

Our natural heritage

Discovering the untouched.

NATIONAL
PARKS
AUSTRIA



MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG VON BUND UND EUROPÄISCHER UNION



LE 14-20
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Touched by the untouched

Austria is renowned for the beauty of its landscapes and its natural diversity: from towering glaciers in the west to dense mountain forests, deeply carved valleys, dynamic wetland meadows, and the great steppe lake in the East. The six local national parks preserve this precious natural heritage for us and future generations. Everyone should visit a national park at least once in their life and discover the impressive diversity of landscapes, animals, and plants. Because: „Extraordinary experiences await in all six of these gems of nature.“

Apart from the Hohe Tauern, the list of Austrian national parks also includes the Thayatal, the Kalkalpen, the Donau-Auen, the Gesäuse, and the Neusiedler See – Seewinkel. Together, they make up 2,380 square kilometres, so around three per cent of the country's surface. As important centres with various functions, the national parks protect the greatest treasures of our nation. They are considered flagship projects of nature conservation and species diversity as well as places of rest, recreation, and relaxation. At the same time, they are both research locations and visitor attractions and provide jobs for more than 300 people. Since these unique nature conservation projects are of enormous importance, the federal government and the regional state governments share the responsibility.

Coordinated by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW), the six national parks work closely together under the umbrella brand „Nationalparks Austria“. The new information campaign „Nothing touches us like the untouched“ aims at reaching out to a wider public. Its goal is to familiarise people with the local treasures of nature, to make them reflect, and, particularly, to prompt them to visit a national park.

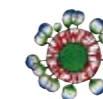
In the course of the initiative „Best of Austria“, the BMLFUW puts the spotlight on the six nature reserves as Austrian model projects. The professional cross-border cooperation with our neighbours or the ranger training, for example, have earned international recognition.

This magazine introduces you to the unique features of our six national parks and provides you with numerous tips for discovering the breath-taking diversity yourself: Kilian, Fortuna, or Glocknerlady can be spotted soaring through the air at the Hohe Tauern; at the Thayatal, you can encounter otherwise rare crayfish. The Donau-Auen are home to European pond turtles and, at the Gesäuse, you can find around 50 different kinds of orchids. At the Kalkalpen, you might catch a glimpse of a lynx and Neusiedler See – Seewinkel awaits you with an abundance of birds. Have fun reading and exploring!



Erich Mayrhofer, chairman of Association Nationalparks Austria

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Idea and concept: Ludwig Schleritzko, Agnes Erler, Nationalparks Austria
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- 1 DONAU-AUEN**
- established in 1996, 9,300 ha
 - Vienna and Lower Austria
 - river dynamics, alluvial forests
 - Common kingfisher, European pond turtle, Danube crested newt, black poplar, white-tailed eagle



- 5 NEUSIEDLER SEE – SEEWINKEL**
- established in 1993, 9,674 ha/A
 - Burgenland and Hungary
 - saline ponds, wet meadow, grazing lands, reed belt of the steppe lake
 - resting and breeding area for migratory birds, hotspot for birdwatchers



- 2 GESÄUSE**
- established in 2002, 11,306 ha
 - Styria
 - rocky cliffs, forests, alpine meadows, river
 - endemic species like Dianthus plumarius, sandpiper, chamois



- 6 THAYATAL**
- established in 2000, 1,330 ha/A
 - Lower Austria and Czech Republic
 - water gap, deciduous woodlands, arid grasslands
 - high plant biodiversity, black stork, wildcat, European green lizard



- 3 HOHE TAUERN**
- established in 1981 (C), 1984 (S), 1991 (T), 185,600 ha
 - Carinthia, Salzburg and Tyrol
 - glaciers, waterfalls, Austrian stone pine forests
 - Bearded vulture, Alpine ibex, eagle



- 4 KALKALPEN**
- established in 1997, 20,825 ha
 - Upper Austria
 - spruce-fir-beech forests, gorges, mountain pastures
 - Lynx, white-backed woodpecker, Alpine sawyer beetle



IMAGES: S.Zeman (Nr. 1), H. Kolland (Nr. 2), NPHT (Nr. 3), Kronsteiner (Nr. 4), Archiv NP Neusiedler See – Seewinkel (Nr. 5), NPHT E. Kahlbacher (Nr. 6), C. Thomas (S. 5, 1)

Six unique gems of nature

Six of Austria's ecologically most valuable regions have been declared national parks. Together, they protect and conserve our most valuable local gems of nature. Because nothing touches us like the untouched.

As different as the natural treasures of the national parks may be – they all have the same goals. Despite their unique features, the six reserves share common values. The core message of the current information campaign of Nationalparks Austria is: „Nothing touches us like the untouched.“

This might sound paradoxical, since truly untouched nature is rare in the Central European cultural landscape. At least if you associate untouched nature and wilderness with areas which have been spared from any kind of human cultivation - such as pristine forests which have

remained unchanged since the last ice age. Wilderness of this kind has scarcity value, even in national parks. That is why the local national parks dedicate themselves to preserving and restoring nature's original, pristine condition.

