

The Green Belt contains a series of areas of great ecological value, which have evolved and been conserved along the former Iron Curtain. Ever since the borders were opened, many of the precious natural landscapes are threatened to be destroyed by the building of new roads and other interventions. And that despite the great potential these areas have for nature and the people living in the Green Belt area.

Therefore, together with its partners, the Austrian League for Nature Conservation aims to preserve these natural oases.

**Please support us in doing so!**

# European Green Belt

A vision  
is taking shape



Lower Austria: The river March as seen from the Thebener Kogel (A. Schneider)

## From death strip to lifeline

The Iron Curtain, this inhuman border, divided Europe for nearly 40 years. From the Barents Sea to the Black Sea an unsurmountable political barrier was created, physically marked with walls, barbed wire and mines.

Throughout Europe, due to the isolation and heavily restricted access, these border zones became death strips - deserted and unused.

At the same time the border zone granted nature a pause. A temporary respite which, unwittingly, allowed for the development of something, which has become ever so rare in our intensively used landscape, namely a piece of wilderness.



Thus, the border area served as a retreat for rare animals such as whinchat, black stork and otter, plants such as the Bohemian gentian, Sea aster and Carniolian lily.

Dry meadows, pieces of forest paradise, flood plains, bogs and mires, and landscapes rich in ponds and heaths developed.

Bohemian gentian (T. Engleder);  
Field fleawort (K. Fischer);  
Whinchat (piclease - E.Thielscher)



Burgenland: Horses grazing at Lake Neusiedl (J. Limberger)

## The world's largest biotope network

The European Green Belt is longer than 12,500 km. It spans 24 countries and can be divided into four sections:

The **Green Belt of Fennoscandia** starts from the Barents Sea and runs between Norway, Finland and Russia; the **Baltic Green Belt** stretches along the Baltic Sea coastline. "Our" **Central European Green Belt** runs along the borders of Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Italy. The **Southeast European Balkan Green Belt** starts from the three-country border Austria/Hungary/Slovenia and extends until the Black Sea, along the borders of Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece and Turkey.

The Green Belt runs through the whole of Europe and, as the longest and **largest ecological network of the world**, is well on the way to becoming an impressive symbol of peaceful co-existence, common nature conservation and sustainable development. Mikhail Gorbachev is the patron of this ambitious project.



White-tailed Eagle (WWF-J.Pickett);  
Map of the Green Belt (European Green Belt Initiative)





Lower Austria: Thayatal National Park (A. Schneider)

## The Green Belt in Austria

In Austria, the Green Belt weaves its way from the corner of Bavaria nestled between Bohemia and Upper Austria **for more than 1,200 km** until Styria and then on towards the Balkans, to Carinthia, where it leaves Austria in the direction of the Adriatic Sea, bordering six neighbouring countries and passing through 145 municipalities.

The Green Belt is home to a staggering number of rare and endangered animal and plant species, which makes it unique for nature conservation and as ecological network. The Green Belt is often described as a **"string of natural pearls"**, which comprises extraordinary natural and cultural assets, such as the Bohemian Forest, the floodplains of the rivers March and Thaya, Lake Neusiedl in Burgenland, the wine region of Southern Styria or the Karawanken Mountains.



Since June 2005, visitors of the Green Belt & Natura 2000 Infocenter in Leopoldschlag, close to the Czech Border, can get an impression of the great natural areas along the Upper Austrian Green Belt. In 2015 the second Green Belt Center opened in Windhaag, where visitors are invited to discover the diversity and history of the European Green Belt.

Straw mandl at Illmitz/Lake Neusiedl (A. Schneider),  
Horned viper, Carinthia (H. Happ),  
Former border fence (R. Hofrichter)



Upper Austria: River Malsch on the border to the Czech Republic (A. Schneider)

## Life along the Green Belt

Strictly speaking, the Green Belt does not resemble a band or belt, but rather a string of pearls of irreplaceable biotopes, which provide refuge for rare species. Wilderness evolved gradually: Along with dry grasslands on rock outcrops, floodplain forests, wetlands and flowering meadows, new habitats have emerged for many rare animals.

