



53. Annual Report 2021

Period of the Report:

01.10.2021 – 30.09.2021

State:

Federal Republic of Germany

Name of the Area:

Lüneburg Heath, (Lüneburger Heide)

**Certifications or national/
International designations**

Nature reserve area (LÜ002)
FFH- Area (Nr.70)
Bird- Saving Area number (V 24)
European Diploma for protected areas
(DE940003)

Central authority concerned:

Niedersächsisches Umweltministerium

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Conditions: List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There were no conditions attached to the renewal of the European Diploma (see Resolution CM/ResDip(2015)5).

Recommendations: List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. Pursue a reduction, or at least a limitation to no more than the current amount, of the concession of ground-water extraction and coordinate the ground-water extraction for irrigation on farmland technically and quantitatively with the activities and infrastructure of Wasserwerke Hamburg ("Hamburg Wasser"); carry out additional studies and monitoring in order to collect more information about the influences of all kinds of water extraction on species and ecosystems; and simulation modelling should be undertaken for all factors possibly influencing the groundwater level, the soil, the streams, the different types of vegetation including forests, the biotopes of red-list-species, and the natural dynamic of the whole ecosystem,.

During the last years "Hamburg Wasser" applied for a "Bewilligung" which is a "non-revocable concession", license or permission in German law, to extract an average of 18,4 Mio cubic metre of groundwater in fauna-flora-habitat area Lüneburger Heide for 30 years.

In 2019 the regional water authority in charge "Landkreis Harburg" granted "Hamburg Wasser" a "gehobene Erlaubnis" which is a revocable concession with restrictions in terms of German law. Landkreis Harburg also shortened the delivery volume to 16,1 Mio cubic metre on average. The extraction rate of 18,4 cubic metre applied by Hamburg Wasser can only be used in particular years with exceptional circumstances not in average.

In 2021 Hamburg Wasser filed a lawsuit at „Verwaltungsgericht Lüneburg“, the regional court in charge. On 7.10.21 "Verwaltungsgericht Lüneburg" has dismissed the claim of Hamburg Wasser.

The extraction rate will be limited to 16,1 Mio cubic metre on average and the "gehobene Erlaubnis", the revocable concession, was not demurred by court.

"Verwaltungsgericht Lüneburg" also stated, that the studies and data handed in by Hamburg Wasser for the concession-procedure are sufficient and meet the current standards of ecological monitoring of ground water extraction.

Verwaltungsgericht Lüneburg also dismissed claims of land owners and the environmental initiative "Landesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz" against the concession given by Landkreis Harburg.

The court permitted an appeal because of the fundamental questions linked to the concession - process.

2. Pursue political recognition of the VNP's Lüneburger Heide Nature Reserve (NLH) and increase the public funding to the same level as is provided to Federal Nature Parks

Programs and funds for nature conservation provided by EU and the Federal State of Lower Saxony are still extremely difficult to apply to for non-profit organizations such as VNP. Application procedures are highly complicate, lengthy, costly and fraught with risk.

Participants of public agri-environmental schemes still have to wait more than a year to receive the first payments. During this period non-profit organization such as VNP have to finance the ecological measures in advance, often by credits and pay the cost for interest rates.

An example for the high risks non-profit organization have when taking part in public agri-environmental schemes is the “segetal species-problem” we illustrated in last year’s report.

In 2020 VNP was accused by "Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen" (the supervisory authority in charge of agri-environmental schemes in Lower-Saxony) of “illegal sowing” of endangered species. VNP had carried out experiments in cooperation with Leuphana University Lünburg to promote the population of endangered segetal species on arable fields owned by VNP by spreading of topsoil not seeds!

Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen has cut the grants for the agri-environmental program for arable fields of VNP for several years. VNP filed a lawsuit against the decision of Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen. Unfortunately, there is still not even a date for the beginning of the lawsuit!

3. Reconsider the ongoing practice of agricultural funding and pursue recognition of all types of heathland cultivation and all heathland restoration activities as a kind of “green land cultivation” with the same amount of funding, especially during the EC-funding period 2013-2020 and also for long term safe guarding.

It is still very difficult to receive funding for heathland habitats as part of the subsidies paid by the EC for agriculturally used land. VNP still has to count each tree on its several thousands of hectares to make sure, that less than 100 trees grow per hectare heathland!

4. Pursue the continuation of funding for the rearing of the „Heidschnucke“ (Heathland sheep) by Lower Saxony and the Federal Republic and recognise the „Dülmener Pferd“ (Heathland horses) as worthy of subsidy by the rear-premium of Lower Saxony

VNP calls for an equal treatment of active breeders of rare breeds in all German federal states when new EU programs are set up in the next period of financing.

5. Develop a concept for connecting the large heathlands areas east and west of Wilsede by an ecological corridor.

The concept for connecting heathland habitats east and west Wilsede was finished during the last years. The corridors are established and are now grazed regularly by the VNPs own sheep and goat flocks.

In Winter 2020/21 a further corridor between isolated heathland habitats was established in the southern part of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve. At “Scharrler Heide” pine woods were thinned and patches of bare soil were created to improve insect habitats.

Heathland habitats in the south-eastern part of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve near “Timmerloh” were linked by oak tree avenues. 715 new trees were planted in 2021 with resources from German Agricultural fund (Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Agrarstruktur und Küstenschutz - GAK).

6. Pursue restoration of streams, their associated wetland biotopes and their buffer strips.

Several projects concerning the restoration of streams and wetland habitats were carried out during the last years and reported in Annual Reports 2017 and 2018. There were no new restoration projects concerning streams in 2021. VNP arranges for new ecological schemes at “Haverbeeke”, a small brook in the center of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve, to be carried out in 2022.

