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TECHNICAL INTERIM REPORT
Covering the project activities from 1.8.2005 to 31.12.2005

Reporting Date
28.2.2006

LIFE PROJECT NAME
Establishing Long-term Protection of *Crex crex* in Slovenia

Data Project

Project location	Slovenia: Ljubljansko barje, Cerknjsko jezero, Nanoščica
Project start date:	1.1.2004
Project end date:	31.12.2006
Total Project duration (in months)	36 months
Total budget	809.024 €
EC contribution:	606.768 €
(%) of total costs	75%
(%) of eligible costs	75%

Data Beneficiary

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Section 1: Introduction

Background to the project

Corncrake (*Crex crex*) is the only species of global conservation concern with a significant breeding population in Slovenia. In the last 15 years DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia has been monitoring between 400 and 590 calling males, an important number comparing to western and central European Corncrake populations. Similar to population trends in most of the EU countries the Slovenian Corncrake population is decreasing in numbers as well.

There are several reasons that explain the negative trend of the corncrake population in Slovenia, but almost all of the key threats are generated by agriculture. The Corncrake population depends on the existence of large areas mostly covered by extensive wet meadows that are generally sustained by low-input agricultural activities. Due to encroachment of high bushes, land abandonment (overgrowing) and farming intensification that includes early mowing dates and conversion of meadows to arable land the total size of Corncrake suitable habitat in Slovenia is decreasing rapidly. Additionally, the absence of proactive conservation measures on a national level, Corncrake unfriendly agricultural policy and relatively low knowledge about species and its conservation requirements among general public are those reasons that explain why the Corncrake population in Slovenia is endangered.

The European Union has developed several tools for farmland bird conservation through the Birds Directive. In Slovenia, most of them have not been developed and implemented yet. We found the accession of Slovenia to EU and the this LIFE project as an opportunity to influence environmental and agricultural policies in a way to transpose and implement efficiently the conservation tools from the Birds Directive.

Overall objectives

The main project objective is the preparation and creation of conservation tools for long term successful protection of Corncrake in Slovenia and speeding up the process of adoption of the European Union's Birds Directive into the Slovenian legislation.

To influence major threats to Corncrake on a ground level, the project aims at producing appropriate habitat management solutions and to educate local farmers and landowners about bird friendly habitat management.

Additionally, the project objective is to raise awareness about birds and other species of general public, local stakeholders and decision-makers on local and national level.

Actions and means involved

DOPPS will prepare the National Corncrake Action Plan as the first step to assure the long-term protection of this species through providing the framework for appropriate conservation steps in the future. Management guidelines for SPA qualification species for the 3 SPAs where project areas are located will be produced. Field actions will be undertaken in three project areas: Ljubljansko Barje, Cerknica Lake and Nanoščica River Basin. A minimum of 180 hectares of land will be leased or purchased for Corncrake protection purposes.

In Cerknica Lake area, the purchase and management of Corncrake breeding habitat is planned as the first phase of securing species' favorable conservation status in the whole area. In the Ljubljansko Barje project area, a small reserve will be established and used as a promotional and educational tool for *Crex crex* and Natura 2000 issues.

Ljubljansko barje and Nanoščica project areas will be used as demonstration sites for further education of farmers and local landowners about *Crex crex* friendly agricultural practices and as testing grounds for management solutions. Educational / public awareness activities include organization of workshops for farmers, local landowners and Slovene farming advisory service.

Machinery for extensive grassland management in all three project areas will be purchased.

DOPPS will also promote and encourage policies, at the national and local levels, that benefit *Crex crex* by lobbying the responsible ministry or municipal officials.

Monitoring of species will be performed on annual basis. The results of monitoring will be used to revise and amend the National Action Plan, if needed. All actions undertaken within this project will be supported by promotion activities with the aim to raise the awareness of general public in Slovenia.

Expected results

Based on a DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia proposal the Ministry of the Environment will designate the three project areas that are subject to this project as SPAs (Natura 2000). The project will result in management guidelines that will serve as a basis for the preparation of management plans for the project areas and subsequently for all other SPAs in Slovenia that are important for wet extensive grassland habitats. An increased up-take of current bird friendly agri-environmental measures by minimum of 15% will be achieved through educational and promotional project activities. Local stakeholders, decision makers as well as general public will become subject of a raised awareness about *Crex crex*. On a national level the project will result in changes of agriculture policy through encouraging the subsidizing of bird-friendly management in future SPAs.

At the end of the project, a minimum size of 180 hectares of *Crex crex* breeding habitat in three project areas will be managed actively according to management guidelines. The established monitoring system will result in overall insight to the conservation status of the species throughout the whole country. Project will build the capacity to provide suitable solutions for threats to *Crex crex* and other grassland habitat species that could turn up in other important bird areas in the future.

Section 2: Summary

Summary of activities during the report period

A. Preparatory actions

A1) The second draft of the National Corncrake Action Plan has been prepared and distributed to the most important stake-holders for review.

A2) The Habitat Study has been completed, data analysed and report prepared. The mowing experiment has been carried out and the recommendations for bird-friendly mowing elaborated.

A3) The workshop with flora and fauna experts were carried out as well as a range of preparation activities needed to examine the locations for the water body. Upon the results, showing that the remaining location B is not suitable for the creation of the water body and potential negative socio-economic impacts, we started the revision of the reasonableness of the water body creation. In the beginning of 2006, the common decision was made to propose the Commission that this activity should be excluded from the project.

B. Land lease and purchase

B1) New possibilities were found to increase the surface of land leased to the foreseen 41,1 ha.

B2) The parcels covering 4,11 ha have been recorded as DOPPS property. Purchasing procedure for additional 1,19 ha of land is in progress. For purchasing remaining 2,8 ha we continued the negotiations with potential sellers.

B3) 22,83 ha of land from 7 land owners are in contract signing phase of the land purchase procedure, carried out by the Municipality of Cerknica. Purchasing activities for further 57 hectares are in progress.

C. Non recurring management

C1) 28,8 ha of wet grassland in Ljubljansko barje project area has been mowed in Corncrake friendly way: 16,9 ha by DOPPS and 11,9 ha by local farmers with the project team assistance. Due to high ground water levels because of rain approx. 15,0 ha remained unmanaged.

C2) 19,5 ha of the Corncrake habitat has been mowed by Mr. Otoničar in Nanoščica project area. The remaining area could not be mowed due to high ground water level. Mowing was not possible in Cerknica Lake too, as the area has been flooded throughout summer and autumn period.

D. Recurring management

D1) The shredder has been purchased for the habitat management activities.

E. Public awareness and dissemination of results

E1) Large number of meetings and contacts were performed to encourage and promote policies at national and local level that benefit Corncrake and aim to encourage legal protection of key sites. The integration into the work of Ministry of Agriculture resulted in many positive results, including the grassland management scheme (HAB) remain open for new contractors in 2006.

E2) Upon all the previous activities, the uptake of the agri-environmental measure for grassland birds (HAB) has increased for approx. 250%. Many promotional and educational activities have been carried out.

E4, E5) Under this actions, which aim to inform and educate local people, local politicians and general public about Corncrake and its protection, we carried out 3 lectures and published over 20 articles in both national and local media and DOPPS magazine Svet ptic.

E7) The preparation of dynamic web application is in progress.

F. Overall project operation

F1) We carried out all necessary planning and organising activities to carry out project successfully. Meetings and personal communication of project team was regular.

F2) The Corncrake monitoring report for 2004 and 2005 has been prepared.

Table of identifiable products and milestones

<i>Identifiable products / milestones</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Date of completion</i>
National <i>Crex crex</i> Action plan – draft version	A1	31.10.2004	31.10.2004
National <i>Crex crex</i> Action plan – 2 nd draft version	A1	31.12.2005	23.12.2005
National <i>Crex crex</i> Action plan – reviewed and updated version	A1	31.12.2006	
Biodiversity Action Plan with <i>Crex crex</i> Action plan included adopted by the state authorities	A1	after the end of the project	in progress
Study on suitable habitats for <i>Crex crex</i>	A2	31.12.2005	23.12.2005
Management guidelines for SPA qualification species	A2	31.12.2006	in progress
Spatial plan for Ljubljansko Barje reserve	A3	30.9.2005	in progress
Technical documentation and evaluation of incidence for Ljubljansko Barje reserve prepared	A3	30.4.2006	in progress
Management plan for Ljubljansko Barje reserve	A4	31.12.2006	
Land in Ljubljansko Barje project area leased	B1	31.12.2004	
Land in Ljubljansko Barje project area purchased	B2	30.6.2006	in progress
Land in Cerknica Lake project area purchased	B3	31.12.2006	in progress
Land in Nanošćica project area leased	B4	cancelled	cancelled
Habitat creation field work in Ljubljansko Barje project area finished	C1	31.12.2006	delayed
Land in Ljubljansko Barje, Cerknica Lake and Nanošćica project area mowed, afforestation eliminated	C2	31.12.2006	in progress
Visitor infrastructure in Ljubljansko Barje reserve set-up	C3	31.3.2006	
Designation of 3 project areas (currently IBAs) as Natura 2000 sites	E1	30.4.2004	30.4.2004
Contacts with farming advisors, local authorities and owners of major land parcels established in all pr. areas	E2	31.12.2004	31.12.2004
10 articles published in agricultural magazines	E2	31.12.2006	in progress
Brochure on <i>Crex crex</i> and proper grassland management	E3	31.12.2006	
Leaflet presenting LIFE Natura III, this project, <i>Crex crex</i> and project areas and project goals	E4	30.6.2004	30.6.2004
6 articles published in national magazines	E4	31.12.2006	31.12.2004
3 articles published in DOPPS magazine	E4	31.12.2006	30.6.2005
Coloring booklet for children presenting <i>Crex crex</i>	E5	31.10.2004	31.10.2004
At least 10 articles published in local media	E5	31.12.2006	31.7.2005
Leaflet published for reserve promotion	E6	31.12.2005	delayed
WEB site	E7	31.10.2004	31.10.2004
<i>Crex crex</i> monitoring report for 2004	F2	31.12.2004	26.10.2004
<i>Crex crex</i> monitoring report for 2005	F2	31.12.2005	15.11.2005
Final <i>Crex crex</i> monitoring report	F2	31.12.2006	
Progress report (1.1.2004 – 31.12.2004)		28.2.2005	28.2.2005
Interim report (1.1.2005 – 31.12.2005)		28.2.2006	22.9.2005, 28.2.2006
Final report (1.1.2004 – 31.12.2006)		31.3.2007	