„Let nature be nature“

The history of Austria's national parks began in 1971 with the „Heiligenblut Agreement“. Three federal states – Carinthia, Salzburg, and Tyrol – decided to establish the Hohe Tauern National Park. Ten years later, it became Austria's first official national park. The project started a

trend; today, there are six ecologically most precious areas in this country that have been declared national parks.

In many respects, the national parks work according to the principle „let nature be nature“. Trees are allowed to grow old, deadwood is left lying on the forest ground, rivers can carve their own ways. And animals profit from this. Wildcats feel at home in the Thaya valley, lynx roam the Kalkalpen and the Gesäuse, bearded vultures soar around the Hohe Tauern, white-tailed eagles breed in the Danube-Auen, and the Neusiedler See – Seewinkel National Park is full of geese.

„Nothing touches us like the untouched.“

When nature is left untouched, we humans benefit as well. National parks share their natural diversity with all visitors and provide unforgettable insights into pristine nature and the remarkable beauty of the landscapes.

The internet and television might flood us with images, films, and explanations about flora, fauna, and natural phenomena, but nothing leaves a greater impression than our own personal experience.

For those who listen to the sound of the river, who feel the sunbeams on their skin, and breathe in the scent of the



Bridge to the future

The six Austrian National Parks - here a glance at the Thaya valley - preserve our natural heritage for future generations. And for all of us. Everyone is invited to get to know these gems of nature right on our doorstep.

forest, the slogan becomes reality: „Nothing touches us like the untouched.“

Further information nationalparksaustria.at

What is a national park?

In order for an area to be recognised as a national park, a number of principles of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have to be fulfilled. For example, at last 75 per cent of the nature reserve have to be economically unused. Compliance with the regulations is checked regularly.

National parks are ambassadors for a responsible and appreciative approach to nature.

The main duties of the national parks include the protection of valuable ecosystems, the preservation of biodiversity, as well as education and research. Visitors are welcome. Further information: iucn.org

Nationalparks Austria

Nationalparks Austria is the umbrella brand of the six Austrian national parks. Together, all six national parks cover an area of 2,380 square kilometres, that is around three per cent of the surface of Austria. Via the umbrella organisation Nationalparks Austria, they coordinate their actions and present themselves to the public.

INFOS & KONTAKT:

Verein Nationalparks Austria
Projekt „Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Nationalparks Austria 2015 – 2018“

A-2082 Hardegg, Merkersdorf 90
Tel.: +43 (0) 2949/70 05 75
E-Mail: office@nationalparksaustria.at
Webseite: nationalparksaustria.at

IMAGES: D. Manhart (1), C. Thomas (1)



Je intakter die Natur, desto besser schmeckt's. Deshalb kommen viele Ja! Natürlich-Köstlichkeiten aus besonders geschützten Gebieten: den Nationalparkregionen Österreichs. Und damit Sie sofort wissen, woher genau, sind die jeweiligen Bio-Spezialitäten mit dem Nationalpark-Logo gekennzeichnet.



Mehr unter www.janaturlich.at



GIBT'S BEI: **BILLA** **MERKUR** **ADEG**



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Life by the river

The Danube traverses the national park over a distance of 36 kilometres and shapes the Donau-Auen habitat with its branches (l.). Visitors can explore the park on boats together with rangers. Local here: the European pond turtle (r.)

Donau-Auen National Park

The free-flowing Danube is the lifeline of one of the last great water meadow landscapes in Europe, the Donau-Auen National Park. Its unique mosaic of biospheres provides refuge for a range of rare animal and plant species. The European pond turtle, the white-tailed eagle, the little ringed plover, and many more appreciate that.

A hard shell, webs between their toes, and yellow spots on the body. This description only fits one particular animal, the European pond turtle. „In the 1990s, young animals were still extremely rare. Today, you can observe turtles of all ages when they bask in the sun on a tree trunk or next to the water,” says Maria Schindler, who directs the long-term conservation programme for the only turtle native in Central Europe.

Where? - At the Donau-Auen National Park; the only place in Austria where the prehistoric reptiles are native.

Unique water meadow landscape

Located between the cities Vienna and Bratislava, the Donau-Auen protect one of the last large water meadow and wetland areas in Europe. Here, red deer are belling in the morning fog, beavers are busily gnawing on willows and poplars, kingfishers soar through the air, and common tree frogs give a melodic performance.