A small bog area called “Egestorfer Torfmoor” was restored in 2021 and 1 ha cleared of unwanted spruces to encourage regeneration of open-land bog species.

At “Holmer Teiche” an area with 40 ha of carp ponds and extraordinary populations of *Littorelletalia* 0,3 ha of waters edges were cleared of unwanted shrubs and 10 pond water drains were repaired. The work at Holmer Teiche was part of LIFE Project (L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement) “Atlantische Sandlandschaften” and financed with means from EC.

At “Seevequellmoor”, a small bog that contains the well of the Seeve river, an area of 3 ha was cleared of unwanted shrubs and trees to restore FFH- habitat type No. 4010 (Feuchte Heide mit Glockenheide).

7. Reduce areas with cultivation of energy-crops to a level that does not affect the nature reserve's flora, fauna, groundwater and the scenic attractions.

In order to promote and increase the attractiveness of so-called agri-environmental measures, VNP wishes significantly higher subsidy rates. Otherwise agri-environmental schemes cannot compete with the highly profitable cultivation of energy crops.

8. Continue ecological forest management and convert mono-croppings of spruce into mixed forests including oak (Quercus ssp.)

In 2021 the forestry department of VNP converted two areas of coniferous wood into mixed forests with Lime tree, Cherry and other deciduous species in Sahrendorf and Timmerloh with a total of 3,2 ha. The conversion was financed by donations of “Deutsche Bank” and “Volksbank Lüneburger Heide”.

9. Ensure that existing data are included and respected in regional planning processes and also ensure that negative impacts on the nature reserve from outside the area's boundary are prevented; before licensing a wind farm, or any other project in the neighborhood of the reserve, carry out sufficient and detailed studies taking into account the formulated VNP recommendations.

VNP is concerned about planning procedures going on at A7 motorway exit “Egestorf” north of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve to build a new motorway stop with extensive illumination. “Light smog” is becoming a serious problem in Lüneburger Heide. Light smog is already caused by a very

high illuminated advertisement pillar at “Bispingen” motorway exit. The light of the existing pillar as well as the proposed one will be seen from many parts of the nature reserve and may have negative effects on lots of nocturnal species such as bats.

10. Complete the database of Lower Saxony concerning FFH-Species so that all species existing in the reserve are listed and considered in regional, national and federal planning procedures.

In 2021 members of staff of VNP charted more than 25.000 areas with endangered species and registered the data in VNP’s own data base.

Unfortunately, there are still no coherent and up to date ecological data bases in Lower Saxony.

11. Create suitable ecological corridors between the nature reserve and the black grouse biotopes outside the reserve without endangering infrastructures such as like wind turbines.

VNP regrets that still no measures to improve or safeguard existing ecological corridors for Black grouse were carried out by the district of Heidekreis during this period of report.

VNP would very much appreciate a discussion with experts of the Group of Specialists in situ to discuss various ecological problems in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve concerning Black grouse in 2022 as soon as the Covid-19-situation allows a meeting.

Ecological corridors to link habitats of smooth snakes (*Coronella austriaca*) were established between “Dröge Heide” an isolated heathland habitat north of the nature reserve and the nature reserve itself and along the banks of the railway running along the eastern fringe of the reserve. Along the railway 20 m corridors were cleared of unwanted shrubs to create open, sunny habitats for reptiles. The ecological schemes at Dröge Heide and along the railway were part of LIFE Project “Atlantische Sandlandschaften” and financed by means of EC.

12. Realize the concept of buffer zone areas with a high protection status in the neighboring areas of the nature reserve

Unfortunately planning procedures to declare “Camp Reinsehlen” (an area west of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve) as FFH-Habitat no. 157 are still not finished. Camp Reinsehlen is a former British military exercise ground that contains large dry grasslands. It is very important to safeguard Camp Reinsehlen and link its habitats with those in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve to create a larger network of dry grassland habitats.

13. Establish a corps of rangers (Naturwacht).

VNP does still not receive public funding to employ professional rangers in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve while other reserves like Harz Nationalpark do get public money for an extensive ranger service. VNP applies to the Ministry of Environment of the State of Lower Saxony for an equal treatment and sufficient means.

14. Site Management: List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

In 2020 and 2021 sheep flocks owned by VNP and herded by shepherds and their dogs were attacked by wolves several times.

VNP and the shepherds working in Lüneburger Heide have discussed the use of guard dogs in the nature reserve. VNP refuses the use of guard dogs because the shepherds in Lüneburger Heide herd their sheep flocks in unfenced areas with public rights of ways. There are lots of tourists walking, cycling, riding or using horse drawn carriages close to the grazing sheep flocks. Guests like to talk to the shepherds, take pictures or even caress the grazing goats.

In 2021 the regional tourist board estimated that about 35-40 Million guests visited Lüneburger Heide region for recreational purposes.

Guard dogs, that have to run free to protect the sheep flocks against wolves, are too dangerous to use in an area with outstanding touristic significance.

VNP would very much like to show experts from the Specialists Group the grazing management in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve in situ and discuss protection strategies for shepherds and their flocks.

15. Boundaries: Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

No changes

16. Other information: List any other information on the Council of Europe's website that you believe should be made available to the Council of Europe.

An on-the-spot check of an EU inspector to solve important and repeatedly stated problems in the nature reserve Lüneburg Heath was planned for 18.-19.8. 2020. Due to the covid-19-situation this meeting had to be canceled at short term notice.

VNP would very much appreciate a meeting in 2022 as soon as travelling is possible again.

17. Please also remember to include one or two paragraphs on the use of the EDPA logo.

VNP informs about the EDPA on its homepage, please notice:

<https://www.verein-naturschutzpark.de/europa-diplom/>