importance**, but having educational or other local value, including DOF’s own 20 nature reserves. This group also includes sites close to cities and newly restored wetlands, which are all very suitable for informing the public about birds and nature conservation.

**Volunteering for DOF**

Where did DOF’s success with mobilizing and retaining volunteers come from? First of all they take volunteers seriously. In fact, the number of dedicated and skilled volunteers is one of DOF’s unique selling points and they consider themselves the best in Denmark. Indeed, DOF may not be the largest membership based NGO in the country, but they are definitely the organisation with the biggest share of active volunteers. Around 10% of the DOF members (currently ca. 14,000) regularly volunteer for the organisation. This enormous contribution of free time, skills and commitment is gratefully acknowledged by the DOF staff and board. It was explicitly listed among the factors for the success of the Caretaker project by DOF’s Director, Jan Ejlsted.

Each volunteer that joins the IBA Caretaker Project is welcomed to the organisation by the project coordinator. They are asked to sign a kind of informal Caretaker contract, called “Mutual Expectations” which defines clearly the roles and responsibilities of both parties. In general, DOF
expect the Caretakers to become members too, to participate and involve others in their activities and to perform the specific tasks that they have agreed to take within the Caretaker project. According to Thomas, the IBA Caretakers expect that their bird observations will be used for the conservation of the sites they monitor. They are interested to take part in seminars and courses to improve their skills. DOF offers basic training for the specific tasks for its newly recruited volunteers. As volunteers become further involved, a lot of them are offered additional training opportunities. For example, many IBA Caretakers have taken basic IT training as part of their volunteering. That helps them maintain their IBA websites. Many volunteers expect that their out of pocket expenses made in relation to their tasks will get reimbursed. On the other hand, due to limited resources, DOF is only providing financial support for attendance to seminars and trainings to its members.

I asked all of the volunteers that I met during my visit to estimate how much time they spend in the field in their role as IBA Caretakers. The responses varied from just a few hours on weekends to 30 hours a week! What makes this commitment extraordinary is the fact that volunteers have shown remarkable reliability. Even if they only had a short time to contribute, they did it on a regular basis. This is perhaps, Thomas and I deliberated, one of the advantages of having mature age volunteers.

**Composition and profile of the Danish IBA Caretakers network**

The Danish IBA Caretakers network is primarily based on local groups, but presently some of the groups consist of only one permanent member. At the time of this review the network consisted of 812 persons organised in 148 local groups. About 2/3 of these groups were established as a direct result of the Caretaker Project, while the rest already existed in one form or another. For example, in 2008 the network of volunteers that served under the DOF Rare and Threatened Species Project became integrated into the Caretaker project, which now consists of both site and species Caretaker groups.

The majority of the group members live near the sites, but some of them travel as far as 60 to 100 kilometres in order to visit their site. Normally the groups grow around a permanent core of 2-3 individuals and a varying number of irregular members. Rather commonly, volunteers take part in more than one group.

Within each group, DOF assigns one site contact who serves as the primary contact for Thomas. Other members of the group act as additional “ordinary” group members, some of which could be responsible for particular sub-sites or localities within larger IBAs. Site contacts are the primary sources of data and local knowledge about their site. There is also a person responsible for the maintenance of the group’s web page. Other volunteer roles in larger groups include data processors, those responsible for conservation, and bird counters which all together form the “ordinary” group members.

The gender balance of the groups was not of particular interest to DOF in the beginning. However, with time they observed that the active participation of women might contribute to the more active social life of the groups, which would help to attract and retain members. On average, around 20% of the members of the groups are women. In fact, the particular reason that triggered the collection of gender statistics was initiated by a special request by one of the
board members of the Jensen Foundation, who wanted to know what measures are taken by DOF to ensure fair gender balance. Therefore, DOF is now able provide accurate statistics of the size and gender ratio of the Caretaker groups (Figure 1).

![Figure 2 Distribution, size and gender statistics of the Danish Caretaker groups (men – blue, women – red)](image)

**Participatory principles promoted by the Danish IBA Caretaker project:**

- Social aspects and teamwork are essential for the success of the groups.
- All participants are offered training in bird monitoring, basic nature policy and IT.
- Participants contribute according to their skills and receive support according to their needs.

