



**Best practice examples for environ-
mental protection & agriculture**

Landcare Associations in Natura 2000 sites

Contents



Editorial information

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Voluntary collaboration – Landcare associations in Natura 2000 sites

The Natura 2000 network was set up to protect the diversity of species and biotopes in Europe. Bavaria has designated a total of 11.4 % of its area as Natura 2000 sites. The diversity that they contain is our region's natural treasure. These sites are dependent on careful management in many ways.

The species and biotopes in Natura 2000 sites have to be conserved and developed. Managing these areas is not easy because there are often conflicting interests of owners, land users and nature conservationists. The DVL approach focuses on "cooperative nature conservation" and is based on voluntary cooperation of all parties.

Landcare Associations have been mentioned several times by the European Commission as exemplary organisations for collaboration with local authorities and farmers.

Farmers, nature conservationists and local politicians work together on an equal footing in Landcare Associations. This brochure highlights how they collaborate by managing Natura 2000 sites.

Employees of the Landcare Associations are at the forefront. They inform, advise, communicate and are reliable partners for local authorities and agriculture. My thanks go to them together with my recognition of their commitment and work.

Josef Göppel

Chairman of Landcare Germany (DVL)





” *Farmers are a godsend
for this area.* “

Ebersberg Streuwiesen

JOSEF RÜEGG

LANDCARE ASSOCIATION EBERSBERG

Natura 2000 site	Gutterstätt Streuwiesen (meadows cut for animal bedding)	
Locality	Ebersberg rural district	
Size of site	16 ha	
Landowners	Predominantly private owners, district	
Agricultural use	Grassland, predominantly approved for direct payments	
Programme of the Bavarian Ministry for Environment and Consumer Protection	Landcare and nature reserve regulation	Mowing, scrub clearance

“Small is beautiful”: Josef Rüegg, Director of the Landcare Association Ebersberg, puts it in a nutshell when describing the six hectares of the Gutterstätt Streuwiesen.

These are meadows of purple moor grass and low-lying marshlands on the northern edge of the foothills of the Alps. The agrobiologist enthusiastically explains how these meadows, which are poor in nutrients but rich in species, are still used as traditional meadows for providing animal bedding – as they were 150 years ago – where the marsh gladiolus blossoms once again and the marsh gentian spread. Where the dusky large blue flutters and the highly endangered marsh

fritillary can be espied on occasion.

However, this change did not happen by itself – it is the result of excellent cooperation between the nature conservation authority, the Landcare Association, landowners and farmers.

Purple moor grass meadows and low-lying marshlands are to be found primarily in the south of Germany, with their main geographical concentration in the Alpine foothills of Bavaria. The meadows were created by extensive late mowing and are mostly very rich in species, which makes them so valuable for nature conservation. They react very sensitively to fertilisation and changes in utilisation.

The Landcare Association was able to prevent a change of management in the Gutterstätt Streuwiesen. When many farmers abandoned the unprofitable meadows in the early 1990s, the area threatened to return to scrubland. This would have meant the loss of numerous species of flora and fauna. In order to avoid this, the Landcare Association talked to many landowners and they agreed to maintain extensive mowing. The Landcare Association submitted its first application for funding from conservation funds and started looking for farmers to mow the grass and cut the bushes.

The Streuwiesen meadows are a jewel for nature conservationists.

Josef Rüegg discusses upcoming activities with the three farmers.

The numbers of the rare marsh fritillary have been steadily increasing over the years since the meadows have been cut.



In 2007 the Gutterstätt meadows were designated as European protection area. "I thought that everything would be forbidden" Josef Abinger, farmer and landowner, remembers. But this was far from the case, as he and his colleagues were astonished to find. "Nothing has changed really. We keep on mowing the meadows and we'll do that as long as we can and we get money for it." On the basis of the many years' good cooperation between the Landcare Association and local players, discussions between the nature conservation authorities and all parties involved regarding the designation of nature protection area ran smoothly.

The three farmers and livestock owners are happy with the management of the Natura 2000 site.



