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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT  
OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HABITATS  
(CDPE)

Group of Specialists "Protected Areas"  
(PE-S-ZP)

23 - 25 March 1994

Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve  
(Germany)

*Renewal of the European Diploma*

Expert report

by

Mr Daniel Daske

A representative of the Secretariat accompanied the expert on his inspection of the reserve. His comments appear in item 4 (page 11).

Appendix I contains Resolution (89) 11, on the award of the European Diploma. Appendix II contains a draft resolution drawn up by the Secretariat with a view to renewal in 1994.

## **Wurzacher Ried: 27 to 30.9.93**

### INSPECTION WITH A VIEW TO RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

#### **I. INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

It is well worth visiting the Wurzacher Ried in order to get a sense of the reserve's landscapes and biological potential. The road linking the few settlements to be found in this environment is basically constructed along lateral moraines overhanging a great basin formed by quaternary glaciers. First of all, one is initially struck by the immensity of the site; covering an area of more than 14 square kilometres, the complex is the largest virtually unspoiled peat bog area in Central Europe. Then, gradually, the eye discovers the diversity of juxtaposed biotopes: immense bog areas with different strata of vegetation, where essentially calluna, birch, pitch pine, alluvial deposits, some small phreatic ponds and wet meadows can be identified.

Parallel lines in the basin demonstrate human interference, which should be brought to an end. In particular, peat cutting is still allowed at present. As we look up we can see that the Wurzacher Ried, a totally natural environment which continued forming right until the glaciers melted, is literally framed in a landscape of intensive agriculture typical of this part of Upper Swabia. The Ried is home to 150 species of lichen, moss and fern, 650 flowering plants, including 20 species of orchids, and 39 species of dragonfly. More than 250 species of bird have been observed: of particular interest is the common snipe, large numbers of which nest here, the precarious presence of the whinchat, which may or may not be reproducing, and the recent appearance of the curlew.

In connection with the two latter species, one wonders whether the altitude (slightly above 600 metres) and weather conditions - with night frosts possible even in summer - are not restrictive factors. Although once present in some numbers, with well defined display areas, the black grouse seems to be disappearing for reasons which are unclear, in spite of attempts to reintroduce it.

So Naturschutzgebiet (NSG) status, complemented by the award of the European Diploma in 1989, is therefore thoroughly justified. The 1989 reports and appendices can be consulted for further details.

Mr Jean-Pierre Ribaut and myself were warmly welcomed to Bad Wurzach Naturschutzzentrum by a large team, reflecting the scale of co-operation necessary in order to optimise the possibilities of nature conservation. In particular, we were introduced to Naturschutzzentrum officials MM. Weisser and Renner, Wiss. Rat Forst, Bundesamt für Naturschutz, Institut für Biotopschutz und Landschaftsökologie, Bonn, Dr. Rohlf and Dr Kracht, Umweltministerium Baden-Württemberg, Mr Wälder, Regierungspräsidium Tübingen, Dr Meineke and Dr Schall, Bezirksstelle für Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege, Tübingen. We also met Dr Blaser, Landrat, his deputy Mr Segmuller, Mrs Finck and the mayor of the town, Mr Morczinietz.



(Sketch by Christiane Daske)

