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Biosphere Reserve – National Park – World Heritage Site

The Wadden Sea has a lot to offer

Biosphere reserve, national park, world heritage site – three prominent seals for only one habitat. Can this collection of seals be sensibly animated or does it remain a heap of labels without content? It is indisputable that the Wadden Sea is an exceptionally special area, land nor sea, one of the last intact nature landscapes in Europe. Its geomorphic genesis as a highly dynamic post ice-age type of landscape and its biological structures and ecological functions are unique worldwide. The latter have impacts far beyond the Wadden Sea. Many of the fish breeding here later colonise the North Sea. The Wadden Sea also has worldwide significance as an indispensable stepping stone for migrating birds.

The German federal states neighbouring the Wadden Sea, i.e. Lower Saxony, Hamburg, and Schleswig-Holstein, declared it as a national park 20 years ago. This was a significant step forward for the preservation of the area. In this way, the three federal states confirmed their will to preserve the original nature of this habitat by law. Thus they also made a significant contribution to the international protection of the Wadden Sea, which has been agreed upon by the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark and is coordinated and further developed by regular intergovernmental conferences.

Ecosystem research in the Wadden Sea area

Against the background of the network project 'Ecosystem research in the Wadden Sea Area', carried out by the Federal Government together with Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony (1989-1999), the Wadden Sea national parks were designated as biosphere reserves within the framework of the programme 'Man and the Biosphere' in the early nineties. The goal of the network project was, next to the investigation of ecological correlations, to describe the man-environment relations in the Wadden Sea area in more detail and to develop recommendations for further development of the protection concepts as well as a sustainable management scheme.

The results of the network project have been integrated into the revised version



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of the Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony national park law (1999, resp. 2001). The identity of the biosphere reserve and the national park, in relation to size and zoning, remained unchanged. The Wadden Sea biosphere reserves exhibit large core areas and buffer zones. Transition areas, which, because of their function, would have to be situated outside the national parks, are still largely non-existent. This circumstance was a significant point for criticism at the time of the 10 year evaluation, which was carried out for the Wadden Sea biosphere reserves in 2004/2005. A first step to make up for the deficit was made when the Hallig Islands decided to join the biosphere reserve Schleswig-Holstein Wad-

den Sea in form of a transition area. The application for extension was accepted and welcomed by UNESCO in 2004.

Evaluation of the biosphere reserve

There are also numerous initiatives and projects in the Wadden Sea area of Lower Saxony, which deal with sustainable forms of economic activity, especially tourism and agriculture. The 2004 evaluation showed that this local and partly regional development corresponded to the activities expected in a UNESCO biosphere reserve and that the integration of a transition area in the biosphere reserve,

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Wadden Sea of Hamburg

The biosphere reserve Wadden Sea of Hamburg, which was designated by UNESCO in 1992, is, at the same time, a National Park. The area comprises of the Wadden Sea surrounding the estuary of the Elbe River. Of the total area of 117 km², 105 km² is core area, the rest is buffer zone. Representative ecosystems are the Wadden Sea, tide-ways, dune islands, dunes, salt marshes and 'binnengroden', which are marshes behind dikes usable for farming. The Elbe estuary is a rich source of nutrients and boasts a diverse world of fish and birds. There are only around 40 inhabitants of the Hamburg Wadden Sea, namely on the island of Neuwerk. The biosphere reserve protects the natural dynamics in the habitat Wadden Sea, based on the European Union's Habitats and Birds Directives.

The biosphere reserve encourages extensive field and grassland cultivation in order to preserve the small-scale farming structures in the 'binnengroden'. This also has the advantage of successfully protecting the stock of grassland birds. Numerous solar plants, thermal collectors as well as photovoltaics sustainably provide energy. In the future, a particular energy concept will make it possible to largely supply the biosphere reserve with renewable energy. Environmental monitoring is an integral part of the work of the biosphere reserve within the framework of the transboundary Wadden Sea Monitoring, and in cooperation with the Wadden Sea biosphere reserves and national parks in Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein.

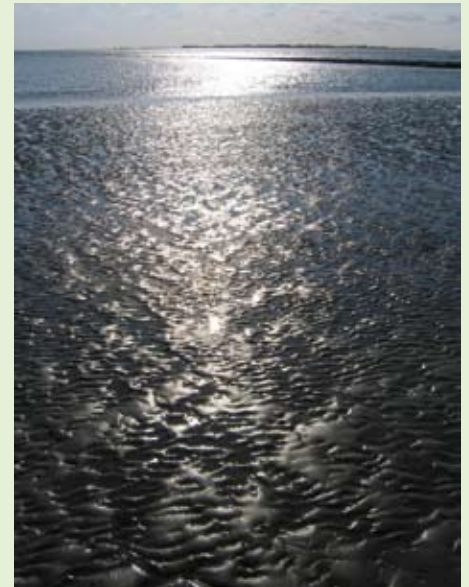


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Further information:

<http://www.nationalpark-hamburgisches-wattenmeer.de/>

as a model region for sustainable economical activities, could only be of advantage for all concerned. In 2006 the administration of the biosphere reserve devised the necessary organisational preparations and initiated discussions with the coastal communities, umbrella associations and individual initiatives. The discussions resulted in a great deal of interest on the part of these target groups. Next to support with moderation, the administration of the biosphere reserve sees its main task in the transregional coordination and realisation of sustainable projects. In order to comply with the requirements as a model region, a further goal is the transfer of findings and methods in bordering regions. In the meantime the development of a transition zone in the biosphere reserve Wadden Sea of Lower Saxony has made significant progress.

