

Annual Report on the “Wurzacher Ried” Nature Reserve

Period under review:: 01/10/2012 to 30/09/2013

Country: Germany

Name of the area: Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve

Central authority concerned:

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Natural heritage – Conservation situation

1.1. Environment:

The autumn of 2012 began with a relatively cold spell, producing heavy snowfall at the beginning of October. The winter continued mild, characterized by a thaw during mid December. This mild weather was followed by a cold spring, culminating in the coldest last week of March since records began. In May and June, continuous precipitation caused localized flooding. At the beginning of June 2013, large parts of the moor and a substantial section of the trail network were under water due to the continuous heavy rainfall. The summer, by contrast, was marked by high temperatures, which changed with heavy hail at the end of August.

(Source: www.wetterwarte-sued.com)

1.2. Flora and Vegetation:

In the renaturalization areas, the vegetation development initiated in line with the stipulations in the maintenance and development plan progressed further.

Overall, the waterlogging areas are developing as hoped and in various reed moor areas gratifying regeneration tendencies are in evidence with increased peat moss growth. The undergrowth and forestation of the moor have been markedly reduced by the irrigation measures. The damming activity of the beaver (castor fiber) in residence since the year 2000 is supporting this development still further.

1.3. Fauna:

Once again during the year under review black storks (*Ciconia nigra*) using the Wurzacher Ried as a feeding biotope have been observed occasionally on the edge of the moor. The black stork is breeding successfully in a woodland area some 6 km distant. The beaver population remains stable with 5 – 6 families.

2. Cultural heritage and socioeconomic context

2.1. Cultural heritage:

The “Oberschwaben Peat Museum Bad Wurzach“ which reopened in April of 2009 proved highly popular again with visitors during the present visitor season. The museum illustrates very effectively the link between the natural and utilization history of the Wurzacher Ried. Alongside the peat educational trail and the Peat Railway, the Peat Museum provides another important module of the educational work carried out in the Wurzacher Ried.

Trips on the restored peat railway have now become an established component of the visitor attraction and education concept of the Nature Conservation Centre.

The spring of 2013 saw the beginning of demolition work and site recultivation of the former Haidgauer Peat Factory. It has now been possible to return the majority of the former site back to nature following a long period of utilization, while the building sections under a preservation order and their infrastructure have been refurbished as objects of cultural heritage interest, which can be included in future in the educational work carried out by the Nature Conservation Centre.

2.2. Socioeconomic context:

The Wurzacher Ried as recipient of the European Diploma plays a significant role in the tourism concept and in the national promotion of the town of Bad Wurzach. The Wurzacher Ried area therefore represents an important location factor for the spa and therapy industry in Bad Wurzach.

The Nature Conservation Centre and the visitors to the moor also represent an economic factor for the town of Bad Wurzach (catering and hotel industry, bus companies, trade).

Within the maintained area, a large proportion of the surfaces are cultivated by farmers. This represents an outlay totalling appr. 40,000 € annually fixed by contractual arrangement, which benefits the local agriculture.

3. Education and scientific interest

3.1. Visitors – Information policy

3.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing visitors:

The most important informative facility for visitors is the Bad Wurzach Nature Conservation Centre. On April 17, 2013 the new permanent exhibition of the Nature Reserve entitled “MOOR EXTREM” was opened. Alongside the permanent exhibition about the Wurzacher Ried, 4 changing exhibitions of topics of relevance for nature conservation and 10 lectures about the Wurzacher Ried were offered. In addition, a range of other events were also held in the Nature Conservation Centre – 253 events during the year under review – on nature and environment-related topics

3.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behaviour:

77 guided tours were held in the Wurzacher Ried by employees of the Nature Conservation Centre, during which 1,606 persons were informed about the nature reserve. 6 of these guided tours were dedicated to special topics (ornithological tours, botanical tours, tours to the former peat cutting area to inspect the rewatering works, forest tours etc.).

In addition, special events were held for children and adolescents. Within the framework of the so-called "Classroom on the Moor", 62 school classes and youth groups with 1,200 participants were familiarized with aspects of nature in the reserve and made aware of nature conservation issues.