DOF did not consider it important to maintain accurate statistics of the age structure of the Caretaker groups, although they estimated that on average the Caretakers are in their middle or late middle age. This corresponds largely to the profile of the average DOF member. They admit, that so far DOF is failing to attract and involve the young generation, as “it is commonly recognized in Denmark that it is next to impossible to engage young people in conservation”, Thomas commented. To some extent this apparent challenge has its positive side. Older people are often experienced birdwatchers who bring in substantial local knowledge and a long history of involvement with the particular sites. Another benefit is the larger amount of free time older participants are able to dedicate to the purpose of the network, as well as their financial stability. On numerous occasions DOF was able to compile important information for a long period (such as ornithological data, site history and threats) thanks to the fact that some of their Caretakers have been involved in local birdwatching and site action since the 1960’s.

Concerning the professional profile of the IBA Caretakers, Thomas had no ready answer. We decided to use one of the planned meetings with a site group to examine this question. We found that in a group of eight Caretakers we had a graphic designer, a retired labour unions employee, a librarian, a construction worker, a former aviation officer, a forester, a chemical
engineer and a refrigerator retailer and despite of our expectations ... not a single teacher! The myth that most of the NGO volunteers are somehow linked to the formal education system was immediately dismissed. The diversity of occupations was confirmed in all following meetings.

Methods of communication with the Caretaker network

The primary method of contacting the network used by Thomas is e-mail. 93% of the Caretakers have an e-mail address. The e-mail group is mostly used as a one way line – to dispatch updates, announcements and instructions for action. Between themselves, members of the local conservation groups use various methods of communication, mostly telephone. They use the outings and gatherings to exchange information about their site based work, share news and socialize.

Thomas does not know all 812 volunteers by name and face. He estimated that he personally knew at least 400 of them. To know everyone individually became more difficult especially after the large increase with 250 new members achieved in 2008. It is also not necessary, as the organizational structure is providing a more efficient way to reach the members. In fact, the existence of such a structure behind the Caretaker network is considered by DOF as one of the main strengths of their Caretakers. The other tool that greatly helps is the Internet. DOF has invested special efforts in developing the internet resources for their work.

Key resources of the Caretaker groups

DOFBasen is the main Internet tool provided by DOF to help monitor birds across Denmark. It is an online database of bird observations covering the entire country.

DOFBasen – integrated approach to bird data

• All bird observations are recorded in DOFBasen – BirdLife Denmark’s online web database for bird observations in Denmark
• The database went online in 2002 and now more than 1,000 active users add around 1,000,000 records per year (including chance records)
• Special IBA modules have been developed for processing the data gathered from IBAs
• There are 15,000 sites and growing, the whole country is covered. Most IBAs consist of several different DOFbase sites
DOFBasen offers essential services both to DOF and to any birder with interests in bird data, including the IBA Caretakers. A popular system captures large amounts of data (the total number of recorded observations for 2009 was 1,181,591) DOFbasen can be used for generating a representative and accurate snapshot of the birds of Denmark almost instantly. Such capability turned out to have multiple applications at national level such as evaluating the distribution and population size of many species or assessing the completeness of the network of SPAs for a given species (see examples under Conservation action).

Its reporting tools offer instant feedback to the users, who can easily see the contribution their observations are making to the ‘big picture’ of conserving birds in Denmark and beyond. All these general functions of the database are quite useful to the IBA Caretakers as well, as the system is enabled to distinguish data that comes from within an IBA. Thus, the site-based modules of the system are just a way of organizing the data according to the needs for IBA monitoring. They are not a separate dataset.

Therefore DOF has achieved an integrated approach to bird data collection and storage where the network of local Caretakers is one of the key sources and users of data. At the same time, they receive instant feedback and insight to conservation.

In addition to DOFBasen ideally each Caretaker group has access to the following resources:

1) **Map** of the IBA they take care of – a detailed map on their IBA website which can be printed for use in the field.

2) A **place to meet**/have coffee together after birding – Caretakers do not meet together very often, but they appreciate socializing after a day in the field. Although they need to organise this themselves, the cold and wet autumns and winters of Denmark are another reason why access to such facilities is important.

3) Each Caretaker supplies their own **binoculars, scope and vehicle**.

4) Normally there is one person in each group, the **site contact**, who is **responsible** for the **data** collection, management and reporting to DOF. He/she involves the group as much as possible in this work.
5) Each group member has their own **e-mail address** to receive communications from the group leader or from DOF.

6) The ability and enthusiasm of the **national coordinator to visit** each group about once a year is of great value to the group members and especially the local coordinators and site contacts. He is also available for e-mail contact as often as needed.

