

## ANNUAL REPORT 2020

### Siebengebirge/ Germany Nature Reserve

**Name of the area:** Siebengebirge Nature Reserve

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas

**Award 2011**            **9 years:**

**Certifications/**        **Nature Reserve Area**  
**Designations**        **FHH-Area**  
                                 **European Diploma of Protected Areas**  
                                 **National Geotope**

**Date of delivery**      **DEC 2, 2020**

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## **1. To draw up a management plan within three years in order to guarantee the preservation of the reserve and its cohesion within the larger area of the nature park.**

In June 2015 we delivered our Management Plan for the Siebengebirge Nature Reserve within the requested three-year period.

As described in our 2015 -2019 annual reports, its main project aims are to be realized within the Large Scale Conservation Project "Chance7 – Natur – und Kulturlandschaft zwischen Siebengebirge und Sieg". This 14.6 million € budget national programme for a ten-year-period from 2013 -2023 is conducted in two phases: a three-year planning phase and an implementation phase.

Meanwhile the implementation of a great number of projects is in full swing and many have been completed. Thus e.g. on 91 allotments measures for the establishment of biotopes, on 42 development processes and on 19 maintenance measures were realized., among them so-called "beacon-projects" (cf. reports 2017-2019) at total expenses of 1.2 million € so far.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1 In case of changes in the management of the area, the leading role of the VVS (Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge), whose work to date has been fully satisfactory in the eyes of the Council of Europe, should be maintained;**

As presented in our 2017/2018 annual reports, there has been a change in the management of the Nature Park. The leading role of the VVS has been secured in the association assembly because of its historical merit of having rescued the Siebengebirge from destruction 150

the centre of the area, who cares for its forests, roads, hiking trails, 26 refuge huts, 180 benches, bridges, brooks, wells and monuments.

In financial respect the VVS invests 120.000 € every year (without personnel expenditure) and contributes provable 300.000 € in honorary output into the Nature Park.

In addition – with its wildernis area (since 2010) - the VVS has created a unique selling point in the Siebengebirge. Moreover, in its former forester's house it runs and maintains the only exhibition/information centre in the reserve. Result: the VVS has been integrated and accepted as the most experienced and most effective partner in the new nature park assembly. For the first five years the seat of the Nature Park – led by the Rhein-Sieg-District - will be the district hall at Siegburg. Later it is planned to be moved into the Siebengebirge, probably the former VVS forester's house/present nature park house.

### **2.2 develop a new financial plan together with local communities and the Rhein-Sieg-District.**

After intensive negotiations the VVS has finally succeeded in 2018 in achieving a reliable and long term financial concept with all communities, the Rhein-Sieg-District, the cities of Bonn, Bad Honnef, Königswinter and Sankt Augustin. All communities have agreed to contribute together up to 200.000 € per year (personnel expenditure) for the management of the nature park.

### **2.3 continue the provision of financial support by the North Rhine Westphalia government**

The support of the Federal Government, the NRW/Cologne District Government, the NRW Foundation, the NRW Regional 2010 Institution and the NRW Forestry Administration has been **outstanding** during the last ten years

### Financial support for the Siebengebirge Region 2010 - 2020

• Federal Government (Project Chance7)	14.600.000,00 €
• NRW/Cologne District Government	6.922.000,00 €
• NRW Foundation (15 projects)	2.400.000,00 €
• NRW Regional 2010 Institution	39.000.000,00 €
• NRW Forestry Administration	102.000,00 €

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**63.024.000,00 €**

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For the preparation of his renewal visit in spring 2021 we have sent Mr. Brunner a detailed list, what exactly these huge amounts have been used for.

I am sure you can imagine, how big parts of the NRW parliament will react, when Königswinter/ Siebengebirge is on the state-sponsored agenda again.

#### **2.4 maintain great vigilance regarding the possible construction of new roads.**

New roads have not been built nor are they planned. One road had to be closed because an underground quarry below the surface threatened to collapse.

