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Breeding Waders on Wet Grasslands (Inland Sites) in West Germany: Examples for Conservation Programmes

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The efforts to protect wet grasslands in West Germany are reviewed. It is outlined that the protection of wet meadows has no appreciable importance because political priorities are lacking. The legal instruments, which are basically sufficient, have therefore no relevant effect. The protection programmes of the federal states, because they show far reaching concessions for agriculture, may be considered partly as a further subsidy for this sector of economy.

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Protection of wet meadows in West Germany

This paper looks mainly at the efforts made to protect wet meadows in the federal states Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen) and Northrhine Westphalia (Nordrhein-Westfalen) where, apart from Schleswig-Holstein and Bavaria (Bayern), the majority of West German meadow birds breed. The situation in these states is generally representative for the other federal states.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany states that the federal states are responsible for nature protection within their boundaries. This applies especially to the financing of conservation activities. This can cause problems since the factors responsible for the destruction of wet meadows, *i.e.* road building, consolidation of farmland, hydraulic engineering, are also financed mainly by the national government or the European Community.

The financial dimensions involved can be better understood when one realizes that during recent years in West Germany about the same amount of money has been spent

yearly for nature protection as for one motorway bridge over the river Rhine.

Farmland consolidation and its threats to wet meadows

In the period from 1945 to 1982 about 7.8 million hectares of farmland have been consolidated in West Germany, corresponding to two thirds of the land used for agriculture today. Every year a further one per cent of the whole area is consolidated. The trend is at least marked in Lower Saxony. The main measures are the enlargement of fields and road building, as well as drainage and hydraulic engineering. These measures are financed mainly with public funds of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Community, from a budget called 'communal task for the improvement of agrarian structure and coastal protection'. Lower Saxony received 330 million DM support from this budget in 1989; this budget exceeds the nature conservation budget by about ten times.

Recently, the financial guidelines of the communal task include relevant determina-

tions for nature conservation purposes. For example the drainage of wet meadows should not be supported in the future. Whether this determination can stop the dramatic destruction of wet meadows remains to be seen.

Up to now all procedures to improve agrarian structure have, without exception, damaged the natural environment.

The nature conservation law is not able, as it stands, to achieve an efficient conservation on agricultural land. Various defects in its application make it ineffective in many points.

The following instruments of the nature conservation laws could be important to protect wet meadows in Germany:

1. Landscape-planning;
2. Protection of areas;
3. Protection of biotope.

Landscape planning in Lower Saxony has only an advisory character. An actual protection of valuable areas cannot be obtained by this means.

In Northrhine-Westphalia landscape plans are legally binding. All measures and planned nature conservation developments can in principle be determined in these plans. The few existing landscape plans do not, however, contain necessary restrictions on agricultural use, as nature conservation has, in contrast to agriculture, no relevant lobby in the district parliaments.

Another suitable instrument for the protection of wet meadows is the establishment of protected areas. In Lower Saxony, for example, all human activity is in principle forbidden in nature reserves unless the activities are permitted by decree.

In reality no adequate restriction of grassland use exists on reserves in West Germany, and certainly none covering extensive areas. The only current programme designed to protect wet meadows is the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* protection project, with an annual budget of 5 million DM until 1992.

The following regulation is only valid for appointed nature reserves in Lower Saxony:

Farmers, who cultivate grassland in these areas without restrictions - presently only about 1,000 hectares in the whole country - obtain 300 DM/hectare/year. Thus this is an agrarian subvention, but using nature conservation funds. Additional voluntary restrictions are provided for payments of only 100 to 200 DM/hectare. The farmers make little use of this option because the economic encouragement is not great enough.

A programme for the protection of wet meadows exists in Northrhine-Westphalia where 100 Million DM were provided during the period 1985-1987 in order to acquire land and to pay for voluntary agreements. This programme is still running in a similar form. Unfortunately only a part (about 18,000 hectares) of the valuable wet meadows have been taken into consideration in this programme. These areas are supposed to be appointed as nature reserves. The present legally binding decrees do not however, contain restrictions for the utilization of the areas. The government of Northrhine-Westphalia intends to cooperate with farmers by paying considerable amounts of money for voluntary arrangements with the aim of restricting the utilization of grassland.

These payments exceed considerably, in my assessment, the actual losses suffered and thus represent partly a subsidy for agriculture. The potential production of the grassland and the voluntary arrangements determine the height of the payment to the farmers. For example: a farmer obtains up to 850 DM/ha if he agrees with the following restrictions for the cultivation of a pasture:

- no cultivation from 15 March to 15 June;
- stocking rate of not more than 2 cows/ha from 15 March to 15 June; and of no more than 4 cows/ha from 16 June to 31 October.

Up to 1,300 DM/ha are paid for an extensive utilization of a meadow in the following way:

- no cultivation from 15 March to 15 June;
- mowing is permitted after 15 June;