The three livestock owners Josef Abinger, Martin Hutterer and Hans Zehemaier traditionally mow the meadows in September and use the cut grass as animal bedding. "It's physically very demanding because a lot of the work is manual. We do it because we live here. We see nature all the time, we drive past here often enough. We can see the success. It's also an extra way of making money, particularly nowadays when, as a farmer, you always have to look for ways to earn a little extra. But we don't do it just for the money, we want to do something good for the area. For ourselves but also for everyone else. We like the plants and animals we've got

The farmers mow the meadows once a year, as their ancestors did, and keep an eye on the diversity of plant life.



here, and we can preserve them through our work for the Landcare Association."

They are paid for their work by the Landcare Association and they receive direct payments for the management of the area. Josef Rüegg smiles. "These three farmers are a godsend for the area! With it being used agriculturally, these meadows, rich in species, have been created and we can only maintain this jewel with the help of these farmers and appropriate funding" he explains, with a satisfied look over the meadows.

These meadows, with their numerous orchids, can only maintain such a rich diversity of species by late mowing.







” *In order to keep streams in their natural state, we have to consider the whole catchment area and make a lot of adjustments.* “

Dillingen river mussels

SUSANNE KLING

DONAUTAL-AKTIV E.V.

Natura 2000 site	Nebelbach, Klosterbach and Brunnenbach streams	
Locality	Dillingen rural district	
Size of site	318 ha	
Landowners	Private owners, district authorities, local authorities, the Free State of Bavaria	
Agricultural use	Woods, arable land, meadows and pastures, approved for direct payments	
Programme of the Bavarian Ministry for Environment and Consumer Protection	Contractual nature conservation programme	22 ha extensive use of grassland
	Guidelines for grants for stream basin management	Hydromorphological implementation of the Brunnenbach concept, hydromorphological measures
Other projects and funding authorities	Biodiversity project “Bringing back Swabia’s best river mussels” – Swabian regional government; BayernNetzNatur project “River mussels in the Dillingen rural district” – Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund; boden:ständig – Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry	

“Dillingen has the largest stocks of river mussels anywhere in Bavaria! We bear a great responsibility” Susanne Kling from Landcare Association Donautal-Aktiv justifies her active commitment to these rare animals. The streams Nebelbach, Klosterbach and Brunnenbach actually have significant stocks of river mussels on a European scale. That is why their interconnected flowing water system has been designated a European nature protection site. The landscape planner and her team have been taking especial care of them for three years now and receive monies from conservation funds of the Free State of Bavaria.

The river mussels live in clear, fast-flowing streams with dense, sandy to gravelly beds. They are dependent on fish such as minnows to reproduce, which act as alternate hosts. Soil and nutrient contamination, water pollution and the drying up of stream sections are having a negative impact on the river mussel and other water inhabitants.

“In order to keep streams in their natural state, we have to consider the whole catchment area and make a lot of adjustments” Susanne Kling explains. Man-made obstructions have to be removed and natural elements such as stones and tree trunks brought in so that

the streams have an uninterrupted course and are well structured. Settling ponds and buffer zones are created in places affected by erosion. Susanne Kling agrees all project activities with the owners and users of the area, applies for funding from conservation, agricultural or water management funds and oversees implementation. Local authorities are responsible for maintaining small waterbodies. Susanne Kling advises them how to keep the streams clear sustainably and improve their ecological value. This means they can also contribute to flood prevention.

Since agricultural use of the land in the catchment area can have a negative

The river mussel is threatened with extinction and is under strict protection.

The river mussel needs clear flowing water and a sandy, gravelly bed.

Checking progress at the stream: Susanne Kling and volunteer Leo Schaudi inspect the river mussels.



Susanne Hochwald



impact on the quality of water, Susanne Kling has started an advisory service for farmers. She proposes measures, such as cultivation methods that protect the soil, the creation of riparian strips and extensive farming methods and identifies suitable subsidy programmes to compensate the farmers for the extra work. "It's not a case of prohibiting farmers from doing things. I can't do that anyway" Susanne Kling explains. "The aim of my advice is to open their eyes, make suggestions and identify financial options." Of course, not all farmers or local authorities accept her proposals. "Some say no, but a lot listen and think about what I say." In this way Susanne Kling has been able to motivate

some farmers to create riparian strips, use mulching methods for sowing and use grubbers instead of ploughs. "The soil should stay where it belongs and we all benefit from clean water" Walter Joas, mayor and farmer, confirms.

