

## **Wild animals returning home:**

### **Pastureland project at the Gerhausen quarry**

In June 2012, a 75-hectare piece of land at the Gerhausen quarry, located near the HeidelbergCement Schelklingen cement plant in southern Germany, has become home to a herd of Heck cattle (a back breed of the extinct Auerochs) and wild Konik horses. In the initial year of the project, ten head of Heck cattle and five Konik horses have been released to graze at the quarry and adjacent land for the entire year. Even with the animals present, operation of the quarry will continue without a problem.

Plant manager, Hans Georg Kraut, from the Schelklingen cement plant explains why HeidelbergCement gave the green light to this project: "It fits in extremely well with our company's sustainability strategy for promotion of biodiversity, and it is one of the flagship projects in the context of HeidelbergCement's partnership with BirdLife International."

The pastureland project is the largest of its kind in the German state of Baden Wuerttemberg with wild horses and cattle. Operation is being handled by the newly formed company Urzeit Weide GbR, (primeval pasture) in which HeidelbergCement AG and Blautal-Land-und-Forst GmbH & Co. KG are partners. Together, they provide the land used for grazing. Two associations, among which NABU Baden-Württemberg, have been involved from the very beginning as cooperation partners and advisors for the project. NABU is the German partner of BirdLife International.

Grazing year-round in a near-natural habitat is an environmental protection concept in which human intervention is kept to an absolute minimum. The primitive animals adapt to the specific terrains in a way that stimulates the dynamism and evolution of the landscape. Biotopes that are grazed by cattle and horses provide prime habitats for animals and plants that require an abundance of light, warmth and a loose vegetation structure. The foraging herds ensure that small streams remain open, as well as maintaining open habitats and varying states of forest succession. This benefits not only the amphibians living in the quarries, but also birds and myriad insects like dragon flies and beetles. Grazing projects of this kind have been in existence in German for at least 20 years. They prove that introduction of large grazers is a successful way to protect the environment.

The demand the animals have to meet are simple: they must be robust enough to survive temperature swings and precipitation in the natural environment. Only in the most difficult winters must they be provided with additional feed by humans. Introduction of Heck cattle and Konik horses is a proven combination that has been used in similar projects in Germany and neighbouring countries.

In September 2013, the pasture land has been enlarged by another 18 hectares of adjacent forest. The number of animals grazing at the Gerhausen quarry and the surrounding countryside has increased to 13 head of Heck cattle and 14 Konik horses.

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