



NATURAL WOODLANDS,
BOGS & HABITAT NETWORK
IN AUSSEERLAND

LIFE+

pro
ject

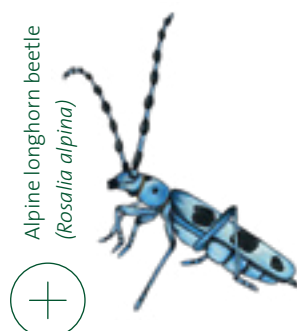
Our heartfelt thanks...

... to all those who have contributed to the success of the LIFE+ project "Ausseerland". Thank you for your excellent cooperation and for helping to ensure great results, with special thanks to the Nature Conservation Department of the Regional Government of Styria, the project partners and financiers as well as the employees of the Inner Salzkammergut Forestry Operation.

The protected resources of the Natura 2000 sites and project manager Anna-Sophie Pirtscher express their thanks.



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Please note that the masculine form has been used throughout this document to make it easier to read. This should be understood as referring to persons of all genders.



It is no exaggeration to characterise the LIFE+ project “Natural woodlands, bogs and habitat network in Ausseerland” as a project of superlatives. For the first time, the Austrian federal forest corporation (ÖBf) has succeeded in asserting itself in the Europe-wide competition for nature conservation funding and in deploying comprehensive measures aimed at protecting habitats and species in one of its core regions.

Of the approximately 30,000 ha which make up the five Natura 2000 sites in the Styrian Salzkammergut, no less than 20,000 ha have been included in design, improvement and networking measures. The project is also the largest nature conservation project in terms of investment volume run by ÖBf to date, with services worth 5.7 million euro rendered over six years. With ecological objectives integrated into the management of forests and natural areas, we regard the project as being future-oriented. This means that a large number of species – from butterflies to crustaceans and from amphibians to capercaillie – as well as a large number of habitats – from forest ecosystems and watercourses to bogs – will benefit from the measures implemented as part of the project in the long term. To lay the foundation for long-

term, fruitful cooperation between authorities, nature conservation organisations and the ÖBf, and in order to foster broad acceptance among local and regional stakeholders, we have accompanied the project with our own series of events. We have also overseen the design of press releases, videos, information posters and brochures aimed at sharing knowledge and tips relating to nature conservation. My thanks and appreciation go out to the project manager as well as to all those who have contributed to the success of the LIFE+ project!

Preface by the Managing Board

Rudolf Freidhager
Chairman of the Managing Board,
Board Member for Forestry and Nature Conservation
of the Austrian federal forest corporation



About the nature conservation project

Locals and tourists alike love the Ausseerland region because of its unparalleled natural beauty. Preserving this internationally important heritage site for future generations requires more awareness and comprehensive management in equal measure.

IN THE HEART OF AUSTRIA

Ausseerland lies 750m above sea level in the geographic centre of Austria. The area's natural landscape is characterised by lakes, bogs and forests. It is bordered by the Totes Gebirge mountains in the north, and the Styrian Dachstein plateau in the south. The landscape has been heavily shaped by man through hundreds of years of salt mining. Nevertheless, the region offers a unique kind of natural beauty, and so it is not surprising that many tourists visit the Ausseerland.



Common beech
(*Fagus sylvatica*)



LONG-TERM PRESERVATION OF EUROPEAN PROTECTED RESOURCES

The ÖBf, as the largest land owner and manager in the region, has endeavoured to secure LIFE+ funding in order to actively carry out nature conservation work and to ensure the networking of ecologically valuable areas within the European Natura 2000 protection areas network. Data was to be completed on protected resources, management plans drawn up, and uncertainties resulting from damage such as windthrow and calamitous bark beetle infestations, as well as from the pressure of other land use interests, reduced.

The LIFE+ project "Natural woodlands, bogs and habitat network in Ausseerland", hereinafter referred to as the LIFE+ project "Ausseerland", succeeded in embedding the Natura 2000 sites and their protected resources in long-term conservation and management concepts.