Since Susanne Kling can't keep her eye on the whole 40 kilometres of the streams, she is looking for people to monitor the mussels. She has been able to find four volunteers so far. They regularly check their sections of stream and report any irregularities. "It works fine!" Susanne Kling smiles. "With their help we are able to respond quickly because sometimes a few hours are crucial to saving the river

mussels." For example, when a landslide silts the water badly, then they have to take action quickly.

Of course Susanne Kling is in constant communication with the relevant authorities for nature conservation, water management and agriculture and maintains contact with local authorities, farmers and fishing associations. Her job as water neighbourhood advisor is very useful here. With all these activities Susanne Kling hopes to save the river mussel. "It's still too early to show any results. But we are doing what we can and everyone is doing their bit."

The river mussel volunteers inspect the water and report problems to Susanne Kling immediately.



Susanne Kling, Leo Schaudi and farmer Walter Joas discuss how to prevent soil erosion in fields bordering waterbodies.



Farmers use windrowers to maintain and preserve the riparian strips.





” *Getting a call that sets a date for mowing is tough for farmers. But now they understand why this work is necessary.* “

Dingolfing bird paradise

JOCHEN SPÄTH

LANDCARE ASSOCIATION DINGOLFING-LANDAU

Natura 2000 site	Meadow birds breeding areas in the lower Isar Valley	
Locality	Dingolfing-Landau rural district	
Size of site	1,386 ha	
Landowners	Predominantly private owners, 174 ha district, 165 ha ecological compensation and “eco-account” areas	
Agricultural use	Arable land, grassland, approved for direct payments	
Programme of the Bavarian Ministry for Environment and Consumer Protection	Contractual nature conservation programme	270 ha under an extensive grassland mowing programme
	Landcare and nature reserve regulations	Monitoring, creation of small moist biotopes, creating meadows by sowing grassland seeds (swath transfer) , measures to encourage biodiversity.
Other projects and funding authorities	Compensation areas: creation of new meadows, channels for draining water, and filling in ditches	



Jochen Späth proudly points out that the Königsauer Moos is the only area in Bavaria where the numbers of the European curlew, threatened with extinction, has increased in numbers. The area in the lower Isar Valley, comprising 1,400 ha, is one of the most important breeding grounds for curlews in Bavaria and therefore has been designated a European bird sanctuary. The protection of meadow birds such as the European curlew and the peewit is of especial importance here. The wide open landscape with its large marsh areas offers ground-breeding birds ideal conditions. Over 60 species breed

in the Moos and over 120 migratory bird species stop over here.

“The bustle of activity with the birds in the spring is stunning. That is the recompense for our work.” The biologist Jochen Späth has been working in the Königsauer Moos for decades and has participated in all the conservation measures of the nature conservation authorities. The district authorities became involved in 1995 and are responsible for these areas and developing them into little gems rich in diversity of species. The district purchased 174 hectares and all meadows are leased

to farmers who manage them sensitively. The Landcare Association has also created small moist biotopes in many parts and has transformed monotonous pastureland into meadows rich in species.

Jochen Späth advised the district authorities and farmers when drawing up lease agreements and on agricultural methods that respect nature conservation. The lease agreements run for five years and contain special provisions, such as winter fallow strips and flexible mowing dates. “Getting a call that sets a date for mowing is tough for farmers. But we have

The Königsauer Moos is an important resting place for migratory birds; up to 120 species have been sighted here.

The curlew is an index species in open marsh areas.

Every year Jochen Späth agrees the best date for mowing meadows with the farmers.



Nature photo Ottmann



explained to them that this is the only way we can give the birds the best protection." Many farmers were sceptical because of the strict conditions. But a low lease price and subsidies from the contractual nature protection programme have made these agreements acceptable to farmers and recompense their readiness to be flexible and to consider the birds who breed in the meadows. In addition, the farmers receive direct payments for the leased areas.

The Mittermeier family farms 11 ha of meadows in the area. "We have always looked out for birds when mow-

ing. So it's no big change for us. On the contrary, we can rely on the Landcare Association now so we're sure we're not mowing down any birds. We don't want to do that." Every spring the Landcare Association, together with ornithologists, observes the ground-breeding birds and discusses the best time to mow with the farmers and the exact area to mow, depending on the breeding location and the birds' stage of development.

