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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Uekötter, F. (2004). The old conservation history - and the new: an argument for fresh perspectives on an established topic. *Historical Social Research*, 29(3), 171-191. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.29.2004.3.171-191>

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The Old Conservation History – and the New: An Argument for Fresh Perspectives on an Established Topic

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Abstract: The German conservation movement is a classic topic of environmental historiography, and yet interpretations have often been characterized by a constrained focus. In a critical discussion of the literature, this article seeks to identify new venues for research. After outlining the breadth of conservation-related developments in late 19th-century Germany, it identifies four directions for future studies: collective biographies of the conservation movement's personnel; friends and allies of the conservation movement and the way conservationists defined their relations towards them; the environmental opposition; and the relationship between the environmental movement and nature as an actor. Taken together, the article argues for a less partisan history of the conservation movement, assuming that such an approach will ultimately serve better the interests of both the environmental history community and the conservation movement.

When Hans-Ulrich Wehler wrote his seminal monograph on Imperial Germany in the early 1970s, he started by asserting that “It is no longer possible nowadays to write a history of the Emperor's Reich of 1871 in the traditional style of political history.”¹ Like historians of Imperial Germany in the 1960s, historians of nature protection are increasingly realizing nowadays that they are

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¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918* (Göttingen, 1973), p. 11. All translations from German by the author – F.U. Interestingly, this quotation is missing in the English translation which was published twelve years later. (Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* [Leamington Spa, 1985].)

caught on a dead end street.² To be sure, the mainstream of current conservation history, focusing as it does on key people and organizations and the ideas they fostered, has produced some valuable books and syntheses; but it is clear that this approach is reaching its limits. At the same time, a few recent publications have struggled to produce new perspectives and approaches to what seemed to be an exhausted topic, attesting to a growing discontent with conventional schemes of interpretation. This essay summarizes some of these attempts, showing that nature protection history is anything but a well-researched topic. In doing so, it demonstrates that the real problem faced by today's environmental historians is not that the fruitful topics have been exhausted but rather that their methodological tools are too blunt to harvest them.

For some time, it seemed that the chief methodological problem of environmental history was its deeply entrenched pessimism. Historians were talking so intensively about decline and decay that "declensionist" – meaning "a narrative structure, or plot, that portrays environmental history as a downward spiral" – is now a subject entry in Carolyn Merchant's *Columbia Guide to American Environmental History*.³ If declensionism has grown unfashionable in recent years, a second, related problem is still with us: the partisan nature of environmental history writing. There are few fields in which this problem is as pressing as in conservation history, which is frequently conceived as something of a heroic struggle of a few wise people against the destructive powers of modern capitalism. Environmental history has shown a clear sympathy for "advocates of nature" and a corresponding distaste for their opponents. As a result, the plot of many environmental history monographs ends up being excessively simple. "Environmental politics involves three competing forces: individuals and groups motivated to protect and improve the environment, the environmental opposition, and the institutions of policy development and implementation," Samuel Hays noted in a recent publication. In fact, Hays boldly extended this scheme of interpretation into the future: "There is little doubt that they will proceed in relatively similar patterns for many decades to come."⁴ However, historians favoring this scheme of interpretation find themselves repeating the same story over and over again, albeit in different times and places; and there is good reason to assume that narratives of this kind are not only boring and repetitive but also actually misleading due to their excessive simplicity. Therefore, it is high time to seek new questions and perspectives that will turn conservation history into a research frontier again.

² It should be stressed from the outset that I will use the term "conservation" in this paper as a synonym of "nature protection". Any allusion to American interpretations of conservation as resource management and an antonym to preservation would be misleading.

³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History* (New York, 2002), p. 206. For a critical discussion of this tendency see Frank Uekoetter, "Confronting the Pitfalls of Current Environmental History: An Argument for an Organisational Approach," *Environment and History* 4 (1998), pp. 31-52.

⁴ Samuel P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics since 1945* (Pittsburgh, 2000), p. 2.

Roots

It is common to note that German nature protection as we know it today emerged out of the nineteenth century. Every student of the field knows and frequently refers to a number of seminal publications when talking about the roots of the German conservation movement: Wilhelm Heinrich Riehs 1854 *Naturgeschichte des Volkes*, Ernst Rudorff's stirring essay in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* of 1880 that encapsulated many of the ideas behind the conservation associations that evolved around the turn of the century; and Hugo Conwentz' memorandum of 1904 that led to the foundation of the Prussian Office for the Protection of Natural Monuments in 1906.⁵ The narrative implied by these references is obvious: first, there were ideas, then came civic associations, then came state agencies that took care of the issues. And, of course, few historians refrain from quoting the devastating assessment of contemporary conservation work by Hermann Löns, who complained of the marginality of nature protection ("*Pritzelkram*") shortly before World War One.⁶

Löns was mistaken – and in much of the same way as are many of today's historians of nature protection: they conflate the history of conservation with the history of conservation *institutions*. All too frequently, historians have taken a narrow institutional view in their narratives, assuming that the work of those institutions that explicitly identified themselves as nature protection institutions would capture the most important aspects of the field, thus treating conservation as if it existed in a vacuum. However, such a view ignores that the rise of the organized conservation community coincided with developments in other fields that showed a renewed interest in, and sometimes even a cult of, nature.

A fitting example of this is the natural history museum. Since the 18th century, these museums had served the dual purpose of research and public education. However, the educational function of natural history museums became more important since the middle of the nineteenth century, and their audience widened considerably, including not only researchers and teachers but ultimately society as a whole. The dominant approach was taxonomic: the natural history museum was supposed to illustrate the zoological system, and hence, displays were basically sets of isolated biological objects. Interestingly, this dominant mode of presentation changed around 1900. At a time when the con-

⁵ Cf. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Social-Politik* (1st edition Stuttgart, 1854); Ernst Rudorff, "Über das Verhältniß des modernen Lebens zur Natur," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 45 (1880), S. 261-276; Hugo Conwentz, *Die Gefährdung der Naturdenkmäler und Vorschläge zu ihrer Erhaltung*. Denkschrift, dem Herrn Minister der geistlichen, Unterrichts- und Medizinal-Angelegenheiten überreicht (Berlin, 1904).

⁶ Walther Schoenichen, *Naturschutz, Heimatschutz. Ihre Begründung durch Ernst Rudorff, Hugo Conwentz und ihre Vorläufer* (Stuttgart, 1954), p. 279.

servation movement was getting off the ground, natural history museums underwent what Susanne Köstering has called a “biological turn.”⁷ Museums increasingly presented animals in groups, thus permitting a demonstration of their social behavior, and in displays that gave an impression of their natural surroundings. In short, biology and ecology, not taxonomy, now determined the mode of presentation. Contemporary observers spoke of a turn from “system” to “life.”

