

A guided walk to the Meerbruch

A guided walk to the EXPO Project "The Meerbruch Breeding and Resting Area" starts in Winzlar. The places to stop on the way are numbered on the accompanying map and are described briefly here. The walk lasts about 3 1/2 hours.

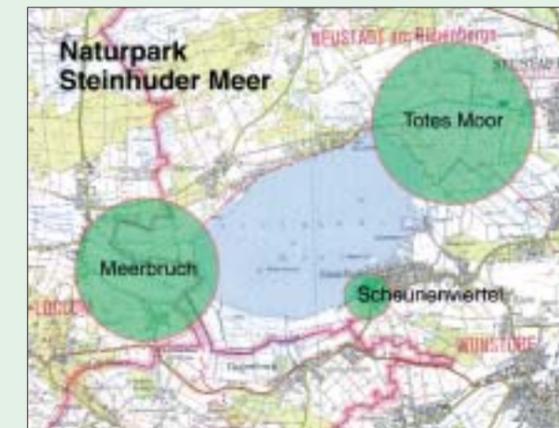
1. Start of the walk in Winzlar.
2. The Steinhuder Meer Ecological Conservation Centre and at the same time the Lower Saxony Nature Conservation Centre. A visit is well worthwhile.
3. From Winzlar the path leads in the direction of the Steinhuder Meer and right into the centre of the breeding and resting area.
4. From the bridge over the Südbach (South Stream) you have a broad view of the less intensively used meadowland areas of the Meerbruch. 
5. A large information board provides information about the unique habitat between the path and the Steinhuder Meer: the bird biotope. The EXPO Project is explained in detail here.
6. Next comes an adventure trail which passes two hides and leads to the new observation tower at the Steinhuder Meer.



7. From the tower you get a good impression of the size of the Steinhuder Meer with Wilhelmstein Island. You also have a good overview of large sections of the shore.
8. On the way back you should take a look from one of the hides. From here you can watch the wildlife in the biotope without disturbing the animals.
9. The path now leads in a northerly direction via the "Heudamm" and past the bird biotope. 
10. To the right of the path lie less intensively used meadowland areas. To the left there are some larger artificial shallow depressions in which water accumulates. They are ideal areas for waterfowl and wetland birds to withdraw to.
11. The bridge leads over the Steinhuder Meerbach (Lake Steinhude Stream), the only outlet from the lake. 
12. To the west of the path the Meerbruch stretches as far as Rehburg. Dams in the ditches are used to maintain higher water levels in winter and spring. This improves the conditions for the meadow birds.



13. You reach the second observation tower in the Meerbruch after crossing the Nordbach (North Stream).
14. From the tower you can overlook the great expanse of the Meerbruch stretching to the south. Looking past the artificially constructed areas of water you can see the Rehburg Hills and the Deister. An information board tells you how the Meerbruch developed. 
15. This is the end of the guided walk. The path leads through the wood to the main road.
16. From here you can catch a bus to Mardorf or Neustadt.
17. However, you can also walk towards Mardorf along the edge of the wood. 
18. From this point you can make a side-trip to the village and the Nature Park Information Centre. From Mardorf you can catch a bus back to Neustadt or to Steinhude via Rehburg.
19. If you wish, you can also continue your walk to the Steinhuder Meer and return to Steinhude from the "Dückerstubben" by boat - on a so-called "Auswanderer".



Published by:

Landkreis Hannover - Amt für Naturschutz-
Hildesheimer Str. 20, 30169 Hannover
Tel.: 0511/989-2211, Fax: 0511/989-123128

Steinhude Information Centre
Am Graben 4-6, 31515 Wunstorf OT Steinhude
Tel.: 05033/939-134, Fax: 05033/939-135

Mardorf Information Office
Mardorfer Str. 6b, 31535 Neustadt OT Mardorf
Tel.: 05036/889

Internet: www.naturpark-steinhuder-meer.de
E-mail: info@naturpark-steinhuder-meer.de

Editor:
Naturpark Steinhuder Meer - Geschäftsstelle
Landkreis Hannover, Hildesheimer Str. 20,
30169 Hannover, Tel.: 0511/989-2211

© Landkreis Hannover 2000
Printed by: Press and Cartography Department,
Landkreis Hannover



EXPO2000
HANNOVER

Registriertes Projekt
der Weltausstellung

Breeding and Resting Area



Meerbruch

The Meerbruch - wetlands of international significance

In 1971 the international conference in Ramsar/Iran adopted "The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat" (Ramsar Convention).

There are currently 32 of these wetlands in the Federal Republic of Germany. The Steinhuder Meer Region is one of them.

Nowadays, wetlands of international importance are subject to damage of many different kinds. At the Steinhuder Meer, for example, the habitats of waders and waterfowl have been severely disturbed by the intensification of agricultural use, the industrial peat stripping and recreational traffic. For many years great efforts have been made in the Steinhude Meer Nature Park to safeguard its status as a wetland of international significance.



The Meerbruch - a changing habitat

A homogeneous meadowland area measuring about 12 km², the Meerbruch, lies to the west and southwest of the Steinhuder Meer in the administrative districts of Hannover, Nienburg and Schaumburg. The Steinhuder Meerbach (Steinhuder Meer Stream) flows through this area and is the only outlet from the inland lake. The Meerbruch is an extensive fenland area in which alder marshes and small high moors are also to be found.

The meadows are the habitat and breeding ground for special species of birds (curlew, black-tailed godwit, lapwing, whinchat), as well as being a resting area of special importance for bird migration. Numerous rare plant species also grow here.

