



RESOLUTION

on the abandonment of traditional grazing and the decline of insects and biodiversity

In the recent discussion about the decline of insects, birds and biodiversity in general in large parts of Europe many experts argue that homogenisation and eutrophication of the agricultural landscape and, in particular, pesticides play a significant role.

As conservationists and stakeholders of extensive grazing from all parts of Germany we are convinced that the loss of biodiversity that is currently visible is not solely a recent phenomenon, but a process lasting for many decades, actually since the early and middle of the 19th century, and has accelerated since the 1970s. The most powerful explanation is in our opinion the disappearing of large grazers in traditional husbandry from the landscape, with cattle and horse as the most important species. Today most of the few grazing animals outside are kept at stocking densities which are not appropriate for the conservation of any endangered plant or animal species. Even worse they are prophylactically treated with anthelmintics which cause a further reduction of biodiversity, notably of insects and plants. On the other hand, the natural role of native wild megaherbivores, especially red deer, has become dis-integrated from our conservation concepts.

On common pastures which were widespread until the 19th century and which included many forests of today there was a wealth of animals and plants such as great and little bustard, roller, stone-curlew, short-toed eagle, griffon vulture and many more, which declined dramatically or even became extinct after separation of commons and their transformation into coniferous forest, fields and mown meadows.

The structural diversity of the former pastures with their hummocks, tracks, wallows, thorny scrub, solitary trees and the mosaic of open and wooded patches has offered habitat for all our species of the open landscape. A single cow produced about 10 tons of dung every year, which nourished huge quantities of insects, which in turn provided a resource for birds, reptiles, amphibians and bats, many of which have become rare today. Dung was also a medium for the dispersal of countless plant seeds and even invertebrate animals many of which are genetically degenerating today in isolated patches or have even entirely vanished.

The last remnants of traditional lowland pastures of noticeable size existed until the 1960s. Since then almost all our livestock is either kept indoor or on intensive pastures. Even the few shepherds who still roam the landscape today have changed to a more intensive management regime for economic reasons.

Not only did grazing on arable fields entirely cease in the 1970s, but intensively mechanised agriculture is dominating now also in grassland accelerated by the boom of biogas. We know from numerous studies that mortality rates throughout all animal groups such as amphibians, beetles, spiders, grasshoppers and bees reach up to 80 % per single cut and that intensified grassland use has caused a large-scale biotic depletion and homogenization of our landscape. The scarce success of a handful of iconic species is not a reversal of the trend since these do not live in the agrarian landscape.

As activists of near-natural grazing we want to draw attention to a number of highly efficient projects which can show a way out of the cataclysmic loss of our terrestrial biodiversity. We frequently observe a multiplication of species numbers and abundance of birds, amphibians, insects and flowers within a few years and even the return of locally extinct species.

We herewith demand the return of large grazers into the landscape, at reduced stocking density, as robust breeds, without prophylactic medication (only if required and not on the pasture), year-round and on at least 5 % of the agricultural and sylvicultural land.

Economically the price for such a management is low if it is carried out on low-productivity or high-risk sites such as frequently inundated floodplains, heaths and bogs or steep terrain. For the society as a whole this could mean a huge gain of returning biodiversity, scenic beauty and identity, recreational value, animal welfare, flood retention, recovered soils, carbon storage and not least the production of high-quality meat.

Therefore we need a substantial subsidisation of extensive, near-natural grazing at European and national level, a reduction of bureaucratic impediments for the establishment of grazing and active support of public institutions and other stakeholders in order to re-establish large-scale near-natural pastures.



ABU - Arbeitskreis Biologischer Umweltschutz im Kreis Soest e.V. • Biologische Schutzgemeinschaft Göttingen e.V. • BundeWischen eG – Landwirtschaft, Natur & Mensch im Einklang • NABU-Bundesfachausschuss Entomologie • Förderkreis Große Pflanzenfresser im Kreis Bergstraße e.V. • Förderkreis Umwelt und Naturschutz Hondelage e.V. • Gärtnerhof Callenberg • Gesellschaft für Naturschutz und Ornithologie Rheinland-Pfalz e.V. • Internationaler Förderverband zum Einsatz des Wasserbüffels als Landschaftsspfler in Europa e.V. • Landesbund für Vogelschutz e.V. • NABU-Bundesfachausschuss Landwirtschaft • Landwirtschaft & Landschaftspflege Jan Gahsche • Naturforschende Gesellschaft Altenburg e.V. • Naturschutz-Förderverein Döberitzer Heide e.V. • Naturschutz Berlin-Malchow e.V. • Naturschutzzentrum Wengleinpark e.V. • Öko Agrar GmbH Unteres Odertal • Primigenius – Köthener Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege gGmbH • Der Reiserer • NABU Kreisverband Stendal e.V. • Taurus Naturentwicklung e.V. • Verein für Landschaftspflege und Artenschutz in Bayern e.V. • Verein für Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege e.V., Kißlegg • Verein zur Förderung der Auerochsenzucht e.V. • Verein zur Förderung naturnaher Weidelandschaften Süddeutschlands e.V. • Verein Thüringer Ornithologen e.V. • NABU-Bundesfachausschuss Weidelandschaften und Neue Wildnis • Weideverein Taurus e.V. • Weidewelt e.V. • Wildes Bayern e.V.

Göttingen, 25.04.2019