



## Roosting place of international importance

They are almost omnipresent in Brandenburg in autumn: cranes. They strut across stubble fields and swoop across the sky with their powerful wing beat. The so-called 'Gruhlinge' are a familiar sight for the inhabitants of the Lower Lusatian Ridge Nature Park. Numerous cranes congregate here in late summer before heading south to escape the winter. In autumn, thousands of birds stop in the area on their way from Scandinavia, Poland and the Baltic States to France and Spain. The Luckauer Becken is a roosting place of international importance.

This gathering and resting place has been in existence at least since the beginning of the 20th century. Observation data is available since the 1940s. Back then, up to 400 birds were counted. Their numbers steadily increased in the 1980s and 1990s. These days, up to 6,000 cranes make the nature reserve their temporary home.

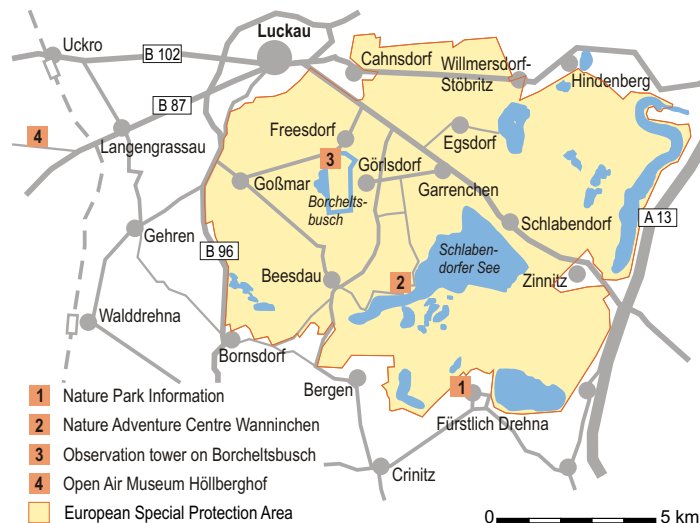
The conditions for these roosting birds have considerably improved here. Although the wetlands for sleeping fell victim to lignite mining, the end of the mining era saw the emergence of new sleeping grounds. The feeding in of mine drainage water has created more favourable conditions in the Borcheltsbusch. Extensive maize growing for dairy farms and biogas plants provides an abundance of food.

## Food and a place to sleep

The birds search for food on harvested corn and maize fields and on newly sown fields. A crane needs about 300 grams of corn per day as it needs to build up reserves for the long flight south. The fields around Luckau provide food in abundance close to the sleeping grounds. Some groups of cranes fly across the ridge to the Sonnewalde region.

The birds need shallow wetlands for sleeping. The most important sleeping grounds in the nature park are located in the conservation areas Borcheltsbusch and Wanninchen.

Borcheltsbusch is a low moor extending over 300 hectares. Many small water bodies that had formed in the 19th and 20th century as a result of peat extraction provided the cranes with undisturbed sleeping places for decades. These days, however, they are covered by reeds. Instead, the neighbouring Borchelt Lake, originally a detention basin, provides good overnight accommodation.



The European Special Protection Area Luckauer Becken is part of the network of protected sites across Europe.

The increase of the ground water level after the end of the lignite mining activity has resulted in extensive shallow wetlands on former dumping sites in the Wanninchen conservation area. Since 2001, the birds have been retreating to these wetlands as they remain largely undisturbed by human activity here. Visitors are not permitted to enter these areas. Changes of location within the large area are forced solely due to rehabilitation works or changes in the landscape resulting from increased ground water levels.

## About gathering and resting

As of August, increasing numbers of cranes can be observed in the nature park. This is when the crane families begin to gather. New birds arrive almost daily and their number increases to over a thousand by early September.

The gathering period turns into a roosting period in October. This is when migrating cranes from north-eastern Europe use the Luckauer Becken for a stopover. Their numbers can increase overnight with new arrivals or decrease again with the departure of larger groups. The roosting activity reaches its peak by mid-October. Then up to 6,000 cranes at one time occupy the area. Depending on the weather conditions and food supply, the birds remain on site for some days and up to several weeks before departing group by group. The last leave for their winter habitats over the course of November. Again and again, some cranes try to spend the winter here in the event of mild temperatures.

The first cranes return in early February, heralding in spring. The birds stopover only briefly before quickly departing for their breeding grounds. Almost 70 couples breed in the nature park. Whereas their loud mating calls betray their presence in spring, it requires some luck to discover cranes after that period. They then live very hidden in moors, swamps and swamp forests and can be observed only individually while searching for food on fields. Occasionally, groups of birds catch the eye. These are usually 'bachelors'; cranes reach maturity only at three to four years of age.

## Observation opportunities for crane spotters



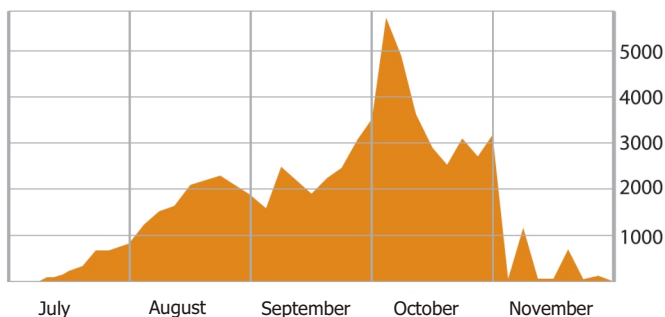
In autumn, cranes can be sighted while they are searching for food on harvested fields. Yet it is difficult to predict where exactly they will be located. Visiting their

sleeping grounds is a relatively safe bet. The birds return to the wetlands shortly before sunset and fly away again in search of food at dawn – an unforgettable sight.

Where to find good observation conditions:

The observation tower between Freesdorf and Goßmar is open to the public at all times. The 15-metre high platform provides a good overview of Borcheltsbusch and Borchelt Lake. The cranes come from all directions, usually linger on the adjoining fields where they groom themselves and fight before returning together to their watery 'bed'.

The Heinz Sielmann Nature Adventure Centre Wanninchen on the shore of Schlabendorfer Lake houses the exhibition "Kraniche – Vögel des Glücks" (Cranes – Birds of Fortune). In autumn, the troops of cranes often fly low across the house before landing noisily on the former dumping sites on the opposite shore. The noise dies down only when the day draws to an end. The spectacle can be observed from the shore of Schlabendorf Lake without the need for climbing stairs. A ramp leads up to the observation platform.



Presence of cranes in summer and autumn

## Three tips for bird watchers:

Weather-appropriate clothing is important in order to fully enjoy nature. Warm clothing is important for longer observation periods and the occasional waiting for cranes.

Real proximity to the birds is possible only with binoculars! Those without binoculars of their own should join a guided tour. The expert guides offer a look through particularly strong ones.

The nature park's Naturwacht rangers and the Heinz Sielmann Foundation offer regular guided tours. The tour times can be found in the nature park's event calendar and online.

## And please:

Whereas visitors are enthusiastic about the scores of birds, farmers often fear for their crops. The birds can cause damage to newly sown fields and are chased away. They are allowed to eat their fill on stubble fields. As every disturbance agitates the birds and increases their need for energy and food, nature enthusiasts should remain on the public roads in the interest of both the cranes and farmers. Do not try to get closer to the birds by using farm roads and tracks. They will take flight even at a distance of 300 metres. It is best to remain in your car (camouflage tent).

### Visitor information:

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## Experience the Cranes

IN THE LUCKAU BASIN

Naturpark  
Niederlausitzer  
Landrücken

