

Project Update: June 2018

Fieldwork Spring, 2018

During the fieldwork of our project, we surveyed in detail altogether 10 reed beds that were suspected to be inhabited by the moustached warbler (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*) in northern Vojvodina (Serbia; Figure 1). Fieldwork begun at the beginning of April and lasted until mid-June 2018. Actually, we planned that fieldwork will be accomplished by end of May 2018 but because of the frequent adverse weather conditions, the fieldwork activities had to be extended by mid-June. In June 2018, breeding pairs, raised their second broods therefore the marking of adult individual was done with similar success as during May 2018. We spent altogether 37 days in field.

Most of the fieldwork was realised in the early morning hours. Besides the members of the project team, colleagues in the local and the rangers of the Palić-Ludas company helped us during the fieldwork. Mapping of territories were accomplished in April 2018. At Ludas Lake individuals were mostly captured with nests set up above water with help of canoes. In these cases, we attracted the individuals with a playback song of males. In the period when nestlings were fed, we used the method by cutting of the feeding routes of adults with mist nets near nests (Figure 2). In the breeding territory, we have taken habitat structure measurements, such as water depth, reed depth, reed height, proportion of main vegetation species.



Figure 1. Location of reed beds surveyed for breeding Moustached Warblers in northern Serbia.

We recorded altogether 14 breeding pairs of moustached warbler, which is far lower than we had been expecting. Twelve pairs were found at the Ludas Lake and two at the abandoned fishpond near Ridica. Our detailed survey suggested that previous surveys based on singing males were inaccurate. For example, besides the definite 14 breeding pairs, in April 2018 we recorded males holding

their territories by singing at the Bara Jezero near Stanišić; however these males disappeared at the end of April, and were never seen or recorded again. This suggests that although this species arrives early to the breeding grounds (March), a singing male in April may not necessarily be a breeding individual. After the mapping of singing males, we demonstrated the breeding status of 14 breeding pairs by observing nesting behaviour of parents, such as collecting and carrying nesting material, carrying food and/or the excrement of nestlings. During our fieldwork, we attempted to capture the breeding adult individuals. We colour ringed and took measurements of 16 individuals (Figure 2). Our measurements and observation suggest that moustached warblers highly accept non-managed reed patches or beds, with relatively high water level, and where the reed is interspersed with narrowleaf cattail (*Typha angustifolia*). All breeding territories were located near the edge of deeper water.



Left: Figure 2. Several mist net in the vicinity of Moustached Warbler territory cutting of the feeding route. Right: Figure 3. A colour marked Moustached.

The absence of this species in the other surveyed reed beds can be explained with various limiting factors. In case of large reed beds along the Veliki backi canal the species is absent because of large extent of reeds were not covered with water and because illegal saturation of the reed bed with building material of construction companies. Although the water availability was satisfied in the reed bed near Sonta, the illegal reed burn at the end of winter 2017 seems to be the main problem. In the reed bed near Svilojevo we also observed saturation of construction material in the reed bed. At Mirkovic Bara reed bed near Apatin we assume that the absence of reed edged near water and the absence of narrowleaf cattail among reeds may explain why no individuals breed here. At the abandoned Kolut fishpond inappropriate reed cut and water management are main causes for the absence of the moustached warbler. Although the reed bed near Gakovo seems to be suitable for the moustached warbler for some reason that we do not know the species avoided this location.

In the next project session, we plan to write in the electronic and printed media, in order to educate citizens. As soon as school begins in September 2018, we plan to arrange popular presentations and workshops for education purposes for pupils in schools. Printed material such as leaflets and posters will be also prepared. In October and November 2018, the autumn fieldwork will take place at the studied reed beds when we will create artificial nesting sites by using the existing reed vegetation.