A similar development took place in the display modes of zoos. The taxonomic mode of presentation remained dominant from the opening of the London zoo in 1828 through the nineteenth century, and continues to be influential today. From a conservation standpoint, this was a somewhat ambivalent design since it centered on scientific rather than educational motives; David Hancocks, currently a strong advocate for a reinvention of zoos, speaks derisively of “the curator’s ‘stamp collecting’ mentality of trying to get full sets of each genus.”⁸ However, a new mode of presentation came into use in the early 1900s with Carl Hagenbeck’s Tierpark in Hamburg. The Hagenbeck family had been operating a menagerie and animal park for decades when Carl Hagenbeck, Jr. opened a different kind of zoo in the Hamburg suburb of Stellingen in 1907. Hagenbeck provided generous space to the animals, displayed them in carefully crafted environments that were natural to them, and decided, against the professional wisdom of the time, to let tropical animals live outdoors, correctly assuming that they could adjust to temperate climates. In that way, Hagenbeck’s Tierpark became “the first zoo in the world to combine naturalistic landscapes, bar-less enclosures, and groups of mixed species.”⁹ Zoo professionals criticized Hagenbeck for abandoning the taxonomic, scientific approach, but visitors thought differently. The new zoo (which initially comprised only two panoramas, Africa and the Arctic) was “an immediate success with the public,” an instructive litmus test of contemporary nature appreciation.¹⁰

The contemporary concern for living creatures was not limited to animals in captivity. The first German society for the prevention of cruelty to animals was founded in Stuttgart in 1837; by 1892, there were 191 associations in this field with a total membership of 70,000.¹¹ That made Germany a worldwide leader in this respect, since only one country had more societies for the protection of

⁷ Susanne Köstering, *Natur zum Anschauen. Das Naturkundemuseum des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871-1914* (Köln et al, 2003), p. 3.

⁸ David Hancocks, *A Different Nature. The Paradoxical World of Zoos and Their Uncertain Future* (Berkeley et al, 2001), p. 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62n.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹¹ Heinz Meyer, “19./20. Jahrhundert,” Peter Dinzelbacher (ed.), *Mensch und Tier in der Geschichte Europas* (Stuttgart, 2000), pp. 404-568; p. 549n.

animals (England, with 244 associations).¹² In principle, the animal protection movement was an attractive ally for the conservation movement. In addition to its sizable membership base, it opened doors to other movements of the times like vegetarianism, nature healing, and the fight against vivisection that gained momentum in Germany with the foundation of the *Internationaler Verein zur Bekämpfung der wissenschaftlichen Thierfolter* by Ernst von Weber in 1879 (Richard Wagner and Johanna von Bismarck were among its members).¹³ However, the conservation movement stuck to its aesthetic categories, thinking of animals mainly as a decorative element within the landscape.¹⁴ Only birds were for some reason admitted to the conservation canon, with Lina Hähnle's *Bund für Vogelschutz* dominating the scene for decades.¹⁵

Perhaps the greatest potential for the conservation movement lay in the transformation of biology teaching in the late nineteenth century. In the 1880s, a book of Friedrich Junge, a schoolteacher from Kiel, became the focal point of what could be called an ecological revolution in teaching. The book dealt with a village pond as a showcase of biological life-cycles.¹⁶ Being as popular as they were omnipresent, village ponds became so ubiquitous in school teaching that some observers spoke of a "village pond movement."¹⁷ The key pillars of Junge's book were a holistic perception of nature, the concept of biocenosis, and a penchant for land that was developed and cultivated by man; the book did not imply an anti-human bias.¹⁸ For Junge, mankind was allowed to guide and dominate nature, but in order to do so, he had to know and respect the laws of nature. Interestingly, Junge's book closed with a warning of ecologically irresponsible human behavior which could destroy the pond; what if, Junge asked, an ignorant person would "thoroughly clean the lake of all the weed," thus

¹² Ibid., p. 550. For a brilliant treatise on the relationship between man and animals in England, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London, 1983).

¹³ Miriam Zerbel, "Tierschutz und Antivivisektion," Diethart Kerbs, Jürgen Reulecke (eds.), *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen 1880-1933* (Wuppertal, 1998), pp. 35-46; p. 38.

¹⁴ Miriam Zerbel, *Tierschutz im Kaiserreich. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Vereinswesens* (Frankfurt et al, 1993), p. 154.

¹⁵ Cf. Anna-Katharina Wöbse, "Lina Hähnle und der Reichsbund für Vogelschutz. Soziale Bewegung im Gleichschritt," Joachim Radkau, Frank Uekötter (eds.), *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt and New York, 2003), pp. 309-328; Anna-Katharina Wöbse, "Lina Hähnle – eine Galionsfigur der frühen Naturschutzbewegung," *Stiftung Naturschutzgeschichte* (ed.), *Naturschutz hat Geschichte* (Essen, 2003), pp. 113-130.

¹⁶ Friedrich Junge, *Der Dorfteich als Lebensgemeinschaft* (Reprint of the 1907 edition, Sankt Peter-Ording, 1985).

¹⁷ Köstering, *Natur*, p. 129n.

¹⁸ Cf. Gerhard Trommer, *Natur im Kopf. Die Geschichte ökologisch bedeutsamer Naturvorstellungen in deutschen Bildungskonzepten* (2nd rev. edition, Weinheim, 1993), p. 181; Adelheid Stippowitz, Herbert Ant, "Friedrich Junge (1832-1905). Wegbereiter eines ökologisch orientierten Biologieunterrichts," *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Didaktik der Biologie* 1 (1985), pp. 1-30.

making the water inhabitable for fish and unsuitable for watering livestock? “The weal and woe of the villagers is truly more or less connected with its village pond,” Junge noted in a phrase that is strikingly similar to current environmental rhetoric.¹⁹ However, the conservation movement, never missing a chance to miss a chance, looked the other way.

It was not until the second quarter of the twentieth century that nature protection and biology established the links that today’s proximity of ecology and conservation is founded upon.²⁰ More than any other topic, it is important to discuss the relationship between conservation and biology in an international context, for the differences are staggering. According to James Sievert, the motives of botanists, zoologists and naturalists were one of the key elements of Italian conservation during the first quarter of the twentieth century, together with tourism and the preservation of historical sites.²¹ In Russia, scientific arguments figured even more prominently, with the *zapovedniki* (nature reserves) being “off-limits to any uses except scientific research on ecological/evolutionary problems.”²² At the other end of the spectrum, the United States could establish its famous national parks without any reference to the natural sciences. The appreciation of the scenic wonders of the American West originated among educated citizens from the East, who gratefully noted that with these natural wonders, there was finally something uniquely American that Europe did not have. Therefore, national parks were essentially an expression of American cultural nationalism. It was not until the 1934 establishment of Everglades National Park that the United States opened a park that did not stand out for its scenic impact.²³ When riding through Yosemite Valley with John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, ardent ornithologist and President of the United States, kept wondering that Muir completely ignored the park’s bird population.²⁴

Conventional wisdom has it that German conservation was generally hostile to tourism. While the English conservation movement forged a strong bond with sightseeing and American conservationists were urging their fellow countrymen to “see America first,” German conservationists primarily were concerned about the damage that nature tourism inevitably produced.²⁵ As far as

¹⁹ Junge, *Dorfteich*, p. 267n.