#### **2.5 minimise disturbance caused by traffic on all roads crossing the Siebengebirge area and consider the setting up of a system of public transport for visitors;**

There are 5 crossroads running east-west in the reserve: L 131; L 144/ L 268/ L 490. Three of them L 331 (9000 cars a day), L 144 (7000 cars a day) and L 268 (7000 cars a day) bear the greatest burden of a five-day commuter traffic from the residential areas east of the Siebengebirge to the Rhine valley and back again. All these roads are barred for heavy traffic which is forced to take a detour of about 20 km to the A3 motorway.

There are recommendations for a speed restriction to 50 km on the crossroads (70 km now).

L 133 from Königswinter – Ittenbach is the only one with access to A3, and on weekends for many tourists, 70 % travelling by car, it is the approach road to the Siebengebirge. Result is that with fair weather conditions the VVS - parking spaces on Margarethenhöhe are permanently overcrowded. In 2019 we had more than 70.000 parking processes only on these spaces.

Meanwhile daytime bus connections to touristic hotspots – especially on weekends- have considerably been improved. Negotiations of the nature Park with the Rhein-Sieg District as traffic carrier about a summertime seasonal bus timetable shall pave the way for tourists to visit the Siebengebirge without their car. The city of Königswinter just examines the possibility to build a large car park available close to the A3 exit, connected with a shuttle service to and through the Siebengebirge.

#### **2.6 continue investigating the possibility of extending the wilderness area so as to guarantee the preservation of the natural beauty, features, resources and biodiversity of the Siebengebirge as a protected area;**

In a treaty with the state of NRW in 2010 the VVS on 523 ha established the first “wildernis area” outside National Parks.

Up to now the NRW Forest Administration has extended its “Wildniswald Siebengebirge” to 208 ha, adjacent to the VVS-area.

In 2018 the NRW Foundation added another 93 ha on the Petersberg to the wildernis area. Thus the coherent wildernis area in the Siebengebirge now covers 824 ha.

In several excursions every year we impart the ecological value of wildernis compared to an actively managed forest to our visitors. Worth mentioning is that the Siebengebirge Nature Reserve has been granted a special forester by the NRW Forest Administration who, as substantial part of his task, organizes quite a lot of events und projects and imparts fundamental knowledge about the area to our guests.

In our Nature Park House we have expanded the existing exhibition by a special room on the topic of wildernis, where we realize that visitors increasingly appreciate the value of wildernis. Caused by Corona restrictions, we had to postpone the formal opening of a 27.5 km “wildernis route” with 55 “windows” including an accompanying brochure from autumn this year to spring 2021.

### **2.7 encourage the continuation and extension of scientific research**

The Siebengebirge has been object of scientific research for nearly 250 years. In 1789 already appeared F.W.Nose “Orographische Briefe über das Siebengebirge”. Hundreds of scientific treatises, papers, articles have meanwhile been published on nearly every field. Nevertheless work continues, perhaps because this small region of only 50 square kilometers has had an interesting development since the Middle Ages, is close to Bonn and Cologne universities and in its size is easy to grasp

Five volumes that have just been published in 2019/2020 are:

1. Zeugen der Landschaftsgeschichte im Siebengebirge, Historische Nutzungen und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Landschaft, Teil 1, Hrsg. LV Rheinland, 346 S., Köln 2019
2. Heisterbach, Die Zisterzienserabtei im Siebengebirge, Hrsg. SG-Museum u. Stiftung Heisterbach, 304 S., Petersberg 2020
3. Zeugen der Landschaftsgeschichte im Siebengebirge Teil 2: Der Ofenkaulberg, Hrsg LVR Rheinland, 288 S. Köln 2020
4. Prof. W.Hachtel: Die Landschnecken des Siebengebirges, zusammengestellt zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Verschönerungsvereins für das Siebengebirge, Bonn 2020
5. Prof. W.Hachtel: Flechten im Siebengebirge, zusammengestellt zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Verschönerungsvereins für das Siebengebirge, Bonn 2020

### **3. Site Management:**

On the initiative of the VVS the Management of the Nature Park Siebengebirge (double the size of the Nature Reserve (11.200 ha - 5.040 ha) has changed from the VVS to the Rhein-Sieg-Kreis in February 2018 in order to include all five communities into the financing of the Nature Park, which up to then only 2 communities felt obliged to do: Rhein-Sieg-Kreis and Bonn). The leading role of the VVS has been maintained (cf. Recommendation 2.1). Cooperation in the Nature Park Assembly is good.