View over the Toplitz- and Grundlsee

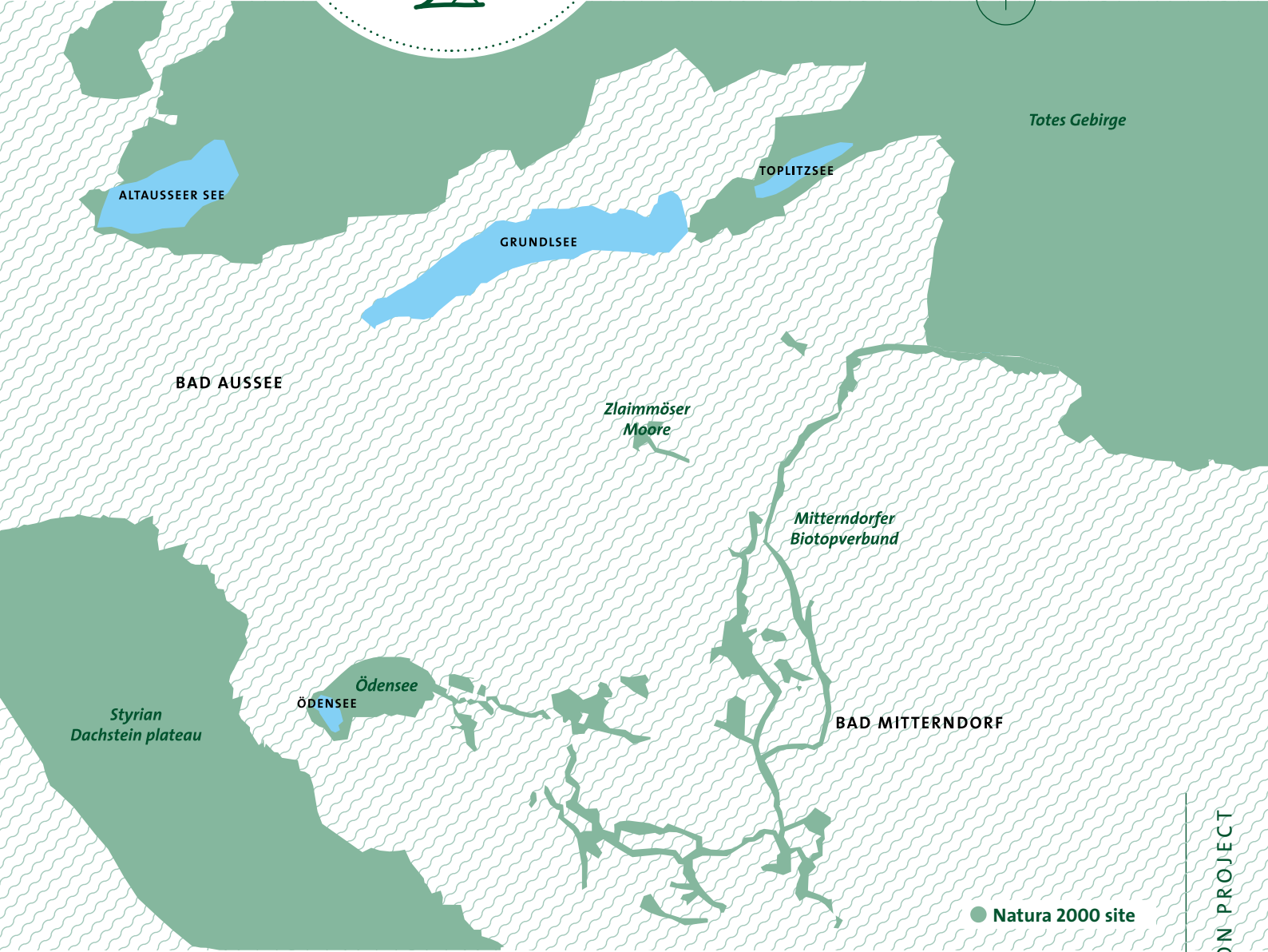


“Natura 2000” is ...

... a network of nature protection areas within the European Union. Its aim is the transnational protection of endangered, wild, native plant and animal species and their natural habitats.



The Natura 2000 sites in the Ausseerland region span 32.942 ha.



SURPRISING RESULTS

Many species and habitats found in Ausseerland are seriously endangered elsewhere in Austria. Experts were therefore surprised during the initial mapping in 2014 and 2015 to find large populations of stone crayfish, to see 500 Italian crested newts swimming in the Aulacke, to find fungi in a primeval forest on deadwood and to be able to differentiate diverse habitat types in bogs.



Lady's slipper orchid
(*Cypripedium calceolus*)



SURVEYED PROTECTED RESOURCES

Stone crayfish
(*Austropotamobius torrentium*)



The stone crayfish lives in streams with a good water quality and weak current.

Alpine longhorn beetle
(*Rosalia alpina*)



This beetle spends most of its life as an unspectacular larva under the bark of old beech trees.