²⁰ Cf. Thomas Potthast, “Wissenschaftliche Ökologie und Naturschutz: Szenen einer Annäherung,” Joachim Radkau, Frank Uekötter (eds.), *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt and New York, 2003), pp. 225-254.

²¹ James Sievert, *The Origins of Nature Conservation in Italy* (Bern et al, 2000), p. 101f.

²² Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom. Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachëv* (Berkeley et al, 1999), p. 3.

²³ Alfred Runte, *National Parks. The American Experience* (Lincoln and London, 2nd edition, 1992), p. 8n, 32, 108.

²⁴ Joachim Radkau, *Natur und Macht. Eine Weltgeschichte der Umwelt* (Munich, 2000), p. 269.

²⁵ Cf. Karl Ditt, “Naturschutz zwischen Zivilisationskritik, Tourismusförderung und Umweltschutz. USA, England und Deutschland 1860-1970,” Matthias Frese, Michael Prinz (eds.),

the core institutions of the conservation community are concerned, there is plenty of evidence for such a perspective. As head of the Prussian Office for the Protection of Natural Monuments, Walther Schoenichen published an essay in the late 1920s that bemoaned the “hustle and bustle in nature” (*Verrummelung der Natur*).²⁶ At the same time, Schoenichen published a book on “Dealing with Mother Green” (*Der Umgang mit Mutter Grün*) that sought to establish strict rules of behavior in nature – purportedly in a humorous fashion, though the book actually smacked of arrogance.²⁷ But again, it is important to realize that the protection of nature was a much broader ideal than historians of conservation usually realize. After all, tourist associations had a fundamental interest in the preservation of scenic beauty, and it is not surprising to find them in the forefront of many battles over conservation issues. When a quarry threatened the Hohenstoffel Mountain in the state of Baden shortly before World War One, the tourist association of Lake Constance (*Bodensee-Verkehrs-Verein*) was among the first to file a petition in protest, asking the government “to preserve the scenic beauty of the Hegau region in its totality” and to save the Hohenstoffel Mountain “for the pleasure of all friends of nature.”²⁸

In fact, many associations that nourished the aversion to nature tourism were not opposed to their own versions of it. For example, tensions abounded during the Nazi era between the Sauerländischer Gebirgsverein, whose core activity was hiking in the mountains of the Sauerland region, and the Nazi leisure organization *Kraft durch Freude*, which brought people from all parts of society to the region and encouraged, in the pejorative terminology of the Sauerländischer Gebirgsverein, “hiking as a horde” (*Hordenwandern*).²⁹ In a telling distinction, the journal of the Bavarian Bund Naturschutz noted that from the point of view of conservation, “alpine lodges are a threat if they not only house serious tourists and alpinists of good education and behavior, idealistic lovers of natures with respect and understanding for nature and other human beings, but the broad masses of men and women with strange appearance and strange behavior.”³⁰ While conservationists were loudly bemoaning the hazards of tourism, they tacitly agreed on one important point: the tourist was always someone else.

Politische Zäsuren und Gesellschaftlicher Wandel im 20. Jahrhundert. Regionale und vergleichende Perspektiven (Paderborn, 1996), pp. 499-533, and Runte, National Parks, chap. 5.

²⁶ Walther Schoenichen, “Die Verrummelung der Natur,” *Naturschutz* 11 (1929/30), pp. 132-139, 157-165.

²⁷ Walther Schoenichen, *Der Umgang mit Mutter Grün. Ein Sünden- und Sittenbuch für jedermann* (Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1929).

²⁸ Badisches Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe Abt. 235 Nr. 16725, Bodensee-Verkehrs-Verein to the Badisches Ministerium des Kultus und des Unterrichts, June 17, 1913.

²⁹ Susanne Falk, *Der Sauerländische Gebirgsverein. “Vielleicht sind wir die Modernen von übermorgen”* (Bonn, 1990), pp. 107-113. Quotation p. 113.

³⁰ Bund Naturschutz in Bayern, *Das Naturschutzgebiet am Königssee in den Berchtesgadener Alpen* (Munich, 1921), p. 17.

It is not difficult to conceive even more parallels to the rise of the German conservation movement. For example, the interest in aesthetics within forestry experienced a boom around the turn of the century, with the German Forest Association (*Deutscher Forstverein*) dedicating its convention of 1905 to the issue.³¹ At the same time, city parks expanded in both number and size. The garden administration of the city of Hannover had 1.3 million square meters of green space under its jurisdiction in 1899, up from only 78,000 square meters nine years earlier.³² Alfred Lichtwark, the renowned director of the art museum of Hamburg, wrote in a letter of 1897, “The citizen of Hamburg is wondering whether his hometown will remain habitable in the long term if we do not create a large municipal park.”³³ History associations and associations for the preservations of historical monuments had already evolved into a complex network by the early 1900s, and the similarities and parallels in both ideology and social structure are striking.³⁴ The colorful “life reform” (*Lebensreform*) movement of the turn of the century offers a rich reservoir of still further linkages.³⁵

It is important to appreciate this general background because it contrasts nicely with the self-descriptions of members of the conservation movement. While there was no scarcity of potential allies, conservationists habitually spent a good part of their energies whining about their own marginality in society at large. For example, Hans Klose complained in 1922 “that a large part of our population is indifferent, or even hostile towards the goals of conservation, being a world apart from the ideas of nature protection.” Writing on the occasion of the death of Hugo Conwentz, the first director of the Prussian Office for the Protection of Natural Monuments, Klose noted that “conservation has been in a state of stagnation due to financial and institutional reasons for some time, and now it is about to die.”³⁶ Ten years earlier, the ministry of education in the state of Baden had offered a completely different perspective: “The guiding thoughts of conservation are commonsensical among members of the educated classes nowadays,” the ministry noted in a letter to a civic association.³⁷ The difference could hardly be more staggering, and it was altogether typical of the wide gap between the idea of conservation and the conservation movement in

³¹ Rolf Zundel, *Einführung in die Forstwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1990), p. 301.