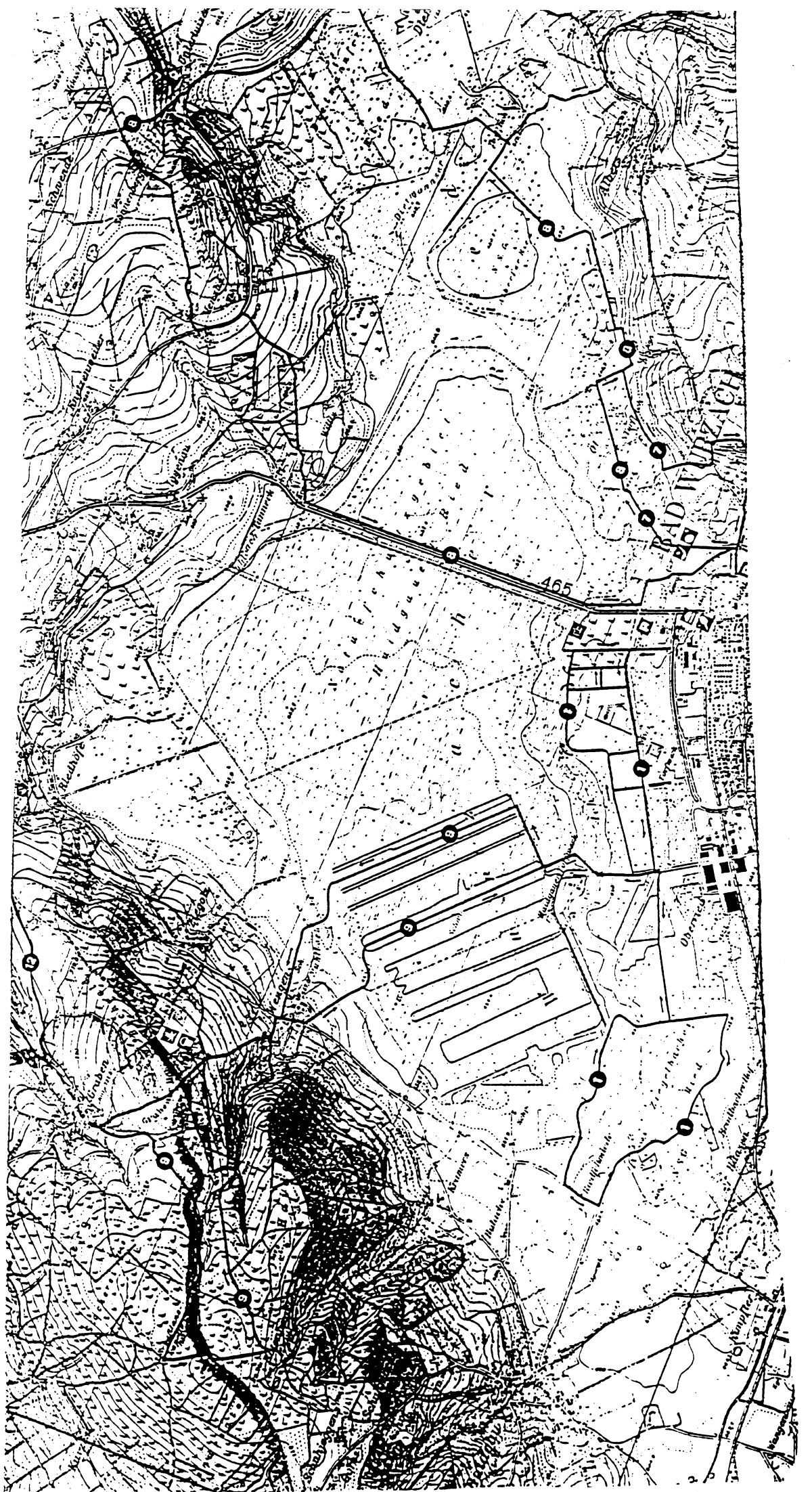
The Wurzacher Ried is an important nesting ground for the common snipe, among other species.

## II. ON-THE-SPOT INSPECTIONS

The initial schedule (see page 13) was completed in full. We shall examine the dominant management principles at Bad Wurzach with reference to these inspections.

### 1. Circular tour: Albert Dietmans, Grabener Höhe - Completion of a buffer zone around the reserve.

As stated in the introduction, the road linking these municipalities runs along lateral moraines and provides good vantage points for the landscape of the central area. This morainic rim surrounding the core of the reserve is gradually being transformed from an intensive agriculture environment (especially maize) into an extensive meadow environment through a large-scale land acquisition programme initiated jointly by the federal authorities (Bund) and the Land. With a budget of DEM 25 million, the project is phased over eight years. It is designed to extend the protected perimeter by creating a buffer zone (Pufferzone). Seventy-five hectares previously given over to intensive agriculture have been acquired. The land ownership situation is currently as follows:



**Total area of the project: 1,731 ha**

Current land owners:

Land Baden-Württemberg	:	950 ha
Town of Bad-Wurzach	:	110 ha
Ravensburg district	:	602 ha
<b>ie</b>	:	<b>1,662 ha</b>

Sixty-nine hectares in the hands of private owners are still to be acquired.

In the vicinity of Albers, we saw a plot that was transformed into a meadow a year ago and another where maize is grown at present but which is due to be transformed into a meadow in the near future. Mr Renner: "The objective is not necessarily to create meadows with a high level of botanical diversity. But by prohibiting all manuring, it will be possible to preserve the quality of water in the basin". Fifty farmers now provide services for the reserve. There is a positive climate of mutual trust and co-operation, which Mr Renner referred to quite aptly as "Vertrauensverhältnis".

The all too traditional antagonism between farming and nature has been overcome, a point worthy of emphasis. The farmers carry out the mowing provided for in the management plan, except in areas which are too wet, where an ingenious tracked vehicle known as a Mähraupe is used.