### **4. Boundaries:**

The Siebengebirge Nature Reserve covers 5040 ha: Rhein-Sieg-Kreis Königswinter 4.525 ha and 515 ha City of Bonn-Ennert area.

## 5. Other information:

### • Spruce tree-and bark beetle crisis/ reforestation

Like many German forests also parts of the Siebengebirge forest were heavily damaged by heat and drought in 2019, especially in the southern part. These high temperatures and the lack of rain dried out the trees and in case of spruce trees, weakened their defenses against pests such as the bark beetle, so that thousands had to be cut down. Reforestation has got the aim of achieving a mixed, drought-resistant and species-rich forest. Yet such a process is expensive, takes decades and it no guarantee, that oaks or other species, which tolerate drought better, will do well.

Meanwhile 40.000 three-year-old deciduous trees (90.000 €) have been planted in bundles of 20-25 trees with 6 different species, bundles at a distance of 15 m: small-leaved elm (*almus laevis*), durmant oak (*quercus petraea*), mountain maple (*acer pseudoplatanus*), Norway maple (*acer plataboides*), bird cherry (*prunus avium*) and red beech (*fagus sylvatica*).

### • Corona-caused pressure on the Siebengebirge

During summer holidays, but especially on some weekends during Sept. to November the Siebengebirge really seemed to “suffer” from Corona and the tourists. People, who normally travel abroad or to resorts all over Germany in their holidays, discovered the Siebengebirge for their weekend recreation and covered distances of up to 150 km. Result was that certain parts came under immense pressure (Drachenfels/ Heisterbach Monastery/ Margarethenhöhe), whereas others remained as calm as ever. More than 50.000 visitors a weekend did not only haunt the Drachenfels but also the surrounding forests. That includes crowds of mountain-bikers, who very often are not only a major source of social conflict, but often cause enormous soil erosion and disruption of wildlife. On the one side, we hope for relief by an end of Corona restrictions On the other side, we were strikingly reminded of our task of further decentralizing/canalizing visitor streams and planning a single track outside the reserve in the nature park.

### • 150 year VVS jubilee programme has literally made a big “corona” splash

As a result of different corona restrictions since March 2020 nearly 75 % of our programme have been evaporated, including assemblies, concerts, exhibitions, presentations on market-places, reports, guided tours, the opening of our wildernis trail etc.etc.

Part of the activity programme is intended to be realized in 2021 (with incertainties), but typical jubilee events can't be postponed.

Nevertheless we are satisfied with 250 new members we could gain this year. With now 1850 members we will start the new year full of energies.

## 6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorpholgy, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora. fauna, landscape) – State of conservation

### 6.1 Environment changes or deterioration in the environment of natural or anthropic origin

Geologically, we observe a development, which may cause unrest with residents:

For 200 years we have had rockfalls from the Drachenfels, from whose quarries up to 1828 nearly 400.000 cbm of trachyte stones were exploited to build the famous Cologne Cathedral. Meanwhile it needs 80 steel cables (each 40 m long) with anchors at their ends to hold the mountain top together and to stabilize the 800 year old ruin. With its rock crevices – in recent years excavated by a growing number of downpours – the mountain is a constant threat, in spite of a wire fence immediately above the vineyards.

These geological movements we also perceive in other former quarries that were closed by the VVS before 1910. 110 years old fault lines cannot stand the pressure any longer, bend over and drop abruptly. So e.g. as a safety measure we had to close the only grill site in the reserve. Consequences of climate change have been dealt with **in 5 = other information**

## 6.2 Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover, causes

An ecological “footprint” of climatic change is the spreading of holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), a plant characteristic of the atlantic climate zone, much further East/North East into continental areas that in 1950 investigations were reported Ilex-free.

Increasingly spread have occurrences of alpine squill (*scilla bifolia*) and wild tulip (*tulipa sylvestris*) and some few specimens of grape hyacinth (*muscari neglectum*) which are most north western outpost species in Germany.

