

Agreement on the conservation of populations of European bats

National report of Austria

A. General Information

Non-Party Range State: Austria

Date of Report: April 2019

Period covered by report: January 2016-December 2018

Competent Authorities: none. Austria consists of nine federal Laender, each of which implements EU-legislation in their own different nature protection laws.

Appointed Member of the Standing Committee: none

Voluntary Member of the Advisory Committee: Friederike Spitzenberger, BatLife Österreich, Kirchengasse 22/7, 1070 Wien

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B. Status of Bats within the Territory of the Non-Party Range State

1. Summary Details of Resident Species

There are 27 species of bats in Austria. *Miniopterus schreibersii* has gone extinct. Only one maternity colony of *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* is left. Further range extensions of *Pipistrellus kuhlii* and *Hypsugo savii* have been recorded. Numbers of *Myotis myotis* and *Myotis emarginatus* females in maternity colonies are increasing. Numbers of hibernating *Rhinolophus hipposideros* are decreasing since 2013.

2. Status and Trends

There is no national database in Austria accessible to the public. Each Bundesland reports to the Environmental Agency Austria. There are no prospects to compile a new national Red List of threatened mammals of Austria. Thus, species extinctions and range contractions and extensions are not recorded and therefore unknown.

3. Habitats and Roost Sites

The annual monitoring of 60-70 important nursery roosts in Burgenland has been continued by BatLife Österreich.

The monitoring of 20 important underground sites in Styria conducted by volunteers in collaboration with Zoological Museum Joanneum and BatLife Österreich (Sackl et al. 2011) since 1973 has been continued.

In the course of an infringement procedure, important bat caves of the Weizklamm in Styria have been protected as Natura 2000 sites in 2019.

4. Data Collection

Raw data are compiled by bat conservation organizations and federal administrations of the nine Laender. At the moment, most of them are not available to the public.

Data used in Habitats Directive reporting (from reports, articles, personal comments etc.) are stored by Environment Agency Austria (Umweltbundesamt Wien).

C. Measures Taken to Implement Article III of the Agreement

Even though Austria is a Non-Party Range State, legislation in the nine Laender provide protection of bats and bat roosts according to some of the Articles of the Agreement.

5. Legal measures taken to prevent the deliberate capture, keeping or killing bats, including details of enforcement actions used to support such measures

Nine different laws in the nine federal Laender protect bats. All species of bats and their roosts are protected; it is forbidden to intentionally disturb, catch, take from the wild, transport, injure or kill bats, as well as to possess, acquire, or pass on bats or parts of them; any damage to bat roosts and resting places is forbidden. Additional regulations apply in areas protected under the EU Habitats directive, where it is forbidden to allow the degradation of habitats, and certain projects have to pass an environmental impact assessment. A special permit is necessary to keep bats for rehabilitation. The competent authorities to approve applications for this permit vary between federal Laender (see below). There is also legislation on animal welfare, stating that keeping wild animals with special requirements regarding their keeping conditions – like bats – is subject to registration, and minimum requirements have to be met.

6. Sites identified and protected which are important to the conservation of bats

As the protection of important bat sites under European legislation was not sufficient, the Commission launched a treaty infringement against Austria, and ordered to nominate further suitable sites by the end of 2015. In the course of this infringement procedure, important bat caves of the Weizklamm in Styria have been protected as Natura 2000 sites in 2019.

7. Activities carried out to promote the awareness of the importance of the conservation of bats

The comprehensive exhibition (“Friends of the Night”) on bats established in the castle of Lockenhaus, Burgenland and associated guided tours, bat nights and training courses are very well-attended. The exhibition itself and guided tours are provided in German and Hungarian. A webcam broadcasts live images from a Geoffroy’s bat’s colony to the exhibition.

In 2016-2018, BatLife Österreich showed a travelling exhibition on bats in 24 schools in Burgenland. In cooperation with the Nature Park Geschriebenstein, a suitcase with educational material focused on bat biology is available to all kinds of schools free of charge.

Bat emergence observations and bat talks for the general public and in combination with school projects are organised by BatLife Österreich and KFFÖ (Koordinationsstelle für Fledermausforschung und -schutz)

8. Responsible bodies, in accordance with Article III.5 of the Agreement, nominated for the provision of advice on bat conservation and management

The nine federal Laender nominated different bodies.

9. Additional action undertaken to safeguard populations of bats

Protecting bats in buildings is one of the main objectives of BatLife Österreich. In close cooperation with the diocese, disturbance and destruction of maternity roosts located in lofts of churches through refurbishment work have been completely avoided since many years. Numerous volunteers watch bat colonies inhabiting public and private buildings (Bat Life Österreich and KFFÖ).

10. Recent ongoing programmes (including research) relating to the conservation and management of bats

1. In 2018, the federal nature protection authority of Burgenland commissioned BatLife Österreich to assess potential impacts on resident and migrating bat species by erection of wind-turbines in the district Oberpullendorf. The size of the district area is 701 km², 234 km² of which is covered by forests. Using a new method (Engelberger et al. 2019) to assess the habitat suitability of forest stands for bat species living in forests or using forest as hunting areas, a zoning concept showing taboo zones and potential suitability zones was accomplished.
2. Several wind parks with a total of approximately 400 wind-turbines on an area of 200 km² in northern Burgenland and adjacent parts of Lower Austria operate since years without any cut-in wind speed management. During ongoing approval procedures for repowering these wind parks, the competent authority will implement measures to minimise bat fatalities compiled by BatLife Österreich.
3. The show-cave “Hermannshöhle” in Lower Austria is a well-known mass hibernaculum of the lesser horseshoe bat. Two standardised annual counts of hibernating individuals have been conducted since 1985 (Spitzenberger & Engelberger 2013). As the bat population inhabiting the cave was threatened by further economic exploitation plans, BatLife Österreich started a monitoring project with infrared light barriers and photo-trapping to study the annual use of the cave by different bat species in 2015. First results confirm regular visits of 16 species and show that the cave is used not only as hibernaculum but also during swarming and is a roosting place for single individuals during summer.
4. The last Austrian maternity colony of the greater horseshoe bat uses the loft of the castle in Eggenberg in Styria. The castle is owned by the federal Bundesland Styria and managed by the museum “Joanneum”. Joanneum submitted a rural development project proposal to conserve and improve the roosting conditions in 2015 and the project was approved in 2019 (LE 14-20). Some of the planned conservation measures will start in the current reproductive season.

D. Functioning of the Agreement

11. Measures taken to implement Resolutions adopted by Meetings of Parties

Even though Austria is a Non-Party Range State, several actions to protect bats were taken in the nine Laender which are in accordance to some Resolutions adopted by the Meeting of Parties.

Resolution 4.3 Guidelines for the protection and Management of Important Underground Habitats

Guidelines are used in negotiations with owners and authorities to protect and manage underground hibernacula.

Resolution 4.5 Guidelines for the Use of Remedial Timber Treatment

Diocese Burgenland does not use poisonous timber treatments in lofts of churches any longer.

Resolution 5.2: Bat Rabies in Europe

No rabid bat was found in Austria yet.

References

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