A brief visit to the pretty phreatic ponds area confirmed the good relations between the reserve staff and local farmers. A couple living in an attractive farmhouse in the immediate vicinity of the ponds asked us to sign their visitors book! We were also briefed on the problem of a cycle path which leads to the very core of the bog area and is a fairly significant nuisance factor. This path, sponsored by the municipal authorities, was opened in 1983. The possibility of creating another cycle path through the new extensive meadows on the lateral moraines, with the bonus of height and a better view, is being considered. But funds are short.

Mr Ribaut raised the secondary, purely visual and aesthetic impact of white glasshouses located in the vicinity of isolated farms. Solutions enabling the greenhouses to blend more effectively into the landscape will be considered.

## 2. Haidgauer Hochmoor

Objectives of the visit:

- Boundaries of peat cutting;
- Natural regeneration of exploited areas,
- Rehumidification
- Discovery of intact areas.

Peat cutting was once intensive in the Wurzacher Ried, but today is carried out by only two people, who supply spa establishments in the area. The area previously exploited and currently in process of natural regeneration covers 200 hectares. As one moves towards the core of the still intact bog, the ultimate aim of the huge rehumidification programme currently under way becomes evident. Around the exploited area, pitch pines are substantial in size and the soil stratum is mainly dominated by calluna.

As the water level of the bog gradually rises, the pitch pine regresses in size and numbers and calluna is replaced by peat moss and, in spite of the first frosts, some moorgrass. Ditches are filled in using an ingenious wood-based system. Today more than 20 hectares of ditches have been filled in, representing a total length of 12,320 metres. Work is continuing. Mr Weisser states: "We are in the process of healing the wounds inflicted by Man during the last century. And first and foremost, that means rehumidifying the environment". The results are already clearly visible, and the rectangular layout of farmed land is gradually disappearing. This long-term project is a remarkable and exemplary achievement.

## 3. The Riedsee

This fairly large body of free-standing water which occupies what was once an exploited part of the bog, looks geometrical on the map. This impression is softened when one visits the area, however, for this shallow lake provides an element of landscape and biological diversification. The problem here is too many walkers, who are still able to use a path around the whole of the lake. On a bank holiday, in the space of two hours as many as 156 people were counted visiting the lake side area. Ornithologists have noted a substantial decline in the bird population, which has a diversified habitat (islets, earth banks, vegetation, etc). Species such as the great reed warbler, teal and garganey, which are not present in great numbers at the moment, could become regular nesters.

Accordingly, plans have been drawn up to divert certain paths so as to avoid any human presence on those banks which are potentially richest. Work will start in the autumn, and attempts will be made at the same time work will be carried out to obstruct and eliminate a whole series of illegal tracks and paths so that they are no longer visually identifiable.

Rest and observation platforms will also be made available for visitors at certain points around the lake. They could be raised sufficiently (for instance, to a height of two metres) and integrated into the birches along the shore so as to facilitate landscape

observation and medium-distance birdwatching. These measures are quite realistic and justified in scientific terms. Visitors on foot cannot be regarded as penalised because they have access to almost 20 kilometers of trails in the reserve. Staff at the Naturschutzzentrum are doing important educational work, mainly in the form of guided tours, which we will look at briefly later.

#### **4. Bundesstraße 465 (Federal Highway 465)**

This relatively busy road cuts through the heart of the Wurzacher Ried. It links Bad Wurzach to Unterschwarzach and is used in particular by school buses. The road's history goes back a long way: before it was built, there was a path constructed on oak boles. Both sides of the road are tree-lined, and it blends well into the landscape.

However, there is the problem of pollution caused by traffic and the noise it generates. The latter aspect, which is not always included in environmental protection plans, is arguably the most serious problem. There is no likelihood of a solution being found in the short term to lessen the effects of this division into two parts. It is however to be wished that in the medium term most of the traffic will be diverted to other roads and that Bundesstraße 465 will be restricted to local residents, essential traffic and cycles.

#### **5. Naturschutzzentrum and the educational prospects**

The Naturschutzzentrum (nature conservation centre), which currently operates from somewhat cramped premises, is soon to move to a high-quality, three-storey building financed by the municipal authorities. Located near the church and next to the convent, the future centre virtually overlooks the Ried via the Kurpark, and this is of considerable educational interest. The final layout plan has been decided and work is scheduled to begin soon.

\* Ground floor:

- reception area;
- exhibition;
- documentation, specialist bookshop;
- small viewing room with seating for about twenty.

\* First floor:

- equipped classroom for schools;
- lecture room;
- small laboratory.