Consolidated table of results since start of the project

Threat n°/name (ref. Form 11 or 13)	Actions (A1, B1,...)	Expected results (quantified if possible)
1. Land abandonment	A3, B1 - B4, C1, C2, D1 B3, C2	- 73,8 ha of <i>Crex crex</i> habitats actively managed, threats arising from land abandonment abolished - Through clear commitment of Municipality of Cerknica, the land in <i>Crex crex</i> breeding area inside the pSPA will be further purchased and actively managed after the project termination and threat abolished in the whole area
2. Intensification of agriculture	A3, B1, B2, C1 E1 E2	- Intensification of agriculture and draining in Ljubljansko Barje project area abolished - Changes in agriculture policies, subsidizing bird-friendly measures in future SPAs achieved – assured for 2006 with successful lobbying, the grassland management scheme (HAB) remains open for new contractors - Increased up-take of agri-environment measures by 250% was achieved in 2005 comparing to 2004
3. Ineffective protection of species and key sites on national level	A1 A2, E1 C3, E1, E6	- Effective protection of <i>Crex crex</i> and its key sites encouraged - Basis for prevention of any <i>Crex crex</i> harmful land use were established through designation of SPAs in April 2004 - Designation of Ljubljansko Barje Landscape Park strongly supported by the beneficiary
4. Agriculture policy unfriendly to low input agricultural systems	E1 E2 – E8	- Changes in agriculture policies, subsidizing bird-friendly measures in future SPAs encouraged through the involvement of the project staff into the preparation of the strategic documents in Rural Development for the next EU Financial Perspective 2007-13 - Positive effects from raised public awareness on all levels – support for the agriculture policies changes gained
5. Low public knowledge and awareness	A3, B1 – B4, C1 - C3 E2 E1 – E8	- Knowledge of farmers, land owners, farming advisors and local authorities on <i>Crex crex</i> friendly management improved upon educational and demonstration functions of 3 project areas - Increased awareness and participation in the Slovene Agri-Environment Program by farmers and other land owners (250%) - Awareness on <i>Crex crex</i> issues among local stakeholders, decision-makers and general public has been significantly increased
All threats	A1, A2 B2, B3 F2	- All threats to <i>Crex crex</i> being analyzed, suitable measures identified to abolish them - 58,46 hectares of land purchased and permanently assigned to nature conservation - Intensity and trends of existing and new threats monitored, resulting in overall insight to <i>Crex crex</i> conservation status in the whole country

Problems and difficulties

As already reported in our previous Interim report, we are facing a number of problems and difficulties. This could be expected, as with this project we are encroaching on the completely new field of nature conservation organisations' activities in Slovenia. We are able to handle most of them and are source of valuable experience and capacity building.

Major problem in the report period was still the feasibility of water body creation in Ljubljansko barje project area under actions A3-C1-C3. There were several problems which are described in detail under action A3. This led us to the revision of the reasonableness of this action and after taking all the aspect into account, the decision was made to completely exclude this activity from the project and to propose this to the Commission. Therefore we plan to prepare a Modification Request in the next few monts.

Another problem is connected with land purchasing at Ljubljansko barje project area (B2), which is extremely complicated and time consuming. Problem is causing large delays in land purchase, but will be completed before foreseen end of the project.

There are other lesser scale problems and difficulties which are presented and discussed under several other actions, but due to the minor scale here do not need special attention.

Section 3: Detailed report of activities

A1 – Production of national *Crex crex* Species action plan

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
A1 Production of national <i>Crex crex</i> action plan					■	■	■	■	■	■		■				

Actions foreseen in the report period

The foreseen actions include:

- the preparation of the second draft of the national Corncrake Action Plan and
- its distribution to all relevant stakeholders, e.g. to environmental and agricultural ministries, Institute for Nature Conservation, to local municipalities etc.

The production of the second draft has not been originally foreseen in the project proposal. It's a minor change upon the decision of the beneficiary and improvement of the project.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

The second draft of the Species Action Plan (SAP) was prepared in December 2005 by two members of project team - Luka Božič and Andrej Medved. Comparing to the first, the second draft includes the following improvements:

- all the new findings of the project research and management testing activities in 2005;
- the comments supplied by Corncrake expert M.Sc. Slavko Polak and some other scientists who were contacted to and clarify certain issues;
- and the full list of sites in Slovenia where Corncrake occurs as requested by the Commission.

The second draft of the SAP has been distributed to the following institutions: all responsible or interested sectors of the Ministry of the Environment (Nature, SEA, Waters), Agency for the Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, Slovenian Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry, involved Farming Advisors' Services, local authorities and project partners. The distribution was carried out in the beginning of 2006. The second draft of the Corncrake SAP is annexed to this report as a separate elaborate (Annex 1).

The project includes the commitment of the Ministry of the Environment to approve and implement the Corncrake SAP as part of national Biodiversity Action Plan. This document is being prepared at the moment, including also the Management Program for Natura 2000 sites and the responsible officials from the ministry confirmed that the Corncrake SAP draft is being included into the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Variations, complications and delays

All the foreseen activities were carried out completely within the planned timescale. No variations, complications or delays occurred.

A2 – Management guidelines for SPA qualification species in 3 SPAs

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
A2 Mgmt. guidelines for SPA qualification species in 3 SPAs						■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in the report period

The foreseen actions include:

- Completion of mowing experiment, including the analysis of different techniques summarized in report with abstract in English and implementation of livestock loading (grazing) experiment;
- completion of Corncrake habitat requirements study (The habitat study), including the preparation of the report with abstract in English;
- Draft management guidelines.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

The preparation of management guidelines is a project-long activity. The final guidelines will be elaborated based on the Habitat study (Vegetation structure survey, Floristic survey) analysis and some additional experiments. During the project the LIFE project team has come out with a conclusion that different mowing techniques and livestock loadings should be tested on wet extensive grasslands to get enough information about the most suitable Corncrake habitat management. The final management guidelines for project areas will be elaborated in autumn 2006.

The Corncrake Habitat Requirements Study (Habitat Study)

Upon the field-work carried out in 2004 and 2005, all the necessary data has been gathered to assess the Corncrake habitat requirements. The data was analysed by project staff, including two conservation ornithologists – Luka Božič and dr. Primož Kmecl, who started to work for DOPPS in December 2005. He has become involved in the project implementation a few months earlier on the volunteer basis.

The report of the Habitat Study has been prepared in December 2005. The report is annexed to this Interim report as a separate elaborate (Annex 2), including the abstract in English, which is enclosed at the end of this the report.

The Mowing Experiment

In the period between August and October 2005, the project team performed the mowing experiment in the Ljubljansko barje project area. Three different mowing techniques have been tested on the ground to get information about most suitable grasslands habitat management. This action represents an extension of Action C.1 where we have foreseen that “*some of the project area will be used as ground for testing the optimal management techniques*”.

The results of the Mowing Experiment are described in the brief report, which is annexed to this Interim report as a separate volume (Annex 3), including the abstract in English, which is enclosed at the end of this the report.

The Livestock Loading (Grazing) Experiment

Testing of different livestock loadings on wet extensive grasslands was planned to be carried out in Ljubljansko barje project area in September and October 2005. The experiment has been prepared

in cooperation with local farmers and with technical assistance of dr. Matej Vidrih from the University of Ljubljana – Department of Agronomy. The purpose of the experiment is to measure and evaluate long-term impact of different livestock loadings on the Corncrake habitat (vegetation structure, floristic composition etc.). The project team was planning to take experimental plots (each plot of an approx. 1,0 ha size) with 10 LU/ha, 5 LU/ha and 2 LU/ha.

Due to unfavourable weather conditions (high water levels in Ljubljansko Barje project area) the experiment could not be performed in autumn 2005. Since this experiment has come out of an extreme significance for the preparation of the management guidelines, the project team is planning to perform the experiment in autumn 2006. Nevertheless, we cannot guarantee its implementation in 2006 due to weather unpredictability.

Draft management guidelines

The project team has started to produce the draft management guidelines based on the knowledge and experience earned during this project to indicate key points in corncrake habitat management. General recommendations for Corncrake habitat management are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of general recommendations for Corncrake habitat management.

Ecological objective	Description
No new drainage systems	Prohibition of new drainage systems establishment and limited renewal of existing drainage channels
	Compulsory application of SEA / EIA to eventual new drainage systems projects
Existing drainage channels management	Bird friendly management outside breeding season (alternate cleaning of channels and channel sides)
	Management of vegetation along channels
Low input agriculture	No use of fertilizers and other chemicals
	Extensive grazing in late season (late grazing after middle August) with limited livestock load
Wet grassland conservation and restoration	Maintenance of extensive grasslands (at least one mowing every two years) to prevent overgrowing
	Conversion from arable land to wet grassland in core areas
Wet grassland conservation and restoration	3 – 5 metres wide ungrazed refuge strips are left across pasture exceeding 5 ha during the breeding season (depends on the shape of pasture)
	Field grassland margins at least 3 – 5 metres wide are left where suitable
	Maintenance of other landscape elements on wet grasslands (diameter of solitary bushes between 3 – 15 metres covering 1 – 3 % of total grassland parcel)
	Late mowing not before 1 st August in core areas / not before 15 th July outside core areas)
	Bird friendly type of mowing (from the centre of the parcel to both sides)
Other	Temporary fencing for grazing management

Variations, complications and delays

The mowing and grazing experiments have been added as additional activities to this action. The purpose of both is to investigate in details the most suitable management of wet extensive grasslands from the perspective of local farmers. The results of experiments are used as valuable information within activities under Action E.1 especially within the process of modeling new

Corncrake friendly agri – environmental tools at the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Food. This variation is not significant in terms of additional costs borne by the project and is most positively affecting the results of the project.

The action hasn't been a subject to any significant complications and delays, except for the implementation of the Grazing experiment which had to be postponed to 2006 due to unpredictable weather conditions as described above.

