



DISCOVER, OBSERVE, UNDERSTAND

# Birds in View

Naturpark  
Kyffhäuser



# Contents

	Page
Welcome	3
Habitats	4 - 5
– Disappearing and endangered habitats in Europe	
Bird observation in the Golden Aue	6 - 7
Bird observation structures	8 - 9
Seasonal observations in the Golden Aue	10 - 11
Cranes	12 - 13
– Common Crane	
Bird species in the Golden Aue	14 - 15
Brief description of some bird species	
Protection	16 - 17
– Protected and preserved by cattle and horses	
Esperstedter Ried	18 - 19
– Natural treasure in Kyffhäuser Nature Park	
Bird observation in Esperstedter Ried	20 - 21
Seasonal observations in Esperstedter Ried	22 - 23
– Fascinating bird watching	
Bird species in Esperstedter Ried	24 - 25
– Brief description of some bird species	
Excursions	26
– to bird life and inland salt marshes	
Literature	27



## Welcome to Kyffhäuser Nature Park

Where cranes rest and feather grasses of the steppes grow

*Everything finds its place in the natural park. Flora and fauna include resting cranes from the north, salt-loving glasswort from the coasts of the North and Baltic Seas, feather grass from Asian steppes, swallowtails and needle sunroses from the Mediterranean area.*

The diversity of the park's "guests" is matched by the wide variety of habitats. The region offers vast forests, orchards, rare dry grasslands, bare rocky outcrops and wetlands. The aqueous areas, such as the Golden Aue with the Kelbra reservoir and the Esperstedter Ried, provide a habitat for thousands of birds.

Would you like to learn more about this abundance of Nature?

Come along. We offer you many interesting ways to do so.

# Rare and endangered habitats in Europe

*In northern Thuringia you'll find the 305-square kilometer Kyffhäuser Nature Park which boasts highly diversified landscapes and a unique natural environment of Europe's rare and endangered habitats.*

One of the treasures in Kyffhäuser Nature Park is the wetlands, specifically the Golden Aue with the Kelbra reservoir and Esperstedter Ried. More than 300 different species of birds use the wetlands as nesting, resting and breeding grounds. The area also contains semi-natural inland salt marshes where plants normally found only on Europe's coastlines thrive.

*Man: Kuse&Beckert, Göttingen*



*View of the Kelbra*

# Bird Watching in the Golden Aue

The Golden Aue stretches across the northern reaches of the Kyffhäuser Nature Park. The Kelbra reservoir, built as flood protection, lies in the triangle formed by the municipalities of Kelbra, Berga and Auleben. Not just the 600-hectare water surface but the vast reed beds and grasslands too offer ideal conditions for more than 300 species of birds. In autumn thousands of cranes rest here before heading off on their long migratory flights. Among the nesting birds are endangered species such as the corncrake, common snipe and northern lapwing. The reservoir is drained in autumn so it can accommodate meltwater from the Harz mountains in the springtime. That creates excellent conditions for mudflat-dwelling birds such as dunlins, Eurasian curlews and ruffs.

From spring to autumn ducks, grebes and coots frolic on the surface of the dammed lake. The mallard duck is the most frequent species, but pochards and tufted ducks are plentiful too. In addition to the impressive great crested grebe, bird watchers may spot the smaller black-necked grebe.



*Northern lapwing, gulls and dunlins on the drained reservoir*

Three structures for undisturbed bird observation are available to park visitors and ornithologists. Located on the easterly and southerly edges of the reservoir, they provide wonderful views of the water. All three are open year-round and are accessible on foot, by bicycle and in part by automobile.



*Dunlin*

**Bird tower (1)** on the eastern shore of the reservoir next to the main dam; it is possible to reach the tower by car from Kelbra, on foot or by bike via the Harzvorland Radwanderweg (bicycle path) and a dirt path.

**Bird tower (2)** at the campground near Reception on the Harzvorland bicycle path. A parking lot is just 100 meters from the tower.

It is recommended that you hike or bike to the mobile **Bird observation station (3)** south of the reservoir. The Harzvorland bicycle path runs right by the station.



### Bird tower (1)

The view over the water and the Golden Aue is magnificent from bird tower (1) at the main dam on the eastern side of the Kelbra reservoir on the outskirts of the city Kelbra. The tower is equipped with roosting aids for amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds. A spiral staircase leads to the open observation platform where info boards tell visitors about the wildlife and habitats.