During the regularly held children's afternoon (not run during school holidays), 124 children were hosted at 15 events. 6 additional events for children were held as part of the summer holiday activity program.

In total 1,384 children and adolescents took part in the environmental education programs run by the Nature Conservation Centre.

Together with the around 8,181 individual visitors to the exhibition area, the 5,661 visitors to the new information area of the Nature Conservation Centre and additional participants at special events, a total of 18,097 visitors were accommodated by the Nature Conservation Centre and informed about the Wurzacher Ried.

As many visitors to the moor cannot be picked up by the Nature Conservation Centre figures, the actual total is not known.

The visitors to the moor were concentrated on the nature trails close to the town around the Riedsee Lake and the close environment of the spa park. Other points of concentration, although these were far less frequented, are the cycle and walking track from Bad Wurzach to Dietmanns and the trails between the Riedsee lake and the Haidgau spring-fed lakes in the south of the region.

Visitors were only afforded access to the ecologically sensitive central core of the nature reserve with qualified guidance by employees of the Nature Conservation Centre within the framework of special guided tours to the former Haidgau peat cutting area. As spa and holiday guests are present around the year in Bad Wurzach, the Nature Reserve is also frequented by visitors in all seasons.

3.1.3. Special visits:

Within the framework of an informative visit, in April 2013 a Japanese delegation under the supervision of the Japanese Consul for Economic Issues from Munich, Yuki Shimizu, visited the new permanent exhibition of the Nature Conservation Centre.

On August 22 and 23, a delegation of moorland ecologists from the Federal State of Lower Saxony was hosted by the Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve management.

3.2. Scientific research

3.2.1. Current or completed research:

The concept for monitoring Wurzacher Ried introduced in 2009 was continued within the framework of the first five-year period (2010 – 2014). Studies carried out during the period under review encompassed vegetation, avifauna, butterflies, ground beetles, grasshoppers and macrozoobenthos.

The research project launched in February 2010 by the University of Freiburg entitled "From process protection to adaptive nature conservation strategies in cultivated landscapes – the return of the beaver (*Castor fiber*) as a motor for new management concepts in protected

areas“ was continued in the year under review. A concluding publication is planned for 2014. In the meantime, this research project has been extended to a third year up until 2015 with an additional study focus: “The beaver as a lead species for integrated nature reserve development”.

3.2.2. Scientific publications:

Within the framework of the research project described under 3.2.1., five Bachelor of Science theses were completed during the period under review.

4. Site description

4.1. Changes in legislation or regulations:

There were no changes during the year under review in respect of the legal situation in the nature reserve. Reference is made to the ordinance issued by the Government Headquarters of Tübingen relating to the nature reserve "Wurzacher Ried" dated October 02, 1996.

4.2. Changes in ownership titles:

No changes took place in the year under review.

4.3. Extension or transfer, new uses:

No changes in the year under review.

5. Site management

5.1. Improvements made

5.1.1. Ecological actions affecting the flora and biotope, control of fauna:

The maintenance and development measures undertaken in cooperation with local farmers within the maintenance and extensivisation zone were continued as in recent years in line with the maintenance and development plan (appr. 300 ha; 35 local farmers).

Special measures:

In addition, the extensive grazing of around 20 hectares of peripheral moorland pasture by a herd of water buffalo (appr. 17 animals) was contractually newly regulated during the period under review.

The species conservation measures undertaken in the Haidgauer spring-fed lake area for the *Dactylorhiza ochroleuca* orchid species, whose stocks had been substantially driven back by rampant growth of reed and rushes, was continued in the year under review.

The maintenance contracts awarded within the framework of the species conservation program for scrub clearance and mowing of habitats for the highly endangered *Scarce Heath* butterfly species (*Coenonympha hero*) in the Dietmannser Ried are were also continued.

Around 7 hectares of overgrown flower meadow were freed of encroaching woodland growth for species conservation reasons for the first time within the framework of a special contract. This will be included in the regular maintenance program in future with yearly mowing.

Due to the spread of neophytes, a campaign was carried out at the end of August 2013 to combat the Canadian Golden Rod (*Solidago canadensis*).

Within the framework of a school project in cooperation with the Werkrealschule Bad Wurzach, scrub clearance work was carried out at the Haigauer peat works on a total of 8 dates. The aim of this measure was to free and open up the site of the former peat works.

