

# COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg 17 March 1982

SN-ZP (82) 23 *24*

AS THIS DOCUMENT WILL NOT BE  
DISTRIBUTED DURING THE MEETING  
PLEASE BRING THIS COPY



COE158741

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE  
CONSERVATION OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Committee of Experts for Protected Areas

Wollmatinger Ried Nature Reserve  
(Federal Republic of Germany)

On-the-spot appraisal

by

Dr. Paul Géroutet  
(Switzerland)

74.497  
09.3

European DiplomaWollmatinger Ried Nature Reserve

(Federal Republic of Germany)

Report of the on-the-spot appraisal (16-17 February 1982)

by Dr. Paul Géroudet (Switzerland)

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference as laid down by the Select Committee of Experts on the European Diploma comprised the following tasks:

- a. to examine the present condition of the site and see whether it had remained stable or improved or deteriorated since the award or most recent renewal of the Diploma; to check whether the recommendations made on that occasion had been applied;
- b. to analyse the state of conservation of flora, fauna and the landscape (any increase or decrease of species);
- c. to examine any improvements (either material or legislative) either effected or in progress;
- d. to study the impact of the public on flora, fauna and the landscape and to make proposals for improving the situation;
- e. to examine the budgetary resources allocated to the area's management.

This mission was carried out in the company of Mr Peter Baum, representing the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Council of Europe, and Miss Mackenzie, a trainee in the same division studying the appraisal procedure for European Diploma awards.

The following persons acted as our hosts and guides and supplied us with the relevant information:

Dr. Fuchs, Senior Conservation Officer for Nature Protection,  
Office of the District President, Freiburg;

Dr. G Leutenegger, Senior Forestry Adviser, State Forestry Office,  
Constance;

Dr. H Jacoby, German Nature Protection Federation, and his staff.

In addition to inspecting the land area, we also toured the lake area starting from Reichenau harbour in a boat belonging to the lake police (Gewässerschutz-Polizei), which enabled us to assess the reserve and the wildfowl situation from the outside.

Our heartfelt thanks are due to those in charge of the reserve for having facilitated our task in this way and provided objective information on every aspect of the Wollmatinger Ried and the factors influencing it.

## 2. TERMS OF REFERENCE POINT BY POINT

### 2.1 Present condition of the site

The annual reports presented since the last appraisal (for the years 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980 and 1981) provide a wealth of detailed information about the water regime, vegetation and fauna of the area, and the measures taken in respect of upkeep and surveillance.

The summer level of the lake has been very high in recent years as a result of heavy precipitation. The lake water, bearing nutritive elements (especially phosphates), consequently flooded the hay meadows for long periods to the detriment of their vegetation balance. Nesting has also suffered from this. There is unfortunately nothing that can be done to counter these floods, which are a natural phenomenon brought about by climatic conditions.

The remarks I made in my 1977 report on the management of the site still apply. Those in charge are doing their utmost to maintain the character of the reserve and its natural assets. Their carefully considered action has yielded good results, and in some respects the general situation can be said to have improved.

The most important point has been the extension of the nature reserve to include the adjacent lake areas (Lower Lake and Gnadensee), under the Decree of 13 February 1981. This very important addition has made it possible to keep disturbance due to boating and bathing at arm's length (see also 2.3).

On the other hand, the problem of shooting has not been resolved in the way the official German authorities had hoped, as their efforts came up against a negative vote in the Thurgau parliament (see 2.3).

This is the only part of the recommendation made by the European Committee when renewing the Diploma in 1979 which has not been carried through, by reason of its international character.

## 2.2 State of conservation of fauna, flora and landscape

### 2.2.1 Flora

The problems of the excessively high summer water level have been aggravated through repeated flooding. Regular surveys of rare plants show a fairly general decline in the flowering of the marsh gladiolus and several orchidaceae and gentianaceae. Had it not been for the annual maintenance work which is carried out with great care, the situation of this flora would probably have become extremely grave. During the excessively wet periods which have occurred in recent years, it has been found that the slightly higher and drier areas of land on the periphery play an important part as refuge and regeneration areas for endangered plant species. This dry marginal area of the marsh, both inside and outside the reserve (where it is constantly shrinking as gardens are planted and industrial buildings erected) therefore deserves special attention.

