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Bislicher Insel

Riverside meadowlands in the Lower Rhine region

Large-scale natur conservation project
of the federal government

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Ministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt,
Landwirtschaft, Natur- und Verbraucherschutz
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen





Die Bislicher Insel

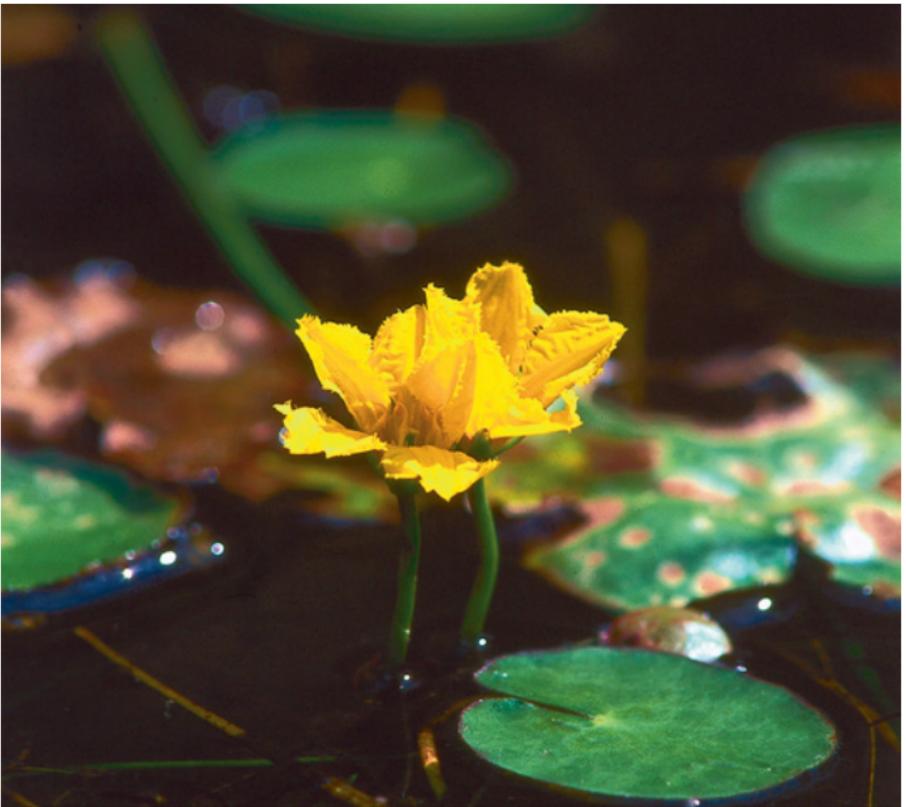
Meadowlands is what we call the fairytale river landscape where the banks are lined with reeds, rustling black poplars, shady alders, elms and willows on verdant grasslands, dream-like at dawn and in the twilight when the mists are rising.

The rich vegetation lives off the regular flooding of the river, sweeping in the seeds of all kinds of plants, which sprout in the rich earth. But that is how it once was.

The construction of canals and damming of riverbeds, straightening banks and regulating the water economy, this charming landscape has almost entirely disappeared.

On the island Bislicher Insel near Xanten, some fragments can still be found of one of the last Lower Rhine wetlands and its typical diversity of flora and fauna.

This landscape is now a nature preserve, of course, and is one of the largest inland “Wetlands of International Importance” in Germany.



Fringed water-lily



White-fronted geese

How the island was created

The 1,200 hectares of Bislicher Insel on the left side of the Lower Rhine between Xanten and Wesel are located in a loop of the meandering Rhine.

It became an island, and got its name, when the Rhine was straightened around 1786 by the construction of the Bislicher Kanal to the north of the island.

Soon thereafter, the main flow of the Rhine shifted there. After the new course of the river was reinforced with jetties and

dykes around 1820, the loop of the meandering Rhine began to transform into land.

The southwestern and southern parts of the loop have survived this process, and have the characteristics of a body of standing water. It is only during rare flooding events that Bislicher Insel actually becomes an island surrounded by water.

This landscape has been shaped not just by the river, but also by the chain of artificial lakes created by gravel mining excavations, with their steep banks, islands and headlands.

Various wetland ecosystems have developed with plant spe-

cies whose area mosaic is typical for the meadowlands.

Many species of bird live here, including some threatened with extinction. Herons and cormorants make their homes around these extensive lakes.

The largest colony of cormorants in North Rhine-Westphalia can be found here. Oystercatchers, great crested grebes, bald coots, diving ducks and water rails also live here, as do wood pigeons, spotted woodpeckers and black-tailed godwits.