Alien invasive species in our forests are: empress tree (*paulownia tormentosa*), tree of heaven (*ailanthus altissima*), farmer’s sumach (*rhus hirta* L.) and Japanese knot-weed (*fallopia japonica*). A project to curb the spreading of knot-weed has been started.

## 6.3 Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating; egg-laying and breeding grounds.

Stabilized occurrences can be stated of *Bubo bubo* (3 breeding pairs) and black stork (*ciconia nigra*) especially in calmed wildernis areas, and of peregrine falcons (*falco peregrinus*) round rocky mountain tops and quarry slopes.

On sunny, dry, warm and rocky Rhein-side slopes, where brushwood has been removed in former vineyards, we regularly find groups of rock bunting (*emberiza cia*) and insularly singular specimens of rare ciril bunting (*emberiza cirilus*).

Together with wall lizard (*podarcis muralis*), smooth snake (*coronella austriaca*) and heath grasshopper (*chartippu vagans*) they are Germany’s northwestern outposts.

Since two years we have proof of wild cat (*felis silvestris*) occurrences in the Siebengebirge. Since September 2019 two photographs have revealed that two wolves (*canis lupus*) have been close to the reserve.

## 7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

Cultural heritage plays an important role in the development of landscapes, both urban and rural. Until recently, the role of heritage has often been understood as the guardian of the past and has often been seen as a burden on the way to development. This role of heritage has changed, also in the Siebengebirge area. Meanwhile cultural heritage – built heritage/ buildings and natural heritage/landscapes - is considered as an essential engine for economic development, especially in the tourist sector.

The Siebengebirge is filled with all kinds of cultural heritage, historical features, architecture, archeological relics, and, of course, a broad natural heritage.

The development of these historical attractions here has found broadest support of public authorities since 2010:

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| • Restoration of the medieval (12th century) Drachenfels ruin                   | 5.200.000 €  |
| • Restoration Drachenfels area platform/ buildings/funicular                    | 15.000.000 € |
| • Restauration of neogothic (19.th Century) Drachenburg Castle                  | 35.000.000 € |
| • Restoration medieval (13-19 <sup>th</sup> century) Monastery area Heisterbach | 6.800.000 €  |
| • Restoration of medieval (13th Century) Löwenburg ruin                         | 1.500.000 €  |
| • Cultural Centre Siebengebirgsmuseum   | 3.500.000 €  |
| • Petersberg exhibiton - cradle of democracy in Germany                         | 1.300.000 €  |
| • VVS–historical forester’s house (nature park house)                           | 150.000 €    |

This upgrading of historical attractions and at the same time people's increasing appreciation of natural treasures in the Siebengebirge has attracted more guests than ever this year and created new economic activities.

## **8. Education and scientific interest**

### **8.1 Visitors – Information policy**

#### **8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklet, maps, cards etc.**

Information should be informing, entertaining, should create interest and produce high attention. Every year we publish our extensive event programme with 5000 booklets, edit 2 member magazines with a circulation of 1800 each, hand out flyers about our activities in the Siebengebirge (1000) and another one advertising for membership and honorary cooperation (1000). We place newspaper ads (2 in 2020), have an up-to-date website, and an open day on May 1st every year round our "Forsthaus" Lohrberg with ca. 1500 visitors and present ourselves and the Siebengebirge in the reserve with our information pavillon (in spite of Corona 4 weekends this year). We have got an exhibition about the Siebengebirge and the wildernis area together with a shop in our "Forsthaus Lohrberg, open all week round with honorary members on weekends

This year three regional and one international (Austria) TV station have produced films about the Siebengebirge. According to our precise press chronicle (since 2000) the Siebengebirge and the VVS have a minimum of 20 mentions a month in the regional newspapers.

Environmental education is an important pillar of our work. Proof of these activities is our yearly programme with up to 50 excursions, conducted tours for adults, families and children, reports, discussions, youth camps for secondary students (from 36 different schools), with exhibitions in our Forsthaus, and especially for juveniles events with practical work, e.g. building dry-stone walls, sheering sheep or building bat boxes.

This year, however, Corona forced us to cancel nearly 75 % of our programme, also all relevant 150 year jubilee-events.

