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Supported by



The Donau-Auen National Park

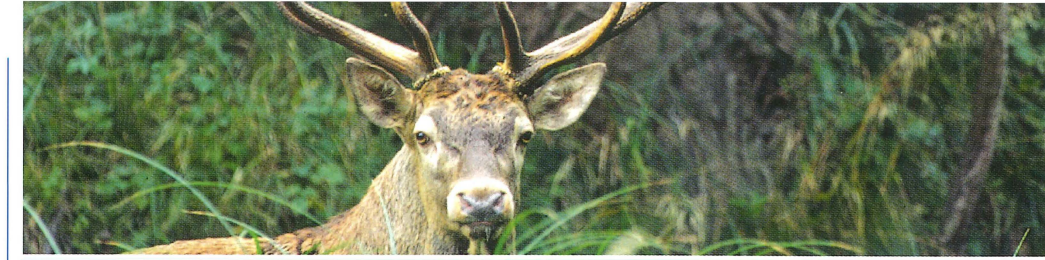


Welcome to the Donau-Auen National Park!



The Donau-Auen National Park

The Donau-Auen National Park is located in the federal provinces of Vienna and Lower Austria and lies between the European capitals of Vienna and Bratislava. The "Donau-Auen" are the Danube wetlands, meaning the forests, meadows, marshes and bodies of water along the Danube river. The Donau-Auen National Park protects these important riverine wetlands, which are one of the last remaining in Central Europe.



Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*. His majesty, king of the wetlands. A full-grown red deer inhabiting the riparian forest may weigh up to 250 kg, which is around 100 kg more than his relatives in the mountains.

Here, the Danube is still free flowing and is the lifeline of the park. The interplay of the river and its environment means that the wetlands landscape is constantly being renewed.

With the founding of the Donau-Auen National Park in 1996, the area was put under lasting protection. The riparian forests remain sheltered from commercial use in order to allow the ecosystem to develop as freely as possible. Innovative hydraulic engineering projects maintain

and improve the Danube's dynamics. With its lively spectrum of visitor programmes and attractive facilities, the Donau-Auen National Park is a centre for environmental awareness and education.

Thus future generations will also be able to experience the power and the beauty of the Danube wetlands.

Habitats and Biodiversity in the Danube Wetlands

The formative element of this landscape is the Danube and its flat banks, gravel bars and islands which have in part been formed naturally. Numerous wetland bodies of water exist alongside the Danube current – side arms with circulating waters as well as silted up former river branches. "Dynamic sites" such as regularly shifting open gravel areas and cracks in the shoreline may still be found despite river regulation.

Eurasian Beaver *Castor fiber*. Once thought extinct but now resettled in the area, the "master builders" of the Danube wetlands may now nibble on trees to their heart's content.

Rich forests of two main kinds are found among these waters: the softwood riparian forest and the hardwood riparian forest. Willow, poplar and alder are among the species found in the softwood riparian forests which are flooded several times each year. Oak, maple, ash and linden form the hardwood riparian forests where flooding is seldom.

There are meadows of great biodiversity in the riparian forests. A distinctive feature is the so-called xeric habitats, the extremely dry steppe-like areas of land where sand and gravel



Burnt Orchid *Orchis ustulata*. The critically endangered Burnt Orchid is one of the smallest species of orchids. Because it likes it bright and warm, the Burnt Orchid thrives in the dry grasslands and on the dam.

banks used to be found in the Vienna part of national park.

On the north bank, the dyke shields the "Marchfeld-Area" from flooding and is home to rare dry grassland plants. To the south, the boundary of the national park is formed by the breakline of the

Vienna Basin where a beech slope forest has come about which is unique for the lowlands.

The wealth of habitats has led to an enormous **variety of species**: more than 800 kinds of vascular plants have been documented. Over 30 mammalian species, 100 breeding bird species, 8 reptilian and 13 amphibian species as well as around 60 species of fish live in the Danube wetlands. There is also an abundance of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates.

Typical animals of the national park include beaver, white-tailed eagle, kingfisher, Little Ringed Plover, corn crane, European pond turtle, European mudminnow (*Umbra krameri*), common carp, Praying Mantis, and numerous dragon fly and beetle species.

Unique botanic specimens include the Siberian Iris, black poplar, the nuphar, certain indigenous vines and diverse orchids.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*. The iridescent emblem of the National Park. The kingfisher lives and hunts in the former river branches of the Danube, where there are enough fish and aquatic insects to satisfy this flying gem's hunger.



Conservation and Research in the Donau-Auen National Park

Leaving nature to its own devices isn't always possible. The national park requires a reversal of former interventions, in particular the excessive regulation of the river. One main aim is to better reconnect the Danube with its former river branches. The process of connecting of bodies of water is taking place in close collaboration

with the waterways authorities; this pioneering process has received international acclaim.

