

Germany turns military bases into rare-bird nature reserves

BERLIN: Germany agreed on Thursday, 18 June, to turn more than 60 former military bases into nature preserves, with the aim of creating vast new green oases and sanctuaries for rare species of birds.



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Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks said an ongoing overhaul of the German armed forces had made it possible to set aside more than 31,000 hectares (76,600 acres) of forests, marshes, meadows and moors.

She said the government had opted against selling the land, in some cases, prime pieces of real estate, to investors in favour of creating natural refuges.

"We are seizing a historic opportunity with this conversion - many areas that were once no-go zones are no longer needed for military purposes," she said.

"We are fortunate that we can now give these places back to nature."

In recent years, large swathes of land in the former communist east that had been occupied by the military, including the so-called "Green Strip" along the once-fortified heavily border to then West Germany, have been turned into nature reserves for flora and fauna.

The 62 bases and training areas earmarked as nature reserves on Thursday, 18 June, by the parliamentary budget committee are mainly in the densely populated former West Germany.

The sites will primarily serve as bioreerves, which the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation said would provide crucial habitats for threatened species such as certain bats, woodpeckers, eagles and beetles.

However many sites will also be open to the public, and bring to 156,000 hectares the amount of federally protected wilderness.

Germany is in the process of reforming its military from a Cold War defensive force into a 21st century institution prepared to counter new threats.

In the process, it is creating a smaller "footprint" of bases in favour of a more efficient and mobile organisation.

Source: AFP

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