A3 – Technical documentation, permits and management plan for Ljubljansko barje project area

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
A3 Lj. Barje Reserve documentation		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in the report period

In Ljubljansko barje project area, the creation of small nature reserve with visitor infrastructure has been foreseen under actions C1 and C3. The creation of the reserve should include creation of water surface and habitats for various flora and fauna species. The preparation activities, as planned under A3 should be carried out in 2004, but were delayed due to the fact, that the area originally planned as the location of water body has been found unsuitable for the purpose as well as all the alternatives, explored by the project team later on. Upon the new time-planning, presented in the previous Interim Report and recent correspondence, the following activities should be carried out in the report period to allow the obtaining of the permits for the creation of water body in spring 2006:

- workshop with flora and fauna experts organised to harmonize their views and to determine the measures to ensure appropriate habitats for the various flora and fauna species, including the water surface;
- preparation of a simple “spatial plan” of habitats and organization of the visitor infrastructure;
- the preparation of technical specifications for the water body creation; and
- evaluation of incidence prepared to evaluate the impact of the new habitats and visitor infrastructure on the Natura 2000 site.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

In the report period, we continued to gather the information and to explore technical possibilities mainly for the creation of the foreseen water body at the potential location marked as B in the previous Interim Report, including the preparation of the draft concept for the creation of water body habitats and other planned micro-habitats. The main activities were as follows:

- On 8.9.2005 we carried out the workshop with flora and fauna experts (dr. Kaligarič – botanist, Mr. Bedjanič – dragonflies, Mrs. Pobjlšaj – amphibians and Mrs. Škvarč – butterflies) at possible locations for creation the water body to harmonize their views and to determine the measures to ensure appropriate habitats for the various flora and fauna species. The main result of the workshop was the conclusion that the restoration of old Iška riverbed (marked as location C in our previous Interim Report) is not convenient, due to the extremely high biodiversity in this part of the project area. Molinion caerulea meadows are of big conservation importance, also as the habitat of globally threatened butterfly *Coenonympha oedippus*. The population of *Coenonympha oedippus* in project area is probably the biggest in Ljubljansko barje and most probably also in Slovenia, due to the fact that the most important habitat of his butterfly has recently been destroyed in the south-eastern part of Ljubljansko barje. Therefore the conserving of this habitat

in our project area has even bigger importance. The experts were generally in favour of the creation of water body, though it became clear that no new Natura 2000 habitats or species can be expected. The expertise on amphibians has been paid to the experts, in the amount of 233,01 EUR.

- We hired company "Inženiring za vode d.o.o.", which carried out geodetic measurements at the possible location B of the water body in October, necessary for checking of the suitability of the location and for further technical specifications (1.165,07 EUR).
- Our warden Željko Šalamun continued to carry out ground water level measurements at three places at location B and with water level measurement in adjacent water channel. Due to the fact, that the year was extremely rainy, the channels had standing water all summer long. However, upon the data gathered from the local farmers and water authorities, the channel where location B has been foreseen is completely dry during the "normal" summers with average quantity of rain.
- In October we met with Mr. Aleš Krnec from the Fund of Farming Land and Forests of Republic of Slovenia, who is the land-owner of the parcels we lease at the Ljubljansko Barje project area, to discuss their view on foreseen water body creation at the location B and to apply for their agreement. His opinion was generally positive though he exposed the potential problem of similar developments in Ljubljansko barje SPA, which would not be nature-friendly and would be hard to control.
- In December we organised meeting with M.Sc. Ana Petkovšek (Faculty for Civil and Geodetic Engineering); at this meeting we discussed the technical data gathered for water body location: geodesic data and data on ground water level. Her estimation was that the creation of water body in location B is technically possible, but she presented a range of technical measures necessary for functioning of the water body. Those include the placing of the plastic foil beneath the bottom of the water body to hold the water (the soil at this locations is not watertight), pumping the water into the water body in the dry periods, which would require the pump with larger capacity as planned and concrete sluice system to enable the water level control. Those solutions were not convenient for nature reserve and would also exceed the financial frame of this project.
- At several occasions, we have discussed the creation of the water body with the representatives of the local Municipality of Ig. They have shared the view of the Fund, that the creation of water body could be a very bad example to the local initiators of small-scale investments, particularly the fish ponds and would encourage such developments, which are hard to control.

Due to the fact, that most of the results of the activities carried out showed that location B is not suitable for the water body creation and that we gained new information about potential negative socio-economic impacts of this action, we have decided to revise the reasonableness of the creation of the water body as proposed under action C1, which also influences some of the A3 activities. The revision included all the aspects, including the objectives of the reserve, water body itself, expected results of the action, summarizing of the foreseen incidence of every location of water body to the Natura 2000 habitats and species and considering also socio-economic context and technical aspects. The internal revision process started in December 2005 and though the majority of the decisions have been made in the beginning of 2006 together with the stake-holders, we wish to summarize the decisions, also according to the fact that they have already been presented in our letter from 20.2.2006. They bring additional variations to action A3 as described below.

Variations, complications and delays

The result of the revision is the consensus taken by all of the stake-holders that the creation of the water body should be excluded completely from the project.

The decision has been taken upon the following facts:

1. Conservation issues:

Scientific data in our project proposal and the research work carried out in 2004-05 as part of this LIFE project demonstrate very high biodiversity in Ljubljansko barje project area. Upon the expert evaluations, we can conclude that the water body with standing water is not a habitat necessary for any of the existing or potential conservation important species of birds, reptiles, invertebrates etc. As a biotope, the water body does not contribute significantly to higher biodiversity of the Ljubljansko barje project area. Upon the estimation of our conservation ornithologists, small populations of 3 bird species could be attracted to breed in the water body habitats, including Little Grebe, Moorhen and Great Reed Warbler, non of them being a conservation priority in this part of SPA Ljubljansko barje. Other Natura 2000 qualification species, for example dragonflies, are not dependent on standing waters – their habitats mostly include rivers and channels with running water.

Our most important conservation priorities in the Ljubljansko barje project area include Corncrake and Eurasian Curlew and their habitats, as well as Molinion caerulea meadows, also a habitat of globally threatened butterfly *Coenonympha oedippus*. According to the currently available data, the population of *Coenonympha oedippus* in project area is the biggest in Ljubljansko barje and most probably also in Slovenia.

To summarize the main points from the project application, the main objectives for the creation of the water body within the reserve were as follows:

-to assure the species heterogeneity in the area through constructing and maintaining the micro-habitats for other flora and fauna species, supporting as many Natura 2000 habitats and species as possible and

-to maximise the promotional and educational function of Ljubljansko barje project area through on-site Natura 2000 promotion aiming to raise public knowledge and awareness.

As explained in the previous text, with the creation of water body we cannot further increase the Natura 2000 habitats and species diversity in the project area which, on the other hand, is already very high. The water body placed in the reserve could on principle contribute to the promotional and educational function, but the new socio-economic circumstances helped us understand that we have to be very cautious as this is not necessarily true (see Socio-economic context for details). On the other hand, the expected wildlife of the water body, particularly the birds would not contribute significantly towards maximising the educational function of the project area due to their secretive way of life.

2. Socio-economic context:

With the implementation of this project, DOPPS has become a stake-holder in the development planning process of the area, particularly in the Municipality of Ig. Gradually we became much more familiar with new small-scale private development initiatives of the local people. Some of them include the creation of the water bodies with different aims: fish ponds or tourism attractions based on creation of historic moor villages, including crannogs. Most of them are not acceptable from conservation or spatial planning point of view.

With the creation of the water body, though with conservation aims, we could therefore create very bad example which would encourage such initiatives. We don't expect people to understand the difference in objectives and as we are not sure that such small-scale investments will be subject of EIA. If not, they could be very hard to control. Our position is not to encourage such developments and this is one of the reasons for omitting of the water body, strongly supported by the local municipality as well.

3. Technical problems:

The technical aspects of the creation of the water body have brought many problems. For the first 3 potential locations, those were presented in the Interim Report as well as in previous correspondence. The remaining location (marked as B in our Interim Report), proved to be unsuitable due to lack of water in the drier periods. This solution has foreseen the creation of the water body around the existing channel, which had standing water all summer in 2005, but only due to the fact that the weather was extremely rainy. Upon the additional information gathered (from local people, responsible water authorities), this channel is not supplying the minimal water levels in dry years. Therefore the existence of the water body would strongly depend on the use of water pump. Much stronger pump would be needed as foreseen in the project proposal (the

originally foreseen function of the water pump was to additionally drain water off in the rainy periods). This solution requests too much technical equipment and is too artificial, which is not fitting into the context of nature reserve.

As evident from our previous reports and correspondence, action A3 was much more time-consuming as originally planned. All the possibilities to fit the water body into the project area were checked and discussed with stake-holders. As the activity has proved unnecessary from conservation point of view and is not influencing the achieving of conservation goals, with only possible technical solution which is not appropriate for nature reserve and potentially harmful socio-economic incidence, the decision was made in January 2006 to propose the Commission to exclude it from the project.

Upon this decision, the project Modification Request will be prepared to exclude the creation of the water body from the project. This way, the action A3 will be changed too, while the preparation of the technical specifications and obtaining of the permits for water body creation will no longer be necessary.

B1 – Lease of land in Ljubljansko barje area

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
B1 Lease in Lj. Barje area					■	■	■	■				■				

Actions foreseen in report period

No actions have been foreseen in report period.

Progress to date

Though the action was reported to be completed in 2004, we have continued to check the possibilities of additional land lease. In original project proposal, a lease of 41,1 ha of land has been foreseen. In Ljubljansko barje project area, DOPPS managed to lease a total of 37,5 ha of land in 2004 that is subject to the leasing contract signed on 28.12.2004 between DOPPS and the Fund. Therefore we were looking for additional 3,6 ha to be leased. The possibilities identified in the report period to achieve this goal are as follows:

- 1) In the north–eastern part of the project area some wet extensive grasslands have been leased by local farmer Mr S. Modic before this LIFE project started and we have decided to try to persuade him to pass those to DOPPS, which is possible with the signing of the updated contract (based on discussions in January 2006 Mr Modic is willing to pass some of his parcels to DOPPS).
- 2) Some of the parcels near Ljubljansko barje project area have been subject to ownership clarification in the last two years. The case of parcel no. 1403/1 of total size 1,05 ha has been solved finally and can become subject to the updated leasing contract between DOPPS and the Fund.

Therefore the leasing contract with the Fund will be updated in early 2006 to include the additionally agreed parcels or their parts. Upon recent calculations, with this change DOPPS will be able to fulfil the foreseen lease. The borders of the project area will be changed in our Modification Request to include the parcels outside originally planned project area with exact explanation on their conservation importance and reasons, why they haven't been included in the project in the first place.

On 24.11.2005, the existing land lease has been paid for 2005, in the total of 1.663,03 EUR.

