



## Press release

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Waterbodies

### River protection without borders

- **The Austrian biologist Georg Frank has been awarded the Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize**
- **Joint press release from the Schweisfurth Foundation and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation**

**Munich/Mannheim, September 21, 2023:** The Schweisfurth Foundation has awarded this year's Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize to 48-year-old Austrian biologist Georg Frank, General Secretary of DANUBEPARKS, the transnational association for the conservation of the Danube river. The prize is endowed with 20,000 euros. The award ceremony took place in Mannheim as part of the conference for the federal programme "Blue Ribbon Germany on the Main and Neckar" organised by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

The DANUBEPARKS association groups together Danube protected areas from almost all Danube countries, including Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Germany. The dedication shown by Georg Frank in establishing the association has contributed significantly to strengthening cross-border cooperation for nature conservation along the Danube.

Sabine Riewenherm, President of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and member of the jury that awards the Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize: "The Danube is a model region in Europe for transnational nature conservation efforts. For around 83 million people, the Danube is a means of livelihood, a safeguard for drinking water and fresh air, and a valued recreational space. Its river and watermeadow landscapes are home to more than 2,000 vascular plant species and over 5,000 species of animals. With expertise and dedication and by working across national borders, Georg Frank has not only put in place but ensured the ongoing success of protection efforts for this unique natural ecosystem. He more than deserves this award!"

Carl Manzano, former director of the Danube-Auen National Park and laudator of the prize: "The natural treasures of the Danube are coming under increasing pressure. Urban sprawl, transport infrastructure projects, energy production as well as intensive land use are all putting a strain on the biodiversity of the river. The networking of protected areas along the entire course of the river



is essential for the maintenance and restoration of biological diversity. Thanks to Georg Frank, Europe has taken a major step forward in this undertaking.”

Georg Frank, 48-year-old biologist from Austria and winner of the Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize 2023: “The founding, development and establishment of DANUBEPARKS is one of my greatest professional achievements. All of my project ideas are based on a vision of further consolidating the association in its function as role model for transnational nature conservation and as a model for the Danube, for Europe and for all major rivers. I am extremely grateful to the Schweisfurth Foundation for its recognition of these endeavours. I will be using the prize money to develop further conservation measures on this magnificent river.”

### **Georg Frank and the DANUBEPARKS Association**

Georg Frank was born in 1974 in Scheibbs in the Alpine foothills of Austria. He completed his biology studies (Zoology) at the University of Vienna in 2002, and since then has worked in a variety of projects relating to the Danube River. In 2007, he took over the initiative for the establishment of the DANUBEPARKS Association, which is focused on Danube-wide and cross-border conservation work along Europe's second largest and second longest river. DANUBEPARKS was founded in 2014, since which time Georg Frank has headed the non-profit association as its general secretary.

The focus of the association's work revolves around the implementation of specific nature conservation measures along the Danube in Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Germany. Thanks to the work and commitment of Georg Frank, more than 30 million euros has been spent to date on individual Danube-wide nature conservation initiatives. The LIFE WILDisland project pursued by the association is one of the largest nature conservation projects underway in Europe. Thereby, numerous islands and over 48 kilometres of water bodies have been renatured and 1,440 hectares of habitats have been improved.

The EU Commission has honoured DANUBEPARKS with the Natura 2000 Award as the foremost European nature conservation network, and has also recognised the association as the first recipient of the Living Danube Award.

More about DANUBEPARKS at <https://danubeparks.org/>.

### **Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize**

Wolfgang Staab (1938-2004) earned his reputation as a passionate environmentalist in Rhineland-Palatinate. He was successful for many years as chairman of the Rhineland-Palatinate regional association of BUND (Friends of the earth Germany); later he worked as treasurer in the BUND federal association. In 2014, Dr. Dorette Staab established the Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Fund as part of the Schweisfurth Foundation. Since then, the prize, which is endowed with 20,000 euros, has been awarded annually to individuals working in science and environmental protection who are particularly dedicated to the long-term development of the river and floodplain landscape, and with this to ecosystems of supra-regional significance.

Applications and nominations can now be submitted for the Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize 2025.

More about the Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize at <https://schweisfurth-stiftung.de/oeko-ethik/wolfgang-staab-naturschutzpreis/>



### **Conference for Germany's Blue Belt Programme**

The awarding of this year's Wolfgang Staab Nature Conservation Prize took place as part of a BfN conference on Germany's Blue Belt Programme. Through this programme, the Federal Environment Ministry and the Federal Ministry of Transport are jointly committed to the natural development and restoration of the federal waterways and their floodplains. Within this, the BfN is responsible for the implementation of the "Auen support programme", in which a range of stakeholders such as associations, societies or municipalities can obtain funding for the implementation of floodplain renaturation measures. The conference discussed the various cooperation and funding opportunities on the Main and Neckar, and together with regional stakeholders analysed the potential and perspectives for sustainable river and floodplain development in the region.

More about the federal programme Blue Ribbon Germany: <https://www.bfn.de/en/topic/germanys-blue-belt-programme>

### **Schweisfurth Foundation**

The Schweisfurth Foundation has been committed to sustainable agriculture and food production since 1985. It was founded by entrepreneur and pioneer Karl Ludwig Schweisfurth, and today focuses on animal welfare, regional and ecological food supply, urban-rural relations and nature conservation. The foundation is a catalyst, advisor and facilitator for civil society, business, politics and administration, and devises regional sustainability processes together with cooperation partners.

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### **Image material:**

Please find the press release as well as pictures of the ceremony here: <https://schweisfurth-stiftung.de/stiftung/presse/>

Pictures will be available under at the same link September 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10 am.