³² *Grün in der Stadt Hannover 1890-1990*. Begleitheft zur Ausstellung im Historischen Museum (Hannover, 1990), p. 23.

³³ Quoted after Hans Walden, *Stadt – Wald. Untersuchungen zur Grüngeschichte Hamburgs* (Hamburg, 2002), p. 571.

³⁴ Cf. Winfried Speitkamp, *Die Verwaltung der Geschichte. Denkmalpflege und Staat in Deutschland 1871-1933* (Göttingen, 1996).

³⁵ Cf. Kai Buchholz (ed.), *Die Lebensreform. Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900* (2 vols., Darmstadt, 2001).

³⁶ Hans Klose, “Über die Lage der Naturdenkmalpflege bei Conwentz’ Tod,” *Beiträge zur Naturdenkmalpflege* 9 (1922), pp. 465-470; p. 466, 468.

³⁷ Badisches Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe Abt. 235 Nr. 48254, Ministerium des Kultus und Unterrichts to the Vorstand des Badischen Landesvereins für Naturkunde, Feb 5, 1912.

Germany: while the general goal of conservation was by all means a popular one, the conservation movement saw itself as an exclusive minority that was constantly under siege from society at large. Conservation was part of a broad general sentiment, and yet the conservation movement captured surprisingly little of the energy such widespread support could have generated. Therefore, it is time to adopt a new perspective in conservation historiography. While historians heretofore have focused on the motives that made the protection of nature an issue in turn-of-the-century Germany, it seems more worthwhile to ask why the nature protection movement never made a determined attempt to reach out beyond its key constituency in order to form what could have become an early environmental movement. With parallel issues and movements abounding, why did the conservation movement remain so weak, and define itself as a marginal group while strategic alliances were just waiting to be forged? Answering this question will require a closer look at the kind of people that the German conservation movement did attract.

Homo oecologicus

The Stiftung Naturschutzgeschichte recently published the results of its inaugural conference in 2002. Written with the emphatic intention to provide “a résumé of the foundation’s research,” it left historians with a feeling of déjà vu: with its focus on the biographies of key conservationists, it inevitably nourished the impression that, at least in conservation history, it is still men (and Lina Hähle as the token woman in the volume) who are making history.³⁸ In fact, the foundation did not even add an introduction in order to dispel notions of this kind – a truly surprising choice in the wake of Pierre Bourdieu’s debunking of the “biographical illusion.”³⁹

And yet biographies should have a place in the history of conservation – if they ask the right questions. After all, biographical studies provide a glimpse on the kind of people that have embraced the ideology and practice of nature protection. Have certain types of people leaned more towards conservation ideas than others? Have social strata, culture, or religion determined whether people have ended up in the trenches of conservation battles? The literature already offers a number of clues. The German conservation movement drew strong support from the *Bildungsbürgertum*, (university-trained intellectuals); it was foreign to workers (who set up their own organization with the *Natur-*

³⁸ Stiftung Naturschutzgeschichte (ed.), *Naturschutz hat Geschichte* (Essen, 2003). Quotation p. 7.

³⁹ Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, “L’illusion biographique,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62/63 (1986), pp. 69-72. The lack of an introduction, and in fact any discernable concept in this book, has already noted by Albrecht Weisker in his review in *sehepunkte* 4 (2004) no. 4 (<http://www.sehepunkte.historicum.net/2004/04/3989.html>).

freunde tourist association); it was overwhelmingly male; and like intellectual Germany as a whole, it was Protestant rather than Catholic.⁴⁰ But these kinds of structural features only go so far in explaining the peculiarities of the German conservation movement. They by no means predetermine an individual's personal stance: obviously, not every intellectual supported conservation, let alone every Protestant. Apparently, there was more that made a person an advocate of conservation, and it would be worthwhile to investigate this "more" more thoroughly: what is the common thread in conservation biographies?

Once again, it is important to discuss this question in an international context. While conservation developed in most Western countries at about the same time, the precise character of the conservation movement differed considerably from one nation to another. Specifically, there was nothing comparable in German conservation to the American pride in the natural wonders of West. While American conservationists saw the national parks as physical proof of their cultural mission, there was no similar sentiment in the German conservation community. More than in other countries, German conservation grew out of an aversion *against*, rather than a passion *for*, certain things. From the outset, German conservation was characterized by an overwhelmingly defensive sentiment: conservation was not so much about cherishing something as about defending it against certain threats. In its most extreme expression, this could lead to statements in which conservationists would *rejoice* over the damage to nature. In a radio address in the early 1930s, the Bavarian Bund Naturschutz declared:

It is probably fortunate that a constant barrage of new and violent incursions is changing the face of our local nature, mercilessly robbing it ever more of its authenticity. The nakedness of nature will then open our eyes, revealing to us the loss and the poverty that ignorance and thoughtlessness has begotten. It is only then, when everything has been destroyed, that the tiny soul of man will realize what it has lost, and will slowly turn around and seek to protect nature from its utter destruction.⁴¹

In the light of statements of this kind, it should come as no surprise that, misanthropic as it often could be, German conservation frequently displayed a distinctly pinched sentimental side. In fact, the quotation shows that the pain of losing nature could even be a source of identity for the German conservation community.

This general orientation of the German conservation movement has striking parallels to the dilemma of conservatism as described by Martin Greiffenhagen some thirty years ago. Defining European conservatism as a symptom of crisis in the age of revolutions, Greiffenhagen argued that conservatism defined itself

⁴⁰ Still the most comprehensive publication on this association is Jochen Zimmer (ed.), *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit. Die Naturfreunde. Zur Geschichte eines alternativen Verbandes in der Arbeiterkulturbewegung* (Köln, 1984).

⁴¹ *Blätter für Naturschutz und Naturpflege* 15 (1932), p. 168.

