



COOPERATIVE RESULTS-BASED MEADOW BIRD CONSERVATION CONTRACTS IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN

The protection of meadow birds leads to a shift to results-based flexible farming schemes.



Black Tailed Godwit

Photo credit: Vicent Van Zalinge - Unsplash



Curlew

Photo credit: Bob Brewer - Unsplash

The Community-based Meadow Birds Conservation Scheme ('Gemeinschaftlicher Wiesenvogelschutz') pays grassland farmers in the Eider-Treene-Sorge lowlands of Schleswig-Holstein to protect meadow bird clutches in fields when mowing, grazing or managing the grassland. The scheme is designed to protect Lapwings, Black-tailed Godwits, Curlews, Oystercatchers and Redshanks and is offered on around 6,000 hectares.

Payments:

- Various according to the number of bird clutches per hectare and the degree to which the birds result in delays to farming operations. Farmers receive between €150 and €350 per hectare for those areas in which birds have successfully bred.
- Are made when the chicks have fledged and the birds have left the field.
- Are also made if the clutches have been lost through natural causes (e.g. weather, flood, predators).

The scheme is funded through Schleswig-Holstein federal state funds, without EU co-financing, and administered by the KUNO cooperative, a local organisation funded through the EU's Local Action scheme, which intermediates between farmers and the regional government. The scheme started in 1997 as a grassroots initiative of local farmers and conservation activists who jointly developed the scheme's cornerstones and lobbied for funding.

An important function is played by the volunteer site managers, who have an overview of the meadow bird population in their area. They make arrangements with the farmers regarding land management in order to support the breeding success of the birds. Participating farmers commit themselves only for the areas concerned and the current breeding season. As soon as the birds have left the area, the land can continue to be farmed without any restrictions.



Lapwing

Photo credit: Daniil Komov - Unsplash



Redshank eggs

Photo credit: Alby De Tweede - iStock

Outcomes

- Around 150 farmers participate in the scheme on average, with some variation from year to year,
- Offering between 400 and 700 hectares of land under contract.
- Scientific evaluations of the scheme in the Eider-Treene-Sorge lowlands region have been carried out since 1999 by the Michael-Otto Institute of the NABU.
- Between 600 and 1,100 bird clutches per year have been protected by the scheme over the past 10 years.
- Total annual payments have varied between €130,000 and 230,000. Besides these quantitative performance indicators, the scheme has produced some less tangible social benefits:
- The positive experience with nature conservation has increased the confidence of farmers in nature conservation agreements.
- For some farmers the scheme has acted as a stepping stone to greater engagement in nature conservation.
- Farmers pass on the appreciation of bird protection to their children, thus contributing to cultural heritage.
- The direct engagement with the conservation volunteers and the joint problem-solving approach has strengthened social networks and trust among farmers and with other stakeholders in the region.

The success of the scheme

The inclusion of a risk mitigation mechanism for the failure to achieve the outcome, flexibility in adapting land management measures and short-term contracts concluded by word of mouth are innovative design elements that significantly contribute to the scheme's success. The success of the programme is highly dependent on the work of the conservation volunteers. Thanks to their work, a trusting relationship has developed that has significantly helped farmers accept the programme. Trust among the stakeholders has resulted in low transaction costs. However, external factors such as the predation problem, increased costs of scheme participation, lack of human capacity (conservation volunteers) for monitoring the target species reduce the potential for upscaling.



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