Streuobstwiese Albvorland - Protection of Wild Birds in Traditional Orchards of the Central Swabian Alb Foothills and the Central Valley of the Rems River

LIFE07 NAT/D/000236

Project description  Environmental issues  Beneficiaries  Administrative data

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Project description:

Background

Orchards have been grown on grasslands for centuries. As well as containing fruit trees of varying ages, orchards often contain old trees with hollows that serve as breeding sites and living places for bats and a variety of bird species, such as the Eurasian wryneck, the grey-headed woodpecker and the collared flycatcher. Orchards are mostly privately owned or financed by municipalities. They are generally managed in an environmentally friendly way without using pesticides and as a result trophic levels are generally low. Furthermore, orchards offer different structures and borders that are home to insects which are an important part of the diet of birds, bats and other mammals.

Urbanisation, especially after the Second World War, has led to the disappearance of a large proportion of these important habitats. The traditional orchards still found in the foothills of the Swabian Alb and in the Rems and Murr river valleys are among the largest connected orchards in central Europe. Decreasing and changing agricultural use, population shifts and abandonments, due above all to the changing economic framework conditions regarding the market of the fruit threaten the future of these remaining areas of orchards. The result of this is an over-aged tree population, leading to the loss of breeding sites for the target bird species. At the same time, the absence of grassland use affects the quality of the feeding habitat for a large number of bird species and for bats.

Objectives

The objective of the Streuobstwiese Albvorland project was the conservation of the biocenosis of traditional orchards and the following bird species: the collared flycatcher, Eurasian wryneck, woodchat shrike, grey-headed woodpecker,
red-backed shrike. This would be achieved by the sustainable and long-term revitalisation of orchard habitats. The dramatic decrease of orchard areas and bird species is linked to economic and social conditions and their protection requires a multi-layered strategy: Safeguarding existing habitats and integrating objectives for environmental protection, particularly the objectives of Natura 2000, into the management and conservation of the remaining orchards.

In order to conserve the targeted bird species the project focused on the maintenance of important habitat trees in large areas, on the creation of orchards that can be used in the future and on the development of alternate habitat models, e.g. lightly forested semi-natural landscapes. Measures to simplify the management of orchards were also to be developed, while communication about Natura 2000 and further financial means were to be further supported.

Expected results: Project activities would take place on 245 ha of municipal orchards and would benefit some 5 900 trees and habitat requirements for the target species. Around 4 000 trees were to be managed on privately-owned land. The creation of lightly forested semi-natural landscapes on 55 ha will lead to new habitats for the target species. After the project, the actions will be replaced by corresponding measures or by standardised processes within the agro-environmental programmes of the region of Baden-Württemberg.

Results

Streuobstwiese Albvorland is the first LIFE project in Germany to specifically address the conservation of traditional orchards, and it systematically combined various conservation strategies. The project therefore has a very high demonstration value for similar projects in this field. The combined effect of all actions contributed to the conservation of the target bird species.

Other results from actions carried out were:

- The restoration of 8 300 trees, much surpassing the 5 900 that was originally planned. Unfortunately the number of sites managed was reduced from 240 ha to 196 ha because some parcels of land were not considered suitable for the work, but this was compensated by the fact that significantly more trees and land in private-owned orchards was managed than originally planned;
- The implementation of the funding scheme “Tree care on private land parcels”, which paid private owners of small traditional orchards (Gütlebesitzer) to maintain the conservation value of trees on their sites. This was a great success: instead of the foreseen 4 000 trees more than 8 800 trees were involved in this action on a total of 1 736 parcels of land. The action demonstrated how private landowners could be financially supported for their conservation activities and how the respective administrative procedures could be established. Intensive communications activities (27 events were organised) led to the participation of a much larger number of private landowners than expected. The experiences gained from this action were then used by the regional ministry of rural affairs to develop a funding scheme for the whole state of Baden-Württemberg. As a direct result of this project a region-wide programme for the restoration of traditional
orchards was established in August 2014, representing an enormous leverage effect and demonstrating how important the lessons learnt were;

