



THE ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE

30 Years of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

Humanity. Nature. Harmony.



Organisation
der Vereinten Nationen
für Bildung, Wissenschaft
und Kultur



Rhön
Biosphärenreservat im Programm
Der Mensch und die Biosphäre
seit 1991



mensch.
natur.
einklang.

30 Jahre

Biosphärenreservat
Rhön





30 successful years together – in harmony with nature

In the Rhön Biosphere Reserve, work and life have been in harmony with nature for 30 years now. With quality regional products, nature-friendly tourism and sustainable, regional development, the region is very much in line with the UNESCO programme “Man and Biosphere”.

Many have contributed to this success story: the Federal State Governments and the teams of the administrations in Thuringia, Bavaria and Hesse, the Mayors, and above all, the citizens of the region. Together, they have managed to turn the “Land of the Open Spaces” into a model region for sustainable development.

The Rhön has also earned an outstanding reputation internationally. Numerous countries benefit from their experiences, some of them as part of permanent partnerships.

30 years of successful cooperation – I congratulate you cordially and wish you all the best for your future work!



Svenja Schulze

Federal Minister for the Environment,
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety





30 years of international recognition – a green triumph of German unity

The Rhön connects three federal states with one another: Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia. Until the 9th of November 1989, the Rhön was divided by the inner-German border. Over a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – the idea for this came from Thuringia. It is a legacy of the “GDR National Park Programme” from 1990.

The Biosphere means sustainable operation and living in harmony with nature. The common motivation for the founding by the three federal states was the preservation of an exceptionally beautiful boundless landscape, the “Land of the Open Spaces.”

Along the former border in the Thuringian Rhön runs the Green Belt. The former death strip is now a vital line of connection for plants, animals and – especially also – for people.

For 30 years, successful and future-oriented experiments have been carried out in the Rhön to see and show how sustainable land use can work. A task and a claim that has become even more important in view of the threats posed by global climate change and the biodiversity crisis.

Many thanks, therefore, to all supporters of the Biosphere Reserve!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anja Siegesmund". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the last letter.

Anja Siegesmund
Thuringian Minister for the Environment,
Energy and Nature Conservation

The Rhön Biosphere Reserve – An integral part and engine of the region as defined by UNESCO

30 years of recognition by UNESCO is a success for all those who live and work in the Biosphere Reserve – and who carry the idea of sustainable development into their everyday lives in a variety of ways.

What began more than three decades ago as an idea of committed nature conservationists in Hesse, Bavaria and Thuringia, is today an integral part and engine of the region as defined by UNESCO. In the Biosphere Reserve on the Hessian side, it has been possible to renature and preserve natural treasures such as the Red Moor and to initiate and successfully implement numerous nature and species protection projects such as for the Red Kite and the Rhön Mountain Meadows. Again and again, numerous volunteers are motivated to get involved – a sign that the population supports the idea of the Biosphere Reserve.

Regional awareness is also evident from the consumption and purchase of local products. The constantly growing network of the Rhön Umbrella Brand is a successful example of a regional economy and the added values that accompany this. This is also demonstrated in the tourism sector. How tourism, sustainability and conservation work together is shown not least by the award as a Dark Sky Reserve – a unique selling point that the local municipalities can be proud of.

I would like to thank everyone involved for their commitment and support. Together with you, we want to further develop the Biosphere Reserve as a model region in the future!



Priska Hinz

Hessian Minister for the Environment, Climate Protection,
Agriculture and Consumer Protection





The idea of the Biosphere Reserve has reached people

30 years ago, the Rhön was designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO – a jubilee to be truly proud of and on which I warmly offer my congratulations. The Rhön Biosphere Reserve stands for three decades of close trans state cooperation, successful sustainable regional development and outstanding commitment and creative drive on site.

The Bavarian Rhön sets standards in the preservation of habitats and landscapes, in sustainable development and in environmental education. The regional goods market is also of particular importance locally. That's how the Rhön sheep, an old domestic breed that was on the verge of extinction 40 years ago, has found a home again in the "Land of the Open Spaces". Today over 6,000 of these Rhön "heraldic animals" are used as valuable landscape maintenance workers on the local mountain meadows and make the annual "Rhön Sheep Weeks" a special spectacle. The products of the Rhön farmers are very much appreciated. The Rhön Umbrella Brand and regional markets such as the Rhön Sausage Market have made major contributions to this.

The idea of the Biosphere Reserve has reached people – proof of this is the expansion of the Bavarian part of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2014 on the initiative of the municipalities. The network of educational and information facilities is continuously being expanded. As the newest facility, the Rhön Nature Experience Centre brings up-to-date, exciting inspiration for sustainable development in the Rhön.

My great respects and thanks to everyone who helped write the success story of the 30 years of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve. I wish continued success and encouragement to the Rhön Biosphere Reserve and all those who are committed to its exemplary development in the service of the people in the Rhön.

With kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Glauber', written on a light-colored background.

Thorsten Glauber, Member of the State Parliament
Bavarian State Minister for the Environment
and Consumer Protection

Living and working – from and with nature

This year we are celebrating 30 years of recognition by UNESCO at a special time that presents our society with new challenges. Those responsible for the trans state UNESCO Biosphere Reserve had a difficult time 30 years ago and were even met with scepticism: there were concerns among the population that bans and restrictions might prevent the locals from using large parts of the Rhön landscape.

These concerns were quickly resolved. Today the Rhön is the most famous Biosphere Reserve in the world. The Rhön residents are proud of their Biosphere Reserve and what has developed and will continue developing there. The employees in the three administrative offices, the six districts, the many nature conservation volunteers and those from agriculture and forestry have played a key part in this. They all implement the idea of the Biosphere Reserve: that people live and work in an attractive region – from nature, but also with nature.

To make the Biosphere Reserve lovable and worth living in in the long term – not only for tourists from all over the world, but above all for those who have their home here – we want to continue on this path together in the next 30 years!



Bernd Woide
Fulda
District Administrator



Thomas Habermann
Rhön-Grabfeld
District Administrator



Peggy Greiser
Schmalkalden-Meiningen
District Administrator



Torsten Warnecke
Hersfeld-Rotenburg
District Administrator



Thomas Bold
Bad Kissingen
District Administrator



Reinhard Krebs
Wartburgkreis
District Administrator

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Humanity. Nature. Harmony.

Let the success story go on!

30 years of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – that is what we celebrate with you, dear Rhön residents, in 2021, even if differently than we had hoped. COVID-19 continues to confront us as a society with new, exhausting challenges – as it does also in the Biosphere Reserve.

The success of the past three decades is no coincidence. The fact that a region can develop into a model region for sustainable development and become the most famous Biosphere Reserve in the world only works if people support the concept of the Biosphere. When they talk to each other, they exchange ideas across borders – across many different interest groups. This exchange has been sorely lacking in the past few months. Clubs and society, the cultural scene, many partners in the education sector and, of course, the hospitality industry have been heavily impacted. We will continue to feel the consequences well into the future. The aim of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – to develop the Rhön into an attractive, liveable region – takes on a whole new meaning in such times. In times of climate change, the protection and preservation of our valuable nature and characteristic cultural landscape also has to be designed very differently than it was 30 years ago.

Let us continue to tackle these tasks together – and to bring and implement the idea of humanity and nature in harmony. The past 30 years have shown how this can work. With numerous projects in the areas of nature and species protection, regional development and tourism – we started early on to initiate sustainable development in the region and to develop high-quality products. Rhön Sheep, the Apple Initiative, the Red Kite Project, the Black Grouse Project and the Dark Sky Reserve are exemplary, outstanding and identity creating sustainable projects that have succeeded in motivating many participants to maintain and develop a unique natural landscape. DER HOCHRHÖNER® and other trails, the Rhön Umbrella Brand, the Junior Ranger Programme, the Green Belt and Rhöner Mountain Meadows are further beacons that we can and should all be proud of. We carry education in sustainable development directly into schools and day-care centres, and we have had our own certification programme for two years. We – the administrations and sponsoring associations of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve – want to build on all of this together with you, who live and work in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve!



Photo: Regina Schmidt

The photos come from our photo competition for the occasion of our anniversary. The photographers have captured what harmony between humanity and nature means to them.



Photo: Andreas Kuhrt



Photo: Annemarie Hochrein



Photo: Helen Stupp

The Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in numbers

Around **280 red kite pairs** breed in the trans state Rhön Biosphere Reserve – that's 560 adult red kites.

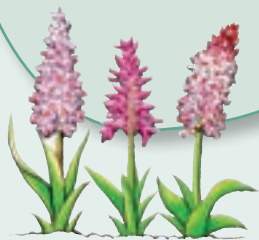
36 Bio-sphere Schools and Biosphere Day-Care Centres

have been certified since summer 2019, with 12 of them focussing on the theme of consumption.



Chiefly the special animal species of the Rhön are suffering from climate change:

32 of 63 so-called target species are "climate losers" and are struggling with deteriorating living conditions.



Count to 100 to find an electric car in traffic flow!

1.32 percent

of cars are **e-cars**, that is a total of **2,504 cars**.

How long does it take to cross from the north to the south of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve? It depends. According to Google Maps and outdooractive ...

By bike: **11 hours** und 5 minutes across 144,9 km,

on foot: **39 hours** und 40 minutes across 143,8 km

or **by car:** **2 hours** und 19 minutes across 124 km.

Aardöpfsküchle, Dätscher, Reibekuchen ... There are

15

different **terms for "potato pancakes"** in the various Rhöner Dialects.

The **website** www.biosphaeren-reservat-rhoen.de was visited

2,592,112 times

in 2020. In 2010 there were only 415,200 hits.



Welcome, new Rhön residents:

1,824 babies

were born in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve in 2019.

Ever since the Rhön Biosphere Reserve was founded, there have been

349 works of scientific research

– 44 of which are still running. From a total of 77 monitoring projects – 38 are still active.

216 brands

can be found in stores with certification from the **Rhön Umbrella Brand**. 62 of them are also certified organic.

Since the awarding of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve as an international Dark Sky Reserve,

50 municipalities

have approved the Dark Sky Reserve lighting guidelines – some of these municipalities or villages are also outside the Biosphere Reserve.



A lesson from this: people took part in

2,597 hours

of educational events. Meanwhile this number is becoming more and more.

A joint effort – around

300 participants

contributed to the creation of the **conceptual framework** from 2014 to 2018.

The total length of the **32 premium routes** amounts to

592.9 km,

allowing it to offer outstandingly beautiful hiking trails. Hikers can **walk** 7,952 km without having to use the same path twice.



Delegations from **51 countries**

have already visited the Biosphere Reserve.

Colleagues of the Biosphere Reserves throughout Germany have met **64-times** so far.

In the six districts that are part of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve there is 1 female and 5 male district administrators, as well as 9 female and 60 male Mayors.

The **proportion of women** in top positions in

municipalities comes out as **13%**.

Forest grows on

102,383.40 hectares

across the Rhön Biosphere Reserve – that is 42.08% of the total area. The most common trees are Beech (44% of all trees), then spruce (22%), pine (10%), oak (7%), other hardwoods (7%) and larches (5%).



The peaceful revolution came as a stroke of luck for nature conservation in the Rhön

Looking back: on a journey through time with Karl-Friedrich Abe

The last meeting of the GDR Council of Ministers before its dissolution, the last item on the agenda – and, so to speak, the last minutes of the GDR before it accedes to the Federal Republic: with the adoption of the National Park Programme on the 12th of September 1990 history is made in German nature conservation.