\* Second floor:

- administration, offices;
- small bedrooms for conscientious objectors working for the reserve.

The municipality has also acquired a building located between the future centre and the convent, which it is planned to demolish so as to give an uninterrupted view of the Ried from the centre. The idea is coherent and attractive, although one may have reservations about demolishing a building that is obviously in good condition.



The large open space in front of the future centre could be used for a variety of displays in connection with the protected environment. It might be the ideal location for a kind of "ecomuseum" showing the development of peat cutting, which is inextricably linked with the town's history. Or, as J.P. Ribaut has suggested, a trail could be created from the centre providing visitors with different views of the surroundings.

Educational events include temporary exhibitions, such as the one on dragonflies in 1992, and general or theme-based guided tours led by Naturschutzzentrum staff. There were sixty-nine tours of this type in 1992, attracting a total of 1,693 participants.

Activities for children and schools are also developing well. In 1992, "School in the Ried" was attended by twenty-five classes with a total of 574 pupils. After an introduction to the centre focusing on the ice age and the formation of the Upper Swabian landscape, children discover the Ried, its landscape and botanical and faunal components in a five-part tour lasting a total of four to five hours, or almost a full school day.

The centre is involved from time to time in the extremely important area of teacher training, an aspect that is certain to receive renewed attention in the near future. In the medium to long term, it would be sensible to consider taking on a specialist in this field.

### **III. IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA**

The European Diploma is a sort of Nobel Prize for reserves which have made special efforts, in terms of both ideas and practical activities, to optimise their landscape and biological heritage. In its August 1993 edition, the specialist review Kosmos described the Wurzacher Ried as "A Nobel prize winning natural paradise".

The award of the European Diploma has been highlighted in a number of local publications. It features prominently in the glossy municipal brochure presenting the 1993 season in Bad Wurzach. Our hosts pointed out that the renewal date of the European Diploma has served as a good argument in negotiations for improving the situation in the reserve.

#### **1. Problem of peat cutting**

As the fundamentals of this problem are well known, there is no point in discussing them in detail here. The award of the 1989 Diploma was conditional on peat cutting being halted by 1995. It is essential to comply with this condition in view of the expected renewal. Our conversations with a number of parties, including Landrat Dr Blaser and the Mayor, Mr Morsciniets, showed that all sides are determined to find a satisfactory solution. We are fully aware of the mayor's legitimate concern to guarantee a supply of peat to the town's spa establishments at a reasonable price.

Three other resorts in the area are facing virtually identical problems of peat supply. The solution is two-fold: to find a new supplier offering competitive prices, and to explore the possibility of recycling peat.

Apparently, the requisite technology is already available and operational. Recycling would be a step in the right direction in view of the need to safeguard this precious natural resource.

Putting an end to peat cutting should enable the wounds Man has inflicted on the Wurzacher Ried to heal fully. The natural regeneration currently under way shows that total healing is possible and desirable. This is the price that must be paid if the largest intact peat bog in Central Europe is truly to merit that description.

## **2. Strong points of the reserve's management**

These are many, and will enable improvements to be made in the various biotopes by offering increased potential for certain vegetable and animal species.

### **Of particular note:**

\* The extension of the protected perimeter with the creation of a buffer zone on the lateral moraines surrounding the heart of the reserve. In this connection, the large-scale land acquisition programme and the return to an extensive meadow environment are quite remarkable.

\* The natural regeneration work being done in former peat cutting areas, the filling-in of ditches and raising of the water level. The healing process is well under way in these areas.

\* The closure of "illegal" paths and modification of pedestrian paths to eliminate human intrusion in sensitive areas such as certain banks of the Riedsee.

\* The educational work carried out with the public in general and schools in particular ("School in the Ried").

\* The numerous opportunities offered by the foundation of the new Naturschutzzentrum.

## **3. Areas for improvement**

**Sewage** from some farms bordering the Wurzacher Ried is not yet channeled to the sewage works. This situation must be dealt with as soon as possible.

**Transferring the cycle path** to the lateral moraines would avoid the current nuisance in areas at the core of the basin through which the path runs.

There are no immediate solutions to the problem of **Bundesstraße 465 (Federal Highway 465)**. There must be a trend, in the medium term, towards a reduction in traffic (access restricted to local residents and cycles).

### **High-tension power line**

A subsequent visit to the neighbouring biotope of Rohrsee provided an opportunity to discuss the visual impact of this power line and its being taken underground for approximately ten kilometers in the reserve and its immediate environs. This project is worth encouraging, and could serve as a model at European level.