Bogland
habitat types



Bogs provide a buffer against heavy rainfall and store CO₂.

Marsh fritillary
(*Euphydryas aurinia*)



This butterfly depends on the devil's-bit plant as food for its caterpillars.

Bleaks
(*Alburnus mento*)



Nothing but by-catch for fisherman, yet a valuable source of food for other fish.



Woodpeckers
(*Picidae*)



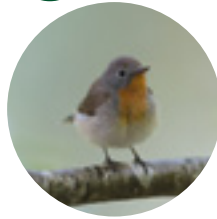
Woodpeckers use deadwood as a musical instrument to mark their territories.

Moss



Special types of moss can be found in areas where plenty of wood lies in damp and dark conditions.

Red-breasted flycatchers
(*Ficedula parva*)



This bird lives in the canopies of older trees and is rarely seen, but its loud singing means it can often be heard.

Yellow-bellied toad
(*Bombina variegata*)



From June the "uh ... uh ... uh" mating call of these toads can be heard from their mating grounds.

Italian crested newt
(*Triturus cristatus*)



This newt avoids ponds which contain fish because they eat its spawn.

Forest habitat types



The forest provides shelter, recreation areas and natural habitats as well as playing an important role in the production of wood, air and clean water.

As a result of the project ...

... Austrian federal forest corporation (ÖBf) is voluntarily contributing a further 850 ha of its area to the Natura 2000 network. Sustainable management will help to preserve nature for future generations.

Black grouse
(*Tetrao tetrix*)



During their courtship display, black grouse blow, hiss, roll around and gargle to get the attention of their hens.

European bullhead
(*Cottus gobio*)



The European bullhead is a fish without a swim bladder, and therefore has a hard time overcoming obstacles in watercourses exceeding 15 cm.







Western capercaillie
(*Tetrao urogallus*)



The capercaillie makes his home in open canopy forests with anthills and a rich supply of blueberries.

KEY DATA



Project title:	LIFE+ project "Natural woodlands, bogs and habitat network around Aussee" (LIFE12 NAT/AT/000321)	
Project short title:	LIFE+ "Ausseerland"	
Duration:	July 2013 to June 2019	
Budget:	EUR 5,7 million, 50 percent funded by the EU	
Implementation:	ÖBf, Forestry Operation at Inneres Salzkammergut	
Project manager:	Anna-Sophie Pirtscher	
Project partners:	Office of the Regional Government of Styria, Department 14 Water Management, Resources and Sustainability	
	Torrent and Avalanche Control	
	Municipality Grundlsee	
	Municipality Altaussee	
Project sponsors:	Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism	
	Office of the Regional Government of Styria, Department 13 Nature Conservation	
www.bundesforste.at/natur-erlebnis/life-projekt-ausseerland.html		

Natural forest management

Forest management shapes woodland areas. Forestry management in Natura 2000 sites involves different objectives than for commercial forests. The LIFE+ project “Ausseerland” has resulted in even more of a return to nature.



Where deadwood is left to decay, new plants can grow



FOREST HABITAT TYPES

The Natura 2000 sites “Totes Gebirge” and “Styrian Dachstein plateau” are covered extensively by woodland. Since there was no concrete data on the forest habitat types, these protected resources were surveyed and evaluated within the framework of regular forest management – an additional expense, but one that provided planning security for all.



Red belt conk
(*Fomitopsis pinicola*)

RICHLY STRUCTURED STOCKS

As part of the LIFE+ project “Ausseerland”, greater emphasis was placed on natural forest management in order to create optimal habitats. Care was taken to promote fir trees and deciduous trees such as sycamore and beech and to use these for afforestation. Trees that had already died were left standing or lying as so-called deadwood. Where otherwise impossible thanks to the bark beetle, spruce trunks were debarked but left in the forest. Thicket maintenance and tree stand thinning were used to bring structure. More than 2,600 ha of forested area were treated in this way. More than 6,000 solid m³ of wood remained in the forest to decay. In the Natura 2000 sites, forest management will continue to be carried out in this way in the future.



Structured forests are more resistant to climate change



White-backed woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leucotos*)

LIVING DEADWOOD

For many forest visitors, deadwood is not something that belongs in their dream image of a forest. However certain animal and plant species, such as hoof fungus and cladonia bellidiflora lichen, depend on it – for these species, deadwood is a valuable habitat. In the summer of 2016, studies of the species living on deadwood were conducted at selected sites. 240 different species of fungi were identified – three of them seen in Styria and Austria for the first time. 124 lichen species were confirmed, including many endangered species. 50 species of moss, 16 of which are classified as endangered, were found alongside several populations of the rare Alpine longhorn beetle (*Rosalia alpina*). All of these species are signs of a very near-natural forest condition.