B2 – Purchase of land in Ljubljansko Barje area

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
B2 Purchase in LJ. Barje area						■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

The foreseen actions include:

- the continuation of all the necessary activities to buy additional 3,98 ha of land in Ljubljansko Barje project area and finish all the administrative procedures for purchased 6,02 ha of land;
- finding the solution which will enable the recording of the purchased land in the sales contract and/or its recording on the land register as nature conservation property according to the article 31.2 of the SAP.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

In the report period, no additional land has been purchased in the Ljubljansko Barje project area. We continued with final administrative procedures for already purchased parcels and with exploring possibilities to purchase additional parcels. The majority of the activities have been carried out by Tomaž Jančar, the Project Manager while the communication with the land-owners was mostly carried out by Željko Šalamun, the warden, who is regularly present at the site.

In August, we concluded the remaining administrative procedures for the parcels purchased from Mr. Modic and Mrs. P.C.Kumše in July 2005. Finally, applications to land register were submitted to record the ownership of DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia. At the moment, the parcels, which were owned by D. Kumše and P.C. Kumše, totally covering 4,11 ha are already recorded as DOPPS property in the land register. For other parcels, we expect the recording of ownership in up to 3 months time.

We continued to explore the possibilities and purchasing procedures for purchasing the parcels (3 parcels, covering 1,19 ha) from Mr. Smole, who owns “protected farm”. We helped him to arrange inheritance of the parcels after his late father. The company Geograd was hired to carry out the retraining of the land use rank in land cadastre from meadow to pasture, because only pastures are allowed to be sold on protected farms (273,10 EUR). We agreed Preliminary Agreement with Mr. Smole in which he engaged himself to sell the parcels to DOPPS when inheritance and other administrative procedures will be concluded. According to progress made in the beginning of 2006, we expect the purchase procedure will be finished until the end of June 2006.

We continued the negotiations with Roman Catholic Parish Tomišelj for the purchase of one parcel, covering 0,47 ha. Upon the positive response by the priest who showed absolute willingness to sell the parcel, we prepared Purchase offer and sent it to the Roman Catholic Diocese in Ljubljana on 24.10.2005. We are still waiting for the final reply by the Diocese office.

Additionally, we continued discussions with Mr. Lenarčič. He owns several parcels at the project area and in past he was considering selling some of the parcels to DOPPS. Unfortunately, he recently decided he will not be selling these parcels at all. Afterwards, we explored land register to get up-to-date list of private land owners at the project area to explore another potential solutions for additional land purchases. Upon this up-to-dated list, we continue the land purchase activities in 2006.

We investigated the possibilities to fulfil the provisions of article 31.2 of Standard Administrative Provisions. Due to the fact that “and/or” are used to specify the place of recording (the article 31.2 says: ... the sales contract, and/or its recording on the land register, includes a guarantee of definitive assignment of the land to nature conservation), the possible interpretation (as we

understand it) could also be that the provisions are fulfilled by including the guarantee that the land will be assigned definitely to nature conservation in the sales contract only.

The investigation also revealed that the registration of the assignment to nature conservation into the land register is relatively easy in the protected areas. The legal protection of the sites is recognised as a legal fact which has to be registered in the land register upon the Provisions issued to the land owners by the responsible Municipality (when the site is protected at local level) or by Administrative Unit (in cases of protection on national level).

We are expecting the reply from the Commission if by any of these two recordings we meet the demands of article 31.2. As described under E.1, we have proposed the designation of the Ljubljansko barje project area as nature reserve to the local Municipality of Ig. Continuing to work on prompt designation, we might be able to assure the recording of all the purchased land in the project area as nature conservation property before the end of the project.

Variations, complications and delays

Variations, complications and delays are as described in our previous Interim Report, except for the recording of the nature conservation property according to article 31.2 of SAP. The progress in fulfilling the article is as described above.

B3 – Purchase of land in Cerknjško jezero area

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
B4 – Lease of land in Nanošćica project area					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

The foreseen actions include:

- the continuation of all the necessary activities to buy additional land in Cerknjško jezero project area and finish all the administrative procedures for the purchased land;
- finding the solution which will enable the recording of the purchased land in the sales contract and/or its recording on the land register as nature conservation property according to the article 31.2 of the SAP.

Project partner, Municipality of Cerknica is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress in report period

Within municipality, the team of Notranjski Regional Park (NRP) staff is working on the project, including the director of the park Valentin Schein and park conservation manager Leon Kebe.

During the report period, no new contracts were signed. Partner continued to work on the remaining administrative procedures for the parcels purchased earlier in 2005. The applications to the land register were submitted to record the ownership of the Municipality. The parcels, bought from 8 land-owners in 2004-05, in total covering 30 ha have already been recorded as the property of the Municipality of Cerknica.

At the same time, the buying procedures for the new land have been carried out. At the end of the report period, the procedures with 7 land-owners were in the stage of the contract preparation for the land totally covering 27 ha, of which 22,8 ha are located in the project area and are eligible under this project. The signing of the contracts is expected in the beginning of 2006 with the remaining buying procedures being completed by mid-2006. The details are shown in the next table.

Table 2: Summary data on land in process of contract preparation in Cerknjško jezero project area

Name	Surface [ha]
Viktor Kebe	3,88
Franc Mulc	7,15
Janez Šuštaršič	2,24
Bernarda Petrič	1,59
Ksenja Butkovič	1,90
Ivan Ule	3,86
Stanislava Turk	2,21
TOTAL	22,83

At the moment, additional 29 bids for 57 hectares of land within the project area are in different stages of land purchase process. The partner estimates that the action B3 will be successfully finished by the end of the project as foreseen. A minimum of 100 hectares of land will be purchased.

The project partner's staff has also been involved into investigation on the nature conservation property recording. As described under B2, the registration of the assignment to nature conservation into the land register is relatively easy in the protected areas. The legal protection of the sites is recognised as a legal fact which has to be registered in the land register upon the Provisions issued to the land owners by the responsible Municipality (when the site is protected at local level) or by Administrative Unit (in cases of protection on national level).

In case of Notranjski Regijski Park, designated by the Municipality of Cerknica, the registration of the assignment to nature conservation into the land register for all the land purchased can be carried out upon this legal basis. The partner is waiting for the response by the Commission before starting to carry out the recordings to the land register.

Variations, complications and delays

No variations, complications and delays happened in the report period.

Nevertheless, we would like use this opportunity to inform the Commission about the mistake, which occurred in our previous Interim Report. Due to misunderstanding with the partner, we have included the total area of the parcels purchased in 2005 as the land within the project area. According to the project proposal, the purchases are being carried out on the land-owner basis and in some cases, some land is being purchased which is outside the project area. These surfaces have to be subtracted, but in the previous Report, they haven't been.

As a consequence, the data on the area reported to be purchased in the period from January to end of July 2005 is not correct. It is too high - 33,63 hectares of land are being reported to be purchased while actually the purchased land within project area covers 25,34 hectares in total. The detailed corrections will be included in the Final Report. Upon the most recent data, the total area of land purchased by Municipality of Cerknica within the Cerknjško jezero project area before this Interim Report period covers 52,44 hectares.

B4 – Lease of land in Nanoščica area

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
B4 – Lease of land in Nanoščica project area					■	■	■				■					

Actions foreseen in report period

No actions have been foreseen in report period.

Progress to date

The action has been cancelled. However, DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia has managed to find the solution to achieve the project goals without leasing the land in Nanoščica project area. All the requested additional information including the details of our proposal to up-grade the activities in Nanoščica project area have been sent to the Commission in our letter, dated 12.9.2005.

Variations, complications and delays

No variations, complications and delays happened.

C1 – Create and maintain habitats for *Crex crex* and other species in Ljubljansko barje reserve

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
C1 Create and maintain habitats in Ljubljansko barje reserve						■	■	■			■					

Actions foreseen in report period

Under this action following activities in Ljubljansko barje project area are foreseen:

- management of wet extensive grasslands according to the management guidelines (before those are prepared, according to the research and management testing activities, which are providing the majority of the data for the management guidelines);
- removal of bushes and grasslands restoration.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date*Management of wet extensive grasslands*

In late August and September 2005, the project team carried out active management on a total area of 16,9 ha of Corncrake habitat. Additionally, an area of 11,9 ha of grasslands have been managed by local farmers with the LIFE project team assistance. Due to unfavourable weather conditions causing high ground water levels, approximately 15,0 ha of wet extensive grasslands could not be accessed by machinery and so remained unmanaged in 2005 (see Annex 4 for details).

The Ljubljansko barje project area has been recently parcelled out on four smaller management units that allow a more efficient control on the ground. The project area is subject to different micro - climate conditions and so specific management practices and time planning.

Table 3: Management units in Ljubljansko barje project area (map annexed as Annex \$4.1)

Name of management unit	Total¹ area (ha)	Area of wet extensive grasslands under active management in 2005² (ha)	Share of total area under overgrowing (%)	Share of total area under high water level in 2005 (%)	Type of management
Jevše	23,9	12,0 (8,8)*	40 – 45	0 – 10	Regular late mowing
Mali deli	14,4	0,0 (0,0)*	45 – 50	55 – 50	Late mowing (high possibility of unfavourable ground water conditions)
Vrbovke	23,9	16,4 (7,7)*	5 – 10	0 – 10	Late mowing (medium high possibility of unfavourable ground water conditions)
Želodc	0,5	0,4 (0,4)*	0	0	Regular late mowing

* Total grassland area managed by DOPPS in 2005

Removal of bushes and grasslands restoration

Due to very unfavourable nature conditions for any mechanical interventions in the project area in autumn 2005 we didn't perform any removal of bushes. The next phase of grassland restoration will be carried out as soon as it will be possible. This is likely going to happen in February and March 2006. In the report period, we have settled the payment for the mulching carried out earlier (1.051,10 EUR).

On 29.10.2005 the project team organised a volunteer action at the Ljubljansko barje project area. The purpose of the action was to assemble the remains of trees and bushes that were left on the ground after the mulching in 2004. More than 30 volunteers participated within this activity and some local farmers joined the event as well. At the end of the day the group managed to remove the remains on a total area of approximately 2,0 ha. This action will enable a faster restoration processes on grasslands that had been under overgrowing for a long time. During the activity the warden, who organised the event, carried out a presentation about the current project activities on other project areas as well as the planned future activities. This action could also be understood as additional activity under Action E.6 – Reserve promotion.

Variations, complications and delays

The summer and autumn of 2005 could be described as very wet period in most of Slovenia. Most of the wet extensive grasslands in Ljubljansko barje project area were under water for the whole period that represented a serious problem in grasslands management. The grasslands were hardly accessed by the project machinery and so some parts of the project area remained unmanaged (especially the area of Mali deli) in 2005.