not so much in terms of a certain agenda but out of a defensive stance against the program of enlightenment, making the history of conservatism appear like a rearguard action with shifting theatres of operation. A similar argument can be made for the German conservation movement: usually, it did not become active until some natural treasure was under siege. However, this general orientation led to a fundamental dilemma that conservatism never managed to escape: in seeking rational arguments against the encroachment of enlightenment, it was inevitably standing on the very same ground that it was trying to attack. “Conservative thinking is enlightened thinking that turns against its own consequences; thus, conservatism is ‘irrational rationality,’” Greiffenhagen argues.⁴² Just as conservatism employed the purportedly foreign rhetoric of enlightenment, conservation argued in (necessarily) human terms for the preservation of what conservationists defined, in a self-deceptive way, as non-human. Also, the parallelism of conservatism and conservation draws attention to the much-neglected fact that there was no obviously “true” stance in conservation. One of the peculiarities of conservatism that Greiffenhagen describes is “that there is no conservative position which has not been designated as a pseudoconservative position later on.”⁴³ The same can be said of the German conservation community: there always has been an enormous amount of infighting among conservationists on a host of issues. Even more important, the conflicts within the conservation movement never led to a “let a thousand flowers bloom” attitude. German conservationists habitually saw a multitude of perspectives as a problem and a threat, and not as a richness of opinions; and if the analogy with conservatism holds true, this dismal situation was not the result of a coincidental argumentative disposition of a few prominent figures but inherent in conservation thought.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this fundamental dilemma was that conservation never managed to define its relationship towards modernity in clear terms. Usually, all that conservationists came up with was a definition *ex negativo*: “We do not want to get back to the romantic stagecoach,” Wilhelm Lienenkämper, a Westphalian conservationist of the mid-twentieth century, declared.⁴⁴ But his emphatic pledge “to live completely and totally in our present time” was contradicted almost instantaneously when he contrasted the profits of industry with the “ethos of conservation ... the sense of responsibility towards the general public, future generations, and the Creator of all things. This is the parting of the ways.”⁴⁵ The frequent disclaimers of sheer nostalgia and antimodernism were only half the truth. Just as conservatism was ines-

⁴² Cf. Martin Greiffenhagen, *Das Dilemma des Konservatismus in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1986), p. 346.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ Wilhelm Lienenkämper, *Grüne Welt zu treuen Händen. Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege im Industriezeitalter* (Stuttgart, 1963), p. 181.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

capably tied to its opponent, the enlightenment, conservation was dialectically dependent on industrial progress with all its repercussions, in defiance of all wishes to the contrary. The call for a “different modernity” revealed more than its proponents realized.⁴⁶

Of course, this general sentiment could play out in different ways. Ernst Rudorff represents what one might call the melancholic expression of this mood: his publications revealed his personal suffering while he observed the environmental changes of the late nineteenth century, but it obviously did not bother Rudorff too much that more than twenty years elapsed between the publication of his essay in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* and the creation of an organization that would fight in its spirit.⁴⁷ In any case, Rudorff’s attitude was very different from that of a crusader like Wilhelm Lienenkämper, who defined conservation aggressively “as a revolt against the advances of technology and its transgressions.”⁴⁸ When conservationists were willing to compromise in the immediate post-war years in reaction to the general social crisis, Wilhelm Lienenkämper called for a strict defense of the movement’s ideals.⁴⁹ Of course, there was a wide spectrum of potential positions between Rudorff and Lienenkämper, but it is important to note that they grew out of the same general sentiment.

In outlining the main threads of a collective biography of the German conservation community, it is important to look beyond ideas and ideology. Frequently, historians have maligned the everyday routine of conservation work. Clearly, conservationists did not simply spend their time at home bragging about the cultural mission of German conservation – though one is tempted to think otherwise when one reads certain publications. As a highly industrialized and densely populated country, the concerns of conservation would almost certainly conflict with other interests in Germany. When setting up a national park in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, proponents routinely pointed out that the land under consideration was essentially “useless land.”⁵⁰ German conservationists could not make a similar claim; they clashed with a whole range of users. For a movement with high ideals, negotiating compromises between all parties concerned was particularly painful. William Ruckelshaus, the first head of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, argued in 1995 that as a result of its constant entanglement

⁴⁶ Cf. Thomas Rohkrämer, *Eine andere Moderne? Zivilisationskritik, Natur und Technik in Deutschland 1880-1933* (Paderborn, 1999).

⁴⁷ Cf. the description in Andreas Knaut, *Zurück zur Natur! Die Wurzeln der Ökologiebewegung* (Greven, 1993), pp. 27-36.

⁴⁸ Wilhelm Lienenkämper, *Schützt die Natur – pflegt die Landschaft* (Hiltrup bei Münster, 1956), p. xi.

⁴⁹ Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf NW 60 No. 711, p. 35R.

⁵⁰ Cf. Runte, *National Parks*. This is not meant to imply that this claim was necessarily a valid one. Whether the land was in fact useless, as Runte has argued, is a matter of dispute, and in fact doubtful in the light of constant conflicts over water and timber resources in the American West.

into countless conflicts, the agency he had helped to create was suffering from a “battered agency syndrome.”⁵¹ It seems that the German conservation community was in a similar situation.

In defining its constituency, every social movement has to make a strategic decision: should it seek to embrace a large group of supporters, knowing that this would create a pluralism of opinion within the movement, or should it aim for a small but dedicated corps of adherents with an undiluted philosophy?⁵² In general, conservationists were more comfortable with the second option; of course, a large number of supporters was important, but not at the expense of ideological coherence within the own ranks. To be sure, not all associations followed this rationale. The Munich-based Isartalverein quickly became popular among the social elite of the Bavarian capital, and the list of members of 1914 “read like a ‘who’s who’ of Munich.”⁵³ Similarly, the Bavarian Bund Naturschutz experienced a rapid growth since its foundation in 1913 and comprised 27,531 members by 1939, making it the largest association of its kind in Germany.⁵⁴ Obviously, there was a potential for a broad-based conservation movement. But the story of the Bund’s foundation is revealing: after working through a state commission for a number of years, Bavarian conservationists created the association primarily as a means to raise money for conservation purposes. However, the war and post-war inflation soon rendered the fundraising drive ineffective, and the Bund realized that members were themselves a resource for conservation. The Bund, which tapped the potential for a broad-based conservation alliance like no other association in Germany, became that way only by accident.⁵⁵

For a psychograph of the “homo oecologicus,” it is also important to look at issues of religion and gender. Though neither factor is likely to play out as simple cause and effect, it would be preposterous to treat them as marginal. Could it really be the case that the Second Denominational Age left no imprint on the conservation community?⁵⁶ It was more than coincidence that conservationists sometimes called for the protection of nature “as a deeply religious and moral obligation.”⁵⁷ And is the dominance of men within the German conservation really just another variation on the well-known theme of the marginaliza-

⁵¹ Cf. William D. Ruckelshaus, “Stopping the Pendulum,” *The Environmental Forum* vol. 12 no. 6 (November/December, 1995), pp. 25-29.

⁵² Cf. Joachim Raschke, *Soziale Bewegungen. Ein historisch-systematischer Grundriß* (Frankfurt and New York, 1988), p. 341.

⁵³ Dorle Gribl, “Für das Isartal”. *Chronik des Isartalvereins* (München, 2002), p. 58.

⁵⁴ Richard Hölzl, *Naturschutz in Bayern von 1905 – 1933 zwischen privater und staatlicher Initiative. Der Landesausschuß für Naturpflege und der Bund Naturschutz* (M.A. thesis, University of Regensburg, 2003), p. 81, 85.