The decision to place 14 large natural landscapes under permanent protection laid the foundation stone for the later trans state Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

A few days before, on the 1st September, the then 35-year-old Karl-Friedrich Abe was sitting in a plain, low-rise building of the former agricultural production cooperative (LPG) in the village of Kaltensundheim – where initially only a fruit crate and a telephone served as office equipment. The task: to form a team of staff for the Thuringian part of the envisaged Rhön Biosphere Reserve from the National Park Programme. “That was a risk – after all, the law didn’t even exist yet,” remembers Karl-Friedrich Abe today.

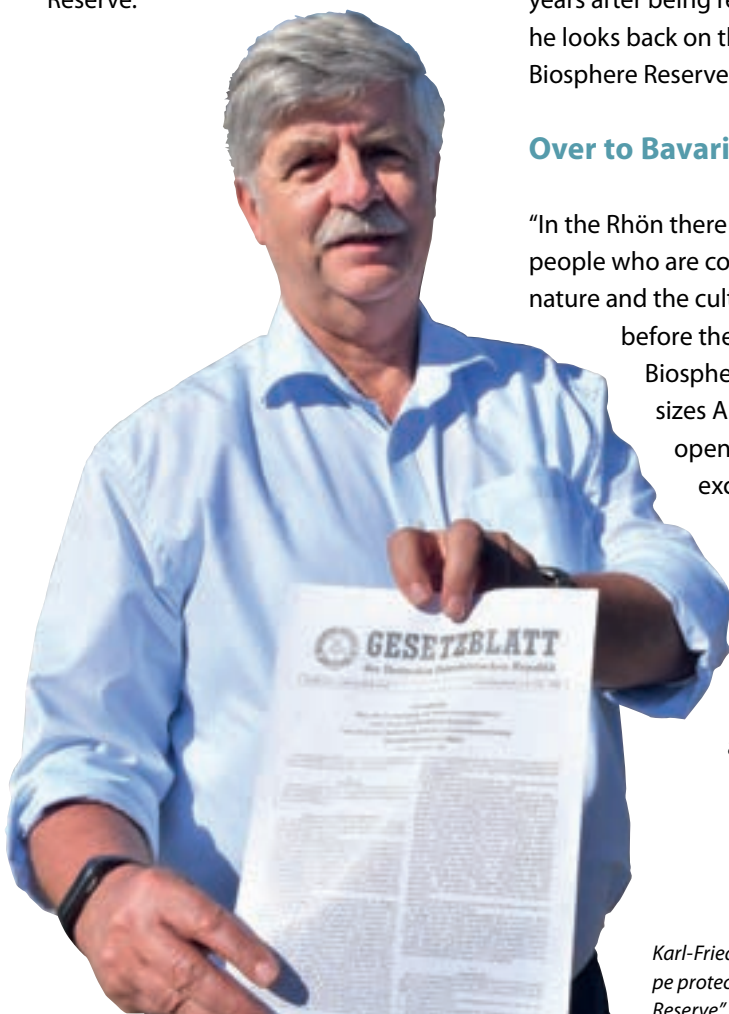
In October 2019, he bid farewell as the longest-serving German head of a Biosphere Reserve administration. Today, 30 years after being recognized by UNESCO, he looks back on the beginnings of “his” Biosphere Reserve.

Over to Bavaria and Hesse

“In the Rhön there have always been people who are committed to preserving nature and the cultural landscape – long before the designation of the Biosphere Reserve,” emphasizes Abe. The border finally opened, making the close exchange between conservationists from Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia possible. “On Thursday the wall fell, on Friday I got myself a visa, and on Saturday I went

hiking,” says Abe. The Black Moor, Red Moor, the Heidelstein, Kreuzberg and Wasserkuppe mountains, all at a rapid pace – Abe and his wife spent every free second in the Bavarian and Hessian Rhön.

“You didn’t know how long this new-found freedom would last.” He quickly got in touch with Willy Bauer, Dr. Franz Müller and Reinhard Kolb from the Hessian Society for Ornithology (HGON). They later worked with Abe, Dr. Aribert Bach, Klaus Schmidt and Volker Trauboth from Thuringia and Ludwig Sothmann from Bavaria to form a German cross border working group of voluntary conservationists. As early as January 1990, there were specific considerations on joint nature conservation projects, work was being carried out on defining an area for a trans state protected area. The first working title: landscape reserve. “The protection category of Biosphere Reserve was not yet known in the West at the time,” explains Abe. At a conference on the 13th of February 1990 in Berlin, an agreement was finally reached on the term Rhön Biosphere Reserve. In June 1990, Abe was asked at a conference in the “Lämmchen” restaurant in the village of Schlitzenhäusen, Hesse, whether he wanted to lead the team of staff for the future Biosphere Reserve. “I had two hours to decide. A name had to be reported to Berlin on the same day.”



Karl-Friedrich Abe with the “Ordinance on the establishment of Nature Reserves and a landscape protection area of central importance with the overall designation as the Rhön Biosphere Reserve”. / Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck

“Everything was still under construction, there was great euphoria”

Abe's career as a vocational school teacher came to an end, and three months later he was in the low-rise building in Kaltensundheim. With the adoption of the National Park Programme, the “Ordinance on the establishment of Nature Reserves and a landscape protection area of central importance with the overall designation as the Rhön Biosphere Reserve” was also accepted which was transferred into federal German law with the unification agreement. “So we had a basis for action,” says Abe. One of the first tasks of the staff team: recognition by UNESCO had to get underway.

In November 1990, the draft for the Thuringian application was ready, which



Long before reunification, volunteer conservationists already campaigned for the preservation of the cultural landscape in the three federal states. After the fall of the Wall, they quickly started to network.

Photo: Scan Magazine “Quick”, the 1st of February 1990

was later sent along with the Bavarian and Hessian parts' applications to Bonn and from there to Paris as a “complete Rhön application”. The handover of the

certificate of recognition to the three environment ministers followed in 1991. “It all happened very quickly at the time,” says Karl-Friedrich Abe. “Everything was still under construction, there was great euphoria. The peaceful revolution that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall came as a stroke of luck for nature conservation in Germany and in the Rhön.”

Today Abe is proud of the trans state cooperation between Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia, which has been strengthened, especially in recent years. The biggest tasks for the future? “Working together on a sustainable development and maintaining the international status”, says Karl-Friedrich Abe. The three main pillars: “Climate, biodiversity – and the people in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve.”

Ulrike Schade, who has been in charge of the Thuringian administration since December 2019, is faced with completely different challenges than 30 years ago. “In addition to protecting nature with its animals and plants, the focus today is primarily on issues such as regional development and education for sustainable development – and alongside climate protection, the question of how sustainable business and coexistence can function in the future.”



Oktober 1991
1. Büro im Flachbau d. LPG

Karl-Friedrich Abe in his office in the village of Kaltensundheim in 1991. / Photo: the archives of Abe



Photo: Harald Meiß

September 25th 1991

The Rhön in the world network

Recognition had already been confirmed on the 6th of March and it is now official with a big ceremony in Kaltensundheim: The chairman of the German Man and the Biosphere National Committee, Winfried Goerke (right), presents the UNESCO certificate of recognition, in the presence of Federal Environment Minister Klaus Potters, to Thuringia's Environment Minister Hartmut Sieckmann. The Rhön is now included in the worldwide network of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves.

September 25th 1991

Founding of the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association e. V. (VNLR)

Following the visit by Federal Environment Minister Töpfer, the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association is founded in the village of Kaltensundheim. Its task it was, and is, to ensure the participation of Rhön citizens in the Biosphere Reserve. Originally planned as a trans state association, it has been active as an association in Hesse since the mid-1990s and also organizes the allocation of EU LEADER funds (funding for regional development) for this area.

July 11th 1991

The foundation of the Landscape Maintenance Association BR Thuringian Rhön (LPV) e. V. as a project management agency for landscape maintenance

July 15th 1991

The Bavarian administration moves into the offices at 16 Rhönbergstrasse in Weisbach

June 12th 1992

The establishment of the Hessian administrative office by decree

1991

1992

1993

August 1st 1992

The development staff team of the Biosphere Reserve in Thuringia moves into the Kaltensundheim House of Culture



Photo: Painted door plate by Jürgen Prüfer

August 1993

The Bavarian administration moves into the offices at 43 Main Street in the town of Oberelsbach

September 9th 1993

First regional show "A Region in Action" in the town of Tann

December 15th 1992

Approval of the draft contract for the establishment, development and administration of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve by the Bavarian cabinet

April 1993

The Rhönbahn (Rhön Railway) will be preserved

In 1989, after almost 100 years, the Rhön Railway providing a connection between Fulda and Gersfeld was to be shut down. With the Rhönbahn contract between the district of Fulda and the Deutsche Bundesbahn (DB), the closure was stopped in 1993. Modernization will follow by 2006, in which the district, the state of Hesse, the EU and the neighbouring municipalities of Gersfeld, Ebersburg, Eichenzell and Fulda will be financially involved. Thanks to LEADER funds, the Biosphere Reserve administration can contribute €1 million euros. Since the renovation work, the route has been operated with signalled train control operations, and is a flagship of the region – and one of the early great successes in the Biosphere Reserve.

My memories

"I was there from the beginning, from 1991, as managing director of the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association. The spirit of optimism at that time and the difficulty in conveying the term "Biosphere" in connection with "Reserve" to people remain vividly in memory. It succeeded with some pioneers from the region who immediately recognized these future opportunities and then contributed with creative ideas and innovative approaches. It is interesting that these "unconventional thinkers", who were often ridiculed at the time, were then able to enjoy the privilege of being among the trendsetters of the respective scene. Nothing makes the approach of sustainable development or model regions more transparent than these people, who were able to think outside the box, have the courage to take risks and are among the winners of this Biosphere Reserve process. When you reduce the concept of "unconventional thinking" to its true core, this was their hour. However those who often call themselves that today have never understood or even lived the meaning of this word."

Dieter Popp, Managing Director VNLR (1991–1996)

January 1st 1995**First educational events programme planned**

The trans state environmental education working group, consisting of Klaus Spitzl, Jürgen Holzhausen and Martin Kremer, presents the first programme of events in which many volunteer providers from the region are already involved.

February 1995**Foundation of the Rhön Apple Initiative**

A handful of idealists found an association to promote and develop the Rhön orchards. It's about maintaining the local variety, organic quality, regional processing and marketing. In the course of time, stationary and mobile apple juice presses, single-variety apple wines, Rhön apple beer and many other products were created. With 2,000 members, the Rhön Apple Initiative is now Germany's largest organic fruit initiative.

April 1994**Foundation of the association From the Rhön – for the Rhön**

1994

July 22nd 1994**Rangers start their work in Hessen**

The first Rhön Ranger already exists in Bavaria, now four full-time nature conservation watchdogs are being presented in the Hessian Rhön – they are all still in service today, a total of seven rangers are employed by the Hessian Biosphere Reserve administration in 2021. In Bavaria, the ranger positions will be increased in the anniversary year: from September 2021, a total of eleven Rangers will be on duty in the districts of Bad Kissingen and Rhön-Grabfeld – seven for the administration, four for the Association for the Nature Park & Biosphere Reserve Bavarian Rhön.



Photo: Fuldaer Zeitung, 23.07.1994 edition

May 5th 1995**All hopes were on the Rhöngold Dairy**

The dairy, originally from the Neuhof potash community, moved to Kaltsundheim in Thuringia after reunification. The settlement (laying of the foundation stone in September 1993, with inauguration in May 1995) is a stroke of luck: It offers jobs and the continuous supply of organic milk is optimally guaranteed by the farm opposite. Rhöngold becomes a pioneer for organic milk, yoghurt and cream cheese products. Unfortunately, organic production had to be stopped nine years later, and bankruptcy followed in 2015.

