

ANNUAL REPORT 2018

Siebengebirge/ Germany Nature Reserve

State: Germany/ North Rhine Westphalia

Name of the area: Siebengebirge Nature Reserve

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

Award 2011 7 years:

Central authority concerned:

Name : Bezirksregierung Köln

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Authority responsible for its management:

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Condition

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 period.

As expounded in our 2017 annual report, its relevant project aims are to be implemented 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 has set the ambitious goal of promoting nationally important landscapes providing outstanding habitats for protected plant and animal species.

Meanwhile the concentration on several points of emphasis has the advantage that – in spite of a tedious process of measures in nature – considerable results can already be presented to the public. This is especially important as this Conservation Project strongly bases on the volunteer cooperation of citizens and communities.

Outstanding is the acquisition of the former basalt quarry "Eudenberg" that because of its previous use has quite a number of different habitats and meanwhile has officially been declared a nature reserve (38.9 ha).

Several smaller water bodies have been created on the floor of the quarry, e.g for the rare vellow-bellied toad, the midwife toad and the crest newt. Only a few weeks after the pools were dug, the toads spawned and tadpoles could be seen.

A second priority has been given to what is called a "beacon project", the restoration of the heath habitat "Komper Heide" (25 ha) connected with a high expenditure of energy and money on the former fir tree areas with nutrient poor soils. Due to favourable weather conditions at the end of 2017 the first heather plants have established themselves. Of course, this area will be integrated into the sheep grazed area of the reserve.

Further progress has also been made on the sunny slopes of a former vineyard near Oberdollendorf (Kellerberg), where biodiverse rough pastures with an immense wealth of insects have developed. Yet some of them still have insular character and need to be interconnected to create migration corridors.

Further measures we listed in our annual report 2017 (e.g. meadows with scattered fruit- trees on former vineyards/ restoration of brooks)

As the Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge-VVS, the NRW State Forest Authority, the NRW-Foundation (as land owners), the Rhine-Sieg District as the new manager of the Nature Park Siebengebirge and the communities (cf. Recommendation No 1) take a high common interest in the preservation of the Siebengebirge area, there are good chances of a positive development.

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;

A decisive change has been taken in the management of the Naturpark Siebengebirge (11.200 ha) Finally, on February 1, 2018, the Rhine-Sieg District, with the agreement of the NRW-Ministries, has taken over the management from the VVS. The Siebengebirge Nature Reserve (4.580 ha) is the central and most important part of the Nature Park. The European Diploma was awarded to the Siebengebirge in 1971 and handed over to the VVS. Our organization has been owner of the central parts of the Siebengebirge since its foundation in 1869, when it bought the area from more than twenty different quarry owners to protect it from destruction.

Officially the Siebengebirge (4.850 ha) was declared as Nature Park in 1958, as Nr.4 in Germany. Since that time the VVS has been manager of the Nature Park, up to 1986 as organizational leader for the communities of Bad Honnef, Bonn und Königswinter and since 1986 as official manager of the Nature Park. This management was performed by the VVS on honorary basis and since then the VVS contributed about 50.000 DM and since 2002 about 40.000 € every year from its private budget to the maintenance and preservation of the reserve. The communities of Bonn, Bad Honnef, Königswinter and Sankt Augustin that were supposed to deal with these tasks, "kept silent" (only Bonn paid 5.000 € a year) and profited from the honorary work of the VVS. On the long run, however, the growing requirements of a nature park cannot be managed on an honorary basis.

So, after intensive negotiations with the communities, including the Rhine-Sieg-District, the VVS succeeded in achieving a reliable and long term financial concept with these partners. With February 1, 2018, the Rhine-Sie-District is the official manager of the Siebengebirge Nature Park.

For the first five years, the seat of the management (1 experienced Rhein-Sieg District expert plus 3 staff members) will be the district hall at Siegburg. After that it is planned to be moved into the Siebengebirge.

In recognition of nearly 150 years honorary VVS- work for the rescue and maintenance of the Siebengebirge and as its essential property owner (850 ha in the center including, roads, all hiking trails, 26 refuge huts, 185 benches, bridges, monuments etc.) the VVS has been accepted as an experienced and effective partner in the new nature park assembly. In addition to this, the VVS-with its private wildernis area (523ha) since 2010 and its historical nature park house, including information and exhibition center, has created unique selling points in the Siebengebirge.