Through **riverbank restoration**, natural flat banks and gravel bars are once again created. These serve as habitat and breeding ground for threatened water fowl and river fish species. The most important principle is to allow the river to create its own environment.

In the coming years, major projects will bring about the continued improvement of the ecological situation of the Danube wetlands east of

Deadwood. Dead trees, rotting wood: that which looks untidy is in fact particularly valuable. So-called deadwood is in fact a vital habitat for numerous mushrooms, lichens, birds, insects and mammals.



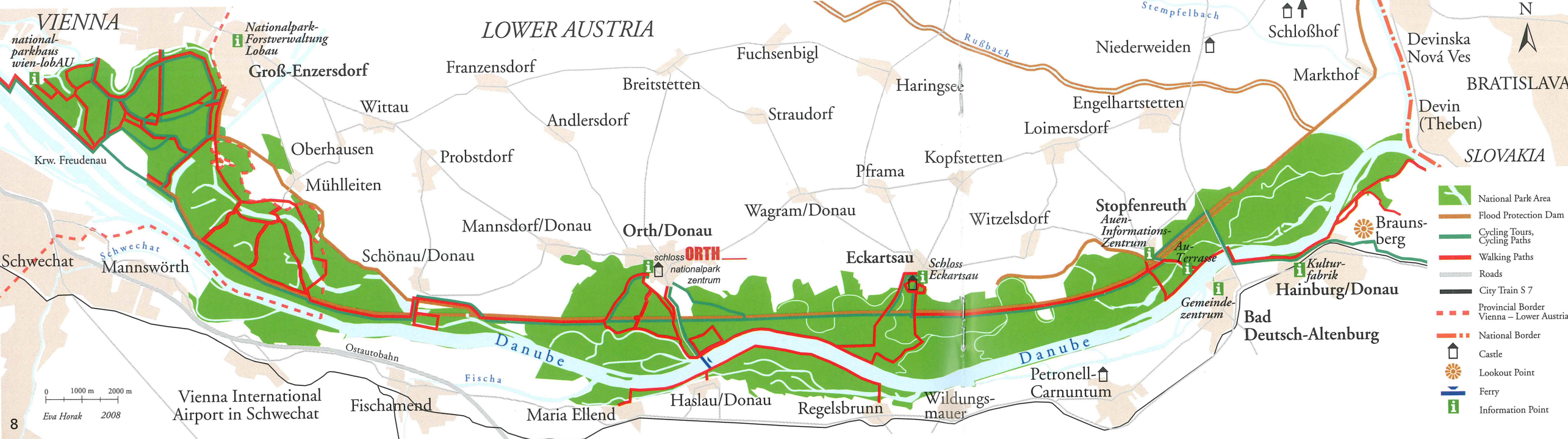
White-Tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*. A majestic winter guest in the Danube wetlands. This bird of prey prefers habitats with an abundance of water in order to better hunt fish and small water fowl.

Vienna. Through collaboration with Austrian and international research institutions, a scientific network has been established which provides expert guidance to the national park and ensures conservation at the highest level.

In the forests of the national park, enrichment with mature stock is an important task. This ensures the survival of many highly-specialised life forms. The transformation of the species and age composition of the tree population back to natural, old-growth forest is a slow and steady process. But then it will be possible to listen to the call – and the tapping – of seven different woodpecker species which have made the national park their habitat. In the Donau-Auen National Park, protection of biodiversity and species is guaranteed primarily through preservation and expansion of habitats. However, for critically endangered species, supporting research and conservation programmes are developed. Examples include programmes for the European pond turtle and the European mudminnow (*Umbra krameri*). The waters of the national park are one of the last refuges for this fish species.

Riverbanks. Broad gravel areas on the Danube. Species of water fowl which nest on gravel surfaces feel at home here. The formation of such natural riverbanks is encouraged in the national park.





The Donau-Auen National Park

Riverine Wetlands National Park, Category II, recognized by the IUCN.

Total area currently 9,300 hectares; of these, approx. 65% is riparian forest; 15% meadow, and approx. 20% is covered by water. Expansion of area is planned.

The Danube is free flowing for approximately 36 km in the Donau-Auen National Park. Variances in water levels of up to 7 meters illustrate the dynamics influencing the Danube wetlands.

The Donau-Auen National Park is jointly administered by the Nationalpark Donau-Auen GmbH, the Austrian National Forests Operations in the Donau-Auen National Park, and the Lobau National Park Administration, City of Vienna Municipal Department 49.