April 12th 1995**402 pages – first framework concept**

In Zella/Rhön, in the presence of Dr. Andreas Gadow, Chairman of the Man and the Biosphere National Committee, final report of the "Framework Concept for the Protection, Maintenance and Development of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve" was ceremoniously handed over. This first framework concept was worked out with the planning office Grebe from Nuremberg between 1992 and 1994 – with three preliminary drafts, countless discussions with local stakeholders and innumerable statements. The then Thuringian State Secretary Stephan Illert speaks of the "first nationwide model for a broad and thus democratic development and dissemination of such a framework concept".

1995

Biosfärenreservat

SIDE NOTE**Biosphere Reserve**

The term "Biosphere Reserve" did not initially catch on quickly everywhere. An attempt for this very Magazine to count the different alternative word constructs that appeared in the press and especially on mail sent to the administrative offices was unsuccessful – there were just too many.

Hence only our favorites – collected by Karl-Friedrich Abe:

- Biosphere reserve "River landscape Rhön"
- Bio-Reserve
- Bioreservat (Bio spare tyre)
- Bio's Phere Reserve
- Rhön Bear Reserve
- Rhön Biosphere Residence



June 1996

For the first time „Messages from the Biosphere Reserve“

The Thuringian administration publishes the first issue in the series “Messages from the Rhön Biosphere Reserve” – free information and teaching material on local history and knowledge. By 2019, numerous full-time and honorary researchers contributed to a total of 24 volumes of newsletters and 10 monographs. The series will be continued in the anniversary year: the cross-border working groups for species and nature conservation as well as research and monitoring, the Biosphere Reserve administrations and their partners are developing a booklet on the main topic of insects in Core Zones.



May 1st 1997

Foundation of the Association for Nature Park & Biosphere Reserve Bavarian Rhön (NBR) e. V.

This association (NBR) e. V. emerged from the Bavarian Rhön Association, which was founded in 1967, after expanding its range of tasks. The association members are the two districts of Bad Kissingen and Rhön-Grabfeld, the district town of Bad Kissingen as well as 40 cities and municipalities and four members from recognized nature conservation associations. From 2001 onwards, in addition to the classic nature park tasks in the Bavarian part of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the association also takes on the task of environmental education, education for sustainable development and information.

May 30th 1997

Opening of the House of the Black Mountains

The Rhön Biosphere Centre “House of the Black Mountains” in the village of Wildflecken-Oberbach takes up the themes of a Biosphere Reserve and provides vivid information in the form of an interactive exhibition about the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the Black Mountains Nature Reserve. Today, tourist information, environmental education, a cafeteria, a regional goods store and a location for media events and special exhibitions are united under one roof.

1996

1997

1998



Photo: B. Fritz, Free Word Newsletter, 08/15/1998 edition

Offenichtlich mundeten der Ministerin die Rhöngold-Produkte.

August 14th 1998

Angela Merkel and Rhön Yoghurt

The then Federal Environment Minister Angela Merkel is a guest in the Biosphere Reserve. She attends the Rhön Secondary School in Kaltensundheim – today a Biosphere School, the landscape maintenance farms and the Rhöngold organic dairy, which processes the milk from the farms. The minister is enthusiastic about the taste of the Rhön yoghurt.

October 29th 1999

New headquarters for the Bavarian administration

At an inauguration ceremony, the then Bavarian Minister of State, Dr. Werner Schnappauf hands over the key for the new management centre in Oberelsbach to Michael Geier.



November 1998

Second round of LIFE

The EU Commission is visiting the three states to monitor the implementation of the second phase of the LIFE project, which is being led by Bavaria and carried out from 1998 to 2001. It has a financial value of 4.1 million Deutschmark. It is about securing the bristle grass and limestone grasslands, raised moors and rubble forests. The first phase, which began in 1994, was successfully implemented with a total value of 2.85 million Deutschmark.

December 1998

The Hessian administration moves to the highest mountain

The Hessian administration office moves from Wüstensachsen to the former “Groenhoff-House” barracks on the Wasserkuppe. After the Bundeswehr has withdrawn, the resettlement will also prevent vandalism on Hesse’s highest mountain. At the same time, the new location opens up new opportunities for educational and public relations work due to the high number of visitors. In addition to the administration, there is an exhibition and a regional shop on the ground floor.



Photo: Arnulf Müller



Photo: Karl-Friedrich Abe

January 8th 2000

The 10th anniversary of an important encounter

It's been ten years since volunteer conservationists from Hesse and Thuringia met at the Sächsischer Hof restaurant in village of Dermbach. In 1990 the first lines to demarcate the Biosphere Reserve were drawn on topographic maps. At a small celebration, those involved look back to that event.

January 13th 2000

Foundation of the ARGE Rhön

The five district administrators from Bad Kissingen, Fulda, Rhön-Grabfeld, Schmalkalden-Meiningen and the Wartburg district as well as the chairpersons of the three associations; the Rhön Nature and Habitat, the Bavarian Rhön Nature Park & Biosphere Reserve and the Thuringian Rhön Tourism Authority set up the Rhön Regional Working Group (ARGE Rhön) in Frankenheim. The aim is to intensify cross-border cooperation for sustainable development and for the design shaping of the Rhön as a common joint economic and cultural living space. With the co-ordination committee, the ARGE has created a working instrument. To implement these specific goals, the ARGE set up specialist task groups for municipal structures and public relations, the Rhön Umbrella Brand, the implementation of energy concepts, jobs and innovation, opportunities for young people, concepts for tourism, landscape-appropriate building and living, as well as for Local Agenda 21.

July 6th 2000

1st place for cross-border cooperation

At the world conference "Urban 21" in Berlin, the Rhön is awarded one of the eight first places in the nationwide competition "Regions of the Future".

1999

2000

March 1st 2000

The Biosphere Reserve on the web

The Hessian administration and the Rhön Nature and Habitat association have had an Internet connection since 1996, and a little later, with the help of an intern, the first website is built. The first relaunch finally follows in 2000 (see photo).



July 2000

Navigate through the Biosphere Reserve

In order to be able to distribute the many requests for guided tours over several shoulders, the first landscape guides are being trained in Thuringia.



SIDE NOTE

Cheers!

In December 1996 a series of beer mats from the Rhön brewery in the town of Kaltennordheim shows endangered bird species from the Biosphere Reserve. The eight motifs are later be recognized as the most beautiful beer mat series in Germany.



My memories

"These years have significantly shaped my understanding of the success factors of large and ambitious nature conservation projects. The very special success that the administrative offices have achieved: They have turned the implementation of a protection project into a project for the holistic development of a region and, with the concept of a regional market and the benefits that accompany this, they also earned a high level of acceptance for their protection task. (...) Ultimately, the cooperation between the three administrative offices was also a decisive impetus for the establishment of the trans state ARGE Rhön, of which I was allowed to be the honorary founding manager. (...) This time was formative for me, both professionally and personally. This was of course due to the special professional challenges that went far beyond the usual duties of a legal state official. It was also due to the many special encounters with people, which to my mind include in a special way the committed heads of the administrations. They deserve special recognition because they connect the passion and commitment to the protection of nature and the "Land of the Open Spaces" with the will and readiness to take an entire region on this journey. That this is successful is shown – even then – by the desire of many municipalities to be included in the area of the Biosphere Reserve. You really couldn't give a nicer compliment."

Volkmar Halbleib, Head of the Environment Department in the Bad Kissingen District Office (1995–2002)

January 2001**First participation in the International Green Week in Berlin****May 14th 2001****Opening of the House of the Lange Rhön**

The House of the Lange Rhön Biosphere Centre in Oberelsbach provides information about the Biosphere Reserve with an interactive exhibition, it explains the development of the landscape and presents various sustainable development projects. At the inauguration ceremony with Environment Minister Dr. Werner Schnappauf, they are celebrating 10 years of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Anniversary events are also held on the Wasserkuppe during the year – with the popular children’s singer Rolf Zuckowski, among others – and in Kaltensundheim.

January 20th 2003**The green light for a major nature conservation project**

After ten years of struggling, the Thuringian Environment Minister Dr. Volker Sklenar can present the funding decision for the first phase of the new major nature conservation project “Thuringian Rhönhutungen” to Wolfgang Dietz, Chairman of the Landscape Maintenance Association (LPV) BR Thuringian Rhön e. V. in Kaltensundheim. By June 2016, 4.5 million euros will be invested to preserve the species-rich and historical Thuringian limestone grassland over an area of 13,400 hectares. The measures are implemented on this land by the LPV.

July 9th 2003**The first UNESCO exam**

The German Man and the Biosphere National Committee reviews the progress of development in the Biosphere Reserve every 10 years – for the first time, a 40-person review commission will be on the move in the Rhön – on the 9th and 10th of July. In addition to extensive reporting by the administration, the focus is on factory tours and discussions with local stakeholders.

2001

2002

2003

February 2002**First acceptance survey by the Allensbach polling institute**Page
42**October 12–13th 2002****First Rhön Sausage Market in Ostheim**

On the initiative of the Bavarian administration, the first market with regional sausage and ham specialties and all kinds of accompanying products takes place in the town of Ostheim vor der Rhön – it was a great success. Around 13,000 visitors come to the premiere, the “Mainpost” newspaper later headlines: “The sausage summit as a gourmet paradise”. The market, which is now held every two years, quickly established itself as a gourmet fair known far beyond the Rhön. The Sausage Market is the role model for a number of other regional markets such as the Bread and Beer Market in Poppenhausen, the Milk and Honey Market in Gersfeld and the Ham and Distillation Market in the village Rasdorf.

December 1st 2002**Cross-border cooperation regulated**

Three states – one Biosphere Reserve. After years of negotiations on the legal regulation of this trans-state cooperation, the three Environment Ministers, Dr. Werner Schnappauf (Bavaria), Wilhelm Dietzel (Hesse) and Dr. Volker Sklenar sign an administrative agreement on the joint conservation and development of the Biosphere Reserve in accordance with the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere programme in November. The agreement comes into force on December 1st, and the Thuringian administration is the first to hold the three-year lead.

My memories

I associate the years 2001 to 2005 with the beginning of the systematic mapping of springs in the Biosphere Reserve. Since hardly anything was known about the tiny inhabitants in springs before, organisms such as the Rhön spring snail and the alpine vortex worm have come into the public eye. At the time, of course, nobody suspected that it would one day become one of the largest internationally recognized surveying projects. When it comes to bat protection, I always associate these years with the opening of the Milseburg tunnel, which was opened to cyclists in mid-2003. In the run-up to construction planning, 2001 marked the start of the monitoring of bat winter roosts in the Hessian Rhön. I remember countless discussions about the construction work with regards to bat protection, long nights and catching nets at the tunnel openings to record the bat species and enjoyable winter inspections. This project shows very well how tourism and nature conservation can be combined. The increasing numbers of the rare pug bat in the tunnel speak well for this.

Stefan Zaenker, State Association for Cave and Karst Research Hesse

October 24th 2003

Advisory board for the Biosphere Reserve

This is to advise the Biosphere Reserve administrations and the responsible ministries: the advisory board for the Rhön Biosphere Reserve is set up in the Eisenacher House – with members from clubs and associations from Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia. The first chairman is State Secretary Stefan Baldus from the Thuringian Ministry for the Environment. The advisory board members are reappointed every three years by the ministries. The next appointments are due in autumn 2021.

2004

The knight of the Rhön streams returns

The native German crayfish has been reintroduced in the waters of the Rhön since 2002. After extensive preliminary investigations, presentations and coordination discussions as well as a test performance, the stocking of crayfish in ten streams of the Hessian Rhön begins in 2004. The project is carried out with many volunteers from the start and is considered one of the many successful Citizen Science projects in the Biosphere Reserve. The streams have been monitored to this day, along with other cross-border stocking measures.