Mowing and removal of hay are carried out over sizeable areas of hay meadow, using special equipment. In these areas consideration is being given to restoring, at least experimentally, the ditches dug by farmers in former times which ensured faster drainage of flood water and attenuated the resultant problems to some extent.

### 2.2.2 Fauna

The bird study carried out by H Jacoby and his staff shows that the Wollmatinger Ried is still as valuable as ever as an ornithological reserve. The addition of shallow water areas to the reserve in 1981 has already yielded interesting results: 69 families of red-crested pochard (a total of 436 juveniles) assembled there throughout the summer, as did flocks of black-necked grebe (maximum 365) which were present for the period of their summer moult in the Ermatinger Becken. On the other hand, the grebe and heron populations suffered from the scarcity of fish. Nesting birds are subject to various natural fluctuations, water level being an important variable in this connection. With reference to the duck population, we note the presence of the tufted duck since 1978 and the sighting in 1979 of one young ferruginous duck which was still not flying; the improvements made in 1976 (lakes and islets) continue to be very favourable to nesting. The black-headed gull colony increased from 386 pairs in 1979 to over 1,000 pairs in 1981; the common tern increased from 15 to 35 pairs during the same period. It is also noted that penduline tits nested in 1979 and 1981.

Migrants are still plentiful, especially ducks. However, from late November until mid-February the overwintering population is gravely disturbed by shooting. The shooting had just finished at the time of our visit, but everywhere along the reedy banks, in the reserve itself, we saw the hides which sportsmen construct for shooting. This is a shocking situation, perpetuated by the municipalities in Thurgau who are deaf to any suggestion that they relinquish their traditional rights (see 2.3).

Obviously, the persistence of this shooting makes it impossible for the stretches of water in the reserve to fulfil their proper function, which is to serve as feeding and resting places for overwintering birds. The damage lies not so much in the number of victims as in the repeated disturbance the shooting causes over a period of three months, constantly scaring the birds off their best feeding grounds. This anachronistic state of affairs is quite intolerable now that the reserve has been enlarged to include the lake area where water sports are now forbidden.

The appearance of the musk-rat was also noted in 1980; research has been started into lepidoptera.

### 2.3 Improvements and upkeep

On 12 May 1979, the "Wollmatinger Ried Nature Protection Centre", built by the DBV (German Bird Protection Association) with financial assistance from the Land of Baden-Württemberg, was inaugurated alongside the water purification station. This centre, which cost 160,000 DM, comprises accommodation for wardens, an equipment store and 56 square metres of exhibition space for visitors with an audio-visual ornithological display. A small demonstration pond has been built outside, and a botanical "demonstration border" is planned.

The observation hides have been improved to conceal visitors more effectively. A portable hide was installed in May-June 1981.

Action to preserve biotopes represents a considerable investment in energy, time and money. Each winter the maintenance team employed by the Forestry Department of the town of Constance mows an average of about 100 ha of hay meadows. This work requires lightweight machinery and a specialised labour force. The mown hay is removed from the meadows and dumped temporarily in places where farmers can collect it; it is mostly used by farmers from Reichenau (especially for silage making).

In addition to this work, the DBN takes responsibility for mowing smaller and more vulnerable areas where only a hand-propelled mower can be used. Maintenance work of this kind was done on 13 ha in 1979 and 15 ha in 1980 and 1981, and involved many individual volunteers or groups of volunteers. A few access ways were improved in order to facilitate this work.

Floating rafts were installed during the nesting season for the benefit of the nesting common tern, who have adopted them and whose broods are now safe from flooding.

The signposting of the reserve is constantly maintained and improved, particularly along the new lake boundaries.