From fenland to grassland

As early as at the end of the 19th century large parts of the Meerbruch were already used agriculturally for making hay. Transportation was done partly by boats on the Steinhuder Meer. In the Fifties and Sixties the entire drainage system of the area was changed in order to allow modern agricultural methods to be used. The Südbach (South Stream) was extended, the course of the Nordbach (North Stream) was altered and a large number of drainage ditches were dug. The wet meadowland thus became very much drier and it was possible to mow it several times a year. Ploughing, the sowing of new high-yield grasses and the increased use of fertilizers turned the species-rich meadowlands into highly productive meadows and pastures or grassland. The plants typical of the meadowlands, such as marsh marigold, lady's smock, ragged robin and rushes, gradually disappeared.



The habitat of the meadowland birds is endangered

Species of meadowland birds, such as curlew, black-tailed godwit, lapwing and whinchat, which build their nests on the ground in meadows and pastures that are used agriculturally, are losing their traditional breeding grounds. The early start of intensive agricultural use, which has been made possible by drainage, results in nests being destroyed, and young birds that are not yet fully-fledged are killed. In addition, it is becoming more difficult for them to survive because the supply of food in meadows with few species is continually declining.

Due to the continuing intensification of the use of land for agriculture there has been a distinct decline in the characteristic flora and fauna. As the body responsible for the Naturpark Steinhuder Meer (Lake Steinhude Nature Park), the Landkreis Hannover thus lodged an application with the Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Reactor Safety in 1988 for the "Meerbruch Breeding and Resting Area" to be included in the Federal Government's funding programme entitled "The Establishment and Safeguarding of those Parts of Nature and the Landscape of Representative Importance to the State as a Whole that are Worthy of Protection-Waterside Programme".

The Meerbruch

Funded by the Federal Government and an EXPO Project

The application was granted in 1989. The goal is to prevent a further decline in the characteristic flora and fauna. The project was started in 1990 and continues until 2001. The total sum involved is DM 12.7 million, 75 % of which is provided by the Federal Government, 15 % by the state of Lower Saxony, and 10 % by the Landkreise (administrative districts) of Hannover, Nienburg and Schaumburg. More extensive utilization is to be achieved through the purchase of as many of the agricultural areas as possible. As the body responsible for the Lake Steinhude Nature Park (Naturpark Steinhuder Meer), the Landkreis Hannover is also responsible for the project. The application was made for the Meerbruch to be included in the list of EXPO Projects; it was registered in 1996 and officially recognized in 1999.

Help for the Meerbruch

A programme to provide help for the Meerbruch was drawn up in close cooperation with the Nature Conservation Offices of the Landkreise of Hannover, Nienburg and Schaumburg, the Lower Saxony Regional Authority for Ecology, the Hannover District Authority, representatives of nature conservation associations and the nature conservation officer responsible for this area. It is part of a conservation and development plan in which the many different measures that are necessary are laid down. For example, the plan makes statements concerning:

1. The future uses of individual areas.
2. Necessary conservation measures.
3. Hydraulic measures, such as damming ditches, creating shallow depressions in which water sometimes accumulates, reshaping stretches of water.
4. Converting fields into meadowland.
5. Removing types of wood not native to the area.
6. Recreational use, such as guiding the flow of visitors, the creation of observation points, the construction of paths.

Almost 650 hectares of agricultural land had been purchased by the year 2000. This land was subsequently handed back to the farmers free of charge with special conditions attached to its use for farming.

Initial success can already be seen

The abandonment of intensive agricultural methods, the creation of new, shallow depressions in which water sometimes accumulates and the damming up of ditches during the winter months improves the habitats of the plants requiring high moisture levels and also of waterfowl and birds whose habitat is the meadow.

A large number of the planned shallow depressions have now been created. Extensive wet areas develop as a result of the long period during the spring when water levels are high. It is here that waders, such as snipes or black-tailed godwits can use their long beaks to seek larvae deep in the soil. Many plants typical of the wet meadowland, such as the marsh marigold or marsh-



cinquefoil, find ideal living conditions on the edge of the shallow depressions. The most important precondition for the development of their habitat is that the land should become wet once again. For this reason dams whose height can be adjusted were built into the ditches, and part of the meadows are covered with shallow water during the winter and the spring. The water level is subsequently lowered so that these areas are easily accessible for mowing at the end of June and can thus be used for agricultural purposes.



The Meerbruch - a popular destination for visitors to the Nature Park

Since it is so close to Hannover, up to 50,000 visitors come to the Steinhuder Meer on fine weekends. In the sensitive parts of the Meerbruch which can easily be disturbed and in the neighbouring nature conservation areas it is therefore absolutely essential to channel the flow of visitors. For a long time now an exemplary visitor guidance system has guaranteed attractive opportunities for observing and experiencing nature without endangering the rare flora and fauna that need to be protected.



A well designed and well marked network of paths was developed for this purpose. In addition, the Nature Park's information offices in Steinhude and Mardorf and the Ecological Conservation Centre in Winzlar offer guided walks. The development of the bird population revealed that in the central area of the Meerbruch, which is particularly interesting from the ornithological point of view, visitors were the source of considerable disturbance during breeding, and this caused some of the birds nesting in the meadows to abandon their brood. After extensive surveys, the southwestern section of the circular path was moved in 1999 in order not to endanger the goal of the Federal Government's project. At the same time a new observation tower was built on the shore of the lake with an adventure trail and observation facilities at the bird biotope. Nature can be experienced at first hand here.



The "Meerbruch Breeding and Resting Area" - a success story

The measures introduced in the "Meerbruch Breeding and Resting Area" have led to a distinct improvement in the situation for waders and waterfowl as well as for migratory birds. With the example of the Meerbruch the intention is to show visitors to the EXPO that we can take decisive action to secure and preserve the breeding and resting areas and the overwintering possibilities for those species of birds which are dependent on water and undisturbed wet meadowlands for a long time in the future. This project has been successful at the Steinhuder Meer!