Photo: Alexander Mengel

2004

Junior Rangers are out and about in the Rhön

Page 36

June 2004

Good grades from Paris

UNESCO sends the result of the first evaluation. The Biosphere Reserve passed the test with flying colors: the Rhön is certified as having “an exemplary approach in the implementation of the Seville strategy and international guidelines”.

September 3rd 2004

Opening of the NABU House on the Red Moor

2004

2005

February 2005

Quality now has a seal

After years of preparatory work, since Spring 2005 regional products from the Rhön Umbrella Brand have been awarded the “Rhön Seal of Quality”. Regional companies from the districts of Wartburg, Schmalkalden-Meiningen, Rhön-Grabfeld, Bad Kissingen and Fulda can now advertise with a standard logo. Criteria are outlined for a total of 9 industries. With the “quality of the Biosphere Reserve” and Rhön origins, the goals of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve are pursued and consumers are able to quickly identify high-quality regional products.



May 31st 2005

The first highway sign

On the A 71, shortly before the Red Valley viaduct in the direction of the Meiningen-North exit, the first tourist sign pointing to the Biosphere Reserve is posted. Schmalkalden-Meiningen’s District Administrator Ralf Luther (left) and Karl-Friedrich Abe, Head of the Thuringian Biosphere Reserve Administration, tighten the bolts. Later there are signs on the A 7 in Hesse and the A 71 in Bavaria.



SIDE NOTE

mine!

To make the Biosphere Reserves in Germany even better known: that is the aim of a nationwide poster campaign by EUROPARC Germany e. V. The campaign is a reaction to a Germany-wide analysis of the awareness of the Biosphere Reserves among the population. Although Rhön is clearly ahead of the other areas here - as the Allensbach study had shown - the Rhön participated on the initiative of the Thuringian administration. It starts on the 6th December 2003: the girl with crossed arms, who calls the typical Rhön landscape - the Ulster valley - her own, can be seen in more than 200 locations.

September 24th 2006

Opening of the HOCHRHÖNER® premium hiking trail

Through the Rhön: the start of the long-distance hiking trail is in Bad Kissingen, the destination is Bad Salzungen – or the other way around! In order to incorporate the most beautiful landscape formations of the Rhön, three variants were developed: the western route over the basalt cones of the Kuppenrhön area (136 km) and the eastern route over the plateau of the long Rhön (122 km). Or if you like it a little shorter, you can hike the Hochrhön's 88 km route. The Premium Hiking Trail, which is now supplemented by more than 31 extra trails, is voted Germany's most beautiful hiking trail in 2010.



Photo: Carsten Kallenbach

April 6th 2006

Opening of the information point at the Black Moor



Photo: Marc Huter, ZdL

June 6th 2008

Presentation of the First Integrated Environmental report for the Biosphere Reserve

October 27th 2007

The observation tower on the Black Moor opens

June 2008

A partnership with South Africa

At a side event of the 9th UN Nature Conservation Conference in Bonn, representatives of the Rhön and Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserves (South Africa) sign a declaration of intent. The two Biosphere Reserves want to continue and deepen the cooperation they have already started.

2006

2007

2008

February 4th 2009

Year of the Biosphere Reserves in Germany

The year of the Biosphere Reserves in Germany is opened in Erfurt with a special trip in the tram – which is adorned with large photos from the Rhön and the Vessertal. Among other things, the 13 German Biosphere Reserves are presented in 2009 in a joint exhibition at the Federal Garden Show in Schwerin.



Photo: Mediendienst Rhön



Photo: Bernd Götte

June 2009

Poetry on the Wasserkuppe

The "Nights of Poetry" in the Rhön and Vogelsberg have been highlights among the annual events since 1996. The actor and singer Rudolf H. Herget inspires hundreds of people again this year – this time on the Wasserkuppe.



Photo: Carsten Kallenbach

February 4th 2010

Biosphere signs are now “tolerated” in Bavaria too

They have existed in Thuringia for a long time, and in Hesse they have also been a part of the appearance of municipalities within the Rhön Biosphere Reserve for some time now – the brown signs with the words “Die Rhön – UNESCO Biosphärenreservat”. From now on, the signs are now also tolerated in Bavaria: “On my instructions, the Free State of Bavaria will no longer intervene against the additional signage until further notice,” says Bavaria’s Minister of the Interior, Joachim Herrmann.

July 2010

Digital car-pooling platform for the Rhön

Under Hessian leadership, the “Rhön digital car-pooling platform” is being developed with a regional company – financed by the three administrations. The idea for this originally came from Michael Müller, an employee of the Hessian administration. In particular, commuters in rural regions should be offered additional options for local public transport.



Photo: Carsten Kallenbach

2009

September 4th 2009

The Thuringian administration moves to the historic Provostry

The move from the Kaltensundheim House of Culture is over, the new offices of the Thuringian administration in the Provostry of Zella/Rhön are inaugurated. With the occupancy by the state authority, the future of the historic building is secured. Since 2001, a total of 1.97 million euros have been invested in the renovation, with the municipality of Zella/Rhön contributing 349,000 euros.

2010

December 11th 2009

Inauguration of the Biosphere information centre in the Provostry of Zella/Rhön



My memories

In the summer of 1989 I became president of the Rhön Club – a large hiking club – and said in my inaugural speech that “My greatest wish would be to be the president of the Thuringian Rhön as well”. Half a year I had the role. A lot happened over the following years.

The Rhön became a Biosphere Reserve! Not all of the Rhön people cheered! Be an “Indian reservation” – and let ourselves be locked up? No! “The truncheons are ready behind the stove” was called out to me at a meeting. In the Hessian part, the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association – and the gastronomic industry invented the “Rhön Charm”. The Rhön sheep became a hallmark in the “Land of the Open Spaces” and thus was preserved as a species. Jürgen Krenzer took old recipes out of the chest. The lupins were fought and the black grouse was reintroduced. Core Zones were designated – often under protest.

The Rhön Club was involved in all consultations, as the unique nature of the Rhön was also under the protection of that very hiking club. The Rhön Club also played its part in the overall concept. The result of long and thorough negotiations and deliberations was the HOCHRHÖNER®, which was ultimately voted Germany’s most beautiful hiking trail.

Regina Rinke, Rhönklub-President (1989–2011)

SIDE NOTE

“Bionade” and “Ostheimer Leberkäs” in the on-board bistro

On Deutsche Bahn trains: on the 1st of October as part of a project of the “Slow Food” initiative, the on-board bistros now offer the nationally known Rhön “Bionade” sodas and the regional specialty “Ostheimer Leberkäs” (a German sausage dish). The aim of the “Ark of Taste” project is to save local and regional foods, species of farm animals and crops, as well as dishes that are in danger of becoming extinct due to a lack of supply.

June 26th 2012

A cosmos full of life in Oberelsbach

The Oberelsbach Environmental Education Centre is officially opened. The educational focus of the facility, with an accommodation capacity of 72, is on the human and natural habitat in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. To date, the environmental education centre has had 38,224 guests, 75,395 overnight stays and 60,278 participants in around 50 freely selectable educational modules in the fields of nutrition and agriculture, forest and wood, settlement and social affairs, sustainable consumption, as well as humanity, nature and the environment.



Photo: Angela-Bungert

June 2013

The second evaluation by UNESCO

The second evaluation by the International Coordination Council (ICC) of UNESCO takes place in the summer with recommendations on the various areas of responsibility to be implemented in the following years. The next evaluation will take place in 2024.

2010

2011

2012

2013

May 16th 2010

The first Bread and Beer market in Poppenhausen

November + December 2010

The second large acceptance survey

Page 42

August 25-28th 2011

20 years of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

Twenty years of recognition by UNESCO is celebrated in the town of Gersfeld – with a “Market of Ideas” and a “Market of Rhön Delights”. In a regional conference with 300 participants, a policy paper is adopted as a template for the new framework concept.

August 14th 2013

A new Bavarian Core Zone decree

3 percent of the Bavarian Rhön with 3,889 hectares will henceforth be protected as a Nature Reserve. This is followed by gentle forest conversion from non-native spruce sites to deciduous or mixed forests typical of the Rhön.



My memories

“With the large-scale nature conservation project “Thuringian Rhönhutungen”, our landscape conservation association has done a lot for the preservation of the sheep grazed areas that characterize the landscape. These nutrient-poor and dry grasslands in the Thuringian Rhön are outstanding in terms of their size and interconnectedness at a national level. As part of this conservation project to maintain and promote biodiversity, we have had to change the Rhön landscape a little.

Projects such as these are successful when everyone involved feels involved. This corresponds to the fundamental philosophy of the landscape conservation associations – they build bridges between humanity and nature. This can only be achieved through constant dialogue and respect for one another. Projects initiate processes, but they are time-limited. If you involve all relevant parties, long term responsibility can be achieved, well beyond the end of the project. People who stand for nature conservation and who take aspects of this into account in their work must be rewarded on a permanent basis. We all bear the responsibility to preserve biological diversity.”

Petra Ludwig, Landscape Maintenance Association BR Thuringian Rhön

June 12th 2014

The area is growing – and remains a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

With the decision of the UNESCO International Coordination Council – part of the Man and the Biosphere programme – the Biosphere Reserve in the Bavarian part will be expanded by 58,113 hectares to a total of 243,323 hectares. At the same time, the committee is extending international recognition of the Biosphere Reserve after it has been successfully evaluated for the second time.



Photo: Martin Kremer

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37

September 16th 2014

Help for the red kite

Funded under the federal programme “Biological Diversity” until 2020, the trans state species aid project “Red Kite in the Rhön” started with monitoring, diverse measures for protection and a budget of around 900,000 euros. The application had been made by the Hessian administration on behalf of ARGE Rhön.



Photo: Martin Kremer

March 2014

Completion of cross-border wildcat monitoring

Numerous participants have gotten involved in the research into the populations of the wildcat in the Rhön. 102 individuals were counted, which indicates a vital, reproducing population that is in exchange with neighbouring regions.

August 7th 2014

Recognition as the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve

Page
34

2014

2015



Photo: Rolf Friedrich

February 20th 2015

The opening of the exhibition about the Green Belt and the Rhön Biosphere Reserve in the house at Point Alpha, along the former inner German border

September 3rd 2015

Black grouse in the Rhön

The species protection project in the Hochrhön, which has existed since 1976, is honoured with the UN Decade Project Biodiversity award of the Month of December 2015. After a sharp decline of the initial 250 male black grouse, male and female Swedish black grouse are released into the wild since 2010 in order to stabilize the population.

August 30th 2015

Opening of the ark in the Rhön Adventure World on the Weidberg mountain



Photo: Rolf Friedrich

SIDE NOTE

The leaning tower is toppled

No second Tower of Pisa in the Rhön: On the 14th of September 2014, the citizens of the Schmalkalden-Meiningen district vote against the planned tourism project on the Hohe Geba mountain. The adventure centre's spectacular visitor magnet was to be a tower inclined at 23.5 degrees. 59 percent of the population was against the 14 million euro project, 90 percent of which would have been funded by the state.



April 4th 2016

The Rhön Natura 2000 Station starts work

The Landscape Maintenance Association BR Thuringian Rhön has been the sponsor of one of the 12 Thuringian Natura 2000 stations since 2016, and has coordinated on site; among other things, the implementation of the Fauna Flora Habitat Directive and The Birds Directive management plans in the European network of protected areas.

July 17th 2016

The first Milk and Honey Market in Gersfeld

October 1st 2016

The LIFE project "Rhön Mountain Meadows" starts

Page 28

October 8th 2017

The first E-Mobility Day in Rasdorf

Page 32

December 9th 2018

The Thuringian Green Belt becomes a National Natural Monument

Page 30

2016

2017

2018

May 26th 2016

Nationwide Junior Ranger meeting in the town of Hammelburg

Hundreds of Junior Rangers from all over Germany meet in the Rhön and experience exciting things on the subjects of cities, the countryside and rivers at the southernmost tip of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Hammelburg.