For example, the lynx has been prowling in the Bohemian forest for a number of years. At the Langen Luss floodplain in Lower Austria, tadpole shrimps (*Triops cancriformis*) frolic in temporary pools during stormy summers, the beautiful European green lizard (*Lacerta viridis*) sunbathes in the dry grasslands of Burgenland. In the diverse eastern Styrian cultural landscape the European roller (*Coracias garrulous*) perches high up looking out for prey and bear bridges in Carinthia facilitate immigration of the brown bear from Slovenia.



Saw-tailed bush cricket (J. Weinzettl)  
Dwarf iris (A. Schneider),  
Daffodil (Arge  
NATURSCHUTZ)





Lower Austria: Traditional landscape in Großschönau (A. Schneider)

## The Green Belt as ecological backbone

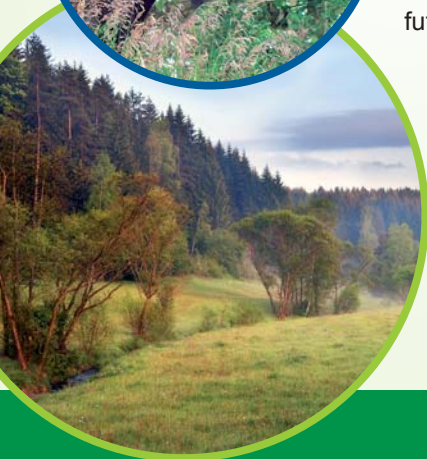
It will probably remain a wish, that on the Green Belt one protected area ("one pearl") is adjacent to another - this is hardly possible. Rather, the Green Belt will continue to contain natural areas with different protection status, linked by unprotected natural areas serving as connecting corridors - similar to a string of pearls.

Since the isolation of individual populations and the fragmentation of habitats represent a massive threat to the natural diversity of species and biocoenoses, preserving the connecting parts is all the more important!



By strengthening these connecting structures, the Green Belt can become the **"ecological backbone"** of the landscape, from which future renaturation measures will be implemented.

Only by means of reconnecting habitats can the loss of biological diversity be effectively combated.



Elk (J. Friedhuber), Migratory corridor in Leopoldschlag (A. Schneider)



Lower Austria: Hotspot March-Thaya floodplains (WWF/B. Strohmaier)

## Why is the Green Belt so important?

Large mammals require a lot of space and can cover considerable distances during their migration. Therefore, they need appropriate connecting structures, which link their habitats. These structures are referred to as **migratory or wild animal corridors**. Especially in areas with intensive farming, there is often a lack of suitable connecting structures. In addition, road traffic and buildings affect the animals on their regular migration routes.



Connecting valuable habitats, the Green Belt represents an important migration corridor. It allows large mammals such as lynx, bear, deer, elk or wolf to cross the borders, supporting a genetic exchange between populations. For only a certain minimum number of individuals provides for a healthy game stock. Here, apart from running waters, linear structures such as hedges play an important role.

In addition, many areas of the Green Belt serve as resting and breeding grounds for migratory birds.



Bear bridge over the A2 motorway in Carinthia (Arge NATURSCHUTZ); Conservation through land purchase in the Mur floodplains: here with "National Focal Point" Dr. Johannes Gepp (Naturschutzbund)



Styria: Bee-eaters can be found on the sandy slope *Katzengraben* (A. Schneider)

## The Green Belt must not tear

The vision of the Green Belt threatens to end, before it has truly taken shape. It is endangered by the conversion of valuable natural areas into intensive grassland, the construction of industrial areas, by afforestation, but especially by road construction.



Time is of the essence, because there is a growing risk that the Green Belt is cut into more and more individual isolated parts by fields and roads. This, however, also means **the end of a still largely intact network of habitats.**



In Germany, from 1989 onwards efforts have been made to protect the areas on the former inner-German border. A sales stop of the former border areas to private persons was imposed to secure the area as national natural heritage.

Encouraged by this successful German approach, the Austrian League for Nature Conservation, together with nature conservationists from all countries, will make every effort to preserve this strip of nature along the former Iron Curtain across Europe.