- National Park Area
- Flood Protection Dam
- Cycling Tours, Cycling Paths
- Walking Paths
- Roads
- City Train S 7
- Provincial Border Vienna – Lower Austria
- National Border
- Castle
- Lookout Point
- Ferry
- Information Point

Things to Do in the Donau-Auen National Park

The visitor facilities in several national park municipalities serve as gateways to the national park and are information points well worth visiting.

Eckartsau Castle: national park information point and starting point for walks.



ECKARTSAU CASTLE AND SCHLOSSPARK

Surrounded by a landscape garden, the Austrian National Forest's Eckartsau Castle is a site of great historical importance, as it was the residence of the last Austrian emperor, Charles I, and his family.

AU-TERRASSE STOPFENREUTH

The two-storey platform lies on a Danube bank with views to the Danube and the wetlands. The terrace is a good place to get more information about the national park and to enjoy the area. Refreshments are also available here.

KULTURFABRIK HAINBURG

The Kulturfabrik is the site of exhibits, events and a restaurant; the Donau-Auen National Park is featured in a presentation. An impressive panorama view of the Danube wetlands may be enjoyed from the glass terrace.



wien-lobAU National Park House: the hub for gathering information, exploring, experiencing and recreation.

WIEN-LOBAU NATIONAL PARK HOUSE

Located in Vienna's 22nd district, the wien-lobAU National Park House offers information, recreational opportunities and other activities. The open areas around the house allow for many wetlands-related recreational activities but are also a place for relaxation and contemplation.

SCHLOSSORTH NATIONAL PARK VISITOR CENTRE

The Donau-Auen National Park Visitor Centre in Orth on the Danube beckons as "Gateway to the Wetlands" and is the starting point for getting to know the fascinating world of the Danube wetlands. The "DonAUräume" exhibit offers exciting new perspectives on the Danube wetlands.

Animal species native to the wetlands such as the European pond turtle and certain snakes may be observed close up from the Schlossinsel ("Castle Island") grounds. The main attraction is the underwater observatory, a window to the underwater world of a former Danube river branch. There are also exhibitions, a lookout point, shop and café.

schlossORTH: originally built as a medieval castle with moat, schlossORTH now houses the National Park Visitor Centre, the museumORTH and event facilities.



Explore & Experience the Donau-Auen National Park

The programme for Donau-Auen National Park visitors is varied with something for both young and old: guided tours at the wien-lobAU National Park House, the schlossORTH National Park Visitor Centre and the Schlossinsel; walks and boat tours with rubber dinghies or canoes – there is so much to explore and experience. Depending on the season, weather, water levels and interests, the national park rangers cover

different topics. In this way, visitors can get to know the fascinating features of the national park: gravel islands which come and go; tranquil oxbow lakes which can become roaring floods at high water; and plants which have adapted perfectly to these conditions. The Danube and the bodies of water in the wetlands can be experienced up close on a guided boat tour. To round out the programme, there are events focussing on special topics and project weeks for children and teens.

And it is also worth getting to know the national park on your own. There are marked walking

Boating Tour. Up close to the Danube and its riparian forest, a most immediate way to experience the wetlands.



European Pond Turtle *Emys orbicularis*.

The only turtle in living memory which is indigenous to Austria, this shy reptile has found a refuge in the Danube wetlands. "Emy spotting" is a popular activity at the Schlossinsel in schlossORTH National Park Visitor Centre.

trails and trail maps are also available. Some bodies of water have been opened to swimming and non-motorized boats.

Warning: at high water, some trails may be diverted or even closed for safety reasons. For more information on water levels call the hotline at +43 (0)2163/3370 or +43 (0)1/1577.

Welcome visitors! Please...



...Enjoy unspoilt nature during your walks; stay on the trails and refrain from making unnecessary noise



...Keep your dog on a leash in order to protect wildlife and other park visitors



...Ride your bike only on the green cycling paths



...Paddle only on the designated boating routes and only dock on the Danube on shore sections which have been allowed for this purpose



...Help to keep the national park tidy by taking your rubbish with you when you leave the park