April 17th 2017

A National Park in the Bavarian Rhön is off the table

Prime Minister Dr. Markus Söder puts the plan for a possible third National Park in Bavaria on hold – and thus ends months of sometimes heated discussions about the designation of a Bavarian Rhön National Park.

July 31st 2018

Cabinet of the Bavarian State Government decides to build a nature experience centre in the Rhön

Page 37

May 16th 2018

New framework concept

After a three-year participation process with 300 participants from the region, in Gersfeld the three environment ministers present the new framework concept for the Biosphere Reserve as a model for the future with numerous project ideas.

August 6th 2017

Noah's Sail: the Biosphere Reserve from above

The new viewing platform "Noah's Sail" is located at a height of almost 830 meters in Oberweid in the Thuringian Rhön and invites you to enjoy breath-taking panoramic views.



Photo: Anand Anders



Photo: Alexander Mengel

April 19th 2019
Opening of the interactive “Natur Aktiv Museum” in the village of Oepfershausen

May 23rd 2019
Biosphere day-care centres and schools: the first awards in Thuringia

Page 36

May 2019
Domain contract for a new joint homepage

The cooperation on the new homepage of the trans state Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve www.biosphaerenreservat-rhoen.de is contractually agreed to by the three administrations, the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association, the Bavarian Rhön Nature Park and Biosphere Reserve Association. The homepage goes online in spring 2020 with a thematic relaunch in an all new design.

Page 28

January 28th 2021
Start of the BROMMI project



Photo: MGO Media

May 28th 2021
The signing of a partnership for sustainable land

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2019

2020

2021

September 13th 2019
First celestial arena opens in Hofaschenbach

Hundreds of guests celebrate the new successful project in the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve: celestial arenas for exploring the day and night sky. It got off to a successful start in Hesse with the opening of the Hofaschenbach, Danzwiesen, Soislieden, Bad Salzschlirf and Eichenried locations.



Photo: Alexander Mengel

September 29th 2019
The first Ham and Distillation Market in Rasdorf

June 2020
Relocation of the Hessian administration to Hilders

The Groenhoff House on the Wasserkuppe has been vacant since mid-June: after almost 20 years, the Hessian Administration of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association are moving to the market town of Hilders.

July 6th 2021
Official kick-off of the large-scale nature conservation project Thuringian Kuppenrhön area

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mensch.
 natur.
 einklang.

March 3rd 2021
The anniversary year starts

The administrations are ringing in the anniversary year of 2021 with a digital press conference. Despite COVID-19, new programmes such as the first Biosphere Weeks, a Core Zone and a Development Zone Day are implemented. The motto of the anniversary is “Humanity. Nature. Harmony.”

SIDE NOTE

The Rhön Sheep – a strong brand!
 On the initiative of the Meiningen Postage Stamp Friends, the Federal Ministry of Finance is issuing an edition with two special stamps, the motifs “Rhön sheep” and “German saddle pig” draw attention to a very special concern: the preservation of old and endangered livestock breeds in Germany. In the vote for the most beautiful postage stamp in 2016, the readers of the “Deutsche Briefmarkenzeitung” (“German Postage Stamp Magazine”) vote the Rhön sheep in second place.





"Hut beech" on the Mathesberg mountain in the Hessian Rhön. / Photo: Arnulf Müller

This is what we do: nature conservation and protection of the cultural landscape

We are a model region for insect protection

The so-called Krefeld study for the decline of the insect population moved the topic of the – until then – hardly considered loss of biodiversity to the centre of public discussion. The former member of the Man and the Biosphere National Committee, Prof. Dr. Diana Pretzell, who at the time worked as a manager at WWF Germany, along with 5 German Biosphere Reserves, came up with the project idea “Biosphere reserves as

model regions for insect protection in Germany”.

As the project management agency, WWF Germany, together with the Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research and the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, submitted the project application to the DLR project management agency, which was approved at the end of 2019. The Bavarian part of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve was selected as one of the five model regions alongside the Black Forest, Schorfheide-Chorin, Middle Elbe and Schaalsee. In 2020 the WWF sets up its own project

office in the Bavarian administration in Oberelsbach. In the Bavarian development zones, new network structures are to be created or existing ones to be optimized in order to promote the spread of different groups of insects in poorly structured arable areas.

The variety of the different locations is represented by a specific selection of focus areas in order to test a number of measures over several years during the project period up to 2025 and to accompany them scientifically. The measures are developed and coordinated with the farmers to ensure greater acceptance.

Protection for the Rhön mountain meadows

Nothing in the low mountain range of the Rhön in the heart of Germany gives such an impression of openness and space like the meadows. Created through human cultivation over centuries, the mountain meadows are a species-rich habitat for many rare plants and animals.

The Rhön mountain meadows are the little paradise next door, a microcosm – which

is also good for us humans. However, this fascinating wonder world is gradually threatening to disappear. Where grazing is given up because it is no longer profitable, bushes spread and displace other species. Where there is frequent and intensive mowing and fertilization, diversity is lost through bare-cutting and the oversupply of nutrients. This means that meadows are now considered to be the most endangered native habitat of all.

The LIFE project “Hessian Rhön – mountain grasslands, Hutungen (“Hut tree”) grazing

lands and their birds” has stopped the decline of Rhön mountain meadows since 2016. In close cooperation with farmers in the Rhön region, measures are being taken to preserve the habitats that have become rare for meadow breeding species – such as common snipe and corncrake, arnica and the globeflower. Protection through gentle agricultural use is an important key to success. The primary goal of the LIFE project is to maintain and improve the species-rich mountain meadow habitats in the middle and high altitudes of the Rhön. The concrete measures include, among other things, the creation of Natura 2000 grassland, the upgrading and creation of limestone grasslands, habitat enlargement and optimization for the marsh fritillary butterfly, control of neophytes and predator management in meadow breeding areas.

The turning over of cut grass on the Stirnberg mountain in the Hessian Rhön – the practice of putting cut grass from a meadow with many plant species on to a meadow with less species in order to get new seeds and increase biodiversity. / Photo: Annika Hennemuth



Opportunity for the Thuringian “Kuppenrhön” area

Water shrew, natterjack toad and bull

bush-cricket, corn crake, whinchat and Meadow pipit – the Biosphere Reserve bears nationwide responsibility for numerous endangered species. A particularly valuable treasure and a hot-spot for biodiversity are the areas in and along the former border strip, the Green Belt. A 112 kilometer long part of this

Thuringian National Natural Monument and other adjoining areas form the backdrop for the major nature conservation project “Thuringian Kuppenrhön” area, which was launched in 2021.

The “chance.natur” project area stretches from Pferdsdorf in the Wartburg district to Hermannsfeld in the Schmalkalden-Meiningen district and aims at land development with nature conservation aspects in the sense of sustainable land use. In concrete terms, lost open land areas become valuable restored ones,

habitats are networked and improved, and mountain meadows preserved and regenerated. Bristle grasslands and limestone grasslands as well as semi-open biotopes such as juniper heaths and orchard meadows are also developed true to nature, and moors, springs and rivers are revitalized. In this way, the habitats of the target species such as adder, black stork, various meadow breeders, high moors, mother-of-pearl butterflies and crayfish are preserved and encouraged.

*A special feature of the “Hochrhön” area are solitary stone walls and basalt block heaps.
Photo: Julia Gombert*



Rescue for the Red Moor

The Red Moor in Hesse is – just like the Black Moor in Bavaria and the Stedtlinger Moor in

Thuringia – a nature conservation jewel in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

A hotspot of biodiversity, a magnet for visitors – and unfortunately also a habitat particularly threatened by climate change. Hesse's largest high moor has long been the focus of nature conservation. Until the 1980s peat was dug there. Then it was placed under protection and what followed was one of the first high moor renaturation projects in Germany. Dams were built, old trenches were closed and sheet pile walls were built into the moor to prevent water from running off.

But all of that was almost 40 years ago.

Some things worked, others have been gnawed by the ravages of time and some building works have simply rotted away. Thus, the since enlarged Nature Reserve is very complex in the central moor area. The main high moor area is in a bad state due to the dryness in 2019 and 2020 – the groundwater levels are far too low. There is hardly any peat moss growth on the high moor.

The conditions are better in the separate Small Moor and in parts of the Leegmoors. Thanks to the EU LIFE project "Rhön Mountain Meadows", numerous measures to optimize the habitats for black grouse, meadow pipit, common snipe and marsh fritillary butterfly have already been introduced in the area around the moor. However, the drainage of water from the moor has not yet been stopped. It is important to introduce suitable measures in the coming years. Sheet piling



The Red Moor and its treasures are severely affected by climate change. / Photo: Arnulf Müller

has to be renewed, compromised dams have to be sealed and suitable damming measures have to be carried out. Permanent monitoring of both species and groundwater levels appears necessary for this. Together with the Higher Nature Conservation Authority, the Hessian Forestry Authority and voluntary conservationists, the Hessian administration of the Biosphere Reserve is working on a realistic concept and examining financing options.

The Green Belt – an important habitat network and memorial site

The National Natural Monument "Green Belt

Thuringia" is the result of social and political development since the end of World War II. With 763 km in Thuringia, it is an essential part of the approx. 1,400 km long Green Belt of Germany. During

the Cold War until 1989, the Rhön in particular was the area where the armies of NATO and the Warsaw Pact faced each other. The massive extension of the border installations into the GDR was associated with decades of the presence of few people and keeping the area vegetation-free.

As a result of these conditions, various animal and plant species, such as the rare whinchat or the great grey shrike, were able to populate this region. With the opening of the border in 1989 and the dismantling of the border installations, completely new opportunities arose for the Green Belt. Since then, various participants in nature conservation from East and West Germany have been working to convert the former border strip into a continuous habitat network. With the protection of the entire Thuringia Green Belt as a National Natural Monument in December 2018, Thuringia was the first federal state to secure the former border

area as a continuous protected area. With the transfer of sponsorship to the Thuringia Nature Conservation Foundation, the tasks of developing it as an important biotope network and as a place of remembrance of German-German history are connected.

It is important that the Green Belt remains perceptible and tangible for people. Valuable habitats and endangered species need to be preserved and supported. The aim is to maintain biotopes in the long term, usually through extensive use. The people of the region should identify with the Green Belt and benefit from it. The Green Belt can connect people regionally, at a trans state level and internationally. The goal for the future is the implementation of the Green Belt programme in Bavaria and Hesse.

The patrol road on the "Green Belt" in Thuringia. Photo: Ulrike Schade



This is what we do: sustainable regional development



Happy about the funding: the community of Dermbach with its districts in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is implementing a total of eleven projects as part of the funding programme. Among other things, the celestial arena on the Gläser mountain will be fitted with new devices. / Photo: Dr. Frank Riedel

Big investment in sustainable development in Thuringia

In the anniversary year of the Biosphere Reserve, the Thuringian Ministry of the Environment (TMUEN) is funding investment projects for sustainable development in the eight National Natural Landscapes of Thuringia. A large part – around 600,000 euros – flows into the Thuringian part of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

49 project outlines were received in spring 2021 – 28 of which the advisory

board of the Rhönforum Association, as the regional decision-making body, then selected for further applications. The grant notices from TMUEN followed in May, and the municipalities started implementing them in the summer. For the Thuringian Rhön, the funding is an important step in the implementation of the goals and projects set out in the framework concept of the Biosphere Reserve. Investments focus on the topics of sustainable tourism, education for sustainable development, the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve, digitalization, sustainable mobility, regional products, climate protection and the protection of natural and cultural diversity.

