

# Use of Polish Konik horses for avifauna conservation in selected ecosystems of Poland

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**The Polish Konik** horse is a native breed undemanding in terms of environmental and feed requirements, long lived, and resistant to disease. Their advantage is the hard hoof horn, which allows them to do well in overgrown wetlands, making them suitable for grazing in inaccessible, environmentally valuable areas.

**The aim of the study** is to present the main efforts undertaken in recent years in Poland which combine the grazing of Polish Koniks with active conservation of biodiversity and bird habitats.



Pics. 1-2. Grazing Polish Koniks ([www.ptop.org.pl](http://www.ptop.org.pl)), Pic.3. *Tetrao tetrax* ([www.ptop.org.pl](http://www.ptop.org.pl))

- Grazing of Polish Koniks is a key element shaping the habitats of water and marsh birds;
- Polish Koniks eat shrubs and bushes, making the area more accessible to protected species and harder to reach for predators;
- By eating sedges, reeds and tree seedlings on wet meadows of the Biebrza National Park, Polish Koniks can prevent migration of rare species of birds: *P. pugnax*, *A. paludicola*, *Charadriiformes* and predatory birds such as *C. clanga*;
- The main initiative was taken by the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds, which introduced Polish Koniks into the Narew Valley and also into Biebrza Marshes, the Białowieża Forest and the Knyszyn Forest, where, as part of the **Natura 2000** project, the active conservation of *T. tetrax* and *C. pomarina* feeding grounds was conducted;
- Grazing is also performed at the Szczecin Lagoon, for the purpose of conserving the habitats of *V. vanellus*, *L. limosa*, *G. gallinago* and *T. totanus*;
- In addition to nesting, grazing facilitates foraging - the consumption of plants by the Polish Koniks allows small invertebrates, which form a forage base for many bird species, to reach the surface.

**In summary**, Polish Koniks are highly useful in the efforts to protect endangered bird habitats in Poland, combining the use of native breeds and conservation of biodiversity.