7) A **welcome document** called *Mutual expectations* – a document containing the basic information about the aims, objectives and tools within the IBA Caretaker project is sent to each Caretaker.

8) Access to **DOFBasen** – each Caretaker group website is directly linked to DOFbasen, so that all observations registered by the group appear on the national database.

9) Each group has a clear **task** and **focus**: these are normally the trigger bird species for which their IBA has been designated. What types of data to collect, what monitoring strategy to follow and how to report – these aspects are decided and agreed within each group and with DOF.

10) **Good local knowledge** of the issues around their site helps Caretakers to follow important processes and understand better what is going on at their site. This helps them to engage and be passionate about their work. It is a serious motivational factor that gives much higher chances of success and levels of commitment from the group.

11) Own **IBA Caretakers website** – each group has their own website, based on a DOF template, for which they are entirely responsible. This website is linked to DOFBasen in a way to allow exchange of data.

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**IBA Caretaker web sites - the Danish approach**

- Each Caretaker group has **access to a website**, where they can upload pictures, post news, give access descriptions etc.
- The content is **fully controlled by the volunteers** using CMS (Content Management System) by easy login on the website
- The template, maps and links to recent bird counts and websites with descriptions of the species relevant to the IBA are **maintained by the central project coordination**
- **More than 100 websites** have been activated so far with altogether more than 20,000 page views per month

**Example of an IBA-website** on [www.dofbasen.dk/IBA](http://www.dofbasen.dk/IBA) edited by a Caretaker group
Figure 3 Sample view of an IBA Caretaker website
The Caretaker network, although largely consisting of DOF members, is in fact independent from the system of local branches of the organisation. The Caretaker leaders are not always the same as the local branch leaders. Caretakers are managed as a functional network. Membership in DOF is encouraged, but is not mandatory. The leading approach to the network is based on encouraging local knowledge, a sense of responsibility, a common calendar of activities and participation. The key coordination services to the network are provided by the National Coordinator (Thomas). It probably won’t be possible to maintain this functional network without a National Coordinator. However, this is still a very cost effective investment. Good communication style and social skills are essential for the coordinator. So are his/her diplomacy, sensitivity to people’s concerns and ability to respond to their needs quickly.

Conservation action by the IBA Caretakers

The conservation background and objectives for each IBA first of all come from BirdLife’s IBA priorities and secondly from the responsible national authorities (as nearly all the IBAs are also Natura 2000 sites) and from the conservation department of DOF. Thus, the Caretakers contribute to the official conservation objectives for each site; they supplement this with their own local priorities. Therefore, at each site, the Caretaker group has to be able to agree between them and with DOF on:

1) The three top threats to their site.
2) The three top conservation actions needed.

Both these ratings are displayed clearly at the website of the group (see Fig. 3).

IBA Caretakers themselves are not responsible for carrying out conservation actions. This is the responsibility of the site manager, such as the local forestry service or farmer. However, the information that the Caretakers provide through DOF feeds into the management of the site and often leads to changes in the way sites are being managed. Such examples were demonstrated at several of the sites that were visited during this trip. Moreover, some Caretaker groups themselves arrange hay mowing and similar activities at their site.

The IBA Caretaker project constitutes about 1/3 of the budget spent on conservation by DOF. In return, the Caretakers are DOF’s most important resource and source of local knowledge. They are the eyes, ears and mouths of DOF at the local level for each IBA. Thanks to the high quality data they collect and provide DOF has been able to play an active and effective role in the decision making process concerning the designation and management of the sites. Moreover, they enable DOF to be instantly updated in case of a threat or change arising at a site. Therefore, Caretakers are fundamental for the effective conservation impact that DOF makes at IBAs.

Achievements

From an organisational point of view, DOF is proud with its IBA Caretakers. They have clearly demonstrated:
• **Very high levels of engagement with the organisation** – Caretakers themselves have recruited hundreds of new volunteers to the groups. And locally based volunteers add to the unique strengths of DOF.

• **The development of the IBA Caretakers network has been a very self-motivating project** – it has reached a stage when there is no need to actively recruit people for the network anymore. New participants come along on their own, attracted by its success.

The project adds to the pride within the organization as a whole. The IBA Caretaker network has been promoted internally a great deal. It could be said that from all of the Caretakers I had the opportunity to meet everyone was eager to promote their work. This open minded approach was used by DOF to promote international cooperation with BirdLife Partners in other countries.

