

The Stettiner Berg in the village Mescherin offers the best opportunity to experience a spectacular view of the untouched river valley. You can also take the opportunity to visit the Polish Lower Oder Valley directly.

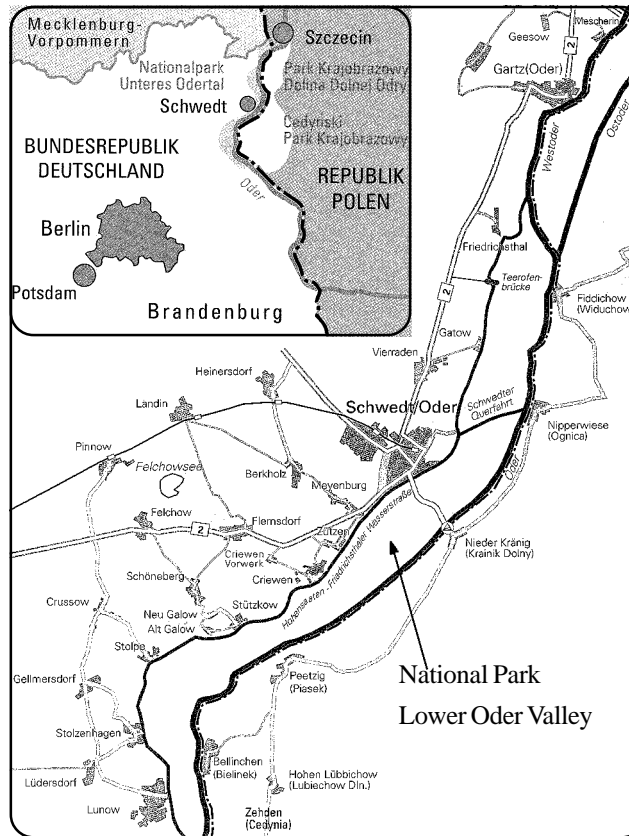
RANGERS IN THE FIELD

What can be discovered, observed and explored and where? What rules must be observed in a national park? Available to answer all of these visitors' questions are the rangers of the National Park. When in 1872 Yellowstone was founded as the world's first National Park, rangers worked there from the very first day.

Over 120 years passed between the foundation and the establishment of very large preservation areas in Brandenburg in 1990.

This means 120 years of worldwide experience in the cultivation of national parks. Thanks to this experience we know that long term protection of areas is not possible without rangers. Among other tasks, they ensure that protection rules are observed and are above all competent partners for both visitors and local people.

In 1991 the pilot project „Naturwacht Brandenburg“ started with 200 participants. Rangers work in all large preservation areas in Brandenburg and can be easily recognised by their uniforms.



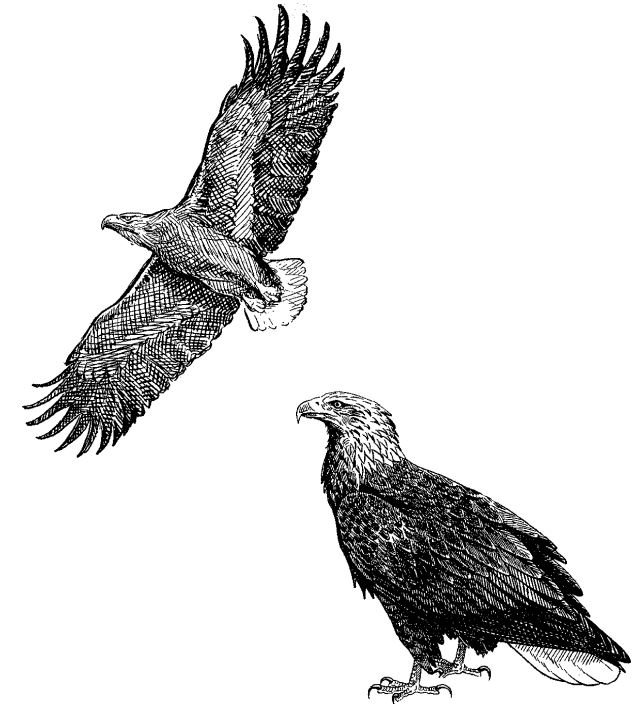
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Park 2, 16303 Schwedt
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lodging and overnight inquiries:
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Berliner Straße 47, 16303 Schwedt,
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National Park Lower Oder Valley



WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL PARK

The Lower Oder Valley National Park is the twelfth German National Park. Right from the beginning it was planned to be part of a German-Polish nature conservation project. This project embraces the whole lower Oder valley with a length of 60 kilometres from Hohensaaten (in Germany) to the gates of the town Szczecin (in Poland). The German part of the flood plain, which has many ox-bow lakes, varies between two and four kilometres in width. There are many valuable forests and blooming dry meadows on the valley slopes. In Germany flooding rivers can become dangerous very quickly, here however, it is an annual event. Every year thousands of hectares of meadows and pastures, marshes and flood plain forests in the lower Oder valley are covered by several metres of water. Nowhere else in Central Europe do such large natural flooding areas still exist. Due to the prevailing natural conditions and the fact that the lower Oder valley was situated in the frontier zone between Germany and Poland it was not developed. Therefore the especially diverse flood plain landscape survived. The polder system which was destroyed partially in World War II was neither rebuilt nor used again by Poland. During the past 50 years a unique renewal without man's influence took place. When in summer 1995 the Land Parliament of Brandenburg passed the law on national parks about 1,100 hectares of the total of 10,500 hectares protected, were declared total preservation area. In the course of the next 15 years about half of the National Park will be left to nature as a total preservation area. The remaining areas will then be used extensively for agriculture as presently practised in the National Park. This cultural and natural landscape is to be protected, developed, cultivated and organised, so that it can be fully experienced by its visitors.

THE RIVER VALLEY

The flood plains are areas which are flooded regularly. They are considered one of the most endangered habitats. An area of 4,700 hectares is regularly flooded between the villages Stuetzkow and Friedrichsthal in the winter months and occasionally as late as early summer. In the adjoining area in Poland, called the „Zwischenoderland“, a further 5,700 hectares are flooded. Together these areas form a huge retention basin where the flood water can drain away without causing damage further downstream. At the same time the flooded valley acts like a huge biological treatment plant, purifying the polluted river – for free.

FLORA AND FAUNA

In the past few years extensive monitoring has established that the lower Oder valley is one of Germany's most diverse habitats. The still backwaters covered by water lilies are as much a part of it as the wet meadows in full bloom, which present ideal breeding sites for various kinds of snipes. Also to be found are the remnants of original flood plain forests and semi-natural, mixed deciduous forests on the valley slopes which are included amongst the most valuable stands in Brandenburg. Particularly remarkable about the dry meadows is their overwhelming diversity of species and the fact that they bloom throughout the summer. The lower Oder valley marks the north-west migration border for a large number of steppe plants and animals. Among them, are attractive plants such as the blue blossomed cross-gentian (*Gentiana cruciata*), the silver coloured feather grass (*Stipa pennata*) and the yellow blossomed Spring Adonis rose (*Adonis vernalis*). Maintaining these habitats is one of the most challenging tasks for the National Park.

As an Alluvium of international importance large parts of the National Park's natural flooding polders had been declared as internationally protected due to the rich population of water-fowl even before the National Park was founded. Some 150,000 geese, ducks, swans and more than 3,000 cranes gather in the lower Oder valley, especially during migration time. More than 120 species of birds breed in the National Park, as for example the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), the Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*), a large number of White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) and the rare Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*). This is Germany's most important breeding site for the Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) and the Corncrake (*Crex crex*), animals which are internationally threatened by extinction.

EXPERIENCE THE NATIONAL PARK

Regardless whether you go by bicycle, horse drawn carriage or by foot the National Park offers a great deal of attractions to make a visit worthwhile throughout the year. It is the perfect place for a bicycle tour. An extensive network of paths will bring you to the most diverse of habitats. In the winter months a tour on the long paths situated on the flooded polder banks is often only possible with a bicycle. The flooding usually lasts from the end of November until April. The birds' breeding period follows. The colourful meadows of the dry and wet grasslands attract many visitors in summer. In autumn the banks offer you an excellent view of migrating and resting water-fowl. They form impressive flocks on the meadows, fields and the water. You should not leave the National Park without also viewing the Polish landscape.