The national park is inhabited by more than 30 species of mammals and 100 bird species as well as eight kinds of

reptiles, 13 kinds of amphibians, around 60 species of fish, and thousands of different invertebrates, such as ramshorn snails, great diving beetles, or harmless freshwater jellyfish. And nothing shapes it more than the river which gives the park its name, the Danube. Over a distance of 36 kilometres, the Danube is the lifeline of the national park. Free-flowing – more so than in many other places – it shapes the surrounding landscape. In fact, the water meadows and wetlands only exist thanks to the force of high water and low water.

With water surface fluctuations of up to seven metres, the Danube soaks and aerates the soil, supplies it with nutrients, uproots trees and creates deadwood, piles up new islands of sand and gravel, and washes them away elsewhere. In this way, the river creates a highly specialised mosaic of habitats that attracts many rare animals and plants.

Amongst them is the black poplar, which is endangered all across Europe and which prefers to take root on sandy, gravelly locations; or the sparrow-sized little ringed plover, which needs freshly-raised gravel bars in order to breed.

These birds had almost disappeared completely from the Donau-Auen, now there are more than 30 breeding pairs again.

The endangered species get support from the national park, which is ensuring that the Danube can flow even more freely with numerous river engineering projects. Formerly disconnected backwaters are now reconnected to the Danube and many hard river embankments have already been removed. „Together with our partner the waterway administration company viadonau, we have renaturated around five kilometres of river bank and have removed about 100,000 cubic metres of stone blocks from revetments and groynes,” Christian Baumgartner, director of the nature and science section of the Donau-Auen National Park, says.

Green wilderness along the great river

The credo of the riparian forest management is „less is more“. The white-tailed eagles, in particular, profit from that. „They need large protected areas, old nesting trees, and quiet areas where there is no forestry in order to breed, because they are highly sensitive to disturbance,” bird expert Georg Frank of the national park explains. The Donau-Auen provide exactly that. Since 2005, the birds of prey, which had previously been extinct in Austria, have been breeding again in the Donau-Auen. There are currently five breeding pairs in the area and, during the winter, even 17 white-tailed eagles – including winter visitors.

But others benefit from the rigorous conservation measures as well, namely visitors of the national park. They now have a chance of catching a glimpse of the majestic birds



again. What is the best way to experience the green wilderness along the great river? – From the river, of course! Guided by a ranger, you can explore certain Danube branches and gravel banks via a rubber dinghy, canoe, or a traditional tschaika. Themed excursions furthermore offer insights into the special fauna and flora of the Donau-Auen; from listening to red deer to botanic rarities like the wild grapes to firefly night hikes.

Those who want to explore the national park on their own can do so on a 100-kilometre road network with 21 different nature trails, theme trails, and circular walks. And, maybe, you will spot a white-tailed eagle in the sky, a beaver swimming by, or a pond turtle enjoying a sunbath. Watch out, the park has lots to offer!

INFORMATION & CONTACT:

Website: donauauen.at

Event programme:

donauauen.at/besucherinfo/

Donau-Auen National Park Blog:

blog.donauauen.at/

There are two visitor centres, in Orth/Donau and in Vienna.

schlossORTH National Park Centre
A-2304 Orth/Donau

Tel.: +43 (0) 2212/35 55

Email: schlossorth@donauauen.at

wien-lobAU National Park House
Dechantweg 8, A-1220 Wien

Tel.: +43 (0) 1 4000-49495

Email: nh@m49.magwien.gv.at

NATIONAL PARK TIPS:

- The „castle island“ at the national park centre in Orth/Donau is a great spot to observe the animals and plants of the area (underwater observatory).
- The new national park lounge at the visitor centre allows a look underneath the surface of the Danube and is an ideal place to recharge your batteries.
- The rubber dinghy tour is an excursion highlight. They take place once per week in the months March till October.
- Donau-Auen National Park – the green classroom: children and school groups can experience the water wilderness first-hand in the course of special programmes. Tip: holiday and English camps are offered during the summer months.

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Mountain with a view

The Gesäuse is one of the cradles of Austrian mountaineering. But the national park doesn't offer only rugged rocks, but also tours for anyone (r.). Beauty blooms all around (l.).

Gesäuse National Park

Water, forests, pastures, and rocks: these four elements characterise the Gesäuse National Park and provide a habitat for a multitude of endemic species. Whether alpinists, adventurers, hikers, or families – the Gesäuse has something to offer for every visitor.

Bubbling, rushing, and untamed, the river Enns carves its way straight through two mountain ranges, the Buchsteinstock and the Hochtorn Range. Their lime stone peaks reach more than 2,300 metres above sea level and put their characteristically rough mark on the Gesäuse National Park in Styria.

But the hard shell contains a soft core. Half of the national park is covered in forest; mostly spruce, fir, and beech trees accompany hikers on their tours. In between: surprises in the form of springs, wet meadows, and marshes. And many charming alpine pastures. They have become veritable hotspots of biodiversity at the Gesäuse.

Seen this one before? The feathered pink

Species diversity plays an important role in the Gesäuse.

