

Successful realization of ecological networks – an example

Habitat Lechtal

No river landscape on the north side of the Alps is as important for the migration and propagation of plants and animals between Alps and Jura as the river landscape of the Lech in South Germany. After the Ice Ages many plant species spread towards the Alps or the Jura via the gravel deposits along the Lech. Hence the term 'Lech Valley Flora Bridge'. The Lech heaths – large nutrient-poor grasslands on gravel deposits – are considered to be particularly valuable as a habitat. Highly endangered species such as the Bug Orchid or the Augsburg Field Fleawort (which grows nowhere else) live here.

Before the Lech was regulated, the flora and biotope bridge Lech Valley was still intact; nowadays, the valley only acts as such in a very limited way. Many habitats were lost; settlements, roads, agriculture and forestry moved further and further into the wetlands. The remaining habitats must therefore be enlarged and interconnected.

To preserve this internationally important axis of linked biotopes, the Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund has funded a BayernNetzNatur project, which ran from 1998 to 2005. Protecting biotope interconnections over an area of 750 sq. km., this is one of the largest of such projects in Bavaria. Apart from 'classical' nature conservancy (especially the safeguarding and restoration of the heaths), regional development and environmental education were key activities. To ensure good cooperation among the many actors, the project had professional management.

Throughout the Lech valley land was bought up to conserve animal and plant species and to reconnect the remaining 'biotope islands'. The buyers included municipalities and water boards. The buyers received a subsidy from the abovementioned fund in exchange for a commitment to turn the purchased area into a valuable habitat.



The Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund also supported the marketing of 'Lechtaler Lamb'. In this way, the income of shepherds from the herds which help to keep the heaths open is increased. Sheep farming also stimulates the growth of rare plants such as the endangered Cross Gentian.

The many environmental education activities – up to 100 per year – brought thousands of people closer to nature in the context of the project. After the official conclusion of the project in 2005, its work was continued by the 'Lebensraum Lechtal e.V.' society, which was specifically created for this purpose.



Project promoter:

Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege

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