

The Feistritz gorge near Herberstein – an eldorado for xylobiontic beetles

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In 2003 the Feistritz gorge area near Herberstein (Oststeiermark district) comprising 120 ha, has been declared as **Austria's first „European Refuge“**.

About in 1980 some rare relict beetle species were discovered and at that time the importance of the area as a nature reservation has been highlighted in expert contributions. In 1991 a purposeful scientific stocktaking of the beetle fauna begun. The results exceed all

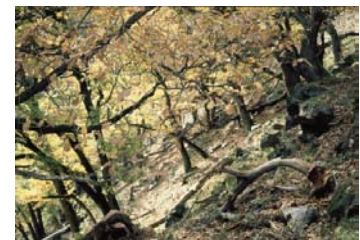
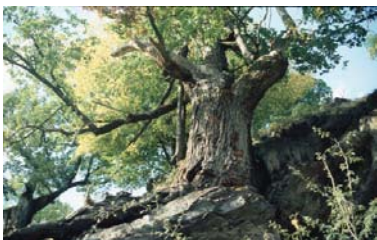
expectations:

Four of the five beetle species protected by European Union law and occurring in the Steiermark were found living in the area: The **Great capricorn beetle** *Cerambyx cerdo*, the **Stag beetle** *Lucanus cervus*, the **Scarlet beetle** *Cucujus cinnaberinus* and the **Hermit beetle** *Osmoderma eremita* which is a high priority species. A total of more than 1600 species was found. 114 of these are listed in Austria's red data books.



The singular combination of characteristics of the geology, the climate and the vegetation of this habitat is responsible for the high species diversity:

- the Feistritz gorge cuts through an apophysis of an crystalline mountain range
- the area is situated at the margin to the tertiary basins to the north
- the peripheral location with already pannonic and mediterranen influences, locked toward the north
- the up to 260 m high scarp, causing different small climatic conditions
- the variety of the vegetation on a small area – ranging from moist ravine forest to extremely dry nutrient poor silicate-grasslands
- and as a main factor the centuries old broad-leafed forest stands containing a high amount of dead wood on the southern slopes of the Feistritz.



24 species of the list of Germany's 115 pristine forest relict species (J. MÜLLER et al. (2005): Urwald-Reliktarten – Xylobionte Käfer als Indikatoren für Strukturqualität und Habitattradition) were proven in the protected area so far:

<i>Aeletes atomarius</i>	<i>Elater ferrugineus</i>	<i>Trox perrisii</i>
<i>Epierus comptus</i>	<i>Lacon querceus</i>	<i>Osmoderma eremita</i>
<i>Ampedus cardinalis</i>	<i>Eurythyrea quercus</i>	<i>Aesalus scarabaeoides</i>
<i>Ampedus brunnicornis</i>	<i>Teredus cylindricus</i>	<i>Megopis scabricornis</i>
<i>Brachygonus dubius</i>	<i>Allecula rhenana</i>	<i>Cerambyx cerdo</i>
<i>Ischnodes sanguinicollis</i>	<i>Platydemia dejeanii</i>	<i>Rhyncolus reflexus</i>
<i>Megapenthes lugens</i>	<i>Corticeus fasciatus</i>	<i>Rhyncolus sculpturatus</i>
<i>Podeonius acuticornis</i>	<i>Tenebrio opacus</i>	<i>Gasterocercus depressirostris</i>

Still to mention are two species irradiating from southeast, which probably correspond to the election criteria of the list specified above:

<i>Mycetochara quadrimaculata</i>	(the only find in Austria)
<i>Stagetus elongatus</i>	(the only find in Central Europe)

The Feistritz gorge near Herberstein ranks among the most important reserves for European xylobiontic beetles.

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