

Engagement to conserve biological diversity

Biological diversity is the basis for human life and economic activity. Along with climate change, the dramatic loss of species, ecosystems and genetic variation is one of the greatest challenges of our time.

Our commitment to biodiversity

Conserving our natural capital has been one of Volkswagen's declared corporate objectives since 2007. Our mission statement on "Protecting biological diversity" states: "As an industrial company active all over the world with a role model function for other members of society, Volkswagen accepts its responsibility in the field of species protection." We reaffirm that the Group implements measures to support species protection "equally at all its sites". And we "recognize the benefits afforded by protected biotopes. Designated nature conservation areas and parks must not be used for economic purposes."

The role of the automobile industry

The automobile industry is exposed in many ways – along the entire length of the value chain. Extraction of mineral resources and rare earths involves serious encroachments on the landscape and is mostly carried on in countries with species-rich ecosystems and low environmental standards. And we also have to consider the use of renewable raw materials such as natural rubber or leather: both natural rubber plantations and the industrial livestock industry take up huge areas of land and have a massive impact on their condition.

At the same time the industry is highly dependent on ecosystem services: this is true of the constant supply of regrowable raw materials for vehicle manufacture and fuel production, and also of water, an important production factor. But above all it is also true of the regulatory effect of nature on traffic-induced emissions as a result of natural CO₂ sinks (seas, moorland, forests).

In view of the interactions between climate change and biodiversity loss, a large proportion of the adverse impacts on biological diversity result from the vehicle use phase, during which 80% of CO₂ emissions occur. Highway construction and transport infrastructure also contribute to fragmentation of the habitats of migratory species.

Founder member of "Biodiversity in Good Company"

As a founder member of the initiative "Biodiversity in Good Company", the Volkswagen Group has made a commitment to establishing a biodiversity management system and supporting the aims of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. This commitment encompasses analyzing the impacts

of our own business activities on biodiversity, integrating biodiversity protection in our environmental management system, defining responsibilities in environmental management, setting targets, informing suppliers, cooperating with environmental associations, and reporting and publicizing the Company's performance in the field of biodiversity.

It nevertheless remains a great challenge for the Volkswagen Group – as for many other enterprises that have little or no direct influence on biological diversity – to measure its own impact on biodiversity on the one hand, and to manage its own dependencies on ecosystem services on the other.

Participation in projects

We are therefore participating in the econsense sustainability forum's Biodiversity project group and cooperating with econsense in a joint working group of the initiative "Biodiversity in Good Company", both of which are devoted to the development of management indicators. Our collaboration in the research project on "product system biodiversity impact assessment" also served to operationalize the objective of biodiversity protection. The project was managed by the Fraunhofer Institute for Constructional Physics and accompanied by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), the Federal Environment Ministry and the Federal Environment Agency (UBA). The Volkswagen factory in Emden also took part in a case study in the context of the "NATURWERT" research project which is supported by the BfN and managed by the Institute for Ecological Business Research (IÖW).

Measures at production sites

We have also made progress with biodiversity management on our own account. Starting in 2010 we first of all investigated potential biodiversity risks at production sites in Germany. And for the sites in Germany and Europe we have also recorded whether they are in the vicinity of protected areas. In the year under review there were again no reports of cases in which Volkswagen's activities endangered the natural habitats of species shown in the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

When building or extending its production facilities, the Company gives preference to brownfield sites to help minimize land sealing. A separate biodiversity impact assessment was made before the construction of the new Volkswagen factory in Chattanooga. Where possible, we combine statutory compensation measures in order to achieve genuine added value for biodiversity on larger areas.

The Company uses classic environmental management measures at all its production sites, in other words mostly reducing waste, wastewater and solvent emissions, to ensure the soil and water protection that is so important for biological diversity. At its new factory in Chattanooga, Volkswagen has even reduced the light pollution that causes problems for some animal species.

Measures to combat water shortage

Sparing use of water, which is one of the main ecosystem services for Volkswagen as well, protects dry regions from critical water shortages. In Puebla (Mexico), Volkswagen has for many years been compensating for the factory's water consumption by means of generous afforestation in the nearby Iztaccíhuatl-Popocatepetl national park. Between 2008 and the end of 2013 the "Izta-Popo project", in which suppliers are also participating, planted 490,000 mountain spruce trees on 750 hectares of the slopes between the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl. This combats soil erosion and enables rainwater to replenish the groundwater reservoirs.

This voluntary afforestation is a joint project with the Mexican Nature Conservation Agency. Together with the National University of Mexico (UNAM), Volkswagen had previously made a detailed study of the groundwater situation in the vicinity of the Puebla factory. A similar project is due to start shortly close to the new engine factory in Guanajuato.

Voluntary nature conservation and biodiversity projects

Voluntary initiatives in the fields of nature conservation, biodiversity and biotope promotion and networking supplement our engagement in biodiversity protection. For more than a decade, the Volkswagen Group has been advised by the German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union NABU, the largest association of its kind in Germany – not least in terms of membership. NABU is also a partner in numerous projects.

A special focus of Volkswagen's activities in Germany is on the conservation of water meadows and moorlands. Moorlands in particular are important CO₂ sinks. Restoring water levels typical of moorlands makes a contribution to climate protection and supports the natural habitat of resident species such as cranes, moor frogs or the Cranberry Blue butterfly. The main projects in 2013 included

- Renaturing moorlands all over Germany jointly with NABU, especially with the aid of the German Moorland Protection Fund which was founded for this specific purpose and is endowed with €1.6 million (until 2016); in August 2013 another project was completed in the Weisser Graben nature conservation area in the Lichtenmoor region of Lower Saxony.
- Financing a feasibility study on renaturing moorlands outside Germany (€100,000)
- Supporting Europe's largest river renaturing project on the Lower Havel, especially through a donation for the reconnection of a former arm of the river in October (€300,000)
- Networking habitats in the Aller valley in collaboration with the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and the Hankensbüttel Otter Centre (for six years at €35,000 per annum)
- Establishing landscape corridors for wild cats by providing mobility assistance for the nature conservation association BUND

- Protecting the endangered fire-bellied toad from extinction, in conjunction with NABU Lower Saxony.

Initiative “Welcome Wolf!”

For ten years Volkswagen and NABU have also been cooperating in the “Welcome Wolf!” initiative. This is engaged in active public relations work to accompany the return of the wolf – the animal in Wolfsburg’s coat of arms – to Germany, and is seeking to improve acceptance of this once exterminated wild animal. In 2013 the initiative was honoured by an invitation from the President of Germany to attend his garden party at Bellevue Palace in Berlin and give a presentation.

Research promotion, environmental education and political dialogue

Our engagement is rounded off by support for research projects and environmental education initiatives. Volkswagen de México’s project “Por amor al planeta”, under which substantial prizes are awarded every year to environmental scientists and biodiversity projects in nature conservation areas, is in fact the country’s largest private research promotion program. Volkswagen do Brasil and the Volkswagen Group in China have also integrated the topic of biodiversity in their environmental education campaigns.

Volkswagen seeks to engage in a dialogue about the conservation of biological diversity not only as an individual company, but also through associations (such as the German Automobile Industry Association (VDA), which in 2013 set up a working group on the subject), and initiatives (such as “Biodiversity in Good Company”, of which we were a founding member). For example, Volkswagen took part in the kick-off event for the communication and action platform “Enterprise Biological Diversity” (UBI) that was initiated in 2013 by the German Federal Environment Ministry.