This year, smaller projects such as the establishment of a mini book exchange and the upgrading of the outdoor facilities of educational institutions, but also the creation of new hiking and nature trails and open air overnight accommodation, will be implemented. The conversion to more environmentally friendly lighting and digital infrastructure in local transport and visitor information will also be implemented. With 90 percent funding and the remainder coming from cashless personal contributions (from equivalent working hours, contribution of materials, and other such ways); the funding programme offers municipalities an uncomplicated way of realizing exemplary and sustainable projects in the region.

E-mobility – taking alternative paths

As a model region for sustainable business, the Biosphere Reserve as always has to deal with new developments and promote them. For example, from 2016 the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association – as a supporting association of the Biosphere Reserve on



E-mobility is booming – also in the Rhön. The trend is particularly noticeable on the bike paths.

Photo: Martin Kremer

the Hessian side – actively supported an e-mobility project by the market town of Eiterfeld, the community of Rasdorf (near Point Alpha) and the Caritas Association (a charitable organisation) of the Diocese of Fulda by acquiring funding. Other project partners were and are the RhönEnergie Fulda GmbH and the Point Alpha Foundation. As part of the project, among other things, e-charging stations were set up in the Hessian Kegelspiel mountainous region and e-vehicles were procured for municipalities and project partners.

Initially, the E-Mobility Day was also part of the project funding, which is now financed jointly by all partners involved. This successful regional E-Mobility fair has been held in the Hessian Kegelspiel since 2017 – and was previously held in Rasdorf, Eiterfeld and at Point Alpha.

The focus is on promoting alternative transport technologies. Each time there were more than 20 exhibitors with e-drive technology such as e-cars, e-wheel loaders, e-buses, e-bikes, e-motorcycles, battery-operated agricultural machines and more. E-mobility enthusiasts presented their own e-vehicles with great passion.

Today e-mobility is booming. In December 2020, 43,000 new electric cars were registered in Germany. There are now over 70 car models from around 25 manufacturers on the German market. More and more e-models are also available on the commercial vehicle market. However, there is widespread scepticism therefore it will be important to promote new forms of mobility in the future.

In search of adaptation strategies

Climate change in Lower Franconia in Bavaria is well ahead of the nationwide forecasts in terms of the annual average temperature. This is particularly evident in the Bavarian part of the Biosphere Reserve, in the rain shadow of the Hochrhön. Very dry and hot summers lead to declines in yields

– across borders. The earlier growth of vegetation in the dry and warm spring months of March and April exacerbate the risk of damage from late frost.

This results in increased yield uncertainty for important crops in arable farming and for permanent crops. Owners of orchards and winegrowers in the central Saale valley have already had painful experiences. There is now no stopping the loss of spruce as an economically important tree species in commercial forestry, with massive drought and

secondary damage occurring to pine and beech. The rising average temperatures favour the spread of previously harmless or unknown forest pests.

Therefore, a project centre was created in the Bavarian administration for adaptation to climate change. It deals with the regionalization of the forecast scenarios and carries out relevant research work – for example on the behaviour of the beech tree under heat, drought and changes to the springs of the Rhön. The transfer of knowledge from research to those affected is of central importance.



The effects of climate change can be clearly felt in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – one consequence is extreme drought, such as here in the Black Moor.
Photo: Alana Steinbauer

The road to success: Advice for agricultural businesses

A biosphere reserve cannot achieve its goals without involvement and joint activities with land users. Sustainable development of the cultural landscape is only possible with the people of the region, especially with those in agriculture. It's all about land management, the implementation of nature conservation projects, the production of high-quality regional food – ultimately the shaping of a landscape that is equally attractive for locals and guests.

In order to maintain solidarity here, in the Hessian part of the Biosphere Reserve, for example, there is not only close cooperation with farmers' associations, but agricultural advice is also offered.

Since 2010, the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association has been offering interested businesses individual advice and providing support for biodiversity projects in the areas of agriculture and community. The agricultural advisor Janet Emig applies scientific studies within an agricultural context and advocates for the boosting of regional products. Examples of successful projects are the mobile cheese dairy, the farm cheese dairy in

the village of Schachen, the Rhön Sheep gourmet weeks and the RhönWollets – fertilizer pellets made from sheep's wool.

In view of the tightening of environmental standards, climate change, the high loss of species and the difficult employment situation on farms, the advisory service is of great importance. It is therefore an urgent goal to permanently secure this offer in Hesse and to establish it across borders in Bavaria and Thuringia.



A successful project from the anniversary year: the RhönWollets – an ecological long-term fertilizer made from sheep's wool. / Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck



*The development of production and marketing structures for Rhön cheese – an agricultural consultancy project at the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association
Photo: Arnulf Müller*

The starry sky is a special experience in the Rhön. / Photo: Dr. Andreas Hänel

Rhön Dark Sky Reserve – protection of the night and unparal- leled experiences

The Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve has been an international Dark Sky Reserve since 2014. Rightly so: not only by daylight does the Rhön boast itself as the “Land of the Open Spaces”, but it offers a special experience at night too. Located in the centre of Germany and with a relatively sparse population, you can still experience natural night skies with a star-filled sky. On clear moonless nights; several thousand stars, the Milky Way, the zodiacal light and other faint celestial objects are visible in the Rhön. Even moonlit nights impress the

observers, because the faint silvery glow covers the nocturnal hilly landscape like a veil.

These night skies are under special protection in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. In 2014 it was recognized as an international Dark Sky Reserve by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) on behalf of ARGE Rhön. This title can be awarded to areas with an almost natural night sky that is particularly worthy of protection. With the award the region has committed itself to the implementation of measures to reduce light pollution: the aim is to preserve the natural night sky and to avoid or reduce harmful light emissions through more environmentally friendly and optimized lighting.

The special recognition of the region was made possible because 50 municipalities have so far participated in the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve and decided to protect the night sky. They have made a voluntary commitment based on specific lighting recommendations. Since then, numerous municipalities have retrofitted their public lighting to conform to the Dark Sky Reserve. That means: the focus is not only on energy efficiency, but on targeted light control, adapted light quantities, needs-based lighting and warm light colours. The aim for the

coming years is to further raise awareness in the commercial and private sector and to continue to reduce light pollution. The application-specific planning aids for environmentally friendly lighting developed in the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve in 2019 are now being recognized nationwide and serve as a model for numerous publications.

But why protection of the night sky? Many animals and plants in the Rhön are nocturnal and therefore require natural nocturnal landscapes with a clear light-dark alternation. Migratory birds, for example, mostly fly at night and lose their orientation due to so-called light domes over settlement areas. But the human endocrine system also reacts to artificial light: it has been scientifically proven that artificial light reduces the body's melatonin production. Light pollution is now one of the main causes of the dramatic decline in nocturnal and crepuscular species. According to the Federal Emission Control Act, light pollution can become harmful to the environment. The federal government has reacted with the new version of the Federal Nature Conservation Act: throughout Germany, action against light pollution will soon be more consistent – the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve is a pioneer.

Last but not least, the Dark Sky Reserve is also a unique selling point for tourists. More and more guests are drawn to the Rhön because of the night sky experience. Dark Sky Reserve weeks, guided tours with certified star guides, and the creation of celestial arenas, in 2019, is a project that is unique within Germany.



The “Star Village” of Silges in the Hessian Rhön before and after the retrofitting of public lighting. Photos: Alexander Mengel

Day and night skies can be explored in a variety of ways on the arenas. / Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck





The Black Moor is one of the tourist hotspots. Due to the large number of people, the plank path was temporarily closed during the coronavirus pandemic. / Photo: Arnulf Müller

Informing visitors and visitor management in the Rhön recreational paradise

Since the designation of the nature parks in Bavaria and Hesse at the end of the 1960s, visitor management has been on the political agenda. It was the central topic of discussion when the "Lange Rhön" Nature Reserve was designated in 1982 and during the federal funding project "Hohe Rhön/Lange Rhön" (1981–1995). It is a focus of the Lange Rhön maintenance and development plan. With the consolidation of the hiking and cycle path system with continuous signage, a fundamental

prerequisite for reducing disruptions has been created. Without targeted visitor information at the hot spots, however, these measures would be ineffective. This was accomplished by setting up information points with specially equipped forest workers' wagons, and the Black Moor information point, where employees of the Bavarian Rhön Nature Park and Biosphere Reserve instruct visitors.

Experience has shown that problems are caused by the onslaught of day tourists – overnight guests behave more considerately. The last, no less important task remains the management of visitors ahead of time – in order to relieve the flow of visitors at hotspots. The experiences from

COVID-19 have once again made this clear. Digital technology allows for the opening up of completely new control options here. The goal in the future remains unchanged however, the reduction of pressure on particularly sensitive areas, the limitation of excesses of visitors on the "sacral mountains" of the Wasserkuppe and Kreuzberg, but also the environmentally friendly guidance of visitors to previously neglected areas that would still be receptive - especially in the Thuringian Rhön.



Involvement of the next generation



Raising awareness among children and young people, also the active involvement of young people in the decision-making and development processes, is an important goal in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves – also in the Rhön. / Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck

Biosphere reserves stand for citizen participation and processes from the bottom upwards. That means: a region should not be developed from above, but on the basis of the needs of the local people and in terms of sustainability. The reality in the Rhön is that in many committees and associations, the older age groups dominate the action. Young people are often clearly underrepresented and their concerns are barely heard.

The administrations of the Biosphere Reserve want to counteract this and create opportunities for young people to participate. Youth conferences, such as those offered by the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association in the Ulster Valley School and the Gersfeld Rhön School in Hesse, are one possible route. In class, the pupils were made aware of regional issues. The initial situation, future perspectives and wishes were discussed and reflected upon in workshops. Finally,

the results were discussed with representatives from local politics, among others. A surprising result: the young people are far more positive about the Rhön as the centre of their lives than assumed. Many see their professional and private futures in the Rhön, and nature is perceived as beautiful and worthy of protection to them. Nonetheless, an important issue highlighted was the improvements in transport required – for example, in order to be able to visit people of the same age in neighbouring villages in the afternoons.

Youth conferences cost energy, and require good preparation and cooperation with schools. Nevertheless, we consider youth conferences to be important in order to raise awareness among young people about the Rhön and to convey the concerns of young people to today's leaders.

This is what we do: education and communication

Biosphere Schools and Day-Care Centres show how it's done

One of the most successful beacon projects from the framework concept of the Biosphere Reserve started in summer 2019. Since then, 36 facilities in Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia have been certified as Biosphere Schools and Biosphere Day-Care Centres. This



The day-care centre in Urnshausen (Thuringia) was recognized as the first Biosphere Day-Care Centre in summer 2019. / Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck

means: these schools and day-care centres are particularly committed to conveying the idea of sustainability to the children and young people in a variety of ways, and to actively implement it with them.

The youngsters are enabled to experience nature, culture and their homeland and gain knowledge about the Biosphere Reserve and its goals and tasks – be it through the natural design of outdoor areas, the inclusion of nature in everyday school and day-care life, or through the

use and joint preparation of regional food or regular activities such as bartering and exchanging.

Certification can be achieved in five areas: nutri-

tion, ecology, the school building, social affairs and cooperation, and consumption. If the necessary criteria are met, the institutions receive the award for three years. They will be looked after closely by the environmental education teams of the administrations and the Bavarian Rhön Nature Park and Biosphere Reserve Association, who have developed special offerings. Topics can be, for example: How is bread made from cereal grains? How “dangerous” is the grey shrike? Why are Core Zones and protected areas also important for us humans? What is the significance of landscape maintenance for biodiversity? How can climate protection be realised?

The “Biosphere School/Day-Care Centre” award is linked to a nationwide award from the National Natural Landscape Association.