### Bird tower (2)

The wooden bird tower (2) is located at the water's edge close to the campground on the Kelbra reservoir. Here too the view over the water is lovely. A large board inside explains the most frequently occurring bird species. The wooden building has been outfitted as a crevice roost for the many different bat species in the area.



*View from the bird tower (2)*



*The flight distances of some bird species allow only long-range sightings, so two pairs of binoculars are permanently installed in bird tower (2). It's a good idea to take along your own binoculars or spotting scope as the birds are otherwise difficult to see over the broad expanses of water.*

### Mobile bird observation station (3)

The mobile bird watching station (3), a rebuilt construction trailer, is located on the southern shore of the Kelbra reservoir. Inside there are benches and lecterns so visitors can comfortably observe the birds. Panels, books and a Litfaß pillar provide information about the most important species and help visitors to identify the birds.

*View from the mobile bird observation station (3)*

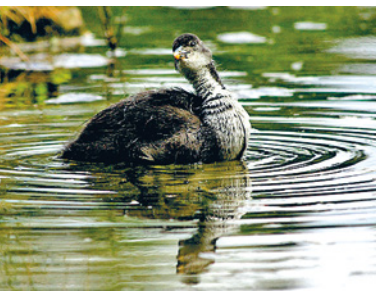


# Fascinating observations throughout the year

*A few examples of what you can see in the Golden Aue*



*Osprey*



*Eurasian coot*



*Penduline tit*

## January:

Many ducks stay through the winter; geese can be seen too.

## February:

Major concentration of goosander; coots overwinter on open-water areas.

## March:

Thrushes and northern lapwings arrive.

## April:

Migration is in full swing; marsh harriers look for nesting places.

## May:

Orioles, common swifts and corncrakes return; penduline tits build their nests.

## June:

Ducks and grebes raise their young.

## July:

Breeding season comes to an end; swifts and marsh warblers fly south.

## August:

Great crested grebes swim on the reservoir with their offspring; young marsh harriers go hunting with their parents.

## September:

Swallows gather, flocks of starlings descend into reed beds, some ospreys regularly show up in the Golden Aue, many gulls are seen.

## October:

More than 50,000 cranes rest in the Golden Aue; large flocks of finches and larks move through the area.

## November:

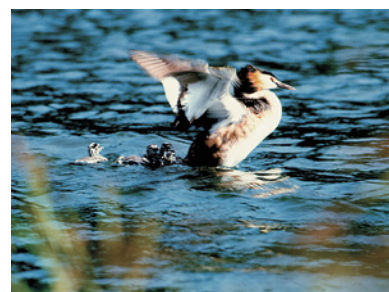
Wading birds, more than 100 curlews are on the drained reservoir; at the end of November the cranes take off.

## December:

The remaining bean geese, Eurasian coots and cormorants overwinter.



*Marsh warbler*



*Great crested grebe*



*Cranes*



*Cormorant*

## Common Crane

*One of Nature's most spectacular shows in Germany is the annual migration of cranes in autumn.*

*"When cranes fly by, winter is nigh." (country saying)*

The crane's beauty in spectacular shades of blue and its inimitable dance make the bird a particularly fascinating species. In Greek mythology the crane was a symbol of alertness and cleverness, the "bird of joy". Among the 15 species of crane in the world is the common crane (*Grus grus*), which is found in northern and Central Europe.

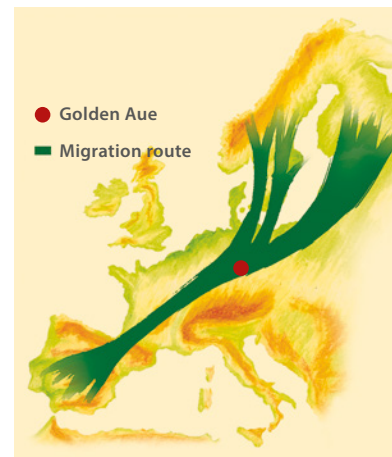
These ciconiiformes or stork-like wading birds can grow to a height of 130 cm. They have a wingspan of up to 245 cm and a weight of five to seven kilograms. They prefer wetlands such as marshes, moors, mires and lake shores.