But the protection of ground-breeding birds takes top priority not only on the land owned by the district authority,

but also on many meadows in private ownership in the Königsauer Moos. When curlew chicks are around, the farmers are quite ready to delay mowing by a few days until the birds are fully fledged. "The farmers now understand why this work is necessary. We have got to know each other very well by now and we are very proud of what we have achieved."

Jochen Späth's years of supervision and cooperation are now bearing fruit. That is the recipe for success for the positive development of ground-breeding birds in the Königsauer Moos.

The farmers leasing land from the district in the bird sanctuary have to comply with strict rules. *The Mittermeier farming family has no problem allowing for ground-breeding birds.* *If the spring swathes are mowed in wavy lines, the chicks can hide better.*







” *We talk to everyone involved until the problem is solved.* “ ¹⁷

Heathland in the Bamberg Albtrauf area

CHRISTINE HILKER

LANDCARE ASSOCIATION OF THE BAMBERG RURAL DISTRICT

Natura 2000 site	Albtrauf from Dörrnwasserlos to Zeegendorf	
Locality	Bamberg rural district	
Size of site	3,063 ha	
Landowners	Private owners, municipalities, State of Bavaria, district	
Agricultural use	Grazing for sheep and goats, extensive utilisation of meadows: meadows are approved for direct payments	
Programme of the Bavarian Ministry for Environment and Consumer Protection	Landcare and nature reserve regulations	Grazing for sheep and goats, removal of scrub, mowing
	Contractual nature conservation programme	total of 80 ha: 43 ha mowing, 37 ha grazing
Other projects and funding authorities	BayernNetzNatur project “The Bavarian Jura in bloom in the Bamberg district” – Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund	

Her favourite place is the view point at the “Grosser Staa” near Schneeberg on the slopes of the Franconian Jura. From here Christine Hilker from the Landcare Association of the Bamberg rural district can see over the 3,000 ha of this European nature protection area into a narrow, jagged valley landscape of meadows, fields, orchards and woods with scattered limestone crags and scree. Large areas of juniper heathland and lime-stone dry grassland cover the slopes of the Jura; they are important due to their rich biodiversity.

They were created by hundreds of years of grazing sheep. Because of their steep slopes and poor fodder many of these areas have been abandoned over recent decades. The nutrient-poor grassland has reverted to scrubland, with livestock trails disappearing and the landscape losing its open character, along with many animals and plants. “Animals and plants of open landscapes are especially under threat here” explains Christine Hilker, a biologist. “That is why we’re doing all we can to maintain and restore these biotopes.

The shepherds are a decisive factor in this!”

A shepherd practicing transhumance and five owners of fenced-in pasture graze their sheep and goats on the valuable biotope areas in the nature reserve. Christine Hilker looks after their concerns: “We ensure that grazing areas are enlarged, grazing paddocks are created, trails are improved and water is available. We also discuss the intensity of grazing and options for funding.”

Erich Kisslinger appreciates her help. He is

The juniper heathland was created by sheep grazing and is characteristic of the landscape of the Franconian Jura.

Numerous special plants grow on the lime-stone dry grasslands, such as the branched St Bernard’s lily.

Christine Hilker and Klaus Weber advise the only remaining practicing transhumance shepherd.



the only remaining practicing transhumance shepherd in the Jura Mountains near Bamberg. "Nature is important to me and the Landcare Association always helps me when I need them."

But not everyone is happy about the grazing. "Sometimes they come into conflict" Christine Hilker describes the occasional disagreements between land users and the livestock farmers. Together with her colleague, Klaus Weber, she tries to mediate. We talk to everyone involved until the problem is solved" and admits

"sometimes you need a lot of patience." The fact that she can look after this area is thanks to funding from the Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund. She coordinates with the nature conservation authorities, does public relation, offers guided tours, mediates when there are disagreements and organises maintenance measures.

For example, the meadows have to be cleared of scrub, mainly blackthorn and other undergrowth. The two Landcare Association officials apply for conservation subsidies for the precise area

in question, then they instruct to local farmers. The work often has to be done by hand because the slopes are too steep for machines.