At this point we identified some complications and problems related to the future management of wet grasslands. Some parts of the project area are becoming very wet because of recent melioration channels abandonment. We are not considering cleaning of all channels in this area

¹ Total Area = total area of management unit including grasslands and overgrowing areas

² Area of wet extensive grasslands under active management in 2005 = total area of managed grasslands in Vrbovski deli including management performed by DOPPS and local farmers with supervision of DOPPS

but we are sure that some channels will have to be cleaned to guarantee the minimum conditions for machinery access. In opposite way, some parts of project area will not be accessible for management any more what means the very first step in grasslands overgrowing and consequently, loss of Corncrake habitat. As some funds will be saved with the exclusion of water body from the project, we are considering proposing the Commission that the necessary part of the funds is used for the cleaning of some of the channels, which would be added to action C1 as additional activity, very important for Corncrake conservation in lowland wet meadows in Slovenia.

C2 – Maintain habitats for *Crex crex* and other grassland species in Nanoščica and Cerknjško jezero project areas

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
C3 Visitors infrastructure in LJ. reserve							■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

Under this action following activities area are foreseen to be carried out in late summer and autumn:

- to mow meadows in Nanoščica project area,
- to maintain appropriate habitat for *Crex crex* on the land purchased by project partner Municipality of Cerknica (both activities at least 1-2 times during the project period).

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action in Nanoščica and together with the Municipality of Cerknica in Cerknjško jezero project area.

Progress in report period

As reported in our previous Interim Report, DOPPS has signed a “Management agreement for 2005” with Mr. Albin Otoničar, the local farmer who leases all parcels in Nanoščica project area. The copy of the contract has been sent to the Commission as annex to our letter dated 20.2.2006. According to the agreement, Mr. Otoničar has mowed part of the meadows in project area in period Avgust-September. Due to unfavourable weather conditions resulting in high ground water levels only 19,5 ha of wet grasslands have been mowed in the period between August and October 2005. In Annex 5 we present the map of the area with mowing carried out in 2005.

In 2005, no activities could have been carried out to maintain appropriate habitat for Corncrake in Cerknjško jezero project area, particularly mowing, due to extremely wet weather conditions. For the first time after more than thirty years, all the lake area was flooded in summer and autumn period as well. The partner – Municipality of Cerknica – is acquiring the official data on lake water levels from the responsible Agency for the Environment to prove the case. Only part of the 2005 data have already been processed (digitalised), which is annexed to this report (Annex 6).

Variations, complications and delays

All the variations in the management of the meadows in Nanoščica project area have already been presented in details in previous reports and correspondence. The habitat management in Cerknjško jezero project area wasn't possible due to the natural conditions as described above and is delayed to autumn 2006.

C3 – Set up visitors infrastructure in Ljubljansko barje reserve

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
C3 Visitors infrastructure in LJ. reserve																

Actions foreseen in report period

No actions have been foreseen to be carried out in the report period. DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

The implementation of the action hasn't started yet.

Variations, complications and delays

The delay is caused by the variation, complications and delays under action A3. See action A3 for details. Due to changes in the Ljubljansko barje reserve concept, the new detailed locations and execution of the foreseen visitors' facilities (infrastructure) have been considered. The revision is still in process.

D1 – Purchase and maintain machinery for habitat maintenance

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
D1 Purchase machinery								■	■	■		■				

Actions foreseen in report period

In addition to the machinery purchased earlier, the purchase of shredder – tractor attachment for small bushes removal in all three project areas has been foreseen to be carried out in the report period.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

Purchasing procedures for the shredder (invitations of tenders) started on 21st October 2005. Further to this the shredder purchase procedure has been completed in the end of December (2.650 EUR).

Variations, complications and delays

No variation, complications or delays happened with the implementation of this action.

E1 – Encourage and promote policies at national and local level that benefit *Crex crex*, including encouraging maximum legal protection of key sites

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E1 Encourage and promote policies...					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

In the report period, we have foreseen an active continuation of the actions reported on in the previous Interim report with special emphasis on encouraging and promoting the Corncrake friendly policies on national and local level. Main actions carried out in the report period were the following:

- Maintenance of contacts with relevant officials at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (MAFF), Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP);
- Maintenance and establishing new contacts at the municipality level (especially municipality officials from project areas);
- Lobbying and educating them through number of contacts and meetings;
- Lobbying for the protection of the Natura 2000 sites, where the project areas are located at the Ministry of the Environment at local municipalities;
- Encouraging the cooperation between both Ministries (MAFF and MESP) to generate synergies in policies solutions within the new programming period 2007 - 2013
- Supplying all relevant officials with project updates.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

Maintaining the contacts with officials from MAFF to encourage and promote adoption of more bird-friendly policies within the programming period for Rural Development 2007 – 2013

The lobbying process at the Ministry of Agriculture and associated organisations in Agriculture and Rural Development could be specified as follows:

- Meetings of the Slovene Monitoring Committee for National Rural Development Plan 2004 – 2006 within the MAFF
- Meetings of Slovene Social Partners and other NGOs in Agriculture and Rural Development at the MAFF
- Meetings of the Slovene Project Group for Strategic documents preparation in the area of Rural Development for the period 2007 – 2013 within the MAFF
- Meetings of the Working Group for 2nd Axis measures under Rural Development Regulation 2007 – 2013 within the MAFF (Department for Sustainable Agriculture)
- Complementary activities

Table 4: Summary of activities lobbying at the Ministry of Agriculture:

Activity	Purpose	No. of meetings / other
Meetings of the Slovene MC for RDP 2004 – 2006	Monitoring of the implementation of measures under the national RDP 2004 – 2006 (2 nd and 3 rd Regular Meeting)	2 Meetings at the MAFF
Meeting of Slovene Social Partners and other NGOs	Comments on Slovene position on new EC Rural Development Regulation 2007 – 2013 (The Regulation has been adopted by the EC in the	/

	report period)	
Meetings of the Slovene PG for Strategic documents in RD 2007 – 2013	Programming of the National Rural Development Strategy and new national Rural Development plan for 2007 – 2013	1 day workshop
Meeting of the Working Group for Rural Development – 2 nd Axis priorities and measures	Modelling new measures (AES, Natura 2000 payments) under Axis 2 of the Rural Development Regulation	3 Meetings at the MAFF
Other activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation and lobbying at the International Conference on Natura 2000 in Ljubljana (Grand Hotel Union, September 2005) • Position paper on application of management plans within the Natura 2000 payments in Slovenia sent to MAFF • Supporting the preparation of the National Rural Development Strategy 2007 – 2013 (MAFF) • Draft management guidelines for Corncrake habitat sent to National Institute for Nature Conservation and to the Institute for Sustainable Development 	More than 25 meetings / contacts with relevant officials

Meetings of the Slovene Monitoring Committee (MC) for RDP 2004 – 2006. Having the possibility to be a member of the MC for RDP 2004 – 2006 has resulted as of an extreme importance. As explained in the previous Interim Report the membership in the MC gives the opportunity to receive updated information about rural development measures and schemes implementation related to the current programming period 2004 – 2006.

In the report period two regular meetings have been organised by MAFF (2nd MC Meeting – 21. September 2005 and 3rd MC Meeting – 30th November 2005). Due to some unexpected financial complications in the rural development measures implementation performed by MAFF and the Agency for agricultural markets in 2004 and 2005 some members of MC proposed changes in the financial framework for 2006. If happened this would have negative impacts especially on existing bird friendly habitat management schemes. Basically would mean that no new AES contractors could be gained in 2006. The informal "nature conservation coalition" inside the MC together with the LIFE project team member had a strong reaction against such changes at the 3rd Regular MC Meeting. The final decision of the MC has been made to leave the financing of the organic farming scheme and the grasslands management scheme (HAB) open to new contractors in 2006.

This result will enable other LIFE actions especially Action E.2 to go further with the existing corncrake friendly agri – environmental schemes promotion. At the moment the HAB and ETA schemes have been identified as the only way to stimulate farmers on Corncrake areas to perform bird friendly farming practices.

Meeting of Slovene Social Partners (SP) and other NGOs at MAFF. Meetings with this group in not relevant anymore since the new EC Regulation on Rural Development has been adopted in September 2005 (1698/2005). Following the activities of this group new working groups have been established by MAFF and active membership of the LIFE project team has been assured. The LIFE project group will keep the contact with the relevant officials within this group and will react when needed.

Meetings of the Slovene Project Group (PG) for Strategic documents in RD 2007 – 2013. Following the adoption of the new EC Regulation on Supports for Rural Development and the Strategic Guidelines a Project Group for new Rural Development Plan 2007 – 2013 for Republic of Slovenia has been formed within the Ministry of agriculture. The PG is the main Slovene body for drafting new RDP 2007 – 2013. A one day workshop was organised by MAFF in October 2005 (27th October 2005) in village Ig where relevant partners were invited to take part at discussion related to the setting up of priorities for the National RD Strategy 2007 – 2013. The discussion was

organised in separate small working groups following the directions of the RDP Axis 1, 2, 3 and Leader + programme.

The project team member took part in the Axis 2 working group where Natura 2000 species and habitats conservation has been set as one of the main priorities.

Meeting of the Working Group for 2nd Axis measures under Rural Development Regulation 2007 - 2013. Several discussions and meetings have been performed under the Rural Development 2nd Axis in the report period. According to Articles 36 – 51 of the Council Regulation 1698/2005 a new set of measures such as the Forestry Environment payments and Natura 2000 payments for farmland and forests could be applied within the national Rural Development Programmes 2007 – 2013. The LIFE Project team has used the membership as opportunity to present the LIFE project purpose and has started negotiations with relevant officials to design new agri – environmental / Natura 2000 scheme for long term protection of Corncrake in Slovenia. The negotiations are still in the process and will continue until the new Rural Development Programme will be adopted, likely in early autumn 2006.

Complementary activities

Promotion of wet extensive grassland management within the Conference on Natura 2000 in Slovenia, Grand Hotel Union, September 2005

DOPPS has organised an International Conference on Natura 2000 in Slovenia. This large scaled conference has been prepared in a time, when the Ministry for Agriculture (MAFF) has started with the programming of new rural development strategic and programming documents for the period 2007 – 2013. Relevant officials from different Ministries and representative of the European Commission (DG Agriculture, DG Environment) were present at the Conference.

As one of the preparatory activities the project team has elaborated special recommendations for integration of bird friendly habitat management guidelines (Corncrake habitat) in the new National Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013. The report is attached to this document as Annex 7.