The Golden Aue is an **important resting spot** for migratory birds, particularly the crane. Beginning in October, up to 50,000 cranes rest here for several weeks.

*Cranes on a field of corn stubble*



In autumn you'll see the cranes during the day in the open countryside, in fields and meadows, where they search for food. They eat harvest residue along with the occasional small animal. In the evening they return to the drained reservoir where they find refuge in the flat waters and protection from ground predators.



*Cranes' western flyway*

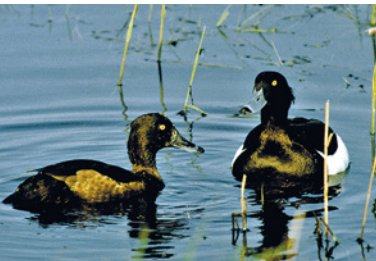
Depending on the weather, the cranes rest in the Golden Aue from October to December. When hard frosts occur, they leave for the western Spanish region of Extremadura. There they are seen in holm and cork oak forests.

Resting cranes in the Golden Aue follow the western flyway and breed in northern Germany (Western Pomerania, north Brandenburg), Scandinavia and the Eastern Baltic region.

Increasing numbers of resting cranes have been reported at the Kelbra reservoir in the Golden Aue in recent years. This natural spectacle draws many visitors to the area. Consequently, the crowds disturb the cranes at their feeding grounds and roosts.

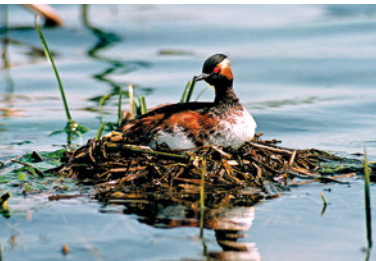
The three bird watching structures provide ideal conditions close to the Kelbra reservoir. From there visitors can experience the evening flight of thousands of cranes. Without disturbing the animals, observers have a very good view and protection from the weather.

# Brief description of some bird species



*Tufted duck*

to more than 1000 on the water's surface. Only a few breed in the dense vegetation along the shore; most are simply passing through or are non-breeding ducks.



*Black-necked grebe*

reed beds. Up to 500 grebes can be seen on the reservoir in the summer months. Many black-necked grebes breed here.



*Great egret*

## Great Egret

The great egret is a strikingly white wading bird which can attain a height of up to 100 centimeters with a weight of only 1.5 kilograms. It is most frequently spotted in autumn. The resting and overwintering egrets can be observed on the drained reservoir, in nearby marshes and fields and along the shores of the Helme river. Evidence of breeding has been reported from Lake Neusiedl on the Austrian-Hungarian border and the Netherlands.

## Tufted Duck

The tufted duck can be quickly identified by its attractive appearance and pronounced agility. The name of this little diving duck comes from the crest of feathers on its hind crown. It is seen on the reservoir throughout the year. It's not unusual to spot 600

## Black-necked Grebe

The black-necked grebe with distinctive dark plumage is smaller than an Eurasian coot. An increasing number of black-necked grebes have been registered at the reservoir in recent years. The bird loves overgrown fish ponds and reservoirs with sparse

## Marsh Harrier

In March and April the marsh harrier comes to the Golden Aue to breed. The bird finds an ideal habitat at the reservoir, which has extensive mudflats, wetlands and reed beds. Nests are generally built in the reeds. Marsh harriers can often be seen flying low over the wetlands on the hunt for small water birds. In October they take off for their winter quarters.



*Marsh harrier*

## Dunlin

This small wading bird regularly comes to rest in the Golden Aue in spring and autumn. At the Berga-Kelbra reservoir the dunlins form large resting flocks. The birds can be observed on the reservoir's mudflats where they search for worms, larva, insects and small crustaceans. The dunlin breeds in the Arctic tundra and spends winters in southwest Europe and West Africa.



*Dunlin*

## Eurasian Curlew

This 70 cm-long bird with a weight of just one kilogram is our largest wading bird. If its size does not help you identify it, the curlew's unmistakable decurved bill will. Until the 1980s the curlew's breeding grounds included the meadows in the Golden Aue. Today these birds are observed on the drained reservoir during migration periods. Small flocks can be seen foraging for food on the mudflats in the spring. In autumn their numbers increase to flocks of 50 to 60 birds.

