



## Crane protection on the Helmestausee Kelbra Dam

LEADER helps protect roosting sites for the common crane in Saxony Anhalt and improves the acceptance of the bird within the area.

### EAFRD-funded projects

**Location:** Helmestausee Kelbra Dam, Germany

**Programming period:** 2014–2020

**Priority:** P6 – Social inclusion and local development

**Focus Area:** Local development

**Measures:** M19 – LEADER CLLD

**Funding:**

Total budget	356 145 (EUR)
	(three projects)
EAFRD	267 109 (EUR)
National/Regional	89 036 (EUR)

**Timeframe:** 02/09/2016–31/12/2019  
(initial project)  
01/07/2020–31/03/2023  
(two follow-up projects)

**Project promoter:** Landschaftspflegeverband  
Südharz Kyffhäuser e.V.

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### Summary

The Helmestausee Kelbra Dam is one of the most important roosting sites for common cranes and other migratory birds in Germany. However, the large number of migratory birds that stop at the reservoir has created conflicts with water sports enthusiasts, campers, residents and farmers in particular because cranes mainly feed from the surrounding agricultural areas. At the same time, the birds are disturbed by the increasing numbers of visitors and observers as they try to rest. To preserve the Kelbra reservoir as an important roosting site in the future, CAP funds were used to: provide food for the birds in the surrounding area; protect the roosting areas; and keep visitors at a sufficient distance while protecting agricultural production.

### Project results

- The yearly peak number of roosting cranes, before the project's conservation activities started, was 10 000. This has since increased to 35 000–60 000.
- Since the start of the LEADER project, the nature reserve has registered over 140 000 tourists in the roosting area, equaling 20 000 each year, with fluctuations due to weather or the pandemic.
- A project manager position and two ranger jobs were created.

### Key lessons and recommendations

- Listen to all partners equally and find compromises. Technical data provided new possibilities for this project, but it was important to show patience and stick to project goals.
- Seek out necessary supporters and partners in the region at the beginning and involve the relevant authorities. They can assist and help sustain the project throughout phases where it seems to be stagnating.





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## Context

The construction of Germany's Helgestausee Kelbra Dam in the 1960s caused this area to become one of the most important roosting sites for common cranes and other migratory birds with in Germany. The more migratory birds stopped at the reservoir, the more they came into conflict with water sports enthusiasts, campers, residents and farmers because the cranes get most of their food from the surrounding agricultural areas. Conversely, the shy birds were disrupted as they tried to rest by the use of the surrounding area - increasingly so by visitors and observers. The only way for the Kelbra reservoir to remain an important roosting site in the future was to ensure enough food was available in the surrounding area, in addition to safe roosting areas at a sufficient distance from visitors, all without infringing upon farming activity. Diversionary feeding, therefore, became essential.

## Objectives

The aims of this project were to protect and secure the roosting site for 40 000 to 60 000 common cranes annually and improve acceptance of the bird within the region.

## Activities

In order to plan for areas to be used for diversionary feeding, and to make decisions about the amount of feed required, it was necessary to determine and evaluate the numbers of roosting migratory birds. The count was carried out by regional ornithologists and farmers, whose active collaboration was initiated by the project's implementing organisation - the landscape conservation association Landschaftspflegeverband Südharz/Kyffhäuser (LPV).

Alongside local farmers, they looked for options for providing the cranes with enough food, while minimising feeding damage in agricultural areas. The project also intended to foster mutual understanding and collaboration between nature conservation organisations and the agricultural sector.

The fact that ornithologists, Kranichschutz Deutschland, and farmers participated in the project helped everyone involved to better understand the viewpoints of other project partners. The public was also made aware of issues surrounding crane conservation, as well as protected species and biodiversity programmes through educational events and public relations work. Interest in the project and the number of project partners grew steadily. Specific activities carried out included:

- Creating new jobs as rangers and coordinating these rangers to manage visitors.
- Identifying and contacting all key actors within the area.
- Determining where change and support are needed.
- Developing a multi-state network (Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt) for crane conservation parallel to other activities.
- Coordinating the project with all project partners and integrate ongoing activities. Expenses for the project manager's salary were covered by CAP funds.
- Identifying sites for diversionary feeding and roosting.
- Obtaining entry rights needed for project activities.
- Purchasing wheat for feed following a bidding procedure.
- Carrying out diversionary feeding (with CAP funds).
- Daily crane monitoring in the fall and data analysis (expenses covered with CAP funds).
- Organising and carrying out feedings, analysing data.
- Regularly checking sites during the roosting season.
- Daily monitoring of the diversionary feeding and drawing conclusions regarding feeding.
- Expanding public relations work.





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## Main results

- Before 1989, around 1 000 cranes roosted at the reservoir each year. This number increased slowly starting in 1990 thanks to increasing awareness of the need for nature conservation and volunteering. The yearly peak number of roosting cranes before the project's crane conservation measures started was 10 000, which has since increased to 35 000-60 000.
- A project manager position and two ranger jobs were created.
- Through the project, a feeding area of approximately eight hectares has been provided to safely supply food to roosting cranes. Every year, a total of 25 tonnes of wheat are spread there in 12-15 feedings per roosting season.
- Promoting crane tourism within the region. Since the start of the project, the nature reserve has registered over 140 000 crane tourists in the roosting area, equalling 20 000 each year, with fluctuations due to weather or the pandemic. Discussions with tourists clearly show that the catchment area is growing steadily. Visitors come from all over Germany and other countries.
- The behaviour and flow of visitors are better managed now, with proactive engagement from rangers. Acceptance and knowledge about species protection have increased among the public through public relations work, media reports, information and education, such as tailored educational programs for schools.

## Key lessons and recommendations

- Listen to all partners equally and find compromises. Technical data provided new possibilities for this project, but it was important to show patience and stick to project goals.
- Seek out necessary supporters and partners in the region right at the beginning and involve the relevant authorities. They can provide assistance and help sustain the project throughout phases where it seems to be stagnating.
- Do not lose enthusiasm for the idea or be afraid of big jobs. Never forget to involve the public in the project work somehow.

*“There has been a successful crane protection project at the Helmestausee in Thuringia since 2013, funded by the Landschaftspflegeverband Südharz-Kyffhäuser. The reservoir extends across two German states. Because of this, it was important to design sustainable measures to preserve this unique area, which is so important for different bird species. Ms. Koschorreck, Managing Director of the landscape conservation organisation, took the initiative to create a cross-state crane protection project in the spring of 2018. Supported by the administration of the Karstlandschaft Südharz biosphere reserve in Saxony-Anhalt, a large number of participating parties met to implement the idea for a large-scale crane protection project across the two states.”*

Dr. Urte Bachmann, Natural Conservation Officer,  
Karstlandschaft Südharz biosphere reserve

### Additional information:

[www.facebook.com/mdr/videos/v%3dB6gel-des-gl%3%BC-cks-kranichtreffen-in-mitteldeutschland/1397300517107024/](https://www.facebook.com/mdr/videos/v%3dB6gel-des-gl%3%BC-cks-kranichtreffen-in-mitteldeutschland/1397300517107024/)

[www.mdr.de/tv/programm/sendung922774.html](https://www.mdr.de/tv/programm/sendung922774.html)

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