

Info in English

Summary - englische Zusammenfassung
LIFE-Nature-Project “Swabian Danube Valley”

Covering 400 km², the Swabian Danube Valley site is one of the largest open fen and fluvial landscapes in the southern part of Central Europe. Altogether 14 habitat types on Annex I of the Habitats Directive are represented here. So far 260 bird species have been identified, with 151 of them breeding. Numerous other taxa are disproportionately well-represented (for instance, over 800 species of fungi, 352 butterfly species, 51 species of dragonfly and 716 species of vascular plant, including 157 species listed on the German or Bavarian red lists). The area is of outstanding importance for bird migration in southern Central Europe.

Because agricultural land use is intensifying, in particular through the conversion of meadows into arable fields, and site hydrology is being disturbed by drainage and faster discharge of water, measures to stabilise and improve the situation needed to be drawn up.

Consequently, the objective of the LIFE-Nature project Swabian Danube Valley, carried out between October 2006 and July 2011, was to optimize the internationally significant Birds Directive Special Protection Areas within the European habitat network Natura 2000. This entailed:

- the conservation, improvement and restoration of breeding and foraging habitats of 43 bird species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive (including the priority species corncrake and bittern),
- the improvement of foraging, staging and wintering habitats for numerous migratory bird species,
- as well as the conservation and improvement, in casus quo restoration, of altogether 6 Habitats Directive habitat types (one of these a priority type) which constitute important habitats for the bird species.

To achieve these objectives, during the project lifetime over 26 ha of land was purchased and 41 ha of land as well as 12 km of ditches were reshaped. Specific actions were:

- levelling banks of ditches and edges of lakes occupying former gravel pits,
- excavating depressions, where levels of humidity will fluctuate, and areas of shallow water,
- clearing bushes from overgrown fens and banks of ditches.

Altogether, 26 applications were submitted for construction permits and another 13 under the regulatory procedures for water management, while about 100,000 m³ of earth was moved.

As a result, on about 50 ha a significant improvement of habitat for breeding and migrating birds was achieved.

In addition, measures to channel visitors and stabilise site hydrology were implemented. Furthermore, 3 nature trails and 7 observation platforms provided opportunities to promote the protection of habitats and the European habitat network Natura 2000.

Parallel to the practical implementing measures, a broad public was, by means of guided excursions, press releases, events, leaflets, brochures and a website, informed about the project and about Natura 2000.

Funding - an amount of about 2 million Euro - was provided by the EU jointly with the Bavarian Environment Ministry as project leader, the Bavarian fund for nature conservation, the districts, cities and municipalities in the Danube valley and the tripartite association for practical nature management in the valley, ARGE Schwäbisches Donaumoos e.V.

The association for regional development Donautal-Aktiv e.V was charged with the management of the project. The project steering committee consisted of the Bavarian Environment Ministry, the higher-tier nature conservation authorities of the Swabian regional administrative entity and the lower-tier nature conservation authorities of the districts Dillingen, Donau-Ries and Günzburg, the association for practical nature management ARGE Donaumoos e.V. and, representing the partner municipalities, the Rural District of Dillingen. The working group advising the project consisted of the participating municipalities, the technical services of the water, agriculture and forestry authorities, the Bavarian Farmers' Union and the conservation NGOs Bund Naturschutz and Landesbund für Vogelschutz. In addition to which, 80 enterprises and farmers assisted with the implementation of the project.

The LIFE-Nature project Swabian Danube Valley did not only successfully carry out measures to remodel about 50 ha of land and to promote, through numerous events as well as through infrastructure allowing people to experience nature, the European habitat network Natura 2000. During the almost 5 years in which the project was implemented, the region identified with the LIFE-Nature project and pulled together to develop the Danube Valley in a nature-oriented manner. The tally of 21 partner municipalities which are working together in the LIFE project, makes this impressively clear.