

# Visit from the Ramsar Convention secretariat to the Tyrifjorden wetland system in Co. Buskerud, Norway

Meeting at Sundvolden Hotel, Hole 2.-3. July 2015

**Presentation about the threats against a Norwegian Ramsar site from the Norwegian Ornithological Society – Birdlife Norway – during the 09:00-13:00 meeting on 2. July 2015 – by Viggo Ree**

*Representatives of the Ramsar Convention secretariat, Norwegian authorities and others present!*

The University of Oslo originally presented protection plans for the most important localities in Northern Tyrifjorden wetland system in the 1960s and ran a field station in the area until the 1980s. In this period the first wetland reserves were established. The wetland system was included in the Ramsar Convention in March 1996, and in April the same year Birdlife Norway took the initiative for saving further valuable localities in the area. A yearlong study from 1997 to 1998 confirmed that most waterbirds used the areas proposed for protection in 1996. The last protection process for including the remaining important localities in the Tyrifjorden Ramsar system started in 2005 and was recommended by the Norwegian Environment Agency in 2012.

The number of waterbirds in the Tyrifjorden wetland system varies according to the seasons, water levels and ice conditions. The largest concentrations occur in the migration periods spring and autumn, but the area is also important for wintering and breeding birds. Wintering waterfowl monitoring has been carried out in the system since 1987. Birdlife Norway has been responsible for these counts from 1990 – and from 1992 the organization has monitored the breeding populations. Regional and local environment authorities have supported this work as a basis for the management.

Kroksund is the strait area between Tyrifjorden and Steinsfjorden – the latter representing the northeastern part of Tyrifjorden. Large waterbirds – mainly swans – move north and south through Kroksund especially during spring and autumn. This corridor is particularly important for migrating and short distance moving waterbirds.

Up to 1996 electrical power lines over Sundøya and Kroksund represented the worst collision point in the county for flying swans. Shortly after the Tyrifjorden wetland system was included in the Ramsar Convention the energy company Ringeriks-Kraft ensured to establish underground cables. The company did the same with aerial lines crossing Storelva river close to Synneren Ramsar Reserve in 2003. Swans fly frequently into lines – and even bridges – under certain weather conditions, especially on days with fog and poor visibility. Any bridges with power lines over Kroksund and Storelva are guaranteed to represent new and serious collision points, which would represent a lack of fulfillment of obligations under the Ramsar Convention.

After Nordre Øyeren east of Oslo, Tyrifjorden is the most important inland wetland system in Norway. For the future it is important to maintain the integrity and ecosystem of this unique area, including as it does one of our country's most remarkable cultural

and historical landscapes. These qualities have great intrinsic values giving Norwegian authorities special responsibilities to save this landscape for the future and make sure to fulfil their obligations in relation to the Ramsar Convention.

The Ramsar Convention representative Tim Jones visited Northern Tyrifjorden wetland system in June 1996, and he dissuaded the Norwegian authorities from constructing a railway over Kroksund. In his report after the visit to Norway the following was recommended from the convention: "To meet its obligations under the Ramsar Convention, Norway should select the rail and/or road development route(s) with the lowest direct and indirect impacts on the ecological character of the wetland system". This was crucial for the treatment of the railway planning in the Norwegian Parliament in 2002, when it was decided that a possible later railway line between Oslo and Hønefoss should be built east of the wetland system (the Åsa corridor).

The Åsa corridor was laid aside during treatment in the Norwegian Parliament in June 2015. It was rather surprising that this happened only a few weeks before the Ramsar Convention official visit to Norway and Tyrifjorden wetland system.

It is particularly important to emphasise that there are good alternatives to railway lines east of the wetland system and for improving existing road between Sundvollen and Hønefoss. The existing plan for railway and highway through the Tyrifjorden wetland system represent the destruction of irreplaceable natural values for coming generations.

Quotes such as "we would particularly like to highlight the environmental interests of the wetlands in Northern Tyrifjorden" and "An implementation of this railway corridor will be in conflict both with the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity" could refer to statements by nature organizations. However, these quotes originate from Hole municipality's unanimous resolution 15. January 2001. Birdlife Norway could not agree more. Today there is a different view within the municipality despite the fact that the natural values are the same.

Let us all remember that our present culture minister Thorhild Widvey designated Hole "the branch of the Garden of Eden" during the treatment of railway solutions between Oslo and Hønefoss in the Norwegian Parliament in 1996. Birdlife Norway trusts that the Ramsar Convention Secretariat will be able to prevent the destruction of irreplaceable nature values in the Tyrifjorden area - one of the world's most important wetland systems.