The issue of peat cutting has already been raised. The deadline for this activity to be brought to an end must be complied with; renewal of the European Diploma is conditional on this. We have seen for ourselves the amount of work carried out in environmental engineering, the convergence of views among those involved, the tremendous goodwill and the network of skills and abilities available. We do not doubt for a moment that a solution can be found in such a favourable situation. We should like to express our encouragement for this exemplary management, which has the potential to improve still further.

### **COMMENTS BY THE SECRETARIAT**

The Secretariat has no particular comments to make. It wishes to emphasise that the Baden-Württemberg authorities attach considerable importance to the conservation and management of the Wurzacher Ried, which they regard as a prestigious symbol. The central government (Bund) is supporting these efforts, allocating approximately DEM 25 million (over five years) for land purchases and compensation for farmers, given that outside the reserve they are encouraged to practise extensive farming, to refrain from using chemical fertilisers and to mow only once a year. Compensation is in the region of DEM 600 - 1,000/ha per annum.

The termination of peat cutting activities raises a number of problems, but all partners, from the Bund to the municipal authorities of Bad Würzach, accept that the diploma will be awarded on condition that peat cutting stops by 1996. This deadline actually has a beneficial effect in that it obliges the parties concerned to put into practice the satisfactory solution that is now emerging.

## APPENDICES

Programme of the visit from 27 to 30.9.93

"School in the Ried"

Report on the protected area since the award of the European Diploma in 1989 (5 pages)

Article published in the Schwäbische Zeitung of 1.10.93

### Other bibliographical sources

Description of the Bezirkstelle für Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege, Tübingen

Naturschutzzentrum Bad Wurzach, 1993 programme (lectures, colloquies, exhibitions, guided tours)

Naturschutzzentrum Bad Wurzach, 1992 annual report

Kosmos magazine, August 1993, with a lavishly illustrated feature on the Wurzacher Ried.

*The appendices are available from the Secretariat.*

# COUNCIL OF EUROPE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

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## RESOLUTION (89) 11

### ON THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA TO THE WURZACHER RIED NATURE RESERVE (FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 June 1989  
at the 427th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE);

Having noted the agreement of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany;

Having deliberated,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category A, in accordance with the regulations for the European Diploma, to the Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve;

Places the aforesaid park under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 18 June 1994;

Makes the award subject to the following conditions:

1. That no more peat is removed from the nature reserve as such by the town of Bad Wurzach after 1995, when the present permit expires;
2. That there is no intensive farming inside the nature reserve;

Makes the following recommendations:

1. The policy of land purchase should be continued, and even stepped up, partly so that intensively worked fields may be given over to extensive farming, to encourage the nesting of rare bird species and combat eutrophication of the waters;
2. The use of chemical fertilisers in the reserve and its periphery should be discontinued;
3. Motoring on the road from Bad Wurzach to Unterschwärzach should be banned; only bicycles should be permitted;



Forty years  
Council of Europe

4. A nature trail should be created in the Dietmannser Ried;
5. A programme of systematic zoological and botanical research should be drawn up;
6. The edges of the fen area should be trimmed by scything, and the water level should be regulated by discontinuing drainage and bringing water into the former streams;
7. Particular attention should be given to the schedule of field sports such as hunting.

Appendix II

**DRAFT RESOLUTION**

On the renewal of the European Diploma for the  
Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve (Federal Republic of Germany)

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on .././..  
at the ... meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the  
Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (89) 11 on the award of the European Diploma to the  
Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve;

Having noted the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and  
Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE);

Renews, until 18 June 1999, the European Diploma, Category A awarded to the  
Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve;

Makes renewal subject to the following condition:

- that no more peat is removed from the nature reserve after 1995, when the present  
extraction permit for the town of Bad Wurzach expires;

Makes the following recommendations:

- the existing funding arrangement should continue, so that the whole of the  
development and management project for the site can be completed (continuation of land  
acquisition policy, compensation for extensive farming, particularly in meadows, etc);

- the use of chemical fertilisers in the peripheral area should be discontinued (as is  
already the case in the reserve itself);

- regulation of the water level should be continued so as to regenerate the original  
environment;

- measures should be taken to prevent penetration of wastewater into the reserve and  
the peripheral area;

- the programme of systematic zoological and botanical research should be  
developed;

- movements of visitors should be channelled, particularly around the Riedsee, and a  
nature trail should be created;

- extension of the nature reserve, and thus the scope of the European Diploma should  
be encouraged;

- the possibility of reducing traffic on Bundesstraße 465 (and its effects) should be  
examined.