„We are in the middle of an endemic hotspot,“ says Andreas Hollinger, employee at the national park, mountaineer, and photographer. „We have many endemics, that is animals and plants which can only be found in one restricted geographical area, here in the Gesäuse.“ Most of them are insects and plants. „These species have their habitat here, because, during the last ice age, the Gesäuse provided areas which were not covered by glaciers.“ The Gesäuse is home to more endemic species than any other area in the country. „This is a very special spot in Austria.“

One of the endemic species has become a kind of mascot of the nation park: the dainty feathery pink, a flower with petals in shades of pink. „It grows right next to the hiking trail leading to the Buchsteinhaus“ Andreas Hollinger says. The Gesäuse's flora generally has quite a number

of remarkable species to offer. „We have about 50 species of orchids here – amongst them lady's slipper, bee orchid, marsh orchid.“ If you do not have a trained eye, you might overlook these botanic treasures. „For that reason, we offer guided hikes with rangers, who will draw your attention to our botanic stars.“

Another celebrity of the Gesäuse National Park is the sandpiper. A bird that is actually common and widespread but that needs quite particular conditions to breed. And those conditions are hard to find in Central Europe. The sandpiper migrates from the south and breeds wherever the habitat fits. Some of the few suitable nesting areas are along the rivers Enns, Johnsbach, and Hartelsbach. „The sandpiper breeds on gravel banks“, Andreas Hollinger informs us. „It needs gravel areas next to rivers which are not flooded due to hydroelectric plants.“ The Enns, which can flow wildly and freely within the national park, provides such conditions. „The most significant breeding population of the sandpiper in Styria can be found in the Gesäuse – five recorded pairs each year.“ This is the birds' way of letting us know that they are comfortable here at the Gesäuse. „They are consequently an important indicator which shows us that things within the nation park are all right for them.“

Mountains for everyone

The Gesäuse presents itself as steep and inaccessible in places. „There are areas where no human has ever ventured – like really ragged dolomite cliffs where mother nature rules,“ Andreas Hollinger tells us. „The national park has a dolomite base. It forms dramatic, inaccessible peaks – dangerous and not worthwhile for sportive activities. The

INFOS & CONTACT:

Website: nationalpark.co.at

Event programme:

nationalpark.co.at/veranstaltungen

The information office in Admont is the central information and contact office in the Gesäuse National Park.
Hauptstrasse 35, A-8911 Admont
Tel.: +43 (0) 3613/211 60 20,
Email: info@nationalpark.co.at



Landscape does the visitor management for us.“ Only on top of the dolomite, the limestone rock faces climbers love so much rise into the sky. In other areas, the Gesäuse is more accessible and also has lots to offer for people who are not too keen on mountaineering. There are numerous activities for families and the park provides barrier-free access for wheelchair users. „That is quite unusual for alpine landscapes,“ Andreas Hollinger, who has a hard time picking a favourite season, informs us. „It is particularly impressive in May and June, when the fresh green emerges and the orchids bloom,“ he says. „But autumn is gorgeous, too, when the mixed forest presents its wide range of colours. And going on ski tours in the winter is something quite special as well.“

NATIONAL PARK TIPS:

- The area is equally popular with strollers and mountaineers. Barrier-free accessibility makes the national park a travel destination for all visitors. Informations: nationalpark.co.at/de/naturerlebnis/barrierefrei
- The national park is popular with white-water sports fans: enjoy the River Enns from a kayak or rafting boat.
- The Willow Dome discovery centre, a living building made out of willow rods, invites children to experiment and discover. Another highlight: the world's first ‚walk-in‘ ecological footprint.
- The Gesäuse Photography School offers beginner and advanced courses, rental equipment, and help and advice all year round for anyone who wants to capture the beauty of nature. Information: nationalpark.co.at/de/fotoschule-gesaeuse

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At the top

The Hohe Tauern National Park preserves a unique alpine biosphere around Austria's highest mountain, the Großglockner. The bearded vulture lives here (r). Waterfalls (l.) are part of the Hohe Tauern's charm.

Hohe Tauern National Park

Gigantic scales, impressive glaciers, a great diversity of animals and plants, as well as a wildlife conservation programme of Europe-wide importance are the flagships of the Hohe Tauern National Park. It is thanks to the park's dedication that the remarkable bearded vulture is once again flying across the entire Alpine region. Personal encounters with the animals are quite possible at the Hohe Tauern.

A shadow moves across the alpine pasture. Maybe it is that of Glocknerlady, of Kilian, or of Fortuna? It is caused by almost three-metre-wide wings gliding through the air – without a single flap, seemingly effortlessly. We are talking about the bearded vulture, the largest bird of prey in Europe.

That the animal is flying again is extraordinary, since it was eradicated at the end of the 19th century. People assumed the birds would prey on lambs, chamois, and even children. In reality, bearded vultures have an appetite for quite different things. As scavengers, they live on whatever others leave behind; preferably bones. In the Hohe Tauern National Park, the largest nature reserve in Central Europe and the Alps, the impressive birds of prey have found a new, worthy home.

