

BJÖRKÖR - LÅGSKÄR ISLANDS

Location: a: Björkör 59° 56' N, 20° 10' E,
b: Lågskär 59° 50' N, 19° 50' E.
The islands are situated in the northern Baltic Sea, in the province of Åland and in the municipalities of Föglö and Lemland.

Area: 6 097 ha; Björkör covers 5 286 ha, comprising 170 ha of land. Lågskär covers 460 ha, comprising 43 ha of land.

Protection status: The area is owned by the Åland Provincial Government and the Finnish government. Björkör was protected in 1966. Lågskär is not officially protected, but in practice the area is considered a bird sanctuary. The area is already included in the Ramsar Convention sites and in the Natura 2000 network of protected areas.

Site description: Björkör-Lågskär is located in the outer archipelago close to the open sea. There are two small forested islands and more than 150 treeless skerries and rocky islets. Lågskär also has a small lagoon with an exceptionally large reedbed for the outer archipelago. Considering the harsh archipelago conditions the vegetation of Lågskär Island is exceptionally diverse.

International and national importance:

Numerous bird species characteristic of the outer archipelago breed in the area. The most numerous is the Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) with a present population of over 1 500 pairs. Other breeding species include e.g. Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*), Razorbill (*Alca torda*), Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) and Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*). There are several colonies of Gulls (*Larus spp.*) and terns (*Sterna spp.*). The White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) also breeds in the area.

The surrounding banks are important feeding and resting areas for migratory birds. The area of Lågskär is among the most important wintering places for Steller's Eider (*Polysticta stelleri*) in the northern Baltic area.

Protection criteria: 1b, 1c, 2b and 3b.

Changes in ecological character:

The vegetation of Lågskär Island has recovered after grazing was given up in 1961. As the vegetation cover has become thicker the island has offered more breeding grounds for waterfowl.

Management measures:

Traditional landscapes have been restored in the Björkör area.

Possible threats: Increased boating during the breeding period causes disturbance to the birds. Oil accidents are possible as the area is located next to shipping lanes with lively traffic.

Research: A bird ringing station has been in operation on Lågskär Island since 1964. An archipelago museum has been set up in Björkör.

References: Haapanen 1973, Haapanen & Rassi 1980, Hilden & Hario 1993, Häggström 1985, Landskapslag 24/1966, Landskapslag 46/1967, Niemelä et al. 1988, Palmgren 1988, Rassi 1977, Sulander 1982, Finnish Legislative Collection 44/76.