

FIRST OFF-SHORE SITE BIRD MONITORING IN POLAND (DEBKI-BIAŁOGÓRA, 2002–2004)

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ABSTRACT

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Due to the presence along the Polish Baltic coast of migratory bird flyways from north-eastern European breeding grounds to wintering areas distributed on continental shelf waters of western and southwestern Europe, the area has been designated as a *NATURA 2000* site (PLB 990002). Therefore the site of a planned off-shore wind farm in this area requires monitoring as to its potential influence on birds. This was the first such monitoring performed in Poland. The expanse of water covered by the research included the planned location of the wind farm as well as adjacent areas. A series of 15 investigative cruises were undertaken from the beginning of October to the beginning of May. The period of observations was divided into five seasons: early autumn, late autumn, winter, early spring and late spring. The standard method of counting birds on transects in the form of strips reaching 300 m from the ship was used in the research, as well as the 'snapshot' technique (scan with bands transect with snapshot technique). Additional observations were made from a point on the shore.

In the study area maritime birds are present in low or moderate densities, with localized clusters. Two diving benthophagous species dominate: the Long-tailed Duck (58.9%) and the Velvet Scoter (34.3%). The next two commonest species have a share of over 1% within the community – the Common Scoter (3.2%) and the Herring Gull (2.4%). Other species are very uncommon. There is very high fluctuation in the number of birds both observed on the water surface and seen in the air. In the area studied no pronounced migratory passage of waterfowl was observed; the usual migratory flyways probably lie farther to the north and the birds observed in flight perform mainly local movements. Observed bird densities in the study area are considerably lower (52.0 ind./km²) than those estimated for the entire *NATURA 2000* area (116.7 ind./km²). In the area of the planned wind farm densities are even lower (36.1 ind./km², i.e. 31% of the *NATURA 2000* level), while densities in neighbouring areas are still below the *NATURA 2000* average.

In the subsequent administrative procedure the area was not accepted as the location of the planned wind farm.

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