*Eurasian curlew*





Salt marshes in the Golden Aue

## Protected and preserved by cattle and horses

At one time this area had extensive salt marshes with 42 different species of salt-tolerant plants. Large areas of these salt marshes were flooded by the building of the reservoir and the damming of the Helme river. The remaining areas are on the western edge of the reservoir region. A salt spring, known as the Nuremburg Westquelle, keeps the surrounding area wet with salt water.

Today there are 24 different salt-tolerant plant species here such as *Lysimachia maritima*, strawberry clover and sea aster.



Strawberry clover

These days the area is used to graze cattle and semi-wild horses in order to ensure the continued existence of the salt-tolerant plants.



Koniks

The salt marshes around the Kelbra reservoir are very important for ground-nesting birds. For some the salty grasslands with low-growing and diverse vegetation are critical breeding and feeding grounds. Among the endangered breeding birds are the corncrake, common snipe and northern lapwing.

Common snipe



Northern lapwing



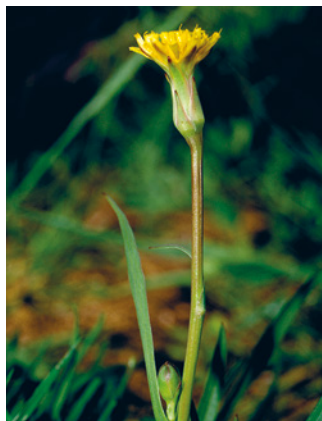


## Esperstedter Ried

### Another natural treasure in Kyffhäuser Nature Park

Esperstedter Ried, located southeast of Bad Frankenhausen near Esperstedt, Seehausen and Oldisleben, is an interior drainage basin covering about 500 hectares which was created by leaching in 300-meter deep salt layers.

For centuries this area was covered by vast mudflats. At the end of the 19th century, grasslands with rich diversity were created when the reeds were drained. Large numbers of wading birds then had a place where they could thrive.



Salt-tolerant plants grew in the highly saline soil. Today the area is Thuringia's most important inland salt marsh, home to 35 different salt-tolerant plant species are here. Particularly rare types include the small-flowered

*Small-flowered black salsify*

black salsify, which is found in Germany only at this site and at two other locations in Sachsen-Anhalt, and oak-leaf goosefoot, which is unique to Thuringia!

The area also hosts a rich diversity of birds, with more than 200 different species documented. During migration periods thousands of cranes and geese rest here and at warmer times of the year, ground-nesting birds like the northern lapwing and common snipe move in. The bluethroat, reed buntings and white storks also are present.



*Cranes*

Agriculture is practiced in Esperstedter Ried, where cows graze peacefully and the scent of fresh hay wafts on summer air.

Well-developed bicycle paths invite visitors to experience nature on the move. Right next to the bike path is a bird observation station built of wood, which is open year-round and accessible on foot or by bicycle.

*For the protection of sensitive birds, visitors should not leave the paths. Unrestrained dogs are a big problem for both nesting and resting birds. Therefore, dogs should always be kept on a leash.*

*Grazing cattle*



*View of Esperstedter Ried*

## Bird Observation in Esperstedter Ried

A special attraction in Esperstedter Ried is the bird observation station constructed of wood. The structure has built-in quarters for the many bat species in the area. Built in 2008, the tower conceals visitors from view and protects them from the weather so they can observe birds undisturbed throughout the year. Very often bird watchers need a certain amount of patience and binoculars to see, for example, the

*Bird observation station in Esperstedter Ried*

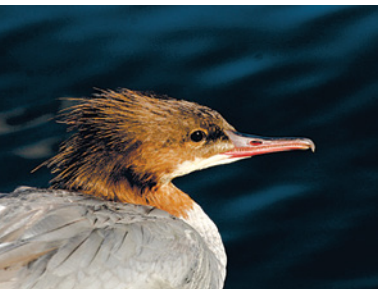
red kite on the hunt, the western yellow wagtail among the cows or the reed warbler on the mudflats.