The 1,856-square-kilometre-big Hohe Tauern National Park extends over three federal states – Carinthia, Salzburg, and Tyrol – and offers visitors a range of extremes. 266 mountain peaks, amongst them the Großglockner, tower over the region at over 3,000 metres above sea level. The glaciers are just as impressive: around 300 of them, including the Pasterze – Austria's longest glacier – make

the Hohe Tauern literally a cool place. 551 lakes sparkle in the midst of mountain forests and alpine pastures; large amounts of water cascade down cliffs all around, such as the Krimml Waterfalls, the highest waterfalls in Europe.

The return of the bearded vultures

In 1986, this phenomenal landscape provided the setting for the start of one of the most successful wildlife conservation programmes in Europe. About 100 years after their eradication, four young bearded vultures were released into the wild again. In the Kruml Valley in the Rauris area – better known as valley of the vultures today – they soared into the sky to establish the nucleus of a new, Pan-Alpine population.

The Hohe Tauern National Park, which was leading the way in the vulture project from the beginning, cooperates with many partners all across the Alpine region. Until today, the national park has returned 59 birds to the wild, amongst them Glocknerlady, Kilian, and Fortuna. Around 25 bearded vultures currently inhabit the local skies; in the entire Alps there are already about 220 of them. Something that's particularly gra-

tifying: the repopulated birds have been successfully breeding in the wild for many years.

The diversity of the Alps

The bearded vulture is not nearly the only animal that feels comfortable in the Hohe Tauern National Park. Around 40 breeding pairs of golden eagles and, during the summer months, up to 100 griffon vultures, soar through the air. Groundhogs romp about the alpine grassland. Chamois and Alpine ibexes climb around in exposed areas, though the latter also like to stay near Kaiser Franz Joseph Höhe. The small protagonists are no less impressive. The summer meadows are covered in butterflies, 500 to 700 species have been recorded along the flank of one high valley alone. In total, the Hohe Tauern are home to about 10,000 animal species – almost half of the mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians of Austria's native species.

How can this biodiversity be explained? – Above all by the vertical dimension of the national park. Between the valleys and the highest peak one finds all biospheres and climatic zones from Central Europe to the arctic. There's a niche for everyone.

In combination with its path network of over 3,000 kilometres, the park has lots to offer in terms of nature discovery. The glacier educational trail Innerschlöß, which leads through one of the most magnificent valleys of the eastern Alps, the geo trail route on the mountain Schareck, from where you can catch a glimpse of more than 100 peaks over 3,000 metres, or one



of the other approximately 60 themed trails? Visitors are spoilt for choice. The motto should be: consciously experience nature with all your senses.

This is also the motto of the events the national park offers – from guided herb hikes to wildlife excursions to glacier exploration tours. Visitors can even book their own ranger and look out for bearded vultures together. The harmless birds are rather curious and are not afraid to inspect hikers up close. The chances of encountering a vulture are particularly good in the Kruml Valley. With its picturesque landscape and the cosy Alpine huts, the valley is a hiking paradise for the whole family. Fancy a tête-à-tête with a bearded vulture?

INFORMATION & CONTACT:

Website: hohetauern.at

Event programme: nationalparkerlebnis.at

There are three national park centres: in Mittersill (Salzburg), Mallnitz (Carinthia), and Matrei (East Tyrol).

Mittersill National Park Centre
Gerlosstr. 18, A-5730 Mittersill
Tel.: +43 (0) 6562/40849-0
Email: nationalpark@salzburg.gv.at

National Park Centre Mallnitz
A-9822 Mallnitz 36
Tel.: +43 (0) 4784 701
Email: nationalpark@ktn.gv.at

National Park Centre Matrei
Kirchplatz 2, A-9971 Matrei i. O.
Tel.: +43 (0) 4875/5161-10
Email: nationalparkservice.tirol@hohetauern.at

IMAGES: K. Dapra (1), Petriket (1)

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Welcome to the woods

The woods characterise the Kalkalpen National Park and make forest hikes (l.) up to the mountain pastures a unique experience. The shy lynx (r.) has returned to the national park.

Kalkalpen National Park

Trees are the most crucial feature of the Kalkalpen National Park. They are part of its history, provide a home for rare animals, and characterise the beautiful landscape. And the paths through the wilderness of the forest lead to alpine pastures and mountain peaks.

The path to the top of the mountain Trämpl leads past colourful alpine meadows and beech trees. At more than 1,400 metres above sea level, one has a great view over one of the biggest forest areas in Austria, the Reichraminger Hintergebirge range. There are no transportation routes or settlements here – only lots of space for mother nature. The Kalkalpen National Park is her host and the mixed beech forest is its most important ally – best marvelled at from the Trämpl.