Lobbying for the higher level of promotion of the project Natura 2000 sites

In autumn 2005, we had several meetings with the representatives of the Municipality of Ig where Ljubljansko barje project area is located, particularly with Mrs. Skok, head of the municipal urbanist department. We have discussed the possibilities of including the project area into the municipal spatial plan as nature reserve and of the protection of the site as nature reserve on local level (by the Municipality). In December 2005, we have sent the Municipality the official proposal to protect the site and include it to the municipal spatial plan as such.

Additionally, we have discussed the possibilities of the protection of the whole Ljubljansko barje Natura 2000 site as Landscape Park with the responsible people at the Ministry of the Environment. The work on protected areas was resumed at the ministry and the last information is that they have just employed a new member of staff at Sector for nature, who will work on the designation of Ljubljansko barje. We are very glad of this progress and informally expressed our willingness to support the designation of the most important site for Corncrake in Slovenia. However, the designation process is expected to be long and we cannot expect the designation to be completed before the end of this project.

As several meetings with the representatives of the Municipality of Postojna, we have also suggested the legal protection of the site as one of the basis for further common activities. This informal proposal was accepted but not considered as an option for further common work with the municipality. As explained under F1, we have received the request for lowering of the co-financing instead.

E2 – Consulting, educating and informing farmers, farming advisors and local authorities

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E2 Consulting, educating ... farmers, land owners ...					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

In the report period we have foreseen the following activities:

- Individual meetings with farmers and farmer advisors in project areas;
- Demonstration of Corncrake friendly management techniques to local farmers;
- Promotion of project at farmer fairs and other events.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

In the report period, we focussed on testing the draft management guidelines on the ground and demonstrate them to the local farmers. The draft guidelines have been repeatedly discussed with farmer advisors and farmers from the project areas. LIFE project material, such as the Corncrake leaflet and the coloring booklet were used at the farmer fairs all around Slovenia to promote Corncrake and proper management practices on a national level. In the next table, the activities under this action are summarised:

Table 5: Summary of activities under action E.2 in report period

Sub-action (contacts)	Subject of meetings	N° of meetings / other	Project Area
Contacting farmer advisors <i>(Mr. Zlatko Krasnič, Mr. Franci Palčič, Mr. Lojze Drašler (Lj. barje))</i>	Project update Preparation of draft management guidelines Current Agri-environmental schemes promotion for <i>Crex crex</i> (HAB scheme)	More than 10 telephone conversations	LjB, Cer, Nan
Meeting farmers <i>(Farmers from project areas)</i>	Discussions about corncrake habitat management techniques Project update Technical supply of the LIFE machinery in Ljubljansko barje Planning of the Nature reserve in Ljubljansko barje	More than 7 individual meetings (Agronomy specialist) More than 10 technical meetings (Warden)	LjB, Cer ³ , Nan
Articles published in agriculture magazines	Threats to Corncrake habitat Special grassland habitats management guidelines Opportunities for farmers within the new RDP period 2007 - 2013	1 Article in agriculture magazines 1 Article in Svet ptic	National / Local Media

³ Informing and educating farmers about *Crex crex* friendly grassland management in area of Cerknica Lake has been implemented by the Project partner – Notranjski Regional Park

Individual meetings with farmers and farmer advisors in project areas

Farmers. Following the activities in the last Interim report, regular meetings with local farmers in project areas have been performed with priority to Ljubljansko barje project area during the report period. The local farmers' knowledge about grassland management still represents the main source of knowledge and practice for the preparation of final management guidelines.

The machinery purchased under Action D.1 is located at the farm of Mr. Tone Uršič from Iška Loka village that is close to the Ljubljansko barje project area. This represents another decision made by the project team that aims at an increase confidence between DOPPS and local farmers. Some individual meetings with farmers in the report period were related to technical supply of the purchased machinery in Iška Loka.

The contacts with local farmers have been well-maintained particularly in Ljubljansko barje area. The reason for that is the DOPPS office vicinity to the project area. Additionally, activities under actions C1, C3 and the planned establishment of the Ljubljansko barje nature reserve in Vrbovski Tali represent an additional reasons for a more frequent visiting of this area.

The contacts with local farmers in Cerkniško jezero project area have been maintained by the Project Partner – the Municipality of Cerknica.

New contacts have been established with farmers in Nanoščica Project Area where most of the planned project area has been leased by a local farmer Mr. Otoničar. The development of the project area in Nanoščica to the planned nature reserve (see letter to the Commission from 20th January 2006) has come out as a very promising idea that could expand the Corncrake active management of grasslands to the wider area of Nanoščica River basin SPA. Regular contacts have been maintained with Mr Otoničar.

Farmer advisors. Regular contacts with farmer advisors have been kept during the whole report period. The project team has managed to improve the relation with farmer advisors and has gained the support of The Chamber of Republic of Slovenia for Agriculture and Forestry. Following to that, a plan was made to organise a workshop on Corncrake habitat management in February 2006. An increased interest for Corncrake grassland management and Natura 2000 issues have been identified in the report period which is related to the coming new Rural development programming period 2007 – 2013. The farmer advisors are willing to cooperate in dissemination of already prepared draft management guidelines among farmers in the project areas.

Demonstration of Corncrake friendly management techniques to local farmers

In September 2005, we organised a demonstration of Corncrake friendly mowing and balling practices. During the grasslands management at the Vrbovski deli inside the project area performed by the the warden, some local farmers assisted the demonstration. Discussions have started about possible application of the Corncrake friendly mowing technique in the whole SPA. At the moment, most of the farmers use the bird unfriendly mowing techniques but they are at least open to new ideas.

Lectures for farmers and farmer advisors

No lectures for farmers and farmer advisors were foreseen in the report period. Lectures are generally organised in the period February – June that coincides with the period of application to measures within the Slovene Rural Development plan 2004 – 2006 (especially the Corncrake friendly agri – environmental schemes).

Advocating for project at farmers meetings and fairs

In the report period the project team planned to take part at four farmers' fairs.

Table 6. Summary of the planned farming fairs

<i>Title of Fair</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Involvement of LIFE project team</i>
<i>The "Kozjansko jabolko fair"</i>	Podsreda, Kozjanski Regional Park	8. – 9. October 2005	Leaflet / coloring book dissemination Project information dissemination
<i>"Organic farming festival"</i>	Ljubljana, Ljubljansko barje area	10. September 2005	Leaflet / coloring book dissemination Project information dissemination
<i>The "Ižanski Festival"</i>	Ig, Ljubljansko barje area	(cancelled)	Leaflet / coloring book dissemination Project information dissemination
<i>"Agri weekend in Koper"</i>	Koper, Slovenian Istria	8. October 2005	Leaflet / coloring book dissemination Project information dissemination

The **"Kozjansko jabolko fair"** is a traditional fair in the area of Kozjansko Regional Park. The southern parts of the Regional park called Jovsi is well known as wet grasslands area with a smaller Corncrake population. Project information and leaflet about Corncrake were disseminated within the fair among farmers and general people. The informational stand at the fair was organised by the project team with a strong support of two DOPPS volunteers.

The traditional **"Organic farming festival"** (Ekotržnica) in Ljubljana city centre organised by the Slovene Organic Farming Association is a type of festival that we couldn't miss. It has been an important achievement to start co-operating with this Association.

The project team was invited to take part at the **"Ižanski Festival"** in Ljubljansko barje project area organised by the Municipality of Ig. This event is of a very high importance because of the immediate vicinity of the planned nature reserve Vrbovski Tali location. From this point of view we found this event as an opportunity to meet local people and farmers and to promote the corncrake friendly grasslands management as well as the nature reserve. **Unfortunately, the festival was cancelled in autumn 2005 due to the bad weather.**

The **"Agri weekend in Koper"** is an opportunity to promote the important bird species especially Corncrake on a national level. Based on a number of visitors that took part at the event in 2005 we see good potential for this event to become a national wide agricultural festival. Despite of the fact that the area of Slovenian Istria is not an important area for Corncrake we believe the Corncrake friendly management practices should be promoted on such events in a way to inform people about general bird friendly practices.

Continuous attention has been given to the activities under this action. The project team has recognised this action to be one of the most relevant actions within whole project. The long - term protection of Corncrake could not be assured without active participation of farmer advisors and farmers. We have identified the individual meetings with farmers as being one of the most important and effective ways for disseminating the project results. A workshop with farmer advisors will be organised in early 2006 just before the start of the agri – environmental schemes application preparation period (March – May 2006).

Poor promotion of nature conservation schemes and poor knowledge of farmer advisors about Corncrake friendly habitat management have been identified as crucial problem in the last Interim report. Based on activities under action E.2 implemented during the period of the last Interim report a significant improvement has been achieved in promoting and implementing the existing agri – environmental scheme (HAB) in Corncrake project areas. According to data presented by the Slovene Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development, a positive trend in number of applications has been noticed in 2004 – 2005 period:

Table 7: Agri-environment scheme (HAB) uptake in 2004 and 2005

Grasslands habitat conservation (HAB scheme)	Year 2004	Year 2005
No. of farmers (KMG) that applied to HAB scheme	122	365
Total size of grasslands that were subject to HAB applications	354,32	908,4
No. of approved farmers (KMG)	64	195*
Total size of approved grasslands (in ha)	171,36	416,7*

* the total number of approved farmers and total size of grasslands under HAB scheme in 2005 are only estimates as all the applications from 2005 have not been processed yet

As derives from the table an increase uptake of approximately 300% occurred in number of farmers that applied to the existing Corncrake scheme (HAB) in 2005. On the other hand, an uptake of approximately 250% in the total grassland area under HAB scheme is noticed in same year. Still many farmers do not fulfill the minimum standards of HAB scheme, especially in relation to the total livestock loading on farms, which is the reason why nearly 50% of all applicants have been rejected annually. Solving this problem is one of the priority targets for the project team in 2006. We see further development in better designed agri – environmental schemes and suitable promotion in the Corncrake project areas.

Variations, complications and delays

No variation, complications and delays occurred during the implementation of action E2.

E3 – Brochure on *Crex crex* and proper grassland management

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E3 Brochure on <i>Crex Crex</i> and proper grassland management																

Actions foreseen in report period

No actions were foreseen in report period. Publishing the brochure describing the project results is foreseen in 2006.