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 83-85.

⁵⁶ Cf. Olaf Blaschke, “Das 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Zweites Konfessionelles Zeitalter?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000), pp. 38-75.

⁵⁷ *Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, EA 3/102 no. 29, Wutach-Brevier. Schriftenreihe der Arbeitsgemeinschaft “Heimatschutz Schwarzwald”, vol. 3, p. 51.*

tion of women in modern society? After all, it is striking that during the early decades of the conservation movement, women were particularly prominent in the campaigns for the protection of birds: Lina Hähnle's Bund für Vogelschutz was joined by Winifred, Duchess of Portland, of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in Great Britain and Mrs. Augustus Hemenway and Minna Hall of the Audubon Society in the United States. And of course, a discussion of gender should be more than taking stock of men and women. The frequent use of military terms in conservation circles, for instance, offers ripe material for a corresponding analysis of gendered rhetoric.

However, any collective biography of the conservation community must not ignore one important fact: the German conservation movement has always been a pluralistic one. Aesthetic, sentimental, elitist, racist, nationalistic, protofascist – all these labels have some degree of justification, and yet each fails as a general description of the German conservation movement. There was no institution in Germany that could claim the lion's share of attention, like the National Trust in England or the concept of wilderness in the United States.⁵⁸ Regional variations and German federalism added to the fragmentation. Why should the Verein Naturschutzpark, whose pet project was the preservation of the Lüneburger Heide near Hamburg, maintain close links with the Bavarian Bund Naturschutz? And why should the Bavarians get excited over the Prussian Office for the Protection of Natural Monuments that has received so much attention in the historiography of conservation? After all, it had been the Bavarians who had set up the first administrative body in the field, with the Landesausschuß für Naturpflege in Bavaria of 1905.⁵⁹ For southern German conservationists, hydroelectric projects were a defining issue from the outset; for conservationists in Northern Germany, this was only one of many worries. The diversity of Germany's nature was closely related to the diversity of the German nature protection movement.

Friends and Fellows

Visitors entering the Museum for the History of Nature Protection in Königswinter are confronted with two walls that intersect towards the back part of the room. One of the walls is decorated with memorabilia of the conservation movement, the other shows pictures from the history of agriculture; both follow a chronological order. The message is clear: agriculture and conservation come

⁵⁸ In this context, the definition of institutions is not limited to formal institutions but rather inspired by Douglass North: "Institutions are a set of rules, compliance procedures, and moral and ethical behavioral norms designed to constrain the behavior of individuals in the interest of maximizing the wealth or utility of principals." (Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* [New York and London, 1981], p. 201n.)

⁵⁹ Cf. Hölzl, *Naturschutz in Bayern*, p. 46.

from different backgrounds, and had nothing to do with each other for quite a long time. Even more, it depicts conservation and agriculture as two forces fundamentally at odds, and bound to clash over time. Of course, there can be no doubt that there is a fundamental conflict nowadays; horror stories about the reckless intrusions of the conservation bureaucracy into agricultural work are a standing feature in farming publications.⁶⁰ But historically, the situation is more complex. On the one hand, one of Rudorff's motivations in his drive for landscape preservation was the alienation he experienced when the re-parcelling of agricultural land changed the face of the countryside near his beloved Lauenstein hometown.⁶¹ On the other hand, some proposals from the conservation community met with favor, if not open support, among farmers. The best example was the protection of birds, which farmers embraced for reasons of pest control. In fact, the practice of catching birds in order to use feathers for fashion purposes, the key issue of the early bird protection movement, was criticized within the farming community as well.⁶² During the Nazi era, the farmer's journal *Westfälischer Bauernstand* emphatically proclaimed that "the love of nature and the love of the homeland (*Heimat*) is rooted deep in the blood of the Germans," arguing that as a result of the Nazi's agricultural policy, farmers were now again in a position to respect the demands of conservation.⁶³ After the passage of the National Conservation Law in 1935, the journal carried an enthusiastic article by Hans Klose.⁶⁴ And mechanization did not necessarily extinguish the farmers' sympathies for conservation issues: in an essay in the notoriously techno-euphoric journal *Die Technik in der Landwirtschaft*, the main forum for Taylorism in the field of agriculture, an engineer listed the proficiencies that a farm engineer would need in addition to professional skills. The first item on his list was "love of nature."⁶⁵

There was, then, at least some common ground between conservationists and farmers; and it is worth asking why commonalities of this kind generally have received less attention than the points of conflict. One of the more extreme examples was the reaction of the officials in charge of nature protection in the regional administration of Detmold, who received a letter from a training and conference center of the Protestant church in 1961: faced with the plan of a

⁶⁰ E.g. Armin Asbrand, "Neiss stellt Ultimatum," *Landwirtschaftliches Wochenblatt Westfalen-Lippe* no. 40 (October 2, 2003), p. 19.

⁶¹ Knaut, *Zurück*, p. 28.

⁶² Cf. Friedrich Schwabe, "Der wissenschaftliche, natürliche Vogelschutz und seine Bedeutung für Land- und Forstwirtschaft," *Vorträge gehalten anlässlich der sechsten sächsischen Landwirtschaftlichen Woche in Dresden vom 25.-29. Januar 1926 und des Vortragskurses für praktische Landwirte in Leipzig vom 5.-7. Januar 1926* (Dresden, 1926), pp. 43-52; p. 52.

⁶³ *Westfälischer Bauernstand* 91 (1934), p. 404.

⁶⁴ Hans Klose, "Naturschutz und Forstwirtschaft," *Wochenblatt der Landesbauernschaft Westfalen* 92 (1935), p. 1208.

⁶⁵ Hans Sack, "Bauer und Fabrik-Monteur," *Die Technik in der Landwirtschaft* 20 (1939), pp. 197-199; p. 197.

high-profile conference on conservation with the goal of “demonstrating to the conservation administration that they have a large number of friends and fellows in our state,” the officials bluntly ignored the proposal. In fact, they filed the letter without sending even the most superficial response.⁶⁶ Of course, this may have been coincidental; but if this behavior reflected a tacit sentiment that there was something wrong about having a “large number of friends and fellows,” it would not be totally misleading. More than once, conservation campaigns gave the strange impression of broadly-based movements that constantly complained about their own marginality. When Wilhelm Münker organized a campaign against outdoor advertising in the early 1950s, applause came not only from conservationists of all camps but also from prominent figures like Wilhelm Röpke, Walter Gropius, and Heinrich Lübke. Nevertheless, Münker saw his battle as that of a lone David facing a fierce Goliath (while lacking a slingshot).⁶⁷ In an annual report, Wilhelm Lienenkämper once lashed out against conservation officials driven by a “fear of being unpopular.”⁶⁸ From such a perspective, lack of popularity was not a liability but a source of pride; and even though one should not generalize from a hardliner like Lienenkämper, his comment suggests the problems that conservationists had with friends and fellows.