MAPPING WOODPECKER HABITATS

While mapping woodpecker habitats, the bird experts at BirdLife had to rely on the occasional sighting, but most of all on their hearing. The Eurasian three-toed woodpecker, white-backed woodpecker, grey-headed woodpecker and European green woodpecker as well as black woodpecker and great spotted woodpecker all make their homes in the Natura 2000 sites in the Ausseerland region. Whether looking for food or building their nests, woodpeckers clearly and audibly feel at home in forests with plenty of dead wood.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Maintaining the “favourable conservation status” of a protected resource as granted by the EU involves taking preventive steps to minimise risks. In the case of forest ecosystems, ensuring regeneration in line with the natural composition of tree species is a central requirement in preserving habitat types which have been designated as protected resources. In Natura 2000 sites, natural regeneration is used wherever possible. This means that no afforestation takes place, and instead young trees are allowed to grow from the seeds of old stock. Like grazing livestock, game can have a decisive influence on the regeneration dynamics of a forest. To minimise risk, a management plan has been drawn up for dealing with cloven-hoofed game (red deer, roe deer, chamois) in Ausseerland.

The two Natura 2000 sites ...

... “Totes Gebirge” and “Styrian Dachstein plateau” are divided into an A and a B zone. In the larger A zone, intervention of any kind is prohibited by law. Here, nature is left to its own devices.



Good conditions for grouse

Grouse populations are in decline all across Europe. For more than 20 years, the Inneres Salzkammergut Forestry Operation in Ausseerland has been countering this development – with even more intensive measures introduced as part of the LIFE+ project.

ALPINE PASTURE MAINTENANCE FOR THE BLACK GROUSE

Fewer and fewer sheep and cattle are being put to pasture in alpine areas during the summer months to keep the vegetation low. However these open spaces at altitude represent an important habitat for the black grouse. During courtship displays, the black grouse wants to be seen by the hens. When it comes to caring for their offspring, black grouse hens seek protection from predators in semi-open areas with a high volume of herbs and where they can also find food for their chicks. To ensure chicks are optimally prepared for life, the hen requires various plant parts from alpine herbs, grasses, cranberries and blueberries. Working together with farmers, hunters and the employees of the Forestry Operation, 50 ha of alpine pasture were cleared as part of the LIFE+ project, thus improving 330 ha of habitat



More than 170 capercaillie ...

... cocks and 300 black grouse cocks were counted in the Ausseerland region during the mating season. There is also a high number of hens, making the population large by European standards.



FOREST MANAGEMENT FOR THE CAPERCAILLIE

Targeted management methods favourable for capercaillies took place across 500 ha of forest at all stages of growth within the Natura 2000 sites of “Totes Gebirge” and the “Styrian Dachstein plateau”. Measures should ensure the capercaillie has access to a year-round habitat which is as networked as possible over the entire area.

The afforestation objectives included a minimum soft-wood proportion of 70% and the introduction of larch and pine. Larch have already been promoted in young growth areas and are left behind during the wood harvest for mating or sleeping purposes. Vehicle-width aisles were cut through thickets in order to connect areas of old wood. Flight corridors with protrusions were created, allowing the comparatively heavy birds to take off and land more easily. The growth of blueberries, an important food source, was stimulated through measures to open canopies.

During the forestry work, special consideration was given to anthills and dust bathing areas. After use, the branch material was collected in piles to make it easier for hens and chicks to cross the area and to quickly detect natural enemies. The embankments along forest roads were kept clear of vegetation, because in spring the snow in these areas melts first, making food available. In many stands there are extensive forest pastures, which create an optimal structure for future capercaillie populations in the forest.

Clearing of alpine pasture means ...

... to cut down mountain pine (*Pinus mugo*) and green alder (*Alnus viridis*) and to collect them in piles. Sometimes the piles get burned.



After the clearing of alpine pastures piles of branches remain on the area

MITIGATING OBSTACLES

Game and pasture fences in the forest pose a threat to the capercaillie. If the capercaillie is startled by an enemy, in its panic it will not notice the fine mesh and its escape attempt will end with a collision, which is often fatal for the heavy bird. For this reason, a total of 4,900 running metres of wire mesh were covered with plastic safety fences to make them visible.

Weighing in at between ...