E4 – Species and project promotion on national level

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E4 Species and project promotion on national level					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

Several activities have been foreseen to promote Corncrake, its conservation and the project to general public at national level. In the report period, we have planned to carry out at least 2 lectures for general public and continue with publishing of the articles in the national media and in DOPPS magazine *Svet ptic*, though the foreseen number of articles has already been achieved in 2004.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

Lectures for general public

The foreseen two lectures have been carried out in autumn 2005. A member of project staff, Andrej Medved presented the relation between farming and nature conservation, with emphasis on the Corncrake and the concept of Natura 2000. One lecture was carried out in Celje on 8.12.2005; the other was carried out at University of Primorska, in Science and Research Centre in Koper on 14.12.2005.

Night excursions for general public

No night excursions have been carried out in the report period as those are planned for the periods when the Corncrakes are active. Two remaining foreseen excursions will be organised in May and June 2006.

Leaflet presenting Corncrake and the project

In the report period, we have continued to disseminate the leaflet. We used every occasion to distribute it to relevant people, such as government and municipality officials, farmers, local people, children in schools, visitors of fairs and at other occasions. Leaflet was printed in circulation of 10.000 copies. So far we distributed over 7.000 copies.

Articles in national media

Before the report period, 12 articles were already published in national media, which is double comparing to what has been foreseen for the whole project duration. Nevertheless, we find it important to continue informing general public about the project, the Corncrake and other endangered meadow birds. In the report period, 8 articles were published or other media broadcasts prepared, among them was the TV report about Corncrake at SPA Planinsko polje, broadcasted on national TV.

Articles in members magazine "Svet ptic"

In our members magazine, we published 7 articles. All articles were about project activities. In 2006, we will continue informing our members on the progress of the project.

Table 8: Summary data on species and project promotion at national level.

<i>Activities foreseen for the whole project period</i>	<i>Activities accomplished till July 2005</i>	<i>Activities accomplished in report period</i>	<i>Activities to accomplish till the end of the project</i>
12 lectures in 6 locations	7	2	3
5 night excursions	3	0	2
leaflet about the project	printed	disseminated	further dissemination
6 articles in national media	12	8	/
3 articles in Svet ptic	3	7	/

Variations, complications and delays

There were no complications, variations or delays.

E5 – Species and project promotion on local level

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E5 Species and project promotion on local level					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

In addition to the promotional activities at national level (E4), we have foreseen to carry out several activities to promote Corncrake, its conservation and the project to local public at three project areas. According to the internal working plan, most of the activities for schools are planned for 2006, while in the report period, we have planned to carry out two lectures and continue with the publishing of the articles in the local media.

The project partner, Municipality of Ljubljana, has foreseen to carry out the second workshop for local people in Ljubljansko barje project area.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out all the activities, expect for the workshop organised by the Municipality of Ljubljana.

Progress to date**Table 9: Summary data on species and project promotion at local level.**

<i>Objectives foreseen for the whole project period</i>	<i>Activities accomplished till July 2005</i>	<i>Activities accomplished in report period</i>	<i>Activities to accomplish till the end of the project</i>
7 lectures	2	1	4
3 night excursions	2	0	1
5 excursions for children	1	0	4
colouring book for children	published	disseminated	further dissemination
instructions for governesses	0	0	will be published
5 lectures in kindergartens	1	0	4
10 articles in local media	11	6	/

Lectures about Corncrake and the project for local people in the project areas

One lecture for local people about Corncrakes in SPA Cerknjsko jezero was carried out in Cerknica on 15.12.2005. Information on lecture was published in local media. 24 participants attended the lecture.

Night excursions to present Corncrake to the local people in project areas

No night excursions were carried out in the report period. One remaining foreseen excursion will be organised in the following year for local people in SPA Nanošćica.

Excursions for local school children

No excursions for local children were carried out in the report period. Four remaining foreseen excursions will be organised in spring 2006. As a complementary activity, we carried out field excursion for geography students on 8.7.2005, presenting them the Ljubljansko barje project area. We have forgotten to include it into previous Interim Report, so we are describing it in this one.

Colouring book for younger children and lectures to kindergartens

Colouring book was distributed to children at various events, such as fairs, lectures etc. In spring 2006, we will prepare instructions for governesses and carry out majority of lectures for kindergartens.

Articles in local media

In the report period, additional 6 articles were published in local media. Though we have fulfilled our foreseen expected article publishing, we will continue to present the project in this way, as we believe it is an efficient way to present the Corncrake, project and other similar themes to the local public in order to raise their awareness on grassland conservation issues.

Workshop for local people in Ljubljansko barje project area (Municipality of Ljubljana)

The general objective of all 3 the workshops foreseen to be carried out by the Municipality of Ljubljana is to promote and raise public awareness of the importance of natural habitats, Natura 2000 sites and biodiversity, and the importance of their protection. Since Ljubljansko barje, one of the project areas, offers several possibilities for the development of nature-friendly tourism offer, the 2005 workshop's objective was to learn about the possibilities of tourism development in nature reserves.

Upon the agreement between the beneficiary and the responsible partner, the decision was made to organise a field workshop by visiting two Italian nature reserves located close to the Slovenian border and both having some important similarities (habitats, species) with Ljubljansko barje, as well as with two other project areas (Cerknjsko jezero, Nanošćica). Additionally, both Italian sites have significant number of visitors and well developed visitor facilities and tend to develop the tourism offer. The sites were as follows:

(1) Foce d'Isonzo (Isonzo Rivermouth) Nature Reserve covers an area of 2400 hectares, located along the final 15 km of the Isonzo River and its delta. In past decades, the marshes were destroyed in order to get the farming ground. However, the natural habitats were restored in 1990s with creation of freshwater marsh. The improved conditions resulted in dramatic increase of the number of wetland species, of which the birdlife is the most obvious element (more than 300 species of birds recorded). Various habitats have been recreated and are nowadays maintained and managed to encourage the presence of large number of plant and animal species. This rich natural environment has brought several visitors to the reserve, thus visitor facilities were created (visitor centre, duck museum, observatory, circular paths, accommodation facilities) offering wide range of nature experiences (walks, horse riding, biking, guided tours etc.)

(2) Lake Doberdo and Pietrarossa Nature Reserve was established in 1996 and covers an area of 726 hectares. It is located in the west of Carst region. Its main natural value are the two intermittent lakes, surrounded with wetlands, on higher ground, however, one can soon find typical carstic forests, dry grasslands and other carstic phenomena. Therefore the number of plant and animal species is outstanding for such a limited area. The Reserve has developed several natural walking trails, as well as a new built Visitor Centre, also offering accommodation.

The workshop had the following objectives:

- to learn about the management of the sites, particularly concerning the visitor management planning;
- to learn about the financing on land purchase, designation of protected areas, management, restoration, facilities;
- to meet representatives of reserves' management and representatives of local authorities to share their views about living and working in protected areas;
- to get to know some good examples of sustainable development and visitors facilities and successful experience in nature interpretation; and
- to compare the situation in Slovenia and in Italy, considering local, regional, national policies towards natural environments and its protection, in particular Natura 2000 sites.

Over 50 people have participated in the workshop, mainly from different local public bodies, NGOs, civil organizations and nature conservation organizations. The participants agreed that the workshop was well organized and the program very interesting. They appreciated the fact that the meetings with management staff and local authorities were held in the field, where they could see the results of actions and programs undertaken. The sites visited have certain similarities with Ljubljansko barje, not only in the landscape and habitats, but as well as in the interest groups, stakeholders and problems occurring. Several actions and ideas are directly applicable in Ljubljansko barje.

The most interesting lessons learned during the workshop:

- the whole Ljubljansko barje Natura 2000 site needs a management plan, a compromise between nature conservation and development interests;
- visitors management plan and development of nature friendly visitor facilities and offer can answer the problems of cohabitation of nature conservation and development interests;
- visitors centers and nature trails can, if managed properly, offer a wide range of experience and education, and manage the flow and number of visitors; and
- the conservation of nature habitats deeply depends on successful co-operation among different stakeholders in the area.

Variations, complications and delays

There were no complications, variations or delays.

E6 – Reserve promotion

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E6 Reserve promotion						■	■	■	■	■						

Actions foreseen in report period

No actions have been foreseen in report period.

Progress in report period

No activities have been carried out in the report period. The reserve promotion was carried out using different means, such as presentation at the lectures, on meetings etc.

Variations, complications and delays

The delay is caused by the variation, complications and delays under action A3 and C3 as a consequence. See actions A3 and C3 for details.

E7 – Web site of the project

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E7 - Web site of the project						■	■	■	■	■						

Actions foreseen in report period

The following activities have been foreseen in the report period:

- designing and launching the dynamic web application with all the project contents to the web, including project summary in English;
- regular up-dating of the site's contents.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress to date

In the report period we haven't managed yet to establish the dynamic web application. Several meetings of the project team have been organised to discuss and design appropriate e-tools for providing updated project information via Internet. The proposed e-tools have been discussed with an external company that provided technical solutions.

Web materials in English have been prepared and are ready to be uploaded to the website as soon as the dynamic system will be established. The web site address has been promoted regularly at all presentations and it was published in some articles.

Variations, complications and delays

The regular updating of the web site is still the most delayed activity under this action. The conversion of the current static system to the dynamic one will be carried out at the beginning of year 2006 and launched most likely in March 2006.

E8 – Notice boards

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
E8 – Notice boards						■	■	■	■	■						

Actions foreseen in report period

No actions have been foreseen in report period. The action has been completed earlier.

F1 – Project coordination

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
	I	II	III	IV												
F1 Project coordination					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

In previous report, this action was divided into two very different set of activities. First is project management/ co-ordination while second is purchasing equipment to support the work of the project team. In the report period, mostly the project management has been foreseen, including:

- overall project management and planning;
- project finance planning and management;
- organization and implementation of activities;
- reporting;
- project team communication, exchange of information, internal meetings;
- evaluating project implementation, results, achieving of goals;
- training & education;
- project administration; and
- internal control from the project Steering Committee.

Additionally, we have foreseen the purchase of the narrow angle objective.

DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action, with project partners and other participants being responsible to act according to their role in the project as described in SAP.

Progress to date

(1) Project management

In course of the project, we have developed a system of planning, communicating, supervising and reporting activities, which enables the control over project and ensure successful implementation of activities foreseen.

(1.1) Planning and organising

We prepared detailed work plan in which we elaborated every action, breaking it down to separate activities and tasks. For each task in work plan we identified timeframe and member of project team responsible for it. In this report period, we have revised working plan twice: first at the beginning of October and second in December, when we were organising work on the project after changes in the project manager position.

In October we also revised project's financial plan and prepared updated cash flow of the project.

(1.2) Communicating, supervising and reporting

In this report period, we continued with regular staff meetings with director every Tuesday morning. At this meeting, every staff member reports on work carried out in past week and about plans for the next week.