As regards legislation, I have already referred to the new Decree of 13 February 1981 (1) defining the status of the nature reserve and enlarging its boundaries to the adjacent shallow water areas (Lower Lake,

---

(1) Available from the Secretariat.

Gnadensee) and increasing the total surface area to 757 ha. The protected landscape area covering 10 ha includes the dyke road leading to Reichenau Island and the adjacent land. Thus the total protected area is 767 ha. This official document unfortunately has to make allowance for the notorious "Gemeinschaftliche Wasserjagd" (communal shooting).

### 2.3 Impact of the public

The system of permanent supervision and the limiting of visitors to a compulsory signposted route, together with the self-discipline shown by the public, mean that the impact on the land is practically nil.

The ban on boating on the adjacent lake areas which took effect in 1981 has already considerably reduced disturbance from that quarter. The new rules are upsetting to entrenched habits and there have been some infringements of them, but it is hoped that active supervision will ultimately prove a complete deterrent, even to windsurfers.

The main black spot continues to be wildfowling in winter, which has already been mentioned. The agreement signed on 17 November 1980 in Constance between the authorities of the Land of Baden-Württemberg and of the canton of Thurgau was rejected on 9 September 1981 by a majority vote in the parliament of that Swiss canton. It provided for a ban on shooting for a period of four years in order to study the effects on the wildfow. It is a serious political setback, but the Thurgau Nature Protection League is preparing a popular initiative on this matter which will leave the ultimate decision with the Thurgau electorate. In the meanwhile, it is highly desirable that the Council of Europe should intervene with the federal authorities in Bern.

### 2.4 Budget and management

Maintenance of the biotopes by the Forestry Administration under the responsibility of Dr. G Leutenegger requires equipment and labour and is therefore expensive. According to the figures provided, total investment has been 125,000 DM over the four-year period from 1978 to 1981 (1).

On 10 May 1979, the management of the reserve was officially entrusted to the "Deutscher Bund für Vogelschutz" (German Bird Protection Association). This task comprises co-operation in drawing up the annual maintenance programme, carrying out special maintenance work, organising guided visits, scientific studies and surveillance and preparing the annual report. The breakdown of the various powers, measures and responsibilities is shown in the 1980 report (Section 3.1, page 12).

---

(1) Graph available from the Secretariat.

3. CONTINUANCE OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

The undersigned recommends that the European Committee renew the Diploma, Category A, for a five-year period.

This decision is fully justified by the value of the reserve, its state of conservation and the efforts devoted to its upkeep.

The undersigned also suggests that the committee should send congratulations to the Government of Baden-Württemberg with a request that they also be forwarded to the Water and Forestry Department of Constance and the Deutscher Bund für Vogelschutz. I was very favourably impressed by the devotion and scientific approach brought to the management of the reserve. Its enlargement is an exceptional event at the present day in western Europe.

The recommendations made when the Diploma was last renewed have been complied with, apart from the waterfowling problem, where the arrangements envisaged between the German and Thurgau authorities were rejected by the Thurgau parliament.

With regard to this problem of communal waterfowling, the undersigned is of the opinion that it is absolutely vital to find a solution consonant with the purposes of the nature reserve. That solution now depends solely on the canton of Thurgau. It is here that public opinion has to won over and local susceptibilities mollified, in order that an intolerable and anachronistic situation can be brought to an end. It is a delicate matter because it is political, and consequently a diplomatic approach via the Federal Department of the Interior in Bern is called for. The Baden-Württemberg authorities are ready to resume talks, and their goodwill is not in doubt. Consequently, it is not to them that a recommendation should be sent.

The undersigned therefore proposes that the European Committee should make any contacts it sees fit, preferably with the Federal Department of the Interior, and subsequently with the Swiss Nature Protection League and, through its intermediary, with its Thurgau section, in order to see what favourable influence the Council of Europe might be able to exert.

In other respects, my appraisal of the Wollmatinger Ried reserve remains identical to that in 1977. I shall therefore refrain from praising it again in the same terms, though I do repeat my personal congratulations.

Geneva 23 February 1982

Signed: Paul Géroutet