... 3,5 and 6 kg, the capercaillie is a relatively heavy bird with poor flying ability. It can fly well over distances of up to 5 km, but would rather glide downwards from height. It prefers to gain this height on foot.



STEPPING STONES FOR HABITAT NETWORKING

Habitat mapping and the number of display sites in the LIFE+ project indicate that the capercaillie and black grouse are doing well in Ausseerland. However, the valley area is a bisection of the Totes Gebirge and Styrian Dachstein plateau habitats. This is why forest management designated rises and mountain ridges as stepping stones in such a way that both species have access to optimal habitats with opportunities for flight and enjoy taking advantage of networking opportunities. The stepping stones will be added to the existing “Styrian Dachstein plateau” Natura 2000 site, and the entire area will be regulated by the Birds Directive.

Black grouse
(*Tetrao tetrix*)



This fencing makes the habitat safer for grouse

More about bogs

Bogs have much to offer: they store CO₂ and water, and represent highly sensitive ecosystems which are home to specialised animal and plant species. For this reason, many bogland areas have been renaturalised as part of the LIFE+ project.

REWETTING

In the past, bogs were exploited by extracting peat to be used as fuel, or they were drained using drainage ditches to create usable land. During the LIFE+ project, nine bogs were restored to their natural state. The installation of a total of 98 sheet pile walls with a total length of around 620 running metres was designed to dam water and feed it into bog areas. This allows the peat moss to grow again, re-establishing the bog. One pleasant side effect of this is that the dams often create open water areas where dragonflies feel at home.



Subarctic damner
(*Aeshna subarctica*)

Sheet pile walls
are used to
keep the water
in the bogs





Peat moss needs water to live

REMOVAL OF PLANT COVER

In cooperation with the Austrian Nature Conservation Association and the Mountain and Nature Guard, a total of 10,5 ha over seven bogs were cleared of emerging trees and shrubbery, namely spruce and deciduous trees, with the help of numerous volunteers. These plants extract water from bog areas, and can thrive even during hot summers, further drying out the bog.

THE WONDERS OF PEAT MOSS

Peat moss can grow indefinitely and store up to 30 times their dry weight in water. They have no roots, receiving all the nutrients they need from rainwater instead. To see whether the LIFE+ project has brought positive changes for peat moss through measures such as water damming and bogland maintenance, 1x1 m monitoring areas have been set up in selected bogs. The first desired effects of the water-damming measures were observed in the shrubs, which discoloured and died.



Obersdorfer bog



Jersey tiger
(*Euplagia quadripunctaria*)

A FLUTTERING INHABITANT

The bogs and surrounding areas in Ausseerland are home to more than 300 species of butterfly. The marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) is the rarest of these. It relies on the devil's-bit (*Succisa pratensis*) as a food source for its caterpillars and can only survive in areas where this plant grows. Since it is reluctant to fly through shaded areas, areas of potential were connected by felling trees in order to give this special butterfly more habitat.

REPLACEMENT OF A ROADWAY

The lime used in the construction of a forest road through the Knoppenmoos changed the pH value of the water and affected vegetation on one side of the bog. For this reason, 100 m of roadway with a width of 4,5 m was replaced to a depth of 1.4 m. Thanks to the newly introduced silicate material, the bog retains its acidity.

Habitats & migration aids

Many species are in decline due to a lack of suitable habitats or a lack of habitat networking. The measures taken as part of the LIFE+ project create and network suitable habitats for amphibians and crustaceans.

CLIMBING AIDS FOR YELLOW-BELLIED TOADS

Yellow-bellied toads (*Bombina variegata*) make their way through forests and meadows on forest roads and agricultural roads, where they run the risk of dying in cattle grids. The amphibians can easily fall through the grating and into the concrete box below, where they starve. To counteract this, 33 cattle grids were equipped with metal ladders. Thanks to their non-slip surface, these enable small animals to escape the box after falling in.

PADDLING PONDS FOR ITALIAN CRESTED NEWTS

Since the Italian crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) tends to make its home in heavily used valley areas, it struggles to find standing bodies of water which do not contain fish. For its spawning grounds, the newt requires ponds with a depth of at least 1.5 m and an area of between 100 and 200 m². Structures such as rootstocks or larger stones in or at the edge of the water are ideal. 45 such networked ponds were created by the LIFE+ project. During the mating season, it was monitored whether the crested newts were using the ponds. Smooth newts, common toads, alpine salamanders and dragonflies also use the waters. Grazing livestock and wild animals can use them as watering holes, and humans get the chance to see a free frog concert!