Some of the specific conservation success stories of the Danish IBA Caretakers are described in the site visit sections. There are two important achievements of the network as a whole, which are worth mentioning here:

**1 - Effective IBA Monitoring**

According to recent BirdLife data, Denmark is one of the two European countries which managed to monitor their IBAs and report them to BirdLife’s World Bird Data Base (WBDB). This achievement is entirely due to the IBA Caretakers project and the use of DOFbasen as a data collection tool. In fact, it is part of the mission of the Caretakers to collect and provide regular monitoring data and they do it with great success.

Here are two examples of the use of DOFbasen in IBA monitoring:

The occurrence of roosting Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) in August, 2009 in and outside Danish IBAs. 10 sites in Denmark qualify as IBAs for Mute Swan, and the species forms part of the basis of designation at 17 SPAs. The 1 % criterion, 2,500 individuals, was met at >3 IBAs/SPAs in this month only.
An example of monitoring cooperation and the use of DOFbasen by NERI\textsuperscript{2} to fulfil EU reporting demands. In this figure, information about the occurrence of Red-backed Shrike (\textit{Lanius collurio}) in the breeding season of 2009 in and outside Danish IBAs was needed. Two IBAs are qualifying because of breeding Red-backed Shrike, and it forms part of the basis of designation at 12 SPAs. The species was found in the breeding season at 47 IBAs/SPAs this year.

\textbf{2 - Status report of the IBAs in Denmark}

Thanks to the long term monitoring data available to DOF (reliable data for most of the IBAs in Denmark is available since the 1960s) and the continuous monitoring activities carried out with the help of Caretakers, DOF has managed to produce a pilot Status report for their IBAs. In late 2006, an internal midway evaluation report was made for the IBA Caretakers project. It covered 14 representative IBAs, one from each county, including different types of habitat.

The main purpose of the report was to estimate the efforts and time needed for gathering data on state, pressure and response indicators, assessing the data quality and to evaluate the methods developed by BirdLife International in preparation for the final project report. Data were gathered from four periods, in which DOF has organised major bird-site surveys: 1960-75, 1978-81, 1992-96, and 2003-06.

\footnote{2 The National Environmental Research Institute (NERI) is the official body responsible for monitoring SPAs in Denmark}
The main findings of this Mid-term report were:

Comparing values of Pressure and Response from earlier IBA surveys with recent values is unreliable; it’s simply too hard to find out the degrees of variation in the responses and especially the pressure at the sites in former times. Thus, DOF concluded it was not very appropriate to compare these values over a long time period.

Favourable Reference Values: Until the Midway Report DOF has been using simply the highest population numbers known at each site as a point of ecological reference. Afterwards they realised that this doesn’t always work. So now DOF are using the numbers from the time of the implementation of the Birds Directive (around 1980), which is exactly the same approach as the one taken by the Danish government. Until now only a few attempts were made by DOF and the Danish MoE to carry out species- and site-specific studies to establish a well-considered FRV for each species at each site.

International cooperation by the Danish IBA Caretakers

So far, the international cooperation activities undertaken by DOF’s Caretaker network included three exchange visits to Indonesia, from Kenya, and to Canada. The Danish agency for International Aid (DANIDA) and the Jensen Foundation have financed these activities. DOF has been involved in DANIDA projects since the 1990s. Some of these projects have been related to establishment and support to LCGs and SSGs.

It has been very motivating for the DOF members to see themselves in an international BirdLife perspective. Thus the exchange visits with Indonesia and Kenya have contributed a lot to motivate the Caretakers by demonstrating the truly global character of BirdLife International. In Europe, DOF Caretakers have visited neighbouring Netherlands and a coordinated approach to the Waddensea has been promoted by the Danish, Dutch and German partners of BirdLife.
**Challenges and keys to the success**

When they started the IBA Caretaker project, DOF had a clear objective: to reach 500 volunteers in five years. They achieved it in about four years. So they started asking themselves: how much should the network grow without draining the organization's resources? How much would it cost to service such a large network without loosing focus and without spending a fortune on maintenance? How sustainable is the network?

DOF’s board had specific concerns which they raised. For example:

- Will the organizational set-up, role and responsibilities of the IBA Caretakers be clear and accepted by everybody in the organization?
- Isn’t there a risk of conflict between DOF’s branches and the IBA Caretakers network?
- People would become tired – how would DOF manage to maintain their interest?

