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# COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION  
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Select Committee of Experts - European Diploma

Wollmatinger Ried Nature Reserve

(Federal Republic of Germany)

Results of the on-the-spot appraisal  
(8-9 September 1977)

by  
Dr. Paul Géroudet  
(Switzerland)

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## 1. Terms of reference

The instructions of the Select Committee of Experts on the European Diploma were to:

- study the present state of the site and ascertain whether it remained the same or had improved or deteriorated since the date the diploma was awarded or first renewed;
- analyse the situation as regards conservation of fauna, flora and landscape (increase or decline in species);
- study developments (practical, legislative) completed or in progress;
- assess the impact of the public on the fauna, flora and landscape and propose improvements;
- determine whether the area should continue to be classified in category A or placed in a different category.

In carrying out this task, in the company of Mr Peter Baum, representing the Division of Environment and Natural Resources of the Council of Europe, I was received, piloted and given information by:

- Dr. Künkele, Reg. Dir, Ministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Umwelt, Stuttgart;
- Mr Leutenegger, Oberforstrat, Staatl. Forstamt, Konstanz;
- Dr. Jacoby, Deutscher Bund für Vogelschutz;
- Dr. Fuchs, Hauptkonservator für Naturschutz, Landratsamt, Freiburg;
- Mr Schröck, Oberamtsrat, Landratsamt, Konstanz.

I should like to extend very sincere thanks to the above-named persons, who facilitated my work and supplied all the desired particulars most obligingly.

## 2. Detailed consideration of points of instructions

### 2.1 Present state of the site

A natural environment evolves on its own, and this process is especially marked in wetlands. The Wollmatinger Ried is no exception, but its evolution is under constant scientific supervision, as shown by the annual reports and various publications.

This supervision dictates carefully planned conservation measures designed to ensure that the area's essential qualities, which justified its initial protection, will not be altered (cf 2.2). Because of this far-sighted management, substantial improvements have been made in several respects (cf 2.3) and, judging by the long-term programme, more are to be anticipated.

On the basis of our necessarily superficial tour and the information given us we may affirm that the Wollmatinger Ried has fully retained its qualities as wetland, refuge for flora and fauna, and natural landscape. We observed no signs of deterioration; on the contrary, the restoration of a number of environments has taken a highly encouraging turn.

## 2.2 Conservation situation of flora, fauna and landscape

### 2.2.1 Flora:

The molinia hay-meadows, which cover a large part of the marsh and bear an outstanding botanical population, are doomed to disappear unless regular maintenance checks their colonisation by woody growth (black alder, willows etc). The mowing carried out by the reserve's management (eg 100 ha in 1975-76) and supplemented by shrub removal in particular places, has already improved the position of several rare plant species (*Iris siberica*, *Gladiolus paluster* etc). Small experimental patches have been subjected to different forms of treatment to determine the best method of management, and these trials are to continue for several more years in order to ensure reliable results. Protective measures have been devised to keep the roe-deer from eating the Pasque flowers. Enriched meadows have been marked out to prevent invasion of the molinia grass lands - the effects of manuring must be closely watched! In addition, isolation of micro-biotopes has been planned and put in hand for some plant populations. The study of phragmita areas, particularly on the lake-front, has continued, with a view to defining the best means of maintaining these reed-beds. On the whole, the condition of the vegetation is highly satisfactory, despite fluctuations in flowering and this is surely the result of active maintenance and supervision.

### 2.2.2 Fauna:

We were surprised to learn that shooting rights had been let in the reserve, and that roe-deer, hare, fox and pheasant are taken every year. The controlled taking of game is alleged to be necessary to keep down numbers and is said to have no harmful effects upon the water-bird populations. This activity is obviously incompatible with the diploma, unless carried out in the interests of management and population regulation.

There remains the major issue of water-bird shooting in the reserve, which is allowed between late November and mid-February. The 1973 Land Baden-Württemberg Order having been effectively opposed by Swiss municipal authorities and hunters defending their traditional rights, the situation in this part of the lake, with three open shooting days a week remains highly anomalous. Because of the great food resources in the water in this area, the reserve has become no better than an ambush for the birds, which gather there even so. During a prolonged frost, the results could be catastrophic. Perhaps the Council of Europe could approach the Swiss authorities and help to remove this irritant threat.

The ornithological exploration of the Wollmatinger Ried is carried out in exemplary fashion by Mr Harald Jacoby and his colleagues, as is made abundantly clear by their seasonal reports on the Lake Constance birds (Orn. Rundbriefe) and by various scientific publications.

In recent years, the nesting bird population has not declined and has in fact been augmented by several new species (Purple heron, Marsh harrier, Black-tailed godwit, Bearded tit). The lapwing and snipe have benefited from the meadow-mowing. There are flourishing colonies of Black-headed gull and Common tern; the construction of islets and rafts has been favourable to the latter (30-40 nesting pairs). These facts, in conjunction with the outstanding duck population, make the Wollmatinger Ried a precious nesting site for a whole range of rare, threatened or fragile species, a situation which can be partly credited to maintenance, improvements (cf 2.3) and supervision.

The large expanse of shallow water in front of the marsh forms a high-quality feeding ground for thousands of ducks from midsummer on - which is unusual for Central Europe. When the water level falls, the area is transformed into mudflats, which are highly attractive to Limicolae.

