



55. Annual Report 2023

Period of the Report:

01.10.2022 – 30.09.2023

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(2023)3).

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. further continue reducing the concession of ground-water extraction and technically and quantitatively co-ordinate with the activities and infrastructures of Wasserwerke Hamburg ground-water extraction for irrigation on farmland; permanently monitor the ground-water situation of the entire Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve using a ground-water monitoring network evaluating changes in the eco-hydrological situation due to water extraction and climate change (changes in seasonality of rainfall and atmospheric humidity); use of ground-water modelling is recommended to simulate the impact of all factors possibly influencing the ground-water level, the surface waters including streams, the different types of vegetation including forests, the biotopes of red-list species and the natural dynamics 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 meter 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 meter on average. The extraction rate of 18,4 cubic meter 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.

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

Hamburg Wasser lodged an appeal against the current judgement of Verwaltungsgericht Lüneburg on 1.12.21. The appeal was immediately admitted by court, but has not yet been heard.

2. strengthen political recognition and increase the structural funding of the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve beyond the local level and continue increasing the public funding to the same level as that provided to federal nature parks; secure funding for a permanent group of employed rangers (Naturwacht);

There is still no public funding for a professional ranger service in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve.

VNP cannot pay the existing ranger jobs with the foundations own financial resources any longer. In 2022/23 VNP had to cut the rangers job pool by two positions unfortunately.

3. continue ensuring appropriate funding for the rearing and maintenance of the grey-horned “Heidschnucke” (grau gehörnte Heidschnucke) and of the Dülmen wild horses (Dülmener Wildpferde) by Lower Saxony and the Federal Republic;

There is still no public funding for the highly endangered rare breed “Dülmener Pferde” in Lower Saxony.

4. implement the broad corridors in woodlands meant to link open heathland habitat, as foreseen in the management plan of the Natura 2000 sites overlapping with the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve; assess the possibility of creating suitable ecological corridors between the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve and the black grouse biotopes outside the reserve;

The Management plan for the FFH-Area Lüneburger Heide, which was still in planning process 2022/2023, contains several 100 m broad corridors in woodlands to link open heathland habitats. The Natura 2000 Managementplan envisages 650 ha of woodland – heathland fringes and corridors to connect isolated heathland habitats.

The State of Lower Saxony’s own forestry management plan (“Forsteinrichtung der Landesforsten”) does unfortunately not manifest any ecological corridors.

VNP is permanently in contact with the neighbouring land owners to develop and maintain corridors to link isolated heathland habitats.

The Nature Conservation Agency of Lower Saxony (NNA) in cooperation with “Institute for Wildlife Science of Hanover Veterinary University” (ITAW) is currently working on a conservation program for Black Grouse. ITAW is also conducting a research project about “Occurrence and spatial use of black grouse predators in the Lüneburg Heath”.

<https://www.tiho-hannover.de/itaw/forschung/projekte-terrestrisch/aktuelle-projekte/vorkommen-und-raumnutzung-der-birkhuhnpraedatoren-in-der-lueneburger-heide>

5. pursue the restoration of streams and associated wetland biotopes and buffer strips; maintain the efforts to safeguard the diversity of typical landscapes associated with the historical “heidepotstalsystem” (deep stable culture, so-called “Heidebauernwirtschaft”); further prepare the ongoing and future management projects in light of historical agro-pastoral land-use habits; develop modern, efficient and effective schemes to mimic to the extent possible these ancient techniques;

In 2022 several ground owners were asked by VNP for permission to carry out restoration work in the streambed and along the banks of Dierkshauser Bach.

Along “Schmale Aue”, a small river in the north of the reserve near Egestorf, conifers trees were cleared and oak trees planted to enhance floodplain forest habitats.

In 2023 more parcels of land around “Freyerser Moor” a large bog in the southwest of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve were cleared of trees. In a couple of drainage ditches dams were built to retain water in the bog.

Landschaftspflegehof Tütsberg, VNPs own farm, maintains several plots of arable land as “Heidebauernwirtschaft”, i.e. a system of historic land use with a 10 year rotation and long fallow periods. This arable fields are very rich in segetal flora. They are also part of VNPs’ “living museum” concept.

In 2022/23 at Suhorn a new plot of “Heidebauernwirtschaft” - historic land - use was ploughed and seeded with an old variety of rye.