Yellow-bellied toad
(*Bombina variegata*)



The newly created ponds are used as spawning grounds by all amphibians



SPECIAL PIPES FOR STONE CRAYFISH

The pipe culverts under the forest roads were replaced at twelve points with special pipes that have specially welded cross-beams. Substrate gets caught on the cross-beams, making the pipes easier for stone crayfish (*Austropotamobius torrentium*) to pass through. In addition, the pipes are installed at ground level with the stream bed, meaning falls are mitigated with stone pitchings. This makes it easier for the stone crayfish to pass under the forest road and reach new habitats.

Hundreds of small shallow ...

... pools are created at moist places in the forest floor from the indentations made by the excavator shovel. The yellow-bellied toad loves the rapidly warming pools of water and chooses these as spawning grounds.





European bullhead
(*Cottus gobio*)

REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

The Salza and the Rödtschitzbach are two bodies of water which are of crucial importance as habitats and networking points for the European bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) and stone crayfish. Previously, however, both species had been prevented from moving further upstream by concrete ground sills and drop structures. Between November 2017 and December 2018 flood protection measures were taken by the project partner “Regional Government of Styria, Department 14”, while the “Torrent and Avalanche Control unit” took measures to make the stream bed passable and more ecological. Five concrete ground sills were half removed, trees were felled and anchored with steel ropes in the bank area, two barriers were slit open and 26 smaller ones largely removed.



Removal of a barrier



RESETTLED CRUSTACEANS

Stone crayfish stocking – the relocation of crayfish from areas with a high number of animals to suitable streams without animals – has never really been attempted in Austria. At least, no successful projects have been documented to date. Although the stone crayfish is very sensitive, the LIFE+ project managed to successfully relocate numerous specimens to two bodies of water. Evidence that the crayfish have reproduced in their new locations has already been found.



The stone crayfish are introduced with great caution into the new streams

NEW CONSERVATION AREA

A new Natura 2000 site, the “Mitterndorfer Biotopverbund” spanning around 250 ha, has been voluntarily placed under protection by the ÖBf. The area is special in that it does not represent a closed area, but connects numerous ecologically valuable areas via water axes and extends over the entire valley area around Bad Mitterndorf.



Deadwood in the water and along river streams offers places to hide

Everything for a fish

Little is known about fish species which are not used as food sources. Bleaks fall into this category. The LIFE+ project "Ausseerland" therefore focused on this rare fish.

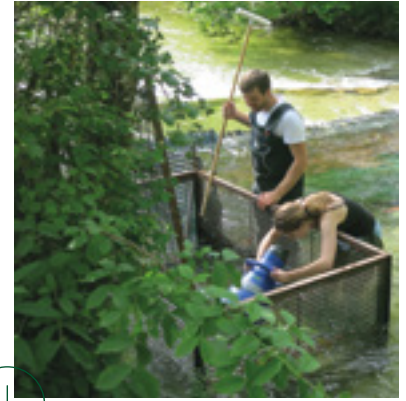
Bleak
(*Alburnus mento*)



FISH CENSUS

To protect an endangered fish species, you first need to know a great deal about it: number of individual fish, gender ratio, possible diseases, etc. Each year at the end of May, thousands of bleaks (*Alburnus mento*) migrate from Grundlsee to Toplitzbach to spawn. All other streams which feed into the Grundlsee are either too cold or move too quickly for the bleak. This, therefore, presents an ideal opportunity for the LIFE+ project to temporarily trap the fish in mobile weirs as they swim upstream. Bleak stocks were surveyed in 2015, 2016 and 2018. With more than 7,500 individual fish counted each year, the species was given a favourable conservation status (A).

With the help of a trap, the fish are counted as they migrate to their spawning grounds.



NURSERY FOR THE BLEAK

An old, closed tributary of the Stimitz, which flows into the Grundlsee, was re-excavated as part of the LIFE+ project, thus creating a shallow area of water with plenty of hiding places for young fish. This benefits the bleak and the common minnow (*Phoxinus phoxinus*). The gravel material was brought directly into the river estuary and is available for use as a spawning substrate by all Grundlsee fish species.

The bleak is a ...

... whitefish. It has many bones and only lives in a few bodies of water in Austria, such as the lakes of the Salzkammergut and in the Wörthersee.



In the new habitat for young fish, deadwood provides good hiding places from predators

Undesirable species

The spread of non-native species threatens protected resources. The American signal crayfish threatens native crayfish populations, and plants such as the Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam are spreading rapidly.