Unfortunately, historians have frequently parroted conservationists’ claims to marginality, rather than challenging them. For example, the conflict over the Hohenstoffel Mountain in the Hegau region in southwest Germany has been told as the lonely battle of the author-activist Ludwig Finckh against a horde of enemies.⁶⁹ But in fact, the protest was broadly based from the outset. Within a matter of months, support for the preservation of the scenic mountain came from a whole host of actors ranging from the state geologist to the Bund Heimatschutz.⁷⁰ As early as 1911, the district administration in Engen asked in a letter to the ministry of education “if and how the destruction can be stopped.”⁷¹ However, a review of the existing rules and regulations led to a dismal result: there was no legal way to prevent the opening of a quarry at the Hohenstoffel Mountain.⁷² Ludwig Finckh was part of a broad alliance that failed to achieve results not out of lack of support, but of legal means; it would

⁶⁶ Cf. Staatsarchiv Detmold D 1 no. 17225, Evangelische Akademie Rheinland-Westfalen to the Regierung Detmold, December 21, 1961.

⁶⁷ Cf. Frank Uekötter, *Naturschutz im Aufbruch. Eine Geschichte des Naturschutzes in Nordrhein-Westfalen 1945-1980* (Frankfurt and New York, 2004), chap. 2.

⁶⁸ Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf NW 60 no. 711 p. 35R

⁶⁹ Cf. Volker Ludwig, “Die Entstehung des Naturschutzgebietes ‘Hohenstoffel’,” *Hegau* 42 (1997/98), pp. 153-190; Kurt Oesterle, “Doktor Faust besiegt Shylock. Wie Ludwig Finckh den Hohenstoffel rettete und wie der Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler als sein Mephisto ihm dabei half,” *Hegau* 42 (1997/98), pp. 191-208.

⁷⁰ Cf. Badisches Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe Abt. 235 no. 16725.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Bezirksamt Engen to the Ministerium des Kultus und Unterrichts, December 7, 1911.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Badisches Ministerium des Innern to the Ministerium des Kultus und Unterrichts, February 23, 1912.

take a regime with a good deal of contempt for the rule of law, the Nazi regime, to save the Hohenstoffel.

Like adherents to all social movements that claim high ethical standards, conservationists could not simply judge friends and allies by whether their actions contributed to their cause. The conservation movement had to probe deeper than that: was the action taken in the right spirit? And would the action be in line with the public image of conservation? The issue of hunting provides a fitting example of these divergent, and often conflicting, rationales. Environmentalists long have argued that as a result of excessive game populations, increased hunting is an important precondition for a more natural forest vegetation. But those who have tried to implement policies of this kind have experienced opposition not only from the hunting lobby – increased hunting usually results in less impressive sets of antlers – but also from an enraged public: a forest official who sought to reduce the game population in the state of Bavaria once found himself denounced by a German tabloid as “the Eichmann of hunting.”⁷³ When plans emerged in the 1940s to reduce the swan population on Lake Constance, the conservation official in charge indicated his sympathy – after all, swans had been introduced artificially to Lake Constance, largely to attract tourists – but also noted that on the issue of hunting, the conservation administration could not offer more than tacit approval: “Conservation cannot take the initiative in this case for psychological reasons.”⁷⁴

While the “friends” of conservation were usually subject of intensive scrutiny, with conservationists carefully distinguishing between a core group of “true believers” and a wider array of merely “tactical” allies, one ally usually was taken for granted: the state. Once again, one has to resort to an international perspective in order to understand the peculiarities of the German situation. In the United States, more than 50 years elapsed between the designation of Yosemite as a nature reserve and the creation of the National Park Service in 1916.⁷⁵ In Prussia, two years elapsed between the memorandum of Conwentz and the inauguration of the Prussian Office for the Protection of Natural Monuments, thanks to the notoriously efficient “Althoff system.” German conservationists would routinely bemoan the weakness of state institutions, but from an international standpoint, things looked far more positive: in a letter of 1922, a Russian conservationist addressed the head of the Prussian Office as “the apostle of the humane nature protection movement.”⁷⁶ The prominence of state authorities inevitably left a marked imprint on the mentality of the German con-

⁷³ Cf. Wilhelm Bode, Elisabeth Emmert, *Jagdwende. Vom Edelhobby zum ökologischen Handwerk* (3rd edition, Munich, 2000), p. 9. Also see *Der Spiegel* no 21 (2004), p. 160n.

⁷⁴ Badisches Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe Abt. 235 Nr. 47680, Der Landesbeauftragte für Naturschutz to the Minister des Kultus und Unterrichts als Höhere Naturschutzbehörde, October 10, 1942.

⁷⁵ Runte, *National Parks*, pp. 29, 103.

⁷⁶ Bundesarchiv B 245/214, p. 50.

servation community: the state was a fixture in German conservation thinking almost from the outset, resulting in a distinctly German brand of etatist conservation. To this day, the German conservation community is characterized by a dense system of formal and informal links between civic organizations and the state, and it is not only information that the network's members are exchanging. More than once, civic associations have received significant contributions from public funds – an issue that is notably absent from current conservation historiography.

It is important to note that the strong etatist leaning of the German conservation community did not imply a general absence of conflicts between civic associations and the state administration. Conflicts were numerous and often intense, though they rarely led to a general breakdown of communication. After all, work within a state administration followed a logic that differed significantly from that of a social movement. It favored the pragmatist who was ready to compromise over the idealist; and a collective biography of the German conservation community would be well advised to include a separate chapter on state officials. But in spite of conflicts, prominent officials often enjoyed a remarkable reputation among conservationists. To give just one example, Wilhelm Lienenkämper spoke admirably of Hans Klose even though he represented the type of power broker that was anathema to Lienenkämper's personal ideals.⁷⁷ Klose was an administrator with managerial skills, a talent for organization, flexibility in molding difficult compromises, and few principles that stood in the way. When the Hohenstoffel Mountain was threatened once again by a reopening of the quarry after World War II and conservationists in all parts of Germany were aghast at the prospect of finally losing the Hohenstoffel after 35 years of campaigning, Klose stood out as the person who wanted to compromise, simply noting that "politics is the art of the possible."⁷⁸ It was, in a way, the credo of many governmental advocates of nature protection.