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

In a treaty the communities of Bonn, Bad Honnef, Königswinter and the Rhein-Sieg District have agreed to contribute together 185.000 € per year (personal expenditure) for the management of the nature park and have budgeted their amounts for the 2018/19 period. The VVS will contribute with material donations and by own contributions with hand and clamping services in about the same extent he was involved so far (nearly 50.000 €)

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

We are glad and thankful to receive considerable financial support by the North Rhine Westphalia authorities. The reconstruction measures on the collapsing medieval Drachenfels ruin until spring 2018 will probably swallow 1.5 million € government money.

Subventions to nature park activities amount to 15.000 € per year.

60.000 € we get every year as compensation for our wilderness area, where we have given up forestry cultivation and leave the area to its natural dynamics.

The NRW Foundation has supported the restoration of our historic forest house from 1907 (classified as a historical building) with 148.000 € during the last two years 2017/2018. Of the total restoration sum of 300.000 € the VVS paid 152.000 € from its own reserves.

Furthermore, the NRW Foundation has especially supported the restoration of the 19 th century neoclassic Drachenburg-Castle (30 million €). The NRW Regionale has immensely subsidized the restoration of the medieval monastery area Heisterbach (10 million €) and the extension of the Siebengebirge Museum at Königswinter (9 million €).

I hope you can imagine that other parts of North Rhine Westphalia roll their eyes, when they hear Königswinter/Siebengebirge mentioned in the NRW parliament.

2.4 maintain great vigilance regarding the possible construction of new roads;

New roads have not been built nor are they planned. One road within the reserve had finally to be given up because of the danger of a former underground quarry collapsing

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;

We are confronted with the problem of many private cars trying illegally to drive up to the Drachenfels. As a private organization we cannot exercise public authority, have difficulties in controlling and fining traffic offenders and up to now must take the tedious detour via the District Nature Protection Board. So we are glad that the Rhine-Sieg District will employ two official nature guards from January 1, 2019, strictly to ensure compliance with the rules of the reserve.

Probably the new nature park administration will start a new attempt with the communities to improve the public transport system.

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;

According to the NRW-Ministries these are the official wilderness areas in the Siebengebirge:

Kennung	Bezeichnung	Größe
WG VVS-0001	Siebengebirge – VVS-Wildnisgebiet	543.7 ha
WG-SU-0008-02	Siebengebirge – Dollendorfer Hardt	13.1 ha
WG-SU-0008-03	Siebengebirge – Weilberg	23.5 ha
WG-SU-0008-04	Siebengebirge – Heisterbach	16.7 ha
WG-SU-0008-05	Siebengebirge – Oelberg	11.9 ha
WG-SU-0008-06	Siebengebirge – Grafen-/Laagsbusch	7.6 ha
WG-SU-0008-07	Siebengebirge – Löwenburg	33.3 ha
WG-SU-0008-08	Siebengebirge – Hartenbruch	53.6 ha
WG-SU-0008-09	Siebengebirge – Himmerich	20.6 ha
WG-SU-0008-10	Siebengebirge – Leyberg	18.8 ha
		742.8 ha

As the NRW Foundation has acquired 93 ha of old beech and oak tree forest (> 100 years) from the Federal Republic on the Petersberg and has added it to the “VVS-Wildniswald” and the “Willdniswald Siebengebirge” of the NRW forestry authorities, the coherent wilderness area in the Siebengebirge now covers 835 ha.

In many excursions we try to impart the ecological value of wilderness compared to an actively managed forest to our guests. After an only 7-year-existence of the VVS-wilderness area they are impressed e.g. by the large rotting deadwood logs on the ground that create a haven for so many small organisms, for invertebrates etc, but also attract moisture sensitive animals like salamanders, toads to these spots. To sum up: increasingly we find the idea of wilderness accepted by our visitors. Nevertheless there are also others that miss a forest that is cared for by a company and has a clean and orderly appearance.

2.7 encourage the continuation and extension of scientific research.

One of our VVS-members, has published one more book on the geology of the Siebengebirge especially for the area of the nature park.

Author: Diplom-Geologe Winfried Leischner

Title: Naturpark Siebengebirge, Das Siebengebirge, sein erdgeschichtlicher Aufstieg und Abtrag, seine Baustein- und Naturlagerstätten, Natur- und Bodendenkmäler

Bonn 2017

67 p, 37 ill.

