



50. Annual Report 2018

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| <u>Period of the Report:</u> | 01.10.2017 – 30.09.2018 |
| <u>State:</u> | Federal Republic of Germany |
| <u>Name of the Area:</u> | Lüneburg Heath, (Lüneburger Heide) |
| <u>Certifications or national/ International designations</u> | Nature reserve area (LÜ002) FFH- Area (Nr.70) Bird- Saving Area number (V 24) European Diploma for protected areas (DE940003) |

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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; 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 approval process for a new concession for groundwater extraction required by Hamburg Wasserwerke (the regional water supplier) is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The withdrawal quantity has been reduced.

VNP agreed to an annual adaptation of groundwater abstraction management in the Lüneburg Heath. This means a positive development of the entire groundwater extraction process.

Hamburger Wasserwerke actively supports the regeneration rate of clean groundwater through silvicultural projects (e.g. changing spruce forests into oak woodland).

We regretted that the state of Lower Saxony did not include the preservation of heathland in the list of priorities for drinking water protection, although intensive protection of the environment significantly contributes to the protection of ground water as well. The non-inclusion, like the problems described in point 3, is a severe discrimination of heathland over grassland.

2. Pursue political recognition of the VNP's Lüneburger Heide Nature Reserve (NLH) and increase the public funding to the same level as that provided to Federal Nature Parks

VNP now receives the requested funding to maintain and develop the Natura 2000 site, the FFH habitats and the species in good ecological condition. The granted projects run until 2022.

Programmes and funds for nature conservation provided by EU and the Federal State of Lower Saxony are very difficult to handle for non-profit organisations such as VNP. Application procedures are highly complicate and lengthy. VNP handed in a programme for conservation projects in several FFH-habitats but still has not received an answer.

Non-profit organisations have to fulfil the same requirements as public organisations such as Districts or Communities. Particular smaller non-profit associations do not have the means and the professional experts to apply for highly complex open competitive bidding programmes that are

offered in the new EC / ELER / VO-EU Nr. 1305/2013 – (financing guideline “Special Species and Habitat Protection”, State of Lower Saxony, Rd.Erl. v. 28.8.2015 28-22620/2/010).

The new financing programmes discriminate small, private non-profit organisations compared to large public institutions that have legal experts and enough professionals to fill in lengthy and complicate application forms.

VNP demands a better support for non-profit organisation to apply for public grants. An information centre and expert help in case of legal questions (particular public procurement law) are absolutely necessary to encourage small private nature conservation associations to apply for sufficient funds.

Public grants for nature conservation in Lower Saxony are now distributed in the context of a ranking scheme. Nature reserves have to compete against each other. VNP wishes that nature reserves holding a European Diploma should get a higher ranking score in comparison to nature reserves without a European Diploma. This would underline the significance of European Diploma Areas in the context of a European nature reserve network.

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.

In 2015 heathland (i.e. Calluna dominated heath land habitats on sandy soil) was included in the list of agricultural land defined by EC. For the first time farmers and shepherds, who manage heathland, are authorised to payment entitlements and are allowed to apply for the European single payment scheme.

There are still two negative aspects concerning heathland as part of the agricultural subsidy system.

Heathland farmers who apply for the single payment scheme get a reduction on grants for agri-environment measures (e.g. sheep grazing nature conservation schemes). This is a severe discrimination of heathland in comparison to grassland and arable land.

The second problem concerning single payments for heath land is the so called “100 tree rule”. In Lower Saxony heathland is only considered as agricultural land, if there are less than 100 trees (even Juniper communis is considered a tree) growing per hectare. This regulation is very difficult to handle in shepherding practice and causes an enormous bureaucratic effort, as each tree has to be counted on aerial photographs.

In 2017 VNPs’ own farm “Landschaftspflegehof Tütsberg” was examined by a board of experts from EC Auditing Board Luxemburg. These experts explained, that the so called “100 tree rule” is meant for arable land only (e.g. for olive trees on arable land in Mediterranean countries). The “100 tree rule” is not meant for grasslands and pastures. Unfortunately the State of Lower Saxony (in particular the authority in charge “Landwirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen) has a different legal perception.

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 commuis (5130) have to be considered agricultural land, even if there are more than 100 trees growing.

The case of the “100 tree rule” indicates that 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.

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

EC and the country of Lower Saxony support breeders of rare breeds of farm animals. Since 2015 the breeding of “grey horned heathland sheep” (Graue gehörnte Heidschnucken), the traditional sheep breed of the Lüneburg Heath, is funded with 200 Euro per livestock unit.

“Dülmener Horse”, the only surviving German pony breed, is included in the 2016 list of rare and endangered breeds. Unfortunately the breeders of the rare breed of Dülmener horses are not supported by the State of Lower Saxony. The neighbouring state of Northern Westphalia offers breeders of Dülmener horses a grant of 200 Euro per horse.

VNP calls for an equal treatment of active breeders of rare breeds in all German federal states.