Enemies

Few things are more revealing of the current state of conservation historiography than the lack of attention to the environmental opposition. A few years ago, Samuel Hays became one of the few authors who drew attention to this striking imbalance: "A wide range of literature exists about the organized environmental movement, written by those who associate themselves with it, those who oppose it, and those who view themselves as relatively neutral. But the environmental opposition as a subject for writing is rarely encountered."⁷⁹ Typi-

⁷⁷ Lienenkämper, *Schützt die Natur*, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Bundesarchiv B 245/3 p. 60.

⁷⁹ Hays, *History*, p. 109.

cally, the environmental opposition only comes into focus in an indirect way. Since the environmental opposition – which is usually synonymous with industry – refused to give in on certain points, conflicts arose; in order to understand these conflicts, one has to give at least momentary attention to this party, which in most cases means little more than pointing out that industry was guided by monetary interests. The environmental opposition is, in a word, the enemy. It is not a party with rights and legitimate interests.

It is high time that conservation history abandons this partisan perspective. The need for a more nuanced picture is particularly pressing in the German case.⁸⁰ After all, there are few countries in which the rights of the environmental opposition were curtailed as extremely as in Germany. In accordance with the Nazi doctrine of “the common good above the individual good,” paragraph 24 of the National Conservation Law of 1935 allowed a confiscation of property for conservation purposes without compensation – a provision that obviously implied a stark violation of civil rights.⁸¹ Interestingly, even authors who were generally sympathetic towards the law’s provisions sensed that this stipulation crossed a threshold: in his comment on the national conservation law, Karl Cornelius noted that its use should be confined to “cases of egoism.”⁸² However, when money was scarce and action was important, officials could be more flexible in this respect: when the discovery of a system of caves led to the closure of a quarry in the vicinity of Warstein in 1948, the conservation administration successfully fended off all demands for compensation, leaving the owner of the quarry with a reported loss of some 170,000 DM.⁸³ The history of conservation will remain incomplete if it fails to give proper regard to those people who were put at a disadvantage by conservation measures.

What About Nature?

A few years ago, David Blackbourn addressed a provocative question to the environmental history community: “What about *real* geographies – if you will

⁸⁰ For an attempt to bring these people into a history of American conservation, see Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature. Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001).

⁸¹ Cf. Edeltraud Klueting, “Die gesetzlichen Regelungen der nationalsozialistischen Reichsregierung für den Tierschutz, den Naturschutz und den Umweltschutz,” Joachim Radkau, Frank Uekötter (eds.), *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt and New York, 2003), pp. 77-105; p. 97n.

⁸² Karl Cornelius, *Das Reichsnaturschutzgesetz* (Bochum-Langendreer, 1936), p. 45.

⁸³ For the details of this case, see Frank Uekötter, “Einleitung,” Joachim Radkau, Frank Uekötter (eds.), *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt and New York, 2003), pp. 13-29; pp. 27-29.

pardon that provocative adjective?”⁸⁴ Much of the conservation literature continues to miss out on this question – including most of this essay, which concentrates on human beings rather than ecology. This omission is by no means the result of contempt for nature. After all, focusing on human beings is what historians are trained to do: “The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies,” Marc Bloch noted in his famous *The Historian’s Craft*.⁸⁵ Also, Blackbourn’s question was not meant to challenge the importance of recent investigations into the human construction of nature, or even an argument for a return to the naive concept of wilderness that Cronon and others were criticizing.⁸⁶ Still, discussions of the human factor in conservation work must not obliterate a simple but important fact: nature is more than a human imagination. Nature is not only a cultural construct but also a physical reality. More than ten years ago, Donald Worster noted in an essay on *Doing Environmental History*: “It is time we bought a good set of walking shoes, and we cannot avoid getting some mud on them.”⁸⁷ In retrospect, it seems that environmental historians have not taken Worster literally enough.

Therefore, “bringing the environment back in” should be a rallying cry for environmental historians. The environment is more than a backdrop for conservation conflicts – it is also an actor in its own right, and should be dealt with accordingly. Of course, such a postulate has its own problems. On the most general level, it requires an interdisciplinary approach: one needs to combine the historian’s skills with those of biologists, geologists, and other disciplines of the natural sciences. Furthermore, it needs a different time frame: natural processes often need decades and centuries to take place, making the hustle and bustle of human politics appear like “surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs.”⁸⁸ In other words, there is a need for an environmental “*longue durée*” – to use Braudel’s famous terminology – that takes a longer look than historians usually do.⁸⁹ Finally, and most importantly, “bringing the environment back in” forces environmental historians to be more skeptical towards simple narrative schemes. Nature has its own

⁸⁴ David Blackbourn, *A Sense of Place. New Directions in German History. The 1998 Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute London* (London, 1999), S. 15f. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁵ Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (Manchester, 1954), p. 26.

⁸⁶ Cf. William Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground. Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York and London, 1996). Also see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995), for a popular presentation of this theme.

⁸⁷ Donald Worster, “Appendix: Doing Environmental History,” Donald Worster (ed.), *The Ends of the Earth. Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge et al, 1988), pp. 289-307; p. 289.

⁸⁸ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1 (London, 1981), p. 21.

⁸⁹ Fernand Braudel, “Histoire et Sciences sociales. La longue durée,” *Annales* 13 (1958), pp. 725-753.

logic, and does not care for human attributes of “good” or “bad” results. For example, environmentalists have fought hard for the restoration of quarries in order to camouflage industry’s “sins towards nature” – but with a few years’ distance, observers frequently find these restorations the most unnatural aspect of abandoned quarries.⁹⁰ These kinds of developments challenge us to reconsider our own narratives, and to adjust them accordingly.

A *Nature* article recently drew attention to an interesting correlation: “countries rich in species and identified as containing priority areas for conservation have lower governance scores than other nations.”⁹¹ Since the governance scores used for this article were based on the extent of corruption, one could formulate the following rule of thumb by way of conclusion: the more corrupt a country, the greater its biological diversity. So should conservationists embrace corruption? The authors’ rather trivial conclusion – “these results stress the need for conservationists to develop and implement policies that reduce the effects of political corruption” – suggests that the fundamental irony of their findings never occurred to them.⁹² More than anything else, the correlation between corruption and biological diversity shows that nature has a subversive tendency to defy human standards, and environmental historians should not mind. After all, it is this kind of irritation that provides the ultimate proof for this essay’s basic contention: that in spite of decades of research, some of the most important questions on the history of nature are still waiting to be explored. The frontier may be closer to home than one usually thinks.

⁹⁰ Cf. Uekötter, *Naturschutz im Aufbruch*, pp. 123-126.

⁹¹ R. J. Smith, R. D. J. Muir, M. J. Walpole, A. Balmford, N. Leader-Williams, “Governance and the Loss of Biodiversity,” *Nature* vol. 426 no. 6962 (November 6, 2003), pp. 67-70; p. 68.

⁹² *Ibid.*