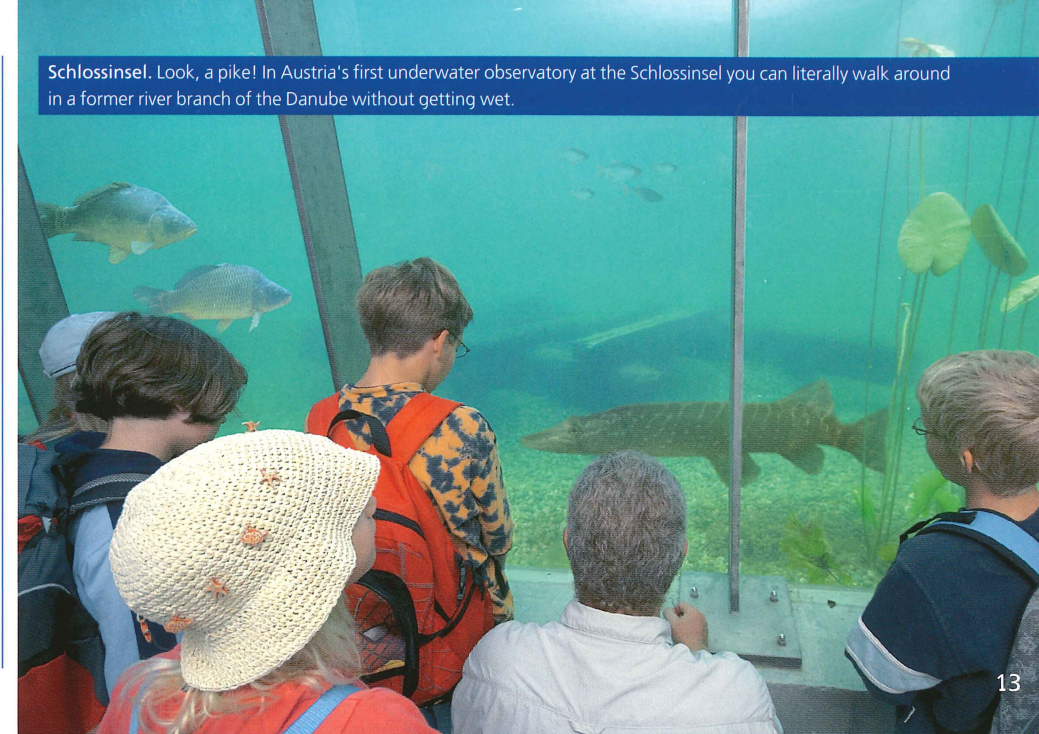


...Do not pick protected plants



...Be aware that campfires and tents are not allowed in the wetlands

Schlossinsel. Look, a pike! In Austria's first underwater observatory at the Schlossinsel you can literally walk around in a former river branch of the Danube without getting wet.



The Path to the National Park

115,000 – 10,000 B.C. Würm Glaciation in the Alps: dramatic climate changes with alternating riverine environments; in the coldest phases, treeless tundra and steppe environments

4,000 B.C. First human settlements in the Danube area

1st century A.D. Roman fortifications on the south bank of the Danube

17th century Royal hunting grounds of Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I

1809 Battlefield on the floodplains: Napoleon defeated by Austrians at Aspern

1830 Ice jam catastrophe

1862 Flooding after the thaw – along with the ice jam, major impetus for Viennese Danube regulation

1863 Last beaver brought down in Fischamend
starting 1875 Marchfeld protective barrier is erected

1938 Danube wetlands are declared nature reserve and (German) Reich hunting grounds

1976 Beavers are resettled in the area between the Lobau and Eckartsau

1977 Declaration of the Lower Lobau as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

1978 Declaration of the Lobau as nature reserve by the legislative assembly of Vienna

1979 Declaration of Lower Austrian Danube wetlands as nature reserve

1983 Danube wetlands are designated Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention

1984 "Hainburger Wetlands Sit-In": thousands of environmentalists pitch their tents near Stopfenreuth, thus preventing the construction of an already-approved Danube power plant



Danube wetlands: once a wild, meandering river landscape consisting of numerous side arms, loops and islands along the entire Danube. Today, this type of landscape is now protected for posterity in the national park.

1996 Founding of the Donau-Auen National Park: treaty signed by the federation and the provinces of Vienna and Lower Austria

The National Park Region

The Donau-Auen National Park is nestled in a cultural landscape with countless places of interest: Vienna, Eckartsau Castle, the Imperial Palace Festival Hof, the medieval city of Hainburg, Carnuntum Archaeological Park, Devín Castle and Bratislava in Slovakia.

Donau NÖ Tourism, Auland-Carnuntum regional offices: Information about short trips in the national park region, restaurants and accommodations. Tel. +43(0)2163/3555 Ext. 10; Fax: +43(0)2163/3555 Ext. 12
E-mail: auland-carnuntum@donau.com
www.aulandcarnuntum.com

Vienna Tourism: Tel. +43(0)124555, Fax: Ext. 666, info@wien.info, www.info.wien.at

The Donau-Auen National Park is one of six **Austrian national parks**. The parks are not only important to Austria, but rather are of vital international interest. For more information, visit www.nationalparksaustria.at.



Imperial Festival Palace Hof. This is where Prince Eugene and the Habsburgs held their celebrations. The Palace Hof is now a popular day trip destination.

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