To co-ordinate our work on current activities we organised ad hoc meetings of team, where either whole team or only relevant members of team were present. There was roughly one such meeting per week. Additionally, once per month the whole project team meeting was carried out to review the progress of all actions within the project.

(1.3) Administration

Every member of team is responsible to keep up to date archive of activities and tasks he/she is responsible for. Documents for each action and for more complex activities are archived in separate binders.

Every member of project team is obliged to fill timesheets form regularly. After the end of the month all forms are checked and signed by project manager and archived in special binder.

We pay special attention to financial documentation such as invoices, receipts etc. After the receipt of a new invoice, firstly member of team, who is responsible for the action checks whether the invoice is correct. Every correct invoice is approved with signing by project manager and by director. After approval project secretary settles the payment, registers it to project financial report form, makes copy for projects archive and finally forward it for booking to company Aktiva Saldo d.o.o., which is external bookkeeping service for DOPPS.

(1.4) Steering

Due to the scale and importance of the project in frame of overall society's activity, DOPPS's Executive board decided, that it will carry out function of Steering committee by itself. This means that this project is special theme on agenda of almost every Board's meeting.

In the report period, the Board discussed this project at the meeting held on 21.9.2005. At the meeting, the project manager reported on the work progress for the time period from the last meeting, which was followed by board members questions to project manager and to director and the discussion.

(1.5) Reporting

In August and September, we have prepared the first Technical Interim Report for the period from 1.1. till 31.7.2005 and the Financial Report since the start of the project with payment request. The reporting work of the partners was co-ordinated in order to prepare a good quality report. Upon the letters from the Commission, additional information were prepared and sent to clarify certain issues.

We have reported about the implementation of the project to other co-financers of this project as well, including the written reports to the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning and the Municipality of Postojna, where we were invited to present the project at the City Council, on 18.10.2005. From the Municipality of Postojna, we got the suggestion that their co-financing share should be diminished due to the fact that less funding is necessary for activities in the Nanoščica project area, which is located in the municipality, comparing to other project areas and co-financing shares of both other municipalities, who act as project partners. We were very surprised about this suggestion, as the complete proposal has been presented to the City Council and approved for co-financing before the final version of the Co-financer's Commitment was signed by the mayor of Postojna in April 2003. This means, that the City Council members were completely aware of the project proposal, activities in each project area and the budget of the project, including the share of each of the partners and co-financers, when they decided to co-finance the project. At this moment they insist in lowering their share to 10.000 EUR (originally planned co-financing was 30.000 EUR). We find this stroke very unprofessional and though it will not threaten the successful completion of the project, it will make us lose a lot of precious time and energy to find substitutive funding.

(2) Purchasing equipment

Nearly all equipment foreseen was purchased before this report period. The only thing purchased after July 2005 was narrow angle objective for our digital camera.

Variations, complications and delays

No variations, complications or delays happened in the project co-ordination.

F2 – Monitoring of *Crex crex* in Slovenia

Action	2003				2004				2005				2006			
Number/name	I	II	III	IV												
F.1 Monitoring of <i>Crex crex</i> in Slovenia						■	■	■	■	■	■	■				

Actions foreseen in report period

The foreseen activities include the preparation of the report on 2005 Corncrake monitoring. DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia is responsible to carry out this action.

Progress in report period

Upon the monitoring activities, carried out in 2004 and 2005 and the data analyses, the monitoring report for both years has been prepared (Annex 8). The results have already been presented in our previous Interim report, so we will not repeat them at this stage.

As a complementary activity to F2, the scientific article on 2004 Corncrake monitoring prepared by Luka Božič has been reviewed and finalised. It will be published in December 2005 issue of *Acrocephalus* magazine. As the printing of this issue has been delayed to March 2006, it will be annexed to the Final Report.

Variations, complications and delays

No variations, complications or delays of the originally foreseen activities have happened.

Overall project management

Changes in project team

As foreseen in the previous Interim Report, another change in the project management has been planned to take place at the end of 2005. Tomaž Jančar, who temporarily took over the position of project manager, starting on 16.5.2005, has finished working on this position on 31.12.2005.

Though it has been originally planned to employ new project manager, the project team and DOPPS Board agreed that this duty cannot be passed to an unexperienced person. In Slovenia, it is extremely hard to find good staff for project management with suitable experience, at least in the field of nature conservation. As no suitable person was found, the team and the Board agreed, that the project management functions should be split among 3 existing and very experienced members of staff, as follows:

1. Andrej Medved will act as Project Manager (managing actions A and F, overall project management) and a contact for the Commission with 20% of his working time;
2. Nataša Šalaja will be responsible for management of E actions, financial management of the project and will assist in overall project management with approx. 30% of her working time;
3. Marijan Logar will be responsible for managing of actions B with approx. 15% of his working time.

Additionally, the administrative part of the management and co-ordination work as well as the preparation of the reports will be assisted by Project Administrator, Ms. Petra Vrh, who will spend approx 35% of her time working on this LIFE project.

This was the only way identified to assure the successful completion of the project and achieving of the project goals. The existing staff know the project activities, goals, as well as problems, complications and variations very well, comparing to a new person, who would spent a lot of time in getting familiar with the project and successfully manage it until its completion.

Internal organisation of project team

The basic internal organisation is as described under report of F1 action. The planning, team communication and reporting is well organised and a matter of routine. The team members relations are not very hierarchical, though the responsibilities are clearly established and monitored by DOPPS director as well as the Board, acting as the Steering Committee.

English Abstracts

ANNEX 2 – The Habitat Study

The research goal was to evaluate Corncrake's microhabitat in Slovenia and particularly to describe vegetation on singing posts and on meadows where Corncrakes are present and compare it with those where they are not; in addition to describe seasonal changes in vegetation on singing posts and on both types of meadows. Vegetation was described in points. Points were either singing posts or randomized on selected areas. Altogether 24 variables were assessed in each point: maximum vegetation height, vegetation height where the cover was 90%, vegetation height where the cover was 50%, average height on 1 m² square, vegetation cover in percents in ten vertical 10 cm bands, horizontal cover of various vegetation types, distance from typical land structures and horizontal cover of more important plant species. GPS was used to pinpoint the exact locations.

In 2004, in SPA Ljubljansko barje 19 singing posts and 63 random points on the meadows where Corncrakes were present, and 39 random points on the meadows where Corncrakes were absent, were assessed. In 2005, 29 singing posts with 18 control points were assessed on SPA Ljubljansko barje and 28 singing posts with 12 control points on SPA Planinsko polje.

The results of the study are as follows. We can make two very important conclusions as regards the microhabitat of Corncrake in Slovenia:

(1) the vertical vegetation structure remains approximately the same throughout the breeding season and regardless of the type of the vegetation; maximum vegetation height was around 100 cm and vegetation height where the cover was 50%, around 40 cm; and

(2) early in May in this regard and in the absence of other tall vegetation, sedge (*Carex* sp.) is very important. In May and June sedge comprised 25 – 50% of total vegetation cover.

Later other species take its role, notably Marsh Horsetail *Equisetum palustre* in late June. Sedge should not be destroyed by farming practice early in the breeding season and regular mowing of meadows should be practiced which should prevent the vegetation become too dense. We also noticed that the areas with Corncrakes have a greater percentage of hedges and other landscape structures.

The original Habitat Study elaborate is annexed to this report (Annex 2).

ANNEX 3 – The Mowing Experiment Report

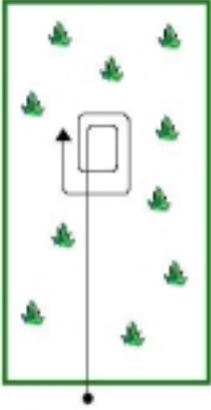
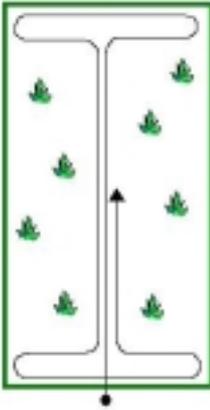
English Abstract

The three techniques that were subject to the experiment (see the volume enclosed for the detailed picture of the experimental plots):

- 1) **Bird unfriendly “outside – in” mowing technique.** This technique is the most commonly used technique in Slovenia. The modernisation of machinery, especially fast rotational mowers and rationalisation of farming techniques are reasons why farmers are pointed at achieving as shortest mowing times as possible. This should not become a common practice in Corncrake project areas and other grassland habitat SPAs in Slovenia. This technique has been identified as most unsuitable and very dangerous to Corncrake and other fauna species.
- 2) **Bird friendly “inside – out round” mowing technique.** This technique has been identified as very unsuitable for wet grassland areas especially because of its limited flexibility in application to different parcels' shapes. In general, within the project areas the typical parcels are relatively long (up to 100 metres or more) and narrow (less than 20 metres) and they cannot be managed using this type of mowing technique. Its application is too complicated. The analysis show that additional costs for mowing are too high comparing with the total benefits this technique is able to generate.
- 3) **Bird friendly “inside – out longitudinal” mowing technique.** This longitudinal technique derives from the round mowing technique and has been recognized as the most suitable one. Starting with a central mowing line and mowing laterally on both sides afterwards enables birds and other fauna species to find their way away from the mowing machine without being uncovered. From the farmers' point of view, this technique is still acceptable considering the time consumption aspect and does not require a strong planning effort in advance. Looking at different shapes of the parcel, this mowing technique could be applied to almost all shapes and sizes.

Additionally, total mowing time consumption and other technical parameters were measured within the mowing experiment such as mowing speed, the distance between mowing machine and the ground, impacts on biodiversity and soil structure, management of solitary bushes and other marginal elements.

Based on the mowing experiment analysis, we have foreseen the following recommendations to be integrated into the final management guidelines for project areas, suggesting the technique no. 3 to be the most suitable for wet extensive meadows:

Mowing Technique Mowing Parameter	Technique no.1 Bird unfriendly “outside – in” mowing technique	Technique no.2 Bird friendly “inside – out” round mowing technique	Technique no.3 Bird friendly “inside – out” longitudinal mowing technique
Mowing technique pattern			
Impact on biodiversity (fauna and flora)	-	+	+
Applicability to different parcels' shapes in project areas	+	-	-/+
Time consumption (efficiency)	+	-	-/+
Management of marginal elements (applicability)	-/+	-/+	-/+

Legend: (+) – positive impact, high level; (-) – negative impact, low level

Annexes: 4, 4.1, 5, 6, 9