The European value of this gathering point has been recognised by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), the ICBP (International Council for Bird Protection), Council of Europe and Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. This entire part of the lake should therefore be declared out-of-bounds for pleasure craft, and cordoned off in order to prevent the birds from being disturbed during the summer months. Even more essential is the banning of shooting - an anachronism here - which makes it impossible for this key sector to fulfil its ecological function in winter.

To sum up, the Wollmatinger Ried continues to remain an outstanding ornithological asset of Central Europe, and could become an even greater one if adequate measures were taken.

2.2.3 Landscape: Water purification is even more vital here than elsewhere, but that cannot justify the appearance of the purification plant adjoining the reserve. In a landscape of harmonious curves this edifice, which can be seen from a considerable distance with all its polished metal surfaces ablaze, struck us as truly aggressive. Would it not be possible to attenuate the effect by a coat of dark neutral matt paint and a screen of Lombardy poplars which could partly hide the building? (This is an entirely personal aesthetic consideration.)

### 2.3 Improvements

In February 1976 a network of broad ditches surrounding islets was dug in the marsh and the raised earth has been turned into dikes, enabling the water level to be raised over a large portion of the marsh. The birds have responded very favourably to the innovation, especially during spring migration and nesting.

The two raised observation posts on the circuit trail are proving most useful for supervision and guided tours. Perhaps one or the other might have an enclosed and roofed-in shelter attached, in which observers would be less visible.

Acquisitions of new land have continued, and this allows greater freedom for new maintenance measures.

### 2.4 Resources

The reserve's annual budget amounts to approximately 50,000 DM, including social expenditure connected with maintenance and supervisory staff. For the moment, this amount appears to be adequate (= approximately 1 DM/86 m<sup>2</sup>).

### 2.5 Impact made by visitors

As the only path through the reserve is a tour circuit used for guided trips, and as visitors are orderly, they make virtually no impact as a rule. Infringements are rare, we were told, at least on land.

In good weather, the lake area (Untersee and Gnadensee) is subject to incursions by pleasure craft and these disturb nesting colonies and flocks in summer moult. For this reason the prohibition of boating is highly desirable, followed by proper boundary markings and close supervision. This is an urgent measure, for otherwise, with the continued increase of pleasure boating, the situation will become very difficult to control.

## 2.6 Category

I earnestly recommend that the European Diploma award be renewed for a further five years in Category A.

In view of the aims of the protection system established, and the innate qualities of the Wollmatinger Ried Nature Reserve, it deserves to remain in Category A.

Shooting rights remain the one bone of contention. The regular leasing of shooting rights for land game can be regarded as a controlled regulation of populations, and hence as a management measure. But taking gamebirds on the lake is a very different matter. The Government of Baden-Württemberg is determined to outlaw the practice, with the support of the European Diploma; but it has encountered difficulties on the Swiss side. The good offices of the Council of Europe would assuredly be a great help in solving this international problem.

## 3. Additional suggestions

### 3.1 Bodensee Naturmuseum, Constance

It is certainly not desirable to attract any more visitors to the Wollmatinger Ried by setting up an information centre next to the reserve. In the interests of a more understanding attitude on the part of the local population and tourists, however, it would be a good idea to introduce the nature reserve and explain the reasons for its protection. The Constance Naturmuseum is the perfect site for this work of education and persuasion, and we accordingly propose that the Government of Baden-Württemberg give it the necessary financial support to set up a permanent exhibit relating to the reserve.

### 3.2 Full-time supervision

The appointment of a full-time warden for the Wollmatinger Ried would seem essential. Supervision during guided tours or in conjunction with research or maintenance work is not adequate, especially in view of the intrusions from the lake side.

## 4. Conclusions

We propose that the award of the European Diploma to the Wollmatinger Ried Nature Reserve be renewed for a further five years, in Category A.

We suggest that the renewal be accompanied by the following recommendations:

- 4.1 Boating should be prohibited on the off-shore shallows in front of the reserve, especially between the Rhine channel and Reichenau dike, as well as in the Gnadensee bay to the north of it.

- 4.2 An agreement should be concluded between Germany and Switzerland to prohibit shooting in the lake shallows (the Council of Europe should take steps to promote this).
- 4.3 This area should be incorporated into the nature reserve so that it can be more closely protected, or else it should be given special status as a protected area (about 290 ha).
- 4.4 There should be a warden on full-time duty on the reserve.
- 4.5 An educational exhibit on the Wollmatinger Ried should be mounted in the Bodensee Naturmuseum in Constance, and funds provided for its maintenance.
- 4.6 The maintenance and restoration of natural environments should be continued and extended.

5. Final comment

At the end of this report I should like once more to draw attention to the outstanding and exemplary qualities of the Wollmatinger Ried. After surviving threats of transformation into an airport, a housing development and a public beach, it is now protected and stands as an oasis of nature surrounded by densely populated land, forming a balance in this lake landscape. As one of the ornithological summits of Central Europe it has the benefit of first-rate scientific supervision and the unremitting care of official departments. It has by no means been left to itself but is receiving the kind of care which will preserve and increase its natural wealth.

So heartening an example of intelligent co-operation and goodwill towards nature deserves the warmest congratulations.