A forge for young talent in nature conservation: Junior Rangers

Another success story in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve has been the Junior Rangers programme since 2004 – this is also a nationwide project by National Natural Landscapes Association. The background to this is the idea that environmental education should have a lasting effect and help young people reflect on what they do and allow them to align their lifestyle with sustainable living. The Junior Ranger programme is therefore a kind of a forge for young talent in (voluntary) nature conservation and sustainable development. The profession of Ranger evokes a noticeable fascination from children and young people in the Rhön,

and the Junior Ranger youth programme also enjoys a high level of confidence from parents. The demand sometimes exceeds available supply, and parents often travel long distances to enable their children to participate.

In the Hessian and Thuringian Rhön there are currently eight groups with a total of around 90 children and young people who are looked after by Rangers or trained specialists. Examples of the activities undertaken by the young nature conservationists under the programme are: beekeeping – the “Rhönmilane” Junior Ranger group from the village of Wüstensachsen” (Hesse) have their own bees – bird box building, red kite counting and observation, planting flower strips and building insect hotels, herbology, orchard fruit and apple juice pressing, identifi-

cation of animals and plants and water excursions. The Rhön Junior Rangers also take part in nationwide junior ranger conferences and attend festivals, markets and fairs – most recently the Federal Garden Show in Erfurt (2021).



A Junior Ranger looking for crayfish. Photo: Alexander Mengel

Rhön Nature Experience Centre: sustainability in all of its forms

With the expansion of the Biosphere Reserve into the Bad Kissingen district in 2014 and in order to meet the additional demand for new educational opportunities, it was clear that a new facility would be needed in the south of the Reserve. The discussion about a possible Rhön National Park



Inauguration of the new office in Hammelburg in summer 2020 (left-right): Dr. Dirk Vogel (Lord Mayor of Bad Kissingen), Bertram Eidel (Head of „Environment, Health and Consumer Protection“ of the Government of Lower Franconia), Felix Papsch (Scientific Coordinator), Dr. Joachim Schneider (head of facility), District Administrator Thomas Bold, Lisa Graskamp (NEZ project manager), Armin Warmuth (Mayor Hammelburg). / Photo: Lena Pfister

gave the concept for a new centre additional impetus – finally the Rhön Nature Experience Centre (NEZ Rhön) with locations in Bad Kissingen and Hammelburg was launched. The first local establishment began in May 2020 with the move of the project office into the Hammelburg “Kellereischloss” Castle, since then a small team has been developing the educational range offered by the NEZ Rhön. The offer of mobile education for sustainable development complements the existing offers of the Bavarian Rhön Nature Park and Biosphere Reserve Association by focusing on the secondary schools in the region. The two locations at the Klaushof Wildlife Park and in Hammelburg differ in terms of theme and target audience. A new educational centre for school classes, children and families is under planning in Klaushof.

There they will concentrate on “green” issues. In the “Kellereischloss” Castle on the other hand, a centre for adolescents and young adults will be set up in space freed up by the city library – this will focus on the social and economic dimensions of sustainability. Climate change, consumption and lifestyle are the topics that are dealt with in an innovative way together with the target audience. Another special task of the Centre: with its didactics competence centre, it is intended to scientifically investigate, evaluate and further develop education for sustainable development in the Biosphere Reserve. To this end, cooperation is being established with colleges and universities in the supervision of theses. The NEZ Rhön thus contributes on several levels to the educational offerings in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Nature is a matter of honour – without volunteering it doesn't work!

The importance of volunteering has risen sharply in the past two decades, especially in the National Natural Landscapes. The fact has prevailed that successful projects require the support of the people in the region – this is essential for long-term success. This is about transparency and acceptance, integrating the wealth of experience and, importantly, communi-

cation between the administrations and citizens.

The administrations of the Biosphere Reserve have been working with volunteers since the beginning. Two trained volunteer coordinators, along with many employees, look after these networks. An example of such civic participation is in the Rhön Nature and Habitat Association's supporting role for the Biosphere Reserve on the Hessian side. There are also numerous other groups and working groups - black grouse mappers, the Rhön botany working group, the waters and crustacean observatories, the volunteers

in freshwater spring and bat protection or in the mountain forest project, and last but not least, the mappers who have been involved in the trans state red kite project for years.

The numerous interns in the administrations also act as volunteers. Every year more than 500 volunteers are supervised in the Biosphere Reserve, who work around 30,000 hours – this is a considerable potential that it will also have to be looked after and maintained in the future.



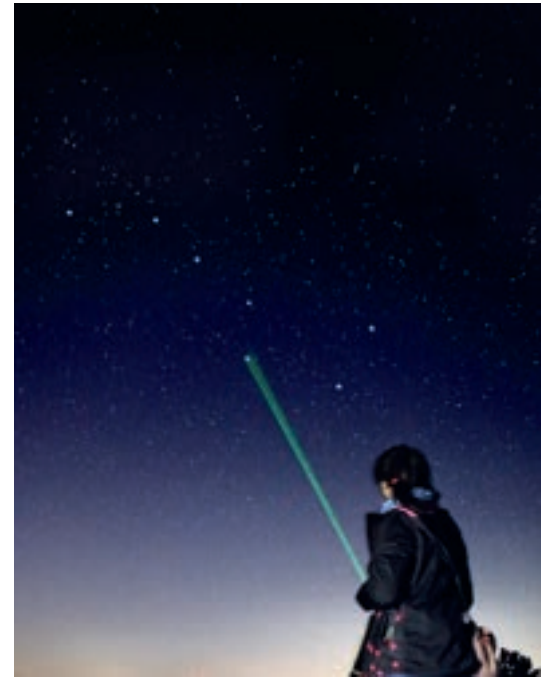
The cross-border commitment to the red kite is unparalleled. Mappers have been in action every year since 2014, without this the species aid project for the protection and preservation of this special Rhön bird would not have been possible. / Photo: Sandra Limpert

Guiding you through the night: training of Dark Sky Reserve guides

The starry sky in the Rhön fascinates locals and tourists alike. The demand for the popular star tours is increasing, they attract star fans from all over Germany to the Biosphere Reserve. Depending on the time of day, the season, the position of the moon and the location of the event, there are guided tours with corresponding content: star tours, moonlight tours, tours in the Star City of Fulda, astronomical or environmental day tours as well as informational lectures on the subject of light pollution. The Star Guides at the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve Association are

on duty all year round and can no longer cover the increased demand. It's time for the next generation – the administrations together with the Rhön districts of the Biosphere Reserve are planning a training programme for new Star Guides.

Across states we are looking for new people who want to learn about and teach not only astronomy, but also the nocturnal life of people, animals and plants. They are also trained in the educational and legal fundamentals in around 80 course units. As planned, there will be new Star Guides in all parts of the Rhön from 2022. This enriches the range of private and public tours related to the protection of the night.



The guided tours in the Rhön Dark Sky Reserve are popular with locals and tourists.
Photo: Alexander Mengel

Discover the Biosphere Reserve with the app

The impetus for developing our own app came from the Advisory Board of the Biosphere Reserve. The model for development was the app of the two Bavarian National Parks – however the task was made more difficult given that the Biosphere Reserve is ten times the size of one of the National Parks. Long delays in development resulted from the lack of aerial photography – spatial orientation using current aerial imagery is the basis of all of the spatial information on offer on the app. Close and long-term cooperation is needed with the Bavarian Rhön Nature Parks and

Biosphere Reserve Association for its central coordination of trails in Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia, and with the Rhön GmbH for its role as a touristic destination management organization – without these the construction and operation of the app would be impossible.

The functionalities of the app are based primarily on the needs of the visitors. It

shows interesting excursion destinations and tour suggestions – along with the latest news and information, for example on road closures and diversions. A step-by-step development of both the technology and content is planned. In the medium term, this offers a high potential for “unobtrusive” or independent visitor guidance. The app should go online in the anniversary year 2021.



The Biosphere app should be launched in 2021.
Photo: André Schnatz

This is what we do: research and monitoring

Get healthy with thanks to nature

An intensive relationship with nature has a positive effect on both physical and mental health – this has already been proven in numerous studies. Since November 2018, “GreenCare: Nature and Mental Health”, a cooperation project between the Bavarian State Ministry for Health and Care (StMGP) and the Bavarian State Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection (StMUV), has been implementing an idea formulated in the second framework concept of the Biosphere Reserve.

In the project, for which a position in the Bavarian administration was created, a nature-based offering for people with mental illnesses is being developed, tested and implemented. Selected areas of the natural and cultural landscape are used to enable the participants to have positive encounters with nature under professional guidance. Nature not only acts as the backdrop for, but is actively included as an object of the mindfulness and perception exercises on offer. In addition, it is scientifically examined to what extent the offer developed is suitable for promoting people’s mental health and the development of values relevant to nature conservation.



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The water is running out – what to do?

The answer: manage the water resources for the ecosystems and the citizens in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in a sustainable manner and in a way

that is adapted to the consequences of climate change – ways to do this are shown in the trans state research project “KlimaRhön”, which started in 2020. The transdisciplinary research project, which the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main is carrying out in close cooperation with the three administrations of the Biosphere Reserve in Bavaria, Hesse

and Thuringia, runs until 2022 and is managed by the Hessian State Office for Nature Conservation, Environment and Geology (HLNUG). The objectives are the joint risk assessment with regards to the restriction of the future availability of water and the development of adaptation strategies – taking into account different interests. Agriculture, industry, tourism, private households - the effects of climate change on water availability and quality will affect all areas of the private, public and commercial sectors in the long term.

A first step in the project was a cross-border survey, in which around 350 Rhön residents took part. According to the respondents, the areas of agriculture and forestry, nature and species protection as well as water and flood protection are most affected by climate change. Periods of dry soil and the drying up of rivers, streams and lakes are deemed to be particularly problematic. In addition to climate changes, the respondents hold private households and agriculture in particular responsible for the perceived decrease in water availability.

The objectives are the joint risk assessment with regards to the restriction of the future availability



Strategies for the sustainable use of water resources are to be found in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. / Photo: Arnulf Müller

The Rhön springs and their animals and plants

TODAY

A nationwide beacon project that started with volunteers in the early 2000s, is the systematic recording of the Rhön springs. The partner in the project is the Hessian State Association for Cave and Karst Research, which records the Rhön springs across state borders using uniform mapping techniques and standards. Among other things, the exact GPS data, water and air temperature, pH value and electrical conductivity are determined. In the vicinity of the springs, the surrounding site, vegetation, soil substrate, flow behaviour and any negative impairments are recorded and documented.

The many years of continuous work are bearing fruit: to date, more than 3,800 springs (Hesse: 2,547, Bavaria: 576, Thuringia: 718, as of June 2021) have been recorded. So far, a total of 2,365 animal species (taxa) have been identified in the springs. In terms of springs, this makes the Rhön the best-researched area in Germany. Pioneering work has been done: the same method is currently being used for mapping in the Kellerwald, Vogelsberg and the Alpine region.

The results are of enormous importance – especially with climate change – since numerous springs have dried up in the last dry years, and meanwhile, demand for water is growing. It is therefore a common goal to continue to promote research into the Rhön spring habitats.



*Through wind and bad weather: investigation of a spring in the Hessian Rhön.
Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck*

Research and monitoring in the Core Zones of the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

TODAY

How can forests, moors and rubble heaps develop in the Rhön when nature is left to develop according to its own dynamics? Are there special features such as a large number of disturbance-sensitive or climate change-adapted species? The monitoring of the Biosphere Reserve administrations' Core Zones has been devoted to these and other questions since 1991.

A large number of Core Zone areas have been exempted from human use for 30

years now and are examined with regular standardized studies. Through that, parameters such as the condition of the forest and selected groups of animals and plants are documented. Temporal changes in the plant and animal communities and possible influences of climate change, and protected area sizes are scientifically analysed in data time series with geographic information systems.