Burgenland: Dry grassland near Rechnitz saved through land acquisition (J. Weinzettl)

## Active contribution to preserve the Green Belt

A number of projects on the Green Belt are carried out by the Austrian League for Nature Conservation. Its Vice President, Dr. Johannes Gepp, is National Focal Point for the Initiative.

The diverse conservation efforts comprise the protection of threatened animal species (e.g. the lynx in Upper Austria), efforts to protect sensitive areas (e.g. Lange Luss in Lower Austria) and field surveys for further conservation measures in Burgenland, amongst others.

Further examples are the conservation of valuable natural areas through acquisition or maintenance measures, e.g. to save valuable floodplain-meadows on the river Mur in Styria, or support measures for migratory species (for example by purchasing forest estates on either side of the bear bridge over the A2 motorway in Carinthia).

But the Austrian League for Nature Conservation is not only active in the field. PR work - such as hikes and excursions, conferences, press releases, brochures and the Green Belt website - is intended to raise awareness among the general public about the importance of the Green Belt.



Mountain Alcon Blue, at significant risk of extinction (piclease / E. Dallmeyer); Mowing and maintaining sensitive meadows in Lower Austria (J. Frühauf)



Carinthia: Daffodil Meadows in the Karawanks (Arge NATURSCHUTZ)

## Both nature and mankind shall benefit

Austria shares a large section of the Green Belt, bordering six neighbouring countries. As National Focal Point of the Initiative, the Austrian League for Nature Conservation works for the protection of this unique wildlife corridor, with the intent of safeguarding of what has become a lifeline for nature and people throughout Europe.



Ultimately, the Green Belt Initiative is not to be dictated from above, but rather implemented together with the people in the region.

The Austrian League for Nature Conservation does not intend to replace the death fence with a "conservation fence"!



Rather, the goal is to support **landscape sensitive, extensive agriculture and forestry** on the one hand and **soft tourism, compatible with nature**, under the brand "Green Belt" on the other.

In line with the rules of "soft tourism", one can explore the unique natural areas of the Green Belt by bike and on hiking trails, enjoy regional and seasonal products of local inns and restaurants or procure them directly from the farm.

Guided field trip to the "pearls" of the Green Belt in Lower Austria (Thayatal National Park), Green Belt & Natura 2000 Infocenter in Leopoldschlag, Upper Austria (J. Limberger)



Lower Austria: a hiker's paradise along the River Kamp (A. Schneider)

## Together for the Green Belt

Again and again, personalities from all over the world express their enthusiasm for the idea of the Green Belt, for example, the world-renowned primate researcher and Peace Ambassador of the United Nations Jane Goodall, who supports the international Green Belt Camp of the Austrian League for Nature Conservation in Leopoldschlag (Upper Austria). From Arge Naturschutz to Umweltbundesamt, from the Austrian federal states to the national parks - they all contribute to the successful implementation of the Green Belt project alongside the Austrian League for Nature Conservation.

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[www.greenbeltcenter.eu](http://www.greenbeltcenter.eu)

Regional products (C. Pühringer), Boat trip on the river Mur (J. Gepp), Old customs bicycles in the open air museum Mönchhof (J. Limberger)





Lower Austria: Short-eared owl at National Park Lake Neusiedl (A. Schneider)



## Your donation helps!

With your support we can protect threatened natural areas along the former Iron Curtain. Let us take a huge step together towards realizing the vision of the Green Belt, which connects Europe and helps protecting nature.

### Account for Donations:

**IBAN: AT74 6000 0501 1014 0425**

**BIC: BAWA ATWW**

Thank you very much for your support.

*This leaflet has been produced with financial support from the project "Public Relations Work for the Green Belt in Austria" that is implemented by Umweltbundesamt (Environment Agency Austria) in cooperation with the Austrian League for Nature Conservation supported by the Austrian Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management as well as the European Union.*

MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG VON BUND UND EUROPÄISCHER UNION



Europäischer  
Landwirtschaftsfonds  
für die Entwicklung  
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Imprint: Editor, owner and publisher



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