*Flood channels*

If you let your gaze wander across the reeds, you'll take in vast grasslands, mud-edged ditches and some watering holes. Those spots to the south of the bird observation station are flood channels established by the EU LIFE project in recent years. The goal of the project was the conservation of valuable inland salt marshes. From 2003 to 2008 project funds went toward renewing the entire drainage system, putting up information signs, constructing the bird observation station and digging the flood channels, which were then filled with salt water. All those measures are intended to conserve this extraordinary area.

# Fascinating bird spotting

*throughout the year  
in Esperstedter Ried*



*Goosander*



*Grey Geese*



*White Storks*

**January:**

Goosander stop by gravel pits and ditches; thousands of bean geese rest.

**February:**

Mallard ducks begin breeding, swans are in the fields.

**March:**

Reed buntings come from their winter quarters; storks return from their winter grounds in Africa.

**April:**

Snipes build nests; long-distance migrants like the yellow wagtail and blue throat come from their winter grounds.

**May:**

Breeding time for many birds; yellow wagtail catch insects in the grass close to herds of cattle.

**June:**

Storks run behind harvesters.

**July:**

Northern lapwings form large flocks in harvested fields and freshly mown meadows.

**August:**

Yellow wagtail move into winter quarters. Gray heron lie in wait on mown meadows.

**September:**

Reed buntings set off for winter quarters.

**October:**

Thousands of cranes rest.

**November:**

Northern lapwings move to winter grounds.

**December:**

Greater white-fronted geese linger in the area; hen harriers sleep in the reeds; increasing numbers of water birds attract the white-tailed eagle as a winter guest.



*Geese and Swans*



*Redshank and northern lapwing*



*Grey heron*



*Cranes*

# Brief description of some bird species

*Northern lapwing*



*Common snipe*



protect its territory – its outspread tail feathers make a drumming noise that can be heard up to 500 meters away. In Germany the common snipe is one of the most highly endangered species as a result of changes made to habitats, particularly through draining. On spring and autumn days the wader is often found in the reeds.

## Western Yellow Wagtail

The yellow throat and breast and long, wagging tail are the distinctive characteristics of the Western Yellow Wagtail. This species also can be quickly identified by its simple song, which sounds like "Zip- zip- zipsi/ sirsirsir". Between 30 and 40 breeding pairs are at home in Esperstedter Ried. The bird likes to ride on the backs of grazing cows. The movements of the big animals rouse the insects which are then easy prey for the wagtail.

*Western yellow wagtail*



## Northern Lapwing

This bird species can be easily identified by its unusual long, wispy crest and iridescent green and purple coloring on its wings. The flight of the lapwing appears somewhat quivery; the rounded wingtips allow quick turns. Some breeding pairs are in Esperstedter Ried. From July the birds form large flocks on harvested fields and mown meadows.

## Common Snipe

The common snipe is a wading bird with a long, black bill. When the bird dives in flight – to attract a mate or



*Mute swan*

## Mute Swan

At 12 kilograms, the mute swan is among the heaviest flying birds at our latitude. Swans use the surfaces of gravel pits, meadows and fields in Esperstedter Ried. Swan pairs remain together throughout life. Most return to the same nest, which they enlarge every year.

## Bean Goose

Every year increasing numbers of geese come to Esperstedter Ried in the winter months. More than 5000 birds have been counted. The waters in gravel pits and the large fields and meadows offer ideal conditions for overwintering. The bean goose's breeding grounds are in northern Scandinavia and the Arctic tundra.

*Bean Goose*



## White Stork

In March the storks return from their African wintering grounds, led by the males. Their loud beak clattering can be heard at long distances. Some breeding pairs make their homes in communities close to the Esperstedter Ried. With a little bit of luck bird watchers might spot the storks searching the reeds for frogs, mice and insects. When temperatures soar the parents carry water in their beaks to their thirsty offspring.

*White Stork*





## Excursions to bird life and inland salt marshes

Excursions are offered by employees of the Kyffhäuser Nature Park and the South Harz Karst Landscape Biosphere Reserve in cooperation with the Förderverein Numburg e.V. Weekly and weekend excursions take place, particularly in October and November.

Details are available from the offices of Kyffhäuser Nature Park, Tel.: 03 61/57 39 16 415 and from the offices of the South Harz Karst Landscape Biosphere Reserve, Tel.: 03 46 51/29 88 90.