#### **8.1.2 Frequentation by visitors and behaviour (number, distribution in time and space)**

It's difficult to deliver exact numbers. Reliable is the number of visitors to the Drachenfels. Here we have 4 electronic registers for pedestrians arriving at the top = 310.000 (in 2019). The second source is the number of tickets sold by the cog railway to the top = 300.000 (in 2019). The Margarethenhöhe is not that precise. From the number of parking tickets we think of about 250.000 visitors a year.

Attractive, however, are also Heisterbach Monastery, the Bonn part of the Reserve and the southern part round Bad Honnef. So altogether the reserve will count nearly 2 million visitors a year, with a high season from April – October. Due to the international travel restrictions, caused by corona this year, we have a much higher attendance this year: 58.000 to the Drachenfels one October weekend only.

We will have to continue our efforts to decentralize this influx of visitors in cooperation with the nature park. Meanwhile circular hiking trails (e.g. chapel trail/ geology trail) have been installed at the edge of the reserve. Attractive offers (e.g. Komper Heide) are also advertized close to but outside the reserve, to relieve it.

#### **8.1.3 Special visits (distinguished persons, groups)**

Mr. Laschet, Prime Minister NRW; Mrs. Heinen-Esser. NRW Minister Environment, Mr. Röttgen, former Federal Republic Minister Environment, Mrs. Walsken, Cologne District

President, Mr. Uhlenberg, President NRW Foundation, Mr. Holthoff-Pförtner, NRW Minister of European Affairs. Several delegations from other nature parks.

## **8.2 Scientific research**

### **8.2.1 Current or completed research**

Monitoring in the reserve according to FHH-Council Directive IV takes place for: wall lizard (*podarcis muralis*), smooth snake (*coronella autriaca*), midwife toad (*alytes obstetrican*), yellow-bellied toad (*bombina varegata*), crested newt (*titurus christatus*), 9 species of bats ( *B. bar/ M.Beck, M.dasy, M.dau, M.myo, M.mys, M.natt, R.ferr, R.hipp*) which have their main NRW winter quarters in former underground quarries.

Vegetation in the reserve is recorded, documented and analyzed on 37 long-term investigation areas by the biological station.

On two natural forest cells of 32 ha in the Siebengebirge (Nonnenstromberg/Petersberg), permanent scientific research activities have been carried out since 1985.

### **8.2.2 Scientific research**

#### **Cf. Recommendations 2.7**

Research of landscape change Siebengebirge 18<sup>th</sup> century until today. Part 1: Wolkenburg/Rhöndorf Valley/Petersberg, Cologne 2019

Research of landscape change Siebengebirge 18<sup>th</sup> century until today. Part 2: Ofenkaulberg, Cologne 2020

Complete research of land snails [castropoda) in the Sienbengebirge area, Bonn 2000

Complete research of lichen (lichenes) in the Siebengebirge area, Bonn 2000

## **9. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)**

### **9.1 changes in legislation or regulation**

On May 8, 2012 the Bezirksregierung Cologne published a new decree for the Siebengebirge nature reserve. As a consequence of this decree this district government passed a trail plan compulsory for walkers, cyclists and riders. The length of originally 280 km hiking trails was reduced to 224 km with a reduction mainly for cyclists/mountain bikers.

In 2015/16 the original 450 stone signposts got new inscriptions drilled into the stone blocks. Since 2019 this system has been expanded from the nature reserve to the complete nature park. Coloured triangles painted on trees clearly regulate which trails are allowed for whom. This system considerably facilitates control.

### **9.2 Changes in ownership title**

No changes

### **9.3 Extension or transfer, new uses.**

Under SU-033 the Bezirksregierung Cologne extended an 8.62 ha area to the Siebengebirge nature reserve: "Eisbachtal mit Nebensiefen" which, however, is not straightly connected to the reserve.

## **10. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)**

### **10.1 Improvements made**

#### **10.1.1 Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes, controls of fauna**

Removal of brushwood from former vineyards, Rhineside slopes, outcropping rocks and rock stockpiles round Wolkenburg to create living space for thermophile animals and plants, e.g.



wall lizard, smooth snake, wild tulip, grape hyacinth. Populations have meanwhile slightly increased.

