Nadleśnictwo Lubaczów

5. ASH-ALDER RIPARIAN FOREST

Fraxino-Alnetum

Riparian forests (łęgi in Polish) are woodlands associated with flowing surface waters (the horizontal movement of water). Typical sites where ash-alder riparian forests occur include the floors of smaller river valleys and stream corridors.

The tree stand of an ash-alder riparian forest is composed primarily of the black alder (Alnus glutinosa), accompanied by the European ash (Fraxinus excelsior). The understorey and lower tree layer are usually dominated by the bird cherry (Prunus padus). Additional tree species that may appear include the Norway maple (Acer platanoides), the sycamore maple (Acer pseudoplatanus), and the European hornbeam (Carpinus betulus). The shrub layer is formed by hazel (Corylus avellana), European spindle (Euonymus europaeus), guelder rose (Viburnum opulus), elder (Sambucus nigra), blackcurrant (Ribes nigrum), and redcurrant (Ribes rubrum). The lush groundcover includes stinging nettle (Urtica dioica), common impatiens (Impatiens noli-tangere), ground elder (Aegopodium podagraria), Enchanter's nightshade (Circaea lutetiana), yellow archangel (Lamium galeobdolon), hedge woundwort (Stachys sylvatica), wood stitchwort (Stellaria nemorum), alternate-leaved golden-saxifrage (Chrysosplenium alternifolium), lady fern (Athyrium filix-femina), wood avens (Geum urbanum), water avens (Geum rivale), as well as marsh marigold (Caltha palustris) and bittercress (Cardamine amara).

Ash-alder riparian forests occur relatively commonly throughout Poland, except in mountain regions. On a nationwide scale, they are the most frequently encountered type of riparian woodland.

Riparian forests also play a key role in shaping the habitats of streams flowing through them. For instance, the riverside woodland typically determines the degree of stream shading, the presence of dead wood in the watercourse, and the presence of cavities and hollows beneath the roots of riverside trees. It also influences the supply of organic matter (such as alder leaves) and thus affects the biogeochemistry of the stream. All these factors shape the habitats of, for example, the weatherfish (Misgurnus fossilis), the bullhead (Cottus gobio, sometimes referred to as the white-finned bullhead in Polish contexts), or various lampreys.

Riparian woodlands are also part of the beaver's habitat. Beaver dams can greatly impact riparian ecosystems, locally causing waterlogging, alder swamp formation, or even destruction of the woodland. However, in comparison to the overall range of riparian forests in Poland, the spatial scale of such changes is minimal and should not be considered a threat to this habitat type.

The ash-alder riparian forest is one of the habitat types of Community interest requiring protection under the designation of Natura 2000 sites. It falls within the group of habitats with code 91E0 – Riparian mixed forests of willow, poplar, alder, and ash. The ash-alder riparian forest is furthermore a priority habitat, meaning it is considered threatened with disappearance across the territory of the European Union Member States.

(compiled on the basis of: "Lasy i bory. Poradniki ochrony siedlisk i gatunków Natura 2000 – podręcznik metodyczny. Tom 5." ["Forests and Woodlands. Manuals for the Protection of Habitats and Species under Natura 2000 – A Methodological Handbook. Volume 5."] Collective work edited by Professor Jacek Herbich. Warsaw, 2004.)

Remote sedge (Carex remota L.)

Alternate-leaved golden-saxifrage (Chrysosplenium alternifolium L.)

Lesser celandine (Ficaria verna Huds.)

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