The Green and the Brown

This study provides the first comprehensive discussion of conservation in Nazi Germany. Looking at Germany in an international context, it analyzes the roots of conservation in the late nineteenth century, the gradual adaptation of racist and nationalist language among conservationists in the 1920s, and the inner distance to the republic of Weimar. It describes how the German conservation movement came to cooperate with the Nazi regime and discusses the ideological and institutional lines between the conservation movement and the Nazis. Uekoetter further examines how the conservation movement struggled to do away with a troublesome past after World War II, making the environmentalists one of the last groups in German society to face up to its Nazi burden. It is a story of ideological convergence, of tactical alliances, of careerism, of implication in crimes against humanity, and of deceit and denial after 1945. It is also a story that offers valuable lessons for today’s environmental movement.

Frank Uekoetter is a researcher in the History Department at Bielefeld University, Germany. He is the author of two monographs and editor, alone or in part, of four collections. He is also author of articles published in Business History Review, Environment and History, and Historical Social Research.
This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2006

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Uekoetter, Frank, 1970–

The green and the brown : a history of conservation in Nazi Germany / Frank Uekoetter.

p. cm. – (Studies in environment and history) Includes bibliographical references and index.


Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org
Für Werner
Contents

Acknowledgments  ix
Abbreviations  xi
A Note on Vocabulary  xiii

1. The Nazis and the Environment: A Relevant Topic?  1
2. Ideas: Diverse Roots and a Common Cause  17
3. Institutions: Working Toward the Führer  44
4. Conservation at Work: Four Case Studies  83
   The Hohenstoffeln Mountain  85
   The Schorfheide National Nature Reserve  99
   Regulating the Ems River  109
   The Wutach Gorge  125
6. Changes in the Land  167
7. Continuity and Silence: Conservation after 1945  184
8. Lessons  202
Appendix: Some Remarks on the Literature and Sources  211

Selected Bibliography  217
Index  223
Acknowledgments

This book is the product of an intellectual journey that had far more resemblance to a roller-coaster ride than I, or anyone, could have imagined when I came to the topic in 2001. At that time, the German minister for the environment, Jürgen Trittin, pushed aggressively for a conference on the topic, a remarkable move given the fact that public interest in the Nazi past of conservation was almost nonexistent. The task of organizing this conference fell to Joachim Radkau, historian at Bielefeld University, who turned for help to a doctoral student who had just finished his dissertation—in other words, to me. The result was a symposium on “Conservation in Nazi Germany,” which took place in Berlin in July 2002. The first conference of its kind, it attracted a surprisingly large number of participants, along with intensive coverage by the media, demonstrating that the issue was clearly more than an academic topic. I am greatly indebted to the speakers at the Berlin conference who helped to make the symposium such a rousing success. At the same time, the conference volume provided a great opportunity to reflect on the state of research and the general approach to the topic. While this book differs from the conference volume in many respects, and seeks to break new ground in some, it clearly could not have been written in this form without the work of seventeen formidable academics.

In writing this book, I enjoyed encouragement and support from more people than I can mention here. Donald Worster inspired this book and guided it, together with John McNeill, as series editors, toward its completion. Their comments were a great help in revising the manuscript, as were the remarks of an anonymous third reviewer. It was a pleasure to work with Frank Smith and Eric Crahan at the Americas branch of
Acknowledgments

Cambridge University Press. For their assistance in the use of archival material, I thank the staff of the German Bundesarchiv in Berlin, Koblenz, and Freiburg; the Geheimes Staatsarchiv in Berlin; the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach; the state archives in Darmstadt, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Freiburg, Karlsruhe, Nürnberg, Schleswig, Stuttgart, and Würzburg; the Westfälisches Archivamt in Münster; the county archives in Warendorf and Altena; and the city archives in Bielefeld, Leipzig, Reutlingen, and Telgte. I was on many occasions a guest at the library of the Bundesamt für Naturschutz in Bonn-Bad Godesberg; the interlibrary loan office of Bielefeld University supplied me with books and articles in a timely manner. Joachim Radkau accompanied this project with his unique blend of encouragement and critique. His seminar at Bielefeld University, cosponsored by Werner Abelshauser, provided a valuable proving ground for my ideas at different stages. Sandra Chaney, Ute Hasenöhrl, and Heinrich Spanier read the manuscript fully or in part and provided valuable comments; Jotham Parsons did a terrific job proofreading the manuscript. During the preparation of the first draft, my wife, Simona, took a new job in Munich, resulting in the irony that this book, first conceived in the city of Prague, is now being finalized within walking distance of the Nazi Party’s former headquarters. The twisted road toward this book probably deserves no other conclusion.