CARRIERS OF CRAYFISH PLAGUE

The Bunzbauergraben near Krungl runs as a narrow, muddy trickle between two fields. The stream, which spans a length of 200 m, is the only place in Ausseerland where signal crayfish can be found at present. However, these few crayfish are all the more dangerous as they have been shown to be carriers of crayfish plague. Likely introduced to a pond further upstream in the 1920s, the signal crayfish was transported to the Bunzbauergraben by underground drainage. If the animals spread over into the adjacent streams, they will pose a danger to the healthy populations of stone crayfish throughout the rest of Ausseerland.

To prevent the signal crayfish from propagating and spreading the crayfish plague, more than 3,000 of these animals were caught by hand or in traps in late-night campaigns between 2015 and 2018 and sent to the culinary industry. A follow-up project researching methods for the long-term prevention of the spread of the disease has been ongoing since 2018.

Crayfish plague is ...

... not only transmitted via signal crayfish, but also via boats, diving and fishing equipment and various aquatic organisms.




The signal crayfish is caught in the dark



Removal of unwanted plants


DISPLACEMENT OF NATIVE PLANTS

Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and Canada goldenrod are three plant species which spread rapidly and displace native species. Since 2014, action has been taken to combat around 160 different cases of these invasive neophytes. Successes have been recorded in the cases of balsam and goldenrod. The knotweed can only be dealt with by digging it out. Unfortunately, covering with film is not an obstacle to this particular species.

In residential areas, green waste is often disposed of in nearby forests. This frequently leads to the propagation of invasive, non-native plants. Educational work was actively carried out with articles in local newspapers and placing signs in the forest. Success is limited because habits are very slow to change.

Neobiota are species ...

... that have established themselves, either with or without human influence, in an area to which they were not previously native. Neophytes are neobiotic plants, while neozoa are neobiotic animals.



Raising public awareness

The widespread raising of public awareness was a very important element of the LIFE+ project "Ausseerland". Workshops, brochures and information posters gave people an insight into the various nature conservation measures.

FOREST TOURS

During the LIFE+ project, 165 pupils from the region and 98 adults in groups accepted the offer of a free tour of the project area. The groups were then given the chance to discover nature under the guidance of ÖBf experts.



Educational forest excursion to Altausseer Seewiese

AUSSEER ECOSYSTEM FORUMS

To date there have been seven Ausseer Ecosystem Forums (Naturraumgespräche), each covering a different topic relating to the nature conservation project. More than 850 participants came to listen to expert lectures on deadwood, grouse, bogs, watercourses and more, and to participate in discussions and excursions. The breaks were used to network with new contacts and exchange technical information.

REST AND LEARN

Seven points along the hiking trails have been kitted out with large information boards and rest areas. The most impressive of these are the platforms in the bog at Ödensee and above the young fish habitat at Grundlsee. The other five info points have also been very well received by hikers.

LIFE-PLATFORM

More than 30 people involved in LIFE-projects in Austria as well as representatives from the EU met in Ausseerland on the 5th and 6th of June 2018. The event involved presentations on changes to EU funding and looking at ongoing individual LIFE-projects; it also promoted the exchange of ideas. The excursion offered insights into the LIFE+ project "Ausseerland".



Platform at the Ödensee bog

Several brochures have been produced as part of the project



READING ABOUT NATURE

The project saw the publication of 30,000 copies of the colouring and puzzle book *Abenteuer Totholz* (“Deadwood adventure”) for primary school children, 16,000 copies of the brochure “Get active for stone crayfish and amphibians”, and 3,000 copies of the leaflet “Hiking in Ausseerland”. These were very well received. Online orders even came in from Germany and Switzerland.

#LIFE AusSEERLAND

The LIFE+ project was at the cutting edge in terms of media usage. Information was shared via the website, Facebook and YouTube. The hashtag #LifeAusseerland redirects users to all relevant Facebook posts. Short clips from the project gave more than 50,000 people an insight into nature conservation work.

NATURE AS ART

Since 28 September 2017, visitors to the Seewiese in Altaussee have been able to visit the *Zeitlose Seewiese* (“Timeless Seewiese”) exhibition by students of the Erzherzog-Johann-BORG and Bad Aussee Polytechnic schools on display at the Jagdhaus free of charge. The works focus on flora and fauna, the passing of time in nature and the complex interrelationships of ecosystems.



Altaussee Seewiese

The media response ...