With these concerns in mind, DOF carefully designed and adapted the project. To ensure the internal acceptance of the project by the volunteers and opinion makers in the organization, DOF made very clear their plans for the organizational arrangements. Discussions before the start of the project took place, until the agreement of everybody concerned was reached. One of the main approaches to the Caretakers was to integrate them as much as possible into the existing DOF branches. Thus the decision from the very start was to build the network by asking the branches to identify local coordinators and – if possible – site contacts.

The challenge of fatigue and drop offs by the Caretakers was also considered. In fact, it is a common problem to everyone working with people. The approach selected by DOF was to provide to the Caretakers the opportunity to share and exchange experiences and to motivate each other by maintaining their own web pages. A regular program for communication and meetings, trainings and exchange visits was built in the project. Despite all of this, DOF admit that it would be difficult to maintain interest forever. That is why they are looking beyond the end of the project in 2013. The ‘exit strategy’ they are preparing for is something they have tried successfully in the past. Constant rebranding and evolving of existing activities into new ones has helped integrate the former Rare birds network into the IBA Caretaker network. In the future, there will be a need to repeat the mapping of breeding birds to produce a new edition of the Danish Breeding Birds Atlas. DOF hope to use the current network for that purpose, while keeping also the site based nature of the Caretaker groups. Nothing is permanent in nature, neither are the nature conservation organizations. Evolution and change should be part of the strategy, rather than a threat or challenge.

One particular issue has become a challenge for the Caretakers. A few cases of conflict of interest have been reported between Caretakers and local civil servants. It has happened that the local Caretaker group included also a forest officer or environmental inspector among their members. On some occasions this has lead to attempts by such people to dominate or even exclude others from involvement in the group. The reason had been conflicting views about the management of a site. In such cases there is a need to separate the roles clearly. One approach to this is to increase the number of participants in that group, thus neutralizing the risks by ensuring ‘rule of the majority’.
Altogether, Jan Ejlsted, DOF’s Director, summarized the key ingredients of success for the Caretaker project like this:

**The three ingredients to the success of the Danish Caretaker project**
- Funding from the Jensen Foundation to allow for one full time staff to lead the project.
- Long history of voluntarism in DOF, two generations of voluntary birdwatchers.
- Clever design of the project, with delegated responsibilities and trust to people.

**Future of the Caretaker network**

The exit strategy planned by DOF includes the New Danish Breeding Bird Atlas. They see it as an opportunity to rebrand the IBA Caretakers network into a national bird mapping mechanism. The challenge will be to retain the site based interest among the local groups. That is why DOF has been considering reorganizing its local chapters around the sites thus merging them with Caretakers.

Transformation – constantly rebranding DOF’s activities – is a common approach of DOF to actually maintain permanent activities, such as monitoring, without risking people’s loss of interest.
Site visits

The Little Belt Caretaker group. Photo: Boris Barov
Programme

5-8 October 2009

Monday, Oct. 5
- 8:40: Arrival at Cph Airport
- 10-11: Meeting with Thomas Vikstrøm and introductions to DOF staff.
- 11-12:30: Interview with TV.
- 12:50: Departure by train from Cph Central Station
- 14:06: Pick-up at Odense Central Station by Kurt Holm, new site responsible Caretaker for IBA 47, Little Belt (the sea between Funen Island and Jutland)
- 16.30: Caretaker meeting at Skibelund Nature School with a brief information about Sølkær Meadows, a part of IBA 47, Little Belt. After this some birdwatching with the group.
- 18.00: Dinner with the group.
- 18.45: Start of Caretaker meeting.
- Departure with Kurt Holm; overnight stay in Odense at Hotel Windsor.

Tuesday, Oct. 6
- Breakfast and departure by train (9.00) from Hotel Windsor, Odense
- 14:30: Meeting in IBA 8, Gribskov Forest (largest forest of DK) with representatives of a local group p.t. reorganizing the hitherto very effective Caretaker group, Bjørn B. Henriksen, chair of the local DOF branch, and John Hansen, Caretaker coordinator of the same branch, the temporary site responsible Caretaker, Per Ekberg Pedersen, and Johannes Bang.
- Walk in the Gribskov forest with the group.
- Interviews with the Caretakers.
- Overnight stay at Hotel Axel near Cph Central Station and DOF.

Wednesday, Oct. 7
- 9.00: Meetings in the DOF Office with Jan Ejlsted (Director)
- Interviews: J.Ejlsted, Jørn L. Larsen (responsible for Greenland)
- 13.55: Departure by train from Cph Central Station to Farum (20 km Northwest)
- 15:00: Meeting at IBA 109, Lake Furesø (deepest lake of DK), with the site responsible Caretaker, Bo Kayser.
- Walk around the lake. Interviews.
- Return and overnight stay at Hotel Axel near Cph Central Station and DOF.