In some places, the forest has been forced back by avalanches, in others, the wind has uprooted trees. It used to be the basis for intensive forestry – old shelters and overgrown paths still remind us of its past. The woodland is continuously transforming back into wilderness where deadwood is left lying on the forest ground and wildlife can flourish. 400 hectare of pristine nature, in the strict sense of the word, and home to the oldest beech tree with 525 years.

„We have a mixture of different types of beech forests of various ages and compositions,“ the director of the national park Erich Mayrhofer says. „This diversity has to do with the many different influences the forest is exposed to,“ he

continues. „The area is characterised by ravines, deep valleys, a combination of rocks, forests, and summit areas. A total of 480 kilometres of forest streams run through the park, up to three metres of snow are common during the winters – including avalanches and snow breakage. Even during the summer time, we have large amounts of precipitation, floods, and storms.“

The land of the golden eagle

From the top of the Trämpl, the many streams are only vaguely perceptible through the trees. They traverse the forest like a mosaic, structuring the entire landscape of the national park, which is located between the Steyr valley, the Enns valley, and the Haller Mauern range at the border to Styria. The mountain torrents are the source of life for many animals, amongst them 170 vertebrate species and 115 types of birds living here in the Reichraminger Hintergebirge and the Sengengebirge.

A golden eagle soars through the sky. At least three breeding pairs have found a home at the Kalkalpen. „These forests provide a home and shelter to particularly rare ani-

mals,“ Erich Mayrhofer says. „Amongst the so called ‘Big 5’ are the golden eagle, which is quite typical for the area, the lynx, which has returned to us thanks to repopulation programmes, the red deer, as well as two animals whose habitat depends on the beech: the white-backed woodpecker and the Rosalia longicorn, a seven- to eight-centimetre-long beetle.“ The lynx makes things a bit more difficult for visitors than the golden eagle and stays hidden. „But it leaves clues in the form of scent marks or remains of prey,“ Erich Mayerhofer says. „Our experts provide insights into the animal’s way of life as it quietly roams its territory.“



INFORMATION & CONTACT:

Website: kalkalpen.at

Event programme: kalkalpen.at/system/web/veranstaltung.aspx

There is one national park centre in Molln and Reichraming, respectively, as well as the visitor centre at the Wurbauerkogel, the National Park Lodge Villa Sonnwend, and the Hengstpasshütte info centre in Rosenau (self-catering hut).

Molln national park centre
Nationalpark Allee 1, A-4591 Molln
Tel.: +43 (0) 7584/36 51
Email: nationalpark@kalkalpen.at

Ennstal visitor centre
Eisenstraße 75, A-4462 Reichraming
Tel.: +43 (0) 7584/36 51
Email: info-ennstal@kalkalpen.at

Wurbauerkogel Panorama Tower
Dambach 152, A-4580 Windischgarsten
Tel.: +43 (0) 7562/200 46
Email: panoramaturm@kalkalpen.at

Hengstpass visitor hut
A-4581 Rosenau Nr. 60
Tel.: +43 (0) 664/88 43 45 71
Email: info-hengstpass@kalkalpen.at

Villa Sonnwend National Park Lodge
Mayrwinkl 80, A-4575 Roßleithen
Tel.: +43 (0) 7562/20 591
Email: villa-sonnwend@kalkalpen.at

The Hohe Nock mountain is the highest point in the Kalkalpen National Park and the highest peak of the Sengengebirge, a northern outlier of the Limestone Alps. „Due to the altitude, there is lots to see and to experience, all year round.“ The forest at the Kalkalpen National Park begins relatively far down, so access to the area is easy. „Along the river Reichraming into the Hintergebirge, for instance, where there is a cycle path alongside an old forest railway. You can go deep into the area, here, with a minimal elevation gain.“ Exploring the park on a mountain bike is, however, rewarding as well. „The 21 managed alpine huts at about 1000 to 1400 metres above sea level are particularly popular. Around half of them sell food and drinks,“ Erich Mayrhofer says. Islands in a sea of trees, whose soundscape is beyond comparison.

NATIONAL PARK TIPS:

- The national park is located between the Enns valley, the Steyr valley, and the Haller Mauern range. The Gesäuse National Park is only 8.5 kilometres away.
- There are three main points of access to the national park: the Steyr valley, the Windischgarsten valley, and the Enns valley. The various and diverse hiking areas of the national park can be accessed via these points.
- On Sundays during the summer – from mid-July to early October – the national park hiking bus runs from the bus terminal in Steyr to Reichraming, through the Hintergebirge to the Hengstpass, and back. Bicycle transport is free.
- There are three bivouac points at the national park.
- Its 32 different forest types are a highlight of the Kalkalpen National Park.