6. continue reducing areas with cultivation of energy crops within and beyond the borders of the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve to a level that does not affect the nature reserve’s flora, fauna, ground water and scenic attraction; continue the efforts to maintain, restore or create segetal plant communities, given the mere biodiversity richness and agro-historical value of these rare plant communities in Europe;

The cultivation of energy crops within and beyond the borders of Lüneburg Heath Nature reserve is still very extensive. The nature authorities of the districts of Harburg and Heidekreis try to buy plots of intensively used arable land. These fields are used as “ecological compensation areas” for construction projects. The arable fields are converted into oligotrophic grassland

In 2022/2023 VNP advised a farmer near Olsen in the northern part of the reserve to carry out a special conservation scheme for arable species in particular the orange lily *Lilium bulbiferum*.

continue ecological forest management and convert monocultures of spruce and pine into mixed forests, including native tree and scrub species; expand whenever possible spontaneous deciduous forest development in the forested areas according to the rewilding concept, but carefully monitor the succession to detect and avoid further coniferous tree expansion;

VNP is still converting monocultures of spruce and pine into deciduous forests, particularly oak forests. VNP does plant young deciduous trees – often with the help of volunteers - and also allows spontaneous forest development (particularly beech, oak) in its own woodlands. Young lime trees, wild cherries, hornbeams, maples, elm seedlings are planted into spontaneous beech and oak stocks to enhance the species variety. For VNP it is very important to have woodlands with a wide variety of different age classes, young and old trees mixed. Woodlands are regularly thinned and only small amounts of wood taken out. Wood is sold locally and regionally only within a 150 km radius to avoid long transports by trucks.

8. continue including scientific experiments in regional planning processes and prevent negative impacts on the nature reserve from outside the area's boundary; carry out sufficient and detailed studies taking into account the recommendations formulated by the Verein Naturschutzpark before licensing a wind farm or any other construction project in the neighbourhood of the reserve; continue the co-operation with scientists and support scientific research programmes within the boundaries of the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve to further underpin the management with evidence-based arguments;

2016-2022 VNP carried out a joined research project with Leuphana University called "Ökokult".

<https://oekokult.de/news/>.

Data collected in this project about insects and N-Deposition are now used regularly in nature conservation work. Some of the field experiment plots can be obtained and used for further scientific projects.

In 2022 and 2023 a new cooperation with Leuphana University started and VNP provided examination plots for a project called "Grasslands".

<https://www.leuphana.de/institute/institut-fuer-oekologie/personen/vicky-temperton/grassworks.html>

9. in close co-operation with the Lower Saxony authorities, continue the efforts to merge the extensive internal data with external data available (for example the database of Lower Saxony concerning Natura 2000) so that all species occurring in the reserve are recorded and mapped to ensure they are considered in regional, national and federal planning procedures; consider outsourcing the development of a data exchange system that will ensure the compatibility of both systems;

There are still extensive and severe problems to transfer ecological data collected during monitoring schemes in Lüneburg Heath Nature reserve into the State of Lower Saxony's own data bases. The state of Lower Saxony is still looking for a suitable database system and interfaces.

VNP makes great efforts to compile ecological data collected by members of staff as well as volunteer reporters in formats that correspond to international standards (GIBIF).

VNP also provides the state of Lower Saxony with its own data in order to revise the outdated red lists of plants and animals.

10. assess the feasibility of creating buffer zones in the neighbouring areas of the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve with a high protection status in order to mitigate the effects of disturbances on the core zone;

The State of Lower Saxony's nature conservation authority included two valuable open land biotopes into the funding backdrop of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve. The very important biotope "Sandmagerrasen Camp Reinsehlen" is still not adequately protected.

An expansion of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve would also make sense for the source system of “Schmale Aue” river near Volkwardingen.

11. continue monitoring invasive alien plant and animal species thoroughly, in order to implement appropriate management measures that minimise their presence and impact on the native species; implement, to the extent possible, the recommendations of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention regarding invasive alien species; strengthen national and international co-operation in the field of invasive alien species;

VNP is monitoring Black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), Spirea, Japanese Knotweed and common ragwort. Every winter large plots of woodland fringes are cleared of Black cherry to avoid the species to reach the open heathland habitats. Common ragwort is creating severe problems on grassland particularly meadows used for hay and silage production. VNPs members of staff are trying to reduce common ragwort mechanically without the use of herbicides.

There are currently far too few financial resources available from public nature conservations funds for a comprehensive approach to combating invasive species.

12. consider setting up a participatory stakeholder platform to address issues associated with the presence of the wolf in the broader area and to define consensual measures that are feasible, effective and fundable to deal with the potential impact of this carnivore species protected by European legislation; strengthen national and international co-operation to identify good species management practices.

In autumn 2023 50 wolf packs, 4 wolf pairs and 2 resident lone wolves were counted in Lower Saxony. In 2023 one wolf was shot with permission of the Ministry of the Environment, two wolves were killed illegally and 37 wolves killed in traffic accidents.

In 2022/23 in Heidekreis county (the southern part of Lüneburg Heath Nature reserve) 14 attacks of wolves on grazing animals, 40 killed grazing animals and 15 injured animals were registered.

<https://www.wolfsmonitoring.com/nutztierrisse>

Due to a very high rate of sheep and other grazing animals killed or injured by wolves, the Ministry of the Environment of Germany presented a new draft management concept for wolves in October 2023. Due to this outline, in regions with high amounts of wolf attacks on grazing animals safeguarded by special fences wolves can be hunted within 21 days after an incident within a 1 km radius.

After further consultation with the federal states, Federal Environment Minister Steffi Lemke will present her proposal to the Conference of Environment Ministers for a decision at the end of November 2023.