Thursday, Oct. 8
- 8:30: Meeting in the DOF Office with Michael Fink Jørgensen.
- 9:00: Departure by boat from Kastrup Harbour.
- 9:45: Meeting at IBA 110, Saltholm Island (between DK and Sweden) with the Caretaker, Michael Fink Jørgensen.
- 10:00-13:00 Walk around Saltholm Island with birdwatching and interviews.
- 14:00 at latest: Departure by boat from Saltholm.
- 14:45: By car from Kastrup Harbour to Cph Airport.
- 16:55: Departure from Cph Airport
**Solkær Meadows**

http://maps.google.com/maps?t=h&hl=en&ie=UTF8&ll=55.436464,9.637156&spn=0.024541,0.024548&z=14

**Site description**

The Solkær meadows are a sub-site of the IBA Little Belt (IBA 47), the adjacent sea strait separating mainland Jutland and the Island of Funen. Solkær consists of wet meadows and a fresh water lake, surrounded by agricultural land. The site has been the subject of a habitat restoration project, aiming to create a nutrient trap for the effluent waters of the surrounding farming landscape. This measure was undertaken by Denmark as a measure to protect the nearby foraging habitats of Common Eider in the Little Belt.

**Conservation objectives**

Protect the foraging habitats of diving ducks in Little Belt and habitats of meadow birds.

**Caretaker tasks**

The local Caretaker group had been reorganized by the time of the visit, and the role of site contact was taken by Sten Nielsen, the Chair of the local DOF branch. In fact, a meeting to discuss the future priorities was held during my visit. Currently, about eight caretakers are involved in this group. One of their main tasks is to undertake coordinated counts of the diving ducks around the large IBA Little Belt, a task they are carrying out successfully, in coordination with two neighbouring DOF groups. Thanks to the internet and telephone, these counting teams very rarely meet each other, but this does not hinder their coordination.

![Overlooking the artificial wetland, Sten Nielsen and the caretakers combine a visit to the site with a nature walk and talk.](image-url)
Meeting of the Sølkær caretaker group at the Skibelund Nature School

The nutrient rich waters of the Little Belt provide suitable conditions for wintering diving ducks and other migratory water birds.
Saltholm Island
http://maps.google.com/maps?t=h&hl=en&ie=UTF8&ll=55.634077,12.759454&spn=0.048837,0.049095&z=13

Location:
The island of Saltholm is situated 4 km out in the Øresund off Copenhagen, between Denmark and Sweden. It can often be seen when flying in on the north landing approach to Copenhagen Airport. Saltholm has been inhabited down through the ages and today is privately owned and managed by a landowner cooperation, the Saltholm Ejerlaug, which acquired it from the state in 1873.

Protection/IBA Status:
Saltholm was appointed a Nature Reserve in 1983. The island and the surrounding sea, including the islet of Peberholm, is an EU Bird Protection Area and an EU Habitat Area, and qualifies as an IBA.

Important Birds:

Habitat:
Saltholm is practically untouched, and consists mainly of flat chalk coastal meadow. The island is no more than 3 m above sea level and often gets flooded during storms. Rainwater is retained in many pans, making it a rather wet environment to move about in. In the north and south-west
are the only two areas with any trees. Apart from the neighbouring island of Amager, this is the only place in Denmark where wild Blue Iris can be found. They bloom in June.

Pumped-up well water here is salty, and not drinkable for humans, but cattle can get used to it. Around 1000 head of cattle graze the vast meadows at present.

South of Saltholm is Peberholm, an artificial islet created from material dug up during construction of the bridge and tunnel across the Øresund during the period 1995-2000.

**Birds and other Wildlife:**
20,000 birds breed on Saltholm, and the island is also famous for its small colony of Grey and Common seals.


The island is often passed over by migrating birds on their way to and from Sweden, for example Crane can be seen in large flocks.

**Conservation objectives**

Protection of wetlands and coastal habitats, meadows and salt marshes, breeding colonies and foraging habitats of a large number of birds.

**Caretaker tasks**

Due to the specific accessibility regime, the island is relatively undisturbed by visitors. At the same time, monitoring activities can only take place in strictly organized visits. Therefore, the main task of the Copenhagen based caretaker group is regular surveys of the entire island, following a pre-determined route and count methodology.

