



52. Annual Report 2020

Period of the Report:

01.10.2019 – 30.09.2020

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.

The regional water authority "Landkreis Harburg" has not completed the permission procedures in 2020. "Hamburg Wasser" is still waiting for an unlimited concession.

To reduce negative effects on groundwater level "Hamburg Wasser" set up a variety of ecological programs.

VNP takes part in this ecological forest conversion program and is currently planting oak trees on seven plots i.e., seven ha. These plots are in close vicinity to hydrogeological features called "schwebende Grundwasserquelltopfe". These are areas of high ground water level along small brooks which can be preserved by a change of land use.

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.

VNP is very dedicated to the promotion of endangered species. During the last years a program to distribute segetal species such as *Arnoseris minima* was set up with Leuphana University Lüneburg. VNP spread soil from species-rich arable fields on plots without populations of endangered plants in context of EU-agri-environmental scheme BS 3. The supervisory authority in charge of agri-environmental schemes in Lower-Saxony "Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen" claims, that spreading of soil from one arable field on to another arable field is "illegal sowing" of endangered species. Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen is threatening VNP with severe penalties. VNP is currently preparing a lawsuit to make sure, that endangered species can be promoted on arable land that is part of EU-agri-environmental schemes.

VNP is still desperately waiting for more than 200.000 Euro granted by the State of Lower Saxony and the EC for grazing of heathland habitats (Agri-Environmental Scheme BB1) in **2019 (!)**.

The regulatory authority in charge “Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen” delays payments for ecological programs such as BS3 or BB1 in a large scale due to bureaucracy failure such as delays in topographical surveys and geodetic problems.

VNP is severely affected by the very bad payment behavior of “Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen”. Serious problems with cash flow from this public organization to VNP will ruin practical nature conservation work in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve soon, if the retained grants are not paid.

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.

VNP asks for a more practical regulation that takes the actual land use, i.e. the grazing of the whole area, into account. FFH habitats especially dry European heathland with *Calluna vulgaris* (4030) and formations of *Juniperus communis* (5130) have to be considered agricultural land, even if there are more than 100 “trees” growing.

Small private non-profit organization need legal counsel and an information Centre or committee to apply to in cases of discrimination or unpractical requirements set by public institutions.

VNP is currently suffering from enormous practical problems caused by one of the two regional nature conservation authorities “Untere Naturschutzbehörde Landkreis Harburg”. Every year VNP sets up a management plan for heathland biotopes and discusses practical nature conservation work with the two nature conservation authorities in charge. This is necessary to get permission for all kinds of conservation measures such as clearing *calluna*-habitats from unwanted shrubs.

Unfortunately, nature conservation authority “Landkreis Harburg” does often contradict the permissions given by the other authority “Landkreis Heidekreis”. Permissions given by “Landkreis Harburg” are extremely bureaucratic and in parts without ecological background and practical knowledge.

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.

During the last years a “corridor scheme” was set up by the three large woodland owners in NSG Lüneburger Heide: VNP, State forest authority (Landesforsten) and Klosterforst—Trust.

VNP started to create ecological corridors between isolated heathland habitats by thinning dense pine woodlands. Corridor habitats are now intensively grazed by the VNPs sheep and goat flocks to develop and maintain grassland and *Calluna* vegetation underneath the tree canopy.

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 in 2020.

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 spp.)

During the last years VNP thinned two areas of dense pine tree plantations. Sheep and goat flocks owned by VNP started grazing the new corridor woodland biotopes created with means of the ÖkoKult-Projekt. Botanists and Zoologists of Leuphana University carried out botanical and zoological surveys and will monitor the development of the woodlands until 2022.

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.

In 2020 members of VNP staff carried out surveys on beetles, moths and bats. At „Holmer Teiche“, an area of carp ponds with very high ecological value, mosses were examined and botanical data collected. Experts of Leuphana University collected botanical data on arable fields and zoological data on heathland biotopes. All data collected by VNP and associated research partners are transferred to public nature conservation authorities to be used in public planning and monitoring instruments.

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.

There are still no coherent 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.

A meeting with experts of the Council of Europe arranged for summer 2020 had to be canceled at short notice due to the covid 19 situation.

VNP would very much appreciate a meeting with experts of the Council of Europe to discuss various ecological problems in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve in 2021.

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

Planning procedures by the regional nature conservation authority are going on to declare “Camp Reinsehlen” (an area west of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve) as FFH-Habitat. Camp Reinsehlen is a former British military exercise ground that contains large dry grasslands.

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.

The European wolf (*Canis lupus*) has shown an enormous increase in packs and individuals in recent years. After 23 packs of wolves in 2019 the population increased to 35 packs and two couples in 2020. There are six packs of wolves living permanently inside NSG Lüneburger Heide or in close vicinity (Bergen, Garlstorf, Munster, Schneverdingen, Visselhövede, Wietzendorf).

In 2020 sheep flocks owned by VNP and herded by shepherds and their dogs were attacked by wolves several times. The attacks took part at day time and one lasted more than 30 minutes. One sheep was seriously injured and had to be treated by a vet. The flock of “Dülmener Pferde (wild horses) owned by VNP was also attacked several times by wolves. One foal was killed and a 2-year-old stallion was seriously injured.

VNP is at a loss how to deal with wolves that specialize in hunting and killing livestock.

The protection of farm animals against wolves required by the state of Lower Saxony (i.e. using high fencing or even guard dogs) is in many ways not feasible in protected areas and many other biotopes (e.g. bogs, wetlands, mountain pastures).

VNP considers the sustainable preservation of historical open landscapes protected throughout Europe and its residential groups of species as endangered and threatened. We strongly recommend a downgrading of the protection status for wolves in the EU and the immediate reduction of stocks in particularly vulnerable areas.

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 2021 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/index.php?id=811>