5. Develop a concept for connecting the large heathlands areas east and west of Wilsede by an ecological corridor.

An ecological corridor linking the heathlands north and west of Wilsede (forest fringe north of “Heinköpen” Woodland) was not carried out until now. VNP demands that corridors are included in the new FFH-Management plan, which will be drawn up in 2018. Corridors should consist of broad transitions from woodland to open land. Woodland should be cleared to a level of 25% tree crown cover to allow enough sun shine to reach the ground covering vegetation.

Extensive sheep grazing with herded Heidschnucken flocks is a great advantage to maintain the ecological quality of corridors.

6. Pursue restoration of streams, their associated wetland biotopes and their buffer strips.

An ecological restoration scheme was carried out on various streams in the nature reserve throughout the past years. Financing was derived from a budget for the implementation of the European Water Framework Directive.

To initialise a dynamic river development, sections of “Haverbeeke” (a brook in the central part of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve) were improved with gravel banks and stream guidance. Artificial ponds that block the permeability along “Haverbeeke” were removed.

Last working stages were carried out in 2017 and the programme concerning the restoration of “Haverbeeke” brook was completed successfully.

In 2016 VNP worked out a detailed concept for the restoration of large wetlands along small heathland brooks. The restoration of wetlands is important to improve the habitat quality of highly endangered ground breeding birds such as curlew (*Numenius arquata*), lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) or common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*).

VNP filed an application for a grant financed by European agricultural Fund / ELER / VO-EU Nr. 1305/2013 – (financing guideline “Special Species and Habitat Protection”, State of Lower Saxony, Rd.Erl. v. 28.8.2015 28-22620/2/010).

The restoration concept was approved in September 2016 by Niedersächsischer Landesbetrieb für Wasserwirtschaft, Küsten- und Naturschutz / NLWKN, the nature conservation authority of State of Lower Saxony.

NLWKN granted a 100% funding in accordance of the ELER guidelines of 381.274,87 Euro (2016-2022) to carry out the following schemes:

- Bird monitoring
- Clearance of surplus shrubs, felling of trees in breeding habitats
- Restoration of channelized ditches and brooks
- Construction of new ponds, ecological enhancement of existing ponds
- Protection of clutches and nests

The wetland restoration project takes place in two different areas:

- Twißelmoor – Tütsberger Grünland, 269 ha, 1 breeding couple of curlews, 1-4 breeding couples of lapwings, no common snipes
- Hörpeler Heide, 327 ha, curlew extinct in 1998, some sightings in 2014, lapwing extinct in 1999, no common snipes

Bird monitoring started in winter 2016/2017. In spring and autumn 2017 unwanted shrubs were felled in Twißelmoor – Tütsberger Grünland. Drainages and artificial ditches were removed. New ponds were built. Further working stages will be carried out in "Hörpeler Heide" in winter 2017/18.

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 increase biodiversity on arable land for energy crops, the VNP implements many projects for ecological measures in agriculture, such as flowering wildflower strips or crops. The projects are funded by the European Union, the state of Lower Saxony and other ecological foundations. The effects are investigated by the University of Lüneburg (Leuphana).

Unfortunately, VNP did not receive an acceptance for a bid for a planned project to promote biodiversity on arable land and to strengthen cooperation between agriculture and nature conservation ("LAGE" project). Again, the preference for "European Diploma Areas" would have been crucial.

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.)

Pasture woodland project

Pasture woodlands are an important habitat in Lüneburger Heide nature reserve for birds like nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), tree pipit (*Anthus trivialis*), wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*) or hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). They also accommodate large populations of reptiles, butterflies and ground beetles.

These picturesque woodlands consist of a canopy of large oak or beech trees with enormous crowns and a ground covering vegetation of grasses, lichens, calluna, blueberry and other species.

Pasture woodlands ("Stühbusch" they are called in Lüneburger Heide) are part of the cultural heritage of former generations of heathland farmers. Most pasture woodlands in and outside the nature reserve were converted into mono-use pine forests or arable land during the last 150 years. But in the centre of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve some pasture woodlands survived. They are still used in the traditional way with grazing (sheep and goat flocks, cattle and horses) and a

traditional method of forestry called "Niederwaldwirtschaft", where single specimen trees are cut circa 1 m above soil level and left for natural regeneration. Some trunks are left in the pasture woodlands to create habitats for the highly endangered stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*), one of the so called European "priority species".

During the last years VNP carried out restoration work at Wilsede pasture woodland (35 ha). In 2017 special fences were acquired with the financial assistance of BINGO (Nature conservation lottery) to protect the treated specimen trees against early grazing in the first decade after cutting (which would destroy the tree).

In autumn 2017 VNP worked out a conservation scheme for pasture woodlands and arranged for further promotion and public funding.

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 neighbourhood of the reserve, carry out sufficient and detailed studies taking into account the formulated VNP recommendations.

There is now an instrument (data base) that bundles all up to date ecological information of Lüneburger Heide nature reserve in one place.

The VNP takes over the management of the protected area and collects data on plants and animals.

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.

The standard information sheet (part of the FFH-directive planning process) was supplemented by known disturbances (but without questioning landowners).

Further species or habitats listed in the appendices of FFH-or EU-Bird-Directive were still not included in the standard information sheet.