**Visiting and Access:**

The various preservation orders mean that there are certain limitations for access to certain areas at certain times of the year (advertised through local signs). There is no public transport to Saltholm, so visitors must either sail over privately (it is requested to avoid mooring by the cattle boat on the small jetty at Barakkebro); or conversely, visitors can join the DOF tours to Saltholm arranged every spring and autumn. (See website for details, and book well in advance, as these tours are very popular.) Another possibility is to phone Allan Frederiksen who does private sailing trips on call: (0045) 32 51 81 39 or mobile 20 77 78 01.
6 Michael Fink Jörgensen and Thomas overlook the island.

7 The Saltholm island is a piece of wilderness among a conglomerate of airports, industry and two of the largest cities in Scandinavia – Copenhagen and Malmö.
Location:
The forest of Gribskov is situated north of Hillerød. It stretches 12 km northwards to Esbønderup and is 7 km across at its widest point between the lake of Esrum Sø in the east to the village of Bendstrup in the west. It is one of Denmark’s largest forests (6,000 ha), and the last remnant of the vast wilderness which covered Zealand in ancient times.

Protection/IBA Status:
Nearly the whole area is protected by the EU Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive. The IBA takes in a little more of the adjacent area in the south. There are several Nature Reserves in the area, including Strødam Reserve, Nørrevang at Gedevang, Bendstrup Common, Møllekrog and Stenholt Mølle.

Important Birds:
Habitat:
Gribskov is situated on a post-glacial system of moraine ridges running north to south, thus creating the east-west watershed. Between the long stretches of ridges are deep cuts in the landscape filled with lakes (Gribsø, St. Fønstrup Dam), bogs (Toggerup mose, Maglemose), ponds left after old peat diggings, and springs (Hvide Kilde, Fruekilde).

During the middle ages, ownership of the forests was shared between the Crown and the Church. However, after the Reformation the Crown claimed this area, and established part of it as hunting grounds. This is still evident in the star-shaped path systems in the south-east corner of the forest, and the grassy common between Esbønderup and Nødebo, which still exist to this day. Forestry did not become the top priority until the end of the 18th century, when the forest boundaries were marked out and proper forestry management was introduced.

Lately, drainage has been discontinued in several parts of the forest, allowing the old wetlands to reestablish themselves (Sandskredssø).

In the sandy soil on top of the ridges, Common Spruce thrives. In the lower regions, where the soil is more nutritious, the forest is characterised by Beech and Oak. In other areas deciduous trees - mainly Oak - have been planted instead of the former pine. The same is the case for the areas which suffered gravely in the 1981 hurricane, when every 6th tree fell. In some low-lying patches, remnants of old forestry practices with alder, ash and grazing have survived. Some of these (Toggerup Enghave, Odderdamsenge) are today fenced-in grazing areas.

Gribskov is still widely used for commercial forestry, and the area is of great value for sport and recreation due to its proximity to Copenhagen and the northerly suburbs.

Birds and other Wildlife:
In spite of considerable forestry and recreational activity in Gribskov, the sheer size of the location secures significant bird populations, such as raptors, Woodcock, Green Sandpiper, Stock Dove, Black Woodpecker, Red-backed Shrike and the Cormorant colony at Møllekrog. The impressive population of Goldeneye is due to a dedicated nesting box project. Other interesting breeding birds are Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Firecrest and Raven.

Conservation objectives
Gribskov forest maintains a great diversity of forest and meadow birds, which has been increasing lately, due to the opening up of the forest for grazing by livestock and by removing some of the drainage canals. The forest is also chosen to be the release site of a beaver reintroduction project in Denmark.

Caretaker tasks
The main tasks of the local caretaker group has been the study of bird diversity and their dynamics in relation to the management of the site. Each year, they provide maps of the breeding locations of target species to the forest management body in order to inform their actions. Thus they enrich the knowledge of the site managers and provide an important tool for
DOF to influence how the forest is managed. The caretakers have been in charge directly when a management plan for the most bird-rich part of the forest was developed.

Johannes Bang is one of the longest active DOF members from the area. He has been involved with the protection of the Gribskov forest since the 1960’s. Thanks to his and other members’ efforts, the forest has been saved on several occasions from logging and transformation to a golf course.

John Hansen, another caretaker group member, commented that the forest has become an important part of his life. He is visiting it almost every weekend with his family “It has become a way of life, rather than just a hobby. We are looking forward to our weekends, being able to spend our time in contact with nature”.