Ospreys are regular visitors, and sea eagles are increasingly amongst the winter guests. White storks breed here successfully, and beavers participate in shaping the landscape.

With their cropped vegetation, the extensive areas used agri-

culturally as hayfields or for grazing make ideal “landing zones” for numerous migratory birds.

Up to 25,000 Scandinavian and Siberian wild geese thus make their winter camp here.

Nature conservation programme for the future

The idyll of Bislicher Insel is a second-hand paradise. Created by humans, the responsibility for its continued existence, for maintaining and for changes in this valuable nature preserve also lies with mankind.

A large part of Bislicher Insel has been in the possession of the Regionalverband Ruhr (Ruhr Regional Association) since 1982.



White stork

Together with the District of Wesel, the biological station located here and the voluntary nature conservationists, a care and development plan has been drafted and ecosystem development measures have been taken.

The Bislicher Insel nature conservation project is supported with federal and state funds, and scientifically accompanied by the Bundesamt für Naturschutz (Federal Agency for Nature Conservation) and the Landesamt für Natur, Umwelt und Verbraucherschutz NRW (State Agency for Nature, the Environment and Consumer Protection of North Rhine-Westphalia).

One of the main objectives in the central area of Bislicher

Insel is the reintroduction of a natural hardwood and softwood wetland, as it used to be found along the Rhine.

After the removal of trees not appropriate to the location, such as the hybrid poplar, nature has for years been left to take over these areas.

The natural process of woodland development through self-seeding (succession) has again already spread tree species here such as the alder, ash, willow and black poplar, which will form the basis for the future wetlands forest that will be appropriate to the location.

The steep banks of the artificial lakes created on Bislicher Insel through gravel mining excavation have been partially levelled in order to create habitats in



Bislicher Insel meadowlands

the shallow waters for amphibians, plants and insects, as well as spawning grounds for fish. The bodies of water have been connected with each other in order to create a network of habitats.

Parking lots and roads have been broken up and removed in order to leave as little soil as possible sealed within the nature preserve, and to allow natural development to take hold.

Two camping grounds have been cleared, demolished and returned to nature.

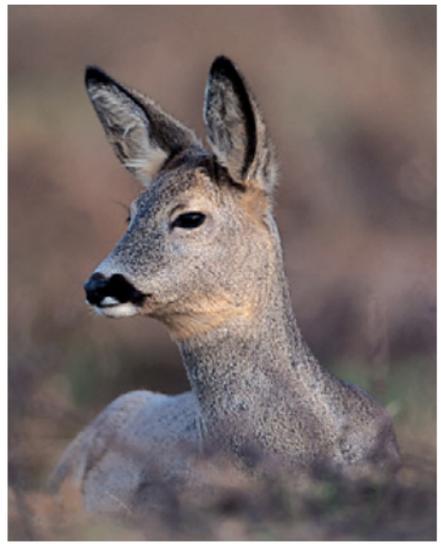
Concrete and tarmac have been removed, as have pipelines, cables and equipment left behind as refuse.

The individual lots had been kept by the campers like gardens, and planted with trees, flowers and bushes, sometimes with exotic plants and coniferous trees that are not native here.

Although very pretty to look at, this is not appropriate vegetation for the meadowlands.

Here, too, artificial planting has been progressively suppressed by locally appropriate tree species in the process of natural succession.

Agriculture on Bislicher Insel is to be planned in harmony with nature and based on concepts oriented towards wetlands ecosystems.



Deer

Alongside this, the maintenance and development of traditional back-garden-type orchards, for example, and other typical elements of the cultural landscape are to be encouraged as well.

The ultimate objective for the further development of the entire area of Bislicher Insel is the encouragement of wetlands-oriented processes.

This mainly consists in making it possible again for the water of the Rhine to flow through the areas and once again take a part in shaping the vegetation.

Only in this way can meadowlands develop in the long term.

The new construction of the dyke away from the Rhine and a flood channel, and the planned upstream and downstream connection to the Rhine, the first steps towards the achievement of this goal have already been initiated.



Geese at sunset

Protecting nature

The meadowlands should not become a mere legend for coming generations.

The continued existence and the development of these types of landscape require commitment and action, just as much as conscious restraint.

Such unique landscapes can be irreparably destroyed sooner than feared.

Often even just normal leisure activities can be enough to cause lasting damage.

Mountain-biking, swimming in natural bodies of water, riding, ice-skating, lighting a campfire, camping, letting dogs run free, walking off the paths: all these things sound like harmless leisure fun.

Unfortunately, these activities damage the sensitive areas of nature. Many bird species, amphibians, reptiles, insects are too sensitive, many plant ecosystems too fragile to cope with serious interference.

The nature reserve is therefore not suitable for the leisure activities specified.