Frank Uekoetter
Munich, September, 2005
Abbreviations

BArch Bundesarchiv
DLA Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach am Neckar
GDR German Democratic Republic
GLAK Badisches Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe
GStA Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin
HStAD Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf
HStADd Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden
HStAS Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart
KAW Kreisarchiv Warendorf
KMK Kreisarchiv des Märkischen Kreises, Altena
LASH Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein
NSDAP Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Nazi Party)
RVH Reichsbund Volkstum und Heimat
SS Schutzstaffel (Protective Detachment)
StAB Stadtarchiv Bielefeld
StAD Staatsarchiv Darmstadt
StAF Staatsarchiv Freiburg
StAL Stadtarchiv Leipzig
StAN Staatsarchiv Nürnberg
StAR Stadtarchiv Reutlingen
StAT Stadtarchiv Telgte
StAW Staatsarchiv Würzburg
WAA Westfälisches Archivamt Münster
A Note on Vocabulary

Writing a book in a language that is not one’s native language is never easy. But writing a book on the Nazi era in the English language presents a challenge all of its own. No one who has never tried it can truly understand the trouble and pain that one encounters in translating the vocabulary of the Nazi era. The trouble starts with words like *Heimat* that encompass an entire cosmos of meanings that no word in the English language can really capture – and it ends with phrases like *Reichskommissariat für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums*, a true monster in terminological and other respects. Trying to bring out all implications of this terminology in another language is bound to produce frustration – or, alternatively, gigantic footnotes whenever one of the ominous words pops up.

Therefore, it seems that a few notes on my choice of words are called for. Whenever I encountered a word that has no direct equivalent in the English language, I have chosen the word that, in my opinion, comes as close as possible to the German original. When the word or expression appears for the first time, I have added the German word in brackets, clarifying the terminology for the Germanophone reader and reminding all others that the word’s connotations in the English language may be deceiving. This approach may be prone to misunderstandings, and it inevitably suggests to English readers that they may miss a few fine points of the story, but it is the best one that I am aware of. Also, I have used the German expression for some organizations and institutions without offering a translation. In all these cases, the role of these institutions becomes clear from the context, whereas the precise meaning of the German words is of no relevance for an understanding of the story. The poem on page 164...
has intentionally been printed in both languages, and I will make no attempt to claim that the translation is anything but inadequate.

In addition to these general remarks, it seems advisable to say a little more about a few specific words. I have used conservation and nature protection as synonyms in this study, and I made no distinction between conservation and preservation: all of these words are the English equivalents of Naturschutz. Thus, any allusion to American concepts of resource management (“wise use”) would be misleading. As the narrative shows, even the use of nature as a tourist attraction was met with scornful disregard in the German conservation community. The word Naturdenkmal (natural monument) means an object of relatively small scale – e.g., a tree or a rock – that conservationists deemed worthy of preservation; no German bureaucrat would have thought of an object the size of the Grand Canyon as a natural or national monument. The first German conservation office, the Staatliche Stelle für Naturdenkmalpflege, thus signaled its penchant for conservation en miniature already in its title. I have not translated völkisch; the word is translated as “folkish” in the American edition of Hitler’s Mein Kampf, but that word clearly sounds far too harmless for a mixture of chauvinist, racist, and xenophobic ideas. I occasionally speak of a German Volksgemeinschaft, a word that literally translates into “community of nationals” or “community of the folk,” but such a translation would mute the dual implications of the word: it was egalitarian in that the term transcended barriers of class and tradition but also racist in that it admitted only those of Aryan origin into the “national community.” The same holds true for the corresponding term Volksgenosse (National Comrade), which designates a member of the Volksgemeinschaft.

In some cases, the search for an English equivalent was simply hopeless. According to the dictionary, Führer translates into either leader or head, but both words give a terribly inadequate impression of Hitler’s pivotal role in Nazi politics. The organization Kraft durch Freude is mentioned with the addition “tourist association” to describe its work, but the concept that the name implied is impossible to convey in a similarly brief form; briefly, Kraft durch Freude linked the promise of pleasant experiences during one of the tourist trips that the Nazis offered many Germans for the first time with a reminder that these trips were ultimately intended as an uplift of the individual’s work ethic in the service of the nation, thus connecting individual relaxation with national strength. The concept of Lebensraum in Eastern Europe that was so central to Hitler’s thinking means more than “living space,” the literal translation, because the Nazi notion of Lebensraum was based on the racist concept of a hierarchy of
A Note on Vocabulary

races, where the Aryan race was destined to subjugate the inferior Slavic people. *Heimat* was already a complex word before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, soon after which the German media began to translate the United States Department of Homeland Security as *Ministerium für Heimatschutz*. *Heimat* alludes to a place of indeterminate size where one feels at home; often (but not necessarily), *Heimat* alludes to a home *region*, and the *Heimat* protection movement was always a strong defender of regionalism. At the same time, *Heimat* is filled with romantic associations, and the word evokes associations of coziness.

*Gleichschaltung* was a process during the first months of Nazi rule that sought to “streamline” those parts of German society that implied, like trade unions or states’ rights, a threat to Hitler’s dictatorial powers. However, the process soon led to the reorganization of countless civic organizations, with the goal of creating one national organization in the place of the previous pluralism. *Dauerwald* is a silviocultural doctrine that allows trees of different ages to stand next to each other; I refrained from a translation in part because Aldo Leopold used the German term in his essay on “Deer and *Dauerwald* in Germany.” The word *Weltanschauung* describes a holistic worldview based on a certain set of key principles, with the Nazis, of course, opting for racist principles; *Weltanschauung* is one of the words that entered the English vocabulary because of the Nazi experience. Finally, I chose not to translate *Gauleiter* because the position was more complex than a simple term could capture. *Gauleiters* were leaders of the NSDAP in one of its forty-two German districts, but in addition to party chairmanship, *Gauleiters* often took up further tasks, acting as ministers, prime ministers, or Reich Commissioners (*Reichsstatthalter*) for a certain state. The extent of the *Gauleiters’* powers was significant, but they depended strongly on the specifics of each individual case.