

PREFACE

On more than a hundred pages in this fourth issue of WhinCHAT, we are able to present eleven original contributions from six European countries. For the first time, articles from Italy and the Netherlands are included.

The overall impression gained from reading the various contributions to this year's issue, is that while Whinchat numbers continue to decline rapidly and the breeding range contracts accordingly, it is nevertheless possible to maintain and even increase breeding numbers in small areas by intensive intervention and liaison with land managers. These remnant "islands" of breeding Whinchats remain vulnerable however to localised misfortunes such as flooding or other natural catastrophes. We must also remember that beneficial management for Whinchats is dependent on a continuation of funding and will remain so indefinitely unless or until politicians can be persuaded to reform agricultural practice to adopt principles of ecological sustainability.

In this context it is highly remarkable that, in a referendum this year, the Bavarian electorate has demanded that conditions for the Whinchat and many other farmland species should be improved by means of new legal regulations. As a result of this initiative of citizens, nature conservation organisations and political parties in Bavaria, and among other achievements, organic agriculture is to be further encouraged, more flower patches are to be sown, the margins of water bodies are to be better protected and important habitats are to become better linked with one another. Millions of people in Bavaria have recognized that industrial agriculture in its present form is heading for a dead end. We can be sure that our "1st European Whinchat Symposium" in 2015 and the highlighting of the drastic decline of this small meadow bird have helped, at least in some small way, to alert wildlife bodies, authorities and specialists in the first place. The referendum ("Volksbegehren") itself was built around another flagship species, ideally suited to catch the attention of the public, namely the Honey Bee. "Rettet die Bienen" – Save the Bees - was the headline.

To what effect the proposed measures are actually implemented remains to be seen and needs to be watched closely. But perhaps Bavaria can be an example here to other regions in Europe. In any case, the referendum has shown that concern for a healthy, species-rich cultural landscape is growing in the minds of very many people. This glimmer of hope should give us strength to renew our efforts in 2020 to save the Whinchat, a jewel of the meadows.

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Jürgen FEULNER
Editor

Jonathan GUEST
Editor

ZOBODAT - www.zobodat.at

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Feulner Jürgen, Guest Jonathan

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