Bislicher Insel

NaturForum

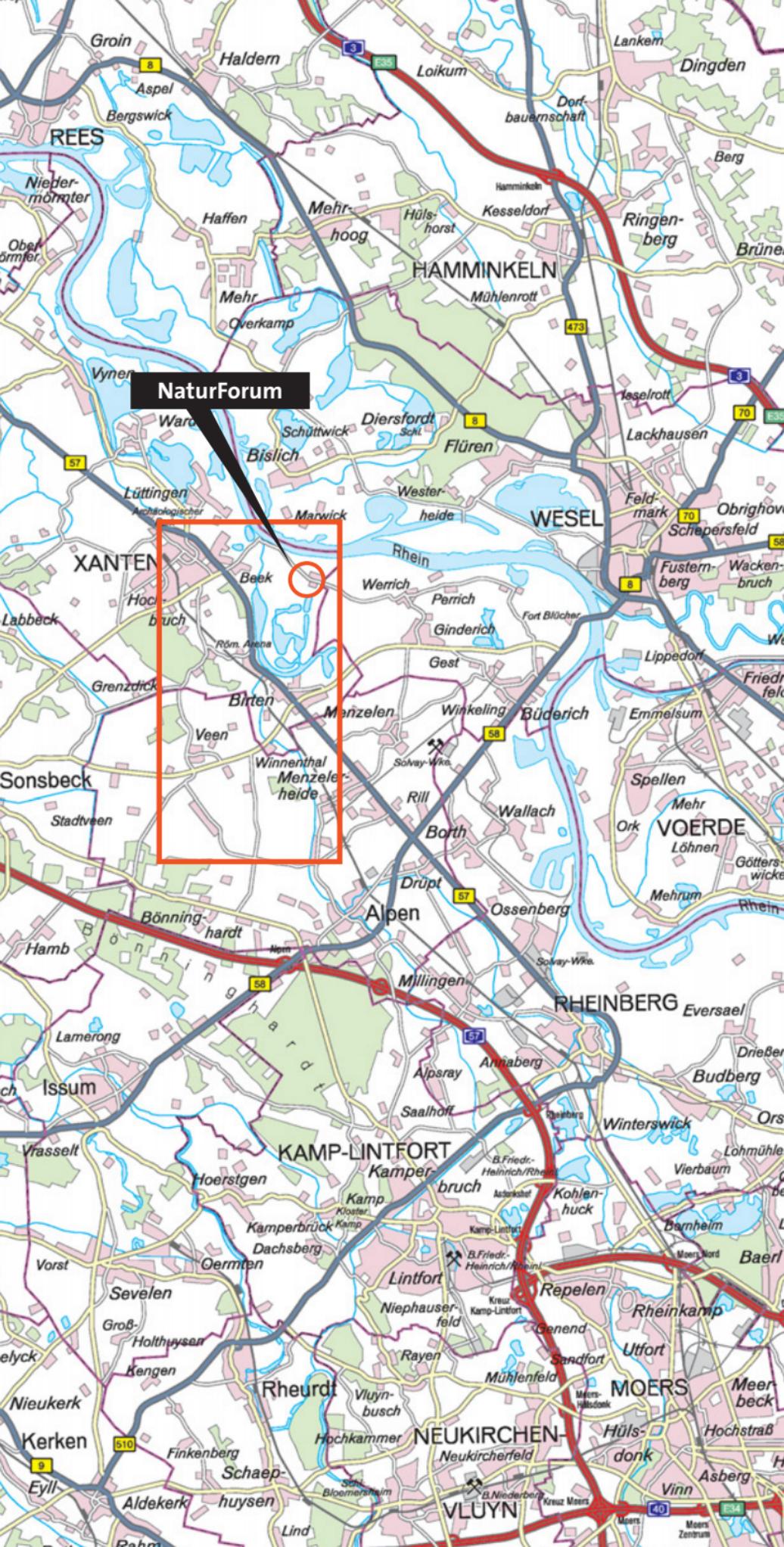
The former farmhouse of Eyländer Hof, purchased by the Regionalverband Ruhr, has been converted with funding from the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (German Federal Foundation for the Environment) into the NaturForum Bislicher Insel, an information and competency centre for nature conservation and flood control. Visitors can see the permanent

exhibition “AuenGeschichten” (“Wetlands Stories”), travelling exhibitions, and numerous nature discovery and environmental education programmes, and can learn about subjects such as nature conservation in general, nature watching, wetlands development, and the cultural landscape in the Lower Rhine area. The NaturForum serves as the starting point for guided nature study tours of the nature preserve.

Special guided tours are available for large groups and school classes upon request.