From December 2012 to March 2013, within the framework of rewatering carried out on damaged moorland, extensive measures were performed to repair and secure the existing damming constructions in the southeast section of the former Haidgau peat works. Measures were performed on a total of 35 dams to repair, secure and optimize water management.

5.1.2 Protection against the elements (fire, water):

No actions.

5.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares:

Regular maintenance work was performed on various trails, in particular on boarded trails, as part of the regular path and track maintenance measures in cooperation with the State Forestry Commission and the Municipality of Bad Wurzach.

All paths were checked during the course of the year several times for sources of danger and safety defects (e.g. trees, defective boards). Defective boards and missing signs were replaced, potentially hazardous trees checked and removed if necessary.

5.1.4 Field equipment:

No actions.

5.1.5. Waste management:

No actions.

5.1.6. Use of renewable energies:

No actions.

5.2. Management

5.2.1. Administrative department:

No changes in the year under review

5.2.2. Warden's department (Nature Conservation Centre):

As part of a new urban development plan for the centre of the town of Bad Wurzach, plans exist to relocate the Nature Conservation Centre to the historic monastery building "Maria Rosengarten". In this context, a first step was undertaken to completely renovate the permanent exhibition in the Nature Conservation Centre which had become out-dated and in need of complete replacement by a modern concept. The new exhibition was housed in a new building constructed as an extension to the monastery building, together with the Bad Wurzach Tourist Information Centre. The result is a very contemporary interactive exhibition which allows visitors to become closely acquainted with the moor as a "land of extremes" from wide-ranging different perspectives. The exhibition is experienced visually, aurally and through the sense of touch, and encourages cognitive identification and understanding through play. The integration of music and sounds using headphones provides the promise of a very special experience of the moor. The audio presentation comes in an adult or a children's version, which guides the younger visitors through the exhibition with narration by the character of Calluna, the witch of the moors. The exhibition "MOOR EXTREME" has been running since mid April and has met with an enthusiastic reception, as reflected in the growing visitor numbers.

In a bid to further optimize public relations, an additional half-day post has been created in the Nature Conservation Centre with effect from January 1, 2013 for a marketing officer with the relevant budget provision.

As part of this reorganization process, a new corporate identity and logo with the word mark "Naturschutzzentrum Wurzacher Ried" has been introduced.

The final relocation of the administrative wing of the Nature Conservation Centre into the historic monastery building is expected to take up until the end of 2014/beginning of 2015.

5.2.3. Internal policing measures:

During the year under review, a certificate of exemption from the conservation status was granted by the Tübingen Government Department to permit the removal of beaver dams in the Wengener mill race. The beaver dams in question were responsible for flooding the main road B 465 running through the reed marsh.

5.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action:

No breaches during the year under review.

II. INFLUENCE OF THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA ON PROTECTED AREAS

As a result of being awarded the European Diploma, the enormous significance of the Wurzacher Ried as a protected area has been recognized and accepted by the general public and by the administrative authorities. Not only the diploma itself but also the recommendations within the framework of the diploma renewals are very helpful and conducive for the execution of specialist nature conservation work and also the implementation of maintenance and development measures.

The European Diploma is furthermore a highly effective promotional tool both for the town of Bad Wurzach with its spa and therapy facilities, and also for the Nature Conservation Centre and nature conservation in general.

III. CONDITIONS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AWARD OR RENEWAL OF THE DIPLOMA

Re. Recommendation 1:

The Peat Museum, the peat railway and the peat educational trail enjoy a high level of demand and have become important building blocks of the educational work carried out in the Wurzacher Ried. A long-term plan is in place to supplement the offering to visitors to include a viewing tower.

Re. Recommendation 2:

An increase of staffing for the Nature Conservation Centre team has not yet been achieved.

Re. Recommendation 3:

As the national road traffic planning is a lengthy procedure, no results can yet be reported.

Re. Recommendation 4 + 5:

Endeavours to acquire land will be continued as the financial circumstances of the State and existing offers from private land owners allow.

Re. Recommendation 6:

There are no new results to report regarding the demolition / underground laying of high-voltage conductors in the Wurzacher Ried area.