- The development and implementation of the project "energetic use of clippings", which coordinated the transport of tree clippings to a local biomass heating plant. In total 2 000 m³ of wood chips were collected. The model was tested on four sites and then adopted on these and on an additional six sites;
- The construction of a sheepfold, which was of crucial importance to ensure long-term grazing on more than 100 ha of traditional orchards;
- Lightly forested semi-natural landscapes were created on 46 ha. This was lower than the original 55 ha planned because not enough suitable sites were available;
- A standard methodology was also developed which looked at how the restoration of traditional orchards can be used as a compensation measure within an existing "community eco-account" on a local level. The methodology demonstrates how ecological improvements in traditional orchards can be measured based on standard criteria (and then calculated with so called "Eco-credits"). This method has now been incorporated into the scheme for the evaluation of compensation measures used by the state of Baden-Württemberg;
- A training module for tree caring and pruning and specific requirements needed to restore traditional orchards based on Natura 2000 objectives was developed. More than 700 people were trained and the content has now also been used for the development of training modules in other projects; and
- Around 50 people were trained as “Obstler” or "multipliers for traditional orchards". The attendees were trained to organise specific events related to environmental education and awareness-raising for traditional orchards and the project itself. During the project around 500 events were organised and the "Obstler" also founded their own club so that they could continue their activities after the end of the project. The experiences gained from this training programme were used to initialise similar training programmes in four other regions with traditional orchards.

Further information on the project can be found in the project's layman report and After-LIFE Conservation Plan (see "Read more" section).

Environmental issues addressed:

Themes

Species - Birds
Biodiversity issues - High Nature Value farmland
Keywords

grassland ecosystem, landscape protection

Target EU Legislation

- Nature protection and Biodiversity
- Directive 92/43 - Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora - Habitats Directive ... 

Target species

Ficedula albicollis  Lanius collurio  Picus canus

Natura 2000 sites

SPA7123441 Streuobst- und Weinberggebiete zw. Geradstetten, Rudersberg... 
SPA7323441 Vorland der mittleren Schwäbischen Alb 
SPA7422441 Mittlere Schwäbische Alb

Beneficiaries:

Coordinator  Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart
Type of organisation  Regional authority
Description  The beneficiary, the Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart, is a public authority of the region of Baden-Württemberg employing 2 800 people. The Unit 56 (Nature conservation) is responsible for the management of protected areas; the management of Natura 2000 areas; species conservation measures; and public relations.

Partners  Kompetenzzentrum Obstbau-Bodensee, Germany Stiftung Naturschutzfonds beim Ministerium für Ernährung und Ländlichen Raum BW, Germany Marketing- und Absatzförderungsgesellschaft für Agrar- und Forstprodukte aus Baden-Württemberg mbH, Germany Landesverband für Obstbau, Garten und Landschaft Baden-Württemberg e.V. (LOGL), Germany Gemeinde Dettingen unter
Administrative data:

- **Project reference:** LIFE07 NAT/D/000236
- **Duration:** 01-JAN-2009 to 31-DEC -2013
- **Total budget:** 5,183,264.00 €
- **EU contribution:** 2,591,632.00 €
- **Project location:** Baden-Württemberg(Deutschland)

Read more:

- **Project web site**
  - Project's website (DE)

- **Publication: After-LIFE**
  - Title: After-LIFE Conservation Plan
  - Author: Markus Mayer
  - No of pages: 26

- **Publication: Guidelines-Manual**
  - Title: "Neue Wege für Streuobstwiesen - Praxiserfahrungen aus dem LIFE+ Projekt"
  - Author: Heike Seehofer *et al.*
  - Year: 2014
  - Editor: Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart
  - No of pages: 48

- **Publication: Layman report**
  - Title: Layman report
  - Author: Heike Seehofer *et al.*
  - Year: 2014
  - Editor: Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart
  - No of pages: 20

- **Video link**
  - "Unsere Streuobstwiesen: Wo Halsbandschnäpper, Neuntöter und Wendehals leben" (5')