"It's back-breaking work" says farmer Heinrich Kerling with a wry smile. He knows that he is doing this work in one of the most beautiful areas of Bavaria. "That's why we like doing it. And because we get paid for it." Christine Hilker and Klaus Weber are pleased about it. "Landscape management and nature conservation only work with such farmers and livestock owners."

The proposed measures are discussed in detail with the farmers.

Heinrich Kerling enjoys working to maintain the landscape, even though it is hard work.

The craggy slopes and steep lime-stone dry grasslands in the Franconian Jura are characteristic of the area and deserve to be protected.





” *The management of Coppiced woodland by the forest administration has proved a great success for nature conservation.* “

Water meadows on the Lech near Augsburg

NICOLAS LIEBIG

LANDCARE ASSOCIATION OF THE CITY OF AUGSBURG

Natura 2000 site	Flood plains on the Lech near Königsbrunn and Augsburg	
Locality	City of Augsburg	
Size of site	2,304 ha	
Landowners	City of Augsburg and Augsburg Wasser GmbH; land administration and utilisation by the local forestry management	
Programme of the Bavarian Ministry for Environment and Consumer Protection	Landcare and nature reserve regulations	Experimental cutting of coppiced woodland
	Contractual nature conservation programme	60 ha of maintained and restored coppiced woodland



Nicolas Liebig is full of enthusiasm for the Lech riverscape in the city of Augsburg. The manager of the Landcare Association of the City of Augsburg is talking about the largest continuous alluvial forest on the Lech, with its unbelievable diversity in the structure and density of biotopes, its rich populations of alpine, continental and Mediterranean plants, including the largest occurrence of marsh gladioli in Germany.

The mosaic of biotopes is especially exciting for the Landscape manager. Dry grasslands and Brennen (dry open

areas in riparian forests) alternate with heath, pine and deciduous forests and are crossed by a dense network of crystal-clear streams. Nicolas Liebig describes it as “an absolutely outstanding and quite enchanting combination”.

The forest provided the inhabitants of Augsburg with firewood into the 1960s, and this use increased biodiversity. Coppicing resulted in different stages in development within the forest, from several years’ growth to dense grey alder copses, interspersed with other trees and bushes, such as the rare black poplar. It

created the ideal habitat for the common European viper, the smooth snake, sand lizard, tree pipit, green and grey-headed woodpecker, the silver-washed fritillary and many more besides. But coppicing was abandoned over 50 years ago as unprofitable. As a result, the grey alders aged and the habitats of many species were destroyed.

With the agreement of the city forest administration and aided by conservation funding, the Landcare Association tried coppicing again in 2006 in order to restore the coppiced grey alder wood-

The municipal forest administration is managing the coppiced woodlands in a traditional manner.

The endangered smooth snake has once again become a regular visitor to the coppiced woodlands.

Nicolas Liebig and Jürgen Kircher, head of the Forestry Office, look for rare beetles in dead wood.



lands. Nicolas Liebig explained: "It was an experiment"! We didn't know whether the grey alders would send out shoots or whether they were too old and which species would re-establish themselves after coppicing". For three years he observed the coppiced areas and was relieved to see that the alders resprouted and no disturbing plants established themselves. "A great result, and the crowning glory was some chance sightings of the grey-headed woodpecker and the smooth snake."

Due to these findings the city forest administration re-introduced coppicing

over 60 ha of the grey alder woods in 2009. "It is very important for us to maintain the grey alder stocks along the Lech as the dominant woodland biotope in the municipal woods of Augsburg. In order to achieve this, we manage them as typical coppiced woodlands and coppice-with-standards forests. It's sustainable, encourages biodiversity and helps to implement the FFH Directive" explains Jürgen Kircher, head of Augsburg's municipal forest administration. "However, without financial support from the government, it would be difficult to make it pay. That's why we are particularly pleased with this well-funded and quite

unbureaucratic contractual nature conservation programme for forests" he adds. The material harvested is utilised as woodchips for heating in Augsburg's biomass generation power station and used throughout the area.

In the meantime, species that live in coppiced woodlands are making a comeback. "What the forest administration has achieved here is a big success for nature conservation" Nicolas Liebig says approvingly.

Lumberjacks coppice young grey alder to encourage rejuvenation of the trees.