The federal state of Lower Saxony does not carry out any further surveys of FFH- or EU- Bird directive species. There are still severe lacks of information concerning bats.

There are still no coherent ecological data bases in Lower Saxony. Data on species can be found in separate forest data bases, FFH-data bases, surface watercourse data bases and data bases concerning certain speciation like birds, reptiles, mammals, locusts, dragonflies, moths.

It is very laborious to extract relevant data from all this dispersed data bases to create a species list for a certain area.

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.

The "Regionales Raumordnungsprogramm" (regional planning document) is currently adjusted. Unfortunately the district of "Heidekreis" (the regional planning authority) still supports a zone for wind energy in "Borstel" right in the centre of an important ecological corridor. This corridor is highly important to connect the breeding habitats of Black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) in "Lüneburger Heide" nature reserve to the military training grounds ("Munster"), where another population of Black grouse is situated.

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.

As mentioned in the cover letter, we asked the Council of Europe Specialist Group several times and urgently for help, but unfortunately we still did not receive an answer.

12. Realise the concept of buffer zone areas with a high protection status in the neighbouring 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).

In particular in Natura 2000 areas and nature reserves, nature conservation qualified, continuous and appropriate according to the requirements in the respective areas on-site care (nature reserve management) is an important factor for the care and development of these areas.

In 2017 new guidelines for the funding of nature reserve management were established by the state of Lower Saxony. VNP drafted a concept for a new reserve management concept including ranger services ("Nature conservation pre-care of NATURA 2000 area" Lüneburg Heath "by VNP Foundation Nature Park Lüneburg Heath (VNP).

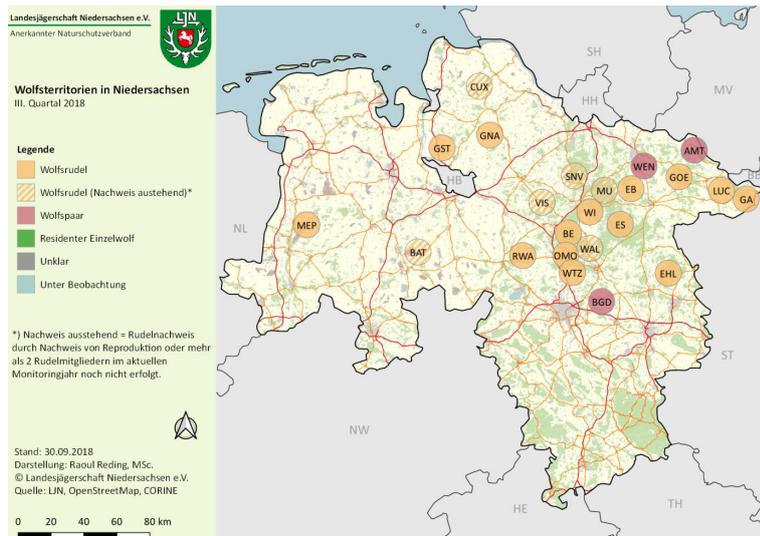
VNP submitted the necessary application forms in autumn 2017. VNP applied for € 368,000 pa (2018-2021) to finance the nature reserve and provide ranger services. The application was permitted in 2018. Funding will be provided for management plans, implementation and billing of care measures, monitoring of success, technical advice and governance, drafting of technical contributions, extensive monitoring and annual work plans.

Unfortunately, there is still no public funding for a ranger service.

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. At least 20 packs of wolves have been confirmed in Lower Saxony in 2018. In addition to familiar packs, wolf couples and various single wolves are found in unknown total number.

The following map shows all known packs, pairs and individuals of wolves in the state of Lower Saxony, autumn 2018.



Inside and outside the nature reserve, several flocks of sheep of VNP Lüneburg Heath Nature Conservation Foundation and other private owners were attacked and several sheep were killed or injured (Note: <https://www.wolfsmonitoring.com/monitoring/nutztierrisse/>)

Wolves repeatedly attacked herded sheep flocks in the Lüneburg Heath nature reserve. The attacks took place during daytime, while shepherds and their dogs were present, guarding the flocks of sheep. The shepherds were able to chase away the wolves. Nevertheless, VNP is at a loss when dealing with wolves that specialize in hunting and killing livestock.

Unfortunately, in addition to attacks on farm animals, wolves seem to lose their natural shyness. They are nowadays seen in villages and even town centers. Particular young wolves follow vehicles and even people at close distance.

A public gardener was presumably attacked by a wolf on 28.11.2018. The incident took place in the neighbouring district of Rotenburg and will be investigated by a team of experts.

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

VNP Nature Park Conservation Foundation sees the sustainable cultivation of open landscapes protected throughout Europe and the species groups resident there 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.

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

Other information:

List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

No changes

Please also remember to include one or two paragraphs on the use of the EDPA logo.

VNP informs about the EDPA on its homepage and uses the EDPA regularly, please notice:

<http://www.verein-naturschutzpark.de/hauptmenue/naturschutzgebiet-lueneburger-heide/europa-diplom.html>