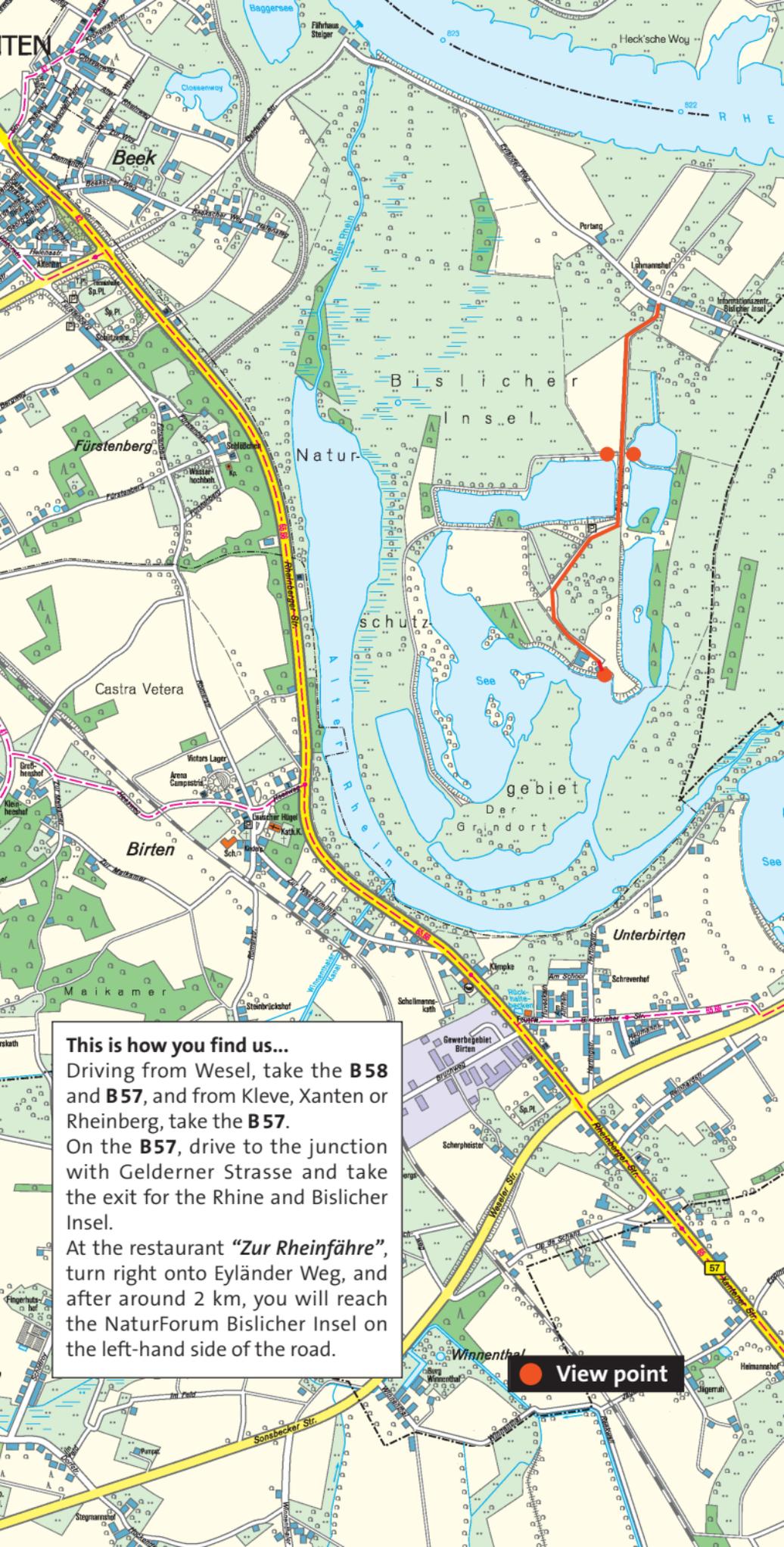


Little owls



NaturForum





This is how you find us...

Driving from Wesel, take the **B58** and **B57**, and from Kleve, Xanten or Rheinberg, take the **B57**.

On the **B57**, drive to the junction with Gelderner Strasse and take the exit for the Rhine and Bislicher Insel.

At the restaurant “Zur Rheinfähre”, turn right onto Eyländer Weg, and after around 2 km, you will reach the NaturForum Bislicher Insel on the left-hand side of the road.

 **View point**

Imprint

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■ Opening hours:

From 1 November to 23 December

and from 2 January to 31 March

Tue to Sun 10:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Closed Monday.

Closed from 24 December to 1 January.

From 1 April to 31 October

Tue to Sun 10:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Closed Monday.