Ponds, tunnels and corridors were created for the yellow-bellied toad and the midwife toad. Grassland management without fertilization and use of pesticides on 44 ha meadow orchards with scattered fruit trees/ Extensive grazing on Wolkenburg with goats.

Deadwood accumulation in the Nonnenstromberg-wildernis area has led to an increase of the stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) population.

#### **10.1.2 Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)**

As a consequence of drought and temperatures of 30°C on nearly 20 days in 2020 (growing numbers expected cf. BfN) there is an increased danger of forest fire in the reserve. Local communities together with the Rhein Sieg District have installed an extra fire brigade company specialized on fire fighting in forests. Fire plans are annually reviewed just like the extinguishing water pipe to the Oelberg restaurant.

In the main streamlets of the reserve the VVS controlled water course passages and widened them.

#### **10.1.3 Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting)**

Roads, natural hiking trails and car parks are in good condition in the reserve (50.000 € in 2019).

Of tourists highly praised is the rock signposting system with exact distance specifications, natural and cultural sights, nearest forest cafés etc (more than 300.000 €). 55 information boards on all car parks, a basic labelling of trails (yellow = bikes/ red = walkers/separate bridle paths) and numerous maps and brochures, also on theme (e.g. geology) or circular trails (e.g. 16 chapels) give visitors broad information.

#### **10.1.4 Field equipment (hides and study facilities)**

26 refuge huts have got partners and are regularly controlled.

45 rescue points and 180 benches with exact number and GPS-data communicated with police and fire-brigade give visitors the feeling of being in easy reach.

Two nature forest cells have been constantly examined by different scientists since 1985.

During the last 3 years the Siebengebirge was object of numerous diploma theses of Bonn university students in geology, forest development, history of nature protection, influence of mountain-biking and architecture and National Park.

In all these cases the scientific archives of the VVS, set up since 1870, were of considerable support. That is also true of several Siebengebirge exhibitions of regional museums that could return to the broad basis of the 150 year-old VVS-archives.

In spring 2021 (corona-postponed from autumn 2020) the VVS will open its wildernis trails on 27.5 km with 55 windows at special points of interest.

#### **10.1.5 Waste management**

All visitors to the reserve are required to take packaging (dominant type), bottles and any other waste with them. For this reason there are no litter bins in the reserve. On their regular rounds honorary guards pick up packages and bottles. Illegally abandoned "green waste" is collected by VVS-guards and then disposed in joined forces with the Königswinter and Bad Honnef communities.

### **10.1.6 Use of renewable energy system**

We are planning the installation of a photo-voltaic system on the roof of our Oelberg-guest-house (461m).

## **10.2 Management**

### **10.2.1 Administrative department: changes made**

In our office we have got 4 permanent employees, 14 constantly active honorary members and more than 40 honorary members depending on the occasion.

On the average, the VVS every year participates with 120.000 € (without personal costs) from its budget plus verifiable 300.000 € of rendered work performance in the maintenance of the reserve.

### **10.2.2 Wardens´ department: changes made**

At present we have got 8 honorary wardens who, however, have no sovereign rights and 2 government officials of the district. In view of the large quantity of visitors this summer/autumn this is an insufficient number of officials. Strong efforts to increase this number have been presented to the Rhein-Sieg-Kreis.

The collaboration/partnership of VVS/NRW Forestry Administration/Communities and Police for common actions will be intensified after the “Corona-season” rush this year.

### **10.2.3. Internal policing measures**

No changes

### **10.2.4 Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action**

Violations were committed by car-drivers , especially mountain-bikers, dog-owners and walkers. In case admonitions did not work, the officials imposed fines, about 2000 € for the January-July period this year.

## **11. Influence of the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas**

We present the award on our website, in our exhibition, in our magazines and flyers, dedicate it a special chapter in our 150 year jubilee publication and are convinced it was the extraordinary reputation of the award that also helped us to gain 250 new members this year – in spite of being forced to cancel 75 % of or complete programme.

Königswinter Dec 2, 2020

Hans Peter Lindlar

Klaus Breuer

(Members of the Board)