

Rescue for Red Deer

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Red Deer love Bioland meadows. Before the harvest, farmers, hunters and drone pilots work together to save them.

When the first warmer days of spring bring nature to explode, Jessica Meierfrankenfeld often wakes up at half three in the morning. The Bioland farmer from Melle is used to getting up early – but in this time she has to spend a few more hours in the night. Because before the harvest can begin in the meadows, Meierfrankenfeld has another job to do: with the drone over the field fly and red deer search. „The early waking is hard“, she says, „but we save lives!“

Red deer like to rest in tall grass. Shortly after birth they move away to attract as little attention as possible to the newborn. Only when suckling they return to the fawn. This tells her exactly what to do: absolutely nothing. So helplessly as possible the tiny animal hides in the grass and stays there until the mother returns. A flight reflex it has not yet developed. Only after about a week the fawn is ready to accompany its mother. This behavior makes the animal almost invisible to its predators – and unfortunately also for farmers and farmwives, who mow their meadows with large machines. Year after year more red deer are caught by the mowers, because their natural protective behavior makes them defenseless. „We notice here also a clear shift in the climate“, complains Bioland consultant Christian Odinga. „The mowing times have moved about 3 weeks forward in the past decade, while the birth times of red deer are only a few days earlier. Therefore, the mowing time and the main birth time overlap.“ Especially in Bioland farming, the rescue of red deer plays a crucial role: „The species-rich meadows with herbs and clover are clearly preferred by wild animals as conventional neighboring areas“, says Odinga. In addition, Bioland farms are obliged to take measures for species protection and to maintain biodiversity on their fields and farms. The rescue of red deer is part of the program.

In a drone rescue for wildlife, there are clearly defined roles. The farmer or the farmer must „take all possible and sensible precautionary measures to avoid mowing deaths.“ The hunting association on site is obliged to participate. The actual work is done by volunteer drone pilots. Meierfrankenfeld is not the only one who has to get up early. In the morning at three o'clock she meets with the farmer or the farmer, representatives of the hunting association and other volunteers at the field edge for a site discussion. Then she sends the drone into the air, whose thermal camera can find the red deer even in the dark. She has located it, she directs the volunteers to the animal with the walkie-talkie. If it is near the edge, they take it out of the field and set it outside the range of the mower. If it is very deep in the field or runs close to the field along a road, they cover the red deer with a perforated potato basket and mark the spot with a flag.

Since Jessica Meierfrankenfeld has her hunting license, she is everything in one person: farmer, hunter and drone pilot. The drone, with which she works, is at the disposal of the hunting association from Melle. Around 7,000 to 8,000 Euro costs such a device, which is equipped for the rescue of red deer. It is usual that the farmer shows his appreciation to the hunting association and the drone pilot or the drone pilot with a donation. Most farmers and farmwives are very happy to have help in the search for red deer. They know each other and have already saved many red deer together. But not everywhere is the cooperation frictionless: „Here it goes well, but in many other places the understanding for the interests of the participants has to be built“, complains Meierfrankenfeld. This is agreed with Odinga, who as Bioland consultant and hunter knows both sides. „The first step is always an open communication with the farmers, because they know their red deer „hotspots“ and

können so ganz gezielt bei der Koordination von Maßnahmen helfen“, erklärt er. „Aber manchmal wird leider der Ton etwas rauher, vor allem wenn alle Landwirte und Landwirtinnen gleichzeitig ihre Wiesen mähen wollen.“ Dann sind die Drohnenpilot*innen plötzlich sehr gefragt. „Aber es gibt einfach zu wenige, die den Pilotenschein für diese Drohnen haben. Die wenigen, die es gibt, bekommen in diesen Tagen sehr, sehr wenig Schlaf.“

Doch es gibt auch Alternativen. Mittlerweile bieten diverse Hersteller eine Kitzerkennung für die Mähwerke an. Diese Technik kostet zwar im ersten Moment deutlich mehr als eine Spende an Jägerschaft und Drohnenpilot*in, hat aber auch ganz klare Vorteile: Das Mähen kann zum Beliebigen Zeitpunkt stattfinden, ist unabhängig von Helfern und der stressigen Organisation. „Noch scheuen viele Landwirte und Landwirtinnen diese Ausgabe – aber das wird sich irgendwann mehr und mehr durchsetzen“, ist Odinga sich sicher.

Bis dahin aber wird Jessica Meierfrankenfeld noch viele kurze Nächte haben. „Es muss ja gemacht werden“, winkt sie lachend ab. „Und außerdem ist es auch einfach immer wieder auf’s Neue ein gutes Gefühl, diese kleinen Leben zu retten.“

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