New shoots grow from the tree stump after coppicing.

The grey alder resprout after coppicing to create a pioneer forest.





” *Cooperation between fish farming, nature conservation and landscape management is working excellently here.* “

Höchststadt wetlands



KARIN KLEIN-SCHMIDT

LANDCARE ASSOCIATION CENTRAL FRANCONIA

Natura 2000 site	Ponds and wetlands in the Aischgrund near Mohrhof	
Locality	Erlangen-Höchststadt rural district	
Size of site	422 ha	
Landowners	Private owners, municipalities, district, Friends of the Earth Bavaria, LBV, Bavarian State Forests	
Agricultural use	Fish farming (carp), wetlands, approved for direct payments	
Programme of the Bavarian Ministry for Environment and Consumer Protection	Landcare and nature reserve regulations	Removal of bushes in accretion zones, mowing of wet grassland, levelling riverbanks, desludging
	Contractual nature conservation programme	Funding for ecologically valuable ponds with accretion zones
Other projects and funding authorities	BayernNetzNatur project “Biotope network of marsh wetlands and fens”, project sponsor: Erlangen-Höchststadt district authority, Landcare Association Central Franconia– Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund BayernNetzNatur project “Natural carp” - project sponsor Friends of the Earth Bavaria	

Her favourites are the big, old pollarded willows. Sitting in their shadow, Karin Klein-Schmidt looks at the wide open ponds with their many birds. The Aischgrund is one of the largest pond landscapes in Central Europe. 7,000 ponds with a total area of 3,000 hectares have been managed for hundreds of years. A representative part of them was designated a European nature protection site in 2004: 190 nutrient-poor to nutrient-rich ponds or Weiher, as they are called in Franconia. They are a paradise for birds, including rare species such as the marsh harrier and the purple heron.

Many ponds are known as “heaven’s ponds” (Himmelsweiher) because they are fed only by rainwater or surface water from the surrounding land and sometimes dry up. “There are an unbelievable number of rare plant and animal species, such as the pillwort, the crested newt or the yellow-spotted whiteface. A very special inhabitant is the moor frog – it turns sky blue in the spawning season”, enthuses Karin Klein-Schmidt from the Landcare Association Central Franconia.

There are 1,200 pond managers active in the Aischgrund. Several groups of

ponds are managed by common property associations (Rechtlergemeinschaften) in which pond managers are organized. They were not enthusiastic when the area was designated a Natura 2000 site. “We were worried that there would be more rules and regulations and less money left” Manfred Mischberger explains, chairman of the 24 Hesselberg Rechtler, a pond manager and pub landlord. Numerous meetings, round tables and one-to-one discussions took place with the nature conservation authorities. “We talked a lot. Afterwards it was clear that we could live quite well with the new nature protection site.” Many

The moor frog is an attraction in the ponds during the spawning season.

Karin Klein-Schmidt and specialist Johannes Marabini agree on the conservation measures with the pond managers

Manfred Mischberger clears underwater plants that are not indigenous to the area.



Josef Röhrlé



pond managers continue to manage their pond in the traditional manner. Some have decided to introduce voluntary restrictions on use, such as not feeding fish or complying with rules on stocking. Others have decided not to manage the ponds at all so that the moor frogs and marsh dragonflies can reproduce and increase in number. They receive financial compensation from the contractual nature conservation programme.

Johannes Marabini from the lower nature conservation authority and Karin Klein-Schmidt plan the conservation

measures for the ponds, which are particularly valuable in conservation terms, and agree on them with the pond manager. They apply for state funding and pay local farmers to carry out the work. Many pond managers such as Manfred Mischberger carry out the conservation measures for their ponds themselves. They mow the banks and adjacent wet meadows or up-root bushes from accretion zones. They receive a fixed wage. "It's a good source of extra income for us" Manfred Mischberger acknowledges.

Every year at the beginning of October nature conservationists and pond managers help each other to harvest the fish in the Blätterweiher. "I like taking part. It's a good atmosphere and the meal of carp afterwards is really delicious" Karin Klein-Schmidt explains. It makes for a good combination of nature conservation and utilisation. And ultimately flora and fauna benefit: The stocks of marsh harrier, little bittern, purple heron and European weatherfish, a rare species of fish, have increased since then.