All investigations are based on established recording standards so that the data

obtained is comparable with those from other National Natural Landscapes and commercially used locations. This is part of ecological environmental monitoring in Germany and, in addition to the actual protection of ecosystems, is one of the main tasks of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. A new joint and trans state Core Zone monitoring concept, which includes modelling, is currently being developed. The first results on the insect fauna will be published in 2021 in the 25th bulletin from the Biosphere Reserve.



*Examination of bats in Core Zones
Photo: Karola Marbach*

Sky monitoring: how bright is our night sky?

Space: infinite expanses, infinite darkness – and countless tiny points of light in between. Unfortunately, we see fewer and fewer of these. This is not because the light from these stars goes out, but because people are shining more and more light into the night sky, which makes the glow of the stars fade. To find out how “bright” the night is in the Rhön, a network of sensors is being set up in the Biosphere Reserve. These sensors look at the zenith with a 20 degree arc and measure the brightness of the night sky in the unit of magnitude/square arcsecond (mag/arcsec²). In order to document changes and to be able to counteract excessive light pollution as early as possible, continuous measurement is required – this is



Nocturnal lighting brightens the night sky – so much that it needs to be monitored in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve in the coming years. / Photo: Stefan Will

required to preserve the designation as an international Dark Sky Reserve.

Measurement locations include the Fulda District Office, the Hohe Geba mountain and the Rhön Hall in the town

of Tann. The analysis and the measuring network are currently under construction, but the first results can already be viewed online at www.himmelsmonitoring.de.

Roadmap for future land management

The Maintenance Zones with their nature conservation and Natura 2000 areas (Fauna Flora Habitat Directive and the Birds Directive protection areas) are among the most ecologically valuable habitats in the Biosphere Reserve. The extensive use of the land helped to shape the landscape as we know it today and establish the local biodiversity. For the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, as a model region for sustainable interaction between humans and the environment, these areas are of central importance. The use of the land should be geared specifically towards the preservation of biological diversity and the effects should be monitored based on regular success checks.

The aim of the three administrations for the coming years is to develop a trans

state concept with a long-term “roadmap” for the various measures. Among other things in recent years, numerous other bird species and habitat types have been recorded in addition to the red kite – one focus was, for example, on forest dwellers such as the black woodpecker, pygmy owl, Eurasian eagle owl. Various forms of cultivation are being tested in order to preserve the valuable grassland.

Insect monitoring is another important component: the decline in insect numbers is documented with malaise traps. Occurrences of species such as the marsh fritillary butterfly and the hermit butterfly are specifically examined in order to be able to develop recommendations for protection and conservation. Previously mentioned efforts are the recording of small mammals – for example bats – and the mapping of the Rhön springs. Another important project from the framework concept is the cross-border coordination in

the management of wild animals: for large predators such as the lynx or the wolf, as well as for red deer, there are different management approaches depending on the federal state, which come together in the cross-border Biosphere Reserve and which should be coordinated over the long term.



Malaise trap on the north slope of the Wasserkuppe. Photo: Dr. Heribert Schöller

And what do you think of the whole thing?

Do people like to live in the Rhön? What do they know about the Biosphere Reserve and its tasks? Do they identify with the goals and concepts? And – hand on heart – what do they think of the whole thing?

In order to find this out, a representative survey was carried out for the first time across states almost ten years after recognition by UNESCO. 800 Rhön residents, all over 14 years of age were asked about their satisfaction with life, the use of educational and informational

offers, perceived advantages and disadvantages, the importance of regional products and the importance of the title for the region.

This gave a positive result: most people are proud to live in the Rhön, rate their quality of life as good to very good and are convinced that the Biosphere Reserve has advantages for the region. People largely identify with the idea and see the Biosphere Reserve as a model for many regions at home and abroad. The survey was repeated in 2010 and painted a similar picture – in some cases even with higher approval ratings. For the vast majority, the Biosphere Reserve tends to strengthen the regional sense

of togetherness. However, the survey also reveals where there are deficits, and that the employees of the administrative offices should set priorities with their education and public relations work. A third survey is planned for 2022, which should make a state wide classification possible.

The socio-monitoring provides a solid basis for future decisions. It supplements the landscape and Core Zone monitoring and will also be included in the sustainability report. This in turn is the basis for the next evaluation of the Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO and updates of the framework concept.



How much do people enjoy living in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve? Questions like these will be the focus of a third representative survey in 2022. / Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck

Seeing, hearing, tasting – and a lot of feeling

A Biosphere for all the senses: events and products for the anniversary

“Humanity. Nature. Harmony.” For the ears: At the start of the Biosphere Weeks the first episode of the brand new “Podcast Biosphere Rhön” went online in May. Julia Rösch, employee in the Bavarian administration and responsible for the topic of sustainable development, welcomes people from all parts of the Rhön. The podcast guests come from a wide variety of areas – regardless of whether they are in nature conservation, research, education, agriculture, tourism, politics, volunteering or simply “from next door”. A new episode is published on the second Wednesday of each month – on well-known streaming platforms such as Spotify and on the homepage of the Biosphere Reserve

www.biosphaerenreservat-rhoen.de.

Beloved Rhön

Those who prefer to listen to music rather than podcasts are welcome to sit back and relax and let the Biosphere song “Geliebte Rhön”, which was released in September, sink in. The duo JANNA composed and recorded the homage to the Rhön and its Biosphere Reserve on

behalf of the administrations. The song including the video can be found on the website and on YouTube.

A triad for bread

There is also harmony in the official anniversary product: a set of three jams with fruits from Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia. The idea comes from the Umbrella Brand department of Rhön Association and is being implemented at the Haselstein Castle in the Hessian part of the Biosphere Reserve. People with disabilities are involved in the manufacture of the “Rhöner Fruchtgenuss” products. The residents painted pictures for the jam triad – the three works of art decorate the jam jars – with rose hip (Thuringia), apple and elderberry (Hesse) and strawberry (Bavaria).

Biosphere² – Peru meets the Rhön

What goes better with bread and jam than good coffee? This is where the new partnership for sustainable land use with the BIOAY Biosphere Reserve in Peru comes in handy! The two Biosphere Reserves signed the partnership agreement at the end of May. The symbol of the cooperation is the coffee “Biosphere² – Peru meets Rhön”, which is processed and marketed in the Rhön.



The Biosphere song “Geliebte Rhön” can be found on the homepage.



Biosphere² – ground or in whole beans – available at several sales outlets in the Rhön. Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck



Sandra Lorenz designed the label for the Hessian jam. / Photo: Andreas Bohl

Bon appetit: Biosphere coffee and anniversary jam. Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck



Photo: Anand Anders

We are the Biosphere!

The worldwide Man and the Biosphere programme of UNESCO is all about people and the Biosphere. People and nature are equally in focus. Whether in nature conservation, agriculture, politics or business – it is the Rhön people who are working together to make the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve a model region for sustainable development.

Forestry



Volunteering



Culture



Nature Conservation



Energy





Education

Gastronomy



Young People

Politics



Agriculture



Administrations and associations



Research



The tasks in the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve are shared by three administrations in Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia and two associations: the Hessian Rhön Nature and Habitat Association, and the Bavarian Rhön Nature

Park and Biosphere Reserve Association . The employees work closely together in cross-border working groups. Some of them reveal their personal wishes for the future.

For the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, I wish that in 30 years ...

... a large portion of the special animals and plants that exist today are still there and people can enjoy nature in the Rhön.

Ulla Heckert (Administration Hesse)

... our biodiversity has increased and that we have enabled the harmony of tourism, nature experience and ecological agriculture.

Jan Knittel (Administration Hesse)

... even more citizens advocate for and engage in the Biosphere Reserve and bring the strategy of working from the bottom upwards to life.

Martin Kremer (Administration Hesse)

... humanity and nature continue to be brought into harmony.

Fabian Hartung
(Administration Hesse)

... we have positive memories of the participants from the beginning. Without them a lot would not have been feasible.

Thomas Schreiner
(Administration Hesse)

... the diversity of species still has a home here.

Nadja Moalem
(Administration Hesse)

... our Junior Rangers sit on many local committees and campaign for our Biosphere Reserve.

Hubert Stumpf (Administration Hesse)

... we managed to keep our target species stable.

Jonas Thielen (Administration Hesse)

... my „adult“ children would like to live and have a home in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve.

Mechthild Winheim
(Administration Hesse)

... the Biosphere Reserve is still a habitat for as many exciting animal and plant species as it is today.

Tina Bauer (Administration Bavaria)



Photo: Tina Bauer



Photo: Anna-Lena Bieneck

... agriculture with regional value markets is a matter of course.

Janet Emig (VNLR)

... the last lupine plant is extinct.

Michael Geier
(Administration Bavaria)

... sustainable living has long become everyday life.

Ute Raband (VNLR)

... good life and insect diversity belong together.

Wiltrud Fischer
(Administration Bavaria)

... it goes without saying that all decisions are „fit for grandchildren“.

Julia Rösch (Administration Bavaria)

... through traffic by lorries is only on motorways, e-motorcycles roll quietly through the Biosphere Reserve, user-friendly local transport solutions have significantly reduced (leisure) individual traffic ... and we once again have at least half a meter of snow from mid-December to mid-March.

Elisabeth Knur (Administration Bavaria)

... the proportion of organic farming is 100% and that a landscape rich in species and features has become a unique selling point for healthy living, working and relaxing in a healthy environment.

Doris Pokorny (Administration Bavaria)



Photo: Arnulf Müller

... the railway connection from Bad Neustadt/S. to Gersfeld has been built.

Michael Dohrmann (NBR)

... the subject „Education for Sustainable Development“ is an integral part of everyday teaching in our schools.

Sarah Göpfert (NBR)



Photo: Anna-Lena Bielejack

... the few old orchards are not only there, but have grown again.

Antje Schwanke (NBR)

... only bicycles and regular (autonomous) electric buses are driven on the Hochrhön Street.

Irene Friedrich (NBR)

... so many people have discovered the special quality of life of the Rhön for themselves that a sustainable population development could be achieved in all communities of the Biosphere Reserve.

Katharina Hergenröder (NBR)

... we continue to have colorful, blooming mountain meadows in the 'Land of the Open Spaces' and the excellent, healthy, regional products of the Rhön Umbrella Brand can be marketed by the Rhön farmers at a fair price.

Klaus Spitzl (NBR)

... the biodiversity in the Rhön has not only been preserved, but it has even grown.

Moritz Krosigk (NBR)



Photo: Alexander Mengel

... the Rhön still brings relaxation and joy to the visitor.

Andrea Suckfüll (NBR)

... climate change has not dried up our Rhön high moors.

Amelie Nöth (NBR)

*... for most Rhön residents,
acceptance of the idea will have
become enthusiasm.*

Volker Bauer (Administration Thuringia)

*... numerous floodplains
have been renatured
by the beaver.*

Nils Hinkel (Administration Thuringia)



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*... there are still enough
open spaces and retreats for people
and nature alike.*

Dr. Frank Riedel (Administration Thuringia)

*... that the Alpine
shrew will still have
a habitat in the UNESCO
Biosphere Reserve.*

Karola Marbach
(Administration Thuringia)



Photo: Mariella Heimmüller

*... the adaptation to the effects of climate
change has been successful and we in the region
live the idea of „humanity and nature in
harmony“ together on a daily basis.*

Ulrike Schade (Administration Thuringia)

*... everyone knows what
“Biosphere Reserve” means –
with all its facets.*

Anna-Lena Bieneck (Administration Hesse)

*... a lot of creative minds still live
and work here to make the region
worth living in.*

Torsten Raab (Administration Hesse)

All information about our projects and the anniversary, the podcast and news from the Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve can be found at

www.biosphaerenreservat-rhoen.de



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Masthead

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