**Visiting and Access:**

Gribskov is a state forest and open to the public. Four folders about various parts of Gribskov are available and can be found at car parks adjacent to the forest, at the local libraries, or at the Forestry Office, Ostrupgård, Gillelejevej (on Route 227, running through the forest, approx 1 km from the west bank of Esrum lake). They can also be downloaded from the following internet sites:

- [www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Esrum](http://www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Esrum)
- [www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Gribsoe](http://www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Gribsoe)
- [www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Maarum](http://www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Maarum)
- [www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Gribskov](http://www.skovognatur.dk/Udgivelser/Vandretursfoldere/atilaa/Gribskov)

The whole forest is of interest for those in search of woodland birds.
Forest glens, grazed by cattle create diversity of habitats which brings together rare breeding species, such as the red-backed shrike *Lanius collurio*.
Location:
Vaserne is a boggy woodland area at the north-east corner of the lake of Furesø, north of the Copenhagen suburb of Holte.

Protection/IBA Status:
Vaserne is part of a much larger protected area comprising the two lakes of Furesø and Farum Sø. The whole area is an EU Bird Protection Area and an EU Habitat Area, and also qualifies as an international IBA. 14 ha of Vaserne's total area of 86 ha was acquired in 1999 by the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, who entrusted it to the Danish Ornithological Society’s Bird Protection Fund.

Important Birds (for the whole IBA comprising Vaserne, Furesø and Farum Sø):
Slavonian Grebe, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Goosander, Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Spotted Crake, Little Gull, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Common Tern, Black Tern, Kingfisher, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

Habitat:
The word "vase" means a causeway of branches and twigs, built across a bog. The area comprises alder swamp, willow scrub, water-logged peat holes, meadows and deciduous woodland. The area is a mosaic of biotopes offering optimum conditions for a varied flora and fauna.
Conservation objectives

Lake Furesø is one of the best studied lakes in Denmark with limnological research dating back over 120 years. It has undergone significant changes over the last five decades. Water quality has increased, as no more agricultural runoff is taking place and much more forest surrounds the wetland today. The water is clean but organic nitrogen and phosphorus pollution is still found in high concentrations on the lake bottom sediment. This ecosystem change has been followed by a change in the bird species composition and numbers. For example the Goosanders *Mergus merganser* have disappeared as breeding in the lake. In the same time many other species have increased. One exception is the tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* whose wintering numbers have stayed the same. Bo wonders why and looks for an answer in the results of the monitoring taking place in the frame of the current project. “It has become so much easier to compile data from across Denmark into representative figures, thanks to the network of caretakers and the use of web based tools”, he said, apparently satisfied with the way the project has changed Danish ornithology and conservation.

Birds and other Wildlife:

No less than 150 bird species have been seen in this locality. It is renowned for its many Thrush Nightingales, that breed in the willow scrub. At the edge of the meadows the Marsh Warbler can be heard - its song imitating a number of other birds heard in its wintering grounds in Africa.

Vaserne offers good opportunities for spotting passerines and other birds all year round, but a morning or evening trip in May or June can be especially rewarding, when large numbers of different warblers, Wrens, Robins, Thrush Nightingales, Pied Flycatchers and tits welcome the visitor. In the reed beds, the Water Rail can be heard, and out on the lake Great Crested Grebe and Cormorant are seen. With luck, one can spot an Osprey fishing in the lake in late summer. In October, the berry bushes can be full of flocks of thrushes, for example Blackbird, Fieldfare and Redwing.

Visiting and Access:

From Holte Station there is a 1 km walk to the entrance to Vaserne. Bus No 334 from Holte or Farum Stations runs to Fyrrebakken, where one alights at Vasevej. There is also a small car park here. Vaserne is criss-crossed by an extended system of paths, making it easy to get around. The Bird Protection Foundation has, with support from the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation and

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9 Bo Kayser, Site responsible Caretaker of Furesø Lake, member of the DOF Scientific board. How to make the IBA Caretaker’s contribution more “scientifically meaningful” is his motivation. He wants to see the results of the IBA Caretaker published and used.
the Danish Outdoor Council, established an Information and Exhibition Centre in the north-east corner of Vaserne.

There is an observation tower at the end of the Engsti path, and information posters about the Furesø lake and Vaserne at key points along the paths. From the tower there is a fine view over the lake where large flocks of ducks and other waterfowl are often seen.

10 Nature in Denmark is squeezed between urban areas, agriculture and infrastructure.

11 Thomas uses every possible opportunity to add a record to his list of observations.