The pond manager carries out conservation work themselves, such as mowing the wet meadow.



The reeds are part of the most sensitive areas of the ponds – rare bird species breed here.



The endangered little bittern is a shy bird that likes to hide in the reeds.





” *With compensation payments we can make farmers appropriate offers adapted to intensive production.* “

Würzburg farmland biotopes

HUBERT MARQUART

LANDCARE ASSOCIATION WÜRZBURG



Natura 2000 site	Ochsenfurt and Uffenheim region and landscapes NE Würzburg
Locality	Würzburg rural district
Size of site	22,162 ha
Landowners	Predominantly private owners
Agricultural use	Arable fields, approved for direct payments
Other projects and funding authorities	<p>“More biodiversity in an agrarian landscape” – a compensation project in the Würzburg rural district</p> <p>Species protection project: the common hamster – the Government of Lower Franconia</p>

Hubert Marquart gazes out over the wide open countryside of the Würzburg Landscape. He is standing in the largest breeding ground for the Montagu's harrier and in the only area in Bavaria where the common hamster is found. The surrounding area is also an important feeding ground for marsh harriers, red kites and black kites and is also a key area for many endangered birds such as the skylark, quail, partridge and corn bunting. 10 years ago, in the midst of intensive crop cultivation, the nature conservation authorities designated it a European bird sanctuary. "It was clear that problems would arise" comments Hubert Marquart from the Landcare Association

Würzburg. Many of these birds breed on the ground and need a suitable place and enough time to bring up their offspring, and find enough food. But the ground, with its high value soil, is under intensive agricultural use. There is little space in the fields of this agrarian landscape for birds and other species, such as the highly endangered common hamster.

For many years now, the nature conservation authorities, the regional association for bird protection, the site-manager and the Landcare Association have endeavoured to mark the nests, create hedges and hedgerows and agree on special measures with farmers, such as leaving

strips of crops standing and extensification of the land use of sections of land. But they haven't had much luck with many farmers with their extensification offers under the agri- environmental programme. "Unfortunately the readiness to participate isn't sufficient because we can't offer farmers enough from the nature conservation programme to compensate them for the loss in earnings" Hubert Marquart explains.

But Hubert Marquart saw a chance to change this through compensation payments. With the construction of wind turbines in the Würzburg rural district, the intervention in the ecological balance was compensated by an amount of money

The wildflower and crop strips help farmland birds and bring variety into the agrarian landscape.

The grey partridge searches for food and protection in fallow land and stubble fields.

Farmer Tobias Sauer and Hubert Marquart are amazed at the busy comings and goings of insects in the wildflower strip.



correspondingly earmarked in accordance with the Bavarian Compensation Regulation. These monies have to be used in the rural district for nature conservation. Hubert Marquart convinced the nature conservation authorities to invest part of the compensation payments in the protection of farmland birds and the common hamster. "We can finally make farmers appropriate offers that are adapted to production and really achieve something across the board for all species" he smiles.

On behalf of the Lower Nature Conservation Authority he and his team have been on the road since 2015, talking to farmers. They put forward proposals

such as creating wildflower strips for ground-breeding birds, leaving strips of crops standing for the common hamster or other measures integrated in agricultural production, i.e. ecological upgrading of agricultural areas. "We offer farmers the available agri- environmental programmes, but we also talk about greening and now we can also make them additional offers."

This environmental advice is going down well: For 2016 they were able to agree with farmers 90 strips over 30 ha.

It is primarily the measures integrated into production from the compensation project that are attractive to farmers.

"Because they are short-term, fit well into farming methods and are easy to process. And the financial compensation is sufficient" confirms farmer Tobias Sauer.

Hubert Marquart points to the wildflower strips in the middle of a corn field. The conservationists have recorded their first successes: breeding rates of the Montagu's harrier have improved in recent years through targeted nest protection. "We are well on the way helping other endangered species in the agrarian landscape. Initial investigations in the crop strips show a positive trend for the common hamster and farmland birds."

The measures are best discussed in a one-to-one chat with farmers in the fields.

Tobias Sauer leaves a strip of crops standing for the common hamster when threshing...

...who benefits from the cover and food offered by this strip of crops.



Roland Sauer

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