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Vast beauty

The many salt water lakes at the Neusiedler See - Seewinkel National Park turn into breeding and roosting places for migrating birds every year. The unique landscape in the east of Austria can be explored by bicycle. Or with binoculars (l.). A welcome visitor: the black-winged stilt (r.)

Neusiedler See - Seewinkel National Park

The Neusiedler See - Seewinkel National Park knows how to keep its true beauty concealed. It only discloses it to those who give something valuable in return: time. If you look closely, you will be rewarded: this is a hotspot for biodiversity.

The distinctive call of the Eurasian bittern echoes over the reed belt. The sounds of the Northern lapwing coming from the wet meadows are reminiscent of computer games from the 1980s and the Eurasian sky lark trills like a didgeridoo in its flight. Unimpressed, the avocet stoically searches the shallow water of the salt water lake for food with its characteristic beak. Around 340 bird species live in Austria's only steppe national park, the Neusiedler See – Seewinkel National Park. Located in the east of the country, it protects an about 300-square-kilometre area together with the Hungarian Fertő-Hanság Nemzeti Park in a cross-border cooperation. Approximately 90 square kilometres of it are located on Austrian soil between Weiden am See and Apetlon.

When the sun is shining, when it is dry and temperatures reach 30°C, that is definitely bad weather; at least for the

inhabitants of the reed belt, the meadows, pastures, and salt lakes of the Neusiedler See – Seewinkel National Park. The hotter it gets, the further the water recedes.

Landscape with substance

The national park around Europe's westernmost steppe lake is considered one of the most biodiverse national park in Austria. The reason behind this is its low altitude – a feature that can have a beneficial effect on species diversity. „You look at the landscape,“ Alois Lang says, „and you think you do not see very much.“ The biodiversity of the Neusiedler See - Seewinkel National Park is well hidden, it's in the detail. The shortest guided hike through parts of the area takes three hours. There are so many different habitats to discover, so many different animals and plants to observe.

Every season has, moreover, its very special appeal. „You can experience nature all year long,“ Alois Lang states. „The national park is located low and it is flat; you do not need any climbing assistance and there is no winter closure due to snow.“ In the springtime, when the water levels are high and the meadows and pastures are still flooded in many places, there is something new happening every day: the first goslings, breeding wading birds, frogs, blooming grassland. Animals are courting and hatching. And spring is also the spawning season of the various amphibians, such as the rare green toad with its distinctive colour or the delicate Danube crested newt.

The warmer it gets during the summer, the lower the water levels sink. Animals withdraw, plants stop growing. Where there were flooded areas in spring, there are now salt layers. In August, the first birds begin their migration to the south. It is the time of the bee-eaters, dragonflies, grasshoppers, of flocks of starlings, shanks, and countless other animals, which can be best observed during the hours of the early morning or late evening.

Hotspot for migrating birds

Until October – when temperatures of up to 20°C are still possible –, bird migration can be observed. The ‚winter geese‘ and many other winter visitors – shrikes, hen harriers, rough-legged buzzards – start arriving at the Neusiedler See - Seewinkel National Park. The sea aster is blooming and covers the area in its purple colour. When temperatures drop below zero, the Lake Neusiedl turns into Europe's

INFORMATION & CONTACT:

Website: nationalpark-neusiedlersee-seewinkel.at

Event Programme:

nationalpark-neusiedlersee-seewinkel.at/programmexkursionen.html

The information centre of the Austrian part of the Neusiedler See – Seewinkel National Park is the single point of contact for all visitor and is the starting point for all activities offered in the conservation zone.

Hauswiese, A-7142 Illmitz

Tel.: +43 (0) 2175/3442, Fax: -4

Email: info@nationalpark-neusiedlersee-seewinkel.at



biggest ice skating rink. Despite most animals and plants going into hibernation, some species endure the cold wind: white-tailed eagles and common buzzards, seagulls and ducks, and singing birds can be seen in droves; and sometimes bizarre snow drift on top of that. „Many visitors are not aware of the national park's size“, Alois Lang says. „One tour is not enough if you want to see everything.“ Those who are prepared to dedicate time will be rewarded: with fragile, beautiful landscapes and a very special flora and fauna.

NATIONAL PARK TIPS:

- The 300-square-kilometre-big, cross-border national park is located between the eastern Alpine foothills and the Little Hungarian Plain.
- The barrier-free visitor centre in Illmitz includes a 12-metre-high tower, which provides a great view over the Little Hungarian Plain.
- Excursions take place with a minimum of six participants all year round and last at least three hours.
- Canoe tours for up to 10 participants and solar boat trips on Lake Neusiedl for up to 20 people can take place at any time, if booked in time (three weeks prior)
- The reed belt's rich variety of bird species can be observed from the newly built jetty at Illmitz lake resort in the course of an excursion taking place at dawn or nightfall.

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Life by the river

The valley of the Thaya has carved itself deep into the landscape and invites visitors to explore its natural treasures (l.). The rare and shy wildcat (r.) lives here in the forest.