ISBN 978-3-944024-08-0

3. Site Management:

Cf.2.1 Recommendations

4. Boundaries:

The whole area of officially declared nature protected areas in the Siebengebirge has increased. With date Dec 1, 2018 it is 5042 ha. In the Rhine-Sieg-District area of the reserve it is 4.273 ha. In the northern Bonn-Ennert part of the reserve it is 515.ha = 5042 ha altogether

5. Other information:

5.1 Drachenfels geological problems

A source of permanent problems is the most famous and also most breakable of our mountains, the Drachenfels (321 m) with its volcanic origin. For hundreds of years, from 1250 until 1829, stones were broken from just under the medieval castle to build Cologne, Xanten and Limburg cathedrals, altogether ca.400.000 tons of trachyte stones. In 1836 the Prussian government bought the castle ruin (built in 1218) to preserve it as a medieval monument.

From the beginning of the 19th century down to our days nearly every year rocks break down (up to 15 tons) from the top, block hiking trails and temporarily prevent work in the vineyards on its slopes. In 1978 the NRW-government (it is the owner of the castle ruin only, whereas the VVS is the owner of the whole mountain as nature reserve) built a concrete ring round the ruin and pulled 40m long steel cables through the mountain to keep it together. In 2012 wire nettings and a protection wall were erected (the VVS paid 110.000 €) to save the vineyards.

Now in 2017 some of the cable anchors lost traction power and must be renewed to save the ruin. These fundamental repair works are expected to last until spring 2019 and are estimated at costs of 1.5 million €.

5.1 ash tree death

In all parts of our forests we can observe the death of large numbers of ash-trees. The trees are killed off by a fungus spreading rapidly in east => west across Europe. The first symptoms are the dieback of the upper and outer crown and dead branches throughout the canopy. Experts estimate that the fungus will soon have killed more than 90 % of the ash trees, especially as only 3 % of ash trees have a genetic resistance to the fungus and as it will take 15 – 20 years before resistant seedlings are available.

5.2 fir tree death

At the end of this year 2018 we have to face a very high level of mortality of another tree, the fir tree, caused by bark beetles. This mortality is primarily influenced by drought conditions. Bark beetles can increase dramatically when sufficient food is available. This is the case in form of drought stressed fir trees. Heat and drought – as extremely high and long as this year – impede a tree's ability to fight back. Prolonged droughts as this year and shorter, warmer winters have spurred bark beetles to kill hectares of trees. Long cold winters freeze them off, but in warm winters the bugs thrive. At the beginning of December 2018 we still have springtime temperatures. In this respect we are in a relatively good position in the VVS forest, as meanwhile 80 % of it are deciduous trees.

5.3 animal observation

A specimen of wild cat (*felis silvestris*) has been found in the Siebengebirge (scientifically certified by Research Institute Alexander König Bonn).

Staff members again monitored two pairs of *bubo bubo* on the Oelberg and Petersberg and in our Wildnisgebiet "Grafen-Laagsbusch" (cf.2.6) in four consecutive years some specimens of *ciconia nigra*.

5.4 decentralization

Decentralization still remains one of the main task fields on our agenda, especially as the already highly attractive Drachenfels mountain has developed even more attraction with the 19th century neogothic Castle Drachenburg half way up the mountain with its funicular station. The beautifully restored castle has attracted nearly 600.000 visitors in 2018.

As another measure to decentralize the stream of visitors, we - together with the new nature park administration – have just installed a new Chapel Trail of 42.4 km with 3 individual sections of ca. 14 km each, and with excellent stone signage, at a distance of about 7 km from the Drachenfels region. The trail visits a total of 12 small chapels, built between 1246 and 1895. Along the path hikers constantly encounter completely different landscapes and marvelous views of the Siebengebirge. The main attractions on the trail are the chapels at Heisterbacherrott from 1246 and at Vinxel from 1348.

6. Other National certification

In 1917 the Siebengebirge Nature Park (Manager still was the VVS) was awarded the title "Quality Nature Park Siebengebirge".

This is a project, funded by the Federal Office for Nature Conservation (BfN) and launched by the Association of German Nature Parks (VDN) and Europarc Germany, Nature parks are evaluated according to a nationwide standardized set of criteria for several days.

The gained certification and label can be used for fundraising and help facilitate communication with decision makers and potential sponsors.

Königswinter, Dec. 8, 2018

Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge VVS

Klaus Breuer

Hans Peter Lindlar

(Members of the Board)