Nomination for the world heritage list

The uniqueness of the Wadden Sea lies in the pureness of its nature, in the highly dynamic and unique landscapes resulting from the changes in sea-level and in its transregional ecological significance. This is why during the sixth Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea, it was decided to work

towards a nomination for inscription in UNESCO's list of cultural and natural world heritage sites. After comprehensive preparations and intensive discussions with the population, the German and Dutch Governments decided to prepare the application in 2005. Although around 10 percent of the Wadden Sea area is Danish, Denmark has not been involved in the application process because of the negative result of a vote by the Danish people from the coastal region. The draft prepared by Germany and the Netherlands was expected to pass through the public discussion process in summer 2007. UNESCO will make a decision about the inscription in the world heritage list, as the case may be, in 2009 or 2010.

National park – biosphere reserve – world heritage site Wadden Sea: these seals are not just labels, which are stuck onto one and the same thing. This is reflected just by the very complex application and admission procedures. The seals are rather awards and responsibilities, each having a value of its own. They each require a different focus for the management of the region. They also compliment each other in many ways. One thing that all three seals have in common is the fact that the preservation of the ecosystem and the exceptional natural landscape is central. The goal of the national parks is

the preservation of the natural range of species, the natural functions and the landscape picture of the Wadden Sea as a nationally significant nature landscape. The designation as a world heritage site raises this significance from the national to the global level and acknowledges the Wadden Sea as being a worldwide unique and, to a large extent, untouched area, whose structures and functions have to be preserved; that task is then acknowledged to be of global significance.

Compared to the designation as a national park, the recognition as a world heritage site does not represent a new or extended protection category. The existing national park legislation is enough for fulfilling the strict requirements of UNESCO with regard to the protection of the areas. In a nutshell, the designation as a world heritage site is a paramount title. However it comes hand in hand with the responsibility, to secure the Wadden Sea as a common heritage of man for the future.

Preservation and use by people

While in the case of the national park and the world heritage site the preservation of the natural habitat, its range of species and its functions are central, the concept of the biosphere reserve

also includes the use by people. The Wadden Sea region has been populated for centuries and the Wadden Sea has always been used by people: in the main, however, the forces of nature only allowed for a non-extensive use.

The building of dikes has, in fact, shaped the transition between land and sea by human hand. The Wadden Sea itself has, however, not been influenced in its integrity. The protection of the people living in the Wadden Sea region is beyond all question, in the same way as their right to work and to make a living. Therefore coastal protection measures and economic use are integrated into the protection concept.

The aspects which challenge the Wadden Sea region to provide protection and regional development on a sustainable basis are: the future developments of coastal protection with rising sea levels, the ongoing economic changes, the growing importance of tourism particularly the wish to 'experience nature', the development of ports and shipping along with the development of renewable energies .

The MAB programme and the biosphere reserve follow an integrated approach and as such, promise to be successful, as the welfare of the region is dependent on the combination of many factors: intact nature as a basis for quality of life and attractive offers for tourists, fishing and agriculture, the retail business and also job opportunities. The

goal of the biosphere reserve is to guarantee sustainable development.

National park, biosphere reserve, and world heritage site are approaches which are built upon each other and complement each other; they highlight the excellent standing of the Wadden Sea and preserve this landscape in its original purity while simultaneously making a holistic development approach possible.

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UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Wadden Sea of Lower Saxony

This biosphere reserve, which was designated by UNESCO in 1992, spans 2,400 km² along the Lower Saxony North Sea coast. The bulk of the area is made up of core area and buffer zone, which also represents the national park. The

biosphere reserve is situated facing the sea side of the dike sluice up to the East Frisian Islands, between the Rivers Ems and Elbe. The tide dynamics of the Wadden Sea create extreme living conditions, which change twice daily. Thus only a

few, specialised animal species such as seals and birds live there; these, however, in large numbers. Next to the mudflats further habitats such as salt marshes, sand dunes and dune islands exist.

With only one inhabitant, at the ornithological station on the island of Memmert, the Wadden Sea of Lower Saxony is the German biosphere reserve with the smallest population. After a decision by the cabinet of the federal state in 2005, the possibility of an extended transition area is being discussed on-site.

Nevertheless the coastal area is an area of economic activity for the people. Yet, the agricultural areas today are used more and more environmentally friendly. On 66 percent of the salt marshes in the core area and buffer zone, cultivation has been abandoned and compensation offered to the farmers. The Wadden Sea has also been a recreation area for more than 150 years; the visitors are informed of the significance of protection through information boards along the nature paths and in leaflets.

Further information:
<http://www.nationalpark-wattenmeer.niedersachsen.de>

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