Thayatal National Park

It may be the smallest national park in Austria in terms of size, but it is the greatest one in many respects. The Thayatal National Park protects one of the last semi-natural valley landscapes in Central Europe, provides a habitat to an astonishing diversity of species, and caused a nature sensation with the rediscovery of the European wildcat. And it transcends borders.

2007 was the year of a veritable sensation. The European wildcat, which had been thought to have gone extinct, showed us that it was very much alive. The animal was rediscovered in the forests of the Thayatal National Park.

Austria's smallest national park is located along the border to the Czech Republic in the very north of Lower Austria's Waldviertel (Forest Quarter) area. With 13.3 square kilometres, it might be modest in size, but the national park is a frontrunner regarding biodiversity. In just a single day, 22 scientists discovered 1,188 animal and plant species in an only 75-hectare-big area. More than 950 species of butterflies, more than 100 bird species, and 22 of the 28 native bat species inhabit the park.

Tracking the wildcat

Rare crayfish can be found here, black storks stalk through the water looking for prey, green lizards lay basking in the

sun on warm stones, and wildcats sneak through the thicket.

It had disappeared off the radar for decades, but the national park's scientists wanted to know more. After all, the natural deciduous forests of the Thaya valley satisfy all habitat needs of the shy mouser. Hollowed-out deadwood, overhanging rocks, and stone runs are suitable lairs; forest glades with meadows and moderate winters ensure food supply all year round.

In order to find out for sure whether there were any wildcats left, the national park had to resort to a trick. Lures – wooden stakes covered in valerian – were set up all around the nature reserve. And it worked. Attracted by the scent, the wildcats rubbed against the wood and left clear evidence: fur and, with that, DNA. The DNA analysis finally confirmed it; there are wildcats in the Thayatal! It is difficult to tell how many of them there are, but twelve fur samples of the nocturnal animals have been identified so far.

Tracking down wildcats in the Thayatal forests yourself will, admittedly, be difficult – particularly during the day. The wildcat hiking trail is, however, a great way to gain insights into the natural habitat of the animals.

New visitors to the Thayatal should also go see the landmark of the national park, the 378-metre-high meander cut-off. From that point, you get a good idea of the valleys characteristics with the many bends and meanders of the River Thaya.

Cross-border nature conservation

Cut up to 150 metres deep into the rock, the river loops along narrow meadow strips and steep slope forests full of beech and oak trees; one of the last semi-natural valley landscapes in Central Europe. A true gem of nature right at the border to the Czech Republic. Fortunately, it does not stop there.

If you cross the Thaya bridge in Hardegg – Austria's smallest town with around 90 inhabitants – you do not only go from one country to another but also from one conservation area to the next. That would have been impossible during the era of the iron curtain, but nowadays it is reality. The Thayatal National Park and the Czech Národní park Podyjí are collaborating across borders. They may have their own independent administrations, but they share the same goals: „For instance, we coordinate management plans, cooperate in research projects, and have a common responsibility regarding inspection rounds,“ Christina Übl of the Thayatal National Park explains. In addition, cross-border events and excursions are core elements of the collaboration.

The national park centre near Hardegg is the starting point for all excursions and the ideal place to begin your exploration of the Thayatal. Here, you can recharge your

INFORMATION & CONTACT:

Website: np-thayatal.at

Event programme:

np-thayatal.at/de/pages/events.aspx

Thayatal National Park Blog: blog.np-thayatal.at/

The national park centre is located between Merkersdorf and Hardegg.

A-2082 Hardegg, Österreich

Tel.: +43 (0) 2949/7005-0

Email: office@np-thayatal.at



batteries – the restaurant prepares local specialities – and enjoy the nature around you. The national park can be explored as intensively as you want via six hiking trails and two bike trails; from a short stroll to easily accessible observation points to demanding long-distance trails.

Those who want to get to know the Thayatal even more closely should do so together with a ranger – explore the area, get information about current nature-related issues at first hand, or find out how scientists tracked down the wildcats during your own night hike.

And do not forget to visit ‚Frieda‘ and ‚Carlo‘. The two wildcats, which live at the national park's centre as ambassadors of their species, are the undisputed stars of the Thayatal. With 450 square metres, their home is the largest wildcat enclosure in Austria. Do not underestimate the small ones!

NATIONAL PARK TIPS:

- At the new exhibition „Natur-Geschichten“ („Natural histories“) you can explore the Thaya valley via tablets. A large aerial photo highlights 15 attractions and provides information, pictures, and videos.
- You can observe the two wildcats Frieda and Carlo at regular show feeding.
- The wildcat night hikes are especially popular. Join a ranger on their patrol through the forest of the national park, check the wooden lures, and witness a night time feeding.
- Six e-bikes and four 7-gear bikes can be rented at the national park centre.
- Eight caravan sites are available at national park centre.

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