The Numburg, the seat of engaged ornithologists, is located on the southern shore of the Kelbra reservoir, right next to the Harzvorland bicycle path. In addition to counting water birds and monitoring migratory birds, the ornithologists work to protect bats. Visitors are directed to info boards for more information.

### Bibliography/Sources:

HERBERT GRIMM: Die Vogelwelt des Esperstedter Riedes – Nachruf oder Comeback einer bedrohten Tiergemeinschaft, Tagungsband Binnensalzstellen Mitteleuropas, Bad Frankenhausen vom 8. -10. September 2005  
M. WAGNER, J. SCHEUER: Die Vogelwelt im Landkreis Nordhausen und am Helmestausee, 2003  
VEREIN NORDHÄUSER ORNITHOLOGEN E. V.: Ornithologische Jahresberichte, Nordhausen 2006  
Information brochure "Binnensalzstellen um das Kyffhäusergebirge" published by the Ministry for Agriculture, Nature Conservation and the Environment, Erfurt/Oldisleben 2005

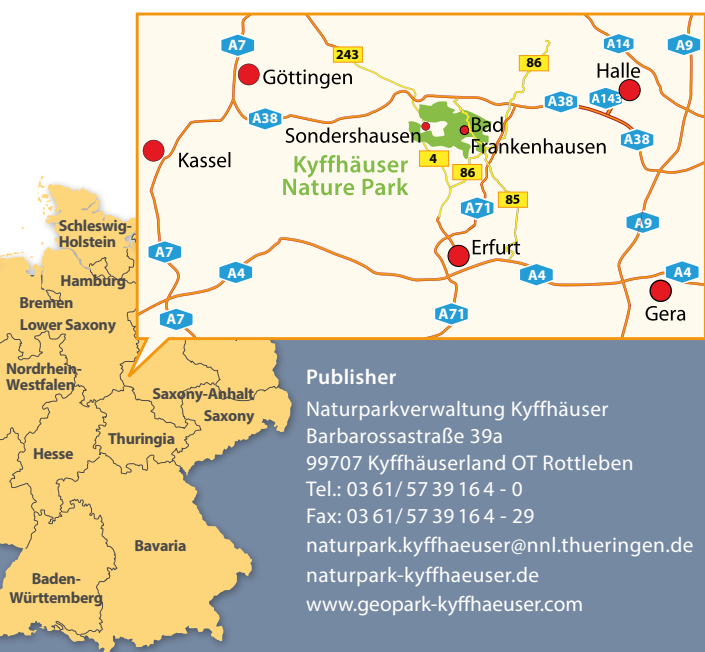
We are grateful for kind support from Herbert Grimm and Joachim Scheuer.

### *The Numburg*



# Additional Information on accommodations, sightseeing and more:

- ✦ from Kyffhäuser-Information Bad Frankenhausen  
Tel: 03 46 71 / 7 17 17
- ✦ from Bürger- und Gästeservice Kelbra  
Tel: 03 46 51 / 45 99 95



## Publisher

Naturparkverwaltung Kyffhäuser  
Barbarossastraße 39a  
99707 Kyffhäuserland OT Rottleben  
Tel.: 03 61/ 57 39 16 4 - 0  
Fax: 03 61/ 57 39 16 4 - 29  
[naturpark.kyffhaeuser@nnl.thueringen.de](mailto:naturpark.kyffhaeuser@nnl.thueringen.de)  
[naturpark-kyffhaeuser.de](http://naturpark-kyffhaeuser.de)  
[www.geopark-kyffhaeuser.com](http://www.geopark-kyffhaeuser.com)

**Photo Credits** Atelier Papenfuß; H. Böttger; B. Dietrich, Europarc Deutschland; S. Green; T. Griesohn-Pfleger; J. Holzhausen; K. Schröter; T. Stephan; L. Koch; R. Kucklick; C. Wicht; J. Bohdal, J. Sevcik, naturfoto.cz; H. Bollinger, cve, S. Dietl, felix.foto; F. Güllmeister; A. Köckeritz; Re.Ko., Templermeister, pixelio.de

**Concept & Text** Julia Hornickel, Landidee

**Realization** [www.blattwerker.de](http://www.blattwerker.de)

As of December 2017

Nationale  
Naturlandschaften  
in Thüringen