... has been great. 15 TV reports, more than 150 articles and mentions in print media and countless Likes on Facebook.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Get active for stone crayfish and amphibians	www.bundesforste.at/folder-steinkrebs-amphibien
Deadwood adventure:	www.bundesforste.at/abenteuer-totholz
Hiking in Ausseerland:	www.bundesforste.at/wanderfolder-ausseerland
Project videos:	www.bundesforste.at/life-videos

Benefits for the region

In an effort to assess the effects and benefits of a nature conservation project of this size on the region, the LIFE+ project “Ausseerland” was accompanied from beginning to end by a socio-economic study.

Data relating to budget use, communication of the project contents and the interest of nature users was collected and evaluated by means of a before-and-after analysis. The aim here was to determine whether a nature conservation project of this size has a positive economic impact on a region.

The study authors concluded that many aspects of such a project are extremely difficult to quantify because, for example, there is not necessarily a connection between participation in the Ausseer Ecosystem Forums and personal holiday planning in the region independent of the project.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR NATURA 2000

An informational event was held for farmers in the region, in which the opportunities for funding through national programmes for various ecological areas were explained. An attempt was made to find tenants for bogland areas which require annual maintenance. With Mitterndorfer Biotopverbund named as a new Natura 2000 site, an event held in the municipality of Bad Mitterndorf provided an opportunity to learn more about Natura 2000 and the code of conduct for the protected area. Both events were well attended.



The yellow-bellied toads are visibly at home in the new pools



EMPIRICAL STUDIES

An online survey, telephone interviews and in-person surveys were conducted at tourist hotspots in 2015 and 2018. A total of 269 people took part in the surveys in 2015, compared with 294 in 2018. The level of awareness of “LIFE” and “Natura 2000” was determined, and the effects of the project were examined from the perspective of the respondents. Among the various findings, the studies obtained the following results:

- > There is a strong link between tourism and nature in Ausseerland. The diverse natural landscape, which includes mountains, forests, lakes, bogs and rivers, plays a very important role. It was not possible to identify a concrete increase in visitor numbers as a result of the LIFE+ project. However, the project has strengthened networking and communication between tourism and nature conservation.
- > The raising of awareness and protection of local nature and landscapes are seen as the primary ways the region has benefited in the context of Natura 2000 and the LIFE+ project.
- > From the point of view of nature conservation funding, it is fair to conclude that the LIFE+ project provides impetus for nature conservation work and encourages professional exchange and networking with other nature conservation projects in the region. In this way it contributes indirectly to nature conservation work and drives this forward.
- > The LIFE+ project has increased awareness of Natura 2000 among the local population and improved knowledge of nature conservation issues among landowners and managers. In the 2015 online survey, around 70 % of respondents said they were familiar with Natura 2000 and 47.5 % were aware of LIFE. By 2018, these figures had already risen to 87 % and almost 73 % respectively.
- > The tourism provisions made as part of the LIFE+ project in particular, such as the platforms and information boards, attracted the attention of all respondents and were seen as a good investment in sustainable tourism.

Numbers and facts ...

... 39,700 hours of work done by
employees of the Forestry Operation.

900,000 Euro allocated for
measures by regional companies.

More than 870 people brought
to the region by events.



REQUESTS AND SUGGESTIONS

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IMPRINT

Publisher and issuer:

Österreichische Bundesforste
LIFE+ project “Natural woodlands, bogs and habitat network in Ausseerland“

Editorial office & text: Susanne Langmair-Kovacs, Anna-Sophie Pirtscher

Coverpicture: Thomas Kranabitl

Illustrations: Studio Nu

Design: Roland Radschopf / Vienna (www.rolandradschopf.com)

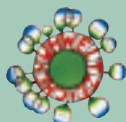
Print: Druckerei Berger, Horn

1st edition, June 2019



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Hergestellt nach der Richtlinie des Österreichischen Umweltzeichens „Schadstoffarme Druckerzeugnisse“



This final report has been produced with the support of the funding instrument LIFE+ of the European Union.

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WO DIE NATUR ZU HAUSE IST



ZOBODAT - www.zobodat.at

Zoologisch-Botanische Datenbank/Zoological-Botanical Database

Digitale Literatur/Digital Literature

Zeitschrift/Journal: [Österreichische Bundesforste - diverse Publikationen](#)

Jahr/Year: 2019

Band/Volume: [26](#)

Autor(